



**NAVIGATING
THE TRANSCULTURAL INDIAN OCEAN:
Texts and Practices in Contact**

PROGRAMME

(all times are Lisbon times, WEST/BST)

TUESDAY 4 JUNE 2024

14:00–14:15 · Welcome and introduction: Juan Acevedo and Eric Staples

14:15–15:00

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Pierre-Yves Manguin

(Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient)

“Rutters for Southeast Asian and South China seas:
their nature, their transmission, and their value as historical sources”

15:00–15:40 · **Gaye Danişan** (Istanbul University)

“Ottoman Navigators’ Dilemma: Mediterranean Tactics Confronting the Indian Ocean
in the 16th Century”

Abstract:

In the historiography of maritime studies, scholars are confronted with two primary challenges: First, the necessity to consider geographical conditions, as they shaped nautical knowledge based on the specific conditions and demands of the navigated area. Second, the inherently interdisciplinary nature of nautical knowledge integrates various fields such as geography, mathematics, meteorology, and astronomy. Researchers must therefore explore multiple avenues, contingent upon time and location, to address inquiries such as “What methods were used for navigation at sea? How were position and direction determined? Which instruments were used?”

With this in mind, our study will start from the findings of a comparative case study, focusing on the role of astronomy in Ottoman navigation. The prevailing perspective in Ottoman maritime studies, which examines maritime organisation, political and military dimensions, shipbuilding techniques and shipyards, piracy, relations with European seafarers, nautical cartography, routes, and Ottoman sailors, consistently highlights the expansion of Ottoman maritime activities and enterprises during the 16th century. The diverse sailing environment of the Mediterranean likely exerted a significant influence on shaping Ottoman strategies. Additionally, while Ottoman interactions with India date back to the second half of the 15th century, their broader involvement in the Indian Ocean region only began to materialise in the early years of the 16th century. A series of expeditions to the Indian Ocean exemplifies the strategy set by the Ottoman Empire for this region. However, the geographical limitations of these voyages, along with their lower success rates compared to those in the Mediterranean, raise the question of how these Ottoman navigators adapted to the techniques used in the Indian Ocean. We aim to conduct our discussion on this subject through a comparative analysis of the following primary sources: the *Kitab-ı Bahriye* (*Book of Navigation*, 1521 and 1526) by Ottoman navigator Piri Reis (d. 1553), containing crucial information about the Mediterranean Sea, widely used among Ottoman sailors; the *Mediterranean Sea Atlases* (1551 and 1571) by ‘Ali al-Sharfi of Sfax (d. after 1579), which will assist us in comparing the relationship between Ottoman and North African traditions in Mediterranean navigation; and the *Kitabü’l Muhit fi İlm el-Eflak ve’l-Ebhur* (*Book of the Ocean on the Science of Spheres and the Seas*, 1554) by Ottoman navigator Seydi Ali Reis (d. 1562), providing practical information about seafaring in the Indian Ocean, tailored explicitly for Ottoman sailors with limited experience on the open sea.

15:40–16:00 · Tea break

16:00–16:40 · **Alexis Wick** (Koç University, Istanbul)

“The Navigator’s Craft: Aḥmad Ibn Mājid on Discipline, Theory and Method”

Abstract:

This paper explores the poetics and practices of space in the Islamic tradition by way of a close reading of the writings of the great *mu‘allim* of the seas, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Mājid al-Sa‘dī al-Najdī, and especially his magnum opus *Kitāb al-fawā’id fī uṣūl ‘ilm al-baḥr wa’l-qawā’id*. A general introduction to the navigator’s craft organized into twelve chapters devoted to various essentials of sea-going (covering domains that would be identified today as history, geography, astronomy, topography, climatology, but also ethics and politics, among others), the *Kitāb al-fawā’id* seeks to enshrine a science of the sea in a web of scholarly practices implicating

people, words and things (and this, from the very title, which mobilizes terms that gesture towards linguistic and legal fields).

Rather than emphasizing the technical and empirical aspects of the text, as the existing scholarship has tended to do —with questions aimed at the actual referent stably located outside the texts themselves (what the words and names refer to exactly, how the information was obtained, what was imaginary rather than real, etc.)— the aim is to remain within the writing itself, so to speak, evoking as much as possible the world as the author narrated it: the disciplinary and methodological scaffolding of the composition; the epistemological and ontological anchors that it assumes and asserts; the referential and citationary cosmos that justify it. In other words, the objective is to reconstruct how the text paints the world, both physical and scholarly, as opposed to reconstructing the world that the text recorded.

The argument is that Aḥmad Ibn Mājid was seeking to give the “science of the sea” the status of a proper discipline and a dignified profession; but that this could only be done, considering the wider discursive formation within which it operated, by blurring disciplinary boundaries too, nestling it between ethics, epistemology, and practical wisdom.

16:40–17:00 · Closing comments and discussion.

END OF FIRST DAY

WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE 2024

14:00–14:40 · **Daniel Martin Varisco** (Institute for Social Anthropology, ÖAW)

“Beyond the Monsoon Horizon: Variability in Sailing in the Red Sea/Indian Ocean Network”

Abstract:

Historical analysis of traditional sailing in the vast Red Sea/Indian Ocean Network has understandably focused on the climatic role of two major monsoons that assisted, and at times contracted, sailing east and west. Interpreting the specific impact of these monsoons is hard to reconstruct for several reasons. First, there is a need for more research on the variability of the timing and intensity of the monsoons over time for the past two millennia. Second, in the vast area of the trade network there were obviously major differences depending on the location. Winds in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, for example, were influenced differently than in more direct sailing from the African coast, along the Arabian Peninsula to both sides of India. Third, since sailing was not confined to specific monsoon winds, what was the context of sailing (e.g., distance traveled, proximity to coast, number of ships in convoy, non-climate factors like piracy, political and economic problems) during and between the monsoons, as well as those areas with minimal impact of the major monsoons. My focus will be on sailing times documented in the Rasulid and Mamluk eras to and from the port of Aden in Yemen, supplemented by later comments of ship captains on winds and climate in the area. This paper will invite comments on how we look beyond the monsoon horizon for a more nuanced understanding of travel in pre-modern sailing within the Red Sea/Indian Ocean network.

14:40–15:20 · **Somy Solomon** (Kerala Council for Historical Research)

“Patterns of circulations of cashew traders from Kollam to Tanzania”

Abstract:

The East African coast and the western coast of the Indian subcontinent have multi-layered and so far untold histories of networks of cultural interactions. A study on the cultural interactions of these two Indian Ocean regions can enrich the emerging field of the long histories of maritime interactions. The traders from southwest India, Kollam traveled to Africa, Tanzania to collect raw cashew to feed the increasing demand for cashew nuts in the international market. Identifying the best quality cashew and transporting it to Kollam required the development of social networks and cultural interactions, including language, money conversion, shipping arrangement, accommodations, food habits and so on. This paper explores the patterns of circulation of cashew traders from Kollam to Tanzania.

15:20–15:35 · Tea break

15:35–16:15 · **M. R. Risse** (Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman)

“Windguru and Other Gurus: Fishing off the Coast of Dhofar, Oman”

Abstract:

This presentation will discuss the every-day practicalities of Dhofari men who fish full- or part-time in small, individually-owned boats in the Indian Ocean. I will give a brief overview of common objects and practices in terms of types of boats, fishing seasons, expected expenditures (clothing, tools, time, etc.) and expected results (which types of fish are caught, how and when), as well as how maritime activity folds into the economic life of Dhofaris. The main focus will be on how men first learn to fish, then improve their fishing skills by working with older men, going on trips with friends and using technology, such as the website Windguru. The information presented is based on over 15 years of research with Dhofari fishermen.

16:15–16:55 · **Thahir Jamal Kiliyamannil** (University of Hyderabad)

“Against Enclosures: Sovereign Networks in the Indian Ocean”

Abstract:

Malabar, a region in Southern India, displayed a substantial influence in the Indian Ocean networks with its strategic geo-political positioning. However, most of the emerging studies on the networks along the Indian Ocean littoral, tracing the transmission of texts and transport of objects, primarily contended the connections as emanating from economic and trade interests (see, for instance, Lambourn 2011, Kooria 2017, Arafat 2018, and Prange 2018). Consequently, the relative authority of Muslims in Malabar was encapsulated in the notion that ‘merchants owned the sea and the kings owned the land,’ where the merchants were Muslims and kings were Hindus. Against this backdrop of perceiving the networks as devoid of any sense of political authority and power, this study analyses the Malabar Muslim networks, including those dealing with Mamluks and Ottomans, to underscore the importance of the political in enhancing and maintaining these global networks and in direct proportion to the expressions of sovereignty.

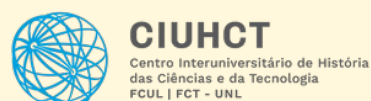
While classical theories proposed by philosophers like Kant, Locke and Schmitt depended on the possession of and dominion over the land as primary in imagining a sovereign, the sovereignty of Muslims in Malabar was contra-territorial enclosures. In Malabar, Muslim sovereignty transcends territorial enclosures, manifesting an openness to the world. Here, the political order is embedded in the openness of the sea, and law is enclosed within this openness, offering a narrative of sovereignty unrestricted by

territory or enclosures. The recitation of Sultans and the Ottoman Caliph's name in the Friday sermon implies an allegiance reciprocated by the Sultan's obligation to grant protection. In this case, local loyalties coexist harmoniously with global loyalties, including allegiance to the Caliphate, despite receiving gifts, grants, and stipends from the Caliphate. Thus, I argue that these tributes and allegiances function as acts against enclosures, imagining sovereignty beyond enclosures.

16:55–17:30 · **Round table and closing comments,**
moderated by **Inês Bénard**

INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION

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