

*British Catholic Merchants in the Commercial Age, 1670-1714.* By Giada Pizzoni. Boydell. 2020. xvi+220pp. £70.00

A thoughtful and well-researched volume that seeks to break through national and confessional stereotypes in order to assess the position of Catholic merchants during a period of tension and then conflict with France, the most dynamic Catholic power. Pizzoni ably substantiates her case. She demonstrates a high level of cooperation between Catholic and Protestant merchants, a level that both enhanced pre-existing links and markets and provided a way to develop new ones despite a difficult international context. She also shows how these relationships could take the direction of smuggling during wartime and offers an especially interesting chapter on Catholic female merchants, mostly widows, and their mercantile skill and resilience. The discussion is anchored in consideration of particular locations, notably St Malo. This enables Pizzoni to conclude that during the Nine Years' War, Catholic merchants in France showed their ability to resort to a diverse range of tactics and tap into a variety of different networks. Catholics in France helped supply the goods in demand, and Protestants proved crucial for coordinating smuggling operations in English waters. Religious contacts proved advantageous for procuring commodities but the ability to adapt and to deal with various partners ensured the survival of businesses. Networks were expanded and adapted as during the War of the Spanish Succession when French and Spanish goods were smuggled to England through Portugal. Pizzoni's coverage of inter-imperial networks is particularly interesting.

An impressive book that is of more general applicability not least in so far as trade and (separately) culture/ideology are considered. Cross-confessional commerce has long been seen, for example being a characteristic of Mediterranean trade, and it was a type of commerce that particularly rewarded networking, skill, and risk-management practices. In the period of Pizzoni's book, there is an important political dimension, with Britain allied to Catholic powers against France. Indeed, these alliances were crucial to Britain politically, economically and financially, and thus Pizzoni's networks can be seen as part of a system that was important to British capability, one that overcame the earlier Franco-Protestant linkages.

Again, more generally, Pizzoni's valuable work demonstrates through contrast the questionable nature of some academic work and culture with its emphasis on opposing identities and culture wars. That is not the approach, however, taken in the relevant scholarship. Indeed, in light of the extent to which cross-confessional trade and relations is taken as given in Mediterranean historiography, the supposed superiority of Protestant culture is now more evident in popular discourse than in current academic books, although teaching certainly lags behind.

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