Figure 1. The earliest surviving world map (c. 1502), by an anonymous Portuguese cartographer, that shows the explorations of Columbus to Central America and of Portuguese explorers Corte-Real to Newfoundland, Canada; Vasco da Gama to India; and Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil. The Tordesilhas line is depicted, and the Portuguese flag is flown over Brazil; the Atlantic archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores; North, West, and East Africa; Madagascar; the Middle East; India; Sri Lanka; Malaysia; Indonesia; and the Spice Islands, together with the names assigned to coastal fortifications. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
The Rise and Fall of Portugal’s Maritime Empire, a Cautionary Tale?

Forgotten Pioneers of the Age of Expansion, Discoverers of Two-Thirds of the World for Europe, Ambassadors of the West, Interpreters of the East, Who for a Century and a Half Governed the Lands and Controlled the Riches Flowing into Europe from Africa, Persia, Arabia, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Oceania, and Half of South America, Then Lost Much of Their Empire to Britain, France, and Holland; with Some Comments about Columbus and the Spread of Christianity

Frederick G. Williams

In the United States, we automatically think of England as the great maritime nation on whose overseas possessions the sun never set. We also identify Spain as a great maritime power, whose American colonies, especially Mexico and Peru, produced immense wealth for the kingdom. However, we forget, or more likely never knew (because we were never taught), that it was Portugal that invented the ship and developed the maritime technology that allowed for the first open-sea travel during the European Age of Exploration,¹ begun by Portugal in 1415 (fig. 1). It was Portugal that discovered more than two-thirds of the world for Europe. It was Portugal that established fortresses and warehouses, communities and cities, on every continent. It was Portugal, that in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and portions of the seventeenth centuries, controlled the European commerce of Africa, India, Arabia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Oceania, and half of South America.² And it was Portugal that first took the gospel of Jesus Christ to

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¹ Also known as the Age of Discovery.
For twenty-seven years, I was a professor of literature in Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California. In 1997, I joined the faculty of Brigham Young University, from which I retired at the beginning of 2018. I have lived in four Spanish-speaking countries (Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, Peru) and three Portuguese-speaking countries (Brazil, Portugal, and Mozambique) and have native proficiency in three languages. My father took his family with him wherever he was called to live. He served as mission president for four years in Argentina and for four years in Uruguay-Paraguay. He worked for the State Department in Washington, D.C.; in Venezuela; and in Uruguay; and as manager of TAPSA Airline in Peru.

In this essay, I inform readers of the pioneering and unique role that Portugal played during the European Age of Discovery in (1) maritime technology, (2) map making, (3) commercial trade and political treaties, and (4) the introduction of Christianity on five continents. These accomplishments are rarely researched, however, for much of Catholic Portugal’s control and influence in many lands was forcefully taken from them by England, Holland, and France in the seventeenth century.

Although not stated in the essay, there is an implied tie to the restored Church. Nephi’s vision recorded in the Book of Mormon makes a clear reference to Columbus, who was a faithful Catholic, trained and prepared by the Portuguese and led by the Holy Ghost to discover the promised land inhabited by the children of Lehi, to whom the gospel of Jesus Christ would be reintroduced. It was the Portuguese and Spanish brothers (especially those of the Jesuit order) who introduced Christianity, at great personal peril, to Africa, America, India, Oceania, and Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I also make clear that although Portugal was greatly blessed by the Lord, the riches she amassed led to wickedness and proved to be her downfall, a pattern that is repeated over and over in the Book of Mormon and throughout the history of all civilizations.
a majority of the peoples of the world through faithful, fearless, and dedicated brothers of the Roman Catholic Church.

How is it that we Americans are largely ignorant of Portugal’s history-changing role on the world stage and in the spread of Christianity in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries and think only of England’s power and world-changing role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

**Columbus**

We also forget, or never knew, that Christopher Columbus (born in Genoa, c. 1451) lived in Portugal for ten years, starting in 1476, and then moved to Spain to pursue his dream of reaching India to share Christianity. His preparation came while living in Portugal, where he joined with his younger brother, Bartolomeu, who worked as a cartographer in Lisbon. In 1479, with the permission of Afonso V, King of Portugal, Columbus married Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, a Portuguese lady, the daughter of Isabel Moniz (whose uncle was archbishop of Lisbon) and of Bartolomeu Perestrelo, a Portuguese knight, who was governor of the island of Porto Santo, near Madeira, and a sea captain who had worked for Henry the Navigator, brother to King Edward of Portugal. Perestrelo had amassed a large collection of maps, charts, reports, and sea instruments, said to be the second largest collection after Henry the Navigator’s. When Perestrelo died, the library went to his widow, Isabel Moniz Perestrelo, who later opened the treasure trove to her daughter and son-in-law. In 1480, Filipa bore a son she and her husband named Diogo. The marriage to Filipa gave Columbus Portuguese citizenship and access to the commercial shipping routes to Africa. He worked for the Portuguese crown and participated in several sailing expeditions down the western coast of Africa, with the goal of eventually rounding the continent at the Cape of Storms and then traveling east to India. When Portugal’s bid to reach India by following that route failed in 1485, Columbus determined he could reach India by traveling west, an idea he is said to have obtained from the numerous charts, maps, and reports contained in his father-in-law’s library.

How is it we are ignorant of Columbus’s Portuguese training in preparation for his singular role in “discovering” America?

**The Portuguese Seaborne Empire**

When Portugal’s King John I (the founder of the Avis Dynasty and father of Henry the Navigator) captured Ceuta, a Moorish stronghold on the
northern coast of Africa in 1415, he set in motion a policy of expansion for the tiny nation on the extreme western edge of Europe that would change the course of world history. The pre-Portuguese world was vastly different from the post-Portuguese world in which we live. With the taking of Ceuta, Portugal became the first European power to conquer territory outside of Europe since the days of ancient Rome. Portugal’s exploits established the model that would be used by Spain, Holland, England, and France in later centuries.

Since Marco Polo’s return from China in the twelfth century, Venice had enjoyed a virtual European monopoly on treasured goods from the East, such as silks and porcelain, and on the all-important spices, which not only enhanced the taste of food but also preserved it. Importation and transportation fees from the East, which were already high to begin with, were increased substantially by the fees affixed to the cost of their transportation and distribution throughout Europe. The Portuguese court believed that if Portugal could find a sea route to the East, they would effectively cut out all the Muslim and European middlemen and would then control the trade, and all the riches would accrue to them. In addition, Christians would be wrestling control of the trade routes from Islam, and in that confrontation Portugal might well win converts to Christ.

There also existed the possibility of finding the legendary Prester John and his Christian kingdom (today’s Ethiopia), which would greatly enhance the probability of success, for with his army’s help, they could place Islam in a pincer hold. The fact that the Portuguese crown was willing to take a leading role in this undertaking meant that all the major institutions and resources of the country—including the nobles, the church, the merchant class, and the Portuguese Military Order of Christ (previously known as the Knights Templar), who had established their headquarters in Tomar, Portugal, and whose leader was Henry the Navigator—could be effectively mobilized for the enterprise.

**Portuguese Maritime Technology**

All that stood in the way to glory, riches, and converts to Christ was the development of a ship that could travel into the open sea—and, more importantly, back again—against the winds and currents. When Ceuta was captured in 1415, the ships of that day were Roman-type galleys, which meant that the fleet rowed across the Mediterranean Sea. After the rigors of rowing over and back across the open sea, the Portuguese were highly motivated to develop a ship that did not depend on human strength. It was an enterprise that parallels the U.S. space program in
many ways. In both cases, sending a ship out into an uncharted territory, although difficult, was not as difficult as bringing it back. Once that major technical problem was solved, both programs faced the dilemma of how to navigate in their new environments, since there would no longer be familiar landmarks. In both cases, the ships had to have the capacity to carry all necessary supplies, since one could not count on the possibility of replenishing stores in their respective unknown oceans. Another intriguing parallel between these two periods of exploration is found in the popular imaginations portraying what the creatures living in these new worlds might look like. The navigational school set up by Henry the Navigator at Sagres in the south of Portugal eventually produced the caravel (1441) and then the much larger ship, the nau (figs. 2, 3).

The most significant pre-Portuguese inventions, which date from approximately the middle of the thirteenth century, include the central rudder affixed to the sternpost of the keel, instead of the oar-like lateral rudder; this innovation is thought to have come from the
Baltic Sea area and was known in the Iberian Peninsula as early as 1282. From China, via the Moors, came the compass and the portolan chart (derived from direct observation by means of the compass), which led to the possibility of plotting a course over a considerable expanse of sea, in contrast to coastal navigation; Italian seamen were using the charts by the early fourteenth century, with a compass rose and directional lines, or rhumbs. From Greece or Syria came the lateen, or triangular sail, which provided the ability to travel against the wind.

The numerous Portuguese contributions to maritime technology can be grouped into three major categories: the ships (caravel and nau); the new navigational techniques (astronavigation) that eliminated the need for coastal sailing with their landmarks; and the amassing of oceano-graphic information (winds, currents, meridians, and so forth), together with its preservation (cartography, maps, charts, chapbooks, and the like).
The first ship, the caravel, was a combination of the Mediterranean carrack and the Arabic dhow, with several refinements, inventions, and new combinations. It boasted a wide hull that displaced little water and had three masts hoisting triangular sails (lateens), which allowed greater mobility for tacking or zigzagging against the wind; the sail could form an angle of more than fifty degrees with the direction of the wind. In its smallest, earliest version, the caravel had the capacity to carry fifty tons and had a twenty-man crew. The later versions were so much larger that they were referred to as floating cities, with eight hundred to a thousand men on board. The legacy of fear engendered by a Portuguese warship, with its colors flying and ready to do battle, is seen in the name given to one of the most colorful and deadly of jellyfishes—the Portuguese man-of-war.

With each voyage taken, Portuguese maritime technology increased and was refined. With the full support of the royal House of Avis, which under King Manuel became the richest and most powerful kingdom in all Christendom, and with the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church, Portugal discovered two-thirds of the world for Europe and for nearly two centuries controlled the commerce (and also held sovereignty) over an immense area of the world. As noted above, this included Africa, Arabia, India, China, Indonesia, Japan, Oceania, and half of South America (fig. 4). The great Jesuit missionary and preacher Father António Vieira, SJ (Society of Jesus), observed, “Truly . . . God gave [my] countrymen a small land for their birthplace, but all the world to die in.”

Never had there been such an empire. Lisbon became the new Venice and drew would-be profiteers from all over the earth. Portugal also became the ambassador of the West to the new lands and the interpreters of the new peoples for Europe. People and goods, as well as flora and fauna, were exchanged, and knowledge increased. The long-standing practice of enslaving people also became a global business. Transporting African slaves around the world as laborers was the underpinning of rapid economic growth that brought great riches but also tremendous grief and suffering to millions.


Discoveries and the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1479)

The Portuguese developed and expanded their maritime technology and voyages of discovery over a period of nearly eighty years (1415–1492), virtually without competition from any other country. The technology they developed and the information they amassed were closely guarded secrets, but soon leaks began to spread to other nations about the incredible value of exploration. In the beginning, Spain was still involved in the type of warfare that merely exchanged real estate between European powers, so in the all-important Treaty of Alcáçovas, ratified by the Pope in 1479, Portugal agreed to give up its claim to the Canary Islands in exchange for any lands it might conquer outside of Europe. A line was
drawn running east and west through the Canaries. Everything south of that line and south of the Canary Islands would belong to Portugal if the country could conquer it. Anything north would belong to Spain on the same terms. Spain continued to fight for territory inside Europe, especially against the Muslim kingdoms that had been established in the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 711 AD. Portugal went on to discover and control the commerce of more than two-thirds of the world for Europe and to introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

We must not forget that beginning with Martin Luther’s publication of his “95 Theses” in 1517, the Protestant Reformation grew and soon divided Catholic Europe through the efforts of reformers like Martin Luther in Germany, John Calvin in France, and Henry VIII in England, who challenged papal authority and questioned the Catholic Church’s ability to define Christian practice. The contest between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation was in the background of every religious, intellectual, political, and military decision made during the European Age of Discovery.

The Portuguese Sea Route to India around Africa

Having systematically sailed south along the west coast of Africa, Portugal was finally prepared to round the continent and sail northeast to India. The historic voyage was set for 1485. A party under Pero de Covilhã was dispatched to India by land. Bartolomeu Dias led the fleet that was to arrive by sea. Covilhã made it; Dias did not. His crew mutinied after rounding the Cape of Storms (later changed by the Portuguese to the Cape of Good Hope), thinking that worse conditions lay ahead, and he was forced to return to Lisbon.

5. Oliveira Marques writes, “When Columbus himself, returning from America after his first voyage (March 1493), called at Lisbon and paid a visit to the king, John reminded him that the newly discovered lands belonged to the Portuguese Crown, for they lay south of the Canary Islands (treaty of 1479–80). John II immediately dispatched an envoy to the Catholic kings, prepared a fleet under Francisco de Almeida to take possession of the new islands, and acted in bellicose fashion.” A. H. de Oliveira Marques, History of Portugal, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 222.

6. Baily W. Diffie and George D. Winius include detailed maps with dates and names of the Portuguese explorers who made discoveries throughout the world in the sixteenth century, with special attention to Africa, India, and the Far East, in Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), following page 192.
It was at this point that Columbus proposed to the king of Portugal that India could be reached easier and faster by sailing west. Portugal turned his proposal down (knowing that his calculations of the distance to India were significantly inaccurate), as did Spain and other European monarchies such as France and England. Nevertheless, Spain eventually became the second nation to fully enter into the Age of Discovery and take advantage of Portugal’s vast store of knowledge, equipment, and experience. Spain did it by contracting Columbus to undertake the proposed voyage, a last-ditch effort to conceivably beat the Portuguese to India. Spain had just conquered Granada, the last remaining Moorish kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula. The year was 1492.

**The Treaty of Tordesilhas (1494)**

When Columbus returned from his first voyage to America with the claim that he had reached India, the Portuguese were crestfallen. They soon recovered from their disappointment, however, by pointing out to Spain that under the terms of the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1479) the lands belonged to Portugal since they were south of the line running east and west through the Canary Islands. To avoid war between the contending parties, the Pope ratified another agreement, the Treaty of Tordesilhas (1494), which established a new line of demarcation that clarified the previous treaty. Yes, all lands south of the Canaries would belong to Portugal, as long as they were east of a new line running north and south established by the Pope in the Treaty of Tordesilhas.

We sometimes forget that the goal was to reach India, which Portugal did in 1498 with Vasco da Gama’s fleet. Spain claimed to have reached India with the first voyage of Columbus in 1492 (he died thinking he had), but in reality he had reached one of the islands in the Bahamas; he did not reach the continent of America until the third of his four voyages. When Vasco da Gama returned with proof that Portugal had reached the real India, Spain was troubled. The anxiousness of the Spanish crown to find something of value in their newfound lands, together with the hope of gaining converts to Christianity, was clearly motivated by the overriding desire to save face. For over twenty years, Spain had been eating crow in the Caribbean, while Portugal was amassing riches in India. But when Cortés found Aztec treasure in Mexico (1519) and Pizarro found Inca gold in Peru (1533), Spain could at last relax. It forgot about the competition with Portugal to reach India and its riches and made America the focus of its empire.
Besides the Portuguese-trained Columbus, Spain employed other Portuguese navigators, such as Fernão de Magalhães, or, in English, Magellan, whose fleet circumnavigated the world and brought the Philippines under Spanish control; João Cabrilho, who discovered California for Spain; João Dias de Solis, who discovered the River Plate between Uruguay and Argentina; and many more.

The Portuguese Overseas Empire

One difference between the explorations of the two Iberian powers was that Portugal interacted with ancient and highly civilized cultures and religions, such as Arabian Islam, Indian Hinduism, Chinese Buddhism, and Japanese Shintoism, whereas Spain did not. Another difference between the two powers was Portugal’s policy of intermarriage, established by Afonso de Albuquerque, the governor of India. Any unmarried Portuguese in the service of the king was urged, often with a financial stipend, to marry a local girl and settle down, never to return to Portugal. Those unions increased and hastened understanding between the two cultures, and the offspring, who were able to speak both languages and act as interpreters, were always loyal to Portugal. It is popularly believed that the Portuguese invented three new races: Mulatos in Africa (African with European); Eurasians in the Orient (Asian with European); and Mestiços in Brazil (indigenous Brazilian with European). It is no wonder that the Portuguese communities throughout the world to this day are ethnically African, Indian, Chinese, and so forth, but their language, dress, religion, and culture is Portuguese.

Another result of the Portuguese voyages of discovery and conquest was that disparate branches of the human family were brought together for the first time. As a consequence of this interaction, and the primacy of Portuguese as the lingua franca in the colonized lands, there are many words found in the English language that came from or through Portuguese, such as albacore, albatross, albino, cashew, caste, cobra, cockatiel, corral (kraal in South Africa), corn pone, cougar, cuspidor, dodo, emu, fetish, flamingo, jaguar, junk, launch, macaw, mandarin, marmalade, molasses, monsoon, pagoda, veranda, yam, and zebra.

Securing the Empire

According to the renowned British historian Charles R. Boxer, the Portuguese empire was a “commercial and maritime empire cast in a military
and ecclesiastical mould.” Individuals served either the crown or the church. Portugal did not always attempt to conquer existing nations or peoples but strove only to maintain a commercial monopoly. To this end it first established naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean with three key strongholds: Goa (India), Hormuz (Iran), and Malacca (Malaysia). Once the Indian Ocean was secure from Muslim traders (it was virtually a Portuguese sea for over a century), Portugal established fortresses all around its perimeters from Africa to Asia, most of them still standing today. Serving as commercial ports, some fortresses were maintained with a Portuguese garrison; others were there by treaty or alliance with the existing chieftains or monarchs. In either case, Portuguese ships, with their superior maneuverability and cannons, policed the entire area. Wherever possible, the Portuguese preferred to establish themselves on the coastal islands. Some ports became Europeanized cities such as Ponta Delgada (São Miguel) and Angra do Heroísmo (Terceira), both in the Azores, a mid-Atlantic archipelago. Similarly, Europeanized cities were established in the African archipelagos of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, as well as Porto Novo in Benin; Lagos in Nigeria; Luanda in Angola; Lourenço Marques in Mozambique; Calicut, Chaul, Goa, Mumbai, Daman, and Diu in India; Macao in China; Dili on the island of Timor in the Indonesia chain;

Nagasaki in Japan; and Recife, Salvador, and São Paulo in Brazil.

**Manueline Art:**
**Preserving a Record of the Discoveries in Stone**

Named in honor of King Manuel (1469–1521), Manueline art is an ornamental or decorative art applied to Gothic forms of architecture. Hence, it is basically a late Gothic style but incorporates a variety of substyles derived from numerous parts of the world, reflecting motifs from Portugal’s overseas expansion. Chief among these are the Military Order of Christ blazon and maritime motifs such as rope, cork, knots, shells, seaweed, and naturalistic and exotic flora and fauna suggesting or representing that found in the newly discovered lands (fig. 6). Manueline art also incorporated the plateresque or silversmith style from Spain and Moorish revivals. Chief among the Manueline monuments are the cathedral and royal monastery of Jerónimos (fig. 7) and the tower of Belém in Lisbon; the monastery of Batalha, midway between Lisbon and Coimbra; the Church of São Julião at Setubal, and the Church of the Military Order of Christ at Tomar.  

**Goa, India**

By far the largest and most prosperous commercial and religious center anywhere in the Portuguese empire was Goa, on the coast of

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central India. Blessed with a mild climate, lush vegetation, and expansive beaches, Goa proved to be a soothing balm for the weary Portuguese traveler after a long sea voyage. It was a balm, that is, until the monsoon season, with its constant heavy rains and flooding.

Goa became the center of Portuguese commerce overseas and attracted the most powerful merchants and commercial houses of the empire. Those who came built mansions for their families and constructed social halls for their entertainment. More than a few of the higher-class citizens also indulged themselves in various other pleasures to excess, giving Goa its legendary reputation for debauchery and low morals. In its heyday, it was said to be larger than Lisbon or London and was filled with treasures brought from all over Asia. These riches included warehouses filled with cinnamon, pepper, and a variety of spices brought from the Moluccas and other Spice Islands awaiting shipment to Lisbon. From India itself were mahogany, sandalwood, inlaid furniture, ginger, gold, pearls, and rubies awaiting shipment. From China came porcelain, wood-lacquered objects, silk, coral
jewelry, and tea (the word for tea in Portuguese is its Chinese name, chá). It is interesting to note that it was the Portuguese who introduced the custom of tea drinking in England, spurred by the example of Catherine of Braganza, Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1662–1705.

**Indo-Portuguese Design.** As Portuguese artists incorporated the baroque style into their churches in India, Indian artists introduced their own tradition of creating curves, concaves, grooves, and arabesques; together these artists originated the much sought-after Indo-Portuguese design. These two art forms easily blended together to create a new form of wood carving, which was highly prized (fig. 8). Soon chests, cabinets (which became known as china closets, used to display porcelain), pulpits, and assorted items of furniture filled the houses and adorned the churches both in India and in Portugal.

**Government and Commercial Center.** Goa was also the seat of power for the Portuguese government in the East. Here the viceroy and other high government officials lived. Here too was the most extensive repository of documents: reports on the peoples and their customs.
Figure 9. Interior of Sé Cathedral with gilded altar. Goa became the headquarters for many Catholic orders. The rest of the city, with its palaces and mansions, fell into decay when the capital moved to Panjim due to repeated cholera epidemics, but some of the cathedrals and churches remain to this day. Courtesy Klaus Nahr, Wikimedia Commons.
Portugal’s Maritime Empire

and accounts of the discoveries, military campaigns, sea battles, and shipwrecks. For the Portuguese commercial companies, as well as the administrative government representatives, Goa’s riches, natural beauty, and strategic location earned it the name “Pearl of the Orient.”

**Religious Center.** Goa also became known as “the Rome of the East” because soon the various religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, established their Asian headquarters in Goa and from there began their proselytizing missions throughout Asia. The orders constructed schools, seminaries, orphanages, hospitals, convents, monasteries, churches, cathedrals, and basilicas (fig. 9) to train new priests and nuns to serve the needs of the populace, from the noble and great ones to the converted indigenous peoples and their families. One of the most beloved of all the early priests was Saint Francis Xavier, who dedicated his life to his new Christian charges. His tomb is in the Jesuit basilica in Goa (fig. 10), and Catholics from around India and the world regularly come to pay their respects.⁹

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Representative Authors: 
Preserving a Record of the Cultural Encounters in Writing

Portugal produced a generation of writers that matched the greatness of the country’s political, military, and maritime achievements. These writers include scientists such as Garcia Abraham da Orta (c. 1501–1568), who wrote Colóquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da Índia (Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India), and religious writers such as Samuel Usque (c. 1500–c. 1555), who wrote Consolação às tribulações de Israel (Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel), and Frei Tomé de Jesus (1529–1582), who wrote Trabalhos de Jesus (The Sufferings of Jesus).

There were numerous gifted historians to record the events, chief among them Fernão Lopes de Castanheda (1550–1559), who published in ten volumes his História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses (The discovery and conquest of India by the Portuguese); João de Barros (1496–1570), who wrote the first five volumes of A conquista da Ásia (The conquest of Asia); Diogo do Couto (1542–1616), who added nine volumes to Barros’s history of the conquest of Asia; and Damião de Góis (1502–1574), who wrote Crónica do Felicíssimo Rei Dom Manuel (Chronical of the Most Fortunate King Dom Manuel).

Among the literary greats were poets Garcia de Resende (1470–1536), who wrote Miscelânea (Miscellany), a poetic rendering of the artistic and literary achievements of the European Renaissance; Sá de Miranda (1481–1558), who introduced Portuguese writers to the new Italian, or Renaissance, verse styles (especially the sonnet), which he brought back with him after living in Italy; and the epic poet and master sonneteer Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1525–1580), whose epic poem Os Lusíadas (The Lusiads) gives an account of Portugal’s historical achievements using Vasco da Gama’s sea route to India as a framing story.

Playwrights included silversmith and prolific court dramatist Gil Vicente (c. 1465–c. 1537), who wrote the comic play Auto da barca do inferno (The Ship of Hell). King Manuel would often requisition plays from Vicente to entertain visiting dignitaries. These emissaries were also entertained by orations offered by black Christian nobles from Angola.10

10. The Christian King of the Congo (with headquarters in today’s Angola), Afonso I, sent his sons and other nobles to Lisbon for their education and indoctrination. One son became the first black bishop of Africa and was invited to the Council of Trent. By 1516, there were over one thousand students in the royal school, leading to a fully literate and Christianized noble class. Frederick G. Williams, ed. and trans., Poets of Angola: A Bilingual Selection: Poetas
Portugal’s Maritime Empire and by a menagerie of parading African animals (including elephants) and were regularly treated to highly prized little bags of sugar crystals. Another famous playwright was António Ferreira (1528–1569), who wrote the tragedy Castro, one of the most intriguing love stories of all time. It involves the lovely Galician Inés de Castro (1325–1355), whose courageous plea before Portuguese King Afonso IV (1291–1357) and her subsequent murder, together with a bizarre Gothic epilogue, have inspired poets, playwrights, and novelists from many lands.

Portugal’s novelists were represented by three different authors, each with a popular and distinctive genre: the chivalric by Francisco de Morais (c. 1500–1572), who wrote Palmerim da Inglaterra (Palmerin of England); the sentimental by Bernardim Ribeiro (1482–1552), who wrote Menina e moça (Maiden and Modest), and the pastoral by Jorge de Montemor (c. 1520–1561), who wrote Diana.

The major travel book of the period was written by Fernão Mendes Pinto (c. 1509–1583), who wrote the immensely popular Peregrinação (The Travels of Fernão Mendes Pinto), which was translated into a dozen languages and became a major bestseller in Europe. He also detailed the successful Christianizing efforts of the Jesuit order of priests, whom King John of Portugal had requested to spread the faith in his new Indian possessions. It is interesting to note that the first English translation of the Peregrinação (1663) deleted all of the Jesuit references. Especially prominent are the activities of Saint Francis Xavier (1505–1552), known as the “Apostle of the Indies,” who with Ignatius of Loyola had founded the order. Pinto, who in 1542 was the first European to arrive in Japan, helped finance the Jesuit mission there.

A new literary genre, shipwreck literature, was “invented” by Portugal and is represented in the collection titled História trágico-marítima (Tragic History of the Sea). The round-trip from Lisbon to Goa, called the Carreira da Índia (literally the “race to India”), could take up to two years. Portugal lost many, many ships laden with treasure from the Far East and India on their return trip to Lisbon, especially during the monsoon season, in the area of southern Africa where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans collide.

It has often been observed that the three major works of literary art to come out of the Portuguese Age of Expansion focus on different

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aspects of the same subject: Camões’s epic speaks of triumph and glorification; Pinto’s travel book satirizes the enterprise; and shipwreck literature speaks of the dark side of the adventure and what it cost in human misery.

The Overthrow of Much of Portugal’s Maritime Empire by England, Holland, and France

The demise of the House of Avis came abruptly at the hands of the Muslims with the overwhelming military defeat suffered by young King Sebastian (1554–1578) and his forces at Alcácer Quibir (Morocco) in 1578; two years later, Sebastian’s great uncle, King Cardinal Henrique, died. Having no issue, the old man left the throne vacant at his death. It was then that Philip II of Spain claimed the throne of Portugal on the basis of his Portuguese heritage: his mother was Cardinal Henrique’s sister, his grandfather was King Manuel, and his wife was the daughter of John III. In addition to his royal blood ties, Philip promised the Cortes (Portuguese parliament) that he would pay the war debt and ransom the prisoners, that no Spaniard would govern in Portuguese territories, and that no Portuguese would fight in any purely Spanish conflicts. His offer was accepted, and thus began the sixty-year period of the union of the two crowns, the so-called Babylonian Captivity of Portugal.

For the most part, Philip lived up to all his promises, as did his son. It was only when his grandson Philip IV began to reign (1640) that the Portuguese nobles thought it best to restore their own monarchy. However, neither Spain nor its allies would recognize Portugal’s independence until 1668; and neither would Spain’s enemies: England, Holland, and France—11—and with very good reason. These three countries were only now getting deeply involved in the European Age of Discovery and Expansion. They found, however, that there were virtually no more lands left to discover (except the islands of the Pacific), and the only way they could expand would be by forcefully taking possession of the lands now under the control of Portugal and Spain. To do this, they needed to find a way to justify their actions. The solution was nothing less than

11. Although we speak of England as a Protestant nation, during the Age of Exploration there was always a strong Catholic presence, even some Catholic kings such as James II (1633–1701). And although we speak of France as a Catholic nation, there was also a sizable Protestant presence, especially among the nobles (such as John Calvin) collectively known as Huguenots, who were very active colonizing in Africa, India, the Caribbean, North and South America, and other areas claimed by Portugal and Spain.
a stroke of imperialistic genius called the Black Legend, the idea that everything Catholic or Iberian was of the devil. As such, northern Europeans would be doing a great service to humankind by liberating and taking possession of the lands held by Spain and Portugal.

We in America had our own version of the Black Legend; we called it Manifest Destiny. The United States, made of thirteen Atlantic-coast states, decided early on to spread all the way to the Pacific coast. A common attitude of that time is portrayed in the following queries and responses.

"Was that appropriate to do, seeing that the land belonged to Spain and then to Mexico?"

"Of course. Those people are Catholic, and Catholics are of the devil."

"But what about the Indians?"

"The only good Indian is a dead one."

The Protestant Reformation begun by Luther was a powerful incentive and justification for many battles, but it reached its climax in the Age of Exploration and continued throughout America’s nation building in the eighteenth century.

By 1644, Holland, by force, had taken the Portuguese territories of Angola and São Tomé in Africa, Ceylon on the Indian subcontinent, Malaysia and Indonesia in the Indian Ocean, and the entire northeast of Brazil in South America. To the English, the Portuguese lost Hormuz in Arabia in 1622 and Bombay (India) and Tangier (Morocco) in 1665. Bombay was a forced dowry paid when Portuguese Catherine of Braganza became Queen of England. To the French, the Portuguese lost the northwestern coast of Africa (from Morocco to Senegal), portions of the central coast of Africa (including Ivory Coast, Benin, and French Guinea), portions of East Africa, and portions of Brazil (Niteroi, Guanabara, and São Luís, Maranhão, established by France in 1612 and named after the same French king for whom our Saint Louis is named). It is interesting to note that the capital city of Benin is still known by its Portuguese name, Porto Novo (new port), and the largest city in Nigeria is also still known by its Portuguese name, Lagos (lakes). Ceuta, which is surrounded by Morocco on three sides and the Mediterranean Sea on the fourth, is situated on the coast of North Africa; it and other Portuguese possessions in Africa were lost to Spain in the peace treaty of 1668. The Portuguese fortress is still standing, and Ceuta’s city escutcheon is still the coat of arms of Portuguese King Manuel.

The Portuguese had successfully defended themselves against repeated attacks in Macao (China); Cape Verde (Africa); Goa, Daman, and Diu (India); Flores and Timor (Indonesia); Mazagão (Morocco), and even
Portuguese Lands Held for Over 100 Years, Then Lost to Other Countries, Listed by Century

Portuguese-Held Lands Lost in the Seventeenth Century

North Africa
Ceuta (in Morocco), won in 1415, lost in 1668 to Spain (held for 253 years)
Tangiers (in Morocco), won in 1471, lost in 1662 to England (held for 191 years)

West Coast of Africa
São Jorge da Mina (in Ghana), won in 1482, lost in 1637 to France & England (held for 155 years)

East Coast of Africa
Mombassa (in Kenya), won in 1505, lost in 1698 to Muslims (held for 193 years)
Zanzibar Island (in Tanzania), won in 1503, lost in 1698 to Muslims (held for 195 years)

Arabian Peninsula
Hormuz (in Iran), won in 1507, lost in 1622 to Muslims (held for 115 years)

Indian Subcontinent
Cochin (in India), won in 1500, lost in 1662 to Hindus (held for 162 years)
Bombay (in India), won in 1534, lost in 1665 to England (held for 131 years)
Colombo (in Sri Lanka), won in 1518, lost in 1658 to Holland (held for 140 years)

Southeast Asia
Malacca (in Malaysia), won in 1511, lost in 1641 to Holland (held for 130 years)

Portuguese-Held Lands Lost in the Eighteenth Century

West Coast of Africa
Fernando Pó Island (in Guinea), won in 1472, lost in 1778 to Spain (held for 306 years)
Ano Bom Island (in Guinea), won in 1472, lost in 1778 to Spain (held for 306 years)

North Africa
Mazagão/El-Jadida (in Morocco), won in 1514, lost in 1769 to Muslims (held for 255 years)

Indian Subcontinent
Bassein (in India), won in 1533, lost in 1739 to Maratha Hindus (held for 206 years)
Chaul (in India), won in 1520, lost in 1739 to Maratha Hindus (held for 219 years)

Portuguese-Held Lands Lost in the Nineteenth Century

South America
Brazil, won in 1500, lost in 1822 to independence (held for 322 years)
Maranhão (in Brazil), won in 1500; it was a separate Brazilian state 1621–1772, rejoined Brazil never again to be separated. Portugal defeated the French and the Dutch in Maranhão.
**Indonesia**
Solor Island (in Indonesia), won in 1521, lost in 1851 to Holland (held for 330 years)
Flores Island (in Indonesia), won in 1521, lost in 1851 to Holland (held for 330 years)

**Portuguese-Held Lands Lost in the Twentieth Century**
During the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century, the country of Portugal included its present territory on the European mainland, plus the Madeira Islands and the Azores Islands in the Atlantic Ocean, and the following eight overseas provinces (each with its own coinage): Angola, Cape Verde, the State of India, Guinea, Macau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor.

**Northwest Africa**
S. J. Batista de Ajudá (in Dahomey), won in 1444, lost in 1961 to French Dahomey (held for 517 years). Upon independence, the name was changed to Benin.
Cape Verde, won in 1444, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 531 years)
São Tomé and Príncipe, won in 1472, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 503 years)
Guinea-Bissau, won in 1444, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 531 years)
Bolama (in Guinea), won in 1790, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 185 years)

*Note:* Great Britain wanted Bolama Island as part of her Sierra Leone colony. The case went to international arbitration. President Ulysses S. Grant of the United States ruled in favor of Portugal in 1870.

**Central West Africa**
Angola, won in 1576, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 399 years)
Cabinda, won in 1576, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 399 years)

**East Africa**
Mozambique, won in 1507, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 468 years)

*Note:* Lourenço Marques (today's Maputo), the capital of Mozambique, and Delagoa Bay were claimed by Great Britain. The case went to international arbitration. President MacMahon of France ruled in favor of Portugal in 1875.

Sofala, won in 1505, lost in 1975 to independence (held for 470 years)

**Indian Subcontinent**
Goa (in India), won in 1510, lost in 1961 to India (held for 451 years)
Diu (in India), won in 1535, lost in 1961 to India (held for 420 years)
Daman (in India), won in 1538, lost in 1961 to India (held for 423 years)

**Southeast Asia**
Timor (in Indonesia), won in 1521, lost in 1976 to independence (held for 455 years)

**Asia**
Macau (in China), won in 1557, lost in 1999 to China (held for 442 years)

**Lands Currently Portuguese**
Portugal (in Europe), won independence from Leon in 1137
Madeira Islands, won in 1419, autonomous region since 1975
Azores Islands, won in 1427, autonomous region since 1975
Lisbon. But Portugal was forced to make an important decision between their Asian, African, and American colonies, for they could not defend all areas of their empire equally. They chose to defend Brazil. It was a fortuitous decision, since a great abundance of gold was discovered there in 1693, and Brazil, during the eighteenth century, provided 80 percent of the world’s gold supply.

By the end of the seventeenth century, Portugal had lost most of its Asian Empire, although it did retain Goa, Daman, and Diu in India until December 1961; East Timor in Indonesia until 1975; and Macao in China until 1999. Portugal regained about a third of its African empire (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, and Mozambique), which it retained until 1975, when these five colonies became independent countries. In 1769, Portugal had lost Mazagão in Morocco, whose entire population was transferred to the Amazonian territory of Amapá in Brazil. Portugal regained the northeast of Brazil from Holland in 1654. The last remnants of English, Dutch, and French designs on Brazil are the three Guianas (Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana), the areas to which these powers were successfully driven.

Seventeenth-Century Writers and the Union of Spain and Portugal

During the Spanish Habsburg reign (1516–1700), which encompassed the sixty-year union of the crowns of Spain and Portugal (1580–1640), there were two extraordinary prose writers: the long-lived Jesuit priest and diplomat Father António Vieira (1608–1697), whose “Sermão pelo bom sucesso das armas de Portugal contra as de Holanda” (Sermon for the Success of the Arms of Portugal against Those of Holland) has long been recognized as one of the most remarkable sermons ever delivered from a Christian pulpit; and the erudite man of letters Dom Francisco

Manuel de Melo (1608–1666), who successfully orchestrated the wedding of Portuguese Princess Catherine of Braganza to Charles II of England.  

There were also two gifted poets: Soror Violante do Céu (1602–1693) and Gregório de Matos (1636–1696). Sister Violante do Céu (who entered a Dominican nunnery at age twenty-eight) witnessed and applauded the separation of Portugal from Spain in her poetry. Matos, a malcontent, criticized everyone and everything: the church, government, and all classes of people, from the rich and powerful to the lowly pauper, sparing no race or profession in between. This constant satirizing against the wickedness he saw earned him the nickname “Boca do Inferno” (Mouth of Hell).

What Contemporary Authors Believed: A Cautionary Tale?

In conclusion, I will give a brief summary of Portugal’s world-changing achievements in the Age of Discovery. I will ask and give my answer to more queries, and, because I am a student of literature, I will end by quoting from renowned contemporary Portuguese writers: two poets, two historians, and one cleric, who corroborate the reason for the fall of the Portuguese empire.

Portugal, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, gave the world its first panoramic and comprehensive view of itself. The country mapped its major geographical components, its oceans, continents, and islands. It studied and described its major civilizations, cultures, races, and tongues and introduced to them Western technology, products, customs, and the Christian religion. It began the exchange of flora and fauna among the continents and the systematic study and cataloguing of their varieties and uses. In sum, Portugal brought together the disparate branches of the human family and their cultures. This stunning achievement was accomplished a mere six hundred years ago. Knowledge of the world before the Portuguese Age of Discovery was limited

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13. It is popularly believed that John IV, king of Portugal (1604–1656), wrote “Adeste Fidelis” (“O Come, All Ye Faithful”) for his daughter’s introduction at the English court. John was a patron of music and the arts, and had one of the largest libraries in the world, which unfortunately was destroyed in the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. He was also a recognized composer of sophisticated music (for example, Crux fidelis) and of music books such as Defense of Modern Music (Lisbon, 1649). The tune name for “O Come, All Ye Faithful” is “Portuguese Hymn” in the current LDS hymnal, Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1985), 403. But it is attributed to John F. Wade (1711–1786), Hymns, no. 202.
and localized. After Portugal’s groundbreaking explorations, the world became a global community.

Query: How is it that Americans are ignorant of Portugal’s power, influence, and unique role on the world stage in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries and think only of England’s power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

Answer: America was founded by England, and Americans were taught only its Protestant history.

Query: How is it that we ignore Columbus’s Portuguese training in preparation for his singular role in “discovering” America and beginning the spread of Christianity there?

Answer: Western North America was founded by Spain and then Mexico, and Americans have been taught only their histories, not the history of Portugal, who, as their competitor, was vastly more successful at exploration and conquest and at spreading the gospel.

Query: Why are Americans ignorant of the spread of Christianity by Portugal throughout the world—Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Japan, Oceania—and by Spain in the Americas and in the Philippines in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries?

Answer: Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian priests spread a Catholic gospel, and America was founded by Protestant Christians. The great missions that spread the Protestant gospel in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands occurred primarily in the nineteenth century.

Query: How do Portugal’s impressive accomplishments function as a cautionary tale?

Answer: They follow a pattern that has been repeated since the world began. A people are blessed by the Lord, grow rich and prideful, and then lose their standing and possessions. This tiny nation once governed much of the earth, but with their discoveries and spread of Christianity also came the exploitation of native peoples and greed, which changed the conduct of Portugal’s citizenry from righteousness to pride and debauchery. Contemporary Portuguese authors chronicled this rise and fall.

Garcia de Resende (1470–1536) was a courtier who served three kings. His long life at court involved such positions as personal secretary to D. João II and scribe of the public treasury for D. João III. He wrote a long poem of 311 ten-line stanzas, entitled Miscellany, which chronicles the major events and changes that occurred in Portugal and Europe
during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is a personally witnessed poetic account of current events. In the poem, Garcia de Resende enumerates many of the artistic and literary achievements of the Renaissance; some of the probings in science and philosophy during the Age of Humanism; the retrenchment and reevaluation of religious doctrine and practices during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; the restlessness, disease, and expansionism in the Age of Exploration; and the expulsion of the Jews and the persecution of the New Christians. In the selections that follow, we read of the threat occasioned by Luther and the Protestant Reformation, the introduction of African slaves into Portugal, the diaspora of Portuguese around the world, the incredibly vast number of goods entering the port of Lisbon, the great buildings and art objects that were made, and the changes in Portuguese society occasioned by the riches from the East. The English translation of the poem is my own.

With subtle guile and heresy
we saw false Luther in his prime
convert from throughout Germany
so many folks, this deed will be
the Empire’s greatest force o’er time:
against our Faith he’s always preaching,
the Pope blasphemes whenever teaching,
from Bishops, and from Cardinals true,
he’s won hard battles, not a few
great men have joined his band, far-reaching.

We witnessed Lisbon flower and grow
with people, greatness, and in size,
’twas much ennobled with the show
of buildings, riches on the rise,
with arms, and power all in tow.
For port and commerce, ships at berth,
there is no equal on the earth;
they’ve fruits, and foods from every nation,
as for control, good regulation
they fail, what’s more, there is a dearth.

And we saw many Portuguese
dispersed abroad to live, they sought
Brazil, the islands of the seas,
and India where they took their ease,
but human dignity forgot.
And back at court we saw they’d brought
great many captives by the lot,
while numerous locals sailed away,
if things continue on this way
we’ll be outnumbered, that’s my thought.

Expenses so extremely high
we’ve seen in married women, who
will spend on silver, jewels and buy
perfume, fringe decorations try,
great tapestries, not one but two,
grand dining on rich food, preserves,
fine dresses, every lass deserves,
and beds with frames, on which to lie;
we saw some leather moons that sold
for twenty coins of shiny gold.

Saw pride in simple folks turn bold,
and vileness in the honorable,
saw greed in priest and constable,
and laxity among the old,
saw states in chaos, damnable.
Saw death move quickly on the best,
their lives cut short and laid to rest,
unknown diseases plagued the world,
while weary people toiled and twirled,
and few men lived their peaceful quest.

The games, the nausea, and the pleasure,
the customs, laws, the dress and things,
the virtues, knowledge, guile, and treasure,
each good or evil choice we measure,
are subject to the whims of Kings;
and since they are by men adored,
who’re so inclined and in accord
we see all men bow and obey,
and laud what kings will do and say,
for even though it’s wrong, they’re lord.¹⁴
Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509–1583) was a Portuguese soldier, missionary, merchant, ambassador, and doctor who spent twenty-one years, from 1537 until 1558, traveling all over Portugal’s Asian colonies, including India, Indonesia, Timor, Malacca, several of the Spice Islands, China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. In 1542, he was one of the first Portuguese to reach Japan and was a party to the introduction of firearms and gunpowder there. He suffered shipwreck, was often captured, made a slave, and sold. After his return to Portugal, he wrote of his travels in a book titled Peregrinação. In it, as described in the preface to the 1663 London edition, Pinto gives “a relation and description of most of the places [he visited]; their religion, laws, riches, customs, and government in the time of peace and war. Where he five times suffered shipwreck, was sixteen times sold, and thirteen times made a slave, written originally by himself in the Portugal tongue.”15

So much of what Pinto described about those Eastern lands—their languages, religions, food, customs, flora and fauna, different cultures, kings and monuments, and the people’s daily lives—was exotic and unfamiliar to Europeans, but they were eager to learn, and Pinto’s book became a must-read bestseller, translated into many languages. It would be like someone today publishing a book on his or her travels to a distant solar system and describing the many civilizations the author encountered. We would hardly believe it.

But Pinto’s book is more than an interesting autobiographical travel memoir. Besides consciously and repeatedly recognizing the Lord’s protecting hand and giving thanks to God for his blessings of safety, he uses his narrative to attack Portugal’s policies of exploitation through conquest and force and to satirize their arrogance in thinking their culture is superior to any other. In order to protect himself from any possible government retribution, Pinto uses a Forrest Gump–type narrator as a shield; he is a fictive author, with the same name, who is a little dim-witted and innocent and who merely repeats what others say about the Portuguese. For example, the Tartar king says, “The fact that

15. Ferdinand Mendez (Fernão Mendes) Pinto, The Voyages and Adventures of Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, trans. Henry Cogan (London: Henry Herringman, 1663), preface. I find it significant that all the references to the Catholics (especially Jesuit priests) were deleted, not only from the title but also from the book itself, making the first English version about one-third of the original. This is another example of the bias by Protestant countries against things Iberian or Catholic, the so-called Black Legend that holds everything Iberian or Catholic to be of the devil.
these people journey so far from home to conquer territory indicates clearly that there must be very little justice and a great deal of greed among them,” to which an old man replies, “It would certainly seem so, . . . for when men, by dint of industry and ingenuity, fly over all the waters in order to acquire possessions that God did not give them, it means either that there is such great poverty among them that it makes them completely forget their homeland, or that the vanity and blindness engendered in them by their greed are so great as to cause them to deny God and their fathers.”

When the Nautaquin, prince of the Japanese Island of Tanishuma, asked three questions about Portugal, Pinto fudged a bit with his replies:

After these matters were settled, the nautaquin resumed his conversations with us. He asked us about many things, in great detail, and in our answers we were less concerned with the real truth than we were with trying to please him. But this was the case only in certain instances when it was necessary to help ourselves out with a few little falsehoods so as not to undo the high regard he had for this country of ours. The first was his telling us that the Chinese and the Ryukyu had told him that Portugal possessed more territory and wealth than the entire empire of China, which we granted him. The second was that they had also assured him that our king had subjugated most of the world by means of maritime conquests, which we also said was true. The third was that our king was so rich in gold and silver that he had more than two thousand storehouses filled from floor to ceiling. To this we replied that, as to the number of storehouses, we could not be sure, because the country and the kingdom in themselves were so vast and contained so many treasures and peoples that it was impossible for anyone to be able to tell him the exact number with any degree of certainty.

Luís de Camões (c. 1525–1580) is the Shakespeare of Portugal, who wrote hundreds of sonnets and the national epic The Lusiads (1572). Although a brilliant writer—whose work Sir Richard Burton (nineteenth-century British military officer, explorer, diplomat, translator, geographer, linguist, and writer about the Mormons in Utah) translated into English and published in 1880, and whom he called “my poet”—Camões was nevertheless forced to make his life’s career that of a common soldier to the king and served for many years in Portugal’s overseas empire, including sojourns in Goa, Macao, and Mozambique.

17. Pinto, Travels, 276.
The Lusiads lauds Portugal’s triumph overseas, with Vasco da Gama’s trip to India and back as the framing story (1497–1498). But because Camões lived in the reality of the conquest, some sixty years after the initial voyage, and knew firsthand the cost in human misery to both the Portuguese and the conquered peoples, he included a powerful warning lesson in the fourth canto that calls a spade a spade: that which was called glory and fame by the military recruiters was really greed and vanity. As to the so-called religious motive for the conquests, there was no reason to go halfway around the world to preach Christianity, when there were Muslims right next door.

At the departure of Vasco da Gama’s fleet from Lisbon’s harbor, the scene includes wives and mothers bemoaning the departure of their husbands and sons into uncharted waters. And most telling of all, the chastisement given by an old salt (obviously Camões’s voice) warns the sailors that the overseas adventure will lead to adultery, the dissolution of family, and to a depopulation of the country, with no one “minding the store.”

A twentieth-century prose translation of the scene, by Professor William C. Atkinson of the University of Glasgow, reads as follows:

But there was one old man of venerable aspect among the others on the shore who fixed us with his gaze, shook his head three times disapprovingly and, raising his feeble voice so that from the ships we heard him clearly, drew out of an experienced heart these words of practical wisdom:

“Oh, the folly of it, this craving for power, this thirsting after the vanity we call fame, this fraudulent pleasure known as honour that thrives on popular esteem! When the vapid soul succumbs to its lure, what a price it exacts, and how justly, in perils, tempests, torments, death itself! It wrecks all peace of soul and body, leads men to forsake and betray their loved ones, subtly yet undeniably consumes estates, kingdoms, empires. Men call it illustrious, and noble, when it merits instead the obloquy of infamy; they call it fame, and sovereign glory, mere names with which the common people delude themselves in their ignorance.

“To what new disasters is it bent on leading this realm and its people? What perils and deaths has it in store for them, concealed under some fair-sounding name? What facile promises of gold-mines and kingdoms does it hold out to them, of fame and remembrance, of palms and trophies and victories? . . .

“Is not the Ishmaelite close at hand, with whom there will always be wars and to spare? If the faith of Christ be the motive, does not he profess the cursed creed of Mahomet? Has not he a thousand cities and territories beyond calculation, if instead lands and riches be the lure?
Or, if it be the praises that fall to the conqueror, is not he too a redoubtable antagonist?

“You allow the enemy to flourish at your gates while you go seek another at the other side of the world, at the price of depopulating and weakening this ancient kingdom and squandering its resources. You are lured by the perils of the uncertain and the unknown, to the end that fame may exalt and flatter you, proclaiming you with a wealth of titles lords of India, Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia.”

Diogo do Couto (1542–1616) was a Portuguese historian who lived for many years in Goa, India, became the chief custodian of the Torre do Tombo (similar to the historical archives of the Library of Congress), and wrote, among other works, nine volumes of history, each entitled Decada and each covering a decade of activities by the Portuguese in the East. One chapter, published separately but slated for the eleventh Decada (a volume that was lost or stolen during his lifetime), described the shipwreck of the heavily laden ship São Thomé off the coast of today’s South Africa in the year 1589. Although he was not a passenger aboard that ship, he was very familiar with countless other ships sailing between Goa and Lisbon filled with valuable cargo in the hold and on each of the four decks.

The opulence of the Goa citizenry was nowhere better displayed than on the Rua Direita (Right Street). Each morning, every imaginable food, object, and service was sold or auctioned to the sedan-riding or strolling ladies and gentlemen. Diogo do Couto witnessed up close the arrogance and debauchery of the upper classes and was convinced that God would punish the Portuguese for their excesses and ill-gotten gains at the expense of the indigenous people. For him, each shipwreck was not only a sign of Portuguese greed but was also most certainly God’s punishment. Writing from the point of view of the survivors who witnessed the sinking of the ship São Thomé, Couto observed:

They were left astounded, like men in a dream, at thus seeing a great ship, in which they had so recently been voyaging, so heavily laden with riches and merchandise almost beyond computation, now devoured by the

18. Luis Vaz de Camões, The Lusiads, trans. William C. Atkinson (London: Penguin, 1952), 119–21. The titles to which Camões refers—“lords of India, Persia, Arabia and Ethiopia”—were the titles that King Manuel of Portugal used (1495–1521). Camões could get away with this attack on the king and the negative results of his overseas conquests because King Manuel had died by this time; it was an old man that spoke in the poem, and everyone knew that what he prophesied in 1497 had come true by the time The Lusiads was published in 1572.
waves and sunk under the water, heaping up riches in the depths of the sea from all those things which belonged to those in her and others in India, acquired by such means as God knows, for which reason he often permits as little enjoyment of them as he did of these. . . Certainly the loss of this ship and the death of the people that had remained in her is a matter to be deeply pondered over, for in many ways it was very clearly a judgment of God.  

Four or five times a year, a fleet of Portuguese ships would make a round-trip voyage between Lisbon and Goa. The term used to describe this perilous journey was Carreira da India (race to India) that typically took a year and a half to complete, counting the stops and layovers due to monsoon conditions. If they left Lisbon before Easter, they could arrive in Goa in September or October. Once they had unloaded the inbound cargo, made the necessary ship repairs, replaced the store and crew, and loaded the outbound goods, they could leave Goa at Christmas and arrive in Lisbon in July.

But not all the ships returned to safe harbor. Between 1550 and 1650, the total number of lost ships is estimated at 130, or one and a third per year. In addition to the perils of rounding the Cape of Good Hope, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans “collide,” forming perpetual storm conditions, the ships faced the challenges of overcrowding, inexperienced crewmen, and the imprecise science of navigation, plus the ever-present threat of enemies and pirates, as well as the seasonal monsoon rains. But the greatest cause for shipwreck was the overloading of the ships on their return to Lisbon.


20. The Portuguese used Cape Verde as a holding pen for their slaves. Competing English, Dutch, and French slavers quickly realized that it was much easier to attack Cape Verde, which listed 13,700 slaves in the 1550 census, rather than have to gather their own. One of the most famous assaults was carried out by England’s Sir Francis Drake, who arrived in 1585 with 2,300 men in twenty-five ships. Frederick G. Williams, ed. and trans., Poets of Cape Verde: A Bilingual Selection; Poetas de Cabo Verde, Uma selecção bilingue (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Praia: Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro; Lisbon: Instituto Camões, 2010), 21.

Father António Vieira (1608–1697) was a religious cleric, diplomat, politician, man of letters, polemist, orator, and linguist (he knew Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tupi-Guarani, and Italian fluently). He was also an opportunist, a pragmatist, and a lover of intrigue; he was ambitious and forceful, possessed a facility for speech and logic and an extraordinary memory. He was a formidable foe of those who crossed him, and his presence weighed heavily on the entire seventeenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. Pope Clement X (1670–1676) is credited with saying of him: “We should greatly praise and give thanks to God that this man is a Catholic; for if he were not, he could cause grave problems for the Church of God.”

In 1640, after a sixty-year union with Spain, Portugal separated and went its own way. In that same year, Father Vieira gave a most remarkable sermon in Salvador, Bahia, meant to buoy up the populace to stand firm against an imminent attack from Holland by land and by sea. It is called “Sermon for the Success of Portuguese Arms against Those of Holland,” but his words were directed at God, with whom he reasoned and argued to get him to change his mind and not punish the people for their wickedness by means of the Protestant Dutch. He used as precedence several of the biblical prophets who had done the same in earlier times, such as Moses when he addressed the destruction of Israel after the golden calf episode, or Joshua when faced with destruction by the Amorites.

Why did you send the Portuguese forth to discover these and other lands? Why did they sacrifice their lives and fortunes to bring Christianity to the heathen nations? If only to give it to another people it would have been better never to have sent us forth in the first place. As the prophet Joshua said, the leader of thy ancient covenant people Israel: “Dear God my Lord, what is this thing? Why didst thou send us forth across the River Jordan to possess this land if only to deliver it up unto the Amorites and destroy us? It had been better that we should never have crossed Jordan.”

But thou, o Lord, doth ordain and want it thus; do that which pleaseth thee. Deliver Brazil to the Dutch, deliver unto them the Indies, give them both Spain, . . . place in their hands the entire World; and to us, Portuguese and Spanish, for sake us, repudiate us, undo us, destroy us. But I only tell you and remind Your Majesty, Lord, that these same ones you hold in disfavor and cast out of your presence, I say, it may be that one day you may again want them, and will not have them.22

Final words

Portugal, like many civilizations in antiquity, sought to rule the world. But those ancient kings of Assyria, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, who rose in power and prestige and then fell to other nations, ruled over comparatively small territories. Portugal, on the other hand, had truly ruled over the "world." The difference between the localized conquests achieved by ancient kingdoms and the global conquests achieved by the Kingdom of Portugal was noted at the beginning of Camões's epic poem, The Lusiads. There the poet states that the ancient bards, like Homer and Vergil, who had lauded the glories of their respective nations' adventures and conquests, paled by comparison to what the Portuguese mariners had done.

This is the story of heroes who, leaving their native Portugal behind them, opened a way to Ceylon, and further, across seas no man had ever sailed before. They were men of no ordinary stature, equally at home in war and in dangers of every kind: they founded a new kingdom among distant peoples, and made it great. It is the story too of a line of kings who kept ever advancing the boundaries of faith and empire, spreading havoc among the infidels of Africa and Asia and achieving immortality through their illustrious exploits. If my inspiration but prove equal to the task, all men shall know of them.

Let us hear no more then of Ulysses and Aeneas and their long journeyings, no more of Alexander and Trajan and their famous victories. My theme is the daring and renown of the Portuguese, to whom Neptune and Mars alike give homage. The heroes and the poets of old have had their day; another and loftier conception of valour has arisen....

There will be no pursuit here of mere national aggrandisement, no praising with false attributions, flights of fancy and feats of the imagination, as is the Muse's wont in other lands. The deeds I tell of are real, and far outstrip the fabled adventures of any Rodamonte, Ruggiero, or Orlando, even granting that Orlando did exist. In place of these you will meet a valiant Nuno Alvares, who did such notable service to his king and country, an Egas Moniz, a Fuas Roupinho, for whom alone I wish I had the lyre of Homer. The twelve knights Magriço led to England are more than a match for the paladins of France, the illustrious Vasco da Gama for Aeneas himself.23

But with the sacrifice, service, and genuine love demonstrated by the faithful brothers of the church in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, and

with the kindnesses of true statesmen and the community-building of
courageous ordinary men and women, came the exploitation and enslave-
ment of native peoples. Riches spawned greed and debauchery in many,
and not just among the lower classes, but also among the merchants and
even among some of the noble and great ones. That iniquity, I believe—as
many contemporary writers also believed, as shown earlier—brought the
judgments of God down upon Portugal: the loss of many of their overseas
lands to Britain, France, and Holland; the loss of much of their treasure
in the depths of the sea; and the loss of more than a tenth of the popula-
tion to disease, war, and shipwreck. It was widely believed at the time
that the earthquake of 1755 was also God’s judgment, which caused the
death of many thousands of people and the destruction of the great city
of Lisbon, wherein were located the nation’s principal palaces, mansions,
monuments, art collections, libraries, and churches. Is this not a caution-
ary tale, pregnant with lessons for today’s society?

Frederick G. Williams, a grandson twice removed and namesake of the Prophet
Joseph Smith’s counselor in the First Presidency, received a BA in Hispanic
civilization from Brigham Young University (1965) and an MA and PhD in
Portuguese studies with a Spanish minor from the University of Wisconsin

For twenty-seven years, he was a professor of literature and cultural his-
tory written in Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California (UCLA
and UCSB), chairman of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for seven
years (UCSB), director of the Jorge de Sean Center for Portuguese Studies for
four years (UCSB), and for a year directed the University of California system-
wide study center at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. He
has published over fifty articles, most on Luso-Brazilian topics, and twenty-
six volumes (with special emphasis on the nineteenth-century Brazilian poet
Sousândrade and twentieth-century Portuguese poet Jorge de Sena).

Professor Williams joined the faculty of Brigham Young University in 1997.
During his twenty years of teaching and researching at BYU, he has translated
into English the major poets from all eight countries and two regions of the
world whose official language is Portuguese (over a thousand poems) and pub-
lished them in bilingual volumes through BYU Studies. These publications
allow the English reader an opportunity to savor the beauty, richness, and
diversity found in Portuguese poetry. Williams served as mission president in
São Paulo with his wife, Carol (a professionally trained coloratura soprano who
sang with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir for seven years). They also served as
president and matron of the Recife Brazil Temple.