

3. Spying Ambassadors for a French Overseas Empire? Michel de Seure and Jean Nicot's Maritime and Cosmographical Espionage in Portugal (1557–61)

Abstract

This chapter uses the correspondences of Michel de Seure and Jean Nicot, the French ambassadors to Portugal during the 1550s and 1560s, to study the French-Portuguese interchange of maritime knowledge during a pivotal period marked by official and unofficial confrontations in Brazil and West Africa. The study demonstrates how French overseas imperial ambitions were closely linked to French espionage and the acquisition of Portuguese maritime knowledge in Portugal, and how this connects to earlier French-Portuguese maritime rivalry.

Keywords: Henry II, Catherine de' Medici, Sebastian, Brazil, West Africa, Lisbon

Introduction

As has been argued in the previous chapter, when King Henry VIII (1509–47) ascended to the English throne in 1509, this meant a slowdown in the English overseas expansionist process. However, on the other side of the English Channel, the opposite happened with France. Influenced by the Iberian maritime achievements and likely also by the early English attempts in North America, Valois France started to consider its first serious overseas projects. Although a French overseas interest can be traced back to the time of the Valois monarch Louis XII (1498–1515), it was during the reign of

King Francis I (1515–47) that France inaugurated more systematic overseas projects and expeditions, particularly from the 1520s. France's maritime and overseas interest, unlike England's, were directly tied to its rivalry with Spain and the attempt to contest Emperor Charles V's (1519–56) European supremacy. Although France had a formal alliance with Portugal, it also began to challenge Portuguese overseas areas. Like what had happened with England, the first French documented ventures overseas also used Iberian maritime knowledge, as shall be detailed in this chapter, particularly by hiring Portuguese pilots.

Nevertheless, under King Francis I, French overseas expansion was marked by both advancements and setbacks as the monarch focused primarily on a European policy.¹ For this king, the possibility of a French overseas empire was a secondary concern. For this reason, under his reign the most important French geographical discoveries were those made by Jacques Cartier (1491–1557) and Jean François de Roberval's (1495–1560) expeditions to Canada in the 1530–40s. Despite this fact, the king proved unable to fully patronize a colonization policy in that region, or in others that he attempted to dispute Portugal's and Spain's possession of: West Africa, South America, Asia, or even the Caribbean. Still, the four major wars that occurred between King Francis I and Emperor Charles V all had an increasing maritime dimension that also fueled French overseas ambitions. If the Valois monarch was sometimes hesitant concerning his overseas policy, his subjects from Normandy, Brittany, and the French Atlantic ports were deeply invested in the profits to be made from long-distance maritime voyages to West Africa, Brazil, and South America. On several occasions, Francis's overseas policy was defied by his own subjects, in the same way that has been documented for the 1550s concerning the English voyages to West Africa under Queen Mary I (1553–58).

The accession of King Henry II (1547–59) marked a significant change in French overseas plans. With this king's rise to power, a new generation of courtiers who sought to fully support a French overseas expansionist process also gained influence. This fact imposed changes on French overseas ambitions that ended up directly influencing King Henry's decisions, which were in contrast to his father's policy. This chapter will draw on the correspondence of two French ambassadors to Portugal, Michel de Seure and

1 On this topic see: Michel Mollat, *Passages français dans l'Océan Indien au temps de François I* (offprint by Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1963); Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos entre Portugal e a França na primeira metade do século XVI* (Redondo: Patrimonia, 1995); Oliveira Borges, "O trajeto final," vol. I, 322–49 and 377–416.

Jean Nicot, to understand the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of Iberian maritime knowledge by Valois France. It will also document how this flow of knowledge to France affected broader French-Portuguese maritime rivalry and the planning of new French overseas expeditions. As the reader will quickly realize, in this process, similarly to what has been documented for Spain and England in the previous chapters, diplomacy, espionage, secrecy, and knowledge went hand in hand. If there were maritime knowledge exchanges taking place, it is critical to understand what the conditions were that favored them; mainly how France used its embassy in Lisbon to achieve its overseas goals. By looking in detail at Seure and Nicot's dispatches, and by matching them with other sources and studies, this chapter will discuss the French-Portuguese, or sometimes Franco-Iberian, interchange of nautical knowledge. To correctly interpret Seure and Nicot's maritime diplomacy and espionage, the political context behind their appointments and their later careers will also be addressed.

Despite the fact that Seure's and Nicot's letters from their embassies in Portugal have already been published by Edmond Falgairolle and Luís de Matos,² the way this correspondence relates to the circulation of maritime knowledge between France and Portugal in the 1560s was not fully studied. Such communications occurred against a backdrop of French-Portuguese maritime rivalry, best studied for King Francis I's reign. For the continued rivalry during King Henry II's reign and the last Valois period, stretching from 1547 to 1589, there is, however, a lack of studies. One notable episode in this period was the *France Antarctique* project of 1555–60, a French attempt at establishing a colony in Brazil undertaken by King Henry II. Despite King Henry II's sudden death in 1559, and the outbreak of the French Civil Wars,³ French-Portuguese maritime rivalry did not subside. Since these issues are both underexamined and essential context for Seure's and Nicot's embassy, this chapter likewise aims to bring them into better focus.

2 Edmond Falgairolle, ed., *Jean Nicot. Ambassadeur de France en Portugal au XVI^e siècle. Sa correspondance diplomatique inédite avec un fac-simile en phototypie* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1897); Luís de Matos, *Les Portugais en France au XVI^e siècle: Études et documents* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1952); Luís de Matos, "Un diplomate humaniste: Jean Nicot, ambassadeur de France au Portugal," *Littératures* 1 (December 1952): 21–42. Nicot's published letters are based on the following manuscripts held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), which also include letters from his predecessor Seure: BNF, *Français* 3151 and 15871. *Français* 6638 contains copies of the letters held today in Saint Petersburg. For the problems relating to the originals from Saint Petersburg see: Vladimir Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance. Les relations franco-portugaises dans les collections manuscrites de Saint-Petersbourg (1557–1572)," *Histoire, Économie et Société* 1 (2021): 44–51.

3 On this topic: R. J. Necho, *The French Civil Wars, 1562–1598* (Harlow: Longman, 2000).

Using key studies on Seure and Nicot, as well as new sources, this chapter will re-examine several aspects of both embassies, highlighting Seure's and Nicot's role as brokers of maritime information. The analysis will begin with Michel de Seure's embassy (1557–59) in order to contextualize Nicot's appointment in 1559. Following this, a brief overview of the main official objectives of Nicot's embassy will be provided. Afterwards, the unofficial factors guiding Nicot's embassy will be discussed, including the French-Portuguese maritime rivalry and the conditions that underlie Nicot's acquisition of Portuguese maritime knowledge. Before concluding, there will be a re-evaluation of the reasons for Nicot's recall and a discussion of his activities as promulgator of Portuguese knowledge after returning home. Seure's and Nicot's strategies for the acquisition of maritime knowledge will be compared to his predecessor in the Portuguese embassy. Finally, the conclusion will reflect on the French acquisition of Portuguese maritime knowledge, comparing it to the previous cases of Spain and England.

3.1 A Spy Ambassador? Michel de Seure and his Portuguese Embassy (1557–59)

A few days after King John III's (r. 1521–57) death, Michel de Seure (1523–95) arrived in Lisbon, as Emperor Charles V's agent in the Portuguese capital, D. Sancho de Córdova reported in a letter dated June 25, 1557 to the Spanish secretary of state Juan Vasquez de Molina.⁴ The new French ambassador to Portugal was the son of the lord of Blois, and had been admitted into the Order of Malta in 1539; his reputation as a fearless knight granted him access to the Valois court. With the impending death of the Portuguese king, France sought to compete with Spain for the Portuguese alliance,⁵ and thus decided to send a new ambassador to Lisbon. Seure's appointment was a strategic move by King Henry II, who, amidst the war between France and Spain, had decided to replace Honorais de Caix (?–1558), the previous French ambassador. Seure was sent to Lisbon with orders to spread the news that the French were on the verge of crushing the Spanish (a traditional French maneuver designed to turn the Portuguese against Spain). For this reason, Seure's appointment had been granted by the courtier party that advocated open hostilities and global war with Spain. The leading figures of this policy were Francis, duke of Guise (1519–63), King Henry II's great

4 Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), *Secretaría de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 164, fl. 2.

5 Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 157.

French general for his military campaigns, and the French Constable Anne de Montmorency (1493–1567).⁶ Like Nicot's mission later, and like the missions of the previously mentioned Portuguese agents dispatched to England in the 1550s, Seure's mission had official and unofficial goals. To understand these, it is important to start the analysis with the political context, in which Seure and then Nicot acted, so that the conditions underlying their maritime espionage and acquisition of Portuguese maritime knowledge can later be rightly contextualized.

Seure's arrival greatly affected the Portuguese court, for several reasons. Seure was replacing the elderly Honorais de Caix, who had been serving intermittently as the French ambassador in Lisbon (although he was born in Savoy) since the 1520s. By 1557, Caix was reported to be a man of peace who despised the conflicts between Portugal and France, especially the maritime ones, as was asserted by D. Sancho de Córdova in a missive to King Philip II (1556–98), dated July 21, 1557.⁷ D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza, King Philip II's ambassador to Portugal, noted immediately that France had appointed a much more prestigious and honored ambassador to Lisbon. In his first letter to the Catholic King about Seure's arrival, dated June 26, 1557, he remarked on the rumors that Seure was under secret orders from King Henry II to propose a marriage alliance between the French and Portuguese royal houses. Mendonza was not much worried about such rumors because the Portuguese regretted the fact that Seure had been French ambassador in Istanbul.⁸ Indeed, the traditional rivalry between the Portuguese and the Ottomans in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean did not sit well with the declared alliance between France and Istanbul.

In another missive, dated also June 26, but addressed to Juana of Austria (1535–73), princess of Portugal, mother of King Sebastian (1557–78) and by then ruler of Spain in the absence of King Philip II, Mendonza noted another relevant issue. To counterbalance the Portuguese criticism of his previous career in Istanbul, Seure had publicly announced that he would use his contacts there to provide intelligence on Ottoman movements and plans against the Portuguese.⁹ The Spanish ambassador tried to uncover Seure's and King Henry II's plans concerning the Portuguese embassy. In a letter penned on July 5, 1557 and addressed to Princess Juana, Mendonza provided news. The following updates were being given in Lisbon's taverns

6 Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance," 44.

7 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 117.

8 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 53, fl. 4.

9 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 65, fl. 4v.

on Seure's mission: King Henry II was proposing a marriage between one of his daughters and King Sebastian; the French dowry would amount to the high sum of 700,000 Portuguese *reais*; France would return to Portugal all the ships and cargos apprehended during the last 10 years of French-Portuguese sea warfare in the Atlantic; for a fair price, the Valois court was willing to negotiate a commercial treaty in which France committed to supplying all the grain that Portugal needed; and finally, and most interestingly, France promised diplomatic and, if needed, military support to Portugal in its dispute with Spain over the Moluccas. Although Hurtado de Mendonza recognized that the Portuguese were highly pleased by such proposals, he was not overly concerned at the tempting French proposal of marriage to Portugal as he believed that while Emperor Charles V was alive, albeit living in retirement in a monastery in Yuste, the French-Portuguese marriage would never occur.¹⁰

However, in the last letter, D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza already recognized that owing to the Portuguese political situation (the young King Sebastian was 3 years old and there was a regency during his minority) and to anti-Spanish feeling in Portugal, Seure had been very well-received by the Portuguese in his formal reception at the royal palace in Lisbon. He recognized in the abovementioned letter of July 5, 1557 to Princess Juana that Queen Catherine of Austria (1507–78), the Portuguese regent during the minority of King Sebastian, had ordered the courtier earl of Vimioso to bring Seure to the palace. When Seure arrived, he was received by all the prominent members of the Portuguese highest nobility, as well as by all members of the Portuguese royal family (including Cardinal Henry, King Sebastian's uncle, and Princess Mary, King Sebastian's aunt). Queen Catherine of Austria granted him a fifteen-minute audience and everyone commented on the courteous manner in which she treated Seure.¹¹

This commenting on the queen's behavior was connected to Portuguese suspicions that she would always oppose a marriage alliance between Portugal and France. As Queen Catherine of Austria was Emperor Charles V's sister and had owed her 1525 marriage to King John III to her brother,¹² the Portuguese suspected that she would always defend a Habsburg marriage for young King Sebastian. Nonetheless, as has been underscored, the Portuguese

10 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 55, fl. 1.

11 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 55, fl. 1v.

12 On the queen's biography and personality see: Ana Isabel Buescu, *Catarina de Áustria (1507–1578). Infanta de Tordesilhas. Rainha de Portugal* (Póvoa de Santo Adrião: A Esfera dos Livros, 2007) and Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, *Catarina de Áustria: a rainha colecionadora* (Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2017).

were seriously tempted by the French proposal which came at a time when the young Portuguese king's fragile health raised fears of a political union with Spain, an idea fiercely opposed by several Portuguese. For this reason and to lift pro-Spanish suspicions from her government, Queen Catherine of Austria had even confided secretly to D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza, King Philip II's ambassador in Portugal, that if needed she would publicly oppose the retired emperor's intentions. The skilled Ambassador Mendonza, who was aware that the emperor had ordered to have King Philip II's heir (Prince Charles of Spain) sworn also as heir to the Portuguese Crown, and who knew of the polemics this had caused in Portugal, issued a warning.

In that context, in a missive to King Philip II dated July 12, 1557, Mendonza asserted that the Spanish king needed to understand that, despite Queen Catherine of Austria's filial reverence for Charles and for himself, she was not in position to accommodate the Spanish plans. As such King Philip II would have to accept the public opposition that Queen Catherine would express to the emperor's intentions. Still, to assuage King Philip II's feeling when reading this letter, D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza assured that he firmly believed that during the time Queen Catherine would be Portuguese regent the matrimonial union between Portugal and France would never happen.¹³ It is precisely in this context that Seure's alleged (it is not confirmed in his correspondence) French marriage proposal to Portugal came to severely disturb Portuguese-Spanish relations and to draw Portugal closer into King Henry II's orbit. The agitation caused by Seure's arrival is also evident in the missives of D. Sancho de Córdova, Emperor Charles V's agent in Lisbon.

Córdova's letter sheds light on a previously unknown conflict between Seure and Córdova. Both men were competing for the support of the Portuguese court. At stake was winning Portuguese support, precisely as King Francis I had done in 1525–26. In 1525–26, the Portuguese government decided the matrimonial unions with Spain, thus rendering Francis I's matrimonial plans useless.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in 1557, the French proposal had a profound impact in Portugal. In a missive dated July 4, 1557 addressed to Emperor Charles V, Córdova provided a more detailed account of Seure's formal reception than that by D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza. After detailing Seure's

13 AGS, *Secretaría de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 55, fl. 2–2v.

14 In 1525 and 1526, respectively, King John III married Catherine of Austria, Emperor Charles V's sister, and Charles married Elizabeth of Portugal, King John III's sister. King Francis I attempted to thwart the plans by tempting King John III with a matrimonial proposal with one of his daughters; it never materialized. On this topic see: Diogo Faria, "Negócios matrimoniais entre Portugal e a França no tempo de Francisco I (1515–1547)," *Anais de História de Além-Mar* XVI (2015): 407–30.

ceremonial reception, the emperor's special agent in Lisbon commented on Queen Catherine's conversation with Seure, approving of her words to him. Córdoba regarded the Portuguese queen's behavior as important to mislead the Portuguese and the French with good words. Furthermore, Córdoba revealed that he had uncovered intelligence about Seure's personal dispute with the pope regarding a debt he owed. Like D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza, Córdoba expressed confidence that King Henry II's efforts to reconcile France and Portugal through Seure's embassy in Lisbon would ultimately prove unsuccessful.¹⁵

In another letter addressed to the Spanish secretary of state Juan Vasquez de Molina on July 12, 1557, however, Córdoba candidly expressed his real concerns about Seure's reception. He confessed that he had requested to be present at the reception and to be given precedence over Seure. His request was denied by Queen Catherine and certain advisors on the grounds that he was not an ambassador. As such Seure would always take precedence over him. Infuriated by such a response, Córdoba replied that he was the emperor's agent. He argued that everyone considered him to be ambassador and that his status as an imperial knight was higher than Seure's, who was a mere knight of the French Order of Saint John, which, in Córdoba's own words, lacked the prestige of the Military Order of the Golden Fleece. Faced with this situation, Queen Catherine summoned Córdoba into her presence before Seure's formal reception. Córdoba omits what happened next and only reports that he came to the palace after Seure's reception to speak with the queen. Nevertheless, he seems once more to have come empty-handed. Later, Queen Catherine attempted to summon Córdoba twice, but he refused to attend.¹⁶ Informed of these events, Emperor Charles V wrote that Córdoba was to remain in Portugal for some time. He also warned Philip II to be careful as Seure was using the Portuguese need for grain and desires for a Valois marriage to further France's geostrategic goals.¹⁷

Thus, everything in Córdoba's letter suggests that Seure was given precedence over him in the ceremony. Although Seure's surviving French correspondence does not mention this episode, Córdoba's later comments about Seure suggest that he was deeply offended by this preferential treatment. As a result, in a letter addressed to King Philip II on July 21, 1557, Córdoba accused Seure of using the possibility of a marriage between Portugal and

15 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 110, fl. 1v.–2.

16 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 160, fl. 1v.–2.

17 M. Gachard, ed., *Retraite et mort de Charles-Quint au monastère de Yuste. Lettres inédites*, vol. II (Brussels: C. Muquardt, 1855), 217–18.

France to disrupt Portuguese-Spanish relations, and he asked King Philip for instructions on how to proceed.¹⁸ Córdova recognized that there was a favorable attitude towards Seure and France, and an anti-Spanish feeling in Portugal. This was the reason why, on July 12, 1557, he had written to Emperor Charles V, requesting instructions on how to deal with Seure. He also mentioned that he had previously proposed a strategy to deal with Seure to the emperor, but as he had not received a reply, he urged him to take a stand as the situation was delicate.¹⁹ Unfortunately, Charles's answer remains unknown. Still, Córdova's letters document very well the impact that Seure's arrival had in Lisbon in June–July 1557.

Nevertheless, things soon changed, as Seure began to encounter difficulties in August 1557. The first challenges came with news of French defeats in Europe at the hands of the Spanish. The propaganda concerning the war between Spain and France explains why Seure changed his public attitude. Owing to reports sent to Lisbon by João Pereira Dantas, the recently arrived Portuguese ambassador to France who will be discussed in the following chapter, on French military difficulties on the battlefield of Saint-Quentin, Seure became more hostile in public. Reacting emotionally to this news, Seure reportedly approached Córdova with anger during an encounter at the Portuguese court. According to Córdova's letter, it seems that Seure was returning home after having visited Princess Mary (1521–77), a figure that Seure and Nicot came to admire very much due to her pan-European reputation of richness, beauty, and cultural interests.²⁰ Knowing of Córdova's previous dispute with Queen Catherine of Austria regarding precedence, Seure looked at Córdova, who had his hat in his hand as a sign of reverence to Seure, and bowed his head to Córdova. However, Seure interpreted Córdova's actions as an intention to dispute precedence with him. As a consequence, Seure became outraged in the presence of several ladies of the court and left the room suddenly, causing comments among those present. In reporting these events to Emperor Charles V, in a missive dated August 25, 1557, Córdova did not hide his happiness.²¹ For some reason not explained in Seure's correspondence, he reacted disproportionately. What could have been a second-round victory over Emperor Charles V's representative at the Portuguese court instead became his first public defeat.

18 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 117, fl. 5v.

19 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 178.

20 On Princess Mary see: Carla Alferes Pinto, *A Infanta Dona Maria de Portugal. O mecenato de uma princesa renascentista* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1998) and Jordan Gschwend, "The Queen's Gambit," 83–112.

21 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 184.

However, several days before this incident, the Spanish representatives had already suffered another defeat at Seure's hands. A dispute between Spanish and French ships arriving in Lisbon from Brittany was resolved in Seure's favor by Queen Catherine, who ordered that the valuable Breton grain be unloaded in Lisbon, despite Spanish opposition, as Portugal was in dire need of it. According to Córdova's letter to the emperor, dated August 12, 1557, Seure had stepped in and achieved this outcome.²² At the same time, an anonymous Spanish intelligence report (undated but likely from October 1557) stated that Seure had received a new package of letters from France, which included missives from King Henry II, the French constable, and a French secretary of state. The letters were sent unencrypted, in order to check if the Spanish would intercept and open them. If they did, they would only find news of the Franco-Spanish war in Flanders and nothing more. To counteract the bad news for the French side in the war against the Spanish, Seure had spread the rumor in Lisbon that the Ottoman fleet in the Mediterranean was planning to attack the Spanish island of Majorca. Most importantly, the report states that Seure had petitioned Queen Catherine of Austria regarding the possibility of a French marriage and her response was: "it is said that the queen has replied to the ambassador that she is determined to marry the king of Portugal in France." Taking advantage of this favorable atmosphere, Seure also demanded that Cardinal Henry (1512–80), as the head of the Portuguese Inquisition, release a number of Frenchmen. The cardinal told Seure to speak with Queen Catherine, but for some unknown reason, Seure did not do so. None of this prevented the Portuguese government from sending naval and military reinforcements to Brazil to oppose the French. According to the report, this was the Portuguese answer to the news that the French Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (1519–72) had sent 300 men to the region.²³ However, Seure was quickly disabused of his illusions as information sent by Córdova to Princess Juana, dated October 1557, evidences. In that missive, it was stated that Seure was no longer under any illusion that a French marriage in Portugal would ever happen, as the main Portuguese courtiers were all in favor of Spain.²⁴

By the end of 1557, Seure faced additional challenges in his propaganda war against the Spanish in Lisbon, particularly with the confirmation of

22 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 182, fl. 1v.

23 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 153; For King Henry II's and the cardinal of Lorraine's orders, dated October 1557, to Seure to provide updated news of the war in Portugal see also Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *Michel de Seure, embaixador francês em Portugal (1557–1559)* (offprint by Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português, 1969a), 457–58.

24 Gachard, *Retraite et mort*, vol. II, 249–50.

the news of the Battle of Saint-Quentin. When news of the French military disaster reached Lisbon via a letter from the Portuguese ambassador in France dated August 28, 1557, Seure ordered everyone in his household to remain silent on the topic, as recorded by D. Juan de Hurtado Mendonza in a letter to the Spanish secretary of state Juan Vasquez de Molina, dated October 14, 1557.²⁵ Yet in August 1557, Seure created another incident that came to show the Portuguese that he was unworthy of any trust, in Mendonza's words. In a missive dated August 26 and addressed to King Philip II, Mendonza asserted that owing to some incidents between French and Portuguese seafarers near Lisbon, stemming from the West African trade dispute, Seure had publicly threatened retaliation, stating that the mistreated Frenchmen were vassals of King Henry II. Seure's manner of issuing the warning convinced the Portuguese not to trust him, according to Mendonza, which greatly pleased King Philip II.²⁶ This action by Seure was directly related to what is evident in his French correspondence: maritime espionage.

In addition to Seure's official mission, King Henry II had tasked his ambassador with another major goal. Seure records the order in a letter: the king wished him to obtain access to all possible intelligence relating to the Spanish and Portuguese fleets overseas.²⁷ Among other things, Seure was supposed to report on the departure of fleets from Seville and Lisbon. The need to monitor Portuguese movements was linked to King Henry II's support of Nicholas Durand de Villegagnon's (1510–71) departure to Brazil in 1555, and the monarch's financial backing of *France Antarctique*.²⁸ Two years earlier, King Henry had sent the French explorer and cartographer Guillaume Le Testu (1509–73) to map coastal Brazil. In tandem with King Henry II's financial support of the Dieppe cartographical school, Le Testu published his own cosmography in 1556, earning him the title of royal pilot.²⁹ Le Testu's atlas was dedicated to Admiral Coligny.³⁰ King Henry II also ordered the translation into French of the important Spanish nautical treatise of Pedro de Medina (1493–1567) to instruct French pilots, as part of

25 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 182, fl. 1v.

26 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 60, fl. 2.

27 Edmond Falgairolle, "Le chevalier de Seure. Ambassadeur de France en Portugal au XVI^e siècle," in *Memoires de l'Academie de Nimes* XVIII (1895): 73.

28 Roncière, *Histoire de la marine*, 453–55.

29 John T. McGrath, "Polemic and History in French Brazil, 1550–1600," *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 27, no. 2 (1996): 388–89.

30 Charles-André Julien, *Les voyages de découverte et les premiers établissements* (Gérard Monfort; Brionne, 1978), 184.

his policy of supporting the cartographical school of Dieppe.³¹ Therefore, the French king was more than vaguely interested in oceanic navigation: he fully understood that he needed Iberian maritime knowledge to successfully launch French overseas plans. This was similar to what was discussed in the previous chapter regarding the English understanding, under Queen Mary I, of the importance of translating Iberian nautical works. Like his father Francis I in 1545, Henry II also attempted to repatriate all French nautical experts working in England.³² He was aware that England under Queen Mary was becoming a competitor to French ambitions overseas, just like the Portuguese and Spanish already were. Given the ongoing French-Portuguese maritime rivalry, Henry II wanted to be informed of Portuguese movements in order to provide timely military assistance to the newly founded Fort Coligny. An analysis of Seure's extant letters, in conjunction with Spanish diplomatic dispatches from Lisbon, reveals that his mission was essentially that of a maritime spy-ambassador.

On February 12, 1558, Seure wrote to Anne de Montmorency, the French constable, to inform him that he had secured intelligence from Portuguese India. The findings were apparently sensitive enough for him to announce that he would transmit them in person. He also requested, on behalf of Princess Mary, Queen Eleonor of Austria's daughter (1498–1558), that the nuptial contract between her mother and King Francis I be sent to her.³³ Princess Mary lacked confirmation of the goods and lands that she had inherited from her mother in Southern France, and needed the Valois Crown's validation.³⁴ Seure hoped to assist the princess. On the same day, Seure sent a letter to Charles de Guise (1524–74), cardinal of Lorraine, with information about China that had just arrived on a Portuguese India Run fleet. He also sent marble, per the cardinal's request. In another missive, addressed to the lord of Fresnes and also dated February 12, 1558, Seure revealed concerns that his ambassadorship was going to last longer than he had expected or wanted. In light of this, he explicitly asked for authorization to leave Portugal.³⁵ The causes for his request become clear in the missive sent to King Henry II on January 30, 1559.

Seure started the letter by alerting the king to his personal correspondence with the Spanish marquis of Tenerife. He then disclosed the destinations of

31 Brossard, "La France de la Renaissance," 311.

32 Brossard, "La France de la Renaissance," 315.

33 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 278.

34 On this topic: Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *A Infanta Dona Maria (1521–1557) e a sua fortuna no Sul da França* (Lisbon: edition by Álvaro Pinto, 1955), 43–74.

35 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 279–81.

two important Spanish fleets: the Caribbean and the Plata River. Furthermore, a Portuguese informant had reported to Seure that the Spanish were attempting to establish a settlement along the Plata River, their interest doubtless piqued by Portuguese proximity in Brazil and the River's alleged propinquity to the Peruvian goldmines of Potosi. Seure likewise related intelligence on a Honduras-bound Spanish fleet that could easily be taken by the French. Seure warned that this could only be achieved if a peace treaty with England was signed, and if the French captains were ready to endure 40 days' of waiting to ambush in the right location. He urged King Henry not to allow an assault on the Spanish fleet during its return to Europe, while passing through the Azores, because the Portuguese and the Spanish Admiral D. Álvaro de Bazan (1526–88) would be expecting a French attack. The same unnamed Portuguese source also passed along intelligence relating to a land north of Cape Saint Agustin (on the Brazilian coast). Seure claimed that this new land lay very close to the Potosi mines, and could readily be occupied by the French. He also reported that an unspecified Spanish governor of South America was planning to launch another expedition to the Moluccas, something that infuriated the Portuguese. Meanwhile, the Portuguese Crown had accumulated many debts (most of which, to Seure's dismay, had been paid off with profits from Indian pepper). This pepper was bought by some Italians and Seure had tried, without success, to prevent Italian cash from arriving in Lisbon. By that time Seure was also negotiating with the French ambassador in Spain for the release of French prisoners from Seville. In his letter to the king, Seure reiterated his plea to favor the petitions of Princess Mary. He ended the letter by apologizing for writing down such details, justifying his behavior by citing the unavailability of a good courier to transmit the news personally to the king. He further requested that Henry II recall him, because his espionage activities had been discovered. And, as if the missive were not already full of bombshells, Seure also sent the king a highly interesting annex.³⁶

In this last document, Seure described all the revenues and expenses from every Portuguese overseas settlement. The conclusions were very clear: despite tremendous profits from Asia, Lisbon did not receive any net gains from India (not even from the rich Moluccas) because of the staggering expenses connected to their Asian empire. The Portuguese Crown was, in fact, forced to rely on the commercial revenues from West Africa, Brazil, and the Atlantic islands for survival. A large part of these funds, Seure emphasized, were used to finance the maintenance of defensive fleets in these last areas.

36 Falgairolle, "Le chevalier de Seure", 61–71.

Gold trade profits from Mina were declining and the Portuguese Crown was still recovering from earlier financial outlays in Morocco. Shipwrecks had begun to garner increased attention because of their considerable costliness. In this annex, Seure also stressed Portuguese-Spanish rivalry overseas. He reminded King Henry II that since the times of Prince Henry (1394–1460), the Portuguese had entrusted all their maritime property rights to the Order of Christ so that they could avoid loss in case of the Spanish rule of Portugal. Seure went on to briefly describe Portugal, stating that the country was split in half by the Tagus River (and that Lisbon ranked as one of the biggest and most beautiful cities that he had ever known).³⁷ This annex was not Seure's first communication to France on the Portuguese Empire. In December 1558, in addition to his requests to assist Princess Mary and to send him more money to pay his debts, Seure had relayed summaries of news of Portuguese India, as well as some products from China.³⁸

In another letter to King Henry II, this one undated, Seure provided similar intelligence but with a curious detail seemingly foreshadowing plans later materialized by Francis Drake (1540–96). The French could easily attack the Spanish island of Santo Domingo, Seure argued, and then proceed to Nombre de Dios and to Panama, where they could launch an offensive against Spanish navigation in the Pacific Ocean. For such a plan to be carried out, Seure explained, the French would need to depart at specific times of the year. If chance was on their side, they would also be able to strike Havana on their return trip. When leaving the Antilles for Europe, Seure counseled not to attack the Azores Sea. In the letter he also noted Portuguese plans to colonize Orinoco, although it was out of their hemisphere according to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. Seure compared Portuguese interest in Orinoco with the Portuguese-Spanish rivalry over the Moluccas.³⁹ This particular missive by Seure was a result of King Henry II's previous decision that France would launch a strong maritime operation in 1559 to strike the Spanish Caribbean and potentially reach as far as Peru.⁴⁰ Therefore, Seure provided all the necessary advice for the French captains to successfully execute the surprise attack. Due to peace treaty negotiations with Spain, King Henry II canceled all the maritime plans almost at the last minute.⁴¹ Nonetheless, this did not halt the departure of French raiders. The French

37 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 292–97.

38 Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 72–74.

39 Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 76–81.

40 Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 85.

41 McGrath, *The French in Early Florida*, 79.

overseas attacks were so successful that they even reduced the strength of Spanish *Mare Clausum* arguments, as has already been argued.⁴² How could Spain claim rights when the French raided the seas it claimed with impunity? While stationed in Lisbon, Seure contributed to this outcome. Thus, it is no wonder that once his espionage was discovered, the Portuguese court demanded Seure's withdrawal. The ambassador's *lettres de rappel* were prepared at the Valois court precisely in January 1559.

The first letter, possibly written by Anne de Montmorency, notified Seure that the Portuguese regent, Queen Catherine of Austria, had demanded his withdrawal. The second and most significant letter was from King Henry II. The French king wrote to apprise Seure of the fact that João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, had complained about him on behalf of the Portuguese regent. Although King Henry II had decided to recall his ambassador, he assured Seure that he was very pleased with his services and promised to receive him well. The third letter may have been composed by the cardinal of Lorraine. Seure was again alerted to Dantas's protest, and also commended him for his diligence in serving King Henry II; indeed, he was to receive a pension for a whole year to finance his return to France via Spain. He was even asked to continue reporting everything he could while in Spain.⁴³ Seure did not receive these letters until later. Unaware of the developments they contained, on February 14, 1559 he wrote to King Henry II urging him to appoint a new ambassador in Lisbon, reminding him that he had been discovered and was being treated very badly. He once again asked for the payment of his debts and briefed the king on the destination of more Spanish fleets. Revolted by Spanish abuses against French seamen, he recommended lifting the embargo on French navigation to the West Indies, enabling the French to take revenge against the Spanish.⁴⁴ It was only on February 18, 1559 that Seure was informed of Jean Nicot's appointment. In a letter to Anne de Montmorency, dated April 18, 1559, Seure noted that it took him two months to receive his *lettres de rappel*.⁴⁵ As late as May 1559, Seure was still negotiating with Portuguese and Spanish authorities to gain authorization to depart from Portugal.⁴⁶ He left Portugal before Nicot's arrival.⁴⁷ Still, it is relevant to question what had motivated the Portuguese complaints against Seure. Once again, in the absence of an answer in Seure's

42 Catellan, "Iberian Expansion," 22.

43 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 285–86.

44 Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 82–84.

45 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 283; Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 84–85.

46 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 289–291.

47 Jean Baudry, *Jean Nicot à la origine du tabac en France* (La Manufacture, 1988), 54.

incomplete correspondence, the reports from the Spanish ambassador in Lisbon provide additional insights.

As early as November 1556, Seure's predecessor in office, the Ambassador Honorais de Caix was accused in a Spanish intelligence document written in Lisbon probably by one of D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza's agents, the Spanish ambassador in Portugal, of plotting to engaging the services of the Spanish friar Pedro de Godoy for the Valois. Godoy had been sentenced to death in Peru, but had managed to escape. Before arriving in Lisbon, Godoy made contact with Caix. Among his belongings, letters addressed to Caix and Anne de Montmorency were found, in which he promised to pilot a French expedition to Peru or the Magellan Strait. In reply, King Philip II issued a judicial order to detain him when he disembarked in Lisbon.⁴⁸ In a letter dated April 30, 1557 and addressed to King Philip II, D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza revealed that Godoy had escaped prison in the Antilles and that he was planning to flee to France to serve the Valois. As the matter involved Caix, the Spanish ambassador in Lisbon had devised a plan to capture Godoy. He sent the Spaniard D. Alonso Henriquez to win his trust and propose that Godoy go with him to the house of the Spanish duke of Vila Nova, who would assist them in their escape to France. But the duke would detain Godoy and deliver him to face Spanish justice.⁴⁹ In another letter addressed to King Philip II and dated June 2, 1557, Mendonza revealed that he had laid hands on all of Godoy's papers and that he was about to send them to Spain.⁵⁰ The vigilance with regard to Godoy is similar to cases of French mariners with knowledge of the Spanish Indies who ended up jailed at the Casa de la Contratación.⁵¹ Thus, the "Godoy problem" seems to have only been solved after Seure's arrival.

In light of the evidence of espionage found in Seure's correspondence, it is plausible that Seure was made aware of Godoy's plans by his predecessor Honorais de Caix and may have played a role in the case, although documented evidence did not survive. As previously established, one of

48 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 198.

49 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 50, fl. 1v.

50 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 379, doc. 69, fls. 1–1v.

51 In 1536, the Casa's authorities wrote to Empress Elizabeth of Portugal, ruler of Spain in the absence of King Charles I from Spain, notifying that they had imprisoned a French mariner who had arrived from the Caribbean. The interrogation of this unnamed French mariner, who was well-versed in the Spanish Indies, were unsuccessful as the man had not revealed anything. Thus, the authorities asked what they should do. The case is enlightening of the vigilance with regard to nautical knowledge in Seville that any Frenchman was subject to (Archivo General de Indias (AGI), *Indiferente* 1092, book 130, fl. 2).

Seure's duties was to gather intelligence on Spanish maritime movements in the Atlantic for France. The potential for a Spaniard to provide valuable knowledge to the French for planning overseas expeditions would not have been overlooked. These suspicions are further supported by the 1558 accusations of Seure's espionage, which ultimately led to his recall. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue.

In February 1558, a large French fleet approached Lisbon to anchor and unload the precious grain that Portugal needed so much. The presence of such a large fleet caused unease within the city. As the ongoing war between France and Spain continued to escalate in the Atlantic and Europe, D. Juan de Ribera y Mendonza, the new Spanish ambassador to Lisbon, had received troubling news that he reported to Princess Juana on February 24, 1558. The ambassador had obtained intelligence from an unnamed informant, stating that several of the recently arrived Frenchmen had received orders to organize a French attack on Galicia in conjunction with Ambassador Seure. He warned Galician authorities to be prepared. The French fleet consisted of nearly 3,000 men and several artillery pieces, further fueling the Spanish ambassador's suspicions. D. Juan Ribera y Mendonza advised Princess Juana that it would be wise to also inform Queen Catherine of Austria, as the French could also be planning a surprise attack on the Portuguese. He expressed his concerns by stating that "they behave like mad men." He also warned that these Frenchmen were able to make "a non-sense especially if this ambassador of France [Seure] commands them to it as he is a mad man." To solidify Ribera y Mendonza's suspicions even more, the 5th duke of Braganza had also given him a similar warning. Upon hearing these French plans from Ribera y Mendonza, Princess Mary started to suspect that her mother's death had not been due to natural causes.⁵²

Some days later, on March 2, 1558 in a letter to King Philip II, Ribera y Mendonza revealed that after the news of the French takeover of Calais reached Lisbon, Ambassador Seure had gathered the French pilots and captains of the 100 French ships that were anchored in Lisbon in his house. After their arrival, the Spanish ambassador went to speak with Queen Catherine of Austria to warn her that the French fleet could potentially attack Spain or Portugal. The queen did not entirely believe his advice, but

52 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 41, fl. 1–1v. This comment is related to the fact that Queen Eleanor of Austria, Emperor Charles V's sister, had married King Manuel I before marrying King Francis I. As queen of France, Eleanor of Austria tried several times to defend Portuguese and Spanish interests at the Valois Court. Her actions were not approved by the courtier party that supported open war with Spain.

commanded him to provide more intelligence if he received it.⁵³ Three days later in a missive to the Spanish secretary of state Juan Vasquez de Molina, Ribera y Mendonza commented that there had been a great outcry in Seure's house when news arrived of a new French defeat at the hands of the Spanish. He could not know the details for sure as Seure had decided to bring the recently received letters from France around his neck (certainly to avoid them being stolen by the Spanish). Rumors were circulating that the 150 French ships and almost 3,000 Frenchmen that were in Lisbon were preparing an assault against the Portuguese island of Berlengas, a key place *en route* for ships sailing from the Azores Sea to continental Portugal and for commercial ships navigating from the south to the north of Portugal. However, Ribera y Mendonza refused to believe that the French would go as far as to proceed in such a way against Portugal.⁵⁴ But why did he give such an opinion if he considered Seure to have been the mastermind behind the French plans?

The explanation for this can be found in another letter by Ribera y Mendonza, also addressed to Juan Vasquez de Molina but dated March 2, 1558. In this letter, Ribera y Mendonza provides further details about his conversation with Queen Catherine of Austria. When he realized that the queen did not take the potential French threat seriously and denied his request to allow the French fleet to depart in small groups rather than as a whole, he made another argument. As 100 of the total 150 French ships were near Belém Palace, where King Sebastian was without royal guard, Ribera y Mendonza argued that if the French desired, they could easily disembark 1,000 soldiers at night and kidnap the young king. According to his report, once he used this argument, the queen was "persuaded." She asked him not to disclose the matter and seems to have planned the Portuguese response as she also requested that he provide written testimony. But, in the end, nothing came of it. According to Ribera y Mendonza, there was another meeting in Seure's residence in which it was decided that Seure would not command or participate in the alleged French attack.⁵⁵ The next day in a missive to King Philip II, Ribera y Mendonza reported the details of his secret negotiations with Queen Catherine and her willingness to take any necessary measures to avoid danger.⁵⁶ On March 8, 1558, Philip II formally replied to Ribera y Mendonza, thanking him for his action, approving the

53 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 32, fl. 1v.–2.

54 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 48, fl. 1–1v.

55 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 49, fl. 1–1v.

56 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 55.

deal of secrecy with Queen Catherine on the matter of the French fleet. He also reassured Ribera y Mendonza: he had given orders for Spain to prepare itself for a French blow.⁵⁷ This communication suggests that by March, Queen Catherine was aware of the French maritime threat and, due to her vigilant nature, likely increased her surveillance of Seure, as she may have suspected that King Henry II's ambassador in Lisbon was providing critical intelligence to fuel France's maritime plans against Portugal. The Portuguese regent's worst fears were just about to be confirmed.

In a letter dated May 6, 1558, D. Juan Ribera y Mendonza expressed his concerns to Juan Vasquez de Molina about a recent event. A Portuguese individual who had secretly disembarked from a French ship in Cascais, near Lisbon, had come to the Portuguese court with a warning. He reported that a fleet of nine well-armed vessels had recently set sail from Dieppe and Le Havre, guided by two Portuguese pilots. While the official reason given for the voyage was to raid Spanish ships returning from the Antilles, the two pilots had also urged the Portuguese to deliver a warning to Queen Catherine of Austria. King Henry II had issued a letter of marque, giving permission for the French privateers to raid Portuguese ships in order to compensate for losses of 200,000 ducats. This revelation caused a scandal at the Portuguese court. Still, it was not the first time this happened, as similar instances had already taken place under King Francis I. The real cause for concern was the information that King Henry II had summoned his Conseil Privé to discuss a possible declaration of war against Portugal.⁵⁸ The document in question does not provide explicit reasoning for the French king's inclination to declaring war on Portugal. However, it is not difficult to infer potential motives. At the time, the Valois court had been unsuccessful in convincing Portugal to align against Spain in its maritime war. Additionally, Portugal was viewed as an ally of King Philip II. As a result, France may have seen an opportunity to openly declare war on Portugal. This possibility was further reinforced by the fact that King Henry had recently succeeded in strengthening the French navy through the conquest of Calais, which served as evidence of France's military and maritime prowess to the rest of Europe.

The threat posed by French maritime activities escalated in the following months. On March 30, 1558, D. Juan Ribera y Mendonza informed Juan Vasquez de Molina that the French had seized Portuguese and Spanish vessels loaded with wealth as they were approaching Lisbon. He regretted that with the riches on board each captured Portuguese ship, the French

57 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 80.

58 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 51, fl. 1.

king had been able to fund his war against Spain for several months. He also asserted that this “black grain that is brought here from Brittany makes Portugal suffer the French dependency even more and this is very harmful for Castile [also]”.⁵⁹ Thus, the Spanish ambassador in Portugal recognized that France was using economic leverage, specifically grain, to strengthen its relationship with Portugal. Ribera y Mendonza was far from misinformed. The Venetian ambassador Michel Suriano, writing his 1562 *relazione* to the Venetian senate and doge, recognized with astonishment that amidst the intense war between Henry II and Philip II, France and Spain kept multiple commercial channels open. The profits and needs of both monarchies surpassed all formal prohibitions.⁶⁰

Seure was also aware of this as a missive he sent to the duke of Etampes, the lieutenant of Brittany, on July 17, 1558, evidences. He noted that Portugal was always in need of French grain, as demonstrated by the February 1558 stopover of 150 French vessels in Lisbon. Additionally, Seure also highlighted that due to a drought in the Iberian Peninsula in 1558, both Portugal and Spain would be in need of French grain, which would weaken both Iberian monarchies’ ability to effectively address their challenges abroad. However, Seure also expressed concern that Breton merchants were not paying taxes owed to King Henry II, which was depriving the Valois court of important funds. Therefore, he urged the duke to take action and he sent him a list of sixty Breton shipowners who were evading tax and also wrote about this issue to the cardinal of Lorraine.⁶¹

In this context, the escalating conflicts between the Portuguese and the French in the Atlantic, along with the ongoing open war in Brazil led by Villegagnon’s expedition, prompted Queen Catherine of Austria to repeat King John III’s decision made in 1552: to unite the Portuguese and Spanish navies in the Azores Sea to combat French privateers.⁶² An order by King Philip II to D. Juan de Ribera y Mendonza, dated June 6, 1558, shows that Spain demanded that Portugal collaborate with D. Álvaro de Bazan’s fleet in the Azores to protect the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese ships as they

59 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 62, fl. 1.

60 James C. Davis, ed., *Pursuit of Power: Venetian Ambassadors’ Reports on Spain, Turkey and France in the Age of Philip II, 1560–1600* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 190.

61 Dom Hyacinthe Morice, *Memoires pour servir de preuves à l’histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Bretagne*, vol. III (Paris, Charles Osmont, 1756), 1222–23.

62 In 1552, this happened owing to the attack executed by François Le Clerc, better known in France as *Jambe de Bois* and as *Pie de Palo* in Spain, on the smaller island of Madeira of Porto Santo. As Le Clerc was searching for Spanish Indies vessels, he also ended up attacking the Portuguese. Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean*, 85.

returned to the Iberian Peninsula.⁶³ Pierre Chaunu and Huguette have argued that it was Portugal that informed Spain of the plans of French interlopers against the Spanish Carrera de Indias in 1558 and they have even documented how Spain reacted to the French menace using Portuguese intermediaries. According to Chaunu and Huguette, the collaboration between Portugal and Spain in 1558 was first requested by Portugal; Spain accepted because of its great need to use the Portuguese Azores, even though that meant ignoring the many complaints that arrived in Seville concerning Portuguese illicit trade in the Spanish Indies,⁶⁴ as has also been mentioned in the first chapter. This collaboration is also evidenced in Seure's missive to King Henry II, which states that Lisbon had ordered the Portuguese fleet in the Azores to collaborate with the Spanish fleet of D. Álvaro de Bazan.⁶⁵

It becomes apparent that while French-Portuguese maritime rivalry and conflicts increased, Queen Catherine of Austria should have remained vigilant with regard to Seure's actions, whether on her own initiative or through information provided by the Spanish ambassador D. Juan de Ribera y Mendonza. In this context, it is important to consider the incident that led to Seure's plea for recall, although it is not detailed in his correspondence. The incident in question involved the robbery of the possessions of the new Portuguese ambassador to King Philip II in the Netherlands, D. Francisco Pereira, who was appointed in 1557. Due to the escalation of French-Portuguese incidents at sea, Seure was concerned about a possible more permanent Portuguese maritime rapprochement to Spain. Seure continued to broadcast propaganda to the French side, even after the incident with Queen Catherine of Austria in August 1558. After Emperor Charles V's death, in September 1558, Seure came to the Portuguese regent to promise her that King Henry II would conquer Brussels. He had received new orders from King Henry II and the cardinal of Lorraine to do so, as D. Juan Hurtado y Mendonza averred in a letter to King Philip II dated September 28, 1558.⁶⁶

D. Francisco Pereira, who had traveled from Portugal to the Netherlands via Spain and France and had a safe-conduct to travel within France, which he had obtained through João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, was robbed of all his belongings. Reports from the Venetian ambassador in France, dated November 1557, shed light on this event. The

63 AGI, *Indiferente* 1965, book 13, fl. 529–530.

64 Huguette and Pierre Chaunu, *Séville et l'Atlantique 1504–1650. Le mouvement des navires et des marchandises entre l'Espagne et l'Amérique, de 1504 à 1650. Partie statistique. Le trafic de 1504 à 1561*, tome II (Paris: Librairie Armand Coulin, 1955), 567–68.

65 Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 61–71.

66 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 34.

first report states that D. Francisco Pereira was robbed of an amount of around 13,000 crowns and initially suspected that the English may have ordered it, as they knew that Portuguese ambassadors usually brought letters from Emperor Charles V to the kings of England. However, this hypothesis was quickly dismissed as the robbery took place on French soil. Another Venetian report also discussed the reasons behind the theft, considering that Pereira had a safe-conduct and his diplomatic immunity was clearly violated by the French. The report concludes that Pereira was robbed in order to determine if he was carrying letters from Emperor Charles V. As he did not have any, the situation became scandalous.⁶⁷

When news of this event, which was widely commented on in Europe at the time, arrived in Portugal, there were immediate orders for João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, to petition the French government for the return of all the stolen goods. It was in this process that Queen Catherine of Austria discovered in Lisbon that the robbery had originally been ordered by Seure, as a letter by D. Juan de Ribera y Mendonza to Princess Juana, dated August 27, 1558, reveals. In it, it is stated that Queen Catherine ordered a courier to depart to France in the past days “to demand that the king of France recall his ambassador here [Seure] because they have certain intelligence that he was the cause of what happened to D. Francisco Pereira and that they [the French] did this after the many discourtesies and war at sea that Frenchmen did to the Portuguese.” The report also added that “And lastly because in the last day he [Seure] came to complain to the queen [Catherine of Austria] about a dispatch from the Portuguese king and he [Seure] did it with such insolence and defiance that the queen being bored replied to him [Seure] that he should thank her for not placing him in his ship and sending him back to France in that exact moment.” According to this account, Seure was so surprised at the regent’s answer and harsh tone that he became depressed in the following days.⁶⁸

Therefore, it was after discovering Seure’s espionage activities in Lisbon and how they threatened not only Portuguese interests but also overall Portuguese-Spanish relations, that Queen Catherine of Austria resorted to action and demanded Seure’s recall. The Portuguese regent, after all the incidents in Lisbon with Seure, thus firmly believed Seure to be involved in the theft of documentation sent from Portugal to D. Francisco Pereira.⁶⁹

67 Brown and Bentinck, *Calendar ... Venice, 1554–1558*, docs. 1089 and 1094.

68 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 39, fl. 1.

69 Maria do Rosário Sampaio Themudo Barata Azevedo Cruz, *As regências na menoridade de D. Sebastião. Elementos para uma história estrutural*, vol. I (Lisbon: INCM, 1992), 227–28.

Seure's espionage is easily proved in his French correspondence, as well as in the Spanish reports, but it did not help matters that Seure had a bad opinion of the Portuguese. This can further be seen in Seure's delighted announcement to the Spanish ambassador in England, in 1561, that the Portuguese would suffer heavily at the hands of Villegagnon's next fleet, which would be departing to destroy Portuguese ships overseas.⁷⁰ The ambassador's evident disdain for the Portuguese stands in sharp contrast to the views of his predecessor Honorais de Caix. Having been appointed to deescalate the French-Portuguese maritime rivalry, Seure ended up worsening tensions, and he even advocated the closure of the French embassy in Lisbon.⁷¹ In a way, what the comparison of Seure's missives with the Spanish diplomatic network in Portugal documents for this period reveal was that Lisbon was more than simply a global city where goods, people, and ideas circulated, as has already been argued.⁷² It was also a global city for espionage, even for issues that were apparently unrelated to Portuguese affairs (like the Franco-Spanish war in Europe). This is the main reason why Seure's rivalry with D. Juan Hurtado de Mendonza and D. Juan Ribera y Mendonza so closely resembles to what is known for the rival French and Imperial ambassadors (the Noialles brothers and Simon Renard) at Queen Mary I's court during the 1550s.⁷³

Neither of these points mean that Seure's mission was a failure. On the contrary, he had accomplished King Henry II's main goal: acquiring intelligence on Iberian nautical and imperial movements.⁷⁴ This is why Henry reacted when alerted to protests,⁷⁵ quickly sending off the above-mentioned letter to Seure. After returning to France, Seure was appointed ambassador to Elizabethan England, holding the post between 1560–61. He was very well-received, despite the challenging times for Anglo-French relations.⁷⁶ Later on, he was named royal counsellor by Queen Mother Catherine de' Medici (1519–89), and worked at the Valois King's chamber. Finally, in 1566, Seure became ambassador to Rome. Thus, Seure's tenure

70 Mendes Leal and Rebello da Silva, *Quadro elementar*, vol. XV, 117–18.

71 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 80–81.

72 Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K. J. P. Lowe, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London: Paul Holberton, 2015).

73 On this topic see: E. Harris Harbison, *Rival Ambassadors at the Court of Queen Mary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

74 Edmond Falgairolle, 1895, 58.

75 Serrão, *A Infanta Dona Maria*, 61.

76 Estelle Paranque, *Elizabeth I of England through Valois Eyes: Power, Representation, and Diplomacy in the Reign of the Queen, 1558–1588* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 28 and 47.

at the Portuguese embassy did not negatively affect his later career. But how did Seure's activities in Lisbon relate to Jean Nicot's appointment, especially considering that Seure was nominated by the courtier party that defended war against Spain (the Guises and Montmorency) while Nicot was appointed by the pacifist party led by Dianne de Poitiers (1500–66), the mistress of King Henry II?⁷⁷ In the following sections, I will analyze how Seure's espionage mission had a direct impact both on Nicot's nomination, and on his approach to Portuguese affairs. In doing so, the analysis will demonstrate how the French-Portuguese maritime interchange only reinforced itself.

3.2 Jean Nicot and the New Valois Approach (1559–61)

3.2.1. Fresh Hope for the Portuguese Embassy?

In order to understand Nicot's embassy, it is important to describe who he was and outline his previous career before coming to Portugal. Jean Nicot was born c. 1520–25, in Nîmes, an important city in southeastern France. He was the firstborn of a family of eleven children; his father was a public notary. Nicot received a good education: he started his studies at Nîmes college and then proceeded to the Nîmes faculty of arts. He rapidly became close to Guillaume Bigot (1502–50) and Claude Baudel (1491–1561), the two first rectors of this faculty. Later, at his father's urging, Nicot obtained a doctorate in law. Rather than become a lawyer, he went to the Valois court in late 1553, hoping to capitalize on the respect he had won for his solid humanist training. His rising status is clear in a letter from 1551 by Guillaume Pellicier (1490–1568), bishop of Montpellier, asking Nicot's advice on the works of Pliny (23/24–79 AD). Publicly known as an aficionado of the classics, Nicot was granted access to the Valois court by Claude Baudel, a figure connected to Jeanne d'Albrecht (1528–72), the queen of Navarre.⁷⁸ At court, Nicot worked alongside Sebastien de Rouillye under the supervision of Jean Bertrandi, the seal keeper and archbishop of Sens. He was employed as map keeper and later as the ambulant archivist.⁷⁹ Soon after, Nicot forged ties with Diane de Poitiers. This relationship facilitated Nicot's first appointment, by

77 Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance," 44.

78 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, XI–XIV, XIX–XXIV, XCV, XCVII and 130.

79 Michel Edmond, "Jean Nicot et sa famille," *Annales du Midi: Revue archéologique, historique et philologique de la France méridionale* 9, no. 34 (1897): 179–80; Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 25.

King Henry II, as keeper of the archives.⁸⁰ Nicot's reputation as a humanist flourished up to 1559.

In 1556, Guy de Bruès, a good friend of Nicot's, published his *Dialogues* and praised Nicot for his knowledge of philosophy.⁸¹ Nicot's relationship with the poet Joachim du Bellay (1522–60), one of the founders of the Pléiade group, also dates to this period. Given his office as keeper of the archives, Nicot became interested in history and he worked on a new edition of a history of France that had been printed in 1514 with several mistakes.⁸² Nicot's humanist identity went hand in hand with his status at King Henry II's court.⁸³ In 1556, the king appointed Nicot as his personal secretary. This position was short-lived, with the king appointing Nicot *maître de requêtes de son hôtel* shortly after.⁸⁴

The office of *maître* was an ancient one and very prestigious in France. It comprised judicial powers, mainly applied to the king's palace, but also conferred upon its bearer the duty to communicate with the highest judicial and political authorities, and it included dealings in the king's political councils and in the Paris Parliament. Nicot belonged to the long list of *maîtres* that were appointed because of wealth, good connections at court, and political protection. He was also another example of a *maître* promoted before being made ambassador. This was part of the traditional itinerancy and the voyages that the *maître* was supposed to undertake in the French king's service.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the *maître* title conferred a special status and renown upon its holder. In turn, this fact easily impressed foreigners with the prestige of the Valois household,⁸⁶ and assisted in displaying France's military and political power in Europe.

During the brief period he served as King Henry II's secretary, Nicot must have had access to copious secret documentation and been responsible for drafting the king's legal decrees. Nicot's abilities were apparently noticed by Queen Catherine de Medici, for soon after his appointment as *maître*, the queen sent Nicot to Florence to negotiate her share of the Medici clan inheritance.⁸⁷ Upon his return, Nicot was seriously considered as a suc-

80 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, XXIV.

81 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 83.

82 Edmond, "Jean Nicot," 179–80.

83 On this topic: H. Noel Williams, *Henri II: His Court and His Times* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1910).

84 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 90.

85 M. Etchechoury, *Les maîtres des requêtes de l'hôtel du roi sous les derniers Valois (1553–1589)* (Geneve: École National des Chartes, 1991), 27, 52 and 89.

86 Jean-François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Tempus Perin, 2014), 55.

87 Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 29.

cessor to Seure at the Portuguese embassy. Although he was only formally appointed in April 1559, Nicot's ambassadorship was the object of careful preparations by King Henry II.⁸⁸ This groundwork was directly influenced by the signing of the peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis between France, Spain, and England.⁸⁹ This development had consequences for France's approach to Spain,⁹⁰ but it also affected the French strategy regarding Portugal, and, in turn, had repercussions on Nicot's appointment.

Renewed hope for a lasting peace and alliance between the erstwhile rivals Spain and France meant that a spy-ambassador, like Seure, was unfit for the job. Already in January 1559, Anne de Montmorency had outlined a new policy proposal to govern relations with Portugal. In a letter addressed to Queen Catherine of Austria, the French constable started by saying that he was aware that she disapproved of Seure's behavior. He notified her of Seure's recall, and informed her that his successor had already been named. While never revealing the identity of Seure's replacement, Montmorency presented Nicot as a celebrated personage at court and an advocate of the traditional French-Portuguese alliance. Montmorency also confessed his admiration for Queen Catherine, and said that although he had thought of writing her a long letter, a previous Portuguese ambassador in France (Gaspar Palha) had advised against it. Montmorency's charm offensive worked; in a letter to a close advisor, the Portuguese queen expressed her joy at the impending arrival of the new ambassador (said to be very different from Seure), as had been confirmed by the Portuguese ambassador in France.⁹¹

But even more important than Montmorency's letter to Queen Catherine was the information about Nicot that João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France of whom we will speak in the next chapter, had sent to Portugal via Gaspar Palha, by then a Portuguese courier, probably in March 1559. It is important to quote his statements in full to understand the deep impact that Dantas's words about Jean Nicot had on the beginning of his embassy. After describing to Queen Catherine of Austria how King Henry II personally and publicly resented the fact that Seure had worsened relations, Dantas wrote:

88 Edmond, "Jean Nicot," 179–81.

89 On the treaty negotiations see: Bertrand Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité. La négociation du Traité du Cateau-Cambrésis* (Madrid: Casa Velásquez, 2010).

90 Jean-Michel Ribera, *Diplomatie et espionage. Les ambassadeurs du roi de France auprès de Philippe II. Du traité du Cateau-Cambrésis (1559) à la mort de Henri III (1589)* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 361–76.

91 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 286–88.

"Another ambassador that had already been appointed is due to leave [to Portugal] in twelve or fifteenth days and is going to take his [Seure's] place. He is a *maître de requêtes* of the valor and caliber of the cardinal of Sens. A meek and sly man more inclined to translate a good story than to mathematics. He is poor and has had no embassy, although he has already been sent by the king to Rome twice. The cardinal [of Sens] sends Your Highness his good testimony and tells him [Nicot] to take account of it when honoring and receiving favors, and that he will be very grateful, for he is the author of his [Nicot] coming. He offered to send him [Nicot] very well informed and instructed on what he must do to confirm and increase the friendship [between Portugal and France]."

Dantas also asked Palha to enquire of Queen Catherine what she would do "regarding this ambassador of France and if she will grant him any favor." Essentially, Dantas was asking the queen if he could grant favors to Nicot before his departure from France, as in the missive he also asked Lisbon to send to France the formal authorization for Nicot to travel to and enter Portugal.⁹² This presentation of Nicot as a peaceful man certainly delighted Queen Catherine. Even though the formal answer of the queen to Dantas has not survived, the queen's joy and curiosity about the new French ambassador to Portugal is completely confirmed in the French documents about Nicot's embassy.

On May 6, 1559, King Henry II gave Nicot his instructions. The king ordered him to view Portugal as an allied kingdom and to reaffirm the French-Portuguese alliance. Bilateral commercial relations were to be reinforced, imbued with aspirations for the new era opened by the Franco-Spanish alliance. Nicot should also provide updates on the marriage plans being made between the Valois and the Habsburgs. On that same day, King Henry II addressed letters to Cardinal Henry and Queen Catherine informing them that he had recalled Seure and asking for a good reception of Nicot.⁹³

One of Nicot's main missions was to pave the way for a marriage alliance between France and Portugal, through the marriage of Princess Margaret of Valois (1553–1615), King Henry II's daughter, and King Sebastian. Thus, King Henry II officially advanced the matrimonial proposal in 1559 in the context of Jean Nicot's appointment. However, the king's plans, like previous French attempts,⁹⁴ failed. Regardless of the outcome, it is important to stress

92 ANTT, *Fragmentos*, Box 1, maço 1, doc. 34, fl. 2.

93 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 81–85.

94 On this topic: Diogo Faria, "Negócios matrimoniais."

that it was one of Henry's ambitions vis-à-vis Portugal, and one that fit well with the diplomatic environment created by the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis. Nonetheless, as had been the case for his predecessor, Nicot's official mission was supplemented by another crucial task: gathering intelligence on the developments of the Portuguese navy and empire.⁹⁵

Since he was operating at a time of ostensible peace, Nicot had to proceed more carefully. His humanist persona had already won this rather young man an appointment that was rare in 16th-century French diplomacy. Although some previous *maîtres* had gone on to become ambassadors,⁹⁶ in 1559 Nicot was not yet an experienced diplomat, a venerable churchman, or a military leader (as were, for instance, the French ambassadors in Spain during the 1560s).⁹⁷ His mission in Portugal would also be fraught with the same thorny questions of French-Portuguese maritime rivalry that had been an unrelenting reality during Seure's tenure.⁹⁸ Shortly after Nicot's arrival in Lisbon, João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, had issued a warning to Queen Catherine: Cateau-Cambrésis and King Henry II's promises that the French would not sail to Guinea, Mina, and Brazil were a façade. The Portuguese should have armed fleets in all these places to fight the French.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Nicot could count on some support in Lisbon because the Portuguese feared the Spanish. This was due to Emperor Charles V and later to King Philip II's attempts at having Prince Charles (1545–68) sworn as heir to the Portuguese Crown because of King Sebastian's minority, youth, and fragile health. Seure, and certainly Nicot, were aware that in such a situation, the Portuguese would rather support a French or Muslim king than a Spanish one, as the Spanish ambassador wrote after King John III's death in 1557.¹⁰⁰ It is now time to analyze how Nicot dealt with this political environment and coped with the main goals of his embassy, in order to later understand his approach to the broader French-Portuguese maritime rivalry and his acquisition of Portuguese maritime knowledge.

3.2.2 Overview of Important Topics during the Embassy

Jean Nicot's embassy was marked by several events, some of which have already been alluded to: the planning of a marriage between King Sebastian

95 Edmond, "Jean Nicot," 180–81.

96 Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 33.

97 Ribera, *Diplomatie et espionage*, 44.

98 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 83.

99 Maria do Rosário de Sampaio Themudo Barata Azevedo Cruz, Vol. I, 1992, 76, 233 and 236.

100 Buescu, *Catarina de Áustria*, 331–34.

and Princess Margaret of Valois; changing dynastic relations due to the death of King Henry II and the accessions of Kings Francis II (1559–60) and Charles IX (1560–74); agreements with Princess Mary and the French envoys extraordinary to Lisbon; several business opportunities; bilateral maritime attacks; and the imprisonment of Frenchmen in Portugal. Nicot's actions in relation to each of these matters will be described, although all these issues are in some fashion interconnected.

The intended marriage between the Valois and the Avis royal houses was of pivotal importance for Nicot's embassy, and became the *leitmotif* of his major actions. The matrimony never came to pass; in 1572, Princess Margaret married Henry, king of Navarre (1553–1610). But at the time of Nicot's arrival in Lisbon, the Valois-Avis wedding had long been desired by the French and Portuguese courts. Nicot was mindful of King Philip II's probable objections. He confirmed this during a short stay in Tordesillas *en route* to Portugal, having been forced to travel via Spain due to threats of English piracy in La Rochelle. In Tordesillas, Nicot met Princess Juana of Austria, King Sebastian's mother, and realized that a French marriage for King Sebastian would face strong opposition from Spain.¹⁰¹ When Nicot arrived in Lisbon, he was granted a special reception as French ambassador, and received by the earls palatine and all the members of the Portuguese royal family,¹⁰² a repetition, in other words, of Seure's 1557 formal reception. Nicot attributed the warm welcome to the desire, shared by everyone from the lowest to the highest station in Portugal, to see the French marriage realized.¹⁰³

Nicot was soon beset with worries about rumors that Princess Juana would return to Portugal to assume the regency. Although this threat did not ultimately materialize, in November 1559, Nicot pointed to the potential French marriage as the main cause of Portuguese-Spanish tension. He noted that the Portuguese would never tolerate a Spanish ruler. In December 1559, Nicot was contacted by two unnamed Portuguese courtiers. Both told him that they wanted the French wedding to proceed, as they were admirers of France. This enthusiasm was soon threatened. King Philip II ordered his ambassador to spread the word in Lisbon that Queen Catherine de' Medici was negotiating a marriage between Princess Margaret and the Spanish Prince Charles.¹⁰⁴ None of the Spanish ambassadorial documents on Simancas refer to Nicot, as there is a lack of documents from late 1558

101 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, XXXVII–XXXVIII.

102 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 94.

103 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 4–5 and 8.

104 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 46 and 48.

almost until late 1561.¹⁰⁵ Although these talks about a Spanish wedding for Princess Margaret were later aborted, Queen Catherine de' Medici's hesitation was felt in Portugal. Between 1560 and 1561, in the aftermath of King Philip II's maneuvers, Kings Francis II and Charles IX sent four special envoys to Portugal to reassert France's commitment to the Portuguese wedding. In July 1561, Queen Catherine de' Medici even sent a portrait of Princess Margaret celebrating her birthday. Although there already were doubts surrounding the notion that Queen Catherine de' Medici would marry off her daughter to the Portuguese king, Nicot was still able to sell the marriage. He was so successful that several courtiers asked him to write home again, communicating Portugal's fervent wish that the French wedding would take place. Despite her fondness for her nephew King Philip II, Nicot considered Regent Catherine of Austria a stauncher supporter of the French marriage than Cardinal Henry.¹⁰⁶

The close connections (and desire to mend relations) between the Portuguese and French courts were important during Nicot's tenure. Nicot arrived in Portugal after the death of King Henry II. Following the coronation of Francis II, the Portuguese court sent an envoy extraordinary to France, the renowned D. Álvaro de Castro (?–1573), son of the famous governor of India D. João de Castro (1500–48). Castro was well-received by the Valois court, as a profusion of letters attests. King Francis II started by writing to Princess Juana to express his admiration. Shortly afterwards, Queen Catherine de' Medici addressed a formal letter to King Sebastian, confirming the old alliance between France and Portugal. This letter was succeeded by two others meriting closer examination. In the first, Queen Catherine wrote to Regent Catherine of Austria, mentioning the renewal of their alliance and remarking that their mutual condition as female regents and mothers of kings should help them provide each other counsel. In the second, Catherine de' Medici wrote to Cardinal Henry, communicating the esteem in which she held D. Álvaro de Castro, and swearing to maintain and deepen the ties between France and Portugal. King Francis likewise wrote to Cardinal Henry with promises that he would never forget his father's and France's alliance with Portugal.¹⁰⁷

105 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajos 380 and 381. For some strange reason, the documents seem not to have survived. I have searched for the missing documents in other collections in Simancas and Seville (at AGI) but did not find them. The missing documents are the letters from the Spanish ambassadors D. Juan de Ribera y Mendonza and the first letters by D. Alonso de Tovar. At Legajo 381, Tovar's first letters date to late 1561.

106 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 65–68.

107 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 86–91.

Princess Mary was another supporter of friendly relations with France. Nicknamed *Always-Bride* by historians because she never married, despite several serious proposals from across Europe,¹⁰⁸ Princess Mary was the focus of veneration from Nicot, as she had been from Seure. This was a consequence of a campaign devised by the Portuguese court and by Mary's mother, Eleanor of Austria, queen of France, to spread this image of Princess Mary in Europe.¹⁰⁹ In one of his first letters from Lisbon, penned in September 1559, Nicot commented that she was a great lady and an admirer of France, and was both very beautiful and very rich. He recorded being impressed by the number of pearls that she had worn at his reception. But Nicot went further, contending that relations between France and Portugal would be even better if she held political power.¹¹⁰ It was in this context that Nicot gladly fulfilled all the princess's requests regarding her inheritance in southern France. In 1561, when he was asked about worrying news, Nicot assured the princess that all her properties would be safe, and wrote to France asking for updates.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, following Jean de Ébrard's visit in April 1561, which was to protest formally at French losses in Brazil, Nicot participated in negotiations with Princess Mary to have Ébrard named administrator of her French lands in Roverge. Ébrard was appointed thanks to the princess's confidence in Nicot and her admiration for King Henry II.¹¹² However, before Ébrard's visit to Portugal in 1561, two other major French embassies extraordinary had occurred. Both are mentioned by Nicot.

In early 1560, fearing the consequences of a possible handover of the Portuguese regency to Princess Juana, King Francis II sent Jean de Ébrard to Portugal to confirm the Portuguese commitment to Princess Margaret's wedding.¹¹³ Ébrard brought with him a portrait of Princess Margaret, authored by the famous French painter François Clouet (1510–72), to be presented at the Portuguese court.¹¹⁴ Queen Catherine de' Medici dispatched letters to Nicot asking him to help Ébrard's mission and to Cardinal Henry informing him of Ébrard's visit. Cardinal Henry wrote personally to King Francis to reassure him that the French marriage would go ahead. Nicot wrote that Ébrard was well-received in March 1560 by the Portuguese royal family.¹¹⁵

108 On this topic: Alferes Pinto, *A Infanta Dona Maria*.

109 For further details see: Jordan Gschwend, "The Queen's Gambit."

110 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 8–9 and 14.

111 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 32 and 34–35.

112 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 121–22; Serrão, *A Infanta Dona Maria*, 70 and 98–99.

113 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 65–68.

114 Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance," 48.

115 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LIII and 95–99.

The Venetian ambassador in France who witnessed Ébrard's departure stated that he went to propose the marriage, but also asserted that the English ambassador had received news that Ébrard went with a secret mission: to negotiate for the acquisition of Portuguese India Run vessels.¹¹⁶ Though there is no known other reference to this, the intention might have been there, as it is consistent with the maritime espionage undertaken by Nicot, as we shall see. Still, English informants in Spain also noticed this embassy to Portugal, stating that the French king had chosen a gentleman of his household. This gentleman would answer Portuguese complaints about French seizures of Portuguese ships by accusing Protestant English instead as the responsible for such actions.¹¹⁷ However, the biggest event of 1560 was yet to come: the naval embassy led by François de Guise (1534–63), the brother of the duke of Guise. The commander in chief of the French army was steering his fleet from the Mediterranean to Scotland and was ordered to make a stop in Lisbon. The visit confirmed the French dedication to Princess Margaret's wedding and to appointments by Princess Mary for her French estates. It is also possible that Guise suggested himself as a suitable husband for the princess.¹¹⁸

In a letter to the duke of Guise, Nicot reported that François de Guise was visited by all members of the Portuguese royal family and the most influential noblemen because he was a famous military leader, and that his presence had helped to improve French relations with Portugal. In a letter to King Francis II, Nicot also stated that François de Guise had been received in such a manner because he was a French prince of the blood and such royal visits were uncommon in Portugal. Indeed, court rules were changed to provide for pageantry suitable for Guise's visit, and Regent Catherine of Austria paid for all of his men's supplies and food.¹¹⁹ As for François de Guise's intentions to wed Princess Mary, the project came to nothing (supposing that he made any serious efforts, profiting from Nicot's good relations with the princess). François de Guise's visit was one of the greatest successes of French diplomacy in Portugal in the 16th century.¹²⁰ Yet in July 1561, François de Guise sent his lieutenant, the lord of Carses

116 Rawdon Brown and G. Cavendish Bentinck, eds., *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, 1558–1580* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1890), doc. 150.

117 *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House*, vol. 1, 1306–1571 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1883), doc. 661.

118 C. Coutinho, *O Grão Prior de França e a sua armada no Tejo em 1560. Subsídio para um pretenso noivado da Infanta D. Maria* (offprint by Arquivo Histórico de Portugal, 1936), 6–9.

119 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LX–LXXII and 55.

120 Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance," 49.

(a member of the party accompanying him in 1560) to Lisbon. This visit was ordered by King Charles IX, who still wanted to work towards the Portuguese marriage of his sister Princess Margaret. Although Carses was not as warmly welcomed as his predecessors (because of Queen Catherine de' Medici's conversations with King Philip II about Princess Margaret's marriage to the Spanish Prince Charles), he was personally presented to Princess Mary and was updated on Mediterranean events by the Portuguese ambassador in Rome.¹²¹

This favorable atmosphere was indispensable to Nicot's acquisition of information on commercial opportunities for France. In one of his first letters from Lisbon, addressed to King Francis, Nicot underscored Portugal's dependency on French imports of grain and argued that France should use this to her benefit. When King Charles IX assumed the French Crown, Nicot reiterated this advice and sent the new monarch the letters he had written previously. Later on, he tried to negotiate the loading of several Indian pepper shipments to France with Regent Catherine of Austria. Since he did not believe the regent would be able to honor her commitments, Nicot opened talks with merchants in Lisbon to ensure that pepper would arrive in France.¹²² These discussions were possibly related to the bankruptcy that the Casa da Índia faced in 1560,¹²³ and perhaps, to an agreement Queen Catherine of Austria may have made stating that Portugal would provide France with Indian pepper. During King Francis I's reign, there were unfinished conversations about the establishment of a Portuguese factory in Rouen to supply France with spices.¹²⁴

For his part, Nicot was able to convince a Venetian merchant, owner of a sugar factory in Lisbon, to come to France. This merchant may have been enticed by Nicot's promises of excellent trading conditions in France; in Portugal, the merchant lacked supplies and authorities had refused to coordinate provision of them. It is unknown whether this merchant is the same as the one who is documented to have settled in La Rochelle shortly after this episode.¹²⁵ However, it is undeniable that Nicot profited from his commercial links with the French community in Lisbon. After all, Nicot also came from a family of merchants, and as such, business language was something familiar to Nicot. On the other hand, it was that same community

121 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, XXXIII, 62 and 65; Coutinho, *O Grão Prior de França*, 14.

122 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 7, 63 and 107.

123 Buescu, *Catarina de Áustria*, 341.

124 Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos*, 197.

125 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 52 and LXIV.

that caused the daily troubles for Nicot that complicated his relations with the Portuguese. These troubles are particularly salient in Nicot's letters.

Shortly after his arrival in 1559, Nicot received word that several Frenchmen in Portuguese jails were suffering deplorable treatment. The imprisonments were justified by French navigation to Portuguese overseas territories, but were also due to the violation by French seamen and merchants of previous accords between Kings John III and Francis I. Nicot started by convincing Regent Catherine of Austria to pardon five death sentences. He then requested of France that any documents that could aid in his countrymen's defense be sent to him. But the crimes of the jailed Frenchmen were hard to look past, as another letter from Nicot clearly lays out. Several of them had habitually departed from France on ships loaded with grain without paying duties to the French Crown. As the matter had already been reported by Seure, King Henry II had ordered Nicot to resolve the issue, but the ambassador was hard-pressed to stand up for these compatriots, who had flouted even French rules. Witnessing the non-stop arrival of French grain-carrying vessels in Lisbon, Nicot even asked Portuguese authorities to halt the French ships' entry so that he could personally speak with the offending captains. Nicot stressed that such behavior was deleterious to the reputation of France in Portugal, and lamented the greed of French merchants who were more interested in the profits won by selling grain in Lisbon than in provisioning their home country.¹²⁶ Nicot's outburst was similar to Seure's, although it seems that there were important developments in relation to this issue during Nicot's tenure.

By October 1559, the customs-dodging debacle had worsened further. Nicot estimated that since his arrival (in September 1559) up to 150 French vessels had anchored in Lisbon. Almost all of them lacked documentation and were thus in breach of established laws. Faced with this situation, Nicot feared the danger of a severe grain deficit in France. He advised authorities to start controlling departures from all ports in France, demanding written documents proving payment of duties, and full lists of cargo and passengers. Until such orders had been implemented, he would advise the Portuguese authorities (using permission already granted him by King Henry II) to arrest French ships. To sustain relations with Portugal as the shipping fiasco unfolded, Nicot worked to please the Portuguese regent and Cardinal Henry. He and a contact in England successfully negotiated the return of a Portuguese cargo captured by the same English pirate that had molested

¹²⁶ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 6, 15 and 18–24.

him in La Rochelle. Sadly, the situation did not readily improve, as Nicot's letters from November 1559 corroborate.¹²⁷

Yet in December 1559, after he was informed of the publication of a royal decree forbidding French seamen and merchants from trading with Portugal if they lacked the needed documentation, Nicot reported that new merchant fleets were being prepared in French ports. These incidents created serious problems with the Portuguese authorities, as Nicot noted regretfully in his letters. A couple of days later, Nicot received a letter from King Francis II insisting that he enforce the new decree and asking him to oppose any Portuguese mistreatment of Frenchmen jailed for other reasons. The king also gave Nicot powers to negotiate a trade treaty with Queen Catherine of Austria concerning the shipping of French grain supplies to Portugal.¹²⁸ No agreement seems to have been reached. In September 1560, commenting on how he envisaged the maintenance of the alliance with Portugal, King Charles IX urged Nicot to defend the imprisoned Frenchmen more vigorously, feeling that their treatment was more akin to what captives of an enemy power could expect than subjects of an allied state. Nicot was also asked to coordinate a response with the French ambassador in Spain. Another undated dispatch from King Charles IX to Nicot documents the king's fury at this state of affairs: the monarch wrote that if matters did not improve, he would not assume responsibility for any further French maritime retaliations against the Portuguese.¹²⁹

In December 1560, Nicot reported that the situation had only worsened. He recognized that if France could neither control Frenchmen coming to Portugal with grain, nor prevent their attacks on the Portuguese while at sea, relations between the two monarchies would be doomed. Despite this maritime tension, Nicot told Charles in the same letter that there was no need for him to declare a renewal of the French-Portuguese alliance thanks to Queen Catherine de' Medici's and the queen of Navarre's widespread fame in Portugal. Still, the bilateral maritime attacks persisted, as did French aggressions against Spanish ships (something that Nicot, in July 1561, would also urge Charles IX to put an end to in order to salvage France's reputation).¹³⁰

The escalation of maritime hostilities between the Portuguese and the French eventually caused a major breakdown, exemplified by the case of Captain Lyard (discussed below). For his part, Nicot turned a blind eye to

127 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 27–31, 33, 40, 107–8 and 115–16.

128 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 42, 47, 54 and 91–93.

129 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 100–2.

130 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 64 and 118–20.

a good deal of Portuguese abuse against the Frenchmen, cognizant that commercial relations between Portugal, Britany, and Normandy were at stake.¹³¹ As France could not risk endangering the profits to be derived from these partners, Nicot knew he could not directly antagonize the Portuguese without facing serious repercussions. Nevertheless, he defended French interests, and sometimes took a more forceful stand, as his action concerning the rivalry overseas confirms.

3.2.3 Encompassing the Globe: Nicot and French-Portuguese Overseas Rivalry

Seure's and Nicot's embassies in Lisbon coincided with Villegagnon's *France Antarctique*, a project that had earlier origins. As Marco Oliveira Borges has argued, although French efforts up to 1547 to compete in Portuguese overseas areas, ended up a failure, it would be a mistake to interpret French overseas expansion as no more than a misstructured project.¹³² Under King Francis I, the French did much more than bait ships on the Portuguese India Run. They started to make trips to Brazil as early as 1502, and extended their sphere of influence to Portuguese Mina and Guinea. During the 1520s, some French expeditions were sent to the Indian Ocean as well. Initially, these voyagers relied on Portuguese pilots and knowledge, but by the time of one of the Parmentier brothers' expeditions, the French enterprise no longer required this external resource.¹³³ Failure to meaningfully maintain expeditions to Asia was followed by investment in Brazil and Guinea. In the 1530s, Portugal's fear of French competition in the Atlantic was so severe that Guinea and Brazil were considered more or less lost. King John III was overcome by worry by news that the French intended to dispatch a member of the royal family to colonize Brazil,¹³⁴ and that the French were fortifying Santa Helena Island.¹³⁵ He rightly understood that France's fight for the South Atlantic was groundwork for their entry into the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese king was therefore relieved to learn that King Francis I had turned his attention to Canada. However, Portuguese concerns were resurrected when King Henry II authorized the departure of Villegagnon to Brazil in 1555. Maritime conflicts between the Portuguese and the French intensified during Seure's

¹³¹ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LXXIV–LXXV.

¹³² Oliveira Borges, "O trajecto final," vol. I, 308–9 and 347.

¹³³ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 333–34.

¹³⁴ Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos*, 183.

¹³⁵ Oliveira Borges, "O trajecto final," vol. I, 343–45.

embassy in Lisbon, leading him to make a stunning endorsement of open-war maritime policy against Portugal. Jean Nicot had a different approach. Still, his letters unequivocally display that French ambitions and interests were not confined to Brazil and Guinea, but encompassed the whole globe.

Shortly after reaching Lisbon, in his second letter to King Francis II, Nicot warned that the Portuguese were already preparing a new fleet, despite his warm reception and Queen Catherine of Austria's speech on the French-Portuguese alliance. Although he could not be sure of the fleet's destination, Nicot warned France, perturbed by the possibility that the ships sailed in pursuit of Villegagnon. Some days later, he reported the departure of another fleet, heading for Brazil with six ships and 200 soldiers. In December 1559, Nicot counseled the cardinal of Lorraine to push for a re-evaluation of the ban on French navigation to Guinea and Brazil. He had discovered that Portuguese trade in Guinea was declining (as Seure had also reported to King Henry II), and believed the Portuguese would focus their financial outlay on Asia. He advised a French investment in Guinea that used moderation, secrecy, and well-armed vessels to both avoid a major Portuguese reaction and force Portugal to pay more for French grain.¹³⁶ The notion that the Portuguese prioritized their position in Asia (and would be willing to cede control over Brazil and Guinea) was a very common reading in France well before Nicot's embassy.¹³⁷ Nicot was to witness the error in this idea and even personally pay a price for defending it.

In another letter, from late 1559, Nicot denounced a law officer called Almeida who frequently imposed the death penalty and disproportionately harsh treatment on the Frenchmen imprisoned in Portuguese overseas areas. In the same missive, Nicot supported a recent petition by the parliament of Normandy asking King Francis II to lift the prohibition on French navigation to these areas. Infuriated by Almeida's actions, he went so far as to claim that France had exhausted its policy of friendly gestures and affirmations of alliance with Portugal, even asserting that such indulgence had encouraged the Portuguese to behave arrogantly with Frenchmen. If Portugal was to respect France, it needed to suffer a good *bastonade* (i.e., a severe maritime blow).¹³⁸

This specific letter by Nicot is reminiscent of the famous writing of Pierre Crignon de Dieppe (?–1540), the French cosmographer and traveler to Asia during the 1520s, who wrote in 1539 concerning the traditional

¹³⁶ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 10–11, 25 and 37–40.

¹³⁷ Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos*, 147.

¹³⁸ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 43–45.

Portuguese maritime attitude towards Frenchmen that: "Even though they [the Portuguese] are the smallest people in the world, it does not seem big enough to satisfy their greed. I think they must have drunk of the dust of King Alexander's heart to be stirred by such inordinate ambition. They believe they hold in their clenched fist what they could not embrace with both hands. And I believe that they are convinced that God made the sea and the land for them alone and that the other nations are not worthy of sailing. Certainly, if it were in their power to close the seas from Cape Finisterre to Ireland, they would have done so long ago."¹³⁹

The Portuguese nautical pride criticized by Crignon was also contested by Nicot. Nicot's desire for a violent French response to Portuguese aggression and ambitions had several consequences at sea. At the time, the Portuguese also accused the French of cruelty. The French Huguenot traveler Jean de Léry (1534–1611) protested against his countrymen for the treatment given to the Portuguese. Léry reminded his audience that the Portuguese were allies of France and regarded it as an indignity that French captains, each time they encountered Portuguese ships at sea, deprived them of all the food and victuals to sail, instead of sinking them. He confronted the French captains, stating that when attacking the Portuguese in such a way they were mistreating friends and behaving in a non-Christian way, but the reply was that this was common behavior during sea warfare.¹⁴⁰ French claims against the Portuguese at sea, as Nicot's letters easily show, included very similar instances.

Nicot was innovating when he recommended a French *bastonade* to Portugal. This was the only time during Nicot's embassy where his attitudes and recommendations mirrored Seure's; he did not take this stance long, as he was perfectly aware of the costs to France associated with naval assaults. Evolving in his strategy, Nicot developed a new approach: rather than propose full-blown war with the Portuguese, he concentrated on obtaining and transmitting all the intelligence he could about the Portuguese Empire. Meanwhile, he took every opportunity to openly defend and advocate for French interests.¹⁴¹ The change in Nicot's attitude is quickly noticeable in his missives.

Yet around the same time as the letter described above, Nicot sent France news that Viceroy D. Constantino de Braganza (1558–61) had conquered Daman in India. This meant the occupation of almost 300 villages and a

¹³⁹ Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 3, note 1.

¹⁴⁰ Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 67–68.

¹⁴¹ Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 85–87.

huge income. He had been alerted to the situation by a Jewish courier sent from India by land (and was enthralled by the description of his journey). Near the end of 1560, Nicot wrote to King Charles IX with intelligence he received from the Portuguese ambassador in Rome. The Ottomans had just opened a channel between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, permitting them to intensify attacks against Portuguese Asia. Nicot rejoiced at these tidings. In the same letter, he commented that Queen Catherine of Austria had withdrawn her decision to leave a fortress in Morocco (Mazagan), in part due to the impact it would have on the reputation of the king of Portugal. This state of affairs was relevant to Nicot's report to King Charles, sent in August 1561, that the Portuguese were preparing to launch an expedition to Mutapa, on the east coast of Africa. Nicot was unsure on the exact location of this famous empire, but believed it to be between the Congo and Nile rivers. He was, however, fully convinced that the Portuguese wanted to explore gold mines in the region (and cut off movement of that precious metal to West Africa, something that could harm the French trade in Guinea). In the letter, Nicot implied that France ought to do something, although he conceded that navigation to East Africa was difficult. Because Coligny, the French admiral, was interested in such matters, Nicot also sent him this intelligence.¹⁴² The Portuguese expedition to Mutapa did not depart until 1569,¹⁴³ but Nicot was absolutely right in pointing out its potential impact.

Nicot also kept the Valois court briefed on other developments related to Portuguese overseas movements. In April 1561, Nicot counseled Queen Catherine de' Medici on the exploration of certain unspecified southern countries, because they would bring much wealth to France. Along with the letter, the queen mother of France was to find a packet of information on that area. The next month, Nicot informed King Charles IX on the Moroccan sultan's siege of Mazagan, and explained that French requests for Portuguese maritime assistance in the Mediterranean were not likely to receive a positive response. His prognosis was based on a report from a Frenchman, lately returned to Lisbon, who had witnessed the size and might of the Moroccan army. The same month, summarizing intelligence brought by India Run ships, Nicot reported that Viceroy D. Constantino had staged a revolt in Asia, and intended to declare independence from Portugal. In this letter, Nicot noted that Portuguese authorities had approached him about the capture of a Portuguese ship by the Scottish. Despite the alliance between France and Scotland, Nicot maintained that this had nothing to do

142 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 53, 56, 63–64 and 71–72.

143 On this topic: Vila-Santa, *Do Algarve, a Marrocos*, 130–74.

with him. But he ended up writing to Queen Mary Stuart (1542–87) about this maritime case. In fact, the Portuguese were justified in approaching him, since France used to hide captured Portuguese ships in Scotland.¹⁴⁴ Although the news on the Asian revolt turned out to be false, it is illustrative of the surprising degree to which Nicot could obtain secret information through contacts at the Portuguese court.

Nicot was not the only one sending intelligence to France. The Portuguese-born António Almeida, *en route* to France at Princess Mary's request, offered his services to the cardinal of Lorraine. His rhetorical strategy to elevate himself as an informant is documented in his 1560 letter. Pleading his love for France and the fact that many years would pass before the young King Sebastian could assume the government of Portugal, he promised the French cardinal information about Portugal and its empire. He also stated that Nicot had been very well-received and was much appreciated in Portugal. Finally, he advised Lorraine to take good care of João Pereira Dantas, but to never forget that the Portuguese ambassador in Paris was a deadly enemy of France's maritime ambitions. He even offered his personal advice on how to deal with Dantas if the graces he sought were granted. Since Almeida wrote that he had Nicot's letters to France,¹⁴⁵ it is quite likely that he was one of the ambassador's couriers or agents. After all, in this task of acquiring intelligence about the Portuguese Empire, Nicot could follow the example of his predecessor Seure and try, albeit with greater discretion, to create his own networks of informants in Portugal. This explains why Nicot reported all the abovementioned details to France. The ongoing maritime rivalry discussed so far both compelled and conditioned the next topic: Nicot's acquisition of Portuguese nautical knowledge.

3.2.4 Diplomacy and Humanism: Nicot and the Acquisition of Portuguese Maritime Knowledge

Nicot's access to Portuguese maritime knowledge is explained by France's maritime projects and linked with the ambassador's personal interests. Using his status as a renowned French humanist,¹⁴⁶ Nicot was able to access a particular milieu in Portugal. Although humanism in Portugal was not in its heyday by the 1560s, this did not prevent Nicot from enjoying an enthusiastic reception from important Portuguese intellectuals. In this section, Nicot's

144 Oliveira Borges, "O trajecto final," vol. I, 355 and 391.

145 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 217–24.

146 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 95–96.

contacts in learned Portuguese circles and the requests he received from the Valois court will be discussed, while sketching the methods Nicot employed to acquire Portuguese knowledge for each specific case.

In one of his first letters to France, Nicot promised he would send jelly from India as soon as he could. With work on the Louvre ongoing, Nicot also sent several samples of marble, as his predecessor Seure had done. By April 1560, Nicot sent the first full package of natural products to Queen Catherine de' Medici: oranges from Algarve, fig and lemon seeds, as well as the leaves of the tobacco plant, which he said possessed miraculous medicinal properties. King Charles IX was so delighted with the oranges that he ordered Nicot to dispatch more, along with their seeds, so that the king could begin cultivating them in the Loire valley. In 1561, a letter from Nicot expresses regret that lack of funds prevented him from fulfilling a request to send strawberries. He was nonetheless able to send over some indigo. In this same letter, he notes that these products came to Portugal not by India Run ships, but via land routes. Nicot had been obliged to bribe several people to purchase his samples, since the business was in the hands of Spanish merchants.¹⁴⁷ Nicot's active gathering of natural or scientific materials in Portugal was not always at the request of the Valois court, as the case of the tobacco shows. This suggests that he was directed to collect them prior to his coming to Portugal, a topic that will now be addressed.

The first hypothesis on previous French requests to Nicot relates to André Thevet (1516–90). The famous Franciscan traveler published his *Cosmography of the Levant* in 1554, spent four months in Brazil and returned to France in 1556. Thevet also published his famous *Singularities of France Antarctique*, in 1556,¹⁴⁸ with the support of the court's keeper of the seals (with whom Nicot had previously collaborated). Members of the Pléiade group (with whom Nicot would later become close) also supported Thevet, as did Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85).¹⁴⁹ Thevet was appointed French royal cosmographer in 1559, the same year that Nicot departed for Portugal. As royal cosmographer, Thevet may have asked Nicot to acquire nautical rutters and treatises and cartographical knowledge in Lisbon. At least from 1563, Thevet had in his possession a copy of the Portuguese seamanship

147 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 12, 35, 50, 103, 121, 128 and 147–48.

148 Filled with references to Portuguese overseas territories. On Thevet's work see: Frank Lestringant, *Le Brésil d'André Thevet: les singularités de la France Antarctique (1557)* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1997).

149 Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 9–10, 22–23 and 126.

book by Manuel Álvares.¹⁵⁰ It is possible that Nicot was the one who brought the book to Thevet either at his request, or because he knew Thevet's interests. Thevet declared himself in his *Universal Cosmography* (1575) that he had been to Lisbon, and that he gathered intelligence regarding Goa there in conversation with Portuguese pilots. Unfortunately, he does not specify dates.¹⁵¹ It is possible that Nicot was the agent who brought Thevet the seamanship book of Manuel Álvares, as Nicot himself had the Portuguese seamanship book by André Pires in his library.¹⁵² Since both books circulated in manuscript form and were the most up-to-date Portuguese nautical compilations of the time, Nicot is likely to have acquired both in Portugal. Whether resorting to bribery or simply exploiting his daily contacts with French and Portuguese seamen and merchants in Lisbon, the fact that Nicot acquired seamanship books for his personal collection suggests a sincere fascination with the subject. At the same time, given that it was in the form of technical knowledge that Portugal was desperate to keep from its rivals, Nicot could be certain that this would captivate the Valois court and win him enhanced status upon his return.

Nicot's pursuit of sensitive knowledge was, moreover, directly related to a special request from the cardinal of Lorraine and Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. Before Nicot's departure from France, they had tasked him with hiring two good Portuguese pilots to guide a French expedition to India and the Moluccas. Cognizant of Queen Catherine of Austria's vigilance, Nicot argued that he would attempt to fulfil the assignment, but noted that the matter demanded special discretion. Nicot did succeed in sending over two pilots (although it is unknown whether they were actually experts on the route to India and the Moluccas).¹⁵³ The request itself illustrates a larger issue: that King Henry II and Coligny were bent on developing policies to create a French overseas empire in the area assigned to Portugal by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This raises the question on earlier French borrowing of Portuguese navigational expertise.

The first French voyage to Brazil in 1502 captained by Binot Palmier de Gonneville was only possible because the French captain hired Portuguese pilots in Lisbon. According to the report of his sojourn in Lisbon, Gonneville and his companions "took on two Portuguese who had returned, one named

150 *O livro de marinharia de Manuel Álvares*, ed. Luís de Albuquerque and Armando Cortesão (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1969), 6–9.

151 André Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. I (Paris: chez Pierre L'Huilier, 1575), fls. 385v. and 387.

152 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 99.

153 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 35–36.

Bastiam Moura and the other Diègue Cohinto, to help them with their knowledge on the road to India.”¹⁵⁴ The French were keen on sailing to the Moluccas as early as the 1520s. Giovanni Verazzano (1485–1528) is said to have planned to sail to the Moluccas via the Magellan Strait, although the trip was eventually canceled. King John III’s agents in France stepped in and attempted to convince Giovanni Verrazano to come to Portugal in 1525. The incomplete references seem to indicate that the Portuguese king was successful for a short time, as Giovanni later returned to France. Also in 1531, Gaspar Palha, a Portuguese agent in France, was forced to negotiate with Leone Pancaldo, one of Magellan’s pilots, because the Venetian Giovanni Francesco intended to use Pancaldo to guide him to the Moluccas. In 1533, even after the failure of the Parmentier brother’s expedition to Asia, the French shipowner and corsair Jean Ango (1480–1551) prepared another French expedition to Madagascar and Sumatra Islands.¹⁵⁵ In 1535, Palha reported that King Francis I considered Pancaldo to be the best pilot to sail to the Moluccas. As a consequence, Palha was forced to deal with Pancaldo again, although the outcome is not clear.¹⁵⁶

In 1538, King Francis I officially hired João Pacheco as his cosmographer,¹⁵⁷ the Portuguese mariner (mentioned in chapter 1) who proposed an expedition in the Pacific to King Charles I of Spain. Portuguese authorities were alarmed by this increasing drainage of pilots, cartographers, and cosmographical experts to Spain, and then to England and France. In the late 15th century, they attempted to stem the outward flow of expertise by issuing strict rules (under penalty of death) for any pilot who betrayed Portugal by handing over sensitive information to its rivals, as has been underscored in the first chapter. As regards Northern Europe, Portuguese pilots started by serving in England,¹⁵⁸ as has been documented in the previous chapter, but France was always interested in hiring such technical personnel to launch overseas expeditions. These tactics explain King John III’s decisive battle with the French shipowner and corsair Jean Ango,

154 *Voyages au Canada avec les relations des voyages en Amérique de Gonneville, Verrazano et Roberval* (Paris: La Découverte, 1992), 40.

155 Roncière, *Histoire de la marine*, vol. III, 270.

156 Michel Mollat, *Quelques aspects de la vie économique et sociale de la France dans la première moitié du XVI^e siècle vus à travers la correspondance des diplomates portugais* (offprint by Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1949), 12–13, 19 and 29. On Ango’s activities, see the classical: Eugène Guénin, *Jean Ango et ses pilotes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1901).

157 Sarah Toulouse, “Marine Cartography and Navigation in Renaissance France,” in *The History of Cartography*, ed. David Woodward, vol. III (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 1555.

158 Roncière, *Histoire de la marine*, vol. III, 282–85; Pereira Ferreira, *Problemas marítimos*, 210–16.

who sometimes had support from King Francis I and the French admirals. When the Portuguese agents in France were not able to delay the departure of fleets, they resorted to bribery. For instance, the French Admiral Phillipe de Chabot (1492–1543) received payments from the Portuguese in the 1530s to abort or delay French overseas voyages. Nevertheless, and once more, neither of this prevented the circulation of Portuguese nautical experts to Europe, and in this particular to Valois France.

The most critical and best-known case was that of the Portuguese pilot João Afonso, a naturalized Frenchman under the name of Jean Alphonse de Saintonge (1484?–1544/49?). He had experience in Portuguese navigation to West Africa, Brazil, and South America, and fled to France at an uncertain date. By 1531, Afonso's presence was noticed by the Portuguese agent Gaspar Palha at La Rochelle. In 1532, another Portuguese agent in France, the lawyer Gaspar Vaz, attempted to convince Afonso to return to Portugal. King John III even issued a letter of pardon for him in 1533.¹⁵⁹ A similar attempt in 1532 to repatriate Afonso, this time by Diogo Gouveia (1471–1557), the renowned Portuguese rector at Paris University, also failed.¹⁶⁰ Afonso never returned to Portugal, as has been underscored in the first chapter for Portuguese pilots in Spain such as Simão de Alcáçova or Estevão Gomes, or António Eanes Pinteado concerning England in the previous chapter. In the meantime, Afonso participated in French voyages to West Africa and became a French subject. In the following years, Afonso became known as the Portuguese who piloted several French interlopers' attacks against Portuguese and Spanish navigation in the Atlantic. Owing to this, some of his sons also served in the French navy. Afonso was officially named as pilot of Jean-François de Roberval's expedition to Canada in 1542.¹⁶¹ He is believed to have died in 1547 at the hands of Spanish captain Pedro Menéndez de Avilés (1519–74).¹⁶² He wrote two important works that were posthumously published in France.¹⁶³ Afonso was celebrated by the Pléiade as one of France's contemporary great sailors, comparable to those of antiquity.

Owing to his extensive experience in Portuguese navigation, it can be assumed that Afonso was one of the most significant contributors to the

159 *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica*, vol. I (Lisbon: INCM/Casa da Moeda, 1987), 150.

160 Jean-Marc Montaigne, *La découverte du Brésil en France à la Renaissance* (ASI Éditions, 2020), 38.

161 *Voyages au Canada...*, 64.

162 Before returning from an expedition to France: P. P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2008), 49.

163 For more details on Alphonse see: Dany Larochelle, *Du ciel au bateau: la Cosmographie, 1544, du pilote Jean Alphonse et la construction du savoir géographique au XVIe siècle* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 2002).

French cartographical school of Dieppe. Although the history of this school is difficult to trace, older and more recent authors agree that most of the surviving cartographical depictions from the school were made based on Portuguese nautical knowledge provided by Portuguese pilots, cartographers, and cosmographers who served the Valois.¹⁶⁴ The Portuguese influence is noticeable in atlases composed at Dieppe in 1538 and 1547.¹⁶⁵ Similarities and influences between the works of the French cartographers Pierre Desceliers and Nicolay Desliens and those of the Portuguese cartographers Pedro Reinel, Lopo Homem, and Gaspar Viegas, respectively, have been identified.¹⁶⁶ Thus, in view of the school's creation in the late 1520s and of Afonso's own career in France and his cosmographical works, it is likely that he was one of its most important members, if not a founder.

In the 1540s, when King Francis I concentrated his maritime endeavors in Canada,¹⁶⁷ French desires for maritime voyages to Brazil, Guinea, and Asia were by no means extinguished. Quite to the contrary, they only fed the commercial ambitions of Norman and Breton ports in France, amply proving that there was in those days a full problem in France of emulating the Portuguese model for overseas expansion with regard to Brazil, as has been argued by Frank Lestringant.¹⁶⁸ Thus it has been recently stated, ironically but accurately, that "For this sovereign [King Francis I], buying a foreign pilot, especially a Portuguese one, was like buying the key to a safe."¹⁶⁹ Precisely because of this, and probably in 1538–39, King John III even sent a fake Portuguese pilot to try to deceive King Francis I personally in his chamber. The Portuguese João Fernandes, nicknamed Lagarto, who presented fake nautical rutters and charts and heard the Valois overseas plans from Francis's mouth. Lagarto was able to trick the Valois king,

164 On this topic: Charles de La Roncière, "Reflects de la cartographie portugaise sur la cartographie dieppoise de la Renaissance," in *Memórias e Comunicações apresentadas ao Congresso de História dos Descobrimentos e colonização*, vol. I (Lisbon, 1940), 63–68; Martine Sauret, *Voyages dans l'école cartographique de Dieppe au XVI^e siècle: espaces, altérités et influences* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 1; Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 121.

165 Kildushevskaya and Pinheiro Marques, *Atlas Universal*, 105.

166 Inácio Guerreiro, "A Cartografia portuguesa dos séculos XV e XVI," in *História dos Descobrimentos e Expansão Portuguesa*, ed. Aurélio Oliveira, Francisco Contento Domingues and Maria Augusta Lima Cruz (Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 1999), 260–61.

167 For an overview of Francis I's maritime policies: R. J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 369–84.

168 Frank Lestringant, *Le Huguenot et le sauvage. L'Amérique et la controverse coloniale, en France, au temps des guerres de religion (1555–1589)* (Genève: Droz, 1990), 26.

169 Montaigne, *La découverte du Brésil*, 18.

presenting himself as another Portuguese who wished to serve France.¹⁷⁰ Later, during the 1540s, the Portuguese king even sent a young and beautiful Portuguese nobleman to get close to King Francis I's mistress, the duchess of Etampes. The man oeuvre succeeded so well that the young nobleman was able to relay all French maritime plans to King John III and even get the king's mistress to influence the king.¹⁷¹ With French ambitions always perilously rising, the Portuguese Courts (which had assembled in 1562–63 to hand over power to Cardinal Henry) passed a motion demanding better treatment of Portuguese pilots. The motion hoped to remedy the flight of experts to serve abroad, who evidently were not prized enough in Portugal.¹⁷² What was at stake was avoiding new instances like that of the Portuguese pilot João Afonso, whose case was far from being singular, and was widely known and commented on in Europe.

At the beginning of his reign, King Henry II maintained the prohibition on French navigation to Portuguese overseas territories, despite Portuguese attacks on French ships in the Atlantic.¹⁷³ However, the 1551 royal entry of King Henry II and Queen Catherine de' Medici in Rouen, prepared for months by Norman authorities, merchants, and shipowners to convince the king to formally adopt a full policy of overseas expansion, made such a personal impact that King Henry II changed his policy.¹⁷⁴ He ultimately decided to change his maritime policy towards Portugal in 1552, despite warnings from Portuguese agents.¹⁷⁵ The shift took place as part of Henry's war against Emperor Charles V. It is within this scope that the king's reaction when asked by Admiral Coligny to support Villegagnon's plan for *France Antarctique* should be perceived: formal support. The question on who personally convinced King Henry to support the establishment of a French colony in the Americas, known as *France Antarctique*, remains a matter of debate. Some historians credit Admiral Coligny, while others point to the expedition leader, Villegagnon.¹⁷⁶

170 Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, "Subornos, espíões e espionagem na defesa do "Mare Clausum": alguns episódios do reinado de D. João III," *Memórias*, vol. XXXI (Lisbon: Academia de Marinha, 2002), 14–15.

171 Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 138–39 and 140.

172 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 6.

173 Lucien Provençal and Vasco Mariz, *Villegagnon e a França Antártica: uma reavaliação* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército/Nova Fronteira, 2000), 73.

174 Ivan Cloulas, *Henri II* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 273–74.

175 Léonce Peillard, *Villegagnon: vice-amiral de Bretagne, vice-roi du Brésil* (Paris: Perrin, 1991), 91.

176 On the wider question of *France Antarctique* and Villegagnon see: Peillard, *Villegagnon*; Provençal and Mariz, *Villegagnon e a França Antártica*; Jorge Couto, "A disputa luso-francesa pelo domínio do Brasil até 1580," in *Viagens e viajantes no Atlântico Quinhentista*, ed. Maria da

Still, King Henry II declared the French Crown's support for Villegagnon's departure in 1555. Similarly, attention has been drawn to Henry II's patronage of Guillaume Testu's previous voyages to Brazil to map the area in the early 1550s and probably prepare an expedition like the one Villegagnon was entrusted with. It is also worth noting that the support for the *France Antarctique* project was not limited to Admiral Coligny and Villegagnon. The French Constable Anne de Montmorency, in the midst of his war plans against Emperor Charles V, supported the idea of disturbing Spanish and Portuguese hegemony in the Atlantic.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, the cardinal of Lorraine, a rising figure at the Valois court, and the son of the duke of Guise, the king's great military leader, also championed a policy of contesting Spanish attempted hegemony in Europe. Thus, despite the lack of concrete evidence, it can be assumed that King Henry II agreed to give Villegagnon the title of viceroy, besides the documented funding, ships, and men.¹⁷⁸

Rather than vacillating on his maritime policy vis-à-vis Portugal in the manner of Francis I, Henry II opted to back the most serious challenge the French would mount to Portuguese maritime hegemony throughout the 16th century. His action cannot be disconnected from his policies to build up a French navy fit to match the power and maritime ambitions of Spain,¹⁷⁹ and especially for the results achieved by the king's policy in the early 1550s,¹⁸⁰ which had prompted Spanish and English fears, as has been seen in the last chapter. Furthermore, King Henry II's decision took place at the same time that he supported the full-blown war of the "French Sea-Dogs" against Spain in the Caribbean, pursued by the famous François Le Clerc, known by the Spanish as the *Pié de Pallo* or as *Wooden Leg* in English. However, Le Clerc was not the only notable figure in French naval efforts. Another individual, Jacques de Soria, emerged as a formidable presence on the seas, striking fear into the hearts of both the Spanish and the Portuguese. He

Graça M. Ventura (Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1996), 33–56; Francisco Bethencourt, "Le Brésil face à la France," in *La France et le monde luso-brésilien: échanges et représentations (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Saulo Neiva (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2005), 21–33; Frank Lestringant, "Au rendez-vous brésilien ou l'agonie de la France Antarctique d'après le De Rebus Gestois Mendi de Saa (1563)," in *Actes du Colloque: Portugal, Brésil, France histoire et culture*, ed. José Augusto França (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, Centre Culturel Portugais, 1988), 25–40.

177 Montaigne, *La découverte du Brésil*, 280.

178 Walter Besant, *Gaspar de Coligny (Marquis de Chatillon)* (London: Marcus Ward & CO/Royal Ulster Works, 1879), 57–58.

179 Roncière, *Histoire de la marine*, vol. III, 453 and 455.

180 Michel Huguier, *Henri II: Catherine de Médicis, Diane de Poitiers et la Renaissance* (Fiacre, 2019), 157–159.

led a surprise attack and destruction of Cuba in 1555, and later, in 1570, orchestrated a bloody attack against the Portuguese fleet carrying Jesuits and a new governor to Brazil. King Henry II personally knighted Le Clerc for his maritime services to France, and it can be inferred that Soria also received recognition for his maritime achievements. The king's personal choice had dire consequences, to the point that a Spanish maritime commander wrote to Emperor Charles V that the French were so strong at sea that no bird could fly without being noticed by them.¹⁸¹ These statements sent to the emperor are reminiscent of the warning of the Portuguese humanist Diogo de Gouveia to King John III in 1529: the French were very strong at sea and had no place to expand, so that the Portuguese king should not have any illusions that he would ever be able to control French movements to the Portuguese *Mare Clausum*.¹⁸²

These choices throw new light on King Henry II's orders to Seure and Nicot to send him intelligence on the Portuguese navy, which he clearly conceived as a model worth emulation. But a navy to be admired is a navy to be feared: Henry prepared his Brazilian plan under utmost secrecy, so that Portugal and Spain would not interfere before Villegagnon's departure. King Henry II's attempted secrecy in 1555, which mirrored similar Portuguese and Spanish attempts,¹⁸³ failed in 1556 when Villegagnon asked for reinforcements. His claim for 3,000 or 4,000 men to assist *France Antarctique*, was reported by Simon Renard, Emperor Charles's ambassador in France, to Queen Catherine of Austria.¹⁸⁴ Renard also warned Charles of the dangers of allowing France to create a base in Brazil that would be used to raid the Spanish.¹⁸⁵ As a result of Renard's warning, the Portuguese launched a strong reaction in 1557, including the appointment of a new ambassador to France (João Pereira Dantas) and a new governor to Brazil (Mem de Sá). While ambassador Dantas, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, likely received orders to contest *France Antarctique*, Mem de Sá was given reinforcements and ordered to plan a military reaction to Villegagnon's expedition.

The episode of *France Antarctique* culminated in a French defeat during Nicot's embassy (in 1560), as shall be discussed below. Still, King Henry II's and Coligny's aims influenced Nicot's actions in Lisbon. If Nicot, like the

181 Boucher, *France and the American Tropics*, 42 and 45.

182 Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, "Mare Clausum, Mare Liberum: Dimensão Doutrinal de um Foco de Tensões Políticas" (BA thesis, Nova University of Lisbon, 1983), 46.

183 Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 320–21.

184 Provençal and Mariz, *Villegagnon e a França Antártica*, 103.

185 A.W. Whitehead, *Gaspar de Coligny: Admiral of France* (London: Methuen & CO, 1904), 93, 98 and 128.

king and Coligny, was not favorable to Villegagnon's whim of proclaiming himself king of America,¹⁸⁶ this was because, while in Lisbon, he quickly grasped that ownership of Fort Coligny was not worthy of such a title. Sensing that *France Antarctique* would fail, Nicot redoubled his efforts to deliver intelligence to France that could assist in the preparation of new expeditions. In 1561, after the defeat in Brazil, Coligny seriously considered organizing an expedition to the Moluccas and Mutapa (hence his abovementioned request for pilots to Nicot). Nicot's considerations on the Moluccas and Mutapa most likely influenced Coligny's decision. The destination of Coligny's intended expedition (plans for which were taking shape amidst the first French civil war, an anti-Spanish policy, and disagreements with Queen Catherine de' Medici) was subsequently changed to Florida. It was there that Coligny next attempted the construction of a French base.¹⁸⁷ Until his death in 1572, Coligny continued to resort to very similar intelligence methods as those Nicot used, to plan more French expeditions against Portuguese and Spanish overseas areas. But, contrary to his ancestors in office, Admiral Coligny was not bought by Portuguese money. Portuguese bribery at the Valois court did not work on Coligny,¹⁸⁸ as shall be shown in the next chapter. Regardless of the precise location from which to launch an empire, the consequences of Coligny's and the Valois's maritime ambitions are easily traceable throughout Nicot's embassy.

Nicot's acquisition of a 1520s text giving a secret technical opinion on the Moluccas,¹⁸⁹ written by Portuguese cosmographer Lopo Homem, is related to these imperial aims. In a letter to France, Nicot used Lopo Homem's opinion, originally addressed to the Portuguese king, to detail all the historical and scientific roots of Portuguese-Spanish rivalry in the Moluccas. He informed France that the Portuguese Casa da Índia had orders to falsify distance in nautical charts, allowing the Portuguese to furnish cartographical proof that the Moluccas fell on their side of the antemeridian of Tordesillas.¹⁹⁰ It is very likely that Nicot was personally acquainted with Lopo Homem; it is almost inconceivable, however, that Lopo Homem would have offered such sensitive and secret information to a French ambassador. By this time, Lopo Homem was an experienced cosmographer of a venerable age. He must have witnessed several cases of foreign espionage of Portuguese

186 Whitehead, *Gaspard de Coligny*, 178.

187 Whitehead, *Gaspard de Coligny*, 315–16, 319, 332 and 335–36.

188 Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 265–66 and 436.

189 *Portugaliae...*, vol. I, 1956, 51.

190 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 109–13.

nautical and cartographical knowledge, especially because some of his sons were examples of Portuguese experts working abroad. He also knew that the Portuguese Crown exacted severe punishment on the perpetrators of such actions. Thus, it is more plausible that Nicot secured Homem's text via bribery. Nicot may also have obtained cartographical knowledge using bribery and the contacts that he had established in Portugal during his embassy. If he did, however, no direct mention is known.

The case of the Portuguese royal cosmographer Pedro Nunes was directly connected with that of Lopo Homem. Nicot was responsible for bringing one of Nunes's major works to France: the *Treatise in Defense of the Sea Charter* (1537). Nicot's covering letter is extant, in which he advised that it should be translated into French under the supervision of the mathematician Pierre Danés (1497–1577). Nicot's dispatch reflects a pre-existing interest in Nunes's works in France. The French humanist Élie Vinet (1509–87), who met Nunes in Portugal during the 1540s, had already brought a short chapter of this book to France. Nunes himself had contacts with the mathematician Jacques Peletier du Main (1517–82).¹⁹¹ The mathematician Oronce Finé (1494–1555), target of one of Nunes's works, and Jean Fernel (1497–1558), King Henry II's personal doctor, were also curious about Nunes's major texts. The professed interest of such scholars may have prompted figures like the cardinal of Lorraine, Élie Vinet, or Jacques Peletier,¹⁹² to ask Nicot to send Nunes's works to France. Members of the cartographical school of Dieppe may have joined the chorus of requests to Nicot. The letter Nicot sent with the book, addressed to the cardinal of Lorraine, notes that Nunes was the royal chief of Portuguese nautical charts and a great mathematician. Because of Nunes's status, when transmitting his book Nicot took precautions analogous to those used when he sent the Portuguese pilots to France.¹⁹³

In sending Nunes's book to France, Nicot was again cognizant of heightened Portuguese vigilance with regard to technical espionage. However, while Nicot probably did meet Nunes at court, there was no need for him to rely on personal connections to gain access to the book, which was on sale in the markets of Lisbon. Although there is no formal evidence that Nicot learned Portuguese,¹⁹⁴ Nicot's suggestion that the book should be

191 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 123 and 126–28.

192 Henrique Leitão, Bernardo Mota, "Uma carta de Jacques Peletier a Pedro Nunes," in *Vir bonus peritissimus aequae. Estudos de homenagem a Arnaldo do Espírito Santo*, ed. Maria Cristina Pimentel and Paulo Farmhouse Alberto (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Clássicos da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2013), 589–99.

193 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 123 and 131–33.

194 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 217–24.

translated suggests he had previously had a look at Nunes's text. If the main audience for Nunes's works consisted of cosmographers, teachers of mathematics, cartographers, and nautical instrument makers,¹⁹⁵ Nicot also saw its utility outside the French court and academia. Potential readership among French seamen explains his desire for a French edition of Nunes's book. Unfortunately, publication was halted by the death of the book's printer, even though the translation of the book itself was ready for release. One copy is still preserved today at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.¹⁹⁶

Nicot's familiarity with the work of Pedro Nunes may imply his ongoing contact with the Portuguese humanists Fernando Oliveira (1507–85), João de Barros (1496–1570), Damião de Góis (1502–74) and others. Although these relationships are not evidenced in Nicot's surviving letters, circumstantial clues, such as those suggested by Luís de Matos concerning Nicot's library,¹⁹⁷ are convincing enough to accept the presumption that such interpersonal connections existed. It is relevant to consider the humanist circles in which Nicot might have moved while in Portugal, bearing in mind that all these interactions took place in the global city that Lisbon was at the time,¹⁹⁸ and that Nicot lived there. Lisbon's intellectual milieu was not that big during the 1550s and 1560s and its members tended to know each other. Each new coming foreigner with a humanist reputation was immediately noticed, and this was precisely what Nicot was.

Given Nicot's personal interest in navigational issues, it is possible that he sought out Fernando Oliveira for discussion on such topics.¹⁹⁹ By the time of Nicot's stay in Lisbon, Oliveira had already worked for the French. In 1541, in his attempt to travel to Italy, Oliveira was caught by the French in the Mediterranean. Brought to Marseille, he served as pilot for the French before returning to Portugal in 1543. In that year, when the French baron of Saint Blanchard stopped in Lisbon, Oliveira took the chance to sail with him once more. Oliveira's choice was made even though Saint Blanchard had in the 1530s mounted one of the French' most serious attempts to create a colonial base in Brazil against Portuguese interests,²⁰⁰ and the fact that he held high rank: he was King Francis I's admiral of the Mediterranean

195 Almeida, "A influência da obra," 528.

196 BNF, *Français* 1338, fl. 22v.

197 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 95–96.

198 Gschwend and Lowe, *The Global City*, 2015.

199 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 107.

200 Couto, "Some Remarks," 195–96; on Oliveira's career see: Contente Domingues and Guerreiro, *Ars Nautica*; Livermore, "Padre Oliveira's Outburst," 22–41 and Loureiro, "Experiencia de navegación," 41–49.

fleet. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Oliveira found himself in the English Channel during the war between Francis I and Henry VIII and was jailed by the English. Indeed, Richard Barker even suggested that, while at the Tudor court, Oliveira might have been employed by Odet de Selve (c. 1504–63), the French ambassador in England between 1546 and 1549, to negotiate the release of the Frenchmen imprisoned by the English or to collect Greek manuscripts in England at Francis I's order.²⁰¹ After his return to Lisbon in 1555, he published his *Art of Sea Warfare*, a work that Nicot probably became familiar with while stationed in Lisbon. Thus, Nicot's contact with Oliveira would have been facilitated by his almost daily interactions with seamen, and Oliveira's previous career abroad. During Nicot's embassy, Oliveira was not a Portuguese Crown official; thus, it remains a plausible hypothesis that he shared material with Nicot.

Similarly, João de Barros may have given Nicot information directly (Nicot had Barros's first two *Decades* in his library, one of which seems to have been acquired in Portugal).²⁰² Barros, who was at the time an officer in the Casa da Índia, may have given Nicot the famous Latin letter that King Manuel I (1495–1521) wrote to Pope Julius II (1503–13) on the Portuguese victories in India.²⁰³ As Luís de Matos argues, this letter, erroneously identified as Nicot's own report on the East Indies, might have been translated into French by Nicot's brother, Gille, who had come to Lisbon to serve as his secretary. Further evidence for this possibility is the fact that Gille Nicot seems to have settled in Portugal; his son was Filipe de Brito Nicote (1566–1616), a famous Portuguese captain in Burma in the 17th century.²⁰⁴ Nicot could have got hold of the letter purely by means of his status and connections, without any espionage, since its contents did not violate Portuguese secrecy policies. Quite the opposite, the letter constituted a piece of Portuguese imperial propaganda that favorably presented Portuguese power abroad. As for Barros's *Decades*, Nicot might have acquired them in the markets of Lisbon (like Nunes's treatise), after personal acquaintance with Barros.

Another work in Nicot's library, the *Itinerario* by António Tenreiro (1485–1560?), might have come to him by way of the Jewish courier sent to Portugal by the viceroy of India in 1560, or through Damião de Góis. Góis is likely to have been one of Nicot's humanist contacts. Góis was King Manuel

201 Barker, *Fernando Oliveira*, 8 and 15.

202 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 97–98.

203 The French translation is in BNF, Ms. *Collections des Cinqs Cents de Colbert* 483, fl. 433v.

204 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 116, 118, 120–21.

It's chronicler and certainly met Nicot at his arrival in 1559, since Góis made a practice of attending the reception of all ambassadors.²⁰⁵ The two men would have had plenty to discuss, since Nicot had worked in France as keeper of the archives, the same post Góis held in Portugal. They could also have exchanged knowledge on Portuguese history and literature. As a reputable humanist, Nicot would have been deemed a worthy interlocutor. Nicot could even present Góis with his ongoing work on the re-edition of French history mentioned earlier, something that would motivate Góis to reciprocate. Thus, aside from Barros, Góis is another possible route through which Nicot might have received King Manuel's famous letter to Pope Julius II.

Nicot's philological interests (which later inspired him to publish the *Treasure*) make close connections with João de Barros and Fernando Oliveira even more plausible, since both published Portuguese grammars. Princess Mary, to whom Barros dedicated a famous panegyric in 1545, might have acquainted Nicot with Barros and his work. She might even have also introduced Nicot to Diogo Sigeu, a fellow native of Nîmes. This servant of Princess Mary was another contact of Nicot's, and their connection can help elucidate the curious fact that certain sonnets by the Portuguese writer André de Resende (1498–1573) were published in France in 1566 (Sigeu gave such sonnets to Nicot, but Nicot was not the one who published them).²⁰⁶ Still, considering a 1566 letter from Nicot to Sigeu,²⁰⁷ it is highly probable that he contributed to the project, since Resende's sonnets would enchant *La Pléiade*, the group that Nicot joined after his return to France.

Despite the incomplete documentary evidence for Nicot's social circle, some humanist contacts within the Portuguese nobility are also quite likely. I would strongly argue that he was acquainted with the dukes of Braganza and Aveiro, whose controversial marriages in 1559 are mentioned in Nicot's letters.²⁰⁸ His hypothetical contact with the 5th duke of Braganza, D. Teodósio (1510–63), might have arisen through Diogo Sigeu, who had been in D. Teodósio's service. Nicot may have met some courtier earls (like those of Redondo, Portalegre, and Castanheira) as well, in addition to the baron of Alvito, who is mentioned in Nicot's letters. All of them attended his ceremonial reception, if not some of his meetings with Queen Catherine of Austria. Furthermore, Nicot reports being called on several times by high

205 Matos, "Un diplomate humaniste," 33.

206 Matos, "Un diplomate humaniste," 109, 112 and 114.

207 Catarina Monteiro, "'Francés de nación, varón doctíssimo': Diogo Sigeu, pai de Luísa Sigeia," *Librosdelacorte.es* 19, no. 11 (2019).

208 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 32.

courtiers. Such relationships were valuable: winning the trust of important noblemen could well have helped Nicot to access strategic information.

Nicot's reputation and engaging personality, together with the fact that he was the sole official representative of mighty France, set the stage for fact-finding at the Portuguese court. By appropriating the renown that King Henry II, Queen Jeanne d'Albret and Queen Catherine de' Medici enjoyed in Portugal,²⁰⁹ Nicot was also able to acquire Portuguese maritime knowledge, which, at the time, was difficult for foreigners to come by. Having laid the groundwork and fostered a diverse social network, Nicot may have wished to remain in Portugal longer, deepening his humanist connections or even becoming a sort of a permanent ambassador (like his predecessor Honoraís de Caix in the 1540s and 1550s). But King Charles IX, in his decision to recall Nicot, was motivated by a different set of factors. Thus, it is critical to analyze the circumstances of Nicot's abrupt departure.

3.2.5 Crisis in the Embassy: *La lettre de rappel*

Although the end of Nicot's embassy is normally associated with the loss of Fort Coligny in Brazil, his letters reveal that much more was at play. The French ambassador had piled up a huge debt that he was unable to repay. The scandalous case of a French captain called Bastien de Lyard, along with Nicot's actions regarding his cook and some Frenchmen suspected of being secret Protestants, did irreparable damage to his embassy. A brief description of each of these strikes against the ambassador's name will be made, before we discuss the factors behind Nicot's recall.

Ever since his arrival in 1559, Jean Nicot had asked that money be sent to him in a timely manner, having found that life abroad entailed significant expenses. Just a year later, in a letter to the French ambassador in Spain, Nicot revealed that he was bankrupt. The situation was so serious that he had to sell some of his own properties in France to keep himself afloat.²¹⁰ In April 1561, Nicot wrote to King Charles IX stating again that he had gone bankrupt. This time, the insolvency had come about because Nicot (and his Francophile friend, one the Portuguese ministers of finance the baron

209 A good example of this renown can be found in a letter by Teodósio, 5th duke of Braganza, to King Philip II concerning King Henry II's death. One of the first noblemen in Portugal, he asserted that the Portuguese wept at King Henry II's death as they used to mourn Spanish kings. This was due to King Henry's great European fame and the signing of the peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, which offered fresh hope for long-lasting peace in Europe (AGS, *Secretaría de Estado*, Legajo 380, doc. 101).

210 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LVIII–LIX, 16 and 116–17.

of Alvito) had made substantial funds available to finance François de Guise's stay in Lisbon in 1560. His salary as ambassador was not enough, and both Nicot and Alvito became objects of ridicule at the Portuguese court. In May 1561, Nicot was desperate enough to beg for 2,000 écus from Queen Catherine de' Medici to begin paying his debts (in the same letter, he bemoaned Guise's attitude, considering that he was one of the richest noblemen in France). Nicot underscored that his own financial woes were tarnishing France's reputation in Portugal.

Indeed, Nicot's financial difficulties are a good example of a topic that always affected French, and more generally all European diplomats', correspondence: the lack of funds.²¹¹ For this reason, diplomatic treatises always insisted that the ambassador needed to be wealthy in order not to depend on the money sent by his monarch as expenses at court and abroad were always high.²¹² This was precisely what happened with Nicot. Although in July he did receive the 2,000 écus, they were not enough. Nicot suggested to Queen Catherine de' Medici that she directly collect the money Guise still owed and return it to him as soon as possible. In the letter, he also noted ruefully that his friend Alvito was a laughingstock at the Portuguese court, as he had recently been forced to sell his personal collections to pay for his French debt. In a letter to King Charles IX, Nicot even reported that Guise's creditor had approached him at the Portuguese court to collect the money. As Nicot could not afford to pay, Guise's creditor promised to go personally to France to recover his money.²¹³ The humiliation suffered by the French ambassador was one of the arguments that King Charles IX used to recall Nicot. Another driving force behind his recall was the Lyard case that was unfolding at the same time.

The Breton Captain Bastien de Lyard and his entire crew were murdered in front of Lisbon's royal palace in May 1561, due to what Nicot called traditional Portuguese arrogance. The Portuguese Captain Diogo Nunes was held responsible for this incident, since he had received orders from Queen Catherine of Austria to inspect French ships. Cognizant of Lyard's status as a reputable seaman and soldier in France, Nicot ordered a judicial testimony be written up and he demanded compensation for Lyard's widow and sons from the Portuguese queen. When Nicot went to the palace to confront Queen Catherine of Austria with this case, she accused Nicot and the French

211 Matthieu Gellard, *Une reine épistolaire: lettres et pouvoir au temps de Catherine de Médicis* (Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2014), 264 and 271.

212 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 144.

213 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 61, 122–24, 127, 133 and 150–52.

community in Lisbon of taking part in a recent English capture of a Portuguese ship. Since the queen refused to sympathize with the ambassador's complaints, Nicot reminded her that he was the representative of a country which ought not be trifled with. The tenor of the conversation deteriorated to such a point that Nicot left the meeting. The next day, the queen announced she would provide compensation to Lyard's widow, but Nicot refused to receive it in view of the queen's haughty tone at their previous meeting. In a letter to King Charles IX, Nicot stated that he would not tolerate Queen Catherine of Austria treating him the same way she had treated Seure. At the same time, Nicot realized that the queen and her ministers distrusted him. In this context, Nicot confessed his inability to assist the many Frenchmen subjected to abuse and imprisonment by the Portuguese Inquisition. To worsen things, the case of Gaspar Treschel, a Frenchman from Lyon caught by the Inquisition with books by Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64) that he intended to sell in Portugal, occurred around the same time.²¹⁴ Nicot was able to persuade Cardinal Henry to release Treschel and ship the heretical books back to France,²¹⁵ but his cook was accused of Protestantism by the Inquisition, condemned, and burned at the stake.²¹⁶ A pall fell over Nicot himself, with the Villegagnon affair in progress and the arrival of news during 1561 about the atmosphere in France surrounding the first war of religion. The long-lasting consequences of the loss of Fort Coligny and the events that it provoked at the Valois court form the final factor in the crisis facing Nicot's embassy.

As Nicot had anticipated, the loss of Fort Coligny was brought about by the arrival of a Portuguese fleet in March 1560.²¹⁷ Nicot had warned previously about a Portuguese reinforcement fleet led by Bartolomeu da Cunha, which departed so heavily armed that he suspected the Portuguese were preparing an attack to Fort Coligny in Brazil. His suspicions proved correct; it was the Portuguese governor, Mem de Sá, who suggested to Queen Catherine of Austria to launch the attack on Fort Coligny, taking advantage of the fact that Villegagnon had temporarily returned to France to defend himself against

214 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 66 and 139–47.

215 Jorge Fonseca, "O lionês Gaspar Trechsel na Inquisição de Lisboa. O livro como veículo de difusão do luteranismo," in *Martinho Lutero e Portugal: diálogos, tensões e impactos*, ed. Edite Alberto, Ana Paula Avelar, Margarida Lalande and Paulo Esmeraldo Catarino Lopes (Lisbon: CHAM/Edições Húmus, 2019), 194.

216 Amélia Polónia, *D. Henrique. O cardeal-rei* (Mem Martins: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 128; Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 85.

217 On the Portuguese context of the attack: Marisa Marques, "Mem de Sá. Um percurso singular no Império quinhentista português" (PhD diss., Nova University of Lisbon, 2017), 137–42.

religious and political accusations.²¹⁸ I agree with the authors who argued that if Villegagnon had remained at Fort Coligny, governor Mem de Sá would not have risked a siege of the prestigious naval and military commander who had, no less, rescued Queen Mary Stuart from King Henry VIII's attempt to detain her in the 1540s. Villegagnon's deed was widely commented on in Europe. Governor Sá certainly knew about it; he openly acknowledged to Queen Catherine of Austria that the leader of *France Antarctique* conducted a wise policy with local Indians against the Portuguese, one that deeply damaged Portuguese interests in Brazil.²¹⁹ During his stay in Brazil, Villegagnon had the opportunity to send scouts to the Plate River in search of the famous Spanish Potosí mines, thus proving that Spain also had reasons to be worried. Therefore, Villegagnon's departure to France offered the opportunity for the Portuguese to strike against the French. The outcome could have been very different, had Villegagnon remained at Fort Coligny.

Since King Francis II had given his blessing to *France Antarctique*,²²⁰ the news of the fort's surrender caused great agitation at the Valois court. Shortly after his return to France, Villegagnon was appointed to command a fleet of eleven vessels that would attack Portuguese India Run ships. But the 1560 Amboise conspiracy put a stop to Villegagnon's departure and a major military reaction.²²¹ The chief reason why Villegagnon did not receive the relief he had asked for was Admiral Gaspard de Coligny's detention by the Spanish at the battle of Saint-Quentin in 1557. As the French admiral was only released in 1559, he was unable to send the reinforcements.²²² Because of the Brazilian loss, and after hearing his Conseil Privé, in January 1561, King Charles IX demanded a 200,000 écus in compensation from João Pereira Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France.²²³ Since Dantas refused this and declined to temporarily return Fort Coligny to France,²²⁴ Charles IX issued letters of marque. This was a traditional French tactic for pressuring Portugal and was aimed at recovering the amount demanded by the French Crown by means of attacks on Portuguese vessels. The tension

218 Provençal and Mariz, *Villegagnon e a França Antártica*, 118–20.

219 Julien, *Les voyages de découverte*, 203.

220 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LXIX.

221 Arthur Heulhard, *Villegagnon, roi d'Amérique. Un homme de mer au XVI^e siècle (1510–1572)* (Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1897), 195.

222 McGrath, *The French in Early Florida*, 35–36.

223 Montaigne, *La découverte du Brésil*, 285.

224 Ana Maria Pereira Ferreira, "Da defesa do monopólio do 'Mare Clausum': Alguns apontamentos na correspondência de João Pereira Dantas (1562–1565)," in *A Viagem de Bartolomeu Dias e a problemática dos Descobrimentos* (Maia: Secretaria Regional da Educação e Cultura, 1989), 164.

prompted Queen Catherine de Medici to seize ambassador Dantas's missives, in which he warned Portugal that King Charles had issued the letters.²²⁵ Meanwhile, from England, the Portuguese agent Manuel de Araújo also sounded the alarm in April 1561: Villegagnon was returning to Brazil in three ships.²²⁶ In the end, again, Villegagnon did not leave France, in spite of his calls for action against the Portuguese.²²⁷ Nevertheless, in 1561, Charles IX and Queen Catherine de' Medici, realizing that ambassador Dantas would not meet their demands, placed all their hopes in Nicot. Once again, they named Jean Ébrard, the future French ambassador in Spain from 1562 to 1565, as envoy extraordinary to Portugal and sent him to insist on financial compensation.²²⁸ Ébrard's return to Portugal was reported to King Philip II by the Spanish ambassador in France.²²⁹

In April 1561, Nicot addressed a letter to King Charles IX concerning Ébrard's arrival and the Brazilian case. Nicot started by informing the French king that the Portuguese court was astonished to learn that Charles dared to demand compensation. When Nicot had confronted Queen Catherine of Austria, she had replied with reports from Dantas that Villegagnon was considered an outlaw in France (because of his harboring Huguenots in Brazil and alleged conversion to Protestantism). She also argued that the French had been attacking the Portuguese, and cited rumors that they even fed their enemies' bodies to Brazilian Indians. In such a scenario, despite the supposed French-Portuguese alliance, the Portuguese were forced to expel the French from Brazil. To keep the delicate peace, the queen agreed to free some Frenchmen who had been imprisoned in Brazil. Nicot reminded King Charles of what he had written to King Francis II: France would only be taken seriously by Portugal if it enforced a tougher maritime policy. Since Nicot knew that would hardly happen, he continued his attempts to free Frenchmen imprisoned in Mina. He watched powerlessly as his request for Portuguese maritime assistance against English corsairs were declined. Nicot could see that Portuguese policy was targeted at forcing France to renounce its maritime and imperial ambitions. Ébrard was very well-received by Queen Catherine of Austria, probably due to his social status. In May 1561, Nicot wrote to King Charles that the queen was so impressed by him that

225 Heulhard, *Villegagnon, roi d'Amérique*, 203–6.

226 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 187.

227 Heulhard, *Villegagnon, roi d'Amérique*, 263–65.

228 Edmond Cabié, *Ambassade en Espagne de Jean Ébrard: seigneur de Saint-Sulpice de 1562 à 1565 et mission de ce diplomate dans le même pays en 1566* (Nouguiès, 1903), 12.

229 *Archivo Documental Español*, vol. II (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1950–59), 1950, doc. 241.

she even sought his political advice. Still, the Portuguese regent did not agree to Ébrard's demands for payment as her formal reply to him shows.²³⁰

Even after King Charles's decision to recall Nicot in July 1561 (of which he became aware when the lord of Carse arrived in Lisbon that month),²³¹ the ambassador continued to worry about the Frenchmen imprisoned in Mina. Nicot's letters from August 1561 document his ongoing demands for compensation to France for the loss of Fort Coligny, and his efforts in obtaining information on captured French ships. Nicot also tried to secure, without success, Portuguese assistance for French ships taken by the Ottoman fleet.²³² The accumulation of all these factors, as well as Nicot's letter to Charles IX, confessing that he had lost all hope of being able to defend French interests because he was distrusted by Queen Catherine of Austria and her ministers, sealed his fate.

On July 8, 1561, Queen Catherine de' Medici addressed a letter to Nicot ordering him to return to France, sending him money for his journey, and asking him to keep protesting about the Brazilian affair. On July 18, 1561, she informed the French ambassador in Spain of her decision and asked him to ensure that Nicot received the funds.²³³ The formal *lettre de rappel* was written by King Charles IX on July 9, 1561. The king explained the decision by stating that Nicot had become useless, since he was unable to provide justice for mistreated Frenchmen abroad, and there appeared to be no profit in maintaining a French embassy in Portugal. He instructed Nicot to reply, should he be asked again about his debt, that he was tired of such inquiries. He would depart from Portugal at the king's orders, although he was not to disclose the exact date of his departure. Nicot was authorized to express Charles's displeasure at the way Nicot had been treated in Portugal. The king saw Nicot's treatment as unworthy of such a great humanist, and doubly inappropriate in the context of an existing alliance between the two kingdoms. Before leaving Portugal, Nicot was likewise ordered to make petitions for jailed Frenchmen and yet again push for compensation for Fort Coligny.

However, it is unclear whether it was King Charles IX himself who wrote the letter to Nicot. It is widely accepted that during his early years, as was the case with King Francis II, it was the queen mother, Catherine de' Medici,

²³⁰ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 124–27, 134–37; Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 303–5.

²³¹ Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LXXXIII–LXXXIV.

²³² Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 66–71.

²³³ M. L. de C. Hector de la Ferrière, ed., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, tome I (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1880), 210–211 and 216.

the Guises, and some French secretaries of state who wrote the letters on his behalf.²³⁴ Studying the queen mother's correspondence in depth, Mathieu Gellard concluded that almost half of the letters written by the queen were addressed to French ambassadors in Europe. The author also concluded that several of her letters were written by French secretaries and signed by the queen, but only after she either read them personally or was given an account of them. Thus, out of 5,958 letters official letters by Queen Catherine de' Medici, only 819 were really written by her hand. Furthermore, the queen fought during Charles's minority to be entrusted with the writing of the king's formal replies.²³⁵ Thus, it is highly probable that the content of Nicot's recall letter was written by the queen mother and her ministers and given for signature to the king.

In September 1561, Nicot replied to Charles IX, stating that he had already received the letter from his mother and was taking care of several issues. He was prepared to leave by the end of that month. Before Nicot's departure from Portugal, he lodged a complaint with the regent regarding a subsidy that Portugal had conceded to France, which was to be paid due to the confiscation of several French cargoes in Lisbon. Nicot knew that the compensation did not represent even a tenth of revenues the Portuguese Crown had received with the seizures of French properties. Instead of confiscating the French goods, Nicot suggested that the Portuguese Crown send lists of apprehended captains and cargoes to France. Only open collaboration in the matter of these confiscations, so it seemed to Nicot, could deescalate French-Portuguese maritime rivalry. This undated letter ends with the assertion that an agreement should be reached between Christian kings in compliance with civil and canonical law.²³⁶ The way the document ends is a reminder of how Nicot never forgot his judicial office of *maître* in France and attempted to use the authority bestowed upon him by that office to continue to openly defend French interests in Portugal, even in adverse circumstances.

It is possible that this letter referred to the maritime incidents also mentioned in an undated Spanish document from the Simancas archive. This document, which appears to date from early 1561 as it mentions Charles IX as the new king of France, reports another episode of French-Portuguese warfare in the Algarve Sea. On board French captured ships there were some Frenchmen who had been sentenced to death. However, at the last

234 Lucien Bély, *L'art de la paix en Europe. Naissance de la diplomatie moderne, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2007), 43.

235 Gellard, *Une reine épistolaire*, 94, 111 and 186.

236 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, 74–78 and 154–55.

moment, Nicot intervened to save their lives by presenting letters from the king of France. As a result, the Frenchmen were released and their goods were restored.²³⁷ Afterwards, a new Portuguese representative was sent to offer condolences on the death of King Francis II. This suggests that in early 1561, Nicot was able to use King Charles IX's recent accession to convince Portuguese authorities to spare the lives of the Frenchmen. However, by the summer of 1561, Nicot's position had changed and he no longer had the same level of influence to repeat this type of success for his countrymen.

Therefore, King Charles personally took charge of Nicot and made an impulsive decision: No French representative would be stationed in Portugal for several years after Nicot's recall.²³⁸ Instead, Charles and Queen Catherine de' Medici chose to simply have an ambassador in Spain. It is hard to pinpoint the main cause for Charles IX's decision. As Vladimir Chichkine has argued, owing to its internal situation, France also had less revenue to finance all its temporary embassies in Europe.²³⁹ Indeed, France had never stationed a permanent embassy in Portugal in the 16th century, as it did for instance in England or Rome. Maritime tensions between France and Portugal also seem a likely explanation for the Valois court's decision. The loss of Fort Coligny must also have been a key factor in the decision, although France's debts and bad image were also at stake. However, despite the loss of Fort Coligny, the French still kept their hold in Brazil at Cape Cold until 1577 when the remaining French were expelled by the Portuguese.²⁴⁰ This is not to imply that the surrender of the Brazilian fortress stalled French overseas and imperial plans. As has been shown, Admiral Coligny first considered expeditions to the Moluccas and Mutapa, but in 1561 shifted to preparing an expedition to Florida (which departed in 1562).²⁴¹ Coligny certainly changed his plans because of the ongoing negotiations between Portugal and Villegagnon for financial compensation.

Allies in Europe and discreet rivals in the Atlantic, as João Paulo Oliveira e Costa outlined, the French and the Portuguese could not endure a long-lasting war against each other. If France was militarily defeated in Brazil, it should not be forgotten that it successfully contributed to the Portuguese commercial decline in Mina and Guinea.²⁴² Portugal would

237 AGS, *Secretaria de Estado*, Legajo 381, doc. 19.

238 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LXXXI–LXXXII.

239 Chichkine, "Mirage d'une alliance," 51.

240 Amorim, "A política externa," 43–44.

241 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LXVII.

242 João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *Mare Nostrum. Em busca de honra e riqueza* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2013), 218–21.

have had difficulty conducting a long Atlantic maritime war with France. On the other hand, France could not hazard overt hostilities and the loss of an ally against Spain. This accounts for King Charles IX's choice to accept compensation from Portugal and delay the Brazilian project for a time.²⁴³ Later on in the 1560s, Charles and Catherine de' Medici were similarly unable to react forcefully to the French expulsion from Florida by the Spanish. Strong pressure from Admiral Coligny could entice neither to start a risky war with Spain.²⁴⁴

Thus, it is relevant not to conflate the Valois's failure in their Brazilian project with the results of Nicot's Portuguese embassy. If Nicot was unable to ameliorate maritime frictions between Portugal and France (and his embassy ended on a sour note), he succeeded in his overall strategy for improving French-Portuguese relations. When he departed from Portugal, the proposed French marriage of King Sebastian, Nicot's main task, was still viable. It was confirmed by the Portuguese Courts in 1562–63. Because of King Sebastian's and Princess Margaret's young age, Nicot departed before any wedding could materialize. This has often led historians to state wrongly that Nicot's embassy failed.²⁴⁵ But plans for the wedding were only scrapped much later and for reasons wholly unconnected to Nicot's embassy. The fact that Nicot had compiled maritime knowledge which he successfully sent to France, where it could assist in overseas plans, is another point in his favor. An analysis of Nicot's role as a translator of knowledge once he returned to France will further demonstrate that his embassy was far from a debacle.

3.3 Nicot's Role as a Go-between for Portuguese Knowledge in France (1561–1600)

After returning to France, Jean Nicot's status was enhanced, just as Seure's had been. Resettling in Paris, Nicot soon connected with members of the Pléiade, including Ronsard and Pierre Ramus (1515–72). He finished his edition of the history of France, which was printed in 1567. Nicot then collaborated with François de Belleforest (1530–83) on his cosmography, providing information on historical monuments from Nîmes. He also gave Denys Lambin (1520–72) three manuscripts of Horace (65–8 BC) for publication, and convinced Marc-Antoine Muret (1526–85) to publish his Latin correspondence. Nicot

243 Heulhard, *Villegagnon, roi d'Amérique*, 242–45.

244 For more details see: Ribera, *Diplomatie et espionage*, 443–64.

245 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, LVII and LXXXIX.

himself thought of preparing editions of Tacitus's (AD 56–120) and Livy's (59 BC–AD 19) texts.²⁴⁶ His abandonment of this project was due to Nicot's joint work with printer Jacques Depuys on a Latin-French dictionary that was printed in 1573. Unsatisfied with his own work, he soon started to work on a more complete edition: the *Treasure of the French Language*. Nicot labored on the *Treasure* for several years, trying to improve upon the renowned dictionary published by Robert Estienne (1503–59). The work was only published in 1606, six years after Nicot's death.²⁴⁷

Nicot also kept busy managing his family affairs, and remained close to the last Valois. Not much is known about his life at court aside from his success in promoting tobacco (helped along by Queen Catherine de' Medici's endorsement of the exotic product).²⁴⁸ He arranged for his nephew (also named Jean Nicot) to become his heir. By the end of his life, Nicot was still *maître* and counsellor,²⁴⁹ although he is considered in this phase to be an extraordinary *maître* and only between 1571 and 1580.²⁵⁰ Still, it is important to note that in 16th-century France it was normal that *maîtres*, like Nicot, had important personal libraries in the fields of law, history, religion, and theology.²⁵¹ This was somehow part of the cultural ambience that fostered academies in 16th-century France,²⁵² and should be perceived as a consequence of what has been termed the second Renaissance in France under King Henry II.²⁵³ Thus, the fact that Nicot formally remained a *maître* contributed to his interest in cultivating knowledge.

Nicot's embassy in Portugal afforded him authority to give advice on any matter related to Portugal, its empire, and navigation in general. In 1564, Nicot prevented a map of France prepared by the Portuguese cosmographer André Homem, from falling into the hands of the Spanish ambassador. Nicot's intervention ensured that the map was given to King Charles IX.²⁵⁴ The episode, mentioned in the *Treasure*, involved Ambassador João Pereira

246 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 91–93.

247 Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 123 and 173.

248 Leonie Frield, *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

249 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, CIX and 177; Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 163–70.

250 Etchechoury, *Les maîtres des requêtes*, 273.

251 Etchechoury, *Les maîtres des requêtes*, 189.

252 On this topic see the classical: F. A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1988).

253 Huguier, *Henri II*, 355.

254 Maria Fernanda Alegria, Suzanne Daveau, João Carlos Garcia, and Francesc Relaño, "Portuguese Cartography in the Renaissance," in *The History of Cartography*, ed. David Woodward, vol. 3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 1042.

Dantas, the Portuguese ambassador in France, who tried without success, as shall be detailed in the following chapter, to prevent André Homem from being accepted as royal cosmographer of the king of France. The details of Nicot's intervention are unknown, but it seems probable that he acted to protect French interests: after all, while in Lisbon he had become a victim of Dantas's actions in Paris. Ill feeling between Nicot and Dantas is also attested in an incident at the Valois court in 1562.

Following Nicot's return to France and protests about French prisoners in Lisbon, Dantas had to justify Portuguese policies at the Conseil Privé.²⁵⁵ Dantas presented the Portuguese position with documents proving that out of the thirty-seven Frenchmen that Nicot mentioned were in jail, only three were French and none were receiving poor treatment. Thus, Nicot's credibility was in question, as Dantas convinced the Conseil Privé.²⁵⁶ The incident was also noticed by the English ambassador in France, who feared that an English envoy to Spain who was facing problems with the Spanish Inquisition, could be refused on the grounds of religious tension, as had happened with Nicot.²⁵⁷ By then, Nicot had personal reasons to wish for Dantas's demotion at the Valois court. Since Dantas was known to harbor Portuguese cartographers and pilots in his house and negotiate their return to Portugal, as shall be detailed in the next chapter, it is possible that Nicot sabotaged Dantas's plans in 1565. If he made any such attempt, it was successful: André Homem, Gaspar Caldeira, and Antão Luís did not return to Portugal in 1565, despite Dantas's efforts.²⁵⁸ Nor would it be extraordinary that Nicot might have contributed to the cartographical school of Dieppe with personal materials and his own knowledge. Still, there is no direct proof that he did so. This matter is closely tied to another major role that Nicot likely played: as a disseminator of Portuguese knowledge in France.

Nicot's library, one of the most extensive to be found in late 16th-century France, included important items related to Portugal. As has been shown, Nicot used his stay in Lisbon to compile a number of Portuguese works for his collection. Some of these, like André Pires's seamanship book, or

255 On the Conseil des Affaires and the Conseil Privé see N. M. Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State in the Age of Catherine de Medici* (London: The Athlon Press, 1962), 39–40.

256 Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo (ANTT), *Corpo Cronológico* (CC) I-106-4, fls. 1v.–2.

257 Joseph Stevenson, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1561–62* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1866), doc. 925.

258 Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 17; Léon Bourdon, *André Homem. Cartographe portugais en France (1560–1586)* (offprint by Revista da Universidade de Coimbra, 1972), 11, 14–15 and 19; Maria Emília Madeira Santos, *João Pereira Dantas um homem da expansão europeia* (offprint from IICT, 1990), 5–8.

the report on the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan, also helped him write a section on artillery and nautical issues in his edition of the Latin-French dictionary.²⁵⁹ Nicot's etymological treatise on naval construction contains features shared with the Portuguese work of Fernando Oliveira. In this text, Nicot details the meaning of several nautical terms that were introduced into the French language. Some of these words had a Portuguese origin and influenced his first edition of the Latin-French dictionary as well as the second edition of the *Treasure*.²⁶⁰ This is another example of how Portuguese information could be worked, developed, adapted, and transformed into a body of knowledge, in this case, suited for French purposes.

Although it is clear that Nicot acquired André Pires's book in Portugal, the source of Magellan's report is less certain. After all, such reports were available in France long before Nicot's embassy. Although this is what can be documented, Nicot's original library might have included other items related to Portugal, especially considering that his library was dispersed after his death and that La Pléiade used to circulate and share materials among its members. Thus, after returning home, Nicot probably went from recommending that translations be undertaken, as he had done for Nunes's book, to assuming the role of promulgator of Portuguese nautical knowledge in France. How then ought the legacy of Nicot's embassy to be assessed when compared with his predecessors Caix and Seure?

3.4 Caix, Seure, and Nicot: French Diplomacy and Espionage Tactics vis-à-vis Portugal

A literary and scientific man at heart, Jean Nicot is an excellent example of the 16th-century French humanist diplomat.²⁶¹ His achievements at the Portuguese embassy cannot be examined without considering the role played by his predecessors in office. As has been shown, Michel de Seure was essentially a spy-ambassador. His inability to adapt to the Portuguese environment and his clearly anti-Iberian approach²⁶² resulted in Portuguese

259 Edmond Falgairolle, 1897, CV–CVI. Also see illustration 3.

260 Baudry, *Jean Nicot*, 84, 112 and 177. A project from Toronto University has made Nicot's major works available, including the nautical treatise: <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~wulftric/marine/traite.html> [accessed on December 16, 2022]. See also: Maxime Lanusse, *De Joanne Nicotio philologo* (Gratianopoli: Ex typis J. Allier 1893) and M. Puech, "Un homme de lettres au XVI^e siècle" in *Memoires de l'Academie de Nimes*, tome XIV (1891), 203–252.

261 Matos, "Un diplomate humaniste," 35.

262 Serrão, *Michel de Seure*, 194.

complaints to King Henry II and demands that he be recalled. Henry II's decision to reward Seure's services is also related to the outcome of Honorais de Caix's embassy.

During his years as ambassador in Portugal, which coincided with the entire reign of King John III, Caix became too well adapted to the Portuguese environment. The meagre surviving documents from Caix's embassy, dating to the late 1520s and 1530s, evidence his transformation into a defender of Portuguese *Mare Clausum* policies. At decisive moments, he opposed France's interests, such as when King Francis I gave Jean Ango brand letters in 1531. He also personally went to France as an agent of King John III on several occasions (to try to recover cargo from Breton and Norman captains, for example), as well as to negotiate at the Valois court in the shadow of the Portuguese ambassador (as John instructed Caix and his formal ambassador). Although he was never formally named King John III's ambassador, he was accused on multiple occasions of neglecting French interests and was physically threatened because of it. At the basis of Caix's behavior was his belief that France should leave overseas expansion to Portugal and simply try to profit from it. Championing a policy of conciliation, like the one Jean Bodin (1530–1596) came to advise later, Caix failed to convince King Francis I that France should not engage in maritime wars with Portugal since that could enable him to negotiate a good commercial treaty with John III.²⁶³ At the end of his life, the French ambassador had been forgotten by King Henry II, as a revealing 1558 letter of Queen Catherine of Austria to Ambassador Dantas testifies. In this missive, she asked Dantas to wait for Caix's advice, and to petition Henry to reward Caix, as his advanced age prevented travel to France, but his devoted service to King John III deserved recognition.²⁶⁴ Given this precedent, it is possible that Henry II's appointment of and mission to Seure were also provoked by Caix's disinterest in promoting French causes.

The espionage Seure undertook while in Lisbon was partly prompted by Henry's support of *France Antarctique*. However, after Seure was discovered, the king was forced to appoint a new ambassador. To improve relations with Portugal and ensure that his new ambassador would not be immediately mistrusted, he chose a man with a very different profile. Instead of a knight (Seure), Henry opted for a humanist (Nicot). The more sympathetic approach of a humanist would and did make the Portuguese forget Seure's espionage. But appearances can be misleading; I am fully convinced that Henry II also instructed Nicot to acquire all the knowledge he could on the Portuguese

²⁶³ Serrão, *Michel de Seure*, 162–63, 182 and 186.

²⁶⁴ Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 274.

empire and navy, while cautioning him not to adopt Seure's tactics. As has been demonstrated, Henry's ploy succeeded, even before Nicot's arrival, in kindling Queen Catherine of Austria's curiosity concerning the new French ambassador.

Thus, Nicot was fated to become an ambassador who fell midway between Caix's and Seure's approaches. This is precisely what can be observed in his correspondence. While promoting the union between France and Portugal (expressed in the planned marriage of King Sebastian and Princess Margaret of Valois), Nicot also stood up for French interests. Nicot was ready to denounce any injustice visited on Frenchmen, like Seure, but also warned the Portuguese of illegal French activities, like Caix. His middle ground positions were targeted at winning Portuguese maritime assistance for France against English and Ottoman corsairs, but as has been shown, this did not happen. Studying the Portuguese and their history, Nicot understood that he could exploit Portuguese fears of and rivalry with Spain to France's benefit. This context enabled him to make numerous contacts at the Portuguese court and secure the conditions needed for fulfilling King Henry II's original directives (later confirmed by Kings Francis II, Charles IX, and Queen Catherine de' Medici) of transmitting intelligence on the Portuguese imperial and nautical *status quo*.

If we consider the new era of French-Spanish relations inaugurated by King Henry II with the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis and the action of French ambassadors in Spain up to the death of Queen Elisabeth of Valois (1545–1568), King Philip II's third wife,²⁶⁵ we are faced with a question. Did King Henry II intend, in appointing Nicot to his embassy and action, to focus France's overseas action against Portugal, instead of following the tradition of a clash with Spain? It is important to note that by signing peace with Spain and England, King Henry II became free to launch informal Atlantic war against Portugal if he so wished. After Cateau-Cambrésis, Henry II knew that Spain would back Portuguese complaints against France but not to the point of another war. Furthermore, as shall be detailed in the next chapter, Spain did not totally back Portuguese diplomatic requests vis-à-vis France. As with several other questions concerning King Henry II's policy after the signing of the peace, the king's death buried the answer. However, this hypothesis remains a possibility, and it might have affected Nicot's actions in Lisbon even after Henry II's death. Knowing Queen Catherine de' Medici personally, Nicot recognized that there would be a continuity of French overseas interests via the role she played during the rule of Kings Francis II and Charles IX.

²⁶⁵ Ribera, *Diplomatie et espionage*, 361–516.

Nicot's access to the details of Portuguese operations in Brazil, Guinea, Mina, Mutapa, and Asia document French maritime interest in Portuguese activities very well. If Nicot became a victim of the loss of Fort Coligny, he was still able to send sensitive intelligence to France. However, his awareness of Portuguese naval capacity explains why Nicot did not push for all-out maritime war, as Seure had done. Nor was Nicot, like Raymond de Forqueveaux (1508–74), the later French ambassador in Spain between 1565 and 1572, a paladin of French overseas expansion against the Iberians.²⁶⁶ In this matter, Nicot's views also run counter to Caix's, who proposed an end to French overseas ambitions. Nicot advised that if France wanted to take a tougher position against Portugal, it would have to prepare itself for the conflict. Thus, Nicot exploited every possible chance to get his hands on sensitive nautical knowledge while in Lisbon, and very likely established important connections with people with robust knowledge of these topics, such as Fernando Oliveira, Damião de Góis, and João de Barros. These endeavors were likely preparatory to his later work disseminating Portuguese nautical knowledge. As Nicot knew, the French civil wars would eventually end, and France would regain the capacity to launch serious maritime projects; to meet the moment when it arrived, preparation was essential. In this context, Nicot was more than an influential figure in the rise of the modern French language with his famous *Treasure*. He also laid the foundations for the major maritime successes that France achieved in the 17th century, despite dying too early to see it happen.

Conclusion

Seure's and Nicot's embassies have analogues in the paths taken by Spanish ambassadors to Portugal during the 1560s and 1570s, such as D. Alonso de Tovar, D. Juan de Borja, D. Juan de Silva, and D. Cristobal de Moura. For all of them, as has been underscored in the first chapter, the same can be observed: an attempt to gather sensitive imperial and maritime information. D. Juan de Borja is often dubbed a spy-ambassador. D. Juan de Silva was instructed by King Philip II (in 1575) to gather Portuguese cartography and nautical rutters, employing discretion and secrecy to avoid detection.²⁶⁷ These orders are not very different from King Henry II's to Seure and Nicot.

²⁶⁶ Matos, *Les Portugais en France*, 11–12.

²⁶⁷ AGI, *Indiferente* 427, book 29, Fl.109V–110V. For further details: Moreno Madrid, "Circulation and Contacts," 1–15.

Such cases suggest a common *modus operandi* of nautical and imperial espionage among 16th-century French and Spanish ambassadors to Portugal. What differentiates Seure and Nicot from his Spanish contemporaries was the degree of political espionage they were able to achieve. Seure and Nicot occasionally reported on political matters, but their main goals were elsewhere. Their quarry was technical (meaning, maritime) intelligence.

At the core of Seure's and Nicot's actions, as well as those of their Spanish colleagues in Portugal, was the realization that Portuguese nautical knowledge was crucial in planning overseas voyages. This awareness was also evident on the Portuguese side, prompting the need to counteract these intentions through other means. As previously discussed in chapters 1 and 2, it was not only Spain and England, represented by Emperor Charles V, King Philip II, or Queen Mary I, that recognized the value of Portuguese maritime knowledge. The same conclusion can be drawn regarding Valois France under Kings Francis I, Henry II, Francis II, Charles IX, and Queen Catherine de' Medici. This raises a question: was the Portuguese government aware that Valois France and Tudor England were highly interested in acquiring Portuguese nautical knowledge, at a time when the renewal of English overseas plans coincided with the maritime leadership of Admiral Coligny in France? If the Portuguese government was conscious of this and also of the espionage methods employed by the French and the English to acquire Portuguese nautical knowledge, what measures did it take to counter them?

By analyzing the correspondence of a Portuguese ambassador in France and England in the 1550s and 1560s, the next chapter examines how Portugal dealt with the simultaneous maritime challenges posed by England and France overseas. Through this process, it will become clear how Portugal's attempts to implement secrecy policies regarding the circulation of sensitive nautical and cartographical knowledge to both England and France were unsuccessful. This period was marked by the rise of Elizabethan England and also set the stage for the emergence and success of the Dutch Republic, which benefited from maritime knowledge exchanges with France and England. Despite the Portuguese failure, the mere existence of such attempts by Portugal highlights their awareness that French and Spanish ambassadors also had their own methods of obtaining Portuguese technical knowledge. Were not the Portuguese ambassadors in Spain or England also tasked with espionage, as previously discussed? Taking a connected history approach, the next chapter will use the correspondence of João Pereira Dantas to study how Portugal attempted to counter such technical espionage.

