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**Mozart and Money:
An 18th-Century Adventure**

Dorothy and Clifton Potter

**Portuguese Coins in
the Age of Discovery**

António Miguel Trigueiros



CELEBRATING
100
YEARS

Portuguese Coins in the Age of Discovery

Impressed by the popularity and acceptance of Portugal's gold coinage, other countries of Europe adapted the design of the "portugués" for their own issues.

by António Miguel Trigueiros

THE MINTING OF Portuguese coins began with the very foundation of the Kingdom of Portugal in 1139. The mintage of gold coins was interrupted in 1383 during the reign of King Ferdinand I and resumed during the time of King Alfonso V (c. 1450), a direct result of Portuguese trade along the coast of West Africa.

From then on, African gold carried to Lisbon in caravels and used for the minting of *cruzados*, *justos* and *Portugueses* played a decisive role in financing the exploration of the African coast and the discovery of a seaway to the spice markets of the Orient. At the same time, African gold enabled the Portuguese to establish and maintain intense trade with several European countries, from which they imported, among other things, metals (such as silver and copper) that did not exist in Portugal.

With This Sign, You Shall Conquer

THE MOST OUTSTANDING coin minted in Portugal during the 15th and 16th centuries was the *Portugués do ouro* ("gold Portuguese," as it is called today, or "coin of the Portuguese," as it was known in those days). It was a large gold coin bearing the name and titles of King Manuel I in a long, double inscription encircling Portugal's coat of arms. The reverse carried a large cross of the Order of Christ encircled by the Latin inscription IN HOC SIGNO VINCES ("With this sign, you shall conquer").

Minted with a value of 10 cruzados ("crusaders"), it was for almost a century the most important gold coin struck anywhere in Europe—simultaneously a coin and a symbol of the Age of Discovery. Very little is known of the reasons for its creation or even the exact year it



Vasco da Gama was the first man to reach the East by sailing southward along the coast of Africa. He sailed from Lisbon in 1497 with four ships, rounded Africa's Cape of Good Hope, and made the port of Calicut, India, in 1498.

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was first struck.

According to Damião de Gois in his *Crônica de El-Rei D. Manuel* (1566), the first ones were produced in 1499, together with a silver coin designated as the *Indio* ("Indian"). This information led to the theory that the coins had been minted for Pedro Alvares Cabral to take on his voyage to India in 1500, which resulted in the "official" discovery of Brazil.

However, another chronicler, Gaspar Correa, in his *Lendas da Índia*, refers several times to the gold "portugueses" given and exchanged by Vasco da Gama and some of his companions in Melinde and Calicut during his first voyage to India:

The King of Melinde rejoiced in seeing the "cruzados" and took them, giving the pilots their worth in the local money. Seeing this, Vasco da Gama immediately sent for ten "portugueses" from the ship and gave them to the King wrapped in a cloth, telling him that the coins were called "portugueses," that each one was worth ten small ones, that he keep them and with them always remember the name of the Portuguese.

In Calicut Vasco da Gama took ashore 5 gold portugueses, 50 cruzados and 100 silver *tostões*, which were weighed and exchanged by a local money-changer.

The first mention of these coins in official published records appeared in 1506 in an auditing report for the Lisbon Mint. After that, references in 16th-century writings and narratives were more frequent, giving an idea of the coins' extensive diffusion throughout the Orient, from the Malabar Coast to Java and the most important trading centers of Northern Europe. It is probable, therefore, that these coins, which were the marvel of both Oriental and European merchants, were first struck between 1497 and 1499.

A study of the portugues itself, however, shows evidence in favor of the date indicated by Damião de Gois—1499. The long Latin inscription on the obverse of the coin proclaims the greatness of the Portuguese sovereign, as if giving additional guarantee of the quality, fine metal content and weight of

Portuguese coins adorn an illustration in the *Livro de Horas de D. Manuel*, which was completed in the mid 16th century.

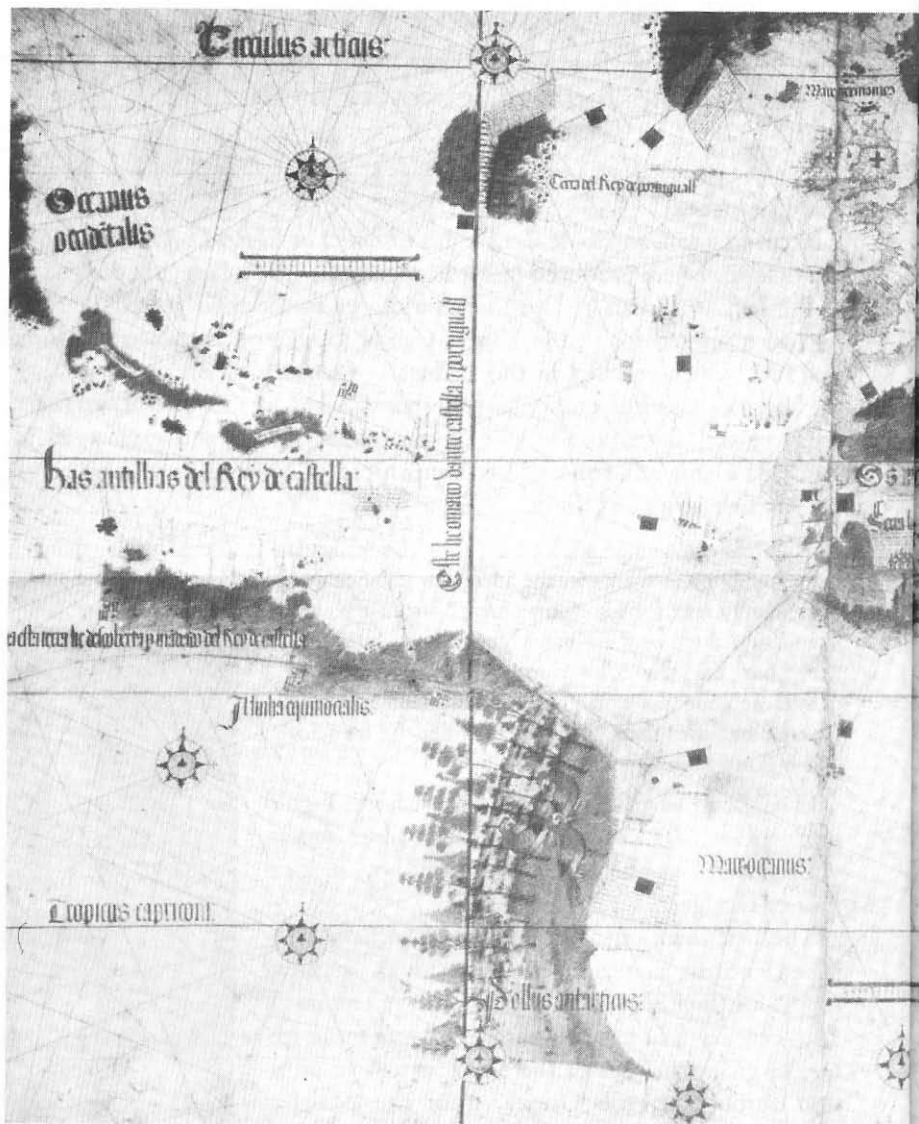




Gold coinage of Manuel I (1495-1521), struck by the Lisbon Mint: a cruzado (top) and a português, which marks the first appearance of the cross of the Order of Christ on coins.



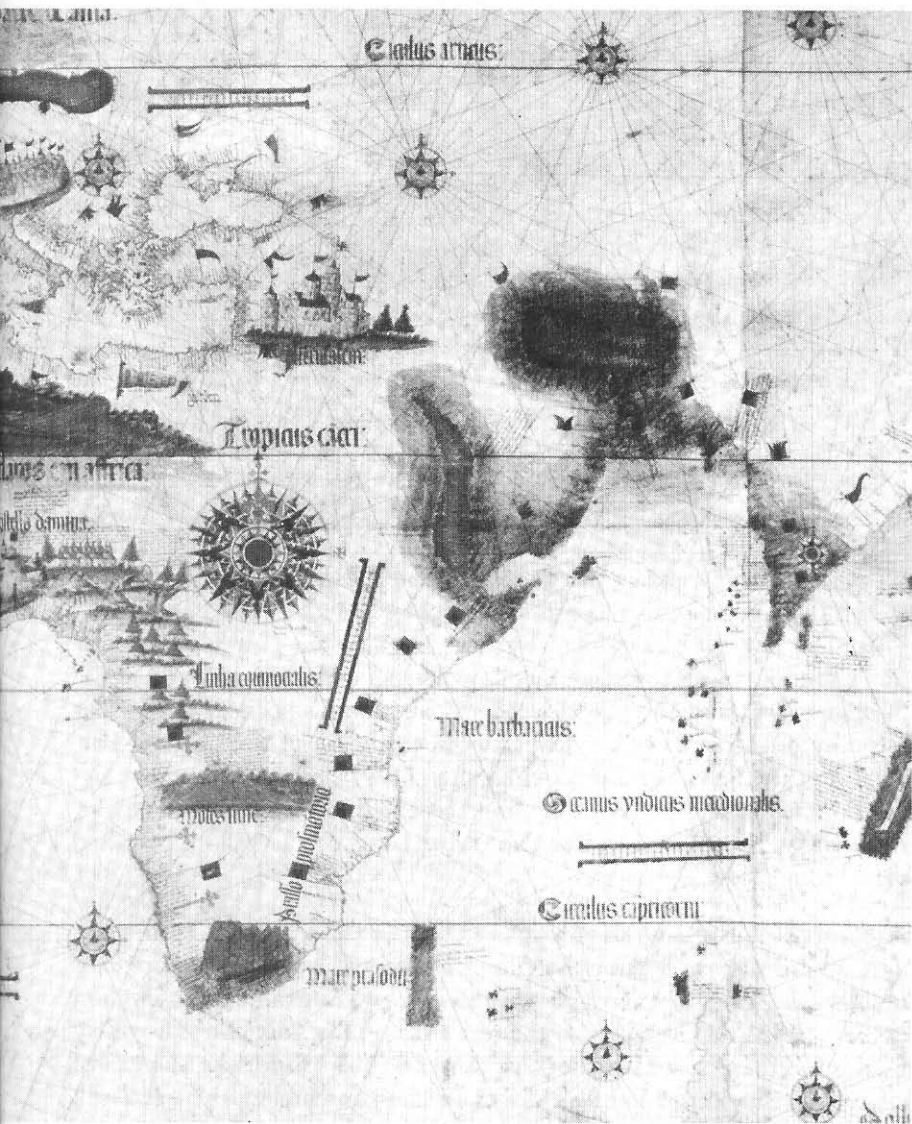
King Manuel I proudly listed his many titles on the reverse of his gold português.



the new coin: "Manuel I King of Portugal and the Algarves, of the Lands before and beyond Africa, Lord of Guinea and the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India."

João de Barros' detailed explanation of the legitimacy of King Manuel's adoption of these titles is well known, having dedicated an entire chapter to the matter in his famous reference *Asia* :

Of all the things that kings do, whatever type they may be, none gives them greater name than that by which they add to their crown some feat or illustrious title. . . . King Manuel, knowing this universal rule and that his



A 1502 map of the known world reflects Portuguese voyages of discovery to Africa, Arabia, Persia, India, Greenland, Newfoundland, Florida and Brazil, and Spanish expeditions to the Antilles.



The royal titles that appear on Portuguese coins chart the progress of the country's voyages of discovery. A half escudo of King Alfonso V (top) declares him to be "Lord of Ceuta"; a silver tostao of King Manuel I (center) reads "Lord of Guinea"; and a gold portuguese of Manuel I (bottom) proclaims him "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Trade of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India."

predecessors always had the conquest of the infidel in mind, not thinking them to be unjust titles . . . added these three: "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India." He did not assume such a title lightly or by chance, but with much action, justice and prudence; with the arrival of Vasco da Gama and, particularly, of Pedro Alvares Cabral, he took possession through them of everything they had discovered and what was granted and given to him through the Sovereign Pontiffs.

For those who may not have understood his explanation, João de Barros continued with a declaration of the king's rights in assuming those titles,

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Under the guidance of Prince Henry the Navigator, the Order of Christ became the pillar of Portuguese maritime explorations.

describing the difference between calling oneself "King" (of the people of a land) and proclaiming oneself "Lord" (of property or landlord of property). As an example, he cited King John II, who called himself "Lord" and not "King" of Guinea because "he did not have jurisdiction over the people of the land, but yet was its landlord."

This accumulation of titles by the Portuguese crown took place soon after the return of Vasco da Gama, as revealed in a letter sent from Lisbon by the King to the cardinal-protector of Portugal in Rome, dated August 28, 1499. King Manuel clearly identified himself as "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India," leaving not a shadow of doubt that he would certainly take upon himself and the Portuguese crown the ownership and rule of the new discoveries, as had been granted to him through previous pontifical endowments.

Considering that a coin—and especially a gold coin—served as international affirmation of sovereignty and ownership and, as in the case of the portugúés, was minted with such lengthy inscriptions, its issue and design can only be interpreted as a deliberate proclamation of the rights of Portugal over the new domains acquired after 1499. The gold piece thus signified grandeur and power on an unprecedented scale and was created to represent an enterprise and a people. What better name could it have had than "coin of the Portuguese"!

A Symbol of the Age of Discovery

THE DESIGN ON the reverse of the portugúés is worthy of notice, not only because of the type of cross it bears and the surrounding inscription (which made its appearance for the first time on this coin and was widely used up to the first half of the 19th century), but also for the absence of any ornamentation in the field, its smoothness resembling the white silk background of a flag, in contrast to the famous cruzados and justos of previous reigns.

Even though the cross is a constant symbol on Portuguese coinage, it is not by mere chance that these coins bear the cross of the Order of Christ. The insignia of the Knights of Christ—red with a simple white cross in the center signifying the open wound in Christ's side—was embroidered on their white habits.

Led by Prince Henry the Navigator from 1417, the Order of Christ became the pillar of Portuguese maritime exploration. In recognition of this, in 1455 King Alfonso V granted it spiritual rule "over all the lands and islands that have been and will be discovered."



A gold cruzado of King Alfonso V (1438-81), struck by the Lisbon Mint in African gold.



firmed by papal edict.

Following the death of Prince Henry, the mastership of the Order remained in the possession of the royal house and in 1483 it was bestowed on the king's brother-in-law Manuel, Duke of Beja, who became King Manuel I in 1495. The cross of the Order of Christ thus appeared on gold coins precisely at the time its grand master was crowned King of Portugal. The Order's insignia became the royal insignia and embellished the new coins that would spearhead the commercial conquest of India, an enterprise that was entrusted to the Order itself.

As happened on the eve of the battle between the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great and Magnentius, these coins also invoked the sign of the cross, as if to prophesize the success of the Portuguese enterprise in the Orient—"With this sign, you shall conquer." The cross appeared on sails, flags and pennants, on weapons and coins—all emphasized the Order's importance in the discoveries, much like a careful and well-planned marketing campaign.

The cross came to signify grandeur and power, and for this reason it became a monetary symbol par excellence on other important gold coins that were later minted by various cities and princes of Northern Europe, Germany, Denmark, Holland and Poland. These coins imitated the portugueses and became known as "portugalosers."

Calicut, on the west coast of India, as it appeared in 1573. When da Gama landed there in 1498, he reportedly took ashore 5 gold portugueses, 50 cruzados and 100 silver tostões.



Coins of Germany, Schleswig-Holstein and the Netherlands imitated the portugueses and became known as "portugalosers." German issues included Hamburg (a), Magdeburg (b) and Lübeck (c). Schleswig-Holstein issued a half portugaloser (d). Dutch portugalosers were struck by the cities of Deventer (e) and Zwolle (f).

The Prominence of the Gold Portugueses

THE MOST RENOWNED of these portugalosers were those from Hamburg, dating from the 1560s and '70s and clearly showing the prominence of the portugueses in 16th-century mercantile Europe. The obverse of the Hamburg coin is an exact reproduction of King Manuel I's portugueses. It bears the city's coat of arms and the inscription *MONETA NOVA AVREA CIVITATIS HAMBVRGENSIS / NACH PORTVVALIS SCHROT VND KORN* ("Gold coin of the City of Hamburg with the same weight and

DESPITE HAVING AN official exchange rate of 10 ducats, Hamburg's portugalosers . . . were not widely used as circulating currency, but rather as gifts.

fineness as the Portuguese coin") in two concentric lines around the border. On the reverse is the characteristic cross of the Order of Christ on an ornamented field (as on the português of King John III) and the inscription IN XPO CRVCIFIXO PENDIT SALVS NRA ("In Christ crucified lies our salvation").

Despite having an official exchange rate of 10 ducats, Hamburg's portugalosers, and later those of other German cities, such as Magdeburg, Lüneburg, Bremen, Leipzig and Lübeck (as well as similar coins struck in Denmark by King Christian IV in 1591-92 and in Schleswig-Holstein by Duke John Adolph in 1611), were not widely used as circulating currency, but rather as gifts. Thus began a tradition of using the word "portugalosers" to designate gold coins and medallions given as gifts on ceremonial occasions by banks, trade associations, military entities or the Senate of a city.

Similar coins were minted by the Dutch cities of Zwolle and Deventer as vehicles for trade in the East Indies, where the memory of the português was deeply rooted. In the case of the Zwolle portugaloser, minted by order of the city council in 1641, it is interesting to note the almost perfect imitation of King Manuel I's português. The center of the obverse bears a crowned design that mimics the Portuguese coin, except that the archangel St. Michael, the city's patron, replaces the Portuguese coat of arms. Around the border is the double-tiered inscription AD VALOREM EMANVEL REG PORTVGAL/MONETA AVREA CIVITAT SWOL ("Gold coin of the city of Zwolle, with the value of King Manuel of Portugal's coin"). The reverse also bears the cross of the Order of Christ encircled by the inscription IN CHRISTO CRVCIFIXO NOSTRA SAL.

The tradition of the Portuguese gold coins was so deeply ingrained on the markets of the Far East that Dutch merchants had to produce a coinage that was identical to that of King Manuel I, 140 years after the original coin's creation! The prediction of the chronicler Gaspar Correa thus came true—the prominence of the gold português gave rise to a new international numismatic term—the portugaloser—which even today preserves the name of Portugal.

Director of the Portuguese State Mint, António Miguel Trigueiros earned a degree in chemical engineering from the Lisbon Institute of Engineers. He served as editor of MOEDA, the Portuguese numismatic magazine, from 1974-85, and is a contributor to GOLD COINS OF THE WORLD, STANDARD CATALOG OF WORLD COINS and the STANDARD CATALOG OF WORLD PAPER MONEY. This article was adapted from Trigueiros' Numismatic Theatre presentation at the ANA's 100th Anniversary Convention in Chicago.



A gold justo of King João II (1481-95) depicts the king who said "No" to Columbus.



This gold português of King João III (1521-57) was issued from 1526 to 1555.