

trade from the Gulf to Malabar. There are indications that in this period, before Islam reached India, the various Christian communities, while not extensive, were prosperous and well-regarded.

The greatest movement of people for other than economic purposes is the migration, if this be the right word, of Austronesian peoples both east and west, though the movement west to Madagascar is our main interest. Broadly speaking, we know that Austronesian people, originating in modern Indonesia, possibly Sumatra, arrived in then uninhabited Madagascar at least by the middle of the first millennium CE, or probably some centuries before this. This is confirmed by linguistic evidence, among other things. Proto Malagasy comes from Indonesia, possibly not from Sumatra but rather from Borneo, as its closest relative is the Barito languages of Borneo.⁵¹ The fact of a migration of Austronesian speakers to Madagascar is not in question. Apart from linguistic evidence, several food crops now found in Madagascar, which moved from there to the coast of East Africa, derive from Indonesia. These include banana, coconut and sugar cane. It is possible that the outrigger canoe also came from east to west across the Indian Ocean. As to bananas, there are two main kinds in Africa. The species found on the east coast is definitely Austronesian, that is it came with the migrants to Madagascar and on to the east coast, but so apparently is the plantain in West Africa.⁵² Another contribution seems to be the disease of elephantiasis, which it is claimed originated in southeast Asia, but is widespread in southwest India and East Africa.

This movement west across the Indian Ocean was only a part of a remarkable migration of these Austronesian speakers. They left from an original homeland in south China or Taiwan perhaps six thousand years ago, and moved to southeast Asia. From there Austronesian speakers, in ocean-going canoes, sailed and settled all over Remote Oceania, from Hawaii to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Aotearoa (New Zealand) between 300 and 1200 CE. When we add in their movement to Madagascar, these intrepid sailors spread over a total of 225° of longitude.⁵³ Manguin stresses that these migrations, including that to Africa, were not chance affairs, but rather were organised, and were done not in primitive outrigger dugouts but in planked boats.⁵⁴ He sees all this as further evidence of an initiative from the peoples of southeast Asia, in contrast to the older wisdom that the area was merely a passive recipient of high culture from China and India.

Three problems remain. First, the evidence of Austronesian contact and influence on continental East Africa is fragmentary and controversial, for even if there was a substantial Austronesian presence there at one time, this was submerged as Bantu people early in the Common Era spread south to the area and incorporated them. The evidence in Madagascar is much clearer, for the island was uninhabited when they arrived. African people arrived later to produce the complex mixture which is today's Malagasy society. Second, there is the matter of how they got to Madagascar. Some argue that they sailed direct from insular southeast Asia, taking advantage of the westward drift of the South Equatorial Current, and prevailing southeast trades in these latitudes. Others point to technological barriers to such long voyages, and claim rather that they proceeded westward piecemeal, going

from port to port and island to island. Manguin implicitly belittles their achievement by stressing southeast Asia autonomy. Third, the movement forth across the southern Indian Ocean is exemplified by the xylophone as an example.⁵⁵ Manguin stresses contact between the two areas up to that is up to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, but the matter of how this was done. The only evidence from the south, taking advantage of the strong winds, have no evidence of their doing this. and indeed seems improbable.

We can close this chapter with two final points. The first is spent and will spend considerable space on the Indian Ocean. Even today these are not really central issues. At least in this earlier period around the Indian Ocean were peasants at least exchanging goods locally, and coastal ones, were not very important. They were amphibious, drawing on the importance of sea trade can and will be dealt with in later chapters, but it is clear also in the trade between the Indus Valley Civilisation and the modern scholars than it was important within these two civilisations, and the significance. If sea trade is of minor importance that is important when we look at early Buddhist and Hindu ideas which we see in the Islamisation of the littoral in the

Finally, we have implicitly been studying the Indian Ocean in this early period. Mark Horton's maritime archaeology of the Indian Ocean. While welcoming a new interest in maritime archaeology, he is dubious of the evidence before the beginning of the Common Era.

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from port to port and island to island until they reached Madagascar. The latter sce-
nario implicitly belittles their achievement, and has been discarded by those who
stress southeast Asia autonomy. Third, was this a round trip? Did they go back and
forth across the southern Indian Ocean? Many claim that they did, pointing to the
xylophone as an example.⁵⁵ Manguin claims that there was continuing reciprocal
contact between the two areas up to the early centuries of Islamisation in Sumatra,
that is up to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.⁵⁶ If this be so, it is then a
matter of how this was done. The only possible route to take would be in the far
south, taking advantage of the strong westerlies in latitudes 40 and 50° S, but we
have no evidence of their doing this. The case for continuing contact is not proven,
and indeed seems improbable.

We can close this chapter with two final and somewhat negative cautions. We have
spent and will spend considerable space on trade and economic connections, yet
even today these are not really central in the total economies of the surrounding
countries. At least in this earlier period the vast bulk of the populations in countries
around the Indian Ocean were peasants, most of them more or less subsistence, or
at least exchanging goods locally, and by land. Economic exchanges by sea, even
coastal ones, were not very important, except possibly for coastal people, but even
they were amphibious, drawing on both land and sea. The relative lack of impor-
tance of sea trade can and will be demonstrated more clearly as our data improves
in later chapters, but it is clear also in this early period. For example, it seems that
trade between the Indus Valley Civilisation and Mesopotamia is of more interest to
modern scholars than it was important in the economies of either area. Trade
within these two civilisations, and their surrounding land areas, was far more sig-
nificant. If sea trade is of minor importance, then arguably it is religion and culture
that is important when we look at exchanges by sea, most obviously the spread of
Buddhist and Hindu ideas which we sketched earlier in this chapter. We will look at
the Islamisation of the littoral in the next chapter.

Finally, we have implicitly been striving to find connections and unity across the
ocean in this early period. Mark Horton, reviewing three new books on the mar-
itime archaeology of the Indian Ocean, provides an important caveat to this attempt.
While welcoming a new interest in maritime, as opposed to the traditional land-
based, archaeology, he is dubious of the claims of widespread maritime connections
before the beginning of the Common Era:

The idea that the sea unites, not divides, cultures is one that archaeologists
have borrowed from Fernand Braudel: it has proved useful in the
Mediterranean, perhaps it could be equally applied to the Indian Ocean? It
has been in the Islamic period, but we need more indications that the
communities along the rim of the Indian Ocean maintained maritime con-
nections over sustained periods of time, to extend this to the prehistoric
period. Certainly the evidence is not there yet. . . .⁵⁷