

Christopher Columbus

The long voyage to the cocoa beans.

In the year 1492, Christopher Columbus set off on his first voyage to find a western sea route to India. He was driven not only by a spirit of discovery but also, above all, by the riches of India and China – spices, silk and gold – which also attracted enough sponsors to back his ambitious plan.

In October that year, Columbus first landed on an island in the Bahamas. It was not until on his fourth voyage (1502-1504) that he reached the American mainland, though he still thought it was India.



The ship of Christopher Columbus

On this trip he also came across the cocoa bean. In 1502, Columbus was on the island of Guanaja, 100km off the coast of Honduras, when he discovered a fully laden Mayan trading canoe. Among other things, it was carrying large quantities of cocoa. Columbus and his crew took note of the strange beans, but as they were unable to communicate with the Mayas, they did not find out that they were cocoa beans, or discover the significance they held for the Mayas. Thus, Columbus was probably the first European to lay eyes on cocoa beans, but without knowing it.

As chance would have it, of all the years that Cortés could have arrived to conquer the Aztec Empire, he came in 1519, the year One Reed. Moreover, the Spanish were light-skinned and bearded, and wore helmets and armor decorated with feathers and glistening like snakeskin.

Tragically, Motecuhzoma II believed Cortés to be the returning Quetzalcóatl, and welcomed him with open arms, a fact which evidently played into the hands of the Spanish to a fairly significant extent during their campaigns.