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Review of Ida Altman and David Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century*

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Altman, Ida, and David Wheat, eds. *The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. xiii–xxv + 330 pages, 4 maps, 3 tables, index.

In publications about the early European presence in the Americas, the Caribbean used to be treated as little more than a collection of stepping stones toward the continents north and south. Moreover, the seminal works of scholars such as Irene A. Wright and Carl O. Sauer in the early twentieth century seem to have led many scholars, particularly those working in English, to assume that there was little more to say. Fortunately, scholars in Spain and the circum-Caribbean continued to explore the riches in administrative and ecclesiastical archives regarding the sixteenth century, publishing collections of documents as well as articles and monographs. The Archive of the Indies in Seville was, of course, a major focus of their work. More recently, the database called PARES (Portal de Archivos Españoles) has provided access to the catalogs of multiple state archives in Spain and fully digitized versions of thousands of documents therein. PARES went online in 2007 after decades of effort by Spanish archivists, and the work of cataloguing, digitizing, and entering documents into the system is ongoing. Along with the broader resources available on the internet in general, current generations of scholars have access to a range of primary materials that Wright and Sauer could hardly have imagined.

The volume under review takes full advantage of the scholarly resources now available to scholars interested in the early years of the Spanish Caribbean. Building upon other recent work, the authors invite the reader to consider the complexity and interconnectedness of the peoples and places that shared the Caribbean space—not just the islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, but also the coastal areas to which they were inextricably linked. The volume took shape during a conference at the University of Florida in 2016 to share preliminary versions of the essays. The authors range from well-published senior professors to beginning scholars still involved in their graduate training, which is somewhat unusual even by today's standards. Nonetheless, presumably aided by the guidance and expertise of the two co-editors, the volume forms a coherent whole. Each of the essays is well written, well documented, and persuasively argued and includes not only endnotes but a detailed bibliography, for which readers can thank the University of Nebraska Press and its former editor-in-chief Alisa Plant. The benefits of fully documenting each essay more than outweigh the costs of some inevitable duplication.

The book is organized in five thematic parts, although individual essays are not necessarily confined to any rigid framework. The five themes are: 1) Indians in the Early Spanish Caribbean; 2) Europeans in the Islands; 3) Africans

and the Spanish Caribbean; 4) Environment and Health; and 5) International Commercial Networks. In the first part, Lauren Macdonald explores the often-fraught relationship between Indians and the regular clergy on Hispaniola in the first two decades of contact and evangelization. Although religious identities and beliefs on both sides of the cultural divide have often been viewed as static, Macdonald argues for the malleability of both indigenous and Christian beliefs and practices. Cacey Farnsworth examines the early history of Spaniards in Puerto Rico and a particular revolt that demonstrated the interisland connections, rivalries, and alliances that Spaniards never fully understood. Erin Stone counters the standard notion that indigenous slavery and slave trading were quickly replaced by the importation of African slaves. Instead, though numbers are hard to establish, indigenous slavery and slave trading persisted well into the sixteenth century.

Ida Altman begins Part 2 by analyzing the life and career of Vasco Porcallo de Figueroa, one of the few early figures to achieve considerable wealth and social status in Cuba. Although never holding major political posts or advantageous marriage alliances, he became powerful through an often-ruthless enforcement of the interests of the crown and himself and also positioned his numerous mestizo progeny to succeed. Shannon Lalor contrasts the careers of two prominent aristocratic women in early Cuba. Doña Isabel de Bobadilla, daughter of Pedrarias Dávila, wife and then widow of Hernando de Soto, actually served as governor of Cuba for several years, but her family's prominence in Spain could not compensate for her lack of established patronage ties abroad. By contrast, doña Guiomar de Guzmán successfully used patronage networks to consolidate the wealth and power of her family. Brian Hamm concludes Part 2 by discussing the roles and reputation of Portuguese immigrants to the Spanish circum-Caribbean. Standard historiography focuses on the presumed identity and exclusion of Portuguese immigrants as crypto-Jews in the seventeenth century. By contrast, Portuguese immigrants in the sixteenth century were generally accepted as natives of an indisputably Roman Catholic country who blended well into Spanish colonial society. In general, they were not tainted by the actions of the few Portuguese who acted as agents of France or England.

In Part 3, Marc Eagle provides a thorough analysis of the limitations and possibilities of sources for the understudied early slave trade, tracing changes in both the origins and the destinations of slaves transported to fill the growing need for labor in the Caribbean region. Although the Portuguese played a prominent role in the trade, other nationalities also participated, while the Spanish crown struggled to keep control of the traffic and the revenue it potentially generated. David Wheat uses parish registers to study the social interactions of slaves from the Upper Guinea coast transported to Havana. He argues that traditional alliances

and enmities in West Africa continued to operate in the new context across the Atlantic, rather than dissolving under the process of enslavement and dislocation.

Observers from Cortés onward contrasted the disease-prone environment of the Caribbean islands with the supposedly healthful environment of the Mexican mainland. Nonetheless, as J. M. H. Clark argues in Part 4, Veracruz, among other coastal settlements in the circum-Caribbean, was also plagued by challenges from climate and disease. After several attempts to establish the town elsewhere, the definitive planting of Veracruz opposite San Juan de Ulúa recognized the political and economic value of a location that remained unhealthy. Pablo Gómez analyzes the continuous efforts of the Spanish crown to combat disease and other challenges to the health of Europeans, Indians, and Africans alike in the circum-Caribbean. From early local and disorganized efforts in response above all to alarming Indian mortality, the crown and religious authorities developed a more coherent and comprehensive effort aimed at fomenting public health in general, largely through the foundation of hospitals. Gómez argues that this comprehensive approach prefigured similar efforts in Europe two centuries later.

Part 5 revisits the traditional theme of transatlantic trade with an emphasis on participants who rarely receive detailed treatment. Spencer Tyce discusses German bankers and merchants who obtained exclusive contracts to explore, trade, and found settlements from Emperor Charles V, a beneficiary of financial support from his imperial subjects. The firms of Fugger, Welser, and other south Germans played early roles in exploration and exploitation of the circum-Caribbean, but they soon found that their profits, especially in Venezuela, did not repay their heavy investments. Gabriel de Avilez Rocha concludes the volume with an analysis of the crucial role played by the Portuguese Azores in the transatlantic trading circuit established in the sixteenth century. Given the winds and currents of the Atlantic, the Azores were an essential stage in the return voyage from the Caribbean to Europe. Legitimate merchants as well as pirates of various nationalities stopped in the Azores before conveying goods and—early on—enslaved captives to diverse destinations in Europe, often avoiding the official entry point of the transatlantic trade in Seville.

The four maps, detailed index, and glossary of terms provide useful aids for readers at all levels. The Portuguese-born Empress Isabel, consort of Charles V, is confusingly mis-identified as Queen Isabel of Portugal (142), which presumably can be corrected in subsequent editions. Overall, this is an essential collection for use in classes of both undergraduate and graduate students.

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