Pêro Da Covilhã Encyclopedia Article

Pêro Da Covilhã

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Pêro Da Covilhã

c. 1460-after 1526

Portuguese explorer who helped establish diplomatic relations between Portugal and Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Determined to find Prester John, a mythical Christian king in the East, Portugal's John II in 1487 sent Covilhã to India and Afonso de Paiva to Ethiopia. The two men agreed to meet in Cairo, but when Covilhã returned there in late 1490, de Paiva was dead. He then proceeded to Abyssinia, on the way making a detour to the Middle East, where he visited the Muslim holy city of Mecca disguised as a Muslim. Covilhã arrived in Abyssinia in 1493, and though he was well-treated, he was not allowed to leave. He married and raised a family, and when the first Portuguese embassy arrived in Abyssinia in 1520, Covilhã served as an interpreter.