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“Sons of Adam”: Text, Context, and the Early Modern African Subject

There is no absolute point of chronological initiation.¹

In 1441 on their return to Sagres, a Portuguese expedition carrying a cargo of pelts and oil dropped anchor off the northwestern coast of “Africa,” near present-day Mauritania. The commander of the “little ship” addressed his nineteen-man crew, asking them, in effect, to strive for more than the “small service” they had performed in gathering their merchandise. In an act whose consequences served to distinguish the European early modern period from the Medieval era, Antão Gonçalves implored his followers to exceed their lord’s expectations: “O how fair a thing it would be if we, who have come to this land for a cargo of such petty merchandise, were to meet with the good luck to bring the first captives before the face of our Prince.” Following this chivalrous plea, Gonçalves outlined how the expedition’s members could secure a cargo that would grace their pedestrian mission with valor. Subsequently, at nightfall, the crew initiated their quest for chattel and, through successive skirmishes, acquired two captives.²

The Portuguese raid, according to scholars of early modern colonialism, marks several related beginnings: Europe’s overseas expansion, a series of Atlantic cultural encounters, and finally the commodification of labor—a process initiated by the Portuguese as the architects of the transatlantic slave trade.³ Commercialization, a signpost of an emergent modernity, united these phenomena. For scholars of early modern slavery, the commercialization of Europe’s material life was at the heart of the enslavement process, the institution of slavery, and the experiences of the enslaved.⁴ Consequently, they have been confident that slavery—as an institution that regulated property—fell under the jurisdiction of Roman law. Authoritative on civil matters, Roman law stood ascendant with regard to property issues in the early modern period. Therefore it seemed natural that Roman law governed slave status in this period.⁵ Insisting that Roman law represented the juridical context through which slaves, as chattel, acquired rights and obligations, scholars of Iberian slavery

ABSTRACT Seeking to dislodge the prism that a singular political practice—represented as the story from savage to slave—informed the slave trade, this essay points to a distinct genealogy shaping the earliest encounters between Europeans and Africans. / REPRESENTATIONS 92. Fall 2005 © 2006 The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734–6018, electronic ISSN 1533–855X, pages 16–41. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.
in Europe and the Americas have concluded that, once embodied in the *Siete Partidas* (the thirteenth-century Castilian legal code), Roman law mediated master-slave relationships. Notwithstanding its authoritative posture, however, Roman law never secured hegemony over civil matters or over the enslaved persons’ lives. As this essay illustrates, Roman law, in mediating between Christians, infidels, and pagans, competed with various legal codes, most notably ecclesiastical or canon law, while contending with the lingering effects of classicism and the legacy of the *reconquista*. In fact, in the long institutional history shaping relations between Christians, infidels, and pagans, the competing laws and discourses constitutive of early modern “politics” played a more decisive role and continued to do so long after Europeans had rendered “Africans” into “slaves.” Attention to these laws, discourses, and politics widens the field of meaning beyond what colonialist discourse currently conceives and with which it simultaneously undermines the still reigning perception that Europeans, from their initial encounter with them, viewed Africans as savages who could simply be rendered into slaves.

Even as the nascent commercial sensibility gained ascendancy over the chivalrous *reconquista* discourse, ecclesiastical authority superseded the prince’s dominion when its subjects included infidels and pagans. As *extra ecclesiam* (an ecclesiastical term applicable to all persons who did not profess Christianity), Guinea’s inhabitants—both infidels and pagans—constituted subjects of the Christian Church with carefully defined rights and obligations. Ironically, ecclesiastical authorities appropriated this imperial posture long before a single clergyman set foot in the “land of the blacks” and prior to the Portuguese encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants. As mediator, the church did not embrace a neutral stance. Ecclesiastical authorities wanted to ensure that the incipient colonial discourse, articulated through the vernacular nationalism propelling Europe’s early modern expansion, also included the church’s corporate interests. For Africans, especially those whom the Iberians enslaved, canon law constituted the primary juridical arena through which their experiences entered the colonial archive.

Though most peoples of African descent arrived in the Indies as slaves, their status as *res* (property) did not preclude the clergy from wielding dominion over Africans and their creole offspring. From the earliest days of the African presence in the Indies the clergy, on the basis of chattel’s humanity, expressed a profound interest in ministering to the growing enslaved African population. Though the clergy did not manifest this desire in the language of spiritual conquest—that language was reserved for the indigenous peoples—they steadfastly attempted to bring Africans and their offspring into the Christian fold. In a strict sense, of course, Africans, like Indians, were seen as spiritual neophytes. But in the encounter between Old and New Worlds, the Catholic Church perceived Africans as inhabitants of the former territorial domain who, as *extra ecclesiam* and subsequently Christian, acquired rights and obligations. From the initial European-African encounter, the crown, and especially the clergy, stipulated how enslaved Africans were to experi-
ence their new lives. Through its elaborate regulatory proceedings intent on discipline and dominion, the Catholic Church played a decisive role in constituting the existing social parameters. The church, on the basis of canon law, even transgressed the master’s authority in determining social identities. Christianity, in short, played a profound role in defining the African and creole experiences. In overlooking Christianity’s institutional presence in the lives of the enslaved, scholars have neglected an important dimension of colonialism—its Christian variant. For enslaved Africans, religious orthodoxy represented an intrusive force rivaling their masters’ power.

In the course of the early modern period, a new taxonomy of difference would emerge. But by the sixteenth-century, the Portuguese had already assimilated Guinea into their medieval Christian order. Despite the competing discourses flourishing at the time of Guinea’s “discovery,” canon law continued to wield a hegemonic influence over Christian intercourse with the *extra ecclesiam*. By defining Guinea’s inhabitants, both infidels and pagans, as the *extra ecclesiam*, the church granted those outside its fold the right to exist unmolested until such time that they violated natural law. Binding Christian princes and their subjects to this protocol, the church, in tandem with African agency and Portuguese commercial motives, curtailed wanton slave raids and established an institutional context through which some of Guinea’s inhabitants assumed the status of sovereign subjects. Others, however, were considered the *herrschaftlos* (sovereignless)—both in the eyes of Africans and Europeans—and legitimately slaves. In this phase of the early modern African diaspora, canon law precluded, in theory, unprovoked aggression against the *extra ecclesiam* and competed with Roman law in shaping the slaves’ subject status.

By ignoring the diverse laws and discourses shaping the early modern Atlantic encounters, scholars of slavery have produced a simplistic savage-to-slave scenario. Simply put, the European need for labor and its perception of Africans facilitated the transatlantic slave trade. As the reigning origin myth, the savage-to-slave trajectory still explains the African presence in the New World and confines the genesis of the transatlantic slave trade to a racial or materialist interpretation of early modern politics. But opting between the cultural and the economic or some combination thereof obscures the confluence of other discursive traditions that defined Africans and then constituted some as slaves. Such simplicity comes at a cost; it saddles social theory and our political reality with the flawed epistemological assumption about a homogenous “black” subject.

I

“Here beginneth the Chronicle in which are set down all the notable deeds that were achieved in the Conquest of Guinea.” With this auspicious inauguration, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, the House of Avis’s royal chronicler and archivist,
introduced one of Portugal’s foundational texts: The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea. Commissioned by the House of Avis, Zurara knew only too well that historical writing represented a construction—a process whereby patrons determined the primacy of certain narratives over others. “Our Lord the King,” Zurara remarked, “ordered me to work at the writing and ordering of the history in this volume so that those who read might have the more perfect knowledge.” Zurara’s candor underscores his sovereign’s desire to link the House of Avis’s imperial activities, especially in “the land of Guinea” and the Canary Islands, with kingship in Portugal. “The notable deeds . . . achieved in the Conquest” therefore constitute the founding acts around which Zurara narrated a hagiography of Infante Henrique (Prince Henry) seamlessly uniting the House of Avis’s dominium, Portugal’s nascent imperium, the ascendance of a Christian-Portuguese nation, and an unwavering Christian presence on the Iberian peninsula. In this narrative’s production, the reconquista discourse—the ideological myth of unwavering Christian opposition to Muslim domination of the Iberian peninsula—was so pervasive that it conflated Islamic Moors and pagan Africans, a representational gesture that precluded the Portuguese and subsequently the Castilians from marveling at their Old World yet novel encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants. This lack of marvel—a product of reconquista historiography—coupled with canon law distinguished Africans, the early modern period’s invented “other,” from the natives of the Indies and constituted the former, on the basis of their conceptual familiarity, as distinct subjects. The contrast with “Indians,” or even with Europeans, did not, however, elicit images of a homogenous “black” subject. Reconquista discourse, but especially canon law, wrought juridical differences among “Africa’s” inhabitants—differences manifested in the language of herrschaft (sovereign) and the concept of the herrschaftlos (sovereignless).

According to Zurara, the “notable deeds” of his compatriots rested on a series of conquests. Yet a cursory examination of these “deeds” brings into relief the new meanings ascribed to the term “conquista” (conquest) during Portugal’s incipient phase of overseas expansion. In the context of the reconquista—the Christian-Islamic conflict over the possession of the Iberian Peninsula that began in the eighth century—conquista represented a Christian sovereign’s dominium extending from a permanently settled village, town, or city to the immediate hinterland and its inhabitants. But as the Chronicle unfolds, the Portuguese do not act in accordance with existing definitions of conquest. During their initial voyages along Guinea’s coast, the Portuguese not only eschew establishing a settlement, peacefully or by force; they also make no effort to contract a treaty so as to acquire a territorial claim to “the land of blacks.” With several noteworthy exceptions, the initial Portuguese encounter with Guinea constituted chattel raids. Such raids underscore the commercial imperatives of those “notable deeds” and of Portugal’s immediate post-reconquista conquests. With Christian ascendancy over the Moors largely insured, the Portuguese, and subsequently the Castilian, secular rulers attached new mean-
ings to the term *conquista*. In the *reconquista*’s waning decades, commerce and the possession of bodies, not territory, signified the “notable deeds . . . achieved in Conquest of Guinea.” Despite their increasing temporal preoccupations, the princes and their chroniclers employed the conquest rhetoric so as to invoke images of Christian Crusades, “just wars,” and the conversion of infidels. For Portugal’s princes, Christian zeal played a role connected yet secondary to one of profitseeking and strategizing about commercial opportunities.

This nascent commercial sensibility and the manner in which the Portuguese represented these secular concerns had profound implications for Guinea’s inhabitants. Prompted southwards by profit, the Portuguese charted Guinea’s physical and human landscape in accordance with their commercial sensibility. While the quest for profits propelled the Portuguese encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants, long-standing practices scripted the interaction between Christians and non-Christians and led Zurara to depict the Portuguese expeditions in the *reconquista* tradition. During the *reconquista*, Christians enslaved infidels under the pretext of a “just war,” yet irrespective of these religious imperatives ransom, *rescate*, still represented a viable option. But when “blackmoors,” as opposed to Moors, became the victims of the Portuguese raids, the practice of accepting ransom for religious captives ended—since they quickly became slaves for life. This transformation underscores developments in the emergent Atlantic economy and the concomitant evolution of an early modern commercial sensibility that gradually untangled itself from its Christian foundations. Though its hegemony over the meanings of conquest had diminished, Christianity retained its ascendant position over the princes’ affairs and, for the time being, kept their ambitions and nascent commercial sensibility in check. Consequently, the church continued to accord infidels and pagans the right to an existence beyond the state of grace, while consenting that those who had been rightfully enslaved or had violated natural law could be reduced to chattel. Yet even among the legitimately enslaved, the church maintained some dominion—especially over their souls—and, in an effort to effect the Christian *republika*’s spiritual well-being, imposed itself between masters and their property.

In the aftermath of Portugal’s conquest of Ceuta (1415), the Moorish stronghold in Morocco and “key of all the Mediterranean,” Zurara crowed that Christendom prospered “from this achievement.” Though the Portuguese deprived the Moors of “the great city of Ceuta,” a city symbolic of Islam’s military prowess, Zurara described the victory solely in commercial terms. According to the royal chronicler, the “East and West alike . . . can now exchange their goods, without any great peril of merchandise.” For Zurara, *Infante* Henrique’s military prowess, honed repeatedly in “Africa,” united the “East with the West, in order that the nations might learn to exchange their riches.” As the Portuguese under Henrique’s influence shifted their gaze southwards, the motives represented commerce, not conversion. Henrique wanted “to know the land” so that “many kinds of merchandise might be brought to this realm, which would find a ready market.” At this
historic moment, however, commerce could not enter posterity as the sole motive behind a noble’s behavior. Thus Zurara, in listing five reasons why the Infante manifested an interest in “the land beyond,” wrote that Henrique’s final reason represented a “great desire to make increase in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In 1434, under the Infante’s encouragement “to gain . . . honour and profit,” Gil Eanes, a squire in the Avis household, finally reached “the land beyond” when he rounded the Cape of Bojador. On his return, however, Gil Eanes informed his sovereign that the mariners had been right, noting that “there is no race of men nor place of inhabitants in this place.” Successive voyages did, however, produce signs of habitation and the Portuguese gradually distinguished “Africa” from “Guinea.” In contrast to the “land of the Moors,” Guinea, “the land of the blacks,” represented the more fertile region. According to Zurara, they “saw a country very different from that former one—for that was sandy and untilled, and quite treeless, like a country where there was no water—while this other land they saw to be covered with palms and other green and beautiful trees.” Eventually the Portuguese rendered geographical dissimilarities into cultural and ultimately juridical distinctions separating Moors from “blackamoors.” The quest to know and the concomitant desire for profit encouraged the Portuguese penchant for specificity. In his quest to offer the “more perfect knowledge” Zurara revised his earlier observation that Guinea included the “land of the Moors.” He declared that “although we have already several times in the course of this history, called Guinea that other land to which the first [Portuguese] went, we give not this common name to both because the country is all one; for some the lands are very different from others, and very far apart.” This difference, in the first instance, resided in a geographic fertility that the Portuguese equated with commercial opportunities. The relationship between fertility, commerce, and imagined profit underscores the discriminating nature of the early modern Portuguese explorers and their motives. Moreover, through this discerning prism the Portuguese made ever more subtle distinctions between Guinea’s various inhabitants.

II

In 1441, twenty-six years after the conquest of Ceuta, the Portuguese expedition under Antão Gonçalves landed near Cabo Blanco in present-day Mauritania. Following a brief skirmish “in the land of Guinea” with a “naked man following a camel,” the Portuguese enslaved their first Moor. Near nightfall, the Portuguese encountered and seized a “black Mooress who,” according to Zurara, “was [the] slave of those on the hill.” By their actions, the Portuguese launched the transatlantic slave trade in whose wake the early modern African diaspora emerged and in which the “slave” constituted the charter subject. Through the capture of the “Mooress,” but in particular through their marking her as distinct from
the Moors on the basis of juridical status and phenotype, the Portuguese introduced a taxonomy that distinguished Moors from blackamoors, infidels from pagans, Africans from blacks, sovereign from *herrschaftlos* (sovereignless) subjects, and free persons from slaves. Later, the Portuguese employed this human measure, formulated via a black woman’s body, so as to delineate who could be legitimately enslaved.

Though the Portuguese discerned a difference between the Moors and the “black Mooress,” this initially did not preclude the enslavement of the former. Arriving in Antão Gonçalves’s wake, Nuno Tristão “brought with him an armed caravel” intent on capturing “some of the people of the country.” On learning of his compatriot’s “deeds,” the zealous Nuno Tristão insisted that “what is still better . . . [is] for us to carry many more; for . . . profit.” According to Zurara, Nuno Tristão led a nocturnal raid against the Moors Antão Gonçalves had previously sighted. In the ensuing raid, the Portuguese took an additional ten more “prisoners,” including a noble named Adahu. The raiding party, interested in learning “the state and conditions of the people of that land,” lingered on the coast for several days. For this purpose, the Portuguese had brought an “Arab” interpreter who questioned the captives. “But the noble in that he was of better breeding than the other captives . . . understood that Arab and answered to whatever matter was asked of him by the same.” Afterwards, the Portuguese captains sent the “Arab” and the blackmoorress ashore so as to instruct the Moors of their terms for ransom. But soon thereafter, the raiders departed for Portugal.25

In Sagres, Zurara’s concerns shifted from the profit obtained through raiding to the captives’ spiritual salvation. Zurara insisted that “the greater benefit was theirs, for though their bodies were now brought into some subjection, that was a small matter in comparison of their souls, which would now possess true freedom for evermore.”26 After recounting the intricacies of the captives’ separation, Zurara directed his attention to the noble Adahu. “As you know,” Zurara stated, “naturally every prisoner desireth to be free, which desire is all the stronger in a man of higher reason or nobility.” “Seeing himself held in captivity,” Adahu offered Antão Gonçalves “five or six Black Moors” in return for his freedom and promised a similar ransom for two youths that were also held captive. Tempted by his desire to “serve the Infante his lord,” who was intent on “know[ing] part of that land,” Antão Gonçalves immediately committed himself to another expedition that included Adahu and the two youths. “For as the Moor told” him, “the least they would give for them would be ten Moors.” According to Zurara, “it was better to save ten souls than three—for though they were black, yet had they souls like the others, and all the more as these blacks were not of the lineage of the Moors but were Gentiles, and so the better to bring into the path of salvation.”27 In addition to the quantity of souls, Adahu promised that “the blacks could give . . . news of the land further distant.”

Prompted by profit, souls, and strategic curiosity, the Portuguese expedition under Antão Gonçalves landed near the Rio d’Ouro (River of Gold), where they
met two Moors who instructed them to wait. The Moors returned with an entourage numbering a hundred “male and female,” thus revealing “that those youth were in great honour among them.” Antão Gonçalves exchanged his two captives for “ten blacks, male and female, from various countries.” Adahu, who had been released earlier with the pledge that he personally would bring his ransom, “never returned to fulfill his promise.” Zurara, in turn, chided “the Moorish noble” for not remembering “the benefits he had received” and informed his readers that “his deceit thenceforth warned our men not to trust one of that race except under the most certain security.”

Despite Zurara’s protestations about Adahu’s treachery, for which the Portuguese would hold “that race” forever accountable, the episode underscores Portuguese awareness of cultural differences and status among Africans. Accordingly, it was the Moor who, because of his superior status, valued his liberty more than did blacks. The Portuguese quickly equated status with sovereignty and the lack thereof with the legitimate enslavement of certain individuals. Though the Portuguese captured both Moors and the “black Mooress” they had already started distinguishing between sovereign “Moorish” subjects and those “Moors,” “Negros,” and “blacks” whom they could legitimately enslave. Zurara observed that the “black Mooress,” unlike the valiant yet vanquished “Moor,” represented the “chattel” of a larger Moorish contingent. Here, already, “blacks” represented the legitimately unfree. In narrating this initial encounter between the Portuguese and Guinea’s inhabitants, Zurara employed an unstable definition of what constituted a “Moor”—but he sought to resolve this ambiguity by using the “Moor” to signify a sovereign subject. As the Portuguese encountered more of Guinea’s inhabitants, the terms “black Moors,” “blacks,” “Ethiops,” “Guineas,” and “Negros,” or the descriptive terms to which a religious signifier was appended, like “Moors . . . [who] were Gentiles” and “pagans,” gradually came to mean the rootless and sovereignless—and in many cases, simply “slaves.”

As the Portuguese perceived distinctions among the peoples they encountered and began acting in accordance with these perceptions, Infante Henrique sought to cultivate papal approval for his subjects’ “deeds.” By linking Portugal’s activities in Guinea with the conquest of Ceuta, the Infante stressed how spiritual imperatives motivated his subjects’ exploration along the Atlantic littoral. In his diplomatic entreaty, Infante Henrique minimized the commercial incentive and fashioned the “toils of that conquest” into a “just war” under the banner of a Christian Crusade.

In his response—a papel bull—Eugenius IV unwittingly underscored the extent of the Infante’s misrepresentation and the church’s willingness to perpetuate this fiction. Romanus pontifex (1433), the first in a series of papal bulls issued during the fifteenth century that regulated Christian expansion, sanctioned the Infante’s request and Portugal’s alleged mission in Guinea, since “we strive for those things that may destroy the errors and wickedness of the infidels and . . . our beloved son and noble baron Henry . . . purposeth to go in person, with his men at arms, to
those lands, that are held by them and guide his army against them.” 30 For Pope Eugenius, the Infante’s alleged “war” constituted a Christian counteroffensive that, if successful, would undermine the “Turks’” military presence in the Mediterranean—a presence that was increasingly felt on Western Christendom’s eastern rim. Though Pope Eugenius claimed that his “beloved son” and “Governor of the Order of Christ” intended to “make war under the banner of the said order against the said Moors and other enemies of the faith,” Henrique’s and his subjects’ motives did not resonate with the “aforesaid war.” The territorial charter granted by Portugal’s Regent Prince, Infante Pedro, to his brother, Henrique, that included exclusive jurisdiction over Guinea underscores the Infante’s true interests and commercial acumen. 31 Desiring legitimacy for his commercial imperatives and wanting to prevent other princes from encroaching on Portugal’s “conquests,” Infante Henrique invoked the rhetoric of a “just war” so as to solicit papal patronage. 32 In order to receive the charter from Portugal’s regent and his brother, Infante Pedro, Henrique did not need to mask his intentions in reconquista rhetoric. Through tactical representation, Henrique acquired an exclusive charter to mediate between Christians and Guinea’s inhabitants.

In soliciting papal approval, Henrique manifested one way in which the early modern prince—a temporal authority with decidedly secular interests—continued to rely on Christian legitimization. Henrique, by his actions, acknowledged the church’s imagined jurisdiction beyond Christendom’s borders and over the extra ecclesiam. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the church still maintained a hold over the Christian princes’ expansionism and their interactions with the extra ecclesiam both in and beyond Christendom. 33 In regulating this interaction, the church drew on a rich corpus of texts but relied on canon law, and especially on the ecclesiastical consensus that formed around Innocent IV’s commentary. 34 The church, on the basis of canonical precedent, increasingly intervened in the domain of laws of nations as it adjudicated over the affairs among Christians, infidels, and pagans. While the secular domain gradually rose to prominence, temporal authorities still needed to contend with Christian dogma’s lengthy history, even though some Christian princes postulated that their activities were subject to ius gentium (law of nations). Well into the early modern period, the Christian Church presided over the temporal authorities’ imperial activities and even after the Protestant Reformation still meddled in the “Catholic sovereigns’” nascent but not entirely secularized domain: the affairs of state. While such affairs increasingly defined treaties and trade between nations as “secular” matters, and property relations as the sole provenance of individuals, on grounds of spiritual considerations and concerns about orthodoxy the church continued to assert its authority over the incipient temporal realm. 35 The church, and to a lesser extent the crown, manifested a keen interest in the spiritual well-being of the infidels and pagans who, as the sovereignless and as chattel, fell into Christian hands. 36 In the church’s eyes, infidels and pagans, both sovereign and sovereignless, constituted the extra ecclesiam as persons who had ac-
quired a juridical position in and beyond Christendom. In constituting the *extra ecclesiam*, the church relied on rediscovered teachings of the ancients, the Bible, natural law (*ius naturae*), customary law (*ius gentium*), commentaries, canon law precedents, theological treatises, and papal bulls. Collectively these texts and institutional practices outlined the obligations but also the rights of the non-Christian, both within and beyond an imagined Europe.

III

In contending with Portugal’s encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants, and subsequently adjudicating Portuguese and Castilian territorial claims in the Atlantic, successive fifteenth-century popes drew on a canonical tradition dating from Innocent IV’s thirteenth-century commentary. Prior to his election as Pope Innocent IV in 1243, Sinibaldo Fieschi had been an influential canonist. As pope (1243–54), the erstwhile canonist took an active interest in Christian-Moslem relations since the Christian Crusades (the *reconquista*) and at that time Christian territorial expansion lacked a firm legal basis in canon law. In his influential commentary, Innocent IV raised the question: “Is it licit to invade the lands that infidels possess, and if it is licit, why is it licit?” According to one leading scholar, “Innocent was not . . . interested in justifying the crusades; the general theory of the just war did that. What interested him was the problem of whether or not Christians could legitimately seize land, other than the Holy Land, that the Moslems occupied. Did . . . Christians have a general right to dispossess infidels everywhere?”37 Innocent acknowledged that the law of nations had supplanted natural law in regulating human interaction such as trade, conflict, and social hierarchies. Similarly, the prince replaced the father as the “lawful authority in society” through God’s provenance, manifesting his *dominium* in the monopoly over justice and sanctioned violence.

All “rational creatures,” like the ancient Israelites in selecting Saul as king, were entitled to elect their rulers—a right that in the Old Testament was not predicated on living in a state of grace. Viewing infidels as “rational creatures,” Innocent deemed them also capable of choosing their rulers. The pope, however, bore responsibility for the infidels’ souls. In outlining his opinion, Innocent delineated a temporal domain that was simultaneously independent yet subordinate to the church. Laws of nations pertained to secular matters, a domain in which a significant tendency in the church, known as “dualism,” showed a decreasing interest. But in spiritual matters, the pope’s authority prevailed, since all humans were of Christ though not with the church. “As a result,” the medievalist James Muldoon notes, “the pope’s pastoral responsibilities consisted of jurisdiction over two distinct flocks, one consisting of Christians and one comprising everyone else.” Since the pope’s jurisdiction extended *de iure* over infidels, he alone could call for a Christian invasion of an infidel’s domain. Even then, however, Innocent maintained that only
a violation of natural law could precipitate such an attack. By adhering to the beliefs of their gods, infidels and pagans did not violate natural law. Thus, such beliefs did not provide justification for Christians simply invading non-Christian polities, dispossessing the inhabitants of their territory and freedom, nor forcing them to convert. Accordingly, Innocent IV’s contribution resided in the fact that he accorded pagans and infidels *dominium* and therefore the right to live beyond the state of grace. Although some canon lawyers questioned the assertion that infidels and pagans possessed rights—including Henry of Segusio, a former student of Sisnibald Fieschi known widely as Hostiensis—“by the end of the fourteenth century Innocent IV’s commentary . . . had become the *communis opinio* of the canonists.”

A half-century later, the imperial activities of Christian rulers again raised the issue of the infidels’ *dominium*. While Innocent IV’s commentary prevailed and continued to mediate European imperial expansion and Christian interaction with non-Christians, the Christian princes’ strength and growing autonomy vis-à-vis the papacy, along with their desire for legitimacy, brought renewed interest in Hostiensis’s commentary. Despite the shifting alliance characterizing church-state relations in the late Middle Ages, temporal authorities in Christian Europe legitimized their rule and defined their actions on scriptural and spiritual grounds. Christianity represented their ontological myth, the source of their traditions, and the banner under which they marched against infidels. Initially, the Christian princes manifested some reluctance to distance themselves from this founding ideology, since to discard Christianity would mean that their *dominium* merely rested on the might of one particular lineage over another. Moreover, by abandoning the pretense to “just war” against the infidels, Christian sovereigns risked revealing that profit motivated their desire for expansion. In the context of the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period, commercial considerations stood in opposition to a Christian sovereign’s purported interest in honor and justice. In the early modern period Christianity still served multiple purposes: it legitimized the ascendency of a particular noble house while sanctioning elite *dominium* over the nonelite. In the face of powerful noble lineage, the position of the nascent absolutist rulers remained tenuous at best, and the prince was reluctant to dispense with the protective veneer that even diminished papal authority accorded. Still, the ambitious Iberian sovereigns manifested a willingness to interpret canon law in a manner that furthered their claims over infidels and Christians. As a result, secular authorities relied increasingly on Hostiensis’s commentaries and on those of theologians who displayed less conformity than did the canon lawyers on the rights of the *extra ecclesiam*.

Developments in Christendom also brought the *dominium* of the *extra ecclesiam* under renewed scrutiny. Since the church defined all nonbelievers, including Saracens (a widely used term for infidels or those who willfully rejected the faith) and pagans (individuals who existed in ignorance of the faith) as the *extra ecclesiam*, it utilized the same laws and traditions in their treatment. In effect, the church did not distinguish between the non-Christian minority in Europe and the *extra eccle-
siam residing beyond its de facto jurisdiction. Therefore, laws and practices shaping church-state relations with nonbelievers in Europe set the precedent for the Christian interaction with non-Christians in the wider Atlantic world. Beginning in the thirteenth century, and in the context of the reconquista, Christians on the Iberian Peninsula started undermining the corporate bodies of Jews and Saracens by ordering those populations to adhere to Christian legal precepts and Iberian customary laws. While indicative of the Christians’ victory over the Moors, such practices represented a departure from reconquista ethics. Throughout much of the reconquista, victorious Christians and Moors often allowed their adversaries who remained under their territorial jurisdiction to adhere to their own beliefs and traditions. By the thirteenth century, when the tide favored Christians, the victorious rulers displayed less willingness to respect Moorish and Jewish corporate institutions and practices.40 This intransigence flourished at the very moment that Castilian scholars rediscovered Roman civil law, which they codified along with their customary practices in the Siete Partidas. Following this legal transformation, the Christian monarchs continued restricting the judicial autonomy of their Jewish and Moorish populations. In 1412, these restrictions culminated in the most draconian legislation to date when it “forbade Jews and Moslems alike to have their own judges. Thenceforth their cases, civil and criminal, were to be tried before ordinary judges of the districts where they lived. Criminal cases were to be decided according to Christian custom.”41 Though the temporal authorities relaxed the 1412 legislation with a decree in 1479, the systematic assault against customary courts of non-Christians continued unabated.

Though inimical to Innocent IV’s commentary granting the extra ecclesiam domínium, the practice of curtailing Jewish and Moorish traditions reflected the ascendant hegemony of Hispania’s Christian rulers. These sovereigns, though zealous Christians, saw all corporate privileges as a threat to their centralizing aspirations.42 In their opinion, all inhabitants of their territories constituted subjects of the sovereigns’ laws. Jews and Moors did not represent an exception. By their actions, Hispania’s Christian rulers contrived new forms of personhood. In a world defined by corporations with their accompanying rights and obligations, Jews and Moors, subject to the victorious Christian rulers, became corporateless beings who, despite their own legal traditions and customs, were expected to adhere to Christian laws and customary norms.43 By undermining Jewish and Moorish courts, the Christian rulers redefined more than their relations to Jews and Moors. As they dismantled the courts through which Jews and Moors reproduced their distinctive juridical status, the Catholic sovereigns actually reconstituted the meaning of being a Jew or a Moor.44 Standing before Christian courts and secular officials whose rulings owed much to Christianity, Jews, Moors, and the inhabitants of Guinea enslaved on the Iberian Peninsula lacked the protective shield of a culturally sanctioned corporate status. As such, they embodied one of the distinguishing features of the early modern period—individualism. But here we need to note how individualism’s ge-
nealogy—a genealogy in which the black subject figured prominently—resided in the jurisdictional breach that would characterize the conflict between positive, canon, and Roman law.\textsuperscript{45}

Understanding Portugal’s initial encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants requires juxtaposing the church’s historical provenance over the \textit{extra ecclesiam} against the secular state’s ascendancy. Despite the precedent established by Innocent IV’s commentary, temporal authorities drastically transformed their institutional interaction with the non-Christian minority, which carried over into their relationship with the peoples of Guinea. As the church’s hegemony receded, the monarch’s power expanded, but dogma continued to affect the secular authorities’ practices and nascent traditions. Much of the imperial activity in the fifteenth century represented secular expansion that the papacy approved after the fact. Despite the secular nature of the \textit{Infante}’s imperial activity, Henrique continued relying on the \textit{reconquista} rhetoric of “just war” and Christian conversion. But the motives informing Zurara’s text and the language through which the Portuguese represented the “conquest of Guinea” also underscores a discursive shift symbolized by the gradual ascendancy of Hostiensis’s commentary. Like transitions in general, the formally reigning discourses remain part and parcel of the newly ascendant view. Consequently, the issue of whether the infidels manifested \textit{dominium} remained a persistent question for early modern jurists, theologians, canonists, and Christian princes. Irrespective of the transformations in Europe, which signaled a shift in the relationship between Christians and the \textit{extra ecclesiam}, secular expansion, for reasons of legitimacy, had to contend with a tradition that acknowledged the infidels’ and pagans’ \textit{dominium} and right to live as sinners. Grace, in other words, did not form the basis on which the rule of law rested. Non-Christian princes did, therefore, wield legitimate authority and constitute sovereign temporal authorities. As the Portuguese, and subsequently the Castilians, ventured further south into “the land of the blacks,” they constantly had to contend with the theoretical and practical recognition that Guinea did not represent \textit{terra nullius} (land without sovereign inhabitants).

\textbf{IV}

Following their initial chattel raid in 1441, the Portuguese launched numerous expeditions against the inhabitants of Guinea’s northwestern coast and the adjacent islands.\textsuperscript{46} These expeditions amounted simply to slave raiding, and the Portuguese displayed no interest in Christian conversion, nor did they seek to assess the “power of the Moor.” The Portuguese did, however, discern differences among the various peoples they captured. In noting phenotypic distinctions, the Portuguese reproduced their own cultural predilections but fashioned somatic divisions into cultural divides among Guinea’s inhabitants. Zurara also recalled how “amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned;
others were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear the images of a lower hemisphere.”

Zurara’s descriptions underscore how the Portuguese associated aesthetic distinctions with corporeal differences. The dark and unsightly captives characterized whom veered on the bestial actually embodied their own difference. As the Portuguese entered the “Land of the Negroes,” these distinctions continued to suffuse the slave raiders’ imagined taxonomy, which linked phenotype, the corporeal, and geography.

As the first caravels penetrated the “Land of the Negroes,” the Portuguese manifested great interest in the southern region’s fertility, for they believed it offered them more “opportunities.” Guinea evidently presented such bountiful “opportunities” that the whole “country” exuded fecundity. Zurara related how “some of those who were present said . . . that it was clear from the smell that came off the land how good must be the fruits of that country, for it was so delicious that from the point they reached, though they were on the sea, it seemed to them that they stood in some gracious fruit garden ordained for the sole end of their delight.” By rendering Guinea into Eden waiting to be harvested “for the sole end of their delight,” Zurara’s text underscores a distinct sensory reaction to the “Land of the Negroes.” The Portuguese had finally left the Moor’s barren desert behind and arrived in a land so ripe that they could actually smell it from a distance. Guided by their senses, the Portuguese distinguished “Negros” from “Moors” on the basis of the fecundity of the former’s territorial domain. Throughout this period, the Portuguese repeated this process and, in fact, charted Guinea’s landscape in accordance with perceived natural resources and the commercial possibilities that each area afforded. Consequently, the Portuguese bestowed commercialized toponyms on Guinea including “Cabo d’Ouro” (River of Gold), “Cabo Verde” (Green Cape), “Madeira” (the Wooded Isle), and “Mina” (literally “the Mine,” but in English it was referred to as the “Gold Coast”). As this landscape entered Portugal’s cosmographic archive, the Portuguese used it to ascribe cultural specificity to Guinea’s diverse peoples, usually in relation to provenance, territory, and purported political jurisdiction. But ethnic labels often simply reflected the commercialization of the landscape.

The relationship between topographical fecundity and commerce reinforced perceived distinctions between Moors and “Negros.” Zurara observed that “the people of this green land are wholly black, and hence this is called Land of the Negroes, or Land of Guinea. Wherefore also the men and women thereof are called ‘Guineas,’ as if one were to say ‘Black Men.’” As the Portuguese awareness of the landscape increased, Zurara corrected his earlier claims, noting that “although we have already several times in this history, called Guinea that other land to which the first went, we give not this common name to both because the country is all one, for some of the lands are very different from others.” In Guinea, the “Land of the Negroes,” the Portuguese finally “found many things there different from
this land of ours.” Despite the importance Zurara placed on Guinea’s unfolding novelty, Dinnis Diaz’s success in finally capturing negros “in their own land” interested him more. For Zurara, this represented a notable feat since the Portuguese could now both act on their nascent taxonomy and, more important from the reconquista perspective, disregard the Moors as middlemen and slaves.

As they harvested Guinea’s diverse fruits, the Portuguese confronted tenacious opposition from the region’s inhabitants. After mounting numerous raids against the Azenagays, the Portuguese finally faced an opponent who could successfully challenge their presence and wanton acts. Cape Verde’s inhabitants even displayed an unwillingness to allow the Portuguese to anchor. When the Portuguese captain, Gomez Pirez, did land he placed “a cake and a mirror and a sheet of paper on which he drew a cross” on the shore before returning hastily to the safety of his vessel. The coastal inhabitants, however, destroyed the signs and symbolically obliterated the Portuguese presence. Zurara recorded how “the natives when they came there and found those things, broke up the cake and threw it far away, and with their assegais they cast at the mirror, till they had broken it in many pieces, and the paper they tore, showing that they cared not for any of these things.” In retaliation, Gomez Pirez ordered his bowmen to fire a salvo at the Cape Verdians who replied in kind. As a result the Portuguese retreated, eventually tacking northwards to the now more familiar “Land of the Moors.” After acquiring water on Arguim Island, Gomez Pirez piloted his ship up the Rio d’Ouro where he encountered Moors who sold him “a black for the price of five doubloons.” During this encounter, the Portuguese captain expressed his desire for more extensive trade, indicating that he would return the following July for additional blacks and gold. In 1446, a year later, Gomez Pirez did return and thus commercialized the enslavement process. Encountering Moors on an estuary of the Rio d’Ouro, Gomez Pirez “began to speak with them by means of his interpreters, asking them to have some Guineas brought there, in exchange for whom he would give them cloth.” The Moors, however, responded, “we are not merchants... they are all engaged in trafficking in the Upland; yet, if they knew it, they would make great endeavor to come here, for they are men well supplied both with Guineas and gold, as well as some other things with which you might be well content.”

Although the Portuguese periodically still preyed on the coastal and island inhabitants, the momentum for raids waned in favor of “traffic of merchandise.” As this shift occurred, the Portuguese focused their attention on “knights,” “lords,” “governors,” and “kings” who could enforce and hinder trading relations. In an initial encounter signifying this shift toward diplomacy, Fernandafonso, the second-in-command on a Portuguese expedition in the Cape Verde archipelago led by the Dane Vallarte, instructed the messenger—through his negro interpreter—to “tell your lord... we are subjects of a great and powerful Prince... who is at the limits of the west, and by whose command we have come here to converse on his behalf with the great and good King of this land.” After this salutation, the Potu-
guese handed the messenger a letter from the Infante Henrique, the content of which the interpreter revealed orally. At the conclusion of this ritualized interaction, the Portuguese sent the messenger to Guitanye, his lord, who was to convey the contents of this interaction to the “great King” Boor. In dispatching the messenger, the Portuguese sent more than a message. The letter symbolized a new phase of Portuguese interaction with Guinea’s purported lords.

Despite some notable exceptions, diplomacy enacted through protocol—the ritualized performance of hierarchy—began to characterize Portugal’s relationship with Guinea’s diverse nations. While both sides constantly struggled to impose their traditions on the commercial formalities, the African elite usually dictated the terms of trade and interaction. Portuguese subjects who violated African laws quickly risked stiff fines or found their lives in danger. Recourse resided with African “lords,” not the king of Portugal. In Guinea, subjects of Portugal’s king had entered the jurisdictions of non-Christian princes who, like all sovereigns, dispensed justice as they saw fit. Though the Portuguese initiated the transition from raids to diplomacy, it was their lack of military successes against the Africans that motivated this shift in imperial policy. African successes revealed the Portuguese conquest of Guinea to be a fiction designed to prevent other Christian “princes” from staking claims in the newly “discovered” territories. As they extolled their reconquista rhetoric, the Portuguese’ intended audience remained strictly Christian and European. Though the Portuguese referred to Africans as objects, in practice they could not render Guinea’s inhabitants into this prescribed role and desperately sought an effective strategy with which to obtain profit from the “land of the blacks.” Diplomacy, with its focus on institutional formalities and mutual, if grudging, respect for difference, generally offered personal security and recognition of private property, both of which effectively facilitated trade. Through diplomacy and its formalities, Portugal’s temporal authorities acknowledged that Guinea’s diverse lords manifested dominium, and they ceased to attempt to “conquer” Guinea. “The affairs of these parts,” Zurara lamented, “were henceforth treated more by trafficking and bargaining of merchants than by bravery and toil in arms.”

V

As a prelude to “conquest,” “discovery” occupied a prominent role in Zurara’s history. But disclosing, unveiling, and subjecting Guinea to the Portuguese gaze elicited little wonder and even fewer marvels. In Guinea, the Portuguese found unfamiliar beliefs and practices but nothing so unusual as to be unintelligible and, therefore, unassimilable. According to one scholar of early modern European colonial encounters, “anything . . . which fell right through [the European] conceptual ‘grid’ could only ever be relegated to the ‘marvellous’ or the ‘wonderous.’” Despite their imperial pretense of having “discovered” Guinea, the Portuguese,
according to Zurara, found little that baffled them in the “land of the blacks.” They explained the extant manifestations of marvel through the teachings of the ancients or simply allowed them to disappear in the *reconquista’s* historiographical wake, since much that seemed incomprehensible came to be described in Moorish tropes that called for their own exorcism.

Steeped in the uncompromising rhetoric of a militant Christianity, the historiography associated with the *reconquista* aimed at restoring an unbroken link between Hispania and imperial Christian Rome. As a romance, this discourse represented Hispania’s Christian princes’ legitimating ideology both in war and in peace. Predicated on Christian victories against the Moors—beginning with the mythical victory at the caves of Covadonga (722) and leading to the more tangible victory at Las Navas de Tolosa (1212)—the *reconquista* historiography denied Islam’s five centuries of dominion over the peninsula and its Christian subjects. In an effort to occlude five centuries of Islamic hegemony and an eight-century-long Islamic presence, the Christian princes relied on more than the cross and the sword. The chronicles and histories, defined as war by means of the pen, represented the nascent Catholic sovereigns’ most effective offensive against Islam.

In drafting Christian charters, chronicles, and histories, the scribes, archivists, and historians drew on the heroic genre of uncompromising valor and chivalry. As legitimizing ideologies, these tracts harked back to an imaginary Europe symbolized by imperial Rome and ancient Greece. As Christian Europe’s foundational metropolises, Rome and Greece represented a cultural provenance untainted by an expansive and cosmopolitan Islam. In reclaiming a lost heritage, Christian archivists and historians sought to order the past and simultaneously invented a functional Graeco-Roman Christian cultural tradition whose direct heirs they claimed to be. The imposition of this classical-Christian ontology onto the world of Hispanic letters signaled the end to the Christian-Jewish-Islamic cross-fertilization that had characterized the period of Islamic domination up to that point. Allegedly restoring the traditions of “their” ancients, Christian Europeans merely invented an interpretive framework through which to filter experience and ascribe meanings. In this context, the discoveries and encounters of Portugal’s mariners—though at odds with the teachings of the ancients—assumed meanings through cultural conceptions that accorded with classical-Christian texts. Since the authors of these texts had imaginary, if not actual, familiarity with “Africa,” “Egypt,” “Ethiopia,” and “Libya,” which was then transposed onto Guinea, the Portuguese found little among the blackamoors that could not be processed through their conceptual grid. This phenomenon, a product of *reconquista* historiography, positioned Guinea’s inhabitants as knowable objects whose customs, habits, and practices could be apprehended.

From their initial encounter, the Portuguese positioned Guinea’s inhabitants in relation to Adam, Christianity’s *paterfamilias*. As Zurara defended his moral sentiments for the enslaved, he insisted, “I pray Thee that my tears may not wrong my
conscience; for it is not their religion but their humanity that maketh mine to weep in pity for their sufferings. And if the brute animals, with their bestial feelings, by a natural instinct understand the sufferings of their own kind, what wouldst Thou have my human to do on seeing before my eyes that miserable company, and remembering that they too are of the generation of the sons of Adam.  

Although *reconquista* and Renaissance historiography ascribed to everyone and everything a position in the Christcentric universe, the former tradition eschewed comparative ethnology, occluded alterity, and initially denied the limitations of Western Europe’s canonical texts despite observations and experiences to the contrary.

As ideologues of a fragile and contested narrative tradition, the architects of *reconquista* historiography resisted practical experiences and novel ideas that threatened their sovereigns’ newly ascendant position. Hispania’s narratives of discovery and conquest of Guinea and subsequently the Indies tended, therefore, to render those encounters meaningful in terms postulated by ancient and canonical authors. For instance, after the Portuguese landed the initial slaves in Sagres, Zurara observed, “here you must note that these blacks were Moors like the others, though their slaves, in accordance with ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of the curse which, after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain, cursing him in this way: that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world.”

Although Zurara clearly sought to validate his compatriots’ actions, his reliance on a Judaic trope that entered Christian theology at its very founding underscores the ways contemporary early modern historians still relied on ancient sources to process their encounter with Guinea’s inhabitants.

Guinea’s discovery and conquest stood in marked contrast to that of the Indies. The Indies gradually emerged as the “New World” due to the influence of Italian humanists who manifested a marked interest in Columbus’s discovery and were the first to assimilate the meaning implied by the terms *Orbe Novo* or *Mundus Novus.*

Unlike the Indies, Guinea constituted a part of the Old World and, as such, largely avoided intellectual scrutiny. An unproblematic conceptual assimilation into medieval Europe’s knowledge accompanied Guinea’s lack of scrutiny.

Although Renaissance humanists barely took note of Guinea’s emergence in the fifteenth century, novelty did not altogether elude the region. But the context in which marvel surfaced underscored how Europeans in the fifteenth century still adhered to an ontology based on ancient authors. Though profoundly hierarchical, this explanatory system obviated a relationship between novelty and Guinea. In his account on João Fernandes, the mariner who spent seven months living among Guinea’s inhabitants, Zurara highlighted the conceptual ambiguity that precluded him from actually believing that “blacks” constituted “images of a lower hemisphere.” “I marvel,” Zurara confessed, “at the affection which those who dwelt there came to feel for him. And albeit that his affability was very great towards all other people, I was astonished it could exist towards these, or how it could be so felt and returned by such savages, for I am assured that when he parted from the men...”
among whom he had lived those seven months, many of them wept with regretful thought.”

Though he abhorred the physiognomy of Guinea’s inhabitants and their purported cultural practices, Zurara acknowledged that they, like all humans, shared the same psychic disposition. “But why do I say so, when I know that we are all sons of Adam, composed of the same elements, and that we all receive a soul as reasonable beings?”

Even as he denied that meaningful differences distinguished Christian Europeans from pagan Guineans, Zurara invoked a status differential that Aristotle had postulated and that verged on the corporeal. “True it is that, in some bodies, the instruments are not so good for producing virtues as they are in others, to who God by his grace hath granted such power; and when men lack the first principles on which the higher ones depend, they lead a life little less than bestial. For into three modes is the life of men divided, as saith the Philosopher.” Describing the “three modes,” Zurara reproduced the social taxonomy that Aristotle sketched in the Politics. “The first are those who live in contemplation, leaving on the one side all other worldly matters and only occupying themselves in praying and contemplation. . . . the second are those who live in cities, improving their estates and trading one with another. And the third are those who live in the deserts, removed from all conversation, who, because they have not perfectly the use of reason, live as the beast live.” Despite social gradations that anticipated Europe’s racial discourse, Zurara acknowledged that “passions” produced a common humanity and explained why Guinea’s inhabitants wept at João Fernandes’s departure. “But these last have their passions like other reasonable creatures, as love, hate, hope, fear, and the other twelve which all of us naturally have. . . . And by these primal passions I hold that these men were moved to the love of John Fernandez. . . . And it would be very fitting to speak a little upon these passions, and in what way they are universal in all men.”

Though this rhetoric shaped the earliest phase of the early modern encounter between Old World regions, the discovery of the Indies questioned its continued valence. By the middle of the seventeenth century, many ancient texts had lost currency as practical guides, but in the preceding two centuries these same texts were instrumental in translating some experiences into meaning. For reasons of timing and familiarity—more imagined then real—Guinea entered the European consciousness at a time when ancient texts still wielded considerable influence and the reconquista historiography reigned ascendant. This confluence explains, in part, the terms and conditions under which Guinea entered European historiography and the subject position the region’s inhabitants came to acquire.

As a historiographical tradition, the reconquista perspective constituted an ideology that had serious implications for Guinea’s inhabitants. Initially representing Guinea’s inhabitants as Moors, Portuguese historians, including Zurara, gradually distinguished “Black Moors,” “Ethiops,” “Negros,” or blacks from “Moors.” But even as blacks, Guinea’s inhabitants symbolized the familiar and knowable who
could be incorporated into Portugal’s, and therefore, the European, cosmos. What the Portuguese could not explain, they simply designated as the sign of the Moor, thus shrouding the blackamoor in cultural ambiguity. But in general the Portuguese manifested little marvel in their encounter with Guinea and loosely ascribed to the continents’ “black” inhabitants a corporate place as the sovereignless, which distinguished them from the sovereign Moors—a gesture that eventually confined some “Ethiops,” “Negros,” “blacks,” and “Black Moors” to the condition of slaves. Stressing these purported distinctions, Zurara drew on classical and medieval psychology that implied that the enslaved found solace in their servile condition. “These captives,” Zurara intoned, “were very different from the condition of the other Moors who were taken prisoners from this part.” Zurara then noted that “after they had come to this land of Portugal, they never more tried to fly, but rather in time forgot all about their own country, as soon as they began to taste the good things of this one.” Identifying “Guineas” as “very loyal and obedient servants, without malice,” the royal chronicler proclaimed “that they were not so inclined to lechery as the others.” While identifying the “Guineas” in relative terms, Zurara’s observation reveals that the ubiquitous Moor constituted the cultural standard with which the Portuguese measured Guinea’s inhabitants, thus underscoring that the reconquista historiography forged alterity around Islam, its adherents, and the most recent conquerors of Hispania. At the time of Guinea’s “discovery,” Islam, despite the Caliphate of Cordoba’s destruction, continued to pose a viable threat to western Christendom. In this context, the Portuguese as crusading Christians could ill afford to marvel at the enemy, for such behavior, in the reconquista milieu, was tantamount to heresy.

I want to conclude by asking the reader to ponder the present through a re-imagining of the early modern past. What happens both to our understanding of black identity and to the politics of redress when their foundational trope, the slave, is no longer conceived of as a stable subject? Posed differently, how does our understanding of the black present change when we configure complexity into the early modern encounter between European Christians and the inhabitants of Guinea? Answers to such questions remain—understandably—far removed from existing political debates. In the current political crucible of the United States, a simple African past still yields political capital.

Notes

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“Sons of Adam”: Text, Context, and the Early Modern African Subject

35


4. Robin Blackburn introduced his recent survey of slavery noting how “this book furnishes an account of the making of the European systems of colonial slavery in the Americas, and seeks to illuminate their role in the advent of modernity.” For Blackburn, the slave systems’ commercialized nature delineates their relationship to modernity. “They (the European systems of colonial slavery in the Americas) became immensely commercial, making Atlantic trade the pacemaker of global exchanges from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth.” In working out his understanding of modernity Blackburn rarely strayed from commercialization and commodification. See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (New York, 1997), 1, 4–5. Orlando Patterson’s suggestion that “it is not the condition of slavery that must be defined in terms of absolute notions of property, as is so often attempted; rather it is the notion of absolute property that must be explained in terms of ancient Roman slavery,” can easily be extended to track and historicize modernity’s genealogy. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 32. David Harvey’s discussion of modernity, though it varies from the ways that scholars of slavery and colonialism employ it, has significantly influenced my thinking. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 11–16. For a rethinking of modernity’s scope and nature see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).


10. Iberian preoccupation, then and now, with an unbroken Christian tradition underscores a deep-seated romance that in its nostalgia stands in as an ideology. Northrop Frye has observed that “in every age the ruling social and intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance where the virtuous heroes and the beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendency. This is the general character of chivalric romance in the Middle Ages. . . . The perennially child-like quality of romance is marked by its extraordinary persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time and space.” See Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), 186. Peter Hulme, to whom I am indebted for this formulation, has brilliantly examined the discursive implication of the “colonial romance.” See Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean*, 1492–1797 (New York, 1986).


of the works just cited. The subjectivity of the New World, the Indies, and their original inhabitants seems always posited around a binary that features Indians and Spaniards as given as opposed to contested representations. Though most scholarship on New World encounters acknowledges, in passing, the enslaved and colonized African presence, very little of it questions the salience of the Spanish-Indian binary as the principal analytical category. Yet a half century ago, Tannenbaum noted that colonization and settlement of the Americas represented “a joint Afro-European enterprise”; Slave and Citizen, 40. Today, this silence remains complicit in the historiography that examines the intersection of race and nation formation throughout Latin America. By exorcising blackness from the “collective memory,” nationalist discourses, which include mainstream History, have naturalized a Christian, hispanized whiteness and in the process have regimented the racial discourse largely around the indigenous presence. See Peter Wade, Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia (Baltimore, 1993), 3–47; Richard Graham, ed., The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940 (Austin, 1990); Winthrop R. Wright, Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela (Austin, 1990); Thomas E. Skidmore, Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought (Durham, 1993); Enrique Florescano, Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence, trans. Albert G. Bork (Austin, 1994).

13. Lyle McAlister noted that “conquest” (conquista) “meant the establishment of señorío over land and people by force of arms but, within a context established by Reconquest experience and the subjugation of the Canaries, for particular ends: the extension of Christendom and the dominions of Christian kings at the expense of infidels and pagans; and the extraction of tribute and booty from the conquered. It is interesting that the Spaniards avoided the word conquista in describing their territorial aggrandizements in Christian Italy.” See Lyle N. McAlister, Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700 (Minneapolis, 1984), 89–90. For the medieval trajectory see Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change (Princeton, 1993).

14. According to Patricia Seed, this behavior should not surprise, since the Portuguese grounded their acts of possession in the nautical science and navigational technology of which they were early modern pioneers. See Patricia Seed, Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640 (Cambridge, 1995), 100–148.

15. Zurara was careful not to conflate the activities of the merchants, including “trade,” “trafficking,” or “bargaining” with the idea of conquest. In 1448, Zurara signals the end of the “Guinea’s” conquest, since “the matters that follow were not accomplished with such toil and bravery as in the past.” See Zurara, Chronicle, 2:289.


23. Valorizing Zurara’s pronouncement simultaneously clarifies and obscures geographical and purportedly related cultural differences between Islamic Moors and Guinea’s pagan inhabitants. As a discursive entity, there has never been just one “Africa”; there have been many. In this pantheon of representations, “Africa” often stood in for the whole continent, but prior to the Renaissance it usually symbolized the northern regions of the continent with which the ancient Greeks and Romans were quite familiar. “Libya” and “Libia” often represented the area bordering the Mediterranean and its

25. Ibid., 1:45–49.
26. Ibid., 1:51.
27. Ibid., 1:55.
28. Ibid., 1:56.
29. Ibid., 1:52–53.
30. Ibid., 1:53.
31. Ibid., 1:54.
32. For imperial competition among European Christians in the late Middle Ages and the nascent early modern period see McAlister, Spain and Portugal, 46–51, 55–69; Bartlett, Making of Europe, 306–14.
34. Conciliar canons predated the twelfth century; however, the systematic deployment of canon law started with the jurist Gratian. See James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago, 1987), 229–35, 229–416.
36. Since the church received a share of the spoils, Zurara, like subsequent commentators, focused on the diezmos (tenth of share) taken from Guinea that the ecclesiastical authorities appropriated at the various ports of entry. Over time, contemporary and subsequent historians have naturalized this perspective but at the price of reducing the church’s ambivalence. The church sought both to benefit materially from colonization and to increase the number of Christian souls. The focus on the former process has obscured canon law’s importance and ability to be both the protector of the colonized and colonialism’s beneficiary. See Zurara, Chronicle, 1:54.
37. Muldoon, Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels, 8.
38. Pennington, Popes, Canonists, and Texts, 6. My understanding of medieval historiography, canon law, and Innocent IV draws heavily on the works of James Muldoon, Kenneth Pennington, and James Brundage. See Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society; Muldoon, Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels; Muldoon, The Americas; Pennington, The Prince and the Law; Pennington, Popes, Canonists, and Texts.
39. Muldoon’s observation about shifting domains seems quite pertinent. Muldoon concluded that: “There was yet another reason for the failure of the popes and lawyers of the late Middle Ages to develop further the work of their thirteenth-century predecessors regarding infidels. The initiative in dealings with non-European societies was passing to secular rulers.” See Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels, 156.
40. David Nirenberg, Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages


43. After the court's destruction, the Jews' and the Moors' corporate identity continued to forge itself around customs and traditions that by now lacked legal enforcement and sanctioned violence. Consequently, the role of shame and community disapprobation gained greater prominence.


47. Ibid., 1:181.

48. Ibid., 1:177.

49. Ibid., 2:177.

50. Ibid., 1:99.

51. Ibid., 2:192.

52. Ibid., 2:194.

53. Ibid., 2:268.

54. Ibid., 2:177.

55. Ibid., 2:289.

56. In a recent work examining possession ceremonies, Patricia Seed states that Portuguese discovery “signified the establishment of legitimate dominion,” which rested on nautical technology, scientific knowledge. Though laudable for the specificity it accords English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch understandings of possession, some of the conclusions seem distinctly applicable to the Indies. In the various texts related to the Portuguese and Spanish encounter with Guinea, the ceremonies identified in the New World do not play an important role. See Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 9–10, 101–48, esp. 128–40. In light of this observation, I rely on the more textual-based definition of discovery employed by Anthony Pagden to situate Europe’s early modern encounters. See Pagden, *European Encounters*, 5–12.

57. Pagden, *European Encounters*, 10; also see his *Fall of Natural Man*, 4–6.


60. We simply are awaiting an intellectual history of the Portuguese encounter with black Africans.


