

## East India Company Power Projection: Kanhoji Angré and the Anglo-Portuguese Expedition of 1721

(La proyección de la compañía de la India Oriental: Kanhoji Angré y la expedición anglo-portuguesa de 1721)

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the causes and consequences of the 1721 Anglo-Portuguese expedition through the prism of regional geopolitics, power projection, and the balancing of power. The existing narrative of the expedition, presently very unclear and full of inconsistencies, shall be revised through the use of the private papers of Sir Robert Cowan, governor of Bombay (1729-34). The existing accounts have until now not adequately incorporated the key role played by Cowan. This article is, as such, an important revision in the wider history of European geopolitics on the west coast of India in the early eighteenth century.

### **Keywords**

Colonial Bombay; Colonial Goa; Kanhoji Angré; Marathas; Power Projection

### **Resumen**

Este artículo examina las causas y consecuencias de la expedición anglo-portuguesa de 1721 a través del prisma de la geopolítica regional, la proyección de poder y el equilibrio de fuerzas. La narración existente de la expedición, actualmente muy poco clara y llena de incoherencias ha sido revisada a partir de los documentos privados de Sir Robert Cowan,

gobernador de Bombay (1729-34). Hasta ahora, los relatos existentes no han incorporado adecuadamente el papel clave desempeñado por Cowan. Este artículo constituye, por tanto, una importante revisión en la historia más amplia de la geopolítica europea en la costa occidental de la India a principios del siglo XVIII.

### **Palabras Clave**

Bombay Colonial; Goa Colonial; Kanhoji Angré; Marathas; Proyección de Poder

### **Introduction**

The concept of early modern power projection, particularly by Europeans, in the western Indian Ocean is one which was key in maintaining the balance of power in given regions at any one time. The projection of power, or often assumed power, was also essential to Europeans in establishing both respect and fear between themselves and native powers in the early modern period. I. B. Watson (1980: 70), in his famous article on power projection in early East India Company history, «Fortifications and the ‹Idea› of Force», laid out that whilst early power projection came in the shape of defensive constructs, the use of more active force was inevitable due to the growing political difficulties in the mercantilist age. The Company was only one European aspect to the wider occidental interest in South Asia, with the Dutch, French, and Portuguese all active in the region at the time. In terms of the western presidency in the early eighteenth century, it was largely the Portuguese of Goa who rivalled the English in geopolitical terms. Both powers competed for trading commodities, native contacts and control over sea lanes in the western Indian Ocean. Whilst European powers were subject to the various rivalries surrounding economic and political motivations, they were also acutely aware of the need to portray an image of strength in the face of native powers, such as the Marathas and Mughals.

Early modern European power relations were complicated by the experiences of seventeenth-century Europe through a number of wars and revolutions in political, national, and religious terms. The various conflicts often called for pacts and alliances in order to balance the power of rival polities. Although England and Portugal were theoretically allied in Europe since the time of the 1386 Treaty of Windsor, their imperial endeavors meant they also fulfilled very different roles in areas of colonial interest, such as South Asia. The existence of Europe-wide pressure to assert dominance over rival powers led to the creation

of what has come to be known as the balance of power theory. David Hume was one of the most well-known proponents of this theory in the eighteenth century, having held the firm belief that such a policy was an effective way for great powers to mediate international relations. The British desire to counterbalance the influence of France was a good example of this (Hume 1987a: 323-1; Hume 1987b: 332-9). However, whilst affairs in Europe may have experienced a semblance of equilibrium due to the policy of balancing power, European relations in the western Indian Ocean were more fluid and lacked such balance. The Portuguese in particular were far more established on the west coast of India in the early eighteenth century than the English, and had been active in the Indian Ocean world since the sixteenth century. Despite the Portuguese foothold in South Asia at this time, their position was also one which had perhaps already reached its peak and entered decline.

In 1721, the English at Bombay appeared to view the Portuguese of Goa as the dominant European power on the west coast of India. This may have been due to the more firmly established geopolitical position of the Portuguese in the region, or possibly due to the greater military resources of the crown colony of Goa. However, despite this vision of Portuguese superiority in 1721, by the end of the decade this position appears to have changed entirely. Robert Cowan, governor of Bombay (1729-34), recorded in August 1728 that the Portuguese empire in India was in decline by the 1720s and that their influence and commercial power waned. According to Cowan (1728: 6v; 1729a: 126v), the only area that the Portuguese were succeeding in empire at this time was in the propagation of Christianity. The strength of the Jesuit order in India, and particularly on the west coast at this time, was a likely reason for their comparative success in this sphere. More generally, the decline of the Portuguese meant that a power vacuum opened on the west coast of India, whereby a determined maritime power had the potential to take their place. Clearly, the Portuguese had either suffered a reduction in prestige from events or changing circumstances, or had in turn failed to adapt to the changing geopolitical situation on the west coast of India between the years 1721-8.

Initially, in terms of European defensive policy, the construction of large-scale fortifications was an effective deterrent against native incursions into European territories such as Bombay and Goa. However, these were static emplacements which could have been easily avoided or blockaded by a determined attacker. This was especially true given the two

primary threats on the west coast of India. First, the Mughal state, or a strong regional power-base of it, such as Gujarat, had the ability to raise considerable armies which would have quickly overwhelmed the much smaller forces of the Europeans. Second, the Marathas possessed a large number of cruisers with which they frequently harassed European shipping. These were contrasting threats and they needed different approaches to deal with them at different times. Whilst the Europeans could not have competed numerically, their advantage was in their strong existing fortifications and their advanced shipping compared to Indian vessels. However, warships could not be everywhere at once. Watson (1980: 76) has argued that the key to understanding English military policy on the west coast of India during the years 1608-1759 was what he has termed as flexibility within the symbiosis of offence and defense.

The solution is perhaps found in the nature of localized Mughal geopolitics; since, as Subrahmanyam and Bayly (1988: 412; 416-8) have argued, as the Mughal state became increasingly regionalized in the early eighteenth century, it became more difficult to coerce regional power bases to follow a common policy. Further, localized rulers may have found it beneficial to cooperate with Europeans rather than enter conflict with them. The longstanding struggle between the Mughals and Marathas was also an element to consider, with sporadic warfare between the powers occurring throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This created a situation on the west coast of India where no single power held absolute control at sea: The English, according to Watson (1980: 74), were confident in their use of Indiamen ships as tactical weapons, whilst the Marathas continued to raid both European and Mughal shipping, and the Mughals were seemingly content to tolerate Europeans providing their commercial traffic was unhindered. Effectively, power appeared sufficiently balanced to allow a relatively well-functioning geopolitical sphere. All of this suggested that the Mughals were relegated to a secondary antagonist role for the English at this time—in contrast to the late seventeenth century—whilst the threat of the Marathas and the Maratha admiral Kanhoji Angré in particular, loomed large. The threat of Angré, and the regionalized power he exerted, was, it is argued, a likely factor in the changing geopolitical dynamic between the English and Portuguese during the period 1721-8. This would have been particularly relevant if, as suggested above, the Portuguese had suffered a decline during the early eighteenth century. The result would have been to

destabilize the existing balance of power, thus giving Angré increasing opportunity to take advantage of the newfound European weakness.

Whilst the English, and indeed the Portuguese, might have felt confident in their warships, they continued to suffer losses to Angré throughout the early eighteenth century. This led to an interesting change in their use of power projection, as well as a significant step away from defensive tactics. In the face of disruptions caused by Angré and the Maratha fleet, the decision to negotiate an alliance against Angré was taken by the Company directors in London and the Portuguese viceroy at Goa («Court of Directors», 1719: 3v-11). This resulted in the Anglo-Portuguese expedition of 1721. The prospect of regional warfare to reassert the existing balance of power is linked to what Edwin van de Haar has written on Hume's views on maintaining the balance of power. Van de Haar (2008: 234) opines that whilst Hume did not view war as a tool for managing power relations, he did accept that war was often inevitable in order to maintain or restore balances of power.

Whilst brief accounts of the Anglo-Portuguese expedition have been undertaken by scholars such as W. S. Desai (1970: 68-75), Anirudh Deshpande (1992: 900-4) and James Grant Duff (1826: 520-1), the overall understanding of the expedition is patchy. Recent research into the career of Sir Robert Cowan has uncovered a rich vein of epistolary evidence which adds considerably to the wider understanding of Company affairs in the western Indian Ocean for this period (Author, 2020). In particular, Cowan played a key role in both the Anglo-Portuguese treaty negotiations and expedition in late 1721. Cowan's papers, in conjunction with the accounts of Desai, Deshpande, Grant Duff, the draft articles of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty, and material from the 1883 Bombay Gazetteer will be used to revise the expedition narrative and comment on its impact upon geopolitics on the west coast of India (Articles of an Alliance: 36-8; Gazetteer of the Bombay Regency, 1883: 260-3). New understandings of geopolitics in the region—conducted through events such as the Anglo-Portuguese expedition—will, it is argued, contribute to the wider debate surrounding the balancing of power in early eighteenth-century India and European attempts to project power in the sphere.

### **The Treaty Negotiations and Text**

In February 1721, Cowan was posted to Goa to negotiate with the Portuguese viceroy. Cowan (1722f: 122v), being a fluent Portuguese speaker, was well equipped for this task. Whilst there, Cowan was faced with the tensions that had arisen between the English and Portuguese on the west coast of India. These difficulties had emerged due to the geopolitical rivalry between the two colonial powers in India, as well as from the initial handover of Bombay to the English in the 1660s. Bombay had been a part of the treaty between England and Portugal which laid out the terms of Charles II's marriage to Catherine of Braganza in May 1662. Under its terms, England was to receive the ports of Bombay and Tangier. However, Clyde Grose (1930: 320) has speculated that these were only offered due to the inability of the Portuguese to sustain them for much longer. Problems arose due to the Portuguese viceroy in India having refused to hand over Bombay when the English squadron arrived to take possession in 1663. The English government protested to Lisbon, and orders were sent to Bombay to instruct that the settlement be surrendered, but these did not arrive until March 1665. By this time, the English expedition had been exiled to Anjediva island, near Goa, and were slowly dying of illness and malnutrition. Whilst Bombay was eventually transferred in 1665—albeit in a far reduced form than had been promised—the first English royal governor of Bombay, Abraham Shipman, had died at Anjediva. The loss of Shipman and so many English lives at Anjediva, together with King Afonso VI's difficulty in paying the balance of Catherine's dowry, meant that there was great distrust for the Portuguese on the English side by the early eighteenth century. Meanwhile, the Portuguese in India had viewed the coming of the English with suspicion due to ongoing Catholic–Protestant tensions, and feared that the loss of Bombay would signal decline for Portuguese India (Ames, 2003: 317).

Viewed through the lens of European colonial rivalry, the Anglo-Portuguese expedition and its negotiations might also be seen as an attempt by the two powers to rebalance European affairs on the west coast of India. Indeed, in following the path of alliance against a common enemy, the English and Portuguese were reducing the likelihood of conflict between themselves. Frederick Whelan (2018: 203) has commented of Hume's views that although he was generally opposed to unnecessary military exploits, such events could be condoned provided they led to a balancing of European power relations. This was a position largely held by the English in India during this period, when uninterrupted

commercial activity was favored by Company directors in London. Although foreign wars were costly for the Company, long-term losses were a greater concern. Whilst there was mutual distrust between the powers, Angré had been a powerful threat to both the English and Portuguese for a number of years, and it was in the face of this joint threat that the powers agreed to negotiate. However, it was only in November 1719 that the Company directors stated that an alliance with the Portuguese was their preferred means of dealing with Angré («Court of Directors», 1719: 3v-11). Cowan's deployment to Goa was also framed against the backdrop of three failed English assaults on the forts of Gheria and Khanderi during the years 1718-20. Numerous military failures and the continued success of Angré at sea meant that both the English and Portuguese had few options remaining, with an unlikely alliance against Angré an increasingly attractive option by 1721. Angré had risen to prominence by 1690 and, according to Grant Duff (1826: 368), Angré's father, «Tookajee Angria», had served with distinction in the navy of Shivaji earlier in the seventeenth century as well. Angré's rise was seemingly driven by his success against Europeans between the 1670s and 80s, as noted by Grant Duff (1826: 388):

But, by the activity of Kanhojee Angria, the Mahratta fleet had made many valuable prizes. Vessels of all nations were attacked; repeated descents were made along the coast, and few of the defenceless mercantile towns, from Travancore to Bombay, escaped a visit from these depredators. The Mahrattas continued in possession of most of their forts on the coast; they had maritime depots at Severndroog and Viziadroog, but the principal rendezvous of their fleet continued, as in the time of Sivagee, at Kohlaba.



Fig. 1 – Kanhoji Angré. Image supplied by Angré Port, Chowgule Group.

The proposed treaty was to have been the framework for a defensive alliance between the two powers, with a joint expedition to be launched against Angré, shown above in figure one, at his island stronghold of Kolaba. Maratha hostility to the European presence on the west coast of India was not a recent phenomenon, with there being numerous records of such aggression in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For example, Niccolao Manucci (2003: 166) had written of the Maratha plot under Sambhaji to take Goa in 1678. Angré's early career also saw him experience considerable success against European vessels in the late seventeenth century: Following his promotion to commander of the Maratha navy in 1690, European powers witnessed an increased frequency of Maratha attacks on their shipping; this was what led them to label Angré a pirate and seek his defeat. Whilst accusations of piracy conjured moral outrage associated with brigands and theft, the practicality of piracy in the western Indian Ocean at this time was far more complex. There were of course commerce raiders who attacked merchantmen, ransomed captives, and plundered coastal villages; however, there was also a sophisticated form of commercial piracy at work. This was the method by which European powers utilized their naval forces to enforce blockades and extort native merchants into purchasing passes. Without the relevant pass, merchant shipping was liable to be prevented from entering certain ports, having to pay exorbitant levies, or run the risk of seizure. One way of viewing such activity is, as Philip Stern (2011: 42-3) has suggested, through the lens of a form of protection racket which was designed to both provide funds and project the alleged superior power of Europeans. The existence of such schemes blurred the lines between what was piracy in the traditional understanding of the term, and the more modern techniques of warfare and colonial activity. However, Angré's political and military station placed him well above a common pirate, with the above arguments surrounding European piracy in India making European sentiment towards him seem unjust. This was, however, likely an element of Europeans asserting their alleged superiority, in line with arguments made in Syed Hussein Alatas' famous work *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977: 231-6). Indeed, Grant Duff's (1826: 417) description of Angré suggested he was the regional Maratha commander: Kanhojee Angria, Sur Kheil, who had been appointed by Raja Ram to the command of the fleet, upon the death of Seedojee Goojur, was placed in charge of the coast.

Although Desai (1970: 68-75) had noted Cowan's involvement in negotiations, he appears not to have had access to Cowan's papers. As such, Cowan's key role was not fully



discussed. The negotiations themselves were complicated by the poor relationship between the two powers, together with the enmity and distrust that had built up. Indeed, the most prominent early disagreement was that of the command structure. Since neither power wished for their forces to be commanded by a foreign general, a great degree of suspicion had to be overcome. From the Portuguese perspective, they felt—since it was to have been Portuguese royal forces joining the expedition, as opposed Company assets—their viceroy should have had overall command out of deference to the Portuguese crown. Whilst this may have seemed an insignificant problem, since the Company was a commercial body, the reality was far more complex when viewed through the lens of the notion of corporate sovereignty. As Stern (2011: 13-4) has commented, the Company held a royal charter granting it the power to govern and administer justice for its Indian subjects. As such, Stern has argued that the Company must be approached from the perspective of it having been a form of political community which, whilst theoretically dependent on the English crown, could in reality exert considerable autonomy.

Since it was the Company, not the English crown, that declared war on the Maratha nation, Stern's argument appears sound in this regard. Effectively, power to govern in India had been delegated from the English crown. This then enabled the Company to operate as a sovereign power alongside the royal power of Portuguese India, though the delineation between where sovereign power began and ended was unclear. However, Cowan assented to the viceroy having overall command due to his considerable military experience. The agreed upon hierarchy which saw the viceroy commanding the Portuguese contingent, and having overall command, with Cowan leading the English forces. A concession was, however, made in that Cowan and the viceroy would hold overall command on alternate days. This is represented in the extract from article III of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty:

‘As to the union of the British and Portuguese forces in their operations, as well as at land, as sea the same order shall be observed that was practiced betwixt the two nations in the late war with Spain, the generals of both nations shall command alternately [except when the viceroy goes to the field in person] and in like manner the troops of both nations shall make the posts of honour, one nation at one ridge in battle, the other at another (Articles of an Alliance: 36-8).

The concepts of geopolitics and security also loomed large for both powers, with draft agreements for the expected European conquest and occupation of Maratha forts

discussed. The Portuguese desired control of Kolaba island itself; this desire led to a specific clause in the draft treaty outlining their supposed future rights over the island. The Company, by way of compensation, was to have received the fort at Greim. Whilst the Portuguese wish to seize Kolaba was understandable in terms of weakening the Marathas' naval capabilities, it could also be viewed in terms of the geopolitical rivalry with the English on the west coast. The Portuguese plans for Kolaba were interesting given its proximity to Bombay, with their expected occupation potentially allowing them to put pressure on the English. This was compounded by their ambition to gain control of Butcher Island, located in the bay of Bombay. The English response to the Portuguese interest in Butcher Island was curious given their attempted reconciliation with the Portuguese. Indeed, a program of fortification was undertaken on the island in 1721, with the move provoking concern at Goa. Although Cowan (1721a: 31) succeeded in smoothing the issue over with the viceroy, events at Butcher Island served as a flashpoint for Anglo-Portuguese relations. It can only be speculated what tensions may have spilled over if the Portuguese had succeeded in taking ownership of Kolaba, but the standoff over Butcher Island suggested that what was already an alliance of convenience may have been pushed to its limits if the fortress of Kolaba was added to the equation. Article X, quoted below, discussed the expected Portuguese ownership of Kolaba following the expedition. Once again it would appear from the text of the treaty that there was at the very least some intention for this military alliance to be the germ for continued friendship and cooperation, with the planned acceptance of official residencies having been a positive step in this direction:

The fort of Culabo and its district shall belong to Portugal, the subjects of Great Britain reserving to themselves a house in Culabo if they please, and the fort of Greim with its districts shall belong to the crown of Great Britain, the subjects of Portugal reserving to themselves a house if they think fit. But in the case the subjects of Great Britain think proper to demolish Greim it shall be effected [sic] by both nations and one equal dividend made of the two artillery and munition; And for Culabo and its district one equivalent shall be given to the subjects of Great Britain in which shall be included the island of Candry (Articles of an Alliance: 36-8).

The Portuguese interest in the strategic location of Kolaba was also intriguing given the transition of European defensive policy from the preeminence of fortifications in the seventeenth century, to the more fluid format of using European shipping as a military deterrent in the eighteenth century. The variation ties in to Watson's (1980: 76) arguments

on the nature of European power projection, arguing that the application of force was neither consistent nor inevitable. The usage of fortifications in power projection might also be viewed as a tool for geopolitical negotiations, with a fixed structure serving as a powerful symbol of strength. The case of the Portuguese interest in Butcher Island, as well as the Tannah–Carinjah standoff were good examples of this. The Tannah–Carinjah passage, dividing Salsette from the Indian mainland, largely dictated relations between Bombay and Goa in the early eighteenth century due to the Portuguese having charged the English a toll to use the passage. The English were keen to negotiate for the abolition of the toll, but the matter was still unresolved by the time Cowan left India in 1735. The negotiating position was complicated by local politics at Goa—with the viceroy allegedly wishing to compromise with the English whilst his councilors objected—as well as the evident need for joint action against the common enemy (Cowan, 1734: 133v). The Portuguese, already weaker in the Indian Ocean than in previous years, needed to reassert their strength through power projection. The addition of the Kolaba fortress would have been a powerful statement in terms of regional geopolitics, which would in turn have put greater pressure on the English at Bombay.

The agreed upon treaty stated that the English and Portuguese were to enter into a defensive alliance against «all the Asiatic Princes, that are enemies to the two crowns of Great Britain and Portugal, except the Mogul, Kings of Persia, Arabia and China» («Articles of an Alliance»: 36-8). Without the wider context, this seemed very vague and suggestive of the potential for military action against other powers in the geopolitical sphere. It certainly gave the impression that there was to be a form of lasting agreement and understanding; this would have gone some way to repairing the already frail Anglo-Portuguese relationship. Whilst there was the potential for future military action, the opening clause of the treaty explicitly stated that an expedition was to be immediately launched against Angré. The treaty could thus be viewed as an instrument to both form an alliance against Angré, as well as a means of de-escalating the tense Anglo-Portuguese relationship.

The treaty's design in being an alliance between the «crowns of Great Britain and Portugal» («Articles of an Alliance»: 36-8) returns to the interesting question regarding sovereignty and the colonies. The company-state debate, launched by Stern (2011), complicates the understanding of both the treaty and under whose authority it was

concluded. Although it was Cowan, a Company servant, who negotiated the treaty, and it was to be Company forces participating in the expedition, no reference to the Company was made in the text of the document. It must be assumed that either the Company was deemed to have been acting on behalf of the crown, or more likely that a sufficient delineation of where Company and royal power overlapped was not recognized in India. Given that no correspondence was sent to London for approval, it must be opined that the Company was acting in a sovereign manner along the lines of Stern's arguments.

Article VIII of the treaty laid out the military expectations of each power: The text outlined that both powers were to supply 2,000 foot-soldiers, together with an appropriate number of officers. In addition to this, as much cavalry as could be mustered was also prescribed, though a specific quota was not mentioned. Cowan, as commander of the English contingent, commanded 2,500 men, largely in accordance with article VIII of the treaty. Deshpande's (1992: 902) work partially disagrees with the composition of the joint force, with his suggestion that the total allied force comprised 6,000 infantry, 200 cavalry, and 16 pieces of artillery. Though this deviates from the treaty text, it can be explained through article VIII's proviso that extra infantry could have been recruited if necessary. The Bombay garrison which was never large, was unlikely to have been able to provide the forces necessary for the English contingent. As such, it was likely that the bulk of the forces were made up of native sepoys or topasses; Cowan (1722a: 108v) had also suggested that the expedition force ultimately only included 1,000 Europeans in total. In addition to land forces, each power was required to fit out five grabs, together with their attendant boats, leading to a proposed squadron of 15-20 vessels. Deshpande's (1992: 902) account of naval operations claimed that ten major ships had shelled Kolaba with 300 guns, something very different to the requirement for grabs. Even if powerful Indiamen ships were supplied instead of grabs, there was no mention of massed naval ordinance in Cowan's account of the siege. This, combined with the very short length of the siege, suggests that the wider account of the expedition is in need of revision.

Article XIV stated that following the draft articles being «duly ratified», and that «execution of the project shall be immediately entered upon» (Articles of an Alliance: 36-8). The lack of a specific date on the draft treaty document meant that the date of the final draft is ambiguous. However, an accompanying letter to Cowan from the Portuguese viceroy, Francisco Joseph de Sampayo é Castro (1721: 39), suggested that the negotiations

were concluded in late August 1721. The Portuguese used this letter to highlight that they needed to refer the treaty articles to the Portuguese crown, but that this should not prevent expedition preparations. Although the precise timing of the expedition is difficult to conclusively define, Cowan's correspondence experienced a lull between November 28, 1721 and January 6, 1722. Arising from these dates, it is suggested that the expedition likely occurred between the end of November and December 1721. This is a timeframe which is in line with Deshpande's (1992: 902) estimation.

Since the Portuguese wished to refer the draft articles to the Portuguese crown, copies of the treaty would likely have been sent to Lisbon for consideration. The delay in communications between South Asia and Europe in the early eighteenth century meant that the packet(s) containing these documents could have taken up to eighteen months to travel from India and back. If this had indeed been the case, and the treaty had not been approved by the time of the expedition, then it could reasonably have been argued that the instrument never came into effect. This was a vital consideration in the wider context of the failed expedition. Article I in particular, which outlined that any peace with the enemy was to have been jointly agreed, had the potential for dispute between the two powers. As shall be seen in the following section, the failure of the expedition and the Portuguese suing for a separate peace caused a further deterioration in Anglo-Portuguese relations on the west coast of India after December 1721.

### **The Anglo-Portuguese Expedition**

Cowan (1721c: 98; 1721d: 98v; 1721b: 99) was very positive about the expedition between October and November 1721, and informed his correspondents of his leading role in the expedition; however, the expedition itself was a failure. None of the combined objectives were accomplished and Anglo-Portuguese relations in India were damaged for several years afterwards. The surrounding scholarship on the expedition is also inconsistent, with Desai's (1970: 68-75) history of the Maratha relationship with the English only giving scant reference to the expedition. Similarly, Deshpande's commentary has elaborated further on the venture, but relied heavily on accounts contained in the Bombay Gazetteer; a summary extract is quoted below. Indeed, it is only recent research that has brought to light

Cowan's role in the negotiations and expedition, as well as his significant influence on the geopolitics of the western Indian Ocean between the years 1719-34 (Author, 2020).

In 1722 the Bombay government, incensed at Ángria's piracies and effrontery, joined the Portuguese in an expedition against Kolába. A Portuguese land force and three English ships of the line under Commodore Matthews co-operated; but the attempt failed owing to the cowardice of the Portuguese (Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency 1883: 263).

Immediately, very striking inconsistencies can be seen to emerge from this extract. As mentioned above, Cowan was already reporting on the failure of the expedition by January 1722. This is compounded by the mention of three ships of the line, whereas Cowan did not reference any significant naval vessels participating in the expedition. It is also worth pointing out that the extract from the Bombay Gazetteer gave the impression that it was only the Portuguese who contributed land forces, whilst the English provided three ships of the line. Cowan's account of the expedition, together with his affirmation that both powers formed their forces as required under the terms of the treaty, suggested that the English had also provided land forces totaling 2,500 men. The role of Commodore Matthews in the expedition is also intriguing given that no mention of him or his squadron appeared in Cowan's reports. Desai (1970: 68-75) has, however, identified Matthews as having been part of a royal squadron sent to assist Bombay ahead of the expedition. Whilst Cowan's correspondence certainly had the potential to be partisan, it was surprising that Matthews was absent altogether. Since the Gazetteer account relies heavily on the history of the Marathas written by Grant Duff in 1826, the question must be posed as to how rigorous the research into the expedition has been until now. However, since Cowan's account had the potential for bias and there is little evidence to further corroborate his narrative, the conclusion must be that there are inconsistencies in the scholarship and that further revision is required.

Kolaba fort was between Bombay and Goa, and so it was relatively easy for the individual forces to coordinate; however, both armies had to cross hostile territory in order to rendezvous. Understandably, this would have been a worrying prospect under normal circumstances. The reality was, however, complicated by the uncertainty surrounding Angré's relationship with the Sou Raja to whom he owed fealty. Cowan reported on rumors that Angré had quarreled with the Sou Raja, but that it was unclear if this had amounted to

rebellion. The fickle nature of fealty and geopolitical rivalry, which was evident in both European and indigenous powers on the west coast of India, meant that local rivalries had the potential to help or hinder either party. Cowan (1722a: 108v) did not provide much information about the expedition preparations, bar that they had been completed, and that the allied force had been harassed by cavalry on the march to Alibaug. The bulk of Cowan's narrative for the expedition came from letters he wrote once he had returned to Bombay in January 1722. Whilst this does not amount to a war diary, Cowan's letters describe the siege of Kolaba in useful detail. It is from these, as well as Deshpande's account, that the basis of the below description shall be formed. The fort of Kolaba itself was a prominent defensive position with a considerable history to it; the below extract from the Bombay Gazetteer describes it:

To the south-west of Alibág, about a furlong from the shore, is the low fortified rock of Kolába. It is mentioned as one of Shivaji's forts. But it did not rise to consequence till, early in the eighteenth century, it became the stronghold of the great Maratha admiral and pirate Kánhoji Ángria. It is a low rocky island, 850 to 900 feet from north to south, and, at the broadest, about 350 feet from east to west. The fortifications consist of an isolated outwork to the north and the main fort enclosed by a wall from twenty to twenty-five feet high and about 700 paces in circuit, with two gates, a main gate in the north-east and a small gate in the south, and seventeen towers, four in the corners, five on the sea face, four on the land face, three on the north face, and one on the south face (Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, 1883: 260).

This made the prospect of an assault very dangerous; nevertheless, the following morning a joint attack was made with 500 men. They had hoped to find a gate to force open, but the only means of access was a narrow flight of steps which was heavily guarded. The initial attack was repulsed, with losses of approximately 50 killed and a further 50 wounded. This early defeat was followed by another setback when the viceroy fell ill on the second day of the siege. With the viceroy incapacitated, overall command devolved to Cowan. Overnight the allied artillery shelled the fort with four pieces; this was, however, a point which conflicted with Deshpande's (1992: 902) narrative which suggested that sixteen pieces had been used. The element regarding the alleged availability of European ships armed with 300 guns was again interesting given that Cowan (1722a: 100v; 1722b: 113v; 1722e: 106v) did not record their use in this instance.

Despite the allied force maintaining the siege in the face of their initial defeat and the illness of the viceroy, the expedition suddenly ended on the third day. The Sou Raja had dispatched his chief general, Baji Rao, to reinforce the garrison at Kolaba, and he appeared with a force of 2,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. Whilst these numbers rivalled those of the Anglo-Portuguese army, the crucial factor proved to be the high number of cavalry. Cowan (1722a: 108v) recorded that the native soldiers he commanded were terrified by the appearance of Baji Rao and his highly mobile force. This fear of a large cavalry force was concurrent with Deshpande's discussion on the nature of Indian warfare in the early eighteenth century. Deshpande (1992: 903) argued that the use of attritional warfare through large cavalry armies and making use of topographical features was often crucial in securing native victories against European-led forces. In the face of such Maratha strength, it was unsurprising that the Anglo-Portuguese army chose to retreat. It was, however, the fallout from the Portuguese peace with Angré that caused the greatest political problems. Under article I of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty, peace with the enemy could only be signed jointly. The Portuguese, however, signed a separate peace with Angré and retreated to their fort at Choul. This, Cowan (1722c: 114; 1722d: 115) described as «scandalous» behavior and used the issue as a means of assigning blame for the failed expedition. As alluded to above, however, it was highly suspect whether or not the treaty was actually in force. Nevertheless, the failure of the Portuguese to honor their commitments was further evidence of their supposed decline in geopolitical terms on the west coast of India.

In addition to the political difficulties between the English and Portuguese, there was also the geopolitical situation on the west coast of India to consider. The failure of two European powers to reduce a localized indigenous one complicated the relationship between them and native polities. So decisive a loss may have led native rulers to question the actual strength of European powers in the western Indian Ocean. This was a concern Cowan was also aware of, and one which led him to reassess the nature of English power in the region. The solution, to his mind, was to base Company power projection on a fluid system of naval patrols, as opposed the more static nature of fortresses (Cowan, 1730: 24). This was a stance which varied with the established Company practice of relying on static fortifications. It did, however, concur with Watson's (1980: 71) assessment that in order to be successful, force, and the projection of such supposed power, was required to be flexible



in its application. Whilst it was important to portray an image of dominance, it was also vital to have the means to back up such an illusion if required.

The failure of the joint European force led to a period of unrestricted naval raiding by Angré until his death in 1729. Instead of defeating the so-called piracy of Angré, the Anglo-Portuguese alliance only succeeded in shattering the illusion of alleged European superiority. This in turn led to the increased aggression of Angré's, and latterly his sons', forces into the 1730s (Cowan, 1729b: 48; 1730: 102v) The geopolitical situation on the west coast of India was thus largely unchanged for several years afterwards, with the problem still evident when Cowan left India in 1735. Indeed, the Company response to the strength of Angré at sea was largely defensive. Company galleys were used to patrol sea lanes and deploy to expected zones of danger, but Angré and his legacy was far too strong to be defeated in the short term.

## **Conclusion**

The failure of the Anglo-Portuguese expedition of 1721 was a good case study for the changing identity of regional power structures on the west coast of India in the early eighteenth century. The increased regionalization of the Mughal Empire, in line with Subrahmanyam and Bayly's arguments, meant that the foundations required for a shift in the balance of power had already been laid by 1721. The increased maritime raiding of the Marathas also underpinned an innate opportunism which came to be visible in the years following the Anglo-Portuguese defeat. The immediate result of the failed expedition was to see the continued naval interdiction of sea lanes on the west coast of India by Maratha shipping. However, the poor showing by the Portuguese also led to increased opportunity in geopolitical terms for the English as well. With the retreat of the Portuguese, it was the English of Bombay who were largely left to offer resistance to Maratha aggression off the coast of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Intriguingly, whilst they experienced difficulties as a result of this, the ultimate result was to see a strengthening of English naval forces and power projection in the western Indian Ocean during the period 1728-34. This period of increased naval aptitude and use of power projection also coincided with Cowan's tenure as governor of Bombay.

As noted above, Maratha aggression did not cease after the failed expedition, but rather continued under both Angré and his sons well into the 1730s. Whilst the English were relatively secure on their island stronghold of Bombay, Portuguese possessions on the west coast of India were more spread out. In particular, the areas of Bassein and Salsette, to the north of Bombay, came under intense pressure from Maratha incursions in 1730-1. The Anglo-Portuguese role reversal appeared complete in January 1731 when Cowan (1731: 108v) offered the Portuguese support against the Maratha assaults on Bassein and Salsette; in this case, the English were clearly in a stronger position to bolster the Salsette peninsula's defenses than the Portuguese of Goa. Whilst the two nations were still geopolitical rivals, the hierarchy of power between them had fundamentally changed. The English could afford to tolerate the Portuguese owing to their reduced strength in order to jointly oppose a resurgent Maratha power. Effectively, this was also a case of the balance of power theory at work on the west coast of India, whereby it was ensured that no one power assumed complete dominance over the others.

It is clear that geopolitical power relations on the west coast of India in the early eighteenth century were both fluid and vulnerable to change depending on regional circumstances. The Anglo-Portuguese expedition of 1721 has proven to be a useful case study for not only displaying the mutable qualities of European power relations in the region, but also those of native powers such as the Mughals and Marathas. It has been shown how early eighteenth-century regionalization of the Mughal empire, together with the increased aggression of Maratha forces under Kanhoji Angré and the destabilization of Anglo-Portuguese power, provided the means for a rebalancing of power relations on the west coast of India during the years 1721-8. The examination of this phenomenon, through the lens of the Anglo-Portuguese expedition, has shown how Europeans attempted to use power projection as a means of managing their power relations with native polities. It is also important to note that the narrative of the expedition itself has been considerably revised; this has been possible due to the wonderfully rich Cowan archive. It is hoped that the opening up of epistolary archives such as that of Cowan will offer new opportunities for both revising existing and under-researched topics, as well as furthering the discussion of East India Company activity in the western Indian Ocean.

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