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Diogo Ramada Curto, Francisco Bethencourt, eds. *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xx + 536 pp. $36.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-60891-6.

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Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1600

This collection of essays is a handbook for the English-speaking world interested in the Portuguese expansion overseas, in which Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Curto set an agenda for a new set of approaches to the study of the Portuguese expansion. First, they wish to provide a global and comparative perspective of the Portuguese expansion. Second, they want to break with the traditional notion that the Portuguese empire should be studied according to different geographical areas. They give precedence to the exchange of peoples, goods, and cultural values throughout and between the different areas of the empire. Third, the editors refuse to bind their book to a clear short- or medium-term chronology. They call for a study of long-term developments and effects of the Portuguese presence throughout the world. Fourth, Bethencourt and Curto look beyond the political borders imposed by Portuguese settlements overseas, as well as the relationships established between local and regional powers and the royal administration *ad hoc*. Finally, both editors refuse to make use of the history of the Portuguese empire as a political manifesto, as has happened in the past. Hence, they suggest the revision of most of the traditional historiography and the construction of new models of analysis that may liberate the history of the Portuguese expansion from its past political constraints.

In order to achieve these goals, Bethencourt and Curto organized this volume in three different parts. The first part of the book focuses on the economy of the Portuguese empire, where the traditional view of imperial economic cycles is replaced by a focus on the circulation of products, the build-up of financial networks, and the development of markets, resulting in the creation of distinct colonial societies within a single imperial framework. This part of the book shows that although there was a direct link between the economic needs of the kingdom of Portugal and the economic cycles throughout the empire, it seems that from an early stage, the empire was able to follow its own economic development, acquiring a certain amount of disentanglement from the kingdom. The Portuguese empire allowed for the coexistence of cycles of agricultural production, mercantile exchange between the colonies and the kingdom, and a certain degree of intracolonial trade. It is in the Atlantic where this combination is clearest.

The metropolis seems to have profited from the empire. If in the beginning of the fifteenth century the forts in the north of Africa were a financial liability, by 1506, the empire was already contributing about 60 percent of the crown's income. In the beginning of the nineteenth century that had been reduced to about 27 percent, mainly through the collection of custom duties. The income provided by the empire to the crown came from the direct exploitation of royal monopolies, the direct participation in trade, and the direct and indirect taxation of commerce and mining. One distinctive feature of the Portuguese kingdom was that it never became a "fiscal state." Portugal remained an "entrepreneurial domain state," mostly interested in the income provided by agricultural and mining production, characteristics of the Atlantic system.

If the benefits of empire seem obvious, the costs are analyzed at two levels. The ordinary costs were often covered by the benefits and therefore we can generally speak of a positive balance. However, the costs of empire were truly felt through the system of extraordinary expenses. Those were mainly provoked by factors external to the empire itself, as was the case of the costs of warfare or political instability. These extraordinary expenses engendered significant deficits, contributing to the general increase of the public debt.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the understanding of the institutions behind the Portuguese empire. Instead of stressing solely the role of the state, this

particular set of articles shows how the state, church, local, regional, and other institutions coexisted in the same framework, competing for both political leverage and economic power. The policy of settlement in the empire is an example of a local institution whose multiculturalism was the basis of an idea of empire, perceived differently in Europe and overseas.

The idea of locality as being the key to institutional power-sharing presupposes what Bethencourt has called a "nebula of power," defined as an attempt to maintain a balance of power between local, regional, and central institutions, all of which competed to control the imperial system. This almost decentralization of interests in the empire promoted the development of an idea of metropolitan centralization on the part of the crown. Therefore, this "nebula of power" provoked a clear seizure between the crown and the "imperial state," being the latter in charge of social control, monopoly of violence and regulation of social conflicts.

The coexistence of a centralized royal ideal of empire and an actual decentralized "imperial state," subject to adaptation and assimilation of institutions *ad hoc*, shows the flexibility of the Portuguese institutional framework to act in a decentralized manner. Although territorial settlements and political institutions were of great importance in keeping the Portuguese colonial empire together, the church played a significant institutional role in promoting the idea of a diverse, but global empire through four mechanisms: the *Padroado Régio*, the military orders, the Inquisition and the confraternities.

The third part of the book covers several cultural developments initiated or influenced by the Portuguese expansion. These include the development of the Portuguese language, art, and literary production as means of contact and the transactions among different cultural forms inside the empire and between these and the kingdom.

The idea of a "nebula of power" introduced by Bethencourt is brought up again by Curto when he emphasizes the levels of local, regional, and metropolitan cultural contributions to a concept of empire. Arguing perhaps in favor of a "cultural nebula," the third part emphasizes the complex transactions between cultural diversity, the practices of tradition, and the means of political action, all of them identifiable through the use of the Portuguese language, different art forms, and technological development. Nonetheless, the editors claim the need for new research into the development and formation of different political or cultural identities throughout the Portuguese empire.

This volume of essays ends with a chapter by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, whose main goal is to place the Portuguese expansion in a global context. According to Fernández-Armesto, Portugal's contribution to global history was that a small kingdom set the example for others to follow, making an undeniable contribution to the construction of an Atlantic world by being the first European country to put in motion the environmental changes provoked by the general European expansion overseas.

Overall, this is a well-balanced book, whose articles fulfill the goals set in the introduction. Its value goes beyond the general information it provides about Portuguese expansion, offering excellent insight and an innovative framework for further research on this theme. This book is particularly successful when explaining the construction of concepts and ideas of empire, giving voice to metropolitan institutions and actors as well as to *ad hoc* communities, institutions, and societies. However, the collection fails to adequately situate of Portuguese expansion in the general debate about world history, globalization, and the "rise of the West."

Although the articles by Schwartz, Pedreira, Alencastro, Bethencourt, and Curto provide an outstanding basis for further explorations in that direction, Fernández-Armesto's article fails to explain how a reasonably balanced empire, controlled by a small country, was unable to take part in the wealth and prosperity distribution process common to other European empires that succeeded in creating enough socioeconomic and cultural leverage to initiate an industrial revolution and by doing so contribute to the "rise of the West" and a significant acceleration of the process of globalization. The lack of a structural theoretical framework to make such an assessment leaves unexplained the relative economic and industrial retardation of both metropolis and empire as well as Portugal's possible contribution to a transition to modernity in early modern Europe.

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