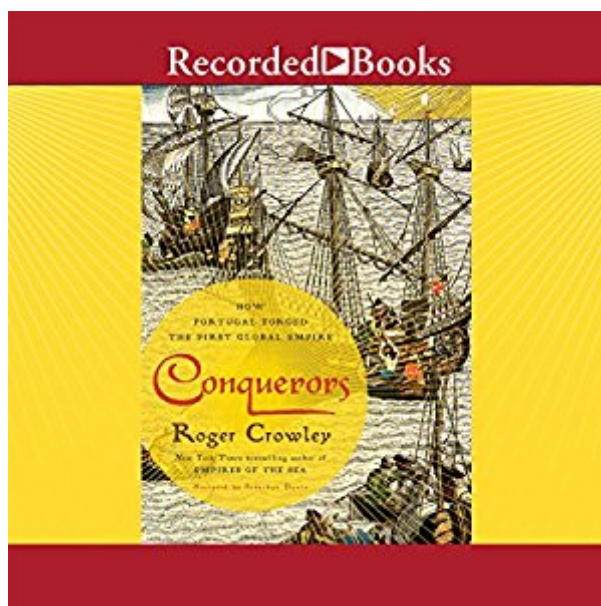


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Conquerors: How Portugal Forged The First Global Empire



Synopsis

As remarkable as Columbus and the conquistador expeditions but far more wide ranging, the dynamic burst of Portuguese voyaging at the start of the 16th century is one of the tipping points of world history: the moment that the world went global. Within a short time span, a tiny country whose population did not exceed a million created a maritime empire that stretched from Brazil to Nagasaki. *Conquerors* tells the almost forgotten story of how Portugal's navigators cracked the code of the Atlantic winds, launched the expedition of Vasco da Gama to India, and beat the Spanish to the spice kingdoms of the East - then set about creating the first long-range maritime empire. In an astonishing blitz of 30 years, a handful of visionary empire builders, with few resources but breathtaking ambition, attempted to seize the Indian Ocean, destroy Islam, and take control of world trade. This is history at its most vivid - an epic tale of navigation, trade and technology, money and religious zealotry, political diplomacy and espionage, sea battles and shipwrecks, endurance, courage, and terrifying brutality. Drawing on extensive firsthand accounts, it brings to life the exploits of an extraordinary band of conquerors - men such as Afonso de Albuquerque, the first European since Alexander the Great to found an Asian empire - who set in motion the forces of globalization. Portugal was the imperial pathfinder, the template for a wave of successors. Its empire connected the world and created a framework for profound interactions. It left a huge and long-lasting influence on the culture, food, flora, art, history, and languages of the globe. It marked the start of 500 years of domination by the West, which is only reversing now.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Portuguese maritime empire has been written about many times, but many of the histories are academic or just not much read. Crowley's book may remedy that, for two reasons. One, he has a large following from previous books and two, this is a rollicking, gory and fascinating tale. Warning: these Portuguese are wonderful soldiers but they are overbearing, and often vicious, in breaking into the Indian Ocean world almost like Vandals breaking into the Roman world. It's not really the Portuguese empire, which lasted until Goa was taken over by India in the 1960s. It tells the story of early Portuguese exploration, the first few ventures to India and then the book is largely concerned with the quite remarkable career of Afonso de Albuquerque, whose steely determination and ruthlessness (some of his method was simply inflicting terror) was primarily responsible for the consolidation of the empire. Albuquerque conquered Goa, Malacca and Ormuz, with Goa being most important. There's a lot of background information as well, on trade, navigating the monsoons, the effective rule of two Portuguese kings, the royal dream of destroying Islam and taking back Jerusalem, the accidental discovery of Brazil, the Egyptian Mamluks and more. Look at a map of the Red Sea, and see where Mecca and Medina are; the Portuguese knocked at the door of the Red Sea and threatened those holy cities. The Mamluks mounted a naval expedition to India, another quite remarkable story well told in this book. In the background, the gathering storm of the Ottomans ominously arises--they took Egypt just after the years in which this book closes (with Albuquerque's death), and would soon after prove to be powerful enemies, mounting naval challenges as far as India. Crowley has a gift for making the historical personage into a living character, even with all the warts and flaws. Albuquerque and his king come through quite powerfully, but so do dozens of more minor players. The Portuguese come through as ruthless, proud, judgment often clouded by honor, extremely formidable soldiers and extremely fractious, and sometimes quite murderous. Their most formidable enemies were Muslim, and the wars take on the characteristics of Crusade. Crowley also describes at length the arduous and often deadly voyages from Portugal to India and back--the ocean killed more Portuguese than the Muslims did. The men (mostly men) aboard ranged from aristocrats of ancient family to scum culled from jails. There are other situations. The horse trade from Ormuz to India, for example, or the Ethiopian emperor, about to be wiped out by Muslim forces from the Horn of Africa--that is a somewhat later story but a few hundred Portuguese stiffened the Ethiopians and helped them survive, a story I'd love to see Crowley undertake.

Clear, readable, thorough and, generally, makes the confusing comprehensible. Only two largish things bothered me. First, how did Afonso (sic) de Albuquerque come by his name when I

understood that Albuquerque is/was a Spanish, not Portuguese name? (We are actually constantly told it is "Alburquerque" with that extra "R". Crowley provided not a clue on this. It would seem to matter -- a bit at least -- to US readers. Second, Crowley is far too enthusiastic about the details of sea battles for my taste; he seems to relish the arcana of types of boats and their various out-fittings. It is a little like reading a description of a Scrabble game played in a foreign language. (Tip: just skip those parts; it never seemed to make one bit of difference.)

This is the first time I am reading a book that relates to the Portuguese "conquest" of India. When in school, I learned a great deal about Indian history, ancient-modern times -- but modern mostly included British and some French conquest information. Our history books barely mentioned Vasco da Gama (mostly the two-liner: "In 1498/Da Gama knocked at India's gate" and others who followed -- but I had never learned more than that -- the reason I bought the book. I am acquainted with the territory of Goa, and that coast and know that the Portuguese heritage exists even today. The book is well-written without being "erudite" -- which would have made it boring. I love that Roger Crowley blends in the belief systems of the time, even some tongue-in-cheek humor about these beliefs. His power of description is vivid, without being exaggerated. The book is easy to read and follow -- and the maps help too. I have enjoyed this book-- even though I don't count myself as a history "buff". Thanks Roger Crowley!

In *Conquerors: How Portugal Forged the First Global Empire*, Roger Crowley offers an epic history that will hold readers' attention while educating many of them. Admittedly the Portuguese efforts in Africa and around the Indian Ocean to build an empire aren't known to much of the English speaking world. There might be faint recognition of Vasco da Gama or even Bartolomeu Dias but much of this important epoch is simply not known. Crowley does an excellent job of offering a global history and how Portugal's efforts in the late 15th and early 16th centuries shaped the world we live in today. Relying on a good blend of primary and secondary sources, Crowley is able to tell his story by bringing in numerous perspectives. This is a lively and engaging narrative with sharp analysis covering an important topic. Highly recommended.

I read this book before, during, and after my trip to Portugal. It covers the explorations of Portugal during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This book gave me a great background on a part of history I never learned in school. And also the name of those great desserts, pastéis de Belem that I ate while there!

An excellent, popular history of the Portuguese exploration, conquest, and exploitation of the Indian Ocean region from 1498 to 1550. A well-written and enlightening work. Do not expect an academic history; this book is for the average, interested reader. All in all, a good read.

great book about a part of history that I had never dug into before regarding Portugal history in discovering the far east.

What an important, and almost unknown epic of history and discovery! And an incredibly prophetic vision of our contemporary world of East West conflict: religious, military, economic. It is also a fun read, written with the pacing and drama of a novel, while never losing its historic accuracy and perspective.

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