As we have seen (p. 245), already in the thirteenth century merchants and missionaries from Genoa and Majorca were making forays into the Atlantic. In the fifteenth century the initiative that would eventually take Europeans around the Cape of Good Hope in one direction and to the Americas in the other came from the Portuguese royal house. The enticements were gold and slaves as well as honor and glory. Under King João I (r. 1385–1433) and his successors, Portugal extended its rule to the Muslim port of Ceuta and a few other nearby cities. (See Map 8.6.) More importantly, João’s son Prince Henry “the Navigator” (1394–1460) sponsored expeditions—mainly by Genoese sailors—to explore the African coast: in the mid-1450s they reached the Cape Verde Islands and penetrated inland via the Senegal and Gambia rivers. A generation later, Portuguese explorers were working their way far past the equator; in 1487 Bartholomeu Dias (d. 1500) rounded the southern tip of Africa (soon thereafter named the Cape of Good Hope), opening a new route that Vasco da Gama sailed about ten years later all the way to Calicut (today Kozhikode) in India. In his account of the voyage he made no secret of his methods: when he needed water, he landed on an island and bombarded the inhabitants, taking “as much water as we wanted.”

Da Gama’s cavalier treatment of the natives was symptomatic of a more profound development: European colonialism. Already in the 1440s, Henry was portioning out the uninhabited islands of Madeira and the Azores to those of his followers who promised to