

# "Christopher Columbus" by Thomas C. Tirado, Permission Granted from ENCARTA

(Reprint permission granted by *Encarta Encyclopedia*, 2000)

## **Christopher Columbus**

by Thomas C. Tirado, Ph.D.  
Professor History  
Millersville University

### **Background to the Age of Discovery:**

One cannot begin to understand Christopher Columbus without understanding the world into which he was born. The 15<sup>th</sup> century was a dynamic century, a century of change. There were many historical events throughout Western Europe that impacted society profoundly. Directly affecting the future explorer much closer to home, however, were three momentous events in and around the Mediterranean: 1) the Conquest of Ceuta in North Africa by the Portuguese in 1415

2) the Fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks in 1453, and

3) the defeat of Muslim Granada by the Christian Spaniards in 1492. All three events were driven by the centuries-long conflict between the Christians and the Muslims.

#### **Ceuta:**

The Portuguese had successfully purged their country of Muslims by the turn of the century and had consolidated political power into a national monarchy earlier than any other Western European country. By 1415 the Portuguese were in a strong position to launch an invasion of North Africa and conquer the Muslim commercial center of Ceuta. Some historians see this as a resumption of the Christian Crusades that had been suspended over a century earlier. With a strong political and military base of operations, the Portuguese were in a position to resume Christendom's long struggle against the Muslims. Determined to destroy Islam once and for all by destroying its commercial empire, Portugal successfully conquered the city and immediately gained access to the lucrative African trade. This led to the subsequent dramatic growth of the bourgeois class. Allying itself to the royal family, the bourgeoisie grew rich on trade and commerce not only in Africa but also on the Atlantic islands. Under the tutelage of Prince Henry (later to be given the sobriquet, or nickname, "the Navigator"), who established a school for navigators in southern Portugal, the Portuguese began the exploration of the Western coast of Africa in hopes of finding passage around the tip of Africa. This prize would elude the Portuguese until a generation after Henry's death in 1460. Not until 1488 when Bartolomeu Dias returned home after a 16-month voyage did the Portuguese know for sure that a trip around the tip of Africa was feasible. It wasn't until eleven years after Dias that the first voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1497-99 fulfilled the Medieval dream of finding a direct trade route to the riches of the Orient.

High on the pantheon of names of important figures of the Age of Discovery is Henry the Navigator's. He is considered by many historians to have provided not only the inspiration for the Age but much of the practical knowledge accumulated over decades of trial and error in developing ocean-going ships, sails, and navigational aids, some even borrowed from the Arabs. The Caravel, which came to be identified with this period of exploration, was a product of his assiduous search for a better ocean-going vessel. Henry contributed significantly to the psychology of discovery and helped to whet the appetite of those who were daring enough to venture out in search of riches.

#### **Constantinople:**

After decades of pounding the Christian Orthodox Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of Muhammad II finally captured the city of Constantinople for Islam in 1453. In the eastern Mediterranean, Islam was on the rise and was advancing deep into Eastern Europe. Only the Iberian kingdoms of Portugal and Spain in the western Mediterranean were having success in their wars against the Muslims. Early in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the Portuguese Christians had already expelled the Muslims after an occupation that had lasted seven centuries. Spain would not succeed in this endeavor until the end of the century.

As one of the major commercial and financial city-states and a major seafaring nation of northern Italy, Columbus' home city of Genoa had spawned many colonies and other trading centers throughout the eastern Mediterranean, the Aegean, and Black seas. It was a major commercial powerhouse, trading in textiles, foods, gold, wood, ship supplies, some spices and Oriental luxury items, and, above all, sugar. From the Greek islands to the Portuguese islands (one-third of the way across the Atlantic) to the Guinea Gulf of Africa, Genoa had a major stake in Mediterranean and Atlantic trade. The city's hegemony extended even to some regions of the Balkans. Events taking place in the Aegean Sea were, in effect, happening in Genoa's own backyard. Columbus was only two years old when Constantinople fell.

Losing colonies, hence markets, in the eastern Mediterranean was a major calamity to a seafaring nation like Genoa. Although the fall of Constantinople was not cause for general panic, the resourceful Genoese had to begin to develop a totally new strategy if they were to remain a major commercial and financial power. Hence, Genoa began to look to the western Mediterranean as an outlet not only for its products of trade and accumulated capital but also for its skilled pilots, navigators, and sailors. Merchants, shipbuilders, bankers and others began arriving in cities like Lisbon, Seville, Barcelona, and Cadiz. But Genoese were not the only Italians arriving in large numbers; also emigrating were Venetians and Florentines, as well as some Greeks and others who were being dispossessed of their fortunes in the east.

Columbus, who in his own words went to sea at "a very early age," was schooled in seamanship in this world of tumultuous change. There was a world of opportunity opening up to him and other adventurers. His own migration from Genoa to Iberia reflects the general Genoese migration out of the eastern Mediterranean into the Atlantic. Although Columbus' family was associated with the wool weaving and cloth export industry, apparently no member of his immediate family was actively involved in seafaring. By all accounts, this would make Columbus a truly representative figure of his contemporary Genoa. As the fortunes of the Genoese shifted from the eastern to the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic, Columbus went from weaving to seafaring. Events surrounding the fall of Constantinople are vital to understanding the career of the future discoverer of the New World, and his migration from Genoa to Portugal and Spain can be understood only in the context of the day.

#### **Granada:**

The next event that influenced greatly the life of Christopher Columbus was the fall of Granada in 1491-92. For Christian Spain, the conquest of Granada was the most important event in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. After nearly eight centuries of fighting, the Christian Iberians finally defeated the Muslim Iberians. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella rode into Granada as conquerors. At their side sat a disconsolate Columbus. While others who had accompanied the Catholic monarchs were rejoicing as they watched the symbols of sovereignty pass to the Christians, Columbus sat dejected. Shortly after the ceremony he rode off to La Rábida monastery nearby to nurse his bruised ego. What had happened a few days earlier in the royal military camp during the final assault on Granada, was that a committee of experts had rejected Columbus' pleas to secure royal backing for his "Enterprise of the Indies." After years of waiting, Columbus had grown impatient for an endorsement. Yet, it would only be now, after this long endeavor to rid the country of Muslim invaders, that the king and queen could begin to think about affairs other than the war and give Columbus the attention he craved.

### Introduction to Columbus:

Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón in Spanish, Cristoforo Colombo in Italian) was born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy; he died in 1506 in Valladolid, Spain.

On October 12, 1492, two hitherto unknown worlds met on a little island in the Caribbean Sea. While on a voyage of exploration for Spain in search of a direct sea route to the Far East, Christopher Columbus unintentionally discovered the New World. In four different voyages to the Caribbean from 1492 to 1504, the discoverer remained convinced, however, that he had found the lands that Marco Polo reached in his overland travels to China at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. To Columbus it was only a matter of time before a passage through the Caribbean islands to the fabled cities of Cathay (China) and Cipango (Japan) was found. To the Europeans of this age, all land east of the Indus River was "the Indies." Because he believed he had reached the Indies, Columbus named the people "Indians." Other contemporary adventurers, however, were not convinced that this was part of the "Old" World. The Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci, after whom the Americas are named, believed that this land was totally unknown to the ancients.

### Childhood and Early Years

Though biographical facts on Columbus vary from author to author, there is general agreement among most scholars that Cristoforo Colombo was born in Genoa between August 25 and October 31, 1451; that his father was Domenico Colombo, a wool weaver who was also involved in local politics; and that his mother was Suzanna Fontanarossa, daughter of a wool weaver. The eldest of five children, Christopher would always remain closest to his brother Bartolomeo. The two brothers shared a lot in common; they studied cartography together, sold books, and planned for a trip to the west; and they traveled to the New World together. Another brother, Giovanni Pellegrino, died young; his sister, Bianchinetta, married a cheesemonger. His youngest brother Giacomo was seventeen years his junior. The entire family moved to Savona, west of Genoa, in 1470.

Although it is not known how much formal training Columbus received as a child, Italian craft guilds did offer a rudimentary level of reading and writing in their schools. As a boy and a young man, Christopher joined his father in the family business of wool processing and selling. He may have worked as a clerk in a Genoese bookshop as well. At a time when it was generally expected that sons follow their fathers in the family business, it was, nevertheless, natural for them to turn to the seas for a career. Like so many other young men growing up in a major sea port, Columbus began a life of seafaring in his early teens.

Like any new apprentice entering the profession at age 14, Columbus served as a messenger, ship's boy, common sailor, and, perhaps, even as a 21-year old privateer. Although most historians doubt that the trip took place, his son Fernando stated in *History of the Life and Deeds of Christopher Columbus* that in 1472, Columbus was given command of a ship on a privateering expedition to Tunis. In a lost letter, Columbus is supposed to have related to his son how he had been commissioned by René d'Anjou, the French pretender to the throne of Naples, to make a surprise attack on a large Spanish galleon sailing off the coast of North Africa. Not in doubt is the hostility that had erupted between René and the House of Aragon in Spain over the throne. Nor is it in question that Genoa entered the conflict against Spain. It was quite natural for the Genoese merchants to come to the aid of their allies the Angevins. What most historians doubt, however, is that Columbus ever received command of the expedition.

Much more credible, however, is a subsequent expedition. In 1474 Columbus was hired as an ordinary sailor on a Mediterranean ship bound for Chios in the Aegean Sea. This was his first long voyage and must have proved profitable since he gained economic independence from his family. Except for a brief return to make plans for his next adventure, never again would Columbus return to Savona to live. As Genoa retreated to the background so did his association with his family's wool weaving business. Columbus spent a year in Chios and could hardly have remained immune to the political, commercial, and religious turmoil throughout the area. The Greek islands were within the sphere of influence of Constantinople, which had fallen twenty years earlier to the Turks. The great irony is that his trip to the Aegean island brought him the closest he would ever get to Asia.

On August 13, 1476, a Genoese commercial expedition of five ships bound for England gave Columbus his first opportunity to leave the Mediterranean Sea and sail into the Atlantic Ocean. But it was an inauspicious beginning for a man who would become Admiral of the Ocean Seas. Having passed through the Straits of Gibraltar without incident, the entire fleet came under attack by French privateers off the Cape of St. Vincent. Both sides lost ships; Columbus, one of the unfortunate ones whose ship was burned, had no escape other than to swim to shore. That he survived, his son boasted, was "because he was a prodigious swimmer." Six miles from shore, he made it to land by clinging to wreckage. After regaining his strength in the Port of Lagos, without money or position, Columbus made his way to Lisbon's large Genoese community of merchants and shipbuilders. He was twenty-five years old.

By 1477 Columbus resided in Lisbon. To someone born and raised in a Mediterranean sea port, his new home must have seemed magical, alive with anticipation. Sitting at the mouth of the Tagus River, Lisbon's rhythm was that of the crashing ocean at its doorstep. Thrusting into the Atlantic, facing water on two sides, Portugal had become a center for maritime activity. Since the time of Prince Henry the Navigator's explorations down the coast of Africa, Lisbon was a haven for explorers, adventurers, entrepreneurs, merchants and any others who saw their fortunes tied to the trade winds and ocean currents. Soon Columbus' brother Bartolomeo would be in Lisbon, as well, working as a mapmaker and studying geography. At times, the brothers worked side-by-side as draftsmen in the map-making business and as book collectors.

In a land of opportunities, Columbus received his first commission soon after he arrived in Lisbon. Sailing for Italian merchants in 1477, Columbus set sail on a convoy loaded with goods for sale in northern Atlantic ports. Included in his ports of call was Iceland, called *Ultima Thule* by the

ancients who believed it marked the end of the world. Other voyages followed, but Columbus did find the time to meet and marry Felipa Perestrello e Moniz. Though the father, Bartolomeo Perestrello, was already deceased by the time Columbus and Felipa met, the Perestrellos were a respected, though relatively poor, noble family. Being a hereditary governor appointed originally by Prince Henry to Porto Santo in the Madeiras Islands, Bartolomeo had been himself a man of the sea whose family had arrived in Portugal from Italy a century earlier. Soon after their marriage in 1478 or 79, the newlyweds accompanied the rest of the family back to Porto Santo where Felipa's oldest brother took over the governorship. Soon after their son Diego was born in 1480 or 81, Columbus and Felipa moved to the larger island of Madeira. It's believed that Columbus' wife died soon thereafter.

The next few years are filled with other voyages and more book learning. In late 1481 or early 1482, Columbus sailed to the new Portuguese fortress of El Mina on the Guinea coast. Believing in error that El Mina was south of the Equator, Columbus was impressed with the riches Africa had to offer, especially gold. Like all good navigators, Columbus was eager to learn about wind and ocean currents from the local pilots and sailors. Some historians believe that in these waters off the coast of Africa and the nearby Canary Islands, Columbus observed for himself the ocean phenomenon known as the Canary Current. Knowledge of a fast moving river of water in the ocean running from the Canaries to the Bahamas could very well have been the reason that Columbus chose to start his crossing of the Atlantic in the latitude of the Canaries, far south of Iberia.

### **The Enterprise of the Indies:**

The experience of these years led directly to the genesis of his plan to reach the east by going west, what he called his "Enterprise of the Indies." Some time between when he arrived in Portugal to when he appeared before the Portuguese king John II in 1484, Columbus devised a fairly complete plan for sailing west to the Indies. Inspiration came from a number of sources, but clearly Columbus had many life experiences that related directly to his future voyages of discovery. As mentioned above, his marriage to Felipa Perestrello e Moniz, whose family belonged to the Portuguese nobility, gave Columbus access not only to the Portuguese court and the king but also to the extensive collection of maps and papers of Felipa's father. Though relatively poor, the family still had connections at court. Columbus apparently gained access to the papers of the deceased former governor and found a wealth of information including maps, charts revealing ocean currents, personal interviews with sailors, and stories about objects that drifted to the coast of the little island from the west. How impressed Columbus must have been when the governor's widow handed over the journals and charts of a man who had sailed for the legendary Prince Henry the Navigator. If he had not thought of it before, living on a island far out in the ocean gave Columbus reason to think that sea exploration further west was possible. It was here that his "Enterprise of the Indies" began to mature.

Other important activities that contributed to the formation of his Enterprise were his association with the Genoese community in Portugal as well as his employment with Italian and Portuguese merchants. Both furthered his knowledge of the Atlantic waters, and his trips to Africa brought him close to the Canary Islands and knowledge of the Canary Current. Others have suggested, however, that it was because Marco Polo had placed the land of the great Khan on the same parallel as the Canary Islands that Columbus chose to sail from that location.

Other voyages by Columbus brought him into the northern Atlantic as well. Stops in England, Iceland, Ireland and other northern lands may have put Columbus in contact with people whose remembered history included knowledge of lands west of Iceland. Although the Viking *sagas* never became a part of the knowledge base of Medieval Europeans, it is believed that their encounter with one island after another across the northern Atlantic was the reason that sailors and cartographers believed that the entire Atlantic was strewn with islands. Columbus' genius was his remarkable ability to gather information from around the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, combining his real life experiences with ancient theories from his books in a way that few navigators were able to do. It was as if he could plug himself into the local knowledge base and draw out information.

But there was more at work than his own seafaring experiences. Columbus' idea of sailing west to get to the east was not original with him, nor did he ever claim that it was. Columbus drew upon the science and knowledge accumulated over millennia. Since antiquity there had been theories that held that earth was spherical in shape. In Greek and Roman times, for example, cosmographers theorized that there was only one body of water on the surface of the Earth that connected both Europe and Asia. If so, one could, theoretically, sail from the west to get to the east. Only the distance was in dispute. The awakening of Medieval Europe began with Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) and the appearance of his unique map of the world in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, essentially a map of the known world during Roman times. There was renewed interest in Ptolemy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century after the Florentine publication of a Latin translation of his *Geography*. To Ptolemy the ocean surrounding the known lands of the world was unnavigable; the Portuguese, among others, were unwilling to accept an infinite ocean. Columbus, too, rejected the idea of an unlimited, boundless ocean. But on the other hand, he accepted willingly other Ptolemaic geographical configurations. To Columbus, Ptolemy meant simply that one could get to the other side of the world by going west, that the two distant coasts had a common ocean sea.

During the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages little energy was spent on such speculation. Other issues, like survival, were more pressing. At the end of the Middle Ages, however, the old theory of one ocean had been resurrected. In particular, the aged cosmographer-physician Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli of Florence believed that one could reach the East by sea in little more than 3000 miles. Since Toscanelli was in communication with the Portuguese in the late 1470s, it is believed that this information ultimately made its way to Columbus. Both Father las Casas, who wrote *The History of the Indies*, and his son Fernando indicate that there had been correspondence between Columbus and Toscanelli.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Columbus had managed to collect a large number of books over the years; a few of them in particular left a deep impression. Without a doubt, the *Bible* was a great source of inspiration to Columbus. He drew heavily from it and took his name, "Christ Bearer," seriously, believing, in fact, that he had a divine mission to accomplish. Influencing Columbus' developing image of the globe were Pope Pius II's *Historia Rerum ubique Gestarum*, published in 1477 when he was still a cardinal, Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi* published in the early 1480s while rector of the Sorbonne, and *The Travels of Marco Polo*, written in 1298 after Marco Polo's return from his travels to the Mongol Empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Also in Columbus' library were Pliny's *Natural History* and Plutarch's *Lives*.

After eight years of experience sailing in Atlantic waters for Italian and Portuguese merchants, and access to the learned scholarship of his day, Columbus was certain that one could reach the Far East by sailing westward.

### **Search for Patronage**

To an explorer of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, royal sponsorship was a necessity, not a secondary consideration. Who else but a monarch could advance sovereignty, legitimize the discovery, conduct diplomatic relations, colonize the land, protect and defend the new colony, promulgate laws,

oversee the exploitation of the riches, and create an ultramarine government? Not a private individual nor a merchant, and not even a banker. It was more than a coincidence that the Age of Discovery occurred at the same time as the appearance of the first truly national governments in Western Europe. Clearly, what the Portuguese learned during the explorations of Prince Henry was that to launch and sustain new explorations and discoveries, a strong political and military base was needed. In addition, indispensable to the success of any commercial enterprise was the support of the bourgeoisie. In fact, discoverers and explorers often served as agents of the bourgeoisie but with royal sanctions.

Columbus' decision to seek royal patronage in Portugal seemed like a good one. With few interruptions the Portuguese crown had encouraged and supported explorations for a century or more, and nearly all new discoveries in the Atlantic were Portuguese. Furthermore, it was well known that the reigning monarch, King John II, who came to power in 1481, was personally committed to discovering a direct sea route to the Indian Ocean and the Far East. Prince Henry's unfulfilled dream of circumnavigating Africa became one of King John's passions. Besides, the king was resolute in his support of African trade and commerce and Christian evangelization of the natives.

Considering the king's strong support of geographical exploration, it was logical for Columbus to approach King John II. Furthermore, Columbus had been in Portugal for seven years and had married a Portuguese noblewoman, and he was a product of Portuguese maritime traditions. According to tradition, in 1484 the king listened to his proposal to sail to the east by going west and summarily passed it onto his Council of Geographical Affairs. But after a public hearing, the Council denied the request on the ground that it was too expensive, that Columbus was only a "visionary" and wrong about distances and measurements, that there was only worthless "rocky points" for land to the west, and that such a plan was contrary to Portugal's commitment to finding an eastward route to Asia by traveling around Africa.

As backing from royal courts in Portugal, France and England fell through, Columbus took his young son and moved to Spain in 1485. Persistent as he was, his intention now was to approach the Spanish monarchs with his "Enterprise of the Indies." After all, wasn't Spain a crusading Christian nation with a long maritime tradition in the Mediterranean and growing interests in the Atlantic? The Canary Islands had already fallen within the sphere of Spanish influence. Though Spain lagged far behind Portugal in exploration of the Atlantic, the two powers were more than "friendly" rivals. In fact, they had engaged in open hostilities since the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Spain began to dispute Portugal's claims to Africa and the Atlantic islands. Though Spanish had recently gained control of the Canaries, the Portuguese had not abandoned their claims. A fragile détente existed with neither side wanting a war. According to tradition, one of the reasons for King John's rejection of Columbus' plan to sail west was his concern over violating Spanish sovereignty in the Canaries.

One of Columbus' first stops in Spain was the monastery La Rábida at Palos de la Frontera. Not far from the Portuguese border, the quiet town of Palos along the banks of the River Tinto opened to the Atlantic, and it was near the town of Huelva where some of his late wife's relatives lived. La Rábida was a fortunate turn of events; Columbus found not only a boarding place for his son Diego but also support from the friars, several of whom became great believers in his vision. He also found Fray Antonio Marchena, with whom Columbus spent many hours discussing geography. Knowledgeable on cosmography, Marchena played an important role in shaping Columbus' plans by pointing him in the direction of the writings of the ancients and of church authorities who were known to support the idea of a westward crossing of the ocean. Through Marchena, Columbus was introduced to powerful noblemen as well. Influential friends are always good to have when one is petitioning the royal court. In this regard, probably no one was more important than Fray Juan Pérez, one of the guardians of the monastery but also Queen Isabella's confessor. It was Pérez who introduced Columbus to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella. La Rábida played one other important role in the history of Columbus' first voyage of discovery: it was the site of many long meetings and discussions with local seaman including the respected seafaring Pinzón family.

Tradition holds that Columbus moved to Seville in 1485, and between May of 1486 and September of 1487 he was maintained at the expense of the queen. Although interested in his ideas, the king and queen were too busy fighting wars and consolidating power to give serious consideration to his plan. Finally, in 1487, Columbus presented his Atlantic project to a committee of experts called to hear the case. The so-called "Wise Men of Salamanca" raised numerous objections, asked many questions, and, in the end, rejected the plan. Among the reasons given for the rejection was that the "ocean sea" was simply too large to cross.

In his "years of great anguish," as he called his years of petitioning the monarchs, 1491 must have seemed hopeless. He was virtually without funds, all pleas had been rejected at court, and he now had two children to support, Diego, his legitimate son, and Fernando, born out of wedlock to Columbus and Beatriz Enríquez de Arana in 1488. In a period of great despair, his one source of comfort was his love for Beatriz. A peasant woman, she was introduced to Columbus by a relative, Diego de Arana, an officer on Columbus' first voyage.

An interlude in Columbus' search for Spanish patronage came in 1488. Tradition relates that the Portuguese king was willing to give Columbus one more opportunity to present his plan. Writing to Columbus as "our dear friend," King John II invited him to return to Portugal under royal protection. (Apparently, Columbus had left some unpaid debts behind when he moved from Portugal to Spain a few years earlier.) The Portuguese king had become disenchanted with efforts to circumnavigate Africa, especially after the great navigator Bartolomeu Dias seemed to have disappeared at sea. Dias had been commissioned in August of 1487 to discover the tip of Africa, but when he failed to return after a year, King John was ready to reconsider Columbus' "Enterprise of the Indies." There is no evidence that Columbus ever made the trip, but in December, 1488, Dias finally returned after 16 months at sea to report that he had rounded the tip of Africa. This sealed Columbus' fate in Portugal and vindicated the Portuguese in their African strategy. They no longer needed a westward route to Asia.

In Spain, Columbus made one final appeal in the last weeks of 1491. Invited to the royal camp as the monarchs prepared for their final battle with the Muslims in Granada, the future discoverer made his final presentation. But again his plan was rejected; although Columbus had been successful in winning over many of the learned scholars and scientific advisers, this time the rejection was due primarily to the excessive demands he made for titles, revenues, and rewards. His request for payment (one-tenth of all riches from the Indies and the rank of Admiral of the Ocean, Viceroy and Governor of the Indies) caused the sovereigns to flatly refuse the project. Tradition relates that as Columbus rode away on his mule, Ferdinand's treasurer, Luis de Santángel, a member of a prominent family of converted Jews, interceded on his behalf. Arguing that the investment was small considering the potential reward, Santángel was able to convince the King and Queen to reverse their decision. A court official was dispatched on horseback to bring him back. After several more weeks of negotiating a contract, Columbus left for Palos de la Frontera, in April, 1492, and his rendezvous with history.

### **The First Voyage (1492-93):**

The people of Palos were ordered to provide and equip two caravels (small light sailing ships). The first, owned by Cristóbal Quintero, was called the *Pinta*; the second, owned by Juan Niño, was officially named the *Santa Clara* but known as the *Niña*. The third ship, Columbus' flagship (a small round ship with a large hold, most likely a *nao*), was owned by Juan de la Cosa and called the *Santa María*. Little is known about the actual

construction but archival evidence suggests that the *Niña* and the *Pinta* were small, about 60 tons each and about 70-80 feet long. Of the three, the *Pinta* was the fastest. The *Santa María* was about 90-100 tons and not much longer than the other two.

It is true that initially Columbus, who was a foreigner, had difficulty recruiting a crew because so many feared a voyage into the unknown. The royal secretary tried to help by offering freedom to any convict who enlisted. Some seasoned seaman objected to this plan but in the end only four convicts accepted. More than anything, it was the friars of La Rábida and Martín Alonso Pinzón, an experienced sea captain from Palos, who persuaded local sailors to join the expedition. Two other Pinzón brothers joined the voyage; all were commanding officers.

About 40 men including Columbus sailed on the *Santa María*. Between 20 and 30 were on the *Pinta* and *Niña* each. Historical figures disagree on the exact number of men recruited, estimates range from 90 to 120 men on board the three ships, but only 87 names are known. Father las Casas and Fernando put the figure at 90, but the truth may never be known. Most were Spanish, the largest number coming from around Palos; there was one Portuguese, one Genoese other than Columbus, one Venetian, and one Calabrian. The crew was comprised largely of experienced seamen, and there were a few government officials. But there were no priests, no soldiers and no settlers; this was a voyage of exploration and discovery.

Little is known about life onboard the ships but it could not have been comfortable. There were no crew's quarters, no hammocks (soon to be discovered in the Caribbean), and no mess halls. Only the captains and pilots had anything like a cabin, and then they were very small. At night one slept where one could find a vacant spot, tying one self down to prevent being tossed into the sea. Prayers, songs, stories, ship chores, eating and waiting filled the sailors' days. Star gazing under a new and unknown sky filled their restless nights.

Provisions on board included but were not limited to: tools, ropes, planks, nails, whale oil, sulfur, tar, leather, yarn, wax, tackle, anchors, buoys, flags, muskets, powder, crossbows, arrows, helmets, shields, swords, biscuits, beans, peas, wine, olive oil, syrup, water, dried fish, salt meat, pigs and hens (to be killed on ship), salt, flour, rice, cheese, figs, almonds, medicines, cooking pots, knives, ladles, bowls, candles, lamps, steel, lanterns, firewood, sweeps, buckets, baskets, fishhooks, lines, sinkers, nets, harpoons, notebooks, journals, nautical almanacs, quills, ink, sealing wax, charts, paper, compasses, compass needles, magnets, half-hour glasses, dividers, rulers, drums, tambourines, glass beads, brass rings, knitted caps, gold, silver, pearls, and spices. The ships carried enough provisions for one year at a time when two weeks at sea was a long voyage.

Compasses, astrolabes, hourglasses, maps and charts were the most important navigational aids. Celestial navigation was the favored method while sailing under familiar stars, but dead reckoning was more dependable in east-west voyages in unknown seas. The Arabs had perfected celestial navigation centuries earlier while incorporating the knowledge from their star charts onto the back of the astrolabe. The astrolabe could tell position simply by positioning the stars in the sky exactly as the user saw them, but this only worked under known skies. On the reverse side of the instrument, images of the Sun and the Moon could be positioned as well to indicate the date. In dead reckoning, east-west travel was facilitated by maintaining the Sun at the same degree above the horizon. Pointing a finger of an extended arm at the Sun at noon and maintaining every day the same angle the arm makes with the body, would guarantee a true east or true west direction. Changing the angle, that is, lowering or raising the arm, would cause a shift in the direction away or towards the horizon. In dead reckoning, a pilot could calculate the distance traveled in an hour or a day by measuring the time that it took a floating device to travel the known length of the ship, from the bow to the stern. The compass, whose magnetized needle was supposed to point in the direction of the North Star, worked very well in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and eastern waters. The needle pointed to the North Star only by coincidence in the Eastern Hemisphere because, from that location in the world, the magnetic northern pole was in line with the polar star. But, an "eastern variation" had been documented centuries earlier. After several weeks out in the Atlantic, the crew became alarmed when compass needles onboard all the three ships began to deviate from true north to a few degrees west. Columbus was able to quell their fears by explaining that the variation was due to instability of the North Star. Like other stars in the sky, he explained, this one moved too. Under overcast skies, in storms, at night and in tight passages the compass provided the best aid. Under open skies, however, navigators trusted naked eye observations of the stars, the Sun and the Moon more than any device.

Columbus preferred dead reckoning over celestial navigation, and he was never comfortable with the astrolabe and other devices for measuring the heavenly bodies. Above all, he was masterful in reading the signs of Nature, such as the behavior of birds, the smell of the air, the color of the sky, the condition of the seas, the pressure he felt in his joints, floating debris, and more. Successful navigators were those who survived by "reading" Nature. Columbus was quite successful at this and even predicted hurricanes accurately.

At daybreak on August 3, 1492, the small flotilla of ships left Palos for parts unknown. One can only imagine what thoughts were going through the minds of the crew, but especially Columbus'. At the age of 41, standing on the bow of the *Santa María*, watching the coast slowly slip below the horizon, Columbus left behind on dry land a struggle that had lasted a quarter of his life. He was now in his element, doing what he had dreamed about for the past ten years.

After a southern passage to the Canary Islands where the *Niña* had her sails replaced with square rigging and the *Pinta's* rudder was repaired, the voyagers departed the known world on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1492. Each day of the voyage, the ships traveled primarily westward. The choice of sailing from the Canaries was masterful. The Canary Current, a river in the ocean, speeded their journey. In mid September the crew began seeing signs of life: brightly colored birds, pelicans, and seaweed. On September 25, it was thought that land was sighted but it was nothing more than low lying clouds. Much of the crew was apprehensive and fearful that the strong daily winds would keep them from getting back to Spain. Columbus had difficulty with his crew at times, and he found it hard to work with the Pinzóns, especially Martín Alonso who was much more seasoned than Columbus, but there is little evidence that the crew was ever close to mutiny. Moreover, it is only legend that Columbus tried to deceive the crew by giving false readings in order to make the distance seem shorter.

On the moonlit night of October 11 the Captain General (Columbus would be called Admiral after fulfilling the obligations of his contract with the monarchs by finding land) thought that he had seen lights in the distance. Two hour past midnight on the morning of October 12 a lookout named Rodrigo de Triana (sometimes called Juan Rodríguez Bermejo), on the *Pinta*, cried out "*Tierra! Tierra!*" A reward of a pension of ten thousand maravedis a year (an able seaman could earn about 12,000 maravedis per year) was to go to he who saw land first. Rather cruelly, Columbus pocketed the money himself, claiming that he had seen several lights the night before.

A new era began for humankind on the morning of October 12, 1492, when the Admiral and a handful of the excited but weary voyagers set foot on land after 36 days of sailing. Columbus raised the royal standard and two captains each carried banners decorated with green crosses and letters representing Ferdinand and Isabel. Soon the curious and naked natives, with some trepidation, came out of their hiding places and greeted the visitors. Although this momentous encounter took place on a relatively inconspicuous island, never again would the world be the same. The actual landfall site is still a question that stirs passions among mariners and historians alike. Called Guanahani by the natives, Columbus claimed

the land for his sovereigns and renamed it San Salvador (in honor of the Savior Jesus Christ), but no one today knows for sure which island it was, perhaps Watling Island or the Semana Cay. Ten or more islands in the Bahamas fit the physical description as recorded by Columbus' in his journal, described simply as large and flat, with bright green trees and much water.

The natives were friendly and open to trade with the sailors. They traded anything for anything. Balls of spun cotton and parrots and spears for the sailors' glass beads, red caps, and trinkets not equal to the worth of the natives' goods. Described as well formed with handsome bodies, the natives were tall, not black or white, intelligent, painted, naked, with coarse, straight hair and broad brows. Called Tainos by the Spaniards, the islanders reminded Columbus of the natives on the Canary Island. Belonging to a larger language family called the Arawaks, the Tainos showed no fear or knowledge of Spanish swords and cut themselves while examining the weapons. Small pieces of gold were seen pierced in the noses of the natives of San Salvador. They told Columbus that the natives of other islands wore gold bands around their arms and legs, and they described countless islands all like theirs. Soon all natives were given the name "Indians" in the belief that the Spaniards had arrived in the Indies (Asia).

On the third day Columbus took six or seven Indians as guides upon his departure from San Salvador and reconnoitered three other islands in the Bahamas. For three months the flotilla sailed about the Caribbean, visiting islands whose beauty the Europeans found nearly impossible to describe. By the end of the month of October, Columbus reached the coast of Cuba. After sailing north and then south along its coast, the Admiral was convinced that this was nothing less than the Cipango, one of the lands Marco Polo had praised. Despite the fact that the local pilots told him it was an island, Columbus convinced himself that Cuba was a promontory of the great country of Cathay. Meanwhile, with growing unrest over the meager riches, anxiety built to the point that Martín Alonso sailed off with the *Pinta* without leave on November 21 and headed for an island that, according to the local Indians, contained much gold. Crossing the Windward Passage, Columbus sailed to another large island which he called La Isla Español (Hispaniola). For a month he cruised the coast, stopping occasionally to inspect the land and the people. Columbus befriended a young Taino chief by the name of Guacanagarí who was welcomed aboard his ship. Arrangements were made for another meeting, this one on Christmas Day at the chief's residence in a large town nearby. Before the meeting could take place, the command ship, *Santa María*, struck a reef off the coast and grounded. Over the next few days, everything that could be salvaged was removed by the crew of the two ships and natives in canoes sent by Guacanagarí. A fort was constructed out of the lumber of the ship, supplies were stored for a year, and 39 men stayed behind in Europe's first settlement in the New World since the days of the Vikings five hundred years earlier. But La Navidad proved no more enduring a settlement than those of the Norsemen in Newfoundland.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, Martín Alonso Pinzón rejoined the expedition and, shortly thereafter, the two remaining vessels headed home. Upon leaving the Caribbean, Columbus had the good fortune again of finding an ocean current, just as he did in the Canaries. Entering the Gulf Stream, his ships sailed far enough north to catch the prevailing westerlies. But it wasn't an uneventful return. Approaching Europe the ships encountered a terrible storm, one of the worst storms ever recorded in Europe. The *Pinta* became separated again from the expedition and arrived at the port Bayona on the northwest coast of Spain several days before the *Niña*. Meanwhile, Columbus limped into Lisbon where he was apprehended by King John II, the very sovereign who had turned him down nine years earlier. For fear that the king might not release him, Columbus sent a secret messenger to the Spanish court relating his experiences and his detention. By mid-March he was free to return to Spain. On March 15, 1493 at Noon, the *Niña* entered the harbor of Palos, 32 weeks after leaving from the same port. Although Martín Alonso arrived in Spain earlier, he did not reach Palos until after Columbus. Very sick, he died before he even had a chance to report to the king.

Columbus alone held the stage. His greatest glory came when he appeared before Ferdinand and Isabella at the royal palace in Barcelona and was invited to sit with them and even eat at the same table. With a parade of exotic natives and colorful parrots, he told his tale of the voyage and of the islands with their lush vegetation and strange inhabitant; he reported on spices, gold, cannibals, and mermaids; and he showed the gold he had brought home, some of it in the form of crowns and large masks but other in the form of ornaments and nuggets and even dust.

All of his titles and rewards were reconfirmed, and he was addressed by his new title "Admiral of the Ocean Seas." He received 1,000 doubloons, the equivalent of 345,000 maravedis. Columbus owned the day; he delivered what he had promised---at least everybody at the Spanish court thought so. On the other side of Iberia, however, the Portuguese were in doubt that he had discovered Asia. For the time being, Columbus boasted of his travels and discoveries and urged the sovereigns to equip another expedition as soon as possible. He promised any amount of gold, spices, and riches as well as more natives to be converted to Christianity. The Admiral had little difficulty persuading the Spanish royalty to aid a second voyage.

To prevent Portuguese claims, Columbus had sent a letter to Pope Alexander VI as soon as he arrived in Spain explaining his discoveries in as much detail as he felt he could reveal. A Papal bull (or decree, titled *Inter coetera*) was issued in May, 1493 granting control of every island Columbus had discovered to the Sovereigns of Spain. At Columbus' urging, a line of demarcation was drawn in the ocean 100 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands declaring that all undiscovered land west of this line not belonging to a Christian sovereign belonged to Spain, east of the line went to Portugal. This resulted in an immediate conflict since Portugal had been granted all land south and west of the Canaries in 1481. A resolution was reached in the following year when the sovereigns of Spain and of Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas. In this 1494 treaty the line of demarcation was moved to 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands.

### **The Second Voyage (1493-96):**

Setting sail from Cadiz on September 25, 1493, the second voyage was on a much larger scale; 17 ships and about 1200 colonists accompanied Columbus. Its mission was to return to La Navidad in Hispaniola to relieve the men left behind from the first voyage, settle more colonists on the islands, and conquer other islands to be discovered. This time Columbus carried a mission to bring Christianity to the Indians.

To quicken the departure, in case another nation might attempt an expedition, the sovereigns did not hesitate to provide Columbus with whatever supplies he requested. The cargo included horses, cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, cats, chickens, grain, seed, and all the supplies needed for sailing, fighting, building and setting up an administration overseas.

The fleet left Cadiz and, as before, stopped at the Canaries to make repairs and to store more meat, wood and water. After leaving the Canary island of Hierro, the fleet took a more southerly route than before, and 21 days later, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, land was sighted. This new group of smaller islands (known as the Lesser Antilles) were south and east of the large islands of Cuba and Hispaniola (part of the Greater Antilles). After spending two weeks discovering and naming other beautiful islands, seeing incredible lush tropics, rare sights, and indescribable flora and fauna, the fleet came upon the island of Guadalupe. The Spaniards were shocked by stories of the cruel practices of the Carib (or Caniba) Indians who waged war on the nearby island and ate their captives. The first real battle in the New World with natives came in a skirmish with these "Cannibals" on the island of St. Croix. It should be mentioned that more than a few historians doubt that the practice of cannibalism actually

existed as described in the chronicles of the sailors; nevertheless, it was believed by the Spanish explorers. Later in Spanish colonial history, it was enough to label a native "cannibal" to enslave him.

Discovering the beautiful island of Puerto Rico on his way to Hispaniola, Columbus could sense an increase in the anxiety level, not only his own, but that of the large contingency of potential colonists, as well. Voyagers, eager to get off their ships, wanted to start looking for gold, or at the least, start colonizing. Reaching Hispaniola at the end of November, the Spanish fired a cannon to announce their arrival, but no one returned the salute. There was response, no flag waving...nothing! An ominous sign. To their horror, they discovered that the entire settlement of La Navidad had been massacred and the site burned to the ground. As they searched for any trace of their compatriots, the newcomers discovered a mass grave in which several Spaniards were buried. They discovered also that the village of Columbus' good friend, Chief Guacanagari, was burned and destroyed. No one will ever know for sure what happened at La Navidad, but the popular theory is that local natives destroyed the settlement out of disgust with the settlers' greed and avarice.

A new city, Isabella, was built a short distance east of La Navidad. There was reluctance on the part of the settlers who balked at the prospect of doing manual labor. Many were ill and others were more interested in finding gold and other riches than building a settlement. Columbus hesitated writing to the sovereigns about the destruction of La Navidad and decided on an expedition into the hinterland to search for gold. When gold failed to show up on large quantities, Columbus decided on a policy of forced labor. Enslavement of the natives had not been one of the stated goals of this expedition and it was offensive to the queen; yet Columbus justified Indian enslavement on the grounds that it would be profitable.

Before returning to Spain in 1496, Columbus explored more of Cuba and discovered Jamaica. En route to Cuba he discovered innumerable small islands which he called collectively the Queen's Garden. The Admiral was determined to prove that Cuba belonged to mainland Asia and was part of the empire of the Mongol khans. Although he never completed the circumnavigation of the island, he did force his men to take a solemn oath that the land mass was a promontory of Asia.

Relations began to deteriorate between the Spaniards and the natives of Hispaniola. Instead of searching for provisions while Columbus was off exploring other islands, the men left behind raided native villages in search of riches. With little hope for anything more than poverty and unhappiness, disgruntled settlers began returning home. Many of the men were sick, many died, most were unhappy with the lack of opportunity, and no one wanted to work in the fields planting crops. Leaving his brother Diego behind as governor of La Isabella contributed to Columbus' problems with the settlers. Diego was not an administrator, there were repeated demonstrations against his ineffective rule, and besides he was resented for being a foreigner, an Italian. Some of the settlers began sending letters back to relatives and officials in Spain complaining about the conditions and the leadership. In October of 1495 a Spanish official arrived with a royal commission to investigate Viceroy Columbus and the charges that had been made by the discontented settlers. On March 10, 1496, Columbus had no choice but to return home hoping to preempt any royal inquiries into the complaints of the settlers. Earlier in the year Columbus did find his first real riches on Hispaniola. Taking part in the expedition into the interior, Columbus and his men forced the inhabitants of the region to gather loose gold. Within a few days they had collected about 10 kg of the precious metal. We know from his own writing that Columbus was impressed with the beauty of the Caribbean, but he did not come looking for that. With incredible single-mindedness, the Admiral was looking for riches and a doorway to Asia, to the land of Marco Polo, hoping that Hispaniola might be Cipango, and Cuba part of Cathay. In reality, no one knew where in the world they were. The relationship of the Western Hemisphere to the rest of the world would not be known until after the Magellan-El Cano around-the-world-in-three-years trip, 1519-22.

The sovereigns gave Columbus a friendly welcome upon his return and listened with interest to his story about the discovery of new islands with great potential. They appeared grateful and continued to show him favor but waited more than a year before approving the provisioning for a third voyage.

### **The Third Voyage 1498-1500**

Having been cleared of any wrongdoing, and with full confidence of the monarchs, Columbus left Seville with a fleet of 6 ships on May 30, 1498. Separating the expedition, one part went to aid the settlement at Hispaniola, while Columbus took the other part and sailed further south than ever before. Departing from the Cape Verde Islands, he crossed the ocean in hope of discovering new islands in the southwest, toward the equator. His intention may have been to reference the location of the demarcation line drawn by the Treaty of Tordesillas. Or, it may have been that Columbus believed the rumors that there was land to the south of the Caribbean. In any case, he continued to search for gold and other precious stones as well.

Columbus had the misfortune on this trip of entering the doldrums, a dead space in the ocean where wind and ocean currents die and the heat is unbearable. After a little more than a week the crew was saved by a south-easterly that pushed them westward. Changing course to the north prevented Columbus from discovering South America but it did bring him to an island with 3 mountain peaks. Columbus named it Trinidad. From here they sailed into the Gulf of Paria and then to the coast of South America which he named Tierra de Gracia. Seeing the huge amount of water flowing into the sea, the Admiral believed that he had discovered a large land mass. The Orinoco River was the largest river any of the crew had ever seen. Columbus believed that the Terrestrial Paradise was at hand, since it was believed that all of the great rivers flowed from the Garden of Eden. How close Columbus came to realizing that this land was other than the fabled land of Marco Polo! In one report he wrote, "Your Highnesses will gain these lands, which are another world." Without giving into the idea that he was some place other than Asia, he did manage to report, "I believe this is a very large continent which until now has remained unknown."

After several weeks of exploring Trinidad, Paria and Margarita Island, Columbus headed for Hispaniola where his other brother Bartolomeo had been put in charge of building a new capital. His choice was to build the seaport of Santo Domingo near to where the Spaniards had discovered gold mines. But when Columbus arrived at the end of August, 1498, he found not a city at work but a country at war. Two factions had formed, those who were loyal to the Columbus family and a party of rebels led by Francisco Roldán, who had been appointed mayor by Columbus before he had returned to Spain after his second voyage. It would take two years to put down the revolt and restore order. To end the rebellion the Viceroy had to agree to the demand of the rebels that each one receive a plot of land and the Indians who lived on it.

A navigator he was, an administrator he wasn't. Columbus' problems were due primarily to a difference in perception between the colonists and the Governor as to the purpose of the colonization. An idealist and dreamer, Columbus believed that riches would come to those who were willing to work hard and build a real colony. The colonist, many of whom were called "idlers" by Columbus, wanted their riches immediately. Much of the loose gold that had been picked up never made it into the royal coffers but instead into the pockets of the settlers. Columbus' plans of building long-lasting colonies did not appeal to settlers who were not planning on staying long. It is clear from his writing that Columbus envisioned colonies along the design of those that the Portuguese had constructed in Africa, like El Mina, a trading factory that dealt with long-range planning, such as establishing contacts with local natives for trade and commerce. The colonists saw only a labor force when they looked at the

natives. Despite his poor record in dealing with the Indians--having enslaved groups of natives already, at least Columbus shared the views of his sovereigns that the natives must be saved in both the physical and spiritual sense. Evangelization was from the very beginning one of the main motivations of Columbus. As for the crown, conversion of the Indians was paramount; Pope Alexander VI had issued a papal bull in 1496 in which he tied the judicial claims of the Spanish crown to the New World to evangelization of the natives.

Meanwhile, conditions continued to deteriorate. In great anguish over his inability to bring peace to the island, Columbus requested of the sovereigns that a lettered judge be sent to the island to deal with an intolerable situation. Indeed, he got the judge he had asked for, the monarchs sent Francisco de Bobadilla. He carried a decree appointing him governor of the islands and mainland of the Indies. Shortly after his arrival, Bobadilla seized Columbus' house and records and sent an order to have Columbus and his brother found and arrested. They were placed in chains and sent to Spain. Columbus refused to have the chains removed until the monarchs themselves issued the authority to do so. He arrived in Cadiz in November 1500. Upon hearing of plight of the Admiral, the sovereigns immediately ordered the chains removed and both he and his brother freed. Columbus was compensated 2,000 ducats (equivalent of about 10,000 dollars) for his ordeal.

On December 17, 1500 Columbus went before the royal court. The King and Queen instructed that whatever items were taken from Columbus at this arrest be restored to him. The monarchs would not reinstate Columbus' titles, however. Instead they ordered Bobadilla removed and replaced by Don Nicolás de Ovando. This was not a victory or vindication for Columbus. With his titles annulled, the ex-governor spent the next two years in despair and humiliation, writing his *Book of Prophecies* in which he intended to show that he had been chosen by God Himself to take Christianity to the "ends of the earth."

Meanwhile, a flurry of exploration had taken place in the Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Ships reached as far south as Rio de la Plata and far north along the northern coast of North America. The Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama returned from his successful trip to India across the Indian Ocean (1497-99). Clinging desperately to his original theory that the islands he had discovered were part of Marco Polo's world, Columbus was alone in his belief. Other navigators saw it as a world hitherto unknown to the ancient savants. Whatever it was, colonial activity in "another world," as Columbus called it, took on a life of its own, and there was very little that Columbus could do to alter its course.

Invariably bad news for the Spaniards, Portuguese navigators had fulfilled the Medieval dream of finding a direct trade route to the Far East, thus outflanking the Muslims. For Columbus, Portugal's success was a new opportunity for the Great Navigator, and the monarchs were again receptive to his vision of finding a strait to mainland Cathay. Rather than retiring with a pension and an estate, perhaps even a castle, Columbus suggested yet another voyage, his fourth. The King and Queen must have been happy to agree to another expedition if for no other reason that to unburden themselves of the bothersome Columbus.

#### **The "High Voyage" (1502-04):**

Allocating 10,000 ducats to provision a fourth voyage, the king and queen made it clear that Columbus was to search for gold and silver, precious stones, spices and other riches. But above all, for fear of aggravating the situation in the colony, they forbade Columbus to return to Hispaniola except if necessary on his return to Spain.

Columbus' fleet, including 4 ships and 150 men, set sail from Cadiz bound for the Indies on May 9, 1502 in what was to be "Another voyage in the name of the Holy Trinity," as he stated in a letter to the Pope. His son Fernando, age 14, and brother Bartolomeo accompanied Columbus on this fourth and final voyage. Because of ill health and poor eyesight, Columbus could not captain his fleet, but seaman loyal to Columbus were honored to serve the Admiral once again. What began with exhilaration over the fastest crossing yet, just 20 days, ended with the loss of the entire fleet on the coast of Jamaica.

Stopping to take on wood and water on Gran Canary, the expedition began its crossing on May 25. The first stop was at the Caribbean island of Martinique where they provisioned the ship again and washed their clothes. Sailing to Dominica, Santa Cruz and, San Juan, Columbus headed for Hispaniola where he dropped anchor at Santa Domingo on June 29.

Expressly forbidden to enter the colony, Columbus felt it was necessary. First, one of the caravels was in disrepair and he wished to purchase another. For an even greater reason, Columbus feared the coming of a hurricane. In a message to Governor Ovando seeking permission to enter the port, Columbus advised him not to allow any ships to depart for Spain. Ovando refused to allow Columbus and his fleet to enter the port, and he did not take the Admiral's advice. Columbus took refuge in a small harbor nearby and was saved, but of the 28 ships that Ovando ordered to sea, only four survived the storm. Over 500 people were killed. Columbus must have felt that divine justice had been done. Not only did the two men he hated most die at sea, Bobadilla and Roldán, but the ship carrying the Admiral's share of the wealth made it the entire way to Castile.

Following the hurricane, Columbus sailed southwest, past Cuba, and into open seas until he reached Central America. Tortuous sailing condition and incredible storms along the coast took their toll on both the ships and on Columbus. The Admiral was sick with rheumatism, fever, and bad eyes, and much of the time he was bedridden. Unsuccessful in finding the Strait of Malacca but seeing much gold on the Indians, Columbus was forced to leave the area he called Veragua (Panama). Skirmishes with the Indians, intense storms, and damaged ships meant that he had to head back to Hispaniola. It was December, 1502.

Losing one ship on the coast of the isthmus and another at sea to sea worms (small mollusks), 130 men crowded onto the remaining, barely sea-worthy, worm-riddled ships. Once at sea, realizing that Hispaniola was too far to reach in such condition, Columbus turned north to Jamaica which he had discovered on his second voyage. The ships were in such bad condition that they were beached, worthy only of being used as protection from the Indians. Columbus would remain marooned here with his men for over a year. One half of the men mutinied when Columbus tried to instill order and discipline, and a second problem surfaced which had the potential of being more disastrous. Tired of dealing with the Spaniards, the Indians decided to stop supplying food. In response, Columbus came up with an ingenious trick. Having an almanac with him, he threatened to punish the natives by taking light away from the Moon. On the night of February 29, 1504, when the Moon began to disappear, the Indians became alarmed and agreed to reestablish trade with the Spaniards. The Europeans, however, were still stranded on the island.

One loyal and brave sailor, Diego Méndez de Salcedo, who had protected the life of Columbus on other occasions, agreed to cross the open channel by canoe to reach Hispaniola, a nearly impossible feat. The island was over 100 miles away and Santo Domingo, home of Governor Ovando, was 300 miles. In five days Méndez and one other sailor made it to Hispaniola in two canoes paddled by natives. After finding Ovando on a mission inland, the men were kept waiting seven months before a ship was sent to check on their story. Not until the end of July did the rescue ship arrive, and it wouldn't be until August 13 that the shipwrecked sailors arrived in Santo Domingo. Not feeling welcome in the city, on



Sept 12, 1504, Columbus took his last voyage across the ocean, this time as a passenger. On November 7, 1504 he, his son, and his brother arrived in Spain.

### Last Days

By the time the Admiral returned to Spain, Queen Isabella of Castile was gravely ill, and soon she died, on November 26, 1504. Weakened by rheumatism, exposure, and years of bad, food Columbus had arrived very ill from his last trip, and he spent many months in Seville recuperating at the Monastery of Las Cuevas. Over the next year and a half, until his death, Columbus tried to regain his lost titles of Governor and Viceroy. He wrote letters, petitioned the crown, persuaded others to intercede on his behalf, and when he was well enough, followed the court of King Ferdinand to several cities in Spain hoping to see the king. In May, 1505, King Ferdinand finally granted Columbus an audience in which the discoverer was allowed to present his claims to the titles and the riches of the Indies. His titles were not returned, but the king did allow for arbitration regarding his financial claims. In the end the Admiral's share was confirmed at ten percent of the royal one-fifth (the *quinto real*). In effect, this amounted to two percent of the riches of the Indies, a considerable amount, and it afforded the Columbus family a life style equal to that of the richest nobility of Spain. Columbus already had a coat of arms and noble status. King Ferdinand in a final gesture offered to property and its revenue for his claims, but Columbus stubbornly refuse. Considering the poor health he was in, it is apparent that concern over profits and rights was not for himself but for his sons Diego and Ferdinand. The Columbus family's struggle for justice continued well beyond the Admiral's death. In 1508 King Ferdinand appointed Diego governor of Hispaniola.

In late 1505, Columbus became too ill with gout and sadness to travel any more and remained until his death in the city of Valladolid. On May 20, 1506, both sons, brother Bartolomeo and his faithful friend Diego Méndez were at his side when the Admiral murmured "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit" and passed away. His body was buried initially in Valladolid, but in 1509 his son Diego transferred the remains to the monastery of Las Cuevas in Seville. Still a subject of great debate is where Columbus' remains are today. Having been moved to the New World in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, first to Santo Domingo and then to Havana (in 1795), his remains traveled back to Spain in 1899 where, it is claimed, they are interred in the Cathedral of Seville.

What seems to be the greatest injustice of all is that the new lands that the Great Navigator, Admiral of the Ocean Seas, Governor and Viceroy discovered were never given his name. That honor fell to a fellow Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, from the city of Florence, considered by some as the heart and soul of the Renaissance. As an agent of the Medici family in Seville, Amerigo, like everyone else, was caught up in the excitement of the discoveries. On two separate occasions he sailed to the Indies and, initially, believed that this was part of the Old World. After extensive travel through the littoral of Brazil and northern South America, as well as visits to several of the islands, Vespucci reached a different conclusion than Columbus. To Amerigo Vespucci this was empirically a "New" World, hitherto unknown to the ancients. Amerigo's letters were widely circulated, and it was through his writing that Europe came to know about the lands to the west. In 1507, when a group of geographers working on a new edition of an atlas, the word "America" was written across the newly discovered lands. By the time they realized their mistake it was too late to correct it.

### The Columbian Legacy:

It is nearly impossible to over-exaggerate the historical significance of Christopher Columbus. The ultimate expression of the Columbian Legacy has been nothing less than global in its impact. Though much has been written about the subsequent Columbian Exchange, that is, the exchange of plants and animals, of diseases, of human migration, and of cultural exchange, students of history should not forget that the discovery of a New World had an intellectual impact as well. During the Age of Discovery (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries), Western Europeans acquired the ability to exchange information with nearly all parts of the world. As one of the great thinkers of the age and one who led the way, Columbus deserves recognition for the intellectual transformation that took place. As a result, a new age was ushered in, the Modern Age, and after 1500 the world would never be the same, nor would the human race.

In hope of finding a way to circumvent the Muslim monopoly on the riches of the Spice Islands and the Far East, Columbus and other late Medieval adventurers sailed away from a world that still believed that Earth was the center of the Universe. This *geocentric* theory left little room for compromise throughout Western Christendom. Was it not logical that since Man was the center of the Universe, the Earth as his home had to be at the very core?

The idea that humankind inhabited a third rate planet that rotated daily on its axis and hurled itself through space at astronomical speeds around a fixed Sun was totally unacceptable in the Middle Ages. In 1530, however, things began to change. The Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus published his work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres) in which he challenged the prevailing *geocentric* view. Advancing the *heliocentric* theory, Copernicus influenced many other great thinkers with his theory that the Earth and all other planets revolved around the Sun. In the next century the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) advanced the Copernican theory significantly with observations made with a telescope. In 1633, however, the Inquisition in Rome condemned Galileo for heresy. The next thinker was the German Johannes Kepler (1571-1630). He too accepted the Copernican theory but went further by deducing that the orbits of the planets were elliptical and not circular.

Now, contrast this picture with that of today. As beneficiaries of this scientific revolution, school children throughout the world have a more accurate image of the Universe than the most learned scholars of the Ancient, Medieval, and Early Renaissance periods. Consider also the manner in which new information is handled today. Within minutes of its revelation, new information enters the information super highway of the Internet and television and radio broadcasting. Almost instantly it appears in our homes, our offices and every other place where there is a computer monitor or TV set. Reflect for a moment upon the spectacular show from space in July, 1994. Almost simultaneously with the scientific community, hundreds of millions of people in a worldwide audience watched in awe as the Comet P/Shoemaker-Levy 9 crashed onto the surface of Jupiter. This once-in-a-lifetime experience was, in itself, remarkable. What made it even more amazing was that this new information entered the global knowledge base at the same moment it revealed itself to the scientific world.

Contrast the above phenomenon with the Middle Ages, a time during which there was no mechanism for disseminating new, uncensored, and raw information. In a segmented Europe with no public school system, no newspapers or news magazines, no TV satellite stations, there was no means by which new information could enter the knowledge base easily. Controlling nearly all centers of learning as well as all publication during the late Middle Ages, the Church and other privileged groups in society were able to stay in power and resist new ideas that threatened the *status quo*. By 1500, however, a new class of people had emerged. The bourgeoisie, who allied themselves with ambitious monarchs, successfully challenged the power of the old feudal order. Having been the major beneficiaries of Medieval commerce, the bourgeoisie now embraced the Age of Discovery enthusiastically. This was especially true after 1453 when the Byzantine capital of Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks. For the

first time North Italian merchants found themselves excluded from the marketplaces of the Middle East. Their only hope of reacquiring their lost markets was to seek new trade routes around the Muslim-controlled lands.

Great thinkers were not the only ones who questioned the traditional view of the world. For decades, navigators and even illiterate seaman had come to doubt many conclusions of the ancient authorities. As ships returned to their ports from the newly found lands and oceans, a new picture of the world began to emerge. Basing their conclusions on hard core empirical evidence--not on theory, scriptures, tradition, or reputation, these sailors learned not only that there was far more water than land on the face of the Earth but also that the Earth was much larger than hitherto believed. The belief that the Earth was spherical was already widespread.

Though there had been other ages of discovery in the past, the period of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries impacted more profoundly than ever on Europe. Barely 50 years earlier the moveable type printing press had come into use throughout Europe. Though this new invention did allow greater and speedier dissemination of information, often the lack of a popular system of education kept Christian Europe from experiencing full exposure to new information. As late as the middle of the 16th century the lack of literacy also made it difficult for the Europeans to absorb all of the new and exciting information that arrived from around the world. With such alacrity did the new information arrive that the knowledge base was unable to assimilate it all. Furthermore, first impressions made during the exciting and emotional contact period were so deeply engraved in the minds of the Europeans that subsequent more accurate images could not obliterate the earlier ones. In today's terminology, the rudimentary system became overloaded with information.

Looking for "new worlds" was not one of the motivations of the Age of Discovery, but finding new routes to Old World marketplaces was. What a shock it was, therefore, to bump into a hitherto unknown world by accident. Even greater, though, was the shock of finding millions of PEOPLE. By chance the first natives that the Europeans encountered were among some of the most primitive societies in the world. Since all peoples of the world had been accounted for as having descended from the sons of Noah, these natives were considered subhuman. In fact, not until 45 years later did the Vatican under Pope Paul II issued an Papal Encyclical positing that the natives were rational beings with a soul. The 1537 statement explained that the Indians descended from sinful Babylonians who, during the Great Flood, fell off a mountaintop, grabbed onto a tree limb, and floated to the New World.

More than a generation after the initial contact, when the Spaniards encountered the more sophisticated natives of *terra firma*, such as the Mayas, the Aztecs and the Incas, the earlier image of "barbarian" still persisted in their minds. The Europeans simply could not see the true native societies. Or, perhaps the Europeans did not want to see anything more than primitive societies. The European settlers cared little for the indigenous culture and saw only a labor force in the Indian population. Thus, the native cultures-~~as well as the native population~~ began to disappear as the invaders advanced into the hinterland. In what can only be described as one of the greatest Holocausts of all time, disease and other conquest- and invasion-related activities led to the destruction of tens of million of natives. Only today are we realizing the enormity of the loss of people and the inestimable loss of culture.