

Landing Place of Columbus in Puerto Rico.

On November 16, 1493, Christopher Columbus, on his second voyage to the New World, sighted the island called by the Indians Borinquen, by him San Juan Bautista, and by us Puerto Rico. The following day he anchored in a port on the western side of the island and remained there for two days. A "great number of our men", wrote Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca, a physician to the fleet, "went on shore". There they visited a village located along the bay and constructed around a common square.¹

For many years it was believed that Aguada or Aguadilla on the bay of Aguada was the site of Columbus' landing. At Aguadilla a monument was erected to commemorate the event. Contemporary accounts of the voyage referred to a spring at which fresh water was obtained and the monument was therefore placed near the spring at this town. The presence of this spring appears to have been the chief reason for selecting Aguadilla as the true site.²

However, the existence of a similar spring at nearby Aguada has caused some historians to select that town as the spot at which Europeans first stepped on Puerto Rican soil. It is, however, by no means indisputably established that Columbus landed at the Bay of Aguada. Early maps and descriptions of the island refer to numerous Indian villages but none is clearly located on either of these two spots.³

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1. A. M. Fernandez de Glarra, The Letter of Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca, 444.
 2. Richard VanMiddledyke, History of Puerto Rico, passim.
 3. Cayetano Coll y Toste, Colon en Puerto Rico, 179-186.

The town of Mayaguez further south on the western side of Puerto Rico also has its supporters. But in this case, too, no Indian village is shown in early contemporary accounts. Guayadilla on the southwestern coast likewise has partisans, but while it was the site of an Indian village there seems to be no other good reason to select it.⁴

The whole question of the landing place of Columbus is confusing. Contemporary accounts are vague and from the meager descriptions given us it is not possible definitely to select any particular site as the correct one. Further study would scarcely clarify the problem. While the site is undoubtedly of prime significance as the point on which Columbus set foot on territory under the American flag, it seems unlikely that it will even be definitely located.

Bibliography

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4. Ibid., 187-192.