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From the Persian Gulf to the
East China Sea

Edited by Ralph Kauz

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Preface

The collection of articles published in this volume were mostly presented at the workshop “The Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea”, organized by the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in February, 2004. The theoretical considerations which were supposed to form the framework of this workshop were the hypotheses that the Indian Ocean has formed a largely coherent structure, and has been a space which served as a huge stratum connecting the various kingdoms and cultures adjacent to it, causing interchanges in all possible fields and certainly mutual influences. These considerations are obviously *sensu* Fernand Braudel, and the Mediterranean served as a conceptual model for the larger Indian Ocean. They are not innovative, and have already been discussed for several decades starting with Kirti N. Chaudhuri’s famous study.¹

The idea of the workshop emerged during discussions with Roderich Ptak who also implicitly suggested the title. Angela Schottenhammer, whose “East Asian Maritime History Project” deals in a considerably broader and larger scope with similar or even identical reflections in the East Asian region, has very kindly agreed to accept these proceedings for publication as part of the series of the project which she edits. My sincerest thanks must go to both of them, not only for supporting my researches and suggesting ways I have not thought of, but also for the long and motivating discussions we have had, sipping many cups of tea!

For this workshop the viewpoints for looking at the exchanges in the Indian Ocean should have had two bases: one in China and the other in Iran, as these two cultures – with the addition of Aden and the Red Sea in the western part – acted as a frame for the Indian Ocean trade network, and not only scholars researching these topics should have participated, but also scholars from both countries. However, unfortunately and most regrettably this was not to be in the case of Iran, as no scholars were able to participate.

The sponsor of the workshop declined his support only a few weeks before it was to take place, but fortunately Bert G. Fragner, director of the Institute of Iranian Studies, stepped in to fully support the event and helped to provide the necessary means. The same must be said of Bernhard Plunger, head of the International Relations Department of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, who gave his essential assistance.

During the preparation of the workshop it soon showed that the basic concepts must be circumvented in a few cases, because the interchanges between the land-based and sea-based silk roads were too interwoven to be kept completely separated, maybe even more than in the paradigm “Mediterranean”. Thus a few articles do not deal exclusively with the maritime Silk Road. The same must be said for the western end of the Indian Ocean where Iran and the Persian Gulf were not the exclusive end, thus this part is called “The Iranian and Arabian Sides”.

The publication of this volume was delayed for many reasons, thus some articles may appear a bit outdated in the eyes of the specialists because the most recent research could not be included. It must be stressed that this possible imperfection is not due to any negligence on the part of the authors.

Two of the authors could not attend the workshop, but were kind enough to write papers for this volume: Geoff Wade, who even sent two profound articles, and Martin Slama.

¹ Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); for a detailed discussion of the research on the topic see Roderich Ptak, *Die maritime Seidenstraße: Küstenräume, Seefahrt und Handel in vorkolonialer Zeit* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), pp. 9–21.

I express my sincerest thanks to both and also to the editors of the *Journal of the South Seas Society* who kindly agreed to reprint my article on the somewhat obtrusive merchant Paliuwan, because his story gives an extraordinary example of land- and sea-bound interrelations. Mrs Brigid O'Connor from Newcastle-on-Tyne was so kind to proof-read the articles of the non-native speakers.

The proceedings are arranged in a geographical order starting from the West and heading to the East and are divided into three parts: the West (Iran and the Arabian lands), the interconnections between the two 'poles', and finally the Chinese side. However, all articles show the exchanges in Asia and this division must therefore remain to a certain degree superficial.

Some people may say that papers presented at conferences rather fit into appropriate journals and that proceedings rather resemble journals more than coherent works on a specific topic, though written by different scholars. This may be true sometimes, but such proceedings also reflect the consideration and open discussion on certain topics, and these discussions and debates are a major cornerstone in the scientific process.

Neusiedl am See, October 2009

Ralph Kauz