

A SPANIARD'S DIARY OF MANGALORE, 1776-1777

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A rare phenomenon in the history of colonial India¹ took place in 1776: a Spanish frigate docked at the harbor of Mangalore on April 7 and departed on March 25, 1777. This occurrence would have remained unknown² but for documents discovered in two Spanish archives, which disclose detailed information about the mysterious visit. An archive in Madrid has most of the material on the background, purpose and result of the expedition.³ On the other hand, the one in Seville contains the narrative of the voyage itself, which is summarized in this article.

The narrative written in the form of a diary consists of 138 folios and is embellished with four sketches and a map of Mangalore. The author was Miguel Antonio Gomez, who by virtue of his office—second in command and eventually the captain of the ship—was probably the most qualified to write about the voyage. Unlike many narratives which read like

¹ As Holden Furber commented: "Among all the foreign flags displayed by ships loading cargoes in British (India) harbors after 1783, the banner of one great European power (Spain) was never to be seen." See *John Company at Work* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1951) p. 145.

Furber could have added: nor was one seen before 1783 with the exception of the year 1776. Although intermittent clandestine trade had long been carried on in Manila by the British, employing ships flying Asian or Portuguese banners, no ship displaying the Spanish flag is known to have gone to British India. For works concerning this topic, see Serafin Quiason, *English "Country Trade" with the Philippines, 1644-1765*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1966; and W.E. Cheong, "An Anglo-Spanish-Portuguese Clandestine Trade between the Ports of British India and Manila, 1785-1790," *Philippine Historical Review*, I (1965) 80-94.

² To the best of my knowledge, there is only one work which mentions this incident but due to lack of information dismisses it in one sentence. See T.W. Venn, *Mangalore* (Mysore: Wesley Press, 1945), p. 57.

³ According to these sources Haidar Ali, the ruler of Mysore (1761-1782), sent a Jewish merchant on a diplomatic mission to seek an alliance with Prussia, a country whose military system Haidar greatly admired. Failing in his attempt, the envoy went to Madrid where the negotiation devolved to the level of a commercial transaction. The Jew was eventually told to confer with the Spanish governor-general of the Philippines. The appearance, therefore, of a Spanish ship in Indian waters was the outcome of a tentative trade agreement between Spain and Mysore.

The historical setting of this bizarre episode occurred between the First and Second British-Mysore Wars (1767-1769 and 1780-1782). Haidar Ali's double objective was to prevent the coalition of the British, the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad, and to seek military alliance with other European countries. If he failed in the latter objective, he hoped at least to establish commercial treaties with them, offering trade privileges in exchange for war material and services of military advisers and skilled shipwrights. While much has been written on Haidar Ali's efforts to win European allies, particularly France, nothing is known about his overture to Spain.

travelogues, Gomez's work is quite unique and valuable in several respects. For one thing, of the ten or so accounts of Mangalore written by travelers from Ibn Batuta in 1324 to an anonymous writer in the 1920's⁴, the Spanish diary is the longest and the most informative. While others wrote briefly of Mangalore as one of the numerous places they had visited, Gomez practically devoted his entire work to the town. Due to his dilligence, he touches on diverse topics, sometimes giving fresh information on such neglected areas of studies, as the rebuilt navy of Haidar Ali, the Nawab of Mysore 1761-1782, after the First British-Mysore War in 1767-1769, or his trade with Muscat in the Persian Gulf. For instance, he mentioned such little known bits of information as Haidar's naval chiefs in the mid-1770's, his "Jewish concubines" and the Persian mercenaries in his army, who on one occasion clashed with the Muscat sailors in armed combat to the consternation of the populace. Most important of all, the Spanish diary is a valuable contribution to Indian local history. There is a scarcity of material on the history of Mangalore, especially the period before the British occupation. Gomez's observation of the town's commerce, religious festivals, social classes and government officials will certainly delight document-starved researchers. It is pleasantly readable, and probably the only Spanish first-hand narrative on colonial India. The summary of Gomez's work follows:

*Relation of the Voyage to Mangalore*⁵

The Spanish frigate departed from the Philippines 25 January 1776, and reached the strait of Malacca February 8. Along the way, the Spaniards were asked twice by the British—first, past Mahim and then, just before entering Mangalore—where they had come from and where they were going. They replied: "From Manila to Goa and Surat," and—on the second occasion—"to get water supply and to ballast the ship." On April 7, they arrived in Mangalore, where the author expressed shock at the uncouth manners and greed of the stevedores that

⁴ A. Stuart, *South Canara* (2 vols., Madras: Government Press, 1895) I, 73; II, 255; and *Gazetteer of India: South Kanara District* (Mangalore: Government Publication, 1973) XI, 49-68; and Venn, pp. 1-4, 9-13.

⁵ The actual title of this document is "Relacion del Viaje hecho del Orden de Su Majestad por la Fragata N.S. del Carmen alias La Deseada escrita por Don Miguel Antonio Gomez al Puerto de Mangalor para Fines del Real Servicio, año 1777," *Archivo General de Indias* (Sevilla), Sección del Estado, legajo 45.

Unless otherwise indicated, hereinafter all parts of this article are drawn from this narrative.

unloaded the cargo from April 9 through 14. "They swarmed all over the ship and tried to get everything they could lay hands on, including cannons on deck." When the lightened vessel was about to enter the inner harbor, a squadron of British ships intercepted it. Informed by the English factor, "Stuart"⁶, that the Spaniards unloaded war material, the squadron commander named "Mor"⁷, tried to confront them with the evidence. In the presence of the Moslem governor of Mangalore, the admiral and other town officials, he yelled angrily at them: "I will do with the Spanish frigate what I will do with this hat." At these words, he grabbed it off his head, hurled it to the ground and stamped on it furiously with his foot until it was torn to pieces."

During the months of May and June, several diary pages of Gomez described in detail the destruction caused by the Indian monsoon which buffeted the town night and day with "continuous torrential rain and howling wind [that] uprooted trees." Several big ships, native as well as European, were wrecked with heavy loss of human life. Although the Spanish frigate was not seriously damaged, the sick crew had to be moved three times because the roofs of the first two houses which had served as infirmaries were blown off by the wind.

On May 8, Ramon Yssasi, the ship captain, departed for "Patan" [Seringapatam] in the company of Haidar's envoy. Cheg Ali, the Moplah governor, left shortly afterward for the same destination but died in "Turcur Umali" [Karkal-Udipi?] on his return trip. He was succeeded by his brother, Pocre Balaal. Gomez, who was in command of the Spaniards left behind in Managalore, tried to win his good-will through gifts, favors and social amenities. Despite his efforts, he had only unpleasant memories of the new governor. The killedar, Yacabai Khan, was different. Initially cold to the Spaniards, he gradually changed his attitude and became quite friendly. Another interesting official was the "admiral" of Haidar Ali's navy, whom the author called "Angri" after his ancestral state Angria.⁸ His father was the famous Maratha pirate who terrorized the coast of Malabar with his mighty fleet based in

⁶ Actually, his name was Charles Stewart, assistant to the senior factor of Hanowar in 1769 within the jurisdiction of the Bombay Presidency. He later became a senior merchant and was elected eventually to the vacancy on the Board of Trade in Bengal in 1788. See *Indian Register*, 1768-1876, vol. 1776-1778, pp. 48.66.

According to Gomez, Stewart spent most of his time in Tellicherry because the local authorities severely restricted his commercial activities in Mangalore.

⁷ This writer was unable to identify this British naval officer.

“Guirien” [Gheria].⁹ After his father’s capture by the British, he was appointed admiral by the Nawab. Gomez described in detail the reception accorded the Spanish officials at the admiral’s residence (see Fig. 1). On November 27, however, Angri was taken prisoner. According to the killedar’s explanation, his father was restored by the British to his state and Haidar had doubts about the admiral’s loyalty. He was succeeded in his post by a Hindu whom Gomez called “Baburao,” a generic name given to a Brahman in the service of the Nawab. Of him, the author wrote: “Unlike others, he is very good and generous to us...without any deceit or intent to exploit us.”

Gomez did not write directly about Haidar’s navy as he seemed primarily interested in recording all ships that called at the port. Implied, however, in his writing is that rarely if ever were all the Nawab’s ships assembled in one place, some of which were in fact seldom seen. Among those frequently mentioned as entering the channel was a flotilla of three packets and five gallivats plying between Mahim and Mangalore, bringing arms and ammunition to the latter port. Its commander was Hebrain Bap Donga, who went to Calicut on 9 March 1777 to conduct to Mangalore an English ship bought by the Nawab for 160,000 rupees. Another frequent caller was a ship of Ali Rajah of Cannanore, an ally of Haidar. It regularly carried rice to Bombay and brought back riggings for Haidar’s fleet. Two bombaras and a grab reportedly from Bombay were sometimes seen unloading cordage and lumber for ship construction. Three and sometimes four frigates of the Nawab sailed regularly to Muscat with cargoes of rice and returned laden with horses, camels, dried fish, salt, sulphur, coffee, nuts, almonds, raisin, dates and drugs. A flotilla of eleven gallivats and two grabs were recorded 21 December 1776 as having sailed for Coondapoor in order to convoy to Mangalore “ships recently constructed” there. The biggest assemblage of Haidar’s navy was sighted 27 January 1777 and estimated by Gomez at about forty ships. But he had nothing good to say

⁸ His full name was Raghunath Angria. In his work, *The Military System of the Marathas* (Bombay: Oriental Longmans, 1958, p. 206.), Surendra Nath Sen mentioned him casually in one short sentence as “the captain of Haidar’s navy”. In view of Sen’s remark, Raghunath Angria’s title of “admiral” has to be ascertained.

⁹ His father’s name was Tulaji Angria. See B.K. Apte, *A History of the Maratha Navy and Merchantship* (Bombay: Government Press, 1973), pp. 82-83.

about the seamanship and valor of the crew, once criticizing them severely for not having "the courage to pursue four or five gallivats [which] robbed two merchant ships from Masulipatam — within sight of the Nawab's fleet." The Maratha pirate who perpetrated the daring robbery was called "Raspu".

The author had much to say about the town's commerce. Rice was the major export. Certain merchandise like pepper, areca, cardamon, etc., were under government monopoly. They were grown elsewhere and transported to Mangalore or Condapoor where they were traded for guns, saltpetre and European hardware. Some products were for local consumption like the cotton textile woven in Chandrapatent and Bagalur and kitchen utensils manufactured in "Nagar" (Bednur?).

The most conspicuous mercantile ships were from Muscat. Six, seven and eight bombaras arrived in October, November and December 1776 respectively. The busiest month was January 1777 during which Gomez counted sixteen bombaras, excluding a huge frigate of the Imam himself. Besides their cargoes of dates, lemons, garlic, shark fins, sulphur, dried fish, camels and more than one hundred horses, they carried aboard three "Jewish women" for Haidar's harem and 300 Persian recruits for his army. When they departed, each ship was loaded with about 3,000 cavans¹⁰ of rice, some areca nuts, sandalwood, sugar and pepper. One day, a fight broke out in the market place and developed into a two-hour melee between 300 Persian mercenaries and an equal number of people from Muscat. The following day, hundreds of uninvolved Muscat sailors landed in order to participate in the fray, but they were pacified by the governor and the killedar who forbade the Persians from leaving their quarters.

Of the European ships that called at Mangalore, the British were predominant. Occasionally, big warships came from Europe loaded with "fresh European troops." Most of the time, however, shipping consisted of small merchant vessels flying the "British flag" and sailing alone or in groups of as many as thirty. Mr. Stewart, the English factor, seldom stayed in town. In fact, he was afterwards prohibited to trade there. Gomez did not mention any resident French factor and recorded only ten French ships during a period of almost one year. One day in October, a frigate arrived allegedly sent by Governor Picot of Mahin with a secret message about an English plot to seize the Spanish ship. Although Gomez offered no explanation, he noted that while Dutch and Portugese ships passed

¹⁰ A cavan is a Philippine unit of measure equivalent to 2.13 bushels.

by in the open sea, none of them entered the harbor of Mangalore.¹¹

The port town of Mangalore, according to the author, is situated at the confluence of Mangalore and Kodial rivers (actually called Natravati and Gурpur rivers) which originated from the Ghats. In the first mentioned river, smaller vessels can sail about six leagues inland as far as the town of Bental; the second river is navigable as far as the town of Gурpur about three leagues away. Besides the downtown coastal area called "Codeal" [Kodial], there were many outlying residential districts located on hilly terrain and separated from one another by vast ricefields (see Fig. 2). At the outskirts of the town was a gunpowder factory, where Gomez saw rows of about 160 women alternately pounding the ingredients with such impressive timing that the numerous falling pestles produced only one sound. The powder, however, was of poor quality. The mill left by the British in 1768 was still in good condition but it had lain idle, because the natives did not know how to operate it.

The author divided the inhabitants into four categories: 1) The Moplahs, about 15,000 in number, who lived in the Kodial and monopolized the town's trade and bureaucracy. Recognizable by their skullcaps which looked like the cheese of Flanders, they were deceitful and notorious for bilking people, especially strangers. 2) Gentiles, consisting of several classes: a) Brahmin or nobles; b) Persis—dedicated to military careers and the "liberal arts"; c) "Baniyas" [Baniyas?] — the common people who worked as laborers, peddlers, boatmen, etc., d) Sudras — about 20,000 in number, who performed the most menial jobs. Gomez considered them as very good people; 3) about 4,000 Catholics — "Portugese, other Europeans, creoles, mestizos, Canarians, old Christians and converts" — concentrated in the parishes of Nuestra Señora del Rosario and Nuestra Señora del Milagro. They worked mostly in the service trades, such as tailoring, shoemaking, etc., while many mestizos served as soldiers garrisoned in town; 4) other nationalities — Europeans, Turks, Persians, Arabs and Mongols — the number of which was difficult to estimate.

¹¹ Maybe, Gomez had little knowledge of the strained relations between Haidar Ali and the Dutch. However, he knew why Portugese ships were not welcome in Mangalore. Angry over the Portugese collaboration with the invading British who captured Mangalore in 1768, Haidar abrogated their rights and privileges, dismantled their forts and imprisoned the factor and his family. Gomez heard the news in Mahim on 3 April 1776 while on his way to Mangalore. He must have a good reason for keeping quiet on this sensitive Portugese issue.

What fascinated though oftentimes dismayed the Spaniards were the many exotic religious celebrations in Mangalore. Gomez gave a lengthy description of the festivals of the elephantine god Ganoso" [Ganesha] 16-18 August 1776 (see Fig. 3), the goddess "Govari" [Gauri] August 27-28 (see Fig. 4), and the "Sheep" January 2, 1777. During the festival of the "Sheep," the governor's dependents and Moslem children flocked to the Spaniard's rented house "like a swarm of bees heading toward the beehive," asking for gifts. Then, there was another Moslem holy day on March 5, during which chained prisoners daubed from head to foot with chalk powder limped along the streets crying plaintively in order to move the people to pity, and thus give alms. Troops of pilferers disguised as fakirs roamed the streets. "It was necessary to close the house all the time," complained the author, "[because] if I were seen and did not give, they would shout all kinds of execrations to me and to all those in the house."

Besides these religious holy days, there were also civic parades and festivities to celebrate the arrival of the new governor on 12 August 1776, and the victory celebration of the Nawab's army over the Marathas near Bankapur January 17-18, 1777. On the first occasion, Gomez gave a sumptuous party (see Fig. 5) to honor the governor. When it was over, six pagodas were given to each band of dancers and each guest was given three pagodas and a wax candle to illumine his way home. During the victory celebration, it was announced that the enemy suffered heavy losses.¹² There was a colorful parade during which the military received the ovation of the people.

Despite this kaleidoscope of distractions, the sojourn of the Spaniards in Mangalore can hardly be described as pleasant. It was essentially a wretched, if not a frightening experience. What they thought would only be a visit of a few months dragged on for almost a year. For those who remained in Mangalore, it was boredom, culture shock, sickness for many, and for a time acute destitution for all. Those who went to Seringapatam had so traumatic an experience that it led to the premature death of Commander Yssasi. The exhausting trek

¹² It was reported that about "15,000 horsemen were taken prisoner and an equal number died in battle; 12,000 infantrymen were captured and 3,000 killed; more than 50 elephants, 30 palanquins, almost all the baggage, artillery pieces and the military cashbox of the enemy were taken."

The accuracy of these figures has to be ascertained. While it is true that Haidar's army was encamped at Bankapur — Gomez's narrative mentioned this a few times — the actual battle was said to have taken place near Saunsi. See Narenda Khrisma, Sinha, *Haidar Ali* (Calcutta: Mukherjee, 1949), p. 125.

covering hundreds of miles over harsh terrain and the gradual realization upon their arrival at Haidar's court that they were literally trapped in the most expensive accommodations¹³ they had ever known must have been a nightmare to the Spaniards, who had no inkling of what could befall them. "To be able to talk to the Prince," a liaison officer wrote to Gomez on 20 September 1776, "it is necessary to bring a gift to him and to all the people surrounding him. Even all the silvers of Potosi¹⁴ will appear little to him, and the [visitors] stay would thus be unnecessarily prolonged as was in our case." After spending a great deal of money, the Spanish delegation was finally received by the Nawab. However, permission to leave was granted after several weeks of delay. They finally arrived in Mangalore on November 10 to the relief of the starving Spaniards who had long awaited their return. With the proceeds from the sale of the ship's cargo, Gomez—now the highest ranking Spanish official—could once more afford to provide regular meals to the crew, and to resume his rather expensive manner of befriending local officials and other Europeans.

At Haidar Ali's order, "Rajah Ran, the governor-general of "Vidonor" (Bednur), sent an elephant as a present to the Spanish governor-general in Manila. Then, one of the twelve secretaries that comprised Haidar's cabinet arrived to discuss various unfinished matters with Gomez. The local authorities gave a three-day banquet in his honor. So did Gomez, who further gave him lavish gifts upon his departure on December 15.

While the Spaniards were preparing for their return trip to the Philippines, two French officers arrived and confided to the author that a combined British-Dutch-Portuguese fleet was being assembled to seize the Spanish frigate as soon as it came out of the harbor. They offered two or more warships to convoy it to Manila. For unexplained reasons, Gomez rejected the offer.¹⁵ As the day of departure approached, Gomez bade good-bye to the authorities. He could not see the Governor, since he was busy entertaining a guest, the son of the Imam of Muscat.

¹³ To have an idea of the hardship involved in traveling to Seringapatam, the expenses incurred in having an audience with Haidar Ali or his son, and the difficulty of obtaining permission to leave, see J. Van Lohuizen, *The Dutch East India and Mysore* (Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1961), pp. 42, 82, 88-90, 123, 138-140.

¹⁴ The richest mine in Spanish America located in what is now Bolivia and is said to have produced 800,000,000 pesos' worth of silver during the Spanish colonial period. See John Edwin Fagg, *Latin America* (12 ed: London: MacMillan, 1969), pp. 195-197.

¹⁵ Maybe, because it implied big protection fee and/or a concession to trade in Manila, which was forbidden by the king.

The killedar, however, was available. "I know for sure that the British will get you," he told Gomez. "If they bring you to Bombay or to other areas, write me and I will notify the Nawab. . . ." To which the author replied: "The Spaniards have also hands and feet like the Englishmen. In terms of strength, I do not know how much to answer you." The Baburao in turn told Gomez, that it was Haidar's wish that "they come back with a huge amount of weapons, especially cannons, and accompanied with skilled shipwrights."

On 25 March 1777, the Spanish frigate departed and had an uneventful voyage to the Philippines. Thus ends the narrative.

Conclusion

If judged by present-day standards of scholarship, Gomez's narrative obviously leaves much to be desired. His ignorance of Indian history and of local dialects, such as Tulu or Kannada, impaired the quality of his work. This led him to commit many errors. Whenever he ventured to render a brief historical background of local dynasties — obtained no doubt through hearsay. The result was a mixture of fact and fiction. His chronology was atrocious. Because of his upbringing and lack of appreciation of Indian culture, racial and religious prejudices surface now and then in his writing. At times he was silent or very brief on matters of great importance and quite verbose on things of little significance.

Viewed, however, from the standpoint of his personal limitations and the circumstances of his time, the author's shortcomings are understandable. First of all, he was not a chronicler by profession, much less a historian. When he devoted 15 pages of his diary to the fauna and flora of Mangalore, which would seem irrelevant to many modern readers, he was merely following the literary style of his time. Although biased, he was typical of Europeans of the 18th century and, in fact, his prejudice was mild compared to that of other contemporary writers. His silence on some important matters (the Portuguese condition in Mangalore, for instance) was probably due to the fact that, being a tactful person, Gomez did not want to offend Haider Ali and his local officials or because he considered some matters too sensitive (the commercial treaty negotiation, for example) to be included in his narrative. To emphasize this point, the author probably in his desire to eliminate the danger of his work falling into the wrong hands, described Mangalore and wrote other important papers and drew the map aboard

the ship during its return voyage to the Philippines. In recapitulation, many of Gomez's errors and superfluities are understandable, and while his local histories are to be disregarded, his first-hand observation are valuable.

As mentioned earlier, Gomez's work is accompanied by four sketches and a map of Mangalore. Experts in Indian art may want to appraise his drawings for whatever they are worth. The map on the other hand seems to have considerable historical value. According to Venn, "neither the archives of Bombay nor of Madras have preserved anything of pictorial interest [of Mangalore]." To his knowledge, there are only two good sketches of Mangalore: one made by a Dutch engineer in 1670, which he considered the best and selected it as the frontispiece of his book; and the other by a Portugese pilot in the early 17th century (no date) which is found in Faria y Souza's *Works*.¹⁶ Venn was of course unaware of the Spanish version, which is definitely superior. Unlike the other two which merely delineated the harbor of Mangalore, Gomez's work was not only a detailed mariner's guide to the seaport, but it is also a map of the town and its outlying areas. According to Gomez, "It was a very difficult task to accomplish," not only because of the town's "extensive irregular terrain and sinuous streets," but also because of the "suspicion he aroused" by roaming the streets with measuring equipment. It was only through sheer ingenuity that he was able to finish the survey. The map's value is further enhanced by the fact that Mangalore was then the bustling seaport and the naval station of Haidar Ali. Due to the shallowing of the channel at the close of the 18th century, Mangalore lost its commercial and strategic importance.¹⁷ It would not be surprising if Gomez's map is the only work of its kinds in the history of Mangalore from ancient times to the end of the 19th century.

¹⁶ Venn, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 7.

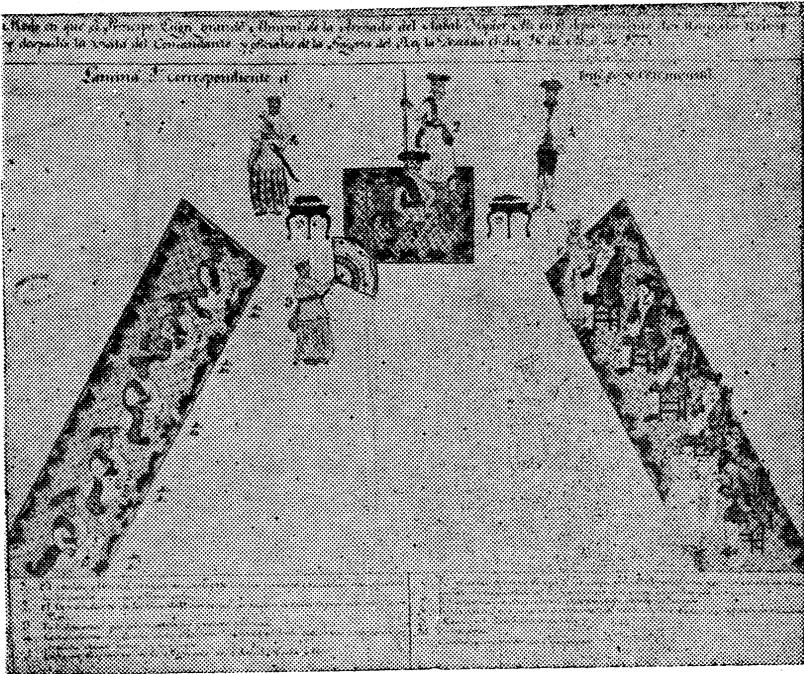


PLATE I. Reception accorded the Spanish officials at the residence of the Admiral of Haidzr Ali's navy.

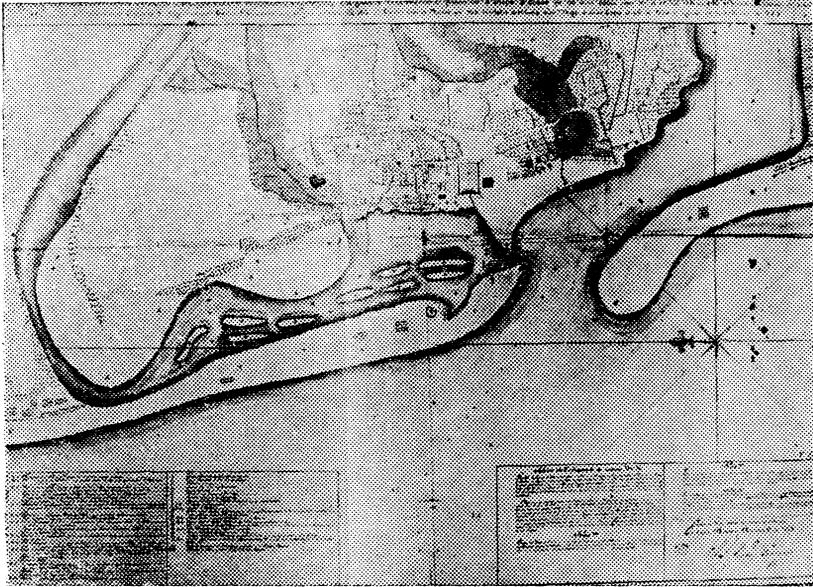


PLATE II. Map of Mangalore made by Miguel Antonio Gomez.



PLATE III. Ganezo.

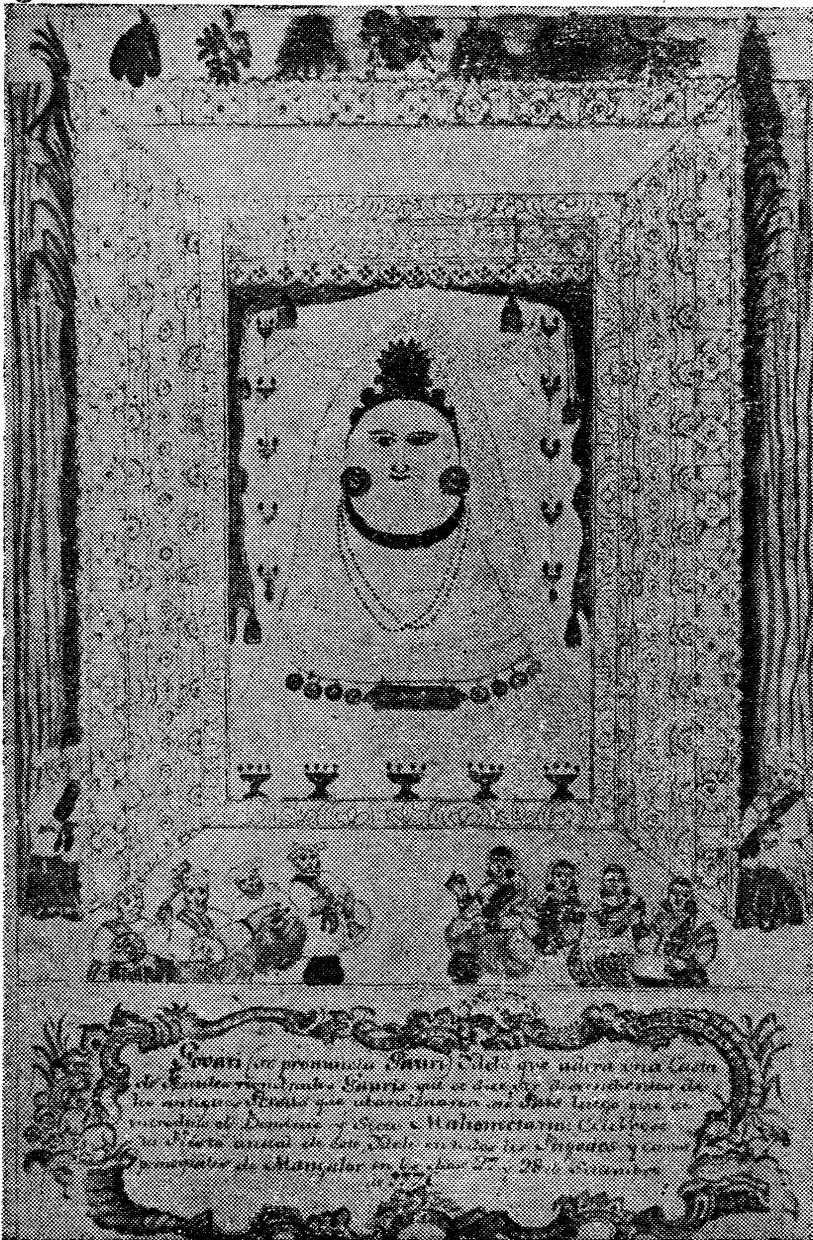


PLATE IV. Govari.

