



*England and Spain in the Early Modern Era: Royal Love, Diplomacy, Trade and Naval Relations 1604–25* by Óscar Alfredo Ruiz Fernández.

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Histories of Spain and England in the early modern period often focus on their sixteenth-century clashes, culminating in the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada. The two nations are portrayed as irreconcilable enemies engaged in bitter conflicts over religion, control of the seas, and trade with the Americas. The truth is far more complicated, as cultural historian Óscar Alfredo Ruiz Fernández (Technical Univ. of Civil Engineering Bucharest) illustrates in *England and Spain in the Early Modern Era*.

The book's three chapters<sup>1</sup> (plus an introduction and conclusion) cast Spain and England as partaking in a relationship featuring alliance-cementing marriages, military provocations, trade rivalries and agreements, and various other diplomatic, cultural, and geographic interactions both peaceful and combative. The author draws on accounts by court ambassadors, records of public and private contacts between monarchs, and sources on actions by proponents of both alliance and enmity.

The volume's first chapter, "The English Crossroads," concerns Spain's foreign policy in the early seventeenth century, when it agreed to peace with England (1604) and carefully reassessed its entire imperial posture, which had been predicated on enmity with England during the reigns of Philip II and (early on) Philip III. At the same time, there was a concerted effort in English literature, drama, and art, to take a broader view of Spain, less tied to the darker images of the Spanish Inquisition and intolerant Catholicism. Although each nation managed to progress from loathing to mixed feelings about the other, conflicts persisted. The Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) in the Netherlands continued, pitting Catholic Spain and its local allies against the Protestant Dutch who could no longer count on support from England.

Chapter 2, "Spanish Diplomatic Finances," reviews the price Spain paid for peace with England: that is, direct and indirect subsidies to Jacobean England. Spain's ambassadors paid bribes, hired agents, and purchased goods—including works of art—to ensure their influence in the English court. Since the ducats Spain's ambassadors spent promoting potential marriages (and concomitant alliances and influence) were far less expensive than going to war, both Philip III and Philip IV were willing to lavishly fund their emissaries in London. They supported extensive embassy staff, including clerks and domestic servants. Even the clergymen who ministered to the Spanish delegation were adept at gathering intelligence from English Catholics and sympathetic Anglicans. They also distributed aid and alms to needy English folk to improve Spain's image in Britain.

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1. Respectively, "The English Crossroads: The Debates and dilemmas of the Spanish Foreign Policy"; "Spanish Diplomatic Finances in Jacobean Great Britain (1603–25)"; and "War and Trade: The Spanish Embassy in England—Lighthouse and Fortress."

The third chapter, “War and Trade,” clarifies the complex relations between Spain and England at sea, in global trade, and in regard to third parties, especially the Dutch. England’s equivocal attitude to pirates who attacked Spanish and Portuguese colonies was an ongoing problem, most notably in the case of Sir Walter Raleigh. England sought to benefit from sales of war materiel to both the Dutch and the Spanish, as a nation merely interested in peace and commerce. The plague of Flemish, French, and Barbary pirates fostered some degree of Anglo-Spanish collaboration at sea.

In his conclusion, the author stresses that the peace between England and Spain in 1604–25 was, despite some interruptions, in the interests of both monarchies. Both countries hoped to secure a more permanent alignment through ties of marriage, commerce, alliance, and even cultural accommodations. Though such ties never emerged, a temporary neutrality benefited both sides in the first third of the seventeenth century. This allowed Spain to deal with the Dutch rebellion, the French, and piracy, while securing its global empire from any existential threat. For England, peace meant economic recovery, the end of a war against a much richer country, and trade access to Spain and its colonies as well as an associated Portuguese empire in Brazil, Africa, and South Asia.

The only flaw in this work is its thematic rather than chronological approach. Each of the book’s three main chapters covers the entire period of interest, while no initial outline sets the parameters of the main political, military, and diplomatic events to be covered. However, this modest deficiency does not vitiate the author’s innovative overall approach to the British and Spanish monarchies in his target era. In contrast to the traditional views of enmity between Spain and England, his book highlights the alternative paths both states embraced with such enthusiasm and high expectations. In so doing, he reminds us of the role of contingency and agency regarding military affairs, marriage negotiations, commercial ties, and cultural affiliations up to and after the eruption of war in 1625—a conflict each state neither sought nor, in the end, chose to avoid.