

*“Um Bom Homem de Tratar”:
Piero Strozzi, a Florentine
in Portuguese Asia, 1510-1522*

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The Florentine association with early Portuguese expansion in the seas of Asia is well-known. Unlike the Venetians, whose control of the spice trade to Europe was directly threatened by the Portuguese endeavour to bring Asian goods via the Cape route, the Florentine merchant-banker families of the XVIth century participated with enthusiasm in financing Portuguese trade, as well as in the redistribution of Asian goods once they reached Lisbon. In the late XVth and early XVIth century, the names of Florentines such as Bartolomeu Marchionni, Girolamo Sernigi and Luca Giraldi appear closely associated with trade on the Cape route, as do those of others, perhaps less famous, like Filippo Gualterotti or Girolamo Frescobaldi.¹

Many of the merchant houses which participated in the India trade also sent agents out to Asia; the presence of Florentines on the ships of the Portuguese *Carreira da Índia* is thus visible almost from the very first voyage. The correspondence of these agents

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¹ On the Florence-Portugal association, see CHARLES VERLINDEN, “La colonie italienne de Lisbonne et le développement de l’économie métropolitaine et coloniale portugaise”, in *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori*, Vol. 1 Milan 1957; P. PERAGALLO, *Cenni intorno alla colonia italiana in Portogallo nei secoli XIV, XV & XVI*, 2nd edition, Genova 1907; finally, the useful overview in VITORINO MAGALHÃES GODINHO, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, 4 volumes, 2nd edition, Lisbon 1981-84, vol. II, pp. 162, 165, Vol. III, pp. 53-54, 190-204, *passim*.

with their principals, and the summaries made at Lisbon by the Italian merchants of these accounts, have come to serve as an important supplementary source for the early history of trade on the Cape route, and of Portuguese expansion in Asia.² Of Florentines to be encountered in early XVIth century Asia, the most frequently cited names are those of Giovanni da Empoli, Andrea Corsali and Girolamo Sernigi. More recently, the researches of Virginia Rau have brought to prominence the curious case of a Florentine (son-in-law of Bartolomeu Marchionni) who was in Asia from 1508, and who actually served as Portuguese factor at Goa for two extended periods, from 1510 to 1515, and again from 1518 to 1521.³ The activities of this entrepreneur, Francesco Corbinelli, were diverse; as yet unpublished Portuguese documents indicate, for example, that he participated in the Goa-Ormuz trade, through a relative and intermediary, Parigi Corbinelli.⁴

The present brief essay concerns itself with one of the more interesting and neglected Florentine figures in early Portuguese Asia — a certain Piero Strozzi. In the present century, one of the few historians who has devoted any attention to him is Marco Spallanzani, in a recent, masterly survey of Florentine sources on the Florence — Portugal — Asia triangle.⁵ Prior to this, however, there are mentions in the XIXth century writings of G. Canestrini

² Cf. CARMEN M. RADULET, MARIA EMÍLIA MADEIRA SANTOS & LUÍS FILIPE THOMAZ, "Fontes Italianas para a história das viagens à Índia", paper presented to the *Fourth International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History*, Lisbon, November 1985.

³ See VIRGÍNIA RAU, "Um Florentino ao serviço da expansão ultramarina portuguesa: Francisco Corbinelli", in *Memórias do Centro de Estudos de Marinha*, Lisbon, Vol. IV, 1974, pp. 107-141; also published as "Un florentin au service de l'expansion portugaise: Francesco Corbinelli", in *Fatti e idee di storia economica nei secoli XII-XX*, Bologna 1977.

⁴ Cf. *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* Lisbon, (henceforth ANTT), Núcleo Antigo, no. 609 "Livro da receita e despesa da Nao Santa Maria do Monte q' foi pa Ormuz em Janeiro de 1520", fragment.

⁵ MARCO SPALLANZANI, "Fiorentini e portoghesi in Asia all'inizio del cinquecento attraverso le fonti archivistiche fiorentine", in *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, Volume to commemorate the 10th death anniversary of Federigo Melis, Florence, 1985, especially pp. 329-30.

and of Amat di San-Filippo, and finally, in 1895, the comprehensive biographical study of Strozzi by Gustavo Uzielli.⁶ It is thus with some justice that Spallanzani describes this particular merchant as a figure, "who in this century has been almost completely forgotten".⁷ The present study hence attempts to recapitulate Uzielli's principal conclusions, correcting them in the light of more recent research, and also supplementing them with records on Strozzi in the Portuguese archives and chronicles of the XVIth century.

Piero, son of Andrea Strozzi, was born in Florence in March 1483. Although the Strozzi (together with the Martelli, Riccardi, Salviati, Pazzi and the Capponi) were amongst the more distinguished and prosperous families of Renaissance Florence, Andrea di Carlo Strozzi belonged to a branch possessed of at best middling resources. On his death in the 1480s, Andrea's father, Carlo di Piero, left a fortune of no more than about 1700 *fiorini d'oro* to be shared among his six surviving children; this compares poorly with the estate of, say, Filippo Strozzi, who on his death in 1491 left investments in commerce and banking worth 35,000 *fiorini* and a similar sum in cash for the completion of the Palazzo Strozzi.⁸ Thus, Piero Strozzi and his brothers had a far less sound start in life than did Filippo di Filippo Strozzi (son of the aforementioned Filippo), who married into the Medici family, gained favour under the Medici Pope Leo X and in France under Caterina de' Medici, only to die in mysterious circumstances in Florence in 1537, after

⁶ GUSTAVO UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi: Viaggiatore Fiorentino del secolo delle scoperte", in *Memorie della Società geografica italiana*, vol. V, Rome 1895, pp. 110-48, and references contained therein.

⁷ SPALLANZANI, "Fiorentini e portoghesi", *op. cit.*, p. 329, "Sempre in questi anni si colloca la figura di Piero Strozzi, un personaggio che alla fine del secolo scorso attrasse l'attenzione degli studiosi e che in questo secolo è stato invece quasi totalmente dimenticato".

⁸ Cf. UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* pp. 114-116; also RICHARD A. GOLDTHWAITE, "The Medici Bank and the world of Florentine Capitalism", *Past and Present*, No. 114, February 1987, pp. 3-31, especially p. 16.

falling out with Duke Alessandro de' Medici.⁹ Andrea Strozzi's family of eleven, from two marriages, comprised four sons and seven daughters. Of the sons, the eldest, Marco, entered the church, and little is known of him. The remaining three sons were forced to seek their fortune outside Florence.

As early as 1497, Piero had been emancipated by his father (at the age of fourteen) and sent to France, where he in all probability engaged in business, either at Avignon or at Lyons. He seems to have returned to Florence in the early years of the XVIth century, and is seen associated with the scions of prosperous, pro-Medici families, notably Prinzivalle della Stuffa and Benedetto Buondelmonti. Uzielli speculates that his association with persons far more wealthy than himself might have fired Piero with the ambition of making a quick fortune. Whatever the reasons, he seems to have left Florence in 1509 against his father's wishes, to make his way to Lisbon and thence to India. His brothers remained behind: one, Carlo — who was later to be his heir — went first to Palermo, and later to Lyons, where he was employed as agent in the 1510s in the prosperous Florentine house of Gondi, while the other, Smeraldo, was sent to Avignon. At Avignon was Andrea's brother, Lorenzo, who found favour under the Medici papacy of Leo X, being made papal treasurer at Avignon in 1513.¹⁰

Andrea Strozzi's extensive network of relatives was of some use in helping Piero enter the India trade. One of Andrea's first cousins on his mother's side was Girolamo Sernigi, who had been involved with trade on the Cape route almost from its inception.¹¹ It is even possible that he commanded a vessel to India on João da Nova's fleet of 1501, using the soubriquet of Fernando Vinete.

⁹ For a study of his career, see MELISSA MERIAM BULLARD, *Filippo Strozzi and the Medici: Favour and Finance in Sixteenth Century Florence and Rome*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1980.

¹⁰ This account is largely derived from UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.*

¹¹ Cf. CARMEN M. RADULET, "Girolamo Sernigi e a importância económica do Oriente", *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, 1984, pp. 67-77.

Again, in the fleet sent out to India in 1503 under the Albuquerque, there was an investment on Sernigi account; this was the fleet on which Giovanni da Empoli made his first voyage to Asia. Sernigi's most ambitious enterprise was however that of 1510 — indicative of his enormous influence at that time in the Portuguese court of D. Manuel. Two fleets were sent out in March 1510 to Asia, the one commanded by Gonçalo de Sequeira and comprising seven vessels. The other fleet, of four vessels, was commanded by Diogo Mendes de Vasconcelos, and lifted anchor from the estuary of the Tejo on 20th March. The factor of the fleet was Vinete Cerniche (whom C.M. Radulet identifies with Girolamo Sernigi), while the captain of one of the vessels was a certain Dinis Cerniche, who one can plausibly interpret to be Girolamo's brother Dionigi Sernigi. The other two vessels were captained by Pero Quaresma and Baltasar da Silva, and the fleet's purpose was to proceed to Melaka, there to procure pepper and spices.

There were numerous Florentines on board the vessels: besides the two Sernigi brothers mentioned above were two of their nephews, Cipriano and Francesco, and others included Giovanni da Empoli, Benedetto Pucci, Leonardo Nardi, as well as the subject of this essay — Piero Strozzi.¹² before embarking from Lisbon, Piero had requested and been sent by his father 50 *ducati d'oro* through his uncle at Avignon. This is unlikely to have been the sum total of his investible fortune on arriving at India, for he had earlier borrowed money from his father (when leaving Florence). However, in view of the limited means available to the family, it is also unlikely that the sum he carried was much more substantial.

The fleet of Diogo Mendes arrived off the west coast of India in August 1510. As has been noted, the Florentines on board the ship had contracted with D. Manuel to permit them to open trade with

¹² RADULET, *ibid.*, pp. 75-76. Also see GASPAR CORREIA *Lendas da Índia*, ed. M. Lopes de Almeida, reprint Porto 1975, 4 Volumes, Vol. II, pp. 131-132, 139-140, *passim*. Finally, see SPALLANZANI, "Fiorentini e portoghesi", *op. cit.* pp. 325-26, 329-30.

Melaka. However, on reaching India, they encountered a difficult situation: The Governor of Portuguese India, Afonso de Albuquerque, was planning an attack on Goa and summarily demanded the services of the men and vessels of Diogo Mendes' fleet. These were given him with some reluctance, and thus it was that Piero Strozzi came to participate in the bloody Portuguese assault on Goa in November 1510.

In his only extant letter, written from Goa to his father, on 20 December 1510, he describes the engagement in graphic terms.

"And afterwards, together, with the aid of God, we went to capture a land in these parts, which is very strong, and populous, and large, where there was a castle and fortress; where in guard of it there were eight to ten thousand persons, with more than 200 pieces of artillery, where, by the grace of God, we entered by force of arms; and to enter it we killed around two thousand persons of those who resisted us. And these were almost all Turks, and renegade Christians of every sort; among whom were Venetians and Genoese in the largest numbers. Then, we entered the land, and no one was spared, neither male, nor female, pregnant women and droves of whores. And this because this land had always been a shelter for thieves and evildoers; both on sea and on land; and had always been an enemy of the Christian name, and above all of the Portuguese; and the land was wholly put to sack and fire and flame, which is called Ghoa".¹³

While storming the fortress-walls, however, Strozzi was wounded by an arrow, and as he naively declares, he was hence unable to loot anything, unlike his companions. The letter, brief as

¹³ "Lettera di Piero Strozzi, scritta dal Castello di Goa il 20 dicembre 1510 a Andrea suo padre in Firenze", published in UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", op. cit. pp. 141-42. The same document is reprinted in R.A. de Bulhão Pato & H. Lopes de Mendonça, eds. *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, 7 volumes, Lisbon 1884-1935, vol. VI, pp. 408-410. Compare this with the account in CORREIA, *Lendas da Índia*, vol. II, pp. 146-160 and in *Comentários de Afonso dalbuquerque*, ed. Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, 2 vols., Lisbon 1973, vol. II, pp. 11-12, where it is claimed that in the massacre that ensued, "entre homens, mulheres e meninos, morreriam passante de seis mil".

it is, is remarkable for its mixed tone. Passages full of crusading fervour, replete with references to "these infidel dogs", who are so treacherous that they "do not use anything but poisoned arrows", alternate with other passages, full of admiration for the acumen of the Muslim merchant. Thus, "We (i.e. Florentines) believe ourselves to be the most astute men that one can encounter, and the people here surpass us in everything. And there are rich Moorish merchants worth 400,000 to 500,000 ducats. And they can do better calculations by memory than we can do with the pen. And they make fun of us, and it seems to me they are superior to us in countless things, except with sword in hand, which they cannot resist".

In this letter, Strozzi also declares his intention to proceed in April 1511 to Melaka, a voyage from which he hoped to make some 2,000 ducats. He makes no mention, though, of a major disagreement which occurred in December on this very account, between Albuquerque and the captains of the fleet of Diogo Mendes de Vasconcelos. The latter had insisted, once the capture of Goa had been accomplished, that they would proceed to Melaka to fulfil their contract with D. Manuel, and obtain their cargo of spices. Particularly vociferous in this view were the Sernigis; Dionigi Sernigi is hence strongly castigated by Albuquerque's apologist (the author of the *Commentaries*), who describes him as a foreigner who was "more concerned with his profit than with honour".¹⁴ The vessels of Vasconcelos' fleet hence attempted to depart against Albuquerque's will, but they were forcibly detained, and legal proceedings mounted against those on the fleet. As a result Girolamo Sernigi was clapped in irons, and sentenced to perpetual exile in the Atlantic island of São Tomé, while the masters and pilots of the other ships were sentenced to exile for life

¹⁴ CORREIA, *Lendas*, *ibid* pp. 170-71, *passim*; also see *Commentários*, *ibid*, Vol. II. pp. 58-65, in which we hear that, "Dinis Cerniche, como era estrangeiro, e queria tratar mais de seu proveito que de sua honra...".

¹⁵ RADULET, "Girolamo Sernigi e Oriente", *op. cit.* pp. 75-76.

in Brazil. Of these sentences, it is unlikely that Sernigi actually had to serve his out, and indeed it has been suggested that it was in part his dislike for Albuquerque which led to the latter's substitution, in 1515, by Lopo Soares.

Whatever his part in this tussle, Strozzi seems eventually to have proceeded to Melaka with Albuquerque's fleet of 1511. A letter written from Lisbon to Florence in January 1514 (and possibly written by one of his cousins), says of the attack on Melaka, "Piero Stroza, nephew of our Lorenzo... has behaved in this and every other engagement most valorously so that he is not only much beloved and esteemed by everyone but by the Captain-Major (i.e. Albuquerque) and his son".¹⁶ At this point, Strozzi's fundamental commercial purpose still lay in the exploitation of the spice trade, so that he seized the opportunities presented him in that direction. After the capture of Melaka, a series of exploratory voyages were organised from there to various parts. Some were in Portuguese fleets, while others were in vessels owned by *keling* merchants based at Melaka. Thus, in November 1511, the first official fleet left Melaka under the command of a certain António de Abreu, but it had already been preceded by a jong, fitted out by a partnership of the *keling* Nina Chatu and the Portuguese factor at Melaka, Rui de Araújo.¹⁷

It has been assumed by Uzielli, and by others following him, that Strozzi must have travelled to the eastern Archipelago on de Abreu's fleet, possibly in the Captain-Major's own *nau*, *Santa Catarina*. However, none of the three vessels in this armada actually succeeded in reaching the Moluccas, and instead followed

¹⁶ Anonymous letter from Lisbon to Fra Giovan Battista at Florence, dated 31 January, 1514, (1513, Florentine style) in ANGELO DE GUBERNATIS, *Storia dei viaggiatori italiani nelle Indie Orientali*, Leghorn, 1875, p. 379. This letter is cited in G. UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.*, pp. 120-21.

¹⁷ Cf. LUÍS FILIPE THOMAZ, "Maluco e Malaca", in A. TEIXEIRA DA MOTA (ed.), *A viagem de Fernão de Magalhães e a questão das Molucas*, Lisbon 1975, pp. 29-48, especially pp. 36-37. According to Thomaz, the jong was captained by a certain *nakhuda* Ismail; another version has it that the captain was a certain Khwaja Kirmani (Cf. *Commentários de Afonso de Albuquerque*, Vol. II, p. 183).

a route via Gresik to Ambon and Banda, returning thence to Melaka. On the other hand, in a letter written in January 1514 to his son, Andrea Strozzi mentions two letters he has received from Piero, the one written at Goa in December 1510, the other of January 1512 (which has unfortunately not survived), written from "the island where cloves originate" (nell'Isola dove nascano i Gherofani).¹⁸ Since, at this time, cloves were grown solely in the Moluccas, and not at Ambon or the Banda Islands, we may legitimately surmise that Strozzi travelled not in de Abreu's fleet, but in the other jong that had preceded it. Circumstantial support is lent to this hypothesis by a promissory note preserved in the Portuguese archives, showing that Strozzi owed the estate of Rui de Araújo 200 *Cruzados*.¹⁹

At any rate, whether he travelled with de Abreu or on the jong of *nakhuda* Ismail, Strozzi would appear to have returned to Melaka sometime in 1512. His activities between this time, and late 1513, are somewhat obscure. It is possible that he had returned to Goa by the end of 1512, but this is based on uncertain evidence.²⁰ We do know, however, that by the close of 1513, he was either in Cochin or Goa, for he was able to despatch some goods to Europe on the fleet of that year, through a fellow-Florentine, Giovanni da Empoli.²¹ These included a bale of unspecified goods, consigned to his brother, as well as some lac and precious stones, apparently on account of the estate of still another Florentine who had been in Asia, Giovanni Buonagrazia. The composition of this consign-

¹⁸ Letter from Andrea Strozzi at Florence, to his son Piero in the Indies, published in UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* p. 193.

¹⁹ ANTT, Corpo Cronológico, (henceforth CC) II/72/92, L.O.U. dated 23rd February, 1517, published in BULHÃO PATO et al., *Cartas*, Vol. VII, p. 170.

²⁰ This is a letter from Albuquerque to the factor at Goa, dated 22nd November, 1512, ANTT CC, II/35/113, asking the latter to pay a certain Vasco Strosy a sum of money; for the text see C.A.A., Vol. V. p. 241. Uzielli's belief that Strozzi was part of the fleet that attacked Aden in 1513 is, however, the purest speculation; Cf. UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* pp. 124-125.

²¹ See UZIELLI, *ibid.*, 125-28. The entire documentation surrounding Giovanni da Empoli has recently been re-edited and published by Marco Spallanzani, *Giovanni da Empoli-Mercante Navigatore fiorentino*, Florence, 1984.

ment is of particular interest, for it shows the shifting focus of Strozzi's interest.

As we have seen, like all the other Florentines on the fleet of 1510, Strozzi's initial interest was in pepper and spices. Indeed, in his father's letter to Piero of January 1514, the principal purpose of the journey to India is described as "learning how to obtain the pepper". It is evident, though, that even in 1510, the younger Strozzi had a great fascination for the trade in gems; in India, he wrote "there are all the riches in the world, both of gold and of gems, and precious stones". It was precisely this interest which took him in 1515 to the Coromandel coast.

At this time, the principal port in Coromandel was Pulicat, with a smaller role being played by Kunjimedu and Naguru in trade across the Bay. One of the principal overseas routes emanating from Coromandel was that to lower Burma, or Pegu as it was known in this epoch. It was on this route that the Genoese Girolamo di Santo Stefano had traded briefly in the 1490s, leaving behind his laconic memoir of Ava, "in which grow rubies and many other precious stones".²² Besides rubies and precious stones, Pegu was noted in the early XVIth century for the export of three other commodities: silver, which flowed in large quantities to Bengal, rice, which was exported to Melaka, Thailand, and northern Sumatra as also in smaller quantities to Coromandel, and lac. The three major ports which contemporaries describe in connection with Pegu's trade in the period are Cosmin, in the western Irrawaddy delta, Dagon in the eastern delta of the same river, and Martaban, at the mouth of the Salween.²³ Initial Portuguese contacts with these ports followed on the conquest of Melaka in 1511;

²² "Account of the Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano, a Genovese, Addressed to Messer Giovan Jacobo Mainer", in R. H. MAJOR, (ed.), *India in the Fifteenth Century*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1857, p. 6. The abundance of red wood at the Coromandel port from which di Santo Stefano set sail, suggests that he embarked from Kunjimedu.

²³ See the letter from António Dinis to Francisco Pessoa and Tristão Silva, ANTT CC, I/20/87 dated 15th August, 1516, published in LUIS FILIPE F. R. THOMAZ, *De Malaca a Pegu; Viagens de um feitor português (1512-1515)*, Lisbon 1966, pp. 187-192.

for a brief period from 1514-1516, the Portuguese even maintained a factory at Martaban. The principal purpose of the Portuguese at Pegu in this period was the procurement of rice for Melaka; next in their priorities came the trade in lac and gems. It is worth stressing that in this period, lac was a very important commodity for trade on the Cape Route; in the fleet which left India for Lisbon in 1517, for example, it accounted for the second largest share of cargo by weight (66, 443 kilos), and was exceeded only by pepper.²⁴

Portuguese trade at Pegu was given a rude shock in 1516, when following the piratical behaviour of the captain of the *nau da carreira de Pegu*, Henrique de Leme, they were summarily expelled both from Cosmin and Martaban. It was, however, not this aspect of the trade which interested Strozzi, but the trade from Coromandel to Pegu, which, according to the letter of 1516 cited earlier, amounted to three or four ships a year.²⁵ The first evidence we have of Strozzi's interest in the Coromandel trade comes from early 1516. The Florentine Andrea Corsali, who corresponded with the Medici, wrote in a letter on 6th January 1516, of how in the previous year, Piero di Andrea Strozzi had been to Coromandel, where he had — among other things — visited the principal church of the St. Thomas Christians. Corsali is a reliable witness, for he was a close associate of Strozzi, and even accompanied him on later visits to Coromandel and Pulicat. This particular letter of 1516 however, is of special interest because its information was wholly derived from Strozzi — since Corsali himself had not yet been to Coromandel. The writer stresses, as do all other contemporaries, the dominant place of Pulicat in Coromandel trade.²⁶

²⁴ GENEVIEVE BOUCHON, (ed.), *Navires et Cargaisons retour de l'Inde en 1518*, Paris 1977, p. XI.

²⁵ Cf. THOMAZ, *De Malaca a Pegu*, *op. cit.* p. 189; also see THOMAZ, *A Viagem de António Correia a Pegu em 1519*, Lisbon 1976, especially pp. 18-19.

²⁶ Other near-contemporary descriptions of Pulicat are those of Ludovico di Varthema, Tomé Pires, and Duarte Barbosa; for a summary of their evidence, SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM, "The Coromandel- Melaka Trade in the Sixteenth Century; A study of its evolving structure", *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien*, Vol. III, 1986.

Corsali's description is different from the others, however, since it concentrates on Pulicat's role as a centre of the jewel trade. He writes, "In this land (Pulicat) there are brought an enormous quantity of gems of each sort, which come in part from Pegu, where rubies originate, and in part from an island which lies opposite Cape Comorin, which is called Zeilan".²⁷ Besides these, it appears from Corsali's remarks that the diamonds of the Deccan and interior south India were sold at Pulicat. Piero Strozzi himself had, in Corsali's account, purchased a twenty-three carat diamond, "which is one of the most beautiful pieces that have been seen in India for some time".²⁸

Besides his account of the jewel-trade, Strozzi provided Corsali with one of the earliest extant descriptions of the sepulchre of St. Thomas. This seems to have excited the latter's curiosity, for he talks of returning with Strozzi to Coromandel in February 1516. They apparently did so, for in another letter from Cochin, dated 18 September 1517, and addressed on this occasion to Lorenzo de' Medici, Corsali briefly describes his visit to Pulicat, "port of the Kingdom of Narsinga, to which a great number of rubies navigate (sic) from the Kingdom of Pegu". Moreover, he states his intention of returning to Coromandel again with Strozzi in the coming year, this time with the purpose of spending five or six months there in the company of "certain Armenian Christians who are my friends", in order to "investigate the life and the customs of these lands to my satisfaction".²⁹

²⁷ Letter from Andrea Corsali at Cochin to Giuliano de' Medici, 6th January 1516, published in G.B. RAMUSIO, *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, cited in UZIELLI "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* pp. 128-29.

²⁸ Corsali's letter cited Uzielli, *ibid.*, pp. 129-30. "In questo luogo esso Piero Strozzi comperò un bellissimo diamante, chiaro e netto, in rocca, il qual pesò carati ventitrè, ed è delli bellissimi pezzi che siano stati veduti in India da un tempo in qua; nel suo ritorno che sarà in termine di due anni, lo porterà a Lisbona".

²⁹ Andrea Corsali at Cochin to Lorenzo de' Medici, 18 September 1517, cited in UZIELLI, *ibid.*, pp. 133-134. On Corsali's life, also see SPALLANZANI, "Fiorentini e portoghesi", *op. cit.* pp. 328-29, who notes the existence of a near-exhaustive bibliography on this merchant, in S. ZAVATTI *Dizionario degli esploratori*, Milan, 1967.

Uzielli's biography is silent on the course of the remaining years of Strozzi's life, for which he could find no Italian sources. More recently, Marco Spallanzani has noted a reference to Strozzi from January 1519, in the letter of another Florentine at Cochin, Piero di Giovanni di Dino. This letter mentions that Strozzi was at the time also in Cochin, and a man of some means, which suggests that his jewel-trade was prospering.³⁰ It would appear that between 1515 and the end of his life, Strozzi divided his time between Pulicat (and Coromandel more generally) and Cochin. After his second trip with Corsali in 1518, he returned to the west coast again, only to make his way back to Coromandel in 1519. For this expedition, our source is the chronicle of Gaspar Correia. With the forcible closure of the Martaban factory in 1516, there was a period (up to the voyage of António Correia) during which the flow of Burmese goods for the ships of the *Carreira da Índia* was interrupted. As we have seen, of these goods, lac was of paramount importance. Hence, in Correia's account, the Governor of Portuguese India, Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, "on knowing that there came a lot (of lac) to the Coromandel coast in the ships of Pegu and Martaban, which trade along that coast, to procure painted textiles and coloured cloth which is made at Pulicat", decided to send a factor there to procure this lac. Consultation with various merchants at Cochin revealed to Sequeira that the most appropriate person for the job was Strozzi, whom Sequeira himself was acquainted with, and knew to be a shrewd businessman (*bom homem de tratar*).³¹

In May 1519, then, Strozzi returned to Coromandel, this time as Crown factor on board an armed caravel, captained by a certain João Moreno. The voyage seems to have been an eventful one, for Moreno — despite instructions to be cautious in dealing with the

³⁰ "Appresso qui in Cuccin Piero Strozzi, ricco che tante volte la fortuna ha ributtato", SPALLANZANI, *ibid.*, p. 330, n. 5.

³¹ CORREIA, *Lendas da Índia* vol. II, pp. 567-68, "(O Governador) mandou hum frolentim, chamado Pero Escroco seu conhecido, que era bom homem de tratar".

inhabitants of the coast — proceeded to rob various vessels, and also extorted money, both from those to whom he gave *cartazes*, and from the officials of the local customshouses, as a price for letting commerce continue. Moreno also seems to have sent his own vessels (or at least vessels under his name) to Pegu, and this possibly constituted another reason why he wished to impede the navigation of competitors.³²

Strozzi himself, it would appear, remained now in Coromandel for a long time, prosecuting his trade. A contemporary notes, "In Coromandel, there is, for the last two years, one Pero Estroço, a man from outside the land, where he does what he likes, and is extremely rich..." He had not returned to Cochin even in October 1520, and is seen instead as unofficial head of the private Portuguese settlers who had by then conglomerated in Coromandel, much to the dismay of Portuguese officials.³³ It was the considered opinion of one such, Nuno de Castro, that what was needed on Coromandel was not the likes of Strozzi but "a loyal man with a few men, around seven or eight, in order not to consent to this evil there, and to have it for His Highness" — the "evil" being the import of pepper and spices from Southeast Asia directly to Coromandel. It is possible that such opinions eventually played a role in creating, in 1521-22, the post of Captain and Factor of the Coromandel coast — to which the first appointee was a certain Manuel de Frias.³⁴

Strozzi died, aged just under forty, in late 1522 or early 1523. While one cannot be certain, it is likely that he died either in Pulicat or in Cochin, the two centres of his activity after 1515. Evidence of his death comes, once again, from the Italian sources — in particu-

³² CORREIA, *ibid.*, p. 568. Also see the letter from Nuno de Castro at Cochin, dated 31 October 1520, ANTT, CC, 1/9/92, published in C.A.A., Vol. VII, p. 182.

³³ See Nuno de Castro's letter, *ibid.*, Choramandell esta a ij anos pero estroço, hũ homẽ detora da terra hõde faz o que quer, e esta bẽ rico, agora vira e esta ja de todo danado por que nunca de la sayẽ iij^o ij^o homẽs Portugueses, que de malaca vẽ hy ter".

³⁴ CORREIA, *Lendas*, op.cit. vol. II, pp. 721-22.

lar on account of efforts by his brother and heir Carlo to recover the value of his estate in Asia. A letter from Alessio Lampacino at Florence to the Portuguese King, D. João III, dated April 1525, mentions Piero's death *apud Indos* three years previously. It also confirms the observations of Nuno de Castro and Piero di Giovanni di Dino, that Strozzi, towards the end of his life, was a wealthy man.³⁵

Having left for India then with the intention of returning by early 1512 to Europe, Piero Strozzi stayed on for more than a decade in excess of his expectation. His father at Florence expected him to return in late 1514, in the fleet in which his erstwhile companion Giovanni da Empoli made his way to Lisbon. This expectation was belied, and Andrea Strozzi seems to have died late the same year, so that his son Piero had less reason to return than before. However, we gather from Andrea Corsali's letters that Strozzi had tentative plans of returning to Europe, first with the fleet of 1517-18, and then with the fleet of winter 1518. Neither of these plans seems to have crystallised, and nor did Andrea Strozzi's vision of Piero settling down in Florence, where the combination of his eastern wealth and his familial connection (distant though it was) with Filippo Strozzi would have made him an important man.³⁶

It is a commonplace that the first half of the sixteenth century sees a crisis in the Florentine economy; while on the one hand, the merchants of the city were edged out of their earlier dominance of international banking and commerce in Europe, one observes, on

³⁵ Letter from Alessio Lampacino at Florence to D. João III, *ANTT*, Gavetas, III/5-11, published in A. DA SILVA REGO (ed.), *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo* vol. II, Lisbon 1962, pp. 37-38, of which a fragment may be found in UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* pp. 146-47. The relevant passage is "obiit apud Indos proximo triennio Petrus Strozza civis et mercator noster, huius vero Caroli germanus frater, remque satis amplam et haereditatem (ut plenique retulere) non contemnendam reliquit..." I thank Giacomo Zordan for translating this letter.

³⁶ Cf. the letter from Andrea to Piero Strozzi, in UZIELLI, *ibid.*, pp. 143-45. "If you bring some present to give the said Filippo, it will do you good and these are useful things for anyone who wants to remain at Florence".

the other hand, creeping inroads made by northern Europeans into the very markets of the Mediterranean backyard of the Italians.³⁷ Access to the Papacy in the epoch of Leo X gave some of Florence's merchants a temporary security in the period: thus the case of Filippo Buondelmonti or even Lorenzo Strozzi at Avignon. It is not unreasonable though that a good many others turned, in the face of this conjuncture, to what seemed the new El Dorado — the markets of Asia. In the Strozzi family itself, there is mention of a certain Filippo, a leading banker at Goa in the 1580s, while in the beginning of the XVIIth century, there is even the odd document concerning a certain Piero Strozzi, apparently a *casado* trader in Asia.³⁸ Even if Piero di Andrea Strozzi (1483-1522), could not return to Florence in the manner of a Marco Polo, it seems reasonable to suppose that the wealth he accumulated in his twelve years of trade in Asia had some influence in shaping the dreams and ambitions of the Florentines who followed him there.

³⁷ R.A. GOLDTHWAITE, "The Medici Bank and Florentine Capitalism", *op. cit.* pp. 22-23; also see JEAN-FRANÇOIS BERGIER, "From the fifteenth century in Italy to the sixteenth Century in Germany: A new Banking Concept", in *The Dawn of Modern Banking*, Los Angeles, 1979, pp. 105-129, and RICHARD T. RAPP, "The unmaking of the Mediterranean Trade Hegemony: International Trade Rivalry and the Commercial Revolution", *Journal of Economic History*, vol. XXXV, 1975, pp. 499-525.

³⁸ On the Filippo Strozzi of the 1580s, see ETTORE M. MARCUCCI (ed.), *Lettere edite et inedite di Filippo Sassetti*, Florence 1855, pp. 217, 245, *passim*, cited in UZIELLI, "Piero di Andrea Strozzi", *op. cit.* pp. 136-37. On the Piero Strozzi of the XVIIth century, see the letter from the king of Portugal to the Viceroy at Goa, Rui Lourenço de Tavora, dated 28th March 1613, in R.A. DE BULHÃO PATO (ed.), *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, Vol. II, Lisbon 1884, pp. 437-38. "A Pero Estroci, estante nessas partes, fiz mercê de 500 xerafins de entretenimento cada anno, de que não houve pagamento té gora; encomendovos que lhe façaes pagar os creditos que lhe forem devidos, do tempo de hua postilla que esta no alvará da dita mercê em diante".