The Flight of the Eagle: an Island Tribute to the Universal Iberian Monarchy at the End of the Sixteenth Century

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Abstract

During the sixteenth century, one of the axial moments in the reflection and production of utopias in what concerns the universal monarchy and the topic of the *translatio imperii* was the Iberian Union. Nevertheless, the process of empire formation, in general terms, remains under-theorized. This paper presents a text by a chronicler, the Azorean priest Gaspar Frutuoso, who, by the end of the sixteenth century, after the integration of Portugal in the Catholic Monarchy and the conquest of Terceira in 1583, compared the Portuguese and the Spanish expansion and glorified the universal monarchy patronized by Philip II who joined together both empires.

Keywords

Empire; universal monarchy; Charles V; Philip II; Azores

Resumo

No século XVI, um dos momentos axiais na reflexão e produção de utopias em torno da monarquia universal e do tópico da *translatio imperii* foi a União Ibérica, processo que, de um modo geral, não tem sido suficientemente considerado no quadro de uma teorização sobre os impérios. Assim, pensamos ser pertinente apresentar um texto do cronista e sacerdote açoriano Gaspar Frutuoso que, no final do século XVI, após a integração de Portugal na Monarquia Hispânica e após a conquista da ilha Terceira, em 1583, comparou as expansões ibéricas e elogiou a monarquia universal de Filipe II, que uniu os dois impérios.

Palavras-chave

Império; monarquia universal; Carlos V; Filipe II; Açores

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In the sixteenth century, Iberian expansion and, in particular, the power of the Habsburgs contributed to the centrality of the imperial paradigm in terms of political ideas, and to the debates on universal monarchy and the classical topic of translatio imperii, a theme that would continue to be present in many texts written in the following centuries. In that same century, one of the axial moments in the reflection about and production of utopias associated with the universal monarchy was the creation of the Iberian Union (1580–1640) when Portugal was integrated into the Spanish monarchy. Generally speaking, this process has not been sufficiently studied within the framework of the theory of empires, although Serge Gruzinski has more than once drawn attention to the “mixed worlds” of the Catholic Monarchy; and Sanjay Subrahmanyam has produced proposals for a comparative study of the connected histories and interdependence of the Iberian empires, considering even that the two political formations constituted “articulated entities.”

Now, as we witness a renewal of the history of the empires, which includes comparative analyses and texts that seek to question the very object of the “empire,” it is nevertheless surprising that there has been no major study so far examining the long-term object of the “parallel Iberian empires,” both of which were born of the dynamics of the

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fourteenth- and fifteenth-century expansion, which peaked for the first time in the sixteenth century. The fact is that it was the Iberian empires with their shared cultural matrix that first combined the use of specific concepts inherited from Rome—*dominium* and *imperium*—with new practices and indicated the road to follow, giving rise to reactions from other European powers that disputed their coveted military and diplomatic supremacy.⁶

I consider it pertinent, then, to present a text that is little known outside its special area of production, the Azores, which compares both the competition and the articulation between the Portuguese and Castilian expansions. Following a brief synthesis of the ideological matrix of early modern empires and the consequences of the voyages of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan, which are essential for contextualizing the analysis, I will focus my attention on the work of an Azorean chronicler, the São Miguel priest Gaspar Frutuoso. In the late sixteenth century, when Portugal had already been integrated into the Hispanic monarchy and the Marquis de Santa Cruz had conquered the island of Terceira in 1583, Frutuoso wrote a tribute to the universal monarchy of Philip II, which had finally united the Portuguese and Spanish empires under one master.

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