

Document A

Depiction of Taíno encountering Christopher Columbus



Engraving by Theodor de Bry c. 15th century

The Granger Collection, New York

Document C

Historical Context: Vasco da Gama was an explorer from Portugal. He was famous for being the first European to sail to India. His expedition to India opened an ocean route from Europe to Asia for the first time. By finding this route, Portugal no longer had to use the Mediterranean Sea, which was being controlled by other countries. The route also made it possible to travel from Europe to Asia completely by water.

Below is an excerpt from the first-hand account of Vasco da Gama's exploration that landed him in India:

Vasco da Gama: Round Africa to India, 1497–1498 CE

On the following day (May 22) these same boats came again alongside, when the captain-major sent one of the convicts... who could speak Castilian and Genoese... They asked what he sought so far away from home, and he told them that we came in search of Christians and of spices... After this conversation they took him to their lodgings and gave him wheaten bread and honey. When he had eaten he returned to the ships, accompanied by one of the Moors, who was no sooner on board, than he said these words: "A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God, for having brought you to a country holding such riches!" We were greatly astonished to hear his talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal.

The city of Calicut is inhabited by Christians. [The first voyagers to India mistook the Hindus for Christians.] They are of tawny complexion. Some of them have big beards and long hair, whilst others clip their hair short or shave the head, merely allowing a tuft to remain on the crown as a sign that they are Christians. They also wear moustaches. They pierce the ears and wear much gold in them... The women of this country, as a rule, are ugly and of small stature. They wear many jewels of gold round the neck, numerous bracelets on their arms, and rings set with precious stones on their toes. All these people are well-disposed and apparently of mild temper. At first sight they seem covetous and ignorant.