

Bruno Lopes (Évora)

‘Does confiscation explain the financial sustainability of the Portuguese Inquisition, 16th-18th centuries?’

It is widely assumed that the revenues from the persecution and repressive action upon heretics played a significant role in financing early modern Inquisitions. However, studies on the Spanish (Kamen 1965; Martínez Millán 1993) and Italian (Maifreda 2017) Inquisitions have shown that the institution did not rely solely on the revenues from repression activity to finance itself. In Portugal, little is known about the topic, despite the traditional narrative points towards the relevance of the confiscations in the financial health of the institution (Saraiva 1969). By the late seventeenth century, the Portuguese Inquisition changed its social mission, shifting from an organization focused on the repression of heresy to concerns over the market for social distinctions (Torres 1994). However, the financial implications of this shift remain mostly unexplored.

This paper aims to fill this gap by thoroughly examining the structure and the evolution of the finances of the Portuguese Inquisition between 1640 to 1773. To delve upon this question, it uses a new dataset of financial records from the Inquisition (account books and financial reports), as well as other qualitative sources, such as letters. Up to now, this kind of source has been underestimated by scholars, especially from a quantitative perspective. This paper argues that the Portuguese Inquisition relied on a triad of financial pillars. The first pillar was formed by the revenues from the Exchequer (mainly proceeds from the Tobacco monopoly). Evidence shows that this was a significant source of income since it contributed to the institution's financial stability in the long run. The second financial pillar came from the Church, as it happened in Spain and Italy (Maifreda 2017). Finally, the activity of the Holy Office constituted the third main source of income. This encompassed not only the repressive activity of the Holy Office (confiscations) but also the revenues from social distinctions (purity of blood), which became relevant from 1680 onwards.