
Document 1493

The Papal Bull of 4 May 1493 established the Line of Demarcation, thus splitting the New World into Portuguese and Spanish spheres of influence

Sources: The original bull, in Latin, issued by Pope Alexander VI, exists in the Vatican archives in Rome. An authenticated official copy is in the Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville, Spain, under file number: Patronato, Simancas: Bulas; Est. 1, caj. 1, leg. 1. Another authenticated copy is in the national archives of Portugal, called Torre do Tombo, in Lisbon, under file number: Gaveta 10, maço 11, n° 16. A Spanish translation, by Grecian de Aldrete, secretary of Felipe II is in the same file at AGI; a copy of which is in the British Library in London, under Add. mss. 13,977: Papeles varios de Indias. This Spanish version has been published in the Colección ... de Indias, Vol. 16, pp. 356-362. I have followed the English translation in Blair & Robertson, Vol. I of the series: The Philippine Islands 1493-1898, pp. 105-111, 340.

INTER CÆTERA — MAY 4 [1493]

Alexander, etc.¹ to the illustrious sovereigns, our very dear son in Christ, Fernando [i.e. Ferdinand], King, and our very dear daughter in Christ, Isabella [i.e. Elizabeth], Queen of Castile and Leon, Aragon, Sicily, and Granada, health, and apostolic blessing.

Among other things well pleasing to his divine Majesty and cherished of our heart, this one assuredly ranks highest: that especially in our times, the Catholic faith and the Christian law be exalted and everywhere fomented and propagated, and barbarous nations overthrown and brought to the faith itself.

Whereof inasmuch as by the favor of divine clemency, through no merits of ours, we have been raised to so holy a see as Peter's, recognizing that as true Catholic kings and princes such as we have always known you to be, and as your illustrious deeds have al-

¹ Ed. note: Alexander VI was Pope from 1492 to 1503.



Pope Alexander VI, author of the Bull “Inter cætera”. *He was born in Valencia, Spain, with the name Rodrigo de Borgia. He issued a bull entitled “Inter cætera”, which means “Among other things”, soon after the news of Columbus’ discovery of the New World reached him in March 1493.*

ready become known to almost the whole world, [that] you, not only desire but with every effort, zeal, and diligence, without regard to hardships, expenses, dangers, with the shedding even of your blood, are laboring to that end; that besides you have already long ago dedicated to this purpose your whole soul and all your endeavors, as witnessed in these times with so much glory to the divine name in your recovery of the kingdom of Granada from the yoke of the Moors, we therefore not unrighteously hold it as our duty to grant you even of our own accord and in your favor those things whereby daily and with heartier effort you may be enabled for the honor of God himself and the spread of the Christian rule to accomplish your saintly and praiseworthy purpose so pleasing to immortal God.

In truth, we have learned that, according to your purpose long ago you were in quest of some faraway islands and mainlands not hitherto discovered by others, to the end that you might bring to the worship of our Redeemer and the profession of the Catholic faith their inhabitants and dwellers therein, that, hitherto having been earnestly engaged in the siege and recovery of the kingdom itself of Granada, you were unable to accomplish this saintly and praiseworthy purpose; but at length, as was pleasing to the Lord, the said kingdom having been regained, not without the greatest hardships, dangers, and expenses, that with the wish to fulfil your desire, you chose our beloved son, Christopher Columbus, a man assuredly worthy and of the highest recommendation as well as provided [him] with ships and men equipped for like designs, to make a diligent quest for these faraway, unknown mainlands and islands through the sea, where hitherto no-one has sailed¹; who at length, with divine aid, nor without the utmost diligence, sailing in the Ocean Sea discovered certain very faraway islands and even mainlands that hitherto had not been discovered by others, wherein dwell very many peoples living in peace, and, as reported, going unclothed, and not users of flesh meat; and, as your aforesaid envoys are of the opinion, these very peoples living in the said islands and countries believe in one God, Creator in heaven, besides being sufficiently ready in appearance to embrace the Catholic faith and be trained in good morals. Nor is hope lacking that, were they instructed, the name of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, would easily be introduced into the said countries and islands. Besides on one of these aforesaid chief islands the said Christopher has already ordered to be assembled and built a well-equipped fortress², wherein he has stationed as garrison certain Christians, companions of his, who are to make a search for other faraway and unknown islands and mainlands. In certain islands and countries already discovered are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of divers kinds and characteristics.

Wherefore, as becoming to Catholic kings and princes, after earnest consideration of all matters, especially of the increase and spread of the Catholic faith, as was the fashion of your ancestors, kings of renowned memory, you have purported with the favor of divine clemency to bring under your sway the said mainlands and islands with their inhabitants and the dwellers therein, and bring them to the Catholic faith.

Hence in heartiest commendation in the Lord of this your saintly and praiseworthy purpose, desirous too that it be duly accomplished in the carrying to those regions of the name of our Savior, we exhort you very earnestly in the Lord and insist strictly both through your reception of holy baptism, whereby you are bound to our apostolic commands, and in the bowels of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, inasmuch as with upright spirit and through zeal for the true faith you design to equip and despatch this

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- 1 Ed. note: Columbus himself knew that lands existed west of the Canary Islands, because some Canary Island fishermen had told him so earlier; this was his secret. So, Vikings asides, his was not really the first European discovery of America.
 - 2 Ed. note: In December 1492, Columbus began the construction of a fort at La Navidad, on the northern coast of Española or Hispaniola (Haïti today). However, when he returned, a year later, the garrison and the fort had been destroyed by the natives.

expedition, your purpose also as is your duty to lead the peoples dwelling in those islands and countries to embrace the Christian religion. Do not at any time let dangers nor hardships deter you therefrom, with the stout hope and trust in your hearts that Almighty God will further your undertakings.

Moreover, moved thereunto by our own accord, not at your instance nor the request of any one else on your behalf, but wholly of our own largess and certain knowledge as well as fulness of our apostolic power, by the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which we hold on earth, in order that with greater readiness and heartiness you enter upon an understanding of so lofty a character as has been entrusted to you by the graciousness of our apostolic favor, by tenor of these presents should any of the said islands have been found by your envoys and captains, **we do give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, sites, places, and towns, as well as all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered toward the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole, namely the north, to the Antarctic pole, namely the south, no matter whether the said mainlands and islands are found or to be found in the direction of India or toward any other quarter, the said line to the west and south to be distant one hundred leagues from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde.**¹ With the proviso, however, that none of the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered beyond that said line towards the west and south, be in the actual possession of any Christian king or prince up to the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ just past in the present year 1493.

Moreover, we make, appoint and delegate you and your said heirs and successors owners of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind; with this proviso, however, that through this gift, grant, and assignment of ours no right conferred on any Christian prince, who may be in actual possession of said islands and mainlands up to the said birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ, is hereby to be considered as withdrawn or to be withdrawn.

Moreover, we command you in virtue of holy obedience that, employing all due diligence in the premises, as you promise, nor do we doubt your compliance therein to the best of your loyalty and royal greatness of spirit, you send to the aforesaid mainlands and islands worthy, God-fearing, learned, skilled, and experienced men, in order

1 Ed. note: Emphasis mine. It is said that this first distance of 100 leagues, which was changed later, came to the Pope after reading a copy of Columbus' journal of his first voyage, in which he said that, upon reaching that point, on 13 September 1492, he found no variation on his compass, as his needle pointed straight towards the north star. Thus, the first line of demarcation was viewed as a basic meridian from which to measure all others. Later on, St. Michael's in the Azores was chosen for the same reason, then Cádiz, and/or Paris and finally Greenwich, once it was realized that magnetic variation was not a constant phenomenon, and that a nation's main port was a better reference point from which to measure longitudes.

to instruct the aforesaid inhabitants and dwellers therein in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals.

Besides, under penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* to be incurred ipso facto, should anyone thus contravene, we strictly forbid all persons of whatsoever rank, even imperial and royal, or of whatsoever estate, degree, order, or condition, to dare, without your special permit, or that of your aforesaid heirs and successors, to go, as charged, for the purpose of trade or any other reason to the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, towards the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole to the Antarctic pole, no matter whether the mainlands and islands found and to be found lie in the direction of India or towards any other quarter whatsoever, the said line to the west and south to be distant one hundred leagues from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde¹, the apostolic constitutions and ordinances and other decrees whatsoever to the contrary notwithstanding.

We trust Him from whom derive empires and governments and everything good, that undertaking, in a short while your hardships and endeavors will result in the utmost success, to the happiness and glory of the whole of Christendom.

But inasmuch as it would be difficult to have these present letters sent to all places where desirable, we wish, and with similar accord and knowledge do decree, that to copies of them, signed by the hands of any public notary commissioned therefor, and sealed with the seal of any ecclesiastical officer or ecclesiastical court, the same respect is to be shown in court and outside as well as anywhere else as would be given to these presents, should they thus be exhibited or shown. Let no-one therefore, etc., infringe, etc., this our recommendation, gift, grant, assignment, constitution, delegation, decree, mandate, prohibition, and will. Should any one, etc.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's in the year, etc. [= of Our Lord] 1493, the 4th day of May, and the first year of our pontificate. Gratis by order of our Most Holy Lord the Pope.

D. Gallectus.

For the registrar: A. de Muciarellis.

Collator: L. Amerinus.

1 The actual text from Columbus' logbook is as follows: "*Thursday 13th of September:...On this day [measured from noon to noon] at the beginning of the evening, the needles varied toward the NW and in the morning they varied somewhat toward the NE.*" (From Folio 3 verso of the ms. copy made by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and reproduced by Carlos Sanz (ed.), *Diario de Colón*, 1962).

