

# IMAGINING THE MOOR IN MEDIEVAL PORTUGAL

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For medieval Portugal, Africa was familiar and strange, a known place across the modest parcel of the Mediterranean between the Algarve and Ceuta, and, farther south, an unknown expanse of land that glimmered black under the equatorial sun. And for Portugal, like for Spain, Africa was part of the demographics and history of Iberian culture in the figure of the Moor, at once an “other” and a closer, more intimate presence. Jeffrey J. Cohen reminds us of the “cultural work” of the Saracen (one of the medieval terminological possibilities for “Moor”), “whose dark skin and diabolical physiognomy were the western Middle Ages’ most familiar, most exorbitant embodiment of racial alterity” [189]. Cohen argues, therefore, that the Saracen (*grosso modo*) existed in a network of literary and ideological productions of western Europe; in the case of Iberia, the Moor was sometimes but not always a Saracen and was both a figure of alterity and of familiarity and sameness, less an aprioristic other and more of a figure that could be variously othered as a marker of boundaries including “race,” spirituality, and sexuality. While this essay does not take on the idea of racial alterity per se, it does assume the notion that in the literary culture of Portugal blackness, in some manner, informed constructions of the Moor. My purpose here is to delineate an understanding of the Moor in medieval Portugal as a construct that resists easy categorizations as an undifferentiated figure of otherness, a consideration that culminates with the work of Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410?–1474?), the first chronicler of Portuguese exploration into (west) Africa. To this end, I will briefly consider the Moor in representative examples from the *livros de linhagens* (genealogical books) and the *cantigas d’escarnho e de mal dizer* (poetry of mockery and insult, hereafter abbreviated CEM), not so much in order to trace a direct influence between these texts and the work of Zurara but to provide an idea of how the Moor was variously fashioned in earlier texts. The analysis here is not exhaustive nor conclusive but suggestive, and is meant to indicate how the Moor—and the idea of the Moor—in Portugal can add to critical conversations on the imaginative and ideological constructions of the Moor and of Africa and its inhabitants.

The formulations of national and cultural identities in European texts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance<sup>1</sup> that in some way engage Africa and the African have increasingly

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1. “Renaissance” is increasingly being replaced with “early modern” as many scholars have noted as a way of indicating, *inter alia*, a more theoretically inflected approach to the study of this general time period. All critical labels are conveniences and therefore shift as the methodologies, assumptions, and objectives of scholars change. I agree that, under the rubric of “early modern studies,” an array of provocative work is being produced; the designation brings with it an invigorating refurbishment of critical postures toward the centuries following the Middle Ages. Yet a note of caution should also be sounded, since “early modern” can imply that what scholars in the field do is only worthwhile insofar as it inevitably relates to the “modern.” Modernity thus becomes the teleological justification and arbiter of value for anything preceding it. A large part of the appeal of the cultural productivity and mindsets of the centuries preceding modernity (and this includes the Middle Ages) is precisely that which is different, alien, strange to the modern world and in-

and understandably become an object of interest among literary and cultural theorists. One of the advances in recent years of this critical work is the freeing of the Moor from the strictures of the “self/other” binary that permeated earlier scholarly work on Europeans and their others, especially in the field of imperial/colonial studies or in the study of the conflictive representations of Moors and Europeans in genres such as medieval epic.<sup>2</sup> In the medieval field, Cohen’s work on the Saracen is one good example of this more theoretically suggestive approach, since Cohen explores the work of representation as it dovetails with the universalizing claims of psychoanalysis. Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s essay usefully reminds us that the medieval world considered itself as existing in three parts, thus making problematic modern applications of binaries as supposedly informing a medieval perception of “Asian Orient and European Occident” [20]. Other studies, though concerned with postmedieval literatures and histories, also explore the cultural work of the Moor. Such, for instance, is the case with Emily C. Bartels’s articles on the Moor in Shakespeare. Bartels charts the flexibilities and inconsistencies of the term “Moor” in Renaissance England [“Making More” 434], noting especially its “racial” claims. In analyzing the place of postcolonialism as it might inform critical work on Africa in the Renaissance, Bartels questions the model that postcolonial studies assumes as underlying its own practice by arguing that “[postcolonial critiques] continue ... to recreate the history of silenced voices through only one model of cultural exchange: one in which European domination is both the motivating force and the inevitable outcome” [“*Othello* and Africa” 46].

These representative studies of the Moor tag certain issues with regard to the Portuguese Moor of the Middle Ages. For example, while the idea of “race,” to some degree, must accompany considerations of the African as perceived and written about by Portuguese, it is also important to remember that other factors—such as the non-Christian status of Africans and their potential convertibility—were often just as predominant, if not more so, in the Portuguese conceptualizations of Moorishness or Africanness. This, in part, was due to physical similarities between Moors (in particular, the lighter, or “tawny” Moors of North Africa and Barbary) and Portuguese, and therefore to what constituted Iberian whiteness and blackness as opposed to those obtaining in northern European countries. The critical pressure, on the other hand, that scholars such as Bartels and Barbara Fuchs put on postcolonial studies and its methodological presuppositions and potential applicability to earlier periods is a point well taken, since the Portuguese model (or better, practice) of empire in Africa was not a simple exercise of dominance or subjugation but was regularly more negotiated, as practical and pragmatic as it was ideological. One only needs to examine, even glancingly, the large corpus of Portuguese mercantile and missionary documentation on fifteenth-century Africa to realize that many, and often competing or contrasting, practices of empire and colonization existed.

Now let’s turn specifically to Portugal and Iberia, beginning with working definitions. “Moor”—Portuguese *mouro* or Castilian *moro*—is a designator that requires some qualification. In the Iberian Middle Ages, *mouro* or *moro* can be a dramatically slippery term, in large part because of the multifarious circumstances of its use as a marker of dif-

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*explicable from a modern perspective. It is possible to take advantage of the critical advances of early modern studies and its many theoretical possibilities without sacrificing the enticing alterity of the Middle Ages and Renaissance if that alterity does not, somehow and ineluctably, point to the modern.*

2. Barbara Fuchs presents a compelling argument for the adoption of “imperium studies” as a theoretical label for the work done by scholars of early modern expansion and empire. Fuchs’s expression seeks to be “a way to address the links between metropolitan sovereignty and expansion abroad and the cultural productions that sustain them both” [“*Imperium Studies*” 71] that also allows the scholar “postcolonial insights in a historical and intellectual tradition” [73].

ference, assimilation, and the porosity and politics of the identity and cultural categories it purportedly delimits.<sup>3</sup> *Moor* is alternately denotative and connotative, precise and imprecise, historically accurate and imaginatively construed. Etymologically, geographical writings gave birth to *mouro* as a generic label. The word derives from Latin *maurus*, the adjective designating someone from Mauritania, a region of North Africa (distinct from modern Mauretania) divided into two provinces and described by classical geographers. In the *Geography*, for example, Strabo, in speaking of Libya (i.e., Africa), mentions the Moors or Maurusians (from *Maurusia*, the Greek word for Mauritania) as “a Libyan tribe living on the side of the straight opposite Iberia” [157]. Pliny the Elder includes Tangier in his *Natural History* as part of Mauritania, and in it live “the Moors (from whom it takes its name of Mauretania), by many writers called the Maurusii” [231]. Pomponius Mela, like Strabo, juxtaposes Mauritania and Spain as facing one another across the ocean (or “Our Sea”) and identifies the mountains Jabal Musa and Gibraltar as the Pillars of Hercules [41–42]. Numerous other examples could be cited. *Maurus*, therefore, was one of the many terms used to designate the peoples of Africa in these and other classical texts, and often though not always coincided with the Greek and Latin terms for “Ethiopians,” which were, as Frank M. Snowden, Jr., observes, words synonymous with blackness of skin [5].<sup>4</sup>

In studying texts written in Latin in Spain during the Middle Ages to 1250, Neville Barbour provides some specifics on the various understandings of *maurus* (in addition to related terms such as *sarraceni* and *arabes*) in the early Iberian context. Barbour acknowledges [253–54] the common understanding of *mauri*, in addition to *sarraceni*, as a designation for the Muslim inhabitants of Spain or al-Andalus and notes its etymological link to Mauritania. However, the location of Mauritania shifts considerably:

*[W]hile the name Mauritania meant properly the former Roman provinces, Mauritania Caesariensis and Mauritania Tingitanis, corresponding to the present western Algeria and north-eastern Morocco, Latin writers sometimes used it not only to cover all North Africa but also the whole of the African continent as far as the Equator, beyond which geographical knowledge did not then [754 CE] extend. From this it followed that there were black as well as white Mauri. [255]*

*Maurus* could, from an early date, be a catch-all term for Africans in the pens of western writers. So varied were the understandings of *maurus* in the early Middle Ages, in fact, that by the eighth century “‘Mauritania’ [became] a word, like Christendom, whose geographical significance depends on the context” [Barbour 258]. This is a crucial point since it establishes that Mauritania—and, by extension, *moro* or *mouro*—was open to the exigencies and positionalities of ideologically produced discourse, even though putatively what was being referenced was the “objective” fact of geographical boundaries. Mauritania ceases to be a specific region in Africa and becomes an itinerant and constructed zone of religious, linguistic, and racial alterity whose existence and location reflect culturally or politically determined objectives. That is, the location of Mauritania in large part depends on who’s doing the looking.

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3. The malleability of the term “Moor” fits into the larger “notion of the Iberian Middle Ages as a complex matrix of societies and cultures in an ongoing process of definition and redefinition, one template of historical and social order soon replaced by another” [Hutcheson and Blackmore 2–3].

4. Snowden further remarks that “Mauri was also used at times both as a poetical equivalent of Aethiopes and as a broad term which included Ethiopians” [11].

Vernacular uses are equally broad along the lines sketched by Barbour, both in Portugal and in Spain. In Portugal, *mouro* is often synonymous with *mourisco* or *muçulmano* as the designation for an Arabic-speaking Muslim. L. P. Harvey notes the terminological vagueness of *moro* in medieval Spain by remarking that

Moor (moro) . . . is a historical term which is authentic in the sense that it occurs in source materials of the period, but it is a term we can rarely use nowadays. It is not merely geographically imprecise, leaving us uncertain whether the person it describes is of North African origin or simply a Muslim, it is ambiguous with regard to the value judgment it implies. Often Moor conveys hostility, but there are contexts where Muslims refer to themselves as Moors with evident pride. [Islamic Spain 1]<sup>5</sup>

Harvey points out the historical authenticity of *moro* in addition to the word's imprecision and the ambiguity of its application, and for these reasons concludes that it is a term not suited for modern usage. Yet the very factors cited by Harvey as militating against "Moor" as a useful label advocate, in my view, for the critical interest of this word/concept. The slippages and imprecisions of *moro* (or *mouro*) reach across a number of boundaries and are precisely that which construe the term as a marker and principle of difference.

In Portugal, the early-fifteenth-century campaigns of expansion into Africa mark a turning point in the presuppositions underlying *mouro*. The Portuguese invasion and capture of the Moroccan city of Ceuta in August 1415, under the command of D. João I, traditionally marks the first action of Portuguese maritime expansion that will eventually include sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the New World. With Ceuta's capture and the subsequent exploration and exploitation of the West African littoral (collectively recorded in Zurara's four chronicles),<sup>6</sup> the *mouro* as an object of expansionist interest and as a figure of the Portuguese historical/textual mindset is refashioned. Prior to Zurara, the Moor of medieval Portugal existed mostly in the annals of historiographic discourse and in the imaginations of poets, most notably and multifariously in the numerous compositions known as the *cantigas d'escarnho e de mal dizer* (CEM).<sup>7</sup> In historiography, texts such as D. Pedro's mid-fourteenth-century *Livro de linhagens* (genealogy book) present the recitations of genealogical descent of the Portuguese (and to a general extent, Iberian) nobility to biblical times and intersperses this genealogy with short narratives that sometimes

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5. The related term *morisco* presents similar difficulties, according to Harvey: "The word *Morisco* illustrates particularly clearly the dangers inherent in vocabulary. . . . [B]y employing this term *Morisco* . . . we are tacitly accepting and approving of the forcible reclassification of this group of Muslims as something other. . . . Not to use it, however, is to court misunderstanding, as it is a standard part of the Spanish historical vocabulary" [Islamic Spain 3]. In another book, Harvey discusses the "insidious ideological bias inherent in this use of [*morisco*]" [Muslims in Spain 4]. For a summary of the history of the *mouro* as *muçulmano* from the early Middle Ages through the initial centuries of overseas expansion from a Portuguese perspective, see Thomaz.

6. Zurara's chronicles, with their dates of completion, are: *Crónica da Tomada de Ceuta (1450)*; *Crónica dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista da Guiné por mandado do infante D. Henrique*, or, more commonly, *the Crónica da Guiné (1452–53)*; *the Crónica de D. Pedro de Meneses (1458–64)*; and *the Crónica de D. Duarte de Meneses (1464–68)*.

7. I include these texts, composed in Galician-Portuguese, under the purview of medieval Portugal since many of the poets were Portuguese by birth or traveled to, and performed in, Portugal. In this regard the *cantigas* are as much "Portuguese" as they are "Spanish," if not more so. It is preferable, however, to avoid the politics of national labels in thinking about this poetry since the distinction is anachronistic given the porosity of poetic, political, and learned cultures in the peninsula during the Middle Ages. "Iberian," in this regard, is more suitable.

mix the historical and the fantastic.<sup>8</sup> Throughout his *Livro*, D. Pedro (most likely the compiler of the tome rather than its sole author) fashions the flow of Portuguese history into an often anti-Islamic and always Christian, chivalric *telos*. The Moor characteristically appears in this *Livro* as military/spiritual opponent, a staple of reconquest ideology buttressed by the *Livro*'s frequent references to the fabled loss of Spain to the Moors by Rodrigo.<sup>9</sup> In the narrative of the Battle of Salado (October 1340), for instance, Portuguese and Castilian armies join forces (in an otherwise politically rife time of tensions between the rulers of Portugal and Castile) to defeat "the last Muslim attempt to invade the Peninsula on a massive scale" [Livermore 89]. In this narrative of Christian-Moorish military encounter, the binary of a favored, Christian defense versus a doomed, Islamic offense is clearly drawn. It is a binary that will be repeated in other narratives of D. Pedro's *Livro* (e.g., the *Lenda da Gaia*) or in many of the religious parables contained in Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*.

While historiographic sources such as the *livros de linhagens* depict Moors in a more stereotypical manner as the opponents of Christendom and underwrite the rationale for a crusading, militaristic zeal, the CEM inventively construe Moors as markers and transgressors of sexual, social, and religious boundaries. Benjamin Liu explores the sexual and cultural "misalliances" enacted in the figure of the Moor in this poetry, arguing that "the complex interplay of sexuality, language, and culture is nowhere more evident than in [the] conflictive arena of religious difference" [89–90].<sup>10</sup> In these arenas of misalliance and shifting signification, Moors can occupy and embody the forbidden zones of sodomy and fornication, and call into question the identifying characteristics of being a Moor.<sup>11</sup> By way of example I cite just two CEM [229 and 297] that target "Joan Fernândiz," one by Joan Soárez Coelho and the other by Martin Soárez.<sup>12</sup> In both *cantigas*, the poets equivocally relate Joan Fernândiz and sex through the figure of an unnamed *mouro*. In CEM 229, Joan Soárez Coelho ridicules Fernândiz because a Moor is sleeping with his wife under his own roof. Liu reads this *cantiga* to mean that the Moor and Fernândiz are one and the same person, and that Fernândiz in essence cuckolds himself since he is most likely a Muslim convert to Christianity [105]. Fernândiz "is simultaneously intended as both the adulterous Moor and the newly Christian husband, who has been cuckolded, paradoxically, by none other than his past self" [Liu 105].<sup>13</sup> Liu bases this interpretation on the rubric to CEM 297, which reads, "Esta outra cantiga fez d'escarnho a un que dizian Joan Fernândiz, e semelhava mouro, e jogavan-lh'ende" (This other *cantiga d'escarnho* was written against one Joan Fernândiz, who resembled a Moor, and that's the joke against him),<sup>14</sup> and on several other *cantigas* featuring Joan Fernândiz that contain

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8. Among the narratives in D. Pedro's *Livro* we find some of the earliest Arthurian literature in Portugal, a version of the life of King Lear, and proto-romances of Christian-Moorish encounter.

9. The traditional view of reconquest presumes a clear distinction between Christian (re)conquerors and Moorish infidels. The realities of medieval Iberia, however, were quite different and not as crystalline as this mainstay of historiographic thought would have us believe, since the separation of Christian and Moorish elements in the cultures of medieval Iberia was difficult. For further analysis of this topic in a slightly later chronological period, see the relevant portions of Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire*.

10. See Liu, chapter 5.

11. Sodomy in the CEM is explored in Blackmore, "The Poets of Sodom." For a study of the construction of the Moor as sodomite in the politics of medieval Spanish historiography, see Hutcheson, "The Sodomitic Moor."

12. The numbering of the CEM is that of Lapa's edition.

13. Lapa, on the other hand, opts to read the *mouro* here as a house servant who beds Fernândiz's wife [156].

14. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.



allusions to Fernândiz's circumcised member, arguing that these allusions “fuse religious and sexual practice in a constant reminder of his convert status” [Liu 106]. In CEM 229, then, Moorishness as a quality that can be changed or discarded is the butt of the joke since it allows for the boundaries separating legally distinct groups to be redrawn comically so that a man may commit adultery with his own wife. Fernândiz's unorthodoxy in carnal matters becomes even more pronounced in CEM 297, which hints that Joan keeps a Moorish boy with him, hidden from public view, for sexual gratification. For readers of the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* (the codex in which this *cantiga* appears), one more layer of equivocal complexity is added to the poem by the rubric containing the key phrase “semelhava mouro.” The ambiguity here lies in the meaning of *semelhar*, “to resemble,” “to appear like,” or “to be similar to.” Most uses of *semelhar* in the CEM denote a visible similarity or likeness between two things, so that one reading of the rubric is that Joan Fernândiz displays visible or readily identifiable traits of Moorishness, such as dark skin, dress, mannerisms, or perhaps even speech. If Fernândiz is a Muslim convert to Christianity, then his similarity to a Moor is a physical trace or vestige of a quality that no longer exists internally, that is, his Islamic faith. Yet given the same-sex innuendoes in CEM 297, *semelhar mouro* may imply that Fernândiz is “like a Moor” in his deviant sexual practices—in fact, the joke here might be that Joan Fernândiz not only looks like a Moor but acts like one, too, sexually speaking.

The historical and poetic figures of the Moor in these examples document the Moor both as a component of an idealized *reconquista* mentality and as a more polysemous marker of difference and contact. With the advent of Portuguese maritime expansion into Africa and the chronicles of Zurara, the *mouro* responds to different textual and political exigencies and is refashioned according to the incipient culture of imperial textuality. The Moor becomes ideologically new in the first decades of the fifteenth century as Africa and its peoples are mapped, appropriated, and incorporated into a rapidly expanding imperial and mercantilist *oikoumene*. Taken together, Zurara's first two chronicles, the *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta* and *Crónica de Guiné*, chart a transition between representations of the Moor as the Arabic-speaking Muslim familiar to Iberian history and as a new and strange occupant of unexplored regions of Africa.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in considering the office and duties of the chronicler, Zurara gestures toward Moorishness as an interior or physiological quality, distinct from faith (or the lack thereof) and that dissociates it from the more immediately discernible physical traits typically rehearsed by medieval writers. This interiority is a capacity of the imagination or *imaginatio*, a component of medieval theories of memory and of faculties of the mind.

Zurara's *mouro*, as it first appears in the *Crónica da tomada de Ceuta*, is the *mouro* in the “classical” definition of a native of northern Africa or the general regions of Mauritania.<sup>16</sup> Zurara describes the Moors of northern Africa as part of a culture with its own his-

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15. “Africa” was frequently conceived of in parts or as specific regions rather than as a geographical whole in the Middle Ages, and these constituent regions were given names such as Mauritania, Ethiopia, or Abyssinia. “The three pillars on which this idea [of Africa] was constructed (Africa pars, the Antipodes/Antoeci, and Ethiopia) were still separate entities with seemingly no relationship between one another in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries . . . the Renaissance idea of Africa came to light from the integration of the medieval basis within a new framework” [Relaño 5]. The same is true for the labels used to describe the peoples of the continent: “although the term ‘African’ was available—and had begun to be employed—by the 1560s, African peoples were described largely in discrete, regionally or racially specific groups such as Negroes, Ethiopians (or Ethiopes), and Moors, with ‘African’ coming into usage to designate any of these parts but not, in the Renaissance, the whole” [Bartels, “Othello and Africa” 49].

16. It should be noted that Zurara's Ceuta is the third part of the *Crónica de D. João I*, begun by Zurara's predecessor, Fernão Lopes. Lopes's first two parts of this chronicle deal entirely with the landbound history of Portugal up to the initial years of the fifteenth century. Zurara certainly

tory, recognizing its authority as a civilization by noting the religious observances of Islam (such as Ramadan) and by ascribing a more legendary, “folkloric” element to it when speaking of aged Moorish sages (“mouros sabedores”) and prophets. The purpose of Moorish prophecy in this chronicle, according to the dictates of Zurara’s responsibilities as royal chronicler of the realm, is to foresee the victories of Christian invaders who enact the “guerra dos mouros” (war against the Moors) [*Ceuta* 47] as “inimigos da fé” (enemies of the faith) [111]. Such visions, which imply the acceptance of Portuguese presence by the indigenous people of Ceuta and therefore of the inevitability and natural validity of a military-crusading directive and its accompanying rhetoric, will become a common trope in imperialist discourse, even when—as is the case with the Portuguese occupation of northern and western Africa in the fifteenth century—this imperialist, discursive practice often stands in contrast to the many and regular experiences of Portuguese defeat at the hands of Moorish adversaries. The city of Ceuta itself was long known to Iberian merchants and travellers, but in Zurara’s text it supersedes this historical familiarity to become the prophetic icon of the “destruição dos mouros” (destruction of the Moors) and of the eventual subjugation of Africa. *Ceuta* is the foundational moment to the chronicler’s ethics of expansionist historiography. Zurara links Ceuta and the Portuguese conquest of it by naturalizing Portuguese movement into African space; he begins the chronicle with the following claim:

*Conclusão é de Aristóteles no segundo livro da natural filosofia que a natureza é começo de movimento e de folgança. E pera declaração disto aprendamos que cada uma cousa tem qualidade, pela qual se move ao seu próprio lugar, quando está fora dele, entendendo ali ser confirmada melhor. E por aquela mesma propriedade faz assossegamento depois que está onde a natureza requer. [37]*

*[Aristotle concludes in the second book of natural philosophy that nature is the beginning of movement and rest. As proof of this let us realize that everything has a quality that compels it to return to its proper place when away from it, and in that place it is in its best state. And, by that same principle, it rests once in the place nature has deemed appropriate for it.]*

Following this, Zurara establishes João I’s role as the “natural” lord of Ceuta by writing that

*O tempo e grandeza das obras nos constrangem fortemente que escrevamos, nos seguintes capítulos, a gloriosa fama da mui notável empresa tomada por este virtuoso e nunca vencido Príncipe, senhor Rei Dom João, que seu propósito determinou forçosamente por armas conquistar uma tão nobre e tão grande cidade como é Ceuta. No qual feito considerando, podemos esguardar quatro cousas, sc. grande amor da Fé, grandeza de coração, maravilhosa ordenança, e proveitosa vitória, a qual foi maravilhoso preço de seu grande trabalho. [41]*

*[Time and the greatness of certain deeds strongly compel us to write in the following chapters the glorious fame of the remarkable enterprise undertaken by this virtuous and undefeated prince King João. He resolved, with great determination, to conquer by force of arms the noble and worthy city of Ceuta. In considering this feat, we may regard four things in relation to it, namely, a great*

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*would have been working, at least in part, from materials provided to him by Lopes, so this helps explain a more “traditional” view of the Moor in Zurara’s first chronicle.*



*Disembodied Voices*, 2004  
Five-projector interactive installation  
Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA



*devotion to the faith, nobility of heart, a marvellous order, and a worthy victory, which itself was a wondrous reward for this notable effort.]*

*Ordenança* (order), Zurara's favored term for expressing the confluence of a providential and cosmic ordering of the universe and the fulfillment of that order through *conquista* and subsequently through the considered activity of the historiographer, is "maravilhosa" in the sense that it is the revelation of a divine plan. In Zuraran discourse, this "order" is a naturalizing principle: anything that is a result of it has come about not by human agency but by the operation of the celestial spheres that coordinate historical action and its narrative expression. Within this schema, the chronicler historicizes Ceuta, not as a component of a more local or Iberian past but in terms that trace the city to the beginning of the world:

*E conta dela Abilabez, que foi grande doutor entre os mouros, que esta cidade foi fundada depois da destruição do dilúvio, duzentos e trinta e três anos. ... E diz que o fundador dela foi seu neto de Noé, e que esta foi a primeira que ele fundou em toda aquela terra de África, e que por tanto lhe pôs nome de Ceuta que quer dizer em língua caldeia "começo de formosura," e diz que mandou escrever umas letras na primeira pedra que se pôs no alicerce. "Esta é a minha cidade de Ceuta a qual eu povoei primeiramente de companhas de minha geração. Os seus cidadãos serão extremados de toda a nobreza de África. Dias virão que sobre o seu senhorio se espargará sangue de diversas nações, e o seu nome durará até o acabamento do derradeiro segre." [42–43]*

*[Abilabez, a learned man highly respected by the Moors, tells that this city was founded two hundred and thirty-three years after the destruction wrought by the flood. . . . He further relates that the city's founder was Noah's grandson and the first city he founded in all the lands of Africa, and because of this named it Ceuta, which means "beginning of beauty" in Chaldaic. And he ordered that letters be chiseled onto the first foundation stone. "This is my city of Ceuta which I have populated with people from my generation. Its citizens rank among the highest nobility of all Africa. There will come days when the blood of many peoples will be spilled here, and the name of Ceuta will last until the end of time."]*

Zurara appropriates Abilabez's narrative for the purposes of his chronicle in its presentation of the history of Ceuta as a narrative of beginnings. The story of Ceuta is literally a foundational story here since it is inscribed on the very foundation stone of the city. A crucial element of this narrative is the expression "começo da formosura" which, as a moment in the flow of the chronicle itself, adumbrates the Portuguese campaigns of exploration and conquest as that which is *formoso* (beautiful) in the overall divine scheme Zurara persistently invokes. The beauty that Ceuta instantiates is therefore ethical in nature since it refers to the city's role as a primordial space of Portuguese expansion that combats the insidious cult and presence of "Mafamede." Zurara's chronicle, by extension, participates in this ethical mandate by rendering the actions on Ceuta into text.

The elaboration of an ethics of historiography, however, is not limited to the appropriation of a (putative) Moorish historiographic tradition (like Abilabez's story) to the purposes of a conquistatorial mindset that is justified, in part, by the chivalric, crusading ethos present in texts such as the *livros de linhagens*. To my knowledge, Zurara stands alone among medieval chroniclers in his use of the *imaginaçom* as a locus where the ethical perception of the world occurs and which is shared by Christian and Moor alike. Zurara's use of the term *imaginaçom* points to an overall familiarity with the concept of

the imagination as part of the “faculties” (or interior wits) of the soul according to classical and medieval theorists of the topic. These theories of the interior wits constitute a medieval theory of psychology, that is, a speculative elaboration of the relation between the sensorial world and the powers of the human soul to process sensory data rationally and create memory. These powers are a divinely bestowed gift on humans. Generally speaking, the *imaginatio* is one of the several faculties or interior wits, and is the one that acts as the “image-making power” [Carruthers 54]. This faculty receives and stores images received through the senses (especially the eyes) before further deliberation of the images causes them to enter into memory.<sup>17</sup> According to Thomas Aquinas, humans, as opposed to animals, possess a “cogitative” power that allows them to deliberate on the images stored in the imagination [Carruthers 51]. Aquinas posits that humans have an “intellectual memory,” a theory that “arose in part to resolve the problem of how one could remember conceptions, since one’s memory stored only phantasms of particular sense objects or composite images derived from particular sense objects. The type of memory which recalls abstractions, things created in thought rather than sensorily perceived, is a part of the intellect” [Carruthers 51]. Avicenna proposes the existence of a “deliberative” imagination, “which has a composing function, joining images together. . . . This power of composing an image in both humans and animals is joined to a power of judgment, whereby we form an opinion of the image we have composed” [Carruthers 53]. In Iberia, one of the most available explanations of the interior wits and the imagination is Alfonso X’s *Siete partidas*, though here Alfonso avoids the physiologically based idiom typical of other treatments of the topic.<sup>18</sup> A large portion of Alfonso’s historiographic and legal works was known to Zurara, so the *Siete partidas* was most likely an important source to the chronicler on this topic. Moreover, Alfonso discusses the interior wits in the laws devoted to how people must serve the king to the best of their abilities; this overall context of moral and civic responsibility to the crown maps well onto Zurara’s chronic enterprise as a service to his patron monarch, D. Afonso V. Alfonso’s laws lay out a code of ethical behavior that, in Zurara’s pen, becomes a precept of historiographic discourse as a part of the *ethos* of expansion.

These basic tenets of faculty psychology help us to understand Zurara’s many references to the visually oriented *imaginação* that he regularly invokes in *Ceuta* and *Guiné* as constitutive of the perception of the world as it is manifested in Africa and recounted in his own historiographic “ordering.” Zurara ascribes perceptive powers to both Christians and Moors, but takes care to specify the failure of the Moorish visual faculty and deliberative power—or, more simply, of the Moorish imagination—and implies that this

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17. The “interior” or “inward wits” are “the function of the human sensitive soul [and are] that which allowed a man or woman to interact with the world around and to process data received through the senses” [Burke 15]. *Imaginatio* is also sometimes known as the *phantasia*. The other faculties are the *sensus communis*, the *aestimativa seu cogitativa*, and the *memorativa*. Folger, in discussing a Spanish treatise on the interior wits, summarizes the process by which the faculties interact: “The common sense receives the first ‘impression’ . . . of the ‘debutos’ which the external senses generate when stimulated by an object. The ‘forms’ of the objects perceived are also imprinted in the phantasy . . . or *vis formalis*. . . . In contrast to the common sense, which is only capable of representing objects while excited by the external senses, phantasy represents its object . . . ‘as it is absent’ . . . it is, then, a retentive power that stores the sense impression temporarily after the object is no longer sensed by contact. The third interior wit, the ‘*ymaginatiua*’ . . . is the power to transform sense impressions and create new images on the basis of previous experience and sense data” [29–30]. For further explanation of the workings of the *imaginatio*, see Carruthers 51–54.

18. Alfonso’s discussion of the interior wits is in the second *partida*, title 13, laws VI–XI. Law IX treats the imagination, “and this has greater power than fancy [i.e., *fantasia*] . . . because it operates by causing the mind to portray matters which relate to the past and the present as well as those which concern the future” [348].

is what relegates Moors to a “naturally” inferior status and elevates Portuguese empirical experience to a level of uncontested authority. Let’s consider a few examples.

In the early pages of *Ceuta*, as the numerous deliberations by the Portuguese court on the viability and desirability of seizing the Moroccan city are detailed, there is a gradually evolving conviction among João’s sons that the invasion of Ceuta is urgent, a conviction that is not so much a result of any one reason or argument but rather of a more spiritual imperative. In chapter 11, titled “Como os letrados tornaram com resposta a el-Rei, dizendo que era serviço de Deus de se tomar a cidade de Ceuta” (“How the learned men responded to the king, saying that it would be in God’s service to take the city of Ceuta”), we read this description of the princes’ preoccupation with Ceuta:

*Ca os seus pensamentos nunca podiam ser livres nem apartados daquela imaginação, e tanto corriam por ela em diante, que passavam por todas as dúvidas, e começavam e prosseguiam o feito por tal guisa, que se esqueciam do ponto em que estavam. E viam-se no meio daquela cidade envoltos entre os mouros, alegrando-se com o espalhamento do seu sangue. E tanta doçura sentiam em tais imaginações, que lhes pesava, quando se lhe oferecia cousa por que se tiravam deles. E, porque assim como naturalmente os feitos em que a imaginação do homem é ocupada de dia, esses se lhe representam depois que o sono tem ocupado seus sentidos. . . . [64]*

*[For since their thoughts could never be freed from that image that was so consistently before them it alleviated their doubts, so they took action and persevered, so much so that they forgot everything else. They saw themselves in the middle of that city surrounded by Moors and rejoicing in the spilling of their blood. Such a delight they took from the imaginations that they became irritated when anything distracted them from it. And so it is that, naturally, the things which occupy man’s imagination by day are also present after sleep has taken over the senses. . . .]*

Here, the image of the princes amid the Moors spilling their blood is a kind of divinely inspired, speculative image, since Ceuta and its Moors would not have entered through the bodily senses yet, whose contemplation affords “pleasantness,” or “doçura.” The image is so strong that it persists into the dream state and overcomes the waking senses. The resilience of the imagination in retaining the victorious image over the Moors in Ceuta suggests its inevitable realization as empirical experience. The (prophetic) certainty of the princes’ imaginations contrasts, some chapters later, with the imperfect “entendimentos” of the Moors. *Entendimento* may be rendered generally as “understanding,” though in the idiom of the faculties it can also be a rough equivalent to “intellect,” the power of the soul that creates abstractions in the imagination. So it is that some Moors, after the capture of Ceuta, “consideraram sobre a vinda destas galés, maldiziam a si e a fraqueza de seus entendimentos” (reflected on the arrival of the galleys, and cursed themselves and the weakness of their understanding) [82]. Zurara ventriloquizes the Moors’ recognition of their own deficient entendimentos since these *entendimentos* failed to assess the image of the invading fleet correctly as the certain sign and presage of the city’s defeat. The Moorish imagination fails because, while it possesses the ability to process and store images, it lacks a properly functioning “deliberative imagination” or power to form a correct judgment.

Zurara’s next chronicle, the *Crónica de Guiné*, narrates the Portuguese explorations of the West African littoral under the initiative of the infante D. Henrique (Prince Henry, “the Navigator”) through the mid-fifteenth century, explorations that were also frequently

slaving raids. It is in *Guiné* where Zurara tells of the passage of Cape Bojador in 1434, long a *terminus ad quem* of European knowledge of Africa and beyond which no recorded voyage existed before Gil Eanes's 1434 expedition.<sup>19</sup> The geographical regions and peoples Zurara documents in *Guiné* are largely sub-Saharan; despite centuries of legends and stories about Africa and its inhabitants, sub-Saharan Africa was a *terra incognita*, so much so that it "was . . . a 'new world' in its own right as much as the latterly named America" [Relaño 1].<sup>20</sup> There is a general geographical division established by Zurara separating the more well-known parts of North Africa from the more unfamiliar, sub-Saharan territories, the "terra dos mouros" (land of the Moors) and the "terra dos negros" (land of the blacks) which begins at the Senegal River. Zurara refers to the sub-Saharan Africans inhabiting these lands alternately as *negros* (blacks), *guinéus* (Guineans), or *mouros* (Moors).<sup>21</sup> The physical characteristics of these "new" Africans claims repeated attention in *Guiné*, and it is in this chronicle where we find Zurara's only references to the supposed existence of the Torrid Zone (a staple of medieval geographical thought taken from Macrobius's climatic map), the region of Africa believed to be so hot that it prevents habitation. At one point Zurara observes

*Vejo aqueles Garamantes e aqueles Tiopios, que vivem sob a sombra do monte Caucaso; negros em color porque jazem de sob o oposito do auge do sol, o qual sendo na cabeça de Capricornio é a eles em estranha quentura . . . ou por outra maneira, porque vezinham com a cinta queimada. . . .* [14]

*[I see those Garamantes, those Ethiopians, who live under the shadow of Mount Caucasus, black in colour, because of living just opposite to the full height of the sun's rays—for he, being in the head of Capricorn, shineth on them with wondrous heat . . . or, in another way, by the nearness of these people to the torrid zone. . . .]* [Beazley and Prestage 1: 7]

Zurara later remarks, apropos of a description of the region of the Nile and its inhabitants, on the "povo de Thiopya, cujo sangue é queimado da grande calentura do sol" [271] ("colour . . . of . . . (the) people of Ethiopia, whose blood is burnt by the great heat of the sun" [Beazley and Prestage 2: 189]). "Ethiopia" was also a toponym of shifting boundaries, and Ethiopians were automatically associated in the medieval imaginary with blackness of skin. Zurara appears to be arguing metonymically (using the Ethiopians as the best-known case) for the blackness of all Africans living outside the northern regions. Zurara's

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19. As used by Zurara and other writers of the period, "Guiné" is a flexible term referring to large expanses of West African coastal areas: "the Portuguese used the term Guinea to apply to the region extending from Cape Blanco and Arguim Bay southward along the coast to Cape Catarina and beyond the islands of São Tomé and Annobom" [Diffie and Winius 78].

20. Bartels varies with the view of Africa as a new world by noting the tripartite division of the globe that also informs Akbari's study: "[y]et Africa was no 'new world.' It had been 'the third part of the world' (after Asia and Europe) since classical times; histories and cosmographies had carried it conceptually into the Renaissance" ["Othello and Africa" 49]. It should be noted that Relaño's and Bartels's views of Africa vary insofar as the European empirical experience with Africa is concerned. While indeed Africa was long part of the western geographic, legendary, and cosmographic imaginaries, actual experience was limited to North Africa before the Portuguese explorations down the west coast. In this sense the intuited, but unrevealed, expanses of sub-Saharan Africa could indeed be considered "new."

21. For extensive typological studies of the African (and in this case, the sub-Saharan African) in Zurara, including considerations of Zurara's inconsistent use of terminology to designate inhabitants of the various regions of Africa, see the studies by Horta. For another study on the body of the African in *Guiné* as it relates to interpretation, see Blackmore, "The Moor."

references to the scorching heat of the sun as causing outer blackness echo Alfonso X's comments in the *Libro de las cruces* in which the monarch groups all Africans under the label "ethiopes" and makes the following observation:

*la gran calentura non se temprá en aquel logar, et pareçe en ellos, que an su color et sos queros negros et crespos cabellos. Et por esto non se estienden sus espiritos por la grant sequedad et por la grant calentura que los quema, et por esto non an sotil entendemento, ni an sennorio, ni leyes, nin decretos, nin se entremeten de sciencias nin de saberes . . . et esto es por que . . . semeian a las bestias en sus mannas. [8]*

*[the immense heat is not tempered in that region and it is evident in them [Ethiopians] in their color and their black skin and kinky hair. Because of it their spirits do not circulate due to the great dryness and heat that burns them, and that is why they do not possess a subtle intellect, and have no state, or laws, or decrees, and do not pursue sciences or knowledge . . . and this is why . . . in their manners and customs they are like beasts.]*

Alfonso's references to the "espiritos" and the "entendemento" coincide with the physiologically based interior wits we saw above. Alfonso's "spirits" are the so-called "vital spirits" (Latin *spiritus*, Greek *pneuma*), the form of refined blood thought to cause the body's operation by emanating from the heart and communicating with all the body's members. Here, the heat of Africa prevents the spirits from reaching all members of the body (and thus causes a slowness of movement) and adversely affects the intellect or *entendemento* so that Ethiopians—and indeed all black Africans—are "like beasts."<sup>22</sup> Alfonso invokes medieval physiology and psychology to explain the inferior alterity of Ethiopians and in so doing makes "Africanness" an interior, physiological quality, an organic and therefore "natural" disposition that is created and conditioned by the sun's heat.<sup>23</sup> Alfonso also addresses the "natural" intellectual inferiority of Africans in the *General estoria* in a discussion of Genesis and Noah's son Ham, the primogenitor of African peoples. For having scoffed at his father, Alfonso writes that "Cam [era] de menor entendimiento que los otros [hermanos]" (Ham was not as astute as his brothers) [85]. The lesser intellectual capacity of Ham would justify the presumed "right" of Europeans to invade and conquer Africa.

With these ideas in mind, we are now in a position to understand better Zurara's use of the *imaginaçom* in *Guiné* as it relates to Zurara and the hermeneutic authority of the state and the monarch and to the perceptual and intellectual capacities of Portuguese sailors and *negros* or *mouros*. Zurara establishes his own position in an opening chapter of the chronicle by noting of D. Henrique's historical example that "[t]ua gloria, teus louvores, tua fama, enchem assim as minhas orelhas e ocupam minha vista, que não sei a qual parte acuda primeiro" [14] ("Thy glory, thy praises, thy fame, so fill my ears and employ my eyes that I know not well where to begin" [Beazley and Prestage 1: 7]). The eyes and ears, in the hierarchy of senses in faculty psychology, are the highest and therefore most reliable senses. Zurara claims a sensorial plenitude before his subject matter and in

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22. In a discussion of the vital spirits as adversely affected by the body's humors, Burke asserts that "[w]ithin the body once the vital spirit is corrupted the correct functioning of the faculties of the sensitive soul in concert with those of the higher powers is no longer possible" [60–61].

23. This is, in effect, an Alfonsine expression of geohumoral theory, that is, the postulation that climate affects and conditions the human body and its temperaments and dispositions. For further analysis of geohumoral theory, especially as it was understood in early modern England, see Floyd-Wilson.



so doing privileges the chronicler's imagination as that which will render this historical matter into a collective or "autorizada memória" (authorized memory). This authorized memory is in part a function of Zurara's position as official chronicler. In another chapter Zurara praises the virtues of D. Henrique and appeals to the Portuguese monarchy by asking that these virtues and worthy deeds be kept "inteiros e são em vossa imaginação" ("whole and sound in your imagination") [41]. The line of royal descent here stands for a collective memory; it vouches for the experiences that so ubiquitously overtake Zurara's senses and hence ratify his authorial perspective. Imagination has superseded the more restricted meaning of interior wit (though still retaining links to it, since the language of the senses is regularly utilized by Zurara in his chronistic project) to represent a perpetual, apersonal storehouse of memory and experiences to be contemplated by readers of Zurara's chronicles. There is an ethical imperative assigned to readers in that they are to contemplate Zurara's works as if they were images or concepts received by the *imaginatio*, subject to deliberation and judgment. This is what Zurara refers to in a late chapter of the chronicle when he remarks:

*Todos estes segredos e maravilhas trouxe o engenho do nosso Príncipe ante os olhos dos naturaes do nosso reino; que posto que todalas cousas de que falei das maravilhas do Nilo por seus olhos não podessem ser vistas, o que fora impossível, grande cousa foi chegarem ali os seus navios, onde nunca é achado por escritura que outro algum navio destas partes chegasse. . . .* [273]

*[All these events and marvels did the genius of our prince bring before the eyes of the people of our kingdom, for although all the matters here spoken of concerning the marvels of the Nile could not be witnessed by his own eyes, for that were impossible, it was a great matter that his ships arrived there, where 'tis not recorded that any other ship of these parts had ever come. . . .]* [Beazley and Prestage 2: 191]

Zurara juxtaposes the sensory or physiological eye here to interior sight; his chronicle is what brings the experiences of D. Henrique to the readerly eyes (a combination of the sensory eye and the deliberative eye of memory and judgment) of the people of the kingdom. So it is that, even in the absence of the empirical eye of direct experience, itself a form of authority, the transformation of these direct experiences into the sight of the interior wits through the imagination of the chronicler allows for them to be experienced and subjected to ethical consideration.

In narrating the many contacts and encounters between the Portuguese and *mouros* or *negros*, Zurara frequently speculates about how any one encounter might have been (mis)perceived. For example, in deliberating on the strategy for capturing Moors, the Portuguese mariners concur that their retreat to their boats at night might be a way to deceive the Moorish inhabitants of the coast:

*—Que poderá ser;—disseram eles—que os Mouros, vista nossa tornada, pensarão que nos viemos como homens desesperados de os podemos cobrar, e com tal imaginação farão a volta para seu alojamento; e não sómente nos aproveitará sua tornada ali, mas ainda a segurança com que se podem lançar em repouso.* [109]

*[For it is very likely, they said, that the Moors, having seen our retreat, will think that we went away like men in despair of being able to catch them, and, thinking so, will return to their encampment; and not only would their return profit us,*

*but also the security with which they are able to repose.] [Beazley and Prestage 1: 72–73]*

The Moors are ascribed an imagination since one of the points of this passage is the meaning the Moors will make of the sight of the Portuguese returning to the ships. That the Moors will interpret this image incorrectly is assumed, and the weaker Moorish imagination—that is, the incapacity of the Moors to apply a reliable faculty of judgment and speculation on the images they see—gives the Portuguese the advantage. Zurara speculates about the visual capacity of another population of Africans (now called *negros*) when narrating the expedition of Dinis Dias to the “terra dos negros” for the purpose of capturing slaves. He writes:

*E indo fazendo sua viagem ao longo daquele mar, viram a caravela os que estavam em terra, da qual cousa foram muito maravilhados, que segundo parece, nunca viram nem ouviram falar de semelhante, que uns presumiam que era peixe, outros entendiam que era fantasma, outros que podia ser alguma ave que corria assim, andando por aquele mar. E razoando-se assim sobre esta novidade, filharam quatro daqueles atrevimento de se certificar tamanha duvida. . . . [146]*

*[And as the caravel was voyaging along that sea, those on land saw it and marvelled much at the sight, for it seemeth they had never seen or heard speak of the like; and some of them supposed it to be a fish, while others thought it to be a phantom, and others again said it might be a bird that ran so on its journey over that sea. And after reasoning thus concerning the novelty, four of them were bold enough to inform themselves concerning this doubt. . . .] [Beazley and Prestage 1: 99]*

Though Zurara does not use *imaginação*, the point of the narrative is nonetheless the capacity to deliberate correctly on the images received by the eye. Zurara imputes a naïve imaginative capacity to the *negros* the Portuguese intend to capture—in fact, it is this capacity that causes the natives to board boats and investigate the caravels, an action that ends in their seizure. A similar instance occurs when Zurara narrates a reconnaissance expedition by two Portuguese horsemen away from the coastal zone, and writes of the contact of the horsemen with the natives by saying that “qual imaginação seria no pensamento daqueles homens, vendo tal novidade, scilicet, dous moços assim atrevidos, de cor e feições tão estranhas a eles” (what would the imagination be of those men when seeing such a novelty—that is, two brave young men of a color and features so strange to them) [59]. While Zurara interestingly allows the African natives a capacity for marvel—a capacity usually reserved for European explorers in later texts of empire—it is one that functions to native detriment since it causes fear and therefore subservience. Ultimately, the Moorish imagination fails because it is non-Christian, unenlightened by the grace of God. The powers of the soul in the writings of medieval theorists of the imagination such as Thomas Aquinas are geared toward the divine. Indirectly, Zurara considers the malfunctioning Moorish imagination as yet one more proof of the necessity for conversion.

In Zurara, then, and in conclusion, the *mouro*, the *negro*, or the *guinéu* in their collective existence function as abstractions in addition to their historical or empirical presence as the objects of Portuguese imperial and mercantilist campaigns. They are the obverse of a capacity to perceive and write the world “correctly,” the dark side of the ethical principles underlying Zuraran historiography. For Zurara, the imagination is the place where the deliberation of empirical or textual images takes place, and the appropriate judgments of these images are what constitute ethical historiographic thought. The Moorish imagina-

tion, by negative contrast, imbues the imperial historiographic project with a hermeneutic authority that can overwrite any instance of Portuguese defeat in Africa. Zurara adds this lessened, deliberative faculty to the qualities that constitute “Moorishness” or “African-ness,” and in so doing fashions the Moor as a principle of historiographic thought.

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