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Islands, the Humanities and environmental conservation

THEMATIC SECTION
Humans and Island Environments

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SUMMARY

This paper concerns itself with the contributions that the Humanities make to the understanding of islands and their bettered environmental conservation. Most distinctively, the Humanities comprise Literary Studies, Studies in Art and Culture (including Indigenous and Gender Studies) and Philosophy (with Aesthetics and the History of Ideas), but they also encompass Archaeology, History, Linguistics, Studies in Religion and, of late, Media and Communication Studies, even though members of this latter cluster frequently deploy methods from the social sciences. The goal here is to explore many of the implications such Human Studies and their sub-branches may have for island conservation, above all informed by the History of Ideas, in order to introduce the relevant key issues and inter-relationships and offer the most judicious illustrative materials. Variances in the reach and special attention of all these branches of knowledge are vast and intricate, while complex relativities apply both in the types of island situations and in expectations about what can or should be conserved. Since the mass of apposite discussions in the literature cannot possibly be summarized here, this article circumvents the difficulties by means of a special double-edged review. It ranges over the history of human consciousness of insular worlds, as reflected in mythic, legendary and historical materials, yet en route it uncovers how Humanities research can elucidate the human responses to islands through known time and shows how developing meaning-making has generally enhanced the appeal of sea-locked environments as worth conserving.

Keywords: environmental conservation, island studies, humanities, mythology, history, studies in religion, cultural studies, pollution, biogeography

INTRODUCTION

I will work with the definition of an island as 'a land mass surrounded by water' if only to acknowledge special ambiguities from the start. Named continents are surrounded by water – Australia and Antarctica for an obvious two – and these island continents of the South will already call to mind both long-held imaginings of a wondrous *Terra Australis incognita*, even projected utopias beyond the beginnings of eastern trade routes (Ferguson 1975: 104–129), and contemporary sensitivities about protecting the biological integrity of the oldest and the coldest continents. Even if habit of nomenclature has it that we exclude continents from the category of islands, what enormous differences in land mass exist between the first and second in size – Greenland (at 2 166 086 km^2) and 'mainland' New Guinea (786 km^2) – down to small atolls of Micronesia, such as Tobi in Palau (0.84 km^2), some (in Tuvalu) now 'drowning'. From the environmental scientist's viewpoint, matters become more complex definitionally when the complete picture is contemplated. The planet has around 80 000 islands that are permanently inhabited and of potential (geo-)political significance (Trompf 1993: xii), but that excludes uninhabited, barely or seasonally visited ones, let alone a myriad of islets, or even significant rocky outcrops (some occasional havens for humans, such as Ailsa Craig in the Irish Sea), tiny offshore South Pacific affairs with one comic book-style coconut tree (near Matu'u, American Samoa) or mangrove and mud islands or exposed or rock-topped reefs (in and beyond Moreton Bay, Australia's Great Barrier Reef). Some islands are only temporarily so: Lindisfarne off Northumberland (UK) and Mont Saint-Michel off Normandy (France) can be cut off by tidal change. Some islands have been humanly created: for culturo-religious purposes in the case of the Mala (Solomon Islands) who have built islets to mark clan identity (Ivens 1930); for commercial convenience in the case of the isthmus canal that eventually isolated Greece's Peloponnese; or for defence, such as the Chinese constructing artificial island extensions to secure the South China Sea (Trompf 1993: 182–192). A few islands lie devastated by nuclear testing – especially Enewetak Atoll (Marshall Islands) and Mururoa Atoll (French Polynesia) in the Pacific and Trimouille Bay, Montebello Islands (northwest Australia) on the Indian Ocean periphery (Futter 2015: 3, 30–48). Marine islands and occasionally islets will form the focus of this paper.

What of conservation? With such a diversity of geographical elements, and there are still more to consider, what shall be our preferred methods of orientation? Here, in general terms, we note first that practitioners of environmental sciences

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find themselves combining an acceptance of goal-values with 'the ordinary doing of science' (observing, measuring, monitoring, calculating, etc.). The value of protecting pristine environments is already built into the 'ideal relationship' between eco-sciences and national park, wildlife and heritage programmes, but it is even more starkly evident when sparsely or uninhabited areas without official protection fall under threat of degradation and pollution and researchers are engaged as assessors or trouble-shooters. Then, where human impact is intense or degrading has already occurred, there are expectations for 'the good' from environmental conservationists, that something should be done to limit or even halt debilitating influences and, where possible, restore ecological balance. When it comes to islands, needless to say, 'questions of value and science' can seriously differ if islands are uninhabited by humans or barely and quite partially so (obviously Greenland), as against highly populated islands, such as Columbia's tiny, impoverished Caribbean Santa Cruz del Islote, which is the most densely populated on Earth (over 124 persons on 0.012 km^2) and such smallish islands housing huge high-rise cities as Hong Kong and Oahu's Honolulu. Axiological issues can also be affected by the relative willingness to engage indigenous groups, whose rationales for preservation may not conform to 'global-scientific' standards (Whitt 2009: 29–132). In addressing these variables, environmental conservationists can be faced with certain hard choices: between conserving natural habitats and blocking such human survivalists as Jamaican squatter settlers, for instance, even preferring nearly 40 million plastic items to be thrown up by oceanic vortices on the beaches of isolated Henderson Island in the Pacific so as to better monitor seaborne pollutants. And in general terms, conservationism has to be concerned with 'humans in nature' and to deal with *humanitas* as embedded in and prone to affect myriad environments, even if only as visitors, tourists or pilgrims, and especially on islands where choices over extinction/immigration equilibriums within the confinements of ocean-bound land surfaces can be difficult (Glacken 1963; MacArthur & Wilson 2001: 40, 145–183).

If we are to give an adequate account of what the Humanities can contribute to conserving island environments, it will be best, in this small compass, to develop 'an archaeology of consciousness about islands' that traces how humans respond to the insular world through time. The multiple ways by which scholars in the Humanities (and Social Sciences) have evoked, recollected and reflected on those responses will bring greater hermeneutical clarity as we tour across very complex ideational terrain. Instead of proceeding with an impracticable review discipline by discipline, then, while negotiating overlap and overwhelming detail, a more convenient methodological and hermeneutical toolkit is preferred. The orientation here will be basically neo-Vichian, in that in the history of human consciousness and thought the mythic precedes the legendary, which is prior to the historical, following Giambattista Vico's heuristically posited 'ages' (*Età*) of 'the gods, heroes, and humans' in his ground-breaking 1744 text on Social Science (Vico 2015: 29). Individuals inherit the mental dictionary of their religio-cultural past through language history, layered earliest as *fantasia* in the face of an unknown environment full of spirit-forces (that is, *mythic* in being powerfully imaginal yet possibly misleading), then as a brash confidence in which all obstacles and challenges will be *heroically* (often too daringly) embraced. These modes of consciousness never leave us alone even while cultures, after different experiences, eventually come to transmit consensus 'principles', *human* reflections on what is 'good' and 'right' in socio-environmental relations that supersede archaic thought-modes. Such abstractions as justice, love, truth and moderation emerge as powerful value bases for larger and larger social unities (if *over*-abstracting can follow later, with invoked principles being divorced from actual, practical problems). The histories of discourse and institutions betray the same shifts: from poetic evocations of the divine and epics of legendary figures, on to studious prose and would-be objective perspectives; from the rulings of lineage and tribal particularities, through the striking (often peremptory and brutal) rulings of commander heroes, on to the elevation of courts and jurisprudential *principii*.

This Vichian framing will facilitate our ranging over the human consciousness of islands through documented Anthropocene times, from prehistoric ventures to contemporary overloads. Humanities disciplines such as the History of Ideas, Classical and Religious (including mythological) Studies and Ethnohistory (along with Archaeology and Anthropology) will be found to be the most useful for clarifying the earlier responses to insular worlds, in turn providing contributive value to island conservation. We can distil what is on offer through judicious examples of myth and legend, moving from the more to the less familiar, and through the critical lenses of these studies.

ISLANDS IN STUDIES OF MYTH AND LEGEND

Traditional myths distinctively accept the environment, whether given or divinely created, as an absolute marvel. Obviously, the Biblical Eden is meant to be a perfect gift, fully 'good' (*tôv*) and beautifully beneficial to all living creatures (Genesis 1: 28–30) and still taken to exist as an angelically inviolate habitat even after the disobedient Adam and Eve were expelled from it into harsh environs (Genesis 2: 14–24). Because Eden was associated with the encircling of four great rivers (Genesis 2: 10–14), it seems inevitable that subsequent interpreters would read this paradise-garden as an island – 'Serendib' (or Sri Lanka) being the interesting choice by the Mandaeans (followers of John the Baptist) (*Diwan Naharawahta* [*c*. 250 CE] Tbls. V, VII) and that mysterious ethno-religious minority, the Druze (mainly in Lebanon) (Hamza, *Epist*. 12 [*c*. 1019 CE]). After all, the 'pure' Sumerian paradise Dilmun in the first known creation myth-poem imagined long before the Genesis account(s) and a place also reckoned to be where the Sumerian Noah-figure Ziusudra beached his giant vessel was once a dry island, a 'place of crossing' in the Persian Gulf irrigated by the

creative water god, later yielding timber and the best dates (spring-blessed Bahrain?) (Bibby 1969). It is little wonder, then, given the perennial attraction of the primal beatific image in the ancient 'Fertile Crescent' through many severe environmental degradations, that a modern founder-figure of environmental history locates in the later discovery of 'tropical island Edens' (from 1600 to 1850) 'the origins of environmentalism' for the West (Grove 1996: 16–24). The study of myth helps explain long-persisting values put on beautiful places protected by sea.

Island environments, of course, are not always paradisiacal. In the Norse myths of the *Eddas*, memorably, Iceland is the 'Land of Fire and Ice'. This is the terrain where the first great giant Ymir emerges from contact between the primal icy mists and intense heat on that volcano-ridden, sub-Arctic island, never inhabited by the Vikings until late in their heyday (Sturluson, *Saemund Edda* 1; *Snorre's Edda* 1). Here, though northerners knew many favourable places to the contrary, islands are utterly inhospitable and forbidding, with the gods capable of drawing them eruptively from the seas in fiery moments. Whereas from a lost paradise a hoped-for bliss may be recovered, here an alien island prefaces all human endeavour with threats of danger, leaving the indelible impression that death awaits at the edges of the world, even the death of the gods themselves (*Ragnarök*), a vision not lost on those now warning against planetary 'environmental destruction' (Beyer 2017: 212). Comparative mythologists usefully show, then, that early or pre-modern 'osmotically developing' valences regarding island environments were typically respectful yet not without ambiguity.

Myths often recount the gods creating, securing or drawing up islands from the sea to reinforce 'the sacredness of the land'. When promiscuous Zeus impregnates beautiful mortal Leto, all were too scared of retribution from jealous Queen Hera to grant her sanctuary, except a floating island, which Zeus securely moored by pillars before Leto bore the twins Apollo and Artemis upon it (Homer, *Hymn Apoll.*). The isle was Delos, the key cult centre for the seafaring Greeks and other Mediterranean visitors; even now, with the leftovers of so many temples on its stony face, it remains protected because people come only for a short time and retreat to other members of the Cyclades chain (in the Aegean) (Pepper & Wilcock 1977: 37–43). In Japan, according to the scripture *Kojiki* (1.3 [*Kuniumi*]), the youngest couple of 'the Seven Divine Generations,' the fabled Izanami and Izanagi, stand over "the Floating Bridge of Heaven" and churn with their spears the soft, formless watery mush to make Japan's primary 'mythic' island Onögörö-shima (an islet off Awaji, in Osaka Bay, Honshu), under which the divine couple inserted a pivotal cosmic 'Support Column.' Because the land is sacred – the very implication of the word Yamato, naming the earliest rulership – the divinely created places of spiritual presences (*kami*) in Japan's island realm (especially its mountains, rivers and forests) are to be honoured and the avoidance of pollution in the ritual life and imperial cult of Shinto includes an inured attitude of 'non-disturbance' to s*hizen* ('life forces arising around'), as is longest shown in archaic poetry (Tucker 2003: 161–166).

Across the Pacific, a frequent mythic motif, particularly from Micronesia, has a deity hooking or drawing up islands (Swain & Trompf 1995: 127). In a special variant of this for Palau, we have the story of the great goddess Latmikaik, from the days 'when there were only Angaur and Peleliu' (coral atolls). Latmikaik gave birth to a giant female child (Chuab) who, sat up, had to be fed by the islanders, but was forever hungry and grew so large that their ladders could not even reach her mouth. When the exhausted villagers complained about her imperfect creation, the disgraced goddess let the villagers burn Chuab, the bits of her body that fell forming the higher (volcanic) islands. In an interesting United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-supported national conservation project, vegetation and soil are taught as layers of skin (Chuab's, as it were) that are protected from further damage and healed after agricultural disturbances by mulching practices, avoiding depletion into the sea through tropical rain (Defley 2013). Background inspiration here derives from studies in Comparative Religion, particularly of the Palauan new religious movement, Ngara Modekngei, that combines traditional Latmikaik veneration with Catholicism (Aoyagi 2002).

Scholarly appreciation of the ancestral sacralizing of surroundings is part of a growing trend in island contexts (Sponsel 2001). Some Pacific islands are well known to have been rarely visited, tabooed places, such as the Melanesian Trobrianders' Tuma or Isle of the Dead (Malinowski 1916), and so were kept conserved. And past desecrations now incite repair. The quest to resurrect Polynesian Hawai'i's 'cosmic navel' Moku'ula, the islet embodying *ahupua'a* (the 'sacred land system'), but now just a public park, expresses this re-sacralizing tendency. That Moku'ula was set for 1700 years amid curated fish ponds between streams and ocean in southwest Maui, was home to the Lizard Goddess Kihawahine and was the last refuge of Hawai'ian royalty (Klieger 1998) is given space in Indigenous, Ethnic and Archaeological Studies in Hawai'ian tertiary education (McGregor 2007).

Turning from mythic to legendary materials, following our cue from Vico's orientation towards ideas and consciousness, myth is generally distinct from legend because it centres on acts of divinities or non-human spirit beings, while the protagonists of legends are humans, typically larger-than-ordinary-life heroic ones dealing with the gods. Most famed among legendary characters bestriding the island world are the Ithacan Odysseus (or Ulysses) and the Trojan Aeneas, warriors leaving the undesired theatre of the Trojan War who visit and skirt various Aegean and Mediterranean islands in episodes that still condition our common imaginings of them as places for caution, even best left unvisited. When Odysseus and his men reach Polyphemus's island and Aeneas both Etna and Sicily, they face Cyclopean figures (Homer, *Odyss.* 9; Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.570–81) who, in reflective Greco-Roman thought, come to stand for savagery and absence of polity (especially Plato, *Leges* 3.680B–D). And in heroes' other

visitations and near-misses of unknown 'maritime lands', the sense of discomfort prevails with the seductions of Calypso's Ogygia and the Siren's Isle, even the wondrous spear tree on Delos, the secret garden on Scheria and the 'sheer-cliff-faced fastness within the Aeolian Island' (Homer, *Odyss*. 5; 12, cf. 6.164–8, 7.142–177, 10.1–3). The intrepid Argonauts, once through the Bosphorus, can only find immediate respite on 'a low-lying island of birds too innumerable to fend off easily,' because 'the tribes along the coasts are hostile!' (Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonaut*. 2.317–393). Studies of such island legends and the attitudes underlying them recognize the caution amid wonder, as well as use and respite, which went with seagoing adventure (e.g. Hirst & Sammon 2014: 220–222).

Jason and his Argonauts bespeak discovery, the quest for riches (the Golden Fleece) and maritime networks that can generate island-based empires. For the Mediterranean and Near East, Bronze Age Archaeology has had to make use of textual information that is basically legendary. The Minoan civilization on and around Crete was rare among exclusively island 'economic empires' (2600–1100 BCE) (Callender 1999), the only others being those of Micronesian Yap (*c*. 500–1800 CE) and Polynesian Tonga (950–1500 CE) in the Pacific much later (Petersen 2000). Requiring ships, the Minoans' demise was sealed by forest depletion (Perlin 2005: 44–55), always a threat of insularity (as oral traditions also tell us of Rapanui or Easter Island, where met the farthest reaches of Polynesian and Incan oceanic ventures; Trompf 2002: 459–465; cf. Diamond 2011). Despite its uncovered glories, in legend the realm of King Minos is forbidding, housing the dreadful Minotaur and the labyrinth constructed by the ingenious captive Daedalus to contain it. When Daedalus needs to escape island Crete, swimming is no option; he has to fly off with waxed wings! Aeneas, later on, reaches the place where Daedalus landed and, clutching 'the Golden Bough,' is allowed descent to Hell; but who should he find below, divinely deployed to judge the dead, but King Minos (Virgil, *Aen*. 6.1–434). Between legend and history in the story of islands, key issues raised by the Humanities, in the philosophy of will and desire and in various literary tropes address judgements of past human enterprises and the limitations of our would-be control and invention.

If the legendary and *island* civilization of Atlantis (Plato, *Critias* 108E) and volcanically destroyed Thera (Manning 1999: 17–18) also reflect the prodigious Minoan spread, more interesting and endearing in lying behind it was the maritime network of Phoenicia (1500–300 BCE), from once-island Tyre, taking in Malta and reaching over to Ceuta (opposite Gibraltar) and the Balearic Isles (where on Ibiza veneration of the Semitic forest goddess Tanit-Astarte still lingers) (Moscati 1999). David Attenborough (1987), combining History and Archaeology into his ecological *Überschau*, reads the agreeable Mediterranean environment as 'the first Eden,' with the cult of the bull (the symbol of the Levantine deity Ba'al, victor over the underworld god of death) a binding thread as cultural contacts congeal across the waters. And the Semite Phoenicians took their connections east into the Red Sea (1 Kings 9:26–27), though the 'hundreds of islands' there still remain the 'least disturbed by Man' (Edwards & Mead 2013: 291).

HEROIC EXPLOITS AND ISLANDS FROM SAGA TO MODERN EXPLORATION

In most historical records, islands are to be 'taken'. Precisely because they are hard to possess makes them a good prize for security. 'Enter not the land surrounded by water,' once warned the Delphic Oracle (Herodotus, *Historiae* 4.163), our very definition of an island, and yet once you conquer it, it can be made a fortress. Or with superior ship power you can fairly readily control its inhabitants; thus, the Athenians, who created the first 'colonial empire', took most tribute from trading islands (Trompf 1961). Or you could use an island as a monumental showpiece of strength, as with two of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Colossus of Rhodes and the Lighthouse of Alexandria (on Pharos). The study of History, often focused on power struggles, already carries implications of environmental exploitation.

We have now reached the horizon of historical consciousness, of less impromptu planning and early scientific endeavour, with increasingly abstract reflection, though not forgetting that prior layers of thought retain profound effects. Obviously, mainstream History and related historically orientated studies will be of paramount relevance from here on, especially for this review as a synoptic outlook on human/island relations over documented time. And with humans intruding their mastery into a divinely ordained cosmos, Feminist culture theory legitimately spots the deepening entrenchment of masculine warrior mentalities. For others, Peace and Conflict Studies can attend to the different rationales for new expansivisms and their long-term consequences for island habitats, while Literary Studies carry importance for plotting new and changing genres in presenting maritime and island-related themes.

Greco-Roman grand poetic narratives of heroes facing peril amid lurking environal danger and suspect people – *gens crudelis* in Virgil's *Aenead* (6.359) – become archetypal for many tales of islands ahead, including famed Sinbad's 'seven voyages . . . from island to island . . . sea to sea,' told in the Arabic *One Thousand and One Nights* about south Asia and Africa (Olcott 1933: 41). Straightaway, the sense of unlocking new mysteries and reaching new horizons, of great adventure by crossing the seas to discover new places of habitation or wealth, often islands, suggests the possibilities, indeed ambiguities, of environmental modification, let alone social subjugations. If we consider what Peter Bellwood (1979) calls the prehistoric human 'conquest of the Pacific', for instance, we are dealing with a long process, from seafaring to Buka (off Bougainville) as old as 32 000 ± BP (Spriggs 1988) on to canoe arrivals as far as Rapanui *c*. 500 CE. This shifting reflects increasing human pressures for resources from west to east, from continental and larger island contexts able to sustain more people (considering the Indonesian and Melanesian

archipelagos) in smaller and smaller units of terrain with less carrying capacity (Loret & Tanacredi 2003: 21). However, among outer island hero-voyagers we have Kupe, finding the exceptionally large landmass of Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Buck 1959: 277–278).

Before serious foreign takeovers in modern times, historians illustrate many 'relatively soft eco-effects' on islands from Antiquity on, through religious heroes and daring traders. Since islands are confined spaces, too, they traditionally encourage sedentary curation and fishing over the grandeur of the chase (Glacken 1979: 616). New Testament Studies have immediate relevance in the epic-like account of shipwreck survival in the Book of Acts. St Paul and his company were washed up on 'Melitê' (perhaps not long-inhabited Malta but isolated, snake-infested and heavily wooded Melita [off Croatia] in the Adriatic Sea), being treated with 'unusual friendliness by natives (*barbaroi*)' well settled there. Here is described the earliest of 'first contact' situations between wonder-associated missionaries and fascinated locals, with St Paul shaking off a viper to survive as if 'a god' (Acts 28:1–6). The story of missions and islands goes on, with complexities. As the Roman world sank under barbarian onslaughts, on its wild northwestern island margins, Irish Christian monastics kept Greek alive and stored ancient texts crucial for later generations (Cahill 2010). Gaelic-speaking monks, it appears, were in Iceland before the Norse arrived in 874 CE (Thorgilisson, *Íslendingabók* 1), braving extreme cold as they did on the Skelligs, off southwest Ireland. Yet of course Viking Norse dared to go further west, settling Greenland and visiting America, on Newfoundland, the sixteenth largest island, by 1000 CE – certainly the stuff of sagas (*Groenlendinga saga*; *Eriks saga raöa*; Ingstad & Ingstad 2000) and not environmentally damaging. As for traders, looking east, intriguingly, Red Sea commerce was progressively lost to the Ethiopic Christians of Aksum, but it was after the Muslim Arab supplanting of 'black power' in their region that we first hear of their control over the Spice Islands trade. With venturesome merchant expeditions to Southeast Asia, Islam was propagated along their trading paths (from the eighth century). By then, China, its junks plying south, was in expansive control of trade in Nanhai (the South China Sea) (Curtin 1984: 100–133) and, during the height of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, Nanhai's island borders, given *stupa* markers, constituted sacred geography (from the seventh century), with Palembang (on Sumatra) and the Andaman Islands the farthest points of this sphere (Alpers 2014: 46). How helpful are specialist historians of trade routes in gauging the role and potential environmental vulnerabilities of islands in these developments!

Since we are discussing 'religiously incentivized' expansions, some relevant pointers should be offered from the toolkit of Comparative (indeed the 'Comparative Ecology' of) Religion. Where lands, in our case islands, are reckoned a sacred given for a people, anyone else not fitting the preconceived paradigm can be rendered wild or impure. For the Japanese Yamato, perhaps unsurprisingly, tribes preceding them on their realm's edges were 'malicious demons' (*Nihon shoki* 7 [pub. 720]); for the Sinhalese Buddhists, finding refuge from India in Sri ('holy') Lanka among the true 'people of the island', outsiders seemed animal-like (*Mahâvamsa* [*c*. 500] 15.105, 19.20–22, 25.83–85), a sad paradox later contributing to civil war (1983–2009), albeit after Ceylon's many environmental compromises (Trompf 1993: 121, 126; Jha 2014: 150–155). We can note some interesting things about the spread of Islam and Christianity on islands. In being very venturesome earlier, Muslims coming and going – to do business on 'island trading stations' and show their religious practice at Zanzibar, Maldives, Dawei Delta, Tawalisi, etc. (Ibn Battuta, *Rihla* [1355]) – left little environmental footprint, except by putting demands on indigenes for more products (ivory!) and feeding into the slave trade (Hansen & Curtis 2017: 306–330). For Christians, with clergy accompanying voyagers, the imprint of a long-term new presence was stronger. Islands were given 'baptismal names' as a blessing, usually on the saint's day of discovery, and so introduced to the divine order of time as the New World unfolded. The special disciple of Missiology (Studies of Missions) enlightens here. This enduring 'liturgicalization' of space, the most dominant fashion for island nomenclatures we have – north to south from St Thomas to Columbus-named Isla de Trinidad (Trinity) in the Lesser Antilles, for a start! – implied a divine purpose for every spot on earth. Islanders were now to nurture their special homelands in a bigger picture, managing through various wider conflicts befalling them, on to a confident post-colonial 'self-possession' (cf. McCusker & Soares 2011: xii), even resilience against climate change (Petzold 2017). Note also how if pioneer missionaries used islands as the 'safe-enough' staging points for work among initially hostile peoples, their choices were 'hallowed' for future land care (from Scotland's Iona through China's Shangchuan to Papua's Yule Island).

It is hard to understand *world* history as it actualized after 1492 without apprehending the role of two extraordinary island groupings – the West Indies (the Caribbean) and the East Indies (especially Indonesia and the tiny Spice Islands off Halmahera), as research by one of the best macro-historians, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, clearly confirms (esp. 1995: 169–264). These island theatres were chief objects of the earlier Western discoverers, the greatest among them – da Gama, Columbus, Magellan, Drake and Raleigh – becoming the new legendary voyagers, now braving truly enormous distances and this time fully human (as also in Vico's framework), with notorious buccaneers acting out a Promethean ethos of 'overcoming and defeating' all. Ironically, when one visits the Caribbean, statues of these greats and the fortresses exchanged by explorers, governors, privateers and pirates became memorial-places of heroic deeds on identifiable *non*-mythic islands, sites worth conserving (beginning with Columbus's Monument on San Salvador, Bahamas). This is where Historical Heritage Studies and Museology assist, as sister activities to the Natural Heritage side to environmentalism (cf. Lowenthal & Olwig 2013). The

early skirmishes in the 16th century, however, herald the settling down of European maritime empires.

If History, generally a constantly improved, critical discipline, ever had a leading focus of attention, it is the rise and decline of modern empires (Trompf 1979–2018), and the place of islands in these vicissitudes has been crucial, practically and ideologically. Sea-power and securing strategic island pockets work hand in hand. Perhaps for Europeans it goes back to the Castilian realized dream of wresting back the Balearics from Islam in the 13th century (Berenguer, *Liber Maiolichinus*), with the first missions to the Atlantic Canary Islands significantly being sent from the Balearic Christian kingdom. But from 1100 to 1500, we find Venice, itself an offshore city, developing an island-acquiring trading empire down the Dalmatian coast to the Ionian Islands, on to Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus, with bases in Sicily and Malta and such castled rock hideaways as Bourtzi to limit Ottoman dominance in cross-Mediterranean commerce (Hinds 2002). The Portuguese were to reapply the Venetian model down the west African coast and around to the Cape to India (after 1497), and once trans-Atlantic crossings went on apace, by 1520 they held the most widespread ('trading') empire ever known, putting a stranglehold on the spice trade in the Moluccas, East Indies. The great Western empires to follow were all going to rely on islands for footholds of expansion, the Spanish especially across the Pacific (Pohnpei; Philippines), and the Netherlanders cut their teeth competing with the Portuguese all the way to the Spice Islands (by 1599). From 1750, Dutch enterprises had laid the basis for colonial control over the world's largest island archipelago – *Indië* (lost 1945–1969, then called Indonesia). Britain's overseas empire was founded in the Caribbean (where she, Holland and France still govern small West Indies territories, such as the Virgins, Sint Eustatius and Saint Martin). Venice's inspirations continued, for to the British, having control over the Mediterranean (the Ionians, Malta and Cyprus, let alone Gibraltar) epitomized the global maritime supremacy that their own experience on 'The Isles" made them fittest to maintain (especially after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805) (Burbank & Cooper 2010: 130–184; Davies 2000: 553–729).

As long as these empires operated in a trading mode, their impact on natural island environments was limited, but the human toll was enormous (due to wars and local depopulation by takeovers and diseases). Once territorial annexations multiplied, matters worsened. Presaging great changes, already in 1500 the Portuguese started turning previously uninhabited São Tomé (off West Africa) into a giant sugar source (Lemos 1975: 41–51). The history of plantations replacing native vegetation surely marks the Earth's most widespread environmental transformation, sugar cane and coconuts on tropical islands – from Cuba to Cebu, Jamaica to Java, as it were. The Europeans' overseas plantation economy largely required slavery, with islands implicated again. The Bijagos raiders of the African mainland (Guinea), for instance, brought human spoils to their islands for sale to trans-Atlantic slavers; even the beautiful Gorée off Senegal leaves an ugly history, if only in preparing domestic slaves. Historical Studies take us on to events increasingly portentous of island vulnerabilities. Among rebellions reacting against slavery, the one against France on San Domingo from 1791 prefaces the French Revolution, though the long-term disorder that followed brought increasing environmental deterioration. Transferring slavery from the Caribbean to the North American mainland (starting from 1619 tobacco plantations) ultimately racked the USA by war, the first of all 'seriously technologized' ones (Black 2015). As Western commerce and capitalist enterprise thrived through all this, new ports, growth in shipping and sporadic bombardments were to put stress on coastal marine environments in many island contexts, while inequalities in the new world system meant confined terrain would be over-exploited and impoverished islanders less able to forestall land degradation, a pattern that is worsening today.

The varied responses to the modern emergence of Western supremacy are reflected in literary riches constantly re-examined in the Humanities, with islands often coming symbolically to the fore. Mythmaking about former island empires occurred. In the classicized 1572 *Os Lusiadas* (Bks. 1–7), the highpoint of Portuguese literature, Luis de Camöes has his national heroes outmatching Aeneas by getting to India; in a *Historie of Great Britaine* (1611), England's John Speed visualized Elizabeth I's trans-oceanic possessions preceded by an ancient Celtic-looking empire stretching to 'the Orcades' (Bk. 1.13). If some legitimated takeovers of 'brutish' islanders, others saw their simple ways and pristine habitats as a foil to Europe's greed and corruption, constructing the tradition of the 'noble savage'. 'Freckled whelp' Caliban, found alone on Prospero's island (in Shakespeare's *Tempest* [1611], Act 1, Scene 2), embodies relevant ambiguous reactions among early moderns – endearment, innocence, naivety, irrationality, treachery and devilish background. In a parallel spectrum, islands *qua* place combined inaccessibility and danger with the enticingly idyllic, a neo-classical polarity (Ginzburg 2000). The self-containment of islands also made them ideal for projecting ordered, unchaotic societies for the 16th- and 17th-century utopias of Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella (using Ceylon), Francis Bacon (a 'New Atlantis') and even James Harrington, whose model Commonwealth, dubbed *Oceana*, posed a 'stability out there' to end England's Civil War (Trompf 2004: 9492–9493). These were considerably urbanized imaginings, though without the cramp of Venice. When other overwhelmingly urban islands did materialize, notably Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau's Taipa (1830–1851), they were far from utopic in their bustle and vice, and locations for utopias became more interior Shangri-Las; even the Erewhon ('Nowhere') of Samuel Butler (1872), on Aotearoa's south island, was placed well inland. Still, combined research in the History of Ideas (Political Theory) and Literary Studies confirms what most know by cultural inheritance: the increasing mental trend was to portray islands as favourable environments. The point is, for what?

By the 1850s, other images of the island world received strengthening through literary impact. At the end of the 16th-century *Lusiad* (Bk. 10), Camöes had had his heroes finding the Island of Love, and Bacchus concedes that 'the Portuguese have become the gods.' Memorably, some nine decades later, French globe-circumnavigator Louis-Antoine de Bougainville prolonged his stay on the island he styled 'Nouvelle-Cythère' in 1768, Kithera being Aphrodite's island. The soft welcoming of women made 'Tahiti' look like a *real* Love Island, or at least one of a 'naturalism' Jean-Jacques Rousseau projected against artificial social constructions (Langdon 1959: 10–34). From then on, islanders were more celebrated in art (often classicized, as by Joshua Reynolds) (Smith 1985; cf. Newman *et al.* 2017) and a tradition set in train the expectation that sexual mores are more flexible when insulated far off – later amid Bronislaw Malinowski's 'Coral Gardens' and Margaret Mead's Samoa. There arose also 'the uninhabitated island' as the topos of survival. Witness Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), part-inspired by the real-life story of Scot Alexander Selkirk's marooning on remote San Fernández Island (southeast Pacific), and afterwards accounts of the mutineers on *The Bounty*, who reached Pitcairn Island (1790), an isolated dot already abandoned by Polynesians, and did well there – actually, once forgiven, as Britain's very first colony in the Pacific (1838) and second place in world history (after island Corsica!) to allow female voting – until population outstripped resources (Young 2003).

In Romantic poetry, Victor Hugo would lament the sadness of so many shipwrecks around the world (in 'Oceano nox', 1840), but still ask whether some survivors might be 'kings in some isle' (*rois dans quelque île*). His competing friend, Alexandre Dumas, evoked another tragedy overcome: his escapee 'Comte de Monte Cristo' (1844–1845) was wrongfully imprisoned in the Chateau d'If, off Marseille. It reminds us that if in myths the gods punish in island scenarios and in heroic sailing stories wrongdoers walk the plank, one Enlightenment mentality saw good sense in prisons being encased by island waters. The subject of much literary and historical reflection, Corsican conqueror Napoleon famously found himself exiled on two islands, Mediterranean Elba and East Atlantic St Helena, within one year (1814–1815). Modernizing Asian states, as with Japan's Hashima and Vietnam's Côn So'on, eventually followed suite. Some such island keeps met environmental damage: Brazil's Fernando de Noronha (off San Salvador) was substantially denuded to make sure prisoners would be visible (De Vita & Lichtenstein 2015: 292–294).

By the 1880s, new island realities were in sight: Scot Robert Louis Stevenson's piratical Long John Silver was a delighting figure of a faded age and the novelist, on retiring to Polynesia, became embroiled in Samoa's colonial politics ([1894] 1924: 69–240), while painter Paul Gauguin's island women subjects looked less erotic than gentle Marquesan churchgoers. However varied the cultural impressions, Western literature and art were now dominant in purveying them. Romantic themes headed them all: insular environments were above all associated with ordeal and tragedy, freedom and captivity, adventure and experiment, isolation and tight community, love and Edenic life in nature. The island became one of the 'multilayered timeless metaphors for human existence' (Le Juez & Springer 2015: 1; cf. Conrad 2009; Gillis 2009).

JUSQU'AUJOURD'HUI: ISLANDS AS THE THEATRE OF SCIENCE AND MOUNTING POLITICAL TRAGEDIES

Such is our earlier inheritance: the island is not yet an eco-tope, even by 1900; it is not yet the object of conservation procedures, like forests (cf. Keller & Golley 2000); and for all their romantic associations, islands were for 'modern use'. Even pre-colonial islanders put 'useful effects' first, although – exceptional Rapanui-type ravaging aside and some excessive hunting to extinction – their traditional technologies kept their eco-footprints mild, with harvesting practices mildly adjusted from island to island. For a larger island, networking on indigenously adaptive, resilient-Hindu and vegetarian Bali was quite a success story, somehow capable (and ready) of withstanding any foreign pressure. Come the Second Industrial Revolution, though, post-1880, and with exponentially rapid changes in technology, imperial exploitation of resources, world wars and with enormous population-, building- and food-acquiring pressures to follow, the island world fell into serious trouble. Oil rig and tanker spillages have affected islands, unashamedly left for too long uncleaned in salmon fishing waters around Namu Island, where west coast Canadian American Indians have traditionally subsisted; Fukushima nuclear waste still leaks into the sea, the one place for which the Japanese have less environmental sensitivity (Tucker 2003: 166–167). Sand has been over-mined: half of Queensland's Fraser Island is deserted because of this and Iran's sand island Sirri has been depleted by undercover sales to Dubai, whose artificial Persian Gulf creations are not permanently sink-proof. Australia sold its phosphate mining business to the Nauruans, who went on destroying their island in their quest for riches; Thailand's Phi Phi coral faces extinction from tourist waste; Chinese fishermen now feel free to use cyanide and dynamite for catches around the Spratlys; and on we could go, not least to the prospect of coral bleaching across the Great Barrier Reef by human-made climate change. And islands have remained markers of strong national identities, from Britain to Japan and Indonesia, in the struggles of contemporary history. Islands have become reasons for war and continuing tension (over the Falklands, for instance, and between the two Chinas, the two Koreas, Japan and Russia and in various spots between Taiwan and Sakhalin).

With the inheritance of myth, legend, real-life daring, opportunism, zeal and survivalism, protagonists for the Humanities have gone on probing the issues. Among novelists, there are Joseph Conrad on the migration of dark European motives to island southeast Asia, James Mitchener on the clash of competing interests in Hawai'i and Paul Theroux

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in *The Happy Isles of Oceania* (1992) turning sour, in fact resulting in Fiji coups, civil wars on Bougainville and the central Solomons, neo-colonial oppression in West Papua and the draining of indigenous energies on New Caledonia, all matters also preoccupying Pacific History experts (Trompf 1993: 195–367). Asian novelists – Zhal Zhenkai, Yasunari Kawabata and Ananta Toer – join the fugue.

Island object lessons abound, drawn in diverse corners of the Humanities. For some historians of the Left, the 'primitive rebels' of Sardinia (1817–1954) give more inspiration than environmentally disastrous Soviet Russia (Hobsbawm 1959), and others will see it better for small islands, for environmental security, to avoid independence and accept subnational reliance on bigger states (as with Rotuma or the Cook Islands) (Baldacchino 2010: 166–187). Missionaries on islands, moreover, have been warned not to look like loggers. There was already ambiguity in Methodist foundations on the Duke of York Islands, New Guinea, to illustrate, when sawmilling was taught to locals by felling the trees on Ulu, the Mission thereafter aping the colonial Germans by turning the islet into a paying coconut plantation (from 1901) (Threlfall 1975: 83–84). Nascent Pilgrimage Studies (exploring the interface between religion and tourism) instruct that lack of planning against environmental stress on constantly visited holy islands is self-defeating (Albera & Eade 2017). Where islands have played a crucial role in history and are depicted in mass media (like Elba), the desire to 'preserve the past' as archaeological or heritage sites is fired, though strategies against 'over-eco-tourism' will be needed. In all, how positive have been the expectations in the Humanities scholarship about what island environments should be, as if some eternal quality inheres in them!

It is over the last 130 years, however, that the conservation of island natural habitats has become a central matter of public attention. This is basically because so many islands lie at the less-disturbed margins of ecosystems or in such isolation that their biota have long-term uniqueness. Islands can bespeak what has been left alone by humans – the residually pristine, free-standing equilibriums, paleontologically significant flora and fauna – that, if left uncontaminated, will preserve longest-surviving bio-systems. And it has been the 'modern legends', the fully human heroes of the natural sciences that have helped clarify this, through the sub-disciplinary History of Science: Charles Darwin on the Galapagos ('a little world within itself,' 1835), Alfred Wallace east of his acclaimed Line on the western tip of New Guinea Island (1861), Philip Sclater on 'Lemurian' Madagascar (1864), etc. (Howgego 2006). As we have already detected, islands have been crucial for exploration of new terrain as such. Tasman discovered Tasmania and 'Nieuw Zeeland' (1642) without sighting continental Australia. Without islands, Cook could not have observed the transit of Venus from Tahiti (1769). More pointedly, how many island plants did his naturalist, Joseph Banks, and those before and after, introduce to a wider world – crotons, Norfolk Island pine, Indonesian Bougainvillea and breadfruit – from very far distant specks in the ocean? The foundation editor of this very journal discovered three of the last known islands as an Arctic botanist (Polunin 1949). On the opposite side of the globe, Kerguelen is where one might quickly prefer the company of friendly, unsuspecting animals to boring humans (Migot 1960). The Bass Strait Islands, as my own exploratory involvements will tell, significantly amount to 'Australia's last frontier', with Lloyds of London declining insurance for vessels near the shipwreck-ridden 'Potboil' between Flinders and riskily accessible Cape Barren Islands and little Chapel Island beating Brazil's Ilha da Queimada Grande for harbouring more killer snakes per square metre (Murray-Smith 1969).

Of course, many of these places are susceptible to inimical disturbance. Introduced rabbits, for example, have ravaged sub-Antarctic Heard Island, as rats have in other long-protected insularities. Recognized island vulnerability in post-war times explains why there are now so many conservation zones, national parks and heritage sites on islands or their inhospitable yet also fragile extremities. Contemplate first the considerable number of world heritage and protected sites in the tropical, tourist-popular Lesser Antilles (Siegel & Righter 2011: 65–100), but ponder also national parks in much less touched southern lands – the southwestern tip of Kangaroo Island (with the rugged Casuarina Islets off it), southern Tasmania (Bruny, Maria, etc.) and Stewart Island, southernmost New Zealand. Of course, environal insecurity increases if too few people are around to spot and contain problems, while more presences can sometimes actually help. Most of the many islets used by holidaymakers on the Swedish coast fare well because visitations are highly seasonal, given the short summers. Baltic islands with only resorts on them are obviously more problematic than those also having national parks (Poland's Wolin), where rangers can inspect things. China's 'fantasy island' Chongming, however, may not do too well as a showpiece of nature in housing the nation's first 'eco-city' (Size 2015: 6–8). Philosophers' hideaways (Korcula, Croatia), literary magazines (Tasmania's *Island*), paintings (portraits of famous environmentalists included), defiant music ('*Gorée c'est ma terre*') and ecologically sensitized tourist brochures are all useful facets of the Humanities for protectiveness. In the tropics, the Hawai'ian group – the celebrated 'legend that sells' (Farrell 1982) – holds extraordinary advantages in show-piecing the urbanized Oahu, historic resort-dotted Maui and dangerously pristine Hawai'i, apart yet in strategic unison.

This paper deliberately excludes contributions of the natural and even social sciences to island conservation (including Development and Legal Studies) and thus leaves untouched much detailed research on insular ecosystems or ethnographies of islanders interacting with their environments (e.g. Damas 1994; Whittaker & Fernández-Palacios 2007), let alone paleo-anthropological controversies (the Tasaday on Paluan or the 'Hobbit' on Flores). But the Humanities, especially History among them, help to put humanity's long-term dealings with islands into perspective, with all the layers of myth, legend, rich human experience and multivalent

thought entailed. Macro-historical reflection discloses whence we have come and where we have arrived. It reminds us of environmental fragilities manifesting after neglect, thoughtlessness and vicious conflict, and indeed through plain biospheric contingencies – for volcanic islands can suddenly blow up (Thera, Etna, Raki, Krakatoa, Montserrat, etc.) and bear death tolls. Reflective studies of science, technology and scientific thought are necessary to explain how scholars came to address environmental issues and think ecologically as people increasingly do, and the discipline usually called the History and Philosophy of Science explores the worldviews and value orientations shaping scientific endeavour.

We can hardly neglect the beauty, majesty and visual attractiveness of islands as factors impelling preservation, encouraged by discourses of spirituality and literary evocation. Romanticizing and islands never lose their association: Flinders Chase National Park on Kangaroo Island, Australia's earliest island national park (1919), was named after Matthew Flinders, patient circumnavigator of Australia, who left his lady behind like the Achaean hero Odysseus, as Ernestine Hill's poignant novel *My Love Must Wait* unravels (1941). But hard realities also strike. Insularities of high spiritual ideals, as Aldous Huxley's utopian *Island* instructs (1962), can quickly falter into dystopia by bringing in big business: look today at New Ireland's paradisiacal and communitarian Lihir, its land and shore-waters devastated by Australia's biggest gold mine (from 1997). Education *qua* discipline and the practical face of the Humanities gives relevant benefits. Indigenous people can often be without resources to get rid of introduced species and may need specialists' advice (as with Melville Island Aboriginals facing feline decimations of bandicoots); they may have to be taught in school how to restore what is destroyed after outside spoliation of an environment their people always basically held intact, as on Marovo Lagoon, western Solomon Islands (Nunyara 2009). Looking at islands will teach a lot about human nature, about greed (the rich buy islands in Fiji), corruption (tax evasion via the Caribbean Caymans), bullying power (William Golding's novel and the film *Lord of the Flies*), physical extremism (Bear Grylls's televised *Island*), tides of sadness and renewal (Laurie Brinklow's poetry) and still more.

CONCLUSION

Upon considering the human consciousness of islands macro-historically, one of the key goals of this review, we can better probe deep-structural responses from the distant past along with those more affected by modern socio-political contingencies, including reactions to worrying present-day disruptions. The synoptic approach taken here also reveals how critical Human Studies are in plotting attitudinal change and the interlacing of elements implicated in human treatments of sea-girt environments 'in the long run'. The second goal of this double-edged review has confirmed how, in their diversity, the *Studia Humanores* make their own special contributions to the environmental conservation of islands, largely through cultivating mental orientations and values in their favour. And labourers in the Humanities will always have a place informing researchers into island conservation about what affects their thinking and what inspires and deepens their quests to understand, nurture and to save. When the Hawai'ian *hokele'a* canoe rounded the world, publicizing environmental and indigenous concerns, the stuff of myth, legend and historical narrative seemed to run together to the same crucial practical end – to cherish and care for islands as eco-topic treasures.

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Note: Biblical and classical mediaeval citations are placed in-text and all modern literary works handled by allusion, since the diversity of versions and editions are too great to construe bibliographically in this article.

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