FORUM

Widening the Ocean: Eastern Atlantic Islands in the Making of Early-Modern Atlantic

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ABSTRACT

Über Jahrhunderte hinweg spielten Inseln als „natürliche Brücken" eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Verbindung von Ozeanen und Weltregionen. Manche nahmen eine „zentrale", andere eine mehr „periphere" Rolle für Schifffahrtswege und Handelsnetzwerke, die Kontrolle der Meere und die Besiedlung von Kontinenten ein. Die Konstruktion und Integration der atlantischen Welt nahm seit dem 15. Jahrhundert ihren Ausgang von den Makaronesischen Inseln, die den Mittelmeerraum mit dem Atlantischen Becken verbanden. Auf den Kanaren, Madeira, den Azoren und Kapverdischen Inseln, aber auch auf São Tomé und Príncipe wurden traditionell mediterrane, soziale und ökonomische Muster an neue geographische und historische Kontexte angepasst. Dabei bildeten sich Prototypen der nachfolgenden Kolonisierung Amerikas heraus. Der Beitrag betrachtet die frühneuzeitliche ostatlantische Welt als frühen Schauplatz der europäischen „Moderne."

Islands have dominated the Western imagination since the Bronze Age. In fact, in Western thought, islands have always enhanced human imagination as realms of possibility and *reservoir of myths.*[1] From Atlantis to the paradisiacal islands that the tourism industry offers to today's societies, the multiple functions and "figures" of the island – the island-

1 See, among others, S. Stephanides and S. Bassnett, Islands, Literature, and Cultural Translatability, in: Transtext(e)s Transcultures [on line], Hors série, 2008, on line on 15 October 2009, [URL: <http://transtexts.revues.org/212>] (accessed 18 September 2015); A. M. Fallon, Global Crusoe: comparative literature, postcolonial theory and transnational aesthetics, Farnham 2011.

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microcosms, the island paradise, the island-lab, among others[2] – lay at the foundation of some of the most important texts of our tradition. During the Middle Ages, people continued to travel for several reasons. Travel and exploration were the source of many circulating texts and islands remained a fascinating subject.[3] The late medieval and early modern *isolarii* condensed "multiple forms of knowledge" and a mixture of experiences that illustrates how islands and archipelagoes both real and imaginary were critical in travel writing and in the shaping of territorial identities[4].

In 1528, in Benedetto Bordone's *Isolario*, all the islands of the world are supposed to be described and depicted and the city of Tenochtitlan, then recently discovered by the Europeans, already has a place in it as one of the most famous islands known to men.[5] Let us also recall the long cultural tradition binding the islands and the project of a new political and social order that we may find in works such as *Utopia*, by Thomas More (1516), *The City of the Sun*, by Tomasso Campanella (1602) or the *New Atlantis*, by Francis Bacon (1623, with a Latin edition in 1624). It was not by chance that these authors, like so many others in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, placed the islands at the core of their texts. After all, as the historian and geographer John Gillis said, "many Europeans came to think of the world archipelagically."[6]

1. From the periphery of modernity back to its early center

It is perhaps by an irony of history that we are to analyze and comment on the pioneering role of the Atlantic archipelagoes in the "first modernity." This means that in a precise moment of history these spaces embodied a dynamic of "modernity," a concept that the triumph of liberal and capitalist ideology has related to associated concepts such as "development" and "progress." In our days these same islands, once at the centre of a oceanic network, are now described under Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty and within the institutional framework of the European Union as "ultra-peripheral regions," featuring social and economic indicators that positions the islands between the poorest and least developed regions of Europe and in the context of chronic uneven development.

Determining the level of isolation of any given island involves a case-by-case evaluation and taking into account the historical context of each island. There may be an "isolation

2 See A. Meistersheim, Figures de l'île, Ajaccio 2001.

3 See D. A. Vinson, The Western Sea: Atlantic History before Columbus, in: The Northern Mariner / Le Marin du nord, vol. X, n.º 3, July 2000, pp. 1-14, at 5: "Islands were endlessly fascinating for Europeans, whether they lived on the shores of the familiar Mediterranean or the more foreboding Atlantic."

4 See B. Wilson, Assembling the Archipelago. *Isolarii* and the Horizons of Early Modern Public Making, in: A. Vanhaelen and J. P. Ward (eds.), Making Space Public in Early Modern Europe: Performance, Geography, Privacy, London 2013, pp. 101-126.

5 See S. Gruzinski, A Águia e o Dragão. Portugueses e Espanhóis na Globalização do Século XVI, Lisboa 2015 [original edition: 2012], p. 109.

6 See J. Gillis, Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania, 1500–1800, in: J. Bentley, R. Bridenthal and K. Wigen (eds.), Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges, Honolulu 2007, pp. 21-37, at 25.

factor" higher than the ones observed in any other places when islands are remote and geographically isolated. However, when islands are strategically located at the crossroads of maritime routes, they are central hubs open to the outside world and less isolated than certain mainland regions of the hinterland and of the mountains.[7] Generally speaking, it will be possible to argue that the "remote" character of the islands was a consequence of the nineteenth century changes in technology and in the transport system, a century that all saw the birth of a romantic representation of the islands.[8]

From the fifteenth century onwards, with the beginning of the European expansion and the interconnection of the continents, islands and archipelagoes clearly emerged as "natural bridges between oceanic worlds"[9] proving to be crucial in terms of navigation, sea power and even as a basis for European settlement, trade or conquest in other continents.[10] In this context, the islands and archipelagoes of Macaronesia were "corridors through which institutions, economic patterns, and people of the Mediterranean region began to pass into the Atlantic basin."[11] It is precisely because of their centrality in the process of construction and articulation of the Atlantic world that we cannot accept the uncritical or essentialist vision of the islands as a "lost" or an "isolated" space. As John Gillis reminds us: "There was nothing at all insular about the islands or the islanders."[12]

If it seems difficult to deny the islands their pioneering role in the making of the Atlantic world and, through it, in the very process of creation of the "first modernity," how then can we understand the fact that several historiographies of the Atlantic ignore both the history of the Eastern Atlantic islands and the historiographical research done by scholars from the Canary islands, Madeira, the Azores or the Cape Verde islands?[13]

A substantial body of work has been written on the Atlantic world over the past few decades. However, despite the importance and the thickness of their history, in general, most of these islands and archipelagoes continue to occupy a secondary place, especially within the academic universe of English language,[14] even when well-known historians or some recent works have pointed out the pioneering role of the archipelagoes, though not always for the best reasons.[15] In 2009, two of the most notable scholars of Anglo-

7 See F. Braudel, O Mediterrâneo e o Mundo Mediterrânico na época de Filipe II, Lisbon 1983 [original edition: 1949; 4th ed., rev. and corr.: 1979], vol. I, pp. 172-174.

8 From the nineteenth century onwards, generally speaking, the small islands and archipelagoes almost disappeared from history and historiographic analysis itself, being relegated to the backstage of the "big history."

9 See R. Ueda, Pushing the Atlantic Envelope: Interoceanic Perspectives on Atlantic History, in: J. Cañizares-Esguerra and E. R. Seeman (eds.), The Atlantic in Global History, 1500–2000, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2006, pp. 163-175, at 164.

10 See J. R. Gillis, Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World, New York 2004, pp. 83-100.

11 See R. Ueda, Pushing the Atlantic Envelope, pp. 163-175, at 164.

12 See J. R. Gillis, Islands of the Mind, p. 99.

13 Although now slightly outdated, see A. T. Matos and L. F. R. Thomaz (dir.), Vinte Anos de Historiografia Ultramarina Portuguesa 1972–1992, Lisboa 1993; A. Vieira (coord.), Guia para a História e Investigação das Ilhas Atlânticas, Funchal 1995; AAVV, Os Arquivos Insulares (Atlântico e Caraíbas), Funchal 1997.

14 See for example T. Benjamin, The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History, 1400–1900, New York 2009.

15 See P. D. Curtin, The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex. Essays in Atlantic History, Cambridge 1990; A. Su-

Saxon historiography and, in particular, of Atlantic history, Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene, in the "State of the art" which both wrote stated: "Most of the studies of Atlantic islands are somewhat old; there is much opportunity for new work here."[16] The authors were certainly thinking in the case of the Anglophone historiography, unaware of the research currently being done in the Portuguese, Spanish and French universities, not to mention in the Caribbean universe. In 2015, the "first encyclopedic reference on Atlantic history" does not have a general entry on "Islands" and the entry "Creolization" forgets the previous experience of the Eastern Atlantic islands to focus on the New World.[17]

This dominant "narrative of modernity," which explains the disappearance of the Iberians since the seventeenth century, the consolidation of "secondary" spaces, such as the Atlantic islands or Africa, and the definition of centres and peripheries both in the past and in the present from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, finds echoes in other historiographies.[18] Not surprisingly, some European scholars consider "Atlantic history" to be nothing but a kind of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism and a new form of intellectual colonialism.[19]

Challenging this dominant paradigm and the imposition of a "hegemonic historiographical logic" over the past and, to some extent, over the present,[20] I would like to quote John Donne: "No man is an *Island*, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the main…"[21] Regarding islands, we can say that no island is actually isolated, it is always a part of a larger world. Within the frame of global history or of Atlantic history, localities, microhistory and "local knowledge" (Clifford Geertz) can prove enlightening and invaluable. I suggest that a critical reappraisal of the dynamics of Atlantic

ranyi, The Atlantic Connection. A History of the Atlantic World, 1450–1900, London 2015, pp. 15-16, at 16: "The Atlantic islands were also the location where Europeans first pioneered plantation slavery, the harshest form of slave labor."

16 See P. D. Morgan and J. P. Greene, Introduction: The Present State of Atlantic History, in: J. P. Greene and P. D. Morgan (eds.), Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal, New York 2009, pp. 3-33, at 30, note 26.

17 See J. C. Miller (ed.), The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History, Princeton 2015.

18 See P. A. Coclanis, *Drang Nach Osten*: Bernard Bailyn, the World-Island, and the Idea of Atlantic History, in: Journal of World History, vol. 13, nº 1 (2002), pp. 169-182; J. Cañizares-Esguerra, The Core and Peripheries of Our National Narratives: A Response from IH-35, in: American Historical Review, vol. 112, nº 5, December 2007, pp. 1423-1431; P. Butel, Histoire de l'Atlantique de l'Antiquité à nos jours, Paris 1997 [English translation: The Atlantic, London 1999].

19 See F. Morelli and A. E. Gómez, La nueva Historia Atlántica: un asunto de escalas, in: Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos, nº 6 (2006), on line on 5 April 2006 [URL: <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/document2102.html>] (accessed 20 June 2007): "una especie de etnocentrismo anglosajón o una nueva variante de colonialismo intelectual disfrazado de una forma legítima de hacer historia."

20 See J. T. Carson, When is an ocean not an ocean? Geographies of the Atlantic world, in: Southern Quarterly, vol. 43, nº 4, Summer 2006, pp. 16-45, at 19. Regarding Atlantic history, this has been so far mainly a history of the North Atlantic and in particular of the English or British North Atlantic. For criticism of this field of research, see R. Ferreira, Biografia, Mobilidade e Cultura Atlântica: A Micro-Escala do Tráfico de Escravos em Benguela, séculos XVIII-XIX, in: Tempo, vol. 10, nº 20 (2006), pp. 23-49, at 24. Referring to Bernard Bailyn, a Harvard scholar and a major reference of north-american and Atlantic history, Ian K. Steele spoke of Bernard Bailyn's "American Atlantic," saying that "Bailyn's genealogy of Atlantic history is deliberately American": see I. K. Steele, Bernard Bailyn's American History, in: History and Theory, vol. 46, nº 1, February 2007, pp. 48-58, at 51.

21 See J. Donne, Meditation XVII, *apud* K. Wilson, The Island Race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century, London 2003, p. ix.

history through an archipelagic framing of analysis can provide an essential counterpoint to the major premises of dominant historiographies.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, beginning with the conquest – as it happened in the case of the Canary Islands – or with permanent settler societies, far from being just a geographical periphery, the external frontier of the Iberian societies of Portugal and Castile, the Eastern Atlantic islands were in fact at the forefront of Europe's maritime expansion and served as "laboratories" for the new European overseas empires.[22] However, after the first centuries of European settlement and of demographic and economic growth, due to environmental constraints – the destruction of the preexisting ecological system, the shortage of land – and the dynamics of external markets, these small insular societies failed to respond positively to the new challenges presented by the process of industrial modernization.

This broad interpretation, which I apply to the archipelagoes of the so-called Atlantic Mediterranean – "cet espace virtuel commun aux limites floues, incertaines" (this common virtual space with blurred, uncertain borders), as François Guichard wrote[23] –, but also to the archipelagoes of Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, finds an important support in the work of the anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz with regarding the Caribbean. In fact, underestimating the pioneering role and the contribution of the Eastern Atlantic archipelagoes for the making of the early-modern Atlantic world, Sidney Mintz argued that between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the crops, through a merger of several factors and a large-scale production, "were landmark experiments in modernity."[24] This, in fact, can be said of the Castilian and Portuguese islands of the Eastern Atlantic from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century.

The transfer of political, social and economic models from the Iberian Christian kingdoms to the insular spaces that were conquered or settled in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries introduced a continuum, a horizontal flow of people and goods from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Institutions, technologies, ideas and plants that had been in use in various regions of the Mediterranean Sea were introduced in the new territories, not to mention the presence of people from Italy alongside Portuguese and Castilians in the oceanic adventure and the peopling of the new lands. This was the first stage of a larger process in the making of "a world on the move."[25]

22 See E. B. Barbier, Scarcity and Frontiers: How Economies Have Developed through Natural Resource Exploitation, New York 2011.

23 See F. Guichard, La Méditerranée atlantique, mirage ou réalité?, in: Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian, vol. XLII (2001): Le Portugal et l'Atlantique, pp. 33-52, at 48.

24 See S. W. Mintz, Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: the Caribbean Region as Oikoumenê, in: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, N. S., vol. 2, n.º 2, June 1996, pp. 289-311, at pp. 294-296. Sidney W. Mintz's best known work will probably be Sweetness and Power. The place of sugar in Modern History, New York 1986 [original edition: 1985]. For a general overview of his work, see D. Scott, Modernity that Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz's Caribbean, in: History Workshop Journal, vol. 58, nº 1, Autumn 2004, pp. 191-210.

25 See A. J. R. Russell-Wood, A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America, 1415–1808, Manchester 1992.

In this sense, the "modernity" of this first "European Atlantic" was the heir of a Mediterranean modernity, following on the heels of the Genoese navigators and merchants who had sought to explore the Atlantic, like the Vivaldi brothers, or of the Majorcan expeditions to the Canary Islands in the middle and in the second half of the fourteenth century.[26] Must we remember that this Atlantic was also an African space, especially Maghrebi?[27] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, among others, posits that the Mediterranean Atlantic region or basin constituted "an extension or transplantation of traditional Mediterranean civilisation in the new oceanic environment."[28] This perspective does not diminish the role of archipelagoes in the creation of the Atlantic world to come in the following centuries. On the contrary, it allows us to reevaluate the traditional chronological divisions between "medieval" and "early-modern," emphasizing, in addition to the alleged novelty that had occurred, the contribution of cultural heritages in the processes under way in the fourteenth and in the fifteenth centuries.[29] As for the integration of both sides of the Western Mediterranean, the Atlantic *Algarves*, we know that during the twelfth-fourteenth centuries sailors and merchants from the North African city of Ceuta traded with the people of Algarve. Furthermore, African slaves, gold, copper and several other commodities were sent to North Africa via Trans-Saharan trading routes reaching the ports of Catalonia, Valencia, Andalusia and of the Algarve and from there shipped into the Mediterranean. It is not, therefore, surprising that the so-called *Catalan Atlas* (*c.* 1375) provides detailed information on the political and economic geography of the Niger. Such an excellent source of information regarding these flows of commerce suggests that by the end of the fourteenth century a certain knowledge of inland African societies was available on both margins of the western Mediterranean. Hence, the coastal regions of the "Extreme West" of the Mediterranean participated actively in the North-South relations.[30] Although in a peripheral position regarding the heart of the European Christendom, the Western Iberian kingdoms were a part of a dynamic world. The Mediterranean-African axis was a vast space where economic and cultural exchanges were taking place over centuries thus helping to establish some of the earlier foundations of the future Atlantic dynamics.[31]

26 See F. Fernández-Armesto, Before Columbus: Explorations and colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492, Houndsmills 1987, pp. 156-159.

27 See M. Balard and A. Ducellier (dir.), Le Partage du Monde. Échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale, Paris 1998.

28 See F. Fernández-Armesto, Before Columbus, pp. 151-168 and 152 for the quotation. See also pp. 169-202.

29 About this subject, see the Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, vol. 37, nº 3, Fall 2007.

30 See V. Cortés Alonso, Valencia y el comercio de esclavos negros en el siglo XV, in: Stvdia, nº 47 (1989), pp. 81-145; A. Franco Silva, La esclavitud en Andalucía a fines de la Edad Media: problemas metodológicos y perspectivas de investigación, in: ibid., pp. 147-167; C. Picard, La présence des gens d'al-Andalus dans l'Occident maghrébin aux XIe et XIIe siècles. Les raisons économiques, in: M. Balard and A. Ducellier (dir.), Le Partage du Monde, pp. 475-483, at pp. 482-483; R. Botte, Le Portugal, les marchés africains et les rapports Nord-Sud (1448–ca. 1550), in: Cahiers des Anneaux de la Mémoire, nº 3 (2001): La Traite et l'Esclavage dans le Monde Lusophone, pp. 85-107, at pp. 86-90.

31 See L. A. Fonseca, Os descobrimentos e a formação do oceano Atlântico (século XIV–século XVI), Lisboa 1999, p. 46.

2. A blueprint for the colonization of the Americas

With the beginning of the Iberian overseas expansion, the Ocean at the western edge of European Christendom was transformed into a new open space, a new borderland, which, despite its novelty, did not break up with the traditional medieval schemes.[32] When one considers the political, social and economic organization of the new territories, it is clear that settlers reproduced the patterns of a "frontier culture" that had been tested in the Iberian Peninsula throughout the Middle Ages in the Christian borderlands.[33] As for the concept of "borderland," it must be understood not just as a political, military, ethnical and religious boundary line, separating Christians from Muslims, but also as an interface region between different but connected societies, a space characterized by fluidity, the circulation of people and the exchange of goods and ideas.

The new frontier societies that formed in the islands did not merely reproduce the forms of collective life of the Iberian societies. Indeed, the islands served as "laboratories" and were the cradle for a "founding moment" of modernity through the creation of new ecosystems and societies. In fact, according to some historians, the frontier societies that arose in the Eastern Atlantic islands in the late fourteenth century and throughout the fifteenth century were the result of the fusion of several elements: a new physical geography, a white settler population coming from a late-medieval society, joined afterwards by other populations, especially from Western Africa, and the demand of the European markets.[34]

The first phase of the Atlantic islands colonization anticipated future events in the Caribbean Islands and in the American mainland. The Canary Islands, known to the Ancient world as the Fortunate Isles, were rediscovered during late-medieval commercial expansion. The archipelago was known and had been visited since 1339. After the expeditions of the fourteenth century, the Castilian conquest of the Canary Islands from the indigenous Guanche population lasted the whole of the fifteenth century, though not in a systematic and continuous way during the first decades of the century. Nevertheless, the process was essentially a military one. It was an extension of the political and military process of the Iberian *Reconquista* and it wiped out much of the original native population.[35]

32 See G. Céspedes del Castillo, Raíces peninsulares y asentamiento indiano: los hombres de las fronteras, in: F. Solano (coord.), Proceso histórico al conquistador, Madrid 1988, pp. 37-50, at 44-45.

33 "La Péninsule Ibérique est une zone frontière qui a élaboré une culture de frontière […]." See P. Chaunu, Civilisation ibérique et aptitude à la croissance, in: P. Chaunu, Rétrohistoire, Paris 1985 [orig.: Tiers-Monde, 4, 1967], pp. 1005-1022, at 1010. See also R. Bartlett and A. Mackay (eds.), Medieval Frontier Societies, Oxford 1989; T. Herzog, Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas, Cambridge, MA, 2015.

34 See R. S. Brito, As Ilhas do Atlântico e os Descobrimentos Portugueses, Lisboa 1987; I. C. Henriques, L'Atlantique de la modernité: la part de l'Afrique, in: Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian, vol. XLII (2001): Le Portugal et l'Atlantique, pp. 135-153, at 141-150.

35 See E. Aznar Vallejo and F. J. Clavijo Hernández, Las islas Canarias en el proceso expansivo de Europa de los siglos XIV y XV. Reflexiones sobre un periodo historico, in: Stvdia, Lisboa, nº 47, 1989, pp. 203-227; E. Aznar Vallejo, La Integración de las islas Canarias en la Corona de Castilla (1478–1526): Aspectos administrativos, sociales, y económicos, Sevilla 2009.

The conquest of the Canary Islands was contemporary of the conquest of the Muslim kingdom of Granada (1492) and of the first voyages of Christopher Columbus. The conquest of these islands put forward a domination system and the practice of forced migration that the Spaniards would later implement in the Caribbean, where a rupture in the aboriginal ecosystem occurred between 1492 and 1525–1530, especially after the discovery of gold around 1500. As David Abulafia suggested, this was a movement that led from the "old" to "new Canary" islands. Within this context and chronology, the archipelago can be considered as the original "New World."[36]

Regarding the archipelagoes with Portuguese settlement, their situation was distinct from the one which characterized the Canaries. Initially, these were uninhabited islands. Therefore, a different model was put in place. These insular spaces were seen as an extension of the realm. Given the distance and the insular discontinuity, the uncertainty regarding the success of the settlement and the shortcomings of the political center in terms of resources, especially when, in the fifteenth century, the military conquest of Morocco was the main objective pursued by the Portuguese monarchy and the nobility, the crown decided to use a traditional system already known in the Mediterranean: the donation of lands to a nobleman, the *donatário* (donatory) of the islands. The donatory would have to insure their settlement by appointing a captain, a small nobleman who would represent him and be the direct responsible for controlling the settlers. This political and administrative model was initially applied in Madeira, where Portuguese settlement started around 1425 or 1426, even before the king donated the archipelago to Prince Henry in the 1430s. Until 1440, when it was granted the Charter of the captaincy of Machico to Tristão Vaz Teixeira (May 8), the jurisdiction of the captains was carried out apparently without a document that defined their jurisdiction. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly regarding the pioneering role of the archipelagoes in the Atlantic world, we must point out that this was the model that framed the settlement of the Azores, the Cape Verde islands and São Tomé and that would be applied, with adaptations to local contexts, in Brazil, initially with the captaincies created in 1534–1536 and then with other donations; in Angola, through the donation of the conquest to Paulo Dias de Novais, by the Royal Charter of 19 September 1571; and even in an unsuccessful attempt to promote Portuguese fixation in Sierra Leone, at the turn of the sixteenth-seventeenth century.

Hence, the Castilian conquest of the Canaries and the Portuguese settlement of the Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verde islands set the precedents which would be staged in other colonies. Perhaps even more important than the framing of a political and administrative pattern in the Eastern Atlantic islands and with even greater consequences when one considers the formation of the Atlantic world was the pioneering role of the islands in terms of their social and economic impact.

36 See D. Abulafia, The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus, New Haven, CT, 2008; D. A. Vinson, The Western Sea, pp. 1-14, at 6: "In every sense of encounter and impact, the Canaries were the first "New World.""

3. At the origins of the Creole plantation society

The historical process of settlement continued over the centuries turning wild, uninhabited spaces into humanized landscapes. The Eastern Atlantic islands actually became important centres of production and consumption. With the introduction of the slave labor, associated with the plantation economy and the emphasis on the production of sugar, especially in the islands of Madeira and São Tomé, a new kind of relationship developed between land, capital and labor. It was on these islands that the first experiments with African slave-based sugar plantations were carried out and this relationship proved to be decisive to several Atlantic societies in the centuries to come.

The prosperity of Madeira and the elevation of the *vila* (town) of Funchal to the status of *cidade* (city) in 1508, less than a century after the beginning of the settlement, are associated with the sugar boom that took place from the late 1470s, with the sugar production reaching its peak in 1506. It was also the dynamism of the sugar-based economy that attracted the Italian, Flemish and French merchants to Madeira. Foreign traders and bankers were active in Lisbon in importing and re-exporting capital and commodities all over Europe. Noteworthy, the merchants-bankers of Florence invested in the early establishment of Portugal's trading empire and through their network of collaborators and partners, they acquired a dominant position in the Madeiran sugar trade.[37]

The plantations of Madeira and São Tomé, but also those in the agricultural islands of the Cape Verde archipelago, where cotton was of greater economic importance, were fed with the regular entry of slaves, first from the Canary islands or from Northern Africa and, later, from sub-Saharan Africa. In the region of the "Rivers of Guinea," the slave trade received a boost with the settlement of the island of Santiago, in 1462, and of the smaller island of Fogo, in the late fifteenth century. The Senegambia region was, until the late sixteenth century, the dominant area in the supply of slaves to the Atlantic world and, in the context of the export of slaves, between 1460 and 1560, due to the policy set by the Portuguese Crown, the regional slave trade depended much on the dynamics of the inhabitants of Santiago, an island which served as the "Portuguese outpost of Guinea," in the words of Maria Manuel Ferraz Torrão. This situation changed dramatically in the early 1560s, with the decreasing importance of the "Rivers of Guinea" and the loss of the Portuguese monopoly of the slave trade. In the Gulf of Guinea, the island of São Tomé, an important producer of sugar in the sixteenth century and, consequently, a consumer market of slaves, played a similar role to that of Santiago as a trading outpost, a slave warehouse and a centre for the redistribution of the "pieces" that were redeemed on the African coast.[38]

37 See A. Vieira, Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Canaries, 1450–1650, in: S. B. Schwartz (ed.), Tropical Babylons: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680, Chapel Hill 2004, pp. 42-84.

38 See M. M. F. Torrão, Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos, meios de pagamento, in: M. E. M. Santos (coord.), História Geral de Cabo Verde, Lisboa-Praia 1995, vol. II, pp. 17-123.

The presence of African population in the islands and the development of a plantation system had long-range consequences especially in the Cape Verde islands and in São Tomé and Príncipe, though not so much in Madeira, where the sugar economy was limited in time and the African contingent was thinning.[39] Despite different social statuses and economic roles, the encounter between European men and African women resulted in an original "miscegenation" (a biological process) and in the creation of the first Creole societies (a cultural process), which would be reproduced in a large scale in the New World.[40] The emergence of populations of mixed origins in the Atlantic islands had a considerable impact in the processes of settlement and in the development of future colonial models. Perhaps contrary to expectations framed by the idea of colonial domination, one of the key elements stressed by Jack P. Greene in his analysis of the policies of colonization in the Atlantic world is the Creolization of what he called the "metropolitan cultures."[41]

If sugar played a central role in the construction of the modern world between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, as suggested by Sidney W. Mintz, then the *engenho* (sugar mill) was a symbol of the rising Atlantic system.[42] For better or for worse, we must consider that in the context of European oceanic expansion. Madeira, the Cape Verde islands and São Tomé and Príncipe set the stage for the development of a given social and economic model – the plantation system – and of the Atlantic slave trade. Once again, in the course of that process, the islands served as corridors through which institutions and technologies of the Mediterranean region passed into the Atlantic basin and into the New World.[43]

Therefore, as we have seen, and contrary to the view of some historians, the "plantation islands" were not a creation of the Dutch, the British or the French, even though it was only in the eighteenth century that an integrated transatlantic economy attained its fullest articulation. In the words of Donna A. Vinson: "The value and importance of the Atlantic islands should be seen not only in light of their *historical* role as prototypes of what was to come but also in their *contemporary* role in the formation and definition of the European Atlantic."[44]

39 On the genetic evidences of miscegenation and creolization see, among others, R. Gonçalves, H. Spínola and A. Brehm, Y-Chromosome Lineages in São Tomé e Príncipe Islands: Evidence of European Influence, in: American Journal of Human Biology, 19 (2007), pp. 422-428.

40 See I. C. Henriques, L'Atlantique de la modernité, pp. 135-153, at 142-146.

41 See J. P. Greene, Elaborations, in: William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, vol. LXIV, nº 2, April 2007, pp. 281-286, at 286.

42 See S. B. Schwartz, Introduction, in: in: S. B. Schwartz (ed.), Tropical Babylons, pp. 1-26, at 21.

43 See S. B. Schwartz, A Commonwealth within itself. The Early Brazilian Sugar Industry, 1550–1670, in Revista de Indias, vol. LXV, nº 233 (2005), pp. 79-116, at 83: "The Brazilian sugar industry adapted the technology of the Mediterranean and Atlantic sugar industries to local conditions."

44 See D. A. Vinson, The Western Sea, pp. 1-14, at 12.

4. Crossroads of transoceanic trade and power

As I wrote before, the islands were "natural bridges between oceanic worlds."[45] Within the context of the Atlantic navigation and commercial networks, certain islands actually occupied a more "central" rather than "peripheral" position inside that system. Benefiting from that position, the islands served as a nodal point in the intersection of different maritime spaces. At a time of imperial competition and of a growing European sea power, seaports were of fundamental importance to colonial and maritime trade, but also in terms of naval logistics and defence. The study of a seaport requires a multifocal analysis. For the purpose of the present paper, let me just point out that the main ports of the Eastern Atlantic islands served as gateways and hubs of trade and information connecting the more local and closed spaces of the islands with the outside world. Not all port cities looked alike, nor can they be reduced to a uniform model. However, in the long run, in spite of all the geomorphologic features of these ports and of the political and socio-economic circumstances, the implementation of infrastructural interventions in the seaport areas allowed the islands' harbors to play a crucial role in the making of early-modern Atlantic as intercontinental trading posts and centres of economic growth.[46]

First let us consider the case of Madeira and the Azores in the early-modern period. Both because of their geographical position but also due to commodities such as sugar, woad or wine, Italian bankers and merchants were already established in Madeira by the late fifteenth century and English merchants were living in both archipelagoes from the sixteenth century onwards, and especially after the mid-seventeenth century. A few decades after their arrival in the Azores, the second and the third generation of English descendants were already local landlords and office-holders.[47] Further south, off the coast of Senegambia, the Cape Verde islands lay "at the very crossroads of the Atlantic" assisting vessels bound for Brazil or India. Commodities like orchil and nonagricultural products (salt, hides, pelts, salted meats) entered the Atlantic trading routes and English ships returning from the Americas called at the "salt islands" of the Cape Verde archipelago.[48] Thanks to the "English connection" and the English island-based trading houses the Portuguese Eastern Atlantic islands were in contact with the ports of the Baltic Sea, the Northern Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Western Atlantic world.

45 See R. Ueda, Pushing the Atlantic Envelope, pp. 163-175, at 164.

46 See A. Polónia and H. Osswald (eds.), European Seaport Systems in the early modern age: a comparative approach. Proceedings, Porto 2007; A. Polónia, Seaports as centres of economic growth. The Portuguese case. 1500–1900, in: R. Unger (coord.), Shipping Efficiency and Economic Growth. 1350–1800, Boston/Amsterdam (printing); A. Polónia, European seaports in the Early Modern Age: concepts, methodology and models of analysis, in: Cahiers de la Méditerranée [Online], 80 | 2010, on line since 15 December 2010 [URL: <http://cdlm.revues.org/5364>] (accessed 22 January 2017).

47 See T. B. Duncan, Atlantic Islands. Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation, Chicago/London 1972; A. D. Francis, The Wine Trade, London 1972; J. D. Rodrigues, De mercadores a terratenentes: percursos ingleses nos Açores (séculos XVII-XVIII), in: Ler História, n.º 31: Açores: peças para um mosaico, 1996, pp. 41-68; J. G. Lydon, Fish and flour for gold, 1600–1800: Southern Europe in the colonial balance of payments, Philadelphia 2008.

48 See T. B. Duncan, Atlantic Islands, pp. 158-238.

David Hancock's work has shown the importance of the personal and business networks connecting the islands of the Mediterranean Atlantic to the islands of the Caribbean Sea (Barbados, Jamaica) and the American mainland. British merchants played an important role in the production, distribution, and consumption of Madeira wine and of "Fayal" wine – in fact, the Azorean wine was mainly produced in the island of Pico – in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, helping to create transimperial networks of suppliers and customers across the Atlantic world. By the early nineteenth century, the Madeira wine was a major Atlantic commodity.[49] But the English were not the only merchants who were active in the Portuguese islands. Illicit trade played an important role in Dutch commercial strategies and the islands of the Easten Atlantic proved crucial for this purpose. During the Twelve Years' Truce, Dutch ships regularly set sail from Holland each year to the Azores. There, the cargo was transferred to the *navios de registo* (authorized ships) and then transported to Brazil where the ships were loaded with sugar, brazilwood, and other Brazilian commodities. However, one must say that the Dutch didn't pay any duties on their homeward bound voyages, thus defrauding the Spanish Crown.[50] Finally, local Customs' archives show that in the eighteenth century ships coming from North American, English, Irish, French, Dutch, and Baltic port cities called at the three main Azorean ports – Ponta Delgada, Angra, Horta.[51] The intersecting networks and trading routes connected the islands with Europe and America, thus underlining their crossroads character and the cosmopolitan dimension of these local communities.

There is yet another dimension in the history of the islands that must be highlighted. As a part of the Atlantic trading system, the islands' main port cities and towns served as trading outposts as well as naval stations. The Canary Islands, Madeira and the Cape Verde islands provided ports of call to ships heading into the South Atlantic. The Azores lie in the path of the prevailing westerlies. Thus, the islands were essential to navigation in the deep ocean, especially before the discovery of longitude in the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly in this context, French or British maps, logbooks and travel narratives include a more or less accurate description of the islands' main geographical landmarks as reference points.[52] The strategic geographical position of the Azores in the central

49 See D. Hancock, Citizens of the World: London merchants and the integration of the British Atlantic community, 1735–1785, Cambridge 1995; D. Hancock, The British Atlantic World: Co-ordination, Complexity, and The Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651–1815, in: Itinerario. European Journal of Overseas History, 1999/2 [URL: <http://www.itinerario.nl/Itinerario_new/hancock.htm>]; D. Hancock, The Trouble with Networks: Managing the Scots' Early-Modern Madeira Trade, in: The Business History Review, vol. 79, n.º 3, Autumn 2005, pp. 467-491; D. Hancock, Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Organization of the Atlantic Market, 1640-1815, New Haven 2009.

50 See Á. Alloza Aparicio, Portuguese Contraband and the Closure of the Iberian Markets, 1621-1640. The Economic Roots of an Anti-Habsburg Feeling, in: e-Journal of Portuguese History [on line], vol. 7, nº 2, Winter 2009, pp. 1-18, at 6 [URL: <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue14/pdf/aaparicio.pdf>].

51 See A. F. Meneses, Os Açores nas encruzilhadas de Setecentos (1740–1770), vol. II: Economia, Ponta Delgada 1995, p. 230, Table nº 13, p. 231, Table nº 15, p. 239, Table nº 26, and p. 244, Chart n.º 5.

52 See Amédée François Frezier, Relation du Voyage de la Mer du Sud aux Côtes du Chily et du Perou, Fait pendant les années 1712, 1713 & 1714, Dediée à S. A. R. Monseigneur le Duc d'Orleans, Regent du Royaume. Par M. Frezier, Ingenieur Ordinaire du Roy., Paris 1716; C. P. Claret (Charles Pierre Claret), Voyage fait par ordre du Roi

North Atlantic transformed Angra, on the island of Terceira, in the main port of call of the archipelago between the early sixteenth century and mid-seventeenth century. Indiamen regularly called at Angra with Asian and American commodities. The presence of homeward-bound vessels in Azorean waters attracted pirates and privateers. In the context of the early-modern imperial rivalries and the dispute over the control of the sea, which extended to the territories outside Europe, the Azores' geostrategic centrality transformed the archipelago into a major scenario of military and naval operations, especially in the final decades of the sixteenth century after Portugal's annexation to the Hispanic Monarchy in 1580–1581.[53]

The islands were important centres of trade and, as such, local port cities and towns were hubs of maritime, business and political information as well as cross-cultural spaces. Local authorities, national and foreign merchants, seamen were the first to hear the news coming from Asia or from the Americas and sources as different as the Portuguese *gazetas* (journals) or the French consular documentation clearly show that warships or trading ships calling at Lisbon usually brought news days or weeks earlier regarding the arrival of the fleets from Brazil or of some Portuguese or French ship coming from Asia that had just reached one of the Azorean islands.[54]

Thus, the islands were also a platform or hub of information, helping to transmit the *news* across the ocean. In the steam-boat era, the islands remained crucial to transatlantic navigation. At the crossroad of different maritime trading routes, the islands of the Iberian Atlantic archipelagoes played a major role as coaling stations, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Once again, British capital and British businessmen were pivotal in these networks.[55] The small town of Maio, on the island of Maio, in the archipelago of Cape Verde, is locally known as *Porto Inglês* (English Harbour), which illustrates the importance of the British networks in the development and creation of a wider Atlantic. And even during the first years of transatlantic flights the Azorean islands proved, once more, their centrality.

en 1768 et 1769, à différentes parties du monde, Pour éprouver en mer les Horloges Marines inventées par M. Ferdinand Berthoud […], Paris 1773, 2 vols.; J. D. Rodrigues, São Miguel no século XVIII: casa, elites e poder, Ponta Delgada 2003, vol. I, pp. 92-94.

53 On the conquest of the Azores by the Spanish forces and the presence of English privateers in Azorean waters, see A. F. Meneses, Os Açores e o Domínio Filipino (1580–1590), vol. I: A Resistência Terceirense e as Implicações da Conquista Espanhola; vol. II: Apêndice Documental, Angra do Heroísmo 1987; J. D. Rodrigues, "off the Islands": os Açores no contexto da primeira expansão inglesa, in: O Faial e a Periferia Açoriana nos Séculos XV a XX, Actas do IV Colóquio: No Bicentenário do Consulado dos E.U.A. nos Açores: O Tempo dos Dabney, Horta 2007, pp. 87-100 [now also in J. D. Rodrigues, Histórias Atlânticas: os Açores na primeira modernidade, Ponta Delgada 2012, pp. 45-60].

54 See M. L. Almeida, Notícias Históricas de Portugal e Brasil (1715–1750), Coimbra 1961.

55 See M. Suárez Bosa, The role of the Canary Islands in the Atlantic coal route from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century: Corporate Strategies, Milton Keynes 2008.

5. Conclusion

The pages above are but an attempt to condense a rich and complex history. In this brief historical overview, I could not cover the full range of the historical processes running through the Atlantic world which had an impact on small spaces like the islands. Several key issues merit further study and additional research should make it possible to explore more deeply the links between global and local phenomena. My overview nevertheless suggests that conceptualizing modernity as a distinct social and cultural transformation is important to both understand world history and criticize hegemonic narratives that tend to impose the culture of the centre of the "world-system." By taking into consideration the history of the Eastern Atlantic islands we can critically evaluate the role of the core-periphery model and achieve a different perspective on the course of modernity.