

*A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100-1500.* Kenneth R. Hall. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. ISBN: 9780742567610

In *A History of Early Southeast Asia: Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100-1500*, historian Kenneth Hall offers a useful overview of Southeast Asian history in the era prior to European involvement in the region. In this wide-ranging survey of a dynamic but understudied period in Southeast Asian history, Hall covers a range of important topics and situates Southeast Asian societies within the broad currents of international commerce and cross-cultural exchange. In less than 400 pages, Hall presents a large body of research drawn from various fields of study and does so in an accessible manner, making this an ideal book for non-specialists and students interested in Southeast Asian and world history.

Looking over the dust jacket and title of *A History of Early Southeast Asia*, one would be forgiven for assuming that this latest work was simply a revised second edition of the author's *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, published in 1985. In the preface, however, Hall makes it clear from the outset that this work is intended to be much more. Grounded in nearly three decades of subsequent research in the fields of Southeast Asian history, archaeology, art history, linguistics, and anthropology, Hall declares that this book is an entirely new work and a "reflection" of "how the study of early Southeast Asian history has progressed over that time" (x). Indeed, Hall does incorporate a substantial amount of new material into this book, including significant discussions centered on the areas that are now Vietnam and Burma, and brief sections on select parts of the eastern Indonesian archipelago and the Philippines, both of which were mostly excluded from his earlier book. Even in light of

this new material, however, the core argument and Hall's explanation of historical development in early Southeast Asian societies—the “essence” of his earlier work—remains largely unchanged.

After a brief preface, *A History of Early Southeast Asia* opens with a somewhat dense but readable chapter that sets the stage for the work as a whole and provides an overview of trade and statecraft in Southeast Asia prior to 1500 CE. This chapter is especially useful for its comprehensive review of the literature and established theories regarding the formation of early polities in the region, their involvement in local, regional, and international trade networks, and the tremendous changes that came as a result of Southeast Asia's participation in these exchanges. It is in this first chapter, furthermore, that Hall introduces and most fully explains what he sees as the two primary forms of states or polities in early Southeast Asia: riverine coastal states, common to maritime Southeast Asia, and lowland wet-rice states typical of the mainland region. Although this simplified typology ignores the diversity of Southeast Asian state forms in this period, Hall uses these descriptive categories throughout the text to help explain fairly complex theories of statecraft and sociopolitical change for the non-specialist. Because of its broad temporal and thematic sweep, this first chapter could stand as a summary of the book as a whole and would make a useful addition to the syllabi of undergraduate and graduate courses on Southeast Asia.

The remaining chapters of *A History of Early Southeast Asia* cover different polities and regions but retain the central focus of the opening chapter, that is “the consequences of Southeast Asia's participation in the international trade relative to the evolution of regional cultures” (1). After another overview of Southeast Asian maritime

trade and cross-cultural exchange, covering the period 100-500 CE, in chapter two, the third chapter offers an interesting comparative case study of Champa and Dai Viet (Vietnam), and the contrasting political and economic histories of these dynamic eastern mainland polities prior to 1500 CE. Chapters four and five then focus on the early polities of the western Indo-Malay archipelago and major socioeconomic changes in Javanese communities between the tenth and fourteenth centuries respectively. Hall's discussion of Srivijaya's history in chapter four, much like the corresponding chapter from his 1985 volume, offers an excellent summary of the research, both old and new. The next chapters return our attention to the Southeast Asian mainland, with chapter six focused on the temple-based agrarian economies of Angkorian Cambodia and Pagan Burma, and chapter seven covering more broadly socioeconomic and political transitions in a wide swath of mainland Southeast Asia and the Melaka Straits. Here, Hall offers a valuable overview and analysis of the excellent research done by scholars such as Li Tana, Charles Wheeler, and John Whitmore, who have drawn needed attention to the maritime dimension of pre-1500 Vietnam history. Chapter nine looks specifically at fifteenth-century developments in four emergent port polities, Samudra-Pasai (Sumatra), Melaka, Banda (eastern Indonesia), and Cebu (central Philippines), particularly at what Halls sees as a shift from sociopolitical systems "based on personal alliances to a more structured and less personal state system involving the integration of the upstream hinterlands and coastal populations" (323). Hall closes the book with yet another sweeping overview of the world of Southeast Asian trade and state development at the dawn of the sixteenth century. With this chapter the author extends his treatment of early Southeast Asian

history beyond the fourteenth century cutoff of his 1985 work, and adds his perspective to important discussions regarding this period of tremendous change.

Overall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia*, much like the author's 1985 volume, is a welcome comprehensive review and analysis of the established research regarding trade and state formation in early Southeast Asia. Based largely on published sources and the work of other established scholars, as well as the author's own research, Hall's primary contribution is to synthesize a large body of information, both new and old, drawn from diverse fields of study, and craft a coherent narrative of Southeast Asia's sociopolitical and economic development in response to external influences. Although Hall seeks to demonstrate that Southeast Asian responses to international commercial and cultural opportunities were "conditioned by and consistent with preexisting patterns of civilization," his focus on foreign influences as the primary stimuli for local historical developments inadvertently gives readers the impression that early Southeast Asian societies transformed only when stimulated by external economic and cultural influences. Still, Hall does a superb job of locating Southeast Asian societies within an expansive network of cross-cultural exchange that spanned the Indian Ocean basin, demonstrating the region's importance for the study of world history. While much of what Hall writes will be familiar to Southeast Asianists from the important scholarship of George Coedes, J.C. van Leur, M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, O.W. Wolters, Bennet Bronson, J.G. de Casparis, Jan Wisseman Christie, and others, his ability to combine established scholarship with new data into an accessible narrative makes this book especially useful for non-specialists looking for an entryway into the field of Southeast Asian history.

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