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Edited by Malyn Newitt

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

The Creation of the Atlantic World

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Portugal and Spain developed two economic and political systems in the Atlantic, comparable in many respects with the Mediterranean world which had dominated the culture and economy of Europe, north Africa and the Middle East since the days of the Greek and Persian empires. These Atlantic worlds linked western Africa, the eastern coasts of North and South America and the Atlantic coastline of Europe and north Africa, and included wholly new societies brought into being in the Atlantic islands. The Spanish Atlantic system eventually extended to the Pacific, the Philippines and China, while the Portuguese system was linked to the empire that Portugal created in the Indian Ocean. These systems were built up through constantly expanding and increasingly interdependent economic activity, and by migrations of population and the cultural interplay of religions and ideas from all four continents. One of the first consequences of this interdependence was that diseases that were endemic in one continent, and plant and animal species from hitherto ecologically distinct areas, now spread throughout the Atlantic basin. Moreover, although these imperial systems were based on old and established practices, their novelty and very size demanded new concepts of law and sovereignty.

The northern parts of the Atlantic, including North and Central America and the Caribbean basin, for some time remained a Spanish world, with the Canary Islands as an outlying fragment; the southern part of the ocean, in turn, was almost exclusively Portuguese. This 'Portuguese South Atlantic' originated as an enterprise sponsored, and controlled, by the Portuguese Crown through official expeditions and embassies, the appointment of royal governors and the operation of royal trade monopolies. However, this was only a part of the story, and by the seventeenth century much of this south Atlantic system

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had evolved beyond the effective control of Lisbon. There were many people other than the Crown's immediate servants who embarked on economic enterprises and territorial expansion, or who were uprooted from their homelands to people this new world. The Portuguese Crown also enlisted many client groups to aid its enterprises. These included soldiers of fortune of many different nationalities, merchants, sugar growers and financiers from Italy, and later Africans and native Brazilians. Entrepreneurs, some of them Italians, were awarded captaincies in the uninhabited Atlantic islands, which they undertook to settle and which they developed in ways that sometimes ran counter to the interests of Lisbon, while the royal governors of the Moroccan fortresses and of the colony based at Luanda carried out their campaigns in search of booty and slaves with scant regard to any policy objectives laid down in Portugal. Other agencies were also at work. The missions sent out by the Church were, at first, instruments of royal policy, but by the end of the sixteenth century were acting largely independently of Lisbon. The Jesuits and the authorities of the Inquisition operated according to their own perceived objectives, while the direct intervention of Rome in the final years of the sixteenth century, and papal encouragement of non-Portuguese missionary orders, such as the Italian Capucins, challenged the control of the African Church by the Portuguese Crown.

Similarly, following the establishment of forts and factories in South America, Brazilian interests also became an agency in west African affairs and operated with little reference to the policies of Lisbon. By the seventeenth century, Brazilians traded directly with western Africa, supplying ships and trade goods and, in the years following the Dutch seizure of Luanda in 1641 when the Portuguese Crown was hard pressed in Europe, even providing governors and soldiers to reconquer and defend the Portuguese possessions in Angola.

Portuguese overseas expansion can also be understood as three separate but interconnected diasporas – three streams of migrants who mingled to form the new communities of the Atlantic world. One migrant stream was provided by ordinary people leaving the poverty-stricken rural communities of Portugal to make their living at sea or to search for new land in the islands on which to settle. Many of these eventually moved on from the islands to the mainlands of Africa and America as traders and settlers, carrying with them their language, religion, technical skills and networks of contacts.

These Christian Portuguese migrants met and mingled with the diaspora of the Sephardic Jews. The expulsion of the Iberian Jews who would not convert to Christianity took place in the final decade of the fifteenth century. Although many moved away from the territories of the

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Iberian rulers altogether, others found that the Portuguese communities that were being formed in the Atlantic were more tolerant of religious difference. Many Jews went either to north Africa and settled in the fortified Portuguese port towns, or to the islands and the mainland trading posts, from where they could put down roots in the coastal African societies. Most of the Portuguese communities in west Africa had numbers of so-called New Christians (*cristãos novos*), who practised their ancestral Judaism more or less openly (Docs. 4, 15 and 56). Others moved to Brazil and played a large part in the development of the sugar industry, enjoying official toleration during the period of the Dutch occupation (1630–54) and spreading from there to the non-Portuguese world of the Caribbean and the north Atlantic.

The third diaspora was that of Africans, sold as slaves by their compatriots on the mainland and taken to Portugal, the islands and the Americas. These forced emigrants contributed substantially to the peopling of the Portuguese Atlantic, supplementing the limited numbers of settlers that mainland Portugal was able to provide. To a large extent, the Portuguese South Atlantic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a creole world – peopled by the mixed descendants of Portuguese and Africans, speaking creole dialects of the Portuguese language, practising religions heavily coloured by African as well as European ideas and developing a texture of culture that owed its richness to European, Judaic and African traditions.

Medieval Portugal's Interaction with the Non-European World

Portugal, like Castile and Aragon, had a long tradition of contacts with the non-European world. Until the reconquest of the Algarve in 1249, southern Portugal had been part of the Islamic world of north Africa, and thereafter an Islamic and Jewish population continued to inhabit the south under Christian overlords. Commercial contacts with north Africa continued, and Christian Portuguese soldiers were often to be found fighting in the wars in Morocco. Portugal remained a country where Islamic, Judaic and Christian cultural influences met one another and merged, the mixture being constantly enriched by the import of slaves. The Portuguese obtained slaves from Muslim north Africa and, in the fourteenth century, took part in raids on the Canary Islands to capture slaves from among the native Guanches. Meanwhile, the Portuguese themselves were liable to be carried away as slaves to north Africa whenever the Moroccans raided the southern coasts of Portugal.

While medieval Portugal interacted constantly with the northwest Atlantic seaboard of Africa, it was also increasingly involved in the

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political struggles of northern Europe and the commercial expansion of the Italian cities. The struggle for power between the Plantagenet rulers of England and the Capetian dynasty of France overflowed into the Iberian peninsula, and English, French and Castilian armies operated in northern Spain and Portugal, interfering in Portuguese politics and threatening the independence of the Portuguese kingdom. In 1385, one of the decisive battles of the Hundred Years War was fought at Aljubarrota north of Lisbon, where an Anglo-Portuguese force defeated an army made up of French and Castilians and installed a new dynasty under João, the Master of Avis and bastard son of the former king Dom Pedro.

These wars saw the growth of a military class, which depended for its status and its fortune upon plunder, ransoms, patronage, the seizure of land and the spoils of war in general. In 1411 Portugal was eventually able to make peace with Castile, but the military class of nobles and knights continued to demand opportunities for advancement and an outlet for their energies. So, in 1415, ten days after Henry V of England opened a new phase of the Hundred Years War with his invasion of Normandy, his uncle by marriage, Dom João I of Portugal, launched an invasion of Morocco. The attack on the north African port-city of Ceuta was an official enterprise, planned and carried out by the king's sons, the Royal Council and the agents of the Crown. The intention was to establish a bridgehead for the conquest of Morocco, and this aspect of the plan was supported by most of the leading nobility. The propaganda of the time represented this attack as a crusade against Islam, and Zurara, the chronicler who recorded the events thirty years later, shaped his narrative to reflect the ideals of chivalry in the same way that Jean Froissart, on whom he modelled his chronicles, had dignified the massacres and plundering raids of the Hundred Years War (Doc. 1).

Throughout the fifteenth century, the conquest of Morocco remained a royal project. An unsuccessful attack on Tangier in 1437 was followed – once the young king, Afonso 'O Africano', came of age – by the capture of Alcazar Seguer (the modern Ksar es Sghir) in 1458 and the surrender of Arzila and Tangier in 1471. This gave Portugal control of a strip of the northern coastline of Morocco. Dom João II (1481–95) attempted only one ill-considered campaign in Morocco, but his successor, Dom Manuel, encouraged the renewal of attempts to conquer territory. Between 1504 and 1514, the Portuguese captured and occupied most of the port-towns on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, including Safi, Mazagão, Mogador, Azamour and Agadir (called at that time Santa Cruz). It was only after the defeat of the Portuguese army at Mamora in 1514 that the conquest of

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Morocco was recognized to be impractical, though none of the garrison towns was evacuated until the 1540s.

The capture of these Moroccan towns and the need to garrison them against the constant threat of attack meant that the Portuguese had to maintain an army at great expense. The Moroccan fortresses became a military frontier where generations of Portuguese soldiers were trained and saw their first active service. It was in these fortresses that outdated religious and military values were cultivated and became entrenched. Portuguese and Moroccans squared up to each other on the battlefield, re-enacting archaic rituals of single combat (Doc. 2), while the Portuguese commanders in the fortresses looked for opportunities to mount raids on the countryside to carry off prisoners, cattle and moveable goods (Docs. 5 and 6), as had been customary in the Iberian peninsula before the completion of the *Reconquista*.

Alongside the raids, however, a more peaceful interaction was taking place. Many Moroccans sought protection against plundering raids by recognizing Portuguese overlordship, and the Portuguese reciprocated by developing a thriving trade in horses, textiles and foodstuffs (Doc. 3). Jews expelled from mainland Portugal also settled in the Portuguese towns in north Africa and negotiated protection for themselves, the traditional tolerance of the Portuguese reasserting itself outside the borders of the kingdom of Portugal (Doc. 4). In these documents, one can see an informal empire of trade, religious toleration and cultural assimilation coming into existence alongside, and often in opposition to, the military purposes of the Crown and the aristocracy.

West African Trade

While the Crown and the military aristocracy took the lead in attempting to make conquests in Morocco, settlements were being made in the Atlantic islands. Although peace had been signed with Castile in 1411, adventurers from the two countries continued to compete for land and slaves in the Canary Islands. Slavers from both Portugal and Castile had regularly raided these islands in the fourteenth century, and various claims to seigneurial rights had been registered. The raiding continued in the fifteenth century with the difference that both Castilians and Portuguese now tried to establish permanent settlements, and frequently clashed with each other as well as with the native inhabitants. The attempt to control the islands should be seen in the same context as the warfare in Morocco. Like the Moroccan expeditions, the Portuguese fleets that attacked the Canaries were organized by members of the military aristocracy and were strongly backed by the Infante Dom Henrique

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(‘Henry the Navigator’). Major expeditions were sent in 1425 and again during the 1440s and 1450s. In this war of raid and counter-raid, the Castilians gradually gained the upper hand, and eventually, in 1479, the Portuguese recognized Castilian sovereignty over the islands. Their subsequent conquest and division into *encomiendas* took place in the 1490s at exactly the time that Columbus was establishing the first Castilian settlements in the Caribbean.

It was this rivalry with Castile that prompted the Portuguese to advance their claims to the other island groups. Madeira and the Azores were uninhabited and had only occasionally been visited by sailors looking for a convenient landfall. However, in 1419 the Portuguese formally took possession of Madeira, and after 1431 began to establish themselves in the Azores. Once again, the nobility and the Crown became involved, eager to secure seigneurial rights to these new settlements. The islands were distributed as ‘captaincies’, a form of feudal overlordship that promoted the entrepreneurial settlement of the islands while preserving the essential rights of the Crown. The Infantes Henrique and Pedro secured titles to the islands and placed their own followers as hereditary captains. Henry also secured the ecclesiastical rights for the Order of Christ of which he was governor, having previously obtained similar privileges in Morocco.

However, the peopling of the islands was not entirely a royal enterprise. Once the first island settlements had been planted, considerable numbers of peasant farmers and fishermen migrated from Portugal. During the fourteenth century, the Portuguese countryside had become increasingly deserted. The Black Death had taken its toll while the poverty of the land and the custom of establishing *morgados* (entailed estates) discouraged peasant agriculture. The *Lei das Sesmarias* of 1375, which created a legal framework for bringing wasteland back into cultivation, was a sign that the Crown was aware of a serious social and economic malaise. More and more people moved to the coastal towns to seek employment in commerce and maritime activities. Madeira and the Azores offered attractive opportunities for farmers, as their soils and climate were extremely favourable, and they provided bases for commercial enterprise and deep-sea fishing.

Also involved in the island settlements were Italian entrepreneurs. Ever since the thirteenth century, the Italian city states had been increasing their trade with north Africa and northern Europe, and an Italian colony grew up in Lisbon as the city became an important port of call for ships bound from the Mediterranean to the north. There was also a Genoese factory in Ceuta at the time of the Portuguese conquest. The Italian presence in Portugal led to the spread of Mediterranean expertise

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in ship design, map making and navigation, and to the Italians becoming partners in the entrepreneurial activities of the Portuguese kings. It was Genoese sugar growers looking for new land who became involved in the settlement of Madeira and the Azores, providing capital and setting up the first sugar industry in the islands. Italians were also to be prominent among the ship owners and traders who began to exploit the new commercial outlets in Africa. The Perestrello family were involved in the settlement of Madeira, Antonio di Noli was the first captain of Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands and a Venetian, Alvise da Cadamosto, not only traded to Senegambia but wrote the first detailed account of the island settlements and the trading activities on the African coast, giving a vivid picture of Europe's first encounters with sub-Saharan Africa (Docs. 11, 16 and 17).

The same combination of official enterprise and the activity of clients under contract to the Crown was to be followed when other island groups were discovered. The Cape Verde Islands were discovered and explored in the 1450s and 1460s, and once again Italians were foremost in their exploration and settlement, the institutional device of captaincies being used to secure their development. Here the Portuguese again faced Castilian competition, and during the war of 1474–79, the Castilians briefly occupied Santiago and claimed possession of the archipelago. Then, when the Guinea Islands were discovered in the 1470s, entrepreneurial captains were once again appointed to try to secure their settlement and commercial development.

Meanwhile, the traditional Portuguese practices of privateering and slaving were leading to the growth of commercial links with the African mainland. Ships would be sent to sea, either by their owners or sponsored by noblemen, to secure prizes and slaves to sell or important prisoners to ransom. If all else failed, the boats could return with a stinking cargo of seal pelts and oil. It was these privateers who first discovered the commercial potential of what appeared to be a barren Sahara coastline. In the 1430s, seamen began to raid the undefended villages of the coast, carrying off women and children and ransoming men of importance. Such raids put the local population on their guard, so that each year the raiders had to travel further to find undefended coastal villages (Docs. 8 and 9). In this way the raiders became explorers, seeking out ever more remote stretches of coastline. On one of these raids, contact was made with desert traders, who offered gold in exchange for foodstuffs and metal ware. The availability of gold attracted a lot of attention, and in 1443 it was decided to establish a permanent trading post on the island of Arguim off the coast of modern Mauretania, which the Crown leased to a consortium of merchants.

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Gold whetted the appetite of men of all classes, but the profitability of such speculative voyages remained in doubt until the return of a raiding expedition commanded by Lançerote in 1444. The excitement caused by the arrival at Lagos of a large consignment of slaves was graphically described by the chronicler Zurara, who gave it a central place in his narrative of the discovery and conquest of Guinea (Doc. 35).

By the 1450s, the trade in gold and slaves was attracting a lot of interest from Portuguese nobles and merchants, and also from non-Portuguese, principally Castilians and Italians. The Portuguese royal family was involved to the extent that it took care to secure the Crown's fiscal and juridical interests. All ecclesiastical rights were vested in the Order of Christ, while the Crown declared the trade of Africa to be a royal preserve, which meant that all merchants had to receive a royal licence and a 'fifth' had to be paid on trading profits. These royal prerogatives were granted to the Infante Dom Henrique who secured papal Bulls, which recognized the exclusive rights of the Portuguese Crown. However, such extensive privileges had to be effectively enforced against interlopers, especially during Portugal's war with Castile from 1474 to 1479 when the Castilians made a concerted attempt to breach the Portuguese monopoly.

Meanwhile, new communities with a distinct creole identity were emerging in the islands. Migrants from Portugal were ready enough to settle Madeira, which was relatively close to Portugal. However, fewer people went to the Azores and fewer still to Cape Verde and distant Guinea. Some of the captains tried to recruit settlers from the Netherlands and Italy, and it seems that one of the captains of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea arranged for Jewish children, taken from parents who refused to convert, to be consigned as colonists to the tropics. However, it was the importation of slaves from Africa that eventually secured the demographic success of the island colonies. Although considerable numbers of slaves were brought to Madeira to work the sugar plantations, the Portuguese element in the population always predominated. In Cape Verde and São Tomé, however, imported slaves soon became the most important element in the population. Portuguese settlers took African wives and their descendants formed a free black population, which retained strong cultural links with mainland Africa and had correspondingly fewer direct ties with Portugal.

These Afro-Portuguese creole communities established commercial relations with the African mainland, operating largely independently of the Portuguese Crown and its representatives. A new 'Portuguese' diaspora now began. Not only were people leaving Portugal to settle the islands and to man the trading and slaving ships, but the islands themselves were becoming the springboard for onward migration and

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further expansion. One of the captains of Madeira mounted his own slaving expeditions (Doc. 9), while ship owners based in the Azores began exploratory voyages westwards in search of new islands to settle. Meanwhile, the creole inhabitants of the Cape Verde and Guinea islands were themselves moving to the African mainland to trade, settle and make their fortunes. The interests of these islanders were soon to clash with those of the Crown.

The Crown Tries to Recover the Initiative

The Infante Dom Henrique had held the right to licence and tax traders going to west Africa but, after his death in 1460, the Crown's interest in Africa and the islands declined. The Cape Verde and Guinea islands were granted to captains and the right to trade in west Africa was leased to Fernão Gomes, a Lisbon merchant. The interests of Afonso V were clearly and explicitly focused on Morocco and latterly in trying to secure the throne of Castile. It was his bid for the Castilian throne that led to the war from 1474 to 1479. During that war, the Castilians organized fleets to trade in west African waters and to challenge the Portuguese occupation of the Cape Verde islands. The danger was perceived to be so great that the king appointed his son, the Infante Dom João, to take control of all the west African enterprises. João not only proved effective in fighting off the Castilian challenge, but devised a coherent strategy for a more direct exploitation of the economic opportunities in western Africa. So successful was he in the first of these that, when the peace of Alcaçovas was negotiated with Castile in 1479, Portugal was able to write into the agreement clauses recognizing its sovereignty in four of the five island groups so far discovered, as well as its exclusive right to control west African trade. Only in the Canary Islands did Portugal have to abandon its claims in favour of Castile.

Having secured for Portugal exclusive rights to trade in west African waters, Dom João, who became king in 1481, decided to build a fortified settlement in the centre of the gold trading region and to make the gold trade a royal monopoly. The fortress of Elmina, which was established by Diogo de Azambuja in 1482, was not like the Moroccan fortresses in that it was not intended to be a base for raiding the surrounding country or a launching pad for conquest (Doc. 22). It was a trading factory, whose fortifications were aimed primarily at discouraging other Europeans, or even other subjects of the Portuguese Crown, from breaching the trading monopoly. It was to be the blueprint for many such fortified factories that were later to be built in the Indian Ocean.

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Dom João also pursued a policy of making alliances with important African rulers. These would be cemented where possible by the conversion of the ruler to Christianity, thereby enabling Portuguese trade to expand and rivals to be kept at bay. The king's third objective was to find a sea passage to India and to ensure that such a vital strategic discovery would be made by Portugal and not by any of its rivals.

A number of traders had already made direct contact with African rulers, and Cadamosto's friendly and inquisitive account of his dealings with the rulers of Senegambia feature in Docs. 16 and 17. Dom João, however, wanted such contacts to be made whenever possible between two rulers. So, when he heard that Diogo Cão, a captain in his service, had established relations with a powerful king who controlled the land on the southern bank of the Zaire estuary, it became one of his priorities to turn this discovery into a firm alliance. The embassy of 1491 (Docs. 25, 26 and 27) had consequences that must have been as unexpected as they were gratifying. The ruler of the coastal province of Sonyo, and later the king himself, eagerly embraced Christianity and allowed a group of Portuguese, who included priests among their number, to establish themselves in his country.

João's third objective was less easily achieved. The king believed that a sea route to the East was within his grasp, and was determined that it would be a royal initiative that would secure it for Portugal. When Diogo Cão returned to Portugal to report on his visit to the Kongo region, Dom João informed the Papacy that the route to India was open. It seems that the same year he rejected the approaches of Columbus – which was not surprising as Columbus was seeking extensive control for himself over anything that he might discover. Cão was dispatched on another expedition, and after his death Bartolomeu Dias was sent to continue his work, while two spies went in disguise overland to report on the commercial centres of the East and to establish contact with the Christian ruler of Ethiopia. Dias returned in 1489, having found the sea route around the end of Africa, but the king did not immediately follow up this discovery. His more immediate concern was to send an embassy to Kongo, a clear indication that, at that time, developing royal trade in western Africa took precedence over establishing trade with India.

Cultural Interaction

The fifty years that culminated in the conversion of the Kongolese aristocracy in 1491 had seen numerous encounters between Europeans and Africans, while the streams of emigrants emanating from Portugal and Africa had met in the islands and had begun the creation of a creole