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The Atlanticity of the Macaronesian islands during the Iberian Union

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ABSTRACT

The search for the definition of the Macaronesian islands world (Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands and Cape Verde) has been a subject of constant reflection for the interpretation of these societies, both to understand their origin and their worldview, and to define the parameters that unite the island spaces with the Atlantic and, consequently, with that which is foreign. This research is focused on the analysis the characteristics which define the island phenomenon with the goal of understanding the peculiar significance of the composition of modern Macaronesian society during the consolidation of the Atlantic world at the time of the Iberian Union. In this regard, the islands of Macaronesia formed an essential terrain to feed and boost transatlantic circulation. The attraction of certain islands is their ability to cross distant paths, redistribute products and promote migratory flows in the Atlantic. In this way, the fluid contacts between islands of Macaronesia, which are complementary, promoted between the Castilian and Portuguese islanders not only a feeling of belonging to a supranational Iberian monarchy, but also a sensitivity of belonging to the same island region formed by a Portuguese and Spanish population of extra-peninsular origin with its nexus being it's the Atlantic insularity.

KEYWORDS

Macaronesian islands;
Iberian Union; identity;
Atlantic; islander

Introduction

This apparently geographically well – defined Atlantic area continues to be a cultural construction which emerged from the common European social imaginary. As several specialist authors in the Atlantic have pointed out,¹ Europeans were the first to shape and trace the limits of this space between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Elliott 2001, 22). Until then, this immense area had been restricted to a simple strip of sea that barely protruded from the known and tangible land.

This creation of the Europeans did not happen exclusively as a result of the coastal areas bordering the sea. This was also the case for Africans and Americans. However, it was the inhabitants of the old continent who first connected the shores of these three continents – and its islands within –, thereby building an entity, “as a system and as a representation of a differentiated natural reality” (Armitage 2004, 8).

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Regarding this space, which was now irretrievably linked, both new legends and myths emerged as well as rationalist approaches which enabled us to appreciate this geographical entity from different perspectives and areas, albeit always from the personal perception of those who had imagined this space. Since the middle of the twentieth century, historiography has been interested in the reconstruction of the past of the Atlantic world. From its origins, this approach has been supported through the European perspective of the shaping of the ocean as a paradigm category in that analysis. The way of dealing with this was based around cartographic, naval, commercial and military knowledge, as well as an expansion policy, economic exploitation, biological exchange and cultural interaction (Santana Pérez 2014, 11). In this original idea, the Atlantic came to be conceived as “the inner ocean of western civilization” (Armitage 2004, 11). Faced with the national or nationalist history of the 1920s, a transnational history saw the light of day. However, neither Africa nor Africans held a place within this so – called definition of “civilization,” except if the slave trade was mentioned as being of interest in the support of the history of the West. Certainly, until very recent times, historiography on the Atlantic focused on strengthening ties between North America and Europe under the seal of “civilization,” leaving aside not only the African continent, but also all of Latin America.

Atlantic History, as well as the appropriation of the Atlantic as a symbol and its categorization as an element of historical analysis, arose from the political and geostrategic interests of some of the winning countries of the Second World War. This story began to be written by the Western allies in 1945 – whereas the Eastern allies, led by the Soviet Union, opted for the Marxist school – with the intention of explaining world history (Valladares 2012, 71).

Faced with the nationalisms of the beginning of the previous century, which had prevented the construction of a transnational and cosmopolitan history (Valladares 2012, 64), the image of a common, civilizing Atlantic emerged as a new historiographical paradigm among the anti – isolationist tendencies which were in full swing in the West. Correspondents and historians, many of them Catholic converts, fought together, first against fascism in Europe and then against communism at the start of the Cold War. The American press, in reference to these conflicts, began to use terms such as: “Atlantic Community,” “Atlantic Powers” or “The Atlantic Character” (Bailyn 1996, 22). North Americans, in order to unify their European allies around a common ideology, spread the notion of a common “civilization” which, at least from the Enlightenment onwards, had established a backbone and linked the societies of the North Atlantic. In other words, North Americans and Europeans shared a series of pluralistic, democratic and liberal values, the origins of which were to be found in the Judeo – Christian tradition and in the heritage of the Greco – Roman civilization (Armitage 2004, 10). With this ideal, in 1941 Forrest Davis published the book *The Atlantic System* in which he justified the intervention in the Second World War through the ancestral ties between Americans and Europeans, with such ties having been forged over time until they had formed a common culture, which was none other than the western one.

After the war ended, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization reaffirmed the Atlantic through this designation which represented the West. With NATO, the use of the concept “Atlantic” became widespread, and even ended up possessing a certain sophistication and an air of intellectuality (Bailyn 1996, 24). Western history became

infected with this idea given these approaches and the interests emerging from the new international order and historians swiftly felt at home with the terminology. Thus, they began to delve into the Atlantic as an object of historical study. In this regard, historiography, which until then had preferred to use terms such as “discovery” or “conquest” to justify transoceanic ties, would in the middle of the century propose the use of other expressions such as “European expansion,” in keeping with the new construction which was taking place throughout the Atlantic space (Pietschmann 2002, 13).

In 1955, the Tenth Congress of the International Association of Historical Sciences was held in the city of Rome, which included a presentation of the study “The problem of the Atlantic, from the 18th to the 20th century,” by the historians Jacques Godechot, who was French of Jewish descent, and Robert R. Palmer, from the USA. They raised the issue of the existence of an “Atlantic civilization.” Godechot and Palmer discussed the concept of the Atlantic – drawing on a Braudelian inspiration –, asserting that the story of an ocean also involves the stories of the lands it borders. They also made reference to the permeability of oceanic routes. However, they mainly took up the notion of an Atlantic civilization based on the aforementioned foundational ideas of the Judeo – Christian tradition (Lucena Giraldo 2010, 40). However, this original essay had little impact among their peers.

However, a short time later, Leonard Outhwaite would repeat the idea of considering the Atlantic as a characteristic and unitary element of historiographical analysis. *The Atlantic*, published in 1957, was his original work on the history of an ocean. In this text he would plant some elements which, *a posteriori*, would be fundamental for the construction of the Atlantic, as well as for the definition of the study parameters of Atlantic History. First of all, notice that this ocean is indivisible. Beyond other intrinsic and conditioning geographical elements – such as straits, rivers or inland seas – this space was to be perceived as a single body, as a single unit of analysis.² Secondly, it outlines an Atlantic characterised by its dynamism, through which people, products and ideas flow. He even asserted that this speed with which it moves and interacts between regions may be faster than the circulation of the same components between border countries within Europe (Outhwaite 1957, 14).

However, we should not forget that this work was limited to a period of tension between the West and the East. The purpose of the text was to highlight the strategic importance of the Atlantic and the need to keep this space under the control of Western powers. As such, Outhwaite (1957, 17) stated: “The nation or nations that control the Atlantic will control the heart of the world.” The dominance of the Atlantic, therefore, became fundamental for the western powers. Just as America had been indispensable to Europe, European allies were now decisive for North America. This interdependence between the two regions was sustained by traditional Atlantic ties. Therefore, Outhwaite demonstrated this in the introduction to his work with a list of seventeen statements about the significance of the Atlantic for the West. Among these, he claimed the role – and even the name – of *Mare Nostrum* for that ocean, as in modern times this space had become the new inland sea joining the *ecumene*, as the Mediterranean had done in classical times.³

Of course, these first works that tried to understand the Atlantic in its entirety were indebted to the Braudelian tradition. The actual architect of that Mediterranean also left the door open in his work to shape this other successor space, the legacy of

primitive civilization, which is the Atlantic.⁴ As Valladares affirms (Valladares 2012, 78), Braudel's work "was the perfect example of a dedication to the (failed) search for a story which he called 'total'". Despite his efforts, *El Mediterráneo* is still based on a geographical determinism built on the basis of a proximity between spaces which share the same strip of water.

For the Atlantic, which is the case at hand here, Braudel's experience has made us reconsider the analytical parameters and the limitations of his approach. In Elliott's words: "If 'Mediterranean history' is itself problematic, then, with much greater justification, it will be necessary to ask how much more so is that the case for the history, not of an inland sea, but of a vast ocean, bordered by three different continents" (Elliott 2001, 21). However, more than just a few authors – and within Iberian historiography – continued in the footsteps of the *Annales* school and used the Braudelian method of studying a circumscribed maritime space to apply this to the Atlantic. Noteworthy was the 1960 work of Frédéric Mauro, *Le Portugal et L'Atlantique*, in which he applied the model of his teacher Braudel to the Portuguese case, and the work of Huguette and Pierre Chaunu (1955-1960) for the Spanish Atlantic.

In this task of building the Atlantic, the figure of Charles Verlinden should also be highlighted. This historian, in the mid-1950s, published his particular vision of the history of Atlantic civilization. This shaped a history of the Atlantic from an economic, social and cultural perspective, delving into a multifocal discourse, which went beyond an actual analysis of maritime trade. This method enabled him to define this oceanic space as a great amphitheatre where historical events shaped a common historical patrimony and, even more importantly, the notion of "civilization" (Pietschmann 2002, 17). This Atlantic, concluded the author, differs from others by being cohesive and riddled with similarities.⁵ In his text, he proposed that the origins of "civilization" lie in the process of European colonization that was uncovered in the Mediterranean in medieval times: "Il est impossible d'étudier les origines de la civilisation atlantique sans remonter aux origines de la colonisation dans cette zone" (Verlinden 1953, 378).

As regards these pioneering works on the history of the Atlantic – works by Mauro, Chaunu, Verlinden, etc. –, John H. Elliott defines them as works arising from the natural stimulus to reconstruct the past of the great oceanic empires. This interest in "civilizations" or "Empires" led, according to the British historian, to the concentration of Atlantic studies within three main fields: the initial process of exploration, conquest and colonization, imperial administration and the commercial systems between the metropolis, and the periphery (Elliott 2001, 22). It is precisely this concern for the structuring of the Atlantic into different "systems" which in 1999 gave rise to the holding of the International Conference in Hamburg, in which the main specialists in the History of the Atlantic sought to lay the foundations of this historical sub – discipline and discuss the definition of "Atlantic system." The conclusions they reached, in the words of Pietschmann – their organizer –, were, in the first place, the impossibility of speaking of a single "system" and, therefore, of proposing the existence of several "systems" or "subsystems." Secondly, this "system" or "subsystems" would be characterized by the set of human, mercantile and cultural movements between Atlantic spaces (Martínez and Oliva 2005, 11).

However, not all the participants at this Conference agreed on the definition given to the "Atlantic system," including Pieter Emmer. He disagreed with the rest of his companions regarding the emphasis placed on migratory contributions and mercantile

exchanges. Rather, he pointed to “values and norms” as the elements on which transatlantic transfers were based.⁶

As we can see, the “Atlantic system” has been a concept discussed among Atlantic specialists. Its origin is associated with the perspective given to this space after the Second World War, with the development of the Cold War and the creation of NATO.⁷ However, since the end of the twentieth century, the idea of the “Atlantic system” has been embraced by numerous historians, thus enabling debates to be renewed and the conception of the space to be recreated and, ultimately, its contents to be defined.⁸

Local history, Atlantic history, or global history?

Historical discourses constructed on the Atlantic world extend over time. Historians such as Viera and Clavijo had already emphasized the importance of this ocean in the process of shaping Macaronesian islands society in the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century and until the middle of the twentieth, the Atlantic was considered as an element to be analysed by social studies. However, it was not until the last decade of the last century that the social sciences, and in particular History, welcomed the Atlantic as an exclusive object of study, giving rise to a sub – discipline of historical research.

The history of the Atlantic world has traditionally been explained from the perspective of the European empires since, ultimately, they were the ones that approached the oceanic region through continuous contacts between different continents. From this perspective, European national or imperial histories only became Atlantic histories when empires jumped over the oceanic geographical barrier to continue their territorial expansion towards other areas. Therefore, this is not a true Atlantic history, but a transoceanic history that falls short of constituting a true international history (Armitage 2004, 16).

This model of traditional history has been built on a transcontinental history in that it crosses spatial borders within the same empire but without exceeding the spatial limits of the nation itself. In this regard, Pietschmann (2002, 20) points out two great evils of historiography: on the one hand, each State has focused on the historical analysis of its former colonies in the Atlantic and, on the other, these countries have shown no interest in advancing the study of the repercussions of the expansion in other areas within the same Europe.

Atlantic History considered from imperial policy begins when the nation extends itself over other extra – European areas, despite the fact that various regions already had a previous awareness of this area due to the routine dealings of their individuals with the marine environment. Let us consider the vision of the ocean that the Nordic peoples who arrived in North American lands could have had, who did not need to use terms such as “expansion,” “conquest” and, even less, “empire” to describe this image. Closer to our study we could reflect on the idea of the Atlantic of the first settlers of the Canary Islands, who by the first AD century were deported to the periphery of the known world from the classical West.

Not all border regions with the Atlantic acted in the same way, since this depended on the experiences of each population with this space. Some people entered, others occupied new territories and some simply lived with their backs to the sea. On the contrary, inland areas forged close ties – even dependence – with the ocean. It is enough to cite the

case of Seville, more than 100 km from El Puerto de Santa María in Cádiz, although linked to the Atlantic until the eighteenth century by the Guadalquivir.

This imperial history, as a simile of Atlantic History, actually involved the study of the organization of the Empire, as the essence of the consolidation of the expansion of nations overseas. From this analytical perspective, any desire to understand the social structure and migratory movements even within the Empire itself was lost.⁹ The Atlantic world was considered in terms of exploration and discovery from the biographies of heroic adventurers instead of seeking a more general interpretation. Indeed, this construction of the Atlantic meant the extension of European national and religious rivalries and, consequently, gave rise to the creation of great works on empires.

The study of the Spanish Empire was based on establishing a defining Indian colonial world for the Hispanic Monarchy, with the enhancement of this being linked to Sevillian centralism as a gateway for its wealth coming to Europe. In works such as Chaunu's, emphasis was placed on the economic aspect, making Seville the hub of the "world economy" of this Eurocentric Atlantic (Dedieu 1999–2000, 133).

This method of analysis represents an even greater stumbling block if we intend to address the period of the Iberian Union. On the one hand, we have the Iberian historiographic tradition which breaks the American reality into two different entities based on the agreements allocating geographical areas and the status of the kingdom of Portugal within the Monarchy. On the other hand, although there are works that have avoided this obstacle, there is a lack of works that address the American reality in terms of the European and African areas (Valladares 2006, 336).

In this history of the European empires connected through the extension of ties from the metropolis to the colonies, Africa and Africans remained in historiographic oblivion. Despite attempts to build a transnational history of empires, this continent is only represented in historical analysis in relation to the slave trade, as a element justifying Western imperialism.

Anglo – Saxon historiography on the Atlantic has emphasised its methodology of analysis of the flows and movements linked to the slave trade. Likewise, Iberian historiography has focused on the slave trade from the former African colonies as a prominent process in the connection of spaces. In this regard, the vision of Africa has been linked more to America than to an analysis of the continent itself.

However, in recent years, research such as that of Barcia (2022), have begun to review the traditional bibliography on Atlantic History with the aim to use the slave trade as an essential subject to understand complex and global historical processes.

Currently, as Santana Pérez (2014, 19) points out, there has been no comprehensive analysis of the African Atlantic coast. However, we do have studies on the Atlantic and its relationship with certain African regions. While Africa is the major outstanding aspect to be integrated within Atlantic History, some Atlantic studies have recently opted to go beyond European centralism and consider analysing social and cultural interactions, thereby advancing African contributions.¹⁰

It is precisely this Eurocentric perspective which is one of the main criticisms that Canny has made of Atlantic History. What he called an encounter with the "other" has been described by historiography as an "Atlantic phenomenon" without fully understanding the processes of alterity and cultural reciprocities (Canny 2001, 399). This assessment follows the argument already argued by historians who are dedicated to

reconstructing international and cross – border dynamics. In 1991, John Elliott, in a speech in favour of comparative history, focused on a more acute understanding of how a community imagines itself in relation to other groups and how it transforms, through redefining its habits and behaviour in response to the perception that others have of that community (Elliott 1999, 27).

Pieter Emmer, at that Conference on Atlantic History held in 1999, also insisted that the “Atlantic system” would have been a process characterized by cultural transposition over and above economic exchanges and migratory movements.¹¹ Only certain regions of the Atlantic were interconnected by economic activities, essentially those promoted by Europeans in Africa and America. The slave trade, the American plantations and European marketplaces were closely linked; however, most African and American commercial activities did not fall within this circuit and, therefore, could subsist without forming part of the great commercial routes.¹² Nor would migration be decisive in conceptualising Atlantic relations, and he points out: “Europe or Africa suffered from depopulation? The answer must be negative ... Did Africa suffer more than Europe in view of the fact that Africa contributed more migrants to the Atlantic economy both during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries?” (Emmer 2002, 173).

In recent years, an analytical perspective based on the principle of the globality of historical processes has spread within the historiographic field. This method has sought to engulf Atlantic History, in particular the studies on the Modern Age and the construction of the idea of globalization which is associated with this period.¹³ Global history, according to its defenders, allows us to understand the Hispanic Monarchy – from a perspective focused on comparisons, synthesis and globalization – in relation to its global character (Valladares 2012, 57). Consequently, globalization would not be a recent process but rather underlying the beginning of the Atlantic expansion of the fifteenth century.¹⁴ For this transformation towards such globality to take place and, therefore, the possibility of dealing with a global History, three conditioning factors would be necessary: connection, dependence and mixing between areas. So, only from the Modern Age could we speak of a true cosmopolitanism. The embodiment of this idea of universality would be associated with the exploration of the world and the awareness of the connection of all of its parts (Valladares 2012, 100). This perspective of global analysis would therefore encompass the areas that imperial history and even Atlantic history dedicated themselves to studying.

Conrad (2016), in this sense, although he warns of the difficulties involved in developing a global history, also he defends that global history constitutes a useful analysis perspective to understand transnational processes, as opposed to an incoherently isolated national history and a westernized world history.

The key to global history, Valladares (2012, 101) points out, would be to Asianise and Africanise globalist discourse in the field of Modern History, which is why modernists have progressively incorporated the Asia – Pacific dimension to explain the globalization process of the Hispanic Monarchy. The undertaking of a global history would allow for the solving of old problems – and the discovery of new ones – created in the analysis of the linking of a worldwide Empire which was formed during the period of the Iberian Union.

In fact, the application of this method of globalist analysis in relation to our field of study must be taken with caution. We have to be aware that the Macaronesian islands, and the other Atlantic islands, are an immovable, intra – Atlantic object that cannot be

subtracted to be categorised outside the geographical context in which they are located. These archipelagos are objects of analysis located within the Atlantic and its history.

However, we do not reject the proposal of analysing global History either. The reality of these areas – even more so during the Hispanic Monarchy – must be understood in the context of the globalization of the Monarchy and the internal dynamics which underlay each subsystem linking the Empire based on the triad of factors – connection, dependence and mixing – which characterize globalization. On the other hand, if the starting point is the representation of the island and its connection with the environment closest to it – which is the circumatlantic area –, this work forms part of the dynamics of a “supratlantic” Hispanic Monarchy. The king and his kingdoms were organized on the basis of a worldwide conformation of their domains within a globalizing context in which the island areas of the Atlantic formed one more piece – albeit an extremely dynamic one – of this historical chess board. However, for the islands and for an islander’s worldview, the globalization of the Monarchy is as global as their own perception of the universality of this kingdom – aggregating institution.

Island territories such as those of Macaronesia, the Caribbean or the Philippines are part of the same Monarchy, even of the same kingdom, where insularity, fragmentation of space and remoteness from the metropolis are common defining elements; as characteristic as the three particular aspects argued for by global history. Island spaces are part of this world narrative and are embedded in the dynamics of globalization, but they are mainly affected by three other conditions: insularity, geographical location and their peripheral positioning.

Atlantic history and Hispanic Monarchy

The Iberian Union represented a second restructuring of the Atlantic after the agreements between Castile and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century. Filipe I of Portugal agreed with the *Cortes of Tomar* on the inviolability of the kingdom of Portugal within the Hispanic Monarchy and, ultimately, ensured the continuity of the Portuguese administration of their overseas territories. However, by 1581 the image of the Atlantic area had changed from those first fifteenth century treaties. Although the division between the kingdoms was clearly defined *de jure*, the Union also supposed an aggregation of forces and interests which *de facto* multiplied the activities carried out in the Atlantic.

This reformulation of the Atlantic affected the areas that were actively related within this space, such as the islands. According to Vieira, this new stage was a nightmare for the island areas since, firstly, they were affected by pirate and corsair incursions from other nations which wanted to take advantage of the great Atlantic market. On the other hand, these attacks motivated – and, above all, so that the Monarchy would not to lose its revenue in the Atlantic – “the rethinking of the institutional structure with a commitment to centralization involving a strong military presence” (Vieira 2001, 322).

However, even though such interferences constantly occurred in the Iberian Atlantic, and in particular in the islands, the same measures were not taken by the central authority in all these areas, not to mention not being applied. The Azores archipelago became the main defensive bulwark for the return journey of ships coming back from America to Europe, which is why the military presence in these islands increased in response to constant exogenous threats. This projection

of the Azores over the Atlantic was used by the islanders, as it was by Gaspar Frutuoso, to promote these lands within the new Atlantic framework of the Hispanic Monarchy.¹⁵

For its part, the Canary Islands archipelago, an essential stopover when heading towards the West Indies from Europe and a port redistributing merchandise from circumatlantic markets, appealed to the King continuously in letters from local authorities for the need to station troops at such an important location given the vulnerability of the islanders regarding possible intrusion by enemy forces of the Monarchy.

For the metropolis, intervention regarding these overseas territories was carried out according to the perspective of the Atlantic trade from the point of view of the Court rather than attending to the needs of such insular appeals. There were two particular and opposing visions of the same situation, but one perceived from the metropolis and the other from the periphery. That is, the Monarchy acted in each archipelago according to the interests that they believed were most important given its notion of being the centre of an Empire. In this way it can be understood that the Azores was set up as a fortress for the defence of the merchandise which was on route to finance the Monarchy, while in the Canary Islands the central authority concentrated its efforts on monitoring contraband with the establishment of figures such as the *juez de Indias* and, in this way, trying to avoid the flight of capital outside the royal monopoly.¹⁶

This relationship between the islands and the Atlantic, as intrinsic spaces acting as a nexus between the coastal regions surrounding the ocean, transcends the flow of commerce which influences population movements and the cultural construction of the societies participating in Atlantic relations. Given this, it should also be remembered that the inhabitants of the Atlantic islands will also make up their own imaginary regarding their links with the ocean. Although the Atlantic area was taking shape as Europeans voyaged within it, and their impression of the sea and its secrets was revealed to the West through maps and *portulan* charts, the people who began to populate the islands developed their own interpretation of the ocean. In this regard, and in relation to the Canary Islands, García Ramos proposed that the Islands formed part of an Atlantic cultural region based on the nature of such a crossroads of peoples from different regions of the Atlantic. Faced with the idea of a monocontinental origin of island culture,¹⁷ this values "oceanity" as the fundamental element of the social genesis of the Islands. This is the principle by which an insular identity is built based on Atlantic movements over and above the ties of dependency to a certain national area, where "oceanity" is the seed of the complementarity between islands and, therefore, of the constitution of Macaronesia as its own entity, intrinsically dependent and externally linked to the dynamics of the Atlantic.

This "Atlanticism" or "Atlantic imaginary" of the islands represents the collective memory shared by different peoples who are linked by solid ties woven through constant interactions:

a collective memory inhabited by myths . . ., of exploits, commercial routes, periods of harmony, in ways of looking at the world and deciphering it, which has generated intimate ways of constructing fables, recreations of a reality built by all.(García Ramos 2002, 24)

Atlantic identity of the islands

It is understood that the Atlantic is a historical construction, at the level of other concepts such as “nation” or “State.” We could establish spatial limits in this vast ocean to which we refer, by limiting its borders to the coastline of three continents. In addition, chronologically, this space was opened following the first transoceanic voyage made by Columbus. However, the delimitation of the Atlantic as an object of historical analysis is much more complex since the perception of this space – and depending on the group of people – has been altered over the centuries. Without going into the representation of this ocean by African or American communities, the westernization of the Atlantic – that is, the construction of an inland sea designed by Europeans – has been a long and constant process. As Braudel (1976, 294) points out, “it was the case that in the sixteenth century the ocean did not yet have complete autonomy. Human beings were just beginning to get an idea of it and construct an identity for it.”

The Middle Ages had inherited from classical antiquity a series of values and ideas about this vast space which were somewhat confused and contradictory, far from any empirical interpretation. This appreciation was due, to a large extent, to its marginal situation in relation to the world known to the Europeans (Aznar 2007, 175). These preconceptions were altered and reconfigured as the navigators entered within it.¹⁸ The Pillars of Hercules, the confines of the known world, grew farther and farther as the expeditions advanced south, with the frontier being located at each new land discovered (Aznar 2007, 179).

This first period of timid forays into an Atlantic with an unknown silhouette was what Verlinden, from his “civilizing” perspective, called “protocolonialism” (Verlinden 1992, 649). This was the phase prior to the European occupation of the Atlantic, characterized by expeditions over this sea without managing to conquer any territory, except for the ephemeral occupation of a certain site. Paradoxically, these first incursions were carried out by non – Iberian sailors, such as the Normans or Genoese. For Verlinden, the latter – the Genoese – were precisely the heirs of the classical tradition of colonization of the Mediterranean and whose model they would export to the first settlements in the non – European Atlantic (Verlinden 1953, 385).

Beyond this initial phase of the European occupation of the Atlantic, we are interested in analysing the structure of the Iberian Atlantic that started to be configured with the treaties between the Iberian kingdoms at the end of the sixteenth century concerning the division of the world to be conquered and which was consolidated for the circumatlantic territories with the *Mare Clausum* statement during this period. In this Iberian Atlantic, although ruled by a single voice and inaccessible to outsiders, solid and indivisible, various Atlantics or subsystems coexisted.

Braudel had already pointed out the existence of various models of interpretation of the Atlantic according to the ties to this space of each territory or kingdom. Thus, he contrasted the Spanish Atlantic with the Portuguese based on the relationship of each of these kingdoms with the arrangement of their overseas colonial territories, giving special consideration to geographic constraints:

The Atlantic of the Spanish is an ellipse in which Seville, the Canaries, the Antilles and the Azores mark the route, being both ports of arrival and their driving forces. The Atlantic of the Portuguese is that immense triangle of the central and southern ocean: the first side goes

from Lisbon to Brazil; the second, from Brazil to the Cape of Good Hope; the third is that line that sailboats follow on their return trip from the Indies, from Santa Helena along the African coast. (Braudel 1976, 295)

Even Mauro also warned about the particularities of the Portuguese Atlantic model. This historian, in a subtle comparison, understood that “The Portuguese colonial Empire in the sixteenth century was also a thalassocracy, like the Athenian Empire of the fifth Century BC” (Mauro 1983, 156). Therefore, although there were similarities and parallels between models of occupancy of the circumatlantic space, and even despite juxtaposed and synchronous influences and types, neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish colonial examples – least of all the British one – followed a homogeneous model for historical development in the Atlantic.

As Correia e Silva points out, if during the first incursions into the Atlantic it was those European conflicts which were projected onto this space; later, it was the Atlantic dynamics which ended up being Europeanized (Correia e Silva 1995, 15). This pretentious *Mare Clausum* – or Iberian Atlantic –, jealously distributed between the Castilians and the Portuguese, became the reflection of European tensions and, on occasions, the cause of these disturbances. The Atlantic is *de facto* an immense ocean unreachable by distant royal authority. The impossibility of bringing the effective power of the Iberian monarchies to such a faraway, distant, and varied territory; the insufficiency of the imperial administration to pragmatically extend and enforce its rules and regulations; and the inability to understand and transmit actual common perceptions between central Europe and the circumatlantic periphery are the main reasons why the Atlantic quickly ceased to be an exclusively Iberian domain, beyond such theoretical and legislative design, to become a prime space for the interests of other European kingdoms.¹⁹

The scope of the effect of the United Provinces (of the Netherlands and Flanders) on the Iberian overseas territory went beyond a mere act of war. They responded to the needs of an economic model which sought to expand a thriving mercantile economy which was constrained by the Portuguese – Spanish monopoly. To increase its trade and encourage economic activity, the Dutch navy occupied the island of Bezequiche, in Dakar, Senegal. It took various possessions on the coast and in the Gulf of Guinea and then conquered Loango, Bahía Mina in Brazil, as well as Guyana, Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire in the Caribbean. These intrusions forced a reinterpretation of the area over the ashes of the utopian Iberian monopoly (Correia e Silva 1995, 15).

However, this interference was not exclusive to the Atlantic. The rebels were interested in this area when they could obtain an economic benefit by intervening in the monopoly of the Hispanic Monarchy. Hence the Dutch did not limit themselves to incursions in the Atlantic area, but also sought to occupy strategic locations to develop their commercial network in the Iberian Pacific.

The compromises reached between King Philip of Castile and the three estates of the Portuguese kingdom during the *Cortes de Tomar* in 1581 established the conditions for the aggregation of Portugal to the Hispanic Monarchy. In addition to the proclamation of a new sovereign, his acceptance as king of the Portuguese presupposed the concentration of the authority of the Iberian overseas empires in a single person, which did not occur without some difficulty. The distant domains of the Iberian Peninsula adapted the imperial administrative model to the peripheral organs, both to their specificities – remote

regions, poorly defined borders, etc.– and to their needs – deficit of populations, scarcity of food, need for manufactures, etc.

In this dynamic ocean, the islands were an articulating subject of migratory flows and the distribution of products. The insular territories connected the bordering coastal regions with the most distant ones, understanding the Atlantic as an undivided space beyond the borders erected by the Iberian monarchs. This is how one can understand how, since the conquest and colonization of the Macaronesian archipelagos, these islands formed an assistance and reciprocity association that was organized in parallel with the administrative structure of the kingdoms of Castile and Portugal.

The dream of an Iberian Atlantic had died during the seventeenth century despite all legal attempts and preventive measures. When the Hispanic Monarchy realized how untamed this ocean was, it had already been divided into multiple areas of influence and fundamentally marked by instability and conflict. The alterations in the spatial domain had repercussions on a society and an economy as open and dependent on the Atlantic circuits as the insular society and economy of the Macaronesian archipelagos. Vieira (2001, 309) states that “the period between the end of the sixteenth century and the first half of the following century was the decisive moment for the History of the islands and of the Atlantic.”

Indeed, the Iberian archipelagos of Macaronesia were constrained by the surrounding environment and by the relational dynamics around and involving them. They were intra – Atlantic areas characterized both by their evident geographical location and by their ties to and dependence on the flows extending around them. The Atlantic thus became the nexus connecting insular life with the outside transoceanic world and, in the same way, the islands were interior elements linking circumatlantic relations.

However, the insular contributions to the field of Atlantic History have been even more extensive and complex, both in terms of different areas and different perspectives. Firstly, Correia e Silva, based on his study of the Cape Verdean archipelago, has emphasized the geostrategic role and the geographic constraints of the islands in the process of European expansion across the Atlantic. Secondly, taking the Azores islands as a reference, other historians have raised the singularity of the relationships of these islands within the Atlantic context.²⁰ Of particular note within this Azorean insular historiography is the work of José Damião Rodrigues. This historian structures his Atlantic History based on the specific aspects of the Azores and the cosmos which these islanders construct in relation to their oceanic environment. In short, he approaches insular history from the local, but with a global perspective in his approach which makes use of the comparative method.²¹

This school of insular historians with Atlantic perspectives has shown that oceanic historical dynamics pass through the intra – Atlantic European spaces. The Atlantic began to be configured as an immense inland sea in the European imaginary from the fifteenth century through the generalisation of the exchanges between the different regions surrounding this ocean. Voyages, through the organization of complex routes, connected the African and American continents with Europe through extensive networks of traders set up by a seedbed of mercantile Atlantic places. The islands, in this commercial network, emerged as a connecting and pivotal element between the different markets. This multiplicity of connections resulted from the complementary economic areas between insular and continental areas, from the use of the environment and the economic activities spread throughout each of these Atlantic locations. However, this economy was also

determined by geographical constraints relating to the ocean, resulting from the currents and the winds which shaped these routes. The islands were outposts in the Atlantic holding strategic value in supplying the vessels as well as redistributing the merchandise which arrived in the archipelagos.

However, the constraints of marine currents and the layout of the Atlantic routes discriminated against the inclusion of certain island areas in terms of their suitability in forming part of a maritime route, turning the islands into active or passive subjects of these Atlantic dynamics. In this sense, the Canary Islands and the Azores were living elements fostering interaction between the Iberian regions of the Atlantic. Meanwhile, the island of Madeira was a passive agent with regard to transatlantic routes. However, on an inter – island scale, the Madeiran archipelago acted as an intermediary between the other two island areas, by re – exporting and supplying goods.

The inclusion and functioning of the islands within the Atlantic network was constrained by their geographical location in relation to both the transatlantic routes and the complementary inter – island routes, forming an Iberian Atlantic supported by an insular subsystem. As such, as Vieira (1992, 275) affirms, knowledge of the historical past of the islands must transcend the limitations of the area itself and contextualise the particular insular world within the historical generality of the Atlantic.

The archipelagos are those historical pawns, the value of which fluctuates depending on the type of relationship and the direct or indirect manner with which they interact with the wide enveloping space. The local – the islands – in the end, constitute another element within the system. That means that any alteration introduced in any of its parts will cause, before or afterwards, adaptive modifications in the rest.

In the case which concerns us, the Atlantic cannot be considered as “a large immense mass of water populated with islands” (Vieira 2006, 3), since they are associated and indivisible elements within historical tradition. The islands behave as connecting elements, as intermediaries, between the surrounding coastlines of Africa, America and Europe.

This is a paradigm shift in the historical analysis of the islands. Most of the works that have been published referring to the Atlantic Islands until very recently – especially in Spanish historiography – have a markedly insular or, if you wish, archipelago character. However, works such as those of Vieira – based on analysis of the island of Madeira – and Rodrigues – with his study of the Azores – have consolidated a proposal for Atlantic History in which the islands are shown as a prominent element forming a link between surrounding spaces which make up a common Atlantic whole.

The structure of the backbone of a dynamic Atlantic passed through the islands. Around the Atlantic space, transnational mercantile networks were formed with its greatest – and most attractive – profit being long-distance trade, in geographical and cultural terms, where island territories acted as a strategic platform providing intermediation between these different worlds. The islanders themselves were able to take advantage of this exchange on island lands. Cheap, and even banal, products in one place, could be exotic and expensive in the other. Exclusiveness was the mother of commercial prosperity (Correia e Silva 1991, 187). The distance between markets and exclusivity increased profit. The Islands of the Atlantic were part of this trade, as redistributive axes which, through this synergy, supported the reproduction of the internal structure. For example, in the case of Cape Verde,

relations with Africa were vital in the operation of the productive units for the islands of Santiago and Fogo, to the extent that through them the fundamental production factor was acquired, which was slave labour (Correia e Silva 1991, 189). It was these distant products which made up the means of payment that in turn financed imports to the islands of basic commodities. Exogenous goods for some islands on the periphery which sought to supply these to reproduce the European model of living. In this way, and following the example of Cape Verde, the export of leather was one of the main sources of financing for food imports – wheat, barley, olive oil or wine – from Castile, so necessary for the island community of European origin (Correia e Silva 1991, 190).

The islands of the Mid-Atlantic during the Early Modern Period were at the mercy of mercantile behaviour which was carried out at considerable distances from the islands, with hardly any ability to intervene in the needs of other markets. Changes in island economic cycles, including the severe crises which plagued these territories, coincided with periods involving the general restructuring of the Atlantic domain, both commercially and politically. Therefore, the islands were subject to the unfolding of the ongoing restructuring of the circumatlantic space. But this feature of dependence is a consequence, not only of their island status – as a synonym for being isolated – but also of their intrinsic situation in the Atlantic.

Conclusions

What converges in the islands, as a fruit of maritimeness, is the complementarity between the island areas providing support for the maintenance of the main mercantile routes, acting as strategic enclaves. Places for the entry and exit of people and products. They are dynamic spaces that act as doors between certain areas and others. They are places of transit, the border for which is the permeable sea.

As Rodrigues (2012, 38) points out, “different political-administrative, economic and social realities and experiences were therefore mirrored in the co-existence of spatial representations and different entities.” The geographical constraints of Macaronesia, as fragmented, reduced and distant spaces, restricted the European model of life which was established in these lands, but did not limit or alter it too much. It only had to adapt itself to these new conditions. The European population which occupied and settled on the islands, would on a smaller scale reproduce the basic principles of European behaviour in its economic, social and cultural aspects. The structuring of a bonding mechanism between islands based on complementarity would enable not only the supplying, but also the continuity – and therefore the efficiency – of the European occupation.

The seas make their mark and the oceans even more so, shaping the impression of the island onto the space which surrounds it. The proximity to Africa, the traditional relations with America, and the dependence on Europe are intermingled within a single Atlantic experience configuring the cultural identity of the islands. “It would not be amiss to remember here that the Ocean probably got its name from the islands and not vice versa,” as stated by Professor Rumeu de Armas in 1955 in his reference to the work of Herodotus (1995, 9).

Notes

1. From Charles Verlinden to David Armitage, including John H. Elliott.
2. "It would be an exaggeration to say that the geographer or historian who separated an ocean from its adjacent and tributary seas was like an anatomist who said that a man consisted of head and trunk and that arms and legs, hands and feet could be ignored. Still it is quite probable that the tendency to give separate names and separate consideration to many different bodies of water delayed the recognition of the organic and integral character of the Atlantic and the systematic study that scientists have brought to bear on it in recent decades" (Outhwaite 1957, 19).
3. "In the Old World in classic times the writers and the military leaders gave the name 'Mediterranean' to a sea. They recognized its importance because practically all of the important nations of the then-known world surrounded it. So today we might give the name 'Mediterranean Ocean' to the Atlantic because it is surrounded by the world's major land masses" (Outhwaite 1957, 14).
4. "... el Mediterráneo da forma al Atlántico, y reinventa y proyecta su propia imagen en el Nuevo Mundo de los ibéricos" (Braudel 1976, 297).
5. "Enfin, et ceci me semble capital du point de vue de l'histoire mondiale c'est sans doute parce que les influences et les ressemblances institutionnelles et économiques sont si nombreuses et si anciennes dans la zone de civilisation atlantique, que celle-ci se distingue d'autres aires de civilisation tout aussi vastes, mais où les facteurs d'unité sont moins intimement soudés à la structure foncière de la société" (Verlinden 1953, 398).
6. "The 'Atlantic System' was not the victory of economic rationality. The 'Atlantic System' was about the resources of Africa and of the New World or about the transfer of capital and labour" (Emmer 2002, 178).
7. "Since the early 1950's the security of Western Europe has been assured by a combination of treaties, commitments, coalition military arrangements and credibly available American nuclear power. By the early 1970's Europe and the world were different from two decades before. An inconclusive and potentially disastrous strategic arms race, a reassertion of domestic priorities in budget allocations everywhere in the NATO countries and insistent Soviet calls for a European security conference were only three of the elements making for change in the Atlantic system as a device for promoting Western Europe's and North America's security against pressures from the East" (Fox and Schilling 1973, n. p.).
8. An example of this is the publication in 2005 of the aforementioned collective work *El sistema atlántico español (siglos XVII-XIX)*, coordinated by the specialists Martínez Shaw and Oliva Melgar.
9. "Nor is it simply an expansion of the venerable tradition of 'imperial' history, either British, Spanish, Portuguese, or Dutch, ... They were describing the formal structure of imperial governments. They studied institutions not the people who lived within these governments or their activities, and they concentrated on the affairs of a single nation" (Bailyn 1996, 20).
10. "Nonetheless, we believe that this work addresses only one part of a much broader problem. Few scholars have yet begun to explore the interactions between the residents of colonies in different European empires, Portuguese Brazil and French Saint-Domingue for example. There is an obvious need, as well, for African contributions to colonial social and cultural development to be more effectively integrated into historical consciousness. Seeing the Atlantic as a unit allows us to do all of this more effectively; it brings us closer to recreating an important part of the world as it operated in the decades and centuries after 1492" (Karras and McNeill 1992, 5).
11. "Do these maritime exchanges constitute sufficient building stones to speak of a system? My conclusion will be ... that an 'Atlantic System' was not an economic phenomenon, but a cultural one" (Emmer 2002, 169).
12. "In fact, there is no evidence that the volume of Atlantic imports could have been of great importance to the population of West Africa at large ... As far as Western Europe was

- concerned, the same conclusion applies. The volume and value of the trade in the non-European part of the Atlantic was relatively small” (Emmer 2002, 171)
13. “To pretend that Atlantic history offers better possibilities than global history in understanding the Modern Age is a noble attempt to avoid the former historiography being subsumed within the latter” (Valladares 2012, 72).
 14. “Far from being ‘eurocentrist,’ the result of this reorientation of history towards a global history is a new social theory on the Atlantic World. This theory highlights the empirical evidence demonstrating that globalization is not a recent phenomenon – although this belief was previously accepted as fact, and still is by some scholars – but an underlying globalization process dating as far back as the 15th century, if not earlier” (Crespo 2014, 1).
 15. “*Saudades da Terra* was thus an instrument designed to promote the archipelago to the Catholic Monarchy, within the context of the new political and social organization, underlining the union between the Portuguese and the Spanish” (Rodrigues 2011, 21).
 16. Hernández Suárez (2023) has recently analyzed the figure of *juez de Indias* in the Canary Islands and the actions of this institution to eradicate the smuggling of the islanders with America.
 17. In this regard, García Ramos makes a series of arguments of a geographical and cultural nature through which he argues that the Canary Islands are not part of Africa: “If we Canaries are rigorous with what ‘natural environment’ means, it does not follow that an archipelago like ours can be assimilated within the African natural environment. Neither 1) by *geological origin* : our volcanic nature is so determinate; nor 2) because of the *natural setting*: our oceanity is, however, more decisive; nor 3) due to the *nature of the population*: stable populations on the continent, a mixed population in the Canary Islands . . . , nor 4) due to *cultural curiosity*: continental tribalism as opposed to the porosity towards other cultures of our islands; nor 5) by *religious creeds*: Christianity or post-Christianity as opposed to the Islamic civilization of our neighbours” (García Ramos 2002, 14).
 18. “We cannot tell at what early era the men of the eastern Mediterranean first ventured through the Strait of Gibraltar out on the open ocean, nor even when they first allowed their fancies free rein to follow the same path and picture islands in the great western mystery” (Babcock 1922, 1).
 19. “The new situation (of the Iberian Union) caused changes in terms of the political geography of the Atlantic area, causing it to be the main stage for conflicts between the European powers” (Vieira 2001, 325).
 20. The historian Avelino Meneses (1997) addressed the specific aspects of the administration of the archipelago under Philippine rule. For her part, Maria Gil (1982) has focused on the field of cultural exchanges.
 21. An example is the global perspective that he introduces in the analysis of Gaspar Frutuoso’s work: “Gaspar Frutuoso very clearly included the Azores in the overseas, Atlantic and insular worlds of the sixteenth century and applauded the universal monarchy of Philip II, stating that the monarch ‘is now the greatest lord in all the environs.’ Just like other contemporary authors who wrote within the framework of the Catholic Monarchy, the object of the discourse is *local* but its horizon is *global*” (Rodrigues 2011, 21).

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