



John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, dining with John I, King of Portugal, in 1386 in a tent by the Minho River (Image taken from Chronique d' Angleterre, Volume III)

The Times on February 19 this year published a leader anticipating in March the 650th anniversary of the Treaty of Tagilde between England and Portugal as the origin of the oldest alliance. Quite apart from the fact that the Tagilde treaty was signed in July 1372, not March, does this assertion bear detailed scrutiny?

In a speech in the House of Commons in October 1943, Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously declared that the unique and ancient friendship between England and Portugal was based on a treaty between King Edward III of England and D Fernando I of Portugal. That Treaty was ratified at London on June 16, 1373 and initiated an alliance "without parallel in world history". So, which of them is right?

Neither treaty is the earliest of Anglo-Portuguese treaties, but the London Treaty is the first between the monarchs of the two countries. The terms of the London Treaty included provisions to guarantee the mutual security of the two nations and to strengthen the commercial links between them. There were also clauses to encourage the free movement and settlement between the two countries, and to grant to subjects of each country the right to settle in the other.

This alliance was born of a convergence of strategic interests. France and Castile (the old name for Spain) had concluded an alliance in 1369 and, as England was in the midst of the Hundred Years'

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War with France, the addition of Castilian power to the French enemy was an increased threat. Alliance with Castile's western neighbour was a logical counter to this threat.

At the same time, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, had a claim to the throne of Castile through his wife Constance. It was he who concluded the Treaty of Tagilde with D Fernando, King of Portugal, on July 10, 1372 – this was not a sovereign treaty because it committed only the Duke of Lancaster, not the King of England. But with the desired military victory in Iberia, and the English Plantagenet Duke of Lancaster on the throne of Castile, France would soon be forced to the negotiating table.

Shortly after the unexpected death of D Fernando in October 1383, his son-in-law, the Castilian King Juan I, aimed for the political and dynastic union of Portugal and Castile. D Fernando's illegitimate half-brother D João of Aviz determined to resist this Castilian threat.

Ten days after his coronation on April 6, 1385, D João instructed his ambassadors to negotiate an alliance with Richard II of England to raise loans to pay his troops and to recruit 800 English soldiers for service in Portugal. These English troops, mainly longbow men, arrived in Portugal in time to play an important role in the Portuguese victory at the Battle of Aljubarrota on August 14, 1385.

The Treaty of Windsor followed on May 9, 1386, partly to sustain the planned invasion of Castile by the Duke of Lancaster. D João also sent a fleet of 10 Portuguese galleys to be stationed off the south coast of England in order to reinforce the protection of English shipping and the towns on the south coast.

The Duke of Lancaster's expedition into Castile failed to find local support, and he arranged a separate peace with King Juan of Castile. As the Castilian threat to Portuguese independence subsided, the essential need for the alliance had faded, and the main reason it did not fizzle out was the marriage of Philippa, daughter of the Duke, to the King of Portugal himself.

The addition of the crucial dynastic element gave a long-lived reason to prolong the alliance. The two nations also continued to enjoy the commercial benefits of the treaty, and records show that Porto gained great profit from the import of English woollens and other English goods.

For such a friendship and alliance to last for so long, there must have been benefits for both sides.

For Portugal, on whom its neighbour Spain has often cast covetous eyes from over the border, her friendship with England has been in the nature of a military insurance policy. The Royal Navy and British armies have helped defend the independence of Portugal not only against Spain, but also against France.

A British Brigade contributed significantly to Portuguese victories during the Restoration War (1640-1668) and, in 1762, another Anglo-Portuguese force successfully defeated a Spanish invasion.

The most famous military intervention by Britain was during the Napoleonic Wars. In the Iberian Peninsula, an Anglo-Portuguese army under the Duke of Wellington fought continually from 1809 until 1813 to eject French troops first from Portugal and then from Spain. In all of the battles

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undertaken by British troops during this war, there was a Portuguese presence and, at the end of hostilities, the Portuguese Army had become a formidable fighting force.

But what about England? Where was the benefit to her of providing costly military help to Portugal? England's global commercial interests required a naval presence for protection. British trade found in Lisbon, Madeira and Cape Verde ideal safe havens for individual ships and convoys on their way towards the Cape of Good Hope and the Far East.

The Methuen Treaty of 1703 confirmed a ready market for British woollen goods in Portugal and the Portuguese Empire, and allowed Portuguese wines and ports to undercut French competition in England. The gold rush in Brazil in the first half of the 18th century produced tons of gold, much of which made its way north to the Bank of England.

In addressing the Commons in 1943, Prime Minister Churchill was right to base his words on the 1373 London Treaty, since that was the first occasion when the two monarchs were involved. But we can agree with the historically mistaken leader writer of The Times that with port or with one of the many other fine Portuguese wines, we should continue to toast the long-lived and ancient alliance.

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