**LESSON SIX Explorers from Europe**

If you ask “who discovered America?”, the answer that you will usually receive is Christopher Columbus, but did he?. We have seen that the Asian ancestors of the Amerindians arrived in America long before Columbus. Was Columbus the next to arrive?

1. **Claims of Arrivals before Columbus**

In the centuries after 1492 stories and legends grew up about other adventurous seamen having reached the new world long before Columbus, one legend tells how a Buddhist monk named Hoei-shin sailed from China to Mexico in 459 AD. Other claims that an Irish monk named Brendon the Bold landed in America in 551 AD. Yet another says that the first European to reach the new world was Leif Ericson, ”Lucky Leif”, a Viking sailor from Iceland in 1000 AD. Others claimed that the Welsh “Prince Madoc” landed on the shores of Mobile Bay in 1170 and left behind, with the Indians, the Welsh language.

All these stories have their supporters. But only in the case of the Vikings have modern scholars found firm evidence to support the old legends. In the 1960s archaeologists uncovered traces of Viking settlements in both Newfoundland and New England.

In Newfoundland the archaeologists found the foundations of huts built in Viking style. they also found iron nails and the weight, or whorl, from a spindle. These objects were important pieces of evidence that the Vikings had indeed reached America. Until the arrival of Europeans none of the Amerindian tribes knew how to make iron. And the spindle whorl was exactly like those used in known Viking lands such as Iceland.

The Vikings were a sea-going people from Scandinavia in northern Europe. They were proud of their warriors and explorers and told stories called “sagas” about them. The saga of Leif Ericson tells how he sailed from Greenland to the eastern coast of North America in about the year 1000 AD. When he found vines with grapes on them growing there, he named the place where he landed “Vinland the Good”. Other Vikings followed Leif to Vinland. But the settlement they made there did not last. The hostility of the local Amerindians and the dangers of the northern seas combined to make them give up their attempt to colonize Vinland. The Vikings sailed away and their discovery of Vinland was forgotten except by their story tellers.

1. **The Conquistadores**

It was the Spanish who started the lasting European occupation of America. When **Columbus** returned to Spain he took back with him some jewellery that he obtained in America. This jewellery was important because it was made of gold. In the next fifty years, thousands of treasure-hungry Spanish adventurers crossed the Atlantic ocean to search for more of the precious metal, it was a lust for gold that led ***HERNAN CORTEZ*** to conquer the ***AZTECS*** in the 1520’s ; the ***AZTECS*** were a wealthy city built by **Amerindian** people who lived in what is today **Mexico**. In the 1530’s, the same lust for gold caused ***FRANCISCO PIZARRO*** to attack the equally wealthy empire of the ***INCAS*** of ***PERU***. A stream of looted treasure began to flow across the Atlantic to Spain from a new empire built up by such conquerors “***Conquistadores”***- in Central and South America.

In the years that followed, other Spanish ***conquistadores*** took the search for gold to North America. Between 1539 and 1543 ***HERNANDO DE SOTO*** and ***FFRANCISCO CORONADO***, working separately, explored much of the southern part of what is now the **United States**, ***DE SOTO*** landed in **FLORIDA** from **CUBA**, he led his expedition westward, discovering the **MISSISSIPPI** river and traveling beyond it into **TEXAS** and **OKLAHOMA**. ***CORONADO*** travelled north from **MEXICO**, searching for the « ***Seven Cities of Gold*** », that **Amerindian** legends said lay hidden somewhere in the desert. He never found them, but he and his men became the first Europeans to see the **Grand Canyon** of the **Colorado** river, and they journeyed as far as **KANSAS** before returning to **MEXICO**. The journeys of men such as ***DE SOTO*** and ***CORONADO*** gave Spain a claim to a large amount of land in North America. They also led to the founding of some of the earliest permanent European settlements there. In 1565 Spanish settlers founded **ST AUGUSTINE** on the coast of present-day **FLORIDA**. In 1609 other settlers founded **SANTA FE** in **NEW MEXICO**.

The growing wealth of **Spain** made other European nations envious, they became eager to share the riches of the New World. In 1497 King **HENRY VII** of England hired an Italian seamen named ***JOHN CABOT*** to explore the new lands and to look again for a passage to **ASIA**, ***CABOT***, sailed far to the North of the route ***Columbus*** had followed, eventually he reached the rocky coast of **NEWFOUNDLAND**, at first ***CABOT*** thought that this was **CHINA**. A year later he made a second westward crossing of the Atlantic. This time he sailed south along the coast of North America.

The **French** also sent explorers to North America, in 1524, the French King **Francis 1**, sent an Italian sailor named ***GIOVANNI DE VERRAZANO***, for the same purpose as ***Columbus*** and ***Cabot*** – to find lands rich in gold and a new sea route to **ASIA**. ***VERRAZANO*** sailed the full length of the east coast of America, but found neither, however, he anchored his ship in what is now the Harbor of **New York**. Today a bridge which carries his name, the ***VERRAZANO narrows bridge***, is one of the city’s most impressive sights.

Ten years later another **French** explorer, a fisherman from Normandy named ***JAQUE CARTIER***, discovered the **ST Laurence** river, he returned to **France** and reported that the forests lining the river’s shores were full of fur- bearing animals and that it’s waters were full of fish. The next year he sailed further up the river, reaching the site of the present day city of **MONTREAL**. ***CARTIER*** failed to find the way to **ASIA** that he was looking for, but he gave **France** a claim to what would later become **CANADA**.

1. **Why is it called “America”**

Why did European geographers give the name America to the lands that Columbus discovered? Why did-they not name them instead after Columbus?

The reason is that to the end of his life Columbus believed that his discoveries were part of Asia. The man who did the most to correct this mistaken idea was Amerigo Vespucci. Vespucci was an Italian sailor from the city of Florence. During the late 1490s he wrote some letters in which he described two voyages of exploration that he had made along the coasts of South America. He was sure, he wrote, that these coasts were part of a new continent.

Some years later Vespucci’s letters were read by a German scholar who was revising an old geography of the world. The letters convinced the scholar that Vespucci was correct, and that the lands beyond the Atlantic were a new continent. To honor Vespucci the scholar named them America, using the feminine form of Vespucci’s first name as the other continents had female names.