

**Bernecker, Walther L. and Klaus Herbers.**  
*Geschichte Portugals.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer,  
2013. ISBN: 978-3-17-020662-5

Thomas Horst<sup>1</sup>

The eventful history of Portugal and its culture is a topic of interest not just for historians of the Iberian Peninsula but also for those from a number of foreign countries, including Germany. Until recently, a comprehensive overview of the history of Portugal was not available.<sup>2</sup> However, two German professors of the University Erlangen-Nuremberg have taken an impressive stab at it – and they have done so in a clearly organized fashion. In 354 pages, they succeeded in publishing a relatively short but extremely informative outline of Portuguese history, from the country’s beginnings to modern times, which can be used as a handbook for German readers. The paperback edition includes two historical parts, a short foreword (pp. 9–13), a bibliography of both parts (pp. 330–344), four genealogies (pp. 345–347), two maps and an index of names (pp. 348–354).

The first part of the book (pp. 15–131), written by the German medievalist Klaus Herbers, deals in four chapters with the beginning of Portuguese history through the end of the Middle Ages. Professor Herbers is an expert in the history of the Iberian Peninsula and has extensively studied medieval pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela. His primary focus is the history of the Roman Catholic Church in medieval times. This is why his part of the book sometimes refers to important aspects of Church history in general, which cannot be neglected when looking at the political history of the Middle Ages (cf. the reference to Petrus Hispanus, who was the only Portuguese Pope [John XXI, 1276–1277], p. 88).

The first chapter starts with the origins of Iberia predating history and illustrates the antique cultural imprints. It speaks about the Romanization of the Provinces “Hispania Citerior” and “Hispania Ulterior”, about Christianization and the various Christian doctrines developed in the Iberian Peninsula (Priscillianism), and explains the Germanic

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon, Centre for the History of Science and Technology (CIUHCT), 1749-016 Lisbon, Portugal. *E-mail:* thomashorst@gmx.net.

<sup>2</sup> Important here are the older studies by the German geographer Hermann Lautensach (1886–1971), together with the German translation (2001) of the *Breve História de Portugal* by António Henrique Rodrigo de Oliveira Marques (1933–2007).

Invasions, where the Suevi (409–585) and Visigoths (507–711) formed their kingdoms in Iberia. With the Muslim conquest of Gibraltar in 711, the Iberian Peninsula became part of the Umayyad Caliphate's empire of Damascus. Some Arabic words like “alfarroba” (carob), “azeitona” (olive), “albufeira” (lake) or “armazém” (store) in current use in Portuguese date back to this time, when Portugal, which was sparsely populated, was under Muslim domination (pp. 25–27). But the Christian Empires in the North of Lusitania were important for the *Reconquista* (Conquest of Coimbra by Fernando I of León and Castile in 1064) – and for the establishment and stabilization of an independent Portuguese kingdom in the High Middle Ages, which started with the Burgundian Knight Henrique († 1112), who became Count of Portugal at the end of the eleventh century.

The second chapter deals with the time of his successors, the Burgundian Dynasty. One of the principal agents in the reorganization of the Portuguese Church was Maurice Bourdin from Occitania (Bishop of Coimbra from 1098/1099, Archbishop of Braga from 1111), who was for a short time Antipope (Gregor [VIII], 1118–1121), but had to flee from Rome after his deposition riding backwards on a jackass. This is why he was given the name “Burdinus” (little jackass, p. 47). After the victory over the Muslims at the Battle of Ourique (25 July 1139), Afonso Henrique “o Fundador” (Afonso I, “the Founder”, † 1185) became king of Portugal. Under his long reign, Lisbon was recaptured in 1147 with the help of foreign soldiers (pp. 56–63). In the time of the crusades, new orders of knights were founded (pp. 63–66), but the Portuguese *Reconquista* only ended in the first half of the thirteenth century.

The political development of Lusitania is described in the third chapter, which deals with the consolidation of the Portuguese Kingdom (first Assembly of the Estates in 1211) and its crisis until the end of the Burgundian Dynasty. During this time, important monasteries (Cistercian in Alcobaça, Franciscan in Santa Cruz de Coimbra, and Dominican in Batalha) and the first universities were founded in Portugal. In order to understand the socio-economic structures, details regarding the Black Death, which caused a pandemic in the whole of Europe in the years 1347 to 1351, are as important as the fruitful coming together of various traditions: in medieval Portugal you can find Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Mozarab and Central European traditions (p. 81 f.). And the international trade contacts demonstrate that Italian merchants had already settled in Lisbon by 1270 and the Portuguese had factories in London, Cologne and Bruges (p. 84 f.). Interestingly, the author does not mention the important fact that there were also close contacts with the Hanseatic League.

The last chapter of the first part concerns itself with the Portuguese history during the time of the European Expansion towards the end of the Middle Ages. After the crisis of the succession (1383–1385), as is well known, the House of Avis established the second dynasty of kings in Portugal (1385–1580). Herbers here gives a short overview of the Portuguese discoveries in a summary from King João I (1385–1433) to João II (1481–1495) but could have made more mention of the connections to the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation. Indeed, Infante Pedro, Duke of Coimbra (1392–1449), the brother of the Portuguese King Duarte I (1433–1438) had traveled throughout Europe since 1425 and had lived at the Habsburg Court from 1426 to 1428,<sup>3</sup> which is also documented in the “Kleine Klosterneuburger Chronik” (short chronicle of the Austrian monastery Klosterneuburg), where his arrival in Vienna on March 28, 1426, is described.<sup>4</sup> Pedro was the uncle of Infanta Leonor (1434–1467), who married the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich III (1415–1493) in 1452. He died at the Battle of Alfarrobeira (May 20, 1449), where he fought against the troops of his nephew Afonso V of Portugal (“o Africano,” 1432–1481). In the time of Afonso’s son João II, who ruled the country between 1481 and 1495, important arrangements were made with the Catholic kings of Spain (Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494) to control the territories overseas.<sup>5</sup> For the Portuguese expeditions, Infante Henrique (“o Navegador,” 1394–1460) played a significant role, as did the technical advances in science and technology (navigation and cartography). However, the motives for the Portuguese Expansion, which are listed here (search for Prester John, continuation of the *Reconquista*, economic causes, p. 110 f.) are not sufficient to explain the start of the voyages of discovery from nowhere, which are described in general (Diogo Cão, Bartolomeu Diaz, Pero de Covilhã, Vasco da Gama, Pedro Álvares Cabral).

The second part of the book – much larger in size (pp. 133–329) – is written by Walther Ludwig Bernecker, a German professor who has published numerous works about the Spanish and Latin American history of modern times. He continues to describe the history of Portugal from the early modern times until our present age in nine chapters:

In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese expanded – under the reign of King Manuel I (“o Venturoso”, 1495–1521) into Africa and India – with the help inter alia of German and Flemish mercenaries (p. 141). The first circumnavigation of the Earth in search of a westward route to the “Spice Islands” (Molucca Islands in Indonesia) from

---

3 Santos, “O Infante D. Pedro na Austria-Hungria”.

4 Cf. the edition by Zeibig, “Die kleine Klosterneuburger Chronik”, 250.

5 Herbers also mentions here the *Oração de Obediência* (December 11, 1485), which is an important document for the History of the Discoveries. See also the new study by Luís, *O Portugal Messiânico e Imperial de D. João II na Oração de Obediência dirigida a Inocência VIII em 1485*.

1519 to 1521, under the direction of the Portuguese explorer Fernão de Magalhães, led to disputes with Spain about the borders at the Indian Ocean, which were resolved in the Treaty of Saragossa in 1529. Besides new trade contacts overseas, the Society of Jesus not only had a strong impact on the cultural life in Portugal (founding of the university of Évora in 1559),<sup>6</sup> but also on the proselytization taking place in China and Japan (Francisco Xavier, Alessandro Valignano, Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, pp. 147–150); the Jesuits played a major role in disseminating European knowledge to Asia until their expulsion from Japan in 1639. Moreover, the Jesuits also evangelized in Brazil, which soon became part of the Portuguese Colonial Empire (Tomé de Sousa was the first governor-general from 1549 to 1553).

So, it is remarkable that this small country in Western Iberia was able to acquire an overseas empire of such vast proportions – and this in only the relatively short space of a few decades! But the government spending on the new colonies was greater than the public revenue, so this was also the beginning of a gradual economic decline, as Bernecker emphasizes (p. 156). In cultural respects, the Renaissance in Portugal was very magnificent, a fact that is documented in the unique *Estilo Manuelino* (the Portuguese style of architectural ornamentation, exemplified by the famous tower and the Jerónimos Monastery of Belém, the Convent of the Order of Christ at Tomar and the royal funerary chapel of the Monastery of Batalha), as well as in the scientific opus of humanists like García de Orta (1500–1568) or the Portuguese national poet Luís de Camões (1524/25–1579/80). In relation to this topic, it would have been appropriate to mention important contemporary figures like Valentim Fernandes from Moravia (a German-speaking printer, who moved to Lisbon in 1495, where he died in around 1518), the well-connected and famous humanist Damião de Góis (1502–1574) or Pedro Nunes (1502–1578), who was an outstanding Portuguese mathematician and a royal cosmographer of European fame.

The reign of the House of Avis ended with the death of Cardinal-King Henrique (1578–1580), who had no descendants and had only come to the throne because his grandnephew, King Sebastião of Portugal (“o Desejado,” 1554–1578), had disappeared (and was presumably killed in action) at the disastrous Battle of Alcácer Quibir in Morocco (August 4, 1578), where soldiers from all over Europe were enlisted. There is a legend saying that this hero could return again at any time. This led to the so-called *Sebastianism* (pp. 167 and 171). After the War of the Portuguese Succession, the monarchy of Portugal combined with the Spanish branch of the Habsburg monarchy to form a political union in

---

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately Bernecker does not mention here the important “*Aula da Esfera*” in Lisbon.

the Iberian Peninsula (1580–1640). But the struggles for national liberty were powerful (pp. 174–177). This led to the rise of the Dynasty of Braganza, even though the Portuguese War of Restoration against Spain did not end until 1668 (Peace Treaty of Lisbon). In this chapter, which focuses on political history, Bernecker could also have mentioned the cosmographer and military engineer Luís Serrão Pimentel (1613–1679), who was professor at the “Aula de Fortificação e Arquitetura Militar,” which was founded in 1647 and was instrumental in training military engineers for the war against Spain.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the gradual decline was appreciable. Portuguese trade was exclusively aligned with the English kingdom (defensive alliance of 1661), which was – as Bernecker (pp. 187–193) emphasizes – one of the reasons for the economic decline. But, on the other hand, new discoveries of gold were made in Brazil around 1698, which led to a period of some abundance. This was the time of King João V (“o Magnânimo,” 1706–1750), when the National Palace of Mafra was constructed and Italian artists flourished, like Giorgio Domenico Duprà (1689–1770), who became a rococo court painter (1719–1770), while many art works were acquired from the best artists abroad. A little later, during the period of Absolutism and Mercantilism, Dom Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (Marquis of Pombal, 1699–1782) consolidated the state. He was secretary of state in the government of King José I (“o Reformador”) from 1750 to 1777. His ministry is associated with sweeping reforms (particularly in the field of education), a distinctive anti-Jesuitism (banishment of the Societas Iesus in 1759). But with the disastrous earthquake in Lisbon on All Saints’ Day 1755, which destroyed many important cultural features, a mastermind like him was required to reconstruct the city (pp. 199–201).

After the end of his despotism, more reforms were made in the Age of the Enlightenment and, in 1779, the Academy of Sciences was created in Lisbon. But – as Bernecker mentions in his fifth chapter – the years from 1770 onwards were affected by a period of “continuous prosperity” (p. 205): The country was occupied by French and British troops in the era of the French Revolution. To escape from the invaders, in November 1807, the Braganza royal family and its court of nearly 15,000 people escaped to Brazil, where Rio de Janeiro served as the nation’s capital until the return of João VI, who acclaimed the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves in 1818 and came back to Lisbon in 1821. In the following year, Brazil gained independence and João’s son, Pedro I († 1834), who was married to Maria Leopoldina of Austria (1797–1826), became its first monarch. In fact, it was Leopoldina’s daughter Maria II da Glória (born 1819 in Rio de

Janeiro), who was Queen Regent of the Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves from 1826 to 1828 and (after the Liberal Wars) again from 1834 until her death in 1853.

The transfer from the Ancien Régime to the period of Liberal Constitutionalism lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. In the sixth chapter (pp. 233–250), Bernecker summarizes the years from 1850 until the Regicide and the Fall of the Monarchy in October 1910. This era is characterized by the existence of an oligarchic leadership between the period of economic prosperity and the subsequent crisis of the system. After the deposition of Manuel II, the last king of Portugal, who died in exile in 1932, the First Republic was installed. But a military uprising led to an unstable transitional dictatorship (1926–1933), which was replaced – as is well known – by the “Estado Novo”, shaped by António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970, cf. the so-called *Salazarism* until the Carnation Revolution in 1974; colonial wars and the breakup of the overseas colonies in the years 1974 to 1976).

In the last two chapters (pp. 292–329), Bernecker sums up the last forty years until today. He interprets the process of Democratization and Europeanization (accession of Portugal to the European Community in 1986, Expo 1998, restoration of Macau to China in 1999) and illustrates the challenges faced by Portugal in the twenty-first century (from decolonization to the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries; from the economic boom through to the international debt crisis).

Overall, both parts complement each other, and so the German reader gains fresh insights into the history of Portugal. The texts are well written and easy to understand and give a balanced view of Portuguese history, even if the description of medieval Portugal could have been a little longer. The book is not intended to provide detailed analysis, but the two bibliographies at the end help to get the basic resources to study each historical era in depth. Even if the bibliographical information provided by Bernecker is not complete, the study, to which a chronological table is accessible online,<sup>7</sup> can be recommended for everyone who wishes to have a general overview of the history of Portugal, especially for German students who will surely benefit from reading this book.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kohlhammer.de/wms/instances/KOB/appDE/Geschichte/Laendergeschichte/Geschichte-Portugals/>

## References

- Bernecker, Walther L. and Horst Pietschmann (2008<sup>3</sup>). *Geschichte Portugals*. Vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Beck'sche Reihe 2156). Munich: Beck.
- Curvelo, Alexandra and Madalena Simões (Ed.) (2011). *Portugal und das Heilige Römische Reich (16.–18. Jahrhundert)*. *Portugal e o Sacro Império (séculos XVI–XVIII)*. Münster: Aschendorff.
- Lautensach, Hermann (1932-1937). *Portugal. Auf Grund eigener Reisen und der Literatur dargestellt*. 2 Volumes (Petermanns geographische Mitteilungen, Ergänzungsheft 213 and 230). Gotha: Perthes.
- Leitão, Henrique (2007). *A Ciência na “Aula da Esfera” no Colégio de Santo Antão, 1590–1759*. Lisbon: Comissariado Geral das Comemorações do V Centenário do Nascimento de São Francisco Xavier.
- Luís, Alexandre António da Costa (2013). *O Portugal Messiânico e Imperial de D. João II na Oração de Obediência dirigida a Inocêncio VIII em 1485*. Covilhã: LusoSofia.
- Marques, António Henrique Rodrigo de Oliveira (2001). *Geschichte Portugals und des portugiesischen Weltreichs* (Kröners Taschenausgabe 385). Stuttgart: Kröner.
- Santos, Mauricio Domingos Gomes dos (1959). “O Infante D. Pedro na Austria-Hungria”. *Brotéria*, 68: 17-37.
- Schreiner, Klaus (1989). Gregor VIII., nackt auf einem Esel. Entehrende Entblößung und schandbares Reiten im Spiegel einer Miniatur der ‚Sächsischen Weltchronik‘. In Dieter Berg and Hans-Werner Goetz (eds.). *Ecclesia et regnum. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Kirche, Recht und Staat im Mittelalter*. Festschrift für Franz-Josef Schmale zu seinem 65. Geburtstag. Bochum: Winkler: 155–202.
- Zeibig, Hartmann Josef (1851). *Die kleine Klosterneuburger Chronik (1322 bis 1428; Monumenta Claustroneoburgensia 1)*. Archiv zur Kunde österreichischer Geschichtsquellen 7: 227–268.