

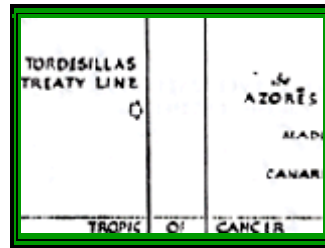
Columbus (Cristóbal Colón)

(1451-1506)

- 1451 Born in Genoa, Italy. Although some scholarly research opposes the following view, it is possible that Columbus descended from a family of Catalan Spanish Jews named Colom which left Spain during the pogroms of 1391 and went to Genoa, Italy, where it is certain that Columbus was born. Columbus was known to be a publicly devout Christian, but there is some doubt about how orthodox a Christian he was. He had reddish hair and light-colored skin. Little else is known about his physical appearance. In Genoa, he studied astronomy, geometry, and cosmography. According to his (mistaken) calculation the Earth was about a third smaller than it actually is; hence, he thought a voyage from Europe to Asia by going west would be a lot shorter than it is. But, of course, he did not know that the Western Hemisphere comes between the two continents. (Lucky man.)
Father: Domenico Colombo, wool weaver.
Mother: Susanna Fontarossa.
Columbus had three brothers. He probably spoke Genoese as a native language; he wrote badly in Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan. Also, he wrote Latin and Greek well.
- 1461 Columbus may have begun the life of a seaman.
- 1470 - 1477 Columbus lived with his family in Savona, worked for a French nobleman, apprenticed as a Genoese business agent, sailed in the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and in the Atlantic Ocean as far as Iceland. During one voyage he was attacked by a privateer, escaped to Lisboa, and then found his way to England.
- 1478-1479 Lived with his brother in Lisbon (Lisboa)
Married Filipa Moniz, daughter to the Portuguese governor (Bartolomeo Perestrello) of the Azores Islands (in the Atlantic)
- 1481 Cristóbal and Filipa's son Diego was born (Diego Colón). Also, this year he went to the Gold Coast in Africa for Portugal under king João II's orders.
- 1485 - 1488 Columbus requested support from the king of Portugal (João II) for a trip to the Orient via a western sea route. Requests denied. Columbus was angry, so, in 1486, he went to Spain with the same proposal and request for support. Spain was deeply involved in the conquest of Granada, so queen Isabel of Castilla put him off. Columbus was frustrated, but he waited.
- 1489 - 1492 Spain supported Columbus while the Catholic Monarchs (*los Reyes Católicos*) finished the war against Granada. Queen Isabel's confessor,

- Fr. Hernando de Talavera was in charge of evaluating Columbus's scheme, and he convinced the queen to reject it.
- 1492 The Catholic Monarchs, at king Fernando's insistence, decided to support Columbus's plans to sail west in search of the "Indies" with the title of Admiral (*almirante*) and a lucrative royal contract in terms of money and power. Columbus's plan was to discover Cipangu (Japan) and establish trade with Cathay (China). He was given letters of introduction for the "grand khan".
- 1492 First Voyage: August. 3 - October 12: Columbus heads a fleet of three ships (la Niña, la Pinta, la Santa María) crossing the Atlantic. (First Voyage of Columbus.) The Santa María was of 100 tons and had 52 men; the Pinta was of 50 tons with 18 men; the Niña was of 40 tons with 18 men also.
- October 12: Rodrigo de Triana sighted an island in the Bahamas called Guanahaní by the inhabitants, called San Salvador by Columbus. At 2:00 a.m. Rodrigo de Triana saw land, but Columbus took away the honor from him and claimed the award for being the first to sight land for himself. He claimed the island for the Catholic Monarchs.
- For Columbus' description of this "first encounter", as he entered it in the log of his first voyage, click on the "Document" button below.
- October 28 - December 5: Columbus discovers Cuba and northern coast of Hispaniola (la Española)
- December 25: the Santa María is wrecked on the coast; Columbus founds settlement of La Navidad (on current coast of Haiti) with 39 men.
- 1493 Columbus and two ships return to Europe via Portugal.
- March 15: Columbus lands in Barcelona, Spain. News of his "discovery" spreads rapidly throughout Spain and Europe. With him he had American gold, cotton, parrots, plants, birds, animals, and several Indians for baptism, all of whom died shortly later.
- 1493 Pope Alexander VI (of Spanish origin), by papal bull, gave Spain all lands discovered west of 100 leagues west and south of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands. Thus, the pope gave Portugal the tip of Brazil. In 1494, Spain and Portugal negotiated the Treat of Tordesillas (a city in Castile, Spain) whereby the moved the dividing line farther west.
- 1493 - 1494 Second Voyage: Columbus sails with 17 ships, 1,200 men, and 12 missionaries arriving in the Lesser Antilles (*las Antillas menores*). Columbus's orders included converting the natives and to "treat them well".
- November 19, 1493: Columbus arrives on Puerto Rico, which he names San Juan Bautista (the name stayed for Puerto Rico's capital).
- November 22: He finds La Navidad destroyed.
- 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal. According to their duopoly, Spain and Portugal moved the dividing meridian 270 leagues farther west; that is, about halfway between the Cape Verde Islands (Portuguese territory) and Cuba/Hispaniola (Spanish territory). In

other words, the dividing line was now 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. For a map of these treaty lines, click on the following map:



- 1494 April 30: He returns to Cuba, naming it Juana. In addition, he discovered Guadalupe, Antigua, and the Virgin Islands. On Hispaniola he started a mine and he initiated the use of Indian slaves.
- May 5: He explores Jamaica and then returns to Spain
- 1496 - 1498 Santo Domingo (oldest European city in the Americas) founded by Columbus's brother on Hispaniola. The colony did very poorly; the Spaniards refused to work (because they considered themselves hidalgos, minor nobility); most colonists were sick; they had little or nothing to eat; and the Spaniards outraged the natives. In 1496, five shiploads of natives were carted off to Spain where they were all sold as slaves. The remaining natives were required to pay the Spaniards a tribute. These are the seeds of the so-called Black Legend.
- 1498 - 1500 Third Voyage of Columbus. At Santo Domingo, he found the colonists engaged in internal warfare, whereupon he restored peace, but Columbus's enemies sailed to Spain to discredit him. For example, queen Isabel was against the enslavement of the native population. he discovered Trinidad, and he explored the northern coast of South America, principally Venezuela. Bartolomé de las Casas accompanied Columbus on this voyage. Columbus was sent back to Spain in irons, and he was imprisoned in Spain accused of incompetence, mismanagement, and more. King Fernando freed Columbus and funded his fourth voyage. A new governor, Ovando, was sent to administer Hispaniola.
- 1502 - 1504 Fourth Voyage of Columbus: Columbus still wanted to find a strait to the Asian mainland (Estrecho de Anián; Northwest Passage). He was refused landing at Santo Domingo while hurricane destroyed the first massive Spanish gold shipment. Instead, Columbus sailed to Central America, exploring the coast of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panamá. After spending a desperate year on Jamaica, with highly damaged ships, he returned to Spain.
- 1505 In Spain, he was increasingly sick, and he joined the third order of (lay) Franciscans.
- 1506 Columbus died in Valladolid (northern Spain). According to various claims, Columbus's remains are buried in (a) Valladolid, (b) Santo

Domingo, (c) La Habana, Cuba.

For sketches of the main parts of Columbus's four voyages, click on this image, the only possible likeness of Columbus:



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