

TITLE: *La Espanola/Alba Sketch-Map of Hispaniola/Columbus Map*

DATE: 1492-93/1892?

AUTHOR: Christopher Columbus

DESCRIPTION: Of the many maps that Columbus doubtless drew on his four voyages to America, only two small cartographic pieces have survived which can with any certainty be ascribed either to Christopher Columbus or to his brother Bartholomew, a chart maker by profession. This hasty outline sketch of the north and northwestern coastline of *La Espanola* [*Hispaniola* - Haiti + Dominican Republic] is none that Columbus may have drawn as he coasted east in December 1492 - January 1493. The features named are Cape S. Nicolas, the island of Tortuga, the point of *Monte Christi* and *Natividad*, for *La Natividad*, the first recorded European settlement in this part of the New World. In Caracol Bay (just above the "s" of *Espanola*), on Christmas Day, the Santa Maria struck a coral reef and could not be freed - from her timbers Columbus built *La Natividad*. The other maps ascribed to Columbus' brother Bartholomew, consist of three marginal sketches in a copy of Christopher's letter of July 1503 describing his fourth voyage (see #304).

In his notes on this map, Gregory McIntosh states that this rudimentary map of the north coast of Hispaniola is variously dated from c. 1493 to c. 1550, or as a modern forgery of c. 1892. It is drawn on parchment, double folio size, and belongs to the Duque de Alba of Madrid, a descendant of Christopher Columbus, though the family only acquired it in 1892.

This map is frequently attributed to Christopher Columbus, and is also referred to as the "Columbus Map." This map is supposed to have been made by Columbus during his first voyage to the New World, most likely just prior to the return to Europe on 16 January 1493. This surmise is based upon the depiction of the eastern section of the north coast of *Hispaniola*, that is, from *Monte Cristi* to *Cabo de Angel*, near *Cabarete*, visited by Columbus in that month. As such, it would be the earliest certain cartographic depiction of some part of America.

The coast of Hispaniola eastward of *Cabo de Angel* to *Samana Bay* is not depicted on this chart. Columbus did not sail along this most eastern coastline until 11th-12th January 1493. Carl Sauer, in *The Early Spanish Main*, notes that "*Ciboa/Civoa*" was at first an island supposed by Columbus but after the *Pinta* rejoined the fleet at *Monte Cristo* on January 6, 1493, and he learned about Pinzon's exploration of the route from *Puerto Plata* to the gold-bearing interior, Columbus then relocated the place-name *Ciboa* to the interior, as it is shown on this map. The implication seems to be that the map was sketched between 6th and 12th of January.

It is curious, however, that a large part of the coastline of the Gulf of Gonave at the west end of the island is shown. During the first voyage, Columbus' ships could not, in the time indicated in the *Diario* on December 6th and 7th, have sailed as far south from *Puerto de San Nicolas* (Môle-Saint-Nicolas) into the Gulf as depicted on this map. The Gulf was first seen by a ship sent by Columbus during the second voyage in 1494, yet here it is on a chart supposedly made a year earlier. Is this additional coastline on the map information obtained from the indigenous people of the village near where the Spanish built their fort after December 25, 1492? It has also been suggested that the chart is a modern forgery made to capitalize on the Columbian quadricentennial in 1892.

The place-names, west to east, are: *san nicolas*, *tortuga* (tortuja), *natividad*, *monte cristi*, *la ispanola*, and *civao*. One noteworthy feature of this map is the presence of the

settlement of *Navidad* (originally named *Villa de Navidad* by Columbus) on the north coast. *Navidad* occurs on only a few other early maps, as *Navida* or *Nabidat* on the Juan de la Cosa map of c. 1500-02 (#305), and as *Paksin vidad*, on the Piri Reis map of 1513 (#322). Other instances of this place-name in the 16th century are: *Nativitadad* on the woodcut map of *Hispaniola* (*Isola Spagnvola*) in Ramusio's edition of Peter Martyr and Oviedo, commonly known as the *Summario* (also *Libri delle Indie*) of 1534; *Nativita* on another woodcut map in volume 3 from 1534 of Ramusio's *Navigazioni e Viaggi*; and *Natividad* in the text of Oviedo's *Historia General* of 1535.

Also, the south coast of *Hispaniola* is not shown. This does not appear to be due to the restrictions of the size of the parchment upon which it is drawn. We must consider that this map, if made by Columbus or under his supervision, was made before that southern coast was known. Columbus first sailed this coast from 20 August 1494 to 14 September 1494, though the island may have been circumnavigated in April of that year on the voyage mentioned earlier.

According to McIntosh, the question of authenticity will have to remain open for the time being. One would not expect, however, a 19th century forger to be completely scrupulous about making and using the appropriate ink. Perhaps a future nondestructive test could answer the question.

LOCATION: Madrid, Biblioteca de Duque de Alba

REFERENCES:

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*Bake, Jill Withrow, "The Maps that Columbus Used", 21pp (e#246)

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McIntosh, G., Unpublished Research Notes no. 3. *Alba Sketch-Map of Hispaniola*.

*illustrated

