APPENDIX V

VASCO DA GAMA’S SAILING INSTRUCTIONS TO
PEDRO ÁLVARES CABRAL, CA. 1500

Instructions

It is in this manner that it appears to Vasco da Gama that Pedro Álvares should proceed on his way, if it please Our Lord.

Item. Firstly, before he departs to make very good rules in order that some ships may not lose other, in this wise.

Namely. Each time that he intends to change course the Captain General will make two fires and all shall reply with two others each. And after they have replied thus all shall change course. And likewise there shall be made a signal of one fire to follow and three to remove bonnets and four to lower. Except if any ship cannot carry so much sail as the Flagship, and the strength of the weather requires him to lower. And no one shall change course nor lower nor remove bonnets without first the Captain General shall make the said fires and all have replied. And after they have lowered none shall make sail until after the Captain General makes three fires and all reply and if anybody is missing they shall not make sail but only proceed with short sail until the day comes so that the ships cannot go so fast that by daylight they will be unable to see one another. And to make ready for sailing any that is dismasted shall make many fires so that the other ships may come to her.

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2 Morison argued that that the term foguos which has generally been translated as cannon shots should instead be interpreted as ‘fires’ in the braziers carried about the ships which would yield smoke during the day and fire at night. Cf. “Sailing Instructions”, p. 406 n. 2.
If the ships departing from this city [Lisbon] before running down to the Canaries should encounter a tempest so that they have to turn back, they should do everything possible so that all may return to this city. And if any cannot do so they should endeavor so far as possible to reach Setuuel and thence whoever finds himself there shall send word immediately here where he is in order to receive orders what he should do.

Item. After they have departed hence in good time they will make their route direct to the Island of Samtiago calling beforehand at the Island of Sam Nicolão in case of any necessity through illness at the Island of Sam Tiago. And if at the time they arrive there they may have water enough for four months they must not call at the said island nor make any delay only insofar as weather serves.

If these ships having departed from this coast separate themselves by reason of a tempest from the others or that by reason of a tempest one runs into one harbor and the other into another. The manner for them to join up.

And if any of the ships making from the North the said signals cannot be seen you will go on your route with all the rest direct to Agoada de Sam Bras.

And when you are there taking on water, the said [lost] ship will be able to catch up with you. And if it does not catch up to you, you shall depart when you are ready and you shall leave such marks for it that it may know that you have been there and be able to follow you.

[Sailing Directions from the Cape Verde Islands]

[With the wind] on the stern they should make their course to the South and if they must swerve it should be to the Southwest. And so long as the wind is ahead they shall sail on the wind [and current?] until they put the Cabo de Bôoa Experança directly to the East. And from there on they are to navigate according as the weather serves and gain more because when they are in the said region they will not want weather, with Our Lord’s help, for to double the said Cape. And in this manner, he thinks, the navigation will be shortest and the ships more secure

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3 Setubal.
4 The Bay of São Brás or Mossel Bay, where Da Gama and his crews had spent thirteen days taking on water and wood in November and December 1497.