



The Age of Exploration

History – Junior Cert

Quick Notes

The Age of Exploration

1.1 Overview:

- In 1400 travel was very limited – little was known beyond coastlines, roads were poor, ships could not sail into the wind or navigate accurately and many people were afraid of the unknown, thinking the earth was flat or the seas were full of monsters
- All this starts to change during the 15th Century – for the following reasons:
- (1) Stories of great wealth to the east by the 14th Century explorer **Marco Polo** inspired many people to travel and make their fortune
- (2) The spirit of the **Renaissance** – questioning, a desire to learn and discover new things – encouraged explorers in the same way as it encouraged painters, sculptors, architects etc
- (3) **Trade in silks and spices** (spices needed to preserve and flavour food) from the east was very lucrative, especially as Europe had a **growing population** and demand was rising, and the chance of becoming rich also encouraged explorers
- (4) The Catholic Church wanted to **spread Christianity**
- (5) Kings and rulers wanted to **build empires** by discovering and conquering new lands
- (6) 1452 and the **fall of Constantinople** shut off access to the **Great Silk Road** – an overland road to the east –and thus new routes needed to be found
- (7) Stronger and more manoeuvrable ships were developed – **Caravels** had strong, **clinker-built hulls** and triangular, **lateen sails** to sail against the wind, **Naos** were large and strong and could carry lots of food and supplies
- (8) New instruments of navigation were also discovered – the **quadrant** and the **astrolabe** helped determine a ship's **latitude** by using the stars, the **compass** identified north and the **log** measured a ship's speed in **knots**
- (9) New **maps**, both by recent explorations and from ancient manuscripts brought west from Constantinople reduced the fear of the unknown, and **Portolan Charts** mapped harbours and coastlines accurately
- (10) The Spanish and Portuguese had driven **Muslim Moors** out of Spain and when they pursued them to North Africa it created a desire to push further down the African coast

- Despite these improvements, voyages were still very risky – sailors risked **scurvy** (a disease from lack of fresh fruit and vegetables) or **cholera** (a disease from lack of fresh drinking water), meals had to be cooked in an iron box to avoid fires and food has to be heavily salted to preserve it for as long as possible
- Early explorers came from Spain, Portugal and Italy – Holland, England and France joined later

1.2 Prince Henry the Navigator:

- Born in 1394 as third son of King John I of Portugal
- Made a knight at 21 in reward for driving Moors out of Ceuta in North Africa – wanted to extend Portuguese control in North Africa to cash in on the trade of gold, spices and slaves
- Began to sponsor voyages of exploration down the African coast
- Founded a **school for explorers** at **Sagres** in Portugal – attracted map-makers, instrument-makers and astronomers
- Under his patronage Madeira was secured for Portugal, the Canary Islands were reached, **Cape Bojador** was rounded and Portugal grew very wealthy from the trade in gold and slaves

1.3 Bartholomew Diaz:

- Born in 1450 – in 1487 ordered to sail beyond furthest marker (**padraos**) on the African coast
- Driven out to sea by storms and when he headed back to the coast he found only more open sea
- Thus he was the first man to reach the southern tip of Africa – the **Cape of Good Hope**
- Lost at sea in 1500

1.4 Vasco da Gama:

- Born in 1469 – set sail in 1497 with three ships aiming to round the Cape of Good Hope and reach **India**
- Having rounded Africa he was able to consult with Arab traders from Mozambique in 1498 who had established trade routes with India centuries before
- Da Gama reached **Calicut** and then returned to Portugal with a great cargo of spices – many men died on the voyage from scurvy
- Hundreds of voyages followed in his footsteps, turning Portugal into a wealthy and powerful country

1.5 Christopher Columbus:

- Born in Genoa in 1451 – gained sailing experience on merchant ships sailing around the Mediterranean
- Shipwrecked off the coast of Portugal he spent nine years living with map-makers
- On a voyage to Iceland he stopped at Galway and saw two Asiatic bodies washed up on the shore and wondered how they got there – became convinced that the earth was round and that east could be reached by sailing west, just not sure of the distance of the voyage
- Believed **Cathay** (China) and **Cipangu** (Japan) lay only 4,000 km west of Europe – thanks to a map by **Toscanelli**
- Approached kings of Portugal, England and France for sponsorship but all turned him down – **Ferdinand** and **Isabella** of Spain gave him three ships (the **Nina**, **Pinta** and **Santa Maria**) and permission to recruit a crew from the port of **Palos**
- The **Pinzon** brothers and 80 other crew signed on including children and men on the run from the law – some feared falling over the edge of the world or monsters but most simply feared the journey would be too long to survive, thus the crew were given the last rites before sailing
- The Santa Maria was the flagship – all three stocked with hard bread, wine, salted meat, dried fish, beans and rice
- Left Palos on **August 3rd 1492** – stopped for repairs and re-supply at the **Canary Islands** then headed out across the ocean

- Crew feared length of voyage so Columbus kept **fake logbook** with shorter distances – **mutiny** still a possibility so Pinzon brothers threatened any rebels with death by hanging
- Land sighted at last on 12th October 1492 – Columbus named it **San Salvador** and the natives **Indians**, as he thought he'd reached India, he had in fact discovered the **New World**
- Spent time exploring **Cuba** and **Hispaniola** before Santa Maria ran aground on Christmas Day 1492
- Wrecked wood turned into a fort (**La Navidad**) and 39 men left on guard while Columbus returned home with slaves and gold
- Columbus was welcomed as a hero and given land and titles – but three voyages later was brought home in chains in disgrace on the charge of cruelty to the natives

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