



Gabriel B. Paquette. *The European Seaborne Empires: From the Thirty Years' War to the Age of Revolutions.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. 312 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-24527-1.

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Soon after Christopher Columbus returned from his first voyage to the New World, Iberian and later, western European powers began seeking out the resources of the rest of the world and established large territorial claims. By the opening of the seventeenth century, resources from colonial expansion began playing an ever-larger role as European nations sparred for power. Naturally, power competitions within Europe spilled to overseas colonies and by the mid-eighteenth century European wars were fought heavily in North America and the West Indies, and ultimately spread across most of the world.

These conflicts are at the heart of Gabriel Paquette's new book, *The European Seaborne Empires*. In his new study the author concentrates heavily on the Spanish, Portuguese, and English empires, and less so on the French and Dutch. The book effectively ignores the smaller seaborne empires. However this book is not intended as a great tome on the subject of empire; rather the author claims it is designed as an introductory text for university students. In doing so Paquette has set himself a substantial task: how to whittle down the enormous amount of literature on the subject into something digestible at the undergraduate level. Therefore, this book forms a synthesis of the field, based primarily on English-language sources

and narrowed to focus primarily on the major European empires.

This is neither a military history, nor a maritime history, although "seaborne" can be found in the title and the cover is a painting of George Rodney's great naval victory at the Battle of the Saintes. Paquette has chosen to focus his work thematically on international relationships and political economy. The first five chapters of this book define empire in the context of western Europe, and walk the reader through the evolution of the main European overseas empires from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. This forms an important context for readers, as the final seven chapters thematically focus on subjects including law and governance, forced and free migrations, societal change, and resistance and revolution. Here the book focuses on three factors that the author considers most influential in Western dominance and empire: 1) coercive violence to pursue objectives, 2) efficacious forms of governance and finance, and 3) the collaboration of indigenous elites.

Paquette has mastered an enormous body of work to produce more than a concise and easily accessible introduction to the subject. Contrary to the author's claims that the book is merely an introduction, it skillfully brings together a very wide and often disparate array of literature, covering

the five major empires of the colonial era, and forms an in-depth comparative history of empires. Further, the book goes beyond the traditional history of empire to bring non-Europeans out of the background and place their contributions to the historical narrative in the foreground alongside those of European colonizers. It also demonstrates that European imperial ambition during the early modern period generally exceeded the ability to control and administer colonial territories, subtly questioning how “imperial” the European empires actually were.

Undergraduates will appreciate the book’s readability, as a quick read can cover this book in an afternoon. More advanced students will get good mileage out the notes and bibliography, which will point them toward deep dives into topics that this book, by its nature, covers succinctly. However, those who may get the most out of this book are professors in American colleges and universities who teach US history survey courses, particularly the course that often covers New World colonization to the American Civil War. This book provides a solid refresher and broader context for professors whose background may not be rooted in the early modern imperial era.

The book is elegantly written and well organized. It goes well beyond an introduction to the subject that the author has claimed as his goal, yet keeps to a crisp two hundred pages of text, while the notes and bibliography provide an invaluable resource. Therefore this is a difficult book to criticize. Is this book worth reading? Absolutely yes! Furthermore, as it hopefully transitions to a low-cost paperback, it will become even more valuable as assigned reading in a world where professors are increasingly conscious of the financial costs incurred by students attending college classes. *The European Seaborne Empires* is a well-framed, easily read, and fresh introduction to the imperial history of western Europe. For this, Gabriel Paquette deserves a hearty congratulations.

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