

# The Portuguese Explore the African Coast

By the early 1400s, the demand of Europeans for goods from Asia, especially spices, was stronger than ever. But Europeans could not get these goods easily. The Silk Road and other land routes were long and dangerous. They were often controlled by merchants who charged a high price for trade.

These problems sparked a drive to find new trade routes to Asia—sea routes. Beginning in the 1420s, the country of **Portugal** took the lead. The king's son, **Prince Henry**, gathered together the best and most experienced sea captains, mapmakers, ship designers, and other experts from many countries. They shared their knowledge to hire crews and design ships that could develop new sea routes. And to guide ships along the way, the experts improved methods of **navigation**. This is the science sailors use to plot their course and find their location far from land. Soon, Henry became known as "Prince Henry the Navigator."

Though Henry did not go himself, he began sending Portuguese ships south along the Atlantic coast of Africa. On each voyage, explorers traveled farther than the

last, mapping the African shore and reporting sailing conditions. Portugal's ships began bringing home African gold.

The Portuguese also profited from the **slave trade**: the buying and selling of human beings. Slavery had existed throughout the world for thousands of years.

For example, slavery had existed among the Aztecs and in the West African kingdom of Mali. Slave traders took captured people into and out of Africa along the Sahara trade routes. Many Arabs, Africans, and Europeans all participated in the slave trade by capturing people and forcing them into slavery. In the 1400s, the slave trade grew.

The Portuguese, and later other Europeans, began transporting African captives to Europe, where they became servants or slaves. A slave, unlike a servant, is owned by a person and has no freedom.

**REVIEW** Name two effects of Prince Henry's drive to explore the coast of Africa.  
**Cause and Effect**

- Under Prince Henry (above), Portugal took the lead in exploring the West coast of Africa. The Portuguese built forts along the coast to protect their trade in gold and slaves.

