

Overseas Expansion in the Early Modern Period

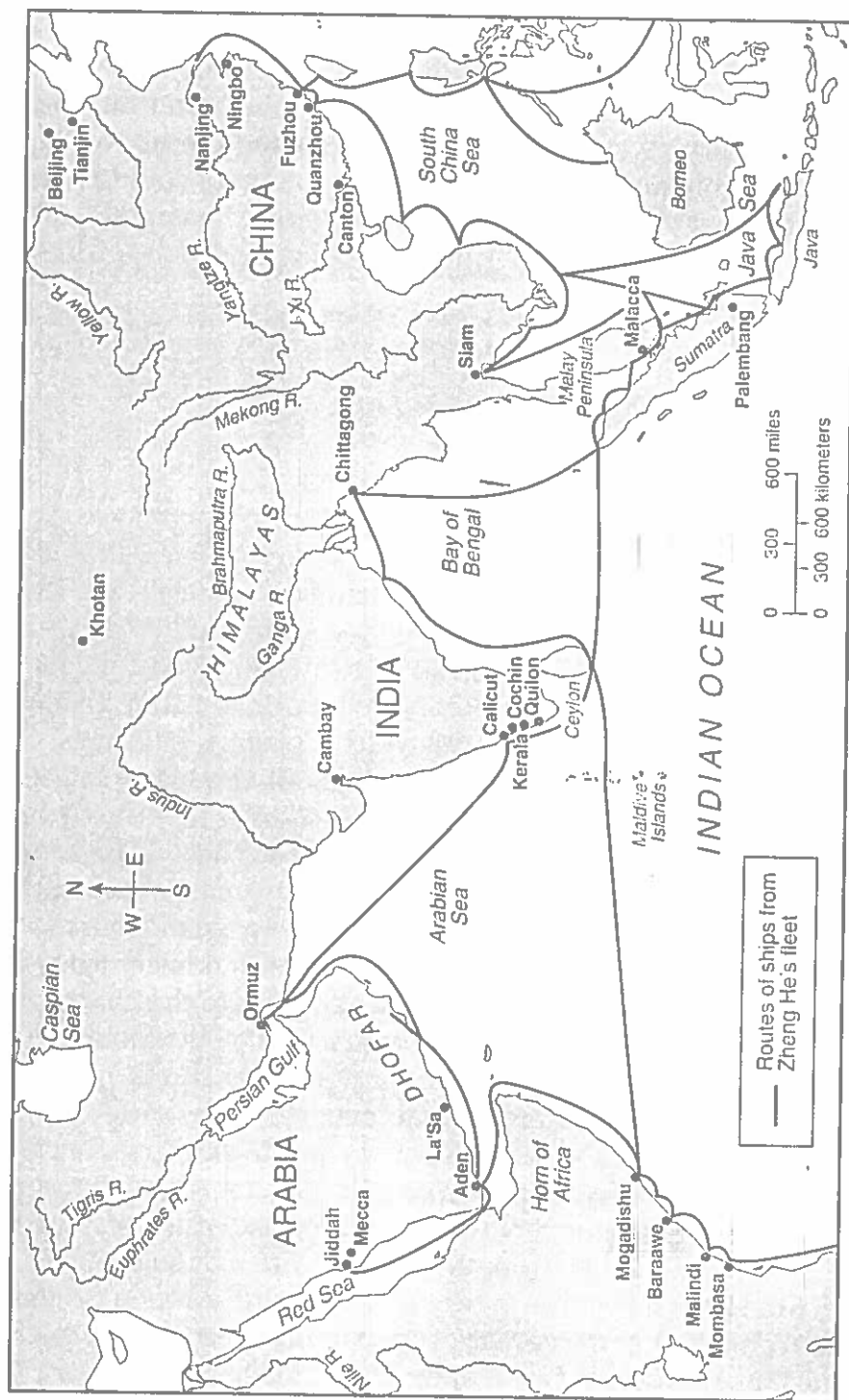
*Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas,
1400–1600*

■ HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Between 1400 and 1500, the balance between Chinese and European sea power changed drastically. Before 1434, Chinese shipbuilding was the envy of the world. Chinese ships were larger, more numerous, safer, and better outfitted than European ships. The Chinese navy made frequent trips through the South China Sea to the Spice Islands, through the Indian Ocean, and as far as East Africa and the Persian Gulf (see Map 15.1). Every island, port, and kingdom along the route was integrated into the Chinese system of tributaries. Goods were exchanged, marriages arranged, and princes taken to visit the Chinese emperor.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Chinese navy virtually disappeared. At the same time, the Portuguese began a series of explorations down the coast of Africa and into the Atlantic Ocean. In 1434 Portuguese ships rounded the treacherous Cape Bojador, just south of Morocco, and in 1498 Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Vasco da Gama sailed into the Indian Ocean, arriving in Calicut the following year. And in 1500 a fortuitous landfall in Brazil by Pedro Cabral gave the Portuguese a claim from the western Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. By 1512 Portuguese ships had reached the Bandas and Moluccas—the Spice Islands of what is today eastern Indonesia.

Beginning in 1492, after the defeat of the Moors (Muslims) and the voyages of Columbus, the Spanish claimed most of the Western Hemisphere until challenged by the Dutch, English, and French. European control in the Americas penetrated far deeper than in Asia, where it was limited to enclaves on the coast and where European nations were in an almost



Map 15.1 Chinese Naval Expeditions, 1405-1433.

perpetual state of war with each other. Taken together, the nations of Western Europe dominated the seas of the world after 1500 (see Map 15.2).

What accounts for the different fortunes of China and Europe in the fifteenth century? Were the decline of China and the rise of Europe inevitable? Probably no objective observer of the time would have thought so. In what ways were the expansions of China and Europe similar? In what ways were they different? Think about these questions as you reflect on the readings in this chapter.

■ THINKING HISTORICALLY

Reading Primary and Secondary Sources

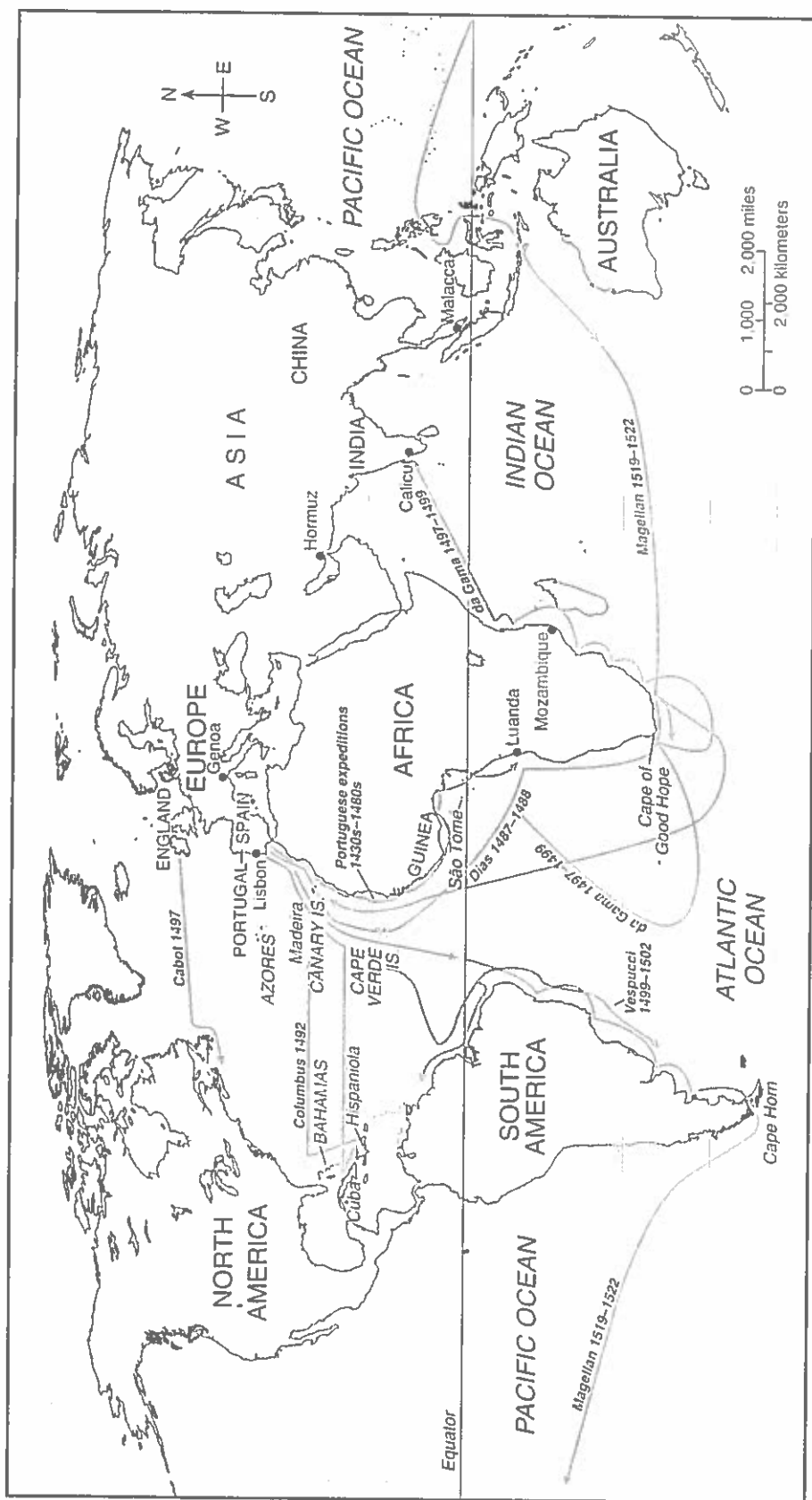
This chapter contains both primary and secondary sources. *Primary sources* are actual pieces of the past and include anything—art, letters, essays, and so on—from the historical period being studied. If a future historian were to study and research students in American colleges at the beginning of the twenty-first century, some primary sources might include diaries, letters, cartoons, music videos, posters, paintings, e-mail messages, blogs and Web sites, class notes, school newspapers, tests, and official and unofficial records. *Secondary sources* are usually books and articles *about* the past—interpretations of the past. These sources are “secondary” because they must be based on primary sources; therefore, a history written after an event occurs is a secondary source.

In your studies, you will be expected to distinguish primary from secondary sources. A quick glance at the introductions to this chapter’s selections tells you that the first article is written by a modern journalist in 1999 and the last is written by a modern environmentalist, taken from his book published in 1991. These are both secondary sources since they are modern interpretations of the past rather than documents from the past. The other selections in this chapter are such documents, or primary sources. The second selection is an account of the great fifteenth-century Chinese admiral Zheng He’s* voyage to Southeast Asia written by someone who was there, Ma Huan, a member of the crew. The third selection is similarly a participant’s account of the voyage of the first European fleet to reach South Asia, that of Vasco da Gama at the end of the fifteenth century. These and the fourth selection, a letter penned by Christopher Columbus more than five hundred years ago, are firsthand accounts of worlds long past.

Having determined whether selections are primary or secondary sources, we also explore some of the subtle complexities that are overlooked by such designations.

* jung HUH

Note: Pronunciations of difficult-to-pronounce terms will be given throughout the book. The emphasis goes on the syllable appearing in all capitals. [Ed.]



Map 15.2 European Overseas Exploration, 1430s-1530s.

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

1492: The Prequel, 1999

Almost a century before Columbus, Zheng He, a eunuch admiral in the court, sailed from China with three hundred ships and twenty-eight thousand men. His fleet stopped at ports in the Indian Ocean and journeyed as far as the east coast of Africa. Nicholas Kristof travels to the East African island of Pate to find traces of these fifteenth-century Chinese sailors. What types of evidence is he seeking? What does Kristof's brief history suggest about China, India, and Europe and their roles in the making of the modern world? How would today's world be different if Chinese ships had reached the Western Hemisphere before Columbus?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

In his secondary account of Zheng He's voyages, Kristof alludes to certain possible primary sources. What sorts of primary sources are available to historians interested in reconstructing the life and voyages of Zheng He? What primary sources are not available? Why are they not available? Has Kristof's recent voyage led to the discovery of a new primary source?

From the sea, the tiny East African island of Pate, just off the Kenyan coast, looks much as it must have in the 15th century: an impenetrable shore of endless mangrove trees. As my little boat bounced along the waves in the gray dawn, I could see no antennae or buildings or even gaps where trees had been cut down, no sign of human habitation, nothing but a dense and mysterious jungle.

The boatman drew as close as he could to a narrow black-sand beach, and I splashed ashore. My local Swahili interpreter led the way through the forest, along a winding trail scattered with mangoes, coconuts, and occasional seashells deposited by high tides. The tropical sun was firmly overhead when we finally came upon a village of stone houses with thatched roofs, its dirt paths sheltered by palm trees. The village's inhabitants, much lighter-skinned than people on the Kenyan mainland, emerged barefoot to stare at me with the same curiosity with which I was studying them. These were people I had come halfway around the world to see, in the hope of solving an ancient historical puzzle.

Source: Nicholas D. Kristof, "1492: The Prequel," *New York Times Magazine*, June 6, 1999, 6, 80:1.

"Tell me," I asked the first group I encountered, "where did the people here come from? Long ago, did foreign sailors ever settle here?" The answer was a series of shrugs. "I've never heard about that," one said. "You'll have to ask the elders."

I tried several old men and women without success. Finally the villagers led me to the patriarch of the village, Bwana Mkuu Al-Bauri, the keeper of oral traditions. He was a frail old man with gray stubble on his cheeks, head, and chest. He wore a yellow sarong around his waist; his ribs pressed through the taut skin on his bare torso. Al-Bauri hobbled out of his bed, resting on a cane and the arm of a grandson. He claimed to be 121 years old; a pineapple-size tumor jutted from the left side of his chest.

"I know this from my grandfather, who himself was the keeper of history here," the patriarch told me in an unexpectedly clear voice. "Many, many years ago, there was a ship from China that wrecked on the rocks off the coast near here. The sailors swam ashore near the village of Shanga—my ancestors were there and saw it themselves."

"The Chinese were visitors, so we helped those Chinese men and gave them food and shelter, and then they married our women. Although they do not live in this village, I believe their descendants still can be found somewhere else on this island."

I almost felt like hugging Bwana Al-Bauri. For months I had been poking around obscure documents and research reports, trying to track down a legend of an ancient Chinese shipwreck that had led to a settlement on the African coast. My interest arose from a fascination with what to me is a central enigma of the millennium: Why did the West triumph over the East?

For most of the last several thousand years, it would have seemed far likelier that Chinese or Indians, not Europeans, would dominate the world by the year 2000, and that America and Australia would be settled by Chinese rather than by the inhabitants of a backward island called Britain. The reversal of fortunes of East and West strikes me as the biggest news story of the millennium, and one of its most unexpected as well.

As a resident of Asia for most of the past thirteen years, I've been searching for an explanation. It has always seemed to me that the turning point came in the early 1400s, when Admiral Zheng He sailed from China to conquer the world. Zheng He (pronounced JUNG HUH) was an improbable commander of a great Chinese fleet, in that he was a Muslim from a rebel family and had been seized by the Chinese Army when he was still a boy. Like many other prisoners of the time, he was castrated, his sexual organs completely hacked off, a process that killed many of those who suffered it. But he was a brilliant and tenacious boy who grew up to be physically imposing. A natural leader, he had the good fortune to be assigned, as a houseboy, to the household of a great prince, Zhu Di.

In time, the prince and Zheng He grew close, and they conspired to overthrow the prince's nephew, the Emperor of China. With Zheng He as one of the prince's military commanders, the revolt succeeded and the prince became China's Yongle Emperor. One of the emperor's first acts (after torturing to death those who had opposed him) was to reward Zheng He with the command of a great fleet that was to sail off and assert China's pre-eminence in the world.

Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He led seven major expeditions, commanding the largest armada the world would see for the next five centuries. Not until World War I did the West mount anything comparable. Zheng He's fleet included twenty-eight thousand sailors on three hundred ships, the longest of which were four hundred feet. By comparison, Columbus in 1492 had ninety sailors on three ships, the biggest of which was eighty-five feet long. Zheng He's ships also had advanced design elements that would not be introduced in Europe for another 350 years, including balanced rudders and watertight bulwark compartments.

The sophistication of Zheng He's fleet underscores just how far ahead of the West the East once was. Indeed, except for the period of the Roman Empire, China had been wealthier, more advanced, and more cosmopolitan than any place in Europe for several thousand years. Hangzhou, for example, had a population in excess of a million during the time it was China's capital (in the twelfth century), and records suggest that as early as the seventh century, the city of Guangzhou had 200,000 foreign residents: Arabs, Persians, Malays, Indians, Africans, and Turks. By contrast, the largest city in Europe in 1400 was probably Paris, with a total population of slightly more than 100,000.

A half-century before Columbus, Zheng He had reached East Africa and learned about Europe from Arab traders. The Chinese could easily have continued around the Cape of Good Hope and established direct trade with Europe. But as they saw it, Europe was a backward region, and China had little interest in the wood, beads, and wine Europe had to trade. Africa had what China wanted—ivory, medicines, spices, exotic woods, even specimens of native wildlife.

In Zheng He's time, China and India together accounted for more than half of the world's gross national product, as they have for most of human history. Even as recently as 1820, China accounted for 29 percent of the global economy and India another 16 percent, according to the calculations of Angus Maddison, a leading British economic historian.

Asia's retreat into relative isolation after the expeditions of Zheng He amounted to a catastrophic missed opportunity, one that laid the groundwork for the rise of Europe and, eventually, America. Westerners often attribute their economic advantage today to the intelligence, democratic habits, or hard work of their forebears, but a more important reason may well have been the folly of fifteenth-century Chinese

rulers. That is why I came to be fascinated with Zheng He and set out earlier this year to retrace his journeys. I wanted to see what legacy, if any, remained of his achievement, and to figure out why his travels did not remake the world in the way that Columbus's did.

Zheng He lived in Nanjing, the old capital, where I arrived one day in February. Nanjing is a grimy metropolis on the Yangtze River in the heart of China. It has been five centuries since Zheng He's death, and his marks on the city have grown faint. The shipyards that built his fleet are still busy, and the courtyard of what had been his splendid seventy-two-room mansion is now the Zheng He Memorial Park, where children roller-skate and old couples totter around for exercise. But though the park has a small Zheng He museum, it was closed—for renovation, a caretaker told me, though he knew of no plans to reopen it.

I'd heard that Zheng He's tomb is on a hillside outside the city, and I set out to find it. It wasn't long before the road petered out, from asphalt to gravel to dirt to nothing. No tomb was in sight, so I approached an old man weeding a vegetable garden behind his house. Tang Yiming, seventy-two, was still lithe and strong. His hair was gray and ragged where he had cut it himself, disastrously, in front of a mirror. Evidently lonely, he was delighted to talk, and offered to show me the path to the tomb. As we walked, I mentioned that I had read that there used to be an old Ming Dynasty tablet on Zheng He's grave.

"Oh, yeah, the old tablet," he said nonchalantly. "When I was a boy, there was a Ming Dynasty tablet here. When it disappeared, the Government offered a huge reward to anyone who would return it—a reward big enough to build a new house. Seemed like a lot of money. But the problem was that we couldn't give it back. People around here are poor. We'd smashed it up to use as building materials."

A second mystery concerned what, if anything, is actually buried in Zheng He's tomb, since he is believed to have died on his last voyage and been buried at sea. So I said in passing that I'd heard tell the tomb is empty, and let my voice trail off.

"Oh, there's nothing in there," Tang said, a bit sadly. "No bones, nothing. That's for sure."

"How do you know?"

"In 1962, people dug up the grave, looking for anything to sell. We dug up the ground to one and a half times the height of a man. But there was absolutely nothing in there. It's empty."

The absence of impressive monuments to Zheng He in China today should probably come as no surprise, since his achievement was ultimately renounced. Curiously, it is not in China but in Indonesia where his memory has been most actively kept alive. Zheng He's expeditions led directly to the wave of Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia, and in some countries he is regarded today as a deity. In the Indonesia city of Semarang, for example, there is a large temple honoring Zheng He,

located near a cave where he once nursed a sick friend. Indonesians still pray to Zheng He for a cure or good luck.

Not so in his native land. Zheng He was viewed with deep suspicion by China's traditional elite, the Confucian scholars, who made sure to destroy the archives of his journey. Even so, it is possible to learn something about his story from Chinese sources—from imperial archives and even the memoirs of crewmen. The historical record makes clear, for example, that it was not some sudden impulse of extroversion that led to Zheng He's achievement. It grew, rather, out of a long sailing tradition. Chinese accounts suggest that in the fifth century a Chinese monk sailed to a mysterious "far east country" that sounds very much like Mayan Mexico, and Mayan art at that time suddenly began to include Buddhist symbols. By the thirteenth century, Chinese ships regularly traveled to India and occasionally to East Africa.

Zheng He's armada was far grander, of course, than anything that came before. His grandest vessels were the "treasure ships," 400 feet long and 160 feet wide, with nine masts raising red silk sails to the wind, as well as multiple decks and luxury cabins with balconies. His armada included supply ships to carry horses, troop transports, warships, patrol boats, and as many as twenty tankers to carry fresh water. The full contingent of 28,000 crew members included interpreters for Arabic and other languages, astrologers to forecast the weather, astronomers to study the stars, pharmacologists to collect medicinal plants, ship-repair specialists, doctors, and even two protocol officers to help organize official receptions.

In the aftermath of such an incredible undertaking, you somehow expect to find a deeper mark on Chinese history, a greater legacy. But perhaps the faintness of Zheng He's trace in contemporary China is itself a lesson. In the end, an explorer makes history but does not necessarily change it, for his impact depends less on the trail he blazes than on the willingness of others to follow. The daring of a great expedition ultimately is hostage to the national will of those who remain behind.

In February I traveled to Calicut, a port town in southwestern India that was (and still is) the pepper capital of the world. The evening I arrived, I went down to the beach in the center of town to look at the coastline where Zheng He once had berthed his ships. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Calicut was one of the world's great ports, known to the Chinese as "the great country of the Western ocean." In the early fifteenth century, the sight of Zheng He's fleet riding anchor in Calicut harbor symbolized the strength of the world's two greatest powers, China and India.

On this sultry evening, the beach, framed by long piers jutting out to sea, was crowded with young lovers and ice-cream vendors. Those piers are all that remain of the port of Calicut, and you can see at a glance that they are no longer usable. The following day I visited the port offices, musty with handwritten ledgers of ship visits dating back nearly a century. The administrator of the port, Captain E. G. Mohanan, explained

matter-of-factly what had happened. "The piers got old and no proper maintenance was ever carried out," he said, as a ceiling fan whirled tiredly overhead. "By the time we thought of it, it was not economical to fix it up." So in 1989, trade was halted, and one of the great ports of the world became no port at all.

The disappearance of a great Chinese fleet from a great Indian port symbolized one of history's biggest lost opportunities—Asia's failure to dominate the second half of this millennium. So how did this happen?

While Zheng He was crossing the Indian Ocean, the Confucian scholar-officials who dominated the upper echelons of the Chinese Government were at political war with the eunuchs, a group they regarded as corrupt and immoral. The eunuchs' role at court involved looking after the concubines, but they also served as palace administrators, often doling out contracts in exchange for kickbacks. Partly as a result of their legendary greed, they promoted commerce. Unlike the scholars—who owed their position to their mastery of two thousand-year-old texts—the eunuchs, lacking any such roots in a classical past, were sometimes outward-looking and progressive. Indeed, one can argue that it was the virtuous, incorruptible scholars who in the mid-fifteenth century set China on its disastrous course.

After the Yongle Emperor died in 1424, China endured a series of brutal power struggles; a successor emperor died under suspicious circumstances and ultimately the scholars emerged triumphant. They ended the voyages of Zheng He's successors, halted construction of new ships, and imposed curbs on private shipping. To prevent any backsliding, they destroyed Zheng He's sailing records and, with the backing of the new emperor, set about dismantling China's navy.

By 1500 the Government had made it a capital offense to build a boat with more than two masts, and in 1525 the Government ordered the destruction of all oceangoing ships. The greatest navy in history, which a century earlier had 3,500 ships (by comparison, the United States Navy today has 324), had been extinguished, and China set a course for itself that would lead to poverty, defeat, and decline.

Still, it was not the outcome of a single power struggle in the 1440s that cost China its worldly influence. Historians offer a host of reasons for why Asia eventually lost its way economically and was late to industrialize; two and a half reasons seem most convincing.

The first is that Asia was simply not greedy enough. The dominant social ethos in ancient China was Confucianism and in India it was caste, with the result that the elites in both nations looked down their noses at business. Ancient China cared about many things—prestige, honor, culture, arts, education, ancestors, religion, filial piety—but making money came far down the list. Confucius had specifically declared that it was wrong for a man to make a distant voyage while his parents were alive, and he had condemned profit as the concern of

“a little man.” As it was, Zheng He’s ships were built on such a grand scale and carried such lavish gifts to foreign leaders that the voyages were not the huge money spinners they could have been.

In contrast to Asia, Europe was consumed with greed. Portugal led the age of discovery in the fifteenth century largely because it wanted spices, a precious commodity; it was the hope of profits that drove its ships steadily farther down the African coast and eventually around the Horn to Asia. The profits of this trade could be vast: Magellan’s crew once sold a cargo of twenty-six tons of cloves for ten thousand times the cost.

A second reason for Asia’s economic stagnation is more difficult to articulate but has to do with what might be called a culture of complacency. China and India shared a tendency to look inward, a devotion to past ideals and methods, a respect for authority, and a suspicion of new ideas. David S. Landes, a Harvard economist, has written of ancient China’s “intelligent xenophobia”; the former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the “petrification of classes” and the “static nature” of Indian society. These are all different ways of describing the same economic and intellectual complacency.

Chinese elites regarded their country as the “Middle Kingdom” and believed they had nothing to learn from barbarians abroad. India exhibited much of the same self-satisfaction. “Indians didn’t go to Portugal not because they couldn’t but because they didn’t want to,” mused M. P. Sridharan, a historian, as we sat talking on the porch of his home in Calicut.

The fifteenth-century Portuguese were the opposite. Because of its coastline and fishing industry, Portugal always looked to the sea, yet rivalries with Spain and other countries shut it out of the Mediterranean trade. So the only way for Portugal to get at the wealth of the East was by conquering the oceans.

The half reason is simply that China was a single nation while Europe was many. When the Confucian scholars reasserted control in Beijing and banned shipping, their policy mistake condemned all of China. In contrast, European countries committed economic suicide selectively. So when Portugal slipped into a quasi-Chinese mind-set in the sixteenth century, slaughtering Jews and burning heretics, and driving astronomers and scientists abroad, Holland and England were free to take up the slack.

When I first began researching Zheng He, I never thought I’d be traveling all the way to Africa to look for traces of his voyages. Then I came across a few intriguing references to the possibility of an ancient Chinese shipwreck that might have left some Chinese stranded on the island of Pate (pronounced PAH-tay). One was a skeptical reference in a scholarly journal, another was a casual conversation with a Kenyan I met a few years ago, and the third was the epilogue of Louise Levathes’s wonderful 1994 book about China’s maritime adventures, “When China Ruled the Seas.” Levathes had traveled to Kenya and found people who believed they were descended from survivors of a Chinese shipwreck. So, on a whim and an

expense account, I flew to Lamu, an island off northern Kenya, and hired a boat and an interpreter to go to Pate and see for myself.

Pate is off in its own world, without electricity or roads or vehicles. Mostly jungle, it has been shielded from the twentieth century largely because it is accessible from the Kenyan mainland only by taking a boat through a narrow tidal channel that is passable only at high tide. Initially I was disappointed by what I found there. In the first villages I visited, I saw people who were light-skinned and had hair that was not rightly curled, but they could have been part Arab or European rather than part Chinese. The remote villages of Chundwa and Faza were more promising, for there I found people whose eyes, hair, and complexion hinted at Asian ancestry, though their background was ambiguous.

And then on a still and sweltering afternoon I strolled through the coconut palms into the village of Siyu, where I met a fisherman in his forties named Abdullah Mohammed Badui. I stopped and stared at the man in astonishment, for he had light skin and narrow eyes. Fortunately, he was as rude as I was, and we stared at each other in mutual surprise before venturing a word. Eventually I asked him about his background and appearance.

"I am in the Famao clan," he said. "There are fifty or one hundred of us Famao left here. Legend has it that we are descended from Chinese and others.

"A Chinese ship was coming along and it hit rocks and wrecked," Badui continued. "The sailors swam ashore to the village that we now call Shanga, and they married the local women, and that is why we Famao look so different."

Another Famao, with the same light complexion and vaguely Asian features, approached to listen. His name was Athman Mohammed Mzee, and he, too, told of hearing of the Chinese shipwreck from the elders. He volunteered an intriguing detail: The Africans had given giraffes to the Chinese.

Salim Bonaheri, a fifty-five-year-old Famao man I met the next day, proudly declared, "My ancestors were Chinese or Vietnamese or something like that." I asked how they had got to Pate.

"I don't know," Bonaheri said with a shrug. Most of my conversations were like that, intriguing but frustrating dead ends. I was surrounded by people whose appearance seemed tantalizingly Asian, but who had only the vaguest notions of why that might be. I kept at it, though, and eventually found people like Khalifa Mohammed Omar, a fifty-five-year-old Famao fisherman who looked somewhat Chinese and who also clearly remembered the stories passed down by his grandfather. From him and others, a tale emerged.

Countless generations ago, they said, Chinese sailors traded with local African kings. The local kings gave them giraffes to take back to China. One of the Chinese ships struck rocks off the eastern coast of Pate, and the sailors swam ashore, carrying with them porcelain and

other goods from the ship. In time they married local women, converted to Islam, and named the village Shanga, after Shanghai. Later, fighting erupted among Pate's clans, Shanga was destroyed, and the Famao fled, some to the mainland, others to the village of Siyu.

Every time I heard the story about the giraffes my pulse began to race. Chinese records indicate that Zheng He had brought the first giraffes to China, a fact that is not widely known. The giraffe caused an enormous stir in China because it was believed to be the mythical qilin, or Chinese unicorn. It is difficult to imagine how African villagers on an island as remote as Pate would know about the giraffes unless the tale had been handed down to them by the Chinese sailors.

Chinese ceramics are found in many places along the east African coast, and their presence on Pate could be the result of purchases from Arab traders. But the porcelain on Pate was overwhelmingly concentrated among the Famao clan, which could mean that it had been inherited rather than purchased. I also visited some ancient Famao graves that looked less like traditional Kenyan graves than what the Chinese call "turtle-shell graves," with rounded tops.

Researchers have turned up other equally tantalizing clues. Craftsmen on Pate and the other islands of Lamu practice a kind of basket-weaving that is common in southern China but unknown on the Kenyan mainland. On Pate, drums are more often played in the Chinese than the African style, and the local dialect has a few words that may be Chinese in origin. More startling, in 1569 a Portuguese priest named Monclaro wrote that Pate had a flourishing silk-making industry—Pate, and no other place in the region. Elders in several villages on Pate confirmed to me that their island had produced silk until about half a century ago.

When I asked my boatman, Bakari Muhaji Ali, if he thought it was possible that a ship could have wrecked off the coast near Shanga, he laughed. "There are undersea rocks all over there," he said. "If you don't know exactly where you're going, you'll wreck your ship for sure."

If indeed there was a Chinese shipwreck off Pate, there is reason to think it happened in Zheng He's time. For if the shipwreck had predated him, surviving sailors would not have passed down stories of the giraffes. And if the wreck didn't occur until after Zheng He, its survivors could not have settled in Shanga, since British archeological digs indicate that the village was sacked, burned, and abandoned in about 1440—very soon after Zheng He's last voyage.

Still, there is no hard proof for the shipwreck theory, and there are plenty of holes in it. No ancient Chinese characters have been found on tombs in Pate, no nautical instruments have ever turned up on the island, and there are no Chinese accounts of an African shipwreck. This last lacuna might be explained by the destruction of the fleet's records. Yet if one of Zheng He's ships did founder on the rocks off Pate, then why didn't some other ships in the fleet come to the sailors' rescue?

As I made my way back through the jungle for the return trip, I pondered the significance of what I'd seen on Pate. In the faces of the Famao, in those bits of pottery and tantalizing hints of Chinese culture, I felt as though I'd glimpsed the shadowy outlines of one of the greatest might-have-beens of the millennium now ending. I thought about the Columbian Exchange, the swap of animals, plants, genes, germs, weapons, and peoples that utterly remade both the New World and the Old, and I couldn't help wondering about another exchange—Zheng He's—that never took place, yet could have.

If ancient China had been greedier and more outward-looking, if other traders had followed in Zheng He's wake and then continued on, Asia might well have dominated Africa and even Europe. Chinese might have settled in not only Malaysia and Singapore, but also in East Africa, the Pacific Islands, even in America. Perhaps the Famao show us what the mestizos of such a world might have looked like, the children of a hybrid culture that was never born. What I'd glimpsed in Pate was the highwater mark of an Asian push that simply stopped—not for want of ships or know-how, but strictly for want of national will.

All this might seem fanciful, and yet in Zheng He's time the prospect of a New World settled by the Spanish or English would have seemed infinitely more remote than a New World made by the Chinese. How different would history have been had Zheng He continued on to America? The mind rebels; the ramifications are almost too overwhelming to contemplate. So consider just one: This magazine would have been published in Chinese.

2

MA HUAN

On Calicut, India, 1433

Ma Huan was a Chinese Muslim who acted as an aide and interpreter on Zheng He's expeditions to Southeast Asia. In 1433 he wrote *The Overall Survey of the Ocean Shores*, a travel account of the lands he visited. This selection, taken from that account, describes his visit to Calicut on the Malabar, or southwest, coast of India. Note that Ma Huan is not always an accurate observer. More familiar with Buddhists than Hindus, for example, he mistakes the latter for the former. Nevertheless, he provides some useful information about

Source: Ma Huan, "On Calicut, India," in *Ma Huan, Ying-yai Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, ed. and trans. by Feng Ch'eng-Chun with an introduction by J. V. G. Mills (Bangkok: The White Lotus Press, 1970), 137–44.

Hindu-Muslim relations, the spread of the Abrahamic religions (note the story about Moses), the vitality of Indian trade, and the variety of Indian plants, animals, and manufactures. In addition to describing Calicut, what does Ma Huan tell us about the reasons for these expeditions?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Ma Huan's account of Zheng He's expedition does not seem to have had an official purpose, but it was probably published instead to satisfy the growing interests of a Chinese public hungry for information about foreign lands and peoples. What sorts of things are of interest to Ma Huan? What does this tell us about his audience? How are his interests similar to, or different from, those of a modern traveler? What might be Ma Huan's strengths and weaknesses as a primary source?

The Country of Ku-Li [Calicut]

[This is] the great country of the Western Ocean.

Setting sail from the anchorage in the country of Ko-chih,¹ you travel north-west, and arrive [here] after three days. The country lies beside the sea. [Travelling] east from the mountains for five hundred, or seven hundred, *li*, you make a long journey through to the country of K'an-pa-i.² On the west [the country of Ku-li] abuts on the great sea; on the south it joins the boundary of the country of Ko-chih; [and] on the north side it adjoins the territory of the country of Hen-nu-erh.³

"The great country of the Western Ocean" is precisely this country.

In the fifth year of the Yung-lo [period] the court ordered⁴ the principal envoy the grand eunuch Cheng Ho and others to deliver an imperial mandate to the king⁵ of this country and to bestow on him a patent conferring a title of honour, and the grant of a silver seal, [also] to

¹ Cochin, a city in southwest India along the Arabian Sea, 80 miles south of Calicut; Ma Huan made a very slow voyage.

² Koyampadi, modern Coimbatore, situated in about 11° N, 77° E, 76 miles nearly due east of Calicut. In giving the distance as 500 *li*, nearly 200 miles, Ma Huan was guilty of an exaggeration.

³ Now called Honavar, situated in 14° 16' N, 74° 27' E; it is on the coast, 199 miles northward from Calicut.

⁴ The order was made in October 1407; but, although in nominal command of this, the second expedition, Cheng Ho did not accompany it.

⁵ A new king, Mana Vikraman, had evidently succeeded since Cheng Ho was at Calicut in 1406–7 during the course of his first expedition.

promote all the chiefs and award them hats and girdles of various grades.

[So Cheng Ho] went there in command of a large fleet of treasure-ships, and he erected a tablet with a pavilion over it and set up a stone which said "Though the journey from this country to the Central Country is more than a hundred thousand *li*, yet the people are very similar, happy and prosperous, with identical customs. We have here engraved a stone, a perpetual declaration for ten thousand ages."⁶

The king of the country is a Nan-k'un⁷ man; he is a firm believer in the Buddhist religion;⁸ [and] he venerates the elephant and the ox.

The population of the country includes five classes, the Muslim people, the Nan-K'un people, the Che-ti people, the Ko-ling people, and the Mu-kua people.

The king of the country and the people of the country all refrain from eating the flesh of the ox.⁹ The great chiefs are Muslim people; [and] they all refrain from eating the flesh of the pig.¹⁰ Formerly there was a king who made a sworn compact with the Muslim people, [saying] "You do not eat the ox; I do not eat the pig; we will reciprocally respect the taboo,"¹¹ [and this compact] has been honoured right down to the present day.

The king has cast an image of Buddha in brass; it is named Naina-erh;¹² he has erected a temple of Buddha and has cast tiles of brass and covered the dais of Buddha with them; [and] beside [the dais] a well has been dug. Every day at dawn the king goes to [the well], draws water, and washes [the image of] Buddha; after worshipping, he orders men to collect the pure dung of yellow oxen; this is stirred with water in a brass basin [until it is] like paste; [then] it is smeared all over the surface of the ground and walls inside the temple. Moreover, he has given orders that the chiefs and wealthy personages shall also smear and scour themselves with ox-dung every morning.

He also takes ox-dung, burns it till it is reduced to a white ash, and grinds it to a fine powder; using a fair cloth as a small bag, he fills it with the ash, and regularly carries it on his person. Every day at dawn, after he has finished washing his face, he takes the ox-dung ash, stirs it up with water, and smears it on his forehead and between his two

⁶Translated "May the period Yung-lo last for ever."

⁷Probably Ma Huan wrote "Nan-p'i" and meant the upper classes consisting of Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

⁸Ma Huan is mistaken; the king was a Hindu.

⁹Detestation of cow-slaughter is the most prominent outward mark of Hinduism.

¹⁰It is noteworthy that a Hindu ruler was employing Muslims as great officers.

¹¹Since it was the king who made the compact, it would seem reasonable to prefer, "You do not eat the pig; I do not eat the ox"; thus, they agreed to respect each others' convictions in the matter of diet. It scarcely needs to be said that the pig is anathema to Muslims.

¹²The name might be a corruption of Narayana, a name for Vishnu. All these references to Buddha, then, must be construed as references to a Hindu deity.

thighs—thrice in each [place]. This denotes his sincerity in venerating Buddha¹³ and in venerating the ox.

There is a traditional story that in olden times there was a holy man named Mou-hsieh,¹⁴ who established a religious cult; the people knew that he was a true [man of] Heaven, and all men revered and followed him. Later the holy man went away with [others] to another place, and ordered his younger brother named Sa-mo-li¹⁵ to govern and teach the people.

[But] his younger brother began to have depraved ideas; he made a casting of a golden calf and said "This is the holy lord; everyone who worships it will have his expectations fulfilled." He taught the people to listen to his bidding and to adore the golden ox, saying "It always excretes gold." The people got the gold, and their hearts rejoiced; and they forgot the way of Heaven; all took the ox to be the true lord.

Later Mou-hsieh the holy man returned; he saw that the multitude, misled by his younger brother Sa-mo-li, were corrupting the holy way; thereupon he destroyed the ox and wished to punish his younger brother; [and] his younger brother mounted a large elephant and vanished.

Afterwards, the people thought of him and hoped anxiously for his return. Moreover, if it was the beginning of the moon, they would say "In the middle of the moon he will certainly come," and when the middle of the moon arrived, they would say once more "At the end of the moon he will certainly come"; right down to the present day they have never ceased to hope for his return.

This is the reason why the Nan-k'un¹⁶ people venerate the elephant and the ox.

The king has two great chiefs who administer the affairs of the country; both are Muslims.

The majority of the people in the country all profess the Muslim religion. There are twenty or thirty temples of worship, and once in seven days they go to worship. When the day arrives, the whole family fast and bathe, and attend to nothing else. In the *ssu* and *wu* periods,¹⁷ the menfolk, old and young, go to the temple to worship. When the *wei* period¹⁸ arrives, they disperse and return home; thereupon they carry on with their trading, and transact their household affairs.

¹³ Again, a Hindu deity.

¹⁴ "Musa" (Moses). Ma Huan alleges that the incidents occurred at Calicut. Presumably he learnt the story of Aaron and the golden calf from Arab informants. A number of Old Testament characters, including Moses, figure prominently in the Koran.

¹⁵ "Al-Sameri" (the Samaritan), the name appearing in the Koran.

¹⁶ Probably Ma Huan wrote "Nan-p'i," and referred to the upper classes of Brahmans and Kshatriyas.

¹⁷ 9 A.M. to 11 A.M., and 11 A.M. to 1 P.M., respectively.

¹⁸ 1 P.M. to 3 P.M.

The people are very honest and trustworthy. Their appearance is smart, fine, and distinguished.

Their two great chiefs received promotion and awards from the court of the Central Country.

If a treasure-ship goes there, it is left entirely to the two men to superintend the buying and selling; the king sends a chief and a Che-ti Wei-no-chi¹⁹ to examine the account books in the official bureau; a broker comes and joins them; [and] a high officer who commands the ships discusses the choice of a certain date for fixing prices. When the day arrives, they first of all take the silk embroideries and the openwork silks, and other such goods which have been brought there, and discuss the price of them one by one; [and] when [the price] has been fixed, they write out an agreement stating the amount of the price; [this agreement] is retained by these persons.

The chief and the Che-ti, with his excellency the eunuch, all join hands together, and the broker then says "In such and such a moon on such and such a day, we have all joined hands and sealed our agreement with a hand-clasp; whether [the price] be dear or cheap, we will never repudiate it or change it."

After that, the Che-ti and the men of wealth then come bringing precious stones, pearls, corals, and other such things, so that they may be examined and the price discussed; [this] cannot be settled in a day; [if done] quickly, [it takes] one moon; [if done] slowly, [it takes] two or three moons.²⁰

Once the money-price has been fixed after examination and discussion, if a pearl or other such article is purchased, the price which must be paid for it is calculated by the chief and the Wei-no-chi who carried out the original transaction; [and] as to the quantity of the hemp-silk or other such article which must be given in exchange for it, goods are given in exchange according to [the price fixed by] the original hand-clasp—there is not the slightest deviation.²¹

In their method of calculation, they do not use a calculating-plate;²² for calculating, they use only the two hands and two feet and the twenty digits on them; and they do not make the slightest mistake; [this is] very extraordinary.

¹⁹ Another observer, Kung Chen, translates "accountant," and adds that the man in question was a broker; Kung Chen further notes that "they wrote out a contract in duplicate, and each [party] kept one [document]."

²⁰ Presumably the goods were unloaded, unless the Chinese left one or two ships behind; at any rate, on the seventh expedition the Chinese stayed only 4 days, from 10 to 14 December 1432, at Calicut.

²¹ This instructive disquisition on administrative procedure illustrates the meticulous care taken to fix the rate of exchange in times prior to the advent of the Europeans.

²² The abacus, a wooden frame in which are fixed a number of beads strung on parallel wires; used by the Chinese for all kinds of arithmetic calculations upon the decimal system; it came into use in late Sung times.

The king uses gold of sixty per cent [purity] to cast a coin for current use; it is named a *pa-nan*;²³ the diameter of the face of each coin is three *fen* eight *li* [in terms of] our official *ts'um*;²⁴ it has lines²⁵ on the face and on the reverse; [and] it weighs one *fen* on our official steelyard.²⁶ He also makes a coin of silver; it is named a *ta-erh*;²⁷ each coin weighs about three *li*;²⁸ [and] this coin is used for petty transactions. . . .

The people of the country also take the silk of the silk-worm, soften it by boiling, dye it in all colours, and weave it into kerchiefs with decorative stripes at intervals; the breadth is four or five *ch'ih*, and the length one *chang* two or three *ch'ih*;²⁹ [and] each length is sold for one hundred gold coins.³⁰

As to the pepper: the inhabitants of the mountainous countryside have established gardens, and it is extensively cultivated. When the period of the tenth moon arrives, the pepper ripens; [and] it is collected, dried in the sun, and sold. Of course, big pepper-collectors come and collect it, and take it up to the official storehouse to be stored; if there is a buyer, an official gives permission for the sale; the duty is calculated according to the amount [of the purchase price] and is paid in to the authorities. Each one *po-ho* of pepper is sold for two hundred gold coins.³¹

The Che-ti mostly purchase all kinds of precious stones and pearls, and they manufacture coral beads and other such things.

Foreign ships from every place come there; and the king of the country also sends a chief and a writer and others to watch the sales; thereupon they collect the duty and pay it in to the authorities.

The wealthy people mostly cultivate coconut trees—sometimes a thousand trees, sometimes two thousand or three thousand—; this constitutes their property.

The coconut has ten different uses. The young tree has a syrup, very sweet, and good to drink; [and] it can be made into wine by fermentation. The old coconut has flesh, from which they express oil, and make sugar, and make a foodstuff for eating. From the fibre which envelops the outside [of the nut] they make ropes for ship-building. The shell of the coconut makes bowls and makes cups; it is also good for burning to

²³ Representing the sound *fanam*. The king was an independent sovereign minting his own coinage; but doubtless, as in 1443, he "lived in great fear" of Vijayanagar (Abdul Razzak).

²⁴ The diameter of the *fanam*, being 0.38 of the Chinese *ts'um* of 1.22 inches, equalled 0.46 of an English inch.

²⁵ Or "characters."

²⁶ The gold content weighed 3.45 grains or 0.00719 ounce troy.

²⁷ Representing the sound *tar* or *tare* (*tara*).

²⁸ If the silver was pure, the silver content weighed 0.00359 ounce troy.

²⁹ The equivalent of 4 *ch'ih* was 48.9 inches; 1 *chang* 2 *ch'ih* equaled 12 feet 2.9 inches.

³⁰ The gold content weighed 345.375 grains or 0.7195 ounce troy.

³¹ The gold content of 200 *fanam* weighed 690.751 grains or 1.439 ounces troy.

ash for the delicate operation of inlaying³² gold or silver. The trees are good for building houses, and the leaves are good for roofing houses.

For vegetables they have mustard plants, green ginger, turnips, caraway seeds, onions, garlic, bottle-gourds, egg-plants, cucumbers, and gourd-melons³³—all these they have in [all] the four seasons [of the year]. They also have a kind of small gourd which is as large as [one's] finger, about two *ts'un*³⁴ long, and tastes like a green cucumber. Their onions have a purple skin; they resemble garlic; they have a large head and small leaves; [and] they are sold by the *chin*³⁵ weight.

The *mu-pieb-tzu*³⁶ tree is more than ten *chang* high; it forms a fruit which resembles a green persimmon and contains thirty or forty seeds; it falls of its own accord when ripe; [and] the bats, as large as hawks, all hang upside-down and rest on this tree.

They have both red and white rice, [but] barley and wheat are both absent; [and] their wheat-flour all comes from other places as merchandise for sale [here].

Fowls and ducks exist in profusion, [but] there are no geese. Their goats have tall legs and an ashen hue; they resemble donkey-foals. The water-buffaloes are not very large. Some of the yellow oxen weigh three or four hundred *chin*;³⁷ the people do not eat their flesh; [but] consume only the milk and cream. The people never eat rice without butter. Their oxen are cared for until they are old; [and] when they die, they are buried. The price of all kinds of sea-fish is very cheap. Deer and hares [from up] in the mountains are also for sale.

Many of the people rear peafowl. As to their other birds: they have crows, green hawks, egrets, and swallows; [but] of other kinds of birds besides these they have not a single one, great or small. The people of the country can also play and sing; they use the shell of a calabash to make a musical instrument, and copper wires to make the strings; and they play [this instrument] to accompany the singing of their foreign songs; the melodies are worth hearing.³⁸

³² *Hsiang*, "a box," used for *hsiang*, "side rooms," which in turn is used for *hsiang*, "to inlay."

³³ *Tung kua*, "eastern gourd," the same vegetable as *tung kua*, "winter gourd."

³⁴ That is, 2.4 inches.

³⁵ That is, 1.3 pounds avoirdupois.

³⁶ The tree is *Momordica cochinchinensis*. The editor is indebted to Dr. J. Needham, F.R.S., for the information that *Momordica* seeds were prescribed in the form of paste for abscesses, ulcers, and wounds, as well as in other ways for other affections. The equivalent of 10 *chang* was 102 feet.

³⁷ The equivalent of 300 *chin* was 394.6 pounds avoirdupois.

³⁸ Music was cultivated at the royal courts, and numbers of musicians were employed in the temples. Conti, in his account of Vijayanagar city, records solemn singing at religious festivals, and the celebration of weddings with "banquets, songs, trumpets, and instruments much like unto ours." The instrument referred to by Ma Huan was probably the vina, a fretted instrument of the guitar kind, which was particularly favoured by Indian musicians.

As to the popular customs and the marriage- and funeral-rites, the So-li people and the Muslim people each follow the ritual forms of their own class, and these are different.

The king's throne does not descend to his son, but descends to his sister's son; descent is to the sister's son [because] they consider that the offspring of the women's body alone constitutes the legal family. If the king has no elder or younger sister, [the throne] descends to his younger brother; [and] if he has no younger brother, [the throne] is yielded up to some man of merit. Such is the succession from one generation to another.

3

Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1498

In 1497 the Portuguese seaman Vasco da Gama left Portugal with a fleet of four ships, arriving in India ten months later. He benefited from the experience of Bartolomeu Dias, who ten years before had negotiated the rough waters of the South African Cape. But Dias had returned to Portugal. Da Gama continued up the African coast and sailed across the Indian Ocean to the port of Calicut, the center of a kingdom that encompassed much of the modern state of Kerala in southwest India. What seem to have been the motives of Portugal and da Gama in sailing to South Asia? How were the Portuguese intentions similar to, and different from, those of China earlier in the century? How would you compare the preparation and behavior of Chinese and Portuguese crews? How would you explain the differences between Chinese and Portuguese voyages?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

We do not know the identity of the author of this document. He was one of the officers or crewmen who sailed on this voyage, however, and many of their names are known to us. What indications do you have that they spanned a wide range of Portuguese society?

The fact that the author was a witness does not mean that he gets everything right. What does he miss? What might have caused him to be misled? Generally, primary sources get more things right than wrong. How do you know this is true for this selection? How do we determine where a primary source is reliable and where it is not?

Calicut

[Arrival.]¹ That night² [May 20] we anchored two leagues from the city of Calicut, and we did so because our pilot mistook *Capua*,³ a town at that place, for Calicut. Still further there is another town called *Pandarani*.⁴ We anchored about a league and a half from the shore. After we were at anchor, four boats (*almadias*) approached us from the land, who asked of what nation we were. We told them, and they then pointed out Calicut to us.

On the following day [May 21] these same boats came again alongside, when the captain-major⁵ sent one of the convicts⁶ to Calicut, and those with whom he went took him to two Moors from Tunis,⁷ who could speak Castilian and Genoese. The first greeting that he received was in these words: "May the Devil take thee! What brought you hither?" They asked what he sought so far away from home, and he told them that we came in search of Christians and of spices. They said: "Why does not the King of Castile, the King of France, or the Signoria of Venice send thither?" He said that the King of Portugal would not consent to their doing so, and they said he did the right thing. After this conversation they took him to their lodgings and gave him wheaten bread and honey. When he had eaten he returned to the ships, accompanied by one of the Moors, who was no sooner on board, than he said these words: "A lucky venture, a lucky venture! Plenty of rubies, plenty of emeralds! You owe great thanks to God, for having brought you to a country holding such riches!" We were greatly astonished to hear his talk, for we never expected to hear our language spoken so far away from Portugal.

[A description of Calicut.] The city of Calicut is inhabited by Christians.⁸ They are of tawny complexion. Some of them have big beards and long hair, whilst others clip their hair short or shave the head, merely allowing a tuft to remain on the crown as a sign that they are Christians.

¹ Brackets enclose editorial additions of translator, Ravenstein, unless otherwise indicated. [Ed.]

² Afternoon (*a tarde*), according to Glenn J. Ames, *Em Nome de Deus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 70. [Ed.]

³ Kappatt, a village about 7 miles north of Calicut. [Ed.]

⁴ About 14 miles north of Calicut. [Ed.]

⁵ Da Gama. [Ed.]

⁶ The crew included a number of "convict-exiles," men who had been convicted of a crime punishable by death who were pardoned by the king to sail as adventurers and live out their lives overseas. Da Gama wanted such people in his crew to create a permanent presence overseas. [Ed.]

⁷ Likely Muslim exiles from Spain after the defeat of the last Muslim stronghold in Granada by Christians in 1492. [Ed.]

⁸ There were Christians in southern India, but the population was overwhelmingly Hindu. [Ed.]

They also wear moustaches. They pierce the ears and wear much gold in them. They go naked down to the waist, covering their lower extremities with very fine cotton stuffs. But it is only the most respectable who do this, for the others manage as best they are able.

The women of this country, as a rule, are ugly and of small stature. They wear many jewels of gold round the neck, numerous bracelets on their arms, and rings set with precious stones on their toes. All these people are well-disposed and apparently of mild temper. At first sight they seem covetous and ignorant.

[*A messenger sent to the King.*] When we arrived at Calicut the king was fifteen leagues away. The captain-major sent two men to him with a message, informing him that an ambassador had arrived from the King of Portugal with letters, and that if he desired it he would take them to where the king then was.

The king presented the bearers of this message with much fine cloth. He sent word to the captain-major bidding him welcome, saying that he was about to proceed to Calicut. As a matter of fact, he started at once with a large retinue.

[*At Anchor at Pandarani, May 27.*] A pilot accompanied our two men, with orders to take us to a place called Pandarani, below the place [Capua] where we anchored at first. At this time we were actually in front of the city of Calicut. We were told that the anchorage at the place to which we were to go was good, whilst at the place we were then it was bad, with a stony bottom, which was quite true; and, moreover, that it was customary for the ships which came to this country to anchor there for the sake of safety. We ourselves did not feel comfortable, and the captain-major had no sooner received this royal message than he ordered the sails to be set, and we departed. We did not, however, anchor as near the shore as the king's pilot desired.

When we were at anchor, a message arrived informing the captain-major that the king was already in the city. At the same time the king sent a *bale*,⁹ with other men of distinction, to Pandarani, to conduct the captain-major to where the king awaited him. This *bale* is like an *alcaide*,¹⁰ and is always attended by two hundred men armed with swords and bucklers. As it was late when this message arrived, the captain-major deferred going.

[*Gama goes to Calicut.*] On the following morning, which was Monday, May 28th, the captain-major set out to speak to the king, and took with him thirteen men, of which I was one.¹¹ On landing, the captain-major was received by the *alcaide*, with whom were many men,

⁹ Governor. [Ed.]

¹⁰ Mayor. [Ed.]

¹¹ We know the names of about half of the thirteen, but not which of them is the author. [Ed.]

armed and unarmed. The reception was friendly, as if the people were pleased to see us, though at first appearances looked threatening, for they carried naked swords in their hands. A palanquin¹² was provided for the captain-major, such as is used by men of distinction in that country, as also by some of the merchants, who pay something to the king for this privilege. The captain-major entered the palanquin, which was carried by six men by turns. Attended by all these people we took the road of Calicut, and came first to another town, called Capua. The captain-major was there deposited at the house of a man of rank, whilst we others were provided with food, consisting of rice, with much butter, and excellent boiled fish. The captain-major did not wish to eat, and as we had done so, we embarked on a river close by, which flows between the sea and the mainland, close to the coast. The two boats in which we embarked were lashed together, so that we were not separated. There were numerous other boats, all crowded with people. As to those who were on the banks I say nothing; their number was infinite, and they had all come to see us. We went up that river for about a league, and saw many large ships drawn up high and dry on its banks, for there is no port here.

When we disembarked, the captain-major once more entered his palanquin. The road was crowded with a countless multitude anxious to see us. Even the women came out of their houses with children in their arms and followed us.

[*A Christian Church.*]¹³ When we arrived [at Calicut] they took us to a large church, and this is what we saw: —

The body of the church is as large as a monastery, all built of hewn stone and covered with tiles. At the main entrance rises a pillar of bronze as high as a mast, on the top of which was perched a bird, apparently a cock.¹⁴ In addition to this, there was another pillar as high as a man, and very stout. In the center of the body of the church rose a chapel, all built of hewn stone, with a bronze door sufficiently wide for a man to pass, and stone steps leading up to it. Within this sanctuary stood a small image which they said represented Our Lady.¹⁵ Along the walls, by the main entrance, hung seven small bells. In this church the captain-major said his prayers, and we with him.¹⁶

¹² An enclosed chair carried on poles front and rear. [Ed.]

¹³ The translator, Ravenstein, who supplied this heading, added a note: "This 'church' was, of course, a pagoda or temple." [Ed.]

¹⁴ Ravenstein (1898) believes the bird to be a Hindu war-god. Ames (2009) suggests it was an image of Garuda, the bird-god who carried Vishnu, the creator-god of the Hindu trinity. [Ed.]

¹⁵ Possibly Mari, a local deity, protector from smallpox. [Ed.]

¹⁶ Another source reports that at least one of the crew did not believe it was a Christian church. He is said to have knelt next to Vasco da Gama and said: "If this is the devil, I worship the True God" (Ames, 2009, 76). [Ed.]

We did not go within the chapel, for it is the custom that only certain servants of the church, called *quafees*,¹⁷ should enter. These *quafees* wore some threads passing over the left shoulder and under the right arm, in the same manner as our deacons wear the stole. They threw holy water over us, and gave us some white earth,¹⁸ which the Christians of this country are in the habit of putting on their foreheads, breasts, around the neck, and on the forearms. They threw holy water upon the captain-major and gave him some of the earth, which he gave in charge of someone, giving them to understand that he would put it on later.¹⁹

Many other saints were painted on the walls of the church, wearing crowns. They were painted variously, with teeth protruding an inch from the mouth, and four or five arms.

Below this church there was a large masonry tank, similar to many others which we had seen along the road.

[*Progress through the Town.*] After we had left that place, and had arrived at the entrance to the city [of Calicut] we were shown another church, where we saw things like those described above. Here the crowd grew so dense that progress along the street became next to impossible, and for this reason they put the captain-major into a house, and us with him.

The king sent a brother of the *bale*, who was a lord of this country, to accompany the captain-major, and he was attended by men beating drums, blowing *anafils* and bagpipes, and firing off matchlocks. In conducting the captain-major they showed us much respect, more than is shown in Spain to a king. The number of people was countless, for in addition to those who surrounded us, and among whom there were two thousand armed men, they crowded the roofs and houses.

[*The King's Palace.*] The further we advanced in the direction of the king's palace, the more did they increase in number. And when we arrived there, men of much distinction and great lords came out to meet the captain-major, and joined those who were already in attendance upon him. It was then an hour before sunset. When we reached the palace we passed through a gate into a courtyard of great size, and before we arrived at where the king was, we passed four doors, through which we had to force our way, giving many blows to the people. When, at last, we reached the door where the king was, there came forth from it a little old man, who holds a position resembling that of a bishop, and whose advice the king acts upon in all affairs of the church. This man embraced the captain-major when he entered the door. Several men were wounded at this door, and we only got in by the use of much force.

¹⁷ Ames (2009) suggests that this term for Brahman priests was either the Arabic *quadi* (judge) or *kafir* (unbeliever). [Ed.]

¹⁸ Possibly ash from burnt cow dung. [Ed.]

¹⁹ Did da Gama's refusal to anoint himself with ash mean he questioned the legitimacy of ritual or church? [Ed.]

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[A Royal Audience, May 28.] The king²⁰ was in a small court, reclining upon a couch covered with a cloth of green velvet, above which was a good mattress, and upon this again a sheet of cotton stuff, very white and fine, more so than any linen. The cushions were after the same fashion. In his left hand the king held a very large golden cup [spittoon], having a capacity of half an almude [8 pints]. At its mouth this cup was two palmas [16 inches] wide, and apparently it was massive. Into this cup the king threw the husks of a certain herb which is chewed by the people of this country because of its soothing effects, and which they call *atambor*.²¹ On the right side of the king stood a basin of gold, so large that a man might just encircle it with his arms: this contained the herbs. There were likewise many silver jugs. The canopy above the couch was all gilt.

The captain, on entering, saluted in the manner of the country: by putting the hands together, then raising them towards Heaven, as is done by Christians when addressing God, and immediately afterwards opening them and shutting fists quickly. The king beckoned to the captain with his right hand to come nearer, but the captain did not approach him, for it is the custom of the country for no man to approach the king except only the servant who hands him the herbs, and when anyone addresses the king he holds his hand before the mouth, and remains at a distance. When the king beckoned to the captain he looked at us others, and ordered us to be seated on a stone bench near him, where he could see us. He ordered that water for our hands should be given us, as also some fruit, one kind of which resembled a melon, except that its outside was rough and the inside sweet, whilst another kind of fruit resembled a fig, and tasted very nice. There were men who prepared these fruits for them; and the king looked at them eating, and smiled; and talked to the servant who stood near him supplying him with the herbs referred to.

Then, throwing his eyes on the captain, who sat facing him, he invited him to address himself to the courtiers present, saying they were men of much distinction, that he could tell them whatever he desired to say, and they would repeat it to him (the king). The captain-major replied that he was the ambassador of the King of Portugal, and the bearer of a message which he could only deliver to him personally. The king said this was good, and immediately asked him to be conducted to a chamber. When the captain had entered, the king, too, rose and joined him, whilst we remained where we were. All this happened about sunset. An old man who was in the court took away the couch as soon as the king rose, but allowed the plate to remain. The king, when he joined

²⁰ Manivikraman Raja. [Ed.]

²¹ Betel-nut. [Ed.]

the captain, threw himself upon another couch, covered with various stuffs embroidered in gold, and asked the captain what he wanted.

And the captain told him he was the ambassador of a King of Portugal, who was Lord of many countries and the possessor of great wealth of every description, exceeding that of any king of these parts; that for a period of sixty years his ancestors had annually sent out vessels to make discoveries in the direction of India, as they knew that there were Christian kings there like themselves. This, he said, was the reason which induced them to order this country to be discovered, not because they sought for gold or silver, for of this they had such abundance that they needed not what was to be found in this country. He further stated that the captains sent out traveled for a year or two, until their provisions were exhausted, and then returned to Portugal, without having succeeded in making the desired discovery. There reigned a king now whose name was Dom Manuel, who had ordered him to build three vessels, of which he had been appointed captain-major, and who had ordered him not to return to Portugal until he should have discovered this King of the Christians, on pain of having his head cut off. That two letters had been intrusted to him to be presented in case he succeeded in discovering him, and that he would do so on the ensuing day; and, finally, he had been instructed to say by word of mouth that he [the King of Portugal] desired to be his friend and brother.

In reply to this the king said that he was welcome; that, on his part, he held him as a friend and brother, and would send ambassadors with him to Portugal. This latter had been asked as a favor, the captain pretending that he would not dare to present himself before his king and master unless he was able to present, at the same time, some men of this country.

These and many other things passed between the two in this chamber, and as it was already late in the night, the king asked the captain with whom he desired to lodge, with Christians or with Moors? And the captain replied, neither with Christians nor with Moors, and begged as a favor that he be given a lodging by himself. The king said he would order it thus, upon which the captain took leave of the king and came to where the men were, that is, to a veranda lit up by a huge candlestick. By that time four hours of the night had already gone.²² . . .

[*Presents for the King.*] On Tuesday, May 29, the captain-major got ready the following things to be sent to the king, viz., twelve pieces of *lambel*,²³ four scarlet hoods, six hats, four strings of coral, a case containing six wash-hand basins, a case of sugar, two casks of oil, and two of honey.²⁴ And as it is the custom not to send anything to the king

²² Four hours after sunset, or about 10 P.M. [Ed.]

²³ Striped cloth. [Ed.]

²⁴ The ships had been loaded by Bartolomeu Dias (1451–1500), who used such goods effectively in trading with Africans. [Ed.]

without the knowledge of the Moor, his factor, and of the *bale*, the captain informed them of his intention. They came, and when they saw the present they laughed at it, saying that it was not a thing to offer to a king, that the poorest merchant from Mecca, or any other part of India, gave more, and that if he wanted to make a present it should be in gold, as the king would not accept such things. When the captain heard this he grew sad, and said that he had brought no gold, that, moreover, he was no merchant, but an ambassador; that he gave of that which he had, which was his own [private gift] and not the king's; that if the King of Portugal ordered him to return he would intrust him with far richer presents; and that if King Camolim²⁵ would not accept these things he would send them back to the ships. Upon this they declared that they would not forward his presents, nor consent to his forwarding them himself. When they had gone there came certain Moorish merchants, and they all depreciated the present which the captain desired to be sent to the king.

When the captain saw that they were determined not to forward his present, he said, that as they would not allow him to send his present to the palace he would go to speak to the king, and would then return to the ships. They approved of this, and told him that if he would wait a short time they would return and accompany him to the palace. And the captain waited all day, but they never came back. The captain was very wroth at being among so phlegmatic and unreliable a people, and intended, at first, to go to the palace without them. On further consideration, however, he thought it best to wait until the following day. The men diverted themselves, singing and dancing to the sound of trumpets, and enjoyed themselves much.

[*A Second Audience, May 30.*] On Wednesday morning the Moors returned, and took the captain to the palace, and others with him. The palace was crowded with armed men. Our captain was kept waiting with his conductors for fully four long hours, outside a door, which was only opened when the king sent word to admit him, attended by two men only, whom he might select. The captain-major said that he desired to have Fernao Martins with him, who could interpret, and his secretary. It seemed to him, as it did to us, that this separation portended no good.

When he had entered, the king said that he had expected him on Tuesday. The captain-major said that the long road had tired him, and that for this reason he had not come to see him. The king then said that he had told him that he came from a very rich kingdom, and yet had brought him nothing; that he had also told him that he was the bearer of

²⁵ Camorim (with a soft c) is a version of the king's title, more often written as Zamorin or Samorin, meaning ruler of the coasts or king of the seas. [Ed.]

a letter, which had not yet been delivered. To this the captain rejoined that he had brought nothing, because the object of his voyage was merely to make discoveries, but that when other ships came he would then see what they brought him; as to the letter, it was true that he had brought one, and would deliver it immediately.

The king then asked what it was he had come to discover: stones or men? If he came to discover men, as he said, why had he brought nothing? Moreover, he had been told that he carried with him the golden image of a Santa Maria. The captain-major said that the Santa Maria was not of gold, and that even if she were he would not part with her, as she had guided him across the ocean, and would guide him back to his own country. The king then asked for the letter. The captain said that he begged as a favor, that as the Moors wished him ill and might misinterpret him, a Christian able to speak Arabic should be sent for. The king said this was well, and at once sent for a young man, of small stature, whose name was Quaram. The captain-major then said that he had two letters, one written in his own language and the other in that of the Moors;²⁶ that he was able to read the former, and knew that it contained nothing but what would prove acceptable; but that as to the other he was unable to read it, and it might be good, or contain something that was erroneous. As the Christian was unable to *read* Moorish, four Moors took the letter and read it between them, after which they translated it to the king, who was well satisfied with its contents.

The king then asked what kind of merchandise was to be found in his country. The captain said there was much corn,²⁷ cloth, iron, bronze, and many other things. The king asked whether he had any merchandise with him. The captain-major replied that he had a little of each sort, as samples, and that if permitted to return to the ships he would order it to be landed, and that meantime four or five men would remain at the lodgings assigned them. The king said no! He might take all his people with him, securely moor his ships, land his merchandise, and sell it to the best advantage. Having taken leave of the king the captain-major returned to his lodgings, and we with him. As it was already late no attempt was made to depart that night.

²⁶ Arabic. [Ed.]

²⁷ Corn had already been transplanted from the Americas by this time, but the author more likely meant wheat (Ames, 2009, 83). [Ed.]