
Document 1524C

Letter from Peter Martyr to the Archbishop of Cosenza, dated Burgos, 14 July 1524

Source: See sources for Doc. 1521G, e.g. Martyr, De orbe novo, Paris, 1907, pp. 567-573.

To the Archbishop of Cosenza, to be offered to His Holiness¹

SIXTH DECADE

Chapter I

Before you returned to Rome, at the end of your mission to Spain, so useful and so honorable that two Popes² have entrusted you with, at the time Spain was not enjoying the presence of her king who had gone to seek the imperial crown that had been offered to him, you do not ignore, I think, that, among the noble Spaniards who, in the New World, explore the southern coasts of the continent, a distinguished one is Ægidius Gonzalez, more commonly called Gil Gonzalez...³

1 Ed. note: Giovanni Ruffo de Forli, formerly Apostolic legate to Spain, and Archbishop of Cosenza, was the author's protector with Pope Leo X (1513-1521). Martyr had corresponded with him as early as 1493, but regularly only as of 1509.

2 Ed. note: Leo X and Adrian VI.

3 Ed. note: He had gone to the Darien in January 1523.

Chapter IX

Let me pause here a while, after having dictated the above. My secretary had already put on his hat, but he will wait. Here, just now, Diego Arias, the son of Governor Pedro Arias¹, has come to see me...

When you find an opportunity, please kiss the feet of His Holiness [Pope] Clement.² The Spaniards will believe in the worth and merit of His Holiness as long as he will believe in yours. Indeed, because they have long appreciated you, they think it appropriate that the powerful of this world keep you informed of their affairs. Princes are often judged definitively on the choice they make of their ministers.

Here is a third news that has just arrived. Since the mail has not yet left, His Holiness, I think, will derive some pleasure in knowing about it. In the decade I dedicated to Pope Adrian³, where I gave a description of the Moluccas, where the spices grow, I had alluded to the debate between Spaniards and Portuguese concerning the ownership of that archipelago. We are so persuaded that the archipelago in question is contained within the limits assigned to us by Pope Alexander, that we have had built for a new expedition⁴, and at considerable cost, in a port on the coast of Biscay⁵, at Bilbao, **six ships**, equipped with whatever they needed. We had decided to send off that fleet, at about the spring equinox, from a port in Galicia which you know, Clunium.⁶ This port had been designated for the spice trade, because it is more accessible to all the traders from the northern countries, and that they can visit the India House of Trade there more easily than at Seville, or even more than in Portugal where the goods from the Indies arrived only after long detours.

For their part, the Portuguese, understanding that they would become ruined, if this enterprise were to succeed, begged us not to inflict such harm upon them, without having studied their claims first. They assert that the Moluccas have been discovered by them first and visited by their sailors, that they are located within the limits assigned to them and not to the Emperor, viz. on this side of the [line at] 370 leagues beyond the islands situated off Cape Verde; this cape is called by Ptolemy Risardinum, and we think such islands correspond to the Gorgades.⁷ The Emperor, who prefers justice and truth to fortune, above all when a king is his cousin, and, if one believes a public rumor, will soon become his brother-in-law⁸, has granted them a hearing and consented in having their claims examined. The ships have already been stopped, the supplies remain un-

1 Ed. note: The Governor of Darien, Panama today.

2 Ed. note: Giulio de Medici had become Pope Clement VII on 19 November 1523. He died on 26 September 1534.

3 Ed. note: See Doc. 1521G.

4 Ed. note: The Loaysa Expedition.

5 Ed. note: The port of Portugalete.

6 Ed. note: Clunium is the Latin name of La Coruña.

7 Ed. note: The Cape Verde Islands.

8 Ed. note: Charles V, indeed, married the Princess Isabel of Portugal, in 1526; she gave birth to the future Philip II in 1527.

used, and the officers and seamen who had been selected for this expedition are unhappy.

It has been decided¹ that some astronomers, cosmographers, mariners and jurisconsults appointed by both sides would meet in the town of Pax Augusta, commonly named Badajoz, because it is on the border between Portugal and Spain.

From both sides, they have gone there. It was during the calends of April, more or less, that they began to argue and discuss. The Portuguese, being resolved not to give in on any point, do not admit any of the reasonings put forward by our negotiators. The Spanish would like to have the 370-league line begin with the westernmost of the Gorgades Islands, the one that is called San Antonio, and they say that this island is situated at 9-1/2 degrees of longitude from the known meridian of the Fortunate Islands.² The Portuguese, for their part, insist in proposing that this line must begin [to be measured] from the first one of those islands, Sal Island, which is situated at only 5 degrees of longitude from the same meridian.

Here is the reasoning of the Spanish. If, between two neighbors discussing the border between their fields, a judge were named to decide their dispute, given that John already owns a well-known field, and that Frank his neighbor is to enter into the possession of another field located 100 paces away, there is no doubt possible. Indeed, if one had to start measuring the distance from the point where John's property begins, John might as well give up his land, because it would be entirely comprised within Frank's allocation. Therefore, either you renounce your rights to the Cape Verde Islands that you have owned up to now, or else accept the distance beginning with the westernmost of those islands. You must accept one or the other of these options. The debate was long. No conclusion was reached.

If the Portuguese had indeed accepted the decision of the Spanish representatives, they would have had to recognize that they had violated, not only the Moluccas near China and the big ocean, as well as the Promontory of the Satyrs³ and Gilolo, but also Malacca occupied by them for some time already.

(Facing page) **Part of Asia, according to Ptolemy, in the Rome edition of 1490.** *The imaginary Cape of the Satyrs appears on the equator, on the right-hand side of this partial map. The Satyr Islands are off this cape, and are described by the caption: "Qui has inhabitant caudas habere dicuntur." [This is where they say that the inhabitants have tails]. Satyrs were mythological men with goat legs. (From Nordenskiöld, **Facsimile-Atlas**, Stockholm, 1889, Plate XXVI)*

1 Ed. note: By the Treaty of Vitoria (See Doc. 1524A).

2 Ed. note: The Canary Islands.

3 Ed. note: The identity of this cape cannot be determined from Ptolemy maps of the period (e.g. Strasbourg, 1522). One must go back to an older edition (e.g. Rome, 1490) to find such a promontory, shown lying on the equator, in the China Sea, east of Chersonesia, Malaysia today.

The Spanish actually claim that the authority of Ptolemy, and of other authors who did not agree on the length of a degree, is sufficient to establish the little value of the Portuguese claims. The Portuguese contest them with arguments of like nature. Let us note, however, that those of our mariners who have come back from this long navigation have received from the main king of those islands, the king of the island where they loaded their ship named **Victoria** with cloves, some letters and superb gifts, as a splendid proof of the allegiance which they have sworn. As for the Portuguese, they show no treaty signed with any of those kings. However, they say that the Portuguese name has been heard there, and that Portuguese [people] have been seen there. It is true, say our people, but there has never been more than one¹, a fugitive at that, who was afraid to pay for his crimes. Furthermore, no other proof of commercial relations was put forward.

The decision to be taken by the Emperor in our Royal Council is still uncertain. It is certain that, for the Portuguese, it will be very hard to be forbidden from known lands, and, for the Spanish, to lose such a beautiful opportunity for wealth will not be pleasant. May God help us!

Good health to you.

Burgos, 14 July 1524.

Chapter X

[The Conference of Badajoz, cont'd]

Many pirates and soldiers of the King of France, with whom we are at war, have closed all the [mail] routes, at sea and overland. Such is the difficulty of our times! I am therefore sending you this letter in two copies, because you wish to know the news from the other world.

In order to solve the dispute with the Portuguese that I told you about, 24 negotiators had been selected, all experienced men. There was one [sic] from each discipline, I mean, 6 astronomers, 6 jurisconsults, 6 cosmographers, and 6 mariners. You know only a few of them, and His Holiness knows none of them. They have all come back.² They have given a report to our Council, and soon will report about their proceedings at that conference. Don Fernando Colón, the second son of Christopher Colón, the discoverer of the New World, who is a very learned man, and 3 jurisconsults, Licentiate Acuña and Licentiate Manuel, both auditors, the first one in the Royal Council and the second one in the chancery of Valladolid, and with them Licentiate Perisa³ of the chancery of Granada have, apparently, first exposed their case. Nothing more than what I have reported earlier has been done.

On the deadline fixed by the Emperor, which was the last day of May, the judges representing Spain have rendered their decision on the bridge of the River Caya, situ-

1 Ed. note: Martyr may refer to Pedro de Lorosa, rather than to Francisco Serrano.

2 Ed. note: From Badajoz, to Burgos where the Court was residing.

3 Ed. note: This name does not appear in the proceedings. It is a misprint for either Ribera or de Pisa. I opt for the latter.

ated on a river which is used as the border between Spain and Portugal. The Portuguese, who had everything to gain by postponing the reading of the sentence, did not succeed in getting it delayed by one day, not even by one hour. The decision was that the Moluccas are situated, according to the opinion of ancient and modern authors, at more than 20 degrees inside the limits assigned to Spain. The same applies to Malacca and Trapobana, if however Trapobana corresponds to the island which the Portuguese call Sumatra. The Portuguese went back home very dispirited and recriminating against what had happened. They refused to give up any of their claims. We have even learned that their young king had despatched a large fleet and that they whisper that they will destroy our vessels, should they show up in those parts.

As for us, on the eve of the calends of July, in our Council of the Indies, we have been of the opinion that the Emperor should order the departure of our fleet of 6 vessels, before the end of next August! They will not be instructed to engage in a war, if they meet with a superior Portuguese fleet. Has not the Emperor at his disposal, and on the continent a ready-made vengeance, in case the treaties are violated at sea? Portugal is indeed, as you know, sort of surrounded by Spain; actually, the whole part of Portugal containing its most flourishing towns, is sort of blocked by Medina del Campo, a remarkable town, by Salamanca, Avila, Segovia, Toro¹, the happy kingdom of Toledo, and many other regions thrown between the Guadiana and Duero Rivers. I have often mentioned this in my previous decades; in olden days Portugal was but a county of Castile, which was granted, in the category of a kingdom, by an obliging king to one of his grandsons.²

It has also been decided that a certain Esteban Gomez, also expert in the art of navigation, would seek another way, between the Land of the Cod-fish³ and Florida which have belonged to us for a long time, to go to Cathay [i.e. China]. He is entrusted with only one caravel and his only instructions will be to look for, inside the multiple and vast inlets of our Ocean, a possible passage to the kingdom of the one commonly referred to as the Great Khan.

[End of the 6th Decade]

1 Ed. note: A small town west of Valladolid, which must have lost some of its former importance.

2 Ed. note: Martyr does not mention that when Portugal was a county, it was then confined to the region between the Douro and Minho Rivers. The same region became an independent kingdom in 1139. Lisbon was recaptured from the Arabs soon after that, in 1147, but southern Portugal only one century later, in 1249.

3 Ed. note: Newfoundland today.