

Gujarati Navigation (India, 16th Cent) to the East at Diu according to Portuguese and Urdu Historiography

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My participation to the previous CAAS Symposium was titled *Portuguese and Urdu Historiography of Gujarati navigation (India, 16 Cent) conflicting views ?* (Désoulières, 2015, pp. 33-38) I intend to proceed further and enlarge the scope of this study both from a technical and historical point of view. My previous work was mainly based on a formal comparison of Correia's *Chronicles* (in Portuguese) and Maulana Nadvi's works in Urdu, mainly his *Cultural History of Gujarat*.

A key factor of the prosperity and decline of the Muslim medieval kingdom of Gujarat is undoubtedly his powerful *naval forces*, allied to important geographical positions and of course talented navigators and *admirals* [*amīr ul bahar*] i. e. *prince of the sea* ; it was a formidable threat to the Portuguese maritime expansion, but also in the beginning of 16th century, due to its wealth, Gujarat had powerful armies and allies on land and would also threaten the Kingdom of Delhi, at that time disputed between Afghan and Mughal pretenders.

For this abridged paper I would like to focus and summarise on two points :

1. **Gujarati navigation to the East terminology and system** (navy, organisation, administration, ships, the institution of *Shah bandar*, (*Governor of the port*) a summary.

2. **The port of Diu in 16th Cent**, a key position for the trade to Malacca with the two sieges of Diu 1538 and 1546.

That is done comparing Indian (Urdu) sources (Maulana Nadvi and others, namely Sayyad Sabah Ud Din and his Urdu description of *Indo Muslim Institutions and Governments*) and Portuguese chroniclers : Correia and others, namely Castanheda and his *History of the Conquest of India*, both written in the 16th Cent.

Point n°1 is both philological and technical : Indo Persian and Indo Portuguese naval terminology, titles, names etc., and technically : what do we know of 16th Cent Gujarati naval resources and administration according to Urdu language research ? Keeping in view that our Urdu historiographers compile Persian and Indian sources for a unique local Indian point of view and are seldom quoted. How do they corroborate Portuguese (partial) descriptions of

Gujarati naval forces ? Of course 16th Cent Portuguese terminology relating to navigation and the Kingdom of Gujarat has to be re examined closely in the light of related Urdu historiography and terminology.

Point n°2 needs Urdu readings of the history of the port of Diu : it would benefit from technical annotations from Point n°1, and allow a more critical reading of the history of the difficult conquest and domination of Diu by the Portuguese, from the Diu Fort concession to the Portuguese by King Bahadur (1533), the death of the King (1536), the first siege of Diu in 1538, and the second siege in 1546 (by the Indians and the Turks). That would also allow a better understanding of three important historical characters of those days : The Gujarati King : Bahadur Shah, the *Shah Bandar* Rumi Khan and the foreign agent Khwaja Sofar.

Further our comparative and technical work would also allow us to understand the Indian/ Portuguese settlement of Diu through 16th Cent. illustration and description, and even a better reading of a 17th Cent. manuscript description of Diu. And we might be able to illustrate Urdu recensions with some Portuguese illustrations.

16th Century Portuguese Chroniclers and India : birth of a nationalism versus Renaissance Humanism (a brief note)

Within the commercial and ferocious Portuguese expansion in Asia, India was first a commercial sector (some sea shores) to be conquered and then, after the conquest of Goa, by Albuquerque in 1510 over the Adil Shah of Bijapur (South West India) the so called Portuguese India became a series of staging and trading posts on the commercial route between the Aden Strait and Malacca's rich harbour and even further.

Gradually the chroniclers abandoned the openness of the Renaissance men : *Nil humanum alienum est, nothing human is foreign* was their motto (inspired by Latin writer Terence), it faded; a spirit of openness and curiosity that would have characterised a traveler like Duarte Barbosa who was writing in Cananore (South India) between 1510-1516. His manuscript book *Livro em que se da relação do que viu e ouviu no Oriente D. Barbosa (a Book in which is related what D. Barbosa saw and heard in the Orient)* was sometimes printed in a clandestine and partial way in Italy around 1563, but never really edited before late 20th Cent. (Barbosa, Neves Aguas, Ed.1992). His chapter about Gujarat a description of « the Great Kingdom of Cambay » is remarkably accurate as far as the economic state of the kingdom and the harmony that would reign between Arabs, Turks Persian and Indians (Hindus for him). His was not a purely economic view but he would care for understanding the different ways of life that he was witnessing. His was a humanist's geography as well as a commercial (and secret treaty).

Later on official Chroniclers like João de Barros, who started writing (in Portugal as an official archivist) from 1545, with the help of former navy officers and their accounts, travelers,

missionaries and translators — slaves for that matter — would adopt a totally different attitude even if they would still care to establish a rigorous *geography* of the so called *Discoveries* and naturally the fear of the displeasure of the King or of the Church (the Inquisition) was always there. The official Royal Chronicler was there to imitate the Histories of the Roman Empire e.g. following Tacitus, Barros would write *Decades of Portuguese Asia*. Barros would narrate the glorious conquest and foundation of the *Lusitanian* (Portuguese) Empire that was to rival with the Spanish *Empire*, that too with a revival of the spirit of the « reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula » a sort of continuation and revival of the spirit of the medieval crusades against the so called *Moors*, an ethnic term that was to apply also to Indian Muslims.

Map 1: Description of the Kingdom of Gujarat. Source : João de Barros, *Décadas Da Asia* (Lisbon, ed. 1777, reprint Livraria Sam Carlos, Lisbon, 1973), Década Quarta, parte primeira p. 535

Contrary to that, another chronicler Gaspar Correia (1596-1563) who was writing in India -he started as a young page to the Governor and died there, and witnessed the war with Gujarat and particularly the brutal assault on the key port of Diu (1535), though he did write sometimes on request of the Court, redacted in a much more realistic way, and most of the time on the field and with first hand testimony; he knew Persian and perhaps Gujri (a Gujarati language, akin to Urdu and Hindi). His writings about India (*Lendas da India, Readings from India*) were censored and not really published before 19th Cent. His *Livro III, Book three*, mostly devoted to the Gujarati affairs and war is more reliable, although neither devoid of religious and racial prejudice.

But because he was mostly on the field, had first hand testimony, including accesses to the governors papers, his writings, though in manuscript for at least three centuries, are well worth being compared with the Indian testimonies of those days (reported by Urdu historiography).

A note on Maulana Nadvi (cf our previous study) :

Written in the beginning of 20th Cent. but published much later (posthumous, Nadvi, 1958), Maulana Nadvi's writings are indeed based on Sanskrit sources, Arab, Persian, chronicles, and, last but not least, Gujarati traditional sources. At a time when British historians, before modern archeology, would confine themselves to Persian and Arab chroniclers, they are still relevant. Also his technical and lexicological efforts in, say, naming precisely the different kinds of ships, for war and trade purposes, are praiseworthy. His local Gujarati (provincial) point of view is also of some importance considering that in those days the historical official point of view was to describe the *rise and fall* of Mughal Empire ; while the Portuguese chroniclers were focussing on their military conquests and naval victories, in the name of Christian expansion against receding (?) Muslim powers relating the building of a vast maritime *Empire*,

conveniently forgetting that without the cooperation of Gujarati merchants in ports like Diu, and of the coastal subsisting Gujarati ships that would help loading and unloading high sea Portuguese vessels (not to mention the local ship builders) and without the enslaving of so many Indian mariners (without converting them) their expansion towards Malacca and Japan would have never taken place.

Nadvi's *Cultural History of Gujarat* is then still very much worth comparing with 16th cent Portuguese writings because of their opposed point of view and also because they complete each other, especially when we look at Portuguese manuscripts included in the *Chronicles*, and *Lendas* by Correia, besides it would bring new annotations of the Portuguese histories, giving genuine Indo Persian orthography of proper names and of indigenous names for geographical locations. But, more important, it would help in confronting Indian local views of the naval conflict with Portuguese classical and colonial interpretations.

Illustration : Nadvi's *Tamaddanī Tārīkh*, 1958, p.1

Quoting Maulana Nadvi's *Cultural History of Gujarat* or *Tamaddanī Tārīkh* (p.17 onwards), my English Translation and summary (2015)

The (Gujarati) Sailing Fleet

The South West coast of Hindustan is situated on the shores of the Arabian Sea and Gujarat is in the middle part of it. That is why every King of Gujarat had to maintain a sailing fleet for the safety of the country as well as external commercial purpose. In the very beginning Ahmad Shah the First [founder of the dynasty and converted to Islam] ordered [ocean] sailing fleet to be made and used it in the war of the Maha'i river region. The port of Cambay [Khambāyat] was its main mooring post. Mahmud the First made it even stronger and, in order to beat the Malabar Pirates who were ransacking the seas he ordered a fleet out of the Port of Ghugh that came back victorious.

In those days ships were built in *Khambāyat* [Cambay] and armed with all kind of war material, when a fleet departed to attack the port of Dabhul then it comprised three hundred warships. It is at the time of the reign of that king that [heavy] guns were mounted on warships and they inflicted a severe defeat to the Portuguese fleet during a naval battle (p.18). Malik Ayaz Sultani was the admiral of that fleet. In the sixteenth century AD, [the Gujarati King] Sultan Bahadur gave more priority to his war fleet. And he had all kinds of ships built in Khambayat : Turki as well as Portuguese, and he made the island of Diu the main center of his fleet. The admiral of that fleet, Malik Tufan [The Master of Storm] was residing there. And he was such a formidable and powerful enemy at sea that during the whole time of his tenure, the Portuguese would not dare to

sail towards Gujarat. Had not the Portuguese committed treason with Sultan Bahadur, he would have chased them out of the Indian seas and Hindustan would never have to witness that [conquest].

Different kinds of ships would have different kind of names. Among the warships they would have a *Birisht* [*The Cutter*] or a *Ghurāb* [*The Crow*] (p.18). A passenger ship would be called a *Safariyā* [*a Travelling ship*] and would be often mentioned as *sambūq* [*a conch*]. In all there were three kinds of vessels : warships, commerce and passenger ships. Among those they would have specific names, for example for the category of passenger ships one would have a vessel named *Madīnā* [the Holy City of *Medina*] or *Zohrā* [*the Shining, feminine name*] but also *Changezī* [*from Genghis Khan*]. Refer to Supplement : *The High seas Fleet of Gujarat ...*

Indeed it would be worth of quoting here the following chapters by (Nadvi, 1958 p.184 sqq) *The High seas Fleet of Gujarat, The geographical position of Gujarat, The old harbours of Gujarat, Ports of the Islamic Era, Present ports of Gujarat ...The navigation of the Gujarati people* (ibid. p.189-190)

Administration of the Port Cities : 186-188 (summary of concerned chapter, Nadvi,1958)

The author concedes that it is not an easy task to inquire about that institution. He quotes the epoch of the Hindu Solanki dynasty of Gujarat and says that the navy and commercial fleet were officially established in those days (12th Cent. AD). He remarks that taxing the commercial vessels sailing to the Gujarati ports was an ancient and well established practice, and logically the post of Port Captain or Governor of the Port [*shah bandar*] came into being during what he calls Islamic Era i. e. during the Gujarati dynasty unto the Mughal and Portuguese dominations. Though on the beginning the *shah bandar* would have both functions : *admiral* [*amīr ul bahar*] as well city governor and tax collector. Which explains how some Gujarati *admirals* also became princes and port administrators and city governors. And then after 1520, functions would differentiate. Through Portuguese example (following the Indians), European countries followed suit and even in 16th Cent France the prestigious title of « Admiral » would also be valued on the seas as well on the land.

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Notes

- 1 A manuscript for the History of Gujarat chapter of volume III is still being examined and I would also refer to my presentation for the 2013 Paris Inalco Conference *Indians and the Sea*, not published.



Barros, T.II, Pl. pag. 535

Map 1. Description of the Kingdom of Gujarat. Source: Joã de Barros, *Da Asia* (Lisbon edn, 1777; reprint: Livraria Sam Carlos, Lisbon, 1973), *Década quarta, parte primera*, P. 535.

