

Topic Page: [Columbus, Christopher \(1451 - 1506\)](#)

Definition: **Columbus** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1.

1446?--1506, Italian navigator in Spanish service; commonly regarded as the first European to discover America, 1492.

Spanish Cristóbal Colón Italian Cristoforo Colombo

Summary Article: **Columbus, Christopher (1451-1506)**

From *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*

Christopher Columbus, whose voyages to the New World greatly changed the world's history, was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451, the son of a middle-class merchant. As a young man, he apprenticed as a business agent for a trading company, and his travels took him as far as Ireland. Europe had long been interested in a sea passage to the Far East because the long overland trip was not very economical. Contrary to popular belief, Columbus did not discover that the world was spherical. Columbus, however, is credited with discovering the trade winds and believed that a journey to the Orient by sea was possible. Late in his life he believed that God had opened his mind to a journey to the New World.

Columbus first asked John II of Portugal for funding for the expedition and was turned down. He also was turned down by Genoa and Venice, and he had trouble attracting sailors for his venture because most navigators correctly concluded that Columbus had grossly under-estimated the distance from the Canary Islands to the Orient, and no ships at the time had the capacity for the food and water needed to make the journey. When Queen Isabella of Spain referred the expedition to a commission for royal consideration, the committee came to the same conclusion. But to keep Columbus from giving his idea to another monarch, Isabella paid Columbus to stay in Spain, and in 1492, he finally convinced her to fund his expedition.

Setting sail on August 3, Columbus had three ships, the *Nina*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*, in his expedition. On October 12, they sighted land (an island in the modern day Bahamas) and after landing, Columbus claimed it for Spain, calling it *San Salvador*. On this voyage he also explored modern day Cuba and left 39 men in what is now Haiti. Upon returning to Spain, he brought back some Native Americans, most of whom died during the voyage back.

Columbus completed three more voyages to the New World, which had a significant missionary element. In order to be granted funding, Columbus had presented his plan to Queen Isabella as economically viable, and certainly a lot of land, spices, and gold came from his trips (in 3 years the royal revenues collected 60,000,000 reals of gold). However, as a staunch Catholic, Columbus' primary purpose was to convert the Indians to Christianity. On his second trip, Columbus brought along 12 missionaries and ordered that they treat the natives "well and lovingly" or face severe punishment. He had an association with the Franciscan religious order late in his life, although there is no certain evidence that he was a lay member of the order.

Columbus died on May 20, 1506. When he died, he was still convinced that his trips had been to the eastern shore of Asia, despite the fact that Amerigo Vespucci had published journals to the contrary

several years earlier. His body was moved to Seville in southern Spain, then to Santo Domingo in Hispaniola in 1542, then to Havana, Cuba, and then finally back to the Cathedral of Seville again.

While Columbus was celebrated by many in the New World, his legacy has been disputed in recent years as some have regarded his voyages to the New World as pure acts of conquest.

SEE ALSO: Geographical Exploration and Christianity

Suggested Readings

- Columbus, C. (1992). *The four voyages: Being his own log-book, letters and dispatches with connecting narratives* (trans. Cohen, J. M.). Penguin Baltimore, MD.
- Sale, K. (1992). *Christopher Columbus and the conquest of paradise*. Knopf New York.

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Coulter, M. (2012). Columbus, Christopher (1451-1506). In G. T. Kurian, *The encyclopedia of Christian civilization*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/columbus_christopher_1451_1506

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