

17 The Next Voyage



The pineapple was just one of many foods new to the Spanish.

Q: What did the ocean say to Columbus?

A: Nothing. It just waved.

Europeans called America a "new world"—but it was another old world with its own ancient civilizations and peoples. They were just different from those in Europe.

If you're going to be an explorer, you need a base: a place you can go for supplies and help. Columbus knew that, so on his first voyage he set up a base on the island of Hispaniola (the island is now divided down the middle into two countries, which we call Haiti and the Dominican Republic). He thought the base would become an important trading post when he found the Grand Khan.

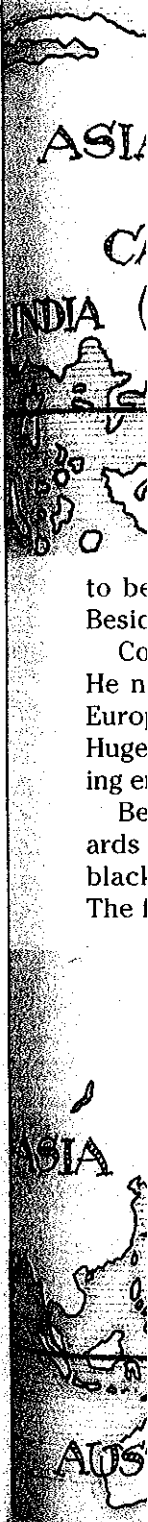
Hispaniola was the first Spanish settlement in the Americas—and it flopped. As soon as Columbus sailed back to Spain for more ships and men, the settlers he left behind started fighting over gold and Indian women. Soon they were killing each other. The Indians—who must have been angry at the way they were being pushed around—killed most of the rest of them.

While this was going on, Columbus was in Spain being a hero. Now Isabella and Ferdinand were happy to give him ships and men. After all, he had found the Indies; he was sure of it. "It's just a matter of getting past those outlying islands to reach Cathay," he must have said.

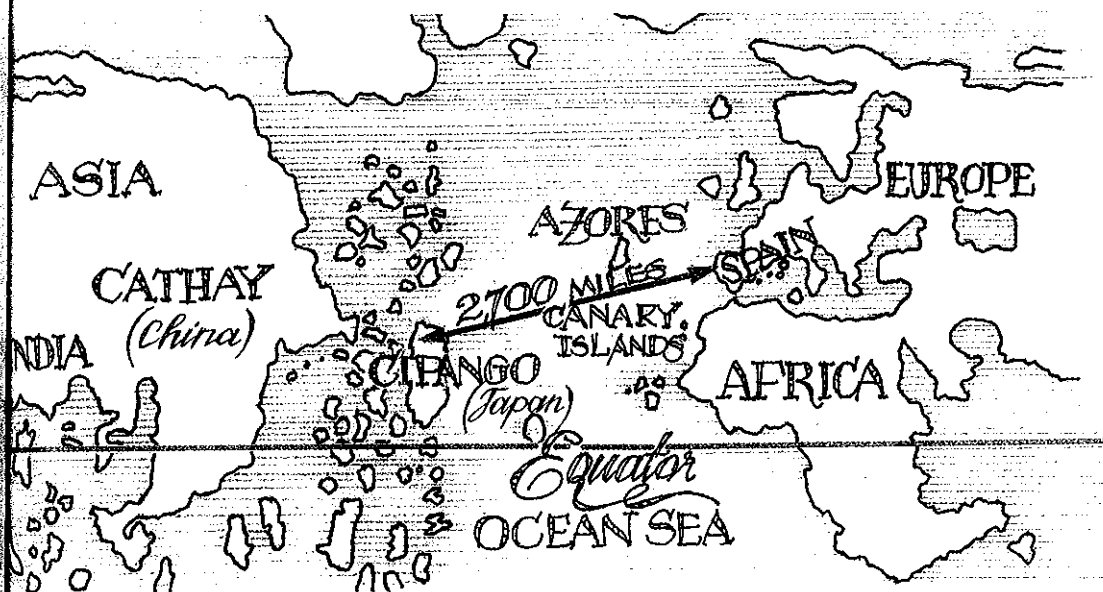
His second trip was to be the payoff voyage. Now that he knew the way, it wouldn't be difficult to cross the ocean. This time he had 17 ships and 1,200 men. He took horses and armor and European goods. Everyone was sure Columbus would meet the Grand Khan and come home with boats full of gold and silk and spices. So adventurers from some of the most important families in Spain went with him.

The adventurers were nothing but trouble. They expected to find China, and when they didn't find it they blamed Columbus.

To keep the men happy, Columbus gave them land on the islands he discovered. They soon began capturing Indians and using them as slaves. Then Columbus sent a boatload of Indians back to Spain



THE FIRST AMERICANS

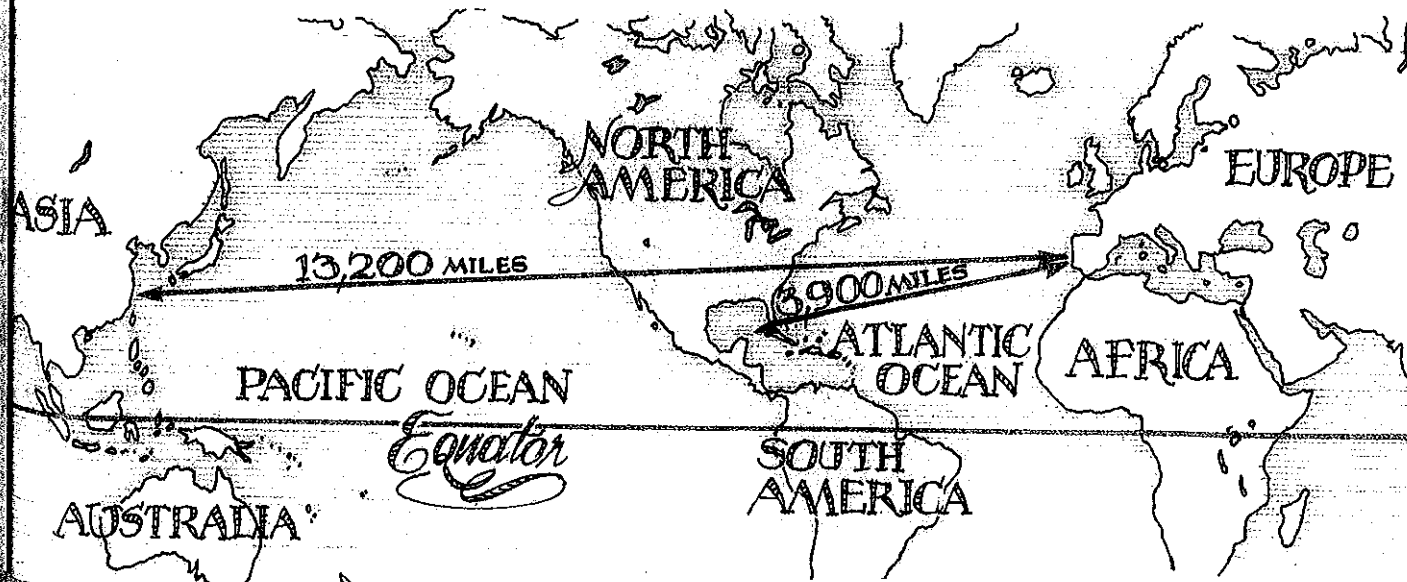


to be sold as slaves. It was a nasty way to begin in a new land. Besides, the Indian slaves often ran away, or died.

Columbus kept searching for gold mines, but he didn't find any. He never guessed that the Caribbean Islands would make some Europeans very rich—but with sugar, cotton, and tobacco, not gold. Huge plantations would produce crops for Europe's markets, creating enormous wealth.

Because workers are needed to grow crops, and because Spaniards didn't want to work in the fields—and the Indians were dying—black people would be brought from Africa to be field workers. The first Africans came in 1503; by 1574 there were 12,000 Africans

Above: Columbus's idea of the length of his voyage and the whereabouts of his hoped-for destination. **Below:** what was really there—and how far it was.



ge

base: a
umbus
ase on
lived
ve call
ght the
t when

in the
mbus
n, the
ld and
—who
und—

y: Now
. After
of get-
e said.
w the
rad 17
oods.
n and
entur-
1 him.
o find

lands
them
Spain

These Indians are preparing a corn liquor drink. The woman in the foreground isn't throwing up; she's mixing the corn with saliva to start fermentation. Corn wasn't the only new food Europeans found in America. More are listed below.



The Columbian Exchange

From the Old World to the New World:

Horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, honey bees, wheat, Asian rice, barley, oats, soybeans, sugarcane, onions, lettuce, okra, peaches, pears, watermelon, citrus fruit, rye, bananas, olives, chickpeas

From the New World to the Old World:

Corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, chocolate, vanilla, tobacco, beans, pumpkin, cassava, avocado, peanuts, cashews, pineapple, blueberries, quinine, sunflowers, wild rice, squashes, marigolds, petunias, turkey, sweet potatoes

peppers, beans, pumpkins, and tomatoes were growing in Europe.

One plant—the potato—proved more valuable to the Old World than all the gold in both the Americas.

The exchange went both ways. Columbus brought oranges to the West Indies, where they were unknown. Cattle, sheep, horses, and pigs were sent to America from Europe.

That transfer of plants and animals provided a way to feed bigger and bigger world populations. Corn was soon a basic food in Africa, as were potatoes in Ireland. The American sweet potato became important in China. Italians took the tomato and created a new sauce for spaghetti.

But nobody back in Spain was thinking about agricultural revolutions. It was gold and spices that they wanted. So Columbus was no hero when he returned from his second voyage. He had a few gold pieces, but he hadn't found a source of gold, and he hadn't found China either.

Still, if Columbus had stopped then, he could have retired with wealth

on Hispaniola—and that was just on one island. It was the beginning of black slavery in America.

Columbus did something important that no one noticed at first: he helped start an agricultural revolution. Before long, American corn,

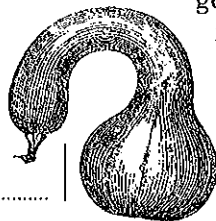
What If Columbus Had

Suppose the old geographers had been right. What if the world were tiny and there were no American continents? What if Columbus had got to Cathay? Would he have met the Grand Khan? Would he have returned home in ships laden with gold and spices?

We can be sure about the answer to only one of those questions. We know Columbus would not have met the Grand Khan. There was no Grand Khan.

Most of what Columbus knew of Cathay came from Marco Polo's book, and it was old knowledge. The Grand Khan and his family had been replaced in the 14th century by rulers of the Ming family. The word *khan* was no longer used in China. Columbus even had China and India confused.

In 1492, China was the most advanced civilization in the world. Its people were better fed, better housed, better clothed, and better educated than people anywhere else on the globe. Most Chinese



and
wha
F
isla
Nor
A
tha
Am
grea
sou
C
sou

lived in
villages.
of state.
govern
out by
pass a
based on

China
ahead
Chinese
for centu
ics, astr
navigatio
licated th
or Portug
great ad
Muslim,
Ocean to
Columbu
comman
100 junk
His trea
long. Co
umbus's
"It now
casional
to the A
tween th

and honors. But he was the kind of man who never stopped. That's what made him a great explorer: he kept going.

He made two more voyages—four trips in all. He discovered more islands and the mainland of South America. He never did reach North America.

And he was always convinced he had found Asia. He was sure that all the islands he reached lay off the coast of Cathay. South America bothered him because it did seem like a mainland. It had a great river. He knew it wasn't China; China couldn't be that far south.

Columbus solved the problem of the southern land by deciding it was the

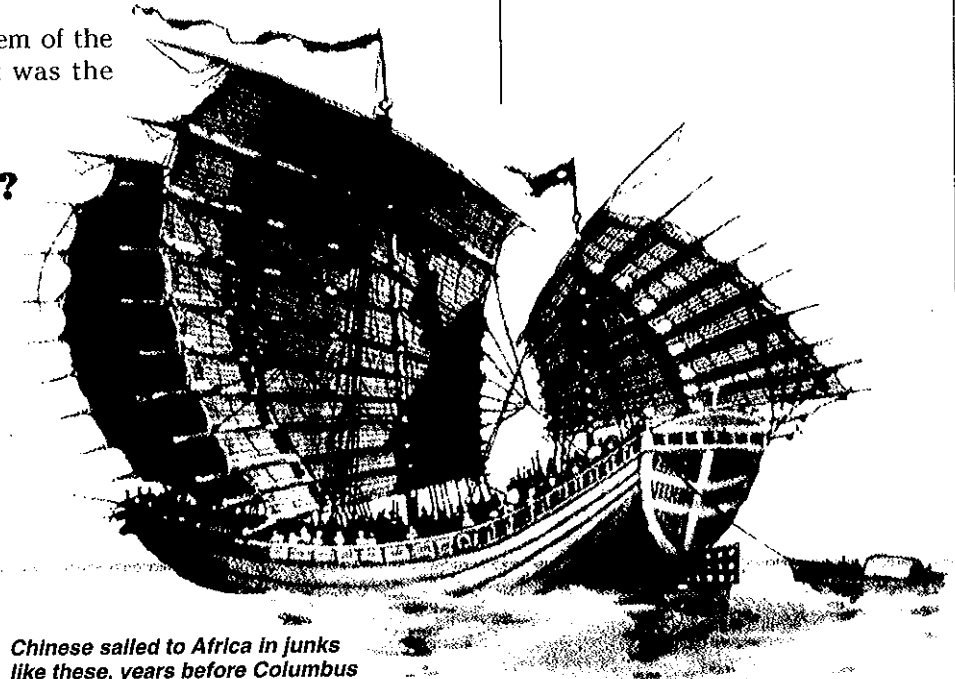
King John of Portugal said Columbus was "a big talker and boastful in his accomplishments." Can you think why bragging might sometimes be useful and not just conceited?

Had Reached Cathay?

lived in family-centered farming villages. An emperor was the head of state. Tax collecting and other government duties were carried out by bureaucrats who had to pass a series of strict exams based on the Confucian classics.

Chinese technology was way ahead of that of the West. The Chinese had been printing books for centuries. Chinese mathematics, astronomy, ship design, and navigation aids were more sophisticated than anything the Spanish or Portuguese had developed. The great admiral Zheng He, a Chinese Muslim, sailed across the Indian Ocean to Africa 60 years before Columbus's voyage. Zheng He commanded a fleet of more than 100 junks carrying 25,000 men. His treasure ship was 400 feet long. Compare that with Columbus's *Santa María*, at 85 feet.

"It now seems certain that occasional visits of Asian people to the Americas occurred between the 7th and the 15th cen-



Chinese sailed to Africa in junks like these, years before Columbus ever made it to America.

turies, bringing to the New World ideas, knowledge, and artifacts," writes historian Geoffrey Parker.

Why did those voyages stop? Why, after the 15th century, did Westerners, sailing puny boats, lead the world in exploration?

No one knows. Perhaps the Chinese were so self-sufficient that they didn't need tribute from abroad. And they seem to have

had no desire to rule other lands.

Competition drove the European nations; the Chinese didn't feel a need to compete with anyone. If Columbus had made it to Cathay, he probably would not have been allowed to see the emperor. The Chinese would have thought him a barbarian. Columbus, with his tiny fleet and his scruffy sailors, would not have impressed them.

Garden of Eden, the place the Bible describes as the first home of Adam and Eve. Columbus believed the Garden of Eden must be somewhere on earth. When he saw brilliantly colored birds and flowers in the southern land, he was sure he had found it. South America was like an Eden. He wasn't the only explorer to be fooled.

Living at the Center of the Universe

When, in the 20th century, men reached the moon, it was an astonishing feat of technology. People actually built a spaceship and rocketed it away from the pull of earth's gravity and on through space. But even so, everyone knew the moon was there. They even knew in advance what the moon would look like when they got there. That wasn't the case in 1492. No one was prepared for Columbus's discovery.

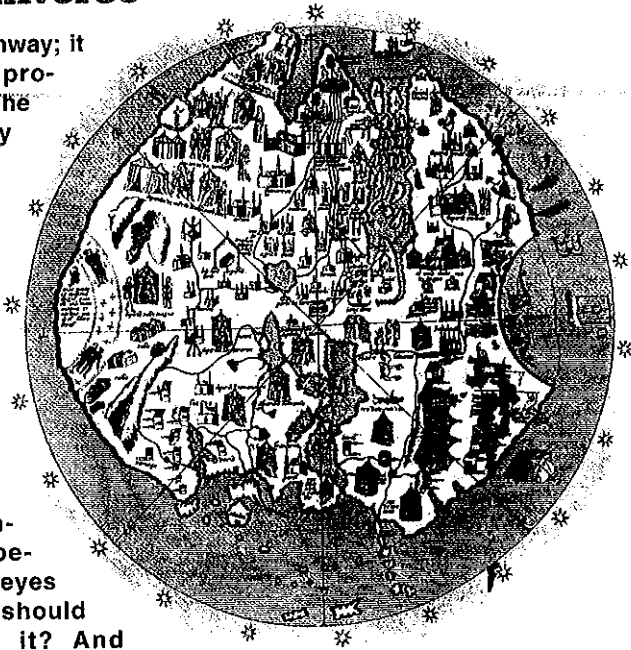
Imagine that you live in the 15th century. Put yourself in school in Egypt or Korea or Italy. Your lesson for today is about world geography. The teacher is telling you that the earth is the center of the universe. But since you're smart, you already know that. Everyone in the 15th century knows that. You also know that the earth doesn't move. The sun and stars move around the earth, the teacher says.

You learn that this world was created with one great three-part mass of land (divided into Africa, Asia, and Europe) and one great ocean that laps its shores. The seas and rivers and lakes are like highways to be traveled. The great

ocean is no highway; it is a moat that protects the land. The world is orderly and easily understood.

So when the news comes of the voyage of Columbus, it never occurs to you to think that he has found a new continent. Columbus himself couldn't believe what his eyes told him; why should you consider it? And when, in the early 16th century, it finally becomes clear—Europe, Asia, and Africa are not the only continents—you realize that some things you were taught in books and school and church were wrong. The Old World is not the center of the universe and not as easy to understand as you once believed. It makes you begin to ask new questions. It makes you begin to think for yourself.

The same kind of thing happened to Indian girls and boys



This map was a bit out-of-date even in 1436, when it was made. But most people thought the world looked about like this. Turn the book sideways to help you find Spain and Europe.

in America. They, too, thought they lived at the center of the universe. They knew of no other continents or cultures—until some brightly painted ships came from the east and changed their view of the world forever.