

BARTHOLOMEU DIAS.

One of the most well-known Portuguese Navigator and Explorer from the age of discovery is Bartholomeu Dias. He is renowned as being the first European in the age of the discovery to go around the tip of the continent of Africa.

Background:

The Portuguese from the 1400s were on the lookout for a way to reach India. This was due to their great desire for spices. Spices were highly prized in Europe and the Portuguese believed that if they found the direct sea route to India, they would be able to make a huge profit margin and thus would be able to make their country into a rich and prosperous one. King John II ordered a number of voyages of discovery. His main motivation was to go around the tip of the continent of Africa. And to thereby monopolize the spice trade. The Navigators were given stone pillars or *padrões* in Portuguese, which were meant to mark or to stake the claims of the Portuguese Crown.

Diego Cão reached the Congo on his first voyage and left a *padrão* over there. But unfortunately, he never returned after his second voyage. Around the same time we have João Covilhã being sent over land to locate India and Abyssinia.

At this time Bartholomeu Dias gained prominence. He was believed to be a Squire

at the Royal Court. He is believed to have belonged to a family of reputed navigators. And the King of Portugal at that time entrusted to him the mission and the command of a new expedition. The purpose of this voyage was to reach the southern limit of Africa or go around the tip of Africa. The second aim was the hope of finding a trade route or a direct sea route to India, and the third was to search for the lands ruled by Prester John. The Portuguese believed that Prester John was a Christian King who ruled somewhere in Africa. So, the hope was if they found him, they could form an alliance with him and thus they would be able to defeat the Muslim Moors who were merchants who controlled the spice trade.

Dias is believed that he left for the voyage in August 1487. It is said that he had three ships, the *São Cristóvão*, the *São Pantaleão* and a supply ship. Dias left Lisbon and he went down South. He

passed the marker left by Diego Cão in Congo and he continued southward on his journey along the western coast of Africa. He reached the land of Saint Barbara on December 4th Walvis Bay on December 8th and the Gulf of Saint Stephen on December 26th. These three places were along the coast of today's Namibia. As he came closer to the Cape, there was very bad weather. Strong winds prevented the ship from going close to the coast and therefore he went further South and he actually rounded the Cape of Africa without even realizing it. As he came closer to land, he stopped to take water and he named the place as São Braz. He continued going up along the coast, and he reached a place, which is called as Mossel Bay today, but was known as Kwaaihoek. In March 1488, he erected a padrao over there to prove that he had reached the area. He then sailed around 100 miles. He wanted to continue going further, but his crew was tired and asked him to turn back. It is only on his return voyage that he saw the Cape in May 1488. Because there was a strong storm over there, he called the Cape as the 'Cape of storms'.

After this, not much is known about his life. It is believed that Bartholomeu Dias was responsible for supervising the construction of two of the ships of Vasco Da Gama since he had prior knowledge of how to go around the tip of Africa. He also sailed with Vasco da Gama's expedition till the Cape Verde Islands. It is known that he sailed with Pedro Alvarez Cabral on his second voyage to India, but because of a storm, they landed in Brazil. Afterwards they went in the direction of India, but unfortunately Bartholomew Dias encountered a storm while going around the Cape of South Africa, and his ship went down and he died.

Impact of the voyage of Bartholomeu Dias

Bartholomeu Dias originally named the Cape as 'the Cape of storms' or the 'Cabo das Tormentas'. But the King of Portugal, renamed the Cape as the 'Cape of Good Hope' for the 'Cabo da Boa Esperança' because they believed that this was the first step in their journey to reaching India.

Bartholomeu Dias, was the first European who is recorded during the age of the discovery to sail around the tip of Africa in 1488.

Finally, his voyage symbolized the opening of a direct sea route to the East which paved the way for the voyage of Vasco da Gama.