

## Merchant Cultures

# European Expansion and Indigenous Response

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# Merchant Cultures

*A Global Approach to Spaces, Representations and  
Worlds of Trade, 1500–1800*

*Edited by*

Cátia Antunes and Francisco Bethencourt



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# General Series Editor's Preface

Over the past half millennium, from circa 1450 until the last third or so of the twentieth century, much of the world's history has been influenced in great part by one general dynamic and complex historical process known as European expansion. Defined as the opening up, unfolding, or increasing the extent, number, volume, or scope of the space, size, or participants belonging to a certain people or group, location, or geographical region, Europe's expansion initially emerged and emanated physically, intellectually, and politically from southern Europe—specifically from the Iberian peninsula—during the fifteenth century, expanding rapidly from that locus to include, first, all of Europe's maritime and, later, most of its continental states and peoples. Most commonly associated with events described as the discovery of America and of a passage to the East Indies (Asia) by rounding the Cape of Good Hope (Africa) during the early modern and modern periods, European expansion and encounters with the rest of the world multiplied and morphed into several ancillary historical processes, including colonization, imperialism, capitalism, and globalization, encompassing themes, among others, relating to contacts and, to quote the EURO series' original mission statement, “connections and exchanges; peoples, ideas and products, especially through the medium of trading companies; the exchange of religions and traditions; the transfer of technologies; and the development of new forms of political, social and economic policy, as well as identity formation.” Because of its intrinsic importance, extensive research has been performed and much has been written about the entire period of European expansion.

With the first volume published in 2009, Brill launched the European Expansion and Indigenous Response book series at the initiative of well-known scholar and respected historian, Glenn J. Ames, who, prior to his untimely passing, was the founding editor and guided the first seven volumes of the series to publication. Being one of the early members of the series' editorial board, I was then appointed as Series Editor. The series' founding objectives are to focus on publications “that understand and deal with the process of European expansion, interchange and connectivity in a global context in the early modern and modern period” and to “provide a forum for a variety of types of scholarly work with a wider disciplinary approach that moves beyond the traditional isolated and nation bound historiographical emphases of this field, encouraging whenever possible non-European perspectives...that seek to understand this indigenous transformative process and period in autonomous as well as inter-related cultural, economic, social, and ideological terms.”

The history of European expansion is a challenging field in which interest is likely to grow, in spite of, or perhaps because of, its polemical nature. Controversy has centered on tropes conceived and written in the past by Europeans, primarily concerning their early reflections and claims regarding the transcendental historical nature of this process and its emergence and importance in the creation of an early modern global economy and society. One of the most persistent objections is that the field has been “Eurocentric.” This complaint arises because of the difficulty in introducing and balancing different historical perspectives, when one of the actors in the process is to some degree neither European nor Europeanized—a conundrum alluded to in the African proverb: “Until the lion tells his tale, the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” Another, and perhaps even more important and growing historiographical issue, is that with the re-emergence of historical millennial societies (China and India, for example) and the emergence of other non-Western European societies successfully competing politically, economically, and intellectually on the global scene vis-à-vis Europe, the seminal nature of European expansion is being subjected to greater scrutiny, debate, and comparison with other historical alternatives.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these new directions and stimulating sources of existing and emerging lines of dispute regarding the history of European expansion, I and the editorial board of the series will continue with the original objectives and mission statement of the series and vigorously “... seek out studies that employ diverse forms of analysis from all scholarly disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, art history, history (including the history of science), linguistics, literature, music, philosophy, and religious studies.” In addition, we shall seek to stimulate, locate, incorporate, and publish the most important and exciting scholarship in the field.

Towards that purpose, I am pleased to introduce volume 37 of Brill's EURO series entitled: *Merchant Cultures: A Global Approach to Spaces, Representations and Worlds of Trade, 1500–1800*. Edited by Cátia Antunes and Francisco Bethencourt, *Merchant Cultures* is a collection of well-written, original, and timely essays that deal with early modern merchants and their cultures across the world's continents and oceans during a period of heightened intensity in the frequency of contacts, interactions, and exchanges – an activity and process that is now called globalization. Based on primary sources in multiple languages and more syncretical works, including paintings, these 14 interventions consist of an Introduction and 13 essays that range chronologically from the mid-15th to the early 19th centuries. They are organized in 3 parts (the first thematic or representational, addressing specific issues, such as, merchants and others' commercial and cultural practices and attitudes towards space, place, practices, strategies, rights, loyalty and subjecthood; and the second and



third parts are geographical divisions that insert merchants and examine their activities through the prisms or worlds of Asia and the Euro-Atlantic).

In their Introduction to this volume, the editors clearly outline the scope and importance of this work, briefly discuss past and present literature concerning merchants involvement in commerce and advocate for the continuation of efforts toward the utilization of comparative analysis of merchant cultures in Europe and Asia, to which should be added, the Americas and Africa, as a necessary step toward a better understanding of early modern trade and merchant cultures. The subsequent chapters highlight how merchants conducted trade in different regional and cultural settings and how they overcame political, institutional, and cultural obstacles and barriers. They also advance evidence and provide analysis on the issue as to whom or what facilitated entrepreneurial accomplishments during this period. The EURO series reader will identify and want to independently determine the adequacy and accuracy of these interventions. But their challenge some past generalized and stereotypical assumptions and interpretations about how merchants conducted trade and how cultural values and practices inhibited trade and enterprise in some parts of the world is to be welcomed. I believe that that same reader will agree that this volumes' focus on merchant cultures is a useful advance in terms of global coverage, depth of historical analysis, and revision of past approaches and interpretations of merchants and their business world. This volume, therefore, will be of interest to scholars and researchers of early modern worlds and modern world economy, as well as other, specialists of maritime history, social history, and cultural history.

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## Acknowledgements

Two preparatory workshops in September 2017 at the University of Leiden on 'Secrets of Business: Empires and Global Commercial Practices in the early modern period' and, in June 2018, at King's College London on 'Early Modern Mercantile Culture' provided the basis for this book. Fruitful areas of dialogue and exchange resulted from these first encounters. Brill kindly agreed to consider the possibility of publishing the volume proposed. We are grateful to the series editor, George Bryan de Souza, and the anonymous reviewers, who helped to shape the revised final manuscript. Alison Gibbs played an important role as copy editor, since most of the authors are not native English speakers.

The contributors responded extremely well to successive challenges to produce a coherent volume that engages with a genuine global approach. The purpose of this volume is to contribute to a field that has been growing in the past seventy years, reaching now a stage in which connections between continents are under increased scrutiny. The richness of merchant cultures is finally moving from a section in economic history to centre stage in global history.

Finally, we would like to thank the institutions that made the workshops and this book possible, Camões Institute in Portugal, King's College London, Camões Centre at King's, and the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

*Francisco Bethencourt and Cátia Antunes*

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