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## **500 years of the manuscript of Valentim Fernandes, a Moravian book printer in Lisbon\***

### **Introduction**

The Moravian book printer Valentim Fernandes (? – 1519?), who, attracted by the news regarding the Portuguese Discoveries and new trade opportunities, arrived in Lisbon at the end of the 15th century, is an example of an early contact between the present-day Czech Republic and Portugal. Fernandes' name is closely associated with the history of book printing in Portugal, since he was the most important Portuguese book printer of his time. Besides book printer, he was also a translator, author, and commercial agent in Lisbon. He is author of a manuscript compiled 500 years ago, in the period of 1506-1510, that has been considered one of the most important documents of Portuguese travel literature in the age of discoveries. The manuscript is one of the very few contemporary sources on the early history of the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea.

### **A Moravian book printer in Lisbon**

While it is not known when Valentim Fernandes was born in Moravia, it is believed that he arrived in Lisbon around 1493. Here he became known as Valentim Fernandes Alemão, as his mother tongue was German, and as Valentim of Moravia. He signed his books and letters with these names. He came to Lisbon attracted by activities related to the maritime expansion and expectations of trade

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\* I wish to thank Jessica Schafer at the University of Ottawa for having corrected my English text.

opportunities with the newly discovered territories. In 1494 he accompanied the German doctor Jeronimus Münzer as guide and interpreter during his visit to Portugal.<sup>1</sup> He adapted so well to local life in Lisbon that he wrote his texts in Portuguese. He worked as a notary, book printer, editor, translator, and author. At the proposal of the representative of the Augsburg-based merchant house Welser in Lisbon, in 1503 King D. Manuel I (1495-1521) appointed Fernandes as local commercial agent for the spice trade with Germany.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Fernandes was notary for the German traders in the Portuguese capital. In 1515 Fernandes sent a friend in Nuremberg the description and drawing of a rhinoceros that the king of Cambaia had given to Afonso de Albuquerque (c 1462 –1515), the vice-king of India (1509 – 1515), who then sent the animal to king D. Manuel I in Lisbon. It was the first rhinoceros that came to Europe. In Nuremberg, the description and drawing of the animal got into the hands of Albrecht Dürer (1471 – 1528), who used this information to create his famous woodcut of the rhinoceros, without ever having seen the animal himself.<sup>3</sup> Fernandes remained in Lisbon until his death, some time before 4 May 1519.

As mentioned, Valentim Fernandes became known predominantly as a book printer, at the time a new profession in Portugal. Johannes Gutenberg (1397? – 1468) in Mainz (Germany) had invented printing with moveable types in the early 1450s. Gutenberg's famous Latin Bible was completed in 1456. The first book printed in Portugal was the *Pentateuch*, the five books of Moses that constitute the Torah, printed in 1487 by Don Samuel Porteiro, a Jew in Faro.<sup>4</sup> Two years later Eliezer Toledano printed the first book in Lisbon: the Commentary on the Pentateuch by Moses ben Nahman (Nachmanides) (1194-1270). Fernandes produced his first book in Lisbon in 1495. Between that date and 1518 he printed a total of 24 books. Frequently he printed the books in co-operation with other book printers, including Nicolau of Saxony, João Pedro of Cremona, Hermão de Campos (or Herman de Kempos) or Nicolau Gazini of Piemonte. His importance as a book printer is evidenced by the fact that he printed eight out of a total of 28 books (14 of which were printed in Hebrew) produced in Portugal up to 1500 and nine of the 17 books published between 1501 and 1510. In 1495, at the request of Queen D. Leonor (1481-1495), he printed together with Nicolau of Saxony, *De Vita Christi* by the

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<sup>1</sup> Leão 1985: 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ehrhardt 1996: 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Marques 2002: 83.

monk Ludolf of Saxony (c. 1300 – 1377), in Portuguese, translated from Latin by Frei Bernardo de Alcobaga and Nicolau Vieira. It was the first book by a German writer to be translated into Portuguese.<sup>5</sup> Dom Afonso I, the second Christian king of the Congo used this book to learn Portuguese.<sup>6</sup> His other books include *Epistolae et Orationes* in Latin (1500), *Proverbios de D. Iñigo Lopes de Mendoza* in Spanish (1501), *Marco Polo: o Livro de Nicolao Veneto* (1502), *Os Autos dos Apósteles* (1505), *O Primeiro Livro das Ordenações* (1512), *O Segundo Livro das Ordenações* (1513), and *O Compromisso da Confraria da Misericórdia* (1518). Among his translations are *Preportório dos Tempos*, from Castilian to Portuguese, and the report of Marco Polo's (1254-1324) voyage, from Latin to Portuguese. Marco Polo's accounts on the Orient had gained new importance in Europe after Vasco da Gama's successful sea voyage to India in 1498. After Fernandes' death, his printing equipment was sold to the French printer Germain Gaillard, who established a printing office in Lisbon in 1519.

## The Manuscript

Fernandes was the author of the printed texts *Prohemio* of the book *De Vita Christi*, the introduction to the *Livro de Nicolao Veneto* (included in the book of Marco Polo), and a few chapters of *Reportório dos Tempos* (1518). His introduction to Marco Polo's book, one of the first European editions, reveals his enthusiasm for the Portuguese discoveries of unknown lands.<sup>7</sup> He imagined Lisbon as a future international commercial centre for the trade of spices, gold, diamonds, and other goods from the East.<sup>8</sup> Fernandes' handwritten texts are included in his famous manuscript, the original of which is kept with the designation *Codex monacensis hispanicus 27*, at the Bavarian State Library in Munich. The manuscript is a compilation of various texts and map drawings, which Fernandes compiled from 1506-1510 and subsequently sent to his friend Konrad Peutinger (1465-1547) in Augsburg, with whom he maintained a frequent correspondence. Peutinger was a famous Renaissance man and humanist, who was married to Margareta Welser, a member of one of the wealthiest merchant families of Germany. Peutinger was

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<sup>5</sup> Ehrhardt 1996: 27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Lopes 2000: 234.

<sup>8</sup> Lopes 1996: 14.

town clerk in Augsburg (appointed in 1497), advisor to the Austrian emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519), and had earned degrees in Classics and Law at the universities of Bologna and Padua. In addition, Peutinger was a diplomat, an archaeologist, a collector of coins, ancient manuscripts, and old books, owned the largest private library north of the Alps (10,000 titles in 2,200 volumes), published the first printed collection of Roman inscriptions, and exchanged letters with the greatest scholar of his time, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam.

The humanist Peutinger was seriously interested in the Portuguese discoveries and recognized their scientific importance. Many books and documents in his large library dealt with this subject, including texts concerning Vasco da Gama's (1469 – 1524) first voyage (1498) and second voyage (1502), the expedition of Pedro Álvares Cabral (c1467 – c1526) to Brazil and India (1500 – 1501), the voyage of Amerigo Vespucci (1454 – 1512) to Brazil (1501), and the armada of D. Francisco de Almeida (c 1450 – 1510), explorer and first Viceroy of India (1505 – 1509). Peutinger translated the account of Vasco da Gama's second voyage into German and referred to the Portuguese discoveries in his book *Sermones convivales de finibus Germaniae contra Gallos* (1506). Besides, Peutinger wanted to encourage German traders to participate in the Portuguese maritime and commercial activities.<sup>9</sup> Possibly it was Peutinger who put together the different texts of the manuscript that Fernandes consecutively had sent to Augsburg. Peutinger called the manuscript *De Insulis et peregrinationem Lusitanorum*, which elucidates its contents.<sup>10</sup> After Peutinger's death his two youngest sons inherited his library and in 1715 the last Peutinger donated it to the Jesuit monastery in Augsburg. Following the dissolution of the Jesuit monastery in 1776, the portion of the library that contained the Fernandes manuscript was transferred to the Royal Library in Munich. In 1845 the Fernandes manuscript was discovered by Johann Andreas Schmeller (1785-1852), a librarian at the Royal Library, currently the Bavarian State Library. In 1930 the Portuguese historian Joaquim Barradas de Carvalho (1920-1980) donated a copy of the manuscript to the University of Coimbra. It took another ten years before the Portuguese Academy of History (APH) published the first edition of the manuscript (1940). In 1997 the APH published the second edition of the manuscript, titled *Códice Valentim Fernandes*, in commemoration of the fifth centenary of Vasco da Gama's first sea voyage to India in 1498.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Guerreiro 2001: 32.

The Fernandes manuscript contains the following texts (in the order set out in the 1997 APH edition):

- A descrição de Cepta por sua costa de Mauretania e Ethiopia pellos nomes modernos (1507);
- Das ilhas do mar oceano (1507?);
- Crónica da Guiné (1508);
- Da Prima Inuenttione Guine;
- Este livro he de Rotear;
- O livro das Rotas do Castelo de São Jorge;
- A viagem de Dom Francisco de Almeida;
- Índia.

Fernandes' *Crónica da Guiné* is an edited abridged version of the *Crónica dos Feitos da Guiné*, by Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410-1474), the chronicler of King D. Afonso V the African (1432-1481). By removing original passages and adding information to others, Fernandes demonstrated the mentality of another era, different from that of Zurara's time. Fernandes removed the chapters on the glorification of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394 – 1460), the speeches of the captains of the Armada, the texts with moralizing intentions, the erudite quotations, and the references to Jewish astrology. At the same time, in his version, the quantity of Arab numbers is superior to that of Roman numbers and he pays more attention to the precision of distances indicated. Moreover, he gave more emphasis to geographic, economic and ethnographic descriptions.<sup>11</sup> The manuscript also includes 39 drawings of maps that are copied from Portuguese prototypes. Although his drawings are different from the real contours, they are closer to the accurate geographic dimensions and abandon the schematic sketches of the Middle Ages. Fernandes never himself visited the territories described. The only journey he made outside Europe took him to the city of Asilah (Morocco), at the time a Portuguese possession.<sup>12</sup> His accounts are based on previous descriptions by other chroniclers and reports of seamen and traders with whom he stayed in touch in Lisbon. Apart from Zurara, the sources for Fernandes' descriptions include the account *Inventione Guinee* of Diogo Gomes (1440-1482), recorded by the German Martin Behaim (1459-

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<sup>11</sup> Carvalho 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Lopes 1996: 20.

1507), who had come to Lisbon around 1484, texts of Luís de Cadamosto (1432-1477) of Venice, and the account of Hans Mayr regarding the Orient, who was one of three Germans to travel in the armada of D. Francisco de Almeida.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Atlantic islands**

Valentim Fernandes was the first author to exclusively describe and draw the Atlantic islands, in the section *As Ilhas do Mar Oceano*. His manuscript is one of at least twenty known *isolarios* or “island books”, collections of map drawings with descriptive texts. The *isolario* originated from the Mediterranean and the majority of the works came from Italy. The first island book was *Liber insularum Archipelagi*, a traveller’s manual of 79 islands in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, written in Latin by the clergyman Christoforo Buondelmonti of Florence (c 1420).<sup>14</sup> In Fernandes’s time, the Atlantic islands were largely unknown in Europe. In the chapter *As Ilhas do Mar Oceano*, composed of two sections, the islands appear in north-south direction starting with the Azores and Madeira, followed by the Canaries, Cape Verde, the Gulf of Guinea islands, namely Fernando Pó, São Tomé, Príncipe, and Annobon, as well as Ascencion and St. Helena. Each island is described in some detail, which Fernandes considered most important. The chapter includes 27 maps and 5 simple sketches of the various islands.

Fernandes paid particular attention to the island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea, which is represented by five maps, of which four are sketches. They are amongst the earliest maps of the island; the Atlantic chart by Pedro Reinel (c. 1462-?), the oldest map signed by a Portuguese cartographer (c. 1485), is the first map showing São Tomé. Discovered around 1471 by the Portuguese navigators João de Santarém and Pedro Escobar, the uninhabited island was successfully settled and colonized by the third *donatário* (feudal lord), Álvaro de Caminha, in 1493. The colonists established sugar-cane plantations, using slaves from the nearby continent as a workforce and engaging in the slave trade. After Santiago (Cape Verde), the island of São Tomé became the second European colony in the tropics. Together with Caminha’s testament (1499),<sup>15</sup> and an account by an anonymous Portu-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Guerreiro 2001: 31.

<sup>15</sup> See in Albuquerque 1989, pp. 66-96.

guese captain of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (1550),<sup>16</sup> Fernandes' description is one of the three existing documents on the island's early history. The report on São Tomé is composed of two parts, dated 1506 and 1510 respectively.<sup>17</sup> The information dated 1506 stems from one Gonçalo Pires, a seaman, who had been to this and other islands many times. The two parts differ in some aspects, particularly with regard to geographic information. The text describes the colonisation by Álvaro de Caminha, including the construction of two churches. Fernandes reports that 1,000 settlers, most of them deported convicts, and 2,000 slaves lived on the island. Another 5,000-6,000 slaves for re-export were temporarily on the island. He also provides information on the island's geography, flora, food crops, fauna, and domestic animals in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **The deportation of Jewish children**

Fernandes's information about the 2,000 Jewish children, aged eight and younger, who in 1493 were separated forcibly from their parents and taken by Caminha to São Tomé and of whom in 1506 only 600 were still alive, has become the best known detail of the manuscript.<sup>18</sup> The children and their parents had arrived in Portugal from Spain, from whence the Catholic Kings had expelled the Jews in 1492. Upon arrival in Portugal they had to pay a poll tax of eight cruzados allowing them to remain eight months in Portugal. All those who did not succeed in leaving Portugal within this period were declared slaves and many children were torn from their parents and sent with Caminha. By including Fernandes's figure of the Jewish children in his monograph *A Ilha de São Tomé* (1961) the Luso-Santomean poet and geographer Francisco Tenreiro (1921-1963) contributed considerably to the dissemination of this tragic aspect of the colonisation of São Tomé.<sup>19</sup> Tenreiro took Fernandes's numbers for granted, and subsequently many Portuguese-speaking and foreign authors have made use of these numbers. Probably Tenreiro's book is the most important secondary source on the deported Jewish children. However, a closer look at other contemporary sources on the deportation of the Jewish children to São Tomé reveals that the number of 2,000 is rather improbable. In his

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<sup>16</sup> Caldeira 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Leão 1985: 86.

<sup>18</sup> APH 1940: 122; Brásio 1954:33.

<sup>19</sup> Tenreiro 1961: 64, 262.

*Crónica de Dom João II*, the Portuguese chronicler Garcia de Resende (1470 – 1536) describes the baptism by force and the deportation of the Jewish children, however he indicates neither their number nor their ages.<sup>20</sup> A contemporaneous chronicler, Rui de Pina (1440 – 1522), does not give their number either.<sup>21</sup> An anonymous manuscript of 1624, dedicated to Pope Urban VIII ((1623-1644) reports 900 deported Jewish children, of whom more than two-thirds had died.<sup>22</sup>

Contemporaneous Hebrew sources also give varying figures of the deported Jewish children. The Jewish financier and philosopher Isaac Abranavel (1437-1508) wrote in 1507 in Venice that the Portuguese king sent “more than 2,000 souls” to São Tomé.<sup>23</sup> In 1510 the Jewish chronicler Abraham of Torrutiél (1482 -?), who had fled from Spain to Fez (Morocco), wrote that approximately 800 boys and girls were sent to the island.<sup>24</sup> The Cretan Rabbi Elijah Capsali (c. 1483 – 1555) affirmed in his book *The Minor Order of Elia* (1523) that deals with the history of the Ottoman Empire, focusing on the persecutions and expulsions from Spain and Portugal, that as many as 5,000 children aged 10 – 15 years were deported to São Tomé.<sup>25</sup> In his book *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, published in Ferrara (Italy) in 1553, the Lisbon-born Jewish writer Samuel Usque (1492 -?) describes the violent separation from the parents and the deportation in some detail, without referring to any numbers.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the above mentioned anonymous captain, who visited São Tomé five times from 1520, does not refer to the Jewish children in his account of the island.<sup>27</sup> Finally, in his testament of 1499, Álvaro de Caminha writes that “when I departed from Portugal king Dom João II ordered to give me provisions, I do not know if for two years or for three, for 1,000 people.”<sup>28</sup> In sum, the various sources differ considerably with regard to the number of Jewish children. Therefore, Fernandes’s figure should not be taken for granted.

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<sup>20</sup> Resende 1973: 253-254.

<sup>21</sup> Pina 1950: 187-188.

<sup>22</sup> Lipiner 1998: 26.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> Usque 1965: 201-202

<sup>27</sup> Caldeira 2000: 101-121.

<sup>28</sup> Albuquerque 1989: 81.



## Conclusion

The Moravian book printer Valentim Fernandes, who, attracted by the news about the Portuguese discoveries, arrived in Lisbon around 1493, became the most important Portuguese book printer of his time. As well as book printer, Fernandes was also a commercial agent, translator, and writer. He was one of the best-informed people on Portuguese maritime and commercial activities of the time. Between 1506 and 1510 he collected information on the Portuguese discoveries and regularly sent his handwritten Portuguese-language reports to his friend Konrad Peutinger, a Renaissance man and town clerk in Augsburg, who had both a scientific and commercial interest in the accounts. Fernandes's manuscript was only rediscovered in 1845 in Munich and it took almost another hundred years before it was published in Portugal. Today the Fernandes manuscript is considered one of the most important documents of Portuguese travel literature in the age of discoveries. The realistic form with which Fernandes described the geographic and ethnographic realities of the newly discovered territories is unique. Fernandes was the first writer to describe exclusively the Atlantic islands. In his account he paid special attention to the island of São Tomé. His information on 2,000 young Jewish children, who were torn from their parents and deported to São Tomé in 1493 to help to colonize this tropical and disease-infested island, has been quoted by many authors. However, while there is no doubt that this tragedy occurred, this figure cannot be taken for granted, since other Portuguese and Hebrew contemporaneous sources indicate contradictory numbers of deported Jewish children.

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# **Iberian and Slavonic Cultures: Contact and Comparison**

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# Contents:

## Introduction:

Beata Elżbieta Cieszyńska: “Work in progress”: Iberian-Slavonic Comparative Research in Portugal and in the world.....	I
--	---

## I. National literatures in comparative perspective

• Petar Petrov (University of Algarve, Portugal): <i>Portuguese and Bulgarian literatures from a comparative viewpoint</i> .....	11
---	----

## II. Reading the Other

• Anna Kalewska (University of Warsaw, Poland): <i>Camões as a Romantic Hero: biography as the ‘model for heroism’ in the literature of Romanticism in Poland</i> .....	27
• Sonja Koroliov (University of Halle/Wittenberg, Germany): <i>Spanish romance and the Russian Other: a reading of Blok’s „Carmen” cycle</i> .....	46
• Pau Sanmartín Ortí (University Complutense of Madrid): <i>Two Formalist Readings of Don Quixote: Viktor Shklovsky’s Cervantine Prose</i> .....	55

## III. Travel and its fruits

• Eva-Maria von Kemnitz (Portuguese Catholic University, Lisbon, Portugal): <i>A vision from the other bank. Maria Danielewicz Zielinska’s contribution to the history of the Polish-Portuguese cultural relation</i> .....	73
• Gerhard Seibert (Institute of Tropical Research, Lisbon): <i>500 years of the manuscript of Valentim Fernandes, a Moravian book printer in Lisbon</i> .....	79
• Adam Kucharski (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland): <i>The Image of Portugal and its Inhabitants in Old Polish travel accounts and reports of diplomatic missions (16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century)</i> .....	89
• Justyna Galińska (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland): <i>Athanasius Count Raczyński an Expert in Portuguese Art</i> .....	107
• Kevin Windle (Australian National University in Canberra, Australia): <i>Russia in 1908: the view from Manila. Teodoro Kalaw’s «Hacia la tierra del Zar»</i> .....	114
• Sergey Mikhalchenko (Bryansk State I.G.Petrovsky University, Russia) <i>The Historians of the Kiev University and Iberian Researchers end 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> Century</i> .....	127
• Wojciech Tomasiak (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland): <i>The Spanish Civil War in colonial discourse (A “General Walter” case study)</i> .....	131
• Pau Freixa Terradas (University of Barcelona): <i>Aspects of the Reception and Image of Gombrowicz in Argentina</i> .....	138

## IV. Translation Study

### 1. Panoramic views

- Arijana Medvedec (Jean Piaget Institute, Lisbon, Portugal):  
*Croatia and Portugal: meeting points through literary translation* ..... 149
- Barbara Pregelj (University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia)  
Krištof Jacek Kozak (University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia):  
*Mapping the Literary Contacts Between Spain and Slovenia* ..... 173
- Alejandro Hermida de Blas (University Complutense of Madrid, Spain)  
Patricia Gonzalo de Jesús (University Complutense of Madrid, Spain):  
*The Translation of Czech and Slovak Literature in Spain* ..... 185
- Larissa Semenova-Head (Moscow Linguistic University, Russia):  
*Recent changes in the orientation and quality of translations of literary works  
from Russian into Portuguese and from Portuguese into Russian* ..... 205

### 2. Detailed studies

- Jacek Pleciński (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland):  
*«Terramoto» (The Earthquake) Vitério Káli: the imaginary world,  
reality and the problems of the translator* ..... 213
- Ján Zambor (Comenius University, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava):  
*Slovak Reception of Romancero Gitano by Federico Garcia Lorca* ..... 222
- Zlatka Timenova (University Lusófona, Lisbon):  
*António Ramos Rosa in Bulgarian: (un)successful encounter?* ..... 231
- Jacek Wójcicki (Polish Academy of Science):  
*'Work in Progress' – Polish Enlightenment Translations of Voltaire's Poem  
on the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755* ..... 239

## V. Inspirations and diffusions – ideas, topics and forms

- José Eduardo Franco (University of Lisbon, Portugal)  
Christine Vogel (University of Mainz, Germany):  
*The «Monita secreta». The Influence of a Polish Anti-Jesuitic Best-Seller  
in Portugal and in Europe* ..... 261
- Danuta Künstler-Langner (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland):  
*The Spanish Inspiration of Polish Seventeenth Century Literature* ..... 285
- Ewa Cybulska (Polish Academy of Science, Toruń, Poland):  
*Mystical Motives in Polish Seventeenth Century Poetry in Context  
of Spanish Culture of Meditation* ..... 292
- Olga Rousinova (European University at St-Petersburg, Russia):  
*Lisbon and Petersburg: to the problem of mirroring eschatological concepts* ..... 302

## VI. Linguistic Perspectives

- Barbara Hlibowicka-Węglarz (Maria Curie Skłodowska University,  
Lublin, Poland, Camoes Institute – Poland):  
*Lusitanian-Slavonic relations: a linguist's perspective* ..... 315

- Jaroslava Jindrová (Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic):  
*Presentation of INTERCORP project of Czech National Corpus Institute* ..... 316
- Hanna Jakubowicz Batoréo (Open University, Lisbon, Portugal):  
*Bilingual Acquisition Revisited. Implications of a Polish-Portuguese Case Study.  
 Twenty Years After* ..... 321
- Gueorgui Hristovsky (University of Lisbon, Portugal)  
 Ernesto d'Andrade (University of Lisbon, Portugal):  
*Why do Bulgarian and Portuguese unstressed vowels behave  
 almost in the same way?* ..... 332