

East in the West : Investigating the Asian presence and influence in Brazil from the 16th to 18th centuries.

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Abstract

This study is the second part of investigative research into early Asian presence in the Atlantic. The first investigation focused on the islands of Macaronesia (Canary Islands, Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde Islands), and resulted in a better understanding of the motives, means and influences that defined Asian presence in some of these islands, and not in others. It identified the existence of a maritime “Lusitanian space” which provided the vehicle of culture contact, and conveyance of Luso-Asians into the Atlantic World primarily through maritime employment, the work of the Society of Jesus (commonly known as the Jesuits) and within the entourage of people in governance and social prominence. This initial multi-disciplinary investigation hinted at a connection between Portuguese Asia and Brazil, which forms the basis of this research study.

Keywords: Iberia, Portugal, Brazil, Maritime trade, Networks, 16th, 18th, centuries, Asia, Roteiro

Introduction

The arrival of Columbus in the Bahamas in 1492 and Cabral in Brazil in 1500 were voyages associated with the discovery of “the Indies” (i.e. all regions east of the Cape of Good Hope), resulting in the terms Indians or “Indios” for the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. To avoid confusion and respect the rights of the indigenous Americans this paper uses the term “indigenous Brazilians” when describing the aboriginal people of Brazil.

Luso-Asians are Asians who came under the sway of Portuguese influence since Vasco Da Gama arrived in Calicut in 1498. From an archival perspective they were characteristically Catholic and had Portuguese names. Remnants of Luso-Asians still exist in Asia and in other parts of the world (Pereira, 2011). Luso-Asians shared aspects

of culture, including maritime traditions, art, architecture, religion and cuisine that were reinforced by centuries of Iberian rule and the impact of Iberian-based Catholicism.

Methodology.

Preliminary research was conducted prior to the fieldwork. This shaped the study to focus on specific localities and disciplines within the limitations of time and funds.

The resultant focus is on the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, concentrating on Northeast Brazil. The field work was concentrated in two areas in the state of Bahia; the state capital of Salvador in the north and the southern provincial capital of Ilhéus where tangible and intangible aspects of heritage were identified. This study aims to academically validate and interpret the multidisciplinary investigation in a discussion leading to a conclusion.

Discussion.

In the early sixteenth century Portuguese colonisation with European settlers only really existed in Macaronesia, where the islands were originally uninhabited, with the exception of the Canary Islands. Portuguese colonisation in Brazil was based on initially sending out *degredados* (petty criminals) and adventurers who were sentenced to the new lands in the hope that they would settle among the indigenous Brazilians, learn their language and culture and produce a mixed population who would later serve the Portuguese as translators, and allies against hostile local or foreign invaders (Bradford Burns, 1980). Between 1530 and 1535 the coast of Brazil was divided into 15 almost equal parts of around 50 leagues, each governed by a hereditary captain. Each captaincy extended inland from the coast to the longitudinal line established by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal. The Brazilian state of Bahia was composed of the Baía, Ilhéus and Porto Seguro captaincies.

Portuguese presence in the Indies focused on strategic coastal *feitorias* (Factories) that were protected by forts. In 1534 Francisco Pereira Coutinho (d.1547) who had been at the conquest of Goa in 1510 was offered the captaincy of Baía. A factory was established at Salvador, Baía, but Brazil at first offered little in comparison to the riches of the East Indies and Coutinho established a wooden fort (Russell-Woods, 1998). In the Ilheus captaincy the village of Ilheus was founded in 1536 (Vianna, 1893). Another Asia-hand Tomé de Sousa (1503 -1579) arrived in Salvador as first governor-general of

Brazil in 1549 with the first Jesuit missionaries (Russell-Woods, 1968). He established a shipyard in Salvador and encouraged the *escala* (calling for victualling and repairs) of Portuguese East Indiamen. But Lisbon was keen to keep a tight control on the high value imports from Asia including those (e.g. pepper) that were under a royal monopoly (Bentley Duncan, 1972).

In the East Indies, trade and fortification was followed by the church who effectively managed the spiritual life of the new lands, moving into agriculture, education and medicine. A *Misericórdia* was established at Salvador in 1549, just forty-four years after the one in Cochin, India (Malekandathil, 2001). It probably initially administered to the sailors, slaves and indigenous Brazilians. Through works by Jesuits in India like Garcia d'Oterga (Dalby, 2002) the use of Asian spices and herbs in medicine, were passed to the Jesuits in South America, and Jesuit discoveries spread from Tropical America to Asia (Hobhouse, 1987). The *Misericórdia* in Salvador still holds a collection of labelled drug containers called *mangas de farmácia* for the major spices; pepper (*Piper nigrum*), cloves (*Sygium aromaticum*), and nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) and cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*). All of these came from Asia (Malekandathil, 2001).

The Jesuit priest Manoel de Nóbrega described how the first bishop Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha (d.1556) who served in Goa arrived in Salvador “with all his attendants and crew in good health” in 1552 (Vianna, 1893) and pronounced Ilheus as town and separate parish. Since their arrival in the Ilheus captaincy the Jesuits controlled the extraction of timber for construction and the navy, especially in the *Fundo das Doze Léguas* (Dias, 2010). Fieldwork suggests that the original Portuguese settlement at Ilhéus was on the easily defensible quarter now known as the Alto de Vitoria, with a harbour frontage below it within the estuary along what is now Avenida Dois De Julho. On the hill was a wooden church that was later built into the stone church of São Jorge in 1556.

The third governor of Brazil was Mem De Sá (c1500 -1572) who assumed the role in 1558. Labour shortages led the colonists to enslave the indigenous Brazilians who were under the patronage of the Jesuits missions. De Sá was retained long after his difficult term (Bradford Burns, 1980) which was marked by a reduction of the number of East India vessels arriving in Lisbon. But in the following decade the number of East India

vessels reaching Lisbon would increase to levels unseen for seventy years with many calling at Salvador. The area around the bay or Baía de Todos Santos known as the Recôncavo contains many rivers, islands and promontories that offered routes and easily defensible sites for the establishment of sugar estates and engenhos (sugar mills). On the outskirts of Santo Amaro is the small cloistered convent at Praça Frei Bento that includes the Museu do Recolhimento dos Humildes. Unfortunately the museum was shut, however a sister of the convent acknowledged the existence of many items which displayed Asian influences. São Francisco was the third town of the Recôncavo to be settled by the Portuguese. After Mem de Sá had subjugated the indigenous Brazilians he gave his land to his son Francisco who paid for the construction of the convent of Santo Amaro and the church with the possible Asian religious artefacts. Felipa, the daughter of de Sa' eventually inherited the land and married Fernando de Noronha Third Count of Linhares (1540-1608), who was the cousin of the viceroy of India between 1629 and 1645. In the Ilheus captaincy Mem de Sá founded the engenho (sugar mill) on the Santana River at the site of the Church of Nossa Senhora de Santana. This is one of three pre-1550 churches in Brazil and has some architectural similarities with churches in Goa. The mill, large estate and church became the property of the absentee Fernando de Noronha and passed into the possession of the Jesuits. By 1585 Brazil was the largest producer and exporter of sugar in the world (Sequeira Antony, 2004) and Salvador developed rapidly (Russell-Woods, 1968).

The first stone fort to be built in Brazil was the Fort of Santo Antonio de Barra Salvador constructed in 1583, which is now the Museu Náutico da Bahia. A vessel called the Saveiro was once common in the calm waters of the bay and the Recôncavo. Many of the features of this craft have similarities with Asian vessels, especially Arab dhows for inshore trade. In fact the Saveiro is constructed with the use of measurements based on the palm of the hand, and an instrument from India called the Graminho. Another craft was the coastal raft or Jangada whose name itself is from Malayam (the language of Kerala, India). It appears that the Jangada was once widespread along the coast of Brazil, but is now only found in the Northeast, especially Ceará.

At the Museu da Gastronomia Baiana local cuisine featured as an intangible heritage and sensory experience. In Brazilian popular culture the African connection to Baiana cuisine is stressed. However there are many ingredients that are not of African origin. The coconut (*cocos nucifera*) appears to have been unknown in the Atlantic at the time of the Portuguese discoveries and work on plant distribution suggest that there were two centres of origin for the coconut in tropical Asia. The Portuguese first encountered the coconuts in Eastern Africa where they called them “Indian palm or nut trees” (Linschoten, 2005). But the importance of the coconut tree was highlighted in India where they described how the Indians produced books “written on leaves of some trees which appear to be palms on which they always write and of these trees and their fruit are made these things; sugar, honey, vinegar, fruit and cordage for ships and for all other purposes” (Roxburgh McClymont, 1914). The Portuguese subsequently introduced the coconut to tropical Atlantic. However, this is quite different to introducing the technology and knowledge to produce the “things” encountered in India, especially the production of coir for cordage. The Portuguese word cayro (coir) is a corruption of the Malayalam “Kayara” (Linschoten, 2005). The production of coconut milk (as opposed to coconut water) by scraping and shredding the hard white coconut meat is done on a metal scraper and the extraction of the milk is done on a grinding stone in India. The use of the milk is a characteristic of South Indian and Southeast Asian cuisine. But two specific Baiana recipes use coconut milk; the popular prawn or fish Moqueca, and the chicken Xinxim de Galinha. The chicken recipe is particularly interesting for its use of ginger (*zingiberi*), garlic and onions. This combination is termed the “Indian culinary trinity”. It also has cloves and black pepper. Ginger in its green form was rare in Europe until the late twentieth century and was imported since medieval times from Asia as a ginger preserve. Garcia d’Orta mentioned that the best quality of preserved ginger came from the Bay of Bengal (Dalby, 2002). Asian influence is strongest in Brazilian sweets. The grated coconut that produces coconut milk is used in Brazil to make Cocada (Coconut Ice). The Brazilian and Goan versions of this sweet have the same name and use lime as flavouring. In Asia the outer flesh of the nutmeg was also preserved in sugar (Dalby 2002). When the Portuguese took the Guava from Brazil to India they called it Pera (i.e. Pear). The Goans produced a preserve that they

called Perada, and it is this recipe that returned to Northeast Brazil where it is known as Goiabada. The Mango was introduced to Bahia from India along with Mangada (Mango preserve). Another Brazilian sweet that demonstrates Indian influence is the steamed rice pudding known as Açaça.

The joining of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns opened the Portuguese empire to English and Dutch attack, resulting in much reduced Portuguese shipping from Asia and attacks on Salvador in 1625 (Russell-Woods, 1968) and Ilheus in 1635 (Vianna, 1893). Asian administrators such as the Viceroy of Goa Vasco Mascarenhas (1605-1678) were appointed to Brazil and despite the prohibition on the escala for ships returning from the Indies in 1656 and further decrees (Sequeira Antony, 2004), ships calling at Salvador from Lisbon were carrying Asian wares as shown by the artefacts from the 1668 wreck of *Santissimo Sacramento*. This period was marked by the growing presence of the Jesuits who between 1657 and 1672 began construction on a Jesuit church in Salvador. In 1677 the Viceroy of India Dom Pedro de Almeida (d.1678) was ordered to send spice cultivators to Bahia and in 1682 two Canarin (Goan) spice cultivators were to be sent to Bahia (Sequeira Antony, 2004). In that year the Jesuits succeeded in growing pepper and cinnamon at their Quinta de Tanque or Casa Suburbana de São Christavão (Russell-Woods 1998). In 1690 under the governorship of Antonio Luiz Gonzalves de Camara Coutinho (1638-1702) two Canarins were sent to Bahia. Their names were Laurenço de Noronha and Salvador de Tavora, both aged 30 and from Bardez. These men were unable to accomplish their work as spice cultivators and were returned to Goa as they were unskilled at peeling cinnamon bark (Sequeira Antony, 2004). Coutinho ended his governorship in 1694 and went on to serve as viceroy of India. The Misericórdia in Salvador holds a painting of Captain Francisco Fernandes de Sym that appears to have been executed at the end of the seventeenth century and is accredited to Laurenço Veloso (d.1708), a Goan-born painter, who was trained by the Jesuits in Goa. Veloso also painted the local merchant Coronal Domingas Pires Carvalho in the Igreja da Ordem Terceira de São Francisco in Salvador. It seems that Carvalho was responsible for funding the rebuilding of the church in 1702. Two other viceroys had served in India in the seventeenth century and were later to serve in Brazil; Viceroy Pedro António Meneses de Noronha de Albuquerque (1661-1731) was appointed as

viceroy of Brazil between 1714 and 1718 and Vasco Fernandes Cesar de Noronha de Albuquerque (1673-1741) who served as Viceroy of Brazil between 1720 and 1735. In 1722 a Portuguese Dominican missionary Brother Gabriel Baptista arrived in Bahia from India and established the Dominican order in Brazil (Vianna, 1893). Bahia increasingly offered a market for European and Asian goods and the British East India Company bound to or from Bombay or Bengal would often put in at Salvador. (Sequeira Antony, 2004). In 1750 fresh orders were issued from the Royal Court for married couples, especially from Bengal and the Coromandel Coast of India who were weavers or dyers of cottons and “muslins”. In a reply the viceroy of India explained the reluctance of Indians to go to Brazil due to caste restrictions and there being few Catholic converts among the textile workers. In 1752 the viceroy sent six Canarins as paid workers to Bahia with a detailed report on the uses of the coconut tree in Goa. Two died of scurvy on the voyage. For the remaining four we have the names of three of them, Pedro Ventura Castilho, João Rebeiro and Laurenço Raposo. These Canarins found that the palm trees of Brazil were not suitable for the extraction and production of palm arrack (Sequeira Antony, 2004).

When the captaincy of Ilhéus was incorporated into the captaincy of Bahia in 1761 the functions of the captaincy were replaced by the comarca (county). In 1763 Rio de Janeiro replaced Salvador as the capital of Brazil and in 1767 the Portuguese crown outlawed the *escala* (Sequeira-Antony, 2004). The plantation at Ilhéus was destroyed by ants in 1788 and in 1798 the Viceroy of India was asked to remit teak plants from Daman, and Sandalwood from Goa, Timor or Solor for transplanting in Brazil. It appears that the cultivation of teak had been undertaken in the Comarca dos Ilheus (Sequeira Antony, 2004).

Conclusion.

From 1502 to around 1650 the jewel in the Portuguese Crown was India with its connections to the Spice Islands. Toby Green (2007) argues that the inquisition was established earlier in Goa than in Brazil because that was simply where greater profits could be made. The suggestion is that the colonisation of Brazil was initially based on a “blue-print” used by the Portuguese in the Indies. It is interesting that the Portuguese chose to locate Ilhéus within a river estuary, on an easily defensible island which is a

similar geography to Cochin and Goa in India. Evidence of transfer of experience and skills acquired in Asia to Brazil was considerable, even though the social conditions were different. The Indian historian Dr. Malekandathil (2001) has suggested that the lack of sufficient ships for the India run in the early sixteenth century forced the construction of vessels at Cochin, where initial plans for a shipyard were established in 1504-1505. With Indian Teak, the yard was capable of building large vessels such as the 800 tonne capacity carrack *Santa Catarina do Monte Sinai* launched in 1520. This ship became the flagship of Vasco da Gama on his third voyage to India in 1525. Malekandathil (2001) points out that the master shipwright was Portuguese, but essential carpenters and dockyard workers were Indian. These vessels were in contact with Brazil and the returning Portuguese East Indiamen were manned with a supplement of “East Indian” crew. It is proposed that these men introduced Asian constructional elements found in the production of the Saveiro around Salvador. These shipwrights may have also initially introduced or at the least modified the raft that they named the Jangada in Northeast Brazil. Interestingly it is the culinary historian Michael Krondl (2007) who states that “the little Iberian kingdom never produced enough sailors to man every spritsail and ratline in its navy, as a result it had long been common for other nationals to join up”. Though in this case Krondl was discussing the employment of Europeans and not Asians. Contrary to the view of John Ferguson (1923) that “little interest seems to have been taken in coconut planting by Portuguese”, it appears that the Portuguese were fully aware of the importance of the coconut tree for its safe water, and useful cordage and promoted its cultivation in the tropics. In the sixteenth century prominent administrators, clergy, soldiers and merchants were transplanted from Asia, accompanied by an entourage of followers, wives, concubines, servants and slaves. As pointed out by Bradford Burns (1980). Portuguese women were notably absent from the settlement pattern during the first century of Portuguese-Brazilian history and the Portuguese became increasingly attracted to indigenous Brazilian, Asian and African women, but we have no idea of the early movements of Luso-Asian women whose voices and original names are rarely recorded. However in the second half of the eighteenth century Goan women were definitely sent to Brazil (Da Silva Gracias, 2001). Women are repositories of culture and we can attribute the use of coconut in Baiana

cuisine to Luso-Asian women, or possibly enslaved African women from India. They also introduced the use of key spices. Ginger arrived in Brazil from São Tomé in the sixteenth century. But Russell-Wood (1998) does not explain how ginger got to the West African islands. Transplanted ginger production in Brazil and Africa was so successful that in 1578 the King forbade exports from the Atlantic in order to protect Asian exports.

In the seventeenth century sugar production required abundant labour by enslaved Africans. At the same time the rise of the Dutch forced the Portuguese to consider other sources for spices and Asian textiles leading to specific requests for Luso-Asians in attempt to transplant Asian agriculture and textile technology to Brazil (Russel-Woods, 1998). This was also a period when Asian influences and presence were linked with the Jesuits and their global organisation, which acted like a modern multinational corporation, where concepts, technologies and people are relocated depending on needs. Brazilian ports like Salvador were regarded by captains, crew and passengers returning from Asia as places to legally and illegally exchange Asian exotics for Brazilian sugar, tobacco and gold. Among the items imported from the Indian Ocean were Zimbo's or Buzio de Costa (Cowrie shells). These shells were important for the Atlantic slave trade, where they served as a currency and were among the artefacts recovered from the *Santissimo Sacramento* that sank off the coast of Salvador on 5th May 1668. Also in the wreck were ceramics from Macau bearing the coat of arms of the Silva family, which connects the wreck to Francisco Correa da Silva who died during the incident (Pernambucano de Mello, 1979). The recovery of Nozeras (Nutmeg containers) from the wreck suggest Asian trade and Luso-Asian contact via Lisbon.

In conclusion this paper suggests that Luso-Asians were not isolated in Asia, rather they were present in and influencing the Atlantic World in a variety of ways in the sixteenth century. Luso-Asians have left identifiable legacies from their contact with early colonial Brazil in a number of disciplines. It also appears that people from all sectors of Luso-Asian society were transplanted into seventeenth century Brazil directly from Asia or through Lisbon. This research like the previous one in Macaronesia breaks new ground for merely considering Asian heritage in this region of South America (Pereira, 2011). It is not the only Luso-Asian heritage in the Americas that has been ignored and a similar

and overlapping Hispano-Asian (Filipino) narrative in the Americas remains to be fully studied. This opens up the notion of Asians across the Pacific, thereby combining the distribution of peoples with that of trade and ideologies in a global Iberian network (Junco, 2011).

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Biography:

Cliff Pereira is a senior researcher specialised in bringing the strands of history and geography, community, heritage and academia together to create factual, colourful, strong, interwoven social narratives with equity and cultural sensitivity leading to personal and community empowerment with an emphasis on shared cultural spaces. He has broad experience consulting for development in the heritage sector, especially for small, medium-sized and large museums, sensitive narratives, diversity and inclusion and accessibility.