

The Aristocratic Estates in Portugal and their Management, 1600–1834¹

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Introduction

I would like to begin by making two preliminary remarks. The first concerns the way in which the Portuguese case fits into the context of this book. As far as I am aware, this book focuses on the survival of the aristocracy into the nineteenth century, of which the English and Castillian (and Andalucian) cases are typical examples. Its objective, I believe, is to explain the survival of the aristocratic estates through changes in the way these estates were managed and administered. Looked at in this way, the Portuguese experience clearly goes against the grain. First of all, this is because there are hardly any pointers to ‘modernisation’ in the eighteenth century, and, secondly, because the old aristocratic houses did not in fact manage to survive into the nineteenth century: there was an almost complete break-up of the aristocratic estates as a result of the impact of the liberal revolution.

My second preliminary remark concerns the extent of the available Portuguese bibliography on this subject. The fact is there is very little written on this, and most of what is available touches on the last phase of the Old Regime.² The information available for that particular period, however, is extremely comprehensive. For this reason, my paper will not follow the usual sequence: instead I will start with the period from 1670 to 1834, and then go backwards in time from there.

The peculiarities of the Portuguese aristocracy

There are two long-term historical features which somehow distinguish the Portuguese aristocracy and their estates from those of other countries. The first is the fact that in Portugal the various forms of lifelong or hereditary endowment of land to tenant-farmers – by way of *foral* (charter), *aforamento colectivo* (grant of collective leases), or by *contrato enfiteútico*