
NOTES

Portugal and Overseas Expansion from XVth-XVIIIth Centuries

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Portugal's overseas expansion was guided by the Infante Henry (1394-1460) and the Order of Christ. Henry, the son of John 1st (1358-1390), was known as « the Navigator » and made the voyage around Northern Africa several times like many of his compatriots in that period. He adopted his nephew Ferdinand (1433-1470), the son of King Duarte (1391-1438) and laid the basis for the dynasty which was to expand Portugal's maritime and commercial power and which in 1495 acceded to the crown with Manuel 1 (1469-1521).

Ceuta, the first conquest on the African coast, was taken on 21st August 1415 and it was afterwards decided to keep it. Then in 1437 the Portuguese besieged Tangiers, the limit of their commercial penetration after the capture of Ceuta. Driven back they returned and took the less important town of El-Ksar es-Seghir (in 1458), they destroyed certain naval and commercial ports such as Anfa, (in 1468), and gradually took control of towns and fortifications such as Asilah and finally Tangiers itself, in 1417. It had taken them fifty years to achieve this.

The conquest of Ceuta had been the culmination of Portuguese punitive actions against Moorish shipping and gave them some valuable prizes such as slaves and gold. Once occupied, the city did not retain its commercial importance, which is why at Tangiers and along the African coasts the Portuguese always attempted to gain control of the trade in gold and African slaves which enriched other Mediterranean traders, especially the Genoese. The exploration of the shores beyond the Sahara led to the discovery of the « mina », and African gold took the road to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal.

This gold was paid for with African slaves, or baubles purchased in the Low Countries, and European "industry" became more directly involved

in this trade than in the past. But apart from gold and slaves, the Mediterranean traders also provided Europe with pepper, spices, pearls and precious stones from the "Indies". As a result of their explorations, Prince Henry's men traced the variegated contours of the African coast and their descendants finally opened up a route to the Gulf of Arabia — in 1498 the Cape of Good Hope was circumnavigated. After that it was a question of finding trading partners on the Malabar coast, in Malaysia and Indochina, and even beyond, in China and Japan. Despite resistance from the Mediterranean traders, the Turks and the Venetians were united by their common interest in profit, and the Islamic monopoly over Eastern trade was broken. It remained to be seen whether Portugal would take their place.

Since the early 1440s, African slaves had been arriving in the kingdom. They provided cheap labour and also valuable husbands in a country whose menfolk travelled a great deal. After white, Islamic, and desert Africa, other areas were opened up beyond Cap Vert which were highly cultivated and inhabited by negroes. Place names such as Cap Branco, Negro, Roxo, Vermelho show that the Portuguese were observant and aware of the colours of the landscape. The Atlantic Islands received their first settlers and were soon sending growing quantities of sugar, which had previously been a luxury item, to the Old World. From the XVth to XVIIth century sugar was consumed on a large scale.

1. The Portuguese crown as a commercial enterprise.

The XVth century began with the creation of the Portuguese commercial empire which was to lay the basis for the modern concept of our planet. They were also helped by Castilian discoveries in the Western Ocean, the Atlantic. This enterprise was undertaken by the Portuguese state which intended to exploit these new markets in the form of monopolies by sharing out the overseas goods — sugar from the Atlantic Islands and dyestuffs from the Americas, pepper and spices from Africa and Asia. Lisbon became the meeting point for African gold and Portuguese labour, both of which were invested in the business. The Crown undertook responsibility in order to ensure European markets and sales on the most advantageous terms.

In 1505 Manuel 1 announced the dispatch of ships with cargoes of spice to Spain and Italy so that it should be known what profits the country was drawing from almost a century of effort. However, Mediterranean competition, especially from the Venetians, was strong. On this occasion, the loss of a ship belonging to the Tuscan Bartolommeo Marchioni came as some comfort. But what is more, the representatives of the Portuguese king in Venice and Antwerp had difficulty in placing their merchandise and therefore in balancing their books. The attempt to establish a foothold in France had not succeeded.

Portugal and its king were to experience many problems, as capitalism was intensifying in Northern Europe. Portuguese merchants and conquerors found themselves serving the interests of Britain and the Low Countries. Navigation also developed with some difficulty, as did the establishment of the imperial staging posts of Goa, Macao and Timor, the relay stations on the African coasts which were the origins of Mozambique and Angola, the Atlantic Islands and Brazil.

At the end of the XVIIIth century the British, as protectors of the continent, helped to defend Goa (1799-1813). But they still left many decisions to the Portuguese crown and the task of colonization remained in the hands of men employed in the imperial service. They defended their positions and attempted to push ahead with colonization by exploring rivers and plains, and endeavoured to get to know both the countries and their peoples in wider terms than those which had characterized the proselyting objectives of the Portuguese in Asia and the Congo.

Being responsible for economic, scientific and political activities, the Portuguese crown was seriously disturbed by the brutality with which the « conquering bourgeoisie » of Europe treated the country. As Portugal had not been able to establish its own commercial relations with overseas countries, the crown, its country, its men and its economic interests were condemned to following those of the « conquering bourgeoisie », that is the powerful companies and illustrious agents of His Britannic Majesty.

2. Prices and market economy.

The competitors' great fear was initially that currency exchange rates would collapse, causing the « Hungarians, Germans, Flemish and French to resort to acquiring them (in Lisbon) where they could have them at a lower price ». The Germans set the pace, but it remained to be seen if Portugal intended to go in the same direction. Later the cause for concern was that the Portuguese crown was looking to stabilize prices. The expense was enormous, and the informers of the *Signoria*, who were employed to find out prices and expenses in Asia, underlined their importance. In fact, the great enterprise was based on the contradictions which alone allowed speculations against the changing economic situation. Thereafter the latter reassumed prime importance.

Portugal had to revise its approach to Indian affairs on several occasions. Various bodies obtained the funds necessary to equip the first fleets. As well as the king, who was always in command of operations, Tuscans, Germans and Portuguese provided capital and ships. In fact, the Cape route was open to anyone willing to collaborate with the Portuguese crown, which of course had to authorize any participation and never conceded the administration of the monopoly that was in the hands of the king's agents (*Feitores reais*).

It was precisely with the aim of avoiding the collapse of the exchange rate that from 1504 the crown strengthened: its hold derogations were conceded to civil and military personnel of the ships and expeditions, particularly religious institutions and individuals, but also to Portuguese investors (*Liberdades* and *Quintaladas*). The trade arising from these privileges provoked restrictive measures. But from the mid XVIth century Portuguese and foreign — German and Milanese — men of commerce were directly involved in the trade in pepper, and later in some spices too, by virtue of contracts made with the Crown. They did not always succeed in acquiring the stipulated quantities and after a series of problems a national company, the East India Trade Company (1628-1633) was established. In fact, the men of commerce made the state bear a considerable proportion of their costs, a proportion which some royal agents and merchants themselves, like Duarte Gomes Solis, thought excessive.

Management of the market economy passes out of the hands of a state that neglects national production. The state, the crown, currency, legislation, in a word, sovereignty, provided the essential framework of speculation which, as elsewhere, increased capital profits, or compensated for unfavourable fluctuations in prices of colonial goods. A country more or less without a domestic market lives on international trade and the essential gains have to be made on the depreciation of national currency.

3. Economic fluctuations override political responses.

Economic fluctuations formed the framework for merchant activity in the South and eventually triumphed over the political responses formulated by the Portuguese state in its expansion. From the mid-XVth century "Italian" men of commerce took part in Portuguese enterprises in Africa. In the course of their activities they followed the alternative canons of judgement (that is, favourable or not favourable) posed in every commercial or monetary choice. Traditional Mediterranean superstructures formed the basis and content of their deliberations and eventual decisions: the supremacy of the written document used to transmit orders which were also the instrument used for agreements between the leading economic agents, the correspondence networks forming a universe and establishing the horizons within which the action of these agents took place, even the elements of reference drawn from the recurring seasons and « weather » to provide dates of reference or expiry.

This was the nature of the short-term economic fluctuations which men of commerce in the XVIth century were already calling « conjunctions » or conjunctures. By dint of the influence which they brought to bear upon these conjunctures, it came about that groups responsible for centralizing capital and the institutions this produced, notably the "exchange fairs", took the lead in making strategic choices. Non-productive investments were in the end

preferred to investment in production, or else innovation (avoided in the commercial and monetary market) was permitted when it was more favourable from a social and political point of view than the concentration of too large groups of workers demanding political rights in the cities.

The Portuguese who had succeeded in opening direct routes to the African countries that supplied gold, or to Asian countries rich in luxury goods, did not escape the "Italian" and Moorish system of business operation and economic speculations. This is the reason why the Portuguese, who had beaten their Mediterranean competitors, and who after a century of exploration and conquest had linked Europe directly with the overseas continents of Africa, Asia and America, were eventually to fail. They failed because they had not been able to establish relationships with the powers or peoples of Africa and Asia which differed in any way from those which the other Mediterranean countries had imposed in the Indian Ocean and Asia. Their intervention apparently contributed to the decline of "Italian" trade, but above all weakened the southern cities and their production. This process was of long standing and had been encouraged by economic fluctuations in the Mediterranean countries. In fact, Portuguese political action complemented perfectly that of the Genoese, who from the XVth century had also been the agents of the British and Northern European producers in the Mediterranean.

In Portugal, too, the "middle classes" of merchants and aristocrats interested in national production were weakened by the expansion and a fundamental change in the Kingdom ensued, with the condemnation of these "middle classes" and of their commercial activity. Superstructures were gradually erected which brought about the formal overshadowing of national productive activity and established the Portuguese as intermediaries of the merchant capitalists of Northern Europe.

4. Social and political consequences.

The *Enfante Henry*, who from 1420 was the administrator of the military Order of Christ, took over the monopoly over African trade so that all profits reverted to the Crown. It was the Crown that took strategic choices which in turn strengthened those agents favoured by the new dynasty, who came from the mainly merchant groups in the entourage of the sons of John I. The eldest, illegitimate, child (Alfonso, 1380²-1461) inherited from the victor of the wars of independence (Nuno Alvares Pereira, 1360-1431) a fortune that enabled him to establish the great house of Bragança in the North, which had close contacts with the Jews and was alert both to trade and to the agricultural and financial interests of his subjects. The rest was swallowed up in the terrible political struggles.

When Henry's successors regained power, one of the results of the distur-

bances was the destruction of what might be called the national "middle classes". They consisted partly of Portuguese Jews who had re-joined exiled Castilian and Aragonese co-religionists — famous men, merchants, craftsmen, they had been isolated since the beginning of the XVth century and survived only at the cost of enforced conversion. The old Christians had come to see these people, whose skills had led to their employment by the Crown as agents, especially in administrative and fiscal roles, as being responsible for their downfall. After various unrealistic projects for combatting the foreigners, they turned against their Jewish compatriots and against all forms of distinction which did not come from abroad, especially Italy. Later it was the "English" who took the lead and allowed the Portuguese to speculate in English currency against the national currency and economy.

The discoveries and conquests, the "Perfumes of India" (*Fumos da India*) and emigration brought out the violent element in a peaceful nation and above all protected the position of those who did not become involved in religious, artistic and casuistic speculation. The new Christians were to take part in colonial and European affairs and in financial speculation, but as eternal rivals of the Genoese many emigrated to England or the Low Countries, where they came up against the religious authorities while attempting to return to the faith of their ancestors. Many became atheists.

In the Kingdom of Portugal there was one institution especially formed to deal with them — the Tribunal of the Holy Office (the Inquisition) — which was the instrument of repressive policies that had been justified in political and social terms since the beginning of the XVth century. Indeed this institution supervised in all sectors of Portuguese life and at all levels the preservation of the order established by the New State of King John 1st, then Manuel 1st and others, right down to the XXth century.

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Rather than weigh down this short text with footnotes, it is sufficient to indicate the following studies:

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