Although Portuguese merchants took the leading role in trade between England and Portugal in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, demand for Iberian goods in England during the peace that reigned in the late fifteenth century allowed both Portuguese and Spanish merchants to benefit. Even so, the relationship between English and Spanish trade was not always easy. In the early fourteenth century, Castile worsened, however, when Constanza, the oldest daughter of King Pedro, married Edward III's son, John of Gaunt, who used the split between Pedro and his half-brother, Enrique Trastamara, to attack France via Spain--a ploy to help his wife claim Castile. Portugal was also drawn into this conflict, although the marriage of João de Avis (King John I of Portugal) with Philippa of Lancaster (the oldest child of John of Gaunt and his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster) set in motion a long-lasting coalition between England and Portugal that counter-balanced the Franco-Castilian alliance.

These political developments had a negative impact on Anglo-Castilian trade. No Spanish merchants traded in England or its Bordeaux territory in the 1370s and 1380s, although some Spanish goods indirectly reached England through Bruges and Portugal. Trade resumed in the early 1390s, but Spanish-French raids on the English coast in 1405 reflected ongoing tensions. Thereafter, merchants and shippers on both sides relied heavily on safe-conducts, a source that provides key details on the commodities, ships, and merchants involved in the first half of the fifteenth century. The relationship changed significantly when Edward IV of England sought support from Castile for his usurpation of the English throne and negotiated a treaty that in 1466 gave Castilians a variety of privileges, including a significant reduction in English customs. By the 1480s, Spanish merchants were responsible for at least 9-15 per cent of England's cloth exports, a minimum figure since an unknown amount of English exports reached Spain via Flanders. The Spanish increasingly concentrated their efforts on London in the last decades of the fifteenth century, where Basque ships and Spanish merchants were especially prominent, but played a relatively more important role in the western port of Bristol, which sent over 50 per cent of its cloth exports to Spain. At this time, English merchants also became more active in Spain, including Andalusia.

The last two lectures concentrate on Anglo-Portuguese trade, which suffered fewer of the disruptions that plagued Anglo-Castilian relations. Portugal exported both basic commodities such as salt, cork, fish, and oil, as well as luxury goods such as wine, kermes vermilio dye, and dried fruits. These luxury items, along with new colonial products such as sugar and marmalade, which first showed up in England at the very end of the fifteenth century, were especially popular in London's richer consumer market. In exchange, England sent mainly cloth, although this trade never reached the scale of its exports to Spain, a far larger market than Portugal. Childs argues that Portuguese trade with England tended to flourish when English-Spanish relations were poor, but when Castile and England were at peace, Portuguese trade declined since it no longer enjoyed a monopoly on providing Iberian goods to English markets. Even so, the demand for Iberian goods in England during the peace that reigned in the late fifteenth century allowed both Portuguese and Spanish trade to reach new highs as they increasingly concentrated on the London market.
centuries, English merchants controlled the bulk of this trade by the late fifteenth century. Bristol merchants were especially prominent; English ships dominated the Bristol trade to Iberia, but Portuguese shipping was far more important in the trade with London. The Anglo-Portuguese alliance also facilitated Portuguese trade with Ireland (though this trade became more notable in the sixteenth century) and enabled English merchants to settle in Portugal, especially in Lisbon, where they had a gild and worshipped at a chapel of St George in one of the local churches. The English were always a small community in Portugal, though some settled permanently and married locals. This section concludes with a discussion of questions that have arisen about Anglo-Portuguese trade. Childs points out that the attractions of the Flemish market probably prevented the Portuguese from expanding their English trade during the early fifteenth century when conditions were favorable; that English shipping and merchants (particularly from Bristol) in Portugal were significant enough to provide real competition to Portuguese merchants’ expansion into areas of England other than London; and that Portugal’s small size and limited resources stymied its commercial expansion in England.

These lectures provide a clear and highly readable short survey of the patterns of trade between late medieval England and Iberia, illustrated by trade figures drawn from the English customs accounts to show the changing patterns of trade and shipping over three centuries, as well as by lively portraits of travelers, merchants, and shippers involved in connecting these two regions. The author provides discussion of and footnotes to the main primary sources, which those entering the field will find very helpful. Less emphasis is put on the secondary literature—a reflection of the book’s origin as a series of lectures—and there are few references to more recent scholarship. The book concludes with six tables and ten graphs depicting shipping and commodities involved in Anglo-Iberian trade, drawn primarily from the English customs accounts, particularly the very detailed accounts extant for the port of Bristol. There are three maps, but none of Iberia to show the regions (such as Cantabria, Guipúzcoa, Galicia, and Andalusia) that are often mentioned in the text and might be unfamiliar to the largely English-speaking readers of this volume.

Note: