

The Ships of Christopher Columbus

The Fleet of 1492

The original ships of Columbus, the Santa Maria, Pinta, and Nina are long gone. These ships from Palos, Spain were ordered to sail with Columbus by royal decree from Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand:

"Because of certain misdemeanors committed by you {the town of Palos} contrary to good order and our interest, you were sentenced by our council to provide us with two caravels, equipped at your expense, for twelve months, whenever we shall require them... We command that within ten days of receiving this our letter you have all ready and prepared two equipped caravels... to depart with the said Cristobal Colon whither we have commanded him to go."

Thus Columbus obtained the Nina and Pinta. The third ship, originally named the Gallega, was leased from its owner, Juan de la Cosa, who signed on with Columbus as pilot. Columbus renamed this ship the Santa Maria. No blueprints were left by the shipwrights who made these ships. There are no original pictures of the ships. All we know of them comes from Columbus' writings, records left by his contemporaries, and on general information from diverse sources about vessels of that era.