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1

The birth of an Atlantic world

The shape of the Atlantic zone

The European navigations of the fifteenth century in the Atlantic opened up a new and virtually unprecedented chapter in human history. Not only did European sailors provide direct ocean routes to areas that had been in contact with Europe through more expensive and difficult overland routes (such as West Africa and East Asia), but the ships reached areas that had had no previous sustained and reciprocal contact with the outside world. Of course, this was obviously true of the American continents, and historians have rightly focused their attention on this immense new world in their discussions of the period. But it was not just the Americans who came into outside contact, for virtually the entire region of west central Africa, south of modern Cameroon, was also without outside contacts, in spite of the fact that it was geographically a part of the landmass whose eastern and western parts had long-standing connections to the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.[1] Thus, in addition to easing and intensifying relations between various parts of the Old World (which in this case also included West Africa), the European navigations opened up connections between the Old World and two new worlds – the two sections of the American continent and the western part of central Africa.

The French historian Pierre Chaunu has argued that perhaps the most

[1] The paradox of west central Africa is that its isolation in commercial and intersocietal relations was not matched by a uniquely different culture. Indeed, west central Africa was in many ways culturally similar to parts of West Africa and even more so to East Africa, especially in language and basic world outlook. The most common explanation for the linguistic situation is the "Bantu migration" hypothesis, which connects all African languages north of South Africa and south of the equator into a single family. But the separation between the western Bantu and eastern Bantu sections is ancient, reflecting, perhaps, an ancient isolation. See the general discussion F. van Noten with Pierre de Maret and D. Cohen, "L'Afrique centrale," in *UNESCO histoire générale de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1980–), 2:673–93.

significant consequence of European navigation was what he calls "disenclavement" – the ending of isolation for some areas and the increase in intersocietal contacts in most areas. This allowed an increased flow of ideas as well as trade throughout the world, ultimately leading to a unified world economy and potentially, at least, to higher levels of economic development.[2] As such then, the opening of the Atlantic was crucial in this process, all the more so because it was only here that true isolation was broken.

More than this, however, the birth of an Atlantic world also involved a gigantic international migration of people, certainly without precedent in the Old World and undertaken nowhere else in the field of European expansion. Not only did thousands of Europeans move to the Atlantic islands and the Americas, but literally millions of Africans crossed to the Atlantic and Caribbean islands and the Americas, becoming the dominant population in some areas. This demographic fact was not lost on early residents and visitors: Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdez described Hispaniola as a "New Guinea"[3] in the mid-sixteenth century when slave imports for its burgeoning sugar industry had changed its demography; Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão used exactly the same term to describe Brazil's sugar-rich northeast in 1618.[4] In the Atlantic, disenclavement meant much more than it did elsewhere in the world; it was not just increased communication but a reshaping of whole societies and the literal creation of a "New World." Moreover, it was a reshaping that involved Africa quite directly, for by 1650 in any case, Africans were the majority of new settlers in the new Atlantic world.

Understanding the origin and direction of this gigantic episode in intersocial relations requires a knowledge of the basic geography of the areas involved – areas in which transport by water defined for most purposes the entire region. One must always remember that in the age before rail and air travel, waterborne travel was immensely cheaper and more practical – despite the risks of storm and shipwreck – than overland travel. Not only could boats and ships average fairly good time, but they were energy efficient in an era that had few energy resources, and they could, moreover, carry heavy and bulky goods easily. Thus, creating a geography of the Atlantic area must take areas accessible by water transport as its first dimension, for use of the water would greatly alter other considerations of space and distance, linking regions that were

[2] Pierre Chaunu, *Expansion européen*, pp. 54–8.
[3] Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdez, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1959), bk. 4, chap. 8.
[4] Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, *Diálogos das Grandezas do Brasil*, 2d integral ed., edited by José Antonio Gonçalves de Mello (Recife, 1968), dialogue 2, p. 44.

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[5] Raymond Mauny, *Les navigations médiévales
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[6] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Muhammad
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[7] 'Ali b. Musa ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi, "Kitab Bas
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apparently distant more easily than regions that apparently lay close to each other.

The first of these great water routes was the Atlantic itself, opened for practical use in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. But the Atlantic was also linked to riverine routes in both Africa and the Americas, which formed a vital supplement to the ocean, bringing societies and states that often lay hundreds of kilometers from the coast into contact with the ocean and, thus, with other societies and states. Even the rivers that did not allow ocean-going vessels to pass into interior regions (because of falls, narrows, or sandbanks) served as connections to extensive travel and commercial networks in the interior. The combination of ocean and river routes defined the shape of the Atlantic zone.

But one must not simply look at a map of the Atlantic and imagine that it was equally penetrable and that those who sailed it had equal access to all parts of the zone. In many ways, in the days of wooden sailing ships, the ocean was as much channeled as were rivers, whose direction of flow is clearly defined. No sailor could ignore the patterns of prevailing winds and currents on the ocean. This was crucial for the development of Atlantic navigation, for the winds and currents created barriers to traffic for thousands of years. They limited contact between the Mediterranean and Africa for a very long time and thwarted whatever potential Africans might have had for effective navigation into the Atlantic beyond their coastal waters, just as it would act as a brake on American ventures to Africa and Europe.

Raymond Mauny has shown that the constant north-to-south flow of the Canary Current along the Saharan coast made it possible for ships from the Mediterranean to sail southward as far as West Africa but prevented a return voyage.[5] For Mediterranean sailors, Cape Bojador, just south of the Canary Islands, represented a point of no return, and even if voyages, intentional and unintentional, went beyond it, they did not pioneer any route with practical significance. Arabic accounts cite several voyages made by accident beyond this point. al-Idrisi (1154) cites one that left from Lisbon,[6] ibn Sa'id heard from a Moroccan traveler named Ibn Fatima of a similar voyage sometime before 1270,[7] and al-'Umari heard of another one from Almeira in Spain made by Muhammad b. Raghanuh in the early fourteenth century – all were forced to return to the Mediterra-

[5] Raymond Mauny, *Les navigations médiévales sur les côtes sahariennes antérieures à la découverte portugaise* (1434) (Lisbon, 1960).
[6] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Sharif al-Idrisi, "Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi iktiraq al-afaq" (1154), in Nehemia Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 130–1.
[7] 'Ali b. Musa ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi, "Kitab Bast al-ard fi 'l-tul wa-'l-'ard" (ca. 1270), in ibid., pp. 190–1.

nean area by overland routes.[8] It was only in the fifteenth century, and then using routes leading back through the Canaries, Madeira, and the Azores and risking a high-seas voyage, that Europeans were able to finally conquer the difficulties of the Bojador on a regular basis.

If the problems with the winds and currents off the Saharan coast checked Mediterraneans from entering the African portion of the Atlantic, a similar problem hampered African navigators. Of course, Africans would have been just as interested in going to North Africa and Iberia by sea as the Mediterranean people were interested in reaching Africa, given the knowledge that each area had of the other through the overland trade,[9] but the constant current that prevented return trips to the Mediterranean also frustrated African efforts to go to the Méditerranean from the very start. The extent of northward sailing by African vessels seems to have been the saltworks of Ijil on the Mauretanian coast, at least according to al-Idrisi's twelfth-century account.[10]

On the other hand, Africans faced the strongly prevailing westward-flowing Equatorial Current from the Senegambian region into the Caribbean basin. Although this current may have made African voyages to the Americas possible, it required fairly well developed techniques for high-seas navigation to even begin, and Africans could not develop such technology on short voyages in calm seas. Thus, Ivan van Sertima, who has championed the idea that Africans made frequent voyages to the Americas since around 800 B.C., has had to acknowledge that these voyages, if they occurred at all, were accidental and initiated no transatlantic commerce. However well such African navigators may have fared in long crossings in craft not designed to sail in the high seas, they faced insuperable barriers to making return trips to any familiar point on the African coast.[11]

Of course, some of the Caribbean peoples developed sufficiently large craft to sail regularly in the Caribbean, and such ships might well have traveled to the Old World. Historian Aurelio Tió has shown how important the native people of the Caribbean were in guiding early European voyages from Florida to the Orinoco, and how they knew the regime of wind and current throughout the basin well. He suggests that they also knew a good deal of the oceanic geography of the western Atlantic.[12] But

[8] ibn Fadl Allah al-'Umari, "Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar," in ibid., pp. 272–3.
[9] See Jean Devisse with S. Labib, "Africa in Intercontinental Relations," in *UNESCO General History of Africa* 4:635–6.
[10] al-Idrisi, "Nuzhat," pp. 106–7.
[11] Ivan van Sertima, *They Came before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York, 1976), pp. 37–109.
[12] Aurelio Tió, "Relaciones iniciales Hispano-Araguacas," *Boletin de la Academia Puertoriqueña de la Historia* 9 (1985): 33–61; van Sertima, *Before Columbus*, pp. 253–6, cites some classical references to suggest that a lost canoe of Arawaks may have visited Gaul during Roman times.

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[13] Chaunu and Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique*, vol.
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[14] Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of th*
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for them, as well, the problem of a return voyage was similar to that the Europeans faced in their own early Atlantic navigations. Indeed, not until the late fifteenth century, when the entire system of Atlantic winds and currents was understood and European sailors knew all the potential landfalls on either side of the Atlantic, was a truly practical round-trip navigation achieved.

But even when the system was understood and European ships could travel (at least in theory) to every point in the Atlantic, they were nevertheless forced to respect the wind and currents. Pierre and Hugette Chaunu, examining the usual voyages of Spanish ships from Seville into the Atlantic, and Frédéric Mauro, considering Portuguese navigation in the same area, have shown that the habitual routes of commerce, stopping points, and even commercial developments were strongly conditioned by these winds.[13]

The regime of wind and current explains a number of developments not immediately apparent to modern travelers. One of the strongest motives for the establishment of an English colony in Barbados in 1624 was that its upwind position relative to Caribbean navigation made it difficult of access for Spanish fleets – fleets that had defeated earlier English attempts in the area. At the same time, British colonies in North America were bound more strongly to their Caribbean counterparts by the fact that return navigation from the Caribbean on the Gulf Stream naturally brought Caribbean settlers and traders to the North American coast. Thus navigational considerations joined economic ones to link the two regions.[14]

If water routes were the earliest form of travel, then the streams of the ocean must be joined to land streams if we are to see the full dimensions of the Atlantic world. This is abundantly demonstrated by the connections of the western Sudan to the Atlantic. Riverine routes going deep into West Africa connected points quite distant from the coast to the Atlantic. Although narrows and sandbars blocking the mouths often obstructed the travel of large, sea-going vessels on African rivers, smaller craft designed for river travel navigated them easily, and portages reduced the obstructions caused by falls.

Michal Tymowski has shown convincingly how important the Niger River was to the economic life of the central portions of the western Sudan, where very large craft were constructed and carried bulky cargoes along the river. Although there were falls from time to time that interrupted the navigations, each segment of the Niger divided by the

[13] Chaunu and Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique*, vol. 7 and atlas attached; Mauro, *Portugal et l'Atlantique*, pp. 71–3.

[14] Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), pp. 8–15.

falls was a veritable highway, and fairly short overland routes around the falls did not form an insurmountable barrier to long-range navigation.[15]

One could make an equally good case for the Senegal River, even if the falls at Felu made inland voyages from the ocean difficult. Certainly there was substantial traffic on the Senegal above and below the falls from medieval times onward, for it was probably on this river that the "strongly made boats" of the people of Ghana traveled in al-Idrisi's account of the Sudan of the twelfth century.[16] Moreover, items were transshipped through overland routes from the Senegal to the Niger or from these two rivers to the Gambia River, which formed the third member in a triad of much-used West African rivers. An overland route that took approximately twenty-five days to complete connected the Niger and the Senegal, and a portage of about 250 kilometers connected the Senegal and the Gambia rivers.[17]

The empire of Mali remained the heart of political power in the western part of the Sudan from the thirteenth century until well into the seventeenth century largely because of its central position at the headwaters of these three river systems. Philip Curtin has demonstrated how merchants based on the upper courses of these rivers could switch exports to the Atlantic from one of the systems to another to make the best of market opportunities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[18] Some of the earliest accounts of Senegambia speak of "Jaga" (probably the town of Diakha on the Senegal or Dia on the Niger, both near the headwaters of the river systems) as both the capital of Mali (which it may never have been) and a source for all the gold in Senegambia and the Gold Coast, indicating the crucial position that such a central location could play in the shifting gold trade.[19] Even in the early sixteenth century, merchants based that far away were capable of diverting the trade from the Gambia to the Gold Coast or back should it suit their interests.[20]

[15] Michal Tymowski, "Le Niger, voie de communication des grands états du Soudan Occidental jusqu'à la fin du XVIe siècle," *Africana Bulletin* 6 (1967): 73–98.

[16] al-Idrisi, "Nuzhat," p. 110.

[17] Philip Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison, 1975), 1:278–86.

[18] Ibid., 1:83–91.

[19] E.g., Jean Fonteneau dit Alfonse de Saintogne [João Afonso], *La cosmographie* (1544), fols. 122v, 124 (the edition of Georges Musset [Paris, 1904] marks the original foliation); Martin Fernandez de Enciso, *Suma de geographia q̃ trata de todas las partidas & provincias del mundo . . .* (Seville, 1519), p. 107 (original has no pagination, pagination given here written in pencil on the edition I consulted, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Reservados, 717 V). These two accounts were probably based on the same material; see Paul E. H. Hair, "Some Minor Sources for Guinea, 1519–1559; Enciso and Alfonse/Fonteneau," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 19–46, which gives a partial English translation and comparison.

[20] See documents and analysis in Avelino Teixeira da Mota, "The Mande Trade in Coast da Mina according to Portuguese Documents until the Mid-sixteenth Century," paper presented at the Conference on Manding Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1972.

An indication of the significance of the rive the western Sudan is revealed by the fact regarded the rivers as forming a single comp Sudan" – a view that was shared not just Africa but by West African merchants the Niger-Senegal-Gambia complex unite a con rica, but the Niger provided a corridor that kingdoms, the Yoruba states, and the Nupe to a hydrographic system that was ultimate When one considers the Benue River as an an idea of how deeply the riverine system Geographical ideas held by Africans and ou century conflated all these rivers – the Se Benue – into a single "Nile of the Blacks" Nile of Egypt.[22] Although it is mistaken gec of the transport possibilities of river routes.

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[21] E.g., ibn Sa'id, "Kitab Bast," pp. 184–5; al-'Umari, "M same ideas presented to early European travelers Diogo Gomes, "De prima inuentione Gujnee" (con nandes, "Desçricã da çepta e sua costa" (1507), in *"Valentim Fernandes"* (Lisbon, 1940), fols. 276v–7; An *e dos Rios de Guiné do Capo Verde* (1625) (modern ec Bourdon, and Paul Hair [Lisbon, 1977]), fols. 29v–30. interior of West Africa from sources on the Niger, ented their geography by the river; see Alan F. C. Ry *1897* (London, 1969), pp. 32–3, 126–34; for political ton, "Traditions, Documents, and the Ife-Benin Relat 351–62.

[22] Thornton, "Ife-Benin Relationship."

[23] António de Oliveira de Cadornega, *História geral das g* ed. José Delgado and Matias da Cunha, 3 vols. Kwanza), 219 (with notices of the Kasai River and central Africa).

[24] António Mendes to Jesuit Father General, 9 May 156

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An indication of the significance of the river system to the geography of the western Sudan is revealed by the fact that many Moslem writers regarded the rivers as forming a single complex system – the "Nile of the Sudan" – a view that was shared not just by amateurs living in North Africa but by West African merchants themselves.[21] Not only did the Niger-Senegal-Gambia complex unite a considerable portion of West Africa, but the Niger provided a corridor that ultimately added the Hausa kingdoms, the Yoruba states, and the Nupe, Igala, and Benin kingdoms to a hydrographic system that was ultimately connected to the Atlantic. When one considers the Benue River as an extension, then one can get an idea of how deeply the riverine system penetrated into West Africa. Geographical ideas held by Africans and outsiders alike in the sixteenth century conflated all these rivers – the Senegal, Gambia, Niger, and Benue – into a single "Nile of the Blacks" ultimately connected to the Nile of Egypt.[22] Although it is mistaken geography, it is a real reflection of the transport possibilities of river routes.

West central Africa was also oriented by its rivers, especially the Zaire and the Kwanza. Likewise, António de Oliveira de Cadornega used rivers to orient his geography of central Africa (and his knowledge extended far into the interior) and combined it with a lengthy paean to the Kwanza River.[23] These rivers bore substantial commerce. Not only was the Kwanza used by the Portuguese in their conquest of Angola, but it was a major artery of commerce for Africans as well, as Paulo Dias de Novais, the first Portuguese to describe the region, made clear in the mid-sixteenth century. Riverine commerce was connected with coastal commerce and African craft plied the coastal waters between the Zaire and the Kwanza.[24]

For many Africans elsewhere as well, the coast was like a river system that connected distant points; it nourished a trade that predated and

[21] E.g., ibn Sa'id, "Kitab Bast," pp. 184–5; al-'Umari, "Masalik al-absar," pp. 156–7. For the same ideas presented to early European travelers by West Africans themselves, see Diogo Gomes, "De prima inuentione Gujnee" (composed ca. 1490), in Valentim Fernandes, "Desçricã da çepta e sua costa" (1507), in António Baião, ed., *O manuscrito "Valentim Fernandes"* (Lisbon, 1940), fols. 276v–7; André Donelha, *Descrição da Serra Leoa e dos Rios de Guiné do Capo Verde* (1625) (modern ed. Avelino Teixeira da Mota, Leon Bourdon, and Paul Hair [Lisbon, 1977]), fols. 29v–30. Europeans often knew of the deep interior of West Africa from sources on the Niger, or near Benin, and sometimes oriented their geography by the river; see Alan F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485–1897* (London, 1969), pp. 32–3, 126–34; for political units on the river, see John Thornton, "Traditions, Documents, and the Ife-Benin Relationship," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 351–62.

[22] Thornton, "Ife-Benin Relationship."

[23] António de Oliveira de Cadornega, *História geral das guerras angolanas* (1680–81) (modern ed. José Delgado and Matias da Cunha, 3 vols. [Lisbon, 1972]), 3:58–61 (on the Kwanza), 219 (with notices of the Kasai River and the first mention of the Lunda of central Africa).

[24] António Mendes to Jesuit Father General, 9 May 1563, *MMA* 2:499, 503.

often complemented that of the Europeans operating on the high seas. Jean-Pierre Chauveau has examined the role of coastal societies and navigation in West Africa and shows that maritime navigation provided coastwise communication between substantial regions, which has often been overlooked in earlier assessments. In Loango, Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, coastal estuaries, creeks, and lagoons form an interconnected, protected system of waterways facilitating the large-scale movement of goods. Such coastal waterways also allow easy communication between the mouths of the Senegal and the Gambia. Likewise, the coast of modern Ivory Coast possessed a system of lagoons and coastal lakes; however, it was less active in Atlantic commerce and thus less well known to modern scholarship.[25] Finally, of course, was the network of waterways that stretched from the mouth of the Volta River across the Niger delta to modern Cameroon, which is beginning to be understood as both a political and an economic axis.[26] Here, as in the Senegambian case, the coastal stretch linked up with rivers flowing into the interior. The Niger, of course, was one such river, but there were others as well. Capuchin priests who visited Allada in West Africa in 1660–62 observed that the several rivers that flowed into the coastal lagoon were navigated by large locally built canoes that permitted the people to travel far into the interior.[27]

American rivers also extended the Atlantic zone. Thus, geographers of North American settlement have noted that major rivers such as the Saint Lawrence, the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay, the Connecticut, and the Hudson formed major roads deep into the interior largely because these rivers were easily navigable for small sea-going vessels and were used heavily by Europeans as an axis for settlement. The Amazon, which is navigable from the Atlantic to the Andes, and the Orinoco, which also is navigable far into the interior, were also connected to Atlantic commerce. Control of both river systems lay in the hands of Native American societies, whose cultural sophistication has only recently been appreciated. From the earliest days of European contact, visitors on the Amazon and Orinoco noted extensive local traffic, and traders at the mouths of the rivers were the end points of riverine trade routes equivalent to the Senegal–Niger corridor of West Africa, where European metal goods were traded for gold, slaves, and cotton ham-

[25] Jean-Pierre Chauveau, "Une histoire maritime africaine est-elle possible? Historiographie et histoire de la navigation et de la pêche africaines à la côte occidentale depuis le XVe siècle," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 36 (1986): 173–235.

[26] Robin Law, "Trade and Politics behind the Slave Coast: The Lagoon Traffic and the Rise of Lagos, 1500–1800," *Journal of African History* 24 (1983): 321–48.

[27] Biblioteca Provincial de Toledo, Colección de MSS Bourbón-Lorenzana, MS. 244, Basilio de Zamora, "Cosmografia o descripcion del mundo" (1675), fol. 53.

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[28] For an early account of the Orinoco, see "Memoria su viaje desde la Margarita hasta el Rio Coretin" (*Relaciones geográficas de Venezuela* (Caracas, 1964), p nian and Orinoco societies is highlighted by the wo among others, "Chiefdoms in the Amazon and Ori Uribe, eds., *Chiefdoms in the Americas* (Washington,

[29] The strength and commerce of the Mississippian s logically. For an attempt to link this with the Atla paper presented by William Swaggerty at the Ar Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., 28 December

[30] Van Sertima, *Before Columbus*, pp. 52–3, though standing up to long-distance travel as well. See African Watercraft: A New Look," in Ivan van Serti *Modern* (New Brunswick and London, 1983), pp. 1 but still shows clearly the focus on riverine and co

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mocks, which were exported by the thousands.[28] Because the natives of these regions (like the inhabitants of the Mississippi valley in North America)[29] controlled commerce and held the Europeans at bay, we know much less about these areas than we do of those that formed arteries of communication for Old World settlers.

Thus, water routes defined the Atlantic zone, and rivers extended the zone far beyond the shores of the ocean itself. The mastery of the sea, however, made it possible for all these continental routes to be in communication. There were considerable problems to be overcome before the connections could be made, in spite of the occasional transatlantic voyages that may have preceded Columbus's voyages and the Portuguese voyages along the African coast. Such problems had proved practically insurmountable to Africans, Americans, and Mediterranean people before 1400. It is therefore worth exploring the circumstances that enabled the Europeans to make transatlantic voyages practicable.

Origins of Atlantic navigation

Europeans' experience with waterborne travel was probably the most significant factor in allowing them to be the ones who finally conquered the Atlantic. The difficulties of tackling South Atlantic navigation may explain why Africans, for their part, seem to have focused their boat-building talents on craft designed for coastal and riverine navigation[30] and as a result had engaged in little deliberate oceanic navigation, leaving even fairly close islands, such as the Cape Verdes and São Tomé, uncolonized and uninhabited. Indeed, they had even eschewed long-range navigation in the Gulf of Guinea (beyond the colonization of Bioko Island, visible from the mainland), which might have proved economically feasible, though hampered by the same problems of currents that prevented transatlantic navigation.

[28] For an early account of the Orinoco, see "Memoria y relacion que hizo Martin Lopez de su viaje desde la Margarita hasta el Rio Coretin" (1550), in Antonio Arellano Moreno, *Relaciones geográficas de Venezuela* (Caracas, 1964), pp. 45–7. The significance of Amazonian and Orinoco societies is highlighted by the work of Anna Curtenius Roosevelt; see, among others, "Chiefdoms in the Amazon and Orinoco," in Robert Drennan and Carlos Uribe, eds., *Chiefdoms in the Americas* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 153–84.

[29] The strength and commerce of the Mississippian societies is well documented archeologically. For an attempt to link this with the Atlantic and European activities, see the paper presented by William Swaggerty at the American Historical Association, 102d Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., 28 December 1987.

[30] Van Sertima, *Before Columbus*, pp. 52–3, though here emphasizing the possibility of standing up to long-distance travel as well. See also Stewart C. Malloy, "Traditional African Watercraft: A New Look," in Ivan van Sertima, ed., *Blacks in Science: Ancient and Modern* (New Brunswick and London, 1983), pp. 163–76, which makes the same point but still shows clearly the focus on riverine and coastal navigation.

The people of the Americas had a slightly better chance than the Africans, for the Caribbean was fully navigable by them long before the Europeans arrived. Thus, the boats of the Caribs and Arawaks were often seen at sea and, unlike African craft, could undertake long sea voyages.[31] But just as the predictability of the monsoons in Asia may have inhibited certain breakthroughs in shipbuilding technology by presenting few challenges, perhaps also navigation of the Caribbean, with its long chain of islands, was too easy.

Europeans had two large inland seas, however: the Mediterranean in the south and the North and Baltic seas in the north, along with a difficult, but passable, stretch of coast between them. Thus, separate navigation traditions could develop to solve the specific problems in each area and then merge through intercommunication to present solutions to further problems. By the fourteenth or fifteenth century, these major seas were regularly navigated, and seagoing vessels were a standard part of every European inventory. Thus, as Pierre Chaunu has argued, it was the opening (or reopening, for such connections were frequent in Classical times) of regular commerce between the Mediterranean Sea and the northern seas in the late thirteenth century that ultimately would lead to European navigation in the Atlantic as well. This trade, signaled by the first recorded voyage of a Genoese ship to northern Europe in 1277, was largely connected with the grain trade and movement of other bulk commodities that could not stand the cost of overland trade.[32]

These early voyages not only helped to start, as we shall see, the Europeans on their conquest of the Atlantic, they linked the various European seas and ultimately helped shape the European boundaries of the Atlantic world. Fernand Braudel has argued strongly in favor of the significance of the connection between the northern seas and the Mediterranean, and it was sailors familiar with each of these two great bodies of water and with the attached riverine areas (such as Germany along the Rhine and even Poland along the Vistula) who came to participate in the larger oceanic economy of the Atlantic.[33]

Although the northern Europeans were late in entering the South Atlantic commerce that linked Africa to the Americas, the Vikings had long pioneered the northern routes westward, colonizing Greenland at

[31] Desmond Nicholson, "Precolumbian Seafaring Capabilities in the Lesser Antilles," *Proceedings of the International Congress for Study of Pre-Columbian Culture of the Lesser Antilles* 6 (Pointe à Pitre, 1976), pp. 98–105.

[32] Pierre Chaunu, *Expansion européen*, pp. 92–3.

[33] For an illuminating discussion of the boundaries of the Mediterranean, see Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 1:168–230. For the significance of the Mediterranean connections to the northern seas, see idem, *Civilization and Capitalism, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, 3 vols., trans. Siân Reynolds (New York, 1982–4), 3:92–173.

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[34] See the discussion in Charles de la Roncière, *L Cartographes et explorateurs*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1925 Malocello's activity comes from a now lost genea of 1632 to counter claims made by the eventu Bethencourt, and must be viewed with suspici Angelino Dulcert, drawn in 1339, clearly shows tl that still bears Malocello's name. According to th for twenty years before being expelled by the l documents quoted).

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the least and providing the first strong links between the northern seas and the Mediterranean. The English and the Dutch were fairly early and frequent in the Atlantic; the Swedes settled in North America early in the seventeenth century and had posts on the African coast as well, and in Africa they were joined by the Danes and by Baltic countries like Kurland and Brandenburg.

Not only did the needs of this seaborne trade between the Mediterranean and northern Europe serve as a stimulus to Iberian shipbuilding and interest in the interregional trade, but the fairly large number of ships involved increased the potential for accidental voyages of discovery. The career of Lanzaroto Malocello is a case in point. Malocello was a Genoese merchant who had commercial connections with Cherbourg in northern France and Ceuta in Morocco and thus had frequent recourse to travel in the Atlantic both north and south of Gibraltar. On one of these voyages he discovered (or rediscovered, for they were known in Classical times), probably by accident, the Canaries in about 1312. The Canaries were the first Atlantic islands rediscovered by Europeans, and their colonization, by Malocello around 1335, represented an early and important step into the Atlantic.[34]

In addition to multiplying the opportunities for accidental voyages of discovery, maritime travel between the Mediterranean and North Atlantic, especially because it involved bulk shipping, allowed the diffusion of shipbuilding techniques. Thus, the sturdy round ships of the North Sea and Baltic were blended with the long and maneuverable galleys of the Mediterranean. This eventually resulted in the creation of ships capable of carrying more cargo and sailing under a wider variety of conditions than could be found in either the Mediterranean or the North Atlantic. To these discoveries were added techniques in sailing and navigation borrowed from the Moslem world, with which the Genoese and Iberians had constant commerce.[35]

Possessing the means to make oceanic voyages and to discover new lands did not necessarily mean that extensive oceanic travel or exploration would be undertaken, however. There also had to be a reasonable

[34] See the discussion in Charles de la Roncière, *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen âge: Cartographes et explorateurs*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1925–6), 2:3–4. Much of the material on Malocello's activity comes from a now lost genealogy of 1453 cited in a polemical work of 1632 to counter claims made by the eventual conquerors, the family of Jean de Bethencourt, and must be viewed with suspicion. On the other hand, the map of Angelino Dulcert, drawn in 1339, clearly shows the Genoese in possession of the island that still bears Malocello's name. According to the genealogy, Malocello ruled the island for twenty years before being expelled by the local inhabitants (ibid., p. 3, n. 2, and documents quoted).

[35] See the summary of an extensive literature in Pierre Chaunu, *Expansion européen*, pp. 273–308.

set of motives, and financial backers had to have some confidence that such voyages would be worth the considerable risks that their undertaking entailed.

European motives: long-range geopolitical and economic goals

A number of technical and geographical factors combined to make Europeans the most likely people to explore the Atlantic and develop its commerce. But the task also required strong political or economic motives before it would be undertaken. An older, romantic school of historians maintained that Europeans undertook this exploration for the pure joy of discovery or to break the Moslem stranglehold on the eastern trade. These motives were enough, in this interpretation, to allow visionaries like Infante Henrique (Prince Henry the Navigator) of Portugal or Queen Isabella of Spain to finance the voyages.[36]

This romantic vision has been reduced to more mundane dimensions by the work of Portuguese historians, especially Duarte Leite and Vitorino Magalhães-Godinho. They have stressed that exploration and voyages proceeded step-by-step, over a long period of time, and were fueled by the prospect of immediate profits that were readily attainable using existing (or only slightly modified) technology.[37] Under such conditions the capital costs were small, profits and returns were all but certain, and the potential for dramatic discoveries was limited. Even the greatest leaps – Columbus's transatlantic voyage of 1492 and da Gama's circumnavigation of Africa in 1498 – were built on many years of profitable exploitation of the Atlantic and excellent intelligence of the prospects (in da Gama's case) or potentially profitable fallbacks such as the hope of finding new Atlantic islands (in Columbus's case).

In this scenario, it is possible to see the technological breakthroughs in sailing methods as following rather than leading the discoveries. People developed the technology once they knew for sure that they could profit by improving their techniques.

There is evidence, however, to support both cases, and it is dangerous to accept more quickly the research of the recent scholars with their less romantic interpretations. After all, many of those who described voyages wrote of the romantic vision themselves. For example, the fifteenth-century chronicler Gomes Eannes de Zurara stresses principally geopolitical motives when he gives a list of reasons that compelled Infante Henrique to send out the ships that pioneered direct sea travel between West Africa and Europe. These motives derived from the centuries-long

[36] Summarized in ibid., pp. 233–40.
[37] Summarized in ibid., pp. 243–5.

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[38] Gomes Eannes de Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos de*
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a less thorough edition and with dated notes,
vols.; London, 1896–9).

[39] Ramon Llull, "Libre d'Evast e d'Aloma e de Bla
Pons i Marquès), in Ramon Llull, *Obres essencia*
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(Paris, 1963).

[40] Recorded in Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo
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Genoa. Published (from the 1492 edition) in Y
Africae et Egypti (Leiden, 1926–53), vol. 4, fol. 1
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[41] See a discussion in the light of Catalan activity
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[42] Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Ris*
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struggle between Christians and Moslems for control of the Mediterranean world. Henrique's principal desire, according to Zurara, was his wish to defeat the North African Moslems, and economic considerations were secondary. He hoped that his mariners would contact a Christian power south of Morocco with whom to form an anti-Moslem alliance or establish trade with non-Moslem southern neighbors who might be converted to Christianity and agree to such an alliance or who at least might be persuaded to cease trade with Morocco.[38]

Zurara was expressing a long-held hope of Christians in Iberia. Writers and visionaries living in the period before the voyages sponsored by Infante Henrique had proposed several schemes to outflank the Moslems in one way or another. In 1285, for example, a Mallorcan theologian named Ramon Llull dreamed of converting the king of Ghana to Christianity, thus creating a Christian state in the hinterland of Moslem North Africa.[39] Since 1306, when an Ethiopian delegation had arrived in Europe seeking a Christian alliance with the "King of the Spains," to "offer him aid against the infidels,"[40] the idea of an Iberian–Ethiopian connection had been considered. Indeed, King Anfós IV of Aragon came close to arranging a double marriage with the negus of Ethiopia in 1428,[41] and the Portuguese Crown sent Pedro de Corvilhão to Ethiopia in 1487 to prepare similar alliances.[42]

Modern scholars have been less convinced by grand geopolitical schemes of a religious and military nature than they have been by eco-

[38] Gomes Eannes de Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos de Guiné*, chap. 8. There are many editions, the best being that of Torquado de Sousa Soares (2 vols.; Lisbon, 1978). The French translation (Leon Bourdon, *Chronique de Guinée* [Dakar, 1960]) contains a valuable introduction to the history and discussion of textual problems. An English translation, from a less thorough edition and with dated notes, is by C. R. Beazley and E. Prestage (2 vols.; London, 1896–9).

[39] Ramon Llull, "Libre d'Evast e d'Aloma e de Blanquerna" (ca. 1283–5), chap. 84 (ed. Joan Pons i Marquès), in Ramon Llull, *Obres essencials*, 2 vols. (Barcelona, 1957), 1:241–2. On Llull's geopolitical philosophy, see Armand Llinares, *Raymond Lulle, philosophe de l'action* (Paris, 1963).

[40] Recorded in Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo, "Supplementum Chronicarum" (1483), from notes taken by Giovanni da Carignano at the time the mission passed through Genoa. Published (from the 1492 edition) in Youssouf Kamal, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Egypti* (Leiden, 1926–53), vol. 4, fol. 1139. A translation (from the 1483 edition) and discussion by R. A. Skelton appears in O. G. S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries, circa 1400–1524* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 212–15. As a result of this visit, the geographer Giovanni da Carignano concluded that Ethiopia was the home of the legendary "Prester John," more or less permanently displacing an Asian location. See Enrico Cerulli, "Giovanni da Carignano e la cartografia dei paesi a Sud dell'Egitto agli inizi del secolo XIV," *Atti del XIV Congresso geografico italiano* (Bologna, 1949), p. 507.

[41] See a discussion in the light of Catalan activity and plans in the eastern Mediterranean in Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer, *L'expansió de Catalunya en la Mediterrània oriental*, 3d ed. (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 171–5.

[42] Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim–European Rivalry in the Region* (London, 1980), pp. 19–40.

nomic motives, and consequently some emphasize the fabulous wealth to be had through oceanic trade, with the spice-rich islands of India and Southeast Asia or with West Africa, mainly for its gold. Such an interpretation is supported by the correlation between Atlantic exploration and the fall of Acre, the last outpost of direct European commercial relations with the eastern Mediterranean, which passed into Moslem hands in 1291. Thus, in the same year that Acre fell, the Vivaldi brothers set sail from Venice to find an Atlantic route to the Indies; they never returned.[43] The cartography of the age, admittedly very speculative, encouraged such attempts by representing Africa in a form that suggested an easy circumnavigation.[44] A Franciscan friar from Castille reported his own circumnavigation of Africa in 1360, but his book was fictional, being based on speculation and the kind of knowledge that well-connected Franciscans might glean from contemporary maps, cosmographies, and commercial gossip in the western Mediterranean.[45]

Of all the economic possibilities that might provide motives for Atlantic navigation, however, the prospect of a short route to the West African goldfields seems the most likely. The Indies, after all, were far away in anyone's conception of world geography, whereas West Africa, known to be wealthy in gold, was much closer and clearly accessible by a sea route. West Africa had been a source of gold for Mediterranean countries for centuries, perhaps since Byzantine times.[46] Moslem writers since the ninth century at least were aware of the gold-producing areas, and a steady stream of Arabic-language descriptions of West Africa resulted, including one made by the famed North African al-Idrisi for the Christian king Roger II of Sicily in 1154.[47] These were joined by Christian accounts, especially those generated by the Catalan and Italian merchant communities of North Africa, who had been dealing in the gold (called the "gold of Palolus" in these sources) since the twelfth century.[48]

[43] De la Roncière, *Découverte* 1:50–1.

[44] See Jaime Cortesão, *Os descobrimentos portugueses*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 1960), 1:304–5.

[45] "Libro del consçimiento de todas las tierras y señorios que son por el mundo y de las señales y armas que han cada tierra y señorio," in Kamal, *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1259–9v (note that folios are numbered consecutively from volume to volume). This includes an English translation.

[46] Timothy Garrad, "Myth and Metrology: Trans Saharan Gold Trade," *Journal of African History* 23 (1982): 443–61.

[47] For example, the early descriptions of Abu al-'Qasim ibn Hawqal, "Kitab Surat al-ard," in Levtzion and Hopkins, *Corpus*, p. 49; Abu 'Ubayd 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bakri, "Kitab al-masalik wa-'l-mamalik," in ibid., pp. 77–85; and al-Idrisi, "Nuzhat," in ibid., pp. 110–11.

[48] These sources are often reflected in the maps of the era; see the discussion in de la Roncière, *Découverte* 1:121–41. Most of these maps are reproduced in Kamal, *Monumenta*. For a detailed discussion of the sources of the Mallorcan group, see Yoro K. Fall, *L'Afrique à la naissance de la cartographie moderne: Les cartes majorquines, XIVe–XVe siècles* (Paris, 1982), pp. 55–120. The problem of "Palolus" has been discussed in detail in Susan

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[49] Kamal, *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1370.

[50] "Libro del consçimiento" in ibid., fol. 1258v.

[51] *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1235.

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A sea route to the goldfields seemed relatively practical, because it did not involve the circumnavigation of Africa. Many maps of the period showed the "River of Gold" (probably the Senegal) and, according to the legend on the map of Mecia de Villadestes (1413), where one could "obtain the gold of Palolus." Although the actual field lay upstream, the "mouth of the river is large and deep enough for the biggest ship in the river."[49] Christians believed that Moslems regularly sailed to the river – the anonymous Franciscan friar even claimed (falsely) to have sailed there himself around 1360 on a Moslem ship,[50] and as early as 1346 Jacme Ferrer, a Catalan merchant, actually attempted to reach it.[51]

European motives: the prevalence of short-range goals

Whatever their dreams or fantasies, whether it was encircling and isolating the Moslems or reaching the spices of Asia or the gold of West Africa, these long-range plans were largely restricted to kings and intellectuals, and neither group proved particularly willing to actually finance the voyages they considered, and private or small-scale ventures (such as those of the Vivaldis and Ferrer) failed. Thus, whatever contemporary writers may have said about motives, or how much rulers may have desired the results of such schemes, the progress of Atlantic exploration ultimately depended on financial considerations. Financial considerations must ultimately force us to agree with the Portuguese historians on the prevalence of short-range, unromantic, step-by-step exploration as the principal method of European expansion.

It is also important to note that another romantic fantasy – that the Iberians were the sole leaders of the exploration – is untrue. The exploration of the Atlantic was a truly international exercise, even if many of the dramatic discoveries were made under the sponsorship of the Iberian monarchs. The people who undertook the voyages gathered the human and material resources from wherever they were available. English, French, Polish, Italian people, ships, and capital joined Iberians in this effort. If the Iberians were pioneers in anything, it was that monarchs of these countries were quick to claim sovereignty (or to offer their protection to the earliest colonists) and to make the effort necessary to enforce

K. MacIntosh, "A Reconstruction of Wangara (Palōlus, Island of Gold)," *Journal of African History* 22 (1981): 145–58. This gold was sufficiently common in Barcelona that a public ordinance of that city in 1271 simply refers to gold as "gold of Palolus" (de la Roncière, *Découverte* 1:114).

[49] Kamal, *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1370.

[50] "Libro del consçimiento" in ibid., fol. 1258v.

[51] *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1235.

these claims, usually after the economic benefits were clearly revealed by an international group of pioneers.

We can conveniently divide the expansion into two "wings," or two directions. The first of these was an African wing, which sought mainland products such as slaves and then gold as the means to finance short voyages along the coast, and whose leaders expected to find people to raid or to trade with all along the route. The second was an Atlantic wing, which sought exploitable but not necessarily inhabited land in which to collect valuable wild products or to begin agricultural production of cultivated products in high demand in Europe. The colonization of these lands began with cutting timber or gathering wild honey, but its real profitability was ultimately realized by producing wheat, sugar, or wine in rich tropical and volcanic soils.

In many respects, the Canary Islands, rediscovered by Malocello in the early fourteenth century, provided the common starting point for both wings and combined in itself both sources of profit. The islands were inhabited and could thus be raided or support commerce, they possessed wild products of interest, and ultimately they became a center for the production of both wine and sugar. Moreover, because traveling to them was fairly easy and profitable, they provided financial security to those who sought more profits on the adjacent Saharan coast or the uninhabited Atlantic islands farther out.

Malocello and those who followed him in the early to mid-fourteenth century rapidly discovered that the Canaries produced a number of useful products. Perhaps the most useful were orchil (a dyestuff derived from lichens that grew on the rocks of the islands) and "dragon's blood," a resin also used as a dyestuff. The islands could also be profitably raided for cattle and people; slaves were always in demand in the Mediterranean world.[52]

An early voyage to the Canaries (under Portuguese auspices, but with a mixed crew and an Italian captain) in 1341 went both to trade and to raid, buying hides, dyestuffs and wood products, but also carrying weapons for raiding, and King Afonso IV of Portugal reported that slave raiding was under way at least as early as 1346.[53] Catalan merchants joined the Portuguese at an early date in both raiding and trading with

[52] An excellent recent survey of Mediterranean slavery at this time is Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris, 1981), esp. pp. 23–64, on the long Mediterranean background of slave raiding and its Atlantic extensions.

[53] Chronicle attributed to Giovanni Boccaccio, "De Canaria et insulla reliquis, ultra Ispaniam, in occeano nouiter repertis," *Monumenta Henricina*, 14 vols. (Lisbon, 1960–74), 1:202–6, on the 1341 expedition; Afonso IV to Clement VI, 12 February 1345, *Monumenta Henricina* 1: 230.

the Canarians.[54] Attempts to colonize earliest colonization in various parts of 1339, an Aragonese group in 1342, and 1344, were all probably simply attempt slave-raiding fort, and none brought any ment. Castillians always seemed to h trading from Spain itself.[55]

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The African wing o

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[54] Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe méd* 1955), pp. 628.

[55] On Malocello and the Aragonese, see Charles découverte portugaise des Canaries," *Revue belg* on the French attempt, Clement VI, "Tue deu *Monumenta Henricina* 1:207–14; and on Castil expediciones a las Canarias en el siglo XIV," *Re*

[56] Pierre Boutier and Jean le Verrier, *Le Canarien* Cloranescu, 2 vols. [Teneriffe, 1959]), vol. 1, ch

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the Canarians.[54] Attempts to colonize grew out of these ventures. The earliest colonization in various parts of the islands, by Malocello around 1339, an Aragonese group in 1342, and a group under French auspices in 1344, were all probably simply attempts to set up a trading factory and slave-raiding fort, and none brought any long-term and productive settlement. Castillians always seemed to have favored simply raiding and trading from Spain itself.[55]

Castille, however, sponsored the first permanent colonization, though it was Norman nobles Gadifer de la Salle and Jean de Bethencourt who actually organized and carried it out, in 1402–5. Like their predecessors, they seem to have been most interested in dyestuffs (they both came from textile-producing areas), organizing the Canarians to gather it. They also brought in Norman colonists and made a land division, although the export of profitable crops seems to have required a century.[56] Later Castillian-Spanish colonization continued agricultural expansion, and by 1520 the islands were producing sugar, wines, and sheep and cattle products.[57]

But whether visited for conquest and raiding or trade, the islands were seen as a source of profit, and much attention was paid to navigation to them throughout the fourteenth century. This activity brought more shipping into the area south of the Straits of Gibraltar, extending Christian raiding and commercial activity farther south and acquainting them with the area and the nearby regions of the African coast. In this way the Canaries, whether as colonies or simply as convenient landfalls, served as bases for further operations along the African coast or to the uninhabited islands farther out in the Atlantic, such as Madeira and the Azores, which were probably known to Europeans since the voyages of da Recco in 1341.

The African wing of expansion

The raiding and commerce of the Canaries provided the base and the motives for European activities farther down the Atlantic coast of Africa.

[54] Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiéval: I. Péninsule iberique-france* (Bruges, 1955), pp. 628.
[55] On Malocello and the Aragonese, see Charles Verlinden, "Lanzarotto Malocello et la découverte portugaise des Canaries," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* (1958): 1173–90; on the French attempt, Clement VI, "Tue deuotionis sinceritas," 15 November 1344, *Monumenta Henricina* 1:207–14; and on Castillian tactics, B. Bonnet Reverón, "Las expediciones a las Canarias en el siglo XIV," *Revista de Indias* 6 (1945): 215–18.
[56] Pierre Boutier and Jean le Verrier, *Le Canarien* (modern ed. Elias Serra Rafuls and A. Cloranescu, 2 vols. [Teneriffe, 1959]), vol. 1, chap. 87.
[57] Described in detail in Fernández-Armesto, *The Canaries after the Conquest* (London, 1982).

Thus, Jacme Ferrer began his ill-fated voyage to the River of Gold in 1346 with a stop at the Canaries.[58] Likewise, Jean de Bethencourt, conqueror of the eastern group of islands, took some time off from his efforts to raid the Atlantic coast of Africa, although he attempted no voyages beyond the customary limits of navigation.[59]

When Bethencourt did homage to the king of Castille in 1405, Portugal found its claim to the islands, vigorously pressed since at least 1341, and its commercial connections there weakened. In this context, Infante Henrique of Portugal pressed hard for conquering the remaining islands and launched an expedition against them in 1415. In 1424 he sent a much larger expedition, involving some 2,500 infantry and 120 cavalry.[60] This increase in Portuguese activity in the Canaries resulted in the papal bull *Romanus Pontifex* of 1436 renewing Portuguese claims on the still-unconquered islands[61] and a corresponding increase in activity along the Saharan coast.

These renewed attacks on the remaining Canaries and the Saharan shore resulted in the doubling of Cape Bojador (though he proceeded little farther) by the Portuguese sailor Gil Eannes in 1434.[62] The year before this feat Eannes had led a slave-raiding expedition against Gran Canaria Island, and the Bojador expedition was a natural excursion in the same vein. Indeed, the sailing craft of the time could avoid some of the difficulties of the currents by sailing out to the Canaries, thus alleviating the age-long problem of return navigation from beyond Bojador.

In spite of the potential for this breakthrough, however, the Portuguese did not immediately reach the Senegal; although expeditions to the "River of Gold" were sent out almost immediately, they did not actually sail so far. Some of these expeditions brought back commodities such as oils and skins (as did one in 1436),[63] but most were simply slave raids, in the tradition of the attacks on the Canaries or southern Morocco, and rarely ventured farther along the coast than was necessary to secure a profitable cargo. It was only in 1444 that the Portuguese actually reached the Senegal, although they had attacked and intercepted caravans bound from there northward in previous years.[64]

[58] See the legends to various maps in Kamal, *Monumenta* 4: fol. 1235.
[59] Boutier, *Le Canarien*, vol. 1, chap. 00.
[60] Recounted in Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 79; see additional details in de Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 1, chap. 12; de Barros was a sixteenth-century writer who saw documents on this expedition in the archives of Portugal. On the general situation, see Florentino Perez Embid, *Los descubrimientos en el Atlantico y la rivalidad castellano-portuguesa hasta el Tratado de Tordesillas* (Seville, 1948).
[61] See Luiz Suárez Fernández, *Relaciones entre Portugal y Castilla en la epoca del Infante D. Henrique* (Valladolid, 1960), pp. 244–72.
[62] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 8.
[63] Ibid., chap. 11.
[64] Ibid., chaps. 8–16.

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[67] Cf. Orlando Ribeiro, "Primórdios da ocupação d
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[68] An early description of the pepper trade can be f
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Thus, the actual motivation for European expansion and for navigational breakthroughs was little more than to exploit the opportunity for immediate profits made by raiding and the seizure or purchase of trade commodities. It was these more limited objectives that ultimately made possible the voyage to the Senegal that geographers and thinkers contemplating longer-range commercial or geopolitical schemes had dreamed of since at least the fourteenth century. It was more or less an extension of these same sorts of motives that eventually allowed the Portuguese to attain that even more distant long-range goal – so important both to commercial and to geopolitical thinking – the rounding of Africa and the discovery of a sea route to India and Ethiopia.[65] The predominance of limited aims in the voyages of reconnaisance and expansion explains why the necessary exploration took so long – from 1434, when the major navigational obstacle was overcome, until 1488, when Dias showed that the Cape of Good Hope was the end of the African continent.

In the Senegal region the profits were made from gold and slaves (first captured in raids, later purchased). Gold was available from many points along the coast, and sailors expanded rapidly southward until they reached the coast of modern Sierra Leone around 1460. Much of the energy of traveling even during those years, however, was spent on commercial or military voyages intended to consolidate and explore the possibilities of the areas already known[66] or to establish bases. The uninhabited archipelago of Cape Verde Islands was crucial to further expansion and was colonized in the 1460s.[67]

But there were other commercial possibilities to be found further on, and perhaps the prospects of the next stretch of coast to produce the pepper known as malaguetta pepper[68] were known to Fernão Gomes when he petitioned the Crown for exclusive rights to the trade of West Africa exclusive of the areas earlier granted to the settlers of Cape

[65] Several Portuguese historians, such as Duarte Leite and Vitorino Magalhães-Godinho, have stressed the short-range plans and immediate profits of expansion, although their specific arguments differ from the one presented here; see the historiographical discussion in Chaunu, *Expansion européen*, pp. 243–51.

[66] The exact timing of these trips is difficult to ascertain; a good survey and new argumentation are found in Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *História de Portugal*, (Lisbon, 1977), 2:164–70.

[67] Cf. Orlando Ribeiro, "Primórdios da ocupação das ilhas de Cabo Verde," in *Aspectos e problemas da expansão portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1962), pp. 130–8. See also, on the general use of the Cape Verdes as a base, T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands: Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago and London, 1972), pp. 166–9.

[68] An early description of the pepper trade can be found in Eustace de la Fosse, "Voyage à la côte occidentale d'Afrique," 1479–80, *MMA*[2] 1:473–4. Pepper was being exported from the Gambia region and northern Sierra Leone by the mid-1450s (Magalhães-Godinho, *Descobrimentos* 1:476–8.

Verde in 1469.[69] In any case, his grant included a provision that he explore further sections of the coast, and his expeditions rapidly began exporting the pepper. Shortly afterward (perhaps about 1471), to his infinite good luck, Gomes's sailors reached the gold-producing region of the Gold Coast (modern Ghana), an unexpected find that paid off handsomely for both Gomes and eventually for the Crown.[70] His sailors located another pepper-producing region at Benin the next year, although it was only in 1485–6 that regular trade began there.[71] They also discovered, on the island of São Tomé, another potential base for operations in the region.

Thus, for a long stretch of time, between about 1340 and 1470, European expansion proceeded slowly along the African coast. It paid off handsomely for the private parties who had sponsored most of it, and in 1482, for the first time, the Portuguese Crown decided to sponsor its own expedition into the Atlantic rather than to charter other people, who raised their own capital.[72] Unlike the earlier voyages, the royal voyages of Diogo Cão had a clearly geopolitical goal. According to João de Barros, intelligence received from Benin suggested to the court that Portuguese sailors were near the lands of Prester John and a circumnavigation of Africa was now possible.[73] Thus, Cão made the first attempt at expansion cast in the romantic mold, but he discovered only that the African continent turned south and ran thousands more kilometers before eventually turning. But fortunately for the Crown, Cão did come to the kingdom of Kongo, whose export products helped recoup the cost of the voyages and contributed to the success of the colony on São Tomé.[74] Undeterred by the length of Africa, the Portuguese Crown continued sponsoring exploration, first by Bartolomeu Dias and finally by Vasco da Gama, whose voyages have generally replaced the more prosaic earlier travels in textbook and romantic history as the search for the Indies.

[69] The terms are known only from their citation in de Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 2, chap. 2.

[70] See the discussion in Cortesão, *Os descobrimentos portugueses*, 2:416.

[71] If one accepts Rui de Siqueira, in 1472, as the first European visitor; see Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans*, pp. 30–2.

[72] Martin Behaim, *Liber Cronicarum cum figuris et ymaginibus ab inicio mūndi usq̄ nūnc temporis*, 1497, fol. 326v, *MMA* 1:30.

[73] De Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 3, chap. 3.

[74] Rui de Pina, "Chronica del Rei Dom João II," chap. 57, *MMA* 1:32–5; de Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 3, chap. 3. On Kongo's export trade see Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (ca. 1506), bk. 2, chap. 2 (modern variorum ed., Augusto Epiphânio da Silva Dias [Lisbon, 1905; reprint, 1975]), p. 134; and legend on the Cantino Atlas (1502), reproduced in Armando Cortesão and Avelino Teixeira da Mota, eds., *Portvgalliae monumenta cartographica*, 6 vols. (Lisbon, 1960), 1:12.

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[77] See Damião Peres, *História dos descobrimentos*, 2d ed. (
map of Gabriel Valseca dated 1439.

[78] Duncan, *Atlantic Islands*, p. 12. Colonization of the
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6:334).

[79] Alvise da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (title from one of f
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[80] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 5, lists wood, wax, honey, dye
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[81] Ibid., chap. 83, from circa 1446; similar observations
Novo," pp. 14–15.

[82] Order of Infante Henrique, 6 July 1439, *Monumenta H*

[83] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 83.

[84] Donation to D. Fernando, 29 October 1462, *MMA*² 1:

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The Atlantic wing and the discovery of America

Like the African wing, the Atlantic wing of exploration began from the Canaries, but it was fueled by the potential for collecting wild products and colonizing otherwise uninhabited areas. Because its results were less impressive, it was slower. Madeira, for example, was probably known (as a result of exploration of the Canary Islands, no doubt) as early as 1339,[75] but its colonization was not undertaken until about 1425.[76] However, its colonization set a strong precedent, because the Azores, reached by Diogo de Silves only in 1427,[77] were already being colonized in 1440.[78]

Because they were uninhabited, islands such as Madeira and the Azores offered no commercial prospects for trading, but they could still be exploited for wild products. In all probability, its early settlers (João Gonçalves Zarco, Tristão Vaz Teixeira, and Bartolomeu Perestrello) relied heavily on the export of available wild products such as wax, honey,[79] wood,[80] and dyestuffs or they raised cattle, which could be easily maintained on the unwooded islands of Porto Santo and Ilha Deserta.[81] Early colonization of the Azores was similar. The order for colonization, given in 1439, already mentioned such products,[82] and Zurara, referring to 1446, indicates that some were already being exported.[83] On the other hand, the Azores were never particularly rich and served more as a base for operations in the Atlantic than as a major center of production.

The process was repeated on all the other uninhabited Atlantic islands. The royal charter giving the Cape Verde Islands to Infante D. Fernando in 1462 clearly indicates that he expected early earnings to be from wild products or those that required little investment to obtain.[84]

[75] It appears on Dulcert's map of 1339, as well as the Atlas Mediceo of 1351 (Kamal, *Monumenta* 4: fols. 1222 and 1248).
[76] A date favored, with good reason, by Duncan, *Atlantic Islands*, pp. 7–8.
[77] See Damião Peres, *História dos descobrimentos*, 2d ed. (Coimbra, 1960), pp. 78–87, citing a map of Gabriel Valseca dated 1439.
[78] Duncan, *Atlantic Islands*, p. 12. Colonization of the "seven newly discovered islands" was begun in 1439 (Authorization of Infante Henrique, 2 July 1439, *Monumenta Henricina* 6:334).
[79] Alvise da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (title from one of four recensions) (modern ed. Tullia Gasparrini-Leporace, *Le navigazione atlantiche de Alvise da Mosto* [Milan, 1966]), p. 17.
[80] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 5, lists wood, wax, honey, dyestuffs, and other products. Several documents of the fifteenth century also refer to water-powered saws, evidently for cutting the wood.
[81] Ibid., chap. 83, from circa 1446; similar observations can be found in da Mosto, "Mondo Novo," pp. 14–15.
[82] Order of Infante Henrique, 6 July 1439, *Monumenta Henricina*, vol. 6.
[83] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 83.
[84] Donation to D. Fernando, 29 October 1462, *MMA*[2] 1:423–4.

Likewise, the earliest settlers of São Tomé in 1485 had a charter that also specified duties for export of wild products expected for that tropical island.[85] In each case, the king, in granting the charter, specified easy terms for the export of a variety of products, both wild and cultivated, that were expected to thrive in the tropics.

The gathering of wild products, the first incentive to visit these islands, gave way to cultivation of readily exportable agricultural products once soil and climate conditions were reasonably well known. In Madeira, clearing land and planting wheat, the first cultivated export, required extra labor; some workers were brought as dependent workers from Europe,[86] and others were probably obtained in attacks on the Canaries.[87] Indeed, the Madeira settlers assisted in the 1424 attack on the Canaries on the very eve of the colonization, so that the two operations went hand in hand.[88]

Madeira and the Canaries rapidly began to export wheat in large quantities, and the virgin soil produced, according to the enthusiastic testimony of Zurara in 1446, 50 for 1;[89] a more sober da Mosto said initial yields of 60–70 for 1 had declined to 30–40 for 1 in 1455,[90] still a boon by the standards of the time. The wheat was exported to Portugal and to Portuguese forces in Morocco, on the Saharan coast, and in West Africa, much of it already baked into bread.[91] But the real earnings came from wine, already described as an excellent product in 1455 by da Mosto,[92] and especially from sugar, which flourished and for which slaves, especially Canarians, provided the labor.[93] Exports of sugar were substantial by 1455 and grew rapidly until Madeira was one of the leading producers of sugar in the European economy.[94]

The success of the Madeira venture encouraged others and showed that even uninhabited islands, especially if they lay in tropical or subtropical zones, could be of economic value and could fairly quickly repay the efforts of populating them.

Not all the islands were as successfully exploited as Madeira was, although some, such as São Tomé, became very profitable indeed. But

[85] Letter of Privilege to São Tomé settlers, 24 September 1485, *MMA* 1:50–1.
[86] Alberto Iria, *O Algarve e a Ilha da Madeira no século XV* (Lisbon, 1974).
[87] An argument cogently made by Sidney Greenfield, "Madeira and the Beginnings of New World Sugar Cane Civilization and Plantation Slavery: A Study in Institution Building," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 292 (1977): 541–3.
[88] See document cited in ibid., p. 550, n. 34, thanking them for their participation in the attack, dated 1425.
[89] Zurara, *Crónica*, chap. 83.
[90] Da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), p. 16.
[91] Magalhães-Godinho, *Descobrimentos* 1:282–6.
[92] Da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), p. 17.
[93] Ibid., p. 22; Greenfield, "Madeira."
[94] Magalhães-Godinho, *Descobrimentos* 1:426–50.

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[95] Donation to Fernão Dulmo, 3 March 1486, in José Ra
do Archivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo àcerca das navag
1892), pp. 58–9.
[96] See the remarks of Samuel Elliot Morrison, *Journa*
Admiral Christopher Columbus (New York, 1963), pp.
A Life of Christopher Columbus (Boston, 1942), pp. 13
[97] De Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 3, chap. 4.
[98] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántida* (Mad

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they did serve as bases for ventures along the African coast (such as the Cape Verdes and São Tomé) or for further Atlantic navigation (as the Azores would for the Brazil and India fleets). More than that, however, the prospect of finding uncharted and uninhabited islands in an Atlantic seemingly full of them encouraged sailors to look west into the Atlantic as well as south to Africa for their fortune. Indeed, just a few years before Columbus's journey, in 1486, the Crown granted Fernão Dulmo, the captain of the island of Terceira (in the Azores group), title to all lands he might discover in the Atlantic, including "a great island or islands, or coastal parts of a mainland."[95]

It was the combination of the prospect of finding new islands and the dream of reaching India that inspired Christopher Columbus's voyage of 1492 – for though he may well have thought his trip would take him to the lands of the Great Khan, his charter specified islands as well.[96] Columbus, of course, discovered many islands and, shortly afterward, a great continent, which (even though Columbus died believing he was in Asia) was soon recognized as being an entirely new and completely unexpected landmass.

In short, then, European navigation in the South Atlantic was not the product of long-range visionary schemes, an explosion of pent-up commercial energy, or even the response to new technology. Instead it was the cautious advance of a new frontier, using or slightly modifying existing technology and relying on relatively small amounts of private capital. Only in the last, dramatic voyages to round Africa or cross the Atlantic did royal patronage, substantial capital, and geopolitical thinking come to dominate the activity. For example, only when Portuguese sailors visiting Benin reported the possibility of contacts with Prester John (in Ethiopia) did the Portuguese Crown decide to fund its own voyage, Diogo Cão's attempt to circumnavigate Africa.[97] All the previous century of expansion had been privately funded though royally sponsored. Likewise, only the conquest of the last of the Canaries and Columbus's voyages received Spanish funding.[98]

It was a pattern that would continue to dominate European activity. The wealthier merchants, government officials, and grand schemes would be saved until politically weaker people had demonstrated the certainty of success, and then the wealthy and powerful would follow

[95] Donation to Fernão Dulmo, 3 March 1486, in José Ramos Coelho, ed., *Alguns documentos do Archivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo àcerca das navagações e conquistas portuguezas* (Lisbon, 1892), pp. 58–9.
[96] See the remarks of Samuel Elliot Morrison, *Journals and Other Documents on the Life of Admiral Christopher Columbus* (New York, 1963), pp. 26–30; idem, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston, 1942), pp. 138–45.
[97] De Barros, *Decadas de Asia* I, bk. 3, chap. 4.
[98] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántida* (Madrid, 1956).

up, absorb the activities and profits of the pioneers, and turn the exploitation of the new discoveries over to those who dominated all society.

Thus, by the late fifteenth century the pioneers had fully tested the regime of wind and currents that dominated Atlantic navigation.[99] By discovering this key, Europeans were able to unlock the commerce of the Atlantic, and because they had single-handedly developed the routes, their domination of the high seas in the Atlantic was ensured in a way that was not possible in any other extra-European area of navigation. In neither techniques nor experience did they dominate the Indian Ocean and South China Sea with the completeness that they dominated the Atlantic.[100]

Oceanic navigation and political domination

Scholars have argued that this domination of the seas gave Europeans insuperable political and commercial advantages over local people in Africa and the Americas.[101] This claim, although possessing some merit, overlooks the complexity of the situation, especially on the coasts of the continents, and when studied in detail is not as persuasive as it first appears. Although Europeans did make some conquests in both Africa and the Americas, it was not naval power that secured the conquests. Their failure to dominate local coastal commerce or overwhelm coastal societies, most pronounced in Africa but also the case in some parts of the Americas, means that we must amplify our estimation of the role played by these societies in the shaping of the Atlantic world. Domination of high-seas commerce is significant, to be sure, but perhaps not as significant as domination of the mainlands.

Naval encounters and Afro-European commerce. Europeans clearly hoped that their maritime abilities would give them military advantages that would result in large profits and perhaps conquests. They were prepared to take over territory and enslave people, and their actions in the Canary Islands bore witness to that desire. However much some visitors to the Canaries might have wanted to engage in peaceful trade, it was ultimately the slave raiders and conquerors who won out. Control of the seas allowed Europeans to land freely on the islands, resupply their forces when necessary, and concentrate large forces for their final

[99] Avelino Teixeira da Mota, "As rotas marítimas portuguesas no Atlântico de meados do século XV ao penúltimo quartal do século XVI," *Do Tempo e da História* 3 (1970): 13–33.

[100] See the important work of K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (London, 1985), pp. 138–59.

[101] This discussion has been summarized and examined in Chauveau, "Histoire maritime africaine," pp. 176–90.

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Although African vessels were not des
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These specialized craft presented a sr
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[102] Zurara, *Crónica*, chaps. 24–5, 30–6, 86, and 94

[103] On West African boats and especially their
"Histoire maritime africaine," pp. 191–7.

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battles – and thus maritime superiority could arguably have been the cause of their success.

The earliest sailors who reached the African coast in the fifteenth century naturally hoped to continue this tradition, as apparently did the Spanish sailors who began the conquest of the larger Caribbean islands in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. But in Africa at least, their confident approach was rebuffed. Unlike the Canarians, who possessed no boats at all, the West Africans had a well-developed specialized maritime culture that was fully capable of protecting its own waters.

One of the first expeditions to the Senegal River, led by Lançarote de Lagos in 1444, brutally seized the residents of several off-shore islands. The inhabitants, although they managed to inflict some casualties, had little other recourse than to try to flee to areas of difficult access. Other expeditions that followed did more or less the same, but it was not long before African naval forces were alerted to the new dangers, and the Portuguese ships began to meet strong and effective resistance. For example, in 1446 a ship under Nuno Tristão attempting to land an armed force in the Senegambian region was attacked by African vessels, and the Africans succeeded in killing nearly all the raiders. Likewise, in 1447 Valarte, a Danish sailor in Portuguese service, was killed along with most of his crew when local craft attacked him near the island of Gorée.[102]

Although African vessels were not designed for high-seas navigation, they were capable of repelling attacks on the coast. They were specialized craft, designed specifically for the navigational problems of the West African coast and the associated river systems. From the Angolan coast up to Senegal, African military and commercial craft tended to be built similarly. Generally, they were carved from single logs of tropical trees and only occasionally had their sides built up. Consequently, they tended to be long and very low in the water. They were almost always powered by oars or paddles and thus were maneuverable independent of the wind. They drew little water and could operate on the coast and in rivers, creeks, and inland estuaries and lagoons. Craft that were designed to carry soldiers could, according to contemporary witnesses, carry from fifty to one hundred men.[103]

These specialized craft presented a small, fast, and difficult target for European weapons, and they carried substantial firepower in their archers and javelinmen. However, they could not go far out to sea, and the larger, high-sided Portuguese vessels were difficult for them to storm.

[102] Zurara, *Crónica*, chaps. 24–5, 30–6, 86, and 94.
[103] On West African boats and especially their military characteristics, see Chauveau, "Histoire maritime africaine," pp. 191–7.

Alvise da Mosto, a Venetian trading in Africa with a Portuguese license, records an encounter he had with an African flotilla in the Gambia in 1456. Da Mosto was mistaken, with justice, for being another raiding party from Portugal and was immediately attacked by seventeen large craft carrying about 150 armed men. They showered his ships with arrows as they approached, and da Mosto fired his artillery (bombards) at them, without, however, hitting anything. Although the attackers were temporarily stunned by this unexpected weapon, they nevertheless pressed the attack, at which point crossbowmen in the upper rigging of the Venetian ship opened fire, inflicting some casualties. Again, although impressed by the weaponry, the Africans continued fighting until da Mosto eventually made it known he did not mean to attack them, and a cease-fire ensued.[104]

The Africans were unable, in most circumstances, to take a European ship by storm, and the Europeans had little success in their seaborne attacks on the mainland. As a result, the Europeans had to abandon the time-honored tradition of trading and raiding and substitute a relationship based more or less completely on peaceful regulated trade. Da Mosto attempted this in his voyage, and the Portuguese Crown eventually dispatched Diogo Gomes in 1456 to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with the African rulers of the coast.[105] As a result, Portugal established and maintained diplomatic relations with a host of African states. Already in 1494, Hieronymous Münzer, a German visitor to Lisbon, noted that the king sent frequent presents to the rulers of African states to win their favor, and as a result Portuguese could travel freely in Africa under the protection of these rulers.[106] These diplomatic and commercial relations easily replaced the raid-and-trade or raid-and-conquer patterns of other parts of the Atlantic, especially because the Portuguese soon discovered to their pleasure that there was also a well-developed commercial economy in Africa that maritime commerce could tap into without engaging in hostilities.

The presence of African naval craft along most of the coast seems to have deterred a recurrence of a raid-and-trade pattern by most subsequent Portuguese voyages to Africa, although, of course, the policy of refraining from attacks on Africans was not always followed. Newcomers or less established powers might still go for the short-term advantages of raiding, as did a Castillian expedition that was sent in 1475 to

[104] Da Mosto, "Mondo Novo" (ed. Gasparrini-Leporace), pp. 82–4.
[105] Gomes related his mission in "De prima inuentione Gujnee," in Fernandes, "Descriçã," fols. 272–83 (this is the foliation of the original text).
[106] Hieronymous Münzer, "Itinerarium," 23 November 1494, *MMA*² 1:247–8. Some of these diplomats are known: Records exist for missions from Kongo, Benin, Labida, and Jolof, all to Lisbon.

trade for gold on the Gold Coast but that a
Likewise, early English voyages, in the lat
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[107] Alonso Fernández de Palencia, *Cronica de Enriqu*
[108] For example, Cavendish's attack in August 1586
which various accounts have been gathered and
pean Sources for Sierra Leone," *Africana Research*
[109] Richard Saltonstall to Massachusetts General Co
ed., *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607–1815*, 2 vols. (Bos
meeting minutes, sessions of 1 and 14 October
November 1646, in Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Re*
Massachusetts Bay in New England, 5 vols. (Bosto
2:84, 129, 136, and 168.
[110] See the retrospective account of André Alvares d
Guiné," 1594, *MMA*² 3:319; and contemporary
Luis, 27 March 1532 and 5 September 1534, *MM*
[111] Alvará of Afonso I to Officials of São Tomé, 27 D
[112] Jean Alfonse de Saintogne, *Les voyages advantu*
published in 1559, this text was probably writte
case, around 1544.

ling in Africa with a Portuguese license,
ith an African flotilla in the Gambia in
with justice, for being another raiding
nmediately attacked by seventeen large
men. They showered his ships with ar-
la Mosto fired his artillery (bombards) at
; anything. Although the attackers were
nexpected weapon, they nevertheless
int crossbowmen in the upper rigging of
, inflicting some casualties. Again, al-
ponry, the Africans continued fighting
le it known he did not mean to attack
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most circumstances, to take a European
eans had little success in their seaborne
esult, the Europeans had to abandon the
ng and raiding and substitute a relation-
pletely on peaceful regulated trade. Da
yage, and the Portuguese Crown eventu-
in 1456 to negotiate treaties of peace and
lers of the coast.[105] As a result, Portugal
plomatic relations with a host of African
nymous Münzer, a German visitor to Lis-
frequent presents to the rulers of African
s a result Portuguese could travel freely in
these rulers.[106] These diplomatic and com-
ed the raid-and-trade or raid-and-conquer
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val craft along most of the coast seems to
f a raid-and-trade pattern by most subse-
Africa, although, of course, the policy of
ricans was not always followed. Newcom-
s might still go for the short-term advan-
stillian expedition that was sent in 1475 to

asparrini-Leporace), pp. 82–4.
prima inuentione Gujnee," in Fernandes, "Descriçã,"
f the original text).
ium," 23 November 1494, *MMA*² 1:247–8. Some of
rds exist for missions from Kongo, Benin, Labida, and

trade for gold on the Gold Coast but that also raided fairly extensively.[107] Likewise, early English voyages, in the late sixteenth century, especially those to volatile areas like Sierra Leone with its many states, also raided or at least let violence and seizure of people predominate over peaceful trade.[108] But such violence "spoiled" trade in an area, and most countries that had a long-term stake in trade took steps to prevent hostilities. Indeed, one of the earliest North American voyages, made from Boston in 1645, was involved in raiding, and the city officials actually returned the slaves seized by the ship with an apologetic note, probably to retain or regain good relations with their potential trade partners.[109]

Even the Portuguese Crown sometimes had to relearn these lessons. In 1535 the Portuguese attempted to conquer the Bissagos Islands, home of some of the most renowned sailors and raiders on the Guinea coast, but with disastrous results.[110] For the most part, however, such exceptions were sporadic, and peaceful trade became the rule all along the African coast, and given the large number of participants and the somewhat uncertain nature of virtually all long-distance trade in the preindustrial period, it is not surprising that some breaches occurred.

Not only did African naval power make raiding difficult, it also allowed Africans to conduct trade with the Europeans on their own terms, collecting customs and other duties as they liked. For example, Afonso I, king of Kongo, seized a French ship and its crew in 1525 because it was trading illegally on his coast.[111] It was perhaps because of incidents such as this that João Afonso, a Portuguese sailor in French service, writing at about the same time, advised potential travelers from France to Kongo to take care to conduct trade properly, explaining that when a ship enters the Zaire, it should wait until the officials on shore send one of their boats and do nothing without royal permission from the king of Kongo.[112]

[107] Alonso Fernández de Palencia, *Cronica de Enrique IV*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1904–9), 4:127.
[108] For example, Cavendish's attack in August 1586 and Cumberland's in October 1586, of which various accounts have been gathered and edited in P. E. H. Hair, "Early European Sources for Sierra Leone," *Africana Research Bulletin* 13 (1974): 71–2, 76–7.
[109] Richard Saltonstall to Massachusetts General Court, 7 October 1645, in Robert Moody, ed., *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607–1815*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1972–4), 1:138–9; Boston Council meeting minutes, sessions of 1 and 14 October 1645, 4 September, 1 October, and 4 November 1646, in Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853–4; reprint, New York, 1968), 2:84, 129, 136, and 168.
[110] See the retrospective account of André Alvares de Almada, "Tratado breve dos Rios da Guiné," 1594, *MMA*² 3:319; and contemporary documentation, Donation to Infante Luis, 27 March 1532 and 5 September 1534, *MMA*² 2:226–9 and 263–5.
[111] Alvará of Afonso I to Officials of São Tomé, 27 December 1525, *MMA* 1:455–6.
[112] Jean Alfonse de Saintogne, *Les voyages advantureux* (Paris, 1559), fol. 55. Although published in 1559, this text was probably written around 1530 – Afonso died, in any case, around 1544.

Portugal's one sustained military excursion into Atlantic Africa, the conquest of Angola, was the result of economic controversy rather than territorial aspirations. The colony was originally intended to be a commercial factory to regulate the trade from Ndongo and for four years functioned as such.[113] When a trade dispute led to war in 1579, the Portuguese position was saved only by the intervention of a Kongo army, and even though Kongo itself joined an anti-Portuguese coalition in 1591, Portugal had acquired a foothold and local allies sufficient to maintain itself.[114]

Naval conflict and conquest in the Americas. Although our purpose is principally to reveal the African role in shaping the Atlantic world, it is worth noting, at least briefly, that in some parts of the Americas European naval superiority was not particularly decisive. Most of the spectacular conquests by Europeans in America involved inland empires, in which naval power was relatively unimportant (with the possible well-known exception of the role played by Spanish brigantines in the siege of Tenochtitlán by Cortés).[115]

It was the Spanish failure in the Caribbean that is most dramatic, however. The Spanish did, of course, conquer (with considerable local help) the larger islands. But in some ways they simply forestalled their conquest by the militaristic inhabitants of the southern and eastern Caribbean. The Kulinago of the Lesser Antilles and the Carib and Arawak people of the mainland of Venezuela and the Guianas (often, though not always accurately, designated "Caribs" in Spanish documents)[116] not only proved capable of resisting Spanish attempts to attack their homes but managed to raid the Spanish possessions of the Caribbean throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The people of the eastern Caribbean basin possessed sufficient naval technology (on African lines, composed of fairly small, maneuverable craft)[117] to defeat Spanish ships,

[113] See the 1571 contract between Paulo Dias de Novais and the Crown, which stipulated commercial relations, although it did allow Dias de Novais to conquer a section of the barren southern coast, then outside of Ndongo's jurisdiction (Carta de Doação a Paulo Dias de Novais, 19 September 1571, *MMA* 3:36–51).

[114] Detailed in Beatrix Heintze, "Die portugiesische Besiedlungs- und Wirtschaftpolitik in Angola, 1570–1607," *Aufsätze zur portugiesischen Kulturgeschichte* 17 (1981–2): 200–19.

[115] There are several surveys of the period, the best, perhaps being Carl Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966); and Troy Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 1492–1526* (Albuquerque, 1973).

[116] On the complexities of the ethnological, historical, and archeological situation in the southern Caribbean basin (including the Guianas and the Orinoco basin), see Marc de Civrieux, "Los Caribes y la conquista de la Guyana española," *Montalbán* 5 (1976): 875–1021.

[117] For an account of naval war between Carib canoes and European vessels that is equivalent in some ways to da Mosto's account for Africa, see the eyewitness account of Jean Baptiste du Terte, *Histoire generale des Antilles habitées par les François*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1667), 1:508–12.

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[118] For a good survey of Spanish relations with the
military prowess in general, see Joseph Barom
Caribbean Quarterly 12 (1966): 30–47.

[119] Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general*
(several modern eds.), decade 7, bk. 7, chaps. 5

[120] Louis de Armond, "Frontier Warfare in Colo
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[121] See the admirable discussion in Phillip Powell, S
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for they did actually take ships on the high seas.[118] The French, English, and Dutch who eventually settled in the West Indies and the mainland were forced into first a co-dominion and then a long-lasting military struggle, which was really only decided by the superior numeric strength of the settlers.

Even in the mainland areas, the European conquest of the Americas was far from complete. Outside the central areas of Mexico and Peru there were many Native American peoples who resisted European incursions or yielded to them only slowly after long-standing military pressure. Among these one might mention the indigenous inhabitants of Florida, who not only defeated Ponce de Leon's celebrated attack on them but pursued his men out to sea in canoes, capturing several of his ships.[119] Even on land, Europeans were unable to easily defeat either the Araucanians of Chile[120] or the "Chichimecas" of Mexico,[121] each of whom resisted European settlers and conquerors with such success that settlement was slowed and undertaken either with their concurrence and assistance or only after long struggle. The Tupinambá and Tapuya of Brazil gave ground to Portuguese settlement very slowly, and by 1680 many regions in South America were either entirely in the hands of natives or were jointly ruled by Native Americans with European settlers in an uneasy co-dominion.[122]

One should not therefore imagine the Americas as simply lying securely under European sovereignty. In many places a long struggle for control ensued; in other places frontier conditions without secure European sovereignty continued for a long time. When Africans were brought to the Americas as slaves, they found this situation often worked to their advantage, and for them, the unsettled nature of the Americas provided the opportunity to escape, to play off the contending parties, or to use the potential for defection or escape to improve their situation.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, then, the Atlantic world had begun to take shape. European sailors, who had come to understand the

[118] For a good survey of Spanish relations with the inhabitants of Dominica and for Carib military prowess in general, see Joseph Baromé, "Spain and Dominica, 1493–1647," *Caribbean Quarterly* 12 (1966): 30–47.

[119] Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos . . .* (1724) (several modern eds.), decade 7, bk. 7, chaps. 5, 8–10.

[120] Louis de Armond, "Frontier Warfare in Colonial Chile," *Pacific Historical Review* 23 (1954): 125–32; Robert C. Padden, "Cultural Change and Military Resistance in Araucanian Chile, 1550–1730," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* (1957): 103–21.

[121] See the admirable discussion in Phillip Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver: The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550–1600* (Berkeley, 1952).

[122] John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500–1760* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), is the best survey; for other regions, such as Paraguay, see James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 253–304.

winds and currents of the Atlantic, had established a system of navigation that bound Europe, Africa, and the Americas into a single system of commerce. European rulers and the more powerful of their subjects had come to see the system as being of great significance and holding potential for wealth and were well on their way to wresting political and economic control away from the pioneers who had created it. But if the powerful of Europe controlled the commerce of the seas, in Africa they were unable to dominate either the coast or coastal navigation, and in the Americas the subdued regions were surrounded by hostile and sometimes aggressive unconquered people. Thus the African role in the development of the Atlantic would not simply be a secondary one, on either side of the Atlantic. In Africa, it was they who would determine their commercial role, and in America they were often the most important group among the early colonists. Even when they played no particular political role, they often could capitalize on the incompleteness of European domination.

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The development of com
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African naval victories might not necessa
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Perhaps the most influential scholar to a
Walter Rodney, whose work on Africa's Atla
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[1] Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, pp. 95–11
Coast, 1545–1800 (London, 1970), pp. 171–99.