

Luso-Asian influences in Macaronesia

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Abstract

In early 1607 when the East India Company was preparing to send its first fleet to India, four Asian men were already in London and requested work on these ships as a means to getting home. The men all had Portuguese names; Marcus, John Mendes, John Rodrigues and John Taro. Where did these men come from and what was their story? Through original interdisciplinary fieldwork in Macaronesia, as well as in South and Southeast Asia this paper is an investigative research into the origin of the earliest medieval seaborne Asians to arrive into the Atlantic Ocean from their homelands in the Indo-Pacific regions. Throwing light on a narrative that has been usually projected from the perspective of “European pioneers” from the opposing direction.

Introduction

In early 1607 when the East India Company was preparing to send its first fleet to India, four men described as Indians were already in London and requested work on these ships as a means of getting home. Marcus, João Mendes, João Rodrigues and João Taro had Portuguese first names (Marcus and João) though these are recorded in Anglicised form (Fisher 2007: 6-8). Two of them have unmistakable Portuguese surnames (Mendes and Rodrigues). This suggests that these men were Luso-Asians or at the least were Asians who had arrived in Europe through the Portuguese seaborne network. Due to Hindu religious restrictions on overseas travel Asian seamen on Portuguese vessels and other free travelers were most likely to be Catholic converts and occasionally Moslems.

Luso-Asian cultures are defined as those cultures that incorporate influences from Portugal and Asia and reflect this hybrid or “creolising” in their language, religion, arts, architecture and cuisine. In all cases these cultures have been viewed as transformations in Asia as a result of the arrival of the Portuguese from 1498 onwards and particularly within the sixteenth century when Portuguese global power was at its height. From the sixteenth century onwards there was considerable migration between these littoral and island Luso-Asian communities. The legacy of the Portuguese Eastern Empire survives today in many areas of the Asia-Pacific world where these communities may go under a number of differing ethnonyms (see Table 1).

Table 1. Luso-Asian communities.

	Regional sub-group	Modern states	Ethnonyms for modern communities of Luso-Asians
	Luso-Indian or Indo-Portuguese	India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.	Goans Damanese in Daman Diu Christians East Indians of Mumbai Anglo-Indians

			Kristi of Korlai
	Luso-Burmese or Burmo-Portuguese	Myanmar.	
Luso-Asian or Asian-Portuguese	Luso-Sri Lankan or Cingalo-Portuguese Luso-Thai or Siam-Portuguese	Sri Lanka. Thailand	Burghers Karava Kaffirs of Puttalam
	Luso-Malay or Malayo-Portuguese	Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and East Timor	Kristang of Melaka, East Timorese
	Luso-Chinese or Sino-Portuguese	P.R. China (inc. Macau and Hong Kong) and Taiwan	Macanese
	Luso-Japanese or Nipo-Portuguese	Japan	

The concept that Luso-Asian influences extended beyond the Indian and Pacific oceans to Europe or the Americas between 1500 and 1700 is a relatively recent theory (Sequeira Antony 2004: 62-68) and the concept that Luso-Asians arrived in Europe or Macaronesia in this period and produced cultural contributions away from Asia has hardly been considered.

This research paper focuses on a preliminary investigation to identify the contact between the Eastern Portuguese Empire based in Goa, India and the islands of the North Atlantic, otherwise known as Macaronesia (these include the Canary Islands, the Azores, Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands) and to place them within a maritime historical setting, that explains the appearance of Asian people in mainland Europe by the early seventeenth century.

The multi-discipline field research was conducted on two fronts. The “source” fieldwork was conducted in India Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Macau and the “destination” fieldwork was conducted in Macaronesia; taking in the islands of Madeira, Grande Canary (in the Canary Islands), Santiago and Fogo (in the Cape Verdes), São Miguel and Terceira (in the Azores).

Results of Fieldwork

Madeira

Many items of Indo-Portuguese origin did make it to Madeira and are to be found in some of the grand quintas¹ of the island. At the Quinta das Cruzes Museu in Funchal, Madeira the objects include a fine ivory carving of the Immaculate Conception² and one of the Christ Child in the form of the Good Sheppard from seventeenth century Goa. Of particular interest is a crucifix where the Indo-Portuguese style figure in ivory is mounted on Bahia Rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*)

¹ Country villas often attached to estates

² Immaculate Conception. MQC138.

from Brazil and Sisso (*Dalbergia sissoo*) from India³. Among the furniture are two Indo-Portuguese cabinets on stands which date from the seventeenth century but were purchased from England. There is also an ivory figure of the infant Christ that is thought to be of Hispano-Philippine origin⁴.

Canary Islands

After the signing of the Treaty of Alcáçovas between the kingdoms of Castille and Portugal in 1479, the Canary Islands were completely within the realm of the Spanish sphere of influence and were tied to the Spanish attempts to reach the Indies through the west leading to strong connections between the islands and Latin America, rather than with Asia.

Cape Verde

Interestingly Luso-Asian influences were least common in the Cape Verde Islands. Early sources suggest that Ribeira Grande/Cidade Velha did have contacts with India in the first decade of the sixteenth century through the returning Portuguese East Indiamen who were “without supplies and manpower, [and] they are repaired and provided with everything”, as happened to Affonso de Albuquerque. However it seems that better understanding of ocean currents and winds, quickly determined that the Cape Verdes were better ports of call on the outgoing voyages from Europe to India and Brazil. There was a request for spice workers from India to be sent to the Cape Verde islands in 1677, but there is no evidence that this was executed. The paramount genetic and cultural influences on the island of Santiago are African with evidence of European, Islamic and Jewish influence. The influence from Asia that was observed was recent and appeared to be linked with the twentieth century.

Azores

The Azores proved to have stronger connections with the Portuguese Eastern Empire than any of the other group in Macaronesia. When Vasco da Gama, returned from his voyage to India in 1499, it was in the city of Angra de Heroísmo (or Angra) on the island of Terceira that his brother Paulo was buried. When the Portuguese East India nau *Madre de Deus* was attacked by the English in August 1592 off the coast of Flores, her surviving captain (Fernão de Mendonça Furtado) and crew were put ashore on the Azores.

The location with the most Luso-Asian artefacts in Macaronesia is the island of Terceira. Here the objects are mainly religious and have been studied and collated by the local expert Mr. Francisco Ernasto de Oliveira Martin (see Table 2).

One facet of the wooden artefacts is that some are made of Asian Teak (*tectona grandis*), but many are made from Brazilian Jacaranda wood. Yet the inlays and carvings are strikingly Asian with lotus leaves, geometric patterns and other designs that bear the stamp of the Malabar coast. One of the finest

³ Crucifix of Calvary, MQC1910.

⁴ Christ Child, MQC2256.

examples of this is the Indo-Portuguese style lectern in the Santissimo Salvador da Sé made in the Azores of Brazilian Jacaranda wood and whale ivory.

Table 2. Distribution of Indo-Portuguese artefacts in the Azores by island and diversity of material.

Island	Ivory	Other materials (metals. e.g.)	Wood
Santa Maria	7	4	0
São Miguel	25	17	2
Terceira	147	20	40
Graciosa	6	0	0
São Jorge	2	0	0
Pico	8	7	1
Faial	7	3	1
Flores	5	2	1
Corvo	0	0	0
Total	207	53	45

The Society of Jesus or Jesuits first built the large College at Ponta Delgada on the island of São Miguel in 1591. Portuguese East Indiaman were the largest ships that regularly called at the Azores. Usually arriving in poor condition and prey to pirates. Although the unloading of cargo from these vessels at the Azores was against royal decree, the state of the vessels and the risk of pirate attack was so great that the valuable cargo of spices was often unloaded and redistributed on other vessels for shipment to Lisbon. This was the case of the *São João Baptista* in 1649 where two thirds of the cargo actually arrived in Lisbon on English vessels. São Miguel quickly became a backwater as it was too far to the east of the centre of the archipelago and its harbour was too exposed. The Jesuits began building the church and college at Angra which had a better harbour in 1636. The Azores and in particular Angra were the most important factor in the safeguarding of Portuguese trade with India. But apart for some smuggling the Azoreans did not greatly benefit directly from this. During the last half of the seventeenth century, the French and also the Dutch at Angra, were outnumbered by the English, who handled a far larger volume of trade than any other foreign merchant group.

When the Portuguese encountered new animals on their explorations they sought to bring back examples of these exotic creatures to Europe. The king of Cochin sent an elephant to Lisbon which was named Hanno. This elephant was sent to Rome by King Manoel I in 1514 as a coronation gift for Pope Leo X and was accompanied by two Asian mahouts⁵. This was followed by Asian Rhinoceros. The first one brought to Europe was a gift from Sultan Muzaffar II of Cambay (Gujarat). This rhinoceros came on the *Nossa Senhora de Ajuda* from India via the Azores and arrived in Lisbon on 20th May 1515. The rhinoceros was accompanied by his Indian tamer Ocem (Hossein), and is remembered in the famous Durer woodcut⁶. King Manuel decided to send it as a gift to Pope Leo X.

⁵ Mahouts are elephant drivers.

⁶ A woodcut of the rhinoceros produced in 1515 by the German Albrecht Durer who never actually saw the rhinoceros but was given a description of it. The woodcut resulted in numerous

The animal was sent by ship to Marseilles in 1516. However, as the ship continued to Rome it encountered a storm and the rhinoceros that was chained to the deck went down with the ship, though its body was later found and the skin was returned to Lisbon. We have no idea what happened to the two mahouts that accompanied Hanno the elephant or the rhinoceros-keeper Ocem.

There are many plants from Asia in the Azores notably the Himalayan Ginger Lily (*Hedychium gardenerianum*) however many of these were introduced accidentally at later dates as ornamental exotics. There was a legend that the huge Cyprus trees of the Ponta Delgada were propagated from trees brought originally from the mountains near Goa in the sixteenth century. In fact they are the *cupressus lusitanica* originally from the highlands of Central America and only introduced at the monastery of Buçaco (in Portugal) in 1634. But even here they were known as Cedar or Cyprus of Goa. Actually the tree was unknown in India until very recently. One theory is that monks from Goa were responsible for its cultivation in the Atlantic. However Asian plants were usually brought to Goa and then sent to Portugal.

Today the Azorean diaspora is found throughout the world. The diaspora consciousness has prompted the study of the origins of surnames in the Azores islands and one of the interesting works is that by James Guill (1993: 177-178, 224, 234) who has researched the surnames found in São Miguel and has noted among the Azoreans the existence of Flemish, English, Irish, Islamic and Jewish surnames. He has also identified some African surnames however there are a few surnames that remain of unknown origin. James Guill does mention the existence of an Indian element within the Azorean population but does not elaborate on the matter. Three of these names stand out as possibly being of Asian origin: Ambar, Patalimand Sena. Ambar or Ambani is a Gujarati name, Sena or Shenoy/Xenoy/Shenoi in particular is a Hindu Goan name. Patalim or Patlikh/Patel is a Gujarati name. Interestingly these are both areas of early Portuguese presence in Asia.

Frederick Walter who visited the Azores in the 1880's made an interesting comment referring to the customs of India. Walter (1886:130-31) stated that in Terceira, "on death the family not only observe a strict seclusion for a few days, but the entire household abstains from work; no cooking even being done; the neighbours and friends therefore send in trays generously laden with cooked meats and fruit to supply the household needs". This practice is still common practice in Goa among both Christian and Hindu communities.

Conclusion

The changing shipping patterns and frequency of the Portuguese East Indiaman in the Atlantic between the sixteenth and early eighteenth century are perhaps the most important aspect governing Luso-Asian influences in Macaronesia.

prints that gained popularity in sixteenth century Europe. One copy dated around 1550 exists in the British Museum. Department of Prints and Drawings. Location: XVIc Mounter Roy. Registraion Number: 1895,0122.715.

These patterns set the frequency, places and periods of contact and thereby the residual influences implicated in artefacts.

To explain the results of this study geographically. The shipping pattern (roteiro) was basically a figure of eight with out-going vessels from Europe sailing south calling at the Cape Verde islands, and incoming vessels from the Indian Ocean sailing north toward the Northwards from the Cape of Good Hope towards Northeast Brazil and then to the Azores and possibly Madeira before arriving at Europe. This explains the paucity of Luso-Asian artefacts in the Cape Verde Islands, and contrasting abundance of artefacts and possible cultural connections in the Azores and Madeira.

Early historical contact between Luso-Asians and Macaronesia, Brazil and in Europe can be divided into two phases. In both first phases from 1499 to 1580 and from 1580 to 1640 crewmen (Lascarim) from the Indian Ocean were returning to the Atlantic on Portuguese vessels that had lost their European crews at sea on the outgoing voyages or due to their crew seeking opportunities ashore in Asia.

In the first phase the first fleets called at the Cape Verde Islands on their return voyages, but within a decade the fleets from Asia regularly stopped at the Azores and only occasionally at the Cape Verdes. Any evidence of Asian influence would have been at Cidade Velha on Santiago Island, which was the first Portuguese tropical city, however further investigation is required to unearth this narrative. In this period the Portuguese Eastern Empire was far more important than the newly founded settlements in Brazil. The fleets with their Asians and Africans crew also brought back exotic animals and their Asian trainers, dignitaries' servants and slaves among their passengers. The Lusitanisation of these Asian people often took place on board the Portuguese ships and in the Atlantic itself (Sequeira Antony 2004: 119-161)..

The second phase from 1580 to 1640 coincides with the period of the Spanish Union with Portugal under Phillip II of Spain. The material in the Azores points to the growing influence of the Jesuits based at Angra. This was a period when the Azores was a key maritime station for the Jesuit expansion in Asia and Brazil (De Souza 1995: 159-163). This explains the existence of larger number of Luso-Asian religious artefacts on Terceira (61%) followed by São Miguel (11.4%) out of the total inventory for the islands. At least some of the Luso-Asian men and women arriving in Macaronesia within this period were connected to the Jesuit network. The route of returning Portuguese vessels allows for the loading of Asian craftsmen in India and of Brazilian woods coinciding with the combination of Brazilian woods and Luso-Asian style that we see in some objects such as Indo-Portuguese style lectern in the Santissimo Salvador da Sé. The Jesuit world was one without national borders in which Asian clerics had an important position and the Jesuit centre at Angra was in constant contact with Goa. This is perhaps the reason for the large number of Indo-Portuguese religious objects in the Azores (87%). It also explains the existence of religious objects from Sri Lanka (4.9%), China (7.2%) and Japan (0.6%) (de Oliveira Martins 1983:333). This in-turn engages the possibility of Asian craftsmen creating Luso-Asian furniture and especially religious items in Macaronesia.

Surviving articles are those made of a religious nature and those of more durable materials. However the hypothesis here is that while Luso-Indian styles have influenced Macaronesia and Europe especially in the area of woodwork, textiles, ceramic tiles, and later in porcelain, this overlooks the actual presence of Asians in Macaronesia. The end of this phase is also the period when the so called Cyprus of Goa trees arrived in Portugal and presumably in São Miguel too. Their arrival in the Atlantic suggests a route across the Pacific and Indian Oceans taking in the Spanish and Portuguese territories.

The period of the Spanish Union marked the decline in the Portuguese maritime empire as the Dutch and English encroached on Portuguese territories (Sequeira Antony 2004: 8-18). We may be forgiven for thinking that Portugal and her Atlantic outposts under the Spanish Union were somehow totally at the mercy of English attacks. However as has pointed out, this was a period of considerable English trade with Brazil through the Azores and Lisbon, with Portuguese traders actually freighting English vessels (Sequeira Antony 2004: 17). Upholding the connection between artefacts and people is an example from the study of Luso-Asian textiles in Europe. Portuguese imports from India in this period include textiles such as the Bengali quilt found at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. It has been suggested that it could have come to England through William Cavendish, a founder member of the English East India Company and who possibly engaged in the India trade through Portugal before 1600.. Cavendish was the son of “Bess”, Countess of Shrewsbury who built Hardwick Hall. A similar quilt from the same period is also to be found in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon. The Luso-Portuguese men in London in 1607 had clearly come to London through the Portuguese East India trade, and João Taro had earlier found work with the East India Company in London. There is an East India Company approval of a petition from “John the Indian” (Fisher 2007: 7) who stated that, “having by some mishap lost his thumb, and not being able to work at his trade as a weaver, to be employed about the ships as he requests”. Clearly these two Luso-Indians were skilled artisans in London at the same time as the Bengal quilts.

From around 1640 onwards there was a shift in Portuguese imperial policy from the Asia-Pacific area to the Atlantic. By the eighteenth century the isolated remnants of the Portuguese Eastern Empire and her now more important Atlantic Empire remained in contact mainly through British vessels. Crew lists and Pay Books of vessels such as the *Boscawen*, sailing from India to London in 1756, include Luso-Luso-Indian crewmen with names such as Jose Fonseca, João Pedro, Antonio Ferreira, Antonio de Sa e Rosario and Manuel De Souza.

This study highlights the need to research into the hidden histories of transnational crewmen and seek beyond the national banners of expeditions, fleets and national disputes. It underlines the alternative histories that are often contradictive of prescribed and stereotyped history, demonstrating the interlinking of maritime networks and maritime worlds. In this context Macaronesia can be regarded as stepping stones for the early Luso-Asian presence in the Atlantic world.

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