Indians in Cuba

By José Barreiro, in *Cultural Survival Quarterly,* vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 56-60 (1989)

Punta Maisi, Cuba

The old Indian woman, a descendant of Cuba's Taino-Arawak people, bent over and touched the leaves of a small tree. Her open-palmed hand lifted the round, green leaves in a light handshake. "These are good for inflammations of the ovaries," she said. "I gave them to all my young women." "She knows a lot," her daughter. Marta, said. "She doesn't need a pharmacy. You have something wrong with your body, she can make you a tea - *un cocimiento* - and fix you up.

The mother and two sisters, part of a large extended family known in this town for its Indian ancestry, continued to show me their patio. Around an old well, where they wash their laundry, they pointed out more than a dozen herbs and other useful plants. The Cobas Hernandez clan, from which Maria and her several daughters, her son, Pedro, and his brothers spring, counts several living generations of families from here to the city of Baracoa, about 12O km west from Los Arados on Cuba's southern coast. They are not the only such extended family and they are not the only people of clear Indian ancestry in Cuba still living in their aboriginal areas.

It may surprise many social scientists that nestled in the mountains of the Oriente region (eastern Cuba), from Baracoa on the southern coast all the way to the Pico Turquino, the highest mountain in Cuba, there are numerous *caserios,* several *barrios,* and at least one community of more than a thousand Indian people. They were called *Cubeños* by Father Bartolome de Las Casas, who helped some of their communities to survive, and are ancestors of the original Tainos who met Columbus.

In March and April 1989, I traveled to Santiago de Cuba to attend a conference, "Seeds of Commerce, mutually sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and a Cuban research center, the Casa del Caribe. I took the opportunity to extend my visit for two weeks, first in the Baracoa-Punta Maisi region and then west to the plains country of Camaguey. I wanted to ascertain the veracity of testimonies that I had heard as a child and that have been recently published in Cuban academic journals, to the effect that Taino-Arawak descendants inhabit the eastern region of Cuba. I wanted to reacquaint myself with the people of *guajiro* background still prevalent in the Camaguey countryside.

I heard about the Indian families of Baracoa while I was growing up in the Camaguey region, some 300 km to the northeast of Baracoa, during the 1950s, before I migrated to the United States at age 12.

Among my elder relatives, don Joseito Veloz (born 1891) migrated to Camaguey from the vicinity of the oriental mountain city of Bayamo. Don Joseito told stories about the old communities in and near Baracoa. He was himself what is called in Camaguey a "guajiro," and one who pointed out the Indian origins of many of his customs and lifeways: the thatch-roof *bohio* made out of the royal palm so abundant in Cuba; and his *yucca* field and his custom of eating the yucca bread, casabe, and the traditional Taino soup, called the *ajiaco.* Guajiro identity, customs, and lifestyle still prevail throughout the Camaguey region.[1]

More recently, after writing for some years on diverse Indian cultures, indigenous development, agriculture, and human rights issues, I noticed several articles in the Cuban press detailing studies carried

out among the Indian descendants in the Baracoa region. The studies were carried out by investigators from the University of Havana, in cooperation with scientists from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union.

Rivero de la Calle Study

At the University of Havana, I met the chief investigator of those studies, Manuel Rivero de la Calle, a gentle, soft-spoken scholar who is dean of Cuban anthropology. He started work in the Oriente area in the mid-1960s, leading a team that for several years conducted studies in physical and biological anthropology with an extended "base" population in the Yateras municipality of the new province of Guantánamo, not far from Baracoa.

Rivero's biological study, conducted in two stages - 1964 and 1972-1973 - focused exclusively on certifying racial composition on a sample of 300 people of Indian origin in the Yateras municipality. His methodology included anthropometric measurements and somastopic observations (following the International Biologic Program), serulogic characteristics, and family genealogies.

The methodology of "physical anthropology," which uses anthropometric measurements, is considered antiquated by North American scholars and insulting by many Indians. Nevertheless, it proves fruitful in initially identifying the effusive Cuban indigenous population.

Rivero's conclusions challenged official academic and sociological positions in Cuba - positions accepted by the international academy - that the Indian population of Cuba was totally extinguished by 1550. Indeed, the scientists found that at least 1,000 people conforming to physical characteristics associated with the Arawak branch of Amazonian Indian peoples live in Yateras alone. The studies assert what oral and written historical sources have also attested: the Yateras Indians are a core group in a larger pattern of extended families and communities of similar Indian origin, now increasingly intermarried with other Cubans of Iberian and African ancestry.

Historical References

The existence of an Indian population and identity in Cuba was vehemently denied for most of the twentieth century, primarily by the Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz. A liberal professor of Hispanic ancestry, Ortiz saw the question of Indian identity as a ploy by the right wing to obfuscate black issues. Deeply conversant in all the social sciences, Ortiz was limited by a Havana base and by a purist, "bell jar" anthropological perspective of Indian-ness. This perspective maintains that American Indians cease to be "real" Indians as they adapt Western tools and methods. Indian "cultures" are assumed frozen at the moment of contact with "the West." Although he framed the theme of "transculturation" in Cuban letters.

Ortiz provided the tree of Cuban multiethnicity with a strictly Ibero-African trunk. The assertion became that all Cuban Indians, purportedly a weak and timid people, were exterminated by 1550.

Nevertheless, the historic and ethnographic record supports the Indian presence in eastern Cuba - the existence of its actual population of descendants and its cultural extensions. Both Rivero and Antonio Nunez Jimenez, a prominent Cuban naturalist - and other historical references - confirm the existence of dozens of Indian family nuclei (caserios) in the extended region of Oriente, from Baracoa to Punta Maisi, to the Sierra Maestra and the Pico Turquino. In the absence of a proper census, it is hard to hazard a guess as to the total population of Indian descendants in the general Oriente area, but it probably comes to several thousand people.

Miguel Rodriguez Ferrer, a Spanish scientist who visited the area in 1847, wrote in the 1870s about finding Indian communities at El Caney, in Jiguani, and on the banks of the Yumuri River (Baracoa). He wrote that the people lived in bohios, and "gifted me with a dance" - possibly an *Areito*, the round dance of the Tainos - during which they recited cosmologies.

Jose Marti, the poet and revolutionary apostle of Cuban independence, traveled in the area in his final days, camping with Indian families. His diary entries just prior to his death in a Spanish ambush in May 1895 describe the *"indios de Garrido,"* direct ancestors of the Yateras families. Marti wondered at reports that some Indians were scouting for the Spanish troops against the insurrectionists. In a letter of 23 June 1895, possibly in answer to Marti's inquiry. another major historical figure, General Antonio Maceo, who commanded troops in the area, commented that the "Indians of Yateras" had now passed into the Cuban insurrectionary ranks (Marti 1964).

A French doctor and anthropologist, Henri Dumont, who for decades lived in the eastern sugar plantations and provided care for black slaves, wrote in 1922 about the existence of Indians in the interior provinces of Cuba - "but where they abound with most frequency is in the eastern department" (Dumont 1922). The Cuban historian Felipe Pichardo Moya wrote in 1945 that during the 1840s Indians in El Caney, near Santiago, could muster "several hundred pure-blood warriors." In March 1845, Remigio Torres, a "pure-blood Indian" clerk of the municipality, claimed lands for the Indian population of the "many Indians in the extended semi-circle from the Paso de Ia Virgen to the foothills of the Sierra de Limones." As proof of cultural continuity, the Indian clerk asserted that every Sunday Indian people held their original dances. In 1849, the same clerk, still arguing Indian land rights, told a meeting of the Cabildo: "You know that it is very rare for a natural of the People to mix his Indian blood with that of the Spanish, and insofar as marriage with the people of color, this was never permitted to them as per arrangement with the sovereign dispositions." As late as 1936, an official Cuban map of Oriente Province showed Indian reser- vations at Tiguabos (between Baracoa and Santiago) and at Palenque (Moya 1945).

Oral history of Yateras Indians corroborates court records indicating that the Indian caserios at Tiguabos and Palenque and Indian settlements in the San Andres valley were dispossessed, farm by farm, during the nineteenth century. Those Indian populations, many with the family names of Rojas and Ramirez, resettled in the more remote valley of Yateras and formed a community called Caridad de los Indios. All

along that valley of the Rio Toa and down to Baracoa and Yumuri, and along the coast to Los Arados, in Punta Maisi, the families of Rojas and Ramirez, as well as the Romeros, the Cobas, the Riveros, many of the Jimenez, Hernandez, Veloz, and Cabrera, retain history, identity, and customs rooted in the Cuban Arawak traditions, the old Taino homeland.2

Among the People

Alejandro Hartmann, the *criollo* historian of Baracoa. accompanied me in my initial rounds in the area. A good citizen and a critical thinker, Hartmann heads the restoration of Baracoa, the first colonial village founded in Cuba (1511). He pointed out that as late as 1561, Baracoa's actual population was made up of three Spanish and more than fifty Taino homesteads, A native Baracoan of German ancestry, Hartmann marveled at the fuss about the Indian presence in the area, He pointed out that until the 1900s the region was relatively unpopulated by Europeans and Africans. "Of course, the Indian presence is all around us," he said. "I know many families who are clearly Indian."

Hartmann pointed out that "from Baracoa to Punta Maisi, the people use more Taino words than anywhere else in Cuba."3 He introduced me to several households in Baracoa, Guirito, and Yumuri, where I conducted interviews. One early morning we took the coastal road to Punta Maisi (*maisi* is the Taino word for "maize"), where we met Pedro Hernandez's family at Los Arados.

"Here I can say, our Indian people, we have been like a fish in a cooler, our eyes wide open but not seeing," Pedro Hernandez Cobas said. His sisters and mother had brought us into the living room of the family's wood-frame, thatch-roofed house. His mother and sisters nodded when he said, "We have always been Indians. Our family, and there are many other families just here in Los Arados, this is our ancestry. But I must tell you, it is only in recent years that we discuss it openly with other people."

Hernandez, curator of a small museum at Los Arados, is in his thirties and is a militant of the Cuban Communist Party. He greatly admires Fidel Castro and particularly the late revolutionary commander, Camilo Cienfuegos. However, his professed passion is learning about his Indian past. Hernandez worked with Rivero's team during their study at Yateras. "There are a lot of Indian families there," he said. "But for a long time, we have been isolated from each other. It has been good for us that other people pay attention now.

I took a ride with Hernandez to the lighthouse at Punta Maisi, easternmost point in Cuba, 50 miles across the Windward Channel from Haiti. Along the way we stopped several times to visit with other Indians walking along the road. Two young women, from another Indian family, were walking to town to get milk. They agreed to be photographed and told us that their father had been a guide to Cuban ex- plorer Nunez Jimenez during his expeditions in the area in the 1950s. Their grandfather, they said, guided the North American archaeologist Mark Harrington at the turn of the century.

The women's features had been measured for a study in 1964, and they joked about having high cheekbones when I went to photograph them. One mimicked how the investigators had marveled at their straight, black hair. As we drove away, Hernandez apologized for their grandfather guide, whom he "respected" but whose knowledgeable eye had led Harrington to valuable Indian pieces hidden and carved in caves. That Harrington took many Indian pieces from here to New York. He even sawed off a stalagmite statue and carted it away," he said.

Over several days, often with Hartmann, I visited and interviewed 14 members of five extended families claiming a Cuban Indian ethnicity. Besides Punta Maisi and Los Arados, people received me along the Rio Toa valley north of Baracoa, along the banks of the Yumuri, east of the city, and in a barrio of Baracoa itself. To the unpracticed eye, but for their looks, many of my interviewees appeared much like other Cuban campesinos. Among all of them I found a casual sense of Indian identity, and most retained important aspects of physical and spiritual culture.

On the way from Baracoa to Punta Maisi, we stopped at a guajiro cemetery near the coast. An indigenous touch: many of the simple graves were covered by small, thatch "houses" and surrounded by large sea shells. The shells (*Strombus gigas Linneo*), known in the area by their Taino name, *guamo,* are believed to protect the deceased from bothersome spirits; guajiro families still use them to call one another across remote valleys.

One evening in Baracoa, I witnessed a communal dance, kept alive by only one Indian caserio at Guirito. The dance, called *quiriba,* has been passed down the generations by several related families. The quiriba certainly has French elements to it (many French people settled in the general region of Oriente after the black revolution in Haiti in the mid-1800s), but is significantly unique in that it has survived within an Indian community.

All the agriculturalists confirmed, with great certainty, the practice of planting root crops by the waning moon (*luna menquante*). The assertion is that both yucca and *boniato* (a native sweet potato) will "rot early" (*se pica temprano*) if not planted by the waning moon. In cutting wood, too, local guajiros argue that it will rot faster if cut in the full or ascending moons. One old man near the banks of the Rio Toa spoke of fishing by the moon for a fish called the *teti,* which is scarce at other times.

At Los Arados, I also visited an elementary school; the principal asked the Indian children to gather, and about 25 students quickly surrounded us. Some were more reticent than others, but all affirmed their Indian background. Many of their names corresponded to the family names identified with Indian-ness.

My questions concentrated on a person's basis or rationale for claiming an Indian identity. All pointed to family history: "We are an Indian family. It has been always that way." "We do Indian things, like my mother, she drinks from a *jicara,* nothing else, she won't use a glass or a cup." "We know the wilderness [*manigua*]."

Going toward the Punta Maisi lighthouse, I asked Hartmann about the reluctance of some Cuban

academics to accept the Indian identity in this area of Cuba. He responded, "Well, even Rivero, he refuses to say the people here are Indians - he defines them as 'descendants' of Indians. It is common to say that there are no Indians left in Cuba."

"But I am here," Pedro Hernandez said from the back seat. "Indians or descendants, it's the same thing. They, the old Tainos, were here. Now, we, my generation, we are here. We don't live exactly like they did, but we are still here."

Not only Hernandez, but everyone interviewed expressed interest in a conference or congress of Indian families. The idea that people with Indian backgrounds and identity could meet and exchange oral histories and natural knowledge was appealing to everyone I interviewed. Several people had heard about the Columbus Quincentenary, coming up in 1992, and expressed interest in some kind of event to observe the occasion. Since the aboriginal ancestors of this region, the Taino, were the first American Indians to greet Columbus, the idea seemed pertinent.

The Legend of Yumuri

At Guirito, I talked with Dora Romero Palmero, 78; her son, Pedro Cobas Romero, 53; and her daughter, Mirta, 48. Grandmother Dora, as with Maria Cobas Hernandez in Los Arados, had been a midwife and was still a well-known herbalist. Dora Romero, from an Indian family, had earlier married a Cobas. Her son, Pedro Cobas Romero, was a cousin to Pedro Hernandez Cobas from Los Arados - yet the two had never met.

Pedro Cobas said, "Our people have suffered a lot. I myself went to work as a boy of six, picking coffee. That was the time you started work then. The adults in our families recognized each other as Indian, but we children were directed not to talk about it.

He retold a legend about the promontory at the mouth of the Yumuri, a river that flows into the Atlantic not far from Guirito. It is said that during the Spanish conquest the Indian families who could not escape enslavement by the *conquistadors* climbed the mountain and cursed their pursuers. Entire families committed suicide by jumping. "How horrible that was," Hartmann commented. "But it is understandable, a proper thing," Cobas responded. "The conquistadors treated them so bad in the mines and the fields. After they had lost in combat, this was their only way left to defeat the Spanish, by killing themselves. That way they could not be humiliated. And they died with their dignity."

Cobas also retold the stories of Hatuey and Guama, two Taino *caciques* who led the wars against the early Spanish conquest. "Hatuey was from what is now Haiti, but Guama was a cacique here. Hatuey crossed over to warn Guama and other chiefs about the evil of the Spanish, what they had done to the Tainos on that island. They say Hatuey brought a basket of gold in his canoe and told our people this gold was the only god the Spanish adored."

Both Hatuey and Guama were killed. but not before leading a 10-year resistance to the conquest. Other uprisings occurred in the area into the late 1500s. "They say a Spanish friar wanted to baptize Hatuey as the soldiers got ready to burn him at the stake," Cobas said. "He informed Hatuey that if baptized as a Christian, he would go to Heaven; but Hatuey, who despised the Christians, refused the baptism. He preferred to go to hell, he said."

The Way of the Yerbas

Three older women, all grandmothers of extended families, discussed herbal traditions with me. "Green medicine," as their traditional knowledge is now called in Cuba, is of great interest to the government, which is presently testing herbal substances in medical laboratories in Santiago and Havana.

The tropical fecundity of the region generates a lush plant life, much of which is named with Indian words. The grandmothers. were slow at first to reveal their knowledge, but warmed to the subject as we established mutual respect. Walking with Dora Romern around her bohio in Guirito, I noted what I could as she pointed out small herbs and specific trees with medicinal properties. With each plant, she explained when and how to pick it, and what part of the plant to use and how to use it. No longer an active midwife (government doctors, who provide free medical care even in these remote parts, have pushed aside the traditional midwifery), Romero claims to have delivered more than 200 infants in her time, mostly cousins, daughters, and granddaughters of her extended family. I asked both Romero and Aleida Hernandez about the source of their herbal traditions. "From my mother," Romero said. "From the grand-mothers," Hernandez responded. It was Hernandez, too, in Los Arados, who first pointed out the wild tobacco plant growing on a trail behind her house.

The tobacco was most important to me, in that it is a peculiarly American plant, used by many Indian people in spiritual ceremonies. I asked her if she used the tobacco in any way.

She looked away. "My father smoked tobacco," she said. "He liked the cigar" (*el tabaco*).

I said, "Not just to smoke, like anybody does. Many people smoke tabacos in Cuba. But the tobacco plant itself, do you use it as a connection?"

"For the collection of the little leaves from the plants," she said quickly.

"Yes?"

"An offering," she said (*una ofrenda*). "To the mother plant. We give her the little seeds of the tabaco.~'

"So. you offer it to the plant or herb you are going to pick?"

"Yes, that is to ask the permission," she said. "So the *cocimiento* does you good."

These responses indicated the perpetuation of a rather ancient indigenous practice of the Western Hemisphere: the use of tobacco, leaf, seed, as a communication to spirit beings or the Creator. Often the tobacco is burnt or is left, wrapped in small bundles, in designated places. In Aleida Cobas' case, it was a "leaving" of small tobacco seeds to the mother" plant. The grandmother asserted that the "plants know" and can "help you or hurt you," depending on how you approach them.

Later, with Dora Romero at Guirito, and in yet another instance, with the old couple by the Rio Toa, both Hartmann and I would hear of a similar use of tobacco as a spiritual gift to the medicinal plants.

Future Work

A relatively short visit yielded good preliminary information for the continuing study of Cuban aboriginal customs still vital among a widespread, genealogically continuous population of Taino-Arawak ancestry. A contemporary people, counting many small agriculturalists among them and with valuable knowledge of tropical flora and fauna, the Indo-Cuban families of eastern Oriente are descendants of the first American indigenous people to greet Columbus.

José Barreiro is editor-in-chief of ***Northeast Indian Quarterly*** *at Cornell University.*

Notes

1. Joseiio Veloz. interviews with the author. 1983, 1989. Camaguey is an agricultural region. Many of the traditions of the guajiro country culture in Camaguey are quite similar to those found in the Baracoa area. The term *guajiro* is synonymous in Cuba with *campesino* or countryman-peasant. There are contending schools of thought on the etymology of the word, but everyone agrees it is deeply rooted. Caribbean scholar Jose Juan Arrom gives it a Taino etymology. meaning "one of us." It would have been the term applied to the new mestizo generation by the Taino elders. Some scholars, including Fernando Ortiz. point to a Vucatec, Carib. or Colombian coastal origin for the term, though all concur that *guajiro* describes what is most autochthonous in the increasingly transculturated Cuban identity. Return.
2. As recently as 18 June 1989 ("Indians of Cuba." *Granma Newspaper*), a Cuban historian. Marta Rey, asserted that the Indian families are limited to two families. the Rojas and the Ramirez. She is in error. Rey proclaims the Indian families are too racially mixed to be called Indians. and states. with unwarranted rigidity. "There are no absolutely legitimate Indians left in our country. Return.

3. Havana linguistics professor Sergio Valdes Bernal later pointed out about 200 active words of Arawak origin in the fauna, flora, and topography of the region. Arrom, in conversation with the author, thought Valdes' estimate conservative. See "Indoamericanismos no aruacos en el espanol de Cuba," by Sergio Valdes Bernal, in *Ciencias Sociales* (Havana. 1978). and "Aportes antillanos a espanol de America," by Jose J. Arrom, in *Areito* 7 (27). Return.

References

Dumont H.
1922 *Antropologia y patologia camparadas de los negros esclavor*. I. Castellanos, trans. Colleccion Cubana de libros y documentos ineditos o raros. Vol. 2. Havana.

Dunn. 0. and J.E. Kelley, Jr.
1989 *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492-1493.* Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press.

Marti, J.
1964 *Obras completas: Viajes. diarios. cronicas. jiucios. notas.* Tomo 19. Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba.

Moya. F.P.
1945 *Los Indios de Cuba en sus tiempos historicos.* Havana: Imprenta "Editorial Siglo XX."

Nunez Jimenez, A.
1963 *Geografia de Cuba.* 3d ed. Havana: Editors Pedagogica.

Rivero de la Calle, M.
1966 *Las culturas aborigenes de Cuba.* Havana. Editora Universitaria.
1978 *Cuba arqueologica.* Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente.

Rodriguez Ferrer. M.
1876 *Naturaleza y civilizacion de la grandiosa isla de Cuba.* Tomo 1. Madrid: Imprenta de J. Noguera.

Tejedor, 0.
1987 Have Cuban Aborigines Really Disappeared? *Granma.* 24 May.

Documents menu

From TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU Wed Feb 7 07:58:57 2001
Date: Wed, 7 Feb 2001 00:42:28 -0500
Sender: Taino-L Taino interest forum <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
From: Automatic digest processor <LISTSERV@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
y Subject: TAINO-L Digest - 5 Feb 2001 to 6 Feb 2001 (#2001-33)
To: Recipients of TAINO-L digests <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>

Date: Tue, 6 Feb 2001 11:08:50 -0500
From: Elder Pedro Guanikeyu Torres <jttn@TAINO-TRIBE.ORG>
Subject: Juan Carlos Martinez: An Interview On the Taino DNA testing in Puerto Rico

>From the web site of the Delaware Review of Latin American Studies
(http://www.udel.edu/LASP/index.html)

An Interview On the Taino DNA testing in Puerto Rico

Of Juan Carlos Martinez, *Profiles,* Vol. 1, no. 2, 15 August 2000

Introduction

Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado is Professor of Genetics at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus. We invited him to talk to us about his research project, funded by the National Science Foundation, to determine the continental origin of the mtDNA of Puerto Ricans--a project spurred by the surprise finding of a much larger-than-expected number of Puerto Ricans testing positive for Amerindian ancestry.

Some important research contributions of Genetics to the study of Population History and Anthropology in Puerto Rico: An interview with Dr. Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado, Dept. of Biology, University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

Some time during the 1980s, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in San Juan, Puerto Rico, received four skeletal remains from a small burial ground that was accidentally discovered during the construction of a boardwalk in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Having been disinterred out of context by a construction crew, these remains were of little archaeological value, soand as a result, the Director of the Program of Archaeology of the IPRC, Juan José Ortiz Aguilú, gave the remains to Dr. Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado, a

Molecular Biologist at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM), to analyze for their mitochondrial DNA (mt DNA) content. Ortiz Aguilú's interest in mtDNA analysis of remains in burial sites was spurred by the peculiar positions in which he had found some skeletal remains, including one male interred holding a head in his hands, and another in which two skeletons were interred in one pit. An analysis of the mtDNA of these remains could shed light on the reasons for these peculiar positions by indicating whether the interred might have been parent and child, brothers, or, lacking a filial maternal relationship, victor and vanquished.

For Dr. Martínez Cruzado, the project had important administrative as well as research implications. Since returning to the UPRM in 1989 after receiving his Ph.D. at Harvard, he has worked with his departmental colleagues in order to develop initiatives designed to improve UPRM's pool of undergraduates who pursue Ph.D. degrees in the field of biomedical sciences. The dramatic success of these initiatives resulted in the need for improvement in the infrastructure of the Department of Biology since it could not meet the students' growing demand for research opportunities. The mtDNA project has helped ameliorate the situation by expanding the scope of the research projects in the department and by affording six students lab experience in identifying Puerto Rican mtDNA. Another six students from the Departments of Sociology and Psychology have also benefited from the project, gaining field work experience by collecting genetic samples (hair roots) and interviewing donors.

Even more important, the identification of the Puerto Rican mtDNA could support or challenge--at least regarding the evolutionary contribution of females--the conventional wisdom that, because the indigenous population had disappeared by the end of the sixteenth century, there was little Amerindian contribution to the Puerto Rican gene pool. Should the results of the mtDNA analyses challenge the conventional wisdom, the stage would be set for Y-chromosome studies to assess the male contribution to the ethnic evolution of Puerto Ricans.

The results of Carbon 14 analysis, which dated the skeletal remains to approximately 645AD, was just the first of many exciting discoveries that this project has generated. The seventh century was a time of great change on the island because some great natural disaster paved the way for a fundamental change in the native population, most importantly, in the evolution of ceramic cultures. Before the disaster the inhabitants of the island were organized into egalitarian communities; but evidence indicates that, after the disaster, a hierarchical social structuralization of the native population evolved.

The Interview of Prof. Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado

What exactly is mitochondrial DNA, and what does its analysis reveal?

An analysis of mitochondrial DNA can positively identify female ancestors because the mitochondrion is an organelle--a cell organ--that does not recombine as it passes from one generation to another down the female line; that is, it passes intact, without combining with the male mtDNA which is not transmitted from one generation to another. Nevertheless, the mitochondrion has a fast mutation rate, thus making it possible to trace ancestry within short periods of evolutionary time. These two characteristics of the mtDNA make it a highly informative genetic unit and the darling of human evolutionary geneticists.

What were the results of the mtDNA analyses of the skeletal remains that you received from Ortiz Aguilú?

The results were surprising: all 4 skeletons possessed identical mtDNA.

Why are these results surprising?

Though a high incidence of homogeneity within particular ethnic groups (referred to as the bottleneck effect) is not uncommon--and indeed, previous studies suggest the occurrence of just such an effect in the Pre-Columbian colonization of Puerto Rico through the Lesser Antilles--such homogeneity makes it impossible to identify the filial relationship of the interred. The results indicated that these people were definitely Amerindian, but it was not possible to determine whether a filial, as well as a cultural, relationship existed between them, even when the most hypervariable region of the mtDNA was analyzed. In order to determine that relationship we would have to examine the mtDNA of contemporary descendants of these people in search of variable sites in the mtDNA.

How could this be achieved?

Because the mitochondrion remains genetically intact through the maternal line, analysis of the mitochondria of contemporary Puerto Ricans who were likely to be of Amerindian ancestry could scientifically reveal such ancestry. Ideally, a study of a large group of Amerindian mtDNA should make it easier to determine the variable sites within that mtDNA, and so help us trace relationships back in time.

Considering that the history of Puerto Rico suggests that there were no Amerindians on the island by the end of the 16th century, how did you identify such descendants?

According to historian Salvador Brau, the censuses of 1777 and 1787 recorded the existence of some 2,000 Amerindians in the areas of Indiera Alta, Indiera Baja and Indiera Fría. These were descendants of a group of Tainos who, in 1570, decided to intern themselves in the mountainous regions of central Puerto Rico in order to protect themselves from Spanish colonization. Also, it is popular belief in the area around the city of Mayagüez that the barrio Miraflores of the town of Añasco was populated by many Indians and negros cimarrones fleeing slavery. We went to these areas and obtained a total of 23 samples of hair roots (18 from the Indieras, 5 from Miraflores) to analyze. We also sent a general e-mail to the staff, faculty and students of the UPRM requesting sample donations from anyone who had a mother or a grandmother who had Amerindian traits. This request resulted in 33 samples.

What did the analyses of these samples reveal?

More surprises. Of the 18 samples from the Indieras, 10 presented Amerindian mtDNA (55%); of the 5 samples from Miraflores, 4 were Amerindian (80%); of the 33 from the UPRM, 25 were Amerindian (76%). The high incidence of Amerindian mtDNA among these three groups was not in itself surprising because we had intentionally sought out those people who had reason to believe they were of Amerindian ancestry; but it was surprising to find that there was a higher incidence among the university students and personnel than among the inhabitants of the Indieras--who were considered pure Amerindians by the census of 1777 and 1787. This led us to request hair root samples from additional students regardless of their ancestry. Of the 38 samples obtained in this collection, 20 (53%) presented Amerindian mtDNA. Such a high incidence in the general student population suggested that, contrary to the prevailing view, some 53% of Puerto Ricans were of Amerindian ancestry exclusively through their maternal line. These findings made it clear that we needed to extend the study by analyzing a representative sample of the mtDNA of contemporary Puerto Ricans

It was at this point that you requested a grant from the National Science Foundation?

Yes. In August, 1999, I received a grant from the National Science Foundation to determine the continental origin of the mtDNA of Puerto Ricans through the analysis of a representative sample. To select the sample, we used a computer program that made a random selection of the total population of Puerto Rico based on the census of 1990. When corrected to take into account population growth in the last 10 years, the original 872 households chosen by the program became 1,073. To further insure the randomness of the sample, we requested hair root samples only from the

adult in the household whose birthday most closely followed the date of the interview. We also interviewed the donors requesting information about their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, as far back as they could remember, to learn of their origin. To date, 92% of the potential donors have agreed to participate, so that we have been able to collect hair samples from 781 residences.

What do the analyses of these samples suggest?

The results of the analyses of approximately 300 of these samples identify 62% as Amerindian, 30% as African blacks and 8% Caucasian.

So these results confirm your original findings and cast doubt on the notion that the Tainos disappeared from Puerto Rico by the end of the sixteenth century.

It seems so, for the moment, especially considering that similar studies in other countries have yielded similar results. In Belen, Brazil, for example, mtDNA analysis identifies 59% of the contemporary population as Amerindian, while Y-chromosome analysis identifies less than 5% as Amerindian. This indicates that 59% of the population of Belen has an Amerindian mother somewhere down the ancestral line, while less than 5% of them have a male Amerindian ancestor.

Are any other traditional beliefs affected?

Yes. Our findings also indicate that the conventional wisdom that Amerindians would be concentrated in the mountains while African blacks would be concentrated in the coasts, is not accurate. A strong Amerindian presence has been found in the southern coastal city of Ponce, for example, while African black mtDNA is present in the central mountains of Puerto Rico. Undoubtedly, African slaves must have fled from the coasts to the mountains even though history does not record such a flight. Loiza Aldea, an area east of San Juan populated mostly by blacks, presents an interesting example. By a crown decree from Spain, the colonial government of Puerto Rico was instructed to place runaway slaves from the British colonies in what is today Loiza Aldea. This area was chosen by the Crown because it was the weakest flank of defense of the island, and they hoped that the freed blacks would help defend the island against British invaders. This is a historical fact, but what history cannot explain is the great quantity of fishermen among the blacks of Loiza Aldea. Fishing by blacks is considered an aberration because black slaves were traditionally taught a fear of the sea as a way to keep them enslaved. Some historians have argued that the blacks of Loiza developed their fishing skills through direct contact with the Tainos of Puerto Rico. The presence of Amerindian mtDNA in Loiza, supports this

hypothesis. In general, the project underlines the fact that biology can help reveal ethnic origins as well as population growth and migration in the development of a people.

Sounds like a true meeting of the arts and sciences. What comes next?

Our findings to date are of great interest to historians and Puerto Ricans in general, but another important goal of our study of the continental origin of the mtDNA of Puerto Ricans is to determine the variability sites within the mtDNA so that the filial relationship among the remains found in Amerindian interments can be ascertained. A detailed characterization of Amerindian mtDNA will identify variable sites that will facilitate the design and execution of ancient DNA studies. Ancient DNA studies are necessary to relate the successive historic ceramic cultures found in Puerto Rico to Pre-Columbian migrations and population expansions. They may also be conducted to study the relationship of prehistoric Puerto Ricans to their neighbors, as well as their burial and religious practices. So, as you can see, we have only just begun our research. Fortunately, the large number of samples of contemporary Puerto Rican mtDNA that we have been able to collect is giving us a good basis for accomplishing our research goals; and the results of our analyses to date have set the stage for Y-chromosome studies that will allow us to estimate with precision the complete ethnic composition of the various geographic regions of Puerto Rico and define the contribution of both sexes to this composition. We have also found a number of variable sites in the mtDNA of Puerto Ricans, so we may someday be able to tell maternal relationships among our ancestors.

Date: Wed, 5 May 1999 01:01:50 -0400
Sender: Taino-L Taino interest forum <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
From: Automatic digest processor <LISTSERV@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
Subject: TAINO-L Digest - 3 May 1999 to 4 May 1999 (#1999-54)
To: Recipients of TAINO-L digests <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>

Date: Mon, 3 May 1999 14:08:59 EDT
From: STaino@aol.com
Subject: #22, Taino DNA evidence

The Taino Forum, #22

UPR study finds high Taino DNA rate: Tests contradict theory of extinction of P.R. natives

By Melba Ferrer, *San Juan Star,* Sunday 18 April 1999

The Taino Forum, #22

The front page of April 18 edition of The San Juan Star had this headline, Taino blood said to still flow in P.R. veins. Studies: Taino DNA more prevalent than previously believed.

The article on DNA testing for Indo-American traits in Puerto Rico, ...

...As late as the Spanish census of (Puerto Rico) 1800, there was still a category of indio. This category was eliminated in 1820 census -- the question is what happened to all the people who categorized themselves as such.

...

If you still favor yucca over French fries and would rather squat than sit, you can thank your Taino genes for that.

Preliminary DNA studies -- the first of their kind -- conducted by the Biology Department at the University of Puerto Rico's Mayaguez campus tend to indicate that TAINO (or at lease Indo-American) mitochondrial DNA is more prevalent among certain populations on the island than previously believed.

And that, if proven, could shift Puerto Rico's history.

It could mean that the Taino population was much greater than believed, says professor Juan Carlos Martinez, who along with forensic anthropologist Edwin Crespo and archeologist Jose Ortiz Aguilu, are looking into the studies.

The studies, part of which was conducted in November of 1998 and another in January, used strands of hair and their roots from volunteers to trace their mitochondrial DNA. The mitochondria, Martinez explained, are tiny organs in each cell. And they carry their own DNA which is transmitted intact only from mother to child, never recombining with the father's DNA.

The professor-student team sought 56 volunteers which specific Indo-American traits, such as straight, black hair and high cheek bones. The volunteers; mothers and female ancestors show these traits as well.

Of the 56 volunteers, a whopping 70 percent or (39 people) showed up with Indo-American DNA.

But the January study was even more surprising as researchers chose random subjects regardless of their traits and features, and without seeking information on their female relatives. They found that out of 38 volunteers, a majority 53 percent came up with Indo American mitochondrial DNA.

So what does it all mean?

Our results suggest that our genetic inheritance of indigenous origin can't be very low and could be even higher than the inheritance from the other two races (Caucasian and Negroid), notes Martinez in an April 9 summary of his study.

While historians believe that the Taino population in Puerto Rico was no larger than 100,000, with a favored average of 20,000, the study, Martinez said, could mean that the island's Taino population was considerably larger, say about 560,000.

And the study could contradict the historical theory that the Taino people in Puerto Rico were wiped out either by violence, exploitation or disease just decades after the Spanish conquest. Other natives were mixed with Spaniards

and black slaves, thus producing the Puerto Rican criollo. Any maybe a handful of pure Tainos did surve by fleeing to the thick brush in the island's mountain region (Las Indieras in Maricao, for example). But they were probably too small of a group to make a difference.

The study points to the possibility of many more Tainos, thus explaining the resistant mitochondrial DNA which has withstood 20 generations through five centuries. The high level of indigenous inheritance in Puerto Ricans that our results imply suggest that, instead, they were assimilated (and not exterminated), adds the summary.

Yet that doesn't mean that each and every Puerto Rican can claim Agueybana as an ancestor.

W have to be a bit more careful with this, notes forensic anthropologist Edwin Crespo, who is involved in the study.

There is Indo-American DNA. But we have to determine if it really corresponds to the Tainos or to others, he said.

Throughout Puerto Rico's history, indigenous peoples of other nations (Yucatan and Venezuela) were either brought to or arrived in Puerto Rico. And the mitochondrial DNA content found in the tests could point to them.

Crespo also stresses that people in certain regions may show traces of Indo-American DNA. But what if the tests are done in Loiza, then? he asks.

But in any case, the important thing is that DNA testing is finally making its way into Puerto Rico's history and could someday set the record straight.

We are more interested in the prehistoric population, Crespo says. DNA testing could no doubt cast light on the scant information of pre-Columbian life in Puerto Rico, while, at the same time, give an idea of the genetics behind the current Puerto Rican. This could be the beginning of what could be a great project, concedes Crespo.

Martinez adds that the idea is to seek funding through the federal National Foundation of Science for further DNA studies around the island for a larger project in seeking the genetic makeup of a Boricua.

Yet what does a historian think of any possible change in Puerto Rico's history?

The information is interesting, says historian and anthropologist Ricardo Alegria. There has never been an actual study on the indigenous heritage here, although you can see among people in the Utuado/Adjuntas/Maricao region certain traits that remind us of [the Taino] . . . A number of years ago,

I began a study on a trait found in the Mongoloid race, which is also shared by the indigenous peoples: their front teeth. I was surprised to see the frequency with which I found this here, he says.

Yet, admitting that information on the Taino people hasn't been abundant, Alegria notes that current theories and conclusions are, nonetheless, documented on decades of research.

And he has some doubts on how the study may point to a much larger number of Tainos than historically reported. I think the numbers are too high . . . Historical evidence shows that there wasn't a great population of indigenous people . . . As a society, they disappeared early on, says Alegria, adding that by mid- to late-16th century the Taino population was just about gone.

And even later references to Tainos are based on the amount of meztizos and not pure Tainos.

But we do have a Taino heritage, says Alegria. And more than biological culture, I'm interested in that heritage.

Yet, Alegria welcomes any studies that could provide insight into what makes a Puerto Rican tick. This is a very interesting study and I would recommend doing a study on blood types.

Documents menu

From TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU Mon Apr 9 06:26:00 2001
Date: Mon, 9 Apr 2001 00:34:21 -0500
Sender: Taino-L Taino interest forum <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
From: Automatic digest processor <LISTSERV@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>
Subject: TAINO-L Digest - 7 Apr 2001 to 8 Apr 2001 (#2001-70)
To: Recipients of TAINO-L digests <TAINO-L@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU>

Date: Sun, 8 Apr 2001 14:06:23 -0400
From: Carmen Rivera <Public-Relations@TAINO-TRIBE.ORG>
Subject: US Government Census 2000 And The Taino Indians of Puerto Rico

US Government Census 2000 And The Taino Indians of Puerto Rico

Jatibonicu Press release, 8 April 2001

Dear Friends and Fellow Islanders,

The United States Government Census Bureau presents a certificate of recognition to the Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation of Puerto Rico. Please view our certificate of recognition. http://www.taino-tribe.org/jttn-census-2000.htm

American Indian population in Puerto Rico total 13, 336 source US Census.

Note: We feel that this number is substantially low compared with the total population of Puerto Rico's 3,808,610 Million. This may have been due to a misunderstanding by the people of Puerto Rico to chose the American Indian race category. This was due to misinformation and the confusion of the term American Indian as it related to the American Indians of the United States. This statistical number of Taino American Indians will surely grow with the up coming or next US Census in Puerto Rico.

United States Census 2000 Statistics on Populations in Puerto Rico. http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/tables/redist_pr.html

Sincerely, Ms. Carmen Rivera, Director of Public Relations
Office of Taino Tribal Affairs (Tribal Representative)
The Government of The Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation

TRIBAL NATION GOVERNMENT CONTACT INFORMATION:
The Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation of Boriken, (Puerto Rico)
English http://www.taino-tribe.org/jatiboni.html
Spanish: http://www.Taino-Tribe.org/jatiboni-s.html
El Consejo Tribal Taino de Jatibonicu
PO Box #253, Orocovis, PR 00720-0253

Oficina Regional de Asuntos Tribales de Puerto Rico
153 Calle Tetuan, Old san Juan, Puerto Rico 00901
PO Box 40715
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00940-0715
Admin. Ms. Arlene Torruellas, Telephone (787) 977-2983

Washington DC Regional Tribal Affairs Office, USA
y 1928 Wicklow Court, Woodbridge, VA 22191
Admin. Dr. Shoshana Avrishon (H)Tel: (703) 490-4793

The Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Band of New Jersey, USA
http://www.hartford-hwp.com/taino/jatibonuco.html
United States Regional Tribal Affairs Office
703 South 8th St. Vineland, NJ 08360
Nitayno-Chief Maria Anani Jimenez, (H) Tel 973-340-8834
Office: Tel: (856) 690-1565 Fax: (856) 690-1312

The Tekesta Taino Tribal Band of Bimini Florida, USA
http://www.hartford-hwp.com/Tekesta/
Tekesta Taino Tribal Band of Bimini Florida
1118 North C Street, Lake Worth FL 33460
Nitayno-Chief Miguel Aonbi Ortiz, (H) Tel: 561-582-6932

Our Tribal Motto: Like A Mountain We Stand Alone
Tribal Name: Great People of The Sacred High Waters
Tribal Affiliation: Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation of Boriken

Documents menu

From: The Taino Tribal Council <torresp@algorithms.com>
To: Taino Indigenous Peoples Forum <Taino-L@corso.ccsu.ctstateu.edu>
Subject: Social engineering and Puerto Rico's Population
Date: Mon, 25 Aug 1997 11:55:03 -0700
X-Info: Algorithms, Inc. Internet Service
Message-Id: <14304237614867@algorithms.com>
Sender: owner-taino-l@corso.ccsu.ctstateu.edu
Precedence: bulk

Date sent: Sun, 24 Aug 1997 12:36:50 -0400
From: William R. Cumpiano <eljibaro@crocker.com>
Subject: Social engineering and Puerto Ricans

The mestzo proples from Guanica, Borkiken aka Guanica, Puerto Rico, are taken by force to Hawaii in the 1890's

From William R. Cumpano, 24 August 1997

The fascinating story of the Moscoso plan to emigrate thousands of excessive Puerto Ricans from their own homeland brought to mind an interview with history professor Norma Carr of the University of Hawaii, which we of the Puerto Rican Cuatro Project conducted in Waikiki during the taping of our independent video documentary, Un Canto En Otra Montaña: Puerto Rican Music in Hawai'i.

Excerpts from the day-long taped interview on the history of the Puerto Rican Diaspora in Hawaii follow:

WHAT WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN HAWAII THAT MADE THEM BRING PUERTO RICANS TO

HAWAII?

Okay, [at the turn of the century] the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association was faced with democracy. The American flag had raised the hopes of all the different labor groups in Hawaii: the Japanese, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the Hawaiians (who were the whole society). Everybody expected things to be better now that the American flag was flying over Hawaii.

In fact, from 1898 until 1900, the Japanese laborers who enjoyed a monopoly on the plantations had forced the wages to go from 50 cents a day to 70 cents a day. And the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, which was the oligarchy in complete control over every aspect of life in Hawaii wasn=92t going to tolerate that. So they wanted to bring in an excess of labor, so that they would threaten the Japanese with their job security.

And another thing that happened was, they couldn=92t just bring in more Japanese or Chinese because the Exclusion Act, which kept out Chinese from the United States now applied in Hawaii. And the Congress didn't want any more people of color coming in. They were pressuring the Congress, the Congress was pressuring the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association to whiten the population.

So Puerto Rico became a convenient place to look for labor, and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association had contacts in Puerto Rico, labor brokers who had worked here in Hawaii previously.

General Davis, who invaded Puerto Rico, had many contacts here in Hawaii. So, you know, they got word back and forth and it was decided to see what kind of labor they could get in [Puerto Rico].

The scouts reported that the Puerto Ricans were industrious and honest, law abiding and docile. And docile was the key word, so they sent an order to the labor brokers in Puerto Rico to start recruiting puertorriqueÑos. The order went out in June of 1900 and as of November they still had not been able to ship anybody over. There were questions about would they come in as citizens? Would they come in as foreigners? What were the conditions to be for their migration?. . .and there were a line of other questions.

Back in Puerto Rico, there was a big fuss about this migration, sending out puertorriqueños. 'Why are we kicking people out of their homes?' But the American Army marched in saying, in 1898, 'there=92s an excess of population on this island. Somebody has to go.' And that's that. That was the tone of the occupation.

DESCRIBE THE JOURNEY FROM PUERTO RICO

TO HAWAII.

It was so different in 1900, in 1901 and then in 1921. Because in 1921 they came through the Panama Canal.

There was no such luxury for the first batch, for the first eleven groups. Their trip was from Puerto Rico. The first group left from San Juan. The next few groups left from Ponce. The next three groups left from Gua'nica and then back to Ponce again, as the port of departure. They left their port of departure to New Orleans. In New Orleans they were boarded on the Southern Pacific Railroad and went to the West Coast.

The first group had to be forced to go on that train, because after being at sea for five or six days, they realized the distance that they were going, and that they might never see Puerto Rico again. So more than half wanted to turn back. But instead they were forced on board the Southern Pacific Railroad, and 114 Puerto Ricans started the journey across the country. And they stopped at different places. That first group, the people guarding them tried to keep them away from the press, and so on, but the Hearst reporters got on board the train, and were interviewing people and so on. And then they got to San Francisco, and 66 of them escaped. And only 56 people were loaded on the Rio de Janeiro and came out to Hawaii.

That first group arrived December 23rd 1900, and after a couple of days in quarantine in Honolulu, they were again shipped out to Maui, to the island of Maui, and they went to work, all 56 went to work at the Pioneer Mill at Lahaina. Now that was not the good luck of all the other groups that came. The other 10 groups that came, sometimes one lone Puerto Rican was the only one to go to a certain plantation. Maybe seven went to another, maybe 25 went to another. But occasionally it was just that one Puerto Rican.

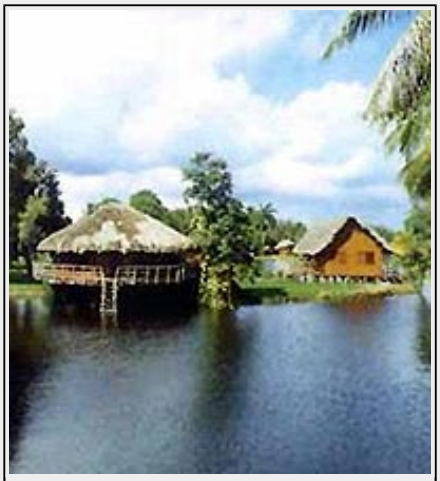
So that by October of 1901, they were on four islands, divided by deep ocean. They were on 44 plantations. I=92ve been able to find that they were on 44 plantations. There were more than 60 plantations, but I only have the name of 44 plantations that they were on.

So imagine being so far away from home, not speaking the language and ... some got sent to the leper colony. They had spots or something on their faces or on their bodies, as they went through quarantine. So about 6 Puerto Ricans got sent to the leper colony but then it was proved that they didn't have leprosy, so then they were shipped back to the major island and sent to plantations.

The horrible thing that happened to them was that so many families were divided. Husbands went to one island, wives and children went to another

island. Imagine a woman with four or five children trying to earn a living for those children on a plantation. She had to go into the fields. Women made half as much as the men made. And children made a nickel less than the women earned a day. So it was like thirty five cents for child labor, forty cents for women, and about eighty cents a day for men. Supposedly 22 to 26 days, 26 days a month.

The Taino Culture Before Spanish Arrival, part 2



Taino village

Caribbean , *1490s*

The Tainos, whose color was olive-brown to copper, reminded Columbus of the people of the Canary Islands, who were neither white nor black. He noted their thick, black hair, short in front and long in back, and that it fell over muscular shoulders. On some islands, the women wore short cotton skirts after taking a permanent man but in others all the people went naked. In parts of Cuba and Santo Domingo, some of the caciques, village or clan and nation chiefs, wore a type of tunic on ceremonial occasions, but they saw no apparent need to cover their breasts or genitals and they were totally natural about it. The Taino had plenty of cotton, which they wove into mats, hammocks and small sails and numerous "bejucos" or fiber ropes.

The Taino islands provided a vast array of edible fruits. The Arawaks made specific use of many types of trees and plants from an estimated floral and faunal range of 5,800 species. The jagua tree they used for dyeing cotton, the jocuma and the guama for making rope, the jucaro for underwater construction, the royal palm for buildings and specific other trees for boats, spears, digging tools, chairs, bowls, baskets and other woven mats (in this art they flourished), cotton cloth (for hammocks), large fishing nets and good hooks made of large fish bones. Inspecting deserted seashore camps, Spanish sailors found what they judged to be excellent nets and small fishing canoes stored in water-tight sheds. Further upriver in the villages, they saw large fields of corn, yucca, beans and fruit orchards covering whole valleys. They walked through the squares of villages, all recently swept clean, where they saw many kinds of drying tubers, grains and herbs, and sunlight-tight storage sheds with shelves packed with thousands of dried casahe or cazabi torts. In one village, sailors found large cakes of fine wax, a local product.

The Taino were a sea-going people and took pride in their courage on the high ocean as well as their skill in finding their way around their world. They visited one another constantly. Columbus was often astonished at finding lone Indian fishermen sailing in the open ocean as he made his way among the islands. Once, a canoe of Taino men followed him from island to island until one of their relatives, held captive on Columbus's flagship, jumped over the side to be spirited away.

Among Tainos, the women and some of the men harvested corn, nuts, and other roots. They appear to have practiced a rotation method in their agriculture. As in the practice of many other American Indigenous eco-systemic peoples, the first shoots of important crops, such as the yucca, beans and corn were appreciated in ceremony, and there are stories about their origins. Boys hunted fowl from flocks that "darkened the sun," according to Columbus, and the men forded rivers and braved ocean to hunt and fish for the abundant, tree-going jutia, the succulent manati, giant sea turtles and countless species of other fish, turtles and shellfish. Around every bohio, Columbus wrote, there were flocks of tame ducks (yaguasa), which the people roasted and ate.

Father Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish friar who arrived on Columbus's heels and lived to denounce the Spanish cruelty toward Indians into the next century, wrote (exaggeratedly but impressively) about "vineyards that ran for three hundred leagues," game birds taken by the tens of thousands," great circular fields of yucca and greater stores of dried fish, corn fields and vast gardens of sweet yams. Tainos along the coasts of Española and southern Cuba kept large circular corrals made of reeds which they filled with

fish and turtles by the thousands. In parts of Puerto Rico and Cuba, Jivaro and Cuajiro fishermen used this method into the 1950s. The early Taino and Ciboney of Cuba were observed catching fish and turtles by way of a remora (suction fish) tied by the tail. (Fernandez Mendez, Eugenio, Los Corrales de Pesca Indigenas de Puerto Rico, Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertoriqueña, Oct. 1960).

The Taino world of 1492 was a thriving place. The Taino islands supported large populations that had existed in an environment of Carib-Taino conflict for, according to archeological evidence, one and a half millennia, although the earliest human fossil in the region is dated at 15,000 years. Tainos and Caribs may have visited violence upon one another, and there is little doubt they did not like each other, but there is little evidence to support any thesis that genocidal warfare existed in this world. A Carib war party arrived and attacked, was successful or repulsed, and the Tainos, from all accounts, returned to what they were doing before the attack. These attacks were not followed up by a sustained campaign of attrition. The Taino existence was not threatened, from these accounts, more than a modern American's existence is threatened by street crime.

Bohio was the Taino name for Española, now Santo Domingo/Haiti. It means "home" in Taino, was in fact home to two main confederated peoples: the Taino, as predominant group, with three cacicasgos, and the Macorixes, with two cacicasgos. There was also one small cacicasgo of Ciqueyo Indians on the island when Columbus arrived. The three main Taino caciques were named Bohequio of Jaragua; Guacanagari of Marien, and Guarionex of La Vega. The two Macorix caciques were Caonabo, of Maguana, at the center of the island and his ally, Coyacoa of Higuey. Mayabanex, also a good friend of Caonabo, was cacique of the Ciguayo country. The three Taino caciques were relatives and allies and had good relations. The Taino of Jaragua had a particularly good agriculture, with efficient irrigation systems that regularly watered thousands of acres of all manner of tubers, vegetables and grains. The Macorixes and Ciguayos were strong warriors, known for a fierce dexterity at archery. They balanced the scale with the peaceful Tainos, who often fed them, and for whom in turn the Macorixes and Ciguayos fought against the more southern Carib. Caonabo, a Marorixe cacique was married to Anacaona, a Taino and sister of Behechio.

It is true that Caribbean Indian peoples fought with each other, taking prisoners and some ritually eating parts of enemy warriors, but even more often they accommodated each other and as "discovery" turned to conquest, they allied as "Indians," or, more properly, as Caribbean Indigenous peoples against Spanish troops. As a peaceful civilization, the Taino caciques apparently made diplomatic use of their agricultural bounty to appease and tame more militaristic groups.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 266

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Arawaks: The First American Aborigines met by Columbus

Caribbean/Central and South America *, 1490*

(Also called Aruacans)

The first American aborigines met by Columbus, an Indian stock widely distributed over South America. Tribes speaking dialects of the Arawak language are met with in and between Indians of other linguistic stocks, from the sources of the Paraguay to the northwestern shores of Lake Maracaybo (Goajiros), from the eastern slopes of the Andes in Peru and Bolivia to the Atlantic coast in Guyana. The Arawaks were met by Columbus in 1492, on the Bahamas, and later on in Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. In the fifteenth century and possibly for several centuries previous, Indians of Arawak stock occupied the Greater Antilles. It is not impossible that up to a certain time before Columbus they may have held all the West Indian Islands. Then an intrusive Indian element, that of the Caribs, gradually encroached on the southern Antilles from the mainland of Venezuela and drove the Arawaks northward. The latter showed a decided fear of their aggressors, a feeling increased by the cannibalism of the Caribs.

Generally speaking, the Arawaks are in a condition between savagery and agriculture, and the status varies according to the environment. The Arawaks on the Bahamas were practically defenseless against the Caribs. The aborigines of Cuba and Haiti, enjoying superior material advantages, stood on a somewhat higher plane. The inhabitants of Jamaica and Puerto Rico, immediate neighbors of the Caribs, were almost as fierce as the latter, and probably as anthropophagous. Wedged in (after the discovery of Columbus) between the Caribs on the South and the Europeans, the former relentless destroyers, the latter startling innovators, the northern Arawaks were doomed. In the course of half a century they succumbed to the unwonted labor imposed them, epidemics doing their share towards extermination. Abuse has been heaped upon Spain for this inevitable result of first contact between races whose civilization was different and whose ideas were so incompatible. Colonization in its beginning on American soil had to go through a series of experiments, and the Indians naturally were the victims. Then the experimenters (as is always the case in newly discovered lands) did not at first belong to the most desirable class. Columbus himself (a brilliant navigator but a poor administrator) did much to contribute to the outcome by measures well-intended but impractical, on account of absolute lack of acquaintance with the nature of American aborigines (see Columbus, Las Casas.)

It is not possible that Indians constantly warring with each other, and warred upon by an outside enemy like the Caribs, not given to agriculture except in as far as women worked the crops, without domestic animals, in an enervating climate, would have been nearly as numerous as, for instance, Las Casas asserts.

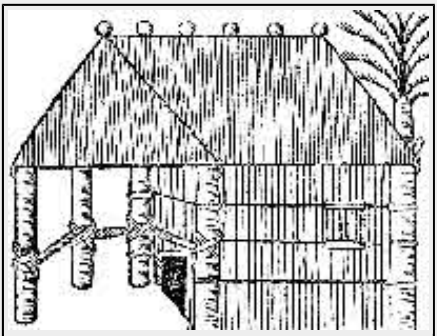
The European attributed the inaptitude of the Indian for physical labor to obstinency, and only too often vented his impatience in acts of cruelty. The Crown made the utmost efforts to mitigate, and to protect the aborigine, but ere the period of experiments was over, the latter had almost vanished.

As already stated, the Arawaks, presumably, held the lesser Antilles also, until, previous to the Columbian era, the Caribs expelled them, thus separating the northern branch from the main stock on the southern continent. Of the latter it has been surmised that their original homes were on the eastern slope of the Andes, where the Campas (Chunchos or Antis) represent the Arawak element, together with the Shipibos, Piros, Conibos and other tribes of the extensive Pano group. A Spanish officer, Perdro de Candia, first discovered them in 1538.

Ethnologically the Arawaks vary in condition. They are well built. Descent among them is in the female line, and they are polygamous. They are land-tillers and hunters. Their houses are sheds, open on the sides, and their weapons are bows, arrows, and wooden clubs. Their religious ideas are, locally varied, those of all Indians, animism or fetishism, with an army of shamans, or medicine-men, to uphold it. Of the Campas and the tribes comprised within the Pano group, about the same may be stated, with the difference that several of the tribes composing it are fierce cannibals, (Cashibos and Canibos). It must be observed, however, that cannibalism is, under certain conditions, practiced by all the forest tribes of South America, as well as by the Aymara of Bolivia. It is mostly a ceremonial practice, and, at the bottom, closely related to the custom of scalping.

by M. Donahue,
Article ID 190

Taino Villages



Taino House (Bohio)
Oviedo, 1547

Hispaniola/Cuba , *October, 1492*

In Fernandina [Long island] Columbus and his party first described Taino villages:
"The houses are all like tents and very high and with good chimneys, but... I have not seen... [a village] of more than... twelve to fifteen houses. [Journal, Oct. 17, 1492]. About ten days later, landing in Cuba at Bahia Bariay, near a fishing camp, "the Admiral ...went to shore, and he came to two houses, which he believed to be those of fishermen who fled from terror ... In each one of the houses many persons lived together" [Journal, Oct. 28, 1492]. Next day at río de Mares (Puerto Gibara), larger houses "looked like tents in a camp, with no regular streets, but one here and another there. Inside, they were well swept and clean, with their furnishings... made of very beautiful palm branches... ". Reaching Cuba's eastern end on December 5, Columbus crossed over to Hispaniola, where the Spaniards remained another month among large Taino populations. The houses on this island, second in size after Cuba among the Greater Antilles, were were later described by Oviedo, a 16th century Spanish historian.

by Athena Review ,
Article ID 133

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Caribs and Arawaks Women

Caribbean , *1493*

Initially, it used to be a village affair that did not interrupt trade. Indeed, as late as the 1870s the tribal hostilities were still very much alive and Edward Im Thurn could observe that, "(members of) each tribe constantly visit the other tribes, often hostile, for the purpose of exchanging the products of their own labour for such as are produced only by the other tribes."
The most important item of exchange were, however, women. In an account as early as the famous letter by Dr. Chanca (1493), the court physician who travelled with Columbus on his second voyage, it was observed that they "take as many women as they can (and) keep them as concubines." There was nothing more valuable to be bought, bartered or stolen.

In a sense, women were, actually and symbolically, the first commodities. Thus, the earliest precious items of exchange, almost functioning, centuries before Columbus, as a money for the diverse tribes reaching from the Amazon to the Greater Antilles, were described by Pierre Barre in 1743 as follows: "This stone is of olive color, of a slightly paler green... The most common shape one gives to this stone is cylindrical, length of 2, 3, up to 4 inches, by six or seven lines in diameter, and drilled their whole length. I have seen some of them that were squaraed, oval, to which one had given the shape of a crescent and imprinted upon it the figure of a toad, or some other animals." Such a stones, the price of a slave, were believed to be the products of a mythic tribe of women who later came to be called the Amazons. They were made of a maleable rock from a special lake - only when taken into the sunlight did the 'piedras hijadas' became hard. Frogs, water, greenness, softness, the longditudinal bore, these were the universal Indian symbols of the female.

This prehistoric attitude might have logic foreign to our overcrowded world but, within limits, the prosperity of the neolithic clan was directly in proportion to its size. The wealth and power of a man were judged by the extent of his family. High mortality rates placed a premium on fecundity. Consequently, women were valued for their reproductive capacity. Here lies the true reason for their exclusion from the dangerous business of warfare and hunting even, or rather especially, when it was a matter of survival or extinction. It has nothing to do with women being a weaker sex. And here lies too the true origin of sexual, and all subsequent forms, of inequality.

"The men only hunt, fish, and cut down trees when a new clearing has to be made, which does not happen often, and do other small jobs," observed Pere Labat, "The women have to do everything else. When the men return from hunting they just throw their game down in the doorway of the carbet, and the women pick it up and cook it, or if they come back from their fishing, they leave the fish in the canoe and not even mention it. The women have to run to the canoe to get the fish and cook it at once, for they are expected to know that the fishermen are hungry. In a word, the women are born servants and remain servants all their lives."
This changed, lost its primitive character, with the appearance of the Europeans. The attrition which the tribes suffered made raiding more vital to augment their declining numbers. At one time the Kalina of Dominica held over 70 captives - Spaniards and negroes, men and women - some of whom had been captured from the 'Arawaks' of Trinidad.

by Race and History,
Article ID 235

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Story of the Caribs

Caribbean , *1504*

Who were those Indians from the Lesser Antilles, the ferocious ones with the infamous appetite for barbecued human flesh? Whoever they were they certainly created a greater impact on the European imagination than the so called Arawaks. The Caribbean was named after them, as was the word cannibal and, by anagram, Shakespeare's Caliban - that "Abhorred slave/Which any print of good-ness wilt not take/Being capable of all ill."
Who were these Caribs? They first entered the picture as a rumor Columbus had heard from the Taino. "All the people I have met here," he entered in his diary, "have said that they are greatly afraid of the 'Caniba' or 'Canima'." Actually we cannot know what Columbus was told because he had a remarkable ability for seeing what he wanted to see and hearing what he wanted to hear. And, after all, the caniba could be "nothing else than the people of the Great Khan, who must be very close by."

Ovideo y Valdez suggested that the word meant 'brave' in Taino language. As much as a century later 'Carib' was still sometimes used as an adjective to describe different tribes. Thus, in 1620 Vasquez de Espinosa could say: "The island of Granada is thickly peopled with Carib Indians called Camajuyas, which means lightning from heaven, since they are brave and warlike."
By then, somehow, Columbus's 'Caniba' were being called 'Caribe'. The English used 'Caribbees' 'Charibs' or 'Caribs', the French used 'Caraibes' and, for those on the mainland, 'Galibis'. Fr. Raymond Breton, who lived amongst the Indians in Dominica from 1641 to 1655, said, however, that the men called themselves 'Callinago' and the women called themselves 'Callipunam'. Today, among anthropologists, the favoured name is 'Kalina' but those still living in St. Vincent call themselves 'Garifuna'.

But if the linguists have clouded the issue of Arawaks with their palaver about Arawakan language speakers, they have also demystified the vulgar ideas about the Carib race, since, we are told, these 'Caribs' spoke a dialect of the Arawakan language family. In other words, linguistically the Caribs were really Arawaks and ironically, according to the linguist, Douglas Taylor, "the various but similar words referring to 'Carib' may go back to an ancestral kaniriphuna, meaningful in Arawakan but not, I think, in Cariban."
Either way, such was the impression created by the Lesser Antillians that the Spanish and other Europeans took the matter of their eating humans quite seriously. For instance, the story was spread in the 16th century that some Dominican Caribs, after eating a Spanish friar, all fell ill. Thereafter, the Spanish, whenever they stopped off at Carib islands, they made sure to dress their sailors in sackcloth, just in case. The Caribs, it was thought, found Spaniards to be stringy and grisly, as opposed to the French who were rather delicious and the Dutch who tended to be fairly tasteless.

For all its seeming detail Spanish knowledge of Kalina culinary habits was actually negligible, far more so than that of the French. It is true that the Kalina and the Lokono raided each other's settlements for captives or revenge. And there was practiced, by both tribes, some degree of ritual cannibalism. In the 17th century account of Adriaan van Berkel who lived with Lokono in Berbice, and the 16th century account of Luisa Navarrete who was a Kalina 'slave' in Dominica, both tribes after successful raids killed one or two male captives in a victory ritual and put pieces of their flesh into the pot. An arm or a leg was preserved to remind them of their hatred of the enemy. That was more or less the extent of it.

There has a never been found any archaeological evidence as would indicate widespread and systematic cannibalism, evidence such as scorched human bones, bones with knife or saw cuts or which are unnaturally fractured, bones widely scattered. Nevertheless, such niceties were less than appreciated by the conquistadores who needed slaves. And if Queen Isabella had in 1503 prohibited any man "to arrest or capture any Indians... or to do them any harm or evil to their persons or possessions," she had also consented to the exception of, "a people called Cannibales ...(who) waged war on the Indians who are my vassals, capturing them to eat them as is their custom." What could be more practical for a Spaniard, then, than to discover as many 'Canni-bales' as there were Indians. After all, the Queen had explicitly ordered that "they may be captured and taken to these my Kingdoms and Domains and to other parts and places and be sold."

In her order Isabella specifically mentioned the coast of Tierra Firme in the region of Colombia, an area which was only visited once previously by Rodrigo de Bastidas who had been peacably received. The Queen's information, it seems, had come from Uraba la Cosa who deliberately misled her to justify his 1504 voyage of plunder and slaving from Cumana to Uraba.
"If they were cannibals in those days," queried the french pirate- priest Pere Labat (1722) who knew the Caribs of Dominica intimately, "why are they not cannibals now? I have certainly not heard of them eating people, whether Englishmen with whom the Carib are nearly always fighting, or Allouages Indians of the mainland near the Orinoco with whom they are continually at war."
The symbolic cannibalism which, it seems, certainly existed must have declined, ironically, after the Europeans arrived on the scene. Thereafter war ceased to be a ritual and became a matter of desperation.

No Indian needed a white arm or leg to invoke a hatred for the new enemy.

by Race and History,
Article ID 234

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Spanish-Indian Fusion

Marriage Portrait of Beltran Garcia De Loyola
Church of La Compañía, Cuzco

Cuba , *Since 1510*

Among the first conquistadors and among the new Spanish arrivals, particularly the men from the Canary Islands and Galicia, many were known to take one or more wives among the Indian villages. There were noted alliances and nuclei of mestizajes stemming from these early intermarriage's. In Santo Domingo, they settled along the Yaque River and into the Marien region. This "nascent, native feudalism . . . claimed hegemony over whole tribes. and was a subtle breakaway from Columbus's factoria system."
The concubinage system set up by the old chiefs and some new Spanish men, both in Cuba and Puerto Rico, and the"guatiao" (exchange of names ceremony) in Santo Domingo created a few somewhat ordained mestizajes, one that would sustain a core of indigenous traditions to modern times.
There were incidents of sympathetic individual Spanish men marrying Indian women and thus removing the caciques and their particular tribes from the encomienda system. The Spanish did this mostly to gain labor and advantage and at times as a way to remove themselves from the central authority all together. For the remaining indian caciques, it was a way to marry their remaining people and take status as one of the new people, neither white nor pure Indian Taino, but with at least the ability to establish families and hold land. The comendadores took after this practice when they could.

One Cristobal Rodriguez (nicknamed "La Lengua") a well-known Spanish-Indian interpreter, was exiled for arranging the marriage of a cacica to a Juan Garces, "probably with the intent to remove her tribe from the encomienda system.
A very few Indian communities, deep in the highest mountain valleys, did manage to survive in isolation in Cuba for nearly five hundred years. These are the communities of Caridad de los Indios and others in the Rio Toa region.
In Cuba's Camagucy province, Vasco Porcallo de Figueroa, a particularly vigorous lieutenant from Narvaez's army took dozens of Indian wives and spawned a generation of more than a hundred mestizos. Rather than continue to fight, Camagucybax, the old cacique of the savanna organized marriages from among his people and Porcallo's children. Later, Porcallo invited some fifty Spanish families to send young men and women to settle in Camaguey where he coupled his mixed offspring to the new arrivals. They named the new mixed generation "Guajiro," a Taino word possibly coined by the cacique Camagucybax and meaning "one of us" or "one of our countrymen."

Porcallo and his fellow conquistadores provided no gentle model of "pater familias." Powallo's rule was so brutal that many Taino families in the region committed suicide rather than submit to his encomienda. Near Baracoa, Cuba, at a coastal village named Yumuri, a promontory stands in mute tribute to the many Taino families who, according to local oral history, jumped to their deaths off its cliffs while taunting their Spanish pursuers.

by José Barreiro, from Northeast Indian Quarterly,
Article ID 132

The Last Taino Indians

Baracoa, Guantanamo Province , *Nowadays*

In these eastern mountains of Cuba, region of Baracoa, Guatanamo Province, there are several enclaves of indigenious comunity culture that have survived 500 years. This remote and yet culturally important area of Cuba has been characterized by its historically rural quality and its major historical import to Cuban movements of liberation.

While the continued existence of several Native populations appears in the deep scientific record (Marti, Rousse, Arrom, Rivero de la Calle, Nuez), the assertion of complete extinction of Taino Indians in the Caribbean became commonplace in the academy throughout the twentieth century. Recently, however, some of these isolated Native groups have begun to represent themselves within Cuba and to communicate with other Native groups around the hemisphere.

Cuban and international documentation was initiated, with several articles appearing in scientific journals. Most prominently, the Taino community at Caridad de Los Indios, near Guantanamo, has retained various Native dances and songs, as well as considerable oral history and understanding of ecological relationships. There are as well, Native populations near Bayamo, Santiago and Punta Maisi in this eastern-most triangle of Cuba. As a result of the indigenous revitalization now in process, the several Native-based community enclaves are now reaching out to each other to generate an awarenes of the remaining Taino identity and culture in the area.

While the Taino-descendant population is not dominant, this is a region of Cuba that has maintained the most sustainable indigenous agricultural traditions (the conuco system) and features an "old Cuba" flavor. The agricultural base of the region is largely self-sufficient farming, with families maintaining gardens and small animals. The Baracoa-Guantanamo region is a great living microcosm of the Cuban ethnogensis, rooted in the tri-raciality of Indigenous (Taino), Spanish, and African peoples. The natural history of the region offers nature walks in tropical forests, cultural exchanges with Native communities, ocean fishing and snorkelling and cultural/historical tours tracing the route of Columbus

by Dr. José Barreiro, American Indian Program, Cornell University, Ithaca,
Article ID 134

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Spanish First Contact

Columbus says his farewells to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain

Cuba/Caribbean , *1492-1511*

Europe's interaction with the Caribbean began in 1492 with the Spanish sponsored voyages of Christopher Columbus. Columbus' voyages to the Caribbean incorporated two differing traditions of expansion. The first was influenced by his Genoese roots and his experience in the Portuguese mercantile system. This background allowed Columbus to view his task as mainly one of discovery to be followed by the establishment of commercial outposts and trading centres that would tap into indigenous resources. The primary goal of this system was the quick exploitation of the local area with minimum investment. This contrasted dramatically with the Spanish Castilian tradition born of the reconquista that emphasised a military advance, followed by the sharing out of new lands and booty. The primary goal of this system was the conquest and eventual settlement of new lands for the purpose of long term exploitation.
The difference between these two traditions created expectations that brought Columbus into immediate conflict with the Spanish settlers who accompanied him. The Crown was called on in several occasions to mediate between Columbus and the settlers, usually deciding in their countrymen's favour. By his death in 1506 Columbus had already fallen to the wayside of Spanish exploration because he was a poor governor in the Spanish tradition.

This Spanish pattern of conquest and settlement became the standard for Spanish exploration in the New World. Upon discovering a new territory, the Spanish expeditions were usually, but not always, greeted by friendly inhabitants. During this initial stage the Europeans would survey the area and the people to determine their potential for exploitation. Within a short period of time the inhabitants would grow to resent the Spanish who helped themselves to 'the natives' food, women and gold.' Such abuses were common in Spanish cross-cultural contact and provoked violent reactions by various indigenous populations.

On the island of Hispaniola a group of tribal leaders, joined forces to expel the Spaniards from the island. The Spaniards, who had the benefit of muskets, arquebuses, armour, and savage dogs ruthlessly put these uprisings down and took captive the tribal leaders to ensure native co-operation. Once native resistance was crushed the Spanish forced the villages to grow cash crops, pay tribute, and mine for their precious gold. The Spanish regime was brutal and violent. Rapes and massacres were casual and frequent in occurrence, rationalised by a racist worldview that justified the exploitation of non-Christians or non-whites.

The Spanish ventures in the Caribbean had to recoup their sponsors' initial investment and this led to an obsession with discovering gold deposits. Once these deposits were found the Spanish had to secure sufficient labour to mine it so the encomienda system was instituted by the Spanish Crown to regulate the new settlements. An encomienda was a grant of land with a number of indigenous slaves given to a settler, whose only obligation was to bring Christianity to his slaves. Unfortunately for these slaves the spread of European disease, a harsh labour regime, and brutal mistreatment decimated their population. The Spanish were forced to send out expeditions to neighbouring islands to capture slaves to replenish their exhausted labour supply.
The exhaustion of gold deposits and labour in the Caribbean led

to the full-scale occupation and exploitation of Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba between 1508-1511.

Each occupation followed the same pattern of discovery, local conquest, settlement, exhaustive exploitation, and finally a push into the frontier for new natural resources and slaves. The men who led these campaigns were known as the conquistadors. They adapted the reconquista pattern of military expedition and settlement, often exploiting the pre-existing indigenous rivalries in order to divide and conquer with extreme efficiency. The quest for gold brought the conquistadors to the mainland of Central America where they would repeat the conquest pattern that had been so effective in the Caribbean, to defeat the Aztec and Inca Empires.

by cuba heritage .com,
Article ID 7

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Chistopher Columbus Privileges

Granada, Spain , *30 April 1492*

FERDINAND and ELIZABETH, by the Grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, of Leon, of Arragon, of Sicily, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Minorca, of Sevil, of Sardinia, of Jaen, of Algarve, of Algezira, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands, Count and Countess of Barcelona, Lord and Lady of Biscay and Molina, Duke and Duchess of Athens and Neopatria. Count and Countess of Rousillion and Cerdaigne, Marquess and Marchioness of Oristan and Gociano, &c.

For as much of you, Christopher Columbus, are going by our command, with some of our vessels and men, to discover and subdue some Islands and Continent in the ocean, and it is hoped that by God's assistance, some of the said Islands and Continent in the ocean will be discovered and conquered by your means and conduct, therefore it is but just and reasonable, that since you expose yourself to such danger to serve us, you should be rewarded for it. And we being willing to honour and favour You for the reasons aforesaid: Our will is, That you, Christopher Columbus, after discovering and conquering the said Islands and Continent in the said ocean, or any of them, shall be our Admiral of the said Islands and Continent you shall so discover and conquer; and that you be our Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour in them, and that for the future, you may call and stile yourself, D. Christopher Columbus, and that your sons and successors in the said employment, may call themselves Dons, Admirals, Vice-Roys, and Governours of them; and that you may exercise the office of Admiral, with the charge of Vice-Roy and Governour of the said Islands and Continent, which you and your Lieutenants shall conquer, and freely decide all causes, civil and criminal, appertaining to the said employment of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, as you shall think fit in justice, and as the Admirals of our kingdoms use to do; and that you have power to punish offenders; and you and your Lieutenants exercise the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, in all things belonging to the said offices, or any of them; and that you enjoy the perquisites and salaries belonging to the said employments, and to each of them, in the same manner as the High Admiral of our kingdoms does. And by this our letter, or a copy of it signed by a Public Notary: We command Prince John, our most dearly beloved Son, the Infants, Dukes, Prelates, Marquesses, Great Masters and Military Orders, Priors. Commendaries, our Counsellors, Judges, and other Officers of Justice whatsoever, belonging Courts, and Chancery, and Constables of Castles, Strong Houses, and others; and all Corporations, Bayliffs, Governours, Judges, Commanders, Sea Officers; and the Aldermen, Common Council, Officers, and Good People of all Cities, Lands, and Places in our Kingdoms and Dominions, and in those you shall conquer and subdue, and the captains masters, mates, and other officers and sailors, our natural subjects now being, or that shall be for the time to come, and any of them that when you shall have discovered the said Islands and Continent in the ocean; and you, or any that shall have your commission, shall have taken the usual oath in such cases, that they for the future, look upon you as long as you live, and after you, your son and heir, and so from one heir to another forever, as our Admiral on our said Ocean, and as Vice-Roy and Governour of the said Islands and Continent, by you, Christopher Columbus, discovered and conquered; and that they treat you and your Lieutenants, by you appointed, for executing the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, as such in all respects, and give you all the perquisites and other things belonging and appertaining to the said offices; and allow, and cause to be allowed you, all the honours, graces, concessions, prehaminences, prerogatives,

immunities, and other things, or any of them which are due to you, by virtue of your commands of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, and to be observed completely, so that nothing be diminished; and that they make no objection to this, or any part of it, nor suffer it to be made; forasmuch as we from this time forward, by this our letter, bestow on you the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and perpetual Governour forever; and we put you into possession of the said offices, and of every of them, and full power to use and exercise them, and to receive the perquisites and salaries belonging to them, or any of them, as was said above. Concerning all which things, if it be requisite, and you shall desire it, We command our Chancellour, Notaries, and other Officers, to pass, seal, and deliver to you, our Letter of Privilege, in such form and legal manner, as you shall require or stand in need of. And that none of them presume to do any thing to the contrary, upon pain of our displeasure, and forfeiture of 30 ducats for each offence. And we command him, who shall show them this our Letter, that he summon them to appear before us at our Court, where we shall then be, within fifteen days after such summons, under the said penalty. Under which same, we also command any Public Notary whatsoever, that he give to him that shows it him, a certificate under his seal, that we may know how our command is obeyed.

Given at Granada, on the 30th of April, in the year of our Lord, 1492

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 12

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: 1492 a Year of Changes in Spain

Columbus ships
Museo Naval de Madrid

Granada/Palos, Spain , *January, 1492*

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Whereas, Most Christian, High, Excellent, and Powerful Princes, King and Queen of Spain and of the Islands of the Sea, our Sovereigns, this present year 1492, after your Highnesses had terminated the war with the Moors reigning in Europe, the same having been brought to an end in the great city of Granada, where on the second day of January, this present year, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses planted by force of arms upon the towers of the Alhambra, which is the fortress of that city, and saw the Moorish king come out at the gate of the city and kiss the hands of your Highnesses, and of the Prince my Sovereign; and in the present month, in consequence of the information which I had given your Highnesses respecting the countries of India and of a Prince, called Great Can, which in our language signifies King of Kings, how, at many times he, and his predecessors had sent to Rome soliciting instructors who might teach him our holy faith, and the holy Father had never granted his request, whereby great numbers of people were lost, believing in idolatry and doctrines of perdition. Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians, and princes who love and promote the holy Christian faith, and are enemies of the doctrine of Mahomet, and of all idolatry and heresy, determined to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the above-mentioned countries of India, to see the said princes, people, and territories, and to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith; and furthermore directed that I should not proceed by land to the East, as is customary, but by a Westerly route, in which direction we have hitherto no certain evidence that any one has gone. So after having expelled the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses, in the same month of January, ordered me to proceed with a sufficient armament to the said regions of India, and for that purpose granted me great favors, and ennobled me that thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents which I might discover and acquire, or which may hereafter be discovered and acquired in the ocean; and that this dignity should be inherited by my eldest son, and thus descend from degree to degree forever. Hereupon I left the city of Granada, on Saturday, the twelfth day of May, 1492, and proceeded to Palos, a seaport, where I armed three vessels, very fit for such an enterprise, and having provided myself with abundance of stores and seamen, I set sail from the port, on Friday, the third of August, half an hour before sunrise, and steered for the Canary Islands of your Highnesses which are in the said ocean, thence to take my departure and proceed till I arrived at the Indies, and perform the embassy of your Highnesses to the Princes there, and discharge the orders given me. For this purpose I determined to keep an account of the voyage, and to write down punctually every thing we performed or saw from day to day, as will hereafter appear. Moreover, Sovereign Princes, besides describing every night the occurrences of the day, and every day those of the preceding night, I intend to draw up a nautical chart, which shall contain the several parts of the ocean and land in their proper situations; and also to compose a book to represent the whole by picture with latitudes and longitudes, on all which accounts it behooves me to abstain from my sleep, and make many trials in navigation, which things will demand much labor.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 105

Columbus Journal: The Problems Begin

On Route to the Canary Islands , *3th-9th August, 1492*

Friday, 3 August 1492. Set sail from the bar of Saltes at 8 o'clock, and proceeded with a strong breeze till sunset, sixty miles or fifteen leagues south, afterwards southwest and south by west, which is the direction of the Canaries.

Monday, 6 August. The rudder of the caravel Pinta became loose, being broken or unshipped. It was believed that this happened by the contrivance of Gomez Rascon and Christopher Quintero, who were on board the caravel, because they disliked the voyage. The Admiral says he had found them in an unfavorable disposition before setting out. He was in much anxiety at not being able to afford any assistance in this case, but says that it somewhat quieted his apprehensions to know that Martin Alonzo Pinzon, Captain of the Pinta, was a man of courage and capacity. Made a progress, day and night, of twenty-nine leagues.

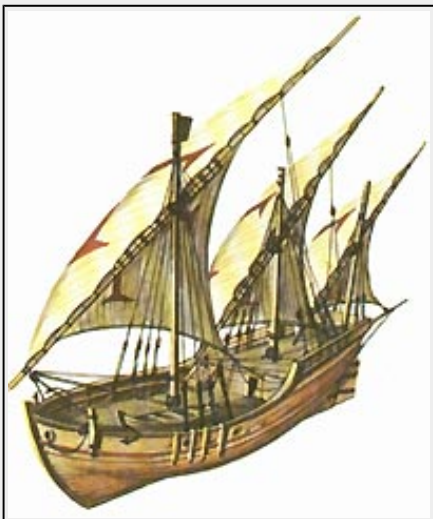
Thursday, 9 August. The Admiral did not succeed in reaching the island of Gomera till Sunday night. Martin Alonzo remained at Grand Canary by command of the Admiral, he being unable to keep the other vessels company. The Admiral afterwards returned to Grand Canary, and there with much labor repaired the Pinta, being assisted by Martin Alonzo and the others; finally they sailed to Gomera. They saw a great eruption of names from the Peak of Teneriffe, a lofty mountain. The Pinta, which before had carried latine sails, they altered and made her square-rigged. Returned to Gomera, Sunday, 2 September, with the Pinta repaired. The Admiral says that he was assured by many respectable Spaniards, inhabitants of the island of Ferro, who were at Gomera with Dona Inez Peraza, mother of Guillen Peraza, afterwards first Count of Gomera, that every year they saw land to the west of the Canaries; and others of Gomera affirmed the same with the like assurances. The Admiral here says that he remembers, while he was in Portugal, in 1484, there came a person to the King from the island of Madeira, soliciting for a vessel to go in quest of land, which he affirmed he saw every year, and always of the same appearance. He also says that he remembers the same was said by the inhabitants of the Azores and described as in a similar direction, and of the same shape and size. Having taken in food, water, meat and other provisions, which had been provided by the men which he left ashore on departing for Grand Canary to repair the Pinta, the Admiral took his final departure from Gomera with the three vessels on Thursday, 6 September.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 107

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Approaching to the Canary Islands



Columbus needed to go to Grand Canary to repair the Pinta

Canary Islands , *3th-9th August, 1492*

Friday, 3 August 1492. Set sail from the bar of Saltes at 8 o'clock, and proceeded with a strong breeze till sunset, sixty miles or fifteen leagues south, afterwards southwest and south by west, which is the direction of the Canaries.

Monday, 6 August. The rudder of the caravel Pinta became loose, being broken or unshipped. It was believed that this happened by the contrivance of Gomez Rascon and Christopher Quintero, who were on board the caravel, because they disliked the voyage. The Admiral says he had found them in an unfavorable disposition before setting out. He was in much anxiety at not being able to afford any assistance in this case, but says that it somewhat quieted his apprehensions to know that Martin Alonzo Pinzon, Captain of the Pinta, was a man of courage and capacity. Made a progress, day and night, of twenty-nine leagues.

Thursday, 9 August. The Admiral did not succeed in reaching the island of Gomera till Sunday night. Martin Alonzo remained at Grand Canary by command of the Admiral, he being unable to keep the other vessels company. The Admiral afterwards returned to Grand Canary, and there with much labor repaired the Pinta, being assisted by Martin Alonzo and the others; finally they sailed to Gomera. They saw a great eruption of names from the Peak of Teneriffe, a lofty mountain. The Pinta, which before had carried latine sails, they altered and made her square-rigged. Returned to Gomera, Sunday, 2 September, with the Pinta repaired.
The Admiral says that he was assured by many respectable Spaniards, inhabitants of the island of Ferro, who were at Gomera with Dona Inez Peraza, mother of Guillen Peraza, afterwards first Count of Gomera, that every year they saw land to the west of the Canaries; and others of Gomera affirmed the same with the like assurances. The Admiral here says that he remembers, while he was in Portugal, in 1484, there came a person to the King from the island of Madeira, soliciting for a vessel to go in quest of land, which he affirmed he saw every year, and always of the same appearance. He also says that he remembers the same was said by the inhabitants of the Azores and described as in a similar direction, and of the same shape and size. Having taken in food, water, meat and other provisions, which had been provided by the men which he left ashore on departing for Grand Canary to repair the Pinta, the Admiral took his final departure from Gomera with the three vessels on Thursday, 6 September.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 108

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Sailing Day and Night

Christopher Columbus searching the horizon

Atlantic Ocean , *9th-30th December, 1492*

Sunday, 9 September. Sailed this day nineteen leagues, and determined to count less than the true number, that the crew might not be dismayed if the voyage should prove long. In the night sailed one hundred and twenty miles, at the rate of ten miles an hour, which make thirty leagues. The sailors steered badly, causing the vessels to fall to leeward towards the northeast, for which the Admiral reprimanded them repeatedly.

Monday, 10 September. This day and night sailed sixty leagues, at the rate of ten miles an hour, which are two leagues and a half. Reckoned only forty-eight leagues, that the men might not be terrified if they should be long upon the voyage.

Tuesday, 11 September. Steered their course west and sailed above twenty leagues; saw a large fragment of the mast of a vessel, apparently of a hundred and twenty tons, but could not pick it up. In the night sailed about twenty leagues, and reckoned only sixteen, for the cause above stated.

Friday, 14 September. Steered this day and night west twenty leagues; reckoned somewhat less. The crew of the Nina stated that they had seen a grajao, and a tropic bird, or water-wagtail, which birds never go farther than twenty-five leagues from the land.

Sunday, 16 September. Sailed day and night, west thirty-nine leagues, and reckoned only thirty-six. Some clouds arose and it drizzled. The Admiral here says that from this time they experienced very pleasant weather, and that the mornings were most delightful, wanting nothing but the melody of the nightingales. He compares the weather to that of Andalusia in April. Here they began to meet with large patches of weeds very green, and which appeared to have been recently washed away from the land; on which account they all judged themselves to be near some island, though not a continent, according to the opinion of the Admiral, who says, "the continent we shall find further ahead."

Monday, 17 September. Steered west and sailed, day and night, above fifty leagues; wrote down only forty-seven; the current favored them. They saw a great deal of weed which proved to be rockweed, it came from the west and they met with it very frequently. They were of opinion that land was near. The pilots took the sun's amplitude, and found that the needles varied to the northwest a whole point of the compass; the seamen were terrified, and dismayed without saying why. The Admiral discovered the cause, and ordered them to take the amplitude again the next morning, when they found that the needles were true; the cause was that the star moved from its place, while the needles remained stationary. At dawn they saw many more weeds, apparently river weeds, and among them a live crab, which the Admiral kept, and says that these are sure signs of land, being never found eighty leagues out at sea. They found the sea-water less salt since they left the Canaries, and the air more mild. They were all very cheerful, and strove which vessel should outsail the others, and be the first to discover land; they saw many tunnies, and the crew of the Nina killed one. The Admiral here says that these signs were from the west, "where I hope that high God in whose hand is all victory will speedily direct us to land." This morning he says he saw a white bird called a water- wagtail, or tropic bird, which does not sleep at

sea.

19 September. Continued on, and sailed, day and night, twenty-five leagues, experiencing a calm. Wrote down twenty-two. This day at ten o'clock a pelican came on board, and in the evening another; these birds are not accustomed to go twenty leagues from land. It drizzled without wind, which is a sure sign of land. The Admiral was unwilling to remain here, beating about in search of land, but he held it for certain that there were islands to the north and south, which in fact was the case and he was sailing in the midst of them. His wish was to proceed on to the Indies, having such fair weather, for if it please God, as the Admiral says, we shall examine these parts upon our return. Here the pilots found their places upon the chart: the reckoning of the Nina made her four hundred and forty leagues distant from the Canaries, that of the Pinta four hundred and twenty, that of the Admiral four hundred.

Thursday, 20 September. Steered west by north, varying with alternate changes of the wind and calms; made seven or eight leagues' progress. Two pelicans came on board, and afterwards another,--a sign of the neighborhood of land. Saw large quantities of weeds today, though none was observed yesterday. Caught a bird similar to a grajao; it was a river and not a marine bird, with feet like those of a gull. Towards night two or three land birds came to the ship, singing; they disappeared before sunrise. Afterwards saw a pelican coming from west- northwest and flying to the southwest; an evidence of land to the westward, as these birds sleep on shore, and go to sea in the morning in search of food, never proceeding twenty leagues from the land.

Friday, 21 September. Most of the day calm, afterwards a little wind. Steered their course day and night, sailing less than thirteen leagues. In the morning found such abundance of weeds that the ocean seemed to be covered with them; they came from the west. Saw a pelican; the sea smooth as a river, and the finest air in the world. Saw a whale, an indication of land, as they always keep near the coast.

Saturday, 22 September. Steered about west-northwest varying their course, and making thirty leagues' progress. Saw few weeds. Some pardelas were seen, and another bird. The Admiral here says "this headwind was very necessary to me, for my crew had grown much alarmed, dreading that they never should meet in these seas with a fair wind to return to Spain." Part of the day saw no weeds, afterwards great plenty of it.

Sunday, 23 September. Sailed northwest and northwest by north and at times west nearly twenty-two leagues. Saw a turtle dove, a pelican, a river bird, and other white fowl;--weeds in abundance with crabs among them. The sea being smooth and tranquil, the sailors murmured, saying that they had got into smooth water, where it would never blow to carry them back to Spain; but afterwards the sea rose without wind, which astonished them. The Admiral says on this occasion "the rising of the sea was very favorable to me, as it happened formerly to Moses when he led the Jews from Egypt."

Tuesday, 25 September. Very calm this day; afterwards the wind rose. Continued their course west till night. The Admiral held a conversation with Martin Alonzo Pinzon, captain of the Pinta, respecting a chart which the Admiral had sent him three days before, in which it appears he had marked down certain islands in that sea; Martin Alonzo was of opinion that they were in their neighborhood, and the Admiral replied that he thought the same, but as they had not met with them, it must have been owing to the currents which had carried them to the northeast and that they had not made such progress as the pilots stated. The Admiral directed him to return the chart, when he traced their course upon it in presence of the pilot and sailors.

At sunset Martin Alonzo called out with great joy from his vessel that he saw land, and demanded of the Admiral a reward for his intelligence. The Admiral says, when he heard him declare this, he fell on his knees and returned thanks to God, and Martin Alonzo with his crew repeated Gloria in excelsis Deo, as did the crew of the Admiral. Those on board the Nina ascended the

rigging, and all declared they saw land. The Admiral also thought it was land, and about twenty-five leagues distant. They remained all night repeating these affirmations, and the Admiral ordered their course to be shifted from west to southwest where the land appeared to lie. They sailed that day four leagues and a half west and in the night seventeen leagues southwest, in all twenty-one and a half: told the crew thirteen leagues, making it a point to keep them from knowing how far they had sailed; in this manner two reckonings were kept, the shorter one falsified, and the other being the true account. The sea was very smooth and many of the sailors went in it to bathe, saw many dories and other fish.

Wednesday, 26 September. Continued their course west till the afternoon, then southwest and discovered that what they had taken for land was nothing but clouds. Sailed, day and night, thirty- one leagues; reckoned to the crew twenty-four. The sea was like a river, the air soft and mild.

Sunday, 30 September. Continued their course west and sailed day and night in calms, fourteen leagues; reckoned eleven.-- Four tropic birds came to the ship, which is a very clear sign of land, for so many birds of one sort together show that they are not straying about, having lost themselves. Twice, saw two pelicans; many weeds. The constellation called Las Gallardias, which at evening appeared in a westerly direction, was seen in the northeast the next morning, making no more progress in a night of nine hours, this was the case every night, as says the Admiral. At night the needles varied a point towards the northwest, in the morning they were true, by which it appears that the polar star moves, like the others, and the needles are always right.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 109

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Discovery and First Indian Contact

Spanish first landing in America

San Salvador , *11th-12th October, 1492*

Thursday, 11 October. Steered west-southwest; and encountered a heavier sea than they had met with before in the whole voyage. Saw pardelas and a green rush near the vessel. The crew of the Pinta saw a cane and a log; they also picked up a stick which appeared to have been carved with an iron tool, a piece of cane, a plant which grows on land, and a board. The crew of the Nina saw other signs of land, and a stalk loaded with rose berries. These signs encouraged them, and they all grew cheerful. Sailed this day till sunset, twenty-seven leagues.

After sunset steered their original course west and sailed twelve miles an hour till two hours after midnight, going ninety miles, which are twenty-two leagues and a half; and as the Pinta was the swiftest sailer, and kept ahead of the Admiral, she discovered land and made the signals which had been ordered. The land was first seen by a sailor called Rodrigo de Triana, although the Admiral at ten o'clock that evening standing on the quarter-deck saw a light, but so small a body that he could not affirm it to be land; calling to Pero Gutierrez, groom of the King's wardrobe, he told him he saw a light, and bid him look that way, which he did and saw it; he did the same to Rodrigo Sanchez of Segovia, whom the King and Queen had sent with the squadron as comptroller, but he was unable to see it from his situation. The Admiral again perceived it once or twice, appearing like the light of a wax candle moving up and down, which some thought an indication of land. But the Admiral held it for certain that land was near; for which reason, after they had said the Salve which the seamen are accustomed to repeat and chant after their fashion, the Admiral directed them to keep a strict watch upon the forecastle and look out diligently for land, and to him who should first discover it he promised a silken jacket, besides the reward which the King and Queen had offered, which was an annuity of ten thousand maravedis.

At two o'clock in the morning the land was discovered, at two leagues' distance; they took in sail and remained under the square-sail lying to till day, which was Friday, when they found themselves near a small island, one of the Lucayos, called in the Indian language Guanahani. Presently they descried people, naked, and the Admiral landed in the boat, which was armed, along with Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vincent Yanez his brother, captain of the Nina. The Admiral bore the royal standard, and the two captains each a banner of the Green Cross, which all the ships had carried; this contained the initials of the names of the King and Queen each side of the cross, and a crown over each letter Arrived on shore, they saw trees very green many streams of water, and diverse sorts of fruits.

The Admiral called upon the two Captains, and the rest of the crew who landed, as also to Rodrigo de Escovedo notary of the fleet, and Rodrigo Sanchez, of Segovia, to bear witness that he before all others took possession (as in fact he did) of that island for the King and Queen his sovereigns, making the requisite declarations, which are more at large set down here in writing. Numbers of the people of the island straightway collected together. Here follow the precise words of the Admiral: "As I saw that they were very friendly to us, and perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force, I presented them with some red caps, and strings of beads to wear upon the neck, and many other trifles of small value, wherewith they were much delighted, and became wonderfully attached to us. Afterwards they

came swimming to the boats, bringing parrots, balls of cotton thread, javelins, and many other things which they exchanged for articles we gave them, such as glass beads, and hawk's bells; which trade was carried on with the utmost good will. But they seemed on the whole to me, to be a very poor people. They all go completely naked, even the women, though I saw but one girl. All whom I saw were young, not above thirty years of age, well made, with fine shapes and faces; their hair short, and coarse like that of a horse's tail, combed toward the forehead, except a small portion which they suffer to hang down behind, and never cut. Some paint themselves with black, which makes them appear like those of the Canaries, neither black nor white; others with white, others with red, and others with such colors as they can find. Some paint the face, and some the whole body; others only the eyes, and others the nose. Weapons they have none, nor are acquainted with them, for I showed them swords which they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their javelins being without it, and nothing more than sticks, though some have fish-bones or other things at the ends.

They are all of a good size and stature, and handsomely formed. I saw some with scars of wounds upon their bodies, and demanded by signs the of them; they answered me in the same way, that there came people from the other islands in the neighborhood who endeavored to make prisoners of them, and they defended themselves. I thought then, and still believe, that these were from the continent. It appears to me, that the people are ingenious, and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language. I saw no beasts in the island, nor any sort of animals except parrots." These are the words of the Admiral.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 112

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Looking for Indian Gold

Indian Conjuror
Theodore De Bry

Indian canoes approaching the Spanish ships
Theodore De Bry

San Salvador , *13th-14th October, 1492*

Saturday, 13 October.

"At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, very handsome; their hair not curled but straight and coarse like horse-hair, and all with foreheads and heads much broader than any people I had hitherto seen; their eyes were large and very beautiful; they were not black, but the color of the inhabitants of the Canaries, which is a very natural circumstance, they being in the same latitude with the island of Ferro in the Canaries. They were straight-limbed without exception, and not with prominent bellies but handsomely shaped. They came to the ship in canoes, made of a single trunk of a tree, wrought in a wonderful manner considering the country; some of them large enough to contain forty or forty-five men, others of different sizes down to those fitted to hold but a single person. They rowed with an oar like a baker's peel, and wonderfully swift. If they happen to upset, they all jump into the sea, and swim till they have righted their canoe and emptied it with the calabashes they carry with them. They came loaded with balls of cotton, parrots, javelins, and other things too numerous to mention; these they exchanged for whatever we chose to give them. I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of this metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed large vessels of gold, and in great quantities. I endeavored to procure them to lead the way thither, but found they were unacquainted with the route. I determined to stay here till the evening of the next day, and then sail for the southwest; for according to what I could learn from them, there was land at the south as well as at the southwest and northwest and those from the northwest came many times and fought with them and proceeded on to the southwest in search of gold and precious stones. This is a large and level island, with trees extremely flourishing, and streams of water; there is a large lake in the middle of the island, but no mountains: the whole is completely covered with verdure and delightful to behold. The natives are an inoffensive people, and so desirous to possess any thing they saw with us, that they kept swimming off to the ships with whatever they could find, and readily bartered for any article we saw fit to give them in return, even such as broken platters and fragments of glass. I saw in this manner sixteen balls of cotton thread which weighed above twenty-five pounds, given for three Portuguese ceutis. This traffic I forbade, and suffered no one to take their cotton from them, unless I should order it to be procured for your Highnesses, if proper quantities could be met with. It grows in this island, but from my short stay here I could not satisfy myself fully concerning it; the gold, also, which they wear in their noses, is found here, but not to lose time, I am determined to proceed onward and ascertain whether I can reach Cipango. At night they all went on shore with their canoes.

Sunday, 14 October.

In the morning, I ordered the boats to be got ready, and coasted along the island toward the north- northeast to examine that part of it, we having landed first at the eastern

part. Presently we discovered two or three villages, and the people all came down to the shore, calling out to us, and giving thanks to God. Some brought us water, and others victuals: others seeing that I was not disposed to land, plunged into the sea and swam out to us, and we perceived that they interrogated us if we had come from heaven. An old man came on board my boat; the others, both men and women cried with loud voices--"Come and see the men who have come from heavens. Bring them victuals and drink." There came many of both sexes, every one bringing something, giving thanks to God, prostrating themselves on the earth, and lifting up their hands to heaven. They called out to us loudly to come to land, but I was apprehensive on account of a reef of rocks, which surrounds the whole island, although within there is depth of water and room sufficient for all the ships of Christendom, with a very narrow entrance. There are some shoals withinside, but the water is as smooth as a pond. It was to view these parts that I set out in the morning, for I wished to give a complete relation to your Highnesses, as also to find where a fort might be built. I discovered a tongue of land which appeared like an island though it was not, but might be cut through and made so in two days; it contained six houses. I do not, however, see the necessity of fortifying the place, as the people here are simple in war-like matters, as your Highnesses will see by those seven which I have ordered to be taken and carried to Spain in order to learn our language and return, unless your Highnesses should choose to have them all transported to Castile, or held captive in the island. I could conquer the whole of them with fifty men, and govern them as I pleased. Near the islet I have mentioned were groves of trees, the most beautiful I have ever seen, with their foliage as verdant as we see in Castile in April and May. There were also many streams. After having taken a survey of these parts, I returned to the ship, and setting sail, discovered such a number of islands that I knew not which first to visit; the natives whom I had taken on board informed me by signs that there were so many of them that they could not be numbered; they repeated the names of more than a hundred. I determined to steer for the largest, which is about five leagues from San Salvador; the others were some at a greater, and some at a less distance from that island. They are all very level, without mountains, exceedingly fertile and populous, the inhabitants living at war with one another, although a simple race, and with delicate bodies.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 113

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Exploring San Salvador

Trading with Indians
Theodore De Bry

San Salvador , *15th October, 1492*

15 October.

Stood off and on during the night, determining not to come to anchor till morning, fearing to meet with shoals; continued our course in the morning; and as the island was found to be six or seven leagues distant, and the tide was against us, it was noon when we arrived there. I found that part of it towards San Salvador extending from north to south five leagues, and the other side which we coasted along, ran from east to west more than ten leagues. From this island espying a still larger one to the west, I set sail in that direction and kept on till night without reaching the western extremity of the island, where I gave it the name of Santa Maria de la Concepcion. About sunset we anchored near the cape which terminates the island towards the west to enquire for gold, for the natives we had taken from San Salvador told me that the people here wore golden bracelets upon their arms and legs. I believed pretty confidently that they had invented this story in order to find means to escape from us, still I determined to pass none of these islands without taking possession, because being once taken, it would answer for all times. We anchored and remained till Tuesday, when at daybreak I went ashore with the boats armed. The people we found naked like those of San Salvador, and of the same disposition. They suffered us to traverse the island, and gave us what we asked of them. As the wind blew southeast upon the shore where the vessels lay, I determined not to remain, and set out for the ship. A large canoe being near the caravel Nina, one of the San Salvador natives leaped overboard and swam to her; (another had made his escape the night before,) the canoe being reached by the fugitive, the natives rowed for the land too swiftly to be overtaken; having landed, some of my men went ashore in pursuit of them, when they abandoned the canoe and fled with precipitation; the canoe which they had left was brought on board the Nina, where from another quarter had arrived a small canoe with a single man, who came to barter some cotton; some of the sailors finding him unwilling to go on board the vessel, jumped into the sea and took him. I was upon the quarter deck of my ship, and seeing the whole, sent for him, and gave him a red cap, put some glass beads upon his arms, and two hawk's bells upon his ears. I then ordered his canoe to be returned to him, and despatched him back to land.

I now set sail for the other large island to the west and gave orders for the canoe which the Nina had in tow to be set adrift. I had refused to receive the cotton from the native whom I sent on shore, although he pressed it upon me. I looked out after him and saw upon his landing that the others all ran to meet him with much wonder. It appeared to them that we were honest people, and that the man who had escaped from us had done us some injury, for which we kept him in custody. It was in order to favor this notion that I ordered the canoe to be set adrift, and gave the man the presents above mentioned, that when your Highnesses send another expedition to these parts it may meet with a friendly reception. All I gave the man was not worth four maravedis. We set sail about ten o'clock, with the wind southeast and stood southerly for the island I mentioned above, which is a very large one, and where according to the account of the natives on board, there is much gold, the inhabitants wearing it in bracelets upon their arms, legs, and necks, as well as in their ears and at their noses. This island is nine leagues distant from Santa Maria in a westerly direction. This part of it extends from northwest, to southeast and appears to be twenty-eight leagues long, very level, without any mountains, like San

Salvador and Santa Maria, having a good shore and not rocky, except a few ledges under water, which renders it necessary to anchor at some distance, although the water is very clear, and the bottom may be seen. Two shots of a lombarda from the land, the water is so deep that it cannot be sounded; this is the case in all these islands. They are all extremely verdant and fertile, with the air agreeable, and probably contain many things of which I am ignorant, not inclining to stay here, but visit other islands in search of gold. And considering the indications of it among the natives who wear it upon their arms and legs, and having ascertained that it is the true metal by showing them some pieces of it which I have with me, I cannot fail, with the help of our Lord, to find the place which produces it.

Being at sea, about midway between Santa Maria and the large island, which I name Fernandina, we met a man in a canoe going from Santa Maria to Fernandina; he had with him a piece of the bread which the natives make, as big as one's fist, a calabash of water, a quantity of reddish earth, pulverized and afterwards kneaded up, and some dried leaves which are in high value among them, for a quantity of it was brought to me at San Salvador; he had besides a little basket made after their fashion, containing some glass beads, and two blancas by all which I knew he had come from San Salvador, and had passed from thence to Santa Maria. He came to the ship and I caused him to be taken on board, as he requested it; we took his canoe also on board and took care of his things. I ordered him to be presented with bread and honey, and drink, and shall carry him to Fernandina and give him his property, that he may carry a good report of us, so that if it please our Lord when your Highnesses shall send again to these regions, those who arrive here may receive honor, and procure what the natives may be found to possess.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 114

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Fernandina and Santa Maria

Indians collecting gold in the streams
Theodore De Bry

Santa Maria/Fernandina , *16th October, 1492*

Tuesday, 16 October.

Set sail from Santa Maria about noon, for Fernandina which appeared very large in the west; sailed all the day with calms, and could not arrive soon enough to view the shore and select a good anchorage, for great care must be taken in this particular, lest the anchors be lost. Beat up and down all night, and in the morning arrived at a village and anchored. This was the place to which the man whom we had picked up at sea had gone, when we set him on shore. He had given such a favorable account of us, that all night there were great numbers of canoes coming off to us, who brought us water and other things. I ordered each man to be presented with something, as strings of ten or a dozen glass beads apiece, and thongs of leather, all which they estimated highly; those which came on board I directed should be fed with molasses. At three o'clock, I sent the boat on shore for water; the natives with great good will directed the men where to find it, assisted them in carrying the casks full of it to the boat, and seemed to take great pleasure in serving us. This is a very large island, and I have resolved to coast it about, for as I understand, in, or near the island, there is a mine of gold. It is eight leagues west of Santa Maria, and the cape where we have arrived, and all this coast extends from north-northwest to south-southeast. I have seen twenty leagues of it, but not the end. Now, writing this, I set sail with a southerly wind to circumnavigate the island, and search till we can find Samoet, which is the island or city where the gold is, according to the account of those who come on board the ship, to which the relation of those of San Salvador and Santa Maria corresponds. These people are similar to those of the islands just mentioned, and have the same language and customs; with the exception that they appear somewhat more civilized, showing themselves more subtle in their dealings with us, bartering their cotton and other articles with more profit than the others had experienced. Here we saw cotton cloth, and perceived the people more decent, the women wearing a slight covering of cotton over the nudities. The island is verdant, level and fertile to a high degree; and I doubt not that grain is sowed and reaped the whole year round, as well as all other productions of the place. I saw many trees, very dissimilar to those of our country, and many of them had branches of different sorts upon the same trunk; and such a diversity was among them that it was the greatest wonder in the world to behold. Thus, for instance, one branch of a tree bore leaves like those of a cane, another branch of the same tree, leaves similar to those of the lentisk. In this manner a single tree bears five or six different kinds. Nor is this done by grafting, for that is a work of art, whereas these trees grow wild, and the natives take no care about them. They have no religion, and I believe that they would very readily become Christians, as they have a good understanding. Here the fish are so dissimilar to ours that it is wonderful. Some are shaped like dories, of the finest hues in the world, blue, yellow, red, and every other color, some variegated with a thousand different tints, so beautiful that no one on beholding them could fail to express the highest wonder and admiration. Here are also whales. Beasts, we saw none, nor any creatures on land save parrots and lizards, but a boy told me he saw a large snake. No sheep nor goats were seen, and although our stay here has been short, it being now noon, yet were there any, I could hardly have failed of seeing them. The circumnavigation of the island I shall describe afterward.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 115

Columbus Journal: Isabela

Isabela , *17th-19th October, 1492*

Wednesday, 17 October. At noon set sail from the village where we had anchored and watered. Kept on our course to sail round the island; the wind southwest and south. My intention was to follow the coast of the island to the southeast as it runs in that direction, being informed by the Indians I have on board, besides another whom I met with here, that in such a course I should meet with the island which they call Samoet, where gold is found. I was further informed by Martin Alonzo Pinzon, captain of the Pinta, on board of which I had sent three of the Indians, that he had been assured by one of them I might sail round the island much sooner by the northwest. Seeing that the wind would not enable me to proceed in the direction I first contemplated, and finding it favorable for the one thus recommended me, I steered to the northwest and arriving at the extremity of the island at two leagues' distance, I discovered a remarkable haven with two entrances, formed by an island at its mouth, both very narrow, the inside capacious enough for a hundred ships, were there sufficient depth of water. I thought it advisable to examine it, and therefore anchored outside, and went with the boats to sound it, but found the water shallow. As I had first imagined it to be the mouth of a river, I had directed the casks to be carried ashore for water, which being done we discovered eight or ten men who straightway came up to us, and directed us to a village in the neighborhood; I accordingly dispatched the crews thither in quest of water, part of them armed, and the rest with the casks, and the place being at some distance it detained me here a couple of hours. In the meantime I strayed about among the groves, which present the most enchanting sight ever witnessed, a degree of verdure prevailing like that of May in Andalusia, the trees as different from those of our country as day is from night, and the same may be said of the fruit, the weeds, the stones and everything else. A few of the trees, however, seemed to be of a species similar to some that are to be found in Castile, though still with a great dissimilarity, but the others so unlike, that it is impossible to find any resemblance in them to those of our land. The natives we found like those already described, as to personal appearance and manners, and naked like the rest. Whatever they possessed, they bartered for what we chose to give them. I saw a boy of the crew purchasing javelins of them with bits of platters and broken glass. Those who went for water informed me that they had entered their houses and found them very clean and neat, with beds and coverings of cotton nets. Their houses are all built in the shape of tents, with very high chimneys. None of the villages which I saw contained more than twelve or fifteen of them. Here it was remarked that the married women wore cotton breeches, but the younger females were without them, except a few who were as old as eighteen years. Dogs were seen of a large and small size, and one of the men had hanging at his nose a piece of gold half as big as a castellailo, with letters upon it. I endeavored to purchase it of them in order to ascertain what sort of money it was but they refused to part with it. Having taken our water on board, I set sail and proceeded northwest till I had surveyed the coast to the point where it begins to run from east to west. Here the Indians gave me to understand that this island was smaller than that of Samoet, and that I had better return in order to reach it the sooner. The wind died away, and then sprang up from the west-northwest which was contrary to the course we were pursuing, we therefore hove about and steered various courses through the night from east to south standing off from the land, the weather being cloudy and thick. It rained violently from midnight till near day, and the sky still remains clouded; we remain off the southeast part of the island, where I expect to anchor and stay till the weather grows clear, when I shall steer for the other islands I am in quest of. Every day that I have been in these Indies it has rained more or less. I assure your Highnesses that these lands are the most fertile, temperate, level and beautiful countries in the world.

Thursday, 18 October. As soon as the sky grew clear, we set sail and went as far round the island as we could, anchoring when we found it inconvenient to proceed. I did not, however, land. In the morning set sail again.

Friday, 19 October. In the morning we got under weigh, and I ordered the Pinta to steer east and southeast and the Nina south- southeast; proceeding myself to the southeast the other vessels I directed to keep on the courses prescribed till noon, and then to rejoin me. Within three hours we descried an island to the east toward which we directed our course, and arrived all three, before noon, at the northern extremity, where a rocky islet and reef extend toward the North, with another between them and the main island. The Indians on board the ships called this island Saomete. I named it Isabela. It lies westerly from the island of Fernandina, and the coast extends from the islet twelve leagues, west, to a cape which I called Cabo Hermoso, it being a beautiful, round headland with a bold shore free from shoals. Part of the shore is rocky, but the rest of it, like most of the coast here, a sandy beach. Here we anchored till morning. This island is the most beautiful that I have yet seen, the trees in great number, flourishing and lofty; the land is higher than the other islands, and exhibits an eminence, which though it cannot be called a mountain, yet adds a beauty to its appearance, and gives an indication of streams of water in the interior. From this part toward the northeast is an extensive bay with many large and thick groves. I wished to anchor there, and land, that I might examine those delightful regions, but found the coast shoal, without a possibility of casting anchor except at a distance from the shore. The wind being favorable, I came to the Cape, which I named Hermoso, where I anchored today. This is so beautiful a place, as well as the neighboring regions, that I know not in

which course to proceed first; my eyes are never tired with viewing such delightful verdure, and of a species so new and dissimilar to that of our country, and I have no doubt there are trees and herbs here which would be of great value in Spain, as dyeing materials, medicine, spicery, etc., but I am mortified that I have no acquaintance with them. Upon our arrival here we experienced the most sweet and delightful odor from the flowers or trees of the island. Tomorrow morning before we depart, I intend to land and see what can be found in the neighborhood. Here is no village, but farther within the island is one, where our Indians inform us we shall find the king, and that he has much gold. I shall penetrate so far as to reach the village and see or speak with the king, who, as they tell us, governs all these islands, and goes dressed, with a great deal of gold about him. I do not, however, give much credit to these accounts, as I understand the natives but imperfectly, and perceive them to be so poor that a trifling quantity of gold appears to them a great amount. This island appears to me to be a separate one from that of Saomete, and I even think there may be others between them. I am not solicitous to examine particularly everything here, which indeed could not be done in fifty years, because my desire is to make all possible discoveries, and return to your Highnesses, if it please our Lord, in April. But in truth, should I meet with gold or spices in great quantity, I shall remain till I collect as much as possible, and for this purpose I am proceeding solely in quest of them.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 116

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus Journal: Near Cipango and the Great Khan

Isabela , *20th-21th October, 1492*

Saturday, 20 October.

At sunrise we weighed anchor, and stood to the northeast and east along the south side of this island, which I named Isabela, and the cape where we anchored, Cabo de la Laguna; in this direction I expected from the account of our Indians to find the capital and king of the island. I found the coast very shallow, and offering every obstacle to our navigation, and perceiving that our course this way must be very circuitous, I determined to return to the westward. The wind failed us, and we were unable to get near the shore before night; and as it is very dangerous anchoring here in the dark, when it is impossible to discern among so many shoals and reefs whether the ground be suitable, I stood off and on all night. The other vessels came to anchor, having reached the shore in season. As was customary among us, they made signals to me to stand in and anchor, but I determined to remain at sea.

Sunday, 21 October.

At 10 o'clock, we arrived at a cape of the island, and anchored, the other vessels in company. After having dispatched a meal, I went ashore, and found no habitation save a single house, and that without an occupant; we had no doubt that the people had fled in terror at our approach, as the house was completely furnished. I suffered nothing to be touched, and went with my captains and some of the crew to view the country. This island even exceeds the others in beauty and fertility. Groves of lofty and flourishing trees are abundant, as also large lakes, surrounded and overhung by the foliage, in a most enchanting manner. Everything looked as green as in April in Andalusia. The melody of the birds was so exquisite that one was never willing to part from the spot, and the flocks of parrots obscured the heavens.
The diversity in the appearance of the feathered tribe from those of our country is extremely curious. A thousand different sorts of trees, with their fruit were to be met with, and of a wonderfully delicious odor. It was a great affliction to me to be ignorant of their natures, for I am very certain they are all valuable; specimens of them and of the plants I have preserved. Going round one of these lakes, I saw a snake, which we killed, and I have kept the skin for your Highnesses; upon being discovered he took to the water, whither we followed him, as it was not deep, and dispatched him with our lances; he was seven spans in length; I think there are many more such about here. I discovered also the aloe tree, and am determined to take on board the ship tomorrow, ten quintals of it, as I am told it is valuable. While we were in search of some good water, we came upon a village of the natives about half a league from the place where the ships lay; the inhabitants on discovering us abandoned their houses, and took to flight, carrying of their goods to the mountain. I ordered that nothing which they had left should be taken, not even the value of a pin. Presently we saw several of the natives advancing towards our party, and one of them came up to us, to whom we gave some hawk's bells and glass beads, with which he was delighted. We asked him in return, for water, and after I had gone on board the ship, the natives came down to the shore with their calabashes full, and showed great pleasure in presenting us with it. I ordered more glass beads to be given them, and they promised to return the next day. It is my wish to fill all the water casks of the ships at this place, which being executed, I shall depart immediately, if the weather serve, and sail round the island, till I succeed in meeting with the king, in order to see if I can acquire any of the gold, which I hear he possesses. Afterwards I shall set sail for another very large island which I believe to be Cipango, according to the indications I receive from the Indians on board. They call the Island Colba, and say there are many large ships, and sailors there. This other island they name Bosio, and inform me that it is very large; the others which lie in our course, I shall examine on the passage, and according as I find gold or spices in abundance, I shall determine what to do; at all events I am determined to proceed on to the continent, and visit the city of Guisay, where I shall deliver the letters of your Highnesses to the Great Can, and demand an answer, with which I shall return.

by Chistopher Columbus, from his Journal,
Article ID 117

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Cuba's Indigenous Population in 1492

Indian Pray
Theodore De Bry

Caribbean , *27 October 1492*

Christopher Columbus discovered Cuba on October 27, 1492 as he searched for the New World and the riches that the Indies would provide Spain. Upon landing in Cuba, Columbus marveled at the physical beauty he found, "the most beautiful land that human eyes have ever seen."

Upon arriving in Cuba, Columbus was greeted by the indigenous indians of the island, the Taíno indians. Little information is known about Cuba's early inhabitants. The Indians that inhabited the island at the time of Columbus's landing possessed no written language and most of them, although peaceful, were annihilated, absorbed, or died out as a result of the shock of conquest.

Archeological discoveries and studies of village sites and buriel places indicate that there existed at least three cultures in Cuba: the Guanahatabeyes, the Ciboneyes, and the Taínos.

The Guanahatabey was Cuba's first culture. They were described as a shell culture living mostly in caves and living off mollusks, fish, and fruits. In the time of the discovery and the conquest, the guanahatabeyes were in the process of extinction in their caverns on the western end of Cuba.

Cuba's second culture were the Ciboney - a distint relative of the larger South American Arawak group. The Ciboney indians inhabited western Cuba and the southwestern peninsula of Hispaniola. They were a Stone Age culture and were more advanced than the Guanahatabeyes, inhabiting towns near rivers or the sea. The Ciboneys lived in both caves and simple dwellings called bajareques or barbacoas. The Ciboneys fell prey to the more advanced Taínos and became their servants or nabories.

The Tainos occupied the central and eastern parts of Cuba, as well as most of Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. They preferred high and fertile terrain close to sources of fresh water and lived in small villages in round houses with conical roofs made of bamboo and thatched palm called caneyes or rectangular ones called bohios. By 1492, the Tainos were being challenged by the Caribs (the word meaning "cannibal"), a warlike group moving north from South America that had made several incursions into Cuba. Upon the arrival of the Spaniards in the Caribbean, the Caribs retreated to the Lesser Antilles and Cuba was left for Spain's colonization.

by Liceo Cubano Website,
Article ID 4

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Where in Cuba did Christopher Columbus land?

Christopher Columbus landing in Cuba

San Salvador, Cuba , *28 October 1492*

In traditional history studies it is without doubt that Christopher Columbus, on the 28th October 1492, landed in Bariay, a bay in the north east of Cuba, in the actual Holguin province.
This is said in the huge literatures about this time. Numerous eminent historians, geographers, archaeologists during many years have tried to prove it, and this is what most people believe.
To confirm it or deny it, is not easy.
The original Admiral diaries disappeared along with any copies.
What we know now is a Bartolome de las Casas version, who probably had access to these documents. But we can suppose too that there are quite deliberate changes and lost texts.
And if this is not enough, there are many appreciation mistakes and things too difficult to explain about many routes, distances and calculations. This can be explained because in the discovery period there was a magnetic declination that affected them.
We need to research deeply in the Admirals texts, trying to find definitive proofs. Christopher Columbus wrote that in his first port, called by him, San Salvador, he only saw 2 houses, where he could find fishing tools and described beautiful mountains like la Peña de los Enamorados.
Contemporary archaeologists tell us about incredible coincidences about the Columbus tale, where they found Bariay.
But others notice the amazing similarity between that zone and an area called Peña de Antequera, in Malaga, Spain.
But not everything agrees with the narrations. The renowned sailor talks about 12 fathoms of deep water (about 20 metres) that Bariay has not. When he navigates to the west from this point, to one legua, he watched another bay called Rio de la Luna, that will be the actual Jururú, located only one kilometre from Baray.
Columbus arrived on the 28th of October in 1492, at night, to a second port, dominated by Río de Mares.
People today who think that Bariay was San Salvador, and affirm that Río de Mares is actually Gibara, don't realise that in these places you cannot see the discoverer descriptions, or the depths he made in this bay.
During some days, Columbus stayed in Rio de Mares. He offers a big quantity of precise details about this place, that curiously coincide with the actual Manati Bay. In his second arrival in Cuban lands, we could believe that San Salvador is the actual Puerto Padre, where have been found 12 fathom of depth, and to a mile in the west, the Malagueta Bay and a wonderful mountain horizons, where probably the Admiral said one of his most remembered sentences:
"esta es la tierra mas hermosa que ojos humanos vieron" (this is the most beautiful land that human eyes have ever seen).

by cuba heritage .com,
Article ID 10

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The menu for a Spanish Seaman

Atlantic Ocean , *1492*

Columbus sailed from Palos de la Frontera on 3 August, 1492. His flagship, the Santa Maria had 52 men aboard while his other two ships, the Nina and Pinta each held 18 men. The expedition made a stop at the Canary Islands and on 6 September 1492 sailed westward.
Let us look at the first voyage and the victuals embarked on the three vessels, the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. The first problem was to obtain supplies of food, wine and water. At the Canary islands they picked up fresh water, wood and the famous Gomera goat cheese.
Columbus' first voyage had the best victuals (and enough to last a year), not the case in his other voyages. The menu for Spanish seamen consisted of water, vinegar, wine, olive oil, molasses, cheese, honey, raisins, rice, garlic, almonds, sea biscuits (hardtack), dry legumes such as chickpeas, lentils, beans, salted and barreled sardines, anchovies, dry salt cod and pickled or salted meats (beef and pork), salted flour. The olive oil and perhaps olives were stored in earthenware jugs. All other provisions were stored in wooden casks which, according to some reports, were of cheap and faulty construction permitting the preserving brine to leak out of the meat casks and moisture to invade the casks of dry provisions. All were stored in the hold, the driest section of which was normally reserved for those casks carrying dry provisions. A cooper (barrel maker) was responsible for keeping the casks tight, an almost impossible challenge.

Food, mostly boiled, was served in a large communal wooden bowl. It consisted of poorly cooked meat with bones in it, the sailors attacking it with fervor, picking it with their fingers as they had no forks or spoons. The larger pieces of meat were cut with the knife each sailor carried.
At the time of Columbus, the only means of cooking was an open firebox called "Fogon." It was equipped with a back to screen it from the wind. Sand was spread on the floor of the box and a wood fire built on it. Of course, all this was obliterated in stormy weather. Later on, portable ovens were made available to set up ashore when the opportunity arose.
Fish was cheaper and more readily available than meat and was served more often. Meats were often prepared in some sort of stew with peas other legumes or rice and served with sea biscuits which were soaked in the soup or in water for edibility. Sea biscuits were purchased to last at least a year, providing they were kept in dry areas.
For drink the crew had wine and water. Both were stored in wooden barrels. The wine was red and high in alcohol -- a preservative feature. It probably came from the hot, dry, undulating treeless chalky plains of Xeres (Jerez) near Cadiz, where the vines were first planted by the Phoenicians, tended by the Greeks after them and then the Romans and much later the Moors. The wines while rich in character were not fortified at that time. Fortification came much later.

During the days of calm at sea, the sailors would fish and then cook their catch.
The weather during the journey was pleasant, no major storms. By 10 October, after 34 days at sea, the sailors became hysterical and were ready to mutiny, many of them feeling that since the world was flat, at any moment they would fall off.
Columbus convinced the mutineers to wait 3 more days. They very next day they saw tree branches in the water and realized that land was close.

by Castello Banfi,
Article ID 118

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Indians: Obey or Will Be Enslaved

King Fernando and Queen Isabel of Spain

Cuba , *1500*

In the name of King Ferdinand and Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castile and Leon, etc., conquerors of barbarian nations, we notify you as best we can that our Lord God Eternal created Heaven and earth and a man and woman from whom we all descend for all times and all over the world. In the 5,000 years since creation the multitude of these enerations caused men to divide and establish kingdoms in various parts of the world, among whom God chose St. Peter as leader of mankind, regardless of their law, sect or belief. He seated St. Peter in Rome as the best place from which to rule the world but he allowed him to establish his seat in all parts of the world and rule all people, whether Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles or any other sect. He was named Pope, which means admirable and greatest father, governor of all men.

Those who lived at that time obeyed St. Peter as Lord and superior King of the universe, and so did their descendants obey his successors and so on to the end of time.

The late Pope gave these islands and mainland of the ocean and the contents here of to the above-mentioned King and Queen, as is certified in writing and you may see the documents if you should so desire. Therefore, Their Highnesses are lords and masters of this land; they were acknowledged as such when this notice was posted, and were and are being served willingly and without resistance; then, their religious envoys were acknowledged and obeyed without delay, and all subjects unconditionally and of their own free will became Christians and thus they remain. Their Highnesses received their allegiance with joy and benignity and decreed that they be treated in this spirit like good and loyal vassals and you are under the obligation to do the same.

Therefore, we request that you understand this text, deliberate on its contents within a reasonable time, and recognize the Church and its highest priest, the Pope, as rulers of the universe, and in their name the King and Queen of Spain as rulers of this land, allowing the religious fathers to preach our holy Faith to you. You own compliance as a duty to the King and we in his name will receive you with love and charity, respecting your freedom and that of your wives and sons and your rights of possession and we shall not compel you to baptism unless you, informed of the Truth, wish to convert to our holy Catholic Faith as almost all your neighbors have done in other islands, in exchange for which Their Highnesses bestow many privileges and exemptions upon you.

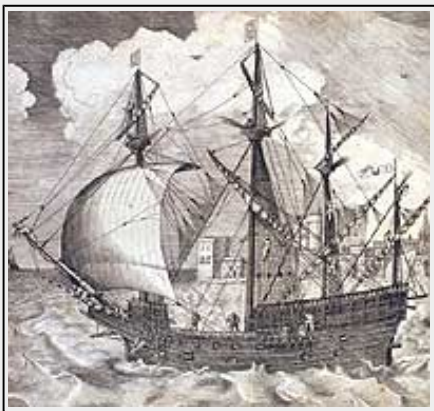
Should you fail to comply, or delay maliciously in so doing, we assure you that with the help of God we shall use force against you, declaring war upon you from all sides and with all possible means, and we shall bind you to the yoke of the Church and of Their Highnesses; we shall enslave your persons, wives and sons, sell you or dispose of you as the King sees fit; we shall seize your possessions and harm you as much as we can as disobedient and resisting vassals. And we declare you guilty of resulting deaths and injuries, exempting Their Highnesses of such guilt as well as ourselves and the gentlemen who accompany us.
We hereby request that legal signatures be a fixed to this text and pray those present to bear witness for us, etc.

by cuba heritage .com,
Article ID 6

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Spanish Treasure Fleet System, Part 1



16th century galleon. During the 16th century, the light caravels used on voyages of discovery and the first ocean-going vessels stepped aside to make way for ships with larger capacity and tonnage such as the robust galleons that plied the Indies run.

Cuba , *1561-1778*

In 1622, 1715, and again in 1733, Spain suffered horrible economic blows when the treasure fleets or flotas entered Florida waters and were destroyed by hurricanes. The 1622 fleet was scattered across the lower Florida Keys and the Dry Tortugas. The 1715 fleet wrecked along the Atlantic coast of southern Florida, on what is now known as the Treasure Coast. And finally, the 1733 fleet met its fate along the upper Florida Keys, from modern Grassy Key to upper Key Largo.
The 1622, 1715, and 1733 flotas were an integral part of an economic system that had developed early in the three centuries of Spanish rule in the New World. A pattern of trade, controlled strictly by the Spanish crown, had evolved based on the mercantilistic policies of the day. Spain's policy was to establish a monopoly, keeping her colonies dependent on her. This monopoly was eventually challenged successfully by English and Dutch traders, but by law Spanish colonials could trade only with the authorized Spanish merchant flotas. As early as the 16th century a law was passed by the Casa de Contratacion, or "House of Trade," which called for the periodic sailing of fleets from Spain to the Caribbean twice a year (though they hardly ever sailed on schedule). The fleets carried manufactured goods for sale to the citizens of the New World, and were then filled with the rich treasures of the Americas for transport back to Spain.

The typical fleet consisted of several types of ships. Heavily armed galleons served as protection for the bulk of the fleet, merchant naos. The only difference between the nao and galleon was the amount of armament carried. Several pataches, small reconnaissance vessels, also accompanied the fleet, as well as resfuerzos or supply ships.. The fleet was led by the Capitana, or flagship, and the Almiranta, or vice-flagship.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 384

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Pre-Columbian

5000 BC - AD 1492

The Cuban Tribes: Tainos, Ciboneys...

Spanish Settlement

1492 - 1762

Columbus arrival, conquest and colonization

British Occupation and US Independence

1762 - 1776

The English Havana siege in 1762

Sugar Boom & Slavery

1776 - 1840

Sugar & Tobacco plantations and Slave Trade

The Fight for Independence

1850 - 1898

The Cuban Struggle for Independence

Corruption & Coups

1898 - 1959

Republic of Cuba times

The Revolutionary Years

1959 - 1989

Fidel Castro Revolutionary Goverment

Special Period & Recovery

Post 1990

Period after the colapse of Soviet economy.

Royal Navy Captain Becomes a Pirate

1658 British Men of War
Peabody Essex Museum

England/Madagascar/East Indies , *17th Century*

When the English, Dutch, and Spanish entered into an alliance to suppress buccaneering in the West Indies, certain worthies of Bristol, in old England, fitted out two vessels to assist in this laudable project; for doubtless Bristol trade suffered smartly from the Morgans and the l'Olonoises of that old time. One of these vessels was named the Duke, of which a certain Captain Gibson was the commander and Avary the mate.
Away they sailed to the West Indies, and there Avary became impressed by the advantages offered by piracy, and by the amount of good things that were to be gained by very little striving.

One night the captain (who was one of those fellows mightily addicted to punch), instead of going ashore to saturate himself with rum at the ordinary, had his drink in his cabin in private.
While he lay snoring away the effects of his rum in the cabin, Avary and a few other conspirators heaved the anchor very leisurely, and sailed out of the harbor of Corunna, and through the midst of the allied fleet riding at anchor in the darkness.

By and by, when the morning came, the captain was awakened by the pitching and tossing of the vessel, the rattle and clatter of the tackle overhead, and the noise of footsteps passing and repassing hither and thither across the deck. Perhaps he lay for a while turning the matter over and over in his muddled head, but he presently rang the bell, and Avary and another fellow answered the call.

"What's the matter?" bawls the captain from his berth.
"Nothing," says Avary, coolly.
"Something's the matter with the ship," says the captain. "Does she drive? What weather is it?"
"Oh no," says Avary; "we are at sea."
"At sea?"
"Come, come!" says Avary: "I'll tell you; you must know that I'm the captain of the ship now, and you must be packing from this here cabin. We are bound to Madagascar, to make all of our fortunes, and if you're a mind to ship for the cruise, why, we'll be glad to have you, if you will be sober and mind your own business; if not, there is a boat alongside, and I'll have you set ashore."

The poor half-tipsy captain had no relish to go a-pirating under the command of his backsliding mate, so out of the ship he bundled, and away he rowed with four or five of the crew, who, like him, refused to join with their jolly shipmates.

The rest of them sailed away to the East Indies, to try their fortunes in those waters, for our Captain Avary was of a high spirit, and had no mind to fritter away his time in the West Indies squeezed dry by buccaneer Morgan and others of lesser note. No, he would make a bold stroke for it at once, and make or lose at a single cast.

On his way he picked up a couple of like kind with himself--two sloops off Madagascar. With these he sailed away to the coast of India, and for a time his name was lost in the obscurity of uncertain history. But only for a time, for suddenly it flamed out in a blaze of glory. It was reported that a vessel belonging to the Great Mogul, laden with treasure and bearing the monarch's own daughter upon a holy pilgrimage to Mecca (they being Mohammedans), had fallen in with the pirates, and after a short resistance had been surrendered,

with the damsel, her court, and all the diamonds, pearls, silk, silver, and gold aboard. It was rumored that the Great Mogul, raging at the insult offered to
him through his own flesh and blood, had threatened to wipe out of existence the few English settlements scattered along the coast; whereat the honorable East India Company was in a pretty state of fuss and feathers. Rumor, growing with the telling, has it that Avary is going to marry the Indian princess, willy-nilly, and will turn rajah, and eschew piracy as indecent. As for the treasure itself, there was no end to the extent to which it grew as it passed from mouth to mouth.

Cracking the nut of romance and exaggeration, we come to the kernel of the story--that Avary did fall in with an Indian vessel laden with great treasure (and possibly with the Mogul's daughter), which he captured, and thereby gained a vast prize.

Having concluded that he had earned enough money by the trade he had undertaken, he determined to retire and live decently for the rest of his life upon what he already had. As a step toward this object, he set about cheating his Madagascar partners out of their share of what had been gained. He persuaded them to store all the treasure in his vessel, it being the largest of the three; and so, having it safely in hand, he altered the course of
his ship one fine night, and when the morning came the Madagascar sloops found themselves floating upon a wide ocean without a farthing of the treasure for which they had fought so hard, and for which they might whistle for all the good it would do them.

At first Avary had a great part of a mind to settle at Boston, in Massachusetts, and had that little town been one whit less bleak and forbidding, it might have had the honor of being the home of this famous man. As it was, he did not like the looks of it, so he sailed away to the eastward, to Ireland, where he settled himself at Biddeford, in hopes of an easy life of it for the rest of his days.

Here he found himself the possessor of a plentiful stock of jewels, such as pearls, diamonds, rubies, etc., but with hardly a score of honest farthings to jingle in his breeches pocket.
He consulted with a certain merchant of Bristol concerning the disposal of the stones-a fellow not much more cleanly in his habits of honesty than Avary himself. This worthy undertook to act as Avary's broker. Off he marched with the jewels, and that was the last that the pirate saw of his Indian treasure.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 49

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Pirate's Punishment: The process of marooning

Caribbean , *17th Century*

"Maroon-to put ashore on a desert isle, as a sailor, under pretense of having committed some great crime." Thus our good Noah Webster gives us the dry bones, the anatomy, upon which the imagination may construct a specimen to suit itself.

It is thence that the marooners took their name, for marooning was one of their most effective instruments of punishment or revenge. If a pirate broke one of the many rules which governed the particular band to which he belonged, he was marooned; did a captain defend his ship to such a degree as to be unpleasant to the pirates attacking it, he was marooned; even the pirate captain himself, if he displeased his followers by the severity of his rule, was in danger of having the same punishment visited upon him which he had perhaps more than once visited upon another.

The process of marooning was as simple as terrible. A suitable place was chosen (generally some desert isle as far removed as possible from the pathway of commerce), and the condemned man was rowed from the ship to the beach. Out he was bundled upon the sand spit; a gun, a half dozen bullets, a few pinches of powder, and a bottle of water were chucked ashore after him, and away rowed the boat's crew back to the ship, leaving the poor wretch alone to rave away his life in madness, or to sit sunken in his gloomy despair till death mercifully released him from torment. It rarely if ever happened that anything was known of him after having been marooned. A boat's crew from some vessel, sailing by chance that way, might perhaps find a few chalky bones bleaching upon the white sand in the garish glare of the sunlight, but that was all. And such were marooners.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 48

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Buccaneers In Caribbean Sea, part 1

Hispaniola/Caribbean , *17th Century*

Just above the northwestern shore of the old island of Hispaniola-the Santo Domingo of our day-and separated from it only by a narrow channel of some five or six miles in width, lies a queer little hunch of an island, known, because of a distant resemblance to that animal, as the Tortuga de Mar, or sea turtle.
It is not more than twenty miles in length by perhaps seven or eight in breadth; it is only a little spot of land, and as you look at it upon the map a pin's head would almost cover it; yet from that spot, as from a center of inflammation, a burning fire
of human wickedness and ruthlessness and lust overran the world, and spread terror and death throughout the Spanish West Indies, from St. Augustine to the island of Trinidad, and from Panama to the coasts of Peru.
About the middle of the seventeenth century certain French adventurers set out from the fortified island of St. Christopher in longboats and hoys, directing their course to the westward, there to discover new islands. Sighting Hispaniola "with abundance of joy," they landed, and went into the country, where they found great quantities of wild cattle, horses, and swine.

Now vessels on the return voyage to Europe from the West Indies needed revictualing, and food, especially flesh, was at a premium in the islands of the Spanish Main; wherefore a great profit was
to be turned in preserving beef and pork, and selling the flesh to homeward-bound vessels.
The northwestern shore of Hispaniola, lying as it does at the eastern outlet of the old Bahama Channel, running between the island of Cuba and the great Bahama Banks, lay almost in the very main stream of travel. The pioneer Frenchmen were not slow to discover the double advantage to be reaped from the wild cattle that cost them nothing to procure, and a market for the flesh ready found for them. So down upon Hispaniola they came by
boatloads and shiploads, gathering like a swarm of mosquitoes, and overrunning the whole western end of the island. There they established themselves, spending the time alternately in hunting the wild cattle and buccanning the meat, and squandering
their hardly earned gains in wild debauchery, the opportunities for which were never lacking in the Spanish West Indies.

Buccanning, by which the "buccaneers" gained their name, was of process of curing thin strips of meat by salting, smoking, and drying in the sun.
At first the Spaniards thought nothing of the few travel-worn Frenchmen who dragged their longboats and hoys up on the beach, and shot a wild bullock or two to keep body and soul together;
but when the few grew to dozens, and the dozens to scores, and the scores to hundreds, it was a very different matter, and wrathful grumblings and mutterings began to be heard among the original settlers.
But of this the careless buccaneers thought never a whit, the only thing that troubled them being the lack of a more convenient shipping point than the main island afforded them.
This lack was at last filled by a party of hunters who ventured across the narrow channel that separated the main island from
Tortuga. Here they found exactly what they needed-a good harbor, just at the junction of the Windward Channel with the old Bahama Channel--a spot where four- fifths of the Spanish-Indian
trade would pass by their very wharves.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 345

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Buccaneers In Caribbean Sea, part 2

Hispaniola/Caribbean , *17th Century*

There were a few Spaniards upon the island, but they were a quiet folk, and well disposed to make friends with the strangers; but
when more Frenchmen and still more Frenchmen crossed the narrow channel, until they overran the Tortuga and turned it into one great curing house for the beef which they shot upon the neighboring island, the Spaniards grew restive over the matter, just as they had done upon the larger island.
Accordingly, one fine day there came half a dozen great boatloads of armed Spaniards, who landed upon the Turtle's Back and sent the Frenchmen flying to the woods and fastnesses of rocks as the chaff flies before the thunder gust. That night the Spaniards drank themselves mad and shouted themselves hoarse over their victory, while the beaten Frenchmen sullenly paddled their canoes back to the main island again, and the Sea Turtle was Spanish once more.

But the Spaniards were not contented with such a petty triumph as that of sweeping the island of Tortuga free from the obnoxious strangers, down upon Hispaniola they came, flushed with their
easy victory, and determined to root out every Frenchman, until not one single buccaneer remained. For a time they had an easy
thing of it, for each French hunter roamed the woods by himself, with no better company than his half-wild dogs, so that when two or three Spaniards would meet such a one, he seldom if ever came
out of the woods again, for even his resting place was lost.
But the very success of the Spaniards brought their ruin along with it, for the buccaneers began to combine together for self-protection, and out of that combination arose a strange union of lawless man with lawless man, so near, so close, that it
can scarce be compared to any other than that of husband and wife. When two entered upon this comradeship, articles were drawn up and signed by both parties, a common stock was made of all
their possessions, and out into the woods they went to seek their fortunes; thenceforth they were as one man;
they lived together by day, they slept together by night; what one suffered, the other suffered; what one gained, the other gained.
The only separation that came betwixt them was death, and then the survivor inherited all that the other left. And now it was another thing with Spanish buccaneer hunting, for two buccaneers,
reckless of life, quick of eye, and true of aim, were worth any half dozen of Spanish islanders.
By and by, as the French became more strongly organized for mutual self- protection, they assumed the offensive. Then down they came upon Tortuga, and now it was the turn of the Spanish to be hunted off the island like vermin, and the turn of the French
to shout their victory.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 346

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Buccaneers In Caribbean Sea, part 3

Hispaniola/Caribbean , *17th Century*

Having firmly established themselves, a governor was sent to the French of Tortuga, one M. le Passeur, from the island of St. Christopher; the Sea Turtle was fortified, and colonists, consisting of men of doubtful character and women of whose character there could be no doubt whatever, began pouring in upon the island, for it was said that the buccaneers thought no more of a doubloon than of a Lima bean, so that this was the place for the brothel and the brandy shop to reap their golden harvest, and the island remained French.
Hitherto the Tortugans had been content to gain as much as possible from the homeward-bound vessels through the orderly channels of legitimate trade. It was reserved for Pierre le Grand to introduce piracy as a quicker and more easy road to wealth than the semi-honest exchange they had been used to practice.

Gathering together eight-and-twenty other spirits as hardy and reckless as himself, he put boldly out to sea in a boat hardly large enough to hold his crew, and running down the Windward Channel and out into the Caribbean Sea, he lay in wait for such a
prize as might be worth the risks of winning.
For a while their luck was steadily against them; their provisions and water began to fail, and they saw nothing before them but starvation or a humiliating return. In this extremity they sighted a Spanish ship belonging to a "flota" which had
become separated from her consorts.
The boat in which the buccaneers sailed might, perhaps, have served for the great ship's longboat; the Spaniards out-numbered them three to one, and Pierre and his men were armed only with pistols and cutlasses; nevertheless this was their one and their
only chance, and they determined to take the Spanish ship or to die in the attempt. Down upon the Spaniard they bore through the dusk of the night, and giving orders to the "chirurgeon" to scuttle their craft under them as they were leaving it, they
swarmed up the side of the unsuspecting ship and upon its decks in a torrent--pistol in one hand and cutlass in the other.
Apart of them ran to the gun room and secured the arms and ammunition, pistoling or cutting down all such as stood in their way or offered opposition; the other party burst into the great cabin at the heels of Pierre le Grand, found the captain and a party of his friends at cards, set a pistol to his breast, and demanded him to deliver up the ship. Nothing remained for the Spaniard but to yield, for there was no alternative between surrender and death. And so the great prize was won.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 347

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Buccaneers In Caribbean Sea, part 4

Hispaniola/Caribbean , *17th Century*

It was not long before the news of this great exploit and of the vast treasure gained reached the ears of the buccaneers of Tortuga and Hispaniola. Then what a hubbub and an uproar and a tumult there was! Hunting wild cattle and buccanning the meat was at a discount, and the one and only thing to do was to go a-pirating; for where one such prize had been won, others were to be had.
In a short time freebooting assumed all of the routine of a regular business. Articles were drawn up betwixt captain and crew, compacts were sealed, and agreements entered into by the one party and the other.
In all professions there are those who make their mark, those who succeed only moderately well, and those who fail more or less entirely. Nor did pirating differ from this general rule, for in it were men who rose to distinction, men whose names, something
tarnished and rusted by the lapse of years, have come down even to us of the present day.

Pierre Francois, who, with his boatload of six-and-twenty desperadoes, ran boldly into the midst of the pearl fleet off the coast of South America, attacked the vice admiral under the very guns of two men-of-war, captured his ship, though she was armed with eight guns and manned with three score men, and would have got her safely away, only that having to put on sail, their mainmast went by the board, whereupon the men-of-war came up with
them, and the prize was lost.
But even though there were two men-of-war against all that remained of six-and-twenty buccaneers, the Spaniards were glad enough to make terms with them for the surrender of the vessel, whereby Pierre Francois and his men came off scot-free.

by David Gimenez,
Article ID 348

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

First Voyages to the Mysterious Island

Hispaniola/Cuba , *1498*

Up to the moment when the conquest of Cuba began (1510), the island was surrounded by "mysteries", insofar as what lay inside it was truly unknown. The origins of this mystery can be traced back to the impression made on the Spaniards by Columbus' second voyage, during which they visited the southern coast of Cuba, an apparently inhospitable land, full of swamps and bordered by keys and sand banks that hindered navigation, all this in contrast to the northern coast, which displayed a vigorous nature. There was a contradiction between an apparent richness and a no less apparent' poverty. On the other hand, we already know that, in his second voyage, columbus decided to decare that Cuba was NOT an island. Nonetheless, Juan de la Cosa, in his map of 1500, presented Cuba as an island; but this knowlwdge of the true geographical condition of the country remained partially secret, since the threat of fine and persecution on the Discoverer's part lay heavy over all. There must have been many secret voyages, carried out against the privileges zealously mantained by Columbus; and one of them, attributed to Alonso de Ojeda or to Vicente Yanez Pinzon along with Juan de la Cosa must have been carried out around 1498, and served to prove that Cuba was an island. Besides this, hardly had the Spaniards settled in the Antilles when numerous clandestine or occasional voyages were undertaken with the purpose of stealing Indians and plundering the riches of the territory.
On the other hand, conquerors came to Cuba pursuing runaway natives from Haiti (Hispaniola). Naturally, Cuba became known as far as its coasts were concerned, but no one knew what lay in the interior: whether or not there was any gold, whether or not they had commercially available products in immediate supply. These mysteries had to be solved.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 70

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus's Privileges and Cuba Conquest Preparations

Hispaniola/Cuba , *1509*

In 1509 Commander Ovando was relieved of command and substituted by Diego Columbus, son of the Discoverer, to whom the king did not wish to return all the privileges. that the santa Fe Agreements had given his father; to make up this, he had united him in wedlock to Dona Maria Toledo, a member of the distinguished family of the Duke of Alba and had appointed him Admiral and Governor. With the arrival of Diego Columbus, old antagonisms undoubtedly grew more bitter. Among the officials appointed by the King we find Treasurer Miguel de Pasamontes, a man of great authority, for he represented the interests of the State, already opposed to those of the Columbus family. The king needed to know what was going on in Cuba, since up to that time the colonizing enterprise had rendered no remarkable profit; that is why he insisted thet the "mysteries" shold be discovered.

In 1508 Ovando appointed Sebastian de Ocampo to sail around Cuba and he carried out the voyage returning to Hispaniola. Actually, the purpose was not to find out whether Cuba was an island, but to learn of its conditions. Ocampo made known the harbors that he regarded as worthy of high steem (Jagua on the South; and Puerto Carenas, that is , the future Havana, in the North).

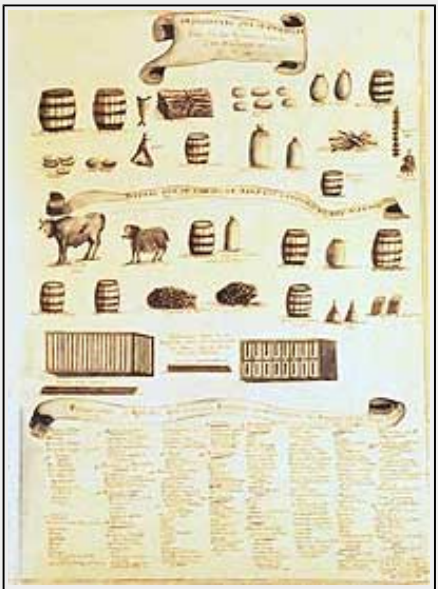
It was indispensable to complete this information by entering the island,a nd this is why orders were given for a fully organized conquering expedition.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 72

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Prepairing a Conquering Army



Supplies taken on for the long transoceanic voyages

Hispaniola/Cuba/Jamaica , *1509*

The Conquering armies were organized under a leader appointed by the King or, as was the case here, by Admiral Diego Columbus, who had the faculty to do so. They constituted veritable private enterprises and drew up contracts and agreements by which the King and the army shared the profits of the conquest.
Each member of the army received advantages according to his economic and military contribution, or merely enrolled for a salary.

About 300 men joined Velazquez. Some contributed capital and goods to equip the expedition; others contributed only their personal services. Naturally, there were many relatives of Velazquez'.
Among other expeditionaries, we should mention Hernan Cortes, Juan de Grijalba, Francisco Fernandez de cordoba, Garcia de Holguin, father Bartolome de las Casas, and others who appear among the founders of Cuban cities. Francisco de morales came as second-in-command. Somewhat later, they were joined by Panfilo de Narvaez and several others from Jamaica.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 74

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Conquerors Land on Cuba

Spanish arcabucero

Province of Oriente, Cuba , *End of 1509 or the Beginning of 1510*

The exact date of arrival of the conquerors in Cuba is not known. According to Articles, the army left Salvatierra de la Sabana near the end of 1509 or the beginning of 1510; Their place of arrival is also debated upon; for while some historians say that they landed on the North of what is now the Province of Oriente -to be precise, in the vicinity of Baracoa, where Indian Chief Hatuey wondered at the time- others, such as Fernando Portuondo, are of the opinion they landed on the South. Nevertheless, both opinions coincide on one point: in any case, Velazquez and his men arrived in the region near Maisi, in the Eastern end of cuba.

The fact that this zone was the headquarters of Hatuey, an Indian who had fled from Santo Domingo upon the abuses of the conquerors, led Velazquez to found the city of Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion de Baracoa, where he built a fortress that served as a base for military operations against unsubmitted Indians.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 75

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Cuban Cities Foundations

Spanish conquerors city foundation

Cuba , *1510-1515*

As they crossed through the territory, the Conquerors founded the first cities. After Baracoa, Velazquez himself founded San Salvador de Bayamo. while Narvaed founded San Cristobal, South of what is now Havana. Velazquez founded Sancti-Spiritus and Trinidad. Sometime later they founded Puerto Principe, now Camaguey, and, last of all, Santiago de cuba in 1515.
These cities have lasted, but the reasons considered by the conquerors in founding them are not exactly based on the wonderful geographical conditions of their sites. More urgent reasons originated these urban centers.

In the first place, Bayamo, as well as Puerto Principe, Sancti-Spiritus and Trinidad, were located in zones of abundant native population, although the finding of gold in the rivers that flow toward the south (Arimao, Agabama, etc.) may have influenced the founding of the last two. Accordingly, those cities were a garrison and, at the same time, the place for gathering together the profits from the weath produced by the Indians.
Santiago de Cuba, as well as San Cristobal, South of Havana, was founded for its position on the Caribbean Sea, where expeditions were being undertaken; to Velazquez, the king particularly entrusted one of these (that of Pedrarias Davila to Castilla del Oro, that is Central America), so that it should be aided from Cuba.

All Spanish activities before 1520 were carried out to the South of Cuba; to the North, lands and the immensity of the ocean were only vaquely known to lie. Cities on the Sothern Coast became necessary, for since the early days commercial traffic was organized through the Caribbean Sea with Central America and Jamaica.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 78

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Cuba Conquest Significance and Consequences

The Spanish Army
The Surrender of Juliers, 1634, Museo del Prado, Madrid

Cuba , *Since 1510*

The conquest of Cuba has a manifold significance. The destruction of native organizations is undoubtedly the most important. The Cuban Indians were unable to endure the pressure of the Spanish material civilization, nor could they adapt themselves to the labor system that was immediately imposed upon them; there were practically exterminated and their culture reduced to dust.
Naturally, the Spaniards absorbed some of the native creations into their colonial organization; this is particularly true and important as to agriculture and food. However, the rapid extinction of the Indians during the Sixteenth Century considerably decreased the possibility of any deep racial and cultural mixture.

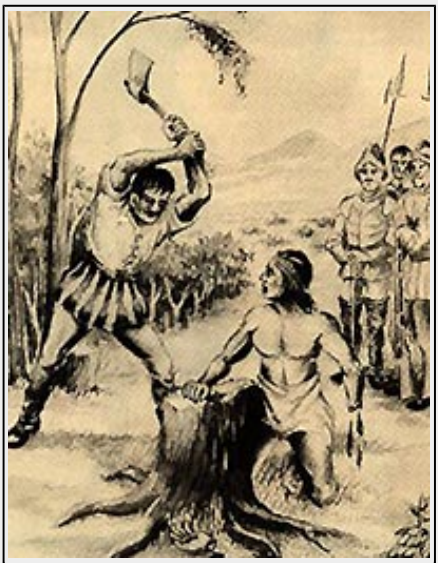
On the other hand, since Velazquez's arrival Cuba began to play the role of bridge or supply base.
As it became a land of refuge for the dissatisfied, not only did it relax the profound strain of conflicting interests at Hispaniola, but became as well the outpost for invading father off lands. The expeditions for the discovery and conquest of Mexico were organized in, and departed from Cuba, as later did those that supported the entrance into the South of what is now the U.S.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 79

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Indians after the Spanish Conquest



Indian punished by a Spanish settler

Cuba , *Since 1510*

The conflict of European economy and war implements with Indian economy and equipment resulted in the destruction of the latter. On the other hand, the Spaniards dispersed the Indians, tearing them away from their villages and cultivated fields toward faraway places, to estancias or mines; or else they employed them as luggage carriers. The Spaniard, conqueror or settler, took no account of the ties between the Indian and the land. He did not put to himself the question of whether or not the Indian had a right to the land; therefore, he took the land, and he also took the Indian. Naturally, all the conquerors and colonizers proceeded likewise: their domination was based on the expropriation of the natives and on their forced subjection to labor.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 83

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Tobacco Plantations in Cuba

A tobacco plantation

Cuba , *Second Half of the sixteenth century*

The farm specializing in tobacco growing generally moved inside the territory following the course of the rivers. Natural tobacco fields are lands of sandy soil formed by the rivers along their course, and they are characterized for their fertility.
Planters settled in these natural tobacco fields, seeking the best rivers. The tobacco planter generally cultivated the land himself, occasionally aided by a stave.
Europeans knew the cultivation of tobacco in the primitive estancias where laborers were mainly Indians; but, in this aspect, the most outstanding immigrants were the islanders from Canary Islands, who arrived in Cuba from the second half of the sixteenth century. They were persistent and hard-working farmers who searched for lands and scattered throughout the territory of the country. They settled royal lands; but they also entered the large ranches, coming into conflict with the cattle-raising landholders.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 84

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Early Cane Plantations

San Isidro Labrador (detail)
New Orleans Museum of Art

Cuba , *Second Half of the sixteenth century*

The cane plantation did not become widespread in the same manner. In the first place, many of the early estancias near the cities specialized, turning into cane fields; in the second place, cane fields quickly multiplied within the cattle-raising latifundia, because the land-holders themselves, as a result of their wealth, could double as sugar planters; and accordingly there was no economic or social conflict between both agrarian exploitations.
However, the cane plantation and the sugar mill tended to remain near the cities or on the coasts, for sugar, being heavy, needed short-distance transportation and ease of communications.
At the end of the sixteenth century there were cane plantations around Havana and Bayamo.
And towards 1650, that is, in the years when the first period of Cuban economic history closes, cane plantations had spread considerably through other areas of the country.

by Julio Le Riverend, Economic History of Cuba,
Article ID 85

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Plants from the New Worl: Maize, Potato, Tomato...

America/Europe , *1492-1498*

After making landfall in the Bahamas at dawn on 12 October 1492, Columbus explored the coasts and named a large number of islands, including Cuba and La Espanola. When he went ashore he was puzzled because the "easterners" were not what footloose Marco Polo described them to be on his return to Europe in 1295 after spending 20 years in the Orient, nor did Columbus see any "pagodas" with golden roofs.

He did find lush vegetation and marvelled at the variety of strange plants. In the "New World," maize (Indian corn) was the most widely cultivated crop to be found and was invariably grown in conjunction with beans, squashes and other food plants, combinations that provided a diet with a good balance of proteins and carbohydrates.

Maize was the predominant staple of the Indian communities of the eastern part of the present-day United States. Almost all other foods were mixed with corn gruel or baked in little corn cakes. In tropical America, manioc or cassava, became the major food crop. Manioc, a plant native to South America produces a starchy root that can be made in gruel or bread. the domestication of manioc was of enormous importance to tropical communities because the plant yields more food per acre than any other crop.

One of the most important food plants developed in pre-Columbian America was the potato - first cultivated in the highlands of South America. Though the potato did not grow well in the tropics, the sweet potato thrived in both temperate and tropical zones. Other crops included the peanut, tomato, papaya, pineapple, avocado, chile pepper, cotton and cocoa. The Mayas and Aztecs valued cocoa highly as a beverage and even used cocoa beans as a medium of exchange.

Within a half a century of the first voyage of Columbus, Spain had conquered the Aztec, Maya and Inca civilizations and established an enormous colonial empire. The Spanish conquest did not completely destroy the pre-Columbian agrarian system. Instead, it introduced Old World plants, animals, tools and methods that coexisted with the Indian system. Eventually, each system borrowed elements from the other, irrevocably changing the agriculture of both the Old and New World.

Europeans introduced sugarcane, rice, olives, bananas, wheat, barley and European broadbeans.

On Christmas Eve 1492 the Santa Maria ran into a coral reef off the coast of Haiti and, with the help of the local Indians, Columbus removed supplies, dismantled the ships timbers and established La Navidad, a colony around two houses donated by the local "cacique" or chief.

He left behind 39 crewmen, including a carpenter, caulker, physician, gunner, tailor and cooper. He also left water casks and oils jars to collect gold. The men were told to trade with the Indians and collect as much gold as possible and hold it for his return. Columbus then instructed them to build a fort with a moat to impress the Indians and to use in case of danger. The crewmen did not follow these instructions as the Indians seemed friendly.

by Castello Banfi,
Article ID 120

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus's Second Voyage

Caribbean , *1493-1496*

Discovered the windward and leeward Islands that bound the eastern Caribbean, explored Puerto Rico, the southern coast of Cuba and Jamaica and circumnavigated Hispaniola Columbus left Spain in September 1493 this time with 17 ships and 1,200 men, all eager to find wealth and immense riches. On October 13, 1493 they stopped at Madeira and Canaries for water, wood and gomera cheese and then in the Cape Verde Islands for goat which he then had slaughtered and salted.
We know that barreled wine from Jerez was used as ballast during Columbus' second voyage to the New World
While there are no complaints of carelessness or ship chandler's dishonesty reported on the first voyage, this was not the case on the second voyage. The people entrusted with supplying 17 vessels carrying 1200 men believed in spending the least money possible. As a result, wine and water barrels leaked, the wine quickly turned to vinegar, the food was beginning to spoil at the time of purchase, and old nags instead of Andalucian horses were loaded along with livestock.

Salting methods were very good and properly meat would keep as long as 40 years provided the casks - which contained about 30 gallons - were kept in good order and their contents were not allowed to become dry. Most of the meat was of such poor quality that it was beginning to go bad at the time of preservation.
In days of calm sea the men fished and were able to enjoy fresh fish.
On land, humidity and heat played havoc with food supplies - sea biscuits turned into soft masses of pulsating weevils, meat and dry fish turned into malodorous masses but the men endured the trials and tribulations.

When sea biscuits became too spoiled, a flour made of cassava roots of the manioc or yucca plant, leached out of their poison (hydrocyanic acid - the Indians dipped their arrow tips into this poison), was used to make into thin pancakes. At first the Spaniards did not like it, but they soon had to accept it as it was superior to the moldy hardtack they had available. They also learned to eat iguanas in Cuba (at first thought disgusting) even "barkless" dogs (thought to taste as good as "kid from Seville").
When he reached Haiti (11 months after leaving) he found La Navidad burned and all his men dead.
Of the twelve hundred crew, staff and passengers on this second voyage, three hundred died of disease in the new settlement of La Isabella during 1494, despite the heroic efforts of Dr. Chanca. The weather was also hostile. A hurricane in 1495 destroyed all the ships in the harbor including those that Columbus' financial backer Berardi had leased and loaded with merchandise. Columbus was able to return to Spain only by patching together two ships from the wreckage.

The Return to Spain

In 1496 he sailed back home. This time he did not receive a hero's welcome. His men were bitter that they did not find the wealth they were seeking, they found no cities, no money economy, no metal tools, manufactures or ores.
Columbus' report to the monarch when he arrived in Seville only confirmed the rumors they had already heard from resupply ships that had crossed the ocean during 1494 and 1495. Ferdinand and Isabel gave the Admiral a distracted if not cool reception.

by Castello Banfi ,
Article ID 121

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Second Voyage: A Exploration and Colonization Effort

Caribbean , *1493-1496*

After the success of Columbus's first voyage, he had little trouble convincing the Spanish Sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabela, to follow up immediately with a second voyage. Unlike the exploratory first voyage, the second voyage was a massive colonization effort, comprising seventeen ships and over a thousand men.
The second voyage brought European livestock (horses, sheep, and cattle) to America for the first time.
Although Columbus kept a log of his second voyage, only very small fragments survive. Most of what we know comes from indirect references or from accounts of others on the voyage.
The fleet left Hierro in the Canary Islands on October 13, 1493. Hoping to make a landfall at Hispaniola (where Columbus had left 40 men the previous January), the fleet kept a constant course of west-southwest from Hierro and sighted Dominica in the West Indies at dawn on Sunday, November 3. The transatlantic passage of only 21 days was remarkably fast, covering 850 leagues according to Columbus's reckoning (or somewhat less according to others).

Shortly after sighting Dominica, another island to the north came into view; this must have been Guadeloupe, although some on the voyage later misattributed it as Maria Galante. This order of sighting shows that the fleet must have been very near to 16° north latitude, 60° west longitude at dawn on November 3. A little farther north, and Guadeloupe would have been sighted first; a little farther south, and Martinique would have been sighted second; a little farther west, and all these islands would have been seen simultaneously.
The actual rhumbline course (rhumbline: a course of constant bearing between two points) between Hierro and this point is 252° true. Since the fleet was sailing WSW (258°.8 magnetic), we know that the average magnetic variation during the voyage was about 7° west.
During the next two weeks, the fleet moved north from Dominica, discovering the Leeward Islands, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico before arriving at Hispaniola on November 22.
Returning to his fortress at Navidad on November 28, Columbus found that the fort had been burned and that the men he had left there on the first voyage were dead. According to the account of Guacanagari, the local chief who had befriended Columbus on the first voyage, the men at Navidad had fallen to arguing among themselves over women and gold. Some of the men had abandonded the fort in the intervening months, and some of the rest had raided an inland tribe and kidnapped their women. The men of that tribe retaliated by destroying Navidad and killing the few remaining Spaniards.

Columbus then sailed eastward along the coast of Hispaniola, looking for a place to found a new colony. On December 8, he anchored at a good spot and founded a new town he named La Isabela, after the Spanish queen. The next several months were spent in establishing the colony and exploring the interior of Hispaniola.
On April 24, 1494, Columbus set sail from Isabela with three ships, in an effort to find the mainland of China, which he was still convinced must be nearby. He reached Cuba on April 30 and cruised along its southern coast. But soon he learned of an island to the south that was rumored to be rich with gold.
Columbus left Cuba on May 3rd, and anchored at Jamaica two days later. But the reception he recieved from the Indians was mostly hostile, and since he had still not found the mainland, he left Jamaica on May 13, returning to Cuba the following day.
But the Admiral quickly found that the southern coast of Cuba is dotted with shoals and small islands, making exploration treacherous. Making slow progress in difficult conditions, Columbus press westward for several weeks until finally giving up the quest on June 13. But not wanting to admit that his search for the mainland was a failure, Columbus ordered each man in his crews to sign a document and swear that Cuba was so large that it really must be the mainland.

The voyage back to Hispaniola was even worse, since they now had to rethread the shoals and islands they had come through before, and now they had a headwind to work against. After four weeks, tired of the incessant headwinds, Columbus again turned south for Jamaica and confirmed that it was indeed an island.
Columbus finally returned to Hispaniola on August 20, 1494, and proceeded eastward along the unknown southern coast. But by the end of September, Columbus was seriously ill. His crew abandoned further explorations and returned to the colony at La Isabela.
Columbus set sail from Isabela on March 10, 1496, bound home for Spain with two ships. They sighted the coast of Portugal on June 8, the second voyage complete.

by Keith A. Pickering, from The Columbus Navigation Homepage,

Article ID 122

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Third Voyage of Columbus

In October of 1500 Columbus was arrested and sent to Spain in shackles

Trinidad / South America / Hispaniola , *1498-1500*

Columbus left the port of Sanlucar in southern Spain on May 30, 1498 with six ships, bound for the New World on his third voyage. After stopping at the islands of Porto Santo and Madeira, the fleet arrived at Gomera in the Canary Islands on June 19. At this point, the fleet split into two squadrons: three ships sailed directly for Hispaniola with supplies for the colonists there; but the other three, commanded by Columbus himself, were on a mission of exploration, attempting to find any lands south of the known islands in the Indies.
The Admiral sailed first to the Cape Verde Islands, where he was unsuccessful in his attempts to obtain cattle. He sailed southwest from the Cape Verdes on July 4, but by the 13th they had made only 120 leagues. At this point, the fleet was becalmed in the Doldrums, an area off the coast of equatorial Africa notorious for its lack of winds.

After drifting eight days in calm and heat, winds returned on the 22nd, and Columbus set their course West. By the morning of July 31 water was running short, so the Admiral decided to steer directly for Dominica, the island he had discovered on his second voyage. After changing course to north by east, the fleet sighted an island in the west at noon that same day. Because the island had three hills, Columbus named it Trinidad, after the Holy Trinity. (Columbus was very devoutly religious).
The fleet obtained water on the south coast of Trinidad, and in the process sighted the coast of South America, the first Europeans to see that continent. Between South America and Trinidad lies the Gulf of Paria, which Columbus explored between August 4th and August 12th. On the morning of the 13th, the fleet sailed out of the Gulf of Paria at its northern entrance and coasted west along the mainland for the next three days, reaching the island of Margarita.

Columbus's health was poor at this time, and he now ordered the fleet to sail for Hispaniola on a northwest by north course. They arrived off southern Hispaniola on August 19, 1498.
Arriving at the new city of Santo Domingo, Columbus discovered that disgruntled colonists had staged a revolt against his rule. Columbus was unable to put down the revolt, and eventually agreed to peace on humiliating terms. But the malcontents continued to grumble, and the amount of gold received from the New World continued to be disappointingly small, both for the colonists and the Sovereigns. Accordingly, Ferdinand and Isabela appointed Francisco de Bobadilla as royal commissioner, with powers above those of Columbus himself. When Bobadilla arrived in Santo Domingo, he immediately had Columbus arrested, and in October of 1500 the Admiral was sent home to Spain in shackles.

by Keith A. Pickering, from The Columbus Navigation Homepage,
Article ID 123

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Fourth Voyage of Columbus

Caribbean/Central and South America , *1502-1504*

On May 11, 1502, four old ships and 140 men under Columbus's command put to sea from the port of Cadiz. Among those in the fleet were Columbus's brother Bartholomew, and Columbus's younger son Fernando, then just thirteen years old. At age fifty-one, Columbus was old, sick, and no longer welcome in his old home base of Hispaniola. But the Admiral felt he had one more voyage left in him.

The nominal purpose of the trip was to find a strait linking the Indies (which Columbus still thought to be part of Asia) with the Indian Ocean. This strait was known to exist, since Marco Polo had traversed it on his way back from China. In effect, Columbus was looking for the Strait of Malacca (which is really near Singapore) in Central America.

Columbus arrived at Santo Domingo on June 29, 1502, and requested that he be allowed to enter the harbor to shelter from a storm that he saw coming. He also advised the treasure fleet assembling in the harbor to stay put until the storm had passed. His request was treated with contempt by Nicolas de Ovando, the local governor, who denied Columbus the port and sent the treasure fleet on its way. Columbus found shelter for his ships in a nearby estuary.

When the hurricane hit, the treasure fleet was caught at sea, and twenty ships were sunk. Nine others limped back into Santo Domingo, and only one made it safely to Spain. Columbus's four ships all survived the storm with moderate damage.

Columbus arrived at the coast of Honduras at the end of July, and spent the next two months working down the coast, beset by more storms and headwinds. When they arrived at present-day Panama, they found two important things. First, they learned from the natives that there was another ocean just a few days march to the south. This convinced Columbus that he was near enough the strait that he had proved his point. But more importantly, the natives had many gold objects that the Spaniards traded for. This made the region, which Columbus named Veragua, very valuable.

After coasting east along Panama until the area rich in gold petered out, Columbus tried to return to Veragua but was again beset by storms and contrary winds. Finally, Columbus returned to the mouth of the Rio Belen (western Panama) on January 9, 1503, and made it his headquarters for exploration, building a garrison fort there. As he was preparing to return to Spain, he took three of his ships out of the river, leaving one with the garrison. The next day, April 6, the river lowered so much that the remaining ship was trapped in the river by a sandbar across the river mouth. At this moment, a large force of Indians attacked the garrison.

The Spanish managed to hold off the attack, but lost a number of men and realized that the garrison could not be held for long. Columbus abandoned the ship in the river, and rescued the remaining members of the garrison. The three ships, now badly leaking from shipworm, sailed for home on April 16.

One of the remaining ships had to be abandoned almost immediately because it was no longer seaworthy, and the remaining two crawled slowly upwind in a game effort to make it to Hispaniola. They didn't make it. Off the coast of Cuba, they were hit by yet another storm, the last of the ship's boats was lost, and one of the caravels was so badly damaged that she had to be taken in tow by the flagship. Both ships were leaking very badly now, and water continued to rise in the hold in spite of constant pumping by the crew. Finally, able to keep them afloat no longer, Columbus beached the sinking ships in St. Anne's Bay, Jamaica, on June 25, 1503. Since there was no Spanish colony on Jamaica, they were marooned.

Diego Mendez, one of Columbus's captains, bought a canoe from a local chief and sailed it to Hispaniola. He was promptly detained by governor Ovando outside the city for the next seven months, and was refused use of a caravel to rescue the expedition.

Meanwhile, half of those left on Jamaica staged a mutiny against Columbus, which he eventually put down. When Ovando finally allowed Mendez into Santo Domingo, there were no ships available for the rescue. Finally, Mendez was able to charter a small caravel, which arrived at Jamaica on June 29, 1504, and rescued the expedition. Columbus returned home to Spain on November 7, 1504, his last voyage complete.

by Keith A. Pickering, from The Columbus Navigation Homepage,
Article ID 124

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Columbus's Death and Remains Travels

Valladolid / Seville / Caribbean , *May 20th, 1506*

Christopher Columbus died in Valladolid, Spain, on May 20, 1506, at the age of 54. He had suffered through a long terminal illness that first showed symptoms on his third voyage eight years before.

According to his son Fernando, the cause of death was "gout." But in those days, gout was a catchall diagnosis for anything that caused joint pain. Recent research by Gerald Weissmann indicates that the most likely cause of death was Reiter's Syndrome, a rare tropical disease.

Upon his death, Columbus was initially buried in a small cemetary in Valladolid. Shortly thereafter, his body was moved to Seville. When Columbus' eldest son and heir Diego died in 1526, he was buried beside his father.

But Diego's widow petitioned the Spanish court to move both bodies to the cathedral in Santo Domingo on Hispaniola. So the remains of Columbus were moved across the Atlantic, and were buried under the right side of the altar in the cathedral in Santo Domingo. And there matters stood for two centuries.

In 1795, France captured the island of Hispaniola from Spain. By this time, the Spanish viewed the Admiral's remains as a national treasure, and wanted to prevent their capture by the French at all costs. So, relying on old records, they dug up the remains and removed them to Havana, Cuba. A century later, when Cuba won independence from Spain, the remains were moved again, from Havana back across the ocean to Seville. And so, if you visit the cathedral in Seville today, you will find the tomb of Columbus.

But that's not the whole story. In 1877, workers were restoring the cathedral in Santo Domingo and found, under the left side of the altar, a box containing human remains. The box bore Columbus's name. It immediately became clear to some that the "left" and "right" sides of the altar depend entirely upon the direction one is facing. And therefore, some argue, the body that had been moved to Havana in 1795 was really that of Diego, while the Admiral's remains had been in Santo Domingo all along. And so, if you visit the cathedral in Santo Domingo today, you will find another tomb of Columbus.

Meanwhile, one historian has argued that the wrong body was moved from Havana to Seville, and therefore, Columbus's remains are really in Havana. And another historian argues that Columbus's remains never left Valladolid! Furthermore, portions of the remains in Seville were given to the city of Genoa in 1892 as part of the quadricentennial celebration.

by Keith A. Pickering, from The Columbus Navigation Homepage,
Article ID 125

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Origin of Dominoes and its Introduction in Cuba

Cuban domino players
Jorge Arche

This is a very old game, known by Chinese, Arabs and Egyptians long time ago. At mid 18th century, Italians introduced the game in Spain and France, that is why it is deduced that the Spaniards were the ones that introduced it in its colonies. This old universal game has thousand fans, irrespective of age, race or sex.

When one hears that someone got two "pollonas," it means that this player was beaten two consecutive times during a round of dominoes. Though the traditional rules establish that talking is not permitted while playing, this is not the case of Cuba where the activity turns noisy, boisterous and exciting in tune with the natural joy of Cubans. Every piece placed on the table stirs a comment among players or the people that approach the table, the "sapos" (slang used for people who are not directly involved and become watchers Trans).
In most quarters, players sit around the same table, usually located outdoors, thus becoming a fixed spot for the enjoyment of this game; the schedule depends on the players' free time.

The game is played with a set of usually 28 or 55 dominoes and different combinations from 1 to 6 or from 6 to 9 can be made. Rounds can be played with 2, 3 and 4 players, the latter is the most common practice in Cuba. The game requires intelligence, concentration and fast thinking, though luck and chance may interfere.

Dominoes, a game regarded by some as "the second national sport," is a wholesome entertainment and demands few resources. Pieces can be hand-made. In times of economic hardships, this game was a resort used for entertainment to compensate for hard work and a way to forget economical problems. The preference for dominoes could have been influenced by the mild climate of the island and the open personality of Cubans.

If you have time, try to play one round and make all the possible combinations with the pieces. Combinations in this game are endless.

by Rita de Zayas, from Excellences Magazine,
Article ID 159

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

De Soto Expedition: An Ambitious Project

Expedition recruitment

Spanish artillery

Cuba / Florida , *1538-1539*

After Hernando De Soto took an active part in the conquest of portions of Central America and the Inca Empire he had settled down in Seville to enjoy life quietly.
The exaggerated accounts of Cabeza de Vaca concerning the vast region then called Florida fired his ambition to undertake the conquest of this land which he considered no less rich than Peru. He therefore sold all his property, and devoted the proceeds to equipping an expedition for this purpose. He readily obtained from Charles V, to whom he had lent some money, the titles of Adelantado of Florida and Governor of Cuba, and in addition, the title of marquis of a certain portion of the territory he might conquer, said portion to be chosen by himself.

The expedition consisted of 950 fighting men, eight secular priests, two Dominicans, a Franciscan and a Trinitarian, all to be transported in ten ships. To this armada was added one of twenty more ships which was on its way to Vera Cruz, but was to be under the orders of de Soto while the courses of the two fleets lay along the same route. The whole squadron set sail from Sanlúcar, 6 April, 1538. On Easter Sunday morning, fifteen days later, they arrived safely at Gomera, one of the Canary Islands, where they stopped for one week and then continued their way without incident. When near Cuba, the twenty vessels destined for Mexico separated from the others and proceeded on their way.

The ten ships of de Soto shortly after arrived in the harbour of Santiago de Cuba where the members of the expedition were well received by the Cubans, whose fêtes in honour of the new-comers lasted several weeks. The new governor visited the towns in the vicinity of Santiago and did every thing in his power to better their condition. At the same time, he gathered as many horses as he could, and, as good ones were plentiful in Cuba, it was not long before he had a fair number of mounts for the men of the Florida expedition. Just about this time, the city of Havana was sacked and burned by the French, and de Soto, upon learning of it, despatched Captain Aceituno with some men to repair the ruins. As he was contemplating an early departure for his conquest of Florida, he named Gonzalo de Guzmán as lieutenant-governor to administer justice in Santiago and vicinity, while for affairs of state, he gave full powers to his wife. Meanwhile, he continued his preparations for the expedition to Florida.

In the latter part of August, 1538, the ships sailed for Havana, while de Soto started by land with 350 horses and the remainder of the expedition. The two parties arrived at Havana within a few days of each other, and de Soto immediately made plans for the rebuilding of the city. He also entrusted to Captain Aceituno the building of a fortress for the protection of the harbour and the city from any possible future attack. At the same time he ordered Juan de Añasco, a skilled and experienced sailor, to set out in advance to explore the coasts and harbours of Florida so that it would facilitate matters when the main expedition sailed. Añasco returned at the end of a few months and made a satisfactory report.

by Ventura Fuentes,
Article ID 191

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

De Soto Expedition: Indian Hostility

Hernando DeSoto's trek through what later became Alabama produced one of the first bloody encounters between aboriginal inhabitants and Europeans on North American soil.

Cuba/Florida , *18 May 1539*

The expedition was finally made ready, and on 18 May, 1539, de Soto set sail with a fleet of nine vessels. He had with him 1000 men exclusive of the sailors, all well armed and making up what was considered to be the best equipped expedition that had ever set out for conquest in the New World.
They proceeded with favourable weather until 25 May, when land was seen and they cast anchor in a bay to which they gave the name of Espiritu Santo (now Tampa Bay). The army landed on Friday, 30 May, two leagues from an Indian village. From this point the Spaniards began their explorations of the wild unknown country to the north and west which lasted for nearly three years.

They passed through a region already made hostile by the violence of the invader Narvaez, and they were constantly deceived by the Indians, who tried to get them as far away as possible by telling them stories of great wealth which was to be found at remote points. They wandered from place to place, always disappointed in their expectations, but still lured onward by the tales they heard of the vast riches which lay just beyond. They treated the Indians brutally whenever they met them, and they were, as a result, constantly at war with them. Setting out from Espiritu Santo, de Soto, with considerable loss of men, went through the provinces of Acuera, Ocali, Vitachuco, and Osachile (all situated in the western part of the Florida peninsula), with the purpose of finally reaching the territory of Apalache (situated in the northwestern part of Florida on the Gulf of Mexico), as he considered the fertility and maritime conditions of that country well suited to his purposes. He finally reached the province, and after some fighting with the Indians, subjugated it. In October, 1539, de Soto sent Juan Añasco with thirty men to Espiritu Santo Bay where he had left his ships and a portion of his expedition, with orders to start from there with the ships and follow the coast until he reached the bay of Aute (St. Marks on Apalachee Bay) in the province of Apalache.

Here he was to be joined by Pedro Calderón, who had orders to proceed by land with the remainder of the expedition and the provisions and camp equipment that had been left on the coast. At the same time, Gómez Arias was to sail to Havana to acquaint de Soto's wife with the progress of the expedition. After many hardships, Añasco reached Espiritu Santo Bay, whence he started with the ships to carry out de Soto's orders. He arrived at Aute in safety, and was there joined by Calderón with the land forces according to arrangement. Meanwhile, Gómez Arias had fulfilled his mission to Havana and the triumphs of the Spaniards in Florida were fitly celebrated in that city. De Soto now ordered Diego Maldonado, a captain of infantry who had served him well, to give up his command, and take two ships with which he was to explore the coast of Florida for a distance of one hundred leagues to the west of Aute, and map out its bays and inlets. Maldonado did his work successfully and upon his return, in February, 1540, was sent to Havana, with orders to inform the Governor's wife and announce to the Cubans as well all that they had seen and done. De Soto gave him further orders to return in October and meet him in the Bay of Achusi which Maldonado had discovered during his exploration. He was to bring back with

him as many ships as he could procure, and also munitions of war, provisions, and clothing for the soldiers.

But de Soto was destined never to see Maldonado again, nor was he to have the benefit of the supplies for which he was sending him, for, though Maldonado was able to carry out his orders to the letter, when he arrived at Achusi in the fall he found neither trace nor tidings of de Soto. He waited for some time and explored the country quite a distance, but without finding him, and was forced to return to Havana. He tried again the next year and again the following, but always with the same result.

by Ventura Fuentes,
Article ID 192

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

The Spanish colonies in the America protection

The impressive San Felipe Castle in Cartagena de Indias

America , *1600*

The Spanish Main was the area that comprises Central America and the Northern Coast of South America. In other words, the Sapnish colonies in the Americas. Ground zero for the Spanish Main would probably be Darien on the Isthmus of Panama. The land was rich in wealth, particularly gold, silver, and precious gems. When Spain wasn't trying to Christianize the natives of the area, they were raping, pillaging, and plundering. Unfortunately for Spain, most of the wealth of the Mainland was not located where ships could easily reach it. This meant the gold would be moved by pack animals to fortified ports that were built along the coast. It was at this point that Spain most vulnerable to attack. Some of the key port cities were port cities were Portobello and Darien in the area of present day Panama and Cartagena near present day Venezuuela.

Of course the pirates were well aware of the methods Spain used for moving treasure and they were willing to risk the dangers of the mosquito infested swamps in order to relieve Spain of its wealth. Despite heavily armed guards, the trail through the jungle afforded ample opportunity for pirates to ambush the gold trains. The trails were narrow, and did not allow the Spaniards to maneuver. Furthermore the Pirates would often attack at dusk, after the Spaniards had had a long and arduous march through the jungle. If the ambush failed, the Pirates could melt back into the jungle, confident that the Spaniards would not follow. (Early map of the Spanish Main) The soldiers could not pursue the attackers for fear that the ambush was simply a diversion and that the main attack would occur after the Spanish split up their forces. In all, the pirates held the upper hand.

The gold trains would move the treasure to the fortified ports set up along the coast. These fortified ports were probably the best defended locations along the Spanish Main and also the richest. For the most part it was foolhardy to attempt an attack on such a heavily fortified area despite the riches that it contained and pirates rarely bothered to attack such a place. Of course Henry Morgan was an exception to this rule, as was Francis Drake. His most daring accomplishment was the sacking of Portobello (located in modern day Panama).It should be noted, however, that this action was done as a Privateer and with the support of a large fleet commissioned by the England.

The ports themselves had shore batteries with larger cannons than the most of the pirate ships could carry. Combine this with higher, thicker walls, and you have an area that was impervious to attack from the sea. The ports would often get the first and possible the second and third round off before the ships could even get close enough to fire. This is, of course, if you could even get that close because the Ports would also have Galleons on hand which could come out to greet you before you even got with in cannon distance of the port. The main vulnerability in the ports was their lack of protection from the landward side. Spain assumed that the jungle was good enough protection for this area. For the most part Spain was correct, but the English attacked Havana in 1762 and proved the Spanish wrong!

by Notorious Place In Pirate Lore Website,
Article ID 379

Discuss this article in our forum

Email this article to a friend

Pre-Columbian , (*5000 BC - AD 1492*)

Taino Leader Hatuey

Tribes on Cuba were Tainos, Ciboneys, and Guanajatabeyes.

5000 BC - AD 1200	Arrival of first native American inhabitants
AD 1100-1492	Arawak, Siboney and Taino indian settlements in Cuba

Spanish Settlement, (*1492 - 1762*)

Conquistadores city foundation in America

From the arrival of Christopher Columbus through to Diego de Velazquez explorations and city foundations to pirate attacks.

1491	Columbus' first voyage ships
1492	Christopher Columbus discovers Cuba
1492-1498	Strange Plants from the New World: Maize, Tomato, Potato, Cocoa,...
1493	The Second Voyage of Columbus
1498	Cuba, the mysterious island.
1498-1500	The Third Voyage of Columbus
1500	A Letter from The King Ferdinand, Requesting Cuban submission
1502-1504	The Fourth Voyage of Columbus
1504	Spanish Colonization Policy
1506	Columbus's Death and Burials
1509	Cuba Conquest Preparations and its Motivations
1510	The Conquest of Cuba
1510-1515	Foundation of the First Cuban Cities
1510-1518	Indians Destiny after the Conquest: A Religious Debate
1510-1659	Colonial Economy: New Products and Beasts
1515	Significance of the Conquest of Cuba
1539	De Soto Expedition to Conquest Florida
1550	Havana: Staging area for the return voyage to Spain
1561-1778	The Spanish Treasure Fleet
15th - 16th Centuries Art	Colonial Art: Panel Painters and Saint Sculptors
1600	The Spanish colonies in the America protection
16th - 17th centuries	Pirates attack Spanish ships and towns.
1760s	Dominoes introduction in Cuba