

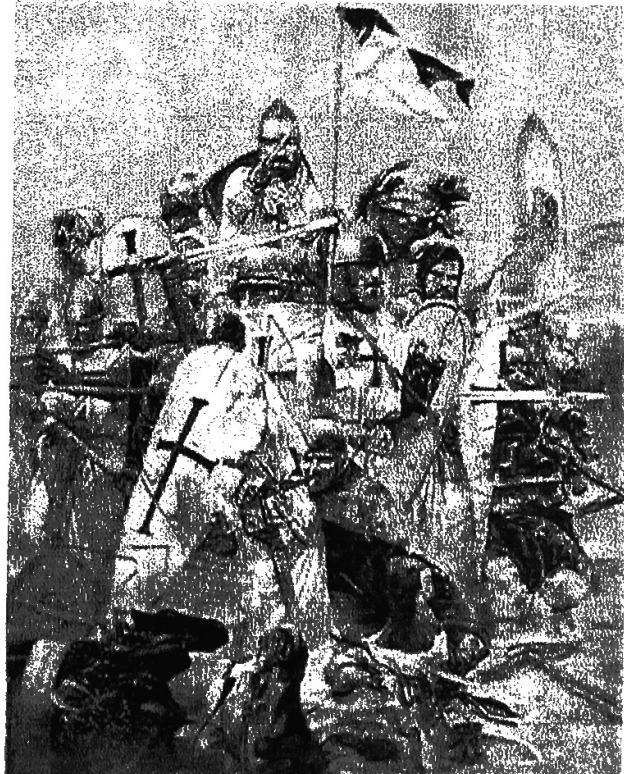
Background History: The Discovery of the New World

The Dark Ages

From about 476 A. D. to about 1000 A.D. people in Europe lived much as their ancestors before them had lived. There was little change in their daily lives. In this period of time, later to be called the Dark Ages, people had few comforts of life. Their food was plain and often spoiled. Their clothes were coarse and uncomfortable. The cloth they used was made from flax or wool. Their houses and furniture were crudely put together. Very few people at this time could read or write. The only learning that took place in these years was religious learning. The people learned about the Bible and the holy places in it.

The Crusades

During the eleventh century, persons began making pilgrimages to Palestine, or the Holy Land as it was then called. At this time, a group of warlike Turks conquered the Holy Land and stopped all Christian pilgrimages. The Turks were Moslems. They had little sympathy for the Christians who wanted to visit Palestine. They treated the Pilgrims cruelly. This action enraged the Christians of Europe. Kings and nobles formed great armies, and a series of wars known as the Crusades broke out. The Crusades lasted over 200 years.



When the Christian Crusaders went to war in Palestine, they visited many beautiful cities. In the market places of Constantinople and Palestine, they

discovered beautiful garments made from soft woven cottons and shining silks. They saw pearls, diamonds, rubies, and other precious stones that were not available in Europe. They experienced foods that were made tasty with spices from the East Indies. They tasted tea from China and wine from Arabia. They viewed rugs and carpets from Persia and ivory from Africa. As the Crusaders returned home from the wars, they brought back some of these fine goods with them. The people of Europe began to treasure the wonders that were available from the East.

Marco Polo

In 1271, two brothers left Italy for a long voyage to the East. They were jewel merchants. They wanted to establish trade with the legendary land of Cathay.



With them they took the son of one of the brothers: his name was Marco Polo. They spent 24 years serving in the court of Kublai Khan, ruler of the land. When Marco finally returned to Europe in 1295, he brought with him tales of the riches of the Far East. He wrote a book which spoke of the Great Wall of China. It told of the great splendid palaces roofed with gold. This book encouraged merchants to begin trading with the East.

The coastal cities of Italy became busy seaports for the goods that moved across the Mediterranean Sea. From the Mediterranean the goods had to be moved across the deserts of the Middle East by camel caravan. In time, they made it to India and China. All the routes were partly by sea and partly land. When the Turks captured more of the land, they blocked off all the trade routes available to the Europeans. The merchants were forced to begin searching for new routes to the Far East.

Henry the Navigator

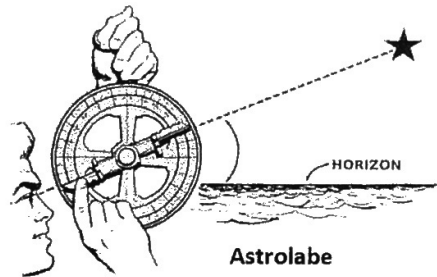
Prince Henry was the son of the king of Portugal. He had an observatory built on the seacoast in southern Portugal. He invited geographers, mapmakers, and seamen from all parts of Europe to come and study at his observatory. He set up a school for navigators. He sailed expeditions farther and farther south along the coast of Africa. Each time a ship would return from such a voyage, the geographers and mapmakers would improve their maps.



The sailors were aided by new and better navigation devices. The compass had been perfected. This allowed sailors to sail out of sight of land. Prior to this time, sailors

dared not stray from the coastlines. They could tell which direction they were going only by viewing the sun or the stars. If they caught fog or a storm at night, they were helpless.

With a new instrument called an astrolabe, they could tell how far from the equator they were. New ships were built with improved steering gear. And when these better ships had sailors using the



new instruments and improved maps, it became much safer to sail out of the sight of land. Nevertheless, when Prince Henry died in 1460, he had never achieved his dream of discovering an all water route to the fabled East.

Three Early Explorers

In 1487, a Portuguese explorer named Bartholomeu Dias set a new record. On orders from the new King John II, he sailed farther south than anyone before him had gone. Each explorer that sailed south along the African coast had been instructed to build a pillar at the farthest point reached. Dias passed the last pillar and kept heading south. His ship was buffeted by stormy seas, but he still kept on. After days of fighting storms, he reached the southern tip of Africa. He



named it Cape of Storms. King John, feeling that the name might discourage further exploration in the area, renamed it the Cape of Good Hope.

On August 3, 1492, three ships left the harbor of Palos, Spain. A voyage was beginning that the commander of the ships has worked toward for many years.



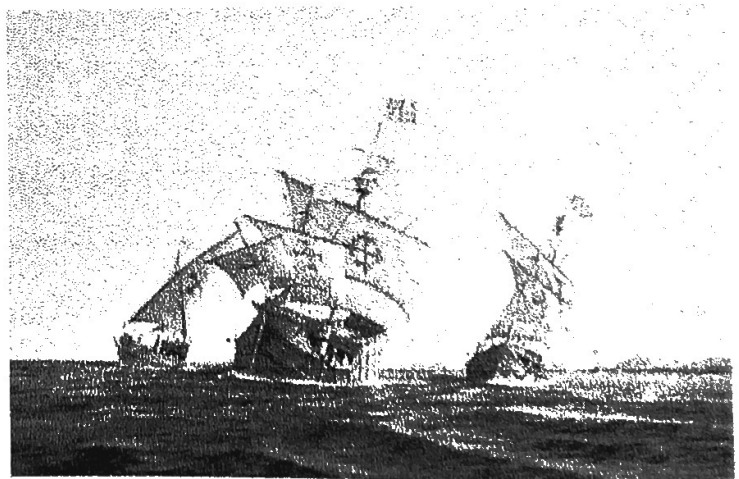
Christopher Columbus

His plan was to reach the East by sailing west. He tried to get support for his plan from the kings of Italy, England, and Portugal. Finally, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to support his dream. The man was Christopher Columbus. The plan seemed ill-fated. The seacoast town of Palos was forced to supply two ships and crew to Columbus for the voyage. The Palos residents received this punishment for having

been caught smuggling illegal goods into Spain. Columbus confiscated a large ship named the *Santa Maria* and a smaller caravel named the *Pinta*. Another caravel, the *Nina*, was purchased outright from a Palos merchant.

Eight-eight seamen were forced to crew the three ships across the Sea of Darkness. The rudder of the *Pinta* broke a few days out to sea. The tiny caravel sailed crippled into the Canary Islands, where it was repaired.

While there, Columbus spent an additional two weeks reregging the *Nina* from lateen (triangular sails) to square rigging. Hearing that a Portuguese man-of-war was on its way to stop his voyage, Columbus slipped out to seas with his three ships.



As he passed the last island in the group, it exploded with a violent volcanic eruption. It seemed to be an additional omen of doom.

When the ships compass failed to work properly, his men demanded that he turn back. Columbus forcing his will on the men continued on. When they sailed into what seemed to be a sea of surface weeds, the men became very moody. The

ships were slowed greatly by the weeds. The area today is known as the Sargasso Sea. Columbus had to lie about the distance they had traveled to keep his men from forcing him to return to Spain. Finally signs of land began to appear. Land birds swooped overhead and bits of brush and pieces of fruit were seen floating in the water. Columbus was very relieved when land was finally spotted on October 12, 1492. Seventy days had elapsed since leaving Spain. Columbus named the first island sighted San Salvador. Columbus was to make four voyages in all to the New World. Unfortunately, he died in poverty in 1506, still thinking he had reached the islands off the continent of Asia and unaware that he would live in history as the discoverer of America. (The honor of discovering the route to the Far East was to go to another Portuguese explorer. In 1498, Vasco da Gama sailed four ships around the Cape of Good Hope northward into the Indian Ocean to reach India and the Spice Islands.) However, other captains followed Columbus' lead and opened up the New World of the Americas with its abundant riches, particularly gold. The age of the great galleons had begun.