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Vasco da Gama

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Vasco da Gama

Vasco da Gama was best known for being the first explorer to sail from Europe to India by rounding Africa’s Cape of Good Hope. He was born in 1460 in Sines, Portugal to nobility and joined the Order of Santiago, like his father. Later in life he joined the navy and learned to navigate and sail. Vasco spoke Portuguese and no other languages other than a little bit of English. Vasco’s childhood was good because he was born to a wealthy Portuguese family growing up and had many opportunities. He grew up and learned a skill he enjoyed and became an accomplished figure in history.

Vasco became an important explorer for discovering a new sea route. He sailed for the Portuguese government and his intentions were to find a maritime route from Europe to the east. Manuel, the Portuguese king, commissioned him to do this. He was helped on his ship by his friend, Ahmad Ibn Majid. Over the course of two voyages, beginning in 1497 and 1502, he landed and traded with locals along Southern Africa before reaching India on May 20, 1498 (Biography). He was the first explorer to ever make the voyage and discover this route.

Vasco had many ups and downs throughout his journeys. He lost men to shipwrecks and other obstacles such as disease and attacks. His first voyage took close to two years and he only had fifty four of the one hundred seventy men that he started with. He even got taken to prison, but when he got out he was greeted as a hero by all who knew him. On the second voyage, he brutally beat Muslim traders to death in one region in retaliation for his men being attacked. He did finally make it to India and set up the first Portugal trade post there. Vasco quoted ‘ I’m not the man that I once was’, which meant that he used to be a better person (Biography). I believe he said this because of all the hardships he went through on his journeys.

He is mostly remembered today as a national hero by the Portuguese people. He was awarded the city of Sines, a royal pension of wealth and the title of Lord for his heroic journey and discovery (Wikipedia). His discovery of this new sea route to the East would lead to long-term colonization in history and was important for Portugal and the surrounding areas to develop trade and wealth (World History). He has had gardens, operas, cities, and a class of frigates in the navy named in his honor and a poem written about him. He is buried in a casket of gold and jewels (Wikipedia). The Portuguese people pay tribute to him for their early history through all of these things.

After his discovery, Vasco da Gama lived a quiet life for decades, had six sons and later was involved in politics and war. He died in the city of Cochin on Christmas Eve in 1524 (History). He was known as a good and a bad person when he passed away because he made sacrifices for others and discovered the sea route, but he had also beaten natives and was imprisoned. His most important contribution was the discovery of the sea trade route to India helped establish colonization (Wikipedia). Overall he is remembered for more good than bad and was a very important historical explorer. I believe he contributed to our modern way of life and the Portuguese people and should be honored and remembered for all the good he accomplished.

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