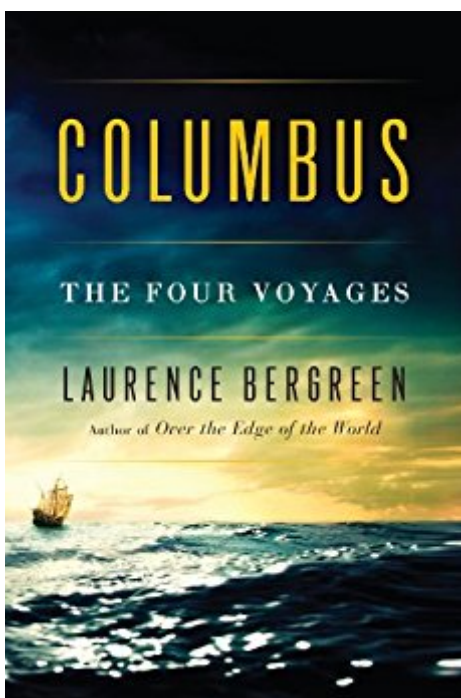


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Columbus: The Four Voyages, 1492-1504



Synopsis

From the author of the Magellan biography, *Over the Edge of the World*, a mesmerizing new account of the great explorer. Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a trading route to China, and his unexpected landfall in the Americas, is a watershed event in world history. Yet Columbus made three more voyages within the span of only a decade, each designed to demonstrate that he could sail to China within a matter of weeks and convert those he found there to Christianity. These later voyages were even more adventurous, violent, and ambiguous, but they revealed Columbus's uncanny sense of the sea, his mingled brilliance and delusion, and his superb navigational skills. In all these exploits he almost never lost a sailor. By their conclusion, however, Columbus was broken in body and spirit. If the first voyage illustrates the rewards of exploration, the latter voyages illustrate the tragic costs- political, moral, and economic. In rich detail Laurence Bergreen re-creates each of these adventures as well as the historical background of Columbus's celebrated, controversial career. Written from the participants' vivid perspectives, this breathtakingly dramatic account will be embraced by readers of Bergreen's previous biographies of Marco Polo and Magellan and by fans of Nathaniel Philbrick, Simon Winchester, and Tony Horwitz.

Book Information

File Size: 3176 KB

Print Length: 423 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; 1st edition (September 20, 2011)

Publication Date: September 20, 2011

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0052RDJ5Y

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #189,030 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #14

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Customer Reviews

Please note the four stars above signify I like the book. I'm not saying it is not a five star book. Prior to Lawrence Bergreen's new effort the best book on Christopher Columbus, as far as I'm concerned, has been "Christopher Columbus--Admiral of the Ocean Sea" by the late Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison of Harvard University. I did find myself reading through Dr. Morison's book on Columbus easier than Bergreen's new book on Columbus. Mr. Bergreen appears to have done considerable research in his book, but I did find myself being told in minute detail of every atrocity committed by Columbus and his men in their quest for the three goals: Gold, Glory, and God. Columbus and his Spaniards were first greeted as gods from the sky by the Tainos or Arawaks, but it wasn't long before violence raised its ugly head. Whereas Dr. Morison's book on Columbus casts a more favorable opinion on Columbus, author Bergreen exposes all the warts of Columbus and his men. Most people don't realize that Columbus made four trips to this new world, and not just the one that initially probably landed him on the island of San Salvador. It's interesting to note that Juan Ponce De Leon was one of those on the second trip. De Leon, as we know on a later voyage, landed on Florida. Columbus was cheated out of having this new world named after him by a scoundrel named Amerigo Vespucci. Read the book and find out how. Both Morison and Bergreen agree on this. Whatever you may think of Columbus he did believe he could reach the east by sailing west, and was willing to take the risk of crossing the ocean to get there. Had he not landed on land unknown to Europeans he and his men would have perished at sea, because their goal was thousands of miles beyond his estimation of the size of the earth. I am reminded of a poem written by Ogden Nash regarding Columbus that went like this: So Columbus said, Somebody show me the sunset And somebody did and he set sail for it. And he discovered America and they put him in jail for it. And the fetters gave him welts, And they named America after somebody else. As an armchair navigator you will enjoy this book, and it is worth your time. Expect a lot of detail which isn't bad if you are comfortable with this.

A Textbook Scorpio Christopher Columbus, the sailor from Genoa and son of a weaver, delivered half the world into the rapacious hands of a fledgling Christian Spain without ever knowing where he had been or what he had found. He died still thinking Cuba was a peninsula jutting outward from the subcontinent of India. He was intuitive, perceptive and persistent, a master of navigation, yet a

failure at his task, a poor leader often victim of scheming and rivalry. He was cruel and magnanimous, monumental and pitiful, a collector of books whose damaged eyesight denied him the full appreciation of their pages, whose greatest reading was in fact the surface of the sea, despite acute arthritis, gout and chronic conjunctivitis. In *Columbus: the Four Voyages 1492-1504*, by Laurence Bergreen, we follow the world's greatest seaman into the morass of political connivance, while he, and those who followed, systematically destroyed the world they had found, corrupted or annihilated its populations and flustered after elusive or nonexistent riches to reward two bewildered monarchs who never fully came to terms with the notion of a "New World" in "the other world" of their resourceful but ineffectual and seriously ailing "both mentally and physically" emissary. Bergreen gives us the product of diligent research and exhaustive culling of available resources, in a prosaic but readable style, peppered by only a few missteps. An "Hidalgo" refers not to a "gentleman", as the author proclaims, but rather a son succeeding the first-born "to whom his family's wealth and titles are destined" in other words the landless, trying to make their fortune by any means. An "escudero" is equally low in the ranks of privilege and refers to a "squire", who for lack of greater opportunity accompanies a man of title and position, wherever destiny may take them. As for the constructions effected by Nicolas de Ovando in his capacity as governor of Hispaniola, they are not stone, as the author describes, but rather blocks of coral cut from the surrounding reefs, and so are solid but porous, pocked with residual shells and other marine life, and are uniquely handsome. The text is generally favorable to "the Admiral of the Ocean Sea", fully aware of his skills and strengths, equally candid and perceptive regarding his idiosyncrasies and limitations. The book nonetheless often borders on harangue. No colonizer was ever bountiful and Spain was no exception, and was further nonplussed by the ambiguity of Columbus' discoveries. He had no idea where he was, less of where he was going, following as he did a hapless chimera he interpreted to be Marco Polo, and the Venetians' journeys to the realm of a "great Khan", by then defunct.

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