



Santana Pérez, Juan Manuel y Germán Santana Pérez.- *Puertas en el Mar. Islas africanas atlánticas en el Antiguo Régimen* (Valencia: Tirant Humanidades, 2022), 376p.

What has been the role played by the Islands during the early stages of the Globalization? The contribution of these isolated territories to the structural and historical shifts has been frequently neglected by the mainstream scholar literature. This is because most of these spaces have been considered as mere transit nodes and they were also located in peripheral regions. During the Modern Age and the consolidation of the imperial powers in the nineteenth century, the role of the Islands was strongly associated to the expansion of the steam shipping and the establishment of a global network of maritime logistical and technical support. The bunkering services also reinforced their economic specialization in a few cash-crop productions. Thus, North-South relations were fostered during that period following Ricardian trade schemes. Nevertheless, the confirmation of this global economic structure did not begin with the technical and institutional innovations developed during the Industrial Revolution. They had a very long story to be told.

The history of the Islands belongs to a relatively emergent academic literature. In short, specific contributions on the economic and social structures of Islands have been secondary research topics in comparison to continental narratives. This assumption is even more striking in the case of the African Islands. It is true that we find relevant contributions in certain specific cases like small the islands of Saint-Louis or Gorée, as well as other relevant historical places like Zanzibar or Reunion. Nevertheless, the long-term history of smaller islands and archipelagos in the African continent is relatively misrepresented. This book essay to set a milestone in this field of research.

This is not the first contribution of those authors to the Atlantic Island academic literature. On the contrary, this is the third book devoted to the history of the Islands, and more broadly those located in the Atlantic African façade. Their previous contributions focused on specific economic functions (e.g., fishing activities) as well as the regional social and cultural exchanges between the Islands and the mainland Africa. Their publication record in the last decades is outstanding and this book seems to be the consolidation of all these previous works.

Hence, in this book authors provide some explanations about the social and economic impact caused by the insertion of these territories into the dynamics of the early Globalization. Their geographical approach is quite relevant because they analyzed almost a dozen of archipelagos -and Islands- from Madeira to Santa Elena. Their aim is exploring common patterns of economic and social development during the Early Modern Age. Thanks to a massive mobilization of historical sources from twenty-five archives located in seven countries, the authors have obtained an overall

perspective of institutional and economic change in the long run. This fieldwork is combined with a remarkable literature review that will be useful for readers and experts interested in this topic.

The structure of the book is clearly defined in twelve chapters. The first part of this volume is devoted to a detailed description on historical sources. Then, authors prepared an interesting discussion on the existing academic literature. Despite they did a great review on this topic, it would be interesting to include the academic debate on historical institutional economics. That approach would contribute to a better explaining on the settlement models in these Islands they described in the book. Authors introduced the patterns of European settlement during the first overseas expansion, but little is said about the effects of mortality among those settlers in quantitative terms. However, the geographical introduction included in the fourth chapter helped readers to understand in which extent the environmental endowments influenced the economic choices in these Archipelagos. Those economic strategies are deeply analyzed in two specific chapters (seven and eight). In these sections, the volume offers an interesting comparative analysis on the introduction of different crops, including those oriented to the foreign markets like sugarcane. Authors remarked a similar trend introducing experimental cash-crops during the early decades of colonization. Thus, they noted that those crops favoured the introduction of those islands into the major Atlantic commercial networks during the Ancient Regime. These choices affected the labour organization in these Islands, including the massive utilization of African slaves. This volume is a valuable contribution to the scholar literature on the discussion on the factors explaining the persistence -or not- of forced labour regimes. Thus, authors made a fascinating comparative approach on the establishment of land rights and its further impact on wealth and labour organization.

Consequently, as peripheral spaces of the European overseas expansion, these Islands introduced a few common economic functions seeking for two main goals as authors suggest: first, consolidate the political control of the territory by the Iberian kingdoms, favouring the establishment of European settlers; second, consolidate export and commercial sectors to assure fiscal revenues and foreign exchange for the purchase of basic imports. This basic structure is found in those Islands during that Age and authors tried to evaluate its impact and the institutional plasticity observed there over time (Chapter 11). Thus, the long-term effects caused by the slavery and the slave trade is a common feature in those territories that functioned like commercial entrepôts during the Early Modern Age. In which extent this bloody and depraved activity marked the development path of those territories? What has been the role played by enslaved black populations in those societies? What can we learn about the social interactions between European settlers and African societies during the Ancient Regime? Authors made a relevant contribution essaying to provide a holistic approach on those topics. In fact, their analysis is not only focused on the evolution of the economic structure. Building on the long-term scholarly tradition from the *Annales*, authors introduced cultural and religious features where the building of specific mentalities are also studied. Thus, authors made a remarking contribution

trying to establish a taxonomy of traditional behaviour and specific Island mentalities which were the result of long-term economic, environmental, religious, and political dynamics (Chapter 12). Finally, this book fairly claims its place within the Braudelian academic tradition.

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