

From Castile to the Spanish Empire: A Study of Geographical Discoveries and Their Impact on the Economic and Social Structure of Spain During the Sixteenth Century

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Received: 11/03/2026 Accepted: 27/06/2026 Published: 30/06/2026

Abstract: This research examines the effects and repercussions of the geographical discoveries on the social and economic structure of Spain during the sixteenth century, a period in which the Kingdom of Castile transitioned from a limited regional entity into a sprawling global empire. The influx of gold and silver from the New World fundamentally restructured the Spanish economy. The treasures arriving from the Americas ignited a severe inflationary wave known as the "Price Revolution," which weakened the middle classes while benefiting the ruling elites, bankers, and merchants. On a social level, the empire generated new elites comprising explorers, traders, and colonial administrators, whilst simultaneously disrupting the traditional system of class hierarchy based on the agricultural aristocracy. These transformations were articulated in the emergence of transoceanic trade networks and in the evolution of Andalusian cities, such as Seville, into unparalleled financial and commercial centres in Europe. The study concludes that the discoveries were not merely a geographical expansion, but rather the fundamental driver of comprehensive structural transformations that reshaped the contours of Spanish society and economy for centuries to come.

Keywords: Castile; Age of Discovery; Spanish Empire; Price Revolution; Sixteenth Century; the new world; Social and Economic transformations;

Introduction:

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the world witnessed profound transformations that reshaped its political and economic landscape. The Age of Geographical Discoveries played a decisive role in this shift, with Spain emerging as one of the

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foremost powers leading this trajectory - particularly following the maritime expeditions inaugurated by Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492. That expedition marked the beginning of a new phase of imperial expansion, extending beyond the Mediterranean into the New World. By the sixteenth century, Spain had evolved into a global power with extensive influence, bolstered by the influx of wealth from the Americas and the expansion of its political and maritime control.

However, this rapid ascent gives rise to a central historical question concerning the nature of the impact that the geographical discoveries had on Spain's internal structure during the sixteenth century: Did these discoveries represent a genuine and sustainable source of prosperity, or did they generate structural imbalances that contributed to the long-term weakening of the state? Was the flow of gold and silver from the colonies an unequivocal source of strength, or did it lead to adverse economic consequences such as inflation and a decline in domestic production? Furthermore, questions arise regarding the extent to which external expansion influenced social transformations within the country, particularly under the rule of monarchs such as Charles V and Philip II, whose reigns were closely associated with the consolidation of the imperial character of the state.

Proceeding from this problématique, this article seeks to analyse the impact of the geographical discoveries on sixteenth-century Spain through a comprehensive lens that integrates economic and social dimensions. It endeavours to interpret the contradiction between the manifestations of imperial power and the elements of structural weakness. The research aims to offer a critical assessment that balances the achievements of maritime expansion with its profound consequences for the trajectory of the Spanish state in the early modern period.

Research Methodology and Sources:

This study adopts a comparative socio-economic historical approach grounded in historiographical analysis. Rather than constituting an archival investigation of unpublished trade records, the research relies on a critical examination of primary and secondary historical sources to assess the impact of the geographical discoveries on sixteenth-century Spain. The study

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relies primarily on historiographical analysis of major scholarly works, supplemented by selected contemporary documents, primary accounts, and early modern economic writings with the interpretations of leading historians such as Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Pierre Vilar, John H. Elliott, and Pierre and Huguette Chaunu. Methodologically, the article compares the economic and social conditions of Spain before and after the Atlantic expansion, focusing on the relationship between the influx of American precious metals, the Price Revolution, urban growth, social mobility, and the transformation of Spain from a Mediterranean kingdom into an Atlantic empire. Through this interdisciplinary historical analysis, the study seeks to explain how imperial expansion generated both unprecedented wealth and long-term structural weaknesses within Spanish society and economy.

I. The Historical Context of the subject:

I.1. From Mediterranean Centrality to the Formation of the Atlantic System:

Prior to the geographical discoveries and the subsequent political and economic transformations, the Mediterranean Sea represented, at both the European and Islamic, the centre of the inhabited world. Its geographical boundaries constituted the framework for civilisational and political perception. Fernand Braudel affirmed that the Mediterranean was "a world unto itself,"⁽¹⁾ a self-sufficient entity. This region constituted an integrated economic space where the commercial cities of Italy, the Iberian kingdoms, the Muslim Maghreb states, and the Ottoman Empire interacted within a system of exchange based on a relative equilibrium between agricultural production, maritime trade, and caravan networks. This area formed a "historical and economic unit" founded on the interconnection of its northern and southern shores within a complex web of interests⁽²⁾.

(1) Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol 01, translated from the French by Sian Reynolds, usa, harper & row, publisher, 1972, p387.

(2) Braudel, *Ibid*, p18-22 ; 170, 171

However, the discovery of the American continent and the sea route to India precipitated an explosion in the geographical conception of the world. The Mediterranean ceased to be the centre of the universe and instead became part of a broader global network. Immanuel Wallerstein suggests that this moment marked the birth of a "global consciousness" that reshaped political mentality; the Atlantic maritime space became a realm for adventure and expansion, while the Mediterranean transformed into a defensive space seeking to reposition itself within the new reality⁽³⁾.

This shift, occurring in the late fifteenth century, constituted a pivotal moment in world history. The major geographical discoveries led to the integration of the American continent into the network of international exchange, effecting a profound transformation in the economic structure of the Mediterranean region. This was not merely a geographical expansion but a transfer of the centre of economic gravity from the Mediterranean basin to the Atlantic seaboard, resulting in a redistribution of wealth, a shift in the balance of power, and an alteration of monetary and financial patterns⁽⁴⁾.

I.2- Spain: From a Mediterranean Kingdom to an Atlantic Power:

The geographical discoveries represented a decisive turning point in the history of Spain and Europe more broadly. They were intricately linked to the process of forming the Spanish nation-state and its transformation from an Iberian kingdom into an imperial power controlling vast territories across three continents. From the second half of the fifteenth century, Europe witnessed the decline of the overly limited city-states in favour of the emergence of regional states that would subsequently play leading roles⁽⁵⁾. The expansion across the Atlantic was not an incidental event but resulted from a complex interaction between internal political transformations, economic motivations, and religious and civilisational rivalry with Islamic powers in the Mediterranean basin, in addition to the

(3) Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, USA, University of California Press, 2011, p 102

(4) Fernand Braudel, *op.cit*, P 228, 229 ; Wallerstein, *op.cit*, p102

(5) Braudel, *op .cit*, , p339

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technical advancements in navigation inherited by the Spanish from the Muslims in Al-Andalus⁽⁶⁾. Consequently, studying the impact of the geographical discoveries on sixteenth-century Spain necessitates connecting them to the context of the kingdom's unification and the strategic choices adopted by the ruling elite in the late fifteenth century.

The marriage of Isabella I and Ferdinand II in 1469 represented a crucial step towards unifying the crowns of Castile and Aragon, laying the political foundation for the establishment of a relatively unified Spanish state by the end of the fifteenth century⁽⁷⁾. This trajectory culminated in the fall of Granada in 1492, the last Muslim stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula—an event that granted the Catholic Monarchs immense religious and political legitimacy and freed military and financial resources that could be directed towards external expansionist projects. This unification contributed to the creation of a central authority capable of financing long-distance maritime voyages and also fostered a religious conception - or more precisely, a motive - for expansion based on spreading Christianity and enhancing the prestige of the Spanish crown in Europe⁽⁸⁾.

It was within this context that the decision to fund Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492 came as the culmination of a long accumulation of European attempts to find alternative sea routes to the East following Ottoman control over trade routes across the Mediterranean. The charter of privileges, known as the *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe*, stipulated that Columbus be granted the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea⁽⁹⁾. The Catholic Monarchs viewed

(6) Elliott, John Huxtable, *Imperial Spain : 1469-1716*, New York : A meridian book New American Library , 1977, P49

(7) J. M. Batista I Roca, *the Hispanic kingdoms and the catholic kings*, the new Cambridge modern history, vol 01 the renaissance 1493-1520, London, Cambridge University Press 1975, P 321-323

(8) H. C. Darbi, *The face of Europe on the eve of the great discoveries*, the new Cambridge modern history, vol 01 the renaissance 1493-1520, London Cambridge University Press 1975, P28 ; J. R. Hale, *international relations in the west diplomacy and war*, the new Cambridge modern history, vol 01 the renaissance 1493-1520, London Cambridge University Press 1975, P262.

(9) *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe*, 1492, Archivo General de Indias, fol. 3r : <https://www.cultura.gob.es/cultura/archivos/difusion/registro-memoria-unesco/2009.html>

Columbus's project as a strategic opportunity to break the Portuguese monopoly on navigation around Africa and to open new commercial horizons that would yield substantial revenue for the crown from gold and spices⁽¹⁰⁾. Furthermore, the religious dimension of the project was powerfully present, as Columbus's discourse was closely linked to the idea of spreading Christianity among the "new peoples", an idea perfectly aligned with the "crusading spirit" prevalent in the Spanish royal court after 1492⁽¹¹⁾.

The background to the orientation towards the Atlantic Ocean can also be traced to profound economic transformations in late medieval Europe. Demand for precious metals and Eastern goods increased against a backdrop of relative scarcity of silver and gold within the continent. Castile, in particular, suffered from limited financial resources compared to certain other European powers, making the search for new sources of wealth an urgent necessity. Thus, the Atlantic Ocean was transformed from an unknown geographical periphery into a promising strategic space, especially with advancements in navigation techniques and shipbuilding⁽¹²⁾.

With the discovery of the New World and the onset of the influx of silver and gold from the American territories, particularly following the subjugation of the Aztec and Inca Empires, Spain entered the sixteenth century as the preeminent European power. This silver inflow financed Spain's European wars and reinforced Habsburg authority across the continent. At the same time, it introduced economic dynamics that would later generate significant structural challenges within the Spanish economy. The excessive reliance on American metals led to the weakening of domestic productive sectors and to widespread inflationary waves known as the Price Revolution⁽¹³⁾.

(10)BATISTA, op.cit, pp 333, 334, 325.

(11) Journal of the first voyage of Columbus, American Journeys collection, DOCUMENT NO. AJ-062, Wisconsin historical society, digital library and archives, pp 89, 90, 111 ; Elliott, op.cit, p 46.

(12)Wallerstein, op.cit , pp 39, 41, 329.

(13) Wallerstein, op.cit, p 180 ; Pierre Vilar, history of gold and money 1450-1920, translated by: Judith white, London-new york, verso edition, 1984, P 51, 145-149; E.E. Rich, expansion as a concern of all Europe, the new Cambridge modern history v1 the renaissance 1493-1520, London Cambridge University Press 1975, P 456.

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II. Structural Transformation in Light of the Geographical Discoveries:

II.1- At the Economic Level:

At the end of the fifteenth century, Spain entered the stage as a Mediterranean kingdom with European and African extensions, not yet the major Atlantic power it would become in the sixteenth century. Its economic and political weight was then concentrated in Aragon, Catalonia, and the Mediterranean sphere, while Castile remained a relatively interior, agricultural space⁽¹⁴⁾. However, the discovery of the New World led to a reorientation of the Spanish economy towards the ocean, especially after the influx of American silver from the mines of Potosí and Zacatecas, to the extent that the Spanish economy in the sixteenth century became highly dependent on American silver⁽¹⁵⁾. Some researchers confirm that the enormous increase in the supply of precious metals was a principal factor in the Price Revolution in Europe. The importance of gold diminished noticeably after 1520, and particularly after 1540, it could scarcely play a pivotal role in Spain's economy despite its abundance⁽¹⁶⁾.

This unprecedented influx of precious metals, such as gold and silver, altered Spain's monetary structure and plunged the economy into an unprecedented inflationary cycle. The resulting paradox for Spain at this time was captured by a lawyer and theologian named Martín González de Cellorigo, who stated: "The cause of its poverty is its wealth"⁽¹⁷⁾.

This situation gave rise to the most prominent characteristic of the sixteenth century: monetary inflation, or what became known as the Price Revolution. The connection between this inflation and the process of capital accumulation has been a major theme in modern history⁽¹⁸⁾. During this period, there was a close correlation between

(14) Batista, op.cit, pp 316, 317.

(15) Wallerstein, op.cit, p 180.

(16) Vilar, op.cit, pp 57-58.

(17) Wallerstein, op.cit, p195.

(18) Wallerstein, op.cit, p 69 ; Jehan Cherruyt Malestroït & Jean Bodin, les paradoxes dv seigneur de malestroït, conseiller du Roy, & Maistre ordinaire de ses comptes, sur le faict des monnoyes, presentez à Sa Maiesté au mois de Mars, M.D.LXVI : Auec la response de Iean Bodin audicts Paradoxes, Reueue, corrigeë, & augmentee de nouveau, par ledit Bodin A PARIS. Chez Martin le Jeune, rue S. Iean de Latran à l'enseigne du Serpent. 1578, p 28.

imports of American gold and silver and prices in Spain. Beginning in the period 1503–1505, there was an upward trend in the arrival of treasures until 1595, while from 1503 to 1597 there was a continuous rise in prices. The largest increases in prices coincided with the largest increases in gold and silver imports⁽¹⁹⁾.

This monetary transformation was reflected in the social structure. Prices rose rapidly while wages failed to keep pace, leading to an erosion of the purchasing power of the lower classes. Economic researchers and historians alike observe that prices nearly tripled during the sixteenth century. This inflation was not merely an economic phenomenon⁽²⁰⁾; it reshaped social relations. The landowning elites, high-ranking state officials, the royal treasury, and foreign bankers initially benefited from this situation, while the poor urban classes suffered, later bearing the brunt of the resulting state budget deficits⁽²¹⁾.

On the other hand, the influx of silver did not modernise Spain's productive structure so much as it reinforced dependence on imports. Spain began to import manufactured goods from Northern Europe, financing them with silver from the New World territories. This indicates that Spain transformed into a conduit through which silver passed to Europe⁽²²⁾. This characterisation highlights Spain's new intermediary role, but it was a different kind of intermediation from that of the Islamic Maghreb, through which African gold had once passed; Spain's intermediation was based on the flow of the metal, not on its reprocessing. It is worth noting that the indirect flow of precious metals to Northern Europe, such as the Netherlands and England, stimulated production there, whereas the

(19) Wallerstein, *op.cit*, pp 70, 71.

(20) (According to the length and depth of the inflationary movement, a change in the balance of society in which the entrepreneurs become more wealthy and powerful at the expense of the landowners on the one hand and of the wage-earners and producers on the other hand. Circumstances in Spain led to the new purchasing power going in the first instance to the aristocratic and ruling classes, so that they bid up wages and created in that country an 'income inflation' rather than a 'profit inflation'), Rich, *op.cit*, P 455.

(21) Elliott, *op.cit*, p 194 ; Wallerstein, *op.cit*, p195.

(22) Rich, *op.cit*, P 456.

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massive direct flow into Spain devastated its own economy, although it initially appeared beneficial to the treasury⁽²³⁾.

Furthermore, after 1580, the sudden influx of American silver created a temporary illusion of an inexhaustible stock of wealth. However, most of it went to Italy, enriching the Genoese bankers. Then arose the difficult problem of the devaluation of silver relative to gold, which became scarcer and was increasingly in demand to finance the campaigns of the Spanish monarchs in the northern territories, which were under the protection of northern soldiers who insisted on being paid only in gold. Once again, only the Genoese could help. As a result of these various phases, Spain attracted a wave of debt and credit. While it was constantly sinking into debt and its external deficit was growing, productive activity gradually contracted. Spain became a rentier state at a time when prices rose again in the last ten years of the sixteenth century⁽²⁴⁾.

Therefore, all the silver coming from the New World could not make Spain a wealthy country. Yes, it helped finance the Emperor's wars, but a very small part of it was invested in production to overcome the country's economic backwardness. As the kingdom of Charles V increasingly transformed into an empire, Spain's economic weakness became an increasingly serious obstacle in its conflict with its rivals in Western Europe⁽²⁵⁾.

Consequently, trade and industry in Spain suffered from the loss of markets, and its economy rapidly became incapable of meeting even its own demands. Spain gradually became dependent on a commercial system in which it purchased its requirements from the rest of Europe, paying the greater part of the purchase price with the treasures of the New World⁽²⁶⁾.

II.2- At the Social Level:

On the socio-urban level, the city of Seville during the sixteenth century underwent a profound transformation that made it the hub of the Spanish imperial economy and the primary gateway of communication with the New World. The monopoly on American trade, exercised through the institution of the "Casa de

(23) Vilar, op. cit, p 37 ; Wallerstein, op.cit, p 153.

(24) Vilar, op.cit, p 154.

(25) Wallerstein, op.cit, p 195.

(26) Rich, op.cit, P 454.

Contratación" (House of Trade), concentrated commercial and financial activity in this city⁽²⁷⁾, granting it a central position within the emerging Atlantic economic network. In this sense, the rise of Seville was not merely a transient urban phenomenon, but a reflection of a structural shift in the economic geography of Spain, where the centre of commercial gravity moved from traditional Mediterranean cities, such as Barcelona, to the Atlantic sphere, of which Seville became the principal pole. This shift was linked to the expansion of trade with the American colonies and the increasing movement of goods and precious metals, which turned the city into a mainstay of the imperial trade system.

This institutional and economic role was reinforced by the establishment of the House of Trade in 1503, aimed at regulating and managing all commercial relations with the "West Indies," an institution that later became one of the fundamental pillars of imperial economic administration. Furthermore, the founding of an associated advisory council in 1543 strengthened oversight of trade and maritime navigation. These institutional transformations were reflected in the city's rapid demographic growth. Seville became a major magnet for European merchants, thanks to its monopoly on trade with the New World, both in terms of exports and imports. Consequently, the city experienced rapid expansion during the sixteenth century; its population rose from approximately 25,000 inhabitants in 1517 to nearly 90,000 in 1594⁽²⁸⁾, while some estimates suggest its population reached around 150,000 by 1588, making it the largest city in Spain at that time, surpassed in size some cities like Paris and Naples. This prosperity was reflected in new urban manifestations; the city became a vibrant commercial centre attracting foreign merchants - Italians, Flemings, and Portuguese - and also became a destination for inhabitants from northern and central Spain who saw in it the gateway to wealth coming from the New World⁽²⁹⁾.

(27) Chaunu Huguette et Chaunu Pierre, *Séville et l'Atlantique (1504-1650)* Tome 01, Paris, "Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales", 1955, pp 24, 60.

(28) Batista, op.cit, P 318.

(29) Elliottop.cit, pp 177, 178.

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This urban transformation was accompanied by broader economic changes in the agrarian and commercial structures within the Iberian Peninsula. With the expansion of Atlantic trade, prices of certain agricultural products, such as wine, rose, prompting extensive areas of Castile to expand vine cultivation. Other regions also witnessed transformations in agricultural production patterns, with the introduction of new crops like maize, which spread in some parts of Europe. While Castile remained primarily dependent on agricultural activity, Andalusia flourished due to its strategic location and role in trade with the New World, contributing to a redistribution of economic roles among the various regions of Spain⁽³⁰⁾.

On the other hand, commercial and maritime institutions played a decisive role in consolidating Seville's position as a centre for Atlantic trade. All Spanish shipping across the Atlantic was concentrated in the city's port, and from 1543 this activity came under the supervision of a powerful merchant guild known as the "consulado." Seville became a kind of "obligatory passage point" through which trade between Spain and its American colonies passed⁽³¹⁾. The "Casa de Contratación" was responsible for collecting customs duties, regulating the movement of ships, emigrants, and sailors, in addition to administering a commercial court, a hydrographic office, and a navigation school, making it a central institution that combined administrative, economic, and scientific functions simultaneously⁽³²⁾.

This economic standing also attracted extensive networks of European merchants to Seville, where prominent foreign trading communities settled, including English merchants who participated in exporting goods demanded in the American colonies to Spain, before they were re-shipped on the annual Spanish fleets bound for the New World. Similarly, French and English merchants took part

(30) Heide Wunder, *Economic change: European agriculture, the new Cambridge modern history, vol 02 the reformation 1520-1559*, second edition, London, Cambridge University Press, 2008, P 43.

(31) Chaunu op.cit , pp 24, 25.

(32) J.H. Parry, *the new world, 1521-1583, the new Cambridge modern history, vol:02 the reformation 1520-1559*, second edition, London, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp 647, 648.

in maritime voyages towards the coasts of the new world within the broader Atlantic trade networks. This international commercial activity contributed to enhancing the cosmopolitan character of the city and transforming it into a global economic centre in the sixteenth century⁽³³⁾.

Despite this urban prosperity, the benefits of Atlantic commerce remained unevenly distributed and reinforced existing social inequalities, revealing the limits of Spain's imperial growth. Although the port of Seville continued to show clear signs of prosperity in the late sixteenth century with the continued arrival of American silver in vast quantities⁽³⁴⁾, this excessive reliance on precious metals weakened, in the long term, the productive foundations of the Spanish economy. Therefore, some historians suggest that gold and silver did not form a solid base for industrial development but rather contributed to the emergence of a fragile rentier economy⁽³⁵⁾. This implies that the Atlantic shift granted Spain significant power in the short term, but at the same time laid the structural foundations for economic crises that would become clearly apparent in subsequent centuries.

The impact of the geographical discoveries was not limited to the flow of gold and silver into the Spanish royal coffers; these transformations also caused a profound upheaval in the traditional social structure, which was based on a delicate balance between the nobility, the clergy, and the commoners. The accumulation of wealth from the New World led to the emergence of new social forces within the coastal cities, especially in centres linked to Atlantic trade such as Seville, where networks of merchants, financiers, and shipping agents, whose interests were directly connected to the colonies, took shape. Over time, this group gained economic influence enabling it to affect political and financial decisions, altering the nature of the social equilibriums that had previously favoured the feudal nobility⁽³⁶⁾.

In contrast to this urban-commercial ascendancy, certain segments of the traditional nobility experienced a relative decline in

(33) Rich, op.cit, p 457.

(34) Elliott, op.cit, p 287.

(35) Vilar, op.cit ,p 47.

(36) Ibid, pp150, 151.

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their economic standing, particularly those who continued to rely on income from agricultural land. The inflation resulting from the influx of precious metals eroded the real value of agrarian rents, weakening the purchasing power of the rural nobility compared to the rising commercial classes. This shift also prompted some noble families to seek administrative or military positions within the new empire to compensate for their declining resources, reflecting a transformation in the sources of social legitimacy from landownership to association with the imperial project⁽³⁷⁾.

The social transformations were also reflected in patterns of property ownership and labour within the country. Land purchases by rising commercial groups seeking to gain social status through property ownership increased, while some nobles began to invest their funds in loans and trade related to the colonies. Noble privileges were also put up for sale as a means to alleviate the burdens on the debt-laden royal treasury; these privileges were apparently available to anyone with money, and the majority of buyers were nouveaux riches from a social stratum lower than the traditional nobility, who had grown wealthy through New World trade. Consequently, a hybrid pattern emerged, combining traditional social privilege with modern economic activities, blurring the boundaries between classes and redefining the concept of "status and nobility," which was no longer based exclusively on lineage but became also linked to wealth and financial capacity⁽³⁸⁾.

Furthermore, large-scale emigration to the American colonies contributed to a redistribution of the population within Spain. Thousands of young men, particularly from impoverished regions of Castile, left in search of wealth and new opportunities in the New World, which relatively alleviated demographic pressure and the severity of unemployment in some provinces⁽³⁹⁾. However, this emigration simultaneously deprived the local economy of human energies that could have contributed to the development of crafts and industries, deepening dependence on foreign imports to meet growing consumer needs.

(37) Elliott, op.cit, pp 30, 306.

(38) Ibid, p 105.

(39) Ibid, pp 53, 54.

Thus, it can be said that the geographical discoveries were not merely an external expansion that added colonies to the empire's map, but rather a process of profound reshaping of Spanish society itself. They redistributed wealth, generated new elites, compelled the nobility to redefine their roles, and brought about transformations in patterns of work, property, and migration. In this sense, the discoveries constituted a pivotal moment in the social history of Spain, where imperial ambitions intertwined with internal transformations to reshape the centres of influence within the state.

Conclusion:

The geographical discoveries constituted a turning point in the history of sixteenth-century Spain, transforming Castile from a regional kingdom into the core of a vast transatlantic empire. The integration of the American territories into the Spanish Crown's sphere of influence provided unprecedented resources and expanded Spain's political and economic power on a global scale.

At the economic level, the influx of American precious metals reshaped the structure of the Spanish economy and contributed to profound monetary and commercial changes. At the social level, imperial expansion encouraged the rise of new commercial and financial elites, altered traditional patterns of social mobility, and reinforced the importance of Atlantic urban centres, particularly Seville, as key nodes of international exchange.

The study demonstrates that the consequences of the geographical discoveries extended far beyond territorial expansion. They generated deep structural transformations that affected the economy, society, and distribution of power within Spain itself. In this sense, the discoveries should be understood not merely as a milestone in the history of exploration, but as a decisive factor in the making of early modern Spain and the emergence of the Spanish Empire as a major actor in the evolving Atlantic world.

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