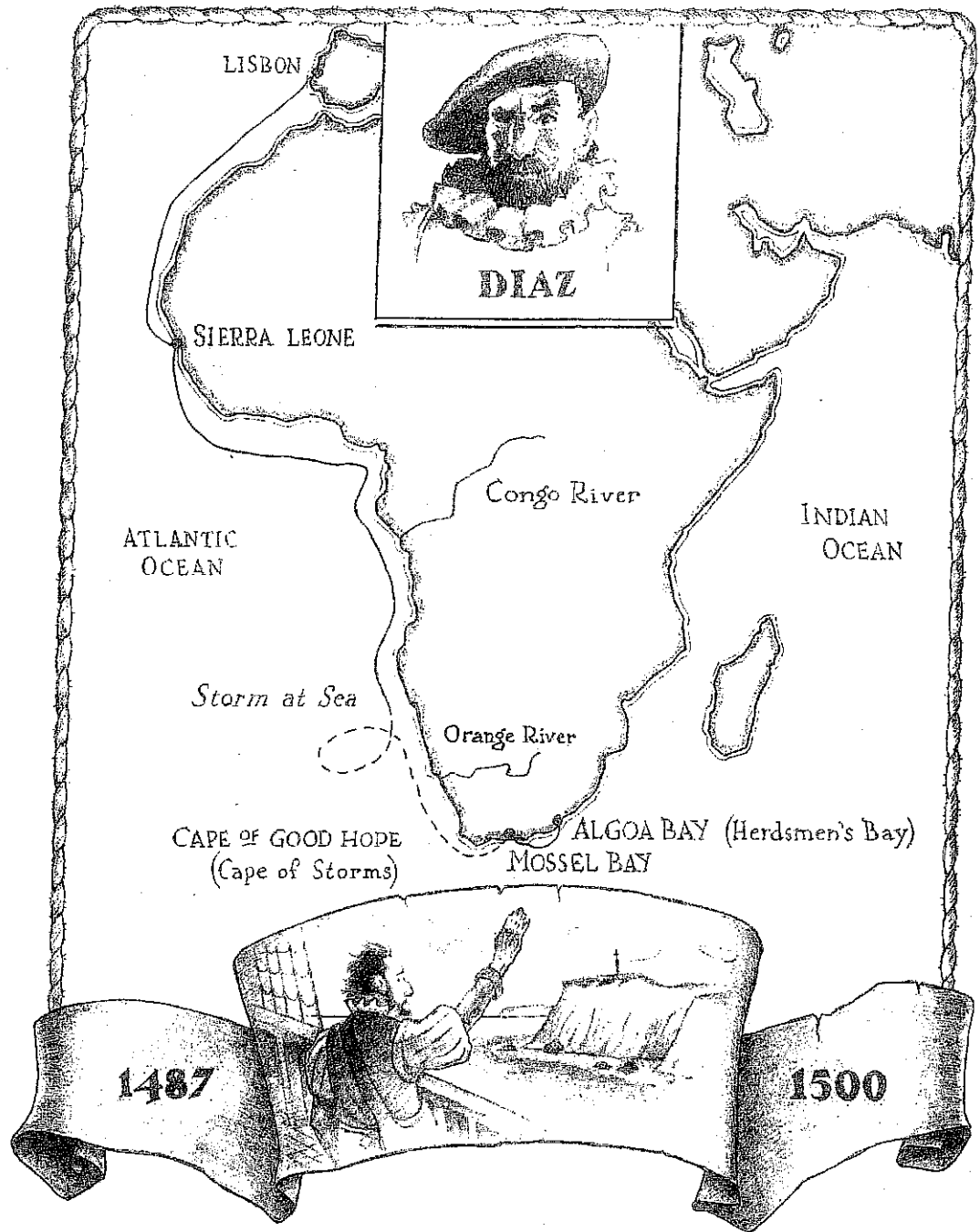


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## Bartholomew Diaz



AFTER PRINCE HENRY'S DEATH, King Afonso took up the exploration and in five years lengthened the African coastline by another 1,500 miles. Still, the question of how far Africa extended south had not been answered. King John the Perfect, who came to the throne in 1481, was determined to find out. He wanted that spice trade, and since the land route to China had been closed by the Turks in 1453, the only way to go, King John figured, was by sea. He knew Africa must end somewhere, and if he could sail around it, perhaps he could cross the Indian Ocean to Calicut, a trading center that everyone knew was on the coast of India.

One thing, however, still hampered explorers. Normally, they fixed their position by looking at the North Star, but when they were south

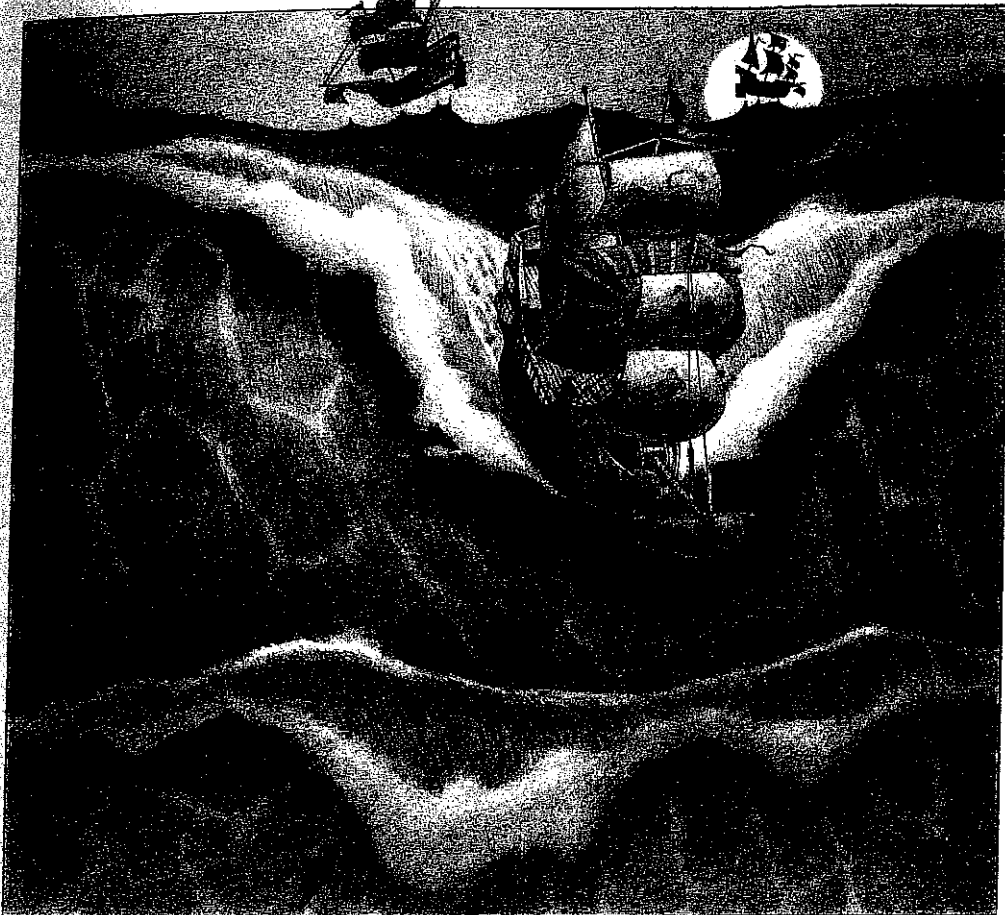
of the equator, the North Star disappeared. Only when they sailed close to the shore did they feel safe—in sight of land and the stone markers that previous explorers had set up as guideposts along the way. But sometimes they were driven into the open sea, and then what? Then all they could do was pray. How could they know where they were when the water was the same on all sides and the sky was like a foreign country that had betrayed them? So King John taught his explorers how to find their latitude by determining the height and angle of the midday sun and checking it against new charts that his astronomers had made.

Then he picked the man who was supposed to bring back the answers. The Diaz brothers were all explorers, but for this trip he chose Bartholomew Diaz, who had been in charge of the royal warehouses in Lisbon.

In August 1487 Bartholomew set sail with two caravels and a store ship carrying extra food and supplies. This was the first time a store ship had accompanied an expedition, so King John obviously expected Bartholomew to be away a long time. He also expected him to come home with answers. Spices and gold too.

No experienced sailor, however, could hope to be away long without running into a storm or two. Still, Bartholomew had never seen such a storm as swept his ships off the south-western coast of Africa. There they were, sailing peacefully along, their course set for the mouth of the Congo River, when all at once the world went mad. Mountains of water attacked them; the sky itself descended; the wind flung their ships about as if they were toys. And it became cold. They had been in the tropics when the storm hit, so how could it suddenly turn so cold? Where could they be? King John had told them to look at the midday sun. There was no midday sun. No night sky. They must be in the Unknown. It was easy enough to scoff at old stories about the

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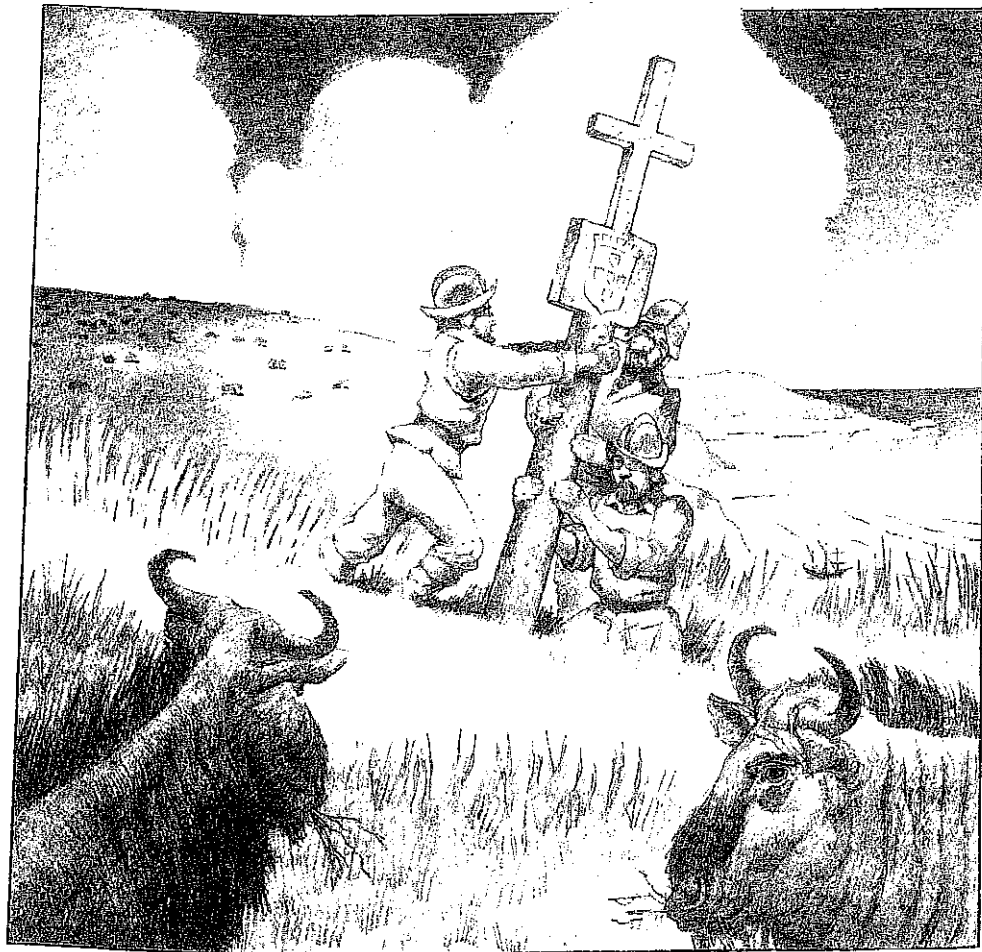
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Unknown when they were on dry land, but not now. Not when they were on the brink of an icy death.

The storm raged for thirteen days, but when it was over, the two caravels were still afloat. The store ship was gone, but the men wouldn't need stores now. Surely their trip would be cut short. Surely they would go straight home. That is, if they could find home. Bartholomew Diaz studied the noonday sun and his charts and ordered the ships to go east. And they did. Day after day. But there was no land in the east. So Bartholomew said, Go north. Finally on February 3,

1488, they saw a bump of land sitting on the horizon, waiting for them like an old friend they had never expected to meet again. When they observed that the coastline continued north, they realized that they were on the other side of Africa. They had gone past the southern tip without even knowing it, and now they were going up the eastern shore. They were sailing in the Indian Ocean, and as far as they could tell, it was open sea.

Bartholomew dropped anchor and went ashore with his men to get fresh water and to put up a *padrão*, a stone marker, the first marker



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on this side of Africa. He was proud of that marker, standing so tall on a green pasture among grazing cattle and naked herdsmen. He called the place Herdsmen's Bay, although the herdsmen had run off at the sight of strangers. Later, peeping over a hilltop, they threw stones down at the white men. Bartholomew did what Portuguese explorers had learned to do when Africans were not cooperative. He shot one of the herdsmen and the rest disappeared.

Bartholomew was ready now to sail up the coast and then across the Indian Ocean, but his men objected. Even the officers objected and threatened to mutiny. They'd had enough of the open sea; they knew the shape of Africa and that should satisfy King John. In the end, Bartholomew was forced to give in, but on one condition only. Each of his men would have to sign an oath, stating that Bartholomew Diaz was not responsible for changing the course. The men agreed, and reluctantly Bartholomew turned around. He hated to leave his stone marker behind. Looking at it, he said that he felt as though he were taking his "last leave of a son condemned to exile forever." To think, he said, that he'd come such a long way and "God would not grant it to me to reach my goal."

But at least on the way back they saw the point where Africa ended, which they had missed before. Africa did not just dribble away to nothing. Before it stopped going south and turned the corner to go north, it flung up a rocky cliff that jutted out to sea, a dramatic good-bye to the continent. Bartholomew called it the Cape of Storms, and landing nearby, he took sightings and drew a chart to show to King John.

Bartholomew Diaz and his two caravels arrived back in Portugal in December 1488. They had been away sixteen months and seventeen days and had added 1,400 new miles to the map. When Bartholomew made his report and showed his charts to the king, there was another

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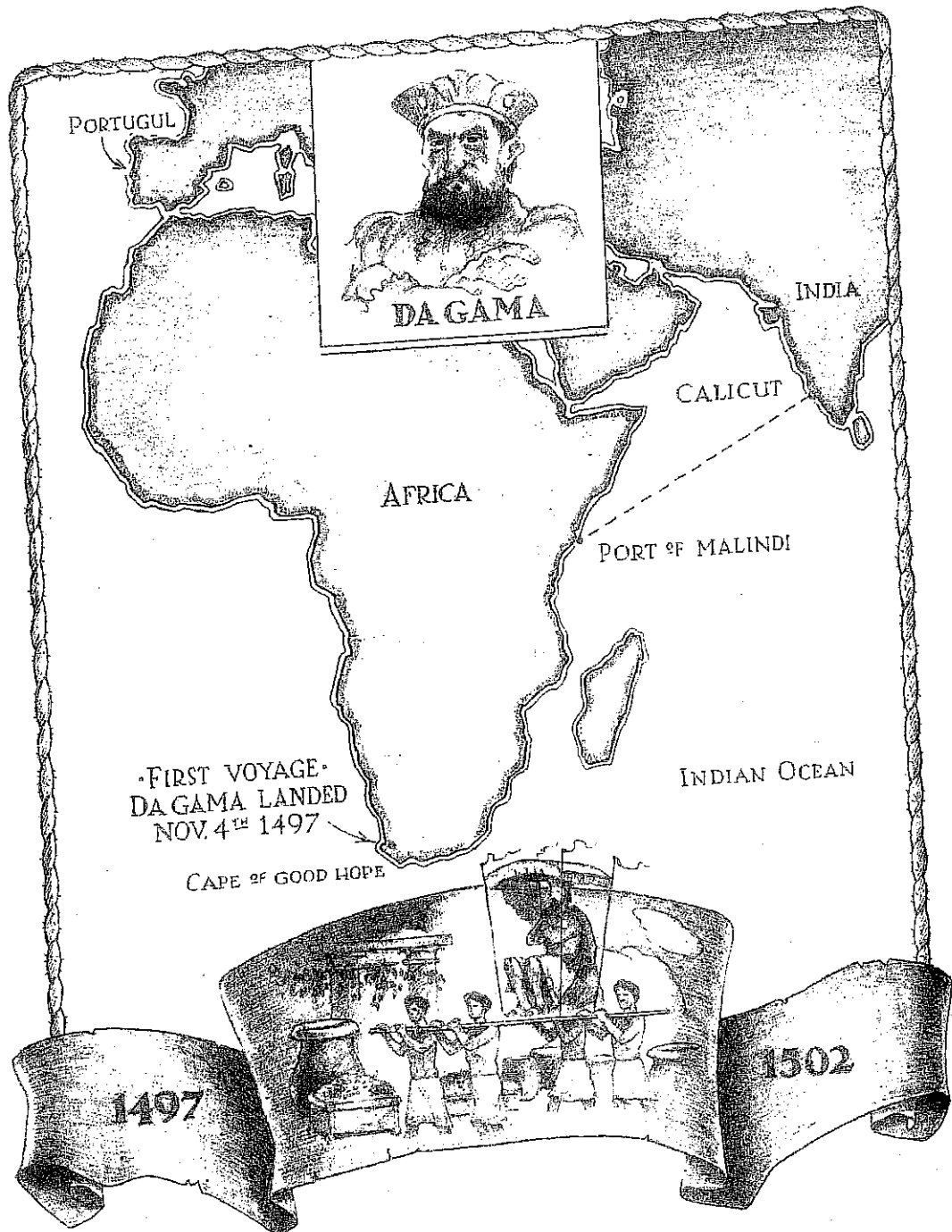


seaman who later claimed to be present, a man by the name of Christopher Columbus, well known in Portugal, who was now soliciting Queen Isabella of Spain to support a venture of his own. It was strange that King John would allow a potential competitor to look at those charts, since Portugal always tried to keep its discoveries secret. Yet Christopher Columbus claimed that he was present and did see just where Bartholomew Diaz had gone and what he had found.

Although King John was pleased with Bartholomew's charts, he did not care for the name that Bartholomew had given the cape at the tip of Africa. Who would seek a cape named the Cape of Storms? He renamed it the Cape of Good Hope.

Although Bartholomew Diaz was obviously the most experienced man to command the next expedition, he was not asked to do it. Instead he was given the job of supervising the building of ships. Perhaps the king thought Bartholomew had shown weakness when he turned back. In any case, King John became too busy with Portuguese troubles to go scouting for silks and spices. No one went to the Indies for another nine years.

Bartholomew Diaz, however, did have one more trip at sea. In 1500, when Pedro Cabral was given a fleet of thirteen ships to go to Calicut, Bartholomew had the command of one. He must have looked forward to greeting that stone marker he had planted, but he never had the chance. The fleet ran into a storm off the Cape of Good Hope. Four ships were lost and Bartholomew's was one of them. Although he had escaped death at sea once, he did not escape this time.



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## Vasco da Gama



IN PORTUGAL King Manuel the Fortunate (who followed King John to the throne) had heard quite enough about Spain's new hero, Christopher Columbus, who had found a string of islands in the ocean. Not much treasure yet, but he promised to bring back more the next time—that is, if he could find it. But the Portuguese already knew exactly where treasure was and knew how to get there.

By 1497 King Manuel had an expedition fitted out, ready to follow Bartholomew Diaz's route around the Cape of Good Hope and then across the Indian Ocean to Calicut, that center for treasures on the southwest coast of India. Four ships were prepared for a three-year journey, and about 170 men signed up for it. Each ship was equipped with six anchors in case of loss and with twenty guns and many

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crossbows, javelins, pikes, and spears in case of trouble. And there was likely to be trouble. Calicut was ruled by Hindus, but its trade was largely controlled by Arabs—Muslims who didn't like Christian interference. Obviously, the leader of Manuel's expedition must be not only a fine seaman but also a soldier and a diplomat. Furthermore, he must be determined. No turning back on this trip. King Manuel chose Vasco da Gama, a thickset, hard-jawed man, born in 1460, the same year Prince Henry had died.

As it turned out, Christopher Columbus was in Spain in 1497, home from his second trip, so of course he knew about Vasco da Gama's expedition and looked forward to meeting him—not in Europe, but in the Indies. When Columbus returned to his islands in 1498, he carried a letter of introduction to Vasco da Gama to be delivered at sea. Although da Gama was going the long way and Christopher was going the short way, he figured that they were bound to bump into each other somewhere.

According to Vasco da Gama, he was going the *sure* way, and on June 8, 1497, he started out with just as grand a send-off as Columbus had been given on his second trip. Spectators crowded on the shore to watch the procession make its way to the waiting boats. First came the priests, chanting; then Vasco da Gama followed by his crew, two by two, all carrying lighted candles. When the four ships in the harbor actually sailed, trumpets blew and the people cheered. There go the Portuguese! On their way to show the world what treasure is!

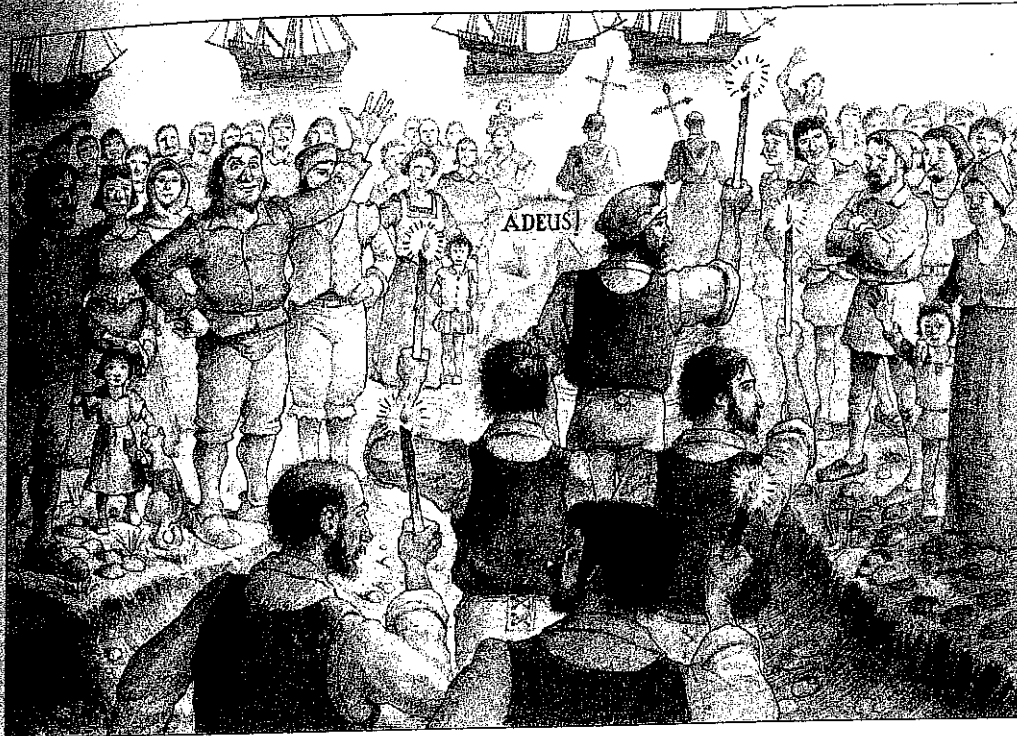
Vasco da Gama proved to be a brave seaman and a good navigator. After his fleet made a short stopover at Cape Verde Islands, he decided to avoid the coastal storms that had plagued Bartholomew Diaz. He made a great loop west and south into the open sea, taking advantage of the circular trade winds that blew here. He returned to land on November 4 just north of the Cape of Good Hope. This was a longer

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route, but it became the regular course that Portuguese ships would follow to the Indies. But the Cape of Good Hope, in spite of its name, was still a cape of storms, and Vasco da Gama had to wait until November 22 before the wind allowed him to round it and head north.

Three days later he was at Diaz's Herdsmen's Bay, where perhaps the happiest scene of his entire journey took place. Vasco da Gama was a stern, forbidding man, but apparently he was in a holiday mood and when two hundred friendly Africans staged a dance, he and his crew joined the circle and danced with them. Back on shipboard, he ordered his musicians to play Portuguese tunes and they continued to dance. Perhaps Vasco da Gama overstayed his welcome; in any case, he must have irritated the local people. As he was sailing away, he watched angry Africans tearing down the stone marker he had put up to replace the one that Bartholomew Diaz had left but that was no longer there.

Sailing far up the eastern coast of Africa, Vasco da Gama was in territory of which much was known to the Arabs but was new to those countries that faced the Atlantic Ocean, as well as to their mapmakers. Here da Gama saw things he had never seen before—melons, cucumbers, and coconuts, or “goblin” nuts, named because of their three eyes. Yet the sailors were uneasy. They were too far south to keep in touch with their familiar stars, although if anyone had felt like turning back, he never mentioned it. Vasco da Gama was not a man to be crossed.

The main concern now was finding a pilot to guide them across the sea to Calicut. Vasco da Gama didn't want to struggle through treacherous waters if an experienced navigator could steer them, but whenever he asked a local chief for a guide, he was given a runaround. Still, Vasco da Gama had his ways. And they were cruel. Whenever a native was uncooperative in giving help, da Gama ordered “the drops”—a mixture of boiling water and resin to be ladled onto his bare skin. Drop by drop. But not even “the drops” produced a pilot.

At last at the port of Malindi on the coast of what is now Kenya, there were many Indian ships at anchor, and Vasco da Gama could wait no longer. He captured a servant of the local sheik and held him hostage. Then at last a pilot was found. Da Gama may never have known that the pilot was a great Arab navigator who called himself the Lion of the Sea in Fury, and certainly the pilot didn't know that the man he was taking to Calicut would eventually destroy Arab trade in the Indian Ocean.

On April 24, 1498, Vasco da Gama and his four ships, led by the Lion of the Sea in Fury, set out for Calicut. It was an uneventful crossing except that soon after they had left Malindi, they recrossed the equator. And there were Orion, the Great Bear, and the North Star, back in place. It was almost as good as seeing Portugal. Since more and more

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sailors had fallen sick with scurvy, a common disease at sea caused by lack of fresh fruit and vegetables (vitamin C), they were eager to go home. But first they wanted a chance at that treasure in Calicut. They had all brought with them private possessions of one sort or another to trade for spices and jewels. On May 20, 1498, Vasco da Gama dropped anchor at Calicut, and eight days later he was being carried in a fancy sedan chair (palanquin) to see the local Hindu king. Da Gama had every reason to think all was going well. On the one-day journey to the king's palace, crowds lined the road, beating drums, showing every sign of welcome, and indeed the king himself received

Vasco da Gama warmly. This, however, was only his first day at the palace.

The second day the king's Muslim officers told the Portuguese that now it was time for them to give the king presents. So Vasco da Gama displayed the gifts he had brought: twelve pieces of striped cloth, four scarlet hoods, six hats, four strings of coral, six basins, a case of sugar, two casks of oil, two casks of honey.

That was all? The king's officers were outraged. Such gifts were fit only for a native chief; for a civilized ruler, they were an insult. Where was the gold?

Vasco da Gama tried diplomacy. The Portuguese had not come to trade, he explained, only to explore. His excuse didn't work. The king was told that Vasco da Gama was nothing but a pirate, and from now on he was treated as such. When he returned to the shore, those crowds who had been so friendly taunted him. "Portugal! Portugal!" they cried, and spat on the ground. His sailors had managed to acquire small amounts of cloves and cinnamon and a few precious stones, and although Vasco da Gama had also gathered some treasure, it was not what he had expected. Yet when he was ready to leave, he was told he had to pay a tax on everything that he was taking. Instead, Vasco da Gama captured some hostages, and on August 23 he simply left. There was only one way to do business with Calicut, he decided. Conquer it. He'd come back with more ships and do just that.

His journey home was a hard one in which he lost so many men to scurvy that there were not enough left to sail four ships. He put everyone on two ships, burned the other two, and in August 1499 he finally arrived in Portugal with 55 survivors from the 170 men who had sailed with him.

In India he had left a trail of fear behind, but what had he accomplished? By proving once and for all that India could be reached by



rounding Africa, he had finally made it possible for Europeans to buy spices without resorting to the high prices that Venice and Genoa charged. In addition, by making the longest voyage of any European vessel, he had shown that the ocean, though dangerous, could be challenged successfully.

Vasco da Gama himself was weakened by the trip and could not return to Calicut as soon as he might have liked. He did go back, however, in 1502 with twenty ships, determined to get even with those Muslims. This time he didn't wait for provocation. Not far from Calicut he stopped a large passenger ship on its way back from a pilgrimage to the Muslims' Holy City of Mecca. He took its cargo (money as well as valuables) and set the ship on fire, with 380 passengers locked up in the hold. When the passengers broke out and came on deck—women and children crying for mercy—Vasco da Gama showed no pity. For four days he stayed with the burning ship, firing at it again and again. Later, as he approached the city, he seized thirty-eight fishermen and hanged them from the rigging of his ship. The message he sent to the king was: Get rid of the Muslims. Then he sailed south to the neighboring state of Cochin, where he established friendly relations (and with other towns on the way), filled his ships with treasure, and sailed home.

Vasco da Gama gave up adventuring, but others continued, bringing much of India under Portugal's control to be ruled by a viceroy appointed by the Portuguese king. In 1524 the king decided that India was being mismanaged, so he asked Vasco da Gama to be the new viceroy. Vasco da Gama was sixty-four years old now, living in retirement with his wife and six sons, but if India needed to be set in order, he figured that he was the man to do it. He didn't have a chance to do much. On Christmas Eve, 1524, three months after his arrival, Vasco da Gama died after a short illness.