

## Our Great Discovery in Portugal

Leticia always has been curious about Portugal because her Great-Great Grandfather was born there. And of course both of us have been curious about the feats of the early Portuguese explorers, how one of Europe's smallest countries was able to lead the other larger European Countries in world discovery back in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The real untold story about the Portuguese explorers started unraveling for us when we drove to the inland village of Tomar, Portugal. There we found an old 15th century castle. Normally the ornamentation or "manueline" of these old castles is rather predictable but this castle had manueline that was curious. There was repeated use of a bold cross with equal sides. It was the Knights Templar symbol that used to drive fear into the hearts of the Muslims; but, that happened long ago. Carved in the same stone work was an occasional geodesic dome. It was a small ball with lines running around it in circles. These stone carvings were the heart of the discovery that led us on a historic tour of Portugal that wound up in Sagres the most Southwestern point in the country.



**The castle in Tomar made repeated use of the cross of the Order of Knights Templar.**

The geodesic domes we saw are still a modern symbol of celestial navigation, a subject I studied at Annapolis.

We had to know more about this Order of the Knights Templar and why they were involved with Celestial Navigation. We proceeded to learn a lot which would finally explain the very importance of the Knights Templar in the exploration of our new world.

We learned that the Knights Templar Order was founded by nine Knights in around 1119 at the time of the Christian Crusades. The Knights took an oath of poverty and swore to be champions of Christianity. They were at first basically a military organization dedicated to protect the Christian visitors to Jerusalem.



**The Tomar castle also repeatedly displayed the Symbol of Celestial Navigation.**

This may seem like small time stuff until we take into account the status at that time of the Catholic Church which had grown in power over the years and was building massive cathedrals and churches in most countries in Europe. These churches that still stand today show the total preoccupation with Christianity. The artists at that time were limited to painting only saints and commissioned works. The musicians composed only music for the Church and for the glory of God. In this totally religious atmosphere, a visit to Jerusalem in the Holy Land was an honor for men of means. And participation in a Crusade was a right of manhood.

The Knights Templar flourished in this environment. They grew in number and showed their devotion and military skill by leading many of the Crusaders' charges into battle. Pope Innocent II was so pleased with the Knights Templar that he issued a papal bull in 1139 stating that they

owed no taxes and they could pass freely through any border. Only an all powerful Pope could grant such license.

A non military support group of the Templars also grew up and became famous for safeguarding the money of the individual crusaders. To afford the necessary armor and trip to Jerusalem the Crusaders had to be individually well off. They would leave their money with the Templars when they left to battle the Muslims. The Templars were enriched with the money of those Crusaders who didn't come back. This was not small stuff at all. The Templar organization became wealthy, and since their members were vowed to poverty, the Templars' wealth grew and grew. The Templars originated many of the present day banking concepts of safeguarding money, and lending it out with interest.

The Knights Templar won many a military victory, and kept the Holy Land open to Christians, but after more than one hundred years of crusades the Muslims' mighty leader Saladin won his decisive victories; and the Christians lost their last foothold in the Holy land. This settled the issue between Christian and Muslims for a period of hundreds of years. The Order of the Knights Templar moved its base of operations to different places, finally France. Along the way they further multiplied their wealth and property holdings. They were one of several different independent orders which eventually aroused the envy of the Catholic Church as well as various European kings.

While domiciled in France the Templars loaned large sums to King Philip IV. The King became so indebted to the Knights Templar that his obligations were just too great for him. He exercised his right as an absolute ruler to disband the Templar Order, just to absolve his debts. At this point came one of those historic world shaping developments. The very alert Prince Henry of Portugal told the Templar Knights they would be most welcome in Portugal. They reorganized, and changed their name from "Order of Knights Templar" to "Order of Knights of Christ". Many years later they changed their name back to "Knights Templar" still their name today. They took their wealth to Portugal and put it at the disposition of their new leader Prince Henry. They re-built a defensive castle in Tomar Portugal, the place we visited. This castle was so well engineered that they were later able to stand off a siege from the Spanish army of Castille.



**William Jarvis in the Tomar Castle. Note the cross symbol (upper center) of the Knights Templar.**

Prince Henry offered these new Knights of Christ the chance to participate in his grand concept of exploring. They totally bought in to Prince Henry's objective of searching a new trade route around Africa. It was also an opportunity for them to break the Moorish monopoly on the African and Asian trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean and to once again best their ancient enemy, the Muslims. The same Order of Knights Templar that spearheaded the crusades was now spearheading what turned out to be the grand exploration of the world, a new worthy cause for the celebrated Order. Out of gratitude and respect they appointed Prince Henry as the leader of the new Knights of Christ, a post he held for 20 years until his death.

Prince Henry now had all the money needed for his cherished exploration. He first set up a school for navigators at Sagres Portugal in 1418. Leticia and I visited this place. This is a small promontory at the southwestern corner of Portugal. It was said at the time to be the "western most point of the whole inhabited world". Looking at a globe shows Sagres to be a little to the west of Ireland. Prince Henry used money from the Knights of Christ to develop the famous Caravelle sailing ships which were capable of sailing long distances. Then he sponsored many early expeditions and laid the groundwork for the many later ones.

Exploring wasn't cheap. You see the names of single expedition leaders below but these caravelles did not sail alone. There were flotillas of 5 to 7 ships all with their ship captains, sailing together for mutual support and protection. Below is a sampling of their many successes around the world.

- 1487 Bartholomew Dias sails around Cape of Good Hope, South Africa
- 1498 Vasco de Gama sails around Africa and reaches India
- 1500 Pedro Cabal discovers Brazil
- 1542 First Europeans to land in Japan

Portuguese influence in Japan remains to this day. The word "obrigado" in Portuguese originally meant more than just "Thank You". It meant, "I am obligated to you." It is the most common phrase in Portuguese. The Japanese adopted this phrase and now a most common word in Japanese is "Arigato", "Thank You".

The Portuguese also claim Christopher Columbus as one of their own since he lived in Portugal and became inspired for his own sailing expedition later financed by Queen Isabella of Spain. Columbus lived in the little town called Cuba, Portugal which Leticia and I visited. It is named after the Cuve, a large container used in winemaking. Columbus later gave this town's name to the island of Cuba.

The exploration of the world was the last great feat of the Knights Templar organization before it turned into the mostly charitable organization that it is today. With its sister Order of the Masons it is now dedicated to charitable causes such as children's hospitals, medical assistance, education, and housing for the needy.

So it was interesting, after all, to uncover some important history with our visit to Portugal.



**Modern remains of the Compass Rose from the 15th century school of Navigation at Sagres, Portugal.**



**Leticia Jarvis with the model of the ancient Caravelles designed by Prince Henry for his exploration of the World.**



**A Caravelle flying the Cross of the Knights Templar, sailing to India. (Hitler adopted this same cross symbol for his Luftwaffe planes.)**