

Jensen, Kurt Villads, *A Cruzada nas Fronteiras do Mundo. Portugal e a Dinamarca desde cerca do ano mil até cerca de 1250.* (Portuguese translation by Fernando Coelho Kvistgaard), Lisbon: Chiado Editora, 2014, 736 pp. ISBN: 978-989-51-1554-9.

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The book *A Cruzada nas Fronteiras do Mundo. Portugal e a Dinamarca desde cerca do ano mil até cerca de 1250* by the Danish Scholar Kurt Villads Jensen, recently published by Chiado Editora, is the Portuguese version of a doctoral thesis presented at the Southern University of Denmark (Odense) in 2011, under the title “Korstog ved verdens yderste rand. Danmark og Portugal ca. 1000 til ca. 1250” (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2011).

The book deals with the history of Denmark and Portugal in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries from a comparative perspective. It seeks to show what the people of Denmark and Portugal felt and thought at the time of the Crusades in relation to both themselves and the “infidels”—that is, how they regarded those who were different from them.

This is an original and (very) large-scale project. The concept of the Crusade in the Iberian Peninsula is not entirely consensual, and Danish history has, to date, been virtually ignored by Portuguese historians (and vice versa). To achieve his ultimate goal, the author was obliged to learn our language, work very hard in Portuguese libraries and archives, and become integrated within the scientific community (especially at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra). As the book is full of references to very specific events, it is mostly a work dealing with the history of mentalities or, as the author puts it, a testimony to European medieval culture built upon the case study of two countries that are far apart but that nevertheless have many similarities.

To produce this volume, Kurt Jensen (who now teaches at the University of Stockholm) used a wide variety of sources: narratives about kings and battles, Danish and Portuguese archival documents, jester and troubadour poetry, and analyses of monuments (castles in particular), weapons (offensive and defensive), and ships used in military expeditions, etc. Thus, his book is panoramic in its scope, with the consequent risks and benefits that are always associated with a choice of this nature, namely having to deal with

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the terrible challenge of synthesis while simultaneously providing an “overall picture” (the expression is the author’s own) of the Crusades on the outskirts of Europe.

Reading this book, one feels the pleasure that Villads Jensen took in its conception and production, especially because it allowed him to plunge into Portuguese medieval history and practice one of his favorite exercises: the study of the work of ancient historians. Among these, we must highlight Saxo the Grammarian (*circa* 1150-1220), a learned Dane, who was secretary to the Archbishop of Lund, one of the most important counselors of King Valdemar I.

This was, then, a long and meticulous investigation that took nearly 25 years, in part because, at the outset, there were almost no studies on the movement of the Crusades in Denmark (and very few for the Portuguese case). The least we can say is that it has been worth waiting all this time to be rewarded now with the publication of a work that will no doubt shake the traditional way of doing medieval history.

What is the main purpose of this book? According to the author, the goal is to be able to reach a new understanding of European medieval history by studying the incredible diversity of the Crusades and their influence, particularly as regards contacts made and relationships forged. To achieve this goal, the work is organized into ten chapters (eleven if we count the Conclusion), which together amount to more than 700 pages, including an extensive survey of the bibliography and sources, over 1600 footnotes, many maps, genealogical diagrams, pictures, tables of Portuguese and Danish kings (indispensable!) and a very useful index that will facilitate consultation of this work by Portuguese professionals. In fact, with all this material, the reader has everything needed to navigate safely through Danish and Portuguese history during the long and lively age of the Crusades.

The great difficulty of this work results obviously from the fact that it is a study of comparative history, undertaken at the highest level: historiography, structural history and factual history. Hence, the first chapter of the work serves mainly to pose the fundamental question. The chosen pretext is amusing: a letter (in French, because France was still the “sun of Europe” at this time) sent, in 1892, by Luciano Cordeiro (the then secretary of the Portuguese Geographical Society) to his Danish friend Christian Brunn (the head of the Royal Library of Copenhagen) requesting information about the Portuguese Princesses Berengaria (who, in 1214, married the famous Danish king Valdemar the Victorious) and Leonor (who married a son of Valdemar).

We may ask: did this marriage take place because of Berengaria’s fascinating beauty (attested by an excavation made in Ringsted in 1855, which allowed anatomy professor

Ibsen to give a description of the Princess's skeleton and skull)? Or was it due to Portugal and Denmark's century-long connection to the movement of the Crusades, which would have created a "common denominator" between these two peripheral nations of Western Europe and made these marriages natural?

This question serves as a pretext for a comparison of European medieval societies, especially for the periods in which the sources are less succulent ("quod non in actis, non in rebus" the Romans said!). In the past, such comparisons tended to highlight the differences, but today historians prefer to look for similarities; for this purpose, the Crusades are ideal, for of course they were pan-European and partook of the universality proper to Christianity.

But what was the reason for choosing Portugal to be Denmark's partner in this historiographical marriage? According to Kurt Villads Jensen, there were five main reasons: i) the two kingdoms were of a similar size; ii) they were both dependent on the sea and on naval warfare; iii) they both had a religious border in the Middle Ages (Portugal with Muslims, and Denmark with the paganism of the Wends); iv) in both cases the crusading movement led to territorial expansion; v) they had strong monarchies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, precisely because of their involvement in the Crusades. Thus, Kurt Villads Jensen, a distinguished professor of medieval history, has also become a Portuguese medievalist in his own right, greatly enriching his own and our culture in multiple ways...

The second chapter of this book is presented in the form of another crucial and very pointed question: "Were there really Crusades on the periphery?" This is largely used to situate the historiographical debate about the origin of Crusaders. As the author explains, between one and two hundred thousand people from all over Europe (including distant Iceland) responded positively to the appeal made by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont at the end of 1095. However, the chroniclers who recorded the major military operations in the Holy Land were mostly French, which meant that the adventure was often perceived as an odyssey of the "Franks."

In the 1120s, a Benedictine chronicler of Anglo-Norman origin, William of Malmesbury, tried to explain the majority French participation through a theory about the effects of the weather. In the south, he claimed, the weather was hot and the warriors were small and tired quickly (though they were ingenious enough to poison the tips of their arrows). In the north, on the other hand, the weather was cold and the warriors, who were large and courageous, were also rather crude and unsophisticated. Only in the center (i.e. in France) was the climate temperate enough to provide a good balance between power and

intelligence... Thus, this Vegetian background theory (I mean from Vegetius, a Latin author of the fifth century AD, who wrote the famous *Epitoma rei militaris*) clearly contributed to the paradigm of the “barbarization of the peripheries,” which prevailed for a long time, creating the myth of the non-participation of many other peoples of Western Europe in the controversial adventure of the Crusades in Syria-Palestine.

In 1864, Denmark lost its provinces of Schleswig and Holstein, which caused alarm in the community and generated fear that Denmark might disappear as an independent nation. Consequently, Danish historians turned inward, highlighting the originality of Danish history and emphasizing its independent development (see the emblematic case of Erik Arup, author of a famous *History of Denmark*, in 1925). At that stage, there was very little interest in what had happened outside Denmark and a great investment was made in the study of agrarian and economic history and very little in the history of the nobility and war (the famous Danish expeditions to the Baltic were considered pillaging campaigns or the expression of episodic minor struggles for power). This scenario continued until the last 10 to 20 years, when a new approach to the Crusades began to become consolidated, provoking a reaction against economic and nationalistic historiography and paving the way for a renewed interest in the history of mentalities, beliefs and ideologies.

In Portugal—again according to Kurt Villads Jensen—Romantic historiography (especially that of Alexandre Herculano) also affected our understanding of the Crusade movement. Portugal was seen as a small nation constantly threatened by powerful neighbors (Oliveira Martins even developed the thesis of a so-called “Lusitanian race”). Thus, Portugal was understood to have a special mission in history, a different and original mission, with particular institutions (see the debate over the existence or not of feudalism in Portugal). Given its unique relationship of coexistence with Muslims, the war against the Moors was seen as a sequel of the Reconquest and not as part of the global movement of the Crusades, causing the Portuguese Crusades to be set apart in relation to the others (indeed, in 1930, the influential German historian Carl Erdmann defended the thesis that the Portuguese wars were secular wars and not real Crusades). All this contributed to an isolationist and non-inclusive approach to Portuguese military campaigns involving Crusaders (Lisbon, Silves, Alcácer do Sal), a tendency that continued until the last 20 years, just as it did in Denmark.

The book *A Cruzada nas Fronteiras do Mundo* as a whole is obviously part of this movement of historiographical renewal regarding the study of the Crusades and the

participation of peripheral countries in this process, which has begun to gain momentum in the last two decades.

It is not possible here to present a detailed summary of each of the chapters of the work. However, the remaining chapters can be subdivided into two main themes: one concerning the *events* of the Crusades in Portugal and Denmark, and the other the *structures* associated with the military campaigns of the Crusaders in those territories.

The third, sixth and ninth chapters are included in the first group. The third concerns the situation before the First Crusade in the Holy Land (1096-1099), addressing the missionary wars, Al-Andalus, the Portucalense County, the influence of the Order of Cluny, the relations between Portugal and northern Europe, some movements to the East, and also marriage relations between Portugal and Denmark. As for the sixth chapter, this deals with the campaigns of Afonso Henriques and Valdemar and chooses two “magical years” as a point of observation in three different dimensions: 1147 (in Damascus, Lisbon and Dobin), and 1168-1169 (with the camcorder set up in Badajoz, Jerusalem and Rügen). Finally, the ninth chapter is about the light and shade of the Crusade movement, describing the action of Knud VI of Pomerania (now Germany-Poland, between the rivers Oder and Vistula), the Danish expansion with King Valdemar II, and the Crusades of Sancho I, including the conquest of Silves in 1189 (shortly after the tremendous Christian defeat by Saladin at the Battle of Hattin and the subsequent fall of Jerusalem and a large part of the Latin territory in the Middle East). In this chapter, particular attention is given to the roaring years of 1212-1219, with the evocation of the events of Navas de Tolosa, Damietta (Fifth Crusade), Alcácer do Sal and Tallinn.

Included in the group of texts that are geared more towards the analysis of *structures* are chapters four, seven, and eight. The fourth deals with the concepts of center and periphery, and the notion of a border, estimating the actual, operational and symbolic distance between Portugal and Denmark. The seventh chapter is concerned with language and ideology, landscape, the nobility and the noble war, and emphasizes the contribution of the Cistercian Order. As for the eighth chapter, clearly the longest of all the work, it analyzes the institutions of the Crusades in both countries: their financing; slaves and free men; redemptions and redemptive saints; the militarization of society; military equipment; castles; vessels; horses; knightly orders; preachers; troubadours; and more.

Inserted between these two thematic groups is the fifth chapter, dedicated to both events and structures. Here, we can find answers to the question of how, shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders (in 1099), the idea of the Crusade was applied in

the Baltic and in the Iberian Peninsula. This story mostly evokes the figures of Svend of Denmark and King Afonso Henriques of Portugal, the journeys of great characters (such as Erick or Henrique) towards the epics of the Crusades, and the emblematic scenarios existing in Magdeburg in 1108, and in Coimbra, barely two years later. Finally, the tenth chapter (the last before the Conclusion) is a fitting ending for this new understanding of national history, the history of the crusading movement and of European history itself.

I would not say that everything is perfect in this book, partly because a work of synthesis always leaves something to be desired in terms of analytical depth, and partly because a translation (even one that has been produced so painstakingly and been systematically corrected) inevitably has limitations and shortcomings compared to the original version. In any case, this is an exceptionally original work and well-founded, and its architecture is tremendously challenging and stimulating, both for specialists of Portuguese and European medieval history and for the general reader who is interested in history. Its comparative approach gives a very important signal about the more integrated and relational way that the history of the Middle Ages is now being studied throughout the world, which in turn emphasizes the need for a much more extensive and long-term internationalization of our universities and researchers!