

The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus

map-makers have not traveled in this part of the world, in their depiction they fall into a grievous error of which I wish to speak, though it break the thread of my story.

They depict those islands and that part of the mainland twice on their charts, as if they were different lands; thus, although Cape Gracias a Dios is the same as that which they call Cape Honduras, they make two of it. The reason for their error is this: After the Admiral had discovered those lands, one Juan Díaz de Solís, after whom the Río de la Plata is called Río de Solís because he was slain by Indians there, and Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, who commanded a ship on the Admiral's first voyage, set out together in 1508 on a voyage of discovery with the intention of following westward the coast that the Admiral had discovered on his voyage to Veragua. Holding on that course, they sailed along the coast of Cariay, up past Cape Gracias a Dios to Caxinas Point, which they named Cape Honduras. The islands they called the Guanajas, giving the name of the principal island to the whole group. From there they proceeded onward, never admitting that the Admiral had been in those parts, in order to assign the discovery to themselves, although one of their pilots, Pedro de Ledesma, who had sailed with the Admiral on his voyage to Veragua, told them he knew that country and had helped the Admiral discover it; this I later had from him. The charts clearly show this, for they depict that island twice with the same shape and in the same position. The reason is that they brought back a map on which that country was accurately sketched, but they claimed it lay beyond the one the Admiral had discovered. That is why the same land is shown twice on the map, as will become manifest when the navigation of that coast, with God's help, is better known.

Having come to the island of Guanaja, the Admiral sent ashore his brother Bartholomew, with two boats. They encountered people who resembled those of the other islands, but had narrower foreheads. They also saw many pine trees and pieces of earth called *cálcide* which the Indians use to cast copper; some of the sailors thought it was gold and kept it concealed for a long time. The Adelantado being eager to learn the secrets of that island, by good fortune there arrived at that time a canoe long as a galley and eight feet wide, made of a single tree trunk like the other Indian canoes; it was freighted with merchandise from the western regions around New Spain.¹ Amidships it had a palm-leaf awning like that

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which the Venetian gondolas carry; this gave complete protection against the rain and waves. Under this awning were the children and women and all the baggage and merchandise. There were twenty-five paddlers aboard, but they offered no resistance when our boats drew up to them.

Our men brought the canoe alongside the flagship, where the Admiral gave thanks to God for revealing to him in a single moment, without any toil or danger to our people, all the products of that country. He took aboard the costliest and handsomest things in that cargo: cotton mantles and sleeveless shirts embroidered and painted in different designs and colors; breechclouts of the same design and cloth as the shawls worn by the women in the canoe, being like the shawls worn by the Moorish women of Granada; long wooden swords with a groove on each side where the edge should be, in which were fastened with cord and pitch, flint knives that cut like steel; hatchets resembling the stone hatchets used by the other Indians, but made of good copper; and hawk's bells of copper, and crucibles to melt it. For provisions they had such roots and grains as the Indians of Española eat, also a wine made of maize² that tasted like English beer. They had as well many of the almonds³ which the Indians of New Spain use as currency; and these the Indians in the canoe valued greatly, for I noticed that when they were brought aboard with the other goods, and some fell to the floor, all the Indians squatted down to pick them up as if they had lost something of great value—their greed driving out their feelings of terror and danger at finding themselves in the hands of such strange and ferocious men as we must have seemed to be.

I should add that they displayed admirable modesty, for if one had his breechclout taken from him, he would immediately cover his genitals with his hands; and the women covered their faces like the Moorish women of Granada. The Admiral was so impressed by this that he ordered his people to treat them well, and gave them some trading truck in exchange for what our men had taken from them. He detained only one, an ancient named Yumbé, who seemed to be the wisest man among them and of greatest authority, to inform him about the secrets of that land and to persuade the others to talk to the Christians; he served us very willingly and loyally all the time we were in the region where his speech was understood. Having come to the limits of the area in which

By His Son Ferdinand

his language was spoken, the Admiral gave him some presents and sent him home very satisfied. This happened before we reached Cape Gracias a Dios, on the Costa de las Orejas.