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Front cover Lopo Homem, Pedro Reinel, Jorge Reinel, António de Holanda, detail from the manuscript map of the Indian Ocean from the facsimile of *Atlas Miller*. © M. Moleiro Editor (www.moleiro.com)

THE *ATLAS MILLER* (1519–1522)

A Trojan horse against Magellan's project

Alfredo Pinheiro Marques

In 2003–2006, crown jewel of the Département des Cartes et Plans of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) – a celebrated nautical atlas of the world, familiarly known as the *Atlas Miller* of 1519–1522,¹ – was published in Barcelona as a facsimile by the publishing house of Manuel Moleiro. For an accompanying volume,² I wrote four essays: a summary of the origin and chronology of Portuguese geographic discoveries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; an overview, with some radical new developments resulting from those discoveries of the origins and evolution of Portuguese cartography, including its first family ‘school’, i.e. the Reinel school; an in-depth study of the geographic and geopolitical content of the *Atlas*, revealing the nature and reasons why such an ostentatiously luxurious atlas was made; a study of its lavish decoration, and new information on the identity of the artist, the Luso-Flemish illuminator António de Holanda.³ Also Luís Filipe Reis Thomaz, leading specialist on the Portuguese presence in the Far East regions, contributed to the volume with a fifth essay. And a sixth essay, authored by both of us, covers the regional maps which are accompanied by an appendix containing transcriptions of the toponyms.⁴

With global celebrations underway commemorating the quincentennial of the first circumnavigation by Ferdinand Magellan and Juan Sebastián Elcano, it is an opportune time to address the close and inextricable relationship between this voyage and the celebrated *Atlas* preserved in Paris. I will present a final summary of my findings regarding the *Atlas*’ curious and sensational geographical and geopolitical aspects and revisit the motivation, preparation and destination of this extremely lavish ‘map [intended] to deceive navigators’.⁵

Ideas that were considered novel in the 2006 studies have, in the intervening years, become universally accepted.⁶ The decisive moment was when the BnF changed the identification, reference, file and the titles of the *Atlas* in its catalogues and exhibitions. It added the name of the illuminator António de

Holanda to its list of the authors and identified them as ‘Atlas by Lopo Homem [with Pedro Reinel, Jorge Reinel, and António de Holanda]’.⁷

In its current state the *Atlas Miller*, so called after Clément Miller from whose estate it was acquired in 1897 (ref.: GE DD 683 [2–5 RES]), is a set of separate parchment folios. Five measure 42 × 59 cm. These include the world map which has the frontispiece on the reverse with mention of Lopo Homem and the date,⁸ and four folios which have charts on both sides depicting the geographical areas of the Indian Ocean north and south, the China Sea, the Moluccas, Brazil and the South Atlantic Ocean, North Atlantic and northern Europe.

They are complemented by a larger fifth ‘folio’ (about 61 × 118 cm) made up of two parchments stuck together back-to-back (ref.: GE AA 640 [RES]). The Atlantic Ocean is depicted on the recto and the Mediterranean on the reverse. Based on the crease folds it was concluded that all these folios had once been part of the same set (the world map and the four regional maps had been folded in half and the larger ‘folio’ had been folded in four with the upper and lower edges turned back). They were bound together to make a kind of ‘atlas’ that measured approximately 42 × 30 cm. At an unknown date it was disassembled, after which the folio depicting Africa disappeared. Moreover, and significantly, even though this ‘atlas’ or collection sought to represent the entire planet, the pages that should have depicted the other side of the world, between the Far East (*‘Magnus Golfus Chinarum’*) and the New World (Brazil), were left incomplete (one of them only has the wind rose lines and the other is entirely blank).

The *Atlas* is richly decorated, painted in the style of a Flemish book of hours by Flemish miniaturist António de Holanda,⁹ about whom little is known.¹⁰ We know he was entrusted as royal heraldic official¹¹ and had married into the family of the cartographer Lopo Homem.

The *Atlas* as a whole – not just its ‘Neo-Ptolemaic’ world map, which is dated and signed – but the regional portolan charts also date from 1519 to c. 1522.¹²



Fig. 2 Lopo Homem, Pedro Reinel, Jorge Reinel, António de Holanda, *Atlas Miller*, 1519–1522, Lisbon, 41.5 × 59 cm. From the facsimile © M. Moleiro Editor (www.moleiro.com). Detail of the map of the South Atlantic and Brazil with indigenous people collecting brazilwood.

Why was the atlas made?

In 1519, on the orders of King Manuel I of Portugal (r. 1495–1521), the cartographers Lopo Homem, Pedro Reinel and Jorge Reinel, along with the illuminator António de Holanda who had recently come to Portugal, created this lavish atlas of nautical maps. Decorated as though it was a Flemish book of hours, it was intended for the young Flemish princess Leonor who became the Queen of Portugal on her marriage to Manuel I in the previous year. Leonor, the eldest child of Philip of Austria and Joanna of Castile and the sister of Charles V, was nineteen years old at the time.¹³ She was widowed three years later and left Portugal in 1523 and, in my opinion, took with her the unfinished *Atlas*.¹⁴

The very fact that the *Atlas* was left unfinished with pages 20 and 21 yet to be completed is definitive proof that Manuel I never intended it to be sent as a state gift to some European dignitary such as the King of France or the Pope.¹⁵

It has been my view since 2005–2006 that the *Atlas* is a deliberate geographical deception, designed as a lavish tool for diplomatic and geopolitical counter-information. It was expressly commissioned to try and thwart the idea that the Earth could be circumnavigated and thus prevent the project that at precisely the same time, during 1519, was being prepared in Seville by Ferdinand Magellan. A voyage

to reach the Far East by sailing via the western hemisphere (later assigned to Spain by the Treaty of Tordesillas) was the longstanding dream of Columbus and the Castilians. Portugal was determined to refute Columbus's plan to reach India by sailing westward. The diplomatic and political aspects of its creation and the purpose for which Manuel I commissioned it were clear: to influence his young and highly-regarded brother-in-law, Charles V, who in 1519 was a new monarch recently arrived from Flanders, King of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon (and hence King of Spain), and shortly thereafter elected Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The Portuguese intended to:

use the Atlas Miller as a tool for geo-strategic, geopolitical and diplomatic misinformation, trying to make the Castilians – esteemed neighbours, rival siblings and cordial competitors – believe two things. First, they tried to make the Castilians believe that it



Fig. 3 Garcia Fernandes (attributed), *Portrait of King Manuel and Queen Leonor*, c. 1521–1541. Oil on board 210 × 165 cm. Reproduced by kind permission of Museu de São Roque/Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa. The painting is traditionally considered to represent King Manuel's third marriage to Leonor, sister of Emperor Charles V, in 1518, but which in fact might represent their entry into Lisbon, pregnant, in 1521.