

The Nomadic Object

*The Challenge of World
for Early Modern Religious Art*

Edited by

Christine Göttler
Mia M. Mochizuki



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Early Modern Incense Boats: Commerce, Christianity, and Cultural Exchange*

Jeffrey L. Collins and Meredith Martin

During excavations at the former Siamese royal palaces of Ayutthaya and Lopburi north of Bangkok, archaeologists uncovered ornate silver and silver-gilt candlesticks, a chalice, and other western-style liturgical objects dating to the seventeenth century. The most striking is a *navicula* or boat used for storing incense burned during Catholic Mass [Fig. 17.1]. Taking the form of a European trading ship but incorporating Chinese dragons and stylised ornamental motifs, this hybrid vessel testifies to the intercultural exchanges prompted both by the establishment of religious missions at Ayutthaya and by Siam's status as a commercial *entrepôt*. Similar incense boats proliferated in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Catholic Europe during the early modern period, notably in countries and port cities tied to long-distance trade. Encoding movement and exchange in their very form, and housing fragrant resins that were themselves an international trade commodity, *naviculae* embody the spread of commerce and Christianity and suggest important links between the two.

Like thousands of related vessels found around the world, the Ayutthaya incense boat tells a local story that is nonetheless part of a global phenomenon. It prompts us to ask how an object type integral to the spread of Christianity joined a more complex and multipolar network fuelled by diplomacy and commerce; and to consider why the makers of these objects chose to evoke the same ships that carried both the people—priests, traders, administrators, artisans, slaves—and the goods—from raw materials like bullion and incense

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FIGURE 17.1 *Anon. (silversmith), Navicula (late seventeenth century). Gilded silver, 27 cm (height). Lopburi, Somdet Phra Narai National Museum (inv. no. L. 1626). IMAGE © SOMDET PHRA NARAI NATIONAL MUSEUM, LOPBURI.*

to finished products like tools, books, and images—on which globalisation depended. The same questions must be asked wherever such vessels appear, from Lisbon to Kongo, and from Ayutthaya to Goa, over a period of centuries. What accounts for their apparent homogeneity across time and space? How do early modern ship-shaped incense boats instantiate what Christine Göttler and Mia Mochizuki have termed a global republic of sacred things?

This historical confluence of function and form has not gone unnoticed, and descriptions of these objects often link them in a general way with seafaring and colonial expansion. But the incense boat has never, to our knowledge, been studied in its global dimension or with an eye to testing the potential or limits of this interpretive approach. As ‘nomadic objects’, do they testify solely to a new, global Catholic culture? Or do superficial similarities conceal a host of different and regionally specific meanings? How closely are boat-shaped religious vessels tied to European expansion, and how did they give new life

to old metaphors? What follows explores these questions while acknowledging the interpretive problems they raise. After reviewing the form's origin and development, as well as its connection to secular versions known as *nefs*, we present selected case studies that highlight the global networks in which incense boats participated while also underscoring how their surface commonalities reflect distinct local challenges and conditions.

What is a *Navicula*? Form, Terminology, and Secular Equivalents

As defined in Catholic Europe, a *navicula* is a small, ship-shaped vessel carried by an acolyte or 'boat boy' and used to store, transport, and dispense resin granules burned during Mass and associated religious ceremonies. Typically made of silver but sometimes crafted from base metals or other precious materials including enamel, polished hardstone, or shell, *naviculae* featured a spreading, columnar foot and hinged lids that, much like the hatches of a cargo ship, gave access to a hollow interior from which the priest extracted resin with a spoon that was sometimes attached with a chain. Placed in an accompanying censer or thurible, the incense would be ignited and the smoke directed with controlled swings towards the objects or persons to be censured as a mark of honour and ritual purification. Together with related altar furnishings including a crucifix, candlesticks, mass cards, lecterns, chalices, and patens, *naviculae* were key components of a highly ritualised Eucharistic liturgy codified in the medieval *Ordo Romanum* and scrupulously observed by the Roman curia. Their presence on the frontiers of the early modern Christian world, where they would also have been visible during processions, consecrations, adorations of the sacrament, funerals, and related ceremonies, testifies to missionaries' faith that replicating canonical rituals and implements might communicate powerfully but nonverbally to observers unfamiliar with Christian beliefs and practices.

Although *naviculae* were intimately associated with the spread and codification of Christian rites around the globe, many of these practices were syncretic and drew upon earlier or competing belief systems. Incense in particular had featured prominently in ancient pagan rites celebrated across the Mediterranean, and it was a major component of Hebrew, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic religious traditions. In all of these contexts, the burning of fragrant incense contributed to a 'multi-sensorial message of the divine', transporting participants to a sacred realm that transcended everyday experience.¹

¹ Ergin N., "The Fragrance of the Divine: Ottoman Incense Burners and Their Context", *The Art Bulletin* 96, 1 (March 2014) 70–97. The phrase 'multi-sensorial message of the divine'

Additionally, incense connoted purification in a spiritual and a bodily sense, and it was often used in healing and funerary rites as well as a variety of secular functions. Because of their multiple resonances, the ritual and implements of Catholic Mass, including *naviculae*, assimilated relatively smoothly into many non-Christian regions during the era of Europe's overseas expansion, especially given the tendency of both missionaries and inhabitants to adapt Christian practices and forms to fit these new cultural contexts. In the case of *naviculae*, a celebrant might substitute local resins for imported frankincense and myrrh, generally sourced from the Arabian Peninsula, thereby rendering an exotic fragrance familiar; or a local artisan might inflect the vessel's design in ways that resonated with native users and observers, as will be discussed below.

While many religious traditions invoked visual metaphors in the design of incense-related objects—from ancient Chinese censers in the shape of smoking mountains to the animal-shaped perfume burners popular in the Islamic world—ship-shaped *naviculae* are, as far as we know, unique to western Christianity. It was not until the thirteenth century, however, that incense holders acquired a nautical shape and name (*navicula* or occasionally *naviculus*, both diminutives of Latin *navis* [ship] and echoed in French as *navette*, Italian as *navetta* or *navicella*, and in Spanish and Portuguese as *naveta*).² Many early *naviculae* resembled ships only in a general sense, such as a thirteenth-century container now at the Walters Art Museum, crafted in Limoges of champlevé enamel with an abstracted, hull-like body and hinged lid evoking a cargo hold.³ Others were more literal, including an example in gilded copper, made in Siena during the fourteenth century and now at the Musée

is taken from Howes D., *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: 2003) 64, cited in Ergin, "The Fragrance of the Divine" 70.

- 2 On the Christian use of incense and associated vessels, including *naviculae*, see *Suppelletile ecclesiastica*, ed. B. Montevecchi and S. Vasco Rocca (Florence: 1988) 256–266, esp. 259–261. Before the thirteenth century, incense containers were variously referred to as *acerra*, *pyxis*, or merely *incensorium* and might be shaped as cups, cylindrical boxes, or miniature towers. See also Moroni G., *Dizionario de erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, vol. 45 (Venice: 1845) 152, *ad vocem* 'incensiere'; *Ordo Romanus VI* ("De missa episcopali secundus") paragraph 6: 'pyxidem in qua thus habetur', quoted from Migne J.P., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, sive Bibliotheca Universalis* [...], first series, vol. 78 (Paris: 1852) 991; Magri Domenico, *Notizia de' vocaboli ecclesiastici* (Rome, Giovanni Casoni: 1669 [third printing]) 290, 351, citing Leo of Ostia (book 2, cap. 98).
- 3 Among this 'abstracted' boat type is a rare fourteenth-century English *navicula* in parcel-gilded silver (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 269–1923), with rams' head finials that suggest it was made at Ramsey Abbey in Huntingdonshire. For the Walters example, see: <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/38824/incense-boat> (accessed: 15.11.2015).



FIGURE 17.2 Anon. (silversmith), *Navicula* (fourteenth century). Gilded copper, 96 × 21.5 cm. Paris, Musée de Cluny (inv. no. C. 1157).

IMAGE © RMN-GRAND PALAIS/ART RESOURCE, NEW YORK CITY, NY.

de Cluny in Paris, that evinces a characteristic pointed oblong shape (in this case articulated to suggest horizontal planking) with twin dragon-head finials recalling prow and stern sculptures [Fig. 17.2].⁴ In both cases, the consolidation of the boat metaphor implies that by the later middle ages the liturgical use of incense had become associated with notions of travel and transport. One reason is indicated by Guillaume Durand, bishop of Mende (ca. 1230–1296), whose discussion of *naviculae* in his influential treatise on the rituals and symbols of Christianity interprets the rising smoke as charting a prayerful Christian's path across a wide sea toward a heavenly home.⁵ This may explain the frequent inclusion of both winged angels (featured on the lid of the Walters example) and the Annunciation (engraved on the lid of the Cluny example), perhaps

4 For another early example, with a projecting aftercastle, see *Suppelletile ecclesiastica*, fig. 77, now in Naples and tentatively ascribed to the fourteenth century.

5 *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, lib. 4, cap. VIII (“De incenso benedicendo et in thuribulum mittendo”) paragraph 3: ‘navicula vero, in qua incensum reponitur, designat quod per orationem, quam incensum significat, de huius mundi mari magno et spacioso at coelestem patriam satagamus navigare. Unde in Proverbiis: “Facta est quasi navis institoris de longe parians panem suum”’.

because they exemplified, like incense itself, the idea of communication and exchange between spiritual and earthly realms.

Naviculae may also have reflected old understandings of the Christian Church as a ship guiding the faithful to salvation. Based on the Gospel story of the Church's founder, Saint Peter, as a fisherman who became a 'fisher of men' (*Matthew* 4:19), this metaphor was visualised throughout medieval churches, ranging from twelfth-century sculptured capitals in a crusader church in Nazareth to Giotto's famous 'Navicella' mosaic (*navicula sancti Petri*), installed around 1310 in the courtyard outside the main entrance to Saint Peter's basilica in Rome.⁶ Depicting the apostle as captain of the 'ship of the church' navigating stormy seas, Giotto's mosaic made reference to the papal flight from Rome to Avignon in 1309 while evoking the broader concept of the church as a salvific spiritual bark. Pope Leo X revived this maritime metaphor in the early sixteenth century, when he commissioned a prominent ship-shaped fountain for the piazza outside his ancient titular church of Santa Maria in Domnica—also known as Santa Maria alla Navicella—in Rome.

The late medieval conflation of ships and incense holders was likely reinforced by incense's exotic origins, as expanding trade routes opened the Christian West to an increasing variety of foreign goods and ideas. Durand's treatise explicitly likened *naviculae* to the merchant vessel of Proverbs that, on analogy with the perfect wife, brings 'her food from far away'.⁷ The association of *naviculae* with long-distance trade was encoded in some early examples through engraved vegetal or marine motifs or the incorporation of exotic gems and pearls. *Naviculae* could also be crafted from rare hardstones, such as a fourteenth-century example in the treasury of San Marco in Venice that incorporates an earlier Byzantine bowl carved from purplish steatite and bearing the inscribed image of St. Demetrios.⁸ An elaborate fifteenth-century incense boat, possibly crafted in Venice, employs both enamels on solid gold and polished panels of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, perhaps also chosen to evoke the colour of the sea and illustrative of the rare, imported materials often employed during the medieval and early Renaissance periods. The connection of *naviculae* with trade did not diminish by the late sixteenth century, by which

6 Terra Sancta Museum, Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth; Boehm B.D. – Holcomb M. (eds.), *Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People under Heaven*, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY: 2016) 188–189, cat. no. 101b.

7 See footnote 5.

8 Buckton D. (ed.), *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: 1984) 292–297.

time the majority were being made of silver (occasionally gilt), a prized material whose new abundance made it a global commodity.⁹

Indeed, as maritime trade increased, *naviculae* became part of a broader fashion for boat-shaped vessels in both domestic and liturgical settings.¹⁰ The 1398 inventory of the royal treasure belonging to Richard II of England listed eighteen ‘niefs’ or ‘neifs’ (the Old French word for ship), including five relatively modest examples connected with the chapel, and thirteen luxurious ships employed on Richard’s table, ranging from smaller models designed to hold salt to lavish and weighty trophies of solid gold or gilt silver, adorned with enamels and encrusted with jewels.¹¹ As markers of power and prestige, elaborate table nefs were associated with sovereigns (Louis I of Anjou possessed thirty-one) and frequently exchanged or re-gifted to mark treaties and alliances or to signal vassalage and loyalty.¹² Besides serving as place markers or receptacles for offerings of food for the poor, such nefs might contain wine, sweetmeats, cutlery, or plates, like the one pictured prominently near the host in the January calendar page of the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean, duc de Berry, of 1412–1416.¹³ Although that example remains fairly abstract, with swooping decks, schematic oar holes, and heraldic animals, other nefs closely replicated contemporary oceangoing vessels. One entry in Richard II’s inventory listed six gold ships complete with fore- and aftercastle, sails, masts, sheets, and royal banners, a level of detail that accords with the similar table ship shown next to King Edward III in an illumination of ca. 1326–1327 to *De secretis secretorum*, a pseudoaristotelian treatise on statecraft.¹⁴

As nefs proliferated on elite tables, their form reflected Europe’s growing interest and investment in long-distance maritime trade and exploration. Around 1448–1449, the itinerant Italian artist Pisanello designed nefs with prominent planking and portholes, borne on dragons much like the sea

9 Flynn D.O. – Giráldez A., “Born with a ‘Silver Spoon’: The Origin of World Trade in 1571”, *Journal of World History* 6, 2 (1995) 201–221.

10 Charles Chichele Oman discusses both sacred and secular examples, although he gives more weight to the latter and claims there is ‘little connection between the development of the incense-boat and that of the secular *nef*’: Oman C.C., *Medieval Silver Nefs* (London: 1963) 1. See also chapter 1 of Keating J., *The Machinations of German Court Culture: Early Modern Automata*, Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University: 2010).

11 Stratford J., *Richard II and the English Royal Treasure* (Woodbridge: 2012). See R 1097, R 1171, R 989, R 1065, and R 41.

12 Buettner B., “Past Presents: New Year’s Gifts at the Valois Courts”, *The Art Bulletin* 83, 4 (December 2001) 612–613, 623.

13 Stratford, *Treasure* 267–268; Buettner, “Past Presents” 612–613.

14 Stratford, *Treasure* R 24; British Library Add. 47680, fol. 60v.

monsters in contemporary charts.¹⁵ More importantly, their raised fore- and aftercastles and cannon hatches closely resemble the sturdy but nimble carracks (*naus*) and square-rigged caravels (*caravelas redondas* or *de armada*) developed to extend and defend the Portuguese expeditions that had begun along the coast of West Africa in the 1420s, rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, reached India under the leadership of Vasco da Gama in 1498, encountered Brazil in 1500, and established the first western links with Japan in 1542. By the sixteenth century, table nefs had come to resemble nautical models of larger merchant ships whose cargoes enriched both royal coffers and an expanding commercial class. It was this naval type that inspired the highly detailed and well-preserved ship crafted in Nuremberg around 1500 for a member of the Schlüsselfelder family, now in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum [Fig. 17.3].¹⁶ This nef, with a removable superstructure allowing it to serve as a wine vessel, depicts a heavily armed, three-masted, seagoing *kraak* like those used in the Netherlands. Complete with billowing foresail, grappling hook, and working rudder, and teeming with seventy-four miniature figures of sailors and passengers, the object suggests direct knowledge of seafaring practices on the part of its maker and, perhaps, its merchant owner.

Realism in secular nefs reached a high point in three elaborate automata crafted around 1580 by the Augsburg goldsmith Hans Schlottheim in the form of galleons, redoubtable fighting vessels on which large-scale shipping depended. With no usable internal spaces, these entertaining table ornaments featured sailors who strike the hours in the crow's nest and a procession of three heralds and seven Electors who file before the enthroned Holy Roman Emperor.¹⁷ The links among empire, sovereignty, and conquest embedded in such objects were made explicit in ship-shaped 'spice boxes' made to contain eastern aromatics as well as pepper from Southeast Asia, cinnamon from Ceylon, and cloves from the Moluccas, all actively sought out by Dutch, Indian, and African seamen as trade goods and gifts to European and Asian rulers.¹⁸ One such box created

15 Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, INV2289 and INV2292.

16 See Kahsnitz R. – Wixom W.D. (eds.), *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg, 1300–1550* (New York, NY: 1986) 224–227. The ship, which has sometimes been ascribed, without much evidence, to goldsmith Albrecht Dürer the Elder, retains its original leather case, dated 1503.

17 These three automata are in the collection of the British Museum (1866.1030.1), the Musée national de la Renaissance in Écouen ('nef de Charles Quint', perhaps made for Rudolf II [E.Cl.2739]), and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

18 Brouwer C.G., "Sweet-scented Shipments: Frankincense and Other Aromatics Landed and Loaded in al-Mukha (1st quarter of the 17th century), According to Dutch Letters and Logs", *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 64, 1–2 (January–April 2007) 63–97.



FIGURE 17.3 *Anon. (silversmith), Table Nef, so-called 'Schlüsselfelder Ship', from Nuremberg, commissioned for Wilhelm Schlüsselfelder (ca. 1502–1503). Silver and gilded silver, 79 cm (height). Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum (inv. no. HG 2146). IMAGE © GERMANISCHES NATIONALMUSEUM, NUREMBERG.*



FIGURE 17.4 Anon. (silversmith), *Spice Box* (before 1618). Silver, 17.6 × 24 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (inv. no. BK-NM-4313).

IMAGE © RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM.

around 1600, just as the Dutch were beginning to colonise Indonesia, embodies the violence and exploitation inherent in the spice trade. Its interior contains four compartments for spices, while the coat of arms on its cannon-clad exterior links it to the *Mauritius*, a famed Dutch vessel (named after Prince Maurits of Nassau) that sailed to the East Indies and brought back huge quantities of spices—sold at a staggering 400 per cent profit—a few years before the formation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) [Fig. 17.4].¹⁹ The fact that these

19 See Dirk Jan Biemond's catalogue entry on this object in Corrigan K. et al. (eds.), *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age*, exh. cat. Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA: 2015) 66. Like the classically-inspired mermaids and sea monsters on the hull, an inscription near the boat's waterline evokes the rewards and dangers of overseas trade: 'When maritime commerce flourishes, thanks to God's blessing, it feeds many mouths

arms appear in mirror image suggests that its anonymous maker based the design on contemporary prints of the *Mauritius*—a reminder that the rise in realism in early modern nefs and *naviculae* did not necessarily depend on first-hand encounter with their models, but rather on a broader visual culture in which ships played a major role.

Early Modern *Naviculae*: Evolution in Design and Meaning

If not for its internal configuration, the Dutch spice box could be mistaken for a sacred *navicula*. In fact, lines between secular and sacred ship-shaped containers were fluid, since table nefs could also serve as reliquaries or votive offerings. As early as the thirteenth century, Queen Marguerite of Provence, wife of Louis IX, bequeathed a small silver nef to the church of Saint Nicolas de Port in Lorraine, while the realistic silver example in the treasury of San Antonio in Padua, a copy of the Schlüsselfelder ship, is thought to be an ex-voto commemorating a rescue at sea.²⁰ In a particularly dramatic transformation, the ceremonial nef presented to Queen Anne de Bretagne by the aldermen of Tours in 1500 was converted into a reliquary by substituting the sailors with figures of St. Ursula and her virgin companions.²¹ As naval imagery spread in early modern Europe, especially around themes of exploration and trade, it was only logical that realistic-looking containers for salt or spices lent themselves to holding incense on the altar or Lord's table—*mensa Domini*—given the analogies between their contents.

This convergence of form and function helps explain why *naviculae*, like nefs, began increasingly to resemble actual seafaring vessels associated with the age of maritime discovery. The trend is exemplified by the grand *navicula* donated by the bishop of Luçon to Chartres Cathedral in 1540, blending an abstracted hull formed from a polished nautilus shell (itself a signifier of oceanic

and brings triumph to our country, but the sea can put up strong opposition if it is God's will.

20 Keating, *The Machinations of German Court Culture* 26; Kahsnitz – Wixom, *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg* 226. For later ship-form ex votos in Netherlandish reformed churches, see Mochizuki M.M., *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566–1672: Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age* (Aldershot: 2008) 290–295, at 292, and Appendix C; and Baader H., “Vows on Water: Ship Ex-Votos as Things, Metaphors, and Mediators of Communitality”, in Weinryb I. (ed.), *Ex Voto: Votive Giving Across Cultures* (New York, NY: 2016) 217–245.

21 Now at Palais de Tau, Reims; see Taralon J. – Maitre Devallon R., *Treasures of the Churches of France* (Paris – New York, NY: 1966) pls. 90–93.



FIGURE 17.5 *Anon. (silversmith), Naveta (1589). Silver, 15 × 20 cm. Madeira, Portugal, Museu de Arte Sacra do Funchal (inv. no. MASF64).*

IMAGE © MUSEU DE ARTE SACRA DO FUNCHAL.

trade) with an animal figurehead, a mast-like superstructure, and a balustraded poop and forecastle, all in silver gilt. The shift becomes clear when comparing the fourteenth-century Cluny example [Fig. 17.2] previously noted with a late sixteenth-century Portuguese incense boat from the Igreja Matriz de Câmara de Lobos on the island of Madeira, now in the collection of the Museu de Arte Sacra do Funchal [Fig. 17.5]. Appropriately, the diocese of Funchal boasts one of the foremost concentrations of naturalistically rendered *navetas* from the early modern period, given that Madeira, discovered off the African coast in 1419 and settled the following year, was one of Portugal's first maritime possessions and became an important trading hub as well as a stopover for Portuguese ships headed to all parts of the globe. Apart from the date of 1589 inscribed on its stern, this example is typical in its resemblance to an early modern Portuguese ship used for maritime trade, exploration, or military purposes, with a realistic-looking keel, a bowsprit, pierced decking rails, a hatch

for holding the incense, and an animal head atop its prow. Even more lifelike is the suggestion of wooden nails and boards engraved on the exterior, as well as rigging supports and a band of repeating scrolls meant to evoke waves crashing against the hull while the 'ship' was under sail.²² As explored below, it was precisely this type of realistic-looking incense boat that became standard during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—what one might call the heyday of early modern globalisation, particularly with the establishment of the Dutch and British East India Companies—during which thousands of examples were produced and circulated in Europe as well as the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Yet it is also clear that this formal development was closely tied to historical conditions, and once the Age of Discovery ended, the correspondence between *navetas* and actual sailing vessels began to decline. Although some realistic examples were still produced, especially in colonial outposts, by the later seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries it became more common for *navetas* to adopt abstracted baroque, rococo, or neoclassical shapes and ornament or to revert to the simple, symmetrical forms of the medieval period.²³

What explains this widespread but ultimately temporary fashion for shaping incense boats as ocean-going vessels? Although ship imagery, as we saw, pervaded Europe's secular imagination in an age of expanding horizons, our examples seem also to reflect the Church's central role in the project of exploration, confrontation, and, if necessary, domination. During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the papacy and its affiliates—among them the mendicant orders, the Jesuits, and the Portuguese Crown, to which the papacy had granted rights of administering overseas churches known as the *padroado real*—marshalled immense resources and naval power to move hundreds of thousands of people and objects (including *naviculae*) to Asia, Africa, and the Americas with the aim of spreading Christianity worldwide. In this climate, ships of all kinds evoked both colonisation and evangelisation. The wave motif on the Funchal *navicula*, for instance, is close in spirit to those caressing the *nau* embossed on a late fifteenth-century Portuguese silver dish, its flag carrying the royal arms and its mast bearing the cross of the military Order of Christ, successor to the Knights Templar, under whose patronage most Portuguese

22 These details are described in: http://www.museuartesacrafunchal.org/eng/arteportuguesa/portuguesa_ourivesaria_img8.html (accessed: 22.11.2015).

23 For examples, see Esteras Martín C., *La platería del Museo Franz Mayer: Obras escogidas, siglos XVI–XIX* (Mexico City: 1992) cat. no. 57 and cat. no. 148. By the mid-nineteenth century, the fashion for high, scrolling handles and/or boldly everted lips made *naviculae* almost indistinguishable from contemporary sauce or gravy boats, and the resemblance to a ship became purely notional.

ships sailed.²⁴ Nautical references acquired particular religious valence during the Counter Reformation as retorts to Protestant claims that the Church of Rome had shipwrecked. The old metaphor of Peter's bark, for instance, gained renewed currency from the later fifteenth century in the form of papal coins representing the apostle in a boat, whose increasing size and detail paralleled the expansion of Christian missionary activity.²⁵ Minted well into the sixteenth century in both silver and gold, these coins circulated throughout Europe and may well have been carried overseas on ships bearing missionaries and trade goods.

The role of ships as vessels of conversion was made explicit around 1600 by the Flemish artist Johannes Stradanus, who celebrated the discovery of a means to determine longitude with a depiction of a fully rigged ship plowing confidently forward, its sails emblazoned with the Jesuit emblem.²⁶ In much the same way, an ivory plaque carved in Portuguese India (perhaps Goa) in the late sixteenth century and now in the British Museum depicts Christ himself as a youthful mariner standing on the ship of salvation.²⁷ But whereas both incense boats and the rituals with which they were associated had previously expressed the Church's ability to transport celebrants *vertically* from the terrestrial to the celestial realm, they now also signified the Church's *horizontal* extension to all four corners of the world. They may have reminded some users of Christianity's global reach, and its creation of an international community united by a common faith across vast geographical and cultural divides. At the same time, local variations in the design and use of *naviculae* suggest the Church's willingness to assimilate itself to foreign traditions, even as it sought to preserve an iconic form in different cultural contexts. The following case studies of *naviculae* from New Spain, Brazil, Kongo, and Thailand illustrate this delicate dance of similarity and adaptation and raise broader questions about the role of sacred things in navigating religious and cultural exchange.

24 Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga/IMC, Lisbon, 1015 OUR; see Levenson J.A. (ed.), *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Reference Catalogue* (Washington, DC: 2007) 24, cat. no. P-16.

25 For a selection, see <http://www.coinarchives.com/w/results.php?search=Navicella&s=0&results=100> (accessed: 15.06.2016).

26 The plate (captioned 'Orbis Longitudines Repertae') is the sixteenth of twenty engraved by Jan Collaert I after Jan van der Straet (called Johannes Stradanus) and published in Antwerp by Philips Galle around 1600 under the title *Nova Reperta* (New Discoveries of Modern Times); see also pl. 16.

27 British Museum, OA 1959 70.21.1; see Levenson, *Encompassing the Globe*, 112–113, cat. nos. I-10 and I-11.

Early Modern *Naviculae*: Case Studies

Before delving into specific examples, it is important to acknowledge that studying early modern incense boats presents significant challenges. Although silver objects made in Europe or its colonies were required by law to bear identifying marks, their frequent absence, and the difficulty of identifying those that are present, means that relatively few *naviculae* can be firmly ascribed to specific makers, places, or periods of production. Even fewer bear contemporary dates [see Fig. 17.5] or dedicatory inscriptions, which are not always easy to pin down.²⁸ In the absence of such hard data, incense boats are instead often attributed based on formal or stylistic developments that are themselves difficult to assess, given that many examples made outside Europe replicated imported prototypes, including designs that were popular decades or even centuries before. There is, moreover, no guarantee that nomadic objects like *naviculae* remained where they were crafted, or, vice versa, that they were manufactured where they were later used or found. To complicate matters further, most existing scholarship on early modern *naviculae* (largely in museum catalogues or market-oriented publications) rarely explores their significance in a global, comparative, or intercultural context and tends to focus on origins rather than afterlives.²⁹ The former is itself a moving target, as in the case of an unmarked *naveta* sold at Christie's in 2012 as seventeenth-century and 'probably Portuguese', but now ascribed by a dealer to sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Mexico.³⁰ Our own struggles to determine the date and place of production for many *naviculae*, including intriguing examples from Portuguese Goa and Macau,³¹ have forced us to limit our case studies to those whose provenance is

28 See, for instance, an example in the Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico City (01808/GNB-0026), with an inscription recording its presentation in 1702 to an unidentified "PUEBLO DE LA BESYTASYON"; Esteras Martín, *La platería del Museo Franz Mayer* 148–150.

29 On this issue see Shalem A., "The Afterlife and Circulation of Objects", in Komaroff L. (ed.), *Gifts of the Sultans: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven, CT: 2011) 92–93. The one broader study of *naviculae* that we have located, Witte F., "Thuribulum und Navicula in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung", *Zeitschrift für Christliche Kunst* 23 (1910) 101–112, 139–151, 163–174, focuses on medieval examples.

30 Christie's London, 6 March 2012, sale 4607, lot 232; now with Manuel Castilho Antiguidades in Lisbon, published in their recent catalogue *Por mares nunca dantes navegados: oriente, ocidente 2*.

31 For one of several examples from Portuguese Goa, see: http://www.museumofchristianart.com/index.php?flag=CD&id=8&img_id=15 (accessed: 09.06.2016). Macau's Museum of Sacred Art and Crypt contains a seventeenth-century silver incense boat from the cathedral, attributed to Portugal but more likely, from its style and facture, to have been manufactured locally.

better established, at least until a time when further study and first-hand examination with curators and conservators will help others give up their secrets. We hope this preliminary study will encourage additional basic research in this direction. The following examples should therefore be regarded as case studies in the true sense, consisting as much of opportunities for asking targeted questions as fixed points around which to construct a definitive history.

New Spain

Unlike most surviving examples, our first case study [Fig. 17.6] is firmly anchored to a specific moment of Europe's colonial expansion, soon after the establishment of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1535 in the wake of Hernando Cortés's conquest of the Aztec empire in 1521. Now in a Mexican private collection, this *naveta* was the work of silversmith Gabriel de Villasana, who submitted it for assay and taxation in the new Spanish capital of Mexico City between 1566 and 1572.³² The resulting hallmark document the flourishing of the goldsmith's trade in Spain's North American kingdom, beginning with the arrival of a silversmith with Cortés and the appointment of the first assay master in 1522. Villasana, who was presumably born and trained in Spain, oversaw these developments, serving in various capacities as guild magistrate (*alcalde*), inspector (*beedor*), and assayer (*marcador*) between 1544 and 1587. Besides 'enforcing the laws and ordinances of his majesty [...] and those established by this city'—sometimes against the wishes of his peers—Villasana's duties included testing locally-made objects for purity and recording payment of the relevant tax or *quinto* (royal fifth) by punching them with the image of a tower or castle in a lake, the symbol of indigenous Tenochtitlan's replacement with a Spanish city.³³ Once tested and approved, Villasana's own incense boat affirmed kingly authority on the American frontier in much the same manner as the Royal Palace symbolically dominating Mexico's central square.³⁴ For those early inhabitants who, like Villasana, had braved an ocean voyage on their way to a new world, the inclusion of realistic planking, portholes, and

32 Esteras Martín C., "Platería virreinal mexicana. Siglos XVI–XIX", in *El Arte de la Platería Mexicana: 500 Años* (Mexico City: 1989) cat. no. 9; *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY: 1990) 394, cat. no. 169.

33 Esteras Martín C., "Más noticias sobre Villasana y Consuegra, marcadores de la platería mexicana del siglo XVI", *Cuadernos de Arte Colonial* 7 (1991) 75–97.

34 On the palace as the symbolic residence of the king, see Schreffler M., *The Art of Allegiance: Visual Culture and Imperial Power in Baroque New Spain* (University Park, PA: 2007).



FIGURE 17.6 *Gabriel de Villasana, Naveta (1566–1572). Silver. Mexico City, Collection Isaac Backal.*

IMAGE © COURTESY OF ISAAC BACKAL.

rudder, perhaps observed from life, must have personalised their participation in Spain's imperial project.

As a *navicula*, Villasana's miniature ship also furthered the project of establishing Christianity in Spain's overseas possessions, both for the foreign transplants clustered in the cities (which were generally off-limits to native people) and among the vast indigenous population addressed through suburban and rural missions. Early sixteenth-century conquistadors and settlers from the Spanish province of Extremadura would have known the many ship-shaped silver or gold oil lamps then hanging in the sanctuary and chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, presented as *ex-votos* in thanksgiving for successful naval battles.³⁵ Ship-shaped liturgical implements also came early to New

35 Talavera Gabriel de, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Conseagrada a la Soberana Magestad de la Reyna de los Angeles [...]* (Toledo, Thomas da Guzman: 1597) fols. 153r–157v, generously signalled by Jeanette Peterson.

Spain, including the *naveta* and spoon (perhaps imported) that were recorded in the first inventory of Mexico's new metropolitan cathedral taken in 1541, part of a small but functional altar set that included silver chalices, candlesticks, a large thurible (*incensario*), and a gilded crucifix.³⁶ Villasana contributed to this expanding sacristy, providing a massive gold *custodia* (monstrance) in 1576 that outshone the 'old' one still present in 1588.³⁷

His comparatively modest *naveta*, by contrast, more likely served in a family chapel, parish church, or rural mission, much like a smaller, anonymous incense boat now in the same private collection, bearing the same assayer's mark for 1566–1572 together with an additional punch marking it as the property of the Dominican order.³⁸ Like their fellow mendicants the Franciscans and Augustinians, the Dominicans, who arrived in New Spain in 1526, embarked on an extensive teaching and evangelising campaign to convert the king's new indigenous subjects to Christianity. Expressive objects helped communicate across barriers of language and culture, much like the rebus- or picture-writing developed by the Franciscan Pedro de Gante upon his arrival in 1523, or the emblematic woodcuts that were translated into stone and paint to adorn monastic buildings. By 1570, when our *naveta* was crafted, the friars' success was such that they could replace their primitive mission churches with imposing fortress-like convents that symbolised the new Jerusalem to be inaugurated with the conversion of the Indies, filled with images and objects celebrating Christianity's arrival, spread, and triumph. These included representations of ships, and at Actopan (Hidalgo), some 120 kilometres northeast of Mexico City, the resident Augustinians pictured one such symbol-laden vessel in the frescoes ornamenting their new *doctrina* (mission complex), painted about 1570 by native artists trained in European techniques [Fig. 17.7].³⁹ Dominating the grand, arcaded *portal* (portico) at the entrance to the convent proper, the mural depicts St. Augustine and his followers arriving in America on a ship whose prow is labelled 'Hope' and its stern 'Charity'. The now-missing hull evidently symbolised the third theological virtue, faith, enacted onshore by Augustinians who are shown venerating Christ and blessing native converts. Like *naviculae*, this proud vessel embodied the Christian Church's salvific voyage, an association enhanced on the Dominican *naveta* by the inclusion of angel heads in the poop railing, a rare return to the religious iconography prevalent in medieval examples.

36 Toussaint M., *Arte colonial en México* (Mexico City: 1962) 58.

37 Esteras Martín, "Más noticias" 78.

38 Esteras Martín, *El Arte de la Platería Mexicana* cat. no. 10.

39 MacGregor L., *Actopan* (Mexico City: 1955) 91–97.



FIGURE 17.7 Anon. (artist), *Detail of a mural at the former monastery of San Nicolás de Tolentino in Actopan (ca. 1570).*

IMAGE © JEFFREY L. COLLINS.

By 1570, however, New Spanish *naviculae* could not be separated from the new and lucrative Asia trade that transformed the colony's fortunes and reshaped American visual and material culture. Spain's annexation of the Philippines in 1565 inaugurated regular trans-Pacific shipping via the annual *Galeón de Manila* or *Nao de China* that established, albeit indirectly, the long-desired trade links between Iberia and Asia previously dominated by Portugal. In a regulated system that lasted almost 250 years and created immense riches, massive cargo ships sailed west from Acapulco carrying American silver, returning laden with Asian silks, porcelains, spices, and other goods—luxuries by the boatload, as Donna Pierce has put it.⁴⁰ Much of this bounty was re-shipped along the coast to Peru or packed by mule train by way of Mexico City to Veracruz, where it was reloaded on ships that gathered in Havana for the final leg across the Atlantic to Cádiz. Those groaning galleons and carracks carried not just secular cargoes but sacred objects of all kinds, including carved ivories and devotional pictures, some inlaid with mother of pearl and other products of the sea, that turned Mexico's churches and chapels into dazzling treasuries. As Fray Domingo de Salazar, bishop of Manila, observed in the late sixteenth century, 'Churches are beginning to be furnished with the images

40 Pierce D., "By the Boatload: Receiving and Recreating the Arts of Asia", in Carr D. (ed.), *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia* (Boston, MA: 2015) 53–73.

the sangleys [Chinese craftsmen] made, and which we lacked before'.⁴¹ By the early eighteenth century, Mexico City's cathedral even commissioned its massive bronze choir screen from Chinese metalsmiths in Portuguese Macau, shipped via Acapulco in 125 crates. No wonder, then, that ships feature in the cathedral's decoration, including a large eighteenth-century stone relief of the *navicula ecclesiae* positioned above the right-hand entrance door, depicting an elaborately rigged galeass captained by St. Peter and propelled by apostles whose oars are inscribed with names of biblical books. Inside, among the Marian symbols carved into the wooden doorway to the sacristy, visitors encountered a second ship with billowing sails plowing through the waves, an unusual and dramatic addition to the standard symbolic repertoire. While it presumably alluded to Mary's guise as *stella maris* (star of the sea and a beacon for seafarers), this vessel's rows of stylised cannons recall the armed galleons in which wealth was flooding into Mexico.

Spanish America's transcontinental trade was fuelled by the output of Mexican and Peruvian mines, and it is no coincidence that Villasana's locally crafted *naveta* coincides with the region's first silver boom. Already by 1555 the metal had become so abundant in the Americas that it cost less, ounce for ounce, than imported iron. The discovery of mercury in the Andean town of Huancavelica in 1563 increased the efficient refining of silver ore, consummating what one viceroy termed the 'grandest marriage in the world [...] the two axles upon which the wheels of this entire Kingdom and Your Majesty's treasury turn'.⁴² That same bullion sustained both the Pacific trade and a newly invigorated north–south commerce between Mexico and Peru that, by the early seventeenth century, consisted of almost 90 per cent Asian goods.⁴³ In this newly globalised economy, the bulging hold of Villasana's miniature galleon must have evoked Mexico City's enviable status as a way station between two oceans bridged by Spanish ships, its gleaming silver hull conjuring both the triumph of faith and the bountiful mines that kept Spain's imperial project afloat.

41 Ibidem 67, citing D. Salazar's 1590 *Carta de relación de las cosas de la China* as quoted in Trusted M., "Propaganda and Luxury: Small-scale Baroque Sculptures in Viceregal America and the Philippines", in Pierce D. – Otsuka D. (eds.), *Asia and Spanish America: Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange, 1500–1850: Papers from the 2006 Mayer Center Symposium at the Denver Art Museum* (Denver, CO: 2009) 151–164, at 153.

42 Pedro de Toledo y Leiva, marqués de Mancera: 'dos exes donde andan las ruedas de todo este Reyno y la hacienda que vuestra Magestad tiene', cited in Esteras Martín C., *Peru indígena y virreinal* (Madrid: 2004) 114.

43 Pierce, "By the Boatload" 55.

Brazil and Africa's Atlantic Coast

If Novohispanic *navetas* like Villasana's document Spain's determination to cultivate a fully developed European-style kingdom across the sea, corresponding examples crafted in Portuguese Brazil, established in 1500 and quickly dependent for economic survival on enslaved African laborers, suggest Portugal's differing but equally transformative presence on both coasts of the southern Atlantic. Whereas the Spanish crown quickly abandoned its prohibition on the manufacture of silver articles in its American possessions, Portugal strove repeatedly but ineffectually to limit, tax, or prohibit the working of precious metals. Identifying Brazilian silver is thus a particular challenge, as early works were rarely marked, even after the arrival of the first local assay master in the early eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Brazilian silversmiths flourished from the colony's early days, however, often by bending or simply ignoring the restrictions. The first practitioners arrived from Portugal in the 1560s, some of them recently converted Jews hoping to escape persecution in Iberia. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in a testament both to the high development of gold- and silverworking in Africa and to the resilience of Afro-Brazilian craftsmen despite the horrors of slavery, African bondmen and their free descendants dominated the silversmithing profession in many areas, notwithstanding a royal ordinance of 1621 specifically barring them from this trade. It is thus quite possible, even likely, that both examples considered here [Figs. 17.8, 17.9] were made by Afro-Brazilian artisans.

Liturgical objects were a staple of Brazilian silver crafting, and it is telling that one of the oldest datable silver objects in the country is a *naveta* acquired by the monastery of São Bento in Rio de Janeiro sometime between 1608 and 1613.⁴⁵ Although many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Brazilian *navetas* exhibit exuberantly scrolling prows and poops linked to baroque and rococo aesthetics, other examples suggest personal familiarity with contemporary naval architecture. In contrast to *navetas* from highland Mexico, those made in Brazil, where settlement remained largely coastal until well into the eighteenth century, often bear closely observed details like the rigging supports and zig-zagged scarf joints between the planks of an early eighteenth-century *naveta*

44 For a helpful overview, see Senos N., "The Art of Silver in Colonial Brazil", in *The Arts in Latin America, 1492–1820*, exh. cat. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, PA: 2006) 230–235.

45 Ibidem 233, citing Silva-Nigra C. da, O.S.B., "A prataria seiscentista do Mosteiro de São Bento do Rio de Janeiro", *Revista do Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* 6 (1942) 241–275, at 248.

in the Museu de Arte Sacra da Universidade Federal de Bahia, convincingly attributed to an anonymous silversmith from the region [Fig. 17.8]. The same feature marks a *naveta* made and marked in Brazil but found in Portuguese Angola [Fig. 17.9], which adds a realistic rudder and a balustraded quarter gallery projecting off the aftercastle like those common in galleons and ships of the line. Other seventeenth- or eighteenth-century *navetas* from Portugal or Brazil reproduce the distinctive pointed beak below the bow (often shaped as an animal snout) that lowered a galleon's wind resistance, anchored the bowsprit, and helped it ram enemy ships.⁴⁶ Although the copying of imported models doubtless played a part, attention to such details is understandable in communities whose existence was intimately tied to the sea.

In this Atlantic context, we must ask what such naturalistic-looking incense boats might have meant to diverse audiences, from European traders, priests, and planters to African rulers and converts and Afro-Brazilian slaves and silversmiths. For those in charge of ensuring the profitability of the essentially private fiefs into which Brazil remained divided until 1775, *navetas* must have evoked both the ships that brought the forced labour on which Brazilian plantations depended and the ever-larger ocean-going *naus* (carracks) that carried Brazilian sugar and forest products to European markets. Brazilian priests and missionaries, in turn, may well have seen *naviculae* in the same allegorical light as their Spanish counterparts to the north. But for the African or African-descended craftsmen who may have fabricated them, must not all ships, however small or abstracted, have recalled the unfamiliar foreign vessels that transported them or their ancestors in chains to a strange land? They too were commodities, after all, brought by sea just like both the incense and the precious metal that housed it. Unlike New Spain, Brazil had little native silver and was compelled to import it. Most arrived as contraband from highland Peru, smuggled along a circuitous route that led down the Andes, along the Río de la Plata (River of Silver, named by explorer Sebastian Cabot after silver objects acquired from Guaraní Indians) to Buenos Aires, whence it was shipped to São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Recife, and Olinda. There, payment was sometimes made in the form of black slaves, in which Brazil abounded, who were exchanged for silver bullion and carried elsewhere along the coast. In other cases, silver—including finished silver objects like *navetas*—travelled across the Atlantic to Africa, perhaps as payment for human cargo. Incense itself carried particular significance in Brazil, where rituals featuring fragrant

46 See, for instance, an example ascribed to Lisbon at the Museu de Arte Sacra de São Paulo, included in the online exhibition <http://www.museuartesacra.org.br/pt/exposicoes/show/exposicao-virtual--arte-sacra-na-ourivesaria> (accessed: 29.06.2016).



FIGURE 17.8 Anon. (silversmith), *Naveta* (eighteenth century). Silver, 16 × 21 cm. Bahia, Museu de Arte Sacra da Universidade Federal da Bahia.

IMAGE © MUSEU DE ARTE SACRA DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA BAHIA.

substances of all kinds reflected the blending of European, native, and African traditions. The historical conjunction raises important but challenging interpretive questions. Can we recover the experience of makers, viewers, and users who left no written records? Or must Brazil's 'black hand', as Edward Sullivan has termed it, necessarily remain elusive?⁴⁷

47 Sullivan E.J., "The Black Hand: Notes on the African Presence in the Visual Arts of Brazil and the Caribbean", in *The Arts of Latin America 1492–1820*, exh. cat. The Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, PA: 2006) 39–55.

On the South Atlantic's opposite shore, to which Brazil's economy was tightly bound, the presence of European-style *navetas* in the West African kingdom of Kongo and elsewhere reflects a long history of coastal trading and diplomatic interaction within which African elites adopted and adapted imported customs to bolster their power. In 1491, eight years after Portuguese sailors and missionaries arrived in search of trade routes to India as well as converts, the Kongo ruler, Nzinga a Nkuwu (r. 1470–1509) willingly converted to Christianity and adopted the appellation João I after the Portuguese monarch. In an effort to solidify the bond and encourage Christianity in the region, King Manuel I of Portugal (r. 1495–1521) sent scores of diplomatic gifts and liturgical objects in 1504 and 1512, including incense burners (*encensoirs*) made of silver, gold, copper, and brass, along with 'other artifacts necessary in the service of the divine'.⁴⁸ Throughout the early modern period, Kongo elites embraced Christianity for political and commercial gain, while also creating generative 'correlations', as Cécile Fromont has termed them, between Christian rituals and indigenous traditions.⁴⁹ European travellers to the region attested to the enduring presence and use of Christian liturgical objects—some sent from abroad but others manufactured locally—both in Kongo churches and in meeting halls for *kimpasi* organisations, elite groups of indigenous men and women whose authority derived from multisensory ceremonies they would perform using altars, incense, ritual objects, and cult figures.⁵⁰ In 1877, the French missionary Antoine-Marie-Hippolyte Carrie visited the Capuchin church of Santo Antonio in the Kongo province of Soyo. He described how the guardians of the church, who claimed descent from slaves formerly in the service of Capuchin church officials, continued to modify and enact Christian rituals with the help of such objects as a ship-shaped '*navette*' filled with local resins rather than foreign incense.⁵¹

Owing to the subsequent ravages of colonialism, the vast majority of liturgical objects belonging to Kongo churches have scattered or disappeared. The

48 Jadin L. – Dicorato M., *Correspondance de Dom Alfonso, roi de Congo, 1506–1543*, Classe des sciences morales et politiques, Mémoires 41, 3 (Brussels: 1975) 16; quoted in LaGamma A. (ed.), *Kongo: Power and Majesty*, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY: 2015) 24.

49 Fromont C., *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill, NC: 2014) esp. 15–19.

50 Ibidem esp. 201–210. Both the catalogue *Kongo: Power and Majesty* and Fromont's book *The Art of Conversion* illustrate and discuss examples of Christian liturgical objects manufactured in the Kongo kingdom.

51 Carrie A.-M.-H., "Une visite à Saint Antoine de Sogno (Congo)", *Les missions Catholiques* (October 1878) 497, cited in Fromont, *The Art of Conversion* 228.



FIGURE 17.9 Anon. (silversmith), *Naveta* (ca. 1719–1755). Silver, 15 × 25 cm. Porto, Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis (inv. no. 129 Our MNSR).

IMAGE © CARLOS MONTEIRO, 1998, COURTESY OF DIREÇÃO-GERAL DO PATRIMÓNIO CULTURAL/ARQUIVO E DOCUMENTAÇÃO FOTOGRÁFICA.

Santo Antonio incense boat, however, probably resembled an example now in a museum in Porto [Fig. 17.9] that formerly belonged, together with other devotional items of Brazilian manufacture, to the church of Our Lady of Muxima in Portuguese Angola, founded in 1599 in an area with strong ties to nearby Kongo and to Portuguese Brazil. With its adjoining fortress on the south bank of the Kwanza River, Muxima was an important node in the transatlantic slave trade from the late sixteenth century. It was reportedly here that slaves captured by Portuguese raiders or purchased from local elites (perhaps with metal liturgical objects as currency) were baptised before being loaded on boats for the coast and thence across the sea.⁵² One thus wonders how this symbolic ship, with its prominent figure of a lion on the prow, was read by the diverse individuals who viewed or handled it across oceans and centuries. In many

52 Site of a Marian appearance in 1833, the shrine is now an important pilgrimage centre, an Angolan National Monument, and a Unesco World Heritage site; see <http://whc.unesco.org> (accessed: 29.06.2016).

historical and cultural contexts, including European heraldry, lions signified monarchy, courage, and resistance to invasion. In Africa, where lions were native and often connoted sovereignty, this figurehead could have evoked the longstanding associations between Christianity and Kongo kingship in which some Africans prospered while others were condemned to exile and servitude. For now, such readings must remain speculative. What is clear is that, like other nomadic *naviculae*, the Porto incense boat changed locations and meanings even as its design followed established prototypes, testifying to Christianity's persistent political and cultural relevance on the Kongo coast and, perhaps, to a desire for continuity in a time of colonial upheaval.

Thailand

Our final case study returns us to the object that introduced this essay: the silver-gilt incense boat excavated from the ruins of Lopburi, a royal residence erected during the 1660s as a retreat from the larger Siamese palace complex at Ayutthaya [Fig. 17.1]. During the reign of King Phra Narai (r. 1656–1688), for whom Lopburi was built, Siam (now Thailand) was a powerful monarchy and a centre of global maritime trade. Although Phra Narai controlled commerce in his kingdom, he welcomed merchants and foreigners from all over the world, and this cosmopolitanism was reflected in Siam's diverse population and its eclectic architecture and culture. At Ayutthaya and Lopburi, palace buildings were decorated with Islamic-style arches and fragments of Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and they were situated within a landscape dotted with European-style fountains, Buddhist temples, Christian churches, and stately homes for Persian residents who served the court.⁵³ In addition, Narai's tolerance for religions other than Buddhism made Siam a hub for European missionary activity in Asia—an activity that was closely tied to politics and commerce.⁵⁴

Although the Portuguese and the Dutch were the first to maintain a strong European presence in Siam, during the second half of the seventeenth

53 Listopad J., *The Art and Architecture of the Reign of Somdet Phra Narai*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Michigan: 1995).

54 Love R., "Monarchs, Merchants, and Missionaries in Early Modern Asia: The Missions Étrangères in Siam, 1662–1684", *International History Review* 21, 1 (March 1999) 1–27.

century France threatened their influence.⁵⁵ Around 1660, Pope Alexander VII (r. 1655–1667) authorised the newly formed French Foreign Missions Society (Société des Missions Étrangères) to establish its own outposts in Southeast Asia, which the papacy believed to be beyond the jurisdiction of Portugal's *padroado real*. In truth, the Vatican wanted to check Portuguese power in the region, instructing the first French bishops sent to Siam to keep their plans a secret.⁵⁶ Narai welcomed the French Society and, in 1666, allowed them to build a seminary at Ayutthaya. French missionaries sent home glowing accounts of Narai's court, attracting the attention of his royal counterpart, Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715). Envisioning their mutual benefit, Phra Narai and Louis XIV established an alliance, spearheaded by Narai's influential Greek-born minister, Constantine Phaulkon, that culminated in multiple embassies sent between France and Siam during the 1680s.⁵⁷ French missionaries spurred these exchanges by suggesting to French officials that Narai might be willing to convert to Catholicism, an event that would have constituted a significant victory for Louis XIV. In fact Narai had no intention of converting, but he did profess a strategic openness to Christianity, one that ironically contributed to his downfall when an internal revolution ousted him in 1688.

Liturgical objects created for Ayutthaya and Lopburi must be seen within this climate of intra-European competition to impress the Siamese king, outdo one another, and attract converts. Throughout Narai's reign, members of the French Society in Siam informed their superiors about the activities of their rivals—including French Jesuit missionaries whom Phaulkon began to favour during the mid-1680s—and requested objects to ornament their churches and present to the king.⁵⁸ Since these were not always forthcoming or were slow to arrive by boat from Europe, missionaries in Siam commissioned western-style devotional wares from Chinese and other Asian craftsmen, who responded eagerly to their demands. Many such objects, including silver *naviculae*, were made in Canton (the centre of Chinese export production) by artisans

55 On European rivalry in Siam during this period, see Cruysse D. Van der, *Louis XIV et le Siam* (Paris: 1991); and Smith G.V., *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand* (DeKalb, IL – Detroit, MI: 1977).

56 Love, "Monarchs, Merchants, and Missionaries" 5.

57 Martin M., "Mirror Reflections: Louis XIV, Phra Narai and the Material Culture of Kingship", *Art History* 38, 4 (September 2015) 604–619.

58 Launay A., *Histoire de la mission de Siam 1662–1811*, 2 vols. (Paris: 1920) vol. 1, esp. 15, 30–35, 75. See also Love, "Monarchs, Merchants, and Missionaries", and Cruysse, *Louis XIV et le Siam*.

supplied with western models, then shipped to Siam on Chinese junk boats. Others were made in Vietnam, where the practice of Christianity was more pervasive, and in Ayutthaya itself, especially the Yaan Paa Thong neighbourhood ('gold forest area') in which gold, silver, and other metal objects were made and sold to foreigners.⁵⁹

Despite European reports to the contrary, Siam contained no rich deposits of precious metals.⁶⁰ China, however, possessed gold and silver mines, and augmented its supply with New World silver brought via the trans-Pacific trade and exchanged for porcelain, textiles, lacquer, and other Asian goods. Chinese artisans had a long tradition of working precious metals, and the country's comparatively low costs of labour and materials made its export metalwork, which was often indistinguishable from European prototypes, more economical than imported equivalents.⁶¹ The use of inexpensive but precious-looking alloys such as paktong (an amalgam of copper, nickel, and zinc) and tambac (copper and zinc, popular in Siam) further reduced the cost, and it is likely that Christian altars throughout East and Southeast Asia featured such wares. The few objects that survive have attracted little scholarly attention, however, partly because they were long assumed to be of European manufacture.⁶² One example is the incense boat from Lopburi [Fig. 17.1], one of a group of liturgical objects comprising a silver-gilt chalice, a pair of silver candlesticks, and a brass crucifix.⁶³ The chalice and candlesticks, which depict scenes from the life of Christ, look European in shape and decoration, but the quality of the metal used, along with their somewhat awkward execution, has led Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h to propose that they were made locally, possibly by Chinese or Thai artisans working in Siam.⁶⁴ Chinese or Thai authorship seems even more likely in the case of the brass crucifix, which rises out of a lotus flower, and the similarly hybrid *navicula*. Although its size and shape conform to our other examples, its ornamental motifs are more stylised, particularly the waves shown

59 Chutintaranond S. (ed.), *The Immortal Art of Ayutthaya Gold* (Bangkok: 2000) 23. On maritime commerce between China and Siam, see Viraphol S., *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652–1853* (Bangkok: 2014).

60 Martin, "Mirror Reflections" 664.

61 Irvine G., "East Asian Metalwork for the Export Market", in Jaffer A. – Jackson A. (eds.), *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800* (London: 2004) 232.

62 Ibidem 233.

63 Jacq-Hergoualc'h M., *Phra Narai, Roi de Siam, et Louis XIV*, exh. cat. Musée de l'Orangerie (Paris: 1986) cat. nos. 121–123. See also Listopad, *The Art and Architecture of Somdet Phra Narai* 113.

64 Jacq-Hergoualc'h M., *L'Europe et le Siam du XVI au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: 1993) 112.

crashing against the hull and the geometric designs on the base, prow, and stern. Such stylisations often characterise early modern East and Southeast Asian export art. Moreover, its two dragons, notably the one appearing at the top of Fig. 17.1, look Chinese, even while recalling the countless dragons and sea monsters that ornament European nefs and *naviculae* [compare Fig. 17.3]. Dragons were auspicious creatures in China and Siam, symbolising both control over water and imperial power and strength, and one wonders how they might have resonated with the boat's presumed Asian makers and viewers.

All of these devotional objects are said to have been found in a ruined town-house complex near Narai's palace at Lopburi known as 'Phaulkon's house'.⁶⁵ It served as Phaulkon's residence at Lopburi during the 1680s, and was also where Phra Narai housed foreign ambassadors, including two French delegations that visited Siam in 1685 and 1687.⁶⁶ Part of the complex represents a type of Persian residential architecture that was common during Narai's reign, and it may initially have been built for a wealthy Persian merchant. Beginning around 1685, Phaulkon added western-style buildings, including a chapel and monk-like living quarters that probably housed French Jesuit missionaries and astronomers who accompanied the 1685 and 1687 embassies. Although we do not know whether the metal objects belonged to these missionaries, one can speculate that they were used for religious ceremonies that Phaulkon and other members of Narai's court could have witnessed. Like the setting and the objects used to perform them, these ceremonies would have entailed a blending of foreign and local traditions. Jesuit missionaries in Asia were known for their skill in assimilating aspects of indigenous culture, and this skill, combined with their scientific expertise, likely accounts for the favour they enjoyed at the Siamese court prior to the 1688 revolution.⁶⁷

Even without assimilation, aspects of Christian ritual would have been familiar to Siamese viewers. Incense was widely used in Buddhism, while the *navicula* itself recalled gold ship-shaped votives used in Siamese religious

65 Listopad (*The Art and Architecture of Somdet Phra Narai*) claims that these objects were found at Phaulkon's house—although he does not provide the date of excavation—and several other sources also associate them with Phaulkon.

66 Hutchinson E.W., "Phaulkon's House at Lopburi", *Journal of the Siam Society* 27, 1 (1934) 1–7. See also Listopad, *The Art and Architecture of Somdet Phra Narai* 100–113, who disputes some of Hutchinson's claims, specifically related to the timing of the construction of different parts of the residence.

67 On Jesuit assimilation in Asia and elsewhere, see Bailey G.A., *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* (Toronto: 2001).

ceremonies at least as early as the fourteenth century, often in connection with maritime trade.⁶⁸ Throughout early modern Asia, as in Europe, ships carried multivalent associations and were used in both sacred and secular contexts. In 1686, Narai sent to France a delegation of ambassadors and gifts that included a ‘gold ship, called a *somme*, in the Chinese fashion, with all of its tackings’.⁶⁹ This ‘*somme*’ (apparently a French variant for *nef*) appears with other Siamese gifts in an almanac print celebrating the 1686 arrival of Narai’s embassy at Versailles [Fig. 17.10]. Since the French translator who compiled the list of Siamese presents made several errors and approximations—for instance, designating objects as ‘gold’ when they were actually made of silver gilt or tambac, and using the terms ‘Chinese’ and ‘Japanese’ interchangeably—we cannot be sure that his description of a ‘gold ship in the Chinese fashion’ is accurate.⁷⁰ Nor do we know whether the print’s designer, the French Jesuit artist Pierre Paul Sevin, represented the ship as it appeared. The ship in the print looks more French than Chinese, with a prominent stern topped by a trio of lanterns and flags bearing the Bourbon *fleurs de lis*. It also rests on a base of sea monsters or dolphins, possibly an allusion to the French *dauphin*. Perhaps the term ‘Chinese fashion’ referred more to the method or place of production than to the style—after all, Chinese export artists were manufacturing scores of European-style *nefs* and *naviculae* by this time. Moreover, we know Narai gifted export arts from all over East and Southeast Asia in order to advertise his intra-Asian maritime connections to Louis XIV, who was desperate to break into the Asia trade. The ‘gold ship’ sent by Narai may have alluded to these connections while simultaneously evoking religious connotations associated with the king’s hoped-for conversion. The altar-like presentation of Narai’s gifts in the print seems to suggest this possibility.

68 One of these votives, excavated from the temple of Wat Mahathat at Ayutthaya, is illustrated in Chutintaranond, *The Immortal Art of Ayutthaya* 49.

69 Smithies M., *The Discourses at Versailles of the First Siamese Ambassadors to France, 1686–7, Together with the List of Their Presents to the Court* (Bangkok: 1986) 82: ‘un navire d’or, qu’on appelle Somme, avec tous ses agrez’.

70 *Ibidem* 11–14.



FIGURE 17.10 *Pierre Paul Sevin (attributed) and François Jollain (publisher), The Royal Reception of Ambassadors from the King of Siam by His Majesty at Versailles on 1 September 1686 (1687). Etching and engraving, 82 × 52 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Arts graphiques, coll. Edmond de Rothschild (inv. no. 26985LR). IMAGE © JEAN-GILLES BERIZZI/RMN/ART RESOURCE, NEW YORK CITY, NY.*

Conclusion

Early modern *naviculae* were mobile and multivalent objects, adept at communicating across time, space, and culture. Indeed, part of the form's worldwide proliferation must be ascribed to its inherent adaptability and 'assimilability' of design and use, especially in association with the ritual ceremonies and incense that accompanied the spread of Christianity.⁷¹ But another key aspect of such boats' cosmopolitan success lay in their power to materialise long-standing metaphors and beliefs in diverse ways for the diverse populations touched by early modern globalisation, giving specific local colour to worldwide phenomena.

In attempting to show how early modern *naviculae* say something significant as a group while addressing particular geographical, chronological, and cultural contexts, we have suggested how such meanings can be recovered, while acknowledging the gaps in our understanding of individual examples and of the multicultural, often ephemeral communities in which they served. We hope other scholars will take up these broader questions. How did traditional meanings of sacred and secular objects change as Europe embarked on global religious, mercantile, and colonial expansion? Did the received understandings of such nomadic objects persist, or did they give way to new resonances occasioned by specific regional circumstances? Or, as we propose, did these meanings coexist?

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