

Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World

Review Number: 773

Publish date: Tuesday, 30 June, 2009

Editor: Liam Matthew Brockey

ISBN: 9780754663133

Date of Publication: 2009

Price: £60.00

Pages: 298pp.

Publisher: Ashgate

Place of Publication: Aldershot

Reviewer: Kathleen Sheldon

Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World provides a nuanced investigation into cities with varying degrees of connection to the Portuguese empire during the 16th through the 18th centuries. Liam Matthew Brockey has organized the volume into three overlapping sections focused on religion, commerce, and politics, though discussions of such topics as identity, racism, public performance, and urban space are found in articles in all three sections. The collection began at a 2004 conference on 'Nodes of Empire: Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World', and Brockey not only translated three of the ten contributions, he contributed a useful introduction.

Though Brockey raises the question of what makes a city 'Portuguese', and many of the chapters suggest some of the parameters, the net is cast quite widely and the collection does not pretend to provide any definitive answer to what is Portuguese. He discusses how these cities were autonomous and sometimes newly founded, but simultaneously were crucial sites of imperial rule, sharing certain institutions and practices across a wide geographical space. His suggestion that these cities 'could not exist independently of their exotic surroundings' raised my concerns about the continued idea of the metropolitan world as the norm, while non-European world areas were formulated as the mysterious yet glamorous other (p. 8).

But the individual chapters do not continue that theme, as they demonstrate how each city became a 'node of empire' while also bringing forth an urban culture of racial and cultural mixing – not that such mixing was easily welcomed by people on various sides of the continuing divisions, but assimilation and amalgamation was a reality nonetheless. The cities shared common institutions of Jesuit missionaries, markets and trading centers, and Portuguese civic institutions, while operating in unique locales that unavoidably affected how religion, commerce, and government were practiced. In the end, the cities also shared the experience of the decline of the Portuguese empire, a process that dragged out over centuries until the cities were each detached from the empire and became, in most cases, significant cities in their own geographic locale. Brockey suggests that Portuguese cities as cultural and political spaces have been little studied, although there is a strong academic tradition focused on urban colonial architecture (pp. 10–11). This collection makes a key contribution to the historical development of urban Portuguese societies.

The first section on 'Religion and Empire', begins with José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim's article on the Jewish presence in Asia and North Africa. Tavim traces the history of the expulsion of the Jews from

Portugal, and their diaspora into other areas where they could find a more welcoming Portuguese presence. In North Africa Jews had connections to various communities that enabled them to act as intermediaries both economically and politically. However, they did not play the same role in the Indian subcontinent, where they found a more precarious existence. Tavim's approach is quite broad as he investigates similarities and differences in various regions. But it is also restricted, because he discusses a very brief period before the Inquisition expanded and deepened the restrictions on Jewish communities throughout the empire.

Charlotte de Castelneau-L'Estoile's chapter on Jesuits in Bahia, Brazil focuses on their role in the city of Salvador via a study of three public events. The first was a riot in 1610 which nearly forced the Jesuits to flee, the second was a procession of reconciliation between the Jesuits and the city government in 1614, and the third was a celebratory Jesuit procession in 1622. Though narrowly conceived as a study of a few decades in a single city, she raises some important themes, including how cities became stages for performing political tensions, and the particular experience of processions, which are described in a variety of settings in the articles in this collection. Though his chapter appears in the section on 'Politics of Empire', Stuart B. Schwartz also discusses colonial Salvador, and more processions. He suggests that the royal processions acted as an intervention into the 'hierarchies of power' in the city, with local (municipal) leaders appearing as alternative authorities (p. 193).

The third chapter on Brazil, by Kirsten Schultz, focuses on the development of academies in Brazilian cities. These organizations paid attention to the development of Portuguese culture in cities that were far from the center. But she also demonstrates how such activities took on local concerns and became a nexus of imperial and local issues. Though members were expected to write celebrations of the monarchy, by the 18th century members increasingly proclaimed the significance of Brazil in the empire. The writings of academy members came to emphasize the importance of urban order to the local elites (p. 241), and streets and squares became an urban stage with more processions that served to put forward ideas of power and authority. Some Congo displays were welcomed by the majority African descent population, but they also reasserted the predominance of white imperial rulers, and of the centrality of the Portuguese empire.

J. S. A. Elisonas's contribution may be the most surprising, and it is one of the longest, as he provides a detailed history of Nagasaki, Japan. While he does not claim Nagasaki as a Portuguese city per se, his evidence clearly demonstrates how Portuguese were present and made an impact. In the end, although there was a strong presence of Jesuits, that period of influence only lasted for seven years and it was never a Portuguese colony or settlement (p. 73). As he concludes, by the 1640s there was no Portuguese influence left (p. 102), making this the most fleeting example of the Portuguese urban presence.

The second section on 'Cities and Commerce' begins with Malyn Newitt's overview of the development and decline of Mozambique Island (Ilha de Moçambique) as a focus of governance and trade. In his assessment, the island's decline reflects the failure of Portuguese government individuals and entities to adapt to changing requirements in international commerce, coupled with geographic problems related to the island's small size and lack of potable water. But the negligence in developing Mozambique Island was seen in a general lack of attention to building or maintaining infrastructure, including docks and major buildings such as hospitals. That the imperial power never built a customs house on the island simply underscores the problem.

Glenn J. Ames discusses several northern Indian cities that were considered the 'Province of the North'. These important trade centers, including Cochin, were also focus of missionary attempts to expand Christianity. Goa, the best known center of Portuguese activity in the Indian subcontinent, is discussed by Diogo Ramada Curto. In his presentation on the late 18th century he emphasizes the hierarchy of Goan society, with slaves and elite, racial divisions, and Catholics positioned against heathens. Though its role as a port and trading center were important in determining Goa's identity, it was also a contentious urban space whose geography mirrored and perhaps also induced social differentiation. Curto examines an urban planning document that attempted to regulate the minutiae of people's lives, including endeavors to control women's dress (p. 207) and the recommendation that prostitutes should be confined (p. 208). The concern

with creating an orderly space (as also seen in Schultz's article on Salvador) gave a prime role to the military.

Macau is the focus of Isabel dos Guimarães Sá's chapter, in which she looks specifically at the intersection of religion and commerce in the charity society known as the *Misericórdias*. These quasi-religious organizations were controlled by merchants, and there were repeated conflicts between bishops and other religious leaders, the governor, and members of the *Misericórdias* concerning the role of each sector in providing charity and in regulating the work of the group. She describes a procession of the Corpus Christi, a common event in other Portuguese colonial cities as well (p. 170). She also describes how the tiny group of Portuguese in Macau maintained a Portuguese identity, in part through the continued practice of processions and other Catholic activities. Sá's chapter includes some of the only explicit references to women in the colonial cities, as they were frequently the recipients of charity in their position as widows and mothers (p. 152).

Catarina Madeira Santos's contribution on Luanda, Angola, returns to some of those themes, as she informs us of the development of the term 'Angolense', as elite residents of European descent came to recognize the local African context as essential to their own identity. She describes the city as a 'privileged contact zone' (p. 266) in which people of various backgrounds came together to develop a city with a unique culture. While much of her discussion explicitly refers to men as the members of the Luandan elite (p. 261), she also refers to women – both European and African – as the mothers who were raising children as Kimbundu (p. 268). Women's clothing, which incorporated colorful Indian cloths, was also a marker of Luanda's multicultural background (p. 272). The intermixture was also seen in housing, with one observer complaining of the sight of huts adjacent to modern buildings, despite the overwhelming numbers of Africans in the population and the cultural importance of African forms of diplomacy (p. 271). But her final comment about the remnants of the colonial physical presence points out that one of the few remaining structures, today a *Tribunal Provincial*, was once the palatial home of the slave trader Dona Ana Joaquina, an African woman who built the largest home of 18th-century Luanda (p. 272).

The chapters all share a high level of historical research and writing, with the authors drawing on little known documents to illuminate aspects of Portuguese imperial history. I appreciated the inclusion of the unexpected Nagasaki, along with attention to Goa and Macau, which invited cross-region comparisons and strengthened Brockey's initial discussion of the shared institutions and practices. I also enjoyed the historic maps and illustrations as evidence of how the urban settings were viewed at the time.

With my own interest in women's history, I did wish for more attention to gender. We know there were women in the cities, but with a focus in most chapters on the Jesuit presence and on official government and merchant activities, I was not surprised that these cities sometimes appeared to be all male. The information in Sá's and Santos' articles indicates that if researchers keep an eye open for references to women in the documents they will be able to analyze a more complete depiction of urban life.

Otherwise, this volume fulfills its goal of answering a decades-old reflection from Charles Boxer; he wondered 'how the study of colonial cities could fit into the broad interpretive framework of the imperial enterprise' (p. 14). By focusing on the early modern period but ranging across the globe, these essays bring new analyses to that inquiry and suggest innovative directions for future research.

The author is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further

Other reviews:

muse

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cat/summary/v096/96.3.cohen.html> [2]

Source URL: <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/773>

Links

[1] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/3751>

[2] <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cat/summary/v096/96.3.cohen.html>