



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (172)

TEXT: *Cristóbal Colón – Viajes a Las Indias (1492 - 1504s)*

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PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Enduring Enigma of Christopher Columbus

Cristóbal Colón – Viajes a Las Indias (1492 - 1504), introduced by Jean-Paul Duviols, compiles crucial documents and narratives from Christopher Columbus's four epoch-making voyages. This edition delves into the persistent enigma surrounding **Columbus's** life, particularly his origins and early years, which continue to be subjects of historical debate despite the strong Genoese thesis. The book references Fernando Colón's *Historia del Almirante* and Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Historia de las Indias* as primary sources that affirm **Columbus's** Italian heritage.

Columbus's Early Life and Vision

The collection outlines **Columbus's** early engagement with navigation and geography from a young age, serving Genoese commercial enterprises. Key dates highlight his probable Mediterranean voyages (1474-1475), his arrival in Portugal following a shipwreck (1476), and his alleged journey to Iceland and potentially North American coasts (1476-1477). These experiences, coupled with his marriage to **Filipa Moniz Perestrelo** in Madeira (1479), shaped his audacious “project” to cross the Atlantic westward to reach Cathay and Cipango (China and Japan).

Navigational Science and Pre-Discovery Debates

Despite his erroneous calculations of the Earth's circumference, **Columbus's** navigational skills, including his understanding of trade winds and the relationship between geographic longitude and magnetic compass deviation, were remarkable. The introduction also touches upon the enduring “undiscovered pilot” theory, suggesting **Columbus** had prior knowledge of western lands, a claim debated by historians but used to explain his unyielding conviction. The *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe* (1492) are analyzed for the extraordinary benefits granted to **Columbus** and the ambiguities regarding the “lands” he was to discover.

Mesianism, Gold, and Mythical Creatures

Columbus's worldview was a blend of medieval and Renaissance thought. He saw himself as divinely chosen to bring Christianity to new lands, a messianic mission intertwined with the pursuit of gold, spices, and the reconquest of Jerusalem. His belief in mythical creatures (like sirens) and his attempts to reconcile newfound realities with traditional legends (e.g., the Terrestrial Paradise near the Orinoco's mouth) reveal a mind grappling with the unknown.

The “Indians”: Perception and Domination

The text explores **Columbus's** initial encounters with the Taíno people, whom he initially perceived as “innocent,” beautiful, and docile. This initial admiration, however, quickly evolved into a paternalistic view, justifying their subjugation for the benefit of the Spanish Crown and their conversion to Christianity. The book details the



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progressive shift towards enslavement, the rationale behind it, and the eventual, albeit often disregarded, royal and papal disapproval of Indian slavery.

PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

The Enigma of Columbus's Origins:

Discuss the ongoing debate surrounding Columbus's origins and early life. How do primary sources (e.g., Fernando Colón, Bartolomé de Las Casas) contribute to our understanding, and what are the implications of the "undiscovered pilot" theory?

Motivations for the Voyages:

Examine the multifaceted motivations behind Columbus's voyages. How did personal ambition, economic drivers (gold, spices), religious messianism, and the political context of the Reconquista interweave?

Columbus as Navigator and Cosmographer:

Despite errors in geographical calculations, how did Columbus's nautical science and practical experience contribute to the success of his voyages? Discuss his specific contributions (e.g., use of trade winds, magnetic compass observation).

The "Other" and the "Good Savage":

Analyze Columbus's initial perceptions of the indigenous populations. How did his observations evolve, and how did European preconceptions (e.g., mythical creatures, the "good savage") shape his interpretation of the "Indians" and justify their eventual subjugation?

The Capitulaciones de Santa Fe:

Discuss the significance of the Capitulaciones de Santa Fe. What did Columbus demand, and what did the Catholic Monarchs grant? How does this document reflect the power dynamics and expectations of the time?

Early Colonial Policies and Slavery:

Trace the evolution of Spanish policy regarding the enslavement of indigenous peoples during Columbus's time. How did the initial "raids" differ from later, more systematic enslavement, and what role did royal and papal decrees play?

PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Duviols, Jean-Paul.** *Cristóbal Colón – Viajes a Las Indias (1492 - 1504).* SpanishBookPress Edition.
- **Colón, Fernando.** *Historia del Almirante.*
- **Las Casas, Bartolomé de.** *Historia de las Indias.*
- **Todorov, Tzvetan.** *La Conquista de América: La cuestión del otro.*
- **Duviols, Jean-Paul.** (Other relevant works by the editor).



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PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

1. According to the provided text, which two primary historical figures wrote biographies or accounts that shed light on Columbus's life?

- A) Marco Polo and Fray Ramón Pane
- B) Fernando Colón and Bartolomé de Las Casas
- C) Luis de Santángel and Juan Pérez
- D) Martin Behaim and Paolo Toscanelli

Correct Answer: B

2. What was a key motivation, besides wealth, for Columbus's voyages, as suggested by his messianic view?

- A) To find new trade routes to Africa
- B) To circumnavigate the globe
- C) To reconquer Jerusalem
- D) To establish a new Spanish empire in Europe

Correct Answer: C

3. Columbus initially confused the "Indias" he reached with which part of the world?

- A) Australia
- B) Africa
- C) Asia (China/Japan)
- D) Europe

Correct Answer: C

4. The Capitulaciones de Santa Fe granted Columbus which of the following titles?

- A) Duke of the Atlantic
- B) Admiral of the Ocean Sea and Viceroy
- C) King of the Indies
- D) Governor of Castile

Correct Answer: B

5. How did Columbus initially describe the indigenous people he encountered in Guanahani?

- A) Monstrous and aggressive
- B) Innocent, beautiful, and easily converted
- C) Highly civilized and technologically advanced
- D) Hostile and untrustworthy

Correct Answer: B

Explore the “Colonialism & First American Chronicles” Collection : This book is part of our comprehensive collection exploring the profound encounter of worlds and the complex construction of the “Other” during the early colonial period in the Americas.

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