

Introduction: Beyond National Boundaries

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The Bay of Bengal forms the north-eastern part of the Indian Ocean. It resembles a cone in shape, and is bordered on the east by Myanmar and the Malay peninsula and on the west by India. The southern extremes reach the island of Sri Lanka, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It is beyond these islands that the waters of the Bay of Bengal merge with those of the South China Sea that extends from the Malacca Straits to the Strait of Taiwan encompassing the coasts of Thailand, Vietnam and south China. Though the seas have been important for the five millennia of human history, they are also the most glossed over in historical discourse, which has tended to focus on predominantly land-based national histories.

In recent decades the sea appears to be emerging from this indifference, with scholars adopting varied perspectives in the study of the ocean, extending from the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea. Trade and commerce and European interventions have been two persistent themes and secondary literature on these is both extensive and rich (Ray, 2011: 27-54). By the ninth century the major states on the islands of Java and Bali, especially the central Javanese state of Mataram had developed complex economic infrastructures and had integrated diversifying agricultural systems into a web of regional and long-distance trade networks. Sanskrit inscriptions from Buddhist sites refer to religious teachers travelling to the region from Gujarat, Sri Lanka and Gaur in Bengal. Mataram also produced maritime Southeast Asia's first standardized indigenous coinage based on gold and billon (silver-copper alloy) divided into weight-value units integrating local and Indian systems. By the tenth-century coins

based on the same system of weights and values were beginning to be minted across the maritime region from Sumatra to Bali and to the Philippine island of Luzon (Christie, 1999: 222-3).

From the ninth to the mid-fourteenth centuries several merchant associations dominated economic transactions in peninsular India, such as the Ainurruvar, Manigramam, Nanadesi and the Anjuvannam. Associated with these merchant associations were communities of craftsmen such as weavers, basket-makers, potters, leather-workers and so on. The topographical distribution of the inscriptions is significant and they are clustered in the Dharwad–Bijapur and Mysore localities of Karnataka, while in Tamil Nadu larger numbers are found in the Thanjavur, Tiruchirapalli and Madurai districts. Not only did these merchant associations develop powerful economic networks, but they also employed private armies. They donated regularly to temples, which were at times named after them and also contributed to the construction of tanks (Abraham, 1988; Karashima, 2002; Kulke, Kesavapany and Sakhuja, 2009). The range of their operations extended well beyond the boundaries of the Indian subcontinent into Southeast Asia.

Several clusters of Tamil inscriptions have been found on the eastern fringes of the Indian Ocean from Burma (Myanmar) to Sumatra. Of the seven mid-ninth to late-thirteenth century Tamil or part-Tamil language inscriptions found so far in Southeast Asia, one has been discovered near Bagan in Burma, two just south of the Isthmus of Kra in the Malay peninsula and four in north and west Java. Perhaps the easternmost record is the bilingual Tamil and Chinese language inscription found associated with remains of one of the two Siva temples at Quanzhou in south China. These inscriptions connect merchants associations operating out of south India with the founding or the endowing of temples or other structures for the use of the resident Indian merchant community.

In the tenth century, local versions of these merchant guilds, termed the *banigrāma*, appeared in the north coast ports of both Java and Bali, especially at Julah on the Balinese coast. There are seven Javanese inscriptions dating from CE 902 to 1053 that refer to merchant associations called *banigrāma* and to the various tax concessions granted to them. While some foreign merchants may

have been included in these groups, these appear largely as indigenous organizations associated with the local economic networks as tax-farmers (Christie, 1999: 242-5).

Chinese records of the 1060s and 1070s report that the Imperial Court received missions from the Chola kingdom of south India as well as from the ruler of Srivijaya located on the island of Sumatra, but by the last decades of the eleventh century the Chinese court had begun to encourage Chinese traders to venture out to the sea. Perhaps the most relevant example for this paper is the Buddhist monastery at Nagapattinam, which was a major landmark on the Tamil coast from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries CE. A Buddhist temple was erected at Nagapattinam specifically for Chinese Buddhists at the instance of a Chinese ruler during the reign of the Pallava king Narasimhavarman II (c. CE 695-722). One of the later Srivijayan king, Maravijayottungavarman, is known to have provided for its construction and the Chola king Rajaraja I granted revenues of a large village, Anaimangalam, for its upkeep in CE 1006.

Scholars such as Haraprasad Ray (2004) and Tansen Sen (2004) have documented commercial exchanges between India and China on the basis of references in Chinese literature and have postulated direct links between the two countries, bilateral relations, as also the fact that these exchanges had a tremendous impact on intermediary states. In place of the earlier Buddhist networking, the Tang and Song governments took greater interest in commercial rather than religious exchanges with the regions to China's south and trade networks proliferated. Recent writings, especially by Kenneth Hall, have, however, questioned the notion of bilateral Indo-China trade in which 'Southeast Asian societies are portrayed as bystanders, contented agriculturalists who were members of communal agricultural and tribal societies, who were hosts and/or marginal participants in the international trade' (Hall, 2004: 213-60). Hall underscores the participatory nature of Indian Ocean networks in the ancient period and their reliance on economic and cultural dialogue rather than hegemony and dominance.

Undoubtedly, Chinese ceramics have a wide distribution in the Indian Ocean region (Rougelle, 1996) and two of the most popular wares are the Yue ware dated from the eighth to twelfth centuries CE

and the Longquan ware present at sites of the thirteenth and fourteenth century CE, although scholars continue to debate unities of time and space as encompassed by the use of these two terms. A search for Chinese ceramics along the Indian coasts has yielded mainly post-eleventh century-ceramics, a majority belonging to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries along the Tamil and Malabar coasts (Karashima, 2004).

Relevant to this discussion are the voyages of Zheng He, who is regarded within the Chinese tradition as a Ming envoy sent abroad at the head of naval armadas by the Yong-le emperor (1403-25) on seven occasions to develop relations of peace and friendship with rulers in the Indian Ocean region. During these voyages Zheng He engaged in trade and brought many of the foreign rulers back to China to offer tribute to the imperial court. It should not, however, be forgotten that the primary motivation of these voyages was military expansion. The voyages sent by the Yong-le emperor were different from earlier ones in that they were commanded by eunuchs. 'It is obvious that these fleets were crewed by a wide range of peoples. Many of the eunuch commanders were Muslims, the navigators were often non-Chinese, and it is possible that descendants of Fu-jian Arabs were also included in the crew' (Wade, 2004). The primary motivation was, however, clear: that of establishing staging posts at centres such as Malacca in the Malay peninsula and of subduing the local rulers by their might and strength. Accounts of these voyages are replete with descriptions of violence and attacks on the local forces of Java, Burma, Sri Lanka and Sumatra and can at best be termed 'gun-boat diplomacy'. It would nevertheless seem that these increased contacts between China, Southeast and South Asia provided an impetus to trade networks.

Reid has characterized the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century as the Age of Commerce, with increased commercialization and the growth of cosmopolitan urban centres along the coasts of the South China Sea (Reid, 1988-93). He attributes this expansion to intensified Chinese maritime activity from the beginning of the fifteenth century onwards, which impacted parts of Southeast Asia as well. Although small quantities of pepper had been exported from Java in an earlier period, the fifteenth-century demand

from China led to the cultivation of Indian pepper in Sumatra and, henceforth, Indonesian pepper and Siamese sappan wood used for dye became items of mass consumption in East Asia (Reid, 2007: 120). Several cultivated crops, such as cloves, cotton, sugar and benzoin (the resin of the tree *Styrax benzoin* used for incense) were grown for export and whole communities in island Southeast Asia depended on trade for their livelihood. Chinese maritime networks were by no means limited to the South China Sea but are known to have extended into South Asia and the Arabian Sea.

Trading networks from the east coast of India to the South China Sea are thus well-represented in secondary writings. More recently other perspectives have emerged. As World History acquires centrality and the focus shifts from national histories to globalization, islands are often seen as a middle plane of analysis between the globe and the region. Increasingly the history of the sea is discussed as 'connected history' across porous borders, linked through boat-building traditions, community networks and cultural practices (Vink, 2007: 41-62).

In his overview of the history of the Indian Ocean, Pearson (2003: 249-88) wrote of movements of people and goods across the waters, as also the spread of religious ideas and migrations of labour, and of traditional groups with trading and banking skills. His emphasis was on tracing transformations both spatially and temporally, with the final push being provided in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that saw radical changes in the ideologies of Empire, colonization, the introduction of new technologies in shipping and the establishment of ports at Madras, Calcutta and Bombay by the English East India Company almost from scratch. Equations in the Indian Ocean changed from the mid-eighteenth century when the British began to acquire land in eastern India and steamship navigation altered the balance of power in the region (Pearson, 2003: 148).

This collection of papers attempts a study of this large expanse of water flowing past the coasts of Bengal and Sri Lanka to the coast of Vietnam through three broad issues which provide unity to this volume. The first relates to an emphasis on boat-building traditions and the communities who traversed the region (Cynthia Chou, Tom

Hoogervorst, Geoff Wade, Charlotte Minh Hà Pham and Somasiri Devendra in this volume). The challenge is to use the ethnographic ‘present’ and mobility for an understanding of the history of the sea. Linked to this movement across the waters are the narratives of trans-locality inherent in memories of communities in the region (paper by Farish A. Noor). The third issue relates to European intervention, starting with the Portuguese and the Dutch (Murari Jha, Pius Malekandathil, Himanshu Prabha Ray and Prapassorn Posrithong in this volume). In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese did not designate a space that was well-defined, but a complex of enclaves subordinate to the Portuguese crown, all of which were linked together as a maritime network. The Portuguese system was a vast protection racket—protection from violence that they themselves had created. By the middle of the seventeenth century most of the Portuguese major forts had been lost mainly to the Dutch (Subrahmanyam and Thomaz, 1991: 304).

The engagement of the English East India Company with the countries of the Bay of Bengal was of a different order from that of its predecessors. The establishment of colonies in South and Southeast Asia resulted in the introduction of new disciplines such as archaeology, which had far-reaching implications for the cultural identity of the sea and the communities who navigated it. The eighteenth century thus, raised a different set of issues with the colonization of large parts of the region. How did notions of a maritime empire impact the study of the region’s past? It is these themes that we address in the volume thereby shifting the focus from chronological markers and national histories to communities who traversed the waters and the changes that these underwent in time. A brief overview of the themes is presented in the next five sections, starting with a discussion of maritime communities.

Maritime Communities

Anthropological studies have shown the close interaction that maritime communities maintain with the sea and the extent to which their knowledge of the waters and seafaring knowledge are vital to their identity construction.

The history and culture of the mobile boat-dwelling people [of Southeast Asia], often known as sea nomads, dates back many centuries. Today, they continue to traverse the waters of the archipelago and to challenge the classical idea of citizenship that is defined within bounded territories and guaranteed by a sovereign state. Their continued widespread distribution throughout the area bears testament to a very different indigenous perception and mapping of the region (Chou, 2006).

How are histories of these mobile communities to be factored into an understanding of the history of the sea? Historically these communities, variously termed sea-gypsies or boat-people have travelled unhampered across the waters and claimed sovereignty through kinship ties. They have facilitated movement of commodities and have forged links with littoral states. These communities are by no means homogeneous and instead consist of at least three major ethno-linguistic groups, each with their own histories, culture, and speech patterns. They are: (a) the Moken and related Moklen of the Mergui Archipelago of Burma with extensions southward into the islands of south-west Thailand; (b) the Orang Suku Laut, of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago and the coastal waters of eastern Sumatra and southern Johor and, until recently, Singapore; and (c) the Bajau Laut, the largest and most widely dispersed of these groups living in the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines, eastern Borneo, Sulawesi, and the islands of eastern Indonesia. The data for the study of these groups either comes from scattered references in European accounts of the region or from anthropological studies and raises issues of historicity.

Fishing as a subsistence strategy dates from at least 10,000 BCE in coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea (Ray, 2003: Chapter II; McPherson, 2007: 34-49). A few coastal shell middens, and open and cave sites with marine shell deposits dating from 8,000 years ago have been identified in northern Sumatra, western peninsular Malaysia and north Vietnam. At present, many of these sites are found inland, e.g. in Sumatra on an old shoreline 10-15 km away from the coast, thereby reflecting higher sea levels during the middle Holocene (Bellwood, 1992: 87).

One of the groups that has been studied ethno-archaeologically

is the 'Chaw Lay' based in the Phuket group of islands in south Thailand, Phuket being the meeting point and ceremonial centre of the widely dispersed network of maritime hunter-gatherers. Of the 4,500 Chaw Lay living along the south-west coast of Thailand in 1981, a third were resident on Phuket island itself—the groups ranging in size from two to more than eight hundred people. The specialized subsistence strategy of these groups is based on an exploitation of marine resources, especially fish. As a result of dependence on a mobile resource such as fish, these communities inevitably maintain a peripatetic way of life,

with a compact and easily transportable material culture and social attitudes which encourage the spirit of adventure, group co-operation and an outgoing hospitable attitude to other nomadic groups they may meet on the foraging expeditions and upon whom they may have to depend for food and shelter (Engelhardt and Rogers, 1997: 179)

One of the problems associated with this subsistence strategy is that it is difficult to isolate it in the archaeological record, especially in the sandy beach matrix of the coast. These habitation areas are generally occupied in short stretches and in keeping with a complex spatial patterning. While a site or a portion of a site is being used as a base camp by one Chaw Lay group, other smaller and transient groups could occupy portions of the site, sometimes temporarily. At the same time the site could also be exploited by other Chaw Lay groups for water and vegetable collection. The use pattern is further complicated by the fact that while some of the sites indicate seasonal occupation, others are left fallow to allow regeneration (Engelhardt and Rogers, 1997: 182). Nevertheless, by adopting this ethno-archaeological approach, the authors have provided insights into the symbiosis between mobile sea-people and coastal groups.

These small-scale fishing and sailing communities were also probably the agency for the spread of crops across the waters. A number of cultivars found in south India have their wild origins in Southeast Asia, such as the arecanut palm. Sandalwood probably originated in the wild in the driest parts of Indonesia, such as eastern Java and the Lesser Sundas. Wood charcoal from the latest Neolithic levels of sites on the Sannarachamma hill, north of the

village of Sanganakallu in the Bellary district of Karnataka in south India, identified as *Santalum*, however, places it in the southern Deccan by *c.* 1300 BCE. The banana is another crop-plant that travelled westward to the Indian subcontinent around 2000 BCE, as evident from banana phytoliths from the Harappan site of Kot Diji in southern Pakistan (Fuller et al., 2011: 548-9). Thus histories of these mobile communities are crucial to an understanding of cultural networks and the spread of plants and crops. Another area that is known for its varied traditions of boat-building and complex of channels is deltaic Bengal that participated in both riverine as well as trans-oceanic networks.

Inland Navigation and the Region of Bengal

Writing in 1792, Rennell was struck by the unique inland navigation network of Bengal and remarked on the brisk trade carried out throughout the region in boats. Salt, fish and rice have been the major resources of the region that were transported through the inland network and traded in the historical period. To these must be added 'the transport of commercial exports and imports, probably to the amount of two millions sterling per annum; the interchange of manufactures and products throughout the whole country' (Deloche 1994: 25). At present, in Bangladesh, the expression country-boat, synonymous with the Bengali term *nouka* 'denotes any wooden non-mechanised craft used on inland waters, along the coast or in the Bay of Bengal'. The sea-going boats found in the Chittagong area ply as far as Myanmar, while a variety of watercraft carry goods and agricultural products to inland ports (Jansen et al., 1989: 72-3). This fluvial network not only provided a distinctive environment throughout the early history of Bengal but it also linked Bengal to the larger Ganga and Brahmaputra Valley networks, on the one hand, and the east coast and Bay of Bengal systems that extended to the South China Sea, on the other.

By the sixth century Bengal is described as a region bordering the eastern sea (*prāksamudra*) in the Faridpur copper plates of Dharmaditya and by the eighth century Dharmapala Deva announced his control of the oceans 'forming the encircling ditches

of the earth'. The Khalimpur charters of the king were issued from Pataliputra 'where a variety of boats had formed a bridge on the Bhagirathi' (Kielhorn, 1896-7: 243-54). By the tenth century CE the Bay of Bengal had acquired a territorial identity as indicated by the use of the term Vangasagara or sea of Bengal in the Madanpur copper plate charter of Srichandra (Sircar, 1949: 337-9).

Another region that continued to play a crucial role in the early history of Bengal was Pundravardhana with Mahasthangarh as a major centre until the thirteenth century when the political focus shifted somewhat south to the Gaur-Pandua area. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at least three of the Pala kings adopted the title of Gaudesvara or lord of Gaur. This area formed a part of a larger trading network with routes traversing the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam to Tibet, upper Burma and China. In addition, it was linked via the lower Bengal coast to the Bay of Bengal coastal system, viz., Arakan and the Irrawaddy valley on the east and the Andhra, Tamil and Sri Lankan coasts to the south. Its strategic location at one end of the Ganga River system provided Pundravardhana access to the ancient historical network of the Ganga plains.

Attention should also be drawn to the overlapping frontiers between Bengal and the kingdom of Arakan lying on its eastern edge, which saw cultural and religious interaction between them, on the one hand, and Burma and mainland Southeast Asia on the other. It is significant that stone and copper plate inscriptions of the Chandra dynasty that ruled Arakan from c. CE 454 to 600 were found from the ruins of stupas and indicate that at this time Arakan was looking to Bengal for models of kingship and administration. In addition to adopting the format of the copper plate grants prevalent in Bengal, Bhuticandra's inscription (496-520) also incorporates several riparian terms known from Bengal such as *jola* (channel) and *khalla* (canal) (Sircar, 1957: 109; 1967: 61-6).

In contrast to the copper plate charters of the Chandras, their coinage struck in silver was closely related to that of Southeast Asia (Wicks, 1992: 86). In addition to the silver coinage of the Chandras, a coinage commenced around Chattagrama (Chittagong) with the legend 'Harikela' and circulated widely in south-east Bengal. At the same time gold coins were minted in the kingdom of Samatata and

also circulated in the region. These two were further supplemented by the use of cowries not only for small transactions, but also for land revenue and other high-value transactions. It would seem that cowries were obtained from the Maldives against the export of rice, while silver came from the Shan states and from Yunnan. Thus Bengal participated both in the riverine and the maritime networks of the region and this is what made it an exceptional trading node in the Bay of Bengal (Deyell, 2011: 279-314).

It is necessary to draw attention to another distinguishing feature of the region—the brick temples with terracotta decoration (Mitra, 2000-3; Gill, 2010). What is particularly relevant for this volume is the depiction of boats on these brick temples, a distinctive feature in the history of temple building in the subcontinent. These boat representations date to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and depict sixty-two panels showing riverboats and fifty-three panels with sailing vessels. The former category included houseboats, passenger and pleasure boats as also war boats, while the latter included European vessels (Deloche, 1991). How are these boat depictions to be explained?

A corresponding development was the enormous popularity of the mythological story of Kamale-Kamini glorifying the power of the Goddess Chandi. The story appeared in literature in the Chandi *Maṅgala Kāvya*s as early as the thirteenth-century version of the poet Manik Datta and came to be known through several versions from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Story-tellers recited the *Maṅgala Kāvya*s at village gatherings and this undoubtedly influenced terracotta artists and *paṭa* scroll painters. In some *Maṅgala Kāvya*s there are elaborate references to the wealth and fortune of merchants like Chand Saudagar and Dhanapati. This prosperity is also reflected in representations on temples, especially the temple of Sridharpur, the Lakshmi-Janardan temple at Dubrajpur and at Karkai, where merchants are shown in large boats accompanied by assistants and carrying cargoes, including animals (Haque, 1980: 30-1).

There was a spurt in temple construction in Bengal from the thirteenth century onwards with a marked increase in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the temples were erected in areas closely linked to riverine trade and relate to the rise of a new middle

class, as the shrines were located in or adjacent to the houses from which landholders governed their estates (Michell, 1983: 8). An analysis of inscriptions found on the temples indicate donations made by several local zamindars or landlords, the raja family of Burdwan, the Mallas at Bisnupur, queens, merchants and several private individuals. Thus it is evident that the brick temples not only provided connectivity between agrarian space and the inland navigation network in Bengal, but also provided cultural and religious identity to the emerging local elite.

These temples have been studied for their architectural styles and terracotta decorations (McCutchion, 1972; Michell, 1983), but not as indicators of the cultural identity of newly emerging elite groups. The assumption is that these were later interventions in the medieval landscape of Bengal and owed their origin to religious movements, such as the Gaudiya Vaisnava movement led by Chaitanyadeva (1486-1533). This contention may be debated on the basis of archaeological data, which indicates a continuous temple-building tradition in Bengal from the fifth and sixth centuries to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE as evident from archaeological sources (Sengupta and Chakraborty, 2002: 395-413). Nevertheless the unique identity of the region is evident.

Ethnographic Studies of the Boat

The boat or the ship, the vehicle essential for mobility on the waters, can itself be interpreted as a complex cultural artefact, one which is traded, modified, renamed, and accepted or rejected for a variety of reasons. Historically the data on boats is sparse and fragmentary in nature. The actual find of a log-boat in Europe dates to the eighth millennium BCE, and that of the earliest plank boat to the third millennium BCE, though there is indirect evidence for the use of water transport as early as 40,000 BCE. In the absence of actual boat remains from India, ethnographic accounts provided by early Europeans are valuable for an understanding of the boat-building traditions of the region. The earliest reference to Indian sewn-plank boats occurs in the sixteenth-century writings of Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese who worked on the Malabar coast from 1500 to 1515.

Those on the east coast were described by the Dutchman, Peter Floris who worked at Masulipatnam on the Coromandel coast in CE 1611 (McGrail, 2004: 270).

The Indian Ocean presented a unique environment to the sailor in antiquity, different both from that in Egypt or the Mediterranean. To sail in this region, the ships had to be 'good weatherly sailers, fast, good carriers, deep-drafted and able to go to windward as well. In short they had to be *real* sailing ships' (Villiers, 1952: 56-7). At the same time, the region also presents special problems for the historian and the archaeologist. On the one hand, it provides a profusion of ethnographic data on local traditions of fishing and boat-building while on the other, actual remains of wrecks are rare.

Thomas Bowrey (1650-1713) may be credited with the introduction of new classifications such as the *masula*—a term that continues to be used for the frameless stitched boats of India's east coast. This is not a term used by local boat-builders and users who adopt the generic term for the boat such as *padagu*, *padava* and *padhua*. Nor does the term incorporate any typical boat type, as there are significant variations in the size, shape and method of construction among the vessels that are said to form a part of the *masula* family (Kentley, 1996: 250).

Admiral Paris (1806-93) formulated the hypothesis that indigenous watercraft were as much expressions of a culture as were palaces, religious buildings or fortresses. As a trained French navigator he circumnavigated the Indian Ocean aboard the *Astrolabe*, the *Favorite* and the *Artemis* and catalogued the 'extra-European' craft (Reith, 1993). This trend continued in the writings of Hornell who argued that a distinctive climate and coast formation dominated or influenced by distinct ethnic stocks resulted in the evolution of characteristic boat-types (Hornell, 1946: 195). In accordance with this correlation, boat-types were seen as 'co-extensive in range with the limits of race and language or the influence of foreign sea-trade' (Hornell, 1946: 195). The influence of Portuguese sea-trade, he stated, was particularly noticeable in the larger vessels of the far south:

Until the arrival in the Indian Ocean of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century little improvement or change appears to have taken place. It was the intrusion of the Europeans into the trade of the Indian Ocean

which brought about a revolution in the designing of the larger craft operating there. (1970: 236)

Attempts at correlating boat-types with race and language do not explain the presence of different boat-types in the same cultural milieu or similar boat construction methods which independently evolved in different environments. Several examples could be quoted but a typical one is that of the clinker-built *patia* in the estuary of the Panchapara in north Orissa together with flush-laid boats, both types of boats being built by the same group of carpenters. While this tradition survives in a few pockets today, it was earlier common on the upper Ganga. Similarly, foreign influences cannot be identified by isolating a few traits and linking their incorporation to European contacts. Instead the crucial issue is to discuss the nature of interaction between different boat-building traditions and the reasons why one dominated and prevailed.

It is significant that before the construction of coastal facilities, such as docks and ports, sailing ships anchored at some distance from the coast and small boats were used to ferry passengers and cargo to the shore:

From the southern point of the coast of Coromandel to the Bay of Balasore it is impossible to make a good landing in European boats. An European boat attempting this passage would run the risk of touching on the bank and being swallowed up by the waves. To prevent this, flat-bottomed boats called *chelinques* are constructed without beams and which have the planks sewed together instead of being nailed. This formation gives them more elasticity; they are so flat that they do not draw when loaded above six inches water, and some not even so much . . . they are in less danger of being filled. They are generally manned with nine Blacks, and when the sea runs high with eleven. . . . When the sea runs so high that they are apprehensive of an accident, they take extra precaution by providing a *catimaron*. . . . On vessels of this frail description the natives of India and particularly the islanders of the Andamans and the Straits undertake long voyages by putting up a sail. (Grandpre, 1803: 85-90)

In addition to the range and variety of ethnographic data on ship-building available in the Indian Ocean, it is significant that a text codifying this information was produced in Sanskrit, i.e. the *Yuktikalpataru*, a treatise on ship-building attributed to King Bhoja

and dated to the eleventh century. The work refers to a variety of woods used in ship-building and classifies water-craft into two main categories: ordinary and sea-going; providing detailed measurements for these. But perhaps the characteristic feature of water-craft that it emphasizes is the stitched tradition and the absence of iron in holding or joining the planks together. This feature of Indian Ocean vessels seems to have persisted almost into the present as evident from notices by travellers to the region.

R.K. Mookerji's compilation of this text has been reworked by subsequent scholars. While Chaudhuri (1976) based her paper on the *Yuktikalpataru*, Schlingloff (1982) elaborated on the textual sources and compared these with representations in art. It is evident that none of the textual sources on ship-building are adequately detailed to allow for the reconstruction of water-craft based on these. It is nevertheless significant that in the eleventh century, these instructions should have been incorporated in a work on state-craft and attributed to the authorship of a king. In the wider context of South and Southeast Asian maritime history, it is from the ninth-tenth centuries onwards that there are increasing references in inscriptions to fishing rights, duties levied on commodities brought through the water-routes, and to revenue obtained from taxes on fishing. This is also a period of expanding maritime networks in the Indian Ocean, as discussed above.

Narratives of Trans-Locality

It is often suggested that the Arabs dominated the trade networks in the Indian Ocean after the introduction of Islam in the eighth century, which saw the formation of an 'Islamic world-economy' (Chaudhuri, 1985; Wink, 1990). Dionisius Agius, on the other hand, shows that with the spread of Islam, Arabic was enriched by borrowings from Aramaic, Persian, Greek, Sanskrit and other Indian languages (2008: 10-11). He also cautions against equating religion with ethnic identity as Arabic sources do not make this distinction and label all non-Arab foreigners who converted to Islam as Muslim, irrespective of their ethnic background. There are nevertheless exceptions. For example, the historian and geographer al-Mas'ūdī (d.

345/956-7), writing in the tenth century states that the Sirafis and Omanis were the leading seafarers of the time, thereby highlighting regional coastal identities.

It is generally agreed that local conversions in Southeast Asia began largely in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as indicated by the presence of early Islamic cemeteries in Sumatra and on the north Javanese coast. Recent research indicates that marble carvings for Muslim patrons across the Indian Ocean from East Africa to Java were produced in the workshops at Khambat in Gujarat between the late thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. This marble carving expertise grew out of a pre-existing tradition involving the production of sculptures for Hindu and Jain patrons and continued to be practised well into the nineteenth century. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, however, the main demand was for Muslim grave memorials followed by foundation inscriptions and architectural elements (Lambourn, 2004: 99-133; 2008: 252-86).

Islam is said to have reached Southeast Asia through the Sufi orders (Arabic *tariqa*, Malay *tarekat*) and to have flourished from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Muslim gravestone inscriptions from east Java date to the fifteenth century and belong to locals. Around the beginning of this century, Melaka on the west coast of the Malay peninsula grew from a fishing village into a trading entrepôt. According to a well-known Malay epic, Melaka's hero was taught to recite the Quran by a trader from the Coromandel coast of India (Andaya and Ishii, 2007: 172). Trading contacts with Persia and Central Asia led to the development of Sino-Muslim communities along the southeast coast of China, especially Canton, and many of the Chinese Muslim groups were actively involved in maritime commerce with South-east Asia. We have earlier referred to the voyages of the Chinese admiral Zeng He, which were commanded by Muslims.

Bayly has argued that trans-locality and long-distance pilgrimage and devotional networks have been enduring features of cultural life in South and Southeast Asia for many centuries. The Sufi *pir* (saint) Shahul Hamid of Nagaur in south India, for example, was known among his devotees for travels across time and space. Earth from his shrine at Nagaur was taken for setting up replica shrines at Penang

and Singapore (Bayly, 2004: 703-4). Sufism contains inherently trans-regional, transnational, and trans-ethnic dimensions. In any particular locality there is a wide range of Sufi saints, from major shrines of great antiquity to minor saints with a highly localized clientele (Werbner, 2003), nor is Sufism the only devotional network in South and Southeast Asia.

An important text for the study of pilgrimage in early Buddhism is the *Gaṇḍavyūha* which dates back in all probability to the early centuries CE and describes the travels of Sudhana who is inspired to travel by the Bodhisattva Manjusri and advised to visit fifty-three 'spiritual friends' in order to learn *bodhicarya* (the Bodhisattva practice). It is not known when and by whom the *Avatamsakasūtra*, one of the most influential Mahayana *sūtras* was first composed, but is thought to have issued from different hands in the Indic cultural sphere. Comprehensive renditions of the latter text were made in China in the early fifth and late seventh centuries CE from versions of the text obtained from Khotan (Cleary, 1993: 2). It was propagated in at least three different versions all over the Far East and in the third and last translation, the *Gaṇḍavyūha* occurs as an individual text and not as a part of the *Avatamsakasūtra*. An autographed manuscript of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* is said to have been presented to the Chinese emperor in CE 795 by an Orissan king, generally accepted to be a member of the Bhaumakara dynasty. This text and a letter were entrusted to the monk Prajna who was asked to provide a translation into Chinese (Levi, 1919-20: 363-4).

The *Gaṇḍavyūha* describes the attainment of enlightenment through tales of pilgrimage, the primary aim of the scripture being to stress that constraints placed by fixed systems need to be overcome to attain full consciousness:

It suggests that all views that are conditioned by cultural and personal history are by definition limiting, and there is a potential awareness that cuts through the boundaries imposed by conventional description based on accumulated mental habit. According to the scripture, it is the perennial task of certain people, by virtue of their own development, to assist others in overcoming arbitrary restrictions of consciousness so as to awaken to the full potential of mind. (Cleary, 1993: 47)

These enlightened people, according to the scripture, could belong to all walks of life and to all regions because ‘the wisdom and virtues of Buddha are in all people, but people are unaware of it because of their preoccupations’ (Cleary, 1993: 47). Historicity is of little account in this Buddhist scripture as the discourse is presented by trans-historical symbolic beings representing various aspects of universal enlightenment.

The starting point of Sudhana’s journey was Dhanyakara, often identified with Dhanyakataka in Andhra, and the littoral played a significant part in his travels (Fontein, 1967: 3). One of the *bhiksbus* he visits is Sagaramegha in Sagaramukha, followed by the monk Supratisthita of Sagaratira on his way to Sri Lanka. For twelve years, Sudhana travels through peninsular India; passes through 110 cities and visits the grammarian Megha at Vajrapura; the merchant Muktaka of Vanavasi; the monk Saradhvaja at the tip of the continent and the seer Bhishmottaranirghosha in the land of Nalayur on the coast. This is followed by visits to centres such as Samudrapratisthana where he meets the lay devotee Prabhuta; Bharukaccha or Broach at the mouth of the Narmada on the west coast of India to visit the treasurer Muktasara; Magadha, an ancient kingdom in north India; Kalingavana in the land of Shronaparanta; Dvaravati to see the celestial Mahadeva, and Kapilavastu where the Buddha was born. The text, however, does not contain any details of the centres visited, but is instead full of repetitions and descriptions of miracles, as also standard phrases and lengthy discourses. These narratives of travel and pilgrimage across the seas lost their centrality with the development of the so-called ‘scientific’ disciplines such as archaeology and the search for national histories.

The Beginnings of Archaeology and the Search for Origins

The exuberant diversity of Southeast Asian life was chopped up by European colonialism into a dozen colonial states with fixed borders. Colonialism and nationalism made common cause in establishing unified institutions and identities within these borders. (Reid, 1999: 39)

The larger issue that concerns this book is the process through which the ancient past of the region came to be configured in the

colonial period, as a result of control over the newly emerging discipline of archaeology. The history of archaeology in India is closely linked to that of the colonial state. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was founded in 1861 and Alexander Cunningham (1814-93) appointed its first head, barely three years after imperial rule had been established. The idea of government-sponsored archaeology was largely the result of Cunningham's bold initiatives and was in marked contrast to the policies of the Asiatic Society. The Cunningham era marked a break from the earlier notion of history of the pre-Muslim period instituted by Sir William Jones (1746-94) and his colleagues working under the aegis of the Asiatic Society. Jones and others had largely concentrated on the Purāṇas, the epics and the law books to work out a history of the Hindus. In contrast, research by James Prinsep and Cunningham clearly brought Buddhism to the forefront and established its study as a legitimate branch in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, Dutch officials founded a learned body known as the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in Java on 24 April 1778 for the promotion of oriental learning and there seems to have been a close collaboration between the two. Valuable Burmese books mainly on religious and mythological subjects collected by Capt. J. Canning during his stay in the kingdom of Ava were presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal. On 25 November 1811, William Hunter presented to Horace Hayman Wilson 'the facsimile of an inscription engraved on seven copper plates in the possession of the Batavian Society of Science with the hope that some persons in Bengal may be able to read it'. The Society also received 'two images from the interiors of Java as specimen of ancient sculpture of that country' (De, 2003: 6).

It should also be remembered that during the British occupation of Java (1811-17) several British administrators who had served in India were now posted to Indonesia, a good example being John Crawfurd (1783-1868) who was in the medical service in India. After serving in north-west India, he was transferred to Penang and acquired extensive knowledge of Java and Bali. In 1816, he presented a paper on 'The Existence of Hindu Religion in the Island of Bali' at the meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and subsequently published

the three-volume *History of the Indian Archipelago*. Crawfurd stated that the first Indian colony was set up in Java in the second century CE and that the Javanese considered Kalinga 'as the country from which the civility, laws and religion of India were introduced among them' (Crawfurd, 1820: 337; Kejariwal, 1988: 19-21). Tytler had accompanied Crawfurd on one of his visits to Prambanan and had collected 'sundry Hindu statues and vessels discovered on the Island of Java', which he presented to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, while on 6 August 1817, Captain Barker presented a 'Memorandum of Antiquities from Java', which remained unpublished and is now lost (Kejariwal, 1988: 121).

The eighteenth to the twentieth century also saw the establishment of museums in Europe and the proud display of collections from the colonies in Asia. A common concern of the European states was to publicize information about their newly-acquired territories and to add to scientific writings on recent 'discovery' based on first-hand knowledge.

The first museum collection in India dates to 1796 when the Asiatic Society proposed the idea of establishing a suitable building to house the archaeological, ethnological, geological and zoological specimens that had been collected by its members. Donations were invited for the purpose and in May 1799, the Asiatic Society received some of the books and manuscripts looted by the British from Tipu Sultan's personal library in Seringapatam. It was not, however, until 1808 that the Society was able to occupy a building erected at the corner of Park Street on land granted by the government (Mookerji, 1914: 1-2).

The museum itself was established in 1814 and Nathaniel Wallich offered his honorary services as the curator of the geology and zoology section. The other section dealing with archaeology, ethnology and technology was placed in the charge of the librarian of the Society. This Asiatic Society Museum provided the nucleus of the Indian Museum, which was founded under Act XVII of 1866, though it moved into its present premises in Chowringhee in 1875. John Anderson and James Wood-Mason were in-charge of the organization of the archaeological and zoological galleries, which opened to the public in 1878 (Mookerji, 1914: 8).

Of interest to this volume are the sculptures and other antiquities from Southeast Asia that were brought to the museum at Kolkata at this time. Colonel Low discovered stone inscriptions at Kedah on the west coast of the Malay peninsula along with a Buddhist stupa carved in relief—a feature that does not occur among records from the Indian subcontinent. The most interesting inscription is that of Buddhagupta, which refers to the setting up of the stone by the master mariner Buddhagupta, resident of Raktamrttika, on the successful completion of his voyage. Texts very similar to these inscriptions have been found on the island of Borneo and on the coast of Brunei. The precise details of the transfer of these inscriptions to India are not known, but the Buddhagupta record is now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata (Low, 1848: 62-6; 1849: 247-9).

The emphasis on conservation in the late nineteenth century and the change in status of the ASI in 1895 resulted in the division of the organization into five regionwise circles, with Burma, which the British had annexed in 1852, being provided for separately 'by the continuance of the existing Imperial grant to the local government of Rupees ten thousand a year' (*Archaeological Survey of India—Annual Report 1902-03*: 7, henceforth *ASIAR*). The archaeology of Burma continued to receive the attention of the British government, and by 1913-14, the local government instituted an archaeological scholarship (*ASIAR 1913-14*: 33). In 1905-6 the local archaeological office was transferred from Rangoon to Mandalay to facilitate revising the lists of antiquities and for supervising conservation work at Mandalay (*ASIAR 1905-06*: 5). The Burmese archaeologist, Taw Sein Ko (1864-1930) carried out archaeological explorations at Hmawza and Pagan in Burma and announced spectacular results regarding the early history of the country, such as the finds of Pyu inscriptions on urns and fifth- and sixth-century Pali epigraphs, which provided data on the early introduction of Buddhism in that country (*ASIAR 1911-12*: 19-20). Architectural fellowships were constituted for training Burmese scholars, though they worked under the supervision of the Consulting Architect to the Government of Bombay (*ASIAR 1922-23*: 196). Following the constitutional changes brought about by the Government of India Act of 1935, the Burma Circle was detached from the ASI and reorganized on an independent basis (Roy, 1961: 116).

How were these discoveries received by scholars involved in the study of the past? The response to this question draws in the work of James Fergusson (1808-86), an indigo merchant who travelled around India from 1836 to 1841. In Fergusson's frame of reference, Indian architecture provided an important missing link in the development of architecture in the world, especially the twelfth-thirteenth century flowering of architecture in Europe. Besides, even though India could never reach 'the intellectual supremacy of Greece, or the moral greatness of Rome' architecture in India was still a living art, which could inform in a variety of ways about developments in Europe (Fergusson, 1910: 4-5). This was significant, as argued by Fergusson, since there was a lack of historical texts in India and post-fifth-century Indian history could only be studied through monuments and inscriptions.

Fergusson's interest in architecture coincided with technological developments, such as the use of the camera in archaeological work and the development of a photo archive was crucial to his study of Indian architecture from 1842 onwards after he left India and settled in London. In 1876 Fergusson published the *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* and it is significant that he used the writings of Crawford, Forchammer and several others who had travelled to Southeast Asia for his own work. Fergusson argued that Burma and Cambodia received their religion through proselytising missions from India.

Thus it is evident that already in the nineteenth century British political interests in Burma, Indonesia and other regions of Southeast Asia had resulted in the concept of 'Further India', as John Marshall termed Southeast Asia in 1902 (*ASIAR 1902-03*: 2). The academic discourse then included discussions on language, architecture and religious structures in Southeast Asia, in addition to the more direct ASI intervention in conservation policies in Burma.

The complex dynamics of the survival of ancient relics, monuments and religious architecture, their recovery and resuscitation through the discipline of archaeology in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the process of imbuing them with new meanings has generally been neglected in historical discourse or has often been subsumed under the overarching category of nationalism. It is these

complexities of the creation of novel methodologies and trans-national interests that mark the beginnings of archaeology in the past 200 years. Histories written over the last five decades in different countries of Asia have primarily dealt with the ancient period of the present nation states and the discussion has largely centred on present national boundaries and local identities *versus* external influences. Perhaps it is time to move beyond the paradigm of the nation state in researching the history of Asia as these frontiers had little meaning in the earlier period.

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