

Portugal and the Curse of Cain: The Birth of the Transatlantic Slave “Trade”, 1421-1441

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This article investigates the role of Portugal in the birth of the transatlantic slave trade. For a long time, most explanations of this traffic by American historians divorced the so-called “Old World” slave trade from the New World slave trade. This historiography blamed Christopher Columbus for the latter trade, while writing Portugal out of Atlantic history. Recent research, however, has shown that Portugal was the first country to claim the governance of the Atlantic Ocean and to trade in African slaves across the Atlantic. In an attempt to bring a much-needed African perspective to balance this Eurocentric debate, I question the notion of “trade” in the transatlantic slave trade. I suggest that this “trade” originated not in commerce, but in the Portuguese, pioneer role as slave raiders on the coast of Western Africa, a role spuriously justified by an invented Curse of Cain. The Pope confirmed this role with a bull granting Portugal exclusive rights to capture African slaves and trade them in Europe. This neglected original slave-raiding chapter is the precedent without which the transatlantic slave trade is dangerously misunderstood.

Keywords: Portugal, first transatlantic African slaves, Curse of Cain, transatlantic slave trade, Adahu

This article investigates the role of Portugal in the birth of the transatlantic slave trade—the how, not the why. It is not interested in the causation of this role, for “Causation in history is always multiple, and to single out any one antecedent as a fundamental cause is a highly subjective operation” (Schuyler, 1959, p. 329). Some historians asked, “Why did Europeans take Africans all the way across the Atlantic to use in America?” (Schuyler, 1959, p. 154). This paper is rather interested in how the transatlantic slave trade began. How did Africans come to be enslaved? Did this episode begin with Europeans purchasing (trading) slaves from West Africa? This article asks this question because of how trade is understood. Trade is generally defined as “[t]he action of buying and selling goods and services”.¹ Pomeranz and Topik (1999) took this view when they wrote about “Africans *purchased* as slaves in the interior of Africa...” (p. 3, emphasis added). Did the transatlantic slavery begin as a “trade”?

Since the dawn of economic history, most Western historians have focused on trade as commerce. In his foreword to Pomeranz and Topik’s *The World that Trade Created*, Kevin Reilly highlighted this school of thought, which characterized his generation—historians trying to break free from the grip of Arnold Toynbee’s study of cultures and civilizations: “For my generation, William H. McNeill’s *The Rise of the West* (1963) showed what a genuine history of humanity could contemplate: trade and tools, mechanical invention, and

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¹ See <https://www.lexico.com/definition/trade>; Internet source; accessed on February 10, 2021.

popular migration, in short the economic activity of the many and unremarkable” (Reilly, 1963, as cited in Pomeranz & Topik, 1999, p. xi).

Historians of this generation of economic history include Hugh Thomas, whose *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870* was hailed by Robert B. Edgerton of the *National Review* as “having given us the most comprehensive account of the Atlantic slave trade ever written”. A closer look at Thomas’s story of the Atlantic slave trade, however, reveals that it started in 1444 with Lançarote de Freitas whom Thomas called “now captain of a newly formed company for trade to Africa”. Thomas (1997) made the choice of Lançarote’s 235 slaves as the origin of the Atlantic slave trade even though, as he put it, these slaves came from “Arguin whence [they] were stolen” (pp. 22-23). How did this practice of stealing slaves start? Did Lançarote steal his slaves in a trade as generally understood? When did the Portuguese begin stealing slaves on the coast of West Africa? How did Portugal secure its first papal bull, *illius qui se*, from Pope Eugenius IV on December 19, 1442, shortly after the Portuguese mariners brought back the first African slaves to Portugal? What is the legacy of this bull in the transatlantic slave trade? (Beazley, 1910, pp. 11-23, 15-16, Footnote 9)²

The attitude of Christopher Columbus when he returned from his first voyage to America seems to suggest that the Portuguese used this bull to claim the Atlantic Ocean for themselves (Herzog, 2015). Before he arrived in Spain on whose behalf he had taken the voyage, Columbus stopped at the court of the king of Portugal, who had summoned him for an interrogation which took place on March 10, 1493: “In that interview, Columbus learned that the king intended to lay claim to the whole of the supposed Indies and adjacent sea in virtue of Bulls issued at various dates from 1443 to 1484...” (Dawson, 1899, p. 492; Herzog, 2015, p. 135).³

After this meeting, Columbus informed Spain of Portugal’s intent. Spain rushed to secure a papal bull (Treaty of Tordesillas, 1493, 1494) that confirmed its possession of the newly discovered lands (Dawson, 1899; Herzog, 2015). In this process, “The Spanish envoys were instructed to inform the Pope that the discoveries had been made without encroaching on the possessions confirmed to Portugal” (Dawson, 1899, p. 493). After the Spanish successfully challenged Portugal’s claim to the Atlantic, Philip Steinberg (1999) noted, “The bull and the treaty frequently are characterized as dividing the oceans of the world between Spain and Portugal” (p. 255).

While the Spanish acknowledged the preexistence and primacy of Portugal’s claim to the Atlantic, Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius rejected this claim in 1608. He wrote,

The Portuguese claim as their own the whole expanse of the sea which separates two parts of the world so far distant the one from the other, that in all the preceding centuries neither one has so much as heard of the other. Indeed, if we take into account the share of the Spaniards, whose claim is the same as that of the Portuguese, only a little less than the whole ocean is found to be subject to two nations, while all the rest of the peoples in the world are restricted to the narrow bounds of the northern seas. (Grotius, 1608/1916, pp. 37-38, as cited in Steinberg, 1999, pp. 255-256)

The effects of Grotius’s argument on European disputes over the governance of the Atlantic Ocean are monumental. “Few works of such brevity can have caused arguments of such global extent and striking longevity as Hugo Grotius’s *Mare Liberum (The Free Sea)*” (p. xi), David Armitage (2004) wrote. As a result of Grotius’s influence, many European thinkers ignored the source of legitimacy for the Portuguese claim, lest

² See also “Nicholas V, in 1452, by the bull *Dum diversas* authorizes the King of Portugal to make war upon the infidels, to conquer their lands, and to enslave their persons” (Beazley, 1910, p. 16); Witte (1953; 1954; 1956; 1958).

³ Note that the first papal bull to Portugal was in 1442, not 1443 as this book says; still, its general point about Columbus’s visit to Portugal is correct.

they legitimized it. In the early 1960s, Belgian historian Charles Verlinden (1966) followed Grotius and gave credit to everyone but Portugal for “the origins of the Atlantic civilization” (pp. 13-16). As the “leading authority on medieval slavery” (Evans, 1980, p. 38), scholars followed his lead in searching for the point at which European slavery reached “what he called its ‘Negro’ period” (Verlinden, 1966, pp. 335-443, as cited in Evans, 1980, p. 38).

At that time, no one in the United States had yet discovered the role of Portugal in the origins of the transatlantic slave trade. In 1966, Yale historian David Brion Davis (1966), whose explanation of the transatlantic slave trade dominated the literature in the 1960s, argued that it was “the discoverer of America who initiated the transatlantic slave trade, which moved originally from west to east” (p. 8).⁴

In 1995, however, George Davison Winius and a group of American historians rejected this argument. They placed Portugal at the center of the transatlantic slave trade “to show how fundamental the Portuguese have been in creating the world as we know it” (Winius, 1995, p. vii). They lamented “that the more recent European traditions of overseas exploration and colonization by larger powers, namely the English, French and Spanish, simply elbow[ed] [Portugal] out of the way”. They speculated that, “[I]n the United States, ignorance of Portugal’s contribution to world history [was] probably due to the early school curricula, which beg[an] history with Columbus and the Pilgrims”. In their view, ignorance about Portugal’s role in transatlantic history was also attributable “to the university patterns dating from prior to World War I, which feature[d] the ‘big’ cultures—England, France, and Germany”. “These [big cultures] have tended to dominate our vision to this day, and in effect, to blot out other pictures which should have an equal place” (Winius, 1995, p. vii), they concluded.

While this debate over the origin of the transatlantic slave trade was still not settled, a sub-debate developed around the ideological justification of the trade. In 1968, Winthrop Jordan blamed the British for the association of blackness with evil and whiteness with good. Before long, the Curse of Ham was identified as the linchpin to this racial ideology in British America.⁵ Davis, however, was skeptical. In 1986, he wrote quite peremptorily that he was “convinced that the “Hamithic myth” played a relatively minor role in justifying Black slavery until the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Davis, 1984, p. 337, Footnote 144). In 1998, Eugene Genovese agreed and insisted that Southern slaveholders did “not rest their case on it” (as cited in Whitford, 2009, p. 2; Genovese, 1998).

African-American historians took interest in the original rationalization of the transatlantic slave trade as well. The first scholar to ask this question was W. E. B. Dubois, even though he missed the Curse of Ham and Portugal in his account (Franklin, 1969). Portugal is still absent in the African-American conversations about the origins of the transatlantic slave trade. In a recent Op-Ed, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (2010) wrote about the “slavery blame-game”, and asked: “How did slaves make it to these coastal forts?” His answer was: “The historians John Thornton and Linda Heywood of Boston University estimate that 90 percent of those shipped to the New World were enslaved by Africans and then sold to European traders”.

Before Gates attempted to end the slavery blame-game, one must recall that this “game” started in the 1990s when some historians blamed ancient Jews for America’s “peculiar institution”. According to Reuven

⁴ This book won the Pulitzer prize in 1967. According to University of Maryland Professor Ira Berlin, “No scholar has played a larger role in expanding contemporary understanding of how slavery shaped the history of the United States, the Americas and the world than David Brion Davis” (as cited in Goodman, 2006).

⁵ Alden T. Vaughan (1995) reviewed the relevant literature addressing the theological root of American racism (p. 6).

Firestone of Hebrew Union College, a public and scholarly debate started in the West in the late 1990s to that effect (Firestone, 2006; Evans, 1980). In 1997, Benjamin Braude (1997) attempted to calm this debate by focusing on how the meaning of the Curse of Ham changed over time, including when the Portuguese adapted it to Blacks across the Atlantic. In the words of Firestone (2006), “[David] Goldenberg wrote the book [he was reviewing] in response to the accusation of the Jewish origin of Western racism” (p. 884).

Goldenberg certainly wrote that he published *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* in 2003 because “of recent writings by scholars and nonscholars alike who have concluded that there is indeed an underlying anti-Black sentiment in early Jewish society” (p. 4). “Was Jewish antiquity where anti-Black attitudes originated and became fixed in Western civilization?” (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 1) he asked. The purpose of his study, he said, was to explain how the story of Noah cursing the descendants of his son, Ham, with slavery (Gen. 9:18-25, RSV) “became the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years” given that “there is no reference to Blacks in it at all” (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 1). How and why did “this strange interpretation of the biblical text t[ake] hold” in the West? (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 1). His method to answer this question was

by looking at the larger picture, that is, by uncovering just how Blacks were perceived by those people for whom the Bible was a central text. What did the early Jews, Christians, and Muslims see when they looked at the Black African? (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 4)

The impact of the book was immediate. Davis, mentioned at the top of this article, praised the work as “stunning”; he said it went “far beyond anyone else in offering the most comprehensive, convincing, and important analysis”, and “yield[ed] almost definitive answers to many longstanding debates over early attitudes toward dark skin”.⁶ Desmond Tutu, a well-known South African archbishop, praised it as a “masterly book ... With erudite scholarship”.⁷ Thus, Goldenberg had triply served his cause as a Jewish scholar, responding to a Western speculation about Jewish racism, while teaching in Africa—as the Isidore and Theresa Cohen Chair of Jewish Religion and Thought at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

Of great interest to me is the fact that Goldenberg (2003) sought to “uncover that point in time when blackness and slavery were first joined” (pp. 3-4). It was therefore a great corrective to the Ancient—Jews—blaming historiography to read Goldenberg’s affirmation without hesitation that the first explicit link between blackness and biblical slavery appeared in Near Eastern sources as the Curse of Ham beginning in the seventh century; and that there is no earlier link between this curse, blackness, and slavery in the Jewish sources of antiquity, late antiquity, or in early Christian sources (Goldenberg, 2003).

It was even more comforting me as African historian that he wrote emphatically:

The Curse of Ham, in its various forms, became a very powerful tool for maintaining the existing order in society. Its importance for explaining, and thus justifying, the enslavement of Blacks cannot be underestimated. We can clearly see the close relationship between social order and biblical justification by tracking the appearance of the Curse. *We note first appearance in the Christian West as soon as Europe discovered Black Africa and began to engage in the slave trade of its inhabitants. In fifteenth-century Portugal, Gomes Eannes de Zurara wrote about Black African slaves he had seen: These Blacks were Moors like the others, though their slaves, in accordance with ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of the curse, which after the deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain [read: Cham], cursing him in this way: that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world.* (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 175, emphasis added)

⁶ David Brion Davis, Cover endorsement, *The Curse of Ham*, by Goldenberg.

⁷ Desmond Tutu, Cover endorsement, *The Curse of Ham*, by Goldenberg.

This is an important finding in light of James A. Rawley and Stephen D. Behrendt's (2009) recent echo of Davis's 1960's argument that the Portuguese trade was an Old World slave trade, and that it was Columbus who introduced the New World slave trade. American historiography cannot afford to continue divorcing this so-called "Old World" slave trade from a New World slave trade, especially because of the weight that the United States represents in public opinion around the world. Africans and African-Americans cannot afford this separation either. The historiographical narrative of Africans selling Africans is an added risk to their already distorted histories. Finally, the dangers of a misguided history of the transatlantic slave trade to peace, development, and interracial progress, indeed, are inestimable in the United States and around the world.

In an attempt to enter this Eurocentric debate from an African perspective, that is, from the perspective of those Africans who featured in this inhuman traffic as captives or participants, this article argues that a detailed account of the Portuguese encounter with Africans is needed to reveal definitively that Portugal's enslavement of Africans and its invention of the theological justification of African slavery do not belong to a so-called "Old World Slavery", but are the foundations of the New World slave trade. Portugal was the instigator of this transatlantic slave trade, a fact which Winius and his colleagues in 1995 and Goldenberg in 2003 started to establish, albeit tangentially.

This article will prove this argument by attempting first to sift through the dates that Western scholars have proposed as the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade in order to understand where the Western debate stands in terms of the beginning of this trade. Second, the article will try to follow the thinking of the Portuguese in their own words for the purpose of assessing it before and after they enslaved the first Africans. Critical attention will be paid to the determinist Portuguese narrative style. As Professor Schuyler (1959) once explained,

In what have been called the great ages of religious faith, when theology was the acknowledged "Queen of Sciences" and history was written by churchmen, past events were viewed as having taken place under an overruling, supernatural and anthropomorphic Providence. (Schuyler, 1959, p. 321)

In that sense, this article is pursuing the how of the Portuguese thought process, with an eye for "contingency", not for the why, causes, or "fundamental cause" of the Portuguese slave raider mindset.⁸ Third, the paper will describe in greater detail than has ever been provided how Portugal captured the first Africans by chance, and how the Portuguese consciously proceeded to invent a theological ideology of the Curse of Cain (confused as the Curse of Ham or vice versa) to formalize their slave trade. Finally, this article explains how Portugal set the precedent that other European countries would uncritically follow.

Dates Used for the Beginning of the Transatlantic Slave "Trade"

As mentioned earlier, in 1966, renowned Yale historian of Western slavery Davis pointed to Columbus as the father of the transatlantic slave trade. In 2005, Harvard's own Bernard Bailyn (2005) supported this view when he defined "Atlantic history" as a subject that covers "the first encounters of Europeans with the Western Hemisphere through the Revolutionary era" (p. 3). A second explanation of the Atlantic slave trade was offered in the 1990s by John Thornton, who pointed to Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic world. He asked at that time: "Did Africans participate in the Atlantic [slave] trade as equal partners, or were they the

⁸ "The historian ought, I submit, to banish 'fundamental' causes from his thought and from his vocabulary" (Schuyler, 1959, p. 330).

victims of European power and greed?” (Thornton, 1992, p. 6). This trend continues to this day with Rebecca Shumway, who published in 2011 a book titled *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, followed by Randy J. Sparks who in 2014 published the book *Where the Negroes are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade*. Together, the first and second explanations commit the same academic sin of missing the originator of the transatlantic slave trade whose ideology and practice were emulated by everyone in the Atlantic.

Fortunately, a third explanation of the origin of the transatlantic slave trade appeared in 2005; it was offered by James Rawley and Stephen Behrendt (2009) who insisted, “It was the Portuguese who first opened the Atlantic Ocean, started the Atlantic slave trade, and established the first European overseas empire” (p. 18). In 2009, Jack Greene and Philip Morgan (2009) similarly attributed the responsibility for starting the Atlantic slave trade to the Portuguese in 1444. They wrote in no uncertain terms:

If one wanted to pick a year when Atlantic history of the early modern era began (admittedly a highly arbitrary way to proceed), a good case could be made that it should be 1415, with the Portuguese capture of Ceuta in North Africa, or perhaps 1444, when the Atlantic slave trade began, rather than 1492. (p. 20)

Greene and Morgan were the first Westerners to admit that picking a year for the beginning of the early modern Atlantic history is arbitrary. Still, they excluded 1492 as a possible year for this beginning. Between the two options (1415 and 1444) they retained for the possible starting point of this history, they privileged the latter:

The slave trade, though centuries old in the Mediterranean world, at first was not an object of Henry’s interest. But in 1444 the caravels of Lançarote and Gil Eannes brought 235 slaves of varying hues to Lagos, presenting the royal fifth of the prince, who said he was well pleased. The era of the Atlantic slave trade had begun. (Rawley & Behrendt, 2009, p. 19)

As this quote demonstrates, for Greene and Morgan, the transatlantic slave trade started when Prince Henry explicitly showed interest in African slaves by giving a license to Lançarote in 1444 to capture slaves in Africa for the sake of his private profit and that of Lançarote.

This rationale for the selection of 1444 is pertinent. However, it ignores some crucial information about the Portuguese expeditions to sub-Saharan Africa before 1444, which, if considered, could help make the case for a different date when the transatlantic slave trade began. To account for this information, we have to ask when and how did the Portuguese pioneer the transatlantic slave trade? In other words, did the Portuguese mariner Lançarote start this traffic, and how? Rawley and Behrendt do not ask these questions. Instead, they wonder: “why were the Portuguese the pioneers [in the transatlantic slave trade]?” (Rawley & Behrendt, 2009, p. 18). In their view, the Portuguese initiated this trade because “Portugal was the first nation-state” (p. 18). For them, this unified monarchy of Portugal “provided the political structure essential to the future’s accomplishments” (p. 18), and to the extent that Prince Henry personified this political structure, his leadership launched the transatlantic slave trade:

In Prince Henry the ruling house of Avis boasted a member who personified much of the spirit at work in the first half of the century. From 1415 to his death in 1460 he was the major figure in the inauguration of the Atlantic slave trade. (Rawley & Behrendt, 2009, p. 19)

I agree with this assessment of Henry’s role in the inauguration of the Atlantic slave trade. I also concur that,

In undertaking the great voyages of discovery, Henry and his countrymen appear to have been animated by a zeal against Muslims, a greed for gold, the quest for the legendary kingdom of Prester John, and the search for Oriental spices. (Rawley & Behrendt, 2009)⁹

However, the first “countrymen” to show zeal in Henry’s voyages of discovery were not Lançarote and his crew in 1444. Rather, they were Antam Gonçalves and Nuno Tristam, and they made the first zealous capture of African slaves in 1441. Why, then, is 1441 not among the dates that Greene and Morgan listed for the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade? As we have seen, these authors selected 1444 because it is the year when Henry consciously awarded a license to Lançarote exclusively for the capture of slaves in Africa. However, what led to this decision?

This article suggests that the precedent to Lançarote’s voyage is Gonçalves and Tristam’s zealous capture of the first African slaves in 1441; therefore, this year should represent the beginning date for the transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, these mariners made their capture that year while on Prince Henry’s mission to search for the land beyond Cape Bojador. Upon their return to Portugal, Gonçalves claimed that one of the slaves he brought was a nobleman who promised other slaves in exchange for his freedom. Gonçalves also explained that he had the right to collect this ransom because the biblical Curse of Cain supposedly said that Blacks should be slaves to whites. Based on this reasoning, Henry received the blessing of the pope for all the slaves he could bring to Christianity. He also received from the king of Portugal a charter giving him not just the exclusive right to issue licenses of exploration in Africa but also one-fifth of all booty brought from there.

Gonçalves then went to make the first slave ransom in 1442, for which he received a great reward. Tristam made the second slave ransom in 1443 for a handsome reward as well. After Tristam reported that he had captured these slaves easily and quickly in West Africa, Lançarote, as a private citizen in Lagos, then applied for and received a license from Henry with the exclusive mission to raid slaves in that region. That year he and his crew brought 235 slaves back to Portugal. The public apportionment of these slaves consolidated the position of Henry as the father of the transatlantic slave trade. However, the roles of Gonçalves and Tristam cannot be occulted.

This article thus argues that Gonçalves and Tristam’s missions to discover the land beyond Cape Bojador in 1441 were the precursor to Lançarote’s mission to capture slaves in 1444. They inspired Lançarote’s expedition and subsequent European slave raids in West Africa by providing the “Black slave” ideology, the biblical Curse of Cain, to justify this enterprise. Gonçalves and Tristam’s missions also served as models for potential rewards that Black slave raiders, such as Lançarote and others, stood to gain in the Atlantic. In that sense, Lançarote did not start this slave—ransom—reward system, known today as the transatlantic slave trade; rather, he only consolidated it. Therefore, 1441—not 1444—should be selected as the date when the transatlantic slave trade began. This article will further build this case in the following section by describing the Portuguese thinking before they captured the first African slaves that year. This description will provide a good context for the reader to understand the shift in thinking that occurred in Portugal after this capture, moving from the ideology grounded in the biblical Curse of Cain to the transatlantic slave trade—which we propose be questioned as a “trade”.

⁹ Indeed, the only official Portuguese Chronicler of Prince Henry’s expeditions to Africa, Gomes Eannes de Azurara, explained that Henry wished to know the land beyond Cape Bojador because “... he was stirred up by his zeal for the service of God and of the King Edward his Lord and brother, who then reigned” (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 27-28).

Identifying Portuguese Thinking Before Their Chance Capture of the First African Slaves in the Atlantic

In 1421, after taking Ceuta in 1415, Prince Henry of Portugal launched his first expedition to search for the land beyond the Canary Islands and Cape Bojador. Before his time, no one had ever written with certainty about the nature of that land (de Azurara, 1963). Thus, in 1421, he sent out several expeditions of men experienced in war, “yet there was not one who dared to pass that Cape of Bojador and learn about the land beyond it, as the Infant wished” (pp. 30-33). Each time, the Portuguese mariners succumbed to fear, deterred by ancient myths spread by Spanish mariners about the deadly Cape Bojador:

How are we, the men said, to pass the bounds that our fathers set up, or what profit can result to the Infant from the perdition of our souls as well as of our bodies—for of a truth by daring any further we shall become willful murderers of ourselves? Have there not been in Spain other princes and lords as covetous perchance of this honour as the Infant? (p. 31)

These men were also reluctant to sacrifice their lives because they believed that there was neither land nor people beyond the Cape (de Azurara, 1963). Still, Henry continued to urge them to pass the Cape, each time promising greater rewards and gerçons to the same or different men as he sent them back to search again (de Azurara, 1963). After 12 years of persistence, one of his squires, Gil Eannes, was the first to reach the Canary Islands in 1433. Struck by the selfsame terror, however, Eannes returned to Portugal with only “some captives” (p. 33). However, we cannot date the transatlantic slave trade to 1433 because the chronicler of the Portuguese expeditions, de Azurara, gave no further details about these captives.

At this point, it would be useful to keep track of the chronology of Henry’s expeditions to search for Africa. According to Edgar Prestage (1933), a letter from King Affonso V in 1443 stated that Henry sent out expeditions 14 times before he received news of land beyond the Cape. De Azurara does not give an accurate count of them, but he describes the expedition that Henry sent before the one that discovered land beyond the Cape. It was the voyage conducted by Gil Eannes in the Canary Islands in 1433. Matching this account with King Affonso’s letter, we can state that Eannes’s expedition in 1433 was Henry’s 14th expedition to Africa.

Henry launched his 15th expedition to Africa in 1434, again placing Eannes in charge. He asked him “to strain every nerve to pass that Cape, and even if he could do nothing else on that voyage, yet he should consider that to be enough” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 33). Eannes successfully “doubled the Cape, despising all danger, and found the lands beyond quite contrary to what he, like others had expected” (p. 33). In short, Eannes became the first man to discover sub-Saharan Africa in 1434, during Prince Henry’s 15th expedition to search for the land beyond Cape Bojador. However, he did not find people or signs of habitation on that voyage. As a result, he only brought roses of Saint Mary from the land and presented them to Henry (de Azurara, 1963).

Encouraged by the news that there was land beyond the Cape, Henry launched his 16th expedition to the unascertained land that year. He readied a ship, in which he sent out his cupbearer, Affonso Gonçalves Baldaya, to accompany Eannes. Together, they passed

fifty leagues beyond the Cape, where they found the land without dwellings, but shewing footmarks of men and camels. And then, either because they were so ordered, or from necessity, they returned with this intelligence, without doing aught else worth recording. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 34)

Hearing this news, Henry informed Baldaya that he intended to send them back. “As you have found traces of men and camels, it is evident that the inhabited region cannot be far off”, he said. “Or perchance”, he added,

they are people who cross with their merchandise to some seaport with a secure anchorage for ships to load in, for since there are people, they must of necessity depend upon what the sea brings them, and especially upon fish, however bestial they may be. Much more so the inland tribes. Therefore, I intend to send you there again, in that same “barinel”, both that you may do me service and increase your honour, and to this end I order you to go as far as you can and try to gain an interpreter from among those people, capturing someone from whom you can obtain some tidings of the land—for according to my purpose, it will not be a small gain if we can get someone to give us news of this sort. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 34)

Henry’s first order to capture some people who lived beyond Cape Bojador was, therefore, issued in 1434 to Eannes and Baldaya during his 17th expedition to search for the land beyond Cape Bojador.

The expedition departed “with great desire to do the Infant’s will” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 35). They passed 70 leagues beyond where they had been before, that is, 120 leagues beyond the Cape of Bojador and found an estuary in which they anchored securely (de Azurara, 1963). Once on land, Baldaya mounted two youths he had brought along on two horses from his boat. He ordered these 17-year-old boys to ride up the country as far as they could, looking for signs of villages or people traveling by some path (de Azurara, 1963). With only lances and swords, the boys went on their mission into the unknown. Seven leagues from their anchorage, “they found nineteen men all banded together without any other arms of offence or defence, but only assegais” (pp. 36-37). They bravely attacked the men, but failed to capture any of them, only bringing back to the ship belongings that the men had left behind in their flight (de Azurara, 1963).

At this point, we can affirm that Eannes and Baldaya were in Black Africa because de Azurara said that these “Moors”, as he called the people the boys found, were “of colour [Black] and features so foreign to” the boys (de Azurara, 1963, p. 37; da Costa, 1985, p. 46).¹⁰ Thus, not satisfied with the boys’ loot (as his mission was to capture one of these people), Baldaya sailed fifty leagues further “to see if he could make captive some man, woman, or child, by which to satisfy the will of his Lord [Henry]” (p. 38). At the Port of the Galley, he gathered his crewmembers and this time went on land with them. They found some nets on shore and took them on board (de Azurara, 1963). The craftsmanship in these nets was impressive to them, the thread being made “of the barks of a tree, so well fitted for such a use that without any other tanning or admixture of flax, it could be woven right excellently, and nets made of it, with all other cordage” (p. 38). They loaded this loot without being able to ascertain the identity or lifestyle of the owners of the nets and returned to Portugal in 1436 (de Azurara, 1963). This was the end of Prince Henry’s 17th mission. It lasted two years, from 1434 to 1436.

The search for the land beyond Cape Bojador continued with an 18th expedition in 1437. De Azurara (1963) found nothing noteworthy to record about it. Similarly, he said that he had nothing to report about the years between 1438 and 1440 because Prince Henry was preoccupied with the civil war for the succession of King Don Edward, and “there went no ships beyond that Cape” (p. 39). In the middle of the crisis, Henry attempted an “aborted voyage” during a 19th expedition to search for the lands beyond Cape Bojador in 1440 (p. 39). Success came, however, in 1441, when the internecine power struggle subsided. That year,

¹⁰ Although not implausible that some Europeans, such as these boys, never encountered a Black person (also explaining the need for the “educated” Portuguese class to invent a rationale for Black enslavement, as we show later), it is generally admitted that Black people existed in Europe through the Middle Ages. For further discussion of this topic, see Bindman, Gates Jr., & Dalton (2010); Sertima (1985); Debrunner (1974); Snowden (1971); da Mota (1960-1962); Brásio (1952).

Prince Henry sent out his twentieth expedition to search for Africa. This time, his chamberlain, Antam Gonçalves, conducted the excursing. The goal was to bring a cargo of oil and skins from seawolves (de Azurara, 1963).

Although Prince Henry had not expressly commanded Gonçalves to bring African captives in that 20th expedition, after accomplishing the chief part of his mission, he said to his crewmembers:

Friends and brethren! We have already got our cargo, as you perceive, by the which the chief part of our ordinance is accomplished, and we may well turn back, if we wish not to toil beyond that which was principally commanded of us; but I would know from all whether it seemeth to you well that we should attempt something further, that he who sent us here may have some example of our good will; for I think it would be shameful if we went back into his presence just as we are, having done such small service. And in truth I think we ought to labour the more strenuously to achieve something like this as it was the less laid upon us as a charge by the Infant our lord. O How fair a thing it would be if we, who have come to this land for a cargo of such petty merchandise, were to meet with the good luck to bring the first captives before the face of our Prince [...] And, if God grant us to encounter them, the very least part of our victory will be the capture one of them, with the which the Infant will feel no small content, getting knowledge by that means of what kind are the other dwellers of this land. And as to our reward, you can estimate what it will be by the great expenses and toil he has undertaken in years past, only for this end. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 40-41)

His crewmembers replied,

since you are our captain we must obey your orders, not as Antam Gonçalves but as our Lord; for you must understand that we who are here, of the Household of the Infant our lord, have both the will and desire to serve him, even to the laying down of our lives in the event of the last danger. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 40-41)

The night of his speech, Gonçalves chose nine men from his crew who seemed to him most fit and went out to hunt Africans. They hoped to capture “fourteen or fifteen of them, of whom we shall make a more profitable booty” (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 41-42), they said. “And returning towards the sea, when they had gone a short part of the way”, de Azurara (1963) reported,

they saw a naked man following a camel, with two assagais in his hand, and as our men pursued him there was not one who felt aught of his great fatigue. But though he was only one, and saw the other that they were many, yet he had a mind to prove those arms of his right worthily and began to defend himself as best he could, shewing a bolder front than his strength warranted. But Affonso Goterres wounded him with a javelin, and this put the Moor in such fear that he threw down his arms like a beaten thing. And after they had captured him, to their no small delight, and had gone on further, they espied on the top of a hill, the company whose tracks they were following, and their captive pertained to the number of these ... And as they were going on their way, they saw a Black Mooress come along (who was slave of those on the hill), and though some of our men were in favour of letting her pass to avoid a fresh skirmish, to which the enemy did not invite them—for, since they were in sight and their number more than double ours, they could not be of such faint hearts as to allow a chattel of theirs to be thus carried off—despite this, Antam Gonçalves bade them go at her ... following his will, they seized the Mooress. And those on the hill had a mind to come to the rescue, but when they perceived our people ready to receive them, they not only retreated to their former position, but departed elsewhere, turning their backs to their enemies. (pp. 42-43)

Thus, the first African slaves that the Portuguese captured in Africa were a Black man and a Black woman during Prince Henry’s 20th expedition to search for the land beyond Cape Bojador in 1441. Nine Portuguese servants commanded by Gonçalves captured these two Africans, thereby establishing the pattern that would dictate the terms of the future relations between Africa and Europe.

Not knowing that Gonçalves had captured some Africans, Henry sent another Portuguese mariner, Nuno Tristam, in 1442 on a 21st expedition

with the special command ... that he should pass beyond the Port of the Galley, as far as he could, and that he should bestir himself as well to capture some of the people of the country, as best he could. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 44-45)

Tristam was a youthful knight himself who had been brought up in Prince Henry's privy chamber (de Azurara, 1963). When he arrived at that very place where Gonçalves was and found that the latter had exceeded his expectations and captured two Africans, he was proud that they were both "natives of the same Kingdom, brought up in one and the self-same Kingdom and brought up in one and the self-same Court" (de Azurara, 1963, p. 45).

Tristam, prepared as he was, informed Gonçalves that he had brought with him an Arab servant to the Infant who, he proposed, should speak with those African captives to determine if they could understand his language (de Azurara, 1963). If they did, they would help the Portuguese garner information about their society (de Azurara, 1963). Thus, the Arab questioned them, but their language was foreign to him and no information was gathered (de Azurara, 1963). This failure caused Tristam to call for more captives. He said to his crewmembers:

How is it right that we should allow these men to go on their way back to Portugal, without first shewing them some part of our labour? Of a surety, I say to you, that as far as it concerneth me, I know I should receive disgrace, holding the order of knighthood as I do, if I gained here no booty richer than this, by which the Lord Infant may gain some first-fruits of a recompense for the great expense he has incurred. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 45-46)

To Gonçalves, he also said:

You, my friend Antam Gonçalves, are not ignorant of the will of the Infant our Lord, and you know that to execute this purpose of his he hath incurred many and great expenses, and yet up till now, for a space of fifteen years, he hath toiled in vain in this part of the world, never being able to arrive at any certainty as to the people of this land, under what law or lordship they do live. And although you are carrying off two captives, and by their means the Infant may come to know something about this folk, yet that doth not prevent what is still better, namely, for us to carry off many more; for, besides the knowledge which the Lord Infant will gain by their means, profit will also accrue to him by their service or ransom. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 46)

The following night, Tristam asked Gonçalves to choose 10 of his men, and they went hunting for Africans together (de Azurara, 1963). That night, they came face to face with Africans in two encampments. In the words of de Azurara (1963),

The distance between the encampments was but small, and our men divided themselves into three parties, in order that they might the better hit upon them. For they had not yet any certain knowledge of the place where they lay, but only a perception of them; as you see the like things are perceived much more readily by night than by day. And when our men had come nigh to them, they attacked them very lustily, shouting at the top of their voices, 'Portugal and Santiago,' the fright of which so abashed the enemy, that it threw them all in disorder [...] The men made some show of defending themselves with their assegais (for they knew not the use of any other weapon), especially one of them, who fought face to face with Nuno Tristam, defending himself till he received his death. And besides this one, whom Nuno Tristam slew by himself, the others killed three and took ten prisoners, what of men, women, and boys [*sic*]. (pp. 47-48)

Thus, Prince Henry's 21st expedition to search for the land beyond Cape Bojador in 1442 was the second expedition that included an express order to capture people who lived beyond Cape Bojador (as I already said, the first such order in our count was during Henry's 15th expedition with Eannes and Gonçalves Baldaya in 1434). In that 21st (but second slave) expedition, 10 slaves were captured, including, for the first time, African children. This 21st expedition was also the first deadly expedition for Africans, with four dead—a death toll of

about approximately 28 percent.¹¹ In praise of Tristam as the precursor to such slave conquests, de Azurara said (1963):

For that the Philosopher saith, that the beginning is two parts of the whole, we ought to give great praise to this noble youth, for this deed of his, undertaken with so much boldness; for since he was the first who made booty in this conquest, he deserveth advantage over and above all others who in after time travailed in this matter. (p. 44)

As this quote shows, de Azurara was mindful to establish Gonçálvez and Tristam (“the beginning is two parts of the whole”) as the pioneers of the African slave trade who “deserveth advantage over and above all others who in after time travailed in this matter” (p. 44).

In short, the capture of the first African slaves was the result, as Tristam put it in his speech to Gonçálvez, of Prince Henry striving for 15 years “to arrive at any certainty as to the people of this land [beyond Cape Bojador], under what law or lordship they do live” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 46). However, Gonçálvez struck the first blow to Africa and Tristam, the second one, in the history of the transatlantic slave trade. Both men acted out of zeal to serve Henry and therefore must be recognized as the “countrymen” who allowed Henry to become the father of this traffic in 1441. Now that we know the Portuguese thinking before they captured the first Africans, we need to document how this capture led to the invention of the Portuguese ideology of biblical curses to enslave Blacks.

The Portuguese Capture of the First African Slaves and the Premeditated Invention of the Curse of Cain Ideology

As we have seen, Prince Henry’s mariners discovered Black Africa because Henry desired to know the land beyond Cape Bojador. We have also shown that the first African slaves were captured as a result of Gonçálvez’s and Tristam’s zeal to serve Henry. Furthermore, we provided evidence that Prince Henry’s first official order to capture some of the “unknown” people who lived beyond Cape Bojador was issued to Eannes and Baldaya during his fifth expedition in 1434. None of these expeditions included a biblical justification for the capture of the “unknown” people beyond Cape Bojador. In fact, as we have already shown, Gonçálvez’s expeditionary assignment did not even include the capture of people. When did the Bible appear in the justification for the capture of “Black” slaves in the early modern Atlantic?

According to de Azurara, the Bible was among five reasons why Prince Henry searched for the land beyond Cape Bojador, beginning in 1415. The first reason, de Azurara (1963) said, was that Henry desired to increase the glory of God and his king and brother, Edward. Second, Henry yearned for a possibility to trade with the people beyond the Cape if they were Christians (de Azurara, 1963). This is new information, since John Thornton had argued that,

the actual motivation for European expansion and for navigational breakthroughs was little more than to exploit the opportunity for immediate profits made by the raiding and seizure or purchase of trade commodities. It was these more limited objectives that ultimately made possible the voyage to the Senegal that geographers and thinkers contemplating longer-range commercial or geopolitical schemes had dreamed of since at least the fourteenth century. It was more or less

¹¹ Most statistics of the slave trade unfortunately do not take into account those Africans who died in Africa during slave raids. According to Philip D. Curtin (1969), “the recent literature on the slave trade tends to put the mortality rate at sea somewhere between 13 per cent and 33 per cent” (p. 276). The death toll would be far worse if we knew and counted those Africans who died in Africa during slave raids—the total could range between 33 and 61 percent if on average 28% of Africans died in the raids and 33% in the sea voyage. For more discussion on the volume of the slave trade, see Inikory (1976, pp. 1-19); Lovejoy (1982, pp. 473-501); Stannard (1993, p. 317).

an extension of these same sorts of motives that eventually allowed the Portuguese to attain that even more distant long-range goal—the rounding of Africa and the discovery of a sea route to India and Ethiopia. (Thornton, 2001, p. 24)

The third reason was that the prince hoped to know the extent to which the power of Muslims extended beyond Ceuta (de Azurara, 1963). Fourth, he wished to acquire Christian allies against the Moors (de Azurara, 1963). Finally, de Azurara (1963) said, Henry searched for the land beyond Cape Bojador out of a “great desire to make increase in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ and to bring to him all the souls that should be saved” (p. 29)

Even if we accept that Henry did articulate these goals after the conquest of Ceuta, de Azurara does not specify whether they were outlined before the first expedition was launched or whether they were developed afterwards. Because de Azurara mentioned no biblical curse among Henry’s five reasons above, it is plausible that this particular justification for the enslavement of Africans came later, especially after the first captures were made. Indeed, according to de Azurara, Gonçalves and Tristram arrived in Portugal in 1442 and presented their “slaves” to Henry. Gonçalves then reported that one of the slaves he had captured was a nobleman called Adahu. This slave, he told Henry, had promised five or six slaves in exchange for his freedom and a similar ransom for two other slaves. De Azurara (1963) reported this conversation as follows:

As you know that naturally every prisoner desireth to be free, which is all the stronger in a man of higher reason or nobility whom fortune has condemned to live in subjection of another; so that noble [Adahu] of whom we have already spoken, seeing himself held in captivity, although he was gently treated, greatly desired to be free, and often asked Antam Gonçalves to take him back to his country, where he declared he would give for himself five or six Black Moors; and also he said that there were among the other captives two youths for whom a like ransom would be given. (p. 54)

De Azurara (1963) then explained why Gonçalves accepted Adahu’s ransom offer:

And here you must note that these Blacks [Adahu and the other two slaves] were Moors like the others, though their slaves, in accordance with ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of the curse, which after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain cursing him in this way—that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world. And from his race these Blacks are descended, as wrote the Archbishop Don Roderic of Toledo, and Josephus in his book on the Antiquities of the Jews, and Walter, with other authors who have spoken of the generations of Noah, from the time of his going out of the Ark. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 54)

The editors of de Azurara’s *Chronicle* attempted to correct his reference to the Curse of Cain for their 20th century readers. They said in a footnote: “Curse ... of Cain—for ‘Curse of Ham.’ Cf. Genesis ix, 25. ‘Cursed be Canaan: a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. For this medieval theory, used sometimes in justification of an African slave trade...” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 54).

How, then, should we interpret the fact that de Azurara went to great lengths to reference his Christian and Jewish sources on an erroneous Curse of Cain? First it is important to clarify for the reader that “Caim” is the original Portuguese word that de Azurara used literally translating as “Cain” (Braude, 1997, p. 128). Yet the content of the curse that de Azurara described matches not that of the Curse of Ham in the Bible but rather that of another well-known biblical curse, the Curse of Cain (Gen. 4).¹² De Azurara’s obvious mismatch of biblical curses is the reason Braude writes that, “the Portuguese engaged not only in exploration but also in slaving, whose justification they found in, among other sources, a curious, inaccurate, and misunderstood tradition, to a degree of their own invention” (Braude, 1997, p. 127). De Azurara incorrectly recalled Josephus’s discussion of

¹² Goldenberg (2003) devoted a chapter to the discussion of this Curse of Cain and how it was sometimes used to justify African slavery well into the nineteenth century (p. 178).

the curse, which was “directed not at Ham or Cain but at Canaan”, he notes (Braude, 1997, p. 128). Furthermore, Braude (1997) explained that this incorrect recollection of the curse as Josephus laid it out “does reflect a complicated amalgam of legends about the curse originating in a number of different sources” (p. 128). “In the Middle Ages, Ham and Cain were often confused”, he says before adding that the confusion stems from the fact that “both were cursed and associated with sin, evil, and heresy” (Braude, 1997, p. 128).

Significant for the title and the argument of this article is the fact that Braude (1997, p. 127) and Goldenberg (2003, p. 175) are in agreement that the fabricated Portuguese “Curse of Cain” to justify Black slavery appeared for the first time in de Azurara’s *Chronicle*. Pushing their remark further, we suggest that scholars should echo this fabrication by keeping—not correcting—the curse as de Azurara laid it out in his original text. Put differently, we accept in this article that de Azurara was referring to the content of the Curse of Ham (or Canaan, as others call it) when he called it the Curse of Cain. However, the fact that these two curses are still conflated prompts us to emphasize the historical context for the reader through the title chosen for the present paper.¹³

For the rest of the story, it is also crucial that the reader understands the ideological context of de Azurara’s Curse of Cain.¹⁴ Portugal, the first European country to explore the West African coast, took ideology seriously. In his own words, de Azurara was appointed by King Don Affonso V to write the chronicle of the deeds of the Lord Infant Don Henry, Duke of Viseu and Lord of Covilham for the purpose of instituting a monolithic understanding of Henry’s adventures in Africa or what might be dubbed the Portuguese ideology of exploration:

No Prince can be great, unless he rule over great men; nor rich, unless he rule over the wealthy. For this cause, said the virtuous Roman Fabricius, that he would rather be lord over those who had gold, than have gold himself. But because the said deeds [of Henry] were written by many and various persons, so the record of them is variously written, in many parts. And our Lord the King [Affonso V], considering that it was not convenient for the process of one only conquest [of Guinea] that it should be recounted in many ways, although they all contribute to one result, ordered me to work at the writing and ordering of the history in this volume so that those who read might have the more perfect knowledge. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 3-4)

By producing an ideology of exploration, Portugal sought to write for the masses the rules of engagement with Africa. This ideology began with a mystification of Prince Henry the Navigator (Russell, 2000; Diffie & Winius, 1977; de Magalhães-Godinho, 1945; Leite, 1941).¹⁵ It proceeded to a definition of Black people as “cursed” and declared war on them (de Azurara, 1963). With biblical curses already being a cultural ideology in the West, de Azurara was only one step away from blackening the Curse of Ham (*jus belli*). He easily achieved this by using his authoritative position as the official voice of the Portuguese Crown to build *ex cathedra* the Curse of Cain as a *casus belli* against Blacks. What role did this unchallenged fabricated curse play in the initiation of the transatlantic slave trade, as we should know it?

¹³ To illustrate this continual problem of conflation of the two curses, I gave three informal surveys to my Honors Seminar class at Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia in the spring of 2015. I also gave the same survey to a colleague, assistant professor of modern languages a month later still in the spring of 2015. There is a summary of the process (see Appendix).

¹⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2004) write in *The German Ideology*: “The ideas of the ruling class, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (p. 64).

¹⁵ Many contemporary scholars caution against de Azurara’s “panegyric” *Chronicle* of Prince Henry’s life.

The Portuguese Curse of Cain and the Birth of the Transatlantic Slave “Trade”

In Chapter 16 of de Azurara’s *Chronicle* (1963), he described, “How Antam Gonçalvez went to make the first ransom” (p. 54). He explained that because Adahu had told Gonçalvez that the latter would at least receive ten slaves in exchange for the freedom of three,

it was better to save ten souls than three—for though they were Black, yet they had souls like the others, and all the more as these Blacks were not of the lineage of the Moors but were Gentiles, and so the better to bring them in the path of salvation. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 55)

Unfortunately for Gonçalvez, once on the ground in Africa, Adahu did not hold up his end of the bargain, if in fact he even gave his word. He fled and never returned, either alone or with the five or six slaves he had supposedly promised in exchange for his freedom (de Azurara, 1963). His escape, despite the “benefits” received from Prince Henry (de Azurara, 1963), shows that he preferred his freedom in Africa to his servitude in Portugal. In de Azurara’s (1963) words, Adahu’s “deceit thenceforth warned all our men not to trust one of that race except under the most certain security” (p. 57). This “deceit”, he continued, justified why Gonçalvez collected slaves in other parts of Africa to pay to himself Adahu’s debt:

Antam Gonçalvez received for his two captives, ten Blacks, male and female, from various countries [of Africa], and besides the Blacks that Gonçalvez received in that ransom, he got also a little gold dust and a shield of ox-hide, and a number of ostrich eggs so that one day they were served up at the Infant’s table. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 57)

How would this ransom collection impact the subsequent Portuguese expeditions in Africa? Gonçalvez’s successful collection of this ransom, indeed, set a precedent for future slave expeditions. He and a German servant who had accompanied him on this 1442 trip received a royal “reward” for their achievement: “And returning to the Infant, his lord, he received his reward, and so did the German knight, who afterwards returned to his own land in great honour, with no small largess from the Infant” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 58).

In that sense, Prince Henry and his mariners were complementary in the enslavement of Africans, although he was the leader. As de Azurara (1963) explained, Henry reveled in the novelty of his slaves and, understandably so, in the prospect of capturing more slaves from Africa: “And now, seeing the beginnings of some recompense, may we not think thou didst feel joy, not so much for the number of the captives taken, as for the hope thou didst conceive of the others thou couldst take” (p. 51). Although Henry was happy to receive these slaves, he estimated that “the greater benefit was theirs, for though their bodies were now brought into some subjection, that was a small matter in comparison of their souls, which would now possess true freedom for evermore” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 51).¹⁶ Therefore, he contacted Pope Eugenius IV to seek his divine blessing for God’s work already done and for future endeavors in his name (de Azurara, 1963).

The pope granted his wish and blessed his future slave expeditions “against the said Moors and other enemies of the faith” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 53). He also blessed those Portuguese who might lose their lives in such expeditions (de Azurara, 1963). He issued a papal bull the same year (1442) that Tristam and Gonçalvez arrived with their slaves, granting to the king of Portugal “in perpetuity ... all the lands that should be

¹⁶ David Brion Davis (1984), the eminent historian of Western slavery, took this reaction of Henry as evidence that African slavery in the Atlantic started as “progressive,” because when he received the first shipments of slaves brought from Africa in the 1440s, he “reflected with great pleasure upon the salvation of those souls that before were lost” (pp. xvi-xvii).

discovered over this our Ocean Sea from C. Bojador to the Indies” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 53).¹⁷ The Portuguese king at the time was Don Pedro, and he, in turn, rewarded Henry with a charter in which he made the prince the recipient of one-fifth of all booty brought to the king:

The Infant Don Pedro, who at that time ruled the Kingdom in the name of the King, gave the Infant his brother a charter by which he granted him the whole of the Fifth that appertained to the King and this on account of the great expenses he had incurred in the matter [*sic*]. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 53)

Don Pedro also conferred exclusive rights of exploration on Henry, whereby only he could issue a license or special mandate for such exploration in Africa:

And considering how by him [the Infant Henry] alone the discoveries were enterprised and made, not without great trouble and expense, he [the Infant Don Pedro] granted him moreover this right that no one should be able to go there without his license and special mandate. (de Azurara, 1963, pp. 53-54)

Gonçálvez then begged Henry to “give him license to go and ransom” Adahu and the other captives if the prince still wished to know more about their land (de Azurara, 1963, p. 55). Henry accepted, and Gonçálvez left for Africa in 1442. As previously noted, de Azurara (1963) described this voyage in Chapter 16, appropriately titled “How Antam Gonçálvez went to make the first ransom” (p. 54). Thus, from Chapter 12, “How Antam Gonçálvez brought back the first captives”, we are now in Chapter 16 in which Tristam went to West Africa to make the second ransom in 1443 (p. 58). Details of this expedition are included in Chapter 17, “How Nuno Tristam went to the Island of Gete, and of the Moors that he took” (p. 58).

We must note that de Azurara makes a conscious effort to connect these expeditions for his readers because, he tells his readers, King Affonso V commissioned him to chronicle Henry’s deeds to institute a monolithic understanding for readers. As he put it, King Affonso V

considering that it was not convenient for the process of one only conquest that it should be recounted in many ways, although they all contribute to one result, ordered me to work at the writing and ordering of the history in this volume so that those who read might have the more perfect knowledge. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 4, emphasis added)

One example of de Azurara “ordering the history” of Prince Henry’s voyages in Africa is the fact that he ends Chapter 16 with the reward Gonçálvez received from the first slave ransom then begins Chapter 17 with how this outcome influenced the larger public in Portugal. Below are the ending of Chapter 16 and the beginning of Chapter 17 to prove this point:

[Last sentence of Chapter 16:] And returning to the Infant, his lord, he [Gonçálvez] *received his reward*, and so did the German knight, who afterwards returned to his own land in great honour, with no small largess from the Infant. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 4, emphasis added)

...

[Beginning of Chapter 17:] *And so these matters* went on increasing little by little, and people took courage to follow that route, some to serve, others to gain honour, others with the hope of profit: although each of these two things bringeth the other with it; that is, in serving they profited themselves. And in the year of Christ, 1443, the Infant caused another caravel to be armed. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 4, emphasis added)

Thus, de Azurara made a deliberate attempt to establish a certain chronological “truth” of Prince Henry’s

¹⁷ Successive popes later upheld this exclusive right of exploration of Portuguese kings. For example, on 13 March 1455, Pope Calixtus III even ruled, “that the discovery of the lands of W. Africa, so acquired by Portugal, as well as what should be acquired in the future could only be made by the Kings of Portugal” (de Azurara, 1963, p. 53).

expeditions to West Africa by demonstrating how the expeditions of Gonçálvez and Tristam inspired other Portuguese to follow in their footsteps. Specifically, he wished to communicate to his contemporary and future readers “the truth” that Gonçálvez’s 1442 slave ransom expedition was the first of its kind, and as such, he credited this expedition with inspiring other Portuguese rank-and-file mariners to realize how much they could enrich themselves by providing more slaves and spoils to their kings and receiving a slave-ransom reward. In that respect, de Azurara sought to crystallize in the mind of his readers that Gonçálvez was at the origin of the slave—ransom—reward system, which we now know as the transatlantic slave trade:

And so these matters went on increasing little by little, and people took courage to follow that route, some to serve, others to gain honour, others with the hope of profit: although each of these two things bringeth the other with it; that is, in serving they profited themselves. And in the year of Christ, 1443, the Infant caused another caravel to be armed. (de Azurara, 1963, p. 58)

In this chronology of events, Tristam and his crew arrived on the Island of Gete in 1443. They found “naked men” in 25 canoes and captured 14 these men easily (de Azurara, 1963). In the end, they made the second slave ransom in the amount of 29 African slaves and could have captured even more had their boat been larger. As de Azurara (1963) reported,

the pleasure they had was very great to see themselves thus masters of their booty, of which they could make profit, and with so small a risk, but on the other side they had no little grief, in that their boat was so small that they were not able to take such a cargo as they desired. (p. 53)

Tristam benefited greatly from this capture, to the extent that de Azurara (1963) said, “The reception and reward which the Infant gave him I omit to write down here, for I think it superfluous to repeat it every time” (p. 60). Thus, by the time of Tristam’s voyage in 1443, the slave-ransom-reward system had become commonplace in Portugal.

Lançarote’s 1444 expedition came on the heels of this newly established culture in Portugal in which mariners ransomed “Black” slaves in Africa for rewards. To make sure his readers properly understood Lançarote’s place in the chronology of the transatlantic slave trade, de Azurara saw the need to begin the account of this mariner’s expedition with a short history of the Portuguese adventure in the land beyond Cape Bojador. In addition to mentioning for the first time the word “license” in the title of a chapter—Chapter 18 is titled “How Lançarote required license from the Infant to go with his ships to Guinea”—de Azurara (1963) explained that, in the beginning, everyone in Portugal ridiculed Prince Henry for undertaking the exploration of lands beyond the Cape. He wrote:

Of a truth, the condition of the people, as Livy saith, is such that men are always found to asperse great actions, especially at the beginning; and it appeareth to me that this is through not having knowledge of the results.... And this appeareth to be very well proved by the deeds of our prince. For at the beginning of the colonisation of the islands, people murmured as greatly as if he were spending some part of their property on it; and basing their doubts upon this, they gossiped about it until they declared his work was absolutely impossible, and judged that it could never be accomplished at all. (p. 60)

However, in the words of de Azurara (1963), people changed their minds when they saw the first “Moorish captives” (pp. 60-61) with Gonçálvez and Tristam in 1441, and then with a second cargo with Gonçálvez that same year. Better still, they erased all their doubts when, the following year in 1443, Tristam brought the third consignment home and reported that he had made this booty “in so short a time, and with so

little trouble” (pp. 60-61). Furthermore, as people “saw the houses of others full to overflowing of male and female slaves and their property increasing”, they were “forced to turn their blame into public praise, for they said it was plain the Infant was another Alexander, and their covetousness now began to wax greater” (pp. 60-61).

Because these slaves were delivered to Henry in Lagos in the kingdom of Algarve, where he resided at the time, the people of that city were the first to apply for a license from him to go to Africa (de Azurara, 1963). Lançarote de Freitas became “the first” to make such a request from Henry so that “he might do him service, as well as obtain honour and profit for himself” (p. 62). The mariner, in fact, was a squire raised in the Household of the Infant who was, at the time of his application, an “Almoxarife [collector of taxes] for the King in that town of Lagos [*sic*]” (p. 62). Because Lagos was on the coast and its inhabitants were a seafaring people, they were “in general men of honour, always ready to exert themselves for a share in good things and especially in naval contests” (p. 62). As a result, Lançarote was able to assemble friends and six armed caravels after securing the license (de Azurara, 1963).

Henry gladly granted Lançarote’s request and, “with the Cross of the Order of Jesus Christ, one of which each caravel was to hoist”, Lançarote, Eannes (the first Portuguese to pass the Cape of Bojador), and about forty men sailed for Africa (de Azurara, 1963, p. 62). Lançarote reminded these men that by education, they were “men of such a kind that very shame should force us to do more and greater things than any who came here before” (p. 63).

As this quote shows, Lançarote did not claim to be the first mariner who started the transatlantic slave trade; rather, he acknowledged that he was the follower of a trend started by his predecessors, Gonçalves and Tristram. There is no doubt that he captured more slaves, and logically so. To highlight this unprecedented achievement for his readers, de Azurara assigned more chapters to Lançarote’s expedition. Specifically, de Azurara usually allocated one or two chapters to an expedition, but to Lançarote’s, he devoted eight chapters. Six chapters (Chapters 19-24) described how Lançarote and his men toiled in the islands of Naar and Tiger and in Cape Branco where, overall, they killed or wounded many Africans before capturing 235 slaves. The other two chapters, de Azurara reserved for Lançarote’s welcome: Chapter 25 described for readers the stir among lowly onlookers caused by the public display and apportionment of these slaves. In Chapter 26, de Azurara detailed the positive transformation of these slaves as they converted to Christianity, an achievement for which Henry made Lançarote a knight.

Conclusion

Portugal initiated the transatlantic slave train (formerly known as the transatlantic slave trade) in 1441, when Prince Henry’s mariners Gonçalves and Tristram captured the first African slaves in the Atlantic—not in 1444, when the prince granted a license to Lançarote, as many historians have claimed. As a result of this first capture, Portugal appropriated a supposedly Jewish and Christian ideology of Black slaves derived from the biblical Curse of Cain to justify his slave ransom expedition in 1442. This “cursed Black slave” ideology would be used to systematically justify slave ransoms in Africa. With the blessing of Pope Eugenius IV, this ideology, in turn, helped foster a new culture in Portugal whereby “Black” slaves were ransomed for rewards. Following this trend, Lançarote captured 235 slaves from Africa in 1444 and received many rewards, including knighthood. As this trend swept across Portugal and Europe, the slave—ransom—reward expedition was

progressively consolidated into the system known today as the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁸

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¹⁸ For a discussion of the migration of the biblical curse ideology from Europe to America, see Goldenberg (2003).

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Appendix: The Summary of the Process

Survey 1:

The honors class had nine students who had never heard me talk about biblical curses (Sample selection question was: Have you ever heard me talk about biblical curses? Students: ☒ Yes; ∇ No).

Method: I handed these nine students a sheet on which de Azurara's justification of the African slave trade was printed—no footnote of the editors of de Azurara's *Chronicle* included and no explanation from me. Below de Azurara's quote was printed a multiple choice question:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham
- B. The Curse of Cain
- C. The Curse of Canaan
- D. None of the above

I asked my students to read the text and the question and let me know when they finished. After about two minutes, they all confirmed completing the reading, and I asked them to answer the question:

Survey 1 Results:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham (...00...students =...00%)
- B. The Curse of Cain (...07...students =...78%)
- C. The Curse of Canaan (...02...students =...22%)
- D. None of the above (...00...students =...00%)

Note: Professor: B-Curse of Cain

Survey 2:

I collected the sheets from Survey 1 and handed these 9 students a sheet on which de Azurara's justification of the African slave trade was printed—this time **with** the following footnote of and no explanation from me: "Curse ... of Cain—for Curse of Ham". See Genesis 9:25. "Curse be Canaan: a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren". Below de Azurara's text was printed the same multiple choice question:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham
- B. The Curse of Cain
- C. The Curse of Canaan
- D. None of the above

Survey 2 Results:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham (...03...students =...33%)
- B. The Curse of Cain (...04...students =...45%)
- C. The Curse of Canaan (...02...students =...22%)
- D. None of the above (...00...students =...00%)

Note: Professor: A-Curse of Ham

Survey 3:

After students completed this survey, I then explained the Curse of Cain and the Curse of Ham with their respective references in the Bible (Gen. 4:11-16 and Gen. 9:20-25). On the classroom computer screen, I pulled up the respective biblical references on Google and we read them together noting only the differences. After this exercise, I handed these nine honors students a new sheet on which de Azurara's justification of the African slave trade was printed—this time **with** the following unattributed footnote: "The Curse of Cain and the mark of Cain are phrases that originate from Genesis 4, where God declared that Cain (the first born son of Adam and Eve) be cursed for murdering his brother Abel. A mark was put upon him to warn others that killing Cain would provoke the vengeance of God, that if someone did something to harm Cain, the damage would come back sevenfold. The writer of the text above assumed that Cain's 'mark' was Black skin, and that Cain's descendants were Black and 'marked' for slavery". Below de Azurara's text was printed the same multiple choice question:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham
- B. The Curse of Cain
- C. The Curse of Canaan
- D. None of the above

Survey 3 Results:

Question: Which curse is mentioned in the text? Circle one:

- A. The Curse of Ham (...00...students =...00%)
- B. The Curse of Cain (...08...students =...89%)
- C. The Curse of Canaan (...1...students =...11%)
- D. None of the above (...00...students =...00%)

Note: Professor: B-Curse of Cain