Discussion of the writings of Christopher Columbus

The “Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella” Columbus informs the king and queen of Spain about some of the richness of the islands he has found. But this letter also advises the king and queen how to establish ordinances to protect the gold and how to establish the first settlements so far from Spain. Make a list of some of these ordinances and what this practice tell us about what is important to Europeans.

“Letter to Luis de Santangel”

If Columbus thought that he was in China, in the “province of Cathay” (p 263) which comprehended the domains of the “*Gran Can,*” why does he says that he took possession of those lands? What gave him the authority? Look at the ritual he does to elaborate on this aspect.

What names does Columbus give to the islands? Why these names reveal a hierarchy that was important to Columbus?

Columbus lacks the language to name some of the birds and tress of the new lands experts have said that he uses “analogy” to do so. Can you explain and give examples of this?

Columbus refers to different species of trees, plants, minerals in this letter, what sort of emphasis he puts in these descriptions? Are they descriptions of their beauty, of their commercial value or both? Explain and give examples.

How does he describe the people? Make a list as complete as possible of their characteristics according to Columbus. Give examples.

Why Columbus says that he has not encountered any “monstrous” what is he referring to?

In page 268, Columbus says “This is [a land] to be desired,--and once seen, never to be relinquished—in which (although indeed, I have taken possession of them all for their Highnesses, and all are more richly endowed than I have skill and power to say, and I hold them all in the name of their Highnesses who can dispose thereof as much and as completely as of the kingdoms of Castille)…” Comment this passage reflecting on why Columbus assumes that those lands are “free”?

The settlement that Columbus mentions in the letter “the Navidad” was destroyed while Columbus returned to Spain. He had mentioned how “friendly” almost like a brother was the indigenous leader (p.269). How is this assumption an example of cultural and linguistic misunderstanding? Think about how for Columbus the indigenous peoples are child like.