

S. 13. 4. – NATURE’S YIELD: COMMERCE AND SCIENCE
Chair: Juan Acevedo
(CIUHCT, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa)

Sargassum harvesting and tithing in NW Portugal: actors and conflicts (17th century - 1832)

ANA ISABEL LOPES (CITCEM, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto)

Abstract

Since the 13th century, the harvesting of sargassum for agricultural purposes, subsistence or trade, has been documented in northwestern Portugal, enabling communities on the border with Atlantic Ocean, to combat the sterility of soils so often affected by drift sands. With the intensification of agriculture from the mid-19th century, the collection of sargassum led to large groups of people settling seasonally (and later permanently) on the dunes between May and September, settling in stone huts with all the necessary tools to minimise the irregularity of maritime and agricultural wages. These large groups of “sargaceiros” attracted the attention of 20th century ethnographers who described their clothing, tools and buildings, or of historians who analysed their “deviant” behaviour. However, we still do not know how this resource, whose tithing was abolished with the definitive establishment of liberalism, was taxed, which institutions and communities were involved, and what conflicts this might have caused.

Based on the analysis of the ordinances on the harvesting of sargassum and tithes drawn up by the local religious institutions and the requests of the communities to the Parliament, it will determine how the tax on this resource was managed and how it evolved in the Early Modern Age and in the first years of the implementation of liberalism. Second, it will use this historical documentation to examine whether there was conflict between institutions and communities, as well as between neighbouring communities, over ownership and revenue from this maritime resource. The aim of this communication is to revive, from a local perspective, the memory of a widespread practise throughout the Atlantic region, which in many cases has been lost in recent decades, but also to understand how maritime resources were exploited in the past and to analyse the relationship between maritime resources, territory, communities and institutions.

Keywords

Sargassum; Maritime resources; Exploitation of resources; Taxation

Biography

Ana Isabel Lopes is a PhD student in History at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto, funded by a scholarship (DFA/BD/4817/2020) from the Foundation for Science and Technology (Portugal). She holds a Bachelor's degree in History and a Master's degree in History and Heritage (specialisation in Local and Regional Studies) from the same institution. Her studies focus on drift sands and its effects, as well as the responses of communities and their institutions, and the exploitation of maritime resources on the northwest coast of Portugal during The Early Modern Age.

Circulating Knowledge: Arabic Texts in Portuguese Nautical Literature

INÊS BÉNARD (Centro Interuniversitário de História das Ciências e da Tecnologia, Faculdade de Ciências-UL)

Abstract

Historians today generally agree on the level of knowledge circulation taking place in 16th century Indian Ocean. European sailors would look for Arabic pilots from the moment they would reach the east coast of Africa. They would request not only practical help and advice, but also information on sea routes and geographical depictions. Even though a considerable amount of the information provided was transmitted orally, Portuguese sources do mention valuable written descriptions and charts. What I propose with this presentation is to look at Arabic nautical texts as objects of intercultural transmission of knowledge. Having been produced under different contexts and in different languages, the Portuguese needed to translate and interpret these descriptions in order to use them not only for navigation per se, but also for scientific and political decisions. The presentation will thus be mainly focused in Portuguese accounts of Arabic texts, but constantly using navigational treatises by Ibn Mājjid and Sulaymān al-Mahrī as references.

Keywords

Navigation; Rutters; Arabic Nautical texts; Indian Ocean; Circulation of knowledge

Biography

Inês is a PhD student at the University of Lisbon and a member of the ERC project RUTTER “Making the Earth Global”. Her research topic is circulation of knowledge between Atlantic and Indian Ocean navigational practices. She is currently focused on Arabic and Portuguese nautical texts.

The Cod Hunters

JOHN GOODLAD (Independent Researcher)

Abstract

This paper is based on my PhD and my published book of the same name. It chronicles the nineteenth century cod fishery undertaken by the Shetland fleet of cod smacks. Fishing at Greenland, Iceland and Faroe, these smacks split and salted the cod on board. The salt cod were then dried on Shetland beaches before being exported to Spain where the “Shetland cure” was in demand for making the best quality baccalau dishes. The paper examines the reasons why the fishery began, how it came to dominate the Shetland economy and why it suddenly disappeared. Not only fish - the paper will explore the hitherto neglected smuggling trade from Faroe to Shetland undertaken by the cod smacks

Keywords

Dried salt cod, Shetland, Faroe, the Basque country

Biography

John is a seafood industry professional - currently working for a large seafood investment fund. Always fascinated by fishing history he undertook a PhD about the Shetland cod fishery. This was the basis for his book *The Cod Hunters*. Following on from the success of this book he has written *Salt Roads* which will be published by Birlinn in September 2022.