The Portuguese rule in east Africa

THE PORTUGUESE AT THE EAST AFRICAN COAST 1500 – 1700 A.D

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to have contacts with the people of the East African Coast. They were adventurous and in search for the sea route to India. This led them to the East African Coast where they stayed for 200 years.

WHY THE PORTUGUESE DEFEATED THE EAST AFRICAN COASTAL TOWNS/WHY THE PORTUGUESE WERE SUCCESSFUL

- They had superior weapons e.g. cannon guns which made terrible noise and threw people in panic as compared to the poor musket guns of the coastal Arabs.
- They had well trained soldiers with superior skills of fighting compared to the coastal people who had no permanent organized army e.g. Vasco da gama, Francisco D'Alemeida were ruthless army commanders which helped them to defeat the coastal dwellers.
They had better and faster ships (carracks) well equipped for naval warfare. The Portuguese soldiers wore Armour on their bodies and helmets on their heads, which protected them from the weapons of the coastal people.

The coastal towns were disunited which gave chance to the Portuguese to fight isolated enemies e.g. Malindi refused to unite with Mombasa due to local conflicts. Some cooperated with the invaders giving them food and bases e.g. Malindi and Sofala.

Some coastal towns like Kilwa were caught unaware. The Portuguese employed cruel methods of fighting like burning down towns and surprise attacks.

The ships acted as stages against the hostile weapons of the coastal people.

The coast had natural burners and was not open to attacks.

The constant attacks on the coastal towns by the Galla, Zimba and Turkish e.t.c had weakened their defence.

The Portuguese were financially equipped and therefore supported their soldiers because they wanted to control the East African trade.

The coastal states had very weak economies that could not sustain prolonged fights especially against the economically strong Portuguese.

**REASONS FOR THE COMING OF THE PORTUGUESE AT THE EAST AFRICAN COAST**

- The need to establish a commercial empire in order to get the products of East Africa e.g. ivory, gold, silks and spices were mainly controlled by the Arabs merchants.
- They wanted to obtain control of the main trading towns, e.g. Kilwa, Mombasa etc.
- They wanted to defeat the Moslem traders and rulers who had monopolized the Indian Ocean trade.
- They wanted to prevent other European rivals from gaining access to the Indian Ocean Trade e.g. the French, Dutch, British
- Desire to get revenue for the development of their country.
- The Portuguese wished to share in the profits of the Indian Ocean Trade by imposing taxes and forcing wealthy coastal towns to pay tribute to the king of Portugal.
- The coast had natural harbors where ships could anchor on their way to and from the East for fresh food and water. The Portuguese therefore wanted to establish a calling station for resting, refresh, treating the sick, repairing wrecked ships e.t.c
The coast was strategically located and this made it easy to control sea pirates and other rival powers.

- They wanted to revenge on the Moslem Arabs who had conquered Portugal in 711 AD by converting them to Christianity and stop the spread of Islam i.e. the Arabs had ever run the Iberian Peninsula and forced the Christians to accept Islam.
- They hoped to get assistance of King Prester John thought to be in the interior of north –east Africa. They hoped the king would help them in their crusade against the Moslems.
- They had hope of stopping Egyptians and Turks from sending military aid to their fellow Moslems on the coast.
- They were interested in exploration and adventure, this was a period of Renaissance (means to be born again/change) in Europe. Hence hoped to search for the unknown, new knowledge and sailing across un mapped seas.
- Desire to acquire revenue for the development of their country.

**Portuguese Administration at the coast; the political, economic, social way of life of the East African coast under the Portuguese rule**

**Political**

By 1510, the conquest of the East African coast was over and administration fell into the hands of the Portuguese. For easy administration, the coast was divided into two zones;

- The area North of Cape Delgado was ruled by the Captain at Malindi.
- The area South of Cape Delgado was ruled by Captain at Mozambique.

By 1507, Mozambique had become the headquarters of the southern portion in charge of a Portuguese viceroy. Another Portuguese captain in charge of the area North of Delgado was stationed at Malindi. Both captains were answerable to the Portuguese viceroy at Goa on Indian coast at the General headquarters. Cape Delgado was made the mid point of the East Africa possession. Sofala was made the regional headquarters but still under the charge of the captain who took his orders from the vicory at Goa. Later, the Captain in the North was stationed at Mombasa after the construction of Fort Jesus in 1593 because they were rebellious. Other forts and garrisons were established at Sofala and Kilwa.

The Portuguese captains were responsible for the collections of tributes from coastal rulers. They imposed the customs dues on all imports and exports. They were also responsible for the suppression of rebellions on the coast. The Portuguese had problems with administration because they could not provide enough troops to all garrisons their strongholds.

The Portuguese captains collected import duties, export duties and tributes from the local leaders. The Portuguese were more interested in gold trade which passed in Sofala land they ignored the towns.

Unfortunately, they failed to develop this trade because of the following;

There were wars in the mining areas between the Portuguese and Coastal people.
As a result the Portuguese were so cruel that any sign of disobedience was punished with maximum brutality to serve as a warning to others who might choose to rebel. This partly explains the unpopularity of the Portuguese on the coast.

**Social**

The relationship with the subjects was not good. They lived in isolation of each other by race and religion. The Portuguese established their own settlements, built their own churches and had their own priest. This could be the reason why their religion was rejected and hatred increased. In addition, the few Portuguese officials were corrupt, plundered and ordered destruction on the coastal town. All this earned them hatred and opposition from the people and it was not a surprise that they were nicknamed "%AFRITI" meaning Devil. The Portuguese did not mix freely with Africans because they considered themselves to be a special race. During the Portuguese reign, the glory of the coastal states was no more. The high standards of living the coastal people had enjoyed were no more. The trade that had made them rich was declining. Many buildings were in ruins and there was widespread poverty and misery.

**REASONS THAT LED TO THE DECLINE OF THE PORTUGUESE AT THE EAST AFRICAN COAST (PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES THEY FACED)**

- Portugal was a small country that could not provide enough administrators and officials for such a large coastline that extended from Sofala in the south to Mogadishu in the north.
- It had few soldiers and could not keep fortified garrison along the coast.
- Authority was left in hands of incompetent and corrupt officials who were after enriching themselves.
- The Africans hated the Portuguese due to differences in religion, that is to say, Moslems against Christians (Portuguese).
- The Portuguese were cruel, harsh and brutal, they always punished the coastal people whenever they attempted to rebel and made them to be hated.
- The Portuguese also used divide and rule policy for example, they allied with Malindi against Mombasa.
- The territory was too big and long for effective control and administration.
- There was decline of trade due high taxes on imports and other restrictions hence smuggling of goods, which affected the Portuguese economy.
- Due to decline in trade, the people became poor and dissatisfied and they continuously rebelled.
- The Portuguese failed to support their own allies at the coast, some even betrayed them.
- Portugal had been forced into a union with Spain between1580–1640 which weakened her control of the trading colonies as she was no longer interested in the overseas empire.
- Portugal was challenged by other European powers, which began competing with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean Trade e.g. Dutch, English, French, Turks and others.
The coastal people found useful allies against the Portuguese due to their bad rule e.g. Turks, Oman, and Arabs.

They were faced with constant rebellions along the coast. This greatly disrupted life at the coast e.g. Pate, Mombasa.

Tropical diseases which claimed their life like smallpox, malaria making it difficult for them to administer the coast effectively.

The Portuguese were greatly weakened by a group of cannibals the Zimba, who attacked the East African coast.

The unhealthy climate made the area unattractive for them to work for instance, some places where too humid and hot while others where too cold.

The distance between Portugal and the East African coast was too far hence reinforcement delayed.

There was a problem of communication barrier, the Portuguese refused to learn the African languages and these made their administration difficult.

The income obtained from the gold trade was not enough to pay for administration i.e. soldiers and officials.

The Portuguese lost muz in 1622 to the Persians during the struggle with Arabs and in 1650 the Oman Arabs won back Muscat.

The Capture of Fort Jesus their stronghold in 1698 by the Omani greatly contributed to their decline.

**RESULTS OF PORTUGUESE STAY AT THE COAST OF EAST AFRICA**

**Positive:**

- The Portuguese built Fort Jesus at the coast in Mombasa in 1592/3 which became a fortress and later a tourist attraction for centuries.
- They enriched the Swahili language with an addition of 60 words e.g. emeza meaning table and pesa meaning money.
- They introduced new crops from South Africa of which many have become staple diet for many East Africans e.g. cassava, pawpaws, maize, oranges, sweet potatoes, guavas, pineapples and mangoes.
- They made an improvement in ship building. During their stay on the coast, many architects came in from India and Europe.
- There was establishment of closer trading links between the coast and India.
- They introduced new farming methods for example they encouraged the use of cow dung as manure.
- They led to the coming of more European and Asian traders and craftsmen especially those who helped in the building of Fort Jesus.
- They broke the Muslim- Arab monopoly of the Indian Ocean Trade.

**Negative:**

- Trade declined due to the constant wars and rebellions and heavy taxes imposed.
- There was decline of the coastal towns because many were burnt down and left in ruins for example Kilwa and Mombasa.
- There was widespread poverty and misery among the coastal people due to decline in trade.
There was heavy loss of lives during the attacks.
There was destruction of property like buildings and crops, which led to famine and starvation.
The coastal people suffered oppression and brutality under harsh rule of the Portuguese.
Their religion, Christianity, made no impact at the coast because they lived far from their subjects and stagnation of the Islamic faith because discouraged preaching.
There was depopulation due to the many wars in the areas smuggling developed because the Portuguese had failed to establish proper trading links with the Interior.
Some towns were prevented from trading with their initial partners which led to their decay e.g. Gedi
They led to the European interest at the coast hence leading to the colonization in the 19th Century.

TEST YOUR LEVEL
(you can then submit this sheet to your instructor for marking)

Student Sheet
The Portuguese in East Africa
(Routes to India)
Activity 1

True or False Quiz
Choose the correct answer:
1. The first Portuguese expedition to the East African coast was in 1497.
   - True □ False □

2. Bartholomew Diaz was the 2nd European to sail around the Cape of Good Hope.
   - True □ False □

3. Pedro. A. Cabral attempted to capture Sofala in 1500.
   - True □ False □

4. In 1502, Vasco da Gama captured Kilwa on his second trip to India.
   - True □ False □
5. Malindi joined hands with Mombasa to fight the Portuguese.
   - True  False

6. Francisco D’Almeida captured Sofara in 1505 on his way to Gao.
   - True  False

7. Scotra, Oja Brava and Meska were captured in 1506 - 1507 by Tristan Da Cunha.
   - True  False

8. Malindi was excused from paying tribute to Portugal.
   - True  False

9. The Portuguese conquest of E.African coast was completed by 1510.
   - True  False

10. The occupation of the E. African coast was largely by use of arms.
    - True  False

**Activity 2: Find out about Portugal and the Portuguese**

Search in textbooks (geography or history textbooks) and the internet
- Find the location of Portugal on a world map.
- What facts can you find about Portugal/the Portuguese?
- Why do you think their location on the world map could have attracted them to the East African Coast?
- What other interesting information can you find about the Portuguese?