the library of iberian resources online A History of Spain and Portugal Volume 1 Stanley G. Payne

## **Chapter Ten The Expansion**

**[188]** The expansion of Spain and Portugal overseas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was one of the most important achievements in world history, an enterprise for which Hispanic people had been prepared by their past and by the changes and opportunities attending the close of the Middle Ages. The medieval heritage of a military society, frequently thinking in terms of divine warfare and crusading, used to living on the boundaries of Latin Christendom and ever pressing back these boundaries, provided cultural and psychological training that was no doubt indispensable for the role played by the Hispanic peoples in the expansion of Europe. Desire for glory and riches had been a major incentive in the reconquest since the eighth century, but fifteenth-century society had become more self-conscious about such goals and had better information about how to attain them. In Castile, especially, aspects of late medieval humanism developed a very conscious stress on individual fame and glory as inducements to great deeds. Direct striving for such goals was clearly in the minds of the sixteenth-century conquistadores.

For centuries the expansion of the faith was inextricably intertwined with military glory and economic profit. Because of this it is idle to ask, as is frequently done, whether the Portuguese pioneers and Castilian conquistadores were motivated more by greed or by religious zeal. In the Hispanic crusading-expansionist ideology, the two went together. In Castile, particularly, wealth was based on **[189]** conquest and dominion, which in turn was the result of the expansion of Christendom against the Muslims. It was accepted by most as axiomatic that God made such wealth available because the expansionists were engaged in a righteous cause. Religious belief was whole and complete, and rarely admitted the possibility of any contradiction between worldly profit and religious aims in the expansion of Christian dominion, at least until the mid-sixteenth century. Crusading and profit were largely viewed as harmonious and complementary.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there had developed a new demand among the upper classes of Europe for luxury goods that could be supplied only from the Orient, goods such as cotton cloth (India), fine silks (China), exotic precious stones (India, Ceylon. Tibet), and pepper, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves to flavor foods, especially tainted meat. During the fourteenth century, Italian and Catalan merchants had enriched themselves as middlemen in the trade for such goods, channeled through the Near East. By the fifteenth century, achievements in maritime technology and navigation, coupled with demand from a broader market and the marshalling of economic and administrative resources for long-range enterprise, raised the possibility of direct communications overseas with the sources of exotic goods. In the process, new items of trade and wealth were acquired--west African pepper, Guinean gold, ivory, valuable new woods, and of fateful importance, African slaves.

The Catalans had been the first of the Hispanic peoples to expand overseas, in the creation of their Mediterranean thalassocracy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the process, the Aragonese-Catalan empire developed key institutions--the viceroyalty and the organized consulate, or

board of trade--that were imitated to some extent in both the Portuguese and Castilian empires. At the height of the Catalan expansion, some of their seamen and adventurers ranged far beyond the ordinary ambit of European commerce. Catalan explorers reached the Sudan and were among the first to get to the Canary Islands. In 1346, Jaume Ferrer rounded the northwest tip of Africa and sailed down as far as Rio de Oro (below southern Morocco). For several generations, Catalan commerce dominated the northwest African trade. Catalan shipping was basically Mediterranean in style and construction, consisting of galleys and sail-driven round boats, but at its height rivaled that of Genoa in skill and soundness of construction. Catalan technicians made significant contributions to the development of the rudder and to new navigational devices, especially in cartography. Italian and Catalan sailors were the first to use regular navigational charts, and the school of cartography **[190]** at Palma de Mallorca, staffed mainly by Jewish experts, was the best in the world of the late fourteenth century, producing the outstanding Catalan Atlas of 1375. Yet by the fifteenth century, the economic decline of Catalonia made it impossible for seamen and merchants to exploit the broader commercial opportunities that the Catalans had done so much to open up, so that in general, Catalan activities did not transcend the traditional avenues of Mediterranean commerce.

The initiative of Portugal and Castile in transatlantic expansion was due first of all to the exceptionally favorable geographic position of the peninsula's western and southwestern coasts. By the end of the fourteenth century, the Castilian fleet had surpassed that of Catalonia in size and scope. It was most strongly developed in the Basque and Castilian ports of the Biscay coast of the north, whose shipping routed English naval forces several times, exploited the French and Flemish trade, and gave Castile its first age of maritime glory, helping to establish Castilian as a commercial lingua franca in some west European Atlantic ports. After the Christian population had become firmly established for several generations in the coastal regions of western Andalusia, a fleet developed there also, mainly in fishing and in coastal trade. By the early fifteenth century it had ventured farther, building an important commerce of the Canaries and later moving down the Guinean coast of Africa. Genoese merchants and entrepreneurs played a key role in the commerce of the southern coast, establishing themselves first when the Christians took Seville and then becoming more and more influential during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many Genoese commercial families were Castilianized or Lusitanized after several generations and became a major part of the new commercial elite.

It must be emphasized again that neither in Portugal nor much less in Castile did economic and mercantile affairs attain predominant importance. They were the concern of small commercial and maritime groups in the port towns. Society continued to be dominated by the aristocracy, and aristocratic ideals tended to dominate thinking and values. The maritime society of the southwestern coasts of the peninsula obviously could not compete with the genuinely important commercial centers of the period. The combined activity of these towns was very small beside that of the north Italian or Flemish towns, but they did develop nuclei of trained sailors and shipbuilders and just enough capital and commercial experience to provide a base for further activity. Though the coastal societies could hardly be called cultured or advanced in terms of the more developed regions of late medieval Europe, they developed significant technology, most notably in ship design and construction. By the fifteenth century the **[191]** slender, graceful designs of the Basque pinnace and Portuguese caravel had produced boats much faster and more maneuverable than the slow, clumsy round boats traditionally used for Mediterranean commerce. These ships were planned for coastal navigation, but soon proved capable of a greatly extended radius of maritime activity.

C. R. Boxer has suggested that Portuguese expansion arose from four fundamental motives: 1) crusading zeal; 2) desire for precious metals (especially gold from Guinea in the fifteenth century); 3) the quest for Prester John (the mythic Christian prince of the East) and the establishment of a stronger

geopolitical position in relation to the Muslim world; and 4) the search for commercial wealth, especially through the spice trade.

Under Joâo I (1384-1433), Portugal achieved a unity and concentration of resources never before realized. It was still a small kingdom that counted for little in European affairs, but it was modestly prosperous and in a unique strategic position. Moreover, the crown's tradition of patronizing shipping and commerce was expanded under the new Aviz dynasty.

Direct and continous outward expansion was begun with the Portuguese conquest of the north Moroccan port city of Ceuta in 1415. This expedition had been encouraged by the Moroccan civil war of 1411-1412 that left Ceuta without support from the interior. Seizure of Ceuta offered an attractive prospect because it opened the door to a variety of new opportunities: a) its position opposite the straits of Gibraltar gave its possessor leverage in the Mediterranean trade and control of one of the main outlets of the trans-African Sudanese gold trade; b) it could serve as a base for naval activity and piracy in several directions; c) it offered a new outlet for the petty nobility to win wealth and glory, an important consideration in view of the limitations on domestic income for much of the Portuguese aristocracy in the fifteenth century; and d) it could enable Portugal to flank its most dangerous rival, Castile, whose further expansion to the south and west might choke off Portuguese opportunity. The chief promoter of the Ceuta expedition was Joâo Afonso, royal overseer of finance and principal representative of the bourgeoisie in the government. The expedition required a major mobilization of Portuguese resources but won a quick, dramatic success and established the Portuguese in a lucrative and strategic trade mart.

Expansion into the Atlantic was actually begun a few years earlier by Castile, when soon after 1400 several small groups of adventurers of Norman and Castilian origin occupied and began to settle three of the outlying Canary islands. They did official homage to the Castilian crown, which had won a vague title to the archipelago two generations before. In the 1420s, the transoceanic Portuguese expansion **[192]** began with the settlement of the Madeira Islands, which at first were prized for their wood (whence the name). In little more than thirty years the Madeiras were converted into a lucrative source of cane sugar, for which there was a great market in Europe. In the mid-1420s, the Portuguese crown sponsored efforts to occupy the largest island in the Canary archipelago, Gran Canaria, but these expeditions were beaten off by the warlike islanders. A half-century of competition with Castile ensued for control of the Canaries, until Portugal finally withdrew in 1479 according to the terms of the Treaty of Alcaçovas. Occupation of the larger islands was not completed by Castile until 1493. The land and native population of the Canaries was divided up among the Castilian conquerors by a semifeudal system of bequests (*encomiendas* and *repartimientos*), which foreshadowed the subsequent system of land grants and division of the native population in much of Spanish America. The Canaries played a growing role in Castilian commerce in the 1480s and 1490s.

During the greater part of the fifteenth century, the main target of Portuguese expansion was not transoceanic dominion but the coast of Morocco. Within Morocco itself there were a variety of useful goods: grain, cattle in the north, sugar, some textiles, as well as fish, hides, wax, and honey. These helped compensate for the grain deficit that had developed in Portugal and were added to the lure of the Sudanese gold trade.

Almost more important was the fact that under the Aviz dynasty there had arisen an aristocracy of modest origins with commercial connections and looking for honor and profit overseas. For much of the nobility, the income from new *senhorios* or from raiding and piracy would compensate for the relative decline in their modest seigneurial dues. It is scarcely an exaggeration to speak of an early

fifteenth-century Portuguese crisis of the nobility, whose small fixed-rent income from land was being reduced by inflation. Whereas the military aristocracy had opposed the Ceuta expedition of 1415, advocating instead a direct land expedition against Granada, within two decades its position had changed and it became a champion of raiding and expansion in northwest Africa. Along with this grew a new sense of chivalry and crusading spirit among the fifteenth-century aristocracy, the product of conscious cultivation of aristocractic norms by fifteenth-century culture. The ideal of the crusade against the infidel had been less prominent in Portugal than in Castile, but it received emphasis in late medieval chivalric culture.

Royal policy under King Duarte (1433-1438) was more strongly sympathetic to the military aristocracy than it had been under Joâo I. A firm money policy -- unlike that of Joâo's reign -- was adopted, accompanied by an attempt at revaluation which benefitted a nobility **[193]** living from rents. Royal decrees established the inviolability of the entailment (*morgadio*) of aristocratic estates. Moreover, new establishments in the Madeiras were set up on the basis of seigneurial domain, contrary to the practice of Joâo's reign. Until 1433, the crown had received one-fifth of the profits of all expeditions, but after that date the royal fifth was limited to the profits of commercial voyages and did not accrue from military raids, and nobles became more active in outfitting pirate expeditions. Younger sons began to concentrate on fighting in Morocco, for which they expected special *mercês* (endowments) from the crown even though they might not be able to establish seigneuries in Morocco.

Thus the territorial aristocracy played a major role in the second great Moroccan expedition--the disastrous campaign against Tangier in 1437, an ill-organized, poorly led campaign designed to provide booty and lay the foundation for direct territorial expansion. Since it was not supported by merchants and moneylenders, the crown had to raise taxes to finance it.

After Duarte's premature death in 1438, Portuguese affairs were plunged into crisis. His heir, Afonso V, was but six years of age. The middle classes and townspeople in general were eager to affirm the regency of Duarte's eldest brother, Pedro, who was well educated, clear minded, and prudent. Dom Pedro was opposed by the territorial aristocracy, led by Joao I's bastard Afonso, for whom the duchy of Bragança, the first dukedom in Portuguese aristocratic history, had been created by the crown. A revolt by the Lisbon population in 1439 was necessary to win the regency for Pedro. Under his leadership navigation and overseas expansion received decisive encouragement.

The key period of maritime innovation was the half-century between 1420 and 1470. During these years the rapid, long-ranging caravel was perfected, and lateen sail rigging, greatly increasing speed and flexibility, was developed. Navigational devices, chiefly the perfected astrolabe, were introduced which made possible the great voyages of the last years of the century. The greater share of this technical achievement was accomplished by the Portuguese, though with considerable assistance from Spaniards and Italians.

The most celebrated figure in Portuguese maritime development was the Infante D. Henrique, one of the younger sons of Joâo I. Don Henrique was not, as he has sometimes been painted, a monomaniac, nor is it clear that he himself knew much about the science of his day. He did possess geographical curiosity, and he was concerned about prosecuting the offensive against the Muslims and converting the heathen. He was also keenly interested in profit from gold, sugar, and slaves, and since he was not in line for succession to the throne, in building the honor and power of his own household. As govenor of **[194]** the port of Lagos and grand master of the Order of Christ, wealthiest and most important of the Portuguese crusading orders, he led in the outfitting of expeditions into the Atlantic and down the west coast of Africa. Had it not been for special resources of the Order of Christ and sometimes of the

crown, these exploratory voyages could not have been continued, for during the first decades they were operated at a considerable loss. Keen professional cost accountants like the merchants of Venice would probably never have developed the facilities for circumnavigating half the world, as did the fifteenth-century Portuguese, for it was not a profitable business. In this respect, the Hispanic crusading impulse was a factor of great significance, encouraging the expansion during its most difficult phase. Prince Henrique's influence was probably most important in the early 1430s during the effort to round Cape Bojador, successful in 1434. The difficult currents in that region made voyaging past the cape unattractive to commercial enterprise, and without special incentive and encouragement Portuguese mariners would surely not have ventured so far at that time. In 1436 Henrique turned his attention toward leading the expedition against Tangier the following year, however, and its crushing failure cast grave doubt on his capacity as a military leader.

More concerted encouragement to Atlantic exploration was given by the regency of Pedro, who had traveled widely, collected maps, and was a classical scholar. Dom Pedro opposed destructive raiding and fighting in Morocco, and championed commerce and exploration instead. Until 1441, there had been only three long Atlantic voyages down the African coast, but during the six most active years of Pedro's regency (1441-1447), there were twenty such major expeditions, and no new military ventures in Morocco.

Meanwhile efforts were going ahead to colonize more distant Atlantic islands. The Portuguese reached the Azores either in 1427 or 1431 and began to settle there in 1439. Settlement progressed more rapidly during the 1450s, and the Cape Verde Islands, farther down off the northwest coast of Africa, were colonized in the 1460s.

In 1443, D. Henrique was given sole authority to approve further African voyages, but expeditions were in fact inspired by a variety of initiatives, and the prince was personally responsible for only one-third of the maritime explorations organized during the seventeen years until his death. During eight years of D. Pedro's regency, 198 leagues of African coastline were discovered. Subsequently, during the last twelve years of D. Henrique's career (1448-1460), only 94 leagues of new coastline were explored. There were no major expeditions between 1448 and 1456, and when they were resumed, it was not primarily at the initiative of D. Henrique.

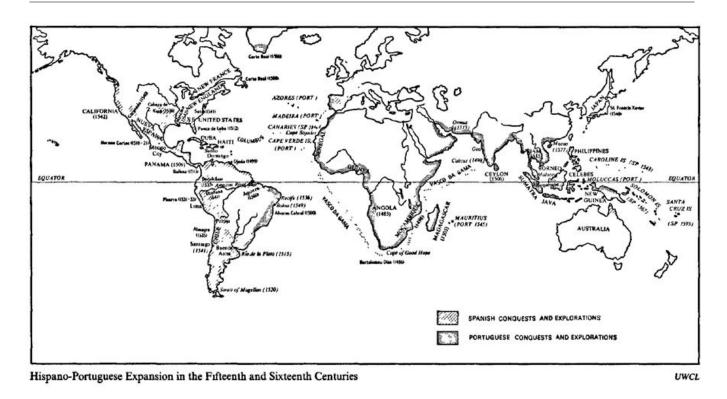
The regency of D. Pedro was ended in 1449 by a reaction of the military aristocracy, who encouraged the pro-aristocratic Afonso V [195] (1438/1449-1481) to seize the reins of government himself. Afonso was an attractive prince but given to rather irrational decisions in matters of major policy. He was urged to imprison or banish his uncle, and in a brief battle that followed between the royal forces and retainers of the ex-regent, the learned, prudent, and far-sighted Pedro was killed.

During the reign of Afonso V, the Portuguese nobility enjoyed great influence and prestige. They were recategorized according to the typical rankings of the French aristocracy, and for several decades the bastard ducal house of Bragança was the wealthiest and most influential force in the kingdom. There was further concentration of land in seigneurial estates, and more estates in the south were cultivated as latifundia with peasant (and later sometimes African slave) laborers.

During the mid-fifteenth century, the Portuguese nobility succeeded in fully imposing its consciously developed style and values on Portuguese society and culture. The ideals of chivalric honor and crusading developed by the early fifteenth century, together with a living standard of great luxury, became the norms of aspiration and achievement. It was within this psychological framework of elite society that the technical achievements of the expansion were carried out. Such a scale of values, still

questioned during the reign of Joâo I, carried the day in Portugal during the second half of the century. The wisdom and justice of an attack on Morocco had to be seriously analyzed in 1415, but during the reign of Afonso V and for the century following, such enterprises were accepted as self-justifying crusades for religion, chivalry, and honor. The justice of Negro slavery was debated in the first years when slaves were brought back from the Guinea coast, and children of the first African slaves in Portugal were set free, but by the end of the fifteenth century the ethics of perpetual slavery for Negroes were rarely questioned.

Afonso V reflected fully the zeal of the military aristocracy for carving out a land empire in Morocco. During his reign there was proportionately less interest in oceanic exploration and expansion, but so much energy was spent on raiding and territorial expansion in Morocco that the king became known as Afonso *o Africano* (the African). With their metal accoutrements and firearms, the Portuguese enjoyed a certain advantage in military technology over the Moroccans, but their attacks upset economic relations and limited the possibilities of commerce. As early as the 1440s, this had diverted the vital Sudanese gold trade from Morocco down to the Guinea coast. Nor did the Portuguese military aristocracy give up plans for a major campaign against the emirate of Granada; in 1465, the Granadan port of Málaga was briefly besieged.



Yet commerce and exploration continued to prosper even though **[197]** they received secondary emphasis from the crown. In 1455, the papal bull *Romanus pontifex* commended to the Portuguese a crusade to the East around the continent of Africa, and granted the Portuguese crown a monopoly of trade in eastern regions. New articles of commerce were becoming important: by 1450, African voyages were bringing back seven to eight hundred slaves a year, and after 1455, coarse malagueta pepper from Guinea was being sold on the European market.

Portuguese enterprise received great encouragement from the shrewd and far-sighted Joâo II (1481-1495), one of the ablest European rulers of the century. D. Joâo was first placed in charge of supervising Atlantic expeditions in 1474 as a nineteen-year-old prince. By this time a very profitable gold trade was beginning along the Guinea coast, where contact was made with caravans from the Sudan. In 1475, the crown established a royal monopoly over the Guinea trade, through the Casa da Guiné. Two years later, D. Joâo was made de facto ruler of the kingdom by his elderly father, and the Treaty of Alcaçovas with Castile in 1479 brought Castilian recognition of the Portuguese monopoly of African coastal trade and exploration. In 1480, the crown officially adopted a policy of absolute secrecy concerning knowledge gained from Portuguese explorations and completely excluded subjects of other powers, on pain of death. To protect the increasingly profitable commerce in gold dust, slaves, pepper, and ivory, the major trading fortress of Sâo Jorge da Mina was built on an island off the Guinea coast in 1482.

During the last quarter of the fifteenth century, the two main sources of overseas income were the lucrative sugar production of Madeira and the gold from Mina. It has been calculated that from 1481 to 1495 Portuguese production of sugar increased forty times over, so saturating the European market that prices fell 60 percent. Despite steady production by central European silver mines, enough gold was returned by Portugal to hold the ratio of gold to silver fairly steady in western Europe during the latter part of the century.

Columbus's first petition to the Portuguese crown (1484) to support a westward expedition to the Orient across the Atlantic was rejected because Portuguese experts were developing a fairly accurate estimate of the earth's circumference. It was realized that Columbus had probably considerably underestimated the length of a westward voyage to the Orient; moreover, Diogo Câo was nearly due to return from a long voyage (1482-1484) that they hoped would show the way around the southern end of Africa. The results of Cao's voyage were disappointing, but by 1485 the Portuguese had perfected calculation tables for charting positions of longitude and latitude. In 1487, three expeditions were dispatched: another major voyage eastward through the south Atlantic led by Bartolomeu Dias; a small land expedition **[198]** across Africa and the near east by Pedro da Covilhao (1487-1493) to gather information about the Indian Ocean; and a private voyage northwestward from the Azores by the Flemish mariner Van Olmen. The latter apparently either never got started or ran into late winter weather in the North Atlantic and was never heard from again. The very useful reconnaissance mission of Covilhao did not get back for six years, but in December 1488, when Columbus was about to renew his plea, Bartolomeu Dias sailed back into Lisbon after an epochmaking voyage that rounded the southern tip of Africa and opened up the route to the East.

Joâo II was succeeded by a twenty-six-year-old cousin and brother-in-law, Manuel I (1495-1521), called the Fortunate, who presided over the most glorious reign in Portuguese history. After nine years of hesitation, four vessels were outfitted for the voyage of Vasco da Gama to the Malabar coast of southwest India (1497-1499), vindicating the Portuguese claim to an eastern sea route to the east. The startling success of Columbus five years earlier was a major incentive for the Portuguese to press their efforts to a climax. Though one-third of the crew on da Gama's epoch-making voyage perished, the expedition's total profit was said to have surpassed 600 percent.

Yet the mere fact of getting ships across a ten-thousand-mile route to India hardly established a profitable commercial position for Portugal. The trinkets and cheap textiles that were used for trade with west Africans held no attraction for sophisticated Asians. The spice trade of south Asia was almost completely monopolized by Muslim middlemen who sold their goods through the Middle East to north

Italian traders, and the Muslim monopolists were in no mood for competition from Christian interlopers. The very aspect of the Portuguese, mostly filthy and bedraggled after six months or more at sea on their small, ill-provisioned vessels, repelled the Asians.

In the Mediterranean and in south Asia, the expansion of Portugal and Castile was not carried out in the face of decadent, yielding non-western societies, but was met head-on by dynamic, conquering Muslim sultanates that were victorious throughout most of southern Asia, like the Turks in southeast Europe. As far as the conquest of territory inhabited by civilized people was concerned, the expansion of the Hispanic kingdoms appeared for a long time relatively insignificant beside the seemingly invincible expansion of the Ottoman Turkish empire after the seizure of Constantinople, the establishment of a Muslim empire in India, and the spread of Muslim sultanates through and across the Indonesian archipelago.

In view of the commercial weakness of the Portuguese economy and the militarily supported monopoly of the Muslim traders in the spice-producing areas, only force of arms seemed capable of breaking the Muslim hold and creating a profitable commercial position for the **[199]** Portuguese. The third voyage to India, again led by Vasco da Gama (1502-1504), was the first major Portuguese military expedition to the east, consisting of fourteen heavily armed vessels with as many soldiers as they could carry. In 1503, it fought and won the first pitched sea battle against the Arab naval forces and blasted its way into the spice trade.

The enormous distance from Portugal of these commercial-military operations meant that direct royal supervision was impossible, and within a few years the office of viceroy of India was created to administer trade and strongholds throughout the litoral of what was being called the Indian Ocean. The second viceroy, and the real founder of Portuguese power in the East, was Afonso d'Albuquerque (1509-1515), a Portuguese nobleman who must be considered the outstanding strategic planner of the sixteenth century. Albuquerque and other leaders realized that Portugal's position could not be secure until it had acquired permanent bases, not merely to guarantee acquisition of spices and other commercial articles, but also to safeguard its lifeline to Europe and to protect Portuguese operations from Muslim counterattack. The base for Portuguese power was laid with the capture of the island city of Goa off the southwest coast of India in 1510. From that time forward "Goa the Golden" served as capital of Portuguese activity in the East. To ward off Arab naval forces, Albuquerque had already partially occupied the key island of Ormuz (1509) at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, whence competing fleets could easily be harassed, and he completely conquered it in 1515. The year after Goa was taken, the viceroy massed most of his small resources for another strike far to the east, seizing the strategic base and spice center of Malacca on the Malay Peninsula (1511). From here the Portuguese could dominate the route to the Indonesian archipelago. Within two more years, Portuguese vessels reached Canton harbor on the Chinese coast, and subsequently obtained commercial rights on the nearby peninsula of Macao, where they remained.

Albuquerque not only staked out the key points of the Portuguese commercial empire in the East but tried also to provide the necessary logistical base for its prosperity. He planned permanent garrisons, reserves of naval manpower, stores, and even shipbuilding facilities, to make the Indian forces partially independent and able to survive long sieges and extended onslaughts by their numerous foes in the east. He did not live long enough to pursue his even more grandiose ambition to use Portuguese naval superiority in a crusade against the Muslim Middle East from the opposite side of the globe. Albuquerque had dreamed of landing an expedition on the eastern shore of the Red Sea to capture Mecca, or diverting the source of the Nile to ruin Muslim Egypt. He died prematurely in 1515, but what he accomplished during the climactic last four years of his life established him **[200]** as one of the

greatest, perhaps the most extraordinary of all, of the Hispanic conquerors.

The military success of small Portuguese forces on the other side of the world, virtually cut off from reinforcement, in a hostile environment populated by scores of millions of potential foes, was in some ways more remarkable than the sixteenth-century Spanish conquests in the Western Hemisphere. In India the Portuguese had to face not religious ascetics of Hindu culture but members of dominant military castes. The giant war junks of China and Java were frequently larger than Portuguese ships and sometimes as strongly constructed. Unlike Amerindians. Asians were well acquainted with guns and gunpowder and were capable of laying cannon which far surpassed those of the Portuguese in size. Nor can it be contended that Arab merchants, Hindu princes, Mogul emperors, and Malay sultans were awestruck or non-plussed by the sudden appearance of a handful of Europeans.

Nonetheless, the Portuguese did possess certain advantages of a military, political, and psychological nature. Portuguese ships, if not always larger, were faster, more maneuverable, and in most cases more stoutly constructed than those of the native peoples of the Indian Ocean. Secondly, the Portuguese were the only armed force in the East to mount long-range naval artillery. Installing light cannon on ships apparently originated with the Venetians, but at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Portuguese had developed this tactic further than any of their contemporaries. Such naval artillery was extremely weak by later standards and could not be used to blow most ships out of the water at long range, but it sufficed to kill enemy soldiers and sailors at a distance, cripple ships, and demoralize foes who were unable to reply in kind.

Psychologically, the morale, vigor, and self-confidence of the Portuguese, like that of their Castilian contemporaries, was incomparable. Products of a heritage of expansion and victory, they were ready to tackle the enemy at any odds in full expectation of triumph. In most of their major conquests, the first Portuguese assault failed but was renewed with greater spirit. Their ferocity and determination may not have been more than Asians had the potential to resist but in many cases was more than they were able to withstand psychologically.

Finally, the Portuguese benefitted from the political disunity of the south Asian states. Though several local alliances were formed at various times against the Portuguese, these rarely lasted. The major Portuguese bases held out and were as prosperous as ever at the end of a hundred years. It was eventually competition from European rivals rather than an upsurge of Asian opposition that broke the back of the Portuguese thalassocracy.

The rise of Portuguese naval power in the East paralleled the **[201]** discovery and settlement of the West Indies by small detachments from Castile between 1492 and 1515. The momentous deeds of the Hispanic powers in those years--the conquest of Granada, the discovery of the Western Hemisphere, the carving out of major Portuguese and Castilian footholds on the Moroccan coast, the opening up of the East--stood out in western civilization during a period in which the primary dynamic expansion was found in the major powers of the Islamic world.

By comparison with the arduous preparation and cost of Portuguese enterprise, Columbus's epochmaking voyage of 1492 cost relatively little money and was undertaken when the Castilian crown was in an expansive mood, immediately following the conquest of Granada. It was financed not by Isabel's crown jewels but by private capital from Zaragoza, Valencia, and the Genoese of Seville. The first voyage to America was made by ordinary small Castilian coastal vessels sailing in extraordinarily propitious weather. In recent years there has been some tendency to downgrade Columbus by emphasizing his ignorance of some of the principal scientific findings of his time, particularly in the calculation of distance. Columbus was indeed not a professional mariner but an imaginative entrepreneur. His intellectual orientation was not thoroughly empirical, and he did not know everything that it might have been possible to learn about his expedition. He persistently misrepresented the reality of what he had discovered. Yet when all is said and done the importance of the voyage can scarcely be overestimated. It is true that if Columbus had not sailed westward successfully, someone else would probably have done so within the next few decades, but the point is that Columbus was the first to accomplish the feat in 1492.

His success precipitated a potential crisis in Portuguese-Castilian relations, for the Portuguese crown had for half a century been trying to maintain a monopoly of transoceanic routes to Africa and the Indies. The bull of 1455 had specifically granted them control of the eastward route around Africa, but after Columbus had shown that new land might be reached by sailing westward, the Portuguese crown insisted on a major share of that. The issue was resolved by the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which when amended drew a boundary between Spanish and Portuguese zones of dominion in the west Atlantic at a line 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. (1) It has been conjectured that the Portuguese already had information that the eastern tip of South America lay within the Portuguese zone. If that is so, they made no haste to take advantage of it. It was not until [202] 1500 that Pero Alvares de Cabral, while making the second major voyage to India, swung far west with the prevailing winds and touched the eastern coast of South America, laying the first direct claim to the vast area subsequently known as Brazil.

One of the principal differences between the Portuguese and Castilian expansions was that the Portuguese were more thoroughly in control of their own activities. For example, Geonese bankers, merchants, and entrepeneurs played a major role in the affairs of Seville, the Andalusian ports, and Spanish America, but there was comparatively little foreign influence among the Portuguese. The latter financed most of their own expansion, despite slender resources, and built up their own state-regulated trading system. They learned comparatively little from the mariners of other countries, whereas Columbus and his lieutenants learned much from the Portuguese.

The arrangement made by the Spanish crown with Columbus was an essentially archaic one, based on medieval precedents. He was invested with the offices of viceroy and governor general of whatever new dominions he might discover, and with the hereditary office of grand admiral of those regions for his family. In his second voyage, the customary Castiliian pattern of expansion and settlement was essayed. The discouraging result of that voyage caused a great decline in interest, and it was not until after the turn of the century that enthusiasm for the Indies was seen again in southwest Castile. In following years it mounted steadily. By 1515 most of the West Indian islands had been staked out, and the following thirty years were the great period of continental conquest.

The explorers and conquerors of Spanish America were drawn mostly from the people of the southwestern quarter of Castile, though there were some from almost every region of the peninsula. The soldiers of conquest were for the most part ex-peasants led by relatively undistinguished, frequently impoverished hidalgos. To that extent they were a representative cross-section of Castilian society. The grandes were not represented in the conquest, though during the second half of the century, younger sons from almost every great family of Castile, and from a few of Aragón, were to be found in Spanish America. Though everything done in America was done directly or indirectly under license from the crown, the initiative was relatively spontaneous and came in almost every case from below rather than from above. The conquest was not carried out by organized military units, for the regular Spanish army was not found in America until later in colonial history. Many of the conquerors had fought against the Muslims or Italians or in Castilian civil war. They were products of a process of

competition and survival, and their toughness and endurance revealed it.

[203] For the crown, the conquest of America was a mere sideline to its major preoccupations in Europe and North Africa, and it is surprising to note how few men and little material were involved. During the first half-century of Spanish activity, in which most of the two continents plus a series of major islands and archipelagos were staked out for occupation, fewer than fifty thousand Spaniards left the peninsula. The amount of capital involved was also small, for there was relatively little available, even in Seville. Other maritime and commercial centers, such as the Basque region and Catalonia-Valencia, were already well occupied in the Flanders and Mediterranean trades, respectively. Moreover, Catalans and Aragonese were soon prohibited by statute from participating in American ventures.

The resourcefulness and vigor of west European initiative was immediately made manifest, though the difficulties involved in dealing with the more scattered and backward aboriginal groups also became apparent. The military superiority of the conquerors was a matter of psychology and leadership more than of weapons alone. Firearms played a comparatively small role. Horses were more important, though most of the fighting was hand to hand, where the superiority of steel to stone might have been offset by the immensely greater numbers of the aborigines had it not been for the vast cultural differences between them and their conquerors.

Comparisons have occasionally been drawn between the Hispanic expansion and other voyages to or from Asia between the twelfth and early fifteenth centuries, raising the question of why the fifteenthcentury European expansion achieved the consequences that it did. This question has been answered by referring to certain social and psychological characteristics of the people of Castile, Portugal, and other west European states. The overland travels to Asia of Marco Polo and others in an earlier period had no immediate results simply because the effort involved was absolutely prohibitive. The major Chinese expeditions westward across the Indian Ocean between 1405 and 1433 were something else, but the Chinese obviously lacked the naval technology to make long-range transoceanic activity possible. The hermetic, subjective exclusivism of their culture discouraged the sort of interest in the outside world generated in Christendom with its intellectual curiosity and evangelical zeal. Certainly, the qualities of spontaneity and individual initiative which played a significant role in the expansion could not have been found in the more authoritarian or traditional-communal societies of other parts of the world. But perhaps as important as anything was the closer proximity of the Western Hemisphere, with large, reasonably fertile, temperate territories inhabited by much less developed societies. The monopoly of the new world was thus a logical consequence of geography and culture.

[204] For an entire century, the Portuguese and Castilian overseas empires stood alone. They had no direct competition until the beginning of the Dutch and English colonies at the start of the seventeenth century, and that of the French a bit later. What the Dutch did was to replace the Far Eastern commercial thalassocracy of Portugal with one of their own. The English ultimately achieved the same sort of thing even more effectively, while emulating the Castilians in the development of large scale continental colonization.

The superseding of the Portuguese in Asia by the Dutch and English and the enormous political and technological superiority of Anglo-North America over Hispanic America have raised some serious questions about the historical efficacy of Luso-Hispanic expansion. English colonization was a product of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; that of Portugal and Castile was, it must be emphasized, a product of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that is, of the late Middle Ages. Portugal and Castile never completed the transition into modernity in the eighteenth century. but they were of course even less developed, by any standard of modernity, in 1500. Thus the Hispanic expansion was a projection of

medieval Hispanic society and culture, not a development of the new society conceived of by so many English emigrants. The "new world" for Spanish conquistadores and Brazilian settlers was to be an extension of the old, a projection of societies which had failed to develop their earlier representative political forms and were unable to sustain the rate of social and economic progress that they achieved momentarily in the latter part of the fifteenth century. Added to this was the overwhelming problem of a populous aboriginal society in much of Spanish America, a vast mass which was difficult to move.

The unique achievement of colonial Hispanic society was the development of an original, hybrid society, but it was not a dynamic society that was born with or quickly developed the finest tools of modern government and technology. It was rather a kind of colonial feudalism which recreated, often in more extreme forms, many of the problems of peninsular society which had not been solved before the expansion and grew only more severe afterwards. The ideals of glory and conquest were effective in part because they raised their practitioners out of the civil community of the merely functional or legally conformist. This brought a kind of aristocratic status, which was considered desirable because among other things it lifted one above the common law. Hence the worst aspects of aristocratic dominion in the peninsula were reproduced socially and psychologically in Hispano-America.

## **Bibliography for Chapter 10**

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## Note for Chapter 10

1. This agreement was not altered until the Castilian occupation of the Philippines in the 1580s, during the period of dynastic union between Spain and Portugal (1580-1640) when the rules of demarcation were no longer so clear.