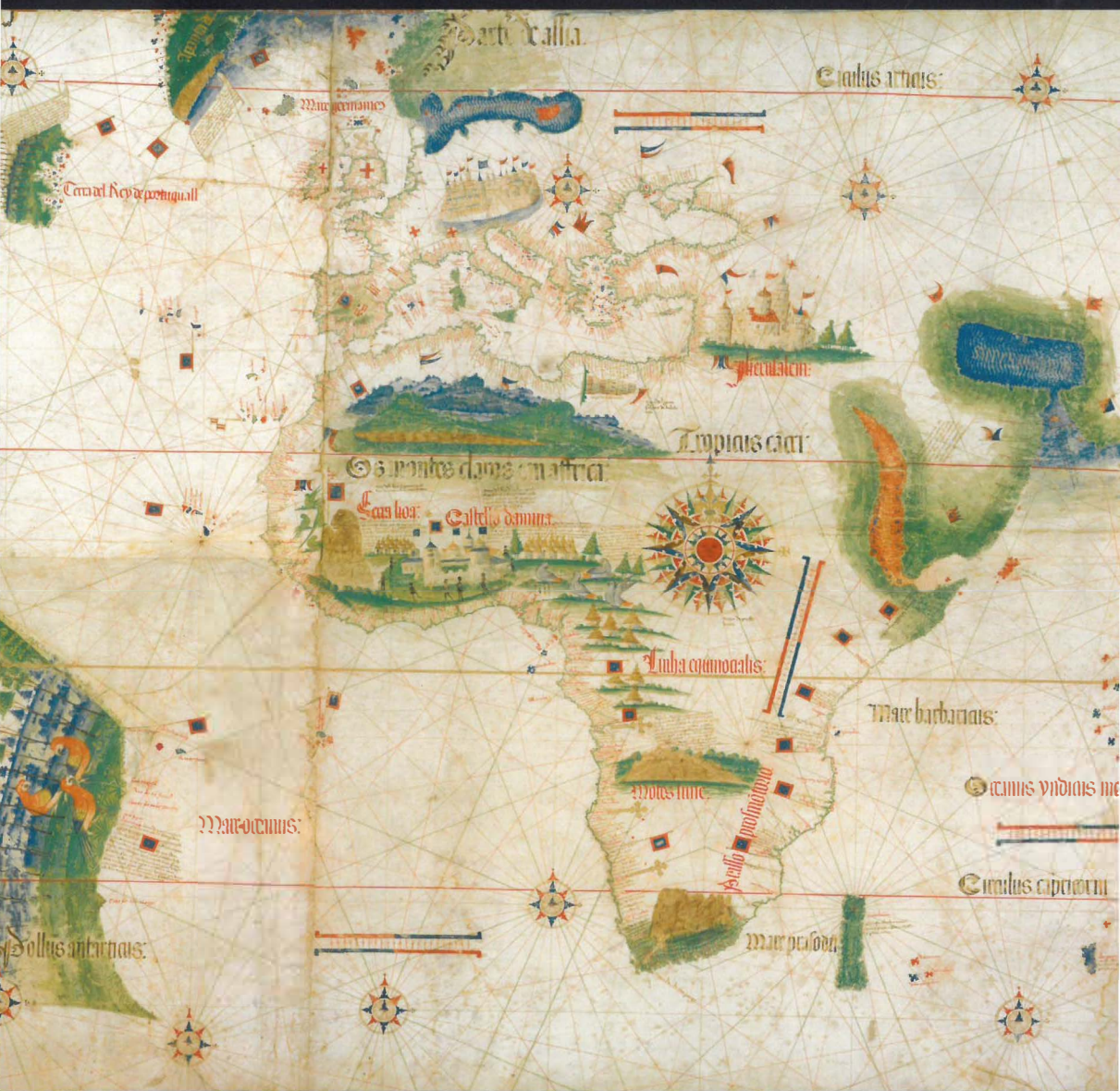


The Global History of Portugal

From Prehistory to the Modern World

Edited by Carlos Fiolhais, José Eduardo Franco and José Pedro Paiva



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2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

First published in 2022 in Great Britain by
SUSSEX ACADEMIC PRESS
P.O. Box 139
Eastbourne BN24 9BP

Distributed in North America by
SUSSEX ACADEMIC PRESS
Independent Publishers Group
814 N. Franklin Street
Chicago, IL 60610

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
To be applied for.

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78976-103-0

Paperback ISBN 978-1-78976-104-7



Typeset and designed by Sussex Academic Press, Brighton & Eastbourne.
Printed by TJ Books Limited, Padstow, Cornwall.

Introduction to Part I

From Modern Humans to the Advent of Writing

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The essays which follow, covering the Prehistory and Protohistory of the territory which is nowadays Portugal, result from critical discussion of key themes associated with the two major periods prior to the introduction of writing (Prehistory) or contemporary with the first societies to adopt writing in the Western Peninsula (Protohistory).

The themes were chosen taking into consideration the main aspects which best reveal the role of the territory that would later become Portugal during this lengthy period of time, as an arena for interactions between different populations or even the setting for the diffusion of ideas and concepts. The information is based on material evidence gathered from archaeological excavations or, more recently, studies in molecular biology and genetics. The latter has provided a new and unexpected set of information that has proved invaluable to our understanding of the mobility of populations prior to the introduction of writing.

Five topics were selected, relating to decisive periods of social, economic and cultural change driven by the various communities existing at the time. They represent a series of events which, although part of a continuum intrinsic to the human occupation of the area nowadays known as Portugal, represent significant examples of social transformation, whilst not detracting from others such as the phenomenon of fortification during the Copper Age, closely related to the increasing social complexity that developed throughout the third millennium BC.

The role of geographical movements of past human groups to and from Portuguese territory, influenced in certain cases by major changes in climate occurring over time, is recognized as a common denominator.

Hence, 240,000–10,000 BC concerns interaction in the south-west of the Peninsula during the transition from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic between groups of anatomically modern humans and the last of the Neanderthals, leading to genetic crossbreeding, as suggested by the hybrid characteristics of the Lapedo child.

One key moment of change in the history of humanity involved the breakdown of the subsistence model based on hunter-gathering that had been present since its inception, followed by the adoption of an economy dominated by food production, which took place in Portuguese territory in approximately 5500 BC and still prevails today. This is the information conveyed by the presence of domestic species of cereals and animals originating from the Near East, accompanied by technological innovations such as pottery and polished stone artefacts, which is the subject of the second essay.

It discusses the practices which influenced the change, in the context of the actual dynamics established between populations in different phases of development.

In the period 2700–1800 BC occurred the expansion of a characteristically European form of pottery in the third millennium BC, namely the Maritime Bell Beaker, whose name refers to the fact that it is shaped like an inverted bell and was distributed throughout Europe from centres located on the Atlantic coast. The oldest of these centres would have been situated in the Tagus estuary, expanding to the Breton coast, which in turn became established as a new distribution point for the Baltics and the interior of mainland Europe. Maritime Bell Beakers have been identified in locations extending as far as Eastern Europe and the Central Mediterranean, embodying the direct or indirect presence of populations that were undoubtedly genetically different yet collectively responsible for the European-wide diffusion of this type of vessel, organized by typologically distinct regional groups and resulting from locally instigated interaction processes that unfolded on an unprecedented scale.

Such wide-ranging interactions, covering the whole of Europe, did not fail to register in the archaeological records as an ongoing movement of people and, above all, objects, travelling more intensively in all directions throughout the Bronze Age, especially between 2000–800 BC. Based on archaeological evidence, it will be demonstrated that Portuguese territory was, at the time although only for a brief period, the hub of Atlantic-Mediterranean relations due to its geographical position and natural resources, embodying the variable geometry of core-periphery economic relations that had developed over time. The voyages to and from Portuguese territory undertaken at the time, essentially for trading purposes, together with the possible overland routes explained by the nature of certain hoards from Central Europe, facilitated the wide circulation of raw materials and manufactured products, both functional and religious. The presence of the latter reveals the creation of a mindset common to all who incorporated them into their cognitive universe, producing the first pan-European consciousness, shared by the elites at least, in the societies of the time.

The period between the **Ninth to the Fifth Centuries BC** is to some extent a corollary of the previous one, characterizes the relations established in certain points along the Portuguese coast from the end of the ninth century BC with the western Phoenicians, who regularly ventured out from Cádiz and Huelva across the ocean, following a pre-established programme, to found settlements in the Tagus and Mondego estuaries. They forged deep and lasting relationships with the local populations which soon resulted in the transfer of technology, including writing and ways of living (urbanism), as well as language itself and exogenous religious practices that were incorporated into everyday life, following on from practices already confirmed for the end of the Bronze Age.

According to the contributions provided it may therefore be concluded that interaction between populations – already existing and newly arrived, as well as those leaving for other destinations – was a constant feature in the history of humanity. For the first time, we believe, these texts offer a coherent, significant and organized vision of this reality with regard to the vast geographical space of Europe, in which the territory of Portugal has always been involved, in ways that extend beyond geographical determinants. The ongoing balance between the economic, social and cultural circumstances of the succession of populations that have lived there and the wider geographical conjunctures which have partly determined but also been repeatedly influenced by them, is the common denominator in these contributions.

This knowledge was only made possible through research and the materials gathered over the last twenty-five years, which comprise an extraordinary collection of new information clearly reflected in the essays which follow. The result, for the reader, is far more than the mere sum of its parts, offering an undogmatic, rigorous and up-to-date critical appreciation, but also one which, like all scientific knowledge, can always be surpassed, since it is constantly being enriched.