

Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Journal of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies

Volume 48

Issue 1

Review 2

2023

Review of Ricardo Padrón, *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West*

Elizabeth B. Davis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://asphs.net/journal/>

Recommended Citation

Davis, Elizabeth B. (2023) "Review of Ricardo Padrón, *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 48 : Iss. 1 , Review 2.

Available at:

<https://asphs.net/article/review-of-ricardo-padron-the-indies-of-the-setting-sun-how-early-modern-spain-mapped-the-far-east-as-the-transpacific-west>

This **book review** is brought to you for free and open access by the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in the Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies by an authorized editor of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact bulletineditor@asphs.net.

Padrón, Ricardo. *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 346 pp.

In recent years, early modernists have increasingly concerned themselves with the global ocean and its shores, which played a critical role in establishing cultural and economic connections during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One emerging subfield of Iberian Oceanic studies is that of Transpacific or Hispano-Asian studies. The work of scholars such as Christina Lee, Raúl Marrero-Fente, John Newsome Crossley, Carmen Y. Hsu, Noemí Martín Santo, Ana M. Rodríguez-Rodríguez, and others is quickly redefining the parameters of Transpacific studies, permitting readers to view long-hidden Spanish and Portuguese texts set in or around the Philippines, the Moluccas, Japan, and China. Ricardo Padrón's *The Indies of the Setting Sun: How Early Modern Spain Mapped the Far East as the Transpacific West* is a key contribution to this exciting outpouring of work. In this book, Padrón marshals the map-reading skills he honed in his first book, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), to challenge established narratives about the "invention of America," most notably that of Edmundo O'Gorman (1961), by focusing on the Asia-Pacific region as the westernmost part of a Spanish "Indies" understood as a hemispheric, rather than a continental space. Padrón asserts that pertinent maps and cartographic literature such as the chronicles of the Indies offer ample evidence that the "Spanish geopolitical imaginary" always linked the New World and Asia, and that it resisted the temptation to view the Pacific Ocean as a boundary between these two parts of the world.

Chapter 1 expands on evidence for these claims, as it sets out the framework for the following chapters. Here, the reader first encounters Padrón's analysis of several early maps of the world, among them the *Typus Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius (1570), Martin Waldseemüller's well-known *Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei* (1507), and a copy of Spain's official map of the world, from the *Carta universal en que se contiene todo lo que del mundo se ha descubierto fasta agora* of Diogo Ribeiro (1529). It is challenging for many of us to read these maps on their own terms. For one thing, we know much more about lands whose coastlines were still being defined in the period that Padrón examines. It is also true that the model of the world we already have in our heads can get in the way of our imagining land masses and coastlines as sixteenth-century Iberian mapmakers did. By letting go of this habit of thinking, the author says, one can more easily approximate a sixteenth-century Spanish manner of conceptualizing America as connected with Asia by land. After considering the historical importance of the Manila Galleon trade, Padrón returns to the matter of the two cartographic traditions that took stock of the Pacific in different ways: a theory of

American insularity, which understood the New World as a vast continent unto itself; and a theory of Amerasian continuity that “identifies the Atlantic coast of North America as part of continental Asia” (30).

Chapter 2 reaffirms the idea that period maps offer evidence for the notion that some mapmakers working for the Spanish empire conceived of the New World as “physically connected to Asia in the North Pacific” (41). The main thrust of the argument here, however, is that, due to their internal coherence, the maps of these cartographers were more than a rendering of the lands assigned to Castile by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This coherence was achieved, according to Padrón, by using various “metageographies”, one of which is the theory of climates. The *Carte du monde* of the Portuguese mapmaker Jorge Reinel (1519) figures prominently throughout this chapter in Padrón’s discussion of these matters. As he points out, this chart was important because it may have been used by Ferdinand Magellan to make a case for sailing toward the Spice Islands. The author subjects the chart to three readings based on the architecture of the continents, the theory of climates, and the art of navigation. Padrón is intrigued by the empty spaces in the Reinel chart and contends that where the “modern eye” mistakes the vast emptiness for the Pacific Ocean, the sixteenth-century eye was trained to view this expanse as “blank cartographic space” (49). The Reinel chart suggests a shift in the “architecture of the continents” to allow for the presence of yet undiscovered lands. Here, Padrón sheds light on a debate taking place in Iberia about the nature of those unknown lands and the separateness or connectedness of America and Asia, hinting in various places that the ascendant view after Reinel was that, heading north, the American coastline eventually merged with that of Asia, while intellectuals of the previous generation, such as Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella, had already opined that the American lands were in fact distinct (54).

The task of Chapter 3 is to examine the “cultural construction of transpacific distance” in four accounts of the first circumnavigation of the world: those of Antonio Pigafetta, Maximilian von Sevenborgen, Pedro Mártir de Anglería, and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. This chapter puts the question of the ominousness of the Pacific Ocean’s expanse for these early modern chroniclers directly in front of the reader. Whereas Pigafetta, who experienced the Magellanic voyage firsthand, makes no effort to conceal the hostility of the Pacific environment or the terrible challenges of its navigation, the writers who followed him engage in a kind of fictionalization of the first circumnavigation story. By omitting the suffering endured during the Pacific crossing and privileging what Padrón refers to as a “rhetoric of smooth sailing”, the later writers render a more promising view of the enterprise that glorifies the navigators and by extension, the Spanish imperial enterprise. This is what the author means when he writes of the “containment” of the Pacific.

In Chapter 4, Padrón argues that even contemporaries like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and Francisco López de Gómara were aware that after the Treaty of Zaragoza (1529), Spain's plans to gain control over the South Sea—including the difficulty in identifying the return route from the Moluccas to New Spain—were starting to slip away. This helps to explain why these writers focus less on the dream of establishing a Spanish colony in the Spice Islands and more on the New World and the Atlantic. In so doing, Padrón argues, they fortify the project of the “invention of America,” leaving the knowledge of transpacific navigation unresolved. Another strong theme in this chapter is the competition between the ascendant imperial project of seaward Portugal and the diminished power of Castile in the Pacific.

Chapter 5 opens with the realization of longed-for Spanish successes in the Philippines. Padrón points out that the accomplishment of so many ambitions finally achieved by Miguel López de Legazpi and Andrés de Urdaneta was met with surprisingly little fanfare. Only one anonymous pamphlet published in Barcelona in 1566 marked the occasion, painting a promising picture of Spain's colonization of the archipelago. Most of the chapter is dedicated to the work of Juan López de Velasco, the first “Cosmographer and Chronicler Major of the States and Kingdoms of the Indies, Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea”. Padrón considers López de Velasco's *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias* (1574) a “reconceptualization” of the Indies made possible by Spain's dominion over the Philippines and Urdaneta's discovery of the return route from the Islas del Poniente to New Spain. We learn of López de Velasco's caginess and his ambivalence as he uses climate theory and the model of the Mundo Nuevo to interpret the social reality of the Philippines by tropicalizing the archipelago and its inhabitants as earlier writers had tropicalized the peoples of Brazil, the Caribbean and New Spain. The Cosmographer Major never acknowledges the insularity of America, even as he draws a sketch map of lands under Spanish control that suggests Spain has a legitimate claim to parts of Asia to the west of the archipelago. The chapter ends on a note of triumph and doubt: Philip II has the Philippines in his grasp, but he receives conflicting opinions from councilors on whether he has the right to exercise dominion over them. Urdaneta, who has more than earned his respect, is one of those who advises him not to sail into the area that Philip's father had effectively sold to Portugal.

In Chapter 6, Padrón shows how several influential writers of the sixteenth century situated China at the western edge of the Spanish hemisphere. Following this logic, what Spain had already accomplished in America appears as a kind of mirror through which to gaze at China and the Philippine archipelago throughout the chapter. The focus is primarily on how Spanish Sinophiles attempted to “map *their* China into” a transpacific space figured forth earlier in the writings of Sinophobic figures such as Francisco de Sande, governor and captain-general of

the Philippines, who had gone as far as to propose a military invasion of China in a letter to Philip II. While numerous written accounts of Spanish dealings with China are referenced here, the chapter revolves around two major works: Bernardino de Escalante's *Discurso de la navegación que los portugueses hacen a los reinos y provincias del Oriente, y de la noticia que se tiene de las grandezas del reino de la China* (Seville, 1577), and Juan González de Mendoza's well-known *Historia del gran reino de la China* (Madrid, 1586). Both writers draw on documents about recent embassies sent from Manila to China, letters, and travel narratives, some of which recycle well-worn Sinophobic tropes about the cruelty and tyranny of the mandarins, and representations of Chinese books and learning as superficially impressive but lacking in substance. In the hands of Escalante and Mendoza, however, such sources are examined in a way that dislodges some of this Sinophobic bias that might have led to an armed conflict with China, in favor of a diplomatic approach that would make it possible for Spanish missionaries to become more active in the region, resulting in a "spiritual conquest" of China. Also discussed in this chapter is the work of the Franciscan friar Martín Ignacio de Loyola: *Itinerario y compendio de las cosas notables que hay desde España, hasta el reino de la China y de la China a España* (Lisbon, 1586). Loyola is notable, among other things, for having sailed around the globe unintentionally.

Chapter 7 tells the story of the fraught efforts of different religious orders—primarily the Jesuits and the Franciscans—to missionize in Zipangu (Japan). Padrón opens with an event some readers will undoubtedly recognize: the crucifixion at Nagasaki of 26 Christians, including six Spanish Franciscan friars, in 1597. The details of the story are narrated in Marcelo de Ribadeneira's *Historia de las islas del Archipiélago Filipino y reinos de la Gran China* (Madrid, 1601). This beautifully written chapter stresses the importance of Japan as a passageway and stopping place for ships heading from the Canary Islands to Cathay and westward to Zipangu. Padrón shows how in this context, the tensions between devout actors are actually a high-stakes turf war between religious orders that held opposing views on the best way to go about their work spreading the Gospel in what was still a novel context for all involved. More important were the long-term consequences of decisions made about these matters: for the Jesuits it was essential to think of East and Southeast Asia as a "natural part of Oriental India" that corresponded to their sphere of influence, whereas for the Franciscans, it was necessary to map Japan within the Castilian hemisphere, where they already had active missions in New Spain. Padrón connects these Franciscans to the push for missions in East Asia, making plain the millenarian underpinnings of Franciscan beliefs about their larger role in hastening the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. For this reader, the section titled "A Franciscan Journey to the West" was a true tour de force. Anything following it would come across as anticlimactic.

The final chapter reminds us that the Spanish empire was indeed marked and defined on and through paper documents: maps, letters, testaments, and manuscripts that were published as chronicles and sometimes apologies for it. As readers, we are also made keenly aware of something that all of us already know: that on its transpacific outskirts, this far-reaching empire was as fragile as the paper used to trace, justify and document it. This chapter is built on a range of topics, starting with the Spanish response to the Black Legend and Spain's need to partner with Portugal while exercising a hegemonic role over its Lusitanian counterpart, and extending to Dutch expansion into the East Indies, with attendant concerns over heretical interpretations of Christian theology, and the violence surrounding the 1603 revolt of the *sangleys*. The two primary texts Padrón analyzes in the chapter are Antonio de Herrera's *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano* (Madrid, 1601 and 1614), and Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola's *La Conquista de las islas Malucas* (1609), which narrates the story of Pedro Bravo de Acuña's capture of Ternate and Tidore and the Spanish expulsion of the Dutch from islands of the Spicery.

This is a tightly-argued book. Padrón never lets his readers forget about the Amerasian connection, even at those moments when he must slightly stretch his line of reasoning to do so, such as his treatment of the figure of Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella, founder of the Colegio Santa María de Jesús, located close to the Palacio San Telmo that would later be the training ground for Seville's pilots. Fernández de Santaella did not live long enough to know that institution. However, he was a member of the governing body that led to the founding of the Universidad de Sevilla, for which his Colegio served as a cornerstone. He was also on the ground in Seville when early ships were already returning from America to the docks of Seville. Such things would have been the talk of the town, so it is hard to imagine that Fernández Santaella, who was well connected, did not begin to form a strong opinion about the American lands as a reality unto themselves by the time he died in 1505. Padrón spots Fernández Santaella's appreciation for the novelty of a "newly charted west" (54), but it might have been possible to take his analysis even further by viewing the man's activities in their Sevillian context.

The great strength of *The Indies of the Setting Sun* is that it forces the modern reader to grapple with the way in which sixteenth-century Spaniards and others thought about global geography. Confronting notions such as the assumption that the coastal areas of North America could be traced north to connect with Asia can be uncomfortable for us, but the maps of the Casa de la Contratación suggest what they suggest. Padrón's work obligates us to deal with that reality. This is a book that shakes up some of our basic assumptions about world geography in order to make a point. At first this can cause intellectual

frustration, but ultimately, we experience delight as we reach backward to “think the world” of the mapmakers and writers included here. For this reason and many others, *The Indies of the Setting Sun* is well worth a good read.

Elizabeth B. Davis
The Ohio State University