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Book Reviews

Between Empires: Brazilian Sugar in the Early Atlantic Economy, 1550–1630

CHRISTOPHER EBERT

Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008

210 pp. (ISBN 9789004167681)

Between Empires offers readers a new approach to the study of the Brazilian sugar trade in the early modern Atlantic World. By detaching from the imperial and mercantile approaches that dominated this type of research until the 1990s and focusing on the commercial activities of the private businessmen engaged in the Brazilian sugar trade, Christopher Ebert comes forward with new and important conclusions regarding not only the Brazilian sugar trade, but also the Atlantic economy in general.

The author starts by examining Portuguese foreign commerce prior to the production of sugar cane in Brazil and its introduction in European consumption markets. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the trade routes connecting Portugal to northwestern Europe and the products transacted. Here, the small scale of Portuguese agricultural production and of consumption markets for colonial products is emphasized. In addition, the author shows the key role of ports such as Antwerp, Amsterdam, Hamburg, London and Danzig as suppliers of grain, wood, metal ware, weapons and semi-finished shipbuilding materials as well as the consumption and re-distribution centers for São Tomé and Madeira sugar.

In Chapter 3, Ebert analyzes the institutions with jurisdiction over the sugar trade and the taxes imposed on this product. Here, the author also looks at the impact of the integration of Portugal into the Habsburg Empire on the sugar trade by paying special attention to warfare and economic embargoes. In fact, due to these constraints and others, a great many sugar transactions and much shipping took place outside the legal framework that regulated this business. These illegal forms of trade are exposed by Ebert in Chapter 7.

After analyzing the role of institutions and state polices on the sugar trade, in Chapter 4 Ebert studies the mercantile groups engaged in the Brazilian sugar business: the Portuguese and the North European merchants. This is the most innovative part of the book, as it provides the reader with fresh ideas and relevant conclusions. First, the author demystifies the thesis that Portuguese Sephardim merchants were the key

players in the Brazilian sugar trade by demonstrating that Portuguese Old Christians as well as North European merchants from Flanders, the Dutch Republic and the German States were highly engaged in the sugar trade. Secondly, Ebert proves that early modern businessmen did not choose their business partners and their commercial agents based on common 'ethnic,' religious and cultural backgrounds or 'national' affiliations. The author leaves out the discussion on cross-cultural trade. This analysis of these merchants' interactions in light of this debate would have strengthened Ebert's conclusions and enriched the study even more. Third, the author puts in evidence the non-specialization of the business activities of the European merchants engaged in early modern Atlantic trade. He shows that the investors in the Brazilian sugar trade had a wide portfolio of investments in different commercial branches as well as in various stages of the sugar business including production, trade and the refining industry. Fourth, the data gathered by Ebert also illustrates clearly the inter-imperial character of the merchant networks set in place by the businessmen engaged in the Brazilian sugar trade during the period under analysis.

Similar conclusions are defended by the author in Chapter 5, where he examines transaction costs in the Brazilian sugar trade. The evidence presented with regard to the size and efficiency of port infrastructures in the port system of the sugar business, the cost of shipping and the expenses associated with the purchase and freightage of ships shows clearly that the shipping of Brazilian sugar had a trans-imperial organization.

An identical trans-imperial dimension was to be found in the system of credit backing the Brazilian sugar trade examined in Chapter 6. Here, Ebert studies the various financial practices used in the commerce of sugar. These financial practices are presented also as strategies to manage risk, alongside many other measures such as diversification of investments in products and commercial branches, parceling-out investment in cargoes or in ownership of ships, and also the purchase of maritime insurance.

This impressive and detailed study of the Brazilian sugar trade ends with an accurate analysis of the supply and consumption markets for this product and the role played by sugar within the Portuguese and the Dutch economies. Ebert not only measures the profitability of the business for the different parties engaged in the business, but also demonstrates that the Brazilian sugar trade was an integrated business where supply and demand affected each other mutually.

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Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil

Edited and translated by NEIL L. WHITEHEAD and MICHAEL HARBSMEIER
Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008
296 pp. (ISBN: 9780822342311)

This new translation into English of Hans Staden's *Warhaftige Historia*, or *True History*, originally published in 1557 in Marburg, will fill a gap in the study of both European