



Review Article

Historical archaeology in the Indian Ocean world

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MARK W. HAUSER & JULIA JONG HAINES (ed.). 2023. *The archaeology of modern worlds in the Indian Ocean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6984-5 hardback \$90.

This edited volume by Mark Hauser and Julia Jong Haines aims to bring together local narratives within the context of the Indian Ocean in modern times, from *c.* AD 1500, and establish how these narratives can inform historical archaeology. As the editors highlight in the introductory chapter, historical archaeology has been greatly informed and inspired by the Atlantic world and its colonial histories. Here, they seek instead to foreground the Indian Ocean as a setting for historical archaeology in its own right. The authors use the long and deep history of interconnectedness and trade in this ocean as a basis for understanding more recent history, not just in light of colonial impact but through bottom-up approaches that focus on the local in the global. The case studies in this book and its overall theme are also part of the ongoing process to decentralise Europe in archaeological discourse. The book consists of 11 chapters, including an introductory chapter by Haines and Hauser and two commentaries. The majority of the case studies are from island East Africa or South India, which naturally limits the scope somewhat.

Following the editors' Introduction, Mick de Ruyter explores the architecture of the item integral to the interconnectedness that is at the heart of this book: the ship. De Ruyter discusses and critiques the use of the iconic illustration of the Maqāmāt ship, which stems from a collection of humorous stories written in the eleventh century by al-Hariri. These were copied and published over several centuries, and one of the ship illustrations has been variously used to interpret seafaring capabilities and ships of the medieval Indian Ocean world. The author, however, encourages caution when using illustrations such as these and, while acknowledging that they are useful, they should be interpreted within the context in which they were made, used, circulated and perceived. De Ruyter offers a compelling case for examining such pieces of historical evidence from multiple angles and cautions against letting the desire for answers lead to wrongful or exaggerated conclusions based on limited pieces of evidence. Although the illustration may not provide a completely accurate representation of a ship from that time, when considered alongside other evidence, such as submerged ship remains, it can still offer valuable insights into what ships might have looked like during this period. But perhaps more tellingly, it can highlight how stories were told and retold, and the “circulation of people, ideas, and things in the historical Indian Ocean” (p.44).

In chapter 3, Ellen Hsieh and Takashi Sakai briefly introduce the history of interaction between the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia in the past 1000 years, to accentuate the longevity of this contact and the ways in which it can be explored archaeologically. The authors

present a selection of material remains that shows the variety of contact and migration between different areas of these regions, that include both religious and cultural transmission. From the ninth century, the presence of Buddhist stupas and their potential stylistic (and in some cases material) origins are important traces of religious contact in the absence of written text. From the fifteenth century, the spread of Islam can be observed in Southeast Asia through cenotaphs and glazed tiles found in mosques, and in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries through a small selection of ceramic wares. In the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, European-made tiles became popular on and in buildings, and European ceramics in general replaced the dominance of Chinese ceramics. Contact and connection took many forms, including the transmissions of religious and cultural styles, ideas and aesthetics that influenced local tastes and uses, but can also be indicative of migration.

Moving westward, Chapter 4 explores Zanzibar and Mauritius, two East African islands with distinct histories yet connected by a shared past as plantation economies. The authors, Krish Seetah, Stefania Manfio and Akshay Sarathi, propose viewing islands within the Indian Ocean world—and these two islands in particular—through the concept of connectivity. Unfortunately, an explanation of this term and its use is missing here. The two islands offer rich assemblages for comparative purposes, and each is described briefly in relation to their more recent histories. As the authors note, islands in the Indian Ocean world were “critical to the specific mode of commerce” (p.76) that developed there since antiquity. Their decentralising Europe approach shows these islands as nodes of connection, not isolated or remote. While Zanzibar and Mauritius differ in their population, culture, climate and religious histories, their economies were hugely affected and fuelled by slave labour, the former under Omani rule and the latter under French and British rule in the past 300 years. Therefore, the focus lies on connectivity through slave labour and slave trading.

Saša Čaval and Alessandra Cianciosi concentrate on the Mascarene Islands, specifically Reunion and Mauritius, in Chapter 5. They approach ways of healthcare (or lack thereof) during the period of enslavement and indenture, focusing especially on women. Both colonial records and archaeological excavation data from cemeteries and quarantine facilities are used, offering a nuanced framework that allows the study of health and healthcare from different perspectives. Unsurprisingly, enslaved and indentured people suffered from poorer health and nutrition than the general population, and little or no access to healthcare, hygiene facilities and proper nutrition. The authors show how women and children suffered higher mortality rates, despite the much lower number of enslaved and indentured women present on the two islands. Poor nutrition and childbirth seems to have caused much of this discrepancy. The agency of women could have been more detailed in this study, but it still gives valuable insights into the health conditions.

Adria LaViolette and Neil Norman’s study of two Portuguese structures in Zanzibar, Mvuleni and Fukuchani, offer an archaeological approach to understanding relationships between Portuguese (colonial) settlers and local Swahili inhabitants outside of main towns. Chapter 6 introduces the start of colonial influence on the Swahili coast, with the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the sixteenth century, followed by Omani, British and German colonial endeavours. The Portuguese presence on the East African Swahili coast lasted some two centuries and mainly sought to secure trade routes and regional power. Relationships with local rulers and inhabitants varied between hostility, co-operation

and coercion. Fukuchani and Mvuleni are two small settlements in the north of Zanzibar's main island Unguja and seem to have been built entwining both cultures, with a Portuguese floor plan using local techniques and materials (and builders, most likely). The study of these settlements offers an original approach to the day-to-day, local interactions of colonial experiences.

Veerasamy Selvakumar and Mark Hauser underscore how the colonial period must be understood in relation to the specific historical and cultural contexts of the Indian Ocean world, bringing Chapter 7 to the Coromandel Coast in South India. There, developments in trade connections, labour structures, settlements patterns and politics that preceded the colonial period, shaped the ways in which later European colonial powers were able to exploit people and resources in this region. It also provided "an ideal basis for the trafficking of humans through either slavery or indenture contracts" (p.166), which in turn fit forms of production favoured by colonial powers, namely plantation agriculture. The practice of indentured labour had a significant impact on this region and its peoples and led to a large diaspora both within South India and beyond, creating a specific kind of unfreedom.

Editors Hauser and Haines return in Chapter 8 to offer a comparison between two settlements existing within the colonial Indian Ocean world and heavily connected to the landscape of labour migration: Sathangudi in India and the plantation Bras d'Eau in Mauritius. The authors aim to compare "the effects of commercial agriculture on architecture and settlement organisation" (p.178), adding layers of interpretation through the use of historical archaeology, which allows them to approach these settlements from the bottom up. They emphasise that the comparison is not meant to suggest a cultural link between the settlements in Mauritius and India, from where the indentured labourers hailed. Rather, they understand settlement organisation and choice of architecture as a mix of local ecology, availability and need, cultural practices and norms, and colonial influence. While they also argue for the distinction of social class or status in space and architecture at both settlements, this is not clearly evidenced in the current chapter, and would be an intriguing aspect to follow up.

Brian Wilson adds a heritage perspective, introducing Goa in India, well-known as the former capital of the Portuguese in the East and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Chapter 9 details the potential role of archaeology in informing the ways heritage sites are managed and understood. Goa as a settlement has a long and complicated history, and the city was modelled after Lisbon in Portugal. It fell into decline in the seventeenth century, after having grown and prospered, and many of the elite groups of the settlement left. This led to a perception of the city as a ruin that has continued until the present day. However, Wilson explains, this overt focus on the (colonial) elites has rendered other inhabitants almost invisible and delegitimises non-elite groups, despite their continued use and occupation of the area. Wilson convincingly argues that historical archaeology can and should counter this narrative, as it has the power to reveal the homes and practices of non-elite groups in Goa, challenging the narrative of Goa as a once glorious city fallen into ruin, a "memorial of past glories" (p.217) that perpetuates colonial sentiments.

The final two chapters of the book are commentaries, starting with Chapurukha Kusimba's observations through the lens of the Swahili coast and its local, regional and inter-regional connections. Swahili coastal towns developed in relationship to the networks that prospered in the Indian Ocean world, especially in the medieval period, being located in

between existing African and Indian Ocean networks. As illustrated throughout the book and highlighted by Kusimba, globalisation is neither a recent development nor a phenomenon initiated by Europeans. He highlights the role of kinship, friendship and familiarity in the ways transactions were carried out on the coast and the interior, and the importance of blood brotherhood where kin ties were not present. The networks and relationships *within* eastern and southern Africa were crucial to the trade that was carried out beyond it, with other Indian Ocean regions.

The final chapter is by Supriya Varma, and it offers a perspective from South Asia, echoing the introductory chapter by emphasising the need for a comprehensive historical archaeology of the Indian Ocean. While the Indian Ocean is rich with archaeological sites and historical documentation that go beyond the past 500 years of colonial expansion, only a limited number of studies have been carried out in this large region. This is particularly true for South Asia, although a steadily growing number of studies in recent years indicates—along with the other chapters in this book—that South India and the wider Indian Ocean world offer necessary comparative approaches and methods to the field of historical archaeology.

The Indian Ocean world was (and is) a vast area connected through trade routes, diasporas, religions and cultures, and its archaeology is equally rich. Comparative studies such as those presented here are crucial to understanding how this region has developed over time, how colonial expansion and exploitation shaped this development, and how we remember these histories today. Not all chapters connect with each other or the topic of the book as fluidly as might be desired. This could have been remedied by a synthesis by the editors at the end of the book, bringing the various strands together. This book is a much-needed overview of recent case studies in the historical archaeology of the Indian Ocean world, encourages further studies to be added in the future and serves to highlight where there is a need for attention.