

Christopher Columbus was very familiar with this network of Atlantic trade. Born in Genoa in 1451, the son of an Italian wool weaver, Columbus was pushed by his father into trade. In 1476 he settled in a Genoese trading community in Portugal. There he met his wife, whose father was the Portuguese governor of an island off Africa's Atlantic coast. For ten years Columbus lived in Madeira and made voyages to the Azores, the Canary Islands, and West Africa. Forty-one years old at the time he made his first voyage of discovery to the New World, Columbus was obsessed with the idea of finding a new route to the Far East, which would provide him with enough wealth to pay for the liberation of the Holy Land from Islamic rule. Personally familiar with slavery and sugar production when he arrived in the Caribbean, he quickly saw the opportunity to extract riches from this new land.

As the following extracts from his journal reveal, within days of his arrival in the New World Columbus regarded the Indian population as a potential labor source. As he and other Europeans would soon discover, the Indians, especially the Caribs, were not as timid or as easily dominated as Columbus originally thought.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, JOURNAL, OCTOBER 14, 1492,

DECEMBER 16, 1492

Sunday, 14th of October

...these people are very simple as regards the use of arms, as your Highnesses will see from the seven that I caused to be taken, to bring home and learn our language and return; unless your Highnesses should order them all to be brought to Castile, or to be kept as captives on the same island; for with fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them....

Sunday, 16th of December

...your Highnesses may believe that this island [Hispaniola], and all the others, are as much yours as Castile. Here there is only wanting a settlement and the order to the people to do what is required. For I, with the force I have under me, which is not large, could march over all these islands without opposition. I have seen only three sailors land, without wishing to do harm, and a multitude of Indians fled before them. They have no arms, and are without warlike instincts; they all go naked, and are so timid that a thousand would not stand before three of our men. So that they are good to be ordered about, to work and sow, and do all that may be necessary, and to build towns, and they should be taught to go about clothed and to adopt our customs.

"Journal of the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus, 1492-93," in E. G. Bourne, *The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot, 985-1503*. Edited by Edward Gaylord Bourne. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906, pp. 114, 145-146, 182.



Figure 7. *Cannibals of the West Indies*.

This very early representation of cannibalism in the Indies depicts a tranquil group of Caribs feasting inside an open-sided hut; human remains hang from the rafters to cure. The Caribs are portrayed in native dress, but with European physical characteristics. (German woodcut, ca. 1505)