

were not eligible. ‘But I’m not American, I’m Chinese’, she said. The incredulous officer asked her to explain. She told of her 1938 marriage to Sinmay in Shanghai. When asked for documentation, she said that the documents were lost during the bombing, but she offered to find Japanese officers who knew her and Sinmay in Shanghai before the war. Amazingly this worked and she and Carola were soon on a ship out of Hong Kong, destination New York.

She arrived on 1 December 1943, and her family was there to meet her, but she had another reception party as well. Not surprisingly, the FBI had a few questions for her about her contacts with Japanese military and civilian officials during her days in Shanghai and Hong Kong. She was detained overnight, repeating her claim of being absolutely apolitical and innocent of providing any assistance to the enemy. In the end she was released and there were no more questions about espionage or collaboration.

In New York, she wrote several books: *China to Me*, *Raffles of Singapore*, and *The Soong Sisters*. Advances and royalties from these books supported the baby and her. The war finally ended, and Charles was reunited with Emily and Carola in New York. Soon after, Ursula changed her mind about her marriage. The divorce came through, and the newlyweds and daughter moved to his family home in Dorset.

Here, their life was not as exciting as their time in the Orient, but no less eventful. A second daughter, Amanda, was born, Charles retired from the army, and they both contemplated their post-war careers. Emily seemed set with her writing, and the *New Yorker* continued to publish her. Even though Charles had no credentials in the academic world, his writing and studies in Portuguese and Dutch discoveries earned him an unexpected opportunity in academia. A chair in Portuguese history at the University of London was offered him, and he went on to enjoy a long and illustrious career as *the* premier world authority in these subjects.

Over the ensuing 40 years he wrote several landmark books recognised by scholars around the world. Among the best known are: *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825*; *The Christian Century in Japan*; *The Golden Age of Brazil*; *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800*.

In these and other books as well as innumerable articles, Boxer treated European discovery, colonisation

and missionary work across a variety of dimensions, and scholars in many fields including cartography and seamanship as well as historians and social scientists studied his works were. Over forty years ago, he addressed the role of women and the non-European races in Portuguese colonial society in an objective manner not typical for that period of scholarly study.

After the unconventional lives they had lived to that point, the love affairs she had had, their differing temperaments, many people were very interested to see what kind of a marriage they would have once they settled down in England. The answer was that it was a long lasting, loving marriage, but not a constraining one. She had a set of interests different from his, including a love of New York City and the *New Yorker* magazine. She also had a healthy dislike of the British Inland Revenue Service, so she spent half the year in New York and half the time with Charles in Britain. He, in turn, travelled and lectured around the world. But their mutual love was visible to everyone, especially their daughters. Carola was trained as a teacher, spent most of her time in the US, and lived in New York where she has worked for the American Cancer Society. Amanda, an actress, lives in London. Both grieved the loss of their mother in 1997 in New York and their father who passed away this year after celebrating his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday at his country home outside London.

The literary and historical legacy of this couple is truly astounding. Emily has had published dozens of books and scores of articles, biographies, novels, non-fictions on a wide range of subjects.

A bibliography of Charles’ work published in the 1990’s listed 324 articles and books from 1926 to 1990. Each required intensive research and in many cases, translating of ancient documents in Portuguese and Dutch language. By any standard, this is a huge body of work, and anyone truly committed to the History of Discoveries must strive to understand and appreciate his work.

Together, Emily and Charles set a timeless example of success in their professions, their personal relations, in life. Their story would be remarkable in any generation. It combined the best of an active life of adventure, hardship and danger with a studious commitment to disseminating challenging ideas to a world audience. The story also manifested an undying mutual love for almost 60 years. **RC**



# Charles Ralph Boxer (1904-2000)

## The Remarkable Career of a Master Historian

ANTHONY DISNEY\*

Charles Ralph Boxer, whose life nearly spanned the 20<sup>th</sup> century almost from its start to its finish, was the most productive and widely respected non-Portuguese historian ever to have written about the role played by Portugal in European overseas expansion and empire. Charles was born in 1904 into a British naval and military service family. His father, Hugh Boxer, an officer in the Lincolnshire Regiment, was killed on the Western Front in the First World War. Charles was therefore brought up from an early age by his Australian mother and by other members of his family circle. One of the latter, his paternal grandmother, happened to possess a collection of *netsuke* ivories. It seems these fascinated Charles in boyhood, helping to

create in him a life-long interest in Japanese culture and history.

As a result of pursuing his Japanese interests Charles quickly came to appreciate that the Portuguese had been the first Europeans to establish physical contact with Japan. Soon he began to exercise an intense curiosity about Portugal per se, and about its role in bringing Europe and Asia together – and in 1924 he started to learn the Portuguese language, so he could read the original sources. In the mid-1920s he joined the Japan Society and began learning Japanese. Then, in about 1927, he began too to learn Dutch seriously, the Dutch being the European successors in Japan to the Portuguese when the latter were expelled in the early to mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Also at about this time Charles began two life-long scholarly pursuits. The first was the task of assembling what would eventually become one of the world’s greatest private libraries of manuscripts and books concerning the histories of the Portuguese and Dutch empires. The second, which he seems to have begun in earnest about the time of his first trip to Portugal in 1925, was the construction of an extensive network of Portuguese and Dutch scholarly contacts.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in 1924, at the age of just nineteen, he completed officer training at Sandhurst and was duly

\* He is a Scholar Emeritus of La Trobe University (Australia). He has written extensively about Portugal and the Portuguese overseas, especially in maritime Asia during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. His first book – *Twilight of the Pepper Empire* – appeared in 1978, and his two volume *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire* in 2009. Anthony is currently writing the biography of Dom Miguel de Noronha, fourth Count of Linhares.

Académico Emérito da Universidade de La Trobe (Austrália). Tem escrito extensivamente sobre Portugal e os Portugueses além-mar, especialmente na Ásia marítima durante os finais do século XVI e inícios do século XVII. O seu primeiro livro, *A Decadência do Império da Pimenta*, surgiu em 1978 e o segundo, em dois volumes, *História de Portugal e do Império Português*, em 2009. Prepara, no momento, a biografia de D. Miguel de Noronha, 4.º conde de Linhares.

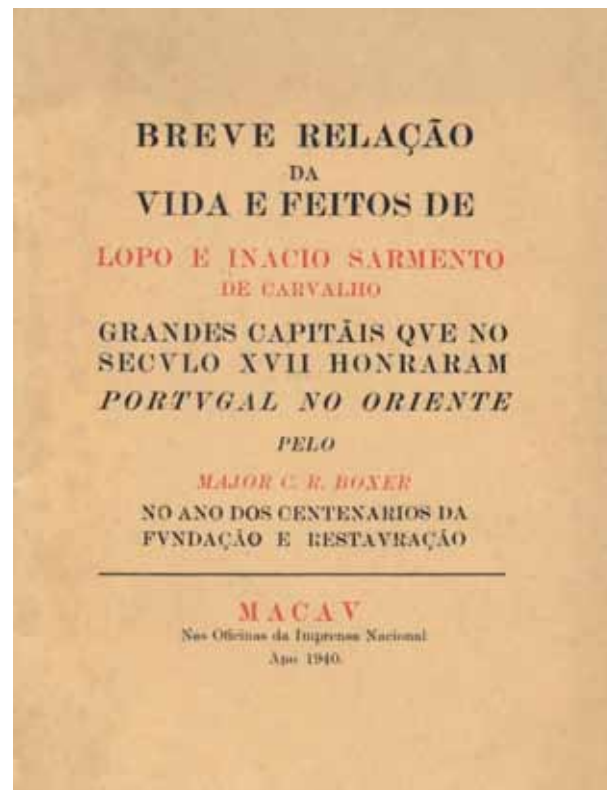
## EM MEMÓRIA DE CHARLES R. BOXER

commissioned as second lieutenant in his father's old regiment, the Lincolns. So began the military career that he was to pursue for over two decades.

Charles Boxer's first army posting was to a then relatively untroubled Northern Ireland, which was soon followed by a period in Aldershot. However, because of his scholarly interests he applied for training as a language officer – and in that capacity he was posted to Japan, in 1930. There he undertook officer training with the 38<sup>th</sup> Nara Infantry Regiment, then did several months at an NCOs school in Nagoya, picking up a working knowledge of colloquial Japanese in the process. He subsequently travelled widely in the East, before in 1933 joining the Intelligence Division of the British War Office. In 1937 he was posted as an Intelligence Officer and Japanese interpreter to the GOC, Hong Kong – that is, at about the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War. The Hong Kong assignment kept him frantically busy and, over the next four years, he travelled widely in China's interior on various intelligence missions. The Japanese attacked Hong Kong itself on 7 December 1941 – and, in the ensuing fighting, Boxer was badly wounded, trying to rally a detachment of defending Indian troops. The colony surrendered on Christmas Eve 1941, and Boxer spent the next three and a half years in captivity – an unpleasant experience described in detail in Dauril Alden's biography, but one that Boxer endured with considerable fortitude and Stoicism. Moreover, when it was all over, he simply moved on with very little rancour.<sup>2</sup>

A consequence of Boxer's capture and imprisonment by the Japanese in December 1941 was an abrupt pause to his career as a historian. For the next three-and-a-half years, which he spent interned in Hong Kong and South China, he was deprived of his library and manuscript collection, and unable to communicate with publishers. His scholarly activity was, therefore, for the time being suspended – which provides an opportunity to evaluate what he had achieved up until then.<sup>3</sup>

Between September 1926 and December 1941 Boxer published approximately eighty-five scholarly works – that is, about one item every two months. Almost all of these publications concerned the maritime and overseas histories of the Portuguese and Dutch, the bulk of them being journal articles or chapters in collectively authored books. Many were supported by previously unpublished documents, more often



than not taken from Boxer's own collection. But Boxer also published during the same period two substantial book-length volumes, each comprising a 17<sup>th</sup> century manuscript that he personally translated into English, and thoroughly annotated. They were *The Journal of Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp* and *The Commentaries of Ruy Freyre de Andrade*. Both were written by 17<sup>th</sup> century commanders, one of them a celebrated Dutch admiral and the other a distinguished Portuguese captain-general. They described their authors' campaigns against the Spaniards in the Downs and the English and Persians in the Persian Gulf respectively, in considerable detail. Boxer himself contributed substantial introductions.

Also during his Hong Kong period Boxer published in Macao two other quite substantial volumes worthy of mention. The first, which appeared in 1940, was a work of about seventy pages that he called *Breve Relação da Vida e Feitos de Lopo e Inácio Sarmento de Carvalho*. This volume reconstructed the lives and exploits of two 17<sup>th</sup> century Macao-based trading *fidalgos* – father and son – whose patriotism and bravery in defending Macao and Cochin respectively Boxer felt deserved recognition. The second volume was

an annotated edition of a 350 page mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese manuscript entitled *Azia Sinica e Japonica*, allegedly by the cleric Friar José de Jesus Maria. This appeared in 1941, and was also published in Macao, Boxer providing an introduction.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the characteristic features of Boxer's historiographical method had become apparent by the end of this phase of his scholarly career. First, there was the close relationship between collecting manuscripts and books on the one hand and writing history on the other. This was also associated with his determination, before committing himself to paper, to consult and critically scrutinise as far as possible *all* the relevant documentary sources. Boxer, as a consequence, aided by his exceptionally sharp memory, invariably seemed to achieve an awesome mastery of detail. Other positive characteristics of his scholarly work in this period were a lively style of writing that was, at the same time, graceful, pungent and entertaining. He likewise developed a remarkable ability to relate to those whose personal stories he was recounting, invariably portraying them as real flesh and blood human beings.

On the other hand, in his historical writing Boxer showed almost no interest in ideological presuppositions or theoretical models, his work being almost exclusively located within the classic empirical tradition. Moreover, at this stage of his career he had still not published a single genuinely book-length monograph – unless the translated Tromp and Freyre manuscripts described above are accepted as such. Nor does he appear to have as yet particularly espoused the notably progressive attitudes towards racism and imperialism that eventually became his hallmark from the 1950s or early 1960s. His focus in the 1920s and 30s was rather on the struggles within and between the various European powers. In these he was particularly keen to demonstrate that the Portuguese and Dutch gave as good as they got – and to argue that they should be more respected for this than they often were in the Anglophone tradition. For instance in a 1935 chapter he wrote, 'It is easy [for the English] to dismiss the lot of them [the Portuguese] as decadent "dagoes" or priest-ridden Papists, but in doing so we sadly under-rate the achievements of our forefathers'. He then added that, 'along with many weaklings and half-castes', the Portuguese had in India 'soldiers and sailors who gave every bit as much as they received'.<sup>5</sup>

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After the Japanese surrender in August 1945 Boxer briefly resumed his duties in Hong Kong as an intelligence officer – and it was not until that November that he was finally evacuated, to San Francisco. From there he proceeded to the eastern seaboard of the United States where, having secured a divorce from his first wife, he promptly married the remarkable American adventurer and authoress, 'Mickey' Hahn, his de facto partner in Hong Kong since 1940. Then that December, through the influence of the well-known Japanologist, George Sansom, he secured a posting to Japan with the Far Eastern Commission. There he was able to secure the return of most of his library, which had been shipped from Hong Kong to the imperial museum in Tokyo in 1942 as part of the spoils of war.

*In 1924 he started to learn the Portuguese language, so he could read the original sources. In the mid-1920s he joined the Japan Society and began learning Japanese.*

At this point Boxer still expected he would be able to continue his military career in the Far East, while simultaneously renewing his scholarly interests. But this was not to be – and, in the event, his army service came to a permanent end in 1947 when, at the age of forty-three, he resigned his treasured commission after approximately 22 years service. The difficulty had been that the army medical authorities considered him unfit for a long-term Far East posting, owing to his partly paralysed left arm where he had been wounded during the defence of Hong Kong. But Hong Kong was the one assignment he desperately craved because of his historical interests in the region and his many roots and contacts there – and he was adamant he would not serve instead in an indefinite desk job in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the Camões Professorship in Portuguese Studies at King's College, London, had fortuitously fallen vacant – and the appointment was offered to Boxer. Convinced, under all the circumstances, that it was an opportunity not to be



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missed, he decided to make the career change, becoming a civilian and accepting the King's College offer. He took up the Camões Chair in October 1947. Altogether it was a quite remarkable achievement for an essentially amateur historian with no formal academic training and no university degree – and Boxer might well be cited as living proof of Hugh Trevor Roper's dictum that the 'greatest historians have been amateurs'.<sup>7</sup>

On his arrival at King's College Boxer began the second phase of his scholarly career – a phase which lasted for some twenty years from late 1947 to 1967. These years were without doubt his most productive as a historian, the period when he wrote and published most of his major works. Overall, through the two decades he produced between 130 and 140 publications – that is, more than one every two months. While this was about the same rate that he had achieved in the first phase of his scholarly career, before the fall of Hong

Kong, the major difference was that during his time at King's College he produced fifteen or sixteen books. Moreover, most of these were full-length monographs and several quickly became classics in their own right. It was as though the understanding, interpretative skill and extraordinary grasp of detail that had been building up inside him for over twenty years had suddenly broken free like lava bursting through the earth's crust.

With just one or two exceptions – most obviously *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (1965) – all these 1950s and 1960s books concerned exclusively or primarily the overseas activity of the Portuguese.<sup>8</sup> But whereas during his earlier pre-war phase he had concentrated overwhelmingly on developments in South, East and Southeast Asia, in his King's College phase he encompassed a much wider geographic area. His first post-war book – *Fidalgos in the Far East 1550-1770* (1948) – was actually a collection of some fifteen previously published articles and essays and was therefore still somewhat in the old mould, or at most in a transitional one. Boxer himself described it as 'a study of key episodes and periods' in the history of Macao, while also focusing on 'typical personalities'.<sup>9</sup> He dedicated it to his Portuguese friends, Armando and Carlota Cortesão – a gesture that would soon acquire great irony.

Boxer's next book – *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (1951) – was a much more radical departure. It was a magisterial account of the extraordinarily ambitious though in the end disastrously unsuccessful campaign to convert Japan to Christianity in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Conducted within the context of the Portuguese *Padroado* the campaign was essentially a Jesuit enterprise though with some, if to the Jesuits unwelcome, input from missionary friars. In writing this book Boxer consulted not only a vast array of documentary sources in Portuguese and other European languages, including the voluminous Jesuit reports in the Ajuda Palace Library and the British Library, but also a significant range of relevant material, both primary and secondary, in Japanese. A number of key Japanese documents translated into English were included in the appendices. The prestigious Japanologist and former U.S. ambassador to Japan, Edwin O Reischauer, declared this book to be 'a major contribution to the historical literature on Japan'.<sup>10</sup>

After *The Christian Century in Japan* Boxer turned his attention for the first time seriously to colonial Brazil

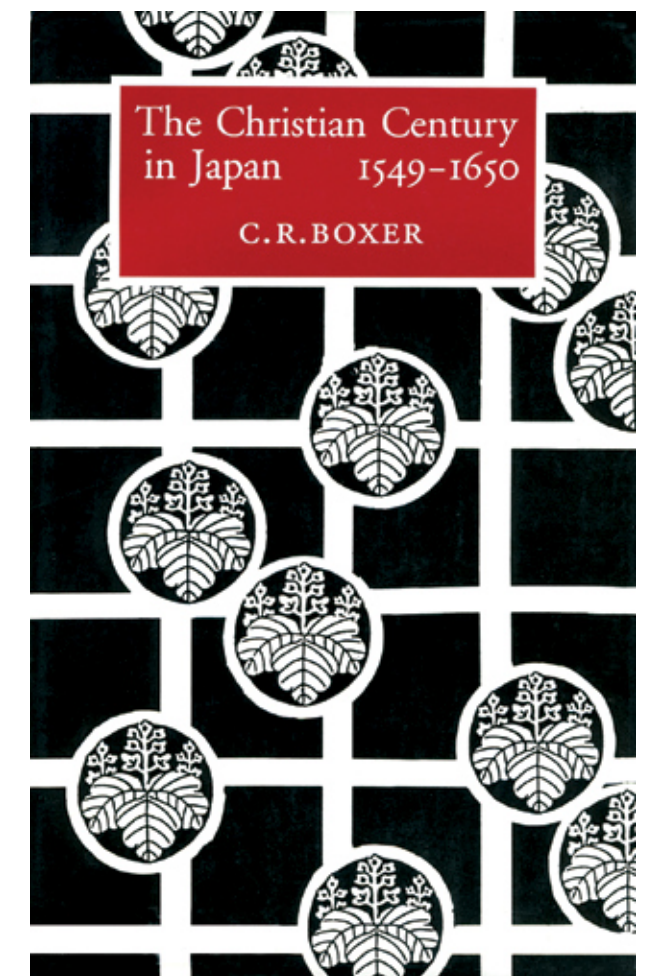
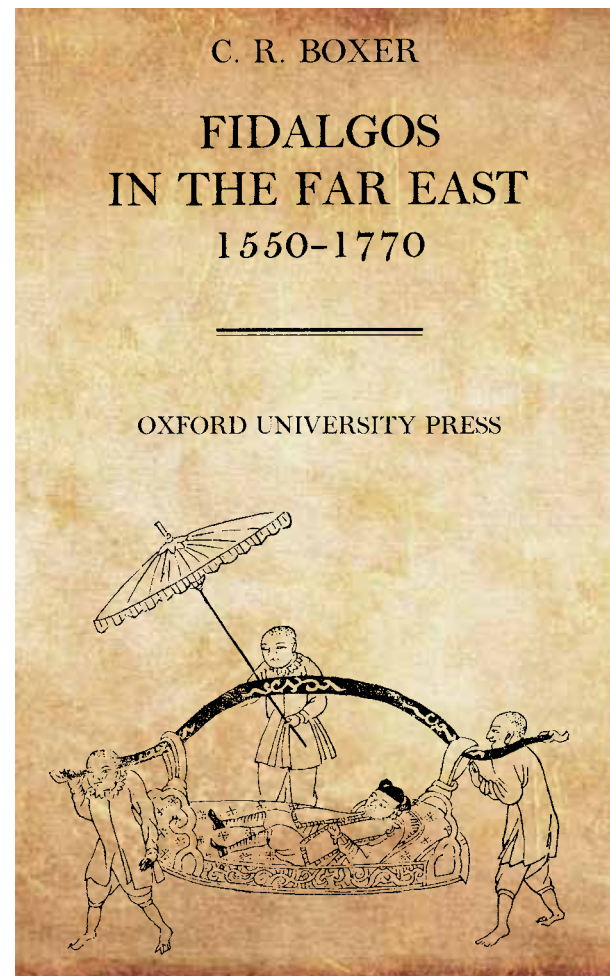


about which he produced three books in quick succession. The first, published in 1952, which might perhaps be categorised as a semi-biography, was *Salvador Correia de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola 1602-1686*. It was followed swiftly by *The Dutch in Brazil 1624-1654* (1957) and then, after a rather longer gap, *The Golden Age of Brazil 1695-1750* (1962). The first two of these books were complementary, being set in overlapping time frames and both being largely concerned with aspects of the Luso-Dutch struggle for control of Portugal's South American settlements. In his preface to *Salvador de Sá* Boxer rightly described English knowledge of colonial Brazil's history in general as 'abysmal'. He pointed out that virtually nothing had been written about it by British historians since Robert Southey's multi-volume *History of Brazil* – and Southey's work had appeared as long ago as 1810-1819. Claiming that Salvador de Sá (1602-1686) was a key figure in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese world, Boxer went on to emphasise that 'the bulk of this book is based on documents in the Portuguese and Brazilian archives'.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Boxer's semi-biographical study of Salvador de Sá allowed him to describe and explain in some detail Portuguese behaviour in the Atlantic world of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *The Dutch in Brazil* enabled him to do the same for the Netherlanders – again, largely by focusing on one pre-eminent leader. In this case the leader was Prince Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, the Enlightened Dutch governor of Netherlands Brazil, whose life-span (1604-1679) roughly corresponded to that of Salvador. Finally, *The Golden Age of Brazil* took up the story of the Portuguese in South America for roughly the following half century – that is, down to about 1750. But, unlike Boxer's earlier Brazil books, *The Golden Age of Brazil* lacked a central individual figure. Instead, it was organised largely on a geographical basis, with separate chapters for each of various key regions of the huge colony. During the period, colonial Brazil was transformed from a cluster of mainly coastal settlements into a much larger, more coherent political entity, significantly more important economically than its Portuguese mother country.

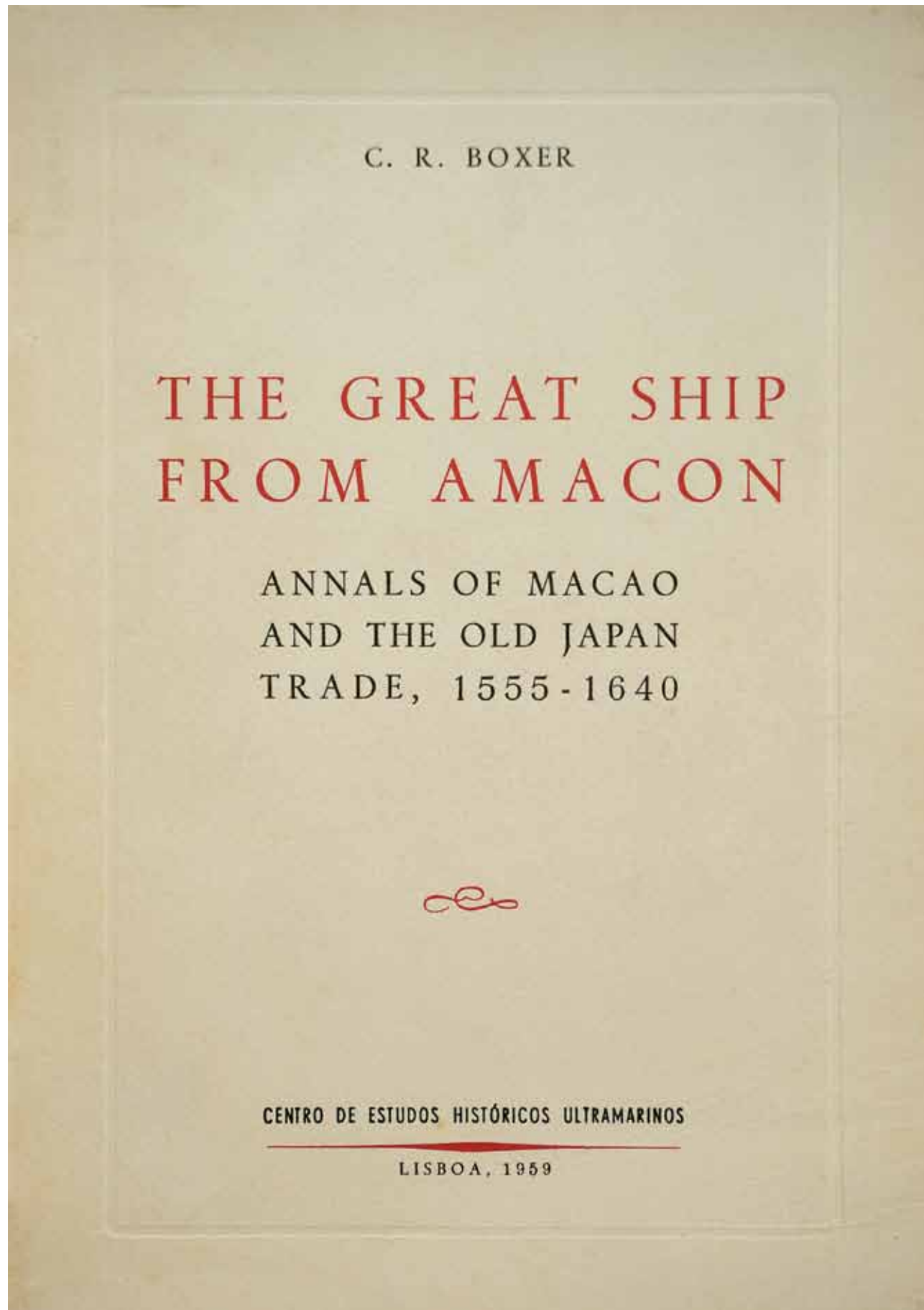
Also during his King's College years Boxer produced three volumes of historical narratives in English translation, each meticulously edited, and

provided with substantial, scholarly introductions. The first was *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (1953), which consisted of two Portuguese and one Spanish account of southern China in the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> The other two were *The Tragic History of the Sea, 1589-1622* (1959) and, almost a decade later, *Further Selections from the Tragic History of the Sea, 1559-1565* (1968). Each of the latter comprised English translations of three 16<sup>th</sup>/early 17<sup>th</sup> century narrative accounts of Portuguese shipwrecks off the coasts of Africa. The first volume also included a masterly introductory essay that described the workings and travails of the *Carreira da Índia*. Meanwhile, linked thematically to these three volumes was *The Great Ship from Amacon: Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555-1640* (1959). This consisted of, first, a long introductory essay of some 150 pages, describing in chronological order the annual trading voyages between





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Macao and Japan for the period of almost a hundred years, between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and the 1630s. There followed a rich array of contemporary documents illustrating *inter alia* such matters as how the trade was organised and conducted, the goods involved, the kinds of contracts entered into, voyaging practices and experiences and the attitudes and reactions of the Japanese. The book demonstrated just how vital the Japan trade was to the *Estado da Índia*, throughout this period.

The year after the publication of *The Great Ship from Amacon*, Boxer produced, jointly with his old friend Carlos de Azevedo, yet another monograph – *Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa, 1593-1729* (1960). This project, begun in 1957, was instigated by the directors of the Gulbenkian Foundation who, having decided to fund the restoration of Fort Jesus, wanted Charles and Carlos to write a book about it and duly sponsored a visit to East Africa by the two of them. The Mombasa book was another new departure for Charles, being his first substantial work on East Africa. Visiting Kenya also marked the start of a period of much greater overseas travel for him more generally, most of it for historical research, writing and relevant sightseeing.

During his final years at King's College Boxer composed his widely applauded general overviews of the Dutch and Portuguese empires. Outstanding works of synthesis and reflection – *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (1965) and, even more, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (actually published in 1969 after he had left King's) – quickly became the standard texts within their respective fields. However, before either had been published Charles produced, in 1963, a small volume that was to have a more dramatic impact, and cause more pain and controversy, than anything else he ever wrote. This little book, consisting of the texts of three lectures he had delivered at the University of Virginia in November 1962 and entitled *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire 1415-1825*, challenged head on the then official Portuguese government doctrine that 'racism' was never a characteristic of Lisbon's overseas empire and had always been officially rejected. Overall the book presented its case courteously, showing respect and understanding for those who sincerely held opposing views. But, given that Boxer was questioning a fundamental article of faith of the Salazar regime, which at the time was

highly sensitive about foreign criticism, he must have known he was going to raise a storm. Moreover, there was one passage in the book that amounted to a direct personal attack on Salazar – and, inevitably, it was this passage that attracted the greatest attention, and was most widely quoted.<sup>13</sup>

To respond to *Race Relations* the Salazar government chose Professor Armando Cortesão, a close and long-time friend of Boxer. A 'liberal' in the 1930s, Cortesão had, at that time, gone into voluntary exile; but in the early 1950s he had decided to make his peace with the regime in Lisbon, and to return to Portugal. Now, in support of Salazar's colonial policy, he wrote a vitriolic indictment of Boxer's newest book, which was duly published in Portugal's most widely circulating newspaper, *Diário Popular*. It accused Charles of betraying the very country that had always welcomed him so warmly and treated him so generously.<sup>14</sup> For the rest of his life Cortesão never forgave Boxer for this 'betrayal' and absolutely refused to be reconciled with him.

Why, then, did Boxer, who had hitherto always been careful to avoid public involvement in contemporary Portuguese politics, decide to break with this tradition when he wrote *Race Relations*? Dauril Alden argued that it may well be that he 'deliberately provoked controversy' simply because he had 'great reverence' for the truth – and he knew the regime's official version of the history of race relations in its colonial territories was not the truth, but a serious distortion of the truth.<sup>15</sup> However, while this may have been a factor, it seems to me that much of the explanation – particularly the timing – lay in the realm of politics. A war of liberation against Portuguese rule in Angola had begun early in 1961, which involved some sickening atrocities. Similar wars were soon affecting Portuguese Guinea and Mozambique – and Portuguese efforts to suppress the 'rebels' in all three territories involved heavy costs and a substantial increase in the military establishment. On top of this, in December 1961 Indian troops seized Goa. Thus the early 1960s were a critical time for the Salazar regime, whose colonial doctrines and imperial pretensions were coming under increasingly close and mostly hostile foreign scrutiny. At the same time, pressure was growing on historians of Portugal and its empire to show their political colours – that is, to commit themselves for or against the status quo. There was therefore a real

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danger for someone like Boxer, a renowned specialist on the history of the Portuguese empire, that if he did not make clear his rejection of Salazarism, he would himself be labeled a Salazarist fellow-traveller.

*With just one or two exceptions – most obviously The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800 (1965) – all these 1950s and 1960s books concerned exclusively or primarily the overseas activity of the Portuguese.*

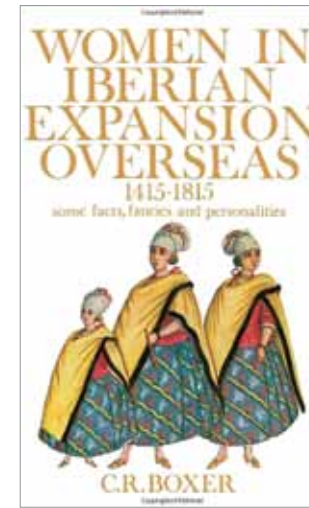
This was a serious concern for Boxer by the early 1960s. At the time, he was tiring of King's College, where he had already worked for over a dozen years and his teaching load was getting heavier. He had begun eyeing possible job opportunities at universities in the United States, where, *inter alia*, they paid their professors better. In November 1962 he accepted a short-term visiting professorship at the University of Virginia – and it was there that his controversial lectures on race relations were originally delivered. It has been plausibly suggested that he deliberately chose to speak out on the racism issue at that time – and to do so with maximum publicity – in order to establish his credentials as a historian *not* committed to Salazarist colonial principles, in the eyes of mainstream American universities.<sup>16</sup> Only two years before, it had been possible for Boxer to avoid committing himself on this emotive issue – to retain the friendship and respect of people like Cortesão in Portugal while at the same time enjoying credibility in the Anglophone world. In 1960 he had been able to accept, apparently without serious hesitation, lavish hospitality from Salazar's Portugal at the five hundredth anniversary celebrations of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator. He had in fact led the British participants in this event – and he had delivered a carefully crafted uncontroversial speech, complimenting his hosts.<sup>17</sup> But, after the turmoil in Portuguese Africa and Goa in 1961, such a balancing

act was arguably no longer possible. It seems that Boxer knew this – and spoke out accordingly. But it is nevertheless unlikely that he expected the intensity of the adverse reaction from conservative Portuguese, when it came.

Meanwhile, continuing his venture into North American academe, Charles contributed another lecture series in 1964, at the University of Wisconsin. Concerning the municipal councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia and Luanda, the lectures were turned into a 240-page book, the following year.<sup>18</sup> It was also at about this time that Boxer began negotiating with various institutions interested in eventually acquiring his splendid library of books and manuscripts – a process which culminated in an agreement with the Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana, in 1965. As a result he received the status of a visiting research professor at that university, where he took up residence in 1967. For the next twelve years Bloomington was his centre of operations in the United States – except from 1969 to 1972 when he held a professorship at Yale. At both Yale, and the University of Indiana, he was widely acknowledged to be an outstanding mentor and teacher – and at both he also maintained his already formidable reputation as an inveterate partygoer. The years 1967 to 1979 therefore constituted a third distinct period in Boxer's academic career – one which might reasonably be described as his North American period. It was, however, much less productive as far as his writing was concerned than had been his years at King's College. This was perhaps in part because he had to devote significantly more time to conducting classes and preparing and delivering lectures. Be that as it may, only four or five of Boxer's works that could reasonably be described as even small books date from this period.

One of these small books was about the activities of a successful 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese private merchant, Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, who traded mainly in the South and Southeast Asia regions. Though based on original documents, Boxer's account of this merchant's activities was intended to be no more than a preliminary study, and did not amount to a full-scale biography.<sup>19</sup> However, through the late 1960s and early 70s Charles continued to accept short-term visiting professorships and lecture tours, as well as performing his longer term commitments – and several of these visiting appointments resulted in significant publications. For

instance, in October-November 1972 he gave a series of lectures at Bryn Mawr College, which linked into the by then increasingly popular subject of women's history. The lectures described the roles played by Portuguese and Spanish women in the overseas expansion process, over a period of about 400 years (1415-1815). They were subsequently assembled into a book of about 140 pages, under the title of *Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas 1415-1815*.<sup>20</sup>



Again, Boxer was invited to deliver the Schouler Lectures at the John Hopkins University in 1976. In this case he chose to speak about the Catholic Church's missionary enterprise into the non-European world, within the contexts of Portuguese and Spanish expansion. Interestingly, the first of the four lectures he entitled 'Race Relations', thereby revisiting the issue that had sparked so much bitterness some thirteen years before. His Schouler lectures were published in 1978 by the John Hopkins University Press under the title of *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion 1440-1770*. By the time *The Church Militant* came out Boxer was aged in his mid-70s – and still teaching. But he was increasingly feeling his age and after a last semester at the University of Indiana in the spring of 1979 he decided enough was enough. Meanwhile he had written his last full-length book – a slim volume entitled *João de Barros. Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*. It was published in 1981, though it had been completed several years earlier. It displayed the full range of qualities for which he had become so famous – thorough culling of primary sources, awesome mastery of factual detail, strong sense of context and elegant expression.

At the end of the 1970s there were still scholarly challenges Boxer wanted to meet, some of them major undertakings. But it was beginning to look as though they might just be too ambitious. Among them were proposed biographies of two major historical figures – Fr. António Vieira and the Marquis of Alorna. Fr.

Vieira, the celebrated 17<sup>th</sup>-century Jesuit missionary and court preacher, Boxer considered to be the finest exponent of prose-writing in the Portuguese language.<sup>21</sup> Charles had written several short pieces on Vieira in the 1950s, but was convinced that a full-scale biography was what was really needed. However, he had been repeatedly forced to postpone undertaking the task owing to other more urgent commitments. In the end, a Vieira biography never eventuated – an outcome Alden lamented as a great loss to posterity.<sup>22</sup> The other projected biography was of Dom Pedro Miguel de Almeida Portugal, first Marquis of Alorna and 44<sup>th</sup> viceroy of Portuguese India (1688-1756). Boxer's interest in Alorna was kindled by his acquisition in 1959 of a substantial collection of that nobleman's papers – and there is no doubt he was enthusiastically committed to the Alorna project, through the 1960s and 1970s. But, again, he was repeatedly forced to postpone working on it because of other more urgent scholarly tasks. In the end the Alorna biography, too, was never written.<sup>23</sup>

At this point I would like to introduce into this short review of the life and work of Charles Boxer some personal memories. As far as I can recall, I first became aware of Charles as a historian when I read some of his articles in the popular magazine *History Today* in the early 1950s, to which he was in those days a regular contributor. A few years later in 1960, when I was an Oxford undergraduate, I acquired my first Boxer book – *Fort Jesus and the Portuguese in Mombasa*. I knew the area concerned quite well, having passed Fort Jesus on numerous occasions in my East African boyhood – though I had never entered it because in those days it was used by the British colonial authorities as a prison. I found the book enthralling – and my respect for Boxer as a historian was reconfirmed. Up to that time I had not, of course, had the privilege of meeting him. Nor had I had any personal correspondence with him, nor even heard him speak – although a little later (I cannot now recall exactly when, but it must have been in late 1960 or 1961) I did attend a guest lecture he gave in Oxford.

It was not until 1964, when I was a young acting lecturer at the University of Melbourne and contemplating doing a Ph.D. thesis on a Portuguese topic, that I first made tentative contact with him. This was done indirectly through Professor Max Crawford, the then chairman of the Department of History at

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the University of Melbourne – and Boxer was kind enough to respond by writing me a personal letter of encouragement, assuring me there was ‘plenty of scope in all fields’ of Portuguese colonial history for what I was contemplating, and urging me meanwhile to read as much on the subject as possible.<sup>24</sup> (I had as yet little idea of precisely what topic I wished to study, though I was rather intrigued by the figure of King Manuel and what he stood for). At the time, Boxer himself was preparing to move on from King’s College. For a while – as he told me in a letter in 1965 – he seriously considered taking up a professional research fellowship in Canberra. If this had happened, I would certainly have become his Ph.D. student. But, as he explained at the time, his family was against him emigrating to Australia – and in the end he ‘reluctantly’ gave up the idea.<sup>25</sup> To soothe my disappointment he assured me in the same letter: ‘Of course I don’t think the question of a supervisor is a vital one. The best Ph.D. theses I have examined (and I have examined a great many since 1947) have nearly all been 90 % or even 99 % the work of the candidate and owe little or nothing to the supervisor’. In the event, a year later I went to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard, where I wrote my Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Professor J. H. Parry.

An opportunity to meet Boxer in person eventually came to me in early 1969. He was then already in Bloomington while I was working at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where I had a one year fellowship. Bloomington was a relatively easy flight from Chicago, so I wrote to ask if I could come and see him. ‘Naturally’, he had replied, ‘I will be delighted to see you, as your topic interests me very much’.<sup>26</sup> He was referring to my Ph.D. thesis, which was about the history of the Portuguese East India Company of 1629-1633. Of course, he knew many of the sources I was using very well, such as the Codex Lynch, which was in the possession of King’s College, London, and the various Ataide documents in Harvard’s Houghton Library. I had an invaluable and wonderfully stimulating meeting with him – and came away amazed at his incredible grasp of detail and grateful for his generous willingness to share what he knew.

A couple of months later I received another letter from him asking if I could help solve an intriguing mystery. He explained that back in April 1962 he had

received, out of the blue, a letter from a Captain E. MacRobert, purportedly of the Melbourne suburb of Beaumaris, who had described himself as the director of navigation in the Australian Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport. MacRobert had written (I quote Charles) ‘I have made an interesting discovery – the original personal journals of Matias de Albuquerque are in Melbourne ... in the hands of Mr Walter Birch of Coburg and are carefully preserved’. He went on to ask Charles if the documents would be of interest to him and undertook to send him a list of them. Boxer said he had written back ‘at once’ saying he was extremely interested; but added that he had received no reply to his letter and had heard nothing more from the mysterious MacRobert since.<sup>27</sup>

Both Boxer and I knew that if genuine ‘personal journals’ of Matias de Albuquerque – who was viceroy at Goa in 1591-1597 – had indeed turned up in Melbourne they would constitute a unique and potentially invaluable source for a 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese viceroy. I therefore immediately agreed to follow up MacRobert’s claims, as soon as I got back to Australia. This I did – but by then the MacRobert letter was already seven years old, and the trail had grown cold. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to track down either the mysterious MacRobert, or Birch – and the story began to look increasingly improbable. I informed Charles and he wrote back, ‘I quite agree with you that the alleged Birch-Albuquerque connection... [sounds] remarkably phoney’. He added that, ‘we should dismiss the whole story as a piece of nonsense, unless something unexpectedly turns up’.<sup>28</sup>

After the disappointment over Matias de Albuquerque Boxer continued to exchange occasional letters with me through the 1970s. Looking over this correspondence now it is interesting to see how his attitude became more relaxed and informal over time. Initially he had always addressed me, somewhat formally, as ‘Mr Disney’; but at some point in the 1970s it had become simply ‘Disney’ (‘surely we can dispense with handles by now’, he wrote in one letter), and finally ‘Anthony’ or just plain ‘Tony’. Similarly, having initially always signed off with ‘yours sincerely, C R. Boxer’, he began to do so with just ‘CRB’ and, finally, simply ‘yours ever, Charles’.

There was a particular flurry of letters exchanged between us in 1978-1979 – mostly to do with a visit

to Australia I was trying to organise for him. It was to take place in July and August 1979, and he would visit Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Armidale, Adelaide and Perth, in the course of three to four hectic weeks, giving a lecture, a seminar or both in each city. He had never been to Australia before – but it was something he had long wanted to do. He was keen to add Hobart because, as he explained, it was ‘where my mother was born’. But he also realised he was committing to a very demanding schedule for someone of his age (he was then in his mid 70s).<sup>29</sup> He worried about the paper he was to give to the La Trobe University Institute of Latin American Studies, because it had to be on a Latin American subject. (In the end he settled for a presentation about English merchants and the Brazil trade.<sup>30</sup>) His other major concern – and mine – was getting enough funding. ‘I shall arrive’ he said, ‘at Melbourne, God willing, on 22 July, with my begging bowl extended’. But he need not have worried, as the funds were cobbled together for him – and although the tour *was* strenuous he appreciated it immensely. Back home he commented, as late as October, ‘I am still very euphoric about my trip to Australia. I enjoyed every minute’. In another letter he wrote, ‘I wish I was back “Down Under”’.<sup>31</sup> As always, he particularly enjoyed the parties where he took characteristic pleasure in singing songs. Of course, he himself had a rich repertoire, and he quickly found a kindred spirit in one of the local minstrels whom he insisted on referring to as ‘Burle Ives’.<sup>32</sup>

Soon after his Australia trip Charles was travelling again, this time to the Gulf. He managed a two-day visit to Muscat, which he claimed was ‘very difficult and took a lot of doing’ because of the political tensions there. He also visited Abu Dhabi, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka and Japan in late 1979 and 1980. Clearly, creeping age notwithstanding, he was still in fine fettle. In 1980 I was on study leave in Europe, during which my family and I had the privilege of calling on Charles at home in Little Gaddesden. He provided a warm welcome, a good lunch and a box of chocolates for the children. I then spent the afternoon working on transcribing material on the Conde de Linhares from the Boxer manuscript collection while the family went to the zoo. After that we continued to exchange letters through the early 1980s. Charles hated English winters and complained much about the weather. ‘After the biggest blizzard which ever hit this country’, he

complained, there was ‘chronic disruption, panic and confusion’, adding somewhat illogically, ‘It happens at least once a year of course, since 1066, if not before’.<sup>33</sup> A couple of years later he wrote about having ‘our hottest summer here on record’, adding ‘everyone else complains of the heat [but] it is certainly preferable to the ice, cold, and snow of the winter’. Then, in reply to question I had asked him about Lisbon, he assured me, rather mischievously, that the congress I had just missed there ‘was a total and utter shambles, with over 700 people (most of them concubines and hangers-on) and very badly organised’.<sup>34</sup> On a more serious note he had recently told me in another letter that he had ‘just got back from a month in Red China’ where he had ‘revisited old haunts I knew in the 1930s from the great wall to Canton’.<sup>35</sup>

The following year I got the first real hint that perhaps, at last, age was seriously catching up with him. He told me in July that he had had to cancel a proposed trip to Manila because ‘I had to go into hospital for an eye implant and cannot focus properly’. He was waiting for new spectacles ‘which take time in this benighted country’ – i.e. three to four weeks, as opposed to, ‘48 hours in Hong Kong’.<sup>36</sup> But he must have got the spectacles eventually – and they would have helped, because he wrote in his Christmas letter for that year (1984) that he had had a ‘delightful trip’ to Macao (via Hong Kong). Furthermore, he expected to be in Lisbon in 1985.<sup>37</sup> He had by then, of course, reached the age of eighty.

Based permanently at Ringshall End, his English home in Hertfordshire, Charles continued to travel through the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991 he returned, for the final time, to his beloved Macao for the Sixth International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History. He did not present a paper; but the University of Macau, taking advantage of his presence, bestowed on him an honorary degree. Meanwhile, in a moving conference tribute, the senior French scholar, Professor Genevieve Bouchon, in the name of all the participants, said simply, ‘We never shall forget the help Professor Charles Boxer has generously given to each one of us’. In 1996, seventy years after his first article was published and now at the age of ninety-two, having produced over 350 scholarly publications – nearly all of them about Portuguese or Dutch global expansion – Charles finally published what appears to have been his last scholarly work.<sup>38</sup> The following June, when he



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In 1991 the University of Macau awarded Charles Boxer an honorary doctorate.

was aged ninety-three, all the participants in the Vasco da Gama Quincentenary Conference that convened in Melbourne and Fremantle signed a collective statement extending to him their ‘warmest greetings’ and ‘highest esteem’.<sup>39</sup> But by this time he had become very frail, his eyesight deteriorating almost to the point of blindness, his short-term memory increasingly unreliable.

Charles finally died on 27 April 2000, at the age of ninety-six. There were many obituaries, most of them laudatory. To cite just a few, António de Figueiredo, writing in *The Guardian*, described him as ‘one of the best British historians of early European overseas expansion’, adding that he was ‘a larger than life figure’ and ‘a man of great sensitivity’. Geoffrey Scammell

called him one of the greatest, most original and most remarkable figures in the world of learning. A third obituarist – Charles’s devoted friend, John Cummins – praised his ‘enormous but unhurried energy’ and his, ‘lucid, sharp, precise mind’. There was, however, one unpleasant dissident note. Hywel Williams, writing in *The Guardian* on 24 February 2001 indeed extolled Charles as ‘a fine soldier and a brilliant historian’ and ‘a magisterial figure’ – but then, astonishingly and without citing any evidence, went on to suggest that ‘with all his gifts, Boxer may also have been a traitor – a man who betrayed his fellow officers in a Japanese run POW camp in Hong Kong, in a way that undermined the entire British intelligence system in south-east Asia’.<sup>40</sup> The outcry that followed from Charles’s friends, family, former students and colleagues was immediate. Many wrote reviews and letters in Boxer’s defence, with particularly powerful refutations coming from Dauril Alden, Charles’s meticulous biographer, who knew the Boxer story better than anyone else, and from Kenneth Maxwell of the Council of Foreign Relations. Williams, who had apparently been relying purely on speculation and innuendo, was unable to produce any credible evidence in support of his sinister accusation. To those who came to Boxer’s defence when Boxer could obviously no longer defend himself he made no response but, having dropped his bomb-shell, apparently just walked away.

I last saw Charles at the 1991 Macao seminar referred to above. He was there to be honoured, not to give presentations – and he was well looked after. By then his letters had more or less dried up. Curiously, the last letter of his I actually saw was addressed to a student who had written to him for advice about his topic. Charles had replied, in a shaky hand, ‘Dear Mr X, thank you for your letter. Unfortunately I am too old (90+), too ill, and too preoccupied with other matters ... to cope with your problems. However, you seem to be on the right lines and should be able to produce something useful.’ Clearly, he was ready to hang up his boots at last – as he surely had a right to do. However, he was still doing what he could to encourage those starting out on their careers. That was one of the great things about him. **RC**

NOTES

- 1

For this brief overview of Boxer’s early formation see the essential Dauril Alden, *Charles R. Boxer: An Uncommon Life. Soldier, Historian, Teacher, Collector, Traveller* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2001), especially pp. 28-29, 44 and 47.
- 2

For Boxer’s experience as an intelligence officer in Hong Kong and subsequently as a POW see Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, chapters 6 to 8.
- 3

Boxer did publish four items including *Macau na Época da Restauração* (Macao: Imprensa Nacional, 1942), and another work, *Subsídios para a História dos Capitães-Gerais e Governadores de Macau (1557-1770)* (Macao: Imprensa Nacional, 1944). But these had almost certainly been submitted to their publishers *before* Hong Kong fell.
- 4

Boxer had recently acquired one of only two known copies of this manuscript. A second edition of the work, with a new preface by Benjamin Videira Pires SJ, was published under the title of *Ásia Sínica e Japónica* in two volumes in Macao in 1988.
- 5

C. R. Boxer, ‘Anglo-Persian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf 1615-1635’, in *Chapters in Anglo-Portuguese Relations*, edited by Edgar Prestage. (Watford: Voss & Michael, 1935), p. 59.
- 6

Ibid, pp. 285-304.
- 7

Cf. Blair Worden, ‘Trevor-Roper at a hundred’, *The Oxford Historian*, no. 11, 2014, p. 14.
- 8

For a fuller review of Boxer’s major publications during this period see Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, especially pp. 341-355.
- 9

C. R. Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East. 1550-1770* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948), ‘Introduction’, p. x. For Boxer’s biographical writings see Anthony Disney, ‘Charles Boxer as a Biographer: A Preliminary Evaluation’, *Anais de História de Além-Mar*, Vol. 4, 2003, pp. 9-28.
- 10

Cited in Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 348.
- 11

C. R. Boxer, *Salvador de Sá and the Struggle for Brazil and Angola 1602-1686* (London: Athlone Press, 1952, p. x).
- 12

The two Portuguese authors of these narratives were Galeote Pereira and Gaspar da Cruz OP, while the Spaniard was the Augustinian friar Martín de Rada.
- 13

On page 40 of *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1415-1825* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) Boxer made the comment that in Angola ‘the prevailing social pattern was (and is) one of conscious white superiority.’ He then added ‘Captain António de Oliveira Cadornega, who lived for over forty years in Angola, is a safer guide in this respect than Dr. António de Oliveira Salazar who has never set foot in Africa.’ (Cadornega wrote a history of the ‘Angolan wars’ in the early 1680s, after spending some forty years in the West African interior).
- 14

The sad and very public breakdown of friendly relations between Boxer and Cortesão at this time is well narrated in Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, pp. 369-386.
- 15

Ibid., pp. 386-387.
- 16

Cf. the interesting essay by Rui Ramos, ‘A erudição lusitanista perante a guerra (c.1960-c.1970): Algumas observações sobre a polémica entre Charles Boxer e Armando Cortesão’, in *Os Descobrimentos Portugueses no Mundo do Língua Inglesa 1880-1972/The Portuguese Discoveries in the English-Speaking World 1880-1972*, coord. Teresa Pinto Coelho (Lisbon: Edições Calibri, 2005), pp. 189-218.
- 17

Charles Boxer, ‘Discurso do representante da Grã-Bretanha’, in *Congresso Internacional de História dos Descobrimentos. Actas* (Lisbon: Comissão Executiva das Comemorações do V Centenário da Morte do Infante D. Henrique, 1960), Vol. 1, pp. 75-77.
- 18

C. R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics. The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510-1800* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).
- 19

See C. R. Boxer, *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo: A Portuguese Merchant Adventurer in South East Asia, 1624-1667* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 113 pp.
- 20

Published by Oxford University Press in New York, 1975.
- 21

C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil 1624-1654* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 273.
- 22

Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 577. However, early on Boxer did write several short pieces on Vieira, including a short booklet entitled *A Great Luso-Brazilian Figure: Padre António Vieira, S.J., 1608-1697* (London: The Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1957).
- 23

In July 1975 Boxer wrote that he still remained committed to the Alorna biography but had been forced to put it aside for a year or two ‘having so many other irons in the fire to finish off first’. CRB to ARD, 30 June 1975. Nearly three years later he admitted, ‘I have made no progress with Alorna as I have been side-tracked cataloguing all the State Papers Portugal 1661-1780 in the PRO ...’. CRB to ARD, 28 May 1978.
- 24

CRB to ARD, 3 November 1964.
- 25

CRB to ARD, 17 July 1965.
- 26

CRB to ARD, 10 March 1969.
- 27

CRB to ARD, 11 May 1969.
- 28

CRB to ARD, 21 June 1970.
- 29

CRB to ARD, 8 August 1978.
- 30

See CRB to ARD, 17 May 1979. This paper was later published in the Institute’s Occasional Paper Series, under the title of *The English and the Portuguese Brazil Trade, 1660-1780: Some Problems and Pesronalities* (Melbourne: Institute of Latin American Studies, La Trobe University, 1981). It has become quite a rarity – and does not even appear in the standard published listing of Boxer’s publications – *Homenagem ao Professor Charles Ralph Boxer/A Tribute to Professor Charles Ralph Boxer* (Figueira da Foz: CEMAR, 1999).
- 31

CRB to ARD, 29 August 1979 and 15 October 1979.
- 32

Later I had to contact ‘Burle Ives’ to get from him the precise words of the satirical Australian song ‘There’ll always be a Menzies’ that Charles wished to perform at home at a Christmas party.
- 33

CRB to ARD, 23 December 1981.
- 34

CRB to ARD, 30 December 1983.
- 35

CRB to ARD, 16 December 1982.
- 36

CRB to ARD, 21 January 1984.
- 37

CRB to ARD, 4 December 1984.
- 38

His last work appears to have been ‘Some Reflections on Macau, Nagasaki and the Maritime Silk Trade in the Late 16<sup>th</sup> and Early 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries’. *Tenri Journal of Religion*, no. 24, March 1996, pp. 79-84. See Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 584.
- 39

Reported in Alden, *Charles R. Boxer*, p. 504.
- 40

Hywel Williams, ‘Secret history of a hero’. *The Guardian*, 24 February 2001.