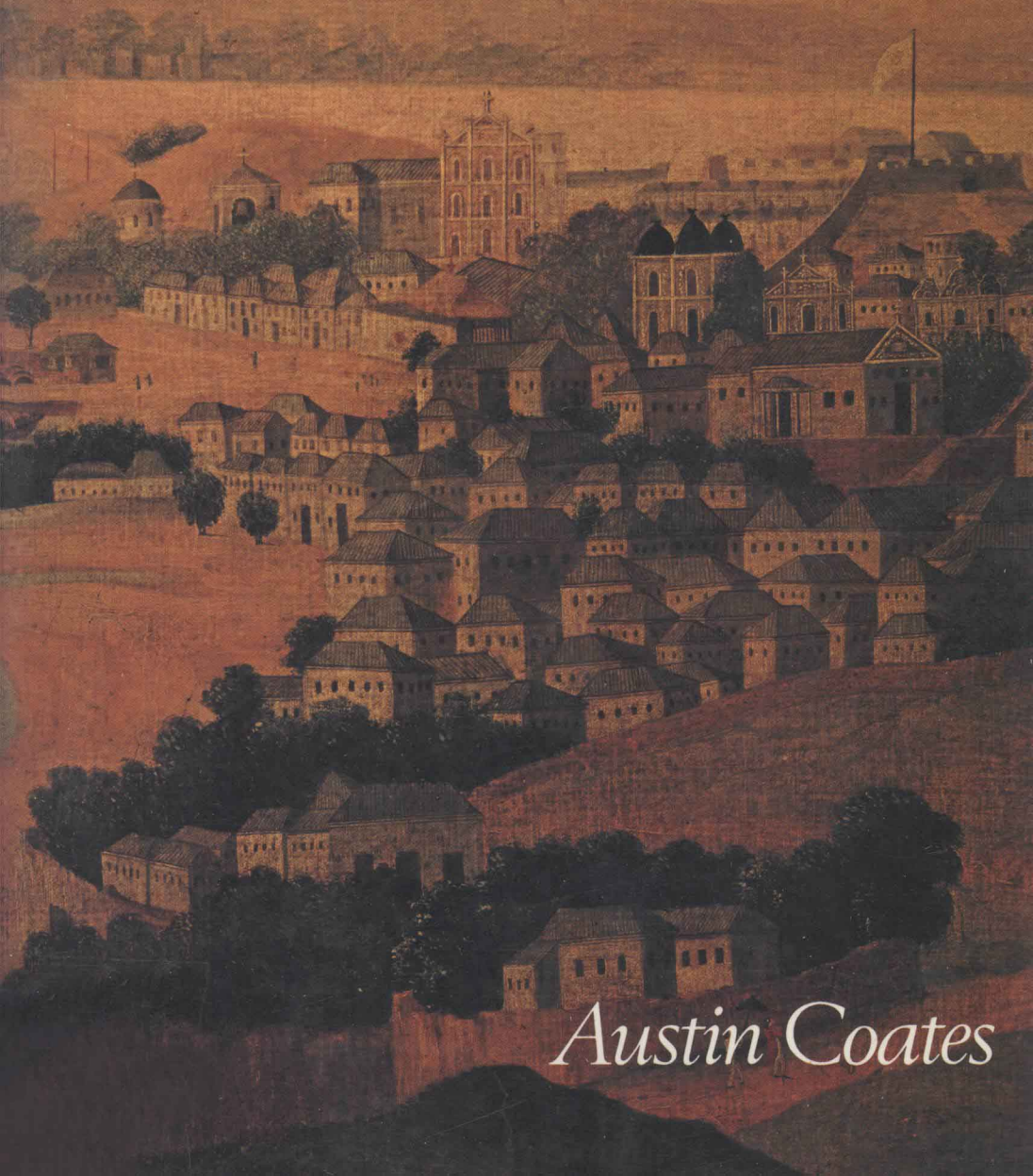


# *A Macao Narrative*



*Austin Coates*

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The ruined church of St Paul in Macao.  
Photograph by Christiane Pikert Scharlau.



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Not even the celebrated Rialto, at Venice, transacted a volume of trade exceeding that which was carried on at Macao. Here, in Macao, men of two continents met and had discourse, in peace, even when no other spot could be found for the purpose in the Farthest East.

J.M. BRAGA : *The Western  
Pioneers and Their Discovery  
of Macao*

I always associate Macao with Venice. Whichever one I am in, I always wake up wondering which one it is.

It has nothing to do with canals. Macao has none.

It is due to the condition that both were once among the greatest trading centres in the world, tightly confined to a minute segment of land surrounded by water, yet not quite an island.

The difference is that Macao never had a Bridge of Sighs. There were no dungeons. Nor did the Inquisition ever come there.

How Macao was founded is to me fascinating. In conveying the story now – and, I hope, some of the fascination – I propose to begin at the beginning, as all stories should. The reader who wishes to plunge straight into Macao may begin at Chapter III.

The story begins on the heights of the Ponta de Sagres, one of the southernmost points in Portugal, not far from Cape St Vincent. Standing on the heights of Sagres is similar to being on top of Beachy Head, save that it is much grander, and beneath it is that sound, the Atlantic Ocean, which is not so much a roar as a message.

Upon that height, long ago, a prince stood in solitude, heard that message, and interpreted it.

A.C.

Hongkong, 1977.

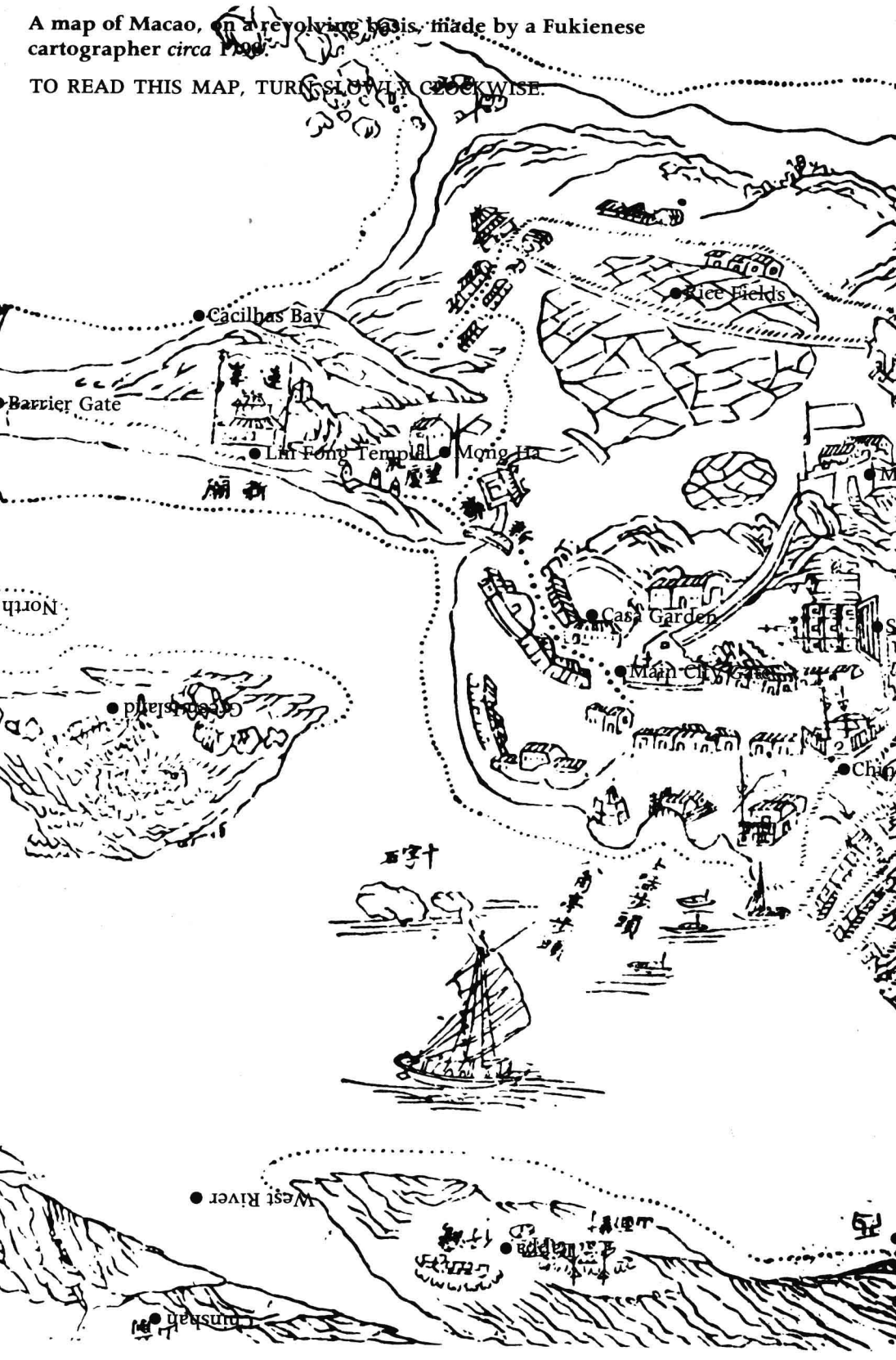


## *Acknowledgments*

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A map of Macao, on a revolving basis, made by a Fukienese cartographer circa 1799.

TO READ THIS MAP, TURN SLOWLY & CLOCKWISE.



澳門全圖





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## CHAPTER ONE

# *Portuguese Asia: Why and How*

### Discovery of the sea route to India

Portugal's stupendous epoch of exploration and discovery began around 1419, when the first Portuguese reached the island of Porto Santo in the Madeira group, following this in 1420 with the discovery of Madeira itself. The initiator of the Discoveries, a person in some ways so strikingly modern and different from his age that he seems to belong more to the twentieth century than to the fifteenth, was the Infante Dom Henrique – Prince Henry the Navigator – the austere, unemotional third son of João I of Portugal and his English queen Philippa, daughter of John of Gaunt. On the heights of Sagres Prince Henry conceived the then incredible idea of making the ocean, beyond which it was believed lay nothingness, into a highway by means of which to reach other lands.

Without himself ever travelling further than Tangier, Prince Henry listened to sea-captains' experiences, examined old travellers' tales and traditions, and after a thorough study of all that in those days could be learnt of geography and navigation, including Arab knowledge which was then the most advanced, he organized from his retreat near the port of Lagos in southern Portugal a series of exploratory voyages down the west coast of Africa. His motives were, like the man himself, a compelling mixture of medieval and modern: to examine the nature of lands hitherto unknown to Europeans, to seek new avenues of trade, to find out how far the dominion of Islam extended, to learn whether there were possibly some unknown Christian kingdoms willing to join in war against Islam, and finally to bring the Christian faith to any willing to receive it.

Europe was threatened, almost encircled by Islam. The entire east and south coasts of the Mediterranean, from Turkey to Morocco, were occupied by a hostile belt of Islamic states; and although the conquering energy of the Arabs had spent itself, the Turks had taken up the faltering banner of the Crescent. In 1453 they captured Constantinople, thereby extinguishing the Eastern Roman Empire, considered to be Christian Europe's main eastern bulwark against

Islam. The salvation of Europe from this menace was the foremost military and political problem of the age.

Another lesser problem was associated with it. The Crusades, reviving between Europe and the Middle East contacts which had been lost since the heyday of the Roman Empire, had stimulated European demand for a number of oriental products. Of these the most important were pepper and other food seasonings, such as nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon. Other items were sugar and luxury goods – precious stones, fine silks, cottons, and embroideries. These, brought by sea from different parts of Asia to Baghdad, Damascus, and Alexandria, were transported by caravan across the deserts of the Middle East, then shipped from Egypt and the Levant to Europe's two most important ports, Venice and Genoa, both of which owed their commercial prosperity to what pious Christians considered a disgraceful trade with the infidel. Such was the anomalous situation the Crusades produced. In order to obtain the oriental goods she required, Europe was obliged and willing to buy at exorbitant prices from Islam, her deadly enemy, who was the sole intermediary between West and East.

Maritime exploration, therefore, could lead to two important results, one military and religious, the other commercial – the discovery of a route by which to attack Islam from the rear, and the establishment of direct contact between Europe and the Spice Islands.

This was religion and trade going hand in hand; and as long as activity was confined to the Islamic zone of Asia – the Middle East and the countries bordering the Arabian Sea – the duality of purpose was a natural one. It was only when, sailing still further, Christians came in contact with Hindus, Chinese, and Japanese that the religious design became more complex, changing from a simple crusading determination to stamp out Islam into a dream of establishing a universal Christian state. The change was unavoidable. The Portuguese Discoveries amazed and excited all Europe, and while laymen dreamed of the fortunes they might make in the Indies, it was natural that the leaders of the Christian Church should interpret these developments as a way leading to universal Christianity.

Prince Henry the Navigator died in 1460, when Portuguese vessels were not even halfway down the west coast of Africa, but his work was carried on by others. In the next decades the Gold and Ivory Coasts were reached, and in 1488 Bartolomeu Dias, hugging the coast



of Africa in uncertain weather, found himself heading north but with land still to port. He had discovered the Cape of Good Hope.

This was the climax of the first, most dangerous and difficult phase of the Discoveries. Once down the long and inhospitable West African coast and round the Cape of Good Hope, the adventurers entered a region of organized Arab trade and more regular winds and seasons, where at every port there was accurate information to be had concerning other ports, weather conditions, and courses. By taking advantage of such assistance, and with a pilot provided by a friendly East African sultan, Vasco da Gama in 1498 completed the next great phase, and reached the west coast of India. He was now in the heartland of oriental commerce and in the rear of Islam, with a sea route which, if developed, could break Islam's commercial hold on Europe.

It remained to secure his tremendous find. Trade in Eastern seas was dangerous for Christians, Mussulman rulers were established throughout Upper India, their power extending gradually southwards, while in the Indies – the principal goal of the spice trade – Arab and Indian Muslim traders and missionaries had succeeded in converting many formerly Hindu or Buddhist states to Islam. None of the Eastern peoples being particularly interested in overseas connexions at this time, Arabs and Gujarati Muslims had monopolized the entire carrying trade of South Asia, with the inestimable advantage of dealing at almost every port with their co-religionists. The Portuguese discovered that the power of Islam was not, as had been originally supposed, a band of influence lying between Christian Europe and Asiatic lands. Islam reached to the furthest ends of the Indies.

It should be borne in mind that up to this time there was still no idea of founding European colonies. But the Portuguese had to protect their lines of operation. They thus constructed what shortly became a chain of fortresses across Asia, carefully disposed at converging points of trade, not too far distant one from another, combining the services of markets, warehouses, barracks, and shipyards. Improving and enlarging their ships, which were then and for another hundred years the most up-to-date in the world, they reckoned that with well-armed trading vessels operating on the routes designated and protected by their coastal forts, they could gain the mastery of the Indian Ocean's trade, and be strong enough to defend it.

The first of the forts was built in 1503 at Cochin, on the south-west coast of India, and was followed by others along the same coast. In

1505 a start was made in East Africa, where within three years there were establishments at Mombasa, Zanzibar and Moçambique. Finally, approaching the narrowest points on the spice trade's two main routes, they installed themselves on the bare, torrid island of Socotra, dominating the southern entrance to the Red Sea, and in 1509 seized Ormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. By these moves, Alexandria and Baghdad were threatened with the drying-up of supplies from the East.

The Islamic world quickly became aware of the threat this presented to their interests. In 1509 they assembled a tremendous international Muslim fleet, which met the Portuguese under their first Viceroy in the East, Dom Francisco de Almeida, off the west coast of India, near Diu. In a well-matched fight, one of the most significant naval battles in history, the Muslims were routed. Although for many years afterwards the Portuguese still had to contend with Mohammedan naval rivalry, their adversaries were never again able to assemble such power against them. By the Battle of Diu, control of trade between Europe and the East passed from Muslim to Christian hands.

## Goa

Celebrating their victory, the Portuguese sailed southward down the Malabar coast, pausing off each Muslim settlement to cannon into its streets one or two limbs of their Muslim prisoners. This uninhibited display was in keeping with the times, the standards of Europe and Asia in matters of this kind being identical.

The following year they seized the port of Goa, a former Hindu city recently absorbed by the Muslims, and transformed it into a tropical headquarters. Forts, churches, colleges, and seminaries were erected with remarkable speed, Goa becoming the capital of the Portuguese mercantile empire, the seat of the Viceroy commanding it, and in addition, the most representative centre of European culture there has ever been in Asia.

A few weeks after Goa's capture, Almeida was succeeded as Viceroy by Afonso de Albuquerque, in some ways the most significant and commanding figure in the history of Portuguese Asia, the nature of which, as a result of his ideas, took a new form, closer to what might be described as colonial. Albuquerque foresaw that with the terrible losses of men by shipwreck, piracy, disease, and warfare, Portugal would not be able to sustain her Eastern fortresses. The supply of

recruits from home was uncertain. Yet permanent, continually replenished military forces had to be obtained. He therefore promoted the colonization of territory in the immediate hinterland of the forts, modest areas sufficient to provide local food supplies, and encouraged his men to marry girls of the various indigenous races, thereby enabling each settlement to have a permanent Christian population, raising sons for its own protection.

### **Malacca**

The Portuguese endeavour now penetrated further east and nearer to the commercial crux of the matter – the Spice Islands. Between Goa and the islands of the Indies lay one last strategic port under Muslim control – Malacca, the most important port in South-East Asia. Like Socotra and Ormuz, it was situated at a controlling point on the main trade route. All commerce between the Spice Islands and Baghdad passed through the Strait of Malacca, which off the town itself is at its narrowest, a patrol ship mid-Strait being able to see Sumatra on one side and Malaya on the other. Only by hugging the coast of Sumatra and making all sail could Arab and Indian traders hope to pass in safety a Malacca hostile to them.

In 1511, after a stiff fight, Albuquerque invested Malacca, which thenceforward became the advance eastern headquarters of Portuguese Asia, under a Captain-General responsible to the Viceroy at Goa. In Malacca the Portuguese once more installed themselves with forts, churches, and harbour works, creating in that beautiful place another Christian town, this time set in the changeless climate of the equator, with its warm breezy days and cool nights.

Forcibly diverting spices and other merchandise from reaching the Middle East, by seizure and trickery the Portuguese obtained its flow along the sea route to Goa and Lisbon. Their conquest of Malacca also threw into their hands the considerable eastward current of trade from Persia, Turkey, and the Arab cities, all of which they put to good account.

### **Jorge Alvares' voyage to China**

On their earliest voyages to the Malabar coast of India, the Portuguese had heard of a mysterious, fair-skinned people called Chin, who many years ago, but just within living memory, had visited India and Ceylon in huge ships. Several times they had come, and then, no one knew why, their voyages had ceased.