

■ Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus

Date: 1492–93

Author: Columbus, Christopher

Genre: diary

“He desired that many other prudent and credible witnesses might see it, and he was sure that they would be as unable to exaggerate the scene as he was.”

Summary Overview

On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus and his three ships, the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*, departed from Spain for in search of a new route to the East Indies. Instead of that subcontinent, he came across the Caribbean islands of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Cuba, and the Bahamas. Columbus kept two logs, the more accurate one of which was lost but recreated thanks to historian Bartolomé de las Casas about forty years later. When he returned, Columbus’s accounts of his trip fascinated the Spanish monarchs, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, as well as the rest of Europe. He was quickly called upon to return to the western Atlantic Ocean and continue his exploration of the region.

Defining Moment

During the late fifteenth century, there was increasing dissatisfaction with the fact that travel to and from East Asia and India took a great deal of time. Christopher Columbus, who had spent much of his career sailing up and down the eastern Atlantic Ocean, heard stories from his fellow sailors of a body of land only a few thousand miles west of the Iberian peninsula. Columbus, after conducting a great deal of research, surmised that the region in question must have been East Asia and that, by sailing west instead of east, he might find a much quicker route to trade zones in China and India.

Columbus spent several years attempting to convince the monarchs of Portugal and Italy to give him the money for ships and crew. Only when Columbus

threatened to take his proposal to the French king did Ferdinand and Isabella agree to commission the ships. Columbus and his crews onboard the three ships set sail in August 1491. As the expected deadline for the ships to make landfall came and went, the crew grew impatient with the journey, with calls for a turnaround and return to Spain. Columbus became aware of the discontent and, in addition to his own log, kept a false journal that had shorter distances traveled—this latter journal initially mollified the crew, who were deceived into thinking that they had not traveled very far. Over time, the deception generated more doubt, and the crew all threatened suicide. Columbus addressed this issue by telling his crew that if no land was sighted within three days, the group would turn around. The very next day, the flotilla made landfall in what is now known as the Bahamas.

Columbus and his three ships spent the next few weeks exploring the Bahamas before heading southwest to Cuba. He traveled up and down Cuba’s eastern side before continuing southeast toward Hispaniola. During his travels, he searched for gold and other treasures that he believed to be located in the region, although he was unable to locate any such items. When the *Santa María* ran aground and sank on the northern coast of Hispaniola, Columbus consolidated as many of his crew as possible (leaving thirty-nine on the island) onto the *Niña*, as the captain of the *Pinta* had sailed off to another area. Columbus came across the *Pinta* shortly thereafter (the *Pinta*, captained by Martín Alonso Pinzón, had discovered the sought-for gold nuggets in a river during his

travels), and the two ships returned to Spain. Isabella and Ferdinand were excited at Columbus's successes. They immediately called upon Columbus to return to the region for more exploration.

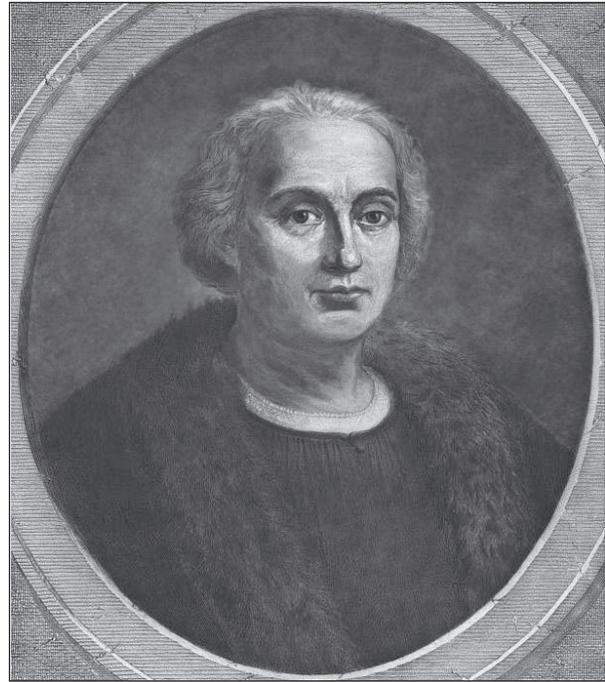
Throughout his travels (and until his death), Columbus believed that he had reached islands near China and India. Others agreed with his views—although he had not discovered America (other parties had achieved that accomplishment many years prior), Columbus was credited with discovering a considerably quicker route to East Asia.

Author Biography

Christopher Columbus was born Cristoforo Colombo in Genoa, Italy, in 1451 to weavers Domenico Colombo and Susanna Fontanarossa. As one of five surviving children in a poor family, he did not obtain a strong education. Very little is known about his early childhood, although at the age of fourteen, young Columbus went to sea, sailing throughout the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic region along trade routes and even to northern Europe and Iceland. Among the jobs he held at sea was that of privateer, attacking ships belonging to the Moors.

In the mid-1470s, Columbus found himself in Lisbon, Portugal, where met up with his brother Bartolomeo, who was a cartographer. The two carefully studied trade routes and developed charts for other mariners. In 1479, Columbus married Felipa Perestrello e Moniz, who bore him a son and heir, Diego, a year later. Columbus and his family moved to Madeira for a brief time, then back to Lisbon, and then on to Spain.

Columbus was greatly inspired by the example set by the Italian merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324), who had first traveled as far as China in the thirteenth century. During the centuries that followed, trade between Europe and East Asia was hampered significantly by the enormous amount of time it took to travel between points. Facilitating the trade in spices and precious metals from East Asia therefore had the potential to be highly lucrative. Shortly after Columbus's wife died in 1485, he developed an interest in exploring alternate, shorter routes to this region. During his time at sea, he had heard tales from other sailors about lands that lay far to the west. No one knew that, heading west, the North American and South American continents lay between Europe and East Asia. Columbus became convinced that these legendary lands must be those of China.



Christopher Columbus. (Library of Congress)

Columbus spent many years attempting to gain support from various European governments for expeditions to China via this western route. The monarchs of Portugal, England, France, and Spain all initially turned him down. Over time, however, Spain developed a rivalry with Portugal, an international competition that Columbus sought to exploit. Enticed by the prospect of riches and besting their rivals, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain reconsidered, granting Columbus's application and helping him develop his expedition. In total, Columbus would voyage to the New World four times, traveling throughout the Caribbean and even coastal South and Central America. During this time, he conquered Hispaniola, setting up a colony there while he continued to explore what he believed to be East Asia.

Columbus would not avoid controversy, as accusations that he mistreated natives living in these areas persisted during his visits. When he returned to Hispaniola for the last time in 1502, he was denied entry to the colony in light of his unpopularity. He returned to Spain in 1504 (shortly before Queen Isabella died) and settled there with his son. He petitioned the king to return but was largely ignored. Columbus took ill shortly thereafter, dying in 1506.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

Monday, 15th of October.

“I had laid by during the night, with the fear of reaching the land to anchor before daylight, not knowing whether the coast was clear of rocks, and at dawn I made sail. As the island was more than 5 leagues distant and nearer 7, and the tide checked my way, it was noon when we arrived at the said island. I found that side facing towards the island of San Salvador trended north and south with a length of 5 leagues, and the other which I followed ran east and west for more than 10 leagues. As from this island I saw another larger one to the west, I clued up the sails, after having run all that day until night, otherwise I could not have reached the western cape. I gave the name of *Santa Maria de la Concepcion* to the island, and almost as the sun set I anchored near the said cape to ascertain if it contained gold. For the people I had taken from the island of San Salvador told me that here they wore very large rings of gold on their arms and legs. I really believed that all they said was nonsense, invented that they might escape. My desire was not to pass any island without taking possession, so that, one having been taken, the same may be said of all. I anchored, and remained until to-day, Tuesday, when I went to the shore with the boats armed, and landed. The people, who were numerous, went naked, and were like those of the other island of San Salvador. They let us go over the island, and gave us what we required. As the wind changed to the S.E., I did not like to stay, and returned to the ship. A large canoe was alongside the *Niña*, and one of the men of the island of San Salvador, who was on board, jumped into the sea and got into the canoe. In the middle of the night before, another swain away behind the canoe, which fled, for there never was boat that could have overtaken her, seeing that in speed they have a great advantage. So they reached the land and left the canoe. Some of my people went on shore in chase of them, but they all fled like fowls, and the canoe they had left was brought alongside the caravel *Niña*, whither, from another direction, another small canoe came, with a man who wished to barter with skeins of cotton. Some sailors jumped into the sea, because he would not come on board the caravel, and seized him. I was on the poop of my ship, and saw

everything. So I sent for the man, gave him a red cap, some small beads of green glass, which I put on his arms, and small bells, which I put in his ears, and ordered his canoe, which was also on board, to be returned to him. I sent him on shore, and presently made sail to go to the other large island which was in sight to the westward. I also ordered the other large canoe, which the caravel *Niña* was towing astern, to be cast adrift; and I soon saw that it reached the land at the same time as the man to whom I had given the above things. I had not wished to take the skein of cotton that he offered me. All the others came round him and seemed astonished, for it appeared clear to them that we were good people. The other man who had fled might do us some harm, because we had carried him off, and for that reason I ordered this man to be set free and gave him the above things, that he might think well of us, otherwise, when your Highnesses again send an expedition, they might not be friendly. All the presents I gave were not worth four maravedis. At 10 we departed with the wind S.W., and made for the south, to reach that other island, which is very large, and respecting which all the men that I bring from San Salvador make signs that there is much gold, and that they wear it as bracelets on the arms, on the legs, in the ears and nose, and round the neck. The distance of this island from that of *Santa Maria* is 9 leagues on a course east to west. All this part of the island trends N.W. and S.E., and it appeared that this coast must have a length of 28 leagues. It is very flat, without any mountain, like San Salvador and *Santa Maria*, all being beach without rocks, except that there are some sunken rocks near the land, whence it is necessary to keep a good look-out when it is desired to anchor, and not to come to very near the land; but the water is always very clear, and the bottom is visible. At a distance of two shots of a lombard, there is, off all these islands, such a depth that the bottom cannot be reached. These islands are very green and fertile, the climate very mild. They may contain many things of which I have no knowledge, for I do not wish to stop, in discovering and visiting many islands, to find gold. These people make signs that it is worn on the arms and legs; and it must be gold, for they point to some pieces that I have. I cannot err, with the help of our Lord, in finding

out where this gold has its origin. Being in the middle of the channel between these two islands, that is to say, that of Santa Maria and this large one, to which I give the name of *Fernandina*, I came upon a man alone in a canoe going from Santa Maria to Fernandina. He had a little of their bread, about the size of a fist, a calabash of water, a piece of brown earth powdered and then kneaded, and some dried leaves, which must be a thing highly valued by them, for they bartered with it at San Salvador. He also had with him a native basket with a string of glass beads, and two *blancas*, by which I knew that he had come from the island of San Salvador, and had been to Santa Maria, and thence to Fernandina. He came alongside the ship, and I made him come on board as he desired, also getting the canoe inboard, and taking care of all his property. I ordered him to be given to eat bread and treacle, and also to drink: and so I shall take him on to Fernandina, where I shall return everything to him, in order that he may give a good account of us, that, our Lord pleasing, when your Highnesses shall send here, those who come may receive honor, and that the natives may give them all they require."

* * *

Tuesday, 27th of November.

Yesterday, at sunset, they arrived near a cape named *Campana* by the Admiral; and, as the sky was clear and the wind light, he did not wish to run in close to the land and anchor, although he had five or six singularly good havens under his lee. The Admiral was attracted on the one hand by the longing and delight he felt to gaze upon the beauty and freshness of those lands, and on the other by a desire to complete the work he had undertaken. For these reasons he remained close hauled, and stood off and on during the night. But, as the currents had set him more than 5 or 6 leagues to the S.E. beyond where he had been at nightfall, passing the land of *Campana*, he came in sight of a great opening beyond that cape, which seemed to divide one land from another, leaving an island between them. He decided to go back, with the wind S.E., steering to the point where the opening had appeared, where he found that it was only a large bay; and at the end of it, on the S.E. side, there was a point of land on which was a

high and square-cut hill, which had looked like an island. A breeze sprang up from the north, and the Admiral continued on a S.E. course, to explore the coast and discover all that was there. Presently he saw, at the foot of the *Cabo de Campana*, a wonderfully good port, and a large river, and, a quarter of a league on, another river, and a third, and a fourth to a seventh at similar distances, from the furthest one to *Cabo de Campana* being 20 miles S.E. Most of these rivers have wide and deep mouths, with excellent havens for large ships, without sandbanks or sunken rocks. Proceeding onwards from the last of these rivers, on a S.E. course, they came to the largest inhabited place they had yet seen, and a vast concourse of people came down to the beach with loud shouts, all naked, with their darts in their hands. The Admiral desired to have speech with them, so he furled sails and anchored. The boats of the ship and the caravel were sent on shore, with orders to do no harm whatever to the Indians, but to give them presents. The Indians made as if they would resist the landing, but, seeing that the boats of the Spaniards continued to advance without fear, they retired from the beach. Thinking that they would not be terrified if only two or three landed, three Christians were put on shore, who told them not to be afraid, in their own language, for they had been able to learn a little from the natives who were on board. But all ran away, neither great nor small remaining. The Christians went to the houses, which were of straw, and built like the others they had seen, but found no one in any of them. They returned to the ships, and made sail at noon in the direction of a fine cape to the eastward, about 8 leagues distant. Having gone about half a league, the Admiral saw, on the south side of the same bay, a very remarkable harbour, and to the S.E. some wonderfully beautiful country like a valley among the mountains, whence much smoke arose, indicating a large population, with signs of much cultivation. So he resolved to stop at this port, and see if he could have any speech or intercourse with the inhabitants. It was so that, if the Admiral had praised the other havens, he must praise this still more for its lands, climate, and people. He tells marvels of the beauty of the country and of the trees, there being palms and pine trees; and also of the great valley, which is not flat, but diversified by hill and dale, the most lovely scene in the world. Many streams flow from it, which fall from the mountains.

As soon as the ship was at anchor the Admiral jumped into the boat, to get soundings in the port, which is the shape of a hammer. When he was facing the entrance he found the mouth of a river on the south side of sufficient width for a galley to enter it, but so concealed that it is not visible until close to. Entering it for the length of the boat, there was a depth of from 5 to 8 fathoms. In passing up it the freshness and beauty of the trees, the clearness of the water, and the birds, made it all so delightful that

he wished never to leave them. He said to the men who were with him that to give a true relation to the Sovereigns of the things they had seen, a thousand tongues would not suffice, nor his hand to write it, for that it was like a scene of enchantment. He desired that many other prudent and credible witnesses might see it, and he was sure that they would be as unable to exaggerate the scene as he was.

GLOSSARY

blanca: copper coin from Spain

caravel: a small, fast Spanish or Portuguese sailing vessel

league: historical unit of distance estimated to be about 3 to 3.6 miles

lombard: a type of cannon used in the fifteenth century

maravedi: any type of minor Spanish copper coins used between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries

skein: a length of loosely coiled yarn or string

Document Analysis

The *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus*, quoted by Columbus to Bartolomé de las Casas, is occasionally written in the third person, with Columbus referring to himself as the Admiral. Columbus's original journal was lost after his expedition, but he quoted it to de las Casas in the hope that it would be retained for the king and queen of Spain.

The journal begins after he departed southern Spanish port city of Palos on August 3, 1492. Columbus had three ships for his journey. The *Santa María* was a *nao*, a large cargo ship, captained by Columbus himself. This ship was wide and, by Columbus's account, difficult to maneuver, especially when used for exploration purposes. The *Pinta* and *Niña*, on the other hand, were caravels, which were smaller and faster ships that were also known for their durability.

The *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa María* made a port of call in the Canary Islands, the Spanish island chain located to the west of Morocco. There, Columbus made some modifications to the *Niña* and made modifications to the other ships as well. However, poor weather and de-

layed repairs kept the ships in the Canary Islands for four weeks.

The delays in departure from the Canaries, along with the long trip across the Atlantic, caused grumbling among the crew about the desire to return to Spain. Columbus offered the crew a deal—if no land was sighted in three days, they would return. However, on the second day, land was spotted. It is believed that Columbus made his first landfall in the Caribbean two months after leaving Palos, most likely arriving in what is now Samana Cay, located in the Bahamas.

Columbus mistakenly believed that he had arrived at his ultimate destination, China. He speculated that the islands he visited were in fact islands off the Indian coast. On a number of occasions, he even sent representatives ashore to make contact with the Chinese emperor. His ongoing misunderstanding (which he maintained until his death) explained his desire to locate gold, spices, and other valuable commodities to bring back to Ferdinand and Isabella. It also clarified his careful examination of the bays, river tributaries, and other areas where Spanish ships could make port to trade.

According to the journal, Columbus, who had christened the area San Salvador, used this region as a base of operations. He and his men had taken natives from that area to serve as guides for the surrounding islands. As he established his base of operations at San Salvador, he wrote, he noticed an abundance of other islands within manageable distance.

One island, which he named Santa María de la Concepción, drew his interest, as he believed there to be gold deposits there. His suspicions were strengthened by claims by his guides (local Arawaks whom he had captured to show them the region) that people on the island wore large gold jewelry. Columbus was skeptical of the guides' claims, however, because in his view, it was possible that the guides might be telling him falsehoods in order to escape their servitude.

Columbus continued to state that his goal for the region was to take control of each island at which he dropped anchor. His rationale was simple: If he was going to conquer one of these islands, he would consequently need to conquer all of them. In light of this goal, he and his men made landfall at each island fully armed and, where necessary, ready to engage the natives there. Columbus understood that it was important to establish a strong Spanish presence in the region (which he assumed was East Asia), as his newly discovered route would undoubtedly draw expeditions from rival European nations.

Although Columbus was searching for valuable commodities to bring back with him to Spain, he also saw the value of the human capital he encountered on each island. The Arawaks were a gentle people not given to violent confrontations; Columbus reasoned that they would be easily conquered in the name of Spain. Many historians argue that the relative ease by which Columbus believed these peoples could be conquered inspired him to see another value for Spanish settlement in the region. Columbus is said to have presented the idea to Queen Isabella for the Spanish to develop a slave market from this indigenous population. Isabella considered the proposal but, to Columbus's disappointment, ultimately decided against his idea.

The Arawaks were not entirely submissive to Columbus's efforts to take advantage of their pacific ways, either. He reported in his journal that several of his captive guides jumped over the side of the *Niña* and escaped in a large canoe that had been pulled alongside the boat. Columbus's men gave chase but were unable to recapture the guides.

Columbus recalled in his journal that, shortly after the escape, another Arawak pulled his large canoe alongside the *Niña*. This individual was looking to trade cotton and did not appear to be as untrusting as some of his fellow Arawaks. Rewarding this man's trust, Columbus gave him some small trinkets. Columbus then allowed the would-be trader to leave the boat a free man, so that the Arawak man could return to his people and spread the word about the benevolence of Columbus and his fellow explorers.

Columbus's actions toward the cotton trader was, in his own estimation, a gesture of goodwill designed to undo any efforts by the escaped guides to form a rebellion against the Spaniards. He added in his journal that it was his hope that, when Isabella and Ferdinand sent future expeditions to San Salvador, they would be greeted warmly by the natives there.

From San Salvador and Santa Maria, Columbus proceeded west toward another large island. This island, he concluded, might have large gold deposits, as the natives coming from this region wore a wide range of gold jewelry. After a short cruise of nine leagues (some thirty miles), Columbus gave careful study of the island he would dub Fernandina after his king. This island was not like the other Bahaman islands he had visited—it had a much flatter terrain with lush, green trees and grass. There were also many broken rocks off the coastline, but the clear water made it relatively easy for the *Niña* to avoid running aground.

Columbus was fascinated by the climate and sights of San Salvador, Santa Maria, and Fernandina, but because his primary focus was on finding gold, he could not stay at one island for very long. To help in his pursuit, Columbus enlisted the help of another native whom he met while traveling in the channel between Santa María and Fernandina. Columbus noticed that he had a number of items, including dried leaves—which Columbus believed were used for bartering purposes. Columbus further observed that the man was carrying two Spanish copper coins known as *blancas*. Columbus concluded that the man was from San Salvador, where he had been trading with the Spanish.

Again, Columbus reported that he and his crew treated the man with great respect and care, bringing him aboard, providing him food and drink and carefully storing the canoe until the man wished to leave. He made clear to Isabella and Ferdinand, whom he knew would read the journal upon his return to Spain, that he

took great pains to create a positive image of the Spanish among the natives in the region.

As suggested earlier, Columbus's friendly and altruistic approach to the people to whom he mistakenly referred as Indians (in light of the confusion regarding their geographic location), as reported in his journal, has been called into question. In particular, Columbus has since come to be known among many modern societies as culpable for the enslavement and near eradication of the natives when he returned to the region as Spain's viceroy and governor of those islands. Then again, Columbus's role in the enormous number of native deaths that occurred in the years that followed his 1492 arrival—including the number of those who died at the hands of Columbus and his men and those who were killed by disease—remains an important historical topic for debate regarding his subsequent trips to the area. It is possible that, although he and his men admitted to taking natives forcefully to serve as guides, he still believed it to be more important to create a positive reputation among them. Such an attitude aided him during his exploration in 1492 and, as stated in his journal, likely made it possible for more explorers and traders to arrive in this region.

By late November 1492, Columbus followed his pursuit of gold by sailing to what is now Cuba. He traveled along the Cuban coast, proceeding as far north along the eastern shore as far as what is now Point Mulas, a region to which he referred in his journal as Campana. Columbus was captivated by the beauty of the Cuban coastline. However, he was also inspired to continue his work, which meant locating gold and other commodities, as well as making contact with the Chinese leadership. To both ends, he continued to sail close to the shore, occasionally traveling into inlets and bays. He observed a number of sites Spain could one day develop into ports, including several large bays and four river inlets. In each of these areas, the waters were deep enough for a large ship to enter and drop anchor without fear of hitting rocks in the shallows.

As Columbus's ships proceeded down the coast of Cuba, which he had dubbed Juana, the *Pinta* veered away from the *Niña* and the *Santa María*. It is believed that the *Pinta*, captained by Martín Alonso Pinzón, broke away from the other two ships after the three veered out to sea near the southeastern tip of Cuba. Whereas the *Niña*, captained by Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, Martín Alonso Pinzón's younger brother, and *Santa María* returned to the coastline, Pinzón (much to the

consternation of Columbus) sailed to the northeast in search of an island known as either Babeque or Baneque. This island, according to Pinzón's guides, had large gold deposits on it. As Pinzón sailed away, Columbus was left with two ships.

Proceeding southeast from the fourth river mouth, which he named Rio San Salvador, Columbus eventually came across a large village along the shore. Columbus provided a detailed review of his encounter with the natives there. As the ship approached, Columbus saw a large throng of unclothed people rushing to the shoreline with poison darts, shouting in a threatening manner. Columbus was unfazed by their defensiveness, ordering that the sails be furled and the anchor dropped. As the ship's boats were lowered, Columbus gave explicit instructions that the men were not to harm the natives in any way. Rather, he instructed his crew to bring gifts to the villagers.

The natives, who had assumed a defensive posture, observed that the Spanish crew nevertheless continued to approach the shore fearlessly, and they quickly retreated from the shore. Columbus suggested that, rather than send a large group of men after them, only a handful of Christians should try to make contact. These "emissaries" were even able to speak some of the natives' tongue, having learned it from the guides they obtained in San Salvador. However, when the group arrived in the village, there was not a single native left. Columbus decided to leave the evacuated community and continue his expedition in a southeasterly direction.

Columbus continued to marvel at the sights of the Cuban coastline. He observed the natural beauty of the mountains, valleys, and clear waters. During the excursion, he observed from the ship's deck another large native village. He wished again to make contact with these natives but could not. However, he was able to find further natural features that would be conducive to the establishment of one or more ports, including a small river mouth that could easily conceal a ship.

From Cuba, the *Niña* and the *Santa María* traveled a short distance around the southern tip of Cuba before sailing north again and across a short inlet that led to what is now known as Hispaniola (to which Columbus referred as La Española). On Christmas Eve 1492, the *Santa María* ran aground on a reef in northwest Hispaniola. The ship was wrecked and sank on Christmas Day. Columbus and his crew used the ship's wreckage to build a fort, dubbed La Navidad (Christmas) on the

shoreline. The men of the *Santa María* could not all fit on board the *Niña*, so about forty of them stayed at the fort while Columbus and the *Niña* sailed onward along the northern coast of Hispaniola.

On January 6, the *Niña* encountered the *Pinta*, having returned from its tangential course. The reacquisition of the *Pinta* was a great relief to Columbus—not only did he have a second ship to lessen the load of the overcrowded *Niña*—Pinzón had also found gold nuggets in a riverbed during his travels. Columbus and the remaining two ships began their return home on January 16, 1493, leaving from the Golfo de las Flechas (now Samana Bay in the northwestern Dominican Republic). The ships traveled along the Gulf Stream toward the northern Atlantic and Europe. Despite being separated in a severe storm, the two ships reconnected and returned to port at Palos, Spain, on March 15, 1493.

As Columbus traveled from San Salvador to Cuba and down to Hispaniola during his first voyage, he was often taken aback by the natural beauty of the region's waterways, landscapes, flora, and fauna. According to the journal of his expedition, he told his men that what they saw simply could not be described to anyone, even to the king and queen, in such a way that would do it justice. Then again, Columbus took pride in the fact that, by being the first European to visit this “enchanted” region, he was making it possible for others to follow in his footsteps and witness these amazing sights for themselves.

Columbus returned to Spain with very few of the valuables he promised to bring to the king and queen. However, his journal, describing the wealth, human capital, and usable port space, provided enough information for the sovereigns to return Columbus promptly to “East Asia.” By his accounts, the first voyage to the area encountered numerous issues, including the destruction of his flagship. Then again, the sights and experiences Columbus reported in his journal helped launch countless other expeditions from Europe to the New World.

Essential Themes

Christopher Columbus's first exploratory voyage to what he believed to be East Asia was not without many setbacks. The *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa María* were held up for an unexpectedly long period in the Canary Islands. The crews of the three ships nearly mutinied two days before arriving in the Caribbean. The *Pinta* sailed off on her own for a long period. The *Santa María* ran

aground. A number of storms further delayed exploration. Interactions with the natives were frequently strained. Finally, Columbus did not return with a hold filled with a large amount of gold or other commodities.

Nevertheless, Columbus's journal told the story of an amazing journey. According to Columbus, the islands near China were lush and fertile, holding great promise for settlement by Spain. Columbus arrived with the expressed desire to claim all land and peoples in the name of his country, and he set about doing so with very little resistance. To Columbus, this region should be visited again soon.

In this regard, Columbus presented the *Journal of the First Voyage of Columbus in 1492* with great optimism. This attitude would prove useful for the king and queen, who were so inspired by Columbus's account that they sent him back to the area almost immediately upon reading the journal. He provided details about the best places at which ships may make berth. As shown in his account, Columbus already opened the door for trade, particularly at San Salvador, as the natives there demonstrated a great willingness to barter with the newcomers.

Columbus also made repeated reference to the positive manner in which he and his shipmates treated the natives. In the journal, he commented on the relative ease by which the natives could be captured (including examples of their kidnapping of guides). Columbus also referenced the negative experiences he had with natives who did not wish to be his guides. After the San Salvador incident in which kidnapped guides jumped over the side of the *Niña* to escape servitude, Columbus reported that he and his crew showed the natives that they meant no harm to the region's indigenous population.

Christopher Columbus's legacy has been tarnished by an ongoing historical debate regarding his treatment of the natives. However, Columbus's account of the first voyage presented a theme of discovery and diplomacy (even though Columbus looked to claim the entire region in the name of Spain). Although he did not knowingly reach China, India, and Japan as planned, he nevertheless discovered a new world, one that countless others, who were inspired by his account, sought to visit.

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