

John Dos Passos on the Portuguese Migration: Analyzing The Portugal Story: Three Centuries of Exploration and Discovery

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Abstract:

The historian John Dos Passos became interested in the history of his forebears' country. His research led to the publication of a study that he entitled *The Portugal Story: Three Centuries of Exploration and Discovery*. With this text, published in 1969, Dos Passos showed great interest in his ancestors' past and proudly evoked the high tide of Portuguese history; he also described heroically the role of the Marquis of Pombal during the great earthquake in Lisbon. He left beyond the scope of his work the current situation of his day—namely, Portugal under the dictatorships of Salazar and Caetano.

Keywords:

John Dos Passos, Portuguese history, Marquis of Pombal

Resumo:

O historiador John Dos Passos se interessou pela história do país de seus antepassados. Sua pesquisa levou à publicação de um estudo intitulado *A História de Portugal: Três Séculos de Exploração e Descobrimento*. Com este texto, publicado em 1969, Dos Passos demonstrou grande interesse no passado de seus antepassados e evocou com orgulho a época gloriosa da história portuguesa. Ele também descreveu heroicamente o papel do Marquês de Pombal durante o grande terremoto em Lisboa. Ele deixa fora do âmbito de sua obra a situação contemporânea de sua época—isto é, Portugal sob os ditadores Salazar e Caetano.

Palavras-chave:

John Dos Passos, história portuguesa, Marquês de Pombal

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The late John Dos Passos grew interested in the history of his forebears' country. He engaged in research, which led to the publication of a study that he entitled *The Portugal Story: Three Centuries of Exploration and Discovery*. As its title may suggest, it was not just another ordinary history book, but John Dos Passos's personal view on his selection of moments in Portuguese history, mainly its more glorious chapters. *The Portugal Story* opens with the *Völkervanderung* (the early European migration period). Various tribes such as the Romans had come to the territory, today known as Portugal, where they settled, and from where they were driven out by "hungry peoples of Germanic origins and speech," who "began to pour down through the passes of the Pyrenees. Of these the . . . Vandals merely looted the countryside and moved on into richer lands in the south" (*Portugal* 7). It was the Swabians, Dos Passos pointed out, who originated "from Saxony and Thuringia," but also from a non-Germanic tribe called the Visigoths, who "came to stay" (*Portugal* 7). As to the Swabians, Dos Passos added that in

the course of their migration south they mixed with Celtic peoples along the River Main, with the result that their culture was not too different from that of the Celts who had originally settled the country. They blended easily with the Romanized peasantry. Basically the Swabians were a people of small landowners who lived in detached houses separated from the villages. They found the soil and rainfall suitable to the crops they were accustomed to in Central Germany. (*Portugal* 7)

Pertaining to the Visigoths, he wrote, they "were a pastoral race. They came from the grazing lands north of the Black Sea" (*Portugal* 7). Whereas "the Swabians established a kingdom which included Galicia and northern Portugal," whose capital was to become Braga, "the Visigoths became the overlords of the central tableland and made their capital at Toledo" (*Portugal* 8). Concerning "the serfs bound to the land who produced the food," Dos Passos claimed their lives "hardly changed" under the rule of their invaders (*Portugal* 8).

"[A]round 447," the Swabians converted "to Christianity." "The church became the most powerful social bond," while "Braga became a powerful religious center" (*Portugal* 8). Garrisons under the Visigoths ended Swabian independence. Even the "Visigothic empire lasted not much more than a century" (*Portugal* 8). New invaders were conquering the Iberian Peninsula. Ever since 711, Arabs controlled the territory.

[The] Moslems subjugated the peninsula with incredible speed. By 715 they were ravaging the Atlantic coast. The Algarve was already Moslem. It was the Arabs who gave that region its name, which means "the West." They conquered Alcácer do Sal, Evora and Lisbon. Only north of the Douro did they meet any resistance. Portucale (now Oporto), and Braga showed fight and were laid waste. The same fate overtook Tuy, Orense and Lugo in Galicia. (*Portugal* 8)

Moslems coming "from Egypt settled Faro and Beja. [...] Others fortified Lisbon and started the palace at Sintra which remains the most visible monument of the Moorish occupation in Portugal" (*Portugal* 9). Jews had also come to the realm, now ruled by caliphs who "not only tolerated the Jews but cherished their scholarship" (*Portugal* 9-10). The Christians tried to reconquer the country and drive off the Moslems. Gradually, they succeeded, and it became the policy of Afonso I "to resettle localities considered safe from Moorish raids" (*Portugal* 14). Those captured cities "were razed" and "their infidel inhabitants slaughtered" (*Portugal* 14). Some cities were lost again and "[i]ncessant raiding and plundering back and forth made settled life impossible on a broad band across the peninsula" (*Portugal* 14). In the end, "Alfonso

reconquered from the Moors a large slice of Portuguese territory, including Montemór and Coimbra. He occupied Lisbon and Santarém and . . . restored the ancient bishopric of Braga” (*Portugal* 16). Shortly before Braga was reestablished to the Portuguese, the Archbishop John Peculiar “made a long speech, calling on the Moors to depart in peace, with their women and children and their money and goods, from the city which they had unjustly held for so many years” (*Portugal* 28). The Moors refused. Some were killed; others, numbering some “fifteen thousand men[,] allowed themselves to be taken prisoner.” In Almada, “eighty heads of slain Moors” were “impaled on pikes” to scare the remaining Moors out of the country (*Portugal* 29). Eventually, they were driven off “the lands south of the Tagus” (*Portugal* 37). “After the expulsion of the Moslems,” “English trade” augmented significantly with Portugal (*Portugal* 45). Many Englishmen settled permanently in Lisbon, Porto, Faro, and Madeira to control the Portuguese trade with England, importing textiles and exporting Portuguese wine, salt and fruits to England. The trade with England brought in some wealth, but it was only with the explorations that Portugal became immensely rich.

John Dos Passos was very much interested in the period of discoveries, as he showed in the book’s subtitle. Due to his own ancestry, Dos Passos was much interested in the discovery of the Madeiran archipelagoes by João Gonçalves Zarco and Tristão Vaz Teixeira, who after a rough voyage “found safe harbor in an island. There were no inhabitants, no wild beasts, the place was well watered and had fertile air. They sailed back to tell their story to the prince” (*Portugal* 92). Prince Henry ordered them “back with a group of husbandmen and the equipment needed to establish a settlement on this island which they named Pôrto Santo” (*Portugal* 92).

Everything was fine on Pôrto Santo except for the rabbits. They bred so fast that they ate up the settlers’ crops. A couple of years later Zarco and Teixeira determined to explore further. They had been perplexed by a perpetual cloud that hung over the horizon to the southwest. (*Portugal* 92-93)

Under the clouds and the fog, they found another uninhabited island, with “forests” of “enormous trees.” “They called the island Madeira which means wood” (*Portugal* 93). Prince Henry ordered “the governorship of the island [to be divided] between Zarco and Teixeira.” Zarco became responsible for the captaincy of Funchal and the whole West, while Teixeira assumed the captaincy of Machico, and along with it the east of the island. A man named Bartolomeo Perestrelo was sent “to Pôrto Santo with a load of cattle to take over the management there.” People from Portugal, including convicts, were sent to these three captaincies to settle the islands in the name of the Portuguese monarch. “The soil,” Dos Passos wrote, “proved unbelievably fertile. The climate was perpetual spring. Every crop flourished there. Wheat yielded sixtyfold. Cattle thrived. Prince Henry sent vines [such as the Malvoisie] from Sicily and sugar cane” (*Portugal* 93). Cattle was raised at the Desertas, which consisted of a “tiny group” of deserted islands in the archipelago. The settlers “prospered mightily from the sugar, hides, honey and beeswax, cedarwood and yew they shipped to the mainland” (*Portugal* 93). An early immigrant to Madeira was to interest John Dos Passos greatly. Christopher Columbus had come to Lisbon from Genoa. It was in Lisbon that he was supposed to have learned “to read and write.” He “is said to have supported himself by hawking printed books and later by drafting maps” (*Portugal* 142). In 1478, Christopher Columbus “was employed . . . to purchase a shipload of Madeira sugar in Funchal and to transport it to Genoa.” In the meantime, Columbus met “the daughter of the Bartolomeo Perestrelo whom Prince Henry had made Captain General of Pôrto Santo.” He married D. Felipa Moniz and settled with her on the little island (*Portugal* 142-43). Whether Columbus became a citizen of the Portuguese

kingdom remains uncertain; Dos Passos thought it “likely that during this period of his life he was considered Portuguese.” This might have been important, since a member of the court “petitioned King John to rid the country of the swarming Genoese who served no function except to spy on the Guinea trade and on the discoveries being made among the western islands.” John II did not assent. To the contrary, the king’s “feeling seems to have been that Portugal stood to gain from the immigration of Italians . . . who brought in such valuable crafts as mapmaking and printing” (*Portugal* 146-47). Anyway, it might be assumed Columbus had no need to fear expulsion because he had married a “high-born wife” (*Portugal* 149). Nonetheless, Columbus decided to leave Portugal in 1485, when his wife died; finding himself with large debts, he left for Castile with his son Diego (*Portugal* 149). After discussing Columbus, Dos Passos proceeded to speak on Pedro de Covilhã, who “was the first Portuguese to set foot in India,” and would open the spice trade by land to the Portuguese (*Portugal* 155). Covilhã had been a spy of

the royal guard. Since he spoke Castilian like a native he was detailed to watch the doings of the emigré Portuguese nobles at the Spanish court. . . . Covilhã was to disguise himself as a merchant and make his way to Cairo. Secrecy was essential because the Castilians, the Venetians and the Barcelona shipowners all had agents out in search of the sources of the spice trade. (*Portugal* 154)

The Portuguese would fully control the spices trade after Bartolomeu Dias’s success in circumnavigating the Cape of Good Hope, in South Africa, and after Vasco da Gama’s discovery of the sea route to India. Portuguese men were now much needed to serve the interest of the crown in the Orient. “The captain major sent off . . . *degredados*,” that “were mostly young men, many of them of noble birth,” who had been sentenced “for various crimes and misdemeanors” and now saw their release in “exile”—that is, they had “to embark for the Indies and there” they had “to undertake any dangerous mission offered them” (*Portugal* 172-73). The voyage was hard. On the ships, built at the famous Portuguese “shipyards,” there “was no proper sanitation Each passenger was supposed to bring along his own food. Water was insufficient or putrid. Out of six to eight hundred passengers and men-at-arms crowded aboard half would die before they reached India” (*Portugal* 359-60).

Soldiers were sent to the Orient to protect the king’s interests and secure the Portuguese merchants. Of course, the establishment of Portuguese trade in India had not been an easy task. The Moors resisted heavily to the loss of their dominion of the spice traffic. It should be noted that Dos Passos paid attention to the violence at the time, in which not even the lives of women nor children were spared. Furthermore, the religious concerns of the period did not go unheeded by Dos Passos. When a Portuguese trading post was attacked by Moorish merchants in Calicut, Vasco da Gama gave orders to “set on fire with gunpowder” a Moorish ship that was just arriving from Mecca. Aboard were men, women and children, which were ordered to be burned. Only some twenty children were spared and taken as forced immigrants “to Portugal to be raised as Christians by . . . monks of Our Lady of Belém” (*Portugal* 216).

At other Portuguese trade posts, Moors “raised a great turmoil and assaulted” the Portuguese traders, some of whom they killed. This time it was Pedro Cabral who responded, “by capturing all the Moorish ships in the harbor and slaughtering those of their crews he could lay hands on. His men appropriated all the merchandise they found on the ships and then burned them” (*Portugal* 201). Meanwhile, in the harbor of Kilwa “the Portuguese crews roamed the city, plundering” the inhabitants. About two hundred “women of the Moslem harems” were

taken on board of da Gama's ship. They were brought to the Portuguese "trading posts at Cananor and Cochin" (*Portugal* 214-15). Some of them were brought to Portugal to be converted to Christianity. Furthermore, Afonso de Albuquerque became engaged in the conquering of the Indian harbors, which he found strategic for the spice trade. By the time he "was installed as governor of India," he was "fifty-six years old." Dos Passos described Albuquerque from a sketch drawn by Gaspar Correa, which showed the Indian governor "as a smallish, dour man with very large eyes, a very long nose and a beard that reached to his belt. His finger is raised in a gesture of admonition" (*Portugal* 233). When Albuquerque had arrived at Goa, the city was

in the hands of Turkish and Persian mercenaries. On St. Catherine's day Albuquerque took the city by storm. . . . [H]e decided to clean out the "Moors" for good. The great majority had fled during the fighting. Hundreds were drowned trying to escape in boats and became food for the crocodiles. Saving alive a few of the best-looking women to serve as wives for his troops and some children to bring up as Christians, he ordered the rest, men, women and children, put to the sword. (*Portugal* 237)

Afonso de Albuquerque wanted his men to take Moorish wives. He saw amalgamation as a tactic to achieve his goal to make the town Portuguese. "He urged all of his people who were . . . in Goa to marry and proselyte. Goa he assured them would [herewith] remain Christian and Portuguese till the end of time" (*Portugal* 238).

At Malacca, the harbors were full of merchants from several other nations who tried to establish permanent trading posts: "The port was full of a diversity of rigs, Hindu ships from Cambaia, Malay prams, Chinese junks, Arab dhows of every size, Shinalese cinnamon boats, vessels from Pegu and Java and from Riukiu Islands off Japan. Each of these nationalities had separate quarters in the city, ruled by their own headman..." (*Portugal* 238-39).

Albuquerque, who just had sacked the city of Malay, "insisted on building a castle and setting up a Portuguese government to take the place of the Malay overlordship." He "allowed the native inhabitants, . . . the various foreign settlements; . . . to manage their own affairs," as long as they did not interfere with Portuguese interests (*Portugal* 242).

After a couple of years, Albuquerque was to fall ill with dysentery. King Manuel, so he had heard,

was planning to recall him and to endow him with a rich county so that he could at last . . . rest from his labors. This news depressed Albuquerque immensely. Some day he might go home and "lean on the handle of a hoe," he said, but first he had to conquer Aden. "Portugal is a small country. What honor is there in Portugal equal to the government of India?" (*Portugal* 255)

When, finally, the new governor arrived at Goa, "with new captains appointed to command all the fortresses,"

Albuquerque's health took a turn for the worse. . . . He asked to be buried in the chapel of Our Lady of the Mountain, which he'd had built in Goa. His house furnishings he asked to be sent to his sister in Portugal, the proceeds to be spent on the education of a small boy she was raising who was rumored . . . to be his own son. In his last letter to King Manoel he asked that whatever pensions or emoluments

might have been destined for him should be paid to his son Blas. Blas was half-Negro. Years later under the name of Afonso de Albuquerque he was to write a worshipful history of his father's exploits. (*Portugal* 255)

Already in 1921, when John Dos Passos went to Portugal with E. E. Cummings, he had tried to read *Os Lusíadas* by Luís Vaz de Camões, whose "introductory poem" Dos Passos "considered to be the first printed work of a frustrated exile" (*Portugal* 340-41).

He became so much immersed in Camões's life and work that he dedicated to him, in *The Portugal Story*, a short biographical sketch. "It was Camões' fate to live in the period when Portuguese expansion began to falter," Dos Passos recorded. "His poetry accomplished the apotheosis of the enterprise of the Indies. In some ways he can be said to have written its epitaph" (*Portugal* 344). Dos Passos assumed "Camões was . . . born in Lisbon in 1524," presuming further that his family must have been of the "lesser gentry": "His father, of whom he saw very little, is said to have been a sea captain and to have died in Goa from exposure when his ship was wrecked off the bar. There was learning in the family. Luis's uncle Bento de Camões . . . became chancellor of the university of Coimbra . . ." (*Portugal* 344). "Luis was sent to study there," when he was thirteen years old. "In his very early twenties he left Coimbra and went back to Lisbon to seek his fortune" (*Portugal* 345). He started to write some comedies, but he could hardly make a living out of it. Instead of substituting Gil Vicente—"the court dramatist" who had just "stopped writing" most likely because "he was silenced by fear of the Inquisition," since "Vicente's reformist ideas were becoming dangerous"—Camões "was employed as a tutor in the household of a member of the Noronha family who had been ambassador to France." Still he "remained dirt poor." "Camões was a man of bravado" with "a genius for getting into scrapes." "Some scandal" forced Camões to enlist "for service in Morocco . . . [to] wash out his disgrace" (*Portugal* 344-45). There he "lost his right eye in an engagement with the Moslems." He went back to Lisbon "with a wound in the king's service to his credit." Nonetheless, he got again "into a brawl," this time

during the Corpus Christi procession. To make it worse the man he wounded with a sword thrust was a gentleman of the court. Camões was sentenced to nine months in prison. After serving most of his term he was pardoned by the king at the request of the very gentleman he had wounded. There must have been a feeling in court circles that they were dealing with no ordinary man. The terms of the reprieve were that he should depart from Portugal immediately to serve the king in India. (*Portugal* 346)

It was in 1553 that Camões "sailed on the great galleon *São Bento*" towards Goa. On board he worked on "celebrating the triumphs of Portuguese seamanship," fully aware that "shipwreck [had become] the nightmare of the India trade." In fact, "stories of drowning and disaster were being put on paper that made such gruesome reading when they were later collected [by Bernardo Gomes de Brito] in the *História Trágica Marítima*." As soon as Camões arrived, he "found plenty to occupy him," taking "part in expeditions." Afterwards Camões went on to Macao. But as Dos Passos stated, "[t]hings went wrong in Macao." Some years later, he "was recalled to Goa" (*Portugal* 346-47):

On the way his ship was wrecked . . . Out of the whatever cash or goods he may have accumulated in Macao all he saved was a bundle of manuscript. . . .

[H]e lingered on in Goa, penniless and discredited, until a friend . . . gave him a lift to Moçambique. There he spent two miserable years trying to borrow money for

his passage home. Diogo de Couto, the historian, who saw him there in 1569 . . . chipped in for the poet's passage to Lisbon. (*Portugal* 347)

Finally, the exile returned home. Luís Camões hardly recognized his country of birth. "Lisbon was barely recovering from a visitation of the plague. A hundred years of neglect of agriculture and the draining off of men to India had left the kingdom dependent on imports of grain and salt meats and cured fish from Flanders" (*Portugal* 347). As per Dos Passos, "at forty-six [Camões] was a worn-out man. He was a stranger in the city he had known so well. Most of his friends were dead. His aged mother was his only human tie. . . . Intellectual life was at a dead end. Prosecution by the Holy Office had scattered the humanist scholars at Coimbra" (*Portugal* 348).

Even Luís de Camões's *The Lusiads*¹ was not spared from investigation by the Inquisition, though "the censor . . . found 'nothing scandalous in the poem, on the contrary faith and good morals,' but he wrote that he should warn the reader against the poet's use of fictitious gods and goddesses: 'This is all poesy and fiction and the author as a poet pretends to nothing but to ornament the poetic style'" (*Portugal* 349).

The discoveries and the triumph of the Portuguese colonies, about which Camões² wrote so much, had been accompanied by the capture and enslavement of the natives in Africa and in the Orient. "The Indians, who at first had seemed so submissive, were proving unruly" (*Portugal* 364); the Portuguese preferred to enslave Africans, whom they found more obedient and more productive. It was around 1444, that "the enterprising Nuno Tristão sailed his caravel far south of Cabo Branco to the land of the true Negroes." The Portuguese started selling African slaves, to the point of trying to monopolize completely the slave trade on the African continent. "[T]heir chief wealth," they supposed, "lay in the Negroes they captured and traded with the Moroccans for wheat" (*Portugal* 118). "Already the Portuguese were shipping a thousand slaves north every year" (*Portugal* 126). Many slave ships departed from Africa, stopping over at the Azores or Madeira, proceeding from there to Lisbon. It was in the Portuguese capital that "public officials . . . inspected the cargo and the papers and set prices for the slaves." "[N]ine to fourteen slaves," for instance, could have been exchanged for a "good horse" (*Portugal* 126). Not all slaves arrived in Lisbon in such good condition that they could have been sold immediately.³ In *The Portugal Story*, Dos Passos observed the contrary, though: "Since many of [the slaves] had been much weakened in transit it was decided to make the distribution to the various owners before day in the morning" (*Portugal* 116). John Dos Passos goes on describing the sorrow of the slaves right as they came ashore by quoting Azurara, an historic source:

"Some kept their heads low and their faces bathed in tears, others stood groaning grievously fixing their eyes upon the height of heaven, crying out loud, as if asking help of the Father of Nature; others, with their faces in the palms of their hands, threw themselves at full length on the ground." In order to divide them into equal portions, "fathers were parted from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from brothers." (*Portugal* 116)

¹ John Dos Passos compared *The Lusiads* to Homer's *Odyssey* describing the poem as "an epic of the sea" (349).

² Today, Camões is considered the most important among the Portuguese poets. When he died, though, there was "nobody to claim his body." Somewhat ashamed, Dos Passos noted that he was "buried in a pauper's grave" (351).

³ See Klaus Bade's 2008 collection *Enzyklopädie, Migration in Europa, Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*.

Many of the Africans were scared, because they had heard that “the Christians . . . were bad men” who captured the “Negroes to take home to eat” (*Portugal* 128-29). Concerning their distribution, some slaves remained in Lisbon, whereas many were brought to other Portuguese regions, primarily the South, or were sold to other countries. Actually, one of the main purchasers was Spain. In Portugal, slaves were employed in agriculture during harvesting, or they worked in manufactories, such as in “soap plants,” or as “helpers of storekeepers,” or at printing shops (Bade 365; my translation). Slaves were accused of taking away jobs; hence, the poorer people of the Portuguese society treated them with contempt. Female slaves often worked as maids or became concubines. The way slaves were treated largely depended on their owner’s humor. Slaves could have been freed or they could have bought themselves out of slavery, as indicated by Dos Passos; those slaves the Portuguese “saw fitted for managing property they set free and married to women who were natives of the land” (Azurara, quoted in *Portugal* 117). Straight away, the Portuguese were converting their slaves to Christianity: “as soon as they understood [the] language they turned Christian with very little ado” (Azurara, quoted in *Portugal* 117).

Another theme deeply interconnected with Portuguese migration, and which John Dos Passos found extraordinarily interesting, was bound to the Sephardim,⁴ the Jews in the Iberian Peninsula.

The Jewish diaspora⁵ is claimed to have begun in 722 B.C. with the conquering and enslaving of the Jewish population; they were forced out of their nation and sold as slaves to foreign countries. For centuries, they found themselves dispersed throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Even there, however, “the Jews were periodically persecuted, massacred, or expelled en masse” (Sowell 70). Portugal was no exception in that regard. Frequently, “Jews became tax collectors and other government officials and advisors. Association with political power holders brought some individual or group protection, but it also made Jews hated by enemies of the regime and especially likely to become targets in the event of its overthrow” (Sowell 73). Initially the Jews were welcomed, such as under the reign of Dom Pedro, who appointed a Jew “under the name of Moise Navarro . . . his court treasurer” (*Portugal* 49). Still, to “the common people the Jews were the descendants of Judas who had betrayed the Savior for thirty pieces of silver” (*Portugal* 187). Jews were excluded; they had to live in the *judiaria*, a quarter in which “the Jews had to wear the [red] star of David on their breasts and were forbidden to leave” their district. “The Jews still retained their own courts and tribunals . . . and held offices of responsibility under the royal administration” (*Portugal* 80, 186). Dos Passos considered “the Jewish community . . . a state within the state” (*Portugal* 186). Dom Pedro was known to protect the *judería*⁶ in Lisbon; he recognized the Jewish skill and professionalism. Among the Jews in Portugal were major property-owners, moneylenders, bankers, physicians, “manufacturers and small merchants” (*Portugal* 80). When two noblemen killed an inhabitant of the *judiaria*, the king ordered them beheaded.

Master John of Avis would also protect the *judiaria*. The day a mob rose to “plunder the Jews” the “Count of Barcelos and the Master” of Avis

⁴ The Sephardim differed culturally from the Ashkenazim; the former had moved to the Mediterranean countries Spain and Portugal, while the latter had lived in Germany and other countries in Central and Western Europe. Although both groups were still Jewish, the Sephardim had interiorized some Iberian traditions, whereas the traditions of the Ashkenazim had fused with the culture predominant in Germany and several Slavic countries.

⁵ The term *diaspora*, which in Greek means “dispersion,” refers to the forced displacement of a massive number of people to many other places. The word is frequently associated with Jews, who, indeed, were driven out of the kingdom of Judah, long before Christian times.

⁶ Dos Passos used to write the word *judería* as in Spanish, and not *judiaria*, as in Portuguese.

rode out to the judería to dissuade them. The Master told the chief judge to announce in the queen's name that no one must go into the judería or to do harm to the Jews. . . .

The Master and his friends had a hard time persuading the mob not to massacre . . . the Jews. Someone got the idea that the best thing to do was to ride away. If they moved off the people would follow. [So they] did. (*Portugal* 60)

The importance of the Jews in Portuguese society was recorded in Portuguese arts, as given by Dos Passos: “when Nuno Gonçalves executed his great panels, which constitute the chief glory of Portuguese painting, the grand rabbi of Lisbon, with an open torah in his hands, is represented along with King Afonso VI and Prince Henry and the bishops and dignitaries of the realm, among the throng adoring Lisbon's patron saint” (*Portugal* 80). It was under John II, and also under Manuel I, that anti-Semitism rose again to extremes. The “kingdoms subject to Castille” forced many Jews out, who immigrated to Portugal. “With each new outburst, refugees, many of them bringing great fortunes and valuable skills, crossed the border into Portugal” (*Portugal* 187). By that time it was John II who was in power, and although he authorized their entry, he was

determined to make money out of them. He forced the refugees to pay a large head tax on being admitted to the kingdom. They had to promise to leave within eight months. They were assured that the king would furnish them with ships. When no ships were forthcoming these Jews, to the number of tens of thousands, were herded together in Lisbon and informed that they were now slaves of the king. They were despoiled of their possessions and their children were shipped off to take their chances with fever and starvation on the island of São Tomé in the gulf of Guinea. (*Portugal* 187)

His successor, Manuel I, “liberated the Jews enslaved in the previous reign and refused a large indemnity which the Jewish community offered to pay as an expression of gratitude” (*Portugal* 187). The reasons for Manuel's mercy were bound to the fact that the Jews

had played an essential part in the development of the country. . . . Their value to the community had long been recognized by the Portuguese kings. Manoel himself had been brought up in this tolerant tradition. . . .

From the time of King Dinis on many of the important financial offices of the court had been held by Jews. From the time of Prince Henry Jewish mathematicians and mapmakers had been eagerly sought for in the development of the charts and tables in which the discover[er]s based their navigation. (*Portugal* 186)

In addition, the Jews had largely amalgamated by then with the Portuguese. John Dos Passos recalled that the

Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno used to tell an amusing story to illustrate the prevalence of Semitic blood among the Portuguese. When the great King Manoel of Portugal wanted to marry a Spanish princess he was told that he must first purge his kingdom of Jews. He consented, but according to Don Miguel, the chief minister

who brought the King the expulsion decree to sign, is supposed to have asked: “Which of us shall leave first, sire, you or me?” (*Brazil* 3)

King Manuel needed to ally his country to Spain. He sought eagerly for young Isabella’s hand. They married in 1500, yet,

[b]efore either [the Spanish queen] Isabella or her daughter could consent to a Portuguese marriage Manoel had to promise to rid his kingdom of the Jews.

From the time of her girlhood in Segovia the elder Isabella had been under the influence of the Prior of the Dominican convent of Santa Cruz there. Tomás de Torquemada was an austere, shrewd, single-minded man who was convinced that all the turbulence that disorganized the Hispanic kingdoms came from the toleration of Judaism . . . and heresy. (*Portugal* 184)

Therefore,

Torquemada induced them to sign a decree expelling the Jews from their kingdoms. This amounted to a population of at least eight hundred thousand families, among which were the ablest physicians and mathematicians, many fiscal agents of the Crown, and a host of skilled craftsmen. It was the most literate, energetic and productive segment of the population. (*Portugal* 185)

The Portuguese monarch “[seems] to have been quite conscious of the damage done to the kingdom by depriving it of such a large population of skilled manpower” (*Portugal* 188). Nevertheless, he insisted that the alliance to Spain took priority. In Spain, those Jews who would not leave the kingdom were persecuted and killed, while the “Holy Office”

amassed an enormous treasure in the process from the confiscated goods of its victims. After having imprisoned, questioned under torture, and turned over to the civil authorities for public burning some two thousand men and women accused of apostasy, heresy or unbelief, Torquemada died like a saint in a bare cell in the convent he had built for his order in Avila. (*Portugal* 185)

On the one hand, Manuel I agreed to purge the Jews out of Portugal; on the other hand, he knew that the country greatly needed them and wanted to avoid such a brain drain. To remedy the situation and end the great “exodus of Jews from the country, mostly to France and to the Netherlands,” Manuel decided to force the Jews to stay and to convert to Catholicism.

Whole families preferred suicide to conversion.

A few prominent Jewish families like that of Abraham Zacuto [personal physician to King Manoel] were allowed to leave the country. Those who had consented to baptism were promised that they should live in peace and that for twenty years no inquiry would be made into their beliefs.⁷ (*Portugal* 188)

⁷ Herewith King Manuel intended a consensus; officially, the Jews converted to Christianity. On the outside, they had to practice the holy rites of the Catholic Church; at home, they could have remained Jewish. Yet, preventively, many Jewish men decided not to be circumcised (according to their religious tradition) so that they would not be identified as false *conversos*.

Those who had agreed to convert “were forbidden to leave the country except with a special permit and then only for commercial purposes and if they left their wives and children behind as hostages” (*Portugal* 188). When the crops failed in 1503, the

high prices of foodstuffs were blamed on the Jews. Jews were stoned on the streets of Lisbon. A synagogue was pulled down in Evora. In 1506 there was a severe outbreak of the plague. The Jews were blamed for it. Led by two Dominican friars a mob ran wild in Lisbon for three days, looting and burning the judería and slaughtering men, women and children supposed to be Jews Two or three thousand people lost their lives.

. . . [Manoel grew angry and] responded with all the force he could muster. Fifty persons implicated in the riot, including the Dominicans, were put to death. . . .

The following year restrictions were lifted against Jewish emigration. So long as King Manoel lived no Portuguese dared lift his hand against a Jew. (*Portugal* 188-89)

His son John III, though, had a contrary viewpoint. Educated under the influence of his mother, he ordered the persecution of the Jews and the *conversos*. It was during his reign, in 1536, that the Inquisition was installed in the country, to further curtail the Jews. Being interested in the dissemination of the Catholic belief, he ordered that Jesuits be sent abroad as missionaries to convert the unbelievers to Christianity. Moreover, he “decided to send no more students to Paris where their souls’ salvation might [be] jeopardized by northern heresies.”⁸ Instead, he “transferred his subsidies to the University of Coimbra” (*Portugal* 325). John III was eager to keep Portugal Catholic and convert the people of the non-Catholic countries, which earned him the nickname “the Pious.”

To conclude, we may say that with *The Portugal Story: Three Centuries of Exploration and Discovery*, published in 1969, Dos Passos showed great interest in his ancestors’ past and proudly evoked the high tide of Portuguese history; *inter alia* he described heroically the role of the Marquis de Pombal during the great earthquake in Lisbon. He left beyond the scope of his work the current situation of his day—namely, Portugal under the dictatorships of Salazar and Caetano, under which well-known figures such as Mário Soares (imprisoned numerous times, then deported to São Tomé, and finally exiled to France) and General Humberto Delgado (exiled in 1959 to Brazil and murdered by the P.I.D.E.⁹ on February 13 1965 at Villanueva del Fresno, Spain) were hindered from living in Portugal. Many others decided during that time to leave the country, looking for a better economic life abroad.

⁸ This of course refers to Protestants and their theological reforms of the Church.

⁹ *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*, the political police under António de Oliveira Salazar’s dictatorship.

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