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.

Sebastian R. Prange is Assistant Professor of History at the University of British Columbia.
Cambridge Oceanic Histories

Edited by
David Armitage
Alison Bashford
Sujit Sivasundaram

Across the world, historians have taken an oceanic turn. New maritime histories offer fresh approaches to the study of global regions, and to long-distance and long-term connections. Cambridge Oceanic Histories includes studies across whole oceans (the Pacific, the Indian, the Atlantic) and particular seas (among them, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the North Sea, the Black Sea). The series is global in geography, ecumenical in historical method, and wide in temporal coverage, intended as a key repository for the most innovative transnational and world histories over the longue durée. It brings maritime history into productive conversation with other strands of historical research, including environmental history, legal history, intellectual history, labour history, cultural history, economic history and the history of science and technology. The editors invite studies that analyse the human and natural history of the world’s oceans and seas from anywhere on the globe and from any and all historical periods.
Monsoon Islam

*Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast*

Sebastian R. Prange

*University of British Columbia, Vancouver*
For
TARA,
my reason why.
## Contents

[List of Illustrations] page viii  
[Acknowledgements] xi  
[Note on Dates, Weights, Places, and Transliterations] xv  

Introduction: The First Indian Muslim  
1  The Port  
2  The Mosque  
3  The Palace  
4  The Sea  
  Conclusion: Monsoon Muslims  279  

[Bibliography] 301  
[Index] 339
Illustrations

Maps
1.1 Indian Ocean trade around the fifteenth century  page 33
1.2 Malabar’s principal ports of trade in the fifteenth century  36
2.1 Malabar’s first mosques according to Qisṣat shakarwāṭī farmād  99
4.1 Towns on the Malabar Coast in receipt of Rasulid stipends  261

Figures
I.1 A Malabar scribe with palm leaf and iron stylus  21
1.1 “The Muslims of Cannanore”  53
1.2 Inscribed minbar of Calicut’s Mithqālpalli  85
2.1 Selective genealogy of the Makhduūm family  112
2.2 Ponnani’s Juma Masjid  114
2.3 Early photograph of a traditional Malabar mosque (at Thalassery)  124
2.4 Mosque with tower at Chirakkal  126
2.5 Masjid Agung at Demak, Java  127
2.6 Superstructure of the Mithqālpalli at Calicut  132
3.1 Panorama of sixteenth-century Calicut  162
3.2 King of Cochin with retinue  168
3.3 Zamorin of Calicut and his palace  185
3.4 Fortress of the Kunjalis  202
3.5 Panorama of sixteenth-century Cannanore  204
4.1 Piper nigrum  213
4.2 South Indian country craft  225
4.3 Engraving of a Hindu pagoda and Muslim mosque  246
4.4 Shrine of Zayn al-Dīn Makhdūm al-Ma‘bari at Cochin  247
4.5 Panorama of sixteenth-century Aden  257
4.6 Sixteenth-century map of Arabia Felix  272
C.1 Twitter post by Narendra Modi  292
C.2 New façade of the Cheraman Masjid at Kodungallur  293
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Shipowners identified in Geniza documents as active in the Malabar trade</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Malabar’s first mosques according to <em>Qīṣṣat shakarwatī farmād</em></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Repartition of Rasulid grants sent to Muslim communities in India</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Locations of <em>qādīs</em> and <em>khatībs</em> in Malabar receiving Rasulid stipends</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
xii Acknowledgements

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

Fieldwork in Yemen and India would not have been possible without help by many individuals. The officers of the British Archaeological Mission in Yemen were instrumental in securing an otherwise elusive research permit. In Sana’a, I was welcomed by Tim Mackintosh-Smith as well as the Centre Français d’Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales de Sanaa. In Hadramawt, I was splendidly hosted by Hassan al-Amrī and received magnanimous support from the curators of the Maktabat al-Ahqāf and Markaz al-Nūr (Dār al-Muṣṭafā) archives. Amin Bāṭāhir provided crucial assistance to my survey of local manuscripts. In Kerala, my requests to examine inscriptions and manuscripts at mosques and shrines were, to the great credit of their custodians and congregations, approved bar only one exception. I particularly benefitted from my extended period of study at the shrine of Zayn al-Dīn Makhduṃ in Kochi, and the information provided by its caretaker, the late Mohammed Abdul Latheef. In Kozhikode, Hamza and Muhsin Bahfaqy and S.M. Jiffri Thangal went to great lengths to facilitate my research, not least by seeking out a number of Arabic genealogies. Although in the end these materials did not speak to the particular concerns of this study, it is hoped that in future they will receive the scholarly attention they merit.

Subsequently, I have benefitted from the institutional support and collegial exchanges at the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and my current home, the University of British Columbia. The debts I have incurred in the course of these appointments are too numerous to enumerate. I would be amiss, however, not to acknowledge the vital funding by the UBC Faculty of Arts (in the form of the Dean’s Faculty Research Award) and two major grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Insight Development Grant 430-2014-00190 and Insight Grant 435-2017-0574) that supported my work.

The many scholars who offered their knowledge and advice in support of my research include Sonia Alexandrian, Sawsan al-Najjar, Giancarlo Casale, Stephen Dale, Kent Deng, Emma Flatt, Ulrike Freitag, Mahmood Kooria, Kai Kresse, Elizabeth Lambourn, Bruce Lawrence, Abhilash Malayil, Pius Malekandathil, Caroline Osella, Michael Pearson, Patricia Risso, Dietmar Rothenmund, Hanna Smyth, Éric Vallet, Kesavan Veluthat, and David Washbrook. Many others must go unmentioned. Special thanks are due to Timothy Brook, Luke Clossey, Christopher Friedrichs, and Archa Neelakandan Girija for reading a complete draft of the manuscript and for their many helpful recommendations. Sadly, my dear friend, esteemed mentor, and fellow maritime historian
Acknowledgements

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 Sivasundarum, 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.

Foremost and forever, it is to Tara Mayer that I am most deeply beholden and most profoundly grateful. She has inspired, exhorted, corrected, sustained, and enlivened me, making all that has been invested into this effort – by me, by her, and by many others – worthwhile. To the inevitable chagrin of our two impossibly wonderful daughters, Asmani and Gaia, it is to her, and her alone, that I dedicate this book.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Malayalam</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barkur</td>
<td>BARKUR</td>
<td>Fākanūr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANGALORE</td>
<td>Mangalapuram</td>
<td>Manjarūr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasargode (Cassargode)</td>
<td>KASARAGOD</td>
<td>Harqiyah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MADAYI</td>
<td>Madai (Pazhayangadi)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Eli</td>
<td>EZHIMALA</td>
<td>Hīlī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>VALAPATTANAM</td>
<td>Budfattān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANNANORE</td>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>?Jūrffatān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>DHARMADAM (Dharmapattanam)</td>
<td>Dahrāftān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>PANTALAYANI-KOLLAM</td>
<td>Fandarīna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Note on Dates, Weights, Places, and Transliterations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calicut</td>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>Qāliqūt; Kālikūt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Chaliyam (Beypore)</td>
<td>Shāliyāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Ponnani</td>
<td>Fannani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranganore</td>
<td>Kodungallur</td>
<td>Kulankalūr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochin</td>
<td>Kochi</td>
<td>Kushi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>Kawlam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.