Tamar Herzog

Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas.

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In *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas*, Tamar Herzog examines how territorial boundaries were established in South America and in the Iberian Peninsula, moving far beyond the discussion of military conflicts, papal bulls, and treaties. She sees the territorial divisions in South America and the Iberian Peninsula as “the end result of complex processes and the result of appropriations carried out by hundreds of individuals in thousands of daily interactions (8). Settlers, nobles, military men, friars, missionaries, governors, municipal authorities, as well as indigenous peoples were among the historical groups who set boundaries. Herzog cushions her detailed historical analysis in her legal training. She argues that Spain and Portugal used both violent and peaceful strategies to subject the indigenous peoples, which subjugation had territorial implications across the Americas. She envisions the penetration of Europeans into the Americas as chaotic and haphazard, and lacking a firm judicial basis, “since allegations were open to reinterpretation” (69). She demonstrates how boundary questions were similarly negotiated and contested in both Spain and Portugal and in the Americas. Territorial disputes in Europe, however, were distinctive, in that they mutated over time and endured for as long as six centuries. One of her main contributions, therefore, is to question how we write history.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part 1, “Defining Imperial Spaces: How South America Became a Contested Territory,” Herzog focuses on the case of the territorial conflict of Colonia de Sacramento and the Jesuit missions in the Río de la Plata and Brazil. She underscores the importance of how indigenous peoples became vassals of the crown who, in return for their loyalty and willingness to submit to royal laws of Spain and Portugal, freely enjoyed their property and benefited from all the agreements and privileges that the laws gave them. This practice, however, came into question with the eventual signing of the Treaty of Madrid (1750), which the Jesuits had opposed throughout the 1740s by sending missives to the Spanish king and his confessor asking the former not to sign the treaty. The Jesuits argued that the king could not unilaterally abandon the Indians who were his vassals. The indigenous peoples verbally protested the evacuation order and discussed the justness of their cause with the priests, as well as the military commanders who came to implement the terms of the treaty. The natives also sent missives to authorities in Buenos Aires, insisting that the land was theirs and could not be given to Portugal

without their consent. In the 1750s and 1760s, Spanish Jesuits argued that Portugal had absolutely no rights to the territory east of the Uruguay River, because Indians inhabiting the region had converted to Christianity and had become vassals of Spain. The Portuguese, however, were adept at portraying the Jesuits not as Spaniards, but as independent antagonists who were intruding on their territories and presented their dispute not on any religious grounds. Herzog's insights provide a better understanding of the politics of conversion in the mid- to late eighteenth century, which stressed indigenous political allegiance and acculturation.

In Part 2, "Defining European Spaces: The Making of Spain and Portugal in Iberia," traces the history of these countries since the ninth century. The author views the emergence of Portugal not as a part of the Reconquest but as the end result of a highly complex multilogue among a great variety of groups with an enormous diversity of interests. The emergence of Portugal was only gradual and its borders were constantly questioned, negotiated, and reaffirmed well into the twentieth century. As in the New World, territorial discussions in Europe focused on possession. Treaties and papal bulls framed the dynamics and structured conversations, but territorial issues could not be sufficiently resolved through these documents. Herzog emphasizes the importance of locals, rather than the king, in maintaining territorial divisions in Europe. She concludes that the history of Portugal and Spain were tightly connected to one another even beyond the period of the union (1580–1640); the two had more in common than was traditionally assumed, and that Portugal had influenced Spain in ways not yet imagined. Locals in both countries also looked to one another for inspiration, as well as wondering why their neighbors succeeded where they had failed.

This is an extensively-researched and densely-written book that considers history from the bottom up. Herzog carefully weaves together cases of territorial conflicts to achieve greater understanding of the possession of territory on both sides of the Atlantic. She comes to view her subject of analysis not as a frontier or a border, but as territory and territorial expansion involving a wide variety of groups and communities. This scholarly contribution is best suited for the teaching of graduate courses on the history of the Iberian world, colonial Latin American history, historical methodology, and comparative frontiers and borderlands. One weakness is that the author assumes that the reader is very familiar with the histories of colonial South America, Spanish and Portuguese history, as well as certain realms of legal terminology. One would also have liked to read more of the individual voices that were directly involved with territorial negotiations, rather than have the author rely on

generic terms for ethnic and social groups, such as “Indians” and “Spanish Jesuits.” Nevertheless, this thoughtful and thought-provoking work offers many new perspectives that will help stimulate further discussion how historians think and write about the past.

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