

Spain's men of the sea

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This paper seeks to analyze and discuss Spain's Men of the Sea by Pablo E. Perez-Mallaina. The author is a historian, being the director of the Department of American History at the University of Seville and he has rich collections of the archives pertaining to stories about the Indies. He intended to write the book to coincide the occasion of the 500th anniversary celebration of Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage of discovery, thus he addressed the book to a Spanish-speaking audience who may know the broad outlines of the time when Spain was a world power.

The book nicely organized into six topical chapters that would show the purpose of the author in presenting his ideas and purpose of the writing the book. Since he was basically addressing his books to mariners, the author tried to paint a picture of the difference between the lives in working in land-based environment of life of a mariner which is basically sea-based. Starting with the first chapter, he titled it ' Land Environment.

Having described the life in a land based environment, he came to talk about the situation of the would-be mariners with title of ' Origin and Social Condition' in the next chapter. The author was logical then to put the ' Ship as a Place of Work' as the next title of the following chapter. This is followed by the chapter title of ' Place of Life and Death' where the authors discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the life in the ship and as well as many interesting issues of life in the ship.

Since life in the boat is necessarily guided by challenges, he titled the next chapter with ' Discipline and Conflict' which spoke these challenges encountered and how mariners tried to resolved situations. So the author

was very logical in his presentation as a historian-researcher based on judicial records and documents which he used as bases of his research. Thus he came with the final chapter called ' Mental Horizons'(Perez-Mallaina, 1998), where he described the some of great heights of human experience as lived and ship and other interesting view that would put the readers get thinking about what Perez presented.

As to what were the social backgrounds of individuals who ultimately took to the sea and what factors influenced their decision, it could observed that people came from different social background and several factors indeed caused these individuals to decide differently. The author explained that individual chose a life at the sea because of economic want. This would mean that there were indeed great opportunities to find one's lot in the life at the sea (Perez-Mallaina, 1998). Other reasons given include running was from home troubles, a quest for personal advancement, and a high chance for adventurism specially the young.

He was particular taking about difficult and danger of life in the fleets but not without rewards that were appropriate with risks (Perez-Mallaina, 1998).

Voyagers to the different routes under the Spanish flag caused them to become business partners with ships' owners as the latter could give them the reward of shares based on sale of cargo. This is in addition to having sailors a percentage of the ship's carrying capacity where under certain condition, they could also carry personal trade goods that could be available of reselling the same. Life in the sea was therefore apt and fitting for clever and determined men.

This was the life that would give the chance for advancement into the skilled ranks of pilots. The luckier ones with financial acumen could even cause them to ships' masters or owners (Perez-Mallaina, 1998). As to why was a ship viewed as a complex machine, it may be argued that the Spanish galleons were such of kind that even the most minor of failure on a part of ship could really produce disastrous consequences. Although this is reality the same risk was able to stop the mariners and voyager to try their lack in navigation. These mariner and explorer were able to cross the expanse between the continents just with kind of Spanish galleons.

What could have added to the complex social and economic life brought by the complex machine is the fact that that there were already occupational and social divisions of labor then. There were few kinds of ships during 15th century with caravel as the most effective sailing ship at the time. It was only in the 16th century that ships like the carracks, galleons and galleys came into being as a result of continuing innovation. The basis for the division of labor in a merchant vessel was on the social backgrounds the mariners or voyagers.

The most powerful individuals are the ship-owners while the least powerful are the common sailors. To illustrate, a wealthy owner, could come from a family of shipbuilders. But it was possible that the ship-owner could have originated from as a manual laborer, who was doing mechanical occupations which as considered then to have low social prestige (Perez-Mallaina, 1998). Since nobility during the Spanish time already existed it was not surprising to

have their sons monopolizing the ranks of the generals and admirals of the large fleet.

These same sons are not much different to be occupying high position onboard merchantmen where they normally took the positions of captains. By being captains, they also become commanders of military ships and thereby leaving technical jobs with ordinary duties and masters who are obviously belonging to less socially distinguished ones. There were opportunities and risks that awaited the many individuals who spent so much of their time on the ship. Men had to chance to many avenues of advancement as sailors could be become ship-owners with their financial and technical ingenuities.

As stated earlier they could also become pilots and masters. As to how did changes in the emerging field of navigation and astronomy lead to what the author calls `the tyranny of the young` and how did each group defend the practices, it may be asserted that careers in the shipping industry requirements was aptly matching the adventurism of the young and these young people could take the risks because of their great chances for advancement in the their life to the seas. The insights that could be gained from the book include man's motivation in life to pursue opportunities has always been associated with risks.

Thus the greater the risks, is the greater the chance for attaining higher heights of success. With sailors having the chance to earn higher earning because of the great trade available during those time, man was also basically a man who searches for the greener pasture. It may be concluded

that ' Spain's Men of the Sea Daily Life' tells about the story of the sailors who were the very of the people of the merchantmen and warships of the Route of the Indies in when Spain was considered the one of world's most powerful nation.

The story is about the old Spain who was once at the top but eventually lost its luster. The story however left practices and stories where fortunes could be had as brought about by trade. When compared with the current time, the life in the ship may be compared to the life in the Internet, which has opened great opportunities for technical and business minded people to make their career progress as the pilots and the ship masters.

People at present especially with financial acumen with business sense can build their fortunes by just using the power of the Internet. Having known that nothing is permanent, it is therefore possible that changes would continue also to happen not only with risks but also opportunities. As the author has put it, " money and opportunity presented themselves more rapidly at sea than in the stable world on land. " (Perez-Mallaina, 1998).