

Book Reviews

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In Asian Waters: Oceanic Worlds from Yemen to Yokohama. By Eric Tagliacozzo. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2022. xix+489 pp.

For Asianists who are not historians, this book is a treasure trove of historical analysis, related literature and sources that invites multiple readings. Centred on the fluid seas that ripple out from Indonesia, Tagliacozzo's work reverses the typical figure-ground of Asia scholarship, prioritizing the watery worlds of the South China Sea, Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as the figure rather than the background that has significantly shaped the histories and developments of this extended region.

After setting the stage through a review of relevant scholarship, starting with Fernand Braudel, who initiated the turn to maritime studies, then discussing the intersections with and between other analyses by Alison Bashford, K.N. Chaudhuri, Takeshi Hamashita, Epeli Hau'ofa, Sujit Sivasundaram and many others (see the extensive footnotes from pages 6 to 14), the author guides us through six thematic forays that has us tacking back and forth between the various islands and coastal cities that form the boundaries of these interconnected seas. His objective in examining five hundred years of maritime history is to connect apparently disparate notions—power, trade, the oscillation of empires, diaspora and religion-in-transit—into a single study to pose the question of “how our vision of the world's largest continent and its history might vary if we see this vast expanse of territory not by land, but rather from the sea, as a part of a unitary story” (p. 5).

Given the temporal and spatial expanse of this study, a reader who is not already immersed in maritime and Asian studies is

sometimes left bobbing in the ocean, unsure of how to swim to shore while floating from Africa to India, or is swept through the Sulu Sea to the South China Sea. The extensive footnotes provide some guidance; indeed, on most pages, there is a quiet conversation like an undercurrent between the text written by Tagliacozzo and the numerous books and articles cited by the author. The challenge for the reader is to follow currents of thinking by briefly diving into cited sources without being drowned in the impressive wealth of information.

The six themes devised by Tagliacozzo—Maritime Connections, Bodies of Water, Religion on the Tides, Cities and the Sea, the Bounty of the Oceans, and Technologies of the Sea—serve as lighthouses and buoys to guide our passage. Unlike the technologies of control and imperialism (lighthouses and maritime maps) discussed in chapters 12 and 13, however, these themes do not coerce. Instead, they leave space for readers to investigate and think further. Indeed, a strength of the book lies in the multiple questions raised and the inducement to dive deeper and search for more connections.

Each of the six themes opens with a preface, a cogent two-page overview, that obviates the need for summaries in this review. One only needs to read short passages of Tagliacozzo's poetic prose to gain a sense of each section. Given the ambitious framing of five hundred years over a broad sweep of planet earth from the Bosphorus to Pusan, there is the danger of grand themes running roughshod over the situated specificity so critical in area studies. Tagliacozzo, with his fluency in Chinese, Indonesian/Malay, Dutch, French and Italian, along with the multiple years invested in the various research projects that contributed to this book, avoids the trap of "big ideas" by presenting provocative interconnections without absolute assertions. As he reminds the reader, "history is always unexpected" (p. 375). If anything, the chapters, at times, read like journal articles woven into a book. Tagliacozzo is a skilled storyteller, but the reader can be left to her own navigational knowledge in area-specific histories and of key thinkers in disciplines such as anthropology, geography, sociology and political science to gauge the validity of his themes and explanations.

The open-ended, one might say fluid, quality of this book makes it an elegant teaching tool. For masters and even doctoral courses, students could be tasked with a number of exercises, such as identifying the dialectic between the main body of the text and sources in the footnotes, producing alternative themes that might also explain the events and relationships in each section, critically analysing the connective tissue between one section and the next, considering the benefits and potential pitfalls of drawing from multiple disciplines, and discussing how history informs the present.

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Decoding Southeast Asian Art: Studies in Honor of Piriya Krairiksh. Edited by Nicola Revire and Pitchaya Soomjinda. Bangkok: River Book Press. 2022. 423 pp.

This *festschrift* honours Dr Piriya Krairiksh, a celebrated and, at times, controversial art historian, curator, artist and professor. The book comprises articles written by an impressive group of international contributors from the disciplines of art history, archaeology, religious studies and more. The topics addressed in their respective essays range from pre-historic bronze drums to ancient Buddhist and Hindu arts and architecture of South and Southeast Asia. In addition, several articles discuss material culture, including ceramic, decorative arts, photography, and contemporary art of Southeast Asia. Overall, the articles are all insightful in content and analysis. Some of the essays update readers with new and revised interpretations of previous scholarship on familiar works of art. In general, the articles are all equally high calibre, which is a challenge in an edited book and highly commendable. Moreover, this richly illustrated book includes many sumptuous colour plates and clearly benefited from the financial support of the Piriya Krairiksh Foundation. River Books did an excellent job with the layout of this felicitous volume. For the