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 **Spanish Naval Power, 1589-1665: Reconstruction and Defeat (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Spanish Naval Power, 1589-1665: Reconstruction and Defeat. By David Goodman.

Given the importance of the subject, it is unfortunate that so little work has been done on the naval history of Spain after the Invincible Armada. Carla Rahn Phillips's *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore, 1986) and R. A. Stradling's *The Armada of Flanders: Spanish Maritime Policy and European War, 1568–1668* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), though works of exceptional quality, address only parts of the story yet effectively comprised the monographic literature in English until the appearance of the book under review. Based on exhaustive archival research, *Spanish Naval Power, 1589–1665* goes far to make good the deficiency.

The introduction traces Spain's development as "a formidable naval power," beginning in the reign of Philip II (a debatable point: Charles V's 1535 Tunis expedition and 1541 Algiers expedition were formidable by any standard) and ending with failure against Portugal in 1665 (p. 1). The story is complex, with a constantly shifting focus, geographically from Mediterranean to Atlantic; technologically from galleys to galleons; and operationally from sea battles and amphibious operations to the unceasing struggle to defend Spanish commerce. The core of the book comprises seven thematic chapters dealing with, in turn, the following: 1) funding, the process of estimating the costs of warship construction, and appropriating the requisite sums and making them available; 2) the process of obtaining timber, particularly oak for hulls; 3) shipbuilding and turning raw timber into hulls, masts, and spars, which were fastened together to make a ship; 4) the fitting out, arming, and victualing that turned an empty vessel into a warship; 5) the fiscal bureaucracy that disbursed and accounted for the funds that sustained Spanish power afloat; 6) the recruiting and retention of crews; and finally 7) the selection and promotion of naval officers and their relationships with the seamen and soldiers they commanded.

Goodman's heavy reliance on primary sources, most of them hitherto

unused, is both the book's main strength and principal weakness. The specialist will find a treasure trove of new information and data, much of it summarized in beautifully executed charts, graphs, and maps and much of it contradicting accepted interpretations. Goodman [End Page 538] convincingly portrays a Spanish naval bureaucracy that was on the whole competent and conscientious. Policy could be surprisingly farsighted, producing, for example, self-sufficiency in cast-iron ordnance and oak timber, the latter as the result of a remarkably successful forestation program. We knew that naval power imposed crushing fiscal burdens on the early modern state, but Goodman, with remarkable perspicacity, shows how this worked in detail, revealing entirely new dimensions. Consider, for example, the struggle in the 1620s between the Council of War and the Council of Finance for control of supplies of Cuban copper needed both to mint debased *vellón* coinage and to cast bronze cannon (pp. 148–49). That the financiers won, overriding royal objections, shows how acute and complex Spain's problems were.

But the reliance on primary sources that is so fruitful in yielding the kinds of insights noted above can obfuscate as well as enlighten. Consider, for example, ship design. Goodman's discussion of the debate over the proportions of the "ideal" warship is interesting, and he rightly dismisses neoplatonic talk of "perfection" as naive. But the net result is that Goodman assigns more credibility than is warranted to the mathematicians and cosmographers whose opinions the crown so eagerly sought. Reference to current scholarship would have been helpful, and would have suggested, for example (p. 148), that Spanish warships of the 1660s were shockingly lightly armed by Dutch and English standards. That Goodman rarely ventures where his sources do not lead helps to explain his neglect of Spain's struggle against the Turks and the failure to address the Dutch, in particular, as a reactive enemy. Goodman's explanations of Spain's naval decline, though thought provoking, are not...



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