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**LP**

Gabriel Paquette

IMPERIAL PORTUGAL IN THE AGE OF ATLANTIC REVOLUTIONS

**TD**

The Luso-Brazilian world, c.1770-1850

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I can recall the chalk curling over the blackboard in my teacher's neat, slow cursive, well over half a century ago: "1494: Charles VIII invades Italy; beginning of Modern Times". By the time I became a teacher myself, early in the 1970s, I was surprised that students could get to A level with similarly naive notions. When I made what was, at that time, a standard remark about Luther's typically medieval mindset, a boy put up his hand. "Please, sir, I thought Modern Times had already begun."

Today, almost no historian believes in "gradualism". Anxious to repudiate teleology, "master narratives" and the progressivist fallacy, we opt for a chaotic model of the world, in which change happens lurchingly, and in which causes are untrackable and effects unpredictable. Contingency has replaced causation in our descriptions of the past, as if Cleopatra had stuck her nose back into the story. But for the allure it added to her face, or the want of a nail, or the non-delivery of a telegram, or the vagaries of a railway timetable, the course of history might have been different.

In partial consequence, perhaps, historians have been drawn to the study of sudden ruptures. Across the history of the New World, for instance, are two trench-like traumas: conquest by European invaders, and expulsion of the imperial powers. They roughly fit conventional periodization, marking off the early modern era. Students of the colonial period tend to depict "a world turned upside down", unfamiliar to its own inhabitants. Their counterparts who study independence reveal *contracti rudera mundi*, reconfigured by nationalism, republicanism and revulsion against the old empires. But the deeper the specialists dig into the trenches, the closer they get to the unchanging bedrock beneath. We are retrieving, I think, a sense of previously undervalued continuities: how indigenous polities, economies and cosmogonies survived conquest; and how independence frustrated impending changes of the colonial era, while perpetuating aspects of colonialism and stimulating transatlantic traffic. Paradoxical as it may seem, "rupturism" leads us back to a kind of gradualism.

Gabriel Paquette's work perfectly exemplifies the trend, discerning a recognizably Luso-Brazilian world before and after the independence of Brazil. In the first half of *Imperial Portugal in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions*, the

author shows - with pleasing elegance as well as abundant evidence - that the dissolution of the empire "intensified interaction between the two shores of the Atlantic". Rupture happened by accident in "a single system", where "an 'integrationist' vision of empire" had its "heyday" between 1770 and 1810. The Napoleonic wars and the treaty of 1810 between Britain and Portugal disrupted, but did not doom, the empire. The second half of the book completes the picture by showing how ties of sentiment, culture, migration, dynastic entanglement and abiding common interests in Portugal's African colonies kept the elements of the Luso-Brazilian world mutually involved in the nineteenth century. "Old connections persisted." The colonial past was "legally extinct but ... not fully eviscerated". Students of the Hispanic and British Atlantic will recognize parallels in recent and current work in their own fields.

Along the way, Paquette makes many important contributions to knowledge. He casts new light on the origins of British "business imperialism" in Portugal and Brazil. He presents an unusually convincing picture of Brazil's first Emperor, Pedro I, by accepting the mercurial inconsistencies of his character and politics. His account of the exiles from Manuelist Portugal does justice to the diversity of "a motley crew. .. of various political hues".

There are a few imperfections. Emphasis on high politics, though justifiable in terms of the author's remit, means that readers get no sense of what the reconfiguration of the Portuguese Atlantic meant to most inhabitants. At one point - mercifully brief - Paquette abandons his usual sensitivity to the evidence and endorses Lawrence Stone's categories for analysing causes: "preconditions, precipitants and triggers". Paquette perhaps underestimates the fissile effects of creolism and the landward wrench of settlement and exploitation in eighteenth-century Brazil. His emphasis on the success of the late colonial regime accords ill with his admission that reforms "failed to produce many effects". The shift of focus to Portugal and Africa in the second half of the book leaves the reader wondering whether the effects of Brazil's internal conflicts in the nineteenth century have been underplayed. Paquette could have strengthened his case by engaging more freely with work on other empires. As it is, he accepts too readily that there was an "Age of Revolutions" elsewhere in the Atlantic, unechoed in Brazil.

It is inspiring to be told that we should speak of "degrees of independence" and reject "the neat demarcation between colonial and national history". It is comforting to find a historian alert to "fuzziness, wobbliness, ambiguity" and ambivalence. Some readers may be disappointed at the hesitancy of the final summation, in which Paquette sees both "discontinuity and seamless transition" at work. But his willingness to relish the beguiling contradictions of evidence helps to make this painstaking, scholarly, revealing and judicious work thoroughly admirable.

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