Such a little place with so broad connections:

Religious Landscape of 'Dutch Ponnani' in the Early Modern Indian Ocean World

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Introduction

The first Dutch expedition to Calicut itself was a failure. Two Dutch factors Hans de Wolff and Lafer representing the Middelburg Company (which later merged to the VOC) travelled from Surat to Calicut in April 1603. In the course of their journey, they fell into Portuguese hands and were killed.[1] After more than half-a-century, though the Dutch whitewashed Portuguese power in Malabar, they could not succeed to surmount the political aura of the kingdom of Calicut. However, the VOC decided to close down their establishment in Malabar in 1793 realizing it is a non-profitable venture. In this duress of two centuries, Ponnani was a region that the Dutch frequently ended up with their temporary or permanent establishments.

Though the economic aspects of early modern Indian Ocean world have been focused well in the hitherto historiography, the cultural aspects are still less-emphasized. Among several non-mercantile clusters operated in the maritime world, one of the dominant parallel functionaries was the Muslims with religious motivations. Mostly they voyaged to perform *hajj* at Makkah, as some studies have articulated.[2] But, they also travelled to get education at the prominent religious centers of the Middle East, such as Makkah, Madinah, and Cairo. Certain recent studies have shed light into such aspects, but primarily focusing on the Southeast- and West-Asian connections.[3] Of course, South Asia had a remarkable role in such contacts acting independently or as an interlink between Southeast- and West-Asia, but no one has looked into such aspects. My intended doctoral project is an attempt to fill this gap, by carefully looking at the missing South Asian part. For this, I plan to focus on a particular region in southwestern South Asia named Ponnani, which functioned vibrantly in the early modern Islamic networks of the Indian Ocean world. Due to its active participation in the religious educational sphere by closely connecting to the West Asian centers and attracting students even from Southeast Asia, it acquired the title(s) of 'Makkah of South India' (*dakshinendiayude makka*), and/or 'Little Makkah' (*cherumakka*).

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[1] Om Prakash, *The Dutch Factories in India, 1617-1623: A Collection of Dutch East India Company Documents Pertaining to India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1984).

[2] Michael Pearson, *Pious Passengers: The Hajj in earlier times*. (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1994); Dionisius A. Agius, *Classic Ships of Islam: From Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean* (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 215-244;
Sugata Bose, *A hundred horizons: The Indian Ocean in the age of global empire* (Harvard University Press, 2006): 233-271

[3] Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Michael F. Laffan, "Raden Aboe Bakar; An introductory note concerning Snouck Hurgronje's informant in Jeddah (1884-1912)" *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 155 (1999): 517-542; Michael F. Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds*. (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); John R. Bowen, "Intellectual pilgrimages and local norms in fashioning Indonesian Islam" *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 123 (2008): 37-54.

The relocation of an ulama(scholars)- family called Makhdums from Cochin to Ponnani in the late fifteenth century and their vivacious activities in the following centuries marked a momentum to the commencement of an educationally outstanding era of this area. Zainuddin bin Ahmad was first to arrive in Ponnani in 1467. His descendants – mainly Shaikh Zainuddin Senior and Shaikh Zainuddin Junior – went to Makkah for higher education and came back to reform the religious education according to the curricula of Makkah. This attracted the students not only from the subcontinent but also from outside, such as Southeast Asia. While this religious aspect of Ponnani is very evident through various textual materials they left behind, we know very little about its political and economic aspects. We have only some passive references about the regional history of Ponnani, though it had particular significances in the broader economic and political realms. The present study would like to examine such aspects, as an entry-point to my future project on the religious sphere entangled with the contemporary economic and political developments.

In the south-western coastal ports of South Asia, there are a series of ports stretching between Daman Diu and Cape Comorin. Most of these ports were subsidiary to certain major ports which engaged in global trade. In Malabar coast (which now mainly formulates the coastal border of present-day Kerala State of India), such 'major ports' changed from region to region in the course of time, but 'minor ports' always remained with the same position. Ponnani is one among these inferior port-towns associating with different superior ports. With its secondary position in mercantile level, it also had other subordinate positions in political and cultural spheres with an exception of the Islamic religious landscape in which it gained a primary position in the subcontinent. However, the port and culture of Ponnani have been completely ignored in the hitherto historical writings despite of its active interactions with the early modern Indian Ocean world – which this study endeavour to address.

The foremost concern of this study is related to the political and economic characteristics of Ponnani during the early modern period. While the religious accomplishments are so vibrant, what exactly were the political and economic facets of the region and to what extent those did or did not affect the religious landscape? I will try to answer this principal question by contextualizing Ponnani in the broader networks of the Indian Ocean world as much as in the regional networks. This will bound me with a couple of auxiliary questions related to the internal and external networks of Ponnani: How the region functioned in the early modern centuries in political, economic and religious realms, and to what extent the European dominance influenced/altered those? What roles it played in the broader networks of the Indian Ocean (mainly economically and religiously) and how it functioned as a basement to the Dutch attempt to shift the mercantile significance of Surat to Malabar?

Locating regional histories of the early modern South Asian coastal belts in the broader cultural and mercantile networks of the Indian Ocean world has put historians into an incongruous and enigmatic challenge. Many tried to validate certain *dominant* localities over others highlighting the foreign engagements boomed by the arrival of Europeans. Some others exalted the indigenous mercantile and cultural perpetuations mostly ignoring the external engagements in a broader framework. The port-townships in the west-coast of the Indian subcontinent particularly had a fluctuating historical process mutually connected with

the indigenous networks as much as with the foreign external ones, but very little studies have endeavoured to trace out such interconnections. In the particular case of Ponnani, which is economically and politically an inferior place, the historiographical attention is remarkably scarce.

In most of the studies related to Malabar, we get only some fragmentary or passive references to the region. Most of such works refer to Ponnani either a) while they discuss about the encounters between the Zamorins and the Portuguese since it acted as a military capital of the former or b) while they refer to the Islamic traditions of Malabar in which the region had an outstanding position. In the first category, the scholars like KM Panikkar, O.K. Nambiar, KM Mathew and Pius Malekandathil make some occasional statements in their works.[4] In the second category, some studies have articulated Ponnani as a centre of Islamic learning with simultaneous political involvements in the on-going anti-colonial struggles and spiritualistic attachments connected with various Sufi orders.[5] Related to the contemporary history of Ponnani, Roland Miller in his *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* and TV Abdu Rahman in his various journalistic articles have analysed the historical processes locating it in a longer tradition of the region.[6] But, related to other aspects, especially related to the Dutch period which I focus in this study, there is hardly any historical writings, apart from the intermittent passive notes by Ashin Das Gupta and M.A.P. Roelofsz and footnotes by Binu John Mailaparambil.[7]

For the practical reasons, this monograph is mainly based on the archival materials of Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) available at the Nationaal Archief of the Netherlands. I have essentially looked at the series titled *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP = Received Letters and Papers) from Malabar and certain letters in the selected documents from Batavia categorized as *Hoge Regering* (HR = High Government). The published volumes of *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden* edited and annotated by W. Ph. Coolhaas, J. van Goor, J. E. Schooneveld-Oosterling and H. K. s'Jacob,[8]

[4] KM Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch: Being the history of the fall of the Nayar power in Malabar* (Bombay: Taraporevala Publications,1931); O.K. Nambiar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963); KS Mathew, *Portuguese trade with India in the sixteenth century* (New Delhi : Manohar, 1983); Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500-1663* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2001).

[5] K. K. Muhammad Abdul Kareem and CN. Ahmad Moulavi, *Mahatthaya Mappila Sahithya Parambaryam* (Malayalam) (Kozhikkode: Published by the authors, 1978); V. Kunhali, *Sufism in Kerala* (Tenhippalam: Publication Division at University of Calicut, 2004); Husain Randathani, *Mappila Muslims: A Study on Society and Anti-Colonial Struggles* (Calicut: Other Books, 2007).

[6] Roland Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* (Madras and Hyderabad: Orient Longmans, 1976).

[7] M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders ter kuste Malabar* ('s-Gravenhage: Het Koninglijk Instituut voor De Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie, 1943); Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) and footnotes by Binu John Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar (1663-1723)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

[8] *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, 13 vols., ed. W. Ph. Coolhaas, J. van Goor, J. E. Schooneveld-Oosterling and H.K. s'Jacob ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960–2007).

and *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando–Indicum* edited by J. E. Heeres and F. W. Stapel[9] are another valuable source that I have incorporated. While the former provides numerous correspondences pertaining to Malabar, the latter offers VOC's diplomatic engagements and with indigenous rulers, in my case: the Zamorin. These all have been supplemented with other sources such as the memoirs of the Dutch commanders and commissioners appointed by the VOC in Malabar. Some of the memoirs provides fragmentary, but valuable, information on Ponnani in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The individual writings such as *Itinerario* by John Huyghen van Linschoten,[10] and *Malabaarse brieven* by Jacobus Canter Visscher[11] also have been utilized.

In addition to the Dutch sources, I also have utilized limited published Portuguese sources such as a *The book of Duarte Barbosa: An account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants* by Duarte Barbosa, who was an official of the Estado de India in Malabar.[12] In order to understand early modern indigenous undercurrents, I have used the contemporary Arabic monographs such as *Tahrid Ahl al Iman* by Shaikh Zainuddin Senior, *Tuhfat al Mujahidin* by Shaikh Zainuddin Junior, and *Fathul Mubin* by Qazi Muhammad written in and around Ponnani and the Malayalam-monograph *Patappattu* written probably in Cochin.[13] The nineteenth-century British writings also provide particular descriptions about the region: Francis Buchanan's *A journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar* and William Logan's *Malabar Manual* are two remarkable works in this regard.[14] While the formers observes various geographical, economic, cultural, and traditional nodesm the latter, who was a colonial District Magistrate and Collector at Malabar in the 1880s, talks about Ponnani with two layers: big and small Ponnanis. By Logan's time, the area was considered as a large administrative unit namely *taluk* comprising numerous villages, maintaining a village-township (which then known as *amsam*) with the same name.

VOC Opens a Window: Ponnani under Dutch 'Influence'

The political scenario of Ponnani in the early modern centuries is much turbulent, especially in eighteenth century. Though the Estado da India of the Portuguese had its influence in overall Malabar it was not that much influential regionally in Ponnani. Nevertheless, their power was ended in 1663 after the war between the Portuguese and the Dutch in Cochin.

[9] *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum: verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten, van privilege brieven, aan hen verleend, enz.* ed. J. E. Heeres ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931).

[10] John Huyghen van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies: From the Old English Translation of 1598*, ed. Arthur Coke Burnell (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885).

[11] Jacobus Canter Visscher, *Mallabaarse brieven: behelzende eene naukeurige beschryving van Jacobus Canter Visscher van de kust van Mallabaar: den aardt des landts, de zeden en gewoontens der inwoneren, en al het voornaamste dat in dit gewest van Indie valt aan te merken* (Leeuwarden: Ferwerda, 1743).

[12] Duarte Barbosa, *The book of Duarte Barbosa: An account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants*, 2 vols., ed. M. L. Dames (London: Hakluyt Society, 1865).

[13] Shaikh Zainuddin Senior, *Tahrid Ahl al Iman ala jihadi abadath al sulban* (Calicut: Maktab al Huda, 1996); Shaikh Zainuddin Junior, *Tuhfat al mujahidin fi ba'd akhbar al Burtughaliyin* (Hyderabad: Matbaa' al Tarikh, undated); Qazi Muhammad, *Fathul Mubin* (Calicut: Other Books, 2012); *Patappattu*, ed. S. Parameswara Aiyar (Travancore: Authority of the Government, 1924).

[14] Francis Buchanan, *A journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, 3 vols. (London: T. Cadwell and W. Davies, 1807); William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, 2 vols. (Madras: Superintendent of Government Press, 1951)

Though the Dutch tried to replace the political powers of the Portuguese along with the economic dominances, the attempt was not successful, at least in the southern and northern kingdoms of Malabar: at Travancore and Calicut.

There are various theories about the Dutch presence in Malabar and their impact in the historical processes during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While some scholars argue that the Dutch was unsuccessful in their political and economic endeavours, the others argue that they had a remarkable effect in discontinuing a European tradition generated by the Portuguese and rupturing a new mode of functionality in Malabar. Instead of inclining to any of such streams, I would like to examine how the Dutch operated in a regional level and to what extent they created spurts political, economic and/or religious layers. By closely paying attention to Ponnani, we can understand how exactly the VOC had to encounter with the regional developments outside the cityscapes in which either they had political dominance (as was the case with Cochin) or they were completely weak (as was the case with Calicut). Ponnani, as a region connected to the trans-regional networks even prior to the arrival of the Dutch, is much capable of explicating the status of the Dutch engagement that is neither 'dominant' nor 'weak'.

Opening a window: Dutch in Ponnani, 1604-1663

The VOC's appearance in the region starts since the early decades of seventeenth century, the period of the Dutch presence in the Indian Ocean waters. They made a treaty with the Zamorin of Calicut in 1604 at Ponnani. In the first decade of the Dutch presence in Malabar itself, they had connections with Ponnani. While Paulus van Caerden came to Calicut in 1607, he wanted to meet the Zamorin. The Zamorin was at his border-fortress **(*grensvesting*)** at Ponnani, thus he sent message to visit him in order to re-establish the older alliances that the Dutch made three years back. But this was unsuccessful due to the Dutch Heeren Majores' priorities on the trade of Moluccas than to Calicut.[15] Ponnani thus was continuing as a favourite place of Zamorin. Writing about the early decades of seventeenth century, Roelofsz calls Ponnani as a town and fort in the border of Cochin who sometimes shared it with the Kings of Travancore – who thus had a border from Cape Comorin to Ponnnani – and with the kingdom of Calicut.[16] In the first decade of seventeenth century, Francois Pyrard writes that the Zamorin used to stay both in Ponnani or in Calicut,[17] but preferring the former when a battle was happening with his enemy, the raja of Cochin.

Since 1617, we come across the letters by the Dutch officials to their commanders visiting India instructing them to meet the Zamorin and to try to win his friendship. Advice to 'win the friendship of the Zamorin' is a constant line in many of such letters.[18] This advice directly or indirectly meant couple of other things – as we sometimes see very explicitly: a) getting pepper and other spices for much reasonable prices, b) crushing the monopoly of the

[15] M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 38
[16] M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 9
[17] Francois Pyrard de Leval, *The voyage*: 409
[18] VOC 1179, Instructions by the Council of the Indies at Jacarta to Van den Broecke, Director-designate at Surat, leaving with the Middelburg and the Zuyder Eendracht as the commander, 5 March 1617, ff. 215-216; VOC 1177, Instructions by the Coen at Jacarta to Van den Broecke, the commander of the fleet going to Mocha and Surat, 15 June 1620. ff.111-112.

Portuguese in the region with the help of the Zamorin, as he 'was a sworn enemy of the Portuguese'.[19] The second one came out very aggressively as many commanders from Batavia advised their representatives to Malabar to damage the Portuguese ships and settlements as much as possible.

In 1620s, we get references to the Dutch presence in Malabar: one of such references is about Commander Frederik Kistjens who went to Malabar as an upper-merchant on the fleet of defence on 22 September 1621.[20] In the late-1620s, the Zamorin offered a factory to the VOC at Ponnani. He offered a remarkably good fireproof stone-house as a rent for one year. This was located near the river which facilitated the collection of pepper easily. There the subjects of Zamorins used to supply the pepper, ginger, and other goods to the foreign ships. According to the contract, the Dutch merchants here thus will be under the protection of the Zamorin and he will extradite the deserters and criminals to the Dutch commander (*opperhoofd*). This treatise was valid for the next six years. He also offered to yield around 3000 *candiel*[21] of pepper, along with other spices such as ginger.[22]

At the same time, we also see a document that says the VOC official refusing an offer of Ponnani from the Zamorin in the same year. Herman van Speult , the Dutch governor to Surat, visited Calicut on his way from Batavia to Surat. He was received by the Zamorin at the port with 10,000 armed men. The Zamorin invited him to set-up a factory (at Ponnani?) offering to supply him the entire amount of pepper and ginger produced in his kingdom. He will deliver the VOC annually 3000 candiel of pepper at 28 *rial*s per candiel, and ginger for 12 rials per kandi. On this price, the Zamorin offered that within 10 days, he will provide 1,000 kandis of pepper. Van Speult refused these all offers as he did not know the price of pepper in Surat, Persia or the Red Sea and also the fund in his hand was limited. Once he arrived at Surat, he realized that a profit of 100 per cent could have been earned on pepper if he would have bought pepper there. This led him to a conclusion that establishing a factory in Calicut is extremely urgent and desirable. In his letter to the Governor General at Batavia, he suggested that if VOC establish a factory in Calicut, Jan Cremier Papas could be a good chief there.[23] This must have led to the aforementioned contract of the VOC with the Zamorin.

Though the VOC made a treaty with the Zamorin and managed to establish a factory there with a contract of six years, it was not as easy as they thought about it. Especially after the end of the treaty, procurement of pepper from Calicut was much difficult. They managed to collect pepper from almost all ports of Malabar except in Calicut and some other places in which the Portuguese had strong influences. The Dutch exchanged 15000 pounds of pepper for led – which was much necessary for the local rulers in the context of their ongoing battles among themselves and with the Portuguese – dealing with the rulers of Cananoor,

[19] VOC 1182, Instructions to the Admiral Jacob Dedel, Vic-Admiral Humphrey Fitzherbert and the the Council of the fleet of eleven ships being sent jointly by the Dutch and the English companies to the coast of Malabar and Goa, 11 October 1621, ff.18-21.

[20] Frederik Kistjens started his career as an under-merchant to the Indies in 1612. He was in Johor since 4 May 1613. From Malabar, he commanded Haerlem to Aceh and Malacca in April 1624 – Om Prakash, *The Dutch Factories in India: A Collection of Dutch East India Company Documents Pertaining to India*, Vol. II (1624-1627) (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007): 168.

[21] A local measurement unit of Malabar. It was equal to 510 Dutch ponds.

[22] *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum* I: 207-208.

[23] VOC, 1199, Governor Herman van Speult on board the *Gouden Leeuw* at Surat to Governor-General De Carpentier at Batavia, 5 April 1626, ff. 297-308.

Baliapatanam, etc. Even outside Calicut, the Portuguese interfered most of the time, especially in Cannanore, Baliapatanam, Mount Deli in which all the individual rulers or the local people collected peppers to trade with the Dutch. In mount Deli and Ponnani the people collected pepper for the Dutch, but was prevented by the Portuguese.[24] Only in Calicut they managed to get some pepper without any threats, as Roelofsz notes down.[25]

Specifically at Ponnani, in October 1634, the Dutch commander Jan Carstenszoon wrote a report in which he demonstrated the complexities of procuring pepper from the region. He also mentioned that despite of handling too much of led, copper, sulphur, he had to be disappointed with collecting sufficient amount of spices.[26] In 1635, Pieter Vlack visited Ponnani, among other places such as Tremepatnam, Cananoor, Baliapatnam and Mount Deli and Bergare, and he found that the pepper-trade in almost all these places were already traded by the Portuguese traders or other foreign traders. Though he tried to collect the peppers for huge prices from the inlands, he failed to do so as many of those were already plucked out. Thus his ship on 27 October left Malabar to Goa without any pepper.[27]

In the 1640s, the Dutch have collected some spices through the brokers functioning at Ponnani. But it was intercepted by the arrival of a new competitor in the waters of Ponnani: the English East India Company. The English contacted the Surati merchant Virji Borah – 'the richest merchant in the world'[28] – who had contacts not with Calicut but with Ponnani.[29] He collected pepper from Ponnani as much as he could, and thus the English ship London arrived here with William Pitt and Thomas Hill in 1641 and collected some low-quality peppers which were 'not suitable at all to transport to England'. Naturally the English were furious on Virji Borah for playing 'this piece of villainy', but they could not do anything as so long as he paid them back.[30] Again, next year in 1642, the English ship Aleppo Merchant[31] sailed along the Malabar coast under the commandership of Edward Knipe. He also made contracts with Virji Borah to collect pepper exchanging it with other goods, mainly coral. Knipe noticed that if he had more time and goods, he would have made too much of profit by collecting too much spices. The then representative of the Zamorin asked him to come again to do much business.[32] These all developments were creating much headache to the VOC and they have reported it to the higher officials in great length.[33] Thus the main attempt of a blockade-fleet under the commanderships of Matthijs Hendricksz. Quast, Cornelis Leendertsz. Blauw and Jan Jansz. De Quesnoy in 1641-1642 was to strengthen the VOC's relationship with the Zamorin and to offer him much support against the Portuguese, by procuring the

[24] VOC 1108, Letter from Philips Lucasz., 20 Juni 1634.
[25] M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 62
[26] VOC 1113, Report of Commander Jan Carstenszoon operating trade in Ponnani, 15 October, ff. 816-818.
[27] VOC 1111, Letter from Van Pieter Vlack to the Directors, 4 June 1635.
[28] W.H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb: A Study in Indian economic history* (London : MacMillan, 1923): 153-156, 234 note 2, 295
[29] For more details on Virji Borah and his entanglements with the Mughal kingdom and with VOC in Surat before 1640, see Hans van Santen, "Shah Jahan wore glasses: Some remarks on the impact of the Dutch East Indian Company on northern India and suggestions for further research", in Jos Gommans and Om Prakash eds. *Circumambulations in South Asian History: Essays in Honour of Dirk H.A. Kolff* (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 47-67 at 57-67
[30] *English Factories 1642-1645*: 7, 8 – as cited by M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 88
[31] The details of this ship have been given by M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 88, 89, 90.
[32] *English Factories 1642-1645*: XXII – as cited by M.A.P. Roelofsz, *De vestiging der Nederlanders*: 89
[33] VOC 1141, Letter from Van Paulus Croocq te Suratte to the Directors, 26 January 1643.

pepper and other spices for the Dutch.[34] This meeting was happened at Ponnani. The Zamorin offered his cooperation and friendship with the Dutch once again, though the latter was sceptic about it.[35]

These all historical developments in the economy of Ponnani lead us to think about the political-economic status of the region during the Portuguese dominance. It seems to be a 'rebellious port-town' to the Portuguese control and dominion in the 1620s to 1640s. Thus, the Dutch and English merchants easily could come and trade with this port, while all other ports were under the extreme control of the Portuguese. Even though the Portuguese tried to intercept such mercantile transactions crossing their monopoly, both the indigenous and foreign traders collaborated each other to break out such a domination.

In such a rebellious status of the port, it also had an alternative mercantile hierarchy of the trading. While most other port-towns in Malabar had a simple twofold layer of the Portuguese officials and the indigenous merchants (who sometimes entangled with their association to the political representatives), Ponnani had much more layers: a) Of course an eye of the Portuguese and their officials were functioning in and around Ponnani. b) the indigenous merchants, but they could not trade directly with the foreign traders, c) thus came the Zamorin to their rescue who brought other mercantile groups than the Portuguese to the port, and d) the bigger merchants and brokers who were functioning throughout the West Coast parallel to the Portuguese. Virji Borah of Surat is best example in this regard with his connections with Ponnani, as most of his clients were the European companies other than the Portuguese and his contact was with the port-towns stood rebelliously against or outside the Portuguese dominance. These multiple layers of the mercantile hierarchy tackled each other and 'difficultly smoothened' the economic transactions of Ponnani.

Also in the first half of the seventeenth century, the entangled geographical-economic advantages of Ponnani must have added to the commercial development in the region. Usually this was played by the river, but this time, I assume it was through the Ghats-pass that we discussed in the Chapter 1. Many correspondences from the Dutch officials at Surat to Batavia and to the Directors at Amsterdam explain that the ships from Malabar have stopped coming to Surat. Pieter van den Broecke from Surat reports this issue first to Batavia and then to Amsterdam. At the end of a letter to Batavia on 11 June 1623, he wrote: "Ordinarily 15 to 20 Malabar ships used to visit Surat every year from whom the city earned more than 100,000 *mahmudis*. But no Malabar ship had come to Surat this year. The Dutch and the English were being held responsible for this since they had allegedly destroyed the Malabar ports. The English had captured two Malabar ships on the sea. The authorities at Cambay had complained that because of the non-arrival of ships from Malabar, they had lost more than 20,000 by way of missed tolls."[36] On 11 January 1624, he wrote to Amsterdam: "Many important people of Gujarat have complained that out of fear of capture by the

[34] They tried to impress the Zamorin with many gifts including French and Spanish wine, an embroidered yellow 'quitesol' and two broad broadswords. Along with the gifts, De Quesnoy handed over the letter from the Governor-General and the Council.

[35] VOC 865, Instruction of Governor General and Council for Quast, 11 July 1641; VOC 865, Letter from Governor General and Council to the king of Calicut, 14 Sept. 1641; VOC 1139, Letter from Jan Jansz. de Quesnoy to the commander Claes Cornelisz., 18 Jan. 1642; VOC 1139, extract of daily-register kept at the ship Hollandia, 20 Jan. 1642.

[36] VOC 1192, Letter from Van den Broecke at Surat to De Carpentier at Batavia, 11 June1623, ff. 136-137.

English and ourselves, Malabar ships had not dared to come to Surat over the last two years. This had resulted in revenue loss of more than f.100,000 a year by way of tolls. In respect of Malabar ships with no Portuguese links, 15 to 16 passes had been given by the Dutch. Van den Broecke hoped that the Directors would approve of this action."[37] Due to this fear of sea-route, the merchants of Malabar must have chosen the overland routes to sell their goods, mostly to the English East India Company but also to the VOC. In a letter written by Governor General De Carpentier at Batavia to Van den Broecke at Surat on 9 August 1624, he says: "According to the information from Surat, the Malabar pepper was bought by the English at Burhanpur at 3 rials per Bantam sack."[38] Few months later, he also writes the same (but with some fluctuations in the price) to the Directors at Amsterdam: "A limited amount of pepper was available at Surat at 6 rials per Bantam sack. This was brought *overland* from Malabar to Burhanpur and from there to Surat."[39]

While the officials repeatedly admit the usage of land-route by the merchants of Malabar, we could simply figure out that they must have used the Ghats-routes. In Malabar's case, since there are no many transportable routes in the Western Ghats towards northern India than the pass at Palghat, which is near to Ponnani. This route had been used in the ancient centuries as an overland highway connecting between the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, as we discussed previously. Since then, this route must have been rejuvenated in the early modern centuries due to the insecurities that the indigenous merchants encountered in the Indian Ocean waters. But this time, they did not go eastward to Coromandel, instead they travelled further inland to the north where they reached at Burhanpur and traded their goods. It also help us to question the taken-for-granted notions that Malabar was connected to the northern India only via sea.

An opened window: Dutch in Ponnani, 1663-1793

The conquest of the Cochin and the stable basing of the Dutch in Malabar without any threats from the Portuguese, strengthened their connection with Ponnani which resulted in the establishment of a factory-cum-fort there.

As a reward to the support of the Zamorin to conquer the Cochin, the Dutch (commanders Van der Meyden and Van Goens) agreed to withdraw his cannons and army from Crangannur, which was ruled by the Raja of Crangannur, a subordinate ally of the Zamorin. In 1662, the Dutch also has agreed to demolish their fort at Cranganur as soon as Cochin is conquered. But, they asked for permission to build a redoubt at Pallippuram, in order to continue their control over the river-mouth of Periyar. Thus a friendship-treaty was signed between the Dutch and the Zamorin in March 1662. According to this, all the pepper from Zamorin's land will be handed over to the Dutch, and the latter will collect those from Ponnani. They selected Ponnani since the Dutch were not allowed to trade with any other ports of Calicut, according to the treaty, and the Zamorins are not allowed to enter the territories of Cochin.

[37] VOC 1188, Letter from Pieter van den Broecke at Surat to the Directors at Amsterdam, 11 January 1624, ff. 225-9.

[38] VOC 1191, Letter from Governor General De Carpentier at Batavia to Van den Broecke at Surat, 9 August 1624, ff. 294-303.

[39] VOC 1191, General Letter from Governor General De Carpentier at Batavia to the Directors at Amsterdam, 27 January 1625. ff.129-77 – Emphasis added.

All the enemies of the Dutch will be the enemies of the Zamorin and vice versa, and this treaty 'will last as long as last as long as the sun, moon, earth and sky existed' (*zolang zou duren als zon, maan, aarde en hemel zouden bestaan*).[40] Of course, it did not last, as the later historical developments show to us.

During the take-over session of Cochin by the Dutch, the Zamorin also participated in the function along with his royal family-members and numerous Nair-militias. In the occasion (on 22 February, 1663) the VOC requested him build a factory and to appoint a resident at Ponnani. He agreed to this, and thus the lower-merchant (*onderkoopman*) Pieter Vertangen[41] was appointed. He was well aware of the borders of the countries.[42] While the VOC could not make any political influence generally in Calicut, Ponnani stood as a special zone in which the Dutch had a sort of political freedom along with their economic priorities.

According to the organizational structure of the VOC, Ponnani was controlled by a Dutch resident who was responsible to his higher official, the governor of Cochin who controlled the whole Malabar, in accordance with his higher official, the Governor General of Batavia who controlled the whole East Indies, being responsible to the Heren XVII at Amsterdam. The roles of a resident were mainly interacting with the local rulers, traders, and brokers in order to procure maximum amount of merchandises from the region under his mechanism. In Ponnani, the most concern of the resident was collecting the pepper. Though I could not build a continuation of the residents in Ponanni chronologically, I have managed to identify certain residents from the VOC archives: Pieter Vertangen was first in the queue, who was followed by Jacob van Ransen, Jacob Permentier, Anthonij van de Coutere, Willem Fe[e]ling, Laurens Trog, Gerrit van Dorpen, Hendrik Isaacksz, and Anthony Litqens. The resident of Ponanni was sometimes assisted with a commander who was in charge of the protection of the factory and the smoothening of spice-collection. Apart from these permanent officials, the VOC at Cochin also sent some special delegates in order to reconcile the politically motivated tensions in the region with the Zamorin.[43] The factory here was built of timber and it was well-fortified.[44] Along with the warehouse, it also had a lodge[45] which mostly had been used by the resident.

Related to the legitimacy-hierarchies of VOC's each establishment in Malabar, s'Jacob makes much clear distinction.[46] There were establishments in which the VOC was allowed to use power and had the right, rendering to the treaties with the local rulers.[47] Some establishments were taken over from the Portuguese. Some other establishments were handed

[40] K.A. 1129, Van Goens to the Gentlemen XVII, 19 February 1663, ff. 1696; K.A. 1131, Van Goens to the Gentlemen XVII, 28 August1663, ff. 600; *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum* II: 199, contract 7 March 1662, contract 15 22 February 1663 – cited by H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: xlix

[41] Pieter Vertangen started his career with VOC as an assistant in 1650, in 1652 at Surat, in 1657 a lower-merchant at Sindh and in 1663 he became a resident at Ponnani. By the end of 1665, he became the head (*hoofd*) at Cannanur, and died in 1677 at the rank of bookkeeper (*boekhouder*) and *visitateur-generaal*. – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 13, footnote 127.

[42] *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum* II: 238 footnote 1.

[43] VOC 1649, Instructions for the delegates sent to Irnalij Coedij and Pananaij, 12 October 1700, fol. 94-98; VOC 1649, Instructions for the delegates to handle with the Zamorin at Ponnani, 18 October 1700, fol. 99-102.

[44] *Generale Missieven* 12: *1750-1755*: 583 (from VOC 2846, fol. 622r-623v.).

[45] *Generale Missieven*, 9: *1729-1737*: 591 (from VOC 2296, fol. 58v.).

[46] H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: lii

[47] Quilon, Cochin, Pallippuram, Cranganur and Cannanur are in this category.

over by the local authorities for contract.[48] There were also some places in which any contracts or treaties were signed.[49] Thus Ponnani was a contractual factory handed over by the Zamorins to the Dutch.

The functioning of the factory was interrupted many times according to the political tensions between the Dutch and the Zamorins. Such interruptions forced the VOC to withdraw the residents from Ponnani and to shut down the factory. The first in this sequence must be in the duress of 1670s and 1680s, when the Dutch and the Zamorins engaged in a series of wars. In 1678, the former Dutch commander in Malabar Hendrik van Rheede (1669-1676) came to Ponnani and tried to make a truce with the Zamorin, and he was successful for a short period. In the following years, the situations were worsened again. A decade later, in 1688, Van Rheede again came into Malabar with a an assignment of strengthening the relationships with the indigenous rulers. He mediated between the Zamorin and the Raja of Cochin about the issue of the former's attack over the Raja of Palacattachery who was aligned with the latter. Van Rheede was successful in bringing peace between these two rulers, and as a result, he also managed to get the permission from the Zamorin to reopen the factory at Ponnani. Thus, a resident along with other clerks were to be appointed again with all freedom to do trade, as it was earlier.[50] But this situation, I assume, did not last very long, since we come across another reference in the memoir of Paulus de Roo, *commissaris* at Malabar,[51] who writes that the Zamorin assured him the permission to establish a residence at Ponnani in a previous discussion.[52] The commander Van Dielen and *raad* have discussed the same issue in their letter on 10th October 1692 to Batavia. Van Dielen reported that establishing a warehouse and a house for the resident in Ponnani, only lead to make the Zamorin more suspicious, and that therefore the VOC should avoid the trade there.[53] But De Roo writes that the merchant Baba Prabhu also has recommended on this issue to agree on this place, that the Zamorin has donated, to build a residence. Prabhu also recommended that this place would help them to collect a good quantity of northern pepper, provided that for hundred candiel you can pay either by cash or by merchandise, though without coming to an agreement on prices. Therefore, De Roo advises his successor, you will have to conduct further discussions with him to collect pepper for 13 or 13.5 European ducats per candiel, as is the predecessor of this work.[54] This lead us to be skeptical about the existence of a factory in Ponnani between 1992 and 1994. But, for sure, it was reestablished by 1995 as we get many correspondences from the Ponnani resident.

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[48] Ponnani, Purakkad and Kayamkulam are in this category.

[49] Such as Tengapattanam.

[50] *Generale Missieven,* 5: *1686-1697*: 239-240 (from **KA 1330**, fol. 303v.)

[51] *Memorie doo commissaris Paulus de Roo voor Commandeur Adriaan van Ommen en Raad, in het schip Spierdijk zeilende omtrent Honawar,* 11 April, 1695 (Copie A.R.A.-K.A. 1461, p. 240-292; andere hss. A.R.A. –H.R. 719, p. 1-47; H.R.B. 720, p. 1-91). – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 271

[52] According to the contact dated 16 November 1691, art. 9 (*Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlando-Indicum* III: 572) – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 271, footnote 59

[53] A.R.A. –K.A. 1417, fol. 396ro, Van Dielen en Raad aan de XVII, 10 October, 1692. – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 271, footnote 60

[54] *Memorie doo commissaris Paulus de Roo voor Commandeur Adriaan van Ommen en Raad, in het schip Spierdijk zeilende omtrent Honawar,* 11 April, 1695 (Copie A.R.A.-K.A. 1461, p. 240-292; andere hss. A.R.A. –H.R. 719, p. 1-47; H.R.B. 720, p. 1-91). – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 272

During the complex or anxious political economic situations in Calicut, the Dutch paid much attention to their fort at Ponnani. In 1711 while the French was getting much hold in Calicut – which appeared to be a violation of a treaty by the Zamorin that he signed with the Dutch – and while the rumors were going around that the Zamorin is planning to attack the raja of Cochin, the Dutch resident urges for the renovation and refortification of the settlement at Ponnani.[55] Two years later, in 1713, they have explicated the same intentions in a different way. The officers write that the establishment at Ponnani is too necessary in order to keep an eye on the Zamorin, and 'foreign'/strange (*vreemde*) Europeans and the natives to his court.[56] As a consequence to the failure of an attempt by the Dutch to recapture the Chetwa fort (taken by the Zamorin) in January 1715, the Dutch had to encounter severe losses to their side. Including all other economic, physical, and manpower costs, they also had to shut down the establishment at Ponnani again.[57]

During these all ups and downs related to the functioning of the factory-cum-fort at Ponnani, VOC always had maintained to collect reasonable amount of pepper from there. The disadvantageous factors were many, such as the breaking of treaty by the Zamorin repeatedly, his attacks against the VOC, increase of smuggling, and furthermore the constant arrival of other European powers to the ports of Ponnani itself or at Calicut. Though these all created threats to the Dutch officials at various points of times, at the end of the day, they had managed to procure a good amount of merchandises from here. For exemplification, in 1711, the English *opperhoofd* of Calicut, Robert Adams managed to buy 250 candiel pepper for more than 14 ducats per candiel from Ponnani. At that time, the merchants of Malabar were asking 15 European ducats per candiel for 500 candiel pepper, which the Dutch found to be too expensive.[58] The English were figuring out that they may not be able to collect pepper from Malabar, and thus pepper from Ponnani was literally a blessing for them, though it was too less compared to what Dutch has collected at that time from throughout Malabar: 1600000 candiel for 13.5 to 14.5 ducats per candiel, a stock twice of what they actually targeted to collect.[59] Even then this move of the English and when eleven English ships acquired only 150 candiel pepper from Ponnani for huge price in 1712, the Dutch officials have written about it with much worries.[60] Also they have emphasized the urge of forcing the Zamorin to remove Molandin, the French resident, from Calicut.[61]

The intermediaries were much crucial in collecting maximum pepper for the VOC. Baba Prabhu and his son Nanu Prabhu are best examples in this regard. With an origin at Konkan coast or at Canara, Baba was quite powerful in Malabar.[62] In an *ola* received at Quilon on 8 April, 1662, the raja of Kayamkulam mentioned Baba as a proficient (*bedreven*) merchant.[63] He a trustworthy merchant for the VOC since the early 1660s, and we get references about him from the first Dutch commander to Malabar Van Goens himself, who calls him as an

[55] *Generale Missieven,* 6: *1698-1713*: 786 (from **KA 1691**, fol. 314v.-315r.).
[56] *Generale Missieven,* 7, *1713-1724*: 27 (from **KA 1722**, fol. 385r.-398v.).
[57] *Generale Missieven,* 7, *1713-1724*: 185 (from **KA 1751**, fol. 570v. – 571r.).
[58] *Generale Missieven,* 6: *1698-1713*: 785 (from **KA 1691**, fol. 304r.).
[59] *Generale Missieven,* 6: *1698-1713*: 786 (from **KA 1691**, fol. 306v.).
[60] *Generale Missieven,* 6: *1698-1713*: 879 (from **KA 1706**, ff. 382v.).
[61] *Generale Missieven, Deel 7*, 1713-1724, p. 27 (from **KA 1722**, ff. 385r.-398v.).
[62] To read further about him, see: Hugo K.S' Jacob, "Babba Prabhu: The Dutch and a Konkani Merchant in Kerala." *Itinerario*, 9 (1985): 135-150.
[63] T.S.A.-Dutch records 9799-48, fol. 46vo) – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 13, footnote: 124.

'experienced merchant' (*erg koopman*), who knows all practical aspects of Malabar trade. Van Goens warns his successor that 'his words should not be taken into account beyond our own reasons'.[64]Earlier he was based at Cochin and Kayamkulam, trading with the Dutch and also dealing with the local rulers. Many Dutch officials have reported against him as he owes an arrear of 22814 pagodas. They found that he had two accounts with the VOC, one starting from 1 January 1688 in which he was indebted of f. 97878 by 31 December, 1692, and the other starting from 3 July 1691 in which he was indebted f. 115939 by 31 December, 1692 according to the details provided by Van Dielen and Van Vink. The raja of Cochin also had his own complains against him. While the VOC was about to take actions against him according to these all complaints on the basis of Van Rheede's earlier instructions, he escaped to Ponnani, which was beyond the political control of the Dutch.[65] There onwards we get many correspondences from the resident of Ponnani related to him. In a correspondence of (4 February) 1695, we know that his debt to VOC was reduced to f. 56690, which cleared by his son Nanna Prabhu who was assigned with new contracts to collect peppers.[66]

However, the last letter explicitly from Ponnani available down to us is by Anthony Litqens in 1749. This fact leads us to raise questions about the Dutch presence in Ponnani after 1750, though they were at Cochin until the close of eighteenth century, especially since we get references to the unfriendly or hostile attitudes between the Zamorin and the Dutch in the context of Ponnani.[67] We do not know exactly what happened after that. Though the factory of Ponnani was not dismantled,[68] it seems that the worsened relationship between the Dutch and the Zamorins significantly affected its smooth commotions. In 1756, the Dutch officials at Cochin have reported that the representatives of the Zamorin forced the Dutch to anchor off the VOC ships from the Ponnani river and prevented them from exporting cowhide, even though the Dutch have recently paid tolls for each export. In such a situation, the VOC officials are discussing even a possibility of war, but they are declining such a move telling that 'the result of gun violence is uncertain, but the costs are not'.[69]

Even before 1749, Ponnani was a began to be an unsafe political and/or economic place for the Dutch. Two of their boats, Zwijndrecth and Coylan, headed towards Cannanore were attacked and conquered by the Angrianen at the Ponnani river. The crew managed to save themselves and 1250 pagodas taken from Cochin were dispensed at Cannanur. The government at Batavia severely reprimanded for this incident.[70]

Even though the factory might have existed there, the Dutch could not engage in trade more meaningfully for long time since it was attacked by the Sultans of Mysore in 1766 and again

[64] Instruction by Rijcklof van Goens for the senior-head Pieter de Bitter, Cornelis Valkenburg and Malabar Council, Cochin, 22 March, 1663, (Copie A.R.A.-H.R.B. 717, p. 1-28) – H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*: 13.

[65] *Generale Missieven,* 5: *1686-1697*: 699 - 700 (from **KA 1430**, ff. 239-240, 243.).

[66] *Generale Missieven,* 5: *1686-1697*: 728 (from **KA 1430**, ff. 161. – 170).

[67] *Generale Missieven,*13: *1756-1761*: 81-82 (from VOC 2867, ff. 542-544.)

[68] We get correspondences related to the approval of the expenditures for the maintenance and reparation-works of the Ponnani factory, along with other establishments at Quilon, Cannanore, Tengapattanam – *Generale Missieven,* 12: 1750-1755: 583 (from VOC 2846, ff. 622-623.). This clearly shows that the Dutch still had a hope in this factory.

[69] 'de uitslag van wapengeweld onzeker is maar de kosten niet' – *Generale Missieven,* 13, *1756-1761*: 82 (from VOC 2867, ff. 542-544).

[70] *Generale Missieven,* 11: *1743-1750*: 565 (from VOC 2867, ff. 436).

in the 1780s. In 1766, Ponnani acted as a safe-place to the Zamorin's royal family while Mysore Sultan Haidar Ali attacked Calicut. During the attack, Ali asked the Zamorin a colossal sum of ten million of gold *mohur*s in order to set Calicut free. The Zamorin was unable to pay that amount, thus while the Ali's army was advancing to Calicut, the Zamorin blew his palace and committed suicide, after sending his family-members to Ponnani.[71] But, in the 1780s, the case was different when Ali's son Tipu attacked Malabar. He entered to Malabar through the Palaghat pass, thus naturally the first place he came across was Ponnani. He camped there for quite long time, built a fort to smoothen his mercantile interests, and made road and transportation facilities to march to Calicut. Thus his dominance over the kingdom of the Zamorin might have put an informal end to the Dutch engagement with Ponnani and thus with Calicut.

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to drag the attention to the religious aspect of Ponnani during this period since the region was known for its Islamic culture in the previous era. While we look at the Dutch correspondences from and to Ponnani, we hardly come across any specific references to the religious aspects. I managed to find out only some passive references about the religious followers or establishments, except a couple of letters related to a ship owned by some Muslim merchants to be sent from Surat to Ponnani.[72] But, as a matter of fact, those are not related to any religious aspects in the region. Jacobus Canter Visscher, the Dutch predikant based at Cochin for six years, has written about the religious lives of Muslims in Malabar in his *Mallabaarse Brieven.* Though he does not talk about particularly on Ponnani, he refers to an adjacent port-town, Tanur, in which the Muslims and the Portuguese were still continuing their rivalry as late as 1721.[73] Nevertheless, these all aspects urge me to state that the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is a time that the religious landscape of Ponnani witnessed its decline, after its 'glorious period' of sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Having argued that, I also admit many of the societal processes of the region were still continuing in eighteenth century without much alteration as we find references to the arrival of students from different parts, advent of scholars from West Asia, and the association of graduates with the Dutch assignments.[74] Ponnani seems to be discontinuing its correlation with such networks except certain anomalous arrivals by some of them.

Conclusion

During the Portuguese dominance in Malabar, Ponnani was mostly a rebellious arena which always created problems to the European interests, and thus they regularly had to raid or attack this region.[75] But once the Dutch overpowered the Portuguese in Cochin, Ponnani suddenly moved to be a diplomatic locale with much economic and political interests for both the indigenous and foreign interest-groups. Allocating the Dutch to build a factory-cum-fort in Ponnani in 1663 by the then Zamorin facilitated not only to make the region much economically vibrant, but it also sequenced to a comportment of the region as a bridge

[71] A Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*: 298

[72] VOC 9017, Letter from Cochin to Surat, 21 October 1733, ff.1158-1161; VOC 9017, Letter from Surat to Cochin, 24 December, 1733, ff. 1702-1707.

[73] Jacobus Canter Visscher, *Mallabaarse Brieven*: 232

[74] Aidrus bin Abdul Rahman alias Adima Musliyar, *Al Ilmu wa hayath al Islam* – as cited by KK Muhammad Abdul Karim, "Arabi-Malayala Sahithyam", *Prabodhanam Special Issue,* 50 (1998): unpaginated.

[75] K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *A Short History of Kerala*: 84

between the two politically hostile kingdoms of Cochin and Calicut through a third party which also had political interests along with the economic motivations. The serial deployment of residents by the VOC to this region served their interests to certain extent, though it was altered occasionally. Thus, in the economic realm, the region witnessed a development along with the symbolic explication of the Dutch connections with the Zamorins. It maintained to be very crucial to the Dutch in certain critical situations, as it was their single window to the kingdom of the Zamorins and to his spice-wealth. While this was the case in commercial terms, the religious sphere was in a diminishing stage during the Dutch presence. Though the older forms of religious institutions and networks were continuing the usual functionalities, those did not acquire a momentous productive stage as was earlier in the Portuguese era and would be later during the British era.

One of the most important conclusions to emerge from this study of Ponnani and its position in trans-regional or trans-oceanic networks, with an emphasis on the Dutch era, is that the Dutch presence in Malabar in general and in Ponnani in particular did not make much ruptures in the historical processes of the region. The pictures are more clearer if we compare the Dutch appearance and their functionality to the extents of Portuguese time previously or the English period lately.

In sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Ponnani was much crucial to the broader administrative and military employments of Calicut. Being the 'chief arsenal', the region played very vital roles in the Zamorins' wars against the Portuguese externally in one hand and against the rajas of Cochin in the other hand. Such a significance was lost by the second half of seventeenth century, though the region passively continued to be a diplomatic locus for the Zamorins as well as for the Dutch. The residents of VOC at Ponnani, though wanted to be much influential in the ongoing political power-transitions, could not acquire much inducement. The attack of the region by the Sultans of Mysore in the second half of eighteenth century completely squeezed any such political dreams out of the Dutch plans.

At the same time, the Dutch duress in Ponnani was much vibrant in terms of trade and economy. Instead of very limited passive references to the mercantile engagements of the region during the Portuguese times, now we get detailed accounts about its much vivacious participation in collecting and exporting mainly pepper. In a broader framework of the Dutch trade in Malabar though Ponnani did not contribute a prodigious amount of merchandises, it blossomed significantly in its own economical existence. Along with the comparative commercial supremacy of the Dutch facilitated by the direct consensus from the Zamorins, other European mercantile groups such as English and French also arrived at the port of Ponnani. Of course, this was not something that pleased the Dutch in Ponnani who was trying their best to monopolize the pepper trade as elsewhere throughout Malabar. Admittedly, through this commercial bourgeoning, the region served up to the constant interests of the VOC officials in Malabar to draw their locale as a prominent and profitable center of trade, against the position so far has been granted to Surat. But it was an action-in-futile, as many previous studies have demonstrated well, finally resulting in the shutting down of the Dutch enterprises in Malabar and the movement of Surat's position to Bombay.

The Dutch period also witnessed a discontinuity in the hitherto historical processes in religious realms, which is an interesting aspect for my proposed doctoral thesis. During the Portuguese times, the Islamic intellectual public sphere of Ponnani was functioning as an

anti-thesis against the 'repressive' and 'discriminatory' attitudes the Portuguese taken most of the time. Thus, its intelligentsia produced many politically motivated religious texts primarily targeting the economic and political structures of the 'cross-worshipping' Portuguese. The recent arrival of ulama, with ancestral origins elsewhere in South or West Asia, educated in Makkah and the revitalization of a religious educational center that communicates with the contemporary social issues must have urged to such a move. This generated a synthesis of religious demesne mediated through a whole bunch of theological, spiritualistic, juridical, political and literary texts. But, since the Dutch did not have an intention, or even capacity, to intrude to the indigenous social or religious spheres of the region, there was neither an anti-thesis nor a synthesis, consequently discontinuing the hitherto historical linearity. At the same time, the older synthesis of religious demesne was continuing very passively without any internal or external struggles, as people from West Asia, especially from Hadhramaut, was arriving and the college was functioning as usual without producing any remarkable momentums. But this discontinuity was taken away in the nineteenth century as, for example, Snoucke Hurgronje talks about a remarkable presence of Malabari scholars in Makka.[76]

Since this aspect is one of major foci for my further research, I will tempt to enquire why Ponnani ulama suddenly stopped their religiously motivated writings against the foreign, 'cross-worshipping' (*abadath al asnam*) peoples from the West. Various reasons must have played significant roles in this historical process. Here I assume a number of different reasons: Firstly, the VOC's attitudes towards religion must have had its significance in this, in contrast to the Portuguese attitudes. Even though I am a bit skeptical about such an assumption due to the vast amount of Dutch priests in the VOC networks, they could not appoint many priests in Malabar, especially in the local regions such as Ponnani. But, VOC had its priests in Cochin but their influential arena was much limited. Secondly, compared to the Portuguese influence in the region, the VOC's power was much nominal, not only in Malabar, but throughout India. Though they managed to overpower the Portuguese from the waters of Malabar, they could not penetrate into the political and economic layers of the region. Thus, they always had to negotiate with the perseverance of local political and social structures in order to maintain their economic priorities. Even a simple encounter with the indigenous structures put their position on the edge. Consequently, the VOC also did not try to penetrate to the social or religious lives of the region, though they attempted to penetrate into the political structures which mostly ended up in disastrous defeats. This must have acted as a foundational reason against the defensive mode of VOC in Malabar, in contrast to its aggressive modes in Indonesian archipelago – where they had much power – in which the people from Makassar or Aceh fought with the Dutch. Thirdly, the 'glory' of Ponnani's ulama was diminished by the second half of seventeenth century, after the demise of towering figures like Shaikh Zainuddin Senior, Qadi Muhammad, and Shaikh Zainuddin Junior. This caused in the lack of energetic mobilization in the Muslim public spheres of Ponnani, in contrast to the activities done by the ulama during the Portuguese times. Fourthly, the Muslim militia was completely collapsed by the turn of seventeenth century itself, as the Zamorins and Portuguese jointly eradicated them on the basis of various reasons. That move of the Zamorins must have

[76] C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century: Daily Life, Customs and Learning. The Moslims of the East-Indian Archipelago* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 202.

generated a fear in the public consciousness of the Muslims of Ponnani disabling them to take another militant move. But they had their dissatisfactions with the Dutch prominence in Ponnani and even some of them (whom the Dutch documents call them robbers (*rover*)[77]) dared to seize the fishing-boats from Chettuva which was under the control of the VOC.[78] Not only the Dutch sources are silent about the indigenous religious engagements, astonishingly, the indigenous sources also hardly provide any descriptions. Still, I hope further researches may shed light into this shadowy area.

This attempt to contextualize Ponnani in the broader networks of the early modern Indian Ocean world as much as in the regional networks could be concluded by paying the attention to the urgency of more researches to the particular aspects of religious composite culture exclusively visible in the region and regrettably ignored in the hitherto historical writing. Even though it produced an enormous amount of textual materials and many of those are uninterruptedly available at various libraries or manuscript-collections around the world, it is quite unfortunate no one had analysed those. By focusing on such texts and their authors, hopefully we can reconstruct a completely different historical narrative against to the descriptions told so far about the trans-Asian Islamic cosmopolitan network connected between the West- and Southeast- Asia, ignoring the roles of South Asia in general and of Malabar in particular.

[77] The term robber or pirate had been used commonly in the European sources (especially Portuguese and English) to indicate the rebellious navigators whom the indigenous historical writings identify as admirals of Malabar.

[78] The Dutch officials report that the robber Cotta Marakkar seized three boats of fishers who live under the control-areas of VOC at Chettuva. Cotta Marakkar was a supporter of the Zamorin, as the Dutch sources say. *Generale Missieven, Deel 13*, 1756-1761, pp. 81 (from VOC 2867, fol. 542r-544r.). We assume that this Cotta Marakkar must be a successor from the families or followers of the Kunjali Marakkars. But we do not have evidences to substantiate this since the last renowned Kunjali Marakkar and his men were killed by the Portuguese almost one-and-half centuries ago in 1600.