

Rivers, Oceans, and Spirits: Water Cosmologies, Gender, and Religious Change in Southeast Asia*

Barbara Watson **Andaya**

Abstract

Water in many different forms and contexts is of central significance in Southeast Asia, and these differences are reflected in the vast range of spirits and deities. Despite wide variation, the most obvious distinction is between spirits associated with fresh and salt water. Those linked to water associated with fertility are typically regarded as female and sympathetic to human requests for assistance. By contrast, the spirits who inhabit turbulent river waters and patrol the shorelines may be male, female, or only vaguely gendered. Although they can be capricious and sometimes cruel, they are nonetheless amenable to individual or communal supplication. The same ambiguity is exemplified by the sea spirits, who extend rewards to those they favour but inflict harsh punishments when their anger is aroused. Yet regardless of their nature or the place with which they were associated, the ‘power base’ of indigenous spirits was always locally concentrated. The limitations in their reach help explain the appeal of cosmologies that extended across a much larger area, and even across the entire globe. The accompanying conceptualization of new and benevolent beings is especially evident in the maritime environment. Here human activity is male-dominated, and the male divinities and saints associated with supra-local belief systems might appear to be the natural guardians of mariners. Even so, culturally entrenched ideas of connections between water and maternal care facilitated the adoption of female deities as protectors of ocean-going voyagers.

KEYWORDS: Salt water, fresh water, Southeast Asia, spirits, gender, religious change

INTRODUCTION

IN A MULTITUDE OF different contexts and different manifestations, water has been fundamental in shaping the history of Southeast Asia, and its characterization as a “world of water” seems eminently apt (Boomgaard 2007). Given this importance, one would expect to see the region figure prominently in cross-cultural studies of water-related rituals, beliefs, and archetypes. Unfortunately, this is not the case; indeed, references to Southeast Asia and its regional water-world are virtually absent in global surveys (Garry and Hasan El-Shamy 2005: xviii; Ashliman 2005; Andrews 2000). One probable reason is that Southeast Asian

Barbara Andaya, Asian Studies Department, University of Hawai‘i, USA; bandaya@hawaii.edu

*Abstract and keywords have been added since original publication. An erratum notice detailing this change was also published (DOI 10.1017/trn.2016.20).

specialists have yet to develop an overview of water-related motifs and mythologies, like those available for other interconnected areas like Scandinavia or Polynesia (Davidson 1990: 158; Craig 2004: 190). Of course, it is not difficult to explain this gap, for the region's cultural and linguistic diversity presents a major obstacle towards developing an overall typology, especially one that would bridge the common distinction between island and mainland.¹ In the best of circumstances the task would be daunting and – since most scholars are understandably reluctant to move beyond an area they know well – would require time-consuming and co-operative consultation. Nor would such efforts be necessarily endorsed, for some authorities have argued that the ethnographic richness of individual case studies should not be parlayed into generalizations that ignore local particularities (King 2001). There is also a question of sources, especially for historians, who have been at the forefront of those who assert a regional cohesion but who lack the direct access to informants and the opportunities for personal observation that are available to their anthropological colleagues.

This article is intended as a preliminary step towards thinking regionally and comparatively about what could be termed the 'spiritual waterscapes' of Southeast Asia and the kinds of changes they have undergone.² At the outset I emphasise that the framework is quite defined. Although I differentiate between fresh and salt water, I do not deal at any length with the many water related-ceremonies that dominate Southeast Asia's ritual life or with the human agents involved. While I reference the manifold forms that 'water' can take, my focus is primarily on the spirits and deities that traditionally inhabited Southeast Asia's rivers, lakes, ponds, and seas. Approaching the topic as a historian, I am interested in exploring the extent to which these supernatural beings were gendered, noting that those linked to water associated with fertility are usually regarded as female. My interest in religious change has also encouraged me to think about the ways in which sea deities might be differently conceptualised when individuals moved beyond a familiar spiritscape. As various scholars have suggested, the protection of divinities whose authority could potentially encompass a much more extensive area helps explain the appeal of larger belief systems, especially in a maritime environment (Horton 1971; Reid 1993: 159–160; Allerton 2009a: 236). Here again I return to gender, for on the oceans male deities and saints might appear to be natural guardians of mariners. I suggest that when religiously-sanctified female images were available, culturally entrenched ideas of connections between water and maternal care facilitated their adoption as protectors of ocean-going voyagers.

The article is divided into three sections. The first addresses the most basic water division, that between salt and fresh, giving particular attention to the links

¹A recent publication by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations adopts a thematic and regional approach to survey water rituals and beliefs, but does not specifically address spirits (Poh 2008).

²Allerton (2009a) refers to "spiritual landscapes" in relation to island Southeast Asia.

between water, fertility, and female procreation. The second moves to think more specifically about the characteristics of local spirits who inhabited the 'potent places' of land-based water, and the degree to which they were incorporated into mainstream beliefs; the third takes a similar approach to sea spirits, and to the incorporation of new deities as potential sources of support for seafarers. A conclusion provides some thoughts on contemporary changes and stresses the need for continuing research.

APPROACHING 'WATER'

In preparing this article, I was frequently reminded that the broad category of 'water' (which covers around 71 percent of the earth's surface) contains two fundamental divisions; 'fresh' water with a very low saline content, and salt water (on average, about 3.5 percent salinity). Despite multiple permutations (brackish water, mineral water, saline aquifers, rainwater, etc.), the division between salt and fresh water is commonly projected as quite distinct. In the Chinese cosmological world, for instance, the ministry that controlled all matters connected with the earth's waters was divided into two major departments, one dealing with salt waters and the other with 'sweet', which included the spirits presiding over rivers, springs, lakes, pools and rapids (Werner 1922: 212). The relationship between salt and fresh also provides a frequent metaphor to illustrate contrast, especially in religious teachings. In the Christian Bible the incompatibility between the two is compared to that between bad and good actions, as in James 3:11, while the Qur'an speaks of the barrier God has placed between two bodies of water, one palatable and sweet, the other salty and bitter (Surah 25:53; 55:19–20). As the Buddha explained, a lump of salt will render a cup of water undrinkable, like the karma of a person of little merit who commits a minor transgression. An individual of great merit, however, can be compared to the Ganges, in which a similar amount of salt is dissipated by the flow of pure water (Stryk 1968: 211).

The tendency to place salt and fresh water in apposition obviously requires qualification, for there are some commonalities. Universally, water from sacred rivers and springs has been an essential component in ritual and liturgy, but salt is still regarded as an effective purging agent, and for many societies bathing in the ocean or drinking small amounts of salt water can be ritually purifying. While the sea will not quench thirst, it was essential for the economic security of coast dwellers, providing basic sources of food and access to maritime trade. In this sense it was as critical to life styles as was fresh water for agriculture. At the same time, the juxtaposition of 'fresh' and salt' had a darker side. Any sea-going venture meant leaving the relative safety of the shore for a perilous and unpredictable zone, where capsized boats, shipwreck, and death by drowning were always possibilities. But landwards, torrential rainfall could cause rivers to burst their banks, while stagnant water could breed disease, and contaminated drinking

water result in illness and death. Yet two fundamental aspects set ‘fresh’ water aside: as a primary source of fertility, it was necessary for the survival of crops and vegetation more generally; and it provided the drinking water without which neither humans nor animals could live.

In this context the work of the Sri Lankan historian and philosopher, Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) is especially relevant to Southeast Asia. In a series of essays, he developed the idea that the art of early India reflected a cosmology centred on fresh water as the primordial source and essence of life. While his evidence was primarily drawn from Hindu sculpture and iconography, he noted that Buddhist thought displays analogous linkages with ideas of creation and rebirth. When Buddha Gautama was born, for instance, a tank of clear water miraculously appeared, while several stream-fed wells and ponds provided water for lustration (Coomaraswamy 1993). In a forthright reference to the contrast between salt and fresh water, one Jataka describes the miraculous events that occurred at the time of the Buddha’s enlightenment: trees flowered and fruited, and the sea, heavy with salt, “became sweet water down to its profoundest depths” (Fausbøll and Rhys-Davis 1880: 103; Shaw 2006: 43).

In Southeast Asian mythologies, the links between water, fertility and extraordinary events is likewise a recurring theme. For instance, according to local belief, the miraculous appearance of a spring located on Mt. Kha Mo in northern Thailand (Figure 1) resulted when the Buddha visited this area and found no water available to quench his thirst. He then pressed his thumb to the ground and a spring immediately appeared, which is said to still yield pure water (Swearer 1976: 6, 57). The Dutch scholar Frederick Bosch argued that the motif connecting water, fertility and supernatural events was actually more common outside India than in India itself, and that the Malay-Indonesian archipelago “abounds” in stories describing the remarkable emergence of springs, lakes, rivers, and ponds as a deity or a saintly teacher thrusts his spear, staff, or trident into the ground in a manner emblematic of a phallic “penetration into the womb of the earth”. Infused with extraordinary qualities, drinking or bathing in water from such sources can help women to conceive, heal the sick, provide access to infinite wisdom, or occasionally punish wrong-doers (Bosch 1961: 155–170).

Given such wide-spread beliefs, it is difficult to underestimate the significance of ‘pure’ water (as opposed to brackish or salt) in ritual practice, whether we are looking at the great *baray* of Angkor, the pouring and collecting of water over Shai-vite *yoni-linga* in Java, the *kala*-head water spouts in the ablution area of the sixteenth-century mosque at Kudus, or a font of holy water at the entrance to a Philippine church. Sacred water could also become a political tool, and a leader often required his (and occasionally her) followers to drink the ‘water of allegiance’ over which imprecations had been chanted and in which sacred items such as daggers had been immersed. Should the vows of loyalty made on such occasions be flouted, the resulting punishments would be unimaginably painful and

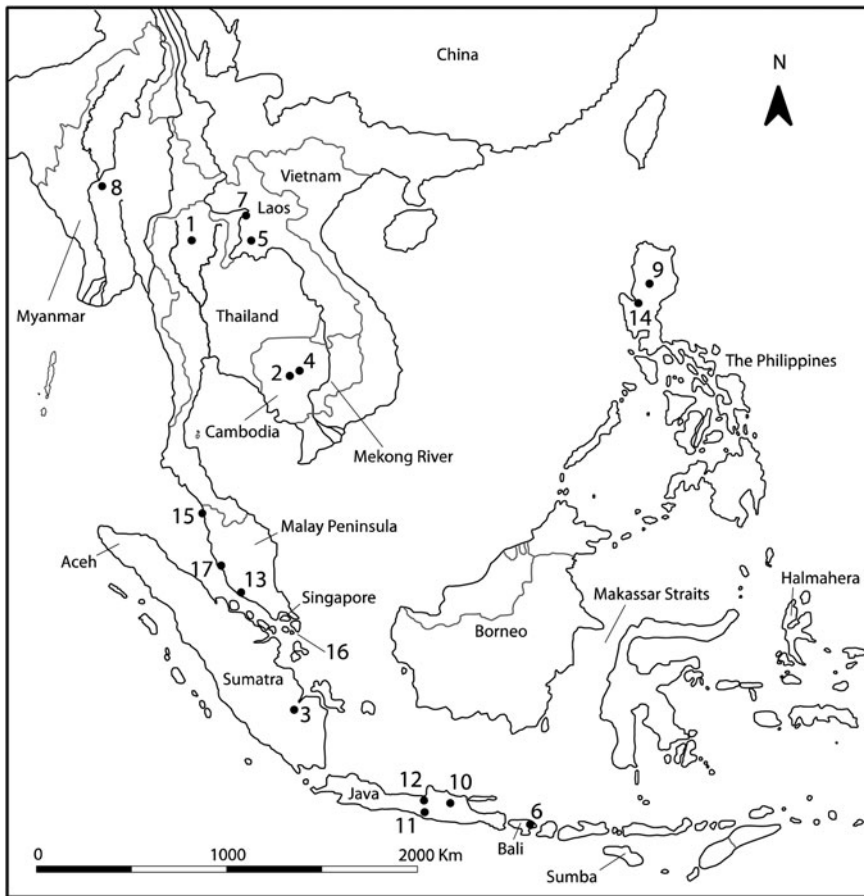


Figure 1. Map showing locations of places mentioned in the article. 1 Mt. Kha Mo; 2. Angkor; 3. Telaga Batu; 4. Stung Kbal Spean; 5. Keng Kang; 6. Lake Batur; 7. Luang Prabang; 8. Kyaukse; 9. Luzon Highlands; 10. Tengger; 11. Yogyakarta; 12. Semarang; 13. Melaka; 14. Manila; 15. Penang; 16. Riau archipelago; 17. Lumut. (Illustration: L. Lloyd-Smith)

long-lasting. The seventh-century Telaga Batu inscription from southeast Sumatra, which calls down curses on those guilty of treason, was designed so that the water could be poured over these potent words and then drunk by subordinates in order to ensure their fidelity (Reichle 2007: 17). While references to this practice can be located in Indian texts, the ‘water of allegiance’ ceremony became a prominent element in Southeast Asian statecraft, and could even be extended to include Europeans (de Casparis 1956: 29; Ruangsilp 2007: 114).

For Southeast Asian societies generally, ritual water was highly valued because of its life-giving, healing, and transformative properties. Together with the appropriate ceremonial, the very act of pouring water over a tangible emblem of fertility (like an upright *linga*) could ensure the community’s well-being, and the landscapes of Java and Bali are dotted with temples dedicated to Shiva as a

generator of sacred water (Christie 1992, 2007). Perhaps the most graphic display of this association is the Cambodian Stung Kbal Spean “river of a thousand lingas” on Mount Kulen, where numerous Shaivite symbols from the eleventh century are carved directly on to the river bed, with inscriptions invoking the Ganges in India (Ly 2011: 468). A similar theme can be tracked in Buddhist iconography. The eleventh-century ruler of Pagan, Kyanzittha, speaks of “compassion, which is even as water” and a statue found in Cambodia dating from the seventh century shows the bodhisattva of compassion, Lokeshvara, with life-giving water flowing from his hands (Woodward 2010: 34; Nai Pan Hla 1991: 19). In Vietnam, as in East Asia more generally, statues often depict the same deity, Quan Am (Guan Yin) in a female form, pouring out healing water for her devotees. As Coomaraswamy explains in his examination of India’s “water cosmology”, it was quite natural that life-giving water should be envisaged as female, for the waters of creation, often compared to milk but also invoking the amniotic fluid in which the seed of life grows, were infused with ideas of birth and maternity. Indeed, for Thais the very word for river, ‘water mother’ (*mae naam*), encapsulates the notion of nurturing care. Yet water and its links with the female can also be activated more forcefully. In the Theravada Buddhist countries of mainland Southeast Asia one of the most well-known deities is the earth goddess, celebrated in innumerable stories because of her role in drowning the army of Mara, the evil one, by ringing water out of her hair (Ferguson 1982: 286).

CONCEPTUALIZING THE SPIRITS OF FRESH WATERS

Obviously, an entire book could be written about the role of water in Southeast Asia’s ritual life, and in her comparative study of nature myths Tamra Andrews notes that in numerous cosmologies this very variety encouraged conceptualizations of a range of water spirits. Displaying their own characteristics, depending on the context in which they operate, some are guarantors of life and fertility, while others are egotistic and hot-tempered (Andrews 2000: 193, 220, 260–1). Not surprisingly, anyone seeking to understand Southeast Asia’s shifting spirit-scape will encounter a virtual army of indigenous water spirits, all of whom have their own domains of authority and whose personalities can range from kindly guardians to mischievous pranksters and jealous waterlords. Spirits of turbulent water like rapids, whirlpools, or waves generating a tidal bore were imagined as unpredictable or even potentially hostile, and though they could be of either gender, they were notoriously capricious, sensitive to neglect, and occasionally destructive.

By contrast, the benevolent spirits associated with sources of fresh water that enabled the cultivation of irrigated rice or provided water for drinking or ritual ceremonies were commonly personified as beautiful young women or mother-like figures, amenable to propitiation and ready to co-operate with humans.

In the arts of ancient India the symbolic link between female deities and the creation and sustenance of existence was powerfully expressed in India's two great river goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna (Coomaraswamy 1993: 103; Shaw 2006: 100–1). Coomaraswamy pointed to Southeast Asian parallels in two statues from a Majapahit site, who hold vessels from which water pours into the pool below and who for him represented “water goddesses”. Similar figures can be found in early Balinese temples, where the localization process is well illustrated in Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning. In Bali she is not only a font of knowledge and the patron of the literate, but also the goddess of streams, venerated by farmers because she supplies the vital water for their fields, animals, and households (Coomaraswamy 1993: 172–3; Knappert 1999: 96; Krom 1926: 61).

In her discussion of world mythologies, Andrews has provided a salutary reminder that the water-fertility-female connections represent a widespread motif. In particular, she writes, “people who revered water as a creative force tended to make their water spirits female” because “they considered water the source of life and the mother of all things” (Andrews 2000: 220). In Southeast Asia, as in India, the relationship between female spirits and water is particularly evident in the indigenous beliefs that developed around the serpent, the *naga*. As Gregory Forth shows for eastern Indonesia, indigenous spirits or *nitu* were often thought to take the form of a snake or a python, an almost universal symbol of sexuality and fertility, and are closely associated with bodies of water (Forth 1998: 82, 90–92, 114). *Naga* can assume many different forms, including that of humans, either male or female; they can also be found in a variety of places but like all freshwater spirits, are closely connected with the land. In mainland Southeast Asia the mythology surrounding female *naga* (or *nagi*) who reside in and near rivers as protectors of the source of life is particularly striking. It is thus worth noting that the six indigenous goddesses identified in the old Lao text *Nangsu Nithan Urangkhathat* (Chronicle of the Stupa of the Breast-Bone Relic of the Buddha), thought to be pre-fourteenth century, all live besides ponds or marshes (Ngaosrivathana 2009: 12, 29). In south India some dynasties even claimed descent from *naga* princesses, and we find parallels in the earliest Chinese reference to Cambodia, dating from the third century. This account records the legendary marriage between an Indian prince and the daughter of the King of the Nagas, who together became the ancestors of the ruling line (Paul 1985: 185; Gaudes 1993). In Laos the *Urangkhathat* lists four serpent-spirits among the first rulers of the royal capital of Luang Prabang, three of whom were female (Ngaosrivathana 2009: 8; Stuart-Fox 2006: 8, 15).

Although there is a vast literature on the *naga* and its significance in Southeast Asian cultures, scholars are agreed that its incorporation into religious iconography, cultural memory, and popular imagination reflects a deep-seated belief in the procreative power of the tutelary spirits of water. In the thirteenth century a Chinese envoy thus described the nightly union between the *naga* princess and the Angkorian king, which affirmed the fertility of the land, and versions

of this myth can still be found in northeast Thailand and in Laos (Chou Ta Guan 1967: 23; Keyes 1977: 66–67; Ngaosrivathana 2009). Echoes of a corresponding connection between female water spirits and fertility also appear in a much later legend from the Malay world. More than a century ago W. G. Maxwell recorded various legends referring to a “princess of the foam” who emerges from a river to become the progenitor of a kingdom. One such account from Perak, in the western Malay Peninsula, tells of the long-ago marriage between a Malay captain and a white-skinned Semang girl. Soon after their marriage the annual overflow of the Perak River resulted in an “unprecedented flood” which caused great quantities of foam to float downstream. When she went to bathe, the “white Semang” discovered a female infant enveloped by cloud-like foam. The childless couple adopted this “daughter of the river” and as she grew to adulthood the wealth of her foster-parents increased, while the village prospered. She was eventually responsible for installing Perak’s first ruler (Maxwell 1881: 498–523).

One can, of course, overplay the idea of an association between female spirits, water, and community well-being. In Vietnam, for instance, the seventeenth-century traveller Cristoforo Borri described the sexual union between the male “lord of the river” and a local woman, and the ceremony that accompanied her death in labour (Dror and Taylor 2006: 176). Indeed, one of earliest recorded legends from Vietnam tells of rivalry between the mountain and water spirits, who are both male, and are contenders for the hand of a beautiful princess. Here the water spirit is hardly benign, for when he loses the contest he sends heavy rains every year in an effort to defeat the mountain spirit (Dutton 2014: 23–24). Since in Vietnam the ‘earth god,’ as in China, is also personified as male, these early accounts may reflect the influence of Chinese legends in which the female water spirit can be represented as a demonic force seeking to disrupt the flow of rivers and interfere with water control (Anderson 2001: 48–72).³

Throughout Southeast Asia spirits associated with smaller bodies of water, such as springs, lakes, and streams were usually personified as female, often helpful and supportive. Nonetheless, the ambivalence towards ‘femaleness’ that scholars have tracked in human societies also permeates the supernatural world (Pintchman 1994: 201–211; Manderson and Liamputtong 2002), and the Southeast Asian waterscape provides numerous examples of unfriendly female spirits. Like their male counterparts, those residing in dangerous swift-flowing rivers, rapids, or whirlpools could be capricious, sensitive to neglect, and even aggressive. A river bend, a large rock, or unexpected shallows could all mark the home of some watchful spirit who was fiercely protective of its watery domain. Any accident in these places was easily blamed on their resentment at some

³For representations of the ‘earth god’ as male in Vietnam, see Thien (2003: 116–117). The indigenous tutelary spirits of Khmer society in the Mekong delta region whose veneration was combined with that the incoming Vietnamese (male) earth god Ong Dia are also glossed as male.

offence. In Sumba, Forth records, a malevolent river spirit could assume the form of a dog-headed woman with pendulous breasts. Should she squirt her milk at any individual, they will surely drown (Forth 2008: 312 n.9). In the 1880s one Englishman travelling in the Lao areas remarked that the river spirit at Keng Kang was “especially unamiable”, but after due offerings he and his porters were permitted to navigate through the river’s rocks and perilous currents (Warrington Smythe 1898: 186). Fifty years later, in the same vein, another Englishman in Myanmar described his experiences in the upstream Irrawaddy, where a female *nat* (a spirit, usually one who has met a violent death) was said to control a whirlpool. If she were displeased, a boat could easily capsize, and even Burmans who had received some modern education were nervous when navigating past this particular stretch (Glass 1985: 114). Standing water could also be home to spiteful and malevolent beings who bore humans nothing but ill-will. In Cambodia, for instance, stagnant or brackish water is considered the haunt of resentful and hostile female spirits (*brai*), who are especially threatening to pregnant women (Jacobsen 2008: 141; Wessing 1988: 53).

While such beings should be rigorously avoided, and their vindictiveness warded off by charms and amulets, gaining the favour of their more benevolent counterparts was a high priority for most Southeast Asian societies, particularly in relation to agriculture. In Vietnam it has thus been suggested that veneration for water spirits as custodians of the irrigation system was itself closely tied to the development of a dyke system (Vo 2008: 89). Though potentially well disposed towards humans, such custodians were also uncompromising in their expectations of community obligations, and failure to render appropriate respect could easily be regarded as an insult. Although irrigation rituals in Java and Bali have been well studied (van Setten van der Meer 1979: 130–132; Christie 1992, 2007; Lansing 2009: 50–72), we find little reference to demands like that of animal sacrifice. It is thus useful to see a photograph taken in 1949 in Bali showing a buffalo being drowned in Lake Batur as a sacrifice to its goddess, Dewi Danu, the guardian of irrigation. A manuscript kept in her nearby water temple warns villagers that if they do not fulfil their obligations they will be denied access to her rice terraces because it is she who makes the water flow (TM nr.1001208; Lansing 2009: 104). Even in less studied areas of Southeast Asia we find that the spirits associated with water control also required blood offerings. An anthropologist working in northern Borneo in the 1930s described how priestesses sacrificed fowls to appease the spirits at the headwaters of the stream that supplied an irrigation dam (Evans 1953: 242–244).⁴ In contemporary times, as Catherine Allerton has shown, an irrigation dam may be marked by a Christian cross, but villagers still believe that the sacrifice of a buffalo, pigs, or chickens is needed to appease the water spirits and ensure that the flow of this “life-giving oil” will restore their crops to productivity (Allerton 2009b: 276–277).

⁴Evans noted that this was an indigenous dam, which he believed to be unique among the Dusun.

Water rituals in mainland Southeast Asia provide a rich domain in which historians could study changes in the kinds of offerings made to water deities. In 1365 the founder of the Lao kingdom of Luang Prabang, Fa Ngum, is said to have called for the sacrifice of 36 buffalo to the local *naga* living near his capital. According to legend, the ceremony became so “bloody” that his queen asked for Buddhism to be revived (Ngaosrivathana 2009: 39). In some cases, propitiation might extend to the shedding of human blood, and in Cambodia the ritual death of a pregnant woman was often considered necessary to generate a protective spirit for dikes, canals, and dams (Jacobsen 2008: 141). Legends from Myanmar’s Kyaukse district relate that installing a *nat* to watch over each weir once meant the sacrifice of many young women. According to folklore, the young queen of Anawrahta (1044–78) asked whether her own death could suffice for all. It is said that Anawrahta agreed, and by the nineteenth century almost every Kyaukse weir maintained a shrine containing a wooden figure of the queen overlaid with gold-leaf (Grant Brown 1916: 491–496; Harvey 1967: 25).

In tapping the supernatural power of water spirits, Southeast Asian societies shared the universal inclination to see certain kinds of water as possessing properties that contributed to good health and long life. In many communities it was thus common for newborn babies to be bathed in a nearby river, accompanied by prayers to the spirit for the infant’s health and long life, while similar rituals could also be part of a young couple’s marriage ceremonies. In this regard, some places may be particularly potent. Southeast Asian chronicles and oral legends are replete with stories of magic springs that bubble out fresh and clear from within the earth and have the capacity to make the ugly beautiful, to transpose human and animal forms, to heal the sick, and even restore life to the dead (Bosch 1961). One story from the Luzon highlands relates that in the distant past a woman was cured of a long-standing illness when she bathed in a magic spring. While she was immersed in the water a male water spirit entered her body, revealed to her the secrets that would ensure the future of the community, taught her how to plant sugar-cane and rice, and explained the rituals that could cure fevers and other ailments. Emerging from the magic spring, she was transmogrified into the spirit guardian of the community (Cooper-Cole 1915: 177).

Another ‘potent place’ was the confluence of two major rivers, which was not only a strategic site for economic and political control but was also pervaded with supernatural power. Luang Prabang, for instance, was traditionally envisioned as a *naga* with its head located at the junction of the Mekong and the Nam Khan, and its tail to the south of the city where the Huay Hop stream flows into the Mekong (Ngaosrivathana 2009: 35, 71). The story of Fa Ngum’s offerings to the *naga* shows that an alliance with local spirits was considered vital in supporting a regime against rivals and warding off disaster. For villagers and rulers alike, spirit shrines along river banks testified to the presence of these potentially helpful beings. According to Vietnamese chronicles, at a time when Nguyen Hoang (1525–1613), the founder of the southern realm, was pressed by the

forces of the Mac dynasty, he heard a crying sound from the river. He asked the spirit there to help him destroy his enemies, and that night he dreamt of “a woman dressed in green holding a white silk in her hand”. After he successfully defeated the Mac, Hoang rewarded the water spirit with a title and gave her a shrine, where she would be duly honoured (Taylor 1993: 65).

In protecting the community, such alliances often required negotiation with a number of spirits, each of whom held jurisdiction over specific river stretches. Their assistance could be critical because enemy attacks were so often launched via a river system. A modern researcher in the islands off the coast of Halmahera (eastern Indonesia) was told that in the past each river was ‘owned’ by a spirit (*kolana*, meaning ruler, or *jago*, guard) who provided protection against hostile raiding. In keeping with expectations of warriors and combat, several of these spirits were male, but informants noted that those personified as female were equipped with intimidating powers, such as the ability to inflict any foe with a skin disease or a swollen belly. The community, however, must play its part in rendering the required respect and recognition. In responding to any perceived neglect or wrongdoing, the more belligerent river spirits could also turn against their own people, inflicting sickness or other calamities that could only be negated by special rituals (Teljeur 1990: 103–109).

More than fifty years ago Charles Archambault, though noting the decline of spirit veneration in Laos, remarked on the persistence of belief in “water spirits or the guardian spirits, rooted in the soil and linked to some sand-bank or spot of water—spirits which go back to some pre-T'ai substratum” (1964: 68). Around the same time the recording of a Lahu propitiation rite offers a unique glimpse into this spirit world:

“Spirit of the upper reaches of the waters, spirit of the lower reaches of the waters, you who sit on the stream, you who sit upon the rocks ... today I offer you this silver pendant, this golden pendant, I offer you these flags made by my own hands; I offer you this beautiful beeswax candle made by my own hands ... do not punish the people, for the people cannot know all things...” (Walker 1976: 446)

While contemporary scholarship would probably argue that these beliefs are now fast fading (Ngaosrivathana 2009: 55–60), mainstream religions at times provide space for the incorporation of ancient beliefs regarding water spirits. This is probably most evident in Bali, where the localised form of Hinduism, known as “agama tirtha”, the religion of holy water, honours deities like Dewi Danu. Buddhism, too, has been more tolerant towards the inclusion of nature spirits, so that villagers in northeast Thailand can still associate healing powers with the female spirit of the village well who must be treated with respect, for otherwise the water will dry up (McDaniel 2011; Reeler 1996: 27). On the other hand, beliefs linked to water ceremonies, like Loy Krathong (originally intended to honour and

appease river spirits), have largely declined since its transformation into a popular and tourist oriented festival. The monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity are far less sympathetic, but in the 1980s Robert Hefner (1990: 58) observed that the cult of the water spirit was “one of the most resilient” in the syncretic Islam found in the Tengger region of eastern Java. Yet whether such village rituals will survive religious pressures remains questionable. In the seventeenth century the Augustinian destruction of a rock in the Manila River that “served as an idol of that wretched people for many years” and its replacement by a cross symbolized missionary intolerance for any kind of spirit veneration (Blair and Robertson 1903–09: 40, 70–71). To a degree, however, Catholic communities were able to accommodate theological conflicts because links are so often drawn between the curative powers of holy water and saintly figures, exemplified by the association of the Virgin Mary with a spring in Lourdes. In central Java, a spring near Yogyakarta was regarded as sacred long before the Jesuit priest Frans van Lith baptised a group of Javanese there in 1904. Although his choice of this site was surely not accidental, over the last hundred years Sendangsono, where the Virgin is said to have appeared, has become a Marian pilgrimage destination known for its healing powers (Courstens 2009: 105–107). In the Philippines, river processions like that honouring the Virgin of Peñafrancia and Our Lady of Salambao (whose image was found by fishermen in 1793 in the Hulongdoong River) have become colourful festivals of dancing, music, and enjoyment. Nonetheless, beliefs that participation will allow childless women to conceive, that individuals will enjoy good health, and that the harvest will be bountiful still speak to ancient ideas about the interconnection between fertility, water, and the spirits who resided there (Battard et al, 2008).

SPIRITS OF THE SEAS

If locating historical sources that illuminate the cultural place of water spirits is difficult in a landed environment, it is far more problematic in relation to the seas. Local sailors and fishermen left no accounts of their own experiences and the chronicles that originate from royal courts only rarely address the presence of the supernatural at sea. In consequence, a historian must rely heavily on a judicious alliance of older material, written and oral, with that collected by more recent observers. A useful departure point is provided by early European accounts, which supply ample evidence of the dangers involved in navigating Southeast Asia’s shallow seas. These accounts frequently stressed unpredictable encounters with storms, hidden reefs, submerged rocks, sandbars, deep water, strong currents, and dangerous whirlpools, and the challenge these posed even to experienced sailors. The depth of Southeast Asian beliefs in the powers of the spirits who patrolled dangerous coasts was well captured by the Spanish priest Francisco Colin (1592–1660). In his perceptive description of the

Philippines, he remarked on “an *anito* [spirit] of the sea, to whom [the Filipinos] commended their fisheries and navigations” and commented on the many offerings that were necessary to conciliate the *anito* associated with the “rocks, crags, reefs and points along the seashore” (Blair and Robertson 1903–09: 40, 69–82). For the most part, however, historians must wait until the nineteenth century to find more detailed accounts of the ways in which such spirits might be approached. Specialists on the Malay world are thus indebted to the ethnologist William Skeat (1866–1953) who recorded numerous mantras demonstrating the language fishermen might use to establish a relationship with sea spirits. One invocation, for instance, called on numerous deities, including the King of the Sea (Raja di Laut), to show their good will, recognizing that “in your charge are the points of the capes, in your charge all borders of the shore/ In your charge, too, are the river bars ... If in truth we be brothers/ Do you lend me your assistance” (Skeat 1967: 316 n.1, 625).

As this mantra suggests, the seas and shorelines were dissected by lines of spirit dominion anchored to a specific environment. Humans entering a specific domain therefore had to be wary of committing any action that could cause offence. The spirits who occupied the reefs, cliffs, islands, sandbars, or animated strong currents and whirlpools were watchful guardians of their territory and of the marine life that fishermen sought. In liminal zones – estuaries where salt and fresh water mingled, or shorelines that marked the transition between land and sea – they might offer protection from outsiders, but they could equally be mischievous and malicious troublemakers. Fishermen and sailors knew that while sea spirits might be persuaded to co-operate, they had the ability to inflict misfortune, such as illness or shipwreck, or at the very least cause snagged nets and broken fishing lines. Spirits were particularly prone to anger if a crew ignored prescribed ritual or employed inappropriate words, especially any terms associated with the land. Traditionally, for example, Acehese fishermen at sea could not refer to a mountain by the ordinary term, *gunung*, lest waves as high as mountains overwhelm their vessel (Barnes 1996: 295–299). Likewise, contemporary Sama Bajo of eastern Indonesia will not mention the names of powerful sea spirits outside of ritual situations or unless circumstances call for their assistance (Nolde 2014). Since such spirits usually communicate in local languages, outsiders were always linguistically disadvantaged and must be especially generous in gifts and observant of protocol. At all times crew members had to be alert to indications of possible spirit presence, since they had the power to transform themselves into other forms of marine life. In favourable circumstances, the appearance of a fish with a curious shape or markings, a giant squid or octopus, or a large shark could indicate the materialization of supernatural approval. According to Vietnamese legend, the future Emperor Gia Long (r. 1802–20) was actually saved by a whale while at sea (Claeys 1943: 1–10).⁵ Equally and more ominously, a

⁵For further information on the veneration of whales, see Nguyen Quoc Than 2008, 77–96.

contemporary study of fishermen in the Makassar Straits has noted that the sighting of unusual sea creatures can be a sign of spirit anger or a response to some slight on board (Zerner 2003: 66).

In general, it seems that indigenous sea spirits were only vaguely envisaged, though they could be addressed by name and accorded a personality. Furthermore, even if described as male or female, gender stereotypes do not necessarily apply. It has been suggested that since the seas are more inclined to be “wrathful, savage, or feral” than rivers and lakes, there is a greater likelihood of interpreting sea spirits as male (Glasgow 2009: 85). Indeed, Zerner’s research on fishermen in the Makassar Straits records that the spirits who inhabit reefs, coasts, and promontories are nearly all male and can be quite cruel (Zerner 2003: 65). Yet Malay fishermen told Skeat that Si Raya (the Great One), who governed the sea from the low water mark at the river’s mouth out to mid-ocean, had a wife and family, and that fishermen hoped that they could become his friends (Skeat 1967: 91–92). As we have seen, the universal tendency to associate water with female spirits was freighted with inherent ambivalences, so that sea beings could be conceived as bewitching young sirens who might lure sailors to their death on sandbanks or reefs. They could also be imagined as ugly and spiteful harpies, ready to steal fish or damage nets. Taking human form as old crones, intent on mischief, they could inhabit submerged rocks waiting to entrap the unwary crew of some passing boat (Pannell 2007: 83–85). Conversely, if manifested as beautiful and beguiling sea wives, they were willing to assist fishermen in procuring marine products. For example, in the eastern Indonesian island of Aru, pearl divers still court the favour of undersea spirit women by offering gifts like white plates and imitation gold jewellery (Spyer 2000: 147–153).

In this context, whether seeking access to sea products or simply asking for an undisturbed crossing, individuals well acquainted with a particular spirit domain and familiar with established procedures will obviously be better equipped to negotiate with unseen beings. In the words of a Malay invocation to the sea spirit guarding the route to Pulau Pinang, “I do not know the hidden snags/ I do not know where tree stumps are/ I do not know the rocks and reefs/ But *you* know” (Skeat 1967: 279, 621). Those dealing with this spiritscape realize that some kind of gift is almost always essential, since taking anything from the sea without permission is tantamount to stealing. Because they are boat-dwellers, the *orang laut* (sea people) of the Riau archipelago described by Cynthia Chou probably have a more amicable relationship with spirits than their land dwelling neighbours, but they will still lay out gifts of food, cigarettes, and other items in the hopes that their nets will attract many fish and that they will return with a good catch (Chou 2003: 63–65). On the other hand, a Bugis fisherman, aware of the importance of establishing a working relationship with the spirits, may approach the situation in more contractual terms. He may place an offering on the sea itself, or in a trap, or on some projecting rock, but tells a spirit, “Here is your share. Don’t you do anything [to me or] my children [or] my grandchildren/ Give

[them] safe passage if they pass by [here]./ This is what is asked” (Zerner 2003: 66–69). In short, it is familiarity with the local environment – knowledge of appropriate spells and prayers, the preferred type of offerings, and the specific mode of address – that will ensure a fisherman’s ability to obtain the favour of the sea spirits and thus guarantee his success.

For Southeast Asian sailors this locally grounded knowledge was simply not available when they entered areas the Malays called *laut jerebu*, or “the sea where land is no longer in sight” (Wilkinson 1903: 593; Andaya 2016). Despite a long-standing maritime tradition, an ocean voyage was still perilous; vessels could capsize in heavy seas, founder on a hidden reef or fall victim to some pirate attack. One of the most terrifying experiences was probably the giant or ‘rogue’ waves that a ship could encounter in otherwise calm waters. Yet the oceans also conveyed their own sense of mystery. A belief that mighty underwater kingdoms lay beneath the ocean’s surface was common among mariners generally, and was widespread in Southeast Asia (Ashliman 2005: 210). To favoured mortals, the powerful rulers of these domains might impart esoteric knowledge and supra-human skills, such as the ability to walk across the sea’s surface, or grant access to the purifying water found in the middle of the ocean. Any student of Malay history will recall the legendary story of the Muslim king, Raja Chulan, a mighty Indian ruler, who appeared in Singapore en route to attack China. Descending to the sea bed in a glass case, Raja Chulan married an underwater princess and deposited “a quantity of precious things – gold, silver, jewels, gems and rare stones of every kind” beneath the ocean. This treasure house would await a descendent who would become ruler over all the lands below the winds (Brown 1953: 22–23; Arps 2014). In a somewhat similar vein, Theravada Buddhists believed that the monk known as Upagupta – whose mother was a fish and who was able, like the Earth Goddess, to tame Mara, the evil one – lived in the middle of the ocean in a gem-studded palace, seated on a splendid throne adorned with jewels, “wafted by fragrant perfumes, bedecked with myriads of flowers filled with sparkling water” (Strong 1992: 186–90, 344 n.2). The recurring theme of great kingdoms governed by individuals with supernatural powers finds its most vehement expression in the Javanese legend of the Princess of the Southern Ocean, Ratu Kidul, who rules from a magnificent palace below the waves. Both venerated and feared, she is thought to serve as the guardian of central Java. Many Javanese still believe that the men lost at sea have been taken by Ratu Kidul in recompense for her protection of both the community and the fishermen who make their living in the dangerous Indian Ocean (Wessing 1997: 312; Lombard 1980: 320).

In the early modern period, the substantial rise in maritime traffic would have intensified the need for enhanced protection in order to ensure the safety of ships and mariners as they moved beyond their customary environment. The rapid expansion of commerce from the fifteenth century encouraged the adoption of new and more universalistic beliefs that encompassed portable

philosophies and religious ideas (Reid 1993: 159–160). What traders and mariners now required was access to protective deities whose authority extended across vast sea spaces and whose assistance could be solicited whether a ship was bound for China or India or Java. The portability of such deities takes tangible form in the many shrines and holy sites that dot the shores of the Indian Ocean. The Upagupta shrine in Penang, for instance, dates from 1976 but was originally set up by Burmese sailors in 1840 and, according to a booklet distributed by the temple, is still visited by “seafolks, who always invoke his blessings for their safety on the sea and voyages across stretches of water” (Walker 2013).

A significant feature of venerated individuals like Upagupta was their non-threatening and sympathetic nature, and their willingness to offer assistance to those who showed true devotion. In the fourteenth century, the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta (1304–1368?) mentioned the veneration accorded the Sufi leader Abu Ishaq al-Kazaruni (963–1035), known to protect sea travellers from storms, shipwreck, pirate attacks, or other dangers in return for a pledge of money. “No ship returns from China or India without yielding many thousands of dinars in votive fees” (Goldziher 1967: 284). As Islam spread, it carried stories of sailor-saints who miraculously moved about in water and who came at the last moment to the aid of the needy, especially sailors, fishermen and those in danger of drowning (Suvarova 2004: 168). The best known of these nautical saints was al-Khadir (“the green man”), associated with a mysterious figure in the Qur’an and in some Javanese accounts said to be the father of Ratu Kidul. Iconographically represented as an old man clothed entirely in green (the Prophet’s preferred colour), Nabi Khadir is often depicted moving across the ocean with a fish as his vehicle (Coomaraswamy, 1989: 157–167). In recent times he was described by Charles Zerner’s informants in Indonesia as “Nabi Heder”, the Prophet of Fish, who was everywhere at once and who “rules the seas – the waves, the wind and the movements of fish from Mandar [Southwest Sulawesi] to Mecca”. As the “President of the Sea”, he commanded the loyalty of a battery of local sea spirits who resembled district officials or *camat*. In the Makassar region, a particularly intriguing localization of the Nabi Heder traditions is the addition of a wife, I Sabaria, who patrols the dangerously liminal shoreline where sea meets land (Zerner 2003: 67–71). Though Islamic exegesis condemns the wife of the prophet Noah as an unbeliever, the lingering belief that she survived the Great Flood may explain the beach rituals by which Malay fishermen in the past hoped to gain her protection (Stowasser 1994: 40–41; Coatalen 1982: 129, 136).

Despite the masculinised maritime environment, there was thus a place for the female divinities associated with supra-local religious beliefs. In terms of indigenous traditions, it is worth noting that while the *orang laut* see the foremost sea spirit as male, they also recognise a female sea spirit who is called “mother” (Chou 2003: 63–65). Her mediating role is reminiscent of such figures as Manimekhala, the Buddhist goddess of the sea, who appears in non-canonical

Jatakas composed in Southeast Asia. In the view of Padmanabh Jaini, Manimekhala was a Southeast Asian creation, the compassionate saviour of the future Buddha, who was shipwrecked during a voyage to Suvarnabhumi, usually equated with mainland Southeast Asia. Previously neglectful of her duties as a sea guardian, Manimekhala rescues the bodhisattva and presents him with 84,000 ships filled with jewels (Levi 1930: 597–614; Monius 2001: 111–112; Jaini 1989: 25). That this episode caught popular imagination is indicated by its inclusion in Buddhist murals across mainland Southeast Asia.

In a similar mode, pilgrims travelling from China to India testified to the power of prayers offered to Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin in China), the ‘Venerable Mother’ who was specifically associated with cults for mariners (Yü 2001: 460). On his return from India, the fifth century pilgrim Faxian was a passenger on a ship that encountered a “violent gale, with tempestuous rain, at which the travelling merchants and traders who were [going back to China] were much frightened”. Faxian invoked Guanyin, “the Hearer of Prayers” and the mother-like guardian of sailors, and the vessel was saved (Wheatley 1961: 38–39). As Chinese voyaging to Southeast Asia expanded, sailors and traders brought with them one of the most vigilant sea deities, Mazu. First appearing in the tenth century, the beliefs associated with her apparently incorporated the cult of other female water and river spirits. Accorded an earthly existence as the daughter of a sea-going family, Tianhou (Empress of Heaven, as she came to be known) died young, but supernatural powers enabled her to appear as a spirit who would guide ships safely back to shore (Watson 1985: 294). Her reputation spread quickly and her temples proliferated, since her influence was thought to extend across very great distances. Prior to his departure on the famed ‘Ming Voyages’ the great admiral Zheng He made special sacrifices at her shrine to request protection for his ships, one of which travelled as far as Africa (Mills 1970: 9). Fishing boats and pirate craft alike maintained a shipboard shrine before which lamps burnt day and night, while embers or ashes from a Tianhou temple were often brought aboard so that they could be consulted as oracles. By the end of the eighteenth century Mazu temples had spread all over Southeast Asia. In these places seafarers could burn paper money and set off firecrackers to thank the goddess for their safe return and/or successful ventures, or request her future favours (Antony 2003: 157–161). Meanwhile, Zheng He had been elevated into a guardian protector of sailors and traders voyaging to the Southern Seas through his deification as the spirit Sam Po, venerated in temples established by overseas Chinese in trading centres throughout the region. Adjustments to the local context are plentiful; in Bangkok, for example, a temple originally founded in 1765 contains a large Buddha image, popularly known among Chinese as Sam Po Kong. In Java, Semarang’s Sam Po temple, which dates from the eighteenth century and was reportedly built on the site of a sacred cave, was dedicated to the legendary Javanese pilot, Dempu Awang. The Sam Po temple in Melaka, constructed in

1795, is said to celebrate a fish that miraculously saved Zheng He's vessel from sinking.⁶

The localization of supra-local religious beliefs is similarly evident in Christianity. Notwithstanding Christ's association with fishermen and the biblical account of his stilling the storm, in Christianised Asia it was his mother, Mary, who became the most potent symbol of divine protection on the seas.⁷ Wearing the blue cloak that invoked both the sea and the sky, the Virgin Mary as *Stella Maris*, the "star of the sea" is believed to intercede as a guide and protector of mariners and those travelling by boat. In the seventeenth century the Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes thus recorded that he had been saved from shipwreck by throwing a precious relic, a hair of the Holy Virgin, into the storm-lashed ocean (Hertz 1966: 66,100).

In Southeast Asia the Madonna image most closely associated with sea travel is enshrined in the church of Antipolo in the Philippines. Brought to Manila from Mexico in 1626, it gained immediately popularity because the face was carved from dark wood and thus resembled a Filipina. Numerous miracles were attributed to her intervention, notably the 1647 defeat of a Dutch armada that lay siege to Manila (Mercado 1980: 14, 77, 83). Because of this reputation, captains making the voyage from Manila to Acapulco in the 'galleon trade' frequently requested that the Virgin of Antipolo be permitted to accompany them. Between 1670 and 1815 thirty of the 108 ships that traversed the Pacific sank, with the loss of the valuable cargo and all aboard, but those that carried the Antipolo Virgin image all returned safely. According to one passenger, "Our Lady was both pilot and captain". In gratitude for this protection, the Spanish Governor awarded her the title 'Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage' (*Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*). Over the years numerous individuals reported other miraculous events at sea, especially rescue from shipwreck, that were all ascribed to the Virgin of Antipolo (Mercado 1980: 143, 145).

The great strength of the sea divinities associated with the supra-local beliefs was threefold. First, their responses to the human condition were predictable, for they were always willing to listen to the appeals of their followers, in contrast to the demanding and sometimes unexpected requirements necessary to gain the favour of local spirits. The maternal care that deities like Guan Yin, Mazu and the Virgin Mary extended to their followers was far removed from the lures of seductive sea maidens. Second, the veneration of sea-associated deities like Nabi Khidir or Sam Po was supported by the political authorities, be they

⁶<http://www.bangkoktour.biz/unseen-in-bangkok/biggest-buddha-image.html>, Accessed 25 October 2015; <http://amazingmelaka.com/2011/12/sam-po-keng-temple/>. Accessed 25 October 2015.

⁷In northern Europe Saint Anne, Mary's mother, was venerated as a maritime protector and often paired with Saint Nicholas, also associated with rescue at sea (Nixon 2004: 18). Though the French form of this cult was taken to Quebec, it does not seem to have been popular in Southeast Asia. For a discussion in an Indian context, see Mukherjee 2009.

Chinese Emperors, Muslim Sultans, or Spanish governors. Third, while such deities were above all ‘portable,’ and like Nabi Khidir, could be recognised from the coasts of Africa to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, they could also forge close relationships with local societies. Filipino men who crewed the Spanish galleons sailing to Acapulco, for example, would have been comforted by the ‘brown Madonna’ who was their patroness, while Chinese sailors could commission a *wayang* performance in Batavia to thank Mazu for a safe arrival (De Bruijn, 2004: 208). Chinese communities in Malaya and Singapore even developed their own deity, Tua Pek Kong, the Grand Uncle. Distinctively Chinese, yet local in origin, he was second only to Mazu in his miraculous protection of seafaring migrants (Chia 2009).

This form of localization permitted the incorporation or adaptation of many pre-existing Animist beliefs. For historians, a telling example from the 1830s is provided by the British soldier Thomas Newbold (1807–50) who described his visit to Lumut, along the Malay coast, where a devout Muslim lady, Rubiah, had been buried. Jealously guarding her territorial waters, the unseen Rubiah (in this sense, now a spirit herself) was quick to act when unwelcome vessels appeared, invoking “the spirits of the elements” and signifying her intention to cause a shipwreck through a loud explosion “resembling the discharge of artillery”. Combined with her reputation for Islamic piety, Rubiah’s ability to command the wind and waves had elevated her to become “a saint of no ordinary celebrity among the sea-faring class of natives” (Newbold 1971: 39–40). But the cultural and physical environment that made this kind of localization possible is fast disappearing. Though the bay (*teluk*) in Lumut still bears her name, a Brazilian iron ore terminal costing more than a billion dollars now overlooks the waters where the saintly Rubiah once reigned.

CONCLUSION

This article on water spirits represents a preliminary venture intended to highlight comparative possibilities for Southeast Asian studies. It began with the comment that despite the centrality of water in this region, the absence of a regional overview means that Southeast Asian societies have been largely ignored in cross-cultural discussions of water-spirit archetypes. Proceeding further down this path means that historians must delve further into their sources, while scholars working on modern case studies could be encouraged to think more comparatively. In particular, the broad category of ‘water’ requires reconsideration, given the differences in attitudes towards the multiple permutations of ‘fresh’ and ‘salt’ water, and the varying roles and conceptions of ‘water spirits’. Sources of fresh-water (not necessarily potable) can range from rivers and waterfalls to hot springs and stagnant pools, and their very form can change drastically. In descending from its headwaters, a torrent that rushes through narrow rapids or spills over

waterfalls can be transformed into a wide, meandering and seemingly benign river, while fresh and salt water mingle in deltas, estuaries, and coastal swamps. Less varied to a land-dweller's eye, the seas and oceans nonetheless have their own character – hidden reefs, sandbanks, currents, deep trenches – best understood by experienced pilots.

The spirits of water reflect this diversity. Although they can be imagined in various forms, and with vague or changing gender, they could be well disposed and helpful, or ill-behaved and even malevolent. In this regard Southeast Asian societies conform to universal patterns, in which spirits linked to 'pure' water, regarded as purveyors of fertility, were typically conceptualised as female. Though such beings could be offended or roused to anger, they were generally concerned for the safety of their communities and were responsive if correctly approached. The maritime world was more dangerous, and land dwellers who took to the seas entered a less predictable spiritscape where even a short fishing trip required offerings and propitiation. But this locally-generated goodwill was of little assistance when seafarers moved beyond a familiar environment, and in this situation incoming religions and belief systems provided new and powerful divinities whose authority was widely recognised. Despite the heavily masculine maritime environment, several female figures seen as steadfast, watchful, and maternal became particular foci of devotion.

As a final note, although otherwise inexplicable events like a sudden drowning or some tragedy during a boat race can still be ascribed to supernatural anger, the relationship between humans, water, and the spirit world is fast fading. An obvious reason is improved education and increased awareness of government policies that have lessened the need to attribute unusual situations to the actions of non-human forces. For example, on learning that the cause of severe flooding resulted from the Vietnamese government's use of inferior cement in dam construction resulting in collapsed walls, Jarai groups on the Cambodia–Vietnam border abandoned efforts to appease the river spirit through traditional rituals (Ly 2014: 156–7). Even when performed on official occasions, 'traditional' ceremonies may be simplified and perfunctory. The territorial guardianship of water spirits is no longer relevant as Southeast Asian states carve out national zones of influence, as global influences encourage a more sceptical attitude towards spirit propitiation, and as religious disapproval becomes more entrenched. Furthermore, travel on water is far less important than once was the case. The power of spirits to bring about a shipwreck or to overturn a boat in turbulent water has been challenged by modern technologies, and in some cases, as in the blasting of rapids on the upper Mekong, has resulted in the destruction of spirit domains. We seem to be entering a new chapter of human history in which, as one elderly Thai informant remarked more than forty years ago, "It isn't the same as in the past. The spirits aren't so powerful any more" (Lando 1983: 147). The reality of change in our fast-paced world makes the task of recording the 'water cosmologies', once so evident in Southeast Asian life, more important

and more urgent, since it is these records that will supply future scholars with their historical documentation.

Works Cited

- Allerton, Catherine. 2009a. Introduction: spiritual landscapes of Southeast Asia. *Anthropological Forum*, 19(3), 235–251.
- Allerton, Catherine. 2009b. Static crosses and working spirits: anti-syncretism and agricultural animism in Catholic West Flores. *Anthropological Forum* 19(3), 271–287.
- Andaya, Barbara Watson. 2016 (forthcoming). Seas, oceans and cosmologies in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.
- Anderson, Poul. 2001. *The Demon Chained under Turtle Mountain: The History and Mythology of the Chinese River Spirit Wuzhiqi*. Berlin: G. and H. Verlag.
- Andrews, Tamra. 2000. *Dictionary of Nature Myths: Legend of the Earth, Sea and Sky*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Antony, Robert J. 2003. *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China*. Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California-Berkeley.
- Archambault, Charles, 1964. Religious structures in Laos. *Journal of the Siam Society* 52 (4), 56–74.
- Arps, Bernard. 2014. Drona's betrayal and Bima's brutality: *Javanaiserie* in Malay culture. Paper presented at an International Workshop on "Traces of the Two Great Epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in Javanese and Malay Literature", Singapore, 24–25 April 2014.
- Ashliman, D. L. 2005. Water spirits. In Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy (eds.), *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook*, pp. 210–216. Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe
- Barnes, R.H. 1996. *Sea Hunters of Indonesia: Fishers and Weavers of Lamalera*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Battard, Teodora T. et al. 2008. *Various Religious Beliefs and Practices in the Philippines*. Volume 1. Quezon City: Rex Bookstore.
- Blair, Emma and James Alexander Robertson (eds. and trans.). 1903–1909. *The Philippine Islands 1493–1898*. Vol. XL. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark.
- Boomgaard, Peter (ed.). 2007. *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Bosch, F.D.K. 1961. Guru, trident and spring. In F.D.K. Bosch, *Selected Studies in Indonesian Archeology*. pp. 155–170. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Brown, C. C. (trans.). 1953. 'Sejarah Melayu or 'Malay Annals,' a translation of Raffles MS 18. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25(2 and 3).
- Bruijn, Max de. 2004. Batavia 1779–1785. In Max de Bruijn and Remco Raben (eds.), *The World of Jan Brandes, 1743–1808: Drawings of a Dutch Traveller in Batavia, Ceylon and Southern Africa*, pp. 146–230. Zwolle: Wanders.
- Chia, Jack MengTat. 2009. Managing the Tortoise Island: Tua Pek Kong Temple, pilgrimage, and social change in Pulau Kusu, 1965–2007. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 11(2), 72–95.
- Chou Ta-Kuan. 1967. *Notes on the Customs of Cambodia*. Translated into English by J. Gilman D'Arcy Paul from Paul Pelliot's French translation. Bangkok: Social Science Association Press.

- Chou, Cynthia. 2003. *Indonesian Sea Nomads: Money, Magic and Fear of the Orang Suku Laut*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Christie, J. Wisseman. 1992. Water from the ancestors: irrigation in early Java and Bali. In Jonathan Rigg (ed.), *The Gift of Water: Water Management, Cosmology and the State in South East Asia*, pp. 7–25. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Christie, J. Wisseman. 2007. Water and rice in early Java and Bali. In Peter Boomgaard (ed.), *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, pp. 235–258. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Claeys, J. Y. 1943. L'Annamite devant la mer. *Indochine* 3, 1–10.
- Coatalen, Paul J. 1982. *The Decorated Boats of Kelantan*. Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 1989. Khwāja Khadir and the fountain of life in the tradition of Persian and Mughal art. In Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *What is Civilisation? and Other Essays*, pp. 157–167. Cambridge: Golgonooza Press.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1993. *Yakṣas: Essays in the Water Cosmology*. (Revised, enlarged). Paul Schroeder (ed.). Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.
- Cooper-Cole, Fay. 1915. *Traditions of the Tinguian: A Study in Philippine Folklore*. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History.
- Courtens, Ien. 2009. Mary, mother of all: finding faith at the sacred source of Sendangsono, Indonesia. In Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (eds.), *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, pp. 101–115. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate.
- De Casparis, J.G. (ed. and trans.). 1956 *Selected Inscriptions from the 7th to the 9th Century A.D.* Vol. II. Masa Baru: Bandung.
- Craig, Robert D. 2004. *Handbook of Polynesian Mythology*. Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-CLIO.
- Davidson, H.R. Ellis. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. London: Penguin, 1990.
- Dror, Olga and K.W. Taylor (eds.). 2006. *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Dutton, George E. (ed.). 2014. *Voices of Southeast Asia: Essential Readings from Antiquity to the Present*. New York and London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Evans., I.H.N. 1953. *The Religion of the Tempasuk Dusuns of North Borneo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fausbøll, V. and T.W. Rhys-Davis (trans.). 1880. *Buddhist Birth Stories or Jataka Tales: The Oldest Collection of Folk-lore Extant*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.
- Ferguson, John P. 1982. The Great Goddess today in Myanmar and Thailand: an exploration of her symbolic relevance to monastic and female roles. In James J. Preston (ed.), *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*, pp. 283–303. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press
- Forth, Gregory. 2008. *Images of the Wildman in Southeast Asia: An Anthropological Perspective*. London: Routledge
- Garry, Jane, and Hasan El-Shamy. 2005. Introduction. In Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy, *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook*, pp. xv–xviii. Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Gaudes, Rüdiger. 1993. Kaundinya, Preah Thaong, and the 'Nāgi Somā': some aspects of a Cambodian legend. *Asian Folklore Studies* 52, 333–358.
- Glasgow, R. D. V. 2009. *The Concept of Water*. R. Glasgow Books.
- Glass, Leslie. 1985. *The Changing of Kings: Memories of Burma, 1934–1949*. London: P. Owen.

- Goldziher, Ignác. 1967. *Muslim Studies*, Vol. I. S.M. Stern (ed). Albany: SUNY Press.
- Grant Brown, R. 1916. The lady of the weir. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July), 491–496.
- Harvey, G. E. 1967 [Reprint of 1925 edition]. *History of Burma*. London: Frank Cass.
- Hertz, Solange (trans.). 1966. *Rhodes of Vietnam*. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press.
- Horton, Robin. 1971. African conversion. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41, 2 (April), 85–108.
- Jacobsen, Trude. 2008. *The Lost Goddesses: The Denial of Female Power in Cambodian History*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) Press.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S. 1989. The apocryphal Jātakas of Southeast Asia. *Indian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1(1), 22–29.
- King, Victor T. 2001. Southeast Asia: an anthropological field of study? *Moussons* 3, 3–32.
- Knappert, Jan and Graham E. Saunders. 1999. *Mythology and Folklore in South-East Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Krom, N.J. 1926. *L'Art Javanais dans les Musées d'Hollande et de Java*, Arts Asiatica VIII. Paris and Brussels: G. van Oest.
- Lando, Richard. 1983. The spirits aren't so powerful any more: spirit belief and irrigation organization in North Thailand. *Journal of the Siam Society* 71, 121–148.
- Lansing, Stephen J. 2009. *Priests and Programmers: Technologies of Power in the Engineered Landscape of Bali*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Levi, Sylvain. 1930. Manimekhala, an Indian goddess of the sea. *Indian Historical Quarterly* 6(4), 597–614.
- Lombard, Denys. 1980. Le thème de la mer dans les littératures de l'Archipel Insulinien. *Archipel* 20, 317–328.
- Ly Boreth. 2011. Broken threats: contested histories of Brahminism in Cambodia and Thailand and the construction of ritual authority. In Pierre-Yves Manguin, A. Mani and Geoff Wade (eds.), *Early Interactions between South and Southeast Asia: Reflections on Cross-cultural Exchange*, pp. 461–481. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Ly Thim 2014. Mobilizing against hydropower projects: multi-scale dimensions of civil society action in a transboundary setting. In Gabi Weibel, Judith Ehlert, and Hart L. Feuer (eds.), *Southeast Asia and the Civil Society Gaze: Scoping a Contested Concept in Cambodia and Vietnam*, pp. 153–167. London and New York: Routledge.
- Manderson, Lenore and Pranee Liamputtong. (eds.). 2002. *Coming of Age in South and Southeast Asia. Youth, Courtship and Sexuality*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.
- Maxwell, W. E. 1881. Two Malay myths: the princess of the foam and the raja of the bamboo. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13(4), 498–523.
- McDaniel, Justin Thomas. 2011. *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mercado, Monina A. 1980. *Antipolo: A Shrine to Our Lady*. Manila: Craftnotes/Aletheia Foundation.
- Mills, J.V. G (trans. and ed.). 1970. Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores' [1433]*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Hakluyt Society.
- Monius, Anne. 2001. *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-speaking South India*. London and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mukherjee, Rila. 2009. 'Locality, history, memory: Vailankanni and a new geography of citizenship.' In Rila Mukherjee and M.N. Tajesh (eds.), *Locality, History,*

- Memory: The Making of the Citizen in South Asia*, pp. 152–181. Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Nai Pan Hla. 1991. The major role of the Mons in Southeast Asia. *Journal of the Siam Society* 79(1), 13–20.
- Newbold, T.J. 1971 [Reprint of 1839 edition]. *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*. Vol. II. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Ngaosrivathana, Mayoury and Pheuiphanh. 2009. *The Enduing Sacred Landscape of the Naga*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- Nguyen Quoc Than. 2008. The whale cult in central Vietnam: a multicultural heritage in Southeast Asia. In Danny Wong Tze Ken (ed.), *Memory and Knowledge of the Sea in Southeast Asia*, pp. 77–96. Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Ocean and Earth Science, University of Malaya.
- Nixon, Virginia. 2004. *Mary's Mother: Saint Anne in late Medieval Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Nolde, Lance. 2014. *Changing tides: a history of power, trade, and transformation among the Sama Bajo sea people of eastern Indonesia in the early modern period*. (unpublished Ph.D. thesis). University of Hawai'i.
- Pannell, Sandra. 2007. Of gods and monsters: indigenous sea cosmologies, promiscuous geographies and the depths of local sovereignty. In Peter Boomgaard (ed.), *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, pp. 71–102. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Paul, Diana Y. 1985. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pintchman, Tracy. 1994. *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Poh, Lindy. 2008. *Celebrating the Source: Water Festivals of Southeast Asia*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.
- Reeler, Anne V. 1996. *Money and Friendship: Modes of Empowerment in Thai Health Care*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Reichle, Natasha. 2007. *Violence and Serenity: Late Buddhist Sculpture from Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Reid, Anthony. 1993. Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: the critical phase, 1550–1660. In Anthony Reid (ed.) *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Period: Trade, Power, Belief*, pp. 151–179. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Ruangsilp, Bhawan. 2007. *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom c. 1604–1765*. Leiden: Brill.
- Shaw, Miranda. 2006. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Skeat, W.W. 1967 [Reprint of 1900 edition]. *Malay Magic*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Spyer, Patricia. 2000. *The Memory of Trade: Modernity's Entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian Island*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. 1994. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Strong, John S. 1992. *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stuart-Fox, Martin. 2006. *The Naga Cities of the Mekong: A Guide to the Temples, Legends and History of Laos*. Singapore: Media Masters.
- Suvarova, Anna. 2004. *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

- Swearer, Donald K. 1976. *Wat Haripunjaya: A Study of the Royal Temple of the Buddha's Relic, Lamphun, Thailand*. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press.
- Taylor, Keith. 1993. Nguyen Hoang and Vietnam's southward expansion. In Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief*, pp. 42–68. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Teljeur, Dirk. 1990. *The Symbolic System of the Giman of South Halmahera*. Dordrecht, Netherlands/Providence, R.I.: Foris.
- Thien Do. 2003. *Vietnamese Supernaturalism: Views from the Southern Region*. London: Psychology Press.
- TM nr.1001208. Tropenmuseum Collection. 'Pekelem', The Drowning of a Buffalo and Offering to Dewi Danu, goddess of Lake Batur, Bali. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Water_buffalo_sacrifice_in_Indonesia. Accessed 16 August 2015.
- Van Setten van der Meer, N.C. 1979. *Wet Rice Cultivation in Ancient Java*. Oriental Monograph Series no. 22. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- Vo Hoang Lan. 2008. Worship of water spirits in the Red River Delta. *Vietnam Social Sciences* 3 (125), 85–90.
- Walker, Andrew R. 1976. *Law ne cai ve*: a Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) rite to propitiate the water spirit. *Baessler-Archive; Beiträge zur Völkerkunde*, Neue Folge, 24, pp. 429–452.
- Walker, Andrew R. 2013. Upakhut in Malaysia. *New Mandala* 27 January. <http://asia.pacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/01/27/upakhut-in-malaysia/>. Accessed 31 May 2014.
- Warrington Smythe, Herbert. 1898. *Five Years in Siam from 1891 to 1896*. London: J. Murray.
- Watson, James. 1985. Standardizing the gods: the promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') along the South China Coast, 960–1960. In David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski (eds.), *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 292–324. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Wessing, Robert. 1988. Spirits of earth and water in West Java. *Asian Folklore Studies* 47, 43–61.
- Wessing, Robert. 1997. A princess from Sunda: some aspects of Nyai Roro Kidul. *Asian Folklore Studies* 56, 317–353.
- Werner, E.T.C. 1922. *Myths and Legends of China*. George Harrop: London.
- Wheatley, Paul. 1961. *The Golden Khersonese*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Wilkinson, R. J. 1903. *A Malay-English Dictionary*. Singapore: Kelly & Walsh.
- Woodward, Hiram. 2010. Bronze sculptures of ancient Cambodia. In Louise Allison Cort and Paul Jett (eds.), *Gods of Angkor: Bronzes from the National Museum of Cambodia*, pp. 30–77. Washington DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.
- Yü, Chün-fang. 2001. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zerner, Charles. 2003. Sounding the Makassar Strait: the poetics and politics of an Indonesian marine environment. In Charles Zerner (ed.), *Culture and the Question of Rights: Forests, Coasts and Seas in Southeast Asia*, pp. 56–108. Durham: Duke University Press.