

The Motives for the Voyages from Europe

Introduction:

While the Mayans, Kalinagos and Tainos were busy with their own lives the people in Europe were just emerging out of the Dark Ages. They had just gone through a period known as the **Renaissance**. That is a French word which means the rebirth of learning. Essentially then they were on a quest for knowledge which would lead to development and progress.

How did this quest for knowledge lead them to the New World?

The quest for knowledge involved the exploration of their world. During the Dark Ages, it was believed and taught that the earth was flat and that if you went too far in the ocean, you would actually fall off! When the light of the Renaissance dawned on them, more and more people began to believe that the earth was round and not flat. They had to produce tangible proof. That could only be done by sailing to 'the other side'. But there were other factors as well.

We will remember these by calling them the FOUR Gs

1. God
2. Goods
3. Gold
4. Glory

1. God

In the fifteenth century, all of Europe was **Christian** except for small parts in the south east and south west which were held by people of the **Muslim** faith. The Muslims controlled a large portion of the Old World or the Eastern Hemisphere, from Africa in the west all the way around to western Asia.

There was much rivalry between these two religions to see who could gain the most converts. So far, the Muslims were leading. This angered the Christians. As a result they held **crusades** against each other.

The Christians in Europe were eager to discover new lands where they hoped to find heathens that they could convert to Christianity and increase the membership of their religion as the Muslims had done in the East.



Crusaders

2. Goods

Many merchants in Europe had more than a religious reason for hating the Muslims. The Arab lands formed a barrier between Europe and the East for example, India. How? These Arabs were Muslims. They charged the Europeans high taxes to pass through their territory to get to the East Indies. It is even said that the route was dangerous because zealous Muslims often attacked, raided and killed traders as they passed through the area. The Europeans needed the spice to preserve their meat to last them through the long winters when the animals go into hibernation and a fresh catch is not possible. What they needed was a **direct route by sea (transoceanic)** that **they** control.

- (a) This would be less dangerous
- (b) The goods would be cheaper since they would not have to pay any taxes to use the sea
- (c) They would make more profits
- (d) They could carry far more in a ship than they could on camels' back through the Middle East

3. Gold

The Europeans also hoped to find gold and other precious minerals on the other side of the world. This would make them more powerful.



Gold

4. Glory

Who would be the first to discover this new trade route by sea? This required exploration by brave sailors willing to risk their lives and their reputation, but whoever did it would certainly be **famous!** They would be richly rewarded by the King and Queen of their country. They would go down in history forever! They would have helped to shape the course of history for the entire Europe. What a glory that would be.

The Portuguese started the race. With the help of **Prince Henry the Navigator**, prince of Portugal who had built a library and an observatory at **Sagres**, they began intensive research and exploration voyages.



Prince Henry the Navigator

Later on, an unknown Italian sailor, Christopher Columbus, would approach the Spanish King and Queen and put forward a most unusual idea. If the earth was round and not flat then you could go around it. If that is so, Columbus argued, he could reach east by sailing west! He could even beat the Portuguese in finding the route.

Why did the King and Queen of Spain agree to sponsor an unknown Italian?

Even though the Portuguese had begun their exploration voyages from as early as 1420, they had only reached the coast of West Africa. When Columbus approached King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1492, the Portuguese had not yet found or reached India. The race was still wide open and so far Spain would be the second competitor. That meant that they had a good chance of beating the Portuguese. Besides, if Columbus 'found' land in the west, Spain would become the sole owner because the Portuguese were exploring from the East. She would have a new overseas empire. She could trade exclusively with them and make huge profits. She would become a super power in Europe. She was a staunch catholic nation. She could make literally thousands of new converts to her religion with very little effort. This proved to be so true.

They signed an agreement with the Italian sailor. It stipulated Columbus would get one tenth of all the wealth and trade. He would get the title of Viceroy of all lands discovered while all the lands would be colonized and controlled by Spain.

The regents gave Columbus their blessings as well as the equipment, crew and financing that he needed to set out on what would be the first of four voyages to the New World.



Christopher Columbus

What new developments made these voyages possible?

- 1.** Improved compass
- 2.** Improvement in shipbuilding. New types of ships were built in the 14th and 15th centuries. The steering was improved. Instead of two steering oars there was a rudder at the stern. An extra mast was added to make the ship go faster. The main sails were no longer triangular but square.
- 3.** Improvement in cartography- map making. Maps were now more accurate as they included territories in the east.
- 4.** The development of gun powder meant that more people would be willing to go on long sea voyages since they could better defend themselves.