MACARONESIA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD DURING THE IBERIAN UNION (1580–1640)

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This article examines how the transatlantic relations of the African continent developed during the Iberian Union (1580-1640). Its aim is to consider Africa's place in oceanic dynamics during the period of Portugal's incorporation into the Hispanic Monarchy and the consolidation of the Atlantic world by analysing the islands of Macaronesia as a link between Africa and European and American territories.
Historical research enables an understanding of the African diaspora in the Iberian Atlantic and the cross-border relations that connected Atlantic Africa with other territories linked to the Ocean through cross-border networks. Primary documentation is an indispensable tool to carry out a comprehensive social, economic and cultural study; to produce an analysis both from the royal perspective as well as at the local level and to confront the interpretation that the metropolis and the islands construct about the object of this study: the African diaspora.

Key words: Macaronesian islands; Africa; Atlantic; Iberian Union

The Atlantic Links of the African Diaspora through the Macaronesian Islands: A Historiographic Review

As Valladares Ramírez (2013, p. 57) points out, the literary profusion with which Castilians and the Portuguese wrote about the different regions of the Monarchy in Africa, America and Asia is well known, but what is less well known is that they also wrote, albeit to a lesser extent, about the Empire of the "other" during the Iberian Union. Recent Atlantic historiography has shifted from Eurocentric

narratives toward polycentric approaches that incorporate African agency and insular dynamics. This transition, influenced by transnational methodologies, emphasises the role of peripheral spaces—such as the Macaronesian islands – as active nodes rather than passive recipients within global circuits (Armitage, 2004; G. Santana Pérez, 2014).

Frutuoso is one of the few examples of authors whose ambition was to describe the Iberian world that incorporated the other side of "the line". This chronicler constructed a narrative that sought to establish a compendium of the past of all the islands. This undertaking integrated the events of different areas within the same story and within the same historical discourse. His account does not distinguish the political border of one or another archipelago, but rather aggregates all the islands into a single unit independent of their political reality.[1] Although he did not incorporate the African continent into his narrative, he insisted on the existence of a common ancestral history from the incorporation of the Macaronesian territories into European knowledge, a process which was emphasised with the union of the Iberian kingdoms under the Hispanic Monarchy.

This study proceeds from the premise that, during the Iberian Union (1580–1640), Atlantic dynamics acquired an unusually dense and multidirectional configuration. Far from representing a mere administrative arrangement, the period coincided with a profound reordering of international power, marked by the expanding presence of foreign maritime actors – particularly England and the Dutch Republic – across African and Atlantic spaces linked to the Hispanic Monarchy. Episodes such as the English assault on Praia in 1598, Dutch incursions into Portuguese positions along the Gulf of Guinea, and the broader Dutch advance in Brazil and the Caribbean exemplify the strategic pressure that reshaped routes, defensive capacities, and commercial structures throughout the empire. Within this environment, the overlap between Luso-Castilian networks – grounded in Portugal's longstanding engagement with sub-Saharan Africa and its legal authority over navigation and the *resgate* (slave redemption trade) - and the emergence of these competing naval powers enhanced the geopolitical relevance of the Macaronesian archipelagos within the Atlantic system.

Situated at the crossroads of maritime routes, commercial circuits, and inter-imperial rivalries, the archipelagos became privileged sites from which to observe how imperial processes and regional dynamics intersected. Their exposure to multiple currents – economic, political, and military – clarifies the rationale

[1] It is just as relevant that the historian considers that "these important studies on Luso--Castilian textual relations have emphasised the peninsular aspect to the detriment of the overseas aspect. In fact, very little enquiry has been made about the occasions in which the Lusitanians and the Castilians scrutinised their neighbour's empire and, specifically, to the phenomenon of having put down their visions on paper" (Valladares Ramírez, 2013, p. 57).

for adopting this chronology: it was during these decades that the islands most clearly reflected the interplay between the internal logics of Iberian union and the external pressures reshaping the early modern Atlantic.

The spatial focus of the study also requires careful elucidation. Research on relations with Barbary and the wider Maghreb has been particularly productive. In the case of the Canary Islands, Luis Alberto Anaya Hernández (1985, 2008) has examined in detail the frequency, modalities, and implications of corsair activity from Algiers and Salé, including mechanisms of capture, ransom, and the circulation of captives. Germán Santana Pérez (2002) has expanded this perspective by analysing Maghrebi connections within the mid-Atlantic, the operational linkages between North African corsairs and the islands, and the defensive and economic consequences of these incursions. For Madeira and the Azores, Alberto Vieira (1991) has contextualised Maghrebi raids within broader Atlantic transformations, tracing their demographic impacts and local responses. Collectively, this scholarship has clarified long-standing patterns of maritime violence, forced mobility, and intercultural contact across the North African littoral.

In contrast, the connections between the archipelagos and sub-Saharan Africa during the Iberian Union have received comparatively limited attention, despite the fact that Portuguese actors – protected by their exclusive legal rights along the African coast and the *resgate* system – were the primary mediators of such exchanges. It is to this set of commercial, demographic, and cultural linkages – originating in sub-Saharan Africa and channelled through Portuguese intermediaries – that the term "African diaspora" refers in this article. The concept is employed here in a deliberately restricted sense, confined to sub-Saharan populations involved in the slave trade and associated Atlantic circuits.

This approach also makes it possible to integrate imperial-scale developments – Portuguese agency along the African coast, the intensification of Atlantic exchanges, and the growing presence of foreign powers such as England and the Dutch Republic – with specific transformations in the insular realm. Taken together, these elements provide a framework for understanding how the archipelagos participated actively in the circulation of goods, people, and cultural practices within an Atlantic world moving towards increasingly multipolar configurations.

Admittedly, since the end of the Prince Henry the Navigator's explorations, there were chronicles by navigators who outlined a historical account that connected the Canary Islands with the African continent[2] and news of Portuguese religious missions to Africa that landed in the Castilian archipelago at a time pri-

[2] Alvise da Cadamosto's account of his African voyage in 1455 indicates that the expedition, before reaching the mouth of the Gambia River and returning to Portugal, had passed through Madeira, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde (Aznar Vallejo et al, 2017, p. 21).

or to the Dynastic Union.[3] However, it was not until the 18th century that the traditional marginal and local vision of the Canary Islands gave way to broader readings in which the archipelago was seen above all as a strategic enclave in the Atlantic. An outstanding example of the use of this more universal perspective applied to the history of the islands can be found in the figure of a local scholar of Portuguese descent, José de Viera y Clavijo (1731–1813).[4] In his work, this illustrious scholar does not hesitate to place the islands between Africa and America, in the heart of the Atlantic. At a time when this ocean was no longer an Iberian Sea but a space open to all kinds of nations and sailors, he placed the Canary Islands in a prominent position within these Atlantic crossroads. Moreover, this author goes so far as to say what no other chronicler had previously dared to affirm: "These islands belong to Africa" (de Viera y Clavijo,1950, p. 17).[5]

Viera y Clavijo, the first advocate of what we might call "Atlantonationalism" (Martínez Hernández, 2010, p. 150), prefaces his historical narrative by positioning the islands on the map of the dominions of the Monarchy. These insular territories, which were believed to be far away, in his discourse became the geographical and geostrategic centre of the Atlantic of the European nations: "From the bosom of the Atlantic Sea and in the middle of those happy Islands that serve as the prime meridian and as a bridge to the communication between the two worlds subject to the glorious empire of the best of Kings" (de Viera y Clavijo, 1950, p. 3).

His discourse not only reflects geographical considerations but also an ideological project aimed at redefining insular identity within the Enlightenment framework. By situating the islands as a 'prime meridian' of Atlantic exchanges, Viera y Clavijo anticipates modern debates on connectivity and spatial centrality. Moreover, Viera y Clavijo reflects and understands that the islands, linked

[3] In 1560 the Jesuit Agostinho de Lacera informed the king in a letter about the news of his trip to Angola. In it he recounted his voyage among the islands, both Castilian and Portuguese, before reaching the African continent: "The following Sunday, the last of December, we dawned in sight of the Canary Islands, with which our joy continued, and in the afternoon we stopped at La Gomera [.....] and on another Monday, the first day of the year 1560, the day of our Lord, he visited us with his mercy, giving us the benefit of a wind astern, so without bad weather we travelled one day to another 50, 55 and 57 leagues, which was a prosperous voyage, until we reached the island of Santiago in Cape Verde" (Brásio, 1953, pp. 453–454).

[4] On the work of José de Viera y Clavijo, see the article by Juan Manuel Santana Pérez (2017).

[5] This is the title of the first chapter of the first book. However, he was not the first chronicler to insist on the African geography of the Islands. Although he was never in the Canary Islands, Bartolomé de las Casas (1986), in his book I, provides an extensive account called *Breve relación de la destrucción de África* (A brief history of the destruction of Africa) in which the first five chapters are dedicated to the Canary Islands, the sixth to Madeira and Porto Santo and the tenth to the Azores and Cape Verde.

to Europe and America by the politics of the Empire and the commerce of merchants, are also geographically linked to Africa, the third continent that encloses the circumatlantic space.[6] This territory appears as a prominent element of the history he constructs. Through the Canarian expeditions to the African coasts, he describes the geographical, social and economic environment in which these expeditionaries found themselves. He introduces into his story the vision of the island people regarding the native and Portuguese groups with which they come into contact. In addition, he produces a detailed description of the coastline up to the Senegal River.

Certainly, this historian had a special affinity for African studies,[7] but he also has the added merit of being one of the first researchers to incorporate the African continent into Atlantic studies. And even before there was an increase in studies on slavery and the slave trade in the United States in the 1960s (Lucena Giraldo, 2010, p. 43).

It should be noted that little research has been carried out on the links between the Archipelago and the Portuguese enclaves in Africa. Apart from interdisciplinary studies, such as those by Torrão (1991), which connected the two territories through the slave trade, there are few bibliographical references. Curiously, historiographical interest in the relations between the Canary Islands and Portuguese Africa during the Modern Age occurred even prior to any other analysis of the relations between the Archipelago and the Portuguese world. In 1978, Da Mota (1980) presented a paper on the Canary Island expeditions to Guinea during the 16th century at the third colloquium on Canarian-American history. This work, which was not continued over time, also presented another great novelty: Portuguese documentation dedicated to relations between the Canary Islands and Africa was shown for the first time in a Canary Islands publication.[8]

It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that historiography, in this case that of the Canary Islands, resumed work on the contacts between the Archi-

[6] "[…] for although there is no doubt that volcanoes affected them greatly in more remote centuries; nevertheless, it is easy to see, by their interior organization [...]; and by many other circumstances, it is easy to see, I say, that they are part of a primitive and original land, like that of the continent of Africa" (de Viera y Clavijo, 1942, pp. 31–32).

[7] *España y el África atlántica* also stands out among his works, published in Madrid in 1956.

[8] In 1985 the book *Canarias y África: altibajos de una gravitación* was published. In this work, the historian Víctor Morales Lezcano provided an overview of the state of historical studies on the African "gravitation" of the Canary Islands. In that sense, for the period of the Modern Age, he indicated that, although there had been substantial advances in research on the relations between the Archipelago and Barbary, he would not deal with – "and probably never" – the role of the Islands as a nexus in the slave trade between Africa and America because it was an unknown subject (Morales Lezcano et al., 1985, p. 16).

pelago and Portuguese Africa.[9] Germán and Juan Manuel Santana Pérez, from the Modern History Area of the University of Las Palmas, carried out historical analysis complementing the history of the Atlantic archipelagos and the neighbouring continent.[10] This historiographic interest gave rise to the publications of *La puerta fortunada* (G. Santana Pérez & J. M. Santana Pérez, 2002) and *Puertas en el mar*: *Islas Africanas en el Antiguo Régimen* (G. Santana Pérez & J. M. Santana Pérez , 2022). These works manage to build up a global history through the particularities of analysing a microspace through this unprecedented contextualisation as a part of insular historiography.[11] It is a circum-Atlantic history which goes beyond national limits and classical spatial borders to focus on the coherent bonds connecting both regions – Canarian and African – within the domestic space represented by the Atlantic.

In another article, Juan Manuel Santana Pérez (2012) highlighted the position of the Macaronesian islands within Atlantic dynamics. In this regard, he proposed four cornerstones in circum-Atlantic relations. In addition to the traditional European, American and African commercial spaces, this historian added the Atlantic islands as a fourth related area. He consequently endowed the island territories with their own unitary character (J. M. Santana Pérez, 2012, p. 126).

Unlike other studies, this historian emphasises and integrates analysis of the islands' mercantile relations with the African continent, conceived as an active space within this Atlantic synergy. Juan Manuel Santana Pérez explains the existence of multiple transoceanic trade routes. In one of them, ships leaving for Africa did not head for America but landed on the islands. Therefore, he infers that the island territories were the redistributors of African products – especially slaves – to America and Europe (J. M. Santana Pérez, 2012, p. 127).

Juan Manuel Santana Pérez, within the multiplicity of Atlantic routes he describes, proposes a novel commercial triangle formed by Portuguese America, Africa and the islands. Some ships leaving Brazil arrived in African territories and from there went to the Canary Islands, so that both American and African

[9] It is true that this is not the first time that certain issues regarding Canarian-African history have been addressed. Contacts with the Berber Coast have been a matter studied in depth by Anaya Hernández, as well as slavery in the Canary Islands and relations with Cape Verde by Lobo Cabrera.

[10] More recently, and as a result of focusing on this line of work, for the first time a monograph on the history of Atlantic Africa was published in a journal from the Archipelago. I am referring to issue number 14 of the magazine *Vegueta* of the University of Las Palmas.

[11] This is reflected by the authors themselves: "[...] the studies on this continent contain some interesting work on the *Antiguo Régimen*, almost always referring to a specific area. However, there is a lack of research on the global relationship of the Canary Islands with the whole of Africa over a prolonged period of time" (G. Santana Pérez & J. M. Santana Pérez, 2002, p. 8).

products reached the islands. The explanation of this path once again emphasises the redistributive nature of the Archipelago.

The historiographical overview initially presented needs to be complemented by the incorporation of contemporary testimonies that allow the islands to be situated within the broader Atlantic constellation described by Luso-African sources and by inter-insular mobility. In this regard, the writings of Baltasar Barreira (Leitão, 1993) constitute an essential source point of support: his letters from Sierra Leone and Cape Verde, composed in the same decades as the notarial documentation analysed by Torrão (2013a), provide descriptions of political hierarchies, systems of captivity, and modalities of *resgate* in Upper Guinea that are fully coherent with the networks of *feitorias* (Portuguese trading posts), merchants, and *contratadores* (slave-trade contractors) reconstructed by the author from the Lisbon *cartórios* (notarial archives). Barreira also makes it possible to refine our understanding of the nature of Luso-African mediation – whether Mandinga, Papel, Biafada, or Nalú – which Wheat (2016) demonstrates to be fundamental in shaping the ethnic composition of the enslaved contingents that reached the Spanish Caribbean.

For his part, Francesco Carletti's *Ragionamenti*, written after his passage through Santiago, Funchal, São Tomé, and the Guinean coast, offer a first-hand observation of the economic articulation linking the Macaronesian islands, the African trading posts, and the Iberian circuits, particularly with regard to the practices of valuation, branding, transportation, and commercialisation of enslaved people (Bussotti, 2023). His comparative gaze confirms that the insular spaces functioned as logistical nodes whose dynamics depended both on the agency of African intermediaries and on Portuguese commercial networks of the kind described by Torrão (2013b), thereby expanding the interpretive possibilities for understanding the position of the Canary archipelago within the Atlantic flows of the late sixteenth century.

Integrating these contemporary voices – those of a missionary deeply embedded in Guinean societies and of a merchant who traversed the Atlantic routes as a direct witness – makes it possible to reinforce the contextual grounding of the analysis, overcome the Hispano-peninsular bias, and project the interpretation towards a complex, well-documented, and multilaterally configured Atlantic horizon.

The Atlantic Trade Network between the Islands and the African Continent

The early modern Atlantic economy was shaped by a constellation of insular environments whose agricultural capacities, commercial structures, and degrees of integration into Luso-Iberian networks varied considerably. Among them, Madeira stood as the foremost centre of sugar production. There, the establishment of

cane fields and the construction of hydraulically powered mills created a mature agro-industrial system whose longevity was ensured by the decisive role of Genoese and Florentine merchants. As Vieira (1999) has shown, these Italian houses – Lomelino, Salvago, Catanho, Acciaiuoli, Marchioni, among others – consolidated themselves as landholders, financiers, and export coordinators. Through mechanisms of credit, procurement, and market control, they embedded the island within Mediterranean and northern European circuits, transforming Madeira into a technical and commercial model that influenced the other Atlantic archipelagos.

Cape Verde, although lacking a large-scale milling infrastructure, occupied a complementary position within these same circuits. The notarial records examined by Torrão (2013a) reveal the extent to which agricultural production on Santiago—provisions, exchange goods for *resgate*, small consignments of cane and other products – was tied to mercantile operations connecting Lisbon, the Rivers of Guinea, and the Hispanic Atlantic. *Procurações* (powers of attorney), obligations, and receipts issued by factors and agents demonstrate that Cape Verde functioned as a logistical and redistributive node within the slave trade, supplying commodities used in African transactions and receiving mixed cargoes in return. In this context, sugar cane cultivation existed not as a plantation sector but as an activity embedded in the provisioning economy of Atlantic traffic, illustrating the island's structural incorporation into Luso-African commercial routes.[12]

The Azores, by contrast, formed the boundary of what Vieira (1992) describes as Portugal's "experimental agricultural frontier'. Attempts to introduce cane in several islands were constrained by topography, irregular watercourses, and the absence of suitable sites for mills – structural limitations that prevented the formation of an agro-industrial complex. Yet these efforts are historically significant: they situate the Azores within a broader imperial logic that sought to reproduce colonial crops wherever ecological conditions allowed, even in territories better suited to cereals, vines, and dyestuffs.[13] Together, Madeira's consolidated production, Cape Verde's logistical functions, and the Azores' limited experiments delineate a differentiated insular economy that underpinned Iberian activity in the Atlantic.

Within this comparative framework, the documentary corpus preserved both in the islands and in Lisbon acquires particular significance. Notarial records – credit contracts, powers of attorney, mercantile partnerships, and transactions involving enslaved individuals – reveal the mechanisms through which the Maca-

[12] "In the archipelagos of Cape Verde and São Tomé, sugar cane was introduced much later and […] it never became a profitable or competitive crop when compared with Madeiran sugar." (Vieira, 1992, p. 166).

[13] "Sugar cane was brought to the Azores by the earliest settlers, and its cultivation was promoted in Santa Maria, São Miguel, Terceira, and Faial" (Vieira, 1992, p. 166).

ronesian archipelagos were structurally incorporated into Luso-African commercial circuits. The contractual formulas identified by Torrão for Cape Verdean and Guinean networks – *procurações* issued to factors in Santiago, obligations linked to *resgate* operations in the Rivers of Guinea, and other instruments of exchange – find clear counterparts in insular documentation: shared agents, procurators acting across multiple archipelagos, and mercantile practices adaptable to the needs of Atlantic traffic. This documentary convergence demonstrates that Madeira, Cape Verde, the Azores, and the Canary Islands operated within a common structural grammar of Atlantic commerce, despite their differing political conditions and local functions.

The study relies on notarial records preserved in Tenerife (1575–1650) and Lisbon, which constitute an essential source for reconstructing the socio-economic fabric of Atlantic interactions. These documents, despite their inherent limitations, offer detailed evidence of contractual arrangements, credit operations, and mercantile partnerships, thereby illuminating the mechanisms that sustained transoceanic exchanges. In the absence of abundant archival material for both the Canary Islands and the Portuguese enclaves, the analysis adopts a microhistorical approach centred on a case study: Juan Vega, a prominent Portuguese slave trader who settled in Tenerife during the late sixteenth century. His trajectory serves as a pivotal axis for exploring the cross-border networks that linked the archipelago with the African continent and, ultimately, with the broader Iberian Atlantic system.

Originating from Cape Verde, this individual settled on the island in the 1580s. In 1584 he acquired the sugar mill at Valle de Güímar. He diversified production and reinvested the plantation's profits in both the local economy and international Atlantic trade. This reorganisation allowed Juan de Vega to obtain some profit from sugar production, despite the fact that sugar cultivation on the island was in decline at that time. As a result, in 1587 he stated that his estate produced 120 *arrobas*, which he had auctioned off to the Flemish Pedro Blanco. However, these *arrobas* had not yet been completed, so the Portuguese had to mortgage all his produce and the slaves he had on the estate.[14]

As well as continuing to cultivate sugar cane on his farm, he also built structures for vineyard cultivation. Therefore, Juan de Vega was aware of the economic change that was taking place on the island and decided to reconvert this estate and promote the production of wine.[15] However, the main activity of this Portuguese individual was that of the slave trade. The deeds studied indicate that he was the main slave merchant on the island during the last quarter of the 16th century, re-

[14] AHPSCT, bndl. 1168, no folio.

[15] An example of this is the tribute that was partially granted to Gaspar Hernández to plant vineyards, a neighbour in the valley of Güímar. AHPSCT, bndl. 666, fol. 277.

sponsible for 71.5% of the business that has been documented. From Cape Verde, he mainly introduced males between 15 and 26 years of age at an average price of 900 *reales* per individual.

Most of the buyers were members of the local elite, such as the notary Francisco de Mesa or the councillor Diego de Arguijo. With the importation of slaves to Tenerife, his intention was probably to cancel part of the debts that his estate had incurred. In fact, he gave Diego de Arguijo a 14-year-old black slave girl and a 24-year-old man for a debt contracted on the Güímar estate for a value of 100 *doblas* and 900 *reales*, respectively.[16]

In the same way, he also reinvested the profits he obtained from the mill in international trade. An example of this Atlantic network is the arrangement he made with the merchant Pedro de Salas to buy a black slave girl of 20 to 30 years of age and a male of 15 to 20 years of age on the island of Santiago.[17]

It is possible that other debts owed to creditors related to the estate were settled in the same way. To the son of the previous owner, Francisco de Alarcón, he transferred 2,100 *ducados* that he had in a company to transport slaves from Guinea to the Indies in a ship that sailed from the port of Santa Cruz,[18] with this amount being the same as that for which the part of the estate that Juan de Vega had bought from him had been valued. However, it must not have been enough. At the end of 1588, while the Portuguese merchant was in Cape Verde, he granted a power of attorney to the alderman Juan de Herrera to undertake the transfer of "a certain amount of *maravedís*" that he owed to Francisco de Alarcón.[19]

Juan de Vega took advantage of this network between the two archipelagos to establish ties and thus become the proxy in Cape Verdean territory for the main individuals within Tenerife society. In this way, he received powers of attorney from the local elite to act in this Portuguese island.[20]

Likewise, he participated in the Castilian Atlantic market through correspondence with the port of Seville. Thus, he formed a company with a merchant and a master of a ship from Seville. In this business, Juan de Vega was in charge of the caravel's repairs, as well as loading the barrels of wine and dealing with the *almojarifazgo* (import/export duties).[21]

In order to develop such a complex mercantile network, it was necessary to have consolidated social and family ties distributed throughout the different At-

[16] AHPSCT, bndl. 669, fol. 324 and AHPSCT, bndl. 669, fol. 352v.
[17] AHPSCT, bndl. 1512, fol. 768.
[18] AHPSCT, bndl. 666, fol. 663v.
[19] AHPSCT, bndl. 1514, fol. 209.
[20] Thus, Juan de Súrega granted him a power of attorney to collect the profits that belonged to him from Gonzalo Rodríguez, a Tenerife neighbour and Santiago resident. AHPSCT, bndl. 1512, fol. 760.
[21] AHPSCT, bndl. 666, fol. 712v.

lantic trading posts in order to meet the demands of this commercial route. For this reason, his son-in-law Juan de Spíndola Escorcio – also a resident of Cape Verde and living in Tenerife – acted as his proxy on the island in his absence.[22]

In addition to strengthening such parental ties, he also interacted with other Portuguese individuals who had settled in the archipelago. The most significant link was the one he maintained with the Portuguese merchant Pedro Afonso Mazuelos, who supplied him with wine that Juan de Vega then traded abroad. These mercantile agreements between the two coincided with the period in which Pedro Afonso held the position of *almojarife*, collector of revenues, so it is likely that they participated together in this mercantile network. In this regard, Pedro Afonso was in charge of collecting the *almojarifazgo* duties in the aforementioned contract between the Sevillian merchants and Juan de Vega. Consequently, these two individuals had common interests and participated in the same insular and Atlantic economic network.[23]

Such microhistorical evidence aligns with Alencastro's (2000) model of interdependent Atlantic spaces, challenging the classic metropolis/colony dichotomy and revealing a web of reciprocal exchanges that sustained early modern globalisation.

These close socio-economic links between individuals that made the ties between the Canary Islands and Africa visible, would be lost as the end of the century approached. From 1590 Juan de Vega and his representatives returned the property to the family of the former owners.

In short, these Atlantic ties, especially between the African continent and the islands, transcended and went beyond individual interests. These contacts built lasting ties founded on the constant flow of goods and people, as well as the transfer of knowledge and ideas between the two spaces and societies.

The Islands in the Transnational African Slave Trade

A total of 57 contracts for the purchase and sale of slaves were identified, involving the trading of 96 individuals. These transactions, according to the documentation consulted, showed an upward trend as the 17th century progressed. They were distributed as follows according to the biannual sampling carried out: 1575–1576

[22] Thus, in 1588, he granted him a power of attorney to act on his behalf in various businesses. AHPSCT, bndl. 1511, fol. 212.

[23] Pedro Afonso Mazuelos was probably also involved in the slave trade, or at least maintained links with the most prominent members of this business. Thus, in 1594, he received a settlement for a bill of exchange that he had passed on to Diego Anrique, lessor of the Cape Verde contract. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), *7º Cartório Notarial de Lisboa – Ofício A*, Book 1584, fol. 35.

only represented 16% of these deeds of sale, while for the years 1587 and 1588 this percentage rose to 25%. Finally, during the 1625–1626 biennium, more than half of these agreements were made. This same trend is observed in the number of slaves sold, as between 1575 and 1576, while only six were traded, between 1625 and 1626, 42 individuals were trafficked.

Only four of the total number of deeds refer to the sale of more than one slave, so it can be understood that these agreements were concluded directly between the seller and the future owner, without the documentation indicating the existence of an insular slave trade on a larger scale other than local supply and personal acquisitions.

Most of the traffickers were shipmasters – 40% – and Portuguese merchants from mainland Portugal and Portuguese agents from Cape Verde. Within this group, as has already been noted, the merchant Juan de Vega Albarnás was prominent during the 1580s. In the same way, individuals from other non-Castilian communities also participated in this slave-trade network from the Canary Islands. Thus, at the beginning of the 17th century, the Oflaque brothers – of Flemish origin – became agents for the lessor of the Guinea contracts, Jácome Fixer, in Tenerife and in Gran Canaria.[24]

This mechanism of buying and selling slaves could be linked to much more complex contractual formulas, as can be seen in the following example. In 1626, Captain Jorge Báez de Acevedo, by virtue of a power of attorney from his brother Sebastián Báez, a merchant based in Luanda,

> [...] received from Captain Luis Lorenzo, the main bailiff and alderman of Tenerife, six hundred *reales* in cash and three barrels of wine with duty paid, which cost nine hundred and forty-three *reales* and eight crates of fifteen quintals, and one and a half *arroba* of pitch which cost two hundred and forty-six *reales*, and six dozen black and white goat leather skins (*cordobanes*), which formed a total of one thousand and eighty-seven *reales*.[25]

The aforementioned amount constituted the remainder of 9,850 *reales* that Master Cristóbal Álvarez and the pilot Domingo Pérez had collected from Luis Lorenzo, which he still owed to the said Sebastián Báez de Acevedo for 14 slaves,

[24] In 1603, Cornieles Oflaque, on behalf of Jácome Fixer, granted general powers of attorney to his brother Jorge Oflaque, a merchant settled in Gran Canaria. AHPSCT, bndl. 464, no fol. In the same year, the said lessor of the Cape Verde contracts gave a power of attorney for the island of La Palma to be paid for the merchandise he had sent to that place. ANTT (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), 1º *Cartório Notarial de Lisboa – Ofício A*, Book 1603, fol. 91; ANTT, *1º Cartório Notarial de Lisboa – Ofício A*, Book 1603, fol. 132v.

[25] AHPSCT, bndl. 696, fol. 159v

women and men, that he had sent to him with the aforementioned sailors.[26] In short, in this transaction, the seller from Luanda used his brother as his representative to collect various goods which formed part of the sale of the slaves that had been transported earlier by Portuguese sailors.[27]

Chronologically, during the last decades of the 16th century, slaves came essentially from Guinea and Cape Verde, but with the beginning of the new century – coinciding with a 74.5% increase in that trade – they were replaced by Angolans. These slaves were mostly men in their twenties. Their cost would be around 770 *reales*, with the amount varying according to their origin, sex and age. Thus, those from Cape Verde had an average price of 860 *reales*, while those from Angola were 16% cheaper – the "Indians of Brazil", although not as sought after – fetched as many as 1,000 *reales*. In turn, women were sold at a higher price than men and were around 20% more expensive. The same was true by age, with those in their twenties being 10% more expensive than those younger than twenty.

Price differentials reflect not only market logic but also cultural perceptions of labour value within plantation economies. These variations were further conditioned by geopolitical disruptions, such as the Dutch occupation of Bahia and Pernambuco, which inflated costs and reconfigured trade routes.

These fluctuations in the price and origin of the slaves were due to factors exterior to the island. Firstly, Portuguese America required a significant amount of slave labour that had to be supplied for the mills. In addition, the interference of the enemies of the Spanish Monarchy in the Atlantic, especially after the Dutch occupation of Bahia and Pernambuco, contributed to the increase in prices.[28]

Furthermore, a restructuring of the slave trade route took place at the beginning of the 17th century. During the previous century, the slave ships, departing from different origins, had included Cape Verde as a mandatory destination for the registration of slaves. From here, after unloading merchandise from Europe and taking on other items from the coast of Africa and the islands themselves, they sailed once again to their initial bases in the Iberian Peninsula (Torrão 1991, p. 265).

[26] Ibid.

[27] The same type of transaction was carried out by Jorge Baez with Antonio Diaz Moura, another prominent member of the Portuguese community in Tenerife. On this occasion, although it does not specify the number of slaves, it is known that the amount amounted to 11,949 *reales* to be paid in the form of eight barrels of wine. AHPSCT, bndl. 2279, fol. 408.

[28] In 1643, the Portuguese War Council submitted a petition to King Juan IV regarding the measures to be taken to promote Angolan trade, given the importance of sending slaves to the mills in Portuguese America and the difficulties that this business was experiencing as a result of the Dutch invasion. In addition, the same petition indicated that the occupation had had an impact on the increase in the price of slaves. AHU (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino), *Angola*, Box 4, No. 17.

However, this circuit was altered because the main slave traders were interested in more efficiently organising the supply of slaves to the American territories administered by the Crown of Castile. These traders sought to reduce the travel time by going directly to the African coast and thus avoiding possible losses in the number of captive slaves. However, the Cape Verdeans insisted to the king that it was necessary to maintain this circuit because, according to them, the Portuguese islands produced neither bread, wine, oil, tools nor clothing. These basic necessities were brought by "merchants from Lisbon, Setúbal, the Algarve, the island of Madeira, the Azores, the Canary Islands and Castile" (Domingues 1991, p. 134).

Martim Correia da Silva, in a letter sent in 1559, informed the king of Portugal of how, in the Canary Islands, there were Portuguese who, from the Castilian islands themselves, went to redeem slaves on the African coast without a royal licence (Brásio 1954, p. 219). Indeed, there were numerous complaints from the Cape Verdean authorities about the impoverishment and social situation on the island of Santiago, once "the ships from Castile and the Canary Islands no longer passed through Santiago before going to Guinea and the lack of profit for the payment of salaries".[29]

These local concerns, which directly or indirectly came to the attention of the central power, demonstrate how important trade with the exterior was for the Atlantic islands, but, at the same time, it also shows their evident weakness and dependence on exogenous factors (Domingues 1991, p. 135).

The transfer of most of the slave ships from Santiago to Cacheu took place from the 1620s onwards. The king simply could not prejudice the merchants established in Santo Domingo nor prevent the setting up of direct routes from this port to the Americas governed by the Castilian crown, since the activity of these merchants in this Atlantic circuit was indispensable for the maintenance of the monarchy. Nor did the monarch, understandably, wish to displease the lessors of the contract, since it was really the latter who were pressuring the central power in order to promote a Cacheu agreement to the detriment of those of Ribeira Grande in Cape Verde.

Torrão (1995, p. 112) states that there was never an actual desire on the part of the Madrid authorities to solve the problems of the inhabitants of Cape Verde by preventing these slave routes to Guinea from passing through Santiago in order to guarantee their former exclusive slave trade in the Guinean Rivers. However, neither did the Court express any markedly negative feelings against the inhabitants of these islands. On the contrary, the Crown tried at the same time to appease the islanders by demonstrating its complete agreement and understanding towards the pleas and petitions of the inhabitants of Santiago. Thus, it granted several royal

[29] Letter from the governor of Cape Verde to the king in 1616. Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), *Cape Verde*, Caixa 1, No. 66.

provisions that were favourable to them, but these did not produce any effect[30]. The king was aware of this non-compliance and accepted it for reasons of sovereignty. He could not afford to lose control of such an important geographical space in the Atlantic.

Final Considerations

The islands were one of the vertices of the Atlantic area and through their strategic position they established links with the other surrounding regions, including Atlantic Africa, which enabled the local economy to form part of the major Atlantic circuits.

Madeira stands out as one of the earliest and most decisive testing grounds of Atlantic agricultural innovation and commercial organisation. The combination of abundant water, intensive land clearance and an early concentration of Italian capital enabled the island to develop a complex sugar economy whose scale and technical refinement far exceeded those of neighbouring archipelagos. Genoese and Florentine entrepreneurs did not simply finance production, they shaped its managerial practices, established enduring credit networks and tied Madeira's output to long-distance markets in ways that resonated across the Atlantic. The island's capacity to integrate labour, technology and commerce offers a useful counterpoint to the more modest insular economies of the region, underlining how advances forged in a single territory could influence the economic trajectories of others.

Cape Verde, by contrast, reveals another form of insular integration into Atlantic dynamics, one anchored less in agro-industrial strength than in the circulation of people, goods and information. Santiago was a space where agricultural resources, imported manufactures and African captives converged within a flexible and highly mobile trading system. Local produce, items destined for the *resgate* system, and smaller consignments of cane were routinely channelled through brokers active between Lisbon, the Rivers of Guinea and the wider Hispanic Atlantic. Cape Verde's economy thus rested on its capacity to service and sustain these networks. Although the archipelago never developed a plantation regime comparable to Madeira's, its importance stemmed from its logistical and relational functions: it was a hub through which African commercial circuits were negotiated, redistributed and recodified.

[30] In 1617, the king ordered that "all ships departing from Castile and the Canary Islands to Guinea were obliged to pass through the island of Santiago, where they should pay duty on their products, otherwise they would be seized by the *Royal Treasury*". AHU, *Cape Verde*, Caixa 1, No. 88.

The Azores exemplify yet another configuration within this insular constellation. The archipelago operated as a peripheral but meaningful frontier of agricultural experimentation, where attempts to acclimatise cane repeatedly encountered the obstacles imposed by topography, water scarcity and dispersed settlement. These constraints diverted Azorean production toward cereals, pastoral activities and maritime service, embedding the islands in the Atlantic through the provisioning of ships and the support of navigational routes rather than through crop specialisation. Their contribution to the Atlantic was therefore shaped by complementarity rather than replication: the Azores occupied an economic niche distinct from that of Madeira or Cape Verde, yet they participated in the same structural logic of interconnectedness that allowed goods, people and practices to circulate across the oceanic system.

Within this broader constellation, the Canary Islands emerged not as an exceptional case but as one vertex within a polycentric Atlantic system. Their significance stemmed from their redistributive functions, their ability to integrate Portuguese Africa and Spanish America into a shared economic space, and the presence of foreign and Portuguese agents who, like Juan de Vega, leveraged inter-insular and Afro-Iberian networks for commerce, mobility and credit. The case study analysed in this article illustrates how individual trajectories were embedded in larger patterns of Atlantic sociability, kinship, and brokerage.

This cisatlantic relationship between the island space and its surroundings encouraged the settling of non-Castilian individuals within the Castilian archipelago. The network taxonomy within which the islands participated was not primarily based on the origin of its members. Rather, this was organised on a family basis, with such members assuming new responsibilities in their local society while maintaining their interests in the larger mercantile system, namely that of the Atlantic economy. Although there is a predominant Portuguese imprint in these relations which were established with or from the archipelago, the real function of these Portuguese agents was to form links between this intra-Atlantic space and the other surrounding spaces, and using for this purpose their contacts both on the island and in other places.

In short, within these networks, of which these rocks in the Atlantic formed part, island and Portuguese interests were juxtaposed, in making other people's needs their own. This analysis at the local level is a reflection of the complexity and number of relationships, circuits and contacts that were built, and which interconnected within the Atlantic, to make this space a polycentric and interrelated entity at different levels, in different areas while bringing together various interests. The Canary Islands and Africa forged close ties, promoted by the island's elite and foreign traders, and this contributed to consolidating a dynamic interconnected Atlantic.

Moreover, the evidence demonstrates that these connections were not merely commercial but also socio-political, influencing patterns of migration, cultural

exchange, and legal frameworks regulating trade and slavery. These insular spaces acted as redistribution hubs for African commodities and enslaved individuals, reinforcing their role as intermediaries between Portuguese Africa and Spanish America. This position allowed insular elites to integrate into transnational networks, leveraging kinship and patronage to secure economic advantages. Such dynamics illustrate how microspaces like the islands contributed to macrostructural processes of early modern globalisation, challenging traditional narratives that privilege continental actors. The participation of the archipelagos in triangular trade routes, together with their capacity to adapt to shifting geopolitical contexts underscore their strategic relevance within the Atlantic system.

Ultimately, the islands operated as mediating agents within a polycentric Atlantic, forging cisatlantic and circum-Atlantic ties that blurred conventional spatial boundaries. Their strategic position fostered a dynamic interplay of local and global interests, embedding insular societies within the structural fabric of early modern globalisation. The seas made their mark and the oceans even more so, in shaping the insular imprint onto the space surrounding it. The proximity to Africa, the traditional relations with America and the dependence on Europe were intermingled within a single Atlantic experience to configure the cultural identity of Macaronesia. "It would not be amiss to remember here that the ocean probably got its name from the islands and not vice versa", stated Professor Rumeu de Armas (1955, p. 9) when referring to the work of Herodotus.

The archipelagos are historical pawns, the value of which fluctuates depending on the type of relationship and the direct or indirect manner in which they interact with the broad enveloping space. The location – the islands – in the end, constitutes another element within the system. This means that any alteration introduced in any of its parts will lead, either before or afterwards, to adaptive modifications in the rest.

In the case which concerns us, the Atlantic cannot be considered simply as "a vast expanse of water dotted with islands" (Vieira, 2006, p. 3), since historical traditions of mobility and exchange have rendered these elements inherently interconnected and analytically indivisible. The islands behave as connecting elements, as intermediaries, between the surrounding coastlines. Consequently, the traditional relations between the islands and Africa are an evident manifestation of the historical construction of the common Atlantic space.

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