

**REVIEW: BURKHARD SCHNEPEL AND JULIA VERNE (EDS.),  
*CARGOES IN MOTION: MATERIALITY AND CONNECTIVITY  
ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN. ATHENS, OH: OHIO  
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Much of history, human or otherwise, is predicated on movement, because transition and change are the linchpins to marking the progress of time. Change makes a better story than stability. It therefore follows that over the last half century or so, a large body of literature devoted to the various topics and aspects of trade and migration has been produced by scholars from a *mélange* of disciplines. *Cargoes in Motion* differs from the preponderance of this research in two key aspects: the emphasis on a material culture approach, and the disciplinary range of the contributors.

Approaches to material culture are laid out generally in the Preface by editor Julia Verne and more specifically in the Introduction by editor Burkhard Schnepel. Material culture as a phrase seems to have been originated by archeologist V. Gordon Childe (1892-1957), which he used at least as early as 1930 in *The Bronze Age*.<sup>1</sup> Childe was a socialist influenced by Marxism and adapted the economic determinism of dialectic materialism to the analysis of excavated objects. Once the term ‘material culture’ evolved from strictly archeological application, its use and methodologies have been somewhat subjective. According to Verne, ‘this volume engages with two major theoretical and methodological approaches. Arjun Appadurai’s attention to the “social life of things and his attendant call for us to see commodities as more than just inanimate, mute things” and the “so-called *Actor Network Theory* and the *new materialism*’ which “emphasizes the co-constitution of material and immaterial dimensions, as well as the vitality of matter (x).’ Actor Network Theory differs from Appadurai in that it was developed by sociologists rather than archeologists or anthropologists, such as Appadurai, and places less emphasis on Marxist-based economic theory and more on the human interactions informed by objects.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Gordon Childe, *The Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).

Schnepel also provides nine concrete ways, or ‘perspectives,’ in which cargos have been organized, like lists and ‘roots and routes’ (6) in which the movement of cargo is emphasized. While the categories Schnepel has defined are not mutually exclusive, his breakdown will be useful to those unfamiliar with conceptualizing material objects in historical contexts.

The chapters themselves are basically empirical rather than theoretical. The editors have done a good job in arraying a variety of things that might make up a cargo, from expensive luxuries like pearls, to the quotidian like salt. While the prefatory material emphasized that the benefit of a cargo-centered analysis is that it allows for the exploration of both cargo that was intentional or unintentional, like fleas or as Japanese writer Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) once wrote of, intangibles like love,<sup>2</sup> none of the authors delved into any kind of inadvertent passenger. The twelve essays of varying length cover the broad swathe of the Indian Ocean, from the east coast of Africa to Indonesia. Cargoes, by definition, are things loaded onto a conveyance to be transported, although not necessarily a ship, as is the case in all chapters that included methods of transportation in their discussions. In that sense, the Indian Ocean as a body of water and the Indian Ocean World (IOW) have been conflated to mean the same thing. Thus, caravan trade, for example, is not discussed even though indigenous networks are emphasized.

Chronologically the essays range from ancient times to the present. They are divided into three sections which, in order, ostensibly represent production, transport, and consumption or application, although many writers wrote more expansively than this brief. The cargoes examined are pearls, salt, tea (Section One), exotic animals, cattle, paper (documents and records), cowries (Section Two), civet cat musk, gecko tails (for scientific research), the beadwork of Penang, and ivory and other maritime commodities in Eastern Indonesia (Section Three).

The interdisciplinary nature of the book makes evaluation something of an apples-to-oranges proposition. Different essays will appeal to different people, depending on their research perspectives and interests. In a highly subjective selection, this reviewer particularly enjoyed Kunbing Xiao’s ‘The Flow of Bohea: The Tea Trade in the Indian Ocean World (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century)’ from Section One, and Edward A. Alpers’s ‘Cattle on the Hoof: The Mozambique Channel Provisioning Trade in the Nineteenth Century’ from Section Two. These essays looked at the broad existence, from

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<sup>2</sup> He writes of the courtesans of Nagasaki ‘Lifting loves loads/From the ships holds’ (Christopher Drake, “Saikaku’s Haikai Requiem: A thousand Haikai alone in a single day—the first hundred verses,” in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, 2 (1992), 544).

production to consumption, of these cargoes in fascinating ways with a great deal of specific data, and they covered wide-ranging geographic areas. Xiao's essay showed the development of Bohea tea, what we today call lapsang souchong, was specifically to please foreign tastes and was not valued by the Chinese except as a commercial product. It thrived as an export cargo because it could withstand the rigors of maritime transport well. By documenting all the actors in the production, transport and consumption of tea, she elucidates the vast impact it had on human actions, such as the transfer of 20,000 tea plants to Darjeeling. As she concludes, 'Throughout the flow of Bohea, taste seems to have been the least important factor' (85). In contrast to tea, which was a luxury, cattle transport was usually about victualing, both as fresh meat and salted, or as jerky for preservation. Alpers examines the complex relationship between Madagascar as a supplier of beef and other livestock like sheep and goats, and Mozambique as a consumer. First-hand accounts describe the difficulty of transporting this active cargo. The process of salting beef, the indigenous networks that supported trade, and the American dealers in hides are all covered. It effectively shows how material culture can document human behaviors.

Conversely, the interdisciplinary contributions meant that each essay offered something slightly different. Fahad Ahmad Bishara's 'Paper Cargoes, Mobile Histories: A view from a Twentieth-Century Dhow,' for example, looked at the paperwork, logs, and memoirs generated by dhow captains. These documents are difficult to categorize because they are neither unintentional nor non-commercial, but they are rarely considered as a category of human action rather than merely as a source for data. Or, Hanne Schönig's 'Arab Perfumes and the Indian Ocean Trade in Animal-Derived Aromatics: The Case of the Civet Cat,' used a wide array of sources in Arabic, English, German, and French to delve into the civet cat and its musk to invite contemplation of the interaction between humans and the natural world. We learn that there are six species of civet cat from Africa and Asia (of which those most commonly used are from Ethiopia and India), how the musk is extracted, that the trade in cats is not exactly the same as the trade in their secretions because they have different buyers, and that the cats are currently covered by CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna), but civet cat musk is still traded to perfumers for heritage scents like Shalimar. The processes of 'milking' the cats for musk and of civet cat musk being transported in cow horns, and that this was used as a counter in documents were fascinating details.

Perhaps this perspective is now old fashioned, but one jarring element in about a third of the essays was the prominent insertion of self into the discourse, contradicting the

stated purpose of the volume to focus on the cargo and not the instigators of its lading. In a time where even the most reclusive, crusty scholar must have a social media presence, this might be par for the course, but this has not been considered acceptable professional practice in the social sciences, which is certainly how the editors introduce this assemblage. While this collection is truly interdisciplinary, those disciplines are history, anthropology, and geography. It may be impossible to completely divorce the self from one's research, and personal experience is certainly useful for informing research, but personal reflections should not replace factual data and the analysis based on it.

The trick to any edited volume is to allow individual scholars intellectual creativity yet maintain enough cohesiveness to stand as a book rather than exist merely as a bound volume of disparate essays, a difficulty compounded with an interdisciplinary compilation. *Cargoes in Motion* successfully navigated this hazard by setting two parameters for their contributors: the geographic region of the Indian Ocean and the theoretical framework of material culture, or cargoes. The combined result provides a rich, visceral tapestry of the region that populates the phrenic landscape with concrete expression, contributing to the growing field of IOW studies with an important counterpoint to conventional migration histories.