

*ancient* At a remarkably early period a high state of civilization prevailed among the Egyptians, in certain towns in the interior of Asia Minor, and along the seaboard of the Eastern Mediterranean, or Levant, where the Phœnicians and Israelites dwelt. From these parts civilization spread to Crete and Greece, and thence around the shores of the Ægean and Black Seas, and to many places in Italy and elsewhere. Both the Phœnicians and Greeks founded many colonies, partly because the restricted areas of fertile land in the home countries rendered emigration desirable, partly to promote commerce, and partly because the Mediterranean Sea, studded as it is with islands, could be navigated with little difficulty by the small boats of those days, when mariners durst not lose sight of land for long at a time. After the Greeks the Romans rose to power, and finally conquered all the lands around the Mediterranean, besides penetrating eastwards to India and north-westwards to Britain. Various causes brought about the decay of this empire in the fifth century, but the remains of the great roads that the Romans made and their massive buildings show how great and widespread was their power at one time.

*Middle Ages* During the Middle Ages the population of Europe gradually increased in number and wealth, and there was therefore an increasing demand for certain products of South-Eastern Asia, as, for example, for pepper and spices, which were required to vary the monotonous diet of the period, when fresh meat was scarce in winter, and there were few fruits and vegetables to be obtained. Silks and gems also, being of high value in proportion to their bulk, repaid the expense of what was then a costly journey. These articles were generally brought from Asia, either up the Persian Gulf and then across to Tyre, Beirut, Alexandretta, or Tripoli in Syria, or up the Red Sea to ports from which they could be easily taken to the Nile, and carried down that river to Alexandria. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Venetians and other traders regularly brought them from Alexandria to Venice, Genoa, and other Mediterranean ports, from which they were distributed throughout Europe. These routes from the East to the Mediterranean were, however, lately largely superseded by that round the Cape of Good Hope, which was discovered by the Portuguese, and used by Vasco da Gama in 1497-1498. Thus the Mediterranean lost a great deal of its Eastern trade, till the cutting of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to its partial restoration.