

# The Nomadic Object

*The Challenge of World  
for Early Modern Religious Art*

*Edited by*

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## Arrivals at Distant Lands: Artful Letters and Entangled Mobilities in the Indian Ocean Littoral\*

*Dipti Khera*

Jain merchants of the port town of Diu in western India sent a painted letter-scroll to Vijaydharma Suri, an eminent Jain monk of the Tapa Gaccha sect, in 1667 [Fig. 19.1].<sup>1</sup> The scroll, a *vijnaptipatra*, meaning an invitation letter, featured the fort at Diu, an island off the western coast of Saurashtra, which is part of modern day Gujarat. The invited monk was then residing in the town of Jasol in western India, part of the modern state of Rajasthan. A surviving fragment of the complete paper scroll, measuring 477 centimetres long and 25 centimetres wide, reveals that the merchants invited him to come to Diu during the next monsoon season. The scroll painter depicts a monk dressed in white attire holding a manuscript in one hand; his other hand gestures in a manner of offering teachings to an assembly of laymen, who wear colourful turbans and costumes. We also see a Jain nun dressed in white holding an assembly for elite ladies.<sup>2</sup> Horizontal orange-coloured bands demarcate this composition of the four-fold community of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen conceptualised within Jainism. A standing woman making offerings to the nun pictorially divides the assembled Jain community into its representative

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\* I am grateful to Amit Ambalal for giving me access to study this scroll, including sending requested photographs. I thank Prem Singh Rajpurohit for transcribing the text of the letter. The workshop preceding this volume led me to address the entangled nature of the travels of people and things across long and short distances. I especially thank John Cort, Finbarr Barry Flood, Christine Göttler, Meredith Martin, Mia M. Mochizuki, and Nancy Um for their helpful comments and suggestions. For the convenience of the broader audience, I have eliminated diacritical marks.

- 1 Ambalal A., "A Vijnaptipatra Dated 1666 from Diu", in Krishna N. – Krishna M. (eds.), *The Ananda-Vana of Indian Art: Dr. Anand Krishna Felicitation Volume* (Varanasi: 2004) 312–318. The date per the Indian calendar (*Vikram Samvat*) on the verso of the scroll is 'samvat 1723 pausa sudi 3', which translates to 1667 CE (I have deducted fifty-six years as the month falls after the new year per the lunar calendar).
- 2 The use of a finer translucent cloth for the upper body of the monk and the use of a cloth painted in more opaque white for the lower figure suggests that the lower figure is a woman, but there is damage to the scroll. Such scrolls commonly show both monks and nuns preaching.



FIGURE 19.1

*Anon. (artist), Diu Vijnaptipatra showing a temple with an image of Jain deity Parshavanath, the assembly of a Jain monk and a nun preaching laymen and laywomen, Portuguese merchants, and Diu harbour (1667). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 477 × 25 cm. Ahmedabad, private collection of Amit Ambalal.*

IMAGE © AMIT AMBALAL.

four-part demographic. The painter's use of a luxurious blue and gold cushion for the monk's seat and his placement on the vertical axis above the figure of the nun indicates his elevated status. The swaying textile canopies likely denoted the decorative cloth hangings in a temple hall or the ephemeral tented architecture that created the liminal religious space of authority for the peripatetic Jain monk's gathering outside the inner temple sanctum.<sup>3</sup>

Almost all painted letter-scrolls show such future-oriented assemblies; they most likely refer to the assembly the invited Jain monk would hold upon his arrival in the city. The painter promises the recipient that the wealthy and elite merchants who invite him will attend his assembly. In the 1667 scroll, an imposing temple with an image of the Jain deity Parshvanath bounds the assembly above and a group of traders standing by blue waters populated with boats and one large Portuguese carrack, probably displaying the flag of the East India Company, bounds it below [Fig. 19.2]. We see a Portuguese general in formal attire and a native man who shields his presence with an umbrella, gesturing to the way painters depicted royal men with parasols in South Asia. The Portuguese seized Diu in 1535, and controlled a good part of the maritime trade into Gujarat from this small, strategically located port at the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay until Surat became the leading cosmopolitan port in the western Indian Ocean [Fig. 19.3].<sup>4</sup> The unnamed painter of the scroll integrates the Jain space of religiosity with the oceanic identity of Diu, while employing the horizontal dividers to mark out the boundaries of each domain.

Whether historical viewers perceived the composition as displacing the powerful pictorial position of the Jain assembly usually seen as the concluding vignette of *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls sent from inland towns is unclear. Yet the oceanic threshold appears to be the visual threshold of the textual letter that follows. From it, we sense the painter's forceful presentation of the entangled boundaries and temporalities of the Jain monastic and lay community and of the trading world of the Indian Ocean. It juxtaposes two types of travelers: Jain monks and nuns who walked across long tracts of land on foot and Portuguese merchants who sailed the ocean. Though the Portuguese had already arrived, the Jain monk belonged to an aspirational future. What kinds of epistolary messages were painters possibly framing by presenting in close

3 On cloth hangings deployed behind divine icons by Shvetambara Murtipujak Jains, see Balbir N., "Une forme d'art religieux jaïn d'aujourd'hui: Les tentures cérémonielles (chor)", *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 33 (2015) 185–243. A shorter English version of this essay is forthcoming in the felicitation volume for Dr Ratan Parimoo.

4 Subrahmanyam S., "A Note on the Rise of Surat in the Sixteenth Century", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43, 1 (2000) 31–32.



FIGURE 19.2 Anon. (artist), Diu Vijnaptipatra showing Portuguese merchants, a Portuguese carrack with small boats in the Diu harbour, and the beginning of a textual letter (1667). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 477 × 25 cm. Ahmedabad, private collection of Amit Ambalal. IMAGE © AMIT AMBALAL



FIGURE 19.3 Map representing Portugal's overseas empire 1498–1598. Reproduced from *Black J.*, *The Cambridge Illustrated Atlas of Warfare: Renaissance to Revolution, 1492–1792* (Cambridge: 1996).

MAP PREPARED BY MAP GRAPHICS LTD. IMAGE © CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS 1996.

proximity journeys so distinct in terms of purpose, time of arrival, distance covered, and mode of travels?

This essay discusses what objects like *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls, which encapsulated the idea, practice, and material culture of travels, can tell us about the aesthetic contemplation of spatial and temporal dimensions of distinct kinds of journeys in the early modern world. While marginal to the canon of art history and the material histories of travel, circulation, and religion, *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls were not just invitations. They communicated a sense of their place of origin and their citizens' piety. By analysing select vignettes from a range of scrolls, this essay draws them into a broader discussion. Beyond 'evidence' or 'diagnostics' of a point of departure and a point of arrival of the scroll—and of the travels of the monks receiving them—the scrolls convey more than a secluded world of Jain religiosity.<sup>5</sup> While scholars have remarked on the historical

5 On methods of approaching 'religious-art' objects that take into account their visuality, textuality, and ritual use, see Cort J.E., "Art, Religion, and Material Culture: Some Reflections on

significance of the vignettes of ships and overseas traders in such letter-scrolls sent from port towns, they have elided sustained discussion of this critical pictorial choice.<sup>6</sup> These images of arrival of monks and merchants at distant ports suggest how port town merchants presented their locales to broader audiences of their religious communities. They also display the pictorial use of spatio-temporal compression to shape the ontological purpose of epistolary objects.

In the past decade, scholars of Indian Ocean societies have underscored that in order to historicise lives, spaces, and exchanges in the waters and frontiers of the Indian Ocean we have to ask questions about contestation and negotiation of boundaries and territoriality based on research from local texts, objects, and architecture generated in and around ports. Drawing upon Fernand Braudel's characterisation of the Mediterranean as a cultural and cognitive space, Rila Mukherjee and Marcus Vink have questioned the assumed generic coherence of maritime regions.<sup>7</sup> They emphasise evaluating the specificity of the interactions between the oceanic and the local context within littoral spaces. Merchants, pilgrims, scholars, and messengers who travelled from ports of South Asia formed central nodes in the western Indian Ocean world and the global economy that expanded from the 1400s onwards.<sup>8</sup> The circulation of mercantile populations shaped the cross-cultural aesthetics of the architecture of ports; it also shaped the urban structure and orientation of port cities like Mocha, such that foreign merchants articulated a sense of belonging in littoral spaces through what Nancy Um traces as the merging of 'distant spatial paradigms with local architectural models'.<sup>9</sup> *Vijnaptipatra*-scrolls were

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Method", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, 3 (1996) 613–632. On what kinds of questions art made for travel can trigger and constitute, see Roberts J.L., "Copley's Cargo: Boy with a Squirrel and the Dilemma of Transit", *American Art* 21, 2 (2007) 20–41.

- 6 Historians have also used depictions of sailing ships within late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscript paintings as illustrations in discussing oceanic journeys featured in early modern Indo-Persian travelogues. These painted folios are distinct from the oceanic vignettes seen in painted letter-scrolls and will be addressed elsewhere. See Alam M. – Subrahmanyam S., *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries 1400–1800* (Cambridge: 2007) esp. 22, 63, 213.
- 7 Mukherjee, R., "The Indian Ocean in the 'New Thalassology': Review Essay Based on Sugata Bose, 'A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire'", *Archipel* 76, 1 (2008) 291–329; Vink M.P.M., "Indian Ocean Studies and the 'New Thalassology'", *Journal of Global History* 2, 1 (2007) 41–62.
- 8 Subrahmanyam S., "Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 4 (1995) 750–780.
- 9 Um N., *The Merchant Houses of Mocha: Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port* (Seattle, WA: 2009) 12.

likewise local and liminal objects that became central to the self-conceptualisation of the religious community of Jains as merchants who belonged to particular urban towns, regional bazaars, and trans-regional pilgrimage circuits. These scrolls do not represent an early modern nomadic object characterised by chance itineraries. Rather painters and poets made such scrolls at the behest of a sectarian community that imagined a broader public associated with the Jain monastic order as well as the intended recipient, a prominent Jain monk, as their audience. Scrolls sent from oceanic towns presented the travels that Jain monks would undertake from inland geographies to the port-towns on the request of influential local merchants. They also represented foreign mercantile players at the threshold of the littoral space in relation to regional merchants.

Objects have been emphatically hailed as the real ‘globetrotters’ of the early modern world.<sup>10</sup> Art historians have integrated the wear and tear of travelling objects, the iconoclastic and additive practices performed upon objects, and the translations and mistranslations by itinerant makers and audiences to ask questions of value, use, and the impact of mobility. In both Asia and Europe, the period between ca. 1500 and 1800 was characterised by long-distance travel and new geographical discoveries; expanding mercantile networks and imperial territories; and the mobility of people and things and associated cross-cultural encounters. The period was global at an unprecedented scale.<sup>11</sup> Yet, shorter-distance travel, the flip side of global, circulatory practices in the early modern world, also shaped local spaces and practices, and scholarship has neglected the relevant religious objects that shaped religious and non-religious networks alike. Distance does not necessarily determine a journey’s significance. We rarely discuss the historical entanglements of distinct scales and modes of mobility, and usually privilege a global itinerary as far more significant.<sup>12</sup> A study of the urban layout and form of the merchant houses of

10 For essays on biographies of objects that describe their crossing of geographical and artistic boundaries and a bibliography of the rapidly expanding scholarship in this area, see essays and introduction in Martin M. – Bleichmar D. (eds.), *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World*, Special Issue of *Art History* 38, 4 (2015).

11 Subrahmanyam S., “Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia”, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 3 (1997) 735–762; Avcioğlu N. – Flood F.B., “Introduction”, in Flood F.B. – Avcioğlu N. (eds.), *Globalizing Cultures: Art and Mobility in the Eighteenth Century*, *Ars Orientalis* 39 (Washington, DC: 2011) 7–38.

12 Chowdhury Z., “An Imperial Mughal Tent and Mobile Sovereignty in Eighteenth-Century Jodhpur”, *Art History* 38, 4 (1 September, 2015) 668–681. Including this essay on shorter

Mocha shows how local and distant networks collided in this port city: late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Ottoman travellers upon arriving from faraway inland sites sought out prominent religious sites and vibrant retail markets and Dutchmen travelling from overseas sites experienced Mocha through the world of maritime and international wholesale trade.<sup>13</sup> Similarly painted letters travelled regional networks of Jain establishments and bazaars and these objects engaged the people and things of global mercantilism and long-distance mobility. Lay men and women in particular undertook pilgrimages along with monks and nuns as part of long, multi-month journeys to temples that were hundreds of miles away as well as short, one-day visits to nearby places.<sup>14</sup>

Pictorial juxtapositions of inland and oceanic mobility seen in painted letter-scrolls invite us to write, in George Kubler's words, a 'history of things' that 'reunite[s] objects and ideas under the rubric of visual forms' to reveal a 'shape of time' in the early modern Indian Ocean littoral.<sup>15</sup> For the original recipients, such scrolls relayed a time of their upcoming journeys and the ambition to create a sectarian community around their presence in a new place. For their senders, such letters constituted their religious affiliations and mercantile strongholds. *Vijnaptipatra*-scrolls forcefully embody the capacity to address us individually across time. The material unfurling of painted letter-scrolls triggers aesthetic and historiographical responses, creates occasions for objects to make 'visual time', and encourages its audiences to imagine anew the time and space of travels and the euphoria of completed journeys and arrivals at distant lands.<sup>16</sup> First let us then understand painted letter-scrolls as a genre of objects that aimed to initiate travels. As circulating objects that depicted the intention of travelling and an aspirational temporality, these were also objects that typically itinerant people, from messengers to merchants and monks, handled.

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travels of a tent in a volume that explores objects and mobility across regions at a more global scale marked an important historiographic shift.

- 13 Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha Trade*, esp. "The Urban Form and Orientation of Mocha".
- 14 Cort J.E., "Twelve Chapters from the Guidebook to Various Pilgrimage Places, the Vividhatirthakalpa of Jinaprabhasuri", in Granoff P.E. (ed.), *The Clever Adulteress and Other Stories: A Treasury of Jain Literature* (Oakville, ON – New York, NY: 1990) 289.
- 15 Kubler G., *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: 1962) 8.
- 16 Moxey K., *Visual Time: The Image in History* (Durham, NC: 2013).

### *Vijnaptipatra*: A Travelling Object that Invited Travel

The *vijnaptipatra* was made in order to travel. Such letter-scrolls were addressed to monks who led extremely mobile lives. The custom of sending them among the Shvetambara Jains owes its origin to the idea of asking for traditional forgiveness for sins and performing pious deeds in the future—in this case, pilgrimages to the immobile sacred sites and mobile holy places eminent monks created by their presence.<sup>17</sup> By sending such scrolls, prominent merchants of the local Jain community hoped to entice pontiffs to spend the upcoming monsoon season (*chaumasa*) in their town, for the pontiff's acceptance of the travel invitation would bring prestige to both the place and its citizens. As quintessential travelling objects, letters and epistles are as material as they are textual, and in the case of a painted *vijnaptipatra*, the letter was also quintessentially visual.<sup>18</sup> Following the iconographic rendition of symbols associated with auspiciousness and prosperity within the religious canon, for example as in the scrolls sent from the Marwari town of Sirohi, painters paid careful attention to composing vignettes representing the town's courtly spaces alongside the local bazaars and assemblies held by Jain monks that included lay members of the community [Fig. 19.4].

A *vijnaptipatra* pictorially represents the kinds of painting and scribal practices that flourished outside of early modern court workshops. While invitation letters dating from the fourteenth through the seventeenth century survive, the *vijnaptipatra*—which always consisted of a long, rolled painted scroll ending with a letter—became particularly popular in the eighteenth and

17 Shvetambara monks, as mendicants on a lifelong pilgrimage, were expected to be mobile for eight months of the year. See Cort, "Twelve Chapters from the Guidebook to Various Pilgrimage Places" 288–289. *Vijnaptipatra*-scrolls were largely sent by Shvetambara Jains, who owe religious alliances to 'white-clad' ascetics, unlike the other Jain sect Digambara, whose members follow 'sky-clad', or naked, ascetics. On epistolary aspects of letters, see Śastri H., *Ancient Vijnaptipatras* (Baroda: 1942). For an overview of the genre, see Jain S. "Inviting the Lords: *Vigyaptipatras* as a Source of Medieval Indian History", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Delhi: 2012) 264–275.

18 For a comparative conceptualisation of Persianate letters in early modern Eurasia as a critical site of circulation, including the mediation of future-oriented desires, see Sood G.D.S., "'Correspondence Is Equal to Half a Meeting': The Composition and Comprehension of Letters in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Eurasia", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, 2/3 (2007) 172–214; Sood G.D.S., "Circulation and Exchange in Islamicate Eurasia: A Regional Approach to the Early Modern World", *Past & Present* 212, 1 (2011) 113–162.



nineteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> These scrolls cited images from an established canon without necessarily particularising pictorial references to represent sites of a specific place. However, painters generally employed regional painting styles. The Agra *vijnaptipatra* (1610) serves as an early example of a *vijnaptipatra* that employed the pictorial idiom of a *jharoka* portrait—a window or a pavilion in an assembly hall where the court's constituents saw the Mughal emperor—emergent in Mughal imperial painting [Fig. 19.5].<sup>20</sup> Even a cursory examination of a series of *vijnaptipatra* sent in 1742, 1774, 1795, and 1830 from Udaipur demonstrates how artists adapted pictorial vignettes from horizontal court paintings to fit the vertical format of the scroll, carefully citing prevalent artistic styles and contemporary portraits of Udaipur rulers.<sup>21</sup> Representation of palatial architecture was a central pictorial concern in Udaipur court painting, so it is not surprising that local artists experimented with modes of depicting their city within the *vijnaptipatra*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Jain invitation letters are important

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- 19 For lists of *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls largely spread across several private libraries associated with Jain religious institutions in India, see Śastri, *Ancient Vijñaptipatras*; Balbir N., *Catalogue of the Jain Manuscripts of the British Library Including the Holdings of the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: 2006); Andhare S.K., "Jain Monumental Painting", in Pal P. (ed.), *The Peaceful Liberators: Jain Art from India* (New York, NY – Los Angeles, CA: 1994) 76–87; Shah U.P., *More Documents of Jaina Paintings and Gujarati Paintings of Sixteenth and Later Centuries* (Ahmedabad: 1976); Chandra M. – Shah U.P., *New Documents of Jaina Painting* (Bombay: 1975); Shah U.P. (ed.), *Treasures of Jaina Bhaṇḍāras*, L.D. Series 69 (Ahmedabad: 1978); Andhare S.K. – Bhojak L., *Jain Vastropas: Jain Paintings on Cloth and Paper* (Ahmedabad: 2015) 134–153. Also, the textual letters of various *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls have been recently republished in a series of special issues of the Gujarati Jain magazine *Anusandhān*: no. 60 (2013); no. 61 (2013); no. 64 (2014); no. 65 (2014).
  - 20 Chandra P., "Ustād Sālīvāhana and the Development of Popular Mughal Style", *Lalitkalā* 8 (1960) 27–46. The Agra *vijnaptipatra* (1610) depicts the Mughal emperor Jahangir's decree (*farmana*)—issued at the request of important Jain monks—which sought to forbid the killing of animals during a period of twelve holy days on the Jain calendar (*paryushana*).
  - 21 Khera D., "Marginal, Mobile, Multilayered: Painted Invitation Letters as Bazaar Objects in Early Modern India", *Journal* 18 1 (2016) <http://www.journal18.org/527> (accessed: 20.11.2016).
  - 22 Udaipur's court painters shifted to larger-scale portrayals of courtly settings in the early eighteenth century. For a discussion on such affective place-centric visions, see Khera D., *Picturing India's "Land of Kings" Between the Mughal and British Empires: Topographical Imaginings of Udaipur and Its Environs*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University: 2013).



FIGURE 19.5 *Salivahana, Agra Vijnaptipatra with the detail of Emperor Jahangir's issuing of a proclamation at the request of Jain monks (1610). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 284.7 × 32.2 cm. Ahmedabad, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum (inv. no. LD11.542).*

IMAGE © LALBHAIDALPATBHAIMUSEUM, AHMEDABAD.

minor artefacts that played a central intermediary role in circulating painted subjects, forms, and tropes beyond courtly and imperial circles.<sup>23</sup>

One way to understand such travelling letter-scrolls is to consider the figures of the merchants, the monks, and the messengers who collected the scrolls from the merchants and delivered them to the monks. *Vijnaptipatra* like the Sirohi scroll (1761) depict the messenger receiving a dated scroll, which suggests an artistic consciousness of a painted invitation letter's connectedness to travels and to early modern bazaars [Fig. 19.4]. In the Agra scroll (1610) prominent monks themselves, accompanied by the merchants, serve as the messengers and carry the scroll object in their hands and on their heads. Messengers enabled the 'circulatory regime' of documents and knowledge in precolonial India.<sup>24</sup> Given the personalised nature of the transactions, these couriers were likely aware of the significance and content of the objects and letters they were carrying.<sup>25</sup>

In all surviving examples of *vijnaptipatra* we see Jain monks holding assemblies attended by a group of lay men and women; painters most often placed this vignette in the conclusion of the pictorial part of the letter, as in the Agra *vijnaptipatra* (1610) [Fig. 19.6]. The textual letter in most scrolls began at the boundary of the monk's assembly, which the painter often composed as the last vignette. The semantic charge of the scribe's words seems enhanced by their formal alignment with the space of the monk's assembly where the invitation letter was expected to do its work. While in the Agra scroll, the depicted assembly presented the space and time where the letter was received; in most other painted letters the monk's future assembly signaled how the invitation would be effective. A diverse and large community of monks, nuns, and lay people travelled together on Jain pilgrimages;<sup>26</sup> it is quite possible that this

23 On the usefulness of concurrent 'minor traditions' for studying how broader audiences acquired their literary tastes in early modern India, see Orsini F., "Introduction", in Orsini F. (ed.), *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (New Delhi: 2010) 1–20, at 11.

24 Bayly C., *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: 2000).

25 Sood G.D.S., "The Informational Fabric of Eighteenth-Century India and the Middle East: Couriers, Intermediaries and Postal Communication", *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 5 (2009) 1085–1116.

26 Granoff P.E. – Shinohara K. (eds.), *Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions* (Vancouver: 2003).



FIGURE 19.6 *Salivahana*, Agra Vijnaptipatra with the detail of the receipt of the scroll by Jain Monk Vijaysena Suri (1610). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper; 284.7 × 32.2 cm. Ahmedabad, Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum (inv. no. LD11.542).

IMAGE © LALBHAIDALPATBHAIMUSEUM, AHMEDABAD.

community or several of its prominent members, apart from the invited monk, were able to see this idealised pictorial image of the depicted city.<sup>27</sup>

Now let us turn to the merchants who invited the monks and handed the scroll to the messengers. *Vijnaptipatra*-scrolls constituted key historical evidence that demonstrates several merchants of the local Jain community played key roles as negotiators and financiers within the circles of the Mughals, regional kings of northern and western India, and the various East India trading companies.<sup>28</sup> The painter Salivahana emphasised the historicity of the Agra *vijnaptipatra* (1610) by portraying and labelling the presence of diverse important figures from Jain merchants to Jain monks, Mughal imperial officers and European ambassadors in the court and city of Agra [Fig. 19.5]. The collective mercantile patronage and annual circulation of several invitations and the prominent depiction of merchants in the letter itself prompts us to consider how the site of the bazaar shaped and was in turn shaped by these objects.<sup>29</sup> The scroll artist of the 72-foot long Udaipur *vijnaptipatra* (1830) departed from the typical metaphorical reference to a bazaar by reinforcing the specificity of each trade and individual [Fig. 19.7]. He created repeating vignettes of types of merchants and craftsmen from textile traders and moneylenders to the makers of arms, jewellery, and utensils. A procession of Udaipur's reigning king Jawan Singh and British political agent Alexander Cobbe, who was gaining greater control of the regional court's political authority, proceeded towards the anticipated assembly of the invited Jain monk Jinharsha Suri. This letter-scroll was sent in the month of October, soon after the Udaipur court was in crisis,

27 It is difficult to ascertain whether the practice of showing the scroll wherein the 'art' object functioned as a 'cultural' prop was followed in the case of Jain painted invitation letters, as it did in other communities. See Jain J., *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art* (Mumbai: 1998); Ghosh P., "Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, 3 (2003) 835–871.

28 On the critical role of Jain monks as intellectual interlocutors and religious advisors for Mughal emperors, see Truschke A., *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, NY: 2016); Cort J.E., "Making It Vernacular in Agra: The Practice of Translation by Seventeenth-Century Jains", in Orsini F. – Schofield K.B. (eds.), *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India* (Cambridge: 2015) 61–106; Jain S. "Piety, Laity and Royalty: Jains under the Mughals in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century", *Indian Historical Review* 40, 1 (2013) 67–90. The remarkable autobiography of Jain poet, philosopher, and merchant Banarasidas, completed in 1641, reveals the role of Jain merchants as important traders of precious jewels, textiles, grains, indigo, and other goods. See Banārasīdāsa – Chowdhury R., *Ardhakathanak (A Half Story)* (New Delhi: 2009).

29 Khera, "Marginal, Mobile, Multilayered".



FIGURE 19.7 *Partial View and Detail of Anon. (artist), Udaipur Vijnaptipatra showing shops with varied crafts and trades in the bazaar and a procession of the Udaipur king Jawan Singh and British Agent Alexander Cobbe proceeding towards the invited Jain monk's assembly (1830). Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper, 2194.6 × 27.9 cm. Bikaner, Agarchand Jain Granthalya.*  
IMAGE © DIPTI KHERA; PHOTO: JONAS SPINOY.

with the British abolishing its status as an independent province within the emergent colonial regime of the company. Devout mercantile patrons likely saw the arriving monk as fulfilling the diplomatic aim of creating a sphere of authority separate from the British East India Company, which was gaining ground in the city.

Thus Jain mercantile collectives who wished to embed themselves in trans-regional religious networks and who closely tracked the changing political-mercantile landscape of their city commissioned *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls.<sup>30</sup> The emergence of new sovereignties, the rise of East India companies, and the expansion of pan-Indian and pan-Eurasian mercantile networks contributed to the increased mobility of people and objects in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the array of scrolls known today, it seems plausible that these changes also led to an explosion in the commissioning of elaborate painted letters. These epistolary objects serve as an effective material reminder that Jain merchants and mendicants were a mobile group, always part of powerful trans-regional networks even when they were localised in towns and cities across South Asia and beyond. Both collaborated for mutually reinforcing spiritual and material gains.<sup>31</sup>

### Circulations at Indian Ocean Ports

By establishing Indian merchant colonies, Gujaratis from Surat and Diu dominated trade in the ports of the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea and the African coast of the Red Sea, especially in Aden and Mocha in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, their trading networks operated from the ports of Cambay, Diu, Surat, and Chaul in Gujarat. The Mughals and the Portuguese, even before the arrival of the Dutch and British, were powerful

30 Increasing rounds of pilgrimages, especially to new nineteenth-century temples in Shatrunjaya, an important religious site for the Jains, coincided with a similar rise in fortunes of the Jain mercantile community in Bombay and Ahmedabad. See Ku H., "Representations of Ownership: The Nineteenth-Century Painted Maps of Shatrunjaya, Gujarat", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, 1 (2014) 3–21.

31 Mehta M. "Hindu World-View and Gujarati Businessmen" and "Social Base of Jain Entrepreneurs in the 17th Century: Shantidas Zaveri of Ahmedabad", in Mehta M., *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective—With Special Reference to Shroffs of Gujarat: 17th to 19th Centuries* (Delhi: 1991).

32 Markovits C., *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge – New York, NY: 2000) 12.

players in the export of textiles and spices in these port towns.<sup>33</sup> Gujarat's ports also enabled Indian Muslims to make devotional, political, and intellectual exchanges with the wider Muslim world.<sup>34</sup> Officials of the Mughal Empire and the East India Company found themselves constantly negotiating with local groups, including powerful merchants who often controlled the political economy of the inland regions and ports, rather than regional kings.<sup>35</sup> The profile of port officials operating in towns of the western Indian Ocean were complex; they combined intermediary roles that crossed mercantile, political, intellectual, religious, and collecting arenas.<sup>36</sup>

The expansion of maritime avenues in the Gujarat region of the western Indian Ocean shaped the corpus of *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls sent from port towns in the Cambay area, along with the above-discussed scroll sent from Diu, and India's leading port city Surat. Nalini Balbir notes that the textual letter and painted letter of the *vijnaptipatra* sent in 1795 from Surat praised different aspects of the city [Fig. 19.8].<sup>37</sup> The letter emphasised Surat's location in the Gujarat region, citing other noteworthy towns and flowing rivers in the region. The author of the letter also noted the names of Jinās, the spiritual victors in Jainism, to whom the temples of the region were dedicated and included a list of non-Jain religious sites. The painter by contrast highlights Surat's economic importance. Following the sprawling vignette of the flourishing bazaars, he concluded the painted letter with depictions of the procession of the British East India Company agent John Griffith, the city's fort with both the British

- 33 Subrahmanyam, "A Note on the Rise of Surat in the Sixteenth Century". For a brief summary on Diu and its place as a port city compared to Surat and Cambay, see Chaudhuri K.N., "Surat Revisited: A Tribute to Ashin Das Gupta", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43, 1 (2000) 18–22.
- 34 Subramanian L., "Capital and Crowd in a Declining Asian Port City: The Anglo-Bania Order and the Surat Riots of 1795", *Modern Asian Studies* 19, 2 (1985) 222. A mid-eighteenth century Gujarati map represents the western Indian Ocean coastline and how Gujarati mapmakers combined European, Islamicate, and local cartographic knowledge. See Sheikh S. "A Gujarati Map and Pilot Book of the Indian Ocean, c. 1750", *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography* 61, 1 (2009) 67–83.
- 35 Nadri G.A., *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat: The Dynamics of Its Political Economy, 1750–1800*, TANAP Monographs on the History of the Asian-European Interaction 11 (Leiden – Boston, MA: 2009) esp. "Introduction".
- 36 Flores J., "The Sea and the World of the Mutasaddi: A Profile of Port Officials from Mughal Gujarat (c. 1600–1650)", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21, 1 (2011) 55–71.
- 37 Balbir N., "Invitation Letter to a Jain Monk (Vijñaptipatra)", in Bennett J. (ed.), *Realms of Wonder: Jain, Hindu and Islamic Art of India, Including Nepal and Pakistan* (Adelaide: 2013) 34–40. A fragmentary painted letter-scroll, likely depicting the English factory established in Surat in 1613, was sent from the city in the early seventeenth century. See Śastri, *Ancient Vijñaptipatras* 42–43.



FIGURE 19.8

Anon. (artist), *Invitation letter to a Jain monk (Vijnaptipatra)* with the detail of a Surat fort and a British East Indies Company ship (1795). Ink and opaque watercolour on paper, 955 × 26 cm. Ahmedabad, Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation, Gift of Michael Abbott AO QC through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2013, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program (inv. no. 20133A54).

IMAGE © ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, ADELAIDE.

flag and the regional king's, and a docked British trading vessel. Balbir views these pictorial choices as acknowledgements of Surat's famous 'Anglo-Bania' alliance, bonds established in the second half of the eighteenth century which benefited British, Jain, and Hindu traders alike.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the 1795 riots, see Subramanian, "Capital and Crowd in a Declining Asian Port City".

An Indian Oceanic perspective has widely recognised how mercantile travel and pilgrimage to Islamic lands were intertwined within early modern Islamicate Eurasia. But, researchers have not accounted for travels initiated by other religious groups of port towns. The Anglo-Bania alliance had given way to conflict, and Surat experienced riots in 1795, spurred in part by the British disruption of trading vessels vital to Muslim communities for the annual Hajj pilgrimage. The riots may have been a reason for the sending of the *vijnaptipatra* in 1795, as the Jain community might have sought to assert their religious presence in Surat. The invited monk and lay community that travelled with him would cast a renewed Jain presence in the city, bringing new pilgrims and devotees to the urban space. This shift in demographics and the public display of piety would also assert the Jain mercantile presence to all the city's residents—including the British. Thus *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls were indeed letters that constituted personal homage and invitations to a single monk, but they were equally public letters that carried proclamations of a time yet to come.

Painters of invitation scrolls sent from Indian Ocean port towns took a special interest in picturing the emergent European power brokers in the city, often in close pictorial proximity to their trading vessels in the Indian Ocean harbours. They clearly assumed that powerful merchants were of interest in addition to local merchants of early modern bazaars with temples, traders, monastic communities, regional kings, and lay men and women. *Vijnaptipatra*-scrolls encapsulated a tradition that from its very inception inspired its makers to adapt artfully a variety of genres and deliberate the phenomenological experience of travels. The earliest fourteenth-century textual invitation-scrolls were written as literary works that interpreted classical Sanskrit poetry that imagined clouds as messengers travelling between lovers.<sup>39</sup> Poets described these clouds' pleasure in gazing at new urban routes, towns, and forested landscapes. Not only Jain merchants, but also messengers who carried scrolls or Jain monks and laity who travelled upon receiving invitations, like the messenger clouds who featured in the early invitations, experienced the pleasure and pain of travelling through a variety of urban and natural landscapes that transcended the boundaries of political states. Painters, poets, and scribes continued to innovate painted letters. How they adapted letter-scrolls to local demands, especially in response to a spatial experience and imaginary as powerful as the western Indian Ocean littoral space, thus demands further attention.<sup>40</sup>

39 Śastri, *Ancient Vijnaptipatras* 6–7.

40 On the lack of a critical discussion on the distinctions between representations of courts and ports, see Beverley E., "Of Court and Port: Regimes of Diversity in Early Modern South Asian Cities", Ifriqiyya Faculty Colloquium Columbia University, 3 October 2013.

### Traders at the Port—Traders at the Temple: Diu, ca. 1666

Painted letters opened with the theme of auspiciousness. Painters used standardised symbolic icons (*ashtamangala*) to represent the water-pitcher, cow, fire, gold, sun, lion, bull, elephant, and flag, all of which signified good luck.<sup>41</sup> Narrative icons associated with the fourteen dreams of Queen Trishala, the mother of the twenty-fourth victorious Jina Mahavira, who saw these dreams when the soul of the future enlightened one entered her womb, were also standardised [Fig. 19.9].<sup>42</sup> Iconic representations of water included the planimetric view of a stepped square-shaped water body or lake with blooming lotus flowers, images of decorated vases and pots, and a pair of fish drawn against a mesh of circular quadrants that denoted the texture of the ocean. The painters of scrolls sent from Diu and Surat depicted all three water icons and additionally included an icon of a boat sailing in blue waters—a four-masted, sailing Portuguese carrack in the Diu scroll and a sailing ship with two British seafarers in the Surat scroll [Figs. 19.9 and 19.10]. The icon of ships and sailors suggests the source of the scrolls as a port town. We identify this icon on the basis of the larger vignettes of the trading vessels and the ocean near the end of the scrolls.

Painters individualised the scrolls as well. For example, the Diu *vijnaptipatra* pictured the Portuguese presence on the western coast in distinct ways [Fig. 19.2]. Firstly, instead of privileging the mimetic rendition of the fort constructed by the Portuguese in 1535, the scroll painter painted a horizontal, buff-coloured slender band decorated with cannons to denote the wall of the Portuguese-controlled fort.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, two men with hats and tall rifles guard

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To understand how Gujarat as a region was shaped by its cosmopolitan coastline and pastoral hinterland especially in the medieval period, see Sheikh S., *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat 1200–1500* (New Delhi: 2010).

41 Śastri, *Ancient Vijnaptipatras* 15–16.

42 Even today during the installation of divine images at temples by Shvetambara Jains in the period of nine holy days, the congregation reenacts with great festivity the seeing of the dreams by the mother of every Jina when he enters the womb. See Cort J., *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India* (New York, NY: 2001) 8.

43 I have not yet found further information on historical Jain temples in Diu. On the construction of the fort at Diu, especially in relation to the changing political-mercantile landscape in Surat, see Subrahmanyam, “A Note on the Rise of Surat in the Sixteenth Century” 25. On the architectural history of Diu fort, see Shokoohy M. – Shokoohy N.H., “The Portuguese Fort of Diu”, *South Asian Studies* 19 (2003) 169–203 and Grancho N., “Diu (India) Historical Background and Urbanism”, in Mattoso J. (ed.), *Portuguese Heritage around the World: Architecture and Urbanism* (Lisbon: 2010) 112–125.



FIGURE 19.9

*Anon. (artist), Diu Vijnaptipatra showing auspicious icons, including a sailing Portuguese carrack painted at the beginning of the letter-scroll (1666). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 477 × 25 cm. Ahmedabad, private collection of Amit Ambalal.*

IMAGE © AMIT AMBALAL.



FIGURE 19.10 Anon. (artist), *Invitation letter to a Jain monk (Vijnaptipatra)* with the detail of a sailing ship with British East Indies Company sailors painted along with the standard auspicious icons (1795). Ink and opaque watercolour on paper, 955 × 26 cm. Ahmedabad, Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation, Gift of Michael Abbott AO QC through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2013. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program (inv. no. 20133A54). IMAGE © ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, ADELAIDE.

a Portuguese general who stands upon the fort wall. While the town belonged to the Portuguese, it was also integrally connected to the region of Gujarat and its local kings and chiefs.<sup>44</sup> The French traveller Jean de Thevenot, who arrived in Diu on 10 January 1666, suggests that the Portuguese did not control the entire town but commanded control over the castles by the ocean. The following pictorial register matches the monumentality of the general's body and his sideways gaze with the implied expanse of the ocean; the painter filled up the narrow strip of blue water with one large Portuguese trading vessel and four smaller, simpler boats. Thirdly, while the Portuguese flag flies high, the triangular sails of the carrack are folded in, in sharp contrast to the opened cloth of the sails stretched along the mast, which the painter emphasised in the depiction of the ship as an auspicious icon at the beginning of the scroll. The sailing ship has now docked in the Diu port. Its dominance in the oceanic waters seems uncontested.

Thresholds and the associated entanglement of distinct mobilities and territorialities distinguish the painter's visualisation of the Jain temple and the four-part Jain monk's assembly and of the Portuguese-controlled fortified space and oceanic frontiers in Diu. Partly, the pictorial format of the genre serves this reinforcement of the religious, fortified, and oceanic spaces. The painter emphasised horizontal registers by using orange-coloured outlines as boundaries, showcasing the distinct domains of the Jains and of the Portuguese traders in the vertical format of a letter-scroll. And, partly, the painter's alignment of the threshold of the ocean and the harbour with the visual threshold that divided the painted letter and the textual letter distinguishes the horizontal registers. Prita Meier argues that the material mediation of the threshold of a harbour by means of coastal architecture in the port cities of the Swahili coast expressed both the relations between a port city and other cultures and how people in these port cities interacted with such hybrid material landscapes.<sup>45</sup> Hannah Baader and Gerhard Wolf's analysis of a late twelfth-century miniature depicting the citizens of Palermo mourning the death of William II conceptualises the artists' rendering as the presentation of a 'sea to shore perspective'.<sup>46</sup> This

44 Thévenot Jean de, *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant in Three Parts, Viz. into I. Turkey, II. Persia, III. the East-Indies* (London, H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough: 1687) Part III, 32–33.

45 Meier P., *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington, IN: 2016) esp. "Introduction".

46 Baader H. – Wolf G., "A Sea-to-Shore Perspective: Littoral and Liminal Spaces of the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 56, 1 (2014) 2–15.

picture of the Mediterranean port city underscored three points. First, a multiethnic and multireligious society inhabited the littoral space. Second, the harbour was liminal, not always open to oceanic circulation. Third, a port city could be approached from the shore and from the sea. The Diu *vijnaptipatra* commissioned by local merchants presents a similar perspective on the Indian Ocean port town as a liminal space. The scroll painter contrasted the transformation the Portuguese traders brought from the sea with what the Jain monk would bring from inland upon arrival in Diu the following year.

The vignette of water and ships in the Diu *vijnaptipatra*, like in all other painted letter-scrolls sent from port towns, locates the harbour at the conclusion of the painted part of the scroll. This pictorial choice marks the visual end of the urban space of Diu and the boundary of peninsular land on the oceanic frontier, the point of arrival and departure from the port. The *vijnaptipatra* thus encapsulates the anticipated arrival of the invited Jain monk in the port town of Diu and of regional traders to the monk's assembly as much as it imagines the merchants who had already arrived at the harbour. The painted letter functioned more than an invitation. It also invited the Jain monk to imagine the community of lay men and women, merchants and pilgrims, that he will command in the coming year, in the company of the other powerful groups and foreign traders who were equally present among the Jain citizens of the port-town awaiting his arrival. It is only right then to see the swaying flag of the Portuguese atop the carrack and the size of the ship matched by the swaying orange flags atop the temple roof and green-coloured icon of the Jina.

In addition, the scroll-painter employed pictorial conventions of frontal and profile views skilfully, which accentuate the pictorial effect of juxtaposition of space of the Jain temple and assembly and the Diu fort and coastline. As in other scrolls, the Jain monk and nun and their lay audiences are depicted as facing each other in profile. This convention privileges the act of preaching and the community's willingness to listen. In contrast to the Jain merchants, monks and native parasol bearers, the painter depicted the body of the Portuguese men in a full frontal view, tilting their faces and orienting their eyes to offer a downward, sideways glance of the three-quarter face. Eighteenth-century artists working in the Rajasthani courts of Kota, Udaipur, and Bikaner, who painted several portraits of European men and women, exemplify a sustained interest in a *firangi* (foreigner) theme modelled after depictions of Dutch men and women shown in a three-quarter face.<sup>47</sup> Artists often employed 'style juxtapositions' of the frontal face and profile face, and the associated realistic

47 Topsfield A., "Ketelaar's Embassy and the Farangi Theme in the Art of Udaipur", *Oriental Art* 30, 4 (1984) 350–367.

and iconic rendering of the portrait, to make a point about idealised beauty and the historical reception of European grotesque as a genre.<sup>48</sup> However, the juxtaposition of frontal and profile postures in the Diu *vijnaptipatra* is suggestive more of a mark of difference, foreign and regional. The frontal posture connects the Portuguese traders with the harbour, although we cannot altogether ascertain whether it was their identity as foreign traders or as trading men who travelled over the sea, or both, connected integrally to littoral spaces, that was at stake for the painters and patrons.

To complement my analysis of the pictorial, let us turn briefly to the textual letter [Fig. 19.11]. The unnamed poet framed precisely the regions the monk was invited to travel—from Jasol in Marwar to Diu in Saurashtra. The letter opens with devotional hymns in Sanskrit that praise the various Jinas, similar to introductory verses in other *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls. A set of verses, mostly in the form of short rhyming couplets in the *doha* meter, in the regional vernacular, follow. Marwari combines with Gujarati, suggesting the mixed language of the Jain merchants of Saurashtra. Seven verses praise the region of Marwar country (*maru desh*), for its sacred Jain temples, pilgrimage sites (*tirtha*), and piety of its peoples and ruling kings. This section concludes by noting that Marwar is the most wondrous region in the peninsular Indian subcontinent (*jambudvip*). The poet telescopes his gaze from Marwar onto the town of Jasol where the invited monk was currently residing. He praises the merchants and variety of trades, the towering temples, and the devoted people. He concludes this urban description by saying that Jasol was like the abode of the gods (*svargalok*).

Poetry praising the invited monk shifts the focus of the letter from urban panegyrics to the virtues of the guru Vijaydharma Suri. The poet's verses for the invited guru composed in between the topographical verses that serve as bookends seeks to transport Vijaydharma Suri from the region of Marwar to the region of Saurashtra. The number of couplets devoted to Marwar and Jasol are only marginally fewer than the ones praising the country of Saurashtra (*sorat desh*) and the port of Diu (*div bandar*). These couplets also praise urban places, temples, and citizens. Perhaps what stands apart in the two urban descriptions is the poet's focus, from the very first verse on Saurashtra, on the wealth of the region. Of the country of Saurashtra, among other features, the letter's author tells us about the pleasure and wealth this region brings to its beautiful citizens; its wonderful forests and gardens, flora and fauna; and its pilgrimage sites that bring salvation to many pilgrims. He certainly tells us that many ships with valuable gems and goods (*ratan*) arrive in this region along

48 Aitken M.E., *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven, CT: 2010) 78–79.



FIGURE 19.11 Anon. (scribe), Diu Vijnaptipatra showing the end of the textual letter (1666). Opaque watercolour and ink on paper, 477 × 25 cm. Ahmedabad, private collection of Amit Ambalal.  
IMAGE © AMIT AMBALAL.

with foreigners and intelligent traders.<sup>49</sup> The concluding fifteenth couplet on Saurashtra says many small and big towns in this country exist and that *div bandar*, the port town of Diu, is prosperous (*susamridha*) both in its wealth (*daulat*) and its good deeds or charity (*sudaan*). The poet opens the poetry about Diu by saying that it has the best harbour for the ships to dock. He follows with praise for the port town's tall temples and religious laity. The letter writer deemed it important to emphasise the wealth of the citizens of Diu and their righteousness in the last verse of this section to induce the monk to come.

The painted letter and textual letter thus supplemented the invitation rather than serving to make any direct connections to entice the recipient to travel. The painter sought to bring the trans-regional geography of the Indian Oceanic travellers and itinerant Jain monks into play by juxtaposing a view of the temple and assembly with the oceanic vignette of ships and Portuguese traders. The poet expressed a keenness to evoke a trans-regional geography of the piety of Jain communities that connected ports to regions further north-west. Especially to a traveller walking from Marwar, a hot and arid desert landscape that is described by its name as the 'land of death', the prospect of arriving at oceanic frontiers would have been appealing.<sup>50</sup>

The format of the scroll acutely affects the pictorial play between repetition and signification of the motif of the carrack, and between text and image. In all likelihood artists began by painting the iconographic symbols central to Jainism. The placement of the postal addresses scribbled on the verso of select scrolls provides critical evidence that recipients would have viewed the letter in reverse sequence as they unfurled it.<sup>51</sup> The material nature of scrolls often demands their viewer go forwards and backwards, to pause and examine details, which encourages us to check and re-check them, and only then to view the scroll in its entirety. Thus, approached from either end, the inclusion of a sailing ship in the iconic part of the letter and the descriptive part of the letter reinforces not only the oceanic identity of *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls sent from port

49 *Ratan* may refer to the riches of gems, pearls, and precious stones specific to the economy of the region, but also to other valuable goods that arrived on these shores. The seventeenth-century merchants of Gujarat and the port towns of Cambay, Surat, and Diu were known for their knowledge and trade of jewels. For an overview based on European and Mughal accounts, see Mehta, *Indian Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Historical Perspective* 25, 91–114.

50 On how wider communities including Jains represented early modern Marwar and its ecology, see Sahai N.P., *Politics of Patronage and Protest: The State, Society, and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan* (New Delhi: 2006).

51 For example, the Udaipur *vijnaptipatra* (1830) shows the address of the recipient. Only the date is noted on the verso of the Diu *vijnaptipatra* (1667).

towns, but also the use of oceanic vignettes to reinforce both the auspiciousness and the economic prosperity a port brought to a place.

### Entangled Objects, Spaces, and Scales of Early Modern Mobility

For scholars of the global early modern period, a *vijnaptipatra* does not offer a desirable social biography. It provides no sense of the associated accruing of meaning that we attach to an object passing through multiple hands across cross-continental geographical boundaries.<sup>52</sup> Nor do these scrolls present a pictorial field rich in recognisable cross-cultural hybridity of the sort other European-Indian artistic encounters in Mughal India represent.<sup>53</sup> The presence of European traders at the port does not necessarily make these objects hybrid, as we cannot know how historical makers and patrons interpreted the inclusion of such vignettes.<sup>54</sup> Seventeenth-century Jain merchants and painters likely saw Portuguese traders as integral players in the markets of a port city. Arguably the textual letter of the Diu *vijnaptipatra*, like other painted letters, contains several generic tropes. Likewise, it concludes with an emphasis on the sincerity of the invitation and the auspiciousness the invited monk Vijaydharma Suri would bring with his arrival. Yet the poet's complex interweaving of an urban imaginary that emphasized regional difference and of the idea that annual travels of Jain monks created a network of auspicious places is clear. The letter writer notes the individual names of eighty local merchants before inviting the monk on behalf of the entire Jain community of the city. Letter-scrolls thus carried multiple messages about changing religious, trading, and political conditions. They made connections with other circulating letter-scrolls and peoples, and they could inspire a curiosity about the place they depicted and create an associated imaginary of completed journeys and transformed urban places.

Objects like painted letter-scrolls reveal a particular kind of material history. The visual traces of oceanic mobility within painted letters also find echoes in the countless engraved views of port towns included within contemporaneous travel-oriented genres like explorers' accounts, atlases, and

52 Kopytoff I., "The Cultural Biography of Things", in Appadurai A. (ed.), *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: 1986) 64–91.

53 Rice Y., "The Brush and the Burin: Mogul Encounters with European Engravings", in Anderson J. (ed.), *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence: The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art* (Carlton, Vic.: 2009) 305–310.

54 Dean C. – Leibsohn D., "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America", *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, 1 (2003) 5–35.

maps.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, historians deploy engraved vignettes of sailing ships on a harbour from Dutch, British, and Portuguese sources to exemplify the visual culture associated with Indian Ocean littoral spaces, hardly turning their attention to quasi-religious genres like *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls. Pictorial parallels between these contemporaneous genres, however, show that efficacious desires to chart successful journeys shaped the aesthetics and ontology of objects that contemplated travels.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maps of newly discovered places invited real and armchair travellers to undertake journeys. In one map from 1708, dedicated to the 'directors of the honorable United East-India Company', the geographer Herman Moll noted that his map of the East Indies primarily sought to explain along with 'many remarks not extant in any other map [...] what belongs to England, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Portugal' [Fig. 19.12].<sup>56</sup> Moll focused on the wealth of the East Indies, especially its ports. He singles Diu out as the port that leads to Portugal. Moll describes Surat as the port of 'greatest trade and note in India, the staple for all the commodities of Europe, India and China, [having] English, French and Dutch Factories'. Ceylon is noted for its production of 'precious stones and best cinnamon'. Of Masulipatan we learn that 'East and Dutch factories in this city [...] stain calicoes the best of any in the Indies'. Regarding the richness of Golconda, Moll calls it 'very rich in diamonds and other precious stones'. Vignettes describing the port towns and cities spread across the new geographical frontiers also entice the map's audience. We see plans of the cities of Bantham and Batavia, prospect views of Goa and Surat, and a plan of Fort St George in the city of Madras. The view of Goa and Surat includes sailing carracks, which were popularly depicted in individual engravings representing harbours in this time period. However, the juxtaposition of a cartographic view and the prospect view of sailing boats at the port and the plans of urban settlements in port towns signal a pictorial move by the mapmaker. Moll sought to arouse among the map's audiences a desire for travels and for completing long, arduous journeys.

The pictorial homology that the use of vignettes of sailing ships on the port and the juxtaposition of representational conventions exemplifies makes an important point about aesthetics of travel. Makers of both *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls and cartographic maps expected their pictorial strategies to incite a desire for travel. Both achieved time-space compression by the means of juxtaposing, in

55 Subramanian L., *Ports, Towns, Cities: A Historical Tour of the Indian Littoral* (Mumbai: 2008) esp. "Introduction".

56 The following descriptions of ports are noted on the map. However, they may be difficult to read in the reproduced Fig. 19.12.



FIGURE 19.12 *Herman Moll (engraver)*, A map of the East-Indies and the adjacent countries; with the settlements, factories and territories, explaining what belongs to England, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Portugal et c. with many remarks not extant in any other map (ca. 1708). *Engraving*, 58 × 96 cm. *New Haven, CT, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library* (inv. no. 12222019).

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the case of the 1708 map, a cartographic view with a prospect or planar view of port towns, and in the Diu *vijnaptipatra*, the horizontal registers of a Jain monks' future assembly oriented to its audience by means of a profile view and a frontally oriented Portuguese general and carrack on the ocean. The prospect of successfully completing journeys in the real and imagined realms shaped them both. These visual parallels reveal the potential of mixing objects that may or may not have been commensurable or shared intersecting spaces. Rather they shared an ontological function in transmitting ideas about upcoming travels. Objects like the Diu *vijnaptipatra* thus open a vista onto the imagining of the time and experience of travels, inland and oceanic. They also suggest a path towards writing interpretive histories of objects that mediated journeys in distinct and lesser-known genres alongside objects and texts that had global itineraries for framing pressing contemporary questions on connected and comparative histories of art.

The Diu *vijnaptipatra* alerts us to historiographical frontiers. Scrolls that described littoral spaces offer a picture of competing journeys that signalled distinct temporalities and corporeal transformations: the one sailors underwent in travelling across oceans to unknown regions, and the one monks and pilgrims experienced in walking on land in extreme heat before the monsoon clouds burst into rains. Both journeys were exhausting. They surely aroused emotions of euphoria, accomplishment, curiosity, and may be even confusion upon completion. The scroll painter chose to eliminate the typical vignette of the bazaar with local merchants selling their wares in the Diu painted letter. Thus the proximity of the vignette of long-distance and short-distance travels accentuates our perception of the spatial distinctions between the Jain temple and monks' assembly and the Portuguese traders and carrack on the Indian Ocean. However, when we take into account the modality of travel, along with the associated disjunctions in the arduousness of the task of travels, the distinct compression of time and space framed in both the vignettes comes into sharp focus. The painter brings to our attention a question that Indian Ocean researchers have been urging us to tackle: the lives within littoral spaces were always bound to practices in towns along the shore as well as the inland spaces of the regions to which these frontier lands were connected. It is compelling to keep in mind that the acceptance of annual invitations by Jain monks, an event that transformed the urban, devotional, and economic landscapes of small towns and cities in the monsoon months, took place when the trading ships were docked in the harbour. The seasonal cycles of trade and pilgrimage and of travels from inland and overseas sites draw attention to the entangled ebbs and flows of a variety of mobile people into port cities.

A littoral perspective enables us to think through the lens of oceanic travels and circulations within a wider geography. Local objects like *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls drive home the point that these oceanic journeys to a port were by necessity bound with travels, communities, and practices that connected the port to inland regions. In turn, these religious objects highlight not only the trading life and wealth of port-towns that an oceanic perspective, offered in European maps and travel accounts, tends to privilege. They also highlight another religious-mercantile apparatus that shaped the local landscape and notions of prosperity which citizens' acts of piety substantively constituted. As a quintessential travelling object created at the behest of religious Jain communities who constituted powerful trading groups, *vijnaptipatra*-scrolls shaped and were shaped by travels—on foot and by ships, long and short, trans-regional and trans-oceanic, and religious and mercantile.

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