

**JAN HUYGEN VAN LINSCHOTEN'S  
*ITINERARIO*: A DECAYING COMMERCIAL  
PORTRAIT OF PORTUGUESE ASIA?\***

Nuno Vila-Santa

Universidade de Lisboa, Centro Interuniversitário de História e Filosofia  
das Ciências e Tecnologia, Faculdade de Ciências

ORCID: 0000-0002-5637-0364

**Abstract**

Jan Huygen van Linschoten's 1596 *Itinerario* was a relevant work that impacted the Dutch, English and French maritime expansions, directly influencing the foundation of the English and Dutch India Companies (EIC and VOC). It is also usually assumed that the *Itinerario* drew a negative vision of Portuguese Asia. The main aim of this article is to discuss if there are reasons to assume this assertion as a valid argument on the commercial topic. I start by discussing how, during his Iberian career, Van Linschoten had access to all the commercial knowledge that he later published in the

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*Itinerario*. I reconstruct his networks of informants, the conditions in which he gathered the commercial intelligence in Asia, as well as the *Itinerario*'s reshaping for publication, after Van Linschoten's return to the Netherlands. Is it really reasonable to assume that the *Itinerario* frames Portuguese trade in Asia in decay at the end of the sixteenth century? Was there any difference in approach between Van Linschoten's *opus* and Portuguese contemporary literature on commerce? These are some of the questions I attempt to answer.

**Keywords:** Dutch Republic; trade; informants; Portuguese Asia; merchants; decay.

## Introduction

In 1596, Jan Huygen van Linschoten (1563–1611) published the first Dutch edition of the *Itinerario*. His book quickly became a best-seller within the Dutch Republic, and, following a series of swift translations, in the rest of Europe. It is estimated that roughly ten to fifteen thousand copies of the *Itinerario* circulated in the seventeenth century (DELMAS, 2021, p. 13). The *Itinerario*'s publication played a major part in triggering the foundation of the East India Companies of the English (the EIC, established in 1600) and the Dutch (the VOC, 1602), thanks to the voluminous amount of commercial information included. This commercial and scientific data, lacking in the aforementioned countries in years prior, allowed the Dutch and the English to carefully plan their systematic entry into the Asian maritime market (PARR, 1964, p. XV, XXV, XXVII, XXXIV and XLVI). Referring to the Dutch case, Ernst van den Boogaart even considers Van Linschoten's *Itinerario* as the book that set off the first Dutch ships bound for Asia (BOOGAART, 1999, p. 1). Taking another perspective, Benjamin Schmidt has highlighted the ways that the *Itinerario* quickly became a sort of Dutch Encyclopaedia on the Portuguese Empire, due to the

several «knowledges» it contained (SCHMIDT, 2001, p. 154 and 163). Van Linschoten's merchant-scientific mentality, readable in *Itinerario*, may also be easily linked to Harold Cook's conception of seventeenth-century VOC's merchant-scientists (COOK, 2007).

A brief overview of the *Itinerario*'s contents shows that trade is its predominant topic. Out of 99 chapters, almost 85% of them relate to or describe trade activities. Over half of the *Itinerario*'s chapters are about specific products and their values. For each product, Van Linschoten starts with a short scientific description of the commodity (for instance, pepper or cinnamon), and then explains the product's sites of production and where it is best to buy and sell it in the vast maritime Asian market. The clearest example of the *Itinerario*'s focus on commerce lies in the chapter where Van Linschoten converts Asian commodities' values from Portuguese currency into Dutch coinage (LOUREIRO et al., 1997 [hereafter mentioned as *Itinerario*], p. 170-172). This provided Dutch merchants with an updated report on Asian commodities and their values, empowering them to make decisions on commercial investments. The way this chapter acted as an impetus to Dutch overseas expansion should always be stressed.

In this article, I will investigate the conditions under which Van Linschoten, during his Iberian career, could have gathered and compiled all this commercial knowledge. Was he a sort of spy sent to plunder Iberian commercial knowledge, or is a more subtle explanation required? Another important question I will address relates to Van Linschoten's intentions in publishing the *Itinerario*. Can his commercial description of the Estado da India<sup>1</sup>, be envisaged as a portrait of decaying Portuguese trade in Asia? I will aim to answer these main questions with an analysis of Van Linschoten's career

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use the expression «Estado da India» referring at once to the Portuguese network of ports and fortresses in Asia, and as another Asian power, as defined by THOMAZ (1994, p. 207-208).

in Portuguese Asia. After this, I will deal with some questions concerning the 1596 edition of the *Itinerario*. Finally, I will discuss the image of the merchant and Portuguese trade in the *Itinerario*.

### **An unconfessed and forbidden Dutch merchant in Asia? Van Linschoten and the collecting of commercial knowledge**

Jan Huygen van Linschoten was born into a family of public notaries of Haarlem in 1563. The aftermath of the Dutch rebellion against Philip II (r. 1556–1598)<sup>2</sup> forced his family to resettle in Enkhuizen in 1572 when the Spanish retook Haarlem. It was mainly there that Van Linschoten acquired his practical education, helping his father in his work of lending money to ship-owners and hosting merchants, bankers and seamen in the family's tavern (*Itinerario*, p. 9-11). In 1579, he decided to depart to Spain, following in the footsteps of his brothers. It was not the first time that a young Dutchman had sought a career in the Iberian world; during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, commercial connections between the Iberian Peninsula and the Low Countries were strong<sup>3</sup>. A number of Dutch-Flemish merchant communities were to be found in Lisbon and Seville, and it was common to encounter Dutchmen serving under the Portuguese and the Spanish<sup>4</sup>. Van Linschoten's goal was, as

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<sup>2</sup> For a classical overview on the topic see ISRAEL (1995).

<sup>3</sup> On this topic, see PAVIOT (2006) for the fifteenth century and STOLS (2014) for the sixteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Especially for the case of Dutchmen serving in Asia under the Portuguese, see EVERAERT (2000). In his investigation, Everaert has brought attention to the difficulty of tracing the boundary, in Iberian sources, between strictly Flemish and Dutch cases. Although the Dutch rebellion triggered a process of separation between the Flemish and Dutch, this is not evident in Van Linschoten's case. Therefore, in this article, I choose, following Everaert, to mention just Dutch, even if in some cases we might be speaking also of Flemish. After all, even considering the events of the Dutch rebellion, the connectivity between Southern and Northern Netherlands remained very strong during the whole sixteenth century.

he states, to know and explore the world (*Itinerario*, p. 57 and 59). Ultimately, he wished to travel to Asia, having heard many stories of this exotic realm at his father's tavern in Enkhuizen. Van Linschoten spent only a short period learning with merchants in Seville but probably took the opportunity to learn Spanish. By 1580, he had relocated to Portugal. The move suggests that he had already elected to travel to Asia by way of the Portuguese Empire, rather than the Spanish. In Lisbon, Van Linschoten worked in merchant houses (although we cannot be sure which), and in the meanwhile learned Portuguese (*Itinerario*, p. 12). Using his brother's connections in Philip II's court and the fact his brother had been named as pepper overseer on the 1583 voyage of the India Run, Van Linschoten pressed to be included in the voyage. As he recognises in the *Itinerario*, his insistence eventually paid off (*Itinerario*, p. 73). He was assigned, in 1583, to serve in the household of D. Vicente da Fonseca, the archbishop of Goa ordered by Philip II to sail that year to India. Van Linschoten's previous tutelage under experienced merchants leads to think that he was not employed as Fonseca's secretary but as his accountant. Once he had won Fonseca's trust, however, he may have been promoted to secretary, but this would have already taken place in Goa, very probably in 1584.

As I have argued elsewhere<sup>5</sup>, there are reasons to believe that archbishop Fonseca charged Van Linschoten with the writing of a book on the Estado to be sent to the King. Philip II had ascended to the Portuguese throne very recently (his coronation at the Tomar Courts was in April of 1581) and had much to learn about his new

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<sup>5</sup> In an article titled «A spy or a go-between? Jan Huygen van Linschoten, the *Itinerario* and the rise of Dutch overseas expansion (1583-1611)» forthcoming in my book on Amsterdam University Press provisionally titled *Knowledge exchanges between Portugal and Europe: maritime diplomacy, espionage and nautical science in the Early Modern World (15th-17th centuries)*, I provide a full analysis of Van Linschoten's career in the Iberian and Netherlandish worlds. Some of the arguments I presented in this paper are also adopted here but in an abbreviated version since not all of them are related to the commercial issues central to this article.

dominions in Asia. As a King obsessed with organizing knowledge and information about his Empire, Philip II would have appreciated possessing, in his personal library at El Escorial palace, an updated book on his Asian dominions<sup>6</sup>. Thus, it is quite possible that he asked Fonseca, sometime in 1583 before his departure from Lisbon, to send him such a volume. Already in Goa and realising that there was no fully updated book on the matter, Fonseca might have assigned someone to rectify the situation. Looking at his own entourage, among which figured an ambitious and inquisitive young Dutchman whose talents he soon recognised, Fonseca could have delegated this mission to Van Linschoten. Two events, both happening in 1584 and reported in the *Itinerario*, point to Fonseca's growing trust in Van Linschoten: the episodes in which Van Linschoten was charged with drawing, on the orders of Fonseca, a strange fish that appeared in Goa, and the case of three Englishmen's escape from Goa's prison (*Itinerario*, p. 201). Although Van Linschoten was publicly accused of aiding these Englishmen, Fonseca's patronage kept Van Linschoten from facing any consequences. Previously, having acted as an interpreter and informal confessor for the escapees, Van Linschoten had even attempted to convince Fonseca that they posed no threat and ought to be released (*Itinerario*, p. 279-282)<sup>7</sup>.

After being, presumably, promoted to Fonseca's secretary around 1584 and ordered to write a book on Portuguese Asia, Van Linschoten must have begun consulting the collections at the library of the archbishop's palace. Even if no catalogue of this library survives, the library had existed at least from the arrival of the printing press in Goa in 1560. Since its advent, the press in Goa had operated under

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<sup>6</sup> On Philip II's management of information and knowledge see BRENDENCKE (2016) and PORTUONDO (2010).

<sup>7</sup> The tale of the four Englishmen is well-known through the account written by Ralph Fitch, one of the Englishmen who was imprisoned and fled. Fitch, himself, tells us about Van Linschoten's assistance. For more details see RYLEY (2017).

the direction of Goa's archbishops, who had to authorize all book publications; notably, the Goan press was also connected to Dutch printers in Lisbon (EVERAERT, 2000, p. 96). In such a context, a library of published books (alongside manuscripts) must have existed in the archbishop's palace, as would be expected of any elite clerical household. It is highly probable that Van Linschoten got acquainted with the *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia* by Portuguese physician Garcia de Orta (1501?–1568) at the archbishop's palace (later on, he even acquired his own Portuguese version, which he ended up selling in the Netherlands (POS, 2006, p. 43). Other books, such as the published chronicles of João de Barros (1496–1570) and Fernão Lopes de Castanheda (1500–1559) or the famous *Lusíadas* by Luís de Camões (1524–1580), might also have featured in Van Linschoten's research at the archbishop's library (*Itinerario*, p. 33–35). Still, it is more likely that Van Linschoten consulted these and other books in the viceroy's palace itself, also in Goa. The *Itinerario*'s detailed descriptions prove that he personally knew the palace (*Itinerario*, p. 161 and 300). Moreover, if Van Linschoten had free rein in the palace, he probably had acquaintances among the high-ranking officials of the Estado as well (POS, 2004, p. 121–122). His access to this Goan seat of power was almost certainly granted by Fonseca, who visited or worked at the viceroy's palace on several occasions in the course of his duties. In 1584 and 1585, for instance, Fonseca temporarily took over rule in Goa (COUTO, 1789, déc. X, liv. IV, p. 436 and liv. VI, p. 9–11, 460). He might also have requested of the Portuguese rulers of India that Van Linschoten be given more permanent entry to the palace. In order to write a book fit for a king, Van Linschoten needed to draw on the writing of others, and even familiarize himself with Portuguese documents that were archived in the viceroy's palace of Goa. It was there that Van Linschoten probably familiarised himself with copies of the works by Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires (1465–1540) and writer Duarte Barbosa

(?–1521), both of which date to the 1510s and describe maritime Asia in a commercial and geographical manner. If not in Goa, Van Linschoten at least became aware of their existence once he had returned to the Netherlands while consulting the compilation of voyages of the 1550s by Italian geographer Giovanni Baptista Ramussio (1485–1557) (BOOGAART, 1999, p. 13). Pires's and Barbosa's books quickly became Van Linschoten's models for the later writing and organization of the *Itinerario*.

But the young Dutchman had more straightforward ways to keep abreast of matters of trade and its specific products. Given his public status in the archbishop's retinue, he was able to start creating his own network of informants. These informants can be classed according to their three different origins: Asian merchants and locals that he met in places such as Goa's market; foreign European merchants established in Goa; and the Portuguese elite of the Estado (viceroys, high-ranking officials and missionaries). The input of all three categories of informant can be traced, although they are not explicitly mentioned by Van Linschoten, who erased explicit references to his informants (and the Iberian authors he consulted) in the *Itinerario*. Still, a close reading of the *Itinerario* enables us to specify several of his sources. The most obvious is seen in Van Linschoten's mention of foreign merchants in Goa. In a chapter, he records the fact that foreign merchants (mainly French, Flemish, Dutch, German and Italian) lived in Goa «like brothers» due to Portuguese prejudice against foreigners (*Itinerario*, p. 296). Because of his nationality, Van Linschoten met several of them. For the rest of his informants, perhaps the best way to get the complete picture is by analysing the text of the *Itinerario* according to the geographical and trading areas it describes.

Starting with the Middle East and Hormuz, we can see that Van Linschoten had several sources. Bernard Bruchets, a servant of the archbishop who in 1584 travelled to Europe by land, via Ormuz and



the Middle East, wrote him letters on the voyage, as Van Linschoten records when mentioning this German friend (*Itinerario*, p. 302). It is quite likely that Bruchets sent him the information on trade routes, products and the land route to return to Europe that Van Linschoten describes in the *Itinerario* (p. 87-93). The same can be said of the four Englishmen aforementioned, whom Van Linschoten met in Goa. Originally, they had departed from England at the orders of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) to explore the commercial land routes of the Middle East and Hormuz. Their aim was to establish an English trade company in this area. The four Englishmen were jailed in Hormuz on suspicion of being spies of the Portuguese pretendant to the Portuguese throne and enemy of Philip II: D. António, Prior of Crato. Considering Van Linschoten's interest in trade and his proximity to these Englishmen, they may well have provided commercial insights to the Dutchman. Other information on this area might have been given to Van Linschoten by Venetian merchants, who annually traversed the land route between India and the Mediterranean (HADDAD, 2011, p. 158). The merchant-humanist Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588), who travelled on the same fleet as Van Linschoten to Asia in 1583, might have also been his informant. Nevertheless, as Sassetti mostly kept to Cochin and Van Linschoten was largely based in Goa, we cannot be sure how much information passed between them, and Sassetti's personal correspondence does not mention the Dutchman<sup>8</sup>. For his sections on Mozambique and Mutapa, Van Linschoten relied in part on the Portuguese captains that he interviewed in 1583 when his fleet stopped in the area before sailing to Goa (*Itinerario*, 82). He also collected information from an enslaved native of Mutapa whom he encountered in Goa (HADDAD, 2011, p. 158).

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<sup>8</sup> On Sassetti see ALESSANDRINI et al. (2019b).

For Ceylon and the Coromandel coast, Van Linschoten procured data from a Dutch contact in the Bay of Bengal (BOOGAART, 2003, p. 3). But I also contend that a Portuguese nobleman, Manuel de Sousa Coutinho, helped him in this area. Coutinho, who would go on to serve as governor of Portuguese India and authorize Van Linschoten's departure from Goa in 1589, was close and admired contact (*Itinerario*, p. 300). Previously, Coutinho had been captain of the Ceylonese Columbus fort (VILA-SANTA, 2008b). Information on Melaka and the Spice islands (the Moluccas) had different origins. In 1589, when returning to Europe, Van Linschoten unexpectedly crossed paths with his Flemish friend Gerrit van Afhyussen, who had been an overseer in Melaka for some years (*Itinerario*, p. 364). Surely Afhyussen shared some knowledge during their encounter. However, even prior to this meeting, while still in Goa, Van Linschoten interviewed the imprisoned Portuguese former captain from Banda Island (BOOGAART, 2003, p. 3), who might have offered commercial information about the Moluccas. Matias de Albuquerque, who had been captain of Hormuz and Melaka (VILA-SANTA, 2008b), could also have given crucial information on these areas to Van Linschoten. The Dutchman records that he met him in Goa and, in the *Itinerario*, openly praises Philip II's choice of Albuquerque as viceroy of India in 1591 (*Itinerario*, p. 352). Ironically, Albuquerque was the ruler of the Estado when the first Dutch fleet sailed to Asia.

Van Linschoten also met D. Paulo de Lima Pereira, former captain of Melaka, while in Goa (*Itinerario*, p. 297-298), and may have derived some useful knowledge from their conversations. We should bear in mind the emotional character of Van Linschoten's account of the shipwreck of *São Tomé*, the ship he had originally planned to sail in and in which Pereira perished (*Itinerario*, p. 315-317). Other data on Melaka, as well as China and Japan, may have reached Van Linschoten through Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit visitor to Asia

who was very close with archbishop Fonseca<sup>9</sup>. Van den Boogaart has even stressed the similarities between Valignano's approach to Asia in his *Summarium Indicum* (1580) and Van Linschoten's *Itinerario* (p. 281). This is owed to their probable meeting in Goa, and also relates to Valignano's controversial first visitation to India between 1574–1577<sup>10</sup>. It is probable that Valignano provided Van Linschoten with some information on the Jesuit missions in China and Japan. But I think that for this latter geographical area, Van Linschoten most heavily relied on his Dutch friend Dirck Gerritsz Pomp. Pomp had served under the Portuguese since 1568, and was renowned for being the first known Dutchman to visit both China and Japan as constable of artillery during three voyages of the *Nau do Trato* (the maritime route that connected Goa to Nagasaki)<sup>11</sup>.

Pomp's information on China created an interesting moment in the *Itinerario*, when Van Linschoten interrupts his somehow dry narrative to note his regret that, in 1584, he had to decline Pomp's invitation to sail to China since he lacked 200 or 300 ducats to invest (*Itinerario*, p. 57). This statement raises an intriguing question: was trade also a personal motivation for his career in Asia? Did Van Linschoten dream of enriching himself by becoming a merchant in Asia? It is quite possible that Van Linschoten would have enjoyed such a career, but he could not have embarked on it without the archbishop's permission, and such authorization would have been hard to acquire. It is almost certain Fonseca would have barred Van Linschoten from long-distance travel for trade, not just because the Dutchman was meant to be work-

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<sup>9</sup> The archbishop preached at the Jesuit college of Goa in 1584 (WICKI, 1968–1981, vol. 13, p. 520 and 550) and in several letters Valignano points out his good relationship with Fonseca, who authorized him to build the Jesuit Professed House at Goa and collaborated with him regarding the approach to the Christians of Saint Thomas at Third Provincial Council of India of 1585 (WICKI, 1968–1981, vol. 14, p. 107–108, 193, 302 and 687–688).

<sup>10</sup> On this topic, see VILA-SANTA (2018b).

<sup>11</sup> On Pomp, see POS (1999).

ing on a book, but also because trade (and the avarice of merchants) was disparaged by Portuguese ecclesiastical leaders. These concerns may have been particularly acute with Fonseca, who departed from Goa in 1587 to denounce, among other things, what he considered the «secular immoralities» of India (*Itinerario*, p. 297; COUTO, 1789, déc. X, liv. VIII, p. 324-325). Although there is no surviving reference to the specifics of those «secular immoralities», it is plausible that among them was this trading mentality. A predecessor to Fonseca in office, archbishop D. Jorge Temudo, had been a vocal critic of the greed he saw in the commercial dealings of Portuguese elites in Asia (WICKI, 1961, p. 198-199). If, therefore, Van Linschoten seems to have been inactive in trade, we should not conclude that he was uninterested; on the contrary, he was, but he must have realised that he could not be a full-time merchant in Asia while serving a Portuguese Catholic archbishop. Nevertheless, this underlying attraction to commerce influenced Van Linschoten's writing of the *Itinerario*, a major aim of which was alerting merchants to opportunities in Asia. Furthermore, the importance of Van Linschoten's commercial interests can be proved by several other cases of informants and circumstances surrounding his career in Asia.

Frans Connigh, a Flemish jeweller from Goa whom Van Linschoten met during his stay, became a close friend. In the *Itinerario*, Van Linschoten records with evident revulsion the case of his scandalous murder in Goa (*Itinerario*, p. 301-306). Thus, it is possible that Connigh was the real author (or at least the one who provided Van Linschoten with data) of the precious stones chapters of the *Itinerario* (*Itinerario*, p. 267-278). Commercial connections were also present in one of the most crucial moments of Van Linschoten's career in Asia: his departure from Goa in 1589. Van Linschoten used his German and Dutch contacts in Cochin to be appointed pepper overseer of the Fugger and Welser merchant houses in the *Santa Cruz* vessel. In 1583, his brother had used this same connection with the Fuggers and Welsers to be

appointed as pepper overseer of one of the Indian run ships, and in turn, Van Linschoten had profited from this fact when he departed from Lisbon. Van Linschoten's relations with these merchants' houses during his tenure in Portuguese Asia remain obscure. Still, there is no doubt that in 1589, he used these contacts to aid in leaving Asia. Van Linschoten states that at that time, Portuguese law did not forbid the appointment of a Dutch overseer on ships (*Itinerario*, p. 309). This was a decisive argument that he could brandish while petitioning Manuel de Sousa Coutinho (1589–1591), the Portuguese ruler of India, to authorize his return to Europe. Elsewhere, I have probed in greater detail the pivotal negotiations around Van Linschoten's departure and argued that he convinced Coutinho to grant him clearance when he promised to personally aid him in the loading of *Santa Cruz* vessel<sup>12</sup>.

This case points to another key network of informants Van Linschoten cultivated among the Portuguese elite: the viceroys and governors of the Estado. Given Fonseca's intimacy with viceroys D. Francisco Mascarenhas (1581–1584) and D. Duarte de Meneses (1584–1588), it is highly probable that Van Linschoten, too, interacted with these rulers. It stands to reason that such conversations could have enabled him to gather commercial and scientific data on several products. Since he had personal access to the viceroy's palace in Goa, and had been charged with writing a book that required collaboration, I put forth that both Mascarenhas and Meneses acted as informants for Van Linschoten. After all, this is hardly different from the comparatively uncontroversial notion that governor Manuel de Sousa Coutinho, or captain (and later viceroy) Matias de Albuquerque, offered Van Linschoten commercial and geographical data.

Van Linschoten's own statements hint at his high status among the Portuguese elites. His visit to nearby Salsete and Bardez in the company of Portuguese noblemen, for instance, had to be authorized by

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<sup>12</sup> For more details see note 5.

Fonseca and the viceroy. For Van Linschoten, the permissions were freely granted, and the sojourn was documented in words and images in the *Itinerario* (p. 191-192). Some sketches for the printed volume's illustrations (like the depictions of Hindu life, and Hindu and Muslim temples) seem to have been produced during this short trip. Among those members of the upper-class Portuguese in Goa, the future chronicler Diogo do Couto (1542–1616) might also have been an informant of Van Linschoten. Couto was also in Goa in the years between 1583 and 1589, and it is hard to imagine that the future Portuguese chronicler of the Estado did not meet the Dutchman. Still, just as in Sasseti's case, a lack of evidence prevents detailing information exchanges between Van Linschoten and Couto. Nevertheless, I believe that Van Linschoten got acquainted with the 1564 first version of Couto's *Soldado Prático*, whether reading a manuscript version in circulation, or by word of mouth<sup>13</sup>. The *Itinerario*'s well-known criticism of the Portuguese system in Asia bears a strong resemblance to this earlier work by Couto.

Perhaps the most famous of Van Linschoten's descriptions and depictions from his stay in Asia is that of the Goa market. Goa market was doubtless one of the main places where Van Linschoten interacted with European and Asian merchants and a site where he took copious personal notes to be used for the *Itinerario*'s writing. All the other images Van Linschoten produced for his book might have been aspects of a patronage-seeking strategy. With regard to Goa market's depiction, however, several details suggest that we are in the presence of a Dutchman who wished to have had the opportunity to trade extensively in Asia. It is now time, therefore, to understand how this *Itinerario*, initially intended to be an Iberian publication, became a work for the Dutch audience. Going further, we must examine how this affected Van Linschoten's portrayal of Portuguese commerce in Asia and his image of merchants in general.

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<sup>13</sup> On this topic see VILA-SANTA (2018a).

## Van Linschoten, the *Itinerario* and the Dutch mercantile mentality

Once Van Linschoten landed back in Enkhuizen in 1592, he was flooded with attention. To his friend Pomp we may attribute much of the responsibility for this eager reception. Pomp had returned prior to Van Linschoten and had spoken about his notes. Pomp had also given an interview for Lucas Waeghnaer's book, released that year, in which he also spoke about China and Japan. Printed alongside Pomp's interview was a 1584 letter from Van Linschoten to his parents (POS, 1999, p. 61 and 78-84). Thus, by the time of Van Linschoten's arrival, he was already known to have gathered voluminous scientific and commercial notes on Asia and was immediately contacted by the Dutch scientific, merchant, and political elite. On the side of the scientific elite, we can include physician Bernardus Paludanus (1550-1633), editor Cornelis Claesz (1546-1606), pilot Lucas Waeghnaer (1534-1606) and the mathematician, cartographer and Calvinist preacher Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). Among the merchants, we number the diplomat, merchant and mayor of Enkhuizen, Franciscus Maelson (1538-1601), as well as Balthasar de Moucheron (1552-1630), one of the first to finance Dutch fleets. In the political arena, it is important to bear in mind that Earl Maurice of Nassau (1567-1625), son of William of Orange, and leader of the Dutch Republic, alongside Johan van Olderbarnvelt (1549-1617), personally summoned Van Linschoten to his presence (SALDANHA, 2011, p. 160). The fact that these key players reached out to Van Linschoten shows the scientific, mercantile and political interests behind publishing the future *Itinerario*. Indeed, in 1594 a special contract was signed between the Dutch Estates General and editor Cornelis Claesz for the future edition of Van Linschoten's book (*Itinerario*, p. 38). Since, by this time, merchants and politicians were already preparing to launch a Dutch overseas expansion, Van Linschoten's notes and *Itinerario*

came to be seen as groundwork for the first Dutch expedition to Asia: that of Cornelis of Houtman (1595–1597). This meant that Van Linschoten's work could no longer be the sort of book it was originally conceived as. If it was not to serve as a cosmographical and commercial text for an Iberian audience, it had to be reshaped in order to fit the goals of a Dutch publication.

In order to achieve this objective, Van Linschoten asked editor Cornelis Claesz for assistance and was referred to physician and academic Bernardus Paludanus (PARR, 1964, p. 199). The future *Itinerario* (which was initially supposed to be limited to the *Itinerario* section) was enlarged to comprise three other main sections: the *Bescheverynghe*, the *Reys-gheschrift* and the *Extract*. The *Bescheverynge* describes geography and trade in America and Africa; the *Reys-gheschrift* details the sailing routes in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans; and the *Extract* is a cursory exposition on the history of Portugal, including the Portuguese and Spanish crown revenues. For all these sections, Van Linschoten relied on a diverse assortment of collaborators and consultation of several books while in the Netherlands (SALDANHA, 2011, p. 157; SCHMIDT, 2001, p. 161-162). The *Itinerario* proper was supposed to be Van Linschoten's more personal account, but it too was reworked by Paludanus and Claesz. To meet the needs of Dutch merchants and become a sort of merchant's manual, Van Linschoten and Paludanus reorganized the commercial chapters of the *Itinerario*, placing better-known products and the most profitable trades at the very beginning. To endorse the scientific and academic authority of Van Linschoten's publication, Paludanus also added his own scientific commentary to several products (POS, 2006, p. 49).

Because of the imperative to provide Cornelis of Houtman with nautical materials to successfully sail to Asia, the *Reys-gheschrift* was printed in April 1595, before Houtman's departure and before the rest of the book was released. A debate ensued over the destina-



tion of the first Dutch fleet and its route, in which Van Linschoten counselled decisively that Houtman should sail to the Indonesian Java Island because the Portuguese commercial and military network there was weak. He also advised Houtman to follow a nautical route between Madagascar island and Java, and explicitly warned the navigator not to sail from India to Java Island, since he would risk capture or open war with the Portuguese. Finally, Van Linschoten recommended that the first Dutch commercial contacts should be made at the Bantam market (PARR, 1964, p. 34-35). This was precisely what he later wrote in the *Itinerario*, when he commented on the Portuguese presence in the Indonesian archipelago (*Itinerario*, p. 117). The *Reys-gbeschryft* also offered Houtman the sailing routes to Indonesia, China and Japan, which occupied the majority of the chapters and were revised and reworked by Van Linschoten and his collaborators (VILA-SANTA, 2021). Summing up, in 1595, Van Linschoten had already pushed for a major Dutch commercial establishment in certain areas and urged against mercantile activities in others. The connection between Van Linschoten's advice and the beginning of the Dutch presence in Asia was already studied by Arun Saldanha (2011).

When the *Itinerario* was published in 1596, it immediately caught the attention of Richard Hakluyt (1553–1616) on the other side of the Channel. This advisor to Queen Elizabeth I of England (and obsessive defender of the English maritime expansion) ordered its swift translation into English. The English edition was prepared by John Wolfe and released in 1598 (VAN LINSCHOTEN, 1598). As it had in the Dutch case, the *Itinerario* kindled the commercial zeal that fostered the foundation of the English East India Company (EIC) in 1600. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the *Itinerario*'s publication instigated the foundation of several commercial companies (which were joined in 1602, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was formally created). In 1598 and 1599, translations of the

*Itinerario* into German and Latin were issued, and in 1610, the first French edition appeared. Until the middle of the seventeenth century, long after Van Linschoten's death in 1611, the *Itinerario*, and even the *Reys-gheschrift* alone, were continuously reprinted in Dutch, German, Latin and French<sup>14</sup>. It is not an exaggeration to state that Van Linschoten's *Itinerario* figured prominently in the Dutch-English rivalry in Asia. In 1619, the VOC forbade the republication of the *Itinerario* due to its widespread use among the English (DELMAS, 2012, p. 21), but even after this prohibition, the *Itinerario* persisted in being reprinted.

Returning to the late-sixteenth-century Netherlands, we find Van Linschoten busily guiding and promoting the Dutch program of mercantile expansion. In 1594 and 1595, he took part in two Dutch expeditions to explore a Northern route to China (PARR, 1964, p. 214-218 and 241-242). The idea was to sail north of the Scandinavian and Russian coasts, following what was considered to be a much shorter path than the Cape route that Vasco da Gama had inaugurated. Dutch merchants were keen on exploring the high commercial profits to be made in China, but equally uneasy about confrontation with the Portuguese in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Although both Dutch expeditions failed, Van Linschoten was able to secure financing from Franciscus Maelson and Balthasar de Moucheron for these projects (PARR, 1964, p. 209-214; SCHILDER, 2003, p. 197; COOK, 2007, p. 123). This also explains why he ended up publishing his own account of them in 1601, paying personally for the edition (NABER, 1914). In the book, Van Linschoten defended the Dutch Republic's pursuit of a northern route to China, but when he died in February 1611, he had still been unable to convince the Dutch leadership (PARR, 1964, p. 277 and 279-281).

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<sup>14</sup> For an immediate assessment on all the *Itinerario*'s and *Reys-gheschrift*'s editions check: VILA-SANTA and GIURGEVICH (2020).

After returning to the Netherlands, Van Linschoten did not become a full-time merchant, even though it may have been his dream while in Asia. This circumstance is important to keep in mind, given its apparent contradiction with the pronounced mercantile aspects of the *Itinerario*. I have already drawn attention to the ways that the *Itinerario* influenced Dutch and English mercantile expansion to Asia. This mercantile interest affected the reshaping of Van Linschoten's book. It is now time to analyse how this Dutch reshaping of the *Itinerario* relates to Van Linschoten's conceptualization of Portuguese trade in Asia. In other words, did the *Itinerario* really contend that Portuguese commercial networks were deteriorating? And if so, did Van Linschoten actually believe it, or was he pressured into publishing it by his Dutch political and scientific patrons?

### **The *Itinerario* and the myth of the Portuguese commercial decay**

In the *Itinerario*, while describing the main Portuguese routes of his time in Asia, Van Linschoten identified the *Nau do Trato* as the most profitable Portuguese commercial route (*Itinerario*, p. 132). This was certainly one of the routes Van Linschoten wished to have experienced when he ruefully noted his lack of 200 or 300 ducats for travelling to China and Japan with his friend Pomp. On the Spanish side, he also mentioned (in the *Reys-gbeshchriфт*) the Manila galleon and the attempt, by Spanish rulers in America, to link it directly to China and to exploit the lucrative margins on silver imports (VAN LINSCHOTEN, 1598, p. 411). Mastering sailing routes was the first step in winning commercial rivalries during the Early Modern period; aware of this, Van Linschoten published the rutter on the navigation from Macau to Acapulco by the Spanish

navigator Francisco Gali<sup>15</sup>. In the *Reys-gbeschrift*, he quotes a Chinese informant's opinion that the passage between Tartary and Northern America lay close to China (VAN LINSCHOTEN, 1598, p. 415 and 493), an assertion that must have influenced his arguments for a Northern route and subsequent exploratory expeditions. Thus, Van Linschoten's own interests are embedded in and furthered by the *Itinerario's* writing. But sometimes Van Linschoten's agenda collided with that of his patrons, namely Earl Maurice of Nassau, to whom he dedicated the *Itinerario*, and his editor Cornelis Claesz, a fierce critic of Philip II.

This point needs to be carefully considered, especially when approaching how Van Linschoten portrayed the Portuguese in general, and their commercial networks in Asia particularly. As the *Itinerario* is also a masterpiece of Dutch propaganda that helped to fuel a Black Legend of the Portuguese and Spanish<sup>16</sup>, it cannot be interpreted in a literal manner (as Ernst van den Boogaart has insisted (BOOGAART, 1999, p. 17)). An attentive reading of the *Itinerario* reveals that Van Linschoten never states that the Portuguese were commercially declining in Asia. On the contrary, he clearly records that, in India, nothing (including enslaved people) could be loaded for Lisbon without being properly registered in Cochin. In the case that unregistered goods were detected after landing in Lisbon, all the ship's cargo was immediately seized by Portuguese crown officers (*Itinerario*, p. 235). The *Itinerario*, in reality, is rife with unequivocal evidence that Van Linschoten believed Portuguese commercial control of routes from Asia to Europe to be highly effective. After all, were he not convinced of this, why would he counsel (in the *Itinerario*) that Bantam and Java Island were weak spots of the Portuguese commercial and

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<sup>15</sup> On Gali's navigation and biography see LOUREIRO (2019a).

<sup>16</sup> As studied by WINIUS (1994), VALLADARES (2001) and VEEN (2000).

military presence in Asia that could easily be exploited? Such advice is only relevant if these regions of unconsolidated control were rare exceptions to the rule. If Van Linschoten considered the Portuguese military to be in decay, he would certainly have suggested that the Dutch sail to India, something he emphatically did not do. Only with the VOC's foundation in 1602 did orders to engage in military confrontation with the Portuguese start to be issued. Until then, most Dutch fleets were instructed against clashing with the Portuguese (MURTEIRA, 2016, p. 136-137 and 149; COOK, 2007, p. 61-62). Van Linschoten's later entry into the VOC capital (which took place only in 1606 (BOOGAART, 1999, p. 20), and his willingness to explore the Northern route to China, may be construed as signals that he was no great enthusiast of Dutch-Portuguese skirmishing in Asia. Keeping these factors in mind, we ought to remember that Van Linschoten did not return to Asia and that it was his personal decision, not an outcome of external constraints, that kept him in Europe. In 1595, Van Linschoten and Dirck Gerritsz Pomp were the only Dutchmen with extensive knowledge of the Portuguese commercial and military system in Asia. Perhaps because of that knowledge, Van Linschoten decided not to participate in Houtman's expedition to Asia and chose the Northern sailings.

Since Boyajian's influential study (BOYAJIAN, 1994), the case has been made that Portuguese commercial networks in Asia were not, in fact, decaying in the 1580s and 1590s. Far from it: during these two decades, the Portuguese maritime empire in Asia was reaching its maximum geographical extension and, simultaneously, hitting peak commercial profits and revenues (although the Portuguese crown did not fully control this intense commercial activity). Even when the Dutch later initiated attacks on the backbone of the Portuguese commercial revenues (the *Nau do Trato* in Melaka and China), the Portuguese adapted and were

able to maintain some revenues (LOUREIRO, 2011). Therefore, to whatever extent it is present, we are dealing with a myth of Portuguese commercial decline in the *Itinerario*. This myth is associated with the *Itinerario*'s famed criticism of what Van Linschoten considered a Portuguese decline in nautical matters, and the Estado's political corruption and social impropriety. Although this opprobrium was itself based on Portuguese contemporary debates (such as those from Diogo do Couto and other authors, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>17</sup>), it should not be conflated with an assessment of the status of Portuguese maritime commerce. A good proof is, again, found in Van Linschoten's own words. When commenting on his difficult decision to leave Asia in 1589, Van Linschoten explicitly states that he had previously considered staying longer, or even settling in Asia permanently (*Itinerario*, p. 306-308). Such a sentiment indicates that he might not have had such a bad opinion about the Portuguese as is usually attributed to him. A distinction between Van Linschoten's personal views, and his patrons' anti-Iberian agenda should be made. The generally accepted fact that Van Linschoten's editor Cornelis Claesz (due to traumatic experiences with the Spanish, and his book trade interests) asked him to darken the image of the Portuguese and the Spanish (PARR, 1994, p. 278), should not be neglected when weighing the attitudes expressed in the *Itinerario*.

Another aspect of the *Itinerario* provides further nuance to this matter. Since Van Linschoten adapted and employed critiques from Portuguese sources for the *Itinerario*, the absence of indictments against the merchant-noble, ubiquitous in Portuguese contemporary literature, should be noted. Therefore, I must agree with Boogaart's contention that, rather than diminishing the state of commerce in Portuguese Asia, the *Itinerario* insinuates the

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<sup>17</sup> Check note 5.

opposite (BOOGAART, 1999, p. 2). Thus, the *Itinerario*'s major criticism should not be read as a sign of Portuguese commercial, or even military, decline. Furthermore, the trajectory of Dutch establishment and entrenchment in Asia (and the wars it ignited with the Portuguese) speaks for itself; major Portuguese losses (e.g. of Melaka, Ceylon and Cochin) only took place from the 1640s onwards. By that time, Van Linschoten was long dead, and his *Itinerario* had, in several ways, become outdated for the Dutch, who could already rely on more accurate data from the VOC's headquarters in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion

Van Linschoten's impressions on the state of the Luso-Asian trade, as captured in the *Itinerario*, had consequences on how he portrayed merchants. Instead of adopting the censorious approach of contemporary Portuguese Catholic literature, Van Linschoten followed a path much more typical of the Protestant Reformation. If the *Itinerario* was intended by Van Linschoten to become a manual for merchants, how could he launch condemnations at his would-be audience? It is hard to imagine that Van Linschoten, or even his editor Cornelis Claesz, would consider publishing such criticism in a book that was meant to boost Dutch commercial expansion. Although there are many causes for the Dutch overseas expansion, we should not diminish the importance of this commercial argument. It is not to be forgotten that in 1594, Philip II had declared an embargo on Dutch navigation to Iberian ports; nor is it a mere coincidence that the contract for publishing the *Itinerario* was signed that same year. The embargo threatened the very survival of the young Dutch Republic, whose financing was crucially dependent on commercial relations with and revenues

from the Iberian Peninsula. The fact that Van Linschoten ended up publishing his book in a Protestant environment (some studies even state that his Calvinist conversion was forced on him by Cornelis Claesz and Lucas Waghenaeer (KOEMAN, 1985, p. 37)), instead of a Catholic ambience, also impacted the final form of the *Itinerario*'s commercial chapters. While in an Iberian Catholic environment, criticism of mercantile activity was common, among Protestant writers, a different opinion prevailed. Individualistic merchants were praised and viewed as following the right path to achieving social distinction and religious salvation. Being, above all things, a pragmatic and adaptable character, Van Linschoten did not hesitate to reshape his book's treatment of commerce. His willingness to modify the text for a new audience is not limited to these sections but may be seen throughout the *Itinerario* (VILA-SANTA, 2021; PARR, 1964, p. 199).

Nevertheless, we must recognize that, fundamentally, Van Linschoten's changes to the commercial sections of the *Itinerario* were a reflection of his own choices and goals. Thus, the use that the *Itinerario* found as a trading manual was no accident, but a result of Van Linschoten's vision and ambitions. At the basis of the *Itinerario*'s success was its author's curiosity, adaptability, drive to know and explore the world, and innate talent, quickly recognized by archbishop Fonseca. Rather than cast Van Linschoten as a commercial or even a scientific spy (an interpretation notably lacking documental evidence), it is much more appropriate to view him as a go-between or cross-cultural broker (RAJ, 2020). His ability to translate Iberian knowledge for use in the Dutch context is manifested not only in the *Itinerario*, but also in his 1598 Dutch translation of the Spanish work by José de Acosta (1540–1600) on the Western Indies.

Van Linschoten was a broker of commercial and scientific knowledge in a time and place that allowed him to make a significant



impact. But let us have no illusions on the matter. Portuguese commercial knowledge began circulating long before Van Linschoten, in the Renaissance global cities and maritime ports where merchants from all corners of Europe convened. Such were the cases of port cities like Lisbon, Seville, Antwerp, Genoa, Venice, Rouen and London from the early sixteenth century onwards. What differentiated Van Linschoten was the effect of his publication on the rise of new maritime and commercial rivalries worldwide, rivalries forming the core of seventeenth-century Dutch, English, and French maritime history. It was precisely in the context of a massive maritime power shift, with ascendancy passing from the Iberian Peninsula to Northern Europe, that Van Linschoten's *Itinerario* made, ultimately, a major contribution.

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<sup>18</sup> In this article I choose to quote the Portuguese edition of the *Itinerario*, by Arie Pos and Rui Manuel Loureiro, two times. The first is related to Van Linschoten's proper account and is listed in the printed sources section. Since the edition also has an Introduction by Pos and Loureiro, I also quoted in the Bibliography. To avoid confusion between both quotations, I opted to mention directly pages instead of the *Itinerario*'s chapters.

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