

Cultural Interactions with Spices and Herbs

Readings Balick & Cox: 132-141

Definitions

- Spices:
- Herbs:
- Essential oils:

Cultural use of aromatic plants is ancient and widespread

Examples:

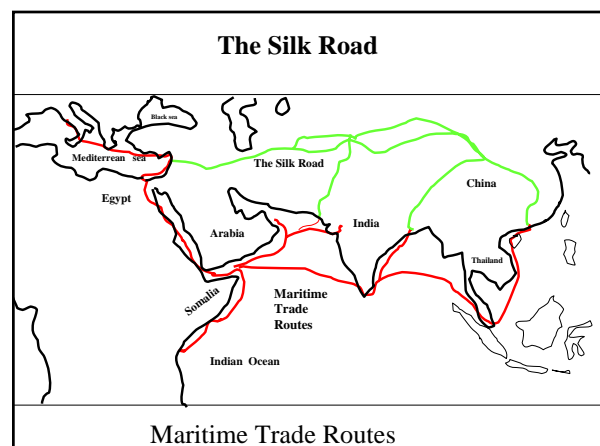
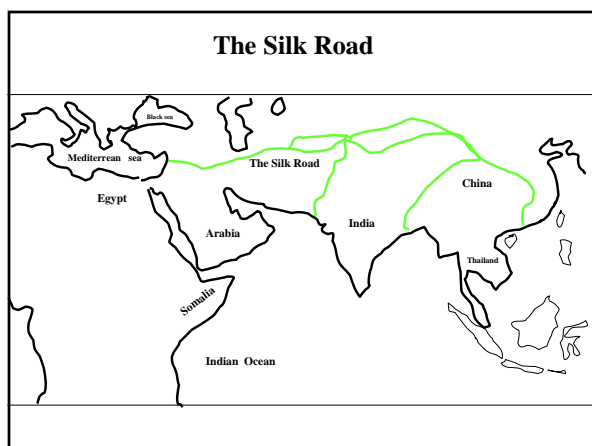
Egypt

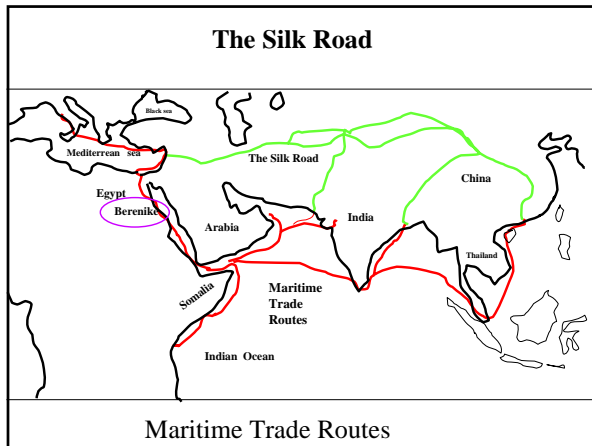
China and Japan

India

Ancient spice trade led to mixes of cultures and cultural traditions

- Egypt
- Greece
- Roman empire:
- Berenike, Egypt





Incense

Resins

- Myrrh

www.oler.net/ingredic.htm

Incense

Resins

- Frankincense

www.tsg-publishing.com

Spices from India and Sri Lanka

- Cinnamon
Cinnamomum zelanicum
- Black pepper
Piper nigrum
- Cardamom
- Gingers (Asia)

www.ang.kfingraz.ac.at/
www.angthf.com
www.mindia.org

Spices from India and Sri Lanka

Cardamom

www.mindia.org
www.angthf.com

Demand for spices in Europe helped foster the Renaissance

- Spices in the Dark Ages in Europe (641-1096)
- Crusades
- Venice and Genoa become trade center
- Capture of Constantinople by Turks (1453)

Herbs from the Mediterranean

- Saffron
- Mint family herbs
- Carrot family herbs



Demand for spices in Europe helped foster the Renaissance

- Spices in the Dark Ages in Europe (641-1096)
- **Crusades**
- **Venice and Genoa become trade centers**
- **Capture of Constantinople by Turks (1453)**

Demand for spices in Europe helped foster the Renaissance

BUT...

ALSO LED TO THE EXPLOITATION AND DECIMATION OF OTHER CULTURES

Spices from the 'Spice Islands'

- Cloves
Syzygium aromaticum
- Nutmeg and Mace
(*pala gula*)
Myristica fragrans



The same spice trade led to the exploitation and near extermination of other cultures

- Portuguese: the route to the 'Spice islands' (Mollucas)
- Dutch monopoly on Spice islands
- Massacre of the Banda people by the Dutch

Spices in Polynesia

Olena

Inamona (kukui)



www.foodsubs.com

→ **Fragrant plants have/had many uses besides foods**

Fragrant plants have/had many uses besides foods in Polynesian societies



Photo from Merry monarch website:
Mokihana and maile lei

Spices in the Americas

- Allspice
Pimenta dioica
- Vanilla
Vanilla fragrans
- Chili peppers



Different cultures used similar species for aroma/spices

Ex. Ginger family (Zingiberaceae)

- Common ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)
- Galangal or Thai ginger (*Alpinia galanga*)
- Myoga or Japanese ginger (*Zingiber mioga*)
- Fingerroot or Chinese ginger (*Boesenbergia pandurata*)
- Olena or turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)
- Black cardamom (*Amomum subulatum*)

“Typical” Spices/Herbs associated with different cuisines

- **Chinese:** Star anise, Fennel, Schezuan pepper, ginger, chili
- **Thai:** Kaffir lime leaf, lemongrass, galangal, cilantro, chili
- **Japanese:** Black sesame, mustard seed, wasabe, different types of seaweed
- **Mexican:** Paprika, cumin, chili, cilantro, oregano
- **Indian:** Coriander, cumin, turmeric, cinnamon, tamarind, cardamom, chili

Key concepts

- Fragrant plants have played an important role in diverse cultures for at least 5000 years
- The spice trade dates back at least 3000 years and led to interactions among cultures from Southeast Asia, Africa and India and the Mediterranean

Key concepts

- The desire for spices in Europe helped to foster the renaissance – or rebirth of European culture;
- European domination of the spice trade often very negatively affected cultural traditions where spices produced.
- Fragrant plants continue to play an important role in many cultures today although the significance and use of species changes over time.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

- What are some ancient uses of spices?
- List some spices from the Mediterranean, India, and from the Americas
- What is the relationship between the spice trade and European renaissance?
- Discuss the effects of the trade in nutmeg for European culture and for culture in the Banda islands
- Do you think globalization is a new or old phenomenon? Explain
- What roles did and do aromatic plants play in Hawaiian culture?