

Macassan History and Heritage: Journeys, Encounters and Influences

edited by Marshall Clark and Sally K. May

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This edited volume draws together an eclectic group of 12 papers sharing a common theme as expressed in its title *Macassan History and Heritage*. It concerns the Macassans, a term used specifically to denote south-east Asian seafarers who traded trepang from the north coast of Australia to China via the eastern Indonesian port of Makassar in Sulawesi. Trepang (also known as sea cucumber or *bêche-de-mer*) is a marine invertebrate that breeds in shallow tropical waters and is highly valued in China for its culinary and medicinal properties. The volume considers the implications of this trade, Macassan encounters with Aboriginal people, and its legacy from before the eighteenth century until today. It draws on varied accounts reflected in its subtitle, *Journeys, Encounters and Influences*, and ranges from history, rock art, ethno-history and ethnography to contemporary accounts of heritage, fishing and trade routes.

The introductory chapter by the editors outlines the scope and themes of the volume. It is the result of a two-day research symposium, a 'Macassan update', run by the Institute of Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts at The Australian National University (ANU) in February 2012. The symposium was well-designed and decidedly useful in that it brought together experts from diverse disciplines and professions to provide an overview of Macassan studies today. The editors are to be commended on publishing the volume so promptly.

A theme raised but not resolved in the introduction and revisited several times throughout the volume concerns the timing and nature of original south-east Asian contact on the north coast of Australia. On this question, the volume would have benefited significantly by including the paper presented at the

symposium by Daryl Wesley (ANU). In it, he reported the results of recent relevant archaeological research that has dated Macassan sites and Aboriginal occupation of nearby rockshelters in western Arnhem Land. The introduction would also have been enhanced by a regional map with place names from the text (which we do not get to see until p. 212) and illustrations from the collections of Aboriginal paintings that the editors discuss in detail. As they say themselves 'each painting tells a story' (p. 5).

Chapters 2 to 5 present Macassan history from different viewpoints. Campbell Macknight summarises the state of play in Macassan studies. His contribution is essentially a review of literature concerning the history of Macassan trade, a theme he has dealt with in detail in previous publications of his research over many decades. Again, this chapter is not illustrated, although in a footnote (p. 27) Macknight thanks two sources for their photographs. Anthony Reid switches the perspective of the discussion by considering the history of political relations between Australian and eastern Indonesia, which he sees both literally and metaphorically as a 'Great Divide'. Likewise, Regina Ganter puts historical relations in a different context with her chapter on 'Macassan contact in the framework of Muslim Australian history'. These latter three chapters all provide positive suggestions for ways to move forward in Macassan studies. In Chapter 5, Paul Thomas presents an intriguing history of the little-known men who provided interpretation from the Malay trade language spoken by the Macassan trepangers in their interactions with Europeans in the nineteenth century.

The subsequent four chapters (6 to 9) present several diverse Aboriginal perspectives of Macassan contact history and heritage. In a fascinating paper, anthropologist Ian Macintosh describes Yolngu mythology through the voice of senior elder David Burramurra, which reveals how contact led to rejection of the 'other' and an affirmation of Yolgnu identity. In the following chapter, Rebecca Bilous quotes senior elder Laklak Burarrwanga and her oral history of the Macassan contact story. By contrast, Bilous analyses visual representations of Macassan–Aboriginal interactions contained in popular twentieth-century magazines. She argues that Aboriginal voices were effectively silenced regarding their role in Macassan trade by depicting Arnhem Land as an empty frontier with no Indigenous agency. Paul Taçon and Sally May provide an account of recent rock art research into Macassan images by Aboriginal artists in western Arnhem Land. This discussion would have benefited from including the context provided by Wesley's paper and reference to the results of his new archaeological research in the region. Through a discussion of Aboriginal material culture, Maggie Brady untangles the history and impact on Aboriginal society of the

introduction of alcohol, tobacco and other substances pointing out that they were originally brought to Australia by Macassans rather than Europeans as is conventionally thought.

The last three chapters (10 to 12) focus on contemporary heritage issues and Macassan influence. In a slightly off-beat paper, Marshall Clark describes what remains of Macassan historical locations in Makassar and compares (unfavourably) Indonesian efforts for cultural heritage conservation with those in Malaysia. This chapter is well illustrated with photographs but could have used a map. Dedi Supriadi Adhuri provides a stimulating discussion of the contemporary trepang industry in eastern Indonesia. He compares the different approaches taken by two fishing villages and illuminates the inconsistencies in the Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and Indonesia regarding ownership and use of fishing zones. In the last chapter, Sandy Blair and Nicholas Hall present a cogent argument for inscribing the Macassan trade route, 'the Malay Road', on the World Heritage list as a cultural route akin to other famous world trade routes. Finally, in this last chapter we are presented with a regional map.

This volume contains a series of interesting and diverse papers on a fascinating chapter in the history of northern Australia and south-east Asia and the Macassan legacy that still resonates today. It offers a stimulating comparative review for scholars of the region and other interested readers. The volume would have been enhanced, however, by more comprehensive use of maps and photographs and the inclusion of updated archaeological research.

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