

THE DISCOVERY OF BRAZIL IN 1500

by

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(Translated from the Portuguese).

The Discovery of Brazil in 1500 — historical date, 22nd April ;
conventional date, 3rd May.

Pedro Alvares CABRAL discovered Brazil on a Wednesday, 22nd April 1500 ; the Brazilians celebrate the discovery on 3rd May. The former is the *historical*, the latter the *conventional* date. Several historians have shown this and it will not, we think, be out of place should we also approach this interesting question.

1. *The Discovery of Brazil in 1500.*

a) Cabral's fleet :

1.— Contemporary sources. The only known ones are:—

- 1) *Letter from Maître João* to D. Manuel, written at Vera Cruz, 1st May 1500 (at the *Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon) ;
- 2) *Letter from Pêro Vaz de Caminha* to D. Manuel, written at Pôrto Seguro, 1st May 1500 (at the *Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon) ;
- 3) *Letter from Francesco de la Faitada* to Domenico Pisani, written at Lisbon on 26th June 1501 (published in the *Journaux de Sanuto*) ;
- 4) *Letter from D. Manuel* to the catholic kings, written at Portugal (no specific place mentioned) on 28th August 1501 (Sixteenth century copy from the State Archives, Venice) ;
- 5) *Account of the anonymous pilot* (published for the first time in the *Paesi nuovamente ritrovati* by Francesco da Mantalobodo : Ed. *princeps Vicentia*, 1507). This document must also be of the year 1501.

The first four were reproduced in the *História da Colonização do Brasil* (Vol. II, Pôrto, 1923) which, again, reproduces that part of the fifth document mentioned having any direct connection with the discovery of Brazil.

Other sources are the works of historical writers, but these disagree as to dates and certain important facts.

2.— *Organisation and composition of Cabral's fleet.*

After the return of the *Gema* in 1499 from her glorious voyage of discovery of the maritime route to the Indies, D. MANUEL immediately decided upon the organisation of a new fleet, commanded by Pedro Alvares Cabral.

The fleet was composed of thirteen vessels ; the names of eleven of these are unknown : they were commanded as follows:—

- 1) Vessel of the Commander of the fleet — Pedro Alvares Cabral ;
- 2) Vessel of Second in Command — Sancho de Tovar ;
- 3) *S. Pedro* — Pedro de Ataíde ;
- 4) *Anunciada* — Nuno Leitão da Cunha ;
- 5) Nicolau Coelho ;
- 6) Simão de Miranda ;
- 7) Vasco de Ataíde ;
- 8) Bartolomeu Dias ;
- 9) Luis Pires ;
- 10) Aires Gomes da Silva ;
- 11) Simão de Pina ;
- 12) Diogo Dias ;
- 13) The provisions tender — Gaspar de Lemos.

Three were small vessels, the others *naus* (men-of-war).

Privilege of nobility was the ruling factor in the choice of the commander and his captains ; those renowned for their nautical skill were exceedingly rare:— the brothers Bartolomeu and Diogo Dias and Nicolau Coelho, the first-named being the courageous discoverer

of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 and the others having sailed on the GAMA in 1497-1499. There were also with the fleet, however, a few navigators of mark, such as the heroic Duarte Pacheco Pereira and Pêro Escolar.

The great fleet was anchored off The Restelo (Belém, on the Tagus, below Lisbon), ready to leave the river, at the beginning of March 1500.

b) *The Discovery of Brazil.*

3.— *The sailing of the fleet.* On the morning of Sunday, 8th March, Cabral, accompanied by his captains and their crews, went to the little chapel of The Restelo, erected by the Infant D. Henrique, where D. Manuel and his following arrived shortly afterwards. After pontifical mass, a procession to the beach was formed and there Cabral and his men embarked on small boats which carried them to the vessels of the fleet on which they passed the night. On the night of 9th March the fleet reached the open sea.

4.— *En route for Brazil.* The fleet set sail for the Canary Islands and on the morning of 14th March the Grand Canary was sighted. From here, route was made towards Cape Verde Islands, and on the 22nd of the month Cabral perceived St. Nicholas. At dawn of the following morning Vasco de Ataíde's vessel was lost sight of and was fated never to be seen again.

The fleet, still sailing towards the south-west, crossed the Equator, reaching the zone of the southerly winds. On Sunday, 19th April, Easter was celebrated in all the twelve remaining vessels of the fleet, already quite close to the American coast. Only on Tuesday the 21st, however, did the keenest, most-experienced eyes begin to perceive, waving far to the west, great upshooting stalks of vegetation, green or yellowish — signs of approaching land.

On Wednesday the 22nd, in the dawning light of day, the first little birds flew over the ships confirming the supposition that the vessels were nearing land.

5.— *In view of American shores.* Only towards nightfall of this day "22nd April 1500" did the look-out on the flagship shout in his powerful voice the incomparable cry which has never failed to move all seamen to their depths:— "Land! Land!"

That southern shore, in the West Atlantic, the future *Brazil*, was discovered.

Far to the west a round mountain was sighted, isolated and clearly distinguishable, which Cabral named *Monte Pascoal*.

Under the orders of its chief, the fleet made all speed in the direction of the discovered land but night fell rapidly and the twelve vessels anchored in about nineteen fathoms of water.

6.— *The Landing.* The ships left their anchorage at dawn on the 23rd, sailing towards the west until within half-a-league — about one and a half sea-miles — from the coast; there they anchored near the mouth of a little river, the "Cahy" of to-day.

Sent ashore by Cabral, Nicolau Coelho was unable to land because of the roughness of the sea, but he encountered a group of natives with whom he was able to exchange a few trifles.

During the night a strong south-westerly wind made a few of the ships drag anchor.

On the morning of the 24th the fleet set sail for the north, keeping close inshore, on the lookout for a better anchoring ground where they might find fresh water and provisions, and take in a supply of wood. Having made all speed for still thirteen leagues — forty-two sea-miles — the small vessels, following the larger but nearer the shore, discovered just before sunset a reef in a "port" (bay), the latter easy and "safe" (*Pôrto Seguro*) with a wide entrance; they made for it, and anchored there. The large vessels remained at sea, about half-a-league from land, anchored in 11 fathoms' of water; on the morning of the 25th they also entered the "harbour".

During the short stay of the fleet in this bay, very friendly relations were established with the local natives. On Sunday, 26th April, the feast of Quasimodo, the first mass on land was said; and on 1st May a second mass was said in front of a large wooden cross erected by order of the chief of the expedition.

Cabral gave to the region the name of "Vera Cruz"; the king renamed it "Santa Cruz".

7.— *Departure of the fleet.* After the discovery of the American shores, Cabral decided to send the vessel which had carried the provisions (Captain Gaspar de Lemos) to Lisbon with the important news.

The *letter-report* of the Commander addressed to the king has been lost, but the precious documents sent to the happy king by *Maitre* João and de Caminha are preserved in the *Tôrre*

do Tombo. The fleet left on 2nd May. The flagship, with ten other vessels, cruised E.S.E., rounded the Cape of Good Hope, keeping the open sea, en route for India (1); de Lemos's vessel sailed for the kingdom, reaching the estuary of the Tagus that same year (1500).

II. *Historical and Conventional Dates of the Discovery.*

a) The *historical date*:— 22nd April 1500.

8.— *The date of the discovery according to contemporary sources.*

Among the contemporary sources mentioned in (1) the following form a basis for dating the discovery:—

a) *Caminha*. He specifies Wednesday, 22nd April 1500.

"This same day (Wednesday 22nd April 1500) towards evening we are in sight of land, namely, first a great mountain, round and very high, with other lower mountains to the south of it, also a valley with great forests, and to the high mountain Captain Cabral has given the name *O Monte Pascoal* and to the plain *A Terra de Vera Cruz*."

Writing on 1st May, nine days after the discovery, Caminha could not have made a mistake. His *Letter*, however, placed among the archives of the Torre do Tombo, was unnoticed until the end of the XVIIIth century; its first publication is dated 1817. (2)

b) *D. Manuel*. Does not specify the day, but the week only:—

"and within the octave of the following Easter (1500) he reached land, hitherto undiscovered, to which he has given the name of *Santa Cruz*"; which means that Cabral discovered Brazil within the week following Easter 1500 — between 20th and 25th April.

c) *Anonymous pilot*. Specifies the day of the week but makes a mistake as to the day of the month:—

"The twenty-fourth April (1500) the same being a *Wednesday* of the Easter octave, we were in sight of land."

The 24th may be an error of the copyist; but the pilot also may have made a mistake, which would not be astonishing in view of the fact that he wrote his *Account* only after the return of Cabral on 9th July 1501.

It is seen that "22nd April 1500" is the *historical date* of the discovery of Brazil.

9.— *The date of the discovery according to historical writers and historians.*— The writers:— Lopes de Castanheda, Damião de Gois and João de Barros, follow the anonymous pilot:— 24th April 1500.

Many historians have adopted the same date; others have indicated quite different dates: the 20th, 25th, 27th April; also the 8th May!

The writer Gaspar Correia is the first to specify "3rd May", in his *Lendas da India*:—

"The flagship, preceding the other vessels, at dawn one *Sunday* sighted land to leeward...

.....
... the chief (Cabral) gave the name of *Santa Cruz* to this new land, for they landed there on 3rd May 1500, feast-day of the *Invention of the Sacred Cross*."

He has bound the day, "3rd May", on which the church celebrates the *Invention of the Sacred Cross*, to that of the discovery of Cabral's *Vera Cruz*, Don Manuel's *Santa Cruz*. The very religious intention is clearly preconceived; Gaspar Correia wrote at a time when the Inquisition was sovereign in Portugal.

A few ulterior accounts take their date from Correia, and in this way the confusion has arisen:— "Brazil was discovered on 3rd May 1500"; this date has thus been given historical sanction and accepted without discussion not only by the unlearned but also by some authorities.

b) *The conventional date*, 3rd May 1500.

10.— *The Brazilian conventional date*. In 1832, Gonçalves Gomide, incited thereto by Lara Ordonhes, (the two deputies to the first Brazilian Constitutive Assembly), suggested to the great patriot José Bonifácio the choice of "3rd May" for the opening of the Assembly, because it was the date of the discovery of Brazil: and so it was decided.

The Empire Constitution, conceded by D. Pedro I, designated the day specified, "3rd May", for the meeting of the Legislative Body, and this is maintained by the Republic.

"3rd May" is to-day the *conventional date* of the discovery of Brazil.

11.— *The conventional date is not a result of the Gregorian reform of the calendar*. A few authors, little versed in questions concerning the calendar, have supposed that the *Julian* "24th April 1500" specified by the anonymous pilot and adopted by a few writers and historians, corresponds to the *Gregorian* "3rd May" of the same year; Brazil, therefore, was discovered on "3rd May 1500".

Let us see what the *Julian* and *Gregorian* calendars tell us.

In 46 B.C., Julius Caesar fixed 25th March as the invariable date for the vernal equinox, and as the beginning of the succeeding year — 45 B.C.

His year — *Julian* — had a surplus of 0.25 days over 365, which he compensated by means of the leap years (multiples of 4).

In reality, however, this surplus was greater by about 11 minutes than it ought to have been so that, in the course of centuries, the day of the vernal equinox fell earlier than its reckoned date.

In the year 325 A.D. it had already fallen on 21st March. The western Christians became alarmed because of the corresponding advance in Easter, ignorant nevertheless of the fact that this arose from the increase of about 11 minutes applied to the length of the *Julian* year.

Then, in the celebrated oecumenical council held at Nicea (the present Isnik) the same year (325 A.D.) it was resolved to fix the date (also *invariable*) of the vernal equinox as 21st March. Because the surplus in question of about 11 minutes continued its action, the day of the vernal equinox also continued to advance in date, and in 1581 it occurred on 11th March: hence the Gregorian reform of 24th January 1582, almost perfect, which reduced the *Julian* surplus to 0.2425 days and fixed the vernal equinox in conformity with the date already decided upon at Nicea. In its civil ordinances the reform decreed:—

1) To Thursday, 4th October, shall succeed Friday, 15th October;

2) The last year in a century shall be a leap-year only when its number will be divisible by 400.

Portugal, Spain and part of Italy immediately adopted the *Gregorian reform*. France and Lorraine did so before the end of 1582; Denmark in the same year, abandoning it, however, in 1699 to readmit it the following year.

In 1583, catholic Holland, Flanders and the German catholic states adopted it.

In Switzerland it was introduced in 1584 but came into general use only in 1812. In 1586 it was accepted by Poland; in 1587 by Hungary; in 1700 by the German and Dutch protestant states; in 1752 by Great Britain and its colonies; in 1753 by Sweden and in 1873 by Japan.

In the present century it has been adopted:— by China in 1912; Bulgaria in 1915; Turkey and Sovietic Russia in 1917, etc.

The *Civil Gregorian Calendar* is to-day in use throughout the whole of the civilised world.

12.— Below we have the correspondence of days in the two calendars, *Julian* and *Gregorian*:—

From 5th Oct. 1582,	} <i>Julian</i>	} <i>Gregorian</i> = <i>Julian</i> + 10 days
to 28th Feb. 1700		
From 1st March 1700	} "	} " + 11 days
to 29th Feb. 1800		
From 1st March 1800	} "	} " + 12 days
to 28th Feb. 1900		
From 1st March 1900	} "	} " + 13 days
to 29th Feb. 2100		

Thus, for instance, 10th April 1600, *Julian*, corresponds to 20th April 1600, *Gregorian*. According to Lopes de Mendonça:— "The national history of each country cannot chronologically differ from a whole which is representative of universal history. As a rule events succeed each other observing a rhythmical law of chronological relativity which must be observed."

The true doctrine is:— "the retroactive action of the *Gregorian reform* cannot be defended"; in reality, events must be referred, chronologically, to the *Julian calendar*, only up to 4th October 1852 and to the *Gregorian* from the 5th October (*Julian*). It is for this reason that the United States of America, where the *Gregorian reform* was adopted in 1752 — America being then still under British rule — celebrates the birth of George Washington on 22nd February (*Gregorian*) while he was born on 11th February 1732 (*Julian*).

If the *Julian calendar* had been reformed in 1475, or shortly afterwards, as desired by Sixtus IV, and Portugal had adopted this reform only in the XVIth century, the historical date of the discovery of Brazil would be 22nd April (*Julian*) plus 9 days, namely 1st May 1500 *Gregorian*; and for those who follow the erroneous date of 24th April (*Julian*)

specified by the anonymous pilot, Brazil would have been discovered on 3rd May 1500 *Gregorian*. This reform, however, was carried out only in 1582, by Gregory XIII, without possible retroaction.

Gaspar Correia, who died between 1561 and 1583 (in the latter year he would have been more than eighty years old), when he specified in his *Lendas da India* "3rd May 1500" as the date of the discovery, simply wished to give colour to the religious ideas of his time, despising the historical truth, as we have indicated in (9). He may possibly have been aware of the Gregorian reform, but it cannot be admitted that he would have applied it, with retroaction, uniquely to the date of the discovery, seeing that the dates of all the other historical events which he records refer to the *Julian* calendar.

III. CONCLUSIONS.

13)

1.— *The historical date* of the discovery of Brazil is "22nd April 1500", as must already have been known to the Brazilian deputies in 1823 from Caminha's *Letter*, published at Rio de Janeiro by Casal in 1817.

2.— *The conventional date*, adopted by the Brazilian nation in the XIXth century, after the Independence, is "3rd May 1500", date of the celebration of the *Invention of the Sacred Cross*.

The first must be followed; it agrees with the *historical truth*. Brazil has adopted the second, *purely conventional*; it should be observed as a tradition.

(1) Cabral, on the return voyage, reached the Tagus on 9th July 1501.

(2) Caminha's *Letter* was catalogued in the Torre do Tombo in the XVII^e century. The Spaniard Juan Bautista Munoz examined and copied it at the end of the XVIII^e century.

Father Manuel Aires CASAL first published it, in the ref. volume of his *Corografia Brasílica* (Rio de Janeiro, 1817). Ferdinand Deniz published a translation of the *Letter* in his *Journal des Voyages* (Paris 1821), also in *Scènes de la Nature sous les Tropiques* (Paris, 1825) and, with H. Taunay, in *Le Brésil ou Histoire, mœurs, usages et coutumes des habitants de ce royaume* (Paris, 1822).

D'Olfeirs published it in German in *Feliner's Reisen durch Brasilien* (1828).

In Portugal its first publication is dated 1826.

Manuel de Sousa Pinto left a very thorough study of the *Letter* of Caminha in his *Pedro Vaz de Caminha e a Carta de « Achamento » do Brazil* (Lisbon, 1934).

