

# Review Article

## Writing the global Indian Ocean

### Sailors, slaves, and immigrants: bondage in the Indian Ocean world, 1750–1914

By Alessandro Stanziani. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. 188. Hardback £59.50, ISBN 978-1-137-44845-3; paperback £56.50, ISBN 078-1-349-49644-0.

### Ocean of trade: South Asian merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean c.1750–1850

By Pedro Machado. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xv + 315. Hardback £67.00, ISBN 978-1-107-07026-4; paperback £19.99, ISBN 978-1-107-67611-4.

### European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850

By Richard B. Allen. Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 378. Hardback £62.00, ISBN 978-0-8214-2106-2; paperback £23.99, ISBN 978-0-8214-2107-9.

### The longest journey: Southeast Asians and the pilgrimage to Mecca

By Eric Tagliacozzo. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 356. Hardback £75.00, ISBN 978-0-19-530828-0; paperback £17.49, ISBN 978-0-19-530827-3.

### Singapore and the silk road of the sea, 1300–1800

By John N Miksic. Singapore: NUS Press and National Museum of Singapore, 2013. Pp. ix + 491. Hardback £56.50, ISBN 978-9971-69-574-3; paperback £35.45, ISBN 978-9971-69-558-3.

### Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese in maritime Asia, c.1585–1800: merchants, commodities and commerce

By George Bryan Souza. Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2014. Pp. xx + 13 articles (various paginations). Hardback £95.00, ISBN 978-1-14724-1700-8.

## L'Asie, la mer, le monde: au temps des Compagnies des Indes

By Gérard Le Bouëdec. Rennes: PUR, 2014. Pp. 216. Paperback €18.00/£15.19, ISBN 978-2-7535-3459-9.

## Les Mondes de l'océan Indien, vol. 1: De la formation de l'état au premier système-monde afro-eurasien; vol. 2: L'Océan Indien au cœur des globalisations de l'Ancien Monde

By Philippe Beaujard. Paris: Armand Colin, 2012. Pp. 624 and 800. Hardback €65/00/£49.71 each, ISBN 978-2-200-27708-6 and 978-2-200-27709-3.

## Gandhi's printing press: experiments in slow reading

By Isabel Hofmeyr. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. 218. Hardback £20.80, ISBN 978-0-674-07279-4.

Reviewed by Nigel Worden  
University of Cape Town, South Africa  
E-mail: nigel.worden@uct.ac.za

doi:10.1017/S1740022816000383

In 2006, a forum on 'Oceans of history' published by the *American Historical Review* declared that 'no longer outside time, the sea is being given a history, even as the history of the world is being retold from the perspective of the sea'.<sup>1</sup> The forum contained incisive essays on the vibrant historiographies of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Mediterranean oceans.

1 K. Wigen, 'AHR forum: oceans of history: introduction', *American Historical Review*, 111, 3, 2006, p. 717.

The Indian Ocean, however, was absent. Although important studies of Indian Ocean histories existed, the field had not yet inserted itself into wider thalassic histories of the sort being promoted in the Western academy.

A decade later, that is no longer the case, as demonstrated by the spate of books that have recently appeared on the Indian Ocean. While each provides a wealth of information on a specific area or theme, they also use the Indian Ocean as their overarching framework. The broader question I wish to address in this review article is how these new works reflect changes in the nature of Indian Ocean historiography as a whole. In 1999, Michael Pearson, one of the pioneers in the field, commented that ‘our empirical knowledge of the India and the Indian Ocean has certainly advanced considerably over the past twelve years even if we have not had any major reorientation of our field’.<sup>2</sup> Has there been such a reorientation now? And if so, how do current historians of the Indian Ocean engage with global and transnational histories and what is the politics of their writing in so doing?

It has been long since we moved away from the idea that a meaningful history of connections and interactions across the Indian Ocean only began with European penetration from the late fifteenth century. Unlike the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean saw ‘a prolonged past of sustained seafaring across this maritime space during the pre-modern times’.<sup>3</sup> Thus John Miksic’s study of Singapore, a settlement usually classified as a British colonial foundation, uses rich archaeological and documentary evidence to emphasize its long history of settlement and trading contacts in the ‘maritime silk road’ of

the fourteenth century. Eric Tagliacozzo’s account of the ‘longest journey’ of Hajj pilgrims from Southeast Asia to Mecca highlights travel from one end of the Indian Ocean to the other by the sixteenth century (although the evidence he provides for this is much less rich than that presented for later periods).

But the definitive, indeed magisterial, demonstration of the antiquity of Indian Ocean networks is Philippe Beaujard’s massive two-volume *Les Mondes de l’Océan Indien*. It is hard to overestimate the significance of the publication of this encyclopaedic study, the result of a lifetime’s work. While some of its overview chapters have been published as earlier journal articles, it is only now that the full sweep of evidence for the complex and shifting nature of contacts within the region is presented. The first volume traces these from the fourth millennium BCE across western, southern, and central Asia and the ‘corridor’ of the Persian Gulf to the sixth century CE and the construction of an ‘Afro-Eurasian system’ that linked China, Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and eastern Africa in a series of interconnected trading routes. This account unusually includes Beaujard’s area of specialization, Madagascar, an Austronesian culture in the south-western Indian Ocean. His second volume extends the analysis to the ‘globalization’ of the Indian Ocean world in the Sung and Mongol eras (tenth to fourteenth centuries), followed by the emergence of ‘European capitalism’ and the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Ironically, although it is not Beaujard’s intention, this endpoint might appear to reinforce the now outdated notion that the Portuguese presence ushered in transformative changes to Asian maritime trading – a notion which Pearson, the leading historian of the Portuguese in India, has dismissed as ‘invalid’.<sup>4</sup>

2 A. Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 1999, p. x.

3 R. Chakravarti, ‘Vibrant thalassographies of the Indian Ocean: beyond nation states’, *Studies in History*, 31, 2, 2015, p. 238.

4 M. N. Pearson, ‘India and the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century’, in Das Gupta and Pearson, *India*, p. 71.

No adequate assessment of such a magnum opus can be given in an essay such as this. It will certainly become – indeed has already become – the standard work in the field and will be the touchstone for future scholarship.<sup>5</sup> But several features of its approach are significant for our purposes. Firstly, it is strongly influenced by the ‘father figure’ of both oceanic and *Annales* historiography, Ferdinand Braudel, whose words open the first volume and lead to Beaujard’s fundamental claim that the Indian Ocean, like Braudel’s Mediterranean, ‘represented less a barrier than a unifying connection between peoples and cultures, a “spatial movement”’ (‘a moins représenté une barrière qu’un trait d’union entre des hommes and des cultures, un “espace-mouvement”’; vol. 1, p. 13). The work’s *longue durée*, illustrated by its elaborate diagrams of the long-term rise and fall of polities and economies, its focus on environmental causation of political and economic change, and an interdisciplinary approach which ranges across spatial, linguistic, and economic analysis are all markers of Francophone scholarship that are absent in the more empirical-grounded Anglophone scholarship. This is not to say that *Les Mondes de l’Océan Indien* lacks empirical richness; quite the contrary – details often overwhelm the reader. But from the start Beaujard is concerned to elaborate on the creation of a connected system that will position the Indian Ocean world alongside that of Braudel’s Mediterranean.

This concern points to a second aspect of Beaujard’s argument: his engagement with the differing approaches to world systems as

represented by the ‘transformationists’, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, who viewed European capitalism as a turning point in the construction of a globalized system, and the ‘continuists’, such as Andre Gunder Frank, who argued for a world system within the Afro-Eurasian world long before European intervention in the Indian Ocean. *Les Mondes de l’Océan Indien* is a firm rebuttal of Kirti Chaudhuri’s somewhat static depiction of the Indian Ocean in his *Asia before Europe*, as well as a thoroughly convincing demonstration of pre-modern long-distance economic links and of the emergence of monetarized economies. However it also problematizes the arguments of the ‘continuists’ by pointing out that such links were neither fully capitalist nor permanent, and that new connections in the fifteenth century between the Indian Ocean, Italy, and the eastern Mediterranean, together with the expansion of Islam in the region, created a significantly modified system that incorporated institutional and ideological innovations.

This leads to a key question. Is *Les Mondes de l’Océan Indien* as much, or more, of a global history than an oceanic one? Certainly it gives the Indian Ocean a history which transcends that of its component parts. But it also ‘retells the history of the world from the perspective of the sea’. Sometimes that sea is less visible than at others: chapters on western Asia, India, or China often make little reference to matters maritime. However, it is Beaujard’s overarching thesis – namely, the creation of an interconnected world that was rooted in the links created in and across the Indian Ocean – which gives this work its larger significance. Beaujard’s Indian Ocean history is thus no longer solely maritime; it is also global.

Trade is a well-established theme in Indian Ocean studies, and much literature in the last century was concerned with commodities, merchants, and their relationship with local state polities, especially in South

5 For an example of a detailed review, and a guide to how to approach the reading of such a massive work, see Philippe Norel, ‘L’océan Indien de Philippe Beaujard’, 7 January and 9 March 2013, [http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/locean-indien-de-philippe-beaujard\\_2390](http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/locean-indien-de-philippe-beaujard_2390) and [http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/locean-indien-de-philippe-beaujard-2\\_2615](http://blogs.histoireglobale.com/locean-indien-de-philippe-beaujard-2_2615) (consulted 29 November 2016).

Asia in the period between c.1500 and c.1800. By no means have the debates around this been resolved, although Beaujard goes a long way towards settling the issue of the extent to which the precolonial Indian Ocean was a capitalist economy. Of the books reviewed here, the collection of articles by George Bryan Souza most closely follows the tradition of focusing on trade, and indeed many of them are reprints of his earlier work from the 1980s and 1990s, joined by some newer pieces. These inevitably appear rather dated when set alongside more recent publications, especially given their focus on Portuguese and Dutch activities to the virtual exclusion of Asian traders. However, drawing on the records of Portuguese and Dutch East India Company archives, Souza plausibly counters several older perspectives, notably by studying private European traders *within* Asia rather than the long-distance voyages between Europe and the Indian Ocean. Meticulous construction of datasets, price records, and epigraphies enables Souza to reveal, for example, the importance of Macao for Portuguese ‘country’ traders in China, the biography of a crown administrator who illegally participated in private trade, and the role of agents at Goa involved in the Brazilian tobacco trade who saw commercial opportunities in China and Southeast Asia and transported textiles to Bahia. His more recent pieces concern Dutch activities, revealing the early export of Bengal opium to Batavia and the participation of Dutch, Moslem, indigenous, and Hokkien Chinese traders in the drug’s wider distribution in the eighteenth century, outside the purview of the English East India Company. The complexity of interchange between European and Asian actors thus becomes more apparent in these later pieces, reflecting the shift away from viewing European traders in isolation from their wider trading environment in the Indian Ocean world.

Souza’s volume represents some of the finest products of an earlier approach to the trading world of maritime Asia. More recent publications consider trade in very different ways. Two books published in 2014 stand out in this regard. Richard Allen’s *European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1800* is the culmination of many years of research into the slave-trading networks of the south-west Indian Ocean, with a focus on the labour demands of European settlers in the Mascarenes as the engine of a system of forced labour procurement that stretched into South and Southeast Asia, where it interacted with local Asian systems of unfree labour. There are some imbalances and the book reads more as a collection of case studies than as an integrated whole. The voices of slaves themselves are largely absent, since Allen’s main concern is to demonstrate the scale and impact of the trade on the regions both of export and of import. In this regard the book is more akin to the earlier classics of the Atlantic slave trade, such as Curtin’s *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (a comparison made on the book’s back cover), than with more recent work on slave cultures and responses.

In addition to convincingly demonstrating the scale of European slave trading in the region, Allen makes a strong case for the importance of Indian Ocean developments in a wider context. Using new material from the India Office records, he shows how debates in the British empire around the abolition of the slave trade and ultimately of slavery itself, were strongly influenced by events in India and the abolitionist sentiments of the English East India Company: ‘India was no less a center of abolitionist sentiment and activity than Britain during the late 1780s and early 1790s’ (p. 182). The connections between the ending of slavery and the use of indentured labour from India, China, and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean has long been recognized

for the Caribbean and Atlantic worlds. Allen shows how it was preceded by experimental use of indenture and convict labour in St Helena, Ceylon, and Mauritius. Allen freely admits that the evidence is not always conclusive, but the significance of his work is certainly broader than the data on slave trading alone, since it points to the need to link the Indian Ocean region to the Atlantic, and the importance of the region to wider global issues.

Pedro Machado's *Ocean of trade: South Asian merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean c. 1750–1850* also focuses on the links between India and the south-west Indian Ocean in an era of intensifying European colonial penetration. At first glance it might seem to be another case study of the activities of Indian Gujarati merchants, albeit in a region little considered by earlier scholars, namely that of Mozambique and its hinterland. However, it is much more than that. The book bursts with new ideas and approaches. First, Machado shows that Gujarati trading did not decline in the eighteenth century in the face of European competition, as argued by earlier scholars, but instead reorientated itself towards Africa. Trade between India and south-east Africa, centred on the exchange of Indian textiles for ivory and later slaves, circled around the Portuguese authorities in both regions. *Vaniya* merchants from Gujarat formed trading associations in Mozambique based on kinship and other connections, used African agents, and provided a source of credit that the Portuguese were forced to recognize. Both Gujaratis and Portuguese were dependent on each other, the latter perhaps more than the former since *Vaniya* merchants from Gujarat were better informed about local market conditions. Secondly, Machado stresses that African consumer demand and shifting taste in textile usage played a key role in cloth production techniques in the Asian regions of supply, so countering the view that African

consumers were insignificant in the trading networks of the Indian Ocean. Thirdly, he demonstrates that *Vaniya* capital played a key part in early nineteenth-century slaving, in the export of African slaves from Mozambique and its hinterland to India and to the Atlantic. Once again, the south-west Indian Ocean emerges as a pivotal space linking the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Machado also explores themes that move away from commodities and economics to the social and cultural aspects of mercantile activity. In so doing he reflects a larger shift in Indian Ocean historiography. To what extent did the ocean produce distinctive littoral communities, dependent, as Pearson has argued, on a 'mixture of maritime and territorial influences' that 'have more in common with other littoral societies than they do with their inland neighbours'?<sup>6</sup> Machado points to such a society in Mozambique. There Indian traders interacted with African middlemen and agents in ways that fashioned new cultural and social interactions, resembling the emporia ports of Indian Ocean Asia and East Africa. Similarly, of the books under review, John Miksic's analysis of fourteenth-century Singapore as an urban community created by Chinese traders is another example of an oceanic view of littoral social formations.

Gerard Le Bouëdec's edited collection *L'Asie, la mer, le monde: au temps des Compagnies des Indes* contains a number of essays that examine the social and cultural characteristics of European trading settlements in Asia. Particular emphasis is placed on the nature of material culture, with striking contrasts between a desire to maintain French styles in eighteenth-century Pondicherry, despite reliance on local

<sup>6</sup> M. Pearson, 'Littoral society: the concept and the problems', *Journal of World History*, 17, 4, 2006, pp. 353–4.

craftsmen, and the emergence of a ‘Luso-Asiatic’ style of furniture, textiles, and household goods in Portuguese India. As Le Bouëdec states, trading company history has shifted from a Eurocentric focus on political power and trade to a greater awareness of the cultural and sociological interchanges between Europeans and Asians. But the oceanic element in these histories is limited. We still lack analysis of Asian littoral Indian Ocean societies that break away from terrestrial perspectives. In this regard, rich work on the Swahili and south-east African coast still leads the field.

One of the most innovative essays in *L’Asie, la mer, le monde* is Lisa Hellman’s analysis of the restrictions of ethnicity, class, and gender in the use of space in the Swedish factory at Canton and its environs. This shows how local Chinese authorities spatially controlled the commercial activities of European traders, while islands, shipboard, and other liminal spaces were more accessible to sailors and crewmen. An intriguing detail is the way in which Chinese officials ‘brought their own space’ on board European ships, maintaining separate quarters from Swedish officers.

A concern of many oceanic historians is to move away from land altogether, to focus on histories formed in the ocean rather than around it. One well-established trope of Indian Ocean studies is the fundamental role of currents, winds, and monsoon patterns in determining seasonal patterns of trade and migration, at least in the era before steamships.<sup>7</sup> This is a major strand in Beaujard’s Braudelian approach, although, as Alessandro Stanziani warns us, ‘we must not fall into the trap of environmental determinism’, given shifts in such patterns over time.<sup>8</sup>

7 See, for example, E. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in world history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, ch. 1.

8 Alessandro Stanziani, *Sailors, slaves, and immigrants: bondage in the Indian Ocean world, 1750–1914*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 17.

A greater sense of human experience at sea is provided by analysis of life on board ship. Machado’s chapter on ‘Crossings’ examines the experience of voyagers between India and Africa in the eighteenth century, including the hierarchies of skill and authority among predominantly Hindu sailors, the recruitment of African seamen as ‘a highly mobile labour force’ (p. 79), navigational methods, cartography, and the risks of shipwreck and attack from ‘pirates’ or privateers. By contrast, Menard-Jacob’s contribution to *L’Asie, la mer, le monde* stresses how a lack of knowledge of Indian Ocean routes, seasons, and navigation handicapped ships of the first French Compagnie des Indes in the seventeenth century.

The most vivid reconstruction of life on board ship is Eric Tagliacozzo’s depiction of the hardships of travel of Hajj pilgrims from Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, in conditions of overcrowding that produced high mortality and alarmed colonial authorities as mobile health hazards. But *The longest journey: Southeast Asians and the pilgrimage to Mecca* goes much further than that. It is a masterly demonstration of the active role played by the ocean, not only in linking together the far-flung regions of Southeast Asia and Mecca, but in shaping the experiences, responses, and mentalité of those who travelled on it. Tagliacozzo convincingly argues that the journeying of Hajj pilgrims gave ordinary Southeast Asian men and (to a lesser extent) women an identity not only within the Muslim world but as part of the Indian Ocean. This identity was shaped by trade and labour in the Red Sea region undertaken by pilgrims seeking to pay off debts and return home, and by a colonial era that connected Southeast Asians with anticolonial and nationalist political sentiments widely dispersed around the Indian Ocean rim. As he concludes, ‘at the heart of the narrative is the Indian Ocean’ (p. 301).

Romain Bertrand's essay in *L'Asie, la mer, le monde* takes us further in considering the commonalities of European and Asian maritime practice and experience on board ships. As well as examining the structures of command and the rapid incorporation of new knowledge in cartography (for example, Javanese maps showed Brazil only a few years after its 'discovery' by the Portuguese), Bertrand explores the symbolic meaning of ships in Malay and Dutch Southeast Asia as markers of prestige and sovereignty as much as vessels for the transport of goods. This analysis is then extended to the ways in which ships' crews perceived and imagined the ocean, as well as how it was represented in indigenous sources, for instance as a symbol of purity and infinity, or as a place of intense divine presence. The ocean was not solely, as often claimed, a place evoking terror.

Such an approach moves Indian Ocean scholarship into the realms of imagination and representation, and reflects interdisciplinary influences of literary and cultural studies on historical analysis. In this vein Tagliacozzo's *Longest journey* includes a chapter on Conrad's *Lord Jim* as a representation of the sinking of the *Jeddah*, a notorious episode in which the European crew abandoned the Hajj passengers aboard a sinking vessel off the east coast of Africa in 1880. To some readers this chapter might seem out of place in a work that focuses on the historical experience of Southeast Asian pilgrims. Nevertheless, Tagliacozzo uses it to show how Conrad's novel made him a 'public interpreter' (p. 127) of the experience of poorer Hajj pilgrims and the impact of European colonial control over them, thus widening the scope from a particular episode to 'a lens by which humanity, race, religion and power could all be judged' (p. 128).

Several key initiatives emanating from the outer rim of the Indian Ocean world have adopted a cultural perspective on its

history: the work of Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke in Sydney and of Isabel Hofmeyr and Pamila Gupta in Johannesburg being the most notable.<sup>9</sup> As a leading scholar of African literature, Isabel Hofmeyr has done much to promote a transnational approach to the study of texts and their circulation, both in Africa and beyond.<sup>10</sup> In particular, she has identified the need for South Africanists to break away from assumptions based on Atlantic (and especially Black Atlantic) studies and instead to embrace the Indian Ocean as a way of connecting with the 'Global South'.<sup>11</sup> *Gandhi's printing press* is an insightful example of such an orientation. Starting with the premise that the mobility of the Indian Ocean world produced 'a rich array of transnational imaginings' (p. 8), Hofmeyr explores how the publishing cultures of the nineteenth century generated encounters of British colonial, Indian, and African printing traditions that were diverse and multilingual but also interactive. The maritime basis of such interactions were both literal – the distribution of pamphlets, books, and newsheets across its waters, with nodal points in Durban, Bombay, and Madras – and metaphorical. Gandhi's printing press is introduced through legends that became part of popular knowledge: its sinking aboard a ship en route from India to South Africa and the belief of a white mob in Durban in 1896, waiting to attack Gandhi on his arrival, that he was travelling with a printing press which they also planned

- 
- 9 D. Ghosh and S. Muecke, 'Editors' introduction' and 'Indian Ocean stories', *UTS Review*, 6, 2, 2000, pp. 1–5 and 24–43; P. Gupta, I. Hofmeyr, and M. Pearson, *Eyes across the water: navigating the Indian Ocean*, Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010.
- 10 Notably in I. Hofmeyr, *The portable Bunyan: A transnational history of The pilgrim's progress*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- 11 I. Hofmeyr, 'The Black Atlantic meets the Indian Ocean: forging new paradigms of transnationalism for the Global South: literary and cultural perspectives', *Social Dynamics*, 33, 2, 2007, pp. 3–32.

to destroy. Neither was based on fact – Gandhi had no such press when he arrived in South Africa – but both are ‘accounts of a printing press at sea’ (p. 31) which underscore the maritime context of his publishing endeavours.

Hofmeyr also stresses how *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper first published by Gandhi in 1903, was not only a mechanism for promoting his political and social campaigns in South Africa but also projected a vision of a transnational space that connected South Africa and India through news reports, shipping bulletins, and advertisements, often blurring the geographical location of each region. Articles included extracts from presses across the Indian Ocean, including Australia. An example of the new linkages this provided is Erasmus, a Boer prisoner of war in Ceylon, who wrote of the spiritual and mythological heritage of the Ramayana. Readers were thus encouraged to imagine themselves as inhabitants of an Indian Ocean world.

Hofmeyr is concerned to bring South Africa into the Indian Ocean – or, rather, to bring the Indian Ocean to South Africa. This not only gives a maritime context to a region whose historiography has been primarily terrestrial but also reorientates it from a predominantly Atlantic focus. Yet, as much as Hofmeyr is concerned to highlight the Indian Ocean world, she also warns us against setting up too strong a contrast between it and the Atlantic, especially for more recent periods.<sup>12</sup> The argument that the intrusion of Europeans from the Atlantic world into the Indian Ocean fundamentally reshaped trade, politics, and social formations has been effectively challenged, at least for the period before the onset of steamships and intensified colonialism in the later nineteenth century. But the Indian Ocean in the early modern period was never an insulated

space or isolated sphere. Now that the Eurocentricity of historical analysis of the region has been overcome, we can reconnect it with other regions in a way that stresses its active agency in global history.

Just as Beaujard has convincingly demonstrated the connections that existed between the Indian Ocean world and the Asian landmass and Mediterranean borderlands in the periods before about 1500, other writers are breaking down the idea of a self-contained region for later centuries. As Eric Tagliacozzo argues, Indian Ocean studies have the ‘ability to connect large swathes of the Southern Hemisphere with the diverse and overlapping expansion histories of Europe’ (p. 41), and thereby further the writing of interconnected global histories on a more equitable basis.

This is a theme which has become particularly evident in recent work on the southwestern Indian Ocean. Pedro Machado shows the importance of *Vaniya* merchant activities not only in connecting southeastern Africa with South Asia but also in fuelling the slave trade between Mozambique and the south Atlantic, while Richard Allen’s analysis of slave-trading activities shows up the need to understand labour policies and practices that reveal the interaction of different oceanic regions. However, the clearest statement of the importance of integrating the Indian Ocean into global labour history is made by Alessandro Stanziani in his *Sailors, slaves, and immigrants: bondage in the Indian Ocean World, 1750–1915*. Despite its subtitle, this book is as much about European and global labour practices and policies as it is about the Indian Ocean. It identifies the close interconnectedness of maritime, industrial, and rural labour markets, and argues for an examination of land-based labour from the perspective of the sea rather than the other way around. In so doing, it makes the recruitment, working conditions, and

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



treatment of seamen, galley slaves, and convicts central to our understanding of wider labour histories. Stanziani argues for the need to consider French and British labour practices in Europe in unison with those in its colonies, especially those in the south-west Indian Ocean such as Reunion and Mauritius.

Stanziani not only breaks down the boundaries between terrestrial and oceanic-based histories; he also rejects regionally confined oceanic viewpoints. The significance of the Indian Ocean was its diverse and shifting variety of political and legal systems which 'helped shape a completely different European conception and practice of sovereignty than that in the Atlantic' (p. 30). So, the legacy of Mughal, Burmese, and East African connections influenced mechanisms of maritime recruitment and notions of freedom, slavery, and abolition in ways that both informed and influenced labour policies and practices elsewhere in the French and British worlds. Developments in the Indian Ocean, Stanziani concludes, had a decisive impact on the British and French labour markets. He thus makes the Indian Ocean central to the history of global labour and legal histories, while preserving the shipboard focus of oceanic approaches.

This leads to a final consideration stemming from a reading of these works. The politics of national histories and interdisciplinary area studies are now well recognized and the artificiality of continental and regional divisions in historiography widely acknowledged.<sup>13</sup> We know that the very term 'Indian

Ocean' is anachronistic for a region whose inhabitants did not use such a concept before very recent times.<sup>14</sup> So what are the imperatives and implications of writing about the Indian Ocean for historians based in differing parts of the world today?

From my location in South Africa, this has become a key question. Positioning southern Africa in the context of the Indian Ocean both removes it from the Atlantic–Western nexus of outdated Eurocentric histories and also modifies a terrestrial Africanist perspective that has unsurprisingly become hegemonic in the post-apartheid era. Isabel Hofmeyr's work consciously aims to show how African scholarship (of which she has herself been a leader in the field of African literature and orality) can be connected to a wider appreciation of interconnected histories in the Global South. The Indian Ocean provides an alternative to Eurocentricity and a complement to Afrocentricity. This is only possible now that scholars such as Beaujard have given Africa its due role in Indian Ocean history, overcoming the total neglect of the continent by earlier writers on the ocean, such as Janet Abu-Lughod and Kirti Chaudhuri.<sup>15</sup> So Madagascar, the Mascarenes, and Mozambique, as well as the East African Swahili coast, have today become a major part of Indian Ocean studies.

A similar use of oceanic models to break out of terrestrial confines is evident in Eric Tagliacozzo's focus on Hajj pilgrims at sea and the impact of their journeys on wider political and social forces, thus rejecting the

---

is also examined in Stanziani, *Sailors, slaves, and immigrants*, pp. 15–16.

13 Readers of this journal will hardly need reminders of this critique, but mention of M. Lewis and K. Wigen, *The myth of continents: a critique of metageography*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, and the work of J. Bentley exemplified by, 'The task of world history', in J. Bentley, ed., *The Oxford handbook of world history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 1–16, may serve as reference points. The issue

14 George Bryan Souza, 'Maritime trade and politics in China and the South China Sea' in *Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese, c.1585–1800: merchants, commodities and commerce*, Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2014, p. 317.

15 C. R. da Silva, 'Indian Ocean but not African sea: the erasure of East African commerce from history', *Journal of Black Studies*, 29, 5, 1999, pp. 157–92.

idea of both the Middle East and Southeast Asia as self-contained regional units. The significance of Chinese traders in the 'maritime Silk Road' connecting the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea is highlighted in the work of both Souza and Miksic, decentring India and Indian traders (in ways which might be reflective of the changing economic balance of contemporary Asia). The Portuguese historian Souza stresses the vibrancy of Portuguese trading by drawing attention to private activities rather than the weakening of the crown system, arguing, for example, that Macao was as significant a centre of Portuguese trading as Goa. Miksic emphasizes the antiquity of Sino-orientated Singapore in a work that overturns the image of the city-state as a purely European colonial

creation with the detailed documentation of a much earlier Chinese-created settlement. In the process, both make arguments that link with present-day concerns and perspectives.

Alessandro Stanziani writes as a global labour historian with a larger agenda: to reintegrate land-based and maritime histories in ways that do not privilege the former. This may mark a new shift in the historiography of the Indian Ocean. Now that the field has demonstrated its sophistication in terms of themes within its own region, it can take its place in wider global analyses. Whether the current institutional weight of research centres, academic appointments, and publishers' series in distinct oceanic fields such as Atlantic, Pacific, and now Indian Ocean history, will impede such a move remains an open question.