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Reseña de "Kaempfers Japan Tokugawa Culture Observed" de Engelbert Kaempfer
Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies, núm. 6, jun, 2003, p. 0
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Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=36100610
to confront the more slippery issues that have left this infamous image of decadence for posterity. In assessing the nature of Portuguese Asia in its second century, one must come to terms with the criticisms leveled in both the cantos of Camões or the décadas of Barros. Likewise, one must seek to understand why later figures such as Jesuits or casados clung to the notion that a battered, yet standing, empire survived stretching from Macao to Mozambique. Unfortunately, van Veen’s speculations on social, cultural, or intellectual themes are restricted to a handful of assertions of the importance of reputação, a “stagnant” Portuguese society, a reactionary local Counter-Reformation, and a “prevailing anti-Semitism” (pp. 112, 230, 236). These points remain as unsatisfying as they were when an older generation of scholars reached the same conclusions using the same sources.

Van Veen’s study, while valuable for its reflections of the foundations of the VOC, offers more new questions about the nature of the Estado da Índia than new answers about the central causes of its seventeenth-century transformation. For instance, what enabled the Portuguese empire to weather political and military storms of considerable magnitude such as the VOC challenge, the Manchu conquest of China, the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa, or the French incursions into Maritime Asia dispatched during the reign of Louis XIV? What was the reach of the “informal empire” created by missionaries, private merchants, and renegades, and bound by cultural or religious links? And, how can we reconcile the conflicting notions about Portuguese society in Asia, reactionary and exclusionist in the eyes of some and porous and mestizo in the view of others? Without new research into what van Veen recognizes as the “treasure of information that can be found in the Portuguese official public archives” (p. 83) and new analyses of Lusophone society and culture in the early modern period, many facets of the old notion of decline will remain unchallenged.

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Kaempfer’s Japan – Tokugawa Culture Observed, by Engelbert Kaempfer
(Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999) 546 pp.

Engelbert Kaempfer’s The History of Japan is certainly one of those mythical books that every serious student of any aspect of Tokugawa Japan has one day dreamed of getting his hands onto. Not only because of the book’s contents, but also, and most specially, because of its extreme rareness. There is no need for us to continue daydreaming, because Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, professor of economic history at Kobe University, has produced a magnificent new English translation of
the German scholar’s description of seventeenth-century Japan. Kaempfer was born in Westphalia in 1651. After years of intense and varied studies, which covered fields as diverse as classical languages, natural science and medicine, in 1683 he took a post as secretary to the embassy sent by King Carl XI of Sweden to the Shah of Persia, an extraordinary opportunity to pursue his yearning for travelling to exotic destinations. When the embassy was heading back to Europe from Isfahan, Kaempfer was invited to join the Dutch East India Company as a physician, which he decided to accept in order to continue his travels, immediately setting sail for Batavia, the VOC’s capital in Java, where he arrived in 1689. The following year he was posted to the island of Deshima, the remote Dutch trading post in Nagasaki’s harbour, where he stayed for two years. He then had the unusual opportunity of twice travelling to the Shogun’s court at Edo, in an age when Japan was completely off-limits to most Westerners. In 1694 he was back in Europe for good. During the past decade, however, he had taken systematic notes of his wanderings and observations, amassing a huge quantity of information about sundry parts of Asia. As he himself stated, “Unlike other travellers, I did not return laden with money and merchandise but with pages on which I had written exotic observations gathered through much labour, expense, and danger in various regions” 1. He submitted a part of his notes to the University of Leiden as a doctoral dissertation almost as soon as he set foot in Holland. Holder of a doctor’s degree, he then settled in his hometown of Lemgo as a resident physician, hoping to have some spare time to prepare his field notes for publication. But it was only years later, in 1712, that he managed to publish his *Amoenitates Exoticae*, or *Exotic Pleasures*, a bulky and handsome volume of some 900 pages, illustrated with many copper engravings, a section of which was dedicated to Japanese flora. Regrettably, this curious work, even today, is only partially available in English. 2 In the introductory pages to this work, Kaempfer revealed that he was now preparing another voluminous work, this time written in German, on “Japonia nostri tempris”. His demise four years later prevented him from pursuing his publishing enterprises. Eventually, and luckily, his manuscripts ended up in the possession of no other than the famous British collector Hans Sloane (1660-1753), who employed a Swiss translator to convey Kaempfer’s manuscripts on Japan into the English language. *The History of Japan* finally came out in London in 1727, meeting with extraordinary success throughout Europe. At a time when Japan’s contacts with the outside world were of

2 Cf. supra.
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Chandeigne, 2003]) and by Arnoldus Montanus in 1669 (Gedenkwaerdige gesantschappen der Oost-Indische maatschappy in ’t Vereenigde Nederland, aan de kaisaren van Japan). But, as Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey concludes in her introduction, “The greatest value of Kaempfer’s work lies in permitting us to enter the world of late seventeenth-century Japan, and see, smell, and hear what he did on the small island in the harbor of Nagasaki and on his travels to Edo”. Alas, we sadly live in times when economic concerns are paramount, not the least in the world of the academic book trade. So, the learned editor of Kaempfer’s History of Japan, Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, has had to make her own economic choices: “to abbreviate or omit those chapters that do not deal with Japan or do not contain Kaempfer’s personal observations and experience”, and also to print only a small part of Kaempfer’s drawings. Needless to say, “All abbreviations and omissions have been clearly indicated”. In any case, all things considered, the new English rendition of Kaempfer’s Japan is a laudable effort.

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6 Ibidem, p. 21.
7 Ibidem, p. 22.
8 Ibidem, p. 22.