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The Archaeology of Modern Worlds in the Indian Ocean

An Introduction

Mark William Hauser and Julia Jong Haines

In recent years an international community of scholars has focused attention on the study of the Indian Ocean's archaeological record over the relatively recent past. They search archives, survey the land, and excavate religious, production, institutional, and home spaces in South India, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the many islands that dot its seas, including Mauritius, Réunion, Zanzibar, Pemba, Madagascar, and Java. Their investigations have resulted in new stories that challenge dominant narratives of European hegemony in which capitalist logics impose order on a chaotic medieval ocean of commerce. This volume connects the modern worlds that emerge out of local stories, producing a transnational archaeology that acknowledges how modern nation states have shaped archaeological knowledge and transgresses such borders methodologically.

As scholars have previously noted, the Indian Ocean is in many ways defined by the far-reaching networks facilitated by the monsoon seasons. Early archaeological studies of the Indian Ocean emphasized how material residues enabled them to trace people and things that circulated among disparate parts of the Indian Ocean. Historians and archaeologists have been careful to chart these connected histories, aware that epochal fallacies can all too often dismiss the complexity and nuance of medieval and early modern relations in the Indian Ocean. Despite the "ongoingness" of European colonization, scholars across the ocean have continually argued for expansive definitions of modernity that move beyond narrow perspectives grounded in Western thought. As such, more recently, the Indian Ocean World has been described as its

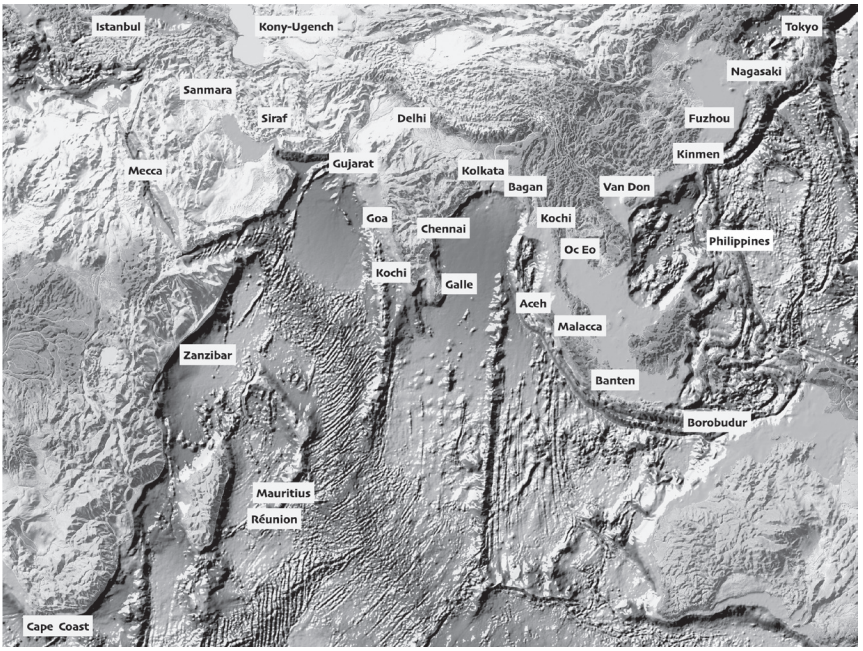

Figure 1.1. Map of locations described in text.

own problem space (in sensu Scott 2004), rather than as a setting in which to see a set of processes play out (Hoogervorst and Hodos 2016; Mathew 2016; Seetah and Allen 2018). Questions about the social and political impacts of long-standing ecological, commercial, and political circulations guide many of these approaches to the archaeological record of the Indian Ocean, with increased attention on the years preceding and through the rise of European economic and political hegemony. Contributors in this volume place these impulses in conversation, along with their modes of inquiry, in investigations of the Indian Ocean and the settlements that dot its shores (Fig. 1.1).

Working in a region that has been largely overshadowed in historical archaeology by another ocean is a balancing act of learning from methodologies, frameworks, ideologies, and ethics that were developed by increasingly diverse and global North American and Atlantic-focused historical archaeologists over the last few decades, and simultaneously advocating for an Indian Ocean archaeology that gestures to these archaeologies but that is framed within its own oceanic temporalities and connections. The authors in this volume strike this balance by considering the archaeological record of modern worlds in the Indian Ocean through explicitly micro-historical, material, and situated approaches that emphasize relationality within the re-

gion. These chapters are locally situated studies that, when read collectively, connectively, and comparatively, describe the Indian Ocean through the relations that weave across its waters, islands, and coastlines, and extend beyond its currents.

Why Modern Worlds

This book contributes to archaeologies of the modern world by focusing on the experience of ordinary people in the Indian Ocean. By modern world, we reference not only a time period—from about 1500 to the 1800s—but also a body of scholarship popularized in the 1990s that focused on "planetary flows" (Trouillot 2003: 28). This body of scholarship gave rise to themes that remain in circulation today, including transnational and postcolonial archaeologies. In this way we rely on one definition of historical archaeology, without considering the totality of its praxis in the Indian Ocean. This period is not as extensively documented in the archaeological record as other times in the Indian Ocean World, which opens the opportunity to shape Indian Ocean archaeology and scholarship from the outset as a region and a field that centers on how ordinary people confronted the material conditions of their lives and by integrating multiple different sources, drawing intraregional comparisons to enrich their interpretations, and challenging the ways in which current politics influence research agendas and local memories and the memorialization of archaeological sites and heritage. It is worth noting that while our authors have provided chapter contributions from East Africa to Southeast Asia, we do not have any case studies from Australia, a rich body of historical archaeology in its own right. Archaeologists have used the Indian Ocean's archaeological record as a counterpoint to dominant narratives about the modern period which overemphasize Europe's influence in shaping the world (Lane 2016; Schmidt 2016; Wilson and Hauser 2016; Acabado 2017). Another counterpoint concerns the use of the Indian Ocean's present as a starting point to study history backward (Stahl 2001), arguing that the archaeological record is also one in which we can consider relationships to futures (Reilly 2019; Franklin et al. 2020).

This volume is guided by a vision that not only sees the archaeological record of the Indian Ocean within its own historical continuities, where the modern might carry ideological baggage with it (Chakrabarty 2009), but also sees the Indian Ocean and the modern integrated into one unit of analysis that the field of historical archaeology has yet to approach (Subrahmanyam 1997). The authors herein approach the field of historical archaeology from a variety

of perspectives that might seem familiar to readers not familiar with the area. In some cases authors stress the value of archaeological thinking in confronting dominant narratives about the past that overlook the struggles of everyday life (Voss 2018). In other cases the authors rely on the empirical richness of textural and archaeological materials to generate and evaluate questions with major theoretical implications (Mrozowski 2010). Finally, others focus on the ability to examine the ideological and material legacies of capitalism as it manifests in landscape and artifactual assemblages (Leone 1995). While none of these perspectives is a perfect fit, they do provide a jumping-off point through which to interrogate the past 800 years in the Indian Ocean.

Our aim here is not to resuscitate a two-and-a-half-decade-old framing to talk about archaeology, yet authors in this volume demonstrate that the Indian Ocean is a scholarly and political zone in which such accounts are required. Scholars (Orser 1996; Hall 2000) have been largely concerned with mapping the relationship between the global, the local, and the spaces in between through a putative systematic or "variable-oriented" comparative approach in which cases were argued based on the presence or absence of certain features. There is value to such an approach, and many examples continue to operate today, as demonstrated by quantitively driven projects such as the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS), which has facilitated a bourgeoning body of material culture-oriented scholarship on comparative enslavement in North America and the Caribbean (Galle et al. 2019) that has implications for opening up archaeology's accessibility and use in the classroom (Agbe-Davies et al. 2014). Such comparative databases are only as good as the variables considered, and if there are blind spots in these variables, they get reproduced in the analysis (Flewellen 2019). Rather, authors in this volume are concerned with shifting the very dimensions upon which comparison and connections are framed. As several authors point out (Wilson; LaViolette and Norman, this volume), the very grounds upon which archaeological research and heritage are framed must, by definition, encounter the epistemologies upon which the past is constructed.

We see this volume as putting forward transnationalism as a methodology and as a framing for historical archaeology. Historical archaeologists have used transnationalism as a way to describe the experiences and identities of people in diaspora who maintain a tie to their homeland, particularly as members of a collective diaspora's shared region, socioeconomic status, and as a result, cultural values. Today scholars are more interested in mapping the social, political, and economic sinews of everyday life that extend in between and beyond the "shadow-lines" of empire, through an "intensive" compara-

tive approach wherein a small number of cases are analyzed in greater depth to produce highly nuanced accounts (Horning 2013; Voss et al. 2018) to trace "the different sources and roots" that brought about "many different forms of meaning it attends" (Subrahmanyam 1997: 735). Transnational approaches to archaeology follow this line of thought especially in consideration of diaspora (Lilley 2006), heritage (Samuels 2016), and environmental justice (Douglass and Cooper 2020). Additionally, a transnational approach does not assume the presence of nation states in the past but, rather, stresses that ideologies presuming the nation state have shaped the production of archaeological knowledge about the past (see Brighton 2009; Ross 2012; Davies et al. 2020).

Many chapters in this volume explore the lived experiences of resource and labor exploitation within the context of Euro colonization and capitalism that shaped modern worlds; however, western paradigms are not and should not be the only lens through which we define Indian Ocean landscapes, materials, debates, and predicaments. We hope these case studies can be read as a praxis of Enseng Ho's (2004) diasporic metaphor "the view from the other boat," which reverses the imperial point of view—Bernard Cohn's definition of imperialism as the "view from the boat" (1990)—by identifying and putting into discursive tension smaller boats "plying the same seas." The concentration on gender (Čaval and Cianciosi), the experience of marginalized communities (Haines and Hauser; Selvakumar and Hauser), highlight that transregional communities form a "view from the other boat," where they are simultaneously locals yet remain cosmopolitans with vital connections across the ocean. Other contributions (Wilson) have turned to transnational heritage to consider the ways in which boundaries are at work both in producing global inequalities and in rendering such forces less visible.

The mode of comparison involved in transnational approaches has been multisited (Voss 2008; Brighton 2009; Cobb and DePratter 2012; Hauser 2011; Voss et al. 2018). A multisited approach lends itself readily to Indian Ocean archaeologies of the past 500 years (Wilson and Hauser 2016). Archaeological perspectives on landscapes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial settlements provide a context for commercial connections between different regions, intensification of land use, and complex social orders in the long term (Lane 2016). These relations shaped Atlantic and Indian Ocean trade circuits and landscapes employed by Europeans beginning in the sixteenth century (Hauser 2018). Even on an island like Mauritius, where human habitation began in the 1600s, the precolonial historical depth of these connections is critical to archaeology since the majority of people who populated the island came from other parts of the Indian Ocean; they or their ancestors were