

Early Maritime Cultures in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean

Edited by
Akshay Sarathi



Access Archaeology



Early Maritime Cultures in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean

Papers from a conference held at
the University of Wisconsin-Madison
(African Studies Program)
23-24 October 2015,
with additional contributions

Edited by
Akshay Sarathi

Access Archaeology





Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 712 8
ISBN 978 1 78491 713 5 (e-Pdf)

© Archaeopress and the individual authors 2018

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

Contents

Prehistoric Settlements on the Red Sea Coast of Eritrea	1
Amanuel Beyin and Daniella E. Bar-Yosef Mayer	
Interdisciplinary Approaches to Stratifying the Peopling of Madagascar	33
Roger Blench	
From the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and Beyond	49
Sing C. Chew	
A Tradition of Large Logboats on the Save River, South-Eastern Zimbabwe?	65
Rosanne Hawarden	
Ancient Connections between China and East Africa	83
Chapurukha Kusimba	
On the Early Maritime Silk Road between China and India	103
Wensuo Liu and Yanrong Wang	
Australia’s Kilwa Coins Conundrum	113
Ian S. McIntosh	
Asian Military and Mercantile Movements in East Africa during the Nineteenth Century, a Few Notes	139
Beatrice Nicolini	
Zilo and Zahula	151
Harriet Joseph Ottenheimer	
Traditional Indian Ocean Maritime Trade and Social Organization.....	163
Martin Ottenheimer	
Shellfish Exploitation at Kuumbi Cave, Zanzibar (c. 11kya – 20th cen. CE): A Preliminary Study	171
Akshay Sarathi	
Artistic Dynamics across the Seas. Architecture, Objects, and Ornamentation in the Medieval Port Cities Kilwa, Songo Mnara and Pisa	185
Vera-Simone Schulz	
Long-Distance Arab Sailing in the Indian Ocean before the Portuguese	215
Marina Tolmacheva	

Australia's Kilwa Coins Conundrum

Ian S. McIntosh

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
E-Mail: imcintos@iupui.edu

During World War 2, a remote Australian beach was the scene of a most unexpected discovery. A Royal Australian Air Force serviceman stationed on the Wessel Islands in north-east Arnhem Land found five copper coins from the once prominent Swahili port of Kilwa in modern day Tanzania. In that same location four Dutch coins were also located. The Kilwa coins, which bear the names of various Sultans, were between 700 and 900 years old. The discoverer, the late Maurice Isenberg from Sydney, was manning a RAAF radar base that tracked the movements of hostile Japanese air and sea craft. (See McIntosh 2013) The regional capital of Darwin had been devastated in a Japanese attack in 1942. Advanced warning bases such as Isenberg's were a vital part of the Allied war effort. There were a considerable number dotted along the Arnhem Land coast of the Arafura Sea.

An Australian Geographic-funded expedition in July 2013 mounted by the author, an Australian anthropologist from Indiana University, and my team of archaeologists, historians and heritage specialists (collectively known as the Past Masters), sought to unravel the mystery of how these wafer thin copper coins from Kilwa, among the first coins ever produced in Sub-Saharan Africa, found their way to northern Australia. We were ably supported by a non-traveling team of researchers, including several noted numismatists, and we had the backing of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the Wessel islands, whose oral history pertaining to foreign visitors would prove very useful in developing our various hypotheses regarding the deposition. (McIntosh 2013, 2104a, b)

Our principle research questions are situated within a current debate in Australian archaeology and anthropology regarding what is called the 'long model' (See Wesley, O'Connor & Fenner, 2016). In this model, contact between north Australian Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples is of long duration, greater than two hundred years, and well before the 18th century start date of Macassan trepanning – Australia's first international export industry. Specifically, in this paper, I ask: Was there a direct link between Kilwa and north Australia? And, were Australia's Indigenous peoples implicated in the ancient Indian Ocean trading network, also known as the Maritime Silk Road, which linked East Africa with Arabia, Persia, India, China, and South-East Asia? The very thought of pre-colonial Australia having medieval links to southern Africa generated considerable news coverage in 2013 with team members undertaking live to air interviews on radio and television in multiple places including South Africa, Spain, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, New Zealand and Russia. There was also detailed reporting in the print media across Indian Ocean, in particular in the United Arab Emirates and India. One positive outcome of this news buzz was further funding, this time from the Office of HanBan in the Chinese Ministry of Education. This support allowed the Past Masters, in partnership with Axum University, to host a major conference in Ethiopia exploring the ancient trading links between East Asia and East Africa, including Australia. This conference, which was the subject of a feature article in the 'New African Journal' (See Abraham, 2015), attracted senior researchers from Tanzania, Italy, China, Australia and the USA, and helped shed light on the considerable movements of peoples across the Indian Ocean prior to the rise of the European powers, in particular Portugal.

The Past Masters approached the Kilwa coin conundrum on three fronts: 1. An examination of the history of international trade across the Indian Ocean and to the immediate north of the Wessels Islands. 2. A review of non-Aboriginal artefacts found along the North Australian coastline. 3. An analysis of the oral history and mythology of the Yolngu (Aboriginal peoples of north-east Arnhem Land).

To the north of Australia lie Indonesia's fabled Spice Islands, once the sole source of the world's nutmeg, mace and cloves. Here, the ports of Ambon and Banda would become vast entrepots attracting traders from far and wide for a whole range of exotic products. In nearby Malacca, another entrepot, Portuguese apothecary Tome Pires reported trade agents from Kilwa, Cairo and Aden being active in the early 1500s (See A. Cortesao, 2011). So at one level, finding a Kilwa coin in Australia might not seem so unusual, given this intensity of foreign activity in the region.

In the search for answers, we understood that the key to success was in heritage detection and conservation training for Yolngu sea rangers and members of Norforce, an Australian government surveillance and reconnaissance unit. These are the men and women who manage the extensive and remote north Australian coastline, including the Wessel Islands, on a day-to-day basis. We wanted to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to make the types of discoveries that really could lead to a major reconsideration of Australia's past. Often the clues are not easy to spot. An appreciation of various forms of ballast, for example, can help distinguish the point of origin of non-indigenous rocks found along the strand. Basalt, limestone or yellow brick, for example, might indicate past visitors from Indonesia, Portugal, or the Netherlands. Accordingly, two well-attended training workshops, as well as community consultations and field exercises, were held in 2013 and 2014 in both the regional center



FIGURE 1. KILWA COIN RESEARCH TEAM EDUCATORS IAN MCINTOSH AND MIKE HERMES, WITH MEMBERS OF NORFORCE DURING AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRAINING SESSION IN 2013 AT SKI BEACH NEAR NHULUNBUY, N.T.

of Nhulunbuy (Gove) and in the Aboriginal village of Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) in order to build up an appreciation for this process of 'collaborative history-making'.

In this paper, I will review our findings to date in order to shed light on a number of hypotheses. Australia, rather than being this isolated land mass that would only be 'discovered' by Europeans in 1607, like the Americas by Columbus in 1492, appears to have already been well known in the international trading networks prior to the 1600s. What attracted these traders? As I will describe later, there were few products of genuine and sustaining interest until the mid-1700s when the high value trepang (beche-de-mer) trade commenced, attracting over a thousand Macassans from Sulawesi each year for upwards of 150 years. (See Macknight 1976) The Macassans would sell their produce to the Chinese, for whom trepang, an aphrodisiac, had special value as a wedding gift. The red rock hematite, found in great abundance on Arnhem Land shores, was an item of interest to traders across the Indian Ocean, and Aboriginal oral history speaks of its utilization in the manufacture of iron tools (See McIntosh 2015). North Australia may also have been a source of slaves for the Portuguese, Dutch, Macassans and Chinese during the heyday of the spice trade. The historical record indicates that the Macassans, and in particular the Bugis, were greatly feared, and their slave raids precipitated the building of protective forts in places such as Timor and elsewhere in what is now eastern Indonesia. (See O'Connor, McWilliam et al. 2014; Lape 2003) Additionally, the remote Wessels Islands appear to have been a port of refuge for brigands attacking the East Indies traders. After an attack, they might flee to places such as the Wessel Islands and hold up there for an indefinite stay. These islands, now vacant, contain vast rock shelters that are alive with cave paintings of boats of all descriptions, the study of which may shed further light on the region's past.

What our hypotheses reinforce is that Aboriginal people were implicated in the vast maritime trade network. Determining the extent of Aboriginal agency is a work in progress, but it is clear that this contact, over millennia, has profoundly influenced Aboriginal lives and worldviews. The presence of Kilwa coins on Australian shores sends a strong message that Australian history, with its focus on British explorer Captain James Cook's 'discovery' in 1770, is in dire need of revision.¹

Banda, and the Indian Ocean Context of Discovery

Following the ground-breaking work of historian and archaeologist Campbell Macknight, Australian primary and high school curriculums today make mention of the extended visits to Arnhem Land of Macassans, trepang fishermen hailing from the island of Sulawesi. They had a long and fruitful trading relationship with Arnhem Land Aboriginal people in the days prior to European colonization (See Macknight 1976, 2011). My research over a number of years on the topic of these relationships has revealed a range of even earlier connections, with groups collectively known as pre-Macassans. (McIntosh 2015) In terms of the Kilwa project, Yolngu oral history and mythology revealed strong links to the island of Banda, the fabled spice island that was the subject of attention by foreign traders over many centuries. Banda lies about 700 hundred nautical miles north-west of the Wessel Islands and it features significantly in Yolngu songs, personal names, mythology and oral history. In other words, we must not limit our speculation on the origins of the Kilwa coins to just the Macassan era, which lasted only from 1750-1907. We need to take a broader perspective that encompasses the rich history of South-East Asia and beyond.

Before the rise of the European powers and their quest for world domination, the Indian Ocean was alive with the movement of peoples, goods, ideas, and religions (Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam). These

¹ In 2016, Australia was still debating whether Australia was settled or invaded in 1788, and whether Captain Cook was merely an explorer, or an agent in the destruction of Aboriginal lives and livelihoods. See *Daily Telegraph* (2016)

early trade routes have been the subject of considerable study.² There were trans-oceanic migrations of Austronesians from central Indonesia to Madagascar, an intercontinental slave trade of vast proportion from the Zanj coast and hinterland to what is now Iraq, and a significant transoceanic network of trading ports from Kilwa to Guangzhou. Calicut on India's west coast, for example, was a major hub immediately before the Portuguese invasion in the 1500s. A few of the major sources of information on the Indian Ocean trade networks include:

1. The Greco-Roman map from the first century CE called the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* records the observations and experiences of a merchant and shows the extent of the trading network that would become known as the Maritime Silk Road. This map indicates the presence of ports frequented by Romans, Arabs and Persians along the east coast of Africa as far as Rhapta in what is now Tanzania, and across to India and Sri Lanka.
2. The Cairo Genizah, which contains some 300,000 Jewish manuscript fragments, describes the movements of traders from the Middle East to North Africa and beyond beginning in 870CE. (See Goiten and Friedman, 2008)
3. The *Jingxingji*, a Tang Dynasty military report compiled by Du Huan from China in the 8th Century CE describes Red Sea ports and the African hinterland. (Liu, 2014) In addition, several Arabic texts from the 800s-900s describe the movement of trade from the Persian Gulf to China through a series of local merchants. In those days, direct sailing with a safe return was almost unheard of (Agius, 2013, 90; Phillips, forthcoming)
4. James De Veere Allen's classic text on Swahili origins locates early Swahili trade routes from the east African coast that follow the monsoon to and from Arabia and Persia, and also an earlier purported 'Cinnamon Route' from South-East Asia, linked to the migration of peoples from Borneo and the Makassar Strait to Madagascar perhaps as early as two thousand years ago.³ (1993, p. 55)
5. The large-scale transfer of Indian culture to South East Asia and the development of what Berenice Bellina (2014) refers to as the 'South China Sea Network Culture', dates back to the first millennium BCE.⁴ By the late centuries BCE, South East Asia was already a part of a world trading system linking the Mediterranean and China (Bellina 2014). For the first millennium CE, Stephen Haw (2017) and Wang Gungwu's (1958) provide comprehensive accounts of the maritime routes between China and the Indian Ocean during the 2nd and the 9th centuries. Chinese goods bound for Arabia and Persia would be unloaded in a region called Funan (which encompasses Thailand and Vietnam) and transported overland across the Isthmus of Kra to the Andaman Sea where other ships would transport the goods to their destinations. By the 5th century CE, this passage was displaced by the sea route via the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java. It was only later that the Straits of Malacca became the predominant route of trade vessels. (See also Rosser and Imray, 1867)

Before its sacking by the Portuguese in 1505, and especially in the 12th century, Kilwa was among the most prosperous Swahili ports on the East African coast, and the coins that were found in Australia bear the names of Sultans who ruled over Kilwa, and also Pemba, the Mafia Islands, Comoros, and Zanzibar. One Wessel Islands coin, for example, bears the inscription Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan ('May he be happy. Trusting with the Master of Bounties. He is glorious'). The coins are the oldest foreign objects ever found in Australia and in archaeological terms, they are priceless, but they also represent a conundrum.

² An additional consideration is that various cultivars (banana, yam, and taro) had crossed the Torres Strait into northern Australia 2,000 years (if not more) before European contact.

³ The date of the extinction of the Elephant Bird in Madagascar may provide a clue to the date of this migration (pers. com. Stephen G. Haw 2016)

⁴ See also Bellina and Glover (2004) and Yang (2004). Dong Son bronze drums from Vietnam were being exchanged along the long established trade routes from this period. (Bellina 2004).

The Wessel Islands Kilwa coins have only been found in two regions beyond the immediate vicinity of their manufacture in East Africa: one in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe; and one in the Dhofar region of Oman on the Arabian Peninsula. The Wessel Islands' Dutch coins, by comparison, have been found along the Arnhem Land coast in association with the trepang (beche de mer) fishing camps of the Macassans. More than 8000 kilometres from Kilwa, on the far side of the Indian Ocean in the Arafura Sea in north Australia, the curious Kilwa coin cache of the Wessel Islands is not easily explained.

Apart from the fact that Kilwa sailors were held in high regard, there is a dearth of information about early Kilwa seafaring (See Pollard, Bates et al. 2016). It is apparent, however, that whatever boats the traders of Kilwa did possess a thousand years ago, these had limited capacity for open sea travel (Hall 1998). Consequently, the Arab sea trade became an early focus of my examination of the links between Kilwa and Australia. The pioneering work of George Hourani (1951) on the golden age of Arab seafaring demonstrated the extent of the Arab accomplishments though few details survive to substantiate what was obviously a grand tradition. Two instructive shipwrecks that speak of the ancient nature of journeys that linked the Middle East to the Far East were from China's Tang Dynasty period circa 800s CE. An Arab, Indian or possibly South-East Asian ship carrying porcelain and a wealth of hand-crafted artifacts was shipwrecked at Belitung Island in Indonesia. Cargo, coming from the opposite direction, perhaps originating in Arabia and then off-loaded for resale in Sumatra or Java and then heading for China, was wrecked near the major historical port of Quanzhou in China. Recovered were trade products from Arabia and Persia and the Horn of Africa, like frankincense and myrrh, 'Dragon's blood' from the island of Socotra, and also ambergris (See Hall 1998; Guy 2010).

The circumstances whereby the territory to the immediate north of Australia became associated with this extensive corridor of trade is thus well known, if not so well documented. The drawing power of the islands just a few day's sail north of Arnhem Land (from where the Kilwa coins were found), was rare spices: cloves from Ternate and Tidore, and nutmeg and mace from Banda. Great profits rewarded the trader on the maritime silk route, and as early as the first century of the Common Era (CE), cloves were being moved via a series of hands through South-East and South Asia all the way to Rome. (Bellina and Glover 2004, Ellen 2003, Frederickson 2000) There are numerous reports, as well, of other spices like sandalwood and cinnamon reaching Egypt and ancient Syria.

By most accounts, it was Indian traders bringing Buddhism and Hinduism into the Indonesian archipelago who, on their return voyages, first introduced cloves, nutmeg and mace to international markets. There are no firm dates for the arrival of foreign traders to the Arafura Sea and the Spice Islands, but Dobson (2014, p.119) reminds us that the 'Book of Routes and Kingdoms', compiled by the Persian cartographer Ibn Khurdadhbih in 844-8 CE, specifically mentions the islands of Maluku (including Banda) as being fifteen days sail from Java. (See also Lape 2000, p.14). By this period, Arabs and Persians were fully engaged in the trade along the Swahili coast as far south as Kilwa and were also active, at least as far as Srivijaya in Sumatra, in the long distance trade in spices that originated from Banda (See Haw, 2017). Gujaratis from India and the Chinese were also actively involved. In the latter case, the imperial demand for 'useful and valuable goods' had provided a major impetus to Banda's growth and standing as an international emporium. Islam would spread all along these Indian Ocean trade networks, from Kilwa to Banda and even northern Australia. (See McIntosh 2015)

In the early 1500s, the island kingdoms of Ternate and Tidore were rival trading ports each with their own extensive spheres of interest. Tidore's domain to the east included Papua, Aru and Tanimbar Islands, and Ternate's domain included Sulawesi (and what was then the small port of Makassar) and Timor. But it was to Banda that both sent their trade goods for sale to the world (Hanna 1991). According to Dobson (2014, p.123) Australian trade products during the pre-Macassan period might have also been sent to Banda.

The name 'Banda' is derived from the word for port and is sometimes translated as 'emporium' (Ellen 2003, p. 65). Islanders from what is now Indonesia's Maluku province would travel to Banda bringing with them their own unique products like Bird of Paradise feathers. Indeed, commentators such as Tome Pires observed that Banda attracted merchants from as far as Papua and Tanimbar who were interested primarily in items such as cloth (Ellen, 2003, p.65). One picul of trepang, for example, might be used to purchase a sarong (Dobson, 2014, p.124).

By the 1660s the Dutch were in the ascendancy and had all but displaced the Portuguese as the primary power throughout the Indonesian archipelago. They saw the rising strength of the rapidly growing Islamic state of Makassar (including the Kingdoms of Gowa and Tallo) as a direct threat to their regional trade monopoly. In a strategic alliance with the Bugis of Bone and also Ternate, they defeated the military forces of Makassar in 1667. The Dutch would then go on to make this city their trade hub for eastern Indonesia; a realm of influence that included Banda and other Maluku islands. It was in this period that Yolngu and Macassan oral histories describe how defeated Gowa and Tallo leaders took refuge in remote north Australia – in the vicinity of the Wessel Islands – to consider their future. During this sojourn, which lasted upwards of twenty years, the Macassans are said to have discovered the trepang that they would later harvest, beginning in the mid-1700s. At this time, if not before, the Yolngu would learn about Banda and the other islands of Maluku, and may well have visited the great emporium. This is strongly suggested in Yolngu oral history, and in ritual songs and ceremonies with strong Islamic and foreign influences. (See McIntosh 2015) As I have documented previously, Banda is referred to in sacred Yolngu narratives and also in personal names as Bandawee ('the source of traditional information'), Banda and Bandayil ('the land of the dead'), and Bandaynga ('where the big people come from') (McIntosh 2015).

At the very least, what we see in this short exposition is an emerging picture of Australia's Indigenous peoples becoming familiar with worlds beyond their shores and knowing something of the dynamic political and religious struggles that were unfolding just to their north.

Potential Reasons for Australian Coastal Trade and Wessels Connections

The 'Wessels' are a 120km long chain of islands that were 'discovered' in 1623 by Captain Jan Carstenszoon of the Dutch East India Company in his ship the 'Arnhem', though on his charts they are known as the Islands of Speult. These same islands are shown but not named on Abel Tasman's 1644 map of his discoveries in north Australia. The English explorer Matthew Flinders writes of some charts showing the chain as one large island called 'Wessel's Eylandt', and he endorsed this place-name in his mapping of the northern coast of Australia in 1802-3. The Wessels form a great arc north from Arnhem Land's Napier Peninsula towards Papua New Guinea. The island chain features rugged sandstone plateaus, rocky cliffs and sandy bays, as well as extensive areas of native grassland, eucalypt woodlands, paperback forests and mangroves. For months at a time the islands are buffeted by the north-west trade winds from Timor, Tanimbar and Aru and from time immemorial they would have acted as a type of barrier, or a great catching mitt, for all the Arafura Sea traffic blown south of their intended course.

The deposition of the Kilwa coins in the Wessel Islands raises many questions about early deliberate and accidental visitors to Arnhem Land. Who were they and why were they so far south of the major trade routes? The first and most obvious reason for travel was European exploration, and Portuguese forays into Arnhem Land should be considered a strong likelihood. By 1519CE the Portuguese had established a major trading post and fort in Ambon, near Banda. Theoretically, engagement east of here would have been seen as an invasion of the Spanish sphere of influence and invite a conflagration at home. Exploration in places like Australia would have thus been conducted in secrecy, but may have been extensive. Indeed, English explorer Matthew Flinders in his report 'A Voyage to Terra Australis',

concedes: 'It may... be admitted that a part of the west and north west coasts [of Australia], where the coincidence of form is most striking, might have been seen by the Portuguese themselves, before the year 1540, in their voyages to and from, India.' (Page VI, Volume One, 1814/1966) As Stephen Haw (pers. comm. 2016) argues, in the period of Portuguese expansion, they may have reached Australia without realizing that this was Terra Australis Incognita. At this time it was comparatively easy for seafarers to establish latitude, but a practical method of establishing longitude with any degree of exactness did not emerge until the eighteenth century.

A second reason was that north Australia may well have been a source of trade goods for the international marketplace. The third was that the 'Top End' of Australia could have been a source of slaves for foreign merchants in the trading outposts of south-east Asia and beyond. Another reason was the random unexpected arrivals of outsiders brought about by accidental or other means, as I discuss later.

In these early years Australia represented to many an 'apolitical' region, in that was not specifically claimed by any colonial power, kingdom or foreign nation – although there is a map of unknown derivation or age that shows northern Australia coming under the influence of the kingdoms of Gowa and Tallo (Makassar) during the 1600s. Until British sovereignty in 1770, in places like Arnhem Land, mariners of diverse origins would negotiate on a case by case basis with local Indigenous groups for entry and access. While today the recognition of Yolngu sea rights is gaining momentum, oral history shows that the waters of the Arafura Sea were free for all to travel, even those whose motives were less than salubrious.

As stated, Dutch explorers are credited with the discovery of the north and west Australian coasts, and many Dutch mariners were wrecked enroute to Batavia in the early 1600s. Tracking east from the southern tip of Africa on the 'Roaring Forties', they would sometimes overshoot and perish on the desolate West Australian coast. They had no interest in settling Australia or trading with the indigenous Australians, dismissing them in the same manner as the English buccaneer William Dampier who described them in 1697 as the most miserable people on earth. Captain James Cook, venturing on to the east coast of Australia in 1770, brought with him Enlightenment ideas of the 'Noble Savage', but still no real recognition that these were people with whom he could parley.

However, there are many potential reasons why north Australia may have been of interest to international traders, but there is no solid evidence of deliberate and sustained interest until the mid-1700s, although our research has opened the door to a possible reevaluation of this conclusion. Below is a brief overview of the possibility of early contact and trade prior to the Macassan trepang industry:



FIGURE 2. COASTLINE, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA, WITH THE WESSEL ISLANDS TO THE FAR RIGHT.

1. Slavery. There were persistent reports of Portuguese slavers (possibly Portuguese Timorese or Topasses) being active on the Tiwi Islands of north Australia during the period of European colonial expansion in South-East Asia. According to Searcy (1912), Tiwi Islanders' hostility to outsiders – including towards residents of the first British settlement in the north at Fort Dundas in 1824 – was a direct consequence of the raids by 'Malays'. They would refer to the Islanders as 'Amba', meaning slaves. In Timor in 1840, English navigator George Windsor Earl heard the Tiwi Islands being described as a major reservoir of slaves for Portuguese slave traders (Ganter 2006, p. 7). Apart from Timor, Ende in Flores was a focal point of the regional slave trade (Sutherland and Reid 1983 p. 273). Most commonly, it was South-East Asian slavers who were responsible for such depredations across the archipelago. Slaves were both a source of status in the slavers' home ports and also a source of profit when sold to Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese merchants. The island of Banda was by 1621 an example of the American-style slave plantation. The Dutch had exterminated, expelled or enslaved the entire local population. (Hanna 1991)
2. Indigenous Indonesian whale hunting. Today, the practice of traditional whale hunting is limited to the Solor Islands, the place where the Portuguese first established themselves in the early 1500s, but this practice may have been much more widespread. Yolngu oral history and mythology, as I detail later, has many references to whale hunting peoples of the north, who were known as Wurumala and Gelurru etc, who were said to be active in north-east Arnhem Land. The recording by the Past Masters of a Wessel Island rock painting of a traditional whale hunting vessel provides the first solid evidence of what may have been sustained contact.
3. Piracy/Refuge. Were the 'off the radar' Wessel Islands a place of retreat for pirates preying upon the rich flotillas on their way in stages to and from Arabia, Persia and China via the rich port of Banda? Piracy was rife in the archipelago, in particular the Sulu Sea and also Papua and raids on foreign ships were common.⁵ (Both supply ships for Fort Dundas, for example, were captured and sunk in 1825 by Malay pirates at Babar Island near Timor). Seasonal winds across the Arafura Sea would have facilitated contact of this nature. Before the introduction of European rigging that allowed 'tacking', south-east Asian boats relied on prevailing winds to a much greater extent. Square-rigged ships could only sail to within a few points of the wind. (See Haw, n.d.:22, and Harland, 1985:62-63). Therefore, one might sail from Sulawesi to Papua downwind, but to get back one must sail down towards Arnhem Land and then turn to the north-west to return home. So West Arnhem Land, in particular the Tiwi Islands and Coburg Peninsula, might very readily have seen regular contact. The remote Wessels Islands, however, may have been sought out because of their very isolation.
4. Pearls and pearl shell. Dobson (2014:142) describes how the pearl-rich coastal waters of northern Australia include the species *Pinctada maxima*, the oyster that produces the large and valuable 'South Seas Pearl'. Pearls and pearl shell were traded by Aboriginal coastal groups for Macassan iron, tobacco and alcohol. The Macassans would then trade the pearl shell to the Chinese for use in their arts and crafts industries. This may have been an item of interest for early visitors to Arnhem Land,
5. Turtle shell. The shell of the Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) was a popular item of trade across the Indian Ocean and this species is prevalent across the north of Australia. According to E. H. Warmington's *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 'tortoiseshell' is said to have come into general use by Romans for the veneering of furniture in the 1st Century CE. The best came chiefly from the eastern Indonesian archipelago especially between the east coast of Sulawesi and New Guinea. (1928: 166).
6. Hematite (Ironstone). Interest by Macassans in the coastal hematite outcrops of Arnhem Land has been noted in the literature (See Macknight 1976). In an earlier paper, I speculated that foreign

⁵ See Kleinen and Ossewijer (2010).

visitors to the coast may have used this resource in the production of iron tools, anchors and weaponry. (See McIntosh 2015). In the Wessels Islands, near to where the Kilwa coins were found, there are specific places associated with iron manufacture that correspond to sites with a rich abundance of the red rock that was in demand across the Indian Ocean.⁶

7. Timber and Palm Oil. Historian Campbell Macknight (1976) identified the cypress pine (*Callitris intratropica*) as an Arnhem Land resource that was traded internationally. The floor boards of some of the old houses of Makassar that I have visited are adorned with Arnhem Land cypress. The Screw Palm 'pandanus' was also a critical commodity centuries ago, before the advent of large-scale whaling, as a source of oil for lamps and candles. In addition, Australian Eucalyptus hardwoods were a useful raw material, and Sandalwood (*Santalum spp*), which has been sourced to Marchinbar in the Wessel Islands, was also targeted by traders, but there is no evidence that specific voyages were undertaken to seek out such resources. Rather, like shark fin or medicinal bezoar stones, they were a byproduct of visitation for other unspecified purposes.

Physical Evidence of Contact in North Australia

The following examples provide an overview of the physical evidence for the interaction of Australia's indigenous peoples and coastal visitors in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. The Past Masters website (www.pastmasters.net) created by the group's co-founder, heritage consultant Mike Owen, contains a number of references to other unexplained foreign objects found in the Northern Territory and beyond.

The Wessel Islands Coin Horde

The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the Kilwa coins are not in dispute. In early 1945, the late Maurice (Morry) Isenberg of the 312 Radar Unit was stationed at Marchinbar Island, in the northern part of the Wessels chain. Isenberg would spend his spare time fishing and bushwalking. One day, whilst fishing, he saw four green circular objects lying in the sand, about one meter below the high water mark. He picked them up and poked around in an area of about four square meters, finding five more. Having no interest in coins at the time, he put them in an airtight match tin; this went into his kit bag and returned with him to the mainland. (Freeman-Grenville 1984, Mira 1993:2) In 1979, Isenberg rediscovered the coins, cleaned them, and sought help in their identification. Through a series of hands the coins came into the possession of noted numismatist Bill Mira, who could easily identify the four V.O.C. (Dutch East India Company) coins with one dating back to 1690. For the other coins, however, he relied upon the diagnosis of specialists in numismatics from Brisbane (R. Domrow) and the British Museum (N.M. Lowick) in confirming an East African connection. The coins were then donated to the precursor of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, where today they lie in storage away from the public eye. The register of the Powerhouse Museum states that the Kilwa coins and the Dutch coins found by Isenberg on the Wessel Islands were deposited in two waves, hundreds of years apart, though this is not substantiated.

The Powerhouse Museum describes the five Kilwa coins as follows:

- N21359-5 Coin, Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa), Falus, copper alloy, Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan (c. AD 1294-1308)
- N21359-6 Coin, Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa), Falus, copper alloy, Sulaiman ibn al-Hasan (c. AD 1294-1308)
- N21359-7 Coin, Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa), Falus, copper alloy, 'Ali ibn al-Hasan (c. AD 1480-1482)
- N21359-8 Coin, Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa), Falus, copper alloy, 'Ali ibn al-Hasan (c. AD 1480-1482)
- N21359-9 Coin, Kilwa Sultanate (East Africa), Falus, copper alloy, Al Hasan ibn Sulaimam (c. AD 1482-1493).

⁶ An XRD (X-Ray Diffraction) analysis needs to be undertaken to determine the iron content of Arnhem Land hematite.



FIGURE 3. TWO OF THE FIVE KILWA COINS FOUND ON MARCHINBAR IN THE WESSEL ISLANDS.

The Kilwa coins were examined by two members of the Past Masters research team, well-known Australian numismatists Peter Lane, and also John Perkins from the United Kingdom. One of the foremost authorities on Kilwa and Kilwa coins, Perkins was able to provide the Powerhouse Museum with a revised estimate for the date of the coins from 1150-1330CE, 100-200 years older than previously considered. The names of two Kilwa sultans were inscribed upon the coins, namely Suliman ibn al-Hasan and Ali ibn al-Hasan.

All five Kilwa coins are almost identical in terms of condition, composition (copper alloy), weight, and therefore value. The four Dutch coins found in the vicinity of the Kilwa coins are of European origin and of somewhat earlier manufacture than other Dutch coins found in north Australia, the majority of which were minted in Batavia (Jakarta) The following detailed information on the mint locations and dates of each coin is found in the Powerhouse Museum files:

- N21359-1 Coin, Netherlands, Dutch East India Co., Doit, copper alloy, Gelderland Mint, 1690;
- N21359-2 Coin, Netherlands, Dutch East India Co., Doit, copper alloy, Zeeland Mint, 1724;
- N21359-3 Coin, Netherlands, Dutch East India Co., Doit, copper alloy, Zeeland Mint, 1784;
- N21359-4 Coin, Netherlands, Dutch East India Co., Liard, copper alloy, Liege Mint, 1745⁷

There is therefore a 300+ year gap between the latest of the Kilwa coins and the earliest of the Dutch coins. According to Perkins (pers. comm. 2015), it would have been unusual for Kilwa coins to have played a part in international trade activities as they were a very local phenomenon. Such coins are still regular surface finds along the Swahili coast and at some sites they can be found in abundance. It is possible, however, that it was the copper itself that was of value and in demand in international trading circles, especially in the spice trade, rather than the local value as ascribed to them in Kilwa, a point that I will return to later.

⁷ Feenstra (2014) describes how the Dutch East India Company (VOC) introduced 1.1 billion copper doits to Java as the economy in the East Indies shifted away from subsistence farming.

Wessel Islands Rock Art

One of the more startling finds of the preliminary expedition to the Wessel Islands was the series of rock art shelters with a range of red, yellow and white images depicting what appears to be waves of foreign visitation, including sailing ships and men with yellow trousers, large brimmed hats, and possibly carrying firearms. These are often superimposed on totemic images of various land and sea creatures, like bandicoots, crocodiles, whales and sharks, and also the two-headed snake linked to the sacred Dreaming narratives of this area.

There is also the 'Cave of the Crew' depicting a row of men with their arms akimbo or holding their hats in the air. Initial speculation was that this represented the crew of a Japanese pearling lugger, for such boats were common in these waters in the 1920s and 1930s. Our latest thought is that it is



FIGURE 4. ROCK ART AT JENSEN BAY, MARCHINBAR, WESSEL ISLANDS DEPICTING A SAILING CRAFT AND TOTEMS.



FIGURE 5. JENSEN BAY IMAGES OF HUMAN FIGURES, POSSIBLY JAPANESE, DATING FROM THE 1930S IF NOT EARLIER.

a representation of the crew of Mathew Flinders' 'Cumberland', which anchored on the southern portion of Marchinar in 1803.

The most significant find to date was at Cape Wessel, where a D-Stretch image of a very faded rock art image revealed an outrigger craft very similar to the Kora Kora of Indonesia's Maluku Province. This is the first evidence of non-Macassan and European culture contact in Arnhem Land. This vessel differs significantly from Macassan praus and provides the first solid evidence for the existence of the whale hunters from Yolngu mythology, known as the Wuramala and Papyili etc (who are linked to the Sama-Bajau or Sea Gypsies) in many of the sacred narratives. (See Wesley, McIntosh and Owen, et. al. Forthcoming).

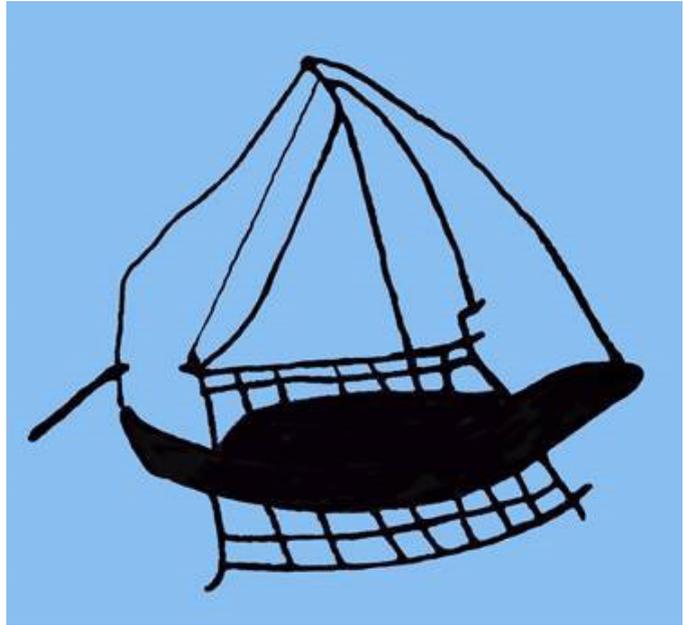


FIGURE 6. STYLIZED IMAGE OF A ROCK PAINTING OF AN OUTRIGGER SAILING VESSEL SIMILAR TO A KORA KORA FROM A ROCK SHELTER ON CAPE WESSEL.

A good number of the images in the rock shelters of the Wessel Islands appear to be linked to the mid-twentieth century and the Golpa clan leader Djingulul or members of his family. There are images of a tractor from the WW2 base located nearby, and also the schooner of the renowned US magician/entertainer John Calvert (See www.pastmasters.net). There are only a handful of sites in Australia with such an impressive record of the past inscribed in rock art,⁸ and mobilizing experts in the recording and deciphering of the images, in close collaboration with our Yolngu colleagues, may provide vital clues on the provenance of the Kilwa coins.

Cape Wessel Mortar and Pestle Sets

Near to where the Kora Kora rock art site is located on Cape Wessel, two mortar and pestle sets were found in the 1970s by a member of the Australian Navy. While such artefacts are found throughout South-East Asia, those of volcanic rock appear to originate in Halmahera in Indonesia's Maluku Province. While it is too early to link the rock art and the stone artefacts, there is good reason for such speculation; the Kora Kora is native to this part of the Indonesian archipelago. In this scenario, the coin deposition might be linked to the Sama Bajau or Sea Gypsies of the islands to Australia's north.

Dundee Beach Swivel Gun

In 2010 a young boy, Christopher Doukas, found a 107cm long bronze swivel gun buried in the sand at low tide at Dundee Beach, an few hours south of the Northern Territory capital of Darwin. There was considerable speculation on its significance for its resemblance to a 16th century Portuguese swivel gun was notable. Geochronologist and Past Master Matt Cupper from the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Melbourne, carefully removed sediment from within the gun barrel in order to determine how long the gun had been buried in the sand. Using optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating methods he was able to determine that it was deposited on the sea floor upwards of 300 years ago, making it one of the most significant historical artefacts ever found in Australia. Cupper also conducted a lead isotope assessment of a fragment of metal from within the bore of the gun and his findings were presented at a national conference

⁸ See for example, Bigourdan (2006) for examples of watercraft in rock art from Western Australia



FIGURE 7. ONE OF THE TWO MORTAR AND PESTLES FOUND AT CAPE WESSEL IN THE 1970s. INITIAL SPECULATION LINKS IT WITH HALMAHERA IN INDONESIA'S MALUKU PROVINCE.



FIGURE 8. THE AUTHOR WITH THE DUNDEE BEACH SWIVEL GUN IN DARWIN, 2013.

on Tropical Archaeology in Cairns in 2015. The sample was compared to some 2000 ore samples from the Mediterranean zone and it corresponded closest to samples from the Coto Laíquez mine near Huebro in Andalusia, Spain. At this stage we are of the view that while the metals can be sourced to Europe, the design of the gun, a prestige piece no doubt, represents a South-East Asian replica based on a Portuguese design. As this dating represents a period of time before the advent of Macassan trepanging, it is unknown who might be responsible, though slavers and brigands are not an unreasonable assumption.

Boustead Jar

In 1998 an earthenware jar now known as the Boustead Jar, was found at Shoal Bay near Darwin by local fisherman Billy Boustead. It was partially exposed on a sand ridge behind a belt of mangroves. Initial speculation by staff of the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery was that it was probably of Spanish or Portuguese origin. In 2003 the jar was dated using thermo-luminescence at

the University of Wollongong School of Geoscience at 490+/- 80 years BP. Three possible scenarios have been suggested for the presence of the jar: European transport, South-East Asian mariners, or drift voyaging (See De La Rue 2006). The date of the pot coincides with the early days of the Portuguese presence in Malacca in 1509, Solor Islands in 1511 and hence further east into the Maluku province and the Spice Islands. The Past Masters are currently undertaking further tests on the jar and are in communication with specialist scholars in Portugal to help determine its provenance.

Fish Traps, Weirs and Ponds

The Past Masters have identified a rare fish trap in the Wessel Islands whose location coincides with the site of a Macassan shipwreck circa 1800. British explorer Matthew Flinders was on his return journey to England after circumnavigating Australia when, at the southern end of Marchinbar Island, he encountered the remains of a prau. He cut it up for firewood and provided gifts to the local Aborigines, whom he identified as the 'Australians' - the first ever use of this term. It is probable that the thirty plus shipwrecked South-East Asians built this fish trap in cooperation with Yolngu to meet their dietary needs as they awaited rescue.

Further west along the north Australian coast there is an ambiguous weir-type structure at the Aboriginal settlement of Goulburn Island (Warruwi). Graeme Dobson (2014) makes this site the focus of his doctoral dissertation examining the possibilities of aquaculture being practiced by foreigners in Australian waters in the pre-colonial period. This stone pond may have once functioned as a fish trap but there is no associated Aboriginal oral history or mythology relating to its origins. It is also possible that this 'trap' may be a natural phenomenon.

Pre-Macassans in Western Arnhem Land

The western Arnhem Land-focused work of archaeologist Daryl Wesley and his colleagues has opened up the possibility of international connections that pre-date the arrival of Macassan trepangers, perhaps as early as the 1600s. Evidence, in this instance, is to be found in the Aboriginal rock art of the Wellington Ranges which show strong evidence of Asian and European contact. Like the Wessels, this area has extensive and diverse indigenous rock art.



FIGURE 9. BILLY BOUSTEAD AND TIM STONE, A GEOMORPHOLOGIST WITH THE PAST MASTERS, INSPECT THE BOUSTEAD JAR IN 2014.

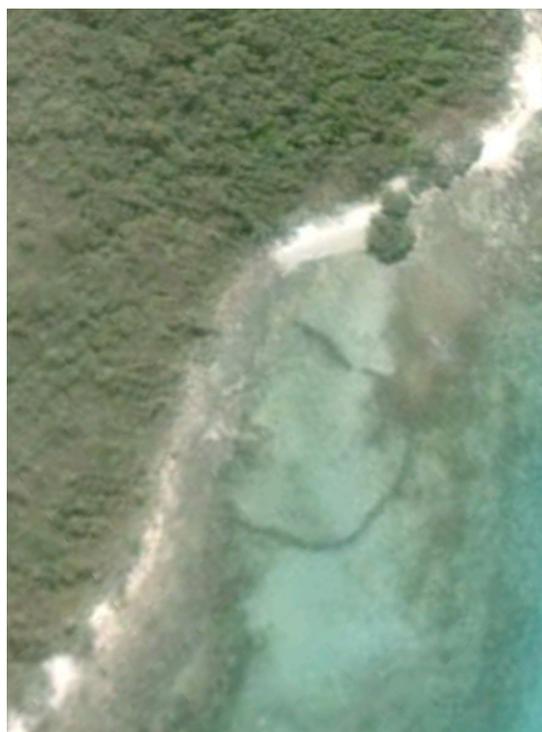


FIGURE 10. THE WESSEL ISLANDS FISH TRAP MAY HAVE BEEN BUILT BY MACASSAN TREPANGERS IN COLLABORATION WITH YOLNGU IN THE EARLY 1800S.



FIGURE 11. AN EXAMPLE OF THE INCORPORATION OF FOREIGN BEADS INTO ABORIGINAL (BINIJ) MATERIAL CULTURE IN WESTERN ARNHEM LAND (WESLEY AND LITSTER 2015) AN1163865001 COURTESY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

At several sites figures made of beeswax are superimposed over the artwork providing an opportunity for radiocarbon dating. One such dating of the beeswax associated with a drawing of a south-east Asian sea craft indicates that this particular image dates to before AD 1664 and is perhaps much older (See Tacon et al 2010). Additionally, Wesley in an award-winning paper, described how a recovered assemblage of beads from six archaeological sites in the Wellington Range supports the case for the introduction of these items in the pre-Mission era context (Wesley and Litster, 2015).

Chinese Connections

Despite the sensational claims of an early Chinese discovery of Australia (See Menzies 2003, Se-Kee 1987), the evidence is very slim. There is no recorded oral history from northern Australian Aboriginal clans that is suggestive of visits by explorer-traders such as Zheng He during the Ming Dynasty. The claim by Gavin Menzies that the Bayini narratives of the Yolngu are linked to Chinese visitation is without foundation (See McIntosh 2015, and later). Only the discovery of an antique Chinese stone statue among the roots of a banyan tree in the city of Darwin in 1870 hints at early Chinese contacts. There is also an unusual painting of a watercraft from the Mt Borradaile area of western Arnhem Land that resembles a Chinese ship but further research is required before any definitive linkage is made. (Pers. comm. D. Wesley, 2016) The Past Masters team did locate an eighteenth century Chinese Qing Dynasty cash coin in 2014 from the southern-most Wessel Island (Elcho Island) during a heritage training session with Yolngu community members. This find was, however, in the vicinity of a Macassan trepang processing



FIGURE 12. THE 18TH CENTURY CHINESE CASH COIN FOUND IN 2014 BY NENAD LONIC OF THE PAST MASTERS AT THE YOLNGU COMMUNITY OF GALIWIN'KU ON ELCHO ISLAND, THE SOUTHERNMOST OF THE WESSELS CHAIN.

site and is probably not linked to the visits of Chinese. Trepong would be traded with the Chinese upon the visitors' return to Makassar (Hermes et al 2014, Macknight 1976).

Outsiders in Yolngu Oral history and Mythology

The Yolngu of north-east Arnhem Land, alone among the peoples of north Australia, developed a very elaborate mythology describing the reasons behind the presence of non-Aborigines in their midst, and also strict laws on how they should interact with them (See McIntosh 2015). The Yolngu have a very extensive oral history pertaining to contact, and this has been a vital resource in the search for information on the Kilwa coins.

From within the Yolngu historical lens, a range of visitors are identifiable, including:

1. Eastern Indonesians and others who were accidentally blown southwards in cyclones or tropical storms. Funerary canoes from the Fly River in Papua New Guinea - which are burned from the inside - occasionally drift onto Arnhem Land shores and are believed by Yolngu to have been sent by the people from the 'land of the dead'. In addition, canoes cut from a single log, and patched over the years with the rubber from flip-flops, are regularly deposited on the beaches, and may originate anywhere from Maluku to Papua New Guinea, or the Torres Strait. Yolngu would refer to the people associated with their manufacture as 'universal travelers'. Their sailing canoes are known as Djulpan, a reference to the stars of Orion's belt which is a canoe in Yolngu mythology.
2. Yolngu oral history identifies various traditional whale hunters who are traceable to Sea Gypsy (or Sama Bajau) populations in various parts of the Indonesian archipelago including the Sulu Sea.⁹ While these Wurumala, Turijene, Papayili, Djamalapu and Gelurru peoples feature in Yolngu myths about the 'land of the dead' they are also said to be real people who have been visiting Arnhem Land since time immemorial. The discovery of the Kora Kora rock art on the Wessel Islands provides some support for this stance. Research indicates that the sea gypsies also worked for Macassan trepong fishermen as divers (See McIntosh 2015). Names associated with their homelands are many, and include actual localities, such as Banda, Danimba (Tanimbar) and Warru (Aru).

⁹ Today, the practice of indigenous Indonesian whale hunting is limited to the Solor Islands, the place where the Portuguese first established themselves in the region in the early 1500s.

3. Yolngu recall in considerable detail the personal names of specific leaders from a period which is associated with the aforementioned Gowa-Tallo (Macassan) Arnhem Land retreat from the Dutch invaders in the late 1660s. As I have documented elsewhere, these men and women established a major encampment on Cape Wilberforce in north-east Arnhem Land and the relationships developed with Yolngu were to have lasting impacts (See McIntosh 2015). This period of contact is associated with iron manufacture from Arnhem Land's abundant red rock (hematite), and also the introduction of aspects of Islam into Aboriginal religious practice.
4. Yolngu oral history makes reference to men with 'hats of mirror' landing on the coast, a probable reference to iron armour, which is suggestive of Portuguese or Dutch explorers. There are also sites linked to the discharge of firearms or cannon in an island chain adjacent to the Wessels known as the English Company's Islands. The associated narratives speak of atrocities, kidnap and possibly slavery.
5. Finally, the landscape of north-east Arnhem Land includes references to specific individuals whose presence is recorded in Yolngu songs and stories but whose origins are unknown. Just north of Elcho Island, part of the Wessels chain, for example, is a reef known as Djiturrk Wangayin, meaning 'Djiturrk cries out.' It was here that a south-East Asian fishermen named Djiturrk caught his foot in the reef and drowned with the rising tide. Yolngu who knew him, lived with him, traded with him, and heard his cries for help, could do nothing. This place remains off-limits for fishing today, especially for non-Aborigines. There are many other named outsiders in Yolngu oral history, young and old, people like Budiman, who had been shipwrecked in Arnhem Land and lived out his life on the Australian coastline, who I will introduce later. Did the Kilwa coins belong to one of them?

There is also a wealth of Yolngu mythology associated with outsiders, most of it focused on the rejection of their advances and influences. The most famous of these narratives are associated with the 'Dreaming' entities Birrinydji and Bayini, and these include plentiful references to the Portuguese and Dutch trading empires, the international trading ports of Banda and Makassar, and of the spread of Islam across the archipelago. These accounts tell of the profound impact of South-East Asians and others on Aboriginal lifeways. In the sacred Yolngu myths of the 'Dreaming' or traditional Aboriginal religion, at the beginning of time the Yolngu were white and rich. Through misadventure and ill fortune, however, the tides were turned on them, and the First Australians became black and poor. The Birrinydji narratives emerged to explain the huge wealth and power disparity between Yolngu and the outsiders, and they embody a future vision of that affluence and influence being theirs once

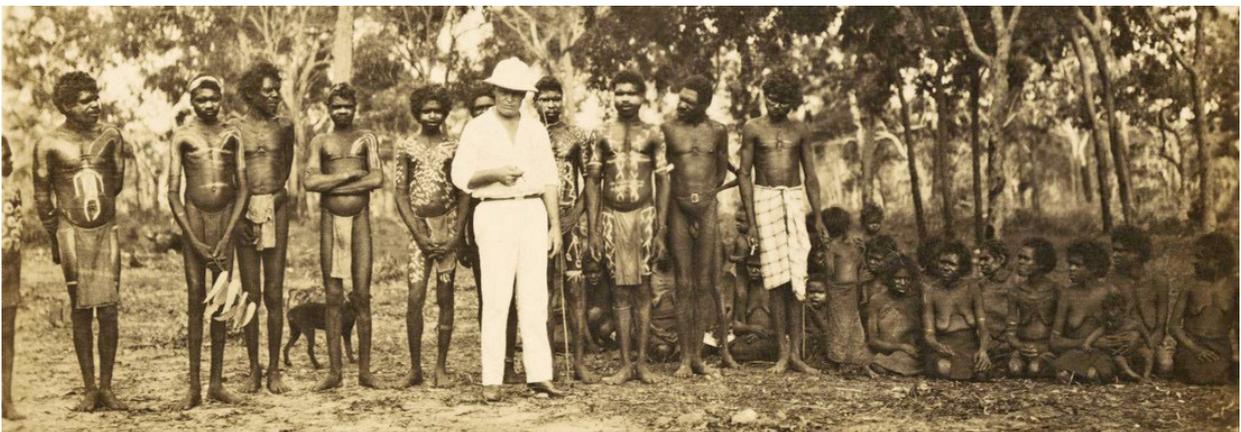


FIGURE 13. IN THIS 1923 ELCHO ISLAND PHOTO, A VISITING JOURNALIST STANDS WITH YOLNGU WOMEN AND MEN 'DRESSED' FOR THE OCCASION. ON THE FAR LEFT IS DJINGULUL OF THE GOLPA CLAN. HIS BODY PAINTING, INSPIRED BY BIRRINYDJI MYTHOLOGY, DEPICTS A 'WHITE MAN'. THIS IS AN IMAGE COMMON IN CAVE PAINTINGS IN THE WESSELS.

again. The Bayini narratives, by contrast, emerged because of the large number of children born from liaisons between South-East Asian men and Aboriginal women, and the angst and turmoil that ensued. In the 1980s, Yolngu elders would share stories about how they were descended from a golden-skinned foreign woman named Bayini who lived "for the Yolngu". Today, in certain localities, the Bayini myths of old have been transformed into amorphous tales about a stranded white Macassan slave woman who died at sea tied to an anchor but whose spirit still haunts the land. These curious new iterations nevertheless still reinforce the older view that all peoples, regardless of skin colour, owe their allegiance to Aboriginal land and to the spiritual entities that inhabit it. The Wessel Islands, including sites in close proximity to where the Kilwa coins were found, are very much linked to the sacred Birrinydji and Bayini Dreaming narratives.

Kilwa Coin Hypotheses

In the 12th century CE, when the first of the Wessels' Kilwa coins were being minted, the Wessels Islands were populated by a range of Yolngu clans but none have survived to this day. The vast majority of the lower Wessel Islands population became extinct in the early 1900s. This extinction has been linked to a smallpox epidemic that was probably introduced by Macassans or Europeans. There is also the suggestion that the high death rate was the result of an influenza epidemic - there was a high mortality across Aboriginal Australia around this time - but the descriptions handed down to the present of the afflicted as dying from a 'scratching disease' points to smallpox. (See Campbell, 2002; Warren, 2014:75-77)

The area where the Kilwa coins were found, on the island of Marchinbar, was depopulated well before this, probably in the mid-1800s, and there are very few clues as to the fate of clans such as the Wurambil Golpa, the 'rainbow people,' apart from oblique references in oral history to how an evil spirit (*Wurramu* or *Crokman*) descended upon them from above, turning them against each other. (See McIntosh 2015) The estates of the various clans and related traditional paraphernalia have either been passed on to other groups on the mainland or are still in the process of succession, but no-one now lives on the islands on a permanent basis. The old camp sites are still visible especially on the largest of the Wessel Islands, Marchinbar, and there is evidence of the trade in items such as edge-ground hammer stones from the mainland, over 100km away. The current traditional Aboriginal owners, and spokespeople for the islands, the Warramiri and Golpa clans, and a specific lineage of the Galpu clan, are strong supporters of a view of the past that links them over the millennia to the innumerable peoples of the Indian Ocean.

In the 1980s and 1990s, I worked with the traditional owner of the Warramiri clan, the late David Burrumarra M.B.E., who claimed seniority over the entire island chain. On one occasion he spoke of how his clan history speaks of so many distant places across the seas, and how many of his lineage wondered if they might have come from there. With Burrumarra, I recorded many contact narratives, and these have guided the Past Masters' search for clues surrounding the Kilwa coin deposit. Those narratives saw our team anchored in 2013 in a bay where, at the 'beginning of time,' a harpooned whale had dragged a large foreign sailing canoe on to the Australian coast. Would this site provide us with a clue to the Kilwa coins? Then there was a beach where the aforementioned men dressed in 'hats of mirror' had come ashore. Were they Portuguese freebooters, the ones who had looted and burned Kilwa in 1505? We also visited the place where the mysterious 'flying fox' people, in partnership with Yolngu, had made iron implements, anchors, knives and axes, from the commonly found coastal red ironstone. Did they leave the Kilwa coins behind when they left Arnhem Land?

With this rich background of ethnographic and historical data, expedition members and our Yolngu colleagues developed many hypotheses to explain the presence of the Kilwa coins in Arnhem Land.



FIGURE 14. LARGE QUANTITIES OF EASILY ACCESSIBLE HEMATITE OR IRONSTONE LIE ALONG THE WESSELS COASTLINE. THIS SITE ON CAPE WESSEL IS KNOWN BY YOLNGU AS YIKINGA, MEANING KNIFE DREAMING.

Macassan fishermen, for example, developed close working ties with the Aboriginal land owners over many generations. Did they offer up the Kilwa and Dutch coins to the Yolngu for access to their land and sea resources? Yolngu are still very familiar with the location of many of these Macassan sites, often marked by tamarind trees and the stone lines that supported metal trepang cooking pots. While the Wessel Islands were not a source of the trepang species desired by Macassans for their Chinese clients, the large freshwater lake on Marchinbar would have been an ideal reconnoitering point for the Macassan fleet upon entry or departure from the Australian coast. It would have been a significant resource for traders, explorers, or any ship's crew making landfall.

Considerable work has been done in Australia documenting the voyages of Dutch explorers like Abel Tasman. Unwarranted skepticism, however, surrounds the idea of a 'secret' Portuguese discovery of Australia, despite the fact that they controlled the waters to the immediate north of Australia from the early 1500s, and had major forts in Makassar, Ambon and Aru. There are also interesting studies on old trading settlements in Aru that predate the Portuguese and may be implicated in the Kilwa story. (See O'Connor, Spriggs, et al. 2006) So while the idea of Kilwa seafarers being active in north Australia is not viewed as feasible, an indirect link via the Portuguese or others is very much worthy of investigation.

We must, however, be cautious in drawing any conclusions. Coins could easily move around the world without any connection to their producers. Sri Lanka, for example, utilized imitation Roman coins for a number of centuries. In the nineteenth century, Mexican silver dollars from the New World were the currency of the China trade, with prices often quoted in 'Dollars MEX' or simply 'MEX'. Some possible examples of the movement of Kilwa coins include:

1. The Chinese expeditions led by the Muslim eunuch Zheng He in the 1400s had touched upon the Swahili coast at Malindi in Kenya and perhaps also Kilwa. Gifts of coins were known to have been made by the Swahili Sultans to the Chinese emperor, so could some of these have found their way down into south-east Asia and eventually Australia?
2. Arabs had been trading along the 'Zanj Coast' from the Horn of Africa to Mozambique from the beginning of the first millennium and were also well established in Asian ports like Cambay and Calicut in India and in Sumatra, and by some anecdotal accounts also Guangzhou in China by the ninth century CE, though the extent of their presence in China is subject to debate. (See Haw, 2017) As mentioned earlier, the Tang Dynasty era shipwreck at Belitung Island is testimony to early Arab/Indian/South-East Asian mobility in the international waters to the north of Australia.
3. The former colony of Tanganyika (which included Kilwa) was a German possession until after World War One, and so was New Guinea, and there was communication between them. Could Kilwa coins have come to Australia via this connection?

There are still other possibilities. Some members of the research team believed that the coins might have been talisman - good luck charms - that were carried by Macassan or other South-East Asian seafarers. Another explanation is that the coins represented the private property and worldly wealth of the Indonesian shipwreck survivors like Budiman, who lived out his life on the Wessel Islands in the late 1800s near to where the coins were found (See McIntosh 2015). A close friend of the Yolngu, Budiman is remembered very fondly. His name has been handed down through the generations and the whale songs he composed were still being sung by Yolngu around the campfires when I lived at Elcho Island in the 1980s. Another idea is that the coins were of value only for their trade value as copper, and not for their Kilwa inscriptions. Such copper would be used in transactions. It would be weighed and then exchanged for items like pepper at the various emporiums across the Indian Ocean.

Many hundreds of Yolngu traveled aboard the praus bound for Makassar in the 18th and 19th centuries and they may have brought these coins home as earned wages or as mementos. Their descendants also wonder if there were even earlier connections, with Yolngu traveling with pre-Macassans as either crew members (voluntary or forced), passengers, slaves, or simply objects of curiosity. Such talk is not farfetched. As mentioned previously, when the Dutch defeated the Gowa fleet at Makassar in 1667, legend describes the retreat of the Indonesians to the northern Australian coast. In Campbell Macknight's 1976 book, 'The Voyage to Marege', one of the last Macassan trepangers in Australia recollected the story of his ancestors' stay in north-east Arnhem Land, but there are few details and apparently no records in Dutch sources. The Gowa/Tallo leaders of Makassar were in hiding. Yolngu oral history, on the other hand, describes in impressive detail the many fine houses that were constructed on remote Australian shores, the boat-building, iron-furnaces, and pottery manufacture. (McIntosh 2015) My research indicates that the most likely location of the settlement is a place called Dholtji on Cape Wilberforce. Smaller reconnaissance bases were located in the Wessels Islands, which is just to the north-west of Dholtji, and to the south at Port Bradshaw. It is therefore not unusual to expect that items of a special historical character - like the Kilwa coins - would be found in association with one of these places.

Unscheduled visitors might have also been the source of the copper coins. An eye witness account by the German Hans Mayr of the sacking of Kilwa by the Portuguese in 1505 CE noted that the Kilwa people had copper coins similar to the Portuguese ceptis, four being equally to one real (the unit of currency in Portugal from 1430-1911). It is evident that Portuguese and Kilwa coins circulated at parity and both had an extremely long circulating life especially in island South East Asia where minting currency would have been limited. According to Daryl Wesley (Pers. comm. 2016), in early colonial Australia keeping enough currency in the new colony was difficult with not enough cash coins being issued to the authorities. This may also have been an issue in the East Indies in the colonial period, and would have required as many coins as possible to remain in circulation, even the thin and fragile Kilwa currency. (See Feenstra 2014)

In my preferred scenario, if the coins were not deposited by the Sama Bajau (Sea Gypsies), then it was probably brigands who had taken refuge in the remote Wessels after attacking and looting ships bound to and from the Spice Islands. In 1791, convicts Mary and William Bryant and two others escaped from the penal settlement in Sydney Cove in an open boat and headed for Timor and what they hoped was freedom. This was the first successful escape from the British penal settlement. After passing through Torres Strait the convicts tracked west towards the Wessel Islands. On attempting to land on Cape Wessel they were chased by an unknown group of South-East Asian pirates and fled to deeper waters. As I mentioned earlier, there was no trepang of commercial interest in the Wessel Island chain leading us to the view that the people that the Bryant's encountered were on nefarious business. North Australia was a coast of adventure, too far away and too dangerous for any serious contemplation of foreign settlement, until the arrival of the British in the early 1800s. But it was not unknown or unvisited.

My personal view is that the Kilwa and Dutch coins were both deposited at the same time, after the date of the latest Dutch coin (1784CE) and were not the result of two separate historical incidents as some contend (See Mira 1993). On the preponderance of evidence, my contention is that if these are not a casual loss linked to the presence of slavers or brigands, or non-Macassan fisherman from the Banda Sea region, then they were probably introduced by sailors from Makassar in the first wave of trepanging and exploration in north-east Arnhem Land in the 1780s. There were large numbers of ships and sailors in the waters to the north of Australia by this time, and these coins may have been given as gifts to the Yolngu land owners of the fresh water lagoon in Jensen Bay on Marchinbar. The coins, and whatever other gifts were bestowed upon the Yolngu, would have been perceived as payment for access to their land and resources. The Macassans, if they were the responsible vector, would have hoped that it would cement a relationship that would last for many years.

Discussion and Next Steps

When a new archaeological idea or hypothesis is at odds with prevailing views, it is readily discredited. This is especially so in Australia where little credence is given to Aboriginal oral history and mythology as sources of information about the past. (See Wylie 1989) The narrow vision of Australian history that situates the island continent within the sphere of British influence rather than South-East Asia has obscured the ability of researchers to comprehend the significance of the Kilwa find. This was a mindset that insinuated that Indigenous Australians had little or no capacity to conduct trade or to otherwise entertain relations with non-Aboriginal others. Such was the case with the 1945 Kilwa coins discovery. Maurice Isenberg had the coins identified in the late 1970s with the assistance of noted numismatist Bill Mira. Soon thereafter, the coins were donated to the Powerhouse Museum where they lay outside the public gaze, the sole internet reference incorrectly labeling the African and Dutch coins – an error that persisted until quite recently. Former museum director, the late Pat Boland, unsuccessfully attempted to mount an expedition to the Wessel Islands in the 1980s to try and unravel the mystery of their deposition. Similarly, in the 1990s, Yolngu leader David Burrumarra and I sought funds to undertake a survey of sites of mythological and historical significance on the Wessels – including the coin find site – but there was little interest from funding agencies. The idea that the Arnhem Land coast might have been connected in some fashion to the Maritime Silk Road was unfathomable, even heretical, to the orthodoxy, and dismissed as a hoax. The Captain Cook-centred view of Australian history that prioritized English (and certain Dutch) discoveries was still very much in vogue.

How times have changed! A press release from Indiana University, where I am based, describing the circumstances in which ancient African coins were found near a far-flung Australian World War Two base, went viral on the internet. Expressions of interest for partnership came from television and documentary producers and journalists from all corners of the globe. Funders were intrigued by the idea of re-writing Australian history and were willing to support the expedition and its goal of putting to bed the outdated myth of Australia's isolation.

Apart from seed money from Australian Geographic, the Past Masters expedition attracted funding from a range of institutions including the Swiss Ubuntu Foundation (that facilitated the Aboriginal training workshops), the Chicago/Adelaide-based Minelab, one of the premier metal-detecting companies in the world, and Pacific Aluminium, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, which oversees the Gove bauxite mine in north-east Arnhem Land. Additional support was received from the Pan-Asia Institute, a collaboration between Indiana University and the Australian National University, and from a large number of individuals through our crowdfunding efforts.

We are now in the process of planning for the second phase of field work. Apart from exploring the possibility of shipwrecks as a cause of the coin deposition, and excavation at key sites associated with iron manufacture, our priority will be the documentation, dating and interpreting of the unique rock art we encountered. Totemic images of snakes, whales, bandicoots, and hand stencils, have been superimposed with paintings depicting what appears to be waves of foreign contact, including a variety of sailing ships and sailors. Working hand-in-hand with the Yolngu traditional owners, sea rangers, and our team of experts and enthusiasts, the answers to the mystery of the Kilwa coins will continue to be explored.

We face a number of challenges. The destructive force of recent tropical cyclones which tore across the Wessel Islands has profoundly disturbed ancient and more recent habitation areas, making site analysis more complex. The rock art also shows serious signs of deterioration since I first witnessed some of the caves in the late 1980s. Protection of the art work needs to be prioritized, but we also have to contend with the impact of looters. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, a noted Australian naturalist publicly admitted to plundering painted Aboriginal skulls from caves in the Wessel Islands. Yolngu land owners seek the immediate return of these and related stolen items of historical and cultural significance, for reburial.

In cooperation with Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and experts at the Maritime Museum of Western Australia, we are also in the process of conducting scientific tests on the Kilwa and Dutch coins to try and determine how long they had been exposed to saltwater. At present it appears that the coins do not have a similar deposition history; unlike the Kilwa coins, the younger Dutch coins show signs extensive wear on both sides. Further testing of both sets of coins, and other Kilwa and Dutch specimens, might help determine whether a shipwreck or shipwrecks, or other processes, are connected with their deposition.

The Past Masters advocate strongly for the long term protection of the Wessel Islands as an Indigenous Protected Area under the Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act. These majestic islands, which are freehold land held by the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Trust, are already under consideration as a conservation zone. All the necessary preconditions for recognition are present: unique natural beauty, sites of major Aboriginal cultural and historical significance, ten threatened or endangered natural species including the Golden Bandicoot and the Northern Quoll, and the remains of a World War 2 outpost. The islands also support many indigenous uses, from conservation, recreation, tourism, and commercial fishing. It is time for the homeland of 'the Australians' to be recognized as being an integral part of Australia's national patrimony.

Even at this early stage of our deliberations it is evident that the idea that Australia lay isolated in the great southern ocean, hidden from the rest of the world until Europeans could liberate the continent from its seclusion, is an anachronism. It is a relic of the mindset that perpetrated, and still perpetuates, the myth of terra nullius, or the 'land without people'. The doyen of Australian archaeology, John Mulvaney, opined in 1969 of a need to change the emphasis from the conventional view of how and why Australia was 'discovered' to an assumption that evidence of earlier discoveries will be forthcoming. With the Kilwa coins, and a growing number of historic finds across northern Australia, we have such evidence.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Curtis, 2015. China's Long History in Africa. *New African* March 11.
- Agius, D.A. 2013. 'Ships that sailed the Red Sea in medieval and early modern Islam. Perception and reception. In V. Porter and L. Saif, eds. *The Hajj. Collected Essays*. British Museum Press, London pp. 84-96.
- Allen, J.D.V. 1993. *Swahili Origins. Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon*. Ohio University Press, Athens.
- Bellina, B. 2014 Maritime Silk Roads' Ornament Industries: Socio-political Practices and Cultural Transfers in the South China Sea. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 24(3), pp. 345-377.
- Bellina, B. and Glover, I. 2004 The Archaeology of Early Contact with India and the Mediterranean World, From the Fourth Century BC to the Fourth Century AD. In *Southeast Asia: From Prehistory to History*, edited by I. Glover and P. Bellwood, pp. 68-88. Routledge, New York.
- Bigourdan, N. 2006. Aboriginal Watercraft Depictions in Western Australia. Report. Department of Marine Archaeology, Western Australian Museum. No. 216.
- Campbell, J. 2002. *Invisible Invaders. Smallpox and other Diseases in Aboriginal Australia 1780-1880*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Corteseo, A., 2011. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires, 1512-1515*. Hakluyt Society, London.
- Daily Telegraph, 2016. 'Whitewash: UNSW Rewrites the History Books to State Cook 'Invaded' Australia.' March 30, p.1.
- De La Rue, C. 2006. The Boustead Jar: A possible Portuguese Connection to north Australia. Newsletter of the Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology Inc. Vol. 36(4). pp. 8-9.
- Dobson, Graeme, 2014. *Pre-European Aquaculture in Northern Australia*. PhD Thesis, Australian National University.
- Ellen, R. 2003. On the edge of the Banda zone: past and present in the social organization of a Moluccan trading network. University of Hawai'i Press, Hawai'i.
- Feenstra, A. 2014. Dutch Coins for Asian Growth. VOC-Duiten to Assess Java's Deep Monetisation and Economic Growth. *Tijdschrift voor Sociale En Economische Geschiedenis* Vol. 11(3) pp. 153-183.
- Fredericksen, C. 2000. Capitalism, colonialism and seaborne power in Maluku: Prospects for an historical archaeology of the spice trade. *The Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Maritime Archaeology*, Vol. 24 pp. 27-34.
- Freeman-Grenville, G.S.P., 'From Africa to Australia: From Africa to Australia: A Find of Coins from Kilwa, Tanzania, and from the Netherlands, in the Wessel Islands'. Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Indian Ocean Studies. Perth, W.A. 5-12 December 1984.
- Ganter, R. 2006. *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia*. University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.
- Goitein S.D. and Friedman, M.A. 2008. *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza*. Brill, Leiden.
- Guy, J. 2010. Rare and Strange Goods: International Trade in Ninth-Century Asia. In *Shipwrecked. Tang treasures and monsoon winds. Exhibition Catalogue*. Smithsonian Museum. Washinton D.C.
- Hall, R. 1998. *Empires of the Monsoon. A history of the Indian Ocean and its invaders*. Harper Collins, New York.
- Haw, S. G. 2017. 'The Maritime Routes Between China and the Indian Ocean During the Second to Ninth Centuries CE.' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. 27 (1) pp. 53-81.
- Hermes, M., Lane, P., Lonic, N., & McIntosh I.S. 2014. The discovery of an eighteenth century Chinese cash coin on Elcho Island, Northern Territory. *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia*. Vol. 25 pp.47-54.
- Hanna, W.A. 1991. *Indonesian Banda: Colonialism and its aftermath in the Nutmeg Islands*. Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya, Banda Naira.
- Harland, J. 1985. *Seamanship in the Age of Sail: An Account of the Shiphandling of the Sailing Man-of-war, 1600-1860*. Bloomsbury, London.

- Hourani G.F. *Arab Seafaring*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Kleinen J. and Ossewijer M. (eds.) 2010, *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. IIAS/ISEAS Series on Maritime Issues and Piracy in Asia, Singapore.
- Lape, P.V. 2003. A highway and a crossroads: Island Southeast Asia and culture contact archaeology. *Archaeology in Oceania* Vol 38 pp. 102-109.
- Lape, P.V. 2000. Political dynamics and religious change in the late pre-colonial Banda Islands, East Indonesia. *World Archaeology* Vol. 32(1) pp. 138-155.
- Liu, W., 2014. The Chinese historical recordings about Africa and related questions, before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Paper presented at the conference 'Exploring China's Early Links to Africa.' Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 2014.
- Macknight, C.C., 1976. *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Macknight, C.C., 2011. 'The View from Marege: Australian Knowledge of Makassar and the Impact of the Trepang Industry across Two Centuries', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 35 pp. 121-143.
- McIntosh, I.S. 2015. *Between Two Worlds. Essays in Honour of the Visionary Aboriginal leader David Burrumarra M.B.E. Dog Ear*, Indianapolis.
- McIntosh, I.S. 2014a. Australia's Ancient African Coins. *Australasian Science*. May, pp 16-19.
- McIntosh, I.S. 2014b. Finding the unexpected in the search for the extraordinary. *Australian Folklore*. Vol. 28 pp. 56-62.
- McIntosh, I.S. 2013. Life and Death on the Wessel Islands: The Case of Australia's Mysterious African Coin Cache. *Australian Folklore*. Vol. 27 pp. 9-26.
- Menzies, G., 2003. *1421: The Year China Discovered America*. Bantam Press, London.
- Mira, W.J.D., 1993. 'A Dutch and East African Coin 'Find' from Northern Australia', *The Journal of the Australian Numismatic Society*, pp. 1-12.
- O'Connor, S, McWilliam A., Fenner, J.N. Brockwell, S. 2014. Examining the Origin of Fortifications in East Timor: Social and Environmental Factors. *The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology*. 7 (2) pp. 200-218.
- O'Connor, S., Spriggs, M., Veth, P. et al. 2006. 'The Ujir Site: An Early Historic Maritime Settlement in Northern Aru.' In O'Connor, S., Spriggs, M., Veth, P. et al. eds. *The Archaeology of the Aru Islands, Eastern Indonesia*. ANU E-Press, Canberra.
- Parker, P. 2012 *The Great Trade Routes: A History of Cargoes and Commerce over Land and Sea*. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis.
- Phillips, J. 2014. Suakin and China. Paper presented at the conference 'Exploring China's Early Links to Africa.' Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Pollard, E., Bates, R., Ichumbaki, E, and Bitu, C. 2016. Shipwreck Evidence from Kilwa, Tanzania. *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*. Vol 45(2) pp. 352-369.
- Rosser, W.H. and Imray, J.F., 1867. *The Seaman's Guide to the Navigation of the Indian Ocean and China Sea; including a description of the winds, storms, tides, currents, &c; sailing directions; a full account of all the islands; with notes on making passages during the different seasons: with numerous illustrations, charts, and plans*. James Imray and Son, London.
- See-Kee, C. 1987. Chinese contribution to early Darwin. *Occasional Papers No. 3*. Northern Territory Library Service, Darwin.
- Tacon, P, May, S, Fallon, S M. Travers, D. Wesley, and R. Lamilami. 2010. A Minimum Age for Early Depictions of Southeast Asian Praus in the Rock Art of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. *Australian Archaeology*. Vol. 71 pp. 1-10.
- Wang G., 1958. 'The Nanhai Trade: A Study of the Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol 31(2) pp. 1-135.

- Warmington, E.H. 1928. *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Warren, C. 2014. Smallpox at Sydney Cove – who, when, why? *Journal of Australian Studies* Vol 38(1) pp. 68-86.
- Wesley, D., O'Connor, S. & Fenner, J.N. 2016. Reevaluating the timing of the Indonesian trepan industry in north-west Arnhem Land: Chronological investigations at Malara (Anuru Bay A). *Archaeology in Oceania*, pp. 1-27.
- Wesley, D. and Litster, M. 2015. 'Small, individually nondescript and easily overlooked': Contact beads from northwest Arnhem Land in an Indigenous-Macassan-European hybrid economy. *Australian Archaeology* Vol. 80. June. 1-16.
- Wesley, D., McIntosh, I.S., Owen, M. et al. Forthcoming. Non-Macassan Double-Outrigger Sailing Vessel in the Painted Rock Art of Rimbija Island, North Australia.
- Wylie, A. 1989. Archaeological Cables and Tacking: The Implications of Practice for Bernstein's 'Options Beyond Objectivism and Relativism.' *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* Vol. 19 pp. 1-18.
- Yang, Bin. 2004 Horses, Silver, and Cowries: Yunnan in Global Perspective. *Journal of World History* Vol 15(3) pp. 281-322.