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**Monetary Tributes to Prince Henry  
and the Treaty of Tordesillas**

*by António M. Trigueiros  
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# Prince Henry and the Treaty of Tordesilhas

Portuguese commemoratives are a testimony to the influence of Prince Henry the Navigator and his nation's importance in the Age of Discovery.

by António M. Trigueiros  
and  
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Portugal and the Cape Verde Islands have issued 1,000-escudo coins to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Treaty of Tordesilhas.

WHAT STUDENT OF the world has not wondered why nearly all of South America speaks Spanish, except for Brazil, whose 155 million inhabitants make Portuguese their mother tongue? And from a numismatic standpoint, why, from nearly the dawn of the Age of Discovery, were Spanish coin standards applied in some colonial areas and Portuguese in others? We find the Spanish standard prevalent in most of the Americas and, at the exact opposite side of the globe, in the Philippines. East of America, however, the Portuguese standard was used in Brazil and the colonial enclaves of Africa, India and the Far East. Not until the 18th century did the coins of France, Britain and other temporary imperialist powers make their presence widely felt.

In 1994 Portugal commemorates anniversaries of the two events that explain all this and much more. One is the 500th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tordesilhas with Spain, which influenced the political and economic development of the world in a way matched by few other mere pieces of paper. The other is the 600th anniversary of the birth of the most important figure in the saga of Portugal's discoveries, Prince Henry the Navigator. These anniversaries are marked by the fifth set of coins in Portugal's "Coins of Discovery" series as well as by a joint issue by Portugal and the Cape Verde Islands.

## Two Consequential Voyages

SAILING UNDER THE Portuguese flag of King João (John) II, Bartolomeu Dias navigated around the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, proving



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that Africa did not extend all the way to the South Pole and that a sea route (and new lands) lay eastward to the Indies. The accidental arrival of Christopher Columbus—backed by Spain’s Ferdinand and Isabella—in the Americas four years later showed that a whole world lay to Europe’s west. These two events formed the basis for a serious conflict between the first two great exploring nations. Who would claim possession and sovereignty of the newly discovered lands and those yet to be found?

On his first return voyage from America, in March 1493, Columbus stopped in Lisbon for repairs to his damaged ship and to inform the King of Portugal of the success of a voyage that, years earlier, he had refused to finance. Columbus’ “discovery” was not welcome news to the Portuguese. If Columbus had indeed been where he said, he had reached the islands the Portuguese unsuccessfully sought for nearly a half century by an entirely different route. King João’s first impulse was to have the explorer killed, but reason prevailed, and Columbus was allowed to leave for a triumphant return to Spain. João knew Ferdinand and Isabella would claim Columbus’ discovery for themselves and that the explorer would again be sent west. In this case, he doubted the Treaty of Alcáçovas (1480), which gave Portugal the rights to the new territories discovered below the Canary Islands, would be accepted by the Spanish, who would take the view that these new discoveries were nowhere near there.

Now there were two players in the game. Portugal had forever lost its monopoly on discovery. The possibility of Iberian conflict was enormous unless an arrangement for dividing the booty could be reached.

### **An Advantageous Agreement**

ONLY ONE POWER in 15th-century Europe could transcend national interests to act as arbitrator in such a matter—the Papacy. Fortunately, Pope Alexander VI was Spanish, having been elected the previous year with the support of Queen Isabella. So just as the Portuguese had done between 1455 and 1481, the Spanish monarchs started lobbying the Pope to publish bulls backing up their rights.

Details of Columbus’ journey reached Rome on April 11, 1493, and



By sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, Bartolomeu Dias proved that Africa did not extend to the South Pole. His voyage is recalled on a 100 escudos in the second series of Portugal’s “Coins of Discovery.”

**After a year of negotiations between Portugal's King João and Spain's Queen Isabella over modifications to a plan originally proposed by Pope Alexander VI, the Treaty of Tordesilhas finally was signed by the Spanish on June 7, 1494, and ratified by the Portuguese on September 5.**



by May Alexander proposed giving Spain the rights to all lands discovered more than 100 leagues (about 375 miles) west of the Azores or the Cape Verde Islands. To Portugal this was an outrage. Not only would it contravene previous bulls giving Portugal claim to all lands south of the parallel of the Canaries, but it also threatened Portuguese control of the Indies. In addition, it made further navigation hazardous, because to take advantage of prevailing winds and currents in their route around Africa, the Portuguese first would have to sail west into Spanish waters.

Accompanied by a little bit of saber-rattling, João entered negotiations with Isabella over modifications to the Pope's plan. The Spanish were receptive to his suggestions. After a year of negotiations, a treaty was signed on June 7, 1494, in the town of Tordesilhas (about 95 miles northwest of Madrid) and ratified by the Portuguese king at Setúbal on September 5. The treaty divided the world into two zones of influence by moving the line of demarcation 930 miles further west to about latitude 46°W, some 370 leagues (1,453 miles) west of Cape Verde. This gave Spain the rights to the American continent, while Portugal was guaranteed the exclusive right of navigation and discovery in Africa, Asia and the Far East.

At the time, no one knew where the countermeridian (the line on the opposite side of the globe) of Tordesilhas was, so it was difficult to claim the new discoveries in the Pacific. Ferdinand Magellan was sent through the Spanish zone on his circumnavigation to determine Spain's claims on the other side—especially the lucrative Spice Islands (Moluccas and Indonesia), which first were discovered by the Portuguese in 1512.

Brazil, yet undiscovered, jutted out east of the line of demarcation into Portugal's sphere of influence. As a result, Brazil became and

remains, in language and culture, an immense Portuguese island in an otherwise Spanish-American sea.

The Treaty of Tordesilhas was so broad in scope and ambition that in the long run it proved impractical. No other nations besides Spain and Portugal ever recognized it. In the short run, however, it served its purpose well by allowing each nation to pursue colonization and trade unobstructed by the other. Spain sent Columbus on three additional trips to America, while Vasco da Gama and other Portuguese explorers followed the route around Africa to India (1498), China (1513), Japan (1543) and Oceania (1522). Portugal built its empire in Brazil and established large areas of dominance in Africa and Asia; Spain controlled the rest of America. Only later did other European nations begin to compete with the Iberians in North America.

### The Influence of Henry the Navigator

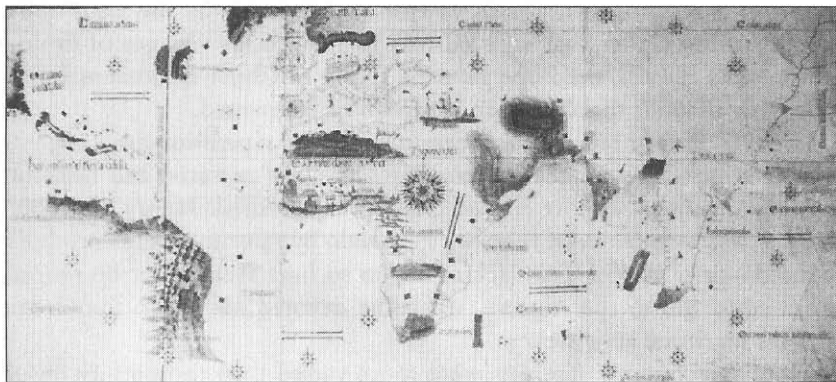
ALTHOUGH THE DISCOVERIES were not the work of one man or even one nation, Portugal's dominance in a formative role is not even debatable. And among the Portuguese, no figure approaches the preeminence of the Infante (Prince) Henry, the founding father of the discoveries. Essentially a man of the Middle Ages, Henry also was one of the main agents in the establishment of the modern era. To his contemporaries, he was known as "he who first revealed seas and lands, which he traced on charts."

The fourth child of King João I and Queen Philippa, daughter of the Duke of Lancaster, Henry was born in Oporto on March 4, 1394, and died in Sagres on November 13, 1460. He was knighted in 1415 after the conquest of the Moroccan city of Ceuta, where he was put in charge of the city's defense and helped lift the Moorish siege in 1418.

After the discovery of the Atlantic islands of Porto Santo and Madeira in 1419 and 1420, Henry took charge of their colonization. In 1433 his older brother, King Duarte, gave him the islands, and in 1439 by virtue of a letter from another brother, the Regent Dom Pedro, he was



In 1898 Portugal issued a 1,000-reis coin (shown), as well as 200- and 500-reis pieces, to mark the 400th anniversary of the discovery of India by Vasco da Gama.



A world map produced in 1502 shows the treaty line running north and south through Brazil.



Portuguese 200-escudo commemorative coins issued in 1994 represent the importance of Portugal's role in the "Age of Discovery." Two pieces depict Prince Henry the Navigator and King João (John) II (top left and right); two coins recall the signing of the Treaty of Tordesilhas and the resulting Spanish and Portuguese zones of influence (bottom left and right).

charged with the colonization of the Azores, which had been discovered in 1427.

Beginning in the early 1420s, voyages ordered and controlled by the prince initiated a systematic and continuous exploration of Africa's west coast. An early landmark was the 1434 voyage of Henry's squire, Gil Eanes, around Cape Bojador, overcoming the "barrier of fear" and opening the area south of the Canaries to exploration.

Henry established his "Vila do Infante" (Prince's Town) near Sagres on Portugal's Algarve coast in 1433. The Regent Dom Pedro granted him the rights of navigation, war and trade south of Cape Bojador. Henry also was a Master of the chivalric Order of Christ (1417) and became its governor and administrator in 1420. It was the enormous wealth of the Order that enabled him to finance his voyages of exploration. As a reward, the Pope gave the Order of Christ spiritual jurisdiction over all lands that had been or would be discovered.

In 1437 Henry led an unsuccessful military expedition to Tangier, during which his younger brother Fernando was captured and held for ransom until the seaport city of Ceuta was returned. Henry's brother Duarte was torn between rescuing Fernando by ransom—as his brothers wanted—or by force. This lack of action so hurt Henry that he retired from court life to the Algarve, where he devoted his life to the Order and his maritime activities.

Henry's economic interests were more varied than those of a typical



HE WAS A dynamic entrepreneur . . . Besides owning ships, he also had them built, using innovative shipyard concepts and sailing techniques.

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medieval property owner. He was a dynamic entrepreneur who took advantage of his social position to expand his business ventures. Besides owning ships, he also had them built, using innovative shipyard concepts and sailing techniques. The caravel was the Atlantic shuttle of the era. This and other ships developed by Henry's craftsmen helped man sail with confidence on the open ocean for the first time. The caravel had two or three masts and lateen sails, which enabled it to tack. Its shallow draught made it the ideal vessel for sailing close to shore and up the wide rivers of Africa.

There never was an actual "school" of navigation at Sagres. The opportunities and challenges that were presented and solved there resulted from obstacles and problems encountered on distant voyages. These were overcome by "knowledge born on experience." Winds and currents far off the coast in the Atlantic were conquered by creating the science of astronomic navigation. To pinpoint positions at sea, the quadrant and astrolabe were adapted to calculate latitude. With Henry ordering the charting of all discovered lands, phenomenal advances were made in the field of cartography.

Around 1505 one of the great Portuguese figures of the 15th century, Duarte Pacheco Pereira, wrote his recollections of Prince Henry in *Esmeraldo de situ orbis*:

. . . on the Cape St. Vincent, which was formerly called Sacro Promontorio, the Infante built his town of Teça Naval, overlooking the bay of Sagres, and it stands there today, it was where he took refuge, with his household, from the fatigue and wickedness of the world. He always lived virtuously and chastely and never knew a woman, drank wine, nor was ever found with any other vice . . .

The contemporary chronicler Zurara (1420?-74?) summed up the factors that drove Prince Henry to exploration. The first was curiosity about what lay beyond the unknown. Henry's determination was attributed to the belief that "if he or any other lord did not take the trouble to find out, mariners and merchants never would . . . and seeing that no other lord was interested in these things, he sent his ships to those parts to find out for sure what was there."

Henry also was driven by economics—a desire to establish lasting commercial links. Trade was an incentive



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## The Portuguese State Mint

Minting of coins in Portugal always has been an exclusive privilege of kings and the state. In ancient times, Romans, Swabians, Visigoths and Arabs produced coinage in areas that are part of modern-day Portugal.

The origins of the Lisbon Mint can be traced to the very beginning of the Portuguese nationality (A.D. 1139). The Casa da Moeda (Lisbon Mint) was established in the 12th century as the Royal Mint of Portugal and Assay Office for precious metals. The Mint has been a publicly owned company since 1972, when it merged with the Imprensa Nacional (Government Printing Office), founded in 1768 as The Royal Printing House.

Today, the Portuguese State Mint produces and markets a wide range of products, including bank notes, security papers, passports, credit cards, bonds and shares, official journals of the Portuguese government, books, circulating coins, medallions, gambling tokens and collectors coins.

Collectors in North America can learn more about Portugal's "Coins of Discovery" series and other issues by writing to Portuguese State Mint, P.O. Box 1057, Clifton, NJ 07014, telephone 800/421-1866.



Recent Portuguese State Mint releases include 40mm silver and 80mm bronze medallions commemorating the 1994 Cutty Sark Tall Ships' Race/Prince Henry Memorial Regatta.

that fed his curiosity. His reasoning was explained by Zurara:

He thought that, finding a Christian community or ports in those parts where we could sail without danger, a lot of merchandise could be brought to these kingdoms very cheaply, as they do not trade with anyone from these parts nor with anyone else as far as is known; and they would also take what we have in our kingdom and the traffic would bring great benefit to the natives.

Zurara also described the strategic and military importance of exploration to the fight against the Moors. The Prince needed to "know how far the power of those infidels stretched." He also sought other Christian kingdoms, perhaps in Africa, with which he could join to form anti-Moor alliances.

Religion drove Prince Henry in other directions as well. Exploration would allow him to spread Christianity to other peoples.

By the time of Henry's death in 1460, his ships had ranged as far south as Sierra Leone. The groundwork was completed for Portugal and its European followers to expand overseas. As Professor George D. Winus wrote in 1977, "No other name has the importance of Henry's in the history of the world's greatest exploring nation—Portugal."

Director of the Portuguese State Mint, **António Miguel Trigueiros** created Portugal's "Coins of Discovery" program (1987-2001) to bring a new cultural and historical dimension to commemoratives. An established author, he has published more than 50 numismatic articles and books and was awarded the International Association of Professional Numismatists (IAPN) 1992 second-place book prize for *PORTUGUESE COINS IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERY, 1385-1580*. Trigueiros has shared his knowledge and enthusiasm for Portuguese numismatic history through *THE NUMISMATIST* ("Portuguese Coins in the Age of Discovery," November 1991) and *Numismatic Theatre*.

Along with his brother, Ira, **Arthur Friedberg** operates The Coin and Currency Institute in Clifton, New Jersey. The Friedbergs have compiled and edited a variety of popular references, including *PAPER MONEY OF THE UNITED STATES* and *GOLD COINS OF THE WORLD*, which won the 1992 first-place IAPN book prize. Arthur received the first-place Heath Literary Award for "Money and Trade in New Netherland," published in the June 1993 issue of *THE NUMISMATIST*.