

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

A
V O Y A G E
TO THE
E A S T I N D I E S.

B O O K I.

CHAPTER I.

Arrival at Puduceri (Pondichery)—Coast of Coromandel—Going on shore—Capuchins—Jesuits—Description of the City—Its trade—Fortifications—White ants—Bitter drops—Error of the heathens in regard to Christianity.

THE ship *l'Aimable Nannette*, commanded by Captain Berteaud, in which I sailed from l'Orient, arrived in the road of *Puduceri** on the 25th of July 1776, after a tedious passage of six months and as many days. Our patience was, therefore, almost exhausted; and we longed not a little to set our feet once more upon dry ground. We directed our anxious looks towards the shore over the blue waves, and flattered ourselves with the

* Pondichery—Respecting the author's orthography of names I have said a few words in the preface, to which the reader is referred. F.

B

hopes

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country
Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

hopes of reaching it that evening*: but, as the duration of the twilight is exceedingly short in India, night suddenly overtook us, disappointed the accomplishment of our wishes, and spread her dusky veil over both sea and land. At sun-rise next morning we saluted the citadel of *Puduceri* with eleven guns; a compliment which the garrison returned with nine, and at the same time hoisted the French flag.

The coast of *Ciòmandala* †, which the Europeans very improperly call *Coromandel*, has at a distance the appearance of a green theatre. The sea-shore is covered with white sand; and a multitude of beautiful shells are here and there to be seen. The country is intersected by a great many rivers and streams, which flowing down from the high ridge of mountains on the west, called the *Gauts*, pursue their course towards the east, and discharge themselves into the sea; some with impetuosity and noise, others with gentleness and silence. In the months of October and November, when the rainy season commences, these streams are swelled up in an extraordinary degree, and sweep from the mountains a multitude of serpents,

* The passage, from England or France, to India is commonly reckoned to be six months; but it depends upon circumstances whether the voyage will be longer or shorter, and particularly on the season of the year and the situation of the place to which the ship is bound. As the monsoons, or *muffongs*, change every half year in the Indian seas, vessels bound to a certain place must often take a long circuitous course in order to fall in with the wind proper for conducting them to it. The change of the monsoons is always attended with violent storms, by which ships in the open sea often sustain great damage. The passage to India must, of course, be often prolonged. I, however, know instances of ships going thither from Europe in five months. *F.*

† In the original there is here an error, either of the author or of the press; for throughout the whole work this coast is always called afterwards *Ciòlamandala* (*Tscholamandala*). *F.*

which,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES. 3

which, to the no small terror of the unexperienced traveller, they carry a great way out with them into the sea. This, in all probability, has given rise to the fabulous tales of sea monsters, which some pretend to have seen in the Indian ocean. The land here is covered, to a considerable distance, with trees of all kinds, and particularly that called by the Europeans the real Indian palm or the coco-nut tree. The Indians give it the name of *tenga*, and make much use of it for planting neat gardens, with which not only the coast of Malabar, but a great part of that of *Cidlamandala* also is, in a manner, overspread. Various hamlets and villages are interspersed between these gardens, and the whole surrounding country delights the eye with never fading verdure.

During my travels through India I found the climate every where mild and healthful; and in no place did I hear complaints of bad weather. The Indians generally sleep with their doors and windows open, except when there is any appearance of the *Caracatta*, which is a certain kind of wind that blows from the quarter of the *Gauts*. This chain of mountains begins at Cape *Comari**, in the eighth degree of north latitude, and extends thence towards the north; so that it almost intersects India in the middle. The eastern part is called *Cidlamandala*, that is, the *land of millet**; the western *Malayala*, or the *land of mountains*. The latter is called by the Arabians and Europeans Malabar, or the Malabar coast. The *Gauts*, the highest ridge of moun-

* The southern extremity of India is, in all the European maps, called Cape *Comoria*; the author, however, gives it the proper Indian name, *Comari*. F.

† The eastern part is, without doubt, called the *land of millet*, because the Indians cultivate, in their fields, various kinds of that grain, such as the *Holcus Sorghum*, *Holcus Durra*, &c. F.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

tains in this country, occasion that difference in the weather, and that remarkable change of seasons which take place on both these coasts. This is one of the most singular phenomena of nature ever yet observed. On the coast of *Ciölamandala* the summer begins in June; but on the coast of Malabar it does not commence till October. During the latter month it is winter on the coast of *Ciölamandala*, whereas on the coast of Malabar it begins so early as the 15th of June. The one season therefore always commences on the east coast at the time when it ends on the western. When winter prevails on the coast of Malabar; when the mountains and valleys are shaken by tremendous claps of thunder, and awful lightning traverses the heavens in every direction, the sky is pure and serene on the coast of *Ciölamandala*: ships pursue their peaceful course; the inhabitants get in their rice harvest, and carry on trade with the various foreigners who in abundance frequent their shores. But when the wet season commences; when these districts are exposed, for three whole months, to storms and continual rains, hurricanes and inundations, the coast of Malabar opens its ports to the navigator; secures to its inhabitants the advantages of trade, labour and enjoyment; and from the end of October to the end of June presents a favourable sky, the serene aspect of which is never deformed by a single cloud. This regulation of nature appeared to Strabo, the geographer, altogether incredible; and he, therefore, abused those travellers who, on their return from India, asserted that in the course of the year, in that country, there were two summers and two winters. In this manner must the writers of travels often suffer

When Bougainville returned from his voyage round the world, some conceited Parisian ladies asked him how the Chinese women

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES. 5

fer by the ignorance of their readers*. “When I called in the aid of commentators to illustrate such passages,” says Chardin, “I every where observed the most palpable errors; for these people grope in the dark, and endeavour to explain every thing by conjecture.”

On the 26th of June I left the ship about noon, and, in company with M. Berteaud the captain, went on board a small Indian vessel of that kind called by the inhabitants *shilinga*. As it is exceedingly dangerous and difficult to land at *Puduceri* and *Madrasspatnam*, these *shilingas* are built with a high deck, to prevent the waves of the sea from entering them. This mode of construction is, however, attended with one inconvenience, which is, that the waves beat with more impetuosity against the sides; raise the *shilinga* sometimes towards the heavens; again precipitate it into a yawning gulph, and, at length, drive it on shore with the utmost violence*. In such cases the vessel would be entirely dashed to pieces, if the *Mucoas*, or fishermen, who direct it, did not throw themselves into the sea, force it back by exerting their whole strength, and in this manner lessen the impetuosity of the surf. I was greatly alarmed before I reached the shore; and

women were dressed. On his replying that he had never been in that country, they were much astonished, and could not comprehend how it was possible to sail round the globe without being in China. Questions have been asked me and my son George, at which we could not help laughing, at least afterwards. F.

* On the flat coast of Coromandel there are no harbours; and, for that reason, neither people nor goods can be conveyed on shore from ships but in these *shilingas*. This labour is very dangerous even for such small vessels, as the flatness of the coast for so great an extent renders the breakers extremely violent. The English, in all their wars, have lost many of their ships for want of a harbour on the eastern coast; and therefore it is of the utmost importance to them to have possession of the excellent, safe, and spacious harbour of *Trincomale*, on the east side of the island of *Ceylon*. F.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

was so completely drenched by the waves, that the water ran down my back.

When I approached the city, I was exactly in the same state as if I had entered a furnace; for the sun had rendered the sand, with which the shore is covered, almost red-hot. The reflection of his rays caused an insufferable smarting in my eyes, and my feet seemed as if on fire. I was met on the road by some Indian Christians, who conducted me to the convent of the Capuchins, in the southern extremity of the city. These good fathers were then employed in building: for the English, in the year 1764, had bombarded *Puduceri* from their ships lying in the road; and the poor Capuchins, as well as others, felt the effects of their vengeance, their church and convent being converted into a heap of ruins. The English, perhaps, were not acquainted with the maxims of the Pagan Indians, who consider it as an unpardonable crime to destroy the temple and house of God; for they say, *Covil kettium tannir pandel kettium nashikarudade*; which may be thus translated: "It is never lawful to destroy a temple, and the halls in which travellers have lodged." For want of room the Capuchins were not able to admit me into their convent, and therefore I repaired to the French missionaries, belonging to the so called *Missions étrangères*, who resided in the pagan quarter of the city. Here I found the procurators of this establishment, Messrs. Jallabert and Mouthon, by whom I was received with every mark of kindness and attention. After dinner I took a walk to the Jesuits' college, where I saw Father Julius Cæsar Polenza, a learned Neapolitan, who was celebrated on account of his political talents, but still more on account of his knowledge of the Tamulic language; also Father le Fabre, Father Anzaldi, and fifteen other missionaries who had not long

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

7

long before assembled there, for the first time, from *Tanjaur* and *Madura*.

The governor of *Puduceri*, at that time, was M. Law de Lauriston, a man of very moderate principles, who perfectly understood the art of living in a state of peace and friendship, both with the English at *Madraspatnam*, and the Pagan Indians his neighbours. Few of those who preceded him in the government of *Puduceri* possessed the same virtue. On the contrary, most of them made it their chief study to endeavour to extend their dominion. This man's prudence and moderation were not, therefore, approved by some of his hot-headed countrymen; and *Sonnerat* * inveighs bitterly against the friendly reception which Lord Pigot the governor of *Madraspatnam* experienced when he passed through *Puduceri*. *Cum vitia profunt, peccat qui recte agit* — When vice thrives, those who act right become criminal.—The moderation of M. Law de Lauriston could not then fail to give offence to illiberal minds, subject to the impulse of their passions.

Puduceri, in my time, was a large and very beautiful city. The governor resided in an elegant palace. It was not uncommon to see a hundred covers on this gentleman's table; and I once had the honour, together with M. Jallabert, of being invited to one of his entertainments. The city, towards the north and south, is defended by excellent fortifications, constructed in the year 1769, under the direction of M. Bourcet, who also formed the plan of them. In the southern part, some of the

† See *Sonnerat, Voyages aux Indes*, vol. i. p. 1. p. 13. *Sonnerat*, who was an excellent draftsman, and possessed some knowledge of natural history, came very young to India, and was hot-headed because he conceived himself to be a man of importance on account of these talents.—Law de Lauriston was a descendant or relation of Law who made himself known by his speculations under the regency of the Duke of Orleans. *F.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

houses, inhabited by the Europeans, are exceedingly large and beautiful, and are ornamented with projecting galleries, balustrades, columns and porticoes. The European quarter is entirely separated from that of the Mahomedans and Pagan Indians. The latter live altogether in the western part. When a certain quarter is in this manner assigned to the Indians for their residence; one of their countrymen is always placed over them as a superintendant, who is obliged to preserve peace and good order among them, and to take care that they do not transgress the laws. At *Cottate, Padmanaburam, Tiruvandapuram, Cayancollam* and other towns on the Malabar coast, the same establishment is made, that no strife or contention may arise among the various tribes, castes, and religious sects, on account of the difference of their manners and customs. Every one here is allowed to live in his own manner, and to enjoy his own belief; as it is not possible that so many classes and so many thousands of people should ever unite in one common system of religion *

The gate of the city towards the west was guarded by the so called *Spoys* (seapoys) or Indian soldiers, who consist of people of every caste, and of all religions. They were exercised according to the French manner. *Hayder Aly Khan*, that celebrated and formidable warrior, who reduced under his dominion *Maissur, Carnate, Concao, Canara* and *Calicut*, was originally a seapoy who did duty at this gate of *Puduceri* †. In that city he became first acquainted

* We have here a striking instance of the truth of the observation, that travelling in distant countries, among people of different manners, customs, and religious opinions, tends to inspire men with more liberal sentiments, and to render them more tolerant. *F.*

† The fiction respecting *Hayder Aly's* mean extraction, &c. has been long ago refuted. See *Sprengel's Hyder Ali*, in the preface, p. 6. *F.*

with

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

9

with the French tactics, which he afterwards employed not only against the Indian kings and princes, but against the Europeans; and it is not improbable that another Indian hero may arise in the course of time, and, in like manner, make use of the military discipline of the English, which that nation still teach to the native Indians. As the English and French in India are in a continual state of enmity, some enterprising Indian generally steps in between them, and attacks either the one or the other of the contending parties. Such was the conduct of *Hayder Aly Khan's* son, *Tippoo Sultan Bahader*, who overran a considerable district in the southern part of India, and defeated the British troops in several engagements.

Puduceri was given up to the French, on the 15th of July 1630, by *Rama Rajah* a son of *Sevagi* king of the *Marattas*. This prince was sovereign of the province of *Gingi*, and possessed a fortress of the same name, which was situated among the mountains on the south of *Puduceri*. *Rama Rajah* had wrested this province, to which *Puduceri* belonged, from its original and lawful owner; and he resigned the city to the French on condition of their paying two per cent. on all the goods which should be there exported or imported. When Captain *Ricaut* established the French East India Company in 1642, he entered into partnership with twenty-four other merchants; and the only object of this society, as they then pretended, was to carry on trade in India. These merchants, however, shewed only too soon that their views were directed to things totally different. By little and little they began to extend their boundaries; endeavoured to get into their hands new possessions; from being merchants became warriors, and at last ventured to refuse the two per cent. which they had solemnly contracted to pay. This was done, in particular, after the year 1695,

in

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02821-9 - A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country

Paolino da San Bartolomeo Edited by John Reinhold Forster

Translated by William Johnston

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 VOYAGE TO THE EAST INDIES.

in which the Moguls took the fortrefs of *Gingi* *. There is juſt reaſon then to be ſurpriſed at the ſingular conduct of the Abbè Raynal, who throws out the bittereſt reproaches againſt the Portuguese, as the firſt conquerors of India; and yet paſſes over, in perfect ſilence, what might be ſaid of the violent proceedings of the other European nations, who certainly trod in the footſteps of the Portuguese. M. Dupleix, who was then governor of *Puduceri*, cauſed the Mogul to create him a nabob, that is an Indian chief or prince; and after that period the before-mentioned engagement and duty were, in the courſe of a few years, buried in oblivion. The haughtineſs of the French ſtill increaſed; the utmoſt degree of jealousy prevailed between them and the Engliſh; and a war was the conſequence, in which the French ſoon loſt their trade and their Indian poſſeſſions, which they afterwards recovered, and loſt and recovered in turns. The Dutch Eaſt India Company, more attentive to its intereſt, and leſs inclined to war, poſſeſſed alſo ſeveral conſiderable ſettlements in India; but it excited much leſs jealousy, becauſe it obſerved a peaceable conduct, and by theſe means acquired greater riches. In the year 1693, the Dutch took *Puduceri*, but reſtored it at the peace of Rylwick. In the year 1748 it was beſieged by the Engliſh; and in 1761 it was taken by them, but given up at the peace of 1763. They made themſelves maſters of it a ſecond time in 1738, when De Belcombe was governor, but abandoned it afterwards in 1783. On the commencement of the French revolution it came under the dominion of the nabob *Mohamed Aly* prince of *Arcaſe*, a faithful adherent of the Engliſh; and ever ſince it has

* The moſt modern and authentic hiſtory of India ſhews that all the European Eaſt India Companies followed the example of the Dutch, and of merchants became warriors. F.

remained