

**VASCO DA GAMA (ca. 1460–1524)**  
***A JOURNAL OF THE FIRST VOYAGE (1497–1499)***

1497 The Bay of St. Helena [on the west coast of the present country of South Africa]. On Tuesday (November 7) we returned to the land, which we found to be low, with a broad bay opening into it. . . It extended east and west, and we named it Santa Helena.

On Wednesday (November 8) we cast anchor in this bay, and we remained there eight days, cleaning the ships, mending the sails, and taking in wood. . . . The inhabitants of this country are tawny-colored. Their food is confined to the flesh of seals, whales and gazelles, and the roots of herbs. They are dressed in skins, and wear sheaths over their virile members. They are armed with poles of olive wood to which a horn, browned in the fire, is attached. Their numerous dogs resemble those of Portugal, and bark like them. The birds of the country, likewise, are the same as in Portugal, and include cormorants, gulls, turtle doves, crested larks, and many others. The climate is healthy and temperate, and produces good herbage. On the day after we had cast anchor, that is to say on Thursday (November 9), we landed with the captain-major, and made captive one of the natives, who was small of stature like Sancho Mexia. This man had been gathering honey in the sandy waste, for in this country the bees deposit their honey at the foot of the mounds around the bushes. He was taken on board the captain-major's ship, and being placed at table he ate of all we ate. On the following day the captain-major had him well dressed and sent ashore.

On the following day (November 10) fourteen or fifteen natives came to where our ship lay. The captain-major landed and showed them a variety of merchandise, with the view of finding out whether such things were to be found in their country. This merchandise included cinnamon, cloves, seed-pearls, gold, and many other things, but it was evident that they had no knowledge whatever of such articles, and they were consequently given round bells and tin rings.

On Sunday (November 12) . . . On that day Fernão Velloso, who was with the captain-major, expressed a great desire to be permitted to accompany the natives to their houses, so that he might find out how they lived and what they ate. The captain-major yielded to his importunities, and allowed him to accompany them . . .

The negroes then began running along the beach, and they came as quickly up with Fernão Velloso as we did, and when we endeavored to get him into the boat they threw their assegais, and wounded the captain-major and three or four others. All this happened because we looked upon these people as men of little spirit, quite incapable of violence, and had therefore landed without first arming ourselves. We then returned to the ships.

**Taken from Vasco da Gama, "Round Africa to India," in *The Library of Original Sources*, ed. Oliver J. Thatcher (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), 5: 26–40.**