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## REZENSIONEN | REVIEWS

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**Jorun Poettering: Migrating Merchants: Trade, Nation, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Hamburg and Portugal, transl. by Kenneth Kronenburg, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019, 389 pp.**

Reviewed by  
Tanja Zakrzewski, Potsdam

With *Migrating Merchants*[1], Jorun Poettering offers a comparison between Portuguese New Christian merchants who settled in Hamburg and Hamburg merchants who moved to Portugal. These two groups have been studied individually, mostly through the lens of economic history; however, a comparative study that includes social, political, and religious aspects of trading activities has been lacking. Particularly, the history of Hamburgers abroad has been relatively unknown.

The overall goal of this monograph is to examine how and to what extent Portuguese New Christian and Hamburg merchants integrated and assimilated into their host societies and how this new social setting shaped their mercantile activities. Above all, Poettering sets out to explain “why the

Hamburgers in Portugal behaved so differently from the Portuguese who settled in Hamburg” (p. 1). The Netherlanders who settled and traded in both Hamburg in Portugal are also taken into account and function as a control group.

Poettering’s premise is that trust and reputation were crucial for successful trade and that both could be established across cultural, social, and religious boundaries despite differences and even within the jurisdiction of the Portuguese Inquisition.

The book consists of three main parts: “The Political and Legal Context”; “Migration, Life, and Trade”; and “Solidarity and Identity”. Theses, premises, and source material are presented and explained in the introduction and summarized in a very concise conclusion. Each of the three parts is divided into five chapters, which again contain many small subsections, facilitating the search for a specific topic. A detailed index further helps to navigate the book. The structure and the linguistic style make this analysis accessible for scholars foreign to the field of Sephardic studies as well as students. However, the terminology may be rather overwhelming for non-experts and for those who are not familiar with the various Spanish, Portuguese, and, in this case, Dutch terms used among scholars of Sephardic history. Poettering comments on the use of terms and their

specific meaning in different contexts, but the matter remains confusing.

In part one, “The Political and Legal Context”, Poettering breaks down the at times complicated political landscape of seventeenth-century Europe. She summarizes political treaties and legal documents in a manner that provides enough information to understand the broader historical context without getting lost in political and legal debates (contemporary and scholarly) and getting distracted from the main focus – that is, how these political and legal frameworks facilitated, hindered, and generally shaped the merchants’ lives and their business practices. This part easily serves as a stand-alone introduction to early modern legal processes and negotiating practices of seventeenth-century political history in Europe.

In part two, “Migration, Life, and Trade”, the focus shifts from the political context to the merchants themselves. While the Hamburgers left their homes voluntarily, usually at a young age, to complete their training in Portugal and lay the basis for later trading networks, many Portuguese were forced to leave by the political factors described in the previous chapters. Poettering brilliantly analyses how this crucial difference in motivation impacted the developing trade networks.

Poettering’s premise is evident and put to the test in part three, “Solidarity and Identity”, when she examines how trust “could flourish across as well as within those [religious and ethnic] boundaries” (p. 183). Trust, Poettering emphasizes, is important not only in relations between individuals but also in relations between institutions,

corporate entities, and different networks of trading correspondents.

Poettering refutes the claim that merchant diasporas were successful because their members were naturally loyal to their group, that these groups were socially and politically isolated, and that they were innovative due to being foreigners and therefore different. Instead, Poettering makes a point that it was limited integration and assimilation that led to isolation and membership in a diasporic group. Likewise, lingering foreignness is caused by external factors rather than self-isolation. It may seem obvious that “[t]he merchants who plied the trade route between Hamburg and Portugal in the seventeenth century led lives marked profoundly by the experience of migration and foreignness” (p. 260), but Poettering’s detailed analysis of how these merchant groups became migrants combines rather than singles out religious, demographic, and social aspects. Furthermore, she leaves no doubt that Portuguese and Hamburg merchants were agents in their own right, even when they found themselves in disadvantageous situations. As a result, we are offered a new perspective on both Portuguese and Hamburg society that corrects former assumptions, especially regarding the religious constraints put on Lutherans in inquisitorial Portugal. Poettering’s comparative framework is not limited to similarities, as is often the case with this methodological approach. She describes the stark contrast between the opportunities offered to Lutheran Hamburgers settling in Portugal and local New Christians, who were continuously being discriminated against.

Migrating Merchants stands out among other studies regarding Sephardim as merchants because Poettering applies a multi-perspective approach that does not reduce them to just the religious or ethnic aspect of their existence. Additionally, she avoids the pitfall of treating Sephardim as passive victims of stigmatization, persecution, and segregation. These phenomena do feature in her analysis; however, Poettering always reconsiders established narratives and corrects them when necessary or discards them altogether.

She examines her case studies carefully and meticulously, always paying attention to how intricately interwoven the social, religious, and demographic spheres of mercantile life are. Albeit being detailed, the analyses are never overwhelming, and Poettering ensures that her readers – seasoned scholars and students new to the field alike – understand her approach and use of the sources. The English translation will make her valuable research accessible to a wider audience and give her the attention she so well deserves.

Note:

- 1 German original: Handel, Nation und Religion. Kaufleute zwischen Hamburg und Portugal im 17. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2013.

**John Connelly: From People into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020, 956 pp.**

Reviewed by  
John C. Swanson, Chattanooga

John Connelly's *From People into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* is a welcomed addition to broad narratives concerning Eastern Europe (or East Central Europe – a term that Connelly uses interchangeably with Eastern Europe). Geographically Connelly is looking at the band of countries between imperial Russia and Turkey in the east and Prussian and Austrian Germany in the west from the late eighteenth century to the present. The book joins earlier works on modern and Eastern Europe, such as Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* and the more recent Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, as well as the more specific works on the Habsburg monarchy by Pieter Judson and Steven Beller.[1] These earlier histories emphasize ideology, territory, politics, and even national indifference, whereas Connelly returns in his narrative to nations, nationalism, and nationality conflicts as the driving forces of historical developments – arguments that were more common in the writings of historians such as Robert Kann.

The 800-page book is divided into 5 parts and 27 chapters, following the “emergency of national movements” in the first part to “from communism to illiberalism” in