

# *The East India Company and the Portuguese loss of the Província do Norte*

Pedro Nobre[1]

## **Abstract**

The Anglo-Portuguese relationship in Asia was marked by cooperation and antagonism, in a connection that can be entitled as pragmatic, flexible and adaptable to the circumstances. This complex and multi-faceted interaction had in the Portuguese-Maratha wars of the 1730s a paradigmatic example of how it was managed the frontier proximity between Bombay and the *Estado da Índia*. In this article, we aim to analyze the dynamics of the Anglo-Portuguese interaction in the particular context of the Maratha attacks to the *Província do Norte* and to frame them in the long relationship process initiated with the cession of Bombay.

**Keywords:** Estado da Índia; Bombay; Marathas; Província do Norte.

## *A East India Company e a perda portuguesa da Província do Norte*

### **Resumo**

O relacionamento anglo-português na Ásia foi marcado por cooperação e antagonismo, numa convivência pragmática, flexível e adaptável às circunstâncias. Essa interação complexa e de múltiplas facetas teve nas guerras luso-maratas da década de 1730 um exemplo paradigmático de como foi gerida a proximidade fronteiriça entre o governo de Bombaim e o Estado da Índia. Neste artigo, pretendemos analisar as dinâmicas de interação anglo-portuguesa no contexto particular dos ataques maratas à Província do Norte e enquadrá-las no longo processo relacional iniciado quando da cedência de Bombaim.

**Palavras-chave:** Estado da Índia; Bombaim; maratas; Província do Norte.

## *La East India Company y la pérdida portuguesa de la Provincia del Norte*

### **Resumen**

La alianza anglo-portuguesa en Asia fue conocida por la cooperación y el antagonismo en una convivencia pragmática, flexible y adaptable a las circunstancias. Esa interacción compleja y con múltiples facetas tuvo, en las guerras entre luso y *maratas* de la década de 1730, un ejemplo paradigmático de cómo fue creada la proximidad de fronteras entre el gobierno de Bombay y el Estado de India. En este artículo, se pretendió analizar las dinámicas de la interacción anglo-portuguesa en el contexto particular de ataques de los *maratas* a la Provincia del Norte y encuadrarlas en el largo proceso relacional que se inició cuando hubo la cesión del Bombay.

**Palabras clave:** Estado de India; Bombay; maratas; Provincia del Norte.

## *La East India Company et la perte portugaise de la province du Nord*

### **Résumé**

La relation anglo-portugaise en Asie a été marquée par la coopération et l'antagonisme, une coexistence pragmatique, flexible et adaptable aux circonstances. Cette interaction complexe et multiforme avaient, aux guerres portugaise-Maratha des années 1730, un exemple paradigmatique de la façon dont il a été géré proximité de la frontière du gouvernement de Bombay et de l'Etat de l'Inde. Dans cet article, on analyse la dynamique des interactions anglo-portugaise dans le contexte particulier des attaques Maratha Province du Nord et en forme eux dans le long processus relationnel a commencé pendant le transfert de Bombay.

**Mots-clés:** État de l'Inde; Mumbai; Marathas; Province du Nord.

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[1] Portuguese Centre for Global History (CHAM) at Universidade Nova de Lisboa - Lisbon - Portugal. *E-mail:* padnobre@gmail.com

Coordination of translation: Thaís Iannarelli.

The period from 1739 to 1740 marked the end of the Portuguese presence and sovereignty over almost the entire Northern Province, which, since 1534, had been under the power of the *Estado da Índia*, after agreement with the Sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this understanding (seen in the context of the dual military pressure by the Portuguese and the Mughal against the Sultanate of Gujarat<sup>2</sup>) secured the incorporation of a wide territorial fringe to the *Estado da Índia*: the Bassein district, and later, the Daman district (1559), which constituted the so-called Northern Province<sup>3</sup> and endowed the Asian Portuguese government with a considerable territory,<sup>4</sup> with land exploration rights,<sup>5</sup> which contrasted with the remaining Portuguese presence in the Indian subcontinent. The British, in turn, were, since 1665, sovereigns of the Bombay territory, south of the border of the Northern Province, incorporated to the *Estado da Índia*. This area offered the East India Company the desired territorialization, complementing their trading posts scattered along the Indian west coast, where, from the early 17th century, they introduced themselves commercially.

The Portuguese and British historiographies have produced various studies over the last century about the Anglo-Portuguese relational dynamics in the Bombay region, isolating it into various defined themes, such as the surrendering process of the island,<sup>6</sup> religious issues,<sup>7</sup> land<sup>8</sup> and tax/legal issues<sup>9</sup> or the maintenance of the Portuguese memory until today.<sup>10</sup> In the particular case of the loss of the Northern Province, specific studies are scarce, except for one article by Souza.<sup>11</sup> The Anglo-Portuguese dynamics are addressed only briefly and in general terms in the works that deal with the Marathas,<sup>12</sup> the Northern

<sup>1</sup>Rodrigo Felner (ed.), *Subsídios para a História da Índia Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Typographia da Academia Real das Ciências, 1868, p. 134-138.

<sup>2</sup>André Teixeira, *Baçaim e o seu território: política e economia (1536-1661)*, Doctoral thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2010, p. 33; Dejanirah Couto, "Em torno da concessão e da fortaleza de Baçaim (1529-1546)", *Mare Liberum*, n. 9, 1995, p. 119-120.

<sup>3</sup>Dejanirah Couto, "Em torno da concessão e da fortaleza de Baçaim (1529-1546)", *Mare Liberum*, n. 9, 1995, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup>Territory along the coastal strip between Mumbai and Daman with a variable width between 7 and 30 km (4-18 miles).

<sup>5</sup>As in Ceylon, Mozambique (later), and Goa, although in the latter, the range was smaller.

<sup>6</sup>Pedro Nobre, *A entrega de Bombaim ao Reino Unido (1661-1668): um processo político-diplomático*, Master's thesis, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais, Lisboa, 2008.

<sup>7</sup>Glenn Ames, "The role of religion in the transfer and rise of Bombay, c. 1661-1687", *The Historical Journal*, v. 46, n. 2, 2002, p. 317-340.

<sup>8</sup>Mariam Dossal, *Mumbai*. Theatre of conflict, city of hope, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>9</sup>*Idem*, "Continuity and change: the Portuguese presence in British Bombay, c. 1660-1860", In: Anthony Disney, Emily Booth (eds.), *Vasco da Gama and the linking of Europe and Asia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 403-18.

<sup>10</sup>Paulo Varela Gomes, "'Bombay Portuguese'. Ser ou não ser português em Bombaim no século XIX", *Revista de História de Ideias*, n. 28, 2008, p. 567-608; Prakashchandra P. Shriodkar, "Bombay and the Portuguese impact and influences with special reference to etymology", *Mare Liberum*, n. 9, 1995, p. 291-301; Paulo Varela Gomes; Walter Rossa, "O primeiro território: Bombaim e os Portugueses", *Oceanos*, n. 41, 2000, p. 210-224; Clement Godwin, *Change and continuity: a study of two Christian village communities in suburban Bombay*, Bombaim, McGraw-Hill, 1972.

<sup>11</sup>E. J. D' Souza, "Portuguese-Maratha-British designs on the island of Salsette", *Indica*, vol. 38, n. 1-2, 2001, p. 213-220.

<sup>12</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970; Stewart Gordon, "The Marathas, 1600-1818", In: Gordon Johnson; Christian Bayly; John F. Richards (eds.), *The new Cambridge history of India*, v. IV, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Province,<sup>13</sup> or the Portuguese–Maratha relationship.<sup>14</sup> In this article, we aim to analyze the dynamics of Anglo-Portuguese interaction in the particular context of the Maratha attacks on the Northern Province, and to compartmentalize them in the long relational process started with the surrender of Bombay. Thus, we aim to undertake a summarized contextualization of the major powers in the region (European and Asian) and their respective interactions, and then analyze the various stages of the Maratha attacks, initiated in the beginning of the 1720s and formally ended by the Portuguese–Maratha peace agreement of 1740.

The Portuguese defeat and retreat in the Northern Province were ultimately — given the events of the previous decades and the internal changes of the *Estado da Índia* and the political context of the Indian Deccan — a predictable and inevitable outcome. In fact, the geopolitical transformations, which, since the early 18th century, reversed the balance of power in the Deccan and peripheral regions (defragmenting of the Mughal Empire and the growing Marathi power), placed the Portuguese possessions in the Indian west in clear danger: not only the Northern Province, but also the capital itself, Goa. On the other hand, the Portuguese defense shortcomings (less human contingent and limited financial and military capacity), added to the limited availability and willingness of British support,<sup>15</sup> provided only in specific moments, which implied a hypothetical danger in the defense of Bombay.

### Major political powers in the Indian subcontinent

The Indian political map in the Deccan and Konkan regions was, in the second half of the 17th century, essentially composed of two major Asian powers: the Mughal Empire and the Maratha kingdom. Other less relevant powers, but of equal importance in Indian political geography, were added to these, such as the Golconda and Bijapur kingdoms, the Siddis<sup>16</sup> and, of course, the *Estado*

<sup>13</sup>Luis Frederico Antunes, “Província do Norte”, In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, v. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 2, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006; Mário César Leão, *A Província do Norte do Estado da Índia (1534-1729)*, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1996.

<sup>14</sup>Alexandre Lobato, *Relações luso-maratas (1658-1737)*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1965.

<sup>15</sup>We chose to use the term “British” in a flexible manner, given the particular characteristics of internal and external English reality in the 17th and 18th centuries. The East India Company (EIC), based in London, was constituted in Europe, but also, particularly, in Asia, with a mix of individuals from the various regions of the old Albion, who could be English, Welsh, or Scottish. In this sense, it seemed more practical to use the term “British” as the operating concept, to simplify the characterization of a heterogeneous group as the EIC subjects stationed in the Indian region.

<sup>16</sup>The Siddis were a Muslim family of Abyssinian origin present in India since the 15th century. Two centuries later, their corsair activity made them one of the most feared forces in the Indian west coast between Daman and Tiracol, where Danda-Rajpuri and Janjira (22 and 31 miles south of Bombay, respectively) constituted their support bases. Acting as feudatories of the Ahmadnagar kingdom at the beginning of the 17th century, they allied with Bijapur after the conquest of that kingdom by the Mughal Empire in 1636, taking the position of Navy admirals. They would assume this same position in the Mughal Empire from the 1660s, and one of their main functions was to protect vessels of pilgrims bound for Mecca. This positioning in the Indian political geography placed them under the focus of the Maratha animosity, with whom they engaged in systematic confrontations, which, given the proximity of the territories in the *Estado da Índia* and the EIC, often involved the Portuguese and the British. Cf. Dauril Alden, *The making of an enterprise. The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its empire, and beyond: 1540-1750*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 448; Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 6-7; Luis Frederico Antunes, *op cit.*, p. 221-222.

*da Índia* and the English enclave of Bombay. With the Mughal annexation of the first two in the 1680s, the control of the Indian subcontinent became disputed, since the late 17th century among Mughal and Marathas. Thus, the Mughal power controlled much of Khandesh and the northern part of the Konkan whereas the Marathas were concentrated mainly in southern Gates and central and coastal areas of the Konkan where Canoji Angria,<sup>17</sup> supporting their maneuvers from key ports such as Colaba, seized vessels, plundered cities and occupied forts.<sup>18</sup>

The death of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb would represent a turning point in the Indian balance of power, embodied in the progressive weakening and decline of the secular Mughal Empire, as opposed to the consolidation and territorial expansion of the Maratha Confederacy. The conquest of the Northern Province was part of this strong expansionist movement that would reach its zenith in the 1740s, establishing the Marathas as the lords of the Deccan and the main rivals to the emerging British territorial policy (Map 1).<sup>19</sup>

The East India Company, founded in 1600, was a joint-stock company composed of members of the English aristocracy and British and foreign merchants, which was therefore quite close to the political and financial power of the City of London. Despite this composition, it generally managed to keep political autonomy from the English Crown (until the mid-18th century), counterbalanced simultaneously by a systematic closeness and support to the English royal and parliamentary power. In fact, the prosperity and the economic and commercial development of the Company were beneficial and of interest to the English political power, which hoped to benefit and obtain profits. From this perspective, several Royal Charters were granted, which guaranteed the Company trade monopolies in the Indian and the Pacific, as well as other privileges: authority to enter into war and peace with the Asian powers, to erect fortifications, to coin money, to form armed contingents, to repatriate illegal traders, and to apply the civil and criminal justice in their establishments. The foundations of the new company sat thus on trade and profit, and its activity focused initially on a purely mercantile and commercial strategy, in stark contrast to the

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<sup>17</sup>Canoji Angria was vice-admiral of the Maratha Navy, having been away from that power during the conflict maintained with Aurangzeb, between 1690 and 1707, which weakened the central Maratha government. This situation enabled Canoji to rebel and act out of the Maratha control, founding a principality of great extension between the Bombay port and Vengurla, where he attacked and plundered Mughal, Portuguese, and British merchant vessels. These activities made him the most feared pirate of the Indian west coast until his death, in 1729. His descendants continued piracy actions in the following decades, albeit with lower efficiency and impact, and, in 1755, the Anglo-Marathi joint action would permanently eliminate the Angria threat. Cf. Jean Sutton, *The East India Company's maritime service: 1746-1834. Masters of the Eastern Seas*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2010 and Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 47-48.

<sup>18</sup>Stewart Gordon, "The Marathas: 1600-1818", In: Gordon Johnson; Christian Bayly; John F. Richards (eds.), *The new Cambridge history of India*, vol. IV, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 92-101; Walter Sadgun Desai, *op cit.*, p. 48-49.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 69-72; Ernestina Carreira, "Aspectos políticos", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 1, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 63-72; Percival Spear, *India. A modern history*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1972, p. 78.

Portuguese and Dutch presence in that space. Subsequently, although not officially changing this strategy, the progressive British rooting in overseas territories would eventually push the adoption of a hybrid approach, where



Map 1. The District of Bassein of the Northern Province.

overlapping commercial and politica-military strategies were connected and complemented.<sup>20</sup>

The possessions of the *Estado da Índia* and the British interests in the Indian west coast (Surat and Bombay) were naturally affected by the Maratha-Mughal antagonism, which potentiated the change in political and diplomatic strategies undertaken so far. Thus, the presence of a new political and military force in the vicinity of Portuguese and British sovereignty spaces necessarily forced the “European” involvement, which went on to align with either one of the opposing forces, depending on the situation and the interests at stake, looking to get dividends from their antagonisms.

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*The prosperity and the economic and commercial development of the Company were beneficial and of interest to the English political power*

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During the eight decades, between 1665 and 1739, British policy in the Indian subcontinent was officially characterized by neutrality, except for a short period in the 1680s, which proved disastrous for the Company and which forced it to readopt its initial posture. With this strategy, they wanted to distance themselves from the political conflicts and not to disturb their main goal, which was trade. It was, therefore, the adoption of a pragmatic economic policy (and not so much a doctrine of warfare rejection) applied from the start and incorporated over time, demonstrating that they comprehended how the space where they were inserted worked politically and economically.<sup>21</sup> The reality experienced, however, was not as linear, and interests and pressures at play forced the readaptation of the guidelines enforced, leading the Company to engage in systematic unofficial and secret aids, such as those seen in the context of the Portuguese-Maratha war. Note that, in the context of the ongoing Anglo-Maratha antagonism, the Bombay government had pressed London to adopt a more offensive posture,<sup>22</sup> which was systematically rejected, possibly because it was considered that this territory did not have the necessary defensive conditions to take a military offensive stance on local issues. This crossroads between the

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<sup>20</sup>On the history of the EIC, cf. the works of Kirti Chaudhuri, *The trading world of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978; Ian Bruce Watson, “Fortifications and the ‘idea’ of force in early English East India Company relations with India”, *The Past and Present*, n. 88, 1980, p. 70-87; Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a history*, London, Longman, 1993; Om Prakash, “The English East India Company and India”, In: H.V. Bowen *et al.* (eds.), *The worlds of the East India Company*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2002, p. 1-17; Philip Stern, *The company-state: corporate sovereignty and the early modern foundations of the British Empire in India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

<sup>21</sup>P.J. Marshall, “The English in Asia to 1700”, In: Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 1 (“The Origins of the Empire”), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 280-281.

<sup>22</sup>British Library (BL), “Carta do conselho de Bombaim para os diretores em Londres”, 21.08.1699, Original Correspondence (OC) 6711.

necessary action and the possible action lasted until the Maratha conquest of the Northern Province, maintaining the British strategy of not getting involved officially in local issues, with the Anglo-Portuguese action against Angria in 1721 being one of the exceptions.

The *Estado da Índia* was also in the middle of tensions between Marathas and Mughal, strategically opting by remaining neutral. The weapons were replaced with diplomacy, creating alliances, covert support, and threats of war, so as not to compromise the Portuguese possessions, and, at the same time, keep the Asian powers in confrontation, to weaken each other.<sup>23</sup> According to Lobato, “halting the Maratha power and wearing out the Mughal power was an imperative of the Portuguese balance policy between neighboring kings,”<sup>24</sup> to which, at the same time, the control of the Dutch and British presence and the fight against pirate activities were added.<sup>25</sup> The Marathas actions especially focused on the region of Goa, the cities of Chaul and Bassein, and the island of Salsette.<sup>26</sup> However, the ongoing Mughal pressure in the rearguard coerced the Maratha forces to focus on another military front and to temporarily abandon their assaults on the Portuguese territories.<sup>27</sup> This military demobilization was normally accompanied by an agreement between both parties, and there had been several over the years, some of which had British mediation,<sup>28</sup> in an environment of intermittent peace and war until 1737, when the final attack on the Bassein district was carried out.

### **The British support and the systematic Maratha incursions (1723–1732)**

In 1723, the Marathas invaded the Bassein district, making several incursions from the regions of Galiana and Biundy, recently reclaimed from the Mughal Empire. Their economic and fiscal motivations influenced their intention of making the Northern Province their tributary province (imposing the *chauth*<sup>29</sup> as a way to mark their power as lords of that region<sup>30</sup>) and to obtain other commercial and customs-related dividends. The subsequent

<sup>23</sup>Joaquim Romero Magalhães, “As tentativas de recuperação asiática”, *In*: Francisco Bethencourt; Kirti Chaudhuri (dirs.), *História da expansão portuguesa*, vol. 3, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1998, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup>Alexandre Lobato, *Relações luso-maratas (1658-1737)*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1965, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup>Luis Frederico Antunes, “Província do Norte”, *In*: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 2, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 210-223.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 215-216; Francisco Bethencourt, “O Estado da Índia”, *In*: \_\_\_\_; Kirti Chaudhuri (dirs.), *op cit.*, vol. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Alexandre Lobato, *op cit.*, p. 33-34; Luis Frederico Antunes, *op cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>28</sup>P.S. Pissurlencar, *The Portuguese and the Marathas*, Bombaim, State Board for Literature and Culture, 1975, p. 174-179.

<sup>29</sup>The *chauth* was charged on ¼ of the income of lands outside of the Maratha policy jurisdiction (*Swarajya*), which they called Mughal or Mughlai lands. Such coercion caused, of course, the animosity in zones controlled by the Mughal or by Bijapur, and also with the *Estado da Índia*, where the demand for payment and the systematic refusals by the Portuguese became a constant point of antagonism between the two powers.

<sup>30</sup>P.S. Pissurlencar, *Maratas em Baçaim*, Bastorá, Tipografia Rangel, 1935, p. 11.

peace agreement (1724),<sup>31</sup> resulting from the Mughal pressure and the defensive reinforcement coming from Goa, was short lived, as attacks on the Portuguese capital were reported on that same year.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, new incursions were carried out — this time, in accordance with Angria and other small neighboring powers<sup>33</sup> — and, again, the Mughal military pressure on another front forced a new Portuguese–Maratha understanding.<sup>34</sup> This new agreement did not invalidate, again, the continuity of new attacks in that time and space, which were focused on the province of Daman, in 1728,<sup>35</sup> and in Thane and neighboring regions at the dawn of the 1730s. In 1732, the Mughal pressure on the lands adjacent to Daman led to a new agreement, under British mediation, the so-called Treaty of Bombay, in which the *Estado da Índia* assured the maintenance of its integrity and sovereignty — at the expense, however, of economic and financial concessions. The British hoped to ensure business benefits with the Portuguese–Maratha pact, including better trading in the lands of the Galiana region, as well as free passage in Thane, which the viceroy stressed he did not have orders to ensure.<sup>36</sup>

The Portuguese–Maratha relationship was thus marked by continuous Maratha hostility to the possessions of the *Estado da Índia*, particularly in the Northern Province, and reached its zenith in the mid-1730s, as, in previous years, the oppositions got to be controlled and minimized through diplomatic means. In that space, the Marathas claimed for themselves a territorial portion of utmost importance in the Indian west coast, which allowed them a connection to the sea and guaranteed commercial, agricultural, and marine income. In fact, the Maratha interest was essentially economic and strategic, which guided their action throughout the Indian subcontinent. However, other less relevant motivations are pointed out (by historiography and by Maratha sources), including reasons of religious (due to intolerant policy of the Portuguese toward the Hindu population), political (due to the Portuguese–Mughal cooperation), and “racial” nature.<sup>37</sup>

The Portuguese–Maratha conflict was, naturally, overlooked with great care by the British Company, who feared that the attacks of the Maratha commander

<sup>31</sup>Júlio Firmino Biker (ed.), *Collecção de tratados e concertos de pazes que o Estado da Índia fez com os Reis e Senhores com quem teve relações nas partes da Ásia e África Oriental desde o principio da conquista até ao fim do século XVIII*, vol. IV, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1883, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), “Governadores do Estado da Índia para o monarca”, 27.12.1724, *Monções*, 90, fl. 172.

<sup>33</sup>Francisco Bethencourt, “O Estado da Índia”, In: \_\_\_\_; Kirti Chaudhuri (dirs.), *História da expansão portuguesa*, vol. 3, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1998, p. 253-254; Luis Frederico Antunes, “Provincia do Norte”, In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 2, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 220-221; AHU, “Carta do vice-rei para o secretário de estado”, 19.01.1726, *Monções*, 92, fl. 366.

<sup>34</sup>Alexandre Lobato, *Relações luso-maratas (1658-1737)*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1965, p. 93-94.

<sup>35</sup>AHU, “Carta do vice-rei ao general do Norte”, 14.07.1729, *Baçaim*, livro 5, fl. 52v; *Idem*, “Carta do vice-rei ao capitão de Baçaim”, 29.10.1730, *Baçaim*, livro 5, fl. 84.

<sup>36</sup>BL, India Office Records (IOR)/E/4/450, “Carta do Conselho de Bombaim para a EIC”, 30.01.1732, fls. 400-402.

<sup>37</sup>Mário César Leão, *A província do norte do Estado da Índia (1534-1729)*, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1996, p. 138-149.



Bagi Rao's forces would lead to a political change on the Salsette island, with potential hazards to Bombay. The British government, following the guidelines issued by London<sup>38</sup> and in view of the Portuguese military weaknesses and of the resulting requests for help from the General in the North and the viceroy, opted, in a nutshell, for private, partial, and pragmatic support to the Portuguese defenses. From the British point of view, the Maratha neighborhood north of Bombay would be more problematic than the fracturing policies undertaken by the Portuguese during the various decades when they shared borders. This British political-strategic framework around the Salsette matter leads to a better understanding of the defensive and military choices made from the early 1730s, in the context of the Maratha invasion. At first, the British position consisted of aiding the Portuguese forces by sending, in 1730, 200 musketeers (50 Europeans, and the other were topasses), 250 *sepois*, and 6 galliots.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, with the military aid sent, the British sought to ensure quick understanding between the belligerents, mediating the negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

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*Between 1665 and 1739, British policy in the Indian subcontinent was officially characterized by neutrality, except for a short period in the 1680s*

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Forces were sent due to Portuguese difficulties and military needs, whether in men or material. However, from the Company's perspective, this aid would be temporary, until Lisbon, Goa, or even recruited troops in Salsette had time to rescue the territory with the appropriate military reinforcement. However, the constant Maratha threat in the Thane River (whose forces were successively strengthened and increased) and the absence of new Portuguese contingent put the British Company in an uncomfortable situation, because if they abandoned their position, Salsette would be easily conquered, since the Portuguese contingent had no resources to hold back the enemy advance.<sup>41</sup> Despite the British pressure, sending members of its board to Bassein, pressing the Portuguese to send more men (and also to pay for the aid provided),<sup>42</sup> their answer was that, due to the Portuguese inability to deploy more forces, the maintenance of the British military support was crucial.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>BL, IOR, E/104, "Carta dos diretores da EIC para o presidente e conselho de Bombaim", 27.01.1730, fl. 356; *Idem*, P/341/7, pt. 1, 30.05.1730, fls. 65-67.

<sup>39</sup>*Idem*, pt. 2, "Consulta do conselho de Bombaim", 11.04.1731, fls. 45-46.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, pt. 2, 30.05.1730, fls. 65-67.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibidem*, 20.11.1730, fls. 177-179.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibidem*; *Idem*, E/106, "Carta dos diretores da EIC para o presidente e conselho de Bombaim", 15.03.1734, fls.110-110v. To the complaints of nonpayment, were added the laments at the continued refusal of free passage to the British in Thane.

<sup>43</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/7, "Carta de Arnold Paauw e Hugh Bidwell", 12.1730.

The Goa reinforcements would eventually arrive in late 1730, several months after the Maratha attack.<sup>44</sup> This Portuguese military reinforcement enabled only the temporary demobilization of British troops, as it was only briefly held back the progress of the Maratha in Salsette and Bassein.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in April of the following year, there was a new request for British soldiers to be deployed in the Thane fortress, specifically 300 *sepois*. This aid was granted because it was stated that it would be more beneficial to the Company that Salsette remained under Portuguese possession, as the reconquering of that island by the Marathas would be extremely difficult.<sup>46</sup>

### The definitive Portuguese retreat and the double British position (1737–1739)

As mentioned, the Treaty of Bombay of 1732, as in previous treaties, did not mean the end of Portuguese–Maratha hostilities. In fact, two years later, incursions were resumed, rekindling the conflict that only ended with the complete conquest of the Salsette island and Bassein by the forces of Bagi Rao in 1739 and 1740, respectively. Note that the Mughal removal from those areas (forced to focus their military attention on Delhi, recently conquered by Nadir Shah of Persia) contributed to this outcome, which resulted in the complete Maratha focus on the attack on the Bassein district.

The previously tested Maratha tactic of simultaneously attacking the main Portuguese cities — blocking food and military supplies — allowed the isolation of the Northern Province, whose defensive weaknesses and limited British aid placed it at the mercy of the Maratha forces. Thus, in addition to the attacks on Salsette, the Marathas invested against Chaul, Bassein, and Goa,<sup>47</sup> which forced the mobilization on several fronts of the few Portuguese defenses. This situation worsened the Northern Province's defensive problems, because in addition to the limitation in the food supply and military support, it faced a systematic lack of money and ammunition.

The attack on Salsette began in April 1737,<sup>48</sup> after some attacks on Chaul. This initial movement resulted in the conquest of the Fort of Thane,<sup>49</sup> whose construction works (by order of the viceroy, the Count of Sandomil) were still in progress. Immediately after the loss of Thane, the General in the North requested

<sup>44</sup>AHU, "Carta do vice-rei ao general do Norte", 1312.1730, *Baçaim*, 5, fl. 98v; *Idem*, "Portaria do vice-rei", 03.04.1731, *Reis Vizinhas*, 7, fl. 94v.

<sup>45</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/7, 11.04.1731.

<sup>47</sup>In particular, the Goan municipalities of Bardez and Salsette, conquering the Fort of Mormugao, besieging the Fort of Rachol and, in the neighboring regions, occupying Ponda and subordinating the neighboring kingdoms of Sunda and the Wadi Sawants.

<sup>48</sup>AHU, "Carta do vice-rei para o secretário de estado", 19.04.1737, *Monções*, 107, fl. 278.

<sup>49</sup>The Bombay governor warned, with one year's notice, about the Maratha movements and their intentions on Thane, and no actions were taken on that matter. Cf. E. J. D'Souza, "Portuguese-Maratha-British designs on the island of Salsette", *Indica*, vol. 38, n. 1-2, 2001, p. 215.

military support from Bombay,<sup>50</sup> as well as from other local authorities, such as the nawab of Surat or the French of Pondicherry.<sup>51</sup> The British denied the request, stating that it was made too late (as the Marathas had already passed the Thane River) and their available forces were limited, since most of their men had been deployed to Thalassery to stop the Dutch threat.<sup>52</sup> They would later add that, given the proximity of the Maratha to Bombay, all men and ammunition they had would be used to defend the island, and they could not, therefore, send any help to the Portuguese.<sup>53</sup> The most that the British could “offer” was their mediation, in 1737<sup>54</sup> and in the following year,<sup>55</sup> not achieving the desired result.<sup>56</sup> After the possession of the strategic Fort of Thane, the remaining island of Salsette quickly came under the Maratha control, except for the villages of Bandora and Versava.

The conquest of Thane put the British authorities on high alert, and immediate orders were given for the strengthening of the Bombay forts.<sup>57</sup> Also from this perspective, the Maratha intrusion and its proximity to the south of Salsette forced the Company to change its position, willing to assist the meager Portuguese forces and thus prevent the dangerous approach to the border of Bombay. This position was justified to the Marathas by the Anglo-Portuguese agreement, which established the provision of support in case of attack.<sup>58</sup>

The defense of the village of Bandora thus became crucial for the safety of Bombay. In this sense, due to a request by a Jesuit priest, 50 men were sent (whose expenses would be covered by the religious order)<sup>59</sup> and, a few months later, 100 barrels of gunpowder was also sent; however, any other human reinforcement was refused.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the provincial and the visitor priest, as well as other priests, were able to take shelter in Bombay during the initial confrontation in Bandora.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the British power proposed a new mediation to the Maratha leader, despite little prospect of an agreement, because the Maratha force and its recent achievements made it unlikely for a compromise to be

<sup>50</sup>Assentos do Conselho de Estado (ACE) (1618-1750), Arquivo Histórico do Estado da Índia, “Proposta para o Conselho de Estado”, 12.04.1737, vol. V, doc. 146, p. 401-404; *Ibidem*, 04.05.1737, doc. 147, p. 419.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibidem*, 18.10.1737, doc. 152, p. 447.

<sup>52</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/9, “Consulta do conselho de Bombaim”, 28.03.1737, fls. 86-91.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibidem*, 04.04.1737, fls. 102-106; *Ibidem*, 27.04.1737, fls. 124-129.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibidem*, pt. II, 25.08.1738, fls. 203-207.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibidem*, 18.09.1738, fls. 220-223.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibidem*, “Consulta do conselho de Bombaim”, 28.03.1737, fls. 86-91; *Ibidem*, 03.05.1737, fls. 136-138; *Idem*, H/332, [Conselho Bombaim], “Representation of the invasion of the Portuguese Northern territories in Deccan by the Marathas and the present state of Bombay in respect thereto, addressed to the Honorable Court of Directors”, 03.10.1737, fls. 557; 561-563.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibidem*, fls. 548-549.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibidem*, P/341/9, *op cit*.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibidem*, 05.05.1737, fls. 139-140; ACE, *op cit*, fl. 447. Despite this aid, the Bombay Council still pointed out the bad Portuguese conduct in this situation, citing the capturing of vessels, the arrest of a British subject in Goa and other acts of hostility. Cf. BL, IOR, H/332, *op cit*, fls. 542-543.

<sup>61</sup>ACE, *op cit*, doc. 151, 16.09.1737, fl. 439.

reached, and because the Portuguese alike, despite the unfavorable context, maintained their pride and arrogance.<sup>62</sup>

Despite this initial support, the Bombay position was officially neutral during the pressure on the villages of Bandora and Versava. Their intentions of asserting themselves commercially in Salsette and their dependency on the Maratha commercial blocks added to the insufficient military force to confront the Asian army and asked for the adoption of a neutral strategy, so as not to antagonize its relations with the Maratha power. London validated this strategy, ordering the noninvolvement in local issues, stressing that its agents were officers of a commercial company and, as such, should refrain from participating in the current balance of power.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the manpower support request by Chimnaji Appa, who, in exchange, offered the return of the British vessels captured and free trade in the Maratha-controlled areas, was refused.<sup>64</sup> According to some Portuguese historiography, this refusal of military forces did not stop them from sending military equipment unofficially,<sup>65</sup> a strategy also used with the *Estado da Índia*. This premise was coherent with British behavioral profile throughout the decades, characterized by a double and flexible diplomacy in the face of local and border conflicts, in a policy that was similar to the Portuguese. However, and despite this military aids being also reported by Portuguese officials,<sup>66</sup> the official English documentation is silent on the matter, which is, naturally, not valid as an absolute counterpoint to the conveyed thesis, but rather puts it under question. Also, subsequent requests for military support by General in the North to the *Estado da Índia* were refused, aiming at a counteroffensive over the Fort of Thane<sup>67</sup> and at the defense of the villages in the south of Salsette. The British justifications were not new, highlighting their inability to mobilize their forces, which were necessary to ensure the defense of Bombay,<sup>68</sup> and equally emphasizing the little success that an Anglo-Portuguese contingent would have against the many Maratha forces.<sup>69</sup> Such inability was, however, an excuse for the Company not to engage in the conflict and maintain its neutral position.

<sup>62</sup>BL, IOR, H/332, [Conselho Bombaim], "Representation of the invasion of the Portuguese Northern territories in Deccan by the Marathas and the present state of Bombay in respect thereto, addressed to the Honorable Court of Directors", 03.10.1737, fl. 547.

<sup>63</sup>*Idem*, E/3, 107, "Carta dos diretores da EIC para o presidente e conselho de Bombaim", 06.01.1738, fls. 192-202.

<sup>64</sup>*Idem*, P/341/9, "Consulta do conselho de Bombaim", 03.06.1737, fls. 157-160.

<sup>65</sup>Ernestina Carreira, "Aspectos políticos", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 1, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 73; Mário César Leão, *A província do norte do Estado da Índia (1534-1729)*, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1996, p. 141.

<sup>66</sup>ACE, "Proposta para o Conselho de Estado", 18.10.1737, vol. V, doc. 152, fl. 447. It was also stated by the General in the North, in a letter to the viceroy in December 5, 1737, that the Maratha enemy knew of the reinforcements made by the Portuguese, because they "were warned by their confidants in Bombay". Cf. *Ibidem*, doc. 153, 11.12.1737, fl. 457.

<sup>67</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/9, *op cit.*, pt. II, 01.03.1738, fls. 54-56; *Idem*, "Carta do general do Norte, D. Pedro de Melo para o presidente de Bombaim", 28.10.1738, fls. 284-285.

<sup>68</sup>They estimated that, to recapture the island, at least three thousand European men with artillery training would be necessary, and the subsequent demobilization would rapidly risk Bombay's defense against the many Maratha forces. Cf. BL, IOR, E/3/107, *op cit.*, 02.03.1739, fl. 324v; *Ibidem*, 02.08.1739, fls. 332v-337.

<sup>69</sup>*Idem*, P/341/9, *op cit.*, pt. II, *Idem*, "Resposta do presidente de Bombaim para o general do Norte", 10.11.1738, fls. 285-286.

The loss of Bandora would happen two years after the first Maratha incursions, after the occupation, in 1738, of part of the territory of Daman.<sup>70</sup> The Maratha intentions over the remaining two villages of Salsette in Portuguese possession (Bandora and Versava) were reported to the British governor by the Maratha commander himself, Kondaki Mankar, who, given the good institutional relationship between them, advised the withdrawal of British forces from those two cities.<sup>71</sup> The British, recognizing the Maratha power and the inevitability of defeat, accepted the suggestion, as long as it was agreed that the Fort of Bandora would be demolished by both forces contending, fearing that the fort, in Maratha hands, would be used as an offensive platform against Bombay. Despite the agreement of the General in the North, the decision was referred to Goa,<sup>72</sup> which accepted the fatality of the situation, ordering the demolition of the fort<sup>73</sup> in February 1739, along with the military structures along the Mahim river, which, likewise, put the defense of the British island in danger.<sup>74</sup> This measure led to strong Jesuit opposition, as expected, and it was said that their influence was so great that the Portuguese commander did not dare to follow the orders of his general.<sup>75</sup>

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*The Portuguese–Maratha conflict  
was overlooked with great care  
by the British Company*

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The British pressure would eventually prevail and, also in February, the Marathas, after the conquest of the fort cities and forts of Mahim, Tarapor, Sirigao, Danu, Asserim, Versava,<sup>76</sup> and Bandora, had, ultimately, full control of the Salsette island. Shortly after this loss, the islands of Caranja and Elephanta, east of Bombay, were also taken by the Peshwa forces,<sup>77</sup> after the refusal of British aid to local inhabitants. Thus, just over three years after the start of the final Maratha attack, the *Estado da Índia* lost an important part of its Northern Province as was the Bassein district, composed of 20 forts, 340 villages, 4 ports, and major islands, such as Salsette, das Vacas, and Caranja.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Luis Frederico Antunes, "Província do Norte", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 2, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 222.

<sup>71</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/10, 19.01.1739.

<sup>72</sup>*Idem*, "Conselho de Bombaim", 27.01.1739, fls. 46-52.

<sup>73</sup>*Idem*, "Resposta do presidente britânico ao general do Norte", 18.02.1739, fls. 55-56.

<sup>74</sup>*Idem*, 19.01.1739; *Idem*, 25.03.1739.

<sup>75</sup>*Idem*, "Conselho de Bombaim", 20.02.1739, fls. 80-85.

<sup>76</sup>At the time of the attacks in Versava, Portuguese authorities, who needed provisions, asked Bombay to send rice (also to Baçaim), which was granted. Cf. BL, IOR, P/341/10, "Conselho de Bombaim", 27.01.1739, fls. 53-54; *Idem*, "Carta do general do Norte para o presidente e conselho de Bombaim", 16.02.1739, fls. 54-55.

<sup>77</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 116.

<sup>78</sup>Frederick Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, London, W.H. Allen & Co., 1894, p. 412.

## The loss of Bassein and the Portuguese–Maratha peace agreement

Shortly after the conquest of the island of Salsette in May 1739, Bassein would also succumb to the Maratha forces. After three months of siege, the limited and weary Portuguese forces, without the support of Goa and Daman, gave them outright control of that important city and the last bastion of that district.<sup>79</sup> Adopting the previously used strategy, the Maratha attacked and surrounded Bassein, at the same time as they attacked the territories of Daman and the entire Bassein district and much of the territory of Daman; the Portuguese in the region were left only with control over the cities of Diu, Daman, and Chaul, with the latter being transferred to the Maratha domain a few months later.

In the attack on Bassein, the British authorities maintained their pragmatic and officially neutral policy. If, on the one hand, they sold provisions to the Marathas, allegedly to maintain a good relationship with their new neighbor, on the other hand, they helped the Portuguese forces with ammunition, supplies, skilled workers,<sup>80</sup> and, bypassing the guidelines by London, money — which is explained by the importance of the preservation of Bassein for Bombay's safety.<sup>81</sup> The aid was extended after the surrender agreement of May 16, 1739, because, in spite of this agreement guaranteeing religious freedom and maintenance of the land for local inhabitants, many Portuguese residents chose to go to Bombay, which was carried out in British vessels that, at the same time, also transported the Portuguese forces.<sup>82</sup> After four months on the British island,<sup>83</sup> where they survived with the support of the local government, these Portuguese would be sent to Chaul, again in the Company's vessels, while some families chose to stay in Bombay.<sup>84</sup>

The Portuguese–Marathi general understanding was finally established in September 18, 1740,<sup>85</sup> establishing the Portuguese loss of the Northern Province (including the Salsette island, Bassein, and Chaul), but their maintenance of the territories of Bardez and Salsette (neighboring Goa), regain of control of the Forts of São Jerónimo and of the *pragana* of Naer in Daman, and the

<sup>79</sup>Luis Frederico Antunes, "Província do Norte". In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 2, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 222-223; Govind Sakharam Sardesai, *New history of the Marathas*, vol. II, Bombaim, Phoenix Publications, 1958, p. 158.

<sup>80</sup>BL, IOR, P/341/10, "Conselho de Bombaim", 20.02.1739, fls. 80-85; *Ibidem*, 01.05.1739, fls. 170-177.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibidem*, 17.04.1739.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibidem*, *op cit.*, 07.05.1739, fls. 184-186.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibidem*, 06.07.1739, fls. 264-270; *Ibidem*, "Carta dos diretores da EIC para o presidente e conselho de Bombaim", 03.02.1741, fls. 151-161.

<sup>84</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 104; Mário César Leão, *A província do norte do Estado da Índia (1534-1729)*, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1996, p. 140-141; Ernestina Carreira, "Aspectos políticos", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *op cit.*, tomo 1, p. 74-75.

<sup>85</sup>Júlio Firmino Biker (ed.), *Collecção de tratados e concertos de pazes que o Estado da Índia fez com os Reis e Senhores com quem teve relações nas partes da Ásia e Africa Oriental desde o principio da conquista até ao fim do século XVIII*, vol. VI, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1883, p. 202-205.

reestablishment of trade links between the region of the Ghats and Goa.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the Forts of Chaul and Mahr<sup>87</sup> came ultimately under the Maratha power, where, as in the case of Bassein, some of its residents chose to abandon the city, aided by British vessels.<sup>88</sup>

From the late 1730s, the British strategy focused on strengthening the friendship with their new neighbor, to ensure a peaceful political and commercial relationship, as the Maratha military force was, at the time, superior to the British, and therefore, its economic prosperity depended on the extension of peace in that region. In this sense, bilateral negotiations were launched, which culminated in the Anglo-Maratha treaty of 1739, which granted peace and, above all, free trade in the Maratha territories.<sup>89</sup>

The wish of the British government to take possession of Salsette, for its strategic, economic, and commercial potential, was derived from the Company's establishment in Bombay territory and revived in periods of increased tension and instability. However, despite the various pressures from India, the Company's directors rejected any military initiative when it was under English or Maratha control. Their new strategy was to try to acquire the island through diplomatic channels, which was changed in the 1770s because, given the growing British military force and defensive reinforcements undertaken on the island, it was understood that the situation was then favorable for the conquest of the territories to the north of Bombay.

Attempts to regain control of Salsette and Bassein by the *Estado da Índia* had, therefore, the Company's opposition, which, at that stage, unlike the stance taken during the 1730s, did not intend Portuguese sovereignty in neighboring lands, noting that such scenario would be detrimental for the development of Bombay, which would again be commercially dependent on Portuguese obstructive policies.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, in 1774, in the context of internal Maratha disagreements, British forces advanced on Thane, seizing, by the end of the decade, other major cities, such as Versava, Daravi, Caranja, and Bassein, despite the protests and opposition by the viceroy.<sup>91</sup> Bassein would return to the Maratha sovereignty in 1782 under the peace agreement that ended the first Anglo-Maratha war; however, the Bombay Treaty of 1802 would seal the definitive possession by the British of the entire old Portuguese district.

<sup>86</sup>Ernestina Carreira, "Aspectos políticos", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *Nova história da expansão portuguesa*, vol. V (O Império Oriental, 1660-1820), tomo 1, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 2006, p. 75.

<sup>87</sup>These forts were surrendered to the British early in the negotiations, on the condition that they maintained their integrity until the Maratha forces abandoned the territories of Goa.

<sup>88</sup>Ernestina Carreira, *op cit.*; Luis Frederico Antunes, "Provincia do norte", In: Maria de Jesus dos Mártires Lopes (coord.), *op cit.*, tomo 2, p. 223.

<sup>89</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774*, Nova Deli, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 105-110.

<sup>90</sup>Rustomji Byramji Jeejeebhoy, *Bribery and corruption in Bombay*, Bombaim, [s.n.], 1952, p. 129.

<sup>91</sup>Walter Sadgun Desai, *op cit.*, p. 101; E.J. D'Souza, "Portuguese-Maratha-British designs on the island of Salsette", *Indica*, vol. 38, n. 1-2, 2001, p. 213-220. The viceroy, Don Francisco Guilherme de Sousa, claimed that, as the possessions of the Northern Province had belonged to the Crown, it was the British obligation (respecting the treaty of 1661) to assist the Portuguese in their recovery, and not to acquire them for their domain. This argument was rejected by the British governor, who affirmed the English sovereignty in those parts since 1775, and stressed that the British aid foreseen in the agreement of 1661 was related only to the Netherlands. Cf. Mário César Leão, *A Provincia do Norte do Estado da Índia (1534-1729)*, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1996, p. 148.

## Conclusion

The Anglo-Portuguese relationship over the period of border proximity in the Indian west coast was characterized by strategic flexibility and volatility, embodied in cooperative phases and antagonistic moments due to internal idiosyncrasies of each power and/or exogenous situations of adjacent regions. The interaction between the *Estado da Índia* and Bombay was thus expressed by an ideological pragmatism, in an extension of the implementation of foreign policy with the local authorities of the Deccan and Indian Konkan, such as the Mughal Empire and the Maratha confederation. These vectors thus characterized both a direct relationship plan — in the framework of territorial, commercial, customs-related, administrative, and military issues, raised by geographical proximity — and an indirect plan, in the context of the Mughal–Maratha opposition, which marked the period in question.

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*Despite the various pressures from India,  
the Company's directors rejected any  
military initiative when it was under  
Portuguese or Maratha control*

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Focusing on this last point, it was found that the conflict between the Mughal and the Maratha and the consequent pressure on the Portuguese and British interests from the 1660s inevitably forced an upgrade and change in the political–diplomatic alignment arrogated by Goa and Bombay. This position resulted in the adoption of a strategy not only of neutrality, but also cyclical collaboration with the Asian powers, seeking, first, to remove the defensive benefits assured by the war between both and, second, to ensure potential commercial benefits.

The Portuguese–Maratha implied, of course, in the involvement of the British Company, whose proximity to the conflict raised its interest in its outcome. The island of Salsette was, since the beginning of the British presence, the subject of particular attention and interest, not only for its strategic importance and economic and commercial potential, but also for defensive reasons. Despite this importance and varied pressures and plans for conquest, it was understood that the Company had no financial and military resources to oppose the Maratha force. Thus, an official neutral position, so to speak, was assumed, and, only after the final Maratha conquest of Salsette, its acquisition was sought, first diplomatically and, later, by military means.

From the perspective of the British, they were afraid of the expulsion of the Portuguese, who they preferred as neighbors over the Maratha, whom they feared could attack the territory of Bombay. However, the vast Maratha manpower limited the Company's intervention, as they had no resources and intention



to antagonize openly. From this perspective, facing the systematic requests for aid by the Portuguese, in the scenario of the incursions of the 1730s, the British support was administered in a limited, sporadic, and unofficial manner, and in contexts that represented little danger to the Bombay border.

After the conquest of Thane, the Maratha supremacy in Salsette concentrated the Bombay authorities on the defense of their possession, relegating the aid to the Northern Province to the background, only to be resumed when the Maratha threat, to the south of the island, came dangerously close to the Bombay border. Despite this situation and the British interest for the Portuguese sovereignty to be preserved in that space, the support given to the villages of Bandora and Versava was limited — in men and ammunition — and unofficial. The disparity of the forces, the commercial vulnerability to the Marathas, and the dangers of a counteroffensive on Bombay inevitably limited the Company's intervention capacity, and it strategically adopted an official neutral position.

This position lasted until the end of the conflict in the city of Bassein, where the official neutrality of the Company was overridden by the private support to both the Marathas and the Portuguese, for different reasons: if the possible limitation of the Maratha power in the region was of interest to the British, their almost certain victory and subsequent conquest of territories to the border of Bombay imposed a good communication and relationship policy, which was undone only decades later, when the British military power in the region would support the replacement of the diplomatic position with military means.