

How to conquer the world? Cartographical knowledge in an early colonialist context

Detlev Quintern

Abstract

The completion of the so called *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) went hand in hand with imperialist ambitions of the Spanish Catholic kings towards the wider world. Ceuta (Morocco) was occupied by Portugal in 1415, before Spain conquered the last Arabic-Islamic city of Granada in 1492. The conquest of Abya Yala—as indigenous people called the American continent—followed soon after the Reconquista in Europe which, accompanied by the enslavement of millions of Africans and the penetration of the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean, unhinged the world's balance. In Abya Yala the European *conquistadores* not only applied the same conduct of war and imposed the same racist purity of blood laws (*limpieza de sangre*) on the inhabitants as they had in Al-Andalus, they also applied knowledge—first and foremost gained from Arabic sources—to subjugate them. This holds true especially for cartographical and nautical sciences, which flourished for centuries in mainly Arabic-Islamic-shaped lands.

This paper will concentrate on such knowledge and outline Sino-Indo-Persian-Afro-Arabic sciences, which were conveyed to Europe in particular in Arabic and adopted in Spain and Portugal in 'early modern times'. These knowledges, as integrated into European discourses, then facilitated Western development and colonization.

Key words: transcontinental early imperialism, postcolonial history of science, universal history of cartography