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BSPHS Forum: Golden Anniversaries: Sir John Elliott's Imperial Spain and The Revolt of the Catalans after fifty years

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BSPHS Forum: Golden Anniversaries: Sir John Elliott's Imperial Spain and The Revolt of the Catalans after fifty years

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BSPHS FORUM:

Golden Anniversaries:

Sir John Elliott's *Imperial Spain* and *The revolt of the Catalans* after fifty years¹

GEOFFREY PARKER, XAVIER GIL, ANTONIO M. ZALDÍVAR, RUTH MACKAY, JAMES BOYDEN, MOLLY WARSH and SIR JOHN ELLIOTT

Introduction by Geoffrey Parker

The 44th ASPHS Annual Meeting in Albuquerque in April 2013 included a Forum to celebrate the golden anniversaries of two path-breaking books published by Sir John Elliott in 1963.² Neither of them was his first book: *Nibble the Squirrel*, by “John Elliott, teller of tales” appeared in 1946 (we plan to hold a Sapphire Anniversary for that in three years’ time.) Instead, in Albuquerque, six Hispanists assessed the impact of *Imperial Spain* and *Revolt of the Catalans* after fifty years, focusing on three major “themes”:

- Sir John’s impact on the writing of Spanish history
- His appreciation of the role of human agency in history
- His impact on writing comparative, Atlantic, and global history

Each theme combined an assessment by one scholar who had worked with Elliott and by another who knew him only through his written work. A response by Sir John completes the menu.

The first protagonists, on the writing of Spanish history, were Xavier Gil and Antonio Zaldívar. Xavier, Professor of History and department chair at the Universitat de Barcelona, writes on the political history and history of political thought in the Habsburg Monarchy. He was Sir John Elliott’s research assistant at the Institute for Advanced Study, 1981-1982 and 1984-1985. Antonio is a doctoral candidate at UCLA, completing a dissertation entitled “Language and Power in the Medieval Crown of Aragon: The Rise of Vernacular Languages and

¹ This piece originated as a commemorative panel at the 44th meeting of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies in Albuquerque, NM in April 2013 with the participation of the authors who write here and Sir John Elliott.

² John Elliott, *Writer of Tales, Nibble the Squirrel*, illustrated by Julian Slade (London: Ernest Benn, 1946); John H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (London: Edward Arnold, 1963; most recent edition Penguin, 2002); John H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain (1598-1640)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963; most recent edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Codeswitching Strategies in the Royal Chancery during the Thirteenth Century”. He has met Sir John only once, at a lunch with Sir John’s wife Oonah, and Xavier and his family, at the *Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya*.

Next, Ruth MacKay and James Boyden discussed human agency. Ruth’s first book, *The Limits of Royal Authority*, was published in 1999 in a wonderful series directed by Sir John. The series, alas, has disappeared, but his interest in and support for her work continues. The forum marked the first time they had met. Jim teaches history at Tulane University and specializes in the political and cultural history of early modern Spain. In a departure from his usual concerns, he recently completed an essay on “Hurricane Katrina as a Providential Catastrophe,” slated to appear in a volume assessing the storm and its aftermath. At Sir John Elliott’s invitation, he participated in the 1996 Oxford colloquium on “The World of the Favourite, 1500-1700.”

Finally Molly Warsh and Geoffrey Parker assessed Elliott’s contribution to writing comparative, Atlantic, and global History. Molly teaches world history at the University of Pittsburgh, and her research focuses on the Iberian and British worlds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her book, *American Baroque: Pearls and the Nature of Empire, 1492-1700*, will be published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. She has only an indirect affiliation with Elliott, having worked with Richard Kagan at Johns Hopkins University, where she finished her doctorate in 2009. Geoffrey works on military history, on the history of early modern Europe, and more recently on the global history of the 17th century. He attended Sir John Elliott’s lectures as an undergraduate at Cambridge fifty years ago, completed his doctoral thesis under Elliott’s direction in 1968, and has benefitted from his advice and friendship ever since. This was only the second time he had the pleasure of addressing the ASPHS: the first occasion was in Washington in 1979, and Sir John and Lady Elliott were also present then to encourage him.

The six authors thank David Messenger, general editor of the *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, for agreeing to publish our presentations at the ASPHS Forum. We have left our texts in the form we delivered them, with two exceptions: we have added references to the works we cite, and we have made some minor corrections in the light of comments and suggestions received during and after the Forum.

The writing of Spanish history

Challenging Received Wisdom, Broadening Views by Xavier Gil

I first read *Imperial Spain*, translated into Spanish, in my second undergraduate year at the University of Barcelona, 1974-75. One of the subjects that year was “Historia de la España Moderna” and the two basic books were *La España Imperial* and Richard Herr’s *Spain and the 18th-century revolution* (1960), also in translation. By that time, nine years after its translation in 1965, *La España imperial* was in its fourth reprint. In the absence of updated textbooks (the new, rapidly successful series *Historia de España Alfaguara*, whose general editor was Miguel Artola, featuring Antonio Domínguez Ortiz and Gonzalo Anes as the authors of the volumes covering the Early Modern period, had just started to appear), these two books by *hispanistas* – as we used to call them – proved most informative and challenging. As for *The Revolt of the Catalans*, the Catalan translation of 1966 was completely out of print and the first Castilian translation appeared in 1977, which meant that our class could have the book by our final undergraduate year. Now Editorial Akal, Madrid, is about to publish a new reprint, with an introduction by Pablo Fernández Albaladejo and Julio Pardos (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid).

Subsequently, as I embarked on my *tesina* or Master’s thesis, the first volume of *Memoriales y cartas del Conde Duque de Olivares* (1978) also appeared. It was, again, quite timely: my research dealt with the appointment of Aragonese jurists and judges to places in royal Councils and Audiencias in Castile, Naples, Sicily, the Indies and the Philippines. This presence seemed to match Olivares’s plans to *descastellanizar* the offices throughout the Monarchy and I could easily read the *Gran Memorial* and other key documents, finely edited by Sir John and the late Quisco de la Peña. In 1979 I published the most substantial part of my *tesina* under the title “La proyección extrarregional de la clase dirigente aragonesa en el siglo XVII a través de la administración pública”. It was my very first article and I was rash enough to send an offprint to Professor Elliott, who happened to find himself in a remote Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, remote, that is, as seen from Barcelona (which means that, right from the start, I looked at the center-periphery schema the wrong way).

I vividly remember that I failed to write “New Jersey” on the envelope, so that my offprint was happily sent to Princeton, USA. Shortly after, I learned to my utter despair from Jim Amelang that there are two or three dozen “Princetons” in the US. You can thus easily imagine how excited I was when a few weeks later I received a letter from Professor Elliott himself: my envelope had managed to reach him. Even more, Professor Elliott most kindly said that my youthful research could be further developed along those lines. If, on the one hand, I am indebted to the efficient US Postal Service, on the other I have no words to express to Sir John my deepest gratitude for his encouragement some 35 years ago and his generosity and understanding toward my work since then.

In assessing what both *Imperial Spain* and *The Revolt of the Catalans* meant back in 1963 and thereafter, it is important to recall the bibliographic panorama of those days: as English historians hotly debated on the rise of the gentry, the crisis of the aristocracy, the general crisis of the 17th century and the making of the English working class, in Spain two leading historians of law, Francisco Tomás y Valiente (murdered by ETA in 1996) and Jesús Lalinde Abadía, published major titles: the former, *Los validos en la monarquía española del siglo XVII: estudio institucional* (1963); and the latter, *La Gobernación general en la Corona de Aragón* (1963) and *La institución virreinal en Cataluña* (1964). Other major works such as Bartolomé Bennassar's on Valladolid and Rosario Villari's on the revolt of Naples only appeared in 1967. That is to say, John Elliott published his two great books with no help from any of these works. And among the Consejos Supremos of the Spanish polisinodial system, only that of the Indies had been the object of a monograph, by Ernest Schäffer (1935-1947).

By means of his books and, not least, many articles, Sir John has made quite an impact on Spanish historiography, of course, but also, more generally, on the way History has been practiced over half a century. I refer not only to the sheer amount of new information but particularly to his sharp insights vis-à-vis the prevailing currents. *History in the Making* offers a pleasant promenade, full of vistas, along this long course. As he himself has said, he has written in tune with the main currents and, at the same time, in reaction to them.³ This is why I would like to direct the spotlight on five of his articles.

First: "Revolution and continuity in Early Modern Europe".⁴ In this masterful essay, Sir John pointed to the risks of anachronism deriving from the then usual way of looking at revolts and revolutions from the stand-point of the French Revolution, which made many of the earlier revolutions to seem flawed or *manquéés*. Moreover, he showed another conjuncture of simultaneous revolts in different places, the decade of the 1560's. This plain fact meant that the whole debate on the 1640's had to be reconsidered. And he spoke of revolution from above, aristocratic constitutionalism and the sense of *patria*, thus bringing a clearly needed balance to so much work being devoted to popular movements in more or less automatic response to economic hardship.

³ J. H. Elliott, *History in the Making* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 9, 87. Hereafter, *HM*.

⁴ J.H. Elliott, "Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe", *Past and Present* 42 (1969): 35-56; now in Elliott, *Spain and its World, 1500-1700* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), ch. 5

Second: his contribution to the famous colloquium held at Johns Hopkins on revolts and revolutions in 1969.⁵ The organizers of the colloquium and editors of the resulting volume, Robert Forster and Jack Greene, borrowed sociological models as a useful tool for the analysis of the topic, namely, the successive stages of preconditions, precipitants and triggers. And while Lawrence Stone found that the English Revolution mostly fit this pattern, John Elliott kept it at arm's length in his coverage of the revolts in the Spanish Monarchy. Moreover, he warned that there were so many differences among the revolts in the Spanish dominions that no single model could provide a satisfactory answer.

Third: "England and Europe: a common malady?"⁶ In this article, which illustrates, at an early date, Sir John's well-known concern for comparative history, he identified unexpected similarities between Britain and the continental countries in their respective institutional structure, fiscal pressures and revolts. A good deal of what was later to become the revisionism on the English Revolution and the later notion of composite monarchies was announced there, as early as 1973. That is to say, in addition to setting Catalan and Spanish history in their proper European context, Sir John also placed English history into a larger, no less necessary broader view. As a consequence, the deeply rooted vision of the English and the Spanish historical experiences as thoroughly divergent between them had been seriously challenged.

Fourth: "Self-perception and decline in early seventeenth-century Spain".⁷ Much earlier than the so-called "cultural turn" was ever mentioned, Sir John showed that decline was not only an objective fact deriving from statistical evidence on demography, rising prices and textile production, but also a perception thereof, according to cultural patterns and expectations. The mental world, be it that of the *arbitristas* or that of Hernán Cortés (to quote another illuminating article by him), is a crucial factor that requires study.⁸ This was an excellent invitation to look at History mainly through the eyes of its protagonists, an approach that we find again in *History in the Making*.⁹

⁵ J. H. Elliott, "Revolts in the Spanish Monarchy", in Robert Forster and Jack P. Green, eds., *Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), ch. 3.

⁶ J. H. Elliott, "England and Europe: a Common Malady?", in Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1973), ch. 9.

⁷ J. H. Elliott, "Self-perception and Decline in early Seventeen-Century Spain", *Past and Present* 74 (1977): 41-61; now in *Spain and its World*, ch. 11.

⁸ J. H. Elliott, "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (1967): 41-58; now in *Spain and its World*, ch. 2.

⁹ *HM*, 215.

And finally, “A Europe of composite monarchies”— an expression that Sir John attributes to Professor Helmut G. Koenigsberger.¹⁰ The impact of the article has been so strong that it needs no further comments here.

In each of those five articles, Sir John shone a different light on their respective topic, a light that scholars could not afford to ignore. If this has been the case concerning Early Modern Europe in general, what could I say in relation to Catalonia and Spain? I shall try to summarize the powerful influence of Sir John’s work in four points.

First, his struggle, starting from his early stages, against essentialist and exceptionalist explanations of national historical experiences. Comparative history is the antidote, of course, as Sir John has brilliantly argued in *History in the Making*.¹¹ This was one of Jaume Vicens’s main goals, as Sir John recalled to good effect three years ago, in 2010, on the occasion of the official commemoration, both in Barcelona and Madrid, of the centennial of Vicens’s birth and the 50th anniversary of his premature death. Authorities, politicians and social leaders attending the lecture in each city were given a precious, timely reflection on the dangers of exceptionalist views for both the past and the present.¹²

Secondly, the notion of a provincial ruling class paying attention to a provincial aristocracy, interacting with the court, was instrumental for a dynamic understanding of politics, in a historiographical period when the prevailing view of political life was structural and, thus, little space was left to decision-making processes.¹³ Sir John challenged the standard view of an absolutist Habsburg regime by noting that the balance of that interaction was, more often than not, rather more beneficial for the provincial ruling class than for the Monarchy. In subsequent works, Elliott paid increasing attention to the education of the members of the provincial ruling classes and one could argue that a major issue in his splendid *Empires of the Atlantic World* (2006) is the making and behaviors of British and Spanish colonial ruling classes, which he addresses by studying their respective education, religion and political culture.

¹⁰ J. H. Elliott, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies”, *Past and Present* 137 (1992): 48-71; now in Elliott, *Spain, Europe and the Wider World, 1500-1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), ch. 1.

¹¹ *HM*, 36, ch. 2.

¹² J. H. Elliott, *Jaume Vicens Vives, ahir i avui; Jaume Vicens Vives, ayer y hoy* (Barcelona: Editorial Vicens Vives, 2010).

¹³ J.H. Elliott, “A Provincial Aristocracy: the Catalan Ruling Class in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in *Homenaje a Jaime Vicens Vives*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1967), 2:121-141; now in *Spain and its World*, ch. 4.

Thirdly, and closely related to the second point, a new, more nuanced balance of Habsburg Spain and its empire. Decadence used to be the obvious balance, and, by the way, very much so among Spanish historians: the title of the volume covering the 16th and 17th centuries in the “Historia de España de Editorial Labor”, published in 1980 with Manuel Tuñón de Lara as its general editor, was *La frustración de un imperio 1476-1714*, that is, frustración only, not even *Génesis y frustración de un imperio*. Sir John made his reappraisal explicit in an essay on Habsburg Spain’s “formula for survival” (1992) and has repeated this expression, “survival”, in *History in the Making*.¹⁴ A couple of years earlier, in 1990, he had identified a hidden, telling phenomenon: Castile’s failure to revolt in the 1640’s in spite of economic stagnation, heavy fiscal demands and political unrest.¹⁵ Thanks to this insightful essay, the non-revolt became a major historical issue, around the same time when Conrad Russell explained the outbreak of the English Civil War by a sequence of seven events and non-events.¹⁶ Sir John presented the aforementioned interaction between government and the several provincial ruling classes in terms of a dialogue and a negotiation, flexible enough as to allow that after more than two hundred years only two parts of the Spanish composite monarchy were lost for good: the Low Countries and Portugal. A formula for survival, indeed. Such a more nuanced appreciation of the period has found further confirmation in Geoffrey Parker’s overview of Philip IV’s reign and in Pablo Fernández Albaladejo’s comprehensive synthesis of 17th-century Spain.¹⁷

And fourthly, Sir John has shed light on the whole period by addressing a crucial if misleading question: between Olivares and Pau Claris, who played the progressive role and who the reactionary role?, a question that has also been discussed concerning Charles I Stuart and Oliver Cromwell. Wary of teleology and anachronisms, and always sensitive to historical timing and contingency, Sir John has showed how inappropriate these labels are for the Early Modern period.¹⁸

In Spain, Europe and America, “modernity” was in the making and the paths leading to it were many or yet unknown. We all are now aware of it and, hence, we are now more demanding with historical explanations. More

¹⁴ J. H. Elliott, “Formula for Survival: the Spanish Monarchy and Empire”, *17º Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Históricas* (Madrid, 1992), 722-726; *HM*, 217.

¹⁵ J. H. Elliott, “A Non-Revolutionary Society: Castile in the 1640’s”, in Jean de Viguierie, ed., *Études d’Histoire Européenne. Mélanges offerts à René et Suzanne Pillorget* (Angers: Presses de l’Université d’Angers, 1990), 253-269; now in *Spain, Europe and the Wider World*, ch. 4.

¹⁶ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1990).

¹⁷ Geoffrey Parker, *La crisis de la Monarquía de Felipe IV* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006); Pablo Fernández Albaladejo, *La crisis de la Monarquía*, in J. Fontana and R. Villares, eds., *Historia de España* (Barcelona and Madrid, Crítica and Marcial Pons, 2009), vol. 4.

¹⁸ J. H. Elliott, *La revolta catalana, 1598-1640*, “Prefaci a la segona edició” (Barcelona, Crítica, 1989); *HM*, 48, 58.

importantly, we are more demanding with ourselves as we try to study the past in its changing relations with the present. As we look back to 1963 we realize that Sir John has taught us to do so for half a century. We shall keep on trying.

A Tribute to Sir John H. Elliott's Contribution to the Historical Craft by Antonio Zaldívar

It is truly an honor to be here participating in this celebration of Sir John H. Elliott, whose magisterial career, spanning over half a century, continues without respite. As a medievalist, I must confess that there is something very exciting about paying homage to a real-life knight. But, of course, more important than Sir John's title is what earned him that title: his extraordinary contribution to the writing of history. Most of us can only dream about publishing a book as groundbreaking, thorough, and well written as the *The Revolt of the Catalans*; Sir John, well, he accompanied it with a superb and lengthy survey of the rise and decline of *Imperial Spain*.

This year we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of these two excellent, albeit very different studies. With the publication of these two books, Sir John shook the foundations of Spanish historiography and altered its course. These studies also inspired an entire generation of English and American scholars to pursue the joys and perils of studying pre-modern Spain. My presence here alone, as a medievalist, Sir John, illustrates the magnitude of your influence, which transcends chronological boundaries.

Sir John, of course, is no stranger to medieval history. In *Revolt of the Catalans* and *Imperial Spain*, he demonstrates a deep understanding of the Middle Ages, a product of his intellectual curiosity, deep knowledge of European history, and direct contact with medievalists such as Walter Ullmann, Steven Runciman, and Ferran Soldevila. He recounts these encounters, at times emotionally, in his charming and equally erudite academic biography, *History in the Making*.¹⁹ The image of Soldevila singing the *Song of the Segadors* at your request with tears running down his face is particularly powerful (and, I must say, a better idea than asking him to dance the *sardana*). Sir John's interest in empires and modernity nevertheless propelled him forwards chronologically, into a historical epoch "neither purely medieval nor purely modern," classified during the twentieth century as early modern.²⁰ Sir John became one of its earliest practitioners.

Yet, as Sir John notes in *History in the Making*, "all attempts at historical periods are by nature unsatisfactory because no single term can hope to

¹⁹ *HM*, 41.

²⁰ *HM*, 58.

encapsulate the character of an epoch as a whole.”²¹ Historical periods, moreover, are often ideologically determined constructs. Take, for example, the concept of a Middle Age (which now sounds more like something out of a Tolkien novel), created by humanists to distinguish themselves from what they perceived to be a one-thousand-year dark age that had lost touch with classical civilization. But what distinguishes the late Middle Ages from the early modern period? Is it the rise of Humanism, as humanists so ardently proposed? Is it the shift from Latin to the vernacular languages? Is it the discovery of the New World and the Age of Exploration? Or is it the challenge to Catholicism by the Protestant Reformation? The answer is not so clear. While all of these represent justifiable markers, albeit some stronger than others, none is fool proof. The truth is that the line distinguishing late-medieval and early modern is at best porous – a valuable lesson I learned from my dissertation advisor and mentor, Teo Ruiz, who describes himself as a humble student of Professor Elliott.

As historians we are taught to look backwards rather than forward, lest we fall victim to anachronism or teleological determinism. Sir John has warned us against these dangers and strongly averted them throughout his career. But he has also demonstrated an ability to borrow theoretical and methodological frameworks from historians of different periods, like Ronald Syme and Marc Bloch. In the spirit of Sir John’s inquisitive and ambitious approach to understanding the past, I propose that we continue challenging and reevaluating our periodization of history, so that it better serves and enriches rather than limits our subject of inquiry. By doing so, we cast a wider analytical net that can help us observe larger patterns, understand our subjects of inquiry more deeply, and allow us to be historically bolder.

You cannot accuse Sir John of lacking historical nerve. A discouraging letter from Fernand Braudel, stating that his intended research question was not “entirely reasonable” and “whose general conclusions can be guessed in advance”, would have dissuaded most young historians from pursuing the topic.²² Not Sir John. Fortunately for us, you dismissed Braudel’s advice, bypassing his model of “total history,” fashionable at the time, to pursue what might have seemed like an abhorrent *histoire événementielle*. The reality, of course, is that far from traditional institutional history, Sir John’s political narrative combined a sophisticated appreciation and innovative application of a number of theoretical frameworks from various disciplines, including anthropology. In fact, Sir John was ahead of his time, preempting the third-wave of *Annales* historians, led by Jacques Le Goff and others, who returned to the history of mentalities and considered culture alongside or even in place of socio-economic structures.

²¹ *HM*, 60.

²² *HM*, 12.

Professor Elliott's multidisciplinary approach to studying culture through politics is particularly influential in my research on state building and the centralization policies of the late-medieval kings of the Crown of Aragon. In my dissertation, for example, I apply theoretical frameworks from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics to analyze systematically what drove the thirteenth-century kings of the Crown of Aragon to begin writing in their realms' spoken vernaculars (Catalan and Aragonese), what these motivations reveal about contemporary mentalities and ideologies, and how code-switching (shifting from Latin to the romance and back) figured into the crown's overall governing practices.

Sir John's impact on my research is not surprising considering his role as a pioneer in Spanish history among English and American historians, along with the likes of Angus MacKay, Raymond Carr, Hugh Thomas, and a few others. But Sir John's students are, as we know, not confined to the English-speaking world. He has also contributed to a tradition of excellent historical research in Spain, embodied by his student, and my friend, mentor, and colleague, Xavier Gil. Either directly as a research advisor or indirectly through his writing and/or friendship, Sir John has shaped the direction of Spanish historiography more than anyone else in the second half of the twentieth century, especially for, but not limited to, students of the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. We can see examples of this impact today if we look around the room, with examples of his students, and his students' students, and even his students' students' students.

In *The Revolt of the Catalans* and *Imperial Spain*, Professor Elliott also helped liberate Spanish historiography from the confines of nationalism, a project begun by Jaume Vicens Vives. This is not to say that nationalist historians did not do good work; on the contrary, my research into the history of medieval Catalonia benefits immeasurably by the painstakingly thorough archival research of nationalist historians, most notably Soldevila. But their interpretations face serious limitations and pitfalls, including most notably a tendency to fall prey of what Sir John terms "chosen nation syndrome or innocent victim syndrome."²³

These unfortunate syndromes always seem to find a way of peeking their heads back into the mix, usually propelled there by political trends. Now rather than a centralist regime that oppresses regional autonomy or culture, we are seeing a generation fuelled by regional nationalism that rejects the concept of Spain and even their historic place within its evolution. In Catalonia in particular, universities have become hotbeds of nationalism, with many faculty members leading the charge. But as guardians of the Spanish past, which includes

²³ *HM*, 46-7.

Catalonia, we must follow Sir John's lead and pursue vigorously what our sources tell us about the past, regardless of the current political trends.

By way of conclusion, Sir John's greatest strength, in the humble opinion of a young historian, is his ability to balance his mastery of the latest historiographical currents and most relevant and applicable theoretical frameworks from various disciplines without allowing them to determine his investigative question or sacrifice his narrative. As Sir John pointedly tells us in the preface to *History in the Making*, "theory is of less importance for the writing of good history than the ability to enter imaginatively into the life of a society remote in time or place, and produce a plausible explanation of why its inhabitants thought and behaved as they did."²⁴ For that quote and your unrivalled contributions to the study of Spain's history: Thank You!

The role of human agency in history

Great Men and Not-So-Great Men: A Social Historian Salutes John Elliott's Count-Duke of Olivares by Ruth MacKay

When I was in graduate school, I caught the tail end of the history-from-below era. My sympathies certainly were with the below end of the spectrum. Then, as now, I worshiped at the feet of E. P. Thompson (though I met him once, which taught me that rock stars are not always nice). But I was more interested in power than in the lack thereof. I was trained as a Marxist, both in school and outside, and I wanted to write about class and social struggle. By the time I reached graduate school, I wanted to write a dissertation about the *comuneros*. But I was dissuaded by one of my advisers, who told me the world did not need another book about the *comuneros*. I'm not sure he was right, but I moved on. "Try the seventeenth century," he counseled. "Here, read this," and he gave me James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, which was supposed to help me get over the sad truth that in Castile there hadn't been much struggle of the sort I was looking for, at least not since 1521.

I was a dutiful student, so I did the struggling instead, reading widely, searching for an angle. And one day, reading *The Revolt of the Catalans*, I found a sentence — which I searched for in subsequent years but never found — saying towns were not producing the numbers of conscripts they were thought to contain, judging by census records.²⁵ And suddenly I had what I wanted: James Scott's weapons of the weak, opposition to the state, and one of my favorite social

²⁴ *HM*, ix.

²⁵ I should add that Geoffrey Parker, upon reading this paper in draft, found two references in *The Revolt of the Catalans* which, combined [pp 238 and 376], may have been the trigger.

groups, draft-dodgers. I wrote the dissertation, which later became a book, which John Elliott was instrumental in getting published.

As I wrote, Elliott's massive biography of the Count-Duke of Olivares was always within reach. Its amazing index (which I understand was done by Oonah Elliott) allowed me to reconstruct all the juntas and families and city councils that for two decades weighed in, generally negatively, as the king and his favorite tried to raise and replenish armies fighting on as many as five fronts. But it was curious to me even then that my efforts to capture the on-the-ground experiences of individuals, villages, towns, lords, and highly stressed bureaucrats so often took me back to this great volume devoted to the man at the top. And it was equally curious that I, with my Marxist background and occasional theoretical bent, should rely so much on a historian who was so different from me, no matter how distinguished.

The biography of Olivares showed, as Jim Boyden perceptively noted when we were preparing these talks, that monarchies have politics. They are not just kings or queens. They are political animals with many moving parts, and that was what ended up captivating me. I read the biography of Olivares at around the same time I read William Beik's study of how Louis XIV was compelled to negotiate with the aristocracy. I also was reading the path-breaking work by Tony Thompson and José Ignacio Fortea about fiscal negotiations between the monarchs and the Cortes. I was learning how the state must accommodate itself to social and economic interests, not just the other way around. I was learning that taxes — which were like conscription, only harder to figure out — depended on a mesh of consent, loyalty, tradition, jurisdiction, and raw power. Olivares sat at the center of all that.

But the Olivares biography was about far more than just the Count-Duke and his doomed efforts to reform the Spanish Monarchy and push that declining curve back up. As Elliott explained in his memoir, he thought that through Olivares, he could reach the rest. The book was about language and satire, the complexities of diplomacy, the art of war, the impact of religion, the persistence of nationalist sentiment, and the ephemeral nature of honor and reputation. And it was beautifully and skillfully written. Each page invariably contains at least one sentence with just the perfect, unexpected word that makes the writerly reader say to herself, "I must use that word like that sometime."

The companion volumes to the biography — some of the essays, the collected papers of the Count-Duke, the comparative study of Olivares and Richelieu, and the co-written study about the Retiro palace — offered Elliott space to explore wider, more cultural themes, including propaganda, appearance, and legitimation. On that last point, one of the essays contains one of my favorite

pieces of advice from Elliott, which I hope has served me well: He wrote, “There is some danger of our being more impressed by the workings of a propaganda machine than those at whom it was directed.”²⁶ So I learned that propaganda and spectacle did not necessarily hit the mark, nor did criticism from below necessarily threaten the structures of power. But without understanding and respecting both ends of that conversation, I was not going to understand either.

In my book, I wrote that resistance was always couched in the vocabulary of obedience. Authority and freedom always interact. One assumes the existence, or potential existence, of the other. Watching how Olivares exercised power reveals to us his opponents — reveals, if you will, the limits of his authority. And watching how commoners, city councilmen, and nobles organized their activities — and even their language and imaginations — we may envision the constraints to which they were subject.

I want here to take a brief detour in tribute to another of my teachers, and I hope Sir John will not be offended. John Schaar was a great political theorist, champion of political freedom, and model of intellectual rigor. One of *his* heroes, since we are talking about great men, was the Puritan leader John Winthrop. In 1630 — just as Olivares was attempting to save Philip IV’s monarchy — Winthrop delivered a famous sermon called “A Model of Christian Charity.” Schaar taught me as an undergraduate that Winthrop’s vision of a “city upon a hill,” a community of believers bound by covenants both with God and with each other, was, in essence, a *political* vision. Politics was the binding together of liberty, community, and authority. Here’s what he wrote, in his great essay on Winthrop: “Authority gives content to freedom and is thus not freedom’s enemy but its necessary condition. It is never a question of whether freedom needs authority but how and toward what ends authority guides freedom.” And later in the same essay he wrote, “To be without authority in this world is to be insignificant in this world. It means that you do not matter to anyone.”²⁷

So how to get from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to Simancas? From John Schaar I learned that acts of mercy and obedience and accommodation are political acts. Social relations, all of them, embody politics. John Elliott, meanwhile, displayed in all its flawed glory the exercise of authority. And as I found myself writing not about the *comuneros* rebelling against their king but rather about their descendants, a century later, making their peace with or sidestepping around that king’s great-grandson and his immense and powerful favorite, I understood that, as Tony Judt wrote, “History is not just about politics,

²⁶ J. H. Elliott, “Power and Propaganda in the Spain of Philip IV,” in *Spain and Its World*, 163.

²⁷ John Schaar, “Liberty/Authority/Community in the Political Thought of John Winthrop,” *Political Theory* 19:4 (Nov. 1991), 504, 512.

it is politics.”²⁸ Power or its absence, authority or resistance, protest or silence, compliance or its simulations, are all part of the same story. One does not choose. I ended up not with history from below, as I intended, but rather with history, plain and simple. And John Elliott took me a good deal of the way.

In his recent reflections on what he calls “history in the making,” he recounts how he and Olivares first met. Elliott arrived at the center, as he might have put it then, from the periphery. He went to Barcelona to get to Madrid. It’s not such a different journey than learning about power by following draft-dodgers, or learning about resistance by reading the king’s *consultas*. The oblique angle serves us well.

Biography suffered years of disdain in the twentieth century as an inferior form of history, and Elliott admits as much. He said in his memoir, “I had to ask myself whether biography was the best way, or even a good way, of approaching what I saw as being the central issue of this period,” which was decline.²⁹ He decided it was; again, the oblique angle. And for me, the apparently top-down direction of Elliott’s work provided an alternative, ultimately far richer route to my central issue, which was obedience.

Biography as a genre does have its limitations, however. It runs the risk of favoring agency to the detriment of structure, though structures alone cannot explain behavior, ambition, or disappointment. The trick is to do both, to understand how people operated within the thicket and hierarchies of economic, administrative, and cultural constraints. In this regard, the fact that Elliott embedded the biography in nearly five volumes of related materials perhaps speaks to the inadequacies of the genre on its own.

As for the rise and fall of the Count-Duke, one aspect I question today, upon rereading, is the notion that the fall was inevitable because of inertia and widespread distrust of *novedades*. I’m not sure about Olivares being “to a large extent a prisoner” of imperial and fiscal trends. And I’m not sure about the depiction of something called “Spanish society” as being “instinctively resistant to the very idea of innovation,” the exceptions, apparently, only proving the rule of immobility.³⁰ Such a personification of society undermines Elliott’s own portrait of the complexity, contradiction, and variation of Spain’s ruling

²⁸ Tony Judt, “A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians,” *History Workshop* 7 (Spring 1979), 68.

²⁹ *HM*, 87.

³⁰ J. H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 677, 680.

structures. But perhaps it is the very nature of the biographical genre, with its star in the center of the firmament, which impels the writer toward such conclusions.

Finally, let me return to Marx, where I started. “History [he said when he was very young] is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.”³¹ Sir John Elliott, who surely has rarely heard his name mentioned in the same paragraph as that of Marx, showed that a man such as Olivares doing everything in his power to attain not only his ends, but those of his king, is indeed a spectacle. Indeed, it is history at its best.

The Historian of an Age of Decline, 1963-2013 by James Boyden

In 1622, at age 35, Don Gaspar de Guzmán—soon to become the Conde-Duque—assumed prime responsibility for guiding onward and upward the direction of the Spanish Monarchy. We are here today to commemorate the fact that, at about the same age in 1963, Sir John Elliott (as he would become) stepped forward quite dramatically—has anyone since published two historical works of such lasting significance in a single year?—to take on roughly the same task for the modern historiography of the Monarchy. We can debate which of these two missions was the more quixotic, but there can be no doubt about which was crowned with success. Where Olivares’ initiatives, for all their vigor and persistence, foundered on shoals of particularism, ambition beyond the limits of resources, ill luck, and perhaps the ‘cycloid’ personality diagnosed by Dr. Marañón, you, Sir John, moved ahead steadily, deliberately, persuasively to outline a regenerative vision of the course of early modern Spanish history. Then, after an exhaustive and surefooted campaign of research and analysis, you came to render a portrait in the round and in unmatched detail of one of the Monarchy’s most crucial passages, the decades in which the Planet King waxed and then waned in the European firmament, ending with *reputación* sorely compromised and his great minister falling from orbit with a resounding thud.

Along the way, without fanfare, you staked a claim for the continuing relevance of political history within a discipline whose louder voices proclaimed it an outmoded, essentially antiquarian pursuit. In your hands, though, the history of politics was placed squarely within the social, economic, intellectual, artistic, and cultural contexts that shaped and constrained its actors. To carry off such contextualization—as you have, perhaps most remarkably in *The Count-Duke of Olivares*—demanded both broad and deep lifelong learning and the rare ability to organize and prune and shape and shuffle a vast amount of disparate information. To put this history across in all its richness required an even more unusual mastery of the art of narrative. Your prose has been and remains a marvel,

³¹ Karl Marx, “Holy Family,” ch. 6.

consistently so finely measured, euphonious, deft in tone, and precise as to put to shame nearly all your contemporaries and juniors writing history in English.

In the annals of blurbing, has anyone ever got it so right as the anonymous writer for *The Economist* quoted on the cover of successive editions of *Imperial Spain*, who noted that the narrative moves “with the grace of a pavane for a dead Infanta?”³² I will content myself here with quoting two sentences that I believe neatly illustrate the point, sentences published nearly a quarter-century apart, each of which hands down a complex judgment at once precise, inexorable, and elegiac. In the first, you summarized in 1963 what you called “the paradox of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Castile”: “For here was a country which had climbed to the heights and sunk to the depths; which had achieved everything and lost everything; which had conquered the world only to be vanquished itself.” And then there is this remarkable sentence from 1986 that both recapitulates the career of the Count-Duke and somehow contrives to retrace its arc: “Failing to settle on terms that he could regard as consonant with the honour of his king, he put himself increasingly at the mercy of events, until he, and much of what he had stood for, were swept away by rebellion and defeat.”³³

You charted the political course of Philip IV’s Spanish Monarchy in the era of Olivares’ ascendancy in a remarkable series of publications, stretching from *The Revolt of the Catalans* in 1963 to *The Count-Duke of Olivares* (1986).³⁴ This body of work provided a daunting model to all of us who attempted to interpret other reigns or other statesmen in the Habsburg centuries. In *History in the Making*, you observed that, while a biography may be hailed as the last word on its subject, “[a]ll historical enterprises are in fact work in progress.”³⁵ As a general principle this is unexceptionable, but I daresay no one will soon be setting out to attempt a major reassessment of Olivares.

There is still much left to do regarding the political history of Habsburg Spain before historians will feel the need to return in force to the 1620s and 1630s. This despite the fact that the last decades have seen the appearance of a

³² A phrase only rivaled in my recollection by this blurb for Geoffrey Wolfe’s crime novel *Providence*: “Cruises along like a hot-wired Mercedes.” See Sir John’s response at the end of this piece for the identity of the reviewer.

³³ Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 386; idem, *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, 683.

³⁴ And including along the way the invaluable collection of *Memoriales y cartas del conde-duque de Olivares*, co-edited with José F. De la Peña, 2 vols. (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1978, 1980); *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, coauthored with Jonathan Brown (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980); and the brilliant comparative evaluation of *Richelieu and Olivares* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), not to mention numerous essays and articles.

³⁵ *HM*, 100.

much wider range of biographies of early modern Spanish statesmen and courtiers. Among many good books, a model study is Santiago Martínez Hernández's 2004 biography of the marqués de Velada. And last year saw the publication of a monumental life (by Rubén González Cuerva) of Baltasar de Zúñiga, once memorably dubbed by our honoree "that great incognito among the European political figures of the early seventeenth century."³⁶

Meanwhile, in the decades since *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* brought the first half of Philip IV's reign into sharp focus, an array of historians have deepened our knowledge of other periods. For the reigns of Charles V and Philip II, the voluminous publications that appeared in conjunction with centenary observances in 1998 and 2000 compiled valuable information and brought some rare contemporary sources into broader circulation.³⁷ Geoffrey Parker's contributions have been much more cogent and conclusive: in *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* and in *Felipe II: La biografía definitiva* he vastly expanded our grasp of how the Prudent King's policies were shaped and executed.³⁸ Spanish aspects of the reign of Charles V await similarly definitive treatment, but it is no small marvel, and a further testament to the stimulus Sir John's work provided to the study of the seventeenth century, that historians in Spain, England and America—among them several of your academic descendants, like Magdalena Sánchez, Antonio Feros, Paul Allen, and Martha Hoffman—have brought forth a valuable literature on Philip III and Lerma.³⁹ It's

³⁶ Santiago Martínez Hernández, *El marqués de Velada y la corte en los reinados de Felipe II y Felipe III: Nobleza cortesana y cultura política en la España del Siglo de Oro* (Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 2004); Rubén González Cuerva, *Baltasar de Zúñiga* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2012); for "that great incognito," J. H. Elliott, "A Question of Reputation? Spanish Foreign Policy in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Modern History* 55:3 (1983), 479.

³⁷ See, for example, *La corte de Carlos V*, ed. José Martínez Millán, 5 vols. (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000); or Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella, *El felicísimo viaje del muy alto y muy poderoso príncipe don Philippe*, ed. José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero and Paloma Cuenca (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2001). Examples in both categories could be multiplied indefinitely.

³⁸ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); idem, *Felipe II: La biografía definitiva*, trans. V. E. Gordo del Rey (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 2010).

³⁹ Today's reading list on the reign should include Bernardo J. García García, *La pax hispánica. Política exterior del Duque de Lerma* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996); Magdalena Sánchez, *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun: Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Paul Allen, *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598-1621* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Antonio Feros, *Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598-1621* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Patrick Williams, *The Great Favorite: The Duke of Lerma and the Court and Government of Philip III of Spain, 1598-1621* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Santiago Martínez Hernández, *Rodrigo Calderón. La sombra del valido. Privanza, favor y*

worth remembering that when I first grew interested in the period, and for a long time thereafter, the only modern interpretation remained Ciríaco Pérez Bustamante's 1950 inaugural lecture, and scattered articles by Charles Carter and Patrick Williams seemingly comprised the sum total of recent research in the field.⁴⁰

These undoubted accomplishments aside, though, there seems little danger that significant research topics in the field will be exhausted anytime soon. In finishing here, I will take up a few perceptions that appear in the writings of our distinguished honoree. First there are his thoughts, from *History in the Making*, on ideology and interest in political decision-making, which point to the necessity of students of Spanish politics in this period grasping both the ideas and values of their protagonists and “the alignments of family and faction whose importance was central to the political life of early modern societies.”⁴¹ Here (and I speak as one who has arguably been too keen to see ‘interest’ and downplay ‘ideas’ in political motivation) I hope we will see studies that focus on the one hand on the formation and interaction of factions, and the rivalries and alliances of families, and on the other hand, on the development and evolution of a ruling ethos or set of governing attitudes at the upper levels of Spanish society and Habsburg government. Such phenomena—factional alliances, lineage networks, or an inculcated sense of elite mission—develop over timelines largely independent of the chronology of reigns, and their more intensive study should allow a new assessment of continuities, dislocations, and crucial turning points in the era. I also suspect that it is here, in the study of noble and *letrado* ‘dynasties’ in service of the Monarchy, and their ideological formation over time, that historians of the state and politics will be able to apply—and eventually broaden—lessons drawn from the increasingly sophisticated religious historiography of early modern Spain, another branch of the field that has been particularly vibrant in recent decades.

But how best to pursue this quarry, the ‘ideas’ and the ‘interests’ of a ruling elite? Thirty years ago, you wrote that “[i]t is becoming increasingly clear that we need a prosopographical approach to the men of Spain’s last imperial

corrupción en la corte de Felipe III (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009); Alfredo Alvar Ezquerro, *El duque de Lerma: corrupción y desmoralización en la España del siglo XVII* (Madrid: Esfera de los Libros, 2010); Martha Hoffman, *Raised to Rule: Educating Royalty at the Court of the Spanish Habsburgs, 1601-1634* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Ciríaco Pérez Bustamante, *Felipe III: Semblanza de un monarca y perfiles de una privanza. Discurso leído el día 17 de diciembre en su recepción pública* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1950); Charles Carter, “Belgian ‘Autonomy’ Under the Archdukes, 1598-1621,” *Journal of Modern History* 36:3 (1964): 245-259; Patrick Williams, “Philip III and the Restoration of Spanish Government, 1598-1603,” *English Historical Review* 88:349 (1973): 751-769.

⁴¹ *HM*, 104.

generation if we are to get appreciably closer to the attitudes and assumptions which helped determine the policies adopted by the ruling faction.”⁴² You recur to this suggestion in *History in the Making*,⁴³ and I would only add that similar studies of all the other ‘imperial generations’ would be no less desirable, not least for allowing more precision in our reckoning of generations in the period and in our assessment of intergenerational continuities and divergences.

Finally, I was very much struck by this passage from *History in the Making*: “Is ‘decline’ therefore essentially a state of mind, created by perceptions of the past and the present—the past and present of one’s own society, and the perceived strength of real or potential rivals?”⁴⁴ Probing this question in the Spanish imperial context is hardly unrelated to the task of sketching the essential characteristics of “Spain’s last imperial generation.” This approach to decline as a phenomenon rooted in mentality brings within the ambit of political and cultural historians the possibility of offering a new answer to what was for many of us THE historical question about Spain when we first came to the field. The economic historians had their long run of trying to assess material causes for decline, falling repeatedly into a quagmire of invidious Weberianism in which objective economic weakness was multiplied by a supposedly intrinsic Spanish aversion to enterprise. But it was perceptively noted, in 1961, that “[i]t seems improbable that any account of the *decline of Spain* can substantially alter the commonly-accepted version of seventeenth-century Spanish history, for there are always the same cards, however we shuffle them.” Sixteen years later, though, the same writer slipped some new cards into the deck in “Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain.”⁴⁵ And now, perhaps, there is an opportunity for an enterprising scholar or scholars to re-conceptualize decline and forge a winning hand at last.

Writing comparative, Atlantic, and global history

Approaching the Iberian World, Inspired by the Insights of Sir John Elliott by Molly Warsh

The first time I heard Sir John deliver a lecture, it produced in me an exhilaration as unrefined as his talk was focused and elegant. This was at the 2004 annual conference of the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture,

⁴² Elliott, “A Question of Reputation?” 483.

⁴³ *HM*, 101ff.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁵ Elliott’s decline articles—“The Decline of Spain” (1961) and “Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain” (1977)—both appeared in *Past and Present*, and both were reprinted in Elliott, *Spain and Its World*, where the quoted passage appears at p. 239.

and the lecture focused on the Spanish context of the settlement of Jamestown (the talk was later published as a collection of essays under the title “The Iberian Atlantic and Virginia”). I remember being so excited after the lecture that I could barely sit down, much less put my finger on exactly why it was the talk had so inspired me. I realize now that it was more than just the novelty of a Spanish perspective on an old North American historical chestnut; it was the combination of the wide lens and the precise insights; the idea that one could approach a topic broadly without sacrificing the ability to shed light on discrete historical problems. Sir John captured this element of his scholarship when he characterized his work as combining the traits of both a truffle hunter and a parachutist, a distinction made by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. (As Sir John notes in *History in the Making*, by “parachutists” Ladurie was referring *not* to those who take a bird’s eye perspective, but rather to French soldiers who covered large swaths of territory during the Algerian war.⁴⁶

I attended Sir John’s Omohundro lecture early in my graduate career at Johns Hopkins, where I had begun the PhD in hopes of combining my longstanding interest in British North American history and my passion for Spain and Spanish. I started at Hopkins after a handful of years living in Madrid, and while I had a lot of enthusiasm for the Iberian peninsula and its past, my hunch that this love affair could make good history was based on nothing more than Richard Cobb’s essay on “a second identity.”⁴⁷ Luckily for me, my dissertation supervisors Richard Kagan and Philip Morgan encouraged my attempt to forge a single path out of these dual interests. Both Richard and Phil (and my wonderful Hopkins colleagues and fellow Kaganistas, Erin Rowe and Kimberly Lynn) set a high standard for intellectual rigor and the careful exposition of precise ideas, but they also had a high tolerance for what John-Russell Wood once called my “ecumenical” interests. My quest to integrate both Iberian and British worlds continues to shape my professional path. After Hopkins, my first job was as an Iberian World historian. I then took a postdoc at that bastion of early British North America, the Omohundro Institute, and I was just hired last year as a world historian at the University of Pittsburgh. Too Iberian to be a bona fide “American historian”; certainly no classic Hispanist: perhaps this daunting new title of “world historian” will be just undefined enough that I can embrace it without issue.

It is hard to find role models in a brand new field, and I am particularly grateful to Sir John for sharing his wisdom on the topic of world history. If Sir

⁴⁶ Elliott discusses Ladurie’s line again and compares it to Hexter’s “lumpers” and “splitters” in *HM*, ch. 7 (p. 197).

⁴⁷ Richard Cobb, *A Second Identity: Essays on France and French History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.)

John's 2004 Williamsburg lecture inspired me to pursue the shared history of the Spanish and British Americas, I was similarly moved by his characterization of the promises and challenges of the field in *History in the Making*. That world history's potential value is its promise to contextualize on a global scale the processes shaping particular peoples and places; that a clear distinction needs to be drawn between world history and the history of globalization (with its frequent conflation of modernity with western or European expansion); these cautionary words are well taken. But instead of disheartening me—particularly given a widely shared skepticism about the utility and feasibility of the world historical approach—they only confirm my excitement at the challenge. What can a world history perspective mean for scholars who cannot work in unlimited archives and/or master infinite and ever growing historiographies?

If comparative history is a daunting challenge, then World History's potential contribution is even more uncertain. In his reflections on the field in *History in the Making*, Sir John notes that World History is sometimes approached "simply by imaginative juxtaposition – for instance, by deploying a series of vignettes of local sights and scenes around the globe to evoke a picture of how the world looked and behaved at a given moment in the past."⁴⁸ I wonder if an integrative (as opposed to comparative) approach can bring analytic heft to these juxtapositions, considering (for example) how related stresses on preexisting patterns evolved in diverse contexts? Such a method might produce histories that were not so much "entangled," but in a sense, the opposite. These histories would offer a careful consideration of the component parts of a whole; a *disentangling* intended to reveal the distinct threads at the heart of the knot.

I am sure other scholars will be drawn to the world historical implications of distinct aspects of Sir John's work, but the focus of my own research (doubtless shaped by a mixture of personal interests and the passions of the day, as Sir John notes often occurs⁴⁹) leads me to focus on the handful of questions I will mention here. Perhaps most obvious is the potential for a global Iberian perspective to chart a course beyond Atlantic History—a field whose stated boundaries (for all their capaciousness) fail to capture the range of the Iberian empires, considered independently or during the period of their union. A world historical perspective might change our views of the relationship between center and periphery within the global Iberian early modern world. (I think it also has the potential to heed Sir John's call to pay attention to the lingering influence of dynasticism in shaping the early modern world, in the Atlantic and beyond.⁵⁰)

⁴⁸ *HM*, 211.

⁴⁹ See *HM*, ch. 2, for Elliott's discussion of the rise of international bodies and the popularity of global history.

⁵⁰ On dynasticism, see *HM*, 61.

My own work considers evolving imperial approaches to the management of human and natural resources, and their relationship to administrative networks around the globe. In this context, I wonder how world history might shape early modern environmental history, and what this global perspective on the relationship between resources and infrastructure might bring to our understanding of the formation of the nation state. What might be learned about the relationship among subjects, and between subjects and central powers, by looking at these questions as they unfolded in distinct locales across the early modern world? I wonder, meanwhile, how a world history perspective can accommodate attention to the importance of individuals and personalities in shaping the past, a facet of Sir John's scholarship that has always resonated deeply with me. In fact, a world history perspective that included attention to individual lives might address some of the inadequacies of microhistory that Sir John so acutely identifies. I may not be a true historian of Spain's composite monarchy under the House of Austria, but it is the question of what a world history perspective does to the notion of a whole and its parts that most occupies me these days. I don't know where this question will lead, but again, Sir John's insights into the nature and workings of the Spanish monarchy are central to my own attempts to make sense of the sinews and stresses that bound a global Iberian world.⁵¹

Nearly a decade after hearing Sir John's Williamsburg lecture, I've added perhaps a little more precision to my own historical passions, but I remain as dumbfounded as I was then by the power and grace of Sir John's insights into the field of early modern Spanish history and the historical practice in general. Certainly, my copies of his works are dog-eared from so much consultation (indispensable whether preparing for exams, assembling lectures for my own classes, or writing my own work). Four years after finishing my PHD, and at the end of my first year as an official "world historian", I find myself returning to, and finding inspiration in, both his broad observations on the practice and future of history and in his identification of the central problems that characterized early modern Spain and its world. Sir John writes in *History in the Making*, "Looking backwards does not automatically rule out moving forwards,"⁵² and as I have indicated, many of the questions that I am grappling with in my ongoing research reflect questions and approaches that Sir John has elaborated throughout his career.

It was no surprise to find myself moved by Sir John's reflections on his extraordinary career in *History in the Making*. But what did surprise me, and give

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 79

⁵² *ibid.*, 58.

me great courage, was his critical engagement with world history: a field whose boundaries are undefined, its contribution yet unclear. At this point in my career—the first book still unfinished, the challenges of world history looming before me—my own chief qualifications as a practitioner in the field seems to be enthusiasm and a tendency to bite off more than I can chew. With Richard Kagan (or Don Ricardo, as his students affectionately call him) as my primary interpreter of Spanish history, I had constant proof that exuberance could be harnessed to create first-rate scholarship. But to know that none other than J. H. Elliott believes that a historical “hunch” can have merit; that historians could and should be bold in their approaches and questions; that linguistic facility is not just a party trick but a crucial avenue into thinking meaningfully about foreign places and times—these statements filled me with hope. I could bring these skills to the practice of world history, an endeavour that Sir John did not immediately dismiss as a fool’s errand. Does world history have plenty of pitfalls? Certainly, as Sir John writes, those who aspire to be practitioners must proceed with caution, and have no illusions about writing the history of the world. But, he seems to say: a historian *in the world* might be a world historian; and world history might come, like other fields before it, and with some hard work, to mean something. With an immense debt to his scholarship, I am hopeful that the early modern Iberian world might chart the way.

Traveling the “Elliott Road” by Geoffrey Parker

I first came across the “Elliott Road” in October 1962, as a first-year undergraduate at Cambridge, in one of the austere Mill Lane lecture rooms. As I shuffled into an auditorium to hear Geoffrey Elton lecture on Tudor England, I noticed a hand-out on the floor. It looked like a family tree, but on inspection it showed the conciliar structure of the Spanish Monarchy. Elton, who knew a thing or two about councils, did not use hand-outs – nobody else did in 1962 – and I idly wondered who had prepared and distributed this useful tool. I discovered the answer two years later when I attended the lecture course on “Europe 1494-1715” delivered in the same austere lecture room by Dr J. H. Elliott – but now it appeared on page 162 of his new book, *Imperial Spain*.⁵³

⁵³ Austere and (I would later realize) unfriendly to the disabled: according to the university’s “Disability Resource Center”, “Disabled badge holders can park on the double yellow lines outside — otherwise there is no parking nearby”. Oh. Those who wish to attend a lecture that is not in a room on the ground floor face an additional challenge: “Currently no evacuation facilities from the upper floors [exist] — evacuation chairs or a separate power supply for the lift are under consideration. Please advise custodian if you will need help evacuating in an emergency. First aider is on site.” So be bold: you will not burn to death alone.
<http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability/guide/sites/mlr.html> (accessed 5 March 2013.)

In one of those lectures, on the Dutch Revolt, you displayed a map (once again cutting-edge audio-visual technology in those days) and alerted the students sitting before you to a core problem in the history of “early modern Europe” (a term you would popularize). You told us that no one had yet explained how the Spanish Crown managed to maintain an army of 80,000 men and fight a war for 80 years 1000 miles away, in the Netherlands. How did it move all those men from Spain and Italy across the Alps to the Low Countries? And, once there, how did it supply and pay them?

After the lecture, I requested some reading on the subject. With a little smile, you recommended a book by Lucien Febvre on “Philip II and Franche-Comté”. I would later learn that your little smile was a warning of imminent danger: but on that occasion, proud and happy to receive such expert guidance, I hastened to the University Library and plucked Febvre’s book from the shelf – only to find that you had omitted two significant facts. First, the book was entitled *Philippe II et la Franche-Comté*; second, it contained over 800 pages.⁵⁴

In *History in the Making*, you wrote that “Febvre’s neglected classic... made a deep impression on me, even deeper than that made by Braudel’s *Méditerranée*, and provided a model that I sought in my own work.” Thanks to you, it did the same for me. Febvre’s chapter on the march of the duke of Alba at the head of 10,000 Spanish troops through Franche-Comté in 1567 formed the hinge of the entire book; and the wealth of detail Febvre had found in local archives made me wonder if similar sources existed elsewhere along Alba’s itinerary from Milan to Brussels, which contemporaries would later call “Le chemin des Espagnols”, *The Spanish Road*. So I returned to ask whether you thought “the Spanish Road” might make a suitable Ph. D thesis. You did; you even agreed to supervise it; and you then accepted a revised version for publication in the series that you edited: *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History*. That explains why I am here today.⁵⁵

Comparative history is a critical component of the “Elliott Road” – and not only have you written it; in the last two chapters of *History in the Making*, you have also written about it. You noted there that in composing Imperial Spain, “I found myself relating it time after time to the history of Britain and Europe... The choice of familiar points of reference is always a useful device for those

⁵⁴ Lucien Febvre, *Philippe II et la Franche-Comté. Étude d’histoire politique, religieuse et sociale* (Paris, 1911).

⁵⁵ *HM*, 53. I still recall the thrill of finding a French manuscript map of 1606 which picked out in red and labelled “Le chemin des espagnolz”: see G. Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road. The logistics of Spanish victory and defeat in the Low Countries Wars, 1567-1659* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; 2nd edn., 2004), 61 and facing plate.

engaged in writing about unfamiliar societies.”⁵⁶ Later, you would compare *Richelieu and Olivares* – despite encountering a major methodological problem. Namely:

It is highly implausible that the societies or events to be compared will be equally well documented... Much more is known, for instance, about the nobility of 17th-century France than about that of Spain, but rather less about the intricacies of French than of Spanish crown finances.⁵⁷

Twenty years after *Richelieu and Olivares* came *Empires of the Atlantic World*, in which you offered a sustained comparison between British America and Spanish America. You noted, somewhat wistfully:

The ultimate challenge would no doubt be a comparative study of all the European empires in the Americas – French, Dutch and Portuguese, as well as Spanish and British – but it was hard enough to keep up with the rapidly proliferating literature on two empires without adding three more. It also seemed to me that, if I did so, I would be faced with one of the central dilemmas of comparative history: *that the greater the number of units of comparison, the more diluted the comparison becomes.*⁵⁸

In *History in the Making* you reviewed this and some other dilemmas of comparative history, providing a unique resource for those brave enough to follow in your footsteps:

- **Chronological disparity** – England embarked on the acquisition and colonization of American territory a century after Castile; whereas Spain retained its American empire half a century longer than Britain.
- **Environmental differences** – climate, geography, resources, population densities.
- **Differences in histories, laws, culture and values** – each of them changing over time.
- **Human variables**, such as the genius of George Washington and Simón Bolívar (or, if you prefer, the limitations of George III and Philip II).

⁵⁶ *HM*, 171-2.

⁵⁷ *HM*, 178-80. Elliott also encountered some intriguing “false positives” (each statesman “was the third son of a noble father who found employment in royal service”; and each died in their fifty-eighth year) and coincidences (each trained for a career in the church, and so read many of the same books; and each sought to learn from, and imitate, the policy initiatives of the other.)

⁵⁸ *HM*, 189, emphasis added.

You wrote *Empires* at a time when “Atlantic history seemed to be sweeping all before it” – and yet, as “the possibilities of Atlantic history were becoming apparent, so too were some of its limitations”. In particular, no single Atlantic world existed during the early modern period; instead there were “a number of Atlantics – Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch and French,” so that “The historian who hopes to span these several Atlantics” requires “impressive linguistic skills and a wide range of reading”.⁵⁹

Few can match your “impressive linguistic skills”, Sir John: you had mastered French, German, Greek and Latin before you got to Cambridge; then you added Castilian and Catalan. Indeed, you later wrote: “before my stay [in Barcelona] was over, I was even dreaming in Catalan” (sigh!) Moreover, you required all traveling the “Elliott Road” to do the same, regarding the failure to learn a relevant language much as you regarded the failure to deliver a thesis chapter at the end of each month: slothful, undisciplined, intolerable.

So I was shocked, SHOCKED to read the following confession on the penultimate page of *History in the Making*: “Great possibilities await the historian *brave enough, as I never was*, to face the difficulties of mastering Ottoman Turkish” in order to “write a modern version of Ranke’s *The Ottoman and the Spanish Empires*.”⁶⁰ In fact, not only would that brave historian need Ottoman Turkish: she or he would also need Arabic and Persian, plus the corresponding paleographic skills.

It certainly *could* be done. After all, Joseph Needham started to learn Chinese at age 38, leading to 27 volumes and parts of the magnificent *Science and Civilisation in China* that he planned and researched. Although a comparative study of the early modern Atlantic world would not require Chinese, it would demand fluency not only in the five “languages of empire”, but also in at least Wolof, Mande and Fula, as well as in Iroquois, Algonkian and Nahuatl – with all of their linguistic subsets.

This may be an option for the young, the zealous, and the absurdly optimistic – but what about the old, the tired, and the resolutely pragmatic? Two strategies come to mind. First: “pay to play.” In researching my *Military Revolution*, I found an unexpected parallel between 16th-century military technology in Europe, the Ottoman empire and Japan: all of them developed infantry volley fire as a way to overcome the time required to reload a muzzle-loading musket. I managed to compare images, and also artefacts, but there was no way I could read the secondary literature, let alone the surviving manuscripts

⁵⁹ *HM*, 204-5.

⁶⁰ *HM*, 217, emphasis added.

that even native historians understand only with difficulty, if at all. So I paid skillful graduate students to gut the literature and provide me with translations of the interesting bits. It may not be perfect, but it's a lot better than enrolling in "Japanese for beginners" at age 69.

The second strategy is the one that you adopted with notable success: find a co-author whose skills complement your own. "It was a piece of extraordinary good fortune that Jonathan Brown... should have been a close neighbour at Princeton," you wrote.

And, as we talked, we began to appreciate how each could help, and learn from, the other. The art historian felt the need for more knowledge of the historical background; the political and social historian felt the need for more knowledge of art.

You discussed and exchanged ideas and information; you worked in the same archives; you read and critiqued each other's drafts – and your collaboration achieved something that it would have been impossible for [either of you] to achieve on [your] own: *A Palace for a King*, now available in a luxurious second edition in both Spanish and English.⁶¹

This combination of strategies solves a problem that you adumbrate towards the end of *History in the Making*: "How a multitude of smaller histories can convincingly be made commensurable with a genuinely global history that spans the world from China to Peru."⁶² Although hiring translators and collaborating with another author means that we may never dream in Nahuatl (as opposed to Catalan), *we* avoid the nightmares about Mexica warriors eviscerating us atop the Templo Mayor, and *you* still receive a chapter at the end of each month.

To paraphrase the famous words of one of Lady Elliott's relatives, the noted British politician R. A. Butler: "History is the art of the possible". Perhaps that is the most important of all the lessons that we learned from both of you: always push yourself, but always know when to stop. And for that, for all the

⁶¹ *HM*, 138, 140 – though note the ensuing caveat that "the work of joint authors can never quite achieve the unified effect, in terms both of approach and of style, of a work by a single author in full command of his or her material. However great their mutual trust, however strong their commitment to speaking with a single voice, there will always be some tension that leaves its traces on the printed page." That has not been my own experience as co-author. Does this mean that my authorial voice is weak, or that I am just insensitive? Or both?

⁶² *HM*, 212, predicted that "Because of the growth of specialist fields and subfields and the massive increase in secondary literature in every field, it seems likely that in the future the writing of history will come to depend heavily on collaborative efforts of this kind."

other lessons, for your unfailing support, and for your hospitality and friendship, John and Oonah, all of us who have travelled the Elliott Road will forever be in your debt.

Response by John Elliott

Reading the tributes paid to me at “Golden Anniversaries,” the session at the 44th Annual Meeting of the ASPHS in Albuquerque so brilliantly organized by Geoffrey Parker and Xavier Gil, has proved to be a perfect example of emotion recollected in tranquility. By agreement with the organizers I did not make a speech on that occasion. I had recently published, in *History in the Making*, my views on the changing nature of historical writing in my lifetime, interspersed with reflections on my own career as a historian, and felt that I had nothing fresh to say. Any remaining time after the six speakers had given their papers was therefore set aside for questions and answers, and I must confess that I have now forgotten all but one of them. But the papers themselves, read at leisure after the event, have vividly brought back to me the occasion itself, and this brief coda to the texts here published in the *Bulletin* provides me with the opportunity to thank the speakers for the dedication and the generosity of spirit with which they approached a far from easy assignment.

Anniversaries are by their nature artificial occasions, and in any event I find it hard to realize that fifty years have passed since the publication of *Imperial Spain* and *The Revolt of the Catalans*. To me at least it seems like yesterday, and I certainly remember as if it was only yesterday the surprise and pleasure with which I opened the *Economist* to be confronted by the long anonymous review of *Imperial Spain* mentioned by James Boyden - a review which, as the author revealed to me several decades later, turned out to have been written by Menna Prestwich, the formidable Oxford historian of early modern France. For an aspiring historian at the start of his or her career there is nothing as encouraging as an enthusiastic review. But I have to say that my pleasure on that occasion has been far outweighed by that generated by the thoughtful, precise and generous assessments of my publications at the ASPHS meeting. It is enormously gratifying, after sixty or more years spent at the coalface, to emerge blinking into the sunlight and find that the hard years of labor have had some impact on the lives and thoughts of others, and particularly on those who had not even been born in 1963.

It should be said, of course, that if the labor was hard, it was accompanied by moments of intense enjoyment. There is nothing quite as intellectually exciting as solving a historical problem, even if it is of only minor importance in the great scheme of things. I have had a renewed sense of this excitement over

the last month or two, when preparing a new edition of the *Memoriales y cartas del Conde Duque de Olivares*, on which, along with my splendid and much-lamented research assistant, José Francisco de la Peña, I worked in the 1970's. Recently I have been revising the texts and the numerous footnotes, this time with the assistance of Fernando Negredo del Cerro, and Marcial Pons plans to publish our new edition, now conflated into a single volume, before the year is over. We intend to follow it late in 2014 with an additional volume, this one containing Olivares's correspondence with the Cardenal Infante when Don Fernando, victorious at Nördlingen, was governor of Flanders. This kind of textual work is inevitably laborious, but it is immensely gratifying to be able to identify long-forgotten figures, and have a second chance to track down obscure references, sometimes with success.

Ideally, however, precision should be accompanied by range, and I have consistently tried to expand the range of my work and my interests, in particular by exploring those different approaches to the past that the conference speakers highlighted in the course of their papers. Where range and variety of approach are concerned, the question that I recall from the question-and-answer session at the Albuquerque meeting was directed to the possible impact of the several changes of location in the course of my career on the kind of historical projects that I undertook. The opportunity to live and work in Spain as a graduate student was obviously critical to everything that followed, but I think it is true to say that changes of work-place, of country, and still more of continents, force one to take stock and rethink both past and current projects and future plans. New environments bring new challenges, but also new opportunities. I was immensely fortunate to be invited to join the Faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. This not only gave me the leisure to undertake large projects, such as my political biography of the Count-Duke, but also brought me into close and intellectually stimulating contact with practitioners of other disciplines, including anthropology and art history. The effect was to broaden my horizons and open my eyes to new worlds and new possibilities.

Those new worlds included the world of art history, and led to my collaboration with my close neighbor in Princeton, Jonathan Brown, in writing *A Palace for a King*. They also included the world of Atlantic civilization - a world that embraced not only Spain and Spanish America but also an Anglo-American Atlantic society whose unity, as well as disunity, struck me so forcefully during my seventeen years as a Briton relocated to the United States. Without that experience I would never have embarked on the perhaps absurdly ambitious project of writing my *Empires of the Atlantic World*, a book that allowed me to test to the full the possibilities and limitations of the comparative history that has been one of my abiding concerns. By seeing my own country from vantage-point of North America, I believe that I acquired new insights into its past, as well as

into that of the country which had become my new home. In the process, I discovered that centers had a way of becoming become peripheries, and peripheries centers – concepts that played a prominent part in *The Revolt of the Catalans*.

These brief reflections on a career that, I hope, has not been entirely mis-spent, have been stimulated by the glowing testimonials that I received in Albuquerque and that are now captured for posterity in the *Bulletin*. This coda allows me to express once again my gratitude to the ASPHS, with which I have had such a long, if at times distant, connection, for hosting a characteristically friendly, informal and informative conference; to Geoffrey and Xavier for the original inspiration for the commemoration, and their thoughtful planning of a session in which, when selecting the speakers, they achieved a perfect balance of known knowns and known unknowns; and, above all, to the speakers themselves, who rose so triumphantly to the occasion, and have left the recipient of their tributes basking in a warm afterglow that will do much to lighten paths that are yet to be pursued.