

MOMENTOUS DECISIONS

Columbus and the colonisation
of the New World

Decisions that eventually led to the colonisation of The New World

- Who?
Christopher Columbus, Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon.
- When?
By Columbus. sometime before 1485, by Isabella and Ferdinand in April 1492.
- Where?
In the Alcázar castle, Córdoba.

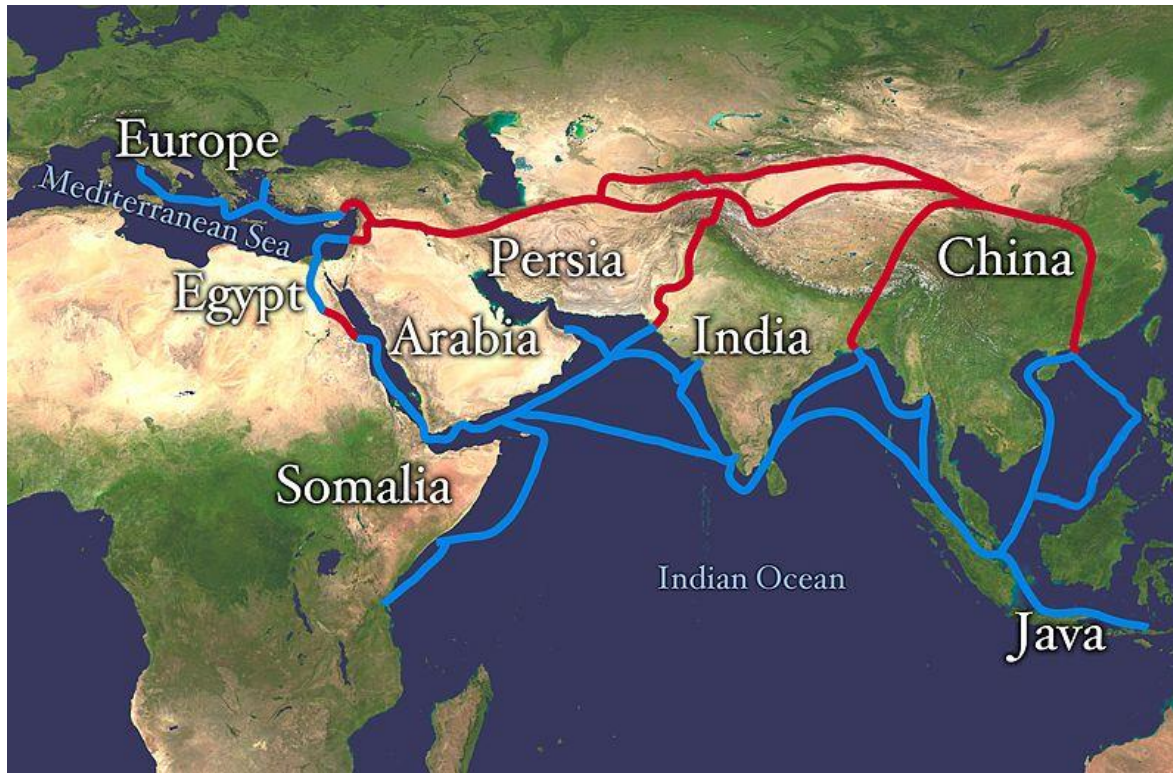
Seeking a sea-road to Asia

- Why?
- To find a new Route to China and Japan.
- The Silk Road had become too dangerous so a new sea route, was needed.



Silk Road closed

- With the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the land route to Asia became much more difficult and dangerous.
- Portuguese navigators tried to find a sea-way to Asia.



Columbus was not the first to suggest sailing westward

- In 1470, the Florentine astronomer Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli suggested to King Alfonso V of Portugal that sailing west would be a quicker way to reach the Spice Islands (East Indies), Cathay (China) and Cipangu (Japan) than finding a way around Africa.
- Alfonso rejected his proposal.



Inspired by a legend?

- As a young seaman, Columbus travelled extensively on the maritime trade routes in the Mediterranean Sea and possibly to Iceland.
- Some historians suggest that while there he heard about Leif Erikson.
- There are myths that the Viking established a colony, called Vinland, on the coast of Newfoundland, Canada, 500 years earlier.
- Statue of Leif near the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul.



Approach to King João of Portugal

- In 1485, Columbus presented his plans to João(John) II, King of Portugal.
- He proposed that the king equip three sturdy ships and grant Columbus one year's time to sail out into the Atlantic, search for a western route to the Orient, and return.



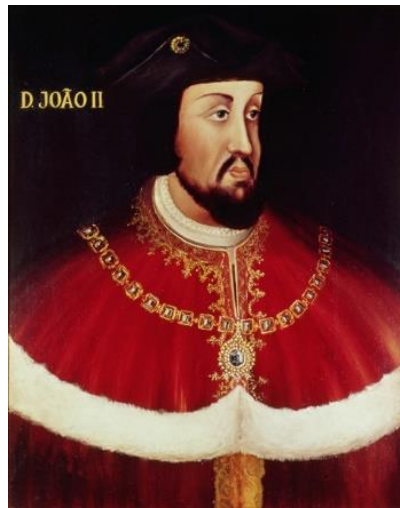
Very ambitious (he saw himself as fulfilling some Biblical prophecies)

- Columbus also requested he be made "Great Admiral of the Ocean", appointed governor of any and all lands he discovered, and given one-tenth of all revenue from those lands.



The experts know better

- The king submitted Columbus' proposal to his experts, who rejected it.
- It was their considered opinion that Columbus' estimation of a travel distance of 2,400 miles (3,860 km) was, in fact, far too low.
- In 1488, Columbus appealed to the court of Portugal once again and, once again, João II invited him to an audience.



Development of sea route around Africa to Asia

- That meeting also proved unsuccessful, in part because, later in 1488, Bartolomeu Dias returned to Portugal with news of his successful rounding of the southern tip of Africa (near the Cape of Good Hope).
- With an eastern sea route to Asia apparently at hand, King João was no longer interested in Columbus's “far-fetched” project.

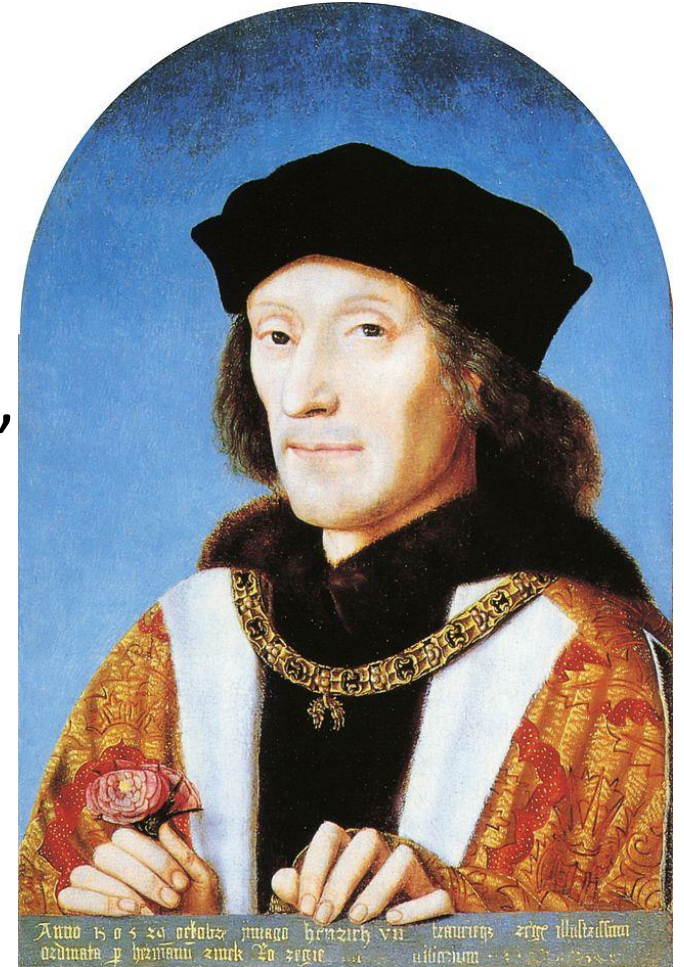
Bartolomeu Dias.



No one willing to sponsor Columbus

- Columbus travelled from Portugal to both Genoa and Venice, but he received encouragement from neither.
- Columbus had also dispatched his brother Bartholomeo to the court of Henry VII of England, to inquire whether the English crown might sponsor his expedition, but also without success.

Henry VII.



Columbus given a retainer

- In the meantime, perhaps to keep their options open, the Catholic monarchs of Spain had given him an annual allowance of 12,000 (gold?) maravedis and, in 1489, furnished him with a letter ordering all cities and towns under their domain to provide him food and lodging at no cost.

A maravedis.



Another audience with Isabella and Ferdinand

- After continually lobbying at the Spanish court and two years of negotiations, he finally had success in January 1492.
- Ferdinand and Isabella had just conquered Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula, and they received Columbus in Córdoba, in the Alcázar castle.
- This may have affected their decision to give an audience to Columbus.
- Ferdinand II King of Sicily and Aragon.



Isabella in charge

- Isabella turned Columbus down on the advice of **her confessor**, and he was leaving town by mule in despair, when Ferdinand intervened.
- Isabella then sent a royal guard to fetch him, and Ferdinand later claimed credit for being "the principal cause why those islands were discovered".

Isabella I of Castile.



Reluctant approval for the first voyage?

- The "Capitulations of Santa Fe", between Christopher Columbus and the Catholic Monarchs, were signed in Santa Fe, Granada on April 17th 1492.
- King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella promised Columbus that if he succeeded he would be given the rank of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and appointed Viceroy and Governor of all the new lands he could claim for Spain.



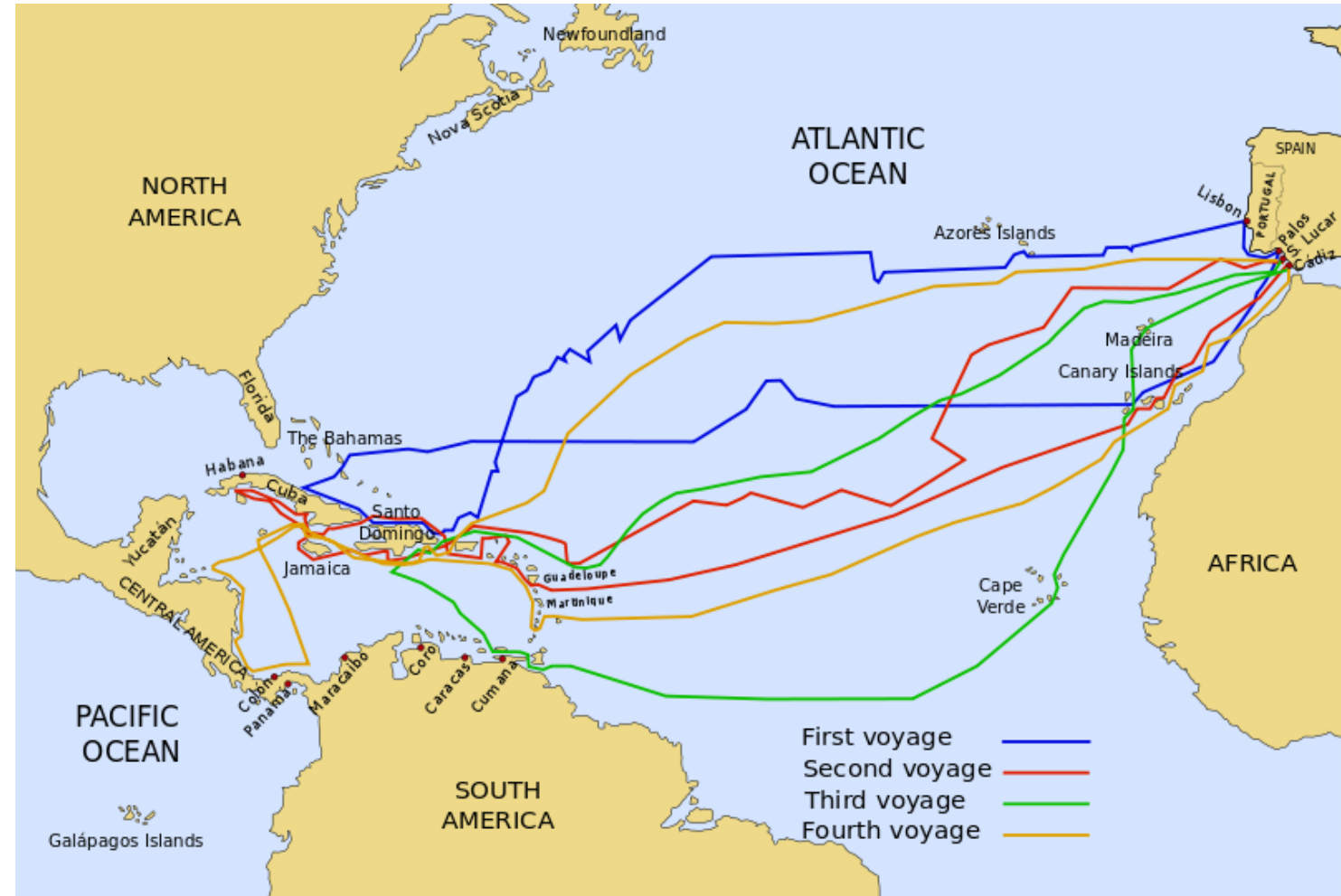
An incredible deal!

- He had the right to nominate three persons, from whom the sovereigns would choose one, for any office in the new lands.
- He would be entitled to 10% of all the revenues from the new lands in perpetuity.
- Additionally, he would also have the option of buying one-eighth interest in any commercial venture with the new lands and receive one-eighth of the profits.



From 1492 to 1503, Columbus completed 4 round-trip voyages between Spain and the Americas

- These voyages marked the beginning of the European exploration and colonisation of the American continents, and are thus of enormous significance in Western history.



Uncertainty

- According to one source: about half of the financing was to come from private Italian investors, whom Columbus had already lined up.
- The problem is that in 1494 'Italy' looked like this:
- Columbus was born in The Republic of Genoa.
- There was also warfare, from 1494- 1498, between Charles VIII of France and an alliance of Pope Alexander VI's Holy Roman Empire, Spain and number of the other states in "Italy".



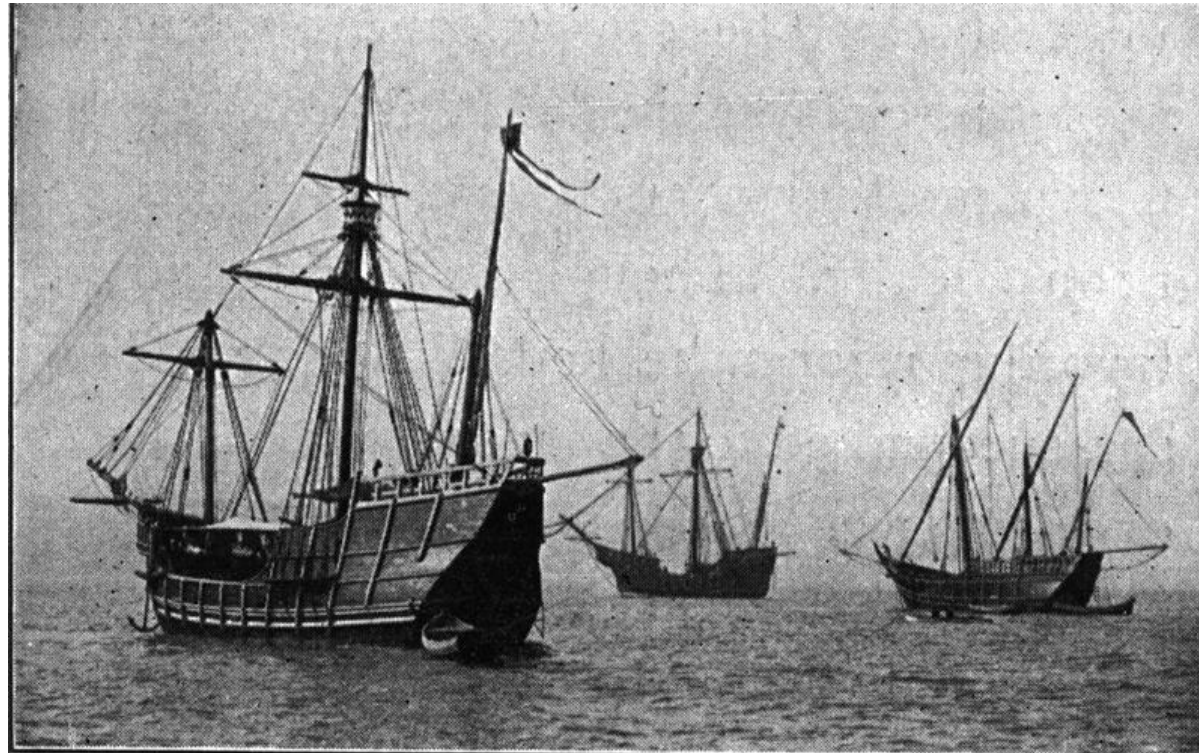
Topping up the finance

- Financially broke after the Granada campaign, the Spanish monarchs left it to the royal treasurer to shift funds among various royal accounts on behalf of the enterprise.
- The monarchs forced the Palos inhabitants to contribute to the expedition.
- On the evening of 3rd August 1492, Columbus departed from Palos de la Frontera with three ships: the Santa Maria, the Pinta and the Santa Clara.



Replicas of *Niña*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria* sailed from Spain to the Chicago Columbian Exposition

- Small ships in a vast ocean.



The first voyage (modern place names in black, Columbus' place names in blue)

- There is some uncertainty about the actual first landfall.
- It may not have been Plana Cays.



Second voyage

- Columbus left the port of Cadiz on 24th September 1493, with a fleet of 17 ships carrying 1,200 men and the supplies to establish permanent colonies in the New World.
- The passengers included priests, farmers, and soldiers, who would be the new colonists.



The Church joins the invasion

- This reflected the new policy of creating not just 'colonies of exploitation', but also 'colonies of settlement' from which to launch missions dedicated to converting the natives to Christianity.



Third voyage. 1

- On 30 May 1498, Columbus left with six ships from Sanlúcar, Spain, for his third trip to the New World.



Third voyage. 2

- After being becalmed for several days in the doldrums of the mid-Atlantic, Columbus' fleet caught the wind and, dangerously low on water, turned north.
- The ships landed on the southern coast of the island of Trinidad on 31st July.



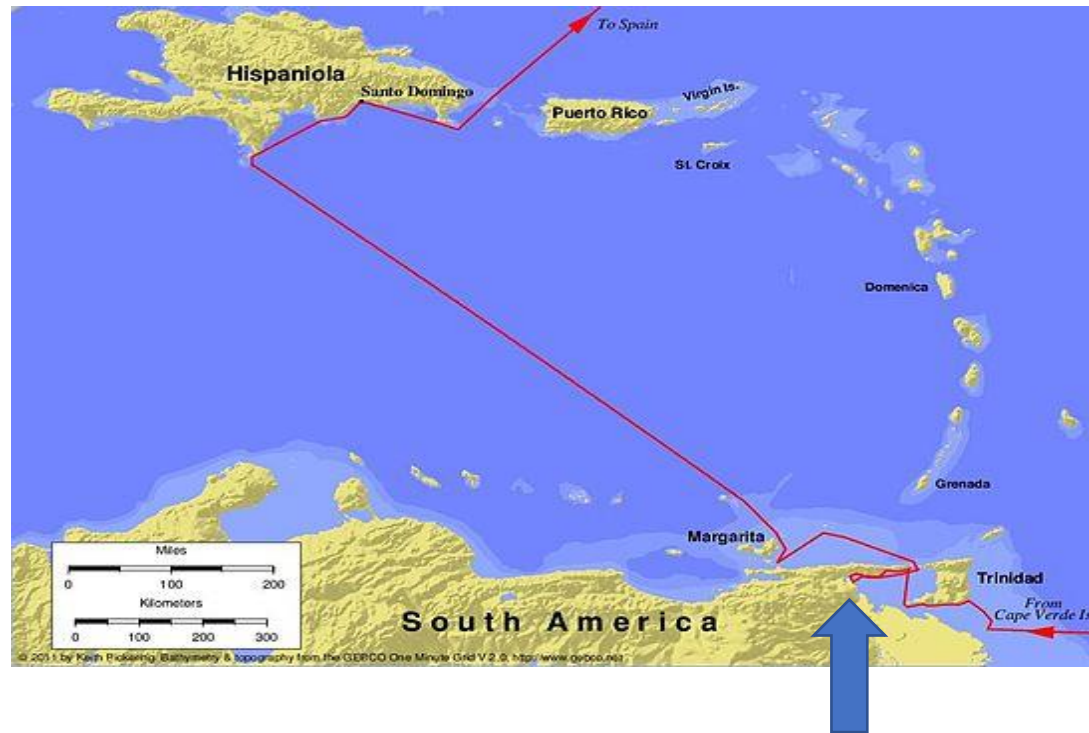
Third voyage. 3

- After re-supplying with food and water, from 4th to 12th August Columbus explored the Gulf of Paria, which separates Trinidad from what is now Venezuela, near the delta of the Orinoco River.



Third voyage. 4

- He then touched the mainland of South America at the Paria Peninsula.



Third voyage. 5

- Columbus correctly interpreted the enormous quantity of fresh water that the Orinoco delivered into the Atlantic Ocean as evidence that he had reached a continental landmass.
- He speculated that the new continent might be the location of the biblical Garden of Eden.
- The return to Spain was in unpleasant circumstances (see later slides).



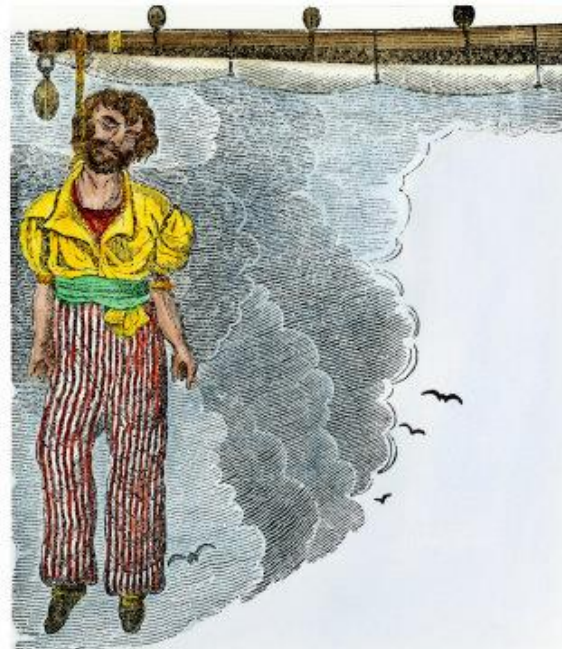
Third voyage. 6

- In poor health, Columbus returned to Hispaniola on 19th August, only to find that many of the Spanish settlers of the new colony were in rebellion against his rule, claiming that Columbus had misled them about the supposedly bountiful riches of the New World.
- Columbus was eventually forced to make peace with the rebellious colonists on humiliating terms.



Third voyage.7

- While Columbus was on his third voyage, a number of returning settlers and sailors lobbied against Columbus at the Spanish court, accusing him and his brothers of gross mismanagement.
- Also Columbus had had some of his crew hanged for disobedience.



Third voyage.8

- He had an economic interest in the enslavement of the Hispaniola natives and for that reason was not eager to baptise them, which attracted criticism from some churchmen.
- An entry in his journal from September 1498 reads: "From here one might send, in the name of the Holy Trinity, as many slaves as could be sold ..."



Columbus accused

- In October 1499, he sent two ships to Spain, asking the Court of Spain to appoint a royal commissioner to help him govern.
- Around this time, accusations of tyranny and incompetence on the part of Columbus had also reached the Court.



Columbus replaced

- Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand responded by removing Columbus from power and replacing him with Francisco de Bobadilla who had arrived in Santo Domingo while Columbus was away on his third voyage.
- Alcázar de Colón, Santo Domingo: America's first castle, once the residence of Viceroy of the Indies Don Diego Colón, a son of Christopher Columbus.
- (Dominican Republic).



Some of the damage done by Columbus is repaired

- Bobadilla arrived in August, 1500, with 500 men and a handful of native slaves that Columbus had taken to Spain on a previous voyage: they were to be freed by royal decree.



Ignominious departure from San Domingo

- Columbus and Bobadilla clashed: because there was little love for Columbus among the settlers, Bobadilla was able to clap him and his brothers in chains and throw them in a dungeon.
- In October, 1500, the three Columbus brothers were sent back to Spain, still in shackles.



Allegations of brutality

- Bobadilla, who ruled as governor from 1500 until his death at sea in a storm in 1502, had also been tasked by the Court with investigating the accusations of brutality made against Columbus.



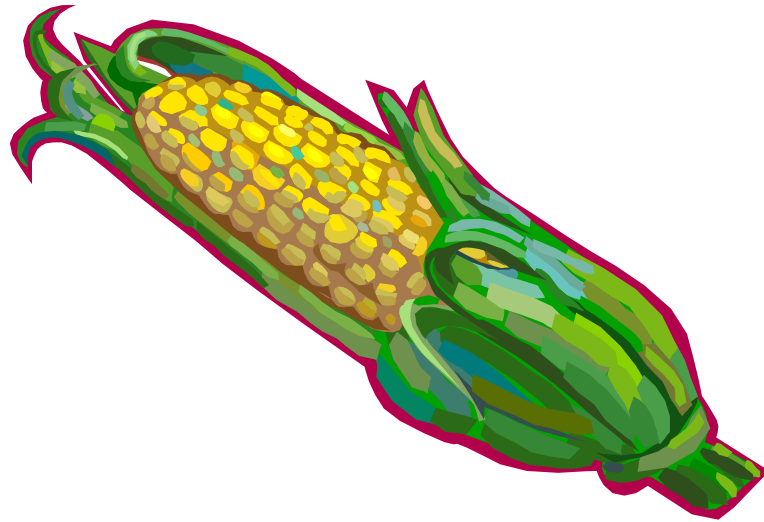
Cruel ruler

- A recently discovered report by de Bobadilla alleges that Columbus regularly used torture and mutilation to govern Hispaniola.
- The 48-page report, found in 2005 in the state archive in the Spanish city of Valladolid, contains testimonies from 23 people, including both enemies and supporters of Columbus, about the treatment of colonial subjects by Columbus and his brothers (Bartoloméo, and Diego) during his seven-year rule.
- In 1506 Christopher Columbus died in Valladolid in a house that is now a Museum dedicated to him.



Further brutality

- According to the report, Columbus once punished a man found guilty of stealing corn by having his ears and nose cut off and then selling him into slavery.



Sadistic behaviour

- The report claims that Columbus congratulated his brother Bartoloméo on "defending the family" when the latter ordered a woman paraded naked through the streets and then had her tongue cut out for suggesting that Columbus was of lowly birth.



Crushing dissent

- The document also describes how Columbus put down native unrest and revolt; he first ordered a brutal crackdown in which many natives were killed and then paraded their dismembered bodies through the streets in an attempt to discourage further rebellion.



Back in Spain after third voyage

- Columbus and his brothers lingered in jail for six weeks before busy King Ferdinand ordered their release.
- Not long after, the king and queen summoned the Columbus brothers to the Alhambra palace in Granada.



Columbus 'forgiven' by Isabella and Ferdinand

- There the royal couple heard the brothers' pleas; restored their freedom and wealth; and, after much persuasion, agreed to fund Columbus' fourth voyage.
- However, the door was firmly shut on Columbus' role as governor.
- Fourth voyage 11th May 1502.



Fights with the Castilian crown

- He and his sons, Diego and Fernando, then conducted a lengthy series of court cases against the Castilian crown, alleging that the Crown had illegally reneged on its contractual obligations to Columbus and his heirs.

Diego Christopher Columbus.



Who is the greedy one?

- During the court cases, Columbus demanded that the Spanish Crown give him 10% of all profits made in the new lands, as stipulated in the Capitulations of Santa Fe.
- Because he had been relieved of his duties as governor, the crown did not feel bound by that contract and his demands were rejected.



Recourse to the legal system.

- On 20th May 1506, aged probably 54, Columbus died in Valladolid, Spain.
- After his death, his heirs sued the Crown for a part of the profits from trade with America, as well as other rewards.
- This led to a protracted series of legal disputes until 1790.
- The Columbus family had some success in their first litigation, as a judgment of 1511 confirmed Diego's position as Viceroy, but reduced his powers.