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REASSESSING PORTUGUESE MILITARY SUPERIORITY IN ASIA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY – THE CASE OF LAND WARFARE¹

Roger Lee de Jesus

The arrival of Vasco da Gama’s armada to India in 1498 opened the Asian markets to European forces and accelerated the development of artillery in this region of the world. Equipped with superior technology, the Portuguese imposed their presence, combining trade and warfare. Most studies on the Military Revolution assess Portuguese forces in Asia to have been superior, usually focusing on naval warfare and the efficient use of broadside gunnery, which ignores or devalues land-based warfare.

This chapter therefore aims to reassess and debate the existence of Portuguese superiority in land warfare in the *Estado da Índia* (the name formally given to the Portuguese Empire in Asia). This assessment is conducted in the context of the European force’s having to resist several military land operations, starting as far back as their settlement in the region, because the use of gunpowder was not limited exclusively to the Portuguese and guns were used similarly by both sides. This chapter therefore broadly evaluates the impact of Portuguese warfare in Asia. It argues that both Portuguese and local landlords adapted to new ways of waging

war and that the Europeans experienced a partial loss of superiority after the first decades of the sixteenth century. To reach this conclusion, first the idea of Portuguese military superiority is challenged, and then a number of battles and sieges are analysed by using both Portuguese and Asian sources, emphasizing the context of India. A map of the Portuguese presence in the Indian subcontinent can be found at the end of this chapter.

The Military Revolution and the Portuguese Empire

This debate is directly connected to the concept of military revolution, as coined by Geoffrey Parker, which refers to the military developments beginning during the Italian Wars that had a deep impact not only on how war was waged but also [p. 153] from political, social, and financial points of view, promoting the rise of the West.² The long debate fuelled by Parker's book still resonates today, because the academic community continues to discuss the implications of such a deterministic theory.³ The participation of the Portuguese Kingdom in this *revolution* was connected mainly with the dissemination of new military developments to the country's over-seas empire and especially to a newly discovered and developed naval firepower, along with the "artillery fortress as an engine of European overseas expansion" (to quote one of Parker's well-known studies). Given that the Portuguese had few resources with which to provide an effective military presence in Asian lands, the *Estado da Índia* relied on a network of coastal fortresses and factories (a *Venetian model*, according to William R. Thompson),⁴ which attempted to control commercial networks and routes, resorting to local allies to intervene in, or instigate, internal wars.⁵ To a certain extent, the introduction of violence and warfare to Asian mercantile routes by the Portuguese gave the latter some level of leadership as part of

the complex commercial game that extended from the eastern coast of Africa to the Far East.⁶

The Portuguese had effective firepower, which, allied with the speed of their ships, gave them significant naval superiority on the Indian Ocean. Artillery was successfully used on board, allowing for the use of broadside gunnery in a line-ahead formation, as evidenced in Portuguese sources dating back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The pioneering naval development led by the kingdom was responsible for a certain European military hegemony in Asia at the beginning of the century.⁷ This seemingly superior nature contributed to some coastal cities' (e.g. Cochin and Cannanur) entering into alliances with the Portuguese.⁸

Decades ago, P.J. Marshall asserted that during the sixteenth century the Portuguese presence "had begun to be absorbed into Asia, participating in its trade and politics but not dominating them."⁹ This idea is somehow linked to the so-called easternization of the Portuguese armadas in this century, which can be explained as the gradual transition towards the regular use of small rowboats rather than high-board ships, the former of which were better suited to wars waged in the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ This process was also connected to the idea of the consequent decadence of the Portuguese military and administrative structures, justifying, to some extent, the Portuguese defeat during Dutch expansion in Asia. Despite these circumstances, André Murteira recently showed that this process does not entirely explain the reasons for the defeat, reassessing the idea of a military revolution in the *Estado da Índia* at the beginning of the seventeenth century. According to Murteira, the inability of the Portuguese to reinforce their fleet through the India Run was parallel to the Portuguese defeat in the Atlantic Ocean and should be seen as a complex

process that needs to be further compared in the future.¹¹ Despite this recent effort, the idea of a military revolution and its application to the Portuguese case in the sixteenth century has rarely been discussed in historiography¹²

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Military superiority?

Portuguese military superiority is commonly associated with naval power and the destructive effects of Portuguese armadas, high sea scouting, defending fortresses, and attacking strategic cities. This idea is related to what some research has described as the ability of the Portuguese to maintain a technological gap, therefore also maintaining their technological superiority, especially where firepower was concerned.¹³

However, this is also related to a general idea that European warfare was superior to Asian practices while at war, in both material and tactical terms. A Eurocentric (or Westernized) view, it devalues, or simply ignores, any Asian military ability, as demonstrated by Jeremy Black and, more recently, J.C. Sharman.¹⁴ Furthermore, this idea is based on an almost homogenizing view of the Indo-West Pacific world as a united reality, which ignores a considerable amount of diversity. In the same debate, the old idea that the arrival of the Portuguese in Asia started some kind of a military revolution has been largely proved to have been a product of misinformation, since gunpowder and guns were already known and used.¹⁵ However, from a technical perspective, Portuguese artillery was highly desired in India, an example being wrought iron pieces that were not as developed in the region.¹⁶ In China, the breech-loader system and the size of the pieces caught the eye of military officers, as Tonio Andrade recently defended.¹⁷ The military gap between Europe and Asia was therefore not as considerable as imagined.¹⁸ As stated previously, the major area in which the Portuguese were

considered superior was in naval warfare, where ships were built to sustain the explosive power of gunpowder and used for broadside gunnery. A good example of their superiority is the 1509 naval battle of Diu, when the Portuguese fleet, commanded by Viceroy Francisco de Almeida, obtained a remarkable victory against a Mamluk fleet through the judicious use of broadside guns, sinking a galley with this use of artillery.¹⁹

Portuguese sources from the sixteenth century tend to emphasize this supposed technological gap between the Portuguese and local forces, especially disregarding the Indian potentates. Governor Afonso de Albuquerque was severely criticized by Afonso Real because his victories were against “naked little black men without weapons.”²⁰ This description is often used as a literary topos in sources from this period and can be found in several chronicles, such as the one written by Gaspar Correia.²¹ Racial prejudice was then transposed to military evaluation.²² These kinds of comments were based mostly on the lack of defensive armour, especially in southern India, where the Portuguese fought at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Standing in stark contrast to heavy European armour, which was made up of various pieces of iron plate, local soldiers preferred lighter protection that thus left them more vulnerable, such as cotton jackets.²³

On the same note, no Asian state had a naval force (with few exceptions, such as China, which had a different system), unlike European states, which had been developing theirs since medieval times.²⁴ Portugal’s opponents were therefore often [p.155] merchants who would defend themselves or try to intervene in order to either share or regain their position in Asian trade. From a materialistic perspective, some Asian sail ships did not even use iron nails, which weakened them and made them vulnerable to Portuguese guns.²⁵

On a political note, Michael Pearson argued that, in the case of the Sultanate of Gujarat, sultans and nobles were not interested in commercial and maritime trade, since their concept of power was based on land tenure and strength in land warfare.²⁶ Geneviève Bouchon also showed how in South India, maritime trade was handled and developed by merchant communities instead of the local authorities.²⁷ Confucianism and Brahmanical orthodoxy could also explain this lack of interest, given that such religious views saw the “just” sovereign as exempt from meddling in commerce.²⁸ Despite this idea, recent studies show that these reasons are too simplistic to explain the complexity of sixteenth-century Asian states, where migrations of elites from diverse backgrounds created an extensive network of cultural and political interpenetration, where merchants were welcomed and cared for by local sultans.²⁹

These situations did not prevent fierce resistance to the Portuguese attempt to control commercial networks, of which three examples will be recalled.³⁰ The first is opposition to the Kannur’s Mappillas (local Muslim converts of the Malabar coast) in the 1520s and 1530s, where waging war with small sailing and rowing ships put the *Estado da Índia* under great pressure, from Malabar through the Cape Comorin and to the island of Ceylon.³¹ The second is related to the first contacts with China and to the resounding defeat of Martim Afonso de Melo’s fleet in 1522, at the hands of the Celestial Empire’s fleet, which was composed of robust junk ships.³² The latter brings us to the long conflict between the Sultanate of Aceh (Sumatra) and Portuguese Melaka; from the 1530s onwards, the local potentate established a strong and successful Ottoman liaison, which enabled the revival of the locally produced pepper trade, receiving state-of-the-art armaments to fight against the Portuguese.³³

In addition to this ability to resist Portuguese expansion, most Asian potentates also demonstrated their skill when it came to learning and replicating the techniques and technologies brought by the Portuguese. This knowledge could be transmitted in an official way (e.g. through local workers in Portuguese dockyards) or informally (by Portuguese mercenaries³⁴). Let us also recall, for instance, various episodes in which the Portuguese supported local landlords, where Portuguese soldiers would fight alongside local soldiers, thus allowing for a better understanding of their *modus operandi*. Such was the case of Cristóvão da Gama's small army in Ethiopia in 1541–2 and Martim Afonso de Sousa's support of Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in 1535.³⁵ As for weaponry, the Portuguese also taught the locals how to make arms, as in Sri Lanka, where the Portuguese started to buy arms in the seventeenth century to supply the *Estado da Índia*.³⁶

In one way or another, Portuguese technology spread along the Asian seas. China, for instance, seized several Portuguese artillery pieces and replicated them with some success, later using them in the 1522 confrontation.³⁷ In 1546, [p. 156] a Portuguese official complained to the governor that many artillery pieces were being smuggled to the local kingdoms around Cochin, identifying more than 130 cannons in those states, all recognized for bearing the heraldic device of the Portuguese kingdom.³⁸ The case of the Battle of Raichur, in 1520, is critical due to its political context and because it involved twenty hired Portuguese arquebusiers, as recently studied by Richard Eaton and Phillip Wagoner.³⁹ The wars of the Deccan Plateau in India, in which the sultanates of Bijapur and Ahmadnagar opposed the Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, are an interesting case study of the reception and development of the new firepower brought by Portuguese and other external agents, as was Ottoman influence.

From what has been said, the central idea is that Portuguese military superiority in the mid sixteenth century has not been proven. The first decades of Portuguese presence may have been marked by some military superiority, which mainly translated into the imposition of naval control. Resistance and setbacks from the 1520s onwards show that multiple adversaries of the *Estado da Índia* were scattered throughout Asia, developing firepower in their own way. Witnessing this proliferation of firearms, Francisco de Lima wrote disappointedly to the Portuguese king in 1548 that, at that time, “the entire world is full of firearms.”⁴⁰

Waging war in Asia: some case studies

The first case to be analysed is the Portuguese defence of Cochin, in 1504, by captain Duarte Pacheco Pereira. At the time, the Samudri Raja of Calicut, supported by Muslim merchants (most of them Gujarati people), was the main adversary of Portuguese trade in the region. To remove them, he prepared an attack on Cochin, where the Portuguese had built their new fortress. Some Portuguese chroniclers speak of eighty thousand men against as little as a hundred Portuguese soldiers, numbers that were, of course, heavily exaggerated. A more critical look reveals around five thousand men from Calicut at most, attacking approximately 130 Portuguese, supported by the small army of Cochin.⁴¹ Several attacks between March and May were launched in an attempt to approach the city. However, the defenders had an important factor working in their favour: the physical conditions of the land. As we know, the island of Cochin is found in a lagoon, with many rivers, streams, and even swamps. Because the Samudri men travelled by land, the Portuguese took advantage of their position to force them to fight outside the city, in the area of the river. Trapped in this area, they could gain access only through small openings, narrowing the size of the battlefield. This allowed the Portuguese to use their firearms

and even artillery, reducing the disproportionate number of men. They held their position not only on land but also in small boats, using the rivers to travel quickly from one position to another, preventing the enemy from advancing. At the time, European weapons were clearly superior to the local forces, whose body armour was unsuited to this kind of attack. The Calicut force lost hundreds of men during the attacks and many more subsequently, when an epidemic worsened their circumstances. The defence of Cochin was one of the first land operations [p. 157] where Portuguese superiority was clear – not only thanks to their weaponry but mostly thanks to their knowledge and use of the physical space.

The other case study involves campaigns launched by Governor Afonso de Albuquerque (1509–15). Albuquerque is known as one of the most important Portuguese governors of the sixteenth century, creating a strong network of fortresses across the Indian Ocean that, ultimately, led to the formation of what came to be known as the *Estado da Índia*. The conquest of Goa (1510), Melaka (1511), and Hormuz (1515), and even the failed attempt to take Aden (1513), were all amphibious operations, which features a remarkable use of firepower and visionary military organization that did not require significant land operations.⁴² In actual fact, the defeat of Albuquerque in Aden clearly shows a diminished Portuguese superiority when naval power was not involved, in which a strong chain of command was unable to oversee and control the operation.⁴³ However, the defence of Goa in 1512 should also be considered.⁴⁴ Upon the governor's return from Melaka, he found that an important fort (Passo de Benasterim) near the city of Goa, on the same island, had been taken by the Sultan of Bijapur's local forces. He expected to successfully retake the castle by using broadside guns, but they proved to be ineffective against the structure. His opponents also used cannons to defend

themselves. The sea attack having proved unsuccessful, the governor then started to make preparations for a siege but was forced to engage in battle in the fields around the fort. The use of an ordinance system should be highlighted at this point: it consisted of mixed formations of pike wielders and arquebusiers, with a strongly enforced hierarchy that underwent frequent training. Albuquerque began using this structure some years before, having been influenced by Portuguese veterans from the Italian Wars. Deployed in the field, the ordinance corps used formations known as *caracol* (snail) and *galé* (galley), tactics which had been successful when used in Europe. The advance of these men, followed by some light Portuguese cavalry, was enough to force the enemy to retreat and therefore surrender the castle. Their military superiority was then showcased in their use of strictly organized combined arms, against an enemy that already had strong firepower.

Dozens of military operations would take place in the following decades, but none with a strong land force. This would be true up until the time of Governor João de Castro (1545–8), who not only tried to enhance how the military was organized (redeploying the ordinance system, which had been abolished after the death of Afonso de Albuquerque, in 1515), but also led a few interesting campaigns that provide an insight into Portuguese warfare in this period. It was a delicate time, because the *Estado da Índia* was at war on two fronts: in Goa, against the Sultanate of Bijapur, and in the North, against the Sultanate of Gujarat.

The conflict with Bijapur centred on the possession of the lands surrounding Goa, Bardez, and Salcete (known in Portuguese sources as *Terras Firmes*), which this sultanate handed over to the *Estado da Índia* in 1543. The various campaigns undertaken under the orders of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah I sought to destabilize Bardez and Salcete and force their reintegration into the sultanate. The pitched battles that took place in 1547 (in September, leading to the

destruction of the Pondá fort, 15 [p. 158] kilometres south of Goa, and in Salcete in December) were fought against relatively small forces. The sultan did not intervene. In this case, the *Estado da Índia* often resorted to maritime blockades at the Bijapur port of Dabul or the destruction of several port cities, to pressure the sultanate to end hostilities.⁴⁵ At the same time, João de Castro was aware that the sultanate was dependent on Portuguese imports of sulphur and horses from the Persian Gulf for it to wage its own internal wars against neighbouring kingdoms, so he used trade as leverage to negotiate peace.⁴⁶ Despite several victories when recapturing outposts in the *Terras Firmes*, the Portuguese administration managed to provide a swift answer to the military threat and retake the lands around Goa.

The war in the north bears significantly more relevance for this case study because it shows that the Sultanate of Gujarat had a military capacity that rivalled that of the Portuguese. At the time, the sultanate had one of the strongest Asian economies⁴⁷ and a well-organized military structure, as demonstrated by several clashes against the *Estado da Índia*.⁴⁸ One of them was at the end of the second Gujarati siege of Diu, in 1546. The siege itself is relevant because the fortress was in a precarious situation for almost eight months. The captain of Diu said to Castro, “I was expecting an attack from the Gujarati, and they besieged me like the French.”⁴⁹ The Portuguese naval forces coming from Goa managed to launch a surprise attack on the besiegers, charging them from the fortress when they were expecting them to land in the Gujarati camp directly. The diversion had a massive impact, allowing the Portuguese to gain an incredible victory in November 1546. Although this siege was conducted under the supervision of Khwaja Safar, lord of Surat and captain of the sultan, he was given the freedom to recruit and organize the operation by using any

means available.⁵⁰ As well as the mobilized troops themselves, the potential of the weapons used during the siege can be gauged (as thirty-six bronze guns were taken at the end of the siege), and proof has been found that serpentine gunpowder was produced in the camp built in front of the fortress.⁵¹ One year later, João de Castro organized a new operation to the north, retaliating after the Siege of Diu but also reaffirming the presence of the Portuguese in the region, preventing a Gujarati fleet from being built in the local ports.⁵² Sailing to the Portuguese fort of Bassein, he learnt that Sultan Mahmud Shah III was in the region, near Broach. He prepared his men and sailed there with 120 small vessels made up of approximately eighteen hundred men. The governor was then ready for a direct confrontation with the sultan of Gujarat, who had around five thousand men, including cavalry, field artillery, and war elephants. Again, the Portuguese were deployed in mixed formations, advancing slowly in the field. However, the Gujarati forces started to retreat, the Portuguese forces chasing them but stopping promptly when it dawned on João de Castro that they were falling into a calculated ruse. The Gujarati aimed to separate Portuguese soldiers from their vessels in an attempt to catch them in the open field with no means with which to retreat. He immediately ordered the soldiers to return to the landing area, waiting for the Gujarati forces to engage again. The latter never attacked, wanting to avoid engaging in combat close to the river. In this case, Portuguese superiority quickly [p 159] disappeared when the troops were distanced from their naval power. The sultan knew this, and the governor knew it too.

The military operations during Castro's period show that during this time, so-called Portuguese superiority was not as easily proven as it had been previously. The Gujarati forces, which had strong connections to Ottoman military developments, were on the same level as the Portuguese, as manifest in the siege of Diu, in the

battle of Broach, and even in the menacing idea of the construction of a fleet. The technological gap was not a true advantage, because it was almost nonexistent on land. Given that the governor was well aware of the delicate circumstances the *Estado da Índia* found itself in, he forced multiple amphibious attacks that sought to spread terror and devastate coastal settlements, thus retaining the image of commanding a destructive power that could launch a quick attack on any location. Surrounded by enemies, João de Castro resorted to alternative methods, those that had been used previously and that had been proven to be effective, to overcome these problems: he established lines of strategic diplomacy, allying himself with common enemies (Ahmadnagar and Vijayanagar against Bijapur, and the Sur Empire against Gujarati), fomented internal wars, and sought to take advantage of the naval superiority of the Portuguese to gain a logistical advantage. In the case of the sieges of Diu (1538 and 1546), it was this ability to maintain a supply line of the fortress that ensured the capacity to resist the operation.

More than twenty years after João de Castro, Viceroy Luís de Ataíde managed to hold off one of the greatest menaces to the Portuguese presence in Asia in the sixteenth century. Between 1570 and 1571, the sultanates of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and other small realms in southern India were plotting to attack several fortresses at the same time. Goa, Chaul, Honnavar, and Chaliyam were besieged during those years, events that ended unfavourably for the local kingdoms.⁵³ The case of Chaul is the most famous and most relevant for the case made herein. The operation was led by the sultan of Ahmadnagar, Murtaza Nizam Shah I, at the head of a great army that had significant artillery. Some Portuguese sources have exaggerated the numbers, stating them to have been between fifty thousand and a hundred thousand men. As in the sieges of Diu, the main advantage of the Portuguese consisted in their naval power, which allowed small reinforcements to arrive during the

operation. Meanwhile, they were immediately involved in diplomatic negotiations, trying to get help from other enemies of the besiegers and using other questionable means. Some Indian chronicles even refer to bribery as being the main force leading to the Ahmadnagar retreat in Chaul.⁵⁴ Despite the considerable investment and deep destruction of the Portuguese fort, the Sultan ordered the operation to retreat and abandon the project.

As evidenced, Portuguese superiority was not always clear. Victory was mostly unplanned and, in fact, less predictable than might be expected, mostly having been achieved by using a combination of several elements. One of them was the effective use of naval resources, which contributed to fruitful amphibious attacks. These operations, which combined naval potential with swift landings and attacks, had been used since the dawn of the Portuguese presence in Asia.⁵⁵ They sought [p. 160] to impose a climate of terror on coastal populations not only as pre-emptive strikes but also as part of a deterrence strategy. Examples of this strategy can be seen on the attack on Dabul in 1509, when Viceroy Francisco de Almeida, heading for Diu, partially destroyed the city of Bijapur;⁵⁶ Afonso de Albuquerque's campaigns on the Arabian coast in 1507;⁵⁷ and even the multiple attacks on the Gujarati coast during and after the second siege of Diu.⁵⁸ Aside from this aspect, we find the use of diplomacy (especially among common enemies) and the thorough knowledge of geography and the physical space – both elements of a supposed Portuguese military superiority during the sixteenth century.

Conclusions

As has been argued herein, it cannot be proven that Portuguese military superiority in Asia in the sixteenth century was linked to a gap in technological or tactical development. Any attempt to

understand Portuguese victories and Portuguese presence in that part of the globe must be explained, as previously stated, through a combination of several factors. The capacity of the Portuguese to successfully adapt to the local military environment allowed for this external force (of European origin), to construct the *Estado da Índia*, which, though external, had the size and impact of a local potentate. The first two decades of the sixteenth century may, to some extent, have been the period of greatest innovation and mutual learning, which was then followed by fast development of the Asian states, competing with the *Estado da Índia*, as seen in the various rebellions and resistance against the *Estado* from the 1520s onwards.

However, this does not invalidate that there was, though only occasionally, a certain degree of technical or tactical superiority. For instance, the case of the defence of Goa in 1512 was carried out by using an ordinance system inspired by European tactical advances. These cases, however, did not constitute the majority of Portuguese military operations in Asia and cannot be deduced as examples of their military presence in the continent. As Jeremy Black stated, warfare was waged by European countries across the world “quite effectively and decisively without reference to Western methods, technology and politics.”⁵⁹

In this sense, the idea of a military revolution, as seen by Geoffrey Parker, poorly applies to the Portuguese case. Although the development of artillery and shipbuilding enabled the Portuguese Kingdom to have unprecedented firepower on board, the other arguments contained in this concept have no full applicability either in the kingdom or in the construction and consolidation of the *Estado da Índia*. On an architectural note, Portuguese forts in Asia gradually integrated the innovations developed in Europe: not until 1546–7 was the first bastion front (in Diu) built, followed by the bastion layout of the fortress of São Sebastião of Mozambique.

The number of Portuguese soldiers also grew slightly over the course of the sixteenth century, though the size and capacity of recruitment did not increase during this period. The development of a bureaucratic apparatus was therefore unconnected to the expansion of military needs, and the Crown could not effectively control its [p. 161] subjects, given that part of them took on an informal presence in Asia outside the royal domain, in what is known as the Shadow/Informal Empire.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, some governors, such as Afonso de Albuquerque and João de Castro, provided examples of how European combat tactics were applied, through use of an ordinance system, thus partially contradicting J.C. Sharman's idea that "the way Westerners fought in the wider world in the early modern period was almost entirely different from the way they fought wars in Europe."⁶¹ As noted, the occasional use of ordinances in various military campaigns, with Albuquerque, Castro, and later Viceroy Ataíde, demonstrates their interest in taking advantage of a successful model to wage war in another context and environment, thus highlighting the idea contained in Parker's thesis.

In the current historiographical debate, Jeremy Black's vision has been found to be the most accurate, drawing attention to the warfare potential and resilience of the Asian powers and to the need that arises to analyse Portuguese military conflicts in Asia on an individual basis, according to the opponents and their contexts. This approach opposes the idea of conducting an analysis on Portuguese conflicts as a whole, the result of which seems to produce the effects of a European military revolution.⁶²

Despite its European origins, the *Estado da Índia* presented itself as another player in Asia's complex military game of chess. The similarities with other states in this region of the world are visible, its having behaved like a local state that needed to find its own space

in order to reinforce its presence and ensure profit.⁶³ Thus, the role of the Portuguese cannot be regarded as merely “marginal” or “insignificant”⁶⁴ but rather as a political and military entity of some relevance – one that was taken into consideration by the other local powers and that did not always bend to their political pressure.⁶⁵

Finally, the *Estado da Índia* was aware of its limitations and its scope. It rarely launched campaigns into the hinterland or even considered directly confronting any Indian sultanate, as the Portuguese troop’s military potential was mainly found in their naval forces.⁶⁶ In turn, the capacity for land warfare among great potentates, such as Mughal, was not comparable to the scarce Portuguese resources, given that it matched other European powers in the early modern period.⁶⁷ In this case, a comparison with the Spanish reality in the “New World” is of little value, since the environment in which the conquistadores’ campaigns took place bears little resemblance to the Portuguese experience in Asia during the same period. The men employed and led by Cortés and Pizarro were taken mostly on private expeditions, seeking to meet particular interests in an expansion that the Spanish Crown failed to complete at the time.⁶⁸ From a technological perspective, the use of firearms and guns (which were completely foreign to the New World) was of little relevance to the whole process, which led John F. Guilmartin to claim that “the Spanish could probably have overthrown the Incas without gunpowder.”⁶⁹

In conclusion, an attempt to explain Portuguese military expansion in Asia by invoking a military revolution and presenting a unified reading of the complex phenomenon of war is too simplistic. Any interpretation must always take into [p. 162] account the role of diplomacy, the local political context, the local support provided, and one’s knowledge of the geographical reality.⁷⁰ In this sense,

J.C. Sharman's statement that the Portuguese were successful in "capturing and defending coastal strong points in an environment of political fragmentation" deserves the most credit.⁷¹

[MAP]

MAP 9.1

Portuguese presence in the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth century

[p. 163]

Notes

- 1 This chapter had the support of CHAM (NOVA FCSH / UAc), through the strategic project sponsored by FCT (UIDB/04666/2020).
- 2 Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution. Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On the debate, see Clifford J. Rogers, ed., *The Military Revolution Debate. Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); a recent and critical approach is Frank Jacob and Gilmar Visoni-Alonzo, *The Military Revolution in Early Modern Europe: A Revision* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- 3 For a critical view of the concept, see Jeremy Black, *War: A Short History* (London: Continuum, 2009), 64–69.
- 4 William R. Thompson, "The Military Superiority Thesis and the Ascendancy of Western Eurasia in the World System," *Journal of World History* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 153–59.
- 5 On the use of internal wars to disrupt the local political context in the Portuguese Empire, see João Marinho dos Santos, *A Guerra e as Guerras na Expansão Portuguesa (séculos XV e XVI)* (Lisbon: GTMECDP, 1998), 289–92.
- 6 On the Portuguese's introducing violence in Asian trade, see Ashan Jan Qaisa, *Indian Response to European Technology and Culture, AD 1498–1700* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 14–17; to a more recent approach on the issue: Philippe Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean. A Global History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 605–6.
- 7 John F. Guilmartin, "The Military Revolution: Origins and First Tests Abroad," in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, ed. Clifford J. Rogers (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 315–18; José Virgílio Pissarra, "O Galeão

- Português e o desenvolvimento das marinhas oceânicas: 1518–1550” (PhD diss., University of Lisbon, Lisbon, 2016), 239–40; George Raudzens drew attention to this naval development, which he considered more important than the military one: “Military Revolution or maritime evolution? Military superiorities or transportation advantages as main causes of European colonial conquests to 1788,” *Journal of Military History* 63 (July 1999): 631–42.
- 8 Philip T. Hoffman, *Why Did Europe Conquer the World?* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 96.
 - 9 P.J. Marshall, “Western Arms in Maritime Asia in the Early Phases of Expansion,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (February 1980): 19.
 - 10 Vitor Luís Gaspar Rodrigues, “The ‘Easternisation’ of the Portuguese Fleets in the Asian Seas During the 16th Century: Causes and Consequences,” in *Gujarat and the Sea*, ed. Lotika Varadarajan (Vadodara: Darshak Itihas Nidhi, 2011), 221–50.
 - 11 André Murteira, “The Military Revolution and European Wars Outside Europe: The Dutch-Portuguese War in Asia in the First Quarter of the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Military History* 84, no. 2 (April 2020): 511–35; and his chapter in this volume.
 - 12 The only Portuguese researcher to have seriously debated this idea is António Manuel Hespanha: see António Manuel Hespanha, “Introdução,” in *Nova História Militar de Portugal*, ed. António Manuel Hespanha, vol. 2 (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2004), 9–17.
 - 13 Santos, *A Guerra*, 255–58; Roger Lee de Jesus, “Gunpowder, Firepower and the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean (Sixteenth Century),” in *India, the Portuguese and Maritime Interactions*, ed. Pius Malekandathil, Lotika Varadarajan, and Amar Farooqui, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2019), 220–31.
 - 14 Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 66–103; on the Eurocentric view: J.C. Sharman, *Empires of the Weak* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 124–29.
 - 15 On the use of artillery in Asia before the arrival of the Portuguese, see the following recent works: Iqtidar Alam Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); R. Balasubramaniam, *The Saga of Indian [p. 164] Cannons* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2008), 17–44, and especially the debate in Peter Lorge, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 112–14.
 - 16 Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms*, 59–61.
 - 17 Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 128–31, 135–42; and Barend Noordam’s chapter in this volume.
 - 18 For instance, see Sharman, *Empires of the Weak*, 63.
 - 19 José Virgílio Pissarra, *Chaul e Diu – 1508 e 1509 – O domínio do Índico* (Lisbon: Tribuna da História, 2002), 80–92; according to this author, this was the first time that a gunshot sank a ship of European origin: Pissarra, *O Galeão*, p. 239.
 - 20 The original is “negrinhos nus e sem armas”: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisbon), *Feitos da Coroa*, Inquirições Particular – 3, Inquirição – 489, fl. 5r.

- 21 Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, ed. Manuel Lopes de Almeida, vol. 4 (Porto: Lello e Irmão, 1975), 2: 16, 734, 3: 407.
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- 26 M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976), 90–91, 132, 153–54.
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- 28 Roy, *Military*, 127–28.
- 29 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 20–21; Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89–94.
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- 31 For a synthetic view of this resistance, see Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire*, 98–99.
- 32 Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age*, 124–31.
- 33 Charles R. Boxer, “A Note on Portuguese Reactions to the Revival of the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Rise of Atjeh, 1540–1600,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 415–28; Anthony Reid, “Sixteenth Century Turkish Influence in Western Indonesia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 395–414; Jorge dos Santos Alves, *O domínio do Norte de Samatra* (Lisbon: SHIP, 1999), 160–69.
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 - 38 Letter from Gaspar Luís de Veiga to João de Castro (5 September 1546), *Colecção de São Lourenço*, ed. Elaine Sanceau, vol. 2 (Lisbon: CEHU, JICU, 1975), 309.
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 - 48 Sheikh, *State and Society*, 176–80.
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- 59 Jeremy Black, “Patterns of Warfare, 1400–1800,” in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 6, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE, Part 2, Patterns of Change*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 47.
- 60 J.C. Sharman is critical of the development of the bureaucratic state connected to a military revolution, as seen in “Myths of Military Revolution: European Expansion and Eurocentrism,” *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2018): 499–500.
- 61 Sharman, *The Empires*, 34.
- 62 Black, *European Warfare*, 53–54, 59–61, 67–68.
- 63 João Paulo Oliveira e Costa already sketched this interpretation: see “O Império Português em Meados do século XVI,” in *Mare Nostrum: Em busca de Honra e Riqueza nos séculos XV e XVI* (Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2013), 184; George D. Winus also analysed the Portuguese Empire as part of an Asian context: “Portuguese as Players on a South Asian Stage,” in *Portugal, the Pathfinder: Journeys from the Medieval Toward the Modern World 1300–ca.1600*, ed. George D. Winus (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1995), 195–96.
- 64 These qualifiers were taken from Sharman, *The Empires*, 35; Jack Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500–1850* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 56.
- 65 This idea goes against one of Sharman’s general statements: “Europeans were almost always deferential toward local great powers,” in *The Empires*, 64.
- 66 Marshall, “Western Arms,” 18, claiming that all Portuguese victories were naval.

- 67 This was how Andrew de la Garza put it in his book *The Mughal Empire at War: Babur, Akbar and the Indian Military Revolution, 1500–1605* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 13–14.
- 68 Sharman, *The Empires*, 39–43; on the Spanish expansion to the New World during the reign of Charles V, see Geoffrey Parker, *Emperor: A New Life of Charles V* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 342–75.
- 69 Guilmartin, “The Military Revolution,” 312.
- 70 This idea was also outlined by Jeremy Black, “Patterns of Warfare,” 29.
- 71 Sharman, *The Empires*, 62.