

Review of the book by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto (eds.) *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400?-1800*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, ISBN 9780521608916 (paperback) £18.99 (US\$34.95); ISBN 9780521846448 (hardback) £50.00 (US\$90.00)

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*Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800*, edited by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto, is an extremely valuable contribution for all those interested in studying the Portuguese overseas empire. It is also a work that is particularly welcome in the market formed by the more than forty postgraduate courses in History already existing in Brazil. The book's quality is immediately guaranteed by the recognized excellence of its contributors, who include Stuart Schwartz, A.J.R. Russell-Wood and J. Thornton. These are senior researchers and experts in the travelers and chroniclers of the time, who are also fully conversant with the primary documentation and the recent postgraduate theses written in their specialist areas. New imperial spaces – particularly Africa – are analyzed in the book, which turns out to be an important innovation in comparison with the studies already published on the theme. Attention is also drawn to the concern shown with studying the relational dynamics between groups and territories within the imperial complex itself, in both economic and religious terms. In the same way, concern is also shown with adopting more general approaches to studying the performance of the Portuguese imperial economy over the long term, while, in the last part of the book, a study is made of the dynamics of the Portuguese empire within the overall context of the modern age. Lastly, the work also includes a number of other extremely valuable contributions, such as those provided by Jorge Pedreira, Luiz Felipe Alencastro, Isabel dos Guimarães de Sá and Anthony Disney, amongst others.

Besides this, the collection provides us with the chance to join in the debate on the political and economic dynamics of the Portuguese empire in the modern age. In the Introduction, the editors immediately criticize what they classify as a *postmodern* approach to the notion of empire. According to the editors, such an interpretation goes beyond a perspective that denotes a *nationalist* bias and instead lays emphasis on local power structures in detriment to the authority of the Crown over the empire's destiny. Being critical of this new interpretation, the editors draw attention to the dangers that it brings with it, since weakening the power of the State implies leaving the helm of the oceanic empire in the hands of the Catholic Church. Thus, as far as the editors of *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion* are concerned, without a monarchy there would be no empire. In principle, although this is a pertinent and valid premise, it does, however, require more precise examination of the nature of the power that was exercised within that monarchy.

Two decades ago, such a monarchy was understood by the specialist historiography in this field to be in essence the State itself. As far as the French case was concerned, Emmanuel Le Roy

Ladurie (1987) defined the state as L'État Royal.<sup>1</sup> This is an important conclusion, as it avoids all types of imprecision in the way in which the monarchy, and therefore the monarchic state, can be contrasted with the autonomy of the local authorities, both within the kingdom and overseas. In the *concelhos* (councils, one of the most important expressions of local power) held across the vast area of Portuguese-speaking America, it was frequently the *senhores de engenho* (owners of sugarmills), businessmen and *lavradores* (cane farmers), amongst others, who placed their houses at the "service of His Majesty, the Republic and God". For these contemporary agents, there was no distinction to be made between republic and monarchy. They considered themselves to be vassals of His Majesty and therefore saw themselves as belonging to the monarchy, as forming part of the monarchic state. Such a statement reduces the temptation to establish a contrast between different levels of social co-existence under the embrace of Portuguese sovereignty in the modern age.

It was exactly with this concern in mind that Jerônimo de Albuquerque – a potentate in Pernambuco, a mestizo and a descendant of the Albuquerques of the State of India – mobilized his networks of clients and *índios flecheiros* ("archer Indians") to take part in the recapture of Maranhão from the hands of the French in the 17th century. In the same way, according to the Overseas Council, in 1648, "the will and the unity of the people" in Rio de Janeiro was vital for the reconquest of Angola.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the phrase "unity of the people" was understood to mean a complex variety of political engineering formed through pacts made between *bandos* of potentates, between these and crown officers, plus the result of skilful trading in slaves. In the following century, Count Assumar was only able to ensure that the "*Morada do Ouro*" (the "Gold Residence" or the captainship of Minas Gerais) remained in the possession of the crown because he enjoyed the support of part of the local potentates and their armed captives.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the authority of His Majesty on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe (West Africa) in the 16th century also depended on the *homens bons* (representatives of parishes and guilds) in the region, many of whom were mulattoes, and on the armed slaves who belonged to the *ordenanças* (territorial non professional troops).<sup>4</sup> Something similar also took place in the remote region of Zambezi (East Africa) in the 18th century, in relation to the *prazeiros* (estate-holders) and their *Chikundas* (captives).<sup>5</sup>

With more empirical data available for Portuguese-speaking America, it can be clearly understood that the societies of the conquered territories were organized along the corporative lines of the second scholastics. The prince was at the head of society, although this doesn't mean that he was confused with it. Certainly, the monarchy and its men (clergy, nobility – in particular, the *fidalgos* – and people from different strata of the *povo* or common people) conquered and organized fortresses, garrisons and societies overseas. However, these men did so in keeping with the political conceptions that they had, as António Hespanha so clearly reminds us. Accordingly, the prince was the center, but there also existed the *concelhos* whose autonomy was respected and protected by the same prince. Perhaps in these men's conception of the world is to be found one of the most important secrets about the way in which the existence of the empire was managed and

<sup>1</sup> Ladurie, E. Le Roy, *O Estado Monárquico, França 1460 - 1610*, São Paulo: Cia Das Letras, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Fragoso, João "A Nobreza Vive Em Bandos: A Economia Política Das Melhores Famílias Da Terra Do Rio De Janeiro, Século XVII. Algumas Notas De Pesquisa", In *Tempo. Review Of The History Department Of Universidade Federal Fluminense*, No. 15. Rio De Janeiro, Universidade Federal Fluminense/7letras, 2003, Pp. 11-35.

<sup>3</sup> Mathias, Carlos Leonardo Kelmer. *Jogos De Interesses E Estratégias De Ação No Contexto Da Revolta Mineira De Vila Rica, C. 1709 - C. 1736*. Rio De Janeiro, Universidade Federal Do Rio De Janeiro 2005. (Unpublished Master's Degree Dissertation In History).

<sup>4</sup> Serafim, Cristina M. S. *As Ilhas De São Tomé No Século XVII*. Lisboa: Centro De História De Além-Mar, Faculdade De Ciências Sociais E Humanas Da Universidade Nova De Lisboa, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Issacman, Allen And Isaacman, Bárbara. *Escravos, Eclavagistas, Guerreiros E Caçadores*. Maputo: Ciedima, 2004

perpetuated.<sup>6</sup> It made it possible for there to exist a relationship between the different and apparently *exotic* social hierarchies to be found in distinct parts of the empire and the center of that same empire. It is sufficient to remember the cross-breeding between the *homens bons* of Luanda and matrilineal lines of descent in the region, or the existence of *Paulista* potentates based on marital pacts and native archers, both of which were typical phenomena of the 17th century. These different forms of logic enjoyed the institutional support of the *concelhos*.<sup>7</sup> It should be remembered that an overseas *concelho*, such as those to be found in America, could have an area of jurisdiction and a population larger than the whole of the Algarve.

For the vassals of the distant overseas lands, the Monarchy – the Monarchic State – represented a system of rules that made their lives in society viable. On the other hand, without the personalities from those different established local hierarchies – millowners from Pernambuco, estate-owners from Mozambique, traders from Luanda – there would have been no empire. As is known, the Portuguese State of the Ancien Regime did not have sufficient bureaucracy or armies to impose its authority on the kingdom, and much less so on all four corners of the world. It is best to be more specific: the conception of a State in Iberian Europe was not synonymous with the idea of an extensive and centralized civil and military bureaucratic network. The authority of the State was imposed by means of pacts, very often rather tense ones, between the prince and the local power.

It is worth remembering here that, in the different corners of the Portuguese overseas empire, the social agents (officers, clergy, landowners, traders, slaves, etc.) had their own assets and resources and that with these they created strategies, sometimes entering into conflict and thus ending in negotiations. This meant that pacts and negotiations were not limited to the relations between the local power and the center.<sup>8</sup> They took place in the midst of the social stratifications observed in such areas. Or, in other words, between slaves, cane farmers and mulattoes, etc. In the same way, the workings of the empire were also affected by the government and trading networks that connected the oceans, the different political and administrative centers and the markets, and which thus made transatlantic travel, for example, a viable concern. Linked in this way were not just mutual interests, but essentially different types of resources and strategies, a fact that increased the capacity for intervention of some of these groups in the particular situations experienced across the Portuguese Empire.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the different people involved in such networks acted as brokers (mediators, in the estimation of E. Grendi) between the different logics of the local powers and the monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Amongst The Various Studies Produced By António Manuel Hespanha, See, In Particular: *As Vésperas Do Leviathan. Instituições E Poder Político. Portugal, Século XVII*. Coimbra, Livraria Almedina, 1994; “A Constituição Do Império Português. Revisão De Alguns Enviesamentos Correntes”, In: Fragoso, J., Bicalho, M. F., Gouvêa, M. F. (Orgs.), *O Antigo Regime Nos Trópicos. A Dinâmica Imperial Portuguesa (Séculos XVI-XVIII)*, Rio De Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2001, Pp. 163-188; And “Antigo Regime Nos Trópicos? Um Debate Sobre O Modelo Político Do Império Colonial Português”, In: Gouvêa, M. F. & Fragoso, J., (Orgs.), *Na Trama Das Redes. Política E Negócios No Império Português, Séculos XVI-XVIII*, Rio De Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2008, Chapter I (In Print).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fragoso, João. “Capitão Manuel Pimenta Sampaio, Senhor Do Engenho Do Rio Grande, Neto De Conquistadores E Compadre De João Soares, Pardo: Notas Sobre Uma Hierarquia Social Costumeira (Rio De Janeiro, 1700 – 1760)”, In: Gouvêa, Maria De Fátima & Fragoso, João (Org.) *Na Trama Das Redes: Política E Negócios No Império Português, Séculos XVI- XVIII*, Civilização Brasileira (In Print).

<sup>8</sup> Fragoso, João, “Fidalgos E Parentes De Pretos: Notas Sobre A Nobreza Principal Da Terra Dio Rio De Janeiro”, In: Fragoso, João, Sampaio, Antônio Carlos Jucá De & Almeida, Carla Maria De. *Conquistadores E Negociantes: Histórias De Elites No Antigo Regime Nos Trópicos. América Lusa, Séculos XVI A XVIII*. 1st Ed. Rio De Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2007, Vol. 1, Pp. 33-120.

<sup>9</sup> Gouvêa, Maria De Fátima S., “André Cusaco: O Irlandês “Intempestivo”, Fiel Súdito De Sua Majestade. Trajetórias Administrativas E Redes Governativas No Império O Português, Ca. 1660-1700”, In: VAINFAS, R.; SANTOS, G.; NEVES, G. P. (Orgs.), *Retratos Do Império. Trajetórias Individuais No Mundo Português Nos Séculos XVI A XIX*, Niterói, Eduff, 2006, Pp. 155-175.

<sup>10</sup> Grendi, E. *Polanyi, Dall'antropologia Econômica Alla Microanalisi Storica*, Milan: Etas Libri, 1978, Pp. 128-129.

It is therefore worth returning to some ideas that are particularly dear to the editors: the comparative analysis between the overseas empires of the modern age, as well as the societies that formed them. The study of the imperial dynamics, and with them of their societies, will only in fact be fully realized through an effectively comparative approach. In the case of the Portuguese Empire, for example, this discussion has to be taken forward through the formation of research teams that will work their way through the archives and systematically compare the different corners of the political geography of an empire that presented itself as a *multicontinental* monarchy. That is to say, a monarchy that largely depended on the resources that came from overseas and whose aristocracy was based not so much on the rents of its European rural landowners, but on the services that they rendered to the king; and, of course, these were mainly performed overseas.<sup>11</sup> Or, further, a monarchy that had organized societies in the course of its conquests, but whose decision-making process depended on delicate negotiations with the power groups living in these same societies. And this happened, not only because His Majesty depended on the revenue originating from the overseas colonies, but also because, the system of rules that had been agreed between the Crown and its vassals, established that the elites of the *concelhos* should also be consulted in matters affecting the *common good*. After all, the king was the king of Portugal and the Algarve, but he was also the king of the overseas colonies. It is obvious that this system had its incoherences and that, through these, the agents, of both the realm and the conquered territories, were able to transform this system. In order to understand these dynamics better, with the increased professionalization of the historian's trade, it is therefore important to devote much more careful consideration to the research undertaken in postgraduate programs being developed in the lands of former Portuguese conquests.

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<sup>11</sup> Cunha, Mafalda Soares., "Governos E Governantes Do Império Atlântico Português Nos Séculos Xvii" In: Bicalho, Maria F. & Ferlini, Vera L. A. *Modos De Governar*. Sp: Alameda, 2005; Monteiro, Nuno F.G., "Governadores E Capitães-Mores Do Império Atlântico Português No Século Xviii", In: Bicalho, Maria F. & Ferlini, Vera L. A. Op. Cit.