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Marina Kate Stephens April 15, 2018

The Travel Account of Ambrosio Bembo: A Venetian in Early Modern India

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Abstract

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The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo is the account of a Venetian noble who, beginning at only 19 years of age, went on a four-year journey through the Middle East and South Asia. He ventured through the three great Muslim empires – Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal – and stayed in European territories of India. Using the framework of microhistory and theories on travel literature, I analyze this account to better understand the early modern period, focusing particularly on Bembo's detailed observations on the religious and ethnic groups who were interacting in India during this time. Bembo's perspective shows openness to understanding the "other" when he encounters different groups in India. Furthermore, this account provides insight on the position of Europeans in India during the era before colonialism.

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Introduction

"The desire to know is innate and natural to the spirit of mankind, whose special gift is the intellect, the sense that is always most eager to feed itself with knowledge. Many things are learned through theory, and more through practice. The world is a great book, which, when perused attentively, proffers teachings and delights with its variety. True, one must tolerate expense, discomfort, and danger, but the effort, if blessed by fortune, brings its reward. Idleness eats away at all virtue and is the worst companion for youth; a source of vices, it perverts the inclination of the good, weakens the courage of the strong, and withers every laurel of glory."[1]

This is Ambrosio Bembo's opening line of his travel account of a journey he started when he was still a teenager. At the age of 19, this young explorer left his Venetian home in 1671 and voyaged into the unfamiliar lands of the Middle East and India. He had a hunger for knowledge and adventure and was willing to endure dangerous travel and uncomfortable situations to expand his understanding of the world. For four years, he explored the lands of Ottoman and Safavid empires and the western coast of India and then wrote a beautiful and detailed account of what he saw and whom he met. However, his work was never published and fell into obscurity for centuries.

In 2007, Anthony Welch and Clara Bargellini published the first English translation of the account titled *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*. Bargellini translated the Italian to English, and Welch wrote an exhaustive introduction as well as informative footnotes

[1] Ambrosio Bembo, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), 33.

throughout. In the introduction, Welch describes the manuscript they used, a book of 316 gilt-edged pages written by a professional scribe in elegant script.[2] The paper is fine and heavy, and there are marginal notes to aid the reader. In addition to the account, there are 52 line drawings of various people and places and an expense account of the journey. It is titled *Viaggio e Giornale per parte del'Asia di quattro anni incirca fatto da me AMBROSIO BEMBO Nob Veneto*, which translates to *Journey and Journal in Part of Asia for about Four Years by Me Ambrosio Bembo Venetian Noble*. I will use Welch and Bargellini's English edition, but there is also a modern Italian version published in 2005 by Antonio Invernizzi with his own extensive footnotes and glossary.[3]

Bembo wrote his account soon after returning home to Venice in 1675. Welch's research has shown evidence of two manuscripts, which I will call A and B. He found this in Iacopo Morelli's private publication *Operette Ora Insieme Raccolte con Opuscoli di Antichi Scrittori* published in 1820.[4] Morelli examined Bembo's account and wrote about what he found. He examined Manuscript A, the one later used by Welch and Bargellini, which he said belonged to the noble lord Joseph Gradenigo.[5] Morelli also said there was a second manuscript, which I call B, that Welch explains belonged to Abbe Celotti.[6] In her article on Abbe Luigi Celotti, Anne Marie Eze explains that the Abbe was a cleric who turned to art dealing after the fall of the Venetian Republic and that "Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous treasures from Venetian patrician and ecclesiastical art collections and libraries passed through Celotti's hands and onto the major European markets, including those of London, Paris and

[2] Anthony Welch, "Introduction" in *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 16
[3] Antonio Invernizzi *Viaggio e Giornale Per Parte Dell'Asia di Quattro Anni Incirca Fatto da Me Ambrosio Bembo Nobile Veneto*, (Torino: CESMEO, 2005)
[4] Welch, "Introduction," 14-15
[5] Iacopo Morelli, *Operette ora insieme raccolte con opusculi di antichi scrittori*, (Venice: Alvisopoli, 1820) vol 2, 86
[6] Morelli, *Operette* 85-86

Berlin".[7] The Gradenigo copy, Manuscript A, is also referred to in the entry on Ambrosio Bembo in the *Encyclopedia Italiana* published by the Instituto Giovanni Treccani in Rome in 1930.[8] According to Welch, this copy was also read by M.A. Langles, the man who in 1811 published the first full version of French traveler Jean Chardin's travel account titled *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin en Perse et Autres lieux de l'Orient*. Langles wrote a letter, stating that he wished he had read Bembo's account before publishing his work on Chardin. Welch confusingly writes that Langles' letter was addressed to the Abbe, owner of Manuscript B, yet it is attached to Manuscript A. Manuscript A, the Gradenigo copy, was in England by the end of the 19th or start of the 20th century. Welch explains that this is evident in the style of the book binding, which is English style of that time period and has an English inscription down the spine.[9] This manuscript was sold to the James Ford Bell Library of the University of Minnesota by English bookseller Frank Hammond of Sutton Coldfield.

Welch initially came across this very manuscript in 1973 when he was doing research for his book *Shah Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan*. In that book, he includes one of the images from Bembo's account, Grelot's drawing of the Ayineh Khaneh, or Palace of Mirrors, in Isfahan.[10] In 1974, another one of these drawings was included in a film commissioned by National Endowment for the Humanities and Harvard University Museum. It was at this time that Welch and Bargellini decided to collaborate to produce their fully annotated English edition. A few years before, in 2003, Welch wrote a chapter titled "Safavi Iran as Seen Through Venetian Eyes" for an edited volume on society and culture in Safavid Iran.[11] Here, after giving the same

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[7] Anne Marie Eza "Abbé Celotti and the Provenance of Antonello da Messina's 'The Condottiere' and Antonio De Solario's 'Virgin and Child with St. John'" *The Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1279 (2009): 673-77.
[8] Welch, "Introduction," 15
[9] Welch, "Introduction," 16
[10] Anthony Welch, *Shah 'Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan* (New York: The Asia Society, 1973), 104
[11] Anthony Welch, "Safavi Iran as seen through Venetian Eyes", *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*. Andrew J. Newman, ed., (Boston: Brill, 2003), 97-121

provenance of the manuscript, he summarizes Bembo's time in Iran and provides some analysis on what it says about the early modern period. Welch states "The young Venetian traveler is recording a period of great political changes with long range implications but is a time of transition in which Venice did not play a significant role."[12] I will expand on this characterization of the period and Bembo's perspective as Venetian later on.

Biography of Ambrosio Bembo and Summary of His Account

Ambrosio Bembo was born on March 10, 1652 in the Republic of Venice. The Bembos were a distinguished noble family. The most famous member was Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). His father was Francesco Bembo and his mother was Caterina of the Coronaro family.[13] Her ancestor was the Queen of Cyprus from 1474 to 1489. The Bembos, Coronaros, and Morosinis were the leading oligarchs of Venice. They were deeply involved in trade and politics in the Republic and throughout the Mediterranean. He served in the navy under commander Taddeo Morosini, whose family was also head of the army. In other words, he belonged to the Venetian elite, was wealthy, and had powerful connections.[14] His privileged position would allow him opportunities most others never received.

In the prologue to his account, Bembo explains that at a young age he was taken out of school and enrolled in the Venetian navy. He participated in the effort against the Ottomans in the War of Candia and directed his own ship with the title of Governor, under authorization of the General Captain Francesco Morosini.[15] When the war ended, Bembo was only 19 years old

[12] Welch, "Safavi Iran as seen through Venetian Eyes," 112
[13] Welch "Introduction" in *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 3 citing the *Dizinario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Instituto Giovanni Treccani, 1966), vol. 8, 101-102
[14] Welch "Introduction," 3-4
[15] Welch "Introduction," 4

and still too young to join the Grand Council of Venice or take up any other public office. His uncle had been appointed to office of consulate in Aleppo long before but was unable to take his position until the war ended.[16] He invited Bembo join him. In the prologue to his account Bembo explains,

> "Since I would be unable to ascend to public service until my twenty-fifth year and unhappy at the prospect of having to spend more than five years in a position of uselessness, I embraced with ready obedience the opportunity given to fulfill my obligations toward the nobleman Marco Bembo, my paternal uncle. . . Wishing to travel in various foreign countries, I accompanied him."[17]

Welch explains in a footnote to this passage that it was common practice for Venetian officials to take a young family member along in order to teach them how to effectively represent Venice.[18]

After the prologue, Bembo's account is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is titled "From Venice to Aleppo" and describes the first leg of his journey, travel in the Mediterranean and his extended stay in Aleppo. They departed the shores of Venice on August 8, 1671 on the ship *Confidenza* which had been used in the previous war. They traveled alongside four other merchant vessels, and the command was given to Ambrosio's uncle Marco Bembo. The passengers included pilgrims to the Holy Land, merchants planning to trade in Cyprus and Aleppo, ministers for the Venetian consulates in Cyprus and Aleppo, and clergymen of various Catholic orders.[19] They briefly stopped on the islands of Zante (Zakynthos) and Cyprus. On September 21, they reached Ottoman controlled Tripoli, at the foot of Mount Lebanon.[20] The

[16] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 34
[17] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 33-34
[18] Welch, *Travels and Journal,* 43 n.4
[19] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 36
[20] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 43

merchants unloaded much of their merchandise here. Next, they stopped at the port of Iskenderun, which Bembo explains was "a famous stopover for all European merchant vessels going on to Aleppo, a distance of three days' travel overland."[21]

When the band of travelers reached the outskirts of Aleppo, they were greeted with much pomp and circumstance by other Italians first, then Ottoman officials, and lastly the French and English delegations.[22] Bembo stayed in Aleppo for an entire year. He provides exhaustive descriptions of the Ottoman governing structures, the architecture of the city, shopping centers, various religious groups, people's dress, and more. Bembo's company was most often other Europeans. Bembo refers to all the Europeans as "Franks", following the practice of the "Turks."[23] While in Aleppo, Bembo was introduced to Friar Giovanni Seabra of the Trinity, a Portuguese Franciscan with the title of Custodian of Goa who was traveling to the East Indies. He presented a trip to India to Bembo as exciting, inexpensive, and not very difficult. As he had been getting bored in Aleppo after a whole year, Bembo agreed to make the journey with Father Giovanni.[24] Bembo later found out, however, that Father Giovanni was only using him to increase his security while on his travels.[25]

Entitled "From Aleppo to Basra", chapter two comprises the second leg of Bembo's travels, a caravan journey along the Tigris river. Bembo stayed in famous cities along the route including Diyarbakir, Mosul, and Baghdad. Along the way, he made friends with various "Turks" and practiced his Turkish language skills.[26] He also identifies several historical sites

[21] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 44
[22] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 48
[23] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 54
[24] Bembo *Travels and Journal,* 81
[25] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 82
[26] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 102

including an ancient well of Syria in Birecik, Roman ruins in Diyarbakir, the ancient town of Hasankeyf, ancient Nineveh, and ancient Babylon.[27]

The third chapter is titled "Basra, the Gulf, the Arabian Sea, India". Bembo describes Basra as a bustling port city rich in goods from India and identifies Indian, French, English, Portuguese, and Dutch merchants. He then travels in the Gulf to the Safavid port city Bandar-i-Kong. He notes that this was the first city where Christians were allowed to practice in the open, and there were Hindu temples as well.[28] Once Bembo reached the Safavid empire, he realizes that Portuguese is now the common European trading language instead of Italian.[29] Father Giovanni secured a galliot from the Portuguese commander for them to travel across the Indian Ocean. To do so, he claimed that he had an urgent message for the viceroy in Goa, the capital of the Portuguese territory in India. The captain of their boat was a native Indian and manned by Christians of India who were subject to the Portuguese.[30]

In April 1672, they landed in Gujarat at the fortress of Diu, which was under Portuguese control. Bembo spent the next year travelling along the Indian coastline. Bembo remained mostly in Portuguese territory and stayed with various European officials and Catholic clergymen. He stayed in Surat while it was one of the largest and richest trading cities in the world and reached Bombay shortly after the British acquired the territory. He continued down the coast and stayed in the Portuguese capital Goa, where he witnessed the power and influence of the Portuguese Jesuits and brutality of their Inquisition. He openly noted his distaste for their racism and lack of concern for the poor. Bembo provides a detailed history of the conquest of Goa by the Portuguese and information about the Delhi and Bahmani Sultanates and the kingdom of

[27] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 88, 99, 106, 113, 120-121
[28] Bembo *Travels and Journal*, 144
[29] Bembo *Travels and Journal*, 137
[30] Bembo *Travels and Journal*, 149

Vijayanagar in the Deccan.[31] This is a good example of knowledge he collected on his journey because it shows he has understanding of the subcontinent's complex history, but his information is not completely factual. It is this part of Bembo's itinerary that I will focus on in detail.[32]

The fourth chapter marks the beginning of Bembo's protracted return journey. Entitled "Iran", this chapter focuses on Bembo's extended stay in Isfahan. He chose to travel back to Basra, not by ship, but overland through the Safavid empire, particularly through the large cities of Shiraz and Isfahan. Here, he describes the governing structures, architecture, marketplaces, people, food, and general customs of Iran. Bembo visited the ancient Achaemenid sites of Persepolis and Naqsh-i-Rustam,, the now-destroyed site of Qumisheh, and the Sassanian site of Taq-i-Bustan, and provided valuable descriptions.[33] While in the capital city Isfahan, Bembo was impressed by the wealth of the metropolis under the reign of Shah Sulayman. He also stayed with the Catholic clergy here. He met Capuchin father Rafael du Mans, who had been commissioned by the French government to write about Iran.[34] He also met merchant and diplomat Jean Chardin who would later publish a very famous account of his time in Persia and India.[35] Chardin had hired a French artist named Guilliame Joseph Grelot to travel with him. Chardin was not paying Grelot, and Bembo made him an offer. Grelot left Chardin and continued with Bembo for the rest of his journey.[36] The 52 drawings in Bembo's account were made by Grelot.

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[31] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 223-231
[32] See Chapter Three
[33] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 311-316, 320-321, 375-383
[34] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 326; Raphael du Mans wrote several studies about his time in Iran, the most famous being *Estat de la Perse en 1660.* Welch, *Travels and Journal,* 326 n.90
[35] Jean Chardin, *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin en Perse et aux Indes orientates, par la Mer Noire et par la Colchide. Première partie, qui contient le voyage de Paris à Isfahan,* (Moses Pitt, London, 1686)
[36] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 360

The fifth and final chapter "From Iran to Venice" focuses on the last leg of Bembo's journey through Safavid and Ottoman lands, across the Mediterranean Sea, and finally back to his Venetian home. They had an extended stay in Baghdad and Grelot produced a panorama of the city. In a hurry to meet up with Bembo's uncle Marco, Bembo and Grelot left all their good behind and travelled overland without a caravan.[37] They stayed in Aleppo another two months, and Bembo reached his home in Venice on April 15, 1675.

Welch found details of Bembo's later career in the *Dizinario Biografico degli Italiani*.[38] A few years after his return home, Bembo rejoined the navy and was very successful. First, he was inaugurated into the Grand Council of the State, as expected. Then in 1680, he was appointed the commander of a ship. In 1683, he became the governor of the Adriatic Sea and the Commander of Corfu in 1686. Ten years later he was elected superintendent of arms and then superintendent of the arsenal in 1703. He died at the age of 53 in 1705.[39]

The Theory of Microhistory

To analyze Bembo's account, I will use the theory of microhistory as defined in the book *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* written by Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson and Istvan M. Szijarto.[40] These two historians define microhistory by three important features.[41] The first is "the intensive historical investigation of a relatively well-defined smaller object." This can include a close study on a single event, small community, or an individual person. This creates a

[37] Bembo, *Travels and Journal* 395
[38] *Dizinario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome, Instituto Giovanni Trecani, 1966) vol. 8, 101-2
[39] Welch, "Introduction" in *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 12 from *Dizinario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Instituto Giovanni Treccani, 1966), vol. 8, 101-102
[40] Gylfi is the chair for the Center of Microhistorical Research at Reykjavik Academy and the editor of *Journal of Microhistory*. Szijarto is a professor of history at Eotvos University in Budapest and is the founder of the Microhistory Network, an international group of historians interested in microhistory.
[41] Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson and Istvan M. Szijarto, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (Milton Park, Routledge, 2013), 4-5

"focal point" for historical research. My "object" is Bembo's account. The second major feature of microhistory is the search for answers to "great historical questions". Szijarto and Magnusson explain that a microhistorical study has a more expansive objective than that of a case study. Whereas a case study is just an *example* of a historical phenomenon, a microhistorical study seeks to *find* a historical phenomenon and answer historical questions by focusing on a very specific subject. Microhistorians "search for answers to large questions in small places". I will use Bembo's account to understand the processes shaping the course of history and affecting people's lives at this time. The third feature of microhistory is the stress put on agency. Microhistorians argue that people are not just products of the "great underlying forces of history," but conscious actors and active individuals. Through the lens of microhistory, I see Bembo as an individual who acted based on his personal experiences but in the context of larger historical trends.

Microhistory emerged around the same time that cultural history became popular in the 1970s under pioneers such as Natalie Davis and Carlo Ginzburg.[42] Cultural history "puts the stress on lived experience and the representations that the actors themselves form to interpret their own experiences."[43] Microhistory can be seen as part of cultural history because of the desire to capture individual experience. However, the feature of answering "great historical questions" connects microhistory to older schools of history such as the quantitative and structural social history. Szijarto and Magnusson explain that microhistory can be used to blend the types of history saying that it is an "approach that can both supply the explanations of social history and grasp the meanings of cultural history within a single very circumscribed

[42] See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford University Press, 1975) & Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) and other works by Davis or Ginzburg
[43] Magnusson and Szíjártó, *What Is Microhistory?* 5

investigation". Microhistory both shows historical actors' individual experiences and seeks to connect their actions with broader historical processes. This helps to avoid the risk of oversimplifying the past.[44]

The "sore point" of microhistory is the discrepancy in trying to find the link between micro-level and macro-level investigation. This connection can be made through "changing the scales", is a "practice based on the reduction of the scale of observation".[45] Microhistorians take the big questions and look for an answer in a very specific case. Szijarto and Magnusson compare this to using a microscope. The historian "changes the scale of observation" in the hope of revealing something previously unseen, focusing very specifically on one historical actor, moment, or object while keeping the bigger picture in mind. I argue that analyzing Bembo's account in detail will lead to a deeper understanding of the major processes happening during the Early Modern era, including globalization and cross-cultural interaction.

Francesca Trivellato's article "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?" examines the methods and goals of microhistory and compares them to global history.[46] Trivellato explains that the recent trend in historical studies has been not only to focus on macro-level global history, but also to focus more on social scientific explanations for broad trends and generalizable theories. There seems to be a desire to explain the world's history as one long process where everything is connected through anthropological or other social scientific means – and a belief that this type of history is more important than more specific histories.

However, one could claim that microhistories are an important part of global history. I personally would argue that global history, or macrohistory, is simply many microhistories put

[44] Magnusson and Szijarto, *What Is Microhistory?* 7
[45] Magnusson and Szijarto, *What Is Microhistory?* 20
[46] Francesca Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?", *California Italian Studies* Volume 2, No. 1 (2011)

together – meaning that the processes that make up global history are only so because of the individuals that initiated them and responded to them. There would not have been globalization and increased cultural interaction without merchants that created trade networks or world travelers like Bembo. Not only that, but microhistories serve as necessary examples of how broader historical trends affected individuals. Giovanni Levi says, "even the apparently minutest action of, say, somebody going to buy a loaf of bread, actually encompasses the far wider system of the whole world's grain markets."[47] Studying something very specific, such as particular moments from Bembo's account, can give much insight into global processes and historical trends. I would go as far as to say that knowing the trends is meaningless if you don't understand in some detail how they affected individuals.

Microhistories are also significant because they focus on individual agency. Global or world histories tend to depict human actions as an inevitable product of world trends to group people together in way that makes the reader assume everyone in a certain group acted the same way. For example, Trivellato says global historians love to study commercial communities, or trading diasporas, that carried goods or ideas across continents.[48] They are presented as these key links in global trends based on solidarity within. However, a closer look shows that they are not so unified. The macro-level of study depicts the outcomes of long-distance trading networks, but the micro-level shows the many motivations and issues within those trading communities. Through an account like Bembo's we can see that not all traveling Europeans were acting similarly nor were the locals of the places he traveled.

Trivellato says, "From microhistory, I came to understand the importance of reflecting on a concept historians often take as self-evident, that of 'context,' and reconstructing, as much as

[47] Found in Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?," 6
[48] Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory?," 15

possible, the ways in which actors understood it."[49] She explains how individuals are always being affected by local and global influences, and neither is more important than the other. I believe her point is that you cannot understand the history of something without understanding both the macro and micro implications. The context of Bembo's journey is influenced by the globalizing world and European trading empires, but also his own family and personal experiences.

I believe analyzing Bembo's account as a microhistory is a very useful way to learn about this historical era, usually referred to as the Early Modern period. Bembo's life is a very good example of how several different global trends can be influencing one specific individual, as Trivellato mentioned. As I will discuss in the first chapter, many historians have commented on how the early modern world was a time of globalization, clash of empires, technological advancement, and societal change. Bembo's account gives us direct insight into not only these processes but also how they affected the individual.

According to Szijarto and Gylfi, to construct a microhistory, one should start by taking a document as his "point of departure".[50] Then the historian identifies all the relevant contexts to the subject at hand. He or she finds first the meaning given by the historical player himself and then searches for contexts farther and farther away. I can use this process to frame my account of Bembo's journey and why he chose to travel and the way he responds to the people he meets. The most relevant contexts would be those directly related to Bembo's life including his family's powerful position, his uncle inviting him to Aleppo, and his natural curiosity. I can then "zoom out" and focus on other contexts that affected his decisions including the Venetian-Ottoman and

[49] Trivellato, "Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory?," 17
[50] Magnusson and Szijarto, *What Is Microhistory?* 21

Venetian-Safavid trade relationships, European proto-colonialism, and the popularity of other travel accounts.

Purpose of This Thesis / Research Questions

The goal of my research is to understand how Bembo is or is not representative of the broader trends of his time. Does the microhistorical analysis show that Bembo is a standard example of someone of his class, career, nationality, etc.? Or will the microhistorical level reveal something more that will enrich our understanding of the current big picture?

To answer these questions, I have investigated exactly what defines Bembo's time. In chapter one, I will analyze the historical context of Bembo's journey. This includes a historical overview of the places he visited, the Ottoman and Safavid Empires and the Portuguese territories of India along the Mughal Empire, and then a deeper discussion on how historians characterize the "early modern" era and what exactly the trends were.

In chapter two, I will compare Bembo's account to other similar travel records. I use *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* to define travel writing as a genre. I will discuss the use of travel writing as a historical source and why it is extremely useful even though travel accounts are naturally "biased" and not always accurate portrayals of the people and places they describe. Along those lines, I will discuss ideas on how to read and understand travel writing, focusing especially on Edward Said's *Orientalism*. I will give an overview of several famous travel writers and explain how they compare to Bembo. Using those examples, as well as other historiographical sources about travel writers, I will extrapolate the general trends in travel writing and see how Bembo's work compares.

Chapter three will consist of a close reading of Bembo's time in India, drawing on specific passages and episodes, to understand both Bembo and this historical period better. I will focus on two main topics: how Bembo characterizes and stereotypes other ethnic and religious groups and the interaction between the different groups he encounters, keeping in mind the status of Europeans in South Asia. Ultimately, I hope that this analysis will contribute to the discourse on using travel writing for historical investigation and will expand our understanding of the processes occurring during this time period.

Chapter One: Historical Context of Bembo's Travels in the "Early Modern" Period

Historical Overview of the Places Bembo Visited

Ambrosio Bembo, born in the middle of the 17th century, was a member of the elite noble class of Venice. Venice, the city and the "Most Serene" Republic, has a history that started long before Bembo's time. European historian Frederic Chapin Lane divides Venetian history into three broad overlapping chronological periods[51]. Up until 1000 CE, Venice was a small city of boatmen who worked mainly on or around the mainland of northern Italy. The next phase starts when the small Republic becomes a seafaring nation, sailing, trading, and warring across the Mediterranean Sea. As a major player in the fourth crusade, Venice expanded its reach across the Eastern Mediterranean and became an empire of naval bases.[52] The Venetians gained lands around the Adriatic littoral, on the Greek Peloponnese, large islands such as Crete, and many smaller islands in the Aegean Sea.[53] Then, by 1600, Venice had transformed into a flourishing city and imperial power, famed for its intricate craftsmanship, cultured nobility, maritime prowess, and long-distance trade.

In her book *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600,* art historian Rosamond Mack, expert on Italian and Islamic art history, illustrates the success of Venetian trade and its connection with the Islamic world. She explains that before the Portuguese found the sea route to Asia around Africa in 1498, the "crossroads of East-West trade" was located in

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[51] Frederic Chapin Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1-2
[52] Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 36-42
[53] By the mid-15th century, Venice held the island of Crete, the fortresses of Koroni (Coron) and Methoni (Modon) in Messenia, Argos and Nauplion, certain of the Aegean islands, the islands of Corfu and Kythera, and Naupaktos (Lepanto). See Davies, Siriol, and Jack L. Davis. "Greeks, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire." *Hesperia Supplements* vol. 40 (Athens: The American School of Classical Studies, 2007), 26

the Eastern Mediterranean.[54] Then, even after that Portuguese circumnavigated Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean maintained a prominent central position in European-Asian trade, though this prominence slowly declined over time. Various Muslim states were the intermediaries in the trade of goods between the Mediterranean and Asia. This would have been the merchants and functionaries of the Ottoman Empire in Bembo's time. Venetians then traded with them and brought the goods to the rest of Europe. This allowed Venice to be the main source for goods from the Far East in Europe, yet they never had to leave the Mediterranean themselves.

From the 14th century onward, Venice established good trade relations with the Ottomans. This eventually ensured the protection of the trade route to Constantinople and the Black Sea, weakened Genoese trading power, and guaranteed freedom of navigation in Ottoman-controlled waters.[55] Bembo's uncle's position as the Venetian consulate in Aleppo was a critical role because of the significance of this trading partnership. However, the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire did not always have such cordial relations. From the mid-15th century to the start of the 18th century, the Venetians and Ottomans fought seven wars against one another, fighting for control over islands and ports in the Eastern Mediterranean.[56] Their trading relationship was never fully broken, however, because it contributed greatly to the economic prosperity of both states. For the first couple centuries, Venice was the superior naval power, but after the sixteenth century, the Ottomans upheld a balance in power, and occasionally had the

[54] Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600,* (Berkeley: University California Press, 2002), 15
[55] Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza*, 15-25
[56] Veneto-Ottoman wars: 1463-1479, 1499-1500, 1537-1540, 1570-1571, 1645-1669, 1684-1699, and 1715-1718 Davies, Siriol, and Jack L. Davis. "Greeks, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire." *Hesperia Supplements* vol. 40 (Athens: The American School of Classical Studies, 2007), 26

upper hand.[57] Bembo fought in the War of Candia, which lasted from 1648 to 1669 and ended in the Venetian surrender of Crete to the Ottomans.[58]

By 1625, Asian goods bound for Europe began to travel the Atlantic route – discovered by Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama in 1498 – more often than the Mediterranean one. Venice slowly lost its trade monopolies as other European powers competed for control of the Asian markets and didn't need the Venetians, Turks, or Arabs as intermediaries any longer. Venice's decline was gradual and not obvious to elite members of society such as Bembo. He encounters French, Dutch, Portuguese, and English merchants on his journey. His relations with them are generally friendly, and he never acknowledges their presence as direct competition to Venetian trade. Shortly after Bembo's time, in the 18th century, the Republic of Venice lost a significant amount of land to the Ottomans and Austrians. This combined with their loss of trade control caused major decline in their power and prestige. Yet, Bembo's description of his world does not indicate any signs of such deterioration.[59]

Bembo journeyed through the lands of the three great Muslim empires: Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal. I chose to use Stephen Dale's book *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* to explain their histories.[60] This is the first book written that extensively compares the three empires from their foundation to their collapse, though he specifically focuses on the height of each empire and their economies around 1600, just preceding Bembo's time. He explains that they are called "Muslim Empires" because their rulers followed Islam and used Islam to legitimize their rule, not because every citizen or subject was Muslim. In fact, these

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[57] Ovidiu Cristea, "Venice Confronting the Ottoman Empire: A Struggle for Survival (Fourteenth-Sixteenth Centuries)," *The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans: Interpretations and Research Debates*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2016), 265-266
[58] Welch, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 33 n.1
[59] Welch, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 239-240 n.176
[60] Stephen Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

were diverse empires, with significant variation in ethnicity, social group, religion, language, etc. Each empire had large non-Muslim populations: a large number of Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire; Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Hindus in the Safavid Empire; and a majority Hindu population in the Mughal Empire, as well as other Indian religions. Bembo is fascinated by these diverse groups and gives lengthy descriptions of their practices.

The three empires' governing structures are characterized as patrimonial-bureaucratic, meaning they rule with a mixture of a large-scale complex bureaucracy and direct personal rule from the usually hereditary monarch.[61] The Ottoman Empire arose from a Turkic Sunni Muslim clan that began operating independently from their Byzantine and Mongol overlords and conquering lands in Anatolia in the early 14th century under the leadership of Osman (d. 1324). The empire was firmly established when they conquered Constantinople in 1453. Around that time, the Turkic and Iranian Safavid family had become influential leaders of a Sufi order in northern Iran. During the 15th century, they underwent two major changes: conversion to Shiism and militarization. Their leader Isma'il conquered the Iranian plateau within a decade, and thus the Safavid Empire was established. Around this time, another elite Muslim warrior, Zahir Muhammad al-Din Babur, descendent of the great Mongol warrior Chenghis Khan and great Turkish warrior Timur, had just left the Uzbek capital of Samarqand in central Asia and conquered the Timurid outpost Kabul in Afghan territory. After two decades here, he swept into the Indian sub-continent, defeated the Sultanate of Delhi, and established the Mughal Empire in 1525.[62] Bembo's travels took him through all three of these empires over a century after their foundations. By that point, they had established themselves as major powers with thriving economies and major cultural centers.

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[61] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 1-7
[62] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 48-49

At the time Bembo was in Ottoman lands, they stretched across Anatolia, into the Balkans, along the edges of the southern Mediterranean littoral, down the Nile into Egypt, and over parts of Arabia. The Ottoman state was a "centralized, highly bureaucratic, slave empire".[63] They had a powerful navy that they used to war against European powers in the Mediterranean and to fight for trade rights in the Indian Ocean. Safavid territory stretched from the edge of Ottoman land in the Caucasus, across the Iranian plateau, and into Afghanistan where it overlapped Mughal territory. This Shi'i empire was less centralized than its counterparts and less powerful militarily, but they maintained their land and central trade position for centuries.[64] Bembo reached the Mughal Empire at its territorial peak, when it stretched across almost the entire Indian subcontinent. The complex administrative system, with major positions held by Muslims and Hindus, was based on familial relations and military merit. As descendants of Turkic and Mongol nomads, the Mughals maintained a tradition of peripatetic rule across the empire. During the time of Bembo's journey, emperor Aurangzeb was busy maintaining control of his northern territories and planning his move to the Deccan plateau of south India where he would significantly expand Mughal territory.[65]

In addition to basic structural characteristics of government, these empires shared many cultural traditions. Rulers and aristocratic elites patronized similar forms of arts, architecture, and literature. Monarchs built imperial structures, religious buildings, charitable institutions, and commercial complexes, especially magnificent in the imperial capitals of Istanbul, Isfahan, and Delhi. In his article "Empires and Emporia", Dale explains how the building of forts/palaces, mosques, and bazaars symbolized the significant connection between politics, religious life, and

[63] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 5
[64] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 5
[65] Michael Fisher, *A Short History of the Mughal Empire*, (London/New York: I. B. Taurus, 2016), 189-197

commercial development.[66] Every building project was intended to glorify the ruling dynasty, display Muslim piety, or bolster the commercial economy. All three empires had a rich court life with Persian as the language of the educated elite. Courtiers lived lavish lifestyles and had marvelous gardens for lounging and beautiful harams for the women. The style of architecture in each empire displayed their distinctive histories, but their poetry and painting traditions came from the same Iranian source. Though the Safavids were the weakest militarily, they had the greatest cultural influence through their language and artistic traditions. Brightly colored miniature paintings were the most common art form, and they were used to glorify the monarchs, to show appreciation to nobles, or to illuminate panegyric imperial histories.[67]

Dale explains that the three empires were "culturally related and commercially linked" from the time of their foundations to their dissolutions.[68] It was the circulation of merchants that linked the empires. Emperors invested in infrastructure to protect travelers and allowed for easy freedom of movement in order to promote trade. This included the construction of caravanserais, elaborate structures whose purpose was to provide safe housing for travelers along trade routes. This push for open movement was what allowed Bembo the freedom to travel throughout these lands. When French traveler Jean Chardin traversed these same territories in the 1670s, he wrote that "Merchants are treated as sacred peoples, never bothered even in times of war". [69] This explains the ability of each nation to constantly be at war with each other, European powers, and other kingdoms, and still maintain their commercial prosperity. Trade routes were continuous from the gates of Vienna to the Bay of Bengal. Though it might not have been a fully integrated

[66] Stephen Dale, "Empires and Emporia: Palace, Mosque, Market, and Tomb in Istanbul, Isfahan, Agra, and Delhi", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient,* vol. 53, no. 1/2 (2010), 212-229
[67] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 135-152
[68] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 7
[69] Dale, *The Muslim Empires,* 106-113

transregional market, this level of commercial connection constitutes a sign of the increase in globalization at this time.[70]

By the 17th century, European naval powers had begun to cause shifts in global patterns of trade. However, the three Muslim empires' economies were not initially impacted by the emergence of Europeans into the Indian Ocean trade. The Safavids and Mughals encouraged European trade and profited significantly from their new economic partners. The decline of these two empires in the 18th century resulted primarily from internal challenges and not exclusively from European technological and economic development. However, Ottoman exports to Europe were disrupted by the new trade patterns starting in the second half of the 16th century, especially due to new competition in the silk market. Portuguese, Dutch, and English were slowly dismantling the Ottoman position as East-West trade intermediary. Competition with the Portuguese over trade control in the Indian Ocean resulted in costly naval battles. As the Ottomans withdrew, the Europeans began to establish their own trading posts, especially the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English in India.[71] Bembo stayed in several Portuguese-occupied territories while in India, on the outskirts of Mughal-controlled land and writes about their violent competition for trade with the other Europeans in India.

Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama founded the new sea route around Africa to Asia in 1498, and by 1510 Portugal had established their Indian capital in Goa on the western coast of the subcontinent. They had a string of settlements that stretched all the way to Gujarat in northwest India. The Portuguese had two goals here: to monopolize trade and spread Christianity. Bembo spends his time in India with European merchants, bureaucrats, and clergymen. Several Catholic orders came to evangelize the natives and became powerful figures

[70] Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 130
[71] Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 130-134

in the Portuguese territories[72]. Bembo stayed with these missionaries not only in India, but also throughout the rest of his journey. He witnessed the Portuguese Inquisition in Goa and noted the superior power of Portuguese Jesuits compared to other orders. The Catholic clergy religious network was a valuable source of money, information, and general assistance for prominent Catholic travelers such as Bembo.

In 1534, the Portuguese established Bombay as a major trading center because of its natural harbors. However, the British peacefully won control when Charles II married the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza and was gifted the land as part of her dowry in 1661.[73] Seven years later, King Charles II leased it to the British East India Company.[74] It was only four years after that when Bembo arrived in India.[75] Unlike the Portuguese, the British and Dutch governments did not get directly involved in Indian Ocean trade. Instead they each granted a private company monopoly over trade between their respective nations and Asia. The British and Dutch were often violent in their push for trade control, but there were no imperial desires in India until the mid-18th century. The Portuguese secured close trading ties with the Mughals during the 16th century. The Mughals had conquered Gujarat, and the port city of Surat had become their maritime trading hub. They initially rejected working with the British and Dutch because of their ties with the Portuguese. However, the Mughals realized they would provide healthy competition to the Portuguese. In 1613, the first English factory, or storehouse, was built in Surat, and they were given official permission to trade by Mughal emperor

[72] Jorge Manuel Flores and Nuno Vassallo e. Silva, eds., *Goa and the Great Mughal* (Lisbon: Calouste Gubenkian Foundation, 2004) 10-13
[73] Gillian Tindall, *City of Gold: The Biography of Bombay* (Faber and Faber, 2010) 59
[74] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic Rise of Islam to 1750*. (Cambridge University Press, 1985) 86
[75] Welch, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, 216 n.148

Jahangir.[76] Surat was the second largest coastal city in the western Indian Ocean and remained an important trade hub for centuries.[77] When Bembo visits in 1672, he describes the wealth of the French, Dutch, and English traders in the city and the freedom they are allowed by the Mughals.[78]

However, the city had been sacked several times by Maratha warrior Shivaji in the 1660s.[79] The Hindu Marathas had long been a subservient class in the Deccan sultanates, but distinguished themselves with a strong martial tradition and deep connection to the land.[80] Their armies were small and fast and expertly used guerilla warfare to fight the Mughals and other major powers. By 1670, they had acquired land stretching from outside Surat to just south of Goa, skirted in between European and Mughal lands.[81] In 1674, Shivaji declared himself an independent emperor, and his new state, the Maratha Confederacy, lasted until they were defeated by the British in 1818. [82] Bembo witnessed a Maratha ambassador visiting the Portuguese captain in Surat. He explains that Shivaji was so powerful that he was feared by all neighboring rulers including the Mughals.[83] Emperor Aurangzeb spent most of his reign conquering the Deccan land of South India, but Shivaji remained his undefeated enemy. The Qutb Shahs of Golconda and Adil Shahs of Bijapur relinquished power to the Great Mughal, but none of them could control the Marathas in the countryside. This constant effort to conquer the Deccan during most of Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707) weakened the Mughal empire because it drained resources and pulled Aurangzeb's attention away from growing disfunction in the

[76] Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 161-163
[77] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe,* 161
[78] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 175
[79] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe,* 233
[80] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe,* 237
[81] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe,* 233
[82] Asher and Talbot, *India Before Europe,* 231-242
[83] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 166-167

northern regions. The empire declined after his reign but was not formally dissolved until 1858 when the British deposed the last Mughal Emperor.

In the construction of the microhistory of Bembo and his account, this is the broadest part of the historical context. Bembo witnessed the connections being made by Italians, French, English, Dutch, Portuguese, Arabs, Ottomans, Indian Muslims, Banians, and South Indians at this time from Venice to the three Muslim Empires and along the Portuguese territories of Western India. His recording of his observations of the early modern world give us an exhaustive source to analyze and better understand the processes occurring during that time period, especially the increased interaction amongst varying ethnic and religious groups.

Bembo's "Early Modern" World: A Time of Globalization, Cultural Encounter, and Transition

Bembo was not the only one traveling great distances during this new age of discovery and exploration. As long-distance travel for trade became more common so did travel for inquiry. Though the average person would never leave their home territory, there was an increasing number of merchant and upper-class individuals utilizing new trade routes to satisfy their foreign curiosities and earn great profits. Bembo even encounters several other travel writers, now much more famous than he. While in Isfahan, Bembo met Jean Chardin, a French traveler known for his lengthy account of his stay in the Safavid Empire. He also met Raphael du Mans, a French scholar and Capuchin father commissioned by the French government to create an Encyclopedia of Iran.[84] His own work often references Pietro della Valle, a Roman traveler who went on a journey very similar to Bembo's and published an account of his journey only a

[84] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 325-326

couple of decades before him.[85] The increase in travel and understanding of the global world was a major phenomenon at this time, which I will examine in greater detail in chapter two.

So, what does Bembo's account tell us about this and other phenomenon during this period in history? Does his perspective align with scholarly characterization of this time? To assess how exactly he is representative of his world, I have analyzed how other scholars define the period. This era is often called the "early modern" period, though this term is debated in modern literature.

Some scholars prescribe a strict definition for this age. In his work "Early Modern India and World History", historian of India John F. Richards locates the early modern period between the late 15th century and the early 19th century, 1500-1800 "for convenience". He sees this period as a coherent historical unit because human societies world over shared in and were affected by the same processes of change "which were unprecedented in their scope and intensity". He continues to explain "the term 'early modern' is merely an attempt to capture the reality of rapid, massive change in the way humans organized themselves and interacted with other human beings and with the natural world".[86] The term "early modern" also implies that these changes are what shaped the "modern" world. Richards summarizes these changes into six major processes:

1) The creation of global sea passages that came to link all of humanity with a transportation network with increasing capacity and efficiency
2) Rise of a truly global world economy in which long-distance commerce, growing rapidly, connected expanding economies on every continent

[85] I used this version of his work for reference: Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim: The Travels of Pietro Della Valle*, trans. George Bull (London: Hutchinson, 1990)
[86] John F. Richards, "Early Modern India and World History", *Journal of World History*, vol. 8 no. 2 (1997): 197

3) The growth of large, stable states and other complex organizations that attained size, stability, capacity, efficiency, and territorial reach not seen since antiquity, if then
4) The growth of world population such that it doubles throughout these centuries
5) The intensified use of land to expand production in numerous episodes of settler frontiers
6) The diffusion of new technologies – cultivation of New World crops, gunpowder, and printing – and organizational responses to them throughout the early modern world

This is a good starting point for understanding the generalizations made about this time. Most scholars do emphasize the increase in globalization, especially in terms of a global economic system, and the major changes in state structures. In his article "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues for a more "generous" definition of the period, saying that "the 'early modern' in Eurasia and Africa at least (pre-Columbian America being a more complex problem) would extend from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, with a relatively great emphasis on the period after about 1450".[87] That said, Subrahmanyam still mainly characterizes the period in terms of global change.

Subrahmanyam also has a list – though less rigidly formulated – of defining elements of the period. He calls it "an age of travel and discovery" and "geographical redefinition". Through travel, people are pushing back the limits of the world as it was known to them. This can even be applied to the people who never leave their homes because of the "development of travel literature as a literary genre".[88] Essentially, travel accounts such as Bembo's are not just a

[87] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1997), 735-737
[88] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 737

product of the period, but part of what was shaping the world at this moment. Subrahmanyam also acknowledges the significance of newly established global trading networks. People, particularly the upper class, became accustomed to the availability of products from several continents in their own markets. Subrahmanyam further emphasizes the birth of a massive global slave trade. This not only changed slavery as an institution but was another form of the mass movement of people around the world.[89] Subrahmanyam explains that the term "early modern" is linked to a "changed domain of interaction".[90] This includes "diverse matters" such as the Europeans' aggressive establishment of new trade routes, the founding of European territories in India and other Eastern lands, and the new fervor of Christians to proselytize overseas, as we see evidence of in Bembo's account.

One of Subrahmanyam's concerns with the term "early-modern" stems from the desire to move away from Eurocentric ideas of history. Though the term does not have to have a Eurocentric viewpoint, it stems from previous literature that defined modernity in terms of European progress and when that progress was brought to the rest of the world. Subrahmanyam emphasizes that we need to "delink the notion of 'modernity' from a particular European trajectory" and that modernity comes from the "global shift" observable everywhere in the world during these centuries.[91] Notions of travel and globalization tend to focus on interconnectedness between Europe and other places. To explain, Subrahmanyam shows that scholars tend to focus on South Asia's new ties with Europe during this period, but not their equally increasing ties with Southeast Asia. When Bembo is in India, he not only notices the availability of European

[89] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 738
[90] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 749
[91] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 737

goods, but also the popularity of Asian goods.[92] Even from Bembo's strictly European viewpoint, evidence is still provided of the globalization happening between nations that aren't European. Interestingly, John Richards argues that applying the term "early modern" to India, or other regions, actually works against Eurocentrism because describing regions with the same terms puts them on a level playing field.[93]

In the article "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World", economic historian Jan de Vries questions the notion that this period is defined by globalization.[94] He explains that there is no common definition for globalization and distinguishes between a "soft" definition and "hard" definition. Soft globalization refers to a process, whereby "shifting forms of human contact leading toward greater interdependence and integration".[95] To count as globalization, this increase in integration has to cause a lasting impact. He explains that though intercontinental empires have existed before, they did not create lasting ties of connection nor were any of them truly global. Using the soft definition, globalization is an accurate defining characteristic of this time period. Though global society was certainly not an integrated whole, there were trade routes and cultural connections being established at this time that are still in existence today.

De Vries' "hard" definition takes a strictly economic approach and yields a different answer.[96] This is globalization as an outcome. Here the focus is solely on integration of markets. De Vries operationalizes globalization into a measurable variable by defining it strictly as price convergence across markets. He analyzes trade between European and Asian markets from 1501

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[92] In his account, Bembo provides a detailed list of goods from the Middle Eastern, African, and Asian countries found in India. *Travels and Journal*, 269
[93] Richards, "Early Modern India," 197
[94] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World", *The Economic History Review*, vol. 63, no. 3 (2010) 710-733
[95] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization" 711
[96] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization" 713-714

to 1795 looking at amount traded in and percentage of return on investment.[97] The numbers show there is no price convergence and de Vries concludes "the early modern era does not deserve to be called the first age of globalization".[98] However, he explains that the lack of price convergence was due to the fact that Europeans "focused on political terms of access to markets and protection of their trading environment" to create monopolies, instead of allowing prices to converge naturally.[99] I would argue that the effort of Europeans to maintain political control over markets is in fact a reason to define the period by globalization, because these efforts would eventually turn into colonialism and effect the political makeup of the world.

In her article "Early Modern or Early Colonial?" Ania Loomba questions the notion that the processes occurring at this time directly created "modernity" in the sense of European phenomenon linked to European ascendance and colonialism, and she calls for a more nuanced definition of modernity.[100] Loomba expresses the same concern that modernity is often defined in terms of European progression and expansion. She explains that European ideas were being spread around the world at this time, but just as many ideas were being brought into Europe from elsewhere. The problem is that the "former type of exchange is privileged". She says that using Subrahmanyam's idea of "connected histories" is the best way to avoid this problem. His method allows "us to entertain the idea of a single global modernity that does not flatten differences of consciousness or expression".[101] The crucial point is that this acknowledges the differences across regions and cultures but also emphasizes their part in shaping each other.

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[97] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization," 716-717
[98] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization," 715
[99] De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization," 731
[100] Ania Loomba, "Early Modern or Early Colonial?" *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2014) 143-148
[101] Loomba, "Early Modern or Early Colonial?," 144-145

Subramanyam says "we cannot attempt a macro history of the problem without muddying our boots in the bogs of micro history."[102] In order to truly understand the big global phenomenon and how to characterize this era, we need to look at specific examples, not just what seems like the outcome of this era. Accordingly, to study the effects of increased global travel and the processes of globalization and cultural interaction at this time, I choose to look at the evidence found in Bembo's account because it shows the "connected histories" at play.

[102] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 750

Chapter Two: Travel Writing – Theories of Interpretation and General Trends

Definition and Significance of Travel Writing

What is travel writing? To answer this deceptively simple-sounding questions I turned to the *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* written by Tim Youngs in search of a definition for travel writing. Youngs, however, starts his book with an explanation of why it is extremely difficult to define travel writing as its own genre. He writes that "Travel narratives, both written and oral, have been around for millennia. Yet their longevity has made it no easier for critics to agree on how to classify them."[103] He goes on to say that nearly every discussion of travel writing includes critics commenting on the difficulty of determining their "object of study." There are several aspects of travel writing that make it hard to define.

The first is that the genre of travel writing overlaps with many other genres. The term "encompasses a bewildering diversity of forms, modes and itineraries." Some of the other genres from which travel writing "borrows" include memoir, journalism, letter, guidebook, confessional narrative, scientific report, diary, autobiography, and novel.[104] Youngs draws from Barbara Korte's work *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* and explains her perspective on the genre: "For Korte, the particular attraction of travel writing lies in its very heterogeneity in matters of form and content."[105] Scholar Guillaume Thouroude takes this idea even farther suggesting that "rather than view travel writing as hard to classify because of its generic admixture, we should accept that this is what actually characterizes it. It is a genre

[103] Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1
[104] Youngs, *Introduction,* 1,6
[105] Youngs found this here: Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, Catherine Matthias, trans. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 14

whose intergeneric features constitute its identity."[106] Therefore, we can argue that Bembo's account is a characteristic example of the travel narrative because it includes a trip itinerary, empirical observation, narrative form, and personal reflection.

More important than genre definition or form is the question where travel writing lies between fact and fiction, a problem which is of special concern to historians. Youngs explains that "Whereas some travel writers insist on absolute verisimilitude, others readily admit to the manipulation and invention of detail."[107] Some authors purposefully change the facts in their accounts to make them more exciting and easier to read. Some others just record inaccurate information accidentally. Bembo shows no intention of deliberately fabricating any part of his account when he states "this diary will be the truthful account of the voyage that began under the auspices of the Virgin Mother of God on the 15th of August at dawn."[108] However, Welch has several footnotes that explain the inaccuracies of some of Bembo's historical and geographical statements. Bembo seems to be a trustworthy source because of his promise of truth and several scenarios where he is very skeptical of information shared with him. Therefore, even if we cannot accept all of Bembo's observations as facts, it can be said that he gives a factual account of what people believed was true in his day and of his own perception of things. Youngs uses Peter Hulme's idea that the author must have travelled to the places in which he describes and that their writing must be a firsthand account. Though it may be embellished, the journey must be real.[109] Youngs says that the guiding principle of his book is that "travel writing consists of

[106] Youngs found this here: Guillaume Thouroude, "Towards generic autonomy: The *recit de voyage* as mode, genre and form", *Studies in Travel Writing* 13, 4 (December 2009) 383
[107] Youngs, *Introduction*, 4
[108] Bembo, *Travel and Journal*, 36
[109] Youngs pulled this from the pamphlet *Talking about Travel Writing: A Conversation between Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs* (Leicester: The English Association, 2007)

predominantly factual, first-person prose accounts of travels that have been undertaken by the author-narrator."[110]

There is also question as to what makes a person's personal account of a foreign land fall into the category of travel writing. Do they have to stay a certain amount of time? If they stay too long, does it just become an account of "sojourn or residence?" Youngs says it has nothing to do with length of journey, but rather the author's "visitor status".[111] As long as the author is considered an outsider or visitor during their time of observation, his work is travel writing. If he became fully assimilated or he is in a land that is not foreign to him, his account would most likely not be considered travel writing. Even as Bembo becomes more comfortable in his travels and gains knowledge of the languages and cultures he encounters, he clearly remains an outsider throughout his journey as expressed through his comparisons to home and

It is important to understand the nature of travel writing. Youngs explains that genres are "a way of making sense of the world" and the definition we give to a genre affects its "power".[112] I would define travel writing as a set of observations and insights made by a traveler that can be used to understand not only the historical setting but also the historical mindset. Furthermore, Travel writing itself has important consequences. Youngs states "travel writing, one may argue, is the most socially important of all literary genres" because it is a record of "how we define ourselves and how we define others."[113] He also says that it "reflects and influences the way we view the world and ourselves in relation to it."[114] Bembo's account gives us insight into not only the lives of people in the early modern Middle East and India, but also

[110] Youngs, *Introduction,* 3
[111] Youngs, *Introduction,* 4
[112] Youngs, *Introduction,* 2
[113] Youngs, *Introduction,* 1
[114] Youngs, *Introduction,* 12

into how a Venetian defines his own culture. In the preface to Michael Fisher's edited volume of travelers' writing on Mughal India, William Dalrymple explains the significance of travel writing to historical understanding:

> "In these memoirs and accounts of European travelers we are presented with real, flawed, subjective portraits of a world that allow us to resurrect the ordinary individuals who lived in and travelled through one of the great Empires of history. Public, political and national history, after all, consist of a multitude of private, domestic and individual histories. It is perhaps through the human stories of the successes, struggles, and excited discoveries of those travelers and the people they encounter that we can best bridge the great chasm of time and understanding separating us from the remarkably different world of Mughal India"[115]

In essence, travel writing helps "bridge the great chasm of time and understanding" because of its mix of factual and opinionated writing.

Travel accounts are useful to historians today studying the past, but they were also very impactful in their own time. Michael Fisher explains that travel accounts are important because they shaped perceptions – as travelers' musings completely shaped Europe's perception of Eastern lands. Many were inspired to go and explore, most often looking for profit.[116] The representations of the world found in travel writing greatly influenced contemporary readers when it was published, spurring social and political action and encouraging or discouraging openness to other cultures. Many scholars would argue that the spread of ideas from travel narratives also played a huge role in the development of European colonialism, which I will

[115] William Dalrymple, preface to *Beyond the Three Seas: Travelers' Tales of Mughal India*, by Michael H. Fisher, (New Delhi: Random House, 2007), xvii-xviii
[116] Michael Fisher, *Beyond the Three Seas*, 11-12

discuss in the next section. In his article "Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunted Impact?", Joan-Pau Rubies argues that travel writing also had a profound influence on European culture. He claims that travel writing shaped the humanist movement leading to the Enlightenment and helped define the new theories of civilization laid out by European philosophers during that time.[117] Because Bembo's account was never published it never had a chance to affect society at large, but it is now an incredibly valuable document for historians seeking to understand the early modern era.

Interpreting Travel Writing

When reading a travel account, there are several questions to be addressed. The first is who is the author? Answering this question can include their nationality, economic status, religion, gender, educational background, social standing, personality and anything else that could influence their perception of the world. Bembo is a wealthy Venetian man of a noble family with a formal education and a successful background in the navy.[118] He is a devout Catholic[119] and loyal to his nation.[120] The next question is to ask why he traveled. Was it for profit, exploration, mission work, escape, diplomacy, military service, or what? Bembo explains that he was bored and without work, so he decided to accompany his uncle Marco in order to learn about Aleppo.[121] He continues his journey seemingly motivated from a pure desire to learn and explore. Another important aspect is understanding the historical context, which I have

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[117] Joan-Pau Rubies, "Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunted Impact?" in *Bringing the World to Early Modern Europe: Travel Accounts and Their Audiences*, ed. Peter Mancall (Boston: Brill, 2007), 131-133
[118] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 33-34
[119] Throughout his *Travels and Journal*, Bembo stays with many different Holy Orders and celebrates mass and holidays with them, he criticizes the behavior of Christians that does not align with Catholic doctrine, and praises several individuals for their Christian beliefs
[120] For examples of Bembo being a proud Venetian see Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 41, 122, 210, 239
[121] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 34

already explained for Bembo in the previous chapter – most importantly focusing on the globalizing world between Europe, the great Muslim empires, and South India. Important aspects of the historical context include local politics, frequency and ease of travel, relations between the traveler's home and destination, cultural norms, religious practices, and the economy. Answering all of these questions is constructing the microhistory of the author.

The next major question to ask is who is the intended audience and how does that shape the final format of the account? Travel writing can be a compilation of personal letters written to a close friend, a private diary, a list of ethnographic observations, a highly stylized narrative for entertainment, a guidebook for future travelers, or other formats. Youngs says the major questions is "what happens between the experience of travel and the perception, representation and the reception of it?[122] The idea is that there can be significant time from the moment a traveler observes something, records it, and then prepares that information for publishing. The style the author chooses, methods of recording, and intended audience can significantly affect the final version of information that is shared, hence the difficulty in deciphering fact from fiction in a travel account. Furthermore, many travel accounts include illustrations which invoke interest from art historians and provide a very different but equally significant form of information. Youngs explains, however, that there has yet to be much scholarly work devoted to travel illustrations.[123] He also reminds us that these illustrations are often made by a second individual, thus providing a perspective in the account separate from that of the author. The 52 drawings of G.J. Grelot in Bembo's account add great visual detail to his account. Some drawings are a

[122] Youngs, *Introduction,* 10
[123] Youngs, *Introduction,* 172

special case because they were drawn by Grelot but are of locations that only Bembo visited.[124] Many more papers could be written about Grelot's work.

Youngs explains that modern criticism of travel writing began with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism.[125] Said's ideas from his book titled *Orientalism* have become the most prominent theory on travel writing today.[126] Said harshly critiques European writing about "Eastern" culture arguing that it promotes that idea of "Western" superiority. Furthermore, he states that the reason Western authors study the East is to better understand the "other" for purposes of conquering or exploiting them. Though it is debated how precisely Orientalism can be applied to all European writing on eastern subjects, we do gain valuable theories of interpretation from Said. Youngs points out that Said was the first to identify the connection between travel, representation, and empire.[127] As Michael Fisher stated, European travel writers were responsible for constructing the perception of non-Europeans nations and cultures, which could drastically affect the subsequent actions of other Europeans. To put Said's concepts into more abstract terms, the main idea is that writers have been influenced before they travel – meaning they cannot travel to a new land and make truly objective observations because they already have biases – and what they write about other cultures can have significant consequences. This means that when interpreting Bembo's account, I have to question his motives and past influences to see how that affects his view of the places he travels and the language he uses to describe them. Bembo is fiercely loyal to Venice and his Catholic faith and tends to speak highly of his countrymen and negatively about other religious groups. However, there is no evidence of imperial or even economic interests for two reasons: Venice already had

[124] Welch, "Introduction," *Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo,* 27
[125] Youngs, *Introduction,* 163
[126] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)
[127] Youngs, *Introduction,* 9

trade connections with the Safavid and Ottomans and it was not Bembo's intent to affect these relationships, and Bembo only traveled outside of Aleppo to satisfy his curiosity.

In his book *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India,* Rahul Sapra further investigates the application of Orientalism to early modern European travel writing about India.[128] He says the purpose of his book is to show the complexities of representations of Indian natives in their writing and how that disrupts Orientalism.[129] His evidence lies in many European writers' accounts, specifically the English, who write very positively about the Mughal Empire and argue for cordial trade relations between themselves and the Mughals. Furthermore, many of the European writers differentiate between religious groups, not just naming them as one homogenous "other" and have varying opinions on them. Sapra argues that the theory of Orientalism is just one discourse to analyze travel writing through and that it oversimplifies the relationship between East and West.[130] Sapra also states that it is incorrect to view the end of the 17th century as the beginning of the British empire in India, and that the only European imperialism in India at that time came form the Portuguese. Because of this it is "highly problematic to assume a straightforward linkage between Orientalism and colonialism in the seventeenth century".[131] Because of these arguments and Bembo's purely exploratory motives and criticism against Portuguese violence in India, I believe Bembo's account is an example of European writing that Orientalism does not directly apply to, though it is still a helpful lens through which we can view Bembo's work and use to understand his point of view, at least in part.

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[128] Rahul Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011)
[129] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism,* 12
[130] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism,* 29, 33
[131] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism,* 163

William Dalrymple argued more strongly against the explanatory power of Orientalism stating:

> "It is ridiculously simplistic to see all attempts at studying, observing and empathizing with another culture necessarily as an act of domination – rather than of understanding, respect or even catharsis. . . If even the attempt to understand is seen as aggression or appropriation, then all human contact declines into paranoia"[132]

In the introduction to Bembo's account, Welch's opinion is that Bembo was actually much more open to other cultures than one might assume of a man of his position.[133] Though Bembo's representations of other cultures and religions are surely not free of judgement, we would miss out on his many moments of positively learning about other cultures and critique of other Europeans' racist practices if we assume Said's Orientalism applies fully to Bembo's work. The point is not to argue whether Bembo was a good person or to qualify exactly how much of a bigot he was or wasn't, but to view his account with as little to no assumptions of our own. Though Dalrymple's critique of Orientalism might be too harsh, he is correct in saying that strictly apply Orientalism to early modern travel writing could cause the reader to have a form of "paranoia" where they wrongly assume the worst of every writer.

Youngs explains that "Whatever the politics of travel texts, scholars' readings of them have led to the realization that the truth claims of travel writing are increasingly being exposed as rhetorical strategy – the 'other' produced by travel writing is increasingly being seen as a textual construction, an interpretation and not a reflection of reality."[134] Though Bembo states that his work is completely factual, one must determine his motives first to understand his point of view.

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[132] William Dalrymple, preface to *Beyond the Three Seas: Travelers' Tales of Mughal India*, by Michael H. Fisher (New Delhi: Random House, 2007), xi
[133] Welch, "Introduction", *Travels and Journal*, 22-23
[134] Youngs, *Introduction,* 12-13

After defining Bembo's historical contexts, motives, and past influences, it seems that there is little reason to believe that he is purposefully changing the facts. However, his views on other religions and nationalities were certainly influenced by European norms are evident in his condescendence towards non-Abrahamic religions, his anti-Semitic comments, and his exaggeration of the superiority of Venice.

The last major point I believe is relevant to interpreting Bembo's account and similar travel writing pieces is emphasizing that this period is not yet the period of massive European colonial movements. Dalrymple explains that "When reading travel accounts by these very early visitors to the East we should certainly try to resist the temptation, felt by so many historians, to project back onto it the stereotypes of Victorian and Edwardian behavior and attitudes with which we are so familiar."[135] It is crucial to understand that this period is distinct because understanding this time which precedes the colonial era can help scholars understand how and why the imperial movements began. Bembo's account describes Europeans living in many different cities throughout the Middle East and India, and the only imperialists are the Portuguese in India. Understanding the attitudes and situations of these people in Bembo's account can be a key to understanding this time period, but it will not be possible if we assume Orientalism directly applies and do not make this period distinct from the subsequent era.

General Trends in European Travel Writing of the Early Modern Era

In order to understand where Bembo's account fits into history, I feel it is important to also note some of the general trends found in European travel writing at this time according to the secondary literature. Additaionally, I will demonsrate these trends with specific examples

[135] William Dalrymple, preface to *Beyond the Three Seas: Travelers' Tales of Mughal India*, by Michael H. Fisher (New Delhi: Random House, 2007), xii

from the travel accounts of Pietro Della Valle and John Ovington.[136] Della Valle was a wealthy Roman aristocrat who started his journey as a pilgrim to the Holy Land but let his curiosity and sense of adventure take him much further. He travelled to Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Persia, and India. His account of his 12-year journey (1614-1626) is a series of letters he sent to his friend Mario Schipano back home in Rome. Schipano was supposed to compile them as a narrative, but just published them as letters with little editing instead. Della Valle's account is famous for being one of the most detailed descriptions we have of these lands during this the 17th century. Furthermore, Bembo's journey follows a very similar path to Della Valle's and he references his account several times. John Ovington was born into a yeoman farming family and earned a high level of education. He was asked to be serve as chaplain for the East India Company and accompanied them to India in 1689. He had a brief stay in Bombay and then spent two years in Surat. He formally organized his account and published it in 1696 with high praise from the East India Company.

The first trend to look at is purpose of travel. Fisher explains that most travel writers in India visited for these reasons: "for commerce, seeking its abundant gold, silver, and gems, as well as agricultural and crafted goods" or "pleasure and exploration" or "business and diplomacy" or "political influence as Catholic missionaries."[137] Bembo's predecessor and influencer Pietro della Valle began his journey as a pilgrim in the Holy Land but then eventually allowed his curiosity to take him to Persia and India.[138] Englishman John Ovington traveled as a

[136] I use these versions of their accounts:
Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim: The Travels of Pietro Della Valle*. trans. George Bull (London: Hutchinson, 1990)
John Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689.* ed. H.G. Rawlinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1929)
[137] Fisher, *Beyond the Three Seas,* 1
[138] Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim: The Travels of Pietro Della Valle*. trans. George Bull (London: Hutchinson, 1990)

chaplain for the East India Company[139], and travelers Jean Baptiste Tavernier[140] and Jean Chardin[141] both went for gem trading. I believe that writers like Bembo who are traveling purely out of curiosity are incredibly valuable sources because they have no ulterior motives when describing what they encounter.

One of the most commonly studied aspects of travel writing is the description of the "other". In other words, how did travelers characterize the people they encountered in the lands they visited? Fisher explains that the most significant dividing factors were status at birth and religion – not so much race or skin color.[142] Most famous travel accounts include a description of Muslim, Hindu, and sometimes Parsi religious beliefs and practices. Sapra explains that most travel writers devote more time to Muslims than Hindus, and that during this age, Europeans were more inclined to praise the "civilized" culture of the Muslims and disparage that of Hindus.[143] This most likely occurred for two main reasons: Europeans at this time had centuries of history with Muslims but the Indians religions still felt very strange and new to them, and the Europeans were actively seeking to increase trade with the powerful Muslim empires but not as much with the Hindu kingdoms. This mindset is exemplified by Della Valle when he describes the inhabitants of India: "Some are Mohammadens, as is the King of Lahore, or the Mogul, who is ruler of the greater part of India; and some are heathens, worshipping diverse idols."[144] Hindus were most often referred to as "gentiles" or "heathens". As we shall see, Bembo follows this trend.

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[139] John Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689.* ed. H.G. Rawlinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1929)
[140] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India.* trans. Valentine Ball (London, New York: Macmillan, 1889)
[141] Jean Chardin *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin en Perse et aux Indes orientates, par la Mer Noire et par la Colchide. Première partie, qui contient le voyage de Paris à Isfahan* (Moses Pitt, London, 1686)
[142] Fisher, *Beyond the Three Seas,* 5
[143] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism,* 90
[144] Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 128

Writers who do decide it is important to describe the "gentile" belief system – usually mixing Jain and Hindu beliefs – focus on four main topics: transmigration of souls, idol worship, animal care, and sati.[145] I will provide examples of this in the next chapter from Bembo's account. Della Valle describes the "Indian heathens" – as he calls them – at length.[146] He explains the practice of avoiding untouchables, not harming any living creatures, burning of the dead, idol worship, belief in transmigration of the soul, and cow veneration. His tone seems to be non-judgmental and curious, but then says that they believe in such things because the devil is deceiving them. Travel accounts like this are often replete with commentary that displays how inconceivable foreign religions, especially non-monotheistic ones, were to European Christians. Sapra explains that John Ovington's account is "perhaps the first English narrative that praises at length both the Hindus and their religion."[147] He tends to refer to them as "Banians" as if that term generally meant followers of the major Indian religion – probably because this was the merchant class of northern Indians that Europeans did the most business with – which was common.[148] Ovington also uses the term "gentile". Della Valle and Ovington both use the word "Giaour" to describe Parsis which is the derogatory term Turks call non-believers.[149] Ovington and Bembo both write about Parsis, emphasizing their ancient roots, worship of fire and the sun, and the fact that they escaped to India to flee persecution from Muslims in Persia, which was a common way to describe them.[150]

Another common phenomenon in European travel writing of this time is to use ancient sources in attempt to understand the places and people they encounter. In her book *Travellers*

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[145] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism*, 92
[146] Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 131-136
[147] Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism*, 117
[148] Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat*, 139
[149] George Bull, footnote in *The Pilgrim*, 137
[150] Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat* 216; Bembo, *Travels and Journal* 192

from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empire, 16th-17th Centuries, Sonja Brentjes explains that much of the knowledge that Europeans had of the "east" was all found in ancient sources, such as classical Greek and Roman texts and the Bible.[151] Della Valle gives a prime example when he is explaining the Hindu practice of coloring their temples and bodies with red colors. Della Valle references ancient Greek historian Herodotus, ancient Roman historian Aelian, and Biblical stories in an attempt to connect the ritual with ancient Egypt.[152] Brentjes goes on to explain that this is a problem because it furthered the idea of the "East" being a "static" place that has not progressed along with Europe.[153] This really emphasizes how foreign these lands are to the European travelers because it shows they did not even have modern sources with which to study the "East".

These Early Modern travel writers also expressed much pride in their own homelands. Youngs explains that there were books being published at this time to instruct travelers on proper action on their journeys and most "emphasized the need for the traveler to serve his country through his actions."[154] Ovington begins his account with two pages of praise for Charles Sackville, the Earl of Dorset who was powerful in the English government, and deeply expresses his desire to please him with his writing.[155] Bembo also speaks very proudly of Venice throughout his account, as Welch explains "he rarely missed an opportunity to draw a favorable comparison between Venice and other European states."[156] For example, when he meets the viceroy in Goa, he makes sure not to seem impressed by the furnishings of the palace because such items would have been "ordinary" in Venice. Della Valle makes a few remarks expressing

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[151] Sonja Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empire, 16th-17th: Seeking, Transforming, Discarding knowledge* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010) *xvii*
[152] Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 226-227
[153] Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empire, xvii*
[154] Youngs, *Introduction to Travel Writing*, 30
[155] Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat*, 2-4
[156] Welch, "Introduction" *Travels and Journal*, 26

his devotion for Italy, but does not make the same type of proud bold statements. This makes perfect sense because Della Valle's account is a series of private letters that he wrote to a friend which he had initially planned to edit before publishing.[157] Perhaps if he had edited them first, he would have added more formal statements of devotion to Rome to show he was a proper citizen.

Bembo humbly begins his account, after his prologue, with this statement:

> "It is unfortunate if this sort of itinerary should seem a bit dry for the delicate taste of modern minds, since it is the same that was undertaken by Marco Polo, also one of us Venetians, and by almost all the others who underwent similar troubles. One should realize, too, that this account might be as boring (if not more so), because it is less distinguished than others. In addition, my youth and inexperience did not permit me to weave an ornamented and ordered story of so many kingdoms and of such great countries."[158]

Welch proposes that this unconfident attitude is the reason why Bembo never published his account.[159] However, Youngs explains that it was very common for travel books to begin with "an apology for their inadequacy".[160] Bembo's account is an amazing source of information and there is no need to let this humble introduction deter us from studying it in depth.

[157] Bull, "Introduction", *The Pilgrim, xi*
[158] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 35-36
[159] Welch, "Introduction" *Travels and Journal,* 3
[160] Youngs, *Introduction to Travel Writing,* 11

Chapter Three: A Close Reading of Bembo's Time in India

This chapter will consist of a close reading of Bembo's account, drawing on specific passages and episodes, to understand both Bembo and this historical period better. I will focus solely on his time in India, partially because his account is so rich that it would take a much longer study to analyze all of its varied content at once. More significantly though, I've chosen to focus on this part of the narrative because India during this early modern age is a fascinating subject. As we have seen in chapter one, this is after Europeans have been in South Asia for a while but before there were any moves towards massive colonization, besides the Portuguese colonies on the Malabar coast. The cosmopolitan South Asian cities of Surat, Goa, and Bombay are prime examples of places that show the connections being made between groups of different religions and ethnicities.

I will focus on two main topics for this close reading. The first is how Bembo characterizes and categorizes religious groups, especially Hindus, Muslims, and Native Indian Christians. The perception of these religious communities in Europe was being shaped by travelers like Bembo. By comparing his account to the previously mentioned works of Pietro Della Valle and John Ovington I will show how his observations were similar to other travel literature but also unique to him. The second topic will cover the cosmopolitan nature of India during this period, and how the Europeans were only a small part of a diverse population. This microhistorical inspection of Bembo's journey allows new insights on these topics. Understanding the perception of these foreign religious and ethnic groups by Europeans in South Asia contributes to our understanding of the dynamic between these groups and how that changed so drastically in the next couple centuries with the rise of massive colonization.

Context of Bembo's Journey in India

To better understand the passages I analyze from Bembo's account, it is important to know the political and social makeup of each city he visits. His time in India was spent mostly in Portuguese territories, the Mughal city of Surat, and the British city of Bombay.[161] He arrived on the shores of Portuguese Daman in India on the 27th of April 1673. This was after a brief layover at the Portuguese-controlled fortress of Diu.[162] He stayed in Daman and then travelled overland north to the Mughal city of Surat.[163] After an extended stay in Surat, he briefly stayed in Bulsar[164] on his journey back to Daman and then explored the cities of Dahanu, Dadra, and Bassein which were under the jurisdiction of Daman.[165] After that, he continued south and sailed to the Island of Thane and then to the newly-British city of Bombay.[166] After a long stay in Bombay, he sailed to the capital of Portugal's overseas territories, Goa.[167]

The Portuguese first landed in India in 1498, under the lead of Vasco de Gama. In 1500, the Portuguese king sent another, much bigger, fleet to India with ambitions of trade control and territorial expansion, all under the guise of spreading their Catholic faith.[168] They conquered Goa by 1510, a territory which had three other rulers in the previous 40 years: the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, the Muslim Bahamani Sultanate, and the state of Bijapur.[169] In 1534, 1535, and 1559 they seized control of Bassein, Diu, and Daman respectively by way of treaty, though with threat of force.[170] The Portuguese fleets that arrived in India were a small number compared to

[161] For the whole of his account of India, see Bembo, *Travels and Journal* 152-272.
[162] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 158
[163] For Bembo's time in Surat, see Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 169-192.
[164] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 194
[165] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 201-207
[166] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 207-218
[167] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 221
[168] M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5
[169] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 88
[170] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 31-32

the population of India. However, they maintained control of their territories because the native populations never unified against them; they fought separately the kingdoms of Calicut, Bijapur, and Ahmadnagar separately, but were frail against large scale attacks.[171] The Portuguese territories were a long and thin band of land along the coast.

The population of the Portuguese state in India was made up of a huge portion of Hindus, a significant number of native Muslims, a small community of native Christians, and an even smaller ruling class of Portuguese.[172] The Portuguese forced conversion to Catholicism by destroying temples, banishing those who refused to convert, and threat of death through their Inquisition.[173] The Catholic clergy, especially the Jesuits, also held significant power.[174] The increase in Dutch presence in the 17th century was the biggest factor in the decline of Portuguese power in India.[175]

Surat is located in the state of Gujarat which was under control of the Kingdom of Cambay until the Mughals seized power in the 1570s. The merchant class of Jains and Hindus from Gujarat, known as *banians*, controlled much of the trade patterns in the Indian Ocean throughout the early modern period, and Gujarati Muslims owned the ships they used.[176] The Mughals developed Surat into a large city and major port and by the turn of the 18th century, it was the largest commercial marine in India.[177] As such, it attracted many merchants from many different communities. The English, Dutch, and French all built factories in Surat after the

[171] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 57
[172] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 81-101
[173] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 109, 117-119
[174] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 127
[175] Pearson, *The Portuguese in India,* 134-135
[176] Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 88-89
[177] Ashin Das Gupta, "The Merchants of Surat c. 1700-50". *Merchants of Maritime India 1500-1800* (Brookefield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1994) 201

Mughals granted them official trade rights in 1612.[178] Surat was also the embarkation point for Muslims of South and Southeast Asia going on the hajj to Mecca.[179] As the major trade emporia of the Indian Ocean, there were ships traveling to Surat from Europe, China, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and the Coromandel and Malabar coasts of India.[180] It was connected to major cities in north India by overland caravan routes as well.[181]

Bembo arrived in Bombay just after the Portuguese had given control of the city to the English. Before Europeans arrived in India, Bombay was a small conglomeration of fishing villages.[182] The population was majority Hindu with small Muslim and Parsi communities. In the 12th-15th centuries, the Muslim sultanates of the Deccan and Gujrat stretched just far enough to influence Bombay, but never fully utilized it.[183] Twelve years after Vasco de Gama arrived in India, a Portuguese fleet landed in Bombay. They realized that the area had good natural harbors to be used for trading ports and well-protected fortifications. They won the land in a violent takeover from the Muslim sultan Muhammad Shah Begada. Under the Portuguese, Bombay started to grow, but never became more than a minor trading post.[184] The British peacefully gained control of Bombay in 1665.[185] Though it was a peaceful takeover of land from the Portuguese, the British immediately angered the nearby kingdoms. They fought with the Marathis and the Mughals, but luckily maintained control from these fierce groups, as they were also fighting each other.[186] In 1672, British Company man Gerald Aungier became governor and

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[178] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic Rise of Islam to 1750*. (Cambridge University Press, 1985) 90
[179] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization,* 118
[180] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*
[181] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization,* 169
[182] J. Gerson da Cunha, *The Origin of Bombay* (Asian Educational Services, 2004) 52-53
[183] da Cunha, *The Origin of Bombay*
[184] Gillian Tindall, *City of Gold: The Biography of Bombay*, (Faber and Faber, 2010), 17
[185] Charles II married the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza and was gifted the land
[186] Tindall, *City of Gold*, 59

is now famous for his rapid development of the city.[187] Bembo met him during his stay in Bombay and they had a friendly interaction, speaking Italian and discussing Venice's efforts in the War of Candia.[188]

Bembo's Description of the "Other"

Bembo's descriptions of Indian Muslims and Hindus mostly follow the trends mentioned in the last chapter, specifically his greater respect for Muslims and the topics he emphasizes when describing the native Indian religion. Also, when Bembo describes the beliefs of native, non-Muslim, Indians he solely uses the terms "gentile" and "idolater". He gives a long overview of "gentile" practices focusing on their belief in the transmigration of souls, veneration of bovine animals, idol worship, kindness towards animals, and the practice of sati. He also seems to be searching for the ways in which the "gentile" religion does practice some proper truths, to his Catholic mindset, by emphasizing what he sees as recognition of a Paradise and belief in God and "devils". He generally seems very interested in what they practice and writes a full ten pages (in this edition at least) about what he hass learned. This is how he starts the overview of what he has learned about the practices and faith of the "gentiles":

> "Since there are many idolaters in this city and in the Kingdom of Cambay or Gujarat, it seems to me appropriate to tell here with some clarity what I can about the various rites and superstitions that they have, without obliging myself to put them in order, however, but only putting down what I remember of what I saw or of what I was told by those who stayed a long time in those parts and who observed more carefully."[189]

[187] Tindall, *City of Gold*, 60
[188] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 212-213
[189] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 177

He is careful to mention the fact that his information might be scattered or not exhaustive. He doesn't tell us his sources, except this mention of "those who stayed a long time in those parts," and once when he mentions "a gentile" that he spoke with.[190] Furthermore, his description of "Gentile" beliefs is long, and he vacillates between anecdotes and concrete explanations of faith.

Next, he gives a brief overview of the way "the Gentile people of India" divide themselves up into different groups, clearly a description of the caste system.[191] He first explains that they are varied, with as many as eighty-four groups.[192] He must of have learned of the different jatis, or ancestral groups of which there are thousands in India.[193] He then goes on to say, "Others say that India is divided into seven parts." This more limited separation of the Indian people into groups that define their occupation, as Bembo explains, is the Varna system. The Varna system comes from ancient Hindu texts and splits them into four groups, that are close to Bembo's description of the seven. He seems close to understanding that the Indian caste system is much more complex than later Europeans would simplify it to be.[194] However, he gives no further explanation on why there is multiple ways in which they divide themselves.

Next, Bembo explains that the central tenet of their faith is the belief in the transmigration of the soul. He writes:

> "However, in the principal things they are alike, as in the belief in the transmigration of souls, which upon death they think are sent by God into other bodies according to merits or transgressions. From a life more or less difficult, or from rich, poor, noble, and

[190] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 180
[191] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 177-178
[192] Della Valle also states that there are 84 castes in India. Possibly Bembo pulled this information from him as well. Pietro Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 227
[193] Diane P. Mines, *Caste in India* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2009), 86
[194] Richard King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism'", *Numen*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1999), 146-185

> common men, the soul can be sent into other men or into animals, all according to the life just passed."[195]

Though Bembo recognizes that their "rites are various", he emphasizes the fact that this is their principal belief and uses that to simplify the diverse beliefs of all Indians across the subcontinent. However, he actually describes the beliefs of many different religious groups across India, including those of different Hindu sects that at that time would not have called themselves the same religion[196] and those of Jains and Muslims.[197] A blindness towards the diversity of native Indian practices was something that was common amongst outsiders traveling in India. Most Hindus did not identify with one unified and structured religion called "Hinduism" until Europeans, and other, showed up and tried to make sense of the diverse belief systems across India.[198] Bembo does, however, say that the "idolaters" are "divided into various and different rites," seeming to at least partially resist the temptation to homogenize the Indians, as later Europeans would do.[199]

Bembo continues his explanation of "gentile" beliefs. His next focus is on the veneration of bovine animals:

> "Each one of them on his deathbed tries to give up his spirit with the tail of a bovine animal in his mouth or in his hand. They anoint themselves with cow dung, and they wash their faces with cow urine as devotion. . . No bovine animal is ever killed by any Gentile but rather is held in veneration, since they believe that in those animals are the souls of their best ancestors. In the whole kingdom of Cambay anyone who killed a cow,

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[195] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 178
[196] For an explanation see Richard King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism,'" 162-163
[197] Bembo confuses the Islamic practice of fasting for Ramadan for a Hindu custom and their beliefs on Christ. Ambrosio Bembo, *Travels and Journal* 181
[198] Richard King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism,'" 146-185
[199] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 177

> even if he were Moslem or of another religion, would be punished severely, even by death. The Gentiles pay a great sum to the rulers of the cities to keep this rule."[200]

Here, Bembo seems inclined to focus on the practices that would be the most bizarre to European Christians, as in the use of cow dung and urine and capital punishment for one who hurt a cow. Many European travel writers saw the customs of the Hindus as "alien" and focus on the binary between their religion and Hinduism as the "irreligion."[201] However, later on Bembo does shows that he understands the rational reason behind the practice when he explains that many do not eat beef because "the cow is their mother for her milk and for the dung with which cows fertilize the earth,"[202] seeming to recognize there is a practicality behind the belief, making it sound less bizarre.

Next, Bembo mentions that the "gentiles" worship idols and practice witchcraft, saying "They all carry their idol on a string around their neck. The idols are various, as they were for the Romans. They also believe a lot in witchcraft."[203] However, he does not dwell on their idol worship, but rather focuses on the aspects of their religion that are closer to his beliefs: "Principally, however, they believe that there is a God, Lord of all things, from whom all good comes. They also believe in devils that can do evil."[204] He continued,

> "They have some notion of the birth of Christ our Lord, of his passion and ascension. They say that he was born of a holy woman and that it was never known who was his father. He grew in age and goodness. When he was grown, very wicked and ungrateful people tried to kill him because he was too good. He hid himself and has never been seen

[200] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 178
[201] Sapra, *Limits of Orientalism*, 89-100
[202] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 180
[203] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 180
[204] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 180

> again. The mother cried so much that she died of sorrow, and thus they hold images of the Madonna in great veneration."[205]

Though he might be conflating Hindu beliefs with Muslim beliefs in this report on their understanding of Christ, he seems to put in an active effort to display what aspects of their faith are similar to Christianity. Certainly many European Christians at this time would have done this out of interest in their own faith,[206] but Bembo seems to also be looking for connections with these people. Throughout his account, Bembo is critical of any group that does not adhere to proper Catholic practices – whether it be Muslims, Protestants, or others – but he does not seem to claim superiority for this reason. He even says, "They make fun of our ceremonies as much as we do of theirs."[207] A statement like this shows a moment of empathy and the possibility of understanding with the "gentiles." Though he finds many of their practices bizarre, he can also recognize that this is not one directional. He seems to believe that though people of different faiths may clash in practice, it does not make one group superior to the other. He also mentions the "Gentile's" belief in a Paradise – another similarity with Christianity.[208]

Similar to other European travel writers, Bembo is fascinated by the practice of showing kindness towards animals. He wrote:

> "All have great veneration for and adore bovine animals, although they respect other animals more or less. Doing good to animals therefore, they esteem a work of charity of no less worth than doing good to human beings. . . They consider themselves obliged to spend their money to save animals from death, otherwise their blood will be on their

[205] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 181
[206] For example, when the Portuguese first landed in India it took them years to understand that the Hindu communities were not the Christians they so hoped for. M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, 116
[207] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 177
[208] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 178-179

> heads. Thus, there are public hospitals for taking care of animals. . . These hospitals are kept by public alms. When he was in Cambay, Pietro della Valle went to see those hospitals where among the many animals kept there, he saw some small mice. They had been found orphans and were being taken care of by an old man . . . They saw that that good man had the intention to set them free when they were grown."[209]

Bembo seems to be impressed by the care the "gentiles" give to animals, calling the animal hospital worker "that good man." Furthermore, even though he provides a great deal of information from his own experiences, he also clearly feels the need to add the information he learned from Della Valle's account. This is because he wants to fully explain the practices of kind animal treatment and bolster his observations with corroboration from a well-respected source. When Della Valle was in Surat, he said he and his companions went to an animal hospital because they wanted to observe the "vain superstitions" of the "gentiles", seeming to also be in awe of the practice.[210] However, both Bembo and Della Valle explain the rationality behind this practice is because "gentile" believe that through the process of transmigration, human souls can be reborn in animal bodies.[211]

The last topic that Bembo explains in detail is the ritual of sati. He wrote:

> "The women of a certain rite are not thought to be honorable if, within some days after the death of their husbands, they do not burn themselves on his ashes. They do it with so much solemnity, accompanied by friends and relatives. . . [describes ceremony] . . .Those who cannot afford this ceremony burn themselves with their husbands, although there is now law that obliges them, only the zeal for self-respect, since they are remembered as

[209] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 177-179
[210] Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 222
[211] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 178-179; Della Valle, *The Pilgrim*, 222

> infamous if they do not do it, as if they had been caught in adultery. Such folly, however, is almost gone today after the contact with other nations."[212]

There are multiple aspects of this passage I would like to focus on. The first is that he yet again shows some understanding of the variety in practices of the Hindu religion when he says, "women of a certain rite." Also, he seems to respect the women who have to endure this ritual. However, his comment on this "folly" ending because of "contact with other nations" could contribute to the racist European colonialist belief that the Indians were a people that needed saving – something that is common in Orientalist work. But, since he does not specify which nations, but instead focuses on "contact" in general as doing the work of making the practice obsolete.

Bembo's characterization of the Hindu religion is critical, but not that of undeniable inferiority. However, as we have seen in chapter 2, he follows the same pattern of other European travel writings, in that he shows much more respect for the Mughals and the Islamic religion. He wrote:

> "The present Mughal, although his ancestors were idolaters, is of the Muslim religion and conforms more with the Arabs and Turks than the Persians, although Persian is spoken in the court and also Hindustani, the native tongue. The subjects are in part Muslims and in part idolaters or Gentiles, which is the same thing. These latter are more numerous than the first, but are people of little spirit, weak, and not lovers of fighting."[213]

It is clear in this statement that he does not view Muslims as idolaters. Also, he speaks of Muslims in reference to the revered Mughals but sees the "gentiles" as lazy. Bembo did not visit

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[212] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 182-183

[213] When Bembo says the "present Mughal" he mans the current Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Bembo, *Travels and Journal* 170

any Hindu kingdoms, and this most likely contributed to his stereotyping of "gentiles" as weak and not lovers of fighting. Also, this contributes to the stereotype of "violent" Muslims subjugating a helpless weak majority.

As a Catholic traveler, Bembo is also very interested in the native Christian church of India. There is certain evidence that there has been a Christian church in India since the 4th century when Syrian Christians migrated there, but there are also many old texts that state the Indian Christian church was founded by the Apostle St. Thomas around the year 50 CE.[214] When Bembo first arrives in Goa, he says "the island is very ancient in the histories of the Gentiles and the Moors" but then focuses solely on the evidence for the ancient Christian church found there.[215] He describes a bronze crucifix that was found by the Portuguese and a copy of a donation made by a king to a temple with a message that details their Christian beliefs. He concludes, "From it one judges that they were Christian descendants of those converted by St. Thomas the Apostle, who brought the Gospel to India."[216] Later in the account he gives a detailed history of St. Thomas' travels and the Christian church of India.[217] He explains the foundation of the church was in either Cochin or Cranganor and they lived without official clergymen for seven centuries. Then two bishops from the Nestorian church came to lead. When the Portuguese arrived in 1502, they tried to enforce proper Catholic practices on the church.[218] Yet, the church was still led by several more bishops whom the Portuguese deemed "completely

[214] Roger E. Hedlund, *Christianity Made in India* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 16-18
[215] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 223
[216] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 223
[217] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 223-261
[218] The Portuguese attempted to manipulate the native Christians into union with Rome, but they resisted. In 1599, the Synod of Diamper officially stated the natives were part of the Catholic church and this subjected them to the Inquisition. The native Christians revolted in 1653. Though a majority resisted Latinization, the intervention of the Portuguese caused lasting divisions in the Native church. See Roger E. Hedlund, *Christianity Made in India* 24

infected by heresy."[219] Bembo details the "1,000 wrong beliefs" that they were practicing. He is critical of any practice that is heretical to the Catholic faith.

However, Bembo does not support violence and racism towards the natives. Several times he criticizes the Portuguese for such actions. He explains that the members of the native Christian church resisted the Portuguese Jesuits when they took over the church:

> "since some were too rigid and not fond of those people, as is often true of the Portuguese, because of their dark color, and since they despised them and mistreated them, they could not support their dominion, even if only spiritual. Many times, they sent to Rome complaints and requests that they be sent better pastors."[220]

Though Bembo praises the Portuguese for having "corrected in those Christians all the things that were consonant with the purity of the faith", he does recognize that they were then too harsh in their treatment of the natives. Bembo also writes, "Some of the rectories are administered by Canarini Fathers, natives of the country, who are not well thought of because they are brown in color. There are many, however, of great virtue and civility."[221] Bembo is critical of non-Catholic religious practices but he mostly does not judge others according to their race. He also wrote, "I went to a mass and saw the wedding of a cafro, that is, a Moor of Africa but a Christian, and the slave of some Portuguese who do not give them their freedom, even if they accept the faith."[222] Bembo uses the term "Moor" several times throughout his account, but it is unclear what he means. He refers to African Moors, black Moors, Christian Moors, Moors that are slaves, and Moors from India. Welch himself proposes that he may be using the term to refer

[219] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 256
[220] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 260
[221] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 243
[222] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 189

to any dark-skinned non-Europeans.[223] Nonetheless, he is clearly appalled by the way the Portuguese mistreat fellow Christians, no matter their race.

Bembo's account also provides many observations on the Portuguese Inquisition of Goa. He explains that the "Inquisition keeps watch over the lands in India, where there are many people who became Christians by force."[224] He then details their system of investigating individuals who practice witchcraft, sodomy, or other heretical acts. They are reprimanded on their first offense, slightly punished on their second offense, and condemned to death after the third. He then explains the yearly ceremony, the *Auto de Fe*, where the sentences are given out and the offenders are given their punishments, such as being whipped, banished, sentenced to work, or burned. Bembo says, "Almost all those of tried were natives." Bembo is surprised that the Portuguese do not allow non-Christians to practice their faiths:

> "They do not even allow the pagans and Moslems to use temples or mosques, and thus many of them abandon the country and go to live under the Dutch, who leave them in liberty of conscience and allow them to practice their cults in their temples."[225]

His phrases "Christians by force" and "liberty of conscience" show that he does not believe in imposed religion, even if he is critical of those who do not practice properly. Bembo is strict on religious matters but does not believe this is an excuse to mistreat people. This shows that a feeling of Christian superiority does not automatically mean support of forcing religion on anyone, nor does it mean support for imperialism.

Bembo's characterization of the "other" is primarily based on his attitude towards different religious groups. He is critical against non-Catholics and clearly unimpressed by the

[223] Welch, *Travels and Journal*, 158 n.62
[224] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 262
[225] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 262

native "gentile" communities he encountered. However, he does not express the Orientalist view that Europeans are "saving" the poor Indians[226] and does not suggest that Christian superiority justifies violence.

The Cosmopolitan World of India: Europeans Coexisting Amongst Many

Bembo travels along the western coast of India, staying in several major cities and interacting with many different groups. He mostly stays in European social circles, residing in Catholic missions and meeting prominent members of the French, Dutch, English, and Portuguese trading communities. His account shows the cosmopolitan nature of early modern India through his descriptions of all the people in each space. Yet, it is clear that there are still societal structures in place that maintain the exclusive nature of each group. Most importantly, he provides evidence that the organization of these ethnic groups is not defined by the European presence.

The first example comes from his time in Surat. Bembo describes it as "the richest city and most famous port of the whole dominion of the Great Mughal."[227] The city is abundant in trade with infrastructure set up to handle travelers constantly coming in and out:

> "There are two customs houses, one across from the other. One is for things arriving by land, and the other for things arriving by sea. They are both well-constructed. There is then another one for things going out. . .There are good buildings for the lodgings of foreigners and for the deposit of merchandise called caravanserais by the Persians."[228]

[226] For example, Sapra explains that travel writers of the 19th century always depict sati as "white men saving brown women from brown men". Rahul Sapra, *Limits of Orientalism,* 100
[227] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 171
[228] Bembo, *Travels and Journal,* 171

Surat's status as a commercial mecca caused it to become one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. Bembo explains the makeup of the city:

> "The city is very rich in inhabitants, not only in native Mughal, Moors, and Gentiles, but in very many foreigners, who French, English, Portuguese, Dutch, Flemish, Italians, Poles, Swedes, and other Europeans. In addition, there are Turks, Arabs, Persians, Tartars, Georgians, Scythians, people from Malabar, Bengalese, Singhalese, Armenians, and other Asian and African nationalities that are not well known."[229]

Bembo describes the groups in terms of ethnicity, religious identity, and territorial homeland, signaling that the ways in which he defines groups is fluid. Still, it is clear that there are many groups of individuals from all over Europe, Africa, and Asia living in Surat. Bembo also explains where the merchants are trading:

> "They are attracted by the great traffic by land and sea from all of Europe, from Africa through the Red Sea, and from Asia overland by caravans. From that port ships then go to Europe, China, Malacca, Ache, the Molucca Islands, Jakarta, the Maldive Islands, Bengal, Sri Lanka, Cochin, Cananor, Calicut, Mecca, Aden, Suez, Mogadishu, Qishn, Muscat, Madagascar, where the French have a fortress, Hormuz, Basra, Sind, and other places."[230]

There is no special emphasis on Europeans here. As Subrahmanyam explains in his work on "Connected Histories", the increase in connection and globalization during this era was happening between many different groups, not just between Europe and the rest of the world.[231] Surat is a quintessential example of an early modern Indian city because of its commercial and

[229] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 172
[230] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 172
[231] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 737

cosmopolitan nature, as the "unquestioned capital of emporia trading in the western Indian Ocean."[232] It is governed by the Mughal empire, the most powerful player in India at this time. The French, English, and Dutch trading companies have significant power in trade,[233] certainly because of their aggressive tactics, but they are by no means the authority. Before Europeans, specifically the English, began to govern India directly and subjugate the Indian kingdoms, they were just a few players among the many in India.

Bembo also wrote about a large fortress in the city where Europeans and natives work together under Mughal rule:

> "Almost in the middle of the city on a canal is the castle or fortress. . . The cannoneers are Europeans who go there for the good pay. Most of them are exiles or fugitives from their countries. There are some French, Flemish, Portuguese, and a Roman. The head of them all is a Portuguese who gets thirty rupees a month as pay. . . It is guarded by two hundred native soldiers directed by a captain who is independent of the governor of the city and who is sent by the king and is called *nabob*."[234]

This is an example of how Europeans were just another group in the city, using their specialized skills to make a profit but certainly not asserting authority. Bembo spends much of his later time in India in Portuguese territories where the Portuguese officials and the Catholic church feel like the most powerful group. However, when he is outside of *Estado da India*, this power hierarchy clearly changes. While traveling between Surat and Daman, Bembo stops in the town of Bulsar and is confronted by an official:

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[232] Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, 118
[233] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 175
[234] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 172

> "As soon as we arrived, a servant of the aga came and ordered that we should present ourselves to him, all the people and all the baggage. When he was asked about the reason, the man answered that the captain of Daman had taken as prisoners a few days ago some men of that town and that thus the aga wanted to stop all Portuguese who passed through there. . . We had great difficulty in making ourselves understood because there was no one there who understood Portuguese, and the dragoman did not understand their tongue. However, when we asked about some things in Arabic, we were understood by one of those ministers, who asked us who we were and where we were going. When he understood that we were Venetians, he let us go immediately with great courtesy and even let go a poor Portuguese soldier whom I had taken with me after having met him along the road."[235]

The Portuguese were powerful within their small state, but they were not rivaling for power over any great portion of India. This episode shows that outside of their territory, they did not have power in government, nor was their language even useful. Furthermore, it shows the usefulness of Arabic, another language which is not native to India.

I hold firm that this account takes place before the massive European imperialist movement in India began. However, Bembo does illustrate a moment that foreshadows what is to come from the British when he attends mass in Bombay one day:

> "On the morning of the 17th. . . all the Christians subject to the church were made to swear loyalty, swearing over the Gospels that in case of war they would take up arms in defense of the Company and of the King of England against any prince, without exception, and that they would fight to the death and be obliged to obey his officers, and

[235] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 194

> they promised not to flee or show any kind of treason. Thus, they all swore one by one. The Moors made the same oath on the Qur'an, and the Gentiles on the heads of their sons."[236]

The British maintained religious freedom in their territories unlike the Portuguese, but still emphasized subjugation to the King of England. This allowed many different religious groups to work with and for the British. A week later, Bembo recorded further observations on this group:

> "On the 24th the President commanded drills involving all the persons capable of bearing arms who had sworn the oath of loyalty on the 17th. The muster field was under the windows of the convent where I was lodged. First, they ordered all the troops in the fortress that morning to pass by in general view. At that time, they had taken weapons away from thirty Portuguese because they had asked to make an exception in their oath so as not to be forced to fight against the Portuguese. They had to leave the island immediately and returned to the mainland to the service of those petty kings. After lunch an official of the fortress put in order all those people, who were 1,500 persons, including about 300 English. The rest were Portuguese, Moors and Gentiles of every station."[237]

The British are beginning to consolidate power in the name of the East India Trading Company. At this moment, it seems the citizens of Bombay had some choice to choose whether they pledged their allegiance but faced possible banishment if they didn't. During this time, Bombay under English governance was actually seen as a very free place to live because they allowed complete religious freedom and let criminals from other cities enter.[238] However, this move toward arming their company and requiring oaths of allegiance foreshadows their future attitude

[236] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 214
[237] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 217
[238] Bembo, *Travels and Journals* 214

of forcing nearly the entire subcontinent to live under their rule. John Ovington was in Bombay 15 years after Bembo, and this is what he wrote about the duties of the governor:

> "In this one of the Companies Factors always resides, who is appointed Governor to inspect and manage the Affairs of the Island; and who is vested with an Authority in Civil as well as Military Matters, to see that the several Companies of Soldiers which are here, as well as Factors and Merchants, attend their various Stations, and their respective Charge."[239]

Ovington's account confirms that the Company has maintained not just their role as financiers and merchants, but also their role in facilitating English military power. Ovington does not write about the diversity of Bombay other than mentioning the English policy of freedom of religion and his accidental entrance into a "gentile chapel."[240] Bembo give greater insight into the non-European makeup of the English Company and military.

Bembo's account gives us a glimpse of the pluralist nature of India in the end of the 17th century, a time when the world was globalizing in every direction, and new encounters were being made every day. There were various types of divisions in society – religious, ethnic, native or foreign – but all these people were directly interacting in India during this time. He also gives a glimpse of where Europeans fit into Indian society before the spread of large-scale colonialism and the hardening of divisive class structures. Though Europeans would come out of this period with large empires around the world, this was certainly not their position in South Asia during this time. The microhistorical close inspection of Bembo's journey contributes to our understanding of the dynamic between groups in India and the perceptions of India by Europeans in the early modern age. Most of all, his account provides a perspective from an individual who

[239] Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat*, 90
[240] Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat*, 91

seeks to understand the “others” he encounters when he is far from home, even if they seem strange at first.

Conclusion

Summary

The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo has proven to be a rich historical source. I have used Bembo's observations of his epic journey to further our understanding of the globalizing world of the "early modern" period, particularly in India. We can see from the analysis of his characterization of the "other" that Europeans were encountering new groups and having a hard time handling religious differences, though in his view it was only the Portuguese who used religion to justify violence and racism. From his descriptions of different groups interacting in India, we see that the Europeans were just one player among many in the cosmopolitan landscape of "early modern" India.

Though it is difficult to define when the world became "modern", an analysis of this "pre-modern" age helps us to understand the ways in which the world was changing. As stated before, Subrahmanyam emphasizes that we need to "delink the notion of 'modernity' from a particular European trajectory" and that modernity comes from the "global shift" observable everywhere in the world during these centuries.[241] Though Bembo offers a strictly European perspective, his account still shows glimpses of how India's modernization and globalization was stemming from much more than just European influences. Subrahmanyam further explains that the term "early modern" is linked to a "changed domain of interaction".[242] Bembo's account shows how the domains of interaction were in fact changing in "early modern" India through his descriptions of people learning about new religions, large-scale trade in cities like Surat, groups and natives and foreigners working together in the Mughal forts or in the East India Company, and Europeans and Indians adopting each other's customs.

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[241] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 737
[242] Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 749

I have attempted to construct a microhistory of Bembo by looking at his personal and historical contexts. As Magnusson and Szíjártó said, we use microhistories to find answers to "big historical questions."[243] Bembo indeed has allowed us to explore the answers to questions like: What characterizes the early modern period? How did Europeans fit into and influence Indian societies at this time? When did Europeans switch from traders to imperialists? Were parts of India being affected by the same early modern processes as other parts of the world? Did Europeans' characterization of the "other" at this time contribute to subsequent colonialism? Though these are broad questions for ongoing historical research and debate, Bembo has certainly contributed to our understanding of the processes at work.

This time period falls after the Renaissance, but just before the Enlightenment and the colonial era. Our exploration of this time period can help shape our understanding of why the world changed in the ways that it did. How did the increase of humanistic study during the Renaissance, the globalization and exploration of the early modern period, the rapid popularity of philosophy and science during the Enlightenment all lead to the violent and racist developments of the colonial age? The microhistory of the journey of Ambrosio Bembo truly contributes to the study of this question.

Further Research

I chose to focus solely on Bembo's time in India to further understand the changes and processes occurring during the "early modern" era in the subcontinent. However, there is so much more to be done with this rich account. First of all, the questions and analysis I applied to Bembo's time in India could also be applied to his time spent in the Ottoman and Safavid

[243] Sigurður Gylfi Magnusson and István Szíjártó, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice,* (Milton Park, Routledge, 2013), 4-5

empires. Bembo provides rich descriptions of his time Aleppo, Baghdad, Basra, Kong, and especially Isfahan. These cities were also experiencing increased globalization and shifting "domains of interaction".

Bembo's travels allow us to understand the modes of transportation and communication being used at this time. As a formal naval officer, Bembo is very knowledgeable about seafaring and he provides many descriptions on different boats and methods used for navigation. He also travels overland in caravans and stays in caravanserai. The emperors of the Great Muslim Empires have been praised for the infrastructure they created to support travelers, and Bembo's gives us a firsthand account of those new roads and stopovers. He also provided a detailed expense account for "fees and tolls and rental of transportation from one place to another" which could be used to study the economics and logistics of travel.[244]

The most significant tool Bembo had to help him travel was the Catholic missionary network. In almost every city, Bembo stayed in a monastery or was provided funding by the clergy to find other housing arrangements. He was able to receive and send post through the mission network, as well, and he could exchange money everywhere he went. Also, most of the clergy learned the native languages of their mission locations and could provide language lessons or interpretation. The extensive clergy network was like the 17th-century equivalent of a bank, postal service, school, and hotel combined into one. Any researcher studying the power and connections held by the Catholic missions at this time could certainly benefit from reading Bembo's account.

Furthermore, there are some Italian writers who have already done research on Bembo's account that I was not able to fully utilize due to the language barrier. Iacopo Morelli's work

[244] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 422-424

mentioned in the introduction, *Operette Ora Insieme Raccolte con Opuscoli di Antichi Scrittori*, includes over 100 pages of reflections on Bembo's journey. Morelli wrote 50 years after Bembo's account was written and could provide an interesting perspective on his work. Also, reading either the modern Italian edition with extensive footnotes[245] or the original manuscript could possibly reveal new details from knowing exactly what Bembo's word choice was. I also only recently learned that a student at the Ca'Foscari University of Venice wrote their dissertation on Ambrosio Bembo in 2011.[246] Giovanni Pedrini writes that the intent of his paper "Sguardi veneziani a Oriente: Ambrosio Bembo e il suo viaggio per parte dell'Asia" was to research Bembo's journal compared to other travel literature with the themes of cultural comparison and "otherness" in mind.[247] Reading such a document would certainly further my understanding of Bembo's account and its comparison to related accounts.

Bembo's account provides facts on many other areas of study, including but not limited to architecture, numismatics, water systems, merchandise and trade, language, slavery, food and drink, city design, ancient ruins, disease and medicine, clothing, holidays and festivals, governing structures, politics, and gender studies. An account this rich in detail can be used to study such a wide variety of topics. Furthermore, the 52 drawings by Guillaume Grelot provide an excellent visual source for many different subjects from the clothing style worn by various ethnic and religious groups, the palanquin Bembo rode in India, the architecture of palaces and mosques, a royal hunt, to panoramas of Aleppo, Baghdad, and Taq-i-Bustan.

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[245] Antonio Invernizzi, *Viaggio e Giornale Per Parte Dell'Asia di Quattro Anni Incirca Fatto da Me Ambrosio Bembo Nobile Veneto*, (Torino: CESMEO, 2005)
[246] I thank Dr. Angela Porcarelli of Emory University' Italian Department for bringing this work to my attention.
[247] Giovanni Pedrini, *Sguardi Veneziani a Oriente: Ambrosio Bembo e Il Suo Viaggio per Parte Dell'Asia*. Università Ca' Foscari Venezia Online, 12 Apr. 2011.

In Conclusion

Ambrosio Bembo was a curious man with an urge to learn about the world and expand his mind. He clearly had an educated background and recognized the value of book learning, but he especially valued the knowledge gained from experience:

> "But the conclusions reached through theories by those seated at their desks who travel only in their thoughts, which seem at first sight self-evident and necessary, are discovered false in practice. Those who personally travel to those countries discover the opposite to be true."[248]

Bembo's account is an active reminder to never blindly accept facts that are given to us, and if we want to learn about another culture, we must go and personally interact with it. At such a young age, Bembo was wise enough to understand the value of learning about other cultures, especially through travel and exploration. As we see in the quote I started with, he renounces laziness and reminds us to never stop actively exploring our world and questioning what we know. He teaches us that, in fact, there were open-minded individuals traveling the world during this time, and that *we* must be open-minded when we seek to understand them.

[248] Bembo, *Travels and Journal*, 189

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