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Exploration, Religion and Empire in the Sixteenth-century Ibero-Atlantic World

A New Perspective on the History of Modern Science

Amsterdam
University
Press

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The Iberian conquest of the Atlantic at the beginning of the sixteenth century had a notable impact on the formation of the new world order in which Christian Europe claimed control over most a considerable part of the planet. This was possible thanks to the confluence of different and inseparable factors: the development of new technical capacities and favorable geographical conditions in which to navigate the great oceans; the Christian mandate to extend the faith; the need for new trade routes; and an imperial organization aspiring to global dominance.

The author explores new methods for approaching old historiographical problems of the Renaissance—such as the discovery and conquest of America, the birth of modern science, and the problem of Eurocentrism—now in reference to actors and regions scarcely visible in the complex history of modern Europe: the ships, the wind, the navigators, their instruments, their gods, saints, and demons.

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'This study is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature that seeks to re-evaluate Iberian scientific activity in America in the early modern period. It is an ambitious work that takes an original approach to establishing how the Spanish sought to build and understand their Atlantic empire, viewing technological practices as part of the broad networks of diverse actors where scientific, technical, political, religious and commercial factors converged. Nieto's clear and compelling narrative highlights the importance of understanding the interactions of these "machines of empire", an approach that allows us to understand anew how the Spanish saw themselves as fulfilling a providential mission in America.'

– Dr Edward Collins, University College Dublin

