

Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. III): The Scientific Hypothesis

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A deficit of bravery currently seems to exist in the once-home-of-the-brave, as demonstrated by the unmitigated roughshod run over our history, society and institutions by the sinister axis of cultural majoritarians, comprised of radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists, and globalist elites. The recent, pandemic razing of statutes of American icons in an attempt at *damnatio memoriae*, for instance, began, only a few years ago with statues and memorials of Christopher Columbus, the progenitor of Western culture in the Americas and the first Founding Father.

In Philadelphia, the early-morning-hour vandalizations of both the Columbus statue in Marconi Plaza and the Columbus monument at Penn's Landing on Columbus Day 2018 were synchronous with a third, simultaneous, attack on the History of Italian Immigration Museum, thus proving that the message was more than merely anti-Columbus, but Italophobic at the very least and outright Europhobic at worst. Despite receiving a direct request to do so, the City refused to pursue the vandals, much less denounce the tripartite attack as a hate crime.

Acts of Columbus Day vandalism have persisted in the years since then, and the bigots who perpetrated them have always hidden behind the pretext that "Columbus didn't discover America" but rather supposedly "started the Atlantic slave trade." Not only is neither claim true, as will be demonstrated in this and the following article in this series, but the primary historical sources, which I have discussed in greater detail in my previous articles (and continue to cite below), demonstrate the exact opposite.

“ When the grief of the loss of his beloved wife finally passed, Columbus could tolerate a sedentary life no more. With his five-year-old son in tow, he pounded the proverbial pavements of Europe in search of a royal benefactor willing to fund his “enterprise” of a possible nautical expedition westward to find an all-water route to China. Such an endeavor, should it succeed, would revolutionize trade by creating an alternative to the lengthy and burdensome overland journey of the Silk Road.

Columbus discovered America in the sense that he brought to light to the rest of the world the existence of the American continents and the Asiatic colonists — known in the United States by the misnomer “**native** Americans” but more accurately described by our Canadian counterparts as the “First Nations” — who had arrived in the Americas via “ice bridges” formed in the Bering Strait during the Ice Age. This installment of the *Broad + Liberty* series of articles “Christopher Columbus, The Greatest Hero of the Fifteenth & Sixteenth Centuries (as Revealed by the Primary Historical Sources)” continues last week’s story of Columbus’s life, focusing on his formulation of his scientific hypothesis and his quest for funding of his great experiment, Columbus’s First Transatlantic Voyage to the Americas.

Last week’s article discussed Columbus’s humble birth to poor Genoan weavers; autodidactic efforts in studying the maps, charts, writings and scientific theories of countless scholars among the “Latins and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and many others of many other sects” (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 15); and early maritime adventures. It concluded with his marriage to Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, a Portuguese noblewoman who died giving birth to their son Diego. And there this article resumes, with the widowed single-father raising his motherless son alone in their new homestead in Portugal’s Madeira Archipelago, a thousand kilometers out in the Atlantic off the east coast of Europe.

Bankrupted by having had to provide his late wife with a funeral befitting a noblewoman, the lowborn Columbus turned again to his familiar comfort, the sea, yearning again to traverse its waves. He listened eagerly to the Portuguese sailors’ stories and legends of uncharted lands to the west. Columbus had been an early adopter of the theory of the new scientific school that the world was spherical and that but a short stretch of sea lay between Europe and “the Indies,” the medieval term for the lands comprising the Indian subcontinent through Southeast Asia (and today referred to, if a bit archaically, as the East Indies).

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Columbus’s own Genoans refused to consider sponsoring the expedition because the discovery of an all-water route to China would bring an end to their contested monopoly (with the Venetians) over the Mediterranean trade routes to the Silk Road. Columbus succeeded in soliciting the funding of the Crown of Portugal, but it was a ruse: King John II took all of Columbus’s maps and charts, delivered them to a fleet of his own, and had them leave without the Genoan master mariner. By the grace of Providence, however, the Portuguese fleet met a devastating storm, returning to port crippled and unseaworthy, thus alerting Columbus to the chicanery. He took his maps and charts and turned his back on Portugal.

Columbus remained undaunted by the selfish acts of the Genoan and Portuguese Imperialists in his search for capital to fund his scientific experiment. Still determined, he sent his brother Bartolomeo to England to solicit the patronage of King Henry VII and went himself to Spain, his last choice.

Spain had just unified three kingdoms — Aragon, Castile and León — rendering it the first European superpower. But the Crown of Spain initially rejected Columbus’s proposal, despite the backing of Columbus by the Cardinal of Spain, who had met him through Columbus’s landlord and been impressed by his “fair speech and learning” and “good intelligence and great knowledge.” Sixteenth Century historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviendo y Valdés recalls of Columbus, in his *General and Natural History of the Indies*, “his cloak was poor and ragged, [and] he was considered a dreamer” of “fantastic ideas” for which the Spanish royals had no time. They had a bigger concern: Spain had been occupied by murderous Jihadists for eight centuries.

Oviendo writes, “all the Moors in Spain ... had insulted and maltreated Christians since 720 A.D.” For so long had Spain been occupied by Moor slavers that the Spanish language itself — even high Castilian — is today but a pidgin of Latin and Arabic. With the newfound wealth of its three unified kingdoms, however, Spain was finally ready for a *reconquista*, a reconquering of its lands out from under the Jihadists’ near-millennium-long death grip on Europe. Though Columbus intrigued Queen Isabella with his hypothesis of an all-water route to Asia, the court scholars counseled the Crown to reject the proposal for these, more important matters.

Demonstrating the “unusual insight into human ... affairs” and “good judgment” that de las Casas described in his biographical sketch of the man in *Historia de las Indias* (Book I, 15), Columbus changed tacks. While in Spain, Columbus had personally witnessed the Spanish monarchs’ overthrow of the Moorish king, who exited the city gates of Andalusia and kissed their hands in submission as they raised their banners on the Alhambra. Later that month, Columbus suggested to the Spanish Crown an alliance with the “Great Khan” of China, who had made “frequent and vain applications to Rome for men learned in the holy faith who should instruct them in it.” Columbus suggested that the legendary military might of the Great Khan might help launch a two-front attack against the Jihadists, driving them out of Europe altogether and, perhaps even liberating Jerusalem from them for all of Christendom. Queen Isabella personally reconsidered, buoyed, no doubt, by the recent success of the Crown’s *reconquistada* of Grenada.

At the turn of the Twenty-first Century, Stanford University Professor Emeritus Carol Delaney left her tenured university position to dedicate a decade of her life to travel the world in the study of Columbus artifacts and become an unparalleled world-expert on Christopher Columbus. She details this particular angle of Columbus’s persuasion in her book *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (Free Press, July 17, 2012), a must-read for any Columbus historian.

De las Casas, in his Sixteenth-Century *Historia*, recalls that Queen Isabella summoned Columbus back to her Court after he had spent seven years of his life trying to persuade her and her husband. Despite continued discouragement from her advisors, she was swayed by his affability, and finally reconsidered the Crown’s original rejection of his proposal, finally accepting his request for patronage.

Christopher Columbus’s personality, not the plausibility of his plan, prompted the Queen to reconsider. If not for Christopher Columbus, the man, some other nation would have inevitably found the Americas — maybe even the murderous Jihadist slavers that Spain had just driven out of Europe, and Christopher Columbus would not have been present to be the pacifying force he was.

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Using funds from the royal treasury, Queen Isabella purchased from Don Luis de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli, the construction contract Columbus had cannily negotiated for the building of three ships: the *Niña* (its formal name being the *Santa Clara*), the *Pinta* (its formal name being lost to history) and the flagship *Santa María de la Inmaculada Concepción* (nicknamed the *Capitana*, the Captain-ship, or the *Gallega*, the Galician). Isabella personally saw to the completion of the vessels and provided Columbus with only half the “trifle” he requested in funding (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 25-34).

But with this half-a-trifle, Columbus had acquired all the capital he had needed for a bare-boned expedition. He was not motivated by greed. Rather, he was driven by a scientific thirst for the sea, that “eagerness to learn” with which de las Casas had characterized him in his *Historia* (Book I, 15).

And this is precisely why the sinister axis of cultural majoritarians, comprised of radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists, and globalist elites, hate Columbus; he was a capitalist, ahead of his time, who began the takedown of the Age of Empires. Apparently, the cultural majoritarians, who still cling to their megalomaniacal vision of monolithic, globalist domination, failed to learn any lesson from imperialism. They failed to learn the lesson from the Peace of Westphalia, negotiated by Catholics and other Christians, whom these same cultural majoritarians hate, that independent nationhood strikes the most effective balance between the chaos of tribalism and the oppression of global empires. As their ignorance of Christopher Columbus demonstrates, they have little interest in or regard for history.

Next week in *Broad + Liberty*, with the arrival of Columbus Day weekend, I will present the next installment in this series of the life and legacy of Christopher Columbus, based on the primary historical sources. It will detail his famous First Voyage to the New World, marking his discovery — in the sense of bringing to light to the rest of the world — of the Americas.

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