



Terrae Incognitae

The Journal of the Society for the History of Discoveries

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ytin20>

The Untold Story of Oceanic Pilot Bartolomeu Borges who Guided Jean Ribault to Florida in 1562: Document Transcription and Translation, Accompanied by an Historical Introduction

Nuno Vila-Santa

To cite this article: Nuno Vila-Santa (2023): The Untold Story of Oceanic Pilot Bartolomeu Borges who Guided Jean Ribault to Florida in 1562: Document Transcription and Translation, Accompanied by an Historical Introduction, *Terrae Incognitae*, DOI: 10.1080/00822884.2023.2182986

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00822884.2023.2182986>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 26 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The Untold Story of Oceanic Pilot Bartolomeu Borges who Guided Jean Ribault to Florida in 1562: Document Transcription and Translation, Accompanied by an Historical Introduction

NUNO VILA-SANTA 

Centro Interuniversitário de História das Ciências e Tecnologia, Faculdade de Ciências, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Until now, Portuguese pilot Bartolomeu Borges has remained an obscure figure. A new document—a lengthy letter sent by D. Alonso de Tovar, the Spanish ambassador in Portugal, to King Philip II in 1563—allows us to reconstruct Borges's career. It suggests that it was Borges (not Jean Ribault) who guided the first French expedition to Florida in 1562, and provides an instructive sixteenth-century case that illustrates the importance of oceanic pilots. The transcription and translation—which make an important but unfamiliar document available to the scholarly community—are complemented by a historical introduction that places Borges's career in context and considers his overall impact. Additionally, the introduction examines the significance of oceanic pilots more broadly, showing that they were important actors in the creation and maintenance of maritime overseas empires of the sixteenth century, agents involved in the creation and circulation of maritime knowledge.

KEYWORDS kidnap; Pilot; nautical knowledge; maritime exploration; ambassadors

Jusqu'à maintenant, le pilote portugais Bartolomeu Borges reste un personnage obscur. Un nouveau document—une très longue lettre envoyée par D. Alonso de Tovar, l'ambassadeur d'Espagne au Portugal, au roi Philippe II en 1563—nous

permet de reconstruire la carrière de Borges. La lettre suggère que c'était Borges (non pas Jean Ribault) qui a guidé la première expédition française en Floride en 1562, et elle fournit un cas contemporain instructif qui illustre l'importance des pilotes océaniques. La transcription et la traduction—qui rendent un document qui est important et jusqu'ici inconnu disponible à la communauté érudite—sont complétées par une introduction historique qui met en contexte la carrière de Borges et réfléchit à son impact général. De plus, cette introduction examine l'importance des pilotes océaniques plus profondément et montre qu'ils étaient des agents importants dans la création et le maintien des empires maritimes d'outre-mer du 16^{ème} siècle, des participants dans la création et la circulation des connaissances maritimes.

Hasta ahora, la figura del piloto portugués Bartolomeu Borges ha permanecido en la sombra. Un nuevo documento —una extensa carta enviada por D. Alonso de Tovar, embajador de España en Portugal, al rey Felipe II en 1563— nos permite reconstruir la carrera de Borges. La carta sugiere que fue Borges (y no Jean Ribault) quien guió la primera expedición francesa a Florida en 1562, y proporciona un instructivo caso que ilustra la importancia los de pilotos de oceano en siglo XVI. La transcripción y traducción, que ponen a disposición de la comunidad académica un documento importante pero poco conocido, se complementan con una introducción histórica que sitúa la carrera de Borges en su contexto y considera su impacto general. Además, la introducción examina la importancia de los pilotos de oceano más amplia, mostrando que fueron actores importantes en la creación y mantenimiento de los imperios marítimos de ultramar del siglo XVI, agentes involucrados en la creación y la circulación del conocimiento marítimo.

PALABRAS CLAVE pilotos de oceano, secuestro, Florida, conocimiento náutico, exploración marítima; embajadores; Bartolomeu Borges; Jean Ribault; D. Alonso de Tovar

Historical Introduction

Jean Ribault's (1520–1565) voyage to Florida in 1562, as part of the first French attempt to establish a colony in the region, is a well-known episode in history.¹ Ribault,

¹ For the most recent overview on the expedition, based on French and Spanish sources, see John McGrath, *The French in Early Florida; In the Eye of the Hurricane* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). For a wider overview of European competition in North America see Margaret and Dwane Pickett, *The European Struggle to settle North America: colonizing attempts by England, France and Spain, 1521–1608* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011).

a French Huguenot commander, was considered to be one of France's most accomplished nautical experts and maritime captains during his time. Even after he began serving the English, Antoine de Noailles (French Ambassador in England, 1552–1556) commented that Ribault was the greatest seafarer in France.² In 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés (1519–1574), the Spanish naval commander appointed by King Philip II of Spain (1556–1598) to expel the French from Florida, killed Ribault. Having previously fought the Frenchman at Calais in 1558, even Menéndez de Avilés had to concede that with Ribault's death, France had lost one of its greatest naval commanders.³ It was just such a reputation, working between Tudor England and Valois France, that led French Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572) to select Ribault to head the French expedition to Florida in 1562. However, behind great maritime historical figures, sometimes lay other less mentioned, but still critical figures. This is the case with the unmentioned and sometimes forgotten role of pilots in the great voyages of discovery.

A recently discovered document—identified below—presents a new perspective on the events commonly associated with Ribault's 1562 expedition. This document strongly suggests that a previously unknown Portuguese pilot, Bartolomeu Borges, played a crucial role in guiding Ribault's expedition to Florida. The document also reveals that the pilot was initially kidnapped by the French and compelled to serve as their guide to Florida. The pilot's abduction underscores the significant role Portuguese pilots played in sixteenth-century French overseas voyages.

There is a long history of Portuguese pilots serving in French overseas expeditions.⁴ Going back to early overseas voyages, the first French voyage to Brazil in 1504, captained by Binot Palmier de Gonneville, was only made possible because the French captain hired Portuguese pilots in Lisbon. According to the report of Gonneville's sojourn in Lisbon, he and his companions "took on two Portuguese who had returned, one named Bastiam Moura, the other Diègue Cohinto, to help them with their knowledge, on the route to India."⁵ During the 1530s, the Portuguese pilot João Afonso became the most famous case of a Portuguese pilot working for France. After participating in French expeditions to West Africa, and being naturalized French under the name of Jean Alphonse, he wrote two important cosmographical works and piloted Jean-François de Roberval's (1500

² Paul Bertrand, *Jean Ribault, marin dieppois et lieutenant du roi en Neuve-France, Floride française, en 1565* (Paris: la Pensée universelle, 1971), p. 30.

³ Paul Bertrand, *Jean*, p. 30. On Menéndez letters and expedition see Albert Manucy, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Captain General of the Ocean Sea* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2009); *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. Cartas sobre la Florida (1555–1574)*, ed. Juan Carlos Mercado (Frankfurt/Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuet, 2002).

⁴ On Portuguese pilots serving on French expeditions see Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos entre Portugal e a França na primeira metade do século XVI* (Redondo: Patrimonia, 1995); and Marco Oliveira Borges, "O trajecto final da Carreira da Índia na torna-viagem (1500–1640). Problemas da navegação entre os Açores e Lisboa: acções e reacções" (PhD thesis, University of Lisbon, 2020), vol. I, pp. 322–349, 377–416.

⁵ *Voyages au Canada avec les relations des voyages en Amérique de Gonneville, Verrazano et Roberval* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992), p. 40.

–1560) voyage to present-day Canada in 1542.⁶ However, Afonso had decided to serve the French and died in their service, killed at the hands of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés.⁷

A different situation happened when Portuguese pilots were kidnapped and forced to serve what they perceived as their enemy (either the French or the English). This type of story is probably less common; it is not as well documented as the cases of Portuguese pilots that by their own free-will decided to serve France and England. Recently, José María Moreno Madrid and David Salomoni examined how the skills of a kidnapped Portuguese oceanic pilot, Nuno da Silva, were crucial to guide Francis Drake's circumnavigation in 1577–79 and how this fact even generated a new report on the circumnavigation itself.⁸ But prior to Nuno da Silva, there was also another documented case. The Portuguese pilot Francisco Dias Salgado was kidnapped by the English in 1558 when they attacked a Portuguese merchant ship in the English Channel, resulting in a famous Portuguese protest at the Tudor court.⁹ These examples with the English, alongside the case of Borges, revealed with this new document, throw new light on the role played by Iberian oceanic pilots in French and English overseas voyages.

This transcription and translation make an important historical source available to the scholarly community. To place the primary document in context and explain its significance, historical background on the document, Borges, pilots, and maritime history is provided beforehand. This introductory section explains why Borges came to play such an important role and why oceanic pilots were so significant in the Early Modern Period.

The Letter, Pilot Bartolomeu Borges, and European Maritime Competition

The transcribed and translated document is a letter sent from Lisbon by D. Alonso de Tovar, the Spanish ambassador in Portugal from 1561 to 1567, to King Philip II (r. 1556–1598), dated 20 May 1563, located in *Archivo General de Simancas* in the collection *Secretarias de Estado*, filed under *Estado Portugal*, which houses the records of diplomatic dispatches and papers related to Portugal until the 1580 Union of the

⁶ Luís de Matos, *Les Portugais en France au XVI^e siècle: Études et documents* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1952), p. 22. Alphonse was associated with the French cartographical school of Dieppe. See Martine Sauret, *Voyages dans l'école cartographique de Dieppe au XVI^e siècle: espaces, altérités et influences* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), p. 1. On Jean Alphonse see Dany Larochelle, *Du ciel au bateau: la Cosmographie, 1544, du pilote Jean Alfonse et la construction du savoir géographique au XVI^e siècle* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 2002).

⁷ P.P. Boucher, *France and the American tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2008), p. 49.

⁸ José María Moreno Madrid, David Salomoni, "Nuno da Silva's third relation: an unknown report on Francis Drake voyage (1577–1580)," *Terra Incognitae* 54, no. 1 (April, 2022), pp. 64–82.

⁹ Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, *Corpo Cronológico* I-102-113, fols. 1–2. On the topic see also Nuno Vila-Santa "From Allies to Rivals: Portuguese maritime espionage in England (1551–1559)," [forthcoming] *English Historical Review*.

Iberian Crowns.¹⁰ Most of Tovar's correspondence is kept at Simancas. Only a small part of it was published in the monumental Spanish compilation *Collección de Documentos Ineditos por la Historia de España*.¹¹ As is often the case with the correspondence of Spanish ambassadors in Portugal, the great majority was omitted in this *Collección*, including the letter discussed here.¹² Checking all of Tovar's correspondence in Simancas, I found no other reference to the topics addressed in the present letter. No formal reply by King Philip II to this missive is known to exist. It is possible that further research will locate a response to this letter in others Spanish archives, as Tovar's correspondence housed in Simancas is incomplete.¹³

Aside from the information provided by Tovar's missive, very few details about Bartolomeu Borges's life are known. As Tovar states, Borges was born in Portugal; sometime during the 1550s he started to serve the Spanish Crown as pilot in voyages to the Spanish Atlantic coast and the Caribbean. The fact that Borges served as Don Juan Tello de Guzmán's pilot in 1560, who on the orders of King Charles I (1516–1556) and later also of King Philip II, escorted the ships of the *Carrera de Indias* to Spain, suggests Borges had already acquired considerable nautical skills. During a Caribbean voyage in 1560, Borges was captured by a French privateer fleet. The name of the fleet's captain that kidnapped Borges is unknown. The letter reveals that Borges was forced to pilot French raids in the region. Only the name of the French shipowner is known: François Le Clerc.¹⁴

In 1560, Le Clerc was already a familiar character to the Spanish, known as an important French privateer. Despite being a Huguenot under a French King with anti-Protestant policies, Le Clerc had been knighted by King Henry II (r. 1547

¹⁰ Archivo General de Simancas, *Secretaria de Estado Portugal*, Legajo 381, doc. 89. The translation of the document and all other non-English sources are done by the author of this piece, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ *Collección de documentos ineditos para la historia de España*, 112 vols, (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1842–1896). The documents about the 1564 expedition against Velez de La Gomera were published, as the expedition involved a negotiation with Portugal for the Portuguese participation in the venture. However, Tovar's correspondence in Simancas encompasses other relevant topics for Portuguese-Spanish relations that remain unpublished, including political relations, dynastic marriages, and European affairs.

¹² The sole exception is the correspondence of Lope Hurtado de Mendonza in the late 1520s and early 1530s: *Correspondence d'un ambassadeur castillan en Portugal dans les années 1530*, Lope Hurtado de Mendonza, ed. Aude Viaude (Paris/Lisbon: Centre culturel Calouste Gulbenkian/Commission nationale pour les commémorations des Découvertes portugaises, 2001).

¹³ In Tovar's correspondence during his tenure as ambassador, there are entire months without any preserved letters by Tovar. Conversely, there are months during which several letters on a variety of topics addressed to different destinations were preserved. I contacted the *Archivo General de Indias* (Seville) as well as the *Archivo Histórico Nacional* (Madrid) asking for Tovar's letters, but both replied that sixteenth-century Spanish ambassadors' correspondence is kept in the Simancas archive. At Simancas, I discussed other possible repositories for Tovar's letters with the director of the Simancas archive, who replied that the *Secretaria de Estado Portugal* would be the only place. Unfortunately, some papers from this repository were lost. Thus, it is possible that other unknown Tovar's letters are still waiting to be discovered in other Spanish archives.

¹⁴ Nicknamed as *Pie de Pallo* by the Spanish (because he had lost a leg in his one of his many naval engagements against the Spanish), *Wooden Leg* in English, and *Jambe de Bois* in French.

–1559) himself in 1551, in recognition to his maritime services to France.¹⁵ In 1553, King Henry II granted him the first French letter of marque for Caribbean waters. The following year, he attacked Santiago de Cuba with royal ships, causing great destruction.¹⁶ In 1559, Le Clerc returned to France after a successful privateering expedition which also included the famous attack on La Palma Island in the Canaries.¹⁷ Profiting from the war between France and Spain until 1559, Le Clerc also sent his captains on expeditions to Spanish areas, including a 1559 expedition to the Caribbean which was captured; the Spanish Inquisition put members of the expedition on trial.¹⁸ According to Tovar's letter, it is possible that Le Clerc sent another fleet to the region in 1560. It is plausible that, in 1560, Le Clerc had given his unnamed captain clearance to kidnap any Iberian oceanic pilots he might encounter for use as a nautical guide. In fact, during Le Clerc's attack on Cuba in 1554, he had been guided by pilot Pero Brás, a Portuguese defector from the Azores mentioned in Spanish sources.¹⁹

When the French fleet that kidnapped Borges returned to Normandy, likely in early 1561, Borges was introduced to Le Clerc. Le Clerc decided to convince Admiral Gaspard de Coligny to use the Portuguese pilot's nautical knowledge in the French expedition under preparation to Florida; the journey to Florida was, in a way, a continuation of recent French efforts in Brazil, albeit in a different geographical context,²⁰ part of Coligny's anti-Spanish policies, aimed at developing a French overseas empire, thereby forcing Spain to divert forces from Europe.²¹ This expedition was captained by Jean Ribault; Borges was commanded to be pilot, as Tovar explains in the missive to King Philip II. As John McGrath has argued, despite his maritime experience, there is no indication that Jean Ribault had ever sailed in long-distance Atlantic voyages before 1562.²² Thus, the need for an experienced pilot to guide the French commander's Atlantic voyage was real.

The description of Ribault's expedition shows that Borges accompanied it and likely played the role that was previously demanded of him: piloting the French expedition to Florida. Furthermore, the fact that French sources on Ribault's voyage state that the nautical route followed in 1562 was entirely new for the French (sailing to higher latitudes) and different from the route utilized by the Spanish in the *Carrera de Indias*, could also indicate that Borges provided knowledge concerning this route. The French accounts merely refer

¹⁵ Gabriel Marcel, *Les corsaires français au XVIe siècle dans les Antilles* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1902), pp. 19–20.

¹⁶ Kenneth Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and plunder, 1530–1630* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 83.

¹⁷ Martine Acerra and Guy Martinière, eds., *Coligny, les protestants et la mer. Actes du colloque organisé à Rochefort et La Rochelle les 3 et 4 Octobre 1996* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1997), pp. 85, 157.

¹⁸ Acerra, *Coligny*, pp. 81–84.

¹⁹ *Collección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las antiguas posesiones españolas de ultramar. Segunda serie*, vol. VI (Madrid: Estab. Tip. Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1891), pp. 364–365, 384–385.

²⁰ Frank Lestringant, *Le Huguenot et le sauvage. L'Amérique et la controverse coloniale, en France, au temps des guerres de religion (1555–1589)* (Genève: Droz, 1990), p. 28.

²¹ For an overview of Coligny's maritime policy see Liliane Crété, *Coligny* (Fayard: Paris, 1985), pp. 289–311.

²² McGrath, *The French in Florida*, p. 55.

two Spanish pilots and McGrath argues that there was no Portuguese pilot in Ribault's expedition.²³ It is here that the present document adds new information. Perhaps, it was Borges who had the nautical knowledge for the route followed in 1562, as the letter underscores how the Spanish valued his knowledge. Additionally, the more northern route that was followed in Ribault's 1562 voyage might have been known by Portuguese seafarers that sailed frequently for cod fishing in present-day Canadian waters ever since the late fifteenth century. The French wanted to avoid encounters with Spanish; hence, a novel route that allowed them to sail undetected was critical. Furthermore, nautical knowledge was also crucial because Ribault's voyage had exploratory goals. Having worked previously for the Spanish and acquired Portuguese nautical experience, Borges might have been in conditions to fulfill this French requisite.

The oral account that Borges gave to Tovar on the French fort built at Charlesroyal and on Ribault's overall expedition, seem to match up with Ribault's own account.²⁴ With the use of the letter, specialists can evaluate if the document provides new information. Upon his return to France, Borges took advantage of the unrest caused by the first French Religious War and the English conquest of Dieppe and Le Havre. When he learned that the French intended to use him for another voyage to Florida, Borges escaped, aided by João Pereira Dantas (Portuguese ambassador to France, 1557–1568), who helped him reach Antwerp and then embark for Lisbon.²⁵ There is no record of Borges's later career.

The mention of a Portuguese pilot who took part in Jean Ribault's expedition has been mentioned in earlier studies.²⁶ But in French and Spanish sources on Jean Ribault's expedition to Florida, there is no explicit reference to Bartolomeu Borges.²⁷ An unspecified Portuguese pilot is mentioned two times. The first is a mention of a Portuguese pilot who had defected from homeland service to France and participated in an 1560–62 expedition, information located in a modern edition of one of the reports on Ribault's voyage.²⁸ Since this document never mentions the Portuguese pilot's name, it cannot be

²³ McGrath, *The French in Florida*, pp. 74–76, 203.

²⁴ Jean Ribault, *The Whole and True Discovery of Terra Florida* (London: Thomas Hacket, 1563).

²⁵ On Dantas action vis-à-vis Borges and his maritime espionage in France and England see Nuno Vila-Santa, "Fighting for *Mare Clausum* and *Secret Science*: France, England and Spain in the strategies of ambassador Dantas (1557–1568)," "unpublished manuscript (2022)" for *Vegueta* 23, no. 2 (2023) Forthcoming.

²⁶ Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States, Florida: 1562–1576* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), p. 31.

²⁷ Two examples of this absence of references to Borges: Jean-Paul Duviols et Marc Bouyer, La Garenne-Colombes, eds., *Voyages en Floride 1562–1567 [Jean Ribaut, René de Laudonnière, Dominique de Gourgues]* (Éd. de l'Espace européen, 1990); and Albert Manucy, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Captain General of the Ocean Sea* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2009). Furthermore, even sources on both expeditions don't mention Borges. See Juan Carlos, ed., *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. Cartas sobre la Florida (1555–1574)* (Frankfurt/Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuet, 2002). Ribault's own account doesn't mention Borges either: Jean Ribault, *The Whole and True Discovery of Terra Florida* (London: Thomas Hacket, 1563). However, there is a reference to an unknown Portuguese explorer who worked with Arellano in 1560. See Herbert Ingram Priestly, ed., *The Luna Papers, documents relating to the expedition of don Tristan de Luna y Arellano for the conquest of la Floride in 1559–61*, vol. 1 (Deland: Florida State Society, 1928), pp. 100–101, and notes on p. 264.

²⁸ *Chroniques de la guerre de Floride: une Saint-Barthélemy au Nouveau monde, 1562–1568/Laudonnière, Le Challeux et de Gourgues*, préface de Frank Lestringant; textes établis, présentés et annotés par Jocelyn Nayrand (Congé-sur-Orne: le Passager clandestin, 2012), p. 16.

ascertained if it was Borges or another Portuguese pilot. However, it is unlikely that the unnamed pilot mentioned was Borges since Tovar's letter suggests that Borges had not fled directly from Portugal to France.

The second set of possible references to Borges are located in the correspondence of Thomas Perrenot de Chantonney (1521–1571), the Spanish ambassador in France, 1559–1564.²⁹ Chantonney makes several allusions to an unnamed Portuguese “renegade pilot.”³⁰ However, Chantonney never names the pilot and his correspondence makes it clear that additional unnamed Portuguese pilots participated in French expeditions. To further complicate matters, throughout his missives, when alluding to French overseas attempts, Chantonney is not absolutely sure of expeditions' destinations. Furthermore, Chantonney's first reference to a Portuguese pilot, in a January 1561 letter to King Philip II, does not appear to be a reference to Borges.³¹ Chantonney's second mention, that dates November 1561, does not appear to reference Borges either.³²

Chantonney's third chronological reference to an unnamed Portuguese pilot, dated January 1563, is more likely to be a reference to Borges. Chantonney reported that João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, acquired some information on Jean Ribault's expedition from an unnamed Portuguese pilot who had participated in it. According to Chantonney's missive dated 9 January 1563, “in the past days a Portuguese pilot arrived who went with the French to Florida and they did not have a better man to guide them.” Later in the same letter, Chantonney reports that “but with the revolts that took place in Le Havre, the said pilot has fled from them and has come to the Portuguese ambassador that resides here, who has done so much that the pilot has returned to Portugal.”³³

Although Chantonney does not mention the name of the pilot, it is likely that he is referring to Borges, since the events he mentions (Ribault's voyage of 1562 and the Normandy uprising) are also reported in Tovar's letter. There is more evidence in João Pereira Dantas's correspondence. In a missive penned to the Portuguese King Sebastian

²⁹ On Chantonney see Jean-Baptiste Vaisman, “La correspondance de Thomas Perrenot de Chantonney, ambassadeur espagnol à la cour de France, 1559–1564: l'acculturation politique d'un diplomate franc-comtois,” PhD thesis (Paris: École Nationale de Chartres, 2012), which mainly examines political affairs in France.

³⁰ *Archivo Documental Español* (Madrid: Academia Real de la Historia, 1950–52), vol. II, pp. 6–9; vol. III, p. 79; vol. IV, pp. 15, 111; vol. V, pp. 485, 521–522.

³¹ Chantonney reported that a fleet of ten to twelve ships had set out from Le Havre, Normandy. Aboard that fleet, and working for François Le Clerc, was a Portuguese renegade captain named Francisco de Die, who had already become famous for his raids on the Portuguese in West Africa. This Francisco de Die is obviously not Bartolomeu Borges. Although Tovar's missive does not mention dates, it seems likely that the fleet that kidnapped Borges in the Caribbean departed from France during the year of 1560.

³² Shortly after the return of a French privateer fleet to Normandy, Chantonney informed King Philip II that he had imprisoned a Portuguese pilot and a Spanish traitor named Laçaela, both of whom had helped the French in their privateering expeditions against the Iberians. Since Chantonney does not name the Portuguese pilot we cannot be certain that he wasn't referring to Bartolomeu Borges. But it seems unlikely because at this date, as Tovar's letter shows, Borges had not yet been jailed by a Spanish ambassador. He was kept hidden from the spies deployed in Normandy by the Spanish and Portuguese ambassadors in France. *Archivo Documental Español* (Madrid: Academia Real de la Historia, 1950–51), vol. II, p. 6–9; vol. III, pp. 75–80.

³³ *Archivo Documental Español* (Madrid: Academia Real de la Historia, 1952), vol. V, pp. 18–19.

(r. 1557–1578), the Portuguese ambassador in France rejoiced at informing his monarch that he had acquired all the French rutters and cartography produced during Ribault's expedition. He also described the new geographical discoveries made by the French, warned of the danger of French ambitions in Florida for Portuguese interests and stated that he was sending his unnamed informant to Portugal.³⁴ Dantas's report is textually very similar to Tovar's letter; as such, it is plausible that Dantas seized the technical details of the French expedition from Borges, such as nautical rutters and cartography, before facilitating Borges's return to Portugal.

After arriving in Portugal, Borges confirmed to Cardinal Henry (1512–1580), the Portuguese regent in the minority of King Sebastian between 1562 and 1568, that Florida laid outside the area assigned to Portugal according to the 1494 Tordesillas Treaty. Although it is not mentioned in Tovar's account, it is clear that Borges had no political problems upon his return to Portugal despite his participation in a Huguenot expedition, notwithstanding the fact that Cardinal Henry, who was also the Portuguese Inquisitor General at the time, had the power to imprison Borges on suspicion of Protestantism. However, he did not. To the contrary, the Cardinal granted Borges honors, as Tovar reports. It is not known whether Borges returned to Spain, as Tovar had recommended to King Philip II. Nonetheless, in Tovar's letters there is no further reference to Borges's later whereabouts. Hence his later life remains a mystery. Perhaps, some answers will be found via future research in later documents of the *Archivo General de Indias* in Seville.

The Importance of Tovar's Letter, and the Broader Significance of Oceanic Pilots

Tovar's missive is particularly relevant for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a rare in-depth account since lengthy sixteenth-century ambassadorial communications about pilots are infrequent. In most cases, ambassadors reported partial details about pilots' careers at best, frequently without providing names. In instances when more information was offered, it was usually justified by the gravity of the context or the affair being described. In this case, the Franco-Spanish dispute in Florida helps to explain why Tovar wrote such a detailed account. He needed to inform King Philip II of several details of the French expedition that a witness (pilot Borges) gave him. This is especially true with regard to Borges's description of Charlesroyal's fort, which would have confirmed King Philip II's worst suspicions regarding the French intentions in Florida. When the letter was written in May 1563, this intelligence would likely be very relevant for the Catholic King's court, which had not received any information from the Caribbean on Ribault's 1562 expedition. The first reports on it only arrived in 1564.³⁵ Thus, the contents of this missive provided new information at the time, material relevant to political history, global history, maritime studies, and the history of science.

³⁴ Biblioteca da Ajuda, codex 49-X-4, fols. 4 v.-5.

³⁵ McGrath, *The French in Florida*, pp. 93–94.

Secondly, Tovar's letter finally reveals the name of the Portuguese pilot who participated in Jean Ribault's 1562 expedition, and may also provide new historical insights into the expedition itself, a claim that awaits confirmation from specialists. Thirdly, the document serves as a reminder of a significant fact: beyond the notable voyages of sixteenth-century discovery led by celebrated naval captains, there were also the vital but often overlooked role of pilots, as the case of Borges clearly illustrates. Indeed, while Ribault had other pilots working with him during the expedition, Tovar's missive implies that it was Borges's expertise in navigation that was crucial for the French expedition's successful arrival in Florida. The threat of Borges's execution for refusal to pilot underscores his importance. Furthermore, Tovar's account contains three explicit references to Borges's attachment to his nautical instruments, suggesting that Borges was keenly aware of the importance of his nautical knowledge and the ways in which it could serve his personal interests.

Finally, Tovar's letter bears witness to a typical affair in the contentious arena of sixteenth-century global maritime history. Spain and France fought over Borges, a skilled oceanic pilot. Furthermore, Tovar's writing strongly suggests that the English (when mentioning the English take-over of Le Havre and Borges's disguised escape) and even the Portuguese (as represented by ambassador Dantas) had an interest in him. Nautical knowledge was the basis upon which Early Modern maritime empires were built and sustained, and European powers competed to obtain it. Still, Borges's story has an ingredient that differentiates it from its earlier analogues, one that is only found from the sixteenth century onwards: its global planetary scale. Borges's tale took place between the New World and the main maritime players in Europe, and involved protagonists with extremely diverse social standings, ranging from the merchant, the privateer, and the admiral; to the King and Queen and their counselors; to the semi-itinerant spy-cum-ambassador. The aggregation of such an unlikely cast of characters invites reflection on why Borges, a mere Portuguese pilot, could be deemed so important to so many stakeholders.

Borges was deemed important because of the significant value placed on pilots' nautical knowledge. Portugal, Spain, France, England, and later the Dutch Republic, understood that they could only construct and maintain their overseas empires with that knowledge. Nevertheless, an experienced oceanic pilot was hard to acquire. Therefore, espionage and kidnapping were tactics employed by the Iberian's rival powers in their efforts to replicate their competitors' overseas maritime achievements. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese pilots were aware that their nationality could provide them with opportunities to find employment with various European powers. Borges's career serves here as a clear example of this phenomenon. Indeed, the association between Portuguese-born pilots and oceanic nautical expertise was already widely recognized in Europe.

As early as the 1530s, D. Pedro de Mascarenhas, the Portuguese ambassador to King Charles I of Spain, underscored the reputation of Portuguese pilots, warning that the Portuguese King needed to develop a policy concerning the phony Portuguese oceanic pilots who were appearing in France and Flanders seeking employment, who were hired on the spot because of their homeland's reputation for cultivating nautical skill and

knowledge.³⁶ There is no sign that the Portuguese Crown ever heeded this advice. On the contrary, the Portuguese King ordered a spy to infiltrate King Francis I's (r. 1515–1547) chamber with fake nautical rutters and cartography to gather intelligence and inform Portugal of the French monarch's plans concerning the expeditions to present-day Canada in the 1540s.³⁷ Even the Portuguese King used the contemporary image of the “skilled Portuguese pilot” to achieve his own maritime and espionage goals in Valois France. It was precisely in this context that a French historian, writing about Portuguese pilots working for King Francis I, wrote with some irony, “For this sovereign, purchasing a foreign pilot, particularly a Portuguese one, was equivalent to obtaining the key to a strongbox.”³⁸

The image of the “skilled Portuguese pilot” that spread throughout Europe is one of the primary reasons why Borges's abilities were recognized by France and Spain. Nonetheless, while Borges's case is relatively well documented, there were many others like his, which, if poorly documented, nevertheless played a key role in the processes of maritime knowledge transfer between the Iberian Peninsula, France, England and, later, the Dutch Republic. Despite Spanish and French attempts to control him, underlying dynamics allowed Borges to move independently of his employers' wishes. Neither King Philip II's, Coligny's or the Valois court's powers were able to prevent Borges from crossing geographical and political boundaries. In this regard, Borges's story bears all the hallmarks of previous nautical experts' experiences. His trajectory is mirrored in Jean Ribault's career between Tudor England and Valois France, or the way the English pilot John Davis secured employment in the 1590s between Elizabethan England and the Dutch Republic.³⁹ Thus, it is no wonder that by the sixteenth-century oceanic pilots like Borges became global mediators of nautical knowledge, coveted by major players on the contemporary geopolitical stage. These cases suggest that more appreciation needs to be given to oceanic pilots as brokers of knowledge.⁴⁰

Above all, Borges's story is a lively testimony to a burgeoning reality that would assume its full form in the seventeenth century, a time of great overseas rivalries. Throughout the sixteenth century, as the oceans became global avenues for communication, trade, war, and imperial strategies, knowledge itself was becoming globalized across maritime enterprises. Geographical and nautical knowledge were two key prerequisites in any overseas maritime project. Without them, as Borges's story reveals, the fate of an expedition hung in the balance. Therefore, Borges's case demonstrates that already in the sixteenth century the “global ocean” was increasingly synonymous with “global knowledge,” as no world power, in spite of strenuous efforts, was able to monopolize the precious skills of oceanic pilots.

³⁶ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, *Corpo Cronológico* 1-48-41, fol. 1.

³⁷ Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos entre Portugal e a França na primeira metade do século XVI* (Redondo: Patrimonia, 1995), p. 160.

³⁸ The original French quote: “Pour ce souverain, acheter un pilote étranger, surtout portugais c'était s'imaginer se procurer la clef d'un coffre-fort.” Jean-Marc Montaigne, *La Découverte du Brésil en France à la Renaissance* (ASI Éditions, 2020), p. 18.

³⁹ David Waters, *The Art of Navigation in England in Elizabethan and Early Stuart times* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1958), pp. 232–234.

⁴⁰ Alida Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Simon Schaffer, Lisa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo, eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009).

Transcription

Archivo General de Simancas, Secretaria de Estado Portugal, Legajo 381, doc. 89
S.C. R. Majestad⁴¹

Aquí llegó un hombre que dice ser de nación portugués y dice que se llama Bartolomeu Borges y que es casado en Sevilla. Y dice [que] ha servido a Vuestra Majestad de piloto con Don Juan Tello de Guzmán en la navegación de las Indias y de la costa de España y con Alonso de los Ríos. Y el año de sesenta, que la armada de Vuestra Majestad se deshizo en las Indias en la Isla Española en la ciudad de Santo Domingo, se vino por piloto en la galeaza en que vino Don Juan Tello de Guzmán. Y al dicho año de sesenta volvió a la isla de Santo Domingo con una cargazón en una urca de particulares, la cual urca se vendió en Santo Domingo. Y allí le dieron mercaderes otro navío aparejado, y que fuese a cargar a Puerto de la Plata y a la Isla Bela, donde estando la carga arribó un navío francés y un pataje al dicho año de sesenta.

Y dice que le tomaron a él y a un hijo suyo, y que echaron gente en tierra, y que avisó a los marineros que no dijese que era piloto; y que, con miedo de los franceses por amenazas que le hacían, tenía confeso ser piloto. Y luego los franceses lo llevaron al navío consigo, y que por fuerza le hicieron [que] los llevase a un puerto que está en la Isla Española, que se dice que llegan, donde hallaron dos navíos, uno portugués y otro de La Palma, cargando azúcar y cueros. Y que tomaron estos dos navíos [fol. 1 v.] y los rescataron en mil pesos poco más o menos, y que también rescataron el navío en que venía este hombre, y que daban los mercaderes de rescate por él y su hijo ciento pesos.

Y los franceses no le quisieron dar, diciendo que tenían guerra con Vuestra Majestad, y que por ningún dinero le darían; y que le dice que le ahorcarían si hablaba en rescate. Y desde allí hicieron que los llevase a una isla que se llama *Xamayé*, donde tomaron un navío que era de un hombre que se llamaba Cartagena, y tomaron en este navío cinco esclavos; y ellos y el navío rescataron en doscientos pesos. Desde allí dice que, haciéndole amenazas que le ahorcarían o le echarían a la mar si no llevaba a parte donde pudiesen hurtar, los llevó a tierra de Yucatán, que es en provincia de Nueva España. Y en el puerto de Campeche, hallaron una urca cargada de sal y de otras mercaderías, la cual urca tomaron y saquearon, y tomaron dos piezas de artillería de bronce que tenía. Y allí saltaron en tierra y saquearon el pueblo, y todo el saco cargaron en un bergantín. Y de la Florida vinieron dos bergantines armados y les tomaron toda la presa, y mataron once franceses y entre ellos un capitán. Y siempre dejaban este piloto con mucha guardia en el navío, y dijeron [que] les trajese a la canal de Habana, donde les trajo, dice, por fuerza. Y que al entrar [en] el canal encontraron un bergantín y le tomaron, y tomaron en él cuatro mil pesos de oro y de plata sin otras mercaderías, y dejaron ir el bergantín y la gente.

Y de allí vinieron la vuelta de Francia, y que entre Garniçel y Casquet, puertos/fol. 2 de Normandía, le querían echar a la mar diciendo que había paces, y que si le llevaban en Francia serían descubiertos y les vendría mucho mal; y de allí fueron a Saber, dónde estuvieron él y su hijo cerrados tres o cuatro días hasta dar parte a Pie de Palo, que era el

⁴¹ on the margin: "A se visto en consejo de Indias." annotation by King Philip II: "Bon seria que platican y que probean lo que combengo sobre estas cosas."

navío suyo. Y mandó le llevasen a su casa de noche, porque no fuese visto de la gente ser español, y que estuvo en su casa cerrado treinta días, informándose de su maestre de la nao, diciendo que este piloto era marinero y que sería bueno que estuviese en servicio. Y fuese el Pie de Palo en este tiempo a la corte a dar relación de este piloto, y en esta manera que le habían hablado en Sorlingas que se había perdido en un navío suyo. E hizo relación de esto a Monsieur de Vendôme y a Monsieur de Condé, y al Cardenal de Borbon y al Condestable y al Almirante, de cómo le habían hallado perdido y cómo le habían hallado en Indias; y mandaron que le presentase en la corte, que querían ver qué hombre era. Y le metieron en una cámara en Saint German y le sacaron un mapamundi estando estos que dice del consejo delante. Y pidieron que les enseñase cuáles eran las Indias de donde venía la plata y oro a Vuestra Majestad, y esto fue en año de sesenta y uno por el mes de diciembre; y que le pidieron les ensenase también que tierras eran las que Vuestra Majestad no tenía pobladas, y todo se lo enseñó. Y determinaron de enviarle a Habla de Gracia y tenerle a buen recaudo, y proveer luego dos navíos bien aparejados, y que fuese por piloto de ellas y los llevase a aquella tierra que se llama Ribera de Cruz, que es tierra llana [fol. 2 v.], a Rio de Corrientes y Ribera de Santa Elena, y los Ancones y el Rio Jordan. Y que si no quisiese ir por piloto que le cortasen la cabeza.

Y que en todas estas tierras hallaron oro, plata y muchas perlas, y muy buenas frutas: uvas, avellanas y nueces. Y muchos indios de grandes estaturas y gente de paz, que tienen muchas piraguas y canoas en que ellos navegan sus ríos. Y que en la Ribera de Cruz los franceses de estas dos naos saltaron en tierra y pusieron un mojón de piedra de altura de un hombre, y en él [estaban] las Armas de Francia. Y en Rio de Corrientes pusieron otro mojón, y en la ribera de Santa Elena otro; y dice que en la Ribera de Cruz quedaron veinticinco hombres por mandado del capitán de estas dos naos, que se llama Joan Ribao, que está en Inglaterra huido por luterano. Y entre los veinticinco hombres que quedaron había herreros, calafates, carpinteros y pedreros, que hicieron una casa de madera muy grande donde metieron mucha munición, que fue: dos tiros de bronce de seis quintales cada uno, seis falcones de hierro, muchas picas, arcabuces, coseletes, pólvora y otras municiones, muchos mantenimientos para ocho meses y una red y una chalupa para que pescasen; y con determinación de hacer una fortaleza en esta ribera y hacer galeras y navíos, que dice [que] hay para ello mucho aparejo. Y de allí corren [fol. 3] la tierra dentro hasta México y estorban a las naos de Vuestra Majestad su navegación, que es que por fuerza han de pasar por aquel paso. Estuvieron en esta tierra cuarenta días con estas dos naos, y fue en el año pasado de sesenta y dos por el mes de mayo y junio. Y de allí se volvieron a Francia con rescate de mucha pellejería, perlas y oro sobre cobre y plata que traían los indios al cuello a maneras de cadenas. Y dice que había indios que traían esmeraldas colgadas de las orejas, y que dejaron veinticinco personas en aquel fuerte o casa que habían hecho.

Y que se vinieron a Habla Nueva que es un puerto en Normandía. Y que cuando vinieron, que fue el mes de agosto pasado, hallaron esta villa donde se armaron estas dos naos por luteranos y contra el Rey. Y la una nao que es donde estaba este piloto vino a este puerto, y la otra se fue a Inglaterra; y que tuvieron a este piloto y [a] su hijo preso con mucha guardia tres meses. Y que cuando los ingleses tomaron esta tierra, que fue a once de noviembre del año pasado, tuvo lugar de huir con sus aparejos de la mar. Y se fue con su hijo, que los ingleses no sabían que hombre fuese, y fue desde allí a Ruan, donde el Rey

tenía su campo. Y que [com]pareció ante la Reina y Monsieur de Vendôme y el Cardenal de Borbon, y echaron mano de él y les dio relación de la jornada. Y les dijo por una información como había sido tomado en Indias, y que le [fol. 3 v.] mandasen volver alguna cosa de su hacienda, o que atento que estaba pobre le diesen por servicio que había hecho algún entretenimiento. Y ordenaron que se le detuviese a buen recaudo, y que proveyeron luego tres naos con muchas mercaderías para rescatar, y carpinteros y gente para quedarse en la tierra, y [que] pudiese armar navíos para correr todas las Indias. Y dice que sabiendo él que esta gente le quería llevar y viendo que esto era en deservicio muy grande de Vuestra Majestad, se determinó de huir. Y que se fue al embajador de Portugal que en aquella corte está, dándole cuenta de todo lo que tenían ordenado de él en el consejo, y rogando [que] le diese orden y manera como se saliese de Francia libre. Y él proveyó que le acompañasen seis criados, y dice que le dio cabalgaduras, dineros y lo demás necesario [para ir] desde Paris hasta Arras con todos sus aparejos de navegación; y así los tiene ahora aquí. Y de allí vino a Flandes este mes de febrero, encomendado a un factor del Rey que está en Amberes que le dio embarcación para este Reino.

Y venido se presentó delante del Señor Cardenal a quince del pasado, y le mandó luego dar alguna ayuda de costa hasta examinarse con su cosmógrafo a quien pertenecía esta tierra; y dijo que pertenecía a Vuestra Majestad, y él dice lo mismo. Yo fui al Cardenal a me informar de Su Alteza de todo lo que en esto [fol. 4] pasaba, y Su Alteza me respondió haberle dicho este lo mismo. Yo le dije que, pues se había averiguado no pertenecer aquella tierra al Serenísimo Señor Rey de Portugal sino a Vuestra Majestad, que me parecía que Su Alteza debía de enviar este hombre a Vuestra Majestad para que su Consejo de Indias entendiese en esto lo que había e hiciese lo que conviniese al servicio de Vuestra Majestad. El Señor Cardenal me ha dicho que le enviaría. Entretanto es bien que Vuestra Majestad tenga allá esta información de todo, para que se ponga todo el remedio que convenga. Vuestra Majestad me mandará dar aviso si esta es cosa de alguna importancia, porque yo no la doy de algunos avisos que acá tengo por tenerlos por cosa de poco momento. Ha S. C. R. M. persona de Vuestra Majestad guarde con acrecentamiento de mayores Reinos y señoríos, como sus vasallos y criados deseamos. De Lisboa XX de mayo de 1563.

S. C. R. Majestad

Beso las manos de Vuestra Majestad sy muy leal vasallo embajador y xxxx.⁴²

a) Dom Alonso de Tovar

[Fol. 4 v.] A la S. C. R. Majestad del Rey nuestro señor

Esa carta firma Vuestra Majestad que pareció que va bien.

English Translation

** Translator's note: the translation attempts to follow, as strictly as clarity permits, the original syntax and wording of the document. When a precise English translation for a specific Spanish word could not be located, the original Spanish has been maintained and an interpretation is provided in footnotes.*

⁴² Unknown word.

Archivo General de Simancas, Secretaria de Estado Portugal, Legajo 381, doc. 89
S.C. R. Majesty⁴³

Here a man arrived who says that he was born Portuguese. The man calls himself Bartolomeu Borges [and] married in Seville. He says that he has served Your Majesty as pilot with Don Juan Tello de Guzmán in the navigation to the Indies and on the coast of Spain and with Alonso de Los Ríos.⁴⁴ And in the year sixty in the fleet that Your Majesty has *deshizo*⁴⁵ in the Indies, at the Hispaniola Island in Santo Domingo city, he came as pilot in the galleon with Don Juan Tello de Guzmán. In the same year of sixty, he came back to Santo Domingo Island in an *urka*,⁴⁶ carrying the cargo of private merchants. Its contents were sold at Santo Domingo. There some merchants gave him another ship to load at Puerto de la Plata and the Island of Bela.⁴⁷ While he was there loading, a French vessel arrived as well as a *pataje*⁴⁸ in the same year of sixty.

He says that they took him and his son and left [the other] people on land. He warned all the mariners not to tell them that he was a pilot; But, out of the fear owing to threats that they made, he confessed that he was a pilot. The French immediately took him on board and with coercion, they forced him to escort them to a port that is on the Hispaniola Island, which they said was close.⁴⁹ When they arrived, they found a Portuguese ship and another one from La Palma, which were loading sugar and leathers. They took both ships [fol. 1 v. begins here] recovering a thousand pesos, more or less. They also retrieved the ship on which this man had come. The merchants offered a hundred pesos for the rescue of this man and his son.

The French refused, saying that they had war with Your Majesty and that no money paid to them would convince him to deliver him back; And he says that

⁴³ On the margin: "It has been seen at the Indies Council." Annotation by King Philip II: "It would be good to practice this and take the necessary measures about this issue."

⁴⁴ Tovar's reference makes it unclear which year Borges started serving the Spanish. Don Juan Tello de Guzmán captained the Spanish fleet that used to escort the ships arriving from the *Carrera de Indias* at the Azores in their navigation to San Lucar de Barrameda. It seems likely that Borges served on these voyages, probably starting during the 1550s, particularly from 1554 onwards when Don Juan Tello de Guzmán's activities in this area are best documented. See Huguette Pierre Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique 1504-1650. Le mouvement des navires et des marchandises entre l'Espagne et l'Amérique, de 1504 à 1650. Partie Statistique. Le Traffic de 1504 à 1561*, tome II (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1955), pp. 510-512, 525 and 552. The reference that Borges served on Spanish coasts likely refers to his voyages to San Lucar de Barrameda, escorting Spanish ships from the *Carrera de Indias* or fighting against French interlopers along the Portuguese and Spanish coasts. It is also possible he served Alonso de los Ríos in this area, but this hypothesis still needs to be verified. Considering Guzmán's voyages to Santo Domingo from 1554 onwards, it is also plausible that Borges participated in those voyages, although Tovar does not explicitly mention them. If Borges participated in these voyages, he was assisting the Spaniards in fights against French interlopers. On the importance of this kind of nautical personnel in the Spanish maritime machine see Pablo E. Pérez-Mallaina, *Spain's men of the sea: daily life on the Indies fleets in the sixteenth century*, trans. Carla Rahn Phillips (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

⁴⁵ This word signifies "split," likely signifying a break up in the Spanish fleet, with some ships staying in Santo Domingo and others returning to Spain, which transpired in 1554 (see Huguette Pierre Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique 1504-1650*, tome II, pp. 510-512.) Tovar's narrative suggests that the same scenario repeated in 1560, but that this time Borges stayed in the Caribbean (for an unmentioned reason) instead of returning to Spain with Don Juan Tello de Guzmán. Still, as Borges had been named as pilot of Don Juan Tello de Guzmán, this might also explain why the French were so keen on kidnapping Borges and employing him in their service.

⁴⁶ A type of small ship.

⁴⁷ Likely Isabela Island.

⁴⁸ A type of small ship.

⁴⁹ It is likely that the text refers to La Yaguana, in modern Haiti, although the word *llegano* is what is written in the original and can be translated as "being close."

they also said that they would hang him if he spoke of rescue. From there, they forced him to bring them to an island called *Xamayé*,⁵⁰ where they captured a ship that belonged to a man called Cartagena. They took five slaves and two hundred pesos from this ship. From there, he says that threatening that they would hang him or throw him to the sea if he did not guide them to places where they could steal, he brought them to the land of Yucatan, which is in the province of New Spain. At the port of Campeche, they found an *urka* loading salt and other merchandise. They sacked it and took two pieces of bronze artillery that this *urka* had. There they landed, robbed the village, and loaded the brigantine with the goods. Meanwhile, there arrived two armed brigantines from Florida that attacked them by surprise. In the attack, they lost what they had stolen and 11 men, among them the captain. They always left this pilot well-guarded in the ship. They ordered him to bring them to the Havana channel, which he was coerced to do. When they entered that channel, they found a brigantine and took from it four thousand pesos in gold and silver, aside from other merchandise, and let the people and the brigantine go.

From there they came back to France. Between Garnicel and Casquet [fol. 2 begins here], harbors of Normandy, they wanted to throw him into the sea, saying that there was peace and that if they brought him to France they would be discovered and would be very badly received.⁵¹ From there they went to Saber,⁵² where he and his son were kept shut up for three or four days until

⁵⁰ Likely Jamaica Island.

⁵¹ The Peace of Cateau-Cambresis, signed in April 1559 between Spain, France and England. In the conversations between Spain and France, a verbal and non-written agreement was achieved concerning French navigation to the Spanish and Portuguese overseas areas. This agreement is mentioned in Spanish and Portuguese sources. Lines of demarcation were settled in the Atlantic, establishing where the French would be allowed to sail. There have been doubts on the exact locations, but it appears that they included North America and excluded South America. The agreement also included the clause that when Frenchmen were found by the Spaniards outside the established borderlines, they could be captured and brought for trial by Spain without appeal to France. According to Tovar's letter, the French violated the peace treaty by organizing a raid on a restricted Spanish area. In that context, Borges could be a dangerous witness, which perhaps explains why the French threatened to throw him overboard. Precisely for this reason, later in Tovar's narrative, the ship master suggested that Le Clerc stated to the Valois court that Borges had been found near France without revealing he had been kidnapped, thereby portraying Borges as a pilot for European waters, when in reality he was an oceanic pilot. In uncovering the truth, the ship master might have been aware how Borges's case could harm diplomatic relations between France, Spain and Portugal. To achieve such a goal, Admiral Coligny's collaboration was essential. Indeed, during the 1560s and until his death in 1572, Spanish ambassadors stationed in France accused Coligny of intervening to prevent French executions of foreigners working for the Valois in nautical matters. See *Coligny, les protestants et la mer. Actes du colloque organisé à Rochefort et La Rochelle les 3 et 4 Octobre 1996*, eds. Martine Acerra and Guy Martinière (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1997), p. 86.

⁵² Likely Le Havre.

they spoke with Pie de Palo, who was the owner of the ship.⁵³ And Pie de Palo ordered them⁵⁴ to bring him during the night so that the populace could not see that he was Spanish. He was kept shut in this house for 30 days, informing the master of the ship. The master said that this pilot was a good mariner and that it was good to have him in their service. He suggested to Pie de Palo that he go to the court to provide details about this pilot, stating that he had been found lost on a ship at *Sorlinga*⁵⁵ Islands. He gave this information to Monsieur de Vendôme,⁵⁶ to Monsieur de Condé,⁵⁷ to the Cardinal of Bourbon,⁵⁸ to the Constable,⁵⁹ and to the Admiral,⁶⁰ stating that they had found this man lost in the Indies. And they⁶¹ gave orders to present him to the court because they wanted to see who the man was. So, they placed him in a chamber in Saint Germain and brought him a *mapa mundi*,⁶² being present there those that I mentioned⁶³ from the Council. They asked him to teach them which were the Indies whence the silver and the gold come to Your Majesty. This was in the year sixty-one in the month of December. They also asked him to teach them which were the lands that Your Majesty had not populated. All of this he taught them.⁶⁴ And they decided to send him to Le Havre and to keep him under good vigilance while they outfitted two ships. He was supposed to go as the pilot of these ships and to guide them to that land called Ribera de Cruz, which is a flat land [fol. 2 v. begins here], to Rio de Corrientes and Ribera de Santa Helena and to Ancones and Jordan river. And if he did not want to go as the pilot, they would cut off his head.

In all these lands they found gold, silver, and many pearls and very good fruits such as grapes, hazelnuts, walnuts, and many indigenous people of high statures and people of peace

⁵³ Nicknamed in English *Wooden Leg*, and in French *Jambe de Bois*, it was François Le Clerc, the first famous French corsair to receive a letter of marque by King Henry II in 1551 and knighted personally by the King in 1553 for his maritime services to France in the war against Spain. According to Tovar's letter, Le Clerc not only captained his own ships, but also had his own captains that he sent in raiding expeditions against the Spanish in the Caribbean.

⁵⁴ The ship crew and captain.

⁵⁵ Likely Guernsey Islands.

⁵⁶ The name given by the Spanish to King of Navarre that by this time only owned this title in French Navarre. The figure mentioned here is Antoine de Bourbon (1518–1562).

⁵⁷ Louis de Bourbon (1530–1569), known as Prince of Condé, who was the brother to the King of Navarre and Huguenot leader.

⁵⁸ Charles of Bourbon (1523–1590), brother of Antoine and Louis de Bourbon, who became Cardinal of Bourbon and was considered for King of France in 1589, but died in jail.

⁵⁹ Anne de Montmorency (1493–1567), France's constable until his death in 1567 in the French Wars of Religion.

⁶⁰ Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572), French admiral since 1552 and Huguenot leader killed on the Saint Barthélemy night (24 August 1572).

⁶¹ Apparently Vêndome, Condé, Bourbon, Montmorency and Coligny.

⁶² It is unknown whether this *mapa-mundi* was French or Spanish; both origins are possible; French and Iberian maps circulated in the Valois court.

⁶³ In this case, Vêndome, Condé, the cardinal of Bourbon, the Constable and the Admiral, all permanent members of the Council (the *Conseil Privée*).

⁶⁴ It is unlikely that by this time the French court knew nothing about Florida's location. It is more plausible that Tovar implied that Borges was asked if the Spanish had managed to successfully colonize Florida in the wake of the D. Tristán de Luna's expedition in the region between 1559 and 1561. As Borges had worked previously for Spain, he might have had also any valuable information for the French on this topic.

that have many *piraguas*⁶⁵ and canoes, which they use to sail in their rivers. He says that in Ribera de Cruz the French from these ships landed and placed a stone landmark of the size of a man's height with the arms of France. He says that in Rio de Corrientes they placed another and in the harbor of Santa Helena another one. And he also says that they left in Ribera de Cruz 25 men by order of the captain of these ships, called Jean Ribault, who has now escaped and is in England because he is a Lutheran. Among these 25 men, there were blacksmiths, *calafates*,⁶⁶ carpenters and stonemasons. They made a very big house of wood. There they placed many munitions, which were two shots of bronze of six quintals each one and six falcons of iron and many pikes, arquebuses, *consoletes*,⁶⁷ powder, other munitions, and many supplies for 8 months and a net and a barge to fish. As they were determined to erect a fortress and to build galleys and ships in this harbor, he says that there is much material to build them there. From there they can explore [fol. 3 begins here] to the mainland as far as Mexico and can molest the navigation of Your Majesty's ships because the ships are forced to pass there. They were on this land for 40 days with these two ships. This was the last year of 62 in the months of May and June. And from there they returned to France with many furs, pearls, and gold with bronze and silver that the indigenous people wear on their necks as jewelry. He says that the indigenous people wore emeralds in their ears and that they let 25 people in that fort or house that they had built.⁶⁸

He also said that they returned to New Havre, which is a port in Normandy. When they arrived last August, they found the town where they had outfitted these two ships taken by Lutherans and rebelled against the King.⁶⁹ And the ship where this came went to this port and the other went to England. They had this pilot and his son jailed and well-guarded for 3 months. And when the English took this land,⁷⁰ which was on 11 November of the past year,⁷¹ he managed to escape with all his sea instruments. He fled with his son as the English could not figure out who he was.⁷² From there he went to

⁶⁵ A type of small indigenous ship.

⁶⁶ Craftsmen responsible for nailing the wood of the ships.

⁶⁷ A type of artillery.

⁶⁸ This detailed paragraph suggests that Borges witnessed important episodes in Ribault's expedition. Additionally, it provided King Philip II's court with a detailed account of the military fortress the French built, information that could prove critical for Spanish planning of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés's expedition. By May 1563 (the letter's date), King Philip II had already received word of new French and English maritime plans in Florida from his ambassador in England, which motivated him to give an *asiento* to Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón. Tovar provided the first eye-witness account of the French activities in Florida, which likely influenced King Philip II's thinking, especially considering that the other eye-witness report, by Manrique de Rojas, only arrived during the year of 1564. See McGrath, *The French in Early Florida*, pp. 93–94.

⁶⁹ Charles IX, French King 1560–1572, who faced a revolt in Normandy in 1562 as part of the first French war of religion. See R. J. Knecht, *The French civil wars, 1562–1598* (Harlow: Routledge, 2000).

⁷⁰ In this case, Le Havre and Dieppe were seized by an English army, as part of the secret agreement signed by Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) with the Huguenot leadership (Condé and Coligny), to assist the Protestants in the war against the Catholics.

⁷¹ 1562.

⁷² This sentence suggests that had the English known who Borges was, they would have captured him. Indeed, Ribault fled to England upon his return. Ribault's report on the expedition was soon published in England, generating great interest. Therefore, Tovar's suggestion is plausible: had the English become aware that Borges had a key role in piloting Ribault's voyage, they would have had interest in taking him into their service for planning their own voyages to the region. In fact, in 1562–63 Englishman Thomas Stukeley (1525–1578) tried to organize an English voyage to Florida, using some of Jean Ribault's pilots, while Ribault was jailed in the Tower of London. Hence, the English were interested in Florida as early as 1562. See M. Adele Francis Gorman, "Jean Ribault's Colonies in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, no. 44–1 (1965), pp. 54–55. On Stukeley see Juan E. Tazon, *The life and times of Thomas Stukeley (c. 1525–1578)* (Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

Rouen, where the King had his army and camp. He presented himself to the Queen,⁷³ to Monsieur de Vêndome, and to the Cardinal of Bourbon. They immediately seized him and he gave them information about the journey. And he told them that he had been taken in the Indies and asked them [fol. 3 v. begins here] to return him some of his seized goods, because he was poor, or that they gave him some reward for the services he had rendered to them. They gave orders to detain him under close guard and also that three ships be prepared with much merchandise for trade, [and] carpenters, and people to return back to the land.⁷⁴ They allowed that the ships be armed to sail and pillage all that land. He says that knowing that these people intended to bring him with them, and sensing that this was a great disservice to Your Majesty, he determined to flee. He went to the Ambassador of Portugal,⁷⁵ who resides in that court, informed him of all the things that those from the Council had ordered him, [and] begged him to get him a way to leave France free. The ambassador gave him six servants and he says that he provided him with horses and money and everything else that was needed for him to go from Paris to Arras with all his navigation instruments.⁷⁶ And here he has all those instruments with him. And from there he came to Flanders, as he had been ordered, in the month of February, to the house of Portuguese King's factor, which is in Antwerp.⁷⁷ He⁷⁸ provided him with a place in a ship for him to return to this realm.⁷⁹

⁷³ Catherine de Medici (1519–1589), known as the Queen-Mother, who assisted her son (King Charles IX) in the ruling.

⁷⁴ This passage raises questions about the Queen-Mother's position vis-à-vis Borges. It is impossible to ascertain if Queen Catherine de Medici had been made aware of Borges's presence on Ribault's voyage. However, in 1562, when the Queen learned that Borges was kidnapped in the Caribbean, she reacted by trying to enlist him in another French expedition. The Queen-Mother's behavior with Borges was similar to her behavior with other Portuguese pilots, as the example of Portuguese pilot Francisco Dias Mimoso illustrates. Pressured several times by D. Francis de Alava, the Spanish ambassador in France, to execute the Portuguese pilot, the Queen delayed the execution. As a result, Mimoso participated in French overseas expeditions. Thus, the Queen-Mother's position toward Borges in 1562 might have not been that different, since what was at stake was organizing what became René de Laudonnière's voyage to Florida in 1564.

⁷⁵ João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France between 1557 and 1568, who came to Rouen to witness and take part in the ceremony in which King Charles IX was declared of age to rule. On Dantas's presence in Rouen and his reading of events in France during his embassy see Nuno Vila-Santa, "Reporting for a King: Valois France and Europe through the eyes of ambassador Dantas (1557–1568)," *Culture & History Digital Journal* [forthcoming].

⁷⁶ Dantas's behavior vis-à-vis Borges was not new. During his ambassadorship, Dantas became known for turning his house into a sort of house of talents, welcoming a variety of Portuguese (merchants, cartographers, pilots and cosmographers) and negotiating their return to Portugal to prevent them from serving the French and English monarchies, especially in maritime affairs (see note 25). However, in Borges's case, it becomes clear in Dantas's letters that he used Borges's participation in Ribault's expedition to obtain geographical knowledge derived from the French voyage. In exchange for providing that information, and as he would do also with others Portuguese pilots, cartographers and cosmographers working in France (see note 25), Dantas also likely wrote a letter to the Portuguese Regent (Cardinal Henry) asserting that Borges was Catholic, a document Borges needed to avoid problems with Portuguese Inquisition once he returned to Portugal, as he had been serving, although by force, Protestants. Furthermore, Tovar later details how Borges was well-received by Cardinal Henry (also the Portuguese Inquisitor General), who even granted Borges rewards. Thus, it becomes clear that Cardinal Henry, who could have easily jailed Borges, did not envisage him as a heretic or a threat.

⁷⁷ Rui Mendes de Vasconcelos, the Portuguese overseer/consul at Antwerp during the 1550–60s.

⁷⁸ In this case, Rui Mendes de Vasconcelos.

⁷⁹ In this case, Portugal.

When he arrived, he presented himself to the Lord Cardinal,⁸⁰ on the 15 of the *past*.⁸¹ And the Cardinal immediately ordered that he be paid a small amount to assist him, while his chief cosmographer⁸² analyzed to whom belonged that land. The cosmographer said that it belonged to Your Majesty and the pilot said the same. I went to the Cardinal to inform His Highness of all that had [fol. 4 begins here] transpired in this and His Highness replied to me that the pilot had told him the same. I told him that since it was clear that the land did not belong to Lord King of Portugal but to Your Majesty, it seemed to me that His Highness should send this man to Your Majesty so that your Council of Indies could understand what had happened and could do what was best for Your Majesty's service. The Lord Cardinal told me that he would send him.⁸³ In the meantime, it is good that Your Majesty has this information there so that a solution can be arranged.⁸⁴ Your Majesty shall warn me if this is a matter of importance because I do not believe the other warnings I have here, as I consider them *de poco momento*.⁸⁵ To C. R. M. person of Your Majesty keep safe with the addition of higher realms and lands as your vassals and servants wish. From Lisbon 20th May 1563.

S.C. R. Majesty

I kiss Your Majesty's hands as your most loyal vassal ambassador and ...⁸⁶

a) Dom Alonso de Tovar

[Fol. 4 v. begins here]/To his S. C. R. Majesty our lord

This letter is signed by Your Majesty and seems to be going well.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge editor Richard Weiner and two anonymous reviewers for earlier comments that helped to improve the article. Additionally, the author is also grateful to Professor Henrique Leitão for early comments and to José Maria Moreno Madrid for solving some doubts in the transcription of the Spanish document. Moreover, the author thanks also Šima Krtalić and Gregory McIntosh for their comments and the assistance in English revision of the text and translation. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 833438). Financed by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P./MCTES and by national funds (PIDDAC): UIDB/00286/2020 e UIDP/00286/2020.

⁸⁰ Cardinal Henry (1512–1580), Portuguese Regent between 1562 and 1568 during the minority of his nephew King Sebastian, the General Inquisitor in Portugal and King of Portugal between 1578 and 1580.

⁸¹ Likely past month of May 1563.

⁸² Likely the Portuguese *cosmógrafo-mor* or royal cosmographer. In those dates it was the Portuguese famous mathematician Pedro Nunes (1502–1578). See Henrique Leitão, "Para uma biografia de Pedro Nunes: o surgimento de um matemático, 1502–1542," *Cadernos de Estudos Sefarditas*, no. 3 (2003), pp. 45–82.

⁸³ Despite Cardinal Henry's promise that Borges would be sent to Spain, I found no other evidence in Tovar's letters that this occurred, a lack of documentation that is possibly explained by the fact that Tovar's correspondence is incomplete.

⁸⁴ King Philip II's response to Tovar's letter has not been located. Still the King's annotation that the matter needed to be discussed at the Council of Indies, indicates that King Philip II considered pilot Borges's affair important. Decades later King Philip II reacted to Portuguese pilot Nuno da Silva in a similar fashion (see note 8).

⁸⁵ Likely "unimportant."

⁸⁶ Unknown word.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Nuno Vila-Santa  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5637-0364>

Notes on contributor

Nuno Vila-Santa is a post-doctoral researcher in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Lisbon, working within the framework of the ERC Project “RUTTER: Making the Earth Global” (grant agreement No. 833438). His more recent works include studies on the circulation of Portuguese geographical and maritime knowledge to sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, attempting to understand how this circulation influenced Spanish, French, English and Dutch overseas expansion. More concretely, he wrote works on the Dutchman Jan Huygen van Linschoten’s *Itinerario*, as a case of maritime knowledge circulation; French maritime and geographical espionage in Portugal under ambassadors Michel de Seure and Jean Nicot (1557-1561); Portuguese maritime espionage and counter-espionage attempts vis-à-vis France and England, using the correspondence of João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador to France (1557-1568) and to England (1562); Portuguese maritime espionage to England during the 1550s; and the Portuguese-Spanish nautical and geographical interchange in the 15th and 16th centuries. Based on this research he is also finishing a book provisionally titled *Iberian Maritime Knowledge circulation and the European overseas expansion (15th-17th centuries)*. Email: nlcampos@fc.ul.pt Academia.edu: <https://lisboa.academia.edu/NunoVilaSanta>