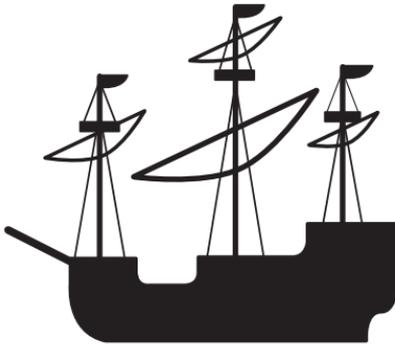


A VERY SHORT
HISTORY
OF PORTUGAL

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A. H. de Oliveira Marques

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INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS

Man arrived in the Iberian Peninsula very early on in history. Remains of cultures are plentiful in the peninsula, which helps us to trace human presence in the region back one million years. The Western part, currently Portugal, is rich in archaeological evidence from all periods.

Bronze cultures probably appeared as early as 2000 B.C., attesting to the predominance of a similar type of man, the dolichocephalies, of average height, probably of dark complexion, as well as some mesocephalies. The Iron period saw the arrival of the first Indo-European peoples. Afterwards, came the Celts and the Iberians, as well as the first highly-civilized maritime peoples, the Phoenicians (before 1000 B.C.) and the Greeks. There is little to say about their contribution to the ethnic composition of the future Portuguese. All of them were similar anthropologically, the so-called Mediterranean type of man. The same is true of other invaders who conquered the Iberian Peninsula, either in part or in its entirety: the Carthaginians, the Romans and the Muslims.

Phoenician and Greek colonization hardly touched the northern part of present-day Portugal. In southern Portugal, however, their influence was noticeable, though limited to the coast line.

When the Romans conquered the Iberian Peninsula and civilized it permanently (second century B.C. to first century A.D.), they found in the West several native peoples who they classified and labelled. Of these groups, the *Gallaeci* and the *Lusitani* were the most important, and only they prevailed in both geography and administration.

The native languages were of little or no importance in the birth and rise of Portuguese. It was the natives who learned Latin, not the Romans who learned the local languages. Two legions settled in *Callaecia* or *Gallaecia* (that is, Galicia) and remained there for some time. It is therefore presumable that the dialectal forms of Vulgar Latin spoken by the legionaries have determined or influenced the rise of Galician-Portuguese.

Yet early medieval Portuguese should not be associated with Galician-Portuguese only. The dialect (or dialects) spoken in *Lusitania* was just as important. There were nuclei of Italian colonists settled in the rising centres of the south. Thus, Roman or Italic dialects probably had a major effect on the rise of southern Portuguese.

Neither Suevi nor Visigoths affected the Hispanic idioms. The Arabs arrived early in the eighth century and with them came the second and last significant component of the Portuguese language. Some 600 words passed from Arabic into Portuguese. The Muslim conquest, however, only lasted in central and southern Portugal, i.e. in the area where Galician-Portuguese was never spoken. «Lusitanian», which we now might call Mozarabic or the language of the Mozarabs, evolved separately and under different cultural circumstances. We know nothing of its features. But it certainly had its own individuality.

By the 11th and 12th centuries, when the Mondego and then the Tagus had been definitively crossed by the Christian armies, Galician-Portuguese and Lusitanian-Mozarabic came in

direct and permanent contact. It was from this encounter that the Portuguese language was born.

The Portuguese borders, as they have existed from the 13th century onwards, are not mere products of the hazards of the Christian Reconquest of territory from the Muslims. Nor were they the fortuitous result of military adventures against Christian neighbours. Their origin and permanent traits must be sought far back into the past and mostly by the Roman, ecclesiastical and Muslim administration systems.

In the first century B.C., the administrative reforms of Augustus divided the former *Hispania Ulterior* into two provinces, *Lusitania* and *Baetica*, loosely separated by the Guadiana River. From *Lusitania*, with its capital *Emerita*, the region to the north of the Douro (*Gallaecia*) was taken and annexed to the *Tarraconensis* province. For judicial purposes, each province was further divided into smaller units called *conventus*. *Lusitania* comprised three of them, named *Pacensis* (from *Pax*), *Scallabitanus* (after *Scallabis*), and *Emeritensis* (after *Emerita*). The first two were separated from each other by the Tagus river. An artificial border line, probably based on tribal frontiers, separated the third *conventus* from the other two. Also artificial, but nonetheless founded upon actual separation of native peoples, was the boundary between north-eastern *Lusitania* and the *Tarraconensis*. The latter province was divided into a great number of *conventus*. In the northwest there were the *Bracarensis* (after *Bracara*), the *Lucensis* (after *Lucus*), and the *Asturicensis* (after *Asturica*).

Two aspects stand out from all these details: the division between southern and northern «Portugal» by the Douro line and an almost complete coincidence between the area of the three adjoining *conventus* (the *Bracarensis*, the *Scallabitanus*, and the *Pacensis*) and present-day Portugal.

In each province there were urban nuclei, the *municipia*, the *coloniae*, the *praefecturae*, and the *civitates*, as well as rural areas known as *gentes* or *pagi*. As time went by, distinctions between their political status and their administrative status, which derived from their origin, were gradually blurred, and the *civitates* prevailed over all the others as a general name.

Some cities emerged as centres of greater political and economic significance. It was there that Christianity, an essentially urban religion, spread more rapidly. By late Roman times, most of the cities were residences of bishops and capitals of religious districts known as *dioceses*. As a rule, in each province one of the bishops — the one living in his capital city — had a certain pre-eminence. He was called the metropolitan and corresponded to the civil head of the province. The metropolitan of *Lusitania* lived in *Emerita*, and that of *Gallaecia* in *Bracara*.

Suevi and Visigoths only brought along minor changes. The *civitas* and its adjoining land, the *territorium*, gradually replaced, for administrative and political purposes, both the *conventus* and the province. This meant a greater emphasis on the local unit and local problems, directly opposed to the existence of an efficient and real centralization. For practical purposes, the province (sometimes called «duchy», for its head was now a duke, *dux*) ceased to have any real relevance. Even the memory of it faded and left no traces in late medieval times. The weakening of provincial authority gave the *conventus* a unique status, not because it played a major role in justice or administration, but because it was reinforced by the the episcopal organization's overriding power.

The *conventus*, however, would also eventually disappear. While Christianity expanded, new bishoprics had to be founded within the same conventual area. In turn, they became the essential administrative units ruling cities and territories. If, for

boundary purposes, some of the *conventus* survived, it was simply because the ecclesiastical dioceses happened to coincide with it and stopped at its borders. But within each *conventus* new fractions were now possible, following the border line of each bishopric. This was particularly true of the dioceses of *Tude* and *Auriense*, which comprised the area between the Lima and the northern frontier of the *conventus Bracarenensis*. Part of *Tude* became «Portuguese» later. The diocese of Egitania, slightly to the east of the *conventus Scallabitanus* and probably a part of the *Emeritensis*, was later added to the new country.

All over the world, the Arab conquest respected and preserved the existing administrative units. Only the identifying names were changed. Emirates were established, each one corresponding to a province or group of provinces. Below the emirates there were the *kuwar* or districts, corresponding to the former *conventus* or the religious dioceses. Lesser units within each *kura* were the *quran* (sing. *qarya*) or local communities. Military reasons led to the rise of other districts or landmarks, closer to the border, encompassing several *kuwar*, and where civilian and military powers were unified under a stronger unit of command.

Thus, when the «Reconquista» started and the Christian order gradually submerged the whole of western Iberia, nothing essential had been changed in the boundaries and administrative habits, which in some cases were almost one thousand years old. No wonder that such a condition would always be kept in mind by kings, lords, bishops and communities.

The Romans, in their effort to centralize administration and to civilize and pacify the native tribes, built a wide network of roads, permanently connecting areas which until then had been more or less isolated. Easy communication became possible among all the provinces and all the *conventus*. Within this

rather complex network of communications, two facts stand out and should be emphasized: first, the existence of two developed areas, one to the north of the Douro, the other to the south of the Tagus basin (thus including the northern bank of the river), separated by a vast region of sparse population and few important settlements; second, the south-north road connection which put those two areas in relatively easy contact.

The Roman road network was probably expanded after the fourth century. All the significant political and economic towns in Visigothic and Muslim times were located along the main Roman roads: capitals of provinces, all the seats of *conventus*, *kura* and judicial units, all the episcopal cities, and even minor urban nuclei and rural centres. During the Muslim era, this network was slightly improved, particularly in the south, where some new roads were built.



Before the actual formation of Portugal as a separate country in western Iberia, several political units existed within parts of her future territory. Much has been written about the impact that such realms might have had on Portugal's birth and permanence as a nation. But because of their remote past, it seems difficult to substantiate such claims.

Among the peoples who invaded Spain in the beginning of the fifth century, the Suevi played one of the most relevant roles. Arriving either by land or by sea, they reached the far northwest as early as 411, settling down in *Gallaecia* as *foederati* and gradually emerging as a strong kingdom. By 419, the Suevi alone were sharing *Gallaecia* with the native peoples, after having got rid of the Alani and the Vandals. As usual, they chose the country and turned their backs on the cities, where the Roman

population was left undisturbed. Their number was obviously small, and their imprint on the land minimal. By the middle of the fifth century, they controlled *Gallaecia*, *Lusitania*, *Baetica*, and part of the *Carthaginiensis*, and raided the *Tarraconensis*. Later, however, their decline became rapid. As a tributary of the Visigoths or coexisting with them in a much-reduced area, the realm of the Suevi persisted and was able to maintain a frontier line which included *Gallaecia* and the two Lusitanian bishoprics of Veseo and Conimbriga, later turned into four. The Suevi were originally a heathen people. After hesitating between Catholicism and Arianism, they chose the former, which led to a violent reaction from the Arian Visigoths. By 576, a campaign against the Suevi started. Their kingdom was incorporated into the Visigothic State (585).

For the future Portugal, only the ecclesiastical framework of the Suevi was significant. In the sixth century, two metropolitan centres overlapped with the Suevi's principal cities, *Bracara* and *Lucus*, each one with a certain number of dependent bishoprics. *Bracara* headed the dioceses of *Dumio*, *Portucale*, *Lamecum*, *Veseo*, *Conimbriga* and *Egitania*. The division line with *Lucus* was the river Lima. The interesting fact in this arrangement is that the area of the dioceses of *Lamecum*, *Veseo*, *Conimbriga* and *Egitania*, formerly included in the metropolitan province of *Emerita (Lusitania)*, was now assigned to *Bracara (Gallaecia)* because of the new political unit. This assignment continued until 660, and was much later, in the «Reconquista» period, used by the bishops of Braga, with the backing of Portuguese rulers, to claim the ecclesiastical inheritance of the Suevi and thus to unite the whole territory from the Lima to the Tagus rivers.

The Muslims landed in Spain for purposes of conquest in 711. Two years later, practically all the Peninsula was under the sway of Islam. But the Christian «Reconquista» came quickly,

growing from a small piece of territory in Asturias to a vast area limited at the south by the Douro basin. The victories of king Alfonso I covered all of *Gallaecia* and reached *Lusitania* south all the way down to *Veseo* (Viseu). For more than a century, most of Galicia was, if not a battlefield, at least a very unsafe frontier land, rather disorganized, with half-deserted and half-burned down cities, impoverished and sparsely populated, with all its bishops (that is, most of its real authority) fleeing to the king's court and remaining there for a long time. South Galicia, between the rivers Minho and Douro, suffered the most from these events.

It was not until the middle of the ninth century that conditions improved and were thought favourable enough for a general reorganization and new settlement. However, the Muslims returned, bringing with them new destruction and disorganization. It took the Christians seventy more years to come back to the Mondego. Dume (ancient *Dumio*) was never restored, being absorbed by Braga. Idanha was transferred to Guarda, but only in 1199 was a new bishop appointed.

Within the kingdom of Asturias (or Leon, as it was known after the tenth century), the great units for administration purposes were the so-called *terrae*, sometimes *provinciae*, and their government entrusted to a count (*comes*), also called *dux*. The old Roman and Visigothic tradition was therefore maintained and enforced. There were, of course, many other counts (*comites*) who administered smaller units, also named *terrae* or *territoria*.

From time to time, royal wills and international dissensions made Galicia «independent». From 926 to 930, Galicia was further dismembered, into two parts, the southern part being assigned to Ramiro Ordóñez, who was «King of Portugal», before inheriting the whole of his father's realm. Such short periods of separation were meaningless. They were normal events in most

feudal monarchies and generally brought about no permanent pretensions of autonomy; nor were they a result of any local efforts leaning toward independence.

Late in the ninth century, the territory south of the Lima and north of the Douro, being sufficiently reorganized and too important to be kept joined with the rest of Galicia, was detached from it and entrusted to a new governor (*dux*). Its seat was *Portucale*, and its name gradually became *Portucale* too, the word appearing for the first time in this broader sense in 938. The land of *Portucale* — *Portugal* in the dialect that was actually spoken — was divided further into small counties, also called *terrae* or *territoria*. The line of known *duces* started with Gonçalo Mendes. After him, a dynasty of five or six governors kept Portugal united as a true fief in the same family until the mid-11th century.

South of the Douro, the conquered territories formed another province called Coimbra, logically maintaining the old administrative tradition. It seems, however, that hereditary transmission in government was never regular here, although the same family kept it for quite a long time.

Thus, for almost two hundred years, either the whole or at least a vast part of northern Portugal was kept united under the same family, with a rudimentary central government, a «ducal» court and the predictable problems consequently arising. A principle of unity was achieved. In feudal times, this meant much more than the old Roman or Visigothic administrative units. It meant the beginning of autonomy, the first continuous assertion of political individuality opposing the kingdom of Leon.



In the 11th century, the central authority of the Cordoba caliphate collapsed. In its place, there appeared all over Muslim Spain small kingdoms called *taifas*. From 1012 through to 1094, six of those kingdoms rose and fell in *Gharb al-Andalus*: *Walba* (Huelva), *Martula* (Mértola), *Shanta Mariya* (Faro), *Baja* (Beja), *Shilb* (Silves) and *Batalyaws* (Badajoz).

Batalyaws was the largest kingdom of all, encompassing most of the ancient *Lusitania*, with the seat in *Batalyaws*, a new military town which was gradually replacing *Marida* (Merida). It lasted from 1022 through to 1094, having been one of the last kingdoms to fall. Its origin was the Lower March of al-Andalus, a successor of *Lusitania*. A continuous conflict with the *taifa* of *Ishbiliya* weakened *Batalyaws* to the benefit of the Christian advance. The entire northern part of the kingdom fell before the Christian armies of Fernando I of Leon and Castile. The Christian advance appeared so dangerous that the king of *Batalyaws* took the risk of begging the Almoravids for help. The Almoravids had built up an imposing empire in north Africa. Although the menace they represented to the independence of the small *taifa* kingdoms was felt, Spanish Muslims had no choice. The Almoravids landed in Spain. They did push the Christians back but decided to reunify the Peninsula under their rule. In a reversal of fortunes, the king of *Batalyaws* asked the Christians for help, surrendering Santarin (Santarém) and al-Ushbuna (Lisbon) (1093) to them, but to no avail. The Almoravid power was too strong to be resisted, and the whole of al-Gharb fell into their hands (1094-95). Shortly after, those two cities were recovered (al-Ushbuna, in 1094; Santarin, in 1110) and the Muslim frontier was pushed back north again to the Mondego basin.

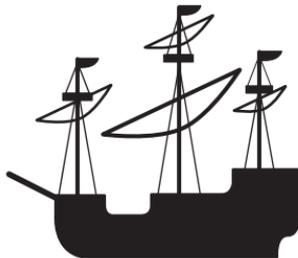
The *taifa* kingdoms did not last long enough to impose a unification pattern on southwest Iberia. Furthermore, their

ties with the rest of Muslim Spain remained unbroken, within an easy system of communication and developed economic relations. Localisms, however, increased and expanded under their existence. They might not have been powerful enough to crystallize into an independence, but they certainly helped to overthrow a yoke which was from then on deemed unsustainable. Conscious of their own small interests and oppressed by a tougher and tighter military system, the local units of al-Gharb became the northern Christians' best allies to accomplish the «Reconquista».

THE AUTHOR

A.H. de Oliveira Marques (1933-2007) was born in São Pedro do Estoril, Portugal. He received a degree in Historical and Philosophical Sciences from the University of Lisbon and pursued an internship at the University of Würzburg, in Germany. In 1957, he started teaching at the Faculdade de Letras/University of Lisbon, where he would complete his PhD in 1960. He moved to the USA in 1965 and lectured in Auburn, Florida, Columbia, Minnesota and Chicago until 1970, when he returned to Portugal. He headed the Portuguese National Library (1974-1976) and became a Professor at New University of Lisbon (1976), where he presided the founding commission of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (1977-1980) and the University's Scientific Council. In 1977, he received an *Honoris Causa* degree from Australian La Trobe University and the president of the Portuguese Republic awarded him with the Grã Cruz da Ordem da Liberdade in 1988. As an historian he authored over 60 books and is considered one of the main experts on Portuguese Medieval History.

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