

ANNOTATING WALLACE'S MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

Alfred Russel Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* (1869) is a classic of scientific travel. Beloved by readers since it was published 146 years ago, it is widely available in a dizzying array of modern reprints. Yet this familiarity has led to an unfortunate paradox—while the book is rightly famous, and new reprints often include an appreciative introduction, its actual content has remained untouched. Instead the text is reproduced again and again without comment. Yet there is a great deal to reveal about Wallace's great work.

For starters, many of the main 'facts' about the book turn out to be misleading or wrong. For example, it is often repeated that 'Malay Archipelago' was the name for Southeast Asia at that time, as if were just a case of 1:1 translation, when in fact it was one of several English names. The most commonly used, in order of frequency, were: East Indies, Indian Archipelago, Eastern Archipelago, Malay Archipelago and East Indian Archipelago. Wallace used the terms Eastern Archipelago and Indian Archipelago until 1860, when for some reason, he mostly switched to Malay or Malayan Archipelago.

It is very often claimed that Wallace's book has never been out of print but Macmillan (Wallace's publisher) stopped printing the book after 1922. It was next reprinted in 1962, and with very sporadic reprints for years thereafter. It is also widely believed that the book went through ten editions in Wallace's lifetime. This derives from counting some unrevised reprints as new editions. In fact, the final edition of 1890 was the fourth.

The new edition published by NUS Press reveals Wallace's *Malay Archipelago* like never before. It begins with a 10,000 word introduction based on the most in-depth historical research programme ever undertaken on Wallace's expedition.¹ Wallace was not a modern field biologist, but a Victorian naturalist, and can only be properly understood and interpreted in the light of his original context. The introduction therefore provides a contextualised account of Wallace's life, his 1854–62 voyage and a survey of the surviving textual sources. Wallace's 250,000 word book was based on his 100,000 word voyage *Journal*, now carefully preserved in the



Library of the Linnean Society, as well as at least a dozen of his published articles and correspondence. His surviving letters were recently edited and published by Oxford University Press with a preface by Sir David Attenborough.² The historian John Bastin, in his excellent introduction to the 1986 reprint of *Malay Archipelago*, identified eight works Wallace consulted to enrich his account. The present edition identifies a further eight.

Wallace illustrated his book with 52 unique woodcuts and ten maps. It has been overlooked that the well-known frontispiece 'Orang Utan attacked by Dyaks', as well as 'Remarkable beetles' and

'Moluccan Beetles', were engraved by J. D. Cooper who was nowhere mentioned by Wallace. Cooper's name is however listed in Wallace's private address book, now housed in the Wallace Archive at the Natural History Museum, London (NHM). The handsome colour fold-out map at the front the book turns out to be rather curious. Not only is it extremely cluttered with place names irrelevant to Wallace's travels, there are even details left over from earlier publication. For example, in the middle of Borneo, where Wallace never trod, it reads: "Dutch steamer reached here in March." This is nowhere mentioned by Wallace. The map was recycled by Stanford's Geological Establishment

ABOVE Wallace praised "the shining blue *Papilio ulysses*, one of the princes of the tribe". (Donovan, E. 1800. *An Epitome of the Natural History of the Insects of India*. London.)



from the plate used to print the 'Asiatic Archipelago' in *The family atlas* (1865). Wallace's map is included as a colour fold-out in the new edition.

Wallace's 'Physical Map' repeats elements of the first map while adding lines of 'volcanic belts' and two lines which merge northeast of Celebes, including the famous 'Wallace Line'. An original map appeared in the 1870 Dutch edition by the eminent scholar of the region, P. J. Veth, which combined the features of both maps with only the minimum amount of place names. It is the clearest map in any edition. It is also reproduced in colour in the new edition.

In all, the new edition provides over 50 colour illustrations including a 16-page colour plate section with animals, plants, peoples and places that Wallace described as particularly striking. All but one of the illustrations are from 19th-century artists or photographers which helps give a sense of the period in which Wallace was writing and collecting.

The text of the new edition is annotated with more than 850 footnotes. These explain terms or topics unclear to modern readers or supply information not included

by Wallace, correct errors in the text, and provide references. Wallace usually did not give the names of the people he met or mentioned. In many cases it has been possible to identify them. Every publication and quotation in the text has also been identified. The points in the narrative where Wallace used substantial text from his manuscript *Journal* and other notebooks are noted. Wallace's presentation lists are provided as well as Darwin's private comments on the text. Veth's edition contained a wealth of corrections and clarifications that was never incorporated into English editions. Veth's information that remains relevant has been incorporated in the new edition.

Wallace referred to most plants and animals with the scientific name then current. These are meaningless to most modern readers and in many cases have been superseded by current names. Each has been annotated with the current common name, if there is one, and the modern scientific name. Several zoologists and botanists kindly offered their expert assistance to modernise the nomenclature.

The *Malay Archipelago* contains a considerable number of small inaccuracies—especially dates. Some

LEFT The Sulawesi Dwarf Cuscus, discovered by Wallace near Macassar. It marked "the furthest westward extension of this genus and of the Marsupial order". (Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London 1858: 100–5.)

BELOW The Sulawesi Dwarf Cuscus, discovered by Wallace near Macassar. It marked "the furthest westward extension of this genus and of the Marsupial order". (Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London 1858: 100–5.)

memorable stories also turn out to be mistaken. Examples include the dramatic claim that tigers "kill on an average a Chinaman every day" in Singapore and that the Dutch Governor General committed suicide by leaping from a waterfall on Celebes. In fact the man who died, in 1855, was C. M. Visser, a former governor of the Moluccas who apparently died by accident. Similarly, Wallace's chapter XII 'Lombok—how the Rajah took the census' was sub-titled 'a folktale' in Veth's edition. These have unfortunately been cited as facts in many works about Wallace and the region.

The Preface and footnotes added by Wallace to the 1890 edition are included as well as places where errors in the first edition were corrected or not. The new edition also includes a fully revised itinerary for Wallace and another for his assistant Charles Allen. That of Wallace's Malay assistant, Ali, has recently been published elsewhere.³

In all, 34,000 words of editorial information have been added to the new edition. The *Malay Archipelago* has inspired generations of explorers and biologists to study and appreciate the diversity and complexity of this fascinating region of the world. This new edition is intended to help readers get the most out of Wallace's great work.

Dr John van Wyhe
dbsjmw@nus.edu.sg
Historian of Science

Parts of this article are adapted from the introduction to *The Annotated Malay Archipelago* by Alfred Russel Wallace. Edited by John van Wyhe. NUS Press, 2015. With thanks to Elaine Charwat and Leonie Berwick.



¹ John van Wyhe, *Dispelling the Darkness: Voyage in the Malay Archipelago and the discovery of evolution by Wallace and Darwin*. WSP, 2013.

² John van Wyhe and Kees Rookmaaker eds., *Alfred Russel Wallace: Letters from the Malay Archipelago*. OUP, 2013. Beautiful scans of the original letters can be seen on G. Beccoloni ed., *Wallace letters online* (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/library-collections/wallace-letters-online/database.html>)

³ John van Wyhe & Gerrell M. Drawhorn, "I am Ali Wallace": The Malay assistant of Alfred Russel Wallace. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Society* vol. 88, Part 1, No. 308 (June 2015): 3–31. On Charles Allen see Kees Rookmaaker & John van Wyhe, In Alfred Russel Wallace's Shadow: His forgotten assistant, Charles Allen (1839–1892). *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 85, part 2, no. 303 (2012): 17–54.