

Monsoon Islam

Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast

Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, a distinct form of Islamic thought and practice developed among Muslim trading communities of the Indian Ocean. Sebastian Prange argues that this “Monsoon Islam” was shaped by merchants not sultans, forged by commercial imperatives rather than in battle, and defined by the reality of Muslims living within non-Muslim societies. Focusing on India’s Malabar Coast, the much-fabled “land of pepper”, Prange provides a case study of how Monsoon Islam developed in response to concrete economic, socio-religious, and political challenges. Because communities of Muslim merchants across the Indian Ocean were part of shared commercial, scholarly, and political networks, developments on the Malabar Coast illustrate a broader, trans-oceanic history of the evolution of Islam across monsoon Asia. This history is told through four spaces that are examined in their physical manifestations as well as symbolic meanings: the Port, the Mosque, the Palace, and the Sea.

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Sebastian R. Prange

University of British Columbia, Vancouver



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For
TARA,
my reason why.

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Acknowledgements

The history of Monsoon Islam is about the tension between global impulses and local exigencies. Something similar may be said about the writing of this book, which required me to combine the study of distant places with the need to negotiate frequent changes to my own immediate environs, institutional and otherwise.

The long ontogenesis of this work, spanning well over a decade from conception to completion, has allowed me to reflect on its implications, pursue various tangents, and test its findings in front of diverse audiences. I have found it especially rewarding to situate this work within not just one but several vibrant fields of historical enquiry. These include major ones such as the scholarship on medieval South India, the Indian Ocean, or global Islam, but also more specialized domains such as the study of Indo-Islamic architecture, Rasulid manuscripts, or piracy. The contours of these fields have repeatedly shifted under my feet as I researched, wrote, and revised this book. I am certain that the scholarly landscape will continue to evolve and hopeful that this study itself will help displace a mound or two.

The empirical foundations of this book were laid during my doctoral studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. It is only with the passage of time that I have come to recognize how many of what I thought of as my ideas had been discreetly instilled in me by my advisor, Daud Ali. The other members of my committee, William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Avril Powell, were likewise active participants in (what I thought of as) my work. My studies at SOAS, including multiple stays in Yemen and India for language training and fieldwork, were generously supported by the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Institute of Historical Research, the University of London, and the Leigh Douglas Memorial Fund. I am also grateful to the International Economic History Association for recognizing my doctoral research with its triennial prize for best dissertation on a premodern topic (2008–2011), an honour all the more gratifying

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since my work in many ways challenges the primacy of an economic history lens for understanding the nature of premodern trade.

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Danny Vickers passed away before I could share these pages with him. Suggestions made by the anonymous reviewers have likewise prompted several important corrections and additions to the text. My editor at Cambridge University Press, Lucy Rhymer, has been an early and enthusiastic champion of this project and was instrumental to its timely realization. I am also grateful to the editors of the Cambridge Oceanic Histories series, David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram, for their support. In light of all the inputs this work has received over the years, it is only proper to state expressly that any remaining errors of fact or interpretation can only be attributed to my own incorrigibility.

What first drew me to the study of merchants is their shrewd pragmatism. Their prosaic attitude, which manifests in a general preference of profits over philosophy, may well have reminded me of my own father, himself last in a long line of *petits commerçants*. Yet, in spite of this general outlook, both my parents, Ute and Benno Prange, have been unstinting in their curiosity about my academic pursuits and boundless in their support of them. At the same time, they managed to maintain a salutary sense of detachment, best expressed by my mother's insistence, quite rightly, that it's all not such a big deal.

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Note on Dates, Weights, Places, and Transliterations

All dates have been converted to accord to the Common Era; where it is of significance, the original calendar is given in parentheses.

Weights are presented in the original units of measurement, with terms of conversion detailed in the notes.

A good argument can be made for following local usage in referring to places in India. For the Malabar Coast, Malayali place names are usually the basis for variants encountered in other languages; in many cases, these original names have now been restored to official usage in India. However, the renderings of Indian toponyms in European languages mark many of the primary sources and they continue to be used in much of the secondary literature. This has created a certain path dependency in academic usage – to reject it outright risks a bewildering incoherency of place names when quoting from sources or the literature. Moreover, as this book focuses on Muslim traders, there are also the Arabic names for Indian ports and towns to contend with. On balance, therefore, this book follows established usage, except in cases where no anglicized form exists or where it seems needlessly remote. The table below (organized from north to south) serves as a reference for the pertinent place names on the Malabar Coast in English, Arabic, and Malayalam; the variant used in this book is given in capital letters.

English	Malayalam	Arabic
Barkur	BARKUR	Fākanūr
MANGALORE	Mangalapuram	Manjarūr
Kasargode (Cassargode)	KASARAGOD	Harqilyah
MADAYI	Madai (Pazhayangadi)	—
Mount Eli	EZHIMALA	Hili
—	VALAPATTANAM	Budfattān
CANNANORE	Kannur	?Jūrfattan
—	DHARMADAM (Dharmapattanam)	Dahfattān
—	PANTALAYANI-KOLLAM	Fandarīna

(continued)

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CALICUT	Kozhikode	Qāliqūt; Kālikūt
—	CHALIYAM (Beypore)	Shāliyāt
—	PONNANI	Fannanī
Cranganore	KODUNGALLUR	Kulankalūr
COCHIN	Kochi	Kushī
Quilon	KOLLAM	Kawlam

Arabic terms in common usage have been simplified (e.g. Quran, not al-Qur’ān); transliteration of proper names of persons, places, and texts follows a slightly modified Library of Congress standard. For improved legibility, plurals of these terms follow the English convention of adding the letter “s” unless they are quoted from the original. Archaic English spellings have been modernized where they reflect usage by a translator or editor rather than the original author.