

CAGLE, HUGH (2018). *ASSEMBLING THE TROPICS: SCIENCE AND MEDICINE IN PORTUGAL'S EMPIRE, 1450-1700*. NEW YORK; CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

REVIEW BY RITA KIRÁLYFY*

Hugh Cagle's *Assembling the Tropics* makes an original contribution to several important historical areas of the Portuguese empire, as it presents an insightful discussion regarding the Portuguese explorations in Africa, South Asia and South America with a focus on scientific and medical developments. The overall structure of the book takes the form of nine chapters that are divided into three main sections where each tropical region is argued in the order of their colonisation, all within the timeframe of the early modern period.

Cagle does an excellent job at highlighting the main differences the Portuguese explorers discovered in each continent, and the way these realisations affected their perception of the tropics. We see these individuals commencing their journey with the belief system deriving from Ptolemaist and Aristotle doubting that beyond the impermeable deserts of the south, any land could be found that nurtures human life; to then them finding an astonishingly rich flora and fauna that challenges their preconceived ideas of the global south. The reader is likewise introduced to the widespread philosophies of the Hippocratic environmentalism, according to which the state of the vegetation, that ensures the availability of fresh air is in direct correlation to people's health, indicating that a lush environment suggests an overall better human health of those inhabiting it

(p. 44). We see this view being challenged by the contradicting nature of the tropics, where despite the presence of all those magnificent jungles that span across the land from shore to shore, plenty of fevers and diseases threaten the well-being of their population, posing an even greater risk to the newcomers.

The chapters indicate that over time the increasing uncertainty regarding the colonisers' pre-existing beliefs encouraged them to rely more on their experiences and draw conclusions based on their own findings. Thus theories such as that of Galen concerning the occurrence and treatment of illnesses gradually became obsolete, as the pioneering settlers got exposed to the influences of the foreign land and familiarised themselves with the healing materials and habits of the aboriginals. The newly emerged theories and practises that derived from the combination of personal discoveries and observed techniques provided the base for such groundbreaking works as Abreu's *Tratado de las siete enfermedades* or Brandão's *Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil*.

Cagle does a wonderful job at demonstrating the step-by-step process of these discoveries in each continent, while highlighting the different connections that contributed to the transformed perception of the Portuguese conquerors, who gradually acquired an understanding of these tropical lands as a whole. As a result,

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through the increasing amount of overseas interactions, a number of all-encompassing conclusions were drawn and the possibility emerged for such formative cross continental endeavours to be realised, as the «intratropical transplantation of drugs and spices» (p. 261).

It is also worth mentioning that Cagle does not cease to supplement the more informative segments with interesting facts or thought-provoking details, such as the plans of Nóbrega to achieve intelligibility through the recruitment of Portuguese orphans and indigenous children to exchange their languages (p. 189), or the case of an African healer in Portugal named António who performed rituals to the local villagers while wearing feminine garments as described in chapter 8:

A slave from Benin, António's ambiguous gender (he donned women's dress and referred to himself as Vitória) was part of a carefully cultivated persona whose transgressive capacity implied the profound curative power by which António (as Vitória) earned both a reputation and a daily (and nightly) wage (p. 276).

These multidimensional passages not only make for a considerably more enjoyable reading, but they go beyond the scope of strictly historical arguments and create an opportunity for this and similar publications, containing valuable information regarding issues that are relatively rarely contemplated within the limits of history, to contribute to more contemporary conversations such as gender identity, or simply add another layer to studies conducted in various differing fields outside of history.

This impressively wide-ranging work not only provides a thorough overview of the happenings that took place in the tropics at the time, but also applies another

intriguing perspective by connecting back to Europe and arguing the effect that those discoveries had on the Portuguese population's thinking and everyday life. Another factor of this sort, besides the aforementioned geographical discoveries that transformed ancient philosophical convictions, was the blossoming intercontinental trade through which a wide variety of unfamiliar Asian herbs became accessible in Europe. These combined with the observed healing practises overseas gave rise to a whole new approach to science and medicine, which developed not only amongst the settlers but translated into newly emerging philosophies in the Iberian Peninsula and eventually the rest of Europe as well. Although these passages dealing with the European circumstances make up quite a substantial portion of the book, Cagle does not dedicate a separate chapter to them; instead they are neatly integrated into the main arguments without causing much disruption to them.

This publication, being a multifaceted work, is based on an extraordinarily large variety of primary sources and bibliography, from contemporary manuscripts to ancient philosophical records. One of the most significant figures of the period, whose influential and revolutionary work is heavily featured in the book, is Garcia de Orta, a Portuguese physician whose observations in Goa majorly contributed to the expansion of the shared scientific knowledge and understanding of his era. His activities in the Portuguese city of South Asia are discussed in great detail in Chapter 3-5 based on his personal notes, correspondence and his pioneering book titled *Colóquios dos simples e drogas da Índia*. Besides him a wide selection of similarly notable contemporary scientists are introduced as well, such as Abreu, Brandão, Macedo and Semedo, whose

recorded collection of discoveries also provided useful resources to those wishing to study the illnesses and treatments or the botany, zoology and overall nature of the tropical lands at the time.

Throughout the book Cagle uses a colourful variety of writing styles. For instance, we see depictions of the rich and exotic tropical scenery delivered in a literary narrative at the beginning of chapter 7: «In one moment, the elephant bent its left foreleg, lunged with its right, and drove a tusk at the head of its stocky opponent» (p. 208). These paragraphs are often continued in more of a casual tone which is particularly favoured when characterising individuals, while scientific arguments are treated with the appropriate manner, using a more moderate and professional voice.

Besides the author's engaging depictions, a number of fitting illustrations facilitate the visualisation of the contents. Covers of contemporary documents, maps, paintings and pictures of various other pieces of fine art complement Cagle's words all throughout the seven core chapters of the book.

Regarding the structure of the work we can't help but notice a slight imbalance between the topics. While the events of the South Asian and South American sphere are deliberated over the span of three chapters occupying more than a hundred pages each, discussions regarding Africa only take up a third of that quantity, in spite of the fact that the historical period it covers (1450-1550) is of equal length. The text does not contain any reasoning to explain this proportional imbalance. Potentially including an introduction to the lives of specific individuals who settled in Africa, similarly to Orta's case in the chapters discussing South Asia, or touching on the religious aspects as we see in both of

the other segments, could have helped to equalise the ratio.

Furthermore we might observe the author's frequent reliance on footnotes with the intention of further clarifying some briefly mentioned background information or to include bibliographic references, as it can be expected from such a substantial and all-encompassing work. Besides the contribution it makes to our shared historical understanding, this remarkably diverse multi-disciplinary writing covers a wide range of other subject areas as well including botany, medicine, science, cartography, alchemy, geography and philosophy. In certain sections the inconsistent treatment of this complexity has caused somewhat of an incoherent impression, however for the most part they are seamlessly linked to each other as they highlight the differing perspectives of the main discourse.

Lastly we might take note of a subtle change in the writer's tone in chapter 6 as he describes the interactions of the Jesuits with the indigenous population in South America. Unlike in previous sections regarding slave traders, Cagle characterises these main actors of the Atlantic scene as rather violent and arbitrary individuals. While it cannot be denied that their less than merciful approach and harsh treatment caused much distress and damage among the inhabitant communities, the author's change of tone argued in parallel with previous chapters, might suggest a sense of bias in the eyes of the lesser informed reader. Some might suppose that the writer's perception of the seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries is influenced by the views of our time. In order to avoid accusations of this nature, a similarly objective approach to those seen in earlier chapters would be advisable. Furthermore outlining the general views and philosophies behind Christian teach-

ings of the era might be beneficial, as it would provide an explanation to a number of the observed Jesuit practises. This way the actors of the ideology could be argued separately from the philosophies, creating the opportunity for a more objective discussion to take place.

All in all, *Assembling the Tropics* is an excellent choice of reading for those

who wish to discover the roots of modern science and medicine from a versatile multi-perspective approach that, apart from providing an insightful overview of the Portuguese empire's historical background, accounts for a number of significant revelations on various other disciplinary grounds as well.

BRITES, JOANA; CORREIA, LUÍS MIGUEL, COORD. (2020).
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Nos dias 6 e 7 de novembro de 2018 reuniram-se na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra mais de 20 investigadores portugueses, fundamentalmente historiadores de Arquitetura e historiadores de Arte, no colóquio *Obras Públicas no Estado Novo*, organizado por Joana Brites e Luís Miguel Correia. O orador principal foi o historiador inglês Roger Griffin, estudioso dos fascismos do período entreguerras. Na qualidade de moderadores do debate participaram Luís Reis Torgal, Sérgio Fernandez, Alexandre Alves Costa e José António Bandeirinha. A reunião das comunicações apresentadas chega agora no volume homónimo e em versão digital, de acesso livre.

Os coordenadores de *Obras Públicas no Estado Novo* pretenderam apresentar um quadro de leitura mais completo e complexo do regime de Salazar, oportunidade para uma reflexão sobre os diferentes modos de pensar e caracterizar o fenómeno.

Escrevem na introdução que, na impossibilidade de consensos, procuraram congregar diferentes perspetivas da historiografia nacional sobre conceitos e problemáticas a partir dos quais se tem desenvolvido a interpretação do legado material das obras públicas. Propõem um ponto de situação, parcelar e provisório, quanto ao conhecimento sobre os múltiplos programas de obras públicas, e uma reflexão interdisciplinar sobre a temática, aberta a reapreciações críticas e diversidade epistemológica (p. 12).

Tanto o colóquio como a sua edição em livro ficam marcados pelo quadro conceptual proposto na comunicação inaugural de Roger Griffin, «*Rooted modernism*»: *The ethos of public works in the «fascist era»*, ao introduzir as temáticas que vem abordando há mais de duas décadas, o fascismo comparado, o parafascismo, o mito palingénético, que está na origem dos fascismos do período entreguerras, e o «modernismo enraizado», que justifica o

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