
Reviewed by Jessica Minieri (Binghamton University (State University of NY))

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Commissioned by Carla Vieira (CHAM, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa)

In the last several decades in the fields of economic history and Iberian studies, the Kingdom of Portugal has not received the same attention as its neighbors Castile-Leon, Aragon, and Navarre from scholars. While scholars of the Middle Ages and the early modern period have long studied the histories of the Spanish Empire and the Crown of Aragon in terms of their fiscal and economic history, Portugal and its empire have not received the same scholarly investigation. Part of this historiographic omission stems from the Estado Novo (1933-74) government in Portugal in the twentieth century and how the political climate stalled historical scholarship on Portuguese premodernity. Rodrigo da Costa Dominguez and Amélia Aguiar Andrade propose that scholars of Iberia and early modern empires must view Portugal as “not different from other European powers in many structural ways,” but as “the pioneers of the oceanic expansion” (p. 7). For this reason, Rodrigo da Costa Dominguez and Amélia Aguiar Andrade argue that Portugal’s place in maritime history and empire allowed them to both create and build on existing economic structures to facilitate empire building in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. Therefore, the goal of this volume is to position Portugal and its territories in a broader historiographic discussion of financial institutions and empire building both before and after the sixteenth century in a global context.

The organization of the volume splits the chapters into two sections based on chronology and the influence of outside governments after the establishment of the Portuguese Empire in the fifteenth century. In organizing the volume in this way, the editors and their contributors chart the changes in Portugal’s monarchy and economic structure over the span of several centuries in the context of the “modern state” and “state building.” While the terminology of “state” and “state building” in the early modern and medieval periods has been subject to debate by historians for dec-
ades, the contributors in part 2 argue that in comparison to “states” such as Aragon, Castile, France, the “Two Sicilies,” and England, Portugal’s oceanic expansion required its government to “take actions to reinforce institutions and their government capacity” to “maximize revenues” (p. 151). Therefore, Portugal, along with its Iberian neighbors, needed its overseas colonies to “function as clear ‘laboratories’ of experimentation for solutions that with greater or lesser success were applied in the territories applied by the Portuguese” (p. 142). In focusing on how this shift in institutional politics and fiscal policy changed between medieval and early modern Portugal, the chapters in the volume’s second part emphasize the significance of oceanic expansion in the economic history of the wider Portuguese world between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries.

In addition to highlighting this lacuna in premodern scholarship and Portugal’s growing monarchy, one of the strengths of this volume is its comparative work between Portugal and other European kingdoms such as Castile-Leon, Aragon, Naples, Sicily, France, and the Netherlands. Considering many of these regions already have a wide variety of existing scholarship regarding their financial history—particularly the Spanish kingdoms and the Netherlands—the comparison to contemporary Portuguese institutions emphasizes the differences and similarities between it and other growing European empires. The chapters by Albert Reixach Sala, Pere Verdés Pijuan, Luciano Pezzolo, and Marjolein ’t Hart that focus on the Crown of Aragon, Italy, and the Netherlands, respectively, work to compare the methods of Portuguese fiscal policy and taxation with its neighbors in Iberia and central Europe. Pezzolo’s discussion of Sicily, Sardinia, and greater Italy highlights the ways in which neighboring powers such as Spain taxed their subjects in their Italian territories. In splitting itself between two sections, Portugal in a European Context demonstrates the importance of further study in medieval and early modern studies on the fiscal history, Portuguese administration of its mainland territories and colonies, and how oceanic expansion fostered the growth of Portuguese economic institutions.

Ultimately, Rodrigo da Costa Dominguez, Amélia Aguiar Andrade, and their contributors highlight the need for further study on Portuguese premodernity and the ways in which “Portugal’s modern divergence with Europe” can be understood through further study of “long-term evolution of indirect taxation, the national budget’s level of support from colonial revenues, and the fundamental role of parliamentary representation and financial control regarding Portuguese political economy in the long run” (p. 329). Therefore, future scholarship regarding premodern and modern Portugal must focus on how centuries of fiscal policy and taxation shaped the political structure of Portugal to the present day.

In sum, Portugal in a European Context presents an important call to economic historians and Iberianists to center Portugal and its empire in the broader history of taxation, financial institutions, and empire. This book’s call to scholars working on the histories of taxation and empire—both in Portugal and beyond—highlights the importance of further study of Portugal’s place within European markets and premodernity itself.
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