

Portugal in the Sea of Oman. Religion and Politics. Research on Documents, edited by Abdulrahman Al-Salimi and Michael Jansen, in collaboration with Pedro Pinto, Karsten Ley and Helmut Siepman. Part 2: Transcription, English and Arabic Translation. Corpus 1: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2015, vols 1-10, 3208 pp. ISBN 9783487152707. €498. Corpus 2: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2018, vols 11-16 + vol. 17 (Index), lxx + 2094 pp. ISBN 9783487152714. €348.

It is one of the ironies of the global turn that, as scholars detach local histories from European expansion history to retrieve overlooked connections, reliance on documents written in the languages of former imperial powers sometimes increases. This is the case for many parts of Maritime Asia before 1700. Where local records are patchy, Portuguese materials tend to fill the lacunae. Nations other than Portugal have thus begun to discover the appeal of exploring Portuguese archives for their own history. An Omani delegation first visited archives in Portugal in 1994. In 2006, the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs in Muscat teamed up with the Aachen Centre for Documentation and Conservation (ACDC) to organize the gathering, transcribing and publishing of all relevant documentation on the Sea of Oman extant in Portugal, starting with the two largest archives in Lisbon, the Torre do Tombo (National Archive) and the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library). In 2012, 16 volumes containing facsimiles of original documents came out with the German publishers Philipp von Zabern – a rare collection robustly priced at €800, unseen to this reviewer (ISBN 9783805343749). Since then, 16 more volumes have appeared, containing transcriptions of the Portuguese originals, side by side with translations into English and Arabic (ten volumes for the Torre do Tombo, covering 1508 to 1697, and six volumes for the Biblioteca Nacional, covering 1507 to 1783). Volume 17 offers a comprehensive analytical index of the materials published so far, a glossary (in English and Arabic), and two overview maps. A list of toponyms in volume 17 offers correspondences between historic and modern placenames alongside with precise geographical coordinates. No review copies were received, but as the project moves on to post-1800 materials under the aegis of the new RIO Research Centre Indian Ocean at Muscat, it seems opportune to take stock.

This is an exemplary publication in more than one way. It offers a template in terms of format and establishes a benchmark in terms of quality. The project as a whole owes much to the experience and diligence of Pedro Pinto, who has conducted the bulk of the archival and transcription work. The English translations, made by Roopanjali Roy and revised by Pinto, focus on reliability over readability. A basic knowledge of Portuguese remains helpful in that the form of many of the texts follows syntactic conventions characteristic of a world long vanished. The Arabic translations, by Madgis Afalay, Saif al-Rumhi, Hilal al-Shakaili and Hilal al-Hajiri, are beyond the expertise of this reviewer. A large majority of the materials are new, offering a veritable treasure trove not only for the study of Oman and the adjacent waters. The geographical reach is considerable, extending to Syria in the northwest, Mozambique in the south, and Maluku in the east. There is a notable concentration of documents covering Omani activities in, and relations with, the Swahili Coast and the western littoral of India.

The title of this collection does not do justice to its complex nature and ample range. *Portugal in the Sea of Oman* is about far more than Portuguese activities in and around the Omani realm – it is a collection of materials produced, in the Portuguese language, in and about a region of Asia. It will thus not just help historians of the Portuguese empire to fill lacunae in their narratives (a pioneering overview for interactions with Oman already exists: Ibrahim Yahya Zahran Al-Busaidi, “Oman e Portugal (1650-1750): política e economia”, PhD thesis, University of Lisbon, 2010). It will also offer

fresh materials for the political, social, economic and cultural history of the western Indian Ocean region. The combination of trade, diplomacy and violence documented throughout these volumes bears testimony to the complex, multilateral, and profoundly transcultural history of Arabia and the Arabian Sea in the early modern period.

As one would expect from a project of such ambition and reach, not everything is perfect. The documents have been expertly transcribed, but not extensively annotated. For information on the countless individuals mentioned, the reader will need to look elsewhere. Not all placenames have been contemplated in the list and maps in volume 17. It might indeed have been useful to include reproductions of some early modern charts and maps to help situate events and trace toponymic variation and duplication. Apart from such minor issues, this impressive collection is an outstanding, exquisitely produced research tool for early modernists with an interest in the Middle East, South Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region, as well as specialists in European expansion. One can only hope that more governments and institutions in Asia and Africa will rise to the challenge and produce comparable resources. It would also be desirable, of course, to see such materials openly available online.

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