

Edmond Smith. *Merchants: The Community that Shaped England's Trade and Empire, 1550–1650*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021. x + 361 pp. \$32.50.

Eleanor Hubbard. *Englishmen at Sea: Labor and the Nation at the Dawn of Empire, 1570–1630*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021. xii + 349 pp. \$38.00. Reviews by JOSEPH P. WARD, UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY.

The emergence of England as an increasingly consequential participant in global trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has long preoccupied historians seeking to understand the causes and consequences of early modern European engagement in international affairs. Both of the lively books under review here explore in considerable detail the separate but overlapping groups of people whose working lives contributed to the long-distance relationships at the heart of English overseas activity. When read together they offer a sophisticated contribution to our understanding of how early modern England entered the world stage.

Edmond Smith's book focuses on merchants, the group that more than any other forged meaningful, long-term connections between England and societies across Europe and, by the middle of the seventeenth century, much of the wider world. His approach emphasizes that merchants comprised a distinct community founded on common experience and shared interests. Although merchants could form a variety of formal partnerships, often their relationships were quite informal—they could form varied and short-term alliances to promote their common interests, broadening their fields of activity while sharing the risks associated with a new venture.

A principal reason for understanding merchants as members of a community was their ability to hold one another accountable for the promotion of shared values. A reputation for reliability and skill was the foundation of a merchant's success given the significant role of trust in the completion of a long-distance transaction. The ability to write clearly and to keep careful, accurate accounts was essential for a merchant's work, and those who were based abroad would also need the cultural and linguistic skill to thrive in a foreign land. Merchants

acquired these abilities during an apprenticeship that would span their late teens and early twenties under the tutelage of an established master. Apprentices increased a merchant's capacity and, once their apprenticeship was completed, could become his valuable commercial allies. The potential for an apprenticeship to foster a successful career meant that merchants with stellar reputations could attract apprentices who already had significant family wealth and social connections. In this way, the social conditions of mercantile activity tended to spawn durable mercantile networks that could span generations and continents.

Given the challenges that they each faced, it was reasonable that merchants would band together to form companies. From the time that they were apprentices, merchants engaged with society at large through their membership in corporations. These included urban trade guilds that were connected to civic life as well as joint-stock companies that were primarily commercial in nature. The rosters of such corporations often overlapped—for example, members of the Grocers' Company, a prominent livery company in London, could also be members of the East India Company, joining with merchants who belonged to other London livery companies as well as trade guilds from other English towns—and together they created a common framework for decision-making. Through these corporations “merchants were connected through a dense network of shared experiences and expectations about how they should behave and operate” because the corporations “helped reinforce existing traditions while allowing the sharing of new information, experiences and ideas” (70).

Despite their members' shared experiences of town life, joint stock companies faced potential regional differences, as merchants based in London steadily gained influence in corporate affairs, in part because their social proximity allowed them to strengthen their connections with one another, building relationships of trust that gave them political as well as commercial advantages. Smith shows how, over time, London-based merchants increasingly sought to gather control over several trades into their hands, relegating traders based in provincial centers such as Norwich, Newcastle, and Yarmouth to secondary roles: “Resisting the centralizing authority of London's new trading companies was an expensive and often fruitless task” (152). Although there were meaningful political aspects to this development, it largely

reflected the social realities of life for merchants, where access to the Crown officials, attorneys, and clerks who controlled vital information was essential for economic success. The consequences of London merchants occupying an increasingly dominant role in England's commercial affairs were profound and long-lasting.

Of course, the relationship that leading merchants maintained with the Crown was a two-way street. Corporations had their legal rights established through royal charters, and overseas merchants who ran into roadblocks in foreign countries looked to the Crown for diplomatic support. English monarchs frequently reminded merchants that such assistance was not free, and Smith describes the variety of ways that they could access mercantile wealth. The granting, regranteeing, and affirming of corporate charters became a steady source of Crown revenue in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Monarchs also saw corporations as a source of loans that could be paid back slowly, if at all. Companies, in turn, looked to their members to provide the funds that would be passed to the Crown, which in effect created a kind of wealth tax on successful enterprises. As English merchants increasingly bumped against competitors from foreign countries during the seventeenth century, they sometimes grew frustrated by the sense that their adversaries enjoyed greater support from their governments; this was especially true for those English traders who considered the apparent success of their Dutch rivals to have come at their own expense. The Crown struggled to sort out the competing theories of how to increase trade at the same time as it grew increasingly reliant on extraordinary means of raising revenue beyond that which Parliament was willing to grant. The result was a deterioration of the leading role of merchants who had been raised in the profession and the increasing influence of those who undermined "the practices of commercial governance that had sustained English merchants across the world for the previous century" (206).

Unlike some of his predecessors in the field, Smith spends relatively little time exploring ways that merchants engaged with issues of broad national importance. He gives only passing regard to how religion may have shaped the world views of the merchants he studies. Although he notes that "the common locations of merchants' everyday contact were work, worship and social interactions" (107), he says nothing about

how, for example, merchants may have shaped—and were shaped by—the Reformation or the rise of religious dissent. Even more surprising is his reticence to discuss the economic aspects of the revolutionary decades of the mid-seventeenth century. Contemporaries and generations of historians alike have noted that both sides in the English Civil Wars drew upon the mercantile fortunes of London, but from Smith's perspective the merchants were largely passive participants in events. He briefly mentions how "during the Civil War" the anonymous author of a pamphlet attacked the monopolistic trading practices of the Merchant Adventurers, but he does not pause to consider the extent to which such critiques of corporations may have motivated some outside the mercantile community to engage in political action (136). It is not the historian's role to pass judgment on the past, but frequently Smith seems eager to avert his reader's gaze from theoretically charged topics, choosing description over analysis as his preferred mode while emphasizing that the contributions of merchants to the shaping of national policy were informal and often subtle.

Among those outside the merchant community and yet intimately connected to it were the seamen whose stories fill Eleanor Hubbard's new book. Reminiscent of Smith's approach to his subjects, Hubbard emphasizes that English seamen in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries formed a community, with shared experiences fostering a common worldview. Mariners learned their trade through hard experience, less formal perhaps than the apprenticeships that aspiring merchants would complete, but novice seamen would have to prove themselves worthy of the trust of their fellow crew members. Hubbard highlights the physical risks that early modern mariners faced, especially in the closing decades of Elizabeth's reign, when war with Spain inspired a new generation of English sailors to see the ocean as a vast opportunity for plunder. Investors scrambled to build vessels and hire crews to take advantage of the many chances to intercept Spanish treasure fleets; they were motivated far more by the opportunity for a quick fortune than they were by any sense of English national ambition. Departing from the interpretation of Kenneth Andrews, which included zeal for the Protestant cause among the motives for Elizabethan privateering, Hubbard finds that "for most privateers and

their backers the central purpose of privateering was to make money. Injuring Spain was a distant second, and in many cases privateers seem not have cared whom they injured, so long as they filled their purses" (39). The Elizabethan seamen whose adventures captured the contemporary imagination were entrepreneurs and allies—rather than employees—of the Crown.

The fortunes of sailors could turn rapidly, and Hubbard draws from a wide array of sources to reconstruct vividly the careers of mariners who spent considerable periods of their lives as hostages, galley slaves, and prisoners in foreign lands. English seamen in this period were valued for their abilities with a sword or cannon as much as for their skill with a sexton or compass, and their loyalties to their captains and shipmates could be fleeting, with alliances forming and dissolving based on calculations of the greatest opportunity for gain. Although this was true throughout the period Hubbard studies, the early years of James I's reign, after England and Spain had ended their formal hostilities, saw some English privateers become renegades, preying upon ships of all nations on their own or entering into the service of foreign rulers. English pirates did not lack for opportunities, and by 1608 many of them found a friendly base in Mamora, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. At times, the numerous ships anchored off the Moroccan coast were a sort of "floating emporium" at which pirates could sell their plunder to corrupted merchants who, if later charged with receiving stolen goods, would spin elaborate tales in court (141). If English pirates tended to treat English vessels more kindly than they did foreigners, Hubbard suggests that this reflected a pragmatic need to maintain constructive relations with home rather than patriotism; she gives several examples of renegades who acted in the hope that they could one day be pardoned for their crimes and retire in England. The Spanish and Dutch navies scattered the Mamora pirate refuge in 1614, leading some of the English sailors to find a way home while others settled in North Africa, joining pirate crews in the Mediterranean.

Merchants and the mariners on whom they depended had, at best, an uneasy relationship. They often had common interests, but when a pirate ship approached, priorities could shift quickly: "Seamen ventured their lives when merchants ventured their goods—and

like merchants, they were obliged to set their potential losses against their potential gains” (98). Tensions between the occupations flared regularly, as corporations brought lawsuits against mariners who tried to trade on their own accounts and merchants sued seamen whose extreme carelessness in handling cargo could plausibly be characterized as a form of theft. Crews would typically be paid at the conclusion of a voyage, giving them incentive to remain true to their purpose, but cash-strapped mariners could succumb to the temptation to seek a faster, potentially larger payoff by seizing control of their vessel and whatever it was carrying and then selling them to pirates. Even though they were not acting on behalf of the Crown, English renegades who seized goods from foreigners could expose English merchants to reprisals when they reached a port whose local merchants had been plundered.

Employing an anthropological lens, Hubbard teases from her sources glimpses of attitudes that English mariners brought with them as they encountered foreigners on distant shores. In Africa, seamen looked with pity, rather than curiosity, on the Khoekhoe of the Cape of Good Hope, a people whose language was beyond their comprehension. By contrast, sailors visiting Japan marveled that even the relatively poor seemed prosperous and civilized. Merchants were well aware that the success of a distant voyage depended on the crews of their vessels being able to form peaceful relations wherever they traveled, both for the facilitation of profitable trade and for the acquisition of fresh water and other supplies that would allow the ships to return safely home. Given the well-earned reputation of English mariners for piracy and plunder, captains would often need to display advanced diplomatic skills to pull this off.

Although English seamen were well-regarded throughout maritime Europe, the Crown struggled to organize the talent in its midst. The high value of English sailors put pressure on the Crown to recruit them away from more appealing opportunities abroad. Their value also made it relatively difficult to redeem English maritime captives, some of whom were sold in Mediterranean slave markets. In the wake of peace with Spain, James took steps to increase his naval strength, but he labored to fill the ranks. A key policy shift was to embrace pirates through pardons—even allowing them to keep their treasure—and

then recruit them into the royal navy. The stress on the royal navy increased dramatically under Charles I, whose aggressive foreign policy initiatives put a premium on recruiting and retaining skilled mariners: “In warfare, as in the captivity crisis, the Crown’s desire to cherish its seafaring subjects outstripped its capacity, resulting in widespread misery and unrest” (268). The disastrous course of the war combined with Charles’s deteriorating financial condition to produce ongoing discontent among the poorly fed and chronically underpaid seamen, many of whom knew from personal experience that they would have been materially better off as pirates. By the spring of 1628, the Duke of Buckingham became the focal point of protests among disgruntled mariners, contributing the context in which he was assassinated in Portsmouth while assembling another fleet.

Smith and Hubbard each engage effectively with the discussion among historians of the process through which the English state modernized as its monarchs developed an increasingly ambitious vision of empire. The corporations on which Smith focuses occupied an important stratum in the composite state of England, and although Hubbard sees the state as relatively weak, the mariners she studies nonetheless facilitated the work of merchant corporations when such corporations provided them sufficient incentives to do so. At the very least, it can be said that early modern merchants and seaman both contributed to a long-term project of nation-building apparently without being motivated by the type of nationalist ideology that would be a hallmark of later phases of imperialist expansion.

J. Vanessa Lyon. *Figuring Faith and Female Power in the Art of Rubens*. Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 248 pp. 67 illus. \$ 136.00. Review by RUTH SARGENT NOYES, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK.

This book, authored by J. Vanessa Lyon, associate professor of Art History at Bennington College, offers a refreshing, thoroughly researched, and well-considered new approach to a shibboleth of art history, the relationship between artist Peter Rubens and women’s bodies (and women more generally); or, put differently: the question of Rubens and feminism (or even: Rubens as feminist). Published under