

The Portuguese Empire in the Americas

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Overview

- I. Reconquest and rise of Portuguese maritime empire
- Discussion of question 1
- II. The discovery and settlement of Brasil
- Discussion of question 2
- III. Conflict and trade expansion in the Atlantic
- Discussion of question 3

I. Reconquest and Rise of Portuguese Maritime Empire

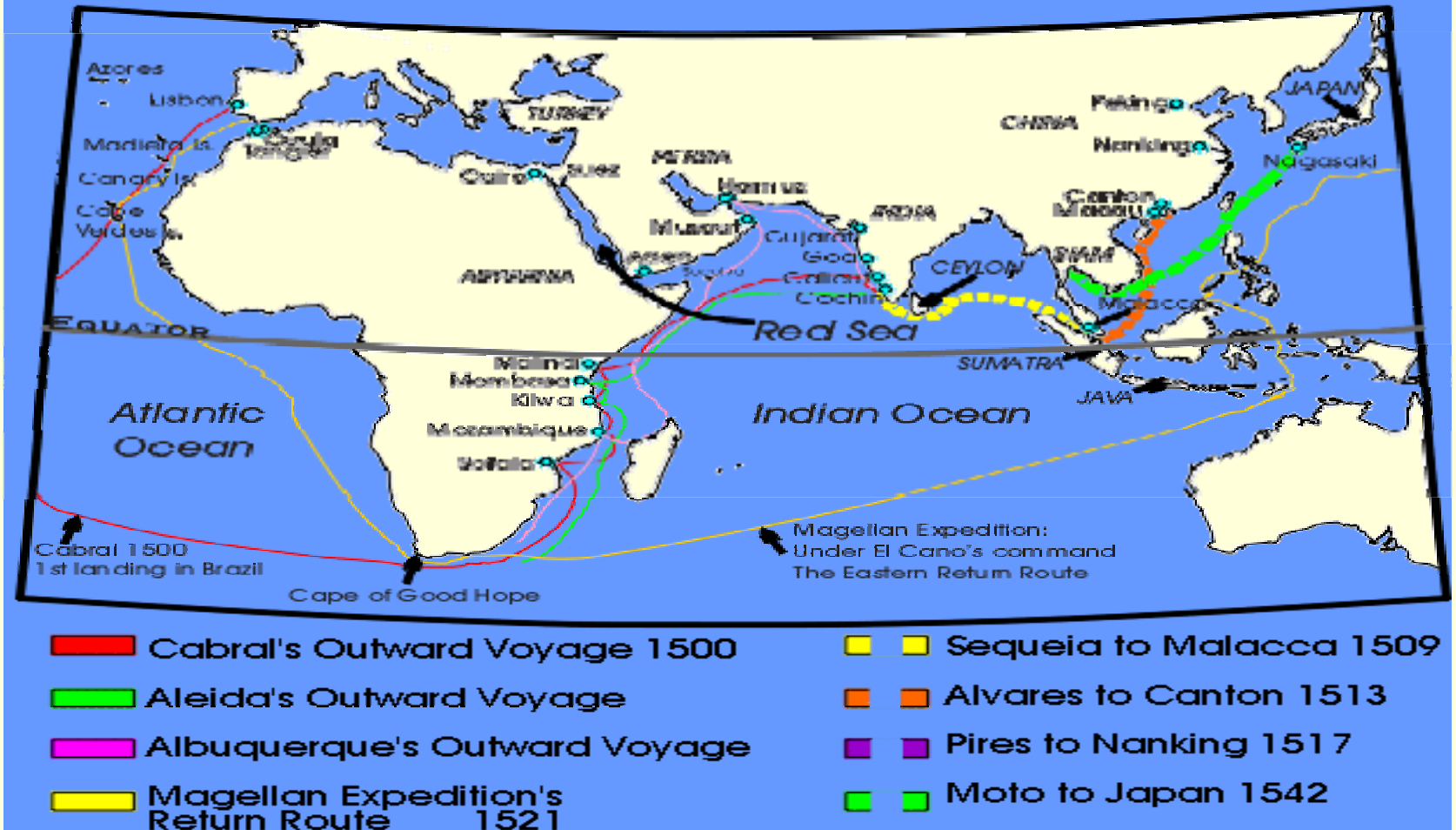
- European nobility went to Iberian kingdoms to fight ‘just wars’ against Muslim occupation. Lisbon recovered in 1147. Burgundy noble (Afonso I) acknowledged by pope as monarch of independent kingdom of Portugal in 1179.
- By mid-thirteenth century, Muslims expelled from Algarve, and by 1384 new Avis dynasty under João I initiates overseas exploration (with help from Genoese) .
- In early fifteenth century (1415), Portuguese take Ceuta from Berbers: attempts to push into North Africa by land fail, and the Crown prefers the sea route, which was furthered by Prince Henry, ‘the Navigator’ (1394-1460).

Timeline of Portuguese maritime expansion

- 1415, capture of Ceuta; 1420, discovery of Madeira; 1427, discovery of Azores; 1434, Cape Bojador; 1460, discovery of Cape Verde islands; 1470, discovery of São Tomé.
- 1487, Bartolomeu Dias rounds Cape of Good Hope; 1498, Vasco da Gama sails to India; 1500, Pedro Alvares Cabral lands in Brasil by mistake.
- 1516, Portuguese reach China; 1519-1522, Magellan circumnavigation (sponsored by Spain); 1542, Portuguese reach Japan.

Portuguese sea exploration

Early Voyages To The Far East



Strengths and weaknesses of Portugal's early empire

- Strengths: a) diversified tenancy in Africa, Asia and America spreads risk; b) low costs due to predominance of *feitorias*; c) outlet for younger sons of Portuguese nobility once crown establishes *doações*; d) stronger presence in Europe of otherwise small, poor kingdom.
- Weaknesses: a) Demographically incapable of large scale settlement colonization; b) financially weak, depends on foreign bankers and traders; c) weak position in Iberia (under Spanish rule – ‘Dual monarchy’, 1580-1640); d) dependence on strategic partnership with England.

The Portuguese Empire



Discussion of question 1

- Question 1: Why did the Portuguese crown decide to switch from factory system to permanent settlements in some cases, but not in others? Provide examples.

Factors that have to be discussed to answer question 1

- 1) Historical practice: Early experience in Atlantic islands and Africa provide models for future colonies.
- 2) Native land resources: Land's capacity to sustain specialized crops (wine, sugar, tobacco) or only traditional crops (wheat) or only grazing.
- 3) Native populations: sparsely populated areas considered extensions of mainland kingdom, and granted to lords by royal gift; in populated areas, preferred pattern is establishment of factories.
- 4) Competition from other kingdoms: revival of *ex iure gentium*: free trade and respect for property titles only when backed up by effective population settlement.

II. The discovery and settlement of Brasil

- Portuguese found only non or semi sedentary populations, sparsely distributed along Brazilian coastline starting in 1500.
- Despite this, they only established factories early on because only very profitable commodity was brazilwood.
- In particular, Brazilian economic contribution to crown was dwarfed by profitable enterprises in Asia.
- Not until 1520s, when sugarcane started to be planted in Pernambuco, did crown and merchants begin to see a potentially important role for the colony, which until then was regarded more as a filling station for ships coming back from profitable Asia.

From early neglect to increasing importance

- Phases in the early settlement of Brasil:
- 1) 1500-1505, crown leases Brasil to merchant consortium; 2) 1506-1534, direct crown control; 3) 1534-1549, new lease of Brasil to territorial lords for settlement purposes; 1549, establishment of royal government in Brasil under a governor:
- -Tomé de Sousa (1549-53): defends weaker captaincies from French and Indian attacks and increase royal revenues for crown.
- -Duarte da Costa (1553-57): clashes with first bishop (Pedro Fernandes Sardinha).
- -Mem de Sá (1557-72): wins conflicts with French and Indians and consolidates Portuguese crown authority in Brasil.

Establishment of Captaincies

- Basic juridical-economic unit of permanent settlement: royal gift (doação) of crown territory (reguengo), given to a lord as hereditary grant (senhorio): 12 captaincies originally established, starting in 1533-34.
- Captaincy regulated by a *foral*: determined taxes, crown monopolies over some commodities, and regulated trade.
- Trade with captaincies open to both Portuguese and foreigners, but only captain and his Portuguese residents allowed to trade with Indians.
- Main economic function: sugarcane plantations and mills (engenhos) to refine sugar: Brasil, largest sugar producer and exporter in the world (1570-1680).

The Church and its role in early Brazilian settlement

- Jesuits chosen to accompany first royal government in 1549: they were made the crown's special agents of conversion.
- Company of Jesus (founded 1540) was much more militant than franciscans or dominicans because it was expressly created to fight the Reform and Protestantism.
- Strategy to promote conversion, pacification and acculturation is indigenous resettlement into *aldeias*, where they would be indoctrinated.
- Both Church hierarchy (first bishop in particular) and captains oppose this policy: bishop wants dual society (Portuguese ruling over heathens) and captains want to continue slaving.
- Aldeias were more successful in the south. São Paulo started as a small conversion aldeia.

The fate of indigenous populations

- Early period of Portuguese-indigenous cooperation lasted until creation of sugarcane plantations, which robbed their lands and subjected them to forced labor.
- Crown distinguishes between peaceful (treated as minors and converted) and bellicose indians (by resisting Christianity, they can be enslaved). In practice, indiscriminate enslavement became the rule (saltos), although hidden under 'ransom' system (resgate); slavers (bandeirantes) conduct forays into the interior (entradas) in search of runaway indian populations.
- Major epidemics in 1562 and 1563: wiped out 1/3 to 1/2 indigenous population.
- Real change for indians' conditions was the rise of slave imports from Africa (started in 1540s, but rose dramatically after 1570 given the sugar boom).

The rise of the slave trade

- Portuguese started importing African slaves into Europe in 1441 from their factories in West Africa (Guinea coast). It expanded to Central and Equatorial Africa (São Tomé), and later in s. XVII to Mozambique.
- Slave trade regulated by private contracts (asiento) became part of international public law.
- Infamous Middle Passage ended in auction of survivors to go to work to the sugarcane plantations.
- By 1600, 70% of labor force in Brazilian sugarcane plantations was black.
- Brazil absorbed largest proportion of African slaves (42%) in the Americas – Spanish America (22%), English colonies (20%), French colonies (12%).

Discussion of question 2

- Question 2: Why were some captaincies more successful than others? Discuss by contrasting a successful and a failed captaincy.

Factors that have to be discussed to answer question 2

- 1) Individual captains' leadership and capacity: Duarte Coelho in Pernambuco vs. Francisco Pereira Coutinho in Bahia.
- 2) Capacity to attract settlers: a problem given Portugal's low demographic pressure.
- 3) Capacity to raise capital: connections to financiers in Portugal and Italy essential for captaincies' economic take-off.
- 4) Capacity to confront attacks from Tupi-speaking Indians: Pernambuco vs. Bahia in 1540s, which convinces King João III to send first royal government to Brasil.

III. Conflict and trade expansion in the Atlantic

- 1) Portugal had to compete first with Spain for control of Brasil. Conflict between the two Iberian powers was intermittent until at least 1750.
- 2) Portugal also faced competition from France in the first and early second half of the sixteenth century.
- 3) In the first half of the seventeenth century, main competition came from the Dutch.
- 4) The backdrop to geopolitical competition and conflict nonetheless remained a growing economy, which fueled the Atlantic trade system.

The conflict with Spain

- 1493 papal bull gives lands 100 leagues west of Cape Verde to Spain, but Portugal complains and gets to shift the line further west (370 leagues) in the Tratado de Tordesillas (1494).
- Main conflicts took place in Iberian peninsular rather than in the Americas: 'Dual monarchy', 1580-1640 until Duke of Bragança was crowned.
- Last quarter of s. XVII and first quarter of s. XVIII saw conflict in the Río de la Plata, where Portuguese founded Sacramento across from Buenos Aires to benefit from contraband trade: Spaniards founded Montevideo (1726) on what had been Portuguese land.
- Conflict persisted until signing of Treaty of Madrid (1750), which fixed boundaries of both empires.

The conflict with France

- French vessels and merchants competed with Portuguese for dyewood since early 1500s in Brazil.
- They refused to recognize Portuguese crown's claims to Brasil until there were permanent settlers: establishment of donatary captaincies were Portuguese answer.
- French sail further south and found the colony France Antarctique in today's Rio de Janeiro (1555).
- Governor Sá fights the French during ten years, and establish in 1565 a second royal captaincy (the other one being Bahia).
- French continue sporadically to attempt establishing a colony, but their efforts fail.

The conflict with the Dutch

- United Provinces' long revolt (1581-1648) against Spanish rule brought Portugal into the conflict during the period of the 'Dual monarchy'.
- End of truce in 1621 led Dutch West India Company vessels to attack Portuguese territories in Brasil and in West Africa. Brasil capital, Salvador, was taken in 1624, and Recife in 1630. Occupation lasted 25 years.
- Despite making peace after end of Habsburg rule in Portugal (1640), war with Holand continued.
- Dutch lost African factories in 1648-49 and Brazilian territories in 1654. Final peace was signed in 1661.

Amidst war, economic expansion

- 1) Strategic organization of trading system: foreigners were not barred from participating (transport and investment), while at the same time a monopoly trading company (Companhia Geral do Comercio) supervised the fleet (frota) system.
- 2) Circular Atlantic trading system: from Lisbon to Africa to Brasil to Lisbon.
- 3) Commodity booms: sugar (1570-1680) and gold (1695-1750s).

Discussion of question 3

Question 3: What were the main consequences of the discovery of gold after 1695 in Brasil?

Factors that have to be discussed to answer question 3

- 1) The maintenance and growth of the slave trade: labor needed in mines.
- 2) Lagging of agricultural development: sugar not profitable given competition from Antilles. Intensive land use will have to wait until rise of coffee.
- 3) Expansion of the frontier: Brasil finally ceased being a coastal archipelago and became a sub-continent: Minas Gerais, Goiás, Mato Grosso.
- 4) Portugal's trade balance: in particular, given the special relationship with England, luxury goods and manufactures are paid for with gold proceeds.

Questions that have to be answered next session

- Question 1: Why did Spain and its colonies experience a deep economic crisis while Portugal and Brasil enjoyed an economic boom in the period 1790s to 1810s?
- Question 2: What was the contribution of social divisions to the independence movements in Spanish America and Brasil?
- Question 3. ‘The movements of independence in Spanish and Portuguese America blur the fact that there were more continuities than breaks with the past after their consolidation’. Discuss.