

←— *Introduction* —→

INITIAL THOUGHTS

THE INDIAN OCEAN WORLD (IOW) encompasses a vast world region with which American students are almost entirely unfamiliar. Bounding neither the Atlantic nor Pacific shores of the United States, it is as distant from most students' worldview and imagination as can be. Yet for all its distance both geographically and conceptually, the Indian Ocean, its surrounding continental landmasses, and its thousands of large and small islands offer as many opportunities to a teacher of world history as challenges. The very fact that the Indian Ocean is so unfamiliar means that students carry few, if any, preconceived notions about this world region. If they bring anything with them, it is likely to be no more than knowledge of a small part of the whole that comprises the IOW. Spanning what area studies specialists have divided into five distinct regions—Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia—most world history texts that adopt a chronological organization broadly survey these separate regional units or include specific examples from them, while those texts that emphasize broad themes in world history similarly tend to draw upon area studies–based case studies.

Although there is a rich body of historical literature on different aspects of the Indian Ocean past, until recently most of this scholarship has focused on specific subregions and topics and has not attempted to reflect the broader place of the

Indian Ocean in world history. To take only a few examples, Roman trade with India, Islamic empires, and Indian Ocean trade, European expansion, and empire all have their own focused historiographies. But historical scholarship on the Indian Ocean as a world region really dates from Mauritian archivist-historian Auguste Toussaint's *History of the Indian Ocean* (1966), which was first published in French in 1960. Even then, however, it took another quarter-century and the publication of K. N. Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (1985) for the rapidly emerging field of Indian Ocean history to begin to take off intellectually. Since then Chaudhuri's pioneering intervention has been followed by important historical syntheses by Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (1993); Michael N. Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (2003); and Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (2014), while important contributions with more focused geographical or chronological parameters within a larger Indian Ocean framework include Patricia Risso's *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (1995), R. J. Barendse's *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (2002), Sugata Bose's *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (2006), and Abdul Sheriff's *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce, and Islam* (2010).<sup>1</sup> The past twenty-five years have also witnessed the production of numerous monographs, collections of essays, and a huge range of journal articles on every aspect of Indian Ocean history. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, new university centers or coordinating networks for studying the Indian Ocean and its world have been established in Canada, India, Denmark, and South Africa, while others feature a particular subregional focus in the context of the Indian Ocean. Yet, despite all this exhilarating intellectual activity, the teaching of Indian Ocean history remains underdeveloped.

Like most students of the Indian Ocean and IOW, the authors of this book came to the teaching of this vast global region from more specific subregional research and teaching specializations. Alpers trained as an Africanist whose research has focused on East Africa and the western

Indian Ocean, reflecting the way in which graduate training has developed over the years. McDow cross-trained in both African and Middle Eastern history, but similarly with a western Indian Ocean focus. Teaching Indian Ocean history forces both of us to stretch well beyond our formal training and research specializations not only to come to grips with the eastern Indian Ocean World, but also to position ourselves more centrally as broad Indian Oceanists. In striving to achieve an Indian Ocean perspective as teachers we also seek to arrive at a balance between our own more specialized knowledge of the western Indian Ocean and synthesizing the work of other scholars on the eastern reaches of this vast region by employing certain integrative and comparative concepts. These include notions such as Michael Pearson's concept of littoral societies and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's notion of connected histories, among others, both of which we discuss at greater length in subsequent chapters.<sup>2</sup> As teachers we each continue to think about how best to construct meaningful and approachable paths to introduce students to the IOW so that they can see for themselves the great variety of human histories that have flourished, and faded, across the entire region. In a series created to emphasize "design principles for teaching world history," we take it as our responsibility to share with our readers—teachers at both high school and undergraduate levels—those ways that have worked for us. We have also benefited from the input of several colleagues who teach Indian Ocean history. We do not claim, however, that there is any one design that will work for you; indeed, one rewarding aspect of cowriting this book is that we each brought our unique perspectives, design, and methods for teaching Indian Ocean history to this project. In that spirit, we hope you will think of this primer as a cookbook—a set of recipes rather than the meal.

As such this is one of many useful "cookbooks" in this series of primers from Duke University Press on teaching different histories that connect to world history. These books are nonprescriptive guides to developing a syllabus and designing a course using broadly applicable design principles for a diverse audience of instructors. This primer is for faculty, teachers, and graduate students at the college or high school level who may be teaching an introductory Indian Ocean World history course for the first

time, those who already teach one and want new approaches, and those teaching a world or other history course with a brief or sustained focus on the Indian Ocean World.

In this primer, we want to emphasize the importance in teaching Indian Ocean history of establishing a clear vision of what one wants to cover and how one wants to accomplish one's pedagogical goals. For us, the most important overriding issues in the field of Indian Ocean World history are connectivity and the destabilization of boundaries. These are themes that also align with the broader fields of world history and global history.<sup>3</sup> Your students will come to this topic with very little if any knowledge of the Indian Ocean region or its millions of peoples; so that they will not be overwhelmed by details or lost in the forest for the trees, to use a peculiarly terrestrial metaphor, careful attention to their needs, skills, and the demands of the subject matter is necessary to achieve meaningful learning. We hope that the ideas and methods that we discuss and propose in the following chapters will help you to achieve your classroom goals.

### Structure of the Book

We divide the book into three unequal sections: Foundations and Sources, Global Themes, and Teaching Strategies. In each chapter of each section, we seek both to establish a meaningful chronology and to achieve a representative, or at least illustrative, balance between the eastern and western reaches of the Indian Ocean World. Under the rubric of "Foundations and Sources," we introduce questions concerning the spatial and imaginative dimensions of the IOW, the importance of questioning Eurocentric perspectives on the region, and the value of seeking out a multiplicity of sources for a more Indian Oceanic view of this history. In chapter 1, "Mapping the Indian Ocean," we argue that for students to engage with this unfamiliar world region it is critical that they gain a solid appreciation of its geography and the significance of mapping. In chapter 2, "Beyond Eurocentrism," we suggest that to appreciate the world of the Indian Ocean, students need to acquire some knowledge of indigenous, as well as Western, sources of information and perspectives. In chapter 3, "Beyond

the Text,” we explore the multiplicity of nonwritten sources for reconstructing the history of the IOW and suggest ways to encourage students to think, and read, beyond literary texts to reconstruct a more human history of the region and its peoples.

The section “Global Themes” includes five chapters, each addressing a set of issues that are integral to the history of the IOW and that resonate with larger themes in world history. In chapter 4, “Indian Ocean Commodities,” we discuss several major commodities that dominated the history of trade in the IOW. Students can relate these to both similar and different commodities around the globe. In chapter 5, “People on the Move,” broader themes in the movement of people are raised, including labor migration, trading diasporas, and religious pilgrimage. In chapter 6, “Rethinking Slavery,” we introduce students to the different types of enslavement and indenture that characterized so much of the region’s labor history. Here the comparisons with the Atlantic World and contemporary issues of race and identity will be especially striking. Throughout the primer we refer to “enslaved people” rather than “slaves”; when we use the word *slave* it is an adjective and not a noun. Chapter 7, “Empire and Its Aftermath,” focuses on the ways in which imperialism (both indigenous and European), colonialism and nationalism, and Big Power competition have played out in the IOW. Finally, with chapter 8 we look at “Disease and Environment,” two issues that resonate especially well with world history themes and are certainly relevant to twenty-first-century students.

The third section, “Teaching Strategies,” includes two chapters on teaching technologies that lay out various methods for engaging your students in the classroom and through online teaching. We also suggest ways in which undertaking original research can enrich their experience of studying the history of the IOW. The projects we have used to engage students in Indian Ocean World history are not the traditional pedagogy of the region. The most Indian Ocean-centered pedagogy might be the chanting and recitation of Quranic verses as a prelude to copying them out on slates. While these techniques have been used for generations, they may not yield the degree of student engagement and reflective learning

that our secondary schools and colleges hold in high regard. Our approach to teaching Indian Ocean World history has been influenced by backward design, student-driven inquiry, frequent use of student reflective writing, and assignments that have audiences beyond the instructor. Backward design encourages instructors to think about their own goals for students in each assignment and to work from there backward, creating the tasks and steps that will achieve those outcomes. We have also created and used assignments that give students great leeway in topics but guide them to common formats. By allowing students to proceed from areas of their own interest and make connections to topics in the IOW, we see a greater degree of engagement. Likewise, by asking students to reflect on their work, we gain a much better perspective on their process, what they have learned, where they need more help, and what they are proud of. By combining these practices with projects that require students to write or present for other kinds of audiences—not just an instructor—we help students gain the skills that they will be able to use long after they leave our world history classroom.

It is our hope that the endnotes to each chapter might serve as starting points for you and your students to follow up on specific topics of interest, but we also include a selected bibliography of essential books and articles that will provide a solid foundation for further study. Our aim throughout the primer is to engage both you and your students in coming to grips with the exciting field of Indian Ocean World history.