



Major Collaborative Research Initiative

NEWSLETTER

The Indian Ocean World: The Making of the First Global Economy in the Context of Human-Environment Interaction



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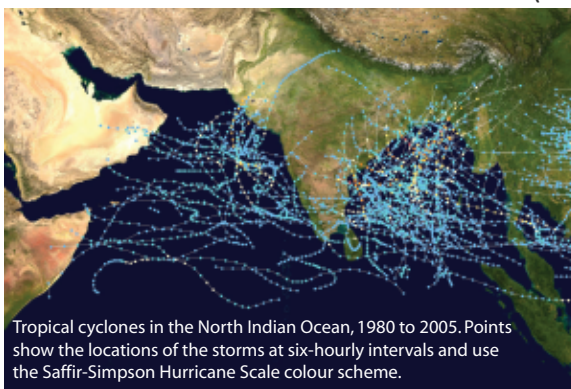
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THE PROJECT

This ground-breaking project investigates the rise and development of the world's first "global economy" in the context of human-environment interaction from the early centuries B.C.E. to the present day. The region under study is the Indian Ocean world (IOW), an arena of primary geo-political importance that includes eastern Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and emerging superpowers, China and India.

The economic, social and political foundations of the IOW date back two millennia and are related to the monsoons, a system of regularly alternating winds and currents unique to the oceanic space comprising the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian, South and East China Seas. The monsoons exerted a huge influence over the lands and societies around these inter-connected bodies of water. Monsoon rains underpinned agricultural production, while monsoon winds created the possibility of direct, trans-oceanic sail that facilitated the rise of a sophisticated, durable structure of long-distance maritime exchange of commodities, ideas, technology and people. This system may be termed a "global economy" (as distinct from the modern "international economy," which began to take shape in the nineteenth century).

In addition to the monsoons, other significant natural factors that will be considered include the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), cyclones and volcanic eruptions. This



Tropical cyclones in the North Indian Ocean, 1980 to 2005. Points show the locations of the storms at six-hourly intervals and use the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale colour scheme.

is the first large-scale attempt to investigate and analyse the causes, inter-relationships and economic, political and social impact of environmental factors and natural disasters over the long term in the IOW. However, project members reject the simple model of environmental determinism. Rather, in adopting the concept of human-environment interaction, they also highlight human agency in responding to and reshaping the environment.

THE BRAUDELIAN APPROACH



This project introduces “human-environment interaction” as an innovative conceptual framework for understanding past and current societies in the IOW. This in turn owes much to the theories of Fernand Braudel (1902-85), one of the foremost French historians of the post-1945 era. Braudel argued that conventional frameworks for historical analysis, notably territorial entities such as nation states, empires and continents, were inadequate as analytical tools because they largely ignored environmental factors and thus could not adequately address the issue of human-environment interaction. Braudel recognised that the environment shapes material culture as much as human activity affects environment.

Conventionally, the history of the non-European world has been viewed in terms of area studies (Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, etc.) or that of the rise and development of “nation states.” However, the Braudelian approach permits a fundamentally different interpretation that recognises the environmental unity of the Indian Ocean world. In this context, studies of human-environment interaction during different time periods at local, regional and inter-regional levels have the potential to reveal hitherto unsuspected linkages and patterns in and across the world’s most populous macro-region.

THE TEAM

The team includes a wide range of researchers from the humanities and social sciences to the natural and technological sciences. They are divided into two main groups. The first will research diverse sources—including archival, oral, linguistic, archaeological, paleo-ecological and genetic—in order to identify and analyse data relating to the structure and development of the IOW global economy; the inter-relationship, timing and impact of environmental processes; and human and natural disasters. The second group will subject the results of archival and field research to cutting-edge computer synthesis and modelling techniques in order to elucidate both longer-term environmental cycles in the IOW global economy, possible patterns in natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions, and possible human impact on the environment. The team will also construct research and teaching aids, such as an interactive website and maps, to illustrate the history of the IOW global economy in the context of human-environment interaction.

The two main groups are further subdivided into nine teams, each with its own research axis. Team profiles are available online at the project’s website www.indianoceanworldcentre.com/mcri.

Future issues of the newsletter will highlight the research being carried out by the individual teams.

Team 1 - The Development and Structure of the Indian Ocean World Global Economy

Team 2 - Southeast Asia’s Global Economy. Climate and the Impact of Natural Hazards from the 10th to 21st Centuries

Team 3 - East Asian Mediterranean

Team 4 - Zheng He Voyages

Team 5 - Currents of Exchange in the Indian Ocean World

Team 6 - Human-Environment Interaction in the Modern Era

Team 7 - Paleoclimate Simulations

Team 8 - Bayesian Network Analysis

Team 9 - Document Analysis and ICRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Peter Hynd joined the project in September 2011 when he began his doctoral studies in the Department of History and Classical Studies at McGill University. He is doing research into the history of alcohol and drinking in British India from the end of Company rule in 1857 to independence in 1947. European attitudes towards alcohol were quite different from those held by most Indians, resulting in numerous disputes and some adaptations to local conditions, as well as furious debates over the traditional role of alcohol in Indian society and the use of alcohol taxes to fund the colonial state.

Students are a big part of this project. They are working directly with researchers in universities and archives across the globe.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MCRI International Conference

21-23 June 2012

“Crossroads between Empires and Peripheries – Knowledge Transfer, Product Exchange and Human Movement in the Indian Ocean World”

Ghent University, Belgium

ARC/MCRI International Conference

12-14 November 2012

"The Dimensions of the Indian Ocean World Past: Sources and Opportunities for interdisciplinary work in Indian Ocean World History, 9th -19th Centuries"

The Western Australian Maritime Museum, Australia

STUDENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

PhD Fellowship in Indian Ocean World History

The Indian Ocean World Centre (IOWC) is offering a PhD Fellowship in Indian Ocean World History. While all proposals within this broad field will be considered, historical studies of (i) the Indian Ocean World trade in animals and/or animal products or (ii) the slave trade indigenous to the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean World (i.e., any region South and Southeast Asia to China) are particularly welcome. The successful candidate will work under the supervision of Prof. Gwyn Campbell, Canadian Research Chair in Indian Ocean World History, and is expected to possess a good reading knowledge of one or more relevant languages. Please contact Prof. Campbell with a title, a two-page outline of your project proposal and a CV. Value: \$15,000 CAD per year, up to a maximum of three years.

This award is tenable at the Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University. It is open to all qualified applicants without restriction as to nationality. In applying to the McGill PhD program, please indicate your wish to be considered for the Indian Ocean World History PhD Fellowship.

Contact Prof. Campbell (gwyn.campbell@mcgill.ca) to discuss consideration for this award.



STUDENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

MA in Indian Ocean World History

The Indian Ocean World Centre (IOWC) is offering an MA Scholarship in researching disease and natural disasters (including shipwrecks) in the Indian Ocean world, focusing on the nineteenth century. The research will concentrate on primary materials available at McGill and be under the supervision of Prof. Gwyn Campbell, Canadian Research Chair in Indian Ocean World History. Candidates should possess the ability to read in English, French and Portuguese, and are expected to spend approximately 10 hours a week working in the archive. Value: \$12,000 CAD for one year (with the possibility of renewal for thesis track MA students).

This award is tenable at the Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University. It is open to all qualified applicants without restriction as to nationality. In applying to the McGill MA program, please indicate your wish to be considered for the MA Scholarship in Indian Ocean World History.

Contact Prof. Campbell (gwyn.campbell@mcgill.ca) to discuss consideration for this award.