

# Reinterpreting Indian Ocean Worlds



Reinterpreting Indian Ocean Worlds:  
Essays in Honour of Kirti N. Chaudhuri

Edited by

Stefan C. A. Halikowski Smith

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SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Reinterpreting Indian Ocean Worlds: Essays in Honour of Kirti N. Chaudhuri,  
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This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2931-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2931-1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	ix
Preface .....	xi
K. N. Chaudhuri	
Gwyn Campbell	
Foreword .....	xvii
From Tuscany: Art and Apologia	
James Kaye	

## **Part I: Intermixing**

Chapter One.....	2
Early Portuguese Emigration to the Ethiopian Highlands:	
Geopolitics, Missions and Métissage	
Andreu Martínez D'Alòs-Moner	
Chapter Two .....	33
Seeking the Lost Tribes of Israel	
Tudor Parfitt	
Chapter Three .....	51
Nagasaki: A Christian Port in the Land of the Rising Sun	
João Paulo Oliveira e Costa	
Chapter Four .....	62
The Cartographic Flight of the Parrots	
Francesc Relañó	

## Part II: The World of Trade

Chapter Five .....	84
The Expansion of Cotton Textile Production in the Western Indian Ocean, c. 1500-c.1850	
William Gervase Clarence-Smith	
Chapter Six .....	107
Eastern Indonesia: A Study of the Intersection of Global, Regional and Local Networks in the 'Extended' Indian Ocean	
Leonard Y. Andaya	
Chapter Seven.....	141
Changing Economic Patterns in the Indian Ocean: Effects on Sri Lankan Culture	
Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya	
Chapter Eight.....	155
A List of Spices Known and Used in Europe during the Sixteenth Century, Their Provenance, Common Names and Ascriptions	
Stefan C. A. Halikowski Smith	

## Part III: Colonial Paths

Chapter Nine.....	232
'The Most Revered and Feared King': The Construction of the Public Image of the Viceroy of the Portuguese State of India, c. 1700-1750	
João Vicente Melo	
Chapter Ten .....	255
Jesuit Art in Goa between 1542 and 1655: From <i>Modo Nostro</i> to <i>Modo Goano</i>	
Cristina Osswald	
Chapter Eleven .....	287
Islands in the Indian Ocean World in the Early Modern Period	
Malyn Newitt	
Chapter Twelve .....	314
Portuguese Colonial Charity: The Misericórdias of Goa, Bahia and Macao	
Isabel dos Guimarães Sa	

Chapter Thirteen .....	336
'Floating' European Clergy in Siam during the Years Immediately Prior to the National Revolution of 1688: The Letters of Giovan Battista Morelli, O.F.M Stefan C. A. Halikowski Smith	
Bibliography .....	377
Contributors .....	381
Index .....	384





# LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1. Northern view of Portuguese settlement and Jesuit Residence of Fremona, c. 1563-1633.
- Figure 2. Map of Jesuit Residences and Sites with Ethio-Portuguese in Ethiopia, c. 1545-1670.
- Figure 3. Portuguese Family Trees in Ethiopia, 1541-c. 1650.
- Figure 4. Map of city and port of Nagasaki, Japan (Museu da Marinha, Lisbon, 17th century).
- Figure 5. A detail of Brazil on the so-called Cantino planisphere, Biblioteca Estense, Modena, 1502.
- Figure 6. South America on Martin Waldseemüller's *Universalis Cosmographia, secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespucii Aliorūque Lustrationes*", Library of the Princes of Wardburg zu Wolfegg-Waldsee, Württemberg, 1507.
- Figure 7. Martin Waldseemüller, "Tabula Terre Nove", in Jacobus Aeschler & Georgius Ubelin, *Claudii Ptolemei viri Alexandrini mathematicae discipline philosophi doctissimi Geographiae opus nouissima traductione e Graecorum archetypis castigatissime pressum, ceteris ante lucubrationum multo prestantius (...)*, Strasbourg: Argentine, 1513.
- Figure 8. Martin Waldseemüller, "Tabula Terre Nove", in Lorenz Fries, *Claudii Ptolemei Alexandrini Mathematicorum Principis Opus Geographicae Noviter Castigatum & Emaculatum (...) Hec Bona Mente Laurentius Phrisus Artis Appollone Doctor & Mathematicarum Artium Clientulus, In Lucem Iussit Prodire. Agammemnonis Puteoli Plurimum Dedicati*. Strasbourg: Ioannes Grieninger Civis Argentoraten[sis] Opera Et Expensis Propriis Id Opus Insigne, 1522.
- Figure 9. Lopo Homem, *Mappamundi*, contained in the Atlas Miller, 1519, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
- Figure 10. Oronce Finé, double-cordiform world map (1531), in Simon Grynaeus' *Novus Orbis Regionum*, Paris: Apud Ioannem Paruum, 1532.
- Figure 11. Abraham Ortelius, "Typus Orbis Terrarum", in Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, Antwerp: Aegidius Coppenius Diesth, 1570.
- Figure 12. François Valentijn, "Kaart der Reyse van Abel Tasman", in *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, Dordrecht: J. van Braam, 1724-26, vol. 3.
- Figure 13. The island world of Southeast Asia. Map produced by Leonard Y. Andaya.
- Figure 14. The Maluku world. Map produced by Leonard Y. Andaya.
- Figure 15. North Maluku. Map produced by Leonard Y. Andaya.
- Figure 16. Central and South Maluku. Map produced by Leonard Y. Andaya.

- Figure 17. Shibam at sunset (Yemen). [Pp. 142ff]. Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 18. Al Mukalla harbour (Yemen). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 19. Janjira Sea Fort (India). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 20. Sanaa House (Yemen). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 21. Janjira lateen rigged boats (India). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 22. Bangkok Floating Market (Thailand). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 23. Yazd Great Mosque (Iran). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 24. Nara temple (Japan). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 25. Sulawesi seascape (Indonesia). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 26. Dhow shipyard, Viraval Kutch (India). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 27. Basra house on Shatt al Arab (Iraq). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 28. Sulawesi Prahus in Harbour (Indonesia). Colour photograph by K.N. Chaudhuri.
- Figure 29. Saint Francis Xavier's burial chapel with the saint's tomb (Giovanni Battista Fogginì, and Indian artists), Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa.
- Figure 30. Doorway of the second church of the Colégio de S. Paulo Velho (1560-72), attributed to Martin Ochoa.
- Figure 31. The Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa, completed 1605.
- Figure 32. Pulpit of the Basilica of Bom Jesus with Indian *naginis* (female snake figures), second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Indian artist(s).
- Figure 33. High Altar of the Bom Jesus, first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Goa.
- Figure 34. Chiesa di San Michele in Insola, 1469-1478, by Mauro Codussi, Venice.
- Figure 35. Oil painting of Jesuits in Adoration of the Salvator Mundi, Basilica of Bom Jesus, Indian artist, first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- Figure 36. Oil painting of five Jesuits in Adoration of Our Lady and Saint Catherine, patron of Goa, with two Evangelists, turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Indian painter, Basilica of Bom Jesus.
- Figure 37. Scene of the Life of St. Ignatius, Rachol. Indian artist, first half of seventeenth century.
- Figure 38. Martyrs of Salsette, Church of Our Lady of the Martyrs, Goa, 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Figure 39. A missionary in the Orient. From *Usage du royaume de Siam en 1688*, s.l./ n.d.

## PREFACE

K. N. CHAUDHURI

GWYN CAMPBELL

It is with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation to write a few words about Kirti Chaudhuri in a collection published in his honour. I first met Kirti in Avignon, where I was lecturing at the university, and close to which he had just bought a large sun-baked *mas*. I was delighted that such an eminent historian had moved to the region, even more so when he warmly accepted my invitation to deliver a keynote speech at a conference I was organising on ‘Women in Slavery’ in October 2002. It was fitting that Kirti was there, for this formed one of a series of conferences I have held which compared the history of slavery and other forms of servile labour in the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds. In the pre-industrial era labour constituted the primary form of capital, and to this day production in many parts of globe remains heavily labour intensive. However, what became increasingly clear as these conferences progressed was that, outside a few European enclaves, forms of servile labour in the Indian Ocean world (IOW) were markedly different to those that are traditionally given prominence in the Atlantic world. Moreover, possibly only on Réunion and Mauritius from the late eighteenth century were Atlantic world structures of slavery duplicated. In other European enclaves, from the Cape to Goa, Batavia and Hong Kong, the structure of slavery differed from that of the Atlantic model. Moreover, it became increasingly evident that these differences in turn reflected markedly different economic structures. The IOW economy was of a different order. And Kirti Chaudhuri stands out as a pioneer, as one of the earliest historians to realize this fundamental difference, and to adopt the analytical concepts of space, time and structure that Fernand Braudel so fruitfully used for the Mediterranean, and apply it to the Indian Ocean region, centred on South Asia.

Kirti was able to do this for a number of reasons. First, he and his family are steeped in the traditions of Asia. Kirti, who was born in

Kolkhota, and grew in Delhi, was the second son of writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1999) who in 1938 became secretary to barrister Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950) through whom he came to know the inner circle of nationalist leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Sarat's brother, Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945), the future Netaji. Kirti witnessed independence for India from British rule when just shy of his thirteenth birthday, and some of the social dislocation and sectarian violence that accompanied the subsequent partition of India (some 12.5 million people were displaced and anything from several hundred thousand to a million killed), with the emergence of a predominantly Muslim Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and a predominantly Hindu West Bengal. Steeped in both a rich political culture and a strong Bengali and literary and intellectual tradition, Kirti moved to London to study history under such luminaries as the Indologist, Arthur Llewellyn Basham (1914-86); C.R. Boxer (1904-2000), historian of European overseas expansion; Bernard Lewis (b. 1916), specialist in Middle Eastern history; Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm (b. 1917); and philosopher Karl Popper (1902-94).

Such influences laid a solid foundation for Kirti's own academic career. He obtained a B.A. (first class) in 1959, and a Ph.D. in 1961—both from the University of London, where he went on to take up a lectureship in economic history. He progressed to Professor, and in 1991 became the first Vasco da Gama Professor of the History of European Expansion at the European University in Florence. Kirti earned plaudits for his *The English East India Company: the Study of an Early Joint Stock Company 1600-1640* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), a meticulous economic history. And his reputation as one of the most eminent historians of our time was cemented with subsequent works in which he applied Braudelian concepts to the Asian arena— notably *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); *The Trade and Civilisation in Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and *Asia before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

It is difficult to do justice to such broad and innovative work. Thus Santhi Hejeebu remarked that “For the range and importance of its findings, its unique method, and its empirical bounty... and for its lasting impact on economic history, *Trading World of Asia* certainly deserves its present distinction -- one of the most significant works of the twentieth century” (EH.Net 2000-12-19); Again, of *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, Tapan Raychaudhuri commented: “a remarkable intellectual achievement. It is perhaps the first serious effort to write an economic

history of Asia as distinct from its several component cultures. Subsequent attempts to emulate Prof. Chaudhuri's example will have to contend with a punishingly demanding standard (*Economic History Review*, ns. 39. 2 (1986), 326); and Om Prakash wrote that it was "an excellent book... a superb analysis of an important area of research in Asian history" (*Indian Economic Social History Review*, 24.3 (1987), 339-41). Kirti's work has earned him numerous honours. The only historian from South Asia to have been elected to the British Academy (1990) and Academia Europaea (1994), he was also elected to the Royal Historical Society (1993), and gained the Dom João de Castro Prize in International History (1994).

There are two areas I would highlight in which Chaudhuri's work has had considerable impact. First, is Chaudhuri's vision of the IOW over the *longue durée* in Braudelian terms; and second is his revision of the Eurocentric interpretation of Islam as a belief system that choked individual enterprise and hindered economic growth. In applying Braudelian concepts to the Indian Ocean, Chaudhuri showed the importance of the monsoon regime as the key to production and long-distance exchange across the entire geographical space between the Red Sea and China. This has in turn enabled scholars to break free from the intellectual constraints imposed by conventional preoccupations with "area studies" and the history of the "nation state." His approach has laid the ground for an emerging school of scholars who consider the monsoons as giving the entire macro-region a unifying force of such historical depth and intensity and regularity of commercial exchange, that it may be termed an Asian "global" economy.

Moreover, as Chaudhuri emphasised, it was the world's first sophisticated durable complex of long-distance economic production and exchange. The time it emerged - by the B.C.E./C.E. changeover (Andre Gunder Frank),<sup>1</sup> alongside Islam from the seventh century (Chaudhuri and André Wink<sup>2</sup>), or linked to developments in tenth-century Sung China (Janet Abu-Lughod,<sup>3</sup> George Modelski and William R. Thompson<sup>4</sup>) - is subject to debate. However, the three great productive and consumer regions of

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<sup>1</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: Berkeley University Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> André Wink, *Al-Hind. The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* 2 vols Leiden / New York / Köln, 1996-97.

<sup>3</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony. The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Leading Sectors and World Powers. The Coevolution of Global Economics and Politics*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1996.

China, India, the Middle East (focused on Babylonia / Iraq) and the trade routes that linked them constituted its core. The Mediterranean basin and Europe was a significant but less important economic region.

Second, Chaudhuri has been forefront in a serious challenge by an 'Asiacentric' school to the Eurocentric view that non-Western societies possessed insuperable institutional and ideological obstacles to innovation and economic development, which experienced stagnation and decline from around the thirteenth century until the arrival of Europeans from 1500. In particular, he has challenged the negative Eurocentric view of the historical role of Islam which they present as a unified body of beliefs that developed between the eighth and eleventh centuries, but subsequently failed to evolve. Hence the inevitable triumph of European Christian and capitalist civilisation.<sup>5</sup> Asiacentrists consider that, following a significant decline between about the fourth and sixth centuries, the Asian global economy experienced an unprecedented boom, characterised by increased production, long-distance trade and migration, that endured until the arrival of Europeans in the IOW in the sixteenth century. Chaudhuri and others associate this renaissance with the rise of Islam; Muslim traders allegedly dominated all significant long-distance trade networks in the IOW in the early medieval era,<sup>6</sup> while Wink considers Islam created the basis of a 1,000-year Indo-Muslim civilisation.<sup>7</sup>

Inevitably some areas of significance were left largely untouched in the innovatory challenge of Chaudhuri and others to conventional paradigms, but their work has promoted an ongoing and vigorous debate about the role of Islam in the IOW following the arrival there of European powers<sup>8</sup> and the role in the IOW global economy of Africa<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See discussion in Richard M. Eaton, 'Islamic history as global history', in Michael Adas (ed.), *Islamic and European expansion; the forging of a global order*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, 1-36.

<sup>6</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, 'Seafaring and Maritime Contacts: An Agenda for Historical Analysis', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 39, No. 4. 1996, 423.

<sup>7</sup> André Wink, *Al-Hind. The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Leiden / New York / Köln, 1996, vol. 1, 4.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the special issue of *Journal of Global History*, 2.2, (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Gwyn Campbell, 'Islam in Indian Ocean Africa Prior to the Scramble. A New Historical Paradigm', in Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (eds.), *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, London: Hurst, 2007, 1-50; 'The Role of Africa in the Emergence of the Indian Ocean World Global Economy', in Pamila Gupta; Isabel Hofmeyr & Michael Pearson (eds.),

that will transform our understanding of global economic history, and of the historical role of Islam and other non-Western faiths.

Kirti has since moved on. Quite literally, from his splendid but solitary *mas* into a beautifully renovated heritage site in the centre of Avignon; and from researching the economic history of the Indian Ocean world into investigating the history of the Cold War in South America. He has also revived his earlier interests as a creative writer, artist, and a musician, and is currently producing audio books and films.

However, he retains a passion for Asian history and is, I hope, encouraged by the rapidly developing field of Indian Ocean world studies which he has done so much to inspire.





FOREWORD

FROM TUSCANY:  
ART AND APOLOGIA

JAMES KAYE

In 1998, K.N. Chaudhuri concluded his last autumnal introductory presentation at the European University Institute (EUI) with the bold claim that he was an artist; a peacock wandering on the terrace outside emitted a high-pitched cry. This was an unusual statement within the context of a scholarly presentation and the coincidence of the peacock's cry helped to fix it in my memory. Chaudhuri beyond academics has been a creative force.

He was appointed the first Vasco da Gama Professor of the History of European Expansion at the EUI in 1991. This by default settled him in the Mediterranean world that, particularly as conceived by Braudel, had a profound effect upon his academic development. Life in Tuscany, the intellectual climate of the EUI and the sensual cultural landscape of the Mediterranean would similarly effect his personal and professional development. Chaudhuri's prime occupation in this climate shifted from the *métier* of Economic History in which he had gained renown over four decades to artistic interests and practices that he had long pursued and which formed an important, yet little known component of his life.

The shift in production was marked, as can be seen in the progression from his last academic monographs completed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (1985) to *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (1990), to his research agenda at the EUI. At the EUI, his production culminated in the production of the monumental *Sea & Civilisation: A Visual Archive*. (2003). The publication of *From the Atlantic to the Arabian Sea: A Polyphonic Essay on History* (1995), as a limited edition, was a first step in this direction. In that volume, Chaudhuri used polyphony: different textures and voice communication in the production of a book. *From the Atlantic* is not merely a written work but

one combining textures of writing and photography juxtaposed and conversant with one another. The author importantly assumed the role of the historian as a creator of visual images.

*From the Atlantic* was the first volume of a trilogy that represented the shift to Chaudhuri's artistic production; the book occupied a grey area on the boundary between art and historiography. The sea change occurred during the following year when the second component of the trilogy *The Dream of the Unicorn in the Year of Geneviève* was published. If Chaudhuri straddled the threshold with *From the Atlantic*, then *The Dream* clearly placed him beyond the pale as a producer of *livres d'artiste*. In the introduction the author characterised *The Dream* as "an *apologia*, for lost time, and present time, and a time which does not exist", that is to say ahistorical, the time in a dream.

The volume is a collection of twelve segments, eight with vignettes. In line with the temporal theme, they encompass four seasons and delineate a year. Some of the "months" are all titled with words; "Punishment" and "Insanity" are examples, and others are entitled with phrases including "In the Shadow of Paradise: Recalling Sophie, The Slave Princess of Shalimar". None of the vignettes extends beyond the length of a page. Each segment contains an image, yet neither text nor photo is a caption or illustration: they are voices or textures that together form a mental image, a dream containing complex polytonal surreal and historical details in the mind.

Chaudhuri's theory of photography at this point was not entirely liberated from the documentary methods he refined working in pre-modern historical sites. In these sites he attempted to transcend time, record the not-yet-lost-past, historical time in the present. In the introduction of *The Dream*, he literally subscribes to the school of straight photography, with reference to his documentary work: "I have always avoided any kind of manipulation of the images through technical devices and rely wholly on the play of light and shade, empty space, diagonal lines the plasticity of forms and shades of colour to capture a mood, an idea, and something that I have seen." It is difficult to say whether this was not written without a touch of irony stemming from the quest for historical truth that had long been his, every camera/recording medium combination is a technical device that manipulates.

In fact, he also writes: "the inner meaning conveyed by the distribution of light and the blending of colours provides the photographer with the palate of self-expression." Thus, it is not only as was, or as it was, but what the photographer made of it. In line with this philosophy, his application of the photography supersedes straight photographic work at

the close of the twentieth century. The choice of paper and the magnificent offset tri-tone prints belie any claim to mundane documentary objectives of the author; this is a *livre d'artiste*. In stark opposition to straight photography, the image of the Satyr in the cypress-lined garden of villa Schifanoia is powerfully pictorialist as are the images of the protagonist(s) Sophie and Geneviève and her (or their) polyonymous interlocutor.

The punctuating volume of this trilogy was entitled *A Mediterranean Triptych: Venezia, Islam and the Desert* (1998). This is a highly complex work, simultaneously a *livre d'artiste* and a historical philosophical confrontation with the prime number of three, with three chapters poetically enunciating the Island Republic, East and West and neither East nor West; the Sahara and the Alps, what the Mediterranean is not; and the monomial unity of Islam in opposition to the Christian Trinity. The irony of civilisation identified by and as a construction of, the terrestrial animal, man through domination of the sea from Tyre through Venice (and before England) is a recurrent theme. The volume is richly adorned with the selection of a set of photographs Chaudhuri assembled over decades of research, documentation and creation. The communication of the images and text expose the sensual beauty unity and contrariety of the Mediterranean.

This trilogy was grounded in an evolution of Chaudhuri's mode of production. In addition to authoring the contents of his works, he progressively assumed control of their material fabrication. The first step was the establishment of a private press and publishing house in 1994, prior to the publication of the trilogy. Chaudhuri was inspired by the tradition of early twentieth-century art presses. The name selected for this press was *Schifanoia*. The very concept 'schifanoia' connected the arts with his academic environment and present with past. Chaudhuri's office and studio at the EUI were located in the eponymous villa. The root of the word is "che schiva la noia", which can be translated as "that which evades boredom". This press became a tool which enabled him to create books as works of art. The progressive assumption of control of the many aspects that brought the production of a book to completion brings to mind ideals of the auteur theory in cinema where the director is accorded full visionary responsibility for the project. Chaudhuri moved toward full creative responsibility in the polyphonic fusion of his creative expression juxtaposing photography and text.

During the initial years of Schifanoia, printing was done by Martino Madersteig at the Stamperia Valdonega in Verona. The first two volumes of the trilogy, for example, were printed at Valdonega. The third differed from the preceding volumes and foreshadowed the later work of Chaudhuri

insofar as the printing was not subcontracted by Schifanoia but done by Chaudhuri himself (in this instance collaborating with Giuseppe Lauricella, while binding was done by Giulio Giannini). This represented a step towards more complete control of the finished product. Meanwhile, ever more luxurious raw materials were sought out for the book production enterprise, including Japanese Kozo bark paper and Gampi vellum, while full Morocco leather became the binding material of choice.

Following the conclusion of his tenure at the E.U.I., Chaudhuri established a base and studio/gallery in Provence; first at a *mas* in the environs of Avignon comparable to Villa Schifanoia, and then in the former Palace of the Cardinal and Archbishop, where the premises were smaller but far more accessible to the city centre. The Schifanoia press continued its operation from these locations and Chaudhuri was invited back to Villa Schifanoia in 1999 for a one man-exhibition of his photography entitled *Mellifluence, Yielding Architecture or What They Saw*. In the Introduction to the exhibition, I wrote of Chaudhuri's leap into visual expression:

one of the few academics of renown who has no qualms about the equation of his scientific and graphic production is Kirti Chaudhuri. Professor Chaudhuri has added dimension to linear literary representations of history—in his life-long confrontation with paradoxes of history, comparison, time and space—through the exploration of such themes as the architecture and landscape of power, of symbols, and the surreality of temporal beauty. He does this to transcend logical and serial description of a world that itself transcends logical and serial description. In this effort, his goal is not, and can not be, to unify, but to provoke.

No longer engaged in an academic institution, Chaudhuri was able to devote a more significant portion of his time to art, itself the challenge and provocation of an *éminence grise*.

This provocation and the possession of a voracious *Wanderlust* transformed Chaudhuri into a hybrid nomad/cosmopolitan. He fashioned himself as “The Flying Dutchman”. Through 2004, this itinerancy was focused upon the Mediterranean, he frequented and worked in Florence, Venice, Rome and the environs of the Gulf of Naples; in France he extensively explored Provence and spent much of time with colleagues and associates in Paris. He made numerous excursions to the Maghreb coast and the Sahara, including Libya and Tunisia. These were punctuated by visits to London. The selection of the allegory “The Flying Dutchman” was not injudicious. “The Flying Dutchman” did not choose perpetual flight; it was condemned to ply the seas, without a home port and unable

to moor. The professor as an artist seems to assume this mantle of condemnation, for which his work is the expression of apologia, or the result of a Faustian bargain, even if he is never in want of welcoming ports.

Chaudhuri's travels, along with memories of pasts, provide much of the raw material that he processed into literary and graphic art. This first period of voyage through 2004 resulted in no less than a dozen volumes. The extent of this creative explosion is truly remarkable (one can garner an idea by examining the bibliography appended below). During this period, assuming even more control over his publications, Chaudhuri bound many of the volumes himself. And as he produced book after book, he refined his skill, often in consultation with master bookbinders including Annie Boige, James Brockman, Paul Delrue and Flarent Rousseau (all have bound volumes for Schifanoia).

From 2005, the Dutchman began to frequent Latin America. There he was at ease and at times remained writing and photographing for months. This extension of travel did not slow output; between 2005 and 2007 he would publish an additional fifteen volumes, ten of which had Latin American themes. Latin America came to occupy Chaudhuri as the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean had earlier. The shift occurred quickly. His first novel *Tree of Blood*, a tragedy published in 2005, was centred in Europe and the Mediterranean. His second novel *The Jaguar of Chaco* (2007), similarly born of tragedy, is an entirely South American adventure. Nevertheless, reading it one cannot help but wonder if South America is not a placeholder for Chaudhuri's coming of age. A clear return in the novels is to literate text, albeit fictive, and not academic prose.

The most recent development in his work has been the extension to drama. The first foray was with the audio play *Four Nights in Tunis* produced in 2007. This afforded Chaudhuri, working both in a professional sound studio in London and with editing software on the computer in his studio, a return to the roots of polyphonic expression, with the addition of sound tracks to his text. The story is one of the deranged assumption of responsibility by a once normal and active family man for the crimes of another. It shows his possibility of survival in prison by assuming the guilt of the criminal he had been condemned to be.

*Four nights* was followed by the audio story *Twelve Days of Summer in Benito Juarez* (2008). This dream-like story of atonement was first conceived as an audio play. After the sound editing was complete Chaudhuri decided to create an image track and using video editing software in his studio. The result was a remarkable work of video art that employed video shot in Europe and Latin America, and photography from

the author's archive in conversation with the sound track. Chaudhuri's latest work is *The Downfall and the Redemption of Dr. John Faustino* (2010). It represented a significant step in the maturation of his filmmaking and video art as it was conceived as a film from the beginning of production. This is not to say that it was conceived as a standard film, but a step in his effort to develop genre of film emphasizing narrative with sparse dialogue and highly developed cinematography. The film was one which spanned two continents and drew on the talents of a troop of professional actors.

# **PART I:**

## **INTERMIXING**

## CHAPTER ONE

# EARLY PORTUGUESE EMIGRATION TO THE ETHIOPIAN HIGHLANDS: GEOPOLITICS, MISSIONS AND MÉTISSAGE

ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER

Portuguese expansion, which achieved momentum in the reigns of Dom Manuel I (1498-1521) and Dom João III (1521-1558), saw the foundation of a number of African and Asian port cities subject to the Lusitanian Crown and also the establishment of several informal communities across the Orient. These informal communities were not the product of a deliberate royal policy. They were rather the outcome of spontaneous colonisations nurtured by the flow of Portuguese – and European – nationals that went to Africa and Asia following the rise of the Estado da Índia. Moreover, there were also cases of mixed-race people who had been in contact in some way or another with the Portuguese and who adopted a Portuguese identity. Some such Portuguese *comunidades* enjoyed only an ephemeral existence, but a few managed to preserve some form of Portuguese identity for centuries and even up to modern times.

In present-day Senegal, emigrants from Portugal (some of whom were Jews seeking to escape religious persecution), and who were known as 'lançados', settled along the Upper Guinea Coast. Many of them married women from local communities and by the early sixteenth century the offspring of these unions, the 'Portuguese', as they called themselves, established themselves at trading centers from the Petite Côte in Senegal to Sierra Leone in the south. As late as the nineteenth century, there were still groups on the Petite Côte claiming to be Portuguese though no longer



using Portuguese Creole as their language.<sup>1</sup> In Persia, a company of arquebusiers enrolled in the army of the Shah Ismail I (1487-1524), and their descendants lived there for a few generations.<sup>2</sup> Also, throughout the sixteenth century more than 2,000 Portuguese settled in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> In south-east Asia there were also a number of Portuguese *comunidades*. The historian Ana Guedes has recalled the interesting story of Portuguese merchants and mercenaries living in Burma who were active in the unification of its kingdom under the local ruler Anaukpetlun (died 1628) and during the independence of Siam.<sup>4</sup> In Melaka, 340 years after the Dutch had captured it from the Portuguese, there was a group of locals still calling themselves Portuguese. Moreover, up to the nineteenth century there were a few islands in Indonesia with 'Portuguese' minorities: Flores, Adonara, Solor, and Timor.<sup>5</sup>

A less well-known case of Portuguese diaspora was the community that lived in the Ethiopian highlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The roots of this group go back to the early 1540s and survived as a distinct community until the second half of the next century. A large part of the Portuguese were occupied in military roles, as members of the army of the Christian *negus*.<sup>6</sup> In Ethiopia, the Portuguese were known as

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Mark, 'Portuguese' *Style and Luso-African identity. Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2002, 13, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, vol. 3, Lisboa: Presença, 1982 (1963-71), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco Rodrigues da Silveira, *Reformaçoão da milícia e governo do Estado da Índia Oriental* (British Library, Additional Manuscripts: Portuguese, Ms. n. 25:412), quoted in George D. Winius, *The Black Legend of Portuguese India. Diogo do Couto, His Contemporaries and the Soldado Prático. A Contribution to the Study of Political Corruption in the Empires of Early Modern Europe*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1985, 45.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ana de Barros Serra Marques Guedes, *Interferência e integração dos portugueses na Birmânia, ca. 1580-1630*, Lisboa: Universidade de Lisboa, 1991, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Daus, *Portuguese Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Inst. of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, 2.

<sup>6</sup> The state for which the Portuguese fought was ruled by the Solomonid dynasty. The foundation of this dynasty is attributed to Yekuno Amlak (1270-85) and the last Solomonid ruler was Haile Sellasie I (1930-1974). The Solomonid name stems from the fact that the Ethiopian rulers were traditionally believed to be descendants of Solomon, King of Israel, and Makedda, the Queen of Sheba. See Carlo Conti Rossini, "La caduta della dinastia Zagué e la versione amarica del Be'Yela Nagast", *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* ser. 5<sup>a</sup>, vol. 31, fasc. 7-10, 1922, 279-314.

*Burtukan* or simply as *Ferenj* (from ‘Frank’) and during more than 130 years preserved a Portuguese identity. Some of them spoke the Portuguese language, practiced Catholic cults and used Portuguese names. Historical sources reporting on this group are relatively abundant, but they have been little used to date. With this study, I will draw on Portuguese and Ethiopian sources and reconstruct the dynamics of this Portuguese diaspora. The genesis and development of this group will be addressed as well as issues concerning their identity and integration into Ethiopian societies. An important focus will be the relationship between this foreign group and the Jesuit mission, active in Ethiopia from 1556 to 1632.

## **The Portuguese and the Ethiopian Kingdom in the sixteenth century**

The Portuguese were not the first foreigners to settle in the Ethiopian highlands. The Ethiopian and Coptic Churches had since early date strong ties and it was the See of Alexandria which nominated the *abun*, the official head of the Ethiopic Church. From this it is reasonable to infer the permanent presence of Coptic ecclesiastics at the Ethiopian court. Moreover, the presence of lay foreigners such as Egyptian Copts, Armenians and probably Arabs at the courts of different Solomonid rulers is amply attested since the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup> In the fifteenth century, as a consequence of an increase in the diplomatic contacts between Christian Ethiopia and European powers, an important number of Europeans were reported to be living in Ethiopia. A large number of the Europeans who settled in Christian Ethiopia were Italians and some enjoyed influential roles at the royal court.<sup>8</sup> Thus in 1450 the Sicilian Pietro Rombolo was

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<sup>7</sup> On the earlier foreign policy of the Solomonid state, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and state in Ethiopia: 1270-1527*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972. An Arabic source has it that *negus* Yeshaq (1414-1429) had in his court Coptic officials who were to help him reforming the army and administration, see Ibn Fadl Allah al-Omari, *Masalik el absar fi mamalik el amsar. L’Afrique moins l’Egypte* [14th century] ed., tr. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1927, 36-37.

<sup>8</sup> The most complete summary on the foreign – mainly Italian – presence in Ethiopia up to the sixteenth century remains Renato Lefèvre’s ‘Riflessi etiopici nella cultura europea del Medioevo e del Rinascimento (Parte I)’, *Annali Lateranensi* 8, 1944, 9-89; idem (Parte II), *Annali Lateranensi* 9, 1945, 331-444; idem (Parte III), 11, 1947, 255-342. A valuable up-to-date survey is Gianfranco Fiaccadori, ‘Venezia, l’Europa e l’Etiopia’, in: Giuseppe Barbieri & Gianfranco Fiaccadori (eds.), *Nigra sum sed formosa. Sacro e bellezza dell’Etiopia cristiana*

sent by Zära Yaeqob (1434-1468) to meet Alfonso V of Aragon to request artists and craftsmen and three decades later Giovanni Battista Brocchi da Imola took on the same role as Ethiopian envoy in Rome.<sup>9</sup>

Towards the beginning of the sixteenth century, with the build up of their dominion in the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese began to replace the Italians as the first European group in Ethiopia. In ca. 1500, an envoy of Dom João II, Pero da Covilhã, arrived at the court of *negus* Naod (1494-1508). Covilhã settled in the country, received lands and eventually stayed there until his death towards 1530.<sup>10</sup> By 1508, Afonso de Albuquerque had landed two other Portuguese envoys, João Gomes and João Sanchez, on the Ethiopian shore; the outcome of their mission, however, remains obscure.<sup>11</sup>

Soon thereafter, a period of a few decades ensued during which the Portuguese achieved a fragile control of the waters of the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. From India convoys were sent yearly to the mouth of the Red Sea to patrol the area and block the trade route that through the Red Sea connected the Mediterranean with the Indian ports.<sup>12</sup> The Portuguese were able to maintain this system in function for a few decades until it ceased in the 1550s but for a few sporadic visits.<sup>13</sup> In 1520,

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(*Venezia, Ca' Foscari, 13 marzo–10 maggio 2009*), Vicenza: Terra Ferma, 2009, (26), 27-48.

<sup>9</sup> Renato Lefèvre, 'Riflessi etiopici', *Annali Lateranensi* 9, 1945, 388-89, 407-44.

<sup>10</sup> On Covilhã's trip, see Conde de Ficalho, *Viagens de Pêro da Covilhã*, Portugal: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1989.

<sup>11</sup> See Damião de Góis, *Chronica do Felicissimo rei dom Manuel* [1566], Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1954, *parte* III, ch. lix; and Armando Cortesão, *Esparsos*, Coimbra: Imprensa de Coimbra, 1974, 25, 77-81.

<sup>12</sup> On this point, see Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, 'In the Company of Iyāsus: the Jesuit Mission in Ethiopia, 1557-1632', Ph.D. thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2008, 11.

<sup>13</sup> The abandonment of the patrols to the Red Sea was grounded on practical and geopolitical factors. On the one hand, this policy was a costly enterprise that overstrained the Indian treasury. On the other hand, after the failed sieges of Diu of 1538 and the Portuguese attack on Suez three years later, the relations between the Ottomans and Portuguese somehow improved. The two powers reached an unofficial truce wherein each would respect its newly-acquired possessions: the Portuguese were granted free hand in India and the Ottomans full control of the Red Sea. On the failed siege of Diu of 1538, it is worth recalling the study of Dejanirah Couto, 'Les Ottomans et l'Inde Portugaise', in: *Congrès International Vasco da Gama et l'Inde*, vol. I, Lisbonne-Paris: Fondation Gulbenkian, 1999, 181-200. Significantly, the loss of control of the Red and Arabian Seas by the Portuguese revitalized the old trade route between Venice and India that crossed the Red Sea. See Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, vol. 3, 132-

the armada sent to patrol the Red Sea called off Massawa, then the main port connecting the Red Sea with the Ethiopian highlands, and landed an embassy of Dom Manuel I to the Ethiopian *negus*.<sup>14</sup> The embassy was headed by the *fidalgo* Rodrigo da Lima and comprised eight other Portuguese officials. Towards the end of 1520, the Portuguese group met with *negus* Lebnä Dengel at Taguelat and, due to the difficult communications with India, could only leave for Europe in 1526. Beyond strengthening the ties between the two distant lands, the embassy also resulted in a fine account of Ethiopia written by the Portuguese chaplain Francisco Alvares.<sup>15</sup>

The next important chapter of Ethio-Portuguese contacts focused on one of the members of da Lima's embassy, the physician João Bermudez, who with the painter Lázaro de Andrade remained in the company of the *negus* after the Portuguese entourage had left. Bermudez became a major player in the later settlement of the Portuguese group in Ethiopia. The physician soon gained the trust of the *negus* and in the early 1630s would have been sent as the ambassador of the Solomonids to Europe. Although this episode remains still obscure, by dispatching Bermudez to Europe Lebnä Dengel probably wanted to request military help from his European allies in a moment when his kingdom was suffering a devastating *djihad* from the neighbouring sultanate of Adal.<sup>16</sup> In 1535, Bermudez arrived in Europe where he claimed to have been appointed as Patriarch of Ethiopia. In all truth, the Portuguese court was suspicious of him and he thus could

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33; and Frederic C. Lane, 'The Mediterranean Spice Trade: Its Revival in the Sixteenth Century', in: Idem, *Venice and History. The collected papers of Frederic C. Lane*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966, 25-34.

<sup>14</sup> On Dom Manuel's policies in the Red Sea and Ethiopia see Jean Aubin, 'Duarte Galvão', in Aubin, *Le latin et l'astrolabe: Recherches sur le Portugal de la Renaissance, son expansion en Asie et les relations internationales*, Lisbonne-Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian, 1996, 11-48; Luis Filipe Thomaz, 'L'idée impériale manuéline', in: Jean Aubin (ed.), *La découverte, le Portugal et l'Europe. Actes du colloque célébré à Paris le 26, 27 et 28 mai 1988*, Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990, 35-103.

<sup>15</sup> Francisco Alvares, *Verdadeira informação das terras do Preste João* [1540], Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1889. A valuable study of Alvares's account and its impact in Portugal is Jean Aubin, 'Le prêtre Jean devant la censure portugaise', *Bulletin des Études Portugaises et Brésiliennes* 41, 1980, 33-57.

<sup>16</sup> On the figure of Bermudez, see Marius Chaine, 'Bermudez, patriarche de l'Éthiopie', *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 4, 14, 1909, 321-29; and Francisco Rodrigues, 'Mestre João Bermudes', *Revista de História* 3, 1919, 119-37.

not attain recognition of his Patriarchal claims.<sup>17</sup> This notwithstanding, his embassy had an impact in Portugal and on Portuguese policies in the Orient. Indeed, far from being removed from office, the “Patriarch” was included in the armada to India from 1538 led by the newly-appointed governor Dom Garcia de Noronha. Bermudez then stayed in Goa for about two years during which time we may assume he became one of the main advocates for sending an expeditionary force to the Red Sea and Ethiopia.<sup>18</sup>

In 1541, spurred by Bermudez and by the fresh news that came from Ethiopia recounting the effects of the *djihad* of Ahmad Grañ, the decision-makers in Goa decided to send a major armada to the Red Sea. The armada was captained by the newly-appointed governor of India Estevão da Gama, who had just replaced the inefficient Noronha. According to Gaspar Correa, the armada comprised 77 minor ships (*fustas e catures*), 3 galiots (*galeotas*) and 12 major ships carrying artillery and more than 2,000 oarsmen.<sup>19</sup> Bermudez sailed aboard one of its flagships. The main objective of the expedition was to destroy the Ottoman fleet at Suez, which had become the major challenger to Portuguese supremacy in Asian waters and to go in rescue of the Ethiopian ‘ally’.

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<sup>17</sup> On suspicions by the Portuguese monarch regarding Bermudez’ nomination to the Ethiopian Patriarchate, see Francisco Rodrigues, ‘Mestre João Bermudes’, 123. The Holy Roman Emperor was also sceptical about the Patriarch; see Georg Schurhammer, *Die Zeitgenössischen Quellen zur Geschichte Portugiesisch-Asiens und seiner Nachbarländer* (.), Rome: Institutum Historicum S. I., 1962, doc. 195.

<sup>18</sup> Shortly before his death in 1570, Bermudez published a personal account of his wanderings. Although the statements therein found have to be taken with much caution, the narrative is a valuable and informative source on the period under scrutiny. In the book, Bermudez attributed himself important commitments. He thus informed that: ‘already when I was in Portugal the king gave me all his authority so that I could provide of everything and I could take all the necessary craftsmen under my service’ (*porque ja em Portugal me fizera el Rey merce de com sua autoridade prover todos os officios necessarios pera a governança da gente que levasse commigo*); João Bermudez, *Breve relação da embaixada que o Patriarcha D. João Bermudez trouxe do Imperador da Ethiopia vulgarmente chamado Preste João dirigida a el-Rei D. Sebastião*, Lisboa: Typographia da Academia, 1875 (1565), ch. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, vol. IV, Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1976 (facsimile repr. of Lisboa: Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1864), 161-63. Couto provides different numbers for the composition of the armada: Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia*, Lisboa: Regia Officina Typografica, 1777, *Década* V, liv. VII, cap. V.

In January 1541, the Portuguese expedition called at Massawa and contacted the Christian *baher nagash* Yeshaq.<sup>20</sup> Yeshaq informed the Portuguese of the progress of the *djihad* conducted by Ahmad Grañ and, responding to it, the Portuguese constituted in July a company of 400 soldiers that should go to support the Christian cause. Although a review of the Portuguese involvement in the Ethiopian campaigns is beyond the scope of this paper, it deserves to be remarked that the intervention of the Portuguese was decisive. Over two years the Portuguese faced the enemy in at least four major encounters, liberated a number of strategic locations and ultimately contributed to the decisive annihilation of Ahmad Grañ's army at Wayna Dega on 21 February 1543. It was as a result of these experiences that most of the survivors of the campaigns decided to settle in Ethiopia.

### **The formation of a mixed race group**

The Portuguese soldiers paid a heavy toll during the two years of combat. Reportedly, more than half of them died. However, their prowess, commitment and their military skills earned them a reputation and the admiration of the *negus*. The rewards promised them by the Ethiopian state, the possibility of marriage to local wives and the hardships of a mercenary life that would await them back in India convinced most of them to settle down.<sup>21</sup> Of the some 170 survivors about 120 stayed in Ethiopia and towards 1544 some fifty soldiers went back to India. One of the soldiers who left, the arquebusier Miguel de Castanhoso, would write, once in Portugal, an account of the military expedition.<sup>22</sup> Another group of

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<sup>20</sup> *Baher nāgash* means literally 'ruler of the sea' (provinces) and was the title of the semi-independent lord based in the provinces of Tegray and Hamasen and formally subject to the Christian *negus*.

<sup>21</sup> The Portuguese troop that went to India with Estevão da Gama at its departure from India was mostly formed of young soldiers, probably in their 20s and 30s, and of a few *fidalgos*; the young age of many and the attraction for the Preste John might have been two important factors pushing many of them to volunteer for the Ethiopian campaigns and, later on, to settle in the African land. For the composition of the armada to the Red Sea I rely on Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, vol. IV, 161.

<sup>22</sup> In Portugal Castanhoso received a pension from the crown and wrote a valuable account of the military expedition in Ethiopia, the above-mentioned *Dos Feitos de D. Christovam da Gama em Ethiopia*, first published in 1564. After the settlement of Christovão's soldiers, a few more Portuguese or foreigners might have settled in Ethiopia but these did not number more than a few dozens at the maximum.