

The early modern period

Francisco Bethencourt¹

‘L’histoire des rois est le martyrologue des peuples’
Abbé Grégoire

This *History of Portugal* has the advantage of presenting in one single volume a comprehensive vision of the past, from the foundation of the kingdom to contemporary history. It is not a history written by one single author, and thus follows a different approach from that of Oliveira Marques, who clearly stands as the previous most professional and efficient historian engaging with this genre. The decision was the right one: each of the three authors knows his period of specialization well. It is increasingly difficult nowadays for one single author to assimilate all the bibliography covering nine centuries. In general, this *History of Portugal* integrates the most recent bibliography well. But it suffers from two problems: the crucial issues of collective identity and nation building, with their plural forms, continuities and discontinuities, are neither clearly raised nor addressed in a systematic way, while they remain the object of constant reflection by philosophers, anthropologists, writers and historians; the initial promise to combine political, economic, social and cultural history is not fulfilled. I understand that there were constraints of space – the Middle Ages received 182 pages, the early modern period 240 and modern history 340 pages – but structure is always a matter of choice. The most balanced section is the modern one: Rui Ramos’s text reads very well, combining political, economic, social, demographic and cultural data in an efficient way. The main issues are present. The only problem, which is not a minor one, is the conservative bias of his political approach: popular movements do not really exist in his account, all political changes or continuities are analyzed from the perspective of political factions, the manipulation of the disorganized population, or the internal feuds of the power elite. One wonders how these manipulative elites were generated in the first place, and how they managed to exercise their power over such an inorganic population. The section written by Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa is also efficient, covering the main issues of the organization of the monarchy, addressing the different powers involved and searching for the origins of the expansion. The distribution of the population and the definition of its structure are other topics touched upon, although the question of its ethnic origins might have been more fully addressed, due to the significant number of studies on this issue in Portugal and Europe, perhaps one of the most recently developed fields in medieval studies (Wolfram, Pohl, Gillett, Noble, Hen). Although the crisis or revolution of 1383-5 is tackled well, history from below might have been better integrated into this section. But this is really the main problem concerning the vision of the early modern period presented by Nuno Monteiro. I have to concentrate on this period, since this was specifically requested from me.

The model of analysis is almost exclusively political and institutional, contradicting the initial promise. This is not the acclaimed British narrative model, which has accommodated the theoretical and methodological acquisitions of the *Annales*, *Past and Present* and German Sozialgeschichte, not to mention gender studies, and linguistic and psychoanalytic turns. It is sufficient to read authors so ideologically diverse as Christopher Bayly, Tim Blanning or Richard Evans to perceive the shared purpose of a comprehensive approach in the different scales they deal with. The concentration of this section on the architecture of powers is overwhelmingly structured by the relationship between the king and the aristocracy (reduced to the titled nobility), which was the focus of Nuno Monteiro’s major work on the ‘Big Noble Houses’ in Portugal.

¹ King’s College London. E-Mail: francisco.bethencourt@kcl.ac.uk

This is simultaneously the strength and the weakness of the text: the noble elite is very well analyzed, concerning its composition, its properties, and its financial and political dependence on the King for access to jobs and rents; but this is essentially a history of kings and high aristocracy. Although the evolution of the population is relatively well addressed – the crucial issue of the spatially diversified family structure could have been developed further – its social composition is quite simply not tackled at all. The bourgeoisie is not studied, with the exception of some timid references to the New Christians, who were overwhelmingly artisans. It would be important to know who the bankers and the contractors were, how they evolved over time, which conjunctures favored them, how they thrived as financiers of the Crown, the Church and the nobility, how their political intervention and international relations were shaped. Moreover, how their opinions were received by the king and how they tried to shape policies (Duarte Gomes Solis, for instance, is never mentioned). It would be interesting to know the role played by foreign merchants, discovering in which periods they dominated the Portuguese market and how the position of Portugal in the world-economies evolved. The distribution, composition and competences of the small merchants could have been addressed, what kind of economic tools they had, what their role in the economy of the empire was, why in Recife, for instance, the local merchant elite was undermined as *mascates*, during the War of the Mazombos, probably a reference to the Persian Gulf peddlers. Nowadays, we have significant studies by Nathan Wachtel, Jonathan Israel, Graça Ventura, Marques de Almeida, or James Boyajian on bankers and merchants, namely New Christians. We know their position as contractors of royal monopolies, namely as slave traders and contractors of the *asiento*. We also know their financial capacity: the general pardon of 1605 was not a failure; 1.5 million *cruzados* were collected from a total forecast amount of 1.7 million, as Claude Stuczinski proved. It is important to clarify that the New Christians were still being targeted by vigorous inquisitorial repression in the 1730s and the 1740s, as happened in Spain, which means that their disappearance dates from the middle of the eighteenth century, although their collective activity was broken down by the vindictive reestablishment of the Portuguese Inquisition in 1681. The artisans, perhaps less studied, but touched upon by a large variety of local studies, would also require some attention, since manufacturing production, corporations and the labor market are essential for understanding the transition to the liberal economy. A table concerning peasants and rural workers is included in the chapter on the Ancien Régime, but we do not know the impact of the different regimes of property, the real life conditions, the forms of cooperation and organization. The social structure of the population has been studied at a local level, namely for Lisbon in the sixteenth century, but the main issue is not addressed. The people, in general, are ignored in this approach. It is true that in Portugal, unlike England, the limited Marxist tradition has not been followed by a significant movement for the writing of history from below. The liberal tradition had already tried to connect the nation to a large community of citizens, whose origins were located in the past (Herculano). The procedure might have been anachronistic, but at least drew attention to the need to overcome the traditional history of kings and introduce those who scarcely have a voice in the chronicles and official documents. The only reference to popular movements concerns the anti-fiscal riots of 1636-7, prior to the Restoration, but their political importance is undermined. The problem of economic backwardness, studied by Jaime Reis and Pedro Lains for the nineteenth century, could also have been discussed for the earlier period. The crucial problem of the slave trade, mentioned in the text, might have been developed further, since it was a structural economic activity of the empire, with enormous social consequences.

If 'modern' subjects did not have a major impact on this new *History of Portugal*, then the postmodern subjects enjoy no better fortune. The historical condition of women (still a modern subject), gender relations, the construction of masculinities and femininities and their political symbolism are not addressed. And yet Portugal, like Spain, whose tradition of strong queens influenced England so much, might have had an original role in this sphere, amplified by emigration – another issue touched upon by Nuno Monteiro, but not studied in all its depth. The absence of fathers, husbands and brothers imposed other forms of labor and favored the emergence of widows and abandoned wives and daughters, who left their marks on the economy, society and literature. If we are talking about gender, then the patterns of behavior and male values might also have been observed within the context of the expansion. By the same token, the policies of the intimate colonial order, based on 'love rules' of who can be intimate with

whom and what processes of social shaming follow from these rules, might also have been addressed. Emotions and feelings, now at the centre of new historical research, are not integrated into this volume. The basic issue of literature is not tackled: we do not find in the index Sá de Miranda, António Ferreira, Fr. Gaspar de Leão, Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcelos, to name just a few, yet Gil Vicente, Camões, Vieira, Manuel de Melo or Bocage are all quoted without any attempt at analysis, mainly as political references. The early modern section is the poorest in the cultural domain: literature is abandoned, the other arts are ignored, music is reduced to the introduction of opera, religious architecture has two or three references to justify the general backwardness – the *Manuelino*, for instance, cannot simply be reduced to the late Gothic style – and military architecture, one of the most powerful elements in Portuguese history (Rafael Moreira) and very much in line with international innovation, is hardly mentioned.

The interpretation we are discussing here considers Portugal to be an archaic country, with a permanent backwardness of fifty to one hundred years when implicitly compared with the standards of the most developed European countries. Portugal did not assimilate the humanist movement, missed out on the absolutist experience of the seventeenth century, only to adopt it later with Pombal, and ignored the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, only to introduce it later with Liberalism. At least Nuno Monteiro has clear ideas when he defines Pombal as an imitator of Richelieu and a typical *valido* (favorite politician of the king) of the seventeenth century, without any influence from the Enlightenment. Neither the idea of the permanent backwardness of Portugal nor the idea of the backwardness of Pombal are new, although the latter still appeals to the national mythology, which has a positive side. The problem is whether this assertion is adequate, resulting from a deep analysis of reality. I do not think that the expulsion of the Jesuits, the extinction of the Inquisition of Goa, the Directory of the Indians, the abolition of the New Christian stigma or the reform of the University of Coimbra, for example, might have occurred in the seventeenth century. And it is irrelevant for the argument to consider whether part of these changes had a long-lasting effect or not. The archaism of the country, which certainly existed, but should be thoroughly identified, nuanced and dated, does not seem to me to have been a systematic and coherent phenomenon. This approach is certainly not the most adequate for the purpose, since it is anchored in the royal policies and the games of power of the titled nobility. But let us now discuss the approach itself.

The text's insufficient reflection on the political theory of the Ancien Régime is surprising. The term 'State' is implicitly rejected in the text, although the notion was already coined by the end of the fifteenth century, referring to human groups submitted to the same authority. Max Weber's notion of State as the monopoly of legitimate violence is not as simple as it looks; to make it meaningful we have to relate it to the notions of system and the mechanisms of social regulation in Niklas Luhmann, the notions of micro-powers and power as decision-making and coercion of wills in Michel Foucault, or the notions of negotiation and resistance in Stuart Hall. In any case, we cannot ignore the vast literature of the period, where we see deep reflection on political community from John of Salisbury to Hobbes, from Dante and Marsilio di Padova to John Locke, from Machiavelli and Giovanni Botero to Tommaso Campanella. The idea of a political body is developed by most of these authors, involving people in their reasoning and considering the king as the apex of a much more complex reality. Nuno Monteiro concentrates his attention on royal power to lament the absence of political centralization; curiously, it is exactly political centralization that is upheld in this same book, by Vasconcelos e Sousa, as a precocious reality for the medieval period. Political community was not limited to royal power: it comprised seigniorial jurisdiction, the Church, municipalities, *Misericórdias*, confraternities, or the three orders of society, which were represented in the *cortes*. The issue is not political centralization, but how the king exercised his power of tutelage over a nebula of largely autonomous corporative and conflictive powers.

The institutional analysis in general is of good quality, although the Church is poorly researched, despite its fundamental role throughout the historical process. In the empire, royal patronage shows how the Church was part of the political community. The regulation of conflicts and direct intervention in the processes of political decision-making showed a constant predominance of religious reason until the government of Pombal. The archbishops of Goa likewise assumed on several occasions the direct interim government of the State of India, while the Dominicans in Timor or the Jesuits in Japan exercised secular jurisdiction over the territories

occupied or granted by local powers. It is sufficient to read Valignano's texts to understand this political dimension. Diocesan structure, represented in a map, is not discussed, while the divisions in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries express the successive reorganization of centers and peripheries. I draw attention to the transfer of the diocese of Kongo from Salvador to Luanda and then the subordination of the diocese of Luanda to Bahia, confirming the structuring of the South Atlantic as a historical and geographical complex in the accurate formulation of Magalhães Godinho, reused by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro. The disciplining of the population through the complementary action of the Inquisition and the pastoral visits, studied by José Pedro Paiva, has not been integrated into the text. I estimated that more than one million people were involved in the enquiries of these institutions for nearly three centuries, which makes the population of Portugal one of the most heavily controlled in the whole of Europe. The religious movements of spiritualism, Erasmism, Protestantism, Jansenism and Sigilism have not been integrated or have been afforded only fleeting references. By contrast, the idea of an Iberian anticipation of the Catholic Reform should be seriously discussed: if it existed, was it institutional, spiritual or theological? What was the reception of the *Devotio Moderna* or Erasmism, for example? The rupture between the Portuguese Crown and the Roman Church in the period of the Restoration might have been mentioned: Sebastião César de Meneses, a figure that deserves a biography of his own, never became Bishop of Porto. Magic, sorcery and witchcraft have not been touched upon, yet they reveal a world vision rooted in the population, which cannot be ignored as an exotic marginality.

The political history in general is of good quality, although this particular line of approach has not avoided problems. The Portuguese expansion should be compared to the Genoese, Venetian and Catalan precedents in the Mediterranean, not to the territorial European states. The messianic vision of Dom Manuel is a fallacy: the king was silent on the subject and the Portuguese expansion can be defined by pragmatism. Nuno Monteiro here is not responsible; he is only repeating other historians who decided to inflate Aubin's research. Sebastianism deserves serious analysis, since the reconstitution of the phenomenon is more or less complete; what we now need is an interpretation of its perpetuation. The analysis of the Restoration as a result of the political factions of nobility and royal bureaucracy, inspired by Jean-Frédéric-Schaub, introduces the vision from Madrid, but does not explain why the Portuguese rebelled against Spanish taxes in the 1630s only to accept paying more in the 1650s and 1660s, with military sacrifices, in some cases loudly demanded by the people. In the same line of reasoning, the explanation of Portuguese victory through Castilian incapacity results from a strange logic of inverted nationalism; we could also add that the international support for Portugal was in effect limited to the access to mercenaries and officers who were paid right down to the last penny. The analysis of the government of Pombal is formalistic and does not take into account the disruption of the traditional relation of powers, the opening up of a new order of knowledge, the rights of minorities and the secularization of Portuguese society. Finally, I think that the idea of an absence of a Brazilian colonial identity should be discussed. I agree that the process of national identity was delayed in Brazil; it suffered from the problems of a society based on slavery, but there were clear signs of a colonial drive for autonomy.

It is difficult for all of us to practice what Albert O. Hirschman called 'self-subversion', questioning our itinerary and choosing radical new challenges and departures from known paths. This is why I do not want to finish on a negative note. I have only focused on points of disagreement, while it must be said that there is a great deal of material that I entirely agree with. The volume documents an enormous effort to collect information on difficult and scarcely researched subjects. This *História de Portugal* offers a coherent though elitist vision, which accomplishes its function of defining a new framework of analysis and discussion for the future.