THE CONQUEST OF MALACCA

FRANCISCO DE SA DE MENESES
translated by
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Readers may be referred to certain useful books in English which have been listed in a brief bibliography which follows. It does not include books written in Portuguese, since readers with access to Portuguese will almost surely approach the work directly, and not through English translation. Certain works in Portuguese, and one in French, have been of such constant service to me in this task that they deserve mention here: João de Barros's Asia, 4 volumes, sixth edition prepared by Hernani Cidade (Lisbon, 1945–6); José Maria da Costa e Silva's Ensaio biographico-critico sobre os melhores poetas portuguezes, 10 volumes (Lisbon, 1850–5), especially volume 4, pages 105–63; Jean Fernand Denis's Résumé de l'histoire littéraire de Portugal (Paris, 1826), pages 323–42; Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira, 40 volumes (Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, 1936–60); and Artur Basílio de Sá's Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente—Insulindia, 5 volumes from 1506 to 1595 (Lisbon, 1954–8).
Historical Background

The central event in the poem is the capture of Malacca by the Portuguese under Afonso de Albuquerque in 1511. This was an essential step in the expansion throughout the sixteenth century of Portuguese trade and influence beyond India and Ceylon to South-East Asia, the Moluccas (known as the Spice Islands), China, and Japan.

Several historical strands which chronologically led up to the capture are woven into the poem. In 1509 Diogo Lopes de Sequeira led a Portuguese expedition from India to Malacca, which had already become a great multi-racial centre of culture and trade. The Portuguese entered into this trade, but aroused some adverse feeling among the Gujarati merchants, among others, who urged a surprise attack on the Portuguese with the approval of the Bendahara or Chief Minister, Tun Mutahir, the uncle of Sultan Mahmud, the 'King of Malacca' of the poem. This attack was not completely successful; some Portuguese were killed and others captured, but Sequeira was able to escape and return to India. Later, eight of the prisoners, among whom was João Viegas, made their escape from Malacca to Pedir in northern Sumatra, where Afonso de Albuquerque found them. The leader of the group of prisoners who were still in Malacca in 1511 was Ruy de Araújo. The stories of Viegas and Araújo form an important part of the action in the poem.

Albuquerque left Goa in the spring of 1511 for Malacca, partly in order to secure the release of the Portuguese still imprisoned there and also to obtain compensation for the Portuguese losses sustained in 1509. He had also a keen realization of the importance of Malacca for Portuguese trade in Asia.

The story of the negotiations, attacks, and counter-attacks in the taking of Malacca is told with considerable elaboration in the poem. It includes details, particularly in the account of the
different groups of Asian allies and the names of their leaders, which I have not found in histories, either on the Asian or on the Malay side, or on the European or Portuguese side. It is possible that Sá de Meneses drew somewhat on his imagination here, although the possibility of his having access to manuscripts or having heard accounts from older members of his own or other families with members participating in the expedition cannot be entirely excluded. The events of July and August 1511 took place 118 years before the completion of the first edition, so that it is not likely that oral tradition would have been able to supply all such details. Perhaps more striking than the names and numbers provided in Sá de Meneses's account is the fact that the Portuguese poet considered them to be an important part of the tale, and that for various reasons he was able to make several of them stand out in the reader's mind.

In the poem Ruy de Araújo relates to the Sultan of Malacca the life and exploits of Afonso de Albuquerque. He gives an outline of his voyages and victories along the Oman Coast, the Persian Gulf, and the Coast of western India, which included the establishment at Goa of the capital of the Viceroy of Portuguese possessions in Asia.

A further historical strand appears in the history of the Malacca Sultanate from its establishment at the beginning of the fifteenth century up to Albuquerque’s day, as narrated by Alaida.

Prophetic passages deal with events and heroes of Portuguese Asia, in Malacca as well as in the Moluccas, Ceylon, India, the Red Sea, between 1511 and 1634. The second and third editions of the poem do not change this picture as markedly as might be expected, but allude to the striking turn of events which resulted in the capture by the Dutch of Portuguese Malacca in 1641. This, indeed, was a chief factor in the desire of Sá de Meneses to publish a second edition of the poem. During the sixteenth century the history of Portugal indicates a decline in power. Albuquerque’s successors were, in general, not his equal in competence, and the economic burdens of the Empire were excessive for Portugal to bear. Not only this, Portugal’s rivals increased through the century in numbers, in variety, and in effectiveness. Asian leaders led attacks on various Portuguese strongholds, and Europeans likewise. The Empire did grow larger in the years subsequent to
the capture of Malacca, chiefly by expansion to the north and east: trade and intercourse with Siam, expansion to the Moluccas, China (particularly Macau), and even Japan. Soldiers and merchants were accompanied by priests and missionaries.

From 1580 until 1640 Portugal was ruled by a King of Spain. This period has been called a ‘captivity,’ and there is no doubt that for the Portuguese this was a sad period. Spain was in the dominant position, although in a period of incipient decadence. The loss of Portuguese prestige made her status in Asia less comfortable. We note in the poem references to the hostility of the Dutch, as well as to the attacks on Malacca from the Achinese and from Johore. It may be partly for this reason that the poem makes reference to the Portuguese who distinguished themselves before 1580 much more frequently than to men like Constantino de Sá and André Furtado de Mendonça, who belonged to generations closer to that of the poet.

Another possible factor is that the historical sources on which Sá de Meneses most relied dealt with the earlier sixteenth century: Bras de Albuquerque’s Commentaries and João de Barros’s historical masterpiece, the Décadas d’Asia.
Francisco de Sá de Meneses was born in the city of Oporto at the end of the sixteenth century, though the exact year is not known. He was the son of João Rodrigues de Sá and Dona Maria da Silva, both of whom came from distinguished families.

He was an avid student of classical and modern European languages and literatures and served in various governmental posts. When very young he married Dona Antónia de Andrade, his cousin, the daughter of Baltasar Leitão de Andrade, Commander of the Order of Christ, and Treasurer of the Casa da India, by whom he had a son, Baltasar de Sá Leitão, and a daughter, Dona Joana de Sá de Meneses, who married Fernão da Silveira.

Francisco de Sá de Meneses was Commander of St. Pedro de Fins and of St. Cosme de Garfe of the Military Order of Christ. A man of means, esteemed by his fellow citizens, particularly the literati, he spent his leisure time in the pursuit of poetry. His wife’s death so depressed him that he decided to leave secular life. After some time of indecision as to which order to enter, he finally retired to the Royal Monastery of Bemfica of the Order of Preachers in Lisbon, where he took orders on 14 December 1641, as Brother Francisco de Jesus. Here he followed an exemplary life until his death 21 May 1661. Barbosa Machado, however, has given the date as 27 May 1664.

Jean Fernand Denis states that Sá de Meneses was a nephew of the famous poet, Francisco Sá de Miranda (c. 1495–1558). It has been impossible to verify this statement. Sá de Miranda did have

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a grandson named Francisco de Sá de Meneses, alive in 1614, who was the son of Hierónimo de Sá d’Azevedo and Maria de Meneses. Another poet, also named Francisco de Sá de Meneses, was Governor of the Kingdom and the first Count of Matosinhos and lived from 1523 to 1584 or 1585. Yet another Francisco de Sá de Meneses, who lived from 1598 to 1647 and married Joana de Castro, was the son of João Rodrigues de Sá de Meneses, Count of Penaguião, and of Isabel de Mendonça. It seems likely that there was a relationship between all these and the poet, but details await clarification.

*Malaca Conquistada* presents various distinguished members of the Sá family, particularly Garcia de Sá and Francisco de Sá, both sons of João Rodrigues de Sá de Meneses (1461 or 1464 to 1576 or 1579), the amazingly long-lived Provost of Oporto. Indeed it has been suspected that two men in the period must have borne that name. This man seems to have been great-grandfather of the Francisco de Sá de Meneses already mentioned as the husband of Joana de Castro.

The poet tells us that Garcia de Sá’s mother was named Joana. He also makes it clear that Garcia de Sá and Francisco de Sá were brothers. João de Barros states categorically the name of the father of these two heroic Portuguese. For example, in João de Barros’s *Asia, Terceira Década*, edited by Hernani Cidade (Lisbon, 1956), page 122, we are told: ‘... Garcia de Sá, son of João Rodrigues de Sá, succeeded in coming to India. ... ’ and in the same writer’s *Asia, Quarta Década*, page 126: ‘Francisco de Sá, Comptroller of the revenue of Oporto, son of João Rodrigues de Sá, Provost of the same city and lord of Matosinhos and of the lands of Sever, Baltar and Paiva, who with a fleet was to go to Java to erect a fortress where Sunda is....’

According to the *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, XXVI (Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, Editorial Enciclopédia, Limitada, n.d.), on pages 443–4, Francisco de Sá, upon being sent to erect a fortress in Sunda, left Malacca and then met some Muslim ships which he attacked, something which displeased the Sultan of Sunda, who resisted him with force. Routed by the unexpected attack, despised, he returned with his dead and wounded to Mala-
It is difficult to be sure whether references to a Francisco de Sá are to the same or to different men, but it is to be assumed that the poet, who was a member of the same family and writing of events that occurred in the preceding century, had knowledge of the details of the lives of these men which is now hard to come by. If we look at Book Ten, octaves 87–89, an allegedly prophetic passage concerning Francisco de Sá addressed in 1511 to Garcia de Sá as a character in the poem, we find clues to the fate of this man.

Francisco de Sá will leave his wife and children for the sea, faithfully serve the King of Portugal, leaving the Island of Bintang in confusion and attacking Sunda, noble brother to Garcia, and in an illustrious position, feared by the Muslim. He was born by the Douro River, and will die in Malacca. His son will be ill repaid for the father's service to his King, and his grandson deprived of his property.

There is a reference to a certain Francisco de Sá which, it is tempting to think, may afford information regarding the declining years of this man. In the sixth volume for the years 1555–8 in India of the Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente, collected and annotated by Father António da Silva Rego (Agência Geral do Ultramar, Lisbon, 1951), there is a letter from Governor Francisco Barreto to the King of Portugal dated at Bassein 6 January 1557, pages 167–87. On page 168 Barreto refers to two Captains of Bassein and of Chaúl, respectively, Francisco de Sá and João de Mendonça, who, as Barreto says, surely must be gratefully remembered by the King for their prior services at Surat.

On pages 176–7 there is a poignant passage regarding this Francisco de Sá:

Francisco de Sá, former captain of Bassein, was also condemned, and exiled for a period of years to Africa, as Your Highness will see by the transcript of the enclosed legal sentence; which sentence was rendered against him for offences that in the captains of Bassein up to his time were so widespread and typical in them all, that I, who think I have well served Your Highness, while I was captain there, also could be accused of part of them. And because he is the first person to have been