

## *Columbus and the "Discovery" of the "New World"*

### **The depiction of Christopher Columbus in popular history magazines**

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#### The perspective of German textbooks on the topic "Columbus and the 'Discovery' of the 'New World'"

In order to analyse the way in which Columbus and the "great discovery" is portrayed in national magazines we will briefly explain the German perspective on this topic as presented in the German curriculum as well as in textbooks.

Columbus and the discovery of the sea route to America is conceived here, above all, as an integral component of the "transition" from the Middle Ages to modern times and is not, for instance, interpreted as the beginning of the European colonialism, which may be due to Germany's short tradition as a colonial power (1884-1918) and the corresponding lack of the history of colonialism in the German narrative.

Along with the invention of the printing press and the concomitant media revolution as well as humanism, renaissance and reformation, Columbus' "discovery of America" passes for a significant stepping stone on the way to modern times since it revolutionised the knowledge about the shape of the earth. The year 1492 is usually interpreted as a landmark and thereby as a "turning point" of world history. Columbus and his "discoveries" are marked as Europe's great historic achievements and as the beginning of the "rise of the west" without national appropriation.

The problems of Columbus' "discovery" are more often than not omitted: his achievements are mostly presented as a heroic act for which the time had come – even though the randomness of the "discovery" is not kept a secret it is also not presented in detail.

Furthermore, the "discovery of America" is not sufficiently historicised in the curriculum and in textbooks. The event appears to be the natural beginning of European dominance in the world (until 1918). Consequently, the wrong impression could easily be conveyed to students that Europe has always been the most important continent in world history. This Eurocentric perspective obscures the peripheral position of Europe within the transnational Eurasian network during the Middle Ages and does not consider it worthwhile to explain why it was Europe or European seafarers and not the inhabitants of other continents who discovered the sea route to America at the end of the middle ages.

In general, the indigenous perspective and the consequences for the indigenous population are taken into account in the curriculum and textbooks even though they are often illustrated merely in few sentences in the presentational part.

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