

**João Pedro Marques, *Portugal e a escravatura dos
africanos***

Lisbon, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2004, 160 p.

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REFERENCES

João Pedro Marques, *Portugal e a escravatura dos africanos*, Lisbon, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2004, 160 p., ISBN : 972-671-118-5 (« Coleção breve : História »).

- 1 If God had not believed that slaves should be taken from Africa to the Americas he would not have created the trade winds which blew constantly from Angola to Brazil without prospect of return. So said the great Native American preacher António Vieira before going on to reassure his slave congregation that although their bodies were in chains their souls were free. You, he said, resemble Jesus Christ, suffering pain, punishment and insults down at the mill as he suffered them up on the cross. Priests in seventeenth-century Brazil struggled with the same moral and theological dilemmas that had perplexed Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas. The continuum is shown in the opening philosophical chapter of an excellent new book on slavery in Africa.
- 2 One of the problems faced by students and scholars of the African trade in slaves is that 90% of the published research on the subject is written in English. It is therefore particularly helpful that João Pedro Marques, the new director of the old Centre for African and Asian Studies in Lisbon, has digested this material and made it elegantly and succinctly available in Portuguese to the great benefit of students in Latin Africa. Over many years the author ransacked the Anglophone literature while simultaneously quarrying the Lisbon archives to write his great book, *Os Sons do Silêncio : O Portugal de Oitocentos e a Abolição do Tráfico de Escravos* (now happily available in English under the gently ironic title *The Sounds of Silence*.)¹
- 3 Marques' new pocket book has an admirably wide time-scale and a broad geographical span beginning with an excellent introduction to medieval slavery in the Mediterranean.

It is particularly useful to have put early Atlantic colonisation, based on Venetian concepts of sugar-planting using Slavonic slaves, in parallel context with Islamic slavery and the early trans-Saharan migration of forced columns of captives from black Africa. From the medieval the book moves on to Prince Henry and the desert phase of Portuguese overseas enterprise which brought slaves to Europe and the Atlantic islands. Marques turns his attention next to Angola which became, and remained for nearly four hundred years, the fulcrum of slavery in the western empire. For those too timid to embark on a reading of Joseph Miller's 770 page *opus* on *Way of Death : Merchant Capitalism and the Atlantic Slave Trade* – one of the most important but least-read of works ever devoted to Africa – Marques has extracted the essence of the arguments about slave catching, colonial credit mechanisms, profit maximisation and mortality statistics.

- 4 The chapter on the daily lot of a slave not only illuminates experiences under Portuguese law but compares their life to that of others. We are reminding us that 10% of 18th century slaves were Dutch, 20% French, 30% Portuguese, and a massive 40% British. When discussing the ideological justification of slavery one of the sources which Marques brings to life is the advocacy of Bishop Azeredo Coutinho, of Elvas, who was quite convinced that the greatest good of the greatest number, with the least harmful effects on the smallest number, required the maintenance of a colonial empire which in turn would inevitably be dependent on slaves, albeit slaves whose ships should have better ventilation and sanitation and whose owners should exercise their duty to punish idle workers with moderation. The bishop published his defence of slavery in 1808, the year after Britain outlawed the trans-national sea transport of slave labour.
- 5 Chapter 7 is a most useful digest of Marques' own *opus* on "abolition". He distances himself from Marxist arguments about the capitalist advantages of wage labour though he accepts that, when the Quaker moral imperatives kicked in, capitalist entrepreneurs – including some Quakers – were not slow to invest in the opportunities which post-slave economies had to offer. But although Marques accepts the argument that the outlawing of slavery was a moral agenda whose political time was ripe (as Seymour Drescher argued in *Econocide* thirty years ago) he argues that in Portugal it was the political need to retain working relations with Britain that turned the tide in 1842.
- 6 Lisbon University's Institute for Social Sciences is to be congratulated for publishing a book which is both readably popular and convincingly scholarly.

November 3, 2006

NOTES

1. See review by M. CAHEN, *Lusotopie* (Paris, Karthala), XI, 2004 : 432-436.