

The Loss of the *Santa Maria* Christmas Day, 1492

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THE first Spanish settlement in the New World, at Navidad in Española, was founded by Christopher Columbus as a direct outcome of the wreck of his flagship, the *Santa Maria*. It lasted less than a year, but its brief existence had important consequences for American history. It provided proof of occupation by Spain, necessary to gain the papal award of these new lands in the west. And the massacre of its garrison gave excuse, if excuse were needed, for Spanish persecution of the native population of Española and the Antilles.

In 1940 Samuel E. Morison located most of the features noted by Columbus in his first voyage along the north coast of Española.¹ He established Acul Bay as the Sea of San Tomas, Cape Haitien as Punta Santa, and the Bay of Caracol as the locality where the ship was wrecked. Navidad he considered to have been sited at Limonade-sur-Mer and Guacanagari's village or town was probably Caracol itself (see map.). He studied these locations on the spot and his arguments carry conviction. But the exact location of the wreck and the circumstances in which it occurred merit further study, for different conclusions seem to be suggested by the account of the wreck in Columbus' Journal of the First Voyage. Our knowledge of this is dependent upon an abstract made by Bartolomé de las Casas from a copy manuscript of the Journal no longer extant. As translated by Cecil Jane,² it reads:

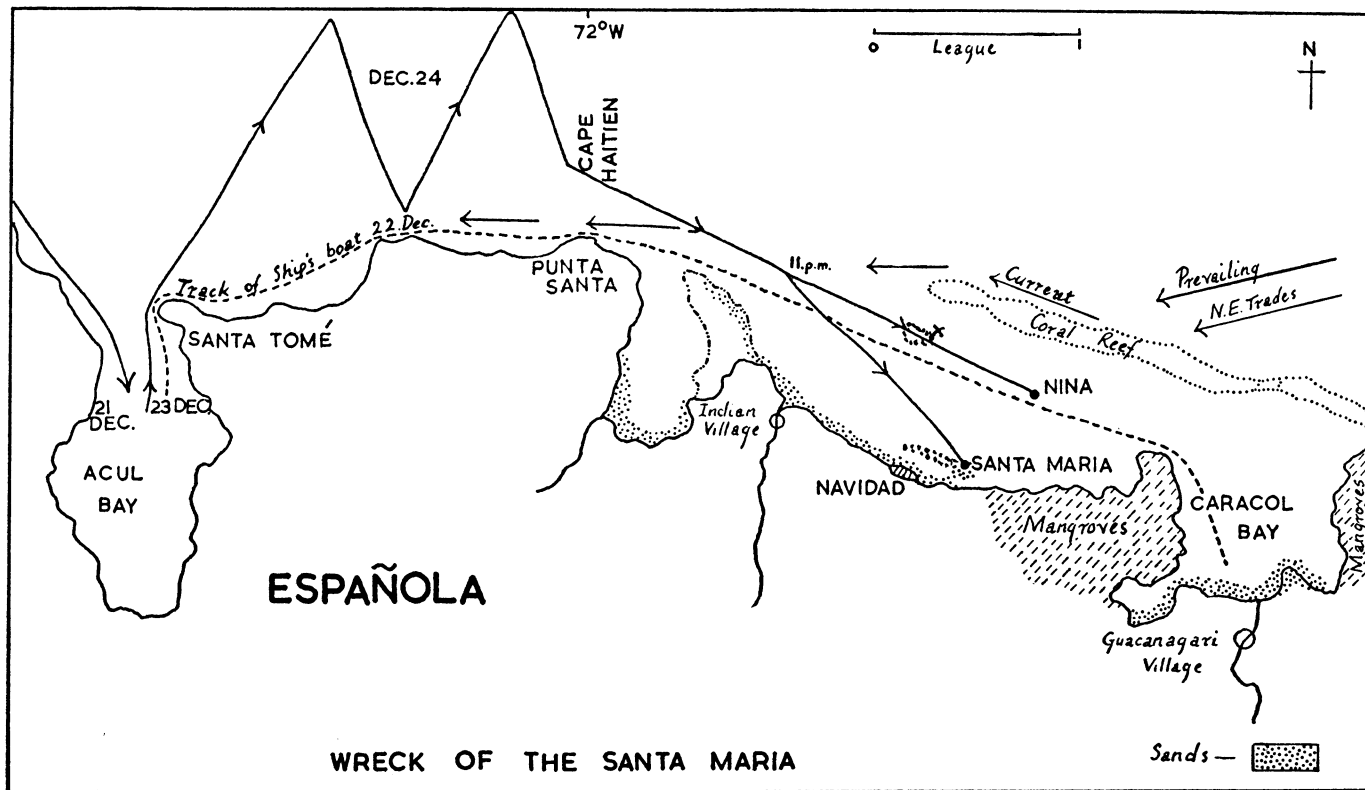
Tuesday, 25 December: Christmas Day

Navigating with little wind yesterday from the sea of San Tomas towards Punta Santa, from which when the first quarter had passed he was distant one

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¹ Samuel E. Morison, "The Route of Columbus along the North Coast of Haiti, and the Site of Navidad," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, XXXI (1940), 239-85.

² Cecil Jane, trans. and ed., *The Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (London, 1930), pp. 216-21. This translation differs in minor details from that of Clements Markham, trans., *The Journal of Columbus* (Hakluyt Society, 1893) but agrees very closely with the excerpts given in Morison, *op. cit.* Concerning the unsatisfactory character of available English translations, see S. E. Morison, "Texts and Translations of the Journal of Columbus's First Voyage," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XIX (August, 1939), 235-61.



league, that is, at eleven o'clock at night, he decided to lie down to sleep, because for two days and a night he had not slept. As it was calm, the sailor, who was steering the ship, decided to go to sleep, and he left the steering to a young ship's boy, a thing which the admiral had always strictly forbidden during the whole voyage, whether there was a wind or whether it was calm. . . . The admiral felt secure from banks and rocks, because on the Sunday, when he sent the boats to that king [Guacanagari], they had passed a full three leagues and a half to the east of that said Punta Santa, and the sailors had seen all the coast and the shoals that there are from the said Punta Santa to the east-south-east for a full three leagues and they had found where it was possible to pass; he had not done this during the whole voyage. Our Lord willed that at midnight, as they had seen the admiral lie down and rest, and as they saw that it was a dead calm and that the sea was like a small bowl,³ all should lie down to sleep, and the rudder was left in the hand of that boy, and the currents which were swift carried the ship upon one of those banks, the sea breaking on which made so much noise that could be heard and seen, if it had not been night, at a full league's distance. The ship went upon it so gently that it was hardly noticed. The boy, who felt the rudder ground, and heard the sound of the sea, shouted, and at his cries the admiral came out and was so quick that no one had yet realised that they were aground. Immediately the master of the ship [Juan de la Cosa], whose watch it was, came out and the admiral told him and the others to launch the boat . . . and they took an anchor and threw it out astern, and he with many others jumped into the boat, and the admiral thought that they had done that which he had ordered them to do. They had no care, except to escape to the caravel [the *Niña*], which was lying off half a league away. The caravel would not take them aboard, therein acting rightly, and on this account they returned to the ship, but the boat of the caravel reached her first. When the admiral saw that they were running away and that it was his crew, and that the water was growing shallower⁴ and that the ship was now lying broadside on to the sea, as he saw no other remedy, he ordered the mast to be cut and the ship to be lightened as far as possible, in order to discover if they could draw her off. And as the water became shallower still, he was unable to save her, and she lay on her side, broadside on to the sea, although there was little or no sea running, and then the hatches came open, but the ship remained whole. The admiral went to the caravel, in order to place the crew of the ship on the caravel, and as a light breeze was now blowing from land, and there also still remained much of the night and they did not know how far the banks extended, he hung off until it was day and then went to the ship from within the line of the bank. He had first sent the boat ashore with Diego de Arana of Cordoba . . . and Pero Gutierrez . . . to inform the king [Guacanagari] . . . who had his town inland, about a league and a half from the said bank. When he heard the news, they say that he wept and sent all his people from the town, with very large canoes and many

³ Markham translates this more freely as "glass." Markham and Morison translate this passage to read that the watch went to sleep before Columbus turned in so that the admiral and the helmsman and the boy were in charge. This is probably a better translation than Jane's.

⁴ Literally "decreasing." Undoubtedly this meant that the tide was ebbing. It had been high tide about 11 P.M., and since the tide was ebbing there was no prospect of higher water to float her off that night. Since the tidal variation in this region is only two feet, the change in level by 1 A.M. can only have been some inches and was quite insignificant. This however would not be known in Spain and is nowhere mentioned in the Journal. It would seem that Columbus or Las Casas used the argument of the ebbing tide as an excuse for having abandoned the ship when it was in no danger.

of them to take off everything that was in the ship. This was done and everything was taken from the decks in a very short space of time. . . . He commanded everything to be placed near the houses [of a native village on the shore]. . . .

Wednesday, 26 December

. . . The admiral . . . recognised that Our Lord had caused the ship to run aground there, in order that a settlement might there be formed. "And," he says, "in addition to this, so many things came to hand, that in truth that was no disaster, but rather great good fortune; for it is certain," he says, "that had I not run aground there, I should have kept out to sea without anchoring at this place, because it is situated within a large bay and in that bay there are two or more sandbanks; and on this voyage I should not have left people here, nor, had I desired to leave them, should I have been able to equip them so well, or to give them so many weapons and so many supplies, or material for making a fort. And it is very true that many people of those who are with me have asked and petitioned that I would consent to give them permission to remain. Now I have ordered a tower and fortress to be built. . . . So they have logs with which to construct the whole fortress, and provisions of bread and wine for more than a year, and seeds to sow, and the ship's boat and a caulker and a carpenter and a gunner, and a cooper, and many men among them who are very zealous in the service of your highnesses, and to give me the pleasure of knowing the mine where the gold is collected. So, then, all has happened greatly to the purpose that a beginning⁵ may be made, and above all, when the ship ran aground, it was so gently that the shock was hardly felt, and there was no sea or wind." All this the admiral says, and he adds more, in order to show that it was great good fortune and the predestined will of God, that the ship should run aground there, so that, if it had not been for the disloyalty of the master, and of the crew, who were all or of whom the majority were from his district [Galicia], in being unwilling to throw out the anchor from the stern, in order to drag off the ship, as the admiral commanded them, the ship would have been saved, and so he would not have been able to learn about the land . . . as he learned in those days that he was there. . . . The admiral ends by saying that of all that was in the ship not a strap nor a plank nor a nail was lost, because she remained as sound as when he set out, except that she was cut and split to some extent in order to get out the water butt and all the cargo. . . . And he says that he trusts in God that on his return [to Navidad], . . . he would find a barrel of gold, which those whom he had left there should have obtained by barter, and that they would have found the mine of gold and the spices. . . .

The exact location of the bank on which the *Santa Maria* ran aground is a choice between possibilities. Morison concluded that the ship ran hard and fast on to a coral reef in the position marked X on the map.⁶ There are difficulties in accepting this view.

The coral reef is today for the most part two fathoms deep and may not have come anywhere so near the surface four hundred and fifty years ago. It is unlikely that the *Santa Maria* had a draught of more than ten

⁵ A beginning to settlement and occupation presumably.

⁶ Morison, "Route of Columbus," p. 259.

feet. The entire description of the wreck suggests that the ship ran aground on a sandbank, so gently that the crew were not even awakened. It is not credible that a ship could run hard and fast onto a coral reef without shock and without noise. Moreover she was whole and sound after days aground and a coral reef would have torn into a wooden ship very quickly. Eight days later on January 2 the ship was still intact when Columbus fired his artillery through her sides to impress the native kings. A coral reef even one fathom below the surface would not produce breakers and surf which could be "heard and seen at a league away"; but the swell breaking on a mud and sand bank would answer to this description. (Las Casas used the Spanish word *banco*, meaning a sand- or mudbank. Ferdinand Columbus used the Italian *secche*, which is a partly submerged sandbank.)

For these reasons it is safer to conclude that the *Santa Maria* ran aground on the sandbank which rises off shore of the sandy beach of Caracol bay. From 11 P.M. the currents and swell of the sea carried the *Santa Maria* southeast and she must have grounded broadside on, for the boy felt the *rudder* ground. In these conditions something more was needed to drag the *Santa Maria* off than to drop her anchor astern and haul on it. That was suitable for a ship beached bows on and where the sea floor gave firm hold for the anchor. A starboard grounding probably required the additional aid of the *Niña* with the easterly trades by day filling the sails and helping to move her back into deeper water. With the sea quite calm there was no danger and Juan de la Cosa, the master of the ship and its owner, probably acted promptly and with a lifetime of experience when he sought the aid of the *Niña*. We have only the account given by Columbus of this incident and it cannot be accepted at its face value, for it is beyond belief that the owner of the *Santa Maria* and his Galicians, the regular crew of the ship and almost the only fully experienced sailors aboard, would panic and throw away their own vessel when no danger threatened at any stage of the wreck.

Morison accepted the account of Columbus on this point and stated:

The Admiral's Journal, which is the only account extant, suggests but does not directly state that the major blame attached to Juan de la Cosa. . . . As master [of the ship] it was his responsibility . . . to see that watches were set and that proper order and discipline were maintained. He had no business to turn in and leave the deck in charge of the Admiral and a helmsman.⁷ When the ship struck, he showed gross insubordination, and a total want of seamanship, if not of common courage, in going off with the only boat, instead of warping an anchor out to windward. Thus he wasted the only chance of hauling her off. . . . Columbus uses the hard word *traicion* (treason) to describe Juan de la Cosa's

⁷ It is possible he was instructed to do so by the admiral.

disobedience. . . . The discovery of gold always brings out the worst traits in human nature; and reading between the lines of Columbus's Journal, I think that he suspected that wrecking the *Santa Maria* was a put-up job on the part of the Galicians, in order to be left in Hispaniola and have first whack at the gold mines. . . .

By his own showing, the Admiral was not clear of blame. . . . There should have been at least one other A.B. on deck to con him [the helmsman], and a competent lookout in the bows, when navigating waters by night so full of reefs. . . . Finally, the Admiral could well have stayed aboard the wreck on a calm night, instead of going aboard *Niña* with the crew. When he did that he threw up the sponge.⁸

This view is contradicted by the facts. It was the admiral who went below leaving no one to instruct the helmsman, not La Cosa. Columbus did not accuse La Cosa of cowardice but only of disobedience in a matter of the best way to rescue the ship, where the experience of its owner was far greater than that of Columbus, a trader who had never commanded a ship as master. If anyone wrecked the ship it would not have been its owner, Juan de la Cosa. And the only person who could get the gold of Española was Columbus, who held a charter giving him possession of what he could find and gain. Moreover the Galicians did not want to stay in Española: without exception they returned to Spain. It was Columbus who on December 26 "recognised that Our Lord had caused the ship to run aground there, in order that a settlement might there be formed." It was Columbus who ordered the mainmast to be cut down in the absence of the master and owner, when the *Santa Maria* was in no danger.⁹ This ensured that she would not sail back across the stormy westerlies of the Atlantic. It was Columbus who abandoned the ship when the sea was quite calm and there was no danger, and it was Columbus who ordered her stores to be unloaded and set up ashore before inspecting her at daylight. He made no signal with his lanterns or guns to call his consort, the *Niña*, to aid the *Santa Maria* and he regarded the action of Juan de la Cosa in rowing to seek her aid as "treason" to his wishes. If anyone "wrecked" the *Santa Maria* of set purpose it was surely the admiral himself. When the full background of the problems facing Columbus is studied in detail it is surprising how "miraculously" the wreck of his ship contributed to their solution. The *Santa Maria* may have run aground by pure mischance, but the possibility that it was arranged to establish the first Spanish settlement in the New World merits serious consideration.

⁸ Morison, "Route of Columbus," p. 260-61.

⁹ It was after the mainmast and sails had been cut down that the ship lay on her side, tilted by the wreckage it would appear.

Columbus spent ten years trying to get support for his great venture from Portugal, Spain, England, and France. In 1492 the Spanish sovereigns granted him the capitulations of Santa Fé. These assured him title and possession to any lands he could discover *or* gain, the monopoly of all trade with them, and appointment as viceroy of such lands and as Admiral of the Ocean Sea. In April, 1492, they altered one word and thereby enormously increased his difficulties; they changed *or* to *and*. Columbus had now not only to *find* but also *gain*.

The sovereigns were well advised to make this change, for without it they would have been committed to support Columbus in the conquests of great lands he might find, like China or Japan, on terms which gave the crown only one eighth of the trading profits with such lands.

Moreover, priority in the discovery of even small islands gave no automatic title to possession by Spain. It was necessary to "gain" these lands by establishing a settlement, the essential condition for papal grant of such lands. This has not hitherto been sufficiently appreciated.

The Canary Islands clearly illustrate the importance of possession by settlement rather than by discovery. They were discovered by Portugal in 1341¹⁰ but no settlement followed, and in 1344 the pope granted them to Spain on payment of an annual tribute. From medieval times the pope had authority to assign possession of islands unoccupied by Christians. Portugal pressed her objections especially under Prince Henry, whose expeditions in 1418 and 1427 to conquer the Canaries from Spain were unsuccessful. In 1435 Portugal tacitly recognized the papal ruling by requesting she be granted those islands in the Canaries not yet occupied by Spain; Pope Eugenius IV did so in that year. Portugal failed, however, to occupy these islands despite four further expeditions. The attempt ended only in 1479 when a Portuguese force landed on Grand Canary and was wiped out by Guanches natives and Castilians. Since Portugal failed to occupy any of these islands, all of them ultimately became Spanish.

Even more significant is the story of the Guinea trade. Portugal led the way in exploration of the Guinea coasts between 1471 and 1475, but no settlements were established. The rich trade in slaves, pepper, and gold dust brought Spanish, French, and English interlopers, and Portugal had to fight a successful naval war (1477-79) before her claims to these lands were admitted. Thereafter King John built Portuguese fortress-settlements to establish possession. El Mina was built in 1482 from stones and timber brought in ships from Lisbon; the soldiers worked with lances at hand to

¹⁰ Edgar Prestage, *The Portuguese Pioneers* (London, 1933), pp. 5-9.

repel native attacks. These matters were well known to Columbus, who had sailed to El Mina and lived in Portugal from 1476 to 1485.

Columbus had not only to find but gain; a problem of cosmography and navigation on the one hand, of politics on the other. He had to gain possession by establishing a settlement. So, whereas the sovereigns provided him with two caravels of 60 tons burden, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, Columbus privately found capital to charter the *Santa Maria* of 120 tons, a Galician cargo vessel engaged in the Flanders trade and described by Peter Martyr as "a great carrack." The two caravels were swift, seaworthy, handy, and of small draught, ideally suited for exploration and economical in manpower. The *Santa Maria* was slow, clumsy near shore, and of seven feet draught or more. But she was large enough to carry stores, men and arms in quantity sufficient to found a settlement. There can be little doubt that this was the intention of Columbus when he chartered her from Juan de la Cosa as his own vessel. In the *Santa Maria* Columbus alone had a cabin astern; it was under the poop deck, near the tiller.¹¹

Columbus discovered the Bahamas, small and worthless. He sailed safely over the dangerous reefs and shoals to Cuba, which, from its size, he believed to be mainland. It was not possible to "gain" a mainland without large forces and in any case he found there nothing of value. He sailed eastward to Española and along its north coasts. Martin Pinzón in the *Pinta* deserted him for six weeks, from November 21 to January 6. Twice before reaching the Bahamas his crew had come near mutiny and it would seem his authority was weak as an Italian with Spanish crews. From December 12 onward they landed and found the Indians friendly and docile. On December 16 and 18 the Indians brought them gold, from the mountain region of Cibao in the interior. On December 16 Columbus wrote in his Journal, "Your Highnesses may believe . . . that this island and all the others are as much your own as Castile, so that there is lacking here nothing except a settlement. . . ." ¹² A week later the *Santa Maria* drifted gently onto a sandbank in a dead calm. Attention may be drawn to certain significant features of the "wreck":

1. Columbus, for the first time on this voyage, knew what lay ahead of him, that a long safe sandy coastline lay to the south once he passed beyond Punta Santa, and that its natives were friendly and had gold.
2. He could be sure that the watch on deck would be asleep for all the ships' crews had spent three days carousing with Indians and their women in Acul Bay. They were asleep on their feet.

¹¹ D'Alberti's model of the *Santa Maria*, Columbus Exhibition in Genoa, March, 1951.

¹² Jane, *Voyages*, p. 203.

3. It was essential for him to found a settlement, but his crews were mainly from inland cities, unaccustomed to long voyages and anxious to be home again in Spain. His authority was not sufficient to order his men to remain in Española but he could not admit to this in his Journal, for it would be confession of failure to "gain" the new land, which would destroy the privileges he had spent ten years in obtaining.¹³ Even if he could persuade enough of them to remain behind he would not be able to get the *Santa Maria* home with a skeleton crew against stormy Atlantic conditions. Moreover it would be no easy task to cut down trees and transport them to a coastal site to build a fort, and during this long period of tree-felling the garrison would be exposed to native attacks, as had happened in El Mina in West Africa. On the other hand, if the *Santa Maria* could be regarded as an expendable store-ship, and were run aground, her crew of forty men obviously could not get home in the *Niña*, which had a crew of twenty-two. Columbus actually left thirty-nine men at Navidad. It should be noted that the idea of an expendable store-ship had been used by the Portuguese in the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias in 1486-87: this voyage was well known to Christopher Columbus and to his brother, Bartholomew.

4. The cabin of Columbus opened to the tiller held by the ship's boy.¹⁴ How easy for the admiral to correct the boy's steering a little to the south and let the current do the rest. Columbus was the first on deck, before anyone else knew she had grounded, as though he were waiting for it.

5. The wreck was located *inside* a good natural harbor, protected from the northeast tradewinds and waves by a long coral reef three miles off shore. This sheltered harbor was moreover as near as possible to the gold region of Cibao. On January 6 Columbus wrote, "... Our Lord miraculously ordained that that ship should remain there, because it is the best place in all the island for forming a settlement and nearest to the mines of gold."¹⁵

¹³ In his letter to the Spanish sovereigns dated February 15, 1493, which announced his discoveries, Columbus did not mention the wreck but claimed to have taken possession of a native town by authority. "... in this Española, in the situation most convenient and in the best position for the mines of gold . . . I have taken possession of a large town, to which I gave the name *Villa de Navidad* and in it I have made fortifications and a fort. . . ." (Cecil Jane, trans. and ed., *Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus* [Hakluyt Society, 1929, 1932], I, 12.) Andres Bernaldez in his *History of Two Catholic Sovereigns, Don Ferdinand and Doña Isabella*, written in 1496, wrote, "Christopher Columbus formed a settlement there in Española . . . in a town to which he gave the name of . . . la Navidad, and left there forty men with artillery and arms and food, beginning to build a fort; . . . And he was forced, as it would appear, to leave them, since, as he had lost a ship, there was no way in which they could depart, and this was concealed here, and it was said that they were left only to begin the work of colonisation." (Quoted in Jane, *Voyages*, Appendix I, p. 313.) It is clear that Columbus concealed the wreck until the massacre of the garrison made it necessary to excuse his action in leaving forty men behind in Española.

¹⁴ See note II above.

¹⁵ Jane, *Voyages*, p. 229.

6. The deck and upper timbers of the *Santa Maria* were used to build the fortress. The Journal makes it clear that for over a week the hull remained quite undamaged by the sea in this sheltered spot. But on January 2, 1493, Columbus held a farewell banquet for the Indian chiefs on board the *Niña* and the admiral ordered that the *Niña's* guns should be fired through the hull of the grounded *Santa Maria*, to impress the natives. Columbus trusted no one; he was an Italian with Spanish crews and very suspicious of their loyalty. The real object of this bombardment was perhaps to make it impossible for the garrison to repair the hull, rig up some kind of sail spread, and abandon Navidad with the gold they had collected. Twenty-six years later, on the coast of Mexico, Hernando Cortez burned all his ships to cut off retreat to Cuba.

7. Juan de la Cosa and his Galicians transferred to the *Niña*. Two weeks later, after the younger Pinzón had listened to their account of the wreck, he joined his brother Martin Pinzón in saying "many things, not just, against him [Columbus]." ¹⁶

8. The first Spanish settlement in the New World was made on Christmas Day, 1492, and was called Navidad. It seemed almost ordained by God to bring the Cross triumphant over the seas. Columbus made full use of this in claiming miraculous guidance and design which "caused the ship to remain here." It was an argument well calculated to impress the medieval crusading spirit of Catholic Spain in those days.

9. The only map that has come down to us drawn by Christopher Columbus shows Española with Navidad.¹⁷ It was probably drawn by him in April, 1493, at Barcelona to support the Spanish sovereigns' request to the pope for grant of these lands in the west. The Bahamas and the mainland, Cuba, are not shown and clearly counted for less than the settlement at Navidad.

10. The wreck fulfilled its purpose. In May, 1493, Pope Alexander VI at Rome issued a bull¹⁸ which assigned these lands to Spain for three reasons: (1) that the Spanish sovereigns had sent out this voyage of discovery; (2) that their ships had discovered this land; (3) *that a stronghold had been built and people left to occupy the land*. This last proved to be the decisive

¹⁶ Journal, Jan. 8, 1493, *ibid*. Most ships in this period which undertook long voyages were insured by shipping merchants and financiers, often Italian or Jewish. The *Santa Maria* may have been insured through Berardi, agent for the Florentine house of Medici. Columbus perhaps claimed that the wreck was an act of God so as to benefit from insurance. Juan de la Cosa, as the owner of the *Santa Maria*, probably found it advisable in due course to concur with this version.

¹⁷ Reproduced in John Boyd Thacher, *Christopher Columbus* (New York, 1903), III, 88, and in many other works.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 96.

point in the Treaty of Tordesillas. Peter Martyr, the earliest and most reliable historian of the Columbus voyages, writing in 1502 stated:

When John the King of Portugal lived . . . there arose a great contention between the Castellians and Portugals as concerning the dominion of these new found lands. The Portugals, because they were the first that durst attempt to search the Ocean Sea since the memory of man, affirmed that all the navigations of the Ocean, ought to pertain to them only. The Castilians argued on the contrary part, that whatsoever god by the ministration of nature hath created on the earth, was at the beginning common among men: And that it is therefore lawful to every man to possess such lands as are void of Christian inhabitants.¹⁹

In late May, 1493, King John protested against the first bull, and the second bull, sent from Rome in late June,²⁰ granted to the Spanish sovereigns all lands in the west not actually possessed by any other Christian king. Such claim to possession, however, had to be "supported by the existence of a stone pillar bearing a date before Xmas Day 1492, set up and surrounded by homes of colonists." The Spanish claim to the New World thus changed from discovery, made on October 12, to possession by the settlement of Navidad on December 25, 1492.

Thus it was Portugal which claimed these new found lands on the basis of priority of discovery. Spain based its claim on the establishment of a settlement in a land "void of Christian inhabitants." This underlines the vital importance of Navidad, built from the wreck of the *Santa Maria*, in Spanish claims to the New World.

Thus far the loss of the *Santa Maria*, in the words of Columbus, "was really a piece of good fortune." But before Navidad was reached on the second voyage the garrison had been killed for making free with Indian wives and maidens. Columbus thereafter lost his former health and strength. He increasingly suffered torments with headaches, sleeplessness, and arthritis of a painful nature. His mind turned more and more to the Hebrew prophets to seek indications that his mission was divinely inspired, and that God's will was done. Was it remorse?

The massacre of the garrison at Navidad was in some respects the critical fact in the history of the West Indies. Queen Isabella had insisted that the Indians were to be treated kindly and converted to Christianity, but after

¹⁹ Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the newe worlde or west India, etc.*, in Richard Eden, trans., *The First Three English Books on America* (1555), ed. Edward Arber (Birmingham, 1885), p. 129.

²⁰ H. Vander Linden, "Alexander VI and the Demarcation of the Maritime and Colonial Domains of Spain and Portugal, 1493-1494," *American Historical Review*, XXII (October, 1916), 1-20.

the massacre the Spaniards and Columbus oppressed them mercilessly. Within a generation 300,000 Indians of Española had been enslaved or had died in terrible conditions, and had almost been wiped out. They were replaced in the sixteenth century by West African slaves. The loss of the *Santa Maria*, the first event in the history of the Americas, thus had incalculable consequences for the New World. If it was deliberately conceived by Columbus, it should rank as one of his boldest and most brilliant achievements.