

*Idolatry and the Construction of the Spanish Empire*. Mina Soormally. Louisville, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781607328001.

Within the context of religious expansion, the Spanish Empire had to combat differing views of those they conquered. Idolatry, a word which saw revisions throughout the religious conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and the New World, maintained a major role in the conquering of other peoples and the construction of the Spanish Empire. In *Idolatry and the Construction of the Spanish Empire*, Mina Soormally analyzes and explores the role that the many forms idolatry played in conquering the Iberian Peninsula and the newly discovered Americas. Soormally does not construct her chapters in a chronological manner, but jumps back and forth through time discussing Spanish and European history from 711 until the death of Charles II in 1700. In doing so, the reader is able to understand easily the ways in which the Spanish Empire transferred their actions of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula to the religious conversion and domination of the New World. Within *Idolatry and the Construction of the Spanish Empire*, Soormally focuses on the theological conquest, the formation of “others,” and Indigenous perseverance in conjunction with the religious expansion of Catholicism. This serves to showcase the shifting roles idolatry had in the New World and the development of Spanish imperialism in the Iberian Peninsula. Her research connects European studies and the history of colonization, especially in the Americas, together to compose a transatlantic study of the changing religious definitions utilized to conquer others.

Soormally discusses the understanding of idolatry through the eyes of major religious figures such as Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam. Their definitions of idolatry focused on religious devotion without corruption and worship of idols. They claimed that Catholicism was idolatrous, as the religion requires the worshipping of art and idols. However, based off of Soormally’s exploration of idolatry, idolatry is defined differently based on who has the most

power or religious domination. When Spanish bishops first arrived in the Americas, they made attempts to understand Indigenous ways of life, traditions, and communities to allow the possibility of religious doctrine to spread—rather than spread religion by sword, the bishops spread religion by words. Soormally provides examples of the diffusion of religion by words with examining the mass baptisms and the use of theatrical dramas in both the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas. For instance, by using plays such as *La Conquista de Jerusalem*, Soormally discusses the idea of theatrics as a propaganda mechanism for religious indoctrination in the Americas, as well as a mass-baptism machine to use on Indigenous peoples. The Spanish Empire used the same tactics throughout the Iberian Peninsula in regards to Jewish people and Moors seeing or experiencing God in times of desperation. Soormally effectively shows how the Spanish Empire reused their Reconquista techniques on the Indigenous people in the New World by showing the theatrical parallels.

Not only are theatrics reviewed, but also the forms of religious repression, such as physical punishment to those who practiced their original spiritual beliefs in the New World. In one example, Soormally reviews a religious document which compares idolatrous practices to adultery committed by a wife in marriage, and as punishment to her breaking the sacred promise of marriage, the wife would be stoned. Lastly, Soormally analyzes the use of symbolism to enhance communal identity. For example, the Catholic Church created religious idols originating from an Indigenous spiritual center. The Virgin of Guadalupe appears to an Indigenous man, speaking Nahuatl, where a religious marker once stood. She instructed the man to inform the bishop of his discovery, which eventually resulted in the creation of a Catholic shrine. The Virgin of Guadalupe not only sparked a more personalized and local connection for the Indigenous people to Catholicism but also created a national identity. This same idolization

occurred in the Canary Islands with Virgin of Candelaria, serving as another example of the ways in which the Spanish Empire recycled their religious domination ploys.

Soormally cites a number of primary sources such as religious declarations, governmental declarations, as well as conversion theatrics throughout her four chapters. In Appendix D, she chronologically organizes events that happened in Spain and Europe, with another chronological timeline of New World events alongside. The chronological display of events and published literature shows the religious actions the Spanish Empire completed before, during, and after the discovery of the New World. It is important for the reader to see both timelines as a comparison of religious action and religious evangelicalism.

This book contributes to multiple fields of study as Soormally incorporates religious studies, transatlantic studies, European studies, and colonization into one piece of literature. She contributes to the study of religion by reviewing and discussing the evangelistic evolution which occurred from the time of conquering the Iberian Peninsula to the conquest of the Americas. The author contributes to transatlantic studies by uniting European history and the history of the colonies together to underpin the interconnectedness of religious and political development in the New World. *Idolatry and the Construction of the Spanish Empire* would be beneficial for those interested in religious history, but also for those wanting to learn more about the colonization process. The lack of chronological organization throughout the chapters makes reading this literature taxing but it is important for the reader to see the similarities between the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula and the religious conquest of the New World. The comprehensive research Soormally completed to create this transatlantic study is unique in that it underpins the transfer of religious conquering practices of one group of inferior people to another group in unexplored lands. This research is important for anyone studying transatlantic studies or the

conquest of the New World, and should be a required reading for upper-division history undergraduate students or for graduate students freshly diving into the study of Latin American history.

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