

Juan Perez (friar)

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Juan Pérez, O.F.M. Conv., (died before 1513) was a [Spanish friar](#) of the [Conventual Franciscans](#) and companion of [Christopher Columbus](#).^[1]

At one time Pérez held the office of *contador* (accountant) to the Queen of Spain, showing he was of noble family. Later he entered the Franciscan Order and [Queen Isabella](#) chose him for her [confessor](#).

Finding court life distracting he asked permission to retire to his [friary](#). Soon after he was elected [guardian](#) of the [friary in La Rábida](#), near [Palos](#) in [Andalusia](#). Father [Francisco Gonzaga](#), [Minister General](#) of the Observant branch of the Order (1579–87), declared that La Rábida belonged to the Franciscan Custody of [Seville](#), which, by decree of [Pope Alexander VI](#) on 21 September 1500, was raised to the rank of a [province](#).

Here Christopher Columbus in 1484 or 1485 made the acquaintance of Pérez. Friar [Antonio de Marchena](#), a [cosmographer](#) of some note, also lived there, and in him the navigator discovered a man bent on the project of discovering a new world. The historian [Francisco López de Gómara](#) in 1552 seems to have started the blunder, copied by almost every subsequent writer on the subject, of making the two names Perez and Marchena serve to describe one and the same person by speaking of the Father Guardian of La Rábida as Friar Juan Perez de Marchena.^[2]

Both friars materially assisted Columbus, who acknowledges his obligation in one of his letters to the king and queen. He writes that everybody ridiculed him, save two friars who always remained faithful. [Martín Fernández de Navarrete](#), indeed, claims that Columbus in this passage spoke of Pérez, the Franciscan, and [Diego de Deza](#), the [Dominican](#).^[3]

It was Pérez who persuaded the navigator not to leave Spain without consulting Isabella, when, footsore and dispirited, he arrived at La Rábida, determined to submit his plan to the King of France. At the invitation of the queen, Pérez made a journey to [Santa Fe](#) for a personal interview with her. As a result, Columbus was recalled, and with the assistance of [Cardinal Mendoza](#) and others his demands were finally granted.

When the navigator at last on 3 August 1492, set sail in the [Santa María](#), Pérez blessed him and his fleet. Some writers assert that Pérez accompanied Columbus on the first voyage, but the silence of Columbus on this point renders the claim improbable. It appears certain, however, that Pérez joined his friend on the second voyage in 1493.

The earliest and best writers also agree: that when the second expedition reached [Hispaniola](#), Pérez celebrated the first [Mass](#) in the New World at [Point Conception](#) on 8 December 1493, in a temporary structure; that this was the first church in America; and that Pérez preserved the [Blessed Sacrament](#) there.^[4] He also became the guardian of the first friary which Columbus ordered to be erected in [Santo Domingo](#). There all trace of him is lost. Whether he returned to La Rábida or died in America is uncertain. All we know is that, in the legal dispute between Diego and Columbus, the royal *fiscal* ([attorney general](#)), Dr. García Hernández, testified in 1513 that Pérez was then dead.