
 NEW TITLES

History

THE DIARIO OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS'S FIRST VOYAGE TO AMERICA 1492-1493. Abstracted by Fray Bartolome de las Casas, trans. by Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. Univ. of Okla. 504 pp. \$57.50

SPAIN AND ITS WORLD 1500-1700. By J. H. Elliott. Yale. 295 pp. \$27.50

We have grown accustomed to commemorating centennials and even bicentennials. But a cinquecentennial is something of a rarity—nearly as rare as discovering a *nuevo mundo* was in 1492. Among the profusion of books and exhibitions scheduled for 1992, this beautiful edition of Columbus's log of his 1492-93 journey has arrived early. Here is the ultimate travel adventure: Through its archaic prose, we witness again the frustration, the endless days without sight of land, Columbus's lies to his men about the distances, the insubordination of one of the captains, and the Spaniards' curiosity about the people they met.

To place Columbus's diary in its historical context, however, we need to turn to the collection of essays by the preeminent historian of early modern Spain, J. H. Elliott, now of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Elliott argues that the discovery of the New World undermined the Christian scholastic world-view as effectively as Galileo or Copernicus or even Protestantism had. The existence of unknown peoples on the Earth, Elliott notes, compelled Europeans to re-examine the old verities, including the very nature of man.

Although Elliott's essays range widely—from the mental world of Hernán Cortés to the nature of 17th-century revolutions—his preoccupation is with Spain's startling decline within a century after Columbus's discovery of the New World. It is this theme of decline that first attracted Elliott to Spanish history: As a student in England after World War II, he sus-



pected "that the collective predicament of the last great imperial generation of Spaniards . . . was not entirely dissimilar to the collective predicament of my own generation."

Elliott's explanation for Spain's decline is perhaps not unfamiliar: moral degeneration, the decay of rural communities, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the profligate few, competition from foreigners, and the loss of military vigor. More surprising is Elliott's depiction of how "economic decline and cultural achievement [walked] hand in hand." As the Spanish political empire outwardly decayed, Spain turned inward and flourished artistically, creating a "golden age" still visible in the paintings of Murillo and Velasquez. There may be a certain advantage to living in dreams of past glory, as is shown by the most famous, if fictional, citizen of early 17th-century Spain: Don Quixote de la Mancha.

AMERICA'S ROME. Volume One: Classical Rome; Volume Two: Catholic and Contemporary Rome. By William L. Vance. Yale. 454 pp; 498 pp. \$30 each

Rome is located not only on the Italian peninsula; it is also a city in the American imagina-