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1

Provenance and Its Discontents

EVIDENCE, RELEVANCE,
LANGUAGE, KNOWLEDGE

Provenance

Two fruitful ways of providing a background framework for this study lie in inserting new documentation into broader flows and circulation of Renaissance people and objects, and in adverting to the global and European connections that made them happen. Provenance is critical to both. The two approaches both allude to the near universally accepted theory of *histoires croisées* that has effectively killed stone dead any nationalistic beliefs that individual countries or areas were immune to outside influence in any period.¹ But the level and extent of sixteenth-century connections still require detailed dissection and exposition. Even if dwelling on comparison has given way to searching for connection, the types and number of these need to be exposed. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out, connections occur in multiple spheres—material, ideas, concepts—and are of varying intensity, duration or complexity.² An understanding of connection, however, is dependent upon informed knowledge of context, and context collapse or context cancellation in relation to the past is rife in the twenty-first century. This book could perhaps be seen as, against the current, an exercise in context enhancement: in minute focusing on the documents and objects in order to extract as much as possible from them about the

1. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45.1 (2006), pp. 30–50.

2. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Empires between Islam and Christianity, 1500–1800* (Albany, NY, 2019 [Delhi, 2018]), p. 22.

known context in a period-appropriate fashion. Unlike the histories of tobacco and chocolate, which in the right hands allow a retelling of empire from the periphery to the centre,³ the focus here remains on how Europe reacted to Portuguese overseas expansion, or more precisely, how parts of Italy catalogued and reacted to the arrival in their midst of goods, animals and people from the Portuguese trading empire.

Whenever an observation connected to the debate over the relative importance of a centre and peripheries seems relevant to these narratives, it has been flagged, but often the absence of information about provenance—understood here in the sense of its place of origin—precludes this, except in its most basic sense. Provenance is now held to be an almost inalienable part of any object or possession of any value, a *sine qua non*, without which not only the authenticity but also the moral worth of the object is called into question. Provenance defines the object, and defines reaction to it. All movement is towards the introduction of new systems and new technologies that provide a novel kind of transparent provenance, wherever possible embedded within the object itself, preempting the possibility of manufacturing fakes or interfering with the record. This is true for everything from cars to digital currencies. A wider understanding of the meaning of provenance would encompass a detailed history of all the places where an artefact had been since its manufacture or creation, a veritable ‘object itinerary’,⁴ and wherever possible and relevant, this wider understanding of the term has been employed. It is here that perhaps the greatest disparity between the importance of provenance in the Renaissance and the importance of provenance in the twenty-first century can be seen. Provenance is a fundamental part of context, and yet in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by itself it appears that it was often considered irrelevant. There is an exception to this—when knowledge of prior ownership, understood as a form of provenance, can be seen, like a pedigree in an animal, to enhance status. In these particular instances, the prestige of prior ownership, by association, raises the quality of the ‘possessed’ object, making provenance critical.⁵

3. Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), p. 12.

4. Rosemary A. Joyce, ‘From Place to Place: Provenience, Provenance and Archaeology’, in Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds, *Provenance: An Alternate History of Art* (Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 48–60 at 48, 54, 58.

5. Gail Feigenbaum, ‘Manifest Provenance’, in Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds, *Provenance: An Alternate History of Art* (Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 6–28 at 7 and 22; Elizabeth A. Pergam, ‘Provenance as Pedigree: The Marketing of British Portraits in Gilded Age America’, in Gail

Three of the most commonly used words in connection with the lure of the consumer revolution of the Renaissance in general and goods from the overseas Portuguese empire in particular are new, rare and exotic. All effectively make implicit reference to provenance at least in a broad sense; all require further interrogation. The three words can be conjoined but can also each stand alone. News and the new were only sometimes linked, and novelty was just one of a range of newsworthy criteria.⁶ The attraction of the new was often commented upon,⁷ and was clearly a motivating factor in gift-giving⁸ and in the formation of collections of extra-European objects. Yet it is not so clear whether rarity was seen as a lesser form of novelty: whether a new object would always be more interesting than a rare object. It is possible to conjecture that a new object made of inexpensive materials would be of interest, but that a piece of rare African gold jewellery, seen before but very infrequently, would elicit greater covetousness. Ingrid Greenfield is right to remind us that new and rare objects and goods were greeted with wonder, but she refutes the use of the category of the exotic, saying that the word *exotica* was not used in Italian until the eighteenth century.⁹ But the adjective *esotico/a* was in use in the sixteenth century in its primary meaning, taken straightforwardly from the Latin *exoticus*, which in its turn had been taken from the Greek, to indicate something from outside, something foreign, as signalled by its prefix *exo*.¹⁰

Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds, *Provenance: An Alternate History of Art* (Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 104–22 at 104.

6. Kate Lowe, 'Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy: News Extracts from Portugal about Western Africa Circulating in Northern and Central Italy in the 1480s and 1490s', *Italian Studies*, 65.3 (2010), pp. 310–28 at 314 and 320.

7. For example, Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols (Bologna, 2004), 2, p. 1152.

8. Giovanni da Empoli in Lisbon to Lorenzo de' Medici, 9 January 1515, writes that he is sending 'certe gemtilezze' that he has brought back from Malacha; he thinks Lorenzo will like them 'per eser chosa nuova'. Marco Spallanzani, *Giovanni da Empoli, un mercante fiorentino nell'Asia portoghese* (Florence, 1999), p. 215.

9. Ingrid Greenfield, 'A Moveable Continent: Collecting Africa in Renaissance Italy', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016, pp. 44–45.

10. The first known instance in print seems to have been in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), p. 356: 'tra tante celeste et dive persone [io] solo contemptibile et exotico'. Here the usage emphasises the prefix 'exo', stressing his outsider status. Giovanvettorio Soderini in the sixteenth century wrote of 'gl'uccelli exotici' in *Il trattato degli animali domesticci*, ed. Alberto Bacchi Della Lega, (Bologna, 1903), p. 263. See Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, 25 vols (Turin, 1961–2009), 5, p. 366.

This usage clearly had and has relevance.¹¹ Catarina Santana Simões clarifies that in the early sixteenth-century in Portugal, the country in which many of the so-called exotic objects arrived in Europe, the word was associated with an ‘exterior provenance’ and could be used as a descriptor of anything that had been ‘decontextualised from its place of origin.’¹² This is an interesting extension of the debate on the relevance of provenance, in which the meaning of exotic has been downgraded from ‘inherently desirable’ to ‘having no secure place of origin.’ In this sense, perhaps, its trajectory could be compared to that of the word *indiano* (see below), which underwent a similar transformation, from referring to a specific place to indicating a generic extra-European nowhere. But Simões goes further, claiming that as the word exotic does not have symbolic depth, it is essential that it be coupled with the concept of the marvellous, which does, in order to understand why non-European objects have been coveted since antiquity.¹³ The argument has turned full circle, to the wonder with which new and rare objects have always been greeted. This significant baggage should be understood to accompany the use of the word exotic whenever it appears, like a tag spelling out contextual collapse and provenance non-knowledge at the same time as desirability. The so-called global turn in history has reinforced rather than diminished the use of the words new, rare and exotic, which frequently take the place of more complicated, less easy evaluation of the route whereby these objects arrived in, and were dispersed around, Europe. Here, care will be exercised whenever these words are chosen.

Evidence

This book’s way into the subject is through a renewed focus on evidence, much of it previously unpublished, both documentary and in the form of still extant objects. This means that two different sets of methodologies are in use. Archival documents form the skeleton, sometimes more and sometimes less complete, but usually identifiable, of a body that is fleshed out where possible with objects that have endured and survived. When the documentary evidence

11. But see Bruno A. Martinho, ‘Beyond Exotica: The Consumption of Non-European Things through the Case of Juan de Borja (1569–1626)’, Ph.D thesis, European University Institute, 2018, e.g., pp. 28–29, who prioritises a theoretical over a linguistic understanding.

12. Catarina Santana Simões, ‘The Symbolic Importance of the “Exotic” in the Portuguese Court in the Late Middle Ages’, *Anales de Historia del Arte*, 24 (2014), pp. 517–25 at 525.

13. Simões, ‘Symbolic Importance’, p. 525.

concerns people, animals or objects, further traces of these have been sought, either in additional records or in visual representations. Unlike Venice, whose claim to hegemony over the Americas took the form of a great number of printed books and maps, thus ensuring that place was paramount and that the Americas remained at the forefront of the Venetian imagination,¹⁴ much of the Italian peninsula's engagement with the Portuguese imperial world depended on decontextualised exotic goods and enslaved peoples, dissociated from their places of origin. In Venice, the encounter can be characterised as focused but virtual; elsewhere, it was imprecise but 'real'. With a subject of this scale, coverage over the *longue durée* is not possible, so instead three discreet sets of unpublished documentation, at three particular moments in a time-frame between the 1450s and the 1590s, in two particular cities, Florence and Rome, have been chosen as sites of analysis.

The finding of new and relevant documents has been the driving force behind the choice of years and places, which however can be easily justified and presented as something entirely positive, because the chronological distance separating them has added to the possible axes of analysis, prompting some intriguing, and rather unexpected, comments about change over time. Each set of documentation takes a different form, and each provides different insights: the first consists of short descriptive records in the entry ledger of a civic institution, the second is an account journal of an overseas trading/buying trip, and the third is a large body of private and professional correspondence. If they are united at all (beyond their ability to elucidate the two central questions), it is because they are all in some sense narrative, more so than the majority of documents, which often record only one piece of information at one particular moment, whereas these often allow historical backstories of objects and people to be reconstructed, even if slight or lopsided or partial. In this, they are unusual. It is also the case that the prior lives and afterlives of the human and other protagonists in these sets of documents can often be triangulated, because of the extraordinarily rich record systems in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence and Rome, and the archives in Lisbon still extant after the 1755 earthquake, which provide more context than might have been expected. It is clear too that there is substantial tension between the ends for which the documents were created, and the uses to which historians put them—and that this tension

14. Elizabeth Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America: Geographic Imagination and Print Culture in the Age of Encounters* (Cambridge, 2018).

or indeed gap also always needs to be articulated and analysed. It is far too simplistic merely to extract whatever snippets appear to be relevant without pausing to consider the genesis, context and *raison d'être* of the documentary material. Documents are created for a reason; without one, they do not just come into being. And the reasons for documents' existence dictate how they are constructed and written, what is included and excluded, and what the parameters of the written material are. The circumstances that led to the creation of the records under consideration require as much concentrated dissection as the documents themselves, prompting an added layer of unwrapping concerning the why and how of production to exhibit more clearly the rationale behind the records. So another way of encapsulating what is being analysed here is to ask, 'In what ways is the Portuguese empire being inscribed into Italian documentation? Was it seen as important?'

It sometimes happens, as in the instance of the Ospedale degli Innocenti records examined in one of the case studies here, that the documents, notwithstanding the straitjackets of their formulae, are sufficiently flexible to incorporate information that subsequently will allow a recreation of aspects of societal change, even if that can never have been part of the bundle of reasons for their existence. But that is quite rare. In the example of the Innocenti records, the unchanging nature of the formulae is itself the reason why it is now possible to map the arrival of change, because its seeds can be traced in minute detail. Much of the time, far from allowing a recreation of the way in which change has been introduced, documents provide some 'facts' or information, but leave a mass of loose ends that remain loose ends for centuries, only being tied up if other records subsequently emerge. Yet it is in the time-consuming perusal and interpretation of these loose ends that much of the best historical speculation lies, with the loose ends—rather than the 'facts'—often being the most useful part of the new material. Interpretation of this sort is only possible when the genesis, context and *raison d'être* of the documentary material are thoroughly understood.

This whole book can be viewed as a reflection on method, or more precisely, on the effect that choices about method have on scholarly outcomes. Here, new material is used first and foremost to prompt reflection: it is not just a question of material revealing new 'facts' but also, just as—if not more—importantly, an issue of the new and diverse material requiring constant, thoughtful interrogation and critical analysis. Nothing is fixed in such a way that it cannot be undone by consideration of new documentation, and this process is constantly repeated as more documentation comes to light, is set alongside the already

existing documentation, and is reconsidered in its turn. Everything is tested and retested. While most historians accept that the type of historical record greatly influences what can be ascertained, and that different results emerge from different sorts of records, in many cases historical subjects are still addressed by historians predominantly via one type of source. This reduces the usefulness of the research, because the resultant history will always be only one part of a much greater story, and the greater, more complete story is only accessible through engagement with a plethora of different types of documentation. Each source has its own built-in advantages and disadvantages, the latter of which need to be counterbalanced if at all possible by other types of source, with different foci. Analysis is more likely to be closer to being 'correct' when it involves cocktails of varying kinds of documentation, so working with combinations of archival sources is of paramount importance, and new varieties of source material are particularly welcome. If research findings cannot be dissociated from the type of material investigated, and each type of material reveals only one part of an immensely larger picture, clearly the larger picture can only edge towards an approximation of what the past might have been like if a wide variety of sources is interrogated. Methodology matters.

Documentary evidence is also notable for its chronological and local divergences and shifts in terminology—and the dual-pronged research question here necessitates an awareness of this in two major European languages. Choices of particular words infuse phrases with meanings that have to be unlocked. Occasionally the new information is in itself the main gain, but once again it needs to be stressed that it is often not the 'facts' themselves that are revelatory or that alert the reader to meaning, but the words used to present these 'facts.' As always, it is the patterns and the absences in these documents that are the most illuminating aspects. The ability to notice and interpret patterns is the single most useful archival skill.

The evidence of objects is rather split. In some cases, the objects exist, but lack documentation, whereas in others documents about objects exist, but the objects themselves no longer do so or cannot be identified; in which case a word-echo is all that is left of their material form. In exceptional cases, both objects and documentation exist; and in the most exceptional cases, objects, documentation and contemporary visual representation of them all exist—but this is almost unheard of, even in the happy hunting grounds of Renaissance Italy. Doing object-based research on the basis of the extant object, without any documentary back-up, provides its own rewards, and a great deal can be ascertained from material, technique and style; but documents can provide

other focused information of great importance, such as maker's name, date of production, commission, price and sale history, and similarly important background information, such as workshops, and the number of such objects produced.

Some current scholarship on objects has attempted to posit that they possess their own agency.¹⁵ There is scholarly disagreement about whether the agency of things is primary—a form of agency related to their lives and interactions that can have a direct impact or effect on humans, even if as objects they lack conscious human intentionality; or merely secondary—a form of agency given to them by humans.¹⁶ Both these propositions seem to require a redefinition of the meaning of agency. Then there are those for whom intentionality is irrelevant, and what matters is the result: things change the lives of humans, and not only technological things, which is where the idea started. Now the idea is carried into every area of life, touting problematic concepts such as reinterpreting the beauty of a thing as another form of agency of the thing, as though it controlled its own aesthetic projection.¹⁷ Other scholars write of the illusion of agency, a more palatable way to approach the issue, that focuses not on the so-called agency of the object, but on the relationship between objects and humans.¹⁸ Still others, more tongue-in-cheek, have imagined that artworks from different cultures and periods might engage in conversation with each other when displayed together.¹⁹ It seems preferable to stay with the old definition, but consider more rigorously moments when objects were the catalysts for change. Actor-network theory assigning agency to objects also seems to be at odds with discussions of layers of signification

15. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005); Carl Knappett and Lambos Malafouris, eds, *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (Boston, MA, 2008); Renata Ago, 'Denaturalizing Things: A Comment', in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early Modern Things: Objects and Their Histories, 1500–1800* (London, 2013), pp. 363–68.

16. Bruno Latour, 'On Actor-Network-Theory: A Few Clarifications', *Soziale Welt*, 47.4 (1996), pp. 369–81; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998); Marcia Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, 'Doing Agency: Introductory Remarks on Methodology', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, 12 (2005), pp. 159–66; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA, 2012), pp. 25, 68, 215–16.

17. Ago, 'Denaturalizing Things', p. 367.

18. Daniel Lord Smail, *Legal Plunder: Households and Debt Collection in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), p. 19.

19. Wole Soyinka, *Beyond Aesthetics: Use, Abuse and Dissonance in African Art Traditions* (New Haven, CT, 2019), p. 19.

‘accruing like a patina’ to artworks, in that these layers of enrichment were created by a wide range of individuals and circumstances, and not by the object.²⁰ In addition, interpretation of perceived meaning differs according to cultural context, so crossing countries or continents, or circulating around areas that were linked, introduced all sorts of new ideas and understandings about the object itself, often unconnected to or disconnected from the meanings assigned to the objects in their places of origin by the people who created them or for whom they had been created. It is worth asking what it would have taken for usage and understanding/meaning to have remained constant with regard to particular objects. The provenance would have had to be secure, but there would also have had to have been a certain level of knowledge or understanding of the culture from which the object came. Even when the first precondition was met, the second was not. The next question is, ‘Did this absence matter?’ If the object were related to a belief system, it would have mattered to those who believed, but they were usually not present. Otherwise, it is unlikely in fact to have mattered, even for objects with a clear function, as change in the function of a secular item happened all the time. People make of objects what they will, repurposing them constantly; objects do not come with instructions for use that have to be followed. Analysing objects via their ‘biographies’, on the other hand, is straightforwardly fruitful, especially, as in the case studies that follow, if these objects have global itineraries.²¹ Here Igor Kopytoff’s reminder that only certain things are considered appropriate to be marked as commodities, and that this is not a permanent but an impermanent state, and that after commodification a process of singularisation often occurs, can be helpful. Things can have eventful ‘biographies’, undergoing many classifications and reclassifications, leading to multiple valuations, and can move in and out of the category of commodities.²² Here, as commodified objects from various interconnected parts of the world were brought to Europe, these successive processes and

20. Suzanne Preston Blier, ‘Capricious Arts: Idols in Renaissance-Era Africa and Europe (the Case of Sapi and Kongo)’, in Michael W. Cole and Rebecca Zorach, eds, *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 11–29 at 11.

21. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds, *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London, 2016); Anne Gerritsen, ‘From Long-Distance Trade to the Global Lives of Things: Writing the History of Early Modern Trade and Material Culture’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20 (2016), pp. 526–44 at 38–41.

22. Igor Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’, in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 64–91 at 64–65, 89.

changes can often be clearly observed, adding greatly to an ability to make sense of the ebbs and flows of their allure and their meanings.

Relevance

What Renaissance Italy knew of the Portuguese voyages, and what influence Portuguese overseas expansion exerted on Renaissance Italy have become questions of some urgency in the contemporary world. They have achieved this urgency because of a new insistence upon weighing the benefits of what was gained in any process against the detriment of what was lost. This was not a way of perceiving or assessing behaviour that would have been considered in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. Nor is it straightforwardly how rulers and governments in Western democracies (let alone elsewhere) operate today, so it remains at the level of public leverage. In this new aspirational model of justice and well-being for all, certain concepts take on increased semantic weight, and the two often related concepts of provenance and possession fall into this category. In one sense, much of this book is about the Renaissance perception of these concepts in relation to extra-European objects, peoples, animals and products brought to Europe: what was understood by these concepts at the point of acquisition; when these concepts mattered, and when they did not matter; what happened to global objects when they arrived in Europe; the erasure of a pre-European past because it was deemed irrelevant.

The principal thrust of this study remains resolutely on the Renaissance. But it is interesting on occasion to rerun the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century material gathered here through a contemporary, twenty-first-century, interpretative filter. Rather than constituting a celebration of what the overseas voyages and the Italian Renaissance achieved, the material takes on a much more sinister hue. Large numbers of people were enslaved in violent circumstances; those that were sold by their fellow countrymen had already been forcibly enslaved, usually also in violent circumstances, beforehand. In a proto-colonial or imperial situation, Europeans may have believed themselves to be the legitimate owners of enslaved people whom they bought from other, mainly African, 'owners'; but people cannot be 'owned' and slavery itself was and is abhorrent—although not considered so at the time—and thus their acts of acquisition may be considered illegitimate. Many aspects of slavery in Renaissance Italy followed the tenets and ideals of Roman slavery. For example, the enslaved were employed in building projects in Tuscany and

Rome,²³ and humanists and artists, as well as patricians, prelates and the more to be expected Italian ‘voyagers’,²⁴ kept domestic slaves. The fact that the Renaissance was not a time of universal gains and freedoms has long been appreciated in other regards: as, for example, in connection with the position and treatment of women. However, the past has to be understood in period-appropriate terms, even while the terms of the present keep on shifting, allowing new interpretations to be made. What is perhaps more profitable is to realise that these considerations were of very little interest to the European acquirers of the enslaved—whose pre-European past did not matter unless a royal or princely provenance could be posited.

The Relevance of Provenance

If two core questions are posed—Why would provenance have mattered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries?, and, What if anything was to be gained from knowing the provenance of something?—using material from the time does not allow them to be answered satisfactorily. But perhaps hindsight can be beneficial here, and the reasons for provenance mattering today can aid analysis of why it did not matter in the same or similar ways in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁵ If the same question is rerun—Why does provenance matter now?—two possible answers are clear. It matters because in the aftermath of the dislocations and thefts of World War II it can guarantee a clear right to ownership; and it matters because it can help guarantee the authenticity of an

23. See, e.g., Suzanne B. Butters, ‘Le Cardinal Ferdinand de Médicis’, in Philippe Morel, ed., *La Villa Médicis*, vol. 2: *Études* (Rome, 1991), pp. 170–96 at 178; and Butters, ‘Ferdinand et le jardin du Pincio’, in *ibid.*, pp. 351–410 at 379.

24. Amerigo Vespucci’s will of 9 April 1511, redacted in Seville, states he had five slaves, including three from the Canary Isles and one from Guinea. See Ilaria Luzzana Caraci, ed., *Amerigo Vespucci*, Nuova raccolta colombiana 21, 2 vols (Rome, 1996–99), vol. 1: *Documenti* (1996), pp. 197–208 at 202–3.

25. The realities of competitive acquisition and accumulation of ethnographic art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from all over the globe are well described in Hermione Waterfield and J.C.H. King, *Provenance: Twelve Collectors of Ethnographic Art in England, 1760–1990* (London, 2009). An almost inexhaustible pool of non-European objects existed, easily and cheaply obtainable, brought back from the European overseas empires by ‘explorers, missionaries, administrators, traders and military personnel’ (p. 9); that is, the same sorts of people who benefited from the Portuguese trading empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to acquire objects. The collectors in the main did not collect in the field, but from these returnees. Trails relating to provenance could be either more or less complete, depending on individual whim.

object. The first reason is not helpful in a Renaissance context, where right to ownership was not in general questioned, and where possession was what mattered. In the Renaissance, possession trumped provenance. The Portuguese colonial context does however raise significant issues about the right to ownership in the twenty-first century. A question mark remains in very many cases about what would now be termed the legitimacy of acquisition of goods originating from the Portuguese trading empire. Power relations were manifestly unequal. Routes whereby goods were obtained by Portuguese and other Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from the Portuguese trading empire differed significantly, moving across the whole of the spectrum from legal to illegal acquisition; that is, from the exchange of diplomatic gifts,²⁶ and equitable trade in unforced conditions, to illicit and violent grabbing of desired goods, to punitive and immoral confiscations (as in Brazil), and to the looting of treasuries at religious sites (as in Ceylon).²⁷ In the absence of local, non-European records—and there are no indigenous sub-Saharan African records for the fifteenth, and few indigenous records for the first half of the sixteenth century,²⁸ although they do exist in India and Ceylon, for example—it is impossible to know with certainty how goods were obtained in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; even with records, doubts and ambiguities remain, although evidence of payment for goods in this period is clearly a suggestive pointer that the acquisition may have been legitimate. Yet ownership is now considered not only to be a financial or economic matter, but to have an ethical element. Sales do not take place in a vacuum, and the circumstances surrounding them can also indicate underlying force. While it is clear that in transacting a sale or exchange the seller values the money or goods received more than the object, the reason he or she does so is now also thought to be pertinent. Were goods being sold because of economic collapse or famine, possibly provoked by or hastened by the arrival of the Europeans? In

26. *Elfenbeine aus Ceylon: Luxusgüter für Katarina von Habsburg (1507–1578)*, ed. Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and Johannes Beltz, exh. cat., Museum Rietberg, Zurich (Zurich, 2010), pp. 37–43; Zoltán Biedermann, ‘Diplomatic Ivories: Sri Lankan Caskets and the Portuguese–Asian Exchange in the Sixteenth Century’, in Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds, *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 88–118.

27. Hugo Miguel Crespo, ‘The Plundering of the Ceylonese Royal Treasure, 1551–1553: Its Character, Cost and Dispersal’, in Michael Bycroft and Sven Dupré, eds, *Gems in the Early Modern World: Materials, Knowledge and Global Trade, 1450–1800* (London, 2019), pp. 35–64.

28. John K. Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 39.

moments of war or shows of violence, force interfered with usual patterns of behaviour, and sales of goods in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may have been the result of coercion, thus perhaps calling into question their legitimacy. These are not problems that apply only in an extra-European context: the legitimacy of many acquisitions inside Europe could similarly be questioned.

The second reason—provenance matters because it can guarantee authenticity—on the face of it seems more likely to be useful. Although views on copying were very different in the Renaissance,²⁹ authenticity was an issue in the sixteenth century, and the copying of desirable and popular objects, such as bezoar stones, was rampant. But in order to assure authenticity, there had to be people with expertise who understood precisely where individual items had been made and who were able to tell the difference between genuine and fake items;³⁰ as far as is known, that was not the case in relation to some of the more unusual pieces from the Portuguese trading empire, which could in any case have been made in more than one location. This would not have been common but, on the contrary, very rarefied knowledge. Once a certain category of object started to arrive in quantities, experts who could assess and value it would have quickly emerged too, but in the case of a few exceptional items, there was no call for this expertise and it appears not to have materialised. In order for knowledge to survive, it both has to be in someone's interests to know it, and be considered relevant: in whose interests would it have been for this very specialised knowledge to survive the move to Europe?

Documentation Adverting to Provenance

The present account does not mean to minimise the effects on historical analysis of loss of objects or of documents, both of which clearly skew attempts at understanding. If only one or two objects of value of a certain category survive now, however, it is extremely unlikely that they were originally imported into

29. Megan Holmes, 'Copying Practices and Marketing Strategies in a Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painter's Workshop', in Stephen J. Campbell and Stephen J. Milner, eds, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 38–54.

30. Peter Borschberg, 'The Euro-Asian Trade in Bezoar Stones (approx. 1500 to 1700)', in Michael North, ed., *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400–1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 29–43; Beate Fricke, 'Making Marvels—Faking Matter: Mediating *virtus* between the Bezoar and Goa Stones and Their Containers', in Christine Göttler and Mia Mochizuki, eds, *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 342–67, esp. 353–55.

Lisbon in their thousands or tens of thousands. Nor have basic questions about categories of objects that were being made in parts of the Portuguese trading empire, but for which there are no extant examples in Europe, yet been posed. It has always been assumed that the loss of the relevant archival documents in Lisbon means that even the most fundamental questions relating to provenance cannot be answered with assurance; but as usual with archival documentation, the situation is more complicated than that. Without the documentation, questions are legion. If one takes the case of West African goods, even which ships returned to Lisbon having put in at ports in West Africa in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is not known with any certainty.³¹ There are very few surviving ships' logs, so the precise routes of individual ships are unknown, but an indication of routes—and more particularly places of landfall on the African coast—can be gathered from rutters or *roteiros* (mariners' handbooks of sailing instructions) and diaries: for example, from the diary by an anonymous diarist now thought to be Álvaro Velho, who accompanied Vasco da Gama on his second voyage to India in 1497–99, first published in 1838, which has in the past been labelled a rutter.³² And newsletters occasionally detailed routes: so a newsletter printed in Augsburg in 1504, for instance, revealed the best route to sail from Lisbon to Calicut.³³

Similarly, the content of the cargoes on individual ships is almost entirely unknown, because nearly all the relevant documentation, such as bills of lading, invoices and cargo registers, is lost. There are details of some sort for cargoes on only a very few of the voyages on the India route—early ones dating to 1505 and 1518,³⁴ with later full information on that of 1587, and summaries

31. Paulo Guinote, Eduardo Frutuoso and António Lopes, *As armadas da Índia, 1497–1835* (Lisbon, 2002) is enormously useful, but does not attempt to discuss places the ships stopped en route.

32. Diogo Kopke and António da Costa Paiva, eds, *Roteiro da viagem que em descobrimento da Índia pelo Cabo da Boa Esperança fez Dom Vasco da Gama em 1497* (Porto, 1838); Eric Axelson, *Vasco da Gama: The Diary of His Travels through African Waters, 1497–1499* (Cape Town, 1998). See Damião Peres, *Os mais antigos roteiros da Guiné* (Lisbon, 1952) and the project on rutters entitled 'Rutter: Making the Earth Global' at <https://rutter-project.org/> (accessed 6 June 2023).

33. See the newsletter by Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus novus* (Augsburg, 1504) reproduced in facsimile and translated in *From Lisbon to Calicut*, tr. Alvin E. Prottengeier, commentary and notes by John Parker (Minneapolis, 1956).

34. Geneviève Bouchon, 'L'Inventaire de la cargaison rapportée de l'Inde en 1505', in *Mare Luso-Indicum: Études et documents sur l'histoire de l'Océan Indien et des pays riverains à l'époque de la domination portugaise*, 4 vols (Paris, 1971–80), 3, pp. 101–25; Geneviève Bouchon, *Navires et cargaisons retour de l'Inde en 1518* (Paris, 1977).

for quite a few between 1588 and 1610.³⁵ A stray cargo list survives from Goa in the early seventeenth century.³⁶ There are few bills of lading or cargo lists for cargoes taken to Lisbon from either East or West Africa for the period between the late fifteenth century and 1600.³⁷ This lack of documentation has until now been given as a reason why the provenance of so many goods from the Portuguese trading empire arriving in Lisbon is unknown—the evidence having been destroyed in 1755. A sole surviving Casa da Guiné treasurer's account book, from 1504–5, now in Lisbon (Fig. 1), indicates the magnitude of this loss, by revealing a whole wealth of information that would have been available if the records had survived: names of the ships; names of their crews; descriptions of their cargoes with valuations made so that taxes could be assessed.³⁸

Even in this document, however, provenance of goods is not specified, so it is now apparent that the survival of these records as a series, although it would have provided a great deal to analyse, would not have provided answers to the specific questions relating to provenance posed here. Routes and places of landfall were not detailed in such records, and cargoes were bundled

35. Niels Steensgaard, 'The Return Cargoes of the Carreira da Índia in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century', in Teotónio R. de Souza, ed., *Indo-Portuguese History: Old Issues, New Questions* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 13–31 at 16–21; see also, specifically on Chinese goods, Rui Manuel Loureiro, 'Chinese Commodities on the India Route in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', in Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London, 2015), pp. 76–93.

36. Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London, 2015), appendix 7, pp. 262–66.

37. Even when fragmentary documentation exists about cargo, such as fragments of ledgers itemising daily purchases of slaves at Arguim, extant for 1508 and 1519–20, it reveals nothing about the provenance of the enslaved people: see Ivana Elbl, 'Sand and Dreams: Daily Slave Purchases at the Portuguese Coastal Outpost of Arguim (Mauretania, Saharan West Africa) (1519–1520); Full Raw Serialized Data plus Archival Analysis Annotations', *Portuguese Studies Review*, 30.1 (2022), pp. 325–54 at 329. Steensgaard, 'Return Cargoes', p. 17 mentions a report concerning the cargoes on two of the boats on the return run of 1587, where the list includes goods embarked in Mozambique.

38. Much of this account book detailing incoming cargoes from West Africa arriving in Lisbon and processed at the Casa da Guiné remains unpublished, but an edition is now being prepared by Pedro Pinto. See also A.F.C. Ryder, 'A Note on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories', *Journal of African History*, 5 (1964), pp. 363–65; Avelino Teixeira da Mota, 'Gli avori africani nella documentazione portoghese dei secoli xv–xvii', *Africa*, 30.4 (1975), pp. 580–89; Kate Lowe, 'Made in Africa: West African Luxury Goods for Lisbon's Markets', in Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London, 2015), pp. 162–77 and appendix 8, p. 267.

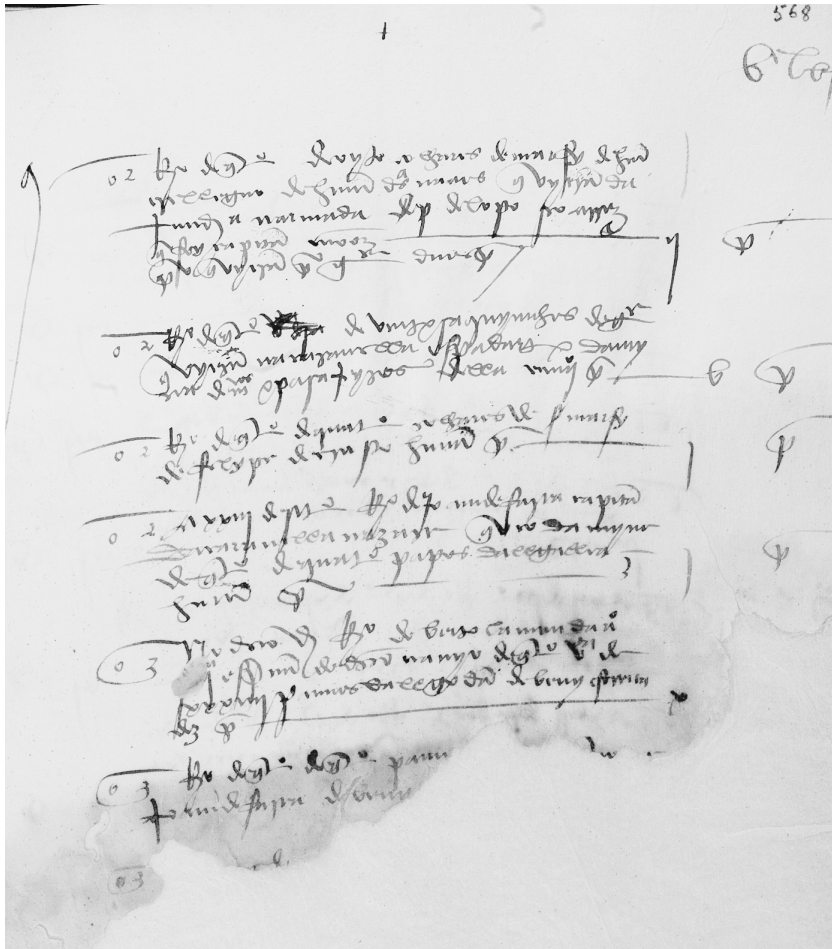


FIGURE 1. Casa da Guiné treasurer's account book, for 1504–5; Lisbon, DGLAB/TT, NA 799, 568r. Photo: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon—José António Silva

together from different parts of Africa and could have been uploaded piecemeal at various ports; so, although their arrival might have been recorded, unless they were correctly noted in detail in Africa upon being embarked, or noted in detail on arrival in Lisbon upon being disembarked, they would have been separated from their provenance even before they left Africa, and most certainly before they reached Europe. Cargo lists and bills of lading are not specific enough to provide cast-iron proof of provenance even in the case of cargoes of local produce, let alone for cargoes composed of goods that had

already travelled from elsewhere in Africa before being loaded, or had been made partly in one place and partly in another. It appears not only that documentary sources giving clear and reliable provenance from the west coast of Africa did not exist, but also that documentation from which precise West African provenance might be able to be deduced was not required by the Portuguese crown; if occasionally one or two such records surface, offering occasional snippets of information, it is a matter of chance rather than design.

Given these documentary constraints, it appears that the primary reason for provenance mattering in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—because it can guarantee authenticity—does not help with a consideration of provenance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Hindsight here led to the breakthrough in relation to what was considered important with respect to cargoes and goods—and it was not provenance. But that does not aid in the pressing quest to reattach provenance to objects. The centralised documentary record relating to goods from the Portuguese trading empire in the main turned a blind eye to provenance and was not concerned with it. Although it is still possible that local trading stations took a different view when they gathered goods to be transported back to Lisbon, it appears that by the time the goods reached Portugal it was usually not relevant. Much more so were questions of material, value and rarity. If provenance was not an issue, nor was the guarantee of authenticity that could have come with it. The general point has not been made before. Previously it had been assumed that confusion over provenance was a result of documentary loss, not that contemporary documents omitted to specify it, leaving the provenance of unfamiliar objects wide open and making clear that place of origin was often considered irrelevant.

Although the provenance of extra-European objects in Europe has proved in many cases to be elusive, their very presence has been interpreted as a sign of global interconnectedness,³⁹ and they (and all other early modern objects) have been lauded on account of their potential for reshaping the writing of early

39. On the concept of connected histories, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies* 31.3 (1997), pp. 735–62; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (New Delhi, 2005); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Holding the World in Balance: The Connected Histories of the Iberian Overseas Empires, 1500–1640', *The American Historical Review*, 112.5 (2007), pp. 1359–85. The history of objects is now accepted as an important aspect of connected history.

modern history.⁴⁰ These are valid perspectives, but more thought is first required about how these objects were brought to Europe, and how they were perceived once there, before the next important steps can be taken. Their existence in Europe requires interrogation as does their labelling in accounts and registers.

The Language of Provenance

Perhaps it is useful to bear this documentary disinterest in mind when moving to examine language and terminology relating to provenance, because it now becomes clearer that contemporary European disinterest in extra-European provenance went even deeper. Not only was the documentary record constructed without any perceived need to note specific provenance (so there were no series of documents written at the time focusing on or clarifying the geographical provenance of cargoes or goods), but the language or geographically specific vocabulary necessary to allow precise provenance to be known is also absent. In the case of the west coast of Africa, for instance, while rutters and charts were full of toponyms of coastal settlements, individual trading places and landing places, the Portuguese had few words for areas or regions or provinces: even the names of African kingdoms or empires were often not known. Nor was it any better for nomenclature relating to people or peoples rather than places: the names of ethnic groups or linguistic communities were very rarely noted (an exception is the Cantino planisphere of 1502 where one of the Portuguese inscriptions refers to three separate groups in Sierra Leone: the 'Jilof', the Mandinga and the 'Cape' [i.e., Sapi]) (Plate 1),⁴¹ and few names of African rulers were known in Europe,⁴² although a handful were. Neither

40. Giorgio Riello, 'Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives', in Karen Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture* (London, 2009), pp. 24–46 at 35–36, in a discussion about a Chinese Wanli porcelain wine cup in early seventeenth-century Jamestown in Virginia.

41. Ernesto Milano, *La carta del Cantino e la rappresentazione della terra nei codici e nei libri a stampa della Biblioteca estense e universitaria* (Modena, 1991), p. 148. The Wolof and the Mandinga are both ethnic groups and languages; Sapi was the name given to the peoples of coastal Sierra Leone by the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the ancestors of the Bullom and Temne (amongst others). Nancy E. van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham, NC, 2015), p. 178, notes the same flattening or erasure of precision with regard to indigenous languages by the Castilian authorities in relation to peoples from the Spanish empire.

42. In the chart of the Atlas Miller containing West Africa, for example, there are no names or labels of any kind except 'Guinee'. In the charts containing India and Brazil, there are coastal place-names, but no ethnic groupings, no areas, regions or provinces, no names of rulers or

the Portuguese nor the Italian material displays sufficient, or anything like sufficient, geographical knowledge about places and peoples to pinpoint correctly the provenance of goods coming from distinct, distant locales. As a result, what is now being looked for—a proper understanding of provenance as shown in documents and terminology—is something that often did not exist at the time, and cannot now be recreated. Furthermore, twentieth- and twenty-first-century insistence on ascertaining provenance overlooks the reality that fledgling fifteenth- and sixteenth-century meanings of the term were still in formation, struggling to emerge into adulthood. In Italian, the word *provenienza* existed, but was used very rarely; the preferred word was *origine*, but this was not generally used in connection with goods or objects. The Italian *provenire* was identical to the Latin from which it derived, its etymology conferring a meaning of ‘to derive/proceed from.’⁴³ *Provenienza* may have been the word of choice in the first instance in a contested legal or war context, when one city or country wanted to stop the import of goods from another.⁴⁴ Otherwise, ‘provenance’ was considered unimportant.

Examining geographical descriptors used in Portuguese and Italian relating to people and objects originating from the Portuguese trading empire, in order to help assess what Renaissance Italy knew of the Portuguese voyages, is revealing. Problems started at the top: the naming of larger categories or geographical units outside Europe presented difficulties to Europeans because of lack of relevant knowledge and languages. Zoltán Biedermann, with reference to Asia, has raised the issue of the lack of clarity surrounding the Portuguese use of the words for ‘kingdom’, ‘empire’ and ‘monarchy’ in the sixteenth century, and the ‘blurry’ meaning of the notion of a ‘region’,⁴⁵ complicating any possibility of stating precise provenance. Without clarity in the naming of extra-European political units or geographical regions, it is easy to understand why geographical descriptors relating to people and objects from the areas in question might also

kingdoms, no place-names in the interior (in Brazil, there is only ‘Terra Brasilis’). See *L'Âge d'or des cartes marines: Quand l'Europe découvrait le monde*, ed. Catherine Hofmann, Hélène Richard and Emmanuelle Vagnon, exh. cat., Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Paris, 2012), pp. 86–87, 90 and 93.

43. Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana*, 2 vols (Rome, 1907), 2, p. 1079.

44. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, 14, pp. 780–81, s.v., no. 9.

45. Zoltán Biedermann, ‘Imagining Asia from the Margins: Early Portuguese Mappings of the Continent’s Architecture and Space’, in Vimalin Rujivcharakul, H. Hazel Hahn, Ken Tadashi Oshima and Peter Christensen, eds, *Architecturalized Asia: Mapping a Continent through History* (Honolulu, 2013), pp. 35–51 at 48, 50.

be problematic. Nor did problems stop with the blurred understanding of geographical units: geography in general, and the names of discrete countries, also presented significant difficulties. Nancy van Deusen dissects court cases in sixteenth-century Castile, where the legitimacy of enslavement depended upon the origin of the enslaved person, and shows that the litigants, *índios* or indigenous people from the Spanish empire, 'relied on the murky geographical knowledge of [...] these territories' to steer the courts towards favourable verdicts.⁴⁶ In one particularly extreme case, Pegu (Burma) was confused with Peru.⁴⁷

The required scholarly research on etymology and usage of many of the geographical markers necessary to make definitive statements has not been carried out, but work by Dieter Kremer on words depicting foreigners in sixteenth-century Lisbon helps to set out the parameters of the problems. Naming is a hugely complex issue, inextricably entangled with matters of provenance, yet names are often themselves local or particular, with different names used by different groups; how one ethnic entity in Brazil referred to itself and its place of habitation was not the same as the later, more random name assigned to it by the Portuguese when they arrived in the area. Nor were geographical descriptors always based on one type of information: they could be based on geographical areas, names of countries or political entities, or on linguistic or ethnic groups. Starting with people, differences in levels of information and understanding, and in Portuguese appropriation of the land, can be seen immediately in the cases of Brazil and West Africa. Indigenous people from these areas were described in a variety of ways in a variety of types of document after they had been transported to Lisbon. The Portuguese first arrived in Brazil in 1500, and Brazil was acknowledged as a country from then on in both Portuguese and Italian sources. However, indigenous people were not described as 'from Brazil' when they arrived in Portugal—this was a descriptor reserved for Europeans who had spent time there; instead, native Brazilians were described—if at all—as *índio brasil* or much more commonly just as *índio*, with actual origin sometimes being provided by context.⁴⁸ It appears that indigenous people from Brazil, at least, were rarely linked straightforwardly to their country of origin as it was known in

46. Van Deusen, *Global Índios*, p. 194.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

48. Dieter Kremer, 'Ausländer im Lissabon des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Namenkundliche Informationen*, 101–2 (2012–13), pp. 97–181 at 118 and 154–55; see also Annemarie Jordan, 'Images of Empire: Slaves in the Lisbon Household and Court of Catherine of Austria', in T. F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 155–80 at 162–64, and Jorge Fonseca, *Escravos e senhores na Lisboa quinhentista* (Lisbon, 2010), pp. 215–28, where a variety of enslaved people are labelled as *índios*.

Europe, or accorded ‘nationality’. Rather, like other indigenous inhabitants of the Americas and elsewhere,⁴⁹ they were labelled as *índios* or ‘natives’. No place-name from Brazil, of a town or settlement, or any other form of human grouping, appears in Kremer’s list in connection to a place of origin or provenance of an enslaved person, but occasionally the name of a city such as Pernambuco appears in some other context.⁵⁰ Clearly the precise provenance of enslaved peoples from Brazil, if known, was not considered to be of much interest or value.

The situation with regard to enslaved people from West Africa mentioned in Portuguese sources was not the same. For instance, the descriptor *guineu* or *guine* always refers to a sub-Saharan African—that is, to an indigenous inhabitant of the large, undifferentiated part of the coast of West Africa known in Europe as Guinea, rather than to a European who may have spent years living there.⁵¹ The word Guinea had originated as a marker of ethnic and cultural difference, rather than as the name of a place, and as a geographical indicator it remained imprecise,⁵² yet at least Guinea itself had not been taken over as an address only fit for Portuguese. There are a couple of instances of the word *angollas* being used in Lisbon to refer to the indigenous inhabitants of Angola—an interesting example of a more precise African term, signalling a secure provenance from a known African country; and one source mentions a ‘natural de Congo ou de Angola,’⁵³ but otherwise Kremer found no mention of the Kongolese. Known islands off Africa heavily involved in the slave trade, such as Cabo Verde and São Tomé, do not appear amongst Kremer’s sample. The adjective *africano*, on the other hand, was usually reserved for Portuguese, most likely those who had lived in North Africa.⁵⁴

These idiosyncrasies are turned on their heads when non-human goods are considered. Another random documentary survival is the log-book of the ship *Bretoa* that left Lisbon for Brazil in February 1511 and docked again in Lisbon the following October (Fig. 2). One of its outfitters and probable part-owners was the Florentine merchant resident in Lisbon, Bartolomeo Marchionni, who was deeply involved in all sorts of imperial enterprises.⁵⁵ Written by the ship’s

49. See, e.g., enslaved elephant handlers from India in Portugal in 1549 and 1559 described as *índios* rather than *indianos*: Fonseca, *Escravos*, p. 219.

50. Kremer, ‘Ausländer im Lissabon’, p. 116.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

52. Lowe, ‘Africa in the News’, p. 315.

53. Kremer, ‘Ausländer im Lissabon’, pp. 113–14.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10.

55. Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, *Bartolomeo Marchionni ‘homem de grossa fazenda’ (ca. 1450–1530): Un mercante fiorentino a Lisbona e l’impero portoghese* (Florence, 2014), pp. 109–10.

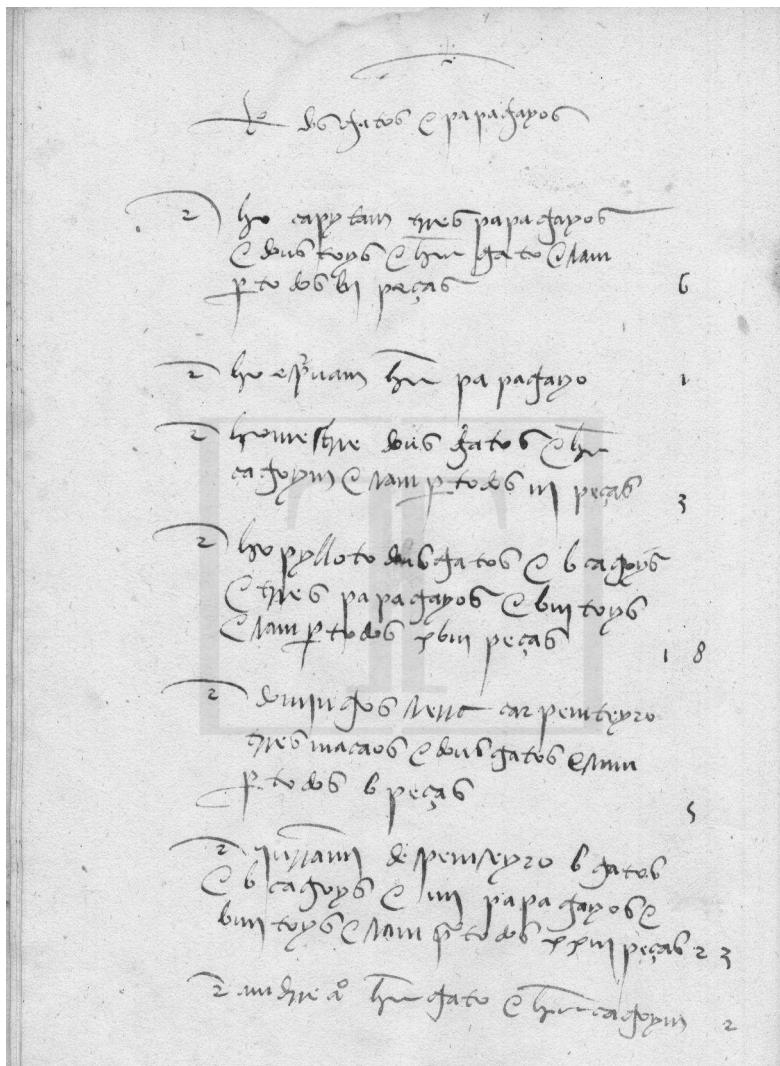


FIGURE 2. Livro da nau Bretoa, 1511, paper, 31.5 × 22 cm; Lisbon, DGLAB/TT, NA 759, 20v (inv. PT/TT/OVNA/759). Photo: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon

scribe, Duarte Fernandes, the log-book records—in addition to its principal cargo of brazil wood—seventy-two animals brought back; in the absence of Portuguese words for some of these animals, Fernandes uses their Tupi names, presumably explained to him in Brazil at the point of acquisition.⁵⁶ Tupi was the language spoken by the Tupinambá, who inhabited the area along the coastline of Brazil. One of over a hundred indigenous languages in Brazil, it was quickly given precedence by the Portuguese, as it was the first language they encountered in the new territory, and was accepted by them as the main indigenous language.⁵⁷ Very unusually, therefore, the log-book provides evidence of the process whereby new non-European words entered the Portuguese lexicon in the critical first years of cultural contact.⁵⁸

If more log-books such as this had survived, this linguistic process could have been traced in relation to Portuguese trading posts around the world. As it is, there are two reasons why the lists in the *Bretoa's* log-book did not have to record the provenance of the animals it carried. The first is that all of the goods were embarked in Brazil, so in the log-book their provenance was understood. (The ship made a stop at the Canaries on the way to Brazil, but took on no goods.)⁵⁹ The second is that the animals and birds were native to Brazil, and their Tupi names showed this. Without the Tupi names for parrots, they could have been confused with parrots from elsewhere, as parrots came from many parts of the world. Antonio Pigafetta included a couple of word lists gleaned from people in Brazil and Patagonia in his account of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe in 1519–22. The one from Brazil had only a few

56. The text of the log-book was transcribed and published by Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, *Historia geral do Brazil*, 2 vols (Rio de Janeiro, 1854 and 1857), 1, pp. 427–32. On this log-book, see Annemarie Jordan Gschwend, 'Animais globais: Coleção e ostentação', in *A cidade global: Lisboa no Renascimento/The Global City: Lisbon in the Renaissance*, ed. Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, exh. cat., Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon (Lisbon, 2017), pp. 192–201 at 193–94 and 206.

57. Aryon D. Rodrigues, 'On the Influence of Indigenous Languages on Brazilian Portuguese', *DELTA: Documentação de estudos em lingüística teórica e aplicada*, 30 (2014), available at http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-44502014000300443&lng=en&tlng=en (accessed 16 April 2023).

58. Dante Martins Teixeira and Nelson Papavero, 'O tráfico de primatas brasileiros nos séculos XVI e XVII', in Leila Maria Pessôa, William Corrêa Tavares and Salvatore Siciliano, eds, *Mamíferos de restingas e manguezais do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 2010), pp. 253–82 at 254–55; Nelson Papavero and Dante Martins Teixeira, *Zoonímia tupi nos escritos quinhentistas europeus* (São Paulo, 2014), pp. 17 and 248ff.

59. Varnhagen, *Historia geral*, 1, p. 427.

words, but the one from the Tehuelche of Patagonia was longer and fuller, and included their words for parrot and birdcage.⁶⁰

In contradistinction to this acquisition of Brazilian nomenclature, indigenous African language or dialect words for African goods have mainly been lost or obscured, and have not passed into Portuguese. The fifteenth-century West African word list included in Eustache de la Fosse's account of his voyage to the West African coast in 1479–80, recalled and written in about 1516, contains only sixteen words, of which only three—the words for gold, cloth and brass armlet—are terms for goods that might have been exchanged.⁶¹ P.E.H. Hair believed that the vocabulary was 'basically Akan throughout',⁶² but as the three goods were recognisable using Portuguese words, these African words were redundant, and were not subsumed into Portuguese. What survives instead, captured in manuscripts and contemporary printed texts, is Afro-Portuguese pidgin or creole.⁶³

It seems clear that although many permutations of descriptor existed in the documentary record of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Lisbon, in the vast majority of cases—whether of people, animals or other goods—precise geographical provenance did not figure in common usage. If it is accepted that how the goods were acquired was of no interest to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europeans (possession is nine-tenths of the law), it starts to make sense that where they were acquired could seem of no consequence either. Here there seems to be a difference between Lisbon/Portugal, the city/country in Europe where the non-European goods first made landfall, and Florence/Rome, which were second and secondary European destinations. All knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is to varying extents a product of its local context.⁶⁴ Consequently,

60. Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, trans. and ed. R. A. Skelton, 2 vols (New Haven, CT, 1969), 1, p. 55.

61. P.E.H. Hair, 'A Note on de la Fosse's "Mina" Vocabulary of 1479–80', *Journal of West African Languages*, 3.1 (1966), pp. 55–57; David Dalby and P.E.H. Hair, 'A Further Note on the Mina Vocabulary of 1479–80', *Journal of West African Languages*, 5.2 (1968), pp. 129–31; P. E. Russell, 'Novos apontamentos sobre os problemas textuais do *Voiaige à la Guinée* de Eustáquio de la Fosse (1479–1480)', *Revista portuguesa de história*, 16 (1976), Homenagem ao Doutor Torquato de Sousa Soares, pp. 209–21.

62. Hair, 'A Note', p. 55.

63. John Lipski, *A History of Afro-Hispanic Language Contact: Five Centuries and Five Continents* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 40, and see also 51–67.

64. David N. Livingstone, *Putting Science in Its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2003), e.g., pp. 179–86; Monica Azzolini, 'Talking of Animals: Whales, Ambergris and

locality and local conditions matter, and place can help elucidate ways in which expert knowledge contributed to an appreciation of the value of non-European objects. It is now clear that in Lisbon there were official appraisers of goods, at the very least from selected parts of the Portuguese trading empire, with the expertise to identify from its appearance not only whether a carpet came from India or Persia, but also more precisely whether it came from Cambay (Khambat) or Odiaz (Odisa).⁶⁵ Or perhaps it is more relevant to note that expert appraisers existed for some expensive categories of goods—certain luxury or prestige goods—for which it was important to distinguish carefully between items from distinct regions in order to arrive at correct valuations. These would therefore be exceptions to the rule that provenance did not matter; in such cases it clearly did. This hypothesis is backed up by evidence from the inventories of objects belonging to Catarina de Áustria, queen of Portugal, between 1525 and 1578; these inventories of extra-European luxury goods consistently recorded provenance—at least at the level of names of countries—because the provenance made the goods more valuable.⁶⁶ The method of acquisition might have been erased, but provenance, in the sense of geographical origin, was still crucial. This must have been because a sufficient number of these goods were appearing in Lisbon for expert appraisers to have a role. The state of expert knowledge in Lisbon and Florence or Rome varied according to the category of object, its quantity, its availability and its perceived desirability, so that while knowledge of porcelain was probably greater in Lisbon, for example, knowledge of coins was probably greater in Florence.

Referring to the Provenance of Extra-European Goods in Italy

By the time Portuguese trading-empire goods had made the next leg of their journey to Italy or the Habsburg Empire, even the provenance attached to exceptional objects appears to have been shed as being no longer relevant. The

the Circulation of Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century Rome’, *Renaissance Studies*, 31.2 (2017), pp. 297–318 at 299.

65. Hugo Miguel Crespo, ‘Global Interiors on the Rua Nova in Renaissance Lisbon’, in Annemarie Jordan Gschwend and K.J.P. Lowe, eds, *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon* (London, 2015), pp. 120–39 at 121.

66. Annemarie Jordan, ‘The Development of Catherine of Austria’s Collection in the Queen’s Household: Its Character and Cost’, Ph.D dissertation, Brown University, 1994, p. 382 n. 5.

point is that detailed knowledge of the Portuguese trading empire was not at a premium in relation to objects in Italy, so no experts emerged with the relevant expertise. The number of goods was too small for expertise to be needed or viable. The desire to possess was more visceral and less refined or informed than that; these objects were deemed desirable, and neither how they had been acquired nor where they came from mattered to Italian buyers, agents or collectors. Returning once again to examine geographical descriptors—this time those used in Italian relating to people and objects originating from the Portuguese trading empire, in order to see what Renaissance Italy knew of the Portuguese voyages—the exercise is even more revealing than examining them in Portuguese. The word used most extensively to describe all these objects is *indiano*. This word would have caused difficulty even if it had been applicable to objects originating from either the East or the West Indies, or from India, but its usage was far wider.⁶⁷ As Jessica Keating and Lia Markey revealed in a seminal article in 2010,⁶⁸ the compilers of sixteenth-century Medici and Habsburg inventories relied heavily on the descriptor *indiano* when confronted with non-European objects that they could not place. Far from signifying a provenance in India or the New World, *indiano* positioned the essence of the object in its foreignness, but not in a specific place of origin. It masqueraded as—but was not—a geographical descriptor. It is relevant that there is no Italian equivalent of the Portuguese adjective *índio* (‘native’/indigenous), that it did not enter Italian; it is as though *indiano* is used instead to signal generic indigenoussness of the non-European. The extra semantic load carried by *indiano* is significant linguistically and conceptually. The word appears repeatedly in the Medici inventories of the Wardrobe or Guardroba; indeed, it is ubiquitous—not only in Medici inventories, but in all sixteenth-century inventories in Italian that included extra-European objects. The compilers used the term as recognisable shorthand, to fix ‘a chaotic mix of visual and cultural information into one semantic statement’, thereby acknowledging

67. Cf. Nuno Senos, ‘The Empire in the Duke’s Palace: Global Material Culture in Sixteenth-Century Portugal’, in Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds, *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London, 2015), pp. 128–44 at 132 states that in the inventory of Teodósio I, fifth duke of Bragança, China and India included a great deal: ‘everything from the Cape of Good Hope to Melaka is referred to as India while China means everything east of Malacca including Japan.’

68. Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, ‘“Indian” Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories: A Case Study of the Sixteenth-Century Term’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23.2 (2011), pp. 283–300.

an object as non-European in origin, style or usage, but signalling that they were unable to pinpoint more specifically the provenance of one of these 'new and unusual things'.⁶⁹ In addition, it is surely relevant that one type of Medici inventory accessioned new objects according to date of entry and recorded when they left the collection, either on loan or permanently (*giornale di entrata e uscita*), another, *quaderni di ricordi o ricordanze*, was more narrative in content, and two further types categorised them either by object type (*a capi*) or by room location around the Medici residences. No inventory categorised according to place of origin or provenance, because in most cases this was not known. Following Oscar Wilde, Keating and Markey memorably write that the compilers of inventories never fell into 'careless habits of accuracy';⁷⁰ widespread employment of the waffle word *indiano* was one way in which these compilers resisted the straitjacket of accuracy. *Indiano* could be applied to people as well as to inanimate objects, leaving the person's place of origin open to speculation.⁷¹ In this, it resembled the Portuguese or Spanish word *índio* (both an adjective and a noun) or 'indigenous person', again used as a way of signalling foreignness—a label of nearly boundless, 'geographically all-encompassing' parameters, according to Nancy van Deusen.⁷²

Lia Markey's book *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* is extremely helpful as a point of comparison, because by the second decade of the sixteenth century, and more especially from the fourth decade onwards under Cosimo, the Medici are believed to have been engaging with information about the Americas.⁷³ Indeed, Markey argues that the arrival of objects from the Americas was the catalyst responsible for the projected design of the Guardaroba Nuova in the Palazzo Vecchio. At the very least, a solid case can be made for them being more on top of information about the Americas than about Africa, to take one example. It is certainly true that some objects were more recognisable than others, or made from unique materials only found in a limited area, and that Mexican featherwork, for instance, might have fallen into this category; yet there is still plenty of evidence that people in Europe

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 285 and 297.

70. Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, 'Introduction: Captured Objects. Inventories of Early Modern Collections', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23.2 (2011), pp. 209–13 at 210.

71. ASF, MdP 220, fol. 93, Cosimo I in Florence to Paolo Trenta in Pisa, 29 May 1565, Florence, Medici Archive Project, doc. ID 9408.

72. Van Deusen, *Global Indios*, p. 228.

73. Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (University Park, PA, 2016), pp. 1–5 and 28–45.

did not recognise featherwork as coming from Mexico. And labelling something as *indiano* and knowing that it came from Mexico are two rather different things. In the inventories under Cosimo post-1539, amongst the objects known to have come from the Americas, the only geographical descriptors used are *d'India* and *delle Indie*, which fit well with the other two, equally vague, ones used in the same section: *asiatica* and *morescha*. All that can be gleaned from this is that the compiler of the inventory thought he could discern objects in three distinct styles originating in different places. Nor is it known whether *d'India* here signified America, which is crucial to the argument.⁷⁴ In contradistinction to letters and *avvisi* arriving at the Medici court from the Spanish court, where precise provenance of events and precious metals was provided (New Spain, Peru),⁷⁵ the inventories were geographically and ethnographically silent in relation to objects from the Americas. At the other end of the scale were objects in the Medici collections, such as turtle-shell pieces, that were utterly perplexing in terms of origin, and might have come from any one of a number of places in Indonesia or around the Indian Ocean; the provenance of these was never going to be securely recognised in Europe at the time (and is still not secure even now).

It is interesting that the word *indiano* does not appear in John Florio's Italian–English dictionary *Queen Anna's New World of Words* of 1611 (or indeed his earlier and less full *A Worlde of Wordes* of 1598), perhaps revealing that it was a word used resonantly in colloquial speech and handwritten lists rather than in printed texts.⁷⁶ While the word was surely clearly recognisable in the sixteenth century for what it was—that is, a handy catch-all—it simultaneously also signalled either ignorance or laziness on the part of the inventory compiler, and a disregard for provenance. Even leaving these drawbacks aside, inventories were not uncontaminated records—no records are; all records are agenda-driven—but repositories of all sorts of social and cultural conventions and influences,⁷⁷ and geographical descriptors reflected this, so the

74. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

76. John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues* (London, 1611) does not contain adjectives derived from the names of countries (such as *cinese*) but nor does it contain geographical descriptors, such as *africano* or *indiano* that have more subtle and nuanced meanings, the sorts of words he usually did include.

77. Giorgio Riello, “Things seen and unseen”: The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and Their Representation of Domestic Interiors”, in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early Modern Things: Objects and Their Histories, 1500–1800* (London, 2013), pp. 125–50 at 125, 127.

absence of precise provenance in inventories mirrored the greater disinterest in provenance in society at large. Some categories of object had a generally known provenance—such as China in the case of porcelain, as it was manufactured and obtainable only there at this date⁷⁸—but it is noteworthy that geographical descriptors are more commonly attached to objects in connection with a style than with a place of origin; and the geographical descriptors attached to styles were nearly all European. So, for example, *seggiolo* (chairs) were described as ‘*seggiolo di Spagna*’⁷⁹ or ‘*intarsiate alla portoghese*.’⁸⁰ Conversely some places were far less likely than others to be noted as places of origin. African objects seem to have been the least likely of all to be ascribed one. In addition, on the quite rare occasions when an extra-European provenance was attributed to these objects (when they were not described as *indiano*), either in inventories or accession records, it was often incorrect or false: an African oliphant, or ivory hunting horn, had supposedly belonged to a Japanese king, and an Aztec codex was described as coming from China.⁸¹

Provenance and the Guardaroba Project

These errors in attribution—or this carelessness—in relation to place of origin make it difficult to believe that objects in princely, ducal or other collections, *Wunderkammern*, *Kunstkammern* or even *studioli*,⁸² could ever have been arranged or displayed thematically according to place of origin, as has sometimes been suggested. In the second edition of *Le vite de’ più illustri pittori, scultori ed architettori* of 1568, Giorgio Vasari discusses in some detail how the custom-built space of the new Medici Guardaroba in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence would be disposed. The room was under construction, so Vasari’s words were intended to give a sense of a project in progress. Nowhere in this description is there any mention of arranging the objects in the cabinets according to

78. On porcelain owned by the Medici, see Marco Spallanzani, *Ceramiche alla corte dei Medici nel Cinquecento* (Modena, 1994); Francesco Morena, ed., *Dalle Indie orientali alla corte di Toscana: Collezioni di arte cinese e giapponese a Palazzo Pitti* (Florence, 2005).

79. ASF, Guardaroba medicea 28, 17r, inventory of 1553.

80. ASF, Guardaroba medicea 44, 151r, inventory of 1560.

81. Daniela Bleichmar, ‘Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections’, in Daniela Bleichmar and Peter Mancall, eds, *Collecting across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, 2011), pp. 15–30 at 17, 19.

82. Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, 1997).

geographical clusters; there is rather a much vaguer emphasis on displaying the choicest, in terms of the most expensive and most beautiful, items.⁸³ However, some scholars have taken this to mean that the whole point of the Guardaroba programme was to integrate cartography, decoration and object, with the objects sorted according to place of origin: ‘Cosimo’s collection of feathered plumes would be placed in the cabinet behind the Mexico map, for example’;⁸⁴ ‘[the Guardaroba Nuova] was designed specifically to store Cosimo’s most precious goods from around the world within cupboards painted with detailed maps of the regions from which the objects hailed’;⁸⁵ ‘[t]he plans for the Guardaroba [. . .] reorganised his objects according to provenance’;⁸⁶ and ‘[t]he cartographic display in the Guardaroba Nuova was constructed specifically to show the provenance of the carefully catalogued objects to be housed in the cabinets behind the panels.’⁸⁷

There is no evidence for this neat and attractive proposition. Instead, there are crippling problems connected to the assumption it involves, hinging as it does on the provenance of the objects being known, when in many (indeed most) cases it was not. Francesca Fiorani—sagely—realised this, while leaving open the possibility that ‘an educated collector’ might have been able to distinguish between the different provenances of ivories described as ‘Moorish’ in the Medici inventories (in fact from Africa) and featherwork likewise described as Moorish in the same inventories (in fact from Mexico).⁸⁸ There are at least three assumptions entangled here. Yes, educated collectors might have realised that the ivories and the featherwork did not emanate from the same culture, but it is another leap again to suggest that they might have known the ivories came from Africa, and a third leap to suppose that they knew in which part of Africa they had been carved. There were eleven maps of Africa in the Guardaroba detailing various parts of the continent.⁸⁹ In the

83. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più illustri pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols (Florence, 1878–85), 7, p. 634: ‘le più importanti cose e di pregio e di bellezza che abbi Sua Eccellenza.’

84. Mark Rosen, *The Mapping of Power in Renaissance Italy: Painted Cartographic Cycles in Social and Intellectual Context* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 87.

85. Markey, *Imagining the Americas*, p. 37.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

88. Francesca Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, 2005), pp. 75 and 294 n. 32.

89. There were fourteen maps of Europe, fourteen of Asia, and fourteen of the West Indies: Fiorani, *Marvel of Maps*, p. 24.

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