



Discovery

Discovery of America by Columbus on 12th October 1492

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Publication History

Received: 4 August 2012

Accepted: 18 September 2012

Published: 1 October 2012

Citation

Anam Haider. Discovery of America by Columbus on 12th October 1492. *Discovery*, 2012, 2(4), 2-3

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General Note



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1. EARLY LIFE OF COLUMBUS

Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451. Little is known of his early life, but he worked as a seaman and then a maritime entrepreneur. He became obsessed with the possibility of pioneering a western sea route to Cathay (China), India, and the gold and spice islands of Asia. At the time, Europeans knew no direct sea route to southern Asia, and the route via Egypt and the Red Sea was closed to Europeans by the Ottoman Empire, as were many land routes. Contrary to popular legend, educated Europeans of Columbus' day did believe that the world was round, as argued by St. Isidore in the seventh century. However, Columbus, and most others, underestimated the world's size, calculating that East Asia must lie approximately where North America sits on the globe (they did not yet know that the Pacific Ocean existed). With only the Atlantic Ocean, he thought, lying between Europe and the riches of the East Indies, Columbus met with King John II of Portugal and tried to persuade him to back his "Enterprise of the Indies," as he called his plan. He was rebuffed and went to Spain, where he was also rejected at least twice by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. However, after the Spanish conquest of the Moorish kingdom of Granada in January 1492, the Spanish monarchs flush with victory, agreed to support his voyage.

2. COLUMBUS VOYAGE TO ASIA

Columbus led his three ships - the *Nina*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria* - out of the Spanish port of Palos on August 3, 1492. His objective was to sail west until he reached Asia (the Indies) where the riches of gold, pearls and spice awaited. His first stop was the Canary Islands where the lack of wind left his expedition

becalmed until September 6. Once underway, Columbus benefited from calm seas and steady winds that pushed him steadily westward (Columbus had discovered the southern "Trades" that in the future would fuel the sailing ships carrying goods to the New World). However, the trip was long, longer than anticipated by either Columbus or his crew. In order to mollify his crew's apprehensions, Columbus kept two sets of logs: one showing the true distance traveled each day and one showing a lesser distance. The first log was kept secret. The latter log quieted the crew's anxiety by under-reporting the true distance they had traveled from their homeland. This deception had only a temporary effect; by October 10 the crew's apprehension had increased to the point of near mutiny. Columbus headed off disaster by promising his crew that if land was not sighted in two days, they would return home. The next day land was discovered.

3. OCTOBER 12th

On October 12, 1492, Columbus first saw the islands of the new world, landing in the Bahamas. Later in the month, he would sail to Cuba, and to Hispaniola (now Haiti). He thought he had reached the East Indies, the islands off Southeast Asia. Contrary to popular belief, most educated individuals in the 15th century, and especially sailors, already knew that the earth was round. What was not realized by Columbus, however, was just how big a globe it was. Columbus also didn't realize that there were two continents in the way: North and South America. During his lifetime, Columbus led a total of four expeditions to the New World, discovering various Caribbean islands, the Gulf of Mexico, and the South and Central American main lands, but he never accomplished his original goal—a western ocean route to the great cities of Asia.

4. COLUMBUS SECOND VOYAGE

Columbus second voyage set sail in September, 1493, with 17 ships. During his expeditions, he helped to colonize Hispaniola, and discovered the South American mainland. Columbus made a total of four trips to the new world. He did not, however, see mainland North America or the undiscovered United States during any of his voyages. He returned to Spain for the last time on November 7, 1504.

5. HONOUR TO COLUMBUS

New York City honoring Christopher Columbus and the 300th anniversary of his landing in the Bahamas. Then, on October 12, 1866 the Italian population of New York organized the first celebration of the discovery of America. Three years later, in 1869 Italians in San Francisco celebrated October 12 calling it C-Day. To mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage, in 1892, President Benjamin Harrison made a commemorative proclamation. But it was Colorado, in 1905, which became the first state to observe a Columbus Day. Since 1920 the day has been celebrated annually, and in 1937 President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed every October 12 as Columbus Day. That's where it remained until 1971 when Congress declared it a federal public holiday on the second Monday in October.

6. COLUMBUS DEATH

Columbus died in Spain on May 20, 1506 at the age of 55, without realizing the great scope of what he did achieve: He had discovered for Europe the New World, whose riches over the next century would help make Spain the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth.