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Review of: Anthony Disney, *A History of Portuguese and the Portuguese Empire: From the Beginnings to 1807*

Teddy Sim Y.H.

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Teddysim@loquesea.edu

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Disney, Anthony. *A History of Portuguese and the Portuguese Empire: From the Beginnings to 1807* volume I Portugal, 416 pp.; volume II The Portuguese Empire, 480 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

Anthony Disney's two-volume history book is a timely and significant update in the scholarship on Portugal and its empire, given that the major general histories documenting the Portuguese overseas exploits written over the last twenty-five years or so required revision. These include the multi-volume *Nova História de Portugal* and *Nova História de Expansão Portuguesa* (1986-2006) directed by J. Serrão and A.H. de O. Marquez as well as the *Portugal no Mundo* (1989) directed by L. de Albuquerque. In the same time frame and on the regional colonial histories, the "Portuguese in India" and in "colonial Brazil" (as the books were titled) was explored by M. Pearson (1987) and L. Bethell (1987) respectively. In the 1990s, another multi-volume book set (*História de Expansão Portuguesa*, 1998) was directed by F. Bethencourt and K. Chaudhuri. Two general colonial histories can be found in Luis Filipe F.R. Thomaz' *De Ceuta a Timor* (1994) and A.J. Russell-Wood's *Portuguese Empire 1415-1808* (1998). On the East, a survey of "the Portuguese Empire in Asia" (as the book was titled) by S. Subrahmanyam (1993) can be found covering the period from 1500 to 1700. At the turn of the millennium to 2007, M. Newitt and Bethencourt wrote and edited a further two general Portuguese colonial histories, focusing more intently on expansion [*A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion 1400-1668* (2005), and *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion 1400-1800* (2007) respectively]. In terms of an update for the English audience, Disney's *History of Portuguese and the Portuguese Empire* is doubly welcomed. The edited volume by Bethencourt in 2007 touches on important topics sprawling the geographical breadth of the Portuguese empire but lacks a coherence (for instance, in terms of bibliographical consolidation) found in a single-author work. The recent work by Newitt compares favorably but Disney stretches the update on 'expansion' to the whole of the 18th century till the Napoleonic upheaval and the shift of the seat of the Portuguese monarchy to Brazil at the dawn of 19th century. The update to 1668 in Newitt's work or, to 1700 as in Subrahmanyam's work, may have reflected the "level of comfort" accommodated by the historiography of 18th-century empire developments at the time of writing. Only the multi-volume works directed by Portuguese historians afforded more coverage (for instance, Serrão directed *Nova Histórias*).

Of the 12 chapters on the empire in Disney's book, one-third of these are devoted to the treatment of the events in the late 17th and 18th centuries. Disney's 'general history' and chronological approach also aims to trace

developments in Portugal hand-in-hand with overseas events, and this is achieved in the first volume of the set. Developments in Portugal cannot be easily disaggregated from happenings in the colonies and works tracing the history of the Portuguese empire sometimes incorporate a separate chapter on home (as is witnessed in Subrahmanyam's book) but more often than not, try to weave developments at home into the main narrative of the empire (as in Newitt's, Pearson's or Bethencourt's work). In fact, in terms of developments at home, Disney traces the beginning of the Portuguese people in his book from the Stone Age. Despite a more equitable treatment this leads to, the style of presentation means that the reader has to make a more conscious personal effort to link up what he reads of Portugal (volume 1) and what transpired in the colonies (volume 2).

Disney's volume on empire, like Luis Filipe Thomaz' work and the older work of B. Diffie and G. Winius (*Foundations of Portuguese Empire*), traces the beginning of the Portuguese empire from the first venture abroad at Ceuta; the roots of the Neo-Reconquest is explored in volume 1. On North Africa, for instance, Disney again drew upon the latest findings from, for example, A. Farinha's monograph on the Portuguese in Morocco published in 2002 to bring up to date the state of field of the Portuguese enterprise there. The two-volume set features a useful glossary and a lengthy list of bibliography, of which the sources listed, are at least quoted and footnoted once. It would be desirable if the author offered some form of a bibliographic essay write-up so that younger scholars can be shown a clearer beacon in their forays into the field. The work spares no space for illustrations except for those on the cover. Maps, however, are amply well-endowed at the beginning of each volume.

Disney's work attempts to explore several areas but is admittedly weaker in accounting on culture and the evolution of ideas within Portugal and the Empire. When asked in a recent seminar on the writing experience of the two-volume books and how he would like to see his contribution, Disney commented that he hoped for his work would be seen "as an update on the historiography of the field". Seen in this way, Disney's 'general history' can act as an enduring signpost so that others may build upon this 'on-going' work; and hopefully, the historiography of Portuguese empire will not lapse far behind the colonial histories of the British and Dutch empires which appear to be more popularized and better resource-endowed in terms of research.

Teddy Sim Y.H.
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore