“From horn to corn": the two regimes of Portuguese agriculture, 1250-1850.

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to account for the changes undergone by Portuguese agriculture from 1250 to 1850, from the Reconquista to the Regeneração. We identify two clearly different agrarian regimes. One, in which pastoralism played a major role, was characterized by high land/labour ratios, high-wages, and high levels of living standards. Under the pressure of demographic growth, it transitioned, over the course of the sixteenth century, to a second regime, in which land-labour ratios fell significantly, arable took the lead over pastoral production, and farming systems became considerably more labour-intensive. After a shift to lower levels, labour productivity, real wages and per capita food consumption stabilized all along the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We analyse the reasons for this evolution bearing in mind in particular that population during this period roughly doubled. Technological change in two key agricultural sectors underpinned the emergence of this remarkable (non-Malthusian) situation by fostering an agricultural ‘industrious revolution’ based on wine and in grain. The former built on a long productive tradition, while the latter – the massive shift from other grains to maize – was an outstanding case of a Columbian exchange. We resort here to newly-constructed variables (real wages, per capita food consumption, labour intensity and productivity, land yields, per capita agrarian output) in order to obtain a unified and consistent perspective over these six centuries. These variables are constructed from a new data base (PWR) of prices, wages and rents in Portugal which covers the period under examination.