

Four Centuries of Portuguese  
Expansion, 1415-1825:  
A Succinct Survey

BY

C. R. BOXER

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WITWATERSRAND UNIVERSITY PRESS

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WITWATERSRAND UNIVERSITY PRESS  
JOHANNESBURG  
1961

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I

FROM THE MAGHREB TO THE MOLUCCAS,  
1415-1521

A sixteenth-century Spanish historian, Francisco López de Gómara, described the Iberian seafarers' discovery of the Ocean route to the East and West Indies as being: the greatest event since the creation of the world, apart from the incarnation and death of him who created it.<sup>1</sup> Even nowadays many people, including those who are not Christians, may think that he was not far wrong. For the most striking feature of the history of civilization prior to the Portuguese and Spanish voyages of discovery was the dispersion and isolation of the different branches of mankind. The human societies that waxed and waned in the whole of America, and in a great part of Africa and of the Pacific, were completely unknown to those in Europe and Asia. Western Europe had only the most tenuous and fragmentary knowledge of the great Asian and North African civilizations. These on their side knew little or nothing of Europe and of Africa south of the Sudan—a “dark continent” to them as well as to us—and nothing at all of America. It was the Portuguese pioneers and the Castilian *conquistadores* from the western rim of Christendom who brought together, for better or for worse, the widely sundered branches of the great human family. They thus first made humanity conscious, however dimly, of its essential unity.

<sup>1</sup> “. . . la mayor cosa después de la creación del mundo, sacando la encarnación y muerte del que lo crió”. Francisco López de Gómara, *Primera y segunda parte de la historia general de las Indias* (Çaragoça, 1553), Vol. I, p. 4.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Since the titles of all works cited in the footnotes are quoted in full when first mentioned, and their respective authors appear in the index, this list is limited to some of the more important and better documented publications, including several which have appeared since the standard bibliographies of G. Schurhammer S.J. (*Die Zeitgenössischen Quellen zur Geschichte Portugiesisch-Asiens und seiner Nachbarländer zur Zeit des He. Franz Xavier 1538-1552*, Leipzig, 1932) and W. Berriman and R. Borba de Moraes (*Manual bibliográfico de estudos brasileiros*, Rio de Janeiro, 1949). It also serves as a guide to further reading for those who wish to deepen as well as widen their knowledge of the subject.

*Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, Nova Goa, 1857-76. 8 Vols.

This invaluable publication edited by J. H. da Cunha Rivara should not be confused with its namesake mentioned below. Particularly rich in 16th-18th century documents on Portuguese India.

*Arquivo Português Oriental*, Nova edição. Bastorá—Goa, 1936-40. 11 Vols.

Edited (very carelessly) by A. B. de Bragança Pereira, and riddled with misreadings and misprints, this series nevertheless contains many interesting documents, which were not included in Cunha Rivara's work. It contains the first integral printing of António Bocarro's *Livro do Estado da Índia Oriental* compiled in 1634-35.

*Arquivo das Colonias. Publicação oficial e mensal*. Lisboa, 1917-31. 5 Vols.

Contains a wide range of 17th-18th century documents, particularly for the Portuguese possessions in West and East Africa.

AXELSON, ERIC: *Portuguese in South-East Africa, 1600-1700*. Johannesburg, 1960.

Published after the present work had gone to press, this book advantageously replaces the highly unreliable works of the late S. R. Welch on the same period.

BARROS, JOÃO DE: *Decadas da Asia*. 1552-1615.

The first three *Decadas* were published at Lisbon during the lifetime of Barros in 1552, 1553 and 1563, respectively, the fourth being edited in 1615 by João Baptista Lavanha from the notes left by the chronicler. Also available in later editions, of which the most recent is by H. Cidade and M. Murias. Lisboa, 1945-46. 4 Vols.

BOTELHO DE SOUSA, ALFREDO: *Subsídios para a história militar marítima da Índia, 1585-1669*. Lisboa, 1930-56. 4 Vols.

Unfortunately the author's death shortly after the publication of the fourth volume, which brings the story down to 1650, prevented the conclusion of this work. Particularly valuable for the war with the Dutch, as the author uses printed Dutch and English as well as Portuguese archival sources.



BRÁSIO, ANTÓNIO C. S. Sp.: *Monumenta Missionaria Africana, Africa Occidental*. Lisboa, 1952—in progress.

The ten volumes published at the time of writing cover the period 1342-1646, and include material from foreign as well as from Portuguese archives.

CADORNEGA, ANTÓNIO DE OLIVEIRA DE: *História Geral das Guerras Angolanas*. Lisboa, 1940-42. 3 Vols.

Written originally at Luanda in 1681-83, the first two volumes were edited by José Matias Delgado and the third, which is in the nature of a geographic and ethnographic survey, by Manuel Alves da Cunha.

CALMON, PEDRO: *História do Brasil, 1500-1800*. São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, 1939-40. 3 Vols.

Another edition was published in 1959 but it is virtually a reprint of this one which gives a better balanced survey of Brazilian colonial history than F. A. Varnhagen's still useful *História Geral do Brasil antes da sua separação e independência de Portugal*, 4th ed. São Paulo, 1948-49. 5 Vols.

*Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque seguidas de documentos que as elucidam*. Lisboa, 1884-1935. 7 Vols.

Edited by R. A. de Bulhão Pato and H. Lopes de Mendonça for the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. An unrivalled source for the establishment of the Portuguese thalassocracy in the Indian Ocean.

*Cartas de Dom João de Castro*. Lisboa, 1954.

Edited by Elaine Sanceau, these most interesting letters by one of the greatest figures of Portuguese Asia cover the decade 1539-48.

CORTESÃO, JAIME: *Alexandre de Gusmão e o tratado de Madrid*. Rio de Janeiro, 1950-59. 8 Vols.

An excellent and lavishly documented work which is indispensable for the study of 18th-century Brazil.

COUTO, DIOGO DO: *Decadas da Asia*. Lisboa, 1602-1788.

References to *Decadas* VI-VIII and *Decada* XII are from the original 17th-century editions of 1602-1673, and those to the other *Decadas* are taken from the collected edition of 14 vols., Lisboa, 1778-88. Couto lived for over fifty years in Portuguese India and his work will always be indispensable for a study of its history, the seamy side of which is exposed in his *O soldado prático*, ed. M. Rodrigues Lapa. Lisboa, 1937.

DELGADO, RALPH, *História de Angola, 1482-1836*. Benguela and Lobito, 1948-55. 4 Vols.

The four volumes published so far cover the period 1482-1737, and are based principally on the documents in the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisboa.

LEITE, SERAFIM S. J.: *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*. Lisboa and Rio de Janeiro, 1938-50. 10 Vols.; and *Artes e ofícios dos Jesuítas no Brasil, 1549-1760*. Lisboa, 1953.

Taken together, these 11 volumes form the definitive history of the Jesuits in colonial Brazil, based as they are on a wealth of manuscript and printed sources.

LOBATO, ALEXANDRE: *A Expansão Portuguesa em Moçambique de 1498 à 1530*. Lisboa, 1954-1960. 3 Vols.

It is much to be hoped that the author will continue this richly documented publication, which supersedes all that has been written on the same subject previously.

— — *Evolução administrativa e económica de Moçambique, 1752-1763. Fundamentos da criação do governo geral em 1752*. Lisboa, 1957.

Another excellent work by the same author which deserves continuation.

*Moçambique. Documentário Trimestral*. Lourenço Marques, 1935-59. 96 Nos.

Contains many well-documented articles by Caetano Montez, Canon Alcantara Guerreiro, and other Moçambique scholars. Now replaced by the *Boletim da Sociedade de Estudos de Moçambique*. Lourenço Marques, 1931 to date.

PISSURLENCAR, PANDURONGA: *Assentos do Conselho do Estado da Índia, 1618-1750*. Bastorá—Goa, 1953-57. 5 Vols.

An excellent publication by the Chief Archivist at Goa. Particularly valuable for the years 1618-1700.

SÁ, ARTUR DE, *Documentação para a história das missões do padroado português do Oriente. Insulíndia*. Lisboa, 1954—in progress.

The five volumes published to date cover the period 1506-1595, and include a reprint of the very rare *Relações sumárias de alguns serviços que fizeram os religiosos Dominicanos nas partes da Índia Oriental*. Lisboa, 1635.

SILVA REGO, ANTÓNIO DA: *Documentação para a história das missões do padroado português do Oriente. Índia*. Lisboa, 1947—in progress.

The 12 volumes published to date cover the period 1499-1582, and include many documents of more than purely a missionary interest.

*STUDIA. REVISTA SEMESTRAL*. Lisboa, 1958 to date.

Though no indication is given in the title, this historical magazine is devoted to the history of Portugal's overseas possessions and contains many interesting documents. Edited by Padre António da Silva Rego, Director of the Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, Lisboa.



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