

MAUSAM  
Maritime Cultural Landscapes  
Across the Indian Ocean





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## Maritime Cultural Landscapes Across the Indian Ocean

Edited by  
Himanshu Prabha Ray

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MAUSAM: MARITIME CULTURAL LANDSCAPES ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN

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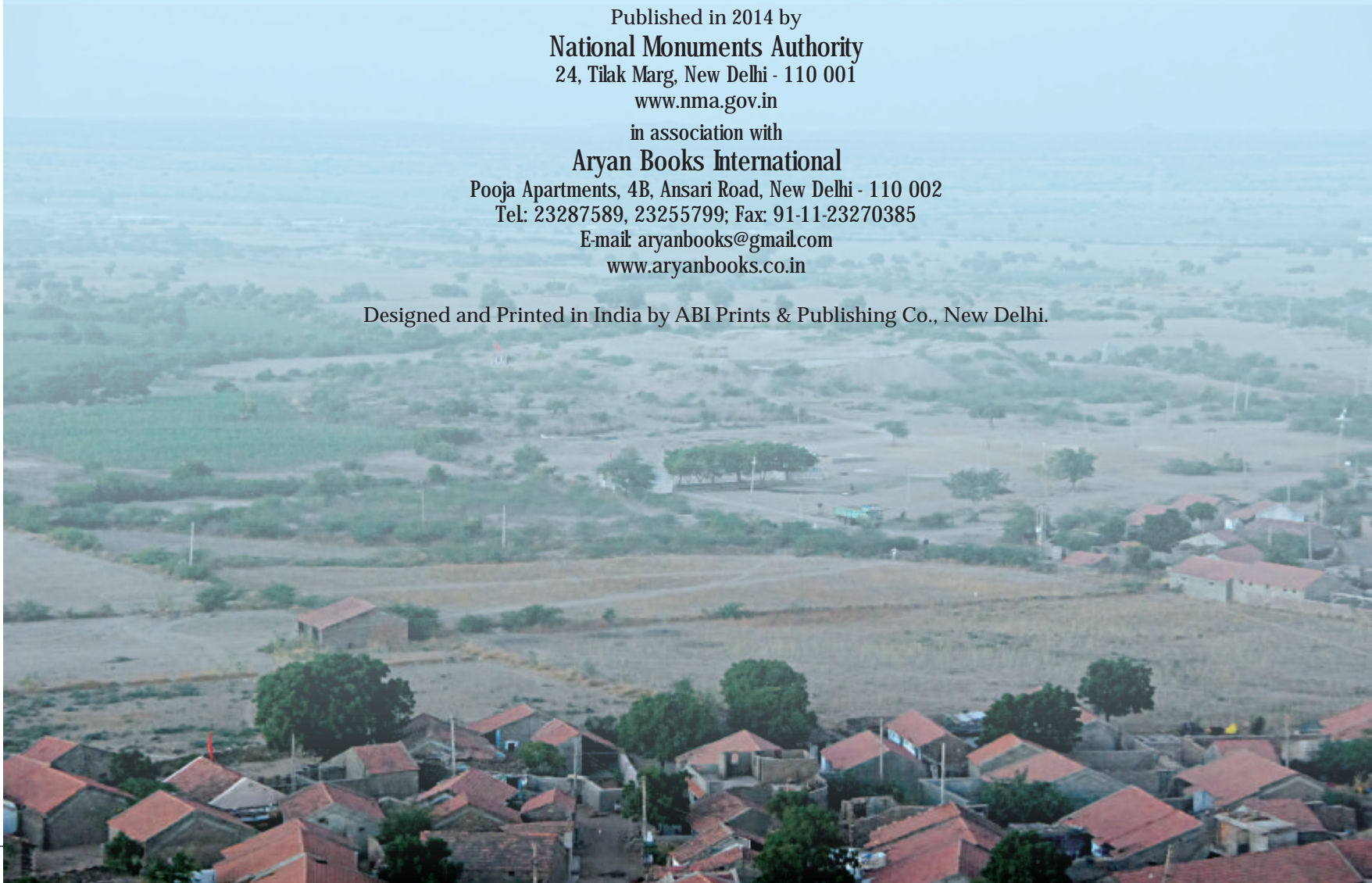
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# Preface

*Mausam: Blueprint for reviving Traditional Networks*

The papers in this book were presented in New Delhi as a part of an ongoing dialogue among scholars and researchers from different disciplines on maritime cultural landscapes, as these evolved across the Indian Ocean both spatially and historically. A common concern that all papers share is with definitions of maritime spaces; different articulations of social and political power; regional and local nautical traditions; and diverse environmental niches. 'Mausam' or Arabic 'Mawsim' refers to the season when ships could sail safely. This distinctive wind-system of the Indian Ocean region follows a regular pattern: southwest from May to September; and northeast from November to March. The English term 'Monsoon' came from Portuguese 'Monção', ostensibly from Arabic 'Mawsim'. The etymology of this word signifies the importance of this season to a variety of seafarers. This intertwining of natural phenomena such as monsoon winds and the ways in which these were harnessed historically to create cultural networks provide building blocks for contemporary societies, as they work towards universal values and trans-border groupings—both of which underwrite UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention. As World History acquires centrality and the focus shifts from national histories to globalisation, the history of the sea is discussed as 'connected history' across porous borders, linked through boat-building traditions, community networks and cultural practices (Vink, 2007: 41-62).

Thus the endeavour of Project Mausam is to position itself at two levels: at the macro level it aims to re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns; while at the micro level the focus will be on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu. This two-fold emphasis is important if issues related to local communities, regional governance and the management of heritage sites are to be included in the discussion.

## *Historical Background*

The 'discovery' of the etesian or annual winds is attributed to the Greeks, although Indian and Arab sailors are known to have used the monsoon winds much earlier. This regular pattern facilitated the movement of people, goods and ideas across the Indian Ocean,





enabling cultural interactions and exchange until when steam-powered cargo carriers reduced reliance on sailing ships. These ancient connections were not limited to the coastal regions; they pervaded life in the hinterland and impacted inland communities as well.

This book focuses on how this natural phenomenon has shaped interactions between countries and communities connected by the Indian Ocean. The knowledge and use of the monsoon impacted ancient and historical trade, local economies, religion, politics and cultural identity. Centuries of trade, migration, colonialism and modern statecraft transformed these traditional interactions across the Indian Ocean, but present-day national identities and perceptions of the past are deeply interwoven with age-old ties.

Fishermen, sailors and merchants travelled the waters of the Indian Ocean as early as the third millennium BCE, linking the world's earliest civilizations from Africa to East Asia in a complex web of relationships. The commodities exchanged through these networks included a wide array of objects—aromatics, medicines, dyes, spices, grain, wood, textiles, gems, stones and ornaments, metals, and plant and animal products—and were transported through voyages and sold at markets or bazaars along the Indian Ocean littoral. Many of the commodities involved had multiple meanings and diverse functions. Spices, for example, were not only used as condiments and for preservation of food, but also played a major role in *materia medica* and ritual practices. Additionally, while trade might have underpinned many of these cross-cultural relationships, the Ocean was also a highway for the exchange of religious cultures and specialized technologies. The expansion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity helped define the boundaries of this Indian Ocean 'world', creating networks of religious travel and pilgrimage. The construction of traditional sailing craft involved trade and transportation of wood for planking and coconut coir for stitching from different regions of the Indian Ocean, enabling the transmission and preservation of ancient boat-building technologies.

How was exchange across the Indian Ocean organized? There are multiple sources that help us answer this question; ranging from archaeological evidence to inscriptions and textual references from a range of time periods. Examples of such trade, exchange and interaction abound in the Indian Ocean world, ranging from third-millennium BCE Harappan ceramics, beads, and seals found on sites across the Arabian peninsula to accounts of European sailors travelling the seas in the nineteenth-century. Maritime voyages in the early centuries of the Common Era were regarded as profitable ventures and Buddhist literature describes a variety of social groups who were involved. In addition to merchants there are references to princes who travelled across the seas to make money. The prosperity and status of these mariners is evident from the donations made by them to the Buddhist monastic establishments, along the coasts of the Indian Ocean and recorded in inscriptions of the Early Historic period.

Temples and monasteries were not merely centres of devotion and worship, but were also principal institutions in the medieval period for establishing laws and enforcing them on their members. A large number of inscriptions from early medieval India document complex arrangements for the use of temple resources, whether these were lands or else revenues from shops and markets. In the larger



temples, we find mention of several classes of temple employees such as administrators, treasurers, accountants, temple women, cooks, sweepers, artisans, watchmen, etc. Resources for temple rituals and for the large number of employees were generated through surplus agricultural production on temple lands and from donations in cash and kind from trading groups. The inscriptions also provide a record of legal transactions conducted and in addition to the temple archives on income and expenditure form a valuable source of information on the legal jurisdiction of the temple. A good example of this is the study of the early seventeenth century archives of a temple in Kerala.

One of the characteristic features of maritime trade from the ninth-tenth centuries onwards was the location of markets in fortified settlements along the Indian Ocean littoral and farther inland. Rules governing the payment of taxes and regulating the functioning of the markets were often inscribed on copper plates and provide useful insights into the organization of the trade network. The Kollam copper plates of Sthanu Ravi from the Malabar coast are significant in connection with trading rights granted to the Christian church. A market was located within the precincts of the fortified settlement at the coastal centre of Kollam, while the church was situated outside the fortification wall.

Another aspect of the maritime networks relates to the visual topography that provided landmarks to sailors and defined the sailing world in antiquity. “The chains of perceptibility created by looking from one vantage point to the next served both to express the relationship of individual localities to one another and to make sense of the wider world” (Horden and Purcell 2000: 125). This visual topography was characterized by coastal structures, many of them religious in nature that created a distinctive maritime milieu. For example, the thirteenth-century Konark Temple on the coast of Odisha in India was known as the ‘Black Pagoda’ to European sailors, as opposed to the ‘White Pagoda’, the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Similarly, the Buddhist temple at Nagapattinam on the Tamil coast in India, erected for Chinese Buddhists, was a major landmark for ships from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries when it was demolished by French Jesuits.

How does an understanding of the maritime heritage of countries around the Indian Ocean littoral provide a viable model to deepen the knowledge of their own cultural legacy, while at the same time engaging with trans-oceanic networks? Legislation and measures for preservation require identification and documentation of the maritime heritage in local and regional contexts. More importantly, its protection draws on national agendas. Can a balance be achieved between national interests and trans-national research collaboration? In the final section, it is suggested that UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention has broadened its appeal over the years to incorporate a variety of interests.

### *The Future: Cultural Maritime Routes and Trans-national Nominations*

The General Conference of the UNESCO in 1972 adopted a Convention concerning Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The Convention sought to encourage the identification, protection and



preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. India ratified this Convention in November 1977. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) functions as a nodal agency for nomination of World Heritage Sites (WHS) to the UNESCO. In addition, it has been involved in conservation work in several countries of the region.

Another step in promoting capacity building in the region involves the establishment of the Category 2 Centre (C2C) proposed by India. This has been envisioned to be a centre of excellence for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage in Asia Pacific Region. It will perform a catalytic role in India and the countries in the Asia region by training and researching issues involved with World Heritage Sites (WHS) inscription, protection, conservation, monitoring and management. The scope of the proposed Centre will therefore be global, regional, and interregional to bring greater synergy to the conservation and management of World Heritage Sites in particular but also other heritage sites in general.

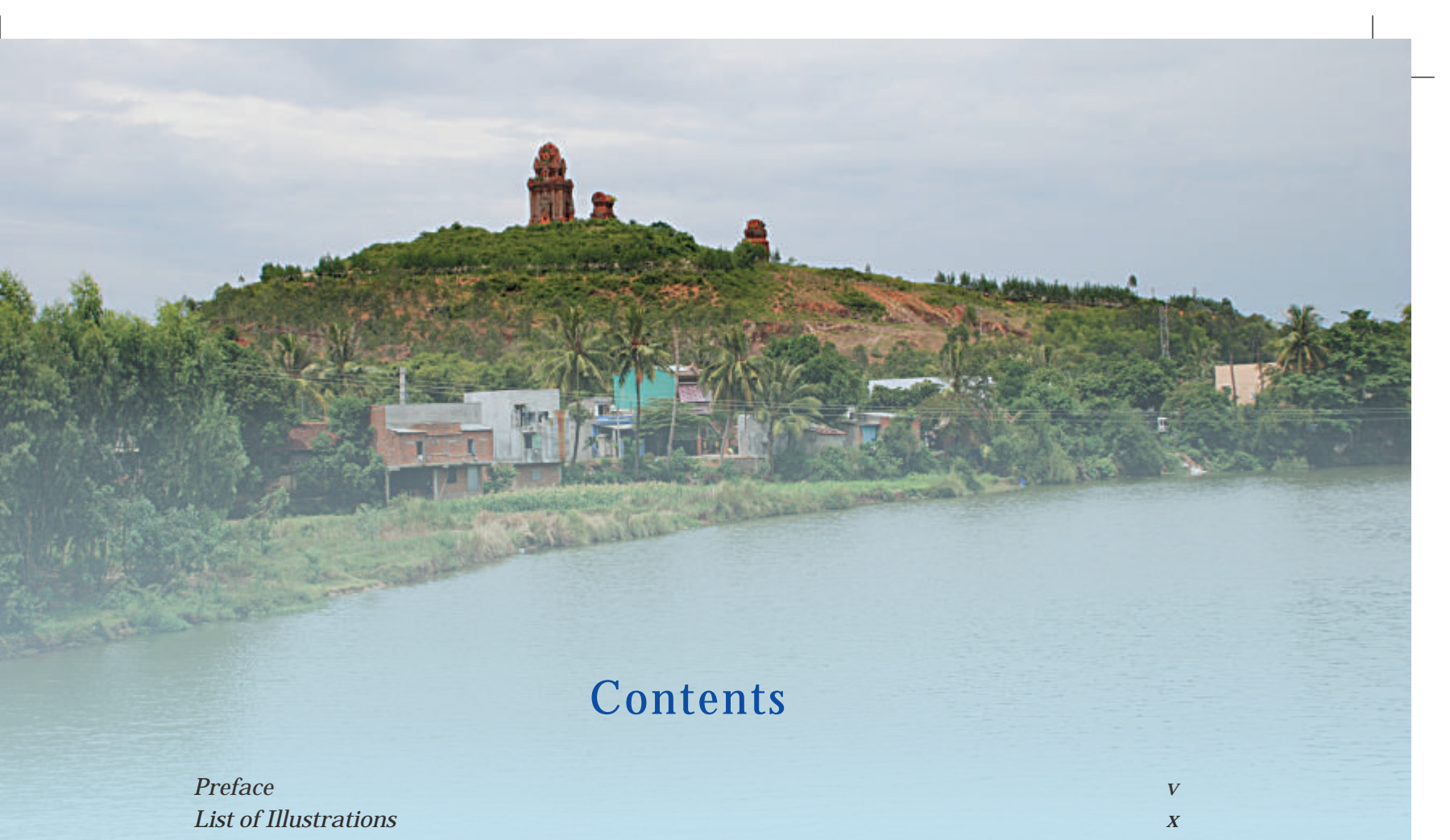
According to the decision of the World Heritage Committee at its 29th session held at Durban in 2005, it was agreed to be 'aware of the need to specify the submission modalities for the nomination of transboundary or transnational serial properties on the World Heritage List'. Categories of heritage within the framework of the World Heritage Convention have been broadened over the decades to include cultural landscapes, industrial remains, and heritage routes, which are all now valued as part of our cultural heritage. The World Heritage Committee has also reflected upon such subjects as the need for community involvement, social benefits, heritage as part of sustainable development and the engagement of young people in the World Heritage process (<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2005/whc05-29com-inf09Ae.pdf> accessed on 10th May 2014, p. 15). The UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity, adopted in November 2001, states "Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

Project Mausam aims to promote research on themes related to the study of Maritime Cultural Routes through international scientific seminars and meetings and by adopting a multidisciplinary approach. It will encourage the production of specialized works, as well as publications for the general public with an attempt at promoting a broader understanding of the concept of a common heritage and multiple identities.

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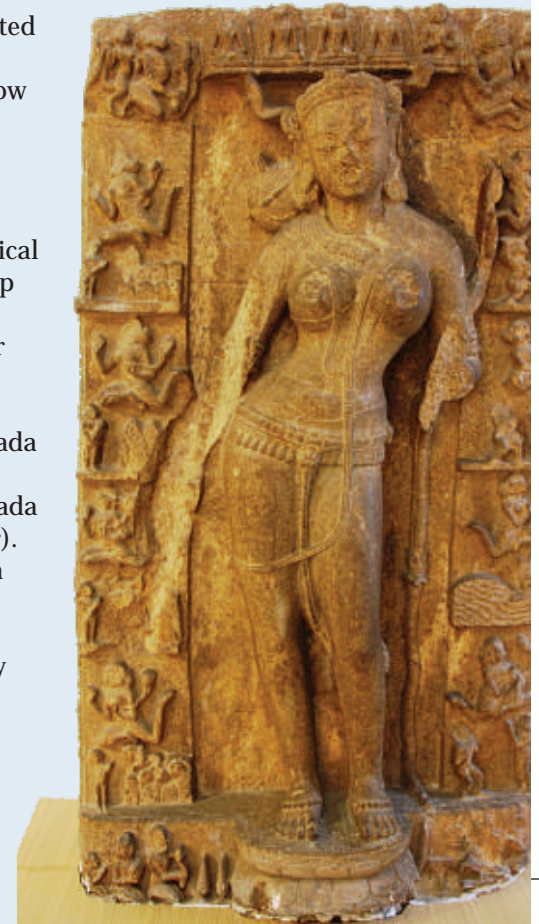
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