Portuguese Exploration

After Columbus’ voyage to find the New World, both Spain and Portugal sought to claim new lands and began competing with one another. This competition was straining the relations between the two countries, which may have eventually led to war. However, both countries listened to one authority- the leader of the Catholic Church, the pope.

Although the pope wanted both countries to continue exploring, he did not want Spain and Portugal to wind up at war with one another. He was concerned with how a war could affect both the economic and religious affairs in both countries.

Portugal and Spain tithed large amounts of money to the church. As these two countries became richer, the church also became richer. Additionally, the church viewed new lands as opportune places to spread their faith, often sending missionaries to try to convert the natives.

In order to keep the peace, the pope ruled that Spain and Portugal would share the seas. In 1494, he had both countries sign the Treat of Tordesillas. This treaty drew an imaginary line from the north pole to the south pole. The line was 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. A league is a unit of measurement that is equivalent to about three miles. The Treaty of Tordesillas declared that all land to the east of this line would belong to Portugal. All land to the west would belong to Spain.

While this treaty seemed to work out for Spain and Portugal, it failed to recognize that other countries, like England, would also begin their own explorations. This short-sightedness shows the dominance of Spain and Portugal with regard to seafaring in the late 1400s. In addition, the Treaty of Tordesillas also failed to account for the fact that the people who lived in Africa, India, and other countries, may not want to be ruled by Spain or by Portugal. The idea that the world could be divided and given to these two countries alone illustrates how both Spain and Portugal viewed themselves as the dominant countries of the time.

Vasco da Gama was a Portuguese businessman who sought to find a route to India by going around Africa. In 1497, he set out with four ships and 170 men to find a route. Da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and up the eastern coast of Africa. This area was new to Europeans, and Da Gama eventually landed in the port of Malindi, which is in modern-day Kenya. In Malindi, Da Gama met and experienced Muslim sailor named Ahmad ibn-Majid who showed Da Gama the route to India.
Portuguese Exploration (Cont’d)

Da Gama’s voyage was a costly one. More than half of the sailors died from a condition called scurvy. (Scurvy is caused by poor diet and a lack of vitamin C). In May of 1498, Da Gama reached Calicut, which is an Indian city. Da Gama brought great wealth to Portugal because he found the route to India. This wealth helped pay for future explorations.

After Da Gama’s success, another Portuguese businessman named Pedro Cabral attempted a voyage to India. Cabral went way off course and landed in South America. Because he landed east of the line established in the Treaty of Tordesillas, he claimed this new land for Portugal. This land became known as Brazil. While most South Americans today speak Spanish, Brazilians speak Portuguese because the land was originally controlled by Portugal.
Portuguese Exploration Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. This treaty drew an imaginary line from the north pole to the south pole:
   a. Treaty of Versailles
   b. Treaty of Tordesillas
   c. Treaty of Portugal
   d. Treaty of Spain

2. This disease is caused by poor diet and a lack of vitamin C:
   a. Measles
   b. Mumps
   c. Bubonic Plague
   d. Scurvy

3. This man sailed around the Cape of Good Hope to find a route to India:
   a. Vasco da Gama
   b. Pedro Cabral
   c. Christopher Columbus
   d. Ferdinand Magellan

4. Brazil was originally claimed for:
   a. France
   b. Portugal
   c. Spain
   d. England

True or False:

____ 5. Ahmad ibn-Majid who showed Magellan the route to India

____ 6. A league is a unit of measurement that is equivalent to about three miles.

____ 7. Portugal and Spain tithed large amounts of money to the church.

____ 8. The church viewed new lands as sinful places and discouraged all countries from continuing their exploration.

____ 9. The treaty signed by Spain and Portugal decreed that all lands to the west of the imaginary line would belong to Portugal.
Portuguese Exploration Answers

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