Ages of Sail, Ocean Basins, and Southeast Asia

Jennifer L. Gaynor

Journal of World History, Volume 24, Number 2, June 2013, pp. 309-333 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2013.0059

Ages of Sail, Ocean Basins, and Southeast Asia*

JENNIFER L. GAYNOR
University at Buffalo
The State University of New York

This article has three main points summarized by the phrases in its title: Ages of Sail, Ocean Basins, and the place of Southeast Asia. The first point is that if one looks before 1450, generally taken as the beginning of the Age of Sail, one discovers other equally impressive complexes of long-distance voyaging in world history. Here, I examine two such cases of maritime efflorescence and decline: early Ming imperial fleets and long-distance voyaging in Oceania. As the former is more familiar to this journal's readers, the latter is discussed at greater length, especially since it requires synthesis of historical and archaeological sources. The article's second and third points follow from discussion of these two examples: on the one hand the prominence of

* This article was originally written for "The Age of Sail, 1450–1850," a conference sponsored by the University of British Columbia and the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. I would like to thank Daniel Vickers, who organized the conference, for the rich and varied discussions it fostered. I am especially grateful to Paul D'Arcy, Michael Pearson, and Pierre-Yves Manguin, as well as to the journal's editor and the anonymous reviewers for their remarks and thoughtful suggestions. I also thank my co-panelists at the conference: Philip Stern, Sebastian Prange, and Tonio Andrade, as well as Marcus Rediker, John Gillis, Robert "Roy" Ritchie, Roger Des Forges, John Miksic, Geoff Wade, Hans van Tilburg, and Lincoln Paine for their kind interest and helpful comments. Errors remain mine alone. Jerry Bentley passed away during the time I was working on the final revisions of this article. He offered comments and encouragement in the article's early stages, reminiscent of the gestures he made at an earlier stage of my career. Like the students and colleagues who have voiced similar sentiments, I am grateful for his vision, insight, and kindness.

Journal of World History, Vol. 24, No. 2

oceanic space in these maritime histories, and on the other hand the shadowy presence of archipelagic Southeast Asia.[1] I show how these same cases illustrate the limits of an ocean basins approach to maritime history, and explore why Southeast Asia has at times registered indistinctly in treatments of maritime Asia and the Pacific. In contrast with this earlier historiography, recent contributions to the study of pre-seventeenth-century inter-Asian maritime history reinforce a picture of the vibrant and active role played by Southeast Asian ships and shippers in the Indian Ocean.[2] Their participation in these networks raises renewed questions about the varied maritime dynamics of Southeast Asia's extensive island chains. Compelling subjects in and of themselves, these archipelagos and their mariners possess historical features that suggest further attention to Southeast Asia's connections with Oceania is warranted as well.

---

[1] The use of 1450 as the start of the "Age of Sail" is based on the premises of the conference for which an earlier version of this piece was written. The term "shadowy presence" is from Barbara Watson Andaya, "Oceans Unbounded: Transversing Asia across 'Area Studies,'" *Asia-Pacific Journal* (2007), http://www.japanfocus.org/-Barbara_Watson-Andaya/2410. This is a revised version of her presidential address, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in San Francisco, April 2006, originally published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 4 (2006): 669–690.

[2] Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Southeast Asian Ship: An Historical Approach," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (1980): 266–276; Manguin, "The Vanishing *Jong*: Insular Southeast Asian Fleets in Trade and War (Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 197–213; Manguin, "Southeast Asian Shipping in the Indian Ocean during the 1st Millennium AD," in *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean*, ed. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-François Salles (New Delhi: Manohar; Lyons: Maison de'Orient méditerranéen/NISTADS, 1996), pp. 181–198; Manguin, "The Archaeology of the Early Maritime Polities of Southeast Asia," in *Southeast Asia: From Prehistory to History*, ed. Peter Bellwood and Ian C. Glover (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 283–313; Manguin, "The Maldives Connection: Pre-modern Malay World Shipping across the Indian Ocean," in *Civilisation des mondes insulaires: Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur Claude Allibert*, ed. Chantal Radimilahy and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2011), pp. 261–284; also see Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade, eds., *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Exchange* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre]; New Delhi: Manohar, 2011). For an overview of Asian shipbuilding traditions in the Indian Ocean and their historical implications, see Manguin, "Asian Ship-building Traditions in the Indian Ocean at the Dawn of European Expansion," in *The Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800*, ed. Om Prakash (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Civilisations, Project on History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilisation, in press), pp. 597–629. On the relation between Southeast Asian and other shipbuilding traditions in the South China Sea, see Manguin, "Trading Ships of the South China Sea: Shipbuilding Techniques and Their Role in the Development of Asian Trade Networks," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 36 (1993): 253–280; and Manguin, "New Ships for New Networks: Trends in Shipbuilding in the South China Sea in the 15th and 16th Centuries," in *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor*, ed. Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), pp. 333–358.

The related question of how far east the Indian Ocean world stretches underscores how recently it has become more common to consider this basin from the western and northern fringes of Southeast Asia's coasts. At an earlier moment the historiography seemed always to look east across the Indian Ocean along with European expansion. Even George Hourani, best known for his work on Arab seafaring, once lamented the irony that in 1498 at Malindi in East Africa, Vasco da Gama took on an Arab pilot who would lead him to India.[3] It turns out, however, that the said pilot was not, as Hourani had romantically claimed, the famed Arab navigator Ahmad Ibn Majid.[4] Yet Hourani's sense of irony that this had been the case situates the Portuguese rounding of the Cape at the nostalgic brim of what he called the slow decline of Arab navigation in the Indian Ocean. He ascribed this decline to the inability of the Arabs to drive out or to compete with the Portuguese and other European nations that followed them.[5]

Perhaps the greater irony is that the image of Portuguese control has been slow to recede. Historians such as Charles Boxer, V. Magalhães Godinho, L. F. Thomaz, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam offered ample evidence that Portuguese attempts to impose monopolies in Asia were far from successful. Now that the term "trading post empires" is commonly used to characterize the geography of European inroads in Asia, the fact that Portuguese trade was circumscribed, with the Portuguese but one group of traders among many, has finally been recognized. Although their impact varied widely, in many realms of life it was quite limited. As for the royal monopoly, the crown did not run it very effectively, while Portuguese private merchants turn out to have been both important to it and quite successful in their own right.[6] The scope of Portuguese control was therefore more narrow than once thought. Yet

---

[3] George F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, revised and expanded by John Carswell (1951; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 83.

[4] On this point see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 123. That Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Majid al-Najdi was "*the* most celebrated Arab navigator of the 15th century," see G.R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese, being a Translation of the 'Kitab*, cited in Subrahmanyam, *Vasco da Gama*, p. 122, n. 47. Also see *Ahmad ibn Majid al-Najdi, Kitab al-Fawa'id fi Usul 'Ilm al-Bahr wa 'l-Qawa'id [Book of Useful Information on the Principles and Rules of Navigation]* (London: Oriental Translation Fund New Series, 1971).

[5] Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 83–84.

[6] C. R. Boxer, "A Note on Portuguese Reactions to the Revival of the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Rise of Aceh, 1540–1600," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 415–428; V. Magalhães Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos e a Economia Mundial*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Editora Arcádia, 1963–1965), 1:513; Magalhães Godinho, *L'économie de l'empire portugais aux XVe et XVIe siècle* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1969); L. F. Ferreira Reis Thomaz, "Maluco e

Persian and Arab trade remain geographically and temporally more extensive than is often realized.

Arabs and Persians during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries generally sailed only as far as India. Before the eleventh century, however, when the route from Baghdad to Guangzhou became segmented, they sailed the entire distance.[7] Recent archaeological finds in island Southeast Asia provide the first material evidence for this direct trade between the western Indian Ocean and China in a wreck discovered off the coast of Belitung, Indonesia, more than 350 miles southeast of the Malacca Straits. The cargo of this ninth-century wreck contained remarkable prestige goods, but, perhaps of greater interest, it was replete with Chinese ceramics produced in Tang dynasty kilns destined for Islamic as well as Buddhist nonelite markets. The wreck site also preserved telling parts of the hull. The technique of hull construction differs substantially from that found in Southeast Asia and in China, while materials from it have been traced to Africa and India. Since no other dhow remains with which one might compare these fragments have been identified from the same era, the most archaeologists can state at this point is that they suggest an Arab, or possibly an Indian, dhow.[8]

I begin with this story about the Belitung wreck for three reasons: the first two concern geography and methodology, and the third relates to narrative and periodization. First, one may rightly ask what we gain from such material evidence that we did not already know from written sources. Apart from providing evidence for the details of long-distance

---

Malaca," in *A viagem de Fernão de Magalhães e a questo das Molucas*, ed. A. Teixeira da Mota, Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga Memóriano 16 (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1975), pp. 27–48; Thomaz, *Nina Chatu e o Comércio Português em Malaca* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudios de Marinha, 1976); Thomaz, "Malaka et ses communautés marchand au tournant du 16e siècle," in *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine, 13e–20e siècles*, ed. D. Lombard and J. Aubin (Paris: SEVPEN, 1988), pp. 31–48; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London: Longman, 1993); Manguin, "The Vanishing *Jong*," p. 201; M. N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580–1640* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[7] Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 87–89.

[8] Michael Flecker, "A 9th Century Arab or Indian Shipwreck in Indonesian Waters," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 29, no. 2 (2000): 199–217; Michael Flecker, "A Ninth-Century AD Arab or Indian Shipwreck in Indonesia: First Evidence for Direct Trade with China," *World Archaeology* 32, no. 3 (2001): 335–354; Michael Flecker, "A 9th-Century Arab or Indian Shipwreck in Indonesian Waters: Addendum," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 37, no. 2 (2008): 384–386.

trade, the location of this wreck, and others as well, serves to remind us that their presence in archipelagic waters was not incidental. A variety of archaeological and written sources show that Southeast Asian goods, markets, and shippers were important in much wider networks, and that the region was therefore no mere conduit between the Indian Ocean and China. Second, the wreck underscores how archaeological research may have important implications for the ways we understand the past, even at times reorienting questions and arguments about the historiography of subsequent periods—all the more so as archaeological techniques have become more sophisticated and at a time when history writing has become sensitive to the dominance of state and elite perspectives in much of the historical record.[9] Third, this ninth-century wreck illustrates one of the article's primary aims: to draw attention to the framing of the "Age of Sail" by looking at maritime achievements that preceded 1450 and the beginnings of a narrative focused on Europeans.

Below I examine the two early fifteenth-century instances of nautical efflorescence and decline mentioned above: the Ming dynasty fleets under Zheng He, and long-distance voyaging in Oceania, neither of which was in any way affected by European expansion. Although probably unrelated to each other as well, juxtaposing them with more familiar narratives of European achievement puts the latter in context and emphasizes the role of historical contingency in accounts of the maritime world. Much of this voyaging took place in ocean basins: one in the Indian Ocean and the other in the Pacific. Yet since each example also touches in different but important ways on archipelagic Southeast Asia, they therefore invite both a reconsideration of the limits of the ocean basins model, as well as a renewed look at archipelagic Southeast Asia's place in inter-Asian and Pacific maritime history. I return to these latter points after addressing what enters the frame of maritime history when it is widened to include the first half of the fifteenth century.

[9] While archaeologists such as Pierre-Yves Manguin and Henry Wright (see notes 15 and 19 below) have been staunch advocates of this sort of interdisciplinary approach for some time now, it is also reflected in recent work by historians. See, for instance, an article on early Javanese history by Kenneth Hall that draws on the archaeology of maritime wrecks, and in the same issue of *Indonesia*, a piece by Eric Tagliacozzo that recognizes the value of situating Indonesian history in long time frames and as part of larger geographies. Kenneth R. Hall, "Indonesia's Evolving International Relationships in the Ninth to Early Eleventh Centuries: Evidence from Contemporary Shipwrecks and Epigraphy," *Indonesia* 90 (October 2010): 15–46; Eric Tagliacozzo, "Trans-regional Indonesia over One Thousand Years: The Art of the Long View," *Indonesia* 90 (October 2010): 1–14.

Ming Imperial Fleets

Most readers of this journal are likely to have heard of Zheng He and the Ming dynasty fleets he commanded in the early fifteenth century. While the Ming prohibitions forbade unsanctioned private maritime trade, these imperially sponsored fleets made seven trips from China, some of them reaching the Gulf of Aden and the east coast of Africa. Although sometimes characterized as peaceful voyages of exploration, an image on which the Chinese government has capitalized, the primary sources on the Ming fleets contain clear statements about imperial aims to rejuvenate and expand the tribute system, both in Southeast Asia and to what was termed the "Western Ocean." The voyages were not undertaken to secure monopoly access to resources and markets, nor were they carried out for conquest.[10] Still, it is also clear that they were not meant to spread a message of peace: all of the missions appear to have carried in excess of twenty thousand military men. This military capacity supported their strategic aims: to inspire awe and to encourage foreign rulers to come to the Ming court. In addition to stirring trepidation and diplomacy, these forces also engaged in major military actions, primarily in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. In short, the voyages were intended to persuade and to compel countries of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to comply with the Chinese tributary system.[11] Rather than compare Zheng He's fleet to Spanish and Portuguese voyages of exploration, which usually consisted of a few ships crewed by a few hundred men, these fleets were instead comparable in numbers to those at key events in Western naval history, such as the Spanish Armada of 1588 and the combined British, French, and Spanish fleets at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Reports on the size of the largest ships are also impressive, describing what may have been the largest wooden ships ever to sail the planet's seas.[12]

Why the voyages came to an end has also been a matter of scholarly debate. A number of factors contributed. The Yongle emperor, who

---

[10] Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007). On "Western Ocean" as a term originally applied in contradistinction from the eastern route through the Philippines and Moluccas, see John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 11.

[11] Geoff Wade, "The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78, no. 1 (2005): 37–58, esp. pp. 45–51.

[12] Dreyer, *Zheng He*, p. 8.

sponsored all but the last voyage, passed away and his successor had less zeal for the endeavor. Zheng He, admiral of the fleet, had risen to the top of a bureaucracy staffed by eunuchs. This eunuch institution was much looked down upon by the Confucian-trained scholar-officials of the civil bureaucracy, who also happened to write the imperial histories. Eunuchs served, among other things, as directors of important and expensive projects that civil officials opposed. The latter viewed the voyages as an enormous drain on imperial coffers, and the need for more resources and manpower elsewhere further jeopardized their continuation.[13]

Voyaging in Oceania

Long-distance voyaging in Oceania and its decline are a rather different story from that of Zheng He and the early Ming tributary system.[14] As with the study of the Indian Ocean, the study of the Pacific has a temporal divide. For the Indian Ocean, on one side of this divide lies the "early modern" period and the rise of European dominance. What some have called the "classical" period during the long millennium from the fifth to sixteenth centuries sits on the other side of this divide.[15] Research on the Pacific has had a similar periodization, which,

---

[13] Ibid., inter alia pp. 4, 13, 166–171.

[14] Roger Green originally drew a distinction between "Near Oceania" and "Remote Oceania" in 1987 to address processes in early Pacific prehistory that were ignored by the usual geographic divisions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Roger Green, "Peopling of the Pacific: A Series of Adaptive Steps, or Punctuated Evolution," presented at Section H, 57th Annual Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, 24 August 1987, cited in Ben Finney, "The Other One-Third of the Globe," *Journal of World History* 5, no. 2 (1994): 274. Finney uses "Near Oceania" to refer to New Guinea and adjacent islands in making the point that together with the islands of Indonesia they form a chain of intervisible or nearly intervisible land masses. This may be somewhat confusing since the western portion of New Guinea and adjacent islands are (not without contest) part of Indonesia. Moreover, as Roy Ellen has shown, the coastal regions of New Guinea at the eastern end of the Banda Sea were part of trading networks in eastern Indonesia. Roy Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone: Past and Present in the Social Organization of a Moluccan Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), pp. 119–147; Ellen, "Trade, Environment, and the Reproduction of Local Systems in the Moluccas," in *The Ecosystem Approach in Anthropology: From Concept to Practice*, ed. Emilio F. Moran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 214. The question "How much of island Southeast Asia is part of Oceania?" is less the point here than the recognition, first, that such geographic vagueness is partly a result of less territorially entrenched histories and, second, that Green's effort was intended to revise earlier geographic terminology in order to depict processes that take place over space and time.

[15] Hermann Kulke offers this schematic periodization at the start of an introduction critical of the way Indian Ocean studies remains "oddly bipartite," with the earlier period

because of the dearth of written sources before European contact, has produced a methodological divide, as well as a disciplinary division of labor. Scholars, in other words, rely heavily on archaeological and to some degree linguistic approaches to understand the precontact past. Yet because of this, historians of Oceania cannot avoid knowing at least a bit about archaeology, and what little we know about precontact voyaging comes in large part through it.[16]

Compared to many other areas of the world, the Pacific has been both less densely and more recently populated, and is simply more liquid, a factor that cannot be ignored. The necessary background to any discussion of voyaging in Oceania touches on Austronesian languages and Lapita pottery. To take up Austronesian languages first, they have an extraordinary distribution, spoken from Easter Island in the eastern Pacific, across much of island and peninsular Southeast Asia, to Madagascar in the western Indian Ocean. Speakers of these related languages crossed the Indian Ocean about 1,500–2,000 years before

still underrepresented in "international studies." Given the contributions in the volume, which intend to address this shortcoming, it is clear that what he means is the early period is poorly represented in studies that take a "transnational" or inter-area approach. Hermann Kulke, "Introduction," in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, ed. Hermann Kulke, K. Kasavapany, and Vijay Sakhuja (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), p. xii. Other periodizations are possible, with which he may agree. Pierre-Yves Manguin points out that regular trade links between Southeast Asia and India started centuries before the fifth century C.E. He further suggests that periodization of Southeast Asia's relation with the world economy may be linked to economic trends elsewhere in the Ancient World, for instance with the economic booms of the turn of the first millenium (third century B.C.E. to third century C.E.), possibly in the fifth to seventh centuries, and again in the ninth to tenth centuries. Among other historical developments in the region, these surges correspond to major phases of state formation and urbanization in Southeast Asia (pers. comm., 29 November 2011). For an overview of the early phase in maritime Southeast Asia see Manguin, "The Archaeology of the Early Maritime Polities of Southeast Asia." For further reading on the latter phase, readers may wish to consult Geoff Wade, "An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900–1300 CE," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 221–265; and the thoughtful response to this piece by Victor Lieberman, "Maritime Influences in Southeast Asia, c. 900–1300: Some Further Thoughts," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2010): 529–539. Besides the Chola collection above, readers may wish to consult a recent state of the field volume on the Indian Ocean by Manguin, Mani, and Wade, *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia*. For other work on early Southeast Asian participation in Indian Ocean networks see note 2 above.

[16] For a critical view, see Atholl Anderson, "Traditionalism, Interaction, and Long-Distance Seafaring in Polynesia," *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology*, 3, no. 2 (2008): 240–250. Spriggs makes a similarly critical assessment focused on the use (or misuse) of ethnographic analogy in history. Matthew Spriggs, "Ethnographic Parallels and the Denial of History," *World Archaeology* 40, no. 4 (2008): 538–552.

Map 1. Archipelagos of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

the present (B.P.), an achievement in terms of distance that matched that, around the same time, for the Pacific.[17]

Although we do not know exactly how Austronesian languages spread across the Indian Ocean, research over the last two decades does suggest that by the first few centuries of the Common Era, when initial contacts with Madagascar are thought to have taken place, Southeast Asians were building and operating large vessels to trade with India and possibly further.[18] Along with related work that substantiates later routes by Southeast Asian ships from the Sunda Straits to the Maldives, this research has helped shift the historiography of the protohistorical period, indicating a much greater role up to the latter sixteenth century than previously thought for Southeast Asians in the Indian Ocean.[19] It is also worth noting that the timing of initial voyaging westward early in the first millennium of the Common Era would make these mariners roughly contemporaries of those who—starting out from the other side of the Indian Ocean—sailed with the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* as a guide. What is more, if mariners who employed this route to the Maldives—one undocumented in Arabic, Chinese, or Portuguese sea pilots—then used the same navigational skills to sail down a latitude to reach Madagascar (an admittedly speculative proposition), they would have been in tremendously intercultural company on their return, since contrary winds across the Indian Ocean at the southern latitudes would have necessitated returning via the Indian Ocean's well-known northern routes.[20]

---

[17] Atholl Anderson, "Slow Boats from China: Issues in the Prehistory of Indo-Pacific Seafaring," in *East of Wallace's Line: Studies of Past and Present Maritime Cultures of the Indo-Pacific Region*, ed. Sue O'Connor and Peter Veth (Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 2000), pp. 44–45. It may be worth noting here that for archaeologists, "the present" is pegged at 1950.

[18] Manguin, "Southeast Asian Shipping in the Indian Ocean during the 1st millenium AD"; Manguin, Mani, and Wade, *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia*; Manguin, "The Maldives Connection," pp. 264, 267.

[19] Manguin, "The Maldives Connection"; Manguin, "Introduction," in Manguin, Mani, and Wade, *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia*, p. xviii. On the historiographic shift, see Ian C. Glover, *Early Trade between India and Southeast Asia: A Link in the Development of a World Trading System,* Centre for Southeast Asian Studies Occasional Paper 16 (Hull: University of Hull, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989); Miriam T. Stark and S. Jane Allen, "The Transition to History in Southeast Asia: An Introduction," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (1998): 163–174; Henry T. Wright, "Developing Complex Societies in Southeast Asia: Using Archaeological and Historical Evidence," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2, no. 4 (1998): 343–348; Peter Bellwood and Ian C. Glover, eds., *Southeast Asia: From Prehistory to History* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

[20] Manguin, "The Maldives Connection," pp. 271–273.

Recent decades have seen comparable shifts in the understanding of Pacific voyaging and historiography. Years of research and debate have finally put to rest the question of whether Pacific islands were originally peopled from east or west, and whether it took place by means of unnavigated, accidental, one-way voyages, or through intentional sailing with the navigational skills to make return trips. Linguistic studies suggest that those who spoke the tongue from which Austronesian languages came were located around Taiwan and the Amoy coast of China.[21] Archaeology focused on Lapita ware has confirmed the movement of the Polynesians' precursors through the Bismark Archipelago and out to the Solomon Islands. Current historiography, for its part, stresses the capacity of ancient Pacific navigators to rove freely.[22] Although in the eighteenth century both James Cook and Louis Antoine de Bougainville expressed appreciation for the nautical technology they saw, the ability to conduct long-distance voyages was not obvious to most early modern Europeans.[23]

This was basically due to the fact that at the time of European contact, eastern Polynesian kingdoms were largely isolated and inwardly focused. Archaeological findings show, however, that this "classic" insularity was a fairly late development. Earlier periods, beginning by around 1000 C.E., were characterized by widespread interaction. Such interaction took place not only within island groups, but also among distant archipelagos, even crossing the cultural boundary between east and west Polynesia. We know this from the transport of identifiable, datable materials brought to areas where they do not naturally occur. In other words, imported artifacts such as pearl shell and stone tools illustrate patterns of interisland communication over time. Of interest here is the finding that in the archaeological assemblages of different areas, the frequency of such imports declines abruptly after 1450. The evidence suggests that this was a result of declining access to resources

[21] John Wolff, *Proto-Austronesian Phonology with Glossary*, 2 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2010); and pers. comm., 13–15 September 2010.

[22] K. R. Howe, *The Quest for Origins: Who First Discovered and Settled the Pacific Islands?* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), esp. chaps. 4 and 5; K. R. Howe, "Voyagers and Navigators: The Sharp-Lewis Debate," in *Texts and Contexts: Reflections in Pacific Islands Historiography*, ed. Doug Munro and Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), pp. 65–75. Not all are in agreement with this view. Atholl Anderson states that "Ever since *Hokule'a* . . . the real problem has been not whether prehistoric sailors could have found the Pacific islands fast enough to match the archaeological evidence, but rather how they could have been prevented from finding them much faster than archaeological data allow." "Slow Boats," p. 40.

[23] Anderson, "Traditionalism, Interaction, and Long-Distance Seafaring," p. 245.

and, by implication, declining levels of interisland voyaging. It has proven difficult, however, to identify the factors that account for this change.[24]

Deforestation is one likely culprit. At the time of contact, smaller and more remote islands were relatively more denuded.[25] In contrast, larger islands and island groups with comparatively greater terrestrial resources, such as Tahiti and Fiji, had sailing technologies supported by active boat building industries producing large fleets of double-hulled voyaging and war canoes. In places comprised largely of low-lying atolls, such as the Tuamotus, said at the time to possess the highest level of canoe technology and voyaging skills in central East Polynesia, long-distance voyaging may nevertheless have persisted as the means by which inhabitants maintained access to the resources of distant high islands.[26] Demography may also have been a factor in the decline of interisland voyaging. Among smaller communities, long-distance voyaging may have been a lifeline to marriage partners and the transfer of domestic animals and plants. But voyaging would likely have declined over time as their populations grew and they became more self-sufficient.[27] In addition, social factors may have played a role in larger communities where the costs of long-distance voyaging came to outweigh the benefits, leading established Polynesian societies to invest their resources in other endeavors such as chiefly rivalries and

[24] Barry V. Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction in Ancient East Polynesia," *Asian Perspectives* 41, no. 2 (2002): 182, 185. For the Marquesas, this interpretation of declining levels of interisland voyaging is supported by independent evidence from investigation of subsistence strategies that reveal that fishing in offshore waters was relatively common during the early periods but notably rare after A.D. 1450. "The same canoes and sailing strategies employed in inter-island voyaging were also used for offshore fishing. It seems probable, therefore, that the parallel declines in offshore fishing and access to imported stone are linked to reductions in the overall scale of open-sea voyaging and inter-island contact." See Rollett, *Hanamiai: Prehistoric Colonization and Cultural Change in the Marquesas Islands (East Polynesia),* Yale University Publications in Anthropology 81 (New Haven, Conn.: Department of Anthropology and the Peabody Museum, 1998), and supra p. 185.

[25] Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 186. Also see M. I. Weisler, "The Settlement of Marginal Polynesia: New Evidence from Henderson Island," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 21 (1994): 98–99, and J. A. van Tilburg, *Easter Island: Archaeology, Ecology, Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

[26] Ben R. Finney, *Voyage of Rediscovery: A Cultural Odyssey through Polynesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 294; Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 186. Nonspecialists may be interested to learn that tall islands produce regular cloud formations and condensation on their lee sides, thus enabling the growth of particular flora and producing a regular source of water to support forms of agriculture.

[27] P. V. Kirch, "Long-Distance Exchange and Island Colonisation: The Lapita Case," *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 21 (1988): 103–117; Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 186.

the construction of religious sites.[28] A picture thus emerges in which increasing local demand restricted the flow of timber and canoes from relatively resource-rich areas to outlying archipelagos. If this coincided with the depletion of forests on outlying islands, at least for central East Polynesia, it could have led to a contraction of interaction spheres and hence a decrease in long-distance voyaging.[29]

It takes a certain dedication to study voyaging through archaeology, especially when one considers how readily most shipbuilding materials decomposed. Archaeology can only tell us so much about the development of hulls and rigging, not to mention navigational practice. The types of boats and rigs used in prehistoric Southeast Asia and the Pacific have mostly disappeared from the record, while those noted by seventeenth-century Europeans could well have been recent innovations.[30] In the two centuries following contact, maritime technology was fairly volatile, which provides reason to doubt that the vessels and rigs recorded by Europeans were the same as those people had brought into Remote Oceania during earlier millenia.[31]

There are indeed few remains to work with, and one cannot infer much about the early period from postcontact developments. Yet some generalizations about Pacific sailing technology may still be made with regard to voyaging in the period just before contact.[32] For instance, while historically and geographically variable, sailing canoes in the

[28] Finney, *Voyage of Rediscovery*, pp. 292–304, and R. Walter, "What Is the East Polynesian 'Archaic'? A View from the Cook Islands," in *Oceanic Culture History, Essays in Honor of Roger Green*, ed. J. Davidson, G. Irwin, F. Leach, A. Pawley, and D. Brown, New Zealand Journal of Archaeology Special Publication (Dunedin: New Zealand Journal of Archaeology, 1996), p. 524; Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 186.

[29] Rollett, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 191. Note that Rollet does entertain the possibility of a single overarching explanation like climate change. He also documents (p. 187) the environmental diversity in the region by listing for the region's islands: their area, elevation, and degree of physical isolation. Such data on geography and environmental diversity thus provides a starting point for investigating how these factors may influence the expansion and contraction of voyaging networks.

[30] Peter V. Lape, Sue O'Connor, and Nick Burningham, "Rock Art: A Potential Source of Information about Past Maritime Technology in the South-East Asia-Pacific Region," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 36, no. 2 (2007): 238.

[31] Anderson, "Slow Boats," p. 29. The nature of early prehistoric maritime technology in the Indo-Pacific region is thus left with some degree of speculation. The limits of available evidence, perhaps along with wisdom, caution how far to take supposition and conjecture. As Evans-Pritchard once made clear, a simplistic model of diffusion without evidence makes for bad history. Contemporary ethnography is, moreover, a poor guide to the past. On the latter point see Spriggs, "Ethnographic Parallels." Although one must be cautious about extrapolating from the historical record to the periods that preceded it, still, it would not be unreasonable to infer some things about voyaging shortly before contact.

[32] Anderson, "Slow Boats," pp. 41, 43.

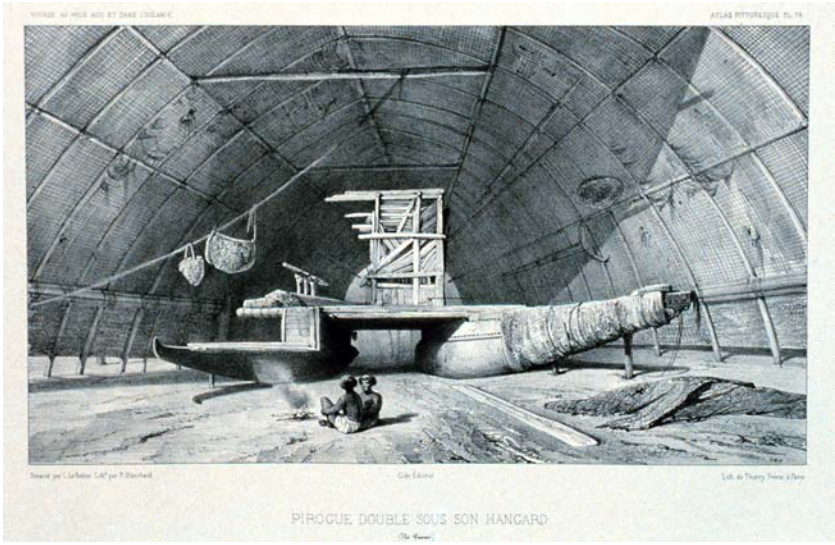

FIGURE 1. Double-hulled canoe in its hangar, Vava'u (present-day Tonga). From Dumont d'Urville, *Voyage au pole sud et dans l'Oceanie*, 1842. NOAA Library Collection. With its uneven hulls, it is geographically and technologically in-between like the Fijian *drua*.

Micronesian western Pacific have typically differed from those in East Polynesia. Geographically and technologically in-between, Fijian *drua* were double-hulled like East Polynesian boats, though having one hull shorter than the other also made them rather like the outriggers commonly found toward the west. Instead of sailing the boat on alternating tacks, the *drua* used a shunting sail, another feature they shared with Micronesian boats.[33]

Developments in hull form and rigging to create the types of vessels, such as the *drua*, seen by Europeans in central East Polynesia, may owe

[33] Most Eastern Polynesian canoes, propelled by both paddle and sail, had two hulls of equal size, each symmetrically constructed when viewed in a transverse cross section. These double-hulled canoes used a variety of sail types and rigging. In Micronesia, single-hulled outriggers were favored, with an asymmetrical hull that was flatter on the lee side. This improved their hydrodynamics and decreased their drift, or deviation from a desired course. Outriggers were always kept windward. Rather than the boat tacking back and forth, the lower forward corner of the sail (the "tack") was rigged instead to shunt fore and aft, in effect reversing the bow and stern. Paul D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea: Environment, Identity, and History in Oceania* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), p. 79. Micronesia was famous for the speed and the rigging of these elegant shunting sails.

much to the arrival of Micronesian technology in the Polynesian islands to which it was closest. This probably started to take place from about 1,200 years ago, but grew as Tongan "imperial" expansion increased the degree of interaction with Micronesia, northwest of Tonga, in the centuries prior to European contact.[34] Although the nature of "empire" in this context is much debated, Yap, in Micronesia itself, had also been at the center of a similar sort of exchange network.[35] Thus, although the decline of long-distance voyaging among island groups around 1450 has been studied primarily in central East Polynesia, it appears that Micronesia, to its northwest, was also part of the preceding widespread interaction.

While my interest here is primarily in the late precontact period, other developments regarding Micronesia are also worthy of note. Much recent attention to Micronesia is due to the fact that the neotraditional renaissance of Pacific voyaging has largely been seeded from there.[36] Yet Micronesia has also seen renewed importance in recent analyses of early population movements. This is a controversial proposal, because over the last twenty years a strong consensus has emerged that the origins of Polynesian language, culture, and biology rest solely with the people who produced the pottery known as Lapita ware. This consensus is now beginning to show some cracks, and recent work looking at evidence that sits uncomfortably with the predominant view indicates the possibility of the arrival of new populations into Polynesia after the initial settlement, coming via Micronesia.[37]

---

[34] Anderson, "Slow Boats," pp. 31, 42. I presume Fijian *drua* are included in Anderson's "central East Polynesia," given the inclusion of Samoa and Tonga in other scholars' maps designated by this term, such as Rollet, "Voyaging and Interaction," p. 183. See also S. Aswani and M. W. Graves, "The Tongan Maritime Expansion: A Case in the Evolutionary Ecology of Social Complexity," *Asian Perspectives* 37 (1998): 135–164.

[35] Glenn Petersen, "Indigenous Island Empires: Yap and Tonga Considered," *Journal of Pacific History* 35, no. 1 (2000): 5–27, offers a useful overview of claims and assessments of these "spheres" as "empires."

[36] Ben R. Finney, *Voyage of Rediscovery*. Mau Piailug from Satawal in western Micronesia, the navigator without whom this renaissance probably could not have happened, died 13 July (some reports say 12 July) 2010.

[37] David J. Addison and Elizabeth Matisoo-Smith, "Rethinking Polynesian Origins: A West Polynesia Triple-I Model," *Archaeology in Oceania* 45 (2010): 1–12, esp. 4, 9. "Triple-I" is a shorthand for "intrusion, integration and innovation." At an earlier moment, in the 1960s, then-current opinion favored Micronesia as a path toward Pacific islands farther east and proposed a gateway leading from Indonesia toward Micronesia, with currents pouring northeasterly through the Jailolo passage, reinforced by winds of the southwest monsoon. Gordon R. Lethwaite, "Geographical Knowledge of the Pacific Peoples," in *The Pacific Basin: A History of Its Geographical Exploration*, ed. H. R. Friis (New York: American Geographical Society, 1967), pp. 57–86, esp. 72.

Taken together, this array of attention to Micronesia presents an image of it as more dynamically involved in processes of Austronesian expansion and transformation.

Southeast Asia, Coastal and Archipelagic

This may be a good place to come back to Southeast Asia, whose waters seep into Micronesia and whose languages are closely related to those in Micronesia's western regions. Perhaps work on Micronesia will have an impact on the predominantly eastward focus of linguists and archaeologists of the Pacific. This focus eastward oddly mirrors how scholarship on maritime Southeast Asia has mostly looked westward, across the Indian Ocean. Each curiously gazes across oceanic space in opposite directions, with archipelagic Southeast Asia between them.[38]

Take, for instance, the Ming fleets under Zheng He. Although interest in them tends to revolve around how far they traveled across the Indian Ocean, their greatest impacts were felt in Southeast Asia, where most of the battles and diplomatic intercessions we know of took place. In the western archipelago Zheng He captured a "pirate chief" (originally from Guangdong), and the Yongle emperor appointed a leader to Palembang who could represent Ming concerns (also, as it happens, originally from Guangdong). Palembang's previous ruler, Parameswara, who had been driven out by Javanese forces, eventually settled in Malacca, where Zheng He later conveyed his investiture as its king from the same Chinese emperor. This bolstered his position vis-à-vis Majapahit Java, and also Siam, to which he had been paying tribute.[39] Other examples of diplomacy and military campaigns carried out under

[38] Roy Ellen pointed to a similar, although much more circumscribed, bifurcation of scholarly attention when he noted that in both the Moluccas and Melanesia, ecologically and culturally separate communities were integrated in systems of trade and exchange in the absence of any political institutions of comparable extent. Such parallels—which he considered "almost incidental"—between the Moluccan and the Melanesian situation "illustrate how scholarly anthropological traditions [were] embedded in particular political histories, the Melanesianist facing east toward the Pacific and the Indonesianist facing west toward mainland Asia," preventing obvious similarities from being recognized and addressed analytically. *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, p. 9. Needless to say, the present article aims to facilitate the recognition and analysis of such parallels, as well as of the connections, between these areas and the wider regions of which they are a part.

[39] Dreyer, *Zheng He*, pp. 41–43, 55–59. For an effort to theorize piracy from fifteenth-, seventeenth-, and nineteenth-century examples based in the region, see Jennifer L. Gaynor, "Piracy in the Offing: The Law of Lands and the Limits of Sovereignty at Sea," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2012).

Zheng He in Southeast Asia could be cited. Less well known is the fact that Zheng He was not the only eunuch commander dispatched to the maritime realm under the Yongle emperor. Other commanders were also dispatched to areas in what we now call the Philippines and eastern Indonesia.[40]

The lack of familiarity with these commanders and their journeys results in part from the grandeur of Zheng He's fleets, his own legendary (and legendarily huge) stature, the distances traveled across the Western (or "Indian") Ocean, and the historiographic counterpoint these voyages provide to a history of European expansion. Yet the impact of the fleets in Southeast Asia's western archipelago and the existence of these lesser-known missions to archipelagos farther east might well give us pause to reconsider the prominence of oceanic space in this story.

Ocean Basins and Archipelagos

My intent here is not so much to advocate for archipelagos as an alternative geographic framework for analysis, but rather to offer a small caveat to an undeniably fruitful refocusing of the geographic structures used to investigate the past. Braudelian antecedents notwithstanding, the ability to pose this problem is greatly indebted to the work of those who, in the late 1990s, asked colleagues to consider what would happen if we shifted the seas from the margin to the center of academic visions. Cautions registered at the same time showed considerable foresight about the limits of such an endeavor's promise.[41] The present piece takes those limits seriously and is offered in a similar spirit, inspired by the invitation to see things afresh and perhaps discover connections previously obscured by received geographic divisions.[42]

The increased attention to ocean basins over the last two decades has invigorated scholarship through the sustained examination of contact and interaction between peoples, closer investigation of imperial

[40] Wade, "Zheng He Voyages," p. 44.

[41] Inter alia: Kären Wigen and Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "Guest Editors' Introduction," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): ii; Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, "A Maritime Response to the Crisis in Area Studies," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 161–168; Jerry Bentley, "Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 215–224.

[42] Martin W. Lewis, "Dividing the Ocean Sea," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 188–214. See also Kären Wigen, "Introduction," in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. Jerry Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 1–18.

networks, and analysis of interregional economic and social integration, including the dynamics of trade, labor migration, and religious pilgrimage. In addition to scrutinizing life at sea, an emphasis on ocean basins has also prompted deeper study of how coastal perimeters and their hinterlands anchored the exchanges, admixtures, and innovations that emerged across and between them. Yet, like the periodization of the Age of Sail, which raises questions about "ages of sail" in a broader world-historical context, an ocean basins framework, while immensely useful, is applied only with awkwardness to some sea-focused regions important to maritime world history. Insular Southeast Asia, for instance, with its vast archipelagic zones, fits comfortably neither within an ocean basin nor neatly along a continental margin. Nonetheless the region is famed as a maritime crossroads, sharing related languages and boat designs with the Pacific, even as its most famed commodities—spices—were transshipped east to west across the archipelago long before the Dutch attempted to monopolize them.

As with other historical work on the maritime world, here one may also point to pre–World War II intellectual precedents. For Southeast Asia, J. C. van Leur's Asia-centric insights, more striking at the time than they now appear, sprang from a critique of colonial historiography itself less concerned with the continuation of colonial rule than with a reduced belief in the superiority of the West. A product of his disenchantment with the political and economic climate of the 1930s as much as his enchantment with Weber, van Leur worked out an approach to studying the history of Asian trade that did not start from the notion that it should be overtaken by a superior economic order.[43] In noting how ill-served this history was by viewing things—as he famously put it—from the decks of European ships, he opened the way for future scholars such as G. J. Resink with his archipelago-centric perspective, and later others, to examine the extensive and often complex role that maritime interactions have played in the region's historical dynamics and in the lives of many of its people.[44]

---

[43] J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1955); W. F. Wertheim, "Early Asian Trade: An Appreciation of J. C. van Leur," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1954): 167–173; Jaap Vogel, "J.C. Van Leur, 1908–1942: A Short Life in History," in *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History*, ed. Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 13–38, esp. 21–23. Ben Finney's eloquent "The Other One-Third of the Globe" provides a more recent critique of Eurocentric historiography and an unabashedly anthropological approach to Pacific history.

[44] This basic insight has inspired a number of historians. Among them, Denys Lombard's contributions have been underrecognized in anglophone scholarship. Heather Sutherland

In this profoundly maritime region, the seemingly divergent histories of Southeast Asia and the Pacific intersected and overlapped. They did so, for example, in Moluccan boats of the seventeenth century and the contexts of their use. As with many Austronesian boats, *kora-kora* had outriggers.[45] Like their counterparts in eastern Polynesia, Moluccan *kora-kora* could be rowed or sailed and were similarly used in war. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in the coastal areas of Ambon, many Moluccan villages formed federations and joined their *kora-kora* together in fleets known as *hongi*. When the Portuguese established their rule in certain parts of the island, they used these same methods to organize indigenous defense for areas under their control. The VOC (Dutch East India Company) continued the institution when they conquered the area, with the first *hongi* under Dutch rule setting out in 1607. *Kora-kora* did not fare particularly well

---

has articulated in the most sophisticated detail how the maritime geography of Southeast Asia has shaped its history. See, inter alia, Heather Sutherland, "Geography as Destiny? The Role of Water in Southeast Asian History," in *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Peter Boomgaard, VKI 240 (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), pp. 27–70. G. J. Resink was a legal historian whose scholarship on the maritime world ranged from research on law and geography to studies of literature in historical context. See the collection: G. J. Resink, *Indonesia's History between the Myths: Essays in Legal History and Historical Theory*, trans. James S. Holmes (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1968). Roy Ellen mentions Resink in a similar intellectual genealogy: *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, pp. 1–3.

[45] In the sixteenth century, *kora-kora* were plank-built vessels used mostly for the transport of large cargoes of men and materials. See C. C. Macknight, "The Study of Praus in the Indonesian Archipelago," *Great Circle* 2, no. 2 (1980): 117–128; Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, p. 149. Roy Ellen notes that early examples of similar boats had double outriggers, as did *kora-kora* well into the twentieth century, although on larger more stable craft they were thought to be unnecessary and hence may have been discarded. See A. C. Haddon, "The Outriggers of Indonesian Canoes," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 50 (1920): 69–134; Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, p. 157. Haddon observed that double outriggers were nearly universal in Indonesia. A. C. Haddon, *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, vol. 1, *General Ethnography* (1935; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 313. In the image used here from Bor's text it is not possible to tell whether the boats depicted had one outrigger or two. The *kora-kora* from the Blaeu–Van der Hem Atlas appears to have just one outrigger. This accords with Dutch woodblock prints of *kora-kora* of different sizes in Isaac Commelin's *Begin ende voortgangh van de Nederlantsche geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Ghent, 1646). (My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested Commelin for comparison.) The upshot is that on *kora-kora* one outrigger was common, and two may not have been unusual. Although often considered "Moluccan" boats, Ellen estimates that features and techniques of their construction suggest a center of dispersal in Sulawesi and the Southern Philippines around 1000–500 B.C.E. See Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, p. 149. As the description for the image from Bor confirms, they were certainly used off Celebes in the mid seventeenth century. It may be useful to note that at least into the eighteenth century, eastern and southeastern Celebes were included in maps of the Moluccas, for instance in F. Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* (Dordrecht/Amsterdam, 1724–1726).

FIGURE 2. Naval battle off the coast of Celebes between the Dutch and forces under Macassar during the Great Ambon War (1651–1656). From Livinus Bor, *Amboinse oorlogen door Arnold de Vlaming van Oudshoorn als superintendent, over d'oosterse gewesten oorlogaftig ten eind gebracht*, 1663. National Library of the Netherlands.

in rough weather or fighting on the open sea, yet their shallow draft made them very effective in coastal areas and amphibious actions.[46]

Such boats continued to be used against the Dutch as well. Makassar, for instance, provided ships that conveyed supplies and manpower in Moluccan conflicts with the Dutch. Makassar provided ships to protect its interests, since its port—based in South Celebes (Sulawesi)—was the eastern archipelago's main outlet for spices.[47] Figure 2 depicts

[46] Gerrit Knaap, "Headhunting, Carnage and Armed Peace in Amboina, 1500–1700," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46, no. 2 (2003): 170.

[47] Knaap, "Headhunting," 178–181; E. M. Beekman, ed. and trans., *The Poison Tree: The Selected Writings of Rumphius on the Natural History of the Indies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 149–150.

FIGURE 3. Moluccan *kora-kora* with mounted artillery under Dutch flags. From the Blaeu–Van der Hem Atlas, 1665–1668. Austrian National Library.

kora-kora located off the coast of Celebes, fighting under Makassar's authority, or in any case on its behalf and against the Dutch, during the Great Ambon War of the 1650s. Note that the *kora-kora* portrayed here have sails pushed up by a tilting boom—a peculiarly Austronesian feature. Figure 3 shows a *kora-kora* from around the same time, possibly a bit later, with deck-mounted artillery, under Dutch flags.[48] This image usefully illustrates both shared boat design with the Pacific as well as the ongoing impressment of Southeast Asian seafarers to serve in *hongi* under the VOC. Although the infamous *hongi* raids were conducted in an effort to maintain Dutch control over the clove harvest, after 1656

[48] On "peculiarly Austronesian," see G. A. Horridge, "The Austronesian Conquest of the Sea—Upwind," in *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. P. Bellwood, J. J. Fox, and D. Tryon (Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1995), pp. 134–151, esp. 141; Anderson, "Slow Boats," p. 28; Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone*, p. 149. Horridge specifies triangular sail; these are regional variants.

they were more often used for a show of force than for actual armed action.[49]

Calls for a maritime focus on Southeast Asia are not new, yet, as Barbara Watson Andaya has pointed out, the region nevertheless often remains a shadowy presence between great oceans even when the theme of maritime Asia is employed.[50] This may in part be due to habits that make it hard to think history—even maritime history—without state formation as object and subtext. Agriculture, and hence settlement and enclosure, may be smuggled in as a corollary, while trade itself is generally considered relevant only insofar as it speaks to urbanization and the concentration of wealth in the service of centralizing political power. Such terrestrial habits of thought and analysis may, however, go only so far in explaining archipelagic worlds.[51]

Even the region's "sea people," with lifestyles closely tied to the waters and no taken-for-granted homeland, provoke theories of uniquely maritime adaptation developed in riverine locations out of interactions with the great maritime power of Srivijaya.[52] How-

---

[49] Knaap, "Headhunting," pp. 182–184; Beekman, *Poison Tree*, pp. 149–150.

[50] Andaya, "Oceans Unbounded." This article provides rich illustrations of how culturally salient the sea is for both high and low in societies across the region. As she indicates, Donald Emmerson advocated a sea-focused approach in "The Case for a Maritime Perspective on Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1980): 139–145. Numerous scholars focused on maritime Southeast Asia have endeavored to turn land-centric historiographies more toward the sea, including O. W. Wolters, Anthony Reid, Denys Lombard, Heather Sutherland, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Barbara Watson Andaya, and more recently Eric Tagliacozzo, Kerry Ward, and others.

[51] A general statement about terracentrism in maritime history may be found in Marcus Rediker, "Toward a People's History of the Sea," in *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Suffolk, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 195–206.

[52] Robert Blust, who places an antecedent form of Sama-Bajau languages in the Barito river basin of southeast Borneo, theorizes that from a riverine context they became sea nomads through trade interaction with Srivijaya. Robert Blust, "The Linguistic Macrohistory of the Philippines: Some Speculations," *Current Issues in Philippine Linguistics and Anthropology: Parangal kay Lawrence A. Reid*, ed. Hsiuchuan Liao and Carl R. Galvez Rubino (Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines and SILPhilippines, 2005), pp. 52–53; Mark T. Miller, *A Grammar of West Coast Bajau* (unpublished linguistics PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington), p. 3. It is a question whether or not Blust was cognizant of O.W. Wolter's shift in thinking about Srivijaya when he articulated this theory. Wolters came increasingly to think that what stood early Srivijayan rulers in good stead when they began to participate in foreign trade and have entrepôt pretensions was less maritime or commercial acumen than what he theorized was an ancient riverine experience in mobilizing neighborhoods. This makes particularly good sense if one posits a sharp divide between riverine and coastal travel. However there is no reason to think that ancient group anchorages or coastal and estuarine settlements would not also have necessitated experience in mobilizing "neighborhoods." O. W. Wolters, "Studying Srivijaya," in *Early Southeast Asia: Selected Essays*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell

ever, rather than adaptation from riverine locations, one might have thought it more likely that they instead drew on Austronesian precedents, retooling earlier maritime ways to suit new modes of politics and economy. If scholarly engagement with the role of the sea in shaping lives and interconnected histories is to have an effect on the geographic frameworks we customarily employ, then perhaps it would do to probe the reasons for this "shadowy presence" further and to recall recent advances.

Southeast Asia's "shadowy presence" in the historiography of maritime Asia rests in part on formations of regional knowledge that look to India and China for models and connections.[53] India and China, as well as the Arab world, indeed helped to shape developments in Southeast Asia, and each has very strong historical traditions. Yet particularly when it comes to themes such as commerce and interaction over long-distances, while those connections have been important, nevertheless—and reminiscent of an earlier historiography—work on them has often emphasized the role of outsiders. On the one hand, this tends to create a picture worthy of that other sense of insularity. On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, emphasis on the role of outsiders results in an image of "openness," seen by some as a defining characteristic of the region, born of its geography and contributing to the vagueness surrounding it.[54]

University, 2008), esp. pp. 105–106. Peter Bellwood, in the 2007 edition of his book on the archipelago's prehistory, revised a position similar to those above. In earlier editions he suggested that the lifestyle of the region's sea people had developed as a specialized economic adaptation within the exchange and trade networks of the archipelago during the last 1,500 years. In 2007, less certain about this proposal, he suggested that their lifestyle may "contain a tantalizing record of more ancient Malayo-Polynesian adaptations long past." Peter Bellwood, *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), p. 136.

[53] John Miksic also points to this as a shortcoming that tends to keep scholars of Southeast Asia from looking farther east than the Moluccas. John N. Miksic, "A Comparison between Some Long-Distance Trading Institutions of the Malacca Straits Area and of the Western Pacific," in *Southeast Asian Archaeology at the XV Pacific Science Congress* 16, ed. D. T. Bayard (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1984), pp. 235–253. I would like to thank John Miksic for bringing this piece to my attention.

[54] Sutherland, "Geography as Destiny?" pp. 44–45. She emphasizes here that in fact with these themes, "it is all too easy for Southeast Asians to disappear from their own history." Also see Heather Sutherland, "Southeast Asian History and the Mediterranean Analogy," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 1–20. The classic statement of a Southeast Asia–centric historiography is John R. Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 72–102, reprinted in Laurie Sears, ed., *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John Smail*, Center for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph 11 (Madison: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1993), pp. 39–70.

Equally important is a history in which particular scholars dismissed maritime aspects of, and achievements in, the region itself. Certain Dutch authors such as Meilink-Roelofsz downplayed the limited information in Portuguese sources that did not fit with the depictions later offered by the Dutch, and rejected the capacity of Southeast Asians to conduct oceanic navigation and trade. Even van Leur, who championed the local carrying trade, based his calculations for regional tonnages largely on extrapolations from trade based at Batavia. Except for Japara on Java's north coast, the picture that thus emerged for seventeenth-century Malay and Javanese shipping was "that of a sizable fleet of smallish vessels involved exclusively in regional networks and maintained by merchants of the peddler category."[55] Yet during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, insular Southeast Asian polities *did* build and sail large oceangoing vessels, and their fleets were among the main carriers working the eastern segments of international trade in the Indian Ocean.[56]

The term "junk," often used for Chinese vessels, in fact comes from the Malay *jong*, which referred to Malay or Javanese trading boats that, to the surprise of sixteenth-century Portuguese sailors, were often larger than their own largest ships—five hundred tons is a common figure in written sources but by no means the largest—with features typical of Southeast Asian technical traditions.[57] Against earlier views that stressed the Portuguese impact, Pierre-Yves Manguin has argued that the Southeast Asian withdrawal from high-seas shipping in the second half of the sixteenth century—the virtual disappearance by that century's end of these ships of exceptional tonnage—may well have been only the epilogue of a long-term, pan-Asian process.[58] What the nature of this process was and whether it bore any relation to the maritime contractions discussed above are questions that remain to be answered.

Finally, in sorting out the reasons for maritime Southeast Asia's "shadowy presence," I would also mention the current historiographic sensibility, in which maritime history, particularly as an approach to global interconnections, gravitates—for evidentiary and perhaps other reasons as well—to oceanic realms. Yet the archipelagos of Southeast

[55] Manguin, "Vanishing *Jong*," pp. 197–201; the quotation is on pp. 200–201.

[56] See note 2 above, and especially Manguin, "Vanishing *Jong*," p. 197; Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, p. 70; Sutherland, "Geography as Destiny?" p. 39.

[57] Manguin, "Vanishing *Jong*," pp. 197–199; Manguin, "Maldives Connection," p. 264.

[58] Manguin, "Vanishing *Jong*," pp. 209–211.

Asia, with dynamics of their own, and linked as well with neighboring coasts and oceans, have been every bit as maritime.

While historical and cultural differences to some extent divide the eastern and western ends of the archipelago, insular Southeast Asia belongs as much to Oceania as it does to the world of the Indian Ocean. For most mariners of the region there would have been no imaginary line dividing the archipelago like that drawn by Alfred Russel Wallace to describe the evolutionary divergence of its fauna. Such mariners, some of them "sea people" who actually lived on their boats—at least some of them, some of the time—in addition to being branded as pirates, played a role in the trade, military defense, and political legitimacy of rulers in polities from the seventh through the seventeenth centuries.[59] Representations of strong polities were at times even described as "fleets of state," which, when gathered around a ruler, could literally move a polity's center resettling it from one place to another.[60] Such features suggest that although attention to links with the Indian Ocean predominates, further investigation may reward comparison, and find connections, with the rest of Oceania.[61]

---

[59] A selective list would include Srivijaya in the seventh to thirteenth centuries, the period of Srivijaya's prominence as attested in foreign sources; Champa as early as the seventh century to (some claim) the early nineteenth century, although it reached its height in the ninth and tenth centuries; Majapahit, which rose from the end of the thirteenth century (ca. 1293) to around 1500; Malacca, established ca. 1400 (by Parameswara/Iskandar Shah) to 1511, when the Portuguese took it; Johor, which rose after the Portuguese took Malacca, flourished through alliances including with the Dutch, and reached its height in the latter sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century; Makassar, prominent during the sixteenth and the first three-quarters of the seventeenth century; and Sulu, predominantly in the late eighteenth century. This is not to mention a host of other maritime centers of trade, politics, and exchange, including many smaller ones in the eastern archipelago such as Bima, Buton, Bone, Ternate, Tidore, and others.

[60] Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Amorphous Nature of Coastal Polities in Insular Southeast Asia: Restricted Centers, Extended Peripheries," *Moussons* 5 (2002): 78–81.

[61] John Miksic, "A Comparison between Some Long-Distance Trading Institutions," p. 247, similarly enjoins scholars of the region "to be aware of the important implications of work being done in the western Pacific and New Guinea, and not to focus exclusively on the correlations with assumed models from India and China." His examination of parallels in the structures and motivations for exchange networks among China, Malacca, and Melanesia/the Western Pacific suggest that the benefits of wide exchange networks in the subsistence sector may have been secondary to ceremonial long-distance trade linked to status systems.