Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, Jose Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, and Gaetano Sabatini, eds.  


“Having succeeded in establishing their presence throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, in the early sixteenth century Spain and Portugal became the first imperial powers on a worldwide scale. Between 1580 and 1640 […] they achieved an almost global hegemony” (3). What mechanisms then favored their expansion, the maintenance of internal cohesion, and the inhibition of their rivals?

Two perspectives have been fairly common in the study of both monarchies. Some historians have tried to analyze their different territories separately, following a “national” narrative, as if Belgium or Mexico were already “out there,” in the seventeenth century. Other historians have studied them either as composite monarchies (following John Elliott), or according to the notion of center-periphery, as metropolis vs. colonial territories (in the wake of Immanuel Wallerstein.) Politics seemed consequently to be played only in the political center, which then negotiated with the local elites of the peripheries. The editors think differently: “Rather than portraying the Iberian Monarchies as the accumulation of many bilateral relations arranged in a radial pattern, they argue that these political entities were polycentric,” multi-territorial; that those territories also interacted; and that in the course of this dynamic the political weight of each one changed, as the rise of the Americas and the demise of the Low Countries would show (4).

The book is structured in three parts: spaces of integration, spaces of circulation, and external projections. Among the four essays of the first part, Jean-Frédéric Schaub studies one of the islands of the Azores archipelago, during the union between both Crowns (1581-1640). Similar to the way Portugal and Lisbon preserved their autonomy, the presence of a military governor and Spanish soldiers in the Azores interacted with former local institutions without suppressing them. Meanwhile Oscar Mazin discusses the subordinate role that the Americas played within the Spanish monarchy, since they were incorporated to the Crown as accessories. However, local elites drew on a reinterpretation of history, emphasizing the voluntary character of incorporation, and the prerogatives that this should carry.

Pedro Cardim compares the initiatives that took place in order to grant political representation to the American territories in the Cortes (parliaments) of Castile and Portugal. These aspirations were put into practice in the last
case, when the new dynasty looked for support after the restoration of independence. Finally Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro studies how the Brazilian lands co-financed some foreign policy enterprises as significant as the peace with the Dutch Republic or the marriage alliance with England and, consequently, expected some kind of reciprocity from Lisbon.

The second part of the book, “Spaces of Circulation,” contains six chapters. They analyze the social and spatial mobility that existed between the different territories, involving the circulation of people, money, and ideas. Enrique Soria studies the mobility that members of the Spanish nobility experienced as officers of the king, and the role of marriage in forging relations with the elites of other territories. Giuseppe De Luca analyzes the role of public debt in Milan as an instrument of integration; not only local elites and the Church, but also large sections of the population became creditors of the king, so Milan was the only Italian domain which did not contest the Spanish rule.

Finally Jean-Paul Zúñiga analyzes the iconographic genre of the Mexican *casta* paintings, which depicted twenty different combinations of race. That taxonomy “blended the nobility’s imaginary of blood with the botanical lexicon of plant hybridization, and theological consideration with phenotypical observations.” Ideas were taken from scholasticism, the aristocratic culture of Western Europe, and even the milieu of slave trade and contact with Asia (222-3).

The third part of the book is devoted to “External Projections,” how the Spanish monarchy was defined from the outside. Manuel Herrero studies the circulation of political ideas between the Spanish monarchy and the mercantile republics of Genoa and the United Provinces. José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez shows how the reputation of the Spanish king among all kind of dissidents in foreign lands, as protector of peace and true religion, was vital to the survival of the monarchy. He analyzes the presence of a Spanish garrison in Paris between 1590 and 1594, and argues that it was the affirmation of a world hegemony, which was first accepted and then rejected by locals.

The editors are not interested in “comparing the Iberian monarchies to other European models (mainly Britain) or judging their performance according to modern criteria such as the [. . . achievement] of a rational bureaucratic administration” (5). Jurisdictional conflicts would not be an evidence of poor function but a sample of the capacity of negotiating the local interests in their own ways. I remember Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge, 1996), where he explored those world-economies that existed previous to European hegemony: the Indian Ocean and China. Goody critically reexamined the hypothesis of Max Weber, who saw the foundations of the hegemony of the West in a quasi-ontological superiority. Individualism and rationalism would allegedly have