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The seasonality of empire: Coping with the intermittence of the global in Portuguese Asia and beyond (1500–1650)

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Abstract

Global historians have contributed greatly to reconfiguring our understanding of the early modern world. An emphasis has broadly emerged in current scholarship on the long-distance circulation of people and goods and cross-cultural exchange of knowledge with overseas empires usually described as major vectors of global interaction. This article corrects and complicates such an interpretation by calling attention to the periodic interruption of the main lines of maritime communication that many port cities around the world experienced every year and what this meant to their inhabitants. In particular, it focuses on the seasonality of the Portuguese Empire in monsoon Asia during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries. This specific case is approached through a combination of ecological history, labour history, and the history of emotions. Its general significance is further illuminated by extensive use of comparison with examples related to other empires across the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Keywords: Monsoon Asia; port cities; long-distance communication; imperial rivalry; Indian military labour market; divination

Introduction

The Portuguese Empire in Asia relied on a delicate symbiosis with powerful natural agents such as winds, currents, and heavy rainfall. The actions undertaken by the diverse range of its inhabitants, their choices, lifestyle, and feelings, were conditioned by climatic factors associated with the passing of the seasons. Established in the early sixteenth century, the so-called *Estado da Índia* developed into a combination of small strips of lands and trading stations scattered along the thousands of kilometres of coastline between southeast Africa and south China (Figure 1). At a given time of the year, its stretched body, whose extremities were held together by oceanic connections, went through a cyclical metamorphosis. It suddenly shrunk to a constellation of isolated localities separated by stormy waters, only to expand again after a few months. This contraction and fragmentation led to a provisional interruption in the complex process of global interaction to which the Portuguese fundamentally contributed throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Iberian empires were on the rise.¹

¹The best work on the Portuguese Empire in Asia is Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History*, 2nd edn. (Chichester; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012). For a recent comparative study of the Portuguese and Spanish empires, see Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalization of Europe, 1415–1668* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

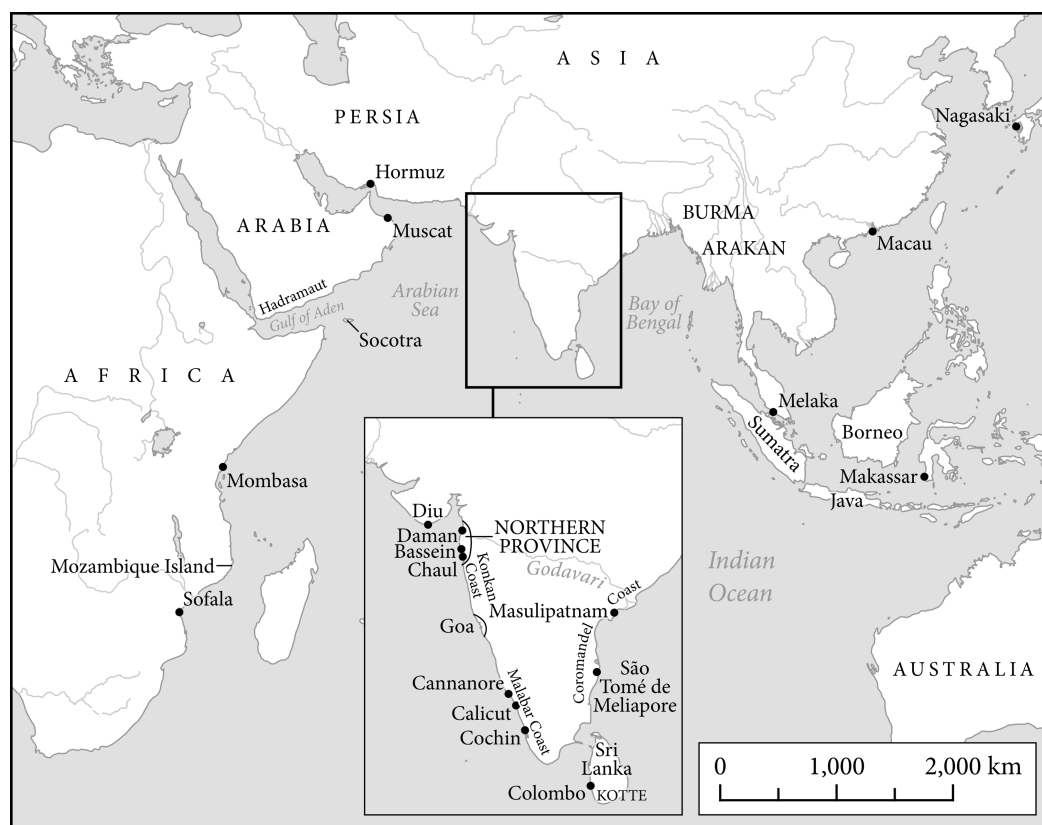


Figure 1. Main localities of the Estado da Índia, c. 1600.

This article centres ‘seasonality’, a concept which is mostly used in economic and biological sciences but which has enjoyed almost no attention among historians.² It focuses on a set of reactions to atmospheric dynamics that transcended any single empire or its constituent parts while simultaneously shaping their interdependence and amalgamation. I discuss Portuguese Asia as a particularly illustrative, though by no means unique, example of how much seasonal changes mattered to early modern overseas empires. My aim is to encourage global historians to engage more systematically with elements such as temporariness and fragility, which are often disregarded in recent narratives of the ‘early modern’ world that typically emphasise the increase of long-distance mobility and knowledge exchange as a result of imperial expansion.³ This intervention is specifically meant to recover the fractured relationship with space and time that seasonality entailed for those living under or across empires.

²A rare exception is Stephen D. Behrendt, ‘Ecology, Seasonality, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade’, in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1850*, eds. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44–85. Archaeologists have recently started exploring the perspectives that the concept of seasonality opens up. See Achim Lichtenberg and Rubina Raja, eds., *The Archaeology of Seasonality* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).

³Works that have shaped the field are Jack Goldstone, ‘The Problem of the “Early Modern” World’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 249–84; Randolph Starn, ‘The Early Modern Muddle’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 296–307; Roy Bin Wong, ‘The Search for European Differences and Domination in the Early Modern World: A View from Asia’, *American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (2002): 447–69; Jan de Vries, ‘The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World’, *Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 710–33. More recently, see Rila Mukherjee, ‘The Global Early Modern’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 25, no. 6 (2021): 534–46.

The key phenomenon considered in this study is the alternation between rainy and dry periods caused by the strong winds of the Asian monsoon (from the Arabic *mawsim*, ‘season’). They blow from the southwest between May and October, before abruptly becoming north-easterly until April.⁴ The overall impact of the monsoon defined the nature of the integration of the *Estado da Índia* into much wider geographies. This is a testimony to the global significance that climatic factors could have in the early modern world. In a book that has caused much debate, Geoffrey Parker has traced the emergence of drought, famine, war, and political rebellion all around the globe in the seventeenth century to extreme weather.⁵ Parker interprets such disparate events as a ‘global crisis’. In his view, this resulted from the exceptional fact that harsh atmospheric conditions hit a great variety of regions almost simultaneously. The present article concentrates on equally unescapable elements of nature, which nonetheless structured global interactions and their limits roughly in the same period exactly because of their regularity.

Portuguese Asia became disconnected from its maritime lines of communication during the season of the monsoon rainfall, effectively between June and September. This is an example of what I call the ‘intermittence of the global’, an expression to be understood primarily in spatial terms. Recovering the fluctuation of global connectivity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with special reference to sea travel among distant regions and continents, has nothing to do with recent attempts to criticise ‘connected histories’.⁶ Indeed, the idea of a deeply rooted connectedness on a Eurasian scale is confirmed by the immediate resumption of oceanic sailing that invariably followed its temporary abandonment. At the same time, the notion of intermittence may help scholars reappraise the elusive dichotomy between ‘the local’ and ‘the global’.⁷ Localities varied in their degrees of relations with each other across different distances and over the course of the year.⁸ Early modern port cities are a case in point. Current historiography celebrates them exclusively as junctions of global interaction.⁹ What is lost in this approach is their deep roots in distinct regional ecologies and their social patterns, which became more fully visible precisely when port cities were cut off from major routes of long-distance trade.

⁴Peter D. Clift and R. Alan Plumb, *The Asian Monsoon: Causes, History and Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Henley and Nira Wickramasinghe, eds., *Monsoon Asia: A Reader on South and Southeast Asia* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023). A general work that approaches the intersection of empire and the monsoon in Asia is Richard Hall, *Empires of the Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and Its Invaders* (London: Harper Collins, 1996). Sunil Amrith, *Unruly Waters: How Mountain Rivers and Monsoons Have Shaped South Asia's History* (London: Allen Lane, 2018) has a prevalent focus on the modern period.

⁵Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For reactions to the book see, among others, Kenneth Pomeranz, ‘Weather, War, and Welfare: Persistence and Change in Geoffrey Parker’s Global Crisis’, *Historically Speaking* 14, no. 5 (2013): 30–3; Paul Warde, ‘Global Crisis or Global Coincidence?’, *Past & Present* 228 (2015): 287–301; and Carla Gardina Pestana, ed., ‘Forum: The Afterlife of Geoffrey Parker’s “Global Crisis”’, *Journal of World History* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141–80.

⁶Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia’, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–62. Its revision has been urged by Zoltán Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires: Imperial Portugal, Sri Lankan Diplomacy, and the Making of a Habsburg Conquest in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a reply, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Across the Green Sea: Histories from the Western Indian Ocean, 1440–1640* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2024), 19–20.

⁷The literature on the topic is constantly growing. I limit myself to works focusing on the chronology under consideration here, such as Anne Gerritsen, ‘Scales of a Local: The Place of Locality in a Globalizing World’, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 213–26; Zoltán Biedermann, ‘Three Ways of Locating the Global: Microhistorical Challenges to the Study of Early Transcontinental Diplomacy’, *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019): 110–41; Maxine Berg, ed., *Global Microhistories, Journal of Early Modern History* 27, 1–2 (2023): 1–155.

⁸Theorists of locality seem to have missed this point. See, for example, Angelo Torre, *Production of Locality in the Early Modern and Modern Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019). For a sophisticated reflection see Christian G. De Vito, ‘History Without Scale: The Micro-Spatial Perspective’, *Past & Present* 242, Supplement 14 (2019): 348–72.

⁹Amélia Polónia and Cátia Antunes, eds., *Seaports in the First Global Age: Portuguese Agents, Networks and Interactions, 1500–1800* (Porto: Universidade do Porto Edições, 2016).

In their endeavour to capture the complexities of the *Estado da Índia* through models and abstract taxonomies, historians of Portuguese Asia have had little time for something as tangible as the natural world.¹⁰ Such neglect contrasts with a thriving historiography that deals with the extremely large set of ecological dynamics lying at the core of material and technological histories of empire across time and space.¹¹ Yet climate and environment profoundly marked the unfolding of major operations in Portuguese Asia during the year. There were striking analogies with the nomadic polities which ranged across vast land areas in North America or Inner Asia. Just like these 'kinetic empires', the Portuguese established 'a power regime that revolved around a set of mobile activities', including 'long-distance raiding, seasonal expansions, transnational diplomatic missions', and 'control over shifting economic nodes'.¹² Such 'mobile activities' were directly and indirectly linked to the schedule of the *armada da Índia*, the annual fleet of carracks and galleons that connected Lisbon and Goa, the city located on the island of Tiswadi in the Konkan region of western India, where from the 1530s the *Estado da Índia* had its capital.

This article is specifically concerned with the ways in which seasonality was perceived on the ground and impacted social life. In his latest book, Sumit Guha argues that the capacity for domination of the Mughal and British empires in South Asia was contingent on environmental knowledge.¹³ My discussion takes a different tack, one that prioritises the study of how historical actors coped with the strain put on them by the ecosystem in which they operated. When observed at a distance, it is reasonable to think of seasonality in terms of predictability. The experience of historical actors, nonetheless, was one largely permeated by haste and waiting, uncertainty and anxiety, especially in relation to the long months of isolation. Their feelings particularly reveal the significance of the intermittence of the global, starkly contrasting the conventional picture provided by scholarship of the Portuguese Empire as a 'world on the move'.¹⁴

What follows is an exploration of Portuguese Asia's seasonal dynamics in a comparative global perspective. It begins with a discussion of the special significance of the arrival and departure of annual fleets and how their calendar lent an intrinsic sense of time pressure to the Portuguese enterprise, which is then contrasted with the Dutch and English experience. The importance of seasonality to such unstable configurations as early modern overseas empires is specifically explored through localities such as Goa, Macau, a Portuguese entrepôt on the southern coast of China, and Manila, the capital of the Spanish Philippines. Seasonality shaped not only navigation and commerce but also imperial communication and record keeping. The analysis then moves on to the months of the monsoon rain in the Indian subcontinent. The Portuguese called this period 'winter', when sailing was interrupted and separation among localities of the *Estado da Índia* was at its most intense. At that time, the incorporation of the Portuguese into regional ecologies became particularly visible, as illustrated by the seasonal mobility of those who chose to desert and

¹⁰This is well exemplified by Anthony Disney, 'Contrasting Models of "Empire": The Estado da Índia in South Asia and East Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *The Portuguese in the Pacific*, eds. Francis A. Dutra and João Camilo dos Santos (Santa Barbara: Center for Portuguese Studies, University of California, 1995), 26–37.

¹¹The historiography has hugely expanded since Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For the modern period see Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). An overview in the longue durée is provided by James Beattie and Eugene Anderson, 'Ecology: Environments and Empires in World History, 3000 BCE–ca. 1900 CE', in *The Oxford World History of Empire*, eds. Peter Fibiger Bang, C. A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), vol. 1, 460–94.

¹²Pekka Hämäläinen, 'What's in a Concept? The Kinetic Empire of the Comanches', *History and Theory* 52, no. 1 (2013), 85. Early modern Portuguese and other Atlantic Europeans are described as 'the Mongols of the sea' in J. R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-eye View of World History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 178.

¹³Sumit Guha, *Ecologies of Empire in South Asia, 1400–1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2023). An analysis insisting on the interdependence of the Mughal Empire and the natural environment is Pratyay Nath, *Climate of Conquest: War, Environment, and Empire in Mughal North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁴The reference is to A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America, 1415–1808* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992).

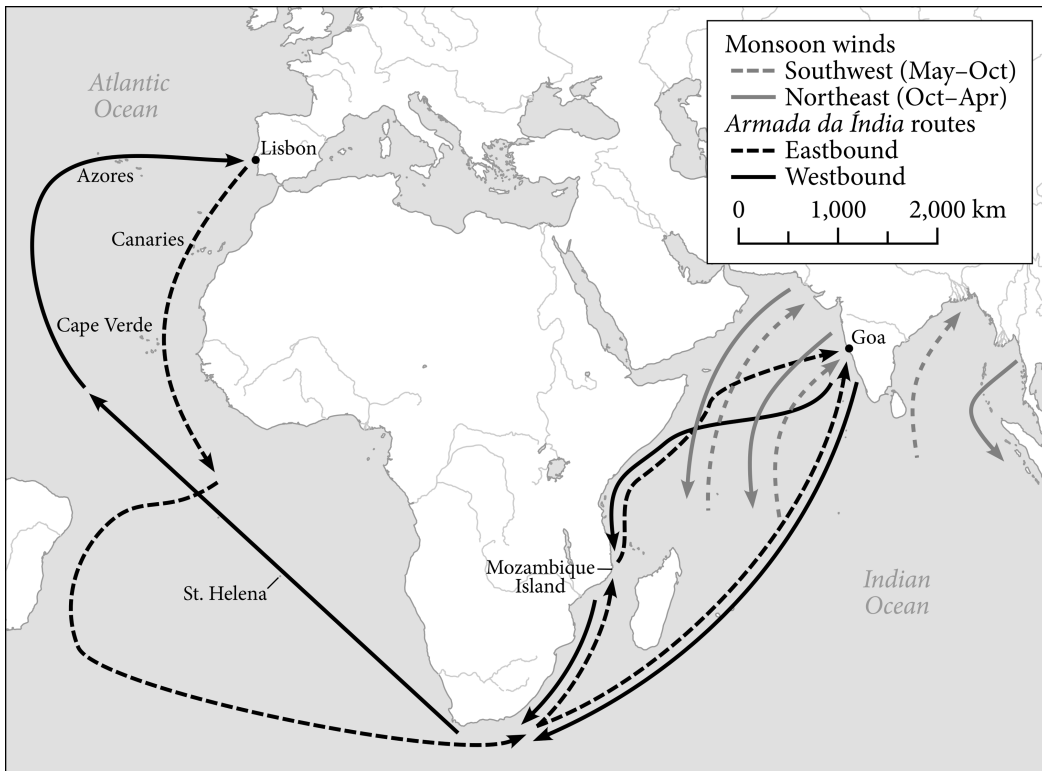


Figure 2. Monsoon winds and the annual voyage of the Portuguese fleet between Lisbon and Goa.

become mercenaries of the local rulers in the Deccan and Hindustan. The final part of this study considers those who remained in Portuguese territory, and how they coped with the anxiety provoked by the long wait for the annual fleet from Europe. The intersection of emotions and global history is further examined in relation to similar attitudes in other parts of coastal western India and along the Pacific coast of colonial Mexico, namely, in Acapulco. The article ultimately urges global historians to restore the centrality of cyclical variations of climate and human environment to the experience of space and time in early modern empires stretching across the oceans.

Time to set sail: The empire on a tight schedule

The survival of the Portuguese Empire in early modern Asia rested on regular contact with Europe through the annual voyage of the ships of the *armada da Índia*. Its tight schedule shaped the relationship of the Portuguese with time across continents (Figure 2). Carracks and galleons tended to leave Lisbon in February or March, though it became relatively common to set sail later in the spring over the course of the sixteenth century. Successful crossings of the Atlantic and Indian oceans were typically completed by late August through October, and the return to Portugal usually followed in late December or January. The problem with a deferred departure from the kingdom was the increased risk of running into contrary winds off Cape St Augustine, Brazil, which could cause early failure and force a return to Lisbon.¹⁵ This possibility created great anxiety among the Portuguese inhabitants of Goa, as emerges from a letter in which local

¹⁵On these journeys and their timing see Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move*, 30–7.

municipal councillors urged King Philip II (r. 1580–98) to order that ships depart from Portugal earlier, ‘at the beginning of March, as in the old times under the kings before you’.¹⁶

Seasonality required overseas enterprise to work like clockwork—at least in theory. The roundtrip voyage between Lisbon and Goa (*Carreira da Índia*) involved a complex geography of ports of call across the south Atlantic and the Indian Ocean world.¹⁷ Journeys tended to occur within a defined time frame, with the *armada da Índia* generally remaining in Goa only between September and January. The transaction of goods to be sent in Europe had to be completed during these few months. Such period was crucial to all those residing there. It was a limited part of the year but conditioned many of their activities, thoughts, and feelings in the other months.¹⁸ As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has shown for southern India more generally, port cities operated at the delicate intersection of three distinct temporalities that characterised overseas, coastal, and overland trade. If the first was governed by the rhythm of the monsoon, the second—which the Portuguese came partly to control through the imposition of trading licences (*cartazes*) and the organisation of escorted convoys (*cafilas*)—largely fluctuated according to when the harvest occurred in the main exporting rural areas, while the third adapted to the hierarchy and periodicity of regional and local markets.¹⁹

A whole set of movements along the west coast of India, as well as among other parts of South and East Asia in which the Portuguese were present, was expected to match the narrow time window during which the annual fleet stayed in Goa. In that context, the art of ruling entailed making decisions based on available information about many different places before ‘there was neither time nor monsoon’ to implement them.²⁰ Generally, viceroys and higher officials endeavoured to minimise the effect of the separation that would inevitably arise between distant localities of the *Estado da Índia*. Partly their aim was to prevent these localities being unprotected for too long but also to maximise profits from commerce.²¹ It is no surprise that, in such a challenging scenario, the Portuguese Crown placed special importance on the various stages of the annual journey between Goa and Nagasaki, with stopovers in Melaka, a major Southeast Asian port city then under Portuguese control, and Macau. It usually consisted of a large carrack (*nau do trato*) under the command of a captain, typically a *fidalgo*. The round trip had to be completed ‘every year without exception’, a royal decree firmly pointed out in 1610. The reason behind such a call to order was the ‘great damage’ caused by those captains who chose to ‘overwinter in the port of Macau for their own interest and private business’ and waited for ‘the following year and monsoon’. Delayed departures allowed the captains and private investors risking their own capital in the travels to speculate by purchasing goods at a much lower price during the months when they were less in demand. This stratagem, nevertheless, led to skipping a journey, so the monarchy lost profits and goods it had anticipated.²²

¹⁶Letter of the municipal council of Goa to King Philip II (1596), in Joaquim Heliodoro da Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, 6 vols. in 10 tomes (Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1857–1877), vol. 1, pt. 2, 42.

¹⁷Charles R. Boxer, ‘The Principal Ports of Call in the *Carreira da Índia*’, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 8, no. 1 (1971): 3–29.

¹⁸The importance of seasonal variations is completely overlooked in Teotónio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi: Concept, 1979), where only a cursory reference to the monsoon can be found on p. 53.

¹⁹Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 46–90. For the Portuguese intervention in coastal trade see M. N. Pearson, ‘Cafilas and Cartazes’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 30 (1968): 200–7.

²⁰The expression can be read in a verdict issued by the council of state on 13 May 1619 about the attacks suffered by the Portuguese fortress in Manar. See *Assentos do Conselho do Estado*, ed. Panduronga S. S. Pissurlencar, 5 vols. (Goa: Tipografia Rangel, 1953–1957), vol. 1, 45. This collection, in which the minutes of the meetings of the viceroy’s advisory council of state kept in the Historical Archives of Goa are published, is of invaluable importance to the study of the impact of seasonality on the governance of the *Estado da Índia*.

²¹On intra-Asian sea movements, see Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move*, 38–40. For a perspective from Goa, see also Teotónio R. de Souza, ‘Goa-based Portuguese Seaborne Trade in the Early Seventeenth Century’, *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 12, no. 4 (1975): 433–42.

²²Royal decree of 10 November 1610, in Raimundo António de Bulhão Pato and António da Silva Rego, eds., *Documentos Remettidos da Índia ou Livros das Monções*, 10 vols. (Lisbon: Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1880–1982), vol. 1,

Monsoon winds framed the relationship with time and space in Iberian Asia more generally. The experience of seasonality resulted from a delicate interdependence of ecologies, which had another crucial junction in Manila. Antonio de Morga, who served as lieutenant to the local Spanish governor between 1593–8, provided an incisive description of the ship traffic which had turned the city into a global trade hub by the late sixteenth century, at the time of the 'Iberian Union' (1580–1640) when the Portuguese and Spanish empires were under the same Habsburg monarchs. The trans-Pacific route opened by the Spaniards in 1565 hinged on the annual galleon between Manila and Acapulco but was ultimately based on a combination of segments of trans-regional commerce, the timing of which relied on the complex intersection of the East Asian and Indo-Australian monsoons (Figure 3).²³

Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, first published in Mexico City in 1609, demonstrates a full awareness of commerce's seasonality, and incidentally reveals structural similarities with what was happening in the major port cities of Portuguese Asia.²⁴ Between 'the new moon of March' and early July, Morga explained, Manila was the destination of many ships from across East and Southeast Asia. Each of these sailings was expected to occur within a given time span and contribute to the integration of global trade in the region. 'Usually', Morga detailed, the process started with the arrival of 'a large number of somas and junks . . . laden with merchandise' from China, between thirty and forty, and 'although they do not come in together in the form of a fleet or convoy, they come in squadrons, with the monsoon and settled weather'. The outbound voyage took two to three weeks, so the ships returned 'in time before the south-westerly gales set in, which is at the end of May and in the first days of June, so as not to be exposed to danger in their voyage'. Therefore, 'the purchase' of merchandise from China, Morga underscored, 'must be made within the month of May, a little more or less', so that the Chinese merchants could travel back successfully while the Spaniards would 'have it all in readiness to load it in the ships which by the end of June sail for New Spain'. However, 'those who are most careful of gain and well provided with money usually effect their bargains later at more moderate prices, and keep their goods till another year'.²⁵ Not too dissimilar to the Portuguese captains in Macau, some wealthy Spanish merchants only bought their wares after the galleon had set sail for Acapulco, when they could get the best price and make a larger profit one year later, when ships returned to Manila.

March was also the month in which a few expeditions from Nagasaki, organised by the Portuguese, visited Manila to sell goods from Japan, where they normally returned 'at the season of the south-westerly gales in the months of June and July'. Other Portuguese ships from Melaka and the Moluccan Islands, a Southeast Asian archipelago, also reached Manila every year 'with the south-west monsoon', although they then had to wait until January before leaving so as to take advantage of 'the north-east winds, which are their fixed monsoon'. The same oceanic currents were used by those 'smaller vessels' that 'come likewise from Borneo, belonging to the natives of the island', Morga noted, adding that 'they enter the Manila river, and sell what they bring inside their ships'. There were even vessels from Siam and Cambodia between April and June, but only on rare occasions. In the end, Morga concluded, the whole business was reduced to a very short period. The need for everything to go smoothly put 'great pressure' on the city, both materially and emotionally. After all, the economy of this colonial entrepôt largely depended on a complex movement of fleets and goods, which only lasted around 'three months of the year, from the time that the ships arrive with the merchandise until those that go to New Spain

396. It was publicly announced in the streets of Goa on 15 September 1611. On the journey to Japan and its dependence on the monsoon, see Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move*, 37–8.

²³The bibliography on the Manila galleon is extensive and central to the recent 'trans-Pacific turn' in the historiography of the Spanish Empire. For a general overview, see Arturo Giráldez, *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

²⁴I use the following English translation: Antonio de Morga, *The Philippine Islands, Moluccas, Siam, Cambodia, Japan, and China, at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Henry E. J. Stanley (Lisbon: Hakluyt Society, 1868).

²⁵Morga, *The Philippine Islands*, 337–40.

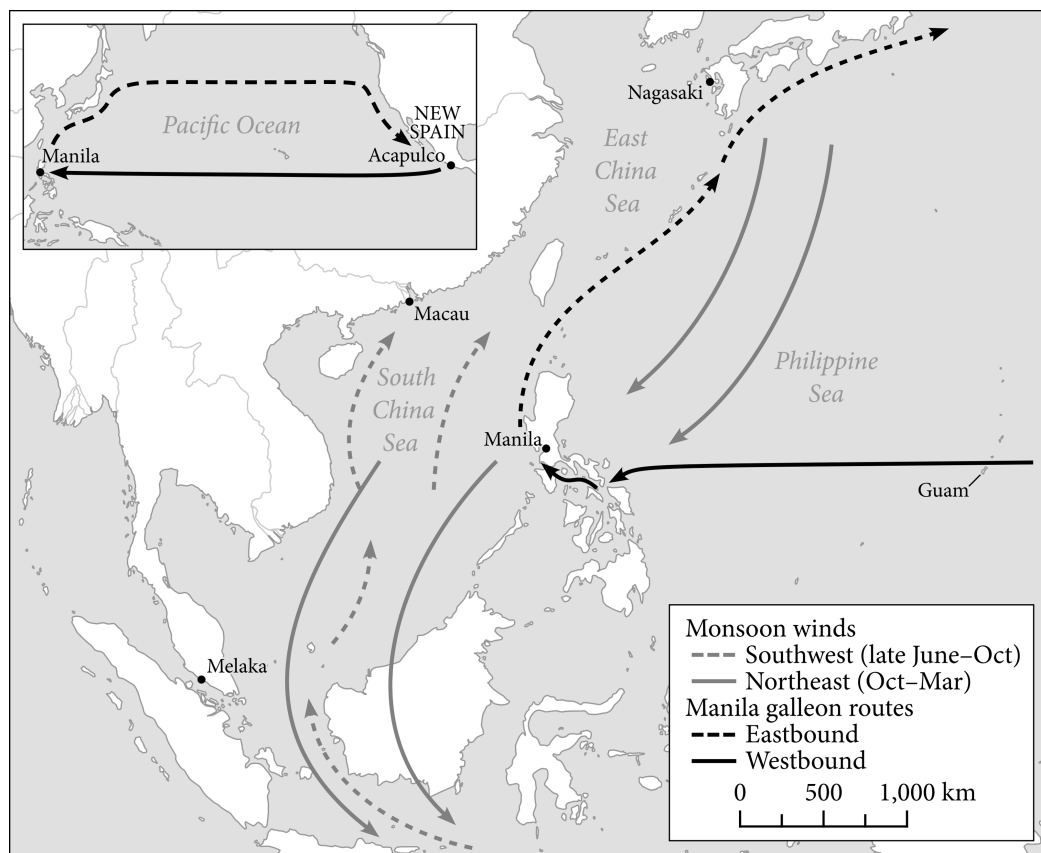


Figure 3. Monsoon winds and the annual voyage of the Spanish galleon between Manila and Acapulco.

take it away'.²⁶ Then, Manila returned to being a calm port on the margins of Southeast Asia for the following nine months or so.

Intercontinental navigation was part of a whole set of oceanic movements recurring every twelve months. The ships of the Dutch and English East India Companies initially followed the Portuguese trail when they became a regular presence in Asia, from the early seventeenth century.²⁷ However, the Dutch soon managed to travel outside traditionally preferred seasonal patterns thanks to a wider cart track that allowed ships to cross the equator in the Atlantic Ocean between June and October and by following a new southerly route across the Indian Ocean, which was not affected by the monsoon winds. It thus became standard practice for the fleets to set sail

²⁶Morga, *The Philippine Islands*, 341–4. Full support to sending Portuguese ships to Manila was expressed by the treasurer of the *Estado da Índia*, Francisco Pais. See his 'Relação que veo de Goa no anno 1612', Cod. 11410, c. 126v, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon (hereafter cited as BNP, 11410). This commerce was considered unprofitable by the late 1630s. Plans to discontinue it were in an advanced stage when the Iberian Union collapsed in 1640. See the report of the treasurer of the *Estado da Índia*, José Pinto Pereira, 7 February 1639, Cod. 210, fol. 5r, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon. On the role of Portuguese merchants in the establishment of the trans-Pacific trade see Cuauhtémoc Villamar, *Portuguese Merchants in the Manila Galleon System, 1565–1600* (London: Routledge, 2020).

²⁷For a discussion of the significance of mobility in the broader making of the sense of time among Englishmen in Asia, see Mark R. F. Williams, 'Experiencing Time in the Early English East India Company', *Historical Journal* 65, no. 5 (2022): 1175–96.

from the Netherlands at three fixed times of the year by the mid-1630s.²⁸ The return voyage from northeast Java, where the Dutch established their main basis, first in Banten then in Batavia, could theoretically be started in any season for it was always possible to reach the latitude where the southeast trade wind prevailed in the Indian Ocean, while the south equatorial current helped navigation through areas of calm in the Atlantic Ocean. Ships simply left Banten as soon as their cargo holds were full in the first two decades of the century. The end of the truce with Spain (1621) and consequent return of open hostility with the Portuguese, however, meant that returning fleets had to sail in convoy. As a result, most departures from Batavia, essentially the only port with direct maritime links with the Netherlands, occurred between late November and late January.²⁹

Intermittent records: Writing and archiving at the rhythm of the monsoon

The seasonality of the Portuguese Empire was more than a matter of navigation and trade. Long-range communication was another aspect of vital importance to the *Estado da Índia*, which depended on the tight schedule of annual fleets and the successful completion of their voyage to maintain contact with Portugal, although overland routes via Persia and the Levant remained in use.³⁰ Climatic factors also affected the exchange of letters among the coastal settlements or with the courts of the Deccan sultanates or the Mughal Empire, where Portuguese viceroys and governors often had agents and informers.³¹ The Portuguese in Asia had to learn how to cope with fragmentary information and protracted periods of interruption in their correspondence.

Seasonality was so important that it was soon weaponised by Portugal's European rivals in Asia. From the early seventeenth century, the Dutch and English actively disrupted communication with Portugal and between Portuguese settlements along the shores of the Indian Ocean and beyond. Blockades of port cities and straits tended to be seasonal, usually with the explicit purpose of preventing Portuguese ships from setting sail in time to take advantage of the monsoon winds. Scholars have mostly considered the impact of blockades on commerce.³² Yet the enforced isolation of major Portuguese settlements on the west coast of India, such as Goa and Cochin, as well as of Melaka and Macau, also had dramatic repercussions on the transmission of information across empire.

A deep-seated effect of the structural adaptation of communication to empire's seasonality can be detected at the level of the Portuguese colonial archive itself.³³ From royal officials to clergymen and ordinary settlers, all commonly drafted hurried missives to remote correspondents in the very days and hours before ships departed. As such, the creation and conservation of these records take on a deeper significance. Apologies for letters hastily penned at the very last minute abound, in official documents as much as in private epistles sent from Portugal or other parts of Portuguese

²⁸J. R. Bruijn, F. S. Gaastra, and Ivo Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979–1987), vol. 1, 62–72.

²⁹Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, vol. 1, 77–9.

³⁰Yun-Casalilla has insightful remarks on the circulation of news in his book *Iberian World Empires*, 327–9. On land-based routes, see Anthony Disney, 'The Development during the Reign of João III of Communication between the *Estado da Índia* and Portugal via the Middle East', in *D. João III e o Império*, eds. Roberto Carneiro and Arthur Teodoro de Matos (Lisbon: CHAM, 2004), 593–600.

³¹On this level of communication, see now Jorge Flores, *Empire of Contingency: How Portugal Entered the Indo-Persian World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024).

³²An approach to blockades only and exclusively in commercial terms is evident in Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 121–96, and James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580–1640* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 202–40.

³³Scholarship on this subject is extremely limited. For the metropolitan archives, see Ângela Barreto Xavier, 'The Casa da Índia and the Emergence of a Science of Administration in the Portuguese Empire', *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, no. 5 (2018): 327–47. A thought-provoking article specifically dealing with archival practices in Portuguese Asia is Jorge Flores, 'Marathi Voices, Portuguese Words, Brahman's Pen (and Thoughts): On Fragments of Peninsula India in a Colonial Archive', *Quaderni Storici* 167 (2021): 341–77.

Asia. Their frequency and ubiquity demonstrate how much pressure the uncertainty of temporality put on historical actors when they wrote the materials on which much historiography of the *Estado da Índia* is based.

Place especially mattered to the methods of record keeping. The impact of seasonality was more palpable in overseas repositories than in metropolitan ones. Local institutions made explicit reference to cyclical repetition in addition to the linear sense of chronology that was typical of archival classification in Europe.³⁴ The centralised archives (*Torre do Tombo*) of Goa, which were established in 1595 under the initial direction of the Portuguese chronicler, Diogo do Couto, offer a clear example of this.³⁵ The 467 volumes containing the official correspondence received from Lisbon, together with copies of the replies and other reports sent back to Portugal, represent the largest collection in the Goa archives: the *Livros das Monções* (*Monsoon Books*). The name of the collection, which was retained until 1866, when monsoon winds had long ceased to frame the schedule of intercontinental journeys, encapsulates the extent to which the seasonality of empire permeated the organisation of archived materials in the *Estado da Índia*.³⁶

The question of records and archives points to a problem of greater relevance. Historians of early modern global empires have not reflected critically on the fact that many of the primary sources they use were produced at a specific time of the year, when ships were being prepared to sail. The details which they contain may give a misleading impression. In the case of a place such as Goa, not only did the circumstances under which such correspondence was written inevitably create an overall picture emphasising action over inaction, but knowledge of what had happened in the meantime had a distorting effect, consciously or unconsciously, on how events from previous months were recorded.

The governance of Portuguese Asia often relied on balancing the timeliness and content of letters to circulate around the *Estado da Índia*, to Portugal, and well beyond. The travails of Viceroy Miguel de Noronha, Count of Linhares (r. 1629–35), reveal the kind of effort this crucial process entailed. As his diary shows, in late September 1634, as travel across the Indian Ocean resumed after the monsoon rain, Linhares hastened to complete and send ‘many letters’ to such disparate and distant localities as Aleppo, Genoa, and Manila, alongside the main Portuguese settlements in Asia.³⁷ Likewise, he spent a great amount of time, between late 1634 and early 1635, frantically drafting missives and reports to be shipped to Lisbon when the *armada* eventually set sail. As the dates of departure approached, Linhares regularly visited the berth at which the fleet was docked, hurried those who prepared it for the journey, and did everything he could to ensure that ships left in time to be carried by the wind blowing from the northeast.³⁸ The Portuguese viceroy running back and forth between his palace in the city centre and the docks while rushing

³⁴For an inspiring if quite different reflection on linear and cyclical temporalities in relation to race and the archive see Chapter 1 (‘A Matter of Time: Archival Temporalities’) of Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (London: Routledge, 2021), 26–47.

³⁵On the origin and evolution of these archives, see the introduction in Panduronga S. S. Pissurlencar, ed., *Roteiro dos Arquivos da Índia Portuguesa* (Goa-Bastorá: Tipografia Rangel, 1955). An inventory of the official records held by the viceroy’s secretary in 1592 is published in Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 3, xiv–xvi.

³⁶A partial description of the books in the Historical Archives of Goa is provided by Charles R. Boxer, ‘A Glimpse of the Goa Archives’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 14, no. 2 (1952): 299–324, esp. 301–10. The National Archives of the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon store an additional 62 volumes relating to the seventeenth century, which were sent from Goa in 1777. On this particular series, see A. C. Teixeira de Aragão, *Descrição geral e historica das moedas cunhadas em nome dos reis, regents e governadores de Portugal*, 3 vols. (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1874–1880), vol. 3, 78–90. On the exact relationship between the two collections see the conjectures made in Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 3, ix–x. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents from both series of the *Livros das Monções* are partly published in Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 3, and Pato and Rego, eds., *Documentos Remettidos da Índia*.

³⁷*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares, vice-rei da Índia*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1937–1943), vol. 2, 179 and 183.

³⁸*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, vol. 2, 225–57. He had actually started preparing some drafts since early July, considering that ‘it is better to do things much in advance so to avoid being overwhelmed since I have to do everything personally’ (142).

to complete one letter after another, is a perfect embodiment of the tight schedule imposed by the intermittence of the global.

Overwintering: The empire on retreat

Eight or nine months passed, on average, between the departure of an *armada* from Goa and the arrival of the following one from Portugal. The final part of this timespan usually corresponded, on the western shores of India, to the torrential rainfall associated with the southwest monsoon. This weather phenomenon starts in June, albeit with notable variations depending on the latitude. When the strong, humid winds of the summer monsoon reach the high temperature of the coast, storm clouds form, the sky becomes dark, and copious rainwater drenches lands and fills rivers. Europeans did not fail to notice the synchrony between this 'winter' and 'our summer', as observed by a Spanish diplomat in early seventeenth-century Asia.³⁹ This period lasted about three months, although the wettest used to be the first two, during which the Portuguese Empire seemed to stall and shrink. Navigations stopped, and ships sought shelter in ports and protected coves.⁴⁰ Those who did not manage to navigate to a safe port in good time found themselves in a grim situation, since they had to 'wait and lie at the mercy of the weather and of their enemies'.⁴¹

'Overwintering' was an important component of Portuguese administrative and social life in early modern Asia. Offices and institutions closed down. The 'vacation' of the High Court (*Relação*) of Goa lasted for two months. Its final days of activity were hectic, as many 'foreign litigants and petitioners' were still waiting for verdicts in town. The judges urgently had to settle their cases and allow them to leave in good time because they could not afford the high cost of 'overwintering' in town.⁴² Different inhabitants' experience of the wet season in Tiswadi varied. The lowlands on the outskirts of the city of Goa flooded and became very fertile, especially for the cultivation of rice. This meant hard work and adaptation to the environment for Konkani peasants. Their condition contrasted with the idyllic situation of wealthy *casados*, as the elite Portuguese settlers were known, many of whom took 'recreation' with their families in the 'beautiful villas and gardens' they had along beaches.⁴³ The rest of the Portuguese who remained in the city fell more easily prey to 'heavie and melancholike' feelings. There was 'mud and dirt' everywhere; torrential rain transformed the streets into 'streams' and made them difficult to cross. All these people could do was 'sitte in their shirtes, with a paire of linen breeches, and goe and passe the time away with their neighbours, in playing and such exercises'.⁴⁴ Diogo do Couto creatively appropriated this atmosphere in his chronicle of the Portuguese Empire in Asia. He inserted thematic blocks detailing the history of Asian peoples at precisely the moment of 'winter', as a 'pastime' for readers. As he explained, it seemed appropriate 'to tell the things of the others (*cousas alheias*) in the winter period, when ours are at a standstill'.⁴⁵

³⁹García de Silva y Figueroa, *The Commentaries . . . on his Embassy to Shah 'Abbas I of Persia on Behalf of Philip III, King of Spain*, eds. George Brian Souza and Jeffrey Scott Turley (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 164.

⁴⁰A contemporary discussion of the seasonality of the Portuguese empire in early modern Asia can be found in a chapter about 'the times of the yeare in India' by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *The Voyage . . . to the East Indies*, eds. Arthur Coke Burnell and P. A. Tiele, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), vol. 1, 232–5.

⁴¹François Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage . . . to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. A. Gray and H. C. P. Bell (London: Hakluyt Society, 1888), vol. 2, 29.

⁴²Resolutions of the High Court of Goa, in Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 5, 1267–71, where the starting dates of the holiday are accurately documented from 1590; *Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, vol. 2, 130. See also Cunha, ed., *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, vol. 1, pt. 2, 90–1.

⁴³Silva y Figueroa, *The Commentaries*, 171 and 175.

⁴⁴Linschoten, *The Voyage*, vol. 1, 233. The conditions of squalor in which Goa found itself during 'winter' are described in Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 35 and 63–4.

⁴⁵Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia: Decada duodecima* (Lisbon: Regia Officina Typographica, 1788), 375 and 24, respectively. On this attitude, see Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, 'Da construção historiográfica de Couto: Os trabalhos forçados do editor', in *Diogo*

Of course, not everyone hibernated in the 'winter' season. Viceroy used these months to review regulations and appointments, while ships were repaired and fleets were prepared to sail again, especially those intended to patrol the northern and southern shores of western India and other routes and regions of South Asia in which the Portuguese had greater interest.⁴⁶ This was also a time of year when plays, processions, and festivities, especially religious ones, were very frequent, despite occasional disruption caused by heavy rain.⁴⁷ The winter of empire had a sinister side too. Sources convey a sense of disquiet, in which entrenched stereotypes and ancestral fears coalesced. It was suggested that crimes of sodomy were especially investigated during that period.⁴⁸ 'Foule and wonderful' murders were also said to occur.⁴⁹ Worry about house robberies 'over winter nights, when it is dark and stormy' was widespread and usually associated with strangers from 'the land of the Moors'.⁵⁰ Around 1610, rumour had it that somewhere on the coast of Gujarat, near the Portuguese town of Diu, in a place recorded as 'Castellet', 'natives of the land created a criminal hideout, where the ships of the thieves from Malabar overwintered, and this caused damage to the caravans'. Such was the concern that the Crown even suggested collaborating with the Mughals, in whose territory the hideout was, to solve what was perceived as a common problem crossing imperial boundaries.⁵¹

The temporary interruption of maritime activities during the 'winter' brings out the intimate relationship of Portuguese coastal settlements with the hinterland. This is a type of relationship that the current scholarship of global port cities tends to obscure, as Anne Gerritsen has recently remarked for the case of Canton (Guangzhou).⁵² Portuguese social dynamics intersected with a vast, politically fragmented region and its composite and fluid human landscape, which had long been used to live in symbiosis with the periodic alternation of the rainy and dry seasons.⁵³ The Portuguese on the west coast of India were immersed in a complex human environment that largely shaped group and individual choices and trajectories on a much broader scale.

A focus on illicit activities is especially useful if one seeks deeper insight into wider social and economic dynamics, as well as their seasonal patterns, in which the Portuguese took part. According to a Dutch observer, highway robbery in Gujarat ceased soon after the monsoon rain began in August 1636 because most bandits were actually peasants who engaged again in farming during the wet season.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, in 1635, the High Court of Goa had discussed the case of a Gujarati recruited by the Dutch East India Company and sent as a spy to the Portuguese capital. He was said to have entered the city 'in the guise of a pearl merchant' at the end of August after travelling 'in the middle of the winter by land, passing through the cities of the Northern Province

do Couto: *História e intervenção política de um escritor polémico*, eds. Rui Manuel Loureiro and Maria Augusta Lima Cruz (Vila Nova de Famalicão: Humus, 2019), 103.

⁴⁶On the review of regulations and appointments, see the instructions for the following 'winter' sent from Portugal to Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo, viceroy of Goa, 4 January 1614, in *Documentos remetidos da Índia*, vol. 2, 470. A few examples in Couto, *Da Ásia: Década duodecima*, 135 and *Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, 135–60. A description of the main *armadas* used for coastal surveillance in the Indian Ocean is offered by Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 116–7.

⁴⁷*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, vol. 2, 145.

⁴⁸Letter of King Philip III to Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo, viceroy of India, 5 March 1612, in Pato and Rego, eds., *Documentos remetidos da Índia*, vol. 2, 202.

⁴⁹Linschoten, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 204–15.

⁵⁰Decree of Dom Miguel de Noronha, Count of Linhares and viceroy of India, 12 March 1632, in José Ignacio de Abranches García, ed., *Arquivo da Relação de Goa, contendo varios documentos dos seculos XVII, XVIII, e XIX*, 2 vols. (Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1872), vol. 1, 430.

⁵¹Letter of King Philip III to Rui Lourenço de Távora, 17 February 1610, in Pato and Rego, eds., *Documentos remetidos da Índia*, vol. 2, 334.

⁵²Anne Gerritsen, 'Reading Late-Imperial Chinese Merchant Handbooks in Global and Micro-History', *Journal of Early Modern History* 27, no. 1–2 (2023): 132–55.

⁵³Sebastian R. Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁴D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 16.

(*Província do Norte*) and staying in each of them for a while'.⁵⁵ Taken together, these two otherwise unrelated episodes may help us better contextualise aspects of the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean world traditionally studied in isolation. In particular, I refer to those individuals, often of mixed Portuguese descent, who fled the *Estado da Índia* to serve as mercenaries in the interior, where they usually renounced Christianity and converted to Islam, thus becoming known as 'renegades' to the Europeans in India.⁵⁶ Many of these renegades followed paths that were very similar to that of the spy from Gujarat precisely in the same period of the year. They moved back and forth across the porous borders of the Portuguese Empire on the shoreline, often using a locality in the Northern Province from which they deserted to one of the sultanates of the Deccan, which was then in a permanent state of war. The timing chosen by these runaways was often dependent on the demand created by the movements of Indian soldiers who—just like the highwaymen in Gujarat—returned home to cultivate the fields when the period of the rainfall drew near. The seasonal dearth of combatants was one of the main factors that shaped the trajectories of Portuguese renegades. A focus on this phenomenon may help give a better understanding of the close interaction that Portuguese settlements on the west coast of India maintained with the hinterland during the 'winter'.

Seasons of war: Portuguese mercenaries and the Indian military labour market

The possibility of serving as mercenaries proved particularly attractive to *soldados* (soldiers), a category loosely applied to all adult unmarried Portuguese men, except for clergy.⁵⁷ While not necessarily indifferent to the Portuguese imperial mission, as stigmatised in the moralising literature about the decline of the *Estado da Índia* from the late sixteenth century, renegades certainly left for material reasons.⁵⁸ Their choice generally tells a story of personal indigence and the weakness of empire, which was also characteristic of other Iberian colonial contexts such as the Philippines.⁵⁹ The miserable conditions that hundreds of soldiers experienced during the 'winter' in Portuguese Asia, when they were unemployed and spent months begging for a bowl of rice, could become a strong incentive to leave for a sultanate in the Deccan—or even the Mughal Empire, for that matter.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, poverty alone did not fuel a substantial flow of runaways.

The departure of those Portuguese and other Europeans who chose to serve as mercenaries related, at least in part, to the effect of the monsoon on military operations in India.⁶¹ The Portuguese learned this lesson personally from the outset of their presence in the region. The very

⁵⁵The spy was almost immediately discovered and then killed by an enslaved person by secret order of the Portuguese viceroy. See the final ruling made on 13 September 1635, in García, ed., *Arquivo da Relação de Goa*, vol. 1, 461–2. The episode is also discussed in Flores, *Empire of Contingency*, 66.

⁵⁶Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, 'Exiles and Renegades in Early Sixteenth Century Portuguese Asia', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 23, no. 3 (1986): 249–62; Dejanirah Couto, 'Some Observations on Portuguese Renegades in Asia in the Sixteenth Century', in *Vasco da Gama and the Linking of Europe and Asia*, eds. Anthony Disney and Emily Booth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178–201.

⁵⁷On the extensive use of the term *soldado* in Portuguese India, see Souza, *Medieval Goa*, 121–122.

⁵⁸Absent soldiers are targeted in various texts from the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries, such as Diogo do Couto, *Dialog of a Veteran Soldier: Discussing the Frauds and Realities of Portuguese India*, trans. Timothy J. Coates (Dartmouth, MA: Tagus Press, 2016); *Primor e honra da vida soldadesca no Estado da Índia: Livro excelente, antigamente composto nas mesmas partes da Índia Oriental sem nome de autor*, ed. António Freire (Lisbon: Jorge Rodrigues, 1630); Francisco Rodrigues Silveira, *Reformação da milícia e governo do Estado da Índia oriental*, ed. Benjamin Nicolaas Teensma (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1996). An explicit criticism of the Portuguese soldiers who deserted to Muslim armies can be found in *Primor e honra*, fols. 5v–11v.

⁵⁹Stephanie Mawson, 'Convicts or *Conquistadores*? Spanish Soldiers in the Seventeenth-Century Pacific', *Past & Present* 232, no. 1 (2016): 87–125.

⁶⁰Remedies against poverty over the 'winter' are discussed in *Primor e honra*, fols. 129r–130v.

⁶¹Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire, 1500–1700* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 8–15.

conquest of Goa, for example, demonstrated how painful a siege from land could be for coastal settlements during the ‘winter’. The Portuguese seized the city through an attack from the sea in February 1510, but this first attempt was neutralised by the troops of Adil Shah of Bijapur which marched against Goa in May in correspondence with the seasonal change of the monsoon winds. The Portuguese found themselves trapped, with heavy storms preventing their ships from going out to sea for three months. They finally managed to leave only to return and take full control over the city in November, but the harsh experience they had gone through taught them that war in India was largely a matter of seasons.⁶² This awareness soon encouraged several of those who served the Portuguese army to seize the opportunity offered by the regional military labour market and search for a better wage in the interior regions.

Portuguese artillerymen were always in high demand, but the majority of renegades only contributed to filling the gaps in the armies of Indian rulers. Soldiers returning home to work as peasants during the rainy months abounded in the northern and central areas of the subcontinent. These men, who were familiar with the use of weapons, represented a vital reserve for local wars.⁶³ The importance of their experience to Indian rural society was captured by the *barahmasa* (literally, ‘the twelve months’), a rather ubiquitous poetic genre of folk origin expressing emotions associated with the different parts of the year, which are rendered through continuous reference to natural and climatic elements. A central theme in this vernacular literature is that of the *virahini*, the woman abandoned by her lover or husband in the context of the seasonal migration that was typical of peasants. It is revealing that the vast majority of *barahmasa* poems from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were precisely *viraha barahmasas*, which focused on separation and alienation, and whose absent hero was represented as a merchant (*banijara*) or a mercenary soldier (*sevaka*) in the service of a distant lord.⁶⁴

The mobility of Portuguese renegades can be partly reappraised against the backdrop of the social world described in *barahmasa* poems. While the latter celebrated the rainy season as the time of year in which lovers reunited and sexual activity was encouraged, this was the period in which many Portuguese soldiers on the west coast of India typically absented themselves. Some of them crossed the borders to act as mercenaries in the Deccan’s ongoing struggles, which grew in intensity at the turn of the seventeenth century, when the expanding Mughal Empire increased military pressure on the region. These Portuguese carefully monitored the situation during the ‘winter’. They knew that their service could be needed at any moment, depending on how opposing armies planned the upcoming rainy season. In early July 1630, for example, soldiers from the Sultanate of Ahmadnagar were preparing to stand the monsoon storms on the Sahyadri mountain chain separating the coast from the hinterland. Conversely, the Mughals withdrew and entrusted all military operations to the troops of the Sultanate of Bijapur. Eventually, ‘not a single drop of water fell from the sky’ in the western Deccan and the war continued as before.⁶⁵ Mercenaries coming from Portuguese territory found themselves with unexpected opportunities to fight.

Diogo Saraiva, then in Chaul, was arguably aware of the demand for Portuguese mercenaries created by persistent bad weather in early September 1624, when he wrote to ‘Nusrat Khan’, as the Portuguese *mestiço*, Gaspar Gomes de Faria, was known in Ahmadnagar. Nusrat Khan had risen through the military and administrative ranks of the sultanate. Saraiva sought his help to join the

⁶²The seasonal factor is given special emphasis in the account of the temporary loss of Goa by the illegitimate son of Afonso de Albuquerque, Brás de Albuquerque, *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, ed. and trans. Walter de Gray Birch, 4 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1875–1884), vol. 2, 132–203. The original edition in Portuguese was published in 1557.

⁶³Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, 16–17.

⁶⁴Francesca Orsini, ‘Barahmasas in Hindu and Urdu’, in *Before the Divide: Hindu and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010), 142–77.

⁶⁵Jorge Flores, *Unwanted Neighbours: The Mughals, the Portuguese, and Their Frontier Zones* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 163.

Habashi regent, Malik 'Ambar, whom he noted was 'in the field', not far from the fort of Bhatvadi. There, he and his army would soon inflict a major defeat upon a coalition of Mughal and Bjiapur troops, partly with the aid of heavy rain. The temporary shortage of Indian soldiers was a unique chance to achieve the 'status and reputation' that Saraiva sought.⁶⁶

No doubt a number of Portuguese relocated to the interior regions of the subcontinent and became mercenaries independently from the monsoon rain. The option, however, was especially tempting for soldiers during the 'winter'. It was not rare that their absences extended longer than anticipated, whether out of choice or because runaways were not in full control of their own situation. In fact, many of those who left between June and early September to escape 'the extreme necessities of poverty' and serve under Indian rulers and warlords did not return to Goa when they were expected to embark on the various fleets resuming their patrolling activity.⁶⁷ This prospect deeply concerned Portuguese authorities, who were grappling with an endemic lack of forces for the *armadas*. In the early seventeenth century, Dom Diogo Furtado de Mendonça, nephew of Governor Dom André Furtado de Mendonça (r. 1609), was one of the four 'great lords' who made food available to soldiers in Goa over 'winter' as a way of keeping them in town.⁶⁸ In 1634, Linhares himself, in his capacity as viceroy, raised funding to provide a subsidy (*quartel*) and other financial help, as well as free food, to avoid the disappearance of soldiers. Only a few, however, made use of these forms of relief.⁶⁹ The available earnings of the seasonal Indian military labour market were much more attractive.

Armada anxiety: The long wait on land

The end of the monsoon rain was widely welcomed as a particularly favourable period of the year in early modern India. As seen in the *Bāburnāma*, the memoirs of the Mughal emperor Bābur (r. 1526–30), 'the weather is unusually good when the rain ceases, so good in fact that it could not be more temperate or pleasing'.⁷⁰ In Goa, the return to dry conditions usually coincided with the festivities for the first harvested rice on St Bartholomew's Day (24 August), when a statue of an elephant was filled with rice straw and exhibited in public.⁷¹ This celebratory atmosphere added to trepidation for the arrival of the *armada da Índia* from Portugal and the return of the empire to full operation. It was a special moment when the fleet finally appeared off the coast, thus materialising Goa's reintegration in the process of global interaction. All the city's bells started tolling.⁷² A large and diverse crowd of people gathered in the esplanade of *Cais de Santa Catarina*, the large dock on the slimy bank of the Mandovi River (see Figure 4). Portuguese and Konkani inhabitants could be seen side by side with enslaved people of African and Asian descent, as well as Indian porters, who carried heavy loads on their shoulders while chanting 'their songs, which consist of some cock-and-bull stories strung together in question and answer'.⁷³

The extraordinary importance of 'all the fleets and convoys that came from Portugal to India, with all their carracks and caravels, and the names of their captains' was immortalised on canvas,

⁶⁶Letter quoted and discussed in Giuseppe Marcocci, 'Portuguese Mercenary Networks in Seventeenth-Century India: An Experiment in Global Microhistory and Its Archive', *Journal of Early Modern History* 27, no. 1 (2023): 75–6. For a reconstruction of the complex dynamics of the battle of Bhatvadi, see B. G. Tamaskar, *The Life and Works of Malik Ambar* (Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-i, 1978), 133–6; Pushkar Sohoni, 'Flushing Out the Enemy: Revisiting the Battle of Bhatavadi', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 76 (2016): 15–22.

⁶⁷BNP, Cod. 11410, fol. 132v.

⁶⁸Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 122 and 268–9.

⁶⁹*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, vol. 1, 102 and vol. 2, 133–4.

⁷⁰As quoted in *Monsoon Feelings: A History of Emotions in the Rain*, eds. Imke Rajamani, Margrit Pernau, and Katherine Butler Schofield (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2018), 62.

⁷¹Pietro della Valle, *The Travels . . . in India*, ed. Edward Gray, trans. G. Havers, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1892), vol. 2, 437.

⁷²Della Valle, *The Travels*, vol. 2, 437–8.

⁷³Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 44–5.

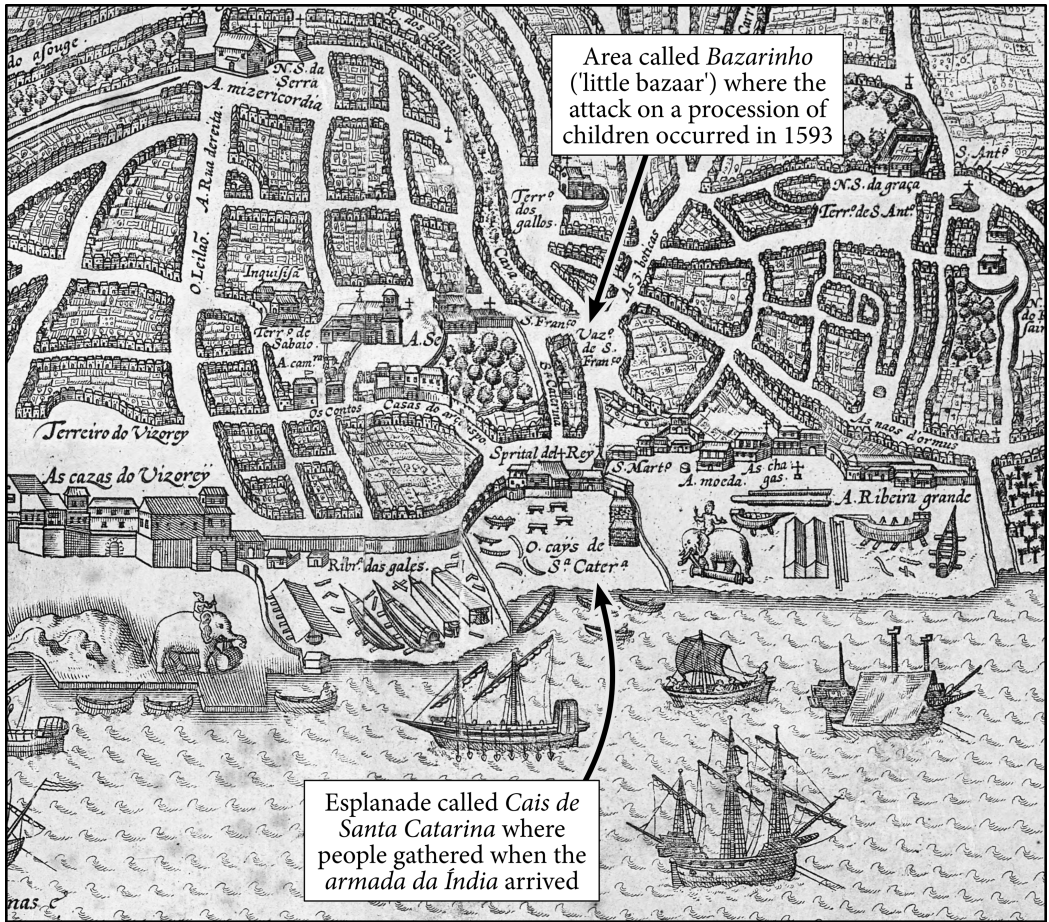


Figure 4. Goa city centre at the end of the sixteenth century. Based on Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *A ilha e cidade de Goa metropolitana da India e partes orientais* (1595). From Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668295> (accessed 7 December 2023).

with such paintings on prominent display in the Viceroy's Palace in Goa.⁷⁴ The idea of creating a sort of visual archive of these risky journeys dated back to 1550.⁷⁵ By the turn of the seventeenth century, the room with paintings of the *armadas* was a place of memory more than glorification. As poignantly testified by a foreign visitor, 'even the ships that were wrecked are portrayed there. It is a fearful sight to see so many lost vessels.'⁷⁶

Those left waiting ashore for time to pass, and for fleets from afar to arrive, had to cope with profound anxiety. At a time when long-distance connections were ultimately a matter of successful navigation, this was a common experience around the globe. Acapulco's position at the eastern end of the trans-Pacific route of the annual Spanish galleon to and from Manila (see Figure 3) turned it into the most important town on the west coast of colonial Mexico. In reality, however, it was just like many other localities in the early modern world in which the impact of the

⁷⁴Frei João dos Santos, *Ethiopia Oriental e varia historia de cousas notaveis do Oriente*, 2 vols. (Evora: Manuel de Lira, 1609), vol. 2, 88. On these paintings, see the old but still useful work by Frazão de Vasconcelos, *As pinturas das armadas da Índia e outras representações artísticas de navios portugueses do século XVI: Subsídios históricos e bibliográficos* (Lisbon: Sociedade Tipográfica, 1941).

⁷⁵Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, ed. Manuel Lopes de Almeida, 4 vols. (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1975), vol. 4, 716.

⁷⁶Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage*, vol. 2, 50 (slightly modified translation).

intermittence of the global was profoundly, and often painfully, felt. In the long period from April to December, when the galleon was away—a time frame that in bad years could extend until February or even March—Acapulco became a ‘poor village of fishermen’.⁷⁷ This situation only intensified worry over the fate of ships carrying valuable goods from Manila among the town’s Spanish residents, whose economic life largely depended on that long and especially perilous journey. While the return of the galleon was one of those pieces of news periodically welcomed with excitement in Mexico City, the exact location and arrival date of the ships was a subject of great apprehension and constant conversation in Acapulco. As Diego Javier Luis has shown, in the 1610–20s, in a context of rapid demographic growth of the Afro-descendant community, many Spaniards, including a Dominican missionary concerned about his colleagues returning from Southeast Asia, attempted to ease tensions caused by the uncertainties of trans-Pacific trade by turning to the predictions and rituals of Afro-Mexican free women. The latter operated at the intersection of west central African divinatory customs and indigenous pharmacology. A therapeutic effect was attributed to their clairvoyance, contributing to their social position in Acapulco. Nonetheless, this did not escape the attention of the Inquisition of Mexico City, whose records kept track of this phenomenon.⁷⁸

The spiritual practice documented for Acapulco has been discussed as an example of the active role played by the African and Afro-descendant communities of colonial Mexico in the process of global interaction. A similar dynamic can be detected much earlier on the west coast of India with reference to the journeys of the *armada da Índia*. The available records present us with uncertainties that went beyond the economic sphere. The choice to consult local diviners, usually men, comes as no surprise in a context where Portuguese penetration had not destabilised a deeply rooted tradition of fortune telling. Mentions of the search for spiritual support in relation to the arrival of Portugal’s fleets recur in private correspondence and travel accounts. Commenting on the beliefs and ceremonies of the Konkan region in a letter sent to a friend in Florence in 1585, the merchant Filippo Sassetti referred to the presence of local fortune-tellers, ‘particularly on the mainland’. He observed that ‘near Goa there is one to whom the Gentiles of Goa’—that is, its Hindu inhabitants—‘turn to know when the ships from Portugal will arrive, and how many, and what goods will be sought after; not only the Gentiles listen to him’, he concluded with a touch of irony, ‘but also many of our own who are over the moon when they hear his lies about the future’.⁷⁹ Despite his scepticism toward a social practice that, unlike in Acapulco, seems to have appealed to Konkani people and European settlers alike, Sassetti had nevertheless experienced emotions not so different to those who sought soothsayers. A year or so earlier, a little after his arrival in India, he had informed his sister Maria in Florence that he was in Cochin, where the Portuguese had their main settlement on the coast of Kerala. He explained to her that the annual fleet returning to Portugal was undertaking a stop-over there. After its departure, Sassetti continued, he planned to move to Goa and stay there ‘until September or October, waiting for the other ships that should arrive’. Only then would he finally receive letters from Maria. She was nevertheless to send her own missive before seeing the letter that he was drafting. Such a significant temporal gap in their epistolary exchange only intensified the trepidation about other news to come. Sassetti did not conceal it: ‘May God grant that they are such as I desire them to be’.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, ‘A Voyage Round the World’, in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 4 vols. (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1704), vol. 4, 502.

⁷⁸Diego Javier Luis, ‘Galleon Anxiety: How Afro-Mexican Women Shaped Colonial Spirituality in Acapulco’, *The Americas* 78, no. 3 (2021): 389–413.

⁷⁹Sassetti to Pier Vettori, 27 January 1585, in Corey Tazzara, *Filippo Sassetti on Trade, Institutions, and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2023) 107 (slightly modified translation).

⁸⁰Letter to Maria Sassetti Bartoli, December 1583, in Filippo Sassetti, *Lettere da vari paesi, 1570–1588*, ed. Vanni Bramanti (Milano: Longanesi, 1979), 385. The letter is not included among those translated by Tazzara.

The time of arrival of the *armada da Índia* was a peak moment in the urban life of the Portuguese settlements on the west coast of India, although the impossibility of predicting if and when the ships would complete their travel turned the event into a matter of widespread agitation. The diary of Linhares gives us a sense of the sort of unverified news which used to circulate from early September. In 1634, a letter from a Portuguese in Aleppo reached Goa by land, which reported 'it was doubtful whether carracks would come to India'.⁸¹ Meanwhile, another missive sent by a Jesuit from the Northern Province circulated a piece of gossip from Surat that the Dutch were preparing to intercept the ships from Portugal just in front of Goa—an eventuality that made the viceroy erupt in a meaningful invocation: 'May God bring them to us as we need.'⁸² The uncertainty surrounding the journeys of the annual fleets from Lisbon was a source of concern in the *Estado da Índia* and led many to connect the successful completion of these voyages with supernatural elements.

Once again, seasonality mediated the assimilation of the Portuguese into regional ecologies. The unescapable impact of the intermittence of the global encouraged fuller participation in local patterns of life and customs. The fortune-tellers consulted on the Konkani coast in the late sixteenth century were presumably similar to those sought out by the Kolathiri Raja, the ruler of Cannanore, in southwest India, in 1498, when Vasco da Gama appeared on the horizon. The Portuguese chronicler, Gaspar Correia, called these diviners *Canayates*. He wrote that at the time, they were asked 'what ships were those and whence they came'. Referring to local legends and prophecies, the soothsayers replied 'that the ships belonged to a great king and came from very far, and according to what they found written, these were the people who were to seize India by war and peace'.⁸³ During the sixteenth century, with the stabilisation of the journey of the *armada da Índia*, some diviners on the west coast of India likely specialised in giving predictions about the arrival of the fleets, thus attracting substantial attention from Indians and Portuguese, as Sassetti witnessed.

Such was the popularity of the practice of seeking divination to soothe anxiety about the annual fleets in the late sixteenth century that the Inquisition of Goa became alarmed. In 1589, the 'debauchery and disorder' of those Portuguese who went and saw fortune-tellers (*consultar pagodes*) on the mainland 'at the time when the ships from the kingdom are awaited' was reported to the Holy Office in Lisbon. It was 'common knowledge' that even the king's highest representative, Governor Manuel de Sousa Coutinho (r. 1588–91), and his family members could not resist the urge 'to enter into this and mystically deal with gentile sorcerers'.⁸⁴ Their conduct was an open breach of the Inquisition's policy of eradicating local ceremonies, which secular authorities were also supposed to halt. What is more, it eroded the social prestige that Catholicism was still struggling to gain in the eyes of the Konkani people. The inquisitors launched formal investigations against Coutinho, his wife, one of their sons, and other relatives and members of the governor's retinue. Several abjurations were heard in private in the following years.⁸⁵

⁸¹*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, 168.

⁸²*Diário do 3.º conde de Linhares*, 170.

⁸³Gaspar Correia, *The Three Voyages of Vasco da Gama and His Viceroyalty from the Lendas da Índia . . . Accompanied by Original Documents*, trans. Henry E. J. Stanley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1869), 146. For a discussion, see Maurice Kriegel and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Unity of Opposites: Abraham Zacut, Vasco da Gama and the Chronicler Gaspar Correia', in *Vasco da Gama and the Linking of Europe and Asia*, eds. Anthony Disney and Emily Booth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48–71.

⁸⁴Letter of the inquisitors of Goa to the Inquisitor-general, Cardinal Albert, Archduke of Austria, 20 November 1589, in António Baião, *A Inquisição de Goa*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Academia das Ciências, 1930–1945), vol. 2, 127.

⁸⁵Letter of the inquisitors of Goa to the Inquisitor-general, Cardinal Albert, 12 December 1591, in Baião, *A Inquisição*, vol. 2, 136–7. The names of those who abjured can be found in João Delgado Figueira, 'Reportório geral de tres mil oito centos processos, que sam todos os despachados neste sancto Officio de Goa & mais partes da Índia', Cod. 203, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon.

There was obvious competition between the predictions of local fortune-tellers and Catholic rituals. The latter, too, could cause concern when they were mobilised to bring about the positive completion of the voyages of the *armada da Índia*. Tensions were at boiling point in the aftermath of the secret trials against Governor Coutinho and his clan. In such a context of disquietude, violence erupted in the streets of Goa in September 1593. According to a religious man, ‘by ancient tradition’ a procession of children taught by the Jesuits occurred almost every evening from the beginning of the month ‘so that God Our Lord would bring the ships from the kingdom’. The spectacle of children parading through the city and singing litanies with lightened candles and torches, crosses, and retablos reportedly inspired ‘much devotion’.⁸⁶ This could be seen as an orthodox response to the success of Indian diviners.

It turned out that Viceroy Dom Matias de Albuquerque (r. 1591–7), the successor of Governor Coutinho to whom he was politically close, was not happy with the procession that year. One day he ordered a bailiff and his guards to smash the procession. That evening children were beaten with sticks and sacred images were thrown on the ground.⁸⁷ The attack occurred in the heart of the city (Figure 4). It caused a scandal and there were no other similar processions in the following two years. It later transpired that, in the middle of the action, the viceroy’s guards had been heard repeating that ‘it was still too early for that procession’.⁸⁸ That the presumption that the *armada* was still a long way off was based on information gathered from local fortune-tellers or was even shared by Albuquerque is difficult to say. It proved wrong, however, because the following night a ship from Portugal reached the mouth of the Mandovi River.⁸⁹

The 1593 public clash over the arrival of the *armada da Índia* in Goa was emblematic of the deep impact that seasonality had on those who lived in early modern Portuguese Asia. It was an extreme episode that stemmed from local tensions but is ultimately to be understood as a specific manifestation of the reaction to the intermittence of the global. As the case of Acapulco shows, it formed part of a broader set of popular if controversial spiritual practices that had become a widespread phenomenon in oceanic port cities across the early modern world by the turn of the seventeenth century.

Conclusion

Climate and weather were central to the experience of empire in early modern Asia. A greater focus on what these factors meant to the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean world and beyond provides global historians with the opportunity to rethink early modern overseas empires as large political formations exposed to the elements. What makes the case of the *Estado da Índia* particularly interesting in this context is that not only did the Portuguese need to learn how to adapt their strategy and action to monsoon winds and rains, but they also had to craft a seasonal empire on an unprecedented global scale. This effort translated into an extremely fluid configuration, which went through a cyclical transformation every twelve months.

Three general points deserve consideration when it comes to the ecological approach advocated in this article and its relevance to scholars of the early modern world. First, the concept of ‘seasonality of empire’ allows global historians to have a more nuanced and precise understanding of the kinetic nature of overseas polities, where their main centres were distant, even isolated, from each other for a significant part of the year. Second, a recognition of the varying shapes that an empire could take in the same locality over the course of the year invites global historians to

⁸⁶Testimony of the Jesuit brother, António Pereira, 8 November 1596, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Proc. 4941, fol. 13r, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon (hereafter cited as ANTT, IL, 4941). It is part of a set of testimonies on the episode gathered by the Goa Inquisition in 1596 (fols. 13r–22v).

⁸⁷See the letter of the inquisitors of Goa to Inquisitor-general Albert, 22 November 1593, in Baião, *A Inquisição*, vol. 2, 147.

⁸⁸Testimony of the priest Bernardo Serrão, 9 November 1596, in ANTT, IL, 4941, fols. 15v–16r.

⁸⁹Testimony of Pereira, 8 November 1596, in ANTT, IL, 4941, fol. 14r.

explore tangible and intangible repercussions of such fluctuations through the eyes and emotions of historical actors, while also paying more attention to the circumstances under which archival records were created. Finally, and most of all, while telling a story of precarity and tight schedules, the dynamics discussed in the previous pages reveal a profound symbiosis with climate. The choices and trajectories of those who lived in a given territory or moved across political borders acquire a very different meaning when interpreted in light of a broader human and social ecosystem and its regional patterns.

The particular attention given to ‘winter’ in this article is intended to make another, more general point. A constellation of coastal settlements of variable nature and size, Portuguese Asia, during the months of its contraction, reveals the limits of current debates over the global and the local, their elusive distinctions and overlaps. Early modern port cities, such as Goa, Manila, and the like are cited by scholars as nodes of global interaction. While this depiction highlights the exchange of goods and circulation of people, it typically reflects the reality of major maritime centres only partially. The perspectives of the vast majority of the inhabitants, who stayed and waited for the arrival of ships from afar, remain excluded. Seasonality profoundly affected their lives on the waterfront and the intense relationship that many of them maintained with the hinterland. It also shaped the wide variety of activities which a diverse population of women and men engaged in outside of those frenetic but relatively short periods of the year when seaports became crossroads of long-distance navigation. A greater attention to this composite experience discloses the multiple realities of coping with the intermittence of the global in the early modern world.

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