

Kid's KOrner

Nina: Columbus's Favorite Ship

WASHINGTON — Her name, rarely mentioned apart from Santa Maria and Pinta, is immortal in the annals of exploration: Nina — Little Girl.

She was Christopher Columbus's favorite ship. Among the most advanced of her day, she proved sea-kindly and swift on his first voyage to the New World. And, after his flagship, Santa Maria, ran aground on Christmas Day, 1492, she carried the discoverer through a fierce mid-Atlantic winter storm safely and triumphantly home to Spain.

What happened to Nina after that famous first voyage? What did she look like? For nearly 500 years, her appearance has been assumed from early 16th-century drawings. Little is known about the Spanish caravels of discovery.

Information in Seville

Searching for information on the early Spanish shipping system in Spain's Archive of the Indies in Seville, historian Eugene Lyon examined a 400-page bundle of documents called the Libro de Armadas. It described the sending of several caravel fleets to the New World between 1495 and 1500.

"When I saw her name on the aged paper before me, I did not immediately grasp its significance," Lyon, an expert in old Spanish documents, reports in the November National Geographic.

"Nina, also known as Santa Clara." Could this be Columbus's Little Girl? She was nicknamed Nina because she was first the property of Juan Nino. She was formally Santa Clara, after the patron saint of the town (Moguer) where she was built.

The bundle of documents included details of her cargo, sails, rigging, and other equipment in 1498, the year of Columbus's third voyage to the New World. Nina, the papers revealed, had four masts,

instead of two or three as has always been depicted.

Most historians, including Lyon, believe the first- and second-voyage Ninas were one and the same. A five-year investigation by National Geographic magazine, also reported in its November issue, has concluded that Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria first anchored in the New World at Samana Cay in the Bahamas in 1492.

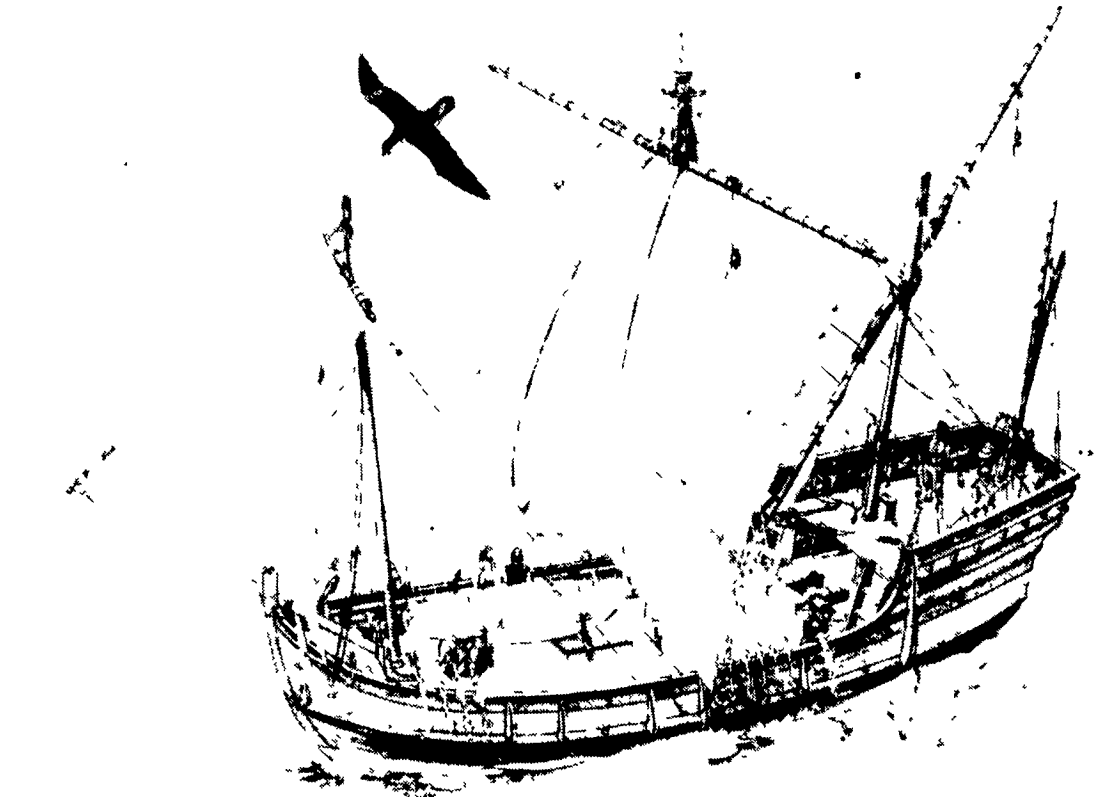
On the second voyage, which left Spain in September 1493, Nina was among the flotilla of 17 vessels. Convinced that Cuba was the Asia he sought, Columbus "aboard the caravel Nina, also known as Santa Clara," on June 12, 1494, required all his crews to swear to their belief about reaching the Asian mainland.

Damaged Off Hispaniola

In August 1495, sturdy Nina was badly damaged in a hurricane off the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic). The documents mention "Nina, which was remade in the Indies." On her return to Spain in 1496, Nina brought back New World goods: gold, wood, cotton, and a barrel of sand. Columbus thought the sand was a precious ore.

Next, apparently without Columbus's approval, Nina was sent to Rome on a commercial voyage in 1497 and was hijacked off the coast of Sardinia by a French pirate. The crew, through bribery, escaped and returned Nina safely to Spain. An angry Columbus recovered her.

Finally preparing for his third voyage to the New World, Columbus decided to send Nina and sister ship Santa Cruz ahead to Hispaniola in early February 1498 with much-needed supplies. To pay his seamen, the documents disclose, Columbus used funds he was to have taken to Hispaniola, hoping to balance the books with



Nina, Columbus's favorite ship, is depicted as she looked on his third voyage to the New World in 1498. Details of Nina's sails, rigging and other equipment were discovered by historian Eugene Lyon in a 15th century document on early Spanish fleets -- providing the first authentic look at a caravel of discovery. Nina had four masts, not three as previously thought. Until now, her style was assumed from early 16th-century drawings.

gold to be found there.

Nina received new sails, a new 200-pound anchor, and cartloads of planking. Caulkers worked 40 days on her deck and hull.

Finally, the documents say, she was refitted and fully laden: 18 tons of wheat, 17 tons of wine in great pipe barrels, some 7 tons of sea biscuit, almost 2 tons of flour, more than 2,000 pounds of cheese, and a ton of salt pork. Also aboard for the colonists were olive oil, sardines, raisins, and garlic.

From a ship's loaded cargo, it is

possible to estimate the dimensions of her hold, and thus her hull. Lyon calculated Nina's 1498 Indies lading at just over 52 tons. She appears, therefore, to have been 67 feet long, with a beam of 21 feet and a draft of just under 7 feet. Her total carrying capacity was 58 to 60 tons.

For this third voyage, Columbus had received permission to take as many as 330 persons to the Indies on royal salary. Nina and Santa Cruz carried more than 90 of them, including farmers and stockmen,

crossbowmen, a priest, locksmith, miner, and surgeon.

Gypsy Women Aboard

Two of the four women aboard were Gypsies named Catalina and Maria, convicted murderers freed by the crown on condition that they emigrate.

Nina was armed with 10 bombardas with their breechlocks, turning yokes, bolts, and wedges, as well as 80 lead balls, 54 short and 20 long lances, and 100 pounds of gunpowder.

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COLOR THIS!

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|-------------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. ORANGE |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. LT. GREY | 10. LT. GREEN |

CLIPPER SHIP: THIS SHIP WAS A FAST SLENDER SAILING VESSEL DEVELOPED BY AMERICAN BUILDERS IN THE 1830'S AND 1840'S, IT HAD HIGH MASTS AND NUMEROUS LARGE SAILS. CLIPPERS CARRIED MANY PASSENGERS DURING THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH IN 1849, AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOLD RUSH OF 1851.

