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978-1-108-01137-2 - Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama, and his Viceroyalty

Gaspar Correa

Excerpt

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(THE FIRST VOYAGE OF VASCO DA GAMA,
FROM THE “LENDAS DA INDIA” OF
GASPAR CORREA).

THE first Book of the Discovery of India by the first fleet which sailed from the kingdom in the year one thousand four hundred and ninety-seven; and other four fleets of captains of expeditions, up to the year one thousand five hundred and five, when Don Francisco d’Almeida went to India, the first conqueror who governed India four years. Which I, Gaspar Correa, brought together and wrote, with the greatest veracity with which I have been able to know the deeds and events of the illustrious captains who went thither up to the year one thousand five hundred and nine.¹

¹ This title-page of the manuscript of the Duke of Gor is not given in the printed edition of Gaspar Correa, Lisbon, 1858.

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[More information](#)

TO THE READER.

NOTHING of this human life is so profitable to the living as the remembrance and memory of the good and evil that has gone by, in order to preserve ourselves from evil, by guiding our life, so as not to fall into those evils, according as the good men acted ; and within the soul a very pure love and lively remembrance of those things which the High God was pleased to suffer for the salvation of the world; with perfect faith, which, if we act righteously, will give us eternal glory: and to those of us who are wanting in this remembrance, damnation without end.

For that which may piously be believed is, that those will obtain merit before God who write good things. I do not speak with respect to sacred writings which are for the purpose of our salvation ; I only speak of the good and virtuous deeds of those who have preceded us, from the memory and remembrance of which, according as each one has an inclination thereto, the fruits of satisfaction may be gathered. Some persons have so much enjoyed these, that they have esteemed it great wealth to possess a large library, only for the pleasure which they derived from reading and knowing things that have passed by. I, the least worthy of all who have handed down the deeds of others, with my weak and rude understanding, direct my efforts to write and relate the affairs of India ; as it appears to me that in some other time they will seem well to whoever hears them.

I chose to undertake this labour, born of leisure, and so unnecessary for me, since these things will be related and written in such perfection in the great chronicle of the most

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[More information](#)

excellent King Dom Manuel, who ordered the discovery of India, and of the illustrious prince Dom Joaô, our sovereign, and successor in his glory. On account of which, it remains for me only to be a writer as an eye-witness (and the chronicler of the kingdom is one by hearsay), and I took up this task with pleasure, because the commencements of the affairs of India were things so gilded, that it seemed that they had not beneath them the iron, which later they discovered to view.

Following out my resolution I went forward, in order that the work I had already executed should not be lost. Evils increased, the benefits diminished ; thus, almost everything changed into lively ills, so that the narrator of them might, with reason, be called the imprecator, and not the eulogist of such illustrious deeds and events as occurred in the discovery and conquest of so many kingdoms and lordships : in the which, the deeds of the Portuguese appear more wonderful than those of any other nation, accomplished with such glorious honours, as Our Lord in his great mercy was pleased to grant the accomplishment of by our hands, as appears in these days.

And as sixteen years had passed since India had been discovered, when I came to it, a youth of few years, without any intention of undertaking this charge ; but seeing the noble deeds which took place, and the doubtful struggles which occurred later, I decided upon making some brief remembrances with veracity of what had happened. I laboured with much care upon the events which I saw, and those which had gone before, inquiring of the older men who had been in this discovery, and removing doubts by means of the same men who had been present at the events : in the course of which, I found some men who had come in the very ships of the discovery. Also by means of some memoirs which I found in the possession of Moors and Gentiles, and especially in Cananor, who wrote with surprise at

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[More information](#)

seeing what they had never imagined. All which I thus collected together, and wrote with that truth (for which I pray our Lord to assist me in the labours of this life for the deserving of the true salvation), for with this design I will add nothing¹ to the truth of what I was able to ascertain most certainly. I do not fear the criticism and contradiction which many will offer on various affairs, shewing the desire to have it understood that they were present at them, and for that cause know them better, striving to reach at the honour which pertains to those affairs. And as I am without any feeling of covetousness, vanity, or envy, I have taken upon myself this labour only to satisfy my desire, and to content my will. And I will not write anything of the countries, people, or trade, because there were some who occupied themselves with those matters: upon which I saw some volumes, and especially a book which Duarte Barbosa made respecting them, and wrote of the factory of Cananor.² For which, if it please God, I will only labour at writing very completely of the noble deeds of our Portuguese who warred in these parts of India. And of the great and small, as will be necessary and reasonable, I will write with much exactness of the good and evil deeds of each one as they happened, without detracting from anyone their deserts, either for good or evil; protesting that I will not show this book to anyone in my days, because after this life is passed they say the same of the good as of the bad; and there are many who correct other men's work but no one corrects himself. The great and small having arrived at equality in death remain such as they were. To God alone I commend myself; may He please to assist me with respect to my desire

¹ The Lisbon edition adds here, "nor diminish."

² Da feitoria de Cananor. Damian de Goes also mentions as the work of Duarte Barbosa a book describing the nations lying between the Cape of Good Hope and the Lequeos, in which he treats of their customs, ceremonies, and sects. Cap. 42.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

TO THE READER.

and purpose, which I entirely offer for His holy service and praise ; and of His holy mercy may I attain to ending my days in His holy service, and to write and end this work in complete truth without any failing of my conscience ; because if I were to write any evil falsehood of the dead, it would be a great charge against me, and an accusation before the Lord God.

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[More information](#)

CHAPTER I.

How the King Dom Joan sent Joan de Covilhan and Gonzallo de Pavia,
his equerries, to go and learn about the countries of Prester John
of India.

DURING the reign of Dom Joan, the second of that name in
the kingdom of Portugal,¹ in the year one thousand four

¹ Os Lusíadas, Canto IV—

LX.

Porém depois que a escura noite eterna,
Affonso aposentou no Ceo sereno,
O Principe, que o Reyno então governa,
Foi Joanne segundo, & Rey trezeno :
Este por haver fama sempiterna,
Mais do que tentar pôde homem terreno,
Tentou, que foi buscar da roxa Aurora
Os terminos, que eu vou buscando agora.

LXI.

Manda seis companheiros, que passáraõ
Espanha, França, Italia celebrada,
E lá no illustre porto se embarcáraõ,
Onde ja foi Parténope enterrada :
Nápoles, onde os fados a mostráraõ,
Fazendo a varias gentes subjugada,
Para a illustrar no fim de tantos annos,
Co senhorio de inclytos Ispanos.

When endless night had seal'd his mortal eyes,
And brave Alfonso's spirit sought the skies,
The second of the name, the valiant John,
Our thirteenth monarch, now ascends the throne,
To seize immortal fame, his mighty mind,
What man had never dared before, design'd ;
That glorious labour which I now pursue,
Through seas unsail'd to find the shores that view
The day-star rising from his watery bed,
The first grey beams of infant morning shed.

Michte.

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hundred and eighty-four, there came to Portugal the King of Benin, a Caffre¹ by nation, and he became Christian, with many of his people, as must be related in his chronicle. From this king, and from his people, the said King Dom Joan collected much information about India and its affairs, for he was very desirous to learn with much certainty that the king of it was Prester John, who was a Christian, and the lord of great riches. Which information produced so great an impression upon the king's heart, that he became possessed with an earnest resolve to send and learn about, and discover India. On which account, carrying out his desire, he at once, in the said year (1484) secretly sent two young men of his equerries² to learn of many lands, and wander in many parts, because they knew many languages. To these he gave many injunctions that each one should go wherever God gave him the inclination to go; and that they should labour earnestly to know about India, and in what direction it was, and that they should go there, and learn

He sent explorers forth, who past athwart
Spain, France, and ever famous Italy.
There they embark'd at the renowned port
Where buried lay the false Parthenope;
Fair Naples which so long was Fortune's sport,
So oft some new assailant's slippery fee,
Until the lordly Spaniard fix'd her fate
And made her glorious in her last estate.

Quillinan.

¹ With the early Portuguese writers Caffre means simply a negro: they took the name from the Arabs on the Atlantic coast, and it was they who gave it to those we now call Caffres. Barros mentions an ambassador of the King of Benim, and not the king himself as coming to Portugal. The kings of Benim used then to receive their investiture from the Ogané [of Abyssinia], a sovereign who lived in great state twenty months' journey to the east of Benim.

² Camoens says he sent six scouts; Barros mentions two who were sent before these mentioned in the text, and who went as far as Jerusalem, but did not venture to accompany the Abyssinian monks who visited Jerusalem, because they did not know Arabic: these two men were Friar Antony of Lisbon and Peter of Montaroyo.

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[More information](#)

about Prester John, and of what he was, and bring him information of all; and if he existed they were to endeavour to see him and speak to him, visiting him on the king's part, and giving him an account of the great desire of the king to know him, and to converse and become friends with him, all for the good service of our Lord, being informed that he was a most Christian king; and giving him the best account possible of everything so that it should appear well to him. Of all that they met with they were to obtain much information and take notes, so as to bring him news of all. The king promised them a large recompense for their labour, and for such great services as they would be rendering him; and for as long as they should continue in this service, he would take good care for the support of their wives and children. He directed them to separate and go by different roads; and gave to each of them letters of acknowledgement of the recompense which he promised them if they returned alive, or to their sons and wives if they should die in this service.

And he ordered a plate of brass like a medal to be given to each of them, with an inscription engraved in all languages, which said, "The King Dom Joan of Portugal, brother of the Christian kings": that they might show them to Prester John, and to whomsoever they thought fit. One of these men was a Canarian by race, named Gonzallo¹ de Pavia, who spoke Castilian. The other was named Pero de Covilhan,

¹ Castanheda and De Barros call him Affonso. Castanheda says they were despatched on the 7th May, 1487, and the king gave them a map on which to mark their track, and four hundred cruzados, of which they took what they wanted and deposited the rest with the Florentine banker Bartolameu; they reached Barcelona on the day of Corpus, and went on to Naples, which they reached on St. John's day; thence they were forwarded by the sons of Cosmo de Medici. Barros says they were despatched by the king in Santarem on the 7th of May, 1487, and that they went to Naples, where they embarked for Rhodes, and there lodged with the Portuguese knights Fray Gonzalo and Fray Fernando. Thence they went to Alexandria, Cairo, and Toro (probably Mount Sinai) where they separated: Alfonso da Paiva went to Ethiopia,

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being a native of the village of Covilhan. These men being thus instructed, the king gave to each one some precious stones to sell for their expenses, and despatched them. They both in company took the road to Venice; and in the pilgrim galleys, and strange dresses passed to Turkey, and went to Alexandria in the guise of merchants, in whose company they put themselves, serving them for wages, and with them they passed in the caravan to Mecca; always inquiring and obtaining information of what concerned them, and there they took counsel together and separated. And Gonzallo de Pavia undertook his journey to India, and went to Calicut, and ran along all the coast as far as Cambay in company with a Jewish merchant, with whom he formed such a friendship that he informed him of all his business;

and Pero de Covilhan to Aden, Cananor, Calicut, and Goa; there he embarked for Sofala, and returned thence to Aden and Cairo, where he had news that his companion da Paiva had lately died in that city. In Cairo he learned that two Spanish Jews were seeking him, one named Rabbi Abraham, a native of Beja, and the other Joseph, a shoemaker of Lamego; these had been sent by the King of Portugal. In accordance with the king's desire, Covilhan wrote to him, and sent him information by the Jew Joseph, and set out with Abraham to Aden, whence they went to Ormuz. There he left Abraham, who returned by way of Aleppo, and he went back to the Red Sea and to the court of the Prester John, who was named Alexander, which they call Escander, who received Covilhan with honour. Alexander died shortly after, and his brother Naut reigned in his stead; he made little account of Covilhan, and would not give him leave to depart from the kingdom. After many years, in 1515, or 1520 according to Correa and San Roman, David the son of this Naut then reigning, Rodrigo de Lima, ambassador of Dom Manuel having asked for Peter of Covilhan, the Abyssinian king still refused him leave to go, saying that his predecessors had given him lands upon which to live with his wife and children. And by means of this embassy of D. Rodrigo news was had of Covilhan, for he gave an account of his journey, and confessed to a priest Francisco Alvarez, who accompanied D. Rodrigo and wrote an account of the embassy.

Castanheda says that Covilhan wrote to D. Joam by the Jewish messenger Joseph that Calicut and Cananor were on the coast, and that it was possible to navigate thither by his coast and the sea of Guinea, first making for Sofala.

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[More information](#)

and with this Jew he turned back, going by Ormuz, where he died ; for which the Jew felt great grief, and promised him that he would endeavour to go to Portugal to give an account to the king of the things which he wished to know, for which the king would give him a great reward. For certifying the truth he was to take to him the metal plate which he carried with him. This the Jew carried out ; but before that, much time elapsed before he came to Portugal, the ships having already departed which went to discover India. Peter of Covilhan, from Mecca took the road to Egypt along the sea-shore, passing by many towns, and went as far as the country of the Prester, and went to where he was and spoke to him, and gave him an account of his journey, and of having come to seek for him ; at which, the Prester was greatly pleased, and read the letters on the metal plate, which were in Chaldee, his own language, to which he gave much credit, because he and his ancestors had their own information by hearsay respecting the great kings there were in Christendom. This was related to him by some of his people whom, at times, he sent to visit Jerusalem and the Pope of Rome, on which account they always had a great desire to hear about them and to communicate with them : for this reason they paid great honours to Peter of Covilhan, and gave him lands and lordships as Count, with many vassals and rents. These Peter of Covilhan did not wish to accept, as he desired to return with his message to the king. But the Prester said that he should stay in his country not to die on the road, and not to lose so good a commencement as he had made ; because he wished to send a servant of his to Rome, who should go from Rome to Portugal ; and during this time his other companion would arrive, and if he did not come, then he could do as seemed fit to him. Meanwhile, he wished him to get sons and a lineage, who would remain to him as a remembrance until he saw that which he so greatly desired. Peter of Covilhan struggled