

International Memory of the World Register

Roteiro da primeira viagem de Vasco da Gama à Índia, 1497-1499 (*Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India, 1497-1499*) (Portugal)

2012-16

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India, 1497-1499, an anonymous work, is a real testimony of how Vasco da Gama, in command of a fleet, sought to discover the sea route to India. His pioneer sea voyage to India is one of the defining moments that changed the course of history. Apart from being one of the greatest pieces of European seamanship of that time, his journey acted as a catalyst for a series of events that would change the world. The voyage described in this Journal settled a stage in the globalization of trade; was an occasion of unprecedented cultural encounters and allowed a new route of exchange of influence between the west and the east. It represents a unique moment for the world at that time, changing an established paradigm. This manuscript, written by an eyewitness who participated in the voyage - and who, through the descriptions, enables the readers to feel they are eye witnessing and participating in the voyage-, is a unique and irreplaceable document that has a world relevance as it represents an undoubtedly breakthrough in the history of mankind.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

*Biblioteca Pública Municipal do Porto/Câmara Municipal do Porto
Public Library of Porto/Municipality of Porto*

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Owner of the manuscript and custodial body.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Carla Fonseca, Director of the Department of Libraries at the Municipality of Porto

2.4 Contact details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Address</i>	
<i>Carla Fonseca</i>	<i>Biblioteca Pública Municipal do Porto Rua D. João IV (ao Jardim de S. Lázaro) 4049-017 Porto Portugal</i>	
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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Roteiro da primeira viagem de Vasco da Gama à Índia, 1497-1499 = Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India, 1497-1499

Ms. 804, Biblioteca Pública Municipal do Porto

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

ROTEIRO DA PRIMEIRA VIAGEM DE VASCO DA GAMA À ÍNDIA, 1497-1499

Roteiro da primeira viagem de Vasco da Gama à Índia, 1497-1499 : manuscript.- Between 1500 and 1550.- 1 volume (451 leaves); 29 cm

The most ancient and unique copy of a lost original text, whose author is frequently mentioned as Atvaro Ve/ho. Apart from the text of the Journal itself, the document includes a description of some oriental kingdoms, prices of spices and other commodities, as well as a vocabulary of the "linguagem de Ca/ecut".

With a different handwriting, the following titles were added: "Descubrim.to da Índia por Vasco da Gama", on folio 1, and "Relat;ao do descubrim.to da Índia por Vasco da Gama", on the initial back page.

Provenance: Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra, from where it was moved, in 1834, to the BPMP. On the initial back page one can find erased the wording : "Pertinet ad usum fratris Theotonii de Sancta G---- Canonici Regularis in cenobio Scte Crucis" (Kopke), followed by the name "Joham Theotónio".

Binding: parchment.

Old shelfmark: Ms. 145.

See a full copy at the Library's repository

http://arquivodigital.cm-porto.pt/Conteudos/Conteudos_BPMP/MS-804/MS-804.htm

3.4 History/provenance

Founded in 1833, the initial collection of the so-called Royal Public Library of the City of Porto incorporated bibliographical resources gathered from libraries of religious orders and individuals, taken following orders of the new liberal regime headed by King Pedro IV. The manuscript of the Journal was received in the Library in this context, where it remains until the present day.

The manuscript, which is the sole contemporary copy of an original that was lost, was part of the collection of the Monastery of Santa Cruz of Coimbra, and came to Porto along with many others, especially the precious medieval library of the Monastery. On the original fly leaf, though erased, there is also an inscription which points to the same origin: "Pertinet ad usum fratris Theotonii of Sancto G ---- Canonici regularis in Cenobio Scte Crucis," followed by the name "Joham Theotónio". The manuscript is signed by Alexandre Herculano, the librarian who brought these documents to Porto from Coimbra.

In 1838, Diogo Kopke published the first complete transcription of the text, which he titled "Roteiro da viagem que em Descobrim.to da Índia pelo Cabo da Boa Esperança fez Dom Vasco da Gama em 1497".

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name

Municipality of Porto

Public Library of Porto

Address

Rua D. João IV (ao Jardim de S. Lázaro)

4049-017 Porto Portugal

Telephone

+351 225 193 481

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4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

Category of ownership

Public Institution - Local Government/Municipality – Public Library

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

Bearing in mind the unique and irreplaceable status of the manuscript, and in order to assure its preservation and integrity, the document is only directly made available for reading on very special occasions. When that proves to be the case, access to it takes place in a dedicated room, after obtaining the reader's identification and under specific and strict specifications of control and surveillance. It is however assured to readers a pro bono and unrestricted access to an electronic copy of the original, which is available on the on-line catalogue of the Library. The manuscript has been displayed at significant exhibitions, the latter of which took place in Berlin ("Neue Welten = Novos Mundos", Deutsches Historisches Museum, 24 Oct. 2007-10 Feb. 2008).

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

Copyright does not apply to this manuscript.

5.1 Authenticity.

This manuscript is the only known contemporary copy of the report of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India. It is an anonymous and undated document, but a palaeographic analysis of the manuscript dates the document on the first half of the sixteenth century. This is also corroborated by the fact that Fernao Lopes de Castanheda, the renowned chronicler who in 1551 published "História da descoberta e conquista da Índia pelos portugueses" (history of discovery and conquer of India by the Portuguese), had accessed the text, using it as one of the sources of his work, along with reports, letters and other testimonies collected in

Portugal and in India through a long and intensive process of study. Since then, the manuscript remained stored in the Monastery of Santa Cruz de Coimbra and away from public sight until 1834, when it was moved to the Municipal Public Library of Porto, where it remains until today. It was brought by Alexandre Herculano, who initialled the document and incorporated it in the collections of the newly established Porto Library.

5.2 World significance

The Journal of the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India, 1497-1499 is undoubtedly a document of world significance as it describes how Vasco da Gama led the first fleet around Africa to India, arriving in Calicut and starting a maritime route from Portugal to India, changing the course of history of humankind. By the XVth century this voyage can be considered the first globalization process of the world.

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Vasco da Gama's pioneering sea voyage to India is one of the defining moments in the history of exploration, one of those moments that suddenly and definitely change the course of history. Apart from being one of the greatest pieces of European seamanship of that time, his journey acted as a catalyst for a series of events that changed the world. The voyage described in the manuscript settled a stage in the globalization of trade, was an occasion of unprecedented cultural encounters and allowed a new route of exchange of influence between the extremities of Eurasia. As far as it is known, there is no other direct equal manuscript or document that describes this fundamental voyage for the modern era. The majority of researchers unanimously believe that for the western and Christian societies of the time, this voyage represents a new encounter point and a dialogue spot with new people, new races with very different cultures.

Therefore, this manuscript is not only relevant for Portugal and for Europe, but also for the world, as it is an evidence of a specific change in history, at a global level, for humankind. For this, it is considered to be of world relevance, being unique, irreplaceable and a heritage of humanity.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

Some authors attribute this text to Álvaro Velho. It is known for a fact that Álvaro Velho did not return to Portugal with his colleagues, and remained for eight years in the lands of Guinea and Gambia. In fact, it is not by this account that we learn that Nicolau Coelho arrived in Lisbon in July 1499 and Vasco da Gama was still in the Azores by the end of August of that year, since the manuscript breaks off the description of the trip when supposedly Álvaro Velho abandoned the expedition. What motivated his decision is not yet known for sure. The manuscript also does not help, nor indicates a date of its production. However, bearing in mind the font type in which it is written, scholars agree to date it as belonging to the first half of the sixteenth century.

In short, regardless of these doubts and uncertainties, this manuscript refers to the time of Portuguese discoveries and expansion, as it refers to the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India. It is an extremely significant document, as it describes the long and troubled voyage to India that in the end of the 15th century had a tremendous and global impact in the economic, cultural, political, religious and scientific levels of that time.

2 Place

Being a Journal of the voyage to India, the facts related in this manuscript were written aboard of one of the vessels that composed the fleet. The narrative style used in the Journal, the different events related, the dangerous situations described, treasons, danger of death, diseases, contact with people on shore, the arrival to India, gifts, war equipments, animals, trees and plants, birds, hostages, titles and professions, food, musical and nautical instruments, precious stones, villages, difficult navigation situations; and so on, constitute the uniqueness and irreplaceability of this manuscript as it allows future generations to get in touch with the context and situation of the voyage, at the time. It describes with more or less detail depending on the situations, the departure from Lisbon, the sailing difficulties encountered, the contact and sometimes the fights with people, the loss of vessels, all the difficulties and all the adventures of the voyage and the respective return to Portugal in a very real way, leading the readers to a better understanding of the context of the successful and heroic, but at the same time risky and complex voyage of Vasco da Gama to India. Also it includes in the appendix a list of oriental kingdoms, including a short description of several of them; a list of goods that were of interest to Portuguese, and in some cases the reference to its value; and a list of spice prices of Alexandria. Finally, it also includes the first known list of Portuguese words and its correspondence into the Calicut language.

3 People

This manuscript comes from a crucial period in the history of mankind, the Discoveries, during which the science of navigation made possible the exploration of the planet. Specifically, the Journal describes the time when firstly the west met the east, the oriental lands, by sea, on a global scale. As previously mentioned, through the description included in this journal we learn on how the Portuguese fleet was organised, the several professions represented, their uses and practices, the navigation instruments and techniques, and also the customs and practices of the people they met during the voyage, their uses and practices, in both political, religious, economical and cultural aspects. The Journal gives a highly detailed account of the habits of the inhabitants, their peaceful or violent behaviour, their houses, food, clothes, tools, birds, the colour of the soil, the religious practices. On one hand, it clearly reflects the impact of the voyage itself and the consequent contact establishes with the several inhabitants and with different cultures; on the other hand it reflects the general, enormous and undoubtedly impact the voyage had to the occidental world.

4 Subject and theme

This voyage represents a breakthrough in the history of mankind and the anonymous manuscript is its live testimony.

5 Form and style

Being written by an eyewitness who accompanied the fleet and also took part in the expedition on land, this journal, although not written in a literary style, describes, in a very enthusiastic manner, the vicissitudes of the voyage, the mishaps and its success. Because its author was an attentive and because he participated in the voyage himself, readers are allowed to understand and feel the context and the environment of the voyage, experiencing and imagining every step described. For this, it can be considered a literary work that is exciting and a pleasure to read.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

As far as we know, this is the only contemporary copy of the Journal of the voyage of Vasco da Gama.

6.2 Integrity

The document remains intact, complete and kept in the status it was at the time of its production.