

A medieval manuscript illustration depicting a rural scene. In the background, a small hut with a thatched roof stands on a hill. To the right, a person in a red tunic is working in a field. In the foreground, a person in a green tunic is carrying a large basket on their head. A young child in a white dress is holding a stick and a small object. A goat is standing in the lower center. A person in a blue tunic is kneeling and working with a small object. The background is a solid gold leaf.

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ESSAYS ON PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN LATE MEDIEVAL IBERIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

1100-1500

FLÁVIO MIRANDA
(COORD.)



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Harvest scene, c. 1340'. Attributed to the Illustratore (Andrea da Bologna?)
(Italian, active 2nd quarter of 14th century).
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**TOWARDS THE MARKET.
PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN LATE MEDIEVAL
IBERIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

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Abstract

From the tenth century onwards, technical and technological advancements in agriculture resulted in an unprecedented growth of cultivated land in Europe. Little by little, Europeans witnessed a progressive integration of markets linked by overland transport and maritime connections in a way that would forever change their societies and economy. This essay introduces this volume and presents the essays published, arguing that research on production and commerce significantly points to a medieval economy moving towards the market.

Resumo

A partir do século X, avanços técnicos e tecnológicos permitiram um avanço na agricultura que resultou num crescimento

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de área cultivada sem precedentes na Europa. A pouco e pouco, os europeus assistiram a uma progressiva integração de mercados conectados por transporte terrestre e marítimo de uma forma que mudou para sempre as sociedades e a economia. Este ensaio efetua a introdução do volume e apresenta os estudos publicados, discutindo sobre como a investigação de temas de produção e comércio apontam de forma significativa para uma economia medieval que se move em direção ao mercado.

Introduction

From the tenth century onwards, technical and technological advancements in agriculture resulted in an unprecedented growth of cultivated land in Europe. Although these changes might seem less vibrant than the ensuing transformations that shaped urban life and trade, they became decisive in breaking the ‘vicious circle of low population, low production, and low consumption,’ which lasted for centuries since the fall of the Roman Empire.¹ With the rise of cities and urbanised population, a new era of ‘strong specialisation and commercialisation of the economy’ slowly began to change certain parts of Europe.² Large agricultural farmers continued to coexist with subsistence-oriented agriculture, but the economic interaction between producers and consumers became more frequent and difficult to escape. Little by little, Europeans started to witness a progressive integration of markets linked by overland transport

¹ LOPEZ, Roberto Sabatino – *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971, p. 27.

² VAN BAVEL, BAS – *Manors and Markets. Economy and Society in the Low Countries, 500-1600*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 1-2.

and maritime connections in a way that would forever change their societies and economy.³

Historians have written a good number of studies about the production and commerce of late-medieval Europe and the Mediterranean. For those investigating the primary sectors, the literature covers almost every activity, with works having been published on cereals, wine, sugar, salt production, among others.⁴ The history of trade and traders is, perhaps, even more complete, as researchers have been drawn to the details about merchant companies, trading routes, shipping vessels, brokerage, urban power, law merchant, banking, insurance, and institutional development.⁵

This economic drive occurred during profound political, social, and religious change. In certain parts of Europe, city-states emerged as the standard form of polity, breaking away from previous ruling models and thrusting a new era of urban life and economic development. This period was also marked by the zenith of Islam throughout the Middle East, the Maghreb, and the Iberian Peninsula. Its people

³ BLOCKMANS, Wim; KROM, Mikhail; WUBS-MROZEWICZ, Justyna – Maritime Trade Around Europe 1300-1600. Commercial Networks and Urban Autonomy. In BLOCKMANS, Wim; KROM, Mikhail; WUBS-MROZEWICZ, Justyna – *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade Around Europe 1300-1600*. London: Routledge, 2017, p. 1.

⁴ The footnotes in this essay do not claim to provide an exhaustive bibliography. See MARQUES, A. H. de Oliveira – *Introdução à História da Agricultura em Portugal. A questão cerealífera durante a Idade Média*. 3 ed. Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, 1978; UNWIN, Tim – *Wine and the Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade*. London: Routledge, 1991; OUERFELLI, Mohamed – *Le Sucre. Production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale*. Leiden: Brill, 2008; HOCQUET, Jean-Claude, SARRAZIN, Jean-Luc (eds.) – *Le sel de la Baie. Histoire, archéologie, ethnologie des sels atlantiques*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006.

⁵ See, for instance, TOGNETTI, Sergio – *Il Banco Cambini. Affari e mercati di una compagnia mercantile-bancaria nella Firenze del XV secolo*. Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1999; HOCQUET, Jean-Claude – *Denaro, Navi e Mercanti a Venezia, 1200-1600*. Roma: Veltro, 1999; KIM, Keechang – *Aliens in Medieval Law: The Origins of Modern Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; SPUFFORD, Peter – *Power and Profit. The Merchant in Medieval Europe*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003; CASADO ALONSO, Hilario – *El Triunfo de Mercurio. La presencia castellana en Europa (siglos XV Y XVI)*. Burgos: Cajacírculo, 2003; CECCARELLI, Giovanni – *Risky Markets. Marine Insurance in Renaissance Florence*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

revolutionised agricultural production with their innovative techniques and knowledge. Despite pockets of peaceful cross-cultural coexistence in Iberia and the Mediterranean, the Latin Church orchestrated the religious wars known as the crusades, which would ultimately shape Europe's economy. A good example of this is the conquest of Lisbon, in 1147, by Portugal's first king with the aid of Northern European crusaders. For centuries, the Islamic al-Lixbûnâ had remained integrated in the economy of the al-Andalus and the Dār al-Islam. Still, the Christian conquest slowly realigned its productive hinterland and supply routes to other sociocultural geographies. Thus, by the end of the Middle Ages, Lisbon had gained economic ascendance to become one of the greatest commercial gateways of Western Europe during the First Global Age.⁶ Research using historical, palaeoecological, and biological evidence has also pointed out how climate change, the Black Death, and warfare triggered demographic decline and economic contraction in several parts of Europe. Dubbed as "the Great Transition", which lasted from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, this blend of natural and human causes interrupted a 'sustained phase of European expansion, cultural efflorescence and trans-Euroasian commercial integration'.⁷ Unequal, however, in its impact across the continent, since research demonstrates that the Iberian Peninsula, for instance, overcame the late-medieval crisis faster than Northern European markets.⁸

⁶ ANDRADE, Amélia Aguiar & Flávio MIRANDA – Lisbon. Trade, Urban Power and the King's Visible Hand. In *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade around Europe, 1300-1600: Commercial Networks and Urban Autonomy*, edited by BLOCKMANS, Wim, Justyna WUBS-MROZEWICZ and Mikhail KROM. London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 333-351.

⁷ CAMPBELL, Bruce M. S. – The Great Transition. Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 1.

⁸ CASADO ALONSO, Hilario – ¿Existió la crisis del siglo XIV? Consideraciones a partir de los datos de la contabilidad de la catedral De Burgos. In Castilla y el mundo feudal. In VAL VALDIVIESO, Isabel del & Pascual MARTÍNEZ SOPENA (eds.) – Homenaje al Profesor Julio Valdeón. Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, Universidad de Valladolid, 2009; FURIÓ DIEGO, Antoni (ed.) – La Crisis de la Baja Edad Media.

Through specific case studies, this book aims at understanding how these pieces of the medieval economy worked and evolved, how distinctive they were from one region to another, and what consequences local, regional, and international trade have had in people's everyday life. The scope used is wide, with production including both the agricultural and the industrial spheres. This choice allows us to dive deep into a rich and diversified primary sector, which had its supply chains of raw materials, different levels of specialised labour force, specific institutional backgrounds, and socioeconomic particularisms. The examination of trade adds a lively interpretation to the functioning of medieval economies and societies, by emphasising the connections with the productive sectors, the mechanisms of short- and long-distance commerce, the formation and integration of regional and international economies, the role of institutions, and the part played by distinct socioeconomic agents.

Perhaps one of the major gaps in our current knowledge of the medieval economy comes from the fact that we still lack in-depth, comparative studies about the particular aspects of production and commerce from the fringes of Europe and the Mediterranean. Fringes being understood as territories that were distant from the major economic and commercial centres (eg. the North of Italy and Flanders), only slightly touched by the principal trading routes of the Middle Ages. This book is all but a single contribution to this ambition of better understanding the peculiarities, the rhythms, the hindrances, and characteristics of the European economy. But one utterly necessary to build the basis of comparative research and economic interpretation.

Una revisión. Edited by Instituto Universitario de Historia Simancas, *Las Crisis a lo largo de la Historia*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2010; IGUAL LUÍS, David – ¿Crisis? ¿Qué Crisis? El comercio internacional en los reinos hispánicos de la Baja Edad Media. In *Edad Media. Revista de Historia* 8 (2007): 203-223.

Questions and Chapters

With the modest ambition of going back to the basics of medieval economic history, this book challenged researchers to reflect on simple questions about production and commerce: How did the primary and secondary sectors articulate with long-distance trade? Did certain parts of Europe specialise in production towards the market? To what extent were rulers, merchants, and institutions responsible for economic growth? Each essay delves into these questions differently, depending on their sources, methods, and approaches. But one of the main goals is to understand local, regional, and international complementarities and to observe continuities and change in institutions and policies.

The first question emerges in Raúl González's essay about Leon's urban market expansion in the early twelfth century. This chronology is particularly useful for identifying the construction of the connection between the countryside and the rise of an urban market. It explores the role played by manufacture and commerce, arguing that it might satisfactorily provide comparison with Lucca, Milan, and Rome for the same period. It goes on to examine urban growth by looking at the rise of prices, the agricultural expansion of Leon's surrounding countryside, the appearance of free craftspeople and specialised artisans, and the development of commercial exchange. Its conclusion points to economic and social changes that promoted market-oriented manufactures and the progressive monetisation and commercialisation of the Leonese society. Rather than an aristocratic-driven economic change based on luxury traders and commodities, this research highlights the importance of modest merchants and traditional commodities in market formation.

Fairs became one of the key nodal points for the liaison between producers and consumers in the Middle Ages. Traditional historiography and some works following the methods of the New

Institutional Economics consider fairs as important for local, regional, and international trade, but serving primarily as an overland trade institution. Paulo Cunha challenges this view by arguing that the late-medieval Algarve's fairs originated in close connection to maritime trade. Contrary to other fairs in Portugal that seem to have existed mainly to dispose of the hinterland's surpluses, Cunha argues that the Algarve's fairs aimed at attracting foreign merchants to its towns. In addition to providing empirical evidence to this hypothesis, this essay proposes new avenues of research for the study of fairs in other Iberian maritime regions.

Several of the book's common questions intersect in Tommaso Vidal's study about regional commercial integration in North-Eastern Italy from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries. Under the scope of the debates and methodologies of the New Institutional Economics, this essay examines institutions and the effect of competing powers in the process of market integration. By doing so, it manages to reconstruct the interregional economic integration of a region, with its epicentre in Friuli, and its trade contacts between Northern Italy and Southern Germany. One of Vidal's main arguments is that Friulian merchants took advantage of their linguistic and cross-cultural competences to establish long-distance trade, opening functional trade routes towards the Lombard plain and the Alps. Moreover, it challenges the established idea that jurisdictional fragmentation hampered economic development and market integration by hypothesising that intermediate markets had the potential to reduce costs without untying regional connections.

Long-distance market integration is visible too in Joana Sequeira's essay on Portuguese hide exports to Valencia in the second half of the fifteenth century. By combining Valencian, Italian, and Portuguese sources, this research investigates the nature of the hide trade in the Western Mediterranean by explaining how Tuscany's leather industries high demand for hides prompted the search for raw materials

in other parts of Europe and North of Africa. In this case, the essay shows how the demand for hides stimulated regional integration and the specialisation of European productive areas towards the market. It does so by examining the routes, the agents, and the prices in comparative perspective.

Taxation is one of the essential components of economies throughout time, and its analysis delivers important contributes to our understanding of production, commercial exchange, routes, investments, and urban and state policies. In José Mesquita's research, the fiscal regulation of Lisbon's wine market is the background for the examination of the state's capacity to enforce economic policies and to expand its jurisdiction over markets. This methodological approach, combined with the use of direct and indirect sources, allowed to determine how Lisbon's wine producers transitioned from self-sufficiency production to becoming suppliers of large quantities of this beverage to local, regional, and international markets. By doing so, Mesquita argues that the expansion of the wine-producing area surrounding late-medieval Lisbon is identifiable in the analysis of the taxes and levies the urban council charged to increase its sources of income. This essay thus contributes to the idea that local and regional producers stimulated the formation of a much larger scale of pan-European markets and trade in the later Middle Ages.

With a focus on the war industry, Miquel Faus Faus examines weaponry manufacturing and commerce in the Crown of Aragon from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. One of the first historiographical contributes identifiable in this essay is related to the fact that this research argues the existence of signs of proto-industrialisation. So much so that Faus Faus considers the weapon manufacturers of Valencia, Barcelona, and Mallorca as a cohesive and dynamic group embodying the necessary conditions to define it as a "war industry". Besides manufacturing and commercial exchange, this essay deals with two other relevant dimensions: arms

exports in wartime and the illegal arms trafficking. Its conclusion points to the existence of a network of productive centres, which connects different economic sectors, markets, and European regions through trade.

The contribution of each one of these essays to economic history is explained in this book's conclusion, with Carsten Jahnke stressing the relevance of regional development and commercial networks for Europe's late-medieval expansion. Jahnke's analysis masterfully highlights the peculiar aspects of economic growth from the rural and urban settings in the *longue durée*, proposing paths for future investigation.

Throughout the whole book, there is one common denominator. Notwithstanding the general approaches to production and commerce, every work seems to rally on an economy moving inconspicuously towards the market. Indeed, markets offer us a glimpse of the nature of the productive sectors and the span of the commercial networks that make it. This is noticeable in the research essays that examine the later chronologies of the Middle Ages, because of the steady crescendo of people living in towns and cities in Europe and how they exerted pressure on all sectors of the economy. But this is not absent from the essays investigating European realities of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, meaning that societies began adjusting the economic circuits of demand and offer very early in time.

The correlation between markets and culture is, alas, not present in this book. Fascinating debates have emerged, in the past decades, regarding the institutional and social peculiarities of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian merchants in Europe and the Mediterranean.⁹ Through

⁹ For instance, the works by: CONSTABLE, Olivia Remie – *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World. Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; GREIF, Avner – *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade*. Cambridge:

the study of markets and commercial exchange, one can grasp economic and social interactions at a broader scale, making it possible to understand better the formation of specialised productive centres, the rise of cosmopolitan urban centres, the paths of divergence, and the role of politics and institutions. Moreover, it allows historians to identify the socioeconomic thread that farmers, merchants, and consumers shared in their daily lives regardless of their origin. Future research encompassing Europe and the Mediterranean, with the Middle East and the North of Africa included, will share more light on the intricacies of local and regional economic systems, the role of individual and organised agents, and the part played by institutions and states.

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