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*A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora
and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640* (review)

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Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert. *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. x + 242 pp. ISBN 0-19-517569-7, \$22.95 (paper).

Studnicki-Gizbert, in this book, attempts to trace the history of Portuguese Diaspora and the crisis that emanated in the Spanish empire. The book covers the period 1492–1640. The end of the fifteenth century is an important period in the history of Portugal and Spain. It was in this century that the Portuguese and Spanish sailors had successfully found the trade routes that revolutionized European trade and commerce, resulting in the emergence of colonialism in Asia and the Americas. Geographical discoveries resulted in the movement of people and ideas.

The book covers the adventure of the Portuguese families that settled in the Atlantic region thereby showing the dimensions of globalization as early as the sixteenth century. The book shows the intimate relationship between economy and polity. The book is based on private records and other accounts left by the merchant families that survived in the Atlantic. The author has culled several private records, which may not be accessible to all the researchers. The private records of merchant families and relatively unused documents have significantly enhanced the value of this opus.

The author has done a commendable work of exhibiting the adventures of the Portuguese traders in the era of discovery and exploration. The readers are expected to possess background knowledge of the events delineated in the book. Thus, preliminary information is not provided in this work. At the same time, the author has succeeded in presenting the achievements of the Portuguese traders and their impact on the Spanish empire.

“The Portuguese Nation” covers the history of the maritime communities that established a parallel state without physical boundaries. They even challenged the authority of the real state by establishing trade networks and thus affecting the political authority of the rulers. One cannot study economy and polity in two unconnected, watertight compartments. The maritime communities that included sailors, soldiers, and most importantly merchants, dominated the ocean and also affected the political realities of the period. The state was affected by the transfer of wealth to other parts of the world. This had a telling impact on the Spanish empire. The Iberian Peninsula takes the center stage of the events described in the book.

Maritime communities participated in the nation-building process by facing the hardships and dangers of sea travel. They can be

considered as the economic face of the nation. The author is aware of the fact that maritime communities belonging to other regions such as the Indian Ocean had also established their own “nation” in the places where they settled. For example, Gujarati merchants had established their settlements in various regions of the Indian Ocean. This, and other examples, shows that maritime communities had always played an important role in building maritime societies. Merchants represent openness that challenged the feudal doctrines of the ancient regime. The Portuguese merchants enter the political arena by publicizing their ideas concerning the methods of achieving political supremacy of the nation. Ironically, the polity that represents closed structure, influenced by religious leaders, oppresses the traders who are forced to change their center of operation.

The fall of the Portuguese nation also represents the decline of the Spanish authority resulting in the expansion of the traders’ network to other parts of Europe. Thus, this work shows the unnoticeable achievement of the Portuguese traders in and outside the Iberian Peninsula. An important merit of this book is that it understands perfectly the limitations of the maritime communities. It does not glorify the achievements of the traders who are also part of the Spanish empire. This work is a passionate record of the working of the maritime communities that worked in the “nation” without borders. The book can be considered as an authentic record of the events leading to the establishment and expansion of the Portuguese nation in the Atlantic region. The Portuguese nation and the Spanish empire move together in the history of the Iberian Peninsula. The author has succeeded in placing the micro-history within the macro-historical perspective of the political history of Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, this work stands out among other works of similar theme. This is a welcome addition to the historiography of Portuguese maritime history.

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