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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pablo E. Perez-Mallaina. *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. xi + 289 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5746-1.



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Published on H-War (May, 1999)

Pablo E. Perez-Mallaina's *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* is the story of the sailors who manned the merchantmen and warships of the *Carrera de Indias* (Route of the Indies) in Spain's Golden Age. Perez, the director of the Department of American Studies at the University of Seville, wrote this work on the occasion of the quincentenary celebration of Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage of discovery, intending it for a Spanish-speaking audience knowledgeable with the broad outlines of the age. Luckily, however, for Anglophone readers not so familiar with this era, Carla Rahn Phillips, author of *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), has translated and written a brief introduction to this intimate look at the lives of Spanish sailors. Her skill at "maintain[ing] the rhythm and flow of the author's Spanish phrasing while bringing the text into idiomatic English" is a key factor in this work's success (p. x).

Spain's Men of the Sea is organized into six topical chapters addressing mariners' "Land Environment," their "Origin and Social Condition," the "Ship as a Place of Work" as well as a "Place of Life and Death," the "Discipline and Conflict" they encountered while at sea, and finally their "Mental Horizons." Perez takes the reader

through these sailors' lives and those of their families from the neighborhoods of Seville, a "human tapestry of great vitality in which the extraordinary became commonplace," to their ships, and destinations throughout the empire (p. 1).

Going to sea, as Perez explains, resulted from the push and pull factors deriving from economic want, a quest for personal advancement, running from troubles at home, and a sense of adventure. Life on the Indies fleets was difficult and often dangerous, but, in the routes' developmental stages rewards could be commensurate with risks. Early voyagers to the New World, the Spice Islands, and the Philippines became something akin to economic partners with ships' owners through the reward of shares deriving from the sale of cargo; additionally, sailors were allowed a percentage of the ship's carrying capacity into which they could carry personal trade goods for resale. Life at sea offered intelligent, ambitious men the opportunity for advancing into the skilled ranks of pilots, and their responsibility for safely navigating and sailing their ships. For a very lucky few, their skill and financial acumen might even give them entry into the ranks of ships' masters or owners. Indeed, "money and opportunity presented themselves more rapidly at sea than in the stable world on land, and an audacious man, with a little luck, had more options at sea than if he

stayed rooted to his native soil" (p. 25).

While the sea offered men an avenue of advancement, it also reflected and reinforced Spain's social order. Financially, the gulf separating common sailors from shipowners was vast, but socially it was practically nonexistent. A wealthy owner, because he most often came from a family of shipbuilders, "still carried the ignominious brand of his obscure origins as a manual laborer, practicing one of the 'mechanical occupations' of low social prestige" (p. 36). Sons of the nobility not only monopolized the ranks of the generals and admirals of the armada, but as passengers onboard merchantmen they frequently assumed command as captains. Captaincies in the merchant fleet, as Perez points out, entitled holders to assume military command of ships while engaged with an enemy, the more technical and mundane duties being left to less socially distinguished pilots and masters.

In the course of examining the ship as a workplace, Perez reminds the reader that a "multidecked ship in the sixteenth century formed a floating collection of the incredible successes achieved by human ingenuity to that time." The organization of ships' companies and the social and occupational divisions of labor arguably made these vessels among the most complex social, economic, and technical systems in the world. Spanish sailors were

manning "veritable showcases of the technological developments of western Europe" (p. 64).

This work is a worthy addition to maritime historiography. Its strength derives from Perez's exhaustive research in the Archives of the Indies in Seville and his skill at translating judicial records and other official documents into a rich, insightful, and sensitive look at sixteenth-century Spanish mariners, one that is enlivened by the author's wry sense of humor and amply illustrated by eight color plates and twenty black and white illustrations. *Spain's Men of the Sea* is an ambitious and deftly-executed work that gives Anglophone readers a rare look at Spanish seagoing history. It deserves to be placed alongside other notable social maritime histories like N.A.M. Rodgers' *Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: Norton, 1986) and Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

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Citation: Ricardo A. Herrera. Review of Perez-Mallaina, Pablo E., *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. May, 1999.

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