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THE PORTUGUESE MARITIME STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS IN EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGION (1515-1526)

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The Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511. With this they not only captured a rich city, but also came to dominate, as L.F.F.R. Thomaz¹ has observed, a complex of commercial routes which started from Malacca to which it held the key. It is important to understand that this was not the end or culmination of a process but the beginning to a new one, which had many implications for other areas of Indian Ocean region. Albuquerque's victory at Malacca, celebrated in the annals of Portuguese colonial history, was preceded only by a mission of Diogo Lopes de Sequeira in 1509, whose unfavourable treatment there served as a pretext to conquest.

Recent researches particularly by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Luis Thomaz and Genevieve Bouchon have borne out the full importance of the eastern part of the Indian Ocean region in the context of Portuguese maritime history². However the outlines of it's history which would help one to understand the exact process or developments that took place still needs to be drawn. This paper attempts to do this with reference to the localized strategies and concern of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean region and examine how these factors became important for the Portugese in the domination and conquest in the east. Much of Portuguese success in the Asian water was due to their exploratory abilities and skill that they had developed as pioneer mariners and explorers. This view would serve as a corrective to the idea that Portugues succeeded in the Indian Ocean region through outright conquests and demonstration of superior military power.

While discussing the theme of maritime and commercial strategies in the context of eastern India Ocean region, a definition of the region and affirmation of it's significance in history would be in order. The studies on maritime history of Asia hardly differentiate the region from those to the west or to the east of it. However in the past, region was rocnognized as a historical unit by Thomas Bowrey³. Tome Pires, view that Malacca, at one end of this maritime system of Asia, points to the differentiation inherent in the char-

acter of maritime zone of Indian Ocean as a whole. Pires wrote about three networks emerging from Malacca, in different directions along the axis of a diagonal extending from Red Sea in the north-west, and to Moluccas and Banda island in the south-east. One network of route extended to the west past Cape Comorin; another in the opposite direction towards the Spice island of south-east Asia; and another was directed towards northern Bay of Bengal⁴. The uniqueness of Malacca's position was in the fact that it radiated these network of routes towards all the important regions of the Indian Ocean, while many other places were converging or diverging points of routes which did cover the whole of Indian Ocean region and also the South China sea.

Turning to the aspect of periodization involved, the discussion will focus on the question of change and continuity in policy between the administrative period of Affonso de Albuquerque and Lopo Soares de Albergaria in military, strategic, and political matters, assuming that there was a definite change in commercial policy⁵. The phase prior to 1515 had witnessed the creation of a maritime empire marked by high degree of military and administrative centralization under Albuquerque. The main accent of policy was on trade. But that was Crown trade primarily, and of that Albuquerque was the main defender. However concentration of power in the hands of Governor-General was perceived by many as a threat to King's powers. The following phase has been described in the areas bordering Bay of Bengal. This "decompression" effect became most noticeable in the areas bordering Bay of Bengal. This "decompression" meant creation of semi-autonomous settlements and trade by individuals who operated beyond the ambit of the Estado da India. The architect of this "decompression" was Albuquerque's successor Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria. However this effect was not so noticeable in the western sector partly due to social differentiations in the character of settlements which led to domination by the *fidalgo* class and hence the Estado, and partly because of the difference in the very character of the Portuguese projects there. In the east the nature of settlement and trade was more private and not so state dominated, and with more *casado* and *solteiro* participation rather than *fidalgo* or state participation. Also the nature of commercial and diplomatic ventures in the west had a military character because Portuguese presence was essentially military here⁶.

Taking both the spatial and temporal differentiations into account we can say that the Bay of Bengal deserved a treatment from

the western India Ocean area. However we should also be aware of the fact over emphasising these differences might cause a problem of perspective. This point assumes greater significance because the orientation of the policies of the Estado had much to do with its existence in the west. The "Imperialist" politics of the Portuguese was still in its ascendant phase. Hence change in policy during this period - 1515 to 1530 — which might suggest a withdrawal from the earlier militarist stance, needs to be examined related to whether or how changes in policy was accompanied by parallel changes in the overall outlook of the Portuguese state towards their political role in Asia which cannot be stated emphatically.

It is now established that the real impact of the Portuguese official policy on maritime commerce in the Bay of Bengal was felt in the second half of the sixteenth century as a consequence of the "second wind"⁷. These changes evolved in response to a 'complex of causative phenomena, and in a particular direction that is of the Bay. The most crucial of these was the system of concession which developed between 1550 and 1570. Thus the Braudelian description of Asian trade as "fine weather after storm" was applicable only to the Western Indian Ocean after 1520, while from the mid-sixteenth century onward Bay of Bengal experienced the second round of impact of the Portuguese presence⁸.

The period 1515 to 1550 for the reconstruction of history of Portuguese in the Bay of Bengal is a short of time compared to the long-run dynamics of their history of colonial expansion within which their activities had been judged. One may sub-divide the period into two parts: (a) 1515 to 1526 i.e. from the beginning of Albergaria's regime to the period when the Portuguese seemed to have established control over the Bay, with Carreira de Bengalas having become a regular affair, and the year 1517-18 being a crucial one. (b) 1526 to 1540 when the politics of the sub-continent and the Estado takes a different turn. It is the first of these periods which concerns us here.

During the period two important developments took place. One, the Portuguese understood the importance of gaining control over the maritime link of the Bay with middle and western halves of the Indian Ocean region. Two, they were able to reach the eastern littoral of the Bay upto its northern-most end (Bengal) from the Malacca side, as well as from the tip of the peninsula. The movement towards north from Malacca was predictable as navigational cum trading explorations from that point had begun soon after the fall of the city. The added dimension was movement from the west.

This east-west connection was fostered by certain strategic compulsions generated within the Indian Ocean region generally.

Though interesting developments in Portuguese Asia took place on the eastern side since 1515, the imperatives of the events and developments in the western side set the priority for the Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria. Genevieve Bouchon has made the point quite emphatically that between 1515 and 1517 though the Portuguese held many important centres of trade and settlements in Asia, their defeat off Aden in 1514 had made their position precarious everywhere⁹. Thus we find invigorated policy of expeditions generally under Lopo Soares de Albergaria whose priority was the conquest of the Red Sea for which he spent much time. This reinvigoration is reflected in the increased vigilance over Muslim ships in the middle Indian Ocean region and efforts to control the eastern sources of navigation too. Portuguese were fearing a combination of forces from east and the west against them in the Indian region. That their fear was not too unfounded is evident from the proceedings of the interrogation of the Portuguese interpreter and his party six year later at Gaur in Bengal¹⁰. Thus the period of time from 1515 till such time they could re-assert full control over navigation and trade was one of anxiety for the Portuguese. From this point of view the decision to send expedition to Bengal was logical outcome of Lopo Soares's policy of expeditions to the west.

A major factor which determined the Portuguese policy from 1515 onward, towards the middle Indian Ocean region was the activities of Mamale Marakkayar of Cannanor, and the reorientations of shipping voyages towards the east after the Portuguese had established effective control over Malabar coast. Genevieve Bouchon says: 'Most of the Malabar merchants, rather than involve themselves in Portuguese trade preferred to go to Pulicat from where they could travel to Malacca on board the Gujarati ships The presence of the Portuguese in Calicut had the effect of turning away from Kerala the Arab and Gujarati ships which had to carry back to their home products from the Gulf of Bengal pepper from Sumatra and spice from the Malay archipelago'. Mamale who used to supply coir from Maldives to the fleets on the Arabian sea, docking at Malabar, suffered losses due to this development.

Mamale was at one point of time a collaborator of the Portuguese but later had turned an enemy. Referred to as Regedor de Cannanor in the Portuguese records he was an active collaborator with the Ali Rajas in Cannanor and played a key role in dynastic struggles at Maldives. Mamale had for long been a key player in the maritime

state politics in the Indian Ocean region and had lent his support to anti-Portuguese combination between Sultan of Egypt and Zamorin of Calicut in 1511 to retain the freedom of Red Sea and the Gujarati fleets. He had strengthened his control dependence under his tutelage. This control became imperative after the diversion of traffic from the coast of Malabar to Maldives. Albuquerque taking notice of the events following the Portuguese incursions and development of an alternative route from east to the Red Sea and Cambay region, had warned Dom Manuel of the danger posed by Mamale. The setback to the Portuguese after the defeat in the Red Sea region made them vulnerable during the year 1515-1517. Their enemies both on the eastern and western side re-invigorated their strength. And at Malabar, Mamale, the leader of the Mappilas' hopes had been kindled as he was bidding his time to reassert his strength. He decided to take control of the Maldives atolls which had become a major port of call for ships coming from the eastern Indian Ocean region and had entrenched his position near Sri Lanka by gaining favour of the King of Kotte to secure for himself a supply of cinnamon. In fact Albuquerque had already suspected him of being responsible for the losses that the Portuguese suffered 'in the Gulf of Ceylon'. He now took cognisance of the change of circumstance in politics particularly after Albuquerque's death and wanted to reintroduce contribution on the Maldivian Sultan which would enable him provide rigging for Cambay and Red Sea fleets. After Albuquerque's death he reiterated his demand that Sultan of Maldives pay a tribute to him again. Obviously the Portuguese could not have ignored this threat¹¹.

A person common to both the east-west aspects was Dom Joao de Silveira¹². It seems he had the charge of general superintendence over commercial navigation and production of Portuguese economic interests like ensuring supply of coir and cinnamon. He was also vested with the responsibility of maintaining a grid of control in the middle Indian Ocean through a network of fortresses and factories and extension of it to the east. This plan of fortress-factory system within a smaller space such as the middle and east Indian Ocean region was limited version of the larger system which Albuquerque had devised for the whole of the Portuguese maritime empire¹³. Silveira reached Chittagong in December 1517; he was also the person instrumental in establishing control over navigation at the tip of the peninsula. Silveira later a key player in the implementation of Portuguese policies in the middle Indian Ocean region, might have made his first familiarity with east Indian Ocean

affairs after his return from the expedition to Zeila and Camaram.

It appears that in the year 1516, the policy of intervention into the Bay of Bengal had taken shape. The expedition to Jida was one which was typical of the early Portuguese to assert the hegemony of the Portuguese in Goa. But a far more important change which was taking place during this period was that the King in Portugal Dom Manuel I was getting increasingly interested in the affairs of his domains overseas. The path was cleared for him after the death of Albuquerque. The King was interested in directing affairs at western end of Portuguese control particularly in Maldives, for navigational purpose, and also directing Portuguese ventures toward the Far East¹⁴. One may surmise that this suited the Portuguese private concern of extending their trading sphere quite adequately.

While the King was more concerned about long-term plans of Portuguese domination on Asiatic waters and was interested controlling Maldives for the purpose of augmenting Portuguese naval strength, or venturing into the Far East, the realities faced by Governor at Goa were different. He had to ensure control over traffic in many commodities like grain and spice reaching different parts of the maritime region directly under the control of the Estado da India¹⁵. A serious threat to this traffic was the presence of the Sultan of Egypt's armada (Armado do Soldado) in the port of Suez¹⁶. Thus we find Lopo Soares embarking on an expedition towards Jida and Camaram in February 1516. Dom Joao de Silveira, Dom Alexixo de Menezes, Dom Joao de Ataide, and Diogo Pereira were some of the members of the expedition¹⁷. Lopo Soares de Albergaria captured by force the main port of the kingdom of (principal port do Reyno de Adel) and then burnt it. Dom Joao de Silveira seems to have been specially summoned for this action and he participated in the sacking of the city¹⁹. Albergaria supervised more expeditions on the coast of Africa and directed Silveira to be at Quiloa during that winter.

Around this time one notices some events which are quite interesting from the point of view of Portuguese engagements in the east. This was the arrival of Rafael Perestrelo who played a key role in the Portuguese private trading activities in the Far East and Bengal between 1516-1521 at Goa. Here Perestrelo met the other Joao da Silveira whom Correa refers to as "trinchante". Barros wrote, "to meet him (Joao da Silveira) were Rafael Perestrelo in a bargantim. He had arrived in one 'nau' at Cochin. As he had arrived from China very rich and as he was a very generous man and a

gentleman many people joined him²⁰. Perestrelo was an Italian private trader in Portuguese service who had connection upto China and later made a bid for exclusive trade in Bengal²¹. This meeting between a private trader who was never above suspicion in the eyes of the official establishment, and one of the commanders of an armada should be considered as significant in the evolution of a strategy to control navigation and commerce in the eastern side of Indian Ocean region especially in the context of the Portuguese King's new interest in ventures in the the Far East²².

It was not unexpected therefore that Albergaria would very soon take up the task of formulating a definite eastern of Bay of Bengal policy and complete certain assignments which were important for the King and also the Estado. One such task was negotiations with the King of Maldives and supervision of navigation there²³. This was crucial for controlling navigation from middle (Ceylon side) and eastern (Bay of Bengal side) and north-western side. The king had attached much importance to it, while the Governnor of the Estado had to be concerned about its security since it involved questions of security from the Red Sea region where the Portuguese persisted with their high militarist posture, and also the control over traffic that used to pass from the southern side of the peninsula or the middle of the Indian Ocean region or from eastern side. This area became the focus of Estado's attention for some time because here it encountered threats from its traditional enemies, while it was necessary to control this passage for access to other regions of Asia, towards the east maintaining control over Maldives was a part of Albergaria's general strategy of continuing political and military domination on the Arabian Sea-Indian Ocean waters.

According to Barros, Albergaria sent some captains to several parts "to do business". He sent Dom Aleixo de Menezes to take care of things at Malacca, Dom Joao de Silveira to Maldives, and Manuel de Lacerda to Diu region. Barros while considering the relative significance of each of these missions and the achievement of individual commanders held the other two to be of much greater importance²⁴. The Governor despatched Dom Joao, nephew of a baron, to sail to the island and wait for the vessels which were heading towards Mecca from Tenasserim, Bengal and Pegu. His responsibility there was to maintain a vigil over those ships which were passing from Cambay to Malacca²⁵. Evidently the Portuguese were trying to implement the cartaze system to the middle Indian Ocean region and extend it further to the east i.e. to the Bay of Bengal. This led Dom Joao into the Bay as far as to the coast of

Bengal where a stream of navigational traffic originated.

Barros begins the discussion on Dom Joao de Silveira's expedition to Bengal in the *Decadas* as an account of what happened in the island of Maldives where the latter was sent by Lopo Soares; and then, as well as in Bengal where he was sent till he reached 'Ceylon' to be given the office of the fortress of Colombo. This seems to be a record of events charting out the course of activities of Dom Joao between 1517 and early 1518 giving the impression that all these visits followed a certain sequence of events. But it is not clear how much of these were by design and how much by chance, though Barros says of the mission "as well as in Bengal, where was sent", suggesting a plan on the part of Lopo Soares to send an official mission there. But the following account of Barros, that which has been accepted by later historians, gives an impression that Dom Joao's visit was largely a consequence of the capture of a ship belonging to a relative of Governor of Chittagong which was sailing without the permission of the Portuguese. The question which has not been asked is whether this suggests a Portuguese plan for the extension of the domain of the *cartaze* or whether this was a visit intended to put up a show of strength before the Governor of Chittagong. It might be argued that the second option does not seem to be a possibility because Bengal was too distant for such an undertaking. Given the disposition of the Portuguese in the 1510's and their overall dominance and strength it cannot be ruled out. However the voyage from Maldives to Bengal had more or less design to it than has so far been explored or even suggested. The explanation probably lies in the development of a Portuguese policy towards the eastern side in general, and a policy to control navigation and trade through the tip of the peninsula connecting east and west.

Maldives is an important island which exchanged its commodities like shell-fish or cowries (which was sent to Cairo and Guinea too) against rice, silk, cotton, gold and silver from Bengal and every year five or six large Bengal ships visited the place²⁶. A commodity which the island possessed was coir. This was used for making ropes and other accessories for the ships. Barros tells us that Dom Manuel I on the basis of information which he had with him, knew that Maldives was an important port of call, and that there were Muslims (Mouros) who made these coir products²⁷. Among other things which Affonso de Albuquerque wrote in his correspondence as things concerning the *Estado da India* was the construction of a fortress there. Genevieve Bouchon says that Dom Manuel could

not have allowed any obstacle to come in the way of expansion of his empire and decided in 1515 to construct a fortress there²⁸. The King wrote to Lopo Soares on this matter and recommended that a person be sent to Maldives and the person should be such as who could note the things, settle peace with the King (*e fosse pessoa que sousesse notar e cousas; e pillaesse assentar paz com o key*) and seek permission to build a fortress there²⁹. According to Barros this is the reason why Lopo Soares chose Dom Joao da Silveira. His mission to the end of the north-eastern maritime region-Bengal undertaking was with a similar purpose under instruction from Lopo Soares³⁰. It is also necessary to note that Silveira's mission to Colombo was also to construct a fortress to control navigation and trade³¹. It therefore seems likely that the Portuguese plan was to fortify the different ends of the maritime region and extend the use of the cartazes. It seems therefore the strategy to bring Mamale to submission and the policy of extending cartazes were intertwined.

Another reason for undertaking this exercise was to control traffic of ships carrying goods from Maldives towards Cambay, as well as towards West Asia which could also hinder the traffic between Maldives and the ports of Malabar³². Lopo Soares sent Dom Joao to tackle the activities of a Muslim trader from Cambay named Ali Khan (Alle Can) who was obstructing the movement of coir and other material coming from Malabar and Maldives to the Portuguese establishments. His ships laden with goods was to have come in the monsoon season in 1517 from Malacca with which he had been trading from Cambay. Ali Khan was sailing with a fleet of seven oarships which were to support six other Cambay ships coming from Malacca. This movement could be effectively cut-off if the Portuguese strengthened their presence in this area and a monopsonistic control over passage of trade and navigation could be established. This could also cut-off the political links between the Sultanate of Gujarat, that of Bengal, and the ousted nobility of Malacca who had taken shelter with the Sultanate of Ache. In Bouchon's opinion since the beginning of the expansionary process of the Portuguese reconnaissance missions had been possible only as the Cape Comorin though the route used by spice convoy had been a constant source of worry ever since 1508 when D. Francisco de Almeida had sounded a warning. This was not possible because of many reasons like urgency of the Red Sea blockade and outbreaks of war around Goa.

Dom Joao left with five vessels towards Maldives and on his way

while attempting to implement the policy of enforcing cartazes forcefully seized two ships sailing from Bengal to Cambay with cargo of textiles. One of the big vessels belonged to a Muslim trader called Gromalle (probably Golam Ali) who was a relative of the Governor of Chittagong one of the principal cities of the kingdom of Bengal³³. Dom Joao captured the ships and sent those to Lopo Soares at Cochin. He then went on his voyage to Maldives³⁴.

Barros says Dom Joao could establish friendship and peaceful relationship with the King of Maldives which Dom Manuel I and Lopo Soares wanted him to do. The king assured him that he would give permission to put up a factory in his land. Dom Joao then went in search of Ali Khan to intercept the vessels. However his efforts were not successful because Ali Khan succeeded in avoiding him.

However Barros's account of the success of D. Joao is not shared by all. Genevieve Bouchon says that the Sultan of Maldives was rather reluctant to grant to him permission to construct a fortress and agreed only to the construction of a feitoria (factory). These steps were taken by Kalu Muhammad without consulting Mamale because the former was trying to improve relations with Portugal³⁵. Obviously Mamale would not have agreed to that. Further Kalu Muhammad agreed to share the produce of coir with the Portuguese through a treaty which was opposed by Mamale. D. Joao da Silveira returned to Cochin where he found that the orders for his departure to Bengal were ready. Confabulations with the pilots of Gromalle's ship had convinced the Government that they would be the best guides to take them to Bengal. Thus began the process of linking up the whole maritime domain upto Bengal under the surveillance of the Portuguese. This could be a possible method of extending the cartazes, or Portuguese passes for sailing on the high seas, but other indications point to the possibility of other motives existing too. This was the motive of taking riches, or acquiring prizes which motivated many a fidalgo³⁶. Gasper Correa says that D. Joao da Silveira had been to Maldives and to the coast of Bengal where he had also gathered riches of high value. However we can rule out that he had arrived there for conquest or to reprimand the authorities there for plying ships without Portuguese permission.

Dom Joao da Silveira on way to Bengal sailed to Colombo and marked the place which in future would be his charge. From there he reached a port near Arakan which Barros says was Silveira's discovery³⁷. Correa says that Dom Joao reached Ceylon with the same armada which he had taken to Maldives, where he encountered a big storm which led D. Joao to the coast of Bengal where

he made, or took rich prizes. The motive of gaining prizes seems to have been firmly fixed on Dom. Joao's actions by Correa. In other contexts, like when he mentions that Lopo Soares had asked D. Joao to conduct the surveillance on ships going to Mecca from Tenasserim, Bengal, and Pegu he added that D. Joao had made rich prizes there too³⁸. However Barros does not suggest that D. Joao's landing on the eastern coast was accidental or he was motivated by prizes only. On reaching Arakan he was advised by the people of the port not to visit Bengal because the country was on war with Bengal. But D. Joao did not accept the advice. Others kept up a pretence of friendship while conspiring behind him.

It is obvious that matters were out of Silveira's control as he could neither anticipate the situation that had developed nor engage in it with any degree of assertiveness which was possible if he was close to the bases of their operation. In this situation it was either the Governor's instructions or the motive of gaining prizes which made him hold out against all odds throughout the winter of 1517-18 at Chittagong. It was this motive which led him to carry out acts of depredations on ships arriving at Chittagong port.

Joao Coelho's arrival almost at the same time as Silveira's at Chittagong is evidence of Bengal's contact with the Portuguese at Malacca. According to Barros, Coelho had reached a day before Silveira on a ship that came from Pacem or Pasai, in the island of Sumatra³⁹. From the manner of Barros's rendering of the event we can surmise that the intention of Coelho was peaceful trade rather than surveillance. The visit of Coelho to Chittagong port is also stated to be an embassy, sent on behalf of King Dom Manuel I to the King (El Rey) of Bengal⁴⁰. Therefore the divergence in the Portuguese approach seems to be clear at this point.

Coelho was a messenger or agent of Fernao Peres da Andrade, and both were purportedly acting on behalf of Dom Manuel I⁴¹. Fernao was given the charge of exploring commercial contacts in the Far East and Bengal by Dom Manuel I. His voyage had started from Cochin and reached Malacca in 1516⁴². Here he encountered Rafael Perestrelo who was leading private trade ventures with other Portuguese in the Far East. Andrade had to abandon his visit to Bengal to pre-empt Perestrelo's design - which were bringing huge profit and also due to the fact that his main ship got burnt at Pasai port. For various reasons Andrade's departure to China was delayed and he decided to send Joao Coelho to represent him and the King of Portugal before the King of Bengal.

From the nature of these activities and the manner in which Barros reported, it seems that the Portuguese attitude in this case was markedly different from that originating from the western side, which was very much the orientation of Silveira's expedition. First, the motives ought to have been peaceful because the objective was of exploring commercial possibilities. Secondly, it also seemed to be less guided by the imperatives of the Estado and thus having lesser connections with its directive. The mission was fairly general in objective and scope and afforded wider opportunities to private trading interests. But in spite of these two differences the legitimacy was sought from one common source, the King of Portugal who authorised the overall venture of discoveries, explorations, conquests and trade. Thus the two tendencies, one eastern and the other western, in inspiration and guidance worked simultaneously in the Portuguese maritime domain. Often at cross purposes and in contradiction to each other's objective, the eastern tendency originating from Malacca gained strength after the reconnoitring and explorative voyages started from there after the fall of the city in 1511. This has been borne out through the researches by Luis Filipe Thomaz and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. Joao de Barros who perceived the conflict of these tendencies as aberrations of Portuguese political policy leading to misjudgements by the Asian states, pointed out the fiasco which took place at Chittagong in 1517 as a case of misrepresentation of identities. He said that because the Moors had received good treatment from Fernao Peres at Pacem they gave favourable reports about Coelho to the Governor of Chittagong who naturally thought that Coelho was the real messenger of the King while Silveira was a corsair⁴³.

The paper has made an attempt at understanding the process of Portuguese maritime expansion and domination in the eastern side of the Indian Ocean region particularly the Bay of Bengal since the closing years of Affonso de Albuquerque's governorship and the beginning of Lopo Soares de Albergaria's term. This is the period noted in recent literature as one which was marked by a change of policy towards trade and considerable expansion of private or non-crown trading interests particularly in the eastern side. Though the fall of Malacca had taken place in 1511, this expansion of trade in private hands and consequent settlement of private traders, had to wait for a change of policy which came about during Albergaria's regime.

However we do notice certain continuities in policy too which gave the activities of the Portuguese a degree of consistency in their

attitude to affairs of maritime politics though it is undeniable that economic and political compulsions dictated a change in the structure of the empire which was evident in the loosening of the grasp of the Estado. But the process of change could also preserve the residual elements of politics of the previous era and is important to take note of it because it helps to explain some ambiguities in action. A case in point is the intervention of the Portuguese fleet in Bengal coast under the leadership of D. Joao struck a hostile posture though the objectives of the mission were conceived differently. The different features of this process may be summed up briefly. One, the Portuguese Estado seemed to be pursuing the task of increased surveillance around the tip of the Indian peninsula, a task left unfinished since the time of Fransisco Almeida which Albuquerque tried to address but without much success due to other pre-occupations. Two, the warlike postures followed in the western sector did have a bearing on the activities and expeditions carried out on the eastern side particularly towards Bengal. This was true not only in the case of the 1517 expedition but for many other expeditions which visited Bengal in 1526, 1533 and 1535. Three, an important Portuguese concern was the possibility of a nexus between interests hostile to them and build-up of an alliance. Their strategy was always to block or pre-empt such developments by extending surveillance and exercise of force. From this point of view events around the Red Sea region had it's impact on the politics of Maldives and Malabar, on that of Gujarati traders trading between Cambay and Indonesian archipelago, and also on the traders and rulers in the Sultanate of Bengal. Four, the policy of the Portuguese to extend the domain of cartaze seems to have been pursued while at the same time they tried to integrate the maritime domain between Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bengal within a system of settlements, factories and if possible fortifications.

Thus while agreeing with the main contentions borne out by recent research, that the period of change came about after the assumption of office by Lopo Soares, the paper has sought to explain the traces of continuity which could be noticed, it also seeks to connect the different aspects of the history of this process of expansion.

NOTES

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3. IE, XIII
4. *Ibid.* XIV; A Cortesao (ed) : *Suma Oriental*, New Delhi, 1990 (Reprint), 1-5.
5. IE, XIV-XVI; PEA, 70-74.
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7. *Ibid.* 35.
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14. C.R. Boxer : *The Portuguese Sea-Borne Empire. 1415-1825*. London, 1969, 47-48.
15. Bouchon, *op.cit.*. 119.
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18. *Ibid.* 54-57.
19. *Ibid.* 62.
20. *Ibid.* 84.
21. PEA. 32; Pires, *op.cit.*, XXIX-XXX.
22. Bouchon 2 Thomas, *op.cit.*
23. Barros, *op.cit.*, 99.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Gasper Correa : *Lendas da India*, Coimbra, 1922, 537.
26. Bouchon, *op.cit.* 144, 161.
27. Barros, *op.cit.* 132-135.
28. Bouchon, *op.cit.* 153.
29. Barros, *op.cit.* 155.
30. *Ibid.* 134-35.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Bouchon, *op.cit.* 154.
37. Barros, *op.cit.* 135.
38. Correa, *op.cit.* 537.
39. Barros, *op.cit.* 136-37.
40. *Ibid.* 137.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.* 138.



A JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN MEDIEVAL KERALA

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Cranganore¹ was known in ancient times as Muziris among the sea-faring people of the Mediterranean coast. It was a flourishing port city described by Pliny as the "First Emporium of India"². With the discovery of Hippalus (south west monsoon wind), the direct sea route from the Red Sea to Kerala had become shorter, safer and more secure than before³. Hence, according to Strabo, about 120 ships a year used to set sail from Myos Hormos to India,⁴ their main destination being Muziris.

The discovery of hoards of Roman coins in the vicinity of Vailuvalli, about twenty k.m. from Cranganore,⁵ and the fact that there was a temple of Augustus in the city itself⁶ are evidences of the presence of a Roman settlement. The *Periplus* describes it as "a flourishing place with ship from Ariake coming to it and also Greeks"⁷. It was the capital of Keralaputra⁸ which is the same as Keprobotos of the *Periplus*⁹, Coelobatras of Pliny¹⁰ and Kerobatras of Ptolemy¹¹. Word of Tamil origin found in the Hebrew Bible¹² suggested that the ships of King Solomon used to visit Muziris¹³. It could have been in the ships of Solomon that the earliest Jewish settlers reached the coast of Kerala. This nucleus was being continually enlarged by the influx of refugees caused by the conquest of Palestine by the Assyrians in the 8th century B.C., by the Babylonians in the 7th century B.C. and by the Romans in the first century A.D.¹⁴.

According to tradition, by the time when St. Thomas, the Apostle, came to Kerala there were Jewish colonies in Palayur, Pulloot, Madai and Maliankara which are places in and around Muziris. They were so numerous that they seem to have had eighteen synagogues and houses of study¹⁵. Some of these Jews might have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and were converted to Christianity as a result of the preaching of St. Thomas. They were the earliest Christians of India. Later a large group of Judeo-Christians are said to have come from Syria to Cranganore under the leadership of K'nai Thomas who settled down on the southern side of the palace of Cheraman Perumal, while the earlier Christians had their colony on the northern side, probably at Pulloot, close to the Jewish settlement. As a result, the two groups