

Between Mughal Art, Ethnography and Realism On Nicolò Manucci's Artistic Patronage in India (1680-1720)

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Abstract Nicolò Manucci (or Manuzzi) (ca. 1638-1720) is a well-known figure among scholars: a Venetian adventurer, artilleryman and doctor in Early Modern India. He was a dynamic man, who frequented for a long time both the Mughal courts and the European agents of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century trade companies, leaving meaningful testimonies of his age, and thus becoming an important (and controversial) historical source on South Asia. In spite of the celebrity gained by his biography and his work, Manucci's role as European patron of Indian artists has been undervalued so far, with scholars often preferring to define him as a mere collector of works of Indian miniatures. Through an historic and artistic examination of his work, of other coeval works of art and contemporary sources, the aim of this paper is to show that Manucci was actually an important patron of Indian painting, a paradigmatic precursor of figurative didactic works mainly illustrated by (unfortunately anonymous) Indian artists under his guidance, and at the same time mediated by his bias and his culture, following an interesting and original hybrid format that bridges European figurative culture and Indian art.

Keywords South Asian Art. Nicolò Manucci. Indian Painting. Connected History & Global History.

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1 Introduction

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, a European self-educated doctor established himself as a patron interested in the vast possibilities of South Asian artistic expression. This singular experience resulted in the creation of two important figurative works. They are known as *Libro Rosso*, with court portraits of Indian princes – especially, but not exclusively, of the Mughal dynasty – and *Libro Nero*, with descriptions of the manners and the rites of Hindus of the southeastern coast. Nicolò Manucci, who commissioned these works, was an exceptional figure, with a remarkable life story and destined for great fame. For several centuries (the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with also a brief parenthesis in the eighteenth) his adventures fascinated scholars, who devoted to him various publications.¹

Manucci was the son of humble spice grinders living in the dark intricacy of the *calli* in San Stin quarter, near the Basilica dei Frari. At the age of fourteen he ran away from Venice in mysterious circumstances. He went across Turkey, Armenia, Persia and reached India following in the footsteps of Lord Henry Bard, Viscount of Bellomont, secret ambassador of Charles II, King of England (Irvine 1907, 1: 72-83; Lockhart 1966, 97-104). If we believe Manucci's version of events – the only one we have, since in the sources referring to Lord Bellomont no hint is made at the young and flamboyant Venetian – they reached Surat, gateway to India, in January 1653 (Irvine 1907, 1: 8-60; Subrahmanyam 2011, 141). As a young immigrant in search of a job and a career, endowed with extraordinary adaptability and a remarkable talent for learning local idioms, Manucci soon managed to enroll as an artilleryman with the Mughal. He was later able to establish himself as a European doctor at the courts of the Indian subcontinent. Critically for historians, he left one of the most important testimonies of any European living in India in the Early Modern period: the monumental *Storia do Mogor*, a hybrid of very complex origins and a work embellished by miniatures made by Indian artists (Irvine 1907, 1: lxxi, xvii-lxxxviii; Subrahmanyam 2011, 136-72).

The Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds two revealing portraits of Manucci, which both show him wearing an Indian dress. In one of the portraits Manucci is holding an Indian patient's wrist, who is probably Muslim, since he is wearing devotional clothes and

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dott.ssa Orfea Granzotto, librarian at the Sala Manoscritti of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venezia) for her invaluable help, sympathy and generosity.

1 Catrou 1705; Foscari 1752; Irvine 1907; Gasparrini-Leporace 1963; Falchetta 1986; Zorzi 1986; De Valence, Scrick 1995; Subrahmanyam 2011, 136-72; Moneta 2018.



Figure 1 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Codex OD 45 Rés (Libro Rosso). Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *Portrait of Nicolò Manucci Dressed in Indian Clothes as Doctor While Holding the Hand of an Indian Patient*. Watercolour on paper with gilded inserts, 1680 ca., 38,5 cm (© BNF)

a turban [figs. 1-2]. Manucci is portrayed in middle age, relaxed in a precious gold-embroidered Mughal robe and a pair of local coloured slippers. In the other portrait Manucci is shown collecting medicinal plants in a hilly setting. This piece is characterised by strong influences from Flemish figurative imagery. Manucci himself seems younger, and sports a long beard and a traditional pakol cap, which is still used today in the region between Northern India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. He also wears an indigo robe and a pair of red and white striped trousers, essentially the classic Indian kurta pajama.



Figure 2 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Codex OD 45 Rés (*Libro Rosso*). Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *Nicolò Manucci as Doctor Gathering Medical Plants in a Landscape*. Watercolour on paper with gilded inserts, 1680 ca., 38,5 cm (© BNF)

Manucci commissioned both of these portraits for his books. Some details in these portraits, particularly in the one where the doctor is holding the patient's wrist, may be connected to the wide current of Indian images that represent European subjects. The bibliography on this theme is so vast that it cannot be mentioned here, but one detail that connects Manucci's portrait to an example of such imagery is so notable it must be drawn attention to. The traditional Indian cap he is wearing in the miniature with the patient is very similar to the one of another European portrayed with his family in a Deccan kalamkari

fabric kept at the New York Metropolitan Museum and made in 1640-50 (Sardar 2011, 148-61). Wearing Indian clothes was becoming, for Europeans, a rather common custom and artists were interested in portraying this, often in works commissioned by Westerners. Therefore, Manucci's cap is a symbol that characterises him as a socially identifiable figure – the 'firangi' who adopts Indian attire. We might take the liberty of considering this detail as constitutive of the very essence of his condition in the world and his history. Quoting Daniel Arasse, "within the classic idea of imitation, every detail constitutes, to all effects, a part of a whole device – the picture – and this latter is built in accordance to a process of cutting and assembling" (Arasse 1992, 127). Thus, in a work of art the detail establishes the emblem of a device built in order to make the 'machine' of representation visible (127).

2 Travelling Books and Wandering Firangis: Flight from the Deccan, Escape from Golconda

Between 1682-84 and 1686 Manucci embarked upon a new phase of his life, first serving as a young artilleryman at the court of Dara Shikoh, during the violent war of succession to the throne, and later as the trusted surgeon of Prince Muazzam-Shah Alam, at the courts of Delhi, Lahore and Aurangabad. In those years, it can be argued, he became a 'cultural mediator' through art: a delicate and complex role that he was able to play due to his position as a traveller, a patron, and an interpreter of the Indian culture. In order to become a cultural mediator in the field of art (a designation we can only give to Manucci in the light of following centuries), however, Manucci had to first become a political mediator. A political mediator, or, more precisely, an 'agent' between the Mughal empire and the European powers settled in coastal India. Here a brief summary of the political events in which Manucci became involved will be traced.

In 1683 Emperor Aurangzeb had planned to besiege the city of Goa, in order to launch an attack from there on the territories of Shambaji, first son of the famous warlord Maratha Shivaji, who had died in 1680. Realising that the army of Prince Muazzam-Shah Alam was threateningly advancing on the heights over Goa, the Portuguese promptly sent a messenger to the Mughal sovereign, in a desperate attempt to negotiate peace (Irvine 1907, 2: 272-3). Here Manucci entered the game. He was recruited by the Portuguese with the primary goal to turn the awful situation in their favour. He was escorted to the fortress of Santiago, near Goa, with a letter signed by Muazzam-Shah Alam. The negotiations were successful. The Portuguese allowed the Mughal army to pass out of the city centre, on the condition that they did not ransack their territories. In turn, the Mughal army could besiege and continue the war against the Marathas. Ma-



Figure 3 View of the Golconda fort, photo by the Author (© G. Dubbini)

nucci proved to be a diplomatic success. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed a Knight of the Order of Santiago by the Portuguese, an important noble title which brought him a great deal of money and prestige (Irvine 1907, 2: 282-3).

After this experience Manucci decided he did not want to continue living in the Indian Muslim courts as a *hakeem firangi* (foreign doctor). He wished instead to seek fortune elsewhere. He dared to confess his wishes to Prince Muazzam-Shah Alam, who reacted rather despotically and continued to demand his services as a court doctor. In response to this refusal, Manucci ran away.²

It is believed that Manucci commissioned and assembled his first artistic work, the *Libro Rosso*, prior to his departure from the court of Prince Muazzam-Shah. Between 1678 and 1682, his career was stable, and he had access to the Mughal Prince's library in Aurangabad. For greater accuracy, pages of the manuscript kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice (Ms. It. VI 134=8299), in which Manucci reports the adventurous vicissitudes of the *Libro Rosso* miniatures in first person, will be quoted. They are short fragments, which scholars have rarely taken into account so far.

2 Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (BNM), Ms. It. VI 134 (=8299), cc. 154v-155r.

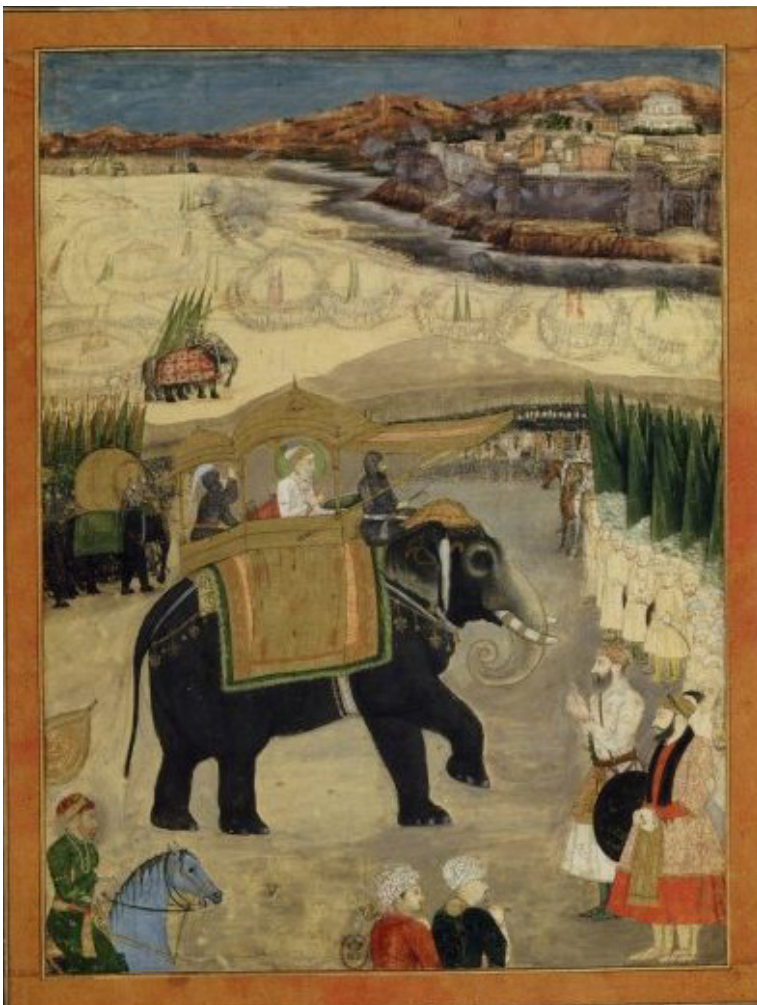


Figure 4 BNF, Cabinet des Estampes, Réserve Od 44 f. 46.
Anonymous artist, *Emperor Aurangzeb at the Siege of Golconda*.
Watercolour on paper-gouache, 1690 ca., 45 x 32 cm (© BNF)

Coming from my escape, I had my books sent away from the field by my trusted spies, who walked with no fear, allowing me to carry with me many golden rupees.³

3 BNM, Ms. It. VI 134 =8299, cc. 154v-155r. The translation into English is made by the Author.

This excerpt shows that every time he moved, Manucci took care to have his manuscripts sent away: among them there might have been the *Libro Rosso*, the work that had absorbed so much of his energy. Then the Venetian fled to Golconda, the opulent fortress and capital city of the Qutb Shahis and their sumptuous kingdom. Manucci arrived there aware that, once he had reached the domains of the Golconda sultans, he would be safe, because he would be outside the Mughal territorial jurisdiction. However, he could not imagine what would shortly happen to the kingdom that kept the world's principal diamond mines.

In 1686-87, after several months of siege, and in blatant transgression of the diplomatic relations that for centuries had guaranteed the reciprocal state of non-aggression between states, Aurangzeb conquered both Bijapur and Golconda. These historic events were unprecedented, because both states paid the tribute to the sovereign. The campaign against the kingdom of Bijapur and its 'puppet king', the fifteen-year-old Prince Sikander, last king of the Adil Shahi dynasty, was a particularly dishonourable action by Aurangzeb. After the conquest of Bijapur, the emperor turned his attention to Golconda and its fortress [figs. 3-4]. In 1687 Aurangzeb's troops laid ferocious siege to the city. Golconda resisted for months, until, in September, a traitor opened the eastern gates, allowing the besiegers to break in during the night (Richards 1975, 46-51; Sardar 2007, 171; Richards 1993, 221-2). The sovereign of Golconda, Abul Hasan, surrendered to the Mughal troops and was imprisoned in the fortress of Daulatabad until his death. The events mentioned above marked the end of the dynasty and the state of Golconda became part of the Mughal empire. After conquering the territory and taking the substantial booty of the fortress of Golconda (over 60 million rupees in golden and silver coins), the noble Qutb Shahis were enrolled in the local army and administration (Richards 1993, 222).

Meanwhile, Manucci had promptly escaped, and in so doing he became one of Prince Muazzam-Shah Alam's most wanted fugitives. The prince demanded that the Venetian be sent to him, along with tributes in the form of elephants, jewellery and weapons (Irvine 1907, 2: 294). However Manucci, with his usual shrewdness, had managed to flee from Hyderabad-Golconda when Aurangzeb's troops were nearing the city. Had he been captured and accused of high treason, he would possibly have been sentenced to death. Instead, Manucci fled Hyderabad around March 1686, carrying with him the *Libro Rosso* miniatures – his own work under his arm, we might say. After his daring escape, he eventually managed to reach Madras, an English maritime enclave on the southeastern coast. He stayed there until his death, living an altogether quieter life in Madras and Pondichéry, devoting himself to culture, art, and medicine. In the light of the historical events related above, it is now important to examine the facts connected to *Libro Rosso*.

3 Making and Unmaking *Libro Rosso*

Codex 45 Rés of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, entitled *Histoire del'Inde depuis Tamerlank jusqu'à Orangze par Manucci* (*A History of India from Tamerlane to Aurangzeb by Manucci*) and commonly named *Libro Rosso* [fig. 5], currently contains fifty-six figures. The pictures of the sovereigns characterising this collection were commissioned by the Venetian to a group of Indian artists led by Mir Muhammad, librarian of Muazzam-Shah Alam at Aurangabad, a figure unknown to scholars⁴. We know that Manucci had thought of the pictures as figures to be assembled and accompanied by an explanatory text, which would interpret them according to his ideas and, obviously, according to his biases. According to his own declaration, it appears that Manucci did not feel comfortable (although he lived there for a long time,) either with the Mughals or with the 'Gentiles' – the term by which the Europeans would define the Hindus, differentiating them from people of Muslim religion.

The style of the sovereigns' portraits, both Muslim and Hindu, is hard to define. It could be attributed to that of the school of miniatures in Aurangabad, where they were made. Otherwise, they could be connected to the stylistic influence of the Indian bazaars of the Golconda school (Kruijtzter 2010, 161-82). Manucci's cultural compass (and the one represented by his books) was that of bazaars, and of the people's perception of the powerful; a compass that had only limited access to the matters of the court, unlike what the Venetian would claim (Subrahmanyam 2011, 170).

In this way his works are rather different from those of Tavernier and Bernier, other famous travellers across India at that time (170-1). The French doctor François Bernier, a rival of Manucci, as Pauline L. Scheurleer has recently pointed out, offered through his work an interesting description of court painting, of the portraits of the emperor and of the highest rank officials, and of bazaar typology of painting. Using Bernier as a source of support, it is possible to argue that some local artists looking for patronage among both Hindus and Muslims could accept occasional jobs on the basis of their availability and even for short periods, complying with the tastes and the aesthetic principles of different clients, many of whom were foreigners (Lusingh Scheurleer 2017, 44). Bernier and Tavernier were of a higher cultural level and had greater cultural access than Manucci, and they did not commission Indian artists to produce their works.

While analysing the paintings Manucci commissioned, one surely meets with a minor genre of Deccan painting. As Mark Zebrowski

⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF, *Libro Rosso*), Codex 45 Rés, *Histoire del'Inde depuis Tamerlank jusqu'à Orangze par Manucci*, f. 1v.

Figure 5 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cod. OD 45 Rés. Red cover of the *Libro Rosso* by Manucci and his artists. In the centre of the cover the Lion of Saint Mark can be seen. It is circled by four gilded eagles, i.e. the symbol of Napoleon Empire. These were executed after the illustrated book was taken from the Saint Mark Library in 1797 by Brumet, Napoleon's High Commissioner for Venice (© BNF)



has cleverly argued, this was, however, the result of the extraordinary cosmopolitanism of the region, which was composed, ethnologically and culturally speaking, not only of Muslim Indians and Hindus, but also of wide and powerful communities of Turks, Persians, Arabs and Africans, settled in the courts together with merchants, holy sufis, and generals – all generous patrons, who financed painters and calligraphers (Zebrowski 1983, 9). In those courts the milieu was certainly multicultural, undoubtedly characterised by a Shiite predominance, whereas the other ethnicities and cultures fed on the dialogue between Hindus and Sunnis and Africans and Afghans, and the central power developed a strong Iranian influence thanks to the good relations with the Persian Safavid empire (Zebrowski 1983, 9). Therefore, the Deccan became, at least until the 1687 Mughal conquest, a huge patronage centre, crucial for the developing of court arts, where miniatures and calligraphy had great importance in relation to power (Zebrowski 1983, 9).

Manucci could gain his own space in the patrons' circle, although, as a doctor, his economic power was limited (Manucci's financial fortunes went up and down at various points in his life). In spite of this condition, he managed to finance a singular and noteworthy pictorial cycle. The case of Manucci – a European playing the role of patron to local Indian artists, unconventional in the domineering social structure – is almost unique for that time. Patronage of local artists, then, was not the prerogative of the sovereign or of his aristocratic circle, but of anyone having the skills and the money to plan and finance these types of artistic enterprises.

If we consider the textual references in *Libro Rosso* and in the works of some contemporaries, we can argue that these pictures were commissioned in Aurangabad. It is more likely, then, to connect them to the local school of miniatures, rather than to Golconda's (Kruijzer 2010, 161-82). But it is highly improbable (if not even impossible, considering the historical facts) that Manucci commissioned the portraits of the princes when he was living as a fugitive in Golconda-Hyderabad. To obtain miniatures from Indian artists, a European had to settle in a court, with the approval of his patron, and had to have much time, if not years, to gather and lead a team of Indian miniaturists and to become the interpreter of their works. In fact he escaped towards Golconda in 1686 (Moneta 2018, 162).

The creation of *Libro Rosso* must have taken place in the Deccan, where Manucci lived for a long time, even if it may have been finished (for example, as far as the captions are concerned) in the European enclaves of the southeastern coast. Another declaration included in Manucci's work affirms this belief, so it merits quotation in its entirety. Manucci himself states that he commissioned the pictures for *Libro Rosso* in a Mughal court.

Before leaving the Mughal kingdom, I commissioned [...] all these portraits of kings and princes, from Tamerlane to Aurangzeb, and of the latter's children and grandchildren.⁵

This fragment offers motives for discussion. The first and primary one, to which scholars have strangely never given sufficient weight, is that Manucci did not collect the paintings, but he commissioned them to Indian artists and assembled them before leaving the Mughal kingdom. The Mughal kingdom could therefore not be Golconda, capital city of the Qutb Shahis. Moreover, this can be confirmed by the style of painting, as well as by the fact that the Deccani Mughal court where Manucci stayed longer was certainly Aurangabad, during the years 1678-82.

It seems that the jigsaw is taking a clear and stable shape. We can also realise that paintings similar to the Venetian's are to be found in a European-influenced milieu – if not of patronage, of collecting practices and stylistic similarities. Some plausible comparisons between Manucci's *Libro Rosso* miniatures and some contemporary Deccan paintings can be made, which is significant.

An album at the Rijkmuseum in Amsterdam offers a first good point of comparison with a similar work by a provincial Mughal atelier. It was created for a Dutch collector and is very similar, in subject and style, to the miniatures commissioned by Manucci. It is the *Wits-*

⁵ BNF, *Libro Rosso*, f. 1v. The translation into English is mine.



Figure 6 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Witsen Album. Anonymous 17th-century Indian artist, *Portrait of the Emperor Aurangzeb with Hailoo*. Watercolour on paper, 1686 ca., 61 mm x 308 mm (© Rijksmuseum)

en Album [fig. 6] (Subrahmanyam 2011, 152 fn. 48; Lusingh Scheurleer 1996, 167-254; Forberg 2016, 213-47; Kruijtzter, Lusingh Scheurleer 2005, 48-60). It is named for collector Nicolaes Cornelisz Witsen who was a wealthy patrician of the Dutch Republic, mayor of Amsterdam and administrator of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company.

A portrait of Emperor Aurangzeb in the *Witsen Album* had a clear stylistic influence on a picture of the old sovereign in Manucci's *Libro Rosso*. In both miniatures [figs. 6-7], the almost ascetic sternness of the emperor, a fervent Muslim, is highlighted: Manucci's artists portrayed him on horseback and wearing an immaculate white robe while in the Witsen miniature he is shown standing. Since this picture is accompanied by a text, it is clear that it was commissioned for a European market (Lusingh Scheurleer 1996, 167-254). In both



Figure 7 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, OD45 (*Libro Rosso*), f. 13r. Anonymous 17th-century Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, Aurangzeb. Watercolour on paper, 1680 ca., 38,5 cm (© BNF)

pictures, the one commissioned by Manucci and the other collected by Witsen, Aurangzeb's gestures are remarkably graceful. In one of the portraits, he smells a white flower with an absorbed expression and, concentrated on the scent, his thoughts seem far from the mundane realities of life.

Along with the miniature of Aurangzeb created for Witsen, another page of Manucci's *Libro Rosso* deserves comparison with a different work in the pictorial style of the Deccan. This is the miniature portrait of the Adil Shahi dynasty [fig. 8] (Subrahmanyam 2011, 152 fn. 52). This dynasty of kings governed the city of Bijapur from 1498 to 1686, the year of Aurangzeb's conquest. As shown in the picture, the dynasty's power is expressed by the figure of Yusuf Adilshah, who reigned from 1489 to 1509 and patronised court customs and visual



Figure 8 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, OD 45 Rés, Cabinet des Estampes (*Libro Rosso*), f. 38. Anonymous 17th-century Indian artist, *The Household of Bijapur*. Watercolour on paper, 1680 ca. (© BNF)

and literary culture of Persian influence (Zebrowski 1983, 60). The word “ISOF” is visible, which connects this picture to Yusuf in Manucci’s miniature.

Manucci’s anonymous artists represented the dynasty of Bijapur on a green background without the Flemish influences on the landscape that characterized the Venetian’s miniature self-portrait. The nine sultans of the Bijapur dynasty are all portrayed here, and on the far right of the painting there is the last sovereign, the adolescent Prince Sikander, deposed by Aurangzeb. This image of Manucci’s is marked with a Roman figure, which refers to an accompanying caption.

Now we trace a comparison with a miniature held at the New York Metropolitan Museum, portraying the royal house of Bijapur [fig. 9]. The work has many similarities to Manucci’s, and in particular to the image of *Libro Rosso*, and may be used as an interesting term of comparison. In the MET picture, the sovereign Yusuf is receiving the keys to the kingdom from Ismail, the Iranian founder of the Persian Safavid dynasty, follower of Shiism [fig. 9] (Zebrowski 1983, 150). He is sitting on a splendid golden throne and is receiving a golden key, symbol of royalty. His turban is undoubtedly Iranian. As Zebrowski has affirmed, this painting reveals a clear purpose: to highlight the Shiite belief in the dynasty, in blatant contrast to the values and the religion



Figure 9 New York, MET, Kamal Muhammad and Chand Muhammad. *The House of Bijapur*. Ink, opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper, 1680 ca. 41,3 × 32,5 cm. Photo by the Author (© MET)

of the new Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb – an uncompromising Sunni. According to Zebrowski, the MET painting is the most important work created during the reign of young Prince Sikander (Zebrowski 1983, 150). It was commissioned for the king from two artists, Kamal Muhammed and Chand Muhammed, and the attribution is confirmed by an inscription in Persian on the left side of the picture (Haidar, Sardar 2015, 154). Aspects pointed out by the curator of the Metropolitan

Figure 10 New York, MET, Kamal Muhammad and Chand Muhammad. *The House of Bijapur*. Ink, opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper, 1680 ca. 41,3 × 32,5 cm. Detail from the same image showing a European vessel, probably Portuguese or Dutch (photo by the Author) (© MET)



Museum, Navina Haidar – the overlapping perspectives and the staircase on the bottom, leading, with no architectural support, to the court carpet – encourage further observations. The rocks in the background appear to be very similar to those of Manucci's miniature portraying Prince Shah Alam hunting for deer, as well as to the backdrop of the Venetian's self-portrait as a doctor. This scenery, however, shows some features which are undoubtedly related to Flemish paintings, both in the buildings and in the geological landscape, and reveals a mixture of Mughal pictorial influence with the same European subject. Indeed, as Navina Haidar has pointed out, the scene aims at demonstrating, through the landscape, the power of the last Bijapur dynasty on the earth and on the sea, which was actually vanishing. The ship in the background is a Portuguese or Dutch caravel, reminding us of the by then strong Western influence on the internal questions of the Indian states [fig. 10] (Joshi 1939, 162-9; Overton 2014, 233-64). The carpet, with flower patterns inspired by local flora, is identical to the one in Manucci's picture, as well as the staircase at the feet of the carpet itself (in Manucci's image, however, the perspective is more complete); in both works one can see, on the foreground, three court servants; in both, the figure on the bottom right is flanked by a horse. The main difference between the two pictures is that, in the MET one, aureoles – symbol of regality – are missing, whereas they are present in the work commissioned by Manucci. As to the aureole, a recurrent theme in Mughal painting, which marks the difference between the two pictures, other aspects may be pointed out.

The Vatican Apostolic Library holds a collection of Mughal paintings that greatly precede Manucci's works, dating back to between 1628 and 1659, on the basis of the dates appearing in the caption of



Figure 11 Rome, Vatican Library, Cod. Barberini Orientale nr. 136, f. 11. Anonymous 17th-century Indian artist, *Genealogy of the Emperor Jahangir*. Miniature on a gouache technique on paper (© BAV)



Figure 12 Rome, Vatican Library, Cod. Barberini Orientale nr. 136, f. 10. Anonymous 17th-century Indian artist, *Genealogy of the Emperor Shah Jahan*. Incomplete drawing, miniature on a gouache technique on paper (© BAV)

the pictures, studied by Otto Kurtz in the 1960s [figs. 11-12] (Kurtz 1967, 251-71, 253; Subrahmanyam 2011, 152 fn. 49). In the collection there are some incomplete 'round' portraits of Mughal power (Kurtz 1967, 252). They come from a little volume, kept in a restored lacquer casing, with Indo-Persian decorations, although it was made in Europe (252). The following inscription is evident: *Collection of Chinese Drawings and Miniatures. Ten drawings, fifteen miniatures VII 80*. The erroneous attribution "Chinese drawings" in the nineteenth century was rectified and the miniatures were attributed to the age of the greatest grandeur for Mughal India and its empire, as the inscriptions in Persian from the era of Jahangir and Shah Jahan testify (252). Otto Kurtz pointed out that the album in the Vatican collection is not one of the refined *Murraqa'* (Mughal court imperial albums) the Europeans loved collecting, but rather a collection of sketchy portraits – an artist's sketchbook, gaining strength from its own incompleteness, that satisfied the taste of the noble Barberini, who were clearly interested in Asia and Oriental scenery (252).

We should now return to Southern India at the turn of the seventeenth century, where Manucci lived in a territory between French, English and Portuguese domains. Another declaration, by a Southern Indian Discalced Carmelite friar will be given here.⁶ His report, consulted and copied down in the Vatican Apostolic Library, offers some interesting information on Manucci's work as a patron, but also on the European enclaves in coastal India. The work is useful for contextualizing Manucci's second work of patronage, the so-called *Libro Nero*, which treats of Hindu customs and traditions.

4 The Friar and the Doctor: Voyage in the European Enclaves of Southern India

«His state, a picture of the golden age,
So oft the subject of the Bard and Sage;
When men united in a friendly band,
And Truth presided o'er the guiltless land.
Of Christian tenents little trace remains;
Two chapels only grace these verdant plains»
(Irwin Eyles, *Saint Thomas Mount, a Poem*, 1774)

On the afternoon of May 8th 1699, the Discalced Carmelite friar Francesco Maria di San Siro (born Antonio Gorla) was in Madras, the main commercial centre of the East India Company in Southern

⁶ Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), *Itinerario Orientale in cui si contengono varie notizie della Turchia, della Persia, di una gran parte delle India. Fatto, e composto da un religioso converso dell'Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi...* Ms. Borg. lat. 317.

India.⁷ He had made a long journey, very similar to the one Manucci had made almost fifty years before.⁸ The journey had taken him to Smyrna, in Turkey, then to Constantinople where he stopped briefly, to Trebizond, to the Kurdish regions of Erzurum, on to Tabriz, and then to Isfahan (capital of Safavid Persia), where he stayed for a considerable period of time. In 1696, some of the most important Christian missionaries in Asia had settled there and a Carmelite had been named bishop (Pagano 1998). From Isfahan, Gorla had travelled, following a caravan, along the deserts of Southern Iran, and had embarked at Bandar Abbas, on the Strait of Hormuz. He then finally reached the coasts of the Subcontinent.

When he arrived there, the area of Madras was an important mercantile centre controlled by the English. The city had many jurisdictions and was part of the manifold and politically diverse identity of the coast. A few kilometres from Madras there was another significant Portuguese settlement, definitely declining at that time: the fortified city of São Tomé. Not far from both, the boundless territories of the Mughal empire.

The harbour of Pondichéry, administered by the French East India Company, 150 kilometres south of Madras following the coast, was in the neighbouring area. It was then a thriving French enclave, founded under Minister Colbert's instructions – a city with a regular urban plan and a prosperous harbour (Suali 1940, 1: 255). At the end of the century, the exclusive power of the Dutch – as had happened with the Portuguese some years before – was progressively decaying in favour of the English. The commercial and military competition in India had been replaced by two ferocious rivals: the British and the French. These two powers, especially the East India Company had almost definitely expelled the Dutch from the eastern coast of India (Margolin, Markovitz 2015, 178; Colli 2016, 50-1).

The area between Madras and São Tomé, with which Gorla had entered into contact for the first time, has been defined by the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam “an irregular urban complex” and a “hybrid city” (Subrahmanyam 2001, 221-39, 224-5). It is in Madras that the terms ‘White Town’ and ‘Black Town’ are used almost for the

⁷ BAV, Ms. Borg. lat. 317, c. 335.

⁸ The Author followed the footsteps of Nicolò Manucci from Venice to Croatia and Greece, and then to Izmir (Smyrna). The itinerary continued across Turkey, Armenia and Iran until Bandar Abbas and Hormuz Island. The Author and his colleague, photographer and academic Angelica Kaufmann, followed this itinerary between July 2015 and December 2016. It resulted in more than 10,000 km on caravan routes, crossed by private and public transports through Turkey, Georgia, Armenia and Iran during very tense geopolitical times for the Middle East. It was the first expedition ever conducted tracing ‘young Manucci’ itinerary, resulting in three photographic exhibitions between Venice and Milan. It included also a section tracing Manucci's partial itinerary in central and northern India.

first time in the language of urbanism: they refer to an Asian city, as to its physical organisation, but actually administered by the Europeans. These terms contribute to marking the first evident separation between 'white' communities – English merchants, functionaries, and officers in Madras – and the Indians, who were diverse as to religion and traditions, and constituted a highly heterogeneous social and cultural melting pot (Nightingale 2012, 47-58).

Far from the centre of Madras, to the south, near the famous Saint Thomas Mount, a sort of free zone existed. Gorla had decided to reach it, "three leagues far", because he knew that a rather influential Italian had chosen to live there.⁹ The hill where this man lived has maintained its Tamil name, *Parangi Malai*, which means 'the mountain of firangis' (the Persian word meaning 'foreigners') (Harris 2015, 274-5; Irvine 1907, 3: 73) [figs. 13-14].

According to the European tradition, Saint Thomas, after evangelizing Malabar and Coromandel coasts in the second half of the first century AD, was martyred at the very feet of the mountain: the sanctuary held the stone on which the Christian saint had been killed by the Indians (Subrahmanyam 2001, 229). Besides being a pilgrimage stop for travellers, in the second half of the seventeenth century the slopes of the mountains became one of the Europeans' favourite places for refreshment – especially for the English officers of the East India Company, who found there an easy escape from the suffocating heat of Madras, as well as some land to be cultivated thanks to the excellent microclimate (229). Other foreigners also lived there.

From Gorla's report we learn that he met a man with a bizarre and adventurous past.

After lunch, I wanted to go to Saint Thomas mount, where a Venetian doctor lived. His name was Signor Nicolao Manucci. Forty-eight years after his arrival in India [...] he had retired three leagues far from Madrastapatan, under the Great Mogul's jurisdiction. He had bought some land there and had built a Persian-like palace.¹⁰

Here we find the former Venetian described as a fugitive again. He had settled in that 'free zone', at the furthest borders of Shah Alam's territories, in order to flee from the prince and his emissaries. The prince, whom Manucci had served for a long time in Lahore, Delhi, and Aurangabad, had become emperor some years before, after his father Aurangzeb's death in 1707, taking the dynasty name of Bahadur Shah I. He did not stay long on the throne, because he died of an

⁹ BAV, Ms. Borg. lat. 317, cc. 335-337.

¹⁰ BAV Ms. Borg. lat. 317, cc. 335-337. The translation into English is made by the Author.



Figure 13 Venice, Gianni Dubbini's private collection. François Valentijn, *Mount Saint Thomas and Plan of the City of São Tomé*. Dutch engraving, 1726, 45 × 23 cm. Photo by the Author (© G. Dubbini)

illness, rather young, in 1712, during a sojourn in Lahore. His fear-some father, on the contrary, had died in his eighties, and during his last years had shown a strict spiritual adherence to Islam. The fact that Shah Alam died of an illness – without Manucci as his doctor – is an ironic fate for the young Indian sovereign, one of the last Mughals to maintain effective power over his empire, fragmented as it was by wars, crises and revolts.

After arriving in that coastal area, Manucci felt safe. The place where he had settled was very close to the territories administered by the English of the East India Company and the Europeans of the coastal enclaves, with whom he would have privileged relations – especially with the leaders of the Madras merchants' company, as well as with the officials of the French East India Company.

Manucci had managed to re-establish his role as a 'political mediator' with the English. In 1686 he had been ordered by the governor of Madras, William Gyfford, to negotiate with the parties as to



Figure 14 London, The British Library. James Hunter, *A View of Mount Saint Thomas Near Madras*. Coloured aquatint from *Picturesque Scenery in the Kingdom of Mysore*, London, W. Bulmer for E. Orme, 1805 (© BL)

some Mughal assaults against the East India Company factories in Bengal, at Hugli (Irvine 1907, 3: 90, 92-3). As a mediator between the Mughal governors of Arcot and the British, Manucci had become a member of the Madras elite (Subrahmanyam 2001, 232). He was also on very good terms with François Martin, the first general governor of Pondichéry, which he had founded in 1673 (Froidevaux 1932, 193-216). However, he longed for stability, to be able to face old age serenely, after years and years of adventures and sudden displacements. On October 24th 1686, he married the widow of Thomas Clarke, an English translator. The bride's name was Elizabeth Hartley Clarke: she was a Catholic, probably of Portuguese origins (Archer 1970, 104-13, 105).

We should now go back to 1699, to Gorla's text and to his travel notes. His description of Madras, which the Author copied down in the Vatican document, can easily catch the image of the identity of the city and of its commerce: Madras was then a political, military and administrative centre, vital for the East India Company, which operated important relations with its commercial stations in Bengal from there. At the turn of the century, the city probably had at least

a hundred thousand inhabitants – a remarkable figure for a fortified mercantile settlement (Prakash 1998, 148). Here is Gorla's report:

Only one league far from São Tomé there is the city of Madrastapatan, governed by the English, who built a farm there. [...] Vessels from every nation arrive there, particularly Armenian, Muslim, Gentile and English. The English govern the city and have business in Manila, China, Siam, Bago, Bengal, Achem [,] Surat, Persia, Mecca [...]. The ships set off and land every day: the city is inhabited by English people, Armenians, French people, Malabar Christians, Gentiles and Muslims, and I met some Italians there.¹¹

He praises the European architecture and the urban structure, likes the military architecture and highlights the differences among the several areas and the several inhabitants, emphasising the multicultural nature but also the segregation of the place. In this report, Gorla's sharpness and spirit of observation are very evident. He shows the same qualities in his accounts of meeting Manucci at the feet of Mount Saint Thomas: this testimony is fundamental to understanding the Venetian's artistic work in the area. Gorla stayed at Manucci's house and reveals important aspects of his host's work.

While I was staying there, he was writing a History, divided into three volumes in folio, about the empire of the Great Mogul, its times of peace and its times of war, beginning from 1655, when he had arrived in India. He gathered in his History sixty figures of princes of the Great Mogul's dynasty, beginning from the great Tamerlane, the founder of the empire, and of all the Gentile princes, the Generals, and the main ministers of the court that he had met. The figures had been taken from the original portraits in the house of the King. [Manucci] had gathered them from Prince Shah Alam's library, paying much money, thanks to a friend of his, an official. He wanted to insert them in the final version of his History. I think this work will be much admired in Europe, being a curious and rare one.¹²

Here Gorla allows us to guess that he saw *Libro Rosso*, possibly inside Manucci's house. This is a crucial report, both to date the work – as a *terminem ante quem* – and for the rare judgement of a contemporary. This passage confirms that Manucci fled the Mughal territories carrying with him his album of miniatures. This fact is also confirmed

¹¹ BAV, Ms. Borg. lat. 317, cc. 350-352. The translation into English is made by the Author.

¹² BAV, Ms. Borg. lat. 317, c. 339. The translation into English is made by the Author.

in the preceding documents and it is likely that Manucci wrote the captions for the pictures exactly there. In the context of European accounts of Southern India's Hinduism, Gorla's (purely textual) work is useful because it has many analogies with Manucci's, and, it is believed, may have been influenced by him. It is very likely that Manucci saw in person some of the scenes he ordered the Indian artists to represent in *Libro Nero*, in the most realistic way. Before analysing these issues, a description of *Libro Nero*, of its composition, its style, and its modes, will be given.

5 Of Hindus, Ascetics and Temples: Unveiling *Libro Nero*

While moving to and from different coastal towns and exploring Hindu territories, Manucci planned and commissioned his last artistic work to another group of Indian artists, this time artists of the Madras area. *Libro Nero* is not easily classifiable within a definite genre of Indian art: it mediates between the European culture of textual interpretation and the figurative culture of the southern region of the Subcontinent. This pioneering work is highly syncretic: combining influences from textiles, manuscripts, print culture, and painting as well as from varied Indian and European styles and cultures. This form finds correspondences with the political, territorial, cultural and urban identity of its time (Subrahmanyam 2001, 236). We will see below how this happened.

Libro Nero is a voluminous manuscript, richly illustrated with sixty-six drawings, and is held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana of Venice: Codex Ita. VI. 136 (=8300). Its name derives from the dark colour of its cover (fig. 15). It is a collection of pictures, almost always accompanied by captions in Italian and in French. This work remained in Venice, where it can be consulted today, because in 1797 it was considered by Brumet, Bonaparte's commissary, a minor work in comparison with the collection of Mughal miniatures in *Libro Rosso* (Zorzi 1990, 65).

Libro Nero is definitely different in theme from the preceding work, commissioned some years before. Indeed, it is a collection of ethnographic figures that offers information on the habits, costumes, and rites of the Hindus, their cosmology and their religion, their traditions, their cultural processions, their sacrifices, the marriages in the several castes, and the ascetics' rites. The ethnographic-didactic commitment, already evident in *Libro Rosso*, is even more accentuated in *Libro Nero*, even if one can also find Manucci's unflattering prejudices against the Gentiles - the European term for the Hindus - that are very strongly expressed here (Subrahmanyam 2011, 165-168). However, Manucci's ethnocentrism and racism should be interpreted in the light of the mentality of his age; in spite of his



Figure 15 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*. The dark leather cover of the Manuscript explains its Italian name, *Libro Nero*, meaning 'Black Book' (photo by the Author) (© BNM)

author's embarrassing deprecative opinions, the work is, in its complexity, a pioneering figurative treaty of Indian ethnography. Moreover, it is significant for its still valid and accurate representations, which can be confirmed today by reflections of the practices he records in the complex mosaic of present-day Indian society. It is something of a *tour de force* in the figurative culture of southern India, and in particular of the coastal region between Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

The illustrations and the captions ordered by Manucci form a cultural synthesis made by a European, with the purpose, controversial and yet unequivocal, of cultural comprehension and of an attempt at interpretation which could explain Indian culture to European contemporaries. In all the representations gathered in the work there is a very close relationship between text and picture, which confirms the role of Manucci as an interpreter, a patron and an executor. He worked next to local artists as well as to scribes for the writing of the texts; he did not only collect the pages for the work, but he also commissioned them according to his own purposes, his cultural agenda, and his instructions.

The figurative nature of *Libro Nero* is, as it was mentioned above, multiform. At the beginning we find the main deities of the Hindu pantheon, such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva (Rudra), and Ganesh [figs. 16-17]. Then there are the Hindu ceremonies, like weddings, funerals, religious processions with carriages, and the celebrations of lunar eclipses, with habits such as the burning of the widow, who throws herself into the flames of her husband's pyre. This Hindu custom was officially abolished by the so-called *Sati Act* in 1829, under Lord Bentinck, then British governor of India (Hawley 1994, 4-12).



Figure 16 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, Lord Vishnu depicted with the cosmic snake and some devotees. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

Other rites represented in *Libro Nero* can still appear bizarre, incomprehensible or shocking, under Western eyes. Notwithstanding this, they were pictured without censure by Manucci's artists. These customs still survive in photographs of ascetics engaged in difficult yoga poses or in the ecstatic ritual consumption of drugs, along with radical deprivations, which today reach their utmost celebration during the *Khumb Mela*. As the English scholar Mildred Archer has argued, the typology of these images corresponds to a genre of artistic



Figure 17 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, Shiva represented as Rudra with his vehicle the sacred bull Nandi. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

representation which has always fascinated the Europeans, accentuating their propensity for the 'exotic' (Archer 1970, 104-13). This happened during the seventeenth century, but also in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, when British colonial influence became predominant in India, with enormous consequences for systems of representation as well.

Libro Nero was composed on paper, in watercolour rather than in gouache, by Indian artists of the Madras area who were working un-



Figure 18 Folio nr. 70 of a manuscript representing the Virata Pravan showing the scene of the Mahabharata when Arjuna and Uttara retake the sacred cows. The drawing was executed in 1680-90 ca. in Tirupati and is an example of portable pilgrimage art (Losty 2013, 158) (© Losty 2013)

der Manucci's direction. Such format was not common for the artists, paper was not a common material for them: Manucci himself provided them with it (Archer 1970, 112). Instead, these artists were used to drawing their pictures on cotton fabric made in the area, the already mentioned kalamkari (Subrahmanyam 2011, 165).

As to the dating of the work, many interpretations exist and there is no agreement on it. It was certainly composed between the late seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth century. Some scholars have tried to suggest more precise dates: between 1702 and 1706, according to Anna Libera Dallapiccola; between 1701 and 1705, according to Mildred Archer (Dallapiccola 2010, 18-19; Archer 1970, 112). In Subrahmanyam's opinion, these pictures date back to the end of the seventeenth and the very beginning of the eighteenth century (Subrahmanyam 2011, 164-5).

Besides dating, other important issues must be discussed here. For example, we should ask ourselves: to what can *Libro Nero* be compared, if observed from the perspective of the Hindu art of southern India, in the area around Madras? The answer is multifaceted and definitive conclusions are somewhat elusive.

We could certainly try to draw a comparison between the kalamkari (painted fabrics) of the Madras area and the precious fabrics of southern India, in particular those in Telegana style (Dallapiccola 2010, 18-19). For example, a picture held at Musée Guimet in Paris represents a Nayaka sovereign in the zenana. This picture comes



Figure 19 Warsaw, Warsaw University Library (476):. Anonymous Indian artist for a French commercial agent of Andhra Pradesh, *The Avatar of Vishnu, Vamana*. Watercolour on opaque European paper, 1680-1700 ca. (© Warsaw University Library)

from a kalamkari cloth of the Tamil Nadu region, probably from Thanjavur or Madurai, even if it is much older than piece under analysis here: it dates back to the second quarter of the seventeenth century. A still better-fitting picture is the one represented on a large cotton cloth in the Tapi collection of Surat, where a Nayaka dynast is celebrating spring (vasantotsava): this work has been analyzed in detail by John Guy (Guy 2011, 162-75). Other good comparisons with the Indian painting of Andhra Pradesh can be proposed here, in particular the nayaka paintings coming from the murals of Thanjavur temples (Guy 2011, 162-75). Besides fabrics, some manuscripts on paper are interesting for the comparison. One page of *Virata Parvan*, for example, presents the scenes of the famous and monumental Hindu *Mahabharata* epic. Composed (ink on paper and gold) in southern India, in Tirupati, in 1680-90, this appears very similar to the style of Manucci's pictures, especially as to the format and the quasi-caricatural stylization of the figures and of the faces of deities and heroes [fig. 18].

Manuscript 476 of the Library of Warsaw University, probably commissioned by a clergyman or a French agent working in the trade

stations of Coromandel coasts (maybe in charge with enriching Louis XV's collections), is useful for a still more convincing comparison [fig. 19]. The pictures are similarly accompanied by captions. It gathers about one hundred images of Hindu deities, a choice of main scenes from *Ramayana* and Krishna legends, and the images of deities from southern temples (Michell 2003, 265; Jakimowicz-Shah 1988, 1-29). Due to limitations of space, it has not been possible to explore the Warsaw manuscript and its implications to understand Manucci's work in this essay. However, the interpretations of Marta Jakimowicz-Shah can be ultimately considered valid as to the stylistic attribution: she defines Manucci's work a hybrid, created by Indian artists in Telegu, style, but composed in Madras (Jakimowicz-Shah 1988, 14).

This work also offers a resemblance with a collection of coloured watercolours on European paper kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France that were collected between 1727 and 1758 by a French agent called Abraham Pierre Porcher des Oulches, chief of the French East India Company in Masulipatan. This collection of images is kept under the name *Histoire et figures des dieux des Indiens ou Théogonie des Malabariquais*. It is a document in four volumes that includes 644 miniatures in gouache and watercolour in different formats [fig. 20]. The main subject of this images is Shivaite and in style it very much resembles the pieces commissioned by Manucci. On the other hand it is, unlike Manucci's *Libro Nero*, multilingual and was assembled during a slightly successive historical period.

It is now necessary to resume the treatment of the meeting of Gorla and Manucci in Madras, fundamental for understanding the origins of Manucci's Hindu pictures and of the Vatican Library manuscript. It was an important exchange of knowledge and opinions, rich in cultural consequences and reciprocal influences. In many cases, Manucci's attitude bordered on ethnographic interest for the Hindus and a true attention to their culture – not only to denigrate their customs or to express prejudices, which have always been part of the participant observer's mentality even in twentieth-century anthropology. It is not a surprise, then, that Manucci mentioned in his writings the presence in southern India of the extraordinary Jesuit Father Roberto De Nobili. As a respectful observer of the Indian culture, De Nobili converted the Hindus to Christianity thanks to a special permission of the prince of Tanjore, but he did so by assuming the habits and the clothes of a Brahmin (Irvine 1907, 3: 105-6; Tucci 1949, 171-4).

By following in these steps, at the end of his life Manucci managed to handle a format of artwork and an Indian figurative culture he had not dealt with before, choosing Indian art to express the images and the fortune of his work. Reading Gorla's report in the Vatican Library, it appears likely that Manucci's illustrated work on Hinduism coincides (at least as far as the captions are concerned) with the



Figure 20 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. *Shurapadma et le siens dans la magnifique ville de Viramahendrapatnam qu'il fit édifier par son beau-père.* Watercolour on paper (Karikal-Tanjore) from the *Histoire de Shiva* assembled by the French agent Abraham Pierre Porcher des Oulches. BnF OD 39 f. 91v-92, Cat. RH nr. 298 a-b. (© BNF)

time of Gorla's second visit, that is, between 1699 and 1710. Nobody could give Gorla better information on Hindu costumes than Manucci: he had been living in India all his life and was an expert, because he was writing his work just at that time.

Some pictures in *Libro Nero* are strikingly accurate for its time. Such level of accuracy could only be gained by a long and detailed observation in person. This is confirmed by Manucci's report of his own experiences.

In my preface to this section I have said that several persons have written upon the manners and customs of the Hindūs. To this I have to add that the reader must remember that any difference found between what is said by me and by others is due to the difference in the places we have visited and the people we have come across. [...] The inhabitants of these places differ in their costumes, as well as in their mode of life, the ceremonies at their temples, and the doctrines of their religion. It should be remembered that what I have recorded refers to the manners and costumes of the Hindūs subjects of the Great Moghul and the Malabarīs, these be-

ing the countries I have seen and through which I have travelled.
(Irvine 1907, 3: 90)

Manucci's anthropological attitude is particularly evident when he focused on the architecture and on some rituals practiced by Hindu ascetics. These observations are believed to have been carried out on the spot, and then reported on paper by the artists who worked for him with great accuracy, scrupulously following their patron's instructions. These merits could 'justify' some ethnocentric passages in the work's captions, which appear very controversial. The value of the work is that it sets a European's artistic representation free from the Ancient Regime's superstitions, by means of formats and modes still unknown at that time. These features are certainly useful in that they inserted in the work a more empirical dimension, which aimed at a precise picture of the otherness it was treating.

One of the more suggestive places in southern India, which Manucci describes in detail, and which he had his group of Indian artists represent on a splendid page of watercolour on paper, is the Hindu sanctuary of Tirupati [fig. 21]. The sanctuary is situated in the Andhra Pradesh inland, on a hill more than 100 km from Madras, and is one of the most important destinations of Hindu pilgrims, called 'the temple of seven hills'. It is the earthly representation of the seven heads of Adisesha, the king of snakes (*naga*) according to the corpus of the Puranas - one of the mythological entities that started creation, on which Vishnu lies during his cosmic rest. The Tirupati sanctuary is devoted to its incarnation: Sri Venkateswara. The deity is here worshipped in its apparition (*darshan*), which can save mankind from the catastrophes caused by Kali Yuga, the age of Kali, the present age, according to Sanskrit sources, the age of conflict and of destruction. The image (*murti*) of the god Venkatesvara, to whom the *sancta sanctorum* of the temple is devoted, is, according to current beliefs, a representation of the god that will remain for the whole Kaliyuga.

The representation in *Libro Nero* of the temple of Sri Venkateswara on top of Tirumala hill includes some interesting considerations. First of all, we should remember that the Tamil word Tirumala means 'holy mountain' (*mala* = mountain; *tiru* = holy). Moreover, it is clear that Manucci was there in person, as it can be inferred from his detailed description of the place [figs. 22-23]. This is not improbable, because the journey by land from Madras to Tirupati was not particularly challenging, especially if the traveller had money - and Manucci did.

The description accompanying the picture of the temple is rather accurate, although much idealised. The site plan is not as precise as a map of today, but the *gopuram* of the temples and the pediments of the pagodas of access to it are realistically represented by the artists. Very realistic (though not in perspective) is the disposition of the water basins for ablution rituals. Moreover, this picture of the Tiru-



Figure 21 The sanctuary of Tirupati
from a contemporary photography (© Google Images)

pati temple is very similar to a wall painting of the rock-cut temple of Ramnad, a painting made in about 1720 under the royal patronage of the Setupati dynasty (Howes 2003, 40).

About the sanctuary, considered at the time by the Europeans a sort of 'Eastern Eldorado', especially during the religious festivals and their widespread and solemn celebrations of habits and richness (Subrahmanyam 1995, 338-90), Manucci wrote:

In the Karnātik, inland six leagues from Madras, is a famous and ancient temple called Tirpiti [Tirupati]. Here assemble many people from all parts of India. The shrine is very wealthy from the large and frequent offerings presented. (Irvine 1907, 3: 143)

The precision of some of his observations makes us think that he was there in person, as it can be read in this report.

This temple is on a rather high hill, the ascent of which occupies two hours. There are various shelters in which there are many hermits, and hollows occupied by Brahman priests [...] Impelled by their barbarous religion, all the devout go there, and every year there is a festival for fifteen days. A large number of people assemble, and take up their quarters in a village at the foot of the hill. Others shelter themselves in tents or camp under trees [...] On this pilgrimage people must shave their heads in order to be cleansed of their sins [...] Many also do penance by climbing the hill on all



Figure 22 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, c. 85. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *View of the Temple at Tirupati*. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

fours, or on their knees, others at full length, rolling their body over and over. Others carry up water to wash the temple, et cetera. (Irvine 1907, 3: 143-4)

In the manuscript held at the Biblioteca Marciana the Tirupati picture is not the only illustration of a temple: it is clear that in Manuc-



Figure 23 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, c. 85. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *View of the Temple at Tirupati* (detail). Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

ci's view this topic was very interesting for a European readership. One of these illustrations represents the significant southern Indian architectural complex in the Tamil Nadu region: the Kanchipuram temple (Manucci writes "Cangivaron" in his caption), one of the most relevant religious sites ever built in southern Tamil Nadu. In his manuscript, Manucci offers highly accurate – for their time – representations of the two main Hindu temples of the Kanchipuram site, which is confirmed by modern site plans and Manucci's description (Irvine 1907, 3: 243). They are the Ekambareshvara temple, devoted to Shiva, and the Kamakshi temple. As to the Ekambareshvara temple, which is worth analysing in detail, it is clear that Manucci understands the Shivaite nature, because he has his artists illustrate the holy *lingam*, the main symbol of Shiva, always present in the *santa sanctorum* of the temples of this god and visible at the centre of this representation.

The accurateness of the drawing is indubitable, because in one of the two pictures the central courtyard of the sanctuary of the *lingam* can be seen clearly: here the mango tree is perfectly visible, as re-



Figure 24 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, c. 81 r. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *The Temple of Kanchipuram*. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

cent photographs show.¹³ The colonnaded rooms and the majestic red *gopuram* (the towers through which the holy yard of the temple

13 Accordingly to a colleague who recently visited the Ekambareshvara temple, the mango tree has been recently hit by a thunder that damaged it severely. The Author would like thank Dr. Lia Wei for this information.



Figure 25 A contemporary photo of the ancient mango tree inside the main courtyard of the temple (© Lia Wei)

can be accessed) are faithfully represented. Both are datable to the period of greatest expansion of the reign, between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. The representation of the Kanchipuram temples by the Indian artists is again the result of a first-person observation [figs. 24-25]. Manucci was clearly interested in architecture, but even more in any tangible cultural expression of Hinduism. Besides architecture, the Venetian obviously considered ethnography highly relevant: this field of research would gain its definitive expression and importance at the beginning of the eighteenth century, persisting all through the colonial period.

Among the figures of Hindus in *Libro Nero*, those which receive more attention are the yogis, the Hindu ascetics. From a young age yogis follow the *sadhana*, the path of yoga; Manucci defines them *samnyasin*, a Sanskrit term indicating those who renounce everything in the final phase of their lives, when the asceticism becomes extreme and deprivations become harder and more rigorous. Moreover, *samnyasa* means withdrawal (indicating the ascetic) and it is the Hindu fourth stage of life (as taught in Manavadharmashastra, Manu's Code of Law). The realism in the representation of yogis' rituals, especially as regards Mughal miniatures, has already been emphasised by SOAS Professor James Mallinson, who has repeatedly affirmed that Indian artists, while working on Mughal miniatures with



Figure 26 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, c. 116v. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 x 250 cm (© BNM)

Hindu motifs, did not idealise the subjects, but portrayed them faithfully, through empiric observation (Mallinson 2013). The same perspective may be found in [figs. 26-27].

One of the pictures features a yogi who has vowed to stand on one foot all through his life. He must not put his foot down. To be able to do so, he carries with him a support, a sort of swing with ropes against which he can lean, so that his foot will never touch the ground. The yogi is helped by an attendant, who follows him everywhere. These practices still survive in India: they are the extreme



Figure 27 The same yoga posture, *kukkuṭāsana*, meaning 'the cock pose' executed by a yogi in our times and captured by photography (© James Mallinson)

forms of devotion of Hinduism, which can even have dangerous effects on the ascetic's health. The leg, forced in that position for long, can atrophy and gangrene can set in, as shown in the picture where the penitent's leg is rather swollen [figs. 28-29].

Another image, produced at a similar moment to Manucci's *Libro Nero*, representing yogis in their asana (ritual poses), is a painting of mediocre quality on a spoiled paper scroll held at the cabinet de curiosités of Saint Geneviève Library in Paris [fig. 30]. It represents twenty-nine yogis in different asana. It was very likely made in southern India, and became part of the collection along with fossils, archeological finds, and natural history curiosities, before 1672 (Zehnacker, Petit 1989). This picture captured the interest of Abbot Claude du Moulinet, who inserted it in a plate of his *Le Cabinet de*



Figure 28 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)

la Bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève, published in 1692 (Du Molinet 1692) [fig. 31]. In spite of the low artistic quality, there are many similarities with the yoga poses that Manucci ordered his Indian artists to represent on paper. Moreover, these portraits of yogis in the context of the French Ancien Régime practice of collecting is rather thought-provoking.

Besides yogis' poses, Manucci wanted to report other habits that he could observe during religious celebrations in southern India.



Figure 28 The same image available in the context of contemporary India where the penitent is standing like in the Manucci painting on one single leg and is smoking most likely cannabis and its derivatives (© James Mallinson)

I have seen Hindūs who, on festival days, through religious fervour, climbed up a mast where there was a wheel bearing two iron hooks, and fixing these into their loins at the back, hung down, and praised the idol, swung round three times, making various gestures with their hands and feet. Such persons are held by Hindūs in great esteem. (Irvine 1907, 3: 145)



Figure 30 Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève. Indian drawing on a scroll showing a variety of yogi asana, from Southern India (© BSG)

Here Manucci is describing something that modern ethnography defines by the term 'ordeal'. In southern India this custom is known as 'hook-swinging' [figs. 32-33]. During hook swinging the Hindu penitent's body hangs by means of metallic hooks, which pierce the elastic skin of his back. By this wound the body can stay hanging for a long time, while the other members of the faithful rotate the ascetic by means of a perch connected to a winch. An important aspect of this religious performance is that the penitent's injuries must not be serious (Brighenti 2012, 104).

After these descriptions of Hindu practices, still surviving today in the varied culture of southern India, it is now time to conclude our study of the Venetian and his figurative universe created by local artists.

6 Conclusion

As a patron and supervisor of the illustrated works called *Libro Rosso* and *Libro Nero*, Manucci clearly aimed to play a political and diplomatic role, by offering the Venetian state visual and written information of value. In his old age he expressed the desire that his works would be sent to Europe, and dedicated them to the *doge* of Venice, hoping they would become best-sellers, like his rival's Bernier's work that had been published a few years before. In doing this he hoped to achieve high social standing in Venice on his return home, which is understandable, particularly if we consider his humble origins. This never happened, however, because he spent the last days of his life in India. One of the practical purposes of the composition of his illustrated books was therefore probably to secure himself and his family a pension and a better life.

Manucci's work raises many questions. Among them: how could a self-taught man have understood the importance of a publication based on pictures accompanied by descriptive texts?

The global circulation of printed books on foreign customs and traditions may be the answer. As the American scholar Bronwen Wil-

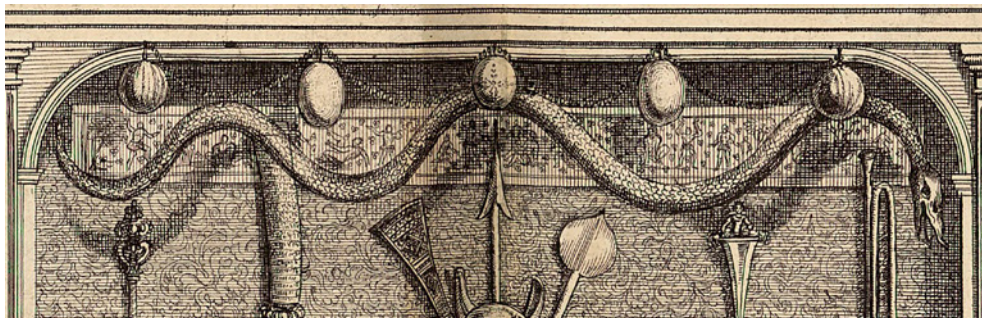


Figure 31 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Claude du Molinet, *Le Cabinet de la Bibliothèque de Sainte-Geneviève...*, Paris, Antoine Dezallier avec le privilege du Roi, 1692, pl. 4. In this engraving the very previous image of the yogis asana from the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève is represented. It highlights the objects in the context of the decorated room of an Ancient Régime *Cabinet des Curiosités* (© BNF)



Figure 32 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, cc. 38v-39r. Anonymous Indian artist for Nicolò Manucci, *Representation of the Cerimonies During the Festival of Kali, Hindu Goddess that Takes Place in the Month of November*. Watercolour on paper, 1700-10 ca., 415 × 250 cm (© BNM)



Figure 33 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Codex Ita VI 136 (=8300), *Libro Nero*, cc. 38v-39r. A detail of the same image showing an Hindu penitent involved in the practise of hook-swinging where the ascetic is attached through his body with hooks to a high pole rotating 360° upon itself (© BNM)

son has observed, the illustrations representing customs, costumes and traditions had a wide circulation (Wilson 2005, 71). In this way, Europeans could get to know an entire world through pictures, and the books of customs expressed just this fascination for geographical classification and its spread (71). If we observe European art, we can find an example similar to Manucci's (although its patronage is of a completely different social level), more than one century before: the work of Nicolas de Nicolay. As the Royal Geographer of France, de Nicolay ordered sixty life-drawn portraits of men and women of different ethnic groups (De Nicolay 1568). In the works of both Manucci and De Nicolay, each category is rendered by precise illustra-

tions of customs, identified by a caption and an explanation in the accompanying text. Customs and traditions of foreign people, including sexual practices, religious beliefs, and funeral rites, are associated with performative acts of the body and of the identity.

Many other examples can be found in the famous illustrated works by Pietro Bertelli and Theodor De Bry, and, further expanding the research field, even the books on Venetian costumes by Cesare Vecellio and Giacomo Franco can be included in the group (Bertelli 1589; Boissard 1585; De Bry 1590-1634; Franco 1596, 1610; Vecellio 1590). Of this vast corpus only some of the main works are mentioned here, with the purpose of associating *Libro Rosso* and *Libro Nero* with a kind of artistic expression that aimed to transcend centuries, cultures, and fashions. As Victor Stoichita has recently affirmed, the representation of 'the other' and of cultural diversity is a fundamental *fil rouge* in the history of modern art (Stoichita 2014).

It is very likely that Manucci consulted these printed works in the French, Portuguese and English settlements, or in the missions of the Capuchins and of the Discalced Carmelites, with whom he met during his journeys across the Subcontinent. Maybe he saw them thanks to the Europeans at the Mughal courts, or even thanks to the Mughal themselves, who were used to printed pictures, in a mutual and global exchange of visual works (Ramaswamy 2007, 751-82).

As regards aesthetic quality, Manucci's books are not an example of stately art or of the heyday of court art. They are products of a 'bourgeois' art, destined for different social categories, with the purpose of satisfying personal needs and then for wide cultural dissemination. In spite of its less than excellent artistic quality, this kind of art is highly significant if observed as a social phenomenon, which managed to create a new paradigm based on the empirical observation of Indian art (Dubbini 2018).

Both recently and in the past, scholars have proposed affiliating Manucci's and his artist's work in the *Libro Rosso* and *Libro Nero* to the artistic style known *Company School* (Archer 1970; Becherini 2016). *Company School* works were paintings commissioned by European patrons (specifically officers and dignitaries of the East India Company) to Indian artists. However, this definition cannot be applied to the books of the Venetian adventurer. Manucci's contacts with European commercial companies existed (both with the East India Company and its French counterpart,) but were too occasional and fragmentary to make us consider him a 'Company man' or to allow the works he patronised to be absorbed fully into the *Company School* category. In his writings there is no mention of an inner desire to dedicate his figurative work to a European private company or to serve their duties. Moreover, the term *Company School* in itself appears increasingly ambivalent today and has been criticised by authors who prefer the term *firingee paintings*: paintings com-

missioned to local artists by firangis (as we said in Persian language term for 'foreigners'), usually European adventurers or mercenaries (Lafont 2000, 119-49).

The only feeling of political allegiance expressed in Manucci's books was for the final addressee of the *opus*, the *doge* of the 'Most Serene Republic' of Venice. Manucci probably thought that realistic pictures, based on the empirical observation of both Mughal customs and Hindu traditions, commissioned to Indian artists, could (if printed) give prestige to Venice (and to himself) especially if they had been reproduced from the original manuscript in hundreds of copies and distributed in an international circuit.

This did not happen until the twentieth century, although a complete version in English and in Italian of the entire Manuccian *opus* does not yet exist (the extraordinary efforts of William Irvine were pioneering, but his work is now old-fashioned and contains several mistakes). It would be of great service to the scholarly community if the globally dispersed academic specialists on the subject should re-unite with the goal of collaborating to fill this gap, and to create a multidisciplinary (and probably multi-volumed) critical edition of Manucci's writings and illustrations.

A final, now completely forgotten and posthumous figurative celebration of Nicolò Manucci occurred in Venice – his hometown – with the restoration of the map room of the *Sala dello Scudo* at the *Doge's Palace* (1760-1763). This happened under the patronage of the Venetian Senate. The results of this original visual operation, backed by the enthusiasm of the erudite *doge* Marco Foscarini, the 'enlightened' geographer Francesco Grisellini and a late Baroque painter, Giustino Menescardi, produced an epitaph dedicated to him on the very walls of the Venetian seat of power (Dubbini 2018, 195-235) [fig. 34]. This has never been explored by scholars but is in fact highly significant. As a document of the Venetian State Archive illustrates, the objective of this propagandistic restoration of the room was to shine a light of glory on the Venetian past in a way that could exhort the weak, declining Republic and its senators to "imitate again the intrepid travellers of the past" who, since Marco Polo, had crossed the routes of Asia and "to celebrate their illustrious memory".¹⁴ On the walls of the room, looking at Grisellini's *Map of Asia* the visitor can read among the names of the Venetian travellers to the East Indies such as Nicolo' De Conti, Gasparo Balbi, Cesare Federici, that of Manucci himself.

Denique Nicolaus Manutius in Aula Mogoli Regis
Dilittissime Versatus Omigenam Earum Regio

14 ASVe, Riformatori allo Studio di Padova, f. 29, cc. 58-61.



Figure 34 Venice, MUVE, Palazzo Ducale. Francesco Grisellini and Giustino Menescardi, *Portrait of Nicolò Manucci*, 1760-73 (© MUVE)

Num Historia Saeculo XVII

Conscripsit Quae in Bibliotheca D. Marci Servatur.¹⁵

Even more interestingly, not only an epitaph was produced for this occasion in the *Sala dello Scudo*, but also a circular portrait (*tondino*) of Manucci dressed in Indian clothes, directly copied from his own *Libro Rosso* and also adapted by Menescardi from the work of the Venetian artist and engraver Giovanni Grevembroch (Dubbini 2018, 230-3).

It can be now said that on the walls of the *Doge's Palace*, visible in the *Sala dello Scudo* to the eyes of millions of tourists that visit the place every day, lies a portrait directly inspired by an Indian painting. Certainly, the adventurous Venetian could not hope for a better place for the celebration of his fame, his images and adventures.

¹⁵ "And indeed Nicolò Manucci, who, while was living at the court of the Mughal emperor, being an excellent expert of all what concerns that kingdom, in the XVIIth century wrote its history, which is now kept at the Saint Mark Library". The translation into English is made by the Author and is adapted from a first translation from Latin into Italian made by Dr. Ivan Matijasac.

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