Editor’s Note:

Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1524-1580), the famous Lisbon poet, composed Os Lusiades in 1572 to glorify the expedition and exploits of Vasco da Gama in the Indian Ocean. It is a lengthy and epic poem, consisting of ten cantos, the portion relating to mainland Southeast Asia limited to a portion of the last of these. Only this portion is reproduced below. The chief utility of this information for the historian is that it helps us to understand how much, by 1572, Portuguese at home knew about the region. Some information is of special interest, such as the reference to the Gwe.

The following translation was made in 1655 by Richard Fanshaw and printed in London for Humphrey Moseley at the Prince’s Arms in St. Paul’s Church-yard. According to the translator’s preface, Fanshaw completed the translation on 1 May 1655 at Tankersley Park. The following text is derived from the British Library original (shelfmark g.11385). Other English translations include Vise Strangford’s version of 1804 (n.p.: Carpenter, BL shelfmark B28.a.31), Edward Quillinan’s version, with notes by John Adamson, of 1853 (n.p.: Edward Moxon, BL shelfmark x15/3449), William Julius Mickie’s 1877 edition (London: George Bell & Sons, BL shelfmark W53/4181), and others in the twentieth century. As the first English translation, the one most late seventeenth and eighteenth century English travelers would have read, warrants special attention.

M.W.C.

THE LUSIAD, OR, PORTUGALS HISTORICALL POEM

Luís Vaz de Camões
Translated by Richard Fanshaw (1655)

Tenth Canto, STANZA. 1.

121.

GANGES, in which his Borderers dye lav’d;
Holding it as a certain principle
That (be they ne're such Sinners) they are sav’d,
Bath’d in those streams that flow from Sacred Well.
The City CATHIGAN would not be wav’d,
The fairest of BENGALA: who can tell
The plenty of this Province? but it’s post
(Thou seest) is Eastern, turning the South-Coast.

122.
The Realm of ARRACAN, That of PEGU
Behold, with Monsters first inhabited!
Monsters, which from a strange commixture grew:
Such ill effects oft Solitude hath bred.
Here (though a Barb’rous misbegotten Crew)
Into her way was erring Nature led
By an invention rare, which a Queen fram’d,
To cure the Sin, that is not to be nam’d.

123.
Behold the City of TAVAY, with which
The spatious Empire of SIAN begins!
TENASSERI! QUEDA: with pepper rich
For which the praise she from all other wins!
MALACCA see before, where ye shall pitch
Your great Emporium, and your Magazins:
The Rendezvouz of all that Ocean round
For Merchandizes rich that there abound.

124.
From this (tis said) the Waves impetuous course;
Breaking a passage through, from Main to main,
SAMATRA’S noble Isle of old did force,
Which then a Neck of Land therewith did chain:
That this was CHERSONESE till that divorce,
And from the wealthy mines, that there remain,
The Epithite of GOLDEN had annexed:
Some think, it was the OPHYR in the Text.
125.

But, at that Point doth CINGAPUX appeare:
Where the pincht Streight leaves Ships no room to play.
Heer the Coast, winding to the Northern Beare,
Faces the fair AURORA all the way.
See PAN, PATANE (ancient Realms that were)
And long SYAN, which These, and more, obey!
The copious River of MENAM behold,
And the great Lake CHIAMAY from whence ‘tis roll’d!

126.

In this vast Tract see an Infinitie
Of Names and Nations to your WORLD unknown!
LAOS, in Land and men That potent bee!
AVAS, BRAINAS, in those long Hills o’regrown!
In yon far MOUNTAINS other Nations see
(GUEOS they’re call’d) and savage ev’ry one!
They eat Mans flesh, and paint their own in knots
With fire, as ye doe Rooms with watring-pots.

127.

The River MECON (which they Captain style
Of Waters) see; CAMBOYA on his brink!
He overflows the Land for many a mile:
So many other Rivers doth he drink.
Set times he hath of flowing (like cool NYLE):
The near Inhabitants brutishly think,
That pain and glory, after this Life’s end
Ev’n the brute Creatures of each kind attend.

128.

Upon his soft and charitable Brim
The wet and ship-wrackt SONG receive shall Hee
Which in a lamentable plight shall swim
From sholes and Quicksands of tempestuous Sea,
(The dire effect of Exile) when on Him
Is executed the unjust Decree:
Whose repercussive LYRE shall have the Fate
To be renowned more then Fortunate.

129.

Heer, (mark it!) runs the Coast that’s call’d CHAMPA,
Whose Groves smell hot of Calambuco wood:
Heer CAUCHINCHINA, and heer AYNAM’S Bay;
Both One and t’Other little understood.
Heer the great Empire (famous for large sway,
And its vast Wealth’s unfathomable Flood)
Of CHINA runs; calling all this her Owne
From burning Cancer to the frozen Zone.