José Luis Gasch-Tomás, *The Atlantic World and the Manila Galleons: Circulation, Market, and Consumption of Asian Goods in the Spanish Empire*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2019. 258 pp. (Cloth €125.00)

José Luis Gasch-Tomás articulates ambitious goals in this book's introduction—to contribute to historiography on the Atlantic by focusing on the region's connections to the Pacific Ocean; to show how Spanish merchants fostered trade across both oceans; and to explain why the Manila Galleon shipping route (Manila to Acapulco) surpassed the Cape route (Goa to Lisbon) as the primary transport channel of Asian goods to Europe. Many scholars have examined these same topics, from William Schurz's *The Manila Galleon* (1939) to Serge Gruzinski's *Las cuatro partes del mundo* (2010). Studies that employ the vast geographical scope of two oceans and the analytical framework of global trade have tended to suffer analytically. It is understandably difficult to parse out historical explanations for events and processes that took place in extremely varied local contexts, and to account for change over a span of generations, and Gasch-Tomás is partially aware of these pitfalls. He begins the introduction by framing the study in broad brushstrokes about global trade and Atlantic-Pacific connections via the Manila Galleon over 250 years, but ends with an explanation that the book offers a focused analysis of consumption patterns in Mexico City and Seville (1570s–1630s). His examination of this discrete topic—the cultural tastes of people who purchased goods from China and Japan—is based on an analysis of wills and testaments, account books, personal letters, and more. An appendix provides details on the book's primary sources.

The introduction contains a short overview of Manila, Mexico City, and Seville—locations of the commercial activity sketched out in the book—that conflates information about the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Chapters 2 and 3 reveal three problematic patterns in the book overall: an overreliance on historiographical discussions to frame limited primary source analysis; a stilted organization strained by overly long chapters with unrelated sections; and an argumentative structure that makes greater claims than the evidence supports.

Chapter 2 is vaguely about “Asian goods” becoming “Asian commodities in the Spanish Empire” (p. 27). The first section focuses on commercial agents who acquired objects in Manila at the request of buyers in Mexico and Spain. Gasch-Tomás (following Martha Howell) characterizes this activity as a western European practice of gift-giving that transferred wealth and fostered social and familial bonds. Another short section discusses the inventories of a small sample of rich merchants and peddlers who sold Asian goods in Mexico City. Contemporaries such as Bernardo de Balbuena and numerous historians have

long confirmed that buyers in Mexico City had access to an astonishing variety of goods from Asia; this chapter corroborates historical fact with piecemeal examples.

Chapter 3 posits that the volume of trade across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans grew from the 1580s to the 1630s and decreased afterwards in a connected manner. This claim follows an outdated Eurocentric argument maintaining that Spain experienced an economic “crisis” in the seventeenth century that shaped global commerce. Herbert Klein and others have repeatedly shown that there is no quantitative evidence for this assertion. The viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru enjoyed relative economic stability throughout the period in question. There, merchants and officials fostered local production and trade across the Americas and the Pacific and thus avoided the economic problems that plagued Habsburg Spain. Gasch-Tomás ignores this scholarship. Instead, he mainly employs customs data published in the 1960s by Pierre and Huguette Chaunu to repeat the claim that the actions of Seville merchants and Habsburg monarchs brought about a “rise and fall” of transoceanic commerce (that is, that an economic depression in Iberia instigated economic decline in the Americas and impinged on transpacific trade). Chapter 4 follows the sources and arguments of Louisa Hoberman’s 1991 monograph on silver merchants and the work of Guillermina del Valle Pavón.

Chapters 5 and 6 address the “consumption” part of the book’s title, arguing that Asian goods transported on the Manila Galleon to Mexico (and then to Spain on the West Indies Fleet) shaped consumer tastes in the “Spanish Empire.” Rich men in Mexico City and Seville are said to have liked different clothes, and their preferences were based on diverging tastes related to local cultural contexts. Scholars not cited in the book such as Elizabeth Leffeldt and Meha Priyadarshini have published on the topic of consumption and self-fashioning in more fruitful ways.

The “Atlantic World” of this book has no Caribbean, and its capital is Seville; the workings of the Manila Galleon are vague; and central Mexico stands in for the “Spanish Empire.” The title, in other words, does not match the contents. Patient readers concerned with the movement of goods from Manila to Mexico City to Seville will find parts of this book of interest.

Tatiana Seijas

History Department, Rutgers University

tatiana.seijas@rutgers.edu