

FORUM

Early Portuguese Navigation

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Professor Cortesão sent the following message to the Annual General Meeting of the Institute on 23 October which he had been unable to attend to receive personally his Honorary Membership. An account of the meeting appears at page 111.

THE Honorary Membership which the Royal Institute of Navigation bestows upon me, when I have reached the eighty-fourth year of my laborious life, the last forty years of which have been largely dedicated to the study of the history of early cartography and navigation, impresses me deeply and I am very sorry that, due only to my advanced age, I cannot be present at this ceremony to thank you personally for such a great distinction.

We cannot refer to anything connected with the history of cartography, navigation and the geographical discoveries without keeping in mind the outstanding figure of Prince Henry the Navigator. May I therefore recall some words that under the heading 'From John I and Philippa of Lancaster Henry the Navigator was born in 1394', I wrote three years ago in Vol. I of my *History of Portuguese Cartography*:

'On 9 May 1386 was signed the famous Treaty of Windsor, confirming and enhancing the alliance of 1373, which has lasted until this day and is the oldest of its kind in the world. Already in the battle of Aljubarrota, in 1385, a company of 500 English archers had helped the Portuguese forces to defeat a Castillian army. On that same year of 1386 was also adjusted the marriage of the young Portuguese king and the Princess Philippa of Lancaster, daughter of John of Gaunt, which came to take place at Porto on 2nd February 1387. As Richard Henry Major wrote in 1868, "The young king had endeared himself to his subjects by his well-proved heroism and wisdom, while Philippa, who was one year his junior, was as remarkable for the modest dignity of her bearing as for her beauty, both qualities well befitting the grand-daughter of Philippa of Hainault. . . . The Queen died on the 19th of July, 1415, to the sincere grief of the people; for while sharing for twenty-eight years the throne of the most highly gifted of the kings of Portugal, she had exhibited qualities which would have placed her among the most noble of her sex in any country or in any age."

Philippa came indeed from that England which had just produced such men as Sacrobosco, Grosseteste, Michael Scott, Bartholomew the Englishman, John of Peckham, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus and William of Occam, and where she met at the court of Edward III, who is known to have favoured him, the great Chaucer, who about 1390 wrote the famous treatise on the use of the astrolabe. Philippa was a cultured lady, and through Chaucer she may have become interested in cosmography or at least heard something about it. I wonder whether Chaucer did not even send her a copy of his treatise on the astrolabe. The King was also an exceptionally cultured man for his time. They

must have had, naturally, a capital influence on the education of their children, and it seems to me likely that the Queen must have imparted at least to her three eldest sons, Edward, Peter and Henry, some of the cultural interests she may have acquired from Chaucer.

The happy and eventful marriage of King John to Princess Philippa, who bore him, among a generation of illustrious Princes, the great leader who became known in history as Henry the Navigator, born at Porto on 4 March 1394, was one of those portentous twists in history which may determine the fate of a nation and influence for ever the course of all mankind. No man was ever more influential in the geographical discovery of the world. It was thanks to the inspiration, devotion, tenacity and impulse of this great leader, the son of a Portuguese King and an English Princess, that the ground was prepared for the voyages of Diogo Cão down the African coast to $21^{\circ} 47' S.$, of Bartolomeu Dias round the Cape of Good Hope, of Columbus to America, of Gama to India and of Magellan across the Pacific.'

Portuguese historians have today no doubt that the process of navigation by the observation of heavenly bodies with instruments on board ship, which led, towards the end of the fifteenth century, to the development of astronomical navigation, with the preparation of quadrennial tables of solar declinations and to the modern art of navigation, began under the leadership of Prince Henry after he sent his first caravels to Madeira and beyond; first by observing equal altitudes of a star, forerunner of the altitude-distance method, which with improvements culminated in the modern art of navigation—the instruments were improved but the fundamental principles are the same.

That is why it seems to me appropriate to recall on this occasion—when you honour a Portuguese historian of early cartography, navigation and discoveries—the name of that most illustrious Prince, half Portuguese and half English by blood, who more than any other man helped Europe to move into the Renaissance, the antechamber of modern times.

I ask you again to accept this expression of my deepest gratitude.

'K's and F's'

from Commander W. E. May

I AM indebted to Captain Duncan M. Henderson (*Journal* 27, 536) for causing me to seek further than I had done previously to enable me to prove that 'F' in old log-books stood for fathoms and not fractions.

I would quote the following authorities who all state definitely that the 'F' meant fathoms and that there were usually eight fathoms to a knot, at any rate in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They are:

Wilson, 4th ed., 1741

Adams' edition of Atkinson, 1782

Hamilton Moore, 8th ed., 1784

Malham, 1790

Wales' 6th ed., 1796, and Gwynne's 7th ed., 1805 of Robertson