

EARLY PORTUGUESE VOYAGES TO NORTH AMERICA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NOVA SCOTIA

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Europeans had long known the world was a sphere, but until the 1406 Latin translation of *Geographia* by the second century Alexandrian geographer and mathematician Claudius Ptolemy, they had no means of estimating the earth's circumference or pictorially presenting a spherical world. Ptolemy applied the system of latitude and longitude developed by the Greeks some 200 years previously, but he underestimated the earth's circumference by one-fifth. He also held that the known world consisted of a continuous land mass from west to east, broken only by a land locked sea, the Indian Ocean. Just how close were the extremities of west and east, and whether or not the East could be reached by sailing around Africa or across the Atlantic Ocean (called the Ocean Sea) became the foremost geographical questions for the fifteenth-century map makers and mariners.¹

In 1457 the King of Portugal commission a Venetian monk, Fra Mauro, to prepare a world map to show the latest Portuguese discoveries along the West African coast in their search to find a way around the continent to India. Although this map has not survived, a copy Mauro made for the Seignoria of Venice has, though Mauro died before its completion. In this world map he incorporated much new detail, having had access to the latest Portuguese West African charts.

Mauro also attempted to deal with the geographical relationship of the European and Asian land limits. He got the longitudes of outer geographical limits of Europe and Asia approximately right. He, however, could not arrive at any definite estimate on the earth's true circumference. So, for any mariner planning to sail west from Europe to reach the East, his map could not tell him how far he had to sail, a most disconcerting fact at a time when mariners considered 800 miles the farthest limit from land for an ocean voyage.

During the last decades of the fifteenth century, Portuguese mariners worked their way down the West African coast. Then, in the summer of 1487, Bartolomeu Dias turned away from the coast in search of a favourable wind and discovered the westerlies, which took him to a land fall some 300 east of the Cape of Good Hope, thus rounding the southern tip of Africa and disproving the prevailing belief of a land bridge to Asia. Henricus Martellus, a German map maker working in Florence, incorporated this knowledge from Dias' voyage into his world map of c.1489 (see Figure 1). His map portrays how Europeans saw their geographical world before Christopher Columbus's epic 1492 Atlantic crossing and Portugal's Vasco Da Gama's reaching India in 1498.

¹ Brian Cuthbertson, *John Cabot & The Voyage of the Matthew* (Halifax: Formac Publishing, 1997, pp. 22-23.

DISCOVERING THE WIND PATTERNS OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

In the fifteenth century, the prevailing westerlies posed a formidable barrier from north of 30E to beyond 60E in the North Atlantic for Europeans attempting to find new lands to the west (see Figure 2). Until they added the lateen sail to ships employing a square sail, useful only when the wind was behind them, their vessels could not sail into the wind. During the last decades of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese developed the first Atlantic sailing vessels by combining various features from northern European and Mediterranean ships: they were caravel-built (hull planks butted edge to edge rather than overlapping) with a stern rudder, fore and aft castles, and had three masts carrying a mixture of square and lateen sails.²

With a weatherly three-masted ship (a foremast and a mainmast carrying square sails and a mizzen with a lateen), able to sail into the wind, Europeans now had the means to cross the Atlantic and return. Figure 3 is graphic presentation of Columbus' *Nina*, as more is known about her than any other late fifteenth-century caravels. She was less than twenty metres long and had a cargo capacity of only about fifty tons.

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE

When Columbus crossed Atlantic he relied almost entirely on dead-reckoning. Mariners of his day used the pivoting compass, portolan charts and navigation tables to estimate a sailing course.³

Late in the fifteenth century, mariners adopted a new astronomical technique of latitude sailing in which they determined latitude by observing the altitude above the horizon of the North Star or the sun at its noon maximum.⁴ Once having selected a latitude, they would sail on that direction. Around 1500, the Portuguese produced the first charts with scales of latitude to facilitate latitude sailing. Although mariners could now fix their north-south position during voyages, they had no means (and would not have until the eighteenth century) of determining longitude or their east-west position. Consequently, maps portraying early explorations of North America

² For shipbuilding and rigging of this period, see Robert McGhee, *Canada Rediscovered* (Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), pp. 73-76; David B. Quinn, *North America From Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 71-9 (hereafter Quinn, *North America*); Samuel Elliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages A.D. 500-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 112-125 (hereafter, Morison, *The European Discovery*, 1971); and Peter Pope, "Ships and Navigation in Atlantic Canada in the 16th Century", report prepared for the Heritage Section, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, 1992.

³ See *ibid.*, pp. 16-24.

⁴ Latitude sailing or running down the latitude was a Portuguese invention, dating from 1485. See D.W. Waters, "Science and the Techniques of Navigation in the Renaissance" in Charles S. Singleton, *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967, p. 219.

are wildly off in their longitudes.

PORTUGUESE DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT OF THE AZORES

As early as the 1330s, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish voyages reached the Canaries.⁵ Later in the fourteenth century came the discovery and mapping of the Madeira Islands and finally the Azores, discovered by navigators seeking westerly winds with which to return home from the Canaries and the African coast. However, the first certain date in Azorean history is in 1439 when the then King of Portugal, D. Afonso V, conferred on his nephew, Prince Henry (the Navigator) the privilege of settling the Azores. From that settlement would spring most of the mariners who later would undertake westward voyaging searching for (mythical) islands believed to lie to the west out in the Atlantic.

CLAIMS FOR PRE-COLUMBIAN PORTUGUESE DISCOVERIES OF NORTH AMERICA

On a mosaic pavement on the Avenida da Liberdade in Lisbon are two inscriptions. At one end of the mosaic is *DESCOBERTA DA AMÉRICA* and at the other *JOÃO VAZ CORTE-REAL DESCOBRIDOR DA AMÉRICA*. Leading Portuguese and Brazilian historians have asserted that João Vaz Corte-Real and others discovered America before Columbus. The earliest such claim involves the Teive-Velasco voyage of 1452. There is good reason to believe that Diogo de Teive, a squire to Prince Henry the Navigator, and Pedro de Velasco did discover the most western islands of the Azores, Flores and Corvo. But the Portuguese historian Jaime Cortesão holds that from this discovery they reached the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. His evidence rests on a story told to Columbus years later of how Teive and Velasco in searching for the (mythical) island of Antilla:

on the return passage they discovered the island Flores, guided by many birds which they saw flying hither, and recognized that they were land and not sea birds, and thus judged that they must be going to sleep on some land. Afterwards it's said that they sailed NE so far that they had Cape Clear (which is in Ireland) towards the E, where they found winds to blow very brisk and the winds westerly and to the sea to be very smooth, which they believed should be because the land should be there, which sheltered them to the westward; which they not follow up to explore, because it was already August and they feared [the approach of] winter. He said this happened 40 years before

⁵ For the discovery and settlement of the Azores, see Samuel Eliot Morison, *Portuguese to America in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), pp. 11-14 (hereafter, Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, 1940) and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, ed., *The Times Atlas of World Exploration* (London: Times Book, 1991), pp. 42-43 (hereafter, *Times Atlas*).

Christopher Columbus discovered our Indies.⁶

Corteseo argued that the described NE course was an textual error, as it would have taken them to Ireland, and really was a NW course, which took them the Grand Banks. Even if such a textual error should be accepted, Corteseo's claim that the references to smooth water must be to the Grand Banks cannot be sustained because the waters over the Bank are usually rough because of their shallowness. As S. E. Morison concludes:

that the Grand Bank of Newfoundland is the most unlikely section of the North Atlantic for Diogo and Pedro to have visited, and the one least compatible with such data as we possess on their voyage.⁷

More credence is given to the alleged 1472 voyage of João Vaz Corte-Real to Newfoundland.⁸ Of Terceira in the Azores, João Vaz ruled the island as a powerful magnate. Surviving documentation gives no hint of his engaging in any exploratory voyaging. What evidence there is for his discovery of America comes from a supposed Portuguese request to King Christian I of Denmark found on a mid-sixteenth-century map of Iceland and worded as follows:

It is remarked that Iceland is twice as big as Sicily and that the two skippers Pynink [Pining] and Poithorst [Pothorst], who by your majesty's [King Christian IV] royal grandfather King Christian I, at the request of the King of Portugal, were sent forth with several ships in order to search for new islands and lands in the North...⁹

Dedrick Pining and Hans Porthorst were Germans in Danish service in Iceland and probably made Arctic voyages between 1473 and 1494. Out of this map legend a Danish historian, Sofus Larsen, in 1925 published a book in which he had King Afonso of Portugal obtain the support of King Christian I for a voyage in 1472 by João Vaz Corte-Real with Pining and Pothorst and for a pilot, a John Scolvus.

⁶ As quoted in Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, 1940, pp. 21-22. It comes from Les Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, lib. i, ch. 13; 1927 ed., I, 70. Corteseo published his "Pre-Columbian Discovery of America", in the *Geographical Journal*, IX (1937), pp. 29-42. The *Geographical Journal* could not be found in the Novanet catalogue for the Halifax universities's libraries.

⁷ Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, 1940, p. 24.

⁸ For this alleged voyage see, *ibid.*, 33-41; Quinn, *North America*, pp. 58-59; *Times Atlas*, p. 76; Morison, *Northern Voyages*, pp. 93-94 and 108-09 and McGhee, *Canada Rediscovered*, pp. 58, 97-98 & 106.

⁹ As quoted in Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, p. 37.

Supposedly, they reached some part of North America. It is conceded by some historians that Pining and Porthorst reached Greenland as did Scolvus either with them or separately.¹⁰ Larsen, however, brought João Vaz Corte-Real into this northern voyaging tradition because some Portuguese maps, dating from the second half of the sixteenth century, have place names on lands to the north and east of Newfoundland, *Baia de João Vaz* and *Terra de João Vaz*. Greenland rather than Labrador is the most likely the location of the bay and coast named after a João Vaz.

As to be described below, two of João Vaz Corte-Real's sons in the period 1500-1502 explored northeastern North America and may have named a bay and a coast after their father. Neither the bay nor coast as named appear on maps derived from the explorations of the sons. Not until much later do the names appear. As well, the name João Vaz was a common Portuguese name and the named bay and coast could have no connection at all to João Vaz Corte-Real. When discussing the claim of the pre-Columbia discovery by João Vaz Corte-Real, David Quinn concludes:

But the evidence is all late; it does not hang together, except with the use of much pure speculation, and is in fact highly unlikely, If João Vaz Corte-Real sighted America before Columbus, as is not impossible, it was almost certainly not in 1472 or thereabouts but much later, in the late 1480s. Either way the vital evidence is lacking.¹¹

REPUTED PRE-COLUMBIAN VOYAGE BY JOÃO FERNANDES LAVRADOR

Although in Portugal proper, the attribute *lavrador* meant a farmer, tiller of the soil, in the Azores it seems to have had the meaning of a landed proprietor. Very little is known of João Fernandes.¹² In 1892, Ernesto do Canto, historian of the Azores, published a document that identifies him as João Fernandes of Terceira mentioned in a 1506 lawsuit involving a large landowner, Pedro de Barcelos, who stated:

...Being thus at the said date in possession these [lands], I received a command from the king, our master, to go on a voyage of discovery, I and a John Fernandes, [*llavrodor*], proprietor, on which discovery we were absent three good years; and when I returned to the said island, I found my people driven from the said lands, and some sons of John Velladam in possession of thereof, who were conveying and

¹⁰ For Pothorst and Pining, see Quinn, *North America*, p. 59 and for Scolvus, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (hereafter *DCB*), vol. 1, p. 679.

¹¹ Quinn, *North America*, p. 59

¹² For what is known, see A. Davies, "Fernandes, João", *DCB*, vol. 1, pp. 304-05.

transferring them to many other people¹³

Do Canto believed that the trespass occurred on 30 January 1495 and so the reputed voyage must have begun “a good three years” before in the first months of 1492, half year before Columbus found land to the west. There is no evidence, however, of where they sailed or if they found any new lands. Moreover, later research showed Do Canto was mistaken about the land in question. The trespass occurred after 1500. Bristol customs records also show that a “Johannes ffordandus” a Portuguese trader in the city in 1493 exporting goods to Lisbon, so he could not have been exploring.¹⁴ Moreover, the usual practice was for a Portuguese monarch to issue a licence of discovery or exploration, but none has been found for Fernandes or Barcelous.

However, a royal licence, *carta de doção*, was issued to Fernandes, dated 28 October 1499. As a result of this licence, Fernandes did make a voyage a year later to Greenland as this fact appears on map legends, starting with Cantino’s, dated 1502.¹⁵ He disappears from the historical record after 1501 and probably died on a voyage that year. As an Azorean *lavrador*, he is believed to be the source for the naming of Labrador, though initially the name was associated with Greenland. Once it was determined that Greenland was an island and separate from the continental America, the name became transferred to the coast we call Labrador.¹⁶

FIRST VOYAGE OF GASPAR CORTE-REAL, 1500

For the final decades of the fifteenth century, there are evidences of voyages in search of lands/islands to the west from both Azores and Bristol, England. They could not, however, overcome the belt of strong westerlies. Voyages that went to Greenland escaped the westerlies by going north and then west. Columbus’s great discovery was to sail west by first going south to the Canary Islands and catching the

¹³ As quoted in H.B. Biggar, *The Precursors of Jacques Cartier 1497-1534: A Collection of Early Documents Relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1911), p. 99 (hereafter, Biggar, *Precursors of Jacques Cartier*). Biggar omitted “*llavrodor*” from his translation. Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, p. 57 gives a somewhat different translation..

¹⁴ A. Davis, “Fernandes, João”, p. 304.

¹⁵ See Bernard G. Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier: Sources for a Historical Ethnography of Northeastern North America 1497-1550* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p.14 (hereafter Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*). and Morison, *European Discovery*, 1971, p. 212. For the Cantino map, see Figure 4.

¹⁶ See *ibid.* Davis makes the extraordinary claim of Fernandes accompanying John Cabot on his 1498 voyage as a pilot and that he charted the coasts from Greenland to Newfoundland and Chesapeake. No other historian has made this claim and Cabot 1498 coasting remains unknown as it seems all perished.

north east trade winds, which took him across the Atlantic to what he believed to his dying day was part of Asia, hence the name West Indies. For his return he sailed north until he found the westerlies which took him home.

Whether it was an English or English/Portuguese discovery, by John Cabot's 1497 voyage it was known that during May and June northeasterly winds prevailed over the westerlies. Cabot used latitude sailing to reach land somewhere between Labrador and south west Nova Scotia and to return with news he had sailed to the land of the Great Khan, of whose empire Marco Polo had so graphically written. On his second voyage with five vessels a year later, Cabot, and as far is known all the crews of five vessels perished, with the possible exception of one vessel that returned to Ireland because of storm and may not have continued again.

In Portugal Cabot's discovery of land to the west created concern because it was thought that land discovered lay within the territory assigned to Portugal by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas.¹⁷ Under this treaty with Papal sanction, Spain and Portugal had agreed to a north-south meridian 360s leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, which gave all discoveries east of the line to Portugal and to the west to Spain. Because of the inability to determine longitude with any great accuracy, what lands were included within each sphere remained a matter of dispute. For a time Portugal erroneously believed Newfoundland fell under its sovereignty. Of course neither France nor England accepted such claims by the Portuguese and Spaniards.

Likely to confirm Portuguese claims, King D. Manuel issued Gaspar Corte-Real, third son of João Vaz, a grant on 12 May 1500 inasmuch as Gaspar Corte-Real:

a nobleman of our court, has made efforts in the past, on his own account and at his own expense, with ships and men, to search out, discover and find by dint of much labour and expenditure of his wealth and at the risk of his life, some islands and a mainland, and in consequence is not desirous of continuing this search and of setting to work and doing whatever is possible in order to discover the said islands and mainland; and we taking into consideration how greatly it will redound to our service and honour, and to the increase of our kingdoms and domains, if such islands and mainlands should be discovered and found by subjects of ours...¹⁸

Historians are in agreement that the above wording means that Gaspar had before 1500 undertake voyages of discovery, but had been unsuccessful in discovering

¹⁷ G.V. Scammell, *The World Encompassed: The first European maritime empires c. 800-1650* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981, p. 344. Scammell also comments that there is no convincing evidence that the Portuguese "forestalled Columbus in America, or that in the fifteenth century they were aware of the existence of Greenland, and the Norse survival there".

¹⁸ Biggar, *Precursors to Jacques Cartier*, pp. 35-37.

new islands and mainlands. He probably tried sailing from the Azores, but could not overcome the prevailing westerlies for he now sailed north west touching Cape Farewell on the tip of Greenland. A chronicler, writing some sixty years after the voyage (and may have confused this first voyage with a second one a year later), recorded that Gaspar:

proposed to go and discover lands on the north side because to the southward he held that others had already discovered much... On this voyage he discovered, on that north side, a land that was very cool and with big trees, wherefore all the land he saw on that side he named *Terra Verde*. The people are very barbarous and wild... They are of middle stature, very active, and great bowman; they use pieces of wood burnt in the fire in place of spears... they wear skins of animals, of which the land has many... Returning to Gaspar Corte-Real [the chronicle continued], after he discovered this land and coasted along a good part of it he returned to the kingdom, and set sail again in the year 1501, wishing to explore further this province.¹⁹

SECOND VOYAGE OF CASPAR CORTE-REAL, 1501

If the chronicler was correct that on his first voyage Gaspar made an American landfall, then *Terra Verde* may have as far south as Newfoundland. For his second voyage, letters from two Italians in Lisbon provide more definite information. Gaspar sailed with three (or two) well-equipped caravels and first sighted the landfall of his previous voyage, but ice forced them south and they coasted along Labrador. Albert Cantino reported to his King, Emmanuel I, that next they came:

to a very large country which they approached with great delight. And since throughout this region numerous rivers flowed into the sea, by one of those they made their way about league inland, where on landing they found an abundance of most luscious and varied fruits, and trees and pine of measureless height and girth that they would be too big as a mast for the largest ship that sails the sea. No corn of any sort grows there, but the men of the country say they live altogether by fishing and hunting animals, in which the land abounds, such as very large deer, covered with extremely long hair, the skins of which they use for garments and also make houses and boats thereof, and wolves, foxes, tigers [sic] and sables. They [the explorers] affirm that there are what appears to me wonderful, as many falcons as there are sparrows in our country, and I have some of them and they are extremely pretty. They forcibly kidnapped about fifty men and women and have brought them to country [Cantino continues with a

¹⁹ As quoted in Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, p. 70. Damião de Góis was the chronicler.

description of the kidnapped men and women].²⁰

A letter from Pietro Pasqualigo to the Signiory of Venice adds little to Cantino's description, other than Gaspar had left two of his caravels to return to Portugal while he "set off to range that coast further, in order to discover as much as possible". Gaspar was never to return. Pasqualigo also described the reception the news of the discoveries made:

This news has given the king here great pleasure, since it seems to him that this country will be most useful to his plans in several respects, but chiefly because being very near to his kingdom, he will be able to secure without difficulty and in a short time a very large quantity of timber for making masts and ship's yards and plenty of men-slaves, fit for every kind of labour, inasmuch as they say this land is very well populated and full of pines and other excellent woods.²¹

Micquel, Gaspar's older brother, determined to search for his lost brother. King Manuel granted Miguel the governorship of any lands he might discover. With three ships, Miquel sailed from Lisbon in May 1502. They probably reached the Davis Strait where they apparently agreed to search separately and rendezvous at likely the site of St. John's harbour in August. Two of the vessels came to the rendezvous, but Miquel never did, and so the two returned to Portugal. When the eldest brother, Vasco Añes Corte-Real, wanted to led another expedition to find his lost brothers, the king refused permission, fearing that he would share their fate. In 1503, however, Manuel sent two vessels to search for the brothers, but they were never found.²²

MAP EVIDENCE FOR THE CORTE-REAL VOYAGES

In October 1502, Alberto Cantino, while in Lisbon obtained surreptitiously a manuscript world map prepared in its northern part with knowledge from the Corte-Reals voyages (Figure 4, which also has the 1494 Tordesillas line). It shows an island covered with enormous trees and to the east of the 1494 Tordesillas division of the Atlantic and thus in the Portuguese sphere. An inscription marks it as discovered 1501 by the Portuguese. Further to the east is Greenland with an inscription marking its Portuguese discovery in 1500. Lands to the west are meant to be Asian and fall within Spain's sphere.

Another world map, dating from 1502, but obviously derived in part from the Cantino map, was that drawn by the Genoese cartographer Nicolo de Caverio (Figure

²⁰ Biggar, *Precursors to Jacques Cartier*, p. 63-64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

²² Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier*, p. 28.

5). On it the island covered with trees and showing Portuguese flags appears again and almost certainly represents the Labrador and Newfoundland coasts as one entity. A year later (or more) Pedro Reinel's map appeared with a version of the same island but within a geographical context of Newfoundland-Labrador-Greenland as a continuous landmass for which the given scale of latitude supports this supposition (Figure 6). To the south of what is Newfoundland appears a strait, which has been speculatively identified as Cabot Strait, with the mainland further south being Cape Breton.

A map in a Portuguese atlas (see Figure 7) published in 1519 records the explorations of the Corte-Reals in an inscription that states "Corte-Real passed through this region, first discovered it and gave it his name". Newfoundland is not shown as an island, but joined in the south to mainland that presumably represents Nova Scotia. As late as 1529, a Spanish map showed a continuous coastline from Labrador to Florida (see Figure 8).

LANDS SEEN BY THE CORTE-REALS

Historians generally agree that Gaspar explored the coasts of Labrador and eastern Newfoundland. On his second and ill-fated voyage, he explored again these same coasts, but seems to have gone exploring further south west crossing Cabot Strait to Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia (see Figure 9). When, in 1940, S.E. Morison published his *Portuguese Voyages to America*, he had Gaspar in 1501 coasting Labrador, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. But in his *The European Discovery of America*, 1971, he had Gaspar following "Cabot's course, ranging the coast from Cape Bauld to around Cape Race, breaking off near Placentia Bay". In 1940, he also had Cabot making his landfall on Cape Breton, but by 1971 he was emphatic that it was northern Newfoundland.²³ His change of view on Cabot's landfall seems to have influenced his opinion on Gaspar's coasting.

Just where Gaspar landed and went inland about a league remains more debatable. S.E. Morison in 1971, of course, believed it was in Newfoundland and that the kidnapped Indians were Beothuk. Others, such as David Quinn, hold the view that they were Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq.²⁴ All that can be said is that the crews' description of mast trees favours a Nova Scotia landing site, but by no means conclusively.

PORTUGUESE FISHERMEN

John Cabot had returned from his 1497 voyages with reports of an abundant cod fishery. European fishermen were soon crossing the Atlantic in surprising numbers. By 1506, Portugal began charging an import duty of 10 per cent on catches. Her fishermen seemed to have fished mostly the eastern coast of Newfoundland, while

²³ Morison, *Portuguese Voyages*, pp. 71 and Morison, *European Discovery*, pp. 179-185 & 217.

²⁴ Morrison, *European Discovery*, p. 216 and Quinn, *North America*, p. 123.

Bretons and Normans from France may have been off Cape Breton as early as 1504²⁵. Evidence, however, that Portuguese fishermen were present also is strongly indicated by the name of Scatary Island, a seaman's landmark off Cape Breton's north east coast. It is probably of Portuguese origin, perhaps being a transformation of the Portuguese name St. Catherine.²⁶

FAGUNDES' AZOREAN COLONY ON CAPE BRETON ISLAND, C. 1520

Much speculation has surrounded a possible, but short-lived Portuguese colony, generally located at Ingonish in the early 1520s.²⁷ About 1520 João Alvares Fagundes, a merchant from the fishing town of Viana in northern Portugal, explored the coasts of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. (see Figure 10 for his presumed explorations). On his return, he secured a charter that gave him proprietorship of what seems to have been southern Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

In league with some "noblemen of Viana" he recruited Azorean colonists to establish a fishing station within his proprietorship. They may initially have done so on the south coast of Newfoundland, but found it too cold and came to Cape Breton. There, they chose a site in a beautiful bay, which has come to be believed as Ingonish, though it could readily be elsewhere. How long the colony lasted is open to much debate, but it seems not for long. Its fate seems to have been decided by the Mi'kmaq, who "put an end to the attempt and killed all those who came there".²⁸

FAGUNDES AND SABLE ISLAND

During his voyage of exploration around 1520, Fagundes sighted an island, which he called Santa Cruz and located "at the foot of [fishing] bank".²⁹ An island called "Fagunda" appears on Portuguese maps created after the voyage and it is placed to the southeast of Cape Breton, near the location of Sable Island. It is a fair assumption that this island is the one Fagundes named Santa Cruz.

Portuguese fishermen became sufficiently familiar with Sable that they worked out a course from Newfoundland to the island. As Edward Hayes, who provided Richard Hakluyt for his *Principal Navigations...* with information on Sir Humphrey

²⁵ Peter Pope, "The Sixteenth-Century Fishing Voyage", prepared for the Heritage Section, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, 1992, pp. 5-6.

²⁶ *Place-Names and Places of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1967), pp. 607-08.

²⁷ For a thorough summary and analysis of the evidence, see Peter Pope, "Sixteenth-Century Azorean Portuguese Colony in Cape Breton: A Speculative Analysis", prepared for the Heritage Section, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, 1992

²⁸ As quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 27. The quote came from Jean Alfonse (Jean Fonteneau), a French navigator, who sailed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, c. 1542 and knew Portuguese.

²⁹ L.-A. Vigeras, "João Alvares Fagundes", *DCB*, vol. 1, pp.303-04.

Gilbert's ill-fated voyage, reported:

Sablon lieth to the sea-ward of Cape Briton about 25 leagues [75 miles], where we determined to goe [from St. John's Harbour] upon the intelligence we had of a Portugal... who was himself presente, when the Portugals (about thirty yeeers past) did put onto the same island both neat and swine to breede, which exceedingly multiplied.³⁰

EARLY PORTUGUESE VOYAGES AND NOVA SCOTIA

It remains highly speculative that any Portuguese pre-Columbian voyages sighted North American mainland. Although there were attempts from the Azores to find islands to the west the strength of the prevailing westerlies defeated all such attempts. Although the vital evidence is lacking, it is possible João Vaz Corte-Real accompanied Pinning and Hothrost with Scolvus as pilot on a northern voyage, which took them to Greenland and perhaps to mainland North America, but there has never been any suggestion that they sighted Nova Scotia. Similarly, with João Fernandes Lavrador's reputed voyage, what evidence exists places it firmly in northern waters.

On his first voyage in 1500, Gaspar Corte-Real may well have sighted Newfoundland, *Terra Verde*, and explored its eastern coast before returning to Lisbon. It is on his second voyage in 1501 that a good case can be made he crossed the Cabot Strait and explored the eastern and southern Nova Scotia coasts, during which he would sighted and followed the coast line of Halifax Regional Municipality. Reports by Albert Cantino and Pietro Pasqualigo stress the "the abundance of luscious and varied fruits, and [especially] trees and pine for the largest ship that sails the sea", are fairly convincing evidence for a Nova Scotian coasting and landing. Nova Scotia became known early for its resource in mast timber and this was never true of Newfoundland.

Reinel's 1503 map (Figure 6) shows the east coast of Labrador/Newfoundland with numerous Portuguese names, which could only have come the Corte-Reals voyages. To the south appears land separated by a body of water, which was probably thought to be a bay, for later maps (Figures 7 and 8) have Labrador/Newfoundland/Nova Scotia as a continuous land mass. The map in Figure 8 has an inscription attributing discovery of this region to Gaspar Corte-Real. In short, the map evidence reinforces that of the documentary that Gaspar Corte-Real not only coasted along Nova Scotia, but also landed during his 1501 voyage. Just where he landed is impossible to determine, but it could well have been somewhere on the Eastern Shore.

Presence of fishermen is notoriously difficult to document. But from the earliest arrival of European fishermen on the banks, Portuguese fishermen likely took

³⁰ The Voyage of Sir Humphrey Gilbert to Newfoundland, An. 1583, recorded in *Hakluyt's Collection of Early Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. III, printed for R.H. Evans (London, 1810), p. 197.

some of their catches from off Cape Breton, though they were most active on Newfoundland's east coast. Later in the sixteenth century, they became familiar with mainland Nova Scotia and worked out sailing courses along its coasts and to Sable Island.

Although little is known of Fagundes's Azorean colony, what evidence there is supports the establishment of a fishing station on Cape Breton Island around 1520. Although Ingonish is favoured as the site, the evidence for it rests entirely on its location and beaches.

Other than the Azorean colony, there was never to be a Portuguese presence on Nova Scotia. The principal connection Nova Scotia and Halifax Regional Municipality have with early Portuguese voyages of exploration is with that of Gaspar Corte-Real's second voyage of 1501; and on which he perished, either while exploring the Nova Scotia coast, or after turning back to return to Lisbon.