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WHY DID VALARTE DIE? DEATH OF A DANISH KNIGHT  
DURING EXPEDITION TO WEST AFRICA  
IN MID 15th CENTURY

The journeys of knights to various European courts were a common phenomenon in the Middle Ages. With regard to the problem of fight with the Muslims or pagans, three journey directions were of special importance in late Middle Ages: At the Hungarian court, fight with the Turks was possible; in the Teutonic Knights' Order State — fight with pagans; at the Portuguese court — fight with the Muslims from North Africa, as well as with pagans from West Africa. Among the works published recently on that subject, an especially important one is Werner Paravicini's study on the knights' journeys to the Teutonic Knights' Order State. Doubtlessly, Portugal gave Christian knights a chance to win such a merit<sup>1</sup>.

Among the knights from Central and North Europe who journeyed to Portugal there happened to be one called Valarte. We can learn about him from Gomes Eanes Zurara's chronicle, written down starting from 1453, that is, not so many years after the knight's journey, though later completed and rewritten again and again until the chronicler's death in 1473 or 1474<sup>2</sup>. Another

<sup>1</sup> W. Paravicini, *Die Preussenreisen des Europäischen Adels*, vol. 1, Sigmaringen 1989. About Polish knights journeys to Portugal and fights with Muslims from North Africa see A. Dziubiński, *Polski rycerz w Maroku w XV wieku (A Polish Knight in Morocco in the 15th Century)*, "Przegląd Historyczny", 1966, vol. LVII, № 3, pp. 444–446; A. F. Grabski, *O polskich rycerzach w Maroku w XV wieku (On Polish Knights in Morocco in the 15th Century)*, "Przegląd Historyczny", 1967, vol. LVIII, № 3, pp. 515–517.

<sup>2</sup> G. E. De Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos notáveis que se passaram na conquista de Guiné por mandado do Infante D. Henrique, versão atualizada do texto pelo Torquato de Sousa Soares*, vol. II, Lisboa 1981, the whole history of Valarte — Chapter XCIV, pp. 533–543. On the author and the chronicle P. Hair, *The Early Sources on Guinea*, "History in Africa", 21, 1994, pp. 87–126, about Zurara pp. 89–92.

source of information about Valarte are also the memoirs of a Portuguese knight, explorer and courtier Diogo Gomes, written down at the end of his life, at the break of the 15th and the 16th centuries<sup>3</sup>, as well as a later work by João de Barro<sup>4</sup>s, dating back to the 1550s.

The figure of Valarte is well known and described in the historical literature, though neither the knight's country of origin, nor his name, his patron in Portugal, or even the moment of his death are known with full certainty — to the contrary, there are several equally probable hypotheses regarding the above. In this article I would like to deal with the reasons for the failure of Valarte's mission and for the attitude of the Africans who had contacts with Valarte. Investigation of a cultural contact requires studying and analyzing the actions and attitudes of both sides of that contact. This methodological principle is difficult to observe in case of the early (15th century) Portuguese expansion in Africa, since most of the available sources describes the attitudes and actions of the Europeans. However, the fragment of Z u r a r a's chronicle we are interested in provides us with a rare opportunity to analyze the attitudes and actions not only of the Europeans, but also the Africans.

According to Z u r a r a "The fame of their affair having spread through the different parts of the world, it arrived at the Court of the King of Denmark and Sweden and Norway; and as you see how noble men venture themselves with the desire to see and know such things, it came to pass that a gentleman of the household of that Prince, covetous of seeing the world, received his licence and came to this realm. And staying for a time in the house of the Infant, he came one day and asked him that he would be pleased to arm him a caravel and put him in the way to go to the land of the Negroes. The Infant, as he was easily moved to anything where a good man might gain for himself the honour or increase, straightaway ordered a caravel to be armed as completely as might be, and told him to go to Cape Verde and see if they could obtain sureties from the King of that land, for he was

<sup>3</sup> Diogo Gomes, *De la première découverte de la Guinée (De prima iuentione Guinee), récit par Diogo Gomes (fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. Th. Monod, R. Mauny, G. Duval, Bissau 1959, the Latin text and French translation pp. 30–31.

<sup>4</sup> João de Barros, *Ásia. Dos feitos que os portugueses fizeram no descobrimento e conquista dos mares e terras do Oriente*. Primeira década, sexta edição actualizada e anotada por Hernani Cidade, Manuel Múrias, Lisboa 1945, pp. 63–65.

informed that this man was a very great lord; and he was to convey the Prince's letters to him and also to tell him certain things from himself for the service of God and His holy faith. And all this because they assured him the said King was a Christian; and the conclusion of all was, that is he did truly hold the law of Christ, it would please him to aid in the war against the Moors of Africa. [...] All things were very quickly ready, and that esquire, who was named Vallarte, embarked in his ship, and with him a knight of the Order of Christ called Fernandaffonso, who was of the Infant's service and upbringing, and was sent by him in that caravel because Vallarte was a foreigner and knew not so well the customs and ways of the ship's company. And he came in order that he might direct the sailors and other matters that pertained to the governance of the vessel, and also that he might be as it were an envoy, if they chanced to see that King. And therefore he took two natives of that land as interpreters; but the chief captaincy belonged to Vallarte"<sup>5</sup>.

The above text has created many problems for the researchers. Valarte's name was noted down in Diogo Gomes' memoirs as Abelhardt, and in Barros' work as Balarte<sup>6</sup>. Richard Hennig was of the opinion that this was the Danish knight Wollert<sup>7</sup>. In turn, Polish historian Marian Małowist suspected that the name in question was Albert, or even Adalbert<sup>8</sup>. A disputable issue was the knight's country of origin, for Zurara mentioned all three Scandinavian kingdoms, Diogo Gomes attributed Swedish origins to the knight, and Barros Danish ones. This need not be surprising, for during Valarte's expedition all the three kingdoms were ruled by Christopher III the Bavarian, who died in 1448<sup>9</sup>. As Zurara mentioned Denmark as first, and Barros also noted down the knight's Danish origins, Valarte is

<sup>5</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, pp. 533–534. English translation — *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea written by Gomes Eanes de Azurara*, transl. by Ch. R. Beazley and E. Prestage, vol. I–II, New York 1899, The Hakluyt Society, First Series, N° C, vol. II, pp. 280–281.

<sup>6</sup> See Notes 3 and 4.

<sup>7</sup> R. Hennig, *Terrae incognitae*, vol. IV, Leiden 1939, pp. 131–137.

<sup>8</sup> M. Małowist, *Europa a Afryka Zachodnia w dobie wczesnej ekspansji kolonialnej (Europe and West Africa at the Time of Early Colonial Expansion)*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 128.

<sup>9</sup> W. Czaplinski, K. Górski, *Historia Danii (History of Denmark)*, Wrocław 1965, pp. 139–140 and 142–146; A. Kersten, *Historia Szwecji (History of Sweden)*, Wrocław 1973, pp. 115–117.

generally accepted to have been Danish, though the more cautious researches write about a Scandinavian knight<sup>10</sup>.

Even the person of the Infant mentioned by Zurara has raised disputes in the literature. Part of the researchers thought Zurara meant Infant Dom Pedro, a regent during King Afonso V minority<sup>11</sup>. However, such a guess is too far-fetched. We know that Henry the Sailor possessed a privilege allowing him to organise expeditions to Africa since the times of John I, confirmed by the kings Duarte and Afonso V, in the latter's name by the regent<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, when writing "Infant", Zurara had in mind Henry the Sailor. Most probably, Valarte's expedition took place in 1447. Though the order of the chronicle's chapters and the last sentence in the preceding Charter 93 would imply we should assume the year 1448, other circumstances speak for just the year 1447<sup>13</sup>.

Also the African territory reached by Valarte has raised disputes. This issue is of an essential importance for our article, the aim of which is to examine the reasons for the failure of Valarte's mission and attitudes of the Africans who contacted him. Though the existing literature has examined many aspects of the Danish knight's expedition, they have been examined first of all from the European viewpoint. If we want to learn the motives and circumstances of the African side's actions, we must start with establishing what Africans were involved here. The West African coast reached by the Portuguese in the late 1440s was settled by numerous ethnical groups with very different organizations, from early state ones through chiefdoms to tribal segmentary systems.

Valarte sailed to Cape Verde, and reached the Isle of La Palma, identified with Gorée. There the expedition members

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<sup>10</sup> G. E. De Zurara, *Chronique de Guinée*, préface et traduction L. Bourdon, notes L. Bourdon et alii, Dakar 1960, p. 258, note 2.

<sup>11</sup> V. Magalhaes Godinho, *Documentos sobre a expansão portuguesa*, Lisboa, vol. 1-3, without date, 1945, 1956, vol. 2, p. 262; G. E. De Zurara, *Crónica do Descobrimento e Conquista da Guiné*, ed. by José de Braganza, vol. 1-2, Porto 1937, vol. 2, p. 252; D. Leite, *Acerca da Crónica dos feitos de Guinee*, Lisboa 1941, p. 169.

<sup>12</sup> *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, ed. L. de Albuquerque, M. E. Madeira Santos, vol. I, Lisboa 1993, N° 01, pp. 23-24, the privilege for Infant Henry issued on October 22, 1443 by Regent D. Pedro, in the name of Afonso V; N° 02, pp. 25-26, confirmation of that privilege issued on September 2, 1448, by Afonso V.

<sup>13</sup> D. Leite, *Acerca*, pp. 162-163; G. E. Zurara, *Chronique de Guinée*, p. 258, note 3.

conferred whether to continue the journey, and according to the Infant's instruction sailed further to the south. They reached a place called Abram by Zurara. After analyzing all the clues, Avelino Teixeira da Mota determined the location of the events as an area lying at the mouth of the Jumbas River, identified with the Salum River<sup>14</sup>. A very important factor in establishing the above was the name assigned to the local ruler, residing in the interior. He was called Boor by the Africans who Valarte talked to<sup>15</sup> — and we know that this word, in the form of *boor*, *bor* or *bur*, means “ruler” in the languages of the Wolofs and their southern neighbours — Serers. Hence Valarte reached the areas settled by one of these two peoples. The main power centres of the Wolofs were located in the area between the mouth of Senegal and Cape Verde. These were the Walo and Kaior states from the north, and Djolof in the interior. To the south of Kaior and Cape Verde, there was Baol, while small states established by the Serers were located at the mouth of Jumbas — Sine (Siin) on its northern side, and Salum on the southern one<sup>16</sup>. We can guess, though we cannot be quite sure, that Valarte kept in touch with the Serers from Sine.

The description of a journey undertaken eight years later by the Venetian Ca da Mosto implies that the power in the Wolof states was concentrated more strongly than among the Serers. Ca da Mosto negotiated and traded with the ruler of Kaior, who he called Budomel (meaning *boor* or *bur* *Damel*), without any problems. However, when he sailed south and reached the peoples he called the Barbacins and the Serers, establishment of any contact with them proved impossible. The Barbacins killed the interpreter and refused any talks. This is how Ca da Mosto described their political system: “They have neither king nor lord of their own, but they nevertheless honour one more than another according to their birth and estate. They will not recognize any

<sup>14</sup> A. Teixeira da Mota, *A Descoberta da Guiné*, “Boletim Cultural da Guiné Portuguesa”, 1946, pp. 299–300. See also G. E. Zurara, *Chronique de Guinée*, pp. 258–259, note 5.

<sup>15</sup> A. Teixeira da Mota, *A Descoberta*, pp. 303.

<sup>16</sup> J. Boulègue, *Le Grand Jolof (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris 1987, pp. 15 (*bourba* — or king, ruler), pp. 46, 129–131 (on the Serers state, called Siin, or Sine), pp. 168 (a map of the states in that region, including Siin and Saalum). See also P. Dia g n e, *Le pouvoir en Afrique*, in: *Le concept du pouvoir en Afrique*, Paris-UNESCO, 1981, pp. 28–55, the term *buur*, pp. 40–44.

lord among them..."<sup>17</sup>. Despite this opinion expressed by the Venetian, some forms of superior power already existed among the Serers — for the name *Barbacins* (in the Italian form — *Barbacini*) is not the name of the people, but the ruler's title in the Serers' language. Namely, its meaning is *bur ba Sine*, that is, the ruler, or sovereign, of Sine. Nevertheless, the information collected by Ca da Mosto proves that the degree of centralization and concentration of power in the rulers' hands was small among the Serers.

The description of negotiations carried out by Valarte and the Portuguese with the Africans given in Zurara's chronicle is exceptionally precise. Zurara wanted to understand the reason for the failure of the Infant's endeavours to establish contact with the local chief. There was no reason for the chronicler to diverge from the truth, and his endeavours to explain the matter are very visible. Zurara's description is based on oral reports by the expedition members who returned to Portugal. We find a trace of this in the chronicle, when it quotes what a rescued Portuguese said about where he last saw Valarte. A written report could have also existed, though. Such reports might have been collected by Afonso Cerveira, the author of an older chronicle of discoveries, which Zurara used and which was later lost<sup>18</sup>. Anyway, the text can be deemed credible. On the other hand, Diogo Gomes' memoirs and fragments of Barros' works are later, second-hand reports, which are only of an auxiliary value for us.

According to Zurara, after anchoring the caravel, Valarte with a few people got into a boat and went to the shore. There he started talks with a numerous group of Africans, whom he proposed to exchange hostages, so that neither of the sides feared contacts with the partner later. Valarte's interlocutors answered that they had no right to make such a decision "without the leave of a knight, who lived there as a governor of that land"<sup>19</sup>. When

<sup>17</sup> T. Gasparrini Leporace, *Le navigazioni atlantiche del Veneziano Alvise Da Mosto, Il Nuovo Ramusio*, vol. V, Roma 1966, pp. 75–76 *non hano re né signor alguno proprio, ma ben honorano più uno cha uno altro, secondo la qualità e condition de li homini che sono fra loro; non voleno consentir signor nesun fra loro*; English translation — *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other documents on Western Africa in the second half of the 15th Century*, ed. G. R. Crone, Hakluyt Society, Second Series No LXXX, London 1937, pp. 54.

<sup>18</sup> D. Leite, *Acerca*, p. 169; see also P. Hair, *The Early Sources*, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, p. 535 *sem autoridade de um cavaleiro que all estava quase como governador daquela terra (e) que havia nome Guitenia*. English translation by Ch. R. Beazley, E. Prestage, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 281.

the chief, called Guitenya, learned about the proposal, he arrived there and agreed to the terms posed by Valarte. He sent his man to the caravel to start the talks. They were conducted by the Portuguese rather than by Valarte himself, for they could communicate more easily with the translators, who had been taught Portuguese in captivity. Guitenya's envoy was told that the newcomers wanted to establish contact with the local ruler. They read and translated the Infants' letter to him. The African partner said that the ruler, whom he called Boor, is just now on a military expedition, and cannot be contacted. In order to reach him, one must travel into the interior for 6 or 7 days.

After collecting the Portuguese proposals and having a common meal, the envoy was given one of the letters so that he could show it to his master, and was sent ashore. "But already when that Guinea reached the land, where was the knight who had despatched him (that is, Guitenya — M.T.), another like unto him was there named Satam, and another known as Minef, who had arrived there a little time before. And of this last the foulness was extreme, and those who were there said that nothing more foul could be painted, and his apparel was not great testimony to his honour, for he appeared there very ill-clad, although he had a greater power than some of the others"<sup>20</sup>.

When the envoy who had visited the caravel was giving his report to Guitenya, the Portuguese's boat was waiting near the shore. However, their wait was in vain, since they didn't get any answer. The envoy was approached by many Africans. Even though Guitenya walked into the water and came close to the boat in order to talk directly to the Portuguese, he gave no final answer, since it was impossible to end the discussions. As a result, all was postponed until the next day.

When the next day, very early in the morning, the Portuguese's boat headed again towards the beach, Guitenya was already waiting there in his boat, which he wanted to use to get to the caravel. Seeing the arriving Portuguese, he went back to

<sup>20</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, pp. 537–538 *Mas já, quando aquele guinéu foi levando à terra onde estava o cavaleiro que o enviara, aí estava outro semelhante que havia nome Satan, e outro que se chamava Minef, que pouco havia que ali chegara; cuja fealdade era extrema [e tal], que, segundo disseram aqueles que ali estavam, não se podia pintar coisa mais feia; nem sua apresentação era grande testemunho de sua honra, porque bastante mal apresentado apareceu. Porém, de maior poder era que qualquer dos outros.* English translation by Ch. R. Beazley, E. Prestage, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 282–283.

the shore, brought a goat and a small billy goat, couscous, a kind of soup with butter, flour and figs, as well as an elephant tusk, the grain which they used for making bread, milk, and palm wine. This could have been understood as a proposal for a common meal, but the elephant tusk was a proof that Guitenya was also proposing either an exchange of gifts or a trade exchange.

However, despite the willingness shown so clearly by Guitenya, the exchange turned out to be very difficult to start. Namely, a son of Guitenya's uncle, called Amallam, arrived to the coast in the night. The Arabian origin of that name is remarkable. It was encountered among the Mande peoples, as well as among the Wolofs, who were reached by Arabian and Berber Marabouts, as evidenced by C a d a M o s t o's report on Kaior<sup>21</sup>. One cannot exclude that Muslims could have reached Sine and Salum, which lay further to the south, spreading the use of Arabian origin names. Next to his name, another evidence of Amallam's social standing was his kinship with Guitenya. Thus another dignitary appeared, who also wanted to participate in the whole event. A dispute on that subject arose between Amallam and Guitenya, for both of them desired to talk to the Portuguese, but each of them wanted to conduct the talks independently. In consequence, Guitenya asked the Europeans to take the food they had been offered, and go away for the time of the meal, while the local people would confer together. However, the dispute that arose between them in the morning only became sharper in the afternoon. As a result, the Africans continued endless discussions for many days.

In their course Guitenya, accompanied by a few other people, many times went by boat to the caravel. He reach an understanding on exchange of goods with the Portuguese. Guitenya also "said that he was able to set everything in order, because that, when king Boor bestowed land on a knight (*cavaleiro*), the latter could do therewith like the king (that is, Boor — M.T.) himself, so that whatever he did, the king held it as well done"<sup>22</sup>. However, the Portuguese together with Valarte decided that they

<sup>21</sup> T. Gasparrini Leporace, *Le navigazioni*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>22</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, pp. 539–540 ... *dizendo que ele bastava para tudo tratar, porquanto aquele rei Boor quando dava terra a algum cavaleiro, [este] podia fazer em ela como ele mesmo; e, assim, qualquer coisa que fizesse ele a havia por bem feita*. English translation by Ch. R. Beazley, E. Prestage, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 284.



wanted to talk to the king himself, i.e. Boor, so Guitenya sent a courier to him. In the meantime, to the mutual satisfaction of the parties, trade and common feasts continued for a few days. Then the Portuguese asked Guitenya to deliver an elephant, for they wanted its skin and tusks. Valarte and the Portuguese often went by boat to the shore together with Guitenya, who kept inviting them. However, they were cautious and did not come ashore in fear of being captured. Once a big wave threw the boat onto dry land, which worried the Portuguese extremely. Then Guitenya reassured them that their worries were wrong, since there were his people on the shore, who he had commanded not to harm the Portuguese in any way. Seemingly, the talks and the trade were developing in a mutually satisfactory direction, and a contact with the ruler himself was to be established soon.

However, one day Guitenya went to hunt for the promised elephant, and Valarte decided to go by boat to the shore, thinking that the Africans were calling him. On the beach he saw a man who was trying to hand a gourd with water or palm wine to Valarte and the boat crew. Because of this, Valarte ordered the oarsmen to come dangerously close to the shore. The boat got stuck on the shallows and was immobilized. At that moment, one of the interpreters jumped out of it — it was not clear if he did it to take the gourd or to escape from the captivity. Africans hidden among the trees decided it was the best moment for an attack. Only one man from the boat crew managed to jump into water and swim to the caravel. Later he told that he had looked back several times and had seen his unfortunate companions still, one already killed, and a few still fighting with the Africans, including the figure of Valarte at the rear of the boat.

The attempt to establish a durable contact with Africans failed, and the caravel sailed back to Portugal under Fernando Afonso's command.

About ten years later some slaves coming from the area where the drama happened, who were brought to Portugal, told a story about four Christians held in a castle deep in the interior. One of them was said to have died recently, and the other three were still alive. Some people, wrote *Zurara*, thought that this could have been people from the crew of the fatal boat<sup>23</sup>. This was not the only evidence of that type of news. In a letter of December 12,

<sup>23</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, p. 543.

1455, a Genovese Antoniotto Usodimare wrote about his journey to Africa, and about his hopes for high profits which would allow him to repay the debts. In addition, he said that in Africa he had met “one of our people, I think from the galleys of the Vivaldi brothers, who got lost there over 170 years ago”<sup>24</sup>. The man he had talked to had allegedly claimed there were still a few of his companions living in Africa. Since they couldn’t possibly have been the members of the Vivaldis’ expedition of 1291, some of the researchers think they might have been either Valarte’s people, or even he himself<sup>25</sup>. However, these rumours were not justified by any evidence, and were most probably untrue. In 1455 Usodimare met Ca da Mosto’s caravel on the ocean, and the Genovese and the Venetian made the trip beyond Cape Verde together. However, Ca da Mosto did not say single word about having met any Europeans. To the contrary, he described how in Sine the Africans had killed their interpreter, and had refused to have any contacts with them<sup>26</sup>. Likewise, at the mouth of Gambia Africans had been attacking their caravels and had not let the Europeans come ashore. Usodimare’s fantasies were to raise the interest of the recipients of his letter, but they cannot be treated seriously. Anyway, neither Valarte nor anybody from the crew of his boat was ever seen in Portugal again.

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The disastrous end of Valarte’s mission must have had a big impact in Portugal for Zurara to have described it in such detail. In two other cases only did the author of the chronicle devote so much space to the deaths of expedition commanders. This was in case of the death of Gonçalo da Sintra in 1444 and the death of Nuno Tristão in 1446<sup>27</sup>. Both the commanders attacked local population and died in the fight. Valarte’s case was different, since his aim was not fight, or capturing slaves and taking war spoils. He was to establish peaceful contacts with the local ruler,

<sup>24</sup> *Portugaliae Monumenta Africana*, vol. I, N° 18, pp. 77–78, Antoniotto Usodimare’s letter of December 12, 1455, to his creditors: *Encontrei ai um da nossa nação, creio que das galés Vivaldi as quais se perderam há CLXX anos...*

<sup>25</sup> D. Leite, *Acerca*, p. 55; A. Teixeira da Mota, *A Descoberta*, pp. 306–307.

<sup>26</sup> T. Gasparrini Leporace, *Le navigazioni*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>27</sup> G. E. Zurara, *Crónica dos feitos*, pp. 155–162 (death of Gonçalo da Sintra), pp. 483–490 (death of Nuno Tristão).

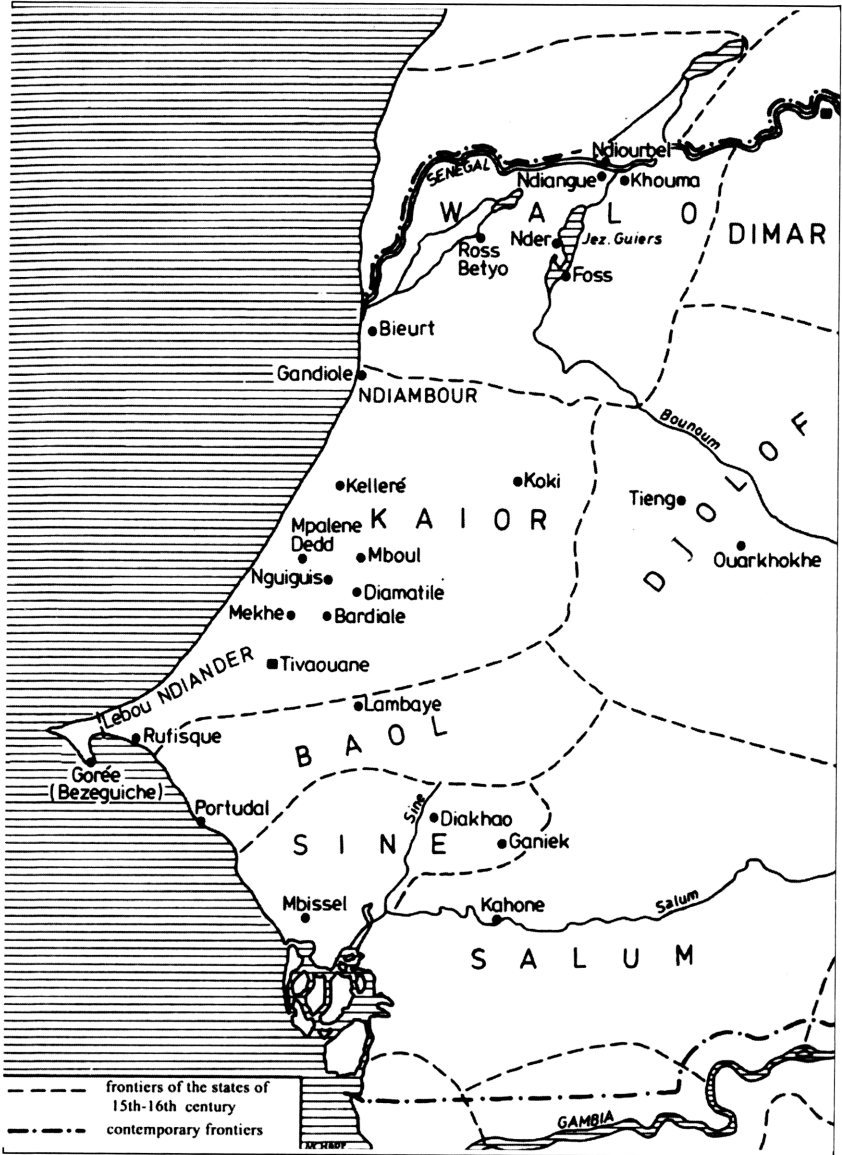
who somehow had been heard of in Portugal. Valarte was close to achieving that goal: the negotiations and trade with Guitenya were developing successfully, Guitenya's envoys were on their way to tell the superior ruler about the proposal to establish regular contacts. So what was the reason for the failure?

The task of discovering the motives behind the African side's actions through analysing the source material written by an European is very difficult. However, Zurara's description is so detailed that it allows us to give a probable answer. Namely, besides Guitenya, Zurara mentions the names of three other local chiefs, and devotes a lot of space to their actions, as well as to the actions of the whole local community. The arrival of two chiefs, Satama and Minef, stopped the others from establishing the contact with the Europeans. Since Zurara stressed especially the ugliness and bizarre behaviour of Minef, one can guess that the latter was the local priest or sorcerer, most probably wearing a mask and a strange apparel, with his body painted in various colours<sup>28</sup>. Minef wielded power, which the Portuguese observers clearly perceived. An issue which proved important for the course of events was the difference in opinions between Guitenya on the one hand, and Satam and Minef on the other hand. While Guitenya wanted to establish contacts with Valarte and the Portuguese, the two other chiefs did not favour them. However, neither Guitenya's decisions nor Satam's and Minef's opinions and aspirations were decisive. All the masculine members of the local community took part in the meetings and discussions on what should be done. They led long disputes, but could not reach any conclusion or make the final decision. As we can guess, the people who did not like the idea of negotiations with the newcomers gathered round Minef and Satam. On the other hand, the negotiations were supported not only by Guitenya, but also by his cousin Amallam, but the latter wanted to conduct them himself and to push Guitenya out of the scene, to which the latter objected. Also in this case the meetings and debates failed to bring a decisive resolution.

In this context, Guitenya's assurances that he had full power in his area since Boor had delegated it to him expressed rather Guitenya's theoretical rights and aspirations than his real possi-

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<sup>28</sup> The thesis that Minef was a sorcerer was formulated by the authors of the notes to G. E. De Zurara, *Chronique de Guinée*, p. 260, note 2.



Map: Walo, Kairor, Djolof, Baol, Sine and Salum in the 15th and 16th century. According to *Historia Afryki do początku XIX wieku (History of Africa up to Early 19th Century)*, edited by Michał Tymowski, Wrocław 1996, p. 481.

bilities. He was clearly limited by the existence and actions of other chiefs, as well as by the right of all the members of the community to participate in decision making. The volatility of Guitenya's political position is confirmed first of all by the course of events, but also by the terminology used by Zurara. Though at the beginning he terms Guitenya "the governor of that land" (*governador daquela terra*), but on this occasion — as well as in many other fragments of the text — he uses the term "knight" (*cavaleiro*), applied to dignitaries of a lower rank. Though Guitenya wasn't quite powerless — as long as he stayed there, he was at least able to stop the other Africans from attacking the Europeans. Nevertheless, he was unable to impose his will on the others. He negotiated, traded and feasted with the Europeans in his name and possibly in his supporters' name. However, when he went away to hunt for an elephant, the other chiefs and the part of the community which opposed the contacts and feared the strangers gained advantage. They might have also feared the perspective of Guitenya's excessive success and enrichment. If the latter were to establish regular contacts with the Europeans, his position in the local community would be strengthened, both with respect to the other chiefs and to all the community.

Hence the attack on Valarte and the Portuguese accompanying him might have had two reasons: the wish to break the negotiations, and the intent to make it impossible for Guitenya to strengthen his status in the community and his power.

The disastrous end of Valarte and his mission shows how difficult it was for the Portuguese to establish contacts with a community characterized by a weakly centralized structure of power, in this case with an incompletely formed chiefdom, operating on the peripheries of a larger organization of an early state type. In the early period of Portuguese expansion, the events on the coast of West Africa took a quite different course, for the Portuguese established contacts with rulers who were really obeyed by their subjects. Such rulers could reject a proposal of trade and talks, and start fight immediately. However, it was more often the case that they decided for negotiations and trade exchange, and following that were able to ensure order and obedience in their area. This is evidenced by the successful contacts with the ruler of Kaior, Budomel, described by Ca da Mosto, as well as the contacts with the chief of the villages

situated near the future trade centre and fortress of S. Jorge da Mina<sup>29</sup>. Valarte was killed for he did not encounter an African leader able to conduct negotiations, independent from volatile decisions and aspirations of his rivals and population groups.

<sup>29</sup> On the contacts with Budomel, the ruler of Kaior — T. Gasparrini Leporace, *Le navigazioni*, pp. 49–68. Successful trade on the site of the future São Jorge da Mina fortress, at the villages Saama and another called Aldeia das duas partes, is described in *Voyage d' Eustache Delafosse sur la côte de Guinée, au Portugal et en Espagne (1479–1481)*, transcrit, traduit et présenté par Denis Escudier, Paris 1992, pp. 26–33. The discovery of that part of the coast in 1471 is evidenced by Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de situ orbis. Côte occidentale d' Afrique du sud marocain au Gabon (vers 1506–1508)*, ed. R. Mauny, Bissau 1956, pp. 120 — the Portuguese text, pp. 121 — the French translation. The course of the negotiations between Diogo de Azambuja and the local chief Caramansa is reported in detail by Rui de Pina, *Crónica de el-Rei D. João II*, ed. Alberto Martins de Carvalho, Coimbra 1950, cap. 5 and João de Barros, *Asia*. Decada I, Livro terceiro, cap. 1 and 2, pp. 77–85. We have an excellent study on establishment of African–Portuguese contacts and, more broadly, African–European ones, as well as on the mentioned negotiations and enforcement of the fortress construction by Azambuja — P. Hair, *The Founding of the castello de São Jorge da Mina. An Analysis of the sources*, Wisconsin–Madison 1994. A fragment of Rui de Pina's chronicle, pp. 99–103, fragments of Barros' work, pp. 103–108.