

Paulo de Assunção

A trama e o drama. O pensamento económico do Padre António Vieira. Lisbon: Esfera do Caos Editores, 2013. Pp 365. Pb, €19.90.

Paulo de Assunção is no Jesuit studies novice, having previously published *A terra dos brasis* in 2001 and *Negecios jesuíticos* in 2004. This most recent book, *A trama e o drama*, is the result of his third doctorate in history from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, earned after receiving two others from the Universidade de São Paulo and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Assunção is not only an expert researcher but also a compelling disseminator of his research to the general public.

Despite his interesting methodological proposal, according to which he aims to contextualize Father António Vieira's unsystematic views on economics so as to better understand them, the first four chapters of the book resemble course notes made by a university professor. Only the fifth and final chapter addresses the subject that gives title to the book. Yet even here, the book is not devoid of problems. Assunção seems to have crafted a collage of notes dealing with fragments of Vieira's sermons and letters, which materials were selected on the basis of Assunção's intended research topic. These notes are presented in a truncated way without due analysis, with inaccurate and ill-founded characterizations of Vieira's economic views. Take for example the case of Vieira's 1642 "The Sermon of Saint Anthony," in which Vieira proposes that, as part of the war effort against Spain, taxes be collected from all three social estates. Assunção poses abruptly contradictory formulations of this position, first stating that Vieira "sought to break with the deep-seated idea of social strata in which each individual's social position was determined by God" (238) but then asserting that "equality in tax collection did not mean change in the social order" (239). In reading the book, it is not clear whether the contradiction comes from Vieira or Assunção. Moreover, despite his methodological premise, the author does not emphasize the military context in which the sermon was delivered. This leads to a belittling of Vieira, as the author concludes that the Jesuit had only a rudimentary understanding of the structural and legal foundations of the social order and therefore failed to grasp what the consequences of his proposal would have been (245). The entire book, and this chapter specifically, unfold in the same manner, moving from a collage of thematic summaries to general propositions that are barely sustained and not very elucidative. The text also suffers from numerous editing problems, including the repetition of words within sentences,

translation problems, and incomplete references in the footnotes. Even if we subscribe to the author's premise regarding the unsystematic character of the Jesuit's thoughts on economics, Assunção undermines his own case by concluding, in the final pages of the book, that Vieira's ideas were in fact the result of a rational approach to economics that drew heavily upon mercantilist thought (335–37). As can be seen, the book contains quite a few contradictions.

Assunção could have focused on the ways in which Vieira's views on economics were shaped by his Brazilian experience (the Jesuit had been raised in Bahia, living there from 1615 or 1616 until 1641), especially in comparison to the views of other Portuguese authors. Vieira's vision of politics and economics is strikingly global and comprises a significant body of ideas that merit further reflection. There are other surprising omissions as well. For instance, there is little about slavery, either Amerindian or African, nor is there any significant discussion of colonial exploitation, although it was a pressing issue in the world in which Vieira lived and one with which he often grappled. The book also fails to approach Vieira's central commitment to the New Christians in a systematic way, offering instead only a fragmented interpretation of its economic aspects—even though it was within the context of that commitment that Vieira's ideas on economic rationality merged with eschatological perspectives. Another cause for concern is the book's lack of methodological rigor, since there is no consideration of the various contexts in which Vieira delivered and later wrote his sermons, a problematic inherent in the study of these texts. Finally, Assunção's volume abounds with generalizing characterizations about not only the retrograde character of the Jesuit's views but also the kingdom of Portugal, as the author resurrects António Sérgio's thesis of the "cadaverous kingdom."

Given the unsystematic character of Vieira's thoughts on economics is the merit of this book is that Assunção has gathered together several fragments of letters and sermons in which the Jesuit deals with the topic. Assunção does not, however, provide an appendix listing these texts. Consequently, we are still left without a work that adequately summarizes this aspect of Vieira's thought. The shadow of João Lúcio de Azevedo remains, as this book falls short of the Portuguese historian's work published nearly a century ago. Aside from that dated volume, there is a paucity of works on the subject, as evidenced by the noteworthy yet still marginal circulation of the dissertation Richard Graham defended at the University of Texas in 1975. I am unaware of any more comprehensive studies regarding Vieira's views on economics, aside from a

few articles and some excerpts in works dealing mainly with other issues, including works by Charles Boxer, Carl Hanson, Luís Palacin, Alfredo Bosi, Luiz Felipe de Alencastro and Camila Dias. The need for another study persists.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00201005-24