In 1534 when the sultan of Gujarat, after years of warfare, handed Bassein (Vasan in present-day Greater Mumbai) to the Portuguese, for the ‘Estado da Índia’, this meant its first possession with territorial depth, with the exception being the small island of Tiswadi in Goa. The negotiations between these contenders and even the differences within the Portuguese camp regarding the objectives of this acquisition were widely discussed. In fact Gujarat gave not only the fortress and island of Bassein, but also lands and rents under its jurisdiction.

We also know that the Portuguese retained the territorial, administrative, and military boundaries, and even the economic operating model and the social order already in force. The various land, crafts, and trade rents were handed over some years after the conquest either to members of the lesser Portuguese nobility, members of the Goan elite, or to local allies; the transfer regime itself was based on European law. As during Muslim rule, these landholders had to provide military aid to the sovereign, help defend the jurisdiction with their horse, and live in Bassein, where they had to ensure the cultivation of land. This was the origin of the first land-based nobility of the ‘Estado da Índia’, which had considerable economic power,
was responsible for building a city of great architectural splendour, and for controlling a vast territory. Years later, the religious orders took part in this process, with the Jesuits increasingly at the forefront, where they gained a prominence that went much beyond their strictly apostolic labour.

This possession was in fact one of the most profitable of Estado da Índia, a fact that must have pushed Portuguese authorities to increase its intervention in this Indian region. It always had budget surpluses during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the second or third highest in the account between receipts and expenses. It was also the third or fourth most profitable possession in the Estado, after Goa, Hormuz, and occasionally Diu. It supplied the king with money and goods, not just trade possibilities, as was the case in many of his other domains. The great value of the region essentially lay in the abundance of wood, ideal for shipbuilding, and in its agricultural products, especially cattle meat and rice. As a territory rich in food products, it could supply small possessions without an hinterland and totally dependent on outside supplies, though there were permanent requests of provisions to Goa. Bassein also became home to one of the most important shipyards of the Estado.

So, contrary to many other Indo-Portuguese cities, where European control was hardly felt beyond the walls of the forts or urban ramparts, here the Europeans controlled a rich, extensive territory. The only exceptions in Estado da Índia were at the time, Goa, to which were added the provinces of Bardez and Salsete; Daman which with Bassein constituted from the mid-sixteenth century onwards the ‘Província do Norte’ (Northern Province); Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where a strategy of territorial conquest triumphed at the end of the sixteenth century; and Mozambique, which was also settled by the Portuguese in the seventeenth century.

In this chapter we intend mainly to analyse this unusual dimension of an Indo-Portuguese city—Bassein—seeking to distinguish the various forms of appropriation and control exerted over the territory. This research is part of a multidisciplinary project entitled ‘Bombay before the British’, of Universidade de Coimbra and Universidade Nova de Lisboa. One of the major challenges facing the team was to chart a territory whose boundaries and characteristics were extremely ill-defined and that had hitherto been largely ignored by historiography. We attempted to define administrative and land districts, settlements, military, civil and religious structures, seeking always to evaluate to what extent these traces of the past were still visible today in the major world metropolis that is Mumbai. This is the final map arrived at by the team, although still requiring some data:

The administrative and land circumscriptions were mainly defined on the basis of the two known ‘tombos’ (land registries) on this territory. The first is included and occupies a substantial part of the ‘Tombo da Índia’, drawn
MAP 30.1: Map of the Former Bassein District
up in the mid-sixteenth century by Simão Botelho, the treasury inspector.\textsuperscript{10} The second is kept in the Historical Archives of Goa, drawn up between 1727 and 1730.\textsuperscript{11} We have also used a list of villages of Bassein from the early seventeenth century, included in an entry of the Council of Treasure,\textsuperscript{12} given the great details set down regarding those districts. Finally, we checked the data with those published by Bragança Pereira.\textsuperscript{13}

It is obvious that there are a few differences between the two inventories, which are dated less than two centuries apart. The two documents mark precisely the birth and the demise of this system, mainly showing: the disappearance of some villages, no doubt abandoned due to the military conflicts of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, leading to the Maratha conquest; the merger of others as the result of a suggestive concentration of adjacent plots under certain individual or collective bodies; the fragmentation of the areas, visible mostly in the lands nearer to the city of Bassein, primarily due to its increasing economic importance and prominence as the largest rural area under Portuguese administration.

The territory of Bassein thus consisted of the following districts: to the south, a number of small islands which with the accumulation of silt became one, the land ceded to the British under the name of Bombay Island in the mid-seventeenth century, within the turbulent context of the wars between Portugal and Spain.\textsuperscript{14} On the left bank of the bar of Bombay’s river was the region of Caranja (Uran), sometimes described as an island which included the caçabé with the same name and a few villages and small islets. We should explain that on this territory the Portuguese employed the local designation caçabé for larger-sized settlements, comprising the respective perimeter, taxes being collected on local artisan work and on bazaar trade, but also on the land rents of the peri-urban lands, called pacárias, or if they were smaller, sorretores.\textsuperscript{15}

To the north was the island of Salsete, the central part of this territory and important agriculturally. It was sometimes called a pragana, given the large number of villages it contained, and often also a caçabé, given the large size of some of its settlements. One of these was Thane, the largest town in the district after the capital, which was at one time an autonomous caçabé. Located to the east in the transition towards the interior of the sub-continent, Thane polarized the trade exchanges with the region’s Muslim potentates. On land facing the island of Salsete were two praganas (modern day Navi Mumbai), Panchana, Taloje Panchanand further inland, and Cairena (Kopar Khairane), bordering the river in Bombay, the letter of which was subdivided later with the creation of the new pragana of Sabaio. Further north was the small pragana of Anjor in the Kalyan region. The designation pragana was also retained here by the Portuguese, and taken to mean a rural province consisting of many villages where none was clearly an important centre.\textsuperscript{16}
North of the island of Salsete and between the Ulhas and Vaitarna rivers, there were the two caçabés of Bassein and Agaçaim (Agashi), close to the coast and surrounding the district capital and the small settlement that bordered the Daman jurisdiction, on what was essentially flat land. In the Agashi caçabé, the settlement of Sopará grew and thus merited being considered a caçabé, during the final phase of the Portuguese presence here. In the adjacent hinterland, which was somewhat hilly, was the Solgão pragana. Further inland towards the mountains, were the praganas of Camão, lying to the south and bordering the Ulhas river, and that of Herá, to the north, following the contour of the Vaitarna river, the respective villages having grown in the valleys and along the rivers.

Finally, as an extension to the north of this district, bordering the coastal lands under Daman jurisdiction, were the lands of Manorá and Serra de Asserim, also quite hilly, which were conquered in 1556 and became two autonomous praganas under the jurisdiction of Bassein.

This territory, considered in the inventories as being part of Portuguese jurisdiction, was 25 to 30 leagues long along the sea and stretched back 4 to 7 leagues inland. Whilst the coastal area consisted mainly of marshy fields, ideal for growing rice, the hinterland was dominated by the Ghates Mountains cloaked in trees, whose wood was used in shipbuilding, which was a key industry to the Portuguese. However, the Portuguese did not make their presence here felt uniformly in the whole area, as a simple study of the records seems to indicate. Other sources have allowed us to distinguish different realities within that territory.

One of the basic elements of this assessment is the extent to which the religious orders spread. In fact, in the absence of an effective state administration at local level, it was mainly the clergy who were responsible for guaranteeing the Portuguese presence in the most basic of the administrative districts, the villages and pacárias. They were also responsible for the intention to seek a more solid and long-lasting integration of the local populations in the Portuguese space, rather along the lines of many other parts of the Estado da Índia. In the last instance, it was the missionaries who most helped local people to feel a greater identification with a distant kingdom and king, whose vassals they had become by force of circumstances, conversion to Catholicism at the core of this process.

The natural consequence of this protagonism, necessarily, was that their actions went way beyond the spiritual field, and gradually they shouldered tasks involving the civil and financial management of the territory. In the seventeenth century, for instance, the rector of the Jesuit college of Bassein was entrusted with administering the jurisdiction, acting as inspector of the Treasury, and this happened in other parts of the north. This also led to the accumulation of significant wealth on the part of these institutions, namely the Company of Jesus, who became the tenant of an increasingly larger
number of villages, in direct competition with lay landlords. The figures of
the above-mentioned ‘tombo’,\(^{18}\) drawn up in the first decades of the
eighteenth century, show the following: of the 362 taxable and mainly
agricultural districts, the Jesuits had 39, spread throughout various schools,
missions and provinces, representing more than 10 per cent of the total. This
made them the largest tenants in the jurisdiction, at a great distance from
the remainder; only 3 other tenants, all lay, had more than 3 villages,
representing little more than 1 per cent each. This assessment is even more
evident if we take into account the rents value.

In the third quarter of the sixteenth century all the great religious
orders in the East settled in the city of Bassein, first the Franciscans, followed
by the Jesuits, the Dominicans and finally the Augustinians, who erected
sumptuous buildings, as can be seen from the ruins. They also created
residences and schools in Thane, the second most important settlement.\(^{19}\)
They gradually spread throughout the jurisdiction, as shown on the map,
and took on parish functions in various rural areas of the territory.\(^{20}\)

The *caçabé* of Bassein was the extra-urban area where the ecclesiastical
network was more dense, and in the mid-seventeenth century it was divided
into eight parishes. Three of them were run by the Jesuits, two by the
Franciscans, one by the Dominicans, one by the Augustinians, and the last
by a secular cleric. These parishes had of course at least one church each,
which acted as the centre of the social life of the small settlements, where
the priests had control over the population, even those who resisted
Christianization. Of these, note the Bhandari, who were involved in
extracting the sap from the palm trees and making arrack, who lived in
former ‘Baçaim de Cima’ (Upper Bassein).\(^{21}\)

In fact, during the first decades of the Portuguese presence, there had
been a division in the *caçabé* of Bassein, a typical form of division in Indo-
Portuguese cities, between the lower settlement near the sea, where the
Portuguese lived, and the upper settlement, further inland, where the local
populations lived, with a strong identity polarization, as noted by Paulo
Varela Gomes.\(^{22}\) In Bassein, however, the segmentation tended to disappear
as the Europeans were successfully able to occupy the city perimeter with
stability.

The island of Salsete is also clearly shown in the sources as an area fully
settled from the religious point of view, and also divided into parishes, eight
of them run by the Jesuits. The British labelled the Jesuit priests as the true
lords of that island, as they were responsible for strongly resisting the British
takeover of Bombay in the 1660s.\(^{23}\) They were based in the school of Madre
de Deus in Thane and in the Bandra residence, wherein lay the basic
nucleus of villages that gave them the highest income. North of Salsete, the
Franciscans had some influence, based in the school of Mandapeshwar\(^{24}\) and
the fortified church of Erangal, whilst the Augustinians also had a small
village. So, the parish network ensured that, by the hand of its missionaries, the Portuguese were effectively present. The same can be said of the more southerly islands of the district, namely those which were ceded to the British, as well as the area of Caranja, under the control of the Franciscans. Churches were also built along the far northern coastline of the territory, continuing on from the *caçabé* of Agashi, under the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

It is obvious that what we are describing is eminently littoral and even insular. It is these two geographical factors, rather than proximity to the urban centres, that determined the implantation of the ecclesiastical network in this territory. We could add another one, that is the flat topography, as the overwhelming majority of religious buildings on the map are to be found on level ground. There was thus an area under Bassein jurisdiction where there was a close Portuguese presence with the aims of acculturation and conversion, imposing a way of life and of Portuguese or Roman Catholic values.

Inland, on so-called *terra firme*, there were practically no religious establishments. It is true that the parishes of the *caçabé* had jurisdiction not only over the respective *pacárias* but also over certain villages of the *praganas*, namely the more coastal Solgão; there, the priests did some apostolic work, particularly as they had settled there with the aim of reducing the ‘paganism’ under Portuguese jurisdiction. However, they themselves acknowledged that these places had ‘many pagans, who were settled on [the] continent, bordering the lands of the Great Mogul, whose neighbourhood, familiar conversation and behaviour greatly prevent the growth of Christianity’.25 These people were not to be trusted and if Portuguese military power decreased, would easily pass to the side of the enemy, according to many Portuguese. In 1636, the Vicar-General of the Dominicans in India and the town vicar were killed in one of the villages of that *pragana*, when they were attempting to destroy a temple,26 sign of the difficulties of the apostolate. In 1669, there is a description of the residents of the *caçabé* in total contrast to the peoples of the *praganas*: ‘they live in a very Portuguese manner, both in their houses and persons and most of them dress in the Portuguese fashion’, most of them being Christian.27 Two opposed realities therefore characterize the territory from this point of view.

On the part of the Crown, the most visible network was military, namely the fortresses, forts and other defensive buildings erected here over almost two centuries (Map 30.1). It was mainly in this manner that the residents of the jurisdiction came into contact with the power of the King of Portugal, through his officials. At the top of the hierarchy was the Captain-General, installed in Bassein but with power over the whole of the north, or the captain of the fort, who had control only over the Bassein district. In addition to creating the officials positions required in any
Portuguese garrison, the control structures that existed prior to their arrival, called *tanadarias*, were maintained, in particular in Agashi, on the island of Salsete, in Thane, in Mahim and in Caranja, that is, along the above-mentioned coastal areas. Until the end of the seventeenth century there was no significant contingent of army allocated to defend the fortress, as it was considered that this function was the duty of the tenants, who should live there and serve their king with horse and gun, as previously mentioned. 28

The main Portuguese military forces were in fact concentrated along the coastal strip of the territory for most of the Portuguese period. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the only large structure was the fortress and the then fortified town of Bassein, 29 whilst from early on, forts also existed in Caranja and in the Thane area. The former defended both the insular and the southernmost part of the territory, far from the capital, whilst the latter protected the settlement and mainly the great entrance road to the island of Salsete from the land. The defensive system was strongly reliant on the navy, which made its presence felt on the river, as in fact happened in other Indo-Portuguese cities. It is obvious that this network grew throughout this period, with the erection of fortifications in places such as the mouths of Agashi, Versova or Bandra, or on the island of Bombay. The *caçabé* of Baçaim was also armed, although with smaller structures.

In addition to the above, we mention the fortresses of the mountain range of Asserim and Manorá, whose conquest provided great internal protection to the Northern Province, and are often classified as the key to the defence of Bassein and Daman; they enabled the Portuguese to take possession of the main mountain passes. 30 Added to the garrisons created, we note the presence of itinerant members who watched the passes. Reinforcing the desire to control the hinterland area, in 1588 the position of Captain of the Bassein field was created, helped by a few Portuguese and mainly by Christian foot soldiers from Goa and local men. These, although itinerant, were considered as belonging to the *Saibana* stockade, a structure erected with perishable materials in the northern hinterland of Baçaim, which was moved to the remote village of Chandip, in the *pragana* Herá in 1635. 31 As for the *praganas*, there is reference only to the existence of Indian corps as guards of the Herá and Camão passes, as well as the coastal fort of Belapur, controlling the present day Navi Mumbai region.

So, the military forces were mainly geared to defending the coastal areas, namely on the island of Salsete and other smaller ones to the south, as well as the *caçabé* of Bassein and Agashi. The Portuguese nearly always considered that the worst threats would come from the sea, principally from the Turks, their European competitors, and finally from the Omanite Arabs. So much so that, asked to comment on recent improvements to the defensive positions, a Jesuit criticized the unnecessary expenditure ‘as the neighbours
of Bassein are very weak’. The Asserim and Manorá fortresses were considered sufficient to defend any incursions from the interior.

Therefore, during the major part of the Portuguese presence in this territory, there was also a clear duality in military terms. Most of the defensive structures sponsored and erected by the Crown were centred on the same littoral regions covered by the aforementioned ecclesiastical network. With the important exceptions of Asserim and Manorá, the hinterland was entrusted to native corps, supported by fragile defensive structures, generally made with perishable materials.

This was only possible due to the context in which the Portuguese lived for most of their time there, which we will not deal with here, but which determined a relatively small number of invasions from enemy forces into the district. The insecurity on the farthest lands was more the result of robbery and pillage perpetrated by small bands, and so the more flexible and manoeuvrable forces were amply sufficient. It was always with the intention of defending their villages from robbery that the tenants pressed to have more armed people in the countryside, insisting on the need for a permanent guard, contrary to what was the practise to judge from the repetition of such orders.

In the case of invasions from enemy potentates, the Portuguese always confined their defensive perimeter to the aforementioned littoral and insular area, which they considered viable and defensible, ignoring the need to protect the praganas. Note the case of the invasion of some regional powers in 1569, when they dominated the territory with their lords and ‘devoured their villages’, leading to punitive Portuguese expeditions to their territories to restore the integrity of the province. Equally, the incursion of Ahmadnagar forces in 1613, when a large extension of the territory was occupied, little remaining ‘but the islands of Salsete and Caranja’. The important thing was for enemy action not to affect the ‘credit of the State’, that is, that peasants should continue to see the Portuguese as the region’s superior military force, who assured them a more peaceful life. In this relationship with the local populations it was also important not to burden them with excessive rates or taxes, nor to impose radically different lifestyles, as this could make them depart for other places and lead to a lack of manpower to work on the Crown’s lands.

Strategically, there was the notion that the defense of the territory depended largely on its geographical configuration. That was clear in a series of Advices on the delivery of Bombay to the English in the decade of 1660. It was then defended at Goa that giving up Bombay would represent a serious threat to the Portuguese positions of Daman, Bassein, and Chaul, which were very vulnerable from land. It was stated that this region ‘is sustained by its contours, which, when they are dominated by
others and besieged by sea, will have no other way of preserving themselves other than surrendering to who shall intend to invade them. There was clearly a notion of the geostrategical importance of the small position of Bombay—located at the delta of the main river of the region—for a predominantly insular territory, where, as we said, most communication was carried out on marine and river routes. Without the maritime connection, all the territory would lay exposed to attacks from the Indian hinterland by Muslim forces.

Nevertheless, this more or less peaceful context only changed at the end of the seventeenth century, with the expansion of Maratha power, even though for a long time it was not considered a dramatic threat to the Northern Province. The interior defensive system was then reinforced, mainly by increasing the number of wooden palisades and setting up permanent defence corps, with the sole aim of preventing enemy incursions against the praganas villages. An important set of instructions of the late seventeenth century established that these structures should be abandoned and burnt if the enemy force was substantial, and that people and arms should retreat to the coastal area.

This military landscape we are describing is hardly different if we consider the structure set up by the Crown in the areas of justice and treasury. In fact, the latter’s extreme insignificance, centred basically on the city of Bassein, prevents us from making much headway concerning its spatial reach. There were never more than three ‘Ouvidorias’, based in the capital, in Thane and very rarely elsewhere on the island of Salsete, the tendency being to concentrate this function in Bassein. The same could be said of assistance institutions such as ‘Provedoria dos Defuntos e Ausentes’ and also of the Factory, which never had more than one.

It is precisely in the area of tax that we raise our last question: did the Portuguese effectively profit from the rents and riches of this jurisdiction, mainly villages shown in the map. A definitive answer to this question is premature at the current stage of the investigation, but we believe that we can put forward several well-grounded tendencies. In fact, most years the tenants stored the product of their rents, namely the rice grown. The gist of the land charters and correspondence between Goa and Bassein shows that the years when crops were not harvested were few and far between. Only this can explain the tenants’ constant interest in confirming possession of their dominions and the high number of state officials requesting the gift of the concession, not only in the coastal regions but also in the praganas, even those really inland.

It is obvious that the duality shown above is also visible from this point of view. In case of a military conflict by land with a neighbour, it was always the praganas that were most damaged, and only rarely was the entire crop of a coastal region lost. Pillage also occurred almost exclusively on dry land,
and hardly ever on the islands and *caçabés*. In these periods the tenants of Bassein claimed exemption from payment of the rents or their reduction for a few years, to recuperate the losses caused by the war, which was not always granted.\(^1\) For example, between 1534 and 1548 there was an obvious drop in income in 1538–9, due to the conflict with a Gujarat captain. It led to a drastic drop in revenue of the *praganas*, and also affected the island of Salsete, which at the time was the setting for military action, but had a smaller effect on the *caçabés*.\(^2\)

The fact is that a few years before the loss of the territory, basing our calculations on the aforementioned ‘*tombo*’, drawn up in years of peace, we reached the following conclusions: the *praganas* then represented 43 per cent of the revenue obtained by the Crown in that district, the island of Salsete and Caranja 33 per cent, and the *caçabés* of Bassein and Agashi only 17 per cent. The data does not differ greatly from those in the first years of the Portuguese presence and show how the inland area of Bassein in the eighteenth century was still important, regardless of the numbers at stake. This would be incomprehensible, especially in a time of military upheaval, if these had not remained stable over almost two centuries, if the land had been constantly sacked.

In brief, then, we can underline the diversity of forms of appropriation of territory occupied by the Portuguese in India. On the one hand, it was an area that in the long term escaped Portuguese cultural and religious influence, where the way of life hardly altered with the European presence, but where the efficiency of a light military system allowed them to exploit its economic riches. On the other, it was a region that the Portuguese controlled permanently for almost two centuries, where they left material and cultural marks, nowadays almost obliterated by the voracity of Mumbai’s great metropolis, although where traces can still be seen.

**Notes**


3. There seem to have been three reasons for the removal of practically all the former tenants from the time of Muslim rule, especially during the D. João de Castro administration: to reward the defenders of Diu at a time when the Estado was short of funds; to employ and pay the contingent of soldiers transferred to the Estado to take part in the war against the Gujarat Sultanate; and the need to defend the large territory of Bassein with more faithful subjects. See André Teixeira, ‘Os Primórdios da Presença Portuguesa em Baçaim…’, in D. João III e o Império…, pp. 355–7.


6. See the growth of land wealth by the Jesuits in Charles J. Borges, ‘Jesuit Economic Interests in the Portuguese Province of the North till the mid-eighteenth century’, in Mare Liberum, 9…, pp. 49–56.


24. Paulo Varela Gomes, ‘There is no spot in the world where the Catholic and Heathen imagery come so closely in contact as here’. Franciscan architecture in Mandapeshwar/Mount Poinsur, Bombay, India’, paper read at the symposium The Arts & the Portuguese Colonial Experience, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 24 March 2006, organized in collaboration with the Centro de História de Além-Mar, Universidade Nova de Lisboa.
31. Letter from the King of Portugal to the viceroy, Lisboa, 30 January 1636, Arquivo Nacional/Torre do Tombo, Documentos Remetidos da Índia ou Livros das Monções, liv. 36, fl. 95, no. 26.
33. Letter from the Bassein Municipal Council to the King of Portugal, 23 December 1626 and 20 December 1634, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Índia, cx.15, doc. 169 and cx. 17, doc. 201.
38. André Teixeira, Isabel Almeida and Pedro Nobre, ‘A concessão de Bombaim aos ingleses …’.
40. ‘Regimento do conde de Alvor para Francisco da Silva Ferrão, capitão-mor do campo de Baçaim e tranqueira de Saibana’, Baçaim, 4 April 1686, Historical Archives of Goa, Norte, cod.1376, fl.17v–18v.

41. Letter from the Bassein Municipal Council to the king of Portugal, 23 December 1626, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Índia, cx.15, doc. 169.