

Some Notes on the Navigation of 1985 Trans-Indian Ocean Canoe Voyage

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The paper by McGrath¹ describing the methods used for navigating a canoe across the Indian Ocean was of great interest in relation to early North Atlantic voyages. The horizontal wooden disc with shadow peg for steering (Fig. 4 of the paper) and the shadow stick (Fig. 6 of the paper) for latitude determination are so similar in design and purpose to the bearing dial and Sun shadow board often linked²⁻⁵ to the Viking navigation of the tenth to thirteenth centuries in the northern North Atlantic that I believe it is worth noting.

The Indian Ocean voyages, Indonesia/Africa, and the North Atlantic voyages, Bergen, Norway/Greenland, are both almost due east/west. During both voyages a bearing or compass dial would have been helpful in keeping the east/west course and a Sun shadow stick or Sun shadow board necessary to maintain the almost constant unchanging latitude.

It would be interesting to know the origin of the design of the horizontal wooden disc with shadow peg for steering (Fig. 4) and the shadow stick (Fig. 6) for noon latitude used during the 1985 Trans-Indian Ocean canoe voyage and whether these instruments are in any way based on instruments occasionally associated with Viking navigation, Norway/Greenland, during medieval times.

REFERENCES

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