

INTRODUCTION TO A SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF PORTUGAL

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Until the mid-1980s, Portuguese economic history existed in relative isolation from the main international currents. A relationship did exist with the French literature of the *Annales* school, which had influenced Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and others. And historians such as Borges Macedo or Oliveira Marques were aware of some of the international trends. But in the research being produced in Portugal, a comparative and quantitative approach, firmly rooted in the notion of the counterfactual, was altogether missing from the literature.

This picture was about to change abruptly with the appearance of a modern classic, Reis (1984). From then onwards, the modern Anglophone approach to economic history has become more frequent in Portugal, though it has never become dominant relatively to the exclusively narrative, descriptive approach of traditional historians.

Portugal's much improved quality of research infrastructure, including university libraries and archives over the last four decades, has led to much easier access to (and interaction with) international scholarship. Together with freedom from censorship since the implementation of democracy and the later appearance of the internet, these developments have led to noticeable improvements in the quality of the research produced. Most of Portugal's historians are still very much rooted in Portuguese institutions, and studying economic history outside the country is still the exception rather than the norm, but a generation of doctoral students at the European University Institute and elsewhere has focused on Portugal in a comparative perspective, and many of them now teach in Portugal. All of these developments have led to a noticeable methodological improvement in the type of papers that are written, as well as a more nuanced understanding of Portugal's history, as a result of having a much more comparative outlook than used to be the case.

This monographic issue is representative of the best work done in recent years, and it shows how much more integrated Portuguese

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economic history is now with international trends. From the submissions received, we selected six papers to be reviewed, and following a rigorous refereeing process, eventually four of these have been accepted by the scientific committee, which included the editor in chief, Blanca Sánchez Alonso, Jaime Reis and myself.¹ It is noticeable that all the accepted papers use quantitative, comparative approaches, and are written by relatively young authors, all of which either work for foreign institutions or have had considerable international experience.

The papers appear in this special issue by chronological order. The first paper, «Investing in a Frontier Economy: Portugal, 1230-1500» is by António Castro Henriques (Universidade do Porto). This paper brings capital into the debate concerning Iberia as a frontier economy during the post-Reconquest, post-Black Death era. That debate is usually framed in the literature in terms of land-labour ratios — which were evidently high — but the role of capital as an input in production tends to be left out. Henriques shows that Portugal's condition as a frontier economy meant that capital — insofar as investment in land to rent was concerned — commanded low interest rates in Portugal by comparison to other Western European countries. This result, together with the author's earlier work (Henriques 2015) seems of fundamental importance for our understanding of Portugal's situation in the late Middle Ages, and seems likely to have important implications for future work.

The second paper, «Reconsidering the southern European model: Marital Status, Women's Work and Labour Relations in mid-eighteenth-century Portugal», is authored by Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (International Institute of Social History) and Hélder Carvalho (Universidade de Évora). Despite some caveats, their paper is a remarkable pushback against the literature which paints premodern Southern Europe as particularly patriarchal in comparison with Northwestern Europe. The authors show that Portuguese women did not become less active in the labour market, after marriage, than was the case in Northern European countries — a result that contrasts what the literature previously assumed for Southern Europe.

The third paper, by Eric Golson (University of Surrey), shows that Portugal during the Second World War, while in principle politically neutral, was in fact closer aligned with Allied (and in particular, British) interests, both financial and political. The author provides a new standardised balance of payments, and shows that, at least from the signature of the 1940 Anglo-Portuguese clearing agreement, Portugal heavily favoured British war effort interests. According to the author, the Portuguese were

¹ In the case of António Castro Henriques, with whom I work on a separate project, I delegated the choice of referees and final decision to the chief editor, Blanca Sánchez Alonso, to avoid a possible conflict of interest.

willing to lend in total over a quarter of a year's GDP during the war to the British — a remarkable figure with no German parallel. The author furthermore advances an innovative hypothesis for why this was the case: the role of the British in supporting the continued viability of the Portuguese Empire, as well as supplying mainland Portugal with goods. The author's point that as the situation stood in the Second World War, Portuguese and British interests were aligned and of importance for our understanding of the period.

Matilde Machado (Universidad Carlos III) and Pedro Gomes (Birkbeck College, University of London) are the authors of the fourth article: «Literacy and primary school expansion in Portugal: 1940-62». These authors estimate, using county-level data, the causal impact on enrollment and literacy of a massive primary school construction program which began in 1940 (*Plano dos Centenários*). The authors' main result is that public policies in the form of school construction was responsible for a 80 per cent increase in enrollment and a 13 per cent increase in the literacy rate of the affect cohorts until the 1960s. But beyond this, this paper has several remarkable results. The authors are well aware that school construction was not random; instead, they specifically study empirically the selection logic of school construction. Their results show that areas with initially lower literacy rates as well as younger demographic characteristics were privileged. This is a rather remarkable result which confirms that the *Estado Novo* regime actively worked to eradicate illiteracy among the least privileged members of society.

All of these papers break new ground in destroying current prejudices with regard to Portugal's history. The paper by Henriques studies in detail the agricultural and capital market situation during a period when the historical emphasis has been traditionally put in the process of the fifteenth century Discoveries. But it should be evident that the background which Henriques studies here systematically for the first time was of much more immediate importance to the everyday life of the late Medieval Portuguese, and also that we can hardly understand Portugal's expansion, to which so much attention has been given in the traditional literature, without first understanding this background.

The paper by Ribeiro da Silva and Carvalho, in turn, presents evidence which is destructive of a long-standing cultural bias against southern Europe. The implicit hypothesis in much of the literature (see for instance, De Moor and Van Zanden 2010) is that the higher levels of gender equality which did become evident in Northern Europe by the last quarter of the twentieth century had very long historical roots in the style of the persistence literature. By presenting evidence against this, Ribeiro da Silva and Carvalho contribute towards the elimination of one candidate explanation for understanding Portugal's failure to enter modern economic growth until the 20th century.

The papers by Golson, and by Gomes and Machado, in turn, show a much more nuanced view of the *Estado Novo* than the politicised notion of a fascist regime which kept the country poor and illiterate — accusations which are today frequent from some professional historians and the general public. In fact, while the *Estado Novo* strategically adopted some of the external trappings of Fascism, the reality is instead that Salazar was a social conservative who fought the truly Fascist political forces which might otherwise have become more influential or even taken power (Pinto 1994).

All authors have been required, as a condition of acceptance, to deliver their data corresponding to their paper, and this will be posted in the journal's website as Supplementary material. This will facilitate access to other researchers who can benefit from such data for their own research, and also makes it easier for others to double-check the validity of the original work. Of course, any researcher who uses the data must cite these authors, so they will also benefit.

It is my desire that Portuguese economic history will flourish during the twentieth-first century. Hopefully, this special issue represents one step in that direction.

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