

PhD Thesis Summary

**Southeast Asia in the ancient
Indian Ocean World**

Combining historical linguistic and archaeological approaches

TOM G. HOOGERVORST

PhD Public Examination, 18 December 2012

PhD in Archaeology

Promoter: Prof Chris Gosden

Co-promoter: Dr. Nicole Boivin

University of Oxford

ABSTRACT

This PhD dissertation examines the role of insular Southeast Asia in the trans-regional networks of maritime trade that shaped the history of Indian Ocean. The work brings together data and approaches from archaeology, historical linguistics and other disciplines, proposing a reconstruction of cultural and linguistic contact between Southeast Asia and its maritime neighbours to the west in order to advance our historical understanding of this part of the world. Numerous biological, commercial, and technical items are examined. The study underlines that the analysis of lexical data is one of the strongest tools to detect and analyse contact between two or more speech communities. It demonstrates how Southeast Asian products and concepts were mainly dispersed by speakers of Malay varieties, although other communities played a role as well. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the study offers new perspectives on the role of insular Southeast Asian agents on cultural dynamism and interethnic contact in the pre-modern Indian Ocean World.

TOM HOOGERVORST is a post-doctoral fellow at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), where he examines the linguistic history of Malay and other Southeast Asian languages. He has finished his DPhil at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, as part of the ERC-funded Sealinks Project. His present research interests include vernacular Malay literature, historical linguistics (in particular Austronesian languages), Indian Ocean studies, youth language, and the languages and cultures of South and Southeast Asia in general. Tom Hoogervorst may be contacted at: hoogervorst@kitlv.nl.

KEYWORDS

Indian Ocean, historical linguistics, archaeology, cultural contact, lexical borrowing, Southeast Asia, biological translocations.

This study, which has recently been published as a monograph (Hoogervorst 2013), attempts to situate insular Southeast Asia within the wider context of pre-modern Asia. Several decisive developments in the history of this continent took place in the maritime instead of terrestrial sphere, where ideas about agriculture, metallurgy, urbanization, maritime technology, and religion were able to spread faster than they could ever have done overland. Indeed, such developments as urbanization, metallurgy, and the expansion of religions took place almost simultaneously in several parts of the Indian Ocean World, following very similar patterns across the regions in contact. Consequently, commodities, concepts, and people moved from South to Southeast Asia and beyond, but also in the opposite direction. The author's recently finished DPhil thesis calls attention to several Southeast Asian plants, spices and boat-building techniques that revolutionized the cultural landscapes – or, rather, seascapes – of the Indian Ocean. It is clear that the populations of Southeast Asia did not play a passive role in these social events, a persistent image constructed in colonial and early post-colonial historiography. Modern archaeology leaves little doubt that societal complexity and home-grown traditions in metallurgy, agriculture and semi-urbanization existed prior to the better-documented epoch of “Indianization”. The author argues that the communities inhabiting insular Southeast Asia – that is to say, the islands that nowadays encompass Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and East Timor – were actively involved in the ancient interregional trade networks that have shaped the Indian Ocean into what it is today.

The thesis approaches the complex and multifaceted topic of pre-modern interethnic contact through the lens of language and draws chiefly, but not exclusively, upon linguistic data. Several loanwords from Malayo-Polynesian languages are found in the languages of the Nicobar Islands, India, Sri Lanka, East Africa and, possibly, the Andaman Islands. These borrowings encompass the domains of maritime technology, agriculture, spices, and other trade commodities. A close examination of the words used for these commodities often reveals the identity of the ethno-linguistic communities involved in their dispersal, something that cannot be determined by solely relying on archaeological data. The Malay language was by far the most influential means of communication in Southeast Asia – as it is today – and many cultural items were disseminated through Malay-speaking people (see Table 1). Other insular Southeast Asian speech communities played smaller roles. We do not know whether they ventured into the Indian Ocean independently. In general, however, it seems likely that a large portion of the non-Malay communities were sailing under Malay patronage, as continued to be the case in better-documented phases of Southeast Asian history.

Eventually, Malay polities began to assert different degrees of influence on their direct and more distant neighbours. It is argued that the advanced technological knowledge and material culture that interethnic contact and maritime trade had conferred upon these coastal Malays provided them with numerous advantages over their inland-oriented neighbours. The linguistic data reveals that the introduction of new concepts, techniques, and ideas across Southeast Asia, possibly as far as Near Oceania, took place through the efforts of Malay-speaking sailors. In particular, contact with South Asia, China, and other regions enabled the early Malay polities to gain substantial economical surpluses, manufacture better ships, improve technological practices, and to establish efficiently structured trade oriented states. Their new-found hegemony was often consolidated through a new religion, such as Buddhism or (Brahmanical) Hinduism.

MALAY PRECURSOR	MEANING	EXAMPLE OF BORROWING
<i>bawang</i>	'onion'	Central Nicobarese <i>powang</i>
<i>kakak tua</i>	'cockatoo'	Dhivehi <i>takatuwā</i>
<i>keris</i>	'kind of dagger'	Tamil <i>kiṛicu</i>
<i>nuri</i>	'kind of red parrot'	Farsi <i>nūrī</i>
<i>sampan</i>	'kind of boat'	Sinhala <i>hambāna</i>

Table 1. Some Malay loanwords.

Against the backdrop of these early trans-regional networks, an important set of trees and other plants is believed to have been introduced from Southeast Asia to India in ancient times and from there to the Middle East, East Africa, and Europe. Examples include sandalwood (*Santalum album* L.), the areca palm (*Areca catechu* L.), betel pepper (*Piper betle* L.), banana (*Musa* spp.) and citrus cultivars (*Citrus* spp.), ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe), and galangal (*Alpinia galanga* (L.) Willd.). These plants changed both the agricultural and socio-cultural landscapes of the Indian Ocean World. The lucrative spice trade, too, featured active Southeast Asian participants. Several popular spices and aromatics, such as cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum* (L.) Merr. Et L.M. Perry), nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.), and Sumatran camphor (*Dryobalanops sumatrensis* (J.F. Gmel.) Kosterm.) were produced exclusively in relatively isolated regions of present-day Indonesia. Consequently, Indian Ocean commerce depended on local intermediates to obtain the required quantities of these commodities. Here, too, mercantile Malay-speaking coastal populations fulfilled this role. Not only did doing so enhance the wealth, status and prestige of their overlords, it effected the incorporation of local kingdoms into the cosmopolitan Indian Ocean World. The inland communities that were responsible for the harvest of these spices and tree resins, too, depended on Malay and other coastal populations to transport and sell their produce abroad. The adoption, by local elites, of Indian notions of ruler ship, religion and other forms of "high" culture fits well within the wider model of cultural

convergence – if not early globalization – in this part of the world. This process was further intensified in Islamic times.

All these developments were connected with and stimulated by advances in maritime transportation. In the domain of shipbuilding, insular Southeast Asians made significant contributions to the rich tradition of maritime transport that shaped the history of the Indian Ocean and connected its coasts and shores. It has long been argued that outrigger boats with sails hoisted from sprit spars have evolved in the waters of Southeast Asia and spread across the Indian Ocean as a result of interethnic contact, perhaps concomitant with the settlement of Madagascar. In addition, it is plausible that larger commercial Indian Ocean vessels, constructed of edge-dowelled planks, also hail from insular Southeast Asia (Manguin 2010, 2012; Selvakumar 2011). Archaeological and historical data suggest that these ship types played an important role in the ancient commercial activities in the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. In both seas, it seems that local nautical traditions have inspired, influenced, and enriched each other. Such widespread ship types as the “junk”, “sampan” and “*parao*” of early European accounts attest to this trans-regional hybridity. The presumed agency of Southeast Asian seafarers in these dynamic processes of cross-fertilization is reflected in the lexical data, all of which – together with other tentative lexical transmissions in the domains of cultural and biological transmissions – are listed in the thesis’ appendix.

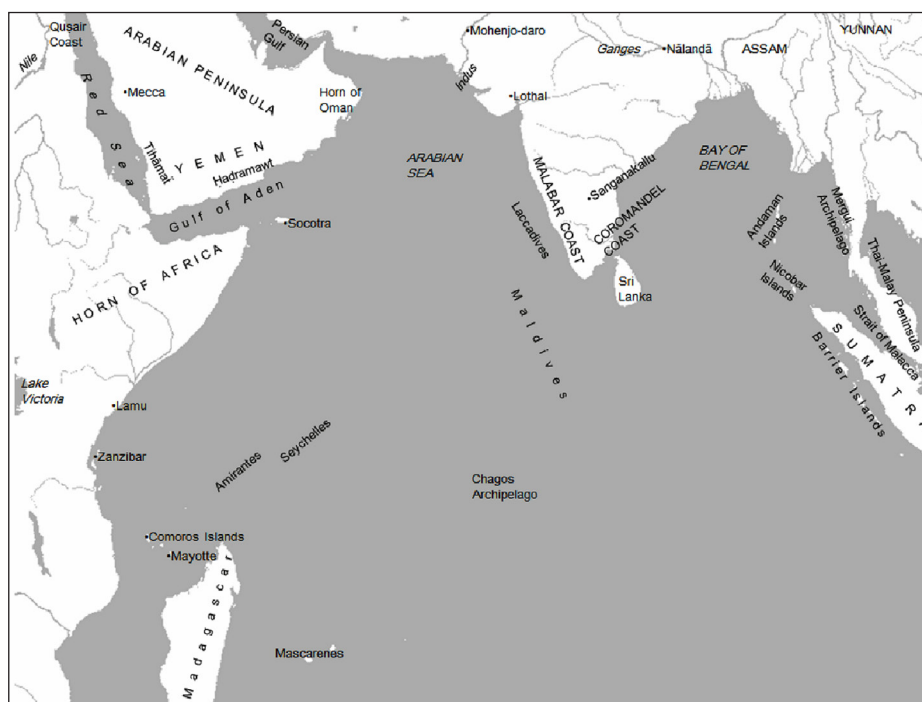


Figure 1. Map of the Indian Ocean World.

We now proceed to highlight some of the linguistic examples. As was recounted in the very first textual sources on the region, Southeast Asian

rainforest products were in demand in South Asia and beyond. Next to the well-documented trade in camphor, the name of which goes back to the Malay word *kapur* 'chalk', Sumatra's benzoin (*Styrax benzoin* Dryand) was among the most valued aromatic products of Indian Ocean commerce. Upon comparing the available lexical data, we see that its Malay name (*kəmānyan*) was adopted into Khmer as *kamñān*, Central Nicobarese *kamiñan* 'gutta-percha (*Palaquium gutta* (Hook.) Burck)', Tamil *kumañcāñ* 'frankincense', Dhivehi *kumunzāni* 'incense', and many other languages. Sometimes the directionality of the lexical transmission is not so obvious. One of the Sanskrit words for 'ginger', *ārdraka*, appears to be a regular nominalization of the root *ārdra* 'wet'. The tentative Malay provenance of this word would have gone undetected had we failed to take into account that: 1) ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe) is a Southeast Asian plant and 2) Sanskrit has the habit to create hypercorrections – based on regular sound laws – of words perceived to be corrupted forms. A closer examination of Indo-Aryan historical linguistics raises the possibility that the Middle-Indo Aryan attestation *allaya* 'fresh ginger' may have stood at the cradle of this "back-formation", presumably a loan from Malay *halia* 'ginger'. Along the same lines, we would not have known that Sinhala *ravala* and Dhivehi *riyā* 'sail' regularly go back to Malay *layar* – in the same meaning – if we could not juxtapose several parallel examples demonstrating that the rearrangement of the sounds in these words (metathesis) follow predictable patterns (Haebler 1965: 118-119). The latter two examples illustrate the importance of a thorough knowledge of the phonological history of the languages under comparison: historical linguistics must be based not on superficial similarities, but on regular sound correspondences.

Not infrequently, lexical transmissions also reveal information about the socio-linguistic relation between the donor and the recipient language(s). If a speech community adopts a loanword for a new concept, it is generally – but not always – taken from those who introduced it into the society. Let us call attention to one example. Basing ourselves on the particular form of the Malay word for 'seal' (*mətərāi*), the most plausible scenario is that it has been introduced through Tamil *muttirai*, which ultimately goes back to Sanskrit *mudrā*, displaying all the expected sound changes. In the case of highly specialized terms, such as those related to metallurgy or nautical technology, the lexical and cultural transmissions presumably took place against the backdrop of active teaching processes from one society to another. In an area as interconnected as the Indian Ocean, people have often learned from their neighbours, patrons or vassals to improve their own skills. It should, however, be borne in mind that people display different attitudes towards external influence and cultural elements "worthy" of imitation, resulting into varying degrees of susceptibility towards lexical borrowing across different speech communities.

These insights reveal complexities that extend beyond the realm of language and touch upon religious and ethno-linguistic (self-)identification. Ever since the expansion of Brahmanical Hinduism beyond its northwest

Indian homeland, the social prestige of Sanskrit in several parts of Asia became similar to that of Latin in medieval Europe or Arabic in the Islamic World. As a result, the cultural and commercial networks of the Indian Ocean became inseparable from religion and ritual. This is illustrated by the trade in a variety of aromatic products valued and used for their ceremonial, medicinal, or cosmetic functions. These commodities often travelled over vast distances under their Sanskrit name. Common examples are the words *candana* 'sandalwood' (*Santalum album* L.), (*jāti*)*phala* 'nutmeg' (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.), and *cavya* 'Java long pepper' (*Piper retrofractum* Vahl), which are found in various languages of Indian Ocean commerce. This is illustrative of a more general sociolinguistic pattern: speech communities prefer to adopt vocabulary from "high" languages with extensive literary-religious traditions, such as Sanskrit and Arabic, as doing so is perceived to be enrichment to their mother tongue. Loanwords from "low", unwritten vernaculars of commerce, on the other hand, were normally regarded as corruptions and were at best confined to the substandard registers of the language. This explains why the communities of the Indian Ocean were not always keen to adopt a Malay word for an item introduced from Southeast Asia, such as sandalwood or nutmeg. In fact, we see examples of the opposite tendency taking place: the Malay language has replaced several indigenous words for local concepts by loanwords from Sanskrit, Arabic, and – more recently – even English. In part, this could be seen as a reflection of its on-going role as a *lingua franca*, connecting people from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

In some cases, the linguistic data discussed in this study corroborate insights from other fields, in particular archaeological and archaeobotanical lines of evidence. The presence of Southeast Asian tree crops and spices in the still sparse archaeological record of South Asia suggests that people were regularly crossing the Bay of Bengal by the first millennium BCE (Saraswat and Pokharia 1998; Asouti and Fuller 2008), enabling the successful translocation of key crops and commercial items. Sporadically, the Southeast Asian influence on the Indian subcontinent is quite tangible in the archaeological record. Tin from Myanmar and the Thai-Malay Peninsula was in high demand in India and bronze artefacts with a high tin content are found rather abundantly on India's south coast and in Sri Lanka (Ray 1994: 103; Rajan 2011: 188-190). The Malayic name for this metal, *timah* – going back to an earlier **timarah* – was presumably adopted into late Sanskrit and other Indian languages as *tivra* (which I believe to be a back-formation through association with *tivra* 'strong; iron'). This again substantiates the role of Malay-speaking communities from the tin-prolific regions in Southeast Asia in these commercial interactions. The other important metal of export was gold, with Sumatra featuring as the semi-mythical "Golden Land" (*Suvarṇabhūmi*) of Indian literature. That being said, the descriptions of Southeast Asia in the Sanskrit literature normally remain rather elusive and ambiguous, urging us to look for additional lines of evidence.

While many ambiguities remain, our overall picture of Southeast Asia's

pre-modern history and its position in the Indian Ocean World is improving. The prevalence of references to cloves and sandalwood in Sanskrit texts (Monier-Williams 1899: 386, 898) and the tentative finding of Sumatran camphor applied to an Egyptian mummy (Mahdi 1994: 190) suggest an intensification of westward voyaging by the end of the first millennium BCE. However, South Asia was not the final destination for Southeast Asian sailors. They reached the island of Madagascar and settled there long before any of the world's better known civilizations could successfully undertake transoceanic journeys of comparable distance. Interestingly, certain Arabic literary references allude to the presence of rogue freebooters and slave-raiders from beyond the fringes of the known world, visiting the coasts of the Middle East and East Africa (Ferrand 1910; Allibert 1999). If these people were from insular Southeast Asia, which the descriptions suggest, we may assume that their presence had later been overshadowed by Indo-Arabian Muslims across the entire western Indian Ocean. Everywhere but on Madagascar and Mayotte, Malayo-Polynesian speech communities have virtually disappeared. It is not known whether the ancient Southeast Asian seafarers preferred to sail directly to Madagascar, stopping perhaps on the Maldives to obtain fresh supplies, or took the coastal route connecting South Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa through seasonal monsoon winds. At first glance, it may appear somewhat implausible that direct, transoceanic journeys were initiated from Southeast Asia, especially in light of the numerous advantages of "shore-hugging" and the perceivable linguistic impact of Malayo-Polynesian ethnolinguistic communities on the intervening regions, such as southern India. However, the Asian element in Madagascar is of an overwhelmingly Southeast Asian character, with relatively little direct Indian influence. This, in combination with the known ocean-faring skills that arose in pre-modern Southeast Asia and facilitated transoceanic journeys all the way to Remote Oceania, urges us to delve deeper into the history of Madagascar's settlement and the possibility of its colonization without the need to sail via India. The resultant insights will increase our understanding of both African and Asian prehistory.

REFERENCES

- Allibert, Claude. 1999. "The archaeology of knowledge; Austronesian influences in the western Indian Ocean", in: Roger Blench and Matthew Spriggs (eds), *Archaeology and language III; Artefacts, languages, and texts*, pp. 268-276. London/New York: Routledge.
- Asouti, Eleni and Dorian Q. Fuller. 2008. *Trees and woodlands in South India; Archaeological perspectives*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Ferrand, M. Gabriel. 1910. "Les voyages des javanais à Madagascar", *Journal Asiatique*, tenth series, 15: 281-330.
- Haebler, Claus. 1965. "Ein nautischer Ausdruck im Pāli (Pā. lakāra-)", *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen* 79: 112-122.

- Hoogervorst, Tom G. 2013. *Southeast Asia in the ancient Indian Ocean World*. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Mahdi, Waruno. 1994. "Some Austronesian maverick protoforms with culture-historical implications", *Oceanic Linguistics* 33(1): 167-229, 33(2): 431-490.
- Manguin, Pierre-Yves. 2010. "The Maldives connection; Pre-modern Malay World shipping across the Indian Ocean", in: Chantal Radimilahy and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana (eds), *Civilisations des mondes insulaires (Madagascar, îles de canal de Mozambique, Mascareignes, Polynésie, Guyanes); Mélanges en l'honneur du Professor Claude Allibert*, pp. 261-284. Paris: Karthala.
- Manguin, Pierre-Yves. 2012. "Asian ship-building traditions in the Indian Ocean at the dawn of European expansion", in: Om Prakash and D. P. Chattopadhyaya (eds), *History of science, philosophy, and culture in Indian Civilization*, Volume III, part 7: The trading world of the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800, pp. 597-629. Delhi, Chennai, Chandigarh: Pearson.
- Monier-Williams, Monier. 1899. *A Sanskrit-English dictionary; Etymologically and philologically arranged with special reference to cognate Indo-European languages*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rajan, K. 2011. "Emergence of early historic trade in peninsular India", in: Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade (eds), *Early interactions between South and Southeast Asia; Reflections on cross-cultural exchange*, pp. 177-196. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Ray, Himanshu Prabha. 1994. *Winds of change; Buddhism and the maritime links of early South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Saraswat, K.S. and A.K. Pokharia. 1998. "On the remains of botanical material used in the fire-sacrifice ritualized during Kushana Period at Sanghol (Punjab)", *Pragdhara* 8: 149-181.
- Selvakumar, V. 2011. "Contacts between India and Southeast Asia in ceramic and boat building traditions", in: Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani, and Geoff Wade (eds), *Early interactions between South and Southeast Asia; Reflections on cross-cultural exchange*, pp. 197-220. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.