

## 16.11. 13, Childs, Trade and Shipping in the Medieval West

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Childs, Wendy R Porto Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales 2013 pp. 187 €35.00 (hardback) 978-2-503-55128-9 (hardback) review Encoding finished

This volume publishes six talks given by Wendy R. Childs as the inaugural speaker for the Armindo de Sousa Lectures at the University of Porto in 2009. Childs draws on her extensive research in the field of medieval English and Iberian overseas trade to provide a useful survey of the commodities, merchants, shipping, and patterns of exchange involved in Anglo-Iberian trade, particularly in the late middle ages. [1] Given the far better documentation available for English trade, particularly the highly quantifiable English national port customs accounts, the perspective is more from the point of view of England than Portugal and Spain, although Childs does a good job of contextualizing the political and diplomatic background against which these trading relationships occurred.

The first two lectures set Anglo-Iberian trade within the framework of European travel, discussing not only who travelled and why--with a special emphasis on traders as one of the most mobile elements of medieval society--but also the factors stimulating the growth of long-distance commercial networks in the high middle ages and the economic contraction of the late middle ages. Childs acknowledges but does not discuss in detail the contentious debates surrounding, for example, the relative importance of such factors as population decline, bullion shortage, war, and state intervention in the economic changes that beset Europe (particularly England) in the late middle ages.

The third and fourth lectures focus on the political and commercial interests of England and Iberia and stress the potential that English merchants saw in Iberia's products and the market that it offered for English cloth. Visits by English pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela and the participation of English and Scottish soldiers in the Iberian crusades helped form this relationship, which was strongest with Portugal and the kingdom of Castile and León. English trade with Biscay and Guipúzcoa was especially active, with ships from more than twenty different Basque ports appearing in English ports. Their chief exports to England were high-quality iron (used for arms and armor), white (and occasionally red) wine, and skins; England was less interested in Spanish wool because it had its own supplies. After the conquest of Andalusia, other Spanish products became increasingly available in England, including sweet wines, fruits, oil, kermes dye, oil, soap, and silk. In England, the Spanish were especially active in Southampton, London, and Sandwich in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century.

The Hundred Years War interrupted this trade, although Alfonso XI of Castile tried to play both sides in renewing his alliance with France in 1337 and 1345 and arranging a marriage between his son Pedro and Joanna, the daughter of Edward III of England. Even the disastrous sea battle called Les Espagnols sur Mer quickly resulted, as Childs points out, in three commercial truces: between England and Castile, England and Portugal, and the merchants of Bayonne (an English territory) and of Biscay. Relations between England and 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 Trastámara, 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 Anglo-Iberian trade during 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 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.

Although Portuguese merchants took the leading role in trade between England and Portugal in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth

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 guild 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.

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Note:

1. Three of her publications are especially important for this subject: *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1978); "Anglo-Portuguese Trade in the Fifteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 2 (1992), 195-219; and "Anglo-Portuguese Relations in the Fourteenth Century," in *The Age of Richard II*, ed. J. Gillespie (New York and Stroud, 1997), 27-49.

Porto: Fédération internationale des instituts d'études médiévales, 2013. Pp. 187; 15 black-and-white figures and 6 tables. €35. ISBN: 978-2-503-55128-9. Richard W. Unger. *Artificial Paleography: Computational Approaches to Identifying Script Types in Medieval Manuscripts*. Kestemont et al. *New Light on the Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Manuscript: Multispectral Imaging and the Cotton Nero A.x. Illustrations*. McGillivray et al. *The Enduring Attraction of the Pirenne Thesis*.