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Period 4
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Title: "John Cabot Voyages for England"

1497

Part One:

In the document, "John Cabot Voyages for England," the author is an unknown Venetian writing a letter to his brothers describing a recent journey to what we now know is Newfoundland; it is not a firsthand account by Cabot, but is rather an account about him. Remarkably, one can see in the writing that the sailor believed that they had arrived in one of the Khanates of the Great Khan in China, and was not aware that he was actually in North America. One thing worthy of noting is that the author observed that there were no human beings in the land in which he landed; however, he concludes from the presence of artifacts and trees that have been cut down that human presence was recent. The author also mentions to his brothers that the King of England (Henry VII) has agreed to finance future voyages and to provide Cabot "money wherewith to amuse himself till then," which is presumably a salary to keep Cabot loyal to England—and not to sail for another country.

Part Two:

Information accompanying this document indicates that a Venetian familiar with Cabot's voyage has written the letter, presumably to inform them (or possibly to brag about) When considering the political climate of Europe in the late 15th century, however, it is reasonable to believe that this letter is to indicate that England intends to position themselves as a player in the recently discovered "New World." Since the letter is written to men living in Venice, the writer may have been trying to "serve notice" to his readers that they should consider their allegiance. Additionally, the letter also exalts the abilities of Cabot; the author is unintentionally contributing to a growing fame that seems to grow around explorers.

Part Three:

One can learn from this document that there was still an ignorance about the location of the "New World" five years after Columbus' "discovery" of the New World, as this reader believes that the Cabot expedition has landed in China, when we now know that they had arrived in Newfoundland. However, when the author mentions that King Henry VII has provided for a larger expedition for exploration in the future and that he has provided money for Cabot to live—like a salary—one can see that the business of voyaging and of exploration was just that: a business. Nations had much to gain by being the "first" to land anywhere in the New or Old World: exclusive rights to trade, domination over locals, annexation of land. The list goes on. Finally, one can conclude that Cabot was seen as a hero in England for his exploits, especially when the author indicates that "vast honor" is paid to him.