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The arrival of the Europeans in the Americas in the fifteenth century changed the lives of people in both the Americas and Europe forever.

The Search for New Trade Routes

Which country took the lead in finding a trade route to India?

In 1492 Christopher Columbus led 90 sailors in three ships on a voyage into the unknown. As the voyage dragged on, the sailors grew angry. Columbus wrote: "I am told . . . that if I persist in going onward, the best course of action will be to throw me into the sea some night." Before that could happen, a lookout from the ship *Pinta* made the signal that he had spotted land. On October 12, 1492, Columbus left his ship, the *Santa María*, and went ashore.

Columbus believed he had arrived in the Indies— islands located southeast of China. Actually, he had reached North America. How did Columbus get it so wrong? The maps that he and other European explorers used at the time did not include the Americas because no one in Europe knew they existed. All maps showed three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—merged into a huge landmass and bordered by oceans. Some explorers thought that the Western (Atlantic) and Eastern (Pacific) Oceans ran together to form what they called the "Ocean Sea." No one realized the true size of the oceans or the existence of other continents.

Columbus was sailing on behalf of Spain, but Portugal was the first European power to explore the boundaries of the known world by sea. Unlike Spain, Portugal did not have a port on the Mediterranean Sea. This meant the Portuguese could not use the existing trade routes between Asia and Europe. Portugal's rulers wanted to find a new route to China and India.

The Portuguese also knew about the great riches in the West African kingdoms. These riches were carried by caravan across the desert to North Africa and then by ship across the Mediterranean. Portuguese traders needed a better route so that they, too, could get West African gold and other riches.

The Beginning of Portuguese Exploration

Portugal's Prince Henry laid the groundwork for the era of exploration. In about 1420, he set up a center for exploration at Sagres (SAW • grish), on the southwestern tip of Portugal, "where endeth land and where beginneth sea."

Known as Henry the Navigator, the prince never intended to become an explorer himself. Instead, he planned the voyages and then analyzed the reports that his crews brought home. At Sagres, Prince Henry set up a school of navigation. There, astronomers, geographers, and mathematicians came to share their knowledge with Portuguese sailors, shipbuilders, and mapmakers. As each successful voyage brought back new information, Henry's expert mapmakers updated the charts.

Portuguese ships sailed south along the coast of West Africa. As they went south, they traded for gold and ivory and set up trading posts in the region. Because of its abundance of gold, Africa's west coast came to be known as the "Gold Coast." In the mid-1400s, Portuguese traders began to buy enslaved Africans there as well.

King John II of Portugal launched new efforts to create a Portuguese trading empire in Asia. All the Portuguese had to do was find a sea route around Africa. If they succeeded, they would be able to trade directly with India and China. They could bypass the North African and Asian caravans and Mediterranean merchants. With that goal in mind, in the 1480s King John urged Portuguese sea captains to explore farther south along the African coast.

Bartolomeu Dias

In 1487 Bartolomeu Dias set out from Lisbon with two small caravels and a supply ship. King John had sent Dias to explore the southernmost part of Africa. From there, Dias was to sail northeast into the Indian Ocean. This expedition included some of Portugal's best pilots.

They sailed for days, staying close to the coast of Africa. After passing the mouth of the Orange River in South Africa, the expedition met with a fierce storm that carried it southward, off course, and out of sight of land. When the winds finally died down, Dias steered east and then north until he found land again. Excitedly, Dias realized that he had already sailed past the southernmost part of Africa. On the way, he had passed a landform called a **cape**, a piece of land that juts into the water.

Dias set a course back to Portugal. On the return journey, after passing that piece of land again, he wrote that he had been around the "Cape of Storms." King John renamed it the "Cape of Good Hope." The king hoped that the passage around Africa might provide a new route to India.

Vasco da Gama

Portugal's voyages to India began years later. In July 1497, after much preparation, Vasco da Gama set sail from Portugal with four ships, headed for Africa. Da Gama's ships did not hug the African coast, as Dias's ships had. Instead, they sailed in a wide arc south and west of Africa. They were out of sight of land for more than three months. The purpose of this detour was to reach ocean currents that would help the sailors travel safely around the Cape of Good Hope.

After rounding the cape on November 22, da Gama was on Africa's eastern coast. He made many stops, including one at Mombasa (mahm • BAH • suh), part of present-day Kenya. There, he met a pilot from India who guided him the rest of the way. Da Gama reached the port of Calicut, in India, in May 1498. Portugal's long-held dream of a sea route to Asia was now reality.

Portugal's Trading Empire

Events moved quickly. Within six months of da Gama's return to Portugal, 13 ships set sail out of Lisbon and headed for India. The ships were commanded by a nobleman, Pedro Álvares Cabral (PEH • droo AWL • vuh ruhsh kuh • BRAWL).

Cabral planned to follow da Gama's westward-thensouthward course. Instead, he went so far west that he reached Brazil. Cabral claimed Brazil for his king and sent one of the ships back to Portugal with the good news that Portugal now had a foothold in the Americas.

Cabral then continued to India and returned with spices, porcelain, and other valuable cargo. Other Portuguese fleets soon made the journey to India, where Portugal set up permanent forts. Portuguese fleets began to make yearly voyages to India. Their cargoes made the Portuguese capital of Lisbon the marketplace of Europe.

Analyzing What was the importance of the voyages of Dias and da Gama?

Columbus Crosses the Atlantic

How did Spain and Portugal protect their claims in the Americas?

Born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451, Christopher Columbus became a sailor for Portugal. He traveled as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far south as Africa's Gold Coast. To reach Asia, Christopher Columbus had a different route in mind than the one used by his Portuguese comrades. He planned to sail west.

In the 1400s, most educated people believed the world was round. People were less certain about the Earth's size. Columbus was among those who based their estimates on the works of Ptolemy (TAHL • uh • mee), an ancient Greek astronomer. Columbus believed Asia was about 2,760 miles (4,441 km) from Portugal—a voyage of about two months by ship. However, Ptolemy had underestimated Earth's size and, by using Ptolemy's estimate, Columbus did, too.

Vikings in North America

Several centuries before the voyages of da Gama, Cabral, and Columbus, northern Europeans had sailed to North America. Known as Vikings, or Norsemen, their ships sailed from presentday Scandinavia to Iceland and Greenland in the 800s and 900s, and established settlements there for a brief period of time. According to Norse sagas, or traditional stories, a Viking sailor named Leif Eriksson explored lands west of Greenland in about the year 1000. The sagas refer to this land as "Vinland." Ruins from around that period exist in northeastern Canada, which could support the sagas. The Vikings' voyages were not wellknown throughout Europe, however. Other Europeans did not "discover" the Americas until Columbus made his historic voyage.

Columbus and Queen Isabella

Columbus had a plan for reaching Asia, but he still needed money to finance his expedition. He visited European monarchs, looking for support. Finally, he found a sponsor in Spain.

For most of the 1400s, Spanish monarchs devoted, or committed, their energy to driving the Muslims out of Spain. Muslims had invaded Spain in the 700s, but their power had been declining for centuries. The last Muslim kingdom in Spain fell in 1492. This freed Spain's monarchs to focus on other goals. The Spanish observed the seafaring and trading successes of neighboring Portugal with envy. They, too, wanted the riches of Asian trade.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to support Columbus's expedition for two reasons. One reason was that Columbus promised to bring Christianity to any lands he found. As a devout Catholic, this was important to Isabella. Another reason was that if he succeeded in finding a route to Asia, Spain would become wealthy from trade with that region. Queen Isabella promised Columbus a share of any riches gained from lands he discovered on his way to Asia.

Columbus's First Voyage

On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail from Palos, Spain. He had two small ships, the *Niña* and the *Pinta*, and a larger one, the *Santa María*. Columbus was captain of the *Santa María*, his lead ship, or flagship. The three ships carried about 90 sailors and a six-month supply of food and water.

The small fleet stopped at the Canary Islands off the coast of West Africa for repairs and supplies. Columbus then began the difficult voyage westward across unknown and mysterious stretches of the Atlantic Ocean.

After a few weeks at sea, the sailors grew nervous about the distance they had traveled. Columbus refused to **alter** his course. Instead, he encouraged the crew by describing the riches he believed they would find. He urged them on, saying that, "with the help of our Lord" they would arrive in the Indies.

On October 12, 1492, at two o'clock in the morning, a lookout shouted, "*Tierra! Tierra!*" "Land! Land!" He had spotted a small island in the chain now called the Bahamas. Columbus went ashore, claimed the island for Spain, and named it "San Salvador." Although he did not know it, Columbus had reached the Americas.

Columbus believed he had arrived in the East Indies, the islands off the coast of Asia. This is why today we call the Caribbean Islands "the West Indies." It also explains why Columbus called the local people "Indians." He noted that the natives regarded the Europeans with wonder and often touched the crew members to find out "if they were flesh and bones like themselves."

When Columbus returned to Spain, Queen Isabella and the Spanish king, Ferdinand, received him with great honor. They made him Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and agreed to provide funds for his future voyages.

Columbus's Achievements

Columbus made three more voyages for Spain, in 1493, 1498, and 1502. He explored the Caribbean islands of Hispaniola (presentday Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Cuba, and Jamaica. He also sailed along the coasts of Central America and northern South America. He claimed these lands for Spain and started settlements. He also mapped the coastline of Central America.

Columbus had not reached Asia, but instead had found a part of the world that was unknown to Europeans, Asians, and Africans. In the years that followed, the Spanish went on to explore most of the Caribbean, and to establish the Spanish Empire in the Americas.

Dividing the Americas

Both Spain and Portugal wanted to protect their claims in the Americas. They turned to Pope Alexander VI for help. In 1493 he ordered a line of demarcation, an imaginary line that reached from the North Pole to the South Pole, and cut through the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Spain was to control all lands west of the line, and Portugal would control all lands east of the line.

Portugal objected, saying that the division gave more land to Spain. In 1494 the two countries signed an agreement called the Treaty of Tordesillas (tohr • day • SEE • yuhs), which moved the line farther west. The two countries had divided the entire unexplored world between themselves.

Further Explorations

After Columbus, other voyagers explored the Americas. In 1499 Italian Amerigo Vespucci (veh • SPOO • chee) led a voyage funded by Spain. On this and a later journey for Portugal, he explored the coast of South America. Vespucci realized South America was a separate continent, and not part of Asia. European geographers began to call the continent "America" in his honor.

A Spaniard, Vasco Núñez de Balboa (bal • BOH • uh), heard stories of the "great waters" beyond the mountains of Panama, in Central America. He hiked through steamy rain forests to find them. At the coast in 1513, Balboa saw a vast body of water, which he claimed for Spain, along with the adjoining lands. Balboa was the first European to see the Pacific Ocean from the Americas.

Sailing Around the World

In 1520 Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese explorer who was sailing for Spain, reached the southernmost tip of South America. He sailed through the stormy waters of a narrow sea passage, or strait. The strait led him into a calm ocean—the same one Balboa had seen. The waters were so peaceful—*pacífico* in Spanish—that Magellan named the ocean the Pacific Ocean. Magellan died in the Philippine Islands, but his crew continued to sail westward, arriving back in Spain in 1522. Magellan's crew were the first people known to **circumnavigate**, or sail around, the world.

Evaluating What did Spain have to gain by supporting Columbus and his voyage?

LESSON 2 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary

1. Use the term *cape* in a sentence about the explorations of Portugal in the late 1800s.

2. Write a sentence about why it was such an achievement for someone to circumnavigate the globe.

Answer the Guiding Questions

3. **Describing** Describe the geographic factors that led Portugal to begin its ocean explorations.

4. **Explaining** What was the purpose of the Treaty of Tordesillas?

5. **INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY** Write a paragraph explaining why Americans might celebrate Eriksson Day rather than Columbus Day.