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**THE TRANQUEBAR PALAMPORE: TRADE, DIPLOMACY, AND “A LITTLE AMUSEMENT” IN AN
EARLY MODERN INDO-DANISH TEXTILE**

Josefine Baark

The Danish *Tranquebar Palampore* is a large cotton textile depicting colorful scenes of elephant games, Danes presenting tribute or hunting, Danish royal insignia, and Indian aristocrats (fig. 1).¹ A *palampore* is a large cotton cloth that has been mordant dyed and hand painted with a *kalam* pen. The term originates from Portuguese and was used to describe large pieces of cloth made in India for the South East Asian and European markets. The events and the monograms that take center stage on this particular textile likely commemorate the coronation of the Maratha ruler Ekoji II in 1735. By establishing an iconographic link between his own ascent to the throne and the recent coronation of the Danish king Christian VI (in 1730), Ekoji II may

¹ The *Tranquebar Palampore* has recently made a striking but brief appearance in Amelia Peck and Amy Elizabeth Bogansky, *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 85–86. See also, Vilhelm Slomann, *Bizarre Designs in Silks, Trade and Traditions*, trans. by Eve M. Wendt (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953); Per Eilstrup and Niels Eric Boesgaard, *Fjernt fra Danmark: Billeder fra vore Tropekolonier, Slavehandel og Kinafart* (Copenhagen: Lademann, 1974); Ole Feldbæk, “The Danish Asiatic Company,” in *Asiatisk Plads Danish Foreign Services New Headquarters in Copenhagen*, ed. Georg Anders (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1980), 24–25; Esther Fihl, *Tropekolonien Tranquebar* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1989), 92–92.

have commissioned the palampore in the hopes of cementing the status of his newly established dynasty in the eyes of his subjects, as well as bringing more Danish merchants to India. This connection is supported by a retelling of events by Danish sailor Peter Petersen Kramer relating to the Danish delegation to Ekoji II's court in late December of 1735 and the unique visual representations of the Indo-Danish relationship found on the textile. I shall return to this testimony below.

INSERT IMAGE #1 HERE

National and individual histories are increasingly traced through the biographies of everyday objects, luxuries, and gifts traversing international borders. Yet, consumption—a significant consideration when material culture crosses borders—is often seen as the purview of the receiver of goods.² Hence, more often than not, the Western appreciation and display of diplomatic gifts from non-Europeans (but only once they have reached the West) take center stage in the interpretation of goods as intermediaries between cultures.³ This article explores how

² Giorgio Riello has been pivotal in championing the turn toward material culture. For a brief sampling, see Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, eds, *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850* (Leiden & Boston: Brill Publishers, 2009); Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, eds, *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1300–1850* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).

³ New scholarship on the global exchange of goods, led by Maxine Berg, has focused on the important complexities of consumption patterns. This trend has fostered a great many important contributions to the field. Yet many works in this vein tend to treat production as two-sided, but consumption as one-sided. See, for instance, the essays by Giorgio Riello and Beverly Lemire in

an artifact was put on display in a spectrum of different milieu during its diplomatic journey. The geographical challenges presented by diplomacy between two distinct powerhouses presents an opportunity to look closely at gift exchange between equals that was subject to public display and therefore, overseen and engineered by socially inferior mediators.

Ceremony, ritual, and display were flamboyantly visual and of paramount importance in the relationships fostered by early modern trade. Gifts exchanged between trade partners traversed multiple boundaries in South Asian and European culture, generating meaning for the giver, as well as the receiver. The public performances associated with gift exchange meant that at a local level, the question of whether the receiver understood every layer of meaning inherent in the gift was extraneous to its purpose. Hence, the public exposure surrounding gifts mandates a revised narrative that places gifts generally, and the highly controlled political and social rituals surrounding the giving and receiving of gifts, in a more prominent position within the history of material culture. In a recent publication on spaces of global interaction, Giorgio Riello and Anne Gerritsen raised the issue that “palampores show how design was neither totally determined by producers nor by consumers.”⁴ I argue here that an important aspect of understanding how design could occupy such an intermediary role, is to take into consideration the ephemeral meanings generated in the moment of gift giving.

Scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the production and circulation of early modern textiles. The majority of their analyses concern themselves largely with narratives of technique, fashion, and economic divergence between East and West. The focus has often been

Riello, *The Spinning World*, esp. 347–348.

⁴ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 117.

on the production of Indian textiles, first for the Portuguese and then for the Dutch, British, and French.⁵ Hence, although other, equally important examples exist, I use the *Tranquebar Palampore* as a springboard for questioning where and when visual consumption takes place, because it is less encumbered by previous scholarship. An added benefit is the introduction of new material to the canon of textile history. The Danish collection has, on the whole, gone unnoticed.⁶ This is not to say that there are vast numbers of textiles in Denmark; indeed, very few have been well preserved. However, the few that have survived are of excellent quality and worthy of closer study.

The Danes were peripheral to Indian Ocean trade and compared to other Northern European merchants were cash-strapped and had strong inclinations toward piracy. Their counterparts in India—traders belonging to the Nayaka and Maratha courts—were wily and diplomatically experienced, having dealt with internal power struggles that, more often than not, were caused by struggles between larger powers such as the Mughals and the Deccan sultanates.

⁵ For a brief sampling since the 1950s, see Beverly Lemire *Cotton* (London: Berg, 2011); John Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); John Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century: Western India,” *Journal of Indian Textile History* 1 (1955): 33; John Irwin, “Indian Textile Trade in the Seventeenth Century: Coromandel Coast,” *Journal of Indian Textile History* 2, (1956): 24–42. Also see Tirthankar Roy, ed. *Cloth and Commerce: Textiles in Colonial India* (New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 1996).

⁶ The only other exception is the writings of Vilhelm Slomann, who worked as director of the Danish Design Museum in the early twentieth century. Vilhelm Slomann, *Bizarre Designs in Silks, Trade and Traditions*, translated by Eve M. Wendt (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953).

The aim of this article is not to claim agency on the part of the Danish trading company within the grander narratives of political or trade empires. In line with Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello's recent overview of early modern trade in South Asia in this journal, the *Tranquebar Palampore* demonstrates that on the whole, the Indian Ocean world operated according to established social and artistic systems regardless of the increase in European tradespeople.⁷ Instead, I aim to mobilize material history as a means to frame alternative perspectives from agents in communities that operated on the periphery of the key players, yet who impacted how trade was conducted and perceived in early modern Asia. This intercession on behalf of ephemeral meaning taps into recent and ongoing discussions of transculturation, cultural in/commensurability, entanglements, and hybridity across cultural borders.⁸ Of particular

⁷ Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, "The Indian Ocean in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48, no.1 (2014): 1–19.

⁸ For a brief sampling, see Paula Dematté, "A Confucian Education for Europeans," *The Art Bulletin* 98, no.1, (2016): 43–44; Meredith Martin and Daniela Bleichmar, "Introduction: Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World," *Art History* 38, no.4 (2015): 604–19; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012); Amar Acheraïou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Vanessa Guignery, Catherine Pessa-Miquel, and François Specq, eds., *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts* (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 1–9; Steven Leuthold, *Cross-cultural Issues in Art: Frames for Understanding*. (London: Routledge, 2010); Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009); Carrier, David, *A World Art History and*

relevance is Sanjay Subrahmanyam's call for scholars to focus on "the acts that produced commensurability."⁹ In other words, Subrahmanyam calls us to acknowledge the dynamic potential of all the visual cultures involved in fashioning the global consumer culture, as well as reflect on the context in which actors navigated these unpredictable waters. To reiterate my main point, I seek to reverse a trend in material culture studies that supposes that consumption is primarily the use and display of a gift (by the receiver) rather than also the gifting and display of the gift (by the giver). Before we tackle the gift transaction, though, we should meet the actors.

VESTED INTERESTS: INDO-DANISH TRADE

The *Tranquebar Palampore*, I argue, was commissioned in the context of Ekoji's coronation, designed and executed by Indian artists who were familiar with "musters," that is, design templates made in Europe and sent to India for copying.¹⁰ Yet the textile's design did not rely on one. Envisioned as a diplomatic gift to the Danish governor or, by extension, to the Danish monarchy, it was intended for display during public parades from Thanjavur to the Danish fort in Tranquebar, almost 100km away. This section will briefly explore the contemporary political and economic conditions that led to such a calculated gift.

its Objects (Univ. Park, PA.: Penn State Press, 2008); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 209.

¹⁰ For instance, the designs of Jean Bérain (1637–1711), a French engraver, have been recognized in several instances, although the original "musters" no longer exist. K.B. Brett, "An English Source of Indian Chintz Design," *Journal of Indian Textile History* 1 (1955): 40–53.

By 1735, the Danes had maintained a trade factory known as Tranquebar (now Tharangambadi) on the Coromandel Coast by permission of the Indian rulers of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu for more than a century. The Danes had arrived in India in 1620, shortly after the Dutch and the British.¹¹ After becoming shipwrecked on the Coromandel Coast, the Danish emissary, Ove Gjedde, set out to visit the Nayaka court of King Ragunatha in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, to negotiate a deal to build a fort in the coastal village of Tranquebar in order to conduct trade. In return, the Danes would pay a yearly tribute to the ruler in money and gifts.¹² This brief history may seem to portray Denmark as a coherent center, strategically extending its influence on a global scale; but in fact, the Danes were interlopers in the Asiatic trade, hoping to profit, yet without the military or diplomatic means to force such an outcome.¹³

The various rulers governing the subcontinent of India had traded with the Portuguese for a century when other European trading companies began to trickle into their ports.¹⁴ In addition, they had hosted a collection of travelers from that continent such as Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, who lived and travelled in India from 1583–1588.¹⁵ Conversely, the Danes arrived in

¹¹ Torben Abd-el Dayem, *Det Ostindiske Eventyr - Ove Geddes rejser til Ceylon og Indien 1618–1622* (Esbjerg: Fiskeri- og Søfartsmuseet, 2006).

¹² Simon Rastén, “The Tranquebar Tribute: Contested Perceptions during the Reign of Rajah Serfoji II,” *Review of Development & Change* 14, no. 1-2 (2009): 42.

¹³ As I have noted, the soldiers depicted on the palampore never appear in any aggressive military capacity.

¹⁴ Kumaran Suberamanian, “European Settlements Along the Tamil Coast in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Asian History* 43, no. 2 (2009): 164-77.

¹⁵ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Een zestiende-eeuwse Hollander in het verre Oosten en het hoge*

India in 1620 with little or no cultural understanding of the subcontinent, and encountered a commercially astute Indian court. The Danes initially deemed their foray into global trade to be a fruitful trade venture. However, the economic affluence of the Danish community in India waned in the middle of the seventeenth century (as it alternated between supporting legitimate trading envoys from the Danish king and taking on the role of South Asian pirates). The Danish merchant community became increasingly dependent on its diplomatic ties with the court at Thanjavur for successful trading, while ties back to Europe weakened. Meanwhile, the Thanjavur court experienced a dramatic regime change. In 1673 the Nayaka dynasty was overthrown by the Bhonsle Marathas, who ruled the Marathas until 1855. Still, the new dynasty had been stable during the early years of its rule and a case can even be made that Europeans had become a staple of Maratha court life.¹⁶

Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, though, a war of succession shook the region. Such political upheaval did not have an adverse effect on commodity prices, and the Danes prospered.¹⁷ Yet there was a discrepancy between the profitable but legally questionable

Noorden: leven en werken, reizen en avonturen van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten (1563-1611)

ed. A. van der Moer. 's (Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979); For a comprehensive overview of early European travelers in India, see Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), 1-72.

¹⁶ Josefine Baark, "Decorum: Courtly Posturing in the Visual Economy of Indo-Danish Diplomacy," in *Visual Histories of India: New Methodologies and Perspectives on South-Asian History*, ed. Annamaria Montrescu-Mayes and Marcus Banks (New Delhi: Primus, 2018).

¹⁷ As Martin Krieger's study of the material culture of European merchants' lives in Tranquebar has shown, the conditions were not at all harsh by the end of the eighteenth century. Martin

private trade conducted by men like the Danish governor before he assumed his official position and the company-funded, legitimate but unprofitable trade of *Det Kongelige Octroyerede Danske Asiatiske Kompagni* [the Royally Chartered Danish Asiatic Company, henceforth DAC]. The increase in investment and royal backing that propelled the launch of a third attempt at a Danish East India company in 1732 was intended to fund a trip to Canton, not continue a faltering trade in Tranquebar. The charter stayed pretty much unchanged and, indeed, the only real difference between the two companies was the final port of trade.

Produced in the 1740s during the reign of Christian VI, King of Denmark (1730–1746) and Queen Sophie Magdalene, the *Tranquebar Palampore* arrived in Denmark hot on the heels of the establishment of the DAC. Christian's father Frederik IV had originally endorsed the new company in 1730. Yet, his death that same year meant that it fell to his son Christian VI to ratify that new endeavor and also to reap the benefits. The Danes had previously established two other such chartered companies, both of which had failed on grounds of inadequate investment. The Indian network and particularly the garrison in Tranquebar were considered financial burdens by

Krieger, "Tranquebar in 1706," in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, Vol. I–III, ed. Andreas Gross, Vincent Y. Kumaradoss, and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Frankeschen Stiftungen, 2006), 153; Martin Krieger, "Material Culture, Knowledge and European Society in Colonial India around 1800: Danish Tranquebar," in *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400–1900: Rethinking Markets, Workshops and Collections*, ed. Michael North (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 53–72; Martin Krieger, "Danish Homes in Colonial Tranquebar: Intercontinental Transfers of Material Culture" in *Beyond Tranquebar: Grappling across Cultural Borders in South India*, ed. Esther Fihl and A. R. Venkatachalapathy (New Delhi: Black Swan, 2014).

the DAC's directors. However, the establishment of an East India Company had from its first inception been a vanity project for the Danish rulers, who wished to consolidate their position as a maritime power in Europe. Hence, Frederik IV had insisted that the Indian factory be maintained.

The diplomatic agreement between the Danes and the rulers of Thanjavur was maintained by both parties through the exchange of diplomatic gifts and rental payments in the form of regular tribute. The exchange of gifts and rent consistently occasioned lavish amusements and celebrations, one of which, I suggest, is the main event depicted on the *Tranquebar Palampore*.

ENTANGLED DESIGN

The *Tranquebar Palampore* depicts at first glance a world of bloodthirsty spectacle: an elephant runs on a rampage, leaving a trail of mangled corpses behind it; soldiers fire canons; a woman trains her gun at a fleeing deer; a man stabs a squealing pig through the heart (fig. 1). Closer observation, however, reveals a world of both Danish and Indian royalty and splendor.

The palampore consists of two large, woven pieces of Indian cotton cloth stitched together lengthwise. The design has been hand-painted. At its center, two hearts frame the royal Danish monograms, static in a lively world of elephants, Indians, and Danish soldiers. The textile appears to have been produced in or near Tranquebar; however, no decisive evidence has yet been found that shows whether it was made according to a European design sent out from Copenhagen or commissioned by persons associated with the Thanjavur court in South India. My analysis suggests that the latter is most consistent with the evidence.

The structure and placement of figural groups on the textile indicate that the piece was intended to be fitted to a rectangular frame, be that a bed canopy or a table. The central

monogram and its satellites function as a coherent whole, which in turn separates the other four divisions by means of the elephants attached to the central monogram by braided red ribbons. The monograms are those of Christian VI and Sophie Magdalene, while those belonging to their son Frederik and daughter-in-law, Louise, the King's sister, Charlotte Amalie, and the sister of the Queen, Sophie Caroline, each occupy a corner. On the shorter sides, the figural group intrudes into the space between the elephants. In both cases, an Indian dignitary attended by servants sits atop an elephant.

INSERT IMAGE #2 HERE

The most unusual image on the palampore is that of a rampaging elephant causing havoc (fig. 2). Two Indian soldiers attempt to shoot it from the back while another faces it, although it has already slain several of their compatriots and is shaking another with its trunk. Elephants were a common motif in the images produced in Indian courts at this time. Moreover, there was a widespread practice of depicting Indian royalty carried by elephants.¹⁸ Yet, images of Indian royalty riding elephants ordinarily adhere to two very distinct iconographic themes: processions, or elephants in the heat of battle, goaded on by their riders. The image is unusual in showing a rampaging elephant wearing parts of his harness that have escaped the control of a rider or guard.

The attempt to capture the elephant is observed from above by a man in a richly decorated *howdah* [palanquin] on top of another, calmer elephant. Stylistically, this rider recalls those seen in the painted murals at the Maratha *Durbar Mahal* [audience hall] in Thanjavur

¹⁸ Elephants were a popular motif on *patola* textiles exported from India to Indonesia. In particular, a design featuring two “confronting elephants with richly decorated canopied howdah,” a prince and entourage proliferated. John Guy, *Indian Textiles in the East: From Southeast Asia to Japan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009).

palace (dated 1684), with their magnificent parade of animals, including elephants, with and without riders.¹⁹ The similarity in form and context suggests that the iconographic style may be linked to artists working for the Thanjavur court. In addition, the scene found on the opposite side cannot be understood unless it is seen as bearing directly on the presence of the Indian dignitary on the elephant (fig. 3). Two Danish soldiers fire a cannon at a target, while two Indian soldiers replenish the gunpowder. Above them, ten soldiers parade under the Danish flag to the music of three others, a flutist, and two drummers. This spectacle is overseen by an Indian monarch or dignitary seated on an elephant decked out in rich harness, fanned by one servant and led by another.

INSERT IMAGE #3 HERE

This scene is the most widely utilized by scholars illustration of the Indian trade with Denmark.²⁰ In his early twentieth-century account of the *Tranquebar Palampore*, Vilhelm

¹⁹ Jennifer Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 95; Baark, “Decorum.”

²⁰ Per Eilstrup and Niels Eric Boesgaard, *Fjernt fra Danmark: Billeder fra vore Tropekolonier. Slavehandel og Kinafart* (Copenhagen: Lademann, 1974); Ole Feldbæk, “The Danish Asiatic Company,” in *Asiatisk Plads Danish Foreign Services New Headquarters in Copenhagen*, ed. Georg Anders (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1980), 24–25; Esther Fihl, *Tropekolonien Tranquebar* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1989), 92–92; A critique of the tendency toward Danish nationalistic colonial melancholia, in which the textile has often featured, can be found in Kirsten Thisted, “‘Where once Dannebrog Waved for More than 200 Years’: Banal Nationalism, Narrative Templates and Post-colonial Melancholia,” *Review of Development & Change* 14, no. 1&2 (2009): 147–73.

Slomann suggested a connection between the elephant rider and the volley.²¹ Since then, Slomann's analysis has unfortunately been forgotten, and references made to the textile have tied it exclusively to interpretations that mistakenly present Denmark as a powerful military force in India. Consideration of a contemporary account of Ekoji II's coronation and the part played therein by the Danish delegation sheds new light on the matter.

A COURTLY GAME

In 1910, Danish historian Kay Larsen published an analysis of a diary by a Danish soldier, Peter Petersen Kramer, stationed at Tranquebar: "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse i Indien (1735)" in *Historisk Tidsskrift*. The title roughly translates to "A Danish Diplomatic Journey in India," and Larsen's article retells a young Dane's day-by-day account of the Danish delegation to the court at Thanjavur, where members were to congratulate the new ruler and present him with gifts. Larsen claimed that his article is based on a "*diarium*" [report] that travelled back to Denmark despite the death of its author on board the trade ship *Elefanten* in 1751. Unfortunately, the report appears to have been lost in the past century; it is no longer present in either the Danish state archives or the royal library.²²

²¹ Slomann, *Bizarre Designs*, 147.

²² I base this analysis on my own research at the Danish State Archives during the period 2012–2014, where I searched for Kramer's account in the archives of the Danish Asiatic Company and the Danish Chancery on numerous occasions. Larsen has deposited a three-volume, handwritten summary of the biographies of all the Danish East India Company employees at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. However, the entry on Kramer merely refers back to Larsen's own

Peter Petersen Kramer, the author of the original report, was a Senior Officer (*Overassistent*) at Dansborg, the Danish trade fort in Tranquebar.²³ He was a new arrival in India and appears to have jumped at the chance to accompany the Danish delegation to the court of the Maratha ruler, Ekoji II. He may well have read or heard of the sumptuous and contradictory accounts describing the Indian court by other Danish travelers.²⁴ These tall tales told of richly decorated palaces, a teeming harem, monstrous statues, and other clichés about the East.

published account. Kay Larsen, *Dansk ostindiske Personalia og Data af Kay Larsen*, c. 1914, NKS 1862 folio, Royal Library of Denmark.

²³ Kay Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse i Indien (1735),” *Historisk Tidsskrift* 8, (1910–1912): 58–69.

²⁴ Jürgen Andersen, *Orientalische Reise-Beschreibunge Jürgen Andersen aus Schlesswig, der An. Christi 1644 aussgezogen und 1650 wieder kommen, und Volquard Iversen aus Holstein so An. 1655 aussgezogen und 1668 wieder angelanget, seynd beyde respective durch Ost Indien, Sina, Tartarien, Persien, Türckeyen, Arabien und Palestinam gezogen, und haben zu Wasser und Land viel merckliche Dinge gesehen und erfahren, ausderen Bericht mit Lust und auch Verwunderung zu vernehmen die Beschaffenheit und heutiger Zustand der Insulen, festen Länder, Städte, der Einwohner Leben, Sitten und Lehre, wie auch von ihnen erlittenden erbärmlichen Schiffbrüchen*, ed. Adam Olearius, (Schlesswig: Johan Holwein, 1669); Jan Petri Cortemünde, *Dagbog fra en ostindiefart 1672–75*, ed. Henning Henningsen (Helsingør: Handels- Og Søfartsmuseet på Kronborg, 1953), 96–103. Volquard Iversen, *Orientalische Reise-Beschreibunge Jürgen Andersen aus Schlesswig, der An. Christi 1644. aussgezogen und 1650. wieder kommen, und Volquard Iversen aus Holstein so An. 1655. aussgezogen und 1668. wieder angelanget, seynd beyde respective durch Ost Indien, Sina, Tartarien, Persien, Türckeyen, Arabien und Palestinam*

The second-hand nature of Larsen's article presents certain issues. For instance, his article is nationalistic in sentiment and he presents a biased view of the Danes that erroneously depicts them as colonial overlords.²⁵ His retelling of events must be taken with a grain of salt. Yet, I would not suggest that the *diarium* itself was a forgery. Notwithstanding the nationalism in Larsen's own interpretation, the unfolding events and quotations from the text far from support his rosy view of Danish privilege in India. Although Larsen claims that the tribute paid by the Danes was merely a symbolic, diplomatic gesture that served to keep the Dutch from gaining influence at the Thanjavur court, the list of artifacts brought by the Danes as tribute was worth more than 1,000 Rigsdaler—a considerable sum at the time.²⁶ The Danish delegation had prepared a speech that, as related by Kramer, highlighted their position of dependency on Ekoji's goodwill and cast them in a deferential light,

gezogen, und haben zu Wasser und Land viel merckliche Dinge gesehen und erfahren, ausderen Bericht mit Lust und auch Verwunderung zu vernehmen die Beschaffenheit und heutiger Zustand der Insulen, festen Länder, Städte, der Einwohner Leben, Sitten und Lehre, wie auch von ihnen erlittenden erbärmlichen Schiffbrüchen, ed. Adam Olearius (Schlesswig: Johan Holwein, 1669) 181–223; Jón Ólafsson, *Jón Ólafssons Oplevelser som Ostindiefarer under Christian IV Nedskevne af Ham Sely*, translated by Sigfus Bløndal (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907).

²⁵ Larson's nationalism is consistent with the emphasis placed on colonial possessions by European nations in the time leading up to the First World War. Denmark had by then sold all its overseas trading posts in the East.

²⁶ Larsen, "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse," 58.

...The Governor of Tranquebar Fort had been glad to hear that His Majesty had ascended the Throne – that the Embassy had been sent to congratulate His Majesty on his coronation in person, wished that His Majesty be given God’s Blessing, a long reign and all possible luck. That the governor recommended himself to His Majesty’s High Respect and hope that Tranquebar’s Fort, which has already stood 18 [sic] years, might flourish under His Majesty’s reign – more so than even in the time of his ancestors.²⁷

Yet, Larsen persists in the narrative strategy that casts Ekoji II as an unreliable and greedy ruler. He writes, “this Embassy was remarkably lacking in delays and setbacks, which were otherwise quite common... They [the Maratha court] must have been reasonably satisfied by the tribute gifts and believed that nothing more could be obtained.”²⁸

Nonetheless, Kramer’s version of events may have been produced as a response to the textile. Thus, the textile may be the only primary account of events. Even if this were the case,

²⁷ “At Guvernøren paa Trankebars Kastel med Glæde havde erfaret, at Hans Majestæt havde tiltraadt Regeringen — at Ambassaden var sendt for mundligt at gratulere Hans Majestæt til den lykkeligt antraadte Regering, ønskende hjærteligt Hans Majestæt Guds Velsignelse, et langvarigt Regimente og “al selv foegierlig (ønskelig) Velgaaende”. At Guvernøren “Recommanderer sig tilliige i Hans Majestæts Høje Affection og haaber, at Trankebars Kastel, som nu allerede havde staaet 18 Aar, maatte florere under Hans Majestæts Regering — endnu mere end i alle hans høje Forgængeres Tid.” Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse,” 65.

²⁸ “Egentlig gik denne Ambassade i mærkværdig Grad fri for Forsinkelser og Ophold, der ellers var saa almindelige... Rimeligvis har man været tilfreds med Schienkagen og overbevist om, at der ikke var mere at faa.” Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse,” 66.

the writer would have relied heavily on other accounts of Danish dealings in India. For instance, the need for gifts on the occasion of cementing a trade deal is corroborated by Ove Gjedde's report to King Christian IV after the first trade negotiation between the Danes and Ragunatha, the Nayaka ruler of Thanjavur. Moreover, the Danish salute and the experience of an out-of-control elephant is featured in the seventeenth-century sailor Jón Ólafsson's diary.²⁹

The Danes were not present at the coronation ceremony of Ekoji II. Instead, after his coronation, Kramer and his superior, Baltazar Hemmische, were sent to congratulate the new ruler and pay tribute. They took with them "silverware, table sets, rosewater perfume (and such), Chinese silk cloth, European 'rarities,' and two Sumatran horses."³⁰ They left the fort on 19 December 1735 to nine shots fired by the guards at the gates, as a parade of two palanquins containing the Danish emissaries, 29 soldiers, two gift carriers, and six "Malabar" musicians (three horn blowers, three trumpet players, and two gong players) marched by, followed by separate entourages for the interpreter and the agent from the Thanjavur court.

The trip took several days through the smaller villages and cities of the surrounding area. Kramer noted for each new stop not only the number of soldiers they passed, but also the architectural wonders of the temples or "pagodas" and the rest houses they used overnight. Once they arrived in Thanjavur, the twelve-man Danish delegation was invited to the *Durbar Mahal*, where the emissaries presented their tribute, received several pieces of silk cloth in return, and recited their congratulatory speech.³¹ In short, the delegation had been a success.

²⁹ Ólafsson, *Oplevelser som Ostindiefarer*.

³⁰ Larsen, "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse," 59.

³¹ The delegation consisted of "Premljint, Memmicke, Kramer, Sieganada, Naganada, de Cruz (the translator) and six men who carried the gifts" (65). The speeches are given in full in

Just as the Danes were on the brink of leaving the city, something unexpected happened. As it left the gates of their guesthouse, the Danish caravan was assailed by one of the elephants and escaped back inside by only a hair's breadth. Once they believed the danger had passed, they ventured out once more near the city gates, only to confront the same elephant, which, by now, had "crushed two men and stomped a Brahmin woman to death."³² The Danes were able to escape a second time. Once they reached the fort Dansborg, they paraded the gifts from the king down the street with the required ceremony, though without the wild elephant.

The descriptions given by Kramer (Larsen) are eerily accurate retellings of two scenes depicted in the *Tranquebar Palampore*: a raging elephant and a celebratory volley fired in honor of an Indian emissary. According to Danish records, the textile has been dated to the 1740s. Thus, it may have travelled to Denmark with Kramer in 1744, although the episode described in the diary would have occurred a full decade earlier. It is possible that the textile instead depicts a subsequent coronation at Thanjavur, since it is likely that the parade of gifts occurred once more,

Larsen's text, but it suffices to say here that they resemble the format followed by Emperor Jahangir and Sir Thomas Roe closely, as well as the original encounter between the Danish trade ambassador Ove Gjedde and the Nayaka king Ragunatha in 1620 (65–66). However, it is noteworthy that, following the speeches, Ekoji asks several questions about the Danish king (i.e., What is his name? How old is he? Replies: Christian VI, 36 years old). This could go some way toward explaining the royal monograms on the *Tranquebar Palampore*, were it indeed linked to this episode or a similar one. Larsen, "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse," 66.

³² "Den havde kvæstet to Mand og ihjeltrampet en Brahminkvinde. Et øredøvende Spetakel røbede, at den kom nærmere. Palankinbærerne satte I Løb." Larsen, "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse," 67.

including after Ekoji II's death when Pratapasimha (r.1739– 1763) succeeded him. Yet the rampaging elephants offer a unique point of reference to Ekoji's reception of tribute.

The scene of the rampaging elephant on the textile recalls the incident with the wild elephant recounted by Kramer. Although the Danes had resided in India for more than a century, they were still so unfamiliar with courtly practices that the dramatic event was open to misinterpretation. Kramer construes the incident as an example of Ekoji II's wanton cruelty. He assumes that Ekoji II released several wild elephants that had been tied up at the back of the palace into the city streets merely "for a little amusement."³³ Although it is unlikely that seeing wild elephants run amok was considered "amusement" by the Thanjavur court, the final test in elephant training (releasing a newly tamed elephant into the street) may have gone wrong.³⁴ In any case, such a final test could have been observed from the excellent vantage point and relative safety of a tame elephant. Moreover, the salute of the Indian emissary links to the parade of gifts through Tranquebar, when the Danish arrived back at the fort. The textile shows two Indian

³³ "For at gøre sig 'en liiden Plaisir.'" Larsen, "En dansk Gesandtskabsrejse," 67.

³⁴ The Thanjavur Saraswati Mahal Library contains an important text describing the capture, characteristics and training of elephants. It was compiled by the Marathas, and was likely intended in part as an education for the ruler. In this text, the final stage of elephant training is described as "[Verse 328:] The elephant should then be released from his earlier place of confinement and made to walk on the roads as the driver presses his big toes against his sides. [Verse 329:] He should be made to run after a person tempting him with a morsel held in hand. The trainer should also teach him to move in circles by using thrusts on the hind parts." Nalini Sadhale and Y L Nene, trans. "On Elephants in Manasollasa," *Asian Agri-History* 8, no. 1, (2004): 5–25; Verses 325–31.

representatives riding domesticated elephants, and the reference to the rampaging elephant may be meant as a direct reference to the historic event of the coronation. Alternatively, it may have been an opportunity to show the strength and ferocity of the elephant species, which had clearly been brought under the control of the Maratha rulers, represented as the observers.

Kramer's (or Larson's) interpretation of the release of a wild elephant as a show of barbarous entertainment does not comfortably fit with current understanding of early modern Indian court practices. Nor does subsequent historians' use of the textile to demonstrate military power fit with the parade of soldiers opposite the elephant. Although, as Kramer noted, both the departure with gifts for the Thanjavur court and the return with reciprocal gifts were accompanied by shots, a parade, and musicians.³⁵ The objects of trade and their visual representation of gift exchange can thus be seen as far more accurate sources in and of themselves than written accounts or later analyses.

Ceremonial parades, whether of gifts or gods, were a regular occurrence; for example, Jón Ólafsson, stationed as a soldier at Dansborg in Tranquebar in 1620, observed,

In the month of October, the King of Thanjavur sent one of his courtiers, a very aristocratic man, to our community. He had 7 men in his entourage, who walked behind him with their swords drawn in their hands. This Naïke [*sic*] and master received a warm welcome from the fort's crew. In front of him walked 12 Taliars or native warriors, shouting loud war cries, as they normally do in this country. All the fort's soldiers stood

³⁵ Later, in the city of Kombagone, Baltzar's palanquin broke, but after an appeal to the local authority, Paramesura Mudali, the Danish emissary is once more furnished with suitable transportation: one of Mudali's own palanquins.

in full regiments on both sides of the gate and shot gunfire, in the same manner, three shots of salute were fired from the fort's large cannons.³⁶

This description closely parallels the scene on the textile seen in figure 3. The Danes continued to pay tribute to the Thanjavur court throughout their time in India, and, this process was always accompanied by revelry and festive celebration.³⁷

Still, the palampore's display during the procession of the Danes out of the city and consequent effectiveness at a local level requires further explanation. On the one hand, lists of artifacts, animals, and attires given and received by diplomatic agents are fairly common in

³⁶ Jón Ólafsson quoted in Eilstrup and Boesgaard, *Fjernt fra Danmark*, 166. A similar procedure is followed when Calicut, the general who had been leading a siege on the Dansborg fortress, heard of the arrival of two armed Danish merchant ships and arrived at the fortress to negotiate an accord. Moreover, Ólafsson described the arrival of the highest priest in Thanjavur to Tranquebar, and how he was greeted by music and dance as he travelled through the village in his palanquin on his beautifully decorated elephant. Ólafsson, *Oplevelser som Ostindiefarer*, 110–12 and 81–82, respectively.

³⁷ Both during the brief take-over by the British following the Napoleonic Wars and at the final hand-over, the British had to honor the tribute agreement. J. Hansen, *Letter to the President in the Council (Mr. N. Bird), Fort William from Mr. J Hansen, Governor of the Danish Settlements in India, Serampore*, 1842, File No. 127, Part A; Count Reventlow, *Letter from Count Reventlow to British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs*, 1842, File No. 360, Part A. Both sources now in National Archives of India, New Delhi.

descriptions of early modern encounters.³⁸ These lists provide an essential overview of the types of artifacts exchanged in the diplomatic dance between trade partners. On the other hand, paintings showing how artifacts were displayed tend to focus on religious or stately parades, rather than the procession of diplomatic gifts. Hence, these depictions form an incomplete picture of how the textile might have featured in a procession.

The Thanjavur court of the late eighteenth century produced numerous paintings of wonderfully ostentatious processions, although to the best of my knowledge none show the parading of diplomatic gifts as such. An earlier textile, now in the Musée Guimet and made in Thanjavur, features a parade led by a man on a rearing horse.³⁹ This parade, which appears to be of a military nature, shows textiles as items of clothing or as flags. Nevertheless, textiles are on display in a myriad of ways during the festivities, not the least of which is as expensive pieces of clothing, flags, suspended above a rider for protection against the sun or spread across the back of an elephant. I suggest that the latter is likely to have been the *Tranquebar Palampore's* intent.

³⁸ For a discussion of European descriptions of Mughal processions in early modern travelogues, see Antje Flüchter, “Weighing the Mughal: German Perception of Governmental Structure and the Staging of Power in Early Modern Mughal India,” in *Structures on the Move: Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Susan Richter (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 2012), 156–59.

³⁹ This textile features linear panels, as it was quite clearly intended to tell a consecutive narrative. It is most likely that it was used as the wall hanging or curtain decoration inside a hall or tent. *Hanging with Court Scenes*, Painted and dyed cotton, 155 cm x 202 cm, MA 5678, India; Tamil Nadu, Musée National des arts asiatiques Guimet.

If the *Tranquebar Palampore* were displayed across the back of an elephant, the scenes with the parade of soldiers and the rampaging elephant would have been the most visible to people standing on either side of the procession. Meanwhile, if the textile were viewed from second story windows, the two scenes of hunting would pair up nicely. As such, I suggest that if the images are interpreted as illustrations of recognizable events, connected vertically and horizontally, then they would have been uniquely intelligible to their early modern audience in India, while also maintaining a meaning for the Danes at the fort in Tranquebar.

Yet, textiles could also be hung from the side of the ceremonial seat or *howdah* on top of the elephant during a procession. This would have exposed the textile as a whole, albeit with one figural scene upside down. If this were the case, one might reasonably expect the textile to have been part of a pair. Examples of this type of display can be found in a late seventeenth-century painting of Emperor Bahadur Shah mounted on an elephant in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, as well as a painting of a regal procession of the Mughal emperor, Akbar Shah II in 1835.⁴⁰ In both paintings, the ruler is seated atop a *howdah* suspended on an elephant carrying a large, bordered textile across its back. An additional textile hangs from the lower edge of the *howdah*. The textiles in question appear to feature intricate designs in the center and more delicate foliage along clear-cut borders.

⁴⁰ See illustration *L'empereur Bahadur Shah monté sur un éléphant* in the album “Batailles et sujets historiques de l'Inde et de Perse,” Mughal school of painters, 17th century, Réserve OD-44 FOL, Cat. RH: 110, fol. 45, Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Akbar Shah II rides an elephant in a huge procession*, ca. 1835, India, Opaque watercolor and gold on ivory, 10.6 cm x 31.6 cm, no. 1990.403, San Diego Museum of Art.

The distribution of monograms structures the iconography in a manner that is recognizable from other trade textiles, as well as trade porcelain. An earlier example of an Indian trade textile, made in Gujarat for the Portuguese, demonstrates a similar distribution where the center and sides are distinct and do not read as a linear narrative. There, the center depicts a battle, while the sides show European figures hunting wild animals. Each corner is occupied by symbolic figures, such as the Habsburg crest.⁴¹ Ordinarily, trade textiles present either concentric or horizontal and linear narratives. If the textile design is intended to imitate a *darbar*-like tent canopy, then the four hunting scenes would merely be performances for the amusement of the tent's absent Danish occupants, much in the way that Mughal tents, especially the *Lal Dera*, function as mobile and even "spectral" centers of power.⁴² While this analysis would emphasize the centrality of the Danish monograms, a concentric reading deprives the images of their historical context by distancing the parade, the wild elephant, and the two hunters. The narrative would be disconnected from the Indian coronation rituals and would read as a performance of leisure activities by the Danes for the Danes (the hunts and the salute), punctuated by an incongruously violent scene illustrating a dangerous exotic animal. Therefore, in the following section, I propose that the *Tranquebar Palampore* links the scenes according to their thematic and historical resonances.

A LEISURELY EXISTENCE

⁴¹ Peck and Bogansky, *Interwoven Globe*, 275–76.

⁴² Zirwat Chowdhury, "An Imperial Mughal Tent and Mobile Sovereignty in Eighteenth-Century Jodhpur," *Art History* 38, no. 4 (2015): 668–81.

What then of the other two scenes on the textile (figures 4 and 5)? And what is their connection to the Danish tribute and any amusement afforded the Maratha ruler? I propose that the two figures depicted may have been the Danish governor, Poul Krisk Panck, and his wife, Karen Werming.

Panck was governor from 1733 to 1741, but had lived in India from a very early age. His father had been part of a select group of European merchants who traded independently in the Indian Ocean from a base in Tranquebar. Although little is known about the couple, it is likely that his wife had lived in the East for some time.⁴³ From a historical point of view, there are several reasons to believe that the two scenes depict a husband and wife. The practice of celebratory leisure connects them to the rampaging elephant and the two Indian dignitaries. However, they are also separate from these events, since neither Panck nor his wife accompanied Kramer in the diplomatic mission.

The two scenes share several characteristics, such as the placement of the figures and the types of costume, suggesting that the figures are husband and wife. They are scenes of hunting, a favorite pastime of the aristocracy in both Europe and Asia. King Christian VI and queen Sophie Magdalene were so enthusiastic in the pursuit that they built one of the most opulent hunting lodges of the Baroque era.⁴⁴ Yet, the Indian connection is both more explicitly Maratha and

⁴³ Kamma Struwe, *Vore gamle Tropekolonier*, Johannes Brøndsted, ed., vol. 6, (Copenhagen: Gad, 1967).

⁴⁴ The royal couple was embroiled in several large building projects in the early years of their reign. One of these was the construction of an elaborate hunting lodge, where explicit reference to their son and his consort was made in its iconographic scheme. This avenue of research will be more thoroughly explored in Josefine Baark, “Bargain Hunting: Global Diplomacy in Eighteenth

more explicitly tied to Indian religious iconography than a generic European hunting scene would allow.

Both scenes are courtly and leisured rather than military. Servants and soldiers tend to the hunters' needs with victuals and shade, while a highly decorative tree unfolds elaborate flowers from behind which the prey has hid. The trees resemble in shape and foliage the traditional flowering "Tree of Life" that normally adorns the whole space of an Indian textile.⁴⁵ This design has an ancient, mixed ancestry, linking it to the Middle Eastern concept of the Tree of Life and the Hindu/Buddhist idea of the wish-granting tree, even maintaining symbolic association with

Century Danish Interiors," *Art History*, forthcoming.

⁴⁵ It is highly unlikely that the Danish agents would have been aware of any of these ideas.

Beverly Lemire, "Domesticating the exotic: Floral culture and the East India calico trade with England, c. 1600–1800," *Textile* 1, no. 1 (2003): 64–85; Veronica Murphy, "Europeans and the Textile Trade," in *Arts of India: 1550–1900*, ed. John Guy and Deborah Swallow (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1990), 166. The earliest chintz designs for the Western market were based closely on crewel-work embroideries (particularly the trees emerging from a rocky base, a design which in turn is based on Chinese porcelain designs). Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 21. It is highly unusual to see animals (except birds) in a Tree of Life design. However, two other examples of animals crawling around a Tree of Life can be found in the two palm trees painted on the *mandapa* (a raised platform with a roof supported by columns) ceiling in the Tyagaraja temple complex in Tirurvarur and in a bronze standard from the Thanjavur region, now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas. George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 239, 218–19.

the idea of creation. In this instance, it is likely that the tree is decorative rather than symbolic. I can think of no diplomatic, religious, or local, political reason to depict Europeans hunting animals springing from the symbolic Tree of Life.

At the center of each scene is a hunter. In the first, a lady atop a side-saddle trains her riffle at a deer (fig. 4). She is accompanied by four men carrying refreshments, tending her horse or scouting. Her entourage indicates that this hunt is for amusement, rather than necessity. One Danish soldier tends her horse, while the other scouts behind the tree. She is followed by an Indian servant shading her with a *kitesol* [parasol] and a man holding a picnic basket and a *suruhi* [carafe of wine]. The servants, food, and drink emphasize the pleasures of the hunt and the anticipated pleasures of an alfresco meal. Bringing their wives and daughters to the East was still a luxury for company men. Domestic bliss and aristocratic lifestyle take center stage in this image.⁴⁶

INSERT IMAGE #4 HERE

The distorted size of the animals and foliage is by no means unusual in Indian textiles of this period. A *Kalamkari* [a hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile] from the early seventeenth century depicts miniature Iranian hunters taking aim at equally tiny birds, who fly

⁴⁶ It has been suggested that the woman is “an Indian princess.” While aristocratic women were known to participate in hunts, I would suggest that this is not the case here. To my knowledge, aristocratic Indian women are entirely absent from the accounts documented by Danish soldiers, except as unseen wives of the Thanjavur ruler. Danish soldiers demonstrate a near obsession with documenting any conspicuous public appearances by women in India, so it is unlikely that they would have passed over describing the opportunity to guard a talented aristocratic huntress so easily. Peck and Bogansky, *Interwoven Globe*, 85.

out from behind enormous flowers and grass.⁴⁷ However, the fleeing deer is noticeably small compared to the tree, the monkeys inhabiting it, and the woman and her companions. Thus, the artist has introduced a sense of distance to suggest that the woman's aim is excellent. The ability to hit a fleeing quarry at a distance was a cross-culturally appreciated skill in the hunt. This compliment to the lady's skill is central to identifying the textile as a diplomatic gift. Just as the tribute paid by the Danes to the Maratha ruler cemented the fellowship and the mutual respect for each other entertained by the two monarchs, so too did the compliment paid to the Danes in this scene and the next emphasize and reflect back the generosity of the Maratha ruler himself.⁴⁸

INSERT IMAGE #5 HERE

Traveling around the cloth, we come upon a very common scene in depictions of leisure time for Europeans in India—the practice of pig sticking (fig. 5). Once more, this scene of hunting is accompanied by the Tree of Life and convenient refreshments (one of Denmark's most important exports to India, apart from firearms, was very large quantities of French wine).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Floorspread*, Coromandel Coast, c. 1630–1640, Kalamkari/chintz: hand drawing and painting of mordants and dyes, in combination with wax resist work. Victoria and Albert Museum. As published in Rosemary Crill, “The Fabric of India Exhibition,” *Arts of Asia* 45, no. 5, (2015): 74, pl. 18; Swallow and Guy, *Arts of India*, 240.

⁴⁸ Maria Heim, *Theories of the Gift in South Asia: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Reflections on Dāna* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 33–35.

⁴⁹ “Some auction records, likewise, show high numbers of wine bottles, such as the wine-stocks of Mons. Monier, which consisted of 132 bottles of red wine as well as 248 bottles of white wine, whereas Danish Mr. Wodschow ‘only’ owned 120 bottles of red wine and 144 bottles of white wine.” Krieger, “Danish Homes,” 528.

Another depiction of a European on horseback accompanied by a retinue can be found in the David Collection in Copenhagen. In that eighteenth-century miniature, an employee of the Dutch East India Company, Cornelis van den Bogaerdes, rides a dabbled grey stallion accompanied by his retinue, carrying weapons, pipes, or fans.⁵⁰

INSERT IMAGE #6 HERE

While the practice of hunting was commonplace for Europeans, the composition of this image resonates with that used by Maratha artists for religious illustration. On the ceiling of the Virabhadra temple at Hampi, an almost identical hunt is depicted as an illustration of the Mahabharata story of Kirata and Arjuna (Shiva) (fig. 6). The depiction and stance of the boar are similar, while the gun and shot fired by Arjuna recall the shot fired by the lady in the first scene discussed. The fleeing deer above the boar bear a resemblance to the one springing from behind the tree. These paintings have traditionally been attributed to the Vijayanagara era (1336–1646), that is, the time preceding the rise of the Thanjavur Marathas. In direct contradiction to this assumption, George Michell proposes that they are eighteenth-century additions because of their similarity to the ceiling paintings at Narasimha temple founded by Tipu Sultan.⁵¹ Given the gun (not common even in the late Vijayanagara period), but also given the stylistic links to the *Tranquebar Palampore*, this alternative attribution seems well founded. Furthermore, similar paintings can be found in the temples at Somapalem and Chippagiri, demonstrating that the visual trope spread fairly far into the Kannada-Telegu zone. After all, the Marathas spoke and wrote fluently in Telegu. This assessment would fit well with the dating of the palampore in

⁵⁰ *Cornelis van den Bogaerdes Procession*, miniature painting, India, Deccan, Golconda, c. 1687, Inv. no. 43/2008, David Collection, Copenhagen, Denmark.

⁵¹ Michell, *Architecture and Art*, 228.

terms of artistic scheme (if not subject matter), which in these cases may have been based on earlier compositions.

The Mahabharata story tells of the warrior, Arjuna, who is bested at the chase by a seemingly ordinary hunter, who in turn reveals himself to be Shiva. A direct iconographic link between a Danish governor and a Hindu deity is hardly viable. However, the story hinges on the extraordinary skill exhibited by both protagonists. Hence, once more, a subtle compliment may have been intended.

These two scenes of hunting on the *Tranquebar Palampore* primarily depict exciting leisure activities that could be pursued by merchants in the East, and subtly commend the skill of the hunters. The two complimentary scenes of amusement and tribute focus on exchanges of respect, rather than demonstrations of military might. The images on the textile challenge the universalizing emphasis on the importance of reciprocity for the giver and receiver in the gift transaction initially proposed by Marcel Mauss.⁵² Rather than stressing the “debt” created by the

⁵² The South Asian concept of *dāna* explicitly eliminates this expected material reciprocity. *Dāna* is to all intents and purposes rooted in both a spiritual quest for merit and a mundane quest for social capital and honor. Hence, it would not have explicitly applied to a gift between two equal kings, as opposed to a gift to a Brahmin. Yet, the underlying dynamic had long since entered Indian courts and social practice by the 1600s. Heim, *Theories of the Gift*, xviii and 33–35. Marcel Mauss and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Gift, Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Cohen & West, 1966). The idea that religious giving in India is altruistic has been raised by Jonathan Parry in “The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift,’” *New Series* 21, no. 3 (1986): 453–73. However, the idea has been further discussed and critiqued in Andrew Sanchez, James G. Carrier, Christopher Gregory, James Laidlaw, Marilyn Strathern, Yunxiang

gift, the palampore creates and cements links, albeit links that can only be decoded with the Indian context of courtly display and celebration. Although it is likely that the textile was intended to entice the Danes to invest more heavily in the India trade, it is by no means direct about it. Instead, as with many gifts in early modern India, the textile emphasizes the establishment of fellowship and continuous relations. Considered together, the four scenes on it constitute an impressive display of iconographic diplomacy—the paying of homage to both parties in the Indo-Danish trade.

TEXTILES AS GIFTS

Previous scholarship on East Asian trade textiles has consistently emphasized the direct commissioning of specific images by Europeans. In this context, even a personal or royal coat of arms was by no means unusual. For instance, a textile from c. 1625–1685 features the Stuart coat of arms in a central roundel (Figure 7). It is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection.⁵³ The practice of sending “musters” for copying by Indian artists, who occasionally altered the images slightly, is familiar. What, then, are we to make of this very distinctive case — the use of

Yan, and Jonathan Parry in “‘The Indian Gift’: A critical debate,” *History and Anthropology* 28, no. 5 (2017). See also Natasha Eaton’s discussion of contemporary scholarly uses of the gift as an analytical tool: Natasha Eaton, “Between Mimesis and Alterity: Art, Gift, and Diplomacy in Colonial India, 1770–1800,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 4 (2004): 816–44.

⁵³ Unknown Maker, Painted and dyed cotton chintz, India, 1625–1685. Crill, *Chintz*, 97 (cat. no. 74, pl. 73).

Indian iconography to show a mix of Indian and European leisure on a textile that prominently bears the insignia of the Danish monarchy, in which European patronage does not quite fit?

INSERT IMAGE #7 HERE

A number of painters, weavers, and dyers were active in and around Tranquebar, not to mention those employed by the Thanjavur court itself.⁵⁴ In a unique instance of distinguishable provenance, the textiles produced in connection with this smaller, less politically influential court can be widely traced not only to Europe, but also across Southeast Asia. As John Guy has shown, many figurative textile samples in the Japanese Ii family collection originated from villages such as Karuppur near Thanjavur.⁵⁵ In addition, the elephant motif, the hunting motif, and scenes from religious texts like the *Ramayana* are all design characteristics of the textiles exported from the Coromandel Coast to Indonesia, where they functioned as currency.⁵⁶ But, as Danish accounts show, they also functioned as diplomatic gifts. Moreover, European trade in the East was focused on the spice islands, as is amply demonstrated by the Danish doctor Jan Petri Cortemünde's published account of his journey to Banten onboard the Danish East India Company ship, *Oldenborg*.⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that the palampore was intended for merchants or royals in Indonesia or Japan, but rather that figural scenes were commonly found in complex designs intended for cross-cultural consumption.

⁵⁴ Slomann, *Bizarre Designs*, 145.

⁵⁵ These samples were used to wrap other exotic and precious objects. They bear a distinct similarity to the textiles used to wrap manuscripts in Maharaja Sarabhoji II's library (1798–1833). Guy, *Indian Textiles in the East*, 171–72.

⁵⁶ Guy, *Indian Textiles in the East*, 111–15.

⁵⁷ Cortemünde, *Dagbog fra en Ostindiefart 1672–75*, 63–94.

The Danes did not have a history of graceful gift giving. In an instance of initial cultural incommensurability, the earliest Danish envoy, Ove Gjedde, asserted in 1621 that he would not participate in the rituals of Indian court life and present the local Nayaka with gifts. Gjedde had some insight into the pan-Asian trading world based on his extended and failed negotiations with the King of Kandy (Sri Lanka), yet he maintained that because he had “come at the Nayaka’s invitation,” he did not have to “give gifts” as he was instructed.⁵⁸ Indeed, he believed that explaining that such things were not done “in our country” would put the Nayaka at ease.⁵⁹ Only after several days of negotiation did Gjedde reluctantly deign to participate in the ceremonial gifting, thus proving that participating in Indian social rituals was necessary if trade was to be successful. The *Tranquebar Palampore*, commissioned a century later, shows that those conditions had not changed dramatically with time, although the Danes’ ability to participate improved.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Ich antwortete, daß ich auf Verlangen des Nayaken gekommen sei, und nicht um Geschenken zu geben.” Ove Gjedde’s Report to King Christian IV, transcribed in Johan Heinrich Schlegel, *Danische Reisebeschreibungen und andre benswürdige Handschriften in der samlung zur Danische Geschichte* (Copenhagen, 1776), 152 and 105–36. See also Esther Fihl, “Shipwrecked on the Coromandel: The First Indo–Danish Contact, 1620,” *Review of Development & Change* 14 (2009): 27.

⁵⁹ Ove Gjedde, “Deben berufe ich mich auf dem Gebrauch in unserem Lande, so daß ich ihn zufrieden stellte,” transcribed in Schlegel, *Danische Reisebeschreibungen*, 152.

⁶⁰ Other European nations had a little more *Fingerspitzengefühl* when it came to international gift giving. For an overview of the publications on diplomatic gift giving in Europe, see Jeannette Falcke, *Studien zum diplomatischen Geschenkwesen am brandenburgisch-preußischen Hof im*

In the intervening century, a shift in attitude towards the relationship between the gift, money, and honor had occurred in Denmark. The introduction of absolute monarchy in 1660 alienated the old aristocracy and meant that the king needed to enlist new sources of economic backing to fund his ventures. In order to induce an influx of affluent new support, Frederik III recruited minor nobles from Germany for the army and advanced the rights of the increasingly wealthy merchant class. These affluent supporters needed to be integrated into court life. By the early 1700s, titles could be purchased if needed, and the practice of reciprocal cash “gifts” (money for honor) was soon to be deeply entrenched in Danish courts.⁶¹ Both at home and abroad, the Danes developed a new awareness of the important role played by gifts in establishing social relations on a grand scale. This contrasted with, but did not eradicate or even come into contact with, the Indian practice of gift giving (honor for honor). The palampore demonstrates that two parallel economies of meaning functioned alongside one another, aided by a commensurable understanding of hierarchical relationships.

Overall, gifts were a means of establishing new power relations or cementing the existing structures. Kim Siebenhüner’s comparative analysis of the meanings and processes underlying the presentation of gifts to a ruler by either European diplomats or merchants and the Mughal

17. und 18. Jahrhundert (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2006), 13, 65, 108–13, 278–79, and 283–84.

⁶¹ The practice of purchasing titles is a familiar feature of court culture in early modern Europe. However, the increased visibility and respectability of cash rather than expensive gifts was a new addition to the exchange in Denmark. Peter Henningsen, “Den bestandige maskerade: standssamfund, rangssamfund og det 18. århundredes honette kultur,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* 101, no. 2 (2000), 313–43.

Indian elite highlights the obscure and dual nature of gift giving. Although gifts have the power and agency to establish social relations and “as similar as some gift giving practices at European and Mughal courts may seem, their logic and meaning was not identical, but rooted in different historical and cultural contexts.”⁶² In the Mughal context, Siebenhüner explains, gifts were a means of paving the way for favors. These favors granted the Indian elite an additional means of achieving increased social mobility. However, this analysis focuses primarily on the presentation of gifts to a superior, rather than the exchange of gifts at the highest social level between equals, facilitated through intermediaries and subject to public display.

The importance accorded the parading of the ruler, and by extension his goodwill, generosity, and gifts, was so important that Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58) moved the capital of the Mughal empire from Agra to Delhi so that his parades would achieve maximum visibility.⁶³ In India, where there is a longstanding tradition of the gifting and displaying of textiles as political gestures, the palampore would have made a strong statement about the status and international stature of the Marathas at a time when Danish trade with India was dwindling.⁶⁴

⁶² Kim Siebenhüner, “Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift giving in Europe and Mughal India: Shared Practices and Cultural Diversity,” *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013): 535, 537.

⁶³ Chowdhury, “An Imperial Mughal Tent,” 669.

⁶⁴ The literature on the study of Mughal, Deccani, and European cross-cultural interactions is too vast to cite here. However, see Linda Komaroff, ed., *Gifts of the Sultan. The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2011); Ania Loomba, “Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats: Diplomacy, Exchange, and Difference in Early Modern India,” in *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Mediation, Transmission, Traffic*, ed.

On the basis of the gift exchange between the Mughal Emperor Jahangir and the British diplomat Sir Thomas Roe, modern scholarship has proposed that gift exchange between the two cultures was a process of continual negotiation between cultural and economic value.⁶⁵ Ania Loomba has pointed out that gifts from Europe were often derided by Indian courts and then “replicated and improved upon” only to be re-gifted to their original bearers.⁶⁶ If this is the case with the *Tranquebar Palampore*—namely, that it has replicated and improved on elements from a gift from the Danes to the Maratha court—the replica is the central monograms, while the four outer scenes are stylistically Indian. The palampore is not an exercise in who does “what the West wants” better. If the idea of influence fails adequately to account for the practices at work in early modern situations, then mere improvement is no less a culprit at distorting our point of view of diplomatic gifts.⁶⁷

That the textile was ultimately intended for Danish consumption is not up for debate. The figures on the *Tranquebar Palampore* are characteristic of figures used for textiles aimed at the European market, not ones meant for nearby or equivalent Indian Ocean courts, which are often more “doll-like.”⁶⁸ For example, the Indian soldiers are very different, albeit similarly attired, from the man shown on a *kalamkari* produced in Tamil Nadu for the Sri Lankan market found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection.⁶⁹ Instead, I suggest that the public ceremony

Brinda Charry and Gitanjali Shahani (London: Ashgate, 2009), 41–76.

⁶⁵ Siebenhüner, “Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift Giving,” 530–34.

⁶⁶ Loomba, “Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats,” 41; Komaroff, *Gifts of the Sultan*.

⁶⁷ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 209.

⁶⁸ Guy, *Indian Textiles in the East*, 111.

⁶⁹ Peck and Bogansky, *Interwoven Globe*, 215–16.

surrounding the gift was seen as an opportunity by the Thanjavur court to demonstrate its international connections to a local populace. In this way, the textile was made temporarily available for domestic consumption.

Export art is commonly seen as a means to shed light on how international relationships influenced aesthetic development in the West. However, by taking into account the public exchange of artifacts during trade negotiations, more can be said about the role played by trade in local politics at the point of production. Additionally, such insights are not limited to artifacts in Danish collections. For instance, certain similarities exist between the *Tranquebar Palampore* and other textiles made for the European market. A painted resist and mordant, dyed cotton petticoat panel also produced on the Coromandel Coast has been the subject of scholarly controversy. While a case has been made for its commission by a resident Dutch merchant in the East Indies based on its close resemblance to depictions of processions with stepped horizons on pieces made for the domestic Indian and Persian markets, some have suggested that it was commissioned for a patron in the Dutch province of Friesland, in the northern part of the Netherlands.⁷⁰ A component of European rather than Indian costume, the panel was likely intended to reach a European audience at some point in its life. Yet, once more we encounter a piece, where the iconographic European context is represented by the portrayal of Europeans, rather than European stylistic conventions. Furthermore, these European figures are all engaged in leisure activities: they are conversing or having dinner parties. Although this cannot be fully treated here, I suggest that considering this textile and others like it in the context of publicly

⁷⁰ Peck and Bogansky, *Interwoven Globe*, 240–41. Alice Zrebiec, “Textiles in The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 53 (1995–1996), 3, 56–57.

visible exchange, whether as a gift or not, allows it to function as a reference point for a polyphony of audiences, rather than one single ethnically determined consumer.

Context and recognition, therefore, are critical to the commission of gifts intended to cement cross-cultural trade. The recognition of leisure and performance as essential elements of successful trade diplomacy on the part of both the court and its visitors is an important catalyst for the development of visual representation that functions on multiple levels. This process of recognition, even when partial, is a key aspect of the spaces, objects and processes that have the potential to connect two cultures. To return briefly to the methodological approach sketched out at the start of the article, gift culture can act as a prism through which to take up Subrahmanyam's appeal to scholars, to look at how people and processes create opportunities where commensurable, connective cultural tissue and incommensurable boundaries are brought into play. Seeing the gift as an integral part of a *process* of "in/commensurability" allows for an analysis that accords value to each stage in the life of the object.⁷¹ Thus, the gift is released from a constricted view that prioritizes visual consumption at a single endpoint and instead, works to open up scholarship to a multitude of ephemeral histories.

CONCLUSION

⁷¹ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*. With reference to the Hindu-Muslim encounter, Barry Flood uses commensurability as a counterfoil to the "heterogeneous nature of all cultural forms and practices." Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 5. See also Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 3-64.

The visual evidence found on the *Tranquebar Palampore* indicates strongly that the textile had one or more Indian patrons who were familiar with the European market. It remains to concretely establish whether the Thanjavur court commissioned it, or whether its design arose from a collaboration between the Danish governor Panck and the Maratha court. Both parties were interested in diverting the flow of funding back to India. Yet, the palampore is not merely a brash advertisement for the leisurely and amusing lifestyle available to Europeans in the East: it also contains subtle references to contemporary events weaved into skillful compliments to all parties involved: Panck, Ekoji II, Christian VI, and Sophie Magdalene.

This article is a first step toward thinking more broadly about the ephemeral meanings conveyed in the act of gifting. By taking into account the nature of South Indian gift exchange in the diplomatic relations with European nations, it is possible to demarcate the framework within which global early modern material culture functioned. Artifacts could communicate two meanings at the same time. Rather than assume that gifts were at heart disguised commercial transactions in both cultures, understanding the value of gift giving for the giver as well as the recipient places it within a far more complex web of cultural values. That is, that the gift was not only accessed for its commercial cash value, where a gift of equal value ought to be returned, but also for the prestige accorded the participants in the exchange. The symbolic function of the Indian *Durbar* exchange meant that the inequality of value represented by the gift was at the heart of the transaction. Gifts were intended for display or storage, not to re-enter the economy at a later date. The palampore's agency at the Danish court and its journey from a royal interior to the aristocratic one must be left for later study.

Conjuring up iconographic references that resonate within both Danish and Indian royal contexts, the palampore takes on layers of meaning whose shifting foci lend it an internal

ambiguity. The elephants, the salute, and the procession of Indian dignitaries allude to the tribute paid by the Danes to the Maratha court—the reception of which was enveloped in just such ceremonial pomp—but the royal monograms and the display of leisured European hunting practices present a concomitant image of the luxurious lifestyle available to Company agents in the East Indies.⁷²

The evidence indicates that the gift was a successful ploy to regenerate trade with India, if only for a very short period of time. Numerous other intricate and precious objects, such as a model of a Hindu temple, entered the royal Danish Kunstkammer around the time the textile was commissioned. It would appear that there was either a significant surge in Danish interest in India or that a particularly spectacular haul of gifts was brought back in those years. Only three years after the arrival of the model temple and probably the *Tranquebar Palampore*, no less than four ships had set sail for Tranquebar—an unusually high number for that era.

The *Tranquebar Palampore* demonstrates the processes engendered by the prolonged interaction between cultural practices. Indeed, the very instability of its iconography shows that the boundaries of the cultural contact zone allowed space for several ideologies to be represented alongside each other, and to reach a variety of viewers.

⁷² Academic analysis of the techniques of textile production have on the whole assumed that the differences between European designs and Indian textile imitations were due purely to Indian imaginative reconstruction of the patterns. Instead, it may be valid to suggest that the need to adapt the ornamentation engendered a two-pronged process of imaginative innovation, on either side of the globe. Brett, “An English Source,” 48.