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HENRY THE NAVIGATOR
Prime Minister of Portugal received Prince Henry (1394–1460) when the north coast of Africa is 405 and 845 to expand his knowledge of the continent. The country sent out as a naval school at Lagos to provide Portuguese sailors with a better education. They knew the necessary skills of navigation, seamanship, and cartography to enable them to venture overseas. Each year he sponsored a voyage south to explore the African coast, with voyages sailing further south than his predecessors.

THE FIRST SUCCESSES
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Before 1450–1750
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The voyages of discovery opened up a new trade route to Asia by sailing east around Africa. The Portuguese and their new navigation instruments transformed this situation. Rogers complained, the atmospheric, which measured the height of the Sun at noon, and the cross-staff and quadrant, which measured the altitude of a star, all helped navigators determine their latitude, so how far north or south they were. Lack of accurate marine chronometers (see p.226) meant that longitude—distance east or west—was not accurately calculated until the mid-18th century.

New technology, new worlds
Armed with this new maritime technology, the Portuguese successfully explored the coast of Africa. Diego Cão sailed around the Gulf of Guinea and then headed south, exploring the Congo River before making his final landing at Cape Cross in what is now Namibia in 1482. Two years later, Bartholomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed into the Indian Ocean, which he called the Zimbe Sea because it was so calm and serene. Dias then sailed north along the coast of East Africa and explored the islands of Madagascar and the Comoros.

Columbus in context
Columbus has been much criticized in recent years both for his geographical ignorance and for his treatment of the native population as governor of the first Spanish colony in the West Indies on Hispaniola (modern-day Dominican Republic). While the European trade to Colombia’s journey as a success, since he had “discovered” a new world it was in the beginning of an extended period of exploration of the Atlantic that completed the empire of Central and South America and the other peoples of the continent. However, Columbus in context, he pioneered the concept of the new world. Indeed, another navigator would have done so within a few years. But he was first, and as a result, he opened up the prospect of European expansion overseas.

In little over a century, European navigators left their continent and sailed the world, opening up new sea routes to India and the east. They discovered a continent previously unknown to them, and began a process that resulted in the total European colonial and economic domination of the world.