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**Pirates, Politics and Companies: Global  
Politics on the Konkan Littoral,  
c.1690-1756 \***

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## Pirates, Politics and Companies: Global Politics on the Konkan Littoral, c.1690-1756.

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### Abstract

This paper examines pre-colonial interaction among polities along the Konkan coast, from Surat to Goa, during the long half-century c.1680-1756. Specifically it uses the dynasty of the Angrias, who were deemed pirates by the European powers but were actually an integral part of the Maratha Confederacy. Scholarship that has dealt with the Angrias has relied on historiography passed down through the English East India Company chroniclers and employees to colonial historians under the British Raj and carried into contemporary times. The result has been a continued Eurocentric interpretation of the Angrias that has obfuscated the geopolitical history of the region. This paper seeks to rectify the situation through a fresh look at British archival evidence coupled with scholarship that has examined the Indian and other European languages primary source material. The Angrias were not pirates preying on the vessels of other nations. Rather, they governed a section of the Marathan Confederacy and sought through a European institution to extend exercise sovereignty over their littoral. The East India Company was unwilling to cede any of their gains of maritime supremacy to the upstart Maratha maritime force. This paper tells the story of how Angria and the East India Company interacted on equal terms through political negotiation, military comparative advantages, and a complex series and ever-changing network of alliances.

*It was now fifty years that this piratical state had rendered itself formidable to the trading ships of all the European nations in India, and the English East-India company had kept up a marine force at the annual expense of fifty thousand pounds to protect their own ships...for as no vessel could with prudence venture singly to pass by Angria's domains...*

Robert Orme<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXVI to Which Is Prefixed a Dissertation on the Establishments Made by Mahomedan Conquerors in Indostan*, vol. 1 (Madras: Pharos & Co., 1861; reprint, 4th). p. 409.

## 1. Introduction

On May 24, 1724, William Phipps Governor of Bombay penned a response to Kanhoji Angria. He warned, “any state bordering upon a neighbour that lives on plunder and robs under colour of friendship must necessarily be careful for their defence.”<sup>2</sup> Angria was, and had been careful for his defence. For over the past seven years the English East India Company (EIC) had launched five major attacks against Angria’s coastal forts. All without success and all causing a great many more deaths among the invaders than the defenders. For thirty-eight years the EIC and the Angria dynasty fought a war along the Konkan littoral that has since been largely forgotten.

The dynasty as a power and source of influence was established in 1688 by Kanhoji who received from Sambhaji, the second emperor of the Maratha Confederacy, command of a coastal fort as a result of exemplary military service against the Mughals. Later he would rise to become the *Sarkhail*, or chief admiral in hereditary perpetuity. Upon Kanhoji’s death in June 1729, the dynasty fell to his oldest son, Sukhoji who ruled till his death in 1733. Another son, from the same wife, Sambhaji took over but the Angrian territories were divided when Sukhoji’s and Sambhaji’s half-brother Manaji gained control of the northern Konkan in the area around Bombay in 1735. Sambhaji died in 1743 leaving the southern Konkan to another half-brother Tulaji<sup>3</sup> who in 1756 would be captured by the Marathas during a joint military operation with the British and die in captivity several years later.

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<sup>2</sup> "Tarnslate [Sic.] of Conajee Angria's Letter to the President, Bombay Castle 24 May 1724," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records (1719 A.D. To 1884 A.D.)*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (Poona: Prashant Printery, 1950). p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Surendra Nath Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria and Other Papers* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1941). p. 21. There is much confusion and contradiction in the historical record concerning Kanhoji’s progeny. Nath Sen bases his information on a contemporary Marathi chronicle and “official family history” as the line still exists. I have therefore taken this to be the most authoritative source.

A case study of the Angrias contributes to a larger framework of scholarship on early modern geopolitical interaction between European and South Asian polities as well as raises questions on how sovereignty is embodied and recognised by various political entities. The Angrias are ideal as a point of departure because they were the leading thalassocracy in the region surpassing the Siddis,<sup>4</sup> Portuguese, Dutch, and effectively challenging the EIC for over fifty years. Yet the Angrias have been continuously misrepresented or simplified in narratives and scholarship. Thus, what was an intricately complex story of indigenous rulers exercising various degrees of maritime sovereignty over time became a smooth tale of pirates challenging the European companies by preying on their commerce. Most fundamentally, the case advocates for a pre-colonial model of state interaction based upon negotiation and alliances, placing south Asians at the centre of what has always been primarily an Indian story, rather than the traditional tale of the rise-of-the-EIC imposing its will in a top-down fashion. To borrow from David Abernathy, the typical story of empire and colonialism is one where “it is the fate of the colonized not to act but to be acted upon, not to take initiative but to respond to initiatives taken by the invader.”<sup>5</sup> The Angrias, offer a prime example of how wrong can be the ‘typical story.’ If anything, their story demonstrates how these roles were reversed and how it was the EIC who reacted against the initiatives of the Maratha admiral Kanhoji. Additionally, this study also hopes to contribute to a better understanding of Maratha politics at the federal level through an examination of one of its most important families.

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<sup>4</sup> Known for their seafaring capabilities the Siddis were a group of seafarers of Abyssinian decent who were known for acting as the Mughal admiralty. They were based in Janjira seventy kilometres south of Bombay and were frequently in conflict with the Angrias and Marathas.

<sup>5</sup> David Abernathy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). p. 30.

As a corollary, this study brings into question misapplied, yet popular, conceptualisations of the 'pirate.' The paper contends that due to the absence of a pirate taxonomy that goes beyond the pirate/privateer distinction, the Angrias have been misrepresented in history simply because they stopped, and sometimes seized, shipping along their coast in an effort to extend the territorial claims over their coastline. As will become clear through the narrative, the historical definitions of 'pirate' and 'piracy' do not accurately describe the majority of the Angrias or their actions. This issue will be raised again further along in the argument.

### *1.1 Literature Review*

In their day the Angrias were infamous, even serving as the basic characterisation of a pirate in an essay by Enlightenment philosopher David Hume.<sup>6</sup> Since then however, the Angrias have fallen into relative obscurity. Consistent misrepresentation of them as mere maritime predators not only allowed the EIC to act aggressively against the Marathas when it was convenient for them to do so, but has led to distortion in the historical record; first through the colonial scholarship which uncritically carried forward Company opinion and has subsequently been adopted into current scholarship. Even in their own time, if the Angrias were not being mythologised by Maratha chroniclers they were being vilified by European adventurers in picaresque narratives and lambasted by the companies' officials.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the historians most interested in Angria were British colonial agents who uncritically continued toting the

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<sup>6</sup> David Hume, "Of the Original Contract," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 1987). p. II.XII.2. Hume wrote regarding the authority of the sovereign: "nor has the greatest and most lawful prince any more reason, upon that account, to plead a peculiar sacredness or inviolable authority, than an inferior magistrate, or even an usurper, or even a robber and a pyrate. The same divine superintendant, who, for wise purposes, invested a Titus or a Trajan with authority, did also, for purposes, no doubt, equally wise, though unknown, bestow power on a Borgia or an Angria."

old official Company line of the Angrias as pirates above all else;<sup>7</sup> the trend continued into the last century with British Colonel John Biddulph's book, *The Pirates of Malabar, and an Englishwoman in India*, published in 1907. The 1920s saw pirate historian Philip Gosse's grossly inaccurate description of Angria as the "Brother of a famous pirate, Angora, Sultan of Timor"<sup>8</sup> though in a subsequent monograph he corrected his major mistakes using the accounts of 18th century British chroniclers.<sup>9</sup> The most significant change in the historiography of the Angrias during the 1900s came out of India after independence riding on the waves of nationalist revisionism. Under this new history the Angria dynasty was seen as an initial resister to European nascent colonialism.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Kanhoji Angria took on the status of the father of the Indian navy due to his role as admiral (*Sarkhel*) of the Maratha fleet. During this period Kanhoji Angria was even honoured by having a naval base named after him in 1951.<sup>11</sup> Ascribing the characteristics of freedom fighters to the Angrias was plausible in this light because Maratha nationalism itself experienced resurgence since it was a focal point of colonial resistance at the turn of the century. Under the rhetoric of the politics of partition, the Marathas became the first indigenous Hindu empire in India and one that created itself at the expense of the Muslim Mughals.

Since then, scholarship on Mughal and colonial India has brought balance back to historical interpretations of the Marathas, but not so of the Angrias. With the Angrias, the nationalist rendering has since been

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<sup>7</sup> For examples see, Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*, Vol. 1. 1826; Low, *History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*, 1877; and Orme, *Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, 1861.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Gosse, "A Pirate's Who's Who Giving Particulars of the Lives and Deaths of Pirates and Buccaneers," (New York: Burt Franklin, 1924). p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Gosse, *The History of Piracy* (New York: Dover, 1932; reprint, Dover 2007). pp. 244-252.

<sup>10</sup> For example see, Manohar Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral: An Account of His Life and His Battles with the English* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959).

<sup>11</sup> Dilnaz Boga, "I.N.S. Angre to Celebrate Golden Jubilee," in *The Times of India* (Mumbai: India Times, 4 September 2001).

largely dismissed outright yet not replaced, whereas the Marathan history was corrected and subsequently built upon. Considering the Angrias went from being a sub-section of Indian history to, more currently, rarely more than a footnote, this is hardly surprising. The outcome therefore, has been a revival in the acceptance of nineteenth and turn of the century British interpretations of who and what the Angrias were -- namely pirates, without a critical engagement of the archival or compiled primary material. Recent scholarship, using the established 'Angrias as pirates paradigm,' has continued to obfuscate the nature of the Angria dynasty and how it interacted with European and south Asian polities. Even the work of historian Lakshmi Subramanian, which does engage critically with the material and sheds new light on both the history of Bombay and Indian Ocean piracy, still continues to categorise all the Angrias as mere pirates and reactionaries against British incursion.<sup>12</sup> What occurred in the past and was carried forward into current scholarship has been a mis-contextualisation of the Angrias by removing their story from its geopolitical environment. This study's reappraisal of the material concerning the Angrias offers a significant step in the right direction to a more complex understanding of the historical realities of the Konkan littoral in early modern times.

## *2.2 Methodology*

Due to linguistic shortcomings, sources for this paper do draw heavily on European, specifically British, archive materials. Whenever possible, this study has incorporated the secondary material of researchers who have had access to the Marathi and other Indian languages primary sources. Nevertheless, Indian Ocean scholar Ashin

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<sup>12</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, "Of Pirates and Potentates: Maritime Jurisdiction and the Construction of Piracy in the Indian Ocean," in *Cultures of Trade: Indian Ocean Exchanges*, ed. Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007). pp. 26-28.



Das Gupta's recommendations to researchers attempting to reconstruct South Asian history from European sources have been adopted. Data from European primary materials are used with the recognition that they may reflect Eurocentrism in the author's or compiler's ideas and that often they only deal with India when it is necessary as part of a wider European story. Careful attention has also been placed on avoiding "structured formulations" of political frameworks that create an iron skeleton of a narrative yet lack the nuance and detail of ground level social and economic history.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, material from a variety of sources, such as private letters of company officials and naval officers, translations of Angria's letters in company records, ships' logs, and the accounts of contemporary chroniclers, are incorporated. Despite the paper's focus on geopolitical interaction, decisions of this kind and the actions of states are always undertaken and influenced by the individuals who act in the story.

## **2. The Angrias and the Wider Political Context**

Central to this study is how the Angrias were situated within the wider geopolitical context of the Konkan coast. On one hand, they were authorities under the suzerainty of the Maratha emperor. On the other, they exercised a considerable degree of autonomy, entering into treaties and conflict with other polities along the coast such as the Siddis and European powers. Indeed, the history of the Angrias cannot be separated from the Marathas; they are intertwined, both having influenced the outcome of the other. As the Maratha ruler made the Angrias, so too did they later play a significant role in their destruction. Accounts of the Angrias, though plentiful, are either incomplete or inaccurate taking much imaginary licence. None insert the Angrias into their political context

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<sup>13</sup> Das Gupta, A. 'Some Problems of Reconstructing the History of India's West Coast from European Sources', in, *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500-1800*, (Aldershot, 1994), p. 175.

which was crucial to their territorial development and military actions throughout the long half-century they ruled the Konkan. To reconcile this problem and the recognised obscurity of the case in general, it is necessary to relate here the historical narrative. The story below will focus mainly on the rise of the Angrian dynasty through Kanhoji, as it was with he that had the longest career and established the policies of how the Maratha's maritime political sovereignty would be articulated.

### *2.1 The Rise of Kanhoji*

According to Maratha chronicles, in 1688 Kanhoji received from Emperor Sambhaji the command of Survarnadurg fortress.<sup>14</sup> Ten years later the new Maratha emperor, Rajaram bestowed upon Angria the command (*Subedar*) of the northern section of the Maratha fleet, based out of Gheriah and Surnarndurg. Though in charge of the navy and influential, it would appear that Angria was not at this time the only authority of the Maratha Konkan. The first reference of Kanhoji in the English records is a response to an incident which occurred in January 1698/99 when “the Sevajeos of Podundroog Castle neare Danda Rapore seized upon two salt vesselles belonging to this Island [Bombay]” and that the crew was “imprisoned and most miserably beate.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, Bombay authorities retaliated by placing under arrest the Padmadurg emissaries sent to collect ransoms for the imprisoned crew as well as ceasing all salt trade to the Marathas. In early February a report from Bombay castle stated that the “Subedar of Conagy Angra...would get the 2 men that were imprisoned by Padamdrooke releast, and that for the future none of our inhabitants should be abused, we permitted the salt vessell to goe.”<sup>16</sup> Angria displayed diplomatic foresight in appeasing the

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<sup>14</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. pp. 54-55; Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

British. Malgonkar states that Bombay at this time was the centre of the region's salt production, which was not worth losing trade rights over.<sup>17</sup> This was the only incident over which the cessation of the Bombay salt trade was threatened.

During this period the Maratha Confederacy was waging a war for its survival in the interior against Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's troops. Rajaram was besieged in the distant fortress of Gingee and barely escaped with his life. Meanwhile in the Konkan, Angria was establishing Marathan sovereignty by issuing a pass, called a *dastak*, to maritime merchants who operated in Konkan ports and waters. Such papers were similar to the *cartaz* "according to the ancient Form established by the Portuguese"<sup>18</sup> in the early 1500s and were now a staple method of political articulation used by British and Dutch alike.<sup>19</sup> The Portuguese, however, were never able to completely enforce their monopoly on spices and often came to accommodation with local powers especially if they could not use the threat of coercion or their trade depended upon the power.<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the 18th century, "prudent traders had already begun to equip themselves with both the *cartaz* and *dastaks*" in order to protect themselves.<sup>21</sup> The EIC did not agree with any institution that cut into its profits. The Company was no longer challenged significantly by the other European powers and had had more-or-less free reign of the Malabar and Konkan coasts for the past hundred years. An employee of the Dutch East India Company commented on the effects the *cartaz* had on certain aspects of their business when he wrote "...it does not appear

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<sup>17</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Clement Downing, *A Compendious History of the Indian Wars with an Account of the Rise, Progress, Strength, and Forces of Angria the Pyrate* (London: T. Cooper, 1737). p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Holden Furber, "Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800," in *Maritime India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). p. 268.

<sup>20</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). pp. 74-75.

<sup>21</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 95.

probable that this trade alone [Surat to Masquette, a port in Arabia] or the transport of the Company's commodities would make good the expenditure they have to incur, since passes have to be obtained from the Angrias...the English and the Portuguese, in coming and going."<sup>22</sup> Conflict seemed inevitable but Kanhoji had given Bombay the assurance that it would not molest its inhabitants after the incident over the salt vessels.

The *cartaz* was always a fluid construct. In theory the vessels of all nations had to possess them if they were to trade unmolested. The issuing authority would stop a trading ship at sea and if the captain failed to produce a valid pass the vessel and goods could be seized and the crew held at ransom. Chronicler and employee of the EIC, Clement Downing related being stopped by Angria's vessels in September 1716, during a moment of concord between Angria and the Company. He remembered,

Then they ask'd where we belong'd to, or whether we had a Pass from the Governor of Bombay; I told them yes, tho' I did not at that time rightly know so much. They never offered to misuse us, nor do us any manner of Harm; only detained us four or five Hours [while the lead EIC ship in the convoy arrived at the scene]...They releas'd us soon after the Captain came off with the Pass.<sup>23</sup>

As the Europeans inserted themselves into the Indian Ocean world so too did the local powers adopt foreign structures when and where it suited them. It is not surprising that local polities should have adopted the revenue producing system, made commonplace by Europeans.

Though exempted from the *dastak* by Angria, the EIC was concerned that a local land power was exercising sovereignty and developing their capabilities on the seas, which for the previous two

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<sup>22</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800," in *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. pp. 21-22.

hundred years had been the uncontested domain of European authority. Yet, despite European superior firepower and deep sea vessel technology the Company's forces were not numerically superior or organised effectively enough to counter strong Indian polities: the military balance had not yet tipped in Europe's favour.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as this narrative will demonstrate, Europeans would not possess the military capability to destroy Indian regional powers until around the middle of the century.

Bombay could not contest the Maratha's claims of coastal sovereignty with force because it was practically defenceless. Despite being surrounded by potentially hostile neighbours, until Governor Charles Boone arrived at Bombay in December 1715 the city "was unwall'd, and no Grabs or Frigates to protect any thing but the Fishery; except a small Munchew."<sup>25</sup> Within a year Boone had a wall built and the beginnings of the Bombay Marine constructed. Twenty-five vessels of different sizes were built by 1716, carrying from five to thirty-two guns each, to the cost of £51,700.<sup>26</sup> In the absence of the Company's overall military superiority, the period 1698 to 1715 was one in which Bombay was forced to negotiate. Economic historian Kirti Chaudhuri reports that it was only with reluctance that the EIC Court sanctioned any naval actions against Angria "saying they had no desire to make war on an enemy from whom nothing worth while was to be expected by way of financial gain."<sup>27</sup> Indeed it was Company policy to negotiate settlements in this period having recently lost a war with the Mughals that saw Bombay occupied by the Siddis in 1690. The English were well aware of what the consequences could be if they took on another land empire in India.

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<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey Parker, "Europe and the Wider World, 1500-1750: The Military Balance," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, ed. James Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). p. 162.

<sup>25</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Charles R. Low, *History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*, 2 vols., vol. I (London: Richard Bently & Son, 1877). p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). p. 118.

Truces were thus called and negotiations drawn up between Bombay and Gheria.

In 1700/01, the Siddis who were the principle Mughal maritime force attacked Angria besieging him at his headquarters in the fortress of Kolaba and also at Khanderi. The Siddis were unsuccessful and falsely blamed their loss on Bombay for supplying the “Sevajeess” with ammunition.<sup>28</sup> Once able, Angria began enforcing Marathan claims on the seas mainly with indigenous traders. Malgonkar contends that it was first the British who in 1702 broke their truce by seizing a ship carrying Angria’s *dastak*, though this was probably due to a difference of opinion between Angria and the Company.<sup>29</sup> We know from Bombay and Surat reports that Angria’s vessels were patrolling the coast and stopping fishing boats and local traders. To Kanhoji these fell within his rights and jurisdiction outlined by the agreement while the Company opined that any vessel belonging to anyone resident in their territory or carrying English goods was considered an English vessel and therefore protected under the treaty. As we will see later, this was a common position for the EIC in its negotiations. Company documents record the truce breaking in a different perspective and give the incident as occurring in 1703. They remark the “Sevajeess...are grown very insolent” and that a ship belonging to one of Kanhoji’s cities came into Bombay harbour where “twas agreed and resolved to embargo and detain here said vessell, cargo and people.”<sup>30</sup> The following year, Angria retaliated by bringing seven of his gallivats, a type of low-lying vessel of around 120 tons with double masts, to blockade Bombay harbour. The Company was compelled to entreat in

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<sup>28</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 6. The term “Sevajeess” was used as a synonym for the Marathas and persisted with the British for more than a century after Shivaji, founder of the Maratha Confederacy, died in 1680.

<sup>29</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 107.

<sup>30</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 7.

order not to be starved out. Bombay records state that Angria was told, though in an unthreatening manner, that

...he cant be permitted searching, molesting or seizing any boates, groabs or other vessells, from what port, harbour, place of what nation soever they may be, bringing provisions, timber or merchandize to Bombay...without breach of that friendship the English nation has always had with Raja Sevajee and all his Captains in subordination to him.<sup>31</sup>

Angria's response was that they, "the Savajees," had been at war with the Mughals for the past 40 years and they would continue to "seize what boates or other vessell belonging either to the Mogulls vessells from any of his forts or Mallabarr, excepting such as had Conjee Angras passports; the English being at liberty acting as they please."<sup>32</sup> Several themes are vividly illustrated here: Kanhoji asserted not only his role as a *Subedar* of the Maratha Confederacy, but also the authority of the Marathan state. Moreover, that he has an obligation to act against the Mughals with whom his state is at war. Simultaneously, he rejected English claims of regional authority and made clear that the Company was operating in India near Marathan territory, not the other way around.

For the next eight years Kanhoji made good on his word by seizing country and European vessels alike. Unfortunately, in absence of indigenous shipping records, it is impossible to know how many country vessels carried Kanhoji's *dastak* and how many were seized. The European records, though fragmented, indicate that losses were significant as this letter to the EIC in Bombay in March 1706/07 indicates,

Your Honours will I presume, from Bombay have a particular account of the growth of the Sevajee Canajee Angra, there ill and

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<sup>31</sup> IOR/P/341/2, "Bombay Public Proceedings," in *IOR* (London: British Library, 1704-1707). p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

near neighbour. He hath lattely taken a ship belonging to Mr. Mildmay and your Honours broker at Carwarr, a ship of Mr. Bouchers of about 200 tons, per cargo amounting to 70,000 rupees, the *Diamond* of Madras carrying 12 guns and twenty-six Europeans, her cargo worth near two lakh<sup>33</sup> of rupees, one of the Islands manchuas, another ship of about two hundred tons, to whose belonging I don't yet hear, and a Dutch Hoigh man'd with about 26 Dutchmen, besides sundry other small vessels.<sup>34</sup>

With a land invasion out of the question, initially the English response was to try to use force to halt Angria's extension of Marathan sovereignty over the coast. However, in an age-old problem of Europeans trying to suppress maritime depredations, the EIC found that their heavy, deep-drawing ships could not pursue Kanhoji's smaller lighter ghurabs (grabs) and gallivats into the coastal shoals and estuaries allowing them to escape.<sup>35</sup> Indeed there are no records of any of Angria's vessels being captured at sea until 1736. As Malgonkar has observed, what allowed Kanhoji to be so aggressive at asserting his jurisdiction at sea was that there was no effective way that any other regional polity could retaliate because "the Marathas did not depend upon sea trade."<sup>36</sup> Without shipping of their own to defend, Angria could remain solely on the offensive, a fact noted and somewhat lamented by Bombay Governor Phipps in a letter to Kanhoji in May 1724,

Had your Honor in the beginning of your rise in the world...cultivated in your territories, a correspondence...and employed that power Providence has by degree blessed you with, to protect trade, instead of quite the contrary practice you have made use of, the territories your Honor now governs might by this

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<sup>33</sup> A lakh is a unit in the South Asian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand.

<sup>34</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed this was a common problem experienced universally when trying to establish jurisdiction or bring to justice known pirate haunts. The British struggled with it for years and never did actually solve the problem. For a good description and history of the problem see the Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (London: Methuen, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 130.



time have been equal in some measures to vie with the Great port of Surat, your Honors Power esteemed to be raised on justice, and yourself become revered for your virtues, whereas now your Honor is more terrible to your friends than enemies.<sup>37</sup>

In this letter one can also read that the British considered Kanhoji as a government in his own right. Indeed, by as early as 1704 Biddulph claims that Kanhoji was being described as a “Rebel Independent of the Rajah Sivajee.”<sup>38</sup> Placing the date of the supposed Angria/Maratha rupture even earlier, Lakshmi Subramanian contends that Kanhoji took “advantage of the confusion that followed the execution of Sambhaji in 1689” to succeed in “gaining hegemony over the Konkan’s trade and shipping.”<sup>39</sup> However, as already shown, it was Rajaram, Sambhaji’s successor who bestowed the title of *Subedar* on Kanhoji. Confusion over Kanhoji’s ties to the Marathas may stem from the political upheavals the Maratha Confederacy underwent during the late 1600s and early 1700s, which are described below.

## 2.2 The Maratha Civil War

The Marathan state was a hereditary monarchy descended from Shivaji, the first Marathan emperor, who died in 1680. For nine years his son Sambhaji ruled before being captured and executed by Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor. In 1700, Rajaram, another of Shivaji’s sons who had also succeeded to the throne died leaving three sons. The eldest, Shahu, was captured by the Mughal army and held by Aurangzeb for eighteen years during the Maratha Mughal wars. The next oldest son, Sambhaji II was the infant of Rajaram’s oldest wife, Tarabai who had gathered enough political support to become Queen Regent, governing in her son’s

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<sup>37</sup> "The Angreys of Kolaba." p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> John Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar, and an Englishwoman in India Two Hundred Years Ago," (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1907). p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion: Bombay, Surat and the West Coast* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). pp. 34-35.

name. During this time, Angria carried on his mandate as *Subedar* of the northern fleet. The Konkan, due to its geographical location on the other side of the mountain barrier known as the Western Ghats, was practically the only region of the Maratha Confederacy not being depredated by Mughal troops or the effects of war. Maratha historian Stewart Gordon states that according to the Mughal histories “throughout the 1690s there was little functioning Maratha polity in Maharashtra. The state Shivaji had created had ceased to exist.”<sup>40</sup> Though the interior was troubled the Konkan was relatively peaceful. Given the problems of early 18th century communications, aggravated by a country in the throes of conflict, Angria was the *de facto* ruler of his part of the Konkan. Yet despite this, in all the records surveyed, at no time does Kanhoji refer to himself as anything other than a servant of the Maratha state. Indeed in a response to Bombay during a round of treaty negotiations in 1706 Kanhoji stated that he could accept the agreement “provided the terms of friendship are agreed upon with the Rana [Tarabai].”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the idea persists that Kanhoji was operating as his own sovereign. It is easy to see why considering the subsequent Maratha political developments.

Confusion was exacerbated regarding where Kanhoji's loyalties lay following Aurangzeb's death in 1707 because Shahu was able to make his escape during the prevailing anarchy that resulted from the Mughal accession struggle. As a result, the Marathas underwent their own succession struggle as Shahu in his freedom claimed the throne. Factions developed among the Maratha *deshmukhs*, or influential land-holding families, which were split in their support. One group supported the reigning Queen Regent Tarabai and the other half for Shahu, the rightful heir to the throne. Shahu's legitimacy was held in question due to rumours that he was an impostor and by concerns that because the

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<sup>40</sup> Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*, vol. II.4, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). p. 98.

<sup>41</sup> IOR/P/341/2, "Bombay Public Proceedings."

Mughals for had held him so long that his loyalty could not be counted upon.<sup>42</sup> The make-up of the Marathas and noble families warrants further explanation.

The structure of the Maratha polity was that it was an amalgamation of *deshmukhs* who supplied troops to, and collected taxes for, the centre similar in composition to the Mughal administrative structure of the *zamindari* system.<sup>43</sup> Gordon goes so far as to claim that "[t]he history of...the Maratha polity is, thus, the history of these *deshmukh* families."<sup>44</sup> This situation was typical of most early modern states and fits well within Koenigsberger's definition of a composite state that is a polity "including more than one country under the sovereignty of one ruler."<sup>45</sup> Under such a design the emperor can only rule through the acquiescence of those countries under their domain. In the early modern period, heteronomous political environments were indeed the norm and the supreme sovereign, in the Maratha case the Emperor, did not have a monopoly on the state's use or control of violence.<sup>46</sup> The incapacity of the state to control such was mainly a result of the fact that early modern administrative and bureaucratic structures were not developed enough to allow for direct control over vast swathes of territory. Alliances through patronage networks were established so that one could govern under the

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<sup>42</sup> Grant Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, & Green, 1826). pp. 416-417.

<sup>43</sup> For an overview of Maratha federal structures see chapter three in Surendra Nath Sen, "District and Provincial Governments," in *Administrative System of the Marathas* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1923). p. 23; The *zamindari* system is too complex to be summarised here. For a general overview see S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals," in *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006; reprint, fifth). pp. 284-298.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*. p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> H. G. Koenigsberger, "Monarchies and Parliament in Early Modern Europe: *Dominium Regale* or *Dominium Politicum Et Regale*," *Theory and Society* 5, no. 2 (1978). p. 202.

<sup>46</sup> Janice Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). pp. 14-15.

name of a higher authority. The Weberian conception of the state as “the exceptionally penetrative sovereign, territorial state” did not yet exist either in continental Europe or India.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Angria, like most local lords or rulers, was able to exercise a certain degree of autonomy despite being unquestionably aligned and subservient to the state.

In developing Koenigsberger’s idea, J. H. Elliott makes the point “[c]omposite monarchies based on loose dynastic union...could only hope to survive if systems of patronage were maintained in careful working order.”<sup>48</sup> Such systems in the Confederacy were thrown into disarray during the civil war resulting from the power struggle between Tarabai and Shahu, which lasted until 1713. Kanhoji as the *deshmukh* and authority over the country of the Konkan was still under the sovereignty of the Maratha emperor, but which one? Initially Angria was a prominent member of the Tarabai faction. This situation allowed for a large degree of subjectivity in determining whether Kanhoji did indeed break away from the Marathas. If the British chose to view Shahu as the legitimate ruler then Kanhoji’s support for Tarabai could easily be seen as rejecting Maratha authority. It may also be due to this period why Downing states that Kanhoji “declared open War with all Nations.”<sup>49</sup> Yet at the same time it is difficult to see how he could amount to being the “Founder of a new Kingdom in India”<sup>50</sup> as one anonymous EIC employee in Bombay claimed Kanhoji was, simply because the latter still aligned himself under the sovereignty of one of the contenders for Maratha leadership.

Initially Tarabai commanded the support of most of the *deshmukh* families. Within a year only about half remained on her side after she lost

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> J. H. Elliott, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies,” *Past and Present* 137, no. 1 (1992). p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria: With a Curious Narrative by Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, in a Letter to a Merchant in London, from a Factor at Bombay* (London: J. Cooke, 1756). p. 38.

a series of early battles and had to seek refuge in the Konkan with Angria. Soon thereafter however, Tarabai was able to retake the forts and territory lost to Shahu. Gordon describes this period as one in which land and alliances switched sides frequently and Maratha regional leaders “more and more took wholly independent action.”<sup>51</sup> There was little co-ordination between groups within the factions and some leaders took it upon themselves to make raids into favourite places in Mughal territory like the rich *entrepôt* of Surat, the effect of which was to mark the beginning of that city’s decline.<sup>52</sup> Angria never changed allegiances in this early part of the war – he had no need to. Under Tarabai he was given the title of *Surkhail* or Grand Admiral in hereditary perpetuity in 1707 greatly increasing his personal and family’s influence.<sup>53</sup>

During the time that the civil war dragged on Kanhoji continued to patrol the Konkan littoral though it is clear from the records that encounters with European vessels diminished from 1707 to 1712. A minor resumption of actions against Europeans occurred in 1710, with the seizure of a Dutch sloop and galley<sup>54</sup> and later, a failed attempt on an EIC ship, the *Godolphin*, just outside of Bombay harbour.<sup>55</sup> Most famously in 1712 Kanhoji’s fleet engaged an EIC yacht, the *Anne*, accompanied by a man-of-war. The *Anne* was carrying the president of the factory at Carwar, Robert Chown and his new wife who were on their way to Bombay. During the engagement Chown “had his Right Arm shot off, and bled to Death in the young lady’s Arms.”<sup>56</sup> The “young lady” was later ransomed for 30,000 rupees.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*. p. 105.

<sup>52</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat C. 1700-1750," in *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). pp. 157-159.

<sup>53</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 37.

<sup>56</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

There are three explanations for fluctuations between hostilities and peace throughout the years 1707 until the treaties of 1713. One possible reason could be that the initial shocks of the civil war were the worst and resources had to be reallocated away from the coast to the Western Ghats in order to defend against the potential threat from Shahu's inland armies. Once these positions were secure attention could be returned to the coast. Actions against companies' shipping could have created conflict among the Europeans and Angria, thus opening a second front, this one from the sea. Without the resources to defend both ghats and coast pragmatism may have won out. As the civil war progressed and stabilised, and the Konkan's security from outside incursion was established, Kanhoji could afford to resume actions against those Europeans shipping in his waters who failed to purchase his *dastak*. A second factor, which can be found in the existing tales from the British chroniclers, but has yet to be corroborated by Portuguese archival evidence, is that from 1707-1710 Kanhoji was making attacks against Portuguese fortresses and factories in order to consolidate his control over the Konkan.<sup>58</sup> Other reports state that this culminated in a failed reprisal attack against the fortress of Kolaba by the Portuguese who brought the Siddis into alliance with them. As a result Angria made a move as soon as possible against the Siddis following the cessation of the civil war.<sup>59</sup> Thirdly then, Angria was biding his time reinforcing not only the ghats but also his coastal forts preparing for the next engagement with the Moghul backed Siddis. During the succession civil wars that plagued both the Marathas and the Mughals neither side had ceased its hostilities towards one another, though there was an unofficial truce between the Siddis and Kanhoji. As previously mentioned, raids

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<sup>58</sup> Anonymous, "History of Angria the Pirate," *The Scots Magazine* 1756. p. 22; Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria*. pp. 22-23; Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. pp. 6-7.

<sup>59</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 172.

were made against Surat and the Mughals sought to win over *deshmukhs* to their empire. Certainly conflict with each other took secondary status to internal matters. The Siddis and Angria had been at odds before and their proximity to each other nearly guaranteed that as long as their empires were at war, so too would they. It seems likely that Angria spent this time preparing for what seemed like inevitable conflict on all possible fronts.

Shahu decided to send an army into the Konkan in 1712. The next year, a force was dispatched but was defeated and its general taken prisoner by Angria. Rumours spread that Kanhoji was going to march over the ghats against Shahu's capital Satara. Shahu hurriedly assembled a smaller force under newly appointed *Peshwa* (prime minister) Balaji Vishwanath to defend the mountain passes but they were hopelessly outnumbered.<sup>60</sup> Balaji instead went to Kanhoji to negotiate. There are several interpretations as to the outcome. One is that Kanhoji was bribed,<sup>61</sup> another that he felt he had to recognise the real and legal descendent of the House of Shivaji,<sup>62</sup> and finally that he negotiated rationally and secured the best terms he could.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the result was the same. In exchange for Angria's pledge of support for Shahu, the former was to receive confirmation of the title of *surkhail* and ten fortresses along the Konkan as well as sixteen fortified palaces and their dependent villages.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the Marathi chronicles record he also received an annual income of thirty-six *lakhs* of rupees.<sup>65</sup> The latter being important for revenue as Kanhoji was responsible for the collection of taxes within his jurisdiction and remitting a percentage of that income to the Maratha ruler. The accommodation negotiated by Balaji between

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<sup>60</sup> Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*. pp. 434-436.

<sup>61</sup> Low, *History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*. p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. pp. 144-145.

<sup>63</sup> Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*. pp. 435-436.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 436; André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 177.

Shahu and Kanhoji deprived Tarabai of her most important supporter.<sup>66</sup> Soon after she and her son were arrested though she was later released after her son died in captivity, therefore, depriving her of any legitimate claims to the throne. As a result, the civil conflict that had torn apart Maharashtra came to an end.

In 1714 the *Peshwa* and Angria marched against the Siddis and reduced their territory significantly while forcing them to accept unfavourable terms of peace. This treaty would hold for the next two decades until the Siddis entered into a conflict against the Marathas on the side of the Portuguese. As a result Balaji would return with troops in 1733 to destroy the Siddis as a geopolitical power.<sup>67</sup> By 1715, the Marathas had become the dominant indigenous power on the Konkan littoral with Kanhoji Angria as their representative authority.

Impossible to know for certain, but nonetheless very likely, Angria's naval patrols had continued against country traders throughout the Maratha civil war as it was an important source of revenue. However, due to a lack of written records only speculative guesses can be made. Depredations against north European company ships were not recorded for the year the Maratha civil war came to a close in 1713. In fact, the next three years saw no further maritime action take place against European company shipping as a result of a treaty between the EIC and Angria and the apparent payment of tribute to Angria from the Dutch.<sup>68</sup> In 1716 the situation unravelled and the Konkan littoral would not see the same level of peace until 1756.

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<sup>66</sup> Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818*. p. 109.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. pp. 123-124.

<sup>68</sup> Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 38; Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria..* p. 28.



### 3. Changing Relationships

The end of the civil war saw a gradual resumption of hostile activities between Angria and the north European companies. Kanhoji continued to take country vessels that did not carry his *cartaz* while the Company felt that he had no right to do so. With Governor Boone at the helm, the EIC continued to build up their naval forces, which by 1717 numbered nineteen vessels.<sup>69</sup> In that same year the first of several unsuccessful attacks against Angria's fleet and fortresses commenced during Boone's tenure.

There were three economic and one political reason the EIC wanted to check the power of the Marathas. From the Company's perspective, Bombay was a "deficit government which could barely support itself" and as such it could not fight wars of territorial conquest.<sup>70</sup> More revenue was needed. Bombay was a small port and even in the lucrative trading environment of Surat, the average value of EIC trade for example had only grown to 322,280 rupees by 1740-1745, compared to the Asian merchants' 2,000,000.<sup>71</sup> Though initially it was thought that action against Angria would not be cost effective, it was later realised that this might not be so. One method of gaining additional revenue was to control the trade routes as the Portuguese had tried and thereafter raise *cartaz* fees to monopolistic prices. Additionally, if it was the sole maritime power, the Company could "impose a general tonnage duty on all Surat ships."<sup>72</sup> However, these plans would involve subduing Angria. Second, the Marathas on sea and land were a cause of instability. They had been at the gates of Surat on more than one occasion in the early 18th century and raids into the surrounding Gujarati hinterland had caused weaver and

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<sup>69</sup> Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion*. p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*, vol. II.5, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). p. 301.

<sup>72</sup> Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*. p. 123.

suppliers to relocate to other more secure markets. Furthermore, the tolls charged at sea and on land routes were high which cut into traders' bottom lines.<sup>73</sup> Insecurity on land raised transaction costs and disrupted the economy. Meanwhile competition between polities over sovereignty, expressed politically through the *cartaz*, also raised transaction costs because merchants had to purchase several passes if they were to trade unmolested.

Third, there were personal considerations. Company employees were paid meagre wages that they made up for through the private trade they were allowed to carry out in the Company's vessels.<sup>74</sup> All levels of employees were active in this kind of trade. For many, especially those in the highest positions, this was how fortunes were made.<sup>75</sup> Considering that Angria's actions could result in the loss of not only Company, but also of personal trade goods, personnel in all levels of the Company would have wanted to make the coast secure from paying additional duties or from the risk of ship's seizure, especially if as a result it led to regional maritime hegemony where everyone could possibly partake in the benefits.

Politically the English were unwilling to accept the sovereignty of another state over the coastal seas. The Company had been in the region since the establishment of their factory at Surat in 1612. The Company had since effectively squeezed out other European powers, such as the Portuguese, and grown to become the recognised maritime power by the Mughals and other lesser potentates in the region. For example, after a series of depredations by European pirates that included British pirates

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<sup>73</sup> Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India*. pp. 301-302.

<sup>74</sup> J. H. Parry, *Trade and Dominion: The European Overseas Empires in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: 1971). p. 64.

<sup>75</sup> Om Prakash, "English Private Trade in the Western Indian Ocean, 1720-1740," *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2/3 (2007). Prakash uses the example of Bombay Governor Robert Cowan who became rich off of the complex merchant network he was involved with during his tenure in India.

Henry Every seizing the richly laden *Ganji-I Sawai* in 1695, the largest ship of the Surat merchant fleet and three years later William Kidd capturing the *Quedah Merchant*, a high Mughal court official's ship, a diplomatic debacle ensued that had been brewing for years between the Mughals and the EIC. The end result of which was the agreement that the Company would undertake responsibility for the operation of a convoy in order to ensure the safe passage of Mughal shipping in and out of Surat and the Konkan coastline against the attacks of European pirates.

Historian Laura Benton argues that by accepting the agreement the EIC recognised implicitly Mughal regional dominance on *terra firma* while conversely the Mughals, by utilising the Company for maritime security reciprocally legitimised the Company's sovereignty on the high seas.<sup>76</sup> However, the EIC was not the only polity to be held responsible for the native merchants' losses, so too was the Dutch East India Company who also operated a factory in Surat.<sup>77</sup> Rather than the Mughals bowing to European naval and military superiority Das Gupta contends that the Mughals considered the Europeans to be of little consequential threat.<sup>78</sup> Only five years previously they had trounced the English in a war and perceived no long-term disadvantages in coercing the Europeans to accept trading privileges on Mughal terms. Furthermore, by opportunistically making the European companies absorb the bulk of the price for protecting native ships and trade wares the authorities in Surat externalised partly the transaction costs of their powerful merchant backers. The Mughals would find that they had overplayed their hand. The EIC was able to flex its naval might through a blockade of Surat that

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<sup>76</sup> Lauren Benton, "Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (2005). p. 716.

<sup>77</sup> Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat C. 1700-1750," in *India and the Indian Ocean World: Trade and Politics*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. pp. 74.

enabled them to gain better terms and placed them in an advantageous position *vis-à-vis* the Dutch.

By 1715 it was clear that Surat was in decline. The English were able to take solace in their factory to the south in Bombay. It was here that they concentrated their resources in the Konkan. The Company had struggled with the Mughals and powerful merchants of Surat as well as with the competing European powers. They were not about to share their recent gains with a new indigenous rising power.

### 3.1 Governor Boone Declares War

The failure of the Marathas to recognise the Company as sovereign over the seas coupled with the rise of the Maratha navy under Angria meant for Governor Boone that there was no other choice but to use force to suppress Angria. After Bombay's fleet and defences were established, Boone began a series of unsuccessful attacks against Angria's forts.

The first target was Vingorola Fortress on the island of Kenerey situated at the mouth of Bombay harbour. This had been under Angria's jurisdiction for the past four years when Shahu transferred over its administration to him.<sup>79</sup> Two frigates, the *Fame* and the *Britannia* were sent with a company of *sepoys* to attack from land and sea. They were soon after joined by another frigate, the *Revenge* and a dozen or so gallivats to land the troops. Biddulph claims the force returned after unsuccessfully bombarding the fort and being unable to even land the troops for the main assault. The commodore in charge of the operation was blamed for the failure, accused of being a coward, and dismissed from service.<sup>80</sup> Later the same year another force was assembled of over twenty vessels and 2500 European soldiers and 1500 *sepoys* and

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<sup>79</sup> Sen, *Early Career of Kanhoji Angria*. p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 41.

topasses. The target to attack was Kanhoji's headquarters: the fortress of Geriah. This undertaking also proved a failure. The only result was to declare the castle impregnable at the cost of two hundred men killed and three hundred "dangerously wounded."<sup>81</sup>

In early November 1718, the same fleet that had attacked Geriah was sent to Kenery to make another attempt on the fortress. The besiegers brought their broadsides to bear on the fortress and "cannanaded the Island very hott, lykewise the Island them."<sup>82</sup> The barrage was kept up from the third of November till the fifth when troops were landed but forced to hold back due to the "brisk Fire the Enemy made, and the cowardice of two of the Land Officers."<sup>83</sup> The sixth and seventh of the month also saw attempts at gaining access to the fortress but these too were repelled, though "more by the force of stones hove from the rocks than fier arms"<sup>84</sup> causing "several of our Men killed, or rather massacred, when they made this sudden Retreat."<sup>85</sup> On November 8, the attack was called off.

Governor Boone proved himself not one to give up. While negotiating a peace settlement with the Marathas and receiving compensation for goods and ships seized by Angria to the amount of 22,000 rupees, the next year was spent in preparation for another all-out assault on Geriah.<sup>86</sup> Boone was also trying to bring other polities into alliance with the Company against Angria such as the Persians,

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<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria*. p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> IOR/L/MAR/B/703A, "Journal of the Addison " in APAC (London: British Library, 1718).

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria*. p. 50.

<sup>84</sup> IOR/L/MAR/B/703A, "Journal of the Addison."

<sup>85</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 39.

<sup>86</sup> "Re: Trade with Angrey: Accounts, April 7, 1720," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 8.

prominent Surati Mughal merchants, and the Siddis.<sup>87</sup> Fortunately for Angria these negotiations all came to naught. Boone also had a new type of ship designed and constructed for the attack called the *Phram*, “the great and mighty floating machine”<sup>88</sup> which had a large strengthened deck and shallow draught and could thus be towed in close to fortress walls in order to cannonade them. A factory employee, Walter Brown, led the expedition commanding from the deck of the *London* whose Captain Upton left an account of the battle in the ship’s logbook.

According to Upton they sailed down to Geriah on the twenty-first of September 1720 and began the assault the following day. Brown having no military experience ordered troops ashore without first softening Geriah’s defences or making sure to secure his troops’ retreat. The result was six soldiers dead on the first day “besides about twenty wounded.”<sup>89</sup> Some of his own forces had yet to even arrive from Bombay, including the *Phram*. When the latter did arrive, the experimental vessel was put into action immediately and found to be defective in design. Its hull openings were cut at an incorrect angle causing the cannons to not even be able to “fling a balle Pistolle shot out of the water, the mussells of her guns pointing directly down.”<sup>90</sup> For the next several days the Bombay force sat in the harbour out of range of Geriah’s guns beset by problems with the officers and men “drinking from morning to night and noe command carryed.”<sup>91</sup> A landing force was again organised for the twenty-ninth ending in a fiasco when one of the *Phram*’s guns exploded, killing the five *sepoys* manning her. After several more days of “continnal disturbances

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<sup>87</sup> See letters number 11, 12, and 13 titled “Public Department Diary 1 A., 18 June 1720,” “Bombay Castle, June 1720,” and “Bombay Castle June 1720: Translate of Shaik Eslam Couns. Letter” respectively in *The Angreys of Kolaba*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya. pp. 3-4.

<sup>88</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> IOR/L/MAR/B/313a, “Journal of the London,” in *APAC* (London: British Library, 1720). Entry for 24 September, 1721.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. September 27, 1721.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. September 27, 1721.

in the ship daily by the Officers ixcessive drinking & noe manner of Command carryed," the fleet finally weighed anchor to attack one of Angria's forts, Tamana further south near Goa.<sup>92</sup> This was at the request of a local potentate and Captain Upton opined that Brown used the appeal as an excuse to abandon the failure that had become their attempted assault on Geriah. Subsequently the allied potentate did not keep his end of the agreement by not even appearing with troops to assist in the taking of Tamana. As a result Brown ordered the fleet to return to Bombay. On the way back the *Phram* was purposely set alight and scuttled so as not to slow the ship towing her.

Walter Brown was the last non-military Company servant to lead a military expedition. In 1721 the Royal Navy was brought in under the command of Commodore Matthews who led the most ambitious attack yet: a joint operation with the Portuguese starting in November to take the island and fortress of Kolaba. The Lusitanians were to march overland from their own territory in Chaul with 2,500 land forces while the EIC were going to supply a similar land force and include five ships of the Bombay Marine, in addition to the ships of the Royal Navy. The assault was to begin by bombarding the fortress from the water and when most appropriate to land artillery on the shore. It would then be possible to send in ground forces to storm the castle. When victorious, the Portuguese were to receive Kolaba and the EIC Geriah.<sup>93</sup> Both parties agreed to be full allies and not to enter into separate peace with the enemy if the operation did not go as planned. Commanding on the Portuguese side was the Viceroy of Goa himself, Don Antonio de Castro and the General of the North assumed second in command. Kanhoji, having learned of the planned attack, had earlier been able to secure the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. October 18, 1721.

<sup>93</sup> Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 64.

assistance of 25,000 of Shahu's troops, which were on their way from across the ghats.<sup>94</sup>

Almost from the start the campaign was beset by problems for the attackers. There was little co-ordination between Commodore Matthews and Viceroy de Castro. Clement Downing, who was present at the battle offers an interesting, if not one-sided, account of it and states the English, "came boldly up to the Castle-Walls...where they pitch'd their Scaling-Ladders and gallantly ascended the Walls" meanwhile,

The Angrians came down in a great Body, with several Elephants; which the General of the North perceiving, he broke the Order of his wing...[and] the whole Army fell into Confusion. So soon as the Enemy saw that the Portuguese were on the Retreat, and the whole Army was confused, they came down upon them, and made a terrible Slaughter amongst the English Soldiers and Seamen; great part of our Artillery was taken with most of the Ammunition<sup>95</sup>

The "Angrians" Downing refers to in the passage are the Maratha forces sent by Shahu to assist Kanhoji. Due to the day's debacle, "the Commodore come on shore in a violent Rage, flew at the General of the North and thrust his Cane in his Mouth, and treated the Viceroy not much better."<sup>96</sup> At this juncture, the Portuguese, saw a way to get out of their agreement with the British and decided to open negotiations with the Maratha commander sent by Shahu. Because the EIC labelled Angria a pirate they did not consider waging war on him to be waging war on the Marathas. The Portuguese who were open to conclude a separate peace with the other Maratha general conveniently exploited this distinction, however false. Of this Downing wrote, "the Angrians defeated us this

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<sup>94</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. pp. 250-251. Malgonkar does not cite a source directly for this number he probably received it from Marathi chronicles. Shahu's force was probably large though this number should be treated with some skepticism.

<sup>95</sup> Downing, *A History of the Indian Wars*. p. 58.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 59.



time, intirely by the Treachery of the Portuguese, who seem'd to design only to lead our People on, and then to leave them in the lurch.”<sup>97</sup>

The British force arrived back in Bombay in early January. Governor Boone had hoped to end his tenure on a victorious note. His replacement, William Phipps, had been waiting in Bombay for over several weeks in order for Boone to get word of a victory that never came. Phipps took over on January 9, 1722 and thus ended the failed military ventures of Governor Boone.

Kanhoji was a tactful leader. His strategy consisted of calculated manoeuvres that stacked the odds in his favour and of never being in a position of fighting too many battles at once. Despite the more formidable firepower of the Company's vessels Angria was able to exploit his comparative advantage by using small, easily negotiable, quick-sailing craft and strong defensive fortresses. The Company's forces were undisciplined and suffered for want of professional command. Even when command was capable the lack of coordination both within the English forces and with their allies helped to defeat the missions before they even began. As such they were no match for a ready trained and professional force such as Angria's. Learning from Boone's mistakes, Phipps would adopt a different strategy of accommodation and negotiation in a new era of relations between the Marathas and the Company.

### *3.2 New Angrias, New Governors, New Peshwas*

The treachery the EIC felt towards the Portuguese as a result of their making peace with Angria had strained Anglo-Lusitanian relations. The Viceroy of Goa was able to secure very favourable terms from Angria. As a part of their new alliance the Estado da India had even “Harbour'd Angrias Vessells when purssued [by the EIC]” and when the EIC was confronted at sea by Angria's ships the Portuguese “would not

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

give the English any assistance.”<sup>98</sup> Being attacked by a combined force had gained Angria an ally, even if it was only through a neutrality agreement. With one less European power to contend with on the seas Angria’s power had expanded rather than contracted as a result of Boone’s wars.

Initially Phipps sought to continue Boone’s policy of military and naval action against Angria. Six ships were built especially for use against ‘the pirate’ in 1722 though three almost immediately after being put into service “perished altogether.”<sup>99</sup> The twilight of 1722 saw London instruct Bombay to desist

...warlike preparations against Angria [they have] been too excessive to be longer supported by us especially when our people both at the Coast & in the Bay...have loudly complained...we shall be necessitated to lessen that charge & maintain no more than sufficient to defend ourselves from Insults between Surat Bombay and the neighbouring places perhaps as far as Carwar without sending them down the Malabar Coast as we did a year or two since to the securing the country trade at our cost...<sup>100</sup>

Bombay had it from high authority to back off. The cost of the unsuccessful expeditions was too much for the Company to bear. They were, after all, there to make profits not to conquer. If the costs of dealing with Angria were to be lessened by accommodating or minimising as best as possible interactions with the Marathan admiral then so be it. By deciding to scale back the extent of their patrols and voluntarily relinquishing the security of the country trade, the EIC was implicitly recognising the jurisdiction of Kanhoji outside of the immediate Bombay

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<sup>98</sup> IOR/H/60, "The United East India Companys Answer to the Portuguese Envoys Memoriall Complaining of Outrages Comitted by Mr. Phipps Governor of Bombay," in *IOR* (London: British Library, 1723).

<sup>99</sup> "Letters from Madras, to the Worship. William Jennings Esqr., August 21, 1722," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records* ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> "Despatches from England, 1721-24: Dated December 21, 1721," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 8.

area. Peace, however, did not reign. Angria continued to stop and seize all "Ships or Vessells he could meet with and overpower Unless they had taken his pass for which they paid him well."<sup>101</sup> Apart from minor skirmishes and the occasional taking of vessels the years leading up to 1729 were relatively peaceful ones. Angria and Phipps exchanged several letters in attempts to come to an accord and occasionally Kanhoji returned goods taken or the two sides exchanged prisoners. A general peace agreement, however, could not be arrived at.

In October 7, 1729 Bombay received word that Kanhoji Angria died. He was immediately succeeded by his son Sukhoji whose own career was "so flush'd with Success that they Attack but everything they meet."<sup>102</sup> This included the Portuguese and Siddis, both of whom were ousted from the Konkan by the Maratha army with the assistance of Angria.<sup>103</sup> Upon Sukhoji's own death in 1733, the *surkhail* was passed to Sambhaji. In 1735, the Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao divided the Angrian territories and gave the northern Konkan to Manaji, Sambhaji's half-brother. .<sup>104</sup> The Confederacy had undergone several changes over the years. Foremost of which was the rise in power of the *Peshwa*. Emperor Shahu was by all accounts content to allow the day-to-day running of affairs in the hands of his ministers. As a result the *Peshwa's* power had grown substantially to the point where, by the death of Shahu in 1749, they were able to take complete control of the affairs of state, while the new emperor Ramaraja was reigning in name only.<sup>105</sup> With the exception of Manaji, none of Kanhoji's sons were supportive of this development.

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<sup>101</sup> IOR/H/60, "The United East India Companys Answer to the Portuguese Envoys Memoriall Complaining of Outrages Comitted by Mr. Phipps Governor of Bombay."

<sup>102</sup> IOR/L/MAR/B/706A, "Journal of the Ockham," in *IOC* (London: British Library, 1732).

<sup>103</sup> "Recounting Sceedy's Losses: Combined Maratha-Angrey Forces against Sceedy: Steps to Prevent Fall of Underee," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). pp. 20-22.

<sup>104</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*. p. 76.

<sup>105</sup> Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas*. pp. 486-487.

The failure of the *surkhail*-holding Angrias to support the *peshwa* regime would eventually lead to their downfall and the end of Angrian power on the coast. In their place the EIC would become the maritime hegemony.

Manaji Angria did not get along with his brothers and they were frequently in conflict with each other. The Company used this division as an opportunity by remaining neutral or only taking sides with the lesser power, Manaji, as they had doubts that any alliance with Sambhaji “would long continue in peace.”<sup>106</sup> Despite the Company’s efforts, Sambhaji captured the most lucrative prize in the history of the Angrias when he captured the *Derby* on December 26, 1735.<sup>107</sup> The loss was so great that Company factor lamented they “shall not have Treasure sufficient to provide a loading of coffee at Moche.”<sup>108</sup> The *Derby*’s capture led to another round of negotiations between Angria and the EIC despite the latter’s sending out ships to engage Sambhaji’s vessels, who also continued to patrol. As a result, ships would be seized and bring any progress in negotiations back to the beginning. Without a freezing of hostilities while entreatments were being discussed peace was never seriously given a chance.

Notwithstanding the problems between the *Peshwa* and Sambhaji the English stated the latter “always called himself to be a servant of the Sou Rajas.”<sup>109</sup> However, in 1740 the Company reported that “the Morattas are so jealous of Sambajee’s power and so many Hostilitys have already past between them, that they are bent upon Reducing him

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<sup>106</sup> "Inchbird Be Sent to Secure the Release of Prisoners, May 1736," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records* ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 36.

<sup>107</sup> For an account of the capture and fate of her crew see: Anonymous, *A Faithful Narrative of the Capture of the Ship Derby* (London: Osborn, 1738).

<sup>108</sup> "Angrey's Boats Capture Derby, January 8, 1735-1736," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 34.

<sup>109</sup> The “Sou Rajas” means South Rajas, another name for the Marathas. "President Informs Sambhaji About the Receipt of Communication, December 14, 1738," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 51.

and will in all Probability attack him.”<sup>110</sup> This outcome was still several years away. Not until after the death of Shahu in 1749 would relations between the Angrias and the *Peshwas* deteriorate beyond repair.

In 1743 Tulaji had succeeded Sambhaji as *surkhail* and a British chronicler states that around 1754, Angria no longer remitted his annual tribute to the Maratha state and that he “slit the noses” of the Maratha ambassadors who came to collect and sent them back empty handed.<sup>111</sup> Whether or not this last part is true, open hostility did not erupt between the Marathas and Tulaji until 1755. Despite the fact that two years earlier the *Peshwa* was reported to have stated he would not tolerate Tulaji any longer.<sup>112</sup> Contrarily Tulaji and the *Peshwa* are also recorded to have co-operated together on several occasions. Notwithstanding, it is clear that there were difficulties with the relationship.

In 1754 however, Tulaji suddenly initiated a peace proposal whose terms Bombay was not willing to accept and in response told Tulaji “Can you imagine that the English will ever submit to take the passes of any Indian Nation, this they cannot do; we grant Passes but take none from any body.”<sup>113</sup> It could be that Angria was having continual trouble domestically and knew what was coming his way and so sought to preemptively come to terms with the English. Regardless, peace between the two did not occur.

The following year in March the EIC was offered by *Peshwa* Balaji Baji Rao “to join forces with theirs and endeavour to subdue and

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<sup>110</sup> “Re: Marathas Jealousy of Sambhaji's Power and Their Determination to Reduce Him, May 16, 1740,” in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). p. 74.

<sup>111</sup> Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria*. p. 63.

<sup>112</sup> Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*. p. 77.

<sup>113</sup> “Re: Doubting the Sincerity of Tulaji's Peace Proposal, November 1, 1754,” in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastavya (1950). pp. 132-133.

demolish Toolaji Angria.”<sup>114</sup> Seizing the opportunity the Company readily agreed and it was decided the campaign should begin that summer. The English would provide a naval force in order to bombard the enemy’s fortresses as well as troops to be landed for a ground assault. The Marathas would make up the majority of the land forces and provide cavalry. “Without the loss of a Man”<sup>115</sup> Angria’s fortress of Severndroog was taken by the joint force followed by Bancoote, which fell with hardly a fight.<sup>116</sup> Another joint assault was planned for next year this time against Geriah.

The following February the Marathas and EIC converged on the fortress that had once been described as impenetrable. In an anticlimactic finish, Tulaji surrendered himself to the Maratha force of 9000 men, leaving his brother-in-law to defend the fort.<sup>117</sup> Commodore Charles Watson and Colonel Robert Clive, of later Plassey fame, commanded 1350 troops on land and sea.<sup>118</sup> After an evening and morning of bombardment the fortress surrendered and was occupied by Clive’s men.

Before the military operation the English and Marathas had agreed on the division of spoils. The Marathas were to keep all land and forts in exchange for favourable trading privileges and the explicit exclusion of other European companies operating in Maratha territories.<sup>119</sup> Manaji was

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<sup>114</sup> "Re: The Laying of the Maratha General's Letter Desiring to Subdue and Demolish Tulaji Angrey, March 10, 1755," in *The Angreys of Kolaba in British Records*, ed. B.K. Shrivastava (1950). pp. 133-135.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Watson, "In a Letter to the Earl of Holderness from the Ship Kent Off Fort St. George," in *IOR* (Fort St. George: British Library, October 7, 1755).

<sup>116</sup> Orme, *Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*. p. 413.

<sup>117</sup> Anonymous, *An Authentick and Faithful History of That Arch-Pyrate Tulagee Angria*. pp. 64-65.

<sup>118</sup> Charles Watson, "In a Letter to the Earl of Holderness from the Ship Kent, Bombay" in *IOR* (Bombay: British Library, February 1, 1756).

<sup>119</sup> "Number 1: Treaty with the Morattas, Dated the 12th of October, 1756," in *Treaties and Grants from the Country Powers to the East India Company, Respecting Their Presidency of Fort St. George, on the Coast of Choromandel; Fort-William, in Bengal;*

not involved in the engagements and was left in possession of his territory, but the Angria *surkhail* was disbanded. Tulaji died several years later while still in captivity.

Lakshmi Subramanian argues that the Angria dynasty fell due to the “incompetence of Kanhoji’s successors” but does not state how or why they were as such.<sup>120</sup> Even the cursory history offered above of the reigns of Kanhoji’s sons demonstrate that they were far from incompetent. They were able to carry on enforcing Maratha sovereignty and continue to challenge successfully the Europeans. It was only when there were internal disputes within the Confederacy that Tulaji was eventually removed from power. The fact that it took a joint force of over 9000 troops demonstrates anything but incompetence.

#### 4. Conclusion

Taking the history of the Angrias within its wider geopolitical context reveals a much more nuanced story than has been previously narrated. As demonstrated here, Kanhoji and his sons were not pirate sovereigns yet they were authorities over the Konkan and its littoral. Why did the English persist in their misconception then of Angria as a pirate? One possible reason advanced by Malgonkar is that by labeling them as pirates the EIC could write off these losses under normal insurance contracts.<sup>121</sup> Another possible explanation is that the EIC did not want to be seen as waging another war against an Indian empire. They had tried this in the late 17th century against the Mughals and it had ended poorly. Wars of conquest carried out by chartered private companies using public funds were not popular at home. The EIC did not want to stir up more

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and Bombay, on the Coast of Malabar: From the Year 1756-1772, ed. Thomas Byfeld and John Spencer (London: 1774). pp. 170-176.

<sup>120</sup> Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion*. p. 37.

<sup>121</sup> Malgonkar, *Kanhoji Angrey, Maratha Admiral*. p. 133.

public discontent than it could help. These explanations beg the question, why did the Marathas let the EIC get away with challenging their indigenous sovereignty over the seas. The short answer is they did not. Angria was there to seek out English shipping and enforce Maratha claims on the coast. Furthermore, the Maratha state did send troops to the Konkan when Angria requested as in the case of subduing the Siddi. Furthermore, this history has shown the Angrias could handle themselves quite well against their enemies. Additionally, the Maratha state was almost constantly involved in wars of territorial expansion. There existed no benefit to opening up a full-scale war on another front against the English and had they done so the Company was bound to enter into an alliance with Maratha's adversaries. No harm came to the Marathas for allowing the British to classify Angria as a sovereign pirate. Lastly, the English were good for trade. To remove them from the area or start an all out war would not have been good for anyone's economy.

For the last 2000 years the western coast of India was infamous for endemic indigenous piracy.<sup>122</sup> However, the only pirates of this sort mentioned during the tenure of the Angrias were the Angrias themselves. As this thesis demonstrated, they were not pirates at all but rather agents of the Maratha Confederacy who enforced the *cartaz* to gain revenue and exercise sovereignty. There exist no other accounts of maritime predation occurring from Indians in the region during the early 18th century. It stands to reason that the possibility exists that the Angrias were so effective in securing their littoral that piracy, once a real problem in the region, was all but eradicated.

The case of the Angrias demonstrates just how vulnerable the

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<sup>122</sup> Biddulph writes, "The people of the Malabar coast were left to pursue their hereditary vocation of piracy unmolested. The Greek author of the "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea," who wrote in the first century of our era, mentions the pirates infesting the coast between Bombay and Goa. Two hundred years before Vasco da Gama had shown the way to India by sea, Marco Polo had told Europe of the Malabar pirates." Biddulph, "The Pirates of Malabar." p. 34.



British position was in pre-colonial India. The Company could influence regional politics but could not dictate them. The Angrias, as servants of the state, articulated themselves politically through the issue and enforcement of the *cartaz*, which brought them into conflict with their neighbours. The ensuing struggles for political recognition and regional hegemony created a complex environment of negotiation and unlikely alliances. What is demonstrated is the reality of early interaction of global powers where there were no foregone conclusions. Europeans may have possessed superior military technology yet Indians possessed comparative advantages in other areas that made them formidable adversaries or welcome allies.

Indeed, it appears that only until the EIC could enlist the assistance of the local indigenous power was it able to effectively coerce other regional polities. By definition pirates are not regional state authorities. Continuing to apply such terms in an universalist misconceived manner has only persisted in faulty analyses and understandings of a more global cosmopolitan phenomenon. Treating the Angrias as nothing more than maritime predators has incorrectly influenced generations of scholarship on Konkan history and has hidden a much more interesting and nuanced story.

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