

# ON OTHERNESS AND INDIA: O LIVRO DE DUARTE BARBOSA (C. 1516) SEEN IN CONTEXT

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**Resumo:** Neste artigo foi analisada a contribuição do Livro de Duarte Barbosa (c. 1516) para a receção e a interpretação da cultura e da sociedade indianas pelos europeus. O Livro só foi publicado em Portugal no século XIX. No entanto, esta narrativa conheceu, desde o início, uma grande circulação em Portugal e no resto da Europa. Antes de mais, a versão manuscrita era conhecida dos mais importantes cronistas do Oriente Português: Gaspar Correia, Lopes de Castanheda e João de Barros. Este relato foi igualmente traduzido para castelhano, alemão e italiano ainda durante o século XVI. Referimos, por exemplo, a tradução para a língua italiana incluída no primeiro volume da obra *Navigazzioni e Viaggi* (1550) por Giovanni Battista Ramusio, uma das mais importantes compilações de textos relativos às narrativas de viagens por europeus fora da Europa desde a Idade Média. O Livro sofre certamente de algumas limitações características da época, como preconceito religioso, um discurso fomentando com frequência uma identificação civilizacional não necessariamente verdadeira entre europeus e não europeus, ou a associação da tipologia de pele com determinado nível civilizacional. No entanto, trata-se de um dos mais completos relatos escritos por autores portugueses acerca da Índia no início do século XVI. De facto, este relato inclui informação fundamental acerca de aspectos políticos, militares, sociais, culturais, comerciais e religiosos característicos da Índia contemporânea. Como indicado pelo título da obra, o Malabar é a região da Índia, cuja descrição foi objeto de maior cuidado. Tal deverá estar relacionado com o facto de Barbosa ter vivido durante quase cinquenta anos nesta região.

**Palavras-chave:** Índia; Portugal; cultura; alteridade.

**Abstract:** In this article we analysed the contribution made by the Livro de Duarte Barbosa (c. 1516) to the reception and interpretation of Indian culture and society by Europeans. The Livro remained unpublished in Portugal until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, from the onset, this narrative enjoyed a wide circulation both in Portugal and throughout Europe. Its manuscript form was known to the most distinguished chroniclers of Portuguese Asia, more precisely, Gaspar Correia, Lopes de Castanheda and João de Barros. Moreover, this report was translated into Castilian, German, and Italian still in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, an Italian translation was included in the first volume of the *Navigazzioni e Viaggi* (1550) by Giovanni Battista Ramusio that was one of the most important collectaneas on overseas travels dated from the second half of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, the Livro suffers from some limitations proper to his time such as religious prejudice, a discourse promoting an often civilizational identification that is not truthful among Europeans and non-Europeans, or the association of the skin complexion with a particular level of civility. Nevertheless, it constitutes one of the most comprehensive accounts of India written by Portuguese authors at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, this report includes fundamental information on the political, military, social, cultural, commercial and religious features characteristic of coeval India. As indicated by the title of the work, among the Indian regions that were described by Barbosa, pride of place was given to Malabar. This was related to the fact that he lived for almost fifty years in this region.

**Keywords:** India; Portugal; culture; otherness.

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\* CITCEM.

## CONTEXTUALISATION



**Illustration 1** – View of the market in Goa, in Linschoten, Jan Huyghen van, *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaert naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien 1579-1592*, c. 1596, Wikimedia ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMH-6598-KB\\_View\\_of\\_the\\_market\\_in\\_Goa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMH-6598-KB_View_of_the_market_in_Goa.jpg))

In 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the idea of the existence of ancient and powerful civilizations in India was broadly accepted, but accurate and reliable information about them was scarce. This situation changed radically in the wake of Vasco da Gama's travels. The first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century compelled Portugal to confront itself with this region and was the beginning of a lasting process or trivialization of mutual contacts between Europeans and Indians as with other communities from a myriad geographical and cultural provenance, but living in or related to India. Indeed, the Goa, as the whole of Hindustan Coast, had a cosmopolitan character by excellence – used to a long contact with Turks, Malays, Chinese, Africans (for instance, a long lasting trade existed between Eastern African and Eastern Indian maritime cities of present Gujarat, and Chinese communities established in India were especially active both in trade and in manufacture)<sup>1</sup>.

In this article we will analyse the contribution made by the *Livro de Duarte Barbosa* (c. 1516) to the reception and interpretation of Indian culture and society by Europeans. Indeed, this report was one of the two first and more comprehensive accounts of this region. The other account was the *Suma Oriental* by Tomé Pires dated 1512. Thus, both Barbosa and Pires must be credited a pioneering role in the formation of a lay historiography of Portuguese empire displaying a considerable array of information on the local society, culture, religious and economic framework.

<sup>1</sup> Among the abundant literature on the subject, see, for example: ASHER & TALBOT, 2006.



Illustration 2 – Map of South India, including the Coasts of Malabar and of Coromandel, first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (<http://www.antiquaprintgallery.com/carte-des-cotes-de-malabar-et-de-coromandel-south-india-de-lisle-1723-map-252481-p.asp>)

Duarte Barbosa, aged 14, embarked to India in 1500 with his uncle, Gonçalo Gil Barbosa, and stayed there until 1506, then returning to Portugal. During this first stay in India, he assisted his uncle in his role as commercial factor, first in Cochin (1500-02) and then in Cannanor (1502-05). He thus belonged to the first Portuguese generation of royal officers, soldiers and merchants who installed themselves in Malabar (this designation, Malabar, was used by 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese people to refer to the geographical area in

the South East Hindustan Peninsula stretching from the Gates Mountains to the sea, from the Mount Eli near Cannanor, and enclosing the area of the Kanara to the North and the Cape Comorin in the Southern extreme). Soon, Barbosa interacted closely with the local communities also as a *língua* (interpreter). Indeed, he learnt Malaylam so well that in 1503 he was commissioned by Afonso de Albuquerque to act as translator during the negotiations of the Portuguese with the King of Cannanor.

After 1511, Barbosa worked mostly as chief *escrivão de feitor* in Cannanor. However, due to the fact that he opposed the military conquest politics of Albuquerque, favouring, by contrast, a concerted action with the local potentates that would facilitate trade, two years later, in 1513, Albuquerque transferred him to the less important *Feitoria* of Calicut. In the subsequent year, Albuquerque even attempted to imprison Barbosa. In 1519, Barbosa was allowed to occupy his former position at the *Feitoria* of Cannanor. He must have passed away in the Orient between September 1546 and May 1547<sup>2</sup>.

## THE STRUCTURE AND THE FORTUNE OF THE LIVRO

For our study, we will use the version of the manuscript text conserved at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal with the reference code FG. Ms. 110008 and published in two volumes by Maria Augusta da Veiga e Sousa in 1996. This text constitutes the only Portuguese version that is dated and signed and is probably the most similar to the original non extant text<sup>3</sup>.

This text is organized into 49 chapters. Chapters 33 to 48 deal with India (the preface that is included in some versions of the manuscript was probably added by Ramusio) and describe the places Barbosa visited or which he heard of, located between the Cape of Saint Sebastian near Cape Town, in present South Africa, and the Japanese Ryukuy Islands, also named Lequios by 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese reports. Barbosa structured his report into large geographical-administrative divisions or chapters mostly referring to a distinct kingdom. Quoting João Marinho dos Santos,

*for Duarte Barbosa, a kingdom is a territorial unit (whose physical contours or limits are not always well defined), inhabited by people with common physical and cultural characteristics (and under this specific perspective he speaks about countries) with an appreciable political, administrative, social and military organization centred on a royalty (that obeys to ancestral traditions and costumes and practices rites) and, obviously, with an economy that functions with more or less difficulty<sup>4</sup>.*

Barbosa began the description of India with a reference to the Gujarat, about which he stressed the leading role played in trade by the two port cities of Diu and Cambay. He

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<sup>2</sup> RUBIÉS, 2002: 205-206.

<sup>3</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996: 2 vols.

<sup>4</sup> SANTOS, 1996: 99-100 (our translation).

then proceeded with the description of the Kingdom of the Deccan, of the Kingdom of Vijaynagar, also called Narsinga or Bisnaga by the Portuguese, of the Kingdom of Orissa, of the Kingdom of Delhi, the Malabar, the Coromandel Coast, and the Kingdom of Bengal. Within this broad framework, the author inserted subchapters on specific cities and towns, chapters on the local population and their main professional occupation, also known as castes in India, and on customs of Indian kings or rulers. One chapter, more precisely subchapter 33F, is dedicated to the betel leave that is an Indian product. The final annex lists the products traded in the Orient<sup>5</sup>.

The reference to Malabar in the title means that this book is especially informative about this region. Having lived for almost half a century in the area, Barbosa provides the reader with a detailed and accurate description of its inhabitants and their customs. This includes the mention to a variety of local castes, including both the foreign castes and the lower castes largely in charge of menial work.

At first, this report had a curious trajectory! The great quantity of documentation on Portuguese India circulating in Portugal in the early 1500s, the policy of secret followed by D. Manuel I or/and the weakness of the publishing infrastructure are some of reasons that, according to scholars, can account for the fact that this report remained unpublished in this country until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, this narrative enjoyed wide circulation in manuscript form during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was known to the chroniclers of Portuguese Asia, such as Gaspar Correia, who went to India c. 1512 and who might have met Barbosa, Lopes de Castanheda, and João de Barros, and the Humanist Damião de Góis<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, it was translated into Castilian, Italian and German still in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first Spanish version, by the Genovese Mario Castilion, dates from 1524, and was used by Hieronymus Seitz in his translation into German in 1530.

Portuguese overseas enterprise was indeed followed throughout Europe from the beginning. The encounter with such varied realities led to the need to report and divulge the contacts in Europe, taking advantage of the coeval impulse of the printing press<sup>8</sup>. It is surely no coincidence that the first volume of *Navigazzioni e Viaggi* (1550-1559) by Giovanni Battista Ramusio, a prestigious officer of the Republic of Venice, was formed of reports written by Portuguese authors, including the report by Barbosa, and by foreign-

<sup>5</sup> The Gujarat is described by the chapters 33 and 34, volume I: 171-233. The description of India is mostly included in the second volume of the edition I use. The description of the Deccan (chapter 35) can be found in page 1 to page 54. The report on the Kingdom of Vijayanagar (chapter 3) occupies the pages 55 to 91. Chapter 4 and chapter 47 that deal with Orissa are respectively included in pages 91 to 92 and from page 313 to 316. The chapter 38, page 83 to page 108, is about the Kingdom of Delhi. The extensive narration of Malabar stretches chapter 39 to chapter 45, from page 108 to page 312. The chapter 46 is dedicated to the Coromandel Coast (301-312). Chapter 48 concerns the Kingdom of Bengal (316-326). The annex with the products traded in the Orient, which we still do not know whether it was included in the original version, is divided into thirteen small chapters: 473-503.

<sup>6</sup> LACH, 1993, volume I: 151-154.

<sup>7</sup> Castanheda has probably based on Barbosa's work in his description of the society and of the customs of both Gujarat and Vijayanagara. In his description of the Malabar, Góis referred his readers to the book written by Barbosa in Portuguese language, on the customs of all peoples from the Cape of Good Hope to China, in which he describes the customs, ceremonies and sects of all inhabitants of Malabar. (GÓIS, 2001, volume II: 109; see also CORREIA, 1975, volume I: 335, 357; volume II: 122, 367; CASTANHEDA, 1979, volume 2: 244; and RUBIÉS, 2002: 220).

<sup>8</sup> AVELAR, 2003: 13-14.

ers at the service of the Portuguese interests. The better knowledge of the Portuguese empire in formation was certainly a central issue for the government of *La Serenissa*, whose political and economic decay from the 16<sup>th</sup> century was closely related to the new maritime and commercial routes opened by Portuguese expansion<sup>9</sup>.

## BARBOSA – AN OFFICER OF THE PORTUGUESE CROWN

This report shows that its author had a remarkable power of observation, and was in possession of great opportunities for inquiry into the manners and habits of the different countries described, drawing from his own experience and from the testimony of other people. Thus, his own experience (what he saw, what he heard and perhaps the authors he read), in addition to the information he gathered through the interviewing of local people, functioned for him as criteria of truth.

At once, the reader notices the rigorous precision that the author put in the writing of this text and that can be considered characteristic of a scribe. Such accuracy can also be found in contemporary Portuguese official documentation, such as financial accounts, inventories, letter-reports<sup>10</sup>. This report moreover shares some concerns with other official documentation written by Portuguese officers and agents, such as the priority given to the detailed description of commercial and military skills of local people.

From an historical point of view, Barbosa and the first Portuguese in India were testimony to important events. Southern India witnessed the decline of the Kingdom of Deccan, an area corresponding to the present states of Karnataka, Maharastra and part of Andhra Pradesh which split around 1500 into the five kingdoms of Ahmadagar, Bijapur, Golconda, Berar and Bidar<sup>11</sup>. Further North, the Delhi Sultanate experienced a last period of recovery under Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) expanding into the states of Punjab and Bengal. Babur founded the Moghul Empire in Agra in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>.

In his report, Barbosa mentioned a few Indian leaders by name, and he also reported on local political life, that is to say, on important events, administration (a whole chapter is dedicated to the administration of justice in Calicut)<sup>13</sup>, and political life. For instance, we learn of the election of Mordafaa as sultan of Gujarat and that the Sultan of Deccan, called Mahamude, had lived in Bidar, the capital of Deccan, since 1479, and delegated all his powers in his governor<sup>14</sup>. Another figure Barbosa mentioned was Malik Ayaz, who brings bad memories to the Portuguese. In his function as governor of the port of Diu, Malik Ayaz opposed Portuguese plans to dominate local trade until his death in 1522.

<sup>9</sup> We used the last Italian edition of Ramusio's *Navigazzioni e Viaggi* dated 2010-2011. On the relation between Portugal, the Portuguese and Venice during the 16th century, see, in particular, BARNES, 2007 and PICCHIO, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> BOUCHON, 1981: 87.

<sup>11</sup> SUBRAHMANYAN, 1994, vol. I: 340.

<sup>12</sup> BARRETO, 2000: 22.

<sup>13</sup> The chapter dedicated to justice is entitled «Do Regimento da Justiça de Calecute» (*Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 143-157).

<sup>14</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 199.

This would explain Barbosa's observation that Malik Ayaz was very much afraid of the power of the Portuguese king<sup>15</sup>. Barbosa and Pires were allegedly the first Europeans to record the still extant tradition of the legendary conversion to Islam of Cheraman Perumal, the last sovereign of the Cera Dynasty (Kerala), which would explain the privileged relationship of the local Muslim group of the Mappilas with royal power<sup>16</sup>.

This text was not intended to constitute a military report at first. Nevertheless, it includes information that may be of interest for military use, such as on the military skills of certain groups. Barbosa considered the Gujarat Rajputs or Resbutes (probably Jains) – that were also described by Barros and Castanheda – to be very good archers and knights, and also good at handling other sorts of weapons<sup>17</sup>. Barbosa was especially thorough in the presentation of Deccan combat techniques and strategy<sup>18</sup>. We argue that the reason for this was the fact that the headquarters of Portuguese endeavour had been seized by the Deccan rulers. From a broader viewpoint, the care he gave to the description of disputes among local rulers and armies must be seen within Portuguese colonial strategy. *I. e.*, let us remember the fact that the Portuguese tried as much as they could to profit from local rivalries, for instance through a politic of alliances, in their affirmation as an empire.

Upon the closer contact established between Europe and India made possible by Vasco da Gama's arrival, the Europeans were confronted with the fact that the Indian civilization was perfectly capable of rivalling them in many aspects. One aspect was certainly of demographic nature. The whole population of India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is estimated at around 140 million, whereas the Portuguese population was 1 million<sup>19</sup>. 16<sup>th</sup> century Portugal can be defined as a poor agrarian country with a very underdeveloped urban tessiture. By contrast, India boasted countless highly developed urban agglomerations with a cosmopolitan character, perhaps even superior to the character of such cities as Amsterdam, Paris or London. The Hindustan Coast was a cosmopolitan area *par excellence* – and was used to a long contact with Turks, Malays, Chinese, Africans or – in Barbosa's expression – inhabited by *toda a sorte de gente* (all sorts of people)<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, Barbosa was astonished by, and praised the quality of the urban and architectural features of the Indian places he visited. This was, for example, the case of the *formosa cidade de Cambaia* (beautiful city of Cambay)

*with its many houses and buildings in stone and mortar. The houses are very high, and have many windows; they are roofed with tiles in our manner, it has very well paved streets, and many places*<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> According to local legend heard by both Pires and Barbosa, some six hundred years before a mighty ruler called Cheruman (also known as Chirimay) Perumal had been converted to Islam by Arab traders, and then divided his kingdom among three Kerala monarchs and numerous lesser feudatories before departing for Arabia where he eventually died (*Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 102-106; *Suma Oriental*, 1996, volume III: 186).

<sup>17</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 177-178; BARROS, 1887, volume II: 57; CASTANHEDA, 1970, volume III: 130.

<sup>18</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 19-23.

<sup>19</sup> BIRABEN, 2005: 14; SERRÃO, 1996: 64.

<sup>20</sup> LOUREIRO, 1991: 156.

<sup>21</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 207 (our translation).

As the *Suma* by Tomé Pires, the *Livro* by Duarte Barbosa presents itself as a geographical treatise or distribution following the trade routes along the Indian Ocean<sup>22</sup>. Both the two reports are informative about the local complex mercantile society and its international character, stretching from Africa to China and Eastern Asia (Malacca). The reader is given detailed data about networks, products and the agents involved in trade, including Afro-Asian intercontinental trade. Focusing our attention on the *Livro*, the author stressed precisely those aspects that contributed to the economic relevance of the distinct cities and towns, and which are: the best cities in terms of trade, their location as sea ports (for instance, the significance of Diu was related to its strategic position on the Peninsula of Gujarat, in the North Indian coast of India, that permitted the control of navigation and trade with the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf), their ranking as trade centres *de muito bom ou grande trato* (of very good and large trade), the quality of certain natural and manufactured items, in addition to the good pricing of certain products.

The importance of the sea for both the locals and the newly arrived is indeed clear in Barbosa's text: the majority of the cities and towns described by this author were important maritime trade centres located either on the Indian Ocean or by the Riverside and the foundation of the Portuguese empire was mostly based on seaport cities and their trade<sup>23</sup>. Barbosa gave information on sorts of ships, for instance the *zambucos*, small crafts by norm used for coast traffic or to connect the shores with larger boats, which seem to have been very popular at the time both on the African and Asian coasts. He gave also practical hints to navigators. For instance, he observed that the navigation in the Gulf of Cambay was very dangerous for ships with keel because the tides were extremely sudden. Thus, he advised foreign crews to employ local pilots in order to avoid shipwrecks and hitting rocks<sup>24</sup>.

The city of Cambay holds a special significance in Barbosa's text for another reason. It exemplifies a typical oriental city whose development was closely related to manufacture. Actually, he compared the quality of local craftsmen to the Flemish artists and artisans, and exemplified the most reputed craftsmen active in Cambay: turners, lapidaries, goldsmiths<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to economics, religion was a primary Portuguese concern from the start. When describing people, the first important distinction made by Barbosa is of a religious nature: Muslims (Moors), Hindus (also called Gentiles), Saint Thomas Christians and Jews. This text also refers to the vast geographical spread of Islamic religion from Africa to Asia.

This report comments on some central features of the rituals of the local rulers. This information was very useful, or should we say essential for the Portuguese rulers. The success of their enterprise was also dependent on their capacity to establish a fruitful relationship with the local people, and this, in turn, would profit from the correct under-

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<sup>22</sup> RUBIÉS, 2002: 2.

<sup>23</sup> THOMAZ, 1998: 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 222.

<sup>25</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 208-212.

standing of the local complex and different ritual code<sup>26</sup>. Illustrating my point, Barbosa claimed that the Brahmans and the Banyans of Gujarat followed a monogamous marriage custom similar to the European marriage custom. Indeed, we argue, the existence (whether real or imaginary) of similitudes not only as referred to religious habits, but also in terms of social reports should favour the contact with the other.

The *Livro* is of relevance for the study of ethno-linguistics. Some passages indicate different designations for the same place. For instance, Diu was called respectively Divixa by the Malabar people and Diu by the local Moors, and Daquem (or Decão, in Portuguese) was called Dacaním by the Indian peopless<sup>27</sup>. Barbosa further informed about the languages in use in different areas. Whereas the inhabitants of the Deccan spoke Arabian, Persian and the local language Deccani, each of the five Narsinga (Vijayanagar) provinces had its own language<sup>28</sup>.

Here, we would argue that this aspect must be further related to Barbosa's function as an agent of the King of Portugal. The correct mapping of the languages followed by the formation of a set of *línguas* (translators) assumed vital importance for the Portuguese, as their success was largely dependent on their capacity to communicate with local people both in an official and in an unofficial manner (Portuguese spies speaking fluently local languages could be found at local courts)<sup>29</sup>. Or, to put it differently, the more the Portuguese succeeded in mastering foreign languages, the more they were able to participate actively in local life.

## THE DEPICTION OF INDIAN SOCIETAL ENTITIES (RICHNESS AND LIMITS)

Barbosa showed a genuine interest in the countries, peoples and their customs. He was intrigued by their way of life and religious practices. One main intention of the author of this book was to reconstruct the forms of sociability, meaning modes of domination or coexistence and the multi-faceted transcultural relationships offered by the large Asian cities he visited or heard of.

Barbosa's competence in building a truthful narrative of Indian society can be seen from different angles. He demonstrated to possess a solid knowledge of the history of some people he dealt with. For instance, his report reads that the Kingdom of Cambay was inhabited by an important community of Muslims that were in their majority foreigners coming from many distinct countries – Turks, Mamlukes, Arabs, Persians, Turkmen – and from the great kingdom of Delhi, and others were native. The Rajputs, who formed a military caste in Gujarat, had been former knights, defenders of the kingdom and governors of the country<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> LOPES, 1998: 168.

<sup>27</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 195; volume II: 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 31, 34.

<sup>29</sup> MATHEW, 1986: 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume I: 178.

This text reflects the fact that its author deeply plunged into the social and cultural complex of India, as expressed by his familiarity in using local perspectives or concepts. He illustrated power relations, as well the strict hierarchical organization of the local society based on the so-called system of castes, according to which the society develops around the distinct groups occupied with specific professional activities<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, this report vests a special importance as it comprises detailed information about the rites and the costumes followed by the different Indian castes, including castes which have disappeared or changed, such as the traditional warrior's caste of the Nayars in Kerala.

The yogis, a sort of hermits, caused the admiration of westerners. Indeed, Barbosa tells us that he had asked them often about the reasons for their peculiar appearance<sup>32</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the *sati* or suttee (the burning of female widows), that was part of Hindu funerary ritual, found its way into every report on India written by foreigners. And the more so in such early reports as the one under analysis here<sup>33</sup>. Barbosa, who was by norm rather impartial, and at times positive, in his observations on local customs, could not resist defining as abominable habits such gruesome ceremonies as the *sati*, or the Gujarat customs of hook-swinging and deflowering with stone idols<sup>34</sup>.

The same can be said about the interdiction still followed by Hindus to eat cow flesh<sup>35</sup>. Other customs were also experienced with astonishment by Barbosa. One of them was the hygienic complex procedures related to the concept of the purification of the soul, through the cleaning of the body, or ritual bath, which is an essential aspect of Hinduism (he compiled a series of products, sandalwood, rosewater, aloes – wood, camphor and musk with which the inhabitants of Vijayanagar used to oil themselves after their daily bath). Another was the habit to be transported in palanquins, which was also observed in the same region but was generalized in India and was soon appropriated by the Portuguese<sup>36</sup>.

This report is extremely precise as to one aspect essential to life: food. The reader is given a very good idea of the main products of local diets, like rice. For instance, in the town of Majandur in Malabar

*They collect four sorts of rice: the first is giraçal, and chamançal, camagal, and pacharil: this giraçal is the best one; each one has its price of great advantage one from the other*<sup>37</sup>.

Reference is also made to local products that may be used as substitutes for European products, as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> As to the first aspect, the Zamorin made himself the greatest and most powerful of all in Malabar (*Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 107).

<sup>32</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 96-101.

<sup>33</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 72-76.

<sup>34</sup> He observed, at the death of the kings of Malabar, up to four or five hundred women of the royal harem committed suttee (*Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 77-78).

<sup>35</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 33.

<sup>36</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 65-66.

<sup>37</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 45 (our translation).

*The Ormuz trades take [to Batecala in Deccan] sugar extracted from palm tree, coconut oil, palm wine [...]*<sup>38</sup>.

But his report also shows a number of limitations. Barbosa was a man of his time, who suffered from spread religious prejudice expressed by a feeling of superiority towards different religious systems. As all Portuguese and European authors of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, he also referred to the Islam as the Mafamede sect<sup>39</sup>. The similitudes he found between the Christian Holy Trinity and the Hindu Trimurti makes us infer that he subjectively explained the encounter with the Hindu cosmogony by using his own Christian reference system, and thereby clearly reveals his incapacity to perceive civilizational difference. In this he was also not different from other European writers of Early Modern overseas expansion. He coined Hindu beliefs, divinities and ritual with such negative terms as idolatry, idolatrous ritual, superstition, augur. Moreover, he suffered from the widely spread prejudice of superiority of Catholic people concerning other Christians, as illustrated, for example, when he praised the fact that a community of Saint Thomas Christians near Cannanor had returned to «our true faith in Christ»<sup>40</sup>. In his view, the Thomas Christians in the Kingdom of Calicut would lack convenient teaching and baptism. They conserved only their Christian names from the original Christian faith<sup>41</sup>.

Barbosa, as Pires and several European contemporary writers about India, described certain physical traits that, in their view, characterized certain local people with such subjective values as good-looking, clean, simple in their needs, pleasure-loving, playful but ultimately modest. His excerpt defining the Vijaynagar people as «men of good height and with our [European] features and appearance» is but one example illustrating the fact that he rated better the local people that, from his viewpoint, had more physical similitudes with Europeans<sup>42</sup>.

This text is indeed pervaded by the European bias of using its own system of reference as a starting point to illustrate the other's appearance to his European mates. This practice contributes to a discourse that promotes a civilizational identification that is not necessarily truthful between the local population and the European population as «having almost our physiognomies» or as «they were almost like Europeans».

In relation to the subject above, a prejudice that can be traced in this report is the association of the skin complexion with a particular level of civility: more precisely the concept of whiteness of skin as a sign of racial superiority. The references in Barbosa to people of white skin, almost white, quite white, spleen, have a clear sense of appraisal, as he completes his descriptions of such persons with positive adjectives, such as «beautiful»; «discrete»; «well-dressed»; «gentile»; «well-built»; «delicate». And in this he was

<sup>38</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 40 (our translation).

<sup>39</sup> GODINHO, 2000: 121.

<sup>40</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 239.

<sup>41</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 265.

<sup>42</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 60.

absolutely in tune with a diffused conception that can be illustrated by the celebrated policy to promote mixed marriages or intermarriage of the Portuguese with native women that should preferably be *alvas e de bom parecer* (white and good looking) advocated by Albuquerque and accepted by the Portuguese king<sup>43</sup>.

A second prejudice refers to nakedness (Barbosa and his mates refer to the sexual parts as *vergonhas* or shames) as a sign of civilizational retrocession. He moreover proved to be absolutely incapable or uninterested in transmitting the other's feelings both as concerned the local people and the recently arrived Portuguese. His analysis or perception of the other often appears rather superficial, as it was mostly directed by the senses. It concentrated on such external aspects as the description of ritual, dresses, jewels, hairstyle or food habits, when dealing with the social statute, certain hierarchy or the affiliation to a group<sup>44</sup>.

## THE MALABAR

Barbosa's narrative on Malabar constitutes an interesting case-study in the sense that his deep knowledge of this region permitted him to illustrate a multiplicity of aspects of otherness from a European point of view.

In contrast to most of the kingdoms and regions mentioned, that were governed by Muslim rulers, the kingdoms of Malabar were mainly governed by gentiles, reads, Hindus. Following, as elsewhere, the traditional pattern, he started with a reference to the highest caste, the caste of the Brahmans or religious leaders, went on to talk of the Nayars, defined as *fidalgos* by Barbosa, who were mainly employed in military jobs, then the Brabares, who were mostly traders, followed by the lower groups, mostly involved with menial work, such as the Calettis, who formed a weavers' caste, or the Mainatos, whose occupation was «to wash the dresses of Brahmin, kings and Nayars» and eventually foreign groups as the foreign Moors<sup>45</sup>.

The attention of the foreign newly arrived travellers was drawn by the rich rituals put into the celebration of death, the more when it concerned the rulers. We read in this narrative that, after the bodies of Malabar kings were incinerated, all their vassals should shave the whole body except the eyelashes and eyebrows. For thirteen days, they should abstain from chewing betel and eating flesh and fish, at the risk of being sentenced to death. A lavish ceremony of enthronement of the new ruler would take place precisely one year after the death of the ruler. Barbosa enumerated the totality of steps of this ceremonial such as the clear order of the procession:

*All rulers took his Nayars with them, with all their musical instruments: small and big drums and trumpets similar to anafis (long trumpets which were popular among the Moors),*

<sup>43</sup> XAVIER, 2008: 716-717.

<sup>44</sup> LOUREIRO, 1991: 165.

<sup>45</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 229.

*flutes and tambourines, with which they produce a great harmony; and the Nayars in the front, all in order, in the manner of our processions; the archers in front were both preceded and followed by lancers, who were followed by soldiers carrying shields and very good swords*<sup>46</sup>.

The royal succession in the several Malabar kingdoms would be assured through the king's brother or through the first son born to the king's eldest sister. As Tomé Pires, Duarte Barbosa did not fail to remark such an alien custom in European eyes as the custom of matriarchal succession. This custom that had disappeared from other Indian regions had persisted in Malabar due to the isolation of this region<sup>47</sup>.

Barbosa noticed another custom in Malabar that was fully strange for contemporary Europeans: the *muta* or temporary marriage. What is important about the *muta* is that its practice among Muslim merchants and low caste native women propitiated a slow but peaceful process of islamization of the local society. In the early 16th century, the descendants of those marriages, the Mappilas, also called local Moors by Portuguese sources, were important trade agents spread in a variety of places. Quoting Barbosa:

*There are such a quantity of them [The Mappila] and so closely related to the land that I have the impression that they form a fifth part of the population. These Moors called Mappila are present in all sea ports, cities and provinces. They are very rich and wealthy. The whole sea trade and navigation lies in their hands*<sup>48</sup>.



**Illustration 3** – St. Thomas Christian couple, in *Codex Casanatense*, end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Biblioteca Casanatense nr. 1889, Rome, Italy, Nasran Net (<http://www.nasrani.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/sychr.GIF>)

<sup>46</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 125 (our translation).

<sup>47</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 115-116; *Suma Oriental*, 1996: 177.

<sup>48</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 229 (our translation).

The Malabar was especially important for a European Christian visitor, as this region constituted the only place in India inhabited by colonies of Christians, called Saint Thomas Christians as they traced their conversion to the Apostle Thomas. Again, Barbosa as his Catholic countrymen showed a biased position as concerned that community. He seemed to have absorbed without questioning, and through his text he contributed to the diffusion of local often rather legendary aspects concerning this community. He mentioned several rather legendary stories, such as the miracle of the transformation of sand into rice<sup>49</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

The *Livro de Duarte Barbosa* is certainly a fundamental report on the creation of otherness, more precisely, of the perception of Indian culture and society among Europeans that developed after the Portuguese arrival on the shores. With the *Suma Oriental*, this text constitutes one of the first two most comprehensive accounts of India, in particular of Malabar, written by Portuguese authors at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As an agent of his Majesty the King of Portugal, Barbosa puts a strong focus on aspects that are of special relevance for the *Estado Português da Índia*: trade, and political and religious matters. Such a detailed set of information as this on the local society and their administrative, political, military and economic systems certainly constituted a fundamental source of information for the Portuguese in their intention to profit as much as possible from the richness available. However, this book goes well beyond this function. Barbosa shows throughout the text a curiosity that is more characteristic of an anthropologist or a sociologist as he often seemed especially interested in understanding and explaining or interpreting the customs and habits and the external appearance of the peoples. At times, he expressed a feeling of true admiration for the *other* and considered some aspects of the other's society even superior to his own (see, for instance, the cosmopolitan features of Indian towns and cities).

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<sup>49</sup> *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*, 1996, volume II: 260-261.

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