

How Columbus Sailed the Ocean Blue and Other Matters

by [Robert Gear](#) (January 2024)



Family of Chickens— Guy Benard, 20th C

You may have been told that Columbus set sail from Palo in southern Spain under the patronage of Ferdinand and Isabella, but that is entirely untrue.

This is the true history of the apparent discovery in 1488 of a new route to India. A Genoan by the name of Christopher Columbus set sail from Bristol aboard the good ship *Peter*

Pomegranate.

This unknown navigator had a cousin who had been baptized with the same name, and it is to him that the discovery is often wrongly attributed. Our mariner's fleet comprised two other ships, *Lady Jane Grey*, and *Margaret*: all seaworthy carracks of the finest timber. On deck, our captain had stowed a menagerie of animals, mostly for consumption and for purposes of barter. These included some chickens (stowed in the hold), goats, sheep and pigs.

Our Columbus had been given the go-ahead for this expedition by King Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch. When Henry was informed that the overland route to India had been compromised since the fall of Constantinople about 35 years previously he agreed that a new route to the Eastern realms was needed.

And so they set sail.

Our Columbus and his crew, having sailed the ocean blue for some time, were ready for some well-earned shore leave. They were all getting restless; and so were the poultry squawking in the hold. To keep everyone's spirits up Columbus promised a sizable reward for the first seaman to sight land. Night and day the crew kept vigilant watch.

The chickens were counseled and arranged by a proud upstanding rooster, possibly named 'Mo' (although history is unclear on the matter) who is said by some to have been an *ex post facto* creation of the original cult. They stood in lines and pecked rhythmically at the underside of the still seaworthy *Peter Pomegranate*. The incessant pecking splintered the wooden planking, and after a few weeks a series of holes each a few inches in depth appeared. Melville, a trusty cabin boy, had the duty of inspecting the hold and by the light of his whale oil lamp descried the emerging damage.

"Shiver me timbers! Blimey! O, you chickens will dig roight fru and sink ve ship, innit!"

The chickens took no notice and continued pecking very rhythmically. They didn't speak, just mumbled incomprehensibly over the ominous tapping sound. Melville informed an ordinary seaman who told the second mate who told the chief mate who told Columbus, who was looking out for Indians and scratching his head over Toscanelli's map. Of course, as we now know, he was looking in the wrong places. He did not consider that *the foot of the lighthouse is dark*.

Not much later and one starry night, Billy Budd, a junior seaman and foretopman, was leaning against the taffrail scanning the endless horizon for smoke signals and other signs of Indians. The chief mate, Jellicoe, was promenading on the poop deck as the sky darkened. Venus now shone on the Western Horizon. But then, unexpectedly, Jellicoe tripped on something squidgy. What was that? In the dim half-light he bent down and peered. It was a piglet. It had been sliced neatly in half as with a scimitar or perhaps a sharp beak. He concluded rightly that the poultry must have pecked their way through the bulkhead and fluttered onto the decks, but he could not for the life of him surmise the motive of such an attack. He descended through the main hatch into the general stores compartment and saw that the chickens had unleashed havoc on inanimate sacks of food provisions. That was the last thing he did see. His head soon lay dripping on a sack of grain.

That squidgy event and the killing of Jellicoe and what ensued came to be known as 'The Great Chicken Mutiny.' It is a story that has been passed down to us, and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity.

A tipping point had been reached and the mutiny spread rapidly, especially after Mo had warned his flock about the tendency of the sailors to poultryphobia. He spread alarm when he told them that they should feel offended upon hearing tweets about the larger world, any of which they might choose not to approve.

Then at some point the chickens swarmed on deck, killing goats, swine and sheep, and waving pennants Pollocked with strange squiggles.

Some sailors were killed outright, either pecked viciously or thrown overboard into the vast, heaving ocean along with the quadrant, sandglass, magnetic compass, and charts. Other sailors were held for ransom or slavery—the chickens not having other means of generating wealth. It has been suggested that both our Columbus and Billy Budd were ransomed on the island of Cipangu, but it has been impossible to verify that claim. One brave lad, Melville that is, clung to an empty casket of rum that the chickens, having been forbidden from partaking of the ingredients, had thrown overboard. Miraculously the casket buoyed up Melville, and he survived to tell the tale, and even wrote it down once he had learnt to read and write. That's how we know what really happened.

A problem soon arose when *Peter Pomegranate* started to take on water as a consequence of the holes drilled through the boards meeting the ocean surface. They had been warned! The chickens themselves could not fix the problem having little technological sophistication and so had to humble themselves before the greater ability of the few crew members who as yet had not been eliminated. These valiant few proved useful for the time being but later were pecked overboard. Another version has it that one or two sailors glued chicken feathers to themselves in the hope that the poultry cult would treat them amicably.

Bear in mind that in those far off days the LGBTQ-and-whatever movement was in its infancy, and the existence of transindividuals was rare, as indeed was 'gender affirming care.' Now, unbeknownst to Columbus, a certain crew member was actually one of those early genders (known as a woman) who dressed as a man. And few could tell the difference. But the chickens could. Now you would think, wouldn't you, that the birds would have such infidels walk the gangplank, thus

anticipating future wrongthink-solving techniques. But Mo, now firmly in command, decided to take the woman-dressed-as-man on shore leave, near present day Boston, India. Clearly he was no swan and failed to seduce the woman-dressed-as-man, who it must be said was no Leda herself. But somehow a new form of creature was engendered—one which valued a whole new array of pronouns and became what is known as ‘an Ivy League Professor.’

And that is why the land that our Columbus got to (almost) will always belong to roosters and their chicken folk. Make no mistake. If you don’t believe that you should try arguing with a chicken.

By the way, the two other carracks, *Lady Jane Grey* and *Margaret* were never heard from again. Speculations have been rife; they run the gamut from collision with an iceberg to being rammed by a giant white whale. Those who have researched most carefully believe they were also the victim of chicken mutinies. Strange, that.

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