



# Prince Henry "the Navigator": A Life

*Sir Peter Russell*

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Henry the Navigator is a legendary, almost mythical, figure in late medieval history. Together with Columbus he was considered one of the progenitors of 'modernity', a man who dared to challenge the scientific assumptions of his age and by so doing was responsible for liberating Europeans from the geographical constraints which had bound them since the collapse of the Roman Empire. His image as imperialist and, above all, maritime, mathematical, and navigational pioneer has been slow to die. Yet there has been no English life of this 'hero of both science and of action' since Beazley's of 1895. This book, therefore, represents the first re-evaluation of his life in over a century. Peter Russell has made use of much recently published documentary evidence to provide an eloquent, sophisticated and highly readable account of Henry's life. While full attention is given to all aspects of his voyages of discovery in the African Atlantic, including their economic and cultural consequences and the difficult questions of international law and papal jurisdiction, Russell also examines in detail the other spheres of activity which contributed to his fame, or sometimes brought it into question. He demonstrates the degree to which Henry's actions were motivated by the predictions of his astrologer an aspect of his career that has been neglected in the past and explains how it was that a man who was anything but 'modern' could have taken the first steps which were to change the political and demographic landscape not only of Europe but of much of the world. This is not a biography in the traditional sense. Too few of Henry's writings survive to provide the kind of material necessary to describe in any detail the emotional or daily life of the man. It is rather a history of Henry's actions, of the world in which they took place and the impact that they had upon the Europe of his time.

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