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Review of Luis Gorrochategui Santos, *The English Armada: The Greatest Naval Disaster in English History*

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Gorrochategui Santos, Luis. *The English Armada: The Greatest Naval Disaster in English History*. Translated by Peter J. Gold. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. viii + 323 pp. + 16 figures + 9 maps.

The ill-fated English Armada of 1589 has traditionally received less attention from scholars than the Great Armada that Philip II sent against England in 1588. Both military campaigns have been treated differently from a historiographical point of view; the failure of the Spanish Armada has been idealized and interpreted as the beginning of the end of the Spanish Empire in the Atlantic, and the rise of England as a maritime power. The fiasco of the English Armada, on the other hand, has been normally neglected or ignored in the majority of English historical literature with a few exceptions. The book written by Luis Gorrochategui, a philosophy professor in a Spanish secondary school and the author of several articles regarding Spanish history, aims to rectify this situation by providing a detailed account and analysis of the English Armada based on primary Spanish and English documents. Gorrochategui also attempts to explain the reason the English Armada received such an unequal historiographical treatment in comparison to its Spanish counterpart.

The book is divided into three parts, totaling 36 chapters and an epilogue, with the majority of the chapters rarely exceeding 10 pages. The first part of the book summarizes the episode of the Spanish Armada in four chapters based on previous published works, challenging the traditional interpretations of the main events that led to its failure and return to Spain. The second part, the most extensive with 27 chapters, covers the English Armada almost on a daily basis from its departure from Plymouth, the attack on La Corunna, the siege of Lisbon, to its dramatic return to England. This section is based principally on Spanish primary sources, while the English primary references are from the documents compiled and published in Wernham's book about Drake and Norris' expedition to Spain and Portugal. The third part is composed of five chapters describing the later stages of the Anglo-Spanish War after the English Armada until the Spanish attempt to invade Ireland that led to the signature of a peace treaty in 1604. In the epilogue the author discusses the reasons the English Armada has not received the attention that it deserves from a historiographical point of view.

In his analysis of the Spanish Armada, Gorrochategui claims that the Spanish were never defeated. Rather, their failure was because of a lack of a suitable port for the Spanish ships in the area to resupply the fleet in order to maintain naval operations. Although this interpretation has been already outlined by other authors such as Mattingly, Fernández-Armesto, and Casado Soto, it challenges traditional hypotheses based on the alleged superiority of the English vessels and ordnance.

In the second part of the book, the author states that the English expedition was a worse disaster than in the case of the Spanish, because of the higher number

of men and ships that were lost. Gorrochategui calculated the number of losses based on English and Spanish documents, although he did not include a table to compare the composition of both Armadas, which would have been a valuable addition. Even so, the English almost completely destroyed La Corunna despite being eventually defeated, and went on to later siege Lisbon. The author also emphasizes that the expedition did not accomplish any of its objectives—the destruction of the Spanish fleet, turning Portugal into an English protectorate and getting access to its overseas territories, and the capture of the West Indies fleet in the Azores. The economic interests of the expedition leaders prevailed over the military objectives, while poor organization and logistics also contributed to the English failure. The author even questions Drake's ability to command large naval forces against an organized defense.

In the final section, Gorrochategui suggests that the exculpatory, fictional, and propagandistic character of the English documents toward the failure of their expedition has biased later historical interpretations. In contrast, Spanish documents have become the foundation of 16th-century naval history because of their more objective approach, especially in the case of the Spanish Armada. The majority of Anglo-Spanish War studies began in England during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when England was at the peak of its economic and political power, and Spain had lost its international relevance. Therefore, historical studies about both Armadas suffered from the nationalistic bias that allowed England to construct its national historical narrative as maritime power starting with the so-called defeat of Spanish Armada, in which there was no place for mention of incompetence or failure in their own expedition.

Gorrochategui's work serves as a necessary counterpart to Wernham's book which uses primarily English documents. Together, these publications allow for a comparative analysis between both Spanish and English primary accounts regarding this expedition. The juxtaposition of the two books demonstrate how primary sources provide completely different accounts of the same event depending on the nationality of the document. Although the author intends an objective analysis and interpretation of the failure of English Armada, it is clear that the subject is approached from a Spanish perspective. However, Gorrochategui's analysis presents less bias than other classic English studies about the Spanish Armada.

The book is a black-and-white paperback edition. While black-and-white printing is not an issue for the maps, it lowers the quality of the original color photos of the real battle locations, photos of the captured English banners, and the underwater images of the English wrecks. Although the figures and maps are numbered, they are not cited in the text. Rather, they are placed near the paragraphs which refer to them. The maps, however, do not appear near their corresponding text because they summarize all stages of the battles described throughout multiple

chapters and paragraphs. All the figures include captions describing the images and their source, although the levels of detail vary. For instance, not all the images are credited except in the case of the maps which were drawn by the author.

Gorrochategui presents a well-written, detailed, and engaging account of one of the most misconstrued episodes of the Anglo-Spanish War, traditionally neglected from a scholarly viewpoint. The quantity and quality of primary sources and selected bibliography referred by the author would indicate that the book is written for scholars rather than for the general public although its style suits general audiences as well. The book is a valuable addition to the bibliography of the Anglo-Spanish War because it provides a different and well-documented interpretation of the English Armada. Such books are necessary to acquire objective knowledge of this historical period, through the comparative analysis of primary sources and novel historical interpretations. Finally, this publication also restores the historical importance of the English Armada within the context of Anglo-Spanish War.

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