

Routes and Networks in the Indian Ocean Goa, Malabar, and Malacca

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I This essay is an attempt at grappling with some aspects of a complex historical textual legacy in several languages involving two regions of the Indian Ocean, namely the Western coast of India—especially the Konkan and Malabar coasts in the Arabian Sea—and the Straits of Melaka.¹ It tries to bring out the many intricate issues associated with a perusal of the origins and trajectories of some texts within the connected histories of the Indian Ocean. In addition, it strives to point out the pitfalls of traditional ways of looking at such texts, and suggests instead how they might be alternatively understood from perspectives that link them together with texts that are normally seen to belong to other canons. I also propose that calling the texts in question ‘Creole’ might help bring out aspects of their production and the social histories in which they are embedded which are not normally emphasised. My point, as will be seen below, is that at least some of these aspects may be useful in inserting the texts into larger Indian Ocean histories.²

Map of Goa (detail), in *Histoire générale des voyages* by de la Harpe, 1750.

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Nicholas Thomas has proposed in the introduction to his book *In Oceania* that the island world of the South Pacific has seen very little Creolisation. On the contrary, European and indigenous imaginaries in Oceania, according to him, have run parallel to each other, seldom hybridising (Thomas, 1997, p. 5). In another, much more colonial—and infinitely smaller in size—oceanic world, the Caribbean, Creolisation has been an established term originally coming from ‘Creole,’ used to describe not only locally born people and their languages (called ‘Creoles’ in both cases) but also local plants and animals. ‘Creolisation’ is later used to describe various complex social and cultural processes (for an important pioneering work related to Jamaica, see Brathewaite, 1971, and for a good theoretical discussion—especially of Francophone literature—see Célius, 1999; Chaudenson, 2001, as well as the essays in Stewart, 2007). Only in the islands of West Africa (Rodrigues, 2003 and Almeida, 2007), as well as the adjoining coast (Mark, 2002), besides the Western Indian Ocean islands, can we find other regions where Creolisation has been just as important in theorisations of local societies (see Vaughan, 2000 and Eriksen, 2007 on Mauritius, as well as Vergès, 1999 on Réunion), though the term can also be used in other contexts (Ribeiro, 2010, 2007, 2004). The world of the Arabian Sea coast of South Asia seems one in which certainly very old processes of Creolisation have arguably taken place since times immemorial but have not marked out local spaces so profoundly as in the Caribbean, the Atlantic islands or the islands of the Western Indian

HISTORIOGRAFIA

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ocean (almost thoroughly colonial creations as they now stand), except perhaps in coastal Ceylon/Sri Lanka. We can tentatively think of Kerala (Malabar) as diverse and hybrid but not exactly as Creole (Goa may be different though further investigation is needed here).³ By comparison, the world of Nusantara remains more fluid than Kerala, but somehow a far cry from Oceania, though it is not quite the Caribbean either.

II This essay is an exploration of specific Creole texts from both regions. I call them ‘Creole’ because these texts not only issue forth from complex local histories but are also themselves embedded in intricate, on occasion even convoluted, literary and philological histories. Moreover, they are part of wide-ranging Indian Ocean networks. They therefore seem to come up at the intersection of several connected histories, not to mention at the confluence of different kinds of knowledge and related languages. A prime example is perhaps *Sejarah Melayu* or the *Malay Annals*. Both in its Malay and English version the title is a colonial name created about two hundred years ago to designate a text originally called *Sulalatus as-Salatn* or the ‘Genealogy of Sultans’. Upon closer inspection, it turns out that this shift in title actually represents a major change in perceptions of the text, a change whose consequences are still with us—namely from a fairly dynastic-centred if multilayered and variegated account to mostly an ethnic narrative of origins. As I will indicate below, the text remains however a very Creole one, even though the colonial emphasis on ethnicity is still the main mode of understanding it to this day, in spite of numerous critical accounts (see for instance Braginsky, 2004, pp. 92–103; Hooker and Hooker, 2010). The text’s trajectory in the postcolonial Malaysian public sphere is incidentally also a testimony to the degree to which colonial modes of historiography and manuscript collection, publishing, and translating are still very relevant.

The history of the various recensions of *Sejarah* is very complex, and absolute consensus regarding aspects of their intricate trajectory has not been reached to this day. However, perhaps the most widely accepted version of the composition history of one major recension of the text remains that put forth by Winstedt back in the 1930s (Winstedt, 1938). It has received considerable support more recently through Vladimir Braginsky's careful and reasoned analysis of all the conundrums facing the specialist in this case (Braginsky, 2004,

pp. 92-103). Braginsky's work is also an important source for disentangling all the major controversies surrounding the origin of the various manuscripts, with all the attendant different points of view. It turns out that Winstedt's explanation of the origins of the text is particularly interesting for a Creolised reading of the text. Following him—and Braginsky—the main manuscript in question was probably originally written by someone with close links to the Melaka court overthrown and put to flight by Albuquerque's forces in the invasion of 1511. Needless to say, the manuscript also provides a major account of the conflict with the Portuguese and the subsequent invasion.

The Portuguese takeover not only destroyed the Melaka Sultanate but also temporarily wrecked havoc with Indian Ocean trading networks. It also gave rise to two new nodal points for trade in the Straits, namely Aceh (at the northern tip of Sumatra) and Johor (at the southern tip of the Peninsula where the Melaka court took refuge). The invasion therefore created a tripartite port system where previously Melaka had concentrated all the functions of an international entrepôt (Pinto, 2011). The Portuguese invasion is an essential factor in the history of the text as because of it the original manuscript, composed around 1536, apparently found its way to Goa on the Konkan Coast. There it was noticed and perused by no one other than the famous Portuguese chronicler Diogo do Couto, who clearly included information from it in his work (without quoting it by name—Braginsky. 2004, pp. 94-95). It then somehow migrated back to the Straits, where it eventually transmogrified into the 1612 version, this time compiled in Johor, and later published by Munshi Abdullah in the mid-19th century. This is currently the best known version of the text. It is however only one of many versions which have been circulating for centuries in the Straits, both in today's Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, often composed or at least copied and edited in various locales, and with quite a few significant differences among them (see for instance Starkweather et alii, 2012 and Shellabear, 1967 [1896]).

As a consequence, the search for an original, as it were thoroughly indigenous, manuscript of *Sejarah Melayu* is actually not very helpful. Instead, it is better to do a connected reading of texts from the Straits, particularly in the case of *Sejarah*. This last of course also contains major pre-colonial elements. In particular it contains myths of origin that are clearly related to



The fortress of Malacca, in Erédia's *Lyvro de Plantafoma das Fortalezas da India*, c.1620.

South Indian influence (more about that below), most probably both from Malabar and the Coromandel Coast. It also contains much material which dovetails with that found in its prestigious predecessor, namely *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, or ‘Tale of the Kings of Pasai’, a clearly pre-colonial text related to Pasai on the north-eastern coast of Sumatra (it dates from the 14th century: Braginsky, 2004, p. 109). Pasai was a sultanate which can be said to be Melaka’s anterior avatar in the region. Of course, as Braginsky shows, again through Winstedt’s pioneering work, several of the issues related to manuscripts and dating of *Sejarah Melayu* also come up in the case of the earlier *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*. All these complex pre-colonial and colonial histories of texts are actually not incidental. On the contrary, they seem to relate to textual modes of production, edition, translation and circulation which are very ancient in the Indian Ocean, and which eventually also influenced Portuguese and other colonial texts, especially when

these were written in the region, as happened with both Diogo do Couto's as well as Orta's (see below).

The notion of the Creole character of texts is therefore quite useful here. *Sejarah Melayu* in particular is now commonly considered as a kind of *ur-text* of Malay literariness and even of Malay historiography and culture. Within this mode of appreciation, however, the Creoleness of the text is not only de-emphasised but altogether lost. Upon closer inspection, Arabic phrases, Siamese terms and expressions, Persian and Tamil words (as well as Portuguese ones), Sanskrit quotes (in one recension in Bengali script: Leyden, 2012, pp. 205-206) and even Javanese poems abound. In particular, the overwhelming presence of (South) India in the text in the form of mythic references, actual political links, trading and so forth is also erased in current humdrum nationalist and other readings emphasising the text's Malayness (see for instance the description of a trading visit from Melaka to South

HISTORIOGRAFIA

HISTORIOGRAPHY

India to buy chintzes, Leyden 2012, pp. 162-164; the Melaka *shahbandar* at one point is a Keling—i.e. Indian—named Raja Mudeliar, and the head of all merchants in Melaka is also said to be a Keling named Penia Sura, Leyden, 2012, pp. 189 and 192). Moreover, the kings of Melaka traced their origin to, among other kings (Alexander the Great included), a divine being who alighted with two companions on a mountain near Palembang—with a very appropriately Creole name, half Indic, half Malay, that is, Sagantang Maha Miru—and who had a Perso-Indic name, Bichitram Shah.⁴ This name was then changed into a Malay one concocted by the two local peasant women who first met him, namely Sangsapurba, a name which perhaps could be translated as the ‘Venerable Ancient One’ (Leyden, 2012, p. 24). The ruler of Palembang then gave up his throne to the newcomer after establishing a kind of covenant with him, and became his *mangkubumi*, a Malay and Javanese royal title figuring the Sanskrit

derived *bumi*—earth, soil—and Malay-Javanese *mangku* (governor). Add to it the many references (occasionally entire chapters in fact) to Siam, Java, China, Arabia, Turkestan, Champa, and the Byzantine Empire as well as various parts of Nusantara, and the text seems almost a strange choice for a nationalist reading based on the origins of Malayness (see Ting, 2009). Appropriately, one of its major 19th century collectors and editors and a name generally associated with the text in colonial times, namely, Munshi Abdullah, is an equally Creole and complex figure with many Indian Ocean links (Hadhrami and Tamil for instance), as Mandal has recently indicated (Mandal, 2012; see also Subramanian, 2010, pp. 145-148; and the introduction by A.H. Hill in Abdullah, 2009). He has sometimes been considered as the father of modern Malay literature (he is memorialised as such in the Melaka museum of literature, for instance. His family house is still to be seen in Melaka).

III The texts by Garcia d’Orta and Sheikh Zainuddin, coming out of Goa and Malabar respectively, pose somewhat different issues.⁵ A joint perusal of both texts reveals a number of complexities, many of them related to aspects of connected histories. For instance, it is clear that Orta and Zainuddin were at the same time near or at the very site of important armed confrontations between Malabar Muslims and the Portuguese, especially a couple of expeditions led by Martim Afonso de Sousa against Calicut on the Malabar coast to which Goa was actually intimately connected by sea (Orta was very closely linked to Martim Afonso and accompanied him in his expeditions). Further down the coast Cochin, Calicut’s rival, was in fact the first seat of Portuguese power in Asia before it was transferred to Goa in 1530, therefore just a couple of years before Orta’s arrival (Malekandathil, 2009, p. 20; for Portuguese attacks against Calicut see for instance Orta, 1563, pp. 56-58, Colóquio 15).⁶ Afonso de Sousa was Orta’s patron. Orta’s text makes clear the closeness between both men, as Orta also accompanied Afonso de Sousa to Diu in Gujarat (Orta, 1563, p. 145, Colóquio 36). As a doctor, Orta was of course particularly useful in such expeditions (in fact, during Afonso de Sousa’s second stint in India as Viceroy, Orta became his official doctor: Liberato, 2011, p. 114). He often also visited Muslim courts, for instance Ahmednagar, where he cured the Nizam Shah’s son to whom he also taught Portuguese (Orta, 1563, p. 147).

Interestingly, Zainuddin was a similar figure in the sense that he too was very close to the sources of power, especially as he negotiated with foreign countries—Gujarat and Egypt for instance—on behalf of the Zamorin of Calicut, the worst enemy of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast. He therefore carried out diplomatic missions on his behalf (often negotiating alliances against the Portuguese) and also wrote the Zamorin’s diplomatic correspondence in Arabic with Muslim sovereigns. Intriguingly, Orta knew about the Adil Shah, the ruler of Bijapur, whose territory was adjacent to Goa and used to include it. It turns out that the Adil Shah was chosen by Zainuddin as his patron (see Zainuddin’s dedicatory and encomium—Zainuddin, 2006, pp. 6-7; and Kurup, 2006, p. xvi; Nainar, 2006, p. xxix). What is interesting here is that, whether or not either Orta or Zainuddin had met Ali Adil Shah, this last was for a time, during the beginning of his reign in 1557, which coincided with Orta’s

old age, a friend of the Portuguese (Subrahmanyam, 2011, p. 65). Though things would change later, in hindsight it seems nonetheless slightly ironical that Zainuddin dedicated his book to him, as this ruler became friendly with the Portuguese (Ali Adil Shah died in 1580 and therefore this year may also help date Zainuddin’s text). It also goes to show how convoluted, complex, and shifting politics in the Deccan could be, and how it had ramifications going all the way from Gujarat to Malabar. Therefore, though they were on different sides of the enemy lines, so to speak, both men had more than a little in common as both were well-connected to local Muslim courts, though in Orta’s case it was clearly the court of Ahmednagar and for a time also that of Gujarat—rather than that of Bijapur. Just as Zainuddin seems to have been no stranger to the Deccan sultanates and Gujarat, Orta was also clearly well-acquainted with at least north and central Malabar (as far south as Cochin) and even its hinterland: he knew the pepper-growing regions in the interior and was also aware of the trade routes through the Ghats towards the Coromandel coast. He even seems to have known Calicut well—at any rate he sounds very knowledgeable about it (Orta, 1563, pp. 55-56, Colóquio 15). Furthermore, both men were equally well-connected to Indian Ocean networks as will be seen below.

A closer inspection of Orta’s and Zainuddin’s biographies reveals further complexities. Garcia d’Orta is almost too strange a choice for a colonial voice in spite of his European origins, his undoubtedly privileged position in colonial society and his obvious closeness to the sources of colonial power in India (not to mention previously also the court in Lisbon): he was a Spanish-Portuguese convert who studied in Salamanca and eventually moved to Goa from Lisbon (where he taught at the university and became physician to King Don João III) to escape possible restrictions and persecutions in Portugal. His family had previously moved from Spain to Portugal to escape early persecutions in the former country. His sister would die at the stake after his death in Goa, courtesy of the Inquisition, and Orta’s remains would in fact be disinterred years after his death, burned at an auto-da-fé and his ashes scattered to the winds (Liberato, 2011; Leão, 2011, p. 23; Zupanov 2002, pp. 2-3; Fontes, 2011). Orta’s text in reality abounds in encounters with other Jews, both so-called crypto-Jews (who had converted to either

The city of Cochim, in *Atlas das Cidades e Fortalezas da Conquista da Índia Oriental*, by João Teixeira Albernaz, c. 1648 (Austrian National Library). From *Oceanos* 29 (1997).



**¶ Colóquios dos simples, e
drogas he cousas medicinais da India, e
assi dalguãas frutas achadas nella onde se
tratam algũas cousas tocantes a medicina,
pratica, e outras cousas boas, pera saber
côpostos pello Doutor garçia dorta: físico
del Rey nosso senhor, vistos pello muyto
Reuerendo senhor, ho liçençado
Alexos diaz: falcam defenbar-
gador da casa da supricaça
inquisidor nestas
partes.**

¶ Com privilegio do Conde visó Rey.

**Impresso em Goa, por Ioannes
de endem as x. dias de
Abril de 1563. annos.**

Christianity or Islam but still might practise their old religion or identify with it somehow) and Jewish inhabitants of the Middle East, especially Egypt and Palestine. For instance, Orta relates an encounter with a Cairo-born Jew named Isaq who would also carry the news of Gujarat's Sultan Bahadur's death to Portugal (1563, p. 131, Colóquio 32). As Halikowski-Smith indicates, New Christians (that is, converted Jews and their descendants) were often sent by the Portuguese on diplomatic missions all over Africa and Asia, usually on the strength of their multilingualism but also partly based on their far-flung connections (Halikowski-Smith, 2006, p. 5). Though Orta does not seem to have been generally employed by Martim Afonso de Sousa in this capacity, Orta was certainly multilingual. Interestingly, this is exactly the role Zainuddin also takes on for Calicut (see Kurup, 2006). Another Creole Hadhrami like Zainuddin, this time from Nusantara, Al-Misri, would become a diplomatic envoy for the Dutch in 19th century Siam (Mandal, 2012).⁷ Both Jews and Muslims of Creole origins, therefore, were routinely employed by various local powers, both colonial and

Asian, as go-betweens, interpreters, and official envoys (see Pearson, 2010 for a study of the important role of all these people).

Orta's text also features many encounters with Muslims, especially doctors and sovereigns in the various sultanates bordering Goa, including Gujarat to the north. In Ahmednagar for instance he consulted with one of the Nizam Shah's physicians, a man who had previously exercised his profession in Cairo and Constantinople (Orta, 1563, p. 61, Colóquio 16). In fact, at the Nizam Shah's court he met and talked with physicians from both Persia and Turkey, to whom the sovereign gave many emoluments, as well as Indian physicians (Orta, 1563, p. 4). He also had extensive discussions with the Nizam Shah himself, as the ruler was a learned man. Orta's also counts as the first description of Ayurvedic practices to a Western audience and of course that means he had contact with Hindu physicians as well as discussions with them.⁸ It turns out that his contacts with Jews, Muslims, and occasionally Hindus far outstrip any contacts he had with Christians as described in his book. He knew Latin

Jewish Synagogue's Clock, Mattanchery, Cochin, Kerala. Author's photo.



HISTORIOGRAFIA

HISTORIOGRAPHY

as well as Hebrew and Arabic, and could converse about Avicenna’s work—one of the main medical authorities shared by Christians, Jews, and Muslims of his time—with Muslim colleagues at the court of the ruler of Ahmednagar. In fact, he discussed Avicenna with the Nizam Shah himself (Orta, 1563, p. 10).⁹

His was also clearly not always an ethnocentric voice: he believed that all kinds of practices had to be looked into, and he did not dismiss either Ayurvedic medicine or other local practices as necessarily inferior to the medical knowledge he had brought from Europe as Pearson emphasises (Pearson, 2011).¹⁰ In Colóquio 36 for instance he relates that he consults both Muslim and Hindu physicians about the properties of melons (Orta, 1563, p. 144). Moreover, he was a slave-owner on his various properties, both in Goa and in Bombay (where he was the first European settler), but his text contains something rare, namely, the voices of slaves (either African or Asian). His whole book is a long dialogue between Ruano, probably another convert (if he was a real person at all),¹¹ and himself, interrupted by several people, especially slave women (for instance Orta, 1563, pp. 120-125, Colóquios 27 to 31, and page 135, Colóquio 34).¹² It is also clear that he was far from unsympathetic to the plight of Goa’s slaves: for instance, when Ruano asks him whether he had ever given datura, a plant inducing delirium leading to compliance and servility in whoever takes it, to any of his *negros* or *negras* (i.e. his slaves), Orta answers that his conscience would not allow him to do it (Orta, 1563, p. 82).

Zainuddin is a man about whom we know perhaps somewhat less than we do about Orta, even though Orta’s first main biography—written by the Count Ficalho towards the end of the 19th century—is often as speculative as it is documentary in nature (Ficalho concentrates for long stretches of text on the social environment from which Orta sprang and where he studied. At times he obviously could not get enough data on Orta himself —Ficalho, 1886).¹³ He was however, just like Munshi Abdullah centuries later, a Creole Hadhrami, from a family established on the Malabar Coast since the 15th century (Shokoohy, 1998). He wrote in Arabic, not in Malayalam, the more common local language during his time (though his work would later be translated into that language and widely circulated in it. His text is in fact a living text to this day in Kerala, both in its Arabic and Malayalam versions).¹⁴ His work by definition was therefore meant

to circulate among Arabic speakers. Arabic was in fact a very important Indian Ocean language at the time, as Pearson indicates, though it is to be doubted that many people could actually read it (Pearson, 2012). Though Portuguese in its Creolised forms was also fast becoming an Indian Ocean lingua franca just before and during Orta’s time in India, its use was certainly much more circumscribed (Orta’s work would become famous in Europe through a Latin translation as well as through later translations into other languages).

Though Zainuddin’s text is famous for his well founded—and as it turns out historiographically accurate—description of the violence of the Portuguese against the Muslims in Malabar, it contains much more than that. It is less noted for instance that he also describes fierce intra-Muslim conflict—in fact powerfully suggesting that the violent Portuguese irruption seriously upset a somewhat fragile local balance of power, something not entirely uncommon in Indian Ocean port societies as Moorthy indicates for another such society, namely Zanzibar (Moorthy, 2010). Another interesting fact is that mention is made of materials from the *Keralolpatti*, only available in manuscripts from slightly later times than the time of the composition of *Tuhfat*.¹⁵ Zainuddin’s text contains in this way what is apparently the oldest extant description in Malabar/Kerala of the history of the last Chera king—who would have converted to Islam after dividing his kingdom and leaving for Arabia—and the myth of Parameswara, the Hindu creator of Kerala. What is therefore avowedly an anti-colonial Muslim text, written in Arabic, also contains the first known references to very important narratives of origin related to Kerala (Kurup, 2009, p. xxi).

It also contains a very interesting, detailed description of the matrilineal customs of the warrior caste of the Nairs, a local caste group who still inhabits Kerala to this day though it is no longer matrilineal (Zinadím, 1898, pp. 26-33). The description is particularly interesting not only because of its pioneering character but also because it is clearly written in an ethnographic mode which is more than faintly reminiscent of contemporary descriptions of Asia by Portuguese and other European chroniclers (see for instance Rubies, 2001). This in itself is quite intriguing because Zainuddin is a local and therefore we would not expect him to look at things local through an exoticising lens. However, this is exactly what he does in his text,

not unlike chroniclers do in the texts of the Portuguese whom he detested. We can also speculate that his use of Arabic gave his text a mostly translocal readership and therefore the very choice of language here brought in ethnographic descriptive modes probably with an old history in Arabic. The language choice, implying as it does a translocal readership, also allows for the description—and perhaps even compels it, especially as a description such as his would have made little sense had Malayalam been chosen as the language of the text, as local readers would in all likelihood be as familiar with the facts laid out in his account as Zainuddin himself. There would have therefore been little sense in casting an outsider’s gaze on the issue in Malayalam.

We could venture that differently to Orta’s Portuguese writing, writing in Arabic also marked both Zainuddin’s Creoleness—and that of his text—as well as his insertion in age-old, prestigious Indian Ocean circuits where Hadhrami scholars and traders (often the same people) circulated for centuries all over the ocean (see Ho, 1997; Mandal, 2012). Nonetheless, in spite of his colonial status, Orta also inserted himself

in complex and ancient circuits of the Indian Ocean, circuits that no doubt at least in part must have overlapped with those of Zainuddin. At any rate, his text shows clearly that Orta, being a convert (and possibly also a crypto-Jew) as well as a speaker of Arabic, was far from unconnected to those circuits. It should be noted here that Arabic was then the language of communication not only among Muslims but also often among Jews. It should also not be forgotten that forms of Arabic were the lingua franca of the Indian Ocean for centuries, including in Orta’s time (Pearson, 2012). His text accordingly abounds with meetings with Jews and Muslims coming from various parts of North Africa and the Middle East, including Tripoli (in today’s Libya), besides his more or less regular meetings with local residents and potentates (for instance the Nizam Shah, the ruler of Ahmednagar, as well as other members of his court: Orta, 1563, p. 125, Colóquio 30). These bring him all kinds of important information that he then imparts to the reader. Actually his enmeshment in this broad Indian Ocean-Mediterranean Jewish-Muslim circuit is a major source of information for Orta in what concerns plant, medical and other knowledge found in his text.¹⁶ He also often corroborates his information from oral or written sources through witness accounts culled from his network, as for instance when he relates that a man who had lived in Melaka had assured him that durians were ‘the best fruit in the world’ even though Orta himself had never tasted or even seen one (Orta, 1563, p. 82, Colóquio 20). His sources were therefore to a major extent local as well as broadly Indian Ocean and Mediterranean-based rather than based solely or mostly on learned treatises from Europe and the Muslim world. In fact, his first-hand knowledge and his conversations with many people in India made him particularly critical, for instance, of Greek views on Indian plants and medicines. Therefore, he put his far-flung network to wonderful use in the compilation of his *Colóquios*, and his enduring fame as well as that of his text is in this way directly related to his insertion in this network.

It is also highly likely that he spoke Konkani, Goa’s local language: he depicts himself talking to slaves at several points, who are perhaps unlikely to have known much Portuguese, if any (throughout the colonial time and to this day Konkani has been the most common local language, though of course today’s Goa, just as its historical avatar of Orta’s time,

Saint Francis Church, Cochin. Author’s photo.



HISTORIOGRAFIA

HISTORIOGRAPHY



Jewish Memorial Plaque in both Malayalam and English, Mattanchery, Cochin. Author's photo.

is a multilingual society).¹⁷ Malekandathil indicates that the forced Lusitanisation of Goa's society, which included the (no doubt only partly successful) imposition of the Portuguese language, as well as religious persecution against both Jewish converts and Hindus, only happened as from the very end of Orta's life, that is, as from 1567 (Orta would die in 1568), the law imposing Portuguese dating from 1584 (Malekandathil, 2009, p. 26).¹⁸



His constant visits to Muslim courts, where he was usually well received, or Hindu ones (for instance that of the King of Cochin as well as that of a king in the Ghats—Orta, 1563, p. 49, Colóquio 13), also show a man who, though very close to Portuguese power (especially in the figure of the redoubtable Martim Afonso de Sousa, eventually made Viceroy of the Estado da Índia), was remarkably cosmopolitan even for his own time. He was also amazingly curious and inquisitive, and reading his *Colóquios* several centuries later, even in his now quaint Portuguese, still brings in a breath of fresh air. The same in fact can be said of Zainuddin's dramatic descriptions of the conflicts between Malabar Muslims and the Portuguese, as well as the parenthetic digression into the nature of Hindu Malabar society during his time. As for the author of *Sejarah*, Winstedt comments that he 'gives us a vivid picture of a port thronged with Indian traders, Hindu and Muslim, with settlers from China, Java and Sumatra. His pages are full of adventurers who frequent the precincts of a flourishing court: Tamil archers, Pathan horsemen, bibulous mahouts, and Indian missionaries self-important and eccentric, and cowardly in battle' (Winstedt, 1996, p. 113).

once in Pasai, Sumatra, the city spoke Arabic instead of Malay;²⁰ and Kerala to this day has a form of Malayalam, both spoken and written in adapted Arabic letters, called Arabi-Malayalam, which is a hybrid language, basically Malayalam but with very heavy additions of Arabic vocabulary, not wholly unlike two other famous Indian Ocean languages, namely Kiswahili and Malay.²¹ In this sense it is significant that various forms

of Arabic (certainly not classical Arabic much less modern standard Arabic) were once a lingua franca in the Indian Ocean (Pearson, 2012), later partially replaced by various forms of Creole Portuguese used all the way from Cape Town to Macao, and then finally by English, also under various forms, some of which have become entrenched (such as the English of urban west Peninsular Malaysia which counts as a new kind of English).²²

I finish with languages because, no matter how local, they are an essential part of the cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean. We tend nowadays to think of languages as primarily fixed written standard media, each medium different from the other by definition. However, the ancient cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean lives on partly in and through languages as well as their archives, both oral and written, some of which,

Royal Palace, Cochin, once visited by Orta. Author's photo.



IV Colonialism apart, it is hard not to speculate that the Portuguese and Spaniards—and later the Dutch and others—were brought into, through their invasions and settlements, an Indian Ocean system with different local versions. Therefore, the texture of some of their texts, especially those which were locally written, was not entirely dissimilar to those of other local texts, in particular when these were contemporary ones, even if these were written in distinctly local languages such as Malay or Arabic. This last is besides a language that was through the centuries as much local as it was translocal in both India and Nusantara.¹⁹ It is even claimed that

HISTORIOGRAFIA

HISTORIOGRAPHY



Jewtown, Mattanchery, Cochin, with synagogue at the back. Author’s photo.

as in the case of Arabi-Malayalam, do not correspond neatly to any modern standard medium. Therefore, it is possible that both the languages and the archives may be hard to ascribe to any modern standard medium. Pollock’s Sanskrit cosmopolis for instance is long gone from Nusantara—and curiously arrived in today’s Kerala *after* it started crumbling elsewhere in India and Southeast Asia, the ancient classical language there being Old Tamil (Freeman, 1998)—but its traces in the local languages—in Nusantara first and foremost in Javanese but also in Malay and other languages—are so manifold as to question the powerful notion put forth by linguists that languages can be clearly identified and set apart through core vocabularies, particular phonetics and specific grammatical structures (Pollock, 2006). In this sense, the original languages of the texts mentioned here—Arabic, Malay, and Portuguese—are not incidental to the texts themselves but an integral part of the Indian Ocean settings and circuits where those texts were compiled and later circulated.

That all three languages not only survive to this day but are also locally rooted whether or not they can

be thought to be indigenous, is also not surprising even in an increasingly mono-Anglophone world (specially in academia). Just as with their lexicon, the texts in those languages also changed and were (re) appropriated, edited, translated and circulated in various ways. The texts also arguably ‘talked’ to each other through their authors, editors, copyists, translators, and collectors (and, it is often forgotten nowadays, oral renditions which used to be in fact the main mode of textual transmission as the *Sejarah Melayu* itself illustrates). Finally, as I hope to have shown above, the texts also entered into dialogue with each other because they were inserted in related local contexts and in comparable or overlapping Indian Ocean networks. That postcolonial Malaysia’s foremost indigenous text has links to an older text in Pasai, in today’s Sumatra in Indonesia, and that it fairly probably ended up in Goa where it was quoted in Portuguese, and eventually also migrated to Johor and other places along the straits, is a marvellous testimony to the enormous complexity of Indian Ocean circuits into which the colonial era slowly inserted itself.

This complexity can hardly be adequately explained by assigning texts to compartmentalised genres, languages, and national or even regional historiographical domains, as these are more often than not the result of colonial era scholarship that still casts its powerful shadow on us all to this day. As long as we look at those texts as belonging primarily to the turf of say Arabic, Lusophone, or Malay studies, however useful these domains may be in academia (I am willing to concede that they have their uses, especially considering the sometimes splendid scholarship coming out of them), we will not be able to see them as what they also are, namely Creole Indian Ocean texts of great complexity, arising out of diverse connected histories, none of which can be easily assigned to a single specific ethnic, national or postcolonial locus. **RC**

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NOTES

- 1

This essay is based on a chapter from my book manuscript, tentatively titled *Luso-Creole Worlds in the Indian Ocean: Essays in Historical Cosmopolitanism*.
- 2

For the concept of connected histories see Subrahmanyam (1997), and my own Ribeiro (2008).
- 3

For a somewhat unsatisfactory approach to Goa from that perspective, see Gomes (2007).
- 4

As Subrahmanyam shows, the text, through its deployment of the story of Alexander, in reality belongs within ancient connected histories linking the Eastern Mediterranean to the Straits of Melaka via Persia and India (Subrahmanyam, 1997). See also my own discussion (Ribeiro, 2007, pp. 37-38; Ribeiro, 2008).
- 5

Fontes (2011) shows that to this day Orta’s work is still discussed from the perspective of the development of pioneering botanical and medical knowledge (see for instance Lopes 2006). The more properly cultural and historical aspects of his works are therefore traditionally neglected. See however Pearson (2013). As for Zainuddin, his work seems to be read as an anti-colonial Muslim tract ever since it came to light in Portugal through the efforts of the Jewish professor of Arabic at the University of Lisbon, David Lopes (Zinadīm, 1898). See also Ho (2004).
- 6

I am grateful to Sumit Mandal from the National University of Malaysia for pointing out to me the relevance of the issue of the contemporaneity and contiguity between Orta and Zainuddin.
- 7

The Hadhramis—Arabs from the Hadhramaut in the Arabian Peninsula—would have settled in Malabar in the 13th century, though connections with Arabia are in fact pre-Islamic. See Bouchon (1973, 1986). I am grateful to Michael Pearson for these references. Hadhramis also settled in Nusantara as well as East Africa (Mandal, 2012; Ho, 2006).
- 8

Unsurprisingly Pearson (2011, p. 8) indicates that the Portuguese elite in Goa resorted routinely to Hindu physicians. See also Pearson (2006).
- 9

Pearson notes that Avicenna’s *Al-Qanun* is in fact the most influential medical book of all times in both Europe and Asia (Pearson, 2011, p. 5). Orta would have first studied Avicenna’s work in Salamanca while a medical student there (Liberato, 2011, p. 113). See also Pearson (2006).
- 10

However, he ridicules to Ruano some Hindu beliefs, for instance the transmigration of souls (Orta, 1563, p. 137, Colóquio 33).
- 11

Fontes (2011) points out that the dialogue form was very common in Renaissance works. She accordingly treats Ruano as a literary character.
- 12

The pagination in Orta’s text is sometimes unreliable and therefore I also include the number of the *colóquios* in question as is traditionally done in scholarship about Orta’s works.
- 13

Carvalho (1934) is another of Orta’s biographers. Ficalho’s however remains the main biographical source.
- 14

I carried out fieldwork in Kerala between January and June 2009.
- 15

See Veluthat’s essay on the *Keralolpatti*: perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the issues surrounding the text are similar to those related to *Sejarah Melayu*, first and foremost the inevitable entanglement with colonial evidentiary modes of historiography (Veluthat, 2009, pp. 129-146).
- 16

This circuit of course pre-dated by several centuries Orta’s arrival in Goa in 1534 in the armada led by Afonso de Sousa. It was an overland as well as a maritime trade circuit as the medieval materials retrieved from the Cairo Geniza show. Incidentally Malabar was an ancient part of this circuit as shown by the extant correspondence of the Tunisian-born Jewish trader Yuji in the 12th century (Goitein and Friedman, 2008).
- 17

See Grove (1996) and my discussion in Ribeiro (2007, p. 42). I am grateful to Siegfried Huigen with Stellenbosch University, South Africa, for pointing out Grove’s text to me. Grove takes the slaves’ voice as ethnographic rather than merely literary.
- 18

In a recent piece, Pearson however suggests that intolerance and persecution of devotees of other religions predated Orta’s arrival in Goa (Pearson, 2013). I am grateful to Michael Pearson for having sent me his piece. A few years after conquest in 1510 apparently not many Muslims were left in the city.
- 19

For an excellent account of the intricacies of the use of Arabic in South India and Southeast Asia, see Ronit Ricci’s detailed work (Ricci, 2011).
- 20

See *Sejarah Melayu*; Winstedt claims that in his own colonial time the city was Acehnese-speaking, which is not a language even remotely related to Malay (Winstedt, 1996, p. 110).
- 21

Unsurprisingly, Kurup mentions that in 1936 K. Moossankutty Moulavi brought out an Arabi-Malayalam version of Zainuddin’s text (Kurup, 2006, p. xv). Malay in Peninsular Malaysia was generally written in a modified version of Perso-Arabic script from at least the 14th century until the 1960s. It has been heavily influenced by Arabic and, to a much lesser degree, Persian.
- 22

Pearson (2012) however indicates that Creole Portuguese was usually only employed when there were European traders involved.

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