

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Pires, Tomé. Suma Oriental. Ed. Rui Manuel Loureiro

James Nelson Novoa

Volume 43, Number 3, Summer 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075326ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35344>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Novoa, J. (2020). Review of [Pires, Tomé. Suma Oriental. Ed. Rui Manuel Loureiro]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(3), 336–338. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35344>

the eponymous part. Munro's illuminating interpretation of the rich theatrical history of *Pericles* through the semantic dilation of the term "traffic," combining the meanings related to sexual use, endurance, and profitable movement and exchange, is brilliantly brought together in an example of a truly new way of reading theatre history through micro-linguistic analysis. Munro shows that *Pericles* belongs to a cluster of plays engaging with the Mediterranean that the King's Men produced around the same time. But the play's origin in romance writing—in dramatizing the kind of narrative found in the wonder stories of the saints' lives from the *Golden Legend*, stories that were the grounds for popular drama before the Reformation and thus well before the politics of the King's Men repertory engaged with the *Pericles* story—adds a new layer of literary complexity in the process of transformation of material out of which such Mediterranean plays are formed. The book's organizing principle around "the questions of authority, service, commodity and collaboration" (177) is maintained consistently throughout. It is buttressed by a useful and detailed appendix of the Shakespearean plays in the King's Men repertory between 1603 and 1642.

This book will be of great interest to all readers of Shakespeare and drama of the seventeenth century, and to theatre historians and practitioners. It also provides a good model for new critical studies of other theatre companies associated with Shakespeare, and for the study of Shakespeare as part of a collaborative enterprise shaped by a company of players.

GORAN STANIVUKOVIC

Saint Mary's University, Halifax

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35343>

Pires, Tomé.

***Suma Oriental*. Ed. Rui Manuel Loureiro.**

Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau; Fundação Jorge Álvares / Macau: Fundação Macau, 2017. Pp. 335. ISBN 978-972-8586-52-2 (paperback) €20.

The Portuguese scholar Rui Manuel Loureiro has provided readers with a fine critical edition of one of the most important yet often ignored sixteenth-century sources of information about Asia: the *Suma Oriental* by the Portuguese

apothecary and first diplomatic representative in China, Tomé Pires (ca. 1470–ca. 1527). English readers will be familiar with the text through Armando Cortesão's 1944 English-language translation published by the Hakluyt Society (curiously, predating his Portuguese-language edition, which came out in 1978). Loureiro, like Cortesão, relies on an extant Parisian manuscript of the *Suma* which is held to be a near contemporary version of Pires's text, one of four known manuscripts. In presenting his new edition, however, Loureiro offers a much more readable and manageable text with a careful reordering of the material present in the Parisian manuscript, a concerted effort to clear up some of the infelicities present in Cortesão's transcription and edition, and copious notes that take into account the most recent scholarship regarding both the text and Asian and Portuguese history.

The *Suma Oriental* is an original work. Its author does not rely on previous European travel accounts or hearsay knowledge about Asia; rather, Pires was present in the region for years, having arrived in Malacca in 1512 and remained in Asia for the rest of his life. As an apothecary, he had a calculated interest in Asian drugs, flora, and fauna—which comes out in the descriptions of the places he saw or gathered information about through his informants and their populations. Dedicated to King Manuel I (1495–1521) and composed at some point between 1511 and 1512, it was obviously calculated to ingratiate the author with the monarch, who took a keen interest in Portugal's *expansão* in Asia, Africa, and America; the work quite literally provides a gander at some of the key cities, outposts, and lands in the Arabian peninsula, India and Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, with a view to continuing the push for Portuguese conquest and economic ties with that part of the world. Pires is not a traveller infatuated with what he is encountering; his text is a poised portrait of the peoples, lands, and products in the geographical area being described. While the *Suma Oriental* was not published in its entirety in Portuguese until the twentieth century—having fallen into obscurity in Portugal and mentioned only in passing by Portuguese authors in the sixteenth century—the text was known and read for centuries in a partial rendering, in Italian, as part of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's (1485–1557) *Navigazioni e viaggi* (1550–56), even though Ramusio was apparently unaware of Pires's true identity and did not attribute the work to him. Through Ramusio's version of the work, European readers were provided primarily with a description of China, though the *Suma Oriental* is noteworthy, in particular, for the wealth of information on Malacca

and Southeast Asia, places of utmost interest for the Portuguese. (This was due in part to the conquest of Malacca in 1511, which went on to be a Portuguese possession until 1641 and which was a lively hub of commercial activity, attracting merchants from a variety of places, becoming a veritable meeting places of peoples and beliefs for centuries.)

Loureiro's new edition is surely to become the standard version of Pires's text, on account of the careful reconstruction of the Paris manuscript with which readers of Portuguese can easily work. As a respected scholar of early modern Luso-Asian history, Loureiro is well-equipped to take on so monumental a task as the edition of this work. His notes provide readers with extensive geographical and historical knowledge of the places and people described by Pires. Aside from the text itself, the edition provides readers with a table comparing the Paris manuscript with Cortesão's English translation and Portuguese edition of the text, along with four of Pires's letters which had been previously published but which are here newly annotated and edited.

Stunning in the breadth of its scope and the sheer extent of its geographic description, Tomé Pires's work is of clear interest to scholars of Portuguese and Asian history and European-Asian interactions in the early modern period. Loureiro's edition is a faithful rendering of this important text, with extensive notes that are never burdensome or excessively erudite. Loureiro's edition should place the *Suma Oriental* where it belongs: at the forefront of scholarship on European interest in and knowledge of Asia.

JAMES NELSON NOVOA

University of Ottawa

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35344>

Poole, Kristen, and Owen Williams, eds.

Early Modern Histories of Time: The Periodization of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. Pp. vii, 362. ISBN 978-0-8122-5152-4 (hardcover) US\$79.95.

Two ideas of time are explored in sustained, sometimes overlapping, and always suggestive analyses in this excellent collection of essays. The first idea,