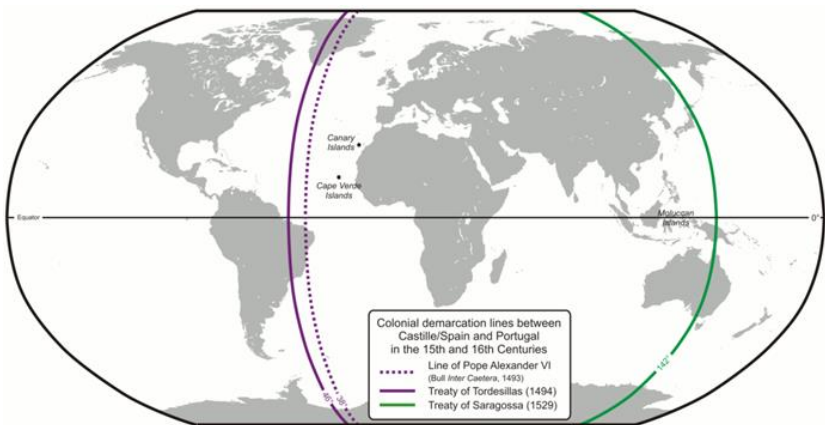


The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance and the Settlement of Australia

The Anglo-Portuguese alliance, established by the Treaty of Windsor in 1386, is regarded as the oldest alliance still in force. For over 600 years the alliance has been invoked in wars and conflicts, but it has had an influence in peacetime as well. The ancient alliance played a significant role in the initial British settlement of Australia in 1788. The settlement of the colony of New South Wales was greatly facilitated by the close relationship with Portugal, especially in the first 20 years of settlement.

By Curtis Stewart



Demarcation lines after Treaties of Tordesillas and Zaragoza

British Claim and Settlement of Australia

The Portuguese claim to the western half of Australia was based on two treaties. By the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, Spain and Portugal agreed on their respective spheres of influence in the Americas. It is well known that the treaty created a line to the west of the Cape Verde islands and gave Portugal a claim to Brazil. However, it did not create a line of demarcation in the Orient. The question of where the division was in

the Eastern Hemisphere remained unresolved until the Treaty of Zaragoza in 1529. By this agreement, the eastern border between the Spanish and Portuguese zones was 297 ½ leagues east of the Maluku Islands.¹ This gave Portugal control of trade with the important spice islands and the Portuguese occupied Timor to the southwest of Maluku to enforce their claim to the region. The treaty of Zaragoza did not modify the line of demarcation established by the Treaty of Tordesillas, so the two lines created divided the Earth into unequal portions, not equal hemispheres of 180° each. Portugal's portion was roughly 191° of the Earth's circumference, whereas Spain's portion was roughly 169°. There was a ±4° margin of uncertainty as to the exact size of both portions, due to the variation of opinion about the precise location of the Tordesillas line.²

A difficulty with both treaties was that it was not easy for the Spanish and Portuguese negotiators to determine the precise longitude of the Cape Verde islands or the Maluku islands. Both sides produced maps to support their respective claims based on different lines of longitude. The disputes and even wars raged for years. In the western hemisphere a *de facto* line of demarcation of the 51st meridian in Brazil was eventually accepted.³ The corresponding line in the eastern hemisphere is the 129th meridian. It is curious to note that the border of Western Australia, a north/south line bisecting the continent, is derived from a treaty negotiated in the 16th century between Spain and Portugal.⁴

Another interpretation of the eastern border was the 135th meridian, which is what was claimed by Capt. Phillip on arrival in New South Wales.⁵ This western limit of 135° east was shown on a 1744

¹ Ibid.

² Delaney, John. "[Demarcation Lines](#)". *Strait Through: Magellan to Cook & the Pacific*. Princeton University Library. a

³ McIntyre, Kenneth Gordon, *The Rebello Transcripts: Governor Phillip's Portuguese Prelude*, Souvenir Press, London, 1984, p. 30.

⁴ McIntyre, p. 23.

⁵ "[Governor Phillip's Instructions 25 April 1787 \(UK\)](#)". *Documenting a Democracy*. [National Archives of Australia](#), cited in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Australia_border#cite_note-NAA1787-2

map, *Complete Map of the Southern Continent*, by Emanuel Bowen, the Royal Mapmaker to King George II.⁶ Adoption of 135° east as a boundary would have minimised provocation of the Portuguese. By 1825, however, Britain was powerful enough and found it convenient to adopt the original line of the Portuguese under the treaty, 129° east.⁷

Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet

The First Fleet, sent out for the purpose of settling Australia with convicts, departed England in May 1787 and arrived in New South Wales in January 1788. The commander of the fleet and first Governor was Capt. Arthur Phillip, who had important connections and contacts with Portugal that greatly facilitated the settlement of Australia.⁸



Captain Arthur Phillip

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Australia

⁷ Brown, A. J. (2003). "[*Chapter two: Union or unity? Anglo-Australian territorial theory to the 1840s*](#)" (pdf). *The Frozen Continent: The fall and rise of territory in Australian constitutional thought 1815-2003*. PhD Thesis. Griffith University.

⁸ Historical Association of Portugal, 1938, *Miscellanea – Sesqui-Centenary of New South Wales; Admiral Phillip's Service with the Portuguese Navy*, pp. 150-152. <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/sesqui-centenary-of-new-south-wales-admiral-phillips-service-with-the-portuguese-navy>

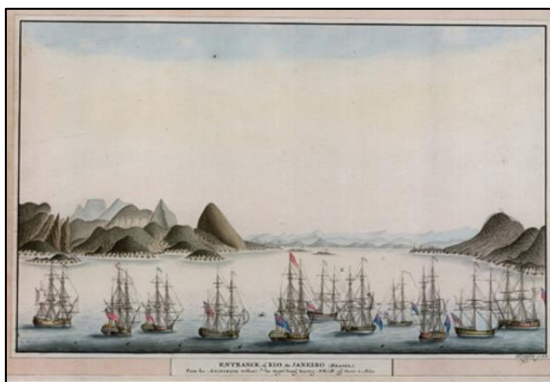
Arthur Phillip's advancement in the navy had been slow: he enlisted as an ordinary seaman in 1755 and in 1762 he was promoted to lieutenant. By the early 1770s, he was still a lieutenant, but had been placed on half-pay. However, in 1774, the Portuguese Minister of the Colonies and the Navy, Martinho de Melo e Castro, was recruiting officers for the Portuguese navy. Melo e Castro had previously served as Portuguese Ambassador in London and had made the acquaintance of Rear Admiral the Hon Augustus John Hervey (afterwards Earl of Bristol). The Royal Navy had a regulation which permitted officers to offer their service to foreign navies and about a half dozen British officers were recruited by Melo e Castro.⁹ Phillip thus had the opportunity to join the Portuguese Navy as a captain, serving in Brazil in the Spanish-Portuguese War, or the Second Cevallos expedition. This was a conflict fought between 1776 and 1777 over the border between Spanish and Portuguese South America, the region that is today Uruguay. While with the Portuguese Navy, Phillip commanded a frigate, *Nossa Senhora do Pilar*, and played a leading part in the capture of the Spanish ship *San Agustín*, on 19 April 1777, off Santa Catarina. The *San Agustín* was commissioned into the Portuguese Navy as the *Santo Agostinho*, and command of her was given to Phillip. In 1778 he returned to duty with the Royal Navy.

His three and a half years of service with the Portuguese navy in Brazil gave Phillip a knowledge of navigating in the southern hemisphere and of the port of Rio de Janeiro, which was useful in the voyage to Australia. He had also acquired a knowledge of the Portuguese language and, even more importantly, a network of contacts within the Brazilian and Portuguese officials. This served him well in his role as commander of the First Fleet.

The First Fleet convoy of two warships, six convict transports and three store ships departed England on 13 May 1787. On 5 August they arrived in Rio de Janeiro and stayed until 3 September. The Viceroy, D.

⁹ McIntyre, Kenneth Gordon, *The Rebello Transcripts: Governor Phillip's Portuguese Prelude*, Souvenir Press, London, 1984, p. 78 ff.

Luis de Vasconcelos, knew Phillip and the reception given to the British was exceptionally friendly and warm.¹⁰ When the Viceroy found that Phillip was now Governor Phillip of New South Wales, he directed that Viceregal honours be accorded the Governor. One of the British soldiers in the fleet, Watkin Tench, a Captain of Marines, wrote of the fleet's visit in 1787: "Some part, indeed, of the numerous indulgences we experienced during our stay here must doubtless be attributed to the high respect in which the Portuguese held Governor Phillip, who was for many years a captain in their navy and commanded a ship of war on this station, in consequence of which many privileges were extended to us, very unusual to be granted to strangers."¹¹



(Top) The 1st Fleet in Rio de Janeiro; (Bottom) Entering Port Jackson

¹⁰ McIntyre, p. 181-182.

¹¹ <https://web.viu.ca/black/amrc/index.htm?Research/Papers/PHILLIP2.HTM&2>

The long rest stop in Brazil of nearly a month was undoubtedly important for the health and well-being of the convicts and crewmembers and ultimately the success of the entire venture. David Collins, who served as Judge Advocate and Secretary of the new colony, wrote of the stay in Rio that, “During their stay in this port of refreshment, the convicts were each served daily with a pound of rice and a pound and an half of fresh meat (beef), together with a suitable proportion of vegetables. Great numbers of oranges were at different times distributed among them, and every possible care was taken to refresh and put them into a state of health and condition to resist the attacks of the scurvy, should it make its appearance in the long passage over the ocean which was yet between them and New South Wales. The Reverend Mr. Johnson gave also his full share of attention to their welfare, performing divine service on board two of the transports every Sunday of their stay in port.”¹²

Collins noted that the following plants and seeds were procured at Rio de Janeiro:¹³

- Coffee – both seed and plant
- Cocoa-in the nut
- Cotton-seed
- Banana-plant
- Oranges – various sorts, seed and plant
- Lemon – seed and plant
- Guava – seed
- Tamarind
- Prickly pear-plant, with the cochineal on it
- Eugenia, or Pomme Rose – a plant bearing a fruit in shape like an apple, and having the flavour and odour of a rose
- Ipecacuana – three sorts
- Jalap

¹² Collins, David, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, London, 1798, section II. <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00010.html#section2>

¹³ Ibid.

When the fleet departed from Rio on 3 September the Viceroy ordered a farewell salute of 21 guns as a mark of respect. When Phillip stopped in Rio de Janeiro, after the conclusion of his governorship, on his way to England on his return voyage in February 1793 he was once again honoured with extraordinary attention.¹⁴

The Anglo-Portuguese alliance underpinned the success of this initial voyage and the visit of Governor Phillip to Rio de Janeiro established a precedent which was invaluable to the success of the new colony of New South Wales. Shortly after his arrival in New South Wales, Governor Phillip proclaimed the territorial boundaries of the new colony. The western boundary of his jurisdiction was set at the meridian of 135° East of Greenwich, so that New South Wales was made to include the whole eastern half of Australia.¹⁵ In 1825 the western boundary of the colony was extended to 129° East, today's border of the state of Western Australia.¹⁶

The Importance of Rio de Janeiro to Australia

In his paper, “The Critical Importance of Rio de Janeiro to British Interests, with Particular Attention to Australia in Her Formative Years, 1787-1805”, Rudy Bauss of Tulane University provides an analysis of why Rio de Janeiro was critical to the foundation of Australia.¹⁷ He consulted the records of the British ships sailing to Australia and found that, “Prior to the first decade of the nineteenth century perhaps as many as seventy percent of the ships bound from England to Australia stopped at Rio de Janeiro.”¹⁸ He notes that, with the settlement of Australia, Great Britain was able to expand its network of commerce and trade in

¹⁴ McIntyre, op. cit. p. 201.

¹⁵ King, Robert J., Arthur Phillip: Defender of Colônia, Governor of New South Wales, Research Paper, Oct. 1999,

<https://web.viu.ca/black/amrc/index.htm?Research/Papers/PHILLIP2.HTM&2>

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Australia_border

¹⁷ Bauss, Rudy, *The Critical Importance of Rio de Janeiro to British Interests, with particular Attention to Australia in her Formative Years, 1787-1805*, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Vol. 64, pt. 3, Dec. 1979.

¹⁸ Bauss, p. 145.

the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific basins. Rio de Janeiro and Australia played a key role in the network of supply centres and ports located throughout the southern hemisphere. During most of those years the Spanish South American ports were closed to British shipping, and because of the Napoleonic Wars were often belligerent. Rio de Janeiro was an ideal way station between England and the new colony of New South Wales because the city had an excellent harbour, the British had free access for ships requiring supplies or repairs, and the location was superb for sailing on to Cape Town or direct to Port Jackson, close to Sydney.¹⁹

It was not only Captain Arthur Phillip who had contacts in Rio de Janeiro. Philip Gidley King, who was a lieutenant on the first fleet and subsequently acting Governor and then Governor between 1800 and 1806, stayed in Rio de Janeiro between 25 May and 13 August 1807. King was on excellent terms with the then Viceroy, the Count of Arcos, and had easy access to him. Thus, both Governor Phillip and Governor King enjoyed excellent relations in Rio de Janeiro and these friendships and contacts were very beneficial thereafter to ship captains seeking supplies and assistance on the way to Australia.²⁰

As mentioned above, the eastern portion of the Australian continent fell within the Spanish sphere according to the Portuguese/Spanish treaties. But the Spanish did not occupy it or trade with the region, leaving an opening for the British. However, once the British had established their new colony, the Spanish took notice. A Spanish expedition commanded by Alejandro Malaspina arrived in Sydney harbor in 1793, one of the first visits by foreign ships. Following the visit, the Spanish considered invading the new colony, but the plan was never carried out.²¹

¹⁹ Bauss, p. 146

²⁰ Bauss, p. 159

²¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2928603/Spain-planned-invade-Britain-s-colony-Australia-1700s-100-vessel-armada-historian-uncovers.html>

Conclusion

The British settlement of Australia was underpinned by a legal claim that acknowledged Portuguese historic claims in the region and thus had some validity in the eyes of other European powers, (even if the claim did not acknowledge the existing occupation of the continent by the Aboriginal Australians). The initial settlement in 1788 was greatly facilitated by the web of contacts between Great Britain and Portugal, built up over the course of a long alliance.

The suggestion that the 1386 Treaty of Windsor could ultimately be connected to the British settlement of Australia, four hundred years later, in 1788, at first appears far-fetched, as does the suggestion of a linkage between the 1529 Treaty of Zaragoza between Spain and Portugal and some of the current borders of the Australian states. But this brief overview of history shows that these linkages, within the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, can be argued to have been important. If the Anglo-Portuguese alliance had not existed, the settlement of Australia would undoubtedly have been much more difficult and could have evolved in a different direction.

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Curtis Stewart is a retired American diplomat living in Portugal. He enjoyed overseas assignments with the Department of State in more than a dozen countries, primarily in Africa. His posting in the Azores and Canberra, Australia, helped in research for the articles appearing in this newsletter. In the course of his career he worked in the areas of economics, energy, mineral resources and science. He met his wife while serving in the Azores and has lived in Portugal since 2002.