Author/s:
Dalton, H

Title:
Relationships Lost and Found in the Mid-Sixteenth-Century Iberian Atlantic: An Englishman's 'Suffering Rewarded'

Date:
2025-01-01

Citation:
Dalton, H. (2025). Relationships Lost and Found in the Mid-Sixteenth-Century Iberian Atlantic: An Englishman's 'Suffering Rewarded'. Dalton, H (Ed.). Keeping Family in an Age of Long Distance Trade Imperial Expansion and Exile 1550 1850, (1st), pp.149-168. AMSTERDAM UNIV PRESS.

Persistent Link:
https://hdl.handle.net/11343/243807

Relationships Lost and Found in the Mid Sixteenth Century Iberian Atlantic
An Englishman's 'suffering rewarded'

Heather Dalton

pages 149-168

IN

Draft 3, 2020

For details re. publication see:
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463722315/keeping-family-in-an-age-of-long-distance-trade-imperial-expansion-and-exile-1550-1850

CONTENTS

Draft 3, 2020. For details re. publication see:
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463722315/keeping-family-in-an-age-of-long-distance-trade-imperial-expansion-and-exile-1550-1850

LIST OF IMAGES, MAPS, AND TABLES

Figures

Tables

Maps

Cover image

Juan Patricio Morlete Ruiz, 'X. From Spaniard and return backwards, hold yourself suspended in mid air' (*X. De español y torna atrás, tente en el aire*), circa 1760, Mexico. LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

Draft 3, 2020

For details re. publication see:
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463722315/keeping-family-in-an-age-of-long-distance-trade-imperial-expansion-and-exile-1550-1850

Iberian Atlantic: an Englishman's 'suffering rewarded'.

Heather Dalton, University of Melbourne

ABSTRACT: At 21, Robert Tomson had become an integral part of an English merchant's household in Seville and in 1555 he joined their emigration to Mexico. There he fell victim to the Inquisition. After languishing in jails in Mexico City and Seville, Tomson resumed his career in Seville under the protection of another English merchant and married a Spanish heiress. On returning to England, Tomson, eager to avoid accusations of papacy, wrote an account of his experiences. In this chapter I look at the personal relationships and family connections central to his story, exploring a world where marriages that transcended national ties and traditional boundaries were central to individual survival and to the project of national expansion.

KEY WORDS: Robert Tomson, Inquisition, Seville, Mexico, trade, race, religion, family

In 1553 Robert Tomson, a Hampshire lad, went to reside with an English merchant and his Spanish wife in Seville. This was a common scenario by the 1550s when English merchants, who continued to thrive in Spain and its Atlantic colonies, were generally married to Spanish women. Such family units provided safe spaces for young Englishmen to learn Castilian, become familiar with Andalusian trading culture and acquire strategies for avoiding the attention of the Inquisition. By the age of 21 Tomson had become part of this merchant's household and in 1555 he joined them in emigrating from Spain to Mexico. After the merchant, his wife and children perished en route, Tomson was stranded alone in Mexico City. There he found employment in a Spanish household with no connection to the familial trading networks that had previously sustained and protected him. In 1557 his Spanish employer denounced him to the Inquisition for voicing 'Lutheran' opinions – making Tomson the first Englishman to fall foul of the Inquisition in Mexico. Tomson was found guilty and banished to Seville to serve out his sentence there. He eventually managed to resume working in Spain under the protection of an established English merchant before marring the daughter of a recently deceased rich Spanish merchant. On returning to England, Tomson wrote an account of his persecution in Mexico and financial redemption in Spain. Mindful of avoiding accusations of papacy, he framed his experiences as a pilgrim's progress with his marriage a reward for his sufferings for his faith.

Robert Tomson's story of his travails in Spain and Mexico were published in 1599 in the third volume of the geographer Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations.* 'The voyage of Robert Tomson Marchant, into Nova Hispania in the yeere 1555 - with divers observations concerning the state of the Countrey - and certaine accidents touching

himself' was perfect for Hakluyt's project in that it provided a unique and detailed description of Mexico City just thirty years after Cortés defeated the Aztecs. Moreover, in the wake of the defeat of the Armada, it fed into what is commonly known as 'The Black Legend', demonising the Spaniards as cruel colonisers devoted to Rome. Although Tomson's account of his seven months in solitary confinement, his trial, the *Auto da Fé*, and his journey to freedom is essentially a propaganda piece for an English Protestant audience, it is a fairly accurate. In 1927, G. R. G. Conway, an Englishman living in Mexico City, published *An Englishman in the Mexican Inquisition 1556 -1560*.[1] The book contains Conway's informative introduction and notes, Tomson's story as in *Principal Navigations*, and Conway's translation of the transcript of Inquisitorial Proceedings against Tomson, which confirmed Tomson's account as published by Hakluyt.[2] Although Conway elaborates on many details of Tomson's life, his work is of an antiquarian nature and he does not examine the background to Tomson's arrest nor challenge Tomson's claim that his marriage to a wealthy Spanish heiress was a God-given reward for his suffering. Conway's choice of border for his frontispiece - that of the title page of the King Edward VI Prayer Book - is significant, adding weight to the idea that Tomson's story is a straightforward account of a Protestant suffering for his faith at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition - and then emerging triumphant.[3]

While Tomson's memoir provides a fascinating window into mid sixteenth century Mexico City, it does not elaborate on the networks that sustained him nor the details of his family life. Although the story has received some attention from English-language scholars, none have looked at all the documents in Spain's archives in order to find out more about Tomson's family life or his marriage.[4] In this chapter I aim to remedy this, looking at how and why young men started their mercantile careers far from home before examining the personal relationships and family connections central to Tomson's story. In examining notarial records in the Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla, I cast light on the variety of arrangements that fell under the heading of family. Specifically, I will be looking at the relationships behind Tomson's apprenticeship in Seville, journey to

[1] Conway's *An Englishman* is available online at various sites. See, for example, https://archive.org/details/MN42000ucmf_3/page/n263 (accessed 15 May 2019).
[2] References abbreviated as follows: Conways preface, introduction and notes (C); 'The voyage of Robert Tomson Marchant' from *Principal Navigations* in Conway (C/T); Conway's translation of Inquisition, vol 32, no. 8, 32 folios, Mexican National Archives (C/I).
[3] Prayer book printed by Edward Whitchurch in 1552. The original woodcut was sent to Juan Pablos, who set up a press in Mexico for the Seville-based printer, Cromburger in Mexico. The border was used for books printed in Mexico in 1554, 1559, 1634 and 1638.
[4] For studies of Tomson's mercantile life, see: Connell-Smith and Sheaves.

Mexico, inquisitorial ordeal, and his return to Spain and fortunate marriage.[5] Tomson's world was one where young men were ideally protected; where parents entrusted their sons' welfare to fellow guild members. It was also one that could be called a 'gender frontier', where marriages that transcended boundaries relating to nationality, class, race, and religion were as central to the survival of men and women on the margins, as they were to the project of national expansion.[6]

Apprenticeship in Seville

Robert Tomson was born in Andover in Hampshire into a family with connections to Bristol, where he was sent as a teenager to board with a merchant to learn his trade. In March 1553, the nineteen-year old Tomson was sent to France, and then on to the Castilian port of Seville. There, he boarded with John Field, an English merchant.[7] Field was married to a local woman and when he and his Spanish wife took the 21 year old Tomson into their household, Tomson was not yet 'of age'. Until he was twenty-five, he could not sign a legal document in Castile and therefore could not send or receive goods. This meant that he operated as Field's assistant rather than his fully-fledged factor. From the late medieval period, merchants' young sons and nephews were sent to trading centres in Europe to learn foreign languages, accounting, and trading practices. Young men could go on to work as assistants, account clerks, cashers or cashiers, factors and eventually merchants running their own businesses.[8]

English merchants had congregated in the Andalusian ports of Cadiz, Puerto de Santa Maria, San Lucar de Barrameda and Seville from the fourteenth century. Along with Italian, Flemish, French and English merchants traders, they came to buy olive oil, wine and silk and raw wool and to sell cloth. When a royal decree in 1503 effectively gave Seville a monopoly over trade with the New World, the influx of foreigners - essentially all non-Castilians - grew. Although Seville was a cosmopolitan city with an increasingly fluid social structure, Castile's rulers did not want 'outsiders' to infiltrate their Atlantic possessions. The initial intention was to allow only Castilians and Christians to trade with the Indies. Because there was suspicion that some *conversos* (Jews who had converted to Christianity) continued to practice Judaism in secret, their access to 'the

[5] See Hoffman.
[6] See Croft (1989). Re. 'gender frontiers' see Kathleen Brown (1996) in Wiesner-Hanks (2012), 194.
[7] C/T and C/I, 2 and 33-24; Sheaves, 28-39.
[8] Dalton (2016), 22, 25-41; Grassby, 178-196.

Indies' was also questioned. This meant that large numbers of merchants operated outside the parameters of legal trade. This caused problems for the authorities, as well as for the excluded merchants, as it became obvious that settlers of fledgling colonies, such as Hispaniola, would starve if the authorities maintained their ban on imports shipped in by 'foreigners'. In February 1505, King Ferdinand attempted to settle the confusion by declaring that 'strangers' living in Seville, Cadiz or Jerez, who had lived in Spain for over fifteen years, owned property, and who had settled with families, should be considered Spaniards for the purposes of trade. This opinion was embodied in a decree, which included all foreigners living in Castile as long as they traded in association with Spanish merchants and employed Spaniards as their factors.[9]

Towards the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, Seville's notaries recorded an increase in the number of transactions involving English merchants. From these records we can see that among the strategies these merchants adopted in order to negotiate the city and overcome the obstacles to trading was to align themselves with one or more local merchants and, in some cases, with entire families. Although the English merchants in Seville could be said, in the words of Eric Spindler, to be a 'portable community', carrying their own 'sense of identity', some were more portable than others.[10] While those who had the support of their countrymen and fellow guild members could prosper, those who made close relationships with local trading families could assimilate and thrive. In some cases, relationships with Spanish merchants led to English merchants marrying into the family. Marriage provided access to economic and political privileges and optimized the chances of foreign merchants acquiring wealth and property locally. Merchants relied on Spanish wives to cement local relationships, translate, check agreements and accounts, and oversee apprentices and factors. Although these wives often enjoyed material comfort and independence, and had more agency than women married to Spaniards, they inhabited a grey area in society and could face suspicion from their own community as well as the one they had married into.[11]

The conventional explanation is that after 1533, when Henry VIII made the break with Rome, English merchants found it difficult to maintain businesses in Spain. However, as

[9] Dalton (2016), 41-46.
[10] Spindler.
[11] Dalton (2016), 51-52.

Peter Marshall has suggested, even by the late 1530s when some English merchants in Andalusia began complaining of their treatment by the Spanish authorities, there was an element of 'playing to the gallery'.[12] Marshall points out that in 1539, when tension between Spain and England was high, William Ostrich, an English merchant living in San Lucar de Barrameda, made a point of noting that Spanish friends were supporting him and his colleagues in Seville.[13] Ostrich had been elected as consul of The Spanish company in 1538 - an organisation set up in 1530 by English merchants for their welfare and protection in the Iberian Peninsula. Ostrich appointed John Field and another merchant, Thomas Harrison, as 'collectors of the average' in Seville.[14] Although English merchants continued to live in and around Seville without incident until the end of the sixteenth century, as time went on the role of the consul became all the more vital. Thomas Pery, a citizen and clothworker of London who had been travelling to Ayamonte at the southernmost point of Spain's border with Portugal for about 14 years, came to the attention of the Inquisition in 1539 for denying that Henry VII was a heretic. Pery was tortured, convicted, imprisoned for six month in the castle of Triana, and had all his goods confiscated. Pery sent an account of his travails to Richard Field, a London-based merchant who regularly traded with Spain.[15] In the letter Pery claimed that he would have died in prison had it not been for the kindness and practical support of John Field (probably a relative of Richard) and Thomas Harrison.[16] It was generally agreed by the English merchants that if any of them intimated that Henry VIII was a true Christian they were 'with moch creweltye put in pryson and their goodis lost forever and theyr life in gret daunger'.[17] The greatest fear was that merchants, locked away and tortured, could implicate their fellow Englishmen. In July 1540 a group of English merchants, including John Field, assembled to prepare and sign an account of their predicament for the king.[18] By the time Tomas joined the Field family in Seville in 1553, John Field had been trading from Seville for about twenty years. By this time he would have become skilled at negotiating the religious minefield in which he traded and, as Pery attested, able to offer assistance to those who fell foul of the Inquisition. Although the ill treatment of English merchants at the hands of the Spanish had become a familiar, if not always justified, motif by the 1550s, English merchants married to Spanish women generally thrived. The

[12] Marshall, 37.
[13] Dalton (2016), 129.
[14] Connell-Smith, 95-7.
[15] Thomas Pery to Richard Field, 1539. Cotton MS Vesp. C/VII, f. 91v-*95r*, British Library (BL).
[16] Connell-Smith, 111-20.
[17] Connell-Smith, 119.
[18] Connell-Smith, 120-2.

historian C.H. Haring referred to these men as 'Anglo-Spaniards'.[19] Tomson's family in England would have presumed that in joining Field, Tomson would be ensconced in an Anglo-Spanish household where he would not only learn the skills of trading, he would be safe and well-schooled in how to avoid the attention of the Inquisition.

Journey to Mexico

After two years lodging with the Fields, Tomson was sufficiently integrated into their household to join them when Field obtained a license to take them to 'the Indies' - to Mexico. Family connections in 'the Indies' made it easier to get the license, providing connections were to an Old Christian family. Authorities overseeing migration at the Casa de Conratación (House of Trade) did not want anyone with Muslim or Jewish ancestry emigrating. Field had Spanish friends in Vera Cruz and his wife may well have had family there. Unfortunately, as neither Field nor Tomson ever recorded her name, this cannot be confirmed. As Jane Mangan explains in her study of family in Peru, those Europeans emigrating to the New World relied on experienced family members for information as to what to pack, what to expect and, most importantly 'how to stay safe'. No family approached a transatlantic voyage as an adventure. It was a project fraught with danger, undertaken only after careful planning in the hope of improved opportunities for all family members.[20]

From the 1540s the common arrangement was for groups of merchant ships sailing for the New World to be accompanied by military ships. Although English and Dutch corsairs became a significant threat to such fleets after 1560, at the time the Fields were travelling, the hazard was French corsairs.[21] The route from Seville to the port of Vera Cruz in Mexico could take as little as 75 sailing days, but usually took longer with prolonged stops in the Canary Islands and Hispaniola.[22] In February 1555 the Field's household made the six-day trip from San Lucar to Gran Canaria. The fact that their ship was shot at as it entered the port because they were mistaken for 'French rovers' highlights the paranoia initiated by the French threat.[23] The party spent three weeks on the island, socialising with the English 'servants' of London merchants, Anthony Hickman and Edward Castelin, before sailing on to Teneriffe where they stayed for

[19] Dalton (2016), 128-9; Haring, 258. See also Eldred.
[20] Mangan (2016), 112, 118-119.
[21] Mangan (2016), 113.
[22] Kamen, 4.
[23] C/T, 3-4.

seven months waiting for the fleet to gather.[24] In October 1555 they boarded a ship owned by John Sweeting, an Englishman based in Cadiz with his Spanish wife. Leonard Chiltern, Sweeting's son-in-law was the captain. Another Englishman, Ralph Sarre, boarded one of the other seven ships in the fleet. They were delayed on Hispaniola after the vessel's keel was damaged as they entered the port of San Domingo, setting sail in January 1556, eleven months after leaving Spain. Twenty-four days later the fleet was ravaged by a storm off the coast of Mexico and the vessel carrying Fields and Tompson sank.[25] The family were saved by another ship and ferried into the island of San Juan de Ulua 'very naked and distressed of apparel and all other things'. [26] Tomson's vivid recollection of a tragedy averted sums up the dangers faced and battering endured by individuals, especially servants or slaves, desperate to keep loved ones close and alive:

> I do remember that the last person that came out of the ship into the boat was a woman blacke moore, who leaping out of the ship into the boat, with a yong sucking child in her armes, lept too short, and fell into the sea, and was a good while under the water before the boat could come to rescue her, and with the spreading of her clothes rose above water againe, and was caught by the coat & pulled into the boate having still her child under her arme, both of them halfe drowned, and yet her naturall love towards her child would not let her let the childe go. And when she came aboord the boat she helde her childe so fast under her arm still, that two men were scant able to get it out.[27]

In the mainland port of Vera Cruz they stayed with Gonzalo Ruiz de Córdova, an old friend of Field's. Ruiz had previously shipped wine from Seville to Vera Cruz in the *Trinidad*, a ship co-owned by Field's colleague Thomas Harrison.[28] According to Tomson, Ruiz was 'a very rich man of the town', receiving Field 'and all his household into his house, and kept us there a whole month, making us very good cheer'. Ruiz provided new clothes, money, mules and horses to his guests, who had lost everything in the wreck, so that they could embark on the overland trek to Mexico City.[29] Just two days into the 400 kilometre journey, Tomson 'fell sick of an ague' and had to be carried 'upon Indians backes'. Eventually the Fields became ill and within eight days of their

[24] C/T, 5. Hickman and Castelin were both members of the Company of Merchant Adventurers of London.
[25] C/T, 6-8.
[26] C/T, 9.
[27] C/T, 8
[28] C/T, 10; Record of Alonso de Cazalla, 12 May 1543, file 15, book 2, f. 1, Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla [APS].
[29] C/T, 7-10.

arrival in Mexico City, Field, Field's wife, at least one of their children and two other members of the household died – leaving only four, including Tomson, alive.[30]

Inquisitorial ordeal in Mexico City

Alone in Mexico City, Tomson was near death himself and spent six months convalescing, three of them in a hospital bed.[31] Once recovered, he emerged into, what was for him, a totally alien environment. Although there were around 1500 Spanish households in Mexico City by the mid 1550s, Tomson remembered that 'In my time, were dwelling and alive in Mexico, many ancient men that were of the Conquerors'. He never mentioned what happened to the remaining members of his household and although there were foreign merchants in the settlement, including Ralph Sarre, none appear to have been linked to Field's network. If Field had been joining a colleague or family member in Mexico City, they do not appear to have reached out to Tomson. Indeed, Conway suggests that Tomson was the 'first Englishman who appears to have resided in Mexico at this early date'.[32] This explains Tomson's claim that he would have been quite alone if not befriended by Tomás Blaque (Thomas Black or Blake).[33] Blaque was a Scottish hosier (the son of William Blake and Agnes Mowat) who had had arrived in Mexico in 1535 as a teenager after taking part in the conquest of New Grenada (Colombia). Blaque had settled in Mexico City and in 1544 married Francisca de Ribera, the widow of Cristóbal de Canyego. Canyego was a conquistador who had been 'Nuncio and Fiscal of the Inquisition' when the Basque Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga was the first bishop of Mexico.[34] The records of the Seville-based notary Alonso de Cazalla indicate that during 1556 Blaque was appointed by the Seville-based heirs of the recently deceased Francisco López and Hernán Rodríguez de Sanabria, a clergyman, to oversee the collection of their assets in Mexico. Although neither Blaque nor his Seville-based contacts appear to have had a link to Field's circle, in 1556 Blaque was sorting out the estate of Rodríguez de Sanabria in Vera Cruz when Tomson and Field's family arrived there.[35] He may have known Gonzalo Ruiz, Field's host, and felt some sympathy for the sick lad from the British Isles.

[30] C/T, 10-11.
[31] C/T, 11.
[32] C, xxi,
[33] C/T, 11.
[34] C/T, 11; C, xxi, 34, 93; Flint and Flint (2005), 606; Flint (2013), 549. If Blaque was telling the truth when he described himself as 23 years old in 1540 when he joined the Coronado Expedition, he would have been 15 when he took part in the conquest of New Grenada.
[35] Records of Alonso de Cazalla, 20 March and 7 December 1556, file 15, book 1, f. 610 v and book 11, ff. 1163-1164, APS. Hernán Rodríguez de Sanabria was a priest in Vera Cruz.

Blaque found Tomson a job in the service of a wealthy Spaniard, Gonzalo Cerezo - a page to Cortéz who had become High Constable of the Court.[36] This would have been a totally new experience for the young man whose employment experience to date had involved trading in an anglicised environment. Tomson had been living in Cerezo's household for just over a year when at dinner on 31 August 1559, the head steward, Manuel Borges, asked him whether it was true that in England, monasteries had been overthrown, images of the saints destroyed and 'obedience to the Pope of Rome' denied. Tomson assented, pointing out that it was 'the expresse commandment of Almighty God, Thou shalt not make to thy selfe any graven image'.[37] He may have thought that if he had simply answered 'yes', he might have endangered himself and that referencing the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4) was a safer option. However, Cerezo objected strongly to Tomson's answer for he had just spent over 7000 pesos on a gold and silver Madonna encrusted with pearls for the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in Mexico City. Although Tomson pointed out that the words were not his and that those present could look them up in the scriptures, nine days later he was arrested by the Inquisition.[38] He was charged with making 'certain remarks similar to those, which are used by the accursed Lutheran heretics, and derogatory to the Holy Catholic Faith' (the term 'Lutheran' was commonly applied to all Protestants).[39]

When he first appeared before the Inquisition on 12 September 1559, Tomson was able to reassure his inquisitors that his parents did not have 'any strain of Jews, or Moors or Converts', that none of his relatives had been condemned by the Holy Inquisition for heresy, and that he had not been to Germany.[40] Tomson reported that he could not recollect having said 'anything against the said Faith', and, if he had, it was because he 'was not in his proper senses at the time'. He said that he had confessed four times since his arrival in Mexico City and that he went to mass on Sundays and Feast Days. He 'asked pardon of the Lord' and submitted himself to 'the correction which our Holy Mother Church may impose'. Tomson claimed that he owned only the clothes he was wearing and his bedding and that his employer Cerezo owed him 20 to 30 pesos for his

[36] C/T, 11; C, xxi, 93-94.
[37] C/T, 14-15
[38] C/T, 14-15; C/I, 40.
[39] Chuchiak, 257.
[40] C/I, 34.

services.[41] Locked up in a prison cell, Tomson was beyond the help of the English mercantile community. Thomas Blaque had died in April 1557 and the only people who may have been able to help were Gonzalo Ruiz, or Ralph Sarre. While Ruiz, who was in Vera Cruz, was probably unaware of what had happened to Tomson, Sarre, who was working in the household of Don García de Albornoz, a councilor of the city, would have surely been loath to bring attention to himself or his employer.[42] Moreover, as Conway points out, as Tomson was the first Englishman to 'suffer at the hands of the Inquisition in America', his arrest may have come as a shock to his peers.[43] Elizabeth 1 had succeeded her half sister, Mary 1, in November 1558 and been crowned eight months before Tomson came to the attention of the Inquisition. This change in regime meant that not only were the colony's episcopal Inquisitors testing the waters, English merchants were coming to terms with the fact that they were suddenly more exposed than they had been under the rule of Mary 1 and Philip II of Spain. Although the Inquisition was not formally established in Mexico until 1571, the Spanish Inquisition had operated there since 1529 because the Council of Mexico was concerned about *'the commerce with strangers here carried on, and because of the many corsairs abounding upon our coasts, which may bring their evil customs among both natives and Castillians'.*[44]

After seven months in solitary confinement and several re-examinations, the Inquisition found Tomson guilty of being aware of the Lutheran heresy AND adhering to it.[45] Based mainly on the evidence of Cerezo's household staff - The head steward, Manuel Borges, and Cerezo's page, Jorje Manuel, who slept in the bed next to Tomson's - it was reported that he had spoken out against the 'Sacrament of Confession' on several occasions, did not make the Sign of the Cross, nor attend Mass.[46] The fact that he was able to translate prayers - such as the Pater Noster and Ave Maria, may have mitigated his circumstances.[47] In March 1560 Tomson and the man in the neighbouring cell, the Genoese Augustin Boacio, were paraded at an *Auto da Fe*.[48] This was on a smaller scale than those in Spain - but nevertheless - quite a spectacle. The officialdom of Mexico City attended as Tomson was paraded before the High Church in the city's central square

[41] C/I, 35-37.
[42] C, xxii - xxiii
[43] C, xxxviii
[44] Chuchiak.
[45] C, 94.
[46] C/T, 11; C/I, 42-44.
[47] C/I, 67-68.
[48] C/T 11: For Augustin Boacio, see Kinder.

before being taken to a scaffold before the high altar. Tomson reckoned that between five and six thousand people watched and that none of them understood 'what Lutheranes were, nor what it meant'.[49] He claimed that although the people had been warned that he and his co penitents were 'more like devils than men', the women and children cried out 'that they never saw goodlier men in all their lives' and that 'we were more like Angels among men'.[50] If this was true, then the performance was not having the desired effect upon the indigenous population, because the intention was that those wearing *sambenitos* (penitential tunics and hats) would be subjected to public contempt prior to the reconciliation process.[51] Tomson was sentenced to one years imprisonment and to 'weare the S. Benito for three years', while Boacio was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment and his goods confiscated.[52] Both men were to serve their sentences in Castille. The fact that Tomson was without friends or funds is confirmed by the fact that the 50 pesos needed for his fare back to Spain were taken from the confiscated funds of Boacio.[53] After Tomson left, the *sanbenito* he wore at the Auto da Fé was marked with his name and hung in the Cathedral. The last reported sighting of it there was over a century later, in 1667.[54]

Rebuilding a life in Spain

Tomson and Boacio made the gruelling journey back overland 'in fetters' to Vera Cruz and on to San Jual Ullua before being placed on a ship bound for Spain. Boacio leapt overboard near the Azores after telling Tomson that he feared that the Inquisition in Seville would burn him. He survived, travelled to Lisbon and later settled in London.[55] Tomson made it back to Seville and served his three-year sentence in Seville. The fact that he survived the ordeal was probably due to the fact that he was once again within the sphere of English merchants married to Spanish women, with experience of operating in what was a profitable but sometimes dangerous environment. His main support was Hugh Tipton, a Bristol merchant who had succeeded William Ostrich as consul of The Spanish Company.[56] Tipton would have had sympathy for Tomson for, as young man, he and a fellow factor, Thomas Shipton, were denounced to the Inquisition,

[49] C/T, 11; Chuchiak, 51, 150-152.
[50] C/I, 25; C/T 12-13.
[51] Bethencourt, 155-168.
[52] C/T, 12-13.
[53] C/I, 170-71, 94. Agustin Soacio was arrested at Zacatecas and tried in 1559 for speaking against purgatory and the confession, and for other heresies (Inquisition Records, Vol. 31. 193 Mexican National Archives.
[54] C/T, 14; C, 96.
[55] C/T, 13.
[56] Tipton held the position until his departure from Andalusia in 1570. Connell-Smith, 124.

processed before the alter of the Church in San Sebastian and fined 600 ducats with costs.[57] In August 1537, while residing in the Basque port of Rentería, Tipton had advised newly arrived merchants to minimise their contact with the Spanish 'for the y have not orderyd oure nassyon well this yere'. By the time he was consul in Seville, Tipton's advice to young merchants was to avoid drinking too much and womanising, pursuits that could loosen tongues and get them into trouble. At least if they settled down and married a local woman, she could not only advise them how to behave, her family connections could give added protection.[58] When Tomson was released from Prison, Tipton promptly hired him as his 'casher'. Within a year, the newly employed Tomson had married the daughter of a recently deceased Spanish merchant, thus taking an important step in optimizing his chances of surviving in the Iberian Atlantic. He claimed that his wife, Marie de la Barrera, was the only daughter and heir of the wealthy Juan de la Barrera, who had died at sea on his way from Mexico to Seville. In his written account, Tomson presented his marriage as his triumph and his reward for his tribulations, claiming that the marriage was 'worth to mee 2500 pounds in barres of golde and silver, besides jewels of great price'.[59]

Tomson's Marriage to Maria de la Barrera

As marriage to a local woman provided access to economic and political privileges, optimizing the chances of acquiring wealth and property, it is not surprising or unusual that Tomson should choose to wed Marie de la Barrera. However, what is surprising is that the family or guardian of a wealthy heiress would allow her to marry a penniless foreign merchant who had just got out of prison and had to wear the *Sambenito* whenever he left the house. Tomson claimed that Maria de la Barrera simply arrived in Seville - a recently orphaned heiress - and married him. He put his good fortune down to 'the goodnes of God to all them that put their trust in him, that I being brought out of the Indies, in such great misery and infamy to the world, should be provided at Gods hand in one moment, of more then in all my life before I could attaine unto by my owne labour'.[60] Unless we accept Tomson's explanation of heavenly intervention, there has to be more to this story - and there is.

[57] S.P. 70/111 no. 577; Harl. 36 f. 26v in Croft (1973), vii-xxix; Smythe, 13-14.
[58] Connell-Smith, 101-2, 105, 122, 126.
[59] C/T, 14.
[60] C/T, 14.

By the time Robert Tomson reached Veracruz, it was an established slaving centre. The first slave rebellion in Mexico had taken place there in 1537. Had Field not died, I suspect Tomson would have become involved in a lucrative slave trading business. He may have been a young man from Andover, but by the time he arrived in Vera Cruz he was ensconced in trading networks that linked the Iberian Peninsula to America and Africa. Maria's father, Juan de la Barrera, was known as an *indianos* (someone who had resided in 'the Indies' for a long period) and he was an important figure in Vera Cruz. He had begun trading in slaves while running a pearling business on the island of Cubagua between Trinidad and the Venezuelan coast.[61] In 1529 he returned to Spain, leaving partners and factors, including his son Alonso de la Barrera, to run the pearl business in Cubagua.[62] In 1542 Cortez had contracted for 500 slaves to be shipped directly from West Africa to Mexico and, as the indigenous population was increasingly depleted by disease, the demand for labour grew. By the 1550s Barrera was slave trading, making maritime loans, dealing in pearls, alum, almonds and a variety of other goods, and owned cattle ranches and plantations in Puerto Rico and Cabo de la Vela. Unlike many merchants, who relied solely on factors, Barerra retained the habit of travel and crisscrossed the Atlantic in the *Santa Catalina*, a vessel he part-owned. His most regular trips were between Seville, the Cape Verde islands, West Africa and Vera Cruz.[63] He died in 1560/61, during one of these crossings.[64] We have corroborating evidence that Juan de la Barrera was Tomson's father-in-law because in 1567 an Englishman in Mexico City, Henry Hawkes, received a letter from Tomson, who was by this time 34 and living in Malaga.[65] In the letter, Tomson asks for help in retrieving 1800 pesos of his father-in law's estate. Specifically asking:

> 'be so good as to delyvar my letres unto Sancho Flores, which goth in one with Honfrey Rickthorne's, and desire him to tacke with of Francisco Tyrado of Mexico and delyvar him a letre of mine which goeth in one with his and knowe of him

[61] Dalton (2012), 104-105.
[62] Alonso is described as 'hijo de Juan de la Barrera' in many documents. For example: Record of Francisco de Castellanos, 24 December 1529, file 5, book r, f. 500 v. and Record of Alonson la Barrera, 22 September 1530, file 1, book 2, f. 211, APS.
[63]For examples of Barrera's activities, see records of the following notaries: Anón Ruiz de Porras, 28 May 1528, file 3, f. 479; Francisco de Castellanos, 26 March, 6 April 1526, file 5, book 2, f. 91 v, f. 172. 29 December 1526, file 5, book 4, f. 354 v, 27 June 1530, file 5, book 3, f. 251; Alonso de la Barrera, 23 September 1530, file 1, book 2, f. 219 v, 13 February 1531, file 1, book 1, f. 465 v; Pedro de Coronado, 5 July 1535, 4 January 1538, 19 February, 15 March, 24-26 April, 12 July, 26 September 1539, file 10, f. 15 v, f. 38, f. 32, f. 116, ff. 50 – 55 v, f. 51 v, 65 v; Alonso de Cazalla: 8 March 1542, 29 March, 3 June, 16 September, 23 - 29 October 1549, 28 June, 6 September 1553, and 30 June 1556, file 15, book 2, f. 581, f. 667 v, f. 1178, f. 461, f. 966 – 967, f. 1010, f. 1012, f. 17, f. 533 v and f. 30; 9 June 1551, file 15, book 1, f. 643; Juan Franco, 18 March 1551, file 15, book 1, ff. 1221-1222, APS. Note that Barrera also owned or part-owned other vessels during his long career.
[64] C/T, 14.
[65] C, xxxviii.

how the matre standith as conserninge a 1800 pesos that he remaynyth to covar of my wyfe's father's goods.'[66]

Tomson informs Hawkes that he has written to Tyrado 'divars tymes' over three years regarding his wife's estate, but has never heard back from him. Tyrado (probably the Francisco Tiraldo born in Fuente de Cantos who moved to Mexico in 1534) was, according to Tomson, a great friend of Barrera's, his wife's godfather, and a man known for his honesty.[67] As others in Mexico had received and answered his letters, Tomson was increasingly concerned that Tyrado was simply ignoring him. He was right to be worried for there were many claims on the estate of Juan de la Barrera, as there were on the estates of many merchants who established several households across the Atlantic.[68]

Juan de La Barrera had only one legitimate daughter, Ana de la Barrera, and she was his sole heir. She was married to Melchor Maldonado de Saavedra and the Archivo General de Indias contains several documents relating to their attempts to manage her father's businesses and claim his estate.[69] Their endeavors were complicated by the fact that Juan de la Barrera appears to have had several other children with Beatriz of Jerez, (apart from Alonso who he left managing his pearl business): Fernán Sánchez and Isabel de la Barrera, and possibly also Leonore de Sevilla.[70] Although Barrera and Beatriz are described as being spouses *(esposos*) in a notary document in which power of attorney is granted to their son (*a su hijo Alonso de Barrera*), it is likely she was his common law wife and therefore their children were illegitimate and thus not legal heirs.[71] Alonso de Barrera, who was married to María de Barrionuevo, spent most of his time in Venezuala and Porto Rica. His son, Hernando de la Barrera was his heir. [72] In Seville in the early spring of 1560, Juan de la Barrera transferred his interest in the pearling business to Juan Pablos and Alonso Camacho, and Alonso de la Barrero transferred his interest to his son, Hernando.[73] After this, neither Juan nor Alonso appear in the records so both could have died around this time, probably lost at sea as Tomson alleges. So where does

[66] C, 95.
[67] Francisco Tirado a Nueva España, 4 September 1534, Con. 5536, L. 5, f. 20r (4), Archivo General de Indias [AGI].
[68] See Dalton (2016), 56-71.
[69] For example: Privilegios de Juros, 'De Melchor Maldonado de Saavedra y de Ana de la Barrera, su mujer', Cont. 1070, 1567, no. 12; 'De doña Ana de la Barrera, hija de Juan de la Barrera', Cont. 1058, 1561, n. 24; 'Petición de Ana de la Barrera', 21 June 1572, Pan. 236, L.10, ff. 288 -288v, AGI.
[70] *Eugenio Martínez*, 10-12.
[71] Record of Pedro Fernández, 30 December 1529, file 15, book 1, sig. 17,460, APS. Note that in some secondary sources Beatriz is listed as 'Beatriz de Sevilla'.
[72] Eugenio Martínez, 12-13.
[73] 'Powers' of Juan and Alonso de la Barrera, 3 January and 11 February 1560, Just. ff. 129, 224-228, AGI.

Maria de la Barrera fit in? The fact that Tomson noted at the bottom of his letter to Hawks that his wife's brother was 'Symon dela Barrera', son of John de la Barrera', provides a key. In 1579 a special license was provided to Simón de la Barrera to travel to Mexico. In the application Simón is described as having been born in Mexico to Juan de la Barrera and Ana de la Barrera. While Ana is described as 'Indian' (*indio*), Symon is described as being half Spanish/half Indian (*mestizo*).[74] Thus, it appears that Maria was the sister of 'Symon': the illegitimate daughter, born of a relationship between Juan de la Barrera and a local woman he met while on business in Vera Cruz. As Jane Mangan has pointed out, in this period, men who did not want such children to be 'lost among the Indians' would bring their mixed race children to live with their relatives in Spain when they could not be with them and thus Maria may have been in Seville when her father died.[75]

Juan de la Barrera had spent a lifetime in the company of families operating at the margins. In Africa he had liaised with traders descended from Portuguese settlers from the Cape Verde Islands and Florentine and Genoese merchants who, intent on benefiting from the slave trade, had invested in the region. These African Europeans (*degredados* or *lançados* as they were variously referred to) were viewed with suspicion by the Portuguese and Spanish authorities. Many were *conversos* who had fled persecution on the Iberian Peninsula, and others were mixed race as a result of relationships between European men and African women.[76] As he built his pearl trading business in Venezuela, and extended his trading operation to Mexico and other Atlantic regions, Barrera appears to have set up at least one household, with Simón and Maria's mother, and there may have been others. That Maria was illegitimate is unlikely to have fazed Tomson as many rich English merchants in Seville fathered illegitimate children. Even when they did not acknowledge these children in their wills, they often made complex arrangements with fellow merchants to vouchsafe their wellbeing. That Maria de la Barrera was mixed race may have meant the couple faced discrimination, but in the early 1560s Seville was a place where there were many mixed-race relationships.[77] It is uncertain as to whether Tomson ever managed to extract his wife's inheritance from her godfather. When Henry Hawkes applied for a license to go to the Indies and sell wine in 1567 he named Robert Tomson as his referee, and is likely to have wanted to help his

[74] 'Expediente de concesión', 1579, Ind. 2059, N. 169, AGI.
[75] Mangan (2013).
[76] Dalton (2012), 91-123, 104.
[77] Dalton (2012), 105-110.

English colleague. However, as negotiations regarding Elizabeth's marriage to the Hapsburg Archduke had broken down, there was a further hardening of attitudes regarding religious differences. In 1570 Hawkes, who by then was going by the name of Pero Sanchez, fell foul of the Inquisition. Tomson's letter to Hawkes survived because it was seized, along with Hawke's other papers, and filed by the Inquisition. Although Hawkes escaped from prison the next year and provided Hakluyt with a description of Mexico, he did not mention his Inquisition experience, probably because his Spanish wife was still alive.[78] By this time, Tomson had returned to England and, whether Maria de la Barrera was still alive or not, he had no qualms about naming her in his memoirs. However, Tomson did not elaborate on her true background or, if he did, Hakluyt may well have expunged the details. Although the era when interracial and transnational marriage and families were seen as what Ann McGrath describes as a 'rupture in colonialism's longed-for neatness' was very much in the future, Hakluyt's vision did not really engage with the idea of family, let alone family that crossed racial and/or religious boundaries. Indeed, even when it comes to colonial historiography, 'stories of marriages across colonising boundaries have not entered the main plotlines'.[79]

Conclusion

Juan de la Barrera appears in many studies of Spain's 'Golden Age', but in that genre of an Atlantic sojourner, a striving European man alone.[80] The fact that illegitimate children like Maria lived with and often travelled with their fathers appears in minor notary paperwork, but was and is not mentioned in official records or subsequent studies. Maria and her brother, Simón de la Barrera, grew up in one of those forgotten households that shaped the Atlantic World. Like Martín Cortés, known as 'el Mestizo', the illegitimate son of Hernán Cortés and his indigenous interpreter (La Malinche or doña Marina), they would have led a life a life of privilege, but a life on the margins nevertheless.[81] Just as Maria's transient origins would have engendered suspicion in Seville, so Tomson's survival of the Inquisition and subsequent conversion to Roman Catholicism would have engendered suspicion when he returned to England during Elizabeth's reign. By fashioning his story as a tale of redemption with a God-given gift at the end, Tomson glossed over his conversion and presented a version of events that

[78] See Sheaves, 1-2.
[79] McGrath, xiv.
[80] Hardwick, Pearsall & Wulf, 205-224.
[81] For an exploration of the life of 'el Mestizo', see Lanyon.

hinged on a religious binary rather than reflecting a world that hinged on opportunism and compromise. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the Atlantic frontier was 'a space defined by changing family relationships' for people not only lived close by those who they classed as different, they had family ties with them.[82] The story of Tomson and Barrera is not unusual - it is typical. For example, the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci's wife, za n c b b were illegitimate daughters attached to a noble house.[83] For those in Tomson's trading circle, the Inquisition was an inconvenience to trade rather than a barrier and unions of outsiders, like that of Robert Tomson and Maria de la Barrera, were central to the project of national expansion and empire building.

Works cited

Bethencourt, Francisco. *'The Auto da Fé*: *Ritual and Imagery*.' Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 55 (1992): 155-168.

Chuchiak, John F. IV. *The Inquisition in New Spain, 1536–1820: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2012).

Connell-Smith, Gordon. *Forerunners of Drake: A Study of English Trade with Spain in the Early Tudor Period* (London: Longmans for the Royal Empire Society, 1954).

Conway, G.R.G. *An Englishman in the Mexican Inquisition 1556–1560; being an account of the voyage of Robert Tomson to New Spain, his trial for heresy in the city of Mexico and other contemporary historical documents* (Mexico City: privately printed, 1927).

Croft, Pauline. 'Introduction: The first Spanish company, 1530–85.' In *The Spanish Company*, ed. Pauline Croft (London: London Record Society, 1973), vii-xxix.

- 'Trading with the Enemy, 1585–1604.' *Historical Journal* 32/2 (1989): 281-302.

Dalton, Heather. *Merchants and Explorers: Roger Barlow, Sebastian Cabot and Networks of Atlantic Exchange, 1500 –1560* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

- '"Into speyne to selle for slavys": English, Spanish, and Genoese Merchant Networks and Their Involvement with the "Cost of Gwynea" Trade before 1550.' In *Brokers Of Change: Atlantic Commerce And Cultures In Pre-Colonial Western Africa*, ed. Toby Green, British Academy Proceedings Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91-123.

Eldred, Jason. '"The Just will pay for the Sinners": English Merchants, the Trade with Spain, and Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1563-1585.' *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 10/1 (2010): 5-28.

Eugenio Martínez, María Ángeles. 'Una Empresa de Perlas: los Barrera en el Caribe.' Huelva y América: Actas de las XI Jornadas de Andalucía y América 2 (1993): 9-38.

[82] Manning, 301.
[83] Fernández-Armesto, 51; Dalton (2016), 51, 65.

Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. *Amerigo: The Man who Gave his Name to America* (NY, NY: Random House, 2008).

Flint, Richard. *Great Cruelties Have Been Reported: The 1544 Investigation of the Coronado Expedition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).

Flint, Richard and Shirley Cushing Flint. *Documents of the Coronado Expedition, 1539–1542* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2005).

Grassby, Richard. The *Business Community* of Seventeenth-Century England (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1995).

Hardwick, J., Pearsall, S. M. S., & Wulf, K. 'Introduction: Centering families in Atlantic histories.' *William and Mary Quarterly 70*/2 (2013): 205-224.

Haring, Clarence Henry. *Trade and Navigation between Spain and the Indies in the Time of the Hapsburgs* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1964).

Hoffman, Paul E. 'The Archivo de Protocolos de Sevilla' *Itinerario* 5/1 (1981): 39-45.

Kamen, Henry. *Early Modern European Society* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Kinder, A. Gordon. 'Agostino Boazio: A Genoese Protestant's Adventure with the Spanish Inquisition.' *Mediterranean Studies* 5 (1995): 51-62.

Lanyon, Anna. *The New World of Martín Cortés* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004).

Mangan, Jane E. 'Moving Mestizos in Sixteenth-Century Peru: Spanish Fathers, Indigenous Mothers, and the Children In Between.' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70/2 (2013): 273-294.

- *Transatlantic Obligations*, *Creating the Bonds of Family in Conquest-Era Peru and Spain* (NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Manning, Patrick. 'Frontiers of Family Life: Early Modern Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds.' In *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in Honour of John F. Richards*, eds. Richard Eaton, Munis Faeuqui, David Gilmartin and Sunil Kumar (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 299-318.

Marshall, Peter. 'The Other Black Legend: The Henrician Reformation and the Spanish People.' *The English Historical Review* 116/465 (2001): 31-49.

McGrath*,* Ann. *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

Sheaves, Mark. 'The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic as a Hemispheric System? English merchants navigating the Iberian Atlantic', in *Entangled Empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500–183,* ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 19-41.

Smythe, John. *The Ledger of John Smythe, 1538–1550.* From the Transcript Made by John Angus, ed. Jean Vanes (London: HMSO/Bristol Record Society 28, 1974),

Spindler, Eric. 'Between Sea and City: Portable Communities in Late Medieval London and Bruges.' In *London and beyond: Essays in Honour of Derek Keene*, eds. Matthew Davies and James Galloway (London: London Institute of Historical Research, 2012), 181-200.

Tomson, Robert. 'The voyage of Robert Tomson Marchant, into Nova Hispania in the yeere 1555 - with divers observations concerning the state of the Countrey - and certaine accidents touching himself.' In Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, made by sea or over-land, to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth.* London, 1589, 1598-1600.

Wiesner-Hanks, Merry. 'Early Modern Women and the Transnational Turn'. *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7 (2012): 191-202.

Draft 3, 2020

For details re. publication see:
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463722315/keeping-family-in-an-age-of-long-distance-trade-imperial-expansion-and-exile-1550-1850