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A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640

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In a seminal article on Portuguese merchants published 35 years ago (1), David Grant Smith suggested (on p. 247) that emigrants from Madeira ?constituted a sort of gentile Diaspora?, highlighting how family ties and friendships originating on this small Portuguese Atlantic island ?endured and formed the basis for a network of commercial relationships?. Studnicki-Gizbert's book *A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea* (developed from his 2001 doctoral dissertation (2)) extends the concept of a diaspora to the thousands of Portuguese who migrated across the Atlantic and infiltrated and settled in Spain and its American empire over the course of the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. Whilst in terms of numbers maritime workers apparently headed this diaspora (pp. 42, 61, and 193, note 3, which indicates they represented some 45 percent of the 451 individuals whose occupations were specified in the data set compiled for this study), Studnicki-Gizbert focuses on the Portuguese merchant community in Spanish America who engaged in the Atlantic trade. The author adopts a prosopographical approach to explore the interplay of social relations and economic activities in the development and operation of transatlantic and regional Portuguese trading networks that spanned the Atlantic world, linking Spanish America, Brazil, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Chapter one plots the origins and growth of the relationship between the expatriate Portuguese 'Nation' and the Spanish Habsburg monarchy's American empire. Chapter two traces the modes and characteristics of

Portuguese migratory movements to, and settlement in, Spain and Spanish America, and reveals the operation of interpersonal relations and the key role they played at all levels. Two central chapters (three and four) provide a fascinating insight into the role of social and business ties in creating and holding together an extensive interdependent transnational network of Portuguese trading houses, formed around numerous individual ? and often interrelated ? merchant families. Chapter five provides an analysis of contemporary published and unpublished treatises on trade relating to the Portuguese and commerce. Chapter six explores the cause and nature of the tensions and opposition to the Portuguese penetration of the American and Spanish markets in the first four decades of the 17th century, and in particular the persecution of New Christian (that is, descended from converted Jews) merchants in Spanish America prior to the 1640 revolt of Portugal. The epilogue offers a short summary of how the relationship ruptured and underwent reconfiguration following the *de facto* secession of Portugal from the Habsburg monarchy in December 1640.

This is a very useful socio-economic study of Portuguese commercial networks that spanned the Atlantic from Iberia to Spanish America. In spite of the broad chronology suggested by its title, the book?s main focus ? and its greatest value for scholars ? is the structure and operation of networks involving a number of Portuguese New Christian merchants in the late 1620s and 30s. Like a handful of scholars before who have pieced together details of the commercial transactions and trading networks of Portuguese merchants and merchant-bankers (3), Studnicki-Gizbert has mined four rich ? and still grossly under-used ? deposits of records of the Spanish Inquisition located in Lima (Peru), Mexico City, Madrid and Lisbon.(4) They contain priceless material relating to an individual?s business transactions and personal correspondence that have rarely, if ever, survived in Spain and Portugal for this period, other than for the nobility. The core of Studnicki-Gizbert?s source material is the correspondence, accounts and other commercial papers of a dozen or so merchants that were seized at the time of their arrest by the Inquisition. Added to this are inventories of the estates of several merchants that were confiscated by the Holy Office. Using the information contained in the accounts and correspondence of over a dozen merchants, and that drawn from a compilation of some 595 transactions of a single merchant based in Cartagena de Indias (New Granada) between 1624 and 1635, Studnicki-Gizbert assembled data sets that enabled him to partially plot the Portuguese commercial network spanning the Atlantic around 1630 (vividly represented in figure 4.2, p. 103). Similarly, a striking representation of the commercial networks of an individual merchant based in Lima, Manuel Bautista Perez, was created through an analysis of his commercial papers for 1618?1635 (see figure 4.1, p. 99).

Unfortunately, Studnicki-Gizbert has not maintained the scholarly rigour that marked out those earlier studies. The lapses are quite wide-ranging. First, a few ?picky? points, some of which should have been addressed by the copy editor: several footnotes lack specific page references where ordinarily these would be expected; the index is quite poor, especially in terms of omitting numerous merchants from the listing, or all the citations for those who are included; and it would have been helpful if the author had compiled genealogies for the merchants who figure regularly in this study. (It might also have allowed the author to identify apparent confusions over the identity of some of the individuals he mentions, e.g. p. 83, Doña Guiomar de Brito, the older sister of Sebastian Duarte, who would appear to be the same Guiomar Lopez about whom Duarte Rodriguez de Leon ? Sebastian?s brother ? was worried.) In relation to the merchants and their families who figure prominently (e.g. Manuel Bautista Pérez and his family, together with his brother-in-law Sebastian Duarte and his family), Studnicki-Gizbert could have filled out their biographies further: a simple check of secondary sources (for e.g., the indices of Boyajian, Braudel (5) and careful reading of Cross?s article (6)) could have provided additional information about their movements and business interests and activities and, in the case of Pérez, an assessment of his fortune (half a million pesos) in 1635.

There is some evidence of limited language competence in Spanish and Portuguese (e.g. p. 5 ?La Nação?, and pp. 52 and 110, where ?swarming? would seem a more apt translation than ?boiling?), alongside a lack of familiarity with Portuguese names. Names are mostly ?castilianized? in relation to spelling and the use of accents, but they have not been standardized ? sometimes not even for the same individual (e.g. pp. 111 and 197, Simón Váez de Sevilla/Simon Baez de Sevilla ? surely one for the copy editor!). More serious, a lack of familiarity with place names in Portugal, coupled with defective geographic knowledge ? e.g. pp. 53?5,

where Sarzedas (not Carcedas, as stated) and Castelo Branco are mistakenly located in Alentejo, instead of the province of Beira; and p. 49 where the author appears to think that ?La Raya? refers only to the Alentejo, rather than to any borderland area ? actually cast doubt on the reliability of the author?s analysis of the provenance of migrants in his data set ?Portuguese migrants to the Indies? (see p. 194, note 34, where 114 individuals of the total 561 whose provenance is known are said to hail from the Alentejo; also p. 199, note 20, which places more than 20 individuals in the sample from Castelho Branco in the Alentejo). Regrettably the migrant data set is not reproduced in the book.

At times the author appears too ready to take his sources at face value, without questioning their reliability. For example, while Israel justifiably declares that a claim by a Spanish official that ?there were more Portuguese than Castillians? in Veracruz (Mexico) is surely a wild exaggeration (7), Studnicki-Gizbert confidently repeats the assertion of its governor that ?? in Puerto Rico [the Portuguese Nation] came to outnumber the Castilians? (p. 26). Rather worrying for the unwary reader is the unsatisfactory representation of background historical events (particularly in the Epilogue), and some factual errors (e.g. p. 23, where João II is referred to as King Manuel?s father). The omission of the relevant volumes of J. Verissímo Serrão?s invaluable *História de Portugal* (8), and sparse use ? a single citation! ? in the epilogue of R. Valladares?s superb *La Rebelión de Portugal. Guerra, Conflicto, y Poderes en la Monarquía Hispánica, 1640?1680* (9), can perhaps explain these infelicities.

A major concern, however, is the indiscriminate use and recurring confusion over who constituted the ?Nation? ? at times it is the entire Portuguese expatriate community on both sides of the Atlantic (though rather bizarrely for a study that focusses on the Atlantic, not migrants to Portuguese Brazil), then it those in Spanish America, then merchants in general, then, more specifically still, merchants of New Christian origin. Such lapses, along with the insistence throughout that the Portuguese expatriate communities and their families were a ?special? case, suggest the author?s rather limited familiarity with an early modern ?society of orders?, and his failure to make full use of the Portuguese and Spanish sources and literature on identity that he cites in the bibliography.

Nevertheless, Studnicki-Gizbert?s fascinating detail of the structure and operation of the Portuguese commercial networks, and examination of the domestic foundations of expatriate Portuguese trading communities on both sides of the Atlantic, admirably complement the findings of the earlier studies of Boyajian, Smith, and Hordes (10), and the articles of Hordes, Israel, and Cross.(11) To its credit, this book significantly expands our knowledge of Portuguese New Christian merchants and their trading networks in the Atlantic world in the 1620s and 30s. For this reason, it will provide rich pickings, not just for scholars of early modern Iberia, but also for social and economic historians of early modern Europe.

Author response pending.

Notes

1. D. G. Smith, ?Old Christian merchants and the foundation of the Brazil Company, 1649?, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 54 (1974), 233-59.Back to (1)
2. D. Studnicki-Gizbert, ?Capital?s commonwealth: the world of Portugal?s Atlantic merchants and the struggle over the nature of commerce in the Spanish empire, 1492-1640? (PhD, Yale, 2001). Back to (2)
3. Notably, James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Bankers at the Court of Spain, 1626?1650*, (Brunswick, NJ, 1983), and two unpublished PhD theses by David Grant Smith, ?The mercantile class of Portugal and Brazil in the seventeenth century: a socio-economic study of the merchants of Lisbon and Bahia, 1620?1690? (PhD, University of Texas, 1975) and Stanley M. Hordes, ?The crypto-Jewish community of New Spain, 1620?1649: a collective biography? (PhD, Tulane University, 1980).Back to (3)
4. Namely, the Archivo General de la Nación, Lima; Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City; Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid; and (according to the sources cited for figure 4.2 on p. 103) the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon.Back to (4)

5. F. Braudel, *Civilization & Capitalism 15th?18th Century, II: The Wheels of Commerce* (London, 1982), pp. 161 and 618, note 84.Back to (5)
6. H. E. Cross, ?Commerce and orthodoxy: a Spanish response to Portuguese commercial penetration in the Viceroyalty of Peru, 1580?1640?, *The Americas*, 35 (2) (1978), 151?67, at 154?5..Back to (6)
7. J. I. Israel, ?The Portuguese in seventeenth-century Mexico?, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, 11 (1974), 2-32, reproduced (and the version cited herein) in J. I. Israel, *Empires and Entrepots. The Dutch, the Spanish Monarchy and the Jews, 1585?1713* (London, 1990), pp. 311?31, at p. 318. . Back to (7)
8. In particular, vol. 2, *A Formação do estado moderno (1415?1495)* and vol. 3, *O Século de Ouro (1495?1580)* (Póvoa de Varzim, 1980); vol. 4, *Governo dos Reis Espanhóis (1580?1640)* (Póvoa de Varzim, 1979); and vol. 5, *A Restauração e a Monarquia Absoluta (1640?1750)* (Póvoa de Varzim, 1980).Back to (8)
9. R. Valladares?s superb *La Rebelión de Portugal. Guerra, Conflicto, y Poderes en la Monarquía Hispánica, 1640?1680* (Valladolid, 1998).Back to (9)
10. See note 3 above.Back to (10)
11. S. M. Hordes, ?The Inquisition as economic and politcal agent: the campaign of the Mexican Holy Office against the crypto-Jews in the mid-seventeenth century?, *The Americas*, 39 (1) (1982), 23?38; Israel, *op. cit.*; and Cross, *op. cit*.Back to (11)

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