



Unknown Seas

Ronald Watkins

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The Portuguese led the way. Still today, landmarks, coastlines and currents around the world bear Portuguese names, and the oceans of the world are one vast watery grave for Portuguese seamen. The reward they bequeathed was an empire that stretched from China to Brazil, and included much of Africa and Southern Asia. The peak of their achievement was Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route to India, and therefore to unimaginable wealth. Yet the discoverers were not lured only by gold, precious stones and spices. They were driven to colonise, to enslave, to bring the certainty of their religion to the unconverted, even to outflank the Muslims and re-conquer Jerusalem. Reconstructing journeys from contemporary logs and papers, Ronald Watkins chronicles the lengths to which they went, pioneering uncertain technologies, even modifying their ships en route to the Indies. This absorbing and wonderfully vivid account brings to life the captains driving their small ships over the horizon; and the far-off, not always friendly traders they met. He depicts the lives of the ordinary sailors, rarely seen, who suffered for trade, religion and imperial power and who forced European rivals to concede that only the Portuguese could find India.

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