

L'invenzione di un impero: politica e cultura nel mondo portoghese (1450–1600)

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The Portuguese empire was a major protagonist in the process of accelerated globalization that took place during the early modern age. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this previously marginal European kingdom was able to project itself in Africa, Asia, and America, giving rise to the first European colonial empire. Moreover, Portuguese royal patronage supported missionary efforts to expand Catholicism in regions beyond European control, such as Japan, China, and the Mughal and Vijayanagara empires in India. Giuseppe Marcocci provides an insightful and well-documented piece of research on the cultural foundations and justifications of the Portuguese empire, from the first conquests in western Africa to the early decades of the dynastic union of Portugal with Spain from 1580. The Portuguese imperial culture studied by Marcocci is primarily theological and canonical. Such a delimitation is understandable, considering the crucial role played by the Catholic Church in early modern Portugal, although it might have been useful to pay greater attention to literary sources.

L'invenzione di un impero is divided into three parts, each composed of two chapters. In the first part Marcocci examines how papal bulls issued between 1452 and 1514 provided justification for military actions undertaken by the Portuguese first in Africa and then in Asia. This involved the reinterpretation of medieval categories of crusade against Muslims, as well as theories concerning indirect papal jurisdiction over 'infidels'. However, even if the very foundation of their empire seemed to be based on papal concessions, the Portuguese kings did not consider themselves vassals of the pontiffs. Particularly during the reign of John III (1521–57), major influence was exerted by court theologians committed to finding a balance between the papal legitimation of the empire and the need to safeguard the Portuguese jurisdiction from Roman interference. During the early sixteenth century, attempts were also made to conceptualize the empire beyond

this orthodox theological framework. Religious millenarianism was turned into political propaganda, so that the Portuguese 'discoveries' were presented as the prelude to the conversion of the whole world to Christ. Other intellectuals were inspired by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), deeming that the newly established empire should follow the model set by the ancient Romans and should tolerate the religious and cultural differences of the conquered populations. However, both the millenarian and the Machiavellian interpretations of the Portuguese empire were eventually defeated around the middle of the sixteenth century by the orthodoxy of the court theologians.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Marcocci considers critiques raised during the sixteenth century against the Lusitan empire, in both its political and economic dimensions. The Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria (c.1483–1546), together with other Dominican confrères of the School of Salamanca, argued that the native populations of America enjoyed property rights and that their polities were legitimate, so that only well-defined reasons could justify an attack against them. While Vitoria's ideas were not openly discussed in Portugal, even there theologians – some of Spanish origin – raised objections against features of the Portuguese empire that could be seen as being at odds with Christian morality.

The Portuguese empire also caused embarrassment to certain Christian consciences insofar as it was seen as contradicting moral principles pertaining to correct economic life. Evangelization and trade had allegedly been the motives behind Vasco da Gama's enterprise; trade was considered 'sacred', inasmuch as it allowed the expansion of Christianity. Furthermore, Vitoria had claimed that war was justified against a country that impeded the freedom of movement and the right to commerce. However, was not Portugal preventing other countries from trading freely in Asia? And was the humanist Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) not correct to note that the Portuguese were selling spices of low quality at prices higher than those that had prevailed before the opening of the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope? Moreover, any claims that religious motivations came before commercial interests were less than persuasive, considering that the Portuguese engaged in intense trade with 'infidels' of all religions.

The last part of the book is composed of two chapters dealing with distinct topics. Chapter 5 synthesizes how the Portuguese represented and dealt with the native populations of their empire. Marcocci stresses the connection between temporal

and spiritual conquest, exemplified particularly by the mass and 'forced' baptisms that allegedly often took place in the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*. However, the author also shows how a missionary such as the Jesuit Manuel da Nóbrega (1517–70) expressed doubts about the right of the Portuguese to enslave the native populations of Brazil and articulated a discourse of conversion that was distinct from that of conquest.

Marcocci argues that conversion to Christianity within the Portuguese empire was based on a 'conditioned integration': while sharing the same religion, the native population and the Portuguese conquerors would remain distinct, according to the Iberian category of 'blood purity' (*limpeza de sangue*), which had originally been used to subordinate Catholics of Jewish origin. As an example of this dynamic, Marcocci maintains that in India 'the Jesuits rejected the hypothesis of admitting neophytes to the sacred orders (with the exception of those descended from Indians baptized within eight days of birth)' (p. 117). However, the very manuscript source quoted to support this statement³ in fact delineates a very different scenario. The anonymous Jesuit author is clear that a 'Christian of the land' who had received the baptism immediately after birth (normally within eight days), 'even if his father, grandfather or great-grandfather was gentile or saracen', was always eligible to be ordained as a priest, according to the same conditions applied to Portuguese candidates. A man who had been baptized for at least ten years, coming 'from whatsoever religion' (*ex quacunque lege*), could also be ordained, if this was approved by his bishop and if the candidate was firm in the faith and had good customs. This arrangement is not adequately described by a notion of 'conditioned integration' based on racial distinctions. That said, it is true that the Jesuits refrained from admitting Indian candidates into their own religious order.

Marcocci argues very persuasively that the study of moral cases in missionary contexts played a major role in the adaptation of Christianity to local conditions. It is indeed desirable that more attention should be paid by historians to the relation between the 'conversion culture that was born out of experience' and 'the official doctrines and goals of the empire' (p. 124). However, some of the moral solutions that were devised in the provinces of the

empire were not so original as suggested here. One example relates to a specific exception to the general Catholic principle of indissolubility of marriage. Various Jesuit theologians in India concluded that a Catholic spouse could be separated from a person of different religion, married when both were non-Catholic, if the baptized spouse risked committing apostasy or if the 'infidel' insulted the Christian faith (p. 126). Far from being a peculiar theory developed in a missionary context, this was in fact simply an application of the well-known 'Pauline privilege', a canonical category based on 1 Corinthians 7:12–15 and further developed by the Decretals of Innocent III (1160–1216).

In the last chapter, Marcocci examines the evolution of the Lusitan imperial culture after the crown of Portugal passed to the Habsburgs of Spain. Part of his argument is that, by the end of the sixteenth century, charges of 'indianization' were used in conflicts within the Portuguese imperial elites (p. 141). An interesting example is the caution expressed in 1593 by the Inquisition about acts of devotion to a statue of Afonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) in Goa. However, Marcocci's analysis of this particular episode is problematic. The document containing the denunciation explains that, while religious veneration could not be accepted, 'otherwise all honours are due to this hero as he is the author of numerous and very illustrious deeds'.⁴ It is therefore improbable that the Inquisitorial concern about superstitious practices performed in front of the statue of the Portuguese conqueror of Goa was actually – as suggested by Marcocci – primarily a political action addressed against the Albuquerque clan.

L'invenzione di un impero provides a solid, updated, and significant contribution to the study of early modern European expansion. Through a careful balance of synthesis, clarity, and scholarly depth, Giuseppe Marcocci has succeeded in presenting a rich and articulated vision of an empire that played a major role in the globalization of the modern world. A larger Portuguese version of this book has just been published by the Imprensa Universitaria de Coimbra with the title *A consciência de um império: política, teologia e cultura no império português do séc. XVI*. With comprehensive studies on the political culture of the early modern Lusitan empire mainly available only in Portuguese, an English-language revised edition of this book would be welcome.

3 Biblioteca Publica de Evora, Cod. CXXII/2-11, *Collecção de resoluções e pareceres de matérias canónicas e morães*, ff. 240v–242r.

4 Baião, *A Inquisição De Goa*, vol. 2: *Correspondência Dos Inquisidores Da India* (Lisboa: Academia das Ciências, 1930): 148.