

PART 1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 1. Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the culmination of more than 50 years of work on the archaeological site of the frigate *Santo António de Tanná*, wrecked in Mombasa in 1697. The ship was built in 1681 in Bassien (also Bassaim), a former Portuguese possession in India, located on the edge of the present-day metropolis of Mumbai. It was part of an effort to overcome the Portuguese shortage of ships in the Indian Ocean through local shipbuilding. After more than a decade of serving the *Estado da Índia*, the name by which the Portuguese dominions east of the Cape of Good Hope were known, the frigate made a voyage to Portugal, and arrived back in Goa in 1696. As soon as it returned to India, the ship was sent to the east coast of Africa in a small fleet to relieve Fort Jesus, the Portuguese fortress of Mombasa, besieged by the Omani Arabs. In this process, the commanding officer also travelled to Mozambique, as he had been appointed captain of that region. The attempt to rescue Mombasa ended tragically, not only because the Portuguese forces capitulated, but also the frigate sank in the harbour. This tangled story, which links the Asian, African and European continents in the first centuries of modern colonization, is analysed in Part 1 of this book, where the ship and its context are studied through the references of written documentation.

The wreck of the *Santo António de Tanná* remained practically untouched until the 1970s. After an initial operation in 1970 and a survey in 1976, four major excavation campaigns were carried out between 1977 and 1980 by a joint team from the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) and the National Museum of Kenya, led by Robin Piercy and Hamo Sassoon. During the four excavation seasons, a significant part of the ship's hull was identified; along with more than 7,000 objects related to the vessel's operation, life on board and commercial activity. This was followed by years of conservation work and study of the collected materials, as well as the analysis of all the documentation produced. Several researchers from around the world were recruited to investigate this unique site.

The *Santo António de Tanná* was the first archaeological excavation of a Portuguese shipwreck and occurred at a time when little was known or understood about wrecks of this type and their associated material culture. By the late 1970s, only a handful of post-medieval shipwrecks had been excavated by archaeologists. The prime example was the *Vasa* (1628) (Cerderlund and Hocker, 2006; Hocker, 2024), which had been raised in Stockholm Harbour in 1961; followed up by the *Mary Rose* (1545) (Gardiner and Allen, 2005), which was not to be recovered until 1982. In Australia, excavation of the VOC ships *Vergulde Draeck* (1656) and *Batavia* (1629) had been completed by 1975, but in conditions quite different from those in the Mombasa Harbour. The VOC shipwreck *Amsterdam* (1748) was discovered in 1969 and a small excavation and survey were undertaken, though major excavation work on that site only began in the 1980s. Excavation of the *San Juan de Pasajes* shipwreck (1565), the Red Bay shipwreck in Canada (Grenier, *et al.*, 2007), took place between 1978 and 1985.

Thus, the excavators of the *Santo António de Tanná* were faced, in 1977, with the problem of how to excavate a very large, late seventeenth-century Portuguese shipwreck. The excavation project and the methods developed to resolve the difficulties encountered are described in detail in Part 2, as well as aspects

of the investigation and conservation processes undertaken after the fieldwork. This knowledge, it is thought, could be a useful resource to trace the history of nautical and maritime archaeology and how methodological problems were solved in the past; with sometimes very complex methods, yet achieving precise information, particularly in site maps and spatial distribution of evidence.

One of the great challenges was the study of the structure of the ship, since it was not recovered and the remains lie buried in the harbour of Mombasa, opposite Fort Jesus; it is situated in an area protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Therefore, Part 2 includes Chapter 7, where a methodology of recording the hull is discussed. Part 3 Chapter 9 Developing a 3D Model; and Chapter 10, in a Theoretical Reconstruction, describes the construction of the *Santo António de Tanná* and its contribution to Iberian ship construction.

Part 4 specifically focuses on elements of the ship, including rigging, pumping, fitting and decoration. What stands out is the great originality of the nautical structure, very different from the European frigates of the time. It seems to be a local adaptation to the needs of the *Estado da Índia*, in a lighter, faster and more manoeuvrable ship, with a reinforced structure against artillery and capable of carrying some cargo.

Subsequent chapters deal with the artefact collection. In some respects, these are the most interesting as, for the first time, a collection of late seventeenth-century material is assembled from a Portuguese ship operating in the Indian Ocean. This is not a ship involved in the *Carreira da Índia* trade, but operating under the *Estado da Índia*. Consequently, the artefacts recovered from the site have a strong bias towards Indian Ocean goods and personal possessions. Many of the items have not been seen before and, as they were quite unusual, the process of identifying them was difficult. Given that the frigate was built for, and in the service of the Portuguese Crown, it reveals 'a mosaic of material cultures rooted within the broader context of a late seventeenth-century Indian Ocean region'. It also demonstrates 'triangular identities' that unite three distinct cultural universes under the Portuguese flag: Asia, with particular emphasis on north-west India; the Iberian Peninsula; and the east coast of Africa (Blot, 2015: 79). The archaeological remains recovered are also indicative of the social organization and hierarchy on board. These vessels were true micro-societies that replicated the habits, practices and beliefs of their areas of origin; here, one would find people from different socio-economic backgrounds, including a series of specialized officers, soldiers and sailors, from nobleman to the indigent. This differentiation had a spatiality on board, observable in certain finds from the frigate.

Part 5 is dedicated to the ship's equipment, namely objects that ensured its navigation and defence. Part 6 addresses collective daily life on board, with special emphasis on food storage, and the crew's cooking and eating. As some authors point out, some of these artefacts may also have been trading goods in the valuable commercial trade between Asia and Africa. Part 7 covers personal items, elements that mostly refer to the elites on board, including their clothes, jewellery and entertainment objects. Finally, Part 8 deals with the cargo and the more commercial aspects, focusing on the large volume of African timber from the vessel's passage through Mozambique. Even though it was a fundamentally

military expedition, it was corrupted by the hybrid nature of the Portuguese administration at the time, where public and private management often crossed paths.

Part 9 provides a translation of one of the key historical documents relating to the three reliefs of the siege of Fort Jesus, its final fall and the loss of the *Santo António de Tanná* (the *Historia de Mombaça*) and some details of the key characters in the story. Chapter 43 includes some additional notes on the historical research relating to the building of the *Santo António de Tanná* in India and the artefacts.

The editors of this work are naturally pleased to finally bring out a joint publication on the archaeological site of the wreck of the frigate *Santo António de Tanná*. Of course, many works have been published on the site over the decades. This includes excavation reports, papers on various aspects of the working methodology or the archaeological study of part of the finds. Master's theses have also been carried out on the subject, particularly at Texas A&M University, but recently also in Portugal. While this work is worthy and has helped to advance research, it is no substitute for a overarching vision of the site and a detailed study of all the archaeological remains.

The saddest and most disturbing part of this story is that this excavation is one of only five Portuguese shipwrecks involved in the *Carreira da Índia* trade that have been excavated in an archaeological manner; this is in contrast to about 65 that have been looted or salvaged (see Table 4 on page 5). The same is true for the northern European shipwrecks of which only a handful of sites have been excavated appropriately. Unfortunately, the material from all these plundered sites has been sold on the antiquities market and the material that was of no commercial value was discarded. Precious information has been lost in both circumstances, as has been demonstrated in the recent publication by Green and Paterson (2021) showing what can be learned from the study of material that has been recovered in an archaeological manner using new technology.

Readers need to be aware that this publication has had a long gestation. Some of the authors have died; some of the chapters were written as term papers in the Nautical Archaeology Programme at Texas A&M University; others have come from academic research carried out in Portugal, as mentioned above; and the people who worked on this site have used different approaches. Some chapters were started at one time by a person and were only finished much later by another. Furthermore, research methodology on these issues has evolved considerably over the decades, as has the progress of science in several of these areas. The volume of bibliography available on some subjects has increased dramatically in the last half-century. From all this, it follows that many of the

chapters were out of date when the present editors started working on the report. Therefore, it has been a priority of the editors to update as much as possible whilst interfering as little as necessary with the authors' original words.

The process has been arduous and, in some instances, it has not been fully achieved. It is acknowledged that the bibliography may not be fully current in all aspects. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the length of time that has lapsed from the start of this project until now—which, while not perfect, the work is still eminently worthy of publication—the editors have opted for a compromise by drawing a line under the research to be published in this volume. The research possibilities are inexhaustible in cases with as much potential as this site, and it is necessary to 'pause' the process at this point and to share the results with the community.

Notably, some groups of materials have not had a comprehensive analysis, either simply because they could not be properly identified or because, despite so many decades of commitment to this site, it was not possible to find specialists who would carry out this task in an appropriate time frame. Even so, all the finds have been published, so that this book is the repository of everything that was found and worked on at that wreck site. We still believe that archaeological sites should be fully published, even if in some respects the research is not consolidated.

The chapters are generally made up of an introduction, outlining the state of research of each theme or material type and the aspects of past life concerning them, especially focusing on their period and context. This is followed by a catalogue in which all the materials are published, with their descriptive elements, photographs and drawings. Finally, there is a conclusion, in which the authors reflect on the significance of the archaeological finds in the context of the frigate *Santo António de Tanná*.

The work contained in these volumes is the result of the efforts of countless individuals over a period of more than 50 years and it is incumbent on the editors to acknowledge every one of those who participated in the project or helped to bring this book to its conclusion.

For those who have been involved in the decades-long journey with the *Santo António de Tanná* archaeological project, it has been one of the most important ventures in our lives as well as for the institutions associated with it. From the accounts of numerous participants, it also had a significant impact on their careers. It is hoped that this book is recognized as an important advance in science such as the site deserves, and may it also be a starting point for the cultural encounter between peoples who have long faced each other on the roads of history.