CHAPTER III

HISTORIAN OR POET?

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN OS LUSÍADAS

What is exactly Luís Vaz de Camões’s identity? Can the readers regard him as a historian in addition to the identity attributed to him as a poet? It becomes, therefore, pertinent to ask the question how the creator of the epic himself viewed his own profession. Therefore, this chapter seeks to analyze the self-consciousness of the author as revealed in the epic regarding the identity the poet himself assumes with regard to the work he has created. He is, for the Portuguese people, the national poet who created an epic that helped enhance the national consciousness and political pride of their nation in Europe. However, it is difficult for most of the Camonians to regard him as a historian. The general perspective of this chapter, therefore, is that Camões can be considered as a historian as well as a poet. Because of the particular nature of a literary source, to take an exclusive position with regard to any category, including the identity of the author, becomes a near impossibility and lends the reader in a critical impasse.

It is a fact that the readers of Camões’s epic find themselves in a precarious position of not being able to decide whether the work is fiction or history. João Camilo dos Santos thinks that Os Lusiadas has a perfect structure of a novel. In his words,
The Lusiadas even includes a perfectly delineated novelistic plot, full of suspense, structured like a detective novel, two groups, both constituted by gods and men, battling with craftiness or arms in order to achieve the ends they pursue. Also not lacking in The Lusiadas is a profound awareness of the economic motivation of action, nor the recognition of life as a constant fight, nor the certainty that it is necessary to crush the enemy in order to survive and overcome. (136)

However, Santos, elsewhere in his article, comments that some readers of Camões still find the work rather indistinguishable from the work of a historian and its identity with history is afraid to be affecting its avowed appeal to fiction. The way out from this dilemma in the reading experience of Os Lusiadas is to approach it from both the positions, simultaneously. As he points out,

To those like António José Saraiva, who, in one of his occasional misdirected antipathies, claimed that Camões in Os Lusiadas did no more than repeat historians he used as sources, missed what C. M. Bowra, in his famous study on the epic [From Virgil to Milton], understood perfectly: that in the narrative poem of Camões we have the impression of discovering the action as recounted by someone who knows of what he speaks from first-hand experience (136, emphasis added).
One may consider how Camões viewed his own identity while he attempted this colossal work. In Canto I, stanza 10, he declares in his address to Dom Sebastião that he is motivated by the love of his country and not by any greed in writing the epic in praise of his country. But in the next stanza, he declares that what he writes would not be things “Fantásticas, fingidas, mentirosas” but historic deeds (as verdadeiras) that “excedem as sonhadas, fabulosas”. Writing in praise of his native land, Camões saw himself, without doubt, as a poet. The challenge Camões had to face was not primarily the question of poetic technique or any other issue related to literary history / theory. The problem he faced was how to transform a historical material into poetic form, without doing harm to historical truth. In the words of Harold V. Livermore, “Para Camões o problema essencial não era uma questão de teoria literária, mas de prática – como tornar poético o material histórico sem fazer violência à verdade histórica” (84, emphasis added).

If Camões were a historian he would not have been required to take sides with the ambiguous events in the history of Portugal. Camões, on the other hand, takes a moral (in other words, ‘poetic’) stand with regard to many such happenings in the political formation of Portugal. One of such impressive turning points is the succession crisis followed by the death of King Fernando in 1383. “The principal claimant was Juan of Castile, husband of Fernando’s daughter Beatrice, whose accession would have meant Portugal’s subjugation to Spain” (White, 238). Therefore, Camões whose single-minded criterion in such matters is always the country, takes sides with
João of Avis, a bastard son of King Pedro (Fernando’s father) though according to many a historian, “Juan of Castile had the [legally] better claim” (White, 238). Therefore, Camões sings: "Porque, se muito os nossos desejaram / Quem os danos e ofensas vá vingando / ... / Joane, sempre ilustre, alevantando / Por Rei, como de Pedro único herdeiro, / (Ainda que bastardo) verdadeiro” (IV: 2).

Camões finds his “loyalty to country and the ‘common will’” (White, 238) a convenient means to pass moral judgments on the events that follow. The battle of Aljubarrota (1385) produced many heroes for Portugal, among whom stands out Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira (1360–1431) while “his brothers Diogo and Pedro, like the majority of Portugal’s noblemen (together with Camões’s own ancestor Vasco Lopes de Camões), fought with Castile” (While, 239). Camões judges Dom Nuno Álvares’s action of killing his own brothers in the battle as ‘morally’ right, for loyalty to the country supersede all other considerations as far as the national poet is concerned: “Eis ali seus irmãos contra ele vão, / (Caso feio e cruel!) mas não se espanta, / Que menos é querer matar o irmão, / Quem contra o Rei e a Pátria se elevanta: (IV : 32 emphasis added). This does not mean that he is a self-assuming poet ready to always eulogize and romanticize the protagonists in Portuguese history. He is well aware that there were men who went against the ideals of the unification and nationhood of Portugal. As he sings in IV : 33, “Dizei-lhe que também dos Portugueses /Alguns treedores houve algumas vezes”. In other words, patriotism is his sole criterion of judging the events in history on moral terms.
Camões puts his ideas imaginatively into the mouth of João de Avis (later João I) as he addresses the knights in the battle: “Defendei vossas terras, que a esperança / Da liberdade está na vossa lança” (IV: 37)

It should also be remarked here that nationalism and patriotism of Camões do not signify merely the geographical boundary of Portugal but more significantly her people. At the end of the battle of Aljubarrota as the Portuguese cause wins, the heroes withdraw their egos from the claims of war. While João de Avis goes on a pilgrimage to offer the complete credit of the success of war to God, Pereira considers the victory as belonging to the people, too humble to be counted even as one among them:

O vencedor Joane esteve os dias

Costumados no campo, em grande glória;

Com ofertas depois, e romarias.

As graças deu a quem lhe deu vitória.

Mas Nuno, que não quer por outras vias

Entre as gentes deixar de si memória

Senão por armas sempre soberanas.

Para as terras se passa Transtaganas. (IV: 45, emphasis added)

It is, therefore, apt to regard Camões as a poet. Like any epic poet he imagines that “- Cantando espalharei por toda parte, / Se a tanto me ajudar o engenho e arte” (1:2). To the Nymphs of Tagus he begs not ‘history’ but
“Dai-me igual canto aos feitos da famosa/Gente vossa” (I: 5). Camões is self-conscious that his project is to attempt a national epic for Portugal: “Mas enquanto este tempo passa lento / De regerdes os povos, que o desejam, / Dai vós favor ao novo atrevimento, / Para que estes meus versos vossos sejam” (I: 18).

All the events in the epic had already been realized as Camões started to compose the epic. But he writes much of the history of Portugal and Portuguese empire expansion in future tense. Such a poetic rendering of history inspires the reader to imagine that Portugal was predestined to achieve the feats it did in the Orient. For instance, Jove assures his daughter Venus the destiny of Diu, Goa and Malabar as in a prophecy:

‘Vereis a inexpugnábil Dio forte,

....................

‘Goa vereis aos Mouros ser tomada.

....................

‘Vereis a fortaleza sustentar-se

De Cananor, com pouca força e gente;

E vereis Calecu desbaratar-se.

Cidade populosa e tão potente:

E vereis em Cochim assinalar-se

Tanto um peito soberbo e insolente.

105
Que citara jamais cantou vitória,
Que assim mereça eterno nome e glória.’ (II : 50, 51, 52)

Camões knows very well that though his subject matter is history, he is allowed, as a poet, to manipulate the time-sense of his text. He also knows that it is the nature of narration (whether be it history or poetry) to be selective and therefore brief even if the narrator may become anxious of the possibility of the work appearing as ‘too unconvincing’. Camões expresses his self-consciousness in this regard through the words of Vasco da Gama who begins to narrate the history of Portugal to the Sultan of Malindi: ‘E para dizer tudo, temo e creio, / Que qualquer longo tempo curto seja: / Mas, pois o mandas, tudo se te deve, / Irei contra o que devo, e serei breve’” (III : 4).

The question of convincing the reader is a preoccupation not only of a historian but also of a poet. While the historian thinks that presentation of documents would substantiate the story he is writing, the poet imagines that he can ensure the conviction of the reader by appealing to the reader’s taste for poetic figures. The death of Afonso the Great (1185), for instance – perhaps, a matter for a historian’s ‘prosaic’ treatment – becomes a thing of universal memory as Camões interprets the event rather poetically. The description,

‘Os altos promontórios o choraram,
E dos rios as águas saudosas

106
Os semeados campos alagaram

Com lágrimas correndo piedosas.

Mas tanto pelo mundo se alargaram

Com faina suas obras valerosas,

Que sempre no seu Reino chamarão

"Afonso, Afonso" os ecos, mas em vão’ (III : 84),

becomes emotionally powerful enough to move the reader’s imagination even to wish if Afonso had continued to live still longer.

The tragic history of Inês de Castro is, indeed, a romantic leaf in the history of Portugal. The ‘story’ (so called because many of the otherwise historical details are shrouded in mystery and myth) is that Afonso IV plotted the death of Inês, the mistress of his son Pedro I (1357-67) to avoid a Spanish claim to the throne. But what was sacrificed was love, and Camões appears to be regarding Inês, in the words of Landeg White, as a “hapless victim of state craft” (237). In the long narration of the incident (III: 118-136) which is rendered in rich literary tropes, the reader is allowed to look at the event not merely historically but even imaginatively. This technique which is pervasive in Os Lusiadas provokes the reader – against a mere linear reading of history – to ask questions and counter-questions regarding the real motives of Afonso, Pedro, Inês and the courtiers. Such a freedom for the reader to
constantly shift the centres of his / her reading is a special feature of literature as a source of history.

This is because, a poet by the very nature of his function turns out to be self-critical, and the reader of an epic has no constraint to refuse to follow a single and monolithic line of thought which is but a fundamental characteristic of traditional historical narratives. The Old Man of Belém (once the entrance to Lisbon harbour on the banks of Tagus, Belém literally means Bethlehem) casts the most powerful means of self-criticism against the follies involved in the Portuguese obsession of building an empire in the East (IV: 94-104). It is curious to observe that Camões does not spare himself from the ire of this imagined personification of wisdom:

- ‘Ó maldito o primeiro que no mundo

Nas ondas velas pôs em seco lenho,

Dino da eterna pena do profundo,

Se é justa a justa lei, que sigo e tenho!

Nunca juízo algum alto e profundo,

Nem cítara sonora, ou vivo engenho,

Te dê por isso fama nem memória,

Mas contigo se acabe o nome e glória.’ (IV : 102)

As Landeg White, the recent translator of the epic comments on the passage, “... the denunciation includes, by implication, Camões himself” (243).
Though, he is dealing with a historical subject, he wants to take the freedom of critically evaluating himself just as a Portuguese citizen who entertained the same dreams as those of the first seafarers.

Camões is well aware of the importance of feats and adventures in history, as is evident from the long narration of Vasco da Gama to the King of Melinde (II: 104 – V: 89) of deeds that surpass all poetry. These accounts, Camões knew, are different from those described by Ovid or Homer; for what the Portuguese achieved were not mere commendations in some epic imagination, but their achievements were historical feats recorded by chroniclers: “Ousou algum a ver do mar profundo, / Por mais versos que dele se escrevessem, / Do que eu vi, a poder de esforço e de arte, /E do que ainda hei de ver, a oitava parte?”(V:86).

But then, Camões proceeds to complement history with poetry, for he knows that without poetic / imaginative rendering of history, men would not be able to emulate noble deeds. He, therefore, assigns the following nine stanzas (V: 92–100) to sing the importance of poet and poetry in recording history for the sake of universal and everlasting memory. Hence a Vasco da Gama (history) needs to become an Aeneas (poetry) if the achievement should become a regular feature of the country. Thus, though action is superior to poetry, “...mas aquele Herói, que estima e ama / Com dons, mercês, favores e honra tanta / A lira Mantuana, faz que soe / Eneias, e a Romana glória voe” (V: 94). However, it is unfortunate, Camões thinks, that
Portugal still lacked a history in the form of an epic, though it was not because Portugal had no history or heroes, but Portugal’s poets were so few and still, Portugal had to strive on harsh circumstances (V: 97,98). The reason could also be identified with the materialism, philistinism and even pessimism of the Portuguese people, as he goes on to express his regret in Canto X: 145: “Não no dá a pátria, não, que está metida / No gosto da cobiça e na rudeza / Dúa austera, apagada e vil tristeza.”

In other words, Camões is a unique poet who insists on the combined effort of history and poetry, holding “numa mão a pena e noutra a lança” (V: 96) in recording history. The result is Os Lusiadas by which Portugal is awarded a history that could be recorded in people’s memory. Da Gama, therefore, should be grateful to the muses / poetry that the Portuguese feats are recorded in a never-fading memory: “Às Musas agradeça o nosso Gama / O muito amor da Pátria, que as obriga / A dar aos seus na lira nome e fama / De toda a ilustro e bélica fadiga” (V: 99) Indeed, what the nymphs sing is not the achievement of a single Portuguese, like Vasco da Gama, but the realization and aspiration of the entire nation: “De dar a todo o Lusitano feito / Seu louvor, é somente o pressuposto” (V: 100).

It is, therefore, no matter of doubt that Camões regards himself as a poet. But the point to make clear here is that though he strives (in Fernão Veloso’s words) to tell ‘our [his]story of war’ (VI: 41), he is also self-conscious that he is dealing in fable or fiction (VI: 42). His means is “meus
versos” (VII: 81) but his project is to ‘keep glory’ (VII: 82). Therefore, he has to be selective with regard to the choice of events and protagonists he is recording in his book of history (VII: 84-87 and VIII: 39-42). He is also aware that what his nation needs is **not mere history but memory**: “Feitos farão tão dinos de memória / Que não caibam em verso ou larga história” (X: 71, emphasis added).

Considering the identity of Camões, one can observe that as a self-conscious poet he is bent on using history as the subject-matter of his epic so that through the work, the history of his nation would be remembered. Shifting continuously between the identities of a poet and a historian, Camões claims himself to be poet, while he is equally forced to remind himself as much as the readers that he cannot but perceive himself as a historian. He knows well that what he records is not ‘fantasies’ but ‘historic deeds’ (I: 11), and, therefore, he goes to the extent of being self-conscious even of the method he adopts in telling the history most convincingly. Through the words of Vasco da Gama, while addressing the King of Melinde, Camões claims of, "Além disso, o que a tudo enfim me obriga, / É não poder mentir no que disser, / Porque de feitos tais, por mais que diga, / Mais me há-de ficar inda por dizer. / Mas, porque nisto a ordens leve e siga” (III : 5).

Da Gama / Camões accepts, like a historian, that some of his narratives belong to the realm of ‘the old legend – perhaps untrue’ (III: 23). For as the first European artist to visit the Orient so that he not only could witness the
places but even take part in action (voyage, war, etc.), Camões could very well claim himself to be more of a historian than a mere poet of imagination. Through the words of da Gama, Camões insistently claims that “A verdade que eu conto nua e pura / Vence toda grandiloqua escritura.”(V: 89), for there is nothing, not even poetry, that can supersede action : “Ousou algum a ver do mar profundo, / Por mais versos que dele se escrevessem, / Do que eu vi, a poder de esforço e de arte, / E do que ainda hei de ver, a oitava parte?” (V: 86). As William J. Entwistle remarks, “...for all that, Camoens is the poet of action, and it is for action that he esteems his country” (85, emphasis added). Action is not only the theme inherent in the poem, but is even the avowed intention and expectation as far as the response of the reader is concerned – after the model set by Camões himself who, though by fate, did visit the sites of actions of the first explorers. It is important to remark here that Hernâni Cidade who analyses two speeches in the poem, one by Bacchus and another by Nuno Álvares, concludes that the purpose of both the speeches is to wake up the dormant spirits of the listeners and to prod them to acção (“Os Discursos”, 201).

Myron Malkiel Jirmounsky thinks that Os Lusiadas is more of a historical narrative than an epic poetry. The work, according to him, presents the Portuguese maritime achievements along with the episodes from the history of Portugal ‘under the very eyes of the reader’ (8). In contradistinction to Tasso and others, as Jirmounsky thinks, Camões’s epic is the least dramatic
imaginative (though he concedes that there are dramatic scenes, like the
tempests, Adamastor, etc.). It is worth quoting Jirmounsky’s words:

No poema de Camões toda a acção relativo às proezas marítimas é
colocada sob os olhos do leitor, ao passo que tudo o que diz respeito a
parte histórica, aos episódios tirados do passado de Portugal, é
apresentado em discursos. Contrariamente aos processos de Tasso, não
é sob uma forma dramática, um quadro cénico, que nos é dada a acção
principal: o processo adoptado é sempre o duma exposição continua
estritamente narrativa. (8, emphasis added)

Consequently Os Lusiadas itself uses art as source of history. When
Catual visits Paulo da Gama’s ship, Paulo explains to the Malabari official the
history recorded in the paintings on the banners of his ship (VIII: 1-42). At
the end of the interpretation of history depicted on these paintings, Catual
remains ‘spell bound’, for history taught through art moves men as the
exercise appeals even to the aesthetic sense of the reader:

Assim está declarando os grandes feitos

O Gama, que ali mostra a vária tinta.

Que a douta mão tão claros, tão perfeitos.

Do singular artifice ali pinta.

Os olhos tinha prontos e direitos

O Catual na história bem distinta;
Considering the nationalistic urgency that provoked the creation of *Os Lusiadas* and the remote century it was written, the objectivity Camões’s work displays is amazing. Relationship (commercial/religious) with Malabar has been the single-most end of the conception of da Gama’s voyage as well as the end of the creation of the national epic. However, Camões, like a true historian, has no difficulty to admit that the romanticized goal of the voyage / construction of the poem could not be realized. He, nevertheless, informs the reader to what extent the voyage was a success:

Parte-se costa abaixo, porque entende

Que em vão com o Rei gentio trabalhava

Em querer dele paz, a qual pretende

Por firmar o comércio que tratava.

Mas como aquela terra, que se estende

Pela Aurora, *sabida* já deixava,

Com *estas novas* torna à pátria cara,

Certos sinais levando do que achara. (IX: 13, emphasis added)

The historical narration Camões gives, as almost every critic remarked is speckless and exact. In Vasco da Gama’s self-introduction to the King of Melinde (II:104–V: 89) is a presentation of *Portugal’s history* from the battle
of Ourique (1139) to the reign of Manuel I (1495-1521). Such a historical account is important to be enumerated, for the writing of history of a country is of paramount significance to the enhancement of nationalist consciousness. In this description of the nation from where he himself is hailing, Vasco da Gama gives a picture of the universe in the Ptolemic conception of the space and then proceeds to describe the peninsula of Iberia which is all but an island (III: 18); but among the other European nations, Portugal occupies a special position: "Eis aqui, quase cume da cabeça / De Europa toda, o Reino Lusitano, / Onde a terra se acaba e o mar começa, /E onde Febo repousa no Oceano" (III: 20).

In his narration of the history of Portugal, he refers to the line of kings and chief personae that helped forming the country into a nation. Alfonso VI of Castile (1065-1109)'s illegitimate daughter Teresa married Henrique (Henry of Burgundy) and their son Afonso I (1143-85) is considered the first King of Portugal, since he took the lead of the battle of Guimarães (1128) which is considered the beginning of Portuguese independence from Castile. His various adventures and victories made him Afonso the Great. His son Sancho I (1185-1211)'s achievements are described in III: 75-89. The third King is Afonso II (III: 90) and the fourth, Sancho II who but was a malicious king. Therefore, his brother Count of Boulogne deposed him and became Afonso III. His feats make him Afonso the Brave (III: 94). His son Denis I (1279-1325) who is known as "O Lavrador" was a great patron of arts, himself a fine poet and the founder of Portugal's first university which is at
Coimbra (III: 96-98). His son, Afonso IV who was known to be disobedient, was nevertheless a king of worth / "mas forte e excelente" (III: 98), primarily because he helped his son-in-law Alfonso XI of Castile to win the battle of the River Salado - "One of the three major battles of The Lusiads", according to Landeg White, the others being Ourique and Aljubarrota (237).

Afonso IV, however, is said to have plotted, "Tirar Inês ao mundo determina, / Por lhe tirar o filho que tem preso./ Cendo co'o sangue só da morte indina / Matar do firme amor o fogo aceso"(III: 123). His son Pedro’s mistress Inês de Castro’s poignant story is told in III: 118-136. Perhaps this event turned Pedro I (1357-67) into, in Camões’s words, a king ‘known as the Chastiser’ (III: 137). He seems to have learned no lesson from the action of his father for he did not have an eye on his own son. Consequently, Fernando (1367-83) was spoiled by lust, became lazy and negligent, who left the borders defenseless (III: 138). The country had to suffer for his sin: "Ou foi castigo claro do pecado / De tirar Lianor a seu marido, / E casar-se com ela, de enlevado / Num falso parecer mal entendido" (III: 139).

The result was the Castilian invasion beginning from 1373, an issue which would be settled only by the Battle of Aljubarrota (described in IV: 7-45). When, naturally, the succession crisis arose after Fernando’s death, his daughter Beatrice’s husband Juan of Castile appeared to have legally better claim (IV: 7). However, Portuguese loyalists fought under the banner of João of Avis, King Pedro I’s bastard son. The Battle of Aljubarrota (1385) that
ensued produced many Portuguese heroes, like Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira (1360? – 1431) whose heroism is sung in IV: 14-45. In the end came peace and even happiness when Prince Henry (later Henry III) of Castile and João of Avis (later João I) of Portugal married sisters – daughters of John of Gaunt (IV: 47). João I’s greatest achievement was his capture of Ceuta in 1415 which is very important in the history of Portugal since it was the first Portuguese overseas possession. As IV: 50 sings, his sons were all gifted ones including Duarte (IV: 51) and his brother who became the next king, as Afonso V (IV: 54). The latter claimed the throne of Castile when its king died. In the words of Landeg White, “The result was an Aljubarrota in reverse…. At the Battle of Toro (1476), Afonso V was saved from defeat only by the intervention of his son João, later João II (1481-95)” (240). It is with João II, the thirteenth king / “Rei trezeno” (IV: 60) that the Portuguese realized a novel interest for voyages, for, he "Manda seus mensageiros, que passaram / Espanha, França, Itália celebrada, / E lá no ilustre porto se embarcaram / Onde já foi Parténope enterrada”( IV: 61).

In these lines (IV: 61), Camões’s references are made to João’s agents Pero de Covilhã and Afonso de Paiva, the former of whom traveled (1487) to the Persian Gulf and to Cannanore, Calicut and Goa. It is the next king Manuel I (1495-1521) known as ‘the Fortunate’ (for he reaped the benefits of João II’s efforts) who dispatches Vasco da Gama and his fleet to India (IV: 66-83). Most of these landmarks in the history of Portugal are repeated and
forgrounded in Paulo da Gama’s interpretation of the paintings on the banners in his ship when Catual of Calicut visited him (VII 2-42).

Camões is also eager to remind the reader of the history of Portugal that took place between Vasco da Gama and the poet himself. The technique his imaginative mind invents is to make a nymph sing a song to da Gama and the sailors as to what would take place in future for Portugal, after their historic maiden voyage (X: 6-74). The idea conveyed through this technique of narration of the past in the garb of future tense is that all that took place in the history of Portugal were a matter of Divine predestination:

Com doce voz está subindo ao Céu

Altos varões que estão por vir ao mundo.

Cujas claras Ideias viu Proteu

Num globo vão, diáfano, rotundo,

Que Júpiter em dom lho concedeu

Em sonhos, e depois no Reino fundo,

Vaticinando, o disse, e na memória

Recolheu logo a Ninfa a clara história. (X: 7, emphasis added)

What is referred to in the nymph’s song is in the description of the Portuguese conquests in East Africa, Arabia, India and the China Seas. One of the first of such events is the Portuguese establishment of a station at Cochin in 1502
which was the beginning of the constant tension between Samorin of Calicut
and the combined forces of Cochin and Portugal:

\[
\text{Cantava dum que tem nos Malabares} \\
\text{Do sumo sacerdócio a dignidade,} \\
\text{Que, só por não quebrar cos singulares} \\
\text{Barões os nós que dera d'amizade,} \\
\text{Sofrerá suas cidades e lugares,} \\
\text{Com ferro, incêndios, ira e crueldade,} \\
\text{Ver destruir do Samorim potente,} \\
\text{Que tais ódios terá co a nova gente. (X: 11)}
\]

In the subsequent stanzas, the nymph speaks of the expeditions of
Durate Pacheco Pereira (who sailed for India in 1503) against Samorin (X: 12-20) Francisco Almeida, the first Portuguese viceroy of India (X: 26–29),
the death of his son Lourenço (X: 29), Francisco’s retaliation in 1509 (X: 35–37), the mistaken expedition of Tristão da Cunha to Brazil in 1506 (X: 39),
the second viceroy Afonso de Albuquerque (1509–15)’s consolidation of the
Portuguese control of the main spice routes (X: 40), the capture of Goa for the
second time on St. Catherine’s Day, Novemebr 25, 1510 (X: 43), execution
of Rui Dias (X: 46, 47), viceroyys like Soares de Albergeria (1515–18; X: 50),
Lopes de Sequeira (1518-22; X: 52), Duarte de Meneses (1522-24; X: 53),
Vasco Da Gama (X: 54), Henrique De Meneses (1524 – 26; X: 54), the

Reading of Os Lusiadas as source of history has not been a novel activity, though in the attempt most of the readers seem to forget to consider the fact that Camões’s work is equally a poem and, therefore, a linear reading would be an injustice done to the work. Fernando Castelo-Branco in his study “A História de Lisboa em Os Lusiadas” is able to identify at least four important instances of Lisbon being referred to in the epic. The first significant reference is about the legendary foundation of Lisbon by Ulysses (VIII: 5). The second reference is to the siege and conquest of Lisbon in 1147, which is also linked to a miracle of Heinrich of Bonn (III: 57-61; VIII: 18). The source for the miracle, according to Castelo-Branco is Crónica de D. Afonso Henriques by Duarte Galvão. The third reference to Lisbon is to the skirmish between the forces of João de Avis and those of Leonor Teles in 1383, when the Bishop of Lisbon, disloyal to the Portuguese cause, was killed (IV: 4-6). The incident is described in Crónica de D. João I, by Fernão Lopes. The fourth reference to Lisbon is with regard to the founding of the University of Coimbra by Dinis I (1279-1325), for which Camões’s source was, according to Castelo-Branco, Crónica de D. Dinis by Rui de Pina (29).
In such attempts as done by Castelo-Branco and others, what appears to lack is a juxtaposition of the essential poetic dimension of Camões’s epic along with historical reading.

In the second vision (first being the history presented through the nymph’s song) Tethys, Neptune’s wife, shows Vasco da Gama the universe from the perspective of the Ptolemyic conception of the world (the epic began with such a depiction of the universe in the Ptolemyic system in the narration of Vasco da Gama to the King of Melinde, and the poem seems to have a circulatory structure) and the world that awaits the Portuguese acquisition. Among the conquests and misgivings (which continue to be events that characterize the time between da Gama’s first visit and Camões’s own voyage to and from the Orinente), are included the Portuguese arrival in Sofala (X: 93), murder of the Jesuit missionary Gonçalo da Silveira in Karanga Kingdom in 1561 (X: 93), da Gama’s son Cristovão da Gama’s victories (X: 96), the siege of Ormuz by Pedro de Castello Branco in 1541 (X: 101), victories over New Ormuz by the governors Pedro de Meneses and Pedro de Sousa (X: 103), the discovery of the straits of Magelhan (Fernão De Magalhães) in 1520 and the Portuguese discovery of Brazil (X: 138–140). What the Portuguese get from this vision is a glimpse into the future of their exploits: “‘Até aqui Portugueses concedido / Vos é saberdes os futuros feitos’” (X: 142).

Authentic in being a historian, Camões has been extolled for being correct and exact in presenting the chronicled history of Portugal with its long
chain of kings and battles. In addition to the fact that, "Camoés's knowledge of constellations was exact and detailed" in the poem (White, 243), the poet is precise and accurate in giving information on the loss of life of Bartolomeu Dias in 1488 (V: 44), Pedro Alvares Cabral's discovery of Brazil in 1500[?] (V: 43), the victories and death (1510) of the first viceroy Francisco de Almeida and the deaths of Manuel de Sousa de Sepulveda and his wife and children in a shipwreck in 1552 (V: 45–47). What Landeg White speaks of V: 62–64 is true of Camões's epic in general: "Camões includes the episode partly because it features in the historical record which he follows with great respect (xii, emphasis added). Even when the invented (?) character Fernão Veloso tells a story (VI: 42–69), Camões takes care that "most of the figures mentioned in this story are historical, the context (chivalry with its blood-sports) is entirely plausible and Camões insists the tale itself is true. [Today] No Portuguese football team sets out for England without the press invoking the name of Magriço and wishing them equal success" (246, emphasis added).

Even though some of the names of the sailors in the fleet of da Gama in the epic might be inventions (which again cannot be proved beyond doubt), most of them are identified as historical (White, 241–242). Francis A. Dutra gives a short description of the voyage to and fro Calicut, as recorded in history:

King Manuel I (r. 1495-1521) named da Gama capitão-mor or leader of the armada which sailed from the Tagus River on Saturday 8 July 1497 in search of a maritime route to India. The size and capacity of
the ships are not known for certain nor is the number of men who
sailed on them. Two of the four ships, the São Gabriel and the São
Rafael, were commanded respectively by Vasco and his brother Paulo
da Gama. Another, the Berrio, was commanded by Nicolau Coelho.
The supply ship was captained by Gonçalo Nunes. Pilots included Pero
de Alemquer (who had piloted Bartolomeu Dias’s ships around the
Cape of Good Hope in 1488), João de Coimbra, Pero Escobar, and
Afonso Gonçalves. The fleet was accompanied by Dias, who captained
a ship whose destination was São Jorge da Mina on Africa’s Guinea
cost. (24)

The fleet sighted the Malabar Coast on 18 May 1498 and two days later, they
anchored several miles north of Calicut. They remained in Malabar Coast for
more than three months, attempting, according to Francis A. Dutra,

...to exchange the cheap trade goods ... [they] had aboard for cloves,
cinnamon, pepper, ginger, and precious stones. However, relations
between the Portuguese and the Samorim (sic) became strained and da
Gama’s stay in Calicut ended in hostilities with small naval encounter
on 30 August. ... On 5 October, da Gama began the long trip home.
... In very late August or sometime during the first three weeks of
September [1499], da Gama arrived in Lisbon. Earlier, on 10 July 1499
the Berrio had arrived in Lisbon, followed by the São Gabriel at an
unknown later date, but no later than 28 August. (24-25)
The sea route, too, which Camões's Vasco da Gama follows is true to history. The fleet that sailed on 8 July 1497 arrived in Calicut on 20 May 1498. In between, the Lusitanians encounter São Tiago (V: 9-13), Saint Helena Bay north of Cape Town (V: 26), São Braz, near Mossel Bay (V: 62-64), River Save (?) (V: 68), Rive Kwakwa (V: 73), Mozambique (V 84; I: 45-89), Mombasa (V: 84; II: 7-28), and Malindi (II: 73 – VI: 5). Camões has also realistically recorded the various victories and vicissitudes of the Portuguese empire in India. As Landeg White says,

Initially, the Portuguese had hoped to enter the spice trade through peaceful alliances. Unable to provide the goods and bullion from Europe to finance that trade, Portugal devised an entirely new concept of empire – to control the seas and make the system pay for itself by levying duty on all goods carried in the Indian Ocean and China seas. Hence the events described in Canto 10.10-73…. (251)

As a historian whose job, Camões knows, is to give structure and order to otherwise disparate events in the past often “has conflated several invasions” / incidents (White, 236) so as to render the narration into a comprehensible whole. It is also true that Camões’s own personal and direct encounter with the ‘original’ experience of Vasco da Gama is distanced only by half-a-century. In the words of Landeg White, “Camões is blending Vasco da Gama’s voyage with his own voyage fifty six years later” (243). As Camões was interested in presenting a (poetic) vision of history rather than
'pure' history or 'pure' poetry, he possessed the poetic license of leaving out many historical details. Thomas R. Hart points out that even Barros has left out many figures, especially the bad ones; for Barros wanted history to be exemplary, and therefore, edifying, too (86). In other words, faith in Providence / Fortune / Fame was, according to Hart, a preoccupation of Barros as much as of Camões (87). Without being guided by an imagination on an epic scale, such a project as Os Lusiadas would have been impossible. This should be reckoned with, as a matter of strength rather than a weakness in writing history.

It is, indeed, true that there are instances of anachronism in Camões's history. For instance in Canto V, Camões says that the west coast of Africa had already been Christianized when da Gama was sailing by. It could only be partly true for, the process of conversion of the west coast of Africa could realize its results more impressively only after the historic voyage of da Gama. It is not too surprising in a work as Camões's to come across a few historical blunders. For instance, Henry of Burgundy ("Henrique"), father of the first Portuguese King Afonso I (1143-85) is wrongly referred to as "King of Hungary" in III: 25 as well as in III: 28. His wife Teresa (daughter of Alfonso VI [1065 – 1109] of Castile), according to Camões had 'a second wedding', a 'marriage' (III: 29) while, in fact, "She is said to have been mistress not wife, of Fernando Peres, Count of Trava" (White, 235). In III: 60, as well as in IV: 9 Camões mistakenly thinks that the Spanish province of Andalusia takes its name from "Vandals" (Visigoth invaders). In III: 86 and
Camões says that Sancho I took Silves, the ancient capital of the Algarve with the help of the Germans; in fact, the help came from the English knights. In III: 100 a suggestion is made to the effect that Attila (433 – 53) was the leader of Goths, while in reality, he was the leader of Huns. In IV: 25, the poet speaks of Antão Vasques de Almada as one who fought at Aljubarrota and was later made count of Avranches (in Normandy) by Henry VI of England. This is, Landeg White considers, “one of Camões’s rare historical errors” (239), to mistake Álvaro Vaz de Almada with his uncle Antão. In the first voyage of da Gama, Camões adds many names more than attested by history, like Fernão Veloso (V: 31; 41-69; IX: 69), Lionardo Ribeiro (VI: 60 and IX: 75–82), Álvaro Vaz de Almada (IV: 25 and VI: 69), and Álvaro de Braga, the clerk, and Diogo Dias, the overseer (VIII: 94): one cannot decide, at the same time, if they are mere inventions of imagination alone, and not culled from history.

In the case of mythology, while describing the personality of Tethys (Neptune’s wife) he once depicts her as Thetis Peleus’ immortal wife (V: 52). Regarding Camões’s references to Chieng-Mai (X: 125) and the peoples of Laos and Burma (X: 126), Landeg White remarks: “Camões’s knowledge of the interior, however, is shaky. Chieng-Mai is not a lake but a city, and his accounts of the peoples of Laos and Burma [as “savages” and that “they eat human flesh” – X: 126] are traveller’s tales” (257). In X: 132, the poet speaks of birds of paradise, which never alight, in Tidore and Ternate which, scientifically, is a misconception; to quote Landeg White again, “the
first bird-of-paradise skins sent to Europe had their legs removed, giving rise to the belief that they were unable to perch” (258).

The purpose of writing Os Lusiadas was not merely to record history but to ‘emphasize humanity’ or ‘the other people’s poetry’ so that Os Lusiadas remains in universal and everlasting memory as the epic of Portugal. If he has committed factual errors in poetically plotting the history of the Lusitanians, the reader may remember that the poet allows an immense amount of freedom of shifting of centres at every point in the epic. To quote again Landeg White: “The Lusiads is packed with such moments when personal experience and alert enquiry combine with an imaginative reinterpretation of his [historical] sources to cast a patina of freshness over the text” (xiii, emphasis added). Therefore, more than being a linear, prosaic and monolithic documentation in the order of historical narration, what a literary piece loaded with history offers is readability or freedom of the reader to interpret the source from contrapuntal and conflicting perspectives. It is this poetic justification that redeems Os Lusiadas from being lowered into a monogram oriented and fashioned after singleness of perspective in reading.

For this same season Camões shall be forgiven if he lacks correct or scientific knowledge of the universe. Camões holding on to the then-known space science, maintains the Ptolemic conception of the universe with the earth at its centre (which consequently makes it easy for him to imagine Portugal at the centre of the earth). The Ptolemic system in which the entire
Os Lusiadas is woven is poetically explained through the words of Tethys addressed to Vasco da Gama during the last lap of his voyage back to Lisbon (X: 79–91). The reason is that "Camões completed The Lusiads and died without knowing of the Polish astronomer Copernicus [1473-1543] and his theories" (White, x).

It is, therefore, befitting to consider Camões as a poet and historian together, become one. What we find in him is a curious combination of, as is already remarked, personal experience and poetic enquiry – itself part of the Renaissance enquiry inaugurated by João II himself:

‘Porém depois que a escura noite eterna
Afonso aposentou no Céu sereno,
O Príncipe, que o Reino então governa,
Foi Joane segundo e Rei trezeno.
Este, por haver fama sempiterna,
Mais do que tentar pode homem terreno
Tentou, que foi buscar da roxa Aurora
Os términos, que eu vou buscando agora’. (IV: 60)

The combination of 'quest' and 'eternal fame' gives birth to various other combinations, as for instance, experience and imagination, history and literature, etc. Da Gama himself reads history (through) "Pelos portais da cerca a sutileza / Se enxerga da Dedálea facultade. / Em figuras mostrando,
por nobreza, / Da Índia a mais remota antiguidade” (VII : 51), depicted on the
walls of a Hindu temple in Calicut. Later Catual of Calicut reads Portuguese
history through the paintings decorated on the banners in Paulo’s ship (VII: 77 – VIII: 43)

Even the apparently pure imagination realized in the Isle of Love
(IX:18 ff) is ‘contaminated’ by realistic elements just as the nymphs and the
actual sailors in da Gama’s fleet indulge in love. Fernão Veloso’s words of
wonderment are profoundly significant in this context: "Sigamos estas
Deusas, e vejamos / Se fantásticas são, se verdadeiras” (IX: 70). It may also
be remarked here that Lionardo Ribeiro is redeemed from his ‘sterile
experience’ (impotence) only by imagination (IX 75–82). There could be no
better illustration of love-making than this to be displayed before a king like
Sebastião (1568-1578) to whom Os Lusiadas is dedicated with the poet’s
anxiety for the lack of worldly wisdom of the King. As White remarks.

The only grandson of João III, and the sole means of preventing the
Portuguese crown passing to Philip II of Spain, his wildness,
fanaticism, and lack of interest in women are reflected in Camões’s
eulogy, which is a masterpiece of controlled anxiety – praising the
young king for what he is yet to accomplish, urging him to ‘anticipate
his maturity’, and setting him the example of his illustrious ancestors.
Even his duty to marry is hinted at in the reference to Tethys who is
preparing the ‘world’s green oceans’ as a dowry (st. 16). (229)
When one reads history through poetry, history tends to offer moral lessons. Aristotle had long back defined the function of poetry as a system that teaches moral lessons through aesthetic pleasure. To choose from the vastness of data is the special freedom of a historian. Camões has also exercised the same freedom by choosing from the ocean of Portuguese history but only those pages (deeds and personae) that contribute to eternal fame, glory, moral edification and everlasting national memory. Therefore, while invoking the nymphs of Tagus to inspire him in venturing this epic, he writes: “Aqueles sós direi, que aventuraram / Por seu Deus, por seu Rei, a amada vida” (VII: 87). This is a very significant aspect in the conception of history in Camões. While deciding upon the deeds and personae from Portuguese history, the criterion he applies is death, honour and fame. He believes, in other words, that only an honourable deed would bring in fame – a combination of material reward in this world and a place in people’s memory, the latter being a metaphor for eternal glory. This seems to be the secret of the climax of the poem, viz., the Isle of Love: “A glória por trabalhos alcançada, / Satisfação de bem sofridos danos, / Lhe andava já ordenando, e pretendia / Dar-lhe nos mares tristes alegria” (IX: 18).

According to William J. Entwistle, the nymphs themselves stand for the future achievements of the Lusitanians. In his words, “These nymphs, we are informed, are allegories of Fame. Fame herself dominates the tenth canto; sweeping the regions of the new-found East as over the chords of a lyre, she makes splendid music of the future achievements of the Lusitanians in the
Indian Vice-royalty” (76, emphasis added). The Isle of Love is not merely a lascivious paradise da Gama and his companions deserved as a recompense for their achievement, but rather it denotes, in the words of White,

... the relationship between the physical and the intellectual, the sensual and the philosophical, the imaginative and the moral, the ‘Roman’ and the Christian visions of the world, with a due sense of their relative claims. The island is not just a place for love-making; it is the setting for the two visions granted da Gama and his companions, and the cantos should be taken together. (252)

It is, therefore, appropriate that each canto / chapter in the saga of Portuguese history should end with an appropriate evaluation or moral reflections appropriate to the situation. According to Fernando Castelo-Branco, interpretation of history through moral lessons is an essential part of Camões’s historiografia (“A Visão”, 115). Sometimes, history teaches Camões that transgressors of moral laws would be visited by Divine punishment, as he sings in Cantos III: 31, 33, 68 etc. He mentions at the close of Canto IV, Leonor Teles, D. Pedro de Portugal, D. Pedro de Castela, D. Afonso V, Egas Moniz, D. Sancho II, and others. In Canto IV, the Old Man of Restelo is the moral voice inspired by the Divine One. It is also part of the moral consciousness and lições morais that the poet exalts the exemplary deeds of exceptional men in Portuguese history (“A Visão”, 116).
Canto I that identifies hardships at Mozambique for the mariners that ventured on a journey - itself figurative of a life full of contingencies - concludes with the reminder that for a man that seeks honourable deeds what first awaits is not fame but inevitable hardships (I: 105,106). One has countless examples from myth and history for men who dared action just to be ‘remembered by the human race’ (II: 113), but still more esteemed are those (the Portuguese for instance) who venture on action for the sake of ‘eternal glory’ (II: 113). Canto III teaches the reader on the havoc that works on a nation abandoned by kings such as Fernando, who were ruled by lust rather than by a sense of duty to the nation. His father Pedro I too, because of his affair with Inês De Castro (a Castilian) seems to have acted rather thoughtlessly, for though he did not cause an immediate loss of the land, nevertheless had to form an alliance with Pedro XI of Castile. The lesson is clear: "Do pecado tiveram sempre a pena / Muitos, que Deus o quis, e permitiu .....E pois se os peitos fortes enfraquece / Um inconcesso amor desatinado" (III: 140, 141). Canto IV offers a warning to those who venture on action that has no direction and purpose as far as the glory of the nation is concerned, but only personal ‘ambition’ (IV: 104) to guide them. This warning of wisdom is the theme of the words exclaimed by the Old Man of Belém addressed to the mariners. His words (IV: 95-104) are most poignant:

- ‘Ó glória de mandar! Ó vôa cobiça

Desta vaidade, a quem chamamos Fama!
Ó fraudulentó gosto, que se atiça
C’uma aura popular, que honra se chama!
Que castigo tamanho e que justiça
Fazes no peito vão que muito te ama!
Que mortes, que perigos, que tormentas,
Que crueldades neles experimentas!’ (IV: 95)

Canto V in which we see the sailors encountering the greatest of marine threats personified in the form of Adamastor, urges the need for imaginative recording of those historical deeds for the future of the nation. For the lesson one learns from such great men as Caesar for whom war did not impede his learning, as pen in one hand, sword in the other (V: 96) is that if one fails to persevere, he would risk fame and eternal glory (V: 100). Canto VI in which the Portuguese spot the end of their journey, namely the coast of Malabar ends by suggesting the ways to achieve lasting esteem / “virtude justa e dura”(VI: 95).

In Canto VII, we encounter the Portuguese after they attempted to peacefully and honourably negotiate with the Samorin and his officials. As the history’s desired end is achieved, the poet too experiences a writer’s block (VII: 78). But his duty to record the aftermath of what was only a beginning (encounter with the Orient) prods the poet further for composing the action for nation’s memory (VII: 87). The initial peaceful approach from the part of
the Portuguese was frustrated by the conspiracy of the Arab traders already in action on the scene. But Camões's mind identifies the real evil with the avarice of the Portuguese officials in India and kings in Portugal. Hence the lesson of Canto VIII of how power and materialism corrupt the minds (VIII: 98, 99).

The Isle of Love which is the poetic climax of Os Lusiadas reminds the reader of what awaits those who are not guided by avarice and ambition which are enemies of fame and eternity (IX: 93-95). Canto X that records the later achievements of the Portuguese from the year 1498 onwards, gives the reader a hint as to why Camões was provoked to write an epic for Portugal — a country which, in his eyes, had already begun a pitiful retreat from the ideals which poet here urgently attempted to chart out for the people of his nation. It is doubtless if anyone else of his times had succeeded to diagnose the real disease that had started to kill the life and the soul of a small nation that rose to the summit of the world at the closing chapter of Renaissance. Camões wails:

Nô mais, Musa, nô mais, que a Lira tenho

Destemperada e a voz enrouquecida.

E nôo do canto, mas de ver que venho

Cantar a gente surda e endurecida.

O favor com que mais se acende o engenho
Não no dá a pátria, não, que está metida

No gosto da cobiça e na rudeza

Dúua austera, apagada e vil tristeza. (X: 145)

As poetry, Os Lusiadas could evoke lessons of history for different readers in different ways. William Julius Mickle who translated Camões’s epic in 1776 as The Lusiads; or, The Discovery of India. An Epic Poem, viewed the work from the commercial interest which was, apparently, the need of the time. Monica Letzring, in her “Mickle Presents the Epic of Commerce”, notes that Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations and Mickle’s translation of the epic were published in the same year, 1776. It was a time when the role of the East India Company was under attack since its monopoly was understood to have ruined the British commerce in India. Then, “Smith, believing he found support for his argument in Portuguese history, pointed out that the Portuguese had managed to carry on a successful Indian trade for more than a century without an exclusive company” (159-160). The idea suggested is that, as long as the Portuguese carried on a free trade, the empire stood and its fall was ensured only because of monopoly. Smith and others believed that the British empire suffered because of monopoly and therefore, they advocated free trade. But the lesson, Julius Mickle learned from Os Lusiadas was different, as is clear from the treatises he attached with the second edition (1778). The lesson Mickle learned may be summed up in the words of Monica Letzring:
The cause of the eventual failure of the Portuguese was not that trade was carried on by a monopoly, but that the monopoly was ‘the worst of all monopolies, a Regal one’; not a monopoly deigned to ‘increase the population and riches, and thus the strength of the mother country’, but a monopoly created solely to fill the coffers to the King. (160)

Here one encounters an impressive instance of reading *Os Lusiadas* as work of history and indeed, “Mickle’s long historical essay [“History of the Rise and Fall of the Portuguese Empire in East”, attached to the second edition of his translation] prepares the reader for the introduction of Camões not just as a poet but as the most able historian of Portuguese glory” (161, emphasis added). In fact, Mickle read *Os Lusiadas* both as history and poetry, and as Mickle states in yet another essay included in the translation, “Dissertation on the Lusiad, and Observations upon Epic Poetry”, his interest in the work was also artistic. For Mickle wanted to counter, in the words of Letzring, “Voltaire’s charge that *Os Lusiadas* is defective because it lacks unity because it mixes pagan and Christian machinery” (162-163).

What one finds in Camões is the curious mixture of the historical and the poetic, or facts and their lessons with universal dimension. In fact, many historians and imaginative writers hold the view that the purpose of both the disciplines is common. Thomas R. Hart, for instance, points out that the author of *Décadas da Ásia*, João de Barros and English poet John Dryden considered the purpose of their respective fields as the same:
Both were considered *exemplary, didactic*. ... For Barros, then, as for many other sixteenth-century writers, *both history and poetry* are primarily means of conveying *moral instruction*. ... many Renaissance historians modify their presentation of men and events in order to make their *exemplary* qualities stand out more clearly. (83, emphasis added)

For Camões, as his verses (V: 92, VI: 42, etc.) show, the purpose of history is to present the exemplary. According to Thomas R. Hart, Camões seems to follow Aristotle's idea in the sense “that in The Lusiads he tries deliberately to universalize the actions of his characters, that is, to see them as embodiments to general moral problems” (86). Hart who thinks that the belief in Providence is common to both Barros and Camões (87), holds the view that the ‘causality’ in History assumes the form of Destiny, Providence or even the *irresistible* power of love (as in the case of Inês de Castro) in Camões's poetry. As Hart continues to say, “This is a view which Camões shares with many Renaissance historians, for whom Fortune or God is the controlling force in human affairs; not all of them, however, would have equated the two as Camões does” (93). Barros (history) is interested in individuals (King of Malindi, Samorin of Calcut, etc.), while Camões (epic) on the roles these individuals should fit into. In this sense, Camões might not have given a ‘historical’ treatment to the kings and people in Malabar, for, the poet is in search for the roles these individuals would fit in. In other words, as Hart observes, “Camões needs a ruler who is a model of hospitality to hear Gama's
account of his journey and of the earlier history of Portugal. ... the King of Malindi must become a European prince in order to make him a suitable audience for Gama’s story” (89).

Thomas R. Hart writes elaborately to prove that “In Barros, however, this view of history as the accomplishment of God’s will on earth is found only as an occasional comment on the narrative, while in The Lusiads it becomes central as a part of Camões’s mythological framework” (93-94, emphasis added). Hart finds the trait not only with Barros but also with Castanheda and others:

Camões once makes Venus intervene to rescue the Portuguese at the point where both Barros and Castanheda attribute their escape to divine intervention.... Though Barros is less inclined to do so than Castanheda, who is reproached by Harrison for his ‘miracle-mongering’, the Décadas offer a number of examples. The practice was by no means limited to Portuguese historians. Camões’s mythological frame-story rests on an attitude which shapes much of sixteenth-century historical writing. (94, emphasis added)

It is, of course, difficult to decide whether Camões is exclusively a poet or a historian. As he is generally known, Camões may very well be considered primarily as a great poet. Quoting Aubrey Bell, one of the biographers of the poet, William J. Entwistle declares: “ ‘It is as a great lyric poet that Camoens (sic) stands supreme, and whatever blemishes the Lusiads
may have, it will always remain one of the world's greatest poems by reason of its magnificent lyric flights...” (75). At the same time, the importance of Os Lusiadas cannot be located much beyond the subject-matter it handles, namely, history. As Entwistle himself observes, the action of the epic is centred around "two interests – the voyage of Da Gama to Calicut and the history of Portugal" (ibid).

To the question whether Camões is a historian or a poet, the answers would always shift the centres from either of the positions. From this tension is born, Camões's interestingly unique treatment or conception of history. Harold V. Livermore compares Camões with two of his contemporaries who also used history as the subject of poetry; Livermore has reason to project the superior worth of the Portuguese poet. The Spanish Ercilla y Zuñiga, the author of Araucana (published only in 1959) tells the story of the resistance of the Indians in Chile against the Spanish. The story which records the war that lasted half a century, reaches out for heroic heights. However, according to Livermore, the war is described only from the point of view of the Indians and not from the perspective of the Spanish and, therefore, the work remains detached from history. The Indians of Chile were, at the same time, simply shamans whose primitive religion contributes nothing toward the elevation or adornment of the poem. It is, nevertheless, an honest work, to judge from the level of rhymed chronicle.
The French writer, Ronsard's *Franciade* (published in 1572), on the other hand, tells the history of the king Francus who founded the kingdom of the Franks. The work is purely mythical for Ronsard believed that the essence of poesy is invention. He rejects authoritative history and justifies his own work on the ground that “a épica de Homero era pura ficção” (84). The greatness of Camões, in comparison with these two writers – who also used history as the subject-matter of poetry – lies in the fact that Camões could unite the national energies, combining at the same time, true history with beautiful poetry. To quote Livermore, “A grandeza d’*Os Lusiadas* reside não no elogio do Gama, nem na visão das riquezas de Goa, mas na sua consagração das energias nacionais. Neste sentido, *Os Lusiadas* combinam duma maneira única os recursos da *verdade histórica* e da *beleza poética* ("Camões",84, emphasis added).

Frank Pierce in his “Ancient History in ‘Os Lusiadas’”, observes how Camões brings in references to ancient history (Rome, Greece, etc.) in order to interpret Portugal’s history. Pierce thinks that this point is important to understand the way Camões articulates his vision of history. Moments in Portugal’s history are projected, foregrounded and interpreted by way of comparison with allusions to similar parallels in ancient history, though, as Pierce remarks, the parallels from Rome are more than those from Greece (221). But history, for Pierce also includes myths or legends from Homer and Virgil. In his words, “Some material from Homer and Virgil must also come under this heading since this was for long also regarded as in some way
"historical" (220, emphasis added). However, the efforts of the Portuguese mariners outshine those from the ancient world (I: 3).

Similarly, the excellence of the Luistanians is projected against the feats of Julius Caesar (I: 12,13); the Lusitanians, Virathus and Setorius, against the protectress and successor of Rome (I:26); Bacchus is compared to Alexander the Great (I:75); Vasco da Gama is compared to the leader of the Trojans (I:98); Venus' miraculous intervention at Mombasa paralleled to two similar instances in the Greek world (II:45); Portuguese naval victories in the Far East, including Malacca are compared with the battle of Actium in Virgil (II:53,54). Cantos III and IV are replete with similar techniques. Further, Venus' intercession for Aeneas is compared to that of Afonso IV's daughter to her father (III:106). However, ancient achievements appear lesser in grandeur compared to those of the Portuguese (III: 116,117). Inês de Castro evokes the memories of 'the almost human treatment by brute beasts of both Semiramis, the queen of Assyria, and the founders of Rome' in (III:126); sins of King Ferdinand and Leonor Teles compared to those of Mark Antony and Hannibal and those in the Old Testament (III:140,141). Camões uses such parallels in order to the highlight special aspects of the Portuguese history of Aljubarrota (IV:20,21), treachery of Nun'Álvares's brothers (IV:32,33), the bravery of Afonso V's son John (IV:54), voyage of the Portuguese (V:86,87), and bravery of the Portugese against Spain and France (VII:71). In Canto VIII, Paulo da Gama tells the history to Catual using appropriate companions. Frank Pierce comments that, perhaps, "Canto IX, notable for the Isle of Love
and its many classical reminiscences, does not lend itself to historical references” ("Ancient History", 227). However, the song of the nymph sung during the Tethy’s banquet and Tethy’s own vision granted to da Gama and his mariners, abound with comparisons from ancient history (which include the so-called legends and myths). Towards the end of the article, Frank Pierce identifies the intention of Camões, in his need to view the past from the future, to make the past appear quite immediate to the present readers. In Pierce’s words,

It is to Camões’s credit that he reserved his use of ancient history to the slightly distanced sections of his narrative that deal with the past, even when the immediate past in Canto X is seen as the future. In this way our poet set up a continuing balance and produced suggestive comparisons with main subject to his epic, the events of Vasco da Gama’s voyage, which is seen as something that is taking place before our eyes without any special narrator to interpret it for us. Once again one feels justified in referring to this freshness and immediacy which set Os Lusiadas apart from most examples of the literary epic. ("Ancient History", 229, emphasis added)

Similar to Pierce, many Camonians, including Dino F. Preti, have analyzed the one-to-one correspondence between histories / chronicles and their poetic transformations in Camões’s work. Preti’s focus is the poet’s use of the chroniclers like Barros, Castanheda, Álvaro Velho and Damião de Goes
(though the last one's work was published after Os Lusiadas) in Canto II. Regarding Preti's conclusions, it suffices to say that the Os Lusiadas has employed so much of historical material that some critics even term the work as a rhymed chronicle / “crônica rimada” (148). Preti's work, remarkable for the scrutinizing analysis of Camões's adaptations and changes of the historical sources in Canto II, is equally significant for the general conclusions he draws from this exercise. Though Preti has set apart a considerable portion of his work to illustrate the historical-poetic convergence in Camões's work, his avowed interest is to examine the kind of artistic process Camões employed in the process of selection, compression, conflation and additions of historical sources. Preti assumes that Camões was probably following the practice of the poets and historians, including João de Barros, of the court of D. João III, who were all attempting 'epics' of the feats of the Portuguese in the Orient. The need of the time was epic narratives, without maintaining much difference between a historian and a poet, in doing history. Camões's own constant reminders in the poem that he is writing history is a case in point.

It is quite debatable, however, to affirm the absolute veracity of the historical information Camões has used. According to Dino F. Preti, however, it is not enough that an epic poet has used true historical facts; what is required of him is the consideration whether the truth / history reflects the process of the artistic idealization / “idealização do artista” which is attained only by following the rules pertaining to art, in other words, verisimilitude /
“regras de verossimilhança” (150-151). As is already hinted at, Camões was living in an age in which reality itself was fascinating; for, feudalism, religious protection and superstition were fast disappearing, and Renaissance started to place man at the centre. The result was humanism and heroism of discoveries / “heroismo dos descobrimentos” (151).

Preti who made a thorough study of the Os Lusiadas, though with a focus on Canto II, on the historical-poetic confluence in the epic, observes that a poet is not expected to attempt all that is real; neither is his work expected to be merely a “crônica rimada”. On the other hand, the poet, by the creative process particular to him, should be selective. The relevant question is if the historical facts selected by him should serve his artistic purpose in creating the “verossimilhança”, a semblance of truth able to convey a personal vision of history to the readers / “uma visão pessoal dos fatos históricos” (151). For this, it is least surprising for a sixteenth century poet to use idealizations, fantasy, intuitions, intentions and deus ex machina, as for instance, “interferência de Vênus” (154). This means that as far as Camões is concerned, what should interest us, is not what historical facts he used but how he used them. As Preti himself puts it, “...o que importa nesse momento lembrar é o processo de aproveitamento do material histórico por Camões, que revela um elemento artístico” (159).