

The *Associação Portuguesa De História Económica e Social*: The First 25 Years (1980-2005)

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In November of 2004, in Lisbon, the *Associação Portuguesa de História Económica e Social* (APHES) held its 24th Congress. Over 150 abstract submissions, from Portugal and abroad, responded to a far-reaching call for papers. About 100 papers were selected by a Committee, and were presented in parallel sessions over two days, in a lively and stimulating environment. Thirty percent of the participants came from abroad and the same proportion of sessions was held in English. The papers were grouped into sessions with a wide range of topics, including medieval Social History, late modern Agrarian History, nineteenth century Business History, History of Economic Thought and quantitative Economic History. In one conference room, the development of agrarian institutions in the late Medieval and early Modern periods was discussed, and we could easily notice there how our colleagues presenting papers on England and the Netherlands were interested in learning more about institutional development in the Alentejo and Madeira – and vice-versa. In another room, we listened to an interesting discussion on the European Empires held by scholars from the United States, Portugal and other European countries, and by young Portuguese researchers studying abroad. In a third room, we were introduced to the most recent research on labor history and on the history of energy consumption. In short, this was a truly interesting European meeting.

The Lisbon Congress was relatively easy to organize – at least from the point of view of the Board of the *Associação*. That was so because it was backed by a tradition that was then 24 years old and also because the vast majority of Portuguese economic and social historians have strong international links. With such a body of experience, with such a development of international links and with such a flexible and lively institutional framework, the *Associação* can certainly go far.

The *Associação* was founded in 1980 by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and a group of his collaborators and students, working in the economics faculties of the Universidade Técnica de Lisboa (ISEG) and the University of Coimbra (where the association has had its headquarters since its foundation). In those early days, late modern and nineteenth century economic and social history were of predominant interest. And a small revolution was going on. At that time, we lacked firm quantitative evidence on the (metropolitan) Portuguese economy for the period since the 17th century, and much new ground was being broken. Interestingly enough, the topics that were chosen for investigation – namely Ancien Régime institutions and agrarian development, investment in railways and other social overhead capital, market integration during

industrialization, and the role of the State in nineteenth and early twentieth century economic growth – were topics that were being researched elsewhere in Europe (and the US). This was clearly a first strong sign of the international leaning of Economic and Social History research in Portugal.

The main concern of the *Associação* from the beginning was first and foremost the organization of annual conferences or *meetings* (we traditionally avoid the more formal designation of conferences). These meetings were of course to be open to all researchers and, most importantly, all *did* in fact come. A further major concern of the *Associação* since its earlier days was that it truly be an institution with contacts at universities across Portugal. This required, first, that its congresses be hosted by faculties and departments from all over the country, and thus that the *Associação* be a major meeting point for researchers in different institutional settings. Secondly, the fact that there has been an intense interchange at the national level has meant that there has been a balanced discussion of topics of national as well as regional and local interest, to the benefit of all involved. It should be noted that in some areas national topics depend on research at the local level and that local topics benefit from a broader discussion at the national (and from there international) level.

The high degree of openness of the *Associação* ultimately means that it is very hard to find in Portugal a living economic or social historian, be he/she well established, less well established, or a young researcher, that has not participated in some way or another in one of our meetings since 1980.

One further characteristic of the *Associação* should be mentioned. It is the fact that it has traditionally concentrated its attention on research and research alone. What we do is to provide the best possible environment for papers to be presented, discussed and developed in order that they may be published in academic journal and books. We focus on what has to be done in order to improve the quality of the research that is published. In the process, of course, there is also plenty of space for new research agendas to emerge. Is there anything important missing? Yes, certainly so – but we should keep on the same path.

One missing link is related to the promotion of research by young researchers, namely, the organization of summer schools and other events where graduate students can present research for their dissertations. One important step in that direction was made in 2001, with the creation of a highly successful annual prize for master's dissertations.

The *Associação* has a sister institution, which is the *Revista de História Económica e Social*, which was founded at the same time, had Vitorino Magalhães Godinho as its first Director, and has exclusively featured members of our organization on its successive editorial boards. Since 1986, the *Associação* has also been a member of the International Economic History Association.

With such an enthusiastic response to the call for papers and with so many foreign papers and sessions in English, was the Lisbon 2004 Conference a blip or instead a further step in a changing trend by which a national economic and social history association is getting increasingly international? History seems to tell us that we are most probably looking at a change in trends. Our conviction that this may in fact be the case can be further strengthened by looking at what is happening presently around Europe.

Economic and Social History is increasingly becoming a European venture, as is happening with most fields of the Social Sciences. We may observe this not only in Portugal but also in other countries closer to ours, most of all, Spain, Great Britain, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, as well as France, Italy and Germany. The annual Conference of the British Economic History Society has recently opened up its call for papers so that a large share of papers presented there are on non-British topics, and that many of its participants are from overseas. In conferences in Europe and elsewhere, we find an increasing number of scholars from all parts of Europe discussing their research in English. The Europeanization – or

internationalization – of research is increasingly becoming a major concern of economic and social historians all over. Yet there are not many conferences taking place on a regular basis with a truly international or European character. In fact there are far too few, particularly conferences with parallel sessions where there is plenty of time to present and discuss papers. Thus, there clearly is a niche market to be explored and the *Associação* is well-placed to fulfil such a task. The next meeting, at the University of Évora, in November of 2005, will only confirm all this.

For more on the *Associação*, see our website at: www.aphes.pt