

VASCO DE GAMA'S VOYAGE TO INDIA

Manuel I (1469–1521), King of Portugal (1495–1521)

to Ferdinand II (1452–1516) and Isabel (1451–1504), Monarchs of Aragon and Castile

Lisbon, July 1499

Most high and excellent Prince and Princess, most potent Lord and Lady

Your Highnesses already knows that We had ordered Vasco da Gama, a nobleman of Our household, and his brother Paulo da Gama with four vessels to make discoveries by sea, and that two years have now elapsed since their departure. And since the principal motive of this enterprise has been, as with Our predecessors, the service of God Our Lord and Our own advantage, it pleased Him in his mercy to speed them on their route.

From a message which has now been brought to this city by one of the captains, We learn that they did reach and discover India and other kingdoms and lordships bordering upon it; that they entered and navigated its seas, finding large cities, large edifices and rivers, and great populations, among whom is carried on all the trade in spices and precious stones which are forwarded in ships (which these same explorers saw and met with in good numbers and of great size) to Mecca and thence to Cairo, whence they are dispersed throughout the world. Of these spices they have brought a quantity, including cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, and pepper, as well as other kinds, together with the boughs and leaves of the same; also many fine stones of all sorts, such as rubies and others. And they also came to a country in which there are mines of gold, of which, as of the spices and precious stones, they did not bring as much as they could have done, for they took no merchandise with them.

As We are aware that Your Highnesses will hear of these things with much pleasure and satisfaction, We thought it well to give this information. And Your Highnesses may believe, in accordance with what We have learnt concerning the Christian people whom these explorers reached, that it will be possible (notwithstanding that they are not as yet strong in the faith or possessed of a thorough knowledge of it) to do much in the service of God and the exaltation of the Holy Faith once they shall have been converted and fully fortified in it. And when they shall have thus been fortified in the faith, there will be an opportunity for destroying the Moors of those parts.

Moreover, We hope, with the help of God, that the great trade, which now enriches the Moors of those parts through whose hands it passes without the intervention of other persons or peoples, shall be diverted, in consequence of Our regulations, to the natives and ships of Our own kingdom, so that thenceforth all Christendom in this part of Europe shall be able in a large measure to provide itself with these spices and precious stones. This, with the help of God, who in His mercy thus ordained it, will cause Our designs and intentions to be pushed with more ardor especially as respects the war upon the Moors of the territories conquered by Us in these parts, which Your Highnesses are so firmly resolved upon and in which We are equally zealous.

And We pray Your Highnesses, in consideration of this great favor, which with much gratitude We received from Our Lord, to cause to be addressed to Him those praises which are His due.

Most High and Excellent Prince and Princess, most potent Lord and Lady, may the Lord Our God ever hold Your persons and kingdoms in His holy keeping.

James Harvey Robinson and Charles A. Beard, *Readings in Modern European History* (1908), 1:92–93.