DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR
Trends and Directions in the History of the Portuguese in Maritime Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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CHAIRMAN
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Abstract:
In this presentation I shall suggest and discuss six possible approaches to understanding the nature of the Portuguese presence in maritime Asia and East Africa, with glimpses of their respective historiographical traditions. In the first approach I shall treat the Portuguese presence, and the various institutions that sprang from it, as a classic ‘formal empire’. Then, secondly, I shall consider the notion that, especially in the eyes of economic historians, the Portuguese did not so much run an ‘empire’ as operate a ‘network’. Thirdly, I shall examine the idea that a fundamental aspect of the Portuguese presence was ‘informal empire’, a phenomenon that developed out of a widespread Portuguese private enterprise diaspora. The fourth line of approach will be to consider the Portuguese presence as represented on ‘constructed’ and ‘deconstructed’ maps. Fifthly, I shall discuss their presence as essentially a ‘cultural’ intrusion manifested particularly in language, religion, architecture and painting. Sixthly, and finally, I shall suggest how the Portuguese presence can be characterized as a vast ‘frontier’ marked by both conflict and peaceful interaction.

About the Speaker
Professor Anthony Disney is best known as the pre-eminent scholar of the Portuguese Empire and Portuguese imperialism working in English (his most important works have all also been translated into Portuguese). Disney produced 40 scholarly articles in journals or chapters in books, two edited books, and four single-authored monographs. Of the latter, the two most influential--Twilight of the Pepper Empire. Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century, published by Harvard University Press in 1978, and the magisterial two volume work Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: a History from Beginnings to 1807, published by Cambridge University Press in 2007--made and anchored his career, respectively.