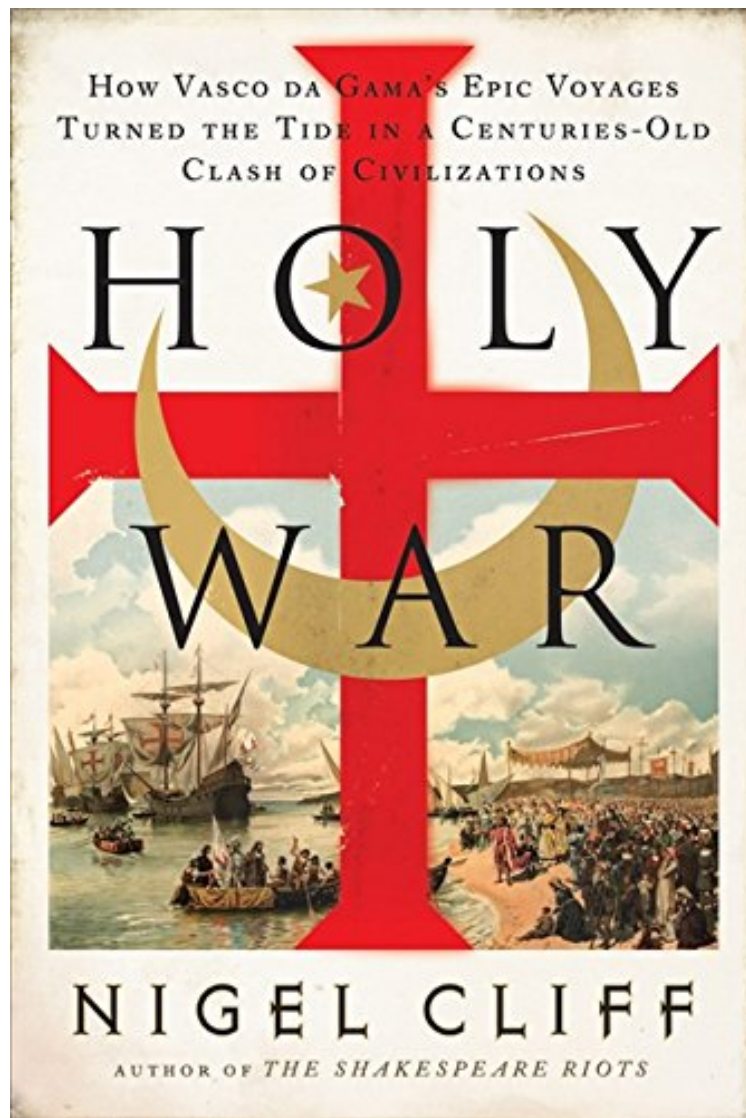


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Holy War: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations

Nigel Cliff

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Nigel Cliff : Holy War: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Holy War: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well done. By Glenn D. Robinson I learned a great deal about

Portugal and this time period that I just did not know too much about before hand. While most know about the Pope's split of the world between Portugal and Spain, Prince Henry the Navigator and the basics, I had not known much about the politics of Portugal, the true competition between Columbus and Da Gama and many more aspects of this period. On one hand "Holy War" seems wrong and the book did not support the title, but on the other hand, the book covers it well. The first voyage and desires were to spread Christianity in the purest of senses. The following voyages fell deeper and deeper into the quest for money and the forced baptism of all, with the frequent imprisonments or worse if the individuals did not submit. What also is well done here is the coverage of diplomacy of this period. England, France, the Ottoman Empire and many other states are covered in depth, which makes it a worthwhile read. The coverage of commerce, military and government structure is also covered with comparisons to Spain, Holland, England and more. I found this to be a very worthwhile book and felt that the author did a very good job. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Masterful, Big Picture History By Mark Mellon Although the goombah from Genoa's reputation has taken a fearsome shellacking in recent times, few Americans are unaware of Christopher Columbus and his voyage across the Atlantic to discover the New World. For better or worse, Columbus still looms large in the collective memory. What is lost to contemporary recall, however, is the fact that for some time after 1492, no great account was made in Europe of Columbus's achievements. He plainly hadn't found Asia, only some savages on the edge of the world with little or nothing to offer even as slave fodder. What Europe longed and lusted for was a way to the East Indies, to break the Ottomans' stranglehold on trade and gain access to spices like cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon, and cloves. This was done by Vasco Da Gama, a name unlikely to stir but the dimmest of junior high memories, the intrepid if merciless Portuguese who was the first to circumnavigate the African continent and the subject of Nigel Cliff's history. Rather than focus on Da Gama's narrow biographical details, Cliff seeks to give the reader a big picture perspective by prefacing his narrative with a broad brush history of the birth and growth of Islam and its centuries long clash with Christianity, with a particular focus on the Iberian Peninsula and the processes that led to the expulsion of the Moors and the emergence of modern Portugal and Spain. Despite these setbacks, Islam still remained strong in the form of the Ottoman Empire, which took full advantage of its control of the spice trade to gouge the hated Europeans. Cliff describes how the Crusader spirit and a desire to aggrandize their realm led Portuguese monarchs to send ships beyond the Pillars of Hercules out into the unknown Atlantic in search of treasure and a way to circumvent the infidels. This all leads naturally and gracefully to Da Gama's first voyage, a grueling ten month journey into terra incognita. Cliff intricately describes the journey's miserable rigors, at sea on uncharted waters on fragile, wooden craft propelled only by the wind, poorly designed and suited for the harsh conditions they endured; at the mercy of terrible storms especially around the ironically named Cape of Good Hope; and the starvation and scurvy crew and officers suffered with men dying like flies. It all adds up to what has to be one of the most awful ordeals at sea ever suffered by men, a trip that makes Columbus's voyages look like an outing in a rowboat at the pond in the city park on a sunny day. Cliff also gives a good, thorough account of Da Gama's activities once he reached India. Upon arrival, the Portuguese pitiful trade goods were mocked and they learned that the spices they sought were entirely tied up by Muslim merchants. Da Gama reacted in typical imperialist fashion by bombarding Indian coastal cities and with piratical raids upon Muslim ships with crew and passengers left to die on burning wrecks. A sidebar here. While I carry no brief on the man's behalf, I'm often puzzled by the modern proclivity to heap scorn and abuse on Columbus as if he were a particularly extreme example of a horrible person in history. Like any other human being, Columbus was a product of his time and place. Again, it's not meant as an excuse, but it should be remembered that he was a contemporary of the Borgias and Machiavelli, none of whom have gone down in history as being particularly nice. This holds true of his fellow explorer Da Gama. As far as any Muslim was concerned, even women and children, he was fully prepared to show no mercy. His treatment of Indians was ruthless as well, especially after the Portuguese figured out that they weren't really Christians as they originally supposed, but followers of another religion, Hinduism, about which they know nothing at all. Where Da Gama differed from other Portuguese explorers of his age was in his incorruptibility, his integrity (he showed absolute loyalty to his monarch), and his insistence on fidelity to duty from officers and men. For his accomplishments, he was richly rewarded only to die in harness on his last voyage to India. Cliff does an able job with his subject. His prose is modern, thorough, and easy to follow, although the details of 16th century Indian and European politics can be sometimes complex and confusing to follow. He takes an objective view of his subject, carefully evaluating Da Gama's strengths and weaknesses, and uses occasional flashes of humor to alleviate what is oftentimes a very grim chronicle indeed. I recommend this book highly to anyone interested in learning more about early modern history, exploration, sea voyages, and Muslim-Christian relations. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A compelling story of the Age of Discovery and events that left an indelible mark on history By Chuck Mann Holy War: How Vasco da Gama's Epic Voyages Turned the Tide in a Centuries-Old Clash of Civilizations, unsurprisingly, charts the story of the Portuguese explorer and his successful charting of a route to India around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. In some ways it's surprising how Columbus' 'discovery' of America so overshadowed this story, especially since both explorers set out in the same decade with the same end in mind, and only Vasco da Gama actually achieved the goal of reaching India and opening up trade routes for spices back to Europe. In another way, it makes sense why Gama's story is lesser known considering how Portugal's overseas empire

lasted relatively shortly and how the British and Dutch so thoroughly replaced the Iberians in most of Asia. Nigel Cliff's premise of the book is less about Vasco da Gama than the rationale for the Age of Discovery. Cliff deftly explains how the Crusades, the Reconquista (a crusade itself), Middle Eastern geopolitics and religious fervor seamlessly nurtured the Portuguese exploration of Africa and Asia. This message gets lost in the story of Columbus' voyage to the Caribbean. It's common knowledge that Columbus was sailing in search of trade routes for spices from Asia. What's lost is the religious, as opposed to purely economic, reasons for this journey and why Portugal and Spain took such a lead in trying to undercut Muslim merchants in Istanbul and Alexandria. Cliff begins his book with a short examination of Muslim history as a prelude to the century-long conflict over the Iberian Peninsula. The book begins to slow its pace in the middle of the fifteenth century as the Christian kingdoms begin to fully wrest power and tenuously cross over the Strait of Gibraltar and into modern-day Morocco. Cliff also delves into curious matters like the Medieval European preoccupation with a fabled eastern Christian king, Prester John, whom they believed would be waiting in Asia to unite and destroy the Muslim menace. The book covers, to me, an incredibly interesting story about a minor power whose influence waxed and then waned in the matter of several decades to be replaced by the more lasting empires of northern Europe. I love these types of histories, and Cliff writes a compelling and informative example.

Historian Nigel Cliff delivers a sweeping, radical reinterpretation of Vasco da Gama's pioneering voyages, revealing their significance as a decisive turning point in the struggle between Christianity and Islam—a series of events which forever altered the relationship between East and West. Perfect for readers of *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*, *Galileo's Daughter*, and *Atlantic*, this first-ever complete account of da Gama's voyages includes new information from the recently discovered diaries of his sailors and an extraordinary series of letters between da Gama and the Zamorin, a king of modern-day Kerala, India. Cliff, the author of *The Shakespeare Riots*, draws upon his own travels in da Gama's footsteps to add detail, authenticity, and a contemporary perspective to this riveting, one-of-a-kind historical epic.

Lively and ambitious... Cliff has a novelist's gift for depicting character... he brings 16th century Portugal in all its splendor and squalor pungently to life. (Eric Ormsby, *New York Times Book Review*) Epic... a compelling adventure tale, told by Cliff with the right mix of sweep and detail. (BookPage) Readers who enjoy a yeasty narrative by a skilled storyteller will mark this book as one of their favorites of the year. (Cleveland Plain Dealer) Nigel Cliff's *Holy War* is one of the most readable, engaging, and provoking books of the season, hands down... Cliff... writes with considerable energy, humor and narrative skill. (Kansas City Star) A fresh take on the history of the age of discovery... Cliff opens new vistas on much-explored territory. (Publishers Weekly) A useful addition to a continuing lively discussion of Christianity and Islam, situated both in respect of religions and culture, as well as empires and trade. (Kirkus) Cliff tells an often thrilling tale of adventure... He effectively restores the luster of da Gama's achievement and provocatively reassesses the goals and significance of his expedition. (Booklist) A story told with great flair and serious scholarship. (James Eckardt, *The Nation*) A stirring epic book a thrilling narrative This is broad-brush history, but it is accurate, and enlivened by splendid spots of color. (Sunday Times (London)) From the Back Cover A sweeping historical epic and a radical new interpretation of Vasco da Gama's groundbreaking voyages, seen as a turning point in the struggle between Christianity and Islam In 1498 a young captain sailed from Portugal, circumnavigated Africa, crossed the Indian Ocean, and discovered the sea route to the Indies and, with it, access to the fabled wealth of the East. It was the longest voyage known to history. The little ships were pushed beyond their limits, and their crews were racked by storms and devastated by disease. However, their greatest enemy was neither nature nor even the sheer dread of venturing into unknown worlds that existed on maps populated by coiled, toothy sea monsters. With bloodred Crusader crosses emblazoned on their sails, the explorers arrived in the heart of the Muslim East at a time when the old hostilities between Christianity and Islam had risen to a new level of intensity. In two voyages that spanned six years, Vasco da Gama would fight a running sea battle that would ultimately change the fate of three continents. An epic tale of spies, intrigue, and treachery; of bravado, brinkmanship, and confused and often comical collisions between cultures encountering one another for the first time; *Holy War* also offers a surprising new interpretation of the broad sweep of history. Identifying Vasco da Gama's arrival in the East as a turning point in the centuries-old struggle between Islam and Christianity one that continues to shape our world *Holy War* reveals the unexpected truth that both Vasco da Gama and his archrival, Christopher Columbus, set sail with the clear purpose of launching a Crusade whose objective was to reach the Indies; seize control of its markets in spices, silks, and precious gems from Muslim traders; and claim for Portugal or Spain, respectively, all the territories they discovered. Vasco da Gama triumphed in his mission and drew a dividing line between the Muslim and Christian eras of history what we in the West call the medieval and the modern ages. Now that the world is once again tipping back East, *Holy War* offers a key to understanding age-old religious and cultural rivalries resurgent today. About the Author Nigel Cliff is a historian, biographer, and translator. His first book, *The Shakespeare Riots*, was a finalist for the National Award for Arts Writing and was chosen as one of the *Washington Post's* best books of the year. His second book, *The Last Crusade*:

The Epic Voyages of Vasco daGama, was a New York Times Notable Book. His most recent book is a translation and edition of The Travels by Marco Polo. A former film and theater critic for the London Times and contributor to The Economist, he writes for a range of publications, including the New York Times Book .A Fellow of Harris Manchester College, Oxford, he lives in London.