

Companion to Music in the Age of the Catholic Monarchs

Edited by

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BRILL

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Musical Cultures in the Reinos de Indias at the Time of Isabel and Ferdinand

Javier Marín López

As [the indigenous peoples] were very friendly towards us..., I gave some of them scarlet hats and some glass beads which they put round their necks ... and they brought us parrots and balls of cotton thread and spears, and many other things, and we exchanged them for other things, such as small glass beads and bells.

DIARIO DE A BORDO, 12 October 1492¹



This account from Christopher Columbus's *Diario de a bordo* represents his first response on reaching the Guanahani island, renamed San Salvador (now part of the Bahamas), on 12 October 1492, after several weeks of a hazardous and uncertain journey across the Atlantic. Having taken possession of the island in the name of the Catholic Monarchs, and given the impossibility of communicating with the Taino Indians, Columbus and his company relied on the exchange of artefacts by way of peace offerings. The presence of bells (*cascabeles*)—constantly used as an object for exchange—is significant, symbolizing the importance of sound, and more specifically music, in the process of encounter with a world that was as new and unknown for the Spanish as they were for the indigenous peoples. This first moment of contact depicts one of the defining characteristics of the 'kingdoms of the Indies' (Reinos de Indias) throughout their existence: the interaction of different ethnic groups and cultures that resulted in the rise of distinctive *mestizo* musical traditions, both in terms of art and popular music.

* Translated by Tess Knighton.

1 Cabrera Silvera 2013: 149: 'Yo porque [los indígenas] nos tuviesen mucha amistad ... les di a algunos de ellos unos bonetes colorados y unas cuentas de vidrio que ponían al pescuezo ... y nos traían papagayos e hilo de algodón en ovillos y azagayas y otras muchas cosas, y nos las trocaban por otras que nos les dábamos, como cuentecillas de vidrio y cascabeles'.