

Background:

From the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trt038.html>)



In 1493, Columbus wrote a brief report concerning his discoveries of "Islands of India beyond the Ganges." It was intended as a public notice to announce his discoveries and to garner support for another voyage. The first edition of this letter was printed in Spanish in Barcelona in April 1493. Within the month a Latin translation of the letter was published in Rome by Stephan Plannck. In its preamble, exclusive credit was given to Fernando of Aragon [King Ferdinand] for supporting the expedition -- omitting Isabel's support [the Queen]. Immediately Plannck published a corrected edition, the one on display [in the Library of Congress], and it was this Latin edition that spread the news of discovery throughout Europe.



A Letter of Columbus, 1493

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What was Columbus' goal when he left Spain?

Having now accomplished the undertaking upon which I set out, I know that it will be agreeable to you to be informed of all that I have done and discovered in my voyage. On the thirty-third day after I had left Cadiz, I reached the Indian Ocean, where I found a great many islands, people by innumerable inhabitants, of all which I took possession, without resistance, in the name of our most illustrious King, with public proclamation and hoisting our colors. To the first of these islands, I gave the name of the Divine Saviour, trusting to whose protection I had reached it and all the rest. It's Indian name, however, is Guana-hanyx. In like manner, I gave new names to the whole. One was named from Holy Mary of the Conception, another Fernandina, another Isabella, another Joanna, and in like manner of the rest. When we landed upon that island, which, I have just said, was named Joanna, I proceeded along its shore, somewhat towards the west, and found it of so great an extent, without any apparent termination, that I conceived it not to be an island, but part of the Continent, a province of Cathay. However, you see neither cities nor towns situated on its shores, only a few villages and rural farms. I could not enter into conversation with its inhabitants; and, accordingly, as soon as they saw us they took flight. I advanced forward, thinking that I should find some town, or country houses; but at length, perceiving that nothing new was likely to appear, however far we might go, and that our progress was carrying us directly north, which I was particularly desirous to avoid, as winter was now set in, and the winds were besides favorable for our voyage southwards, the direction which I wished, I determined to make no further search, but returned to a harbor, whole situation I had marked. I notwithstanding sent from hence two of our men into the country, to inquire, whether there were any king or cities in the province.

Why might he be giving islands the names he's listing here?

Why couldn't he talk to the natives?

Why does Columbus keep looking for houses, kings, and cities?

Summary:

What were the purposes of the letter that Columbus wrote?

How does Columbus describe his interactions with the native people?

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