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Shining a Spotlight on the History of Diu

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1 Introduction

The small island of Diu is located just off the southern tip of the peninsula of Saurashtra, in Gujarat (India), and it is currently integrated within one of the country's union territories.¹ At present, the island may seem rather peripheral, but Diu has a complex history that is crisscrossed by multiple influences from near and far, making it especially cosmopolitan and, in many ways, central.

The colonial rule of the Portuguese, which extended from 1535 to 1961, has greatly impacted Diu and the Diuese and is undoubtedly crucial to defining this territory's unique history from the early modern period up to the present day. The enormous interest shown by the Portuguese in Diu from the very outset of their imperial engagement with South Asia derived from the island's strategic importance and commercial vitality—which, in turn, had already placed it at the center of important networks of people and trade extending not only inland but also across the Indian Ocean (especially toward the Persian Gulf and East Africa). In fact, Diu was the setting for a number of highly significant episodes in the history of South Asia, including the Zoroastrian migration to the region (in which, according to tradition, this island was the first port of call); a series of crucial military encounters that cemented the position of the

1 Up until January 2020, Diu was part of the Union Territory of Daman and Diu. After a merging with another union territory, it now belongs to the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.

incoming Portuguese in the sixteenth century and politically reconfigured the region, including the 1509 Battle of Diu, in which the Portuguese scored a naval triumph over a fleet raised by South Asian and Middle Eastern powers; and the assassination of the Sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, in 1537.

The tremendous opposition the Portuguese had to overcome to establish their stronghold in Diu in the sixteenth century—including two strenuous sieges of their fortifications in 1538 and 1546—gave it something of a mythological status in the Portuguese imperial narrative about Asia, which may seem at odds with its later perception as a peripheral territory within the Portuguese colonial empire.

Diu's importance in the sixteenth century may have drawn the most attention from historians to date, but the island is relevant to many other research topics and periods, some of which are developed in this special section of the present issue of the *Asian Review of World Histories*. Diu is hardly untouched territory for historical research,² but the full extent of its local, regional, and global relevance has not yet been fully worked out, and the island is often unduly overshadowed by, or lumped together with, other locations, including the surrounding regions of Gujarat or (within the context of the former Portuguese *Estado da Índia*) Daman, Bassein, and Goa. In order to give Diu and its inhabitants pride of place and contribute toward raising the veil of relative obscurity that surrounds them—not only in historical research, but also, and perhaps more pointedly, in other disciplines—the international congress “Diu and the Diuese: Multidisciplinary Perspectives” was organized at the University of Lisbon in 2016. The articles included here, which treat the history of Diu, constitute one portion of the research presented at the conference. Several papers that locate Diu in the fields of anthropology, ethnomusicology, linguistics, and literature have already been published in a special issue of *South Asian Studies*,³ which should be seen as a companion to the present collection.

2 Contents

The four articles that constitute this special section approach various aspects of the history of Diu in periods ranging from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth

2 For further details, including bibliographical references, see Hugo C. Cardoso and Pedro Pombo, “Diu and the Diuese: Indian Ocean, Heritage, and Cultural Landscape,” in “Diu and the Diuese: Indian Ocean, Heritage, and Cultural Landscape,” ed. Hugo C. Cardoso and Pedro Pombo, special issue, *South Asian Studies* 34 (1):1–5.

3 See n. 2 above.

century. The embedding of Diu within the former Portuguese empire is a common thread, yet these studies tackle a wide array of topics. As a result, the reader will find multiple perspectives that either emphasize the expansive reach of Diu and the Diuese, both in their regional context and in the larger Indian Ocean world, or explore issues specific to the territory.

Nuno Vila-Santa's "Between Ottomans and Gujaratis: D. Diogo de Noronha, the Repositioning of Diu in the Indian Ocean, and the Creation of the Northern Province (1548–1560)" is a detailed study of the ways in which D. Diogo de Noronha, captain of Diu from 1554 to 1557, redefined the island's relevance after the two sieges of the fortress in 1538 and 1546. The concrete geopolitical situation of Diu, which in the period in question was wedged within the Sultanate of Gujarat, provides the backdrop for an intricate diplomatic engagement. D. Diogo's negotiations with the neighboring sultan ensured the later conquest of Daman and other territories for the Portuguese crown—comprising the seed of what came to be known as the Northern Province (*Província do Norte*) of Portuguese India—while simultaneously consolidating the fortress and city of Diu as vital components of the Portuguese foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Luís Frederico Antunes's "A Long-Distance Nexus in the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Baniyas, Brokers, and Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Portuguese East Africa" expands on the topic of Diu's place in regional dynamics. Antunes widens his perspective to include Diu's participation in Indian Ocean trade routes by looking specifically at one of the major protagonists of the island's old commercial dynamism: the Bania community. While it has been established that Bania merchants sustained old links with East Africa, this study focuses on how, within the Portuguese colonial networks, they turned Diu into a privileged hub for their business activities. From the seventeenth century onward, the Baniyas came to dominate not only transoceanic trade with Mozambique but also trade within Mozambique itself by establishing merchant communities there and adapting their merchant knowledge to the Mozambican reality.

One of the distinctive features of Diu within its wider context is the presence of Christian art and architecture. Several examples located on the island powerfully translate cultural and political history while materializing social and religious sensibilities. In "Artistic and Cultural Values in the Churches of Diu: Reflections on Their Architecture, Iconography, and Artistic Processes," Mónica Esteves Reis situates the altarpieces of Diuese churches within Indo-Portuguese art. While Diu was an important component of the Northern Province of Portuguese India, it was geographically distant from Goa and from the nearest artistic production center, Bassein. The author demonstrates that this circumstance led to the development of particular features in the local Catholic architecture and art, as well as hybrid iconographies that evidence a

dialogue between the Catholic faith and local religious traditions. Therefore, while certainly inscribed in the wider aesthetics of Indo-Portuguese art and visual culture, Catholic art in Diu equally integrated local expertise, producing unique artistic examples within the Portuguese empire.

The final article, Luís Cabral de Oliveira and João Caleira's "Between the Law in Books and the Law in Action: The Case of Diu in Constitutional Liberalism," also focuses on Diu's specificities, in this case the impact of colonial legislation on the island during the nineteenth century. To uncover the particular mechanisms of social administration applied to Diu during the period of constitutional liberalism, the authors analyze the *códigos de usos e costumes* (codes of uses and customs) elaborated in 1854 and 1894 to define the legal treatment of the non-Christian inhabitants of Diu, as well as the context in which they were produced and the main protagonists. Cabral de Oliveira and Caleira identify and contextualize innovations in the second code, their reception, and their implementation, thereby providing a detailed account of a significant legislative initiative integrated in a wider movement toward codifying and controlling diversity within a colonial system.