

12. Travelling the ‘Malay Road’: Recognising the heritage significance of the Macassan maritime trade route

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The ‘Malay Road’, just off the northeastern tip of Arnhem Land, was part of the historical route followed by annual fleets from the port of Makassar in what is now South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The fleets sailed to the northern Australian coastline, seeking edible *Holothuria*,¹ commonly known as trepang or sea cucumber. As mentioned throughout this volume, these marine invertebrates of the echinoderm family were prized for their culinary and medicinal values in Chinese markets. This extensive maritime tradition and trading connection linked Australia, Sulawesi and China and long predated European settlement of Australia. Recent research based on the dating of Aboriginal rock art depictions of the early praus, or wooden boats, used extensively in this trade, suggests the connection may be at least 400 years old (Taçon et al. 2010, p. 8).

This chapter explores the tangible and intangible evidence of the trade in the context of how the extended cultural exchange and connections between Indonesia and the Aboriginal people of northern Australia might be recognised in the contemporary setting of cultural, heritage and economic development approaches and practices. The cultural connections that have arisen from the trade have been enduring and are manifest in a range of personal, educational and arts activities today. The heritage sites that are connected to the trade in northern Australia, South Sulawesi and at points along the way are subject to ongoing research, creating new understandings and knowledge of the activities around the trade itself. Recognition of the significance of these sites is being pursued at both state and national levels. Meanwhile, Aboriginal groups are retelling the stories of this cross-cultural exchange in art, film and through the development of new tourism products that reinterpret the ideas of the trade into contemporary contexts.

This chapter raises the possibility of seeking greater recognition for the heritage of this trade and exchange and its potential to be recognised as a cultural route of outstanding universal value under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. In 1992, the World Heritage Convention became the first international legal instrument to recognise and protect cultural landscapes of outstanding

¹ In the shallow coastal waters of island Southeast Asia and adjacent Australian waters, 80–100 species are known, up to half of which have commercial value; see Schwerdtner Máñez and Ferse (2010, p. 1).

universal value (Lennon 2012, p. 47). In 2005, the concept was widened to include cultural routes and itineraries, and an international scientific committee has been established to promote research and world heritage inscriptions in this area: the Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes and Itineraries (ICOMOS 2012). The new category highlights long-distance routes and journeys, such as those associated with trade or pilgrimage, which have linked people, countries, regions or even continents for long periods. Little work has been done to date on the recognition of maritime trading routes on a regional or global scale or on communicating their values as universal cultural heritage.

The Malay Road

On Thursday, 17 February 1803, as he rounded Cape Wilberforce, having completed the survey of the Gulf of Carpentaria, the navigator Matthew Flinders recorded in his journal an encounter with six praus and their captain:

The chief of the six prows was a short, elderly man named 'Pobassoo';² he said there were upon the coast, in different divisions, sixty prows, and that 'Salloo' was the commander in chief. These people were Mahometans...

[Friday, 18 February]...[F]ive other prows steered into the road from the S.W. anchoring near the former six...At daylight they got under sail and steered through the narrow passage between Cape Wilberforce and Bromby's Isles, and afterwards directed their course south-eastward into the Gulph of Carpentaria.

[Saturday, 19 February]...According to Pobassoo, sixty prows belonging to the Rajah of Boni and carrying a thousand men, had left Macassar with the north-west monsoon, two months before...The object of their expedition was a certain marine animal called 'trepang'...Pobassoo had made six or seven voyages from Macassar to this coast, within the preceding twenty years, and he was one of the first who came...

This road was the first rendezvous for his division, to take in water previously to going into the Gulph...Pobassoo even stopped one day longer at my desire, than he had intended, for the north-west monsoon, he said, would not blow quite a month longer and he was rather late. (Flinders 1814, pp. 228–34)

2 According to Macknight (1969, p. 67), Flinders writes 'Pobassoo' for the Makassar name 'Pu' Baso'.

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Impressed by the large number of praus he met at the rendezvous point for the trepang fleet, which was a sheltered stretch of water near the Wessel and English Company's Islands just off the northeastern tip of Arnhem Land, Flinders named it in his journal the 'Malay Road'. The ship's artist, William Westall, has depicted the fleet of praus anchored in the Malay Road, as viewed from Pobassoo's Island (Figure 12.1).



Figure 12.1 'View of Malay Road from Pobassoo's Island'. Painting by W. Westall, artist on Matthew Flinders' Voyage to *Terra Australis*, 1803. Engraved by Samuel Middiman. Location is The English Company Islands, Northern Territory.

Source: National Library of Australia, PIC 52269 LOC Westall Box 16

In his journal, Flinders has also provided a firsthand account of his extended interview with Pobassoo, communicating through Williams,³ his Javanese cook, to find out details of Pobassoo's voyage and many aspects of the trepang trade (see Thomas, this volume). Westall also sketched Pobassoo himself, as well as details of the exotic and unfamiliar 'prows' (praus).

³ Flinders' journal describes Williams as being 'from the island of Java', though in his published account he uses the more general racial classifier of 'Malay' (see Flinders 1814, p. 229).



Figure 12.2 *The English Company's Islands, Pobassoo, a Malay chief.*
Drawing by William Westall, 1803

Source: National Library of Australia, PIC R4366 LOC Westall Box 12

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The area where Flinders encountered the Macassan fleet, and what he referred to as the 'Malay Road', is shown in Figure 12.3.

This area of northeastern Arnhem Land is a channel between the mainland and the English Company's Islands, which provides a well-defined linear path, relatively protected from the open ocean. When Flinders marked the place where the praus were anchored the 'Malay Road', he was using it in the seafaring sense of a place where ships ride in a sheltered piece of water near the shore; however, the Malay Road is also symbolic of the more extensive trading route and its repeated journeys back and forth along a defined pathway, more akin to a road or a busy highway on land.



Figure 12.3 The location of Flinders' 'Malay Road'

Source: After McIntosh (2006); based on Flinders' chart 'North West Side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, 1803', in Flinders (1814, Atlas)

Flinders described the men he met on the praus as 'Malays', a term often used by European observers to describe the trepangers (Macknight 1976, p. 17; Sutherland 2004, p. 92). Distinct from our current use of the term 'Malay', which refers to a particular ethnic group centred in present-day Malaysia (Milner 2008), the seafarers who travelled to northern Australia, we now know from considerable research, were of diverse backgrounds and origins that

reflect the historical role and maritime history of Sulawesi. Amongst the crews were predominantly Makassarese, Bugis and Bajau, as well as crewmembers from various other racial groups in the Malay and Indonesian archipelagos (Macknight 1976, p. 18). As outlined in the opening chapter (see Clark and May, this volume), the term 'Macassans' has come to be the encompassing one for all those who came on the annual fleet of praus to the northern Australian coastline. They most intensively worked the section of the Arnhem Land coast known to them as Marege', until the economic conditions for the trade changed and it was finally closed by the South Australian Government after the 1906–07 season (Macknight 1976).

The trade: Makassar, China and the trepang fishery

The Malay Road was part of a much wider intercultural trading route, carrying substantial seaborne traffic from at least the eighteenth century and possibly earlier.

The route immediately to the north of Australia was determined partly by the effect of the prevailing winds across the Timor Sea, but extended much further north, to East Asia and China in particular. The trade links to Australia's north provide an important historical link of Australia to its region. While there is much talk of Australia's new links to Asian economies, Australia's trade connections with China are not quite as new as contemporary commentators lead most Australians to believe (Walker and Sobocinska 2012). China's demand for new sources of trepang emerged from the late seventeenth century (Sutherland 2004, pp. 98–9). Maritime expansion and commercial development by Muslim traders working the trade into China spread throughout Southeast Asia into the Indo-Malay archipelago. The port city of Makassar was captured by the Dutch in 1669 and was established as a centre for Dutch trade and as a colonial outpost.

The timing and impetus for the initial development of the trepang trade remain matters of much debate (see, for example, Macknight 2008, pp. 136–7); however, new research into the records of the Dutch East India Company has filled in many of the details of the ships, skippers and commodity trading from eighteenth-century Makassar (Knaap and Sutherland 2004). Ready access to the trepang-rich southeastern seas enabled certain ethnic groups who had lost access to the more-profitable spice trade through the new Dutch monopoly to re-engage in local and regional trade by tapping the new and rapidly expanding market for trepang in China. The productive trepang fisheries in the Gulf of Carpentaria and more generally on the northwest coast of New Holland were called by the Chinese Lam-Hai' (Crawford 1967, p. 441). Makassar benefited in

this local and regional trade from its central position at the intersection of many routes. Northern Australia became the southernmost limit of this trade (Knaap and Sutherland 2004, pp. 148, 246; Macknight 2008, p. 137).

The Macassans came on yearly return visits, setting up temporary villages and processing sites at sheltered beaches along the coast. The Arnhem Land coast offered a long series of suitable anchorages, running parallel, or nearly so, with the direction of the monsoons and relatively free of unwelcome control by government or other interests, at least until the 1880s (Macknight 1976, p. 49). Extensive archaeological evidence at sites such as Anuru Bay, including what are almost certainly Macassan burials, as well as the distinctive rock-line processing sites where trepang were boiled in stone fireplaces, offer tangible proof of the Macassan industry, its industrial processing methods and the density of related sites in particular locations along the Arnhem Land coast (Macknight 1976, pp. 61–82; Theden-Ringl et al. 2011, pp. 41–8). The sole reason for Macassans travelling to Marege' was commercial: focusing on the collection and processing (smoking and drying) of trepang. Processed trepang was returned to Makassar, and from there exported to China. While not of the highest quality, Marege' 'chalk fish' or 'white trepang', known as '*koro susu*', was very abundant and of consistent quality such that it commended reasonable prices when processed skilfully (this including being buried in sand to remove the calcareous deposits in the skin that gave it its chalky appearance). It was also referred to as '*tripang Marege*' (Schwerdtner Máñez and Ferse 2010, p. 5; Macknight 1976, pp. 7, 40). There appears to be only opportunistic collection of other products by prau crew: besides trepang, the Macassans also imported to Sulawesi timber (ironwood, cypress pine, sandalwood), pearl, pearl shell and tortoise shell. Items such as these were often collected and traded by Aboriginal people in exchange for cloth and various items made of iron (tomahawks and knives), glass and ceramics, food (rice, cocoa), alcohol and drug substances such as betel nut, opium and tobacco (Macknight 1976, pp. 40, 84; Wurramarrba 1986, pp. 1, 3; Brady, this volume).

Tripang Marege' made up the largest part of Macassan exports and of the total imports into China (Macknight 1976, pp. 14–16; Schwerdtner Máñez and Ferse 2010, p. 5). The trepang industry in Australian waters was comparatively large and well organised. At the height of the trade, as many as 60 praus carrying between 1000 and 2000 Macassans spent four to five months of the year gathering trepang. The product fetched considerable amounts of money in Makassar for the fleet financiers, who enjoyed high social standing in their community (Macknight 1976, p. 19). Shipping to southern China was handled by the Chinese businessmen living in Makassar. Most voyages were financed and outfitted by merchants who supplied basic items like rice, tamarind fruit, '*kajang*' (awning mats made from palm leaves), '*atap*' (mats similar to *kajang*,

made of nipa palm leaves), rattan, '*karoro*' (palm-leaf sail cloth), iron pots for cooking, '*parring*' bamboos for building, and so on (Macknight 1976, p. 20). At the height of the trade from the 1770s, an annual junk sailed directly from Xiamen, or Amoy, in southeast China, to Makassar to collect the trepang (Knaap and Sutherland 2004, pp. 148–9).



Figure 12.4 The route of the trepang trade from Makassar north to China and south to Australia

Source: Peter Johnson

The experience of the journey of the Macassan traders to Marege' is of considerable interest. Recent research into the navigation skills of the Bugis of South Sulawesi helps to explain the success of the Macassans in undertaking these difficult and often dangerous journeys year after year (Ammarell 1999, p. 1). Bugis seafaring capability, developed over centuries of inter-island trade, was based on an indigenous system of non-instrument navigation by which

fishing boats and trading ships could be guided along often treacherous coastlines and across broad stretches of open sea (Ammarell 1999, pp. 1–8). Of particular importance was an intimate knowledge of the wind, which propelled their ships and determined the ship's course. As well, knowledge of stars, currents, wave patterns and the behaviours of various sea animals and birds was crucial to safe navigation in these difficult and sometimes dangerous waters. The Macassans drew on this rich seafaring knowledge and practice to sail without any navigational instruments to guide them other than simple compasses or telescopes, although Dutch maps and charts were available. Navigation was possible because of the personal knowledge and skill of the master of the prau, so they could successfully navigate their praus in a southeasterly direction, having learnt by oral tradition. Many could remember details of the coastline years after they sailed (Macknight 1976, p. 35; see also Daeng Sarro's account in Macknight 1969, pp. 180–7).

Indonesian praus were frequently described and drawn by early Europeans, often seaman themselves, who were intrigued by the unfamiliar craft with its great rectangular sails, as well as the use of bamboo, rattan and other seemingly flimsy local materials in the rigging and superstructure. These craft and other Macassan objects are also depicted frequently in Aboriginal rock art along the northern Australian coastline (May et al. 2010, pp. 57–65; Clarke and Frederick 2008, pp. 148–64).

The praus left Makassar with the onset of the northwest monsoon in late December or early January (Macknight 1976, pp. 33–5). The total trip from Makassar was about 1600 km and often took approximately two weeks. The crossing from Makassar to Timor took about eight days, while the 500 km crossing from Timor to Melville Island (immediately to the north of Darwin) took four days. Early visits were haphazard and poorly coordinated but as the industry became more organised, so did their visits. They aimed to strike the Australian coast in the vicinity of the Cobourg Peninsula to the northeast of Darwin and then work slowly eastwards. During these summer months of the wet season, several praus usually worked together in one locality for a few days or even weeks. When the dugout canoes, from which the trepang was collected, had combed the immediate vicinity of the processing camp, the bamboo smokehouses were dismantled and the praus moved on. By April and the change of the monsoon, the fleet was scattered around eastern Arnhem Land, Groote Eylandt and down into the bottom of the Gulf of Carpentaria. With the dry southeasterly wind behind them, all then turned back to Makassar (Macknight 1976, p. 37).

According to oral tradition, the Macassans regarded the voyage to northern Australia as a long and adventurous one. Marege' was the farthest south and east of the areas they normally visited, with many differences from the more familiar islands to the north. As Macknight points out, among the novelties

and perhaps the dangers of the coast were the local people (1976, p. 83). While there were also contacts with the Kimberley coast, as Macknight points out, this trade has always been more complex, in regard of both the products collected and the home ports of the vessels involved. This well-defined industry came to an end when the last prau returned from the Arnhem Land coast in early 1907. Nevertheless, there have also been varied and sporadic visits to this coast throughout the twentieth century (Macknight 1976, pp. 133–6).

The route of connections

This route of intercultural trade, together with the journeys, encounters and influences it has encompassed over centuries and which still continue, has created many cultural resonances both in Makassar and among the Indigenous peoples of northern Australia. The effects of such interactions have been manifested across many fields including language, art and music, religion, health and economic life. As well, the memory of the Macassan presence is still strong, particularly for the communities along the coast of Arnhem Land.

Some of the most compelling accounts we have today of the Macassan traders and their close relationship with Aboriginal people come from the Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land. The Macassans had mainly friendly relations with the Yolngu: the same boats returned each year to the same places and their crews established continuing relations with the people who lived there. Yolngu were employed to work collecting and preparing the trepang. They learnt to communicate with the Macassans, and a trade language developed that survived long after the trade was halted. Yolngu would travel with the Macassans along the coast, with some even returning with them to spend the dry season in Sulawesi. The captains of the Macassan boats developed close relationships with particular local Indigenous leaders, which were reflected in an exchange of names. These were passed on, and Yolngu are still able to identify names of Macassan origin (Morphy 2004).

There are also many Malay, Bugis and Makassarese loan words in Yolngu languages and other items of material culture from Macassan times (Evans 1992). Yolngu obtained dugout canoes from Macassans and, with the benefits of iron tools, began to manufacture them for themselves (Morphy 2004). The vessels were much more stable and seaworthy than bark canoes (Mitchell 1996, p. 184). The Yolngu learnt how to work iron from the Macassan traders and trade with them would have been one of the main sources of metal for use in shovel-nose spears that then provided Yolngu with a valuable commodity for trade with inland groups (Allen 2011).

Cross-cultural interaction has its dark forms and inevitably with Macassans came disease. Smallpox epidemics had a devastating effect on local communities, although it remains unclear as to the scale of impact this caused (Campbell 2002; Macknight 2008, p. 138). Better understood is the fact that Macassan influence has been manifested in the social, spiritual, symbolic and ceremonial lives of the Yolngu in intricate and complex ways. There is a particular parallel made between mortuary rituals and farewelling the Macassans for the return journey. Morphy describes in detail how ceremonies associated with the concluding stages of Yolngu rituals contain multiple and juxtaposed layers of symbolism that cross-referenced Macassan activities with the ancestral past (Morphy 1998, pp. 212–18). He indicates that as such ceremonies manifest a conflation of the past, the Macassan influences continue to be reinterpreted in ceremonial contexts in new ways into the present.

Flags, sails, anchors, masts and the wind itself that brought the Macassans have been incorporated into Yolngu daily and ritual life. Items such as daggers, swords and flags had particular roles in South Sulawesi villages as sacred heirlooms that were powerful symbols of unity and solidarity (Rössler 1990, p. 300; Röttger-Rössler 2000, pp. 521–2). Yolngu '*bungul*' (ceremonial dances) and '*manikay*' (ceremonial songs) that deal with Macassan themes also make reference to these items (Palmer 2007), and flags have come to play a prominent and highly symbolic role for Yolngu. Today, communities across the north and east coasts of Arnhem Land have their own local flags, and proudly fly flags and display them. They appear in many rituals and are used to effect in contemporary political statements (McIntosh 2011). In Blue Mud Bay, '*Bawu*' is an image of the sails of the Macassan ships. *Bawu* appears in local ritual and bark paintings and is used as a Mardarra and Mangalili clan design (Mununggurr 2010). The two horizontal bands of white and blue make the flag that is flown by these clans. The flag was used in symbolic fashion when it was planted in the tidal zone offshore from the community of Yilpara at the time of the successful sea rights case in the High Court of Australia in July 2008. The High Court decision established that the intertidal water lying over Aboriginal land should not be treated differently from the land itself, and clan leaders saw the flag as a fitting symbol of this victory.



Figure 12.5 *Bawu*, the flag that represents the Macassan sail, which is also the symbol for two clans in the Blue Mud Bay region of east Arnhem Land

Photo: Nicholas Hall, 2008

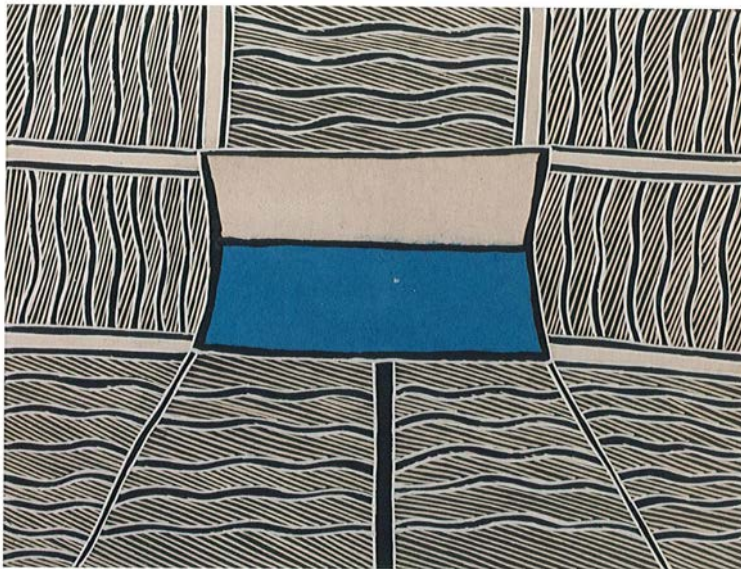


Figure 12.6 An image of *Bawu* in the form of the Macassan sail by Yolngu artist Marrnyula Mununggurr

Archaeological evidence confirms a close relationship between Macassans and Aboriginal groups, with camps located in close proximity and Macassan goods present in Yolngu sites that have been researched and documented. The influence of these encounters and relationships flows into the present. An ongoing debate connected to the trepang trade is about Aboriginal agency and the extent to which they controlled and directed relations with the Macassans (see Russell 2004). An example of this is through negotiating to protect and secure their own interests and the influence this continues to have on contemporary events. Russell makes a case that 'in some places Aborigines did assert a right to exclude Macassan fishers, and that the history of Macassan and Aboriginal interactions justifies a rethink of the basis for sea claims for Aboriginal people'. Russell argues that 'if Macassan fishing formed part of a network of negotiated arrangements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this provides a good basis for the restitution of similar negotiated arrangements in the twenty-first' (Russell 2004, p. 15). The sea rights cases determined in the High Court of Australia, in relation to both Croker Island and Blue Mud Bay, documented and highlighted the importance of the Macassans in the historical memory of the people of these areas. In the High Court cases, evidence was brought forward about the way in which a cultural legacy of trade and negotiation is a part of recognising traditional rights of agency and responsibility (Russell 2004, p. 15).

Ian McIntosh (2006) has also argued that the current Yolngu vision of intercultural diplomacy is based on former negotiated partnerships, which could be considered as treaties. His informant, Warramirri elder David Burrumarra, describes ceremonies linked to a Dreaming entity, Birrinydji (loosely based on a Macassan boat captain and traditional iron-maker), who united Yolngu and the very earliest Macassan visitors, the Bayini and Wurrumala. According to McIntosh, 'this mirrors the fundamental principle of intermarrying moieties, bringing together the very best from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds, and is as relevant today as during the heyday of trepangers' (McIntosh 2006, pp. 153–72).

The connections the trade generated are reflected across different aspects of culture and society, in tangible and intangible forms. They go back prior to European records in Australia and have endured even after the historical trade itself. Moreover, Yolngu returned to Makassar in the past and such visits continue sporadically today. Recognition of the heritage significance of the trade and route itself needs to include not only the historical contexts and values but also the contemporary connections and influences in northern Australia as well as in Sulawesi.

What does the route of connections mean today?

The Macassan contact with northern Australia as it was through the trepang trade is no longer, yet its influence still resonates and has enduring and strong contemporary social significance. Both Indonesian and Arnhem Land Aboriginal cultures maintain, celebrate and explore their cultural contact and connections in present-day stories and memories. This is done in relation to specific places through family connections, visits and exchanges, ongoing cultural practices and artistic expression. There has been a string of cross-cultural exchanges since the 1980s. In 1986, 10 students from Batchelor College in Darwin visited Makassar and, in 1988, there was a bicentennial project to create a replica of a Macassan prau, the *Hati Marege*, which now resides in the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin (see Ganter, this volume). In 1993, Indigenous artist Johnny Bulunbulun, well-known for his paintings of Macassan themes, led a group from Maningrida to Makassar, which was known at the time as Ujung Pandang. In 1996, an opera, *The Trepang Project*, was developed with input from both Aboriginal and Makassar-based artists and musicians (see Ganter, this volume). This musical theatre project was performed in both Darwin and Makassar (Palmer 2007; Stephenson 2007, pp. 40–57; Macknight 2008, pp. 141–2). Musicians from Makassar have also performed at the Garma Festival in east Arnhem Land in 2005 (Thomas 2005).

Another aspect of contemporary reinterpretation of the Macassan trade and retelling of its narratives has been the conception and trial of a new tourism product taking visitors on a nine-day voyage by sea from Darwin to Nhulunbuy. The ‘Across the Top: Macassan Voyage’ was a niche cultural tourism product intentionally created to provide an opportunity for Bininj and Yolngu traditional owners (and emerging tourism businesses) along the Arnhem coast to greet travellers coming from the sea. The voyage stopped at various communities along the coast for them to tell their stories of Macassan encounters in their own way. A series of resource materials for the voyagers was prepared with contributions from researchers and traditional owners. The boat carried 10 passengers and four crew and moved along the coast as Macassans might have; at each stop different narratives, places and influences of the trade were encountered, building a larger picture of the context of the trade as the voyage progressed. The visitors had the experience of approaching by sea and appreciating the seas and winds for themselves. A stated aim of the tour was for the economic aspect of the payments for guiding and local cultural knowledge being means of recreating a form of maritime economic activity and a ‘trade’ commensurate with that of the past. The reinterpretation of the context from historical to the present was a natural way of creating significance for and in the activity itself. The ‘Across the

Top: Macassan Voyage' was one way of celebrating the significance of the route while demonstrating how heritage values can be used to create tourism products and experiences as cultural productions with resonance and local meaning.

There is increasing interest in recognising the heritage places associated with that part of the route associated with Australia. The Northern Territory Government, for instance, has recently assessed the Djulirri rock art site in the Wellington Ranges on the Arnhem Land coast for inclusion on the Northern Territory Heritage Register for its significance as a pictorial document of observations and encounters, including the prominent Macassan contact images of boats, people and material culture such as Macassan daggers. There are many places of significance connected to the route (see, for example, May et al 2010, pp. 57–65). The Malay Road we have mentioned specifically here is an example. There are other places that contain tangible evidence or key components of the stories of the trade and connections that lie along the route, including South Sulawesi (see Clark, this volume). A more comprehensive listing of places and intangible values connected to the route in its entirety would be an important next step in recognition of the significance of the route. It would be a critical research tool to further document the associations with the trade and its broader significance in local, national, regional and international terms. A heritage approach would have a role to play in thinking of the tangible and intangible aspects, the sum of knowledge and how the ongoing aspects of the connections may be more widely understood and celebrated. The project would be a fitting engagement between Australia and Indonesia and assist in placing the history of Australia's northern coast and seas rightfully into the context of regional trade and exchange—a much different perspective to the usual conceptions of Australia's maritime and settlement links to Europe. Recognising the heritage of the Macassan route helps us to look at Australia not as an isolated continent a long way from 'home' but as one historically connected to the region, with the sea as a contact zone, a place of exchange (Macknight 2008, pp. 139–44; Balint 2012, pp. 345–65).

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the new world heritage category of 'cultural routes' offers one opportunity to recognise and celebrate the intercultural heritage of this route in an international setting. Routes and journeys have often created remarkable cross-cultural exchanges and influences—for example, the Pilgrim Routes of Santiago Compostela in France and Spain, entered on the World Heritage List in 1993 and 1998, or the more recently inscribed Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (the Royal Inland Road, or silver route) connecting Mexico City to Texas and New Mexico. While these routes are well known, to date there has been little work on understanding the heritage values of maritime trading routes on a global scale. Table 12.1 looks at some of the defining features of a cultural route, and considers how they might apply to the Macassan trading route with China and northern Australia (ICOMOS 2008, pp. 3–5).

Exploring the possibility of a world heritage nomination to recognise the heritage values as a collaborative project between Australia, Indonesia and perhaps also China may be one option for the future. Such a project would present many challenges (see Clark, this volume), not least because the route crosses territorial, social and cultural boundaries. Like the 'China Silk Road', already on the world heritage tentative list, the Macassan route has both land and sea components, and a network of related sub-routes. It would require researchers to document and assess the wide range of tangible and intangible heritage values and aspects associated with the proposed cultural route. There are also challenging management issues associated with sites along what remains today a remote coastline, as many sites of former Macassan contact are suffering heavily from natural and human impacts. Yet Aboriginal ranger groups are eager to incorporate meaningful cultural heritage work in their land and sea management programs (see, for example, Marika and Roegeer 2012, pp. 119–31). A Macassan-themed project documenting stories and sites and looking after them would be a valuable addition. Such a project needs vision, context and practical support across a wide range of possible partners including local communities, government, researchers and heritage practitioners. Hence more than just an inclusion on a list is needed for heritage practice to play a useful role. A strategic and integrated approach is needed to understand the contribution and interplay of tangible and intangible heritage in this cross-cultural context.

Many maritime historians have envisaged the sea as the greatest highway of all—with imprints of long, lonely and difficult journeys, especially in the age of sail (Powell 2010, p. 1). The Macassan trepang trade is part of this long tradition of seaborne journeying to seek adventure and new resources in a wider world, through connections with different cultures and lands. This route of intercultural connections situates Australia in the Southeast Asian region in ways that other travel routes do not, those that emphasise connections to Europe and the remoteness and distance of the colonies. The Malay Road is presented at the beginning of this chapter as a small 'porthole' into the people, places and stories of this route. The broader story we present is of an intercultural and international route that symbolises the complex connections and seas in our region. We will only understand it with multiple perspectives.

Table 12.1 World Heritage cultural route category: Defining features and preliminary application to Malay Road

Cultural route defining feature	Macassan trepang route
Different types, for example, religion (pilgrimage), trade (silk, salt, slaves), military (crusades)	Intercultural maritime trade route linking Indonesia, China and Indigenous Australia
Interactive movement of peoples as well as exchange of goods and ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant period	<p>Eighteenth-century trading route based on marine products especially trepang collected along northern Australian coastline by fleets of praus from Makassar, then traded with China.</p> <p>Some evidence suggests the trading relationship predates the eighteenth century, with other forms of contact prior to trepang trading.</p> <p>Significant cultural exchange involving material and social-symbolic aspects over hundreds of years.</p> <p>Has significant contemporary cultural expression and reinterpretation through art, music and ongoing cultural practices.</p>
Reflects cross-fertilisation of cultures in both tangible and intangible aspects of heritage	<p>Tangible aspects include:</p> <p>Rock art and bark painting depictions of Macassan praus and trading goods</p> <p>Archaeological remains of beach camps and processing sites on northern Australian coastline</p> <p>Technology of dugout canoes and working of iron learnt from Macassans.</p> <p>Intangible aspects include:</p> <p>Language, placenames in northern Australia</p> <p>Influence on cultural practice of Yolngu in many areas</p> <p>Expression in art, music and other cultural forms</p> <p>Oral narratives</p> <p>Macassan traditional navigation practices and knowledge associated with riding the monsoon winds to Australia.</p>
Must combine cultural exchanges with journeys, compared with those that only represent a physical act of travel, such as railway lines	Extensive evidence from many sources of cultural exchange over a long period, including Aboriginal bark painting and rock art, archaeological remains of Macassan campsites, linguistic evidence of word borrowings and ethnographic evidence of changes in cultural practices.
Interaction with the natural environment in all of its diversity is often important	Winds, sea, currents, wave patterns, maritime ecology, coastal geomorphology, terrestrial fresh water.

Cultural route defining feature	Macassan trepang route
Must be described and delineated to its full extent, including boundaries, component parts, setting	The route is a 1600 km sea crossing from the port of Makassar in central Indonesia to the northern coastline of Australia (and perhaps to China). Stopping points/features along the way. Sites in South Sulawesi. Sites along northern Australian coast.
Does the cultural route as a whole entity (rather than individual components or features) have Outstanding Universal Value?	The Malay Road meets World Heritage criteria.

Source: Sandy Blair

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