

THE DISCOVERY OF ST HELENA*

By Ian Bruce

By long tradition, St Helena was first found by the third Portuguese armada to India commanded by João da Nova during its return voyage to Lisbon in 1502. However, as noted by Alexander Schulenburg two decades ago other ships may have seen the island first.¹ This article will therefore review the balance of evidence to identify who most likely discovered St Helena.

Early Portuguese Expeditions from the Cape

The voyage of Bartolomeu Dias from Lisbon to the Indian Ocean in 1487 not only showed the possibility of a direct sea route to India but also, from the parochial perspective of this article, increased the likelihood that St Helena and Ascension would be discovered. On their return voyages, after passing the Cape of Good Hope back into the South Atlantic Ocean, ships soon met southeasterly trade winds and currents which, if followed, took them towards the mid-Atlantic islands. From a crow's nest, the islands, or the stationary clouds above them, could usually be seen from a distance of at least 50 miles. Even in the vastness of the South Atlantic, there was a realistic chance of sighting them.

In the event, it has been claimed that of the six Portuguese expeditions that sailed back to Lisbon from the Indian Ocean between 1487-1505, three saw St Helena and also landed there. Several details need to be understood about those six voyages:

1. As already mentioned, Bartolomeu Dias was the first to reach the Indian Ocean in 1487. Having explored a section of the East African coast, he sailed back into the South Atlantic and rejoined his supply ship anchored at modern-day Porto Alexandre, Angola. Returning to Lisbon from there he was unlikely to have seen either St Helena or Ascension, passing well to the east of them.
2. Vasco da Gama commanded the first trading armada to India (1497-1499). It is often said he took an anticlockwise circular outward course across the South Atlantic to the Cape, but this is a guess, only vague descriptions of his routes being given in either direction. His ships may have sailed through the region of St Helena and Ascension on both occasions but there is small hint that this happened.

At the cost of many of his men's lives, Da Gama realised that ships should never cross the Indian Ocean against adverse monsoon winds. Since these reverse in direction twice a year, ships on the outward voyage needed to cross the Indian Ocean from Africa by about August. That in turn meant ships needed to leave Lisbon by about March or April. Reaching India about September, holds were filled, and repairs made, the return voyage usually starting in late December/early January. Refreshment might be taken at St Helena about April/July, Lisbon being reached around July/September. This timetable meant the annual fleets usually returned to Lisbon four to six months after the next expedition left, only occasionally sighting one another where their courses happened to cross one another in locations such as off the South African coast.

3. Pedro Cabral commanded the second trading armada to India (1500-1501), later fleets being sent annually thereafter. He seems to have followed the anticlockwise South Atlantic winds and currents on his outward voyage, thereby sailing west of St Helena and Ascension. Indeed, his ships went so far west they reached Brazil. On his return, his scattered ships rendezvoused

* This article is a considerably expanded version of a paper, Ian Bruce, 'The Discovery of St Helena', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 51 (2022): 27-45.

at the bay of Dakar on the West African coast, so presumably passed east of both mid-Atlantic islands without seeing them. Certainly, the accounts do not suggest they were seen.

4. João da Nova commanded the four ships of the third armada (1501-1502). Two Portuguese chronicles claimed he discovered Ascension during the 1501 outward voyage, naming it Conception - as discussed later, that name was probably a mistake. Two other sources claimed the ships steered west and reached Brazil. At least six Portuguese chronicles claimed da Nova discovered St Helena in 1502 during his return voyage to Lisbon.

The long tradition that the island was discovered on 21 May is today questioned²: Huygen van Linschoten had converted to the Protestant faith³ when his book describing St Helena and his suggestion of this discovery date were first published in 1596.⁴ He presumably quoted 21 May because this was the date celebrated by Protestants for Saint Helena (also by the Eastern Orthodox church). If so, he apparently neither considered the fact that the Catholic discoverers would have marked Saint Helena on 18 August nor that the island was discovered and named at least a decade before the Reformation and start of the Protestant faith. If João da Nova indeed found St Helena, he probably reached the island around April/June. Therefore, the alternative discovery date of 3 May first suggested by Filippo Pigafetta in 1591, a few years before Linschoten, seems more likely because for Catholics this marks the discovery of the True Cross by Saint Helena.⁵

5. Vasco da Gama was again selected as overall commander, this time of the fourth armada (1502-1503). Vasco's paternal cousin Estêvão da Gama led one division of ships that discovered Trindade during the 1502 outward voyage, about 700 miles off Brazil. He later picked up João da Nova's letters at Quiloa [Malindi] on the East African coast. Convincing eyewitness accounts described Estêvão da Gama's landing at St Helena on 30 July 1503 during the return voyage to Lisbon. Both Trindade and St Helena were described as unknown island discoveries.
6. Afonso de Albuquerque commanded the fifth armada (1503-1504). His ships rediscovered Trindade⁶ (also named *Ascension Minor*, leading to long confusion that he rediscovered "Conception" and renamed it Ascension).⁷ One ship captained by António de Saldanha was delayed by a year in the Indian Ocean. On his return to Lisbon in 1505, Saldanha's mast broke in a storm off the Cape. However, he successfully navigated his way to St Helena where he landed and made repairs.

The Third Armada and João da Nova

The Portuguese chronicles described all the early armadas to India. These were written and published at least half a century later, the earliest by João de Barros in 1552. Unfortunately they suffer from many differences in detail, both of events and dates. Eyewitness accounts published soon after the events have helped resolve some discrepancies, but these do not exist for the third armada. Only a few letters alluding to it survived the 1755 Lisbon earthquake (because they were sent out from the city), but these said nothing about the discoveries made. Thus, details of da Nova's voyage almost wholly come from the contradictory Portuguese chronicles. As a consequence, the third armada to India commanded by João da Nova is the most elusive of all the early Portuguese trading expeditions.

The four ships of the third armada left Lisbon in the spring of 1501. Exemplifying the uncertainties involved, the date of departure from Lisbon has variously been quoted as 1 March⁸, 5 March⁹, 11 March¹⁰, 26-27 March¹¹ and 10 April.¹²

Two chronicles claimed these ships discovered Ascension during the outward voyage, naming it Conception Island. Thus, João De Barros wrote that passing eight degrees beyond the equator, towards the south, an island was found to which the name *Concepção* was given¹³ whilst Damião de Góis' later chronicle described the sighting of an island south of the line which was named *Conçeam*.¹⁴

In the age of sail, Ascension was usually only observed by ships on their home voyage back to Europe as they followed the south-easterly trade winds towards the equator. If João da Nova saw Ascension on his outward voyage, he presumably must have sailed directly into the trade wind. The Portuguese ships were sufficiently weatherly to do this, but only by constant tacking, making slow progress. However an answer to this comes from Victorian sailing instructions which suggested a route whereby a direct voyage to Ascension could more easily have been made.¹⁵ After passing Cape Verde, if ships navigated east of 18-19°W (shown as a double grey band in Figure 1) and crossed the equator at 9°W (single grey band), they could then steer southwest across the angle of the trade wind and thus reach Ascension. This image also shows indicative routes from Ascension to the Cape of Good Hope and Mossel Bay, either touching Brazil or not.

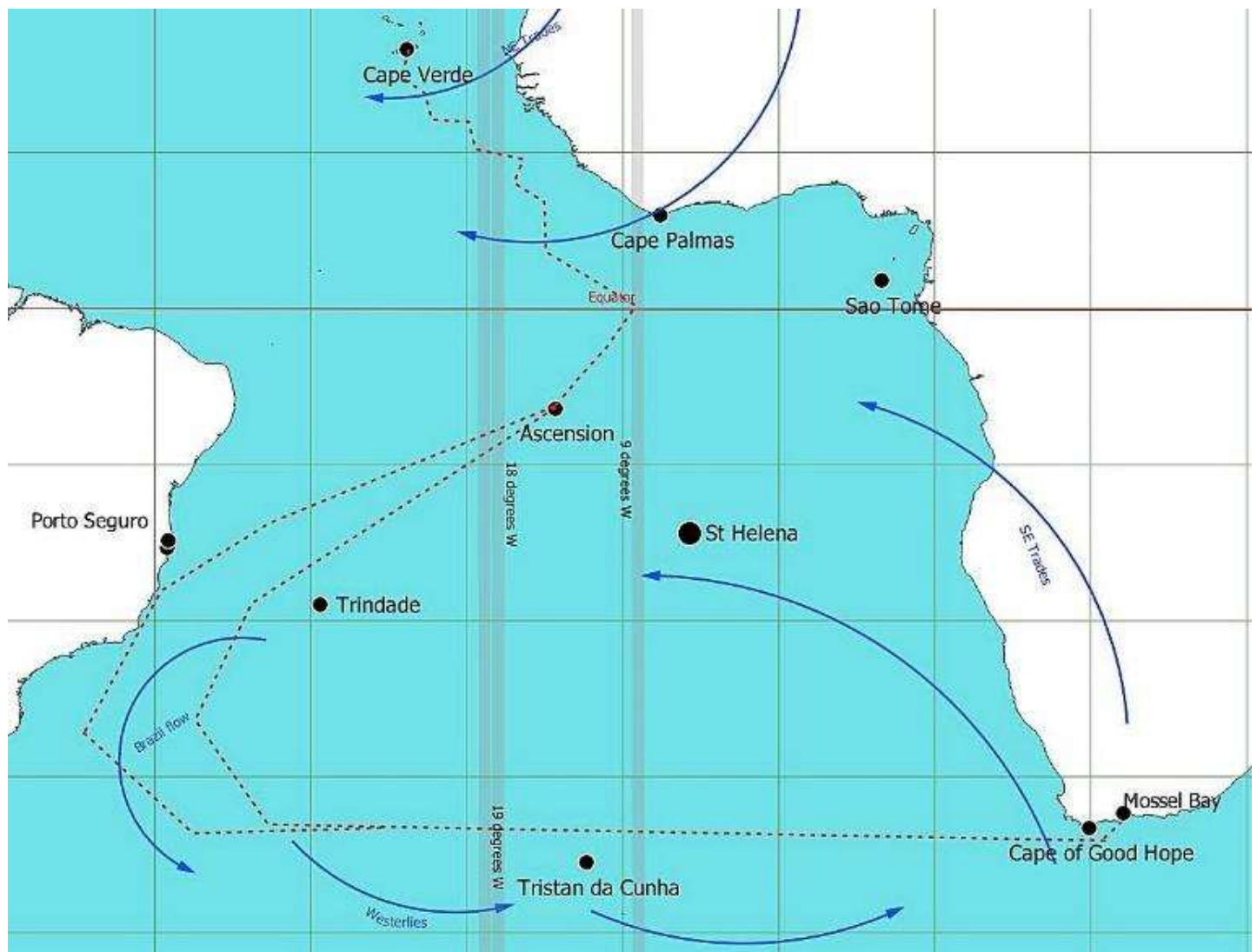


Figure 1: Possible outward route taken by João da Nova to Ascension Island and beyond[†]

There are at least three reasons for thinking de Barros, repeated by de Góis, should have named the island Ascension, not Conception:

1. The Church of Rome has long celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary on the fixed date of 8 December, yet by then the third armada had long reached India. Given the timing of João da Nova's departure in March/April, the moveable feast-day of Ascension Day (20 May in 1501) seems a better fit.¹⁶

[†] I would like to thank Dr Chris Hillman for creating the images used in Figure 1 and 5.

2. The Portuguese 1502 Cantino Map, completed about a month after the third armada returned, shows the newly sighted island marked as *ilha achada e chamada Ascenssam* [island found and called Ascension], not as Conception. Likewise, the Italian 1504 Visconte Maggiolo map named the island as *izola dasansion* [crudely translates as Ascension Island].
3. As will later be discussed, in 1503 a division of the fourth armada under Estêvão da Gama also named the island as Ascension, not Conception.

I have just alluded to the Cantino map. This was created between December 1501 and October 1502. Alberto Cantino was an agent, effectively a spy, in the employ of Ercole d'Este, Duke of Ferrera in Italy. Smuggled out from Lisbon and passed to Francesco Cataneo, Genoese ambassador to Aragon and France, the chart was finally despatched to the Duke of Ferrera in Modena. Cantino reported its purchase in a letter dated 19 November 1502.¹⁷ It had a chequered history at Modena, being thrown out of a window during a nineteenth-century riot. From there it ended up being used as a screen in a pork butcher's shop. Happily, a curator from Modena Museum visited the shop, realised its importance and rescued it.¹⁸

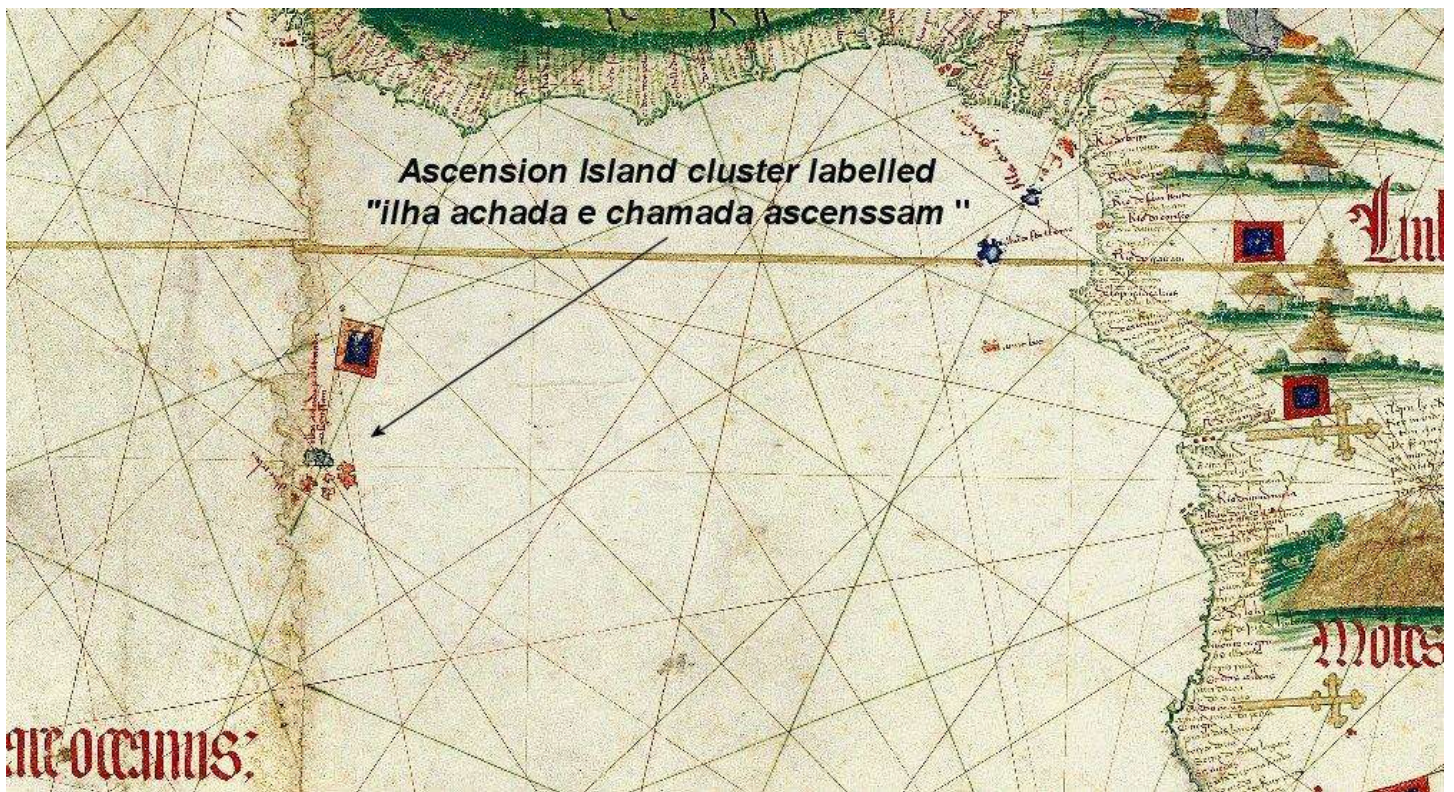


Figure 2: Ascension named in a section of 1502 Cantino map

It shows an archipelago of six islands in the mid-Atlantic. Zooming further into the chart (Figure 3), one island is coloured differently, marked with the Portuguese flag and named as Ascension. The overall “Ascension” island archipelago was labelled *Illas Tebas*, or the Tebas Islands. As will later be discussed, this name is similar to *Yslas Tibias* (Tibias Islands) marked on the Spanish 1500 Juan de la Cosa map. It has been estimated the archipelago is centred at latitude $7^{\circ}15'S$, about 50 miles north of Ascension’s true position at $7^{\circ}56'S$ ¹⁹, corresponding to João de Barros’ description of “eight degrees beyond the equator, towards the south”. The depiction of a single island as an archipelago was common in the early maps. Perhaps this was based on the observation that North Atlantic volcanic islands usually featured as archipelagos, the same being presumed when Ascension was first seen.

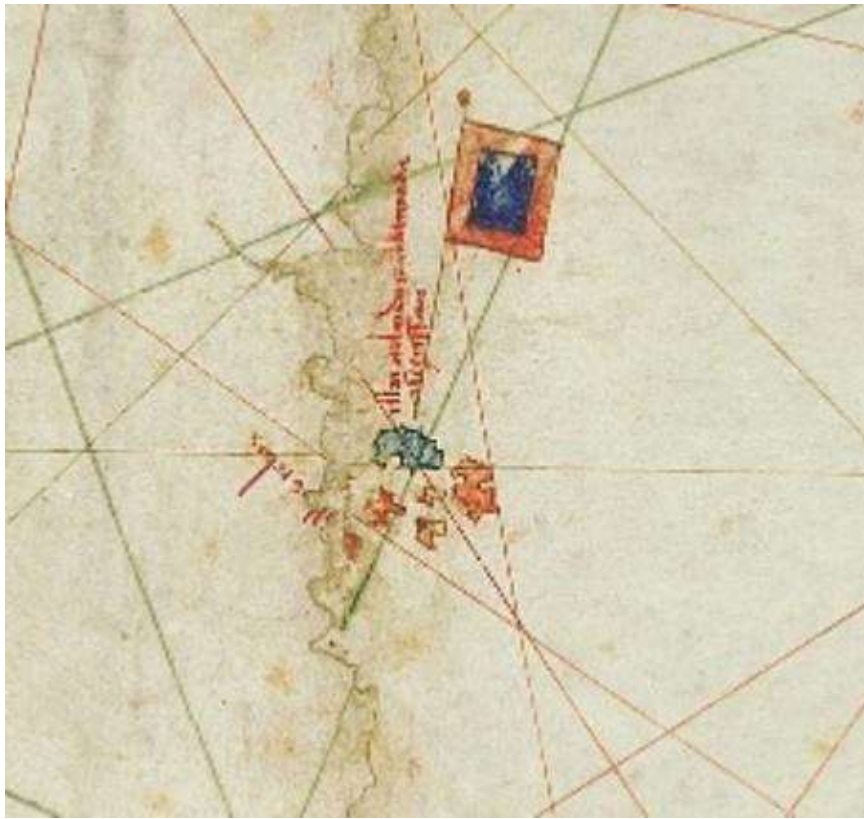


Figure 3: Cantino Map – Ascension, shown as an archipelago.

Since the third armada returned to Lisbon on 11/13 September 1502 before the Cantino map was completed in October it is usually assumed it includes João da Nova's discoveries.²⁰ The blank sea of blue in the area where St Helena should lie was key to the doubt expressed by historians such as Duarte Leite that João da Nova found the island.²¹ I will return to this problem later. Meanwhile, attention is drawn to Sidney Welch's statement in 1946: "The absence of Saint Helena Island from this map makes it more likely that it was discovered by Cabral [..]".²² That seems a bizarre conclusion – Cabral's voyage was undertaken between 1500-1501 and the Cantino map dates from 1502. If the absence of St Helena from the Cantino map suggests anything, it is that the island was discovered *after* 1502, not before.

Continuing the story of João da Nova's outward voyage, two sources, a letter from King Manuel and Gaspar Corrêa's chronicle, made no mention of Ascension, instead describing a visit to Brazil:

King Manuel: "In that same year [1501], on the tenth of the month of April, having no news of that first fleet [the second armada under Cabral], I sent to the above-mentioned parts four more well-equipped ships, which, because there was already news of that new land named Santa Cruz [Brazil], called there in order to take some refreshments, for certainly the said land is very necessary for that voyage".²³

Gaspar Corrêa: "In accordance with the sailing instructions which the pilots carried, they took their route along the coast of Brazil which had already been wholly discovered by many vessels trading there [Corrêa obviously did not think Cabral was the first to reach Brazil], and they followed it as far as *Cabo de S. Agostinho*, and thence they made the crossing toward the Cape of Good Hope".²⁴

The question of whether João da Nova visited Brazil may seem irrelevant to the discovery of St Helena and Ascension – yet by focusing on dates, the historians Duarte Leite (in 1922) and Edzer Roukema (in 1962) each saw a direct connection. The Cantino map shows an outline of the eastern

Brazilian coastline with a magnificent display of parrots (Figure 4). A Portuguese flag at a coastal location named Cabo de Sam Jorge [Cape of St George] marked the northern limit of coastal exploration. If the Portuguese conformed to their normal practice of naming new lands by the feast-day of their discovery, it was presumed this Cape was discovered on 23 April, the feast day for St George. According to these historians, only João da Nova's ships could have reached Brazil this early in the year.²⁵ Obviously, the Cape was named before completion of the Cantino map in October 1502. Also, da Nova would have taken at least a month to reach Brazil, so if he named the Cape on 23 April 1501, he must have left Lisbon in March, not in April.

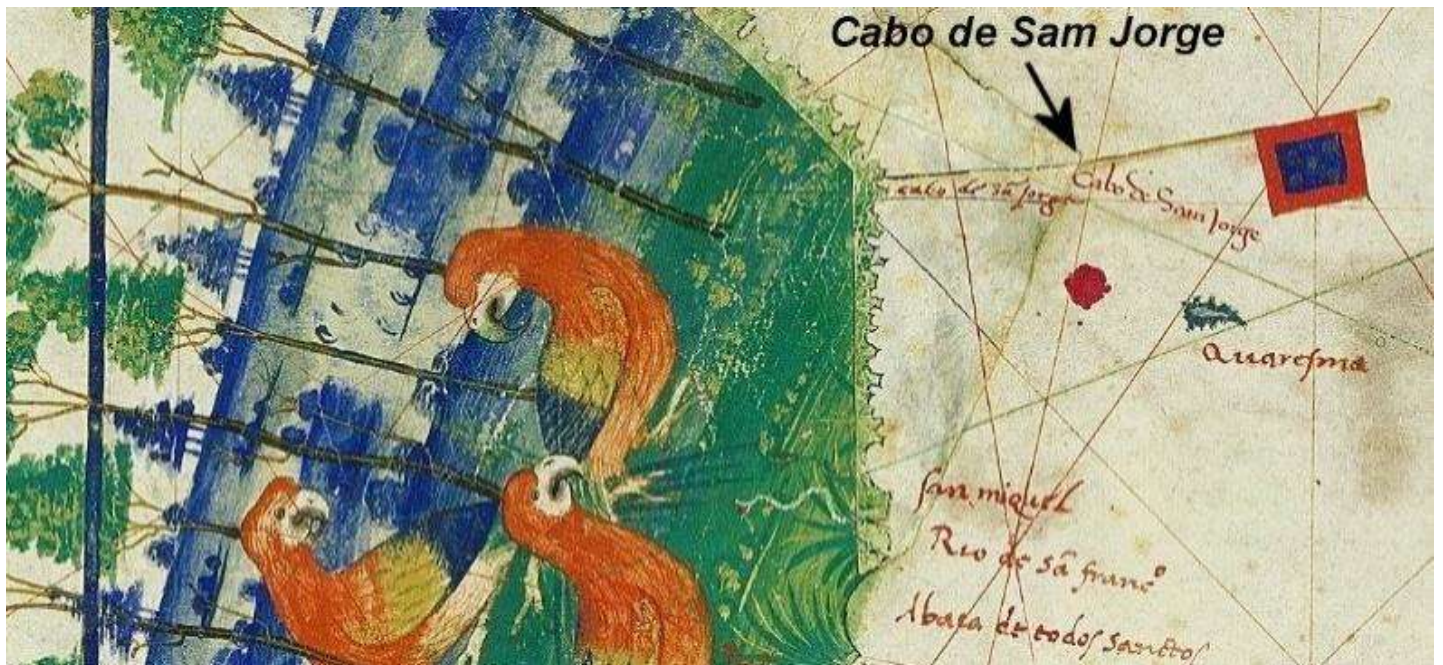


Figure 4: 1502 Cantino map, northern limit of Brazil exploration

If João da Nova indeed named *Cabo de Sam Jorge* on 23 April, how can his discovery of Ascension on the later date for Ascension Day (20 May 1501) be explained? Leite suggested the third armada first sailed to Brazil and then returned across the South Atlantic in order to meet up with ships from the second armada, thereby sighting Ascension.²⁶

Whilst that explains the dates, Roukema argued it was navigationally absurd, requiring ships to sail back and forth across the South Atlantic regardless of winds and currents. He suggested the ships sailed to Brazil without sighting Ascension, named *Cabo de Sam Jorge* and then sailed for the Cape of Good Hope. Sighting one of the Tristan da Cunha islands on 21 May, it was named St Helena - as will be seen, the idea that Tristan was cartographically confused with St Helena harks back to a suggestion first made by George Nunn in 1934. Roukema next suggested Ascension was only found during da Nova's return voyage, on Ascension Day - this would be 5 May in 1502. In other words, he thought the chronicles described the discoveries in the wrong order, Tristan da Cunha being sighted first in 1501 (but named St Helena), and Ascension second in 1502.

Roukema did not explain why he thought it necessary to introduce Tristan into his scenario. It might for example be thought more obvious that the real St Helena and Ascension were successively found one after the other during the return voyage. I suspect he was misled by the doubtful tradition that St Helena was discovered on 21 May and thus needed to avoid a new absurdity arising - if Ascension was discovered on 5 May, the feast-day in 1502, then the ships needed to sail backwards to find St Helena on 21 May. Of all scenarios, I believe the chronicles provide the best fit, Ascension being discovered first in 1501 and then St Helena in 1502. I find all alternatives, especially if Tristan is dragged into the story, end in a tangle of contradictions. If João da Nova indeed visited Brazil, it

must have followed his discovery of Ascension on 20 May 1501. I therefore doubt he named *Cabo de Sam Jorge*.

I will next examine the third armada's return voyage to Lisbon. João da Nova left India around the turn of 1501/2. Whilst only two chronicles said his ships discovered Ascension in 1501, at least six claimed they sighted St Helena during the home voyage in 1502:

- João de Barros stated João da Nova [...] “passed the Cape of Good Hope, had more good fortune, that God showed him a very small island which he named Santa Helena and took on water, having done so twice since leaving India”.²⁷
- Luiz de Figuerido Falcão wrote, “They left Belém [Lisbon’s port] on March 5 of that year (1501). All four [ships] returned and arrived at Lisbon on September 11, 1502. João da Nova discovered S. Elena Island from India”.²⁸
- Damião de Góis recorded da Nova “[...] passed the Cape of Good Hope, came to an island which he named Santa Helena where he took on water, a fertile though small island very useful for those ships that came across it for the good water, fruit and meat found there [...]”.²⁹
- Diogo de Couto mentioned both the discovery of Juan de Nova Island in the Madagascar Channel and St Helena: “[...] forty leagues to the sea northwest southeast from Mozambique was discovered the island to which João da Nova gave his name, and he visited Santa Elena Island at sixteen degrees south”.³⁰
- Manuel de Faria e Sousa noted “[...] after the Cape of Good Hope, [João da Nova] found the Island of S. Elena, with thick woods; without any shelter [...] with benign, delicious amenities, fine clear and healthy waters. It is at 16 degrees”.³¹
- Estacio do Amaral wrote in 1604: “It was discovered in the year 1502, 102 years before this year and named Sancta Elena by the main captain of the fleet of ships of India Joaó da Noua coming from there & so many years that the crown of this monarchy is of possession of it that the Portuguese have brought in pigs, goats, rabbits, partridges and has chickens bigger than those in Guinea”.³²

This unanimity of opinion would seem to strengthen João da Nova's claim as St Helena's discoverer, yet this had entirely the opposite effect on Anthony Disney who wrote in 2009: “Barros's version is repeated by a number of later chroniclers, including Damião de Gôes, Estacio do Amaral, and Manuel de Faria e Sousa. However, their accounts are clearly derived from his”.³³ It is certainly true that De Góis seems to have copied De Barros' error in naming Ascension as Conception Island yet there are so many differences in the chronicles about other sections of João da Nova's voyage that I personally see little evidence of plagiarism.³⁴ Also, at least one chronicler did not toe the line, Gaspar Corrêa claiming that St Helena was only discovered in 1511.³⁵

The absence of detail in these primary sources of the claimed island discovery is obvious, but that did not discourage later elaborations – its date, the location of anchorage, what was seen during the first explorations, the loss of a ship, the construction of a chapel and so forth. All these inventive ideas came from the febrile imagination of later writers, later entering the public mind as historic facts.

According to the chronicles, João da Nova returned to Lisbon on either 11 September³⁶ or 13 September 1502³⁷, shortly after a separate three-ship expedition to Brazil with Amerigo Vespucci (1501-2).

The Fourth Armada and Estêvão da Gama

The overall commander of the fourth armada (1502-3) was Vasco da Gama. His fleet formed about 20 ships split into several divisions, one of which was commanded by Vasco's paternal cousin, Estêvão da Gama. Two eyewitness reports separately described Estêvão's discovery of Trindade on

the outward voyage to India and the sighting of St Helena during the return. An anonymous Flemish writer wrote about St Helena as follows:

On the 14th day of June [1503] bread and victuals began to fail us, and we still were nearly 1,780 miles from Lisbon. On the 30th day of June we found an island, where we killed at least 300 men, and we caught many of them, and we took there water and departed thence on the 1st day of August. On the 13th day of August we saw again the polar star, and we still were well 600 miles from Portugal. [...]. And thus we came back healthy and safe to Portugal. Deo Gratias.³⁸

Since St Helena was uninhabited, the massacred 300 “men” must be a typographical or translational error - presumably, birds, turtles or seals were slaughtered for meat. Likewise, the quoted dates suggest the Portuguese were on the island for a full month, but a separate and fuller account first published in 1507 by Thomé Lopes³⁹ shows the ships arrived on 30 July, not June, and left within a couple of days. Lopes was employed as ship’s clerk (escrivão or scrivener) and described the sighting as follows:

On the 30th [of July 1503], we sighted an undiscovered island towards which we made our way. On the north-west side of the aforesaid island we cast our anchor. We did not find any fish, nor did we see any kind of trees, but it was completely green, and we judged that there should be some water. As our anchor dragged, the other ships sent out their boats and told us what they found in it. So we got under sail, and on that day, and for most part of the following one, we were waiting for them. As they showed no signs of coming, we understood that the two aforesaid ships were still riding at anchor at the aforesaid island. This island faces the Cape of Good Hope north-west to south-west, taking a rhumb of east to west; from it to that cape the distance is 600 leagues. It faces the island of San Thome [São Tomé] north-east to south-west, and the distance between them is 380 leagues. It faces the Cape of Palms [Cape Palmas] north to south, taking a rhumb of north-west to south-east, and the distance between these is 360 leagues. It faces the Ascension islands north-west to south-east, and the distance from one to the other is 200 leagues. It faces the island of May [Cape Verde] north-west to south-east, taking a rhumb of north to south, and the distance between those is 680 leagues.⁴⁰

Thomé Lopes’s placement of St Helena compared with the actual distances is summarised below. Apart from the figure quoted for the Cape of Good Hope, all his other distances were a little short, i.e. most of his quoted distances located the island a little north of its true location. It will also be noticed Lopes named “the Ascension Islands” in the plural, perhaps suggesting he regarded it as much an archipelago as did the Cantino cartographer.

Distances to St Helena	Thomé Lopes distances Leagues	Thomé Lopes, distances Miles*	Actual Miles	Thomé Lopes distances as % of actual
Cape of Good Hope	600	2,070	2,044	101.3
“San Thome”	380	1,311	1,402	93.5
Cape Palmas	360	1,242	1,420	87.5
Ascension Island	200	690	803	86.0
Cape Verde	680	2,346	2,465	95.2

* 1 Portuguese League = 3.45 English miles.⁴¹



Figure 5: Distances to St Helena according to Thomé Lopes

Based on these two eyewitness accounts, I know of no historian who disputes that Estêvão da Gama landed at St Helena. The main controversy centres around the question of whether his was the first or second visit. Given the fact that the third and fourth armadas had no known direct contact with one another either in port or at sea, this in turn raises the question of how Thomé Lopes knew both the name and location of Ascension.

Based on Lopes' narrative, three explanations are available to that last question. First, the historian Duarte Leite suggested Lopes learnt the name of Ascension when he returned to Portugal. However, in that case, Lopes should also have known that the name of the "undiscovered island" was St Helena.⁴² The same is true of Trindade. In fact, the abrupt ending of Lopes' account after describing St Helena hints at the possibility that he never reached Lisbon, dying during the last part of his voyage after leaving St Helena, others publishing his account of the voyage posthumously.

A second and more likely solution comes from Lopes' statement that Estêvão da Gama read letters from João da Nova at Quiloa [Malindi] during the outward voyage in August 1502.⁴³ If da Nova discovered Ascension during his outward voyage, its name and location may have been mentioned in his letters, but not St Helena which for him lay in the future.

Then there is a third possibility that carries an important implication. During their return voyage to Lisbon, three weeks before reaching St Helena, Lopes described how Estêvão da Gama's ships sighted a section of the outgoing fifth armada off the Cape:

On a Monday 10 July [1503]⁴⁴ we found the *Leitoa Nova*, which had separated from us, and told us it sighted two Portuguese ships that are going to India [from the outgoing fifth armada]: on 12 July we also met two other Portuguese ships that followed the same course, whose captain was Afonso de Albuquerque; at which sight we took great pleasure, and we fired some cannons. Captain Mór [Estêvão da Gama, Lopes' commander] did not want to lie alongside the ships, and he sent *Julia* to lie in the lee near the stern to give him news of India, and so she did. We went straight to the other ship, and we told the Captain to lay off his boat because we didn't have ours, then the officers came on board and we on his; and so we informed him about much that he needed to know about India, and they told us how in Portugal we had a new Prince, son of the high and very great King D. Manoel.⁴⁵

Albuquerque and his captains from the fifth armada left Lisbon six months after the third armada's return so they should all have known whether João da Nova found St Helena and/or Ascension. Lopes described how Albuquerque needed "to know about India". Other than news of a new-born prince, how far did Albuquerque reciprocate with his own information? Is this how Lopes knew the name and location of Ascension?

The Flemish eyewitness said that da Gama's ships were short of supplies. Regardless of whether or not the fourth armada first learnt of Ascension from João da Nova's letters at Quiloa, if Albuquerque or his captains heard about these supply shortages and also knew about St Helena, they surely should have told Estêvão da Gama he could replenish his food and water there. From Thomé Lopes' description of St Helena as an undiscovered island it seems Albuquerque and his captains said nothing about it – which in turn suggests St Helena was not discovered by João da Nova.

The Fifth Armada and António de Saldanha

António de Saldanha was one of Albuquerque's captains from the fifth armada. Sailing from Lisbon in 1503, he either arrived too late to cross the Indian Ocean or was under orders to harass Arab shipping near the Red Sea.⁴⁶ At all events, the delay meant he spent an extra year in the Indian Ocean, even meeting up with ships from the sixth armada. Commanding the *Frol de la Mar* (not to be confused with the giant carrack *Flor de la Mar*, at that time captained by João da Nova with the seventh armada to India then en-route to India⁴⁷), he embarked on his return voyage in 1505, a year behind other ships from the fifth armada. During this, "in a storm which he encountered in the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, broke his mast; yet without it he made his way to the island of St Elena".⁴⁸

This landing at St Helena raises an important question. How did Saldanha find St Helena with a broken mast? Did he already know its location and so navigated his way there or did he fortuitously sail sufficiently close to the island that it was seen from near deck level?⁴⁹ As already mentioned, Saldanha and all of Albuquerque's other captains should have known the details of João da Nova's discoveries. For Saldanha to deliberately steer for St Helena implies he knew its location. However, these are slippery facts because he also met up with ships from the sixth armada. Their captains should have heard that Estêvão da Gama sighted St Helena in 1503 and so could have told Saldanha about it. And thus the possibilities continue, on and on!

Cartographic Evidence of Earlier Discoveries

Cartographic evidence suggests St Helena and Ascension were both known before João da Nova sailed from Lisbon in the spring of 1501.

It is easiest to describe the maps in reverse order of time. The Italian Visconte Maggiolo world map (Figure 6) was the first to depict St Helena and Ascension as single islands. According to the mapmaker's inscription, this map dates from 4 June 1504, a date that has been little disputed.⁵⁰

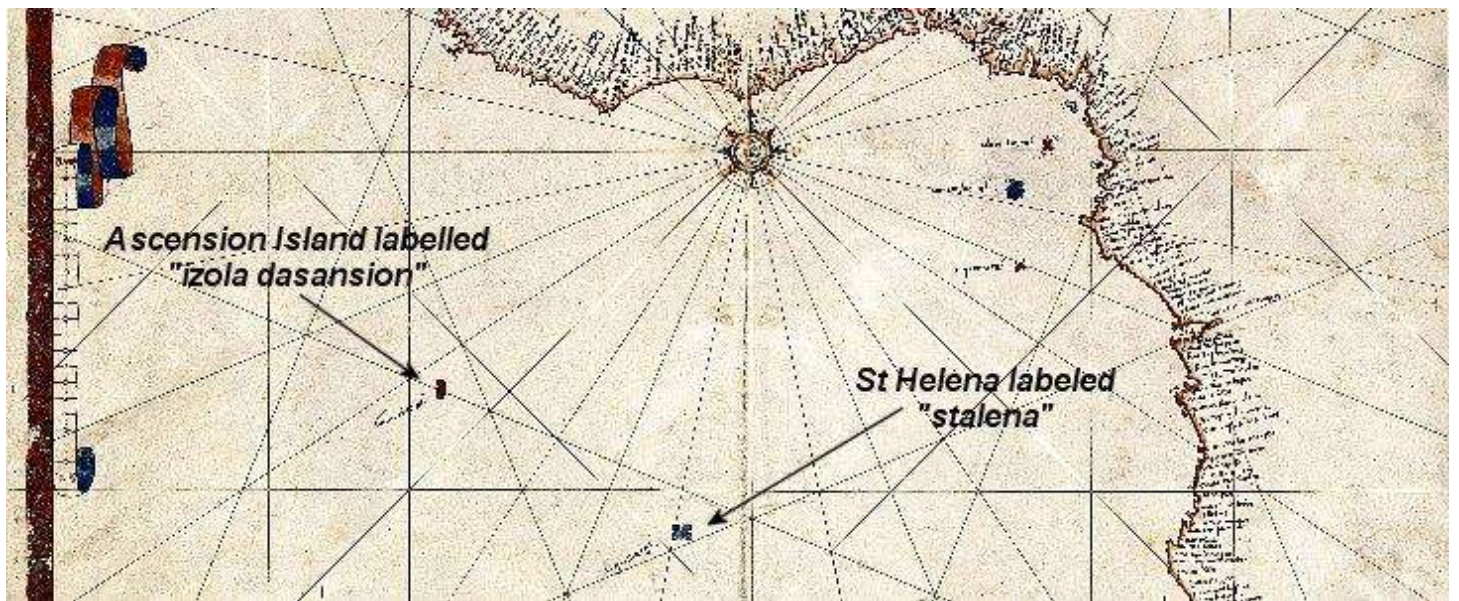


Figure 6: Section of the 1504 Visconte Maggiolo Map⁵¹

Just as the 1502 Cantino map is the first artefact naming Ascension, so this map is the earliest to name St Helena (as *stalena*). Zooming into the map, St Helena and Ascension respectively look like a piece from a jigsaw puzzle and a lozenge (Figure 7).⁵²

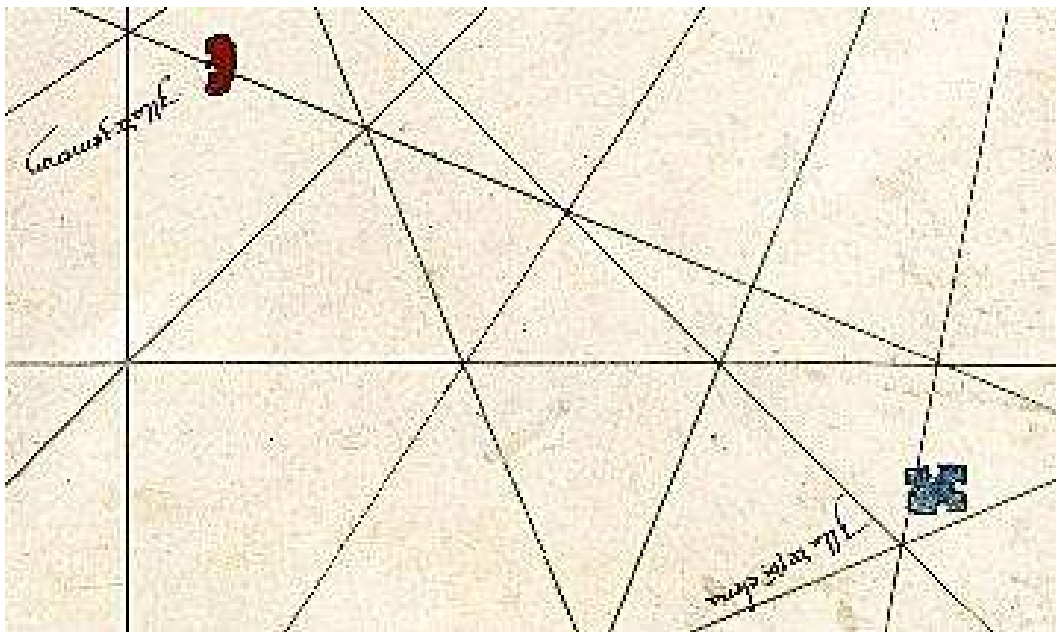


Figure 7: Magnified section of 1504 Visconte Maggiolo Map

I have already discussed the 1502 Cantino map which shows Ascension but not St Helena. Moving back two further years, we come to the 1500 Spanish Juan de la Cosa map (Figure 8) – a captain of this name sailed with Columbus, and it is uncertain whether the cartographer was the same person or a namesake.

The map is intriguing because it shows two archipelagos in the South Atlantic Ocean that are reminiscent of St Helena and Ascension, albeit well east of their true locations. The “St Helena” group (six islands) is centred at 15°S, close to the actual latitude of 16°S.⁵³ It was labelled *Islas Tausens*

montilos Etiopicas Oceanas [Tausens islands in the African Ocean]. The “Ascension” group (also six islands at about 1° 40’S, north of the actual island at 7° 56’S), was named *Yslas Tibias Etiopacus yn Oceanon Austral.* [the Ethiopian warm islands in the South Atlantic].⁵⁴ The words *Yslas Tibias* [warm islands] are similar to *Illas Tebas* on the 1502 Cantino map, and this connects the two maps.

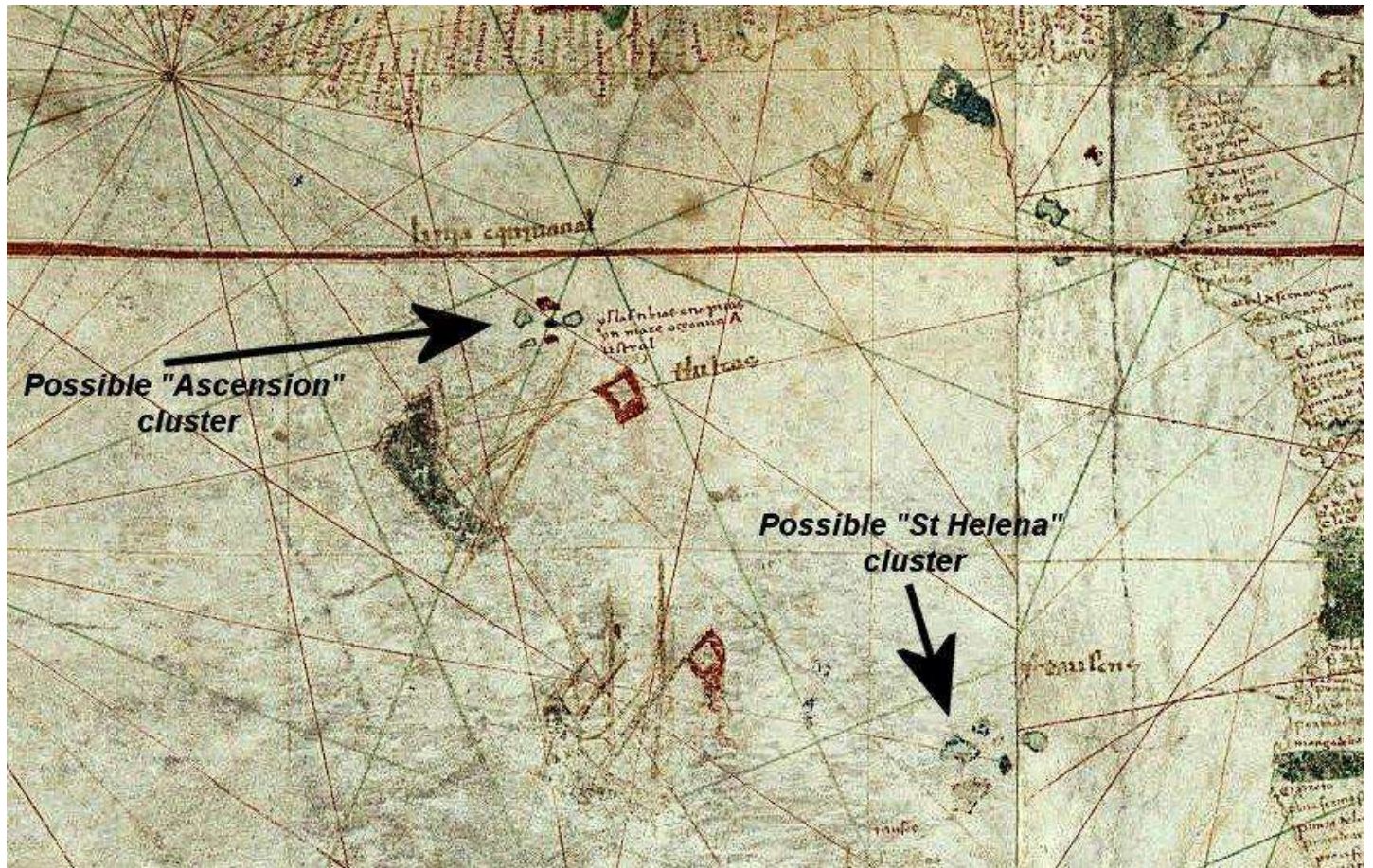


Figure 8: 1500 La Cosa map showing two island clusters⁵⁵

Taken at face value, the 1500 La Cosa map implies St Helena and Ascension were each known before João da Nova’s 1501-2 voyage.⁵⁶ As long ago as 1898, the geographer and cartographer Ernst G. Ravenstein magisterially dismissed these islands as “quite imaginary” but failed to substantiate his opinion.⁵⁷ Again, in 1934 George Nunn argued that although the map carries the legend *Juan de la Cosa made it in the port of Santa Maria in the year 1500*, it was actually created up to eight years later.⁵⁸ One of his several suggestions was that the “St Helena” group of islands marked as *Islas Tausens* depicted Tristan da Cunha, which was only discovered in 1506.

Later historians have rejected Nunn’s suggestions. For example, his identification of the “Tausens islands in the African Ocean” seems a poor description of either Tristan da Cunha’s location, which lies 1,700 miles distance from the African coast, or of the chilly seas that surround these islands. Also, the map showed islands centred at 15°S, yet Tristan da Cunha lies at far lower latitudes, about 38°S. Again, whilst the Cantino map named Ascension and the Visconte Maggiolo map named both St Helena and Ascension, the la Cosa map named the islands as *Islas Tausens* and *Islas Tibia*. The use of these quite different names implies the la Cosa map predates both the 1502 Cantino and 1504 Visconte Maggiolo maps.

Although Nunn’s suggestions have long been refuted, the idea that Tristan da Cunha was cartographically confused with St Helena has lived long in the memory. This possibility was central to theories propounded by Roukema (discussed above), Cawley (he suggested Tristan was discovered and named St Helena by Vasco da Gama in 1497 (da Gama is usually assumed to have reached St Helena Bay in South Africa) and this possibility is presently mentioned on St Helena’s Wikipedia

page (“Another theory holds that the island found by da Nova was actually Tristan da Cunha, 2,430 kilometres (1,510 mi) to the south [.]”).⁵⁹

In an attempt to resolve the central issue of the la Cosa map’s date, its custodians at Prado Museum ran radiographic, infrared and ultraviolet fluorescent tests. These concluded the map pigments were the same age as those used in the 1500 date inscription.⁶⁰ Of course, this only shows the map is as old as the inscription and does not identify its precise age. More recent papers have suggested it is a copy of Juan de la Cosa’s original map with later amendments or even, despite Prado Museum’s results, that it is the original but includes alterations.⁶¹

Moving even further back in time, a sea chart dating from the early-1490s known as the “Columbus” Portolan sea chart also hints at an early knowledge of Ascension, displaying it as a mid-Atlantic archipelago south of the equator (Figure 9). However, there is no trace of a “St Helena” archipelago. The age of this map is uncertain. A Spanish flag flying over Granada implies it was created after 1492 when that city was captured from the Moors, yet it shows none of the discoveries made by Columbus after 1493.⁶² The legend near the “Ascension” island cluster on the “Columbus” map translates from Latin as: “These islands are reportedly called the ‘Islands of the Maidens’: there Sirens are seen and many seals and different types of fish are said to be found, and a black race inhabits the islands: at birth they are white but the force of the sun turns them black, and they always go naked”.⁶³

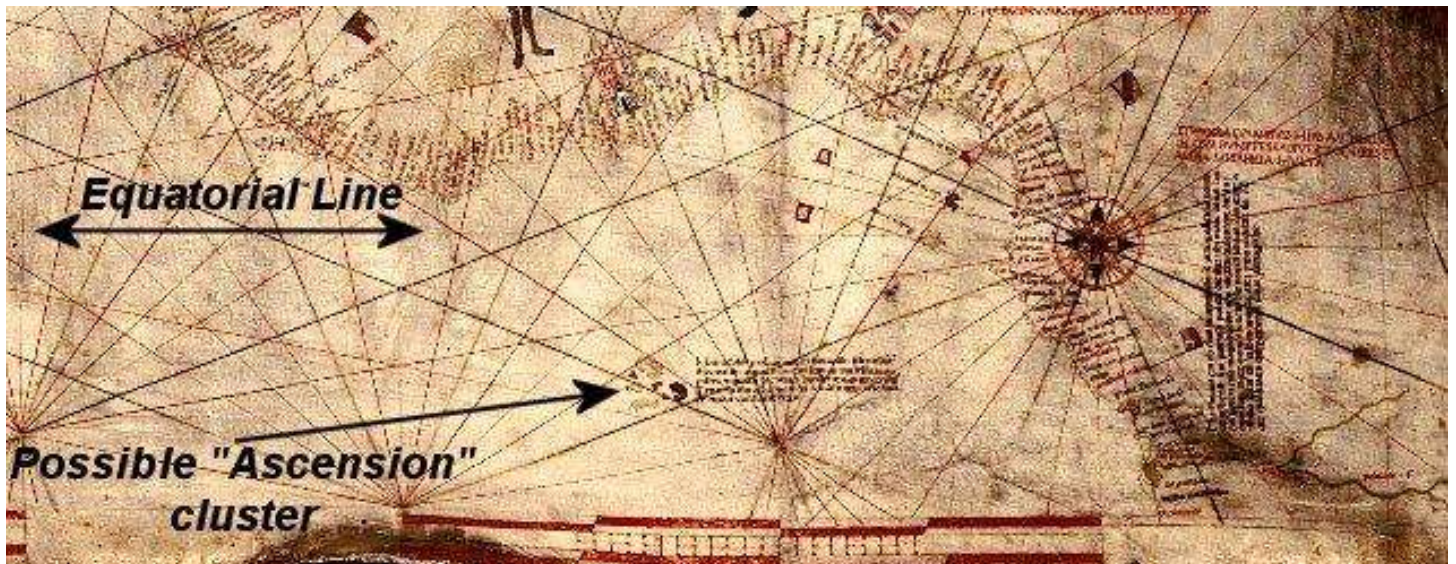


Figure 9: Section of the 1490’s “Columbus” Portolan sea chart⁶⁴

This mention of sirens and ‘Islands of the Maidens’ carries an implication that this archipelago is mythical. Several middle-to-late medieval maps similarly show imaginary archipelagos at various locations in the North and South Atlantic that variously relate to the virgins of St Ursula, St Brendan, Hy Brasil and Atlantis.⁶⁵ Great caution is therefore needed in not only interpreting the significance of the “Columbus” chart but also of early cartographies such as the Henricus Martellus map (circa 1490), Martin Behaim’s 1492 globe and even the Waldseemüller map (1507), all of which feature similar single archipelagos in the South Atlantic. They could potentially all be mythical.

That being the case, might the two South Atlantic archipelagos on the 1500 Juan de la Cosa map also be mythical? It would be wrong to deny this as a possibility, yet there are reasons to think that the archipelagos shown on the la Cosa map were based on real ship observations.

First, the la Cosa map labelled a six-island group *Islas Tibia*, a name that was later written as *Illas Tebas* on the similar archipelago shown on the 1502 Cantino map. As previously discussed, the Cantino map completed soon after João da Nova’s return to Lisbon named one of these islands as Ascension. That in turn suggests a backward connection between the two maps, the discovered island

assumed to be part of an archipelago named *Islas Tibia* [warm islands] by its discoverer, and then renamed as Ascension by da Nova.

Second, the “St Helena” archipelago labelled *Islas Tausens* is unique to the la Cosa map. I am unaware of any other map of this period that displays a second South Atlantic island group. The most obvious explanation for this is that St Helena was sighted before this map was completed in 1500.

An entirely different suggestion has been made about several of these early maps - that the discovery of St Helena and Ascension might be less the result of chance sightings than the result of earlier map projections.⁶⁶ I personally struggle to accept the paradox of foreknowledge of the unknown. The example cited is the confidence with which Columbus knew he would find an unknown shore to the west of Europe before he began of his voyage.⁶⁷ However, even that example seems doubtful because Columbus and everyone else around him knew he wanted to find a westward route to the shores of India, which were *known* to exist. He knew the world to be a sphere, India simultaneously lying both to the west and east of Europe. His unknowns included the distance to India sailing west, which he grossly underestimated, and the fact that a direct passage to his destination would be blocked by the American continent, of which he not only had no foreknowledge but mistook as being India.

In short, the presence of the *Islas Tausens* and *Islas Tibia* archipelagos on the la Cosa map respectively hint at early knowledge of St Helena and Ascension. If so, who first saw them? It should be remembered that this was a Spanish map, so perhaps some of their unrecorded ships sighted the two islands before this map was completed in 1500.

That conclusion entirely contradicts the long tradition that the Portuguese found both South Atlantic islands. Having at the start of this article already dismissed the likelihood of a pre-1500 sighting by the earliest Portuguese voyages led by Bartolomeu Dias and Vasco da Gama from the Indian ocean into the South Atlantic, it is possible that other ships from that country saw these two islands. Perhaps these islands were seen by one or more of the numerous 15th-century Portuguese ships that traded along the West African coast. For their outward voyage, winds and currents allowed these vessels to sail close to the coast. For their return, rather than clawing their way back against contrary winds and currents, many ships steered clockwise deep into the Atlantic, first west and then circling north until, reaching the latitude of Portugal, they could steer due east to Lisbon. This was the *volta do mar* manoeuvre.⁶⁸ The further south they began their return the deeper they needed to sail west into the Atlantic before circling north. If sailing in the southern hemisphere, perhaps one or more of these anonymous Portuguese trading ships sailed far enough west to reach and then follow the south-easterly trade winds and currents, thus being taken towards St Helena and Ascension.

Balancing the Evidence

From eyewitness accounts published soon after the event, there seems little doubt that Estêvão da Gama and his section of the fourth Portuguese armada to India reached St Helena in July 1503. However, João da Nova’s claim of a discovery in 1502 is entirely reliant on the Portuguese chronicles written at least half a century later. This long delay does not help da Nova’s claim, which is also undermined by two negative facts. If his ships found St Helena as well as Ascension then both islands should have been shown on the Cantino map, yet only the latter is shown. Likewise, Albuquerque and his captains from the fifth armada should have known about St Helena based on what João da Nova reported when the third armada returned to Lisbon. In turn, someone from the fifth armada should have told Estêvão da Gama or one of his men about St Helena when they met off the Cape on 12 July 1503, but this does not seem to have happened.

These two difficulties prompt an aphorism: *the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*.⁶⁹ The absence of St Helena on the Cantino map raises doubts but does not disprove da Nova found the island. The island’s exclusion from this map could either have been a deliberate act by the Cantino cartographer or an oversight. Certainly, one or both islands were missed from many later maps, yet nothing is

usually inferred from this other than that they were a copy of the Cantino map, that the islands were overlooked or thought too insignificant to show.⁷⁰

The same aphorism can be applied to the silence about St Helena from Albuquerque and his captains when meeting Estêvão da Gama's ships off the Cape. Each may have known about da Nova's discovery but were too forgetful, preoccupied or negligent to suggest that da Gama should navigate to St Helena and replenish stocks of food and water there.

Sceptics of João da Nova's discovery assume the creator of the Cantino map, Albuquerque and his captains would have separately acted differently had they known about St Helena, but these were humans, not automatons. Conclusions can seldom be reached on the basis of how people *ought* to act in a particular set of circumstances.

Da Nova's claim is strengthened by the unanimity of the chronicle accounts which on other matters are so contradictory. Minor support for him also comes from the fact António de Saldanha somehow found St Helena on his dismantled ship in 1505. Putting all these factors together, this explains why I personally think it slightly more likely that João da Nova discovered St Helena in 1502 and that this happened before Estêvão da Gama in 1503. However if put to a jury, it would not be surprising if others voted the other way round. This is a very marginal judgement.

The problem is that this is not a simple choice between one of two alternative discoverers. If it is accepted the Juan de la Cosa map is based on reality rather than myth and indeed dates from 1500, then it is difficult to explain what the islands marked as *Islas Tausens* were intended to depict other than St Helena. That in turn suggests St Helena was found before either João da Nova or Estêvão da Gama ever set sail from Lisbon, so the conclusion reached in the previous paragraph actually only relates to early sightings and landings, not to the first discovery. Perhaps St Helena was found by early Portuguese trading ships sailing home from West Africa, but given the nationality of the la Cosa map, the extraordinary possibility also arises that St Helena was a secret Spanish discovery. All of which leads to an unsatisfactory conclusion - whoever first found St Helena, their identity and the exact year are likely to forever remain a mystery.

Supplementary Information

Several supplementary topics arise from the above article that do not directly bear on the question of who discovered St Helena.

João da Nova's Background

According to two Portuguese chronicles, João da Nova came from a noble Galician family, several websites also suggesting without sources that he was born and raised at the historic Maceda Castle [Castillo de Maceda].⁷¹



Figure 10: João da Nova, 2002 St Helena's Quincentenary Coin

It is thought he was an experienced seaman and had conducted early overseas missions in Africa. Prior to his selection as commander of the third armada by King Manuel, he served as Alcaide-menor of Lisbon, both deputising the city's military commander (the An Alcaide-mor) and enforcing civil law over the civil population.⁷² His appointment may have come from influence in the royal court by the da Cunha family (he was their protégé). It may also demonstrate an ambition by the high Portuguese nobility to gain an entry in the new eastern spice trade.⁷³

Purpose and Command of the Third Armada

The statements made in the “standard” histories of St Helena by Brooke and Gosse about the purpose of João da Nova’s third armada require correction. These sources claim the ships were sent out to reinforce Cabral’s second armada, Gosse elaborating with the statement that it was known “the plight of the Portuguese at Calicut was acute”.⁷⁴ This must be wrong because the Portuguese monarchy was entirely ignorant of the war with the kingdom of Calicut until the first of Cabral’s ships returned to Lisbon, and this was about six months *after* da Nova sailed for India.

Certainly the four ships of da Nova’s third armada were armed to defend themselves, but they were primarily built as cargo ships, not battleships.

In 1997, Geneviève Bouchon suggested that João da Nova was charged with a further purpose, which was to block any attempt by the Spanish to enter the spice trade.⁷⁵ If this is true, given the small size of his fleet, he was entrusted with a very delicate mission.

Two ships were owned by the Crown and the others partially or wholly by a major slave trader, merchant and banker, Bartolomeo Marchionni from Florence.⁷⁶ Judging from an illustration (Figure 11) in the *Livro das Armadas da Índia* (created circa 1568), three ships were carracks (mainly square-rigged) and the fourth was a caravel (mainly lateen-rigged).⁷⁷ Although this illustration suggests the ships sailed under the banner of the red squared cross, the emblem of the Order of Christ, I have been unable to confirm that João da Nova was a member.

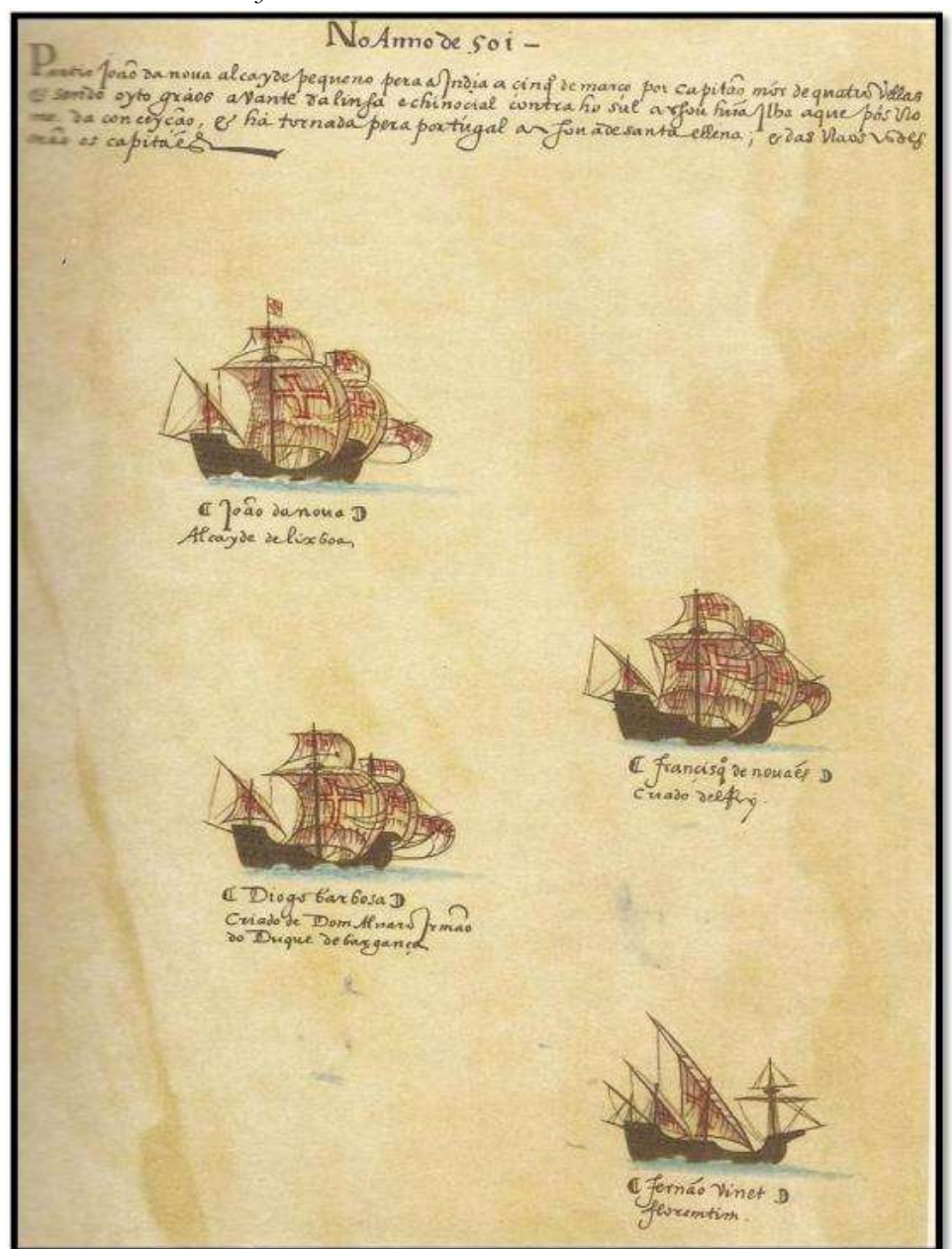


Figure 11: The Third Armada to India, 1501-2, *Livro das Armadas da Índia* illustration

None of the ship names are known. In terms of command, apart from João da Nova the three other captains have been variously quoted as Francisco de Nováis, Diogo Barbosa, Fernão Vinet (a Florentine), Fernão Pacheco, Rui de Abreu or Duarte Pacheco – six names, of which at least three must be wrong.⁷⁸ It has also been suggested that the ships carried a total of about 400 men⁷⁹ of whom 80 were armed.⁸⁰

Also regarding the command, Brooke⁸¹ followed by Gosse⁸² stated without explanation or sources that João da Nova was only appointed commander after the ships won their sea battle against Calicut (discussed below). I have searched the literature to understand the rationale behind this claim. Perhaps a small hint comes from Edzer Roukema's 1963 paper, albeit this was published 25 years after Gosse. Roukema discussed Amerigo Vespucci's account of a separate three-ship transatlantic expedition.⁸³ This sailed from Lisbon about a month after João da Nova in the spring of 1501. First meeting up with some vessels from the returning second armada at the Bay of Dakar, the expedition reached Brazil on 17 August 1501, sailed south down the coastline and then returned back west to east across the South Atlantic on 28 August. Roukema postulated that these ships were meant to join João da Nova at India but reached the African coast too late in the year to round the Cape of Good Hope before crossing the Indian Ocean, so instead returned to Lisbon.⁸⁴ If that is true, then perhaps Brooke and Gosse thought the unknown commander of this three-ship expedition was meant to assume overall command of the third armada, now expanded to seven ships. However, I personally doubt Roukema's suggestion was correct because the Vespucci expedition showed no urgency to reach the Indian Ocean by the August deadline, before the monsoon winds reverse direction. Instead, by that month these ships were still navigating their way south down the South American coastline, roughly at a distance of 8,000 miles from the usual Indian Ocean crossing points.

The Third Armada and the Calicut war

The Portuguese war with Calicut was precipitated by events following the arrival of the second armada to India (1500-1501) under the command of Cabral.

The Samoothiri (anglicised as Zamorin) was the hereditary monarch of the Kingdom of Kozhikode (Calicut) in the South Malabar region of India. For centuries past, Calicut's port had served as an important source of spices for Muslim traders shipping goods to the Middle East and onward into Europe through Venice.⁸⁵ Tensions grew between these Moors and the Portuguese from the moment the first armada under Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut in 1498. Whilst for the Moors, the Portuguese were new and unwelcome competitors, for the Portuguese this tension was exacerbated by a hatred of all who practiced the Muslim faith. As a Hindu, the Zamorin unsuccessfully steered a middle course in balancing his traditional Muslim trade against the demands of the newly arrived Portuguese.

The earliest conflict between the Portuguese and the Moors was an attack by eight Muslim vessels that occurred shortly after da Gama's ships left Calicut. The situation rapidly worsened with the arrival of the second armada under Cabral in 1500 with seven ships.⁸⁶ A series of escalating events followed. Frustrated by the slowness in filling the holds, Cabral seized a Muslim vessel and took its cargo. That led to the death of about 50 Portuguese in a riot led by Muslims at the factory then being assembled to hold goods for onward shipment. Cabral retaliated by seizing and putting to death about 600 seamen, irrespective of their nationality, next devastating the harbour with a two-day cannonade.⁸⁷

Initially rendezvousing at the Bay of Dakar, the first of Cabral's ships arrived back at Lisbon about six months after João da Nova's departure. However one of Cabral's ships left letters for da Nova at Mossel Bay to warn him of the hostile reception he would receive at Calicut. Da Nova therefore filled his holds at friendlier locations along the Indian coast. Whilst at Cannanore, news arrived of the approach of over 200 hostile vessels with a force of about 7,000 men from Calicut. In the action

that followed, João da Nova's four ships won a memorable sea battle, largely due to their superior cannonry and one of the earliest combinations of line-ahead and standoff gun battle tactics.⁸⁸

Following Cabral's return with news of events at Calicut, the Portuguese adopted a new and aggressive policy whereby battleships would be included in future armadas, both for the purpose of protecting cargo ships and to enforce naval power in the Indian Ocean. João da Nova's third armada therefore marks a new in Portuguese policy. Perhaps this transition explains why so many descriptions of the first four expeditions to India regard the third armada as sufficiently unimportant to altogether exclude it.⁸⁹ Indeed, where this expedition has been mentioned, at least one author wrote it off as "not memorable"⁹⁰ whilst another described the memorable 1501 battle at Cannanore but then replaced João da Nova as the Portuguese commander with Vasco da Gama.⁹¹

Monuments left by João da Nova

The early Portuguese explorers placed *padrões*, carved stone pillars, on prominent coastal locations to mark their claim to new discoveries. It is unlikely a *padrão* will ever be unearthed at St Helena, but other Portuguese markers might one day be found. For example, markers discovered elsewhere have variously been claimed to mark the progress of João da Nova's 1501/2 voyage. At the Cape, two engraved stones were found following the demolition of the old Government House. One portraying a cannon was lost but the other known as the Mossel Bay Stone apparently marks da Nova's arrival in 1501. Recognised as one of the country's oldest artefacts left by the early Portuguese, it is today kept at the Museum of South Africa in Cape Town (Figure 12):



Figure 12: The Mossel Bay Stone⁹²



Figure 13: Lithograph of Colombo Boulder Inscription

Louis Péringuey suggested that the name "DA NOVA" or "NUEVA" was mistakenly spelt as "Nova" and that the letters "BRA" stood for Braz (the Portuguese name São Braz).⁹³ As previously stated, two sources (a letter from King Manuel and Gaspar Corrêa's chronicle) stated João da Nova visited Brazil. There is an obvious anomaly though – João da Nova anchored at Mossel Bay in July 1501, yet the stone is dated 1500. However, Péringuey explained this on the basis that perhaps the stone was prepared before da Nova left Lisbon in the spring of 1501, the Church year for 1500 ending at the end of March.

In 1898, a large 20-ton boulder was discovered at the bottom of the old Breakwater Office building at the site in the Fort of Colombo. This featured a finely produced carving of the Portuguese coat of arms, above which was carved a cross and to one side a cruder carving, apparently of the numerals “1501”. This carving was reproduced in a paper the following year as a lithograph (Figure 13)⁹⁴ If this is indeed a date, this suggests Sri Lanka was discovered by João da Nova four years before the traditional date of 1505 by Lourenço de Almeida.

Geneviève Bouchon has argued this boulder was indeed left by the third armada in 1501.⁹⁵ However, an alternative suggestion made in the 1899 paper by F. H. de Vos tentatively suggested that the characters might be read as “ISOI” representing a phrase such as *Jesus Salvator Orientalium Indicorum* [Jesus the Saviour of the East Indies].⁹⁶

Location of early landings

None of the Portuguese chronicles stated where the third armada under João da Nova anchored at St Helena. However, Thomé Lopes described the landing of his division of the fourth armada under Estêvão da Gama as follows: “**On the northwest side** of the aforesaid island we cast our anchor”. This would certainly have been a sensible location for anchorage because ships on the northwest of the island would then be in the lea of the island. Indeed, it remains the case to the present day that ships arriving from the Cape of Good Hope, even powered ships such as the RMS, usually took advantage of the greater shelter offered by the island by circling it in an anticlockwise direction to reach Jamestown on the northwest coast.

If Estêvão da Gama’s ships indeed followed this anticlockwise route, they would in turn have passed three obvious coastal anchorages along the north-western coast where water could be collected from streams – first Ruperts Bay, then James Bay and finally Lemon Valley Bay. These days permanent streams flow through both James Valley and Lemon Valley, the stream down Ruperts Valley usually only running during wet periods. Maybe the situation was different 500 years ago because documentary and cartographic evidence suggests that the earliest landings were indeed made at Ruperts Bay. For example, Benjamin Wright’s 1598 map⁹⁷ appears to name Ruperts Bay as *Agoada Velha* [old watering place], James Bay being marked as *Bay de S. Elena*.⁹⁸ Again, early Portuguese navigational instructions for St Helena dating from the late 16th century named James Bay as *Agoada Nova* [new watering place] with the added comment that vessels usually anchored at *Agoada Velha*.⁹⁹

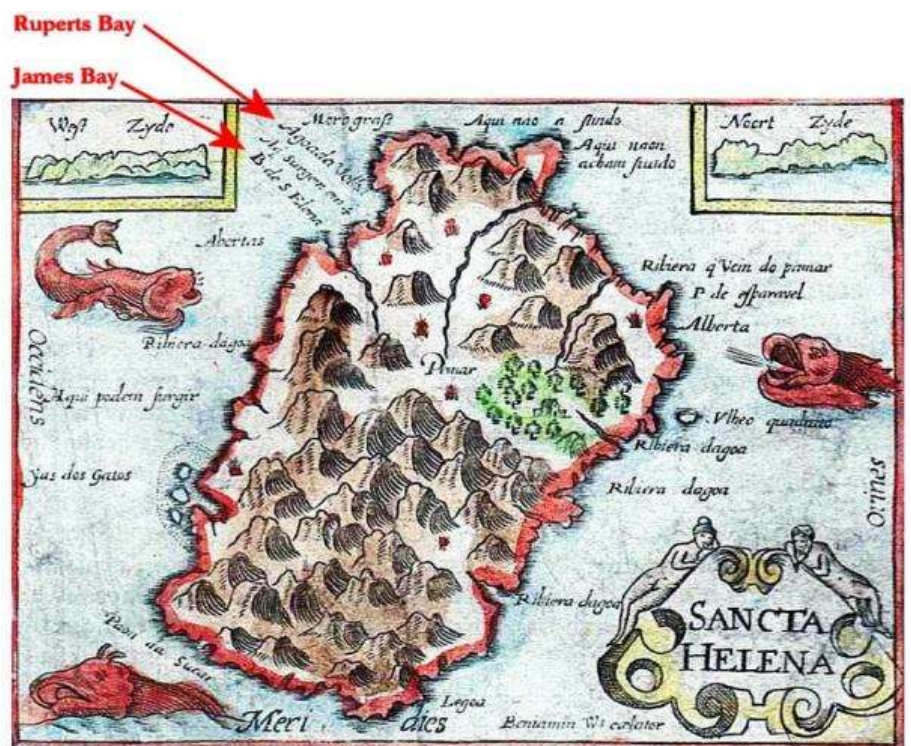


Figure 14: Section of 1598 Benjamin Wright map showing two alternative northwest coastal anchorages

St Helena’s Early Botanic Appearance

Thomas Brooke’s two editions of St Helena’s history were hugely influential in terms of informing as well as misinforming the world about this unique island. His description of St Helena published in 1808 has long been remembered and then repeated, sometimes word for word, by other influential

authors such as Beatson, Mellis, Gosse and Grove: “The interior of the island was one entire forest; and even some of the precipices, overhanging the sea were covered with gumwood trees”.¹⁰⁰ As an example of attempts to illustrate this image, Donal McCracken’s recently published botanical book includes James Wathen’s absurd portrayal of Ladder Hill with plants growing vertiginously up the cliffs (Figure 15).¹⁰¹

It is not obvious where Brooke sourced this portrayal of cliffs covered in vegetation. Perhaps it came from Jerónimo Osório’s description of St Helena’s trees written in 1592 which might be misread as suggesting that the entire island was forested:

“This island standing by itself in the midst of such a vast ocean, seems, as if it were to have been placed there by Providence, for the reception and shelter of weather-beaten ships in their return from an Indian voyage. There are many delightful rivers in this place. **It is covered with fine trees**, and the air is temperate and healthy and after it was inhabited and cultivated (which we shall take notice of afterwards) it abounded in all kind of cattle, and the soil produced plenty of all sorts of fruits and refreshing herbs”.¹⁰²

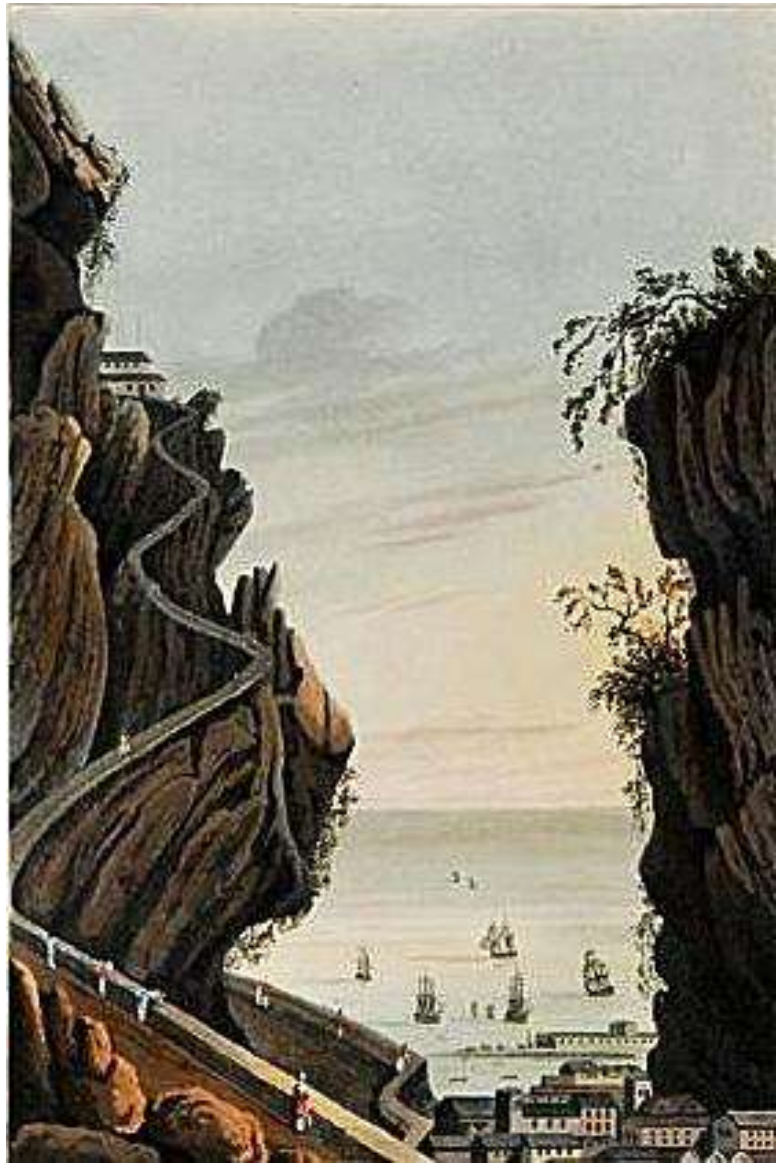


Figure 15: Imaginative Engraving of Ladder Hill by James Wathen, 1821

Quentin Cronk has published a reconstruction of early island vegetation which suggests that only grass, scrubland or low-growing shrubs grew in the saline semi-desert coastal region up to a height of about 250 metres.¹⁰³ Thomé Lopes seems to have confirmed this when he described the island in July 1503: “We did not find any fish, **nor did we see any kind of trees, but it was completely green**, and we judged that there should be some water”. Although sparse, this description seems closer to Cronk’s picture than Brooke and his many followers.

That all said, it would be surprising if vegetation was not seen to grow more strongly along the length of St Helena’s streams. Indeed, it seems at least theoretically possible that these streams played a role in the establishment of some hydrophilic endemic plants. Given that the coastal regions were probably always arid since the island was first volcanically formed¹⁰⁴, it is usually assumed ferns arrived within the interior as spores, having been blown at least a thousand miles across the Ocean. Likewise, it is assumed plants with seeds or small fruits reached the island’s interior in the plumage, droppings or muddy claws of migrant birds.¹⁰⁵ However, I should like to suggest an alternative scenario whereby the island’s streams played a role by functioning as riparian zones.¹⁰⁶ If brushwood fortuitously landed on beaches took root at the points of freshwater runoff, then plants may then have rooted and begun to spread up the streams. Within the microclimate of streams and growing in the damp alluvial soil, perhaps this allowed plants to spread and flourish even in the lower reaches of the coastal region where semi-desert conditions prevailed. Over time, this vegetation could have

spread up the full course of streams, thereby taking them into the island interior uplands where moister conditions prevailed more widely. There, plants could propagate and spread beyond the stream banks into the wider landscape.

St Helena as a Waystation

It is uncertain how soon after discovery the Portuguese began to adapt St Helena as a waystation by planting herbs and trees and the introduction of mammals such as goats, pigs and rabbits. In 2009, Anthony Disney suggested the Portuguese decision to utilise the island as a regular stopover was taken in 1511 when it was sighted by a division of ships from the thirteenth armada commanded by Garcia de Noronha, nephew of Afonso de Albuquerque.¹⁰⁷ De Noronha left Lisbon in April 1511¹⁰⁸ and Gaspar Corrêa's chronicle includes the following passage:

“And thus making their way, at sixteen degrees south they came to a very small island, and they went towards it, and could not reach it, because it calmed the wind and deep seas of over sixty fathoms [...]. Then they went on their way, and the pilots marked the island on their chart and named it Santa Elena, because they found it on that day”.¹⁰⁹

It should first be mentioned that this seems to be a case where the ships were sailing directly for the Cape of Good Hope, presumably making slow progress against the south-easterly trade winds. Approaching from the northwest, the wind would indeed have slackened as ships approached the island.

Gaspar Corrêa's account is the only Portuguese chronicle to suggest St Helena was discovered as late as 1511. In the face of the other chronicles and first-hand accounts, Disney concluded Corrêa was wrong to ascribe this as a discovery but then put forward a series of reasons why he thought it was this 1511 sighting that prompted the first cultivation of St Helena. As will be seen from the following I am not persuaded by Disney's arguments and believe the island was cultivated earlier:

1. *“The absence of any known references to further visits to Saint Helena between the original discovery or discoveries, and D. Garcia's alleged chance arrival in 1511 or 1512, certainly points in this direction. By contrast, after D. Garcia's voyage such references follow swiftly”*. **Comment:** But the island was indeed seen by other ships before 1511. António de Saldanha's visit in 1505 has been discussed above. Also, the island was accurately located and named in 1505 by Albericus (possibly Albericus Vesputius) in a Flemish book.¹¹⁰
2. *“[...] it is established that Correia himself was in India from about 1512, and was closely associated with the Albuquerque faction. He was therefore likely to be well-informed concerning D. Garcia de Noronha's voyage - indeed, it is possible he even travelled to India aboard one of D. Garcia's ships himself. At the very least, he would have been conscious of Albuquerque's reaction to D. Garcia's news. Moreover, it is intrinsically unlikely he would have been ignorant of the earlier discoveries of Saint Helena had they in fact led to the island becoming, before 1511, a regular port-of-call”*. **Comment:** In the absence of any evidence, it is hard to know how informed Correia was about St Helena.
3. *“Reinforcing the view that the 1511/12 voyage may have been decisive is the fact that there is no known cartographic evidence to indicate Saint Helena had been much noticed or appreciated before about that time. [...] As far as I can ascertain, the earliest surviving map to show Saint Helena is one usually attributed to Jorge Reinel, dated at about 1510”*. **Comment:** This is not true. Several pre-1511 maps did show St Helena, e.g. the 1504 Italian Visconte Maggiolo map and the 1506/7 manuscripts left by the German printer Valentim Fernandes.¹¹¹
4. *“[...] there is the evidence of the names and dates which were carved on trees on Saint Helena by visiting sailors, from very early in the island's history. The carvings were observed and commented upon by both Linschoten in 1589¹¹², and Pyrard in 1601 and 1610.¹¹³ Significantly, Linschoten said the carvings he saw were dated from the years 1510 and 1515 onwards, and Pyrard from 1515 and 1520. Their testimony further strengthens*

the probability that it was from the second decade of the sixteenth century rather than the first, that Saint Helena began to be regularly visited by returning Portuguese Indiamen. [...] the way in which these dates are mentioned by both authors seems to indicate they are intended to be approximate rather than exact - and in both cases the emphasis is on the second decade of the century". **Comment:** Two points here: First, Pyrdard's description is suspiciously similar to Linschoten's earlier account, suggesting a degree of plagiarism.¹¹⁴ Therefore, Linschoten's date range of 1510-1515 may be more reliable. Second, it seems likely the Portuguese brought saplings to St Helena, not full-grown trees. These will have taken some years to reach a size where they could take carvings. This in turn suggests cultivation of the island occurred some years ahead of de Noronha's 1511 sighting.

5. In a separate section Disney wrote: "[...] there is solid confirmation that Saint Helena was known by the middle of the first decade of the sixteenth century, for it is named as a possible locale for exiling certain categories of *degredados*, in the *Regimento* given to D. Francisco de Almeida on 5 March 1505".¹¹⁵ **Comment:** *Degredados* being criminals, political or religious prisoners, this is the earliest occasion St Helena was suggested as an ideal location to exile troublesome members of society. This proposal by Afonso de Albuquerque seems to contradict Disney's thesis about the significance of Garcia de Noronha's sighting in 1511. What were these *degredados* meant to do after arriving at St Helena? They surely needed to start cultivating it, if only for their own survival. In short, by 1505 consideration was already being given to the cultivation of St Helena.

St Helena's first place of worship

Although none of the Portuguese chronicles support the long tradition that João da Nova built a chapel at St Helena, he certainly built a *hermida* or a small hermitage with space for only a few supplicants near Mossel Bay in South Africa during his 1501 outward passage to India. A letter written by Pedro Quaresma to King Manuel II described a visit to this location a few years later in 1506. According to this, da Nova's *hermida* could be seen by ships at sea, which suggests it was built on a cliff-top promontory:

[...] beyond the Cape the wind was south, so that I stood out more to sea with the ships, and on the 2nd May I entered the watering place of St Bras [Bay of São Bras, named after St Blaise the protector of mariners], having no one on board who knew the locality, nor a man who had been there, but by a *hermida* made by Joham da Nova which we saw therein we recognised it; and I ordered the ship to be anchored, as your Highness commanded in your instructions; [...].¹¹⁶

This *hermida* must have been the first place of Christian worship built in the southern hemisphere. Describing the South African coast in 1576, Manuel De Mesquita Perestrello wrote that part of the walls of a ruined *hermida* dedicated to St Blaise built at the time of the discovery of the sea route to India could still be seen on the high ground (Cape St Blaise) between two coves at Mossel Bay.¹¹⁷ No trace of this building remains today, the most prominent structure being a lighthouse, which was perhaps constructed on the old hermitage site.

It seems credible that da Nova both constructed hermitages on prominent cliff-top locations at both St Helena and Mossel Bay. At St Helena, the most obvious location would have been Munden's Point where a *hermida* would have been a prominent feature to approaching ships. Perhaps it was no coincidence that a crucifix once stood at a location recommended for the placement of defensive guns to protect ships at anchor, the location called "the Morro" in a late sixteenth century Portuguese report maybe being Munden's Point:

As for building a fort on the island, the most convenient place to do it is the Morro **where the cross is**, which is the harbour where the ships anchor, and there is better anchorage and watering than anywhere else on the island; and as for whether you could close the mouths [?] of the other

harbours, you could not, because everywhere the bottom is so deep that any ship, however big, could ride with a rope ashore.¹¹⁸

The earliest documented mention of a church arose from the 1571 arrival at St Helena of Duarte Lopes:

“Very fine fruits grow without any cultivation, but the Portuguese brought the vine there. Particularly in the vicinity of the **little church**, and of the sailors’ inns, there are groves of wild oranges, citrons, lemons, and large figs, and also of a peculiar kind of apple, which all the year round bears ripe and unripe fruit, like the orange tree”.¹¹⁹

Lopes gave no hint that this church was newly built, yet from the Francis Pretty’s description of Thomas Cavendish’s arrival at St Helena on 8 June 1588, a crucifix was seen carved with the year 1571, the same year as Lopes’ visit.

[..] and one [building] particularly, which was a church, was tiled and whitened on the outside very fair, and made with a porch; and within the church, at the upper end, was set an altar, whereon stood a very large table, set in a frame, having in it the picture of our Saviour Christ upon the cross, and the image of our Lady praying, with divers other histories curiously painted in the same. The sides of the church were hung round with stained cloths, having many devices drawn on them. [..] There is also over against the church a very fair causeway, made up with stones reaching unto a valley by the sea-side, in which valley is planted a garden, wherein grow great store of pompions and melons; and upon the said causeway is a frame erected, whereon hang two bells, wherewith they ring to mass; and near to it a cross is set up, which is squared, framed, and made very artificially of free-stone, whereon is carved in cyphers what time it was built, **which was in the year of our Lord 1571**.¹²⁰

It is on this basis that it is usually stated that this church was built in 1571. However, it is an odd coincidence that 1571 was also the year of Lopes’ visit yet he gave no hint that the church was then under construction. This suggest the church was bult before that date. Several scenarios might explain the date seen during the Cavendish visit. Perhaps it marked the church’s refurbishment in 1571, but personally I like to think that so many dates were already carved on the island’s trees that one of Lopes’ more wicked crewmates decided to carve it on the church’s cross instead, thereby unwittingly misleading historians for many centuries since.

Neither of the accounts regarding the 1571 Lopes and 1588 Cavendish visits precisely located the church. Greater clarity comes from Huygen van Linschoten who arrived on 12 May 1589, eleven months after Cavendish. Clearly, the church stood in what is today known as James Valley:

[..] wee were brought to a place wher the other ships lay at anker, which is right against a valley, that lyeth betweene two high hilles, wherein there standeth a little Church called Saint Helena.¹²¹

The location of the church and its distance from the landing place is unclear from these descriptions. An engraved portrait of Linschoten by Lambert Cornelisz (approx. 1595), a copy of which is held by the British Museum, includes four illustrations of geographical locations, including St Helena in the bottom left-hand corner (Figure 16). This shows the church drawn near the centre of the image and suggests it was located some distance up the valley.¹²² However in 1616, only a couple of decades later, Thomas Best commanding the tenth English trading expedition to the East Indies anchored at St Helena and recorded that “At three of the clocke we anchored in the Roade **right against the**

Chappell".¹²³ Perhaps, like the modern church, the first building was built relatively close to the shore. At any rate, it must have been clearly visible to ships at anchor.

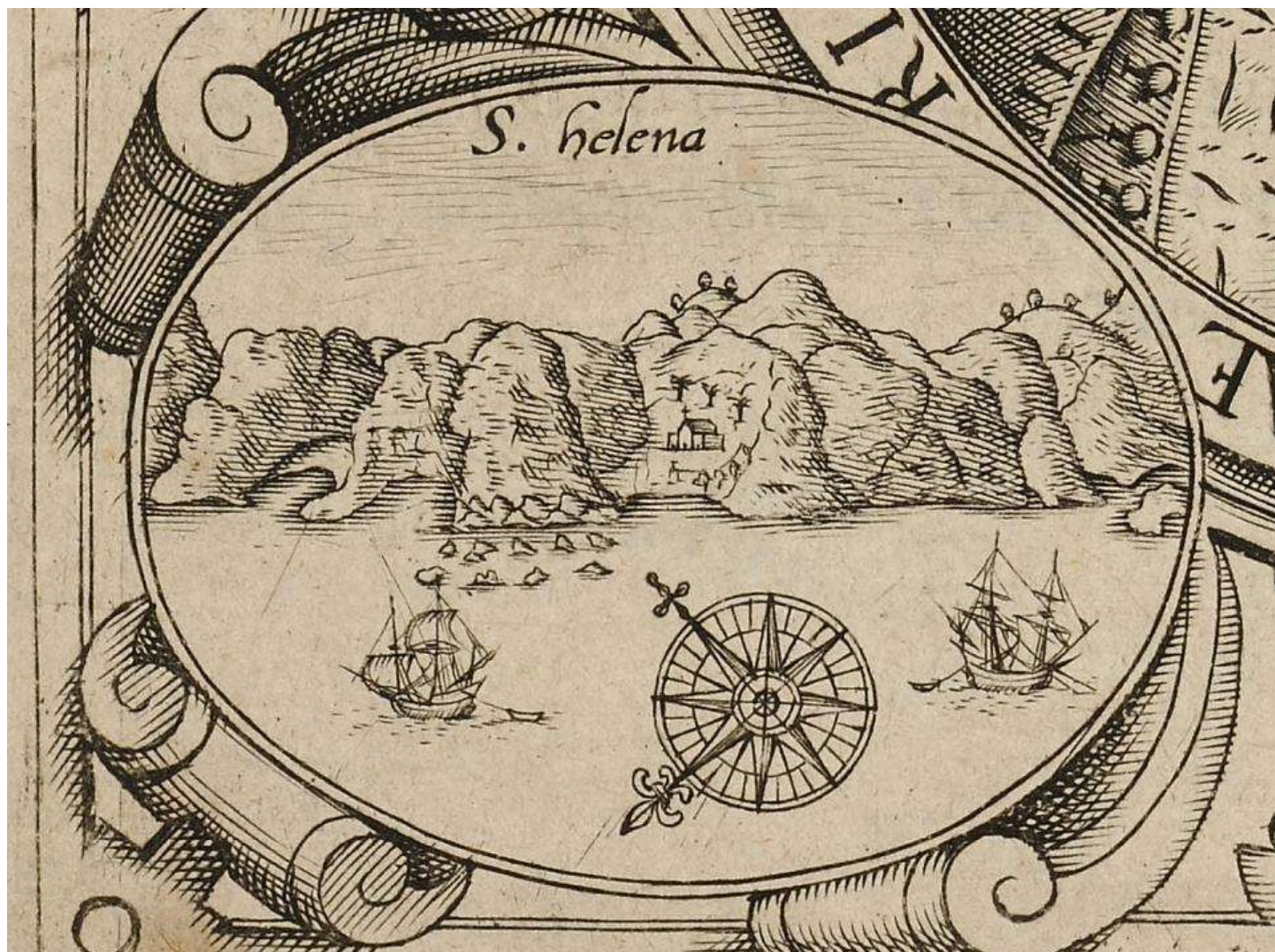


Figure 16: Lambert Cornelisz's portrayal of St Helena's early church

¹ A. H. Schulenburg, 'Transient Observations: The Textualizing of St Helena through Five Hundred Years of Colonial Discourse' (University of St Andrews, 1999), 135–41, <https://tinyurl.com/42fnwk97>; A. H. Schulenburg, 'The Discovery of St Helena: The Search Continues', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 24 (Spring 2002). A contradictory and confusing article about the discovery can presently be read on Wikipedia [<https://tinyurl.com/2p88mxxa>].

² Ian Bruce, 'St Helena Day', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 44 (2015), <https://tinyurl.com/mthdwp63>.

³ Carmen Nocentelli, *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 70, <https://tinyurl.com/4z8yx3fz>.

⁴ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert, van Ian Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, inhoudende een corte beschryvinghe der selver landen ende zee-custen ...* (Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1596), 131, <https://tinyurl.com/5bdb9m28>.

⁵ Filippo Pigafetta, *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo, and of the Surrounding Countries; Drawn out of the Writings and Discourses of the Portuguese Duarte Lopez*, trans. Margarite Hutchinson (London: John Murray, 1881), 7, <https://tinyurl.com/3z3vcy8t>.

⁶ Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*, trans. G. H. T. Kimble, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d series, No. LXXIX (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937), 24, <https://tinyurl.com/2p93esn5>; Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, *Collecção de noticias para a historia e geografia das nações ultramarinas: que vivem nos dominios portuguezes, ou lbes são visinhas*, vol. II, Nos 1 & II (Typ. da Academia, 1812), 219; <https://tinyurl.com/kaxbz79b>.

⁷ For example, George Forster, *Voyage Round the World in His Britannic Majesty's Sloop Resolution Commanded by Capt. James Cook during the Years 1772, 3, 4 and 5*, vol. II (London: B. White, 1777), 571–72, <http://tinyurl.com/lguplnn>; J. E. Packer, *The Ascension Handbook. A Concise Guide to Ascension Island, South Atlantic*. (Georgetown, Ascension Island, 1968).

⁸ Gaspar Corrêa and Rodrigo Jose de Lima Felner, *Lendas da India. Publicadas de ordem da Classe de sciencias moraes, politicas e bellas lettras da Academia real das sciencias de Lisboa e sob a dirrecção de Rodrigo José de Lima Felner*, vol. 2 (Lisboa Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1858), 235.

- ⁹ João de Barros, Manoel Severim de Faria, and João Baptista Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barros e de Diogo de Couto*, vol. I, book V, chapter X (Lisbon: Regia Officina Typografica, 1778), 466, <https://tinyurl.com/y5zcends>; Damião de Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo senbor rei D. Manoel* (Lisbon: Na officina de M. Manescal da Costa, 1749), 84, <https://tinyurl.com/yxdr2uub>.
- ¹⁰ Duarte Leite, *História da colonização portuguesa do Brasil, Chapter IX, O mais antigo mapa do Brasil*, ed. Carlos Malheiro Dias, vol. 2 (Porto: Litografia Nacional, 1922), 251, <https://tinyurl.com/4hspbxfx>.
- ¹¹ William Brooks Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1938), 139, <https://tinyurl.com/yav89bet>.
- ¹² Edzer Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map', *Imago Mundi* 17 (1963): 15.
- ¹³ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:466.
- ¹⁴ Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo*, 84; <https://tinyurl.com/yxdr2uub>.
- ¹⁵ John Purdy, *Laurie's Sailing Directory for the Ethiopic or Southern Atlantic Ocean to the Rio De La Plata, Cape Horn, and the Cape of Good Hope Etc.*, ed. Alex G. Findlay, Fouth (London: R. H. Laurie, 1855), 74, <https://tinyurl.com/y6yp74gl>; W. C. Palmer, 'St. Helena and the Route to the Indies, 1659–1702', *Historical Research* 3, no. 9 (1 February 1926): 74; <https://tinyurl.com/y65h7orq>.
- ¹⁶ Ascension Day is celebrated 39 days after Easter Sunday. According to the website "Side-by-side Easter calendar reference for the 16th century" [<https://tinyurl.com/ltru447>] Easter was celebrated on 11 April in 1501 (Julian calendar), which means Ascension Day fell on 20 May [<https://tinyurl.com/8ujab5vs>]. Similarly, in 1502 Easter fell on 27 March and Ascension on 5 May.
- ¹⁷ Guglielmo Berchet, *Fonti italiane per la storia della scoperta del Nuovo mondo*, vol. 1, part III (Rome: Ministero della pubblica istruzione, 1892), 152, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9f4bjv>.
- ¹⁸ Stefaan Missinne, *The Da Vinci Globe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 4, footnote 8.
- ¹⁹ Joaquim F F A Gaspar, 'From the Portolan Chart of the Mediterranean to the Latitude Chart of the Atlantic, Cartometric Analysis and Modeling' (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2010), 225, <https://tinyurl.com/yysll2w7>.
- ²⁰ Gregory C. McIntosh, 'Martin Waldseemüller, Amerigo Vespucci, and the So-Called "Error" of the "Abbey of All Saints"', *Terrae Incognitae* 43, no. 2 (2011): 134–59; <https://tinyurl.com/yx9qu6bm>; Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map'.
- ²¹ Leite, *História da colonização portuguesa do Brasil, Chapter IX, O mais antigo mapa do Brasil*, 2:251.
- ²² Sydney R. Welch, *South Africa Under King Manuel 1495-1521*, 1946, Note 181, 96, <https://tinyurl.com/4fvuy6rx>.
- ²³ Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map', 15.
- ²⁴ Gaspar Corrêa, *Lendas de India*, vol. 1 (Lisbon: Typ. da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1858), 235.
- ²⁵ The first recorded visit to Brazil was made by the Spanish explorer Vicente Yáñez Pinzón. He made landfall about 1,800km north of Cabo de Sam Jorge on 26 January 1500 and then sailed north to the West Indies. The second Portuguese armada to India under Cabral first sighted a mountain (Monte Paschoal) on 22 April 1500, sailed north for three days and made landfall of what is now Porto Seguro [Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map', 8.]. The three ships with Vespucci arrived at Brazil in August 1501.
- ²⁶ Leite, *História da colonização portuguesa do Brasil, Chapter IX, O mais antigo mapa do Brasil*, 2:251.
- ²⁷ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:477; <http://tinyurl.com/lebfc6b>.
- ²⁸ Luiz de Figueiredo Falcão, *Livro em que se contém toda a fazenda e real patrimonio dos reinos de Portugal, India, e ilhas adjacentes e outras particularidades* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1859), 138; <http://tinyurl.com/n2xwoj2>.
- ²⁹ Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo*, 85; <http://tinyurl.com/na9cgdj>.
- ³⁰ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:118; <http://tinyurl.com/n8qodqe>.
- ³¹ Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*, vol. 1 (En La Officina de Henrique Valente de Oliueira, 1666), 50; <https://tinyurl.com/fpm9jzhy>.
- ³² Melchior Estacio Do Amaral, *Tratado das batalhas e sucessos do Galeão Sanctiago com os Olandeses na Ilha de Sancta Elena: e da não Chagas com os Vngleses antre as Ilhas dos Açores*, 1604, 20; <https://tinyurl.com/w2ytb78b>.
- ³³ A. R. Disney, *The Portuguese in India and Other Studies, 1500-1700, Chapter 17: The Portuguese and Saint Helena*, Variorum Collected Studies Series 933 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 216.
- ³⁴ For example, see the many chronicle contradictions in '3rd Portuguese India Armada (Nova, 1501)', in *Wikipedia*, 6 August 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/h9y2pt74>.
- ³⁵ Corrêa and Lima Felner, *Lendas da India*, 2:196–97; <https://tinyurl.com/y4kpfseu>.
- ³⁶ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:477; Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo*, 477.
- ³⁷ Marino Sanuto, *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, ed. Nicolò Barozzi, vol. 4 (Venice: F. Visentini, 1880), 486 <https://tinyurl.com/n23sfen9>; Leite, *História da colonização portuguesa do Brasil, Chapter IX, O mais antigo mapa do Brasil*, 2:251.
- ³⁸ Jean Philibert Berjeau, trans., *Calcoen. A Dutch Narrative of the Second Voyage of Vasco Da Gama to Calicut, Printed at Antwerp circa 1504* (London: Basil Montague Pickering, 1874), 37, <https://tinyurl.com/y3ln3msc>.
- ³⁹ Little is known about Lopes other than that he was Portuguese and originated from Porto. [Diogo Barbosa Machado, *Bibliotheca lusitana, na qual se comprehende a noticia dos authores portuguezes*, vol. III (Lisbon, 1787), 355, <https://tinyurl.com/yx8ky2tc>].
- ⁴⁰ Schulenburg, 'The Discovery of St Helena: The Search Continues'; Thomé Lopes, *Primo Volume Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi: Nel Qual Si Contiene La Descrittione Dell' Africa, et Del Paese Del Prete Ianni, Con Uarii Uiaggi, Dal Mar Rosso à Calicut, & Insin All'isole Molucche, Doue Nascono Le Spetierie, et La Nauigatione Attorno Il Mondo*, ed. Giovanni Battista Ramusio (Venice: Appresso gli heredi di Lvcantonio Givnti, 1550), 156, <https://tinyurl.com/y4ybvl3>.
- ⁴¹ Wikipedia: <https://tinyurl.com/4h6dhn72>; <https://tinyurl.com/ntunyr42>
- ⁴² Harold Livermore, 'Santa Helena, A Forgotten Portuguese Discovery', *Estudos Em Homenagem a Louis Antonio de Oliveira Ramos*, 2004, 623–31.

- ⁴³ Lopes, *Primo Volume Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi*, 145; Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:477.
- ⁴⁴ According to the TimeAndDate website, 10 July 1503 was indeed a Monday [https://www.timeanddate.com/date/weekday.html]. This suggests Lopes' dates are more accurate than those quoted in the anonymous Flemish account.
- ⁴⁵ Lopes, *Primo Volume Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi*, 156.
- ⁴⁶ João de Barros and Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia de João de Barros e de Diogo de Couto*, vol. Part II (Na Regia officina typografica, 1777), 86, 104; https://tinyurl.com/2hv2jtx7.
- ⁴⁷ Beau W. Rowlands, *Fernão Lopes: A South Atlantic 'Robinson Crusoe'* (Winchester: George Mann Publications, 2007), 156.
- ⁴⁸ Afonso de Albuquerque, *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque Second Viceroy of India*, trans. Walter de Gray Birch, vol. 2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1875); https://tinyurl.com/jprafpzk.
- ⁴⁹ Height advantage of a mast: Assuming a flat sea, a deck 5m above flat sea level, eye-level 1.75m above the deck and the floor of the crow's nest 25m above the deck, the viewed horizon is 9.2km from the deck and 19.4km from the crow's nest [https://tinyurl.com/sk7j8w8w].
- ⁵⁰ Michael J. Ferrar, 'ChFANO/1; Fano Federiciana Chart; Technical Assessment', *Academia.Edu*, https://tinyurl.com/2wjzrs7x.
- ⁵¹ Gregory C. McIntosh, 'The Vesconte-Maggiolo World Map of 1504 in Fano, Italy', *Imago Mundi*. 67, no. 1 (2015): 107. For a high-definition image see https://tinyurl.com/y5hwy8xh.
- ⁵² McIntosh, 10.
- ⁵³ E. Roukema, 'Some Remarks on the La Cosa Map', *Imago Mundi* 14 (1959): 38–54.
- ⁵⁴ Roukema; Ricardo Cerezo Martínez, *La cartografía náutica española en los siglos XIV, XV y XVI* (Madrid: CSIC Press, 1994), 116; E. G. Ravenstein, ed., *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 205.
- ⁵⁵ For a high-definition image of the "Juan de la Cosa" map see https://tinyurl.com/y5rex3r4. See also Kenneth Nebenzahl, *Atlas of Columbus and the Great Discoveries* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1990), 30–33.
- ⁵⁶ Roukema, 'Some Remarks on the La Cosa Map'.
- ⁵⁷ Ravenstein, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama, 1497-1499*, 205.
- ⁵⁸ George E. Nunn, *The Mappemonde of Juan de La Cosa: A Critical Investigation of Its Date* (Jenkintown: George H. Beans library, 1934); the date of 1500 was disputed on several grounds, the most important of which was that the map depicted Cuba as an island whereas it was not officially circumnavigated until 1509. However, in 1501 Peter Martyr noted: 'For there are many who affirm they have sailed. around Cuba'; Richard Eden, ed., *The First Three English Books on America: ?1511>-1555 A.D.* (Birmingham: Turnbull & Spears, 1885), 90, https://tinyurl.com/y52714yw.
- ⁵⁹ Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map'; Charles Cawley, *Colonies in Conflict: The History of the British Overseas Territories* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 16.
- ⁶⁰ Martínez, *La cartografía náutica española en los siglos XIV, XV y XVI*, 116..
- ⁶¹ Joaquim Alves Gaspar, 'The Planisphere of Juan de La Cosa (1500): The First Padrón Real or the Last of Its Kind?', *Terrae Incognitae* 49, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 68–88 Citations 2-5; https://tinyurl.com/3ayrdzfc.
- ⁶² Nebenzahl, *Atlas of Columbus and the Great Discoveries*, 23.
- ⁶³ Chet Van Duzer, 'Cartographic Invention: The Southern Continent on Vatican MS Urb. Lat. 274, Folios 73v-74r (c.1530)', *Imago Mundi* 59, no. 2 (2007): 193–222; https://tinyurl.com/y4bx626b.
- ⁶⁴ For a high-definition image of the "Christopher Columbus" map see https://tinyurl.com/yyc7a8zo. See also Nebenzahl, *Atlas of Columbus and the Great Discoveries*, 22–25.
- ⁶⁵ Barbara Freitag, *Hy Brasil: The Metamorphosis of an Island: From Cartographic Error to Celtic Elysium* (Rodopi, 2013), 119–24; Vanessa Nah and Francesco Perono Cacciafoco, 'Ex-Isles: Islands That Disappeared' 25–26 (1 December 2018): 31–58.
- ⁶⁶ Schulenburg, 'Transient Observations', 139.
- ⁶⁷ Robert Paine, 'Columbus and Anthropology and the Unknown', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1, no. 1 (1995): 47–65, https://tinyurl.com/54wa22jp.
- ⁶⁸ Bailey W Diffie, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*, Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion; v.1 (St Paul, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 136, 189; A. R Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: From Beginnings to 1807*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40; Wikipedia, Volta do mar, https://tinyurl.com/y5jalg4t.
- ⁶⁹ Often attributed to Martin Rees (1971) and Carl Sagan (1977), this statement was first approximately quoted by the Reverend William Wright in 1887 [https://tinyurl.com/tjcew4m5]. The truth of this aphorism critically depends on the credibility of the proposition. Thus, despite the absence of any evidence it remains credible that life exists elsewhere in the universe whereas the lack of any evidence that fairies live at the bottom of my garden merely confirms the stupidity of the idea.
- ⁷⁰ The 1506 Caveirio map (https://tinyurl.com/y24t8ltb) only shows Ascension. Both islands are missing from later maps such as the 1508 Francesco Rosselli map (https://tinyurl.com/y2jzpk9), the 1511 Bernard Sylvanus maps (https://tinyurl.com/y5ta5z27) and the 1512 Johannes de Stobnicza map (https://tinyurl.com/yxcq69c7).
- ⁷¹ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:463; https://tinyurl.com/y2ujxr5t; https://tinyurl.com/y2gpm249; https://tinyurl.com/y5yga8pf.
- ⁷² Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, I, book V, chapter X:463; A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 266, https://tinyurl.com/y5kh99xk.
- ⁷³ M. D. D. Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400-1668* (London: Routledge, 2005), 61.
- ⁷⁴ Thomas H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St Helena: From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1806* (Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), 35; Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (Oswestry: Anthony Nelson, 1938), 2.

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- ⁷⁵ Geneviève Bouchon, *Vasco de Gama* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 232.
- ⁷⁶ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (London: Papermac, 1998), 86.
- ⁷⁷ Beau W. Rowlands, 'Ships at St Helena, 1502-1613', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* No 28 (Spring 2004): 5–11. Image displayed in the Livro das Armadas da India and preserved at the Academia das Sciencias de Lisboa. This image sourced from <https://tinyurl.com/y36xhzem>.
- ⁷⁸ Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:464; Góis, *Chronica do serenissimo*, 83; <https://tinyurl.com/y8qprof4>; Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, vol. 1 (Lisbon: Typographia Rollandiana, 1833), 126; <http://tinyurl.com/kekpuwp>; Barros, Faria, and Lavanha, *Da Asia de João de Barro*, I, book V, chapter X:118, <https://tinyurl.com/yy23357r>; Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*, 1:50, <https://tinyurl.com/y3rqur9n>; Ignacio da Costa Quintella, *Annaes Da Marinha Portuguesa*, vol. 1 (Na Typografia da Mesma Academia, 1839), 257–58, <https://tinyurl.com/y2rw8luo>; Corrêa, *Lendas de India*, 1:235, <https://tinyurl.com/y4zh3tre>; Maria Herminia Maldonado, ed., *Relação Das Nãos e Armadas Da India, Com Os Successos Dellas Que Se Puderam Saber, Para Noticia e Instrução Dos Curiozos, e Amantes Da Historia Da India: British Library, Códice Add. 20902* (Coimbra: Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra, 1985), 5, <https://tinyurl.com/y2hwzs5a>; Geneviève Bouchon, 'A Propos de l'Inscription de Colombo (1501) Quelques Observations sur le Premier Voyage de João da Nova dans l'Ocean Indien', *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* 28 (1980): 250, <https://tinyurl.com/y3ujmd4l>.
- ⁷⁹ Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*, 1:49, <https://tinyurl.com/y5k83y92>.
- ⁸⁰ Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento*, 1:126.
- ⁸¹ T. H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St Helena, from Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823.*, 2nd ed.. (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1824), 47.
- ⁸² Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938*, 2.
- ⁸³ Clements R. Markham, *The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1894), 36–38.
- ⁸⁴ Roukema, 'Brazil in the Cantino Map'.
- ⁸⁵ Sebastian R. Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- ⁸⁶ It is thought Cabral commanded initially twelve ships when leaving Lisbon. One supply ship was sent back to report the discovery of Brazil. Four ships were lost in storms near the Cape of Good Hope, leaving seven to arrive at Calicut.
- ⁸⁷ R. S. Whiteway, *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India, 1497-1550* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1899), 85–87.
- ⁸⁸ K. K. N. Kurup, *India's Naval Traditions: The Role of Kumbali Marakkars* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1997), 11; Frederick Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in India: A.D. 1481-1571* (London: W.H. Allen & Company, 1894), 76.
- ⁸⁹ For example, only the 1st, 2nd and 4th Portuguese armadas are described by Harold Victor Livermore, *A History of Portugal. [With maps.]* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947); J. H Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963); Diffie, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580*; William J. Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008); John Laband, *Bringers of War: The Portuguese in Africa During the Age of Gunpowder and Sail from Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century* (Frontline Books, 2013); Roger Crowley, *Conquerors: How Portugal Seized the Indian Ocean and Forged the First Global Empire* (New York: Random House, 2015).
- ⁹⁰ Kingsley Garland Jayne, *Vasco Da Gama and His Successors, 1460-1580* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1910), 64, <https://tinyurl.com/9zrs58zk>; This included the comment: "[The] Four ships of burden had already been despatched to Malabar under the command of Joao da Nova; but their adventures are not memorable except for the discovery of Ascension (originally named Conception) on the outward run, and of St Helena on the return".
- ⁹¹ Stanley Sandler, *Battleships: An Illustrated History of Their Impact* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 2.
- ⁹² Mossel Bay Stone, Image comes from the Bartolomeu Dias Museum Complex website, <https://tinyurl.com/y4wzeqrf>, SAHRA file reference 9/2/064/0003.
- ⁹³ Louis Albert Péringuey, 'Inscriptions Left by Early European Navigators on Their Way to the East', *Annals of the South African Museum* XIII (1913): 6–7, <http://archive.org/details/inscriptionsleft01peri>.
- ⁹⁴ Sundry Correspondents, 'Antiquarian Discovery Relating to the Portuguese in Ceylon', *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16 (1899), <https://tinyurl.com/yxndre4v>.
- ⁹⁵ Bouchon, 'A Propos de l'Inscription de Colombo (1501)'.
- ⁹⁶ Sundry Correspondents, 'Antiquarian Discovery Relating to the Portuguese in Ceylon', 18.
- ⁹⁷ St Helena Info website, <https://tinyurl.com/44zxzf28>. Benjamin Wright's map is a copy of Barent Langenes' 1597 map created in Middelburg, both being thought to be based on an earlier Portuguese map that has since been lost.
- ⁹⁸ Barry Weaver's website, <https://tinyurl.com/tzd3ppb3>.
- ⁹⁹ Quentin C. B. Cronk, *The Endemic Flora of St Helena* (Oswestry: Anthony Nelson, 2000), Appendix 1; David L Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502-2002 / David L. Smallman*. (Penzance: Patten, 2003), 16; 'Sancta Helena, Langenes, 1598', <https://tinyurl.com/5x44ed7m>.
- ¹⁰⁰ Thomas H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St. Helena: From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1806; to Which Is Added an Appendix* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), 36; Alexander Beatson, *Tracts Relative to the Island of St. Helena; Written during a Residence of Five Years*. (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1816), act 1; John C. Melliss, 'The Island of St. Helena', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 57, no. 2941 (1909): act 404; Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938*, act 2; Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Studies in History and Environment (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), act 96.
- ¹⁰¹ Donal P. McCracken, *Napoleon's Garden Island* (Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2022).

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- ¹⁰² Jerónimo Osório, *The History of the Portuguese, during the Reign of Emmanuel*, trans. James Gibbs, vol. 1 (London: Printed for A Millar, 1752), 107, <https://tinyurl.com/y7h3fngq>.
- ¹⁰³ Q. C. B. Cronk, 'The Past and Present Vegetation of St Helena', *Journal of Biogeography* 16, no. 1 (1989): 47–64.
- ¹⁰⁴ It has been observed that some of the cones formed in the late Miocene period (over eleven million years ago) near the south-western volcano near Sandy Bay are asymmetric with the finest grain material extending to the north-west. [Ian Baker, 'The Geology of Saint Helena Island, South Atlantic' (London, Imperial College, 1967), 87, <https://tinyurl.com/y9tukvbj>]. This seems strong evidence that the south-westerly trade winds were as much a dominant feature of the island's climate when the island was being formed as they are today. The coastline has therefore probably always been arid.
- ¹⁰⁵ H. N. Ridley, *The Dispersal of Plants Throughout the World*. (Ashford, Kent: L. Reeve & Company, Limited, 1930), 543, 549, 682, <https://tinyurl.com/yr9bvpa5>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Wikipedia, Riparian Zones, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riparian_zone.
- ¹⁰⁷ Disney, *The Portuguese and Saint Helena*, 217.
- ¹⁰⁸ Falcão, *Livro em que se contém toda a fazenda e real patrimonio dos reinos de Portugal, India, e ilhas adjacentes e outras particularidades*, 144–45, <https://tinyurl.com/y7ehdwav>.
- ¹⁰⁹ Corrêa and Lima Felner, *Lendas da India*, 2:196–97; <https://tinyurl.com/y4kpfseu>.
- ¹¹⁰ Albericus Vespucci, *The Voyage from Lisbon to India, 1505-6: Being an Account and Journal*, trans. C. H. Coote (London: B.F. Stevens, 1894), 42.
- ¹¹¹ Adam Kucharski, *Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: The Image of Portugal and Its Inhabitants in Old Polish Travel Accounts and Reports of Diplomatic Missions (16th - 18th Century)*, ed. Beata Elżbieta Cieszyńska (Lisbon: CompaRes - International Society for Iberian-Slavonic Studies, 2007), 84.
- ¹¹² Linschoten, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert, van Ian Huygen van Linschoten*, 131.
- ¹¹³ François Pyrard, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, vol. 2, Part 2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 302, <http://tinyurl.com/yccunz53>.
- ¹¹⁴ Pyrard, 2, Part 2:302, footnote 2.
- ¹¹⁵ Afonso de Albuquerque, *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque, seguidas de documentos que as elucidam*, vol. 2 (Lisboa, Typ. da Academia real das sciencias de Lisboa, 1884), 307; <https://tinyurl.com/y2355suv>; Disney, *The Portuguese and Saint Helena*, 217.
- ¹¹⁶ George McCall Theal, *Records of South-Eastern Africa: Collected in Various Libraries and Archive Departments in Europe*, vol. 1 (Government of the Cape Colony, 1898), 54, <https://tinyurl.com/y7nbjzx5>.
- ¹¹⁷ Theal, 1:293.
- ¹¹⁸ Cronk, *The Endemic Flora of St Helena*, Appendix 1. See also, Disney, *The Portuguese and Saint Helena*, 226, references 34–36.
- ¹¹⁹ Pigafetta, *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo*.
- ¹²⁰ David Henry, *An Historical Account of All the Voyages Round the World* (F. Newbery, 1774), 231–32, <https://tinyurl.com/yckhw5wc>. Contrary to what is stated in many sources, this was not written by Cavendish but by a member of his crew, "Master Francis Pretty, lately of Eye, in Suffolk, a gentleman employed in the same action".
- ¹²¹ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen Van Linschoten to the East Indies*, ed. Pieter Anton Tiele, vol. 2 (Hakluyt Society, 1885), 261.
- ¹²² 'Portrait of Jan Huygens van Linschoten', The British Museum, <https://tinyurl.com/4bnu3h3k>.
- ¹²³ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others*, vol. 4 (Glasgow : J. Maclehoose, 1905), 145, <https://tinyurl.com/37aykwp9>.