

**THE SOFALA COAST (MOZAMBIQUE) IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY:  
BETWEEN THE AFRICAN TRADE ROUTES AND INDIAN  
OCEAN TRADE**

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*This article addresses the local and regional impact of the settlement of the Portuguese in Sofala, Mozambique, in the 16th century. Using the documental archive sources on the Sofala coast we highlight the specificity of the interaction between the Portuguese and the local communities, the importance of the “non-official” strategies used by the Portuguese in order to be accepted by the local chieftaincies, the impact of their integration into the local and regional networks and how their attitude formed new geographies of power in the area, while exposing political, economic, social, cultural and religious dichotomies. Focusing our attention on these aspects we make new contributions to the analysis of the Sofala region in the 16th century for a better understanding of its role in the African and Indian Ocean trading networks in the Portuguese empire, mostly based in informal economic and political control and thus pretty close to the concept of “shadow empire”.*

keywords: Portuguese Expansion, “Shadow empire”, Intercontinental trading networks, Sofala, Mozambique, Indian Ocean

When arriving in the Indian Ocean in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese were confronted with an important intercontinental trade network dominated by Muslim merchants. This network involved the East African coastal ports, India and the Far East as well as inland African kingdoms and was part of a much larger, ancient Muslim network of trade, kinship and port-state complexes (Tibbetts, 1981; Abu-Lughod, 1989; Chaudhuri, 1990) connecting Africa, Asia and Europe (Fig. 1).

Regional African trade routes played a very important role in this system because of the coastal ports from the Bazaruto Islands up to the North of Mozambique. African trade goods, including gold, were exported from these ports to the northern Swahili towns and through them to the Indian Ocean where they exchanged for cotton, beads, spices and other Indian goods (Beach, 1980; Smith, 1983). A huge trade network covering the Middle East and the Far Eastern countries, dominated mainly though not exclusively by Muslim merchants (Sicard, 1968).

As early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century, archaeological evidence of this long-distance trade confirms the existence and importance of these coastal ports (Sinclair; 1982, Sinclair, 1987; Sinclair et al, 2012; Wood et al, 2012), particularly around the Save delta (Sicard, 1968).<sup>1</sup> This suggests that this trade was of primary importance to the prosperity of the northern towns and some smaller southern African ports, such as Sofala or Mozambique Island, long before the Portuguese arrived in the region (Newitt, 1995) and that it was the reason for the first Portuguese settlements on the East African coast.

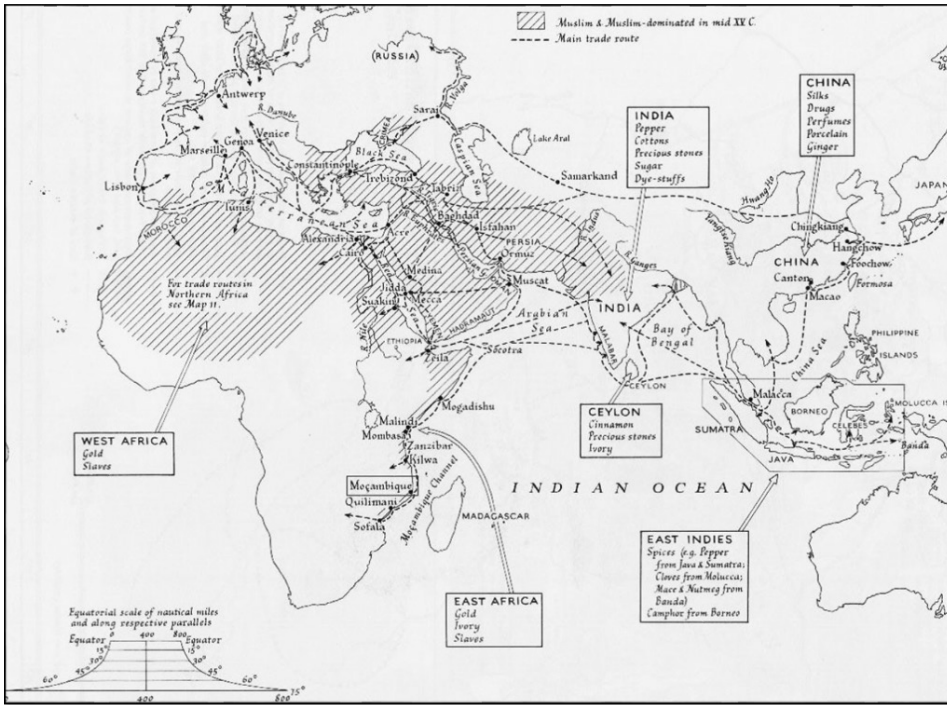
After building a fortified trading post in Sofala in 1505, Portugal expected to control the gold trade and thus guarantee the gold it needed to purchase Indian spices. At the same time, transforming Mozambique Island into a Portuguese port of call would guarantee both the possibility of provisioning ships on their way to India and providing sailors and travellers with facilities for rest and recovery (Boxer, 1961).

However, expectations and reality were two very different things and in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese were finding it very difficult to replace the well established Muslim networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Sicard states that, before the Muslim traders, merchants from Asian origin would have used the port of Singó or Nshawa in the Save Delta for gold trading. This port, which the author identifies as the island of Wasika reported by Ibn-Madjid, would have been the key point in the Indian Ocean trade routes and also the inland African trade route, since going up the Save River, it was possible to reach Butua where the gold was mined. Based on Blake-Thompson's works he also states that the Save was navigable in small boats all the way through Mozambique at least as far as the confluence with the Lundi, where traces of a port with evidence of marine and estuarine fauna have been found.

Fig. 1. Trade between Africa, Asia and Europe on the eve of the Portuguese expansion



In: Fage, 1978, p. 27

## Portugal, Sofala and the Indian Ocean trade network in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

At the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the arrival of the Portuguese on the East African coast and the Indian Ocean foreshadowed the advent of deep changes in the existing trans-regional social and commercial networks and that these changes were viewed differently by those involved.

For the Muslim networks it was the beginning of the end of a long period of indisputable supremacy in the Indian Ocean and they reacted immediately by appealing for armed resistance against the newcomers, intruders and violent Portuguese (al-Malibari, cit. in Ho, 2004, p.222). For the Portuguese, it was the beginning of a process of contacts and exchanges essential for the consolidation of the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean and the construction of the Portuguese Empire. They believed that, whatever the circumstances, their right to control the ocean was unquestionable. Violence was therefore to be used

if necessary, and the Indian Ocean soon turned into “an arena of military and commercial geo-strategy” (Ho, 2004, p.217).

In this context the establishment of the Sofala trading post in 1505 was the main basis for the structure of this presence in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The information from Vasco da Gama’s first voyage (1497-98) had shown how essential it was to the success of the Portuguese plan to control Indian Ocean trade to set up a trading post on the East African coast. Accordingly, based on the assumption that it would not be difficult to replace the “Moors” (the Muslim merchants dominating Indian Ocean trading and social networks) Sancho de Tovar was sent with Pedro Álvares Cabral’s fleet, in 1500, with specific instructions to set up a Portuguese trading post in Sofala. The launch of this initiative was considered so important and urgent that a new *Feitor* (administrator)<sup>2</sup> was appointed for Sofala even before the return of Cabral’s fleet and in the absence of any information confirming the establishment of the post. In fact, this new *Feitor* sailed with João da Nova’s fleet in 1502. The only reason why he did not stay in Sofala was because, during a stopover at Aguada de S. Braz (present day Mossel Bay in South Africa), they were informed that the trading post had not yet been built (Correia, 1858).

This setback did have the benefit of giving King Manuel time to set put the guidelines of his policy towards the region, stressing the need to set up trading posts in Sofala and Kilwa to ensure control of the pivotal African points in trade with the African hinterland (Sofala/gold) and the East Indian Ocean countries (Kilwa/cloth and beads).

The model that was drawn up – a trading fortress (*Fortaleza-feitoria*)<sup>3</sup> – was very revealing of the idea the Portuguese had of the region and the possible hostility of its inhabitants. It also highlighted the urgency of taking appropriate measures to support the Portuguese project, even in the absence of any survey of the region and ignorance of the market structure, involving both East Africa and the Eastern countries on the Indian Ocean. However, this shortcoming was largely overcome by a conviction of the importance of trade, especially in gold, which in itself seemed to justify the investment .

<sup>2</sup> *Feitor* – Royal official responsible for the economic and financial management of the trading post and the collection of taxes on behalf of the king

<sup>3</sup> The setting up of a trading fortress in the presence of a fairly hostile environment from a political point of view requires the pre-existence of trade in one or more sufficiently valuable products to justify such a large investment as the construction of a fort and the maintenance of its garrison of soldiers and royal officials (M. E. M. Santos & V. Rodrigues, 1989, p. 237).

The Sofala trading post embodied the Portuguese dream of mastering the African gold trade to provide the necessary capital for purchasing pepper (Newitt, 1995) and was therefore the first step towards building what would be the Portuguese Empire in the East.

Furthermore, Sofala was the reason for Kilwa's prosperity. As a port for the export of gold from the hinterland, the Portuguese regarded Sofala as the focal point of this trade and conquering it would automatically ensure control of the gold trade. Therefore, the availability of military resources to support this decision and caution in drawing up strategies for the occupation or establishment of a network of local alliances became crucial to facilitating successful completion of the project.

Once the guidelines of the Portuguese policy for the region had been defined, it was necessary to implement a plan that took account of possible scenarios and ways to overcome potential difficulties.<sup>4</sup> In fact, depending on the specificity of each situation, the occupation of the coast followed four different models, namely, the conquest of positions by force of arms (Kilwa), the submission to Portuguese sovereignty expressed in payment of a tribute (Zanzibar), the alliance with important partners in the region (Malindi) or the deployment negotiated with the local chieftains, involving the availability of a physical space and the grant of exclusive trading rights (Sofala) (Roque, 2012, pp. 209-236).

The implementation of this policy assumed that trade on this coast thereafter would be the monopoly of the Portuguese Crown, the local indigenous people would be respected and the "Moors" would be subdued by the Portuguese and would agree to pay taxes, fees and licences, if necessary, by force of arms. The latter was the position that prevailed in the early years<sup>5</sup> when the Portuguese had to face the opposition of the Muslim communities there and throughout the Indian Ocean, where they were strongly deployed.

However, even after the establishment of fortresses, trading posts and alliances or the imposition of a system of trade licences – *cartazes* – (Villiers, 1986; Mathew, 1986) on behalf of the Portuguese Crown, the system proved to be ineffective.

The absence of prior, accurate, credible information on the political, social and economic structure of the local communities or the size and characteristics of

<sup>4</sup> In this respect, the *Regimento do Capitão-mór, D. Francisco de Almeida* (1505) is a key document in understanding the main lines of Portuguese policies both for this region and the Indian Ocean in general.

<sup>5</sup> Among the most significant examples of the use of force, we have the conquest of Kilwa and the sacking of Mombasa in 1505 under the orders of Francisco de Almeida, the Tristan da Cunha campaigns on Madagascar's northwest coast in 1506 and the sack of Oge also in 1506 performed by Tristan da Cunha, Afonso de Albuquerque and João da Nova. Anonymous, 1521(?), Caps. 70 and 71

the Muslim diaspora in the Indian Ocean or its importance in East Africa meant the Portuguese had no idea on how to act effectively. Only after settling did they realise the urgent need to change the basis on which the whole plan to control the African Indian area was centred.

Indeed, the need for this adjustment became clear shortly after the negotiations between Pedro de Anhaia and Yusuf, King of Sofala, on the establishment of the trading post. They showed that to achieve its objectives, the Portuguese Crown had to find a different policy. On the one hand, the importance of the Muslim community in the region could clearly not be ignored and that the Portuguese should be able to cooperate, at least until they were able to replace these “Moors” and their networks. On the other hand, it became equally obvious that if the Portuguese wanted to master the Indian Ocean trade routes between East Africa and the East, they also had to adapt their usual range of commodities to African preferences and requirements, especially with respect to the gold trade.

The months following the opening of Sofala trading post were crucial for the Portuguese to realise the importance and the role of these “Moors” and, especially, to learn how to handle the situation and take advantage of it for their own benefit.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese, trade in the Indian Ocean was free of impositions and restrictions on the movement of people and goods (Mathew, 1986; Pouwels, 2002; Ho, 2004). It operated on the basis of commercial networks built on inter-personal relationships linking the communities of the northern Swahili towns with the southern African ports and the hinterland fairs. This enabled the “Moors” to dominate coastal traffic and most of the trade between the coast and inland kingdoms and chieftaincies (Roque, 2013, pp. 189-193).

Together with their local agents they were not only in control of the trade routes for African gold and Indian cloths and beads, which were the breadwinners of the coastal establishments, but also of essential food supplies for local residents and many other African products with high demand in the Eastern markets, such as ivory, precious woods, pearls, seed pearls, tortoiseshell, animal skins, amber, elephant oil, teeth of “fish-woman”, medicinal plants, slaves and even raw cotton (Anonymous, 1497, pp. 98-21). Cotton was a regional product exclusively intended for the manufacture of textiles (Barbosa, 1516, p.18; Monclaro, 1569, p. 547) that were so special they could only be worn by the local ruling elite (Barros, 1552, p. 377).

This network also encompassed other key economic sectors, such as ship-building and boat charters to carry passengers and goods along the coast. In both cases, the communities involved benefited from a secular background, providing



know-how and expertise over many generations, which made them highly mobile and able to adapt to changes or new situations (Roque, 2013).

The influence of the “Moors” had clearly been underestimated by the Portuguese Crown and it would not be easy to remove or replace them within the rights enshrined by the papal bulls (*Rex Rerum*, 1436; *Dum Diversas*, 1452; *Romanus Pontifex*, 1455 and *Inter Caetera*, 1456) or the guidelines of the *Regimentos* and provisions of the first royal instructions, which clearly revealed the king’s priorities for Portuguese actions in overseas territories (Russell-Wood, 2007, p.16).

As pointed out by Mathews (1986, p. 73), Portuguese “aspirations to appropriate trade in the Indian Ocean were based on certain assumptions which did not stand the test of actual encounter with the existing systems in East Africa”. It was therefore necessary to show some flexibility and adaptability to gain gradual but undisputable control.

As early as November 1506, the first results of this readjustment were reported by Manuel Fernandes, the local *Feitor*. Hoping to reduce business that the trading post was unable to control and benefit from the local influence of the Muslim community, Fernandes, strongly committed himself to forming a group of “friendly Moors and subjects of the King” – *Mouros amigos e servidores d’el-Rei* – (Fernandes, 1506, p. 692). They would act as intermediaries between the trading post and the hinterland kingdoms in favour of Portuguese interests. The initiative had little success but his successors were still keen on preserving and even strengthening this link. They asked the “Moors” to serve officially as mediators in negotiations (Sobrinho, 1515, pp. 240-246; Soares, 1513, p. 466) and included them in Portuguese embassies sent to local kingdoms and chieftaincies (Anhaia, 1506, pp. 508-519; *Rol do pagamento de soldos ... 1518*, p. 429).

Far from meaning they were giving up on their goals, the attitude of the Portuguese was in line with common practice among local chiefs. It showed an awareness of a situation that required changes and adjustments with immediate impact on the trading post and the survival of the people living and working there. In this context, the availability of suitable goods in demand in the local and regional African markets was as important as ensuring the regular supply of food to the trading post (Roque, 2012).

When it came to alliances, the difficulty of keeping local indigenous people and “Moors” apart combined with impossibility of considering them separately in business. This latter aspect was particularly important in the purchase of provisions. Although royal instructions demanded that the fortress should always have enough supplies to maintain staff and residents for about six months (*Regimento do Capitão-mór D. Francisco de Almeida*, 1505, p. 234; *Regimento*



de Sofala, 1530, p. 348), in practice they were all at the mercy of what could be bought locally (Regimento de Sofala, 1530, p. 348 and 368). And if, theoretically, available goods were conditioned by market supplies, in fact the main constraint was access to regional production and distribution networks, mostly dominated by “Moors”, who acted in collusion with Sofala chiefs.

In the diplomatic approach to the local chieftaincies and kingdoms, the Portuguese carefully thought through the system of alliances so as not to jeopardise the provisioning of the trading post. In turn, this strategy also allowed them to develop personal relationships with the most important chiefs in the Sofala region and to join regional and local trade networks. This resulted in partnerships and associations especially at an individual level, and the subsequent acceptance of many Portuguese into the local communities (Roque, 2004; Roque, 2012).

This relationship highlights how quickly the Portuguese in Sofala realised the *modus operandi* of the local structures and began to use similar models to ensure their own acceptance. As a result, in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many Portuguese were already living in the inland regions.

Some of them, who engaged in diplomatic or commercial activities, even went to live in the courts of the local chiefdoms such as the Kingdom of Quiteve.<sup>6</sup> Others, such as criminals banished from Portuguese settlements, invested at their own risk in backcountry trade (Roque, 2012). Some of these convicts eventually achieved prestigious positions in local and regional trade networks, where they earned a living, and, later, the status of official intermediaries in trade with the same Portuguese who exiled them (Naufrágio da Nao São Thomé ... 1589, p. 29).

One of the most interesting characteristics of the Portuguese Sofala fortified trading post was its people’s ability to survive by blending in socially and culturally with the local communities (Roque, 2013). This process was particularly important from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. This was when the gold trade in the Zambezi Valley began to polarize attention and resources and Sofala experienced a progressive disengagement from the Portuguese Crown in favour of Mozambique Island. The island was further north and nearer to the Zambezi Delta, where a new trading post and port of call were under development to support the Carreira da Índia and assist the Portuguese in East Africa and Africa Indian ocean trade (Boxer, 1961).

Even though the reasons for this loss of interest are not analysed here, we should note that this position stemmed from a clear marginalisation of Sofala.

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<sup>6</sup> See the case of Rodrigo Lobo, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, who was granted by the King of Quiteve with more than a half of Maroupe Island in Sofala’s River and awarded with the title of “king’s wife”. Santos, 1609, p. 139.

The main consequences were the growing power of the captains, the progressive involvement of residents and their acceptance among the local communities and, no less important, a new status for the region. The emergence of Mozambique Island as the new Portuguese trading station would transform Sofala into a place of exile, where criminals and convicts were sent and outlaws could easily escape from the Portuguese administration's control and offer their services to the local chiefs (Roque, 2013, p. 201).

It is known that in about 1520 Sachiteve Ynhamunda had the support of Portuguese outlaws (Silveira, 1518, p. 70), that one of his daughters was married to a Portuguese (Anónimo, 1530, p. 298) and that António Fernandes was representative of the King of Portugal in his court between April 1517 and March 1518 (Rol do pagamento de soldos... 1518, p. 429) along with Francisco da Cunha and João Escudeiro, a ward of Manuel Goes, in Sofala since 1505 (Almada, 1516, p. 283).<sup>7</sup> It is also known that some Sofala Portuguese in Sofala married indigenous women and chose to live elsewhere on the coast (Monclaro, 1569, p. 504) and that convicts sentenced to exile, often ran away from the trading post and went to live among the local indigenous population (Lopes, 1515, p.88).

This "marginalisation" contributed to the progressive weakening of their ties to the Portuguese Crown's authorities, giving them space to expand their influence and act on their own.

All these men were responsible for most of the diplomatic activities and a preliminary survey of the backcountry and its people and potential resources. In fact, the importance of these deportees and renegades cannot be overemphasised in the way that it affected immediate perception of the region and its inhabitants and the image of them that was passed on to the European world. Irrespective of the offence leading to their exile, these men were good explorers, adventurers, interpreters and diplomats. Acting on their own or as representatives of the Portuguese authorities, they were mainly responsible for the first reconnaissance of the African hinterland: They were able to map the locations of the region's

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<sup>7</sup> Like Escudeiro, Fernandes arrived in Sofala with Captain Pedro de Anhaia in 1505 but unlike him he was a deportee, listed at the fortress as a carpenter. They both became familiar with the local language and Fernandes was often enrolled as an interpreter or Portuguese representative to the local chiefdoms. He spent time more than once at the Mwenemotapa's court and had the opportunity to travel the region where he was given much credit and was always welcome. Almada, 1516, p. 283.

population, natural resources and trade routes<sup>8</sup> and spread Portuguese influence and interests further into the backcountry.

In line with similar situations occurring in the Far East areas of the Empire (Winius, 2001, Andaya, 2010), it seems quite clear that in East Africa a "shadow empire" was acting in parallel with the official representatives of the Portuguese crown. The Portuguese in this informal empire, operating outside areas under formal Portuguese administrative control, took on the dual roles of actor/individual and actor/vehicle for Portugal's political and economic interests. Either role might be prevalent at any one time.

The policy followed by the first Sofala captains had the merit of bringing the Portuguese trading post to local chiefdoms while also offering opportunities for fruitful trade on the sidelines of the monopoly the Portuguese Crown wanted. And, while the imposition of that monopoly became difficult because it clashed with the interests of those who had no intention of giving up their rights to seek personal profit by engaging in business (Newitt, 2005), it provided a business opportunity to all those who, with capital, ambition and few preconceptions, were willing to try their luck in the intricacies of the regional market.

In this scenario, the captains did not lack the means to invest, while most people at the trading post did not waste the opportunity when, for lack of money, the administration paid them their salary in cloth.<sup>9</sup> Trade and profit seemed to be within everyone's reach and soon many others joined these first group of potential traders, who were regarded as smugglers by the Portuguese administration. Thus, by necessity, imposition or will, many Portuguese explored the backcountry and tried their luck, looking for personal wellbeing but helping to give Sofala a peculiar status among Portuguese settlements in East Africa.

We do not intend to expand on the reasons for the decay of Sofala, the consequences of payments in cloth or measures to improve the situation. However, we must point out that this decadence and the Portuguese diaspora across the African continent and the coastal islands resulted either from a policy inappropriate to the African reality and the lack of means to implement it (Roque, 2012),

<sup>8</sup> The history of the Portuguese expansion is littered with examples of exiles who were used in the first reconnaissance of unknown regions. On the East African coast, the best known example was António Fernandes who reconnoitred the Sofala hinterland between 1511 and 1515 before being appointed Portuguese "ambassador" to the Quiteve's court. The results of his travels were known at the time through Gaspar Veloso (1512) and João Vaz de Almada (1516) and were later studied by Tracey (1940), Godlonton (1940 and 1945), Lobato (1954-1960) Dickinson (1971) and Roque (2012). However, 16th century documents report on many other situations where convicts had an important role. See e.g., Quaresma, 1506, p. 624-626, Regimento de Cid Barbudo, 1505 (?) or Fogaça, 1507, p. 26-28.

<sup>9</sup> Referring to the possible drawbacks of this situation, in 1510 Afonso de Albuquerque stated that people should not be allowed to buy provisions at the local market in Sofala in exchange for cloths as this contributed to a decrease in the gold trade. Pato, 1903, (I) p. 434.

or from political changes in the African kingdoms and chieftaincies prior to the Portuguese presence in the region and not resulting from their possible influence (Mudenge, 1988; Pikirayi, 2001). Both factors hampered the implementation of Portuguese plans and facilitated the proliferation of marginal cores where trade was controlled not by the Portuguese Crown but by a few Portuguese on their own account.

In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the hinterland and islands of the Sofala coast to Lourenço Marques Bay was full of Portuguese living among the *Kaffirs* (Arab name for black indigenous non-Muslim people) and trading freely in ivory and other goods. The initial core of Portuguese married to indigenous women, renegades, fugitives, convicts and outlaws was supplemented by survivors of shipwrecks who chose to live in the backcountry and often, though acting on their own, became the main mediators of Portuguese trade in the region.

In this context, the actions of some Afro-Portuguese families were quite meaningful, particularly the first generation of children, known as “local born people”. As for the renegades or exiles, marrying indigenous women often meant leaving the trading post and settling elsewhere. In all cases, the Save river basin and the islands south Sofala Bay were some of the preferred areas owing to their natural characteristics and resources and the proximity of the Portuguese settlement. Once they had settled in and benefitted either from family relationships and inclusion in local communities or their knowledge of the region and the *modus operandi* of both Muslim and Portuguese traders, most of these Afro-Portuguese were able to take over leadership and control of the main sectors of economic life of the region.

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, António Rodrigues, an exiled native of Sofala, settled in the south with homes in both the Bazaruto islands and on the mainland near the “rivers of Monemone”. From these two places he controlled the production, distribution and marketing of goods and foodstuffs and the shipbuilding and boat charter business. He was also the only locally recognised authority for issuing travel permits for people and goods in the area. Although he had been expelled from Sofala as an outlaw, the trading post’s authorities regularly found themselves in need of his services and apparently no one could travel safely in the region without his permission or assistance (Naufrágio da Nau São Thomé..., 1589, p. 29).

Testifying to the importance of these families, António Rodrigues was just one of the many Afro-Portuguese who would continue to play a decisive role in the

economy of the region and diplomatic relations with the local chiefdoms in the following century.<sup>10</sup>

When addressing this issue, the main focus is usually on businesses operating beyond the control of the Portuguese administration, particularly the captains of Mozambique and Sofala, and the increasing smuggling trade. However, this diaspora is no less relevant from the point of view of the impact of the Portuguese presence or influence in the region. Anonymous or not, these Portuguese moved in areas where Portugal had no official deployment and where, on being accepted by local chiefdoms, they came to hold privileged positions that would be crucial in connecting these chiefdoms with the Portuguese administration.

This diaspora was primarily responsible for the expansion of Portuguese influence in marginal areas to the ones directly frequented or formally occupied by representatives of the Portuguese Crown, as witnessed in 1589 by Captain Estevão da Veiga, survivor of the shipwreck of the *Nau S. Thomé*.

In his long journey from the Terra dos Fumos to Sofala, the only help he was able to find came from some villagers who had Portuguese names and spoke Portuguese because there, as he noted, “sometimes, though not very often, Portuguese traders came to buy ivory” (*Naufrágio da Nau São Thomé...*, 1589). Most of these merchants acted on their own in the areas where they had previously settled, as the captain could see later when arriving in Inhambane, Monemone, Bazaruto or Funbaze.

Thus, despite the fact most of the Portuguese trading vessels took on board Moors and Kaffirs as interpreters and many Portuguese had learned to speak the local languages, this diaspora also resulted in the dissemination of the Portuguese language in these same areas. This meant that it helped to make Portuguese a sort of *língua franca* for trading purposes in the 16th century. In other words, the language of commerce in all those areas with a Portuguese presence or influence was indeed significant.

## Final considerations

More than the King’s official guidelines to be implemented by his representatives in the Portuguese settlements in East Africa, it was this diasporic movement and the actions of these Portuguese that constituted the main basis for establishing contacts and trading relations with local chiefdoms and kingdoms, and their progressive knowledge of the territory and potential regional resources that otherwise would have been very difficult to obtain. In fact, these men were truly

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance the case of António Álvares Teixeira. Coelho, 1698, fl.47

responsible for the beginning of an epistemic cultural exchange process based on mutual learning of know-how and practices that enabled the Portuguese to settle in this region.

As in the case of the Far Eastern areas of the Empire, behind the Regimentos and royal instructions this diaspora played a decisive role in structuring a “shadow empire” working to strengthen relationships with local authorities, which were essential to the existence of the few Portuguese settlements and integration into regional networks. A comparative study of the different areas of the Portuguese Eastern Empire, focusing on the Portuguese diaspora and using the concept of “shadow empire”, would certainly allow a new insight into the modus operandi of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean.

In East Africa, as the Portuguese Crown was focusing its attention on the Zambezi Valley, in an almost parallel process, the Portuguese from Sofala were moving into the hinterland, gaining prestige and respect among the local chiefs and becoming owners of most of the islands. Little by little, they managed to control regional trade and showed considerable capacity to understand and fit into the local structures, families and businesses, which enabled them to build new, powerful trade networks. This huge potential only much later came to be recognised by the Portuguese central administration.

In fact, even if “the Sofala business” fell short of the Portuguese Crown’s expectations, this same business, with easy, guaranteed profit, very soon fell into the hands of the Portuguese and, albeit under the brand name of exile and marginality, it came to take on a prominent role that eventually benefited the interests of the Portuguese Crown.

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