

The interaction between the Canary Islands and Africa as part of a common Atlantic construction during the 16th and 17th centuries

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Abstract

This article examines the entangled relations between the Canary Islands and the African continent during the Iberian Union (1580–1640), situating both within the broader Iberian Atlantic framework. Drawing on a multifocal analysis of Spanish and Portuguese primary sources—particularly notarial records from the Canary Islands and Lisbon—the study reveals the archipelago's role as a strategic intermediary in transoceanic networks. Far from being a peripheral outpost, the Canaries emerge as a dynamic node linking Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The study challenges Eurocentric historiographies by foregrounding African agency and the significance of Atlantic Africa in shaping early modern global circuits. It highlights the participation of Canarian and Portuguese elites in the slave trade, the redistribution of African commodities, and the formation of transnational mercantile alliances. Chroniclers such as Viera y Clavijo envisioned the islands as integral to a tri-continental Atlantic identity, reinforcing their centrality in the Atlantic world. Ultimately, this research contributes to a polycentric understanding of Atlantic history, emphasising the historical construction of a shared Afro-Atlantic space in which the Canary Islands and Africa were not marginal, but essential actors in the making of the early modern world.

Keywords: Atlantic, Africa, identity, Canary Islands, transnational

The interaction between both territories: A historiographic review

The Atlantic and the intrinsic areas of the ocean gave rise to new legends and myths as well as rationalist approaches, which have enabled us to consider this geographical entity from different perspectives and subjects, always based on the personal perception of those who have imagined this space. Since the middle of the 20th century, historiography has been interested in the reconstruction of the past of the Atlantic world. This approach to the shaping of the ocean has formed an analytical category, which has been based on a European perspective from its very origins. The approach adopted has involved the processing of cartographic, naval, commercial and military knowledge, as well as the expansion policy, economic exploitation, biological exchange and cultural interaction (Santana Pérez, 2014, p. 11). Following this initial idea, the Atlantic came to be conceived as "the inner ocean of western civilisation". (Armitage, 2004, p. 11). This study adopts the conceptual lens of Atlantic History, which emphasises polycentric and relational dynamics (Bailyn, 2005). Recent critical appraisals

have refined this approach, warning against teleological narratives and advocating for comparative perspectives (Greene & Morgan, 2009).

Faced with the national or nationalist history of the nineteen twenties, a transnational history emerged, encouraging scholars to move beyond isolated narratives toward interconnected frameworks. While early historiography privileged European perspectives, later works have highlighted the interplay of imperial systems in shaping Atlantic spaces (Elliott, 2006; Armitage & Braddick, 2002). This comparative approach situates the Canary Islands within broader Iberian and British Atlantic contexts, revealing their role as active nodes rather than peripheral outposts. In line with this perspective, recent scholarship underscores the strategic function of Macaronesian islands as interconnective hubs between Mediterranean and Atlantic circuits, facilitating flows of people, goods, and cultural practices (Armenteros Martínez, 2018). However, neither Africa nor Africans held a place within this so-called definition of "civilisation", except when the slave trade was mentioned as being of interest to support the history of the

West. Certainly, until very recent times, historiography on the Atlantic focused on strengthening ties between North America and Europe under the seal of "civilisation", leaving aside not only the African continent, but also much of Latin America. Anglo-Saxon historiography on the Atlantic has emphasised its methodology in analysing the flows and movements linked to the slave trade. Likewise, Iberian historiography has focused on the slave trade from the former African colonies as a key process in connecting different spaces. In this regard, the vision of Africa has been linked more to America than to an analysis of the continent itself.

Currently, as Santana Pérez points out, there has been no comprehensive analysis of the Atlantic African coast. However, we do have studies on the Atlantic and its relationship with certain African regions (Santana Pérez, 2014, p. 19). While Africa has largely been underrepresented within Atlantic History, certain Atlantic studies have recently opted to go beyond European centralism and consider analysing social and cultural interactions, thereby advancing African contributions (Karras & McNeill, 1992, p. 5). This historiographic gap has been

significantly addressed by Africanists whose work has redefined the analytical scope of Atlantic Africa. For example, John Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* foregrounds *African agency* in Atlantic exchanges; Ndubueze Mbah's *Emergent Masculinities* demonstrates how Atlantic forces reshaped gender and social structures in West Africa; and James Sweet's *Domingos Álvares* reveals the intellectual, religious, and political dimensions of African healing across the diaspora.

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 it is less well known that they also wrote, albeit to a lesser extent, about the Empire of the "other" during the Iberian Union. Frutuoso is one of these few examples of authors who had the ambition to describe the Iberian world that incorporated the other side of "the line". This chronicler undertook a narrative exercise that sought to establish a compendium of the past of all the islands. This approach integrated events from different regions into a single narrative and historical framework. This

approach integrated the events from different areas into a single narrative and 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. This tendency to simplify spatial and political distinctions parallels a broader historiographic bias noted by Valladares Ramires, who argues 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 Ramires, 2013, p. 57). Such observations reinforce the need to adopt an Atlantic perspective that accounts for both insular and imperial dimensions. 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, which was further emphasised during the union of the

Iberian kingdoms under the Hispanic Monarchy.

Certainly, since the end of the Infante Dom Henrique explorations, chronicles produced by navigators began to outline a historical account that connected the Canary Islands with the African continent. One notable example is Alvise da Cadamosto's account of his African voyage in 1455, which 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, Corbella Díaz & Tejera Gaspar, 2017, p. 21). These narratives, together with news of Portuguese religious missions to Africa that made stops in the Castilian archipelago at a time prior to the Dynastic Union, are complemented by Jesuit testimonies. 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 bonanza 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, p. 453–454). However, it was not until the 18th century that the traditional marginal and local vision of the 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) –On the work of this author, Juan Manuel Santana Pérez (2017), has a detailed study which explores his intellectual project and its significance within the broader Atlantic and Enlightenment contexts. 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" (Viera 1950, 17). This statement, however, was not the first attempt to emphasise the African geography of the Islands. Long before Viera, Bartolomé de las Casas (1986), although he never visited the Canary Islands, introduced in Book I of his *Historia de las Indias* an extensive account entitled "Breve relación de la destrucción de África" ("A brief history of the destruction of Africa"), in which the first five chapters are devoted to the Canary Islands, the sixth to Madeira and Porto Santo, and the tenth to the Azores and Cape Verde. Such early narratives reveal that the association of the archipelago with Africa was already present in the historiographic tradition, even if framed within broader reflections on the Atlantic world.

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 traditionally

perceived as remote, became in his discourse the geographical and geostrategic centre of the Atlantic for 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" (Viera, 1950, p. 3).

Moreover, Viera y Clavijo recognised that the islands, linked to Europe and America by the politics of the Empire and the commerce of businessmen, are also geographically linked to Africa, the third continent that closes the circumatlantic space. He even reinforces this idea by arguing that, despite the volcanic transformations they have undergone in remote centuries, "it is easy to see, by their interior organisation [...] and by many other circumstances, that they are part of a primitive and original land, like that of the continent of Africa" (Viera, 1942, p. 31-32). This territory appears as a prominent element within his historical narrative. Through the Canarian expeditions to the African coasts, he describes the geographical, social and economic environment in which these expeditionaries operated. He also

incorporates into his story the perspective of the island people regarding the native and Portuguese groups with which they come into contact. In addition, he gives a detailed description of the coastline extending as far as the Senegal River. Certainly, this historian had a special sensitivity towards African studies, but also with the added merit of being one of the first researchers to incorporate the African continent into Atlantic studies. Among his works, *España y el África atlántica*, published in Madrid in 1956, stands out as a pioneering contribution that explored the historical ties between Spain and Atlantic Africa, reinforcing his commitment to situating Africa within the broader Atlantic framework, even before the 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 connect the two territories through the slave trade, there are few bibliographical references. Interestingly, the historiographical interest in the

relations between the Canary Islands and Portuguese Africa during the Modern Age emerged even before sustained analyses of the Archipelago's broader connections with the Portuguese world. In 1978, Da Mota presented a paper on the Canary Island expeditions to Guinea during the 16th century at the third colloquium on Canarian-American history (Da Mota, 1980). This work, which was not developed over time, also later introduced another significant innovation: Portuguese documentation on relations between the Canary Islands and Africa appeared for the first time in a Canary Islands' publication. In 1985, the book *Canarias y África: altibajos de una gravitación* was published, in which historian Víctor Morales Lezcano offered an overview of the state of historical studies on the African "gravitation" of the Canary Islands. For the Modern Age, he noted that although research on the relations between the Archipelago and Barbary had made substantial progress, he declared that he would not address—and probably never—the role of the Islands as a nexus in the slave trade between Africa and America as it remained a largely understudied subject (Morales Lezcano et al., 1985, p. 16).

It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that historiography, in this case Canary historiography, resumed work on the contacts between the Archipelago and Portuguese Africa. Germán Santana Pérez and Juan Manuel Santana Pérez carried out a historical analysis that expanded and complemented existing narratives on the Atlantic archipelagos and the neighbouring African continent. This historiographic interest gave rise to the publication of *La puerta fortunada* (Santana Pérez & Santana Pérez, 2002) and *Puertas en el mar. Islas Africanas en el Antiguo Régimen* (Santana Pérez & Santana Pérez, 2022). These works construct a global history by analysing a microspace, thereby offering unprecedented contextualisation within insular historiography. As the authors themselves acknowledge, "[...] the studies on this continent have some interesting works on the Antiguo Régimen, almost always referring to a specific area. However, there is an absence in the research on the global relationship of the Canary Islands with the whole of Africa over a prolonged period of time" (Santana Pérez & Santana Pérez, 2022, p. 8). It is a circumatlantic 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 a more recent work, Santana Pérez (2012) highlighted the position of the Macaronesian islands within Atlantic dynamics. In this regard, he proposed four cornerstones in circumatlantic relations. In addition to the traditional European, American and African commercial spaces, this historian added the Atlantic islands as a fourth interconnected sphere. He consequently endowed the island territories with a distinct and unitary character (Santana Pérez, 2012).

Unlike other studies, this historian emphasises and integrates the analysis of the islands' mercantile relations with the African continent, conceived as an active space within this Atlantic synergy. Santana Perez 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 (Santana Pérez, 2012).

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, thereby channelling both American and African commodities into the archipelago. The explanation of this path once again emphasises the redistributive nature of the Archipelago. Within this historiographic landscape, the present study is guided by three core questions: how the Canary Islands contributed to the formation of an Atlantic geography that was simultaneously African, European, and American; what forms of political and mercantile interaction linked the archipelago to Atlantic Africa during the Iberian Union; and what these connections reveal about the circulation of people, commodities, and ideas across imperial boundaries. These questions orient the analysis throughout the article.

Primary documentation as a source of study for the reconstruction of African and insular Atlantic links

These questions that arise from a multifocal vision of the links between the African cosmos and the Iberian universe in the Atlantic have been addressed by considering different sources from diverse

origins. Primary documentation is an indispensable tool to carry out a comprehensive social, economic and cultural study; It enables an analysis that considers both the royal and local perspectives and facilitates a critical comparison between metropolitan and insular interpretations of the subject under study.

Methodologically, the archival research undertaken for this study is based on the analysis of notarial documentation, both from the Canary Islands and Portugal. Because of the type of information it provides and the variety of matters it addresses, the notarial documentation from the island of Tenerife forms one of the central pillars of this research. Tenerife was chosen for two methodological reasons: first, the good state of conservation of its documentation compared to other island territories of the Archipelago; and second, because it was the island with the greatest international projection during this period of the Modern Age. With all their limitations and reservations, these writings show the everyday life of individuals, their relationship with the environment and interaction with other members of society. In the case of the

insular notarial records, the deeds have been analysed for a longer period than that of the Portuguese incorporation itself, between 1575 and 1650, with the aim of exploring the background and the repercussions for Canarian-African relations during this Portuguese-Spanish political union. The files consulted for this purpose are preserved in the Provincial Historical Archive of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (AHP SCT).

To carry out this extensive chronology, two types of sampling of the notarial records were undertaken. The first of these consisted of analysing the documentation of all the notary offices of the Island for the following specific years: 1575, 1576, 1587, 1588, 1603, 1604, 1625, 1626 and 1650. This selection of years was meant to establish a sample of the fluctuating relationships between the island of Tenerife and the Iberian Atlantic and, more specifically, its connection with Africa.

The second sample was carried out through a selection of the most significant notary offices on the island in order to obtain a representative sample of the chronological period under study. Thus, certain longstanding notary offices were sought out in order to obtain a

more enduring and extensive perspective over time, including those of Rodrigo de Vera Acebedo (1608–1612) and Salvador Fernández de Villarreal (1613–1644) in La Laguna, as well as that of Salvador Pérez de Guzmán (1608–1630) in Garachico. In the case of Portuguese documentation, it was decided to consult the *Cartórios notariais* preserved for the city of Lisbon. Following this methodology, the surviving records corresponding to the period under study were consulted. This is documentation that essentially deals with economic matters: sales, bills of exchange, powers of attorney, chartering agreements, obligations, credits, etc. However, these collections have suffered significant losses over time, with the earthquake of 1755 being the event that caused the most severe damage.

Lisbon was one of the most active European ports during this period under analysis, along with Seville and Antwerp. As a city, head of the kingdom of Portugal and a world-class trading centre (Serrão, 1979), the idea of consulting this documentation was to reinforce the vision of the economic organisation of the Atlantic and, above all, that of the commercial networks of Portuguese origin operating closely between Africa

and the Canary Islands. Since their conquest and occupation by the Castilians, these islands had become objects of Portuguese interests and were drawn into the orbit of Portuguese Atlantic trade, particularly as a link to their African neighbour. Given this, commercial opportunities in the Canarian market created a constant source of attraction for bankers, investors and major traders. However, it was after the Dynastic Union that the definitive integration of the Castilian islands into the socioeconomic activities linked to the African continent took place. Firstly, within the international context, the consolidation of the Atlantic area occurred. Secondly, and as part of this oceanic dynamism, an export-oriented insular economy emerged and was consolidated overseas.

Beyond this typology, there was a tight mercantile network encircling the different shores of the Atlantic, of which the Canary Islands formed part. An Atlantic circuit that was not bidirectional, encompassing a wide range of regions surrounding the Ocean, investing profits from this business in other goods that were re-exported to Europe, and where the final profits from this would be used

again in products circulating the Atlantic. In this sense, it is possible to agree with Alencastro's approach, who argues—contrary to the classic dual metropolis/colony schematic—for a model based on the existence of interdependent spaces and markets, with multiple and complex hierarchies. Such microhistorical evidence aligns with Alencastro's model of interdependent Atlantic spaces, challenging the classic metropolis/colony dichotomy and revealing a web of reciprocal exchanges that sustained early modern globalisation (Alencastro, 2000).

The islands in the transnational African slave trade

A total of 57 contracts for the purchase and sale of slaves were identified, involving the trade 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 accounted for 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. Documentary evidence shows that in 1603 Cornieles Oflaque, acting on behalf of Fixer, granted his brother Jorge Oflaque general powers of attorney while

the latter was residing as a merchant in Gran Canaria (AHP SCT, bndl. 464, n.f.). That same year, Fixer also issued a power of attorney for the island of La Palma to ensure the payment for merchandise he had sent there, as recorded in Lisbon notarial archives (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).

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*.

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, women and men that he had sent to him with the aforementioned sailors (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 696, fol. 159v). A similar transaction was also carried out by Jorge Báez with Antonio Díaz Moura—another prominent member of the Portuguese community established in Tenerife—in which, although the documentation does not specify the number of slaves involved, the total amounted to 11,949 *reales*, paid in the form of eight barrels of wine, as recorded in the island's notarial archives (AHP SCT, bndl. 2279, fol. 408). 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.

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, could reach prices of up to 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.

These fluctuations in the price and origin of the slaves were due to factors external 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. Evidence of this impact was explicitly recognised by the Portuguese War Council, which in 1643 petitioned King João IV to adopt measures to stimulate Angolan trade, noting that the Dutch

invasion had severely disrupted supply and driven up slave prices (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [AHU], *Angola*, Box 4, No. 17). 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 there, 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). 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 that the king 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, noting that this decline occurred 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", as the governor of Cape Verde reported to the king in 1616 (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [AHU], *Cape Verde*, Caixa 1, No. 66). 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, they also reveal their evident weakness and dependence on exogenous factors (Domingues, 1991). The transfer of most of the slave ships from Santiago to Cacheu took place from the 1620s

onwards. The king 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) states that there was never any intention 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 toward 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 provisions

that were favourable to them, such as the 1617 order requiring that all ships departing from Castile and the Canary Islands to Guinea first call at the island of Santiago and pay duty there—under penalty of seizure by the Royal Treasury—although these provisions ultimately had no practical effect (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [AHU], *Cape Verde*, Caixa 1, No. 88). 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.

The Canary Islands as a link between Africa and the Iberian Atlantic

Although trade relations between the Canary Islands and Africa were regular and constant, the volume of this business was less than that of other circumatlantic areas (Santana Pérez & Santana Pérez, 2022). However, the role of the mercantile networks that linked Africa with the Canary Islands within the Atlantic system should not be underestimated. Network analysis applied to modern port systems offers valuable insights for reconstructing historical patterns of connectivity, allowing us to conceptualise these insular exchanges within broader maritime circuits (Delgado

Aguiar & Hernández Luis, 2019). The islands were one of the links that connected the African continent with the American continent. On the one hand, ships from the Portuguese enclaves in Africa called at the Castilian islands to exchange certain African goods, such as skins, for Canary Island wines and, with this new cargo, continued on to America (Santana Pérez, 2012). On the other hand, some ships leaving America, especially from Portuguese Brazil, landed in African territories, mainly in Cape Verde, and from there headed for the Canary Islands, arriving with both Brazilian and African goods.

Islanders – Canary Islanders and the Portuguese – participated in the slave trade that passed through the islands bound for the New World. Since the end of the 16th century, and mainly during the first decades of the following century, numerous Portuguese ships stopped at the island before continuing on to the African continent and, from there, heading for the American territories administered by the Crown of Castile. The structural backdrop of these interactions was shaped by the rise of Atlantic slavery and sugar economies, processes deeply intertwined with insular spaces

(Blackburn, 1997; Eltis & Richardson, 1997). In the Canary Islands, these vessels were especially used for taking on wines that would be exchanged in the *redemption* of slaves. In this way, merchants settled in Tenerife were involved in this slave trade, through increasing the value of the cargo carried by the ship, in this case, wine, which Portuguese sailors and agents would use as part of the purchase of the slaves. In addition, the island traders who participated in this network also guaranteed themselves a profit that increased as the initial amount was reinvested – even if it was in kind – in new products in different markets. That is to say, the sale of wines on the island was not usually an agreement directly linked to supplying the ship bound for Africa. On the contrary, it was customary to form companies with the purpose of increasing the value of this initial business through a commercial formula based on the continuous exchange of goods between distant places with demand for these so-called exotic products.

An example of this is the 1618 agreement between Bernardo Brago, a resident of Seville, and Antonio Álvarez Suárez, a

resident of Lisbon, with Antonio Fernández Dayla, a Portuguese resident of La Laguna. The latter supplied 27 barrels of wine to the company at the risk and expense of Diego and Jorge Coronel, neighbours in Lisbon. These two merchants, together with their father, Héctor Coronel, had maintained frequent commercial dealings with the Canary Islands and had already claimed outstanding debts for money, merchandise, and slaves from Antonio Fernández, a resident of Garachico, in 1619, as recorded in Lisbon's notarial archives (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo [ANTT], 1º Cartório Notarial de Lisboa – Ofício A, Book 1616, fol. 63v). Once Bernardo and Antonio Alvarez arrived in Luanda, they exchanged the wine for slaves, who they intended to transport to New Spain. Once in America, they or one of the agents within the network had to register the proceeds from the sale of the slaves in gold and silver in the *Flota de Indias* or, if this was not possible, they had to consign the profit to Seville or Lisbon in the names of the aforementioned Diego and Jorge Coronel (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1536, fol. 416v).

A year later, Antonio Fernández Dayla himself once again formed a similar partnership with Diego and Jorge Coronel, this time investing 20 barrels of wine in the *redemption* of slaves in Cacheu, who were subsequently to be transported to New Spain. This time, since the notary did not know the Portuguese sailors who would undertake the voyage, those involved in the agreement presented as witnesses two Portuguese members of the Regiment of the island of Tenerife, the aforementioned Tomás Pereira de Castro and Cristóbal Salazar. Curiously, only a few days after the agreement had been concluded, it was Tomás and Cristóbal themselves who joined the venture, each contributing 17 and 27½ barrels respectively (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1537, fols. 329v, 349v, 354).

As can be seen, prominent members of the island's elite participated in this business from the island. Among them were the main Portuguese agents, who had become established and integrated into local society. Along with them, other non-Castilian merchants resident on the island also took part. Thus, and also in 1619, Domingo de Boulmeau, a French

merchant from Tenerife, together with Richarte Baqueman, a Flemish merchant in Lisbon, formed a partnership to transport 22½ and a half barrels of wine from Santa Cruz de Tenerife to Luanda. The proceeds from the sale of the wines in Africa would be invested in slaves who would then be transported to the Indies. Afterwards, the final profit from this trade would be sent to Seville to Gaspar González Noguera, one of the agents in this network. (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1537, fol. 516). Cristóbal Salazar and Tomás Pereira were also involved in this company, thereby increasing the quantity of wines supplied to this company to the amount of 27 and 20 barrels, respectively (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1537, fols. 507, 511).

It can be deduced, therefore, that the Canary Islands-African circuit during this period was noteworthy, especially if we consider the position of this trade within the Atlantic system. Despite the existence of the figure of the registry judge of the Indies in the Canary Islands, the competence of these authorities did not extend to ships loading cargo for Brazil, Cape Verde and Guinea, and therefore

these officials were prohibited from inspecting these vessels, as this was the responsibility of the ordinary justice system (Peraza de Ayala, 1977, p. 73). However, in practice, there were constant disputes between the judge of the Indies and the *Cabildo*, or municipal judge, accusing each other of interfering in the registration of the vessels operating along this route (Archivo Municipal de La Laguna [AMLL], A-XI, 2).

In the same way, the links between the Canary Island trade with America and that with Africa generated concern in the Sevillian monopoly. In 1611, the Consulate of Seville, in agreement with the *Casa de Contratación*, requested that the ships coming from Portugal to the Canary Islands to load cargo for Brazil, Angola and elsewhere, should not register in the Islands but in Seville.

Such a tight transnational mercantile network was formed around this multifocal organisation of Atlantic trade, which, in the case of that established in the Canary Islands, was also accompanied by a process of the social integration of these foreign merchants with the island elite. The history of the Pereira de Castro family shows this insular-Atlantic pact. Tomás Pereira arrived on the island in

1610 or 1611 to administer the assets of the *Adelantamiento de Canarias*, and in 1618, he integrated more fully into society through his marriage to the daughter of a lifelong councillor (*regidor perpetuo*) of the island (Fernández, 2004, p. 277).

From that moment on, Tomás Pereira combined the activities of that international network with the economic interests of the island, or at least of part of its oligarchy. From Tenerife, he continued to correspond with his relatives resident at court – Simón Pereira, Payo Rodríguez de Paz and Domingos Pereira – so that they could secure the royal revenues for 1620 (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1538, fol. 535). At the same time, he linked members of the local elite with this international network, including his son-in-law, Juan Carrasco, who became involved in the business of exporting wines to Brazil (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1538, fol. 311).

The business activities he carried out became increasingly complex. He traded with the Americas under the jurisdiction of the Crown of Castile and with Africa,

and sometimes even acted as a link between these two territories. In 1618, he sold four black slaves to a shipmaster on his way to New Spain. However, it was a false transaction. Although the insular society had already accepted him as a "neighbour", he was not yet recognised as a native of the island in other parts of Castile. At times, he was forced to use certain tricks to be able to trade with the Indies. In this case, although the official sale of the slaves had been made to a neighbouring navigator from the port of Santa Cruz, the risk, but also the profits of the slave trade in America, were registered in his name in the first fleet of the *Carrera de Indias* that returned to Castile (Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santa Cruz de Tenerife [AHP SCT], bndl. 1536, fol. 345). A cross-border network can thus be noted in which the Canary Islands and Africa constituted two fundamental connecting pillars and which, in the end, were fundamental pieces for the consolidation of the Atlantic world.

Conclusion

The islands were one of the key nodes of the Atlantic area, and through their strategic position, they established links with the surrounding regions, including

Atlantic Africa, which enabled the local economy to form part of the major Atlantic circuits. 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; hence, their contacts are used for this purpose both on the islands and elsewhere. In short, within these networks, of which those rocks in the Atlantic formed part, island and Portuguese interests were juxtaposed; each side incorporated the needs of the other into its own strategies. 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 across the Atlantic, producing a polycentric and interrelated space at different levels, across different regions, 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.

The seas made their mark, and the oceans even more so, in shaping the insular imprint on 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 the islands. "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 (1995, p. 9) when referring to the work of Herodotus.

The archipelagos are those 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 broader surrounding 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 others.

In the case which concerns us, the Atlantic cannot be considered as "a large, immense mass of water populated with islands" (Vieira, 2006, p. 3), since these form interconnected and indivisible elements within their historical tradition. The islands behave as connecting elements, as intermediaries, between the surrounding coastlines. Consequently, the traditional relations between the Canary Islands and Africa are an evident manifestation of the historical construction of the common Atlantic space.

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