

Estado da India

As for you others, who usurp the name
Envoy of God, as was Thomas, tell me:
If you are missionaries, why do you not
Go forth to preach the holy faith?

CAMÕES, *The Lusiads*

1 VASCO DA GAMA (1469?-1524)

The dark and threatening sea was now behind us:
we had cut through its chains. As the green shores
came into focus, our caravels held their breath.

Closer the land broke into sounds and colors,
and we took in the spicy fumes of
cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and pepper.

But gold was quite another thing.
In our quest for it, we left no city standing:
we burned entire villages to the ground.

If any native dared to stand up to us,
we blew the poor bastard's head off.
In order to spread the faith among the heathen,

we spared neither mosque nor temple.
We made cathedrals rise from their ashes.
Or how else do we enter the kingdom of God?

2 AFONSO DE ALBUQUERQUE (1453-1515)

So many bits and pieces of Portugal you see here —
in Fontainhas, among these bumpy cobblestones
and in these squares, in these houses with wrought-iron

balconies and tiled roofs, tattooed with bougainvillea;
in these hillsides dotted with a tangle of churches —
that tell of another Estremadura! Who would look

now for that rusty old needle, Afonso the Great,
in the unkempt Iberian haystack? Who would remember
his dying words: *Out of step with mankind by virtue*

*of my love for the King, and out of step with the King
by virtue of my love for mankind?* So many bits and
pieces of life you see here of a battered Portugal!

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NOTE. Estado da India was the Portuguese state in India (1510-1961).