

Vasco de Gama's Voyage and Display of European Prejudice against Africa

Steven Tio

Westward voyages into the Atlantic were expected to be futile and through their trade in the Mediterranean, the Portuguese found that the Venetians were obtaining significant wealth through their trade with Asia. In 1487, a sailing fleet left Portugal under Bartolomeu Dias to explore an ocean route to India. This fleet managed to reach as far as the southern tip of Africa which was named the Cape of Good Hope with aspirations of discovering India. At the same time, two spies, Covilhã and Paiva, were sent east overland, and they discovered the origin of the pepper and cinnamon which had been a highly sought-after commodity in Venice. Vasco da Gama's voyage was thoroughly planned with a fleet comprised of the most experienced Portuguese navigators. The voyage had the goal of finding a highly profitable trade route using the information Dias and Covilhã acquired. Through a careful study of Vasco da Gama's account of his first voyage, my paper argues that ideals of European superiority and prejudice are shown by the crew's military, religious and economic interactions with the African people they encountered on the voyage.