



Sights and insights : interactive images of Europe and the wider world / edited by
Mary N. Harris and Csaba Lévai
(Europe and the world : thematic work group 6 ; 2)

303.482 (21.)

I. Europa – Relazioni culturali I. Harris, Mary N. II. Lévai, Csaba

CIP a cura del Sistema bibliotecario dell'Università di Pisa



This volume is published thanks to the support of the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission, by the Sixth Framework Network of Excellence CLIOHRES.net under the contract CIT3-CT-2005-00164. The volume is solely the responsibility of the Network and the authors; the European Community cannot be held responsible for its contents or for any use which may be made of it.

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Lungarno Pacinotti, 43
56126 Pisa
Tel. 050 2212056 – Fax 050 2212945
info-plus@edizioniplus.it
www.edizioniplus.it - Section "Biblioteca"

Member of



ISBN 978-88-8492-467-4

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The People of the Orient as Seen by the Chroniclers of King Manuel I

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work, based on specific documentary sources – the chronicles relating to King Manuel I, who ruled from 1495 to 1521 – is to examine descriptions of the habits and customs of the peoples the Portuguese navigators encountered. Knowing that these Portuguese navigators opened the way to another world and another set of civilizations, little known in Europe, these chronicles present different values and different ways of life which confront those of the Christian West.

It is in this context, through the lens of a set of European rules and laws, that the Portuguese would look at such others and embrace their world. And these others lived in a world not entirely unknown, whose differences would, however, produce perplexity, wonder and even fantasy, as seen in writings which would in turn give rise to others, reinforcing the expectations of those leaving Lisbon to reveal the secrets of the sea.

Com este trabalho pretendi captar, através de crónicas régias relativas a um dos reis portugueses que teve papel de destaque no período da Expansão – D. Manuel I, a maneira como são relatadas as relações dos Portugueses com os povos do mundo Asiático, incidindo particularmente no momento da chegada à Índia e na forma como foram estabelecidos os primeiros contactos. As referências temporais estão, assim, integradas na primeira parte do século dezasseis.

A base do meu trabalho são, pois, esses documentos oficiais, recaindo o estudo sobre o que escreveram três diferentes cronistas acerca da mesma época e dos mesmos acontecimentos.

A documentação usada permite ter a noção da maneira como o Português captou o outro e conviveu com essa alteridade; ao mesmo tempo e dado que as crónicas tinham também a função de levar ao mundo conhecido, o mundo europeu, notícias de um outro mundo que todos sabiam apenas existir, é possível captar nestes documentos uma determinada maneira de fazer a História que, por sua vez, caracteriza uma época.

Para cumprir estavam traçados objectivos comerciais e religiosos, sendo essas as razões mencionadas nas crónicas para o empreendimento da Expansão Portuguesa no Oriente. Para registar, estava toda uma vivência de contactos que a permanência portuguesa no Índico veio permitir. Para o trabalho de análise efectuado no presente, ficaria a noção de que a

presença portuguesa provocou algumas mudanças num mundo que, embora se esperasse estático, possuía toda uma rede de rotas comerciais já estabelecidas e organizadas.

The voyages that brought Portuguese sailors to the Indian coasts were considered events of particular importance for the history of Portugal, but were also important for the establishment of interconnectedness and interdependence between continents. After these voyages a great number of political and social changes occurred in both East and West and they would mark the beginning of a new historical period.

The Portuguese chronicles of the early 16th century were written at a time when many people in Portugal, as well as in the rest of Europe, expected to gain knowledge about the world and about these first contacts of Portuguese sailors with the Indian Ocean. The historical importance of these reports is expressed in their narration of a great number of events, in descriptions of the Other, whose differences simultaneously set them apart and bring them closer, in a mixture of curiosity and the desire for accuracy. Through the chronicles, one can experience the confrontation between different peoples and cultures, although we also know that these kinds of sources emphasised the idealistic vision of efforts to promote the aims of Faith and Empire¹.

In Portugal a great number of scholars study this subject. Therefore, the task of re-analysing the documentary sources is always a very stimulating one when studying the personality of the king who ruled when these events occurred. Searching for their motivations we can indeed mention local and national problems as the leading motors of expansionist tendencies but we cannot avoid stressing the world consequences of these voyages.

At a time when Europe was rediscovering the Greco-Roman world and was becoming involved in all aspects of its revival, the Portuguese navigators opened the way to another world and another set of civilizations, equally old and, more than that, little known and highly desirable, whose different values and different ways of life would confront those of the Christian West. It is in this context, through the lens of a set of European rules and laws, that the Portuguese would look at such others and embrace their world. And these others lived in a world not entirely unknown, whose differences would produce perplexity, wonder and even fantasy. This, in turn, would give rise to other writings, yielding an imagery likely to reinforce the expectations of those leaving Lisbon to reveal the secrets of the sea.

It was on and through the “yet uncharted sea”² that historic deeds became a subject for the Portuguese chroniclers of the time, literary exponents of the Renaissance, all with what might be called a humanist formation. Even when such chronicles referred to events occurring during the reign of a particular king, they were written in an epic style: it was in praise of the heroism of the Portuguese people that the chroniclers reported the conquests and the battles, the supremacy and the sovereignty of their culture over the people of the Orient.

This work focuses on a specific documentary source – the chronicle – written about a specific king. Our analysis relates to the chronicles covering the reign of King Manuel I (who ruled between 1495 and 1521), and which reported these events some time after they occurred. Above all, these chronicles were official records and, as such, praised every aspect of the king's actions. But at the same time the chroniclers also described the habits and customs of the people the navigators now encountered: their clothes, their food, their socio-cultural behaviour. Such descriptions appear to us as fragments diluted in the epic style used to describe Portuguese life beyond the seas. One could say that there was no clear preoccupation with the understanding or the perception of the spirituality of Hindu religious practices, since that was not the aim of the chroniclers. There was much more of a need to write about what was immediately seen and felt. Since this was a chronicle and the main task was to glorify the Portuguese, the customs of the others would have to take second place: “Many more things could be said about their customs, but for now we will focus on other more pressing concerns”³.

We find that these chroniclers felt the need to describe events as accurately as possible, through a meticulous description of reality; their main concern was to show what was happening to those eager for such information. They strongly believed that their words had the duty to adapt events to memory. Their literary style conveys images and sounds so as to create a true mimesis. It was, at least, an attempt, because, as Damião de Góis said, History is “unlimited and its praises are endless and can be reduced to no single word, since everything broached in these writings is almost nothing compared to what it should be”⁴.

The notion of History mirrored in these 16th-century chronicles is therefore the one that looks for a description of events, the consequence of observing reality. An example of this is the work of Gaspar Correia (c. 1495- c. 1561). This chronicler travelled to India probably in 1540 and based his history on manuscript sources and papers he studied in Goa. He personally witnessed those events in India, so he described the Portuguese presence in those shores in a collection of texts named *Lendas da Índia* [Legends of India], written around 1550. These texts were printed, for the first time, between 1858 and 1863⁵. In these very detailed texts he provides us with a logical tapestry of intertwined events, insofar as time and place were concerned, by describing what his journey to the Orient was like, how he lived there and what contacts he could establish, even though, in several places, one can detect some implausibility in the report. He visited several cities and could not help feeling astonished by particular aspects of peoples' lives:

I could see with my own eyes our building of a fortress in the year 1540 (he is referring to Ormuz). I saw the street where merchants were selling seed-pearls [...] covering red clothes. [...] I saw other wonders in the city. I could write pages and pages about what I saw, but I will not do so because my aim should be to describe the actions of the Portuguese⁶.

However, such fidelity could also be obtained through a careful analysis of all existing documents, as Damião de Góis did. A warder of the Torre do Tombo⁷, Góis (1502-1574), often annotated documents and referred to the fact that there had been little

care in handling them, which shows how exhaustive his research work must have been. He also made plenty of references to his own evidence when he confirmed what he heard from people involved, what he could see for himself and what was mentioned in the texts of others. Góis served King João III (the son of King Manuel), on a variety of diplomatic missions throughout Europe, from 1503. These travels allowed him to meet some important people involved in the Northern Reformation, including Luther and Erasmus. After taking a degree from the University of Padua, Góis lived in Flanders for a decade. After returning to Portugal he wrote King Manuel's chronicle, printed in 1566-1567. A true humanist, this chronicler did not forget the classical authors, as when a certain geographical description could be related to what Plinius, Strabo or others had said. When referring to the Brahman, Góis wrote:

... most of them are experts in Philosophy and Mathematics; they are an ancient people in India, since they already lived there when Alexander reached that part of the world. Megasthenes and Strabo, Greek writers, called them the philosophers of India⁸

As for Jerónimo de Osório, one must inevitably mention the elegance of his writing, which employs humanist literary devices, such as rhetoric and direct speech, as in his imaginary dialogues between the characters whose story he is telling. Osório (1506-1580), was an important Latinist who was appointed bishop of Silves in 1564. He was asked by Cardinal Henrique – another son of King Manuel, who ruled as a regent when King Sebastião was young and as a king after his death in the battle of Alcácer-Quibir (1578) – to adapt the text of Góis to Latin so that knowledge of Portuguese exploits could reach European intellectual circles, eagerly awaiting information about the still largely unknown Orient⁹. In 1571 his *Rebus Emmanuelis Regis* was published in Lisbon. Proclaiming that History “should be conceived as an inexorable archive of facts, no matter how abject or gloriously supreme they may be, with a geometric precision as far as their truth is concerned”¹⁰, Osório often passed judgment on people's behaviour, playing his other role of bishop. Nevertheless, his writings include plenty of references to Antiquity, as when he compares Albuquerque to classical heroes “building in Goa what, in other times, Romulus had done in Rome or Theseus in Athens or any founder of any city. Calling him the founder of Goa is indeed an act of justice, since he conquered it with his weapons and his valour”¹¹.

One cannot forget that all of the narrative writings produced by these chroniclers were based upon principles of Christian values, taken to be the founding norms of human nature. It is therefore common for us to see Osório legitimate scenes of slaughter which he knew had occurred all along the shores of the Indian Ocean, as a demonstration of Portuguese naval power.

But let us see how the Orient was made visible. When the Portuguese reached the Orient they had already crossed Africa and discovered a ‘new world’ on the other side of the Atlantic, Brazil. The contact with the populations – first on the Eastern side of the African continent and then also on the coast of Malabar – was the contact with another kind, a different kind. The colour of their skin, their clothing (or lack thereof), their

wealth or poverty, their kindness or aggression had already been seen in the places they had visited. But the aim was India, or rather 'the Indies', where one went in search of Christians and spices¹². Everywhere there was talk about the spices; their existence was well known, and Europe, always fond of new flavours, was eagerly waiting for them. As far as the particularities of the religious cults were concerned, there were some inevitable misunderstandings. On reaching Calicut, the Portuguese supposed they had heard what they had wished to hear: according to Góis:

They arrived at a round chapel [...] carved in squared stone, with a narrow door of wire mesh [...] inside the chapel framed in the wall due to the darkness of the place [...] and these men did not let them in, pointing to the picture, saying Mary, Mary; on hearing such a name, Catual and the Naires¹³ threw themselves flat onto the ground, with their hands thrust forward, and then immediately stood up, praying while standing. Believing it to be the picture of the Virgin Mary, our men knelt and prayed as well¹⁴.

Christians? It would eventually be discovered they were not Christians. But they appeared to behave as such. Vasco da Gama left Calicut convinced that he had met Christian people but with somewhat different religious practices.

The Portuguese would soon discover that these oriental people were actually very well organized merchants, involved in a long-term interaction with the Muslim world. Many Muslim communities had established themselves in several areas around the Indian Ocean, earning their living through commercial activities and developing links with Hindu communities, but with a strong influence as far as political power was concerned¹⁵.

Today we know that the world between the Cape of Good Hope and Japan was not a static world; the Asian population, in spite of its uneven distribution, was probably about twice the European population¹⁶ and there was already a strong commercial structure involving numerous peoples of several origins and races. The trading activities in both the Indian Ocean and the Far East were intensified by the inter-Asian commercial circles: each region specialized in a specific kind of product, and the resulting profit was used to buy other goods. From East Africa they acquired ivory and slaves; from the Persian Gulf, through Ormuz, they obtained silk, pearls and horses; from Arabia, through Aden, they received aromatic products as well as horses; from the Malabar coast, they brought pepper and ginger; from Ceylon, elephants and cinnamon; from Northern India, rice; from Bengal, cotton clothes, rice and sugar. Such commercial circles were mostly controlled by Muslim merchants, which is why the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean was seen as an inconvenient intrusion.

One can always find such references in the Portuguese chronicles of the beginning of the 16th century, where the true enemy was always the Muslim. And it was on Islam that the blame for the fighting would inevitably fall, as the Portuguese pursued their much-desired overseas domination.

Having become aware of the difficulties that faced them, the Portuguese came to the conclusion that only through the power of their weapons could such a situation be

changed – but only later, since the true religious geography of India was still unknown. On leaving Lisbon there were concrete aims: King Manuel I wanted alliances with the Christian communities thought to inhabit the shores of the Indian Ocean. The plans for a crusade might be fulfilled. Given the alliance with “Prester John of the Indies”, the mythical Lord of the Christians¹⁷, the aim of reaching Jerusalem – which was also one of the reasons for the Portuguese campaigns in the North of Africa – was closer to being fulfilled. Obviously there were commercial aims in such an enterprise; under no circumstance should we forget that a no lesser objective was to bring to Europe, via the Cape route, the spices that were already being brought through the Levant – but with high costs, due to the considerable number of merchants involved.

It would soon be seen that Christian help for such a mission was not feasible and that the importance of the Muslim presence would determine the relations that were being established. In fact, during those years, the Portuguese presence would be based on a true fight against such hegemony. However, a certain respect was due to the natives, especially because of their relatively peaceful character, common to people used to a mercantile existence. The coastal areas were visited by ships owned by merchants. According to the chroniclers, it was in those areas that the Muslim communities lived.

One of the primary aims of the Portuguese king was certainly commercial trade. There were many types of valuable merchandise ready to be shipped back home. One must not forget that, in their records, the chroniclers started by mentioning the geographic characteristics of the regions and then enumerated the products likely to be found in those areas or along the commercial routes they would follow. However, for the Muslims, to lose such hegemony would be to surrender it to the intruder, who had come by sea to put an end to the land-based trading routes. We are dealing here with the history of the struggle for domination of the seas, and it is in this struggle that the establishment of the much-desired commercial routes is to be found. And the Portuguese of the 16th century found themselves before a wealthy India, very well entrenched in those commercial routes.

The contempt of the Samorim of Calicut for the gifts Vasco da Gama had brought him on behalf of King Manuel – “the king did not make much of them”¹⁸ – shows a certain lack of familiarity on the part of the Portuguese with the Indian reality and also their inability to enter the already established commercial circles – at least initially, since the economic capacity of the Orient had not yet been rightly evaluated. The offer was slight in the opinion of a king who was as powerful as the Portuguese king: “Vasco da Gama told him not to be surprised by the scarcity of the presents.”¹⁹ In a velvet-carpeted room whose walls were covered by silk and golden tapestries and where many men sat as in a theatre, a lone figure occupied the centre of attention because of his clothing, with golden buttons and with a set of pearls decorating the velvet of his turban: the Samorim, the wealthy king of Calicut. On his hands, arms and feet he wore bracelets, also decorated with pearls, and other jewels, and he had the rather unusual habit of spitting into a massive gold vase, an object whose name would later become known: *betete*. It was a strange habit, which would come to be described in the following terms:

... a leaf as big as rib-grass, actually very similar to it, which grows like ivy stuck to trees or in *espaliers* (a leaf which would be chewed), smeared in lime of shellfish, diluted in rose water. With this leaf they use a fruit they call *areca*, as big as a walnut, cut in pieces, which grows in trees similar to very tiny palm-trees, very tall and very clean. They swallow its juice and spit out the remaining viscous globs or release it through the gases that come out of their stomachs and heads, something which is good for their health, causes good breath and quenches their thirst²⁰.

First, the Samorim's men had taken the Portuguese to him, very slowly, very cautiously, according to Damião de Góis: "they realized that the Portuguese were very tired because of the sea voyage and could not follow them, as the Naires could; many people were behind them, astonished to see people from a very distant place, wearing rather unusual clothes, unknown in those regions"²¹. They, too, found the Portuguese very different²². The customs of these Muslims are, naturally, described from a European perspective. Osório says of Malabar that the people are "extremely poor, superstitious and worship false gods"²³; Góis wrote that they adored monstrous idols, placed in "huge temples they call pagodas, well decorated, full of pictures of angels and devils"²⁴. There were peoples amongst whom certain noblemen did not marry, because they were destined to fight in battles. However, they could have "many concubines (who, in turn, could also) accept as many lovers as they wanted to"²⁵, without this giving rise to misunderstandings. Different customs were described in the language of European concepts, with Christian roots.

The Portuguese chroniclers also noticed that in the lands of the Malabar contact with the lower castes was not allowed and therefore more attention was paid to the Brahman and the Naires, though it is possible to find, every now and then, references like this, in the context of war: "a tall stick the Malabares call *calvete*, with which they mete out justice when people of low rank do something wrong"²⁶.

Góis emphasized the nobility of the Naires and their honour status, since they were men who would die for their master and could have neither a wife nor children precisely because of this devotion. Thus, special mention was made of the authority that only mothers could have over their children, as their mistresses, like the Naires themselves, had the right to as many partners as they desired: hence only the children of their sisters were recognized as being legitimate descendants²⁷. These Naires were described as walking bare-chested, with their lower body clothed in silk and cotton; they always wore swords and bucklers, as well as lances, bows and arrows; they were very dexterous at wielding their weapons, a skill they had acquired as children; they would bathe every day and have as many women as they wanted, a right extended equally to the women. The Portuguese did find such 'licentiousness' rather strange, although women were praised for the perfection of not having men from other castes:

... (the children) do not know who their father is, since their mothers do not have only one husband or male friend: they get to know as many men as they want and the more male friends they have the more honoured they are. When one of these friends enters the house of a woman, he must leave his weapon at the entrance door: if another friend comes with the intention of entering he will immediately know he should not do so; such attitudes leave no place for any sort of jealousy or quarrel²⁸.

As for the Brahman, the priests, as the Portuguese used to call them, they would get married only once; when they died, their widows would be buried alive, with them²⁹. According to the chroniclers, men of this caste also had the strange habit of bathing more than once a day: before eating, after eating and before religious celebrations. It seemed to the Portuguese that their eating habits would also vary according to each caste: the Brahman did not eat either meat or fish, preferring vegetables, rice and butter, while other castes, who lived close to rivers or the sea, would only eat fish. There were also castes whose food and clothing were made up of plant roots; these lower castes would have to shout when walking in public to avoid being touched or seen. The basic food was rice and the Portuguese were told that the king of Narsinga possessed a territory with nine rivers, which provided an explanation for such a copious production of that cereal.

Other customs also caused surprise, but the Portuguese themselves surprised the local people: after a fight in Cambalan, where the natives had to beat a retreat due to the military superiority of the Portuguese, the combatants assembled some cows they had taken with them to serve as food, “which the Naires of the king of Cochim found very unusual, since it is a precept of the Malabar religion not to kill any cows or eat their meat”³⁰.

If it is true that the Portuguese were surprised by the shape of the faces, the clothes and the habits of the natives, one cannot forget that the natives were equally “astonished at seeing men wearing such inappropriate clothing, who had come to those shores from so far away”³¹. Physical aspects of the Portuguese were also strange, particularly the colour of their skin and their smell (most probably because they had spent many months at sea). The bread that the Portuguese ate – the biscuit – was regarded by Easterners as similar to stones; the blood-coloured liquid they drank (wine) was also strange to them. Furthermore, they wore boots and hats made of iron. And the way the newcomers used to gather and take part in religious celebrations was remarkably unusual. When the settlement of Cochin was ready, “the captains organized a procession in which the clergyman took a crucifix under a canopy, followed by trumpet players and jesters. And they walked through the whole city causing the Indians much astonishment: our way of showing religious faith was strange and so was the joy of the celebration, something never seen before in those places”³².

The Malabar Coast was described as a geographic area divided into many kingdoms, all of them subject to a bigger kingdom, that of Calicut. Jerónimo de Osório said that the shores of the Indian Ocean were inhabited by “many different nations, (and that the Malabars were ruled by) *régulos* (a sort of king or local governor), most of them vassals of the emperor of Calecut, to whom they paid tributes”³³. This author also insists on the great social distinction established between the groups the chroniclers called generations or laws. In their reports there seems to be a perception of a different hierarchy, since there were the nobles and the men and women called mechanics whom it was forbidden to touch, as they were a source of impurity. Those of the lowest rank paid for such a touch with their death, other ranks with dishonour, the chronicles tell us.

Because of the closed nature of these castes, it is also said that “not even virtue can enlighten a dark origin: they all have to go through the same condition their grandparents went through”³⁴, which did not happen in European societies, where such virtue was a factor of social promotion, particularly in the context of the expansion. We read about the situations of navigators belonging to the nobility who would arm another navigator (of a low social standard), when the latter revealed worthy behaviour, particularly in battle.

It did not prove difficult for the Portuguese to accept a society divided and organized according to the caste system. The image of their own integration in a hierarchical society, as were all ancient European societies, made such acceptance easier. However this hierarchy caused perplexity among the Portuguese as it was a very different form of social organisation. It was more difficult to accept such a close bond to one’s origin and the impossibility of what Western civilization would call social mobility. All authors referred to this distinction and its rules. Osório described the exclusivity of the castes by saying that the orders or generations were such that “the weaver can never be a shoemaker, nor a tailor a carpenter, nor a carpenter a blacksmith, and on and on: they have to go on doing the work their forefathers did, and if one develops a friendship with a woman of another generation, his own parents or friends will kill him”³⁵. Góis also wrote that “there are many sects of them and so many orders with different religions that I would have to write a big volume if I wanted to mention them all”³⁶. However, his task was writing a chronicle, and one not specifically about social customs; he therefore suggests to the reader a book by Duarte Barbosa³⁷, a true anthropological treatise, with descriptions of the many things he saw.

Góis says that these people

have many different idolatries, they have a strong belief in witchcraft and omens; they mainly believe in a single God, whom they profess to be the Lord of all things, and then in devils, who, they believe, can do them harm, and that is why they honour them in houses they call pagodas, a great number of which are to be found throughout the kingdom, very sumptuous and expensive houses, some of them for men and others for women³⁸.

There were also kings who

do not get married, but who have more than three hundred young women, all of them daughters of high nobles of the kingdom, who spend some months in the court and the rest of the time at their parents’ homes. When the king of Narsinga dies, his body is burnt in a huge fire of sandal and other scented powders and all those women are burnt with them, as well as their servants and all the officials in their houses, something they do with so much love that they fight in order to be the first to approach the fire³⁹.

They also considered strange the immolation of widows, in a dignified public ceremony attended by their relatives: the sati⁴⁰.

When reading these chronicles there seems to be a dichotomy between what was described and reflected the point of view of the eye witness, on the one hand, and the possible understanding of different forms of spirituality on the other. In the Orient the Portuguese encountered a cosmopolitan people, as there were multiple commercial

routes involving Turks, Malayans, Chinese and others, whose presence implied trans-cultural exchanges⁴¹.

At the beginning, in the presence of the gentile (the Indian), it was necessary to accept another precept, another way of perceiving the divine: the difference here did not seem to cause difficulties with dialogue, because such dialogue was commercially motivated. However, in the presence of Muslims, everything happened as if friendly contact could never take place. First, because the Portuguese did not trust 'the sect of Mafamede' and the spirit of crusade still present in some texts and ways of feeling, demanded that malevolent deviants be combated; secondly, and maybe more importantly, because the Muslim possessed what the Portuguese desired: Eastern commerce. The Indian did not have such status: he was only the inhabitant of the regions where the coveted merchandise was found and bought – contact with him would have been friendly, if it were not for the Muslim presence.

One could always confine such a confrontation to the religious sphere and move to an explanatory model of permanence, since the values proclaimed in Christian Europe were still those that held the fight against Islam to be an ultimate task. In this case, however, there was not really a fight against Islam or, at least, there was no essentially religious fight, because the Hindu's way of showing devotion had some aspects similar to those of the European manner, at least at the beginning of the period this study refers to, since we know that later, after the establishment of the city of Goa as the centre of the State of India, the relationship between the different peoples changed considerably. First, the intention was to fight the Muslims, for reasons of religious antagonism and mainly for commercial reasons. It was not by chance that in the records of the chroniclers the Muslim always appeared as the traitor, the one who would beget every kind of plot and trap so that the friendly contacts with the Hindu kingdoms might give way to conflicts and then to fiery battles. There are records of complaints made by these Muslims to local kings about the dirty appearance of the Portuguese, people who would not wash, would touch those of a lower social class, would eat the meat of cows and pigs (and pigs ate dirty things they found in the streets) and would sleep with the dirty and tarnished women of the lower castes⁴². We can read about the strangeness relating to the unusual clothes the Portuguese wore⁴³.

It is also very important to consider that one of the Portuguese aims was to leave fortified places on the coast in order to use them for commercial purposes. For the Portuguese it was essential to build shelters, where they could defend themselves from the Muslim enemy, who was always willing to intervene by plotting aggressive schemes, according to the chroniclers. The Muslim was an enemy who would also feel attacked, because there was, after all a situation of war, in this case, a war caused by the true mercantile nature of the Portuguese presence.

Some of the villages that the Portuguese set on fire were Muslim villages and they did it because their inhabitants had not submitted to the friendship they had been offered, according to the chroniclers' accounts. They often did the same to some boats, as they

also belonged to Muslims and transported merchandise or were there for the purpose of waging war. The routes which were drawn, the straits which were strategically controlled and the agreements which were made with the local kings, everything aimed at the destruction of Muslim influence and at the imposition of Portuguese sea power. The intention was to establish a commercial network, more than a systematic and general conquest of lands.

As for relations amongst the several kingdoms, the chroniclers also referred to the multiple rivalries and the frequent disobedience of Calicut, the head-city of the whole land of Malabar. They also gave evidence of how the Portuguese changed the natural order of this geo-administrative organization, once they learned about the alliances being established and started to take advantage of the inevitable rivalries:

... and the king (of Calicut) was the wealthiest and most powerful of all kings of that province before the Portuguese arrival in India, but now, because he does not want our friendship, having followed Muslim advice, he has lost much of his state, and the king of Cochin has increased his, precisely because of the good and true friendship he has always maintained with us⁴⁴.

This was the opinion of someone who could not know that Cochin, like Quiloas or Ormuz, was a relatively small and essentially commercial state, therefore easy to deal with, unlike the solid imperial states of agrarian basis, such as Vijayanagar (which the Portuguese would call Bisnagá or kingdom of Narsinga)⁴⁵.

Later Ormuz also complained about not having the means to pay the king of Portugal for the *páreas* [tributes], since from the time the Portuguese established their dominion there, in a strategic attempt to intercept Muslim vessels coming through the Persian Gulf, all kinds of commerce in Ormuz would eventually be redirected.

But did the Portuguese manage to start a dialogue between East and West after having been the pioneers in this Oceanic adventure? The chroniclers tell us of an incident that disrupted the usual mercantile relations, one that expresses a clear relationship of domination. Looking at the other basically meant casting him a hostile glance and did not necessarily imply a relationship of knowledge to ignorance, but rather a kind of tolerance born of domination and a confrontation of religious views, as filtered through a European lens. In presence of the Indian, even if cultural shock had yielded a perception of difference, another precept had to be accepted, another way of perceiving all things divine; it was possible to accept alterity, in spite of there not being the metaphysical preoccupation with understanding the spirituality which had given rise to another belief. In the 16th century most historians did not write analytical history: they were chroniclers. And it was a chronicler's task to record how events had occurred chronologically; it was not up to him to analyse them, nor to express his own opinion about them⁴⁶. However, in the presence of Muslims, everything happened as if a friendly relationship was impossible. The spirit of crusade was infused with Christianity and here alterity meant a form of refusal, a situation that had its ancient roots in the peninsular relationship with the North of Africa. Osório often said that "the sect of Mafamede" accused the Portuguese of being pirates, pernicious to all nations, since they scattered

the poison of their wrong doctrine⁴⁷. The chronicle always blamed the Muslim element for all failures, contrivances, plots and dissimulations: they would even pretend to be Christians if that meant getting what they wanted. And the chronicler would feed his narrative with the slaughters taking place on the shores of the Indian Ocean. Each intercepted Muslim boat would be sacked and often its crew slaughtered: the Portuguese would usually cut off the Muslim sailors' ears and noses and, if there were a suspicion of betrayal, they would even cut off their hands and feet. There are also records of violence towards Muslim women: "such was the cruelty of these low-class people (the sailors) that they cut off the hands of more than eight hundred living women in order to take immediate possession of the golden and silver bracelets they wore on their arms"⁴⁸, there are also descriptions of the destruction of sacred places, the concept of sacred never being the same for Europeans and Muslims: "they tore down a large part of the Muslim mosque, where Muslims were praying, since it was Sunday; some of them died when the wall fell"⁴⁹.

One must, however, point out that it was not always like this. Albuquerque ordered that young Muslim women held in captivity be protected, which would allow him to fulfil his politics of social harmony. Marriages between Portuguese men and Eastern women were a necessary measure to assure the Portuguese presence in the Orient, particularly in Goa, which would become the capital of the Portuguese State of India. However, it was still a pale skin colour (in accordance with European aesthetic ideals) that would determine these relations and, as the gentile women of the higher castes were not usually willing to accept such change, it was the Muslim women who would perform this role⁵⁰.

Discovery, conquest, colonization, evangelization and commerce were therefore the forms of contact established between distant societies and civilizations, bringing differences to the fore. From such contacts a new awareness of the social and natural worlds would be born and recorded in texts that give us the opportunity to try and solve the puzzle of the past.

These chroniclers left us narratives of episodes related to the Portuguese contact with the other, but always as narrators who were describing things temporally removed, that is to say, without the surprise or the astonishment of someone witnessing something for the first time, though one can still perceive a certain feeling of strangeness, a natural consequence of a first contact with the alterity.

One cannot forget, though, that the chronicles were, first of all, official records. One can often read that nothing else happened at that time worthy of mention, which suggests that references not corresponding to the epic character of the record were automatically excluded. We also know that censorship certainly added finishing touches to Damião de Góis's texts, but it is up to us to sift through the diverse sources of information that have reached us to reconstruct the past.

By reading the chronicles we may get the idea that the Portuguese presence on the shores of the Indian Ocean changed a certain order. However, we also get the sense that the

Orient was already a complex universe, where cultural and religious tensions, together with inevitable commercial ones, gave rise to a dynamic environment the Portuguese did not expect to find. Islamic, Jewish, Nestorian and Syrian Christian communities were living together with Hinduism, in their confused diversity. Such an internal set of conflicts would unsurprisingly help the Portuguese to establish themselves in that region⁵¹.

We must not forget the political fragmentation of the Indian coasts, where the Portuguese could always find a political leader to embrace an alliance against Calicut. Nor must we forget that Christian imagery dominated the writing of chronicles, not so much because D. Manuel had ordered the Portuguese to sail to India in search of Christians, but because at the time people's cognitive structures so determined it. On the other hand, after reading the extensive records of these men, the journeys to the other side of the world are proven to have had much more to do with the search for spices, the very spices that turned this Portuguese king into the Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India, a title he adopted immediately after Vasco da Gama's voyage in 1497.

NOTES

- ¹ L.F. Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisbon 1998, p. 189.
- ² This expression was used by Luís de Camões, a 16th-century poet, in his Portuguese epic poem *Os Lusíadas*, written about the Portuguese discoveries.
- ³ J. Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos de El-Rei D. Manuel*, Porto 1944, I, p. 66. (Frequently the original language of the chronicles was adapted, to facilitate translation).
- ⁴ D. de Góis, *Crónica do Felicíssimo Rei D. Manuel*, Coimbra 1949, I, p. 1.
- ⁵ G. Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, published by The Royal Academy of Sciences in Lisbon, in six volumes. Gaspar Correia also wrote the Chronicles of two kings – *Crónica de D. Manuel & D. João III* – a source that is used also as a reference in my work.
- ⁶ G. Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, Porto 1975, I, p. 815.
- ⁷ A.N.T.T. – Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo – National Archive of Torre do Tombo, is the place where the royal archives were kept.
- ⁸ Góis, *Crónica* cit., p. 96.
- ⁹ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, p.12; see also L.Matos, *L'expansion portugaise dans la littérature latine de la Renaissance*, Lisbon 1991 – cf. information about the importance and diffusion of Osório's texts in Europe, pp. 109-544.
- ¹⁰ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, Prologue, p. XVI.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 33.
- ¹² This was the answer the Portuguese gave when they were asked, in Calicut, about the reasons for their voyage.
- ¹³ Naires or Nayars were warriors belonging to a superior caste of Malabar.
- ¹⁴ Góis, *Crónica* cit., I, p. 92.
- ¹⁵ C.C.S. Tavares, *Jesuítas e Inquisidores em Goa*, Lisbon 2004, p. 56.
- ¹⁶ S. Subrahmanyam, *O Império Asiático Português, 1500-1700 - Uma História Política e Económica*, Lisbon, 1995, pp. 13-14; orig. *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1570-1700*, London 1993.

- ¹⁷ Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor* cit., p. 125, p. 190. We must add some information about this character, who is always mentioned in the chronicles. Góis wrote about the contacts of the Portuguese with the Emperor of Ethiopia, “king of Abexi, who is wrongly called Prester John”, he says (cf. D. de Góis, *Crónica* cit, I, p. 141); in fact the author knows about the mythical aspect of this character; he described the attempts to reach this kingdom and even the contacts established with the Ethiopian Christians; although he could not avoid mentioning him as “Prester John” in the chronicle, as was common in that time.
- ¹⁸ Góis, *Crónica* cit., I, p. 99.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94; see also Correia, *Lendas* cit., I, p. 99 and p. 171.
- ²¹ Góis, *Crónica* cit., p. 90.
- ²² Correia, *Lendas* cit., I, p. 69. This chronicler mentions a legend known along the Malabar coast, told by wizards and fortune-tellers, the “canayates”; it was about a powerful king who would come from very distant shores, accompanied by white-coloured people and who would conquer and dominate India.
- ²³ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, p. 64.
- ²⁴ Góis, *Crónica* cit., I, p. 96.
- ²⁵ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, p. 65.
- ²⁶ Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p. 125.
- ²⁷ As far as lineage is concerned, it was always the nephew who would inherit posts and estates, because he was the son of one’s sister and therefore of the same blood.
- ²⁸ Correia, *Lendas* cit., I, p. 356.
- ²⁹ There are references to two dignified ways for the widow to die: one was the above-mentioned burial beside the dead husband and the other that of the voluntary immolation in a public ceremony, the sati.
- ³⁰ Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p. 200.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 91.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 185.
- ³⁴ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., p. 64.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- ³⁶ Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p. 98.
- ³⁷ *O Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, Lisbon 1996; this book was not used as a source for this chapter since it goes beyond the bounds of this research topic.
- ³⁸ Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p. 21.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, p. 207; c.f. Correia, *Lendas* cit., II, p. 66; cf. Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p.21).
- ⁴¹ Tavares, *Jesuitas e Inquisidores em Goa*, Lisbon 2004 (with very detailed information about the Orient before the arrival of the Portuguese).
- ⁴² Correia, *Lendas* cit., I, p. 193.
- ⁴³ Góis, *Crónica* cit., III, p. 5.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 99.
- ⁴⁵ Subrahmanyam, *O Império Asiático* cit., p. 16.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. T. de Castelo Branco, *Na Rota da Pimenta*, Lisbon 2006, p. 17.
- ⁴⁷ Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., I, p. 314.

⁴⁸ Góis, *Crónica* cit., II, p. 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Góis, *Crónica* cit., III, pp. 49, 68; cf. Osório, *Da Vida e Feitos* cit., II, pp. 19, 41; cf. Correia, *Crónicas de D.Manuel e de D. João III*, pp. 84-85.

⁵¹ According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the mercantile spirit was penetrating a great number of states during the 16th century, which increased interest in commerce. The Portuguese presence on the shores of the Indian Ocean was certainly not decisive, but it definitely strengthened the links between the economy of the various Eastern states and those of Europe and the New World, in an articulation that would literally involve the whole globe. The great spread of firearms or the diffusion of precious metals and forms of money of lesser value are examples of the changes that began to occur in this period (cf. pp. 388-390).

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