

Empires: Concepts and New Research on the Hispanic world, 16th - 18th centuries

In the context of Global History, the discovery and opening of new maritime trade routes has been an important topic for research when revealing and analysing the main factors which contributed to the impact which certain trade routes came to have in terms of the processes of regional and global interaction. Research into the Iberian empires (Spain and Portugal) has highlighted that, although these empires have been regarded as secondary in relation to the attention other merchant nations have attracted, their Atlantic expansion was one of the most important achievements in world history. As for the Spanish empire, the study of its Atlantic commercial system has only been addressed recently from an Atlantic Historiography perspective (Martínez Shaw and Oliva Melgar, 2005; Bustos Rodríguez, 2005). However, new research lines are being opened into the Hispanic presence in the Atlantic world which are oriented chiefly towards an analysis of the transnational flow of ideas coming from Spain to France and England, albeit from an American perspective. But there are still a number of questions that remain to be answered in relation to how the Spanish Atlantic system worked and what was its real influence, if any, on the progress in the regional integration of the Atlantic economies, spatial networks, maritime routes and institutions, and if it really had an impact on how the spatial logistics in the other *Merchant Empires* were organised.

The Hispanic expansion developed and was built around a licence-based trading system which was overseen and inspected by the Crown of Castile although privately run, and which delimited a number of production areas and markets in Spain as well as in the Spanish overseas territories. And this spatial structure thus created was, perhaps, what mostly influenced the logistics that the other mercantile empires established when it came to developing their own respective expansions.

What was described as Hispanic Monarchy was in fact a combined empire that became the major actor in the first global, maritime expansion together with the kingdom of Portugal, with which it was politically united between 1580 and 1640. Before and during this period, both political entities enriched one another, and the Hispano-Portuguese cooperative networks expanded all over the planet. New research has recently been conducted into the impact of the maritime routes opened by both empires, both from a spatial dimension perspective and from the density reached by the transnational merchant networks operating around these trading routes and in which a number of mercantile colonies from many nationalities were involved (Crespo Solana, 2010; Crespo Solana & Alonso García, 2012; Mukherjee, 2011 and 2013; Crespo Solana, 2014). In fact, these research works are beginning

to produce, owing to their innovative character, important results even though new visions are still to be cast on what globality meant to Hispano-Portuguese expansion.

This piece of work is yet another result of cooperation among experts on this matter with the objective of offering a much more coherent vision of the institutional and socio-economic entity called the Hispanic World in the Early Modern Era. Far from a nationalist perspective, this approach is intent on analysing the impact of this expansion. To that effect, purely conceptual issues are being studied, such as social and economic ones, with an emphasis on the analysis of spatial networks in maritime trade.

One of the most important chapters to read when trying to understand the complexity of the connections makes reference to the role played by the trade communities of different nationalities based in various urban centres linked to the Atlantic economy, both in Europe and in America, along with large trading companies in Asia and Africa. Historiography has also highlighted the importance and features of these merchant communities and how they worked and were structured around this system of global interactions, by establishing a close relationship between the phenomena of migration, the formation of trading companies and the evolution and integration of the various socio-cultural and economic areas. Furthermore, it has been possible to create a theoretical model for the study of trade communities and their impact on the evolution of these companies, as well as their influence on political and diplomatic relations between modern states. These studies have evolved from traditional macro-economic works (Chaunu, 1955-60; García-Baquero, 1976) to analyses of European trading companies in the colonial world or the Spanish trade with America (Bustos Rodríguez, 2005; Crespo Solana, 2010).

The aim of this set of papers is to offer the reader a first approach to the impact of the Iberian empires at various levels. This is a first volume that will be complemented with a second set of essays which will be featured in a future volume of this journal. Two central issues are being analysed. On the one hand, emphasis is laid on the conceptual aspects related to the empire's implicit nature as applied to the Hispanic case. This is, undoubtedly, a major advance since the Iberian empires have been sidelined historiographically in their conceptualisation within the framework of the Atlantic and Global History—save very few exceptions (Pagden, 1995; Cardim et al, 2012; Pietschmann, 2013). On the other hand, most of these articles analyse issues related to the creation of space through social and economic networks. These texts study, from various perspectives, how networks are created as well as their impact on the social, cultural and economic,

in various periods marked by “events” that determined the construction of the Ibero-Atlantic space.

The first paper, by Horst Pietschmann and Christian Hausser, provides a very much needed historiographical reflexion on the concept of empire as applied to Portugal and Spain and introduces a comparative vision between them. The article studies the more recent historiography about the Spanish and Portuguese empires. It identifies several types of interpretations and the use of ‘empire’ as a concept in different contexts, academic traditions and epochs. In doing so, it points to the achievements made and to the gaps that still exist, especially in the context of Renaissance Humanism. It is the article’s goal to facilitate a dialogue between academics about a topic that in the last decade or so has revealed crucial for the study of Ibero-American as well as for European history.

A new challenge is ahead of us: to set out new research initiatives applied to a parallel, comparative study of merchant networks as actors in a) the processes of spatial-geographic integration; b) the social and economic relation among the various interconnected areas; and c) the evolution and function of those areas in relation to each specific spatiotemporal delimitation. The “World Connected History” is rising to face up to these new conceptual and methodological challenges, and this requires the use of new communication technologies in the new age of “Digital Humanities” (Owens, 2007; Crespo Solana, 2013). This approach focuses on the study of problems deriving from spatiotemporal representation and the analysis of networks and routes of great geographical, historical and cartographical importance, as previously claimed by Fernand Braudel, but it would not be possible to carry this out without the help of new technologies which will doubtlessly complement and enrich the work of specialists in European expansion and global trade between the 16th and 19th centuries. Renate Pieper follows with an essay on the relations between the name “America” and the German commercial networks involved in Portuguese trade, and offers very valuable information on the extent of the exchange of geographic and cartographic knowledge as it boosted since its inception the interests of the political elites in the empires’ maritime expansion.

The following essay, by Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw, offers an extraordinary narrative of the processes describing the Iberian expansion in the South Pacific as early as the 16th century when globalisation grew, thanks to the “discovery” of America, from an already existing process into an oceanic expansion as it had never been seen before. This paper deals with the analysis of the globalisation of a route spanning between three continents. The axis running from Seville (later Cadiz) to Veracruz, Mexico City and Acapulco to Manila, as it flowed both ways, served as a permanent route for the exchange of precious metals and exotic products. This was the first global route ever in History. To a large extent, the expansion into the Pacific was encouraged by Hispano-Portuguese cooperation and competition in their territories. In relation to this, the paper written by José Antonio

Martínez Torres delivers a perspective on the connections in the colonial territories in Asia during the Iberian Union. The piece of work by Regina Grafe offers an important approach to interconnection and the always difficult to discern thin line between institutions and networks. Finally, Ana Crespo Solana, this volume’s coordinator, offers a historiographical reflexion on how networks and institutions evolved as a result of the Treaties of Utrecht. Networks fuelled interconnection systems and also fashioned institutions. This is but one more contribution from the writer of these pages, as she conducts a complementary study of the recent works delving into the evolution and impact of these networks from a perspective based on the Complex Systems Theory (Crespo Solana & Alonso García, 2012; Crespo Solana, 2014).

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