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## Merchants, ports and hinterlands. The building of sea-port structures in the Early Modern Porto

### A B S T R A C T

*Emerging in the Middle Ages, Porto became one of the most important ports of the Iberian Peninsula. The city's affirmation over the nearby territory was accompanied by the expansion of business towards the northern markets of Flanders, Brabant, Great Britain and northern France (Brittany and Normandy), stimulating the emergence of a merchant navy, and inspiring a set of engineering works meant to organize the harbour. With this paper, I'll pay attention to the role performed by small ports and apparently modest business centres in the building and organization of the first global age.*

*The history of such port like Porto will contribute to enlighten fields of interaction that existed between the port-cities and their umlands and hinterlands, which supported its economy, mould a significant part of its society, and influenced its cultural standards. In this study I'll present the most important facts of the process of territorial domination, and the way things were conducted in order to get effective its mercantile economy. Charts will be presented and comment, once they are very informative to this evolution, and I'll also emphasize the international context in which it occurred.*

This article will focus on the history of relations between Porto and its hinterland during late-Middle Ages and Early Modern Times, and examine the general conditions from which a jurisdictional kind of process generated an articulated economy. The analysis here proposed will demonstrate how, in the long-duration, several actions were directed from the city and were meant to extend and make effective its authority over the surrounding territory, and profit from that.

In these forewords it seems to me important to present the guidelines of the main ideas that will be developed in the chapters ahead, namely the territorial extension and the jurisdictional level of influence in a diachronic perspective, and the initiatives aiming its consolidation, the motivation of the whole plan and the evolution of the economic ties in the meantime established.

The first one underlines the fact that the process by which Porto achieved to control a vast territory around the city was rapid and not by all means erratic. Evidence will show that the intervention over the hinterland was not an empirical attempt or a response to momentary necessities. It had a sense, a very concrete goal: it was thought and set in motion during medieval

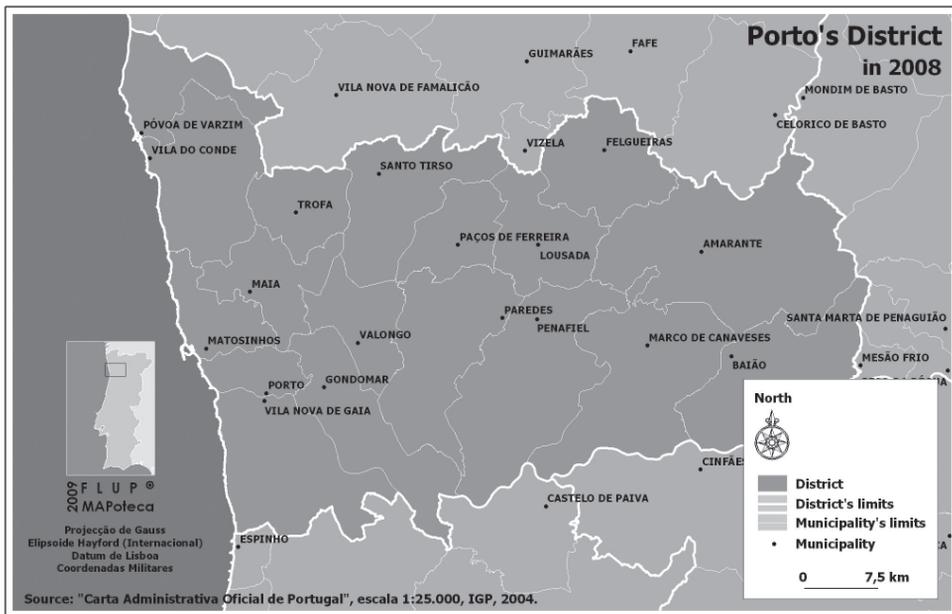
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times and sought to ensure the survival in addition to the growth of city's wealth. After identifying the city's seating conditions – pretty much unfavourable<sup>1</sup> – Town Hall members assumed a political speech next to the King justifying expansionist projects over the hinterland as a matter of survival<sup>2</sup>. This is, perhaps, the main thesis here supported: that Porto's territorial construction rather than accidentally was carefully thought and resolutely achieved.

The second idea involves the fact that since Porto was given a municipal chart (1123) until later medieval years it changed from a small urban centre<sup>3</sup> into an extensive territory coincident with the actual Porto *district*<sup>4</sup>.

Map 1  
Current Porto District



The third idea will emphasize the fact that Porto's men in charge took advantage of the dispute involving the local Bishop and the King about the city's jurisdictional statute<sup>5</sup>, having been granted with privileges and acquire political rights over the countryside. This process occurred between 1369 and 1384 and was a consequence of labour force requirements for projected city-wall construction, as well as a matter of city's needs of provisioning.

<sup>1</sup> Geologically speaking the place was (still is) profoundly rocky, granite, and the ground nature didn't allow a productive agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> This is a very complex and interesting subject: how the official discourse and the language used in it had a subjacent image destined to exalt the strength of those in charge of the city's government, and to impress and convince the ones whom it was addressed. This was remarkably studied by SOUSA, 1995: 155-173.

<sup>3</sup> Only the space involving the cathedral.

<sup>4</sup> In the Portuguese sense of *região*. The Porto District (*Distrito do Porto*) has 2395Km<sup>2</sup> or 1488,3 square miles.

Therefore, some chapters will analyse the reliability of this territory which was the most populated in Portugal and one of the most fertile, features that are enough to explain Porto's attraction over it. The remaining municipal records highlight many decisions and energetic actions led by Porto when desertion risked arming the desired unity, mainly in terms of economic interdependence.

The fourth idea examines the motives behind the medieval and early modern expansion which are to be observed also in a diachronic approach. In an early stage Porto's rulers aim was to guarantee the urban market and urban population supply. *Maia*, one of the countryside regions was foremost important as wheat producer, while *Refojos* grew vast corn fields of sorghum<sup>6</sup> and maize<sup>7</sup>, *Aguiar* and *Penafiel* produced both wheat and corn, and *Gondomar* and *Gaia* harvested corn, wheat and barley. In times of food shortage – which happened frequently in the period here studied – the city never hesitated to send commissioners throughout the territory accompanied by armed men to requisite in its name, by force if necessary, every cereal they could find in barns, and bring it to the urban storehouses to be distributed by the population and whenever there was food shortage. Then, when commercial activities developed hinterland commodities were essential to dynamize logistics: wood to supply naval construction and cooperage, and flax and hemp both to ropery, ship's tackle and industrial textile purpose. Finally, and also subjected to a diachronic perspective, the hinterland productions were vital to feed exports and the commercial structure: salt, kettle, wine and leather, in the Middle Ages, which should be added, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to the “triangular trade” commodities, sugar, slaves and raw materials internationally distributed, and Port-Wine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the last stage of Porto's participation in the world's exchange games<sup>8</sup>. This means as well that relations between the city and its hinterland can be seen as crucial to the international projection of the port. And although they appear so, the following chapters are not isolated; they should and can only be understood as a whole aiming to inspire the reflection that small ports count in the history of international trade.

This lead to the last major idea this paper aims to provide evidence of the fact that we cannot study medieval and early modern seaport cities without attach them to a wider hinterland that supported and sustained them.

1. In the year 1123 Porto was granted with a municipal chart of privilege by its landlord, the Bishop Hugh (*Hugo de Cluny*). Less than eighty years later there were Porto's ships visiting France and British Isles ports, and a way of life centred on trade and shipping had begun. Quite soon Porto joined the group of ports with higher level of activity in the Iberian Peninsula,

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<sup>5</sup> Porto was donated to the Bishop in 1120; by the end of the thirteenth-century, however – and in face of the important revenues produced by commerce – the Crown tried to recover the city claiming rights to it, and supported by the local bourgeoisie who looked for advantages in statute changing. In the end an agreement was reached and the Crown bought the city from the Church in 1406;–*Corpus Codicum* (Repertoire of medieval documentation of the city), vol. I, p. 136. See also BASTO, 1937: 323.

<sup>6</sup> In the Middle Ages.

<sup>7</sup> Since the second-half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the so-called “corn revolution”.

<sup>8</sup> CRUZ, 1983; BARROS, 2004; CARDOSO, 2003.

moving raw materials, supplies, salt and wine, which means not far from the general repertoire of early medieval trade.

The city's long tradition of maritime traffic was built thanks to a strong support: the amount of marketable richness produced in its hinterland and distributed from the port by merchant's houses and firms established here which since medieval times had powerful links with the countryside controlling salt, cereals, wine and leather trade<sup>9</sup>. That kind of relation, contemporary of comparable ones produced in other European regions, displayed two main characteristics: firstly, the city's control over the surrounding territory, and secondly, the effective articulation between city's needs and hinterland production in terms of economic evolution. We will see that this was a process that had a lot to do with dynamics experienced in the northern Portuguese region, namely the way local agents and merchants involved understood the role the hinterland could play in their pursuance for prosperity.

For most, this process, which is also political and jurisdictional, only in part had something to do with Portuguese central government policy; it did not come out from any central institution in Portugal, rather was thought and applied by local representatives, although they made the best from political issues concerning the city but generated outside it. Simultaneously with the city's affirmation on the nearby territory, local trade monopolies – such as salt commerce – guaranteed Porto traders the expansion and success of their dealings in the northern markets of Flanders, the British Isles and northern France (mainly Brittany and Normandy)<sup>10</sup>, stimulating the rising of their merchant navy, and inspiring a set of engineering works meant to organize the harbour, facilities and trade.

From the beginning of the Early Modern Ages, merchant community's activity was enhanced which can be observed by the significant level of business and commerce internationalization. Those were the days of the Atlantic commerce, sugar and slave trade, which determined the city's prosperity and the ledge of its trade networks that, by then, became noticed in thriving European markets. Local companies dedicated to trade and shipping became responsible for port infrastructures modernization, enacting a comprehensive programme designed to respond the needs of the maritime international commerce<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, the study of these trade companies performances provide us precious indications about the self-organized communities' process that, as mentioned, for the most part succeeded without central government policies or strategies. In the Portuguese case, this posture influenced bigger commercial trends developed from sea-ports that were ranked outside State "imperial" initiatives<sup>12</sup>. From there it

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<sup>9</sup> Most Porto's prominent merchants acquire major property in Douro valley and explored its resources for trade, export included, purpose; when the harvesting time approach most ask permission to be excused from their administrative duties in the municipality pointing that they had to go "making his «farm» up river";

<sup>10</sup> SILVA, 1990: 17-37. See also the texts published in the catalogue of the exhibition, *O Porto e a Europa do Renascimento (Porto and Renaissance Europe)*. Porto: Arquivo Histórico Municipal do Porto, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> BARROS, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> It's the aim of the Portuguese research team of the international project DynCoopNet (Dynamics Complexity of Cooperation-Based Self Organising Networks in the First Global Age, within the EUROCORES Programme *The Evolution of Cooperation and Trading* to bring light into these themes by studying Portuguese merchants correspondence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

was possible to promote Atlantic enterprises, mainly the Brazilian sugar route in the last quarter of the sixteenth-century<sup>13</sup>.

This is a topic so far usually unknown among scholars, more preoccupied with the study of a general overview or a macro-analysis centred in the idea of an imperial Early Modern trade, which, in some cases can hardly be found before late eighteenth-century<sup>14</sup>. I mean, it is necessary to focus on a different level of analysis, more informative about traders' strategies meant to respond challenges launched by the first wave of expansion and also by the first wave of globalization, which, in fact, was, in most ways, the work of merchants acting on their own.

From that point of view, micro-perspective analysis can be useful to enlighten several aspects of the role performed by small ports and apparently modest business centres in the building and organization of the first global age. From the study of such ports, which function can be interpreted in terms of efficiency, gateways of saleable goods and merchandise, home of well reputed trustable merchants and trade agents (in the way that was interpreted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), we are given important data to clarify topics on social, economic and cultural history. The history of Porto's trade offers a major contribution to enlighten fields of interaction that existed between the port-city, their *umland* and hinterland; both supporters of its economy, moulded a significant part of its society, and influenced its cultural standards<sup>15</sup>.

As far as this article is concerned, the city always relied on the surrounding territories to feed its international trade, to produce exportable goods, to recruit ship crews and merchant employees, to obtain means of transportation for merchandise such as sugar dispatched to Castilian fairs (such as Medina del Campo), and to acquire raw materials for the local industry. Amongst the main factors which contribution was crucial to "unite" this extensive land that extended beyond national boundaries was the river Douro. Navigable, intensely crossed, nodal centre of communications from where the main roads left and lead to, this was in the course of History the strongest link between northern Portuguese provinces and the sea, through Porto. That explains why a Portuguese novelist once wrote that "Porto is the last city of the province of Trás-os-Montes"<sup>16</sup>.

These territories were the town's "vital space", carefully dominated and jurisdictionally under the authority of the city council. In fact, Porto's authorities knew exactly what they wanted and what to expect from those regions since the Middle Ages, when the domination process began, up to the seventeenth<sup>th</sup> century (when the domination process was completed). The main objective was to achieve one "economic unit" as it was defined by scholars like Britnell,

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<sup>13</sup> An excellent case-study is Vila do Conde, a Northern Portuguese sea-port closely connected with Porto: POLÓNIA, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> This has been a long-time tendency in the Portuguese historiography as well as some international; recent works by Amélia Polónia, Hilario Casado, Evan T. Jones, Mathias Tranchant, Jean-Phillipe Priotti, Inês Amorim, and myself bring the small ports into the spotlight and calling the attention for the important dynamics they had performed; there's a good revision of the traditional historiography in TRACY, 1990, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> As an extensive programme of port development analysis proposed by Gordon Jackson, 2007: 8-27 points-out.

<sup>16</sup> Northern province of Portugal which far limit stays at more than 220 km away from Porto.

Dyer, Eiden or Irsigler<sup>17</sup>, based on the domain of the city over the surrounding territory. If medieval times witnessed the first efforts made in that direction, the seventeenth<sup>th</sup> century was crucial for the city's history because Porto's entrepreneurs and promoters begun to change the Douro valley into the land of Port Wine and, at the same time, converted the city into an "hegemonic port"<sup>18</sup>, a gateway for wine trade at the service of the new leading men of international trade: the British merchants.

Some specific port activities were also a factor of attraction into the city, and promoted complementarity between regions, which must be underlined. The implementation of a naval construction sector attracted countless craftsmen and technicians particularly numerous in the shipyards. This tradition, which started earlier and continued along the Early Modern Period, had always been a motive for people drainage into the city: in 1656, in the era of the great galleons some 147 caulkers and ships carpenters worked on daily basis in the shipyard of *Ouro*, which meant the assemblage of comprehensive logistics<sup>19</sup>. Besides the buildings and warehouses, access ways, rampages for ships, and a complex personnel scale were needed.

Again the subject of city's and hinterland relations was present: to complement imports from Northern European countries, to transform raw-materials or even to completely produce them, agricultural and manufactory investments were made in the province. For instance in *Trás-os-Montes* an agriculture based on linen production was implemented and put up to the point where rope and sails production for ship-equipment was possible<sup>20</sup>. And in the case of wood the supplies came from the neighbourhood forests and also from the ones located up-river Douro. And again, the subject of hinterland domination through jurisdiction comes out.

In this study I'll point out the most significant facts of this territorial control process, which was planned in order to supply solid sustain to merchants' initiatives, and the way things were conducted in order to get effective and efficient the economic features of this port. As I wrote back, the thesis supported in this study focuses the crucial role performed by ports hinterlands while supportive regions for port prosperity, by analysing the case-study provided by Porto. For this purpose, I'll show up and comment charts that I believe can be very informative about each phase of the process, and I'll emphasize the international context of this evolution.

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<sup>17</sup> The discussion of the way in which rural development supported urban and seaport growth, about market integration, size, functions and town relations, economic development and special articulation between cities and their hinterlands can be followed in BRITNELL, 2000; DYER, 2000; EIDEN and IRSIGLER, 2000; GALLOWAY, 2000. See also IRSIGLER, 1996: 1-33, cit. by EIDEN and IRSIGLER, 2000: 46.

<sup>18</sup> As it was defined by GUIMERA RAVINA, 2002: 237-255.

<sup>19</sup> About the logistics implemented in the Ouro shipyard, see AHMP (Porto's Municipal Archive) – *Provisões* (Royal privileges), liv. 3, fl. 23; AHMP — *Vereações*, liv. 25, fl. 509; *Corpus Codicum...*, cit., vol. V, p. 55; ADP (Porto's Provincial Archive) – *Contadoria da comarca do Porto* (Provincial customs accounts), liv. 0007, fl. 193; TT (Portuguese National Archive, Torre do Tombo, Lisbon) – *Chancelaria de D. Afonso VI* (Royal Chancery of Afonso the VIth), liv. 28, fl. 198, etc.

<sup>20</sup> In the case of rope and cable production, in articulation with the great rope-factory of Porto and, in the case of sails, within the scheme we know as *verlagsystem*, which in fact covered all Portuguese regions; POLÓNIA, 1997: 11-23; CRUZ, 1983: 125-130.

2. In the eighteenth century Porto was a known port within the Atlantic system being one of the most important ones in the context of the contacts established between Europe and the Atlantic settlements in Brazil and Western Indies, by providing continental markets of some interesting merchandise. Commodities from Brazil, mainly sugar and tobacco, were abundantly commercialized starting a shipment that would change these goods into mass consumption ones. At the same time, wine produced in Douro valley, some 150 kilometres away from the city, also succeed. That mean that, in an era of overseas expansion, commercial richness could be obtained within narrow homeland territories; and mean as well that hinterland was crucial as economic wealth was concerned, commercial prosperity included.

Recent historiography studies have typified the scheduling of medieval and modern cities according to their function and hierarchy. Some of these concepts come from a profitable interdisciplinary dialog with Geography, as well as Economy, Sociology and Anthropology, which produced new operating concepts in urban dynamics. The city was defined as a place of centrality, serving commercial, administrative, religious and cultural necessities of its spheres of influence, facts pointed by Christopher Dyer in a recent article, very useful for the present study<sup>21</sup>.

Urban centres were organized in hierarchical terms; each one's position and influence is determined by the scale, value and variety of its functions, and also by its ramifications and vital articulations. We are dealing here with the theme of *centralities* and market formation: if the biggest cities have the tendency to supply the surrounding territory of manufactured goods and imported commodities, the latter was generally dominated by primary activity and performed the role of first necessity provisions and goods supplier to the city. Whenever possible, as it was in Porto, the city could turn into a gateway and a mediation point from where a big part of the hinterland productions (manufactured goods included) where commercialised and shipped away. That kind of dynamics motivates a constant flow between them, with the hinterland feeding the city of workers/employees needed in economical, social, administrative and military services developed through the urbane space, besides merchandise meant for commercial purpose.

Though demographic behaviour constitutes decisive factor for the markets health, in this paper I will mainly attend the political procedure that lead Porto to control the territory and determined the forms of co-operation that suited it best: the affirmation of the city and its elites, the management of economics and merchandise circulation according to its projection strategies between the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century.

Since medieval times, the Portuguese were aware that territories enjoyed different statute. They were distributed in three ranks:

- the inner city or the "urban" perimeter;
- the suburbs or periphery (or *arrabalde*);
- the surrounding territory or hinterland (*termo* or *alfoz*).

If we consider these places according to the predominant occupational genre – within the context of Medieval and Early Modern economy – the first was dedicated to the secondary activity, mainly manufacture and crafts, with a strong presence of transport and commerce

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<sup>21</sup> DYER, 2002: 103-109.

activities and the emergence of pure tertiary sector activities in the form of jurisdictional and government institutions; although the suburbs enjoyed an agricultural statute, they more and more displayed a strong secondary sector with some “industry” and manufacture<sup>22</sup>; as far as the hinterland is concerned this was mainly dedicated to primary sector, that means agriculture and agriculture both for foodstuff purpose and for industrial ends.

Suburbs and hinterland evolution cannot be separated from city’s development. The growth of the urban territory by the erection of new walls (in the fourteenth century as far as Porto concerned) had two major effects: the formation of new borrows inside the urban perimeter “gained” from the suburbs; and the establishment of a new periphery in areas once distant from the city centre.

This was a process experienced in Porto where up to the nineteenth century old suburb districts were gradually integrated in the city: Miragaia, Massarelos, Cedofeita, Santo Ildefonso during Early Modern Period; Campanhã and Paranhos, which were a bit more distant, at the end of the nineteenth century, they all changed into city neighbourhoods.

In the Middle Ages *umland* and *hinterland* were already perfectly understood as spheres where vital exchanges for the future of the local economy took place and were wholly established.

A great deal of economic resources were produced in the surrounding fields since then. The land was always fertile, well-populated and able to produce both victuals and manufactured commodities. Besides, by the sea-shore fishing and trade were successfully accomplished from active small harbours which depended on the city in supply and marketing. On the other hand, all these economic resources (mainly salt, wine, olive oil, sumac, leather, fresh and dry fish, etc., in large quantities) were of the most importance for city’s business progress. International trade was very demanding, and in order to succeed among such tough competitors as the Basque, the Bretons, the Italians, and the English, Porto’s traders needed to present solid arguments like the ones they could get with the sale of those products. And so, the city had to find a way to control the places where they were produced and obtained, and profit from their potentialities by governing them. Without a thriving territory, or failing to dominate it, then city’s prosperity would always have been reduced.

The advantages presented by Porto’s hinterland were as follows: largely populated capable to supply manpower, feeding the city’s growth and the development of its professional activities, and particularly fertile of agro industrial products to nourish city’s inhabitants and feed their trade.

These were obviously most valuable assets for a seaport intended to be projected at an international level. From the thirteenth century a maritime port opened to international contacts, a maritime society and a maritime economy grew up based on the hinterland productions. By the sixteenth century, transatlantic commodities were traded simultaneously along with the mentioned traditional products from the hinterland. That meant solid trade economy, able to resist fluctuations that occurred within international demand<sup>23</sup>. We can say, either, that Atlantic

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<sup>22</sup> That, of course, never out-ranked agriculture, farming and cattle breeding, etc.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, when northern European competitors troubled the Portuguese sugar trade, Porto was able to resist focusing its business in wine or salt.

operations – mainly in Brazil and West Indies – were possible because some sort of organized and reliable local trade market was shaped by Porto’s merchants, which became rulers of the city in the Middle Ages, acting over its hinterland; imposing co-operation.

This said, very soon, Porto’s authorities realised they needed to rule the territory. Which is easier to say than to do; territory and jurisdiction were not offered; achieving those was a different task. And they were built on the basis of opened confrontation, imposition, and development of a concrete, planned project, persistently implemented. Certainly, this advance was only possible, in an early stage, thanks to the support of the central government<sup>24</sup>. But this support was conquered with perseverance, it was toughly justified and negotiated, and in the end it was recognized. In the eyes of the Crown such project supposed the existence of a local strong and relatively unified power, which was very handy in a period of affirmation of royal prerogatives struggling against feudal jurisdictions. Powerful cities meant support, and they were the best way to ease the influence of the great manorial houses still predominant in the medieval political scene.

In sum, Porto’s objectives were achieved through a combination of strong propaganda near the King and intense pressure over the countryside regions.

Porto’s initial full-scale pressure over the surrounding populations took place when a second row of city walls was built<sup>25</sup>. That was the first strong move to the official reconnaissance of this projected domination.

This initial growth should be put in context with what went on in Europe between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The “commercial revolution” reached the Northern coast of Portugal in the thirteenth-century; in Porto its commerce propensity noted in the way population approached the river and took advantage from its potentialities was based in previous contacts made with European merchants in the context of the Iberian Christian *Reconquista* (ninth to twelfth centuries). Thus, this military process provided the city with a new space of wealth, at South, and made Porto an unavoidable path for the traffic heading North and South of Douro river.

3. One must be aware of the fact that the second wall meant, also, a strong desire of commercial port facilities normalisation in view of the trade progress experienced by then. It is known that such urban structures were determinant in terms of logistic improvement. Shaping port areas according to the merchandise exchanged<sup>26</sup> as could be seen in Porto was of the most importance and, from then-on (1347), some specialised areas of its port following that criteria emerged: *Lumber Gate* (“Postigo das Tábuas”), *Charcoal Gate* (“Postigo do Carvão”), *Quay and*

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<sup>24</sup> In 1369, and by city’s request, the King recognized and determined that there was no need that places around Porto like “Bouças”, “Gondomar” and “Massarelos” had their own judges because their “business could be properly dispatched in the City Hall”; *Corpus Codicum*, I, p. 110.

<sup>25</sup> In the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and had the effect abovementioned: some suburb neighbourhoods were integrated within city limits.

<sup>26</sup> TRACY, 2000.

*Gate of the Warehouse* (“Cais e Postigo da Arrecadação”), etc. From the wall also emerged substantial docks<sup>27</sup> with solid rock quays meant to facilitate cargo handling operations.

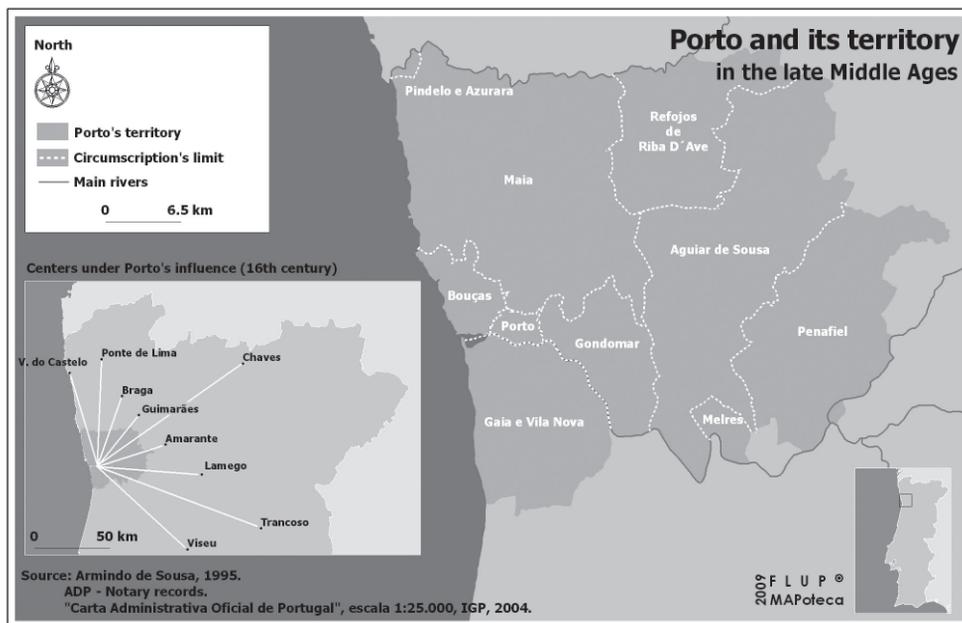
For the construction of the second wall row massive collaboration of the surrounding territory – by then, still not officially integrating the jurisdictional *termo* – was required and systematically applied; better said: they were sharply imposed. It will be enough to verify the remaining medieval records to understand the level of the protests coming from the country against the successive obligations published in the city obliging the hinterland inhabitants to bring the stone needed in the wall-works, and to work in it or paying for it. This project went through great part of the fourteenth century (it ran for over three reigns, *D. Afonso IV*, *D. Pedro* and *D. Fernando*, until the 1380’s) and I believe it meant the decisive step for the official recognition of the city’s jurisdiction over the nearby territory, because no matter how strong the protests were, no matter how many bills of indictment, no matter how many appeals to the king’s court were sent, the wall was built and, in parallel, King *D. Fernando* had confirmed Porto’s jurisdiction over those lands through successive letters of privilege which continued until the next reign (of *João I*), when the process was completed.

The obvious intention of this city’s projection was to ensure tax revenues, labour force, and population augment. In time, when the city’s administration ran undisputedly over the surrounding area, identical requests were published. In the sixteenth-century an expensive street was opened, several arteries were paved, a solid-stone quay was built, and so were a castle and a fortress. And for all of these works, major contributions of those outside the city were required. With identical reactions than before: strong protests, complaints and refusal attempts from those who were ordered to pay or to work or to bring materials, burdens that from then-on would be borne systematically by the hinterland population.

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<sup>27</sup> The first one or at least the more noticeable was built in 1439.

Map 2  
Porto's jurisdiction and area of influence



Map 2 gives an idea about the mentioned political construction of the *termo* that became effective in the fourteenth century. Over the command of the city there was a region delimited at West by the sea, its natural exit and project of prosperity, and at East, composed by populated territories which guaranteed abundant labour force and essential merchandise for local consumption and trade.

In the final years of the fourteenth century, a very concrete strategy to reinforce domination over this territory was implemented, through the institution of the salt trade monopoly. This issue emphasises the process of hinterland domination by the city, and the continuation of the imposed cooperation process.

Since the early Middle Ages salt reached Porto mainly from Aveiro, approximately 80km south from the city. Salt production was very important in that region and some Porto's merchants and inhabitants owned saline's and managed significant business dispatching numerous ships with salt they stored and sold in warehouses placed near the city quays.

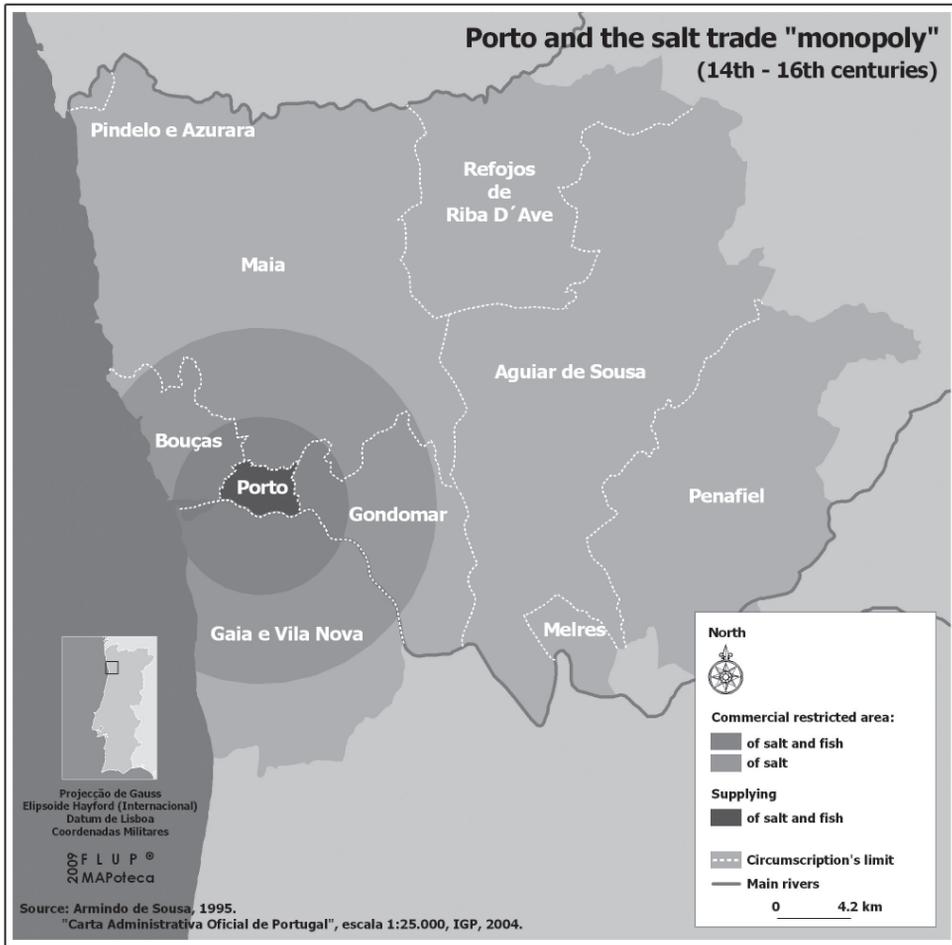
The salt possession became a key factor for the city's international trade, and very soon Porto achieved the monopoly of this commerce in northern Portugal, a statute that was sanctioned by the Crown and huge revenues obtained with this traffic flowed. Furthermore, the salt was exported throughout the Douro bar in the direction of the Galicia markets and, also to northern European staple centres. However, there was an issue to resolve. Next to the city, in the neighbourhood village of Matosinhos, an auxiliary port, from long time salt plants existed and they were explored for fishing purpose and trade. Within the city's strategy of affirmation as a

business centre, to allow such practice was a way to compromise the projected monopoly. The intention was that everyone interested in buying salt should have to go next to the city to get it, and would have to bring their own commodities in exchange. Otherwise, if there was possibility at buying salt outside the bar avoiding the awful risks for the navigation with its crossing, it was obvious for everyone that Porto's commerce would be seriously affected.

To admit that practice was to face profits reduction and to irremediably condemn the city's affirmation project to fail. So, with no further delay, still during the fourteenth century (1392), and with some violence applied in the process, Porto rulers, previously authorized by the king, destroyed the more than one hundred existent salt plants in Matosinhos and stipulated that everyone who wanted salt had to come and buy it exclusively in the city. From then-on local fishermen, for instance, were forced to satisfy their salt needs in the city and, as a matter of fact, they also started to work as salt transporters from Aveiro for Porto merchants.

This prohibition was stretched out; very soon, and to avoid smuggling, the commerce of fish was subjected to the same regime with its acquisition being headed into the town's markets. More than a matter of government, this was a matter of economic policy, and these ordinances were approved in the same spirit or course of action: to direct to the city the whole of the commercial movement, imposing economic practices.

Map 3  
Salt and fish trade monopolies

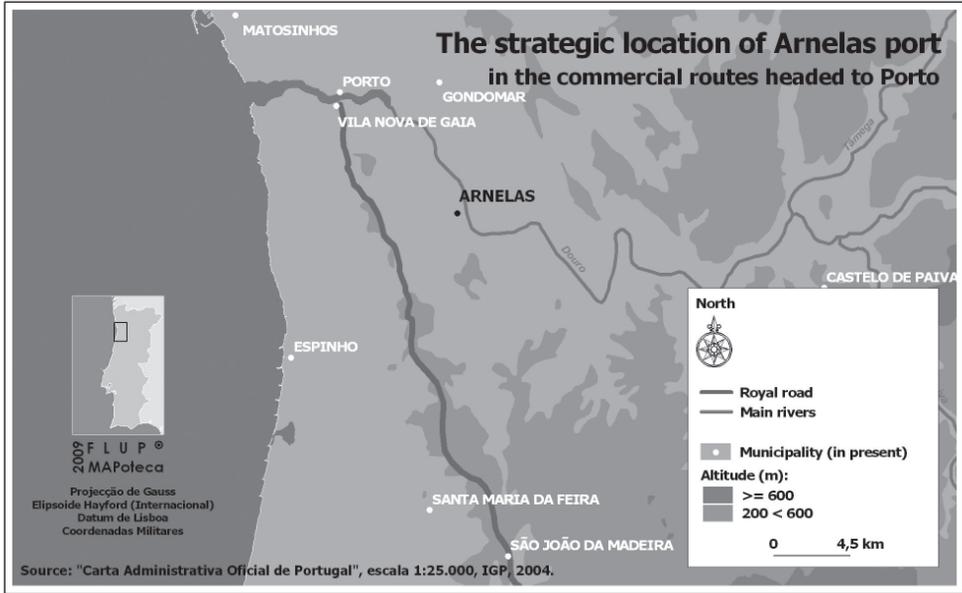


As a result of these rules, at some point also extended to leather trade, Porto became an international port and their merchant ships soon became engaged in transport operations throughout Europe<sup>28</sup>.

These solutions did not mean that the surveillance over the surrounding communities came to an ease. Holding jurisdictions was a very delicate problem in those times. The city was surrounded by groups of powerful men that could not wait to dispute them, and diverted economic routes in their favour. Thus, the Arnelas situation began.

<sup>28</sup> Actually, most of the international trade was performed far away from the city, since Porto masters chartered their ships to foreign merchants: for instance merchandise from Flanders to the Italian republics of Genoa and Florence, and from the Mediterranean ports to Northern Europe; BARROS, 2001: 259-295.

Map 4  
The *Arnelas* situation



4. The Count of *Feira*, landlord of an extensive territory located in the south of Douro River shore, was one of the most active competitors disputing the river traffic control with the city; and he had arguments to be a very tough one. The sixteenth century was running when the conflict between these two entities, the city's authority and the Count, reached higher proportions. And this argument burst when the Count tried to seize the revenues of the traffic.

By that time, there was a considerable traffic carried out by boats coming down the River with wine, sumac, olive oil, iron, forest products, especially wood for shipbuilding purpose, and other important commodities. There was in addition a very prosperous commerce of grain essential for Porto's inhabitant's daily life support. Bulky barges, later on known as *rabelos boats* (mainly specialized in wine transportation), were starting a long history of traffic headed to Porto, to its warehouses in order to feed city's needs. Very soon, however, trade went beyond these local requests and a large part of the commodities brought in were diverted to the merchant navy, to supply ships headed to the Atlantic settlements and to European ports feeding a medium and long-distance trade. That was the case of sumac, which was particularly interesting for the northern European textile and tanning industries, and was a profitable complementary for the trade carried out by national merchants and ships returned from the American routes. In a few words: by then Douro river traffic meant a lot for the city's merchant economy.

That is why their rulers could never admit any kind of interference that might damage that monopoly. The attitude adopted by the city's government can be contextualized within the

framework of river richness – meaning by controlling the boat traffic or the passage and crossing, or strategic and profitable nearby lands<sup>29</sup>.

Possessing the jurisdiction over some domain nearby the river, the Count tried to took advantage attracting it – or a big part of it – to a port under his jurisdiction. In 1553, using an old quay in the small village of Arnelas, 7,5 miles distant from Porto, on the left border, right next and outside the limits of the city, he decided to attract the boats and barges offering them better conditions by enlarging the structures of mooring and with tax reductions. He wanted to shift away from the city the boats that were sailing down the river loaded with sumacs and wines.

He also presented a supplementary argument to strongly enter the game: the Aveiro salt could easily reach that village, since the limits of his land reached closely to the salt territory and were served by an important road.

Like their equals in the fourteenth century, Porto's authorities reacted rapidly and firmly because they were aware of the serious danger that fact represented; and with the same efficiency. The city throw into the fight every trump available: for a start their representatives in the king's court managed to convince the sovereign of the inconvenience of such action; then, provided legal documents sanctioning their claims. With that, they managed to chase the traffic away from the anchorage post by threatening the ships owners with heavy fines and loss of personal goods.

In a matter of just a few months the question was resolved in favour of the city. The Arnelas project never flourished; the small village remained for centuries just a passage of the river served by a crossing barge, and only knew some liveliness during the realization of its annual fair.

Some few years later Porto's claims over the hinterland gained new dimension with a renewed Crown's support and recognition of its role. Besides international inclusion and commercial expansion, the seaport promotion and its articulation with the hinterland owe a great deal to the Spanish dynasty who ruled the country between 1580 and 1640. It was Phillip the second (first of Portugal) the founder of the provincial court seated in Porto, a judicial institution that reinforced the role of the city as a service provider for all Northern Portugal.

5. So far we have been seen relevant aspects of the political intervention of the city over the hinterland and adjacent territories, noticing an aggressive line of action with Royal support. This posture in fact meant imposed cooperation as well as self-organized initiative, although in some aspects an official central back-up was required to make them succeed. Now, an important part of the evolution regarding Porto and hinterland relations depended on the role performed by merchant communities within the Iberian Peninsula, their networks and the ties they established, the variety and range of business they performed, which were extremely important to improve an economic articulation and support.

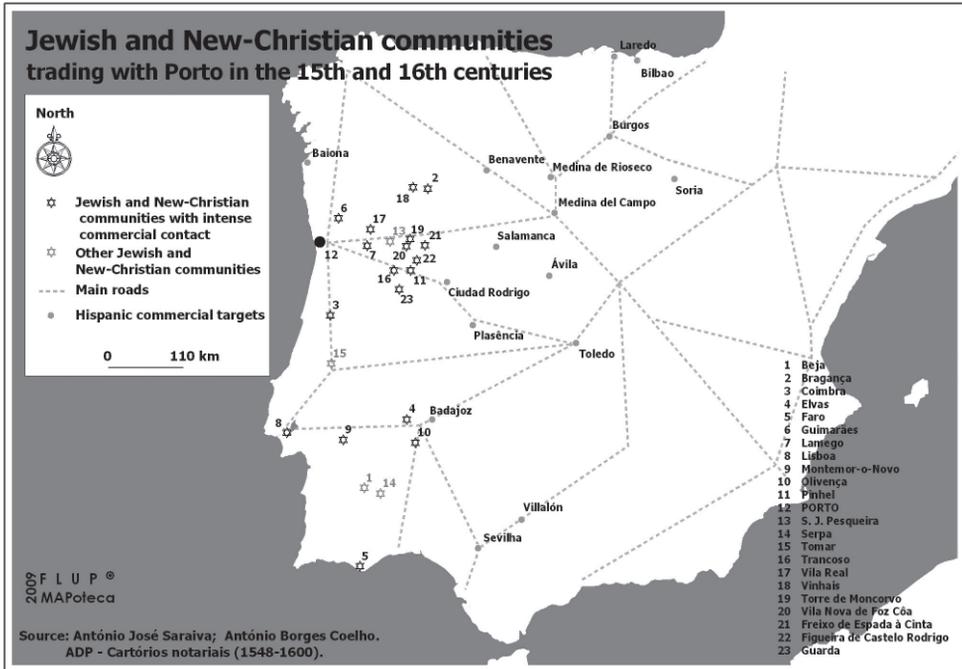
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<sup>29</sup> ROSSIAUD, 2007: 166.

Most of this was the outcome of Jewish and New-Christian (*Conversos*, in the Spanish world) interventions in the territory. In the following map we can observe the distribution of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries New-Christian communities that had developed intense economic connections with Porto.

Map 5

Jewish and New-Christian communities contacting with Porto (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries)



It is possible to notice the concentration of contact points in the northeast border of Portugal<sup>30</sup>, in the provinces of *Trás-os-Montes* and *Beira*. This delineation has its origins in the medieval period when Jewish communes settled in the bigger towns and next to communication lines, starting a process of economic improvement that would be especially enhanced by action of the New-Christian merchants in the sixteenth century<sup>31</sup>. For the most part they have been responsible for the decisive expansion of wine, sumac, leather and olive oil trade, making them

<sup>30</sup> Intentionally, there's no indication of national limits. These communities performed a role that goes beyond political borders, connecting and cooperating themselves in the context of an economical board that could not be limited by political issues.

<sup>31</sup> See BARROS, 2007: 877-896; DIAGO HERNANDO, 2002: 749-764. Both studies focus the fact that the installation of *conversos* communities near the border lines after de decree of expel published by the Spanish Catholic Kings (march, 31<sup>st</sup> 1492) had all to do with the fact they keep contacts in both sides, which they explore maintaining an intense activity and eventually returning to their places of origin although leaving representatives (of their own families) in Portugal. In the case of Porto, they founded a powerful colony (probably aggregating the local Jews which from now-on cease to be mentioned in the documentation) extremely noted in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as we will see ahead.

available to exportation, both for Europe and the Portuguese and Spanish Atlantic overseas settlements. Furthermore, they were the first ones to realize that the money should be applied in the Atlantic enterprises, in the rising economy of sugar, the American silver and slave trade. They were, somehow, the builders of the Atlantic system, in which they managed to involve all the Portuguese maritime communities, in contrast with the previous oriental expansion in which private participation was partially obstructed by a Royal monopoly<sup>32</sup>. And more: with this, they managed to involve hinterland and inland regions in the Portuguese Expansionist process, promoting interesting forms of co-operation between the city, the hinterland, the productive areas, and the overseas settlements, in order to fulfil new and complex European requirements.

The way these merchants got organized, in extensive, dynamic and functional networks, accomplishing business in all vital centres of Europe and the Atlantic world, justifies the level of wealth they achieved<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, thanks to their activities, in less than one hundred years Porto became a city internationally regarded as a vigorous commercial centre. They were responsible for the big push that dynamized the local economy by founding banks and promoting capitals flow and investments that benefited the local merchant maritime fleet and an extensive body of traders who were directly engaged in business<sup>34</sup>. They established fruitful relations with the most opulent European merchants, like Simón Ruiz and his company of Medina del Campo in Castille from where they created a system for sugar drainage into numerous places in Europe, namely Antwerp.

They created currents of distribution, played with the markets, invested in the purchase, sale and redistribution of hinterland products, took merchants at their service, and they were responsible for retailing international commodities such as English, Flemish and Castilian textiles and distributed them within provincial Portuguese centres<sup>35</sup>.

Of course they were not alone in the process. From a long time Porto was characterized by the high level of its trade. Merchants existed and worked very well since the Middle Ages both in trade and in government. They established commercial firms, invested significant capitals in long-distance trade, and managed to engage in important international ventures. The problem was that, at some point in time they became stagnated, more concerned with governance and politics which, in fact, they never cease to practise, and remained in charge of the political destinies of the city for centuries despite they became second in trade, behind the newcomers. Although some of them noticed advantages by entering in an alliance with the New-Christian merchants, the majority remained separated, in their aristocratic pedestal. In fact, from merchants

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<sup>32</sup> Although new research contributions disclose ways of participation which study must be continued and deepened. See BARROS, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Portuguese traders were, with the Spanish, the ones responsible for the most important trade (trade of high price commodities) in Antwerp in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century; see SICKING, 2006: 799-800.

<sup>34</sup> More than 20 per cent of the city's inhabitants dedicated themselves to trade; actually they were registered like that; however, we have to consider that the 16<sup>th</sup> century way of life, in Porto, was marked by something that we can define as pluriactivity which means that the majority of the city, at some point, became committed within trade operations even at an international level. Ribeiro da Silva, 1988: 113-117, points some figures for Porto's Early Modern Society.

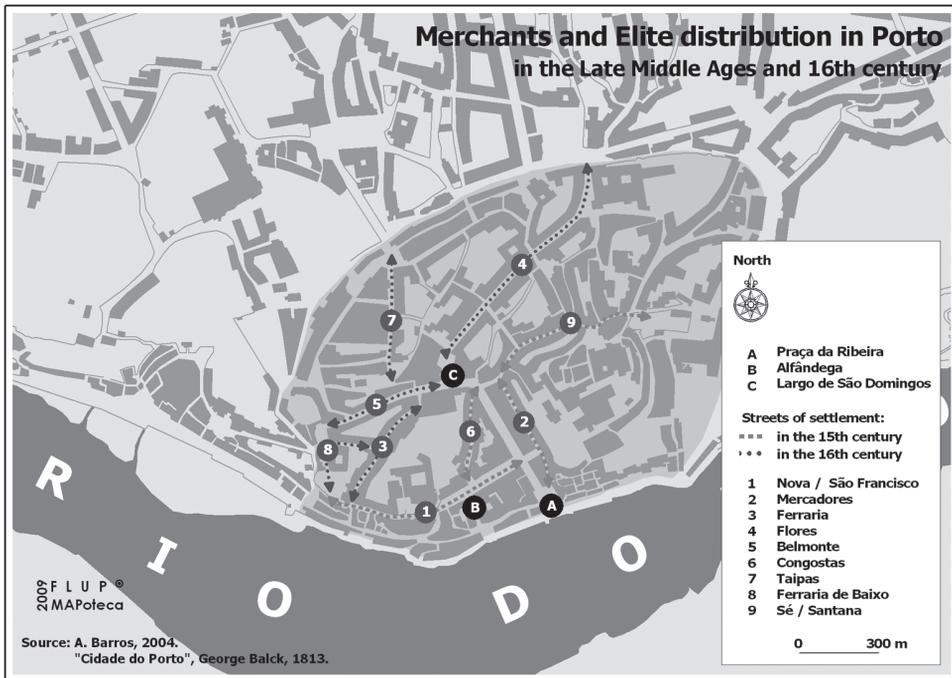
<sup>35</sup> Textile products were, in fact, decisive in what we can call the integration of the Iberian economy in the Atlantic and European contexts; see LUCAS VILLANUEVA, 2005. See also CASADO ALONSO, 2007.

they changed into elite, in most ways showing medieval mentality<sup>36</sup>, somehow responsible for the cleavage between the city's mercantile groups.

So, the government of the city stayed in the hands of the old merchant dynasties in charge. Sometimes deciding things in favour of their New-Christian rivals when they believed the higher interests of the city were at stake, but many times disputing their contestant's wealth<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, and in my point of view quite interesting, was the rivalry between both groups in the district city streets the two groups chose to live in, as if this arrangement created two different cities: one medieval, close to the cathedral, a part of the town's old memories, and the other a new one, Northern-European Renaissance style from where the Atlantic ventures were designed.

### Map 6

Merchants neighbourhoods in Porto, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries



Having at their disposal a solid background that was offered by the hinterland and the continental contact areas, very well incremented by the richness of the Atlantic trade they performed, Porto's merchants had built a solid commercial network that enable them to participate directly in the growth of the sixteenth century international trade.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, they start to invest in land and property in the province acting like noblemen.

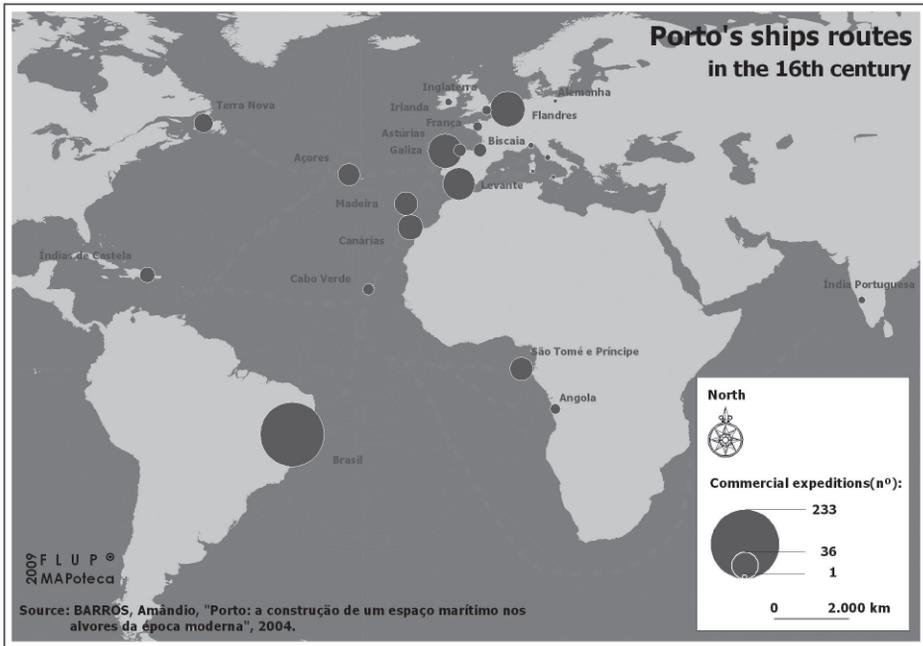
<sup>37</sup> Exemplos de defesa dos interesses, questionar o papel da Inquisição que, se não foi requerida pelos velhos mercadores pelo menos não parece ter sido contestada com firmeza.

They had actually built a trade centre at a global scale from Porto whose wealth, as we have seen, derived from Brazilian sugar and Douro commodities. They were connected with financiers in Lisbon, Madrid, Antwerp, and Lyon dislocating commodities, speculating and developing trade networks on self-organized basis that were responsible for the promotion of ports and maritime communities related with the Atlantic enterprises.

We cannot think of this in terms of a huge flow of capitals and goods from each one of this ports and small centres; however, the sum of all the trades and relations developed from them matters. If we look closely to the figures of imports of Brazilian sugar, for instance, from Porto, Viana do Castelo and Vila do Conde in the last quarter of the sixteenth century<sup>38</sup>, we can easily reach to the conclusion that the Northwest Portuguese ports were one of the main sugar entrances in Europe<sup>39</sup>.

Map 7

Intensity and directions of Porto trade in the sixteenth century



6. That statute would remain in the early decades of the seventeenth century. However, conditions were about to change. If Brazil, in the eve of another huge contribution to the world economy (I mean, the one represented by the discovery of gold mines and the gold flows in the first half of the eighteenth century), kept on being a referential for the commercial system

<sup>38</sup> Despite the fragmentary character of this figures, due to the lack of consistent records.

<sup>39</sup> There are a lot of contracts that explicitly point the fact that the sugar transported should be laded to Porto, or Viana, and not to Lisbon, because this port was jammed with other traffics.

managed from Porto, the concurrence led by Dutch and English in the Atlantic<sup>40</sup> pushed the search for alternatives. These were looked for within the home territory and, definitely in the Douro valley. The once modest wine explorations became extensive vineyards, the *quintas* that mean the future *Port-wine quintas*. And a new era of business between the city and the hinterland went underway, as well as a new opportunity for the landlords, most of them descendents from the old medieval urban elite, started. Taking advantage of the international context wine shipments were massively direct to the European markets, mainly in Britain, and in parallel, to the Portuguese overseas settlements.

That fact meant the final step in the process towards an articulated economy, which was, most of all, the result of the river navigability. The interest put on the works launched in order to make effective and efficient the traffic in the Douro river displayed all the interest the city had in that region, vital to its business, and, at the same time, the notion that the homeland market articulation would be a valuable asset to the city's commerce. That represented as well, a form of co-operation and also a way of promoting a broad attention and interest towards the port activity. Although the first attempts to remove obstacles were made in the sixteenth century<sup>41</sup>, it was only during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – especially in this last one – when the real works were actually carried out. Obstacles such as river fishing tackles and, especially, the rocks that existed all over the canal, as well as the river-fall of Cachão da Valeira which totally obstructed the navigation, were the main concerns. We must keep in mind that due to the geographical accidents (high lands and sparse roads), land communications between the city and the province were very hard to accomplish. They meant also an impediment to the real development of the Douro valley region and its wine economy. At the same time, a set of major works were executed in the bar entry by removing some of the most dangerous reefs that obstructed it and made the navigation headed to Porto extremely hazardous. One of the most significant interventions consisted in the creation, in 1584, of an official body of bar pilots by initiative of the Municipality and sanctioned by the King<sup>42</sup>. Coasts that would have to be supported by trade revenues and tax reduction or exemption.

Although progress was made throughout the Early Modern Age, it was only after 1788-1792, when the Valeira fall was removed that a new era of relations between the littoral and the interior began. Most of all, a direct navigation became possible making easier the economic flow in the territory. From then-on, the river Douro became, definitely, the fastest and cheaper line of communication and way out of Douro province and Northern Portugal products to Porto, making effective the potentialities and the articulation between the littoral and the interior.

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<sup>40</sup> The rise of long-distance colonial Dutch commerce and its paramount importance for the whole Dutch society and world trade dates from the 1590s; ISRAEL, 1995: 311, 313, 315-327. Despite the difficulties of central government resources to shape an overseas policy and a massive interest in overseas commitments, English entrepreneurs managed to achieve important positions in the Atlantic world; see the various essays published in CANNY, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> In fact, before 1531 attempts to destroy some rocks in the river with “vinegar fire” were made; see FERNANDES, 1531 [2001]: 95.

<sup>42</sup> BARROS, 2004, I: 124. It's important to observe that an existing bar-piloting service already existed in the city since the Middle Ages although not in official terms and contracted whenever was necessary by the masters and ship captains.

Being a long-time hub of intense networks and maritime connections, Porto's maritime economy, although from then-on dominated by wine trade, remain as a cluster where immigrants from the countryside found job opportunities both in the city and their merchant marine or, through it, access to the overseas regions.

Nevertheless, the vigour of old times was somehow lost, at least in self-initiative and leading roles once performed. The fact is that, in Porto, the language of the business changed, more and more, into English, and, for the most part, international trade became dependable on the British demand. And a new financier system was introduced, with great consequences: the foreign finance assumed the investment in rural estate and agrarian structures vocationed to wine production which proves again the economic articulation between the city and the hinterland. That led also to the growing of the State intervention reinforcing the presence of the central policy in the economic activity. Those were the days of the monopolistic companies, especially the Port-Wine Trade and Agriculture Company (*Companhia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro*), established by Pombal in 1756, which represented the decrease of small merchants and small investors opportunities, and an attempt to control foreign agrarian investment by the regulation of the first demarcated wine region in the world. Although at a certain point successful, these politics were compromised by the dismissal of Pombal from government, and the international economic context dominated by the English<sup>43</sup>. The British colony in Porto grew extremely quickly, and an English factory was established in the heart of the city, in the medieval place once called "New Street" that soon changed its name into "The New Street of the Englishmen".

#### Acronyms

ADP = Arquivo Distrital do Porto

AHMP = Arquivo Histórico Municipal do Porto

TT = Torre do Tombo

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