

George Schwarz

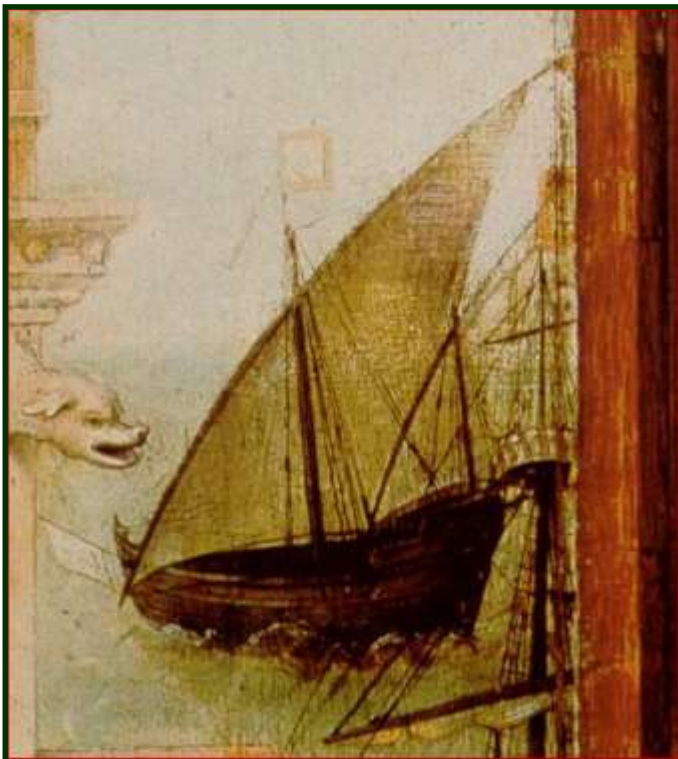
## The History and Development of Caravels

MA, 2003-2008

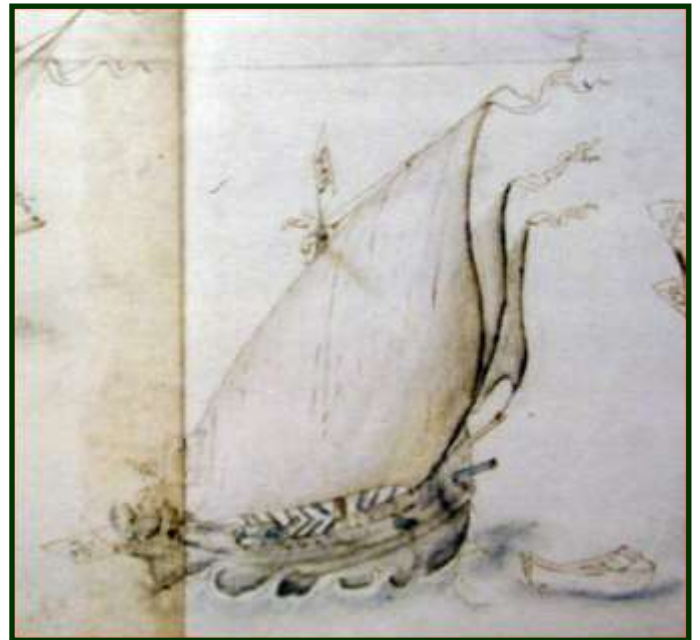
*An array of ship types was used during the European Age of Expansion (early 15th to early 17th centuries), but one vessel in particular emerges from the historical records as a harbinger of discovery: the caravel.*

### **Introduction**

The problem is that little is known about these popular ships of discovery, despite the fair amount of historical evidence that has been uncovered. How big were they? How many men did it take to operate such a vessel? What kind of sailing characteristics did they have? How and by whom were they designed? Where did they originate and how did they develop? These questions cannot be answered by looking at the historical accounts alone. For this

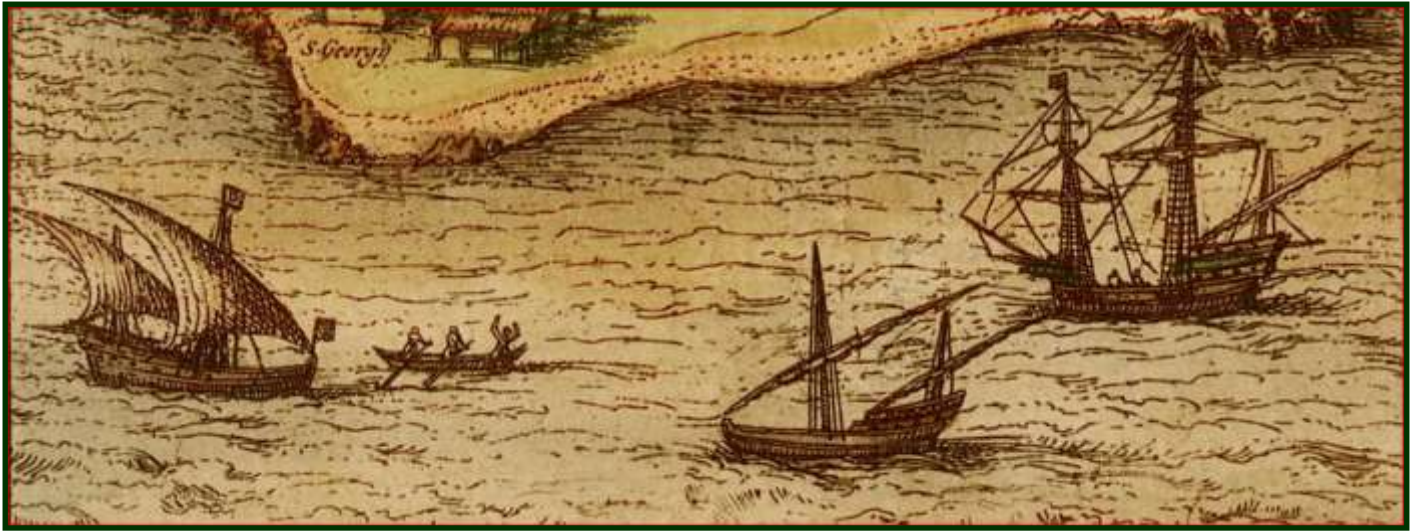


Early 16th century depiction of a caravel. Retábulo de Sta. Auta.



Caravel in the Leiden View of Lisbon, c. 1535.

reason, scholars must take another approach for learning about caravels by examining additional sources, namely ancient shipbuilding treatises, archaeological evidence, surviving archaic shipbuilding techniques, and iconographic representations from the past. Information gained from the available sources reveals many of the caravel's characteristics through time. This ship type outclassed its contemporaries during the age of exploration because of its highly adaptive characteristics. These traits were, principally, its shallow draught, speed, maneuverability, and ability to sail close to the iv wind. This combination of attributes made the caravel the ideal ship for reconnaissance along the



Braun and Hogenberg Atlas, 1572. S. Jorge da Mina.

rocky African coastline, as well as for making the transatlantic voyages to the New World. It was built in a Mediterranean way during its post-medieval phases, a method that still survives in some parts of the world today. During the Age of

Discovery is a body of information that can be applied to other studies about ancient seafaring, and can serve as a starting point for further research.

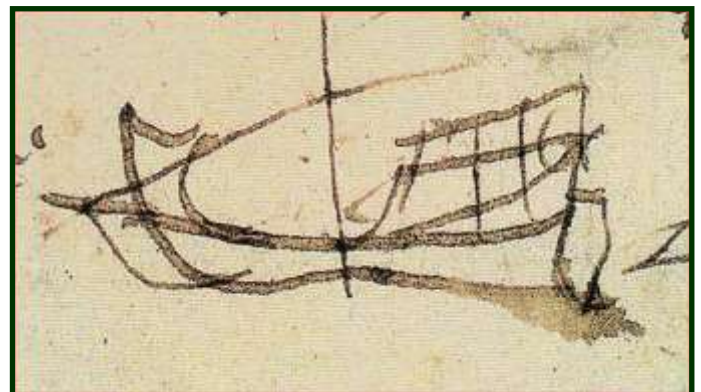
### Citation

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Livro das Fortalezas. Duarte d'Armas, 1509. Valença do Minho.

Discovery (ca. 1430 to 1530), the caravel sat low in the water, had one sterncastle, and was either lateen-rigged or had a combination of square and lateen sails. This vessel reflects the advanced ship-building technology that existed in Europe at this time, and played an important role in the voyages which allowed the Europeans to expand their territories around the world. The results of the studies presented in this thesis provide a history and development of the caravel, which was gradual and often obscure. What has been gained from this work



Signature of João de Leão, late 15th century.