

GEOGRAPHY, GEOPOLITICS, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW. ATLANTIC EXPANSION IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at Iberian Atlantic policy during the 15th and 16th centuries through the lens of geopolitics, at the same time taking geographical space and spatial imagination into account. Focusing on the Canary Islands and their geostrategic importance for Portugal and Castile it becomes clear, that the conquest of the archipelago can only be understood in the context of the exploration of Africa, new sea routes to India and the *Reconquista*. Above that, the article analyses to what extent geographic knowledge was instrumentalized for political purposes during this period. Despite an increasing importance of experience and geographic accuracy, the relativity of geographical locations in international politics is a constant from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period.

KEYWORDS: geopolitics, geography, International Law, conquest, Canary Islands.

GEOGRAFÍA, GEOPOLÍTICA Y DERECHO INTERNACIONAL.
LA EXPANSIÓN ATLÁNTICA A FINALES DE LA EDAD MEDIA

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la política atlántica ibérica durante los siglos xv y xvi a través de la lente de la geopolítica, teniendo en cuenta al mismo tiempo el espacio geográfico y la imaginación espacial. Centrándose en las islas Canarias y su importancia geoestratégica para Portugal y Castilla, se pone de manifiesto que la conquista del archipiélago solo puede entenderse en el contexto de la exploración de África, las nuevas rutas marítimas hacia la India y la *Reconquista*. Además, el artículo analiza hasta qué punto el conocimiento geográfico fue instrumentalizado con fines políticos durante este periodo. A pesar de la creciente importancia de la experiencia y la precisión geográfica, la relatividad de los lugares geográficos en la política internacional es una constante desde la Baja Edad Media hasta la Alta Edad Moderna.

PALABRAS CLAVE: geopolítica, geografía, derecho internacional, conquista, islas Canarias.

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REVISTA ATLÁNTIDA, 16, 2025, PP. 35-66

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.atlantid.2025.16.03>

REVISTA ATLÁNTIDA, 16; mayo 2025, pp. 55-66; ISSN: e-2530-853X

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I. INTRODUCTION

“More than other histories, the history of international relations is realised in space” (“Mehr als andere Geschichte verwirklicht sich die Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen im Raum” Osterhammel, 2000, p. 287). Space and geographical circumstances are and have been throughout history decisive factors of international politics. It is indubitable that the geographical location of a nation has much influence on its political action, might it be peaceful or aggressive, and its history. But whereas one should be careful to deduce from this a certain determinism, one might agree that geographical location and circumstances can hinder or offer course of actions without proclaiming moncausality (Osterhammel, 2000, p. 287).

The research field that deals with the “ways in which international affairs can be understood through geographical factors” is “geopolitics” (Marshall, 2015, p. x). Due to the “klassische Geopolitik” that was developed in the context of German imperialism and “Großraumdenken” of National Socialism between 1890 and 1945, German research tries to avoid this tainted concept and prefers to speak of “political geography” (Osterhammel, 2000, pp. 295-296). During this period, aggressive wars were legitimised by biological analogies, such as explaining the expansive behaviour of states as a natural need to grow (Werber, 2015, p. 124; Teschke, 2023, p. 157). In contrast, the concept is still accepted in the anglophone speaking world and will be used in the following to take a specific analytical perspective on European expansion at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, traditionally marking the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern Period in historical sciences. Above that, we will see to what extent foreign policy was guided by geostrategic thinking. A second part then deals with the instrumentalization of geographic knowledge in international legal discourse.

Problematic as an academic figure due to his role in National Socialist Germany but nonetheless acknowledged for his political theory, Carl Schmitt in 1950 published a book entitled with “Der Nomos der Erde”, considered by international legal historians as a contribution that “focused most closely and explicitly on space” (Anghie, 2012, pp. 1071-1072). For the period of the Middle Ages, Schmitt highlights the different horizon of the medieval man, having no spatial concept of a global world, that had been neither explored to its uttermost ends nor properly measured (Osterhammel, 2000, p. 290). Although one could argue against Schmitt, that medieval man was well aware of the spherical shape of the earth, it is true that medieval societies – not only Western-European – had compared to today only limited geographic knowledge. Blank spaces at the outer edges of the world on medieval maps were filled with imagination, such as fantastic islands full of riches and wondrous creatures. Moreover, biblical and mythological narratives were deeply interwoven in these spatial imaginations. For instance, on the Catalan Atlas, probably created by the Majorcan cartographer Cresques Abraham in 1375, one finds Noah’s Ark or the monstrous peoples Gog and Magog who were according to legend imprisoned by Alexander the Great. This limited geographical knowledge went hand in glove with a strong dependence of medieval man on geographical and natural occurrences, both touching the life of every individual but also political course of action. For example,

high mountains or unknown waters could form natural boundaries, leaving people in isolation. The Canary islanders for instance, who migrated to the archipelago during antiquity, only sporadically had contact with neighbouring islands which lead to a differentiation of cultures and dialects. Schmitt also stresses the lack of states as political entities (Schmitt, 1974, pp. 23-25). Whereas geopolitics and foreign policy as modern concepts are in a way bound to the territorial state as an ideal type (Osterhammel, 2000, p. 290), these concepts are widened and used here to describe the political actions of medieval kings and princes.

According to Schmitt this medieval spatial idea of the world ends with Ferdinand Magellan's and Juan Sebastián Elcano's circumnavigation of the earth (1519-1522), that created a new spatial image in need for order. Furthermore, the turn of the centuries would mark the beginning of global linear thinking with the papal bull *Inter caetera divinae* (1493) and the treaties of Tordesillas (1494) and Saragossa (1529) (Schmitt, 1974, p. 54 and 57). The papal bull as well as the treaties arranged spheres of influence and appropriation between the rival maritime powers Portugal and what we today call Spain. Whereas the Treaty of Tordesillas separated the Atlantic in a way that led to a Portuguese dominion over Brazil making it the only non-Spanish speaking country of Latin America, the Treaty of Saragossa defined spheres of influence in the Pacific. These lines of demarcation also defined zones of war, conquest, and appropriation (Schmitt, 1974, pp. 62-63). Thereby, the earth was cut in a half like an orange, as the crown official on Hispaniola Alonso de Zuazo wrote to the Spanish King (Duve, 2021).

Finally, Schmitt considers these thalassocrat forms of rule over the oceans a signum of the Early Modern Period. But, as Nikolas Jaspert among others has recently shown, one can already find forms of ruling over the sea in the medieval period (Jaspert, 2024, p. 8). First and foremost highlighting discontinuities between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, Schmitt manifests what has been called the “medieval-modern divide” (Muldoon, 2013). When looking in the following at geopolitical aspects of the conquest of the Canary Islands (1402-1496), the processual character and the continuities between the 15th and 16th century will become clear. Whereas Schmitt links geopolitical and geostrategic thinking to the Early Modern Period, it will be shown that geographical knowledge and imagination were already instrumentalized for political purposes in the context of new discoveries made during the 14th century. Here, precisely the vagueness and limitation of medieval geographical knowledge offered a wide range of possible arguments.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND GEOSTRATEGIC THINKING

1291 marks the beginning of a period, that Canarian historical research has denominated the “Redescubrimiento” (f. ex. Quartapelle, 2017) (1291-1402) of the archipelago, followed by the “Conquista señorial” (1402-1479) and finally the “conquista realenga” (1479-1496), ending with the capitulation of the *Guanches* of Tenerife. This naming on the one hand presupposes an identification of the Canary

Islands with the Fortunate Islas or Isles of the Blessed mentioned in ancient sources, such as the *Historia Naturalis* of Pliny the Elder (Frenschkowski, 2016). On the other hand, the periodization only reflects the European perspective, at the same time glorifying their achievement and disregarding the experience of the indigenous Canarians. Some works have already tried to write medieval Canarian history from a post-colonial or global historical perspective, paying attention to the indigenous peoples (author, 2024). In total awareness of one-sidedness, we will take here only the course of actions of the Iberian and Mediterranean political powers into account.

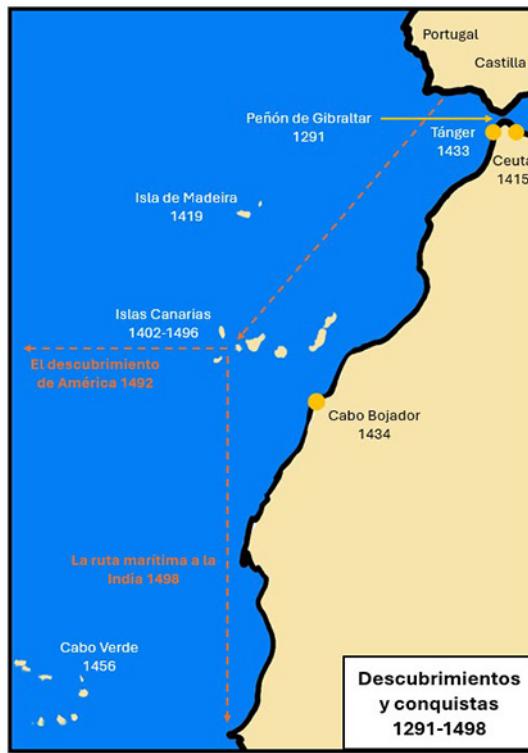
But why 1291? In the municipal annals of Genoa, we find the following entry for this year: Ugolinus de Vivaldo and his brother would have set sail with two ships to find a sea route to India (Aurie, 1929, p. 124). This expedition of the Vivaldi brothers does not coincide with the fall of Acre in the same year. The rise of a new military power of Islam, the Mamelukes, and the fall of the last harbour city of the crusader states in the Holy Land also touched economic matters and encouraged the search for an alternative trading route to India (Jaspert, 2014, pp. 54-55). Whereas it is unsure if the expedition of the Vivaldi brothers ever reached the Canary Islands, because they disappeared after passing the Strait of Gibraltar, the archipelago was to play the role of a stopover on the way to India for the next two centuries.

As well as the geographical location of the archipelago was decisive for its role in European expansion, the powers of the Iberian Peninsula undoubtedly became protagonists of this undertaking due to their maritime location and traditional role as sea powers. Naturally, this was accompanied by a great deal of knowledge about nautical science and shipbuilding (Bendemann et al., 2016, p. 17). In 1344, the Strait of Gibraltar no longer remained under Muslim control and the Canary Islands were given as a papal fief to Luis de la Cerda (Herbers, 2006, p. 291). Both the Portuguese and the Castilian King complained about this papal grant, a rivalry that lasted until 1479, when Portugal formally recognized Castile's rule over the archipelago in the Treaty of Alcáçovas.

In his *Crónica dos Feitos da Guiné*, the Portuguese historiographer Gomes Eanes de Zurara reports about the first African voyages and praises the deeds of Prince Henry the Navigator. In Chapter vii, he lists five reasons that supposedly motivated the Infant to search for the land of Guinea that seem to be likewise representative for the Kings of Castile and their expansive interests (In the Middle Ages, everything south of Muslim Africa was referred to as "Guinea", a hitherto largely unknown territory).

First, Zurara names the joy of exploring and discovering. Especially the presumed impassability of the Cape Bojador, the disappearance of ships and contradictitious legendary stories about travels of the Irish monk Saint Brendan, would have motivated the Infant to know for sure (*para tener conocimiento preciso*) (Zurara, 2012, p. 130).

When the Portuguese sailor Gil Eanes succeeded in rounding the Cape in 1434, the Infant's interest in dominating the Canary Islands intensified and thus also the concurrence with Castile (Herbers, 2006, p. 294). Peter Edward Russell even speaks of a "life-long obsession" of Henry the Navigator, who would have been "plainly concerned to conquer all the islands of the archipelago as a prize worth



I. The Map indicates the crucial geostrategic position of the Canary Islands in the context of exploration and conquest in the Late Middle Ages.

winning for its own sake, not just to secure a safe haven there for his Guinea-bound caravels" (Russell, 2001, p. 83). Nonetheless, dominion over the islands promised a major geostrategic advantage for the exploration of the African coast and the trade with gold and slaves. Trading opportunities and colonisation are then summarized as a second motivation (Zurara, 2012, p. 130). The reign of John I of Portugal (1357-1433) had given rise to a new elite, substituting nobles who sympathized with Castile. This new Portuguese nobility needed to be rewarded with land very limited after the end of the Portuguese *Reconquista*, the conquest of Muslim territories on the Iberian Peninsula. Atlantic expansion thus offered new territories and riches that could be distributed among these upstarts (Herbers, 2006, p. 289). At the same time, the conquest of the Canary Islands opened another field of activity for crusaders.

Although hopes to find gold were disappointed, the archipelago was not only a transshipment point but also had its own goods to offer, such as dates from palm trees, an indigenous population that could be enslaved, blood from the dragon tree that was said to have magical power and especially orcein, a lichen from which

the valuable purple dye could be extracted. Both the seigniors of the eastern and the leading royal conquistadors of the western islands struggled for a monopoly over the orcein trade. Whereas the chronicle *Le Canarien* on the French conquest of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and El Hierro speaks of a princely monopoly of the Béthencourts over the trade with the lichen, the successors of this lordship, namely Inés Peraza and Diego de Herrera, tried to profit from it by concluding treaties with indigenous leaders. Thereby they even went so far as to hand over Christian hostages in exchange for its delivery. Concerning the submission of Tenerife, Gran Canary and La Palma, leading conquistadors such as Don Juan de Frías were guaranteed a monopoly over the trade with orcein that could both be considered a reward as well as a financing opportunity for the military operation (author, forthcoming).

Toda persona sensate, por prudencia natural, está obligada a conocer el poder de su enemigo (Zurara, 2012, p. 131). To gain knowledge about Muslim territories in Western Africa, in this period considered the worst enemies of Christendom, was according to Zurara another motivation for the Portuguese Infant. In a way, some contemporaries understood and justified the conquests of the Canary Islands and cities in northern Africa, the submission of Ceuta in 1415 and of Ceguer (today Tangier) in 1433, as part of the *Reconquista* (Le Canarien, 2003, B5r, p. 164). Furthermore, the Canary Islands were an ideal starting point for raids on the West African coast. These so-called *cabalgadas* remained a constant activity of the territorial lords of the Canary Islands, well into the 16th century.

Forth, Prince Herny would have promoted trips to explore the coast of Guinea and the African hinterland in search for potential Christian allies against the Muslim “enemy” (Zurara, 2012, p. 131). The assumption of a legendary Christian kingdom of Prester John was a constant motive in medieval travel reports. Thus, it was reported in the *Libro de conocimiento* (around 1348), that the son of the missing Ugolino Vivaldi lived in Etiopia, the land of Prester John (Libro del conocimiento, 1980, p. 63 and pp. 67-68).

Finally, the undertakings initiated by the Infant aimed at the dissemination of Christian faith, the salvation of souls. Naturally Christianization played a major role in the context of Iberian expansion. But, as a closer look at treaties between Christians and indigenous infidels shows, economic interests were often paramount and evangelizing the other party not imperative when it came to making a profit (author, forthcoming).

Zurara's explanations of the motifs of Herny the Navigator exemplarily show, that the Iberian powers of the 15th century followed clear geostrategic interests. Thereby, the Canary Islands should offer a stopover for the further reconnaissance of the west African coast and its hinterland, an offshore stationary to trade with or attack peoples in western Africa and another Christian stronghold against the supposedly spread of Islam. That the Canary Islands would also pave the way for the discovery and conquest of Latin America, as Francisco López de Gómara (1511-1566) states in his *Historia General de las Indias*, was then not a geostrategic plan but a historical coincidence (López de Gómara, 1999, chapter ccxxi).

III. POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF GEOGRAPHY

La opinión actual es muy diferente de la de los antiguos escritores, ya sea en lo que atañe a su número ya sea a su dirección, visto que los antiguos las colocan al sur y dicen que son seis en número, mientras que los marinos de nuestra época dicen que [las Islas Canarias] son diez en número y distan de la Libia inferior, que se encuentra enfrente en dirección oeste, cuatrocientas veinte millas, una después de otra. Estoy de acuerdo con esta distancia, si hablamos de la posición de la isla más oriental, pero en cuanto a la más occidental la distancia con Libia es de mil veinte millas (Bordone, 2008, p. 103).

This passage translated from Italian is taken from Benedetto Bordone's most famous book, *Isolario nel qual si ragiona de tute l'isole del mondo*, compiled between 1505 and 1508. The Venetian cartographer whose date of birth is unknown thereby contributed to a specific genre of island books, a "Renaissance project" that reflected "Humanism's curiosity about geography, natural history and ethnography" (Tolias, 2012, pp. 27-28). He is the first in contrasting ancient assumptions about the Fortunate Islas or Isles of the Blessed of Pliny the Elder with contemporary knowledge, his correction of distances mirroring a new tendency to geographical accuracy. This coincided with a shift of the *Isolario*'s focus from the Mediterranean to oceanic islands (Tolias, 2012, p. 36).

Although his description seems to be neutral, Georg Tolias attributes the genre in view of colonialism in the Levante a "hidden political agenda" (Tolias, 2012, pp. 27-28). But when looking at the Canary Islands mentioned in the *Isolarios* from the 14th to the 16th century, this concerns less geographical descriptions than historical excursions that vary the history of their discovery. For instance, Valentin Fernand, a German who visited Portugal in 1495 and used various Portuguese chronicles and historiographies for his island book *Das ilhas do oceano* (Sarmiento Pérez, 2004: 21-22), highlights Portugal's role in the discovery of the archipelago (Canarias en el llamado «Manuscrito Valentim Fernandes» (conclusión), 1947, pp. 539-550). When considering that the *ius inventionis*, a dominion right derived from being the first discoverer of new land, was a common argument in the international legal discourse on the archipelago, one could interpret this as a juridical statement. The same applies to geographic descriptions used in the discussions on the dominion rights over the archipelago that were transformed into legal arguments and official maps that could be turned into "juridical cartography" (Duve, 2017, p. 438).

Since the 14th century it was common to have heraldic symbols on charts, such as flags and emblems, indicating the political situation (Baumgärtner and Stercken, 2012, p. 20). Thereby, also claims of ownership over a region could be expressed. In 1339, the Majorcan Angelino Dulcert created a map that refers to the journey of a Genoese to the Canary Islands. Bearing this name until today, Lanzarote is labelled with *Insula de Lanzarotus Marocelus*, thereby referring to its discoverer. Above that, the whole island is coloured in white with a red cross, the emblem of Genoa, marking the supposed dominion right of the Mediterranean harbour city over the island (Quartapelle, 2017, pp. 11-37).

As the world historian Jürgen Osterhammel has pointed out, all variants of geopolitics are less based on theoretical knowledge but are the result of a limited experience used for political judgement (Osterhammel, 2000, p. 300). Exact location or accurate determination of distances was in this context of lesser interest. Even today, the geographical location of islands, regions and countries can become relative: “The relative position of an island is also determined by (geo)political interests, affecting the geopolitical power game and localised conceptions of space” (Ratter, 2018, p. 11).

Already in 1345, reacting to a bull of Pope Clemens VI, the Portuguese and the Castilian monarchs had defended their prerogative over the Canary Islands arguing with their geographical location, transformed into a legal argument. Alfons IV, called the Brave, claimed in his letter that the Canary Islands were closest to Portugal, and it would therefore be best to conquer them from this position (Carta del Rey Alfonso IV de Portugal, 1987, p. 747). Alfons XI of Castile and León likewise emphasized the proximity between the archipelago and his territory, but thereby referred not to Castile but to Africa. The islands would form a part of Africa, conquered in former times by his ancestors, making him the rightful heir of this possessions (Carta del Rey Alfonso XI de Castilla, 1987, p. 750).

When looking at another use of this argument eighty years later, it becomes clear to which historical period the Castilian monarch related. In the context of the Council of Basel (1431-1449), Portugal and Castile tried to solve their conflict regarding overseas possessions, considering the Pope as a potential mediator. The debate was triggered by a papal bull of December 1434, *Letras Creator omnium*, that demanded the liberation of Canarian Christians and the restitution of their goods (Letras Creator omnium, 1963, pp. 118-123). Eduard I of Portugal, fearing a curtailment of his conquering rights, again argued in a letter with the *vicinitas*, the proximity of the Canary Islands to his ruling territory. This time, he also stressed the proximity of the archipelago to Africa thereby considering it as a part of his reign. According to the Portuguese monarch there would be also geographical evidence for his statement: it would have been proven by experience (*experiencia*) through the records of cartographers (Suúplica dirigida pelos embaixadores de el-rei D. Cuarte ao papa Eugénio IV, pp. 255-257).

The Castilian position, presented in front of a commission during the Council of Basel, was based on the argumentation of a jurist and bishop of Burgos, Alonso de Cartagena. In his *Allegationes* he argues with the *vicinitas* between the Canary Islands and former Castilian territory, clarifying the argument of Alfons XI of Castile and León. According to Cartagena, northern Africa, a region he names *Tingitania* as a former Roman province, would have belonged to the Visigoth Kingdom (Cartagena, 1994, p. 84). Until the Muslim conquest of a major part of the Iberian Peninsula in 711, the Visigoths had ruled over most parts of it. That northern Africa also belonged to it, is not true, but an argument often used to defend the political idea of a unified Spanish empire. But why should islands in the Atlantic also belong to this empire? Here, Cartagena uses a principle formulated by another famous Italian jurist, Bartolus de Saxofferato. He had described the principle that each island belonged to the mainland closest to it. Therefore, being offshore islands of Africa, and Africa formerly being part of the Visigoth Kingdom, the rule over the

archipelago would belong to the ancestor of this empire, the actual Castilian King John II (Cartagena, 1994, p. 128).

The Treaty of Alcáçovas of 1479, which temporarily solved the conflicting overseas interests of Portugal and Castile, marks then the beginning of a globalization of imperial geography: “The Treaty can be seen as an important example of the tightening connection between European imperial ambitions and the rationalization of global space” (Duve, 2013). But, as Thomas Duve highlights, these attempts to rationalize space were still not based on accurate geographical knowledge. Having yet no standard in measuring longitude, the position of the demarcation line negotiated in the Treaty of Tordesillas for instance needed to be “empirically verified”. Thus, it was decided that after the ratification of the treaty, a joint voyage of Portuguese and Castilian cartographic experts should explore the line, mark it, when there would be an island or at least have it accurately on a map (Duve, 2017, pp. 430-431). Although this expedition was never realized, the proposition of the Iberian powers as well as the argumentation of Eduard I and Benedetto Bordone show that experience and empirical knowledge (*experiencia*) was revalued during the fifteenth century and received authority (*auctorias*) in relation to ancient, traditional knowledge. Despite the increasing importance of accuracy of measures and experience as a new form of accepted knowledge, space stayed a relative category, at least regarding international geopolitical discourses. Moreover, geographic visions of life in a certain region linked to climate or vegetation could be instrumentalized for political purposes as well as geographical categories such as “insularity” or “islandness”: “The concept of insularity had two main aspects: on the one hand, it was understood as an expression of connectivity, and on the other as an indication of isolation” (Constantakopoulou, 2007, p. 2). This “dichotomy of insularity” (Sicking, 2014, p. 496), associated with connectivity and/or isolation, can be found in every historical period, whereby “isolation” was often equated with “backwardness” and therefore used in a pejorative manner (Baldacchino, 2023, p. 4). This negative geographic visions of islands and islanders was also applied on the Canaries and used to justify the submission of the indigenous peoples. Coming back to the *Isolario* of Benedetto Bordone, we find not only a correction of ancient assumptions on the geographical position of the archipelago, but also a description of the supposedly savage costumes of its inhabitants.

About the indigenous population of Tenerife, La Palma and Gran Canary, not yet under Christian rule, Bordone writes, that they would not have any religion, only adored the sun and the moon, would run around naked and live in caves. Furthermore, he describes various practices in discordance with Christian norms and commands, such as polygamy or ritual suicide committed during the initiation of a new indigenous leader. Furthermore, their rule is qualified as tyrannical, being appointed by the right of the strongest and having the prerogative to deflower every bride (Bordone, 2008, pp. 103-104).

Only in the 16th century, when the archipelago was conquered and colonized, the Canary Islanders and life on the archipelago lost their negative image. The indigenous warrior Doramas for instance, a war hero but nonetheless considered an epitome of savagery and wildness, becomes the protagonist of a comedy of the

literate Bartolomé Cairasco de Figueroa. In his *Comedia del recibimiento al obispo Fernando Rueda*, Doramas is chosen to welcome the new bishop of the archipelago. With a little help of magic, he is enabled to speak Castilian and then appears not as a wild warrior but as a natural philosopher (author, 2023).

All in all, both geographic visions such as insularity as well as geographic descriptions such as proximity (*vicinitas*) could be transformed into an international legal argument. Although medieval vagueness and limitation of geographic knowledge offered great argumentative potential, increasing world experience and geographic measurement did not automatically lead to a more objective view. Geographic reality stayed relative, depending on the interpretation and geostrategic interests of political powers.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, spatial imagination in terms of geographic position and presumed distances played a major role in the international legal conflict between Portugal and Castile. The geopolitical importance of the Canary Islands in this legal dispute and colonial war can only be understood when taking the context of the exploration of Africa, the search for new sea routes to India and the *Reconquista* into account. The geographic location of the archipelago made it the ideal stopover for travels to India and the Americas, to a major extent determining its destiny far beyond the 16th century. The medieval Kings and Princes involved in Atlantic expansion were familiar with geostrategic thinking and instrumentalized geographic knowledge and spatial imagination for their foreign political interests. European exploration and discoveries went hand in glove with a rationalization of space, an increasing interest in geographic accuracy and measurement. Meanwhile knowledge gained from experience (*experiencia*) became an authority (*auctoritas*) used to defend geostrategic interests or negotiating spheres of influence. Thereby, geographical location and distances as much as geographical visions stayed relative and convertible when debated in international legal discourse. In a way, the Canary Islands can be compared here to the eight, mythical island of the archipelago called *San Borondón* in historical sources: floating and vanishing depending on geopolitical will.

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