THE PORTUGUESE IN WEST AFRICA, 1415–1670

The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415–1670, brings together a collection of documents – the majority in new English translation – that illustrate aspects of the encounters between the Portuguese and the peoples of north and west Africa. This period witnessed the diaspora of the Sephardic Jews, the emigration of Portuguese to west Africa and the islands, and the beginnings of the black diaspora associated with the slave trade. The documents show how the Portuguese tried to understand the societies with which they came into contact, and to reconcile their experience with the myths and legends inherited from classical and medieval learning. They also show how Africans reacted to the coming of Europeans, adapting Christian ideas to local beliefs and making use of exotic imports and European technologies. The documents also describe the evolution of the black Portuguese communities in Guinea and the islands, as well as the slave trade and the way that it was organized, understood and justified.

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THE PORTUGUESE IN WEST AFRICA, 1415–1670

A Documentary History

Edited by

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King's College London
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This book was originally designed to be part of a series of publications (since discontinued) entitled Portuguese Encounters with the World in the Age of the Discoveries, and was to be the companion volume to the one on east Africa that was published by Ashgate in 2002. The general editor of the series laid down the format to which all the volumes were to conform. The object of the series was to provide a selection of original sources in English translation that would illustrate the interaction of the Portuguese with the peoples of Africa, Asia and America in the period from 1400 to 1700. The emphasis would be on the way Europeans and non-Europeans reacted to these first contacts, and how their mentalities and cultures were changed by the experience. This volume follows closely the original conception of the Portuguese Encounters series.

Anyone approaching the history of the Portuguese in northern and western Africa soon becomes dependent on the great collections of documents edited by Pierre de Cenival, António Brásio and Louis Jadin, which have never been translated into English. English readers have had to rely on the publications of the Hakluyt Society and the scholarly volumes edited by Paul Hair and Avelino Teixeira da Mota. These are the main sources from which the documents in this collection have been drawn, supplemented with extracts from von Ehingen, Pigafetta, Cadornega, Carletti, the Anonymous Pilot who wrote about São Tomé and the manuscript of Valentim Fernandes.

I am immensely grateful for the scholarly insights and editorial skills of John Villiers, the General Editor of the original Portuguese Encounters series. His vision and persistence are responsible for the appearance of the volumes, which have contributed substantially to widening the understanding of Portuguese expansion in the English-speaking world.

I would especially like to acknowledge help with translation received from Alexander Keese and Maria Eduarda Pinheiro.
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