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Late Medieval Trade

SPICES (SPECIES)

Spices (species) in Ireland 1302-1468

https://chancery.tcd.ie/

- **Almonds**
- **Cloves**
- **Cumin**
- **Dates**
- **Figs**
- **Galangal**
- **Ginger**
- **Mace**
- **Olive-oil**
- **Pepper**
- **Raisins**
- **Saffron**

The spice trade

- What did the term spices mean to medieval traders? We find the answer in merchants' handbooks of their business.
- The longest such list appears in the commercial manual *La practica della mercatura,* composed shortly before 1340 by Francesco Pegolotti from Florence. Itemizing 288 spices (speziere), he included alum and wax, as he considered any non-perishable imported good as a specie.
- The four major commercial spices were black pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and saffron. (Paul Freedman, *Out of the East*, 10f.)

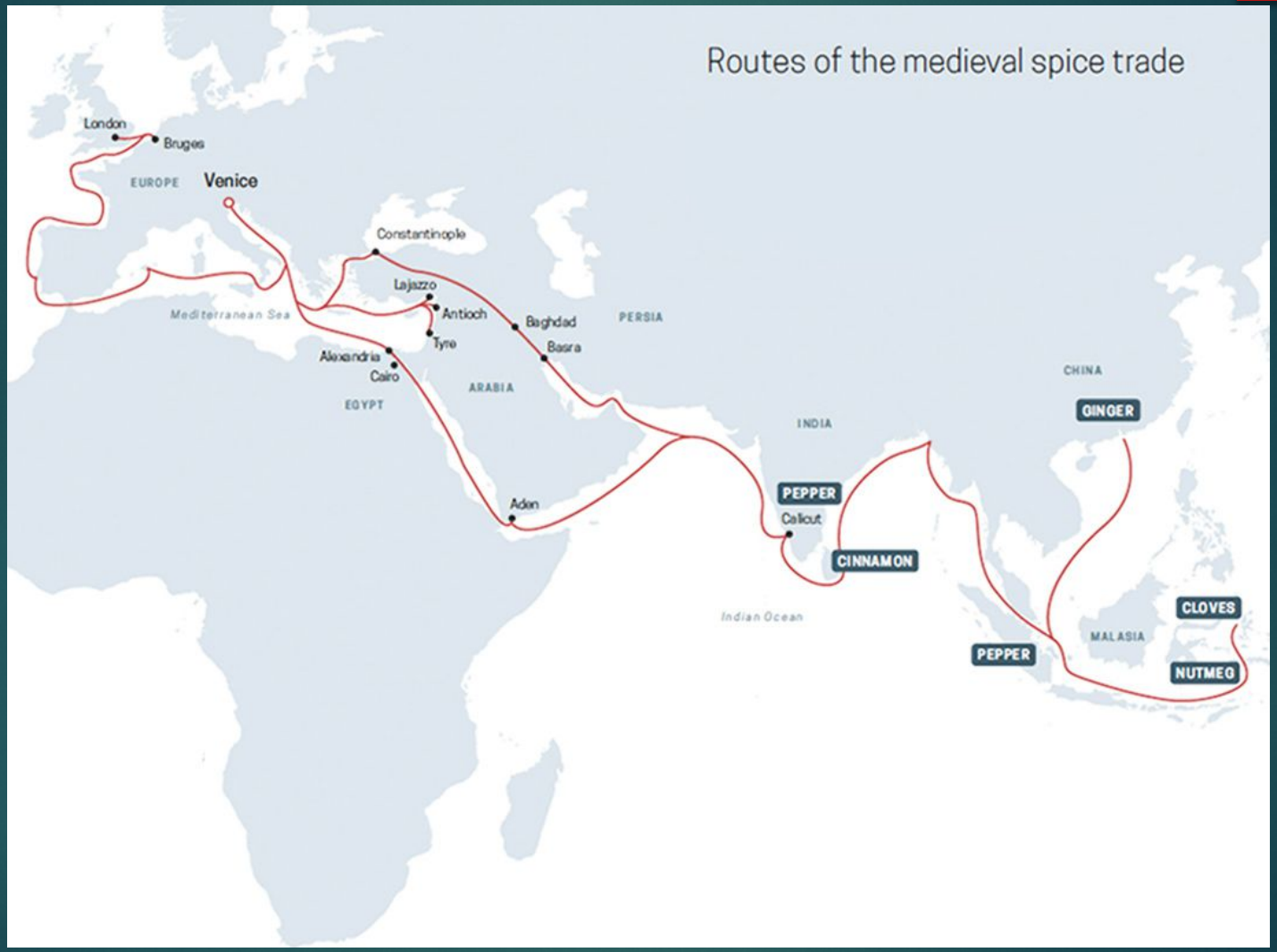
The spice trade

- As Freedman points out (12), the most important new spice according to the "medieval classification of imported goods and drugs" was sugar: "exotic, sold in small quantities, valuable, and credited with marvellous properties".
- "It began as another import from India, but by the fifteenth century sugar cane was being cultivated in Spain, Sicily, the Canary islands and the eastern Mediterranean. … In the medieval period it was a luxury, first considered a medicine, and also mixed with medicines, and used in preserving medicinal products.
- Sugared medicines of different consistencies were the apothecaries staples, and the origin of their confections. (Freedman 13)

The spice trade

- In *The Spice that Built Venice* (Smithsonian Journeys Quarterly, Nov 2, 2015) Jack Turner explores the pepper trade.
- https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/spice-trade-pepper-venice-180956856/
- Maps on slides 6 and 14 are reproduced from his article.
- In the late 12th century "Venetian traders in London sold a pound of pepper for a sum equivalent to a week's work for an unskilled laborer."

Pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, nutmeg …



© Smithsonian Journeys Quarterly

Luxuries for the table

Cloves, pepper and ginger came into use in medieval Europe in the 12th century, and from that time onwards no banquet was completed without spiced dishes. (…) An account written in England in 1418 reveals that half a kilogram of ginger cost as much as a sheep, and a kilogram of mace as much as a cow. (John Lawton, *Silk, Scents, and Spice*, 114.)

Nutmeg and mace

- "Nutmeg is the seed of the evergreen *Myristica fragrans,* native to the Moluccas (Spice Islands) of Indonesia. The fleshy yellow peach-like fruit of this tree splits open when ripe, revealing the nutmeg encased in a dark brown shell, encircled by a network of crimson mace. The hard aromatic nut or seed is ground into nutmeg. Less known, but even more valuable, is mace, the spice prepared from the bright red waxy lace covering the nut. Nutmeg trees are sensitive, and are cultivated in groves protected by tall kanari trees. Even today the specific conditions they require, namely moist air and light volcanic soil, exist only in Indonesia and Grenada." (*Silk, Scents, and Spice*, 115.)

Nutmeg, mace, & nutmeg tree







The Flanders Galleys:

- A trader called Michael of Rhodos, or Michalli da Ruodo, made over forty journeys with the Venetian merchant fleet and navy. He started his career in 1401, and wrote down his journeys in Venetian, in a manuscript in 1434. In 2000 this manuscript was made available to the *Dibner Institute for the History of Science and Technology.*
- It was published by Pamela O. Long, David McGee and Alan M. Stahl, (eds.) *The Book of Michael of Rhodes: A Fifteenth-Century Maritime Manuscript* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).
- One trade route was covered by the Flanders Galleys.
- The route is shown on this website dedicated to him and his manuscript.
- Route of Flanders galleys

Galley from Michael's manuscript p. 145b



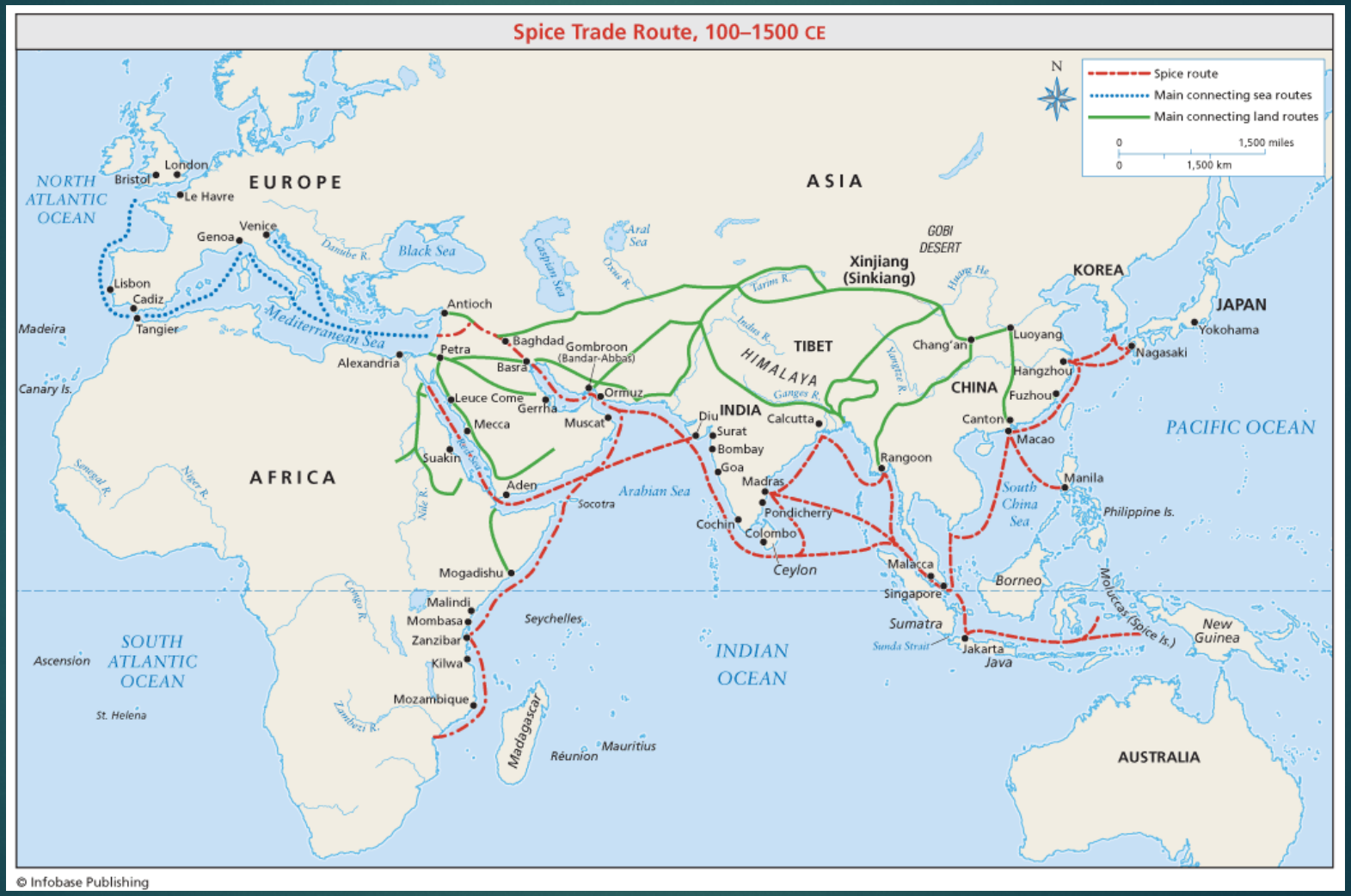
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Michael of Rhodos: the Flanders route



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The Spice Route (red)
Main connecting sea routes (dotted blue)
Main connecting land routes (green)



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Pepper fit for a king



"A king is offered the fruits of a pepper harvest." (*Livre des Merveilles du Monde*,15th century, © Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

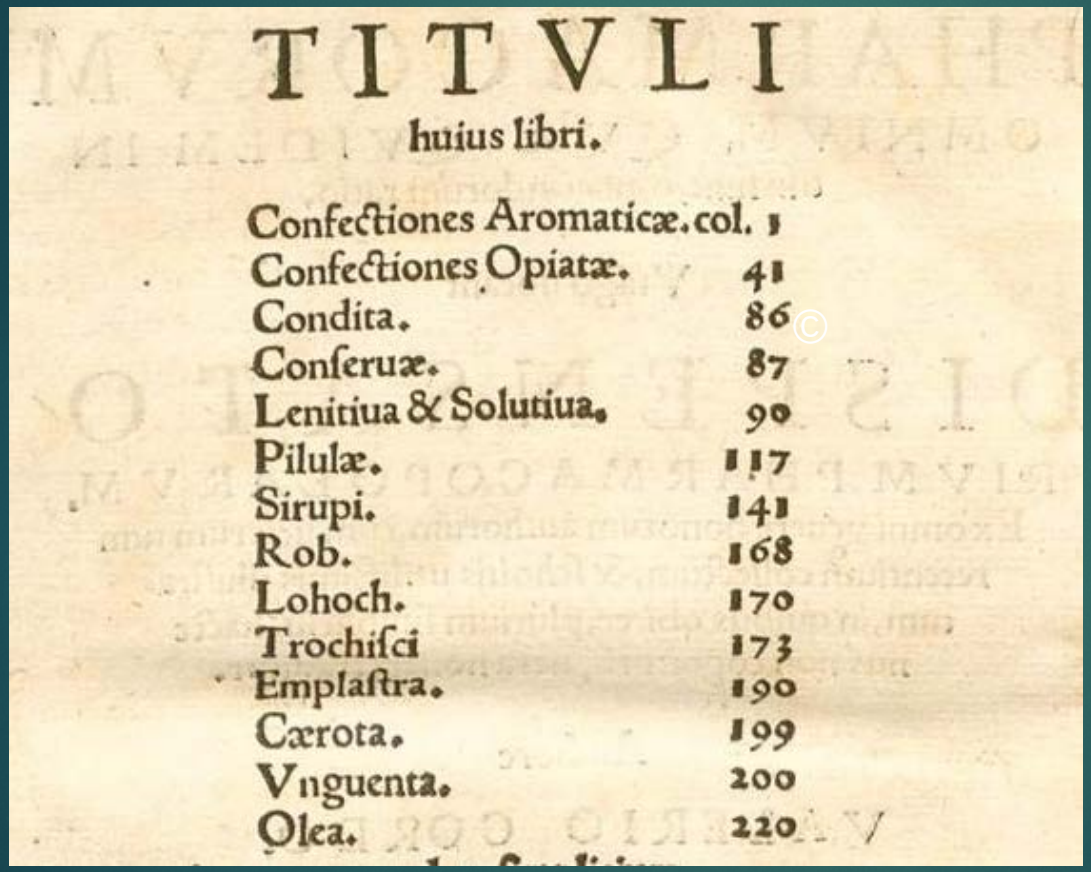
An apothecary's shop



Le régime du corps. Besançon - BM - ms. 0463 (f. 001)
culture.gouv.fr [Public domain]

Valerius Cordus, Dispensatorium Pharmacopolarum (Nuremberg 1546)

- Apothecaries' preparations



TITVLI

huius libri.

Confectiones Aromaticæ. col. 1
Confectiones Opiatæ. 41
Condita. 86
Conſeruæ. 87
Lenitiua & Solutiua. 90
Pilulæ. 117
Sirupi. 141
Rob. 168
Lohoch. 170
Trochiſci 173
Emplaſtra. 190
Cærota. 199
Vnguenta. 200
Olea. 220



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Some preparations listed in the *Dispensatorium*

- Confectiones: a mixture of powdered drugs with honey or wine, syrup or juice. Also called electuarium, electuary.
- Condita: the equivalent of today's candied fruit. Boiled in dissolved sugar and dried. Fruits from abroad were imported in candied form.
- Conservae: One part of finely sliced fresh flowers or herbs was mixed well with two parts of confectioners' sugar, to be used on its own or added to electuaries.
- Pilulae or pillulae: pills; they were started with wine, honey, lemon juice, syrup, turpentine, pressed herb juices or tragacanth gel. This mass was stored, and the pills them selves prepared as necessary in various sizes.
- Sirupi: syrups made from the fresh juice of fruits, herbs or flowers, by boiling with sugar. Wine or honey might be added.
- Rob: a pressed and thickened fruit juice.
- Lohoch: a jam-like remedy taken for cough or lung trouble; made from drugs, sweetener, and aqueous infusions of drugs. Often nuts and kernels, gum, dates or figs were added.
- Trochisci: powdered drug and sugar were formed with traganth into a kneadable mass, resulting in little spheres. These were marked with a little sign and dried.
- Emplastra: made from various substances.
- Unguenta: unguents, the base of salves, made with rendered animal fat, marrow, butter, pressed and boiled etheric oils, wax, turpentine, resins and similar.

(According to Ludwig Winkler, *Das Dispensatorium des Valerius Cordus*, Mittenwald 1934, 12-19)

Tadhg Ó Cuinn's *Materia Medica*

- An Irish Materia Medica
- http://research.ucc.ie/celt/document/G600005

- Reference to the Flanders Galleys in Ó Conchubhair;s Introduction:

- https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol1/cxxxv-cxxxix

Pepper from Malabar (Kerala)

- South of Goa lie the Malabar ports of Calicut, Cranganore, Cochin and Quilon. The Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Chinese, Syrian Christians and Jews all had trading colonies here. The climate of the Western Ghats highlands, with its long rainy season, moderate warmth, and shade was ideal for pepper. Pepper is a woody climber, can reach 10 metres and bear fruit for 40 years. (Cf. *Silk, Scents, and Spice*, p. 95)
- Pepper has been grown here since ancient times. As Classical Tamil poetry affirms, "Here lies the thriving town of Muchiri (sc. Muziris), where the beautiful large ships of the Yavana come, bringing gold, splashing the white foam on the waters of the Periyar, and return laden with pepper. Here the music of the surging sea never ceases, and the great king presents to visitors the rare products of sea and mountain." (Grant Parker, *The Making of Roman India*, p. 173.)
- First published in *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years ago,* Visvanatha Kanakasabhai Pillai, Chennai 1904.)

Tamil poetry on Greek wine merchants

- The poet Nakkirar addresses Prince Nan-maran: „O Mara whose sword is ever victorious! Spend thou thy days in peace and joy, drinking daily out of golden cups, ... the cool and fragrant wine brought by the Yavanas in their good ships.“

- „The Yavanas alluded to ...were undoubtedly the Egyptian Greeks, because as stated in the Periplus, it was Greek merchants from Egypt who brought wine, brass, lead, glass, for sale to Muchiri (Muziris) and Vaikkarai (Bakare) and who purchased from these ports pepper, betel, ivory, pearls and fine muslins.“ (*The Tamils*, 36-37.)

Roman trade with India, *Periplous of the Erythraean Sea*, 1st century CE



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The race is on

- As the spice trade grew, the valuable freight was transported in “armed fleets carrying up to 300 metric tons of spice, defended by a contingent of marines, and sped on their way by banks of rowers, swift enough to outrun any pursuer.” (Jack Turner)
- The seas were dangerous, and pirate ships abounded. These were usually galleys.

Model of a Maltese war galley typical of the 16th century



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Spice trade routes (blue)
blocked in 1453 by the Ottomans



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