

# The Role of Interpreters, or *Linguas*, in the Portuguese Empire During the 16th Century

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## Abstract

This article analyses the different categories of interpreters (*lingoas*), the forms of their recruitment and the strategies of their use in the Portuguese Empire in Asia in the first half of the sixteenth century. The interpreters were as good as adventurers, convicts and natives, captives, renegades and converted slaves recruited during expeditions and military operations. Besides the social-economical status of these interpreters the article highlights the case of the territory of Macao where the necessity to answer to imperial bureaucracy determines the creation of a corps of interpreters (*jurubaças*) and perfectly organised family dynasties of "lingoas".

## Keywords

Renegades, Convicts, Interpreters, Jews, New-Christians Slaves, Languages, Conversions, Translation, Lingoas, Jurubaças

Former renegades and captives, natives and converted slaves, Jews and new Christians, adventurers and convicts formed an important contingent of a specific category inside the frontier society of the Portuguese empire: that of the interpreters or *linguas*. Their functions could be executed by those who were not marginal, but the ideal profile required to competently fulfill this position presented some characteristics such as the facility to evolve in several worlds, which was not a quality found in the *milieux* of the imported society.

Furthermore, there were several technical problems. Individuals with proficiency in Eastern languages were rare in Portugal; only some merchants, men of letters or religion who had traveled could occasionally be used as interpreters. The languages known in these *milieux* were also limited. Only Arabic, often in corrupted form, and possibly Hebrew were known. The most popular among these languages was no doubt Arabic, which was spoken to some extent by soldiers or ex-captives from the Moroccan garrisons.

As far as the nobility was concerned, such linguistic capacities were even more rare. Only a few cases were registered of former prisoners that had learned the language of the country where they were captives, first in Morocco and later in Asia. For this reason, Antonio Camelo's example, that of squire of the royal household who accompanied Viceroy D. Francisco de Almeida to India in 1505 as an interpreter, is neither isolated nor that frequent (Bouchon 1985: 206)<sup>1</sup>.

Linguistic variations and the sheer diversity of languages generated other obstacles. The Arabic spoken in North Africa was understood neither in Egypt nor in Syria, which was responsible for the dominant idiom of commerce in the Indian Ocean. Further, Persian and also a mixture of Arabic-Persian enriched by Malayan terms and different Indian languages were equally used as *lingua franca* in the East (Ibid.: 204). The *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, a mixture of Italian, Castilian, Arabic and Turkish, also spoken by western mercenaries and renegades from diverse nations, was brought in turn by the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper doesn't concern the interpreters belonging to religious orders: see, for this last example, Cooper 1994.

Levantines and the Turkish, in particular, to the maritime environment in the Indian Ocean (Kahane and Tietze 1958).

By recruiting people from totally heterogeneous origins and cultures, it was hoped by the Portuguese that an extensive range of languages could hereby be covered. Nevertheless, this recruitment would still raise problems of another order. Having a double culture, sometimes even with various and mastering diverse languages, the interpreters were marginalized by their past. Conversely, their function integrated them into “respectable” society, and even into its higher echelons. If talented, they would frequent the antechambers of power, share state secrets and, at times, fulfill a determining role. Gaspar da Gama, also known as Gaspar da India, (Lipiner 1987, Tavares 1992), a Jew of Ashkenaze origin, came to India as an interpreter for Vasco da Gama, D. Manuel, Pedro Alvares Cabral and D. Francisco de Almeida; also, Francisco de Albuquerque and Alexandre de Ataíde were the two Sephardic interpreters for Afonso de Albuquerque (Aubin 1974). These are some well-known examples of interpreters of talent<sup>2</sup>.

The paradoxical status of the interpreter explains the general mistrust they engendered. This was aggravated by the fact that the *lingua's* function was practically not dissociated from spying missions or secret negotiations. Since the examples are so numerous in the inevitably sparse documentation, we will only cite some that we find paradigmatic.

Gaspar da India prepared his son Baltasar for the function of *lingua*. The latter was charged to spy on the forces of the Mameluke Admiral Amir Husayn al-Kurdî in 1508 (Castanheda I/II, cap. LXXVII: 391)<sup>3</sup>. In 1515, the delegation sent to Shah Isma'îl integrated a *lingua*, Gaspar Rodrigues, whom Afonso de Albuquerque had sent “in disguise to hear what the Moors had to say about him” (*dissimulado pera ouvir ho que os mouros dizião acerca dele*) (Castanheda I/III, cap. LIII: 326). In 1535, the *lingua* João de Santiago secretly informed Governor Nuno da Cunha about the intentions of Bahadur Shah (Correia III/II cap. LXII: 620/621)<sup>4</sup>. Diogo de Mesquita, prisoner in Cambay, learned Gujurati (apparently thanks to the liberality of his guards); although certainly converted to Islam, he still acted as a *lingua*, a messenger, a spy and a negotiator between the Portuguese and the Gujurati sultanate around 1535 (Aubin 1974: 178)<sup>5</sup>.

At times, these missions revealed themselves to be incompatible with the prestige and social position and yet the political responsibility of those the interpreter served. The discrepancy of which he was testimony occasionally rendered him inconvenient: other than being associated to state secrets, many times he also knew their darker side. Afonso de Albuquerque kept a close eye on his interpreters. In 1512, he had his *lingua* Francisco de Albuquerque put in irons for five months, accused of knowing his secrets (Bouchon 1985: 210).

On the other hand, these characters, being difficult to classify or to ascertain to which culture they belonged, were troubling due to their knowledge of different languages. The interpreter was suspected of having his soul corrupted, being contaminated by “the other side” (*outro lado*), because employing other languages necessarily implied the use of the thought mechanisms of the Asian world. He had access to forms of a mental universe which escaped his masters<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, from a practical and immediate point of view, the fact the interpreter dominated various codes put the powerful in a position of inferiority, since they were totally dependant on the *lingua* to understand written and spoken language, knowing beforehand that the *lingua* could --- according to the consecrated formula ‘traduttore, traditore’--- manipulate and distort it with respect to his interests.

A significant example is an account from the Portuguese embassy to Bengal in 1521. A renegade, João de Borba (known for his linguistic gifts) served as an interpreter in a dissension between Antonio de Brito and, a Turk, Ali Aga. During the course of the discussion, he “translated” one of the answers in an

<sup>2</sup> A parallel is possible with Abraão Benzamerro, «língua» of Mazagan: see Tavim 1993: 115-141.

<sup>3</sup> In his letter of 1506 (?), Albuquerque, Pereira da Costa 1990: 313, where Gaspar da Gama declares to D.Manuel that his son may succeed to him because “he is such a good man like I am and knows even more about languages than I do and is a young man of 28 years” (*he tam bom homem como eu e sabe lyngoas mais que eu e manço de xx biij annos*).

<sup>4</sup> About the person, his captivity and career, see Castanheda, II/VII, cap.LXIX, pp.487-488; Correia, III/II, cap.LXII, pp.502-504, and cap.LVII, pp.602-609; Couto, V/I, cap.III, p.37.

<sup>5</sup> In spite of his admiration for the Governor, Correia shows that Albuquerque's behaviour was not always honest; for example, Albuquerque made «a deal» with his Jewish interpreter (Francisco de Albuquerque?), in order to extort an important quantity of rubies from a rich merchant of Batkal (Correia, II/I, cap.XLVI, pp.388-390).

<sup>6</sup> About the Bengali's episode, cf. Bouchon and Thomaz 1988: 252-253 [f<sup>o</sup>76 b], and about the instructions to the embassy, Correia, II/I, chap.X, p.72.

entirely different way, for his own convenience. For this reason, in 1510 Albuquerque sent the delegation of Ruy Gomes de Carvalhosa to Shah Isma'il with interesting, well specified instructions: the *lingua* should not add a single word beyond those of the ambassador during the audience, always remaining by his side, and should be lodged in isolated accommodation for the duration of his mission (Correia, II/I, cap.X: 71/72)<sup>7</sup>.

The only way to counterbalance the interpreter's "occult" power consisted in his master's treating him with condescension, dealing with him as a simple *factotum* of no great importance. Significantly, sources often maintained the *lingua's* anonymity, scarcely referring to him and when so obliquely. Also, by playing on his modest status of origin, the *lingua's* ambitions were suppressed, hoping essentially to render him cognizant of his vulnerable position.

In the event of a diplomatic incident, it was easy to make the *lingua* the scapegoat. He was obliged to assume the responsibility of the cultural "misunderstanding" and the consequences that could arise. This responsibility, whether veritable or not, was unanimously attributed to him, either by the Europeans or the Asians. The interpreter of the same delegation to Bengal in 1521 declared in a passage in his Journal that at the moment the Sultan prepared to condemn to death the members of the delegation, the first to be decapitated would be him, "only because he's the *lingua*" (*so por ser lingua*) (Bouchon, Thomaz 1988: 214).

There were permanent interpreters to fortresses, governors and armadas, and they were called State *linguas*. Marco Fernandes was the *lingua* present for the signing of the peace treaty of 1534-1535 by which the Portuguese settled in the port at Bassein. Some of them had long careers, like João Garcês, who was captured in Cape Comorim, and served in India for twenty-five years, twenty-three of which as a *lingua* in various armadas and fortresses on the Malabar Coast<sup>8</sup>

The majority of State *linguas* were episodically recruited for urgent situations, during specific negotiations, military operations or maritime expeditions, in which it was necessary to initiate contact with adversaries or simply during a fortuitous encounter between unknown entities which urged making contact. So, Afonso de Albuquerque profited from among the passengers of a ship to Mecca captured in September of 1510 off the coast of Malabar by Simão Martins. He used the services of two Jews of Iberian origin, later baptized Francisco de Albuquerque and Alexandre de Ataide, who accompanied his expeditions to Malacca in 1511 and to Aden in 1513. (Aubin 1974: 176) In 1535, on a reconnaissance mission to destroy the city of Ujong Tanah, near Malacca, D. Estevão da Gama captured an inhabitant of a village who was obliged to furnish information concerning the defenses of the city and remained in service as a *lingua* for the armada (Correia III/II, cap. LXIII: 627).

Indigenous interpreters, used in all areas in which the Portuguese operated (trading posts, fortresses and armadas) came to serve many times in zones far away from their land of origin. In 1512, Afonso de Albuquerque sent a young Abyssinian who "knew the Arabic tongue" to D. Manuel. In 1517, in addition to the Portuguese and the local *linguas*, Ormuz disposed of two Indian interpreters, one Gamgua, a Gujurati, and one Jorge, a Christian from Malabar<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, the recruitment of non-converted Asian and converted interpreters or Eurasian *mestizos* did not please everyone. A certain rivalry opposed the Portuguese *linguas* to the Asian natives, the former despised the latter, and tried to relegate them to a secondary position, even though they had been renegades or convicts themselves. In a letter to the king, João Garcês complained that "a lot of trouble is created here in India as a result of the *linguas* not wishing to serve the interests of His Royal Highness, and

<sup>7</sup> For the embassy to Gaur, see Bouchon and Thomaz 1988: 241 [f°66 a]. See also the example of Duarte Barbosa, arrested by Afonso de Albuquerque, "because he is an interpreter and cause of all these revolts" (*porque ele he lymguoa e causa de todas estas revoltas*): Bouchon 1985: 205.

<sup>8</sup> See his letter, from Cochín, 2.I.1529, AN/TT, CC.I, 24, 3, published by Luís de Albuquerque and José Pereira da Costa, «Cartas de «Serviços»...», doc.VI, p.328-330, especially p.328.

<sup>9</sup> About the young Abyssinian, «mancebo abexim» cf. AN/TT, *Corpo Cronológico* (CC) I, *maço* 12, *documento* 36 (de Cananor, 1.XII.1512). About the interpreters of Ormuz, see Farinha 1991: 30 [Payments made by the «feitor» of Ormuz in 1516-1517] and p.44 [*Livro de Receita e Despesa da Feitoria de Ormuz* (doc.n°7)]. The «Gamgua Guzarate» who was interpreter in the fortress is certainly the «Ganda Chatim», «gentio de Goa que sabia bem fallar a lingua dos guzarates», of Correia, sent in 1514 as «lingua» with the embassy of Diogo Fernandes de Beja to the Gujarat (Correia, II/I, cap.XLIV, p.368). Castanheda says that the «lingua» of this embassy was Duarte Vaz, but he mentions a Brahmin called Anagapatu, ou Ganapatu, possibly Ganda Chatim, in charge of obtaining the safe-conduct (*salvo conduito*) for the embassy (Castanheda, I/III, cap.CXXVII, p.803, e CXXXI, p.810).

the captains turn to some of the niggers (*sic*) giving them credit for having been of service” ( *muitas couzas se fazem qua na India por as lingoas non serem aquelas que desejam de fazer o servjço de Vosa Alteza porque amdam qua hus ngrinhos a que os capitames dam o credito porque lhe fazem seos proveitos*) (Albuquerque e Pereira da Costa 1990: 329).

This climate explains the reason why many *linguas* were recruited among the Jews and the new Christians, although this recruitment was also favored for practical reasons. The Jews mastered a wide range of languages: Albuquerque’s Jewish interpreters, mentioned earlier, knew Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Gujarati, and Kanara, and one even learned Malay in a few weeks (Aubin 1974: 176). Gaspar de Gama, other than Hebrew, mastered Arabic and Chaldean (*Caldeu*), also speaking Italian mixed with Spanish (Tavim 1994: 141). On the other hand, they disposed of an extended family and community network that made them excellent emissaries and informers. But the fact that many were of Portuguese, Castilian or even North African origin, gave them above all a certain “cultural proximity” that pagan Asian did not have and created some connivance with the Portuguese.

Isaac do Cairo, for example, was maybe not of Iberian origin; but he originated from Cairo, where an important Jewish community was located, as in Rosetta, in the Nile Delta. Garcia de Orta judged him “a man of discretion and knowledgeable of many languages” (*homem discreto e sabedor de muytas lingoas*), and made reference to him in his “*Coloquios dos Simples e Drogas da India*” (Orta 1987: 85/204).

Isaac do Cairo rendered remarkable services as an emissary and an informer to the Portuguese Crown. In the troubled period when the Turkish threatened the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean, among other missions, during his long career, he is attributed the news of the death of Bahadur Shah in 1537, news from the Sultan of Gujarat and the movements and alliances of the Ottoman in the region in 1538 (Tavim 1994: 180/181)<sup>10</sup>.

To recompense his services, the king graced him with the office of *lingua* of the city of Diu. This position offered him the right to an annual retainer of one hundred and sixty thousand *reais* paid in four-month periods. He was also asked by the sovereign to designate a substitute to fulfill the same functions in case of absence or inability to execute his functions (Tavim 1994: 240/241).

Originating from Cairo also was the Jew Samuel, used by Afonso de Albuquerque as his interpreter, who was called forth to translate the letter sent him by the king of Abyssinia (Barros II/VII, cap.VI: 339)<sup>11</sup>.

These Jewish *linguas* were not converted, since there was an advantage in keeping them apart from their employer, the Portuguese Crown. This way they could maintain their contacts with different Jewish communities without risking to be ostracized by their coreligionists. The situation changed when they intended to obtain properties and favors like Gaspar da Gama (Albuquerque e Pereira da Costa 1990: 312/313). As with Islamic society, conversion became then necessary as a first step in the acculturation of the individual and his social integration in the community, hoping simultaneously to seal his fidelity to the Crown.

It would seem to have worked for some individuals, even though the Portuguese testimonies, if anything over-zealous in their wish to report conversions to Christianity, need to be constantly confronted with complementary documentation. Francisco de Albuquerque, for example, solicited favors from D. Manuel and acquired the status of *casado* in Goa, where he fulfilled the duty of *lingua*. However, and contrary to what Correia affirmed, he did not die in Goa as a *casado* and good Christian. After Afonso de Albuquerque’s death, he returned to Portugal where he continued on to Cairo. There, Antonio Tenreiro encountered him with his people in the Jewish quarter of the city in 1525 (Aubin 1974: 181 183/184). On the other hand, one should take into account the fact that conversion was not always immediate: the Jewish interpreter for Afonso de Albuquerque, Yussef or Joçef, only agreed to conversion under the name of Alexandre de Ataide in 1515, while in fact he had been serving the Governor since 1510 (Ibid.: 177).

Like the Jews, the new Christians also offered advantages when recruited as *linguas*. They did not perhaps have community connections as widespread, nor the capacity of efficient penetration of different oriental societies that the Jews had, but they had their religion and their own community networks (which would at times overlap those of the Jews), which represented considerable weight (Tavim 1994: 187-230).

<sup>10</sup> For a general view of his travels, Tavim 1994: 173-185.

<sup>11</sup> Some Jewish merchants had been also «*linguas*» at the court of some the local kings; see the case of Samuel Castiel, in the first half of the 17th century in Cochin (Subrahmanyam, 1987).

In the absence of definite evidence, it is not always easy to distinguish them from non-converted Asians or Muslim converts who generally received patronymic Portuguese names (typically that of their baptismal godfather) when they became Christian. Only mention of a knowledge of Hebrew allows us to identify them with assuredness. This was the case of João Nunes, a former convict who knew a little of this language and who was condemned to remain in Calicut to learn the local language (Bouchon 1985: 205). In other cases, concerning some of the *linguas* from Ormuz, such as Gaspar Martins, Gaspar Rodrigues or Salvador Rodrigues, suspicion remains since it is known that Ormuz, in addition to counting an important Jewish community, was one of the obligatory ports of call for the New Christian of peninsular origin that went to India<sup>12</sup>.

The Muslim interpreters constituted a block apart. Some of them were converted to Christianity, others were not, according to rules which escape us or perhaps only in function of concrete contexts and situations. Khwaja Pîr Kulî (Coja Percolim), a Persian interpreter, was present at the signing of the treaty of the concession of Bassaim in the company of the State interpreter Marco Fernandes on 23 December 1534. Not a convert, he was frequently used by the authorities of Goa, perhaps due to his high social status. He was a respectable merchant, not only a *lingua* (Couto 1995: 120)<sup>13</sup>. However, the personal interpreter of Lopo Soares de Albergaria (1515-1518), Miguel Nunes, a Muslim merchant at one time, was a convert to Christianity (Couto 1988: 249). Garcia de Noronha, a spy and a *lingua* for D. Garcia de Noronha, equally a convert, was originally Turkish (Aubin 1974: 182).

As for the celebrated Sidi Ali “The Twisted” (*O Torto*), a nickname due to his squinting, a Moor from Granada who settled in the Gujarat, he represents a special case. He was not a permanent interpreter for the Portuguese, but was the *lingua* for the group imprisoned in Chaul in 1508. As a recompense for his services, D. Francisco de Almeida rewarded him with four hundred *cruzados* in February 1509. In a definite illustration of geo-cultural solidarity, he had actually protected that group of Portuguese captives personally and avoided their being sent to Constantinople against the wishes of the Mameluk Admiral Amir Huseyn al-Kurdî<sup>14</sup>.

Even more surprising is the case of João de Santiago. Once a Muslim slave of “subtle ingeniousness” (*sutil engenho*), this adventurer and interpreter originated from North Africa. He received a Christian name when he converted in Lisbon where a caulker had bought him and taught him his art. When the latter left on one of the first ships sent to India, João de Santiago accompanied him. Enfranchised by his master’s will upon his death in Goa, he began to sell precious stones in Kanara, thanks to the money he had been able to save. Converted to Hinduism, he became an influential personage at the local court.

A reverse of fortune and diverse intrigues drove him to seek refuge in Goa where he embarked for Ormuz. In this city, he entered into the King’s service, returned to Islam and continued his activities under the identity of a Muslim merchant. Business rivalries and his arrogance as a protégé of the sovereign obliged him nevertheless to take refuge anew among the Portuguese. Nuno da Cunha, without forcing him into Christianity, sent him to Cambay as a *lingua* (in the company of secretary Simão Ferreira) to sign the peace treaty regarding the cession of Bassein.

This mission perhaps justified his continuing being a Muslim, in the sense that his religion only made it easier to unfold conversations. According to Diogo do Couto, Simão Ferreira ended by ceding João de Santiago to Bahadur Shah, whose favorite he became and from whom he earned twenty thousand

<sup>12</sup> For Gaspar Martins, see Castanheda, I/III, cap.CXLVII, p.845; about Gaspar Rodrigues, already mentioned, see also Castanheda, I/II, cap.LIII, p.326. Salvador Rodrigues is mentioned by Aubin 1988: 417-432. One of the first two should be Gaspar Pires, new-christian and «boticário» in Cochim em 1509, in mission in Onor in 1512 at the court of Nizâm-ul-Mulk in 1514; he subsequently integrated the embassy sent to Shah Isma’îl in 1515 as «língua» (Aubin 1993: 24-25). About the Jewish community of Ormuz, cf. Fischel 1950: 209-210/216-218; the Ormuz itinerary is mentioned by Cunha, 1995: 48/56/58.

<sup>13</sup> About Khwaja Pîr Kulî, a friend of the great naturalist Garcia de Orta, cf. the letter of Rui Gonçalves de Caminha to D. João de Castro, [from Goa, 4.II.1547], in Cortesão and Albuquerque w.d.: 358, as well as the *Livro que trata das Cousas da Índia e do Japão*, 1957, (25), F<sup>o</sup>132-133. See also, for Marco Fernandes and Khwaja Pîr Kulî, Matos 1999: 62/65 and 70-71.

<sup>14</sup> Correia, I/II, cap.IV, p.943, and Castanheda, I/II, cap. LXXXI, pp.401-402, and cap. CI, pp.441-442. Cf. in CAA, II, p.429, the «mandado» of D.Francisco de Almeida for «Cide Alle Baci, andaluz» (made on board the *Froll de la Mar* 6.II.1509). Cf. also the letter already mentioned of Tristão de Gá, by Candeias Silva 1996: 356.

*cruzados* out of the revenues from the villages. His service to his new master proved of short duration. Following Bahadur Shah's early death in 1537, Santiago ended by being stoned by the Portuguese in a disturbance which occurred at sea off the coast of Diu (Couto V/I cap.X: 104-107).

Just as with all other categories in the frontier society, the *linguas* were also motivated by economic interest. What they earned as interpreters was not considered to be enough in an environment where many individuals, officers of the Crown, *casados* and merchants-entrepreneurs tried with all means to make a fortune. It is certain that, barring exceptions, the *lingua* who either accompanied a delegation, served as an emissary or even as an informer, always had the possibility to receive --- other than the emoluments (at times secret) inherent to the specificity of his mission --- small donations according to Oriental custom offered by kings or local potentates they visited. Gaspar Martins, interpreter for the delegation of Fernão Gomes de Lemos to Shah Isma'il, received one hundred and fifty *cruzados* in this manner, as did the clerk Gil Simões (Castanheda I/III, cap.XLVII: 845)<sup>15</sup>.

But all this did not amount to making one's fortune. Even if we look at the habitual complaints of the servants of the Crown in Asia in relative terms, João Garcês, who characterized himself as "a proven peon" (*hu prove pyam*) complained bitterly that he did not "have food to eat like other people who buy and sell" (*ter de comer como estroutras jemtes que compram e vendem*), affirming that as for "as for the salary, it does not suffice for the barrels [in which the pay is carried], since the basic salary is 12.000 reais a year and 6 *cruzados* by way of subsistence-allowance" (*ao soldo e mantimento nom mabasta pera pagar os tones em que amdam porque sam doze mjl rs cada ano e sei cruzados de montimento*), to conclude precisely: "Sir, you should make sure that a *lingua* has to eat in proportion to the service he provides" (*olhay senhor que hua limgoa de Vosa Alteza nam ter que comer quanto servjço ha de dar*) (Albuquerque, Pereira da Costa 1990: 329)<sup>16</sup>.

For this reason, , we find them in commercial activities, just as with the *casados*, even illicit ones, such as smuggling pepper (Disney w/d: 69/70)<sup>17</sup>.

However, the interpreter's activity could also be a passport, if not to fortune, at least to obtaining certain political influence at a local level. Various merchant-adventurers, mercenaries or Portuguese renegades, while advisers to Asian potentates, added to their competence the functions of interpreter-secretaries, which thereby substantially enhanced their power. Bhuvaneka Bahu, King of Kotte, gave immense credit to Antonio Ferreira and Antonio de Fonseca who worked for him as *lingua* and clerk around 1540 (J. Flores [1993]: 140)<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless the status of *lingua* was not completely unfavorable. Although we only dispose of documentation relative to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one might highlight the special case of China during this period. From the earliest times, the Chinese empire was characterized by an attitude of rejection

<sup>15</sup> Fernão Gomes de Lemos got 300 *cruzados* e «hu terçado goarnecido douro».

<sup>16</sup> For variations of salaries, see Matos 1999: the «lingua» of the Vice-roy earned 30.000 *réis* a year (p.65); but that of the King of Ormuz received 125.590 *réis* (the equivalent of 9 *lack*) (p.27), and the one of the King of Cochin, 15.600 (p.103) ; the one of the customs of Ormuz in 1571, 10.500 *réis* each year (p.28); the interpreter of the fort of Daman, 12.000 (p.38); of Tarapor, 7.500 (p.41); of Quelmamahim, 7.200 (p.41); of Açarim, 8.640 (p.45) ; the rent of Dabul was so low that the salary of his interpreter is not mentioned specifically (p.57); of Cananor, 14.400 (p.99); of Cranganor, 4.600 (p.101); of Cochin, 9.600 (p.103); of the little forts of Coulan and Coulicouran, a total of 21.600 (p.106); of Ceylan, 6.000 (p.108). The *linguas* of the captains of the important fortresses were better paid: of Bassein, 20.000 (p.49); of Diu, 20.000 (p.33); but the «lingua» of Goa, did get only 12.960 (p.76); the salary of the interpreter of Barcalor was 14.400 (p.93); of Mangalor, 14.400 (p.96); of Onor, 12.000 (p.89); of Chaul, 7.200 (p.53). Some salaries of private interpreters are also provided. The salary of the «lingua» of the «feitor» of Chaul was included in the general expenses of the fort (p.54), but the interpreter of the judge of Ormuz (*ouvidor*) received a salary of 7.200 *réis* each year (600 *réis* per month) (p.24). Documents also show that they could be landlords: see, for example, *O Tombo de Diu*,..., p. 135 (lands of the «lingua» Aleixo Gomes).

<sup>17</sup> They assisted the administration officers when the land taxes were paid: see *O Tombo de Diu*,..., p.88.

<sup>18</sup> See, for renegados, Couto, 2001: 178-201, published also (with more critical notes) in *Mare Liberum*, 16 (1998), pp.57-85; Lima Cruz 1995: 39-47; Subrahmanyam 1994 and 1990; Coates 1998: 147-155.

towards foreigners or their communities, considering them alien bodies whose presence could only be tolerated from the moment they submitted themselves for forced integration. In accordance with the application of these principles, the foreigners from Macao were considered “Chinese” and forced to comply with the regulations of the Chinese laws. The interpreters whose function symbolized the survival of the foreign identity itself were fiercely persecuted. The *linguas* from the delegation of Tomé Pires were executed as a result and their women sold as slaves (Flores [1993]: 4)<sup>19</sup>. This attempt to avoid the acculturation of the Chinese was especially directed at the renegades who were considered “Portuguese Chinese” (*Chineses aporuguesados*) (Flores [1993]: 4), and this explains also the daily aggressions the *jurabaças* (*linguas*) were victim to in Macao during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid.: 4).

Beyond these aspects, a series of specific characteristics obliges a different way of conceiving the existence and the employment of the *linguas* here. The bureaucratized structure of the Chinese State, the problematic existence of a written language in the form of ideographs, and the lack of assistance from foreign communities to serve as linguistic intermediaries--- they expressed themselves in Chinese--- just as the absence of the insertion of adventurer-merchants into local political structures led to the creation of bureaucratized, formal structures, which were not found in other areas of Portugal’s Empire of the East.

To face this situation and confront the Imperial bureaucracy in a systematic way, a municipal linguistic corps was created in 1627. This corps employed five men: one principal *lingua* assisted by two other minor *linguas* and two clerks (Ibid.: 7). Considering that this group was in charge of the credibility of the city in its relations with the Empire, the interpreters could not then be marginalized in the sense observed above. They could at worst be economically marginalized: farmers in flight who, having abandoned their land, flowed into the city and were engaged by the authorities to exercise this office (Ibid.: 8).

One of the rare aspects in common to these *linguas*, as well as their very different life trajectories mentioned up to now, was their conversion to Christianity. However, as far as Macao is concerned, the goal was not only to guarantee the interpreter’s fidelity but also to avoid him from being marginalized. The need to reinforce the respectability of the *linguas* as well as their identification with the imported society can also be seen by their being granted the *casado* status. This fact turned the *lingua* into a rooted individual and thus more easily controlled by society. It is worth noting that their salaries were also considerably superior to those of the other interpreters of the Portuguese empire in the East (Ibid.: 9).

Also significant of this policy of stabilization, planning, and projection of the “long trend” (*tempo longo*) was the fact that families of *jurabaças* were constituted to serve the city of Macao. The father and the brother of one of the most important interpreters of the city in the years around 1620, Simão Coelho, were themselves also interpreters and the office would be perpetuated through following generations (Ibid.: 9)<sup>20</sup>. With the goal of planning for the “long trend”, we can also note the originality in the preparation of future *linguas*. This task was the charge of the principal interpreter who was to create an actual school, recruiting young children to receive complete training so as to later serve as *linguas*. This preparation was principally a linguistic one, but also demanded a knowledge of the laws and customs, an initiative largely justified by the extent of the attributions assigned the *linguas* (Ibid.: 11).

If in India, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the interpreters of Afonso de Albuquerque (certainly some others as well) executed administrative functions: the payment of soldiers, the management of fortresses’ building works, the selection of gifts to be offered to local royalties, they did not, however, possess extended political-administrative responsibilities at an institutionalized level. But the *linguas* of Macao were invested with a series of responsibilities that we do not see elsewhere: they were in charge of the census and surveillance of the Chinese population in the city; they were supposed to avoid any interference of the Mandarin authority with that of the town-council, and above all they had to keep a written record of political and diplomatic contact with the Imperial Administration (Ibid.: 12)<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> About the embassy, see also Ptak 1992: .290-291, and the *Suma Oriental de Tomé Pires e o Livro de Francisco Rodrigues*, (transcription and notes of Armando Cortesão), 1978: 21-61, specially p.51.

<sup>20</sup> We have, for the XVI century, the example already mentioned of Gaspar da Gama, who tried to pass on his charge to his son.

<sup>21</sup> They also could act as maritime security agents : in 1651 the «jiribaças» from the city , with the help of the Chinese, could take eleven pirate boats which fled from Canton (Boxer 1985: 133, letter of the Governor and Captain Major of Macau, João de Sousa Pereira to the Viceroy of Índia [2.XII.1651]

However, as respectable as the interpreters from Macao were, their functions could not escape the fate of secret informants. The service and the defense of a city which was part of a xenophobic Empire provided, nevertheless, another dimension to this espionage: it did not serve disparate strategies individual or collective, instead it represented the interests and the political action of a city-state in a cohesive manner. This spying activity was actually vital for the city to be aware of what was written concerning it, as well as what circulated on the continent. Just as important was the necessity of projecting via the *linguas* a favorable image of the community to the continent.

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