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Portugal and England, 1386-2010 Transcript

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Portugal and England, 1386-2010: A complex web of political, economic and intellectual interchange

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Probably most people have heard of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, famously signed in Windsor in May 1386 and never rescinded, not even to this day. No one at the time would have imagined that it would have lasted so long. In the Middle Ages treaties and alliances were frequently made, and frequently broken. By the alliance Richard II of England and John I of Portugal agreed to provide each other "with military aid and naval assistance on request and to grant reciprocal trading rights to their respective citizens in each other's territory. Richard also promised to support John against any enemy who tried to overthrow him, and John sent Richard a squadron of galleys".^[1] The alliance was cemented by the marriage of Philippa of Lancaster, the daughter of John of Gaunt, to King John. Her diplomatic and social skills - and fecundity, she produced six children, mostly boys, who lived until adulthood - helped keep the alliance together in its early days.

A feature of the alliance which must strike every observer - certainly every English observer - is the inequality between the two partners. In the Middle Ages, as today, England was a rich country, politically one of the most important players in Western Europe, and possessing a formidable army. The English monarchs had territorial ambitions in Scotland, Wales and Ireland and were also masters of large parts of what is now France. Portugal, on the other hand, was a small and struggling kingdom, one of five in the Iberian Peninsula, and by no means the strongest of those, which was Castile.

English political, economic and military strength, over the centuries, has often made the alliance seem a very one-sided affair, from which the weaker partner has benefited disproportionately. Incidents like the Peninsular War (1807-09) come easily to mind, in which England spent huge quantities of money, and many lives, in rescuing Portugal from the invading French - that is one way of putting it. Another, perhaps more realistic, is that England and France were engaged in a struggle for dominance in Europe, and Portugal just happened to be a convenient battlefield. The alliance may have begun for rather similar reasons: John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and one of the children of Edward III, had ambitions to become king of Castile, and Portugal was a convenient jumping-off place for an invasion. While in Portugal Lancaster's troops, especially his archers, took part in the crucial battle of Aljubarrota (1385) by which an invading Castilian army was comprehensively defeated. The battle of Aljubarrota, not unlike the battle of Bannockburn of earlier in the century - it was fought in 1314 - enabled a weaker power - Portugal, Scotland - to remain independent of a stronger neighbour - Castile, England - for centuries.

When it comes to economic relations England again dominates. Probably the most famous incident in this area is the Methuen treaty, or treaties, of 1703. These locked a still largely agrarian Portugal into the economic embrace of a country on the verge of modern industrialization, and the slow start of Portuguese industry has often been attributed to the maleficent influence of Methuen. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century the Portuguese wine trade benefited greatly from the provisions of the treaty.

However, in this lecture I want to look at the alliance from another perspective. England may have been the dominant partner, but that does not mean that England has not needed Portugal, just as Portugal has needed England. It is useful to remind ourselves that, although by comparison with Portugal England is rich and powerful, it is not rich and powerful all the time and in every respect. There have been times - usually largely unrecognized in England - when what Portugal has had to offer has been very important indeed. I shall try to illustrate this point with a series of snapshots, taken from the Middle Ages, the sixteenth century, the seventeenth century and the twenty-first century.

You will recall that a few moments ago I said that one of the things that John I of Portugal did in consequence of the Treaty of Windsor was to send Richard II a squadron of galleys. This was a very serious naval force and it is interesting to learn why its presence in the English Channel was requested.

The late Professor Sir Peter Russell's famous monograph on *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the time of Edward III and Richard II* provides some startling information on the state of the English navy in the 1300s. Quite simply, there was none. Despite a state of almost constant warfare between England, France and Castile at this time, the English government made no attempt to provide any kind of naval defence, apart from trying to hire foreign ships and sailors to man them.

At this time the most useful naval vessel was not, as might be expected, some kind of sailing ship, but the rowing galley. These

ships had originally been developed for use in the Mediterranean, but were quite capable of reaching England from southern Europe, at any rate, in spring and summer. Their average length was about 130 feet and they carried about 180 rowers on 30 benches, six men to a bench. In the Middle Ages they were "all volunteers and specialists at their job, for which they were quite well paid". "A prominent feature of every galley was the "wooden ram attached to the bows and capable of doing great damage to an enemy galley or even to a merchant ship's hull when propelled forward by 180 rowers moving some 200 tons of galley behind it".^[2] They also carried some cannon.

In the 1370s the Hundred Years War was in full swing and there was fighting between Castile and France on one side and England on the other. The Spaniards provided the galleys. They were not much used for combat at sea, because the English had no ships with which to oppose them. The advantage of the galley, with its shallow draft and great speed, was to launch raiding parties on the English coast. Let us take up Sir Peter Russell's narrative of the events of 1377 again: "The Franco-Castilian attack was first directed against Sussex. Several thousand armed men were put ashore in the Rother estuary on 29 June and Rye was captured and pillaged. The fleet then moved further west and attacked Rottingdean, which was abandoned by its terrorized inhabitants. From this place the allied troops marched inland towards Lewes. The only resistance they encountered was from a scratch force of local levies commanded by the prior of Lewes. This was speedily defeated."^[3]

The soldiers then re-embarked and sacked Folkestone and Portsmouth before returning to their base in France. In August they returned, this time to sack the Isle of Wight. One of the aims of the French commanders was to teach the English a lesson, and to show them at first hand something of the horrors of war, from which French peasants had been suffering at the hands of the English for decades.

Though eventually the English government was able to mount an effective defence against enemy raiders on land, there was nothing they could do at sea, except to find foreigners who would do the fighting for them. So it was that they turned to Portugal, and between 1384 and 1390, under the terms of the treaty of Windsor, a squadron of Portuguese galleys was based permanently in English waters, usually in Southampton. It consisted of six galleys, some of impressive size, under the command of Afonso Furtado, and a number of other ships. It cruised regularly in the Channel and must have been successful as a deterrent, because Russell reports no enemy invasion of Southern England during this time.

Here, then, is an interesting snapshot of Portuguese assistance to England at a time of English weakness at sea. But let us move forward a couple of centuries, to the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I and VI, for a glance at a quite different aspect of Anglo-Portuguese relations.

I am now going to talk a little bit about intellectual relations between England and Portugal during this period. English people normally think of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a time of great intellectual creativity. It is the time when Shakespeare's plays were written and performed, after all. But what people often forget is that Shakespeare was a writer of English, and that in his day English was a very provincial and parochial language. With the possible exception of a few merchants in places like Antwerp, no continental European could speak or understand it. Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote only for their own countrymen, and what they wrote was regarded in their time and for many years afterwards as entertainment, unworthy of the sustained attention of serious intellectuals. Sir Thomas Bodley, founder of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, in 1602, refused to allow any play texts in his new institution.

The reason why Sir Thomas did not want English plays in his library was because serious writing on intellectual and professional subjects was done in Latin, the international language. By professional subjects I mean law, medicine and theology, the subjects you had to learn if you wanted to be an advocate, a doctor or a clergyman. In Oxford and Cambridge lectures were given in Latin, the students had to write their academic exercises in Latin, and the books they read were in Latin too. It is in this context of Latin learning that I want to put my next snapshot.

It is normally assumed that Portugal is an importer of books and ideas from England. In modern times, from the nineteenth century onwards, that has probably been true, but it was certainly not the case in earlier periods. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period of rigorous censorship in Portugal, any book by an author who lived in a Protestant country was suspect, and their ownership forbidden. So the Portuguese were not even allowed to read books by Englishmen, unless they happened to be Catholic. But theological or philosophical creativity could continue without books from England. This was a time of intellectual renewal in the Catholic world, in which Portuguese writers participated fully. They helped to formulate the new doctrines of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, proposed at successive meetings of the Council of Trent, and they flocked to join the new and dynamic Society of Jesus, which soon after its inauguration in 1540 embarked on an ambitious educational publishing programme. In other areas of intellectual enquiry, medicine, for instance, or ethnography, the Portuguese were

European leaders because they had access to the information that derived from their voyages of exploration to Africa and Asia. And so it was that, far from being the passive recipient of ideas from elsewhere, Portugal enjoyed a boom period in intellectual exports. And no institutions were more anxious to acquire these exports than the Protestant universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The century from 1540-1640, the period I am concerned with here, was not altogether a happy one for the English universities. Changes of religious allegiance in the reigns of the children of Henry VIII necessarily involved forced changes of university personnel, which cannot have created an atmosphere conducive to calm reflection. Even when more stability was achieved in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign and under James I, English scholars spent a disproportionate amount of time in mutual religious recrimination. Some chancellors of the universities, like Laud at Oxford, brought an undue political interference to bear.^[4] So, on the whole, in the sixteenth century the English were not contributing much to European intellectual life. Instead, they were importing books and ideas. We think of London as a great publishing centre, and it was, for books in English. But English printers did not produce much in Latin, and so books in Latin, the mainstay of the academic world, were imported from the continent.^[5] One of the most famous books in Latin by an Englishman, Thomas More's *Utopia*, went through several editions in the sixteenth century, but all of them abroad.

Religious, and consequently academic life in Portugal was much more stable. The country was hardly touched by Protestantism. There was a violent change of regime in 1580, when Portugal lost its independence to Philip II, but that had no religious consequences and academic productivity continued apparently without a break. There was religious intolerance, as in every European country at the time, in Portugal directed not so much against fellow-Christians, but against Jews. So, although the Portuguese Inquisition did not have many heretics to worry about, they did actively persecute anyone suspected of Judaism. In the long term, the persecution and expulsion of writers suspected of Jewish practices did great harm to the intellectual development of Portugal, but in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries such writers, most of them doctors, very often tried to maintain their links with their home country. It is surprising how many of them, even when living and writing in Italy or Germany, were proud to call themselves "Lusitani" on the title-pages of their books.

I mentioned that in England publishing in Latin was small in scale and did not reach the international market much. The same is true for Portugal. Portuguese printers and publishers, even when using Latin, had great difficulty in distributing their books abroad. The difference, in the early modern period, is that the Portuguese wrote a lot in Latin and were prepared to go to the great foreign printing centres of Venice, Lyon, Cologne and Antwerp to get their work published. This is as true of Christian as it is of Jewish writers. So it was that books by Portuguese writers formed a substantial part of the flood of Latin books imported by the English.

So the Portuguese wrote learned books, and the English acquired, and in some cases read them.^[6] Today one can find in Oxford and Cambridge libraries more than 2,000 of these books, all printed before 1640, but here it will be possible to mention only one.

Damião de Góis's treatise, /Fides, religio moresque aethiopum (The Faith, Religion and Customs of the Ethiopians was first published in Louvain in Belgium in 1540. It was a tremendous success and went through many editions. There are more than 40 copies in Oxford and Cambridge libraries, almost one in every library there, which shows that it was a real academic best-seller. Ethiopia was a country of great interest to early modern scholars. Its association with the ancient myth of the Christian emperor Prester John, and the fact that the first non-Jewish convert to Christianity had been an Ethiopian (see Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8), meant that all books about Ethiopia were in demand.

To a modern reader the attraction of *Fides*-lies, paradoxically, in the fact that Góis (1502-74) had never been to Ethiopia and had no chance to form opinions of his own about the country. Accordingly, he had to rely on informants, in his case, the Ethiopian ambassador in Lisbon, who Góis calls Zagazabo. At the heart of Góis's book is Zagazabo's long statement about religion in his country, one of the first instances in any European literature in which the voice of a black African is heard without interruption or commentary. The use of the international learned language, Latin, has the effect of elevating Zagazabo's discourse, of making it impossible for him to be seen as comic or barbarous, which was often the fate of black people in early modern literature.

Góis's treatise is an example of the kind of academic book English scholars wanted to read, but could not possibly produce themselves. One of the work's many editions was prepared by an Englishman, Robert Beale, though for the reasons already explained he published it abroad, in Frankfurt. Later, though not until 1611, an English translation appeared, in a compilation called *The Manners, Lawes and Customs of All Nations*.^[7] In the early sixteenth century England was not visited by ambassadors from places as remote as Ethiopia - Zagazabo went to Lisbon because he could go there on a Portuguese ship.

At that period English voyagers were not nearly so ambitious. And Góis himself, a cultivated and tolerant man who was at home in several European countries - and who had a good command of Latin - was a cosmopolitan figure very unlike the majority of his English contemporaries.

My next snapshot - more a formal portrait - is of one of the very few Portuguese residents in England to become - almost - a household name, Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles II, who arrived here as a bride in 1662, shortly after Charles's own return from exile during the Commonwealth. Queen Catherine, D. Catarina de Bragança in Portuguese, may have been of royal birth - her father was King John IV - but in the English historical tradition she has become a pathetic figure, practically a figure of fun. Small in stature, dark and very foreign looking she had great difficulty in holding her own against those strapping ladies the king frequently took as mistresses, all the more so because Catherine, unlike the mistresses, was unable to bear children, though she seems to have conceived more than once.

The marriage - which was, like all royal marriages at that period, a way of sealing a treaty - came at a time when Portugal's political fortunes were at a very low ebb. This was an occasion when Portugal needed the alliance more than ever, though English assistance did not come cheaply. Portugal was ruled by Spain for sixty years, between 1580 and 1640. John IV, the first king of the house of Braganza, was the initially reluctant leader of a rebellion which led to the restoration of independence. That act of defiance was followed by a protracted war in which neither of the combatants - which were both militarily and economically weak - could gain the upper hand. King John found himself obliged to negotiate with the hated regime of Oliver Cromwell, but finally secured a deal with Charles's government. It is described by Antony Disney:

The deal with Charles II was an important breakthrough for it re-affirmed the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, brought Portugal explicit promises of English protection against Spain and Holland and signalled international acceptance of the Braganças' royal credentials. But the price was high: confirmation of all the [commercial] concessions granted to England in 1654 plus a dowry for Catherine comprising Bombay, Tangier and two million *cruzados* in cash. The cash component long remained a burden on the Portuguese people - and in the end was never fully paid.^[8]

Queen Catherine did not have a strong hand to play, therefore. She came from a country that did not count for much internationally, and she was constantly upstaged by those big, bouncy girls the king had such a liking for. She took a long time to be accepted in England, not least because she was rather more civilized than most of the people who surrounded her. As is well known, one of her first acts on arrival in 1662 was to ask for a cup of tea. None was forthcoming, for in the eleven years during which England was without a king London had become very out of touch with continental fashions, and in England people, even queens, still drank ale, even at breakfast. One of the reasons for this was the unpopularity of Cromwell's regime abroad - the European monarchs regarded the English republic as a pariah state, even though, as the example of John IV shows, they sometimes had to have dealings with it.

The queen had other domestic interests besides tea. She was knowledgeable about what we would now call design, and introduced cane furniture into England, another taste which has lasted to the present day. Another, rather more significant enthusiasm of Catherine of Braganza was for music. Musical culture did not disappear under the Commonwealth - the Lord Protector himself had a liking for it - but again it was cut off from European developments.

The Braganza family liked music. The queen's father, King John IV, was more than just an amateur, but a composer and author of technical works about music. The queen herself had a particular regard for Italian music, and she was able to exercise patronage, at first through her private chapel. Under the terms of the marriage settlement Catherine, a devout Catholic, was allowed to maintain her own chapel, and this was a large-scale affair, with a considerable staff of priests, monks and musicians. It was housed first in St James's Palace and later in Somerset House.

Although the queen was not the first to bring Italian music to London her patronage was extremely important. It led eventually to the first performance of an Italian opera in England, at the wedding ceremonies of the future James II and Mary of Modena, an Italian lady, also a Catholic, who became a great friend of Queen Catherine.^[9] Samuel Pepys, the diarist, was another enthusiastic amateur musician, and it is interesting to see how his reactions to the new music changed over time. In 1662, the year of the queen's marriage, he was dismissive: "I heard their musique too; which may be good, but it did not appear so to me, neither as to their manner of singing, nor was it good concord to my ears, whatever the matter was". One has the feeling that, in musical terms, he was out of his depth. Here was new music, what is more, foreign new music, and he wasn't used to it. However, by September 1668 he was more appreciative: "The Italians came in a large barge before the Queen's drawing room [in Somerset House, in those days closer to the river than it is now], and so the Queen and the ladies went out and heard it [the music] for almost an hour; and indeed it was very good".

It is often said that Portugal is a peripheral, or semi-peripheral country, while England is at the centre of things. This is certainly true, some of the time, but not always. In the course of this lecture we have seen how at certain periods the English, obsessed with their insular concerns, have slipped behind the European mainstream and how, in areas as diverse as naval warfare, ethnographic research and musical culture, the Portuguese have helped to bring us up to date.

So far I have discussed the influence in England of individuals who were prominent members of society: the commander of a naval taskforce, a famous writer, and a princess, who became queen of England. In choosing my final snapshot, in which I hope to bring the story up to our own times, I hesitated as to whether I should not go for another prominent figure, an artist like Paula Rego, who lives and works in England and has recently been created Dame of the British Empire. Paula Rego certainly deserves to be included, because she has taught us a good deal, but since the City of London Festival is concerned with the contemporary arts I can perhaps leave that world to others who know more about it than I do.

However, there is another side to the importance of Portugal to England - mass immigration, especially of low-skilled workers who do the work local people prefer not to do, often in peripheral parts of the U. K., far from the main centres of population and often forgotten by them.

Portugal has for centuries been a country from which people have emigrated, usually for economic reasons. Modern emigrants sometimes see a connection between their own experiences and those which drew the Portuguese Discoverers - men like Vasco da Gama - to cross the oceans in the search for Christians and spices. In fact, there is likely to be little connection between a fifteenth-century aristocrat, like Vasco da Gama, and a worker in a Norfolk turkey-packing plant.

In reality, the modern phenomenon of mass economic emigration began in the nineteenth century when the Portuguese, like the Italians and the Irish, went to America, south and north. Brazil was the favourite destination, but many Portuguese went to other Latin American countries, like Venezuela, and in the first half of the twentieth century to the U.S.A., especially to the small New England state of Rhode Island and the Fall River area of Massachusetts. After World War II the increasing prosperity of Europe, especially the European Economic Community, as it was first called, drew many workers to France, Germany and Luxembourg. For a time Paris was said to be the second largest Portuguese city in the world, after Lisbon. About 13% of the population of Luxembourg is Portuguese, and for speakers of the language there is an amusing coinage to describe them: *os lusoburgueses*. The main driver for emigration was economic, though for a while, in the 1960s and early 1970s, a desire to avoid military service in the colonial wars Portugal was fighting in Africa was a strong impulse. It is said that there are about 4.5 million Portuguese people living worldwide today, as compared to 10 million in Portugal itself.

Mass immigration of Portuguese to the U. K. began after Portugal itself joined the European Union, in 1986, and there are now around ¼ million Portuguese people here. Even though, since the turn of the century, increasing prosperity in Portugal has turned it into a country of net immigration, from Brazil, the former African colonies, especially Cabo Verde, and Eastern Europe, Portugal continues to export workers.

In London there is a population south of the river, in Stockwell, and also in North Kensington. However, it is noteworthy how many Portuguese people have moved to the U. K. periphery, to Norfolk and the fen country, to Northern Ireland, and to the Channel Islands, especially Jersey.

In London, hardly surprisingly, the Portuguese are associated with catering, and many long-term residents have set up catering businesses of their own. In the other parts of the country they are associated with what are called the three P's: picking, packing and plucking. In this environment of long hours and low wages the Portuguese are valued workers, because they possess a strong work ethic and have family values at the root of their decision to emigrate and seek employment abroad. As Martin Eaton says, they are a "well-motivated, highly productive and relatively docile immigrant labour force".^[10] The forces that drive them are a desire to earn money, remit savings, improve their lives and those of their children, and broaden their horizons. These forces are sufficiently strong to enable them to put up with poor pay and, in the initial stages of their time in the U. K., extortions and mistreatment at the hands of gangmasters and the like. The financial rewards are too tempting, because even unskilled work in a Norfolk meat-packing plant pays around three times as much as the minimum wage in Portugal.

One of the consequences of this is the very common sight, in the summer in rural parts of Portugal, of cars with foreign number plates. They belong to emigrants who, every year, return to spend their summer holidays in their home village, to participate in local religious festivities, and often to prepare their eventual permanent return by buying property or building houses.

I would like to end with an extended quotation from a recent article about the Portuguese in Jersey - where they constitute

about 10% of the population - because the author makes an important point which underlies the whole of this lecture.

The Portuguese population of Jersey is spread out across the island, with some families living in rented accommodation on farms, although the area most densely populated by the Portuguese is within the more built-up areas of the main city, St Helier. Whilst the Portuguese are omitted from official documents, such as the history of the island or visitors' guides, they are very visible in everyday Jersey life. For example, within the centre of St Helier there are two small Portuguese supermarkets that sell everything from Portuguese speciality foods to ketchup imported from Portugal; two Portuguese coffee shops that also sell Portuguese cakes and run a parcel delivery service to and from Portugal; and at least two Portuguese restaurants that not only sell Portuguese food but also imported beers, wines and fruit juices. Furthermore there is a Portuguese club; a Portuguese travel and employment agency; a Portuguese team in the Jersey football league; a special service in the main Catholic church in Portuguese and lessons for confirmation in Portuguese. Moreover the Jersey government offers information in Portuguese, as does the hospital and the Citizens Advice Bureau. The largest supermarket on the island, the Co-op, even sells Portuguese magazines and books.^[11]

In a sense that is the message of this lecture. The Portuguese are in England, and have been, one way or another, since the Middle Ages. Whether as sailors, writers, princesses or turkey packers we have appreciated their efforts, made use of them - but hardly noticed who was providing them. It is particularly telling how the government of Jersey provides services for its Portuguese community but does not mention them in guide books or histories of the island. That is the story of the Portuguese in England across the centuries. Perhaps this lecture will help to see things from a different perspective.

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[1] A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) I, p. 120.

[2] P. E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) pp. 231-2.

[3] *Id.* p. 239.

[4] For Laud's Chancellorship, see Kenneth Fincham, 'Early Stuart Polity', in *The History of the University of Oxford: the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 179-210

[5] See Julian Roberts, 'Importing books for Oxford, 1500-1640', in *Books and Collectors, 1200-1700: Essays presented to Andrew Watson* (London: The British Library, 1997), 317-33. Sir Thomas Bodley was particularly contemptuous of English printers of Latin texts, p. 318.

[6] Further information in T. F. Earle, *Portuguese Writers and English Readers: Books by Portuguese Writers Published Before 1640 in the Libraries of Oxford and Cambridge* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2009).

[7] Published in London by George Eld.

[8] A. R. Disney, *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, I, p. 229.

[9] For the queen as a patron of the arts see Maria da Conceição Emiliano Castel-Branco, 'O percurso anglo-português da rainha D. Catarina de Bragança', *Revista de Estudos Anglo-Portugueses*, 15 (2006) pp. 155-203.

[10] Martin Eaton, 'Portuguese Migrant Worker Experiences in Northern Ireland's Market Town Economy', *Portuguese Studies*, 26.1 (2010), 10-26 (17).

[11] Vanessa Mar-Molinero, 'Family and Transmission: Collective Memory in Identification Practices of Madeirans on Jersey', *Id.*, 94-110 (99).