
12 A Period of Political Instability Begins and Major Projects are Entrusted to Vespucci (1505-1506)

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In this chapter, news of events that occurred at the same time in different places are intertwined: dynastic problems in Spain, problems with the Inquisition in Portugal, the preparation of an expedition to the Moluccas, meetings with the Huastecs in Mexico, and death of Christopher Columbus and subsequent problems.

12.1 “Nothing Makes a Prince So Well Esteemed as Undertaking Great Enterprises”¹

In 1505, after the death of Queen Isabella, a period of political instability began in Spain. According to the dynastic rules, Isabella was succeeded by her daughter Juana, who at that time lived in Flanders with her husband Archduke Philip of Austria and her first five children.

Doña Juana of Castile was nicknamed Juana la Loca (the mad) but she was not crazy, at least in the sense that we understand the word today; certainly, she did not behave ‘serenely’ as was demanded by the etiquette of the court. There was much talk about the scenes of jealousy surrounding the infidelity of her beloved, Philip the Handsome; besides, for years she ne-



Figure 12.1 Aztec gold labret, Serpent with Articulated Tongue, ca. 1300-1521, Public Domain.
Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/321343>

glected the sacrament of confession, which was a grave sin for the daughter of most Catholic parents. On the other hand, the decrees she signed and the initiatives she promoted evince nothing but wisdom. Since Doña Juana always showed interest in overseas exploration, and intervened with valid decisions in this field, we would like to understand her better, since she is described in contrasting ways and still remains controversial.²

When the problem of succession to the throne of Castile arose, King Ferdinand summoned the *Cortes* to Toro, where he resided at that time: the *Cortes* were large assemblies composed of different strata of Spanish society called to discuss problems of the country. This last meeting of the *Cortes* being particularly quiet, King Ferdinand presented himself as the candidate to succeed Isabella. He proposed a Spanish expedition that would outrun the Portuguese rivals to the Moluccas, islands rich in spices and other priceless treasures. The *Cortes* preferred Doña Juana as the successor, and the Catalan King accepted the assembly's decision but did not abandon the idea of sending a fleet to the Spice Islands.

² Airaldi, Varela, *Isabella di Castiglia*.

12.2 King Manuel's Policies for Managing the Lands of Vera Cruz

Serious political problems also arose in Portugal.

Manuel I was a great King for Portugal. He determinedly built the commercial and colonial empire that brought glory and riches to himself and his country. Luís Vaz de Camões celebrated this remarkable enterprise in the epic poem *The Lusiads*. However, Manuel I was not the conventional magnanimous King of the fables; he was often cruel and distrustful, as well as miserly. Those who did him great service received small recompense, and thus he alienated many people. His treatment of Afonso de Albuquerque and Ferdinand Magellan is well known (see Epilogue), and the case of Amerigo Vespucci, who paved the way for Magellan's enterprise, was not different, and perhaps even worse. However, it must be said that at that time the King was at an impasse, of the sort that makes even the best news sound bad. In this period, Portugal was a small, sparsely populated kingdom, with just over one million inhabitants, and it was extraordinary that it had been able to create a commercial empire in the faraway countries of the Indian Ocean. Amerigo's news meant that the King had to move swiftly and take control of another empire on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, just when the country was about to lose a substantial part - almost one fifth - of its population.

It so happened that King Manuel had been widowed in 1498; his wife Isabella was the daughter of Queen Isabella of Castile and León. According to the dynastic rules, which were strictly respected at that time, he had the right to take Maria, younger daughter of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, as his second wife. The devout Catholic sovereigns agreed to this, but insisted that Portugal should conform to the policy of the Inquisition by forcing the Jews to convert or leave the country. At the time, Portugal was home to about two hundred thousand Sephardic Jews who constituted the educated and active part of the population, so much so that many had become indispensable functionaries, many of them as part of the court.

After the second marriage with Maria, Dom Manuel prevaricated and did not obey the Inquisition, which was not yet present in his kingdom. However, he could not continue in this manner, nor could he do without one fifth of the population.

Therefore, the King issued a decree that forced the Jews to convert to Catholicism without giving them the choice of leaving the country; yet, it did give them the possibility of immigrating to the New World with the advantage of greatly reduced taxes.

The King of Portugal contracted out the lands that he [Vespucci] discovered to certain new Christians, and they are obliged to send 6 ships each year and discover 300 leagues further each year, and build a fort in the discovered [place] and maintain it for 3 years, and the first year they will pay nothing, the second year 1/6, and the third 1/4; and they will count on transporting large amounts of brazilwood and slaves, and perhaps they will find other profitable things there.³

It was implicit that, on the other side of the ocean, the Jews would be able to continue following their traditions and would not be subjected to any checks.

³ Letter from P. Rondinelli, *Codice Vaglianti*, folio 57rb.

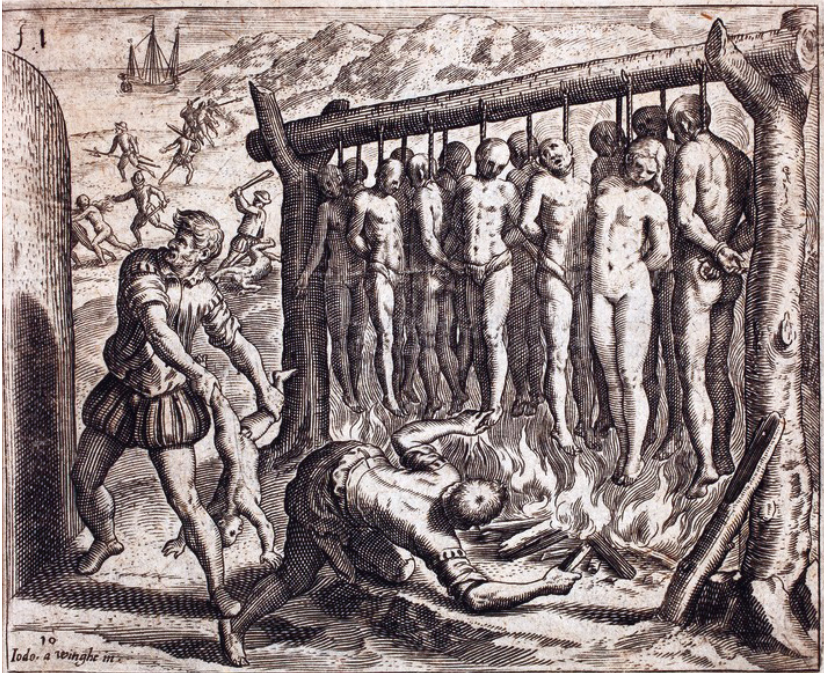


Figure 12.2 Collective hanging of Indios by the Spanish conquistadores. The illustration by Jean Israel de Bry is taken from the 1598 edition of the book by Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Frankfurt 1598). © Wikimedia Commons

The result was not what he desired: only a small number of ‘new Christians’ were able to create bases in the New World at the time, while others fled to the Maghreb and some even reached Palestine, as for example Rabbi Zacuto did in 1504. Many remained in the country, and were judged ‘bad converts’ and at first regarded with suspicion by the Catholic authorities and then scorned as ‘marranos’. Finally, in 1506, thousands were massacred in one of the first pogroms of history. King Manuel was furious. He had some of the perpetrators punished with death, but this was of no use to stop their actions.

12.3 Amerigo Returns to Seville and is Invited to Court. Columbus Entrusts Him with a Delicate Mission

It is not known whether Amerigo arrived in Seville in December 1504 or in the following January, and whether he arrived by sea or by land. But it is very likely that he was fleeing Portugal, given the measures taken against him by King Manuel.

In February 1505 Vespucci was invited to court by Ferdinand of Aragon in Toro. When Christopher Columbus, who had returned to Seville one or two months before him, was informed of that invitation, he asked Amerigo to intercede on his behalf with the King who, since his return from his fourth journey, seemed to have forgotten about him. On that occasion he

also gave him a letter for his son Diego who resided in Toro together with his brother Hernando in the employ of Queen Juana as pages. The content of that letter is known to us and is important because it belies the legend of the bitter competition between the two navigators:

Dearest son, I spoke with Amerigo Vespucci, the bearer of this letter, who has been called to the royal court for questions relating to navigation. He always wanted to please me. He is a very honest man, but fortune has been as adverse to him as to many others and his labors have not been so profitable to him as it was reasonable to expect. He comes for my good, and very anxious to do everything that may prove to be beneficial to me if it is within his power. You must see what kind of service he may render to my advantage and cooperate with him in having it rendered. He will work and speak and do everything suggested, but the suggestion must be made secretly so as to remove suspicion. I told him everything I could tell him about my case, and I told him of the reward which they have given and continue to give to me. Your father, who loves you very much.⁴

Amerigo's mediation was successful, after which Christopher Columbus moved to a simple residence in Valladolid. From Valladolid, travelling down the river Duero, it was easy to reach Toro where his two sons lived.

12.4 An Expedition to the Moluccas is Scheduled and Amerigo Becomes a Citizen of Castile

The expedition to the Moluccas was scheduled⁵ and for two months Vespucci had been working on the ambitious programme when, perhaps due to the expiry of a debt, he urgently needed money. King Ferdinand promptly arranged to help him by sending a note that deserves to be transcribed here:

The King to Alonso de Morales, treasurer of the Most Serene Queen Doña Juana, my dear and much loved daughter. I command you that, from whatever amount of money [maravedís] you have in your hands, you give and pay immediately [luego] to Amerigo Vespucci, a citizen of Seville, 12,000 *maravedís*, which I give him as a supporting gift; and take [his] support payment certificate with which, together with this coupon of mine, I order that you make sure that the said 12,000 *maravedís* have been received; and from now on do nothing else...⁶

It is interesting to note that King Ferdinand had free access to the finances of his beloved daughter, but it remains unclear why Amerigo needed the sum of 12,000 *maravedís*, which corresponded to a year's pay for a modest employee. Note that the price of a mule was 24,000 *maravedís*. Could it be the residual payment for those who had helped him reach Seville after leaving Lisbon?

⁴ Facsimile and English translation in *The Authentic Letters of Columbus. Translations* [by José Ignacio Rodríguez] <https://archive.org/details/authenticletters00colu/page/170>

⁵ On the expedition see Luzzana Caraci, *Per lasciare di me qualche fama*, ch. 9.

⁶ Navarrete, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos*, vol. 3, doc. III, 292.

Another difficulty arose when it was decided that Amerigo would have commanded a ship for that expedition. This contrasted with the ban, promulgated five years earlier, that foreigners participate in overseas trips organised by Spain. It was remedied by a decree from Queen Doña Juana who granted the Florentine citizenship of the kingdoms of Castile and León. The decree of April 24, 1505 contains words of praise for Amerigo Vespucci,⁷ but these are bureaucratic formulas that we find equivalents for in similar documents.

12.5 The Great Plan to Reach the Moluccas Islands

The programme of the Moluccan journey included a route that was not very different from the one assigned to Gonçalo Coelho's failed expedition to the Malacca peninsula. The fleet had to be composed of six ships: three to be ordered from the shipyards of the Basque Country, and these would be particularly sturdy, as in the north-eastern coast of Spain where whaling was practiced they knew how to build a ship. A fourth ship was to be found in Andalusia along with two small support vessels. The possibility of covering the hulls with lead sheaths to protect them from the shipworms was also taken into consideration. This improvement was suggested by Amerigo, mindful of its work as shipyard manager.

In a few words, the route was to be as follows: to reach the bay of San Julian, cross the strait located a few degrees south in late December, during the least stormy time of the austral summer, then sail west into the great unknown sea, and finally head towards the Equator where the Spice Islands arise. The route for the return journey would be decided on the spot: either continuing towards the west, perhaps touching Arabia and then rounding Africa, as Christopher Columbus had dreamed, or going back and crossing the strait indicated by the Indios and then back home. The total duration of the trip was to be two years: such a long navigation in space and time had never been planned. The crew would consist of 200 people, including sailors and soldiers, all paid three months in advance: the bread and other supplies had to be commensurate with these values. Amerigo was to lead the enterprise with 50,000 *maravedís* of annual pay. His second-in-command would be Vicente Yáñez Pinzón who, at Amerigo's request, was immediately recalled from Palos where he then resided.⁸

There were many difficulties: from the equatorial calms and storms, to the endless squalls and the frost of the latitudes next to the Antarctic Polar Circle. However, the most serious difficulty was the hostility of the Portuguese: the expedition should avoid their ports and bases, of which little was known, and for this purpose it was even possible to reach the port of San Julian without a stop. In 1504, Vespucci had crossed the Ocean Sea from 52°S to Sierra Leone without a stop; he had also piloted the return from Brazil to Lisbon making a non-stop navigation of almost two and a half months. In short, the programmes were formulated on the basis of solid experiences, long investigations and scrupulous controls.

⁷ Navarrete, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos*, vol. 3, doc. IV, 292.

⁸ "Vicente Yáñez deve consultarsi e parlare con Amerigo riguardo alla flotta che i suddetti danno per ordine di sua altezza", cited from Luzzana Caraci, *Amerigo Vespucci*, 119-20, doc. 100.

As decisions were taken, orders began to be issued and the programme planners themselves executed them in the right way: fitting out the ships and procuring the food necessary for two years of travel for 200 people was not easy, since the harvest had been very scarce and the wheat needed to prepare the 'biscuit', the staple food of sailors, had very high prices.⁹

12.6 The Letter of Girolamo Vianello to the Republic of Venice

The programmes for the new naval enterprise intrigued the diplomats and informants of the Serenissima Republic of Venice, who sent more and more messages back to the Republic intended for the prediction of market trends. These often untidy/rambling messages, in which ancient facts are sometimes intertwined with projects to be implemented, were collected by Marino Sanuto in his *Diarii*, a veritable mine of news on relevant episodes.¹⁰

Marino Sanuto's accounts, which were written in the Venetian dialect, are sometimes unclear and the subsequent transcriptions edited by those who misunderstood that dialect make reading them difficult. There is, however, a long letter from Girolamo Vianello that contains news of facts of such great interest that they deserve to be reconstructed, even at the risk of stumbling.¹¹

In March 1504, King Ferdinand of Aragon commissioned a fleet of four ships that were to be commanded by the Basque sailor Juan de La Cosa, with a crew of 150 men, including sailors and soldiers, to explore the Pearl coast¹² (north-eastern coast of Venezuela) and build a solid stone tower.

It also appears, from another source, that a plague epidemic had broken out in the West Indies. Leonardo de Ca' Masser thus writes in anguish on April 16, 1506, that "we don't talk about spices and goods, everything is dried up, the earth is abandoned, from 80 to 100 people die a day".¹³

Vianello's letter,¹⁴ which is dated December 23, 1506, consists of two parts. In the first part, he talks about two ships commanded by Amerigo Vespucci and Juan de La Cosa that, beyond the Ocean, discovered a land in which a river [the Amazon river] opened its 40 leagues-wide mouth. The two ships went up the river for 150 leagues and encountered small islands, many of which were inhabited by naked natives. Returning and traveling 600 leagues along the coast, they encountered an Indian canoe which "dug into a wooden trunk like a hoof, sailed and headed to the mainland loaded with 80 men". These are episodes related to the Second Voyage (see Chapter 7). In the following, the story seems to be confused with the narration

⁹ These problems are carefully described by Bonari, *Amerigo Vespucci*, 301-2.

¹⁰ *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto* (manuscripts of 1466-1536), Venezia, Stabilimento Visentini Federico ed., 1879-1902.

¹¹ The letter of Vianello, much disputed since its discovery, has become understandable only in the light of the journey of Juan de La Cosa and Vespucci here reconstructed in Chapter 7 and in the light of the Voyage of the Four Merchants. The key-word to place the central episode in the right context is Alsechi (= Aztecs).

¹² See Navarrete, *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos*, vol. 3, doc. XXI, 109.

¹³ Luzzana Caraci, *Amerigo Vespucci*, 141, doc. 102.

¹⁴ My primary reference for Vianello's letter is Luzzana Caraci, *Amerigo Vespucci*, 148-50, doc. 105. A concordant transcription of the document is found in Ferraro, *Relazione delle scoperte fatte da C. Colombo, da A. Vespucci e da altri*, 211-18.

of the fight with the Camballi that occurred at the end of the Voyage of the Four Merchants (see Chapter 4): “they had many bows and shields made of a wood as light as cork but very robust; they went to these islands to capture people who live there and eat them, as we eat deer and roe deer. Our men took these Indians who have ebony bows and the strings are nerves [?] of snakes”. A digression then appears about an island inhabited half by native people and half by many reptiles. This section concludes: “said vessels left and brought with them seven Indians who were good pilots of those lands”, a phrase that reminds us of the 7 Indians who with the Spaniards reached a distant island where they fought, won and captured 250 Camballi as slaves.

The second part of Vianello’s letter regards more recent and completely different events, related to the expedition of the four ships commanded by Juan de La Cosa, which however seems to contain reminiscences of the Voyage of the Four Merchants who arrived in the Gulf of Campeche at Easter time in 1498.

[T]hey reached a place called ‘Alsechii’ and [the ships] proceeded 400 leagues towards ‘west garbino’ [WSW] along the coast and [the sailors] went ashore. They found many houses from which many Indians came out to receive them with honor. They said that one of them, some time before, had predicted that some ships of a great King unknown to them were about to arrive from the east, that he would reduce them to servitude and that everyone would receive perpetual life and their [people] would be adorned with various clothes.

They said that when they saw our ships their King exclaimed: “here are the ships I have been talking about for 10 years now”.

That King came with a golden breastplate, a golden mask with four golden rattles weighing one mark [230.35 g] each at his feet; with him were 20 Indians, all with golden masks on their faces, playing gold castanets that weighed 30 marks each. And when they saw those of the island [?], they began to disdain and fight hard with poisoned arrows, and also against us. There were about 5,000 of them, and 140 of us went ashore; they were [came] at blows: they tore to pieces about 700 of them; one of our fighters died of an arrow. Our men reached the houses and took castanets, masks, rattles and that armor with the aforementioned King (taken alive) for 800 marks and set fire to those houses. There they stayed for 96 days, since the three ships that remained were damaged [collapsed]¹⁵ and went down.

Seeing this [trouble] they unloaded the provisions and ammunition and built a fort with a very solid tower. Every day they came to blows with the Indians and [spent] the night inside the park [central courtyard], the day lined up outside, and they earned as much as [the distance] they walked, but they dared not expose themselves beyond their station.

One day they arrived at a lake and with certain ‘vernicali’ [wooden bowls] they began to wash that sand and in half an hour each one washed four to six to eight gold Castilian [coins]; and those Indians taken [prisoner] told them not to tire themselves to wash, since beyond a high mountain that was in front of them, half a league away, a river flowed into the valley

¹⁵ Literally ‘se abissorono’, that is they were invaded by ‘bisse’ (shipworms, *Teredo navalis*), common trouble in that gulf.

at the bottom of which there was not much need to wash, since in one day everyone could collect ten gold marks [2.3 kg] without too much effort.

Finally, although they had little hope of leaving, they decided to raise [for protection] the bulwarks of the boats and lifeboats that remained, and return traveling along the coast to Hispaniola/Haiti.

During the 96 days that they remained there, many people died of an illness that struck them and only 44 survived. Finally, with God's help, the survivors left the place safely, except for ten people who wanted to stay in the tower with enough food and ammunition for a year. During the return they were attacked three times by the natives with their canoes, who were always defeated. They arrived in this way safely at the base.

I saw all the pieces of gold brought from there and also, among other things, excellent pepper but bigger than usual, like a pea of medium diameter, and nutmeg as big as our 'masculine' nut[meg]s. They brought gold for 70 marks, virgin pearls [not drilled] of 10 and 12 carats, round and pear shaped, and lots of brazilwood. The Indians carried a green stone like diaspore four fingers long, right in the middle of the cheek and the lower lip (in general they do not wear beards).

Vianello reported what he had heard and seen without commenting, but a comment on and clarification of this second part of the letter is really necessary.

In this account, we witness the meeting of old acquaintances who exchange, without uncertainty, distant memories of almost a decade: "here are the ships I told you about ten years ago" and then, perhaps, a reference to evangelization appeared on the occasion of Easter 1498, attested to by the allusion to a 'perpetual life'. At this point, however, the natives become suspicious because among the foreigners there are 'those of the island together with them'; on the other hand, the craving for gold becomes unstoppable. In this way, the conflict is triggered, as in the stories of the Nibelungs.

On one side people from the ships gather, while on the other thousands of soldiers with bows and arrows assemble, 700 of which are 'torn to pieces', while the Spaniards lose one man and remain in possession of the field.

The winners came out cautiously from their fort, since they were besieged. But they managed to find even more gold, in addition to that which they stripped off their dead. After three months and more they realised that the shipworms had damaged their three ships, making them useless. In addition, an epidemic killed almost a third of the expedition's men: such small crews could be saved with boats and lifeboats, which had remained intact because they were pulled dry, along with the gold they had piled up. What the visitors saw was only one fifth of the total, the portion due to the Crown: Juan de La Cosa had become very rich.

All this seems like a dream, a restless dream of finding gold, pearls and even spices, the spices which were so sought-after but never found. But it was not a dream: the trophies of that trip were there, in a well-kept room, the gold had been weighed, catalogued and well protected.

Vianello, who lost himself listening to those marvels, wanted to add a final strange detail of de La Cosa's and Vespucci's first voyage: the Indios pierced their cheeks to insert "a green stone, like a diaspore, four fingers long".¹⁶

¹⁶ Compare with fig. 8.2.

Vianello closed his letter of December 1506 with a last piece of news: “The Archbishop [Fonseca?] sends back these two captains (Vespucci and de La Cosa) with 8 ships and 400 men very well equipped with artillery weapons, etc.”

This is how I read this letter, and there, in the vast Gulf of Campeche, you can find the ruins of a well-built tower and the remains of a battle, the first of the conquest of New Spain, as Mexico was then called.

12.7 Christopher Columbus Dies at Valladolid

Vespucci’s mediation was successful.

In May 1505, Christopher Columbus, together with his brother Bartholomew, were received at the King’s court and, with the assistance of an intercession from the Bishop of Seville [de Deza], Christopher had some of his rights restored. In the tranquillity of his new home in Valladolid, Columbus returned to collaborating with his friend the friar Gaspare Gorricio on the completion of his *Book of Prophecies*.

The marriage of Don Diego Colón to the virtuous Maria di Toledo, a member of the very powerful family of the Dukes of Alba, was planned, but Christopher was unable to attend the wedding. On May 20, 1506, the suffering that afflicted the great Genoese navigator came to an end. His coffin was taken from Valladolid to Seville, where the funeral was celebrated in the church of Santa María de la Antigua; the body, dressed in a Franciscan habit, was buried in the monastery of San Francisco.

12.8 West Indies or New World? The Seed of a Long Disagreement

Fernando Colón’s *Le Historie* ends with the death of Christopher Columbus, but the author added an appendix that reads, “By order of the Catholic King an epitaph written in the Castilian language was set up in perpetual memory of his unforgettable feats, and the discovery of the Indies, which reads: A CASTIGLIA Y Á LEÓN / NUEVO MUNDO DIÓ COLÓN”. The editor of this work, Rinaldo Caddeo, rightly affirms that King Ferdinand “would never have thought up or authorized this motto”, adding that it appears for the first time in the work by Gonzalo Oviedo dated 1531, in a slightly different form “POR CASTILLA Y POR LEÓN NUEVO MUNDO ALLÓ COLÓN”. This is also the formulation in which it appears on the coat of arms of the Admiral of the Ocean Sea. The editor concludes that the motto, “entered into the conscience of peoples and of history, which sooner or later render to Heroes the glory that ingrates would wish to strip from them”.¹⁷

Caddeo’s opinion is decisive: the conviction that the First Admiral had found and given Spain a New World was born in the collective conscience. Although this opinion was true in some ways, it was not exact, as a careful examination shows that Christopher Columbus had always believed he had reached Asia and not a New World. This is confirmed by the official documents that always use the name West Indies, a name the cartographers almost always rejected. Hernando Colón never cited Amerigo and firm-

¹⁷ See note 2 by Rinaldo Caddeo to *Le Historie* by Fernando Colón, vol. 2, 157.

ly sustained that his father had set foot on the mainland, but not on a new continent. He never called Amerigo a usurper, and he was a friend and collaborator of Juan Vespuccio.¹⁸

Columbus never believed in a New World, even though many believed the contrary: a biographer can only assign to each his own merits.

12.9 Columbus's Son Diego Succeeds Him Becoming Second Admiral of the Ocean Sea

Diego succeeded his father with the title of Second Admiral, also obtaining the post of Viceroy and Governor of Haiti. He had a very large income, but none of his revenue came from Nueva España and Nueva Andalucía, territories that promised to be infinitely more profitable than Haiti/Hispaniola.

Before departing for Santo Domingo, where he intended to settle, prompted by his young and energetic wife and the backing of the family of the Dukes of Alba, Don Diego Colón and his brother Hernando had brought the court action mentioned above. The case dragged on from 1508 until 1526, the date of Don Diego's death, without reaching a conclusion.

Don Diego succeeded Nicolás de Ovando as viceroy. The latter had initiated a violent and wicked repression of the Indios. His brutality was such that he had several *Caciques* who were meeting inside a hut burnt alive, while he in the meantime distracted himself by playing the game 'piastrelle' with a friend.

He then had Anacaona, a wise woman and the only surviving *Cacique*, hanged.¹⁹ Diego Méndez, who was attempting to find a ship in Haiti to save the shipwrecked sailors in Jamaica, wrote: "The Governor kept me for seven months, until he had finished burning and hanging 84 *Caciques*, lords of vassals". Nicolás de Ovando's ferocity and insane cruelty had no precedents; by comparison, the misdeeds attributed to Christopher Columbus appeared insignificant. Devastated by such horror, many Indios, finding themselves without a leader, committed suicide by drinking water poisoned with manioc, while others took refuge in inaccessible places, and *encomienda* (serfdom) caused the rapid deaths of those forced to work on the land. The new viceroy Don Diego attempted to remedy this disaster by importing slaves from the Old World, but they also took refuge in the mountains. Thus, the rapid, unstoppable and total extinction of the 'infinite' natives of Hispaniola/Haiti was completed.

12.10 The Brief Reign of Philip of Austria. The Trip to the Moluccas is Cancelled

Philip of Austria, who had encountered major problems during the trip, landed in Spain in April 1506. He reached Burgos, capital of Old Castile where he met Ferdinand of Aragon and discussed many questions with him concerning his succession to the kingdom of Castile and León. The discussion was not easy and the two Kings found themselves in agreement only on two

¹⁸ See Consuelo Varela, *Colón y los florentinos*, 95.

¹⁹ See note 4 by Rinaldo Caddeo to *Le Historie* by Fernando Colón, vol. 2, 81-2.

things: that Queen Juana had to remain under tutelage and that the plan to reach the Moluccas was to be realised. Concerning all the rest, King Ferdinand had to give his forced assent which, at the end of the negotiations, he denied with a document that had to remain secret.

King Philip I immersed himself in the programmes concerning the West Indies, managing them through the *Casa de la Contratación*: the Bishop Fonseca was put aside, replaced by the Bishop de Vela, a great chamberlain of the King and a more prudent man. Many financial difficulties started coming up: who had to pay so many expenses? The crew to be hired demanded a much more substantial advance since the duration of the expedition was much longer than usual. Finally, it was not possible to meet the departure date.

After 5 months of reign, Philip I fell seriously ill and within ten days he died at 28 years old. The causes of his illness were and remain obscure: a violent strain seemed likely, but it also could have been poisoning. Many thought that behind the poisoning lay the hand of an assassin engaged by King Ferdinand, a thesis that ancient and modern historians exclude. But Doña Juana had to believe in the worst, and it is said that for days and days she followed the coffin of her beloved spouse through the lands of Castile deep in the throes of depression. Besides, she was pregnant with her last daughter.

Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros, who had been appointed her guardian given that Ferdinand was in Naples, somehow managed to comfort her.

With the death of Philip I of Spain, Ferdinand of Aragon became King and ruler of the whole of Spain, as well as of the Two Sicilies and master of the islands and the land beyond the Ocean.

At that point, he thought it appropriate to cut the expenses for the expedition to the Moluccas and to silence his son-in-law Don Manuel of Portugal, who was protesting threateningly, by cancelling the ongoing project, assigning Amerigo Vespucci and Vicente Yáñez Pinzón to resell the wheat and flour and the other provisions purchased for the expedition and to sell the three ships built in the Basque Country or use them for other purposes.

The two captains resumed traveling around Spain and visiting the ports of Andalusia to obey new orders.