

MARITAL POLICY AND THE ROLE OF FLANDERS IN THE COLONISATION OF MADEIRA AND THE AZORES

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Introduction

The first Portuguese discoveries and the colonization of Madeira and the Azores were a byproduct of the political, cultural and social-economic changes that took place in northwestern and southern Europe during the late Middle Ages.

Although as a general statement this is probably true, it does very little to explain exactly how the colonization of the Atlantic islands took place, by whom and why. Their colonization was a complex process and the fact that not only the Flemish but many other 'nations' took part does not make our understanding any easier.

Many historians have suggested or are still maintaining that Isabel of Portugal, who was married to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, was instrumental in obtaining the Flemish involvement, particularly in the colonization of the Azores.

This article will discuss the motivations behind this marriage alliance, the process of colonization and the possible reasons why Flemish settlers took part.

The house of Burgundy

The Burgundians held a reputation of achieving their long term dynastic goals through marriage arrangements and their policies have been extensively analysed and described.¹

The events of the Hundred Years' War confronted them with the problem of how to combine simultaneously their three objectives viz: to extend their territory, to play a dominant and accepted role at the French court and, following the marriage of Philip the Bold with Margaret of Flanders, to maintain normal trade relations between Flanders and England.

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¹C.A. J. Armstrong, 'La politique matrimoniale des Ducs de Bourgogne' in *England, France and Burgundy in the fifteenth century* (London 1983) 237-342.

Philip the Bold (1342-1404)² was able to extend his sphere of influence towards the North by arranging the double marriage of his son, John, and daughter, Margaret, with the children of the Bavarian Duke Albert, who was also Count of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault. But he also called himself 'son of the King of France' and was keen to reinforce a close relationship with the House of his forefathers. The latter dynasty had run into serious problems because Charles VI (1368-1422) was only twelve years old when he ascended the throne and was insane during the greater part of his life. Various pretenders were obtruding themselves to the French throne: Charles' brother Louis of Orléans, Henry V of Lancaster, who married Charles' daughter Catharina and the Burgundians. In 1403 Philip arranged another double marriage: of his grandson Philip the Good to Michelle, another daughter of Charles VI and of his granddaughter Margaret to the dauphin Louis³. It was most unfortunate for the pretenders that in the same year Charles VII was born, who became dauphin after Louis' death in 1415 and who lived until 1461.

The murder of Louis of Orléans in 1407, arranged by John the Fearless (1371-1419)⁴, meant the end of the Franco-Burgundian alliance. In 1415 a new flare up of the Hundred Year's War caused France to be divided into three parts: Lancastrian France, the territories which supported the son of Charles VI and the area ruled by the House of Burgundy.

The personal conflict between the House of Orléans and that of Burgundy was intensified by the assassination of John the Fearless of Burgundy in 1419. Philip the Good insisted on revenge and the House of Lancaster made good use of the opportunity to obtain his support for the recognition of Henry V as King of France. Philip from his side demonstrated his interest in the Lancastrian connection by arranging (or allowing) the marriage of his sister Anne to the Duke of Bedford, who was Henry V's successor as ruler of

² For the position of Philip the Bold as Count of Flanders and regent of Charles VI of France, see M. Haegeman, *De Anglofilie in het graafschap Vlaanderen tussen 1379 en 1435. Politieke en economische aspecten* (Standen en Landen 90) (Kortrijk-Heule 1988) 206-208, 213-228.

³ Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Bold. The formation of the Burgundian state* (London/New York 1979) 91-92. Philip the Good was then seven and his sister Margaret nine years old. It was her second marriage. She was first married in 1396, at the age of one and a half years, to the then dauphin Charles who died in 1401. Philip the Bold did not give up and arranged thereafter her marriage to the new dauphin Louis, who died in 1415.

⁴ For the person and policies of John the Fearless see C. de Borchgrave, *Diplomaten en diplomatie onder Hertog Jan zonder Vrees. Impact op de Vlaamse politieke situatie* (Standen en Landen 95) (Kortrijk-Heule 1992) 57-75, 165-203.

Lancastrian France. In 1423 he was able to arrange a third marriage for his eldest sister Margaret, who meanwhile had lost her second dauphin, to Arthur of Brittany.

Philip the Good's alliance with the English, which lasted until the treaty of Arras in 1435, was clearly in conflict with his position of principal vassal of the Crown of France. It was his duty to protect it, not to alienate it and he continued his grandfather's policy of improving his position within the French balance of power. In the first place he set in motion the plans of his father respecting his youngest sister Agnes, who married Charles of Bourbon in 1422. However, in that same year Charles VI, Henry V and Michelle died, leaving Charles VII free from the ties with the Houses of Lancaster and Burgundy.

Philip was now in the position of being able to choose a new second wife for himself. He chose his aunt Bonne of Artois, Countess of Nevers whom he married in 1424. She had been widowed during the battle of Azincourt and had already given birth to two sons. The trouble and expense of obtaining dispensation from Rome was repaid in two ways. Philip could consolidate his French connections and also improve his grip on the country of Nevers, a territory lying next to the Duchy of Burgundy. However, when Bonne died a year later⁵, the possibilities in France were exhausted and Philip still had no legitimate heir, to the great concern of his entourage.

As Philip himself was in no hurry to marry again, it was on the insistence of the people around him that steps were taken to arrange for a new, more fruitful marriage. The negotiations, on his behalf, for a matrimonial alliance with Aragon in 1427, which failed, and the contract signed in July 1429 for his marriage to Isabel of Portugal (1397-1471) was a distinct break with the past policy of the House of Burgundy.

The house of Avis

In Portugal, Dom João (1357-1433), Master of the Order of Avis, was the founder of a new dynasty. In 1385 he had been able to summon the *Cortes* in Coimbra and was acclaimed King of Portugal. In the Treaty of Windsor of 1386 the House of Lancaster recognized the autonomy of the Portuguese and in return the latter supported the claims of the Duke of Lancaster on the Castilian throne. To confirm the new understanding, the Duke of Lancaster and Dom João agreed a marriage between Philippa of Lancaster and the new King of Portugal.

⁵ Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good. The apogee of Burgundy* (London 1970) 6-9.

João's marriage to Philipa produced, for those times, an unusual large number of children, of which six survived him: Duarte, his successor; Pedro, Duke of Coimbra; Henrique, Duke of Viseu and Grandmaster of the Order of Christ; Isabel; Fernando, who succeeded his father as Master of Avis and João, Master of Santiago. His illegitimate son Afonso, Count of Barcelos, became Duke of Bragança and his illegitimate daughter Dona Beatriz was married twice into English nobility. His main objective, however, was to maintain a state of truce with Castile and to establish close relationships with its potential enemies. His future successor Dom Duarte was therefore married to princess Leonor of Aragon (1428) and Dom Pedro with Isabel of Urgel (1429). Finally, his daughter Isabel, who had no title or land of her own, married Philip the Good of Burgundy: a giant leap from the Iberian into the Burgundy dynastic meltingpot.

Recently published documentation⁶ leaves little doubt that the initiative for the wedding came largely from João I. He had always been interested in maintaining commercial links with Flanders. The Treaty of Windsor of 1386 might, at that time, endanger the Portuguese trade with Flandres, since Philip the Bold was on the side of France against the English and maintained an alliance with the king of Castile. João therefore sent an emissary to negotiate a contract with the Four Members of Flanders, who were the deputies of Ghent, Ypres, Bruges and Franc of Bruges, thus bypassing the Duke of Burgundy⁷. They in turn convinced Philip the Bold of the disadvantages of not giving a privilege to the Portuguese traders⁸.

With John the Fearless the situation changed radically: Portuguese envoys were well received, exchanges of presents took place and Portuguese nobility and archers offered their services to the Duke. In 1411 the Portuguese merchants and shipmasters were given a new charter of privileges⁹. In return, Flemish nobility also joined the army which conquered Ceuta in 1415¹⁰.

⁶ J. Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne au XVe siècle. Recueil de documents extraits des archives bourguignonnes (1384-1482)* (Lisbon/Paris 1995).

⁷ *Idem*, 21-22.

⁸ Gilliodts-van Severen, *Inventaire des chartes* (Bruges 1875) III, 15 and 104-105.

⁹ *Idem*, 25 and A. Zoete, *Handelingen van de Leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen (1405-1419)* (Brussels 1982) 603-606.

¹⁰ Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne*, 77-78.

Philip the Good, however, as the new Duke of Burgundy, showed only limited interest in the Portuguese connection. After the death of Michelle in 1422 he received various Portuguese emissaries, who apparently came with the intent of proposing Isabel as his new wife. Their proposals were supported by a gift of expensive horses¹¹. In January 1424 it came even to the point that a Venetian, living in Bruges, informed his republic that the Duke of Burgundy would summon a meeting of the Estates, to discuss his marriage with the daughter of Portugal, for which purpose a Portuguese embassy had already arrived, bringing four more horses¹². However, as we have seen, in November of the same year, Philip married Bonne d'Artois.

After the death of Bonne, the Portuguese still had to wait a considerable period to see their wishes fulfilled. Some historians have been confused by the role of Dom Pedro, who, while travelling through Europe, arrived in Flanders in September 1425 and who would have brought up the proposal again in discussion with Philip. The papers published by Paviot¹³ clearly show that the two never met. In actual fact, the Duke was not even interested: in 1427 he sent envoys to Valencia to ask for the hand of Leonor. They arrived in September of that year, just too late since at that time she had already been promised to Dom Duarte, the future successor of João I, thus leaving the 33 years old Isabel as the only acceptable candidate. In January 1429 Philip's representatives were received by the Master of Avis, in the presence of Duarte, Pedro, Henrique, Fernando and the Count of Barcelos. Jan van Eyck was also there to paint her portrait¹⁴, which would be sent to Philip, together with the agreed conditions, to obtain his final approval.

The rather one-sided conditions of the marriage contract confirm that the House of Avis was very much interested in the deal. They were prepared to pay the 154,000 gold crowns, which Philip had requested. Dom Henrique had to pawn his golden plates and dishes¹⁵ and the last instalment was paid in June 1433¹⁶. The contract also stipulated that King João had to give his daughter

¹¹ *Idem*, 28-29.

¹² *Idem*, 29.

¹³ *Idem*, 29-31. Dom Pedro travelled first to England to see the Duke of Gloucester, who was married to Jacqueline of Bavaria. If Dom Pedro intended to put the Duke of Burgundy in a good mood, this was the last thing to do. Philip did not wait for his arrival in Bruges, but left for Holland, where his troops were at war against the supporters of his cousin Jacqueline.

¹⁴ E. Dhanens, *Hubert en Jan van Eyck* (Antwerpen 1980).

¹⁵ Idalino Fereira da Costa Brochado, Manuel Lopes de Almeida, António Joaquim Dias Dinis O.F.M. (eds.) *Monumenta Henricina IV* (Coimbra 1962) 126-128, no. 25.

¹⁶ J. Martins da Silva Marques, *Descobrimientos portugueses* (Lisbon 1988) I suppl., 484, nr. 755.

the jewellery in keeping with her standing and that he had to pay all travel expenses. Isabel herself had to renounce all rights to property and lands which Philip owned now or in the future. The latter condition demonstrated considerable foresight: the fruits of the dynastic relationships, which had been established by his grandfather, included, amongst others, Brabant, Limburg, Holland, Zeeland, Hainault and in the early 1440's, Luxemburg.

In exchange, Philip promised to marry Isabel within two months of her arrival and guaranteed her an allowance of 77,000 gold crowns, by giving her the income from a few towns, worth 8% of that amount annually. In case Isabel would die without children, two thirds of it would be paid back to the Portuguese Crown¹⁷.

There are a number of possible answers as to why the Avis dynasty was so interested in this marriage. João's interest in trade relations with Flanders can be explained by the shortage of corn in Portugal, by the interest of the wealthy Portuguese in woollen cloth and other textiles from the North and by the need for arms to defend Ceuta. In exchange, the Portuguese shipped their own products, such as honey, wax, leather, seeds, oil, figs, grapes and wine¹⁸. A marital relationship with the House of Burgundy would protect this trade, even if the relationships between them and the English were to deteriorate in the future. A more important consideration must have been that the wedding of Isabel to the Duke of Burgundy meant the recognition and acceptance of the newly arrived House of Avis amongst the European aristocracy¹⁹. Due to circumstances²⁰ the marriage did not give the Portuguese merchants any direct advantage over their competitors in Flanders: they had to wait until 1438 to acquire the same rights as their Castilian colleagues who, as from 1428, had been permitted to nominate their own consul.

¹⁷ Claudine Lemaire, Michèle Henry, *Isabella van Portugal, Hertogin van Bourgondië 1397-1471* (Brussels 1991), 28-29.

¹⁸ A.H. Oliveira Marques, 'Notas para a história da feitoria Portuguesa na Flandres, no século XV' in *Ensaios da história medieval Portuguesa* (Lisbon 1980) 167-168.

¹⁹ In his *A relação dos descobrimentos da Guiné e das Ilhas* the chronicler Diogo Gomes described Dom Henrique as 'infante, son of Dom João king of Portugal and brother of the Duchess of Burgundy, mother of Charles'.

²⁰ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I supl. 130-131, no. 102. It should be realized that privileges were only awarded upon request. A lack of initiative from the Portuguese during that time can possibly be explained by the preparations for the Moroccan adventure of 1437, which drained considerable energy, manpower and money from Portuguese society. At the same time, in the years 1436-1438 Burgundy was at war against the English and had to cope with a revolt in Bruges. The road towards new privileges only became free after these difficult years.

As far as the House of Burgundy was concerned, the marriage must have more than fulfilled their expectations. After Philip had declared war against the English in 1436, the King of Portugal assisted him by sending carpenters to build a galley and a few years later they built three caravels and one big ship for him, to give support to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem at Rhodes²¹. Isabel gave birth to three children, the first two of which died very young, but the third becoming known as Charles the Bold. Isabel was capable and energetic with a strong personality, and played an important role in the central administration of the Burgundian state and in its dynastic politics. She took part in the diplomatic negotiations with the English in 1438-1443²² and demonstrated a great ability in handling Burgundian financial matters²³. In fact, she even had a strong enough personality to give up her position and the income which covered her expenditures²⁴. In 1457 she deserted Philip and his Court and withdrew at her castle La Motte in the forest of Nieppe²⁵. Whether, from there, Isabel had any influence on the movement of Flemish colonists to the Atlantic islands is a question now to be answered.

The Atlantic Islands

According to Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and Joel Serrão it was the shortage of wheat in Portugal that drove the Portuguese to colonize the Atlantic islands²⁶. Another reason may well have been political. Ownership of the Atlantic islands had become a matter of competition between Castilians and Portuguese. The latter had learned their lesson when they lost their claim to the Canary islands: just discovering and looking at an island was not sufficient to establish ownership.

²¹ The galley was not ready in time to participate in the attack on Calais [Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne*, 37-38]. The vicissitudes of the fleet for Rhodes have been described in great detail by the same author in his article 'La piraterie bourguignonne en mer Noire à la moitié du XVe siècle' in Henri Dubois, Jean-Claude Hocquet, André Vauchez (eds.), *Horizons marins Itinéraires spirituels (Ve-XVIIIe siècles)*, Volume II *Marins, navires et affaires* (Paris 1987), 203-214.

²² M.R. Thielemans, *Bourgogne et Angleterre. Relations politiques et économiques entre les Pays-Bas Bourguignons et l'Angleterre 1435-1467* (Brussels 1966) 111-163.

²³ A full account of the activities of Isabel can be obtained through W.P. Blockmans, *De volksvertegenwoordiging in Vlaanderen in de overgang van Middeleeuwen naar Nieuwe Tijden (1384-1506)* (Brussels 1978), 156-157, 353, 403, and 533 which contain extensive references to transactions of the members and states of Flanders, published later in idem, *Handelingen van de Leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen. Excerpten uit de rekeningen van steden, kasselrijen en vorstelijke ambtenaren, 1419-1467* (Brussels 1990).

²⁴ Werner Schulz, *Andreaskreuz und Christusorden, Isabella von Portugal und der Burgundischen Kreuzzug* (Freiburg 1976) 73.

²⁵ Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, 167-168.

²⁶ Joel Serrão, 'Le blé des îles Atlantiques Madère et Açores aux XVe et XVIe siècles' in *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations* 9 (1954) 337-341.

The archipelago of the Madeiras, including the islands of Madeira, Porto Santo and Deserta, has been known since the middle of the XIVth century from manuscripts and maps. Actual colonization may have started in 1425²⁷. In order to make settling in the islands more attractive, in 1439 the inhabitants were exempted for a period of five years from paying *dizima* (tithes) and *portagem* (harbourtaxes) for all the goods they brought to Lisbon or other parts of the kingdom²⁸.

The speed of development of the islands was remarkable. Wood was the first product exported, and in the late 1440's several shipments of yew, for the production of handbows in Flanders, were recorded²⁹. In 1455 the Italian navigator Cadamosto reported that Madeira had become a producer of wheat, meat, planks of cedar wood and yew, sugar and very good wines, and at Porto Santo wheat and barley were grown³⁰. However sugar was to become the main produce of Madeira, being more profitable than cereals. The monopoly of the Genoese and Arabs was broken, and at the end of the 1460's the supply of sugar to the European market, in particular to Flanders, began to exceed demand. Sugar was still a luxury product for the happy few with a low price elasticity and prices dropped rapidly. In 1498 quotas were established for the various markets, the largest being Flanders, receiving 40,000 arrobas or about one third of the total production³¹. One of the companies in Bruges

²⁷ An undated and unsigned letter, said to have been written in 1426 and confirmed in 1493, gave João Gonçalves Zarco an order to distribute the land of Madeira to its first inhabitants [Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses* I suppl., 109-110, no.82]. Some writers have concluded from this document that around this time, and may be even already in 1425, João Gonçalves Zarco, together with Bartolomeu Perestrelo and Tristao Teixeira, set foot in the bay where Funchal would be founded. It was in 1433 that Dom Henrique received from his brother Duarte the three islands with all the royal rights, privileges and income. In addition he obtained complete control of civil and criminal jurisdiction, with exception of the death penalty and dismemberment. The King reserved for himself the overall jurisdiction, the mint and the rate of monetary exchange [Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses* I, 271-272, no. 256].

²⁸ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 400, no. 314, letter, directed to Dom Henrique, signed by Queen Leonor and approved by Infante Dom Pedro, uncle and defender of the King and 440, no. 343, signed by Dom Pedro, Regent. These exemptions were repeated and extended to all the islands of Dom Henrique in 1444. The same exemptions were applied in 1449, and, after many years, brought to life again in 1482. In 1496 the concession was limited to 'novelties' and in 1539 limited to the inhabitants of Madeira only, with many restrictions.

²⁹ Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne*, 82.

³⁰ Joel Serrão (ed.), *Dicionária de História de Portugal* IV (Lisbon 1961-71), Vol. III 126.

³¹ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, III, 488-490, no. 323. One arroba was equivalent to almost 14.7 kilograms.

concerned with the sugar trade was that of Despars, described by O. Mus³², but smaller entrepreneurs also took part³³.

By the end of the fifteenth century the development of the sugar culture in Madeira caused a shortage of cereals in Ceuta and in Madeira itself, and this gave the colonizers of the Azores a chance to export their wheat. In the sixteenth century they took over the role of Madeira as a refreshment station for the *Carreira da Índia*, whereas, still later, their location made the Azores an ideal stopover for ships returning from Brazil.

The Azores can be divided in three groups: in the southeast São Miguel, Santa Maria and a group of rocks, called the Formigues, in the middle Faial, Pico, São Jorge, Graciosa and Terceira, and in the far west Flores and Corvo. The first group is situated about 745 statute miles (1200 km) west of Portugal. With the prevailing current and the strong westerly or northwesterly winds they were difficult to approach directly and the safest route went via Madeira. Also, because they were uninhabited and colonization meant starting from scratch, finding colonists for the Azores was far from easy.

In 1439 Henry the Navigator obtained a royal licence to send sheep and to populate the islands³⁴. The first settlement, most probably on the island of Santa Maria, may not have been without success, but further encouragement was apparently necessary. In 1443, like in Madeira, the conditions for commerce were made more attractive³⁵.

³² O. Mus, 'De Brugse compagnie Despars op het einde van de 15e eeuw' in *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis gesticht onder de benaming Société d'Emulation te Brugge* 101 (1964) 5-118.

³³ In 1485 three Flemish shipowners went to a notary to obtain a written statement, in which they declared that they had gone to Madeira, in Portugal, to buy sugar (three crates, each containing 16 arobas of sugar, each aroba being 28 pounds of Bruges weight), but that on their way back their ship and its cargo had been confiscated by two Danish men-of-war [L. Gilliodts-van Severen, *Cartulaire de l'ancienne estaple de Bruges* (Bruges 1904) II, 252].

³⁴ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 401-402, no. 316. Henry informed his nephew, King Afonso V, that he intended to send sheep to the seven islands of the Azores and that, if the king agreed, he would arrange for the islands to be populated. The King, with the authority of his mother as his tutor and curator and with the agreement of his uncle, Dom Pedro, gave Henry licence to do so and ordered the inspectors of finance, judges and magistrates of justice and anybody else to allow him to go ahead and not to impede him in any way.

³⁵ *Idem*, 425, no. 334. The first commander Gonçalo Velho and his colonists were exempted from paying *dizima* and *portagem*, when bringing goods from the Azores to Portugal, for a period of five years.

Four years later the inhabitants of São Miguel, which by then had been taken over by the curator of Afonso V, the Infante Dom Pedro, were exempted for ever from duties on goods brought to Portugal³⁶. After Afonso V had declared himself King, Henry's licence to populate the islands was again confirmed, expressing a closer relationship with uncle Henry, but leaving the original text of 1439 almost unchanged³⁷.

However, some progress must have been made, as can be seen from a number of royal pardons and commuted sentences issued in the 1450's, i.e. after the death of Dom Pedro. They indicate that the Azores, just as Ceuta or Madeira, were also used to exile criminals or so-called criminals. A number of them asked for a review of their sentences because they had been condemned without proper judgement or without even being heard. If the remarks of Afonso do Porto, who was pardoned in 1454 after spending six years in the Azores, can be taken at face value, Dom Pedro had ordered his judicial magistrates to send as many people as possible to populate the islands³⁸. We may assume that the number of people who dared to ask for a review of their sentence represented only a small sample of the total number who were exiled.

³⁶ Charles Verlinden, *The beginnings of modern colonization* (Cornell, London 1970) 223, concludes that Dom Pedro, who in 1439 had become the sole tutor and curator of King Afonso V, must have been in possession of São Miguel since at least 1445. In 1447 present or future inhabitants of the island were exempted for ever from *dizima* when bringing goods to Portugal, so that it would be easier to persuade people to live on the island. Particular products in mind were cereals, wine, fish, wood and vegetables [Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 452-453, no. 355].

³⁷ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 466, no. 368. The confirmation was signed after Afonso V had declared himself independent, but two months before Dom Pedro's death near Alforrobeira in 1449.

³⁸ *Idem*, 517-518, no. 406. A similar story could be heard from Constança Gonçalves, whose daughter Catarina Fernandes was condemned at the age of ten to exile on São Miguel. (*Idem*, 524-525, no. 413). In the same year João de Lisboa, who, in a rage, had killed somebody and had been condemned to 15 years exile on 'the islands governed by Gonçalo Velho', was pardoned after he had spent nine years there. (*Idem*, 528-529, no. 416). João Vaz was condemned to eternal exile on São Miguel, which penalty was commuted in 1453 to a similar penalty at Ceuta. (Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses* I supl., 344, no. 223).

Whether this provides another perspective on the way the Flemish came to the Azores, we will see hereunder³⁹. Shortly before his death in 1460, and before the Flemish came, Dom Henrique took a series of measures concerning some of his islands, which seem to indicate that social communities were developing there⁴⁰.

The Flemish in the Azores

In 1492 Martin Behaim from Nurnberg produced a globe, indicating two of the Azores as the 'Flemish Islands', a name which gave rise to much speculation about their discovery⁴¹ and which in the 17th century was still on the maps. Documents confirm that in the second half of the 15th century there were Flemish settlers on the islands.

One of them was Jácomo of Bruges who had to share his position of *capitão* on Terceira de Jesus Cristo with a certain Alvaro Martines, the two of them having frequent disagreements about the ownership of land. In 1474, after Jácomo's death, the island was divided into two *capitanias*, so that similar arguments could be avoided in future and João Vaz Cortereal became Jácomo's successor⁴². The charter also listed a number of manorial rights, delegated to the Governors, which included duties on the use of watermills for the grinding of wheat or sawing of wood, on the manufacture of metal tools, on bread ovens, on the sale of salt and the income from civil and criminal jurisdiction. This suggests that in 1474 the plans for colonization of the island were becoming reality and that a social structure and economy were developing along the familiar feudal patterns.

³⁹ The suggestion that some of the Flemish on the Azores may have been exiled from Europe was put forward earlier by Martin Cunha da Silveira, 'De la contribution flamande aux Açores' in *Marine Academie Mededelingen* 18 (1966) 92-93.

⁴⁰ Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 569-570, no. 446. In May of 1460 Dom Henrique sent his directives to Gonçalo Velho with regard to the organisation of civil and criminal justice on the islands of Santa Maria and São Miguel, trying to establish himself as the highest judicial level to whom appeals could be sent directly. In his last will Dom Henrique gave the Azores back to Afonso V, who in turn gave them to the Infante D. Fernando. Also the title of Duke of Viseu went to Fernando, who died in 1470.

⁴¹ The claim that Faial was originally called New Flanders because it had been discovered by the Flemish has already been successfully contested in 1874 by Emile vanden Bussche in his *Flandre et Portugal. Mémoires sur les relations qui existèrent autrefois entre les Flamands de Flandre - particulièrement ceux de Bruges - et les Portugais* (Bruges 1874) 127-136

⁴² Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, III, 138-140, no. 105. A further confirmation of Jácomo's stay on Terceira can be obtained from a document which was published in 1717 without reference to any existing original source, suggesting that Jácomo de Bruges received the *capitania* of Jesus Cristo from Dom Henrique in 1450 [Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 470-471, no. 373].

In 1489 the island of Terceira, as it was now called, together with Graciosa, was donated by King João II to Dom Manuel, his later successor⁴³. Jácome de Bruges's part of the *capitania* stayed in hands of the Corte Real family at least until 1582⁴⁴. It was probably before 1486 that a certain Fernão d'Ulmo, or Ferdinand van Olmen, Knight of the Royal Court, received the *capitania* of the other part. He was one of the adventurers who would acquire the first rights on any island or continent they would discover west of the Azores⁴⁵.

The best known Flemish colonist who played a role in the Azores was Joost de Hurtere (Jos de Utra). He was said to be of noble family from the area around Bruges, served under Philip of Burgundy, and was married to Brites de Macedo, from an important Portuguese family. Sometime during the years 1460-1470, while the Dom Fernando was owner of the islands, de Hurtere was nominated to be *capitão* of Faial, perhaps because there were already other Flemings living on the island⁴⁶. In 1482 he obtained the captaincy of Pico, on condition that he would colonize that island as well⁴⁷. In 1491 De Hurtere's captaincy of Faial was confirmed by Dom Manuel⁴⁸. He left the island or died around 1495. His eldest son, with the same name, took over. He married a daughter of João Vaz Cortereal, the successor of Jácome de Bruges and governed over Faial and Pico for a period of 54 years. In 1646 there was still a Luís de Utra Corte Real as *capitão* of the two islands⁴⁹.

Altogether, in the second half of the fifteenth century, there were three Flemings who rose to the position of *capitão* in the Azores. Other Flemish names known to be present during the time of the first Jos de Utra were Willem Bersmacher, Tristan Vernes, Antonio Brum and Joost van Aartryke (Joz da Terra)⁵⁰. Other names of Flemish origin are Groot (Grotas), Govaert (Gularte or Goulart), Bulscamp (Bulcão), Herman (Armas), Roose (Rosa) and Speldmaeker (Espalamaca)⁵¹. In 1553 a citizen of Mesen, Josse Flahoen,

⁴³ Marques, *Descobrimentos Portugueses*, III, 355, no. 237.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, 147-149, no. 110.

⁴⁵ *Idem*, 317-318, no. 205, 326-329, no. 212 and 213 and 331-332, n° 215. Although the first document speaks of the *capitania* of Terceira, we must assume that Van Olmen received the part of Alvaro Martines.

⁴⁶ *Idem*, 76-77, no. 54. This is the way the partially obliterated text of the letter of donation has been made up. However, another interpretation could be that he was head of the Flemish nation in Portugal and rewarded for his good services with the *capitania* of Faial.

⁴⁷ *Idem*, 218-219, no. 150 and 253-254, no. 168.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, 76-79, no. 54 and 366-367, no. 245.

⁴⁹ *Idem*, 366, no. 245.

⁵⁰ Charles Verlinden, *Koloniale expansie in de 15de en 16de eeuw* (Bussum 1975) 49.

⁵¹ Cunha da Silveira, *De la contribution flamande aux Açores*, 110.

settled as a farmer in the neighbourhood of Angra on Terceira. He married a Portuguese woman from Lagos⁵². A decree of king Sebastian of Portugal in 1578 referred to a Willem van Haegen, who was to become the ancestor of the da Silveiras, a well known family in the Azores⁵³.

It was apparently after 1460 that the greatest influx of Flemish colonists took place. As to the question how they came there and why they went there, it is difficult to draw a firm conclusion and the answer presented here will have to be an educated guess.

A mass, but not recorded, emigration directly from Flanders would appear to have a low probability. It would certainly not have gone unnoticed and one would expect to find at least some documented evidence somewhere, which has not been the case.

Sofar no proof has been found either that Isabel showed any interest or took any positive steps to facilitate the emigration of individuals or groups of Flemish settlers to the Azores⁵⁴. By the time the Flemish colonization was taking place, she had already withdrawn from the Court. It is also difficult to see why she would have had any interest in it, unless it were to support a legal system which protected the nobility and the clergy against the poor masses of the *povo*. But, although ordinances of Philip the Good in the years 1458-1461 provided for the penalty of the galley for poverty and begging⁵⁵, there seems to be no written evidence that Flemish 'criminals' were banished to the Atlantic islands.

A more understandable explanation for the Flemish presence in the Azores may be found if we look at the economic situation in Flanders and the position of the Flemish in Portugal.

In Flanders the years around 1460 were years of economic boom. However, one should ask oneself: boom for whom? During the second half of the 1430's the war against the English, the revolt in Bruges and the epidemic of Black Death in 1437-1439 caused a downturn in economic activity and a

⁵² Vanden Bussche, *Flandre et Portugal*, 137.T

⁵³ Verlinden, *The beginnings of modern colonization*, 185-186.

⁵⁴ Paviot, *Portugal et Bourgogne*, 82.

⁵⁵ W.P. Blockmans, W. Prevenier, 'Poverty in Flanders and Brabant, from the fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century: sources and problems' in *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*, 10 (1978) 20-57.

shortage of skilled labour, which was quickly followed by an upturn, leading to the prosperous years of 1440-1474⁵⁶. In particular in the beginning of this period the shortage of skilled labour in the towns and the rising wages must have caused migration to the towns, leaving the landed aristocracy and farmers in serious trouble. Some of the Flemish nobility went to Portugal, where they offered their services to the Portuguese Crown.

Throughout the fifteenth century the Flemish maintained a strong, if not aggressive, presence amongst the foreign *nations* in Portugal and it is well known that in 1414 a Flemish fraternity already existed, which made use of the chapel of Santa Cruz in the Dominican Convent of Lisbon. In 1445 English, French, Flemish and other foreigners, married locally and living for many years in Lisbon where they owned houses and had their businesses, still refused to pay the taxes and other contributions that the Portuguese themselves had to pay⁵⁷. In 1451 the English, Flemish and other foreigners were accused in the *Cortes* of even interfering with the inland retail trade in cloth and fruit⁵⁸. In 1456 Martin Lem, merchant from Bruges, living in Lisbon, became so close to the Portuguese Court that he, together with the Lomellini, was able to obtain the monopoly on the export of cork⁵⁹. A year later he apparently felt confident enough to approach the King, speaking on behalf of the merchants and sea-captains from Flanders, Holland and Zeeland, to obtain special privileges for themselves⁶⁰. In the 1470's the traffic between Portugal and Flanders was hampered by the War of Spanish Succession and the presence of the French fleet north and south of the Iberian peninsula⁶¹. Nevertheless, the special privileges for the Flemish were reconfirmed in 1472, 1478 and

⁵⁶ In 1475 the economic situation started to deteriorate, with 1480-1490 as the years of crisis, when the town of Bruges lost its prime position. See W. Prevenier, W. Blockmans, *De Bourgondische Nederlanden* (Antwerpen 1983) 191-196. English translation: *The Burgundian Netherlands* (Cambridge 1986) 191-196 and W. Brulez, 'Bruges and Antwerpen in the 15th and 16th centuries: an antithesis?' in *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*, 6 (1973) 1-26.

⁵⁷ Marques, *Descobrimentos Portugueses* I suppl., 527-528, no. 973.

⁵⁸ *Idem*, 340-341, no. 220.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, 571-572, no. 1162. The contract stipulated a period of 10 years, with freedom from all duties, except the *sisá*. The King would receive 2000 pounds and a third of the annual profit.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, 259-262, no. 140 and 576, no. 1179. For more details on Maertin Lem and his family relations see John G. Everaert, 'Les Lem, alias Leme une dynastie marchande d'origine Flamande au service de l'expansion Portugaise' in *Actas do III Colóquio Internacional de História da Madeira* (Funchal 1993) 817-838. Maertin Lem's son was burgomaster in Bruges who in 1467 occasionally attended discussions with Isabel [W.P. Blockmans, *Handelingen van de Leden en van de Staten van Vlaanderen: excerptie uit de rekeningen van steden, kasselrijen en vorstelijke ambtenaren, 1467-1477* Volume II (Brussels 1971) 12, 19, 21, 174, 175 and 182].

⁶¹ Mus, *De Brugse compagnie Despars*, 30.

1483. As we have seen the sugar trade brought the Flemish merchants and mariners even to Madeira.

It is therefore hardly surprising that some members of the Flemish *nation* in Portugal found their way to the Azores, but we have to distinguish between the *povo*, in other words the merchants, mariners or farmers who followed their landlords⁶², and the people who obtained a *capitania*. We can be certain that the Flemish who rose to the position of *capitão* were nominated because they had rendered military, commercial or financial services to the King, the Duke of Viseu or the Order of Christ. After 1475, due to economic circumstances, there was little incentive for the Flemish to go back to their original homeland.

Conclusion

As far as possible, this article has made use of literature based on verifiable sources and on publications of original documents. From these it has not been possible to connect the marital policy of the House of Burgundy and the House of Avis, which led to the marriage of Philip the Good and Isabel of Portugal, with the presence of the Flemish on the Azores.

As far as the marital alliance is concerned, the two dynasties each followed their own interests. For the House of Avis it meant status and recognition amongst the European aristocracy and support for trade with northwestern Europe. For the House of Burgundy, the continuation of the dynasty had become a first priority. Their sudden preference for an Iberian bride can be explained by the fact that the possibilities in France were exhausted, whereas after the weddings of his two sisters, Philip's own marriage into English aristocracy would have made his position vis-à-vis the French political circuit extremely difficult. The fact that in the fifteenth century Aragon was the largest political and economic power in the western Mediterranean⁶³ and that Philip, like his forefathers, had a growing desire to leave his mark as a crusader, may have been the motivation for approaching, in the first instance,

⁶² An illustrative case is that of a German knight of the Order of Santa Catarina, who, together with seven or eight workers, obtained a piece of land on Madeira to grow grapes, vegetables and sugarcane and to build a house and an oratory. [Marques, *Descobrimientos Portugueses*, I, 541-542, no. 423]. Robert Bartlett, *The making of Europe. Conquest, colonization and cultural change 950-1350* (Harmondsworth 1994) 24-59, describing the aristocratic diaspora of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, gives an excellent analysis of the phenomenon and of the possible motivations behind colonization in the Middle Ages, in which the Flemish played an important role.

⁶³ F.L. Ganshof, *The Middle Ages. A history of international relations* (New York 1971), 278, quoted by Borchgrave, *Diplomaten*, 196.

the House of Aragon. The delegation that finally went to Portugal to negotiate the marriage contract with the House of Avis, no doubt had an open eye for the qualities of Isabel as a possible substitute for Philip, for example during negotiations or in running his financial affairs.

The Flemish participation in the colonization of the Azores can probably best be understood from the Flemish presence in Portugal, especially after 1450. Many of them were married there and had children with Flemish names, whereas the Flemish *nation* continued to receive injections of newcomers from Flanders. The people that rose to the position of *capitão* were connected to the Portuguese Court or had rendered services to the King or the worldly or spiritual owners of the islands. That some of the Flemish participated in the Portuguese colonization of the Azores can therefore be hardly surprising.

SAMENVATTING

De Bourgondische hertogen hebben de huwelijkspolitiek met succes ingezet om hun doelstellingen te bereiken. Filips de Stoute hanteerde deze methode om zijn invloed in het Franse koningschap te vergroten. Onder Jan zonder Vrees kwam een einde aan de Franco-Bourgondische alliantie en door de moord op hem werd de tweestrijd tussen het huis van Orléans en het huis van Bourgondië nog aangescherpt.

Filips de Goede onderhield een bondgenootschap met de Engelsen tot in 1435, wat hem in een moeilijke positie bracht t.o.v. de Franse kroon. Door zijn tweede huwelijk met Bonne van Artois kon hij zijn positie in Frankrijk versterken. Maar zij stierf zonder erfgenamen. De onderhandelingen voor een nieuw huwelijksbondgenootschap met Aragon in 1427, die mislukten, en met Isabella van Portugal, die tot een alliantie leidden in 1429, betekenden een onmiskenbare breuk met de vroegere politiek van het Bourgondische huis.

Het initiatief voor het huwelijk van Isabella van Portugal en Filips de Goede kwam duidelijk vanwege João I, de eerste Portugese koning van het huis van Avis. Filips de Goede zelf had aanvankelijk weinig belangstelling. Gedurende verscheidene jaren poogden de Portugezen hem met gezantschappen tot een huwelijk met Isabella over te halen. Ze hadden er in 1429 in het huwelijkscontract zelfs heel veel geld voor veil. Dit toont duidelijk aan hoezeer de Portugese koning, o.m. om redenen van economische aard, in de alliantie geïnteresseerd was. Bovendien bracht het huwelijk de erkenning van het jonge huis van Avis in Europa mee. Voor de Bourgondiërs was het huwelijk ook een succes. Isabella schonk Filips zijn opvolger Karel de Stoute en speelde zelf een belangrijke rol in de staatszaken.

Madeira was gekend sinds het midden van de 14de eeuw en werd door de Portugezen gekoloniseerd vanaf 1425. Zijn ontwikkeling ging razendsnel. Hout was er het eerste exportproduct, weldra gevolgd door graangewassen en vervolgens door suiker. Aan het einde van de 15de eeuw werd een derde van de suikerproductie van Madeira naar Vlaanderen verscheept.

De Azoreneilanden waren moeilijker te koloniseren. Hendrik de Zeevaarder kreeg daar in 1439 toelating voor en maakte er de handelsvoorwaarden aantrekkelijk. Ook werden er criminelen naartoe gestuurd. Rond 1460 moeten er reeds een aantal nederzettingen ontwikkeld zijn.

De naam "Vlaamse Eilanden" die aan een deel van de Azoren gegeven werd op de wereldbol van Martin Behaim uit 1492, gaf aanleiding tot heel wat speculaties over hun ontdekking. In de tweede helft van de 15de eeuw waren

er effectief Vlamingen gevestigd. De belangrijkste waren Jacob van Brugge, Fernand van Olmen en Joost de Hurtere. Ze verwierven er "capitania's". Het is duidelijk dat de grootste toevloed van Vlaamse kolonisten na 1460 gebeurde. Er is nog geen vaststaande verklaring voor dat fenomeen. Er zijn geen aanwijzingen dat het om een massale emigratie ging, noch dat Isabella daar een actieve rol heeft in gespeeld. De meest aannemelijke verklaring kan gevonden worden in de economische situatie van Vlaanderen, die toen een "boom" beleefde met massale uitwijking naar de steden en een gebrek aan werkkrachten bij de aristocratie en de boerenstand. Anderzijds waren er gedurende de 15de eeuw voldoende mogelijkheden voor ondernemende Vlamingen in Lissabon en was daar dan ook een sterke Vlaamse aanwezigheid. Dat bepaalde lieden van de Vlaamse natie aldaar, die zich verdienstelijk gemaakt hadden voor de Portugese kroon, met belangrijke posities op de eilanden begiftigd werden, kan geen verbazing wekken.