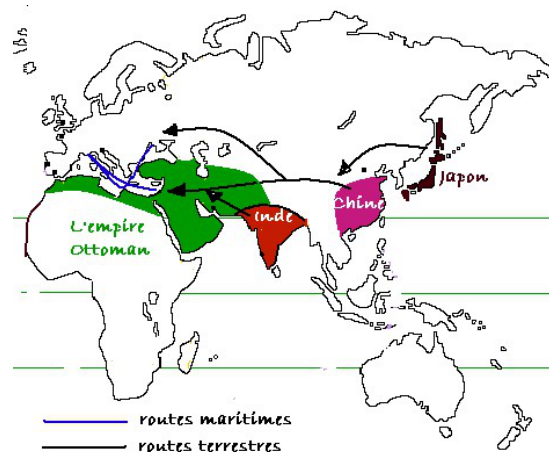


1492 - conquest of the Atlantic

Key question: How did Atlantic voyages change the world?

European expansion connected societies through trade, conquest and migration. It also caused violence, forced labour and devastating epidemics. The Americas were already inhabited: “new” describes a European perspective, not an empty world.

Learning goals: describe routes; compare viewpoints; explain exchanges and their unequal effects.



Simplified map of routes towards Asia. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 1.



A geographical image reproduced in the original pack; author and date are not supplied. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 1.

Your task

Locate Europe, Africa, Asia and the Atlantic. What did Europeans hope to obtain in Asia? Why must we question the expression “New World”?

Word help - route = itinéraire; conquest = conquête; viewpoint = point de vue

1. Why sail west?

European merchants sought direct access to gold, spices and other valuable goods. Rulers wanted wealth, power and Christian converts. Navigation relied on accumulated knowledge of winds and currents, ships, charts and instruments. Many educated Europeans already knew that the Earth was round; Columbus underestimated the westward distance to Asia. The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 did not close all trade routes.



An engraving of ships. Treat it as a representation, not a photograph of the voyage. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 2.



A European representation of an encounter with Indigenous people. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 3.

Your task

Classify the motives as economic, political or religious. In the encounter image, identify two signs of unequal power. What information about its maker would help you judge it?

Word help - wealth = richesse; ruler = souverain; to seek = chercher

2. Columbus: a journey and a mistake

Supported by Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, Columbus left Spain in August 1492. On 12 October, his expedition reached Guanahani in the Bahamas, which he renamed San Salvador. He had reached the Caribbean, not Asia. He encountered established Indigenous societies, including the Taíno. He made four Atlantic voyages between 1492 and 1504 and continued to interpret the lands he reached as part of Asia.



Map of Columbus's Caribbean voyages; use its key to distinguish the routes. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 4.



Allegorical representation of Europe and America; maker and date are not given in the pack. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 3.

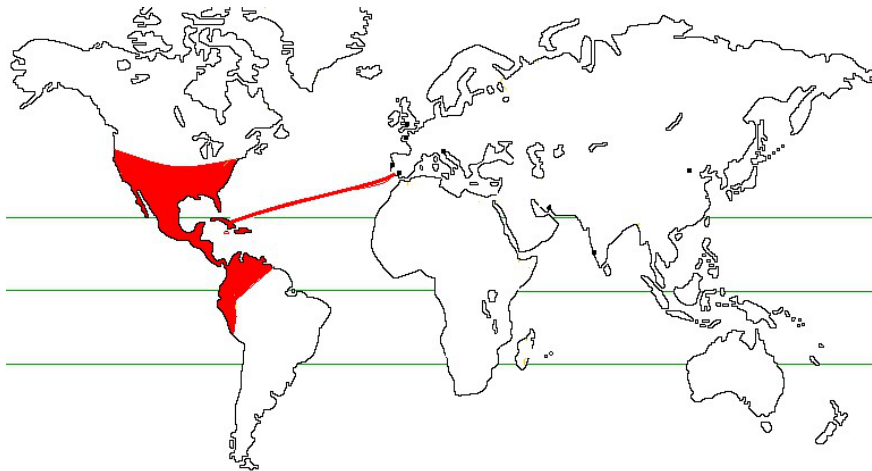
Your task

Trace the first voyage. Explain the difference between Columbus's intended destination and his actual arrival. Compare the two figures in the allegory: how is Europe's position presented?

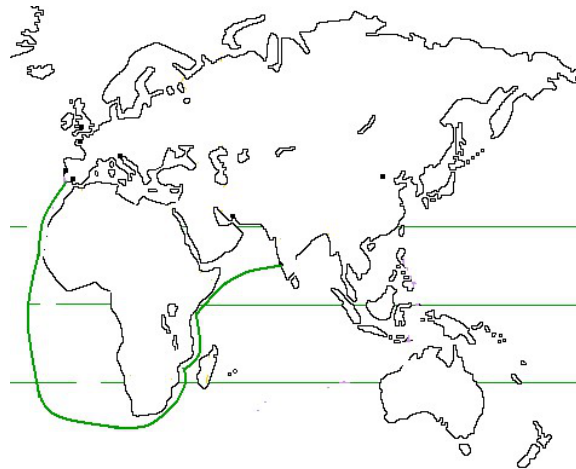
Word help - to reach = atteindre; to rename = renommer; allegory = allégorie

3. Several routes, several expeditions

Portuguese voyages explored the African coast. Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in **1488**. Vasco da Gama reached India by sea in **1498**. In contrast, Columbus's expedition crossed the Atlantic westwards in 1492. These voyages built on earlier African, Asian and European navigation and trading networks.



Simplified westward route associated with Columbus. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 2.



Simplified route around Africa to India. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 3.

Your task

Describe each route using compass directions and oceans. Explain why the voyage to India achieved a different result from Columbus's voyage.

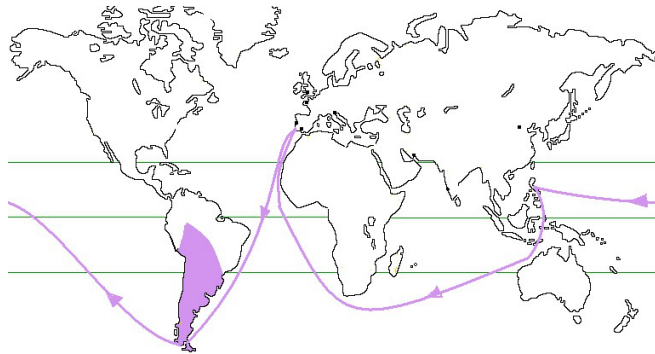
Word help - westwards = vers l'ouest; to round = contourner

4. Wider horizons, 1500-1534

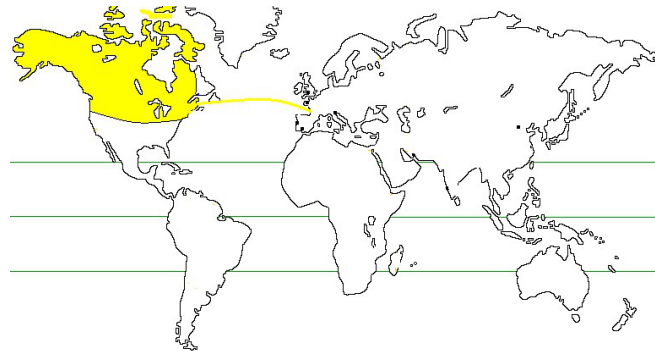
Cabral reached the coast of Brazil in 1500 while sailing towards India. An expedition led by Magellan left in 1519 and crossed the Pacific. Magellan died in the Philippines in 1521; the surviving ship returned under Elcano in 1522, completing the first circumnavigation. Cartier explored the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in 1534. The diagrams below simplify these journeys.



Cabral and the Portuguese route via Brazil. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 4.



Route of the Magellan-Elcano expedition. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 4.



Cartier and the search for a north-western route. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 3.

Your task

Make a table: navigator / date / sponsor / route / result. Why is it inaccurate to say that Magellan personally completed the voyage?

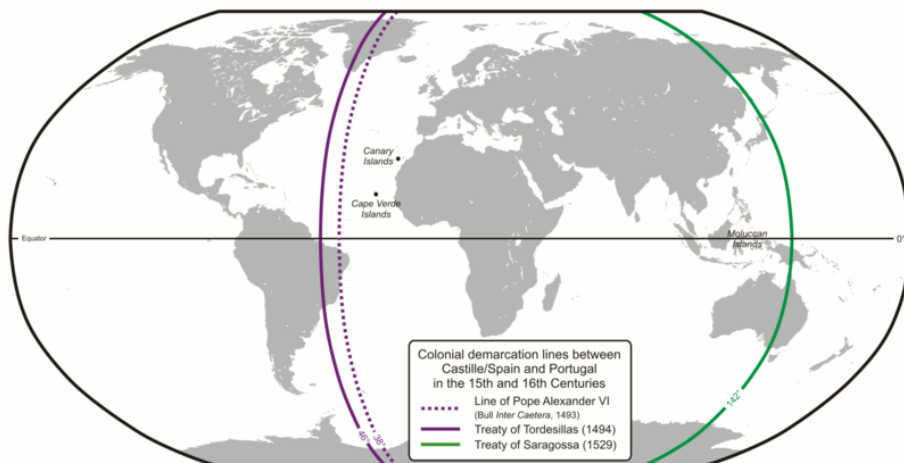
Word help - sponsor = commanditaire; circumnavigation = tour du monde

5. Claiming the world

The **Treaty of Tordesillas (1494)** divided overseas claims between the Castilian and Portuguese crowns. Its line ran 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. These European claims did not mean effective control of every territory. Indigenous peoples were not parties to the agreement. Maps changed as voyages provided information; a European map used the name “America” in 1507.



Historical world map reproduced in the pack; original identification is not supplied. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 6.



Modern diagram of Iberian demarcation lines; distinguish the Atlantic and Pacific agreements. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 6.

Your task

Find the Atlantic dividing line. Which crown claimed lands to its east and west? Explain why the agreement ignored the rights of existing inhabitants.

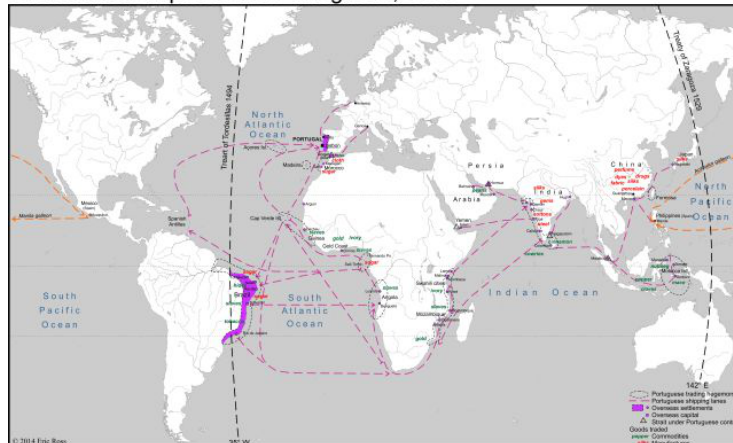
Word help - claim = revendication; crown = couronne; inhabitant = habitant

6. From voyages to empires

Spain conquered large American territories. Tenochtitlan fell in 1521 to Cortés and his Indigenous allies. Pizarro captured the Inca ruler Atahualpa in 1532; conquest and resistance continued afterwards. Portugal developed coastal strongholds and trading posts across Africa and Asia, and a colony in Brazil. Both empires relied on local intermediaries and coercion.

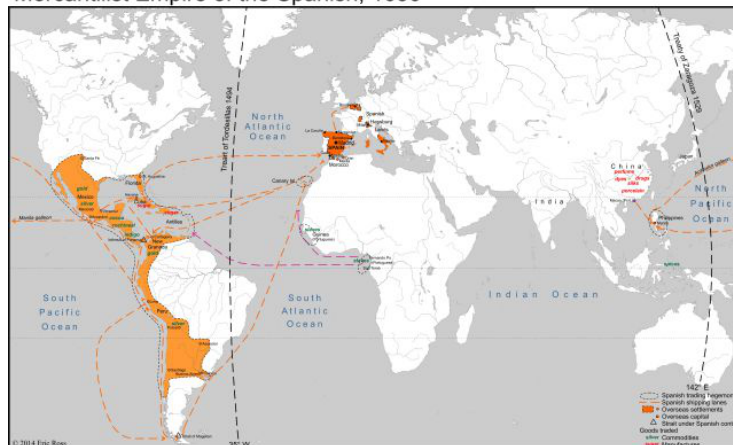
Check the dates: the maps below show later situations, not the world in 1492.

Mercantilist Empire of the Portuguese, 1580



Portuguese empire, 1580, according to the map title. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 5.

Mercantilist Empire of the Spanish, 1650



Spanish empire, 1650, according to the map title. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 6.

Your task

Compare the two empires: where were their main possessions? Explain the difference between a trading post and a large territorial colony.

Word help - trading post = comptoir; ally = allié; stronghold = place forte

7. Conquest seen through images

Indigenous populations suffered from epidemics, warfare, dispossession and forced labour. Disease was a major cause of demographic collapse, but violence and colonial exploitation also mattered. People resisted, negotiated and preserved cultural practices.

Source criticism: the engravings below convey European views of colonial violence. Their makers, dates and publication contexts are not identified in the supplied pack. Do not assume that their artists witnessed these scenes.



Engraving representing violence and destruction. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 5.



Engraving representing armed conflict. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 5.



Engraving representing colonial brutality. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 5.

Your task

Choose one image. Describe only what you can see, then suggest the message. Separate visible evidence from interpretation. Which missing source details limit your conclusion?

Word help - forced labour = travail forcé; to resist = résister

8. The Columbian Exchange

After 1492, plants, animals, people and pathogens crossed the Atlantic in growing numbers. Maize, potatoes, tomatoes and cacao travelled from the Americas. Horses, cattle, wheat and sugar cane reached the Americas from the Old World. These exchanges changed diets and landscapes. Their effects were unequal: introduced diseases devastated many Indigenous communities.



Diagram of the Columbian Exchange. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 7.

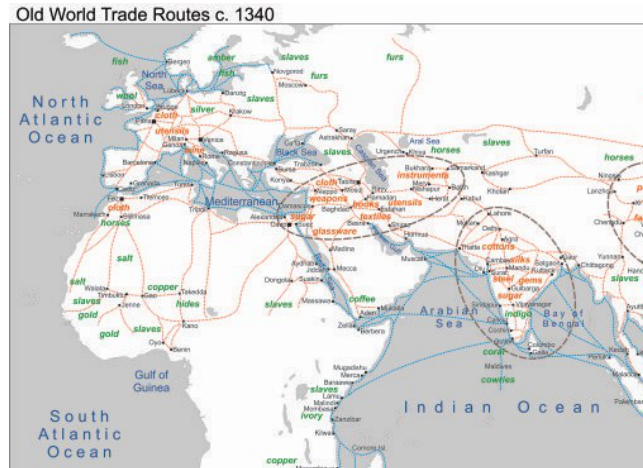
Your task

Draw a two-column table: from the Americas / to the Americas. Add four examples to each. Why is “exchange” too neutral a word to describe every consequence? Write three sentences using “whereas”, “because” and “as a result”.

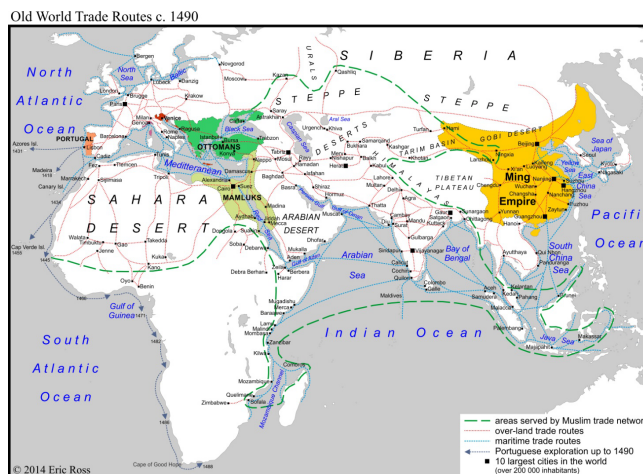
Word help - pathogen = agent pathogène; cattle = bovins; whereas = tandis que

9. Trade before and after 1492

Long before Columbus, extensive networks linked Africa, Europe and Asia. Atlantic voyages added new connections; they did not invent international trade. European ships entered existing Indian Ocean markets, often using military force to secure advantages. Mediterranean commerce continued alongside the growth of Atlantic ports.



Map titled "Old World Trade Routes c. 1340". Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 8.



Map titled "Old World Trade Routes c. 1500". Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 9.

Your task

Identify two regions connected before 1492. Compare the maps: what changed and what remained important? Explain why a story beginning only with European "discoveries" is incomplete.

Word help - network = réseau; alongside = parallèlement à

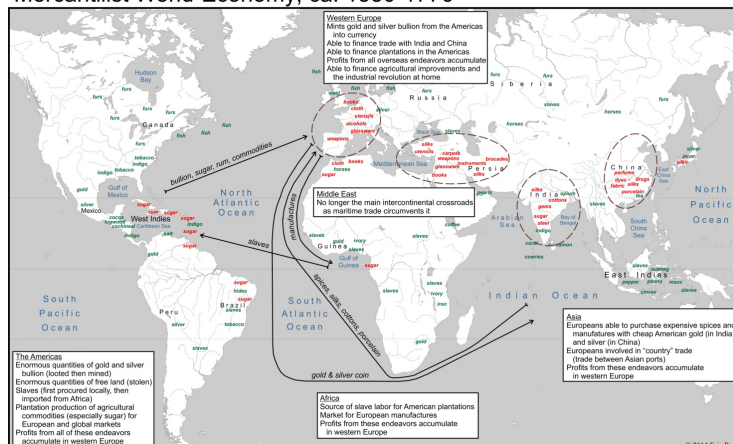
10. Ports and a changing world economy

Lisbon and Seville became important centres of overseas trade. Seville's Casa de Contratación, created in 1503, regulated commerce with Spanish America. Silver, sugar and other goods connected colonial production to distant markets. These links developed over centuries; they were not fully formed in 1492. The profits depended in part on coercive labour and slavery.



A view of Seville reproduced in the pack; painter and date are not supplied. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 10.

Mercantilist World-Economy, ca. 1530-1776



Map titled "Mercantilist World-Economy, ca. 1530-1776": a later overview. Source: supplied Atlantic teaching pack, p. 11.

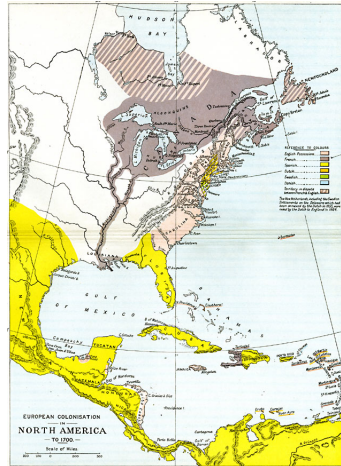
Your task

Describe the port scene. Use the map to trace one movement of goods. Why must we distinguish the sixteenth century from the later Atlantic system?

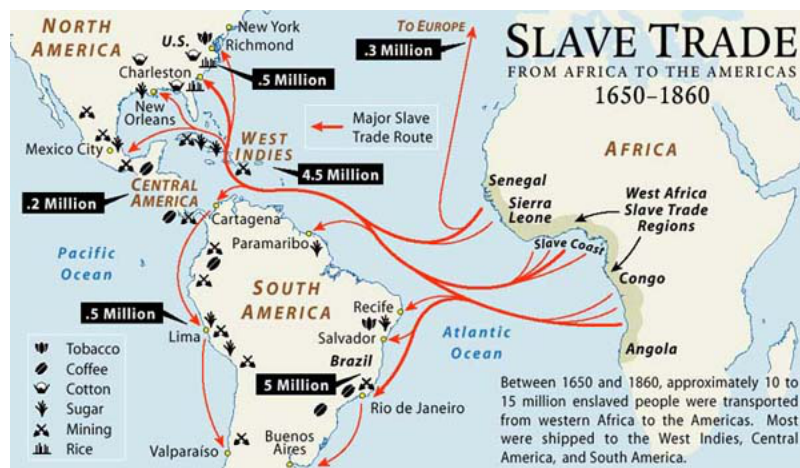
Word help - goods = marchandises; profit = bénéfice; slavery = esclavage

11. Looking further ahead

Later developments, not a map of 1492: French, English and Dutch colonisation expanded after the first Iberian voyages. Colonial boundaries changed repeatedly. Indigenous nations remained political actors and resisted expansion. The later geography of colonies cannot explain every society or event at the time of Columbus.



Map of European colonial possessions in North America, showing a later historical situation. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 7.



Map titled "Slave trade from Africa to the Americas, 1650-1860": an extension beyond the Renaissance. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 8.

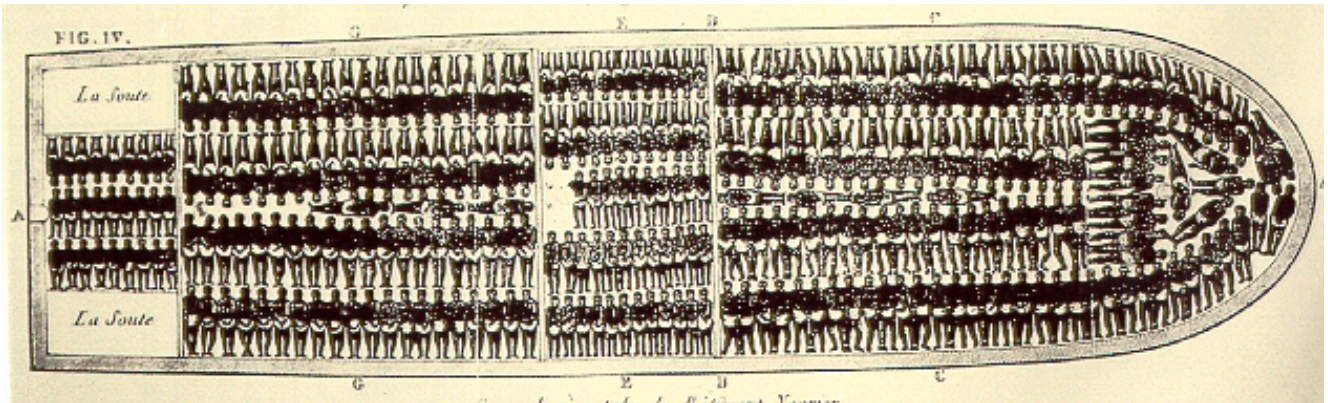
Your task

Read the dates in the second map. Calculate how far they extend beyond 1492. Explain why the maps belong in an extension rather than an account of Columbus's first voyage.

Word help - boundary = frontière; possession = possession territoriale

12. Enslavement: reading hostile sources

Historical sources contain racist language and representations. The documents below show how enslavers treated human beings as saleable property. The Atlantic slave trade had begun before the Valladolid debate and expanded greatly in later centuries. It was not created by a verdict at Valladolid. Enslaved Africans resisted captivity and preserved and transformed cultural practices.



Ship-plan image illustrating the crowding imposed on enslaved people; the pack does not supply its original caption. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 8.



Historical sale advertisement containing racist language; original date and publication are not supplied. Source: supplied Columbus teaching pack, p. 9.

Your task

Which details show dehumanisation? Whose voice is missing from these documents? End the dossier with 100-120 words answering the key question. Include voyages, conquest, exchanges, and their unequal human consequences.

Word help - enslaved person = personne réduite en esclavage; captivity = captivité

Sources and reading guide

This student dossier is a new English adaptation of the two supplied teaching packs. All 27 maps and illustrations embedded in those PDFs have been retained. The original captions are not always sufficient to identify their creators; missing attributions have been stated rather than invented.

Supplied visual corpus

Fichier ouverture atlantique.pdf, 12 pages (13 images).

Fichier colombus.pdf, 9 pages (14 images).

Checks and further reading

Library of Congress, "Columbus and the Taíno", Exploring the Early Americas.

loc.gov - Columbus and the Taíno

UNESCO, "Treaty of Tordesillas".

unesco.org - Treaty of Tordesillas

Turismo de Portugal, "The Portuguese Discoveries" (chronological reference for 1488 and 1498).

visitportugal.com - The Portuguese Discoveries

Remember

A route diagram is a simplification. An engraving expresses a viewpoint. A map of a later empire must not be used as a map of 1492. A source's silence is not evidence that people had no voice or agency.