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CHARLES BOXER AS BIOGRAPHER: A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

by

ANTHONY DISNEY *

Charles Boxer and the Writing of History

Charles Boxer was an astonishingly prolific historian. In a writing career that stretched from 1926 to 1996 he produced over 350 separate scholarly works: in other words, he published on average one significant piece every two to three months, maintaining this rate uninterrupted for some seventy years. Nor is it only the volume of Boxer's scholarly output that impresses, but its chronological, geographical, linguistic and national range. Boxer's interests, while focused particularly on the seventeenth century, extended from the fifteenth to the nineteenth and covered a vast expanse of the globe including much of Western Europe, West and East Africa, maritime Asia and Brazil. Moreover he published in Portuguese and Dutch, as well as in English.

The fact that Boxer published so extensively, on such a wide area and for such a prolonged period of time presents a challenge to any scholar seeking to understand his work. What animated him? Was Boxer just a particularly productive empirical historian, content to follow the Portuguese and Dutch through time and space as they went round the world trading, fighting, colonising, converting and interacting with each other and the various exotic peoples they came across? It can readily be acknowledged that he was an exceptionally meticulous researcher who industriously accumulated and processed information. But did he also trace patterns and draw conclusions from his evidence – in short, extract some more profound meaning from his history?

The existing bibliographies of Boxer's writings constitute an appropriate starting-point for exploring such questions; but their obvious limitations mean they cannot in themselves advance us very far ¹. The seminal bibliog-

* La Trobe University, Melbourne, Austrália.

¹ There are two published bibliographies of Boxer's works – S. George WEST (ed.), *A List of the Writings of Charles Ralph Boxer Published Between 1926 and 1984*, London, Tamesis, 1984, and *Homenagem ao Professor Charles Ralph Boxer/A Tribute to Professor Charles Ralph Boxer*,

raphy compiled by S. George West simply lists Boxer's writings in chronological order, without providing annotations. The other bibliography – *Homenagem ao Professor Charles Ralph Boxer* – which is largely based on West, provides a similar chronological catalogue but then adds another, thematic listing, which divides Boxer's works into three general categories and numerous sub-categories². This schematisation is clearly helpful to anyone seeking material on the particular themes selected. However, its logic is not derived from the writings themselves but borrowed from a classificatory system devised by the publishers for more general purposes³. It can therefore tell us little about Boxer's own approach to history.

More helpful in this respect is the recent biography of Boxer by Dauril Alden, which traces the evolution of his career as a historian in considerable detail, and links it to his life course. Alden shows that Boxer was at his most productive during a twenty year period between the late 1940s and the late 1960s – an era approximately coinciding with his tenure as Camões Professor of Portuguese at King's College, London. In these years he published an astonishing total of eighteen books or parts of books, as well as many articles⁴. Alden succinctly reviews each of these major Boxer works, providing descriptions of their content and accounts of the backgrounds against which they were written. In the process he identifies much that was characteristic of Boxer's historiographical method: his rigorous and exhaustive research, his uncanny ability to ferret out and access rare published and unpublished sources, his sharp eye for detail, his scrupulous detachment and his systematic cultivation of contacts with other scholars⁵. Similarly Diogo Curto, the editor of Boxer's *Opera Minora*, notes his habit of accumulating exhaustive collections of sources before embarking on a writing enterprise. Curto concedes that much of Boxer's work concentrates on «personalities and battles or events». But he goes on to argue that this kind of history attains an unusual level of sophistication in Boxer's hands because of his meticulous research and his skilful application of comparative analysis – even though his «comparative method» was not based on any specific model or theory⁶.

Figueira da Foz, CEMAR/AFMP, 1999, pp. 41-77. The latter has been used in preparing this article. It lists 274 separate items, some of which are in fact reprints. To these should be added a further thirty-two items listed in Dauril ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer. An Uncommon Life*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 2001, pp. 581-84, and several others that have been overlooked in all these listings, including C. R. BOXER, *The English and the Portuguese Brazil Trade, 1660-1780: Some Problems and Personalities*, Bundoora, Institute of Latin American Studies, La Trobe University, 1981.

² See *Homenagem*, pp. 59-77.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 342.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 325 and *passim*.

⁶ Charles Ralph BOXER, *Opera Minora*, Diogo Ramada CURTO (ed.), 3 vols., Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, vol. 1, pp. xix, xxi-xxii.

In fact, it was precisely Boxer's pre-occupation with «personalities» that lay at the heart of his historical writing – and was fundamental to his success as a historian. His published works suggest a tireless interest in individuals, both great and obscure, who were in one way or another involved in the European presence beyond Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He wrote copiously about men, and occasionally women, from a smorgasbord of nations – particularly Portuguese, but also Dutch, Spanish, English, Italian, Japanese and others. Among them were individuals of the sword, the pen, the cross, the toga and the ledger book, or different combinations thereof. This focus persisted throughout Boxer's career, as can be demonstrated by examining a selection of his writings in various categories.

Major Biographies

That Boxer was especially pre-occupied with individual biographies is perhaps least obvious with reference to his major published works – i.e. monographs or full-length books. Excluding edited works, Boxer produced fourteen monographs between 1948 and 1981: but only two of them could reasonably be termed biographies. The first was *Salvador de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola*, widely considered to be one of his finest books⁷. The second was a biography of the great sixteenth century chronicler and humanist, João de Barros⁸. The latter work, not published until almost twenty years after *Salvador de Sá*, proved to be his final monograph. Given Boxer's own career, there was something particularly appropriate in one of his major biographies being about a man of action and the other a man of letters.

Many of Boxer's most characteristic qualities as a biographer are evident in *Salvador de Sá*. The personage he selected for study – Salvador himself – had been a relatively obscure and neglected figure before Boxer wrote about him. Yet, particularly as governor of Rio de Janeiro and later of Angola, he was deeply involved in many political and military struggles on both sides of the Atlantic through the mid seventeenth century and played a quite significant role in shaping the future of the Luso-Brazilian world. In researching for the book Boxer utilised a mass of little-known sources: as he pointed out in the preface, most of the book was based on «documents in the Portuguese and Brazilian archives»⁹. Though some of these documents

⁷ C. R. BOXER, *Salvador de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola 1602-1686*, London, the Athlone Press, 1952. Alden stresses the generally high regard in which this book was held. See D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 349.

⁸ C. R. BOXER, *João de Barros. Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, 1981.

⁹ C. R. BOXER, *Salvador de Sá*, pp. ix-x.

had been previously published they had mostly appeared in obscure works difficult to access; so as far as possible he had personally checked all of them against the originals in the archives. He had also uncovered much relevant unpublished material in depositories in Lisbon, Évora, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and Recife – and, where appropriate, had used Spanish as well as Portuguese sources. (He modestly failed to add that, in addition, he had drawn freely on Dutch West India Company documents in the Rijksarchief at the Hague and on manuscripts from the British Library and the Public Record Office in London.) Of course, he also consulted an exhaustive range of published works – some 250 are listed in the bibliography.

Salvador de Sá gave Boxer a good opportunity to draw on his personal experience and linguistic skills in writing precisely the kind of comparative history at which he excelled. For Salvador de Sá himself had lived and operated in a number of quite different regions and situations, each with its pattern of interacting peoples, cultures and interests – and Boxer found himself dealing, on the one hand, with investors in the Dutch West India Company and, on the other, unassimilated Amerindians of the Brazilian Backlands, or João IV and the mulatto *pumbeiros* of the Angolan interior.

Salvador de Sá was Boxer's first major work with a Brazilian emphasis, and it enabled him to write on a subject few people in the English-speaking world knew anything about. This was a situation that would certainly have appealed to him. In Britain, as Boxer remarked in his preface, virtually nothing had been published on colonial Brazil since Robert Southey's famous three-volume history of 1810-19¹⁰. *Salvador* was therefore a particularly apt choice for a biography, from several viewpoints. Though a much-neglected figure, he could nevertheless be rescued from obscurity because sufficient sources existed to reconstruct much of his career. Moreover, he had been involved directly or indirectly in many important issues of the period and his biography had the potential to cast considerable light on these issues. This raises a significant point concerning Boxer's biographical writings: he seldom wrote about individuals just for their own sakes, but liked to view them within their contexts of time, place and society. He used individual lives to show what animated contemporaries more generally, what their values and modes of thinking were, how they interrelated, what held them together on the one hand and divided them on the other, and how their behaviour influenced the future. It was a particularly Boxerian form of history from the bottom up – but it could only be written by focusing firmly on people who were actually there.

Boxer's other full-length biography, *João de Barros*, was a relatively slim work of 159 pages, including bibliography and index; but it was more explicitly biographical than *Salvador de Sá*, focusing firmly on Barros himself.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii. Cf. Robert SOUTHEY, *History of Brazil*, 3 vols., London, 1810-19 (2nd. edn., New York, Greenwood Press, 1969).

Boxer was concerned primarily with Barros as a historian and humanist. He incorporated into the book chapters on each of Barros's significant literary works, even though he considered himself to be more the Portuguese chronicler's biographer and expositor than his literary critic ¹¹. Barros easily met Boxer's preference for writing about people who had led full lives and left worthwhile written evidence behind them. Moreover, as in the case of Salvador de Sá, even well informed English-speaking readers had only the haziest knowledge of Barros – and Boxer himself pointed out that no previous biography of him existed in English, despite his being the leading Portuguese chronicler of the sixteenth century and a humanist and pedagogue of considerable stature on the European stage.

João de Barros displayed the usual qualities of Boxerian scholarship, such as systematic culling of primary sources (in this case mostly Barros's own works), great mastery of factual detail and a strong grasp of context. The prose style was smooth, clear and evocative, and the referencing meticulous. The biography also demonstrated Boxer's capacity to relate to and identify with a man of letters – and one, furthermore, who had felt himself inadequately recognised in his own lifetime. Boxer would have readily empathised with Barros's avid collecting of books and manuscripts in various languages, both Western and Eastern, being himself a renowned and insatiable collector. The reader will hardly be surprised to learn that, in his personal library, he held such precious exemplars of Barros's writing as the 1626 edition of the first and second decades of the *Décadas da Ásia*, the very rare 1563 edition of the third decade, and the 1777-78 eight-volume edition of the entire work ¹².

Projected but Uncompleted Major Biographies

In addition to *Salvador de Sá* and *João de Barros* Boxer projected, but never completed, two other major biographical works. One of these was a life of Pde. António Vieira ¹³. In *Salvador de Sá* Boxer had described António Vieira as one of the greatest Portuguese who ever lived – and had lamented that of all the major European languages only English lacked a translation of his works ¹⁴. Boxer appears to have accepted the idea of writing Vieira's biography by the mid 1960s at the latest, and to have had in mind a book of about 300 pages to be published by the University of California Press. He had earlier written several short pieces on Vieira, including an article in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, a short semi-biographical pamphlet, and brief sketches in *Salvador de Sá* and *The Dutch in Brazil* ¹⁵.

¹¹ C. R. BOXER, *João de Barros*, p. 7.

¹² C. R. BOXER, *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 10-11.

¹³ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, pp. 576-77.

¹⁴ C. R. BOXER, *Salvador de Sá*, p. vii.

¹⁵ See C. R. BOXER, «Padre Antonio Vieira S.J. and the Institution of the Brazil Company in 1649», *Hispanic American Historical Review*, November 1949, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 474-97; C. R.

Boxer had the greatest admiration for Vieira's talents as a writer. He claimed that, «all the most competent literary critics are agreed that António Vieira is the finest exemplar of Portuguese prose, and that he and Luís de Camões are the two writers who have extracted the most from the genius, style and structure of the Portuguese language»¹⁶. In fact, Vieira possessed even more of the characteristics that were most likely to attract Boxer than did João de Barros. He had great courage in adversity, he was extremely persistent, he had dash and flair, he seemed equally at home at court or in the Brazilian wilderness and he was undeviatingly loyal to the causes he espoused. Given Vieira's long and colourful life, his remarkably gifted tongue and the relative abundance of surviving writings both by and about him, there was plenty of material available that a biographer could utilise. However, apart from drawing up a plan and drafting a preface, Boxer made little progress with the project. Perhaps he was discouraged by reports that Denis Brass was also writing a biography of Vieira – or perhaps he simply could not find the time to come to grips with such a major project alongside his many other commitments, until finally it was beyond him. Alden considered Boxer's failure to write this biography a great loss to posterity¹⁷.

The other biography Boxer intended to write, but never completed, was that of the first marquis of Alorna (1688-1756), who was successively governor of São Paulo and Minas Gerais and viceroy of the Estado da Índia. Alorna was a product of the Enlightenment, a cultivated aristocrat who served an unsympathetic king and a suspicious chief minister more than competently, in Portugal, Brazil and Asia. He was not only a man of action, but also of science and of letters – again, precisely the kind of character with whom Boxer readily identified. Boxer noted Barbosa Machado's comment that Alorna «always maintained a relationship with the muses» during active service – and that no adequate biography of him had ever been written, even though there was extensive material concerning him in the archives of Lisbon, Minas Gerais and Goa¹⁸.

Boxer's interest in Alorna intensified after his personal acquisition in 1959 of a substantial collection of the marquis's papers that related to his time as viceroy at Goa (1744-50)¹⁹. It was probably following this purchase that Boxer decided to write a full-scale biography of Alorna, an ambition he would nurse for many years. In the end, however, apart from a brief biogra-

BOXER, *A Great Luso-Brazilian Figure: Padre António Vieira, S.J., 1608-1697*, London, The Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1957; C. R. BOXER, *Salvador de Sá*, pp. 165-67; C. R. BOXER, *The Dutch in Brazil 1624-1654*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, pp. 271-73.

¹⁶ C. R. BOXER, *The Dutch in Brazil*, p. 273.

¹⁷ See D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 577.

¹⁸ C. R. BOXER, entry on «Portugal, D. Pedro de Almeida... primeiro Marquês de Castelo Novo e de Alorna», in *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, 4 vols., Lisbon, Iniciativas Editoriais, 1961-71, vol. 3. (Reprinted in C. R. BOXER, *Opera Minora*, vol. 3, pp. 182-83.)

¹⁹ D. Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 578.

phical sketch or two in *The Golden Age of Brazil*, a relevant entry in the *Dicionário de História de Portugal* and a description of the Alorna papers published in *Stvdia*, Boxer failed to produce anything substantial on this interesting figure ²⁰. But he still remained committed to the project in 1975, declaring he had put Alorna aside just for a year or two, «having so many other irons in the fire to finish off first». Then three years later he had to admit: «I have made no progress with Alorna, as I have been sidetracked cataloguing all the State Papers Portugal 1661-1780 in the PRO...» ²¹. Time, age and repeated postponements eventually defeated him, and nothing substantial ever emanated from the Alorna project.

Biographical Essays

Over a thirty-year period between 1938 and 1967 Boxer published five works of a biographical or semi-biographical nature that were not full-length monographs, but were nevertheless substantial studies. Most fell within the range of about 50 to 100 pages of text, excluding documentary appendices. The earliest such work concerned António Teles de Meneses, first count of Vila-Pouca. This competent and energetic seventeenth century nobleman commanded various Portuguese naval forces in Indian waters with notable distinction during the 1620s and 1630s, then served as governor of the Estado da Índia in 1639-40. Later he was admiral of the Portuguese home fleet, then governor and captain-general of Brazil, before being nominated viceroy of India – but died prior to assuming this last post. Boxer's study focused on one particular episode in Vila-Pouca's career: his naval action against the Dutch off Goa in January 1638. The work was therefore a contribution towards a biography rather than an actual biography. But in Boxer's characteristic manner it was supported by substantial documentary appendices. One of the items included was a contemporary account of Vila-Pouca's battles with the Dutch during 1636-38 by Salvador do Couto de Sampaio – an exceedingly rare work, published by Pedro Craesbeeck in Coimbra in 1639, of which Boxer possessed his own copy ²².

Another of Boxer's publication's in this category was entitled *Breve Relação da Vida e Feitos de Lopo e Inacio Sarmiento de Carvalho, Grandes*

²⁰ See C. R. BOXER, «The Manuscript Livro do Governo da India e Africa Oriental of the Marquis Viceroy of Alorna, 1744-50», *Stvdia*, no. 49, 1989, pp. 215-34; C. R. BOXER, *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962, pp. 362-64; *Dicionário de História de Portugal*, vol. 3.

²¹ C. R. Boxer to Anthony Disney, 30 July 1975 and 28 May 1978.

²² See «O general de mar, António Telles, e o seu combate naval contra os holandeses na barra de Goa», in *Boletim do Instituto Vasco da Gama*, no. 37, 1938, pp. 1-62, and «António Telles em Goa. Apêndice III. Relação dos sucessos vitoriosos que na barra de Goa ouve dos Olandezes Antonio Telles de Meneses... por Salvador do Couto de Sampaio», *ibid.*, no. 40, 1938, pp. 37-56.

Capitães que no Seculo XVII Honraram Portugal no Oriente, published in Macao in 1940. This work described successively the lives and careers of Lopo (or Lobo) Sarmiento de Carvalho and his oldest son, Inácio. The former was a prominent Macao-based fidalgo renowned in both arms and trade; the latter was remembered for his gritty defence of Cochin in 1659-63, but was later foully murdered at Goa. At the start of the work Boxer tells us of a discussion he had had in Macao over who was the most distinguished Macaonese, during which he put forward the view that «the illustrious seventeenth century warrior, Inácio Sarmiento de Carvalho», had as strong a claim to this distinction as anyone²³. There ensued a succinct outline of the careers of both Sarmentos, followed by Boxer's usual supporting documentation. In this case the documentation consisted of Fernão de Queiroz's description of Lopo's victory over the Dutch off Macao in 1622 and an anonymous «Relação» of 1663 that described Inácio's military exploits²⁴. Both were works from Boxer's own library, the second being particularly rare.

The next work may seem at first glance to sit rather oddly in this group; but its length and substantive content arguably earn it a place. It is entitled *Subsídios para a História dos Capitães-Gerais e Governadores de Macau 1557-1770* and was published in Macao in 1944, when Boxer was a prisoner-of-war in Japanese-occupied Hong Kong²⁵. This work consists of a series of mini-biographical sketches of which many, especially those relating to the period before 1623, are very brief. However, the entries for after 1623 tend to be much more detailed. Some run to several pages and are supported by documents. Boxer also provided an appendix of twenty-seven previously unpublished documents from the British Library, which filled some ninety pages.

Boxer's first post-war work of this type was a small book totalling some 135 pages on the life and career of André Furtado de Mendonça, which he wrote jointly with Frazão de Vasconcelos and published in 1955²⁶. Despite the formal joint-authorship it seems the book was largely Boxer's work²⁷. The subject was another well-known seventeenth century figure – a resourceful fighting fidalgo who led an eventful career in various parts of South

²³ C. R. Boxer, *Breve Relação da Vida e Feitos de Lopo e Inacio Sarmiento de Carvalho Grandes Capitães que no Seculo XVII Honraram Portugal no Oriente*, Macao, Imprensa Nacional, 1940, p. 9.

²⁴ Fernão de QUEIROZ, *Historia da Vida do Veneravel Irmão Pedro de Basto...*, Lisbon, Miguel Deslandes, 1689, pp. 305-8; *Relaçam dos Sucessos das Armas Portuguesas nas Partes da India Tomada de Aycota por Ignacio Sarmiento de Carvalho...*, Lisbon, Domingos Carneiro, 1663.

²⁵ C. R. BOXER, *Subsídios para a História dos Capitães-Gerais e Governadores de Macau*, Macao, Imprensa Nacional, 1944. (Also reprinted in *Obra Completa de Charles Ralph Boxer. Vol. 1. Estudos para a História de Macau. Séculos XVI a XVIII*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 1991, pp. 193-281.)

²⁶ C. R. BOXER and Frazão de VASCONCELOS, *André Furtado de Mendonça (1558-1610)*, Lisbon, AGU, 1955, p. 2.

²⁷ See D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 359, note 56.

and Southeast Asia. André Furtado de Mendonça eventually became acting governor of Goa in 1609 – before dying, debt-ridden but respected, later the same year. The book concluded with a series of previously unpublished documents from various archives.

The final work in this group – a study of the life and career of Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, published in 1967 – merits consideration at greater length. Francisco Vieira was a Portuguese Old Christian of rather modest origins who arrived in Asia in the early 1620s, then remained there until his death some forty-five years later. Initially a *soldado*, he quickly shifted from arms to commerce and moved on to the Coromandel coast where he was said to be, «friendlier with Hindus than with Christians»²⁸. Boxer's book is concerned primarily with the last two decades of Francisco Vieira's life, the 1650s and 1660s, for which sources are relatively abundant. During most of this period Vieira was based in Makassar (Sulawesi), until forced to leave under pressure from the Dutch in 1665, when he moved on to Larantuka. For many years he was on extremely friendly terms with the sultans and chief ministers of Gowa on Sulawesi, and maintained numerous fruitful contacts along the Southeast Asian, South Asian and East Asian maritime trading circuits. As well as his friends in Gowa, his business associates included the Jesuits at Macao, the Dutch East India Company in Batavia, the Nawabs of Golconda and various private traders ranging from Muslims to Englishmen. He clearly possessed remarkable commercial acumen, which he exercised while steering a difficult course through competing political pressures and interests.

Boxer used the Francisco Vieira case study to draw various conclusions about the nature of Portuguese commerce in Asia in the seventeenth century, and the men who drove it. He showed that Vieira himself, despite operating far from Goa, always remained loyal to his king, his nation and his Catholic faith. In fact Vieira played a significant role in ensuring Portugal's interests survived at an extremely difficult time for the Estado da Índia, especially in island Southeast Asia²⁹. Boxer considered the career of Francisco Vieira illustrated the important role played by «alien» merchants in Asian maritime trade. Successful merchants of this type did business over a wide area, sometimes attained positions of considerable influence in the trading centres where they settled and dealt successfully with different cultures and polities. They could be extremely flexible, shifting their business operations from one place to another as conditions required. Francisco Vieira, married to a Macaonese wife and quite at home with Makassans and Dutch alike, represented an element of the Portuguese presence in Asia that Boxer considered was too often overlooked. He combined, to an extraordinary extent, com-

²⁸ C. R. BOXER, *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo: A Portuguese Merchant Adventurer in South-East Asia, 1624-1667*, the Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 52-53.

mercial know-how, local knowledge and cultural adaptability. To the Dutch at Batavia Vieira was a classic example of an enviable type: a Portuguese «smart merchant»³⁰.

Boxer regarded *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo* as no more than a preliminary study. He stated that he had not had the opportunity to undertake the extensive research in the archives of Lisbon, Goa, the Hague and Jakarta that he considered necessary to compose a full account of Vieira's life³¹. Nevertheless, the book bore many of the characteristic hallmarks of a typical Boxer biographical study. It was based largely on unpublished documents, many of which were in his own possession – and its appendices contained nineteen previously unpublished items that in total were almost as long as the text itself. English abstracts were provided for all documents in Portuguese or Dutch. The subject of the work was a little-known historical figure whom Boxer thought was an «intriguing character»³². The book involved comparative analysis at several levels: Boxer was working with material in different languages and on subject matter that involved various competing interest groups with widely differing perspectives – Portuguese, Dutch and English; Catholic, Calvinist and Muslim, and so on. Finally, the task Boxer had set himself was manageable: though there were significant, largely untapped documentary sources on particularly the two final decades of Francisco Vieira's life, these were neither so vast nor so numerous as to demand prolonged research and study – at least for someone of Boxer's experience and ability.

Translations

Boxer edited and published a number of translations of seventeenth century journals and personal memoirs, with appropriate scholarly introductions. These publications did not in themselves constitute biographies, but amounted to an important step in that direction. They also re-emphasised Boxer's abiding pre-occupation with flesh-and-blood historical characters. The most important of his works in this mode concerned the military and naval commanders M. H. Tromp, Rui Freire de Andrade and Dom Estevão de Ataíde, and the ambassador Manuel de Saldanha³³. Obviously in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹ *Ibid.*, foreword.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See C. R. BOXER (ed.), *The Journal of Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp, Anno 1639*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1930; C. R. BOXER (ed.), *The Commentaries of Ruy Freyre de Andrade*, London, Routledge, 1930; C. R. BOXER, (ed.), «Cercos de Moçambique defendidos por D. Estevão de Ataíde, Capitão-General, Governador daquela Praça, por António Durão...», in *Arquivo Histórico de Portugal*, Lisbon, vol. 3, 1937-38, pp. 19-72, 198-223; Francisco PIMENTEL, *Breve Relação da Jornada que Fez a Corte de Pekim o Sr. Manuel de Saldanha Embaixador Extraordinário del Rey de Portugal ao Emperador de China e Tartaria (1667-1670)*, eds. C. R. BOXER and Jack BRAGA, Macao, Imprensa Nacional, 1942.

these kinds of writings the balance between the documents and Boxer's own text was the opposite of what it was in the biographies already discussed above – i.e. the documents themselves were the principal contents.

Biographical Pamphlets and Articles

We now come to a category of Boxer's writings that is particularly crucial to an understanding of his work as a biographer. This is his pamphlets and articles – i.e. stand-alone works in the range usually of about ten to forty pages – that are biographical in nature. Boxer wrote a large number of works within this category – about fifty to sixty separate pieces in all, depending on whether or not some marginally biographical items are included. They were being produced virtually throughout his working life, the first published in 1928 and the last in 1983. To convey some idea of the type and range of historical characters Boxer wrote about in these shorter pieces we shall divide them up alphabetically into a number of sub-categories, indicating in each case the date of publication ³⁴.

Portuguese Fidalgos and Merchant Adventurers:

D. António de Ataíde (1934), D. Jorge de Meneses Barroche (1976), Sisnando Dias Bayão (1938), Nuno Álvares Botelho (1928), António de Albuquerque Coelho (1934, 1940), Jorge de Albuquerque Coelho (1965, 1969), Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo (1940), D. Francisco da Gama, 4th count of Vidigueira (1930), António Coelho Guerreiro (1940), Pedro de Melo (1937), Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, marquis of Pombal (1955), D. Luís Carlos de Meneses, 5th count of Ericeira (1974, 1979), José Pinto Pereira (1941, 1942), João Ribeiro (1955), Salvador Correia de Sá (1948), Gonçalo da Siqueira (1938), D. Francisco de Távora, 1st count of Alvor (1937), Luís Velho (1947-8).

Portuguese Writers or Men of Learning:

João de Barros (1948), António Bocarro (1948, 1956), Luís de Camões (1940, 1972), Diogo do Couto (1948, 1972, 1985), Luís Gomes Ferreira (1973), Garcia de Orta (1963), Ribeiro Sanches (1970).

Priests:

Pde. Jacinto de Deus (1937), Pde. João Rodrigues Tçuzu (1950), Pde. António Vieira (1949, 1957).

³⁴ It would occupy too much space within the compass of this article to provide here the full bibliographical details of all these short works. However, the reader who wishes to identify them can easily do so by consulting either of the published Boxer bibliographies cited in footnote 1 above, under the appropriate dates.

Dutchmen:

Piet Heyn (1963), Adriaen Janszoon Pater (1959), Michiel Adrianszoon de Ruyter (1957, 1958, 1976), Cornelis Speelman (1958), Isaac Titsingh (1939, 1949), Marten Haarpertszoon Tromp (1953, 1954).

Other Europeans:

Robert Blake (1950), Beauvillier de Courchand (1979), Ferdinand Cron (1971), Robert Knox (1954), Nicolás Monardes (1963), Don Antonio de Oquendo (1959), Marshall Schomberg (1976), Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1985), Lord Tyrawly (1970).

Asians:

Nicholas Iquaam (1941), Rin Shihei (1932), Hosakawa Tadaoki (1935).

Women:

Dofia Maria Guadalupe de Lencastre, 6th duchess of Aveiro (1973).

Some of these articles and essays bear sub-titles indicating that they focus on a particular element in the life of the individual concerned – an administration, a campaign, a particular battle, an embassy and so on. But many others are of a more general nature and have terms like «esboço biográfico» or «a biographical sketch» in their sub-titles. The bulk of these sketches concern men of action of one kind or another, particularly military or naval commanders; but merchants, missionaries, writers, medical men and others are also represented. In quite a number of cases Boxer's subjects combined elements from more than one of these types. As already noted, he was particularly attracted to those who combined both military and literary careers – or, as Boxer himself put it, «... that union of arms and letters on which so many Iberian *conquistadores* prided themselves» ³⁵.

For further consideration here, let us select two examples of Boxer's writings within this category. In 1942 Boxer published an article on the seventeenth century fidalgo José Pinto Pereira, which consisted of twenty-four pages of text and seventeen pages of documents ³⁶. Pereira, who spent many years in crown service in Asia, was clearly someone for whom Boxer had considerable respect – indeed, he referred to him in such terms as «herói» and «tão ilustre varão» ³⁷. As a biography the work was patchy; but

³⁵ C. R. BOXER, «Dom Jorge de Meneses Baroche and the Battle of Mulleriyawa, 1560», *Mare Luso-Indicum*, vol. 3, 1976, p. 95.

³⁶ C. R. BOXER, «José Pinto Pereira Vedor da Fazenda Geral da Índia e Conselheiro Ultramarino del Rei Dom João IV», *Anais da Academia Portuguesa de História*, vol. 7, 1942, pp. 71-118.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 98.

this was unavoidable, given the many large gaps in Pereira's life about which no information was available. Moreover the article possessed many typically Boxerian characteristics. It brought together an impressive collection of previously unpublished sources, the appendices containing seventeen substantial documents – in Portuguese, Dutch and English – of which seven were from Boxer's personal library. The article also showed Boxer seeking out help and advice from Portuguese scholars – in this case Frazão de Vasconcelos and Armando Cortesão. This was something he was always careful to do, valuing and nurturing his professional friendships and contacts.

The second piece we shall consider in this grouping was a more mature work. In 1963 Boxer gave a lecture at the Wellcome Historical Medical Library in London on Garcia de Orta and Nicolás Monardes, physicians who wrote pioneering treatises on the medicinal plants of Asia and the Americas. The lecture, which was later published as a 36-page pamphlet, contained brief accounts of the lives of these two men and an evaluation of their writings³⁸. Boxer saw «interesting parallels and some curious contrasts» between the two; but his pamphlet focused mainly on Orta. He argued that the traditionally accepted version of Orta's life was riddled with errors – which he proceeded to correct. For this purpose he relied heavily on an obscure work that had been recently published by Augusto da Silva Carvalho, a Portuguese medical doctor whom he praised highly for having «completely revolutionized» knowledge concerning Orta³⁹. Next Boxer reviewed with great clarity Orta's *Colóquios*, the celebrated book on which that physician's reputation rested. He also informed readers that he knew of twenty-four existing copies of the 1563 edition of this work, fourteen of which he had examined personally. Only two of these were in private hands – one being his own. Finally he showed that Monardes's *Dos Libros*, contrary to what his biographer Francisco Guerra had argued, could not have been inspired by Monardes himself reading Orta's book. In short, the pamphlet displayed a number of typical components of a classic Boxer piece: a meticulous critical review of the existing literature, the correcting of past mistakes, extensive use of original sources, incisive comparative analysis.

Mini-Biographical Sketches

The next type of biographical writing produced by Boxer, and the last to be discussed here, was what might be termed the mini-biographical sketch or biographical summary. This varied in length from just a paragraph or two to several pages. It differed from the biographical articles and pamphlets

³⁸ C. R. BOXER, *Two Pioneers of Tropical Medicine: Garcia d'Orta and Nicolás Monardes*, London, the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1963.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

discussed above not only in being appreciably shorter but also because it was not a stand-alone work; instead, it was inserted into the text or placed in the appendices of larger works. Finally, it was usually accompanied by significantly less bibliographical information.

Some of Boxer's mini-biographical sketches are easily found, particularly those written for encyclopaedic compilations such as the *Dicionário de História de Portugal*. For volume one of this work Boxer wrote entries on António de Oliveira Cadornega, António de Albuquerque Coelho de Carvalho, João Pereira Corte Real and Diogo do Couto. For volume two he wrote on D. Luís Carlos de Meneses (fifth count of Ericeira), João da Maia da Gama and Gabriel de Magalhães, for volume three Vasco Fernandes, Cesar de Meneses, Garcia de Orta, Fernão Mendes Pinto, D. Pedro de Almeida e Portugal (first marquis of Alorna), João Ribeiro, Salvador Correia de Sá e Benevides and D. Brás Baltasar da Silveira, and for volume four João Fernandes Vieira. He had, of course, already written about some of these individuals in earlier works.

Boxer's other mini-biographical sketches, most being buried within larger works, are not so easily located – and it would require quite extensive research to identify and list all of them. However, some selected examples should suffice to demonstrate just how integral they were to his historiographical method. In his first post-war monograph, *Fidalgos in the Far East*, Boxer included brief pen sketches of various individuals including the first count of Aveiras (pp. 140-42), António de Albuquerque Coelho (pp. 201-11, 217-21), Doña Ignez Gracias Cardozo (pp. 246-49), Lopo Sarmiento de Carvalho (pp. 67-8, 109-14), D. Francisco Mascarenhas (pp. 94-103), António José Teles de Meneses (pp. 242-46), D. João Pereira (pp. 35-7), André Pessoa (pp. 52-62), D. Sebastião Lobo da Silveira (pp. 149-53) and Tristão Vaz da Veiga (pp. 37-8) ⁴⁰. In his next major monograph set in Asia, *The Christian Century in Japan*, there were similar pen-portraits of Hasegawa Gonroku (pp. 345-46), Fernão Mendes Pinto (pp. 18-24), Alexandre Valignano (pp. 72-4) and Fray Juan Pobre de Zamora – to mention just a few ⁴¹.

The Dutch in Brazil appears to have been the first of Boxer's monographs in which he included a special appendix entitled «Personalialia». It contained short biographical résumés of six Dutch and four Portuguese individuals prominent in the hard-fought seventeenth century struggle for Northeastern Brazil. Witte Corneliszoon de With, George Marcgraf, Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, Cornelis van den Brande, Adriaen Jacobszoon van der Dussen, Michiel van Goch, Manuel de Moraes, Gaspar Dias Ferreira, Pde. António Vieira and João Fernandes Vieira ⁴². The same approach was adopted in *The Golden Age of Brazil* where an appendix on «Personalialia» pro-

⁴⁰ See C. R. BOXER, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550-1770*, the Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1948.

⁴¹ See C. R. BOXER, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1951.

vided pen portraits of D. Pedro de Almeida e Portugal (marquis of Alorna), Manuel Nunes Viana, João da Maia da Gama, António Rodrigues da Costa, D. Lourenço de Almeida and Giovanni António de Andreoni⁴³. In both *The Dutch in Brazil* and *The Golden Age in Brazil* there were also numerous other biographical sketches scattered throughout the texts – including in the latter, for example, portrayals of António Coelho de Carvalho de Albuquerque (pp. 75-6), René Duguay-Trouin (pp. 92-3), Gomes Freire de Andrade (p. 314), King João V (pp. 145-46), Francisca «Xica» da Silva (pp. 219-20), Vasco Fernandes César de Meneses (first count of Sabugosa) (pp. 144-45) and Paulo da Silva Nunes (pp. 287-89).

As a final example of how Boxer habitually incorporated biographical sketches into his monographs we might cite *Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas*. In this book the reader will find portraits of Catarina de San Juan (pp. 41-2), Soror Juana Inés de la Cruz (p. 39), Doña Catalina de los Rios Liperguer (pp. 45-8), Teresa Margarida da Silva e Orta (pp. 55-6) and various other women⁴⁴. This last cluster of mini-biographies is particularly interesting because it demonstrates Boxer's fascination with the oppressed, persecuted or under-privileged sectors of society – such as Christian martyrs in Japan, Negro slaves in the Americas, people discriminated against because of their colour, ethnicity or faith or, as in this case, females. Boxer's interest in these groups seems to have increased over time, and to have become more evident in his work published after about 1960.

Boxer's output of mini-biographies was extremely copious over his long writing career and was by no means confined to pieces inserted into his monographs. Often they were included in or attached to articles – sometimes in footnotes, sometimes incorporated into the body of the text. Thus in 1935 he included in an article commemorating the 300th anniversary of the Anglo-Dutch truce of 1635 a sketch of the career of António Teles de Meneses as well as brief notices concerning José Pinto Pereira, André Coelho and several others⁴⁵. Boxer could seldom resist the temptation to include a biographical sketch in any of his works, large or small, if it seemed to him in the slightest degree relevant and appeared to possess intrinsic interest. Sometimes the relevance was barely marginal – and this he occasionally admitted, as when he wrote: «Although it is not strictly-speaking connected with our story, I cannot forbear from quoting [António] Vieira's description of the Count [of Aveiras]...»⁴⁶. On the other hand Boxer would sometimes announce his intention of providing a biographical sketch, begin it, but fail to complete

⁴² C. R. BOXER, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624-1654*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, pp. 259-76.

⁴³ C. R. BOXER, *The Golden Age of Brazil*, pp. 362-70.

⁴⁴ C. R. BOXER, *Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas, 1415-1815. Some Facts, Fancies and Personalities*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

⁴⁵ C. R. BOXER, «The General of the Galleons and the Anglo-Portuguese Truce Celebrated at Goa in January 1635», *Ethnos*, no. 1, 1935, pp. 28 (note 5), 32 and 39 (note 19), etc.

⁴⁶ C. R. BOXER, *Fidalgos in the Far East*, p. 141.

it, instead sliding off onto something else that had caught his interest ⁴⁷. However, such lapses were rare, Boxer's biographical sketches usually being models of clarity, coherence and objectivity. He tended to maintain a continuing interest in characters who had once caught his eye and not infrequently wrote up-dates, and occasionally corrections, of his earlier work. In 1978 he wrote in a private letter, «... a lot of individuals in whom I am interested, such as Joseph Pinto Pereira and André Salema were operating in Asia from 1602 and were big shots in Goa...» ⁴⁸. Yet he had first published on José Pinto Pereira almost forty years before, in 1940 and 1941.

At their best, Boxer's brief biographical sketches were extraordinarily lucid and vivid vignettes. They provided often brilliant pen portraits of the character, achievements and failings of selected individuals, usually with just the right amount of factual detail and always with rigorous attention to accuracy. Everyone familiar with Boxer's writings will no doubt have his or her favourites from among these vignettes; for me one of the best is that of Pde. António Vieira, inserted into *Salvador de Sá*. Here, in just a few paragraphs, Boxer seemed to convey all that was most important, and most interesting, about Vieira. His outline of Vieira's origins and life's course, from his education and upbringing through his long and eventful career in both Portugal and Brazil, brilliantly brought out the rich character and extraordinary achievements of this remarkable man – as missionary, master orator, linguist, propagandist, royal confidante, ambassador and political manipulator. He also took due note of Vieira's controversial theological views and his ambiguous public image, and assessed his impact on his own era ⁴⁹.

Conclusions and Reflections

Having surveyed Boxer's output in various categories we are now in a better position to suggest what made him such an effective writer of biography, and especially of short biographical sketches. One factor was certainly his remarkable ability to unearth often obscure and long-neglected primary sources – which he would then compare and evaluate with great competence, systematically retrieving and processing useful information from them. Probably no historian has ever been a more complete master of his documents. Of course, in many cases Boxer personally owned the source materials with which he was working. As several scholars have noted, there

⁴⁷ For example see C. R. BOXER, «Anglo-Portuguese Rivalry in the Persian Gulf 1615-1635», in Edgar PRESTAGE (ed.), *Chapters in Anglo-Portuguese Relations*, Watford, Voss and Michael, 1935, pp. 59-60. Here, having expressed the need to «devote some space to a sketch of the principal fidalgos who crossed swords with King James' men» Boxer begins a pen portrait of Rui Freire de Andrade, but then inexplicably reverts to the main narrative, without finishing it.

⁴⁸ C. R. Boxer to Anthony Disney, 21 June 1978.

⁴⁹ C. R. BOXER, *Salvador de Sá*, pp. 165-68.

was a close correlation between Boxer as a historian and Boxer as a collector of books and manuscripts, his collecting being both the instrument and the inspiration for much of his writing⁵⁰.

In his biographical studies, as in his historical writings in general, Boxer paid scant attention to theorising. He embraced no particular model of human behaviour or of the human life-cycle – indeed, he showed little interest in any particular theory, whether psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological or of any other kind. However, he did have a strong interest in investigating the mindsets or «mentalities» of the people about whom he wrote. Alden argues that he liked to experience «an intimate intellectual relationship» with those who «marched across his histories»⁵¹. But it was not only the minds of his subjects that interested Boxer, but their physical attributes. He had a profound commitment to *knowing* his characters as complete, functioning human-beings – and he was deeply frustrated when, as was too often the case, descriptive and iconographic material about them proved inadequate, unattainable or totally non-existent. Conversely, when he came across such material he was elated, for it enabled him to put flesh and blood into his subjects. This was the case, for example, when he discovered Pde. António Vieira's vivid if somewhat uncomplimentary description of the viceroy count of Aveiras⁵².

Despite being disinterested in behavioural science at an abstract level, Boxer was fascinated by individual human behaviour. In his working career he investigated a broad spectrum of historical figures, from the high and mighty to the oppressed and almost voiceless, and tried to understand all of them⁵³. He strove to penetrate the thought-processes that animated those whom he studied, but was scrupulously impartial and almost always non-judgemental – even though he delighted in describing his subjects with complete frankness. When dealing with interactions between individuals or groups of opposing faiths, nationalities or political orientations, he seldom took sides. But he was easily drawn to those who displayed courage and fortitude, striving to make the best of their opportunities, whether they be fidalgos, Jesuit missionaries or even, at the bottom of the heap, coloured slave girls.

Such attitudes were reflections of Boxer's own values and beliefs. We know that he considered himself neutral in matters of religion but that he was probably quite strongly attracted to Stoicism – or at least to Stoicism as expounded in *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*⁵⁴. It is hardly surprising

⁵⁰ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 504; C. R. BOXER, *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, p. xix, vol. 3, p. lvi.

⁵¹ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 435.

⁵² C. R. BOXER, *Fidalgos in the Far East*, p. 142.

⁵³ Cf. D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 492.

⁵⁴ A copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* was given to Boxer while a P.O.W., after which he apparently always kept this work by his bedside. See D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, pp. 253, 272, note 12.

that a form of practical philosophy that emphasised self-control, perseverance and calm acceptance of the inevitable should have appealed to Boxer, given his strong personal discipline and rigorous work ethic. Nevertheless, there was also something of the Epicurean in him, for he was a great socialiser with notorious staying power on party occasions. He once quoted approvingly some defiant words of Rui Freire de Andrade, a true Boxer hero if ever there was one – words written not long before that formidable commander's death: «So long as there is water I shall drink, and then let what may happen, happen»⁵⁵.

Like any serious graduate student today, Boxer realised from the start of his writing career that to succeed as a historian he had to make a personal journey of cultural and linguistic exploration. It was a journey he embarked upon in the 1920s with great determination. On the way, he gained competence in several foreign languages – namely, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish and Japanese. But the path he chose was an unusual one, especially when compared with those commonly followed by scholars-in-training today. He never studied at a university but instead trained at Sandhurst for a military career. On his own request posted as a language officer to Japan in 1930, he sailed to the Far East aboard a Japanese ship. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that he saw himself on this voyage as a kind of latter-day Peter Mundy⁵⁶. On arriving in Singapore, instead of fraternising with the resident British community – as most in his position would probably have done – he went off «exploring» with a Chinese and two Spaniards⁵⁷. In Japan he declined to claim European expatriate privileges but had himself attached to the Thirty-Eighth Nara Infantry Regiment with which he underwent rigorous training. Then he did the same at the N.C.O.'s school at Nagoya. He carefully cultivated Japanese customs and etiquette, became a proficient speaker of the language and learned *kendo*.

Boxer was greatly stimulated by Japan where he made lasting friendships, acquiring high respect for the Japanese people and their culture. He leased a «cook-concubine» and became a self-confessed disciple of the Japanese scholar Okamoto Yoshitomo; he himself was much respected by his fellow officers in the Thirty-Eighth Nara Regiment, who presented him with a seventeenth century daimyo's sword. Later, as a prisoner-of-war in Hong Kong, he reputedly became friendly with a couple of Chinese pirates – much to the surprise of his European companions⁵⁸. Boxer was badly wounded in the battle for Hong Kong, and subsequently in captivity (1941-45) he narrowly escaped execution for his association with a clandestine camp

⁵⁵ C. R. Boxer to Anthony Disney, 9 July 1979.

⁵⁶ Alden remarks on Boxer's love of adventurous travellers' accounts of their exploits. D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 489.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 252, 262.

radio. Yet he bore no grudges against the enemy and once told a fellow-prisoner after their release: «the war's over and its time you forgot about it». He also dismissed his ill-treatment over the radio incident, simply declaring he had had it coming to him because, «that was something you had to pay for if you got caught»⁵⁹. Boxer's involvement in the Japanese world in fact went well beyond that of an observer; it was that of an active participant. After the war he quickly renewed his friendships with Japanese scholars. In Japan itself his work was deeply appreciated, and publication of *The Christian Century* earned him the nickname «Father of Nagasakiology»⁶⁰.

Such attitudes help explain why Boxer was so successful at his particular kind of biographical writing. He had an extraordinary determination to get to know what Post-Modernists call «the Other», though he himself would never have used so ugly an expression. He encountered in his own life, and probably to a certain extent sought out, various experiences that came close to mirroring what happened to some of the historical characters that so appealed to him and about whom he researched and wrote with such commitment. At the same time he remained detached, and never postured or pretended to be anything other than what he was – an inquiring and highly intelligent Englishman. Perhaps his deep interest in Japan and its relationship with the West was linked to his respect for Stoicism and his fascination with heroic deaths. It was personalities like André Pessoa, one of those men who «when they can no longer conquer, show that they at least know how to die», who especially attracted him⁶¹. Nevertheless, these interests appear to have become more subdued as Boxer grew older – and after *The Christian Century* he wrote little more about Japan, focusing instead on the Portuguese world, especially in the Atlantic.

Needless to say, Boxer was never an adherent of either the Marxist tradition or that of the Annales School: in fact, he showed no interest in writing after the fashion of any of the great historical schools of his day. He was essentially an empirical historian, but in the best sense – and it was partly this that gave him the open-mindedness, flexibility and impartiality that made him such an effective biographer. Boxer's style of history was in marked contrast to that of Fernand Braudel, that other great twentieth century historian who has had so profound an influence on Portuguese historiography⁶². Where Braudel and his disciples began with sweeping underlying realities, using such concepts as «structure», «conjuncture», «mentalités», «collective destinies» and so on, and consigning the actions of individuals to the merely incidental, Boxer worked in the opposite direction.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 264; also see p. 291.

⁶⁰ See J. S. Cummins's obituary of Boxer in *The Hakluyt Society. Annual Report and Statement of Account for 2000*, London, the Hakluyt Society, 2000, p. 21.

⁶¹ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 217.

⁶² Cf. comments by Diogo CURTO in his introduction to C. R. BOXER, *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, p. xxiii.

To him it was individual people who made history – and one best understands history by studying the individuals who lived through it.

Approaching history from this standpoint the paramount importance of biography is obvious. However, Boxer was not interested in biography merely for its own sake but as a means towards understanding broader issues. To him individual lives, and the inter-relationships between them, constituted building blocks on which more general historical analyses could be constructed. This is perhaps one reason why Boxer devoted so much of his time and effort to producing short biographies and biographical sketches rather than writing major biographies – for it was often the volume and variety of the individual life studies he undertook that enabled him to discern patterns and suggest generalizations. Research and writing about little-known or poorly understood characters, however fragmentary the sources, was almost certainly what he preferred – and it was what gave his biographical writings much of their originality and their lasting value.

In Tokyo in 1946 Boxer was asked by an old Japanese friend if, like other Westerners, he carried pictures of his loved ones with him during the war. He replied in the affirmative, pulled out his wallet – and showed his friend two seventeenth century manuscript fragments bearing the signatures of Tadaoki and Diogo do Couto ⁶³. This is a revealing story, for it underlines the great affinity, indeed love, Boxer felt for many of the historical characters whom he studied. Yet he did not allow such feelings to prejudice his judgement – and that is what made him such a very special biographer-historian.

⁶³ D. ALDEN, *Charles R. Boxer*, pp. 291-2. See also p. 435.