

S. 9. 4. – Oceanic Rutters as Tools for Globalization

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Panel Abstract

Our panel will explore different aspects of the historical impact of the nautical specialised literature encompassed by the umbrella-term “rutter”. Starting from an identification and characterisation of the genre, and taking into account the social environments and mechanisms which fostered its development, we will present specific examples from the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, of how through their use in practical contexts they are simultaneously acted upon and become agents of a kind.

We want to trace the long and deep history of nautical rutters’ textual tradition, building up from its earlier manifestations and including the different nautical genres covered by the generic “rutter” (roteiros, regimentos, livros de marinharía, etc). Oceanic rutters were products of long-distance, multicultural networks and of continental-scale voyages, and they had a complex relationship with the contexts in which they were produced and used.

We shall take into account the problems raised and brought to light by the different and overlapping traditions of printed, manuscript and oral nautical instructions.

The production and circulation of the oceanic rutters was part of a collective and organised effort to gather, process, and disseminate information and knowledge on a large scale. The information and knowledge they contained became crucial not only for shipowners, sailors and pilots, but also for the activities of merchants, cartographers and philosophers.

Despite a robust literature focusing on very technical nautical aspects, oceanic rutters have received little attention in the history of science. This panel highlights the importance of oceanic rutters as historical sources, showing how they are able to provide new insights on globalization and cross-cultural encounters.

From our perspective, oceanic rutters are not an endpoint in the consolidation of knowledge, but a vital text in constant transformation, the primary driver of a set of new developments.

Keywords

nautical literature, circulation of knowledge, globalization, cross-cultural exchanges, early modern history

Tracing a New Textual Tradition: The Oceanic Rutter (15th – 17th c.)

LUANA GIURGEVICH (CIUHCT, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa)

Abstract

By the end of the 15th century, the Oceans emerged as the loci of a new textual genre: the oceanic rutter. The standardization of long-distance voyages made necessary the development of more effective navigational tools, able to adapt themselves to novel sailing conditions, and to Worlds never seen before. Oceanic rutters represented a special way of making sense of the maritime space among the varied range of nautical technical documents which proliferated in the early modern period. This paper proposes to examine the evolution of this specialized textual genre through the study of the different stages of text production, transmission, and reception. In a history of global interactions, oceanic rutters will be analyzed mainly as social objects of cross-fertilized cultural traditions.

Biography

Luana Giurgevich is a post-doctoral researcher of CIUHCT, University of Lisbon, within the ERC Project RUTTER “Making the Earth Global”. Presently, her research focuses principally on maritime technical literature and scientific textual genres. Her main publication is the book *Clavis bibliothecarum. Catálogos e inventários de livrarias de instituições religiosas em Portugal até 1834* (2016), co-authored with Henrique Leitão, which resulted from a six-years research project on scientific books and religious libraries. Since 2020, she is responsible for the website “A Sea of Books. RUTTER Virtual Library”.

Scaling Up Nature: The Construction of a Global Perspective of Nature through 16th-century Oceanic Rutters

FABIANO BRACHT (CITCEM, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto)

Abstract

In 16th-century Europe, as a direct result of the overseas expansion, there was an increasing influx of knowledge about the natural world from different parts of the globe. Over the last thirty years, historiography has explored the role of various historical agents, physicians, chroniclers, and missionaries who, through their writings, produced knowledge about nature, the environment, and drugs of America, Africa and Asia. However, given that high prices and distribution bottlenecks hampered their circulation, those printed travel accounts, chronicles, and medical treatises may not be sufficient to explain the wide dissemination that information about nature and the environment achieved during the first decades of the 16th century. It is thus imperative to focus on other categories of historical sources, cheaper, more accessible, easier to reproduce and circulate. The textual genre that most effectively fulfils these specifications is undoubtedly the oceanic rutter. Essentially practical documents that could easily be transmitted from hand to hand, oceanic rutters (and ship's logbooks) are technical documents that collect and analyse critical information for the successful accomplishment of oceanic navigation. Aside from the knowledge needed for long-distance navigation, such as distances, latitudes, currents, tides and winds, these rutters also contain substantial information about the natural world. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise about the importance of nautical routes for the global circulation and accumulation of knowledge about nature during the 16th-century. This paper aims to explore this hypothesis from the evidence contained in the Portuguese sources.

Biography

PhD in History at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto; research interests include History of Medicine, Pharmacy and Natural Sciences within the construction and circulation of scientific knowledge; researcher at Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar «Cultura, Espaço e Memória» (CITCEM), Faculty of Arts, University of Porto; team member of the ERC Rutter Project in History of Science.

The Cross-Cultural World of Arabic Nautical Literature

JUAN ACEVEDO (CIUHCT, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa)

Abstract

It is well known that Arab navigators and Arabic nautical literature had a pivotal role over many centuries throughout the Indian Ocean, acting as the expert intermediaries par excellence in trade, exploration and pilgrimage. I will show how deep and prolonged the presence of other cultures was in Arabic nautical literature, both linguistically and technically, and how all related activities were deeply enmeshed with a host of other Asian cultures, from Chinese to East African peoples, including Persian, Gujarati, Sinhalese, Javanese and other languages, and eventually Portuguese and other European languages. The resulting characterization is that of a centuries-long, truly multicultural endeavour which acted as an integrative force, permeating all human affairs and making possible the constitution of an Indian Ocean cosmopolis.

Biography

Born 1971; studied Classics (+Hebrew) at Universidad de Los Andes, Venezuela; specialised in Arabic-English bilingual typesetting (Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, UK); Comparative Religion (The Matheson Trust, London); 2018 PhD in Comparative History of Philosophy, Warburg Institute, University of London; presently post-doctoral research in Lisbon for the ERC Rutter Project in History of Science. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5330-9672>