

The Many Languages of Oceanic Navigation in the Early Modern Period

Silvana Munzi, Juan Acevedo, Luana Giurgevich

Centro Interuniversitário de História das Ciências e da Tecnologia, Universidade de Lisboa



The ERC RUTTER project (<https://rutter-project.org>) aims at writing a narrative of the scaling up of a scientific description of the earth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries using Early Modern nautical rutters (sailing directions).

Here we consider aspects within the research lines devoted to [textual genres of maritime technical literature](#) and to [Indian Ocean navigation](#).

Travelers of very different social strata, nations and cultures worked on board. Crews were composed of sailors from different nations: Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, Greek, French, etc. This international maritime experience produced texts written and/or translated into many different languages.



Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, COD. 1507, 1594



Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1595



Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, IL. 156//1, 17th century



Ministry of Cultural Heritage of Oman, Ms 3910

The establishment of oceanic routes was the synthesis of centuries of multicultural traditions. The interaction with local and regional pilots was indispensable at every turn of the expeditions. This was particularly dramatic across the Extended Indian Ocean,



Yale University Library, Landberg MSS 401, 16th century

where the Portuguese had aid from pilots who spoke Arabic, Gujarati, Tamil, Malay or other languages.

The stable and regular crossing of the earth's oceans on a planetary scale in the Early Modern period must be therefore considered not an Iberian endeavor, but a multicultural achievement that prompted the emergence of global concepts about the earth.