In 1589, Gioliti’s printing press in Venice published for the first time the work *Della Ragion di Stato*, a treatise written by the Piamontese thinker Giovanni Botero. It is possible that its author never suspected the notorious repercussions that the work would have in Spain, where it went through six editions in Castilian during the first 36 years after the publishing of the *editio princeps*. This text, with a structure consisting of ten brilliant and precise chapters, greatly impressed two generations of Spaniards who had been born under the reigns of Philip II and Philip III. In it, the author made clear how controlling the seas and maintaining coastal defences was crucial for the political strategy of a Christian prince. In the opening chapter of the same work, Botero wondered “Whether compact or dispersed states are more lasting”. The question was not unsubstantial for the Spanish Monarchy, which had incorporated the scattered and vulnerable Portuguese colonies in the African and Asian continents almost a decade before. This giant with feet of clay which was the Spanish Empire was soon the object of several attacks on the coasts of the Atlantic and Indian oceans by the sailors of the *East India Company* (EIC) and the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC).

The ideas of the Count-Duke of Olivares were probably influenced not only by the frail political and financial situation of Spain at the time, but also by the abundant “warnings” concerning maritime affairs addressed to the Crown by experienced councillors and by the reflections made by Giovanni Botero in *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589) as well as in other works of his such as *Delle cause della grandeza e magnificiencia delle cità* (1588) or *Relazioni Universali* (1595). In 1621, Olivares conceived his famous Union of Arms, which intended that all the kingdoms which made up the “composite monarchy” of the Spanish Habsburgs would contribute to its defence and that this task would not be left to Castile alone. Evidence of this is provided by the example of the now-disappeared library of the high tower of the Alcazar of Madrid in which several of Botero’s main works could be found. Other ministers, such as Luis de Haro, a nephew of Olivares, or able state and war secretaries like Martín de Aróztegui were also mesmerised by the reflections of the Italian thinker. The readers of Botero’s works, which were also abundant in Portugal and its empire, could

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1 Cf., Carlos Martínez Shaw and José Antonio Martínez Torres (eds.), *España y Portugal en el Mundo* (Madrid: Polifemo, 2014).
also find among their pages one famous apothegm: “Him who is the lord of the seas will also be the lord of the land”. Similar ideas can be found in Xenophon’s works and in a series of Spanish treatises on the matter which are still widely unknown and which emerged as a response to the truces that Spain signed with England (1604) and the Dutch Republic (1609–21).2

The purpose of the words above was to settle down that the relationship between naval power and state modernisation – the central subjects treated in Iván Valdez-Bubnov’s work – is extremely important both to political and intellectual history as well as to socioeconomic history, nowadays less practised than the former. The link between the ambition to govern and control the seas and oceans and the rise and fall of empires has always been a recurring theme in the historiographical debate from Antiquity until our days. In our times, historians devoted to what has been called world history, have revisited the hypothesis put forward in the now dated but still solid works about European expansion written in the mid-twentieth century. The work of Valdez-Bubnov, who is a researcher in the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas of Mexico, could not have been timelier, becoming the last addition to the methodological revisionism undergone by studies in this field over the last few decades. At the same time, the author cleverly integrates the substantial findings in maritime issues made by British and American historians such as Carla Rahn Philis and David Goodman with those made by Spanish historians such as José Luis Casado Soto and Pablo Emilio Pérez Mallaina. The primary sources consulted, including material unknown until now kept at the Spanish archives of Simancas (Valladolid) and Indias (Seville), strongly support a well-written and edited work.

The aim of this work is twofold. First, the author presents an analysis of the close connection existing between the development of naval technologies and the strategic needs of the Spanish maritime system between the mid-sixteenth and the end of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the work tries to elucidate the impact of naval construction in the processes which influenced

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2 A notable example of these is the work of Flemish Jesuit Nicolaus Bonaert, Minos sive mare tutum (1610). In anticipation to the portuguese Serafim de Freitas (De Iusto Imperio Lusitanorum Asiatico, 1625), in his work Bonaert replied to Hugo Grocio (Mare Liberum, 1609), who had argued that Portugal and Spain did not have an exclusive right to trade in the possessions of the Estado da Índia, Annabel S. Brett, Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Martine Julia van Ittersum, Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); David Armitage, Foundations of Modern International Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 46-56 at 52–3.