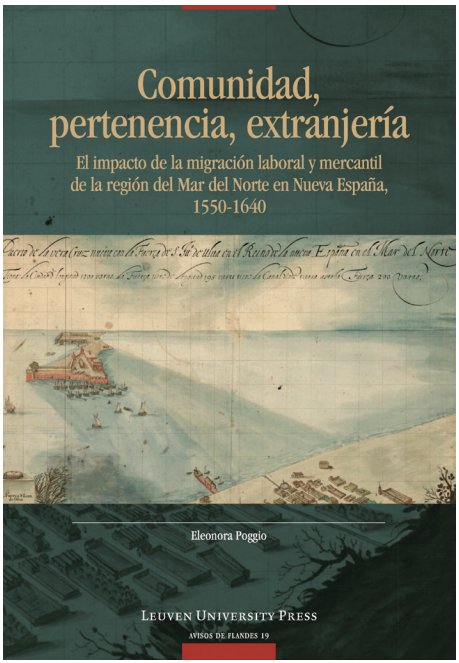
Review

Germán Jiménez-Montes, *A Dissimulated Trade. Northern European Timber Merchants in Seville (1574-1598)*, Leiden, Brill, 2022, 260 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-46018-8.

Eleonora Poggio, *Comunidad, pertenencia, extranjería. El impacto de la migración laboral y mercantil de la región del Mar del Norte en Nueva España, 1550-1640*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2022, 470 pp. ISBN 978-9-46166-445-7.





Historiography on the Atlantic World and the Hispanic Monarchy in the early modern period has seen a significant shift towards the study of mobility, migration, and transnational trade networks as structural factors in the shaping of imperial societies. In contrast to traditional interpretations centred on rigid national, normative, or institutional frameworks, this approach highlights the economic and social interdependence between imperial and extra-imperial spaces, as well as the active role of non-Castilian

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actors in sustaining a system that was a veritable transnational empire of interconnected networks.

Two key contributions fall within this context: *A Dissimulated Trade* by Germán Jiménez-Montes and *Comunidad, pertenencia, extranjería* by Eleonora Poggio. Both works address the presence of northern European migrants within the Spanish Habsburg Empire, but from complementary perspectives: the former focuses on metropolitan commercial structures and the latter on social and regulatory processes in the colonial sphere. Reading the two works together allows for a substantial reformulation of our understanding of the Spanish Empire as a permeable, pragmatic system sustained by international networks. Jiménez-Montes' study focuses on Seville in the late sixteenth century, the main hub of the Atlantic system, and analyses the role of Flemish, Dutch, and German merchants in the timber trade. This sector was strategically important: timber was an indispensable resource for shipbuilding, fleet repairs, and the maintenance of port infrastructure, in other words, for the material functioning of the Spanish Indies trade known as the *Carrera de Indias*. Drawing on notarial documentation, the author reconstructs the networks that linked Seville with the Baltic and northern Europe, demonstrating that the supply of vital resources relied on international trade routes. The study's main interpretative contribution lies in its concept of 'covert trade', which is understood as an economic activity that operates on the margins of, or in direct contradiction to, the legal restrictions arising from political and religious conflicts.

This model reveals a structural dynamic: restrictive legislation coexisted with tolerated economic practices; pragmatic solutions were imposed due to the need for strategic resources; personal and commercial networks prevailed over confessional divisions. Consequently, Seville does not appear as a closed space, but rather as a centre of convergence for European networks, where foreigners acted as indispensable intermediaries. Thus, the imperial economy appears to be dependent on agents who operate simultaneously both within and outside the institutional framework.

Poggio's work extends the analysis to the colonial context, addressing the presence of migrants from northern Europe in New Spain between 1550 and 1640. The author's approach is structured around three key categories: community, belonging, and foreignness. These categories enable an examination of how these individuals were classified, regulated, and integrated into colonial society. Drawing on inquisitorial and administrative sources, the author reconstructs the life stories of sailors, artisans, and merchants. These individuals were able to settle in the viceroyalty despite the legal restrictions that were in place at the time. The study demonstrates that imperial regulations, which formally prohibited the presence of foreigners, were systematically qualified by social and economic practice. One of the most significant elements of the study is the analysis of regularisation mechanisms, with a particular focus on the 'compositions' paid by foreigners, allowing the legalisation of their residence through financial means. These mechanisms serve to institutionalise the exception and reveal a system that is characterised by regulatory flexibility. The Inquisition emerges as a privileged space for observation in which suspicions towards foreigners are manifested, particularly on religious grounds, alongside forms of daily coexistence and processes of identity construction. The study shows that foreignness was not a fixed condition, but rather a relational and negotiated category, determined by political, economic, and

cultural factors. In this sense, migrant communities contributed to the formation of hybrid colonial societies, in which inclusion and exclusion coexisted dynamically.

Both works agree in questioning the idea of effective and coherent control by the Hispanic Monarchy over the foreign presence. The repetition of legal provisions is in stark contrast to their limited application, which can be attributed to structural factors such as administrative inadequacy, corruption and local collusion, or economic dependence on foreigners. This tension between law and practice is not an anomaly, but a systemic feature. The imperial economy functioned through a structural coexistence of legality and illegality, in which controlled transgression was functional to the system. Furthermore, both studies highlight the pivotal role of foreigners' economic agency. Far from being marginal actors, these groups performed key functions such as the supply of strategic resources (timber, naval materials), the acting as intermediaries in commercial and financial networks, and the provision of skilled labour in colonial contexts. This evidence compels us to rethink the role of foreigners as integral components of the imperial system, rather than merely tolerated elements.

A significant conceptual contribution is the redefinition of foreignness as a flexible, contextual, and performative category. In both Seville and New Spain, individuals adapted their identity according to the prevailing circumstances. They made use of intermediaries or neutral carriers integrated through marriage or patronage, and sought regularisation through legal mechanisms. Consequently, foreign identity was thus constructed through interaction with the institutional and social environment. This approach aligns with historiographical trends that emphasise the negotiation of belonging and the relational nature of categories such as citizenship or neighbourhood.

From the perspective of the *Carrera de Indias*, both works allow for a profound reinterpretation of the system. Traditionally, it is understood as a monopoly controlled by institutions such as the *Casa de la Contratación* (House of Trade). However, in these works, the system is presented as a complex, multi-nodal network, sustained by diverse actors. Three dimensions merit particular attention: first, that the material infrastructure, the construction and maintenance of the fleets, was dependent on imported resources, particularly from northern Europe. Second, that foreigners were integrated into labour and migration networks, actively participating in transatlantic circuits, both in the metropolis and in the colonies. Moreover, that their role is instrumental to understanding global interdependence. The imperial economy was integrated into a broader system of European and Atlantic exchanges. This approach situates the *Carrera de Indias* within a logic of global circulation of goods, capital, and knowledge, thereby distancing it from self-centred interpretations.

The complementarity of both works constitutes one of their main strengths. However, their integration also allows us to identify future lines of development. In Poggio's case, there is a limited connection with the peninsular spaces that formed the basis of migratory networks. In Jiménez-Montes's work, certain hypotheses, such as covert cooperation in contexts of embargo, require further empirical development. Both issues point to the need for research to be conducted in a more systematic manner integrating the metropolitan, Atlantic, and colonial levels. Taken together, the two studies contribute to a substantial re-evaluation of the Hispanic Monarchy as a historical system.

Far from being a closed and homogeneous empire, it emerges as a flexible, interdependent structure traversed by transnational networks. The main conclusions that can be drawn are: the imperial economy was structurally dependent on the actions of foreign actors; regulations coexisted with adaptive and pragmatic practices; foreignness was a negotiated, rather than a fixed, category; and commercial and migratory networks linked imperial and extra-imperial spaces. This approach not only enriches the study of the *Carrera de Indias* but also situates the Hispanic Monarchy within the broader framework of the global history of the early modern period, characterised by mobility, interconnection, and constant circulation.

Ana Crespo Solana (Institute of History, CSIC)