

Eberhard Crailsheim, *The Spanish Connection: French and Flemish Merchant Networks in Seville (1570-1650)*. (Köln: Böhlau, 2016). 450 p. ISBN 9783412225360.

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A grandiloquent discourse on its colonial importance has often overshadowed the real role Seville played in the Atlantic economy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the last decades, nonetheless, historiography is starting to reckon that the rise of Seville as the key *entrepôt* of the Hispanic Monarchy was mainly due to its trade with other European regions rather than with America. Despite this assumption, we still lack of comprehensive studies on the European connections of Seville. The book of Eberhard Crailsheim is a successful attempt to assess this historiographical gap. In *The Spanish Connection: French and Flemish Merchant Networks in Seville (1570-1650)*, he analyses the evolution of the Flemish and French networks in Seville during the central years of its predominance in the Hispanic trade, i.e. from the consolidation of its American monopoly in times of Philip II to its commercial decline in favor of Cadiz.

The book is organized in three sections although two distinct parts can be distinguished. The first part, which corresponds to the first section ('The Merchants of Seville'), is a complete synthesis of the local and regional socioeconomic structures in which these foreigners became eventually embedded. The second part –second and third sections- consists on studies of a variety of French and Flemish networks along these eighty years. In the following lines we will turn our attention to the second and third sections, as they compose the core of Crailsheim's contribution.

The second section ('Private connections') deals with the private networks of merchants that applied for naturalization, which was the royal recognition of their belonging to the kingdom of Castile. Thanks to these naturalization charts held by *Archivo General de Indias*, Crailsheim examines the cases of twenty-five Flemish and fourteen French applicants reconstructing their personal history (i.e. their origin, time residing in Spain or close ties) and examining their strategies for integrating the local society.

The third section ('Business connections') concentrates on several economic networks that were active in four different years: 1580, 1600, 1620 and 1640. Crailsheim aims to identify continuities and changes in the long term, especially concerning the agents that were involved and the diversification of their investments. He conducts four types of social network analyses for each of these years (1580, 1600, 1620 and 1640). Firstly, he delineates a 'total network' including every agent in the documents, and then he separates the Flemish and French colonies into two 'main networks'. The 'total' and the 'main' networks for a given year provide the reader with the big picture of the connections, the size of the communities and

its interaction with other local and foreign groups. Finally, he focuses on the most relevant clusters of these wide networks, depicting 'sub-networks' and 'ego-networks' of the most central agents, from which he examines individual strategies.

The notarial files of the *Archivo Histórico Provincial de Sevilla* compose the core of these social network analyses. Crailsheim covers two to three months of every twenty years (1580, 1600, 1620 and 1640) in some of the most relevant notarial offices of Seville (namely V, XII, XVI, and XXIV), working with an impressive total of more than 1500 notarial documents.

However, the effectiveness of his sample should be subjected to consideration, for it is rather possible that another selection criteria based on other time periods or notarial offices, would have led to different conclusions. The relevance of each of the 24 notarial offices of Seville changed over time depending on the official who run it and its location; for example, Flemings were widely documented in the XV-office in 1580, a year in which Crailsheim fails to identify the centrality of Flemish or French agents in other offices. One can also argue that three months every twenty years is not enough to truly grasp the evolution of such complex networks; if an important agent had been absent in those months he would have been neglected. Moreover, the fact that non-historical motivations were used in the selection of the years deters us to understand how they reacted to external constraints imposed by the Hispanic wars in the Atlantic against the Dutch and the French. Finally, all the notarial documents are treated equally despite their varied nature, not taking into account that not all contracts evidence the same degree of closeness; for instance, the ties built upon a power of attorney normally represent a higher degree of trust than the ones upon a bill of obligation. In short, it could be argued that his selection may have biased to a certain extent some of the conclusions, especially the ones related to the growth of the communities and the centralities of the agents within the networks.

Despite these considerations, we must reckon the value of his methodology. His comparative approach sheds light on significant differences and similarities between the Flemish and French merchant groups, such as their sizes, their business, their connections or their social aspiration. Nonetheless, the greatest contribution lies on his innovative use of social network analysis. Thanks to this methodology, Crailsheim offers the reader an accurate view on the *real* role Seville played between two continents. *The Spanish connections* means therefore a breakthrough in the research of the foreign and local networks that integrated one of the most important commercial nodes in the Early Modern Atlantic.

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