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## READING EUROPEAN UNIVERSAL HISTORIES IN JAPAN, 1790S–1840S\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article offers a case study in the nature of uses of the European past in East Asia at a time when the search for the knowledge of the West was not yet motivated primarily by any sense of its civilizational, moral, or technological superiority. In the course of the later eighteenth century, as Dutch philological expertise gradually became another available tool—alongside the long-established Sinological erudition—for generating knowledge about the world, commentators around the Japanese archipelago began to turn not only to the medical and astronomical manuals of the occidentals but also to their histories. The translation-cum-commentary Miscellanea from the western seas by Yamamura Saisuke (1801) is a case in point. The text became effectively a crossroads of two philological and historiographical bodies of knowledge that intersected in unexpected ways as the European past was subjected to a reinterpretation in terms of the classical Chinese precedent, while the product of that reinterpretation informed a different understanding of the recent and contemporary historical trajectory of a Japan now exposed to the dynamics of the global European presence.*

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This article offers a case study in the nature of appropriations and uses of the European past in East Asia at a time when the search for the knowledge of the West was not yet motivated primarily by any sense of its civilizational, moral, or technological superiority. The early preoccupation with the shapes

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and partitioning of European history among some Japanese was driven by a mixture of amused ethnographic curiosity, pedantic antiquarianism, and demand for geopolitical intelligence, rather than by the considerably later arrival of the diplomatic gunboats of the Western powers around the mid-nineteenth century. In the course of the later eighteenth century, as Dutch philological expertise gradually became another available tool—alongside the long-established Sinological erudition—for generating knowledge about the world, commentators around the archipelago began to turn not only to the medical and astronomical manuals of the occidentals but also to their histories.

Owing to inertia, we continue referring to European and East Asian historiographical ‘traditions’ as if they existed as intellectual worlds apart, destined to remain echo chambers of their own internal debates until the global diffusion of Western influence created a single discursive modernity. Yet, even before the nineteenth century, there existed a dense network of textual connections that criss-crossed the urban hubs of the old world and new and drew them together in a sort of global republic of letters, whose centre of gravity and authority was not by default the Euro-Atlantic West.

The translation-cum-commentary *Miscellanea from the western seas* (西洋雜記 *Seiyō zakki*, 1801), by Yamamura Saisuke 山村才助 (or Masanaga 昌永, 1770–1807), is a case in point.<sup>1</sup> The text effectively became a crossroads of two philological and historiographical bodies of knowledge that intersected in unexpected ways as the European past was subjected to a reinterpretation in terms of the classical Chinese precedent, while the product of that reinterpretation informed a different understanding of the recent and contemporary historical trajectory of a Japan now exposed to the dynamics of the global European presence. Illustrative of this is Yamamura’s discovery of what he took for an ancient stratagem—queen Dido’s ox-hide trick in the founding of Carthage—that enabled the occidentals to gain their first footholds in the East Indies from the sixteenth century onwards.

Retracing the steps of this reader requires us to consider how, on the desk of a Japanese low-ranking samurai scholar, Chinese dynastic histories and provincial gazetteers interacted with the seventeenth-century commercial production of Dutch printing presses and German Lutheran writers’ biblical schemes of universal history. In Yamamura’s summary, the Danielic scheme of four empires that served as the standard framework for Protestant universal historiography was subjected to a re-reading through the prism of an equally universalist Chinese historiography which conventionally contrasted periods of imperial stability with the fragmented periods of Warring Kingdoms. Following the defeat

<sup>1</sup> All references to Yamamura Saisuke’s *Seiyō zakki* here are to the first printed edition from 1848, which the title page attributes to the Bun’enkaku publishing house in Edo. This edition is available from Waseda University’s Kotenseki database, [http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/bunkoo8/bunkoo8\\_co309/index.html](http://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/bunkoo8/bunkoo8_co309/index.html).

of the Qing empire in the so-called First Opium War, this interpretation of the European past as a drift from ancient imperial unity to modern Warring Kingdoms fragmentation would provide an explanation for the expansive presence of the Western powers, still Dido's diligent pupils, in East Asia.

## I

The copperplate engraving on page sixty-two of the leather-bound volume he perused caught young Yamamura Saisuke's attention. There was clearly a story behind it, but it was hard to tell what it was. In the foreground of the outdoor scenery stood a female figure, bedraped robes all splendidly billowing around her. A crown on her head, she gestured towards a sort of table or altar on which a less splendidly clad man was taking a knife to what appeared to be the whole skin of a cow. At least so much was signalled by the – oddly – still attached skull of the deceased beast glumly staring through the empty eye sockets. Other men were busy laying out what appeared to be a length of rope into the distance towards a city wall with bastions and ramparts. Behind the woman crowded a retinue of ladies-in-waiting and soldiers with spears and shields, the only other more prominent figure being an elder statesman who looked on with an expression that one could interpret as wise reserve or bemused disapproval. Yamamura might have lacked much of the iconographic wherewithal to place the characters, but even he would have identified the time as the remote past and the female figure as royalty. He had heard before of the English and Russians having female sovereigns. Nevertheless, the scene was intriguing, and he would turn to the accompanying Dutch text to find a clue. The marginal notes that ran through the whole book gave the date 'Anno Mundi 3080'.

## II

The illustration that Yamamura inspected was the work of Matthaeus Merian (1593–1650), called the Elder, that is, successful enough in his trade to have founded a lineage. A Basel-born, Zürich-trained engraver, he came to establish himself as an illustrator and publisher in Frankfurt, inheriting the business of a Calvinist refugee family from the Spanish Netherlands into which he married.<sup>2</sup> Over time he acquired a certain celebrity status, owing, among other things, to his panoramic portrayals of some of the great German cities of his time. His was a tortuous age when confessional and political divisions combined to tear Europe apart in one of the most destructive conflicts of its history, which has gone down in textbooks as the Thirty Years' War. In his panorama of

<sup>2</sup> Lucas Heinrich Wüthrich, 'Merian, Matthaeus der Ältere', in Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, xvii (Berlin, 1994), pp. 135–8.

Heidelberg, the capital of the Protestant ruler of the south German Palatinate, Merian by luck captured the town's scenery just before the violent cycle of conquests and counter-conquests by the Catholic imperial armies of General Tilly and the Swedish Protestant forces turned parts of the castle into ruins.

The text to which Yamamura turned in order to make sense of the illustration had originally been written in German by Johann Ludwig Gottfried (1584–1633), who had studied theology at the University in Heidelberg as it appeared on Merian's 1620 panorama of the yet unscathed town. At least physically unscathed, for underneath its red-tiled roofs were already brewing the conflicts that would soon spill into violence fuelled by confessional difference. In 1601, young Johann Ludwig entered a faculty that had already gone through several rounds of purges of the professoriate depending on the confessional bent of the current princely occupant of the castle.<sup>3</sup> As Heidelberg and the Rhine-straddling Palatinate descended into the decades-long Catholic-Protestant tug of war in the 1620s, Gottfried made his way north towards Frankfurt and, delegating his parson's duties, turned to the life of letters, taking on translating, editing, and proofreading jobs.<sup>4</sup> His first commission – with Merian's father-in-law, Johann Theodore de Bry – was an illustrated digest of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>5</sup>

Partly as the language of both the educated Catholics in France and the large diaspora of francophone Protestant refugees scattered around northern Europe like the de Bry family, French was quickly becoming the *lingua franca* of the republic of letters across the confessional battle lines.<sup>6</sup> Yet Latin classics continued to be required reading, though not everyone had enough proficiency to appreciate the ancient originals. And as vernacular idioms emerged as self-sufficient vehicles of *belles lettres*, it became a sporting challenge for the renowned writers of the day to prove the worth of the vernacular prose and verse by trying to reproduce in them the greatest Latin classics. Between 1590 and 1632 alone, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were rendered into English by at least five different authors, including celebrities such as John Dryden, Arthur Golding, and Christopher Marlowe. There existed an even higher number of partial or full translations into French,<sup>7</sup> among them, for example, one by

<sup>3</sup> Peter Classen and Eike Wolgast, *Kleine Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg* (Berlin and Heidelberg, 1983), pp. 21–3.

<sup>4</sup> Lucas Heinrich Wüthrich, 'Gottfried, Johann Ludwig', in Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed., *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vi (Berlin, 1964), pp. 677–8.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ovidii Nasonis *Metamorphoseon plerarumque historica, naturalis, moralis ekphrasis. Ad figuras elegantissimas, quibus illa repraesentantur, accommodata* (Frankfurt am Main, 1619).

<sup>6</sup> See Michiel van Groesen, 'Entrepreneurs of translation: Latin and the vernacular in the editorial strategy of the De Bry publishing house', in Harold J. Cook and Sven Dupré, eds., *Translating knowledge in the early modern low countries* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 107–28.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond de la Charité, ed., *A critical bibliography of French literature, volume 2 (revised): sixteenth century* (Syracuse, NY, 1985), p. 144.

Joachim du Bellay. Du Bellay's *Complaint of Dido to Prince Aeneas according to Ovid*, based on the fourteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, rehearsed Ovid's version of the well-known theme of the Trojan survivor Aeneas and his affair with Queen Dido, the mythical founder of Carthage.<sup>8</sup> This was bound together with du Bellay's translation of book iv of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which told the same tale of the founding of Carthage.

In other words, translation between Latin and the European vernaculars was now a viable and respectable pursuit. Gottfried was capable of tapping into this trend by translating not only to and from Latin and German, but also from French, possibly from Spanish, and to an extent perhaps even from the marginal English.<sup>9</sup>

### III

After Merian took over the de Bry printing press in Frankfurt, Gottfried became his main writer.<sup>10</sup> Among their joint hits was Gottfried's comprehensive history of the world, the *Historische Chronica*. The book's full title specified its ambitious scope.<sup>11</sup> Its 1,200-odd folio-sized pages purported to catalogue in chronological sequence 'the most important events since the beginning of the universe until the year 1619, following the division into the Four Monarchies'. This periodization invoked an old scheme in place since antiquity, which in the Old Testament book of Daniel morphed into the four ages of humankind's empire of this world to be superseded by the kingdom of God. The reference is to Daniel 2:31–45, the famous passage where the prophet interprets the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. (King James Version)

<sup>8</sup> *Le quatriesme livre de l'Énéide traduict en vers françoyis. La complaincte de Didon à Énée, prinse d'Ovide. Autres oeuvres de l'invention du traducteur, par J. D. B. A. [Joachim Du Bellay]* (Paris, 1552).

<sup>9</sup> *Historia Antipodum oder Neue Welt* (Frankfurt am Main, 1631). Later republished by Merian's heirs as *Neue Welt und Amerikanische Historien ... aus verschieden West-Indianischen Historien-Schreibern und mancherley Sprachen mit sonderm fleiß zusammen getragen und extrahiert ... durch Johann Ludwig Gottfriedt* (Frankfurt am Main, 1655). See also Michiel van Groesen, 'America abridged: Matthaeus Merian, Johann Ludwig Gottfried, and the apotheosis of the De Bry collection of voyages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 41 (2011), pp. 67–92.

<sup>10</sup> Wüthrich, 'Merian, Matthaeus der Ältere', p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> *Historische Chronica, oder Beschreibung der fürnemsten Geschichtten, so sich von Anfang der Welt bis auff das Jahr Christi 1619 zugetragen. Nach Austheilung der vier Monarchien ...* (Frankfurt am Main, 1657). It first appeared in eight physical volumes between 1629 and 1634; the first folio edition followed in 1642 and the book continued to be republished as a single tome, including in 1657 and 1674, by Merian's heirs long after both his and Gottfried's deaths.

The vision was explained by the prophet as a declining succession of four great kingdoms, corresponding to the body parts of the figure in descending order from the head to the feet.

Combined with the prophet's vision of the four beasts from the seventh chapter of the same book, which were identified with the four parts of the figure and the four universal empires, the image became an irresistible trope for visualizing actual history.<sup>12</sup> The eschatological scheme endowed the past with a direction and partitions that made sense of the historical record. It just about managed to accommodate the actual evidence by positing a succession of empires that came close to ruling most of the known world and hinted that the relay was part of the masterplan for humanity's fortunes. The sequence needed to be tweaked, but by the 1500s had been stabilized to count the empire of the Assyrians or Babylonians as first; the empire of the Medes or Persians as second; the empire of the Greeks, that is, of Alexander of Macedon and his successors, as third; and the Roman empire, which in German lands could be claimed to still somehow exist, as fourth and last.

The scheme became especially entrenched in Protestant historiography.<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther's erudite disciple Philipp Melanchthon was behind the production of a standard history handbook for Lutheran universities based on the four-fold division of secular history into the sequence of world empires that would precede the return of the Messiah and the instauration of God's own reign.<sup>14</sup> Melanchthon's pupil Zacharias Ursinus of Breslau would uphold this historiographical orthodoxy at Heidelberg after he became one of the most influential professors there and the editorial soul of the Heidelberg Catechism project, the digest of Protestant theology that was to have a momentous afterlife in puritan England and the puritan settlements overseas, including in the North American colonies. The eschatological tropes of Danielic universal history would be influential among American evangelicals well into the nineteenth century and are not entirely dead even today.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 1600s, therefore, the Heidelberg graduate Gottfried was simply sticking to the mainstream in deploying Daniel's prophecy as the default container for universal history. It was neither odd nor very original that he composed his history in the way that he did. What was more remarkable was that the book retained its popularity in its many re-editions and translations into the eighteenth century. It was clearly owing to its copious illustrations

<sup>12</sup> For an example see Loren Faust, *Anatomia Statuae Danielis. Kurze und eigentliche erklerung der grossen Bildnis des Propheten Danielis, Darin ein historischerausszug der vier Monarchien ...* (Leipzig, 1585).

<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Kess, *Johann Sleidan and the Protestant vision of history* (Aldershot, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Joachim Carion and Philipp Melanchthon, *Chronicorum libri tres* (Paris, 1557). See also Anthony Grafton, *What was history? The art of history in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 167–73.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Boyer, *When time shall be no more: prophecy belief in modern American culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

through Merian's copperplate prints that the *Historische Chronica*, far from becoming obsolete as new universal histories were written, remained on active duty for so long.

In fact, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe listed it, alongside Merian's illustrated Bible (in Luther's famous translation), Comenius's *Orbis pictus*, and Ovid's *Verwandlungen* (another vernacular rendering of *Metamorphoses*), as the most influential early reading that filled his 'young brain quickly enough with a mass of images and events'.<sup>16</sup> Born in 1749, Goethe must have been describing a familiar bookshelf of the 1750s or '60s, which apparently did not boast Leibniz, Wolff, Montesquieu, Hume, or Voltaire, but rather these earlier, less enlightened classics. His testimony leaves no doubt that the illustrations were a key part of their enduring appeal.

The same quality would recommend Merian-illustrated books outside Europe, too. It was its remarkably long shelf life that enabled Gottfried and Merian's universal history and its four universal empires periodization to reach entirely unintended and unexpected audiences in late eighteenth-century East Asia. Very likely acquired for the exotic value of its illustrations, it came to be appreciated for the text. Only a few decades after the young Goethe devoured it, Yamamura Saisuke's translated digest of Gottfried would become one of the earliest overviews of Western history available in any East Asian tongue, possibly the earliest. And Yamamura's text, even without any of the illustrations reproduced, would be eagerly scanned for clues to the sort of challenge that the confrontation with the West posed in early nineteenth-century East Asia.

#### IV

The success of the German edition ensured that Merian and Gottfried's *Chronica* would sooner or later be picked up by a Dutch publisher. The wealth of the United Provinces and the fragmentary jurisdictions that made attempts at censorship impractical had turned the Dutch Republic into the heart of the publishing industry of seventeenth-century Europe.<sup>17</sup> In 1660, a Dutch version appeared in Amsterdam as *Historisch Chronyk*, published by

<sup>16</sup> 'Man hatte zu der Zeit noch keine Bibliotheken für Kinder veranstaltet. ... Außer dem *Orbis pictus* des Amos Comenius kam uns kein Buch dieser Art in die Hände; aber die große Foliobibel, mit Kupfern von Merian, ward häufig von uns durchblättert; Gottfrieds *Chronik*, mit Kupfern desselben Meisters, belehrte uns von den merkwürdigsten Fällen der Weltgeschichte ...; und da ich gar bald die Ovidischen *Verwandlungen* gewahr wurde, und besonders die ersten Bücher fleißig studierte: so war mein junges Gehirn schnell genug mit einer Masse von Bildern und Begebenheiten, von bedeutenden und wunderbaren Gestalten und Ereignissen angefüllt ....' *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811), in *Goethes Werke*, IX (Hamburg, 1948), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The bookshop of the world: making and trading books in the Dutch golden age* (New Haven, CT, 2019).

Jacob van Meurs, apparently without consulting the rightful heirs of either the author or the original publisher.<sup>18</sup>

The business model of a single enterprise encompassing illustration, engraving, editing, and book-printing worked for van Meurs as well as it had for Matthaeus Merian. Within a few years of completing his apprenticeship, van Meurs was churning out books under his own imprint, with a marked focus on the popular and commercially profitable genre of travel literature. In the 1660s and '70s, he published the texts of Johan Nieuhof, Olfert Dapper, and Arnoldus Montanus, and the Dutch translation of the great Jesuit polymath and amateur orientalist Athanasius Kircher.<sup>19</sup>

Richly illustrated, in large folio and quarto formats, van Meurs's books tended to be rather splendid affairs. As such, they in turn became objects eagerly sought by bibliophile collectors beyond Europe, just as collectors in Europe coveted albums of Persian miniatures or Japanese woodblock erotica. During the long eighteenth century, Dutch burghers like Nicolaas Witsen and British gentlemen like Hans Sloane were not the only ones in Eurasia attracted to exotic novelties and curious antiquities from overseas.<sup>20</sup> And the Indiamen of that early trading multinational the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), the East India Company under the monopoly charter of the United Provinces of the Dutch Netherlands, which brought to van Meurs and his authors, Montanus, Dapper, and Kircher, the information (and misinformation) that filled the pages of their books, often carried those same books on their outbound voyages back to the East Indies.<sup>21</sup>

Western books would arrive in Nagasaki, from the mid-seventeenth century the sole authorized entry point for a limited number of VOC ships. Books were mostly brought as ostensibly personal effects of the company's staff posted to the trading station there. But they were known to sell well – as collectibles as much as readables – and made for an article frequently packed with the express intention to be traded privately. In the later eighteenth century, orders for specific titles could be placed in Nagasaki, although the delivery period could run to upwards of the two years required for the round trip via Batavia to Europe. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, several products of van Meurs's printing press found their way to Japan. Nieuhof's account of the VOC diplomatic overtures towards the Qing court was well known, for example. Gottfried and Merian's *Chronicle* was another. It was in its Dutch version brought out by van Meurs in 1660 that Yamamura encountered the above-described illustration.

<sup>18</sup> Joh. Lud. Gotfridi Historische chronyck, vervattende de gedenkwaardigste geschiedenis van 't begin des werelts tot op 't jaar 1660 ... (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1660).

<sup>19</sup> John E. Wills, 'Author, publisher, patron, world: a case study of old books and global consciousness', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 13 (2009), pp. 375–433.

<sup>20</sup> James Delbourgo, *Collecting the world: the life and curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Iris Bruijn, *Ship's surgeons of the Dutch East India Company: commerce and the progress of medicine in the eighteenth century* (Leiden, 2009).

## V

Around 1782, lord Matsura Kiyoshi 松浦清 (1760–1841) – better known under his Chinese-styled pen name Seizan 静山 – contracted keen curiosity for copper-plate-illustrated books. He was a cultured member of the dynasty of Matsura warlords from the harbour castle town of Hirado off the western coast of Kyushu, once a busy port of call for European as well as Chinese merchants.<sup>22</sup> Seizan could hardly read any Dutch himself, but he nevertheless became one of the most avid collectors of books from the western seas with pictures and maps in them. The best place to lay hands on these was Nagasaki.

In 1782, on his inaugural trip to Nagasaki as the new Hirado lord – one of whose duties as the notional vassal of the Tokugawas was securing the defences of the city against barbarians – Seizan bought an illustrated barbarian book. This was the second Dutch edition of Engelbert Kaempfer's *Beschryving van Japan* (*History of Japan*) of 1733 and it was apparently Seizan's very first acquisition of a *bansho*, 'barbarian book', the technical classification in Tokugawa-period libraries that held such texts, including Seizan's.<sup>23</sup> Over the following decades, several hundred leather-bound tomes in the barbarian horizontal script gradually gathered in the annex that Seizan had built in the Hirado castle precincts to house his Rakusaidō library and in his secondary residence in the capital, Edo, where he ultimately retired. And, although they were vastly outnumbered by the thousands of Chinese and Japanese titles he also owned, this made Seizan's one of the most significant collections of Western books in Japan in this period.<sup>24</sup>

Among his acquisitions were Ovid's collected works in the duodecimo pocket format. *Metamorphoses*, rendered into Dutch as *Herscheppingen*, was the second of its three parts.<sup>25</sup> This Dutch edition post-dated Gottfried's own rendering of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by some decades, but was representative of the same trend. The drift towards vernacularization in the European republic of letters meant that, among some Japanese, an almost accidentally acquired proficiency in the language of Dutch merchants opened an avenue of access to a surprising range of content, from Latin classics to German Protestant historians.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Clulow, 'From global entrepôt to early modern domain: Hirado, 1609–1641', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 65 (2010), pp. 1–35. For the continued importance of Hirado as an intellectual locus and for a Cambridge-studying descendant of Matsura Kiyoshi, see Martin Dusinberre's contribution to this special issue.

<sup>23</sup> *Shinzō shomoku, gaihen: bansho* 新增書目 外篇 蛮書 (*The new expanded catalogue [of the Rakusaidō library], part 2: barbarian writings*), Matsura Historical Museum, Hirado, MS VII-1 (i). 3.

<sup>24</sup> Matsuda Kiyoshi 松田清, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū* 洋学の書誌的研究 (*A bibliographical study of Western learning*) (Kyoto, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> *Alle de werken van P. Ovidius Naso*, trans. A. Valentyn (Amsterdam, 1662). See also Matsuda, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū*, p. 321.

Another book to which Matsura Seizan could not bear to give a miss was Gottfried's *Historische Chronyck* in the folio edition by Jacob van Meurs.<sup>26</sup> The title page claims that van Meurs not only prepared the translation of the Amsterdam edition but also produced the copperplate illustrations. But, even though he may have had to re-engrave the plates for his pirate edition, the illustrations are without doubt those of Matthaeus Merian, exactly copied from the original German version of Gottfried's book. With an illustration on nearly every other page, the purchase must have greatly pleased Seizan, although it would have cost him a fortune. His carefully kept acquisition records preserved for the year 1785 quote a price of 10 *ryō* for an unspecified large-format Dutch book, so the going rate of the two folio tomes of van Meurs's Gottfried could easily have been around 20 *ryō*. Compare this to the – still very pricey – 1 *ryō* for the pocket-sized collected Ovid with no illustrations:<sup>27</sup> even a domain lord would think twice before incurring such an expense, especially as by the eighteenth century many domains were in chronic debt to the monetized, archipelago-wide market economy, which was outside their control.

If Seizan could afford this, it was to an important extent thanks to the windfall dividends from an industrial-scale whaling operation based in his domain.<sup>28</sup> The profit from a single humpback whale catch amounted to a fair few Gottfried equivalents and, over decades, the Hirado-based Masutomi whaling group paid tens of thousands of *ryō* in fees, taxes, and donations to the domain.<sup>29</sup>

The movement of texts along the synapses of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century worldwide web was no inevitable, nature-like process of diffusion or osmosis. Rather, it was a sum of discrete occurrences and actions that depended on contingent circumstances, including the vigour of the Dutch Republic's

<sup>26</sup> Joh. Lud. Gotfridi *Historische chronyck, Vervattende de gedenkwaardighste geschiedenissen voorgevallen van't begin des werelts tot op't jaar 1660 ...* (2 vols. in one, Amsterdam, 1660).

<sup>27</sup> Under the ideal exchange rate, 1 gold *ryō* should have been the equivalent of 1 *koku* of rice, a tax accounting unit as well as the assumed amount of sustenance for one person for one year. In the real economy, these rates fluctuated widely. But in the early nineteenth century, a housemaid could receive not much above 1 *ryō* as remuneration for an entire year's work, while, at the opposite end of the labour market, a carpenter's monthly wage might be worth 1–2 *ryō*. In any case, 20 *ryō* was the sort of sum that very few private individuals anywhere on the archipelago might ever hope to see together, let alone expend on printed matter.

<sup>28</sup> Matsuda Kiyoshi, 'Matsura Seizan – Ranpeki daimyō' 松浦静山 – 蘭癖大名 ('Matsura Seizan: the Dutch-crazed *daimyo*'), in Wolfgang Michel, Kawashima Mahito, and Torii Yumiko, eds., *Kyūshū no rangaku* 九州の蘭学 (*Dutch studies in Kyūshū*) (Kyoto, 2009), pp. 94–101, at p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> Jakobina K. Arch, *Bringing whales ashore: oceans and the environment of early modern Japan* (Seattle, WA, 2018), p. 87. See also Koga Yasushi 古賀康士, 'Saikai hogeyigō ni okeru chūshō kujiragumi no keiei to soshiki' 西海捕鯨業における中小鯨組の経営と組織 ('Small whaling enterprises in the Japanese traditional whaling industry: the case of the mid-nineteenth-century northern Kyushu region'), *Bulletin of Kyushu University Museum*, 10 (2012), pp. 99–126.

publishing industry, enhanced by the Huguenot diaspora and confessional propaganda wars in Europe; the vernacularization that now encompassed all genres, from contemporary treatises to the Bible and Latin classics such as Ovid and Virgil; the reading habits of the business representatives of the VOC; the collecting choices of peacetime Japanese warlords; and the profitability of whaling off the shores of Kyushu.

## VI

Gottfried's universal history in van Meurs's Dutch edition found a striking number of readers, or at least viewers, in late Tokugawa Japan. Its textbook-like organization, its clear chronology, and probably most of all its plentiful illustrations made it a much appreciated reference in the circles of so-called Dutch studies, *Rangaku* 蘭学 (or perhaps 'Hollandology'), and beyond. Motoki Yoshinaga 本木良永 (1735–94), a senior Dutch interpreter in Nagasaki who was among the first to use his linguistic expertise to cultivate intellectual interests, is believed to have perused it.<sup>30</sup> So did his older colleague Yoshio Kōgyū 吉雄耕牛 (or Kōsaku, 1724–1800), who leveraged his position as a Nagasaki interpreter with first-hand access to VOC staff and cargo to build a profitable career as a middleman and book agent. It was through him that Matsura Seizan purchased many of his 'barbarian' volumes, including the Dutch version of Kaempfer. It must have been Gottfried's *Chronicle* that Kōgyū showed in 1778 to his distinguished visitor Miura Baien 三浦梅園 (1723–89), a Kyushu scholar and natural philosopher, who commented that the book's account of the supposed origin of the world was as suspect as any other such folk tale and that the story of Adam and Eve resembled Izanagi and Izanami, the first male and female from the 'age of gods' chapter of the eighth-century *Kojiki* 古事記 chronicle.<sup>31</sup> Kondō Morishige 近藤守重 (1771–1829) – the learned Tokugawa retainer, geographer, and explorer, and a prolific writer in his own right, who held a string of important offices including those of Nagasaki commissioner and archivist-in-chief, *shomotsu bugyō* 書物奉行, of the shogun's Momijiyama library at the Edo castle – made an annotated bibliographical entry for *Gottofurito seiyo zenshi* ゴットフリート西洋全史 (*Gottfried's complete history of the West*).<sup>32</sup> Tachihara Suiken 立原翠軒 (1744–1823) – a vassal of the Tokugawa branch house of Mito and the head of the Office of Historiography, Shōkōkan 彰考館, tasked with compiling the new official history of Great Japan, *Dainihonshi* 大日本史 – asked another Nagasaki interpreter, Narabayashi Jūbei 榎林重兵衛, to help him make sense of some passages

<sup>30</sup> Matsuda, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū*, p. 458.

<sup>31</sup> Baien-kai 梅園会, ed., *Baien zenshū* 梅園全集 (*Complete works of [Miura] Baien*), I (Tokyo, 1912), p. 1064.

<sup>32</sup> Kondō Morishige, *Kōsho koji* 好書故事 (*A bibliophile's curiosities*), fasc. 80, in Kokusho kankōkai 国書刊行会, ed., *Kondō Seisai zenshū* 近藤正齋全集, III (Tokyo, 1905), p. 246.

of the *Historische Chronyck*.<sup>33</sup> And another exploration enthusiast and statecraft theorist, Honda Toshiaki 本多利明 (1744–1820) – who looked to the practices of European states when formulating an early argument for engagement in overseas commerce and empire-building – cited the book and recommended it to yet another Mito historiographer, Komiyama Fūken 小宮山楓軒 (1764–1840).<sup>34</sup> Considering the overlap in time, place, and range of historiographical concerns, it is likely that Aizawa Seishisai 会沢正志斎 (1782–1863), the most notorious of Mito school theorists and historians, must have had at least a brush with the book. His interpretation of what kind of challenge the West presented would crucially inform the loyalist movement that ultimately led to the peculiar revolution now called the Meiji ‘Restoration’.<sup>35</sup>

All this puts Gottfried’s history on a par with such popular references as Johann Hübner’s encyclopaedic *Kouranten-tolk*, the abbé Prévost’s multi-volume travelogue anthology *Beschrywing der reizen*, or indeed Engelbert Kaempfer’s *Beschrywing van Japan*, all Dutch re-translations from German, French, and English respectively. Examining Gottfried was no fringe oddity. Yamamura was not discovering an unknown source but rather trying his hand on a well-known classic. The patterns of accessing Gottfried in late 1700s and early 1800s Japan reveal how the uses of the knowledge of the European past travelled beyond the specialist Hollandology circles to the wider community of scholar-officials, theorists, and commentators concerned about geopolitics but lacking the philological skills necessary to read Dutch sources. Illustrations – and other visual material, such as maps – clearly played a major role here.

Importantly, a Dutch copy of Gottfried was owned by Ōtsuki Gentaku 大槻玄次 (1757–1827). Gentaku was the self-promoted patriarch of ‘Dutch studies’ as a marketable scholarly niche beyond the practical business of Dutch-interpreting in Nagasaki, and the founder of the private academy Shirandō in Edo. Yamamura Saisuke entered the academy in 1789 and became one of Gentaku’s most promising pupils.<sup>36</sup> It must have been Gentaku’s copy that Yamamura pored over to find out what the cow-skin illustration meant. This must have happened around 1799, give or take a year. Although many had by then consulted and cited Gottfried, it was Yamamura – possibly on Gentaku’s instigation – who first undertook extensive translation of selected parts of the book. These were included in his aforementioned *Seiyō zakki* (*Miscellanea from*

<sup>33</sup> Matsuda, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū*, p. 467.

<sup>34</sup> Honda Toshiaki, ‘Saiki monogatari’ 西域物語 (‘A tale of the western lands’), 1798, in Tsukatani Asahiro and Kuranami Seiji, eds., *Nihon shisō taikei 44: Honda Toshiaki, Kaiho Seiryō* 日本思想大系 44: 本多利明・海保青陵 (*Japanese intellectual history series 44: Honda Toshiaki, Kaiho Seiryō*) (Tokyo, 1970), p. 99. See also Ozawa Eiichi 小沢栄一, *Kindai Nihon shigakushū no kenkyū: bakumatsu-hen* 近代日本史学史の研究：幕末編 (*Studies in the history of historiography in modern Japan: the period of the end of the shogunate*) (Tokyo, 1966), p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> Bob T. Wakabayashi, *Anti-foreignism and Western learning in early-modern Japan: the New theses of 1825* (Cambridge, MA, 1986).

<sup>36</sup> Ayusawa Shintarō 鮎沢信太郎, *Yamamura Saisuke* 山村才助 (Tokyo, 1959), pp. 50–1.

*the western seas*), a collection of strange tales and anecdotes interspersed with serious historiographical, geographical, and philological commentary.

In his preface, dated 1801, Yamamura left an account of how the *Miscellanea* came together. Over the years of reading Dutch sources, he jotted down on slips of paper fragments or anecdotes that caught his attention but for which he otherwise saw no serious use. As the paper slips accumulated, he started storing them in a box. When the box was full, he emptied it and arranged the notes into an anthology. With conventional modesty, he apologized to an obliging reader for the frivolousness of such an enterprise. Despite this allegedly haphazard genesis, most of the first and a part of the second of the four volumes comprise a digest of Gottfried's four universal empires scheme, with an emphasis on the ancient and classical past. The result might be better described as a Japanese summary of Gottfried rather than a translation in the strict sense, and it is further complemented by Yamamura's extensive commentary, which in turn draws on many other sources. Although not actually printed until 1848, the *Miscellanea* circulated widely in manuscript copies, like so many other texts of its sort. It is known to have been owned by outspoken contemporaries like Watanabe Kazan 渡辺華山 (1793–1841).<sup>37</sup> It was also widely cited, in an acknowledged or unacknowledged manner. And, importantly, it begot several spin-offs by later authors who used Yamamura's rendering of the four monarchies framework as the scaffolding to contextualize their own, more contemporary, accounts of the Far West.<sup>38</sup>

With his translated and commented excerpts from Gottfried, young Yamamura Saisuke burst onto the Hollandological scene as one of its young stars. His best-known project would be the expanded and corrected edition of Arai Hakuseki's 新井白石 (1657–1725) *Sairan igen* 采覽異言 (*Various sights and strange words*, 1713), a century-old treatise of world geography, ethnography, and geopolitics based largely on Hakuseki's interrogation of the detained Jesuit missionary Giovanni Battista Sidotti. Gentaku lent the edition his authority by providing it with a preface, and Gentaku's own teacher, the venerable Sugita Genpaku 杉田玄白 (1733–1817), praised Yamamura's achievement as a rare combination of natural talent and diligence.<sup>39</sup>

The Hakuseki edition also earned Yamamura the recognition of the top echelons of Tokugawa scholarly officialdom: Kondō Morishige, the aforementioned librarian-in-chief, was among its first users. Shibano Ritsuzan 柴野栗山 (1736–1807), a professor at the Shōheizaka academy in Edo, the closest one gets to a shogunate-sponsored school of higher learning, arranged for the formal

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Satō Nobuhiro's 佐藤信淵 (1769–1850) *Seiyō rekkoku shiryaku* 西洋列国史略 (*A brief history of the Western Warring Kingdoms*) of 1808 is an early instance. For the discussion of the examples of Nagayama Choen 長山樗園 and Saitō Chikudō 斎藤竹堂, see below.

<sup>39</sup> Sugita Genpaku, *Rangaku kotohajime* 蘭学事始, see Mori Kōichi, ed. and trans., 'Rangaku kotohajime (Die Anfänge der "Holland-Kunde") von Sugita Gempaku [sic] (1733–1818)', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 5 (1942), pp. 501–22, at p. 514.

presentation of the manuscript to the government.<sup>40</sup> And Takahashi Kageyasu 高橋景保 (1785–1829), himself one of the new cohort of Western studies enthusiasts, who had in 1804 replaced his father as the head of the shogunal Astronomical Bureau (*Tenmonkata* 天文方) and kept a lookout for Hollandological talent, commissioned Yamamura to translate material on Russia and recommended him to receive an official appointment.<sup>41</sup> Yamamura would be responsible for a few more projects using Dutch-language sources for historical geography, including *Ajia shotōshi* 亜細亞諸島志 (*Gazetteer of Asian islands*), dated 1807. His premature death in 1807 abruptly cut off that career.

## VII

Merian's illustration and Gottfried's entry dated 'Anno Mundi 3080' – in Vulgate chronology corresponding to the year 830 BCE – of course described the foundation of the ancient city of Carthage, in today's Tunisia. In its basic version, the legend has a female chieftain lead a breakaway band of Phoenicians from the city of Tyre in an attempt to escape the persecution by the local ruler. Sailing westward along the African coast they make landing and negotiate with the locals, who are unenthusiastic about immigrants coming in boats across the Mediterranean. The woman claims that she only asks for her people as much land as a single ox hide might encompass. The tiny plot not being worth a conflict, her request is granted. The Phoenician leader has the ox hide cut up into the thinnest possible strips, which she ties together to a single length of line and measures out the perimeter of a city no smaller than Carthage. Tricked but obliged to honour the promise, the locals acquiesce in the settlement, which quickly grows to be the greatest power in the western Mediterranean.

The story was well known around the ancient Mediterranean. A sort of visual shortcut of it even appeared on Phoenician coinage. Gottfried's marginal notes make clear that he credited the story of Carthage's foundation to Justin, or Marcus Iunianus Iustinus (fl. third century CE), who in turn preserved by extensive quotation the only trace of *Historiae Philippicae et totius mundi origines et terrae situs* (*Philippic histories*) by one Pompeius Trogus (first century BCE), the chief source for Carthage and its mythical founder, here called Elissa. Justin's summary of Trogus, *Epitome in Trogi Pompeii historias*, was popular reading and from the fifteenth century on saw numerous re-editions and, of course, vernacular translations.

It is, however, Virgil's redaction of the story in the *Aeneid* that became by far the most famous version of it.

... Dido made ready her flight and her company.  
Then all assemble who felt towards the tyrant relentless hatred  
or keen fear; ships, which by chance were ready,

<sup>40</sup> Ayusawa, *Yamamura Saisuke*, p. 168.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

they seize and load with gold; the wealth of grasping  
 Pygmalion is borne overseas, the leader of the enterprise a woman.  
 They came to the place where today you will see the huge walls  
 and rising citadel of new Carthage,  
 and bought ground – Byrsa they called it therefrom –  
 as much as they could encompass with a bull's hide,  
 and they are choosing laws and magistrates, and an august senate.<sup>42</sup>

Virgil's innovation was to bring his Trojan hero to Carthage shortly after its foundation and make his love affair with the clever Phoenician queen, now called Dido, the narrative axis of his epos. It was on Virgil that Ovid based the Aeneas and Dido episode in the *Metamorphoses*.

Gottfried passed on the legend of Carthage's foundation without questioning its veracity, although he did point out that Virgil's chronology, which put the Trojan refugee Aeneas in the same time frame as the Tyrian refugee Dido, was implausible. That, however, hardly bothered anyone. Virgil's masterstroke was to symbolically link, regardless of historical plausibility, the myths of the foundation of the two great rivals of the Mediterranean: of Carthage by Dido, the refugee princess of Tyre, and of Rome by the progeny of Aeneas, a refugee prince of Troy. The failed relationship and Dido's tragic end not only explained the subsequent hostility between Rome and Carthage but could also be seen as a premonition of a collision of two paradigmatic models of polity. For the gold that Dido's party carried to north Africa was not a treasure to be hoarded or provision for living expenses: it was trading capital to be invested. To these Phoenicians, gold was what seeds were to other tribes, and the sea was the field in which to sow it. It was something to be diligently cultivated by application to commerce to deliver a new crop of profit. And patrolling sea routes was the equivalent of guarding the frontiers of a crop-yielding territory. The city that mythical Dido established on the ox-hide perimeter was a trading port, not a territorial landlord like Rome.

In his *Spirit of laws*, Montesquieu lined up Tyre, Carthage, Florence, Venice, and Holland under a type of republic that lived by commerce.<sup>43</sup> And in 1766, the physiocrate François Quesnay – expressly targeting Montesquieu – used Carthage to define a type of polity from the perspective of the degree of its commitment to trading interests and colonial policies.<sup>44</sup> Contemporary England, to him, was ‘une constitution carthaginoise’, a Carthaginian polity, meaning that

<sup>42</sup> *Aeneid*, 1.360–9, in Virgil I: *Elegies, Georgics, Aeneid, books 1–6*, trans. H. R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 287.

<sup>43</sup> Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des loix* [1748], book xx, chap. 4. See also Christopher Brooke, ‘Eighteenth-century Carthage’, in Béla Kapossy, Isaac Nakhimovsky, and Richard Whatmore, eds., *Commerce and peace in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 110–24.

<sup>44</sup> François Quesnay, ‘Remarques sur l'opinion de l'auteur de *L'esprit des lois* concernant les colonies’, in August Oncken, ed., *Oeuvres économiques et philosophiques de F. Quesnay* (Frankfurt am Main, 1888), pp. 425–36.

the form of its sovereignty was governed by the interests of merchants, specifically the monopoly trading joint stock ventures like the East India Company.<sup>45</sup>

## VIII

The fact that Yamamura was capable of reading and understanding the Dutch translation of Gottfried's text that related the story behind the illustration was impressive enough. But the real revelation occurred the moment that he deciphered the tale of Dido's trick from the lines of van Meurs's edition. To his great surprise, he realized he already knew the story. He had read it before. Not in Dutch, however, nor in any other European tongue, but in Chinese.

The young Yamamura had entered Ōtsuki Gentaku's Dutch studies academy when he was about nineteen. Until that moment, however, like every educated person in the broad East Asian Sinosphere – the gravitational field of the cultural forms and precedents of Chinese classical texts – the default general learning he had acquired would have been 'Chinese', not dissimilar from the Latinate *trivium* required of an educated European of Gottfried's time. And just as accomplished eighteenth-century French, Dutch, or Englishmen needed to at least pretend to be familiar with the original Tacitus, Sallust, and Livy – obviously to be studied not as 'Italians' but as universal classics – the men (and occasional women) of learning in Tokugawa Japan, Yi Korea, the Ryūkyū kingdom, and Viêt Nam would be expected to know their classical – meaning Chinese – histories. These went back to the semi-mythical records of the *Classic of documents* (*Shujing* 書經), through the canonical commentaries on the *Spring and autumn annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), and Sima Qian's *Records of the grand historian* (*Shiji* 史記), down a sequence of officially sanctioned histories of the dynastic states, from the early Han to the most recently demised Ming.

It was against this shared background of default historical common sense that the record of the European past was first queried, interpreted, translated, and used. Far from an imperial imposition of a framework for history, around 1800 the Western record of Europe's past arrived in Japan to be subjected to a re-reading and reshaping in terms of a confident, lively, and unselfconscious body of historiography which provided its own conceptual patterns and period markers. We should pay attention to this moment, for among other things it gives us a counter-factual glimpse of a European past chopped, stretched, and twisted to fit the mould of a different historiographical common sense – something, of course, that otherwise typically happens to pasts non-European.

In fact, the bibliography that Yamamura Saisuke carefully enumerated in his corrected edition of Hakuseki's *Sairan igen* contains a considerably larger number of Chinese references than those of European provenance.<sup>46</sup> It lists

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 429.

<sup>46</sup> See the unpaginated manuscript copy of Yamamura's edition from Watanabe Kazan's collection, preserved in the National Diet Library in Tokyo (call number 寄別 14-3). The list of

Merian and Gottfried's *Chronicle* alongside sources such as the *Mingshi* 明史, the official dynastic history of the Ming. And it was from the *Mingshi* that Yamamura realized he remembered Dido's ox-hide story. Except that it was not the tale of the foundation of Carthage by the Phoenicians, but of Manila by the Castilians.

## IX

The Ming dynastic history mentions the island of Luzon just after Ryūkyū in the fourth section of its 'Waiguo' ('Foreign countries') part.<sup>47</sup> It reports the fall of the island to the Franks during the Wanli reign (1572–1620). The 'Franks' (here the Spanish from Mexico) had been trading with Luzon and sensed an opportunity in its feebleness. They came to the local king (raja Soliman, in charge of the defences of the Manila bay) with plentiful presents, and begged for a plot of land no bigger than an ox hide on which they could build a warehouse. The permission granted, they cut up the ox hide into thin strips and measured out a large perimeter of 1,000 *zhang*. The raja had no choice but to honour the promise. The Franks built a fort, equipped it with cannon, provisioned it, and bided their time. Then they launched a surprise attack, killed the king, expelled his people, and took the country. That is how the *Mingshi* depicted the origin of the city of Manila and of the Spanish annexation of the islands which were soon to become the Islas Filipinas. Yamamura saw a pattern.

Once on the trail, Yamamura identified the ox-hide story in another Chinese source, *The biography of Zheng Chenggong* (*Zheng Chenggong zhuan* 鄭成功傳). This Chinese text arrived at Japanese shores by the same regional and global commercial shipping routes that brought Gottfried and the *Mingshi*. It became the main source of information about the dashing pirate and Hirado-born Ming loyalist known to Westerners as Koxinga.<sup>48</sup> Its material was widely recycled in popular romances, and a domestic reprint edition was published in Ōsaka in 1774 under the patronage of the famous cultural impresario Kimura Kenkadō 木村蒹葭堂 (1736–1802). It was very well known, but no-one had previously tried to read it alongside a German universal history.

In Japan, Zheng Chenggong (1624–62) was admired mostly as a Kyushu lad who displayed moving filial piety to his Japanese mother and exemplary loyalty to the lost cause of his liege, who happened to be the last Ming pretender to the

sources used ('Teisei zōyaku Sairan igen in'yō shomoku' 訂正增訛采覽異言引用書目) ('Index of works quoted in the corrected and expanded edition of *Various sights and strange words*') is found at the beginning of the first scroll.

<sup>47</sup> *Mingshi*, Liezhuan 列傳 211, Waiguo 外國 4. See Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., eds., *Mingshi* (Beijing, 1974).

<sup>48</sup> Masuda Wataru, 'Zheng Chenggong and Guoxingye (Kokusen'ya, Koxinga)', in Masuda Wataru, *Japan and China: mutual representations in the modern era*, trans. Joshua Fogel (Richmond, 2000), pp. 184–95.

imperial throne.<sup>49</sup> In modern Chinese and Taiwanese history, however, his greatest claim to fame is having retaken Taiwan from the Dutch. This recalls Zheng Chenggong's 1661 retreat from the mainland, precipitating his clash with the VOC masters of the island and a victorious siege of the main Dutch stronghold there.<sup>50</sup> In the build-up to that moment, *The biography of Zheng Chenggong* rewinds the story all the way back to the arrival of the Dutch at Taiwan and the sneaky way in which they established their foothold, Fort Zeelandia, in 1625–6. It is obviously here that the ox-hide trope enters. The Chinese account (but not the Dutch<sup>51</sup>), also repeated in the Qing *Taiwan gazetteer* (*Taiwan tongzhi* 臺灣通志), had the Dutch tricking the locals into the ox-hide deal to obtain the ground in the Bay of Taoyuan on which to erect the fortress.<sup>52</sup>

Ever the sharp-eyed detective philologist, Yamamura noted this reference, too. He believed, however, that he had not merely found an intriguing textual parallel but had made a real-world discovery. He assumed—at least so he wrote in his commented translation of Gottfried and repeated two or three years later in his *Gazetteer of Asian islands*—that the seafaring occidentals drew inspiration from their own ancient histories and used the ox-hide ploy in order to gain advantage over credulous strangers. On Luzon and Taiwan they reproduced the trick they had learnt from Dido.

## X

Unbeknown to Yamamura, the tale of Dido's city on an ox hide had an even more astounding transcultural career. It had been told not only about the foundation of Manila and Fort Zeelandia, but about a string of other South-east Asian trading hubs taken over by the Europeans. In various records it is used in narrating the Portuguese conquest of Melaka (Malacca) in 1511;<sup>53</sup> the permission granted, typically under duress, to the Portuguese to build the forts at

<sup>49</sup> See the early eighteenth-century historical play for *jōruri* puppet theatre and *kabuki* drama *Kokusen'ya kassen* 国性爺合戦 by Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門, translated into English by Donald Keene in *The battles of Coxinga: Chikamatsu's puppet play, its background and importance* (London, 1950).

<sup>50</sup> Tonio Andrade, *Lost colony: the untold story of China's first great victory over the West* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> For the VOC version of the claim to possession, see Adam Clulow, 'The art of claiming: possession and resistance in early modern Asia', *American Historical Review*, 121 (2016), pp. 17–38, at pp. 21–2.

<sup>52</sup> Qiong Zhang, *Making the New World their own: Chinese encounters with Jesuit science in the age of discovery* (Leiden, 2015), p. 272. For the discussion of another view of Taiwan settlement, this time by a Qing Chinese official, see Leigh Jenco's contribution to this special issue.

<sup>53</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese empire in Asia, 1500–1700: a political and economic history* (2nd edn, Chichester, 2012), pp. 3–5, quoting Luís Filipe Thomaz, 'La prise de Malaca par les Portugais vue par les Malais (d'après le manuscrit Raffles 32 de la Royal Asiatic Society)', in C. D. Grijns and S. O. Robson, eds., *Studies on cultural contact and textual interpretation* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 158–77.

Kolamba (Colombo) on Sri Lanka in 1518 and at the Gujarati port of Diu in 1535;<sup>54</sup> the capture of the key Burmese port of Syriam (Thanlyin) by the Portuguese mercenary Filipe de Brito in 1599;<sup>55</sup> and the Dutch VOC takeover of Jayakarta (henceforth Batavia) on Java in 1619.<sup>56</sup> This is the chronological order of the actual events depicted, but it must be noted that the extant records are Malay, Sinhala, or Javanese texts that typically post-date the events themselves, by decades if not centuries, although they might be based on older oral traditions that accumulated fable-like elements including Dido's ox-hide trick.

The early eighteenth-century Malay account of the 1511 conquest of Melaka, for example, bears all the marks of fabrication after the fact.<sup>57</sup> It claims that the Franks arrived in Melaka from Spanish Manila, which obviously did not yet exist; and it ascribes their success to the ox-hide trick, even though Afonso de Albuquerque's capture of the city was the result of a frontal attack, not of any particularly Carthaginian stratagem. But the tale and its many other iterations encapsulate the perception of the treacherous newcomers. Often called 'Franks' – following the old Arabic designation that trickled through Persian, Sinhala, and Malay usage<sup>58</sup> to the *Folangji* 佛朗機 in the Chinese of Yamamura's Ming dynastic annals – these strangers did not play by the established rules, while the gullible local rulers did not recognize the danger when there was still time to contain it. It is surely this pattern that turned the tale into a popular container for making sense of the inroads that Westerners made into the South-east and North-east Asian commercial and political landscape between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its trajectory copies the progress of the Iberians and the monopoly trading companies of the northern Europeans as they aggressively asserted control over the choke points of the bustling maritime commerce routes in South-east and East Asia. The story is invariably told by locals, not by the Portuguese, Spanish, or Dutch conquerors themselves. This makes sense, for one apparent effect of the tale is to explain the defeat in terms of domestic moral and political failure, the failure

<sup>54</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Taking stock of the Franks: south Asian views of Europeans and Europe, 1500–1800', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42 (2005), pp. 69–100, at p. 75, quoting Luís Filipe Thomaz, 'Os frangues na Terra de Malaca', in Francisco Contente Domingues and Luís Filipe Barreto, eds., *A abertura do mundo: estudos de história dos descobrimentos europeus*, II (Lisbon, 1987), pp. 209–17; and Sikandar ibn Manjhu, *Mirāt-i Sikandarī*, in E. C. Bayley, ed. and trans., *The local Muhammadan dynasties: Gujarat* (London, 1886), pp. 394–5.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Reid, *Charting the shape of early modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai, 1999), p. 175.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Reid, 'Southeast Asian categorizations of Europeans', in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit understandings: observing, reporting and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 268–94, at pp. 290–1.

<sup>57</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese empire in Asia*, pp. 3–5; see also Romain Bertrand, *Histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre orient–occident (XVIe–XVIIe siècle)* (Paris, 2011), pp. 192–5.

<sup>58</sup> Bertrand, *Histoire à parts égales*, p. 217.

of foresight, resolve, or virtue on the part of indigenous rulers, not in terms of the mere superior firepower of the intruders.

There were many possible ways in which the tale could have reached the editors of the *Mingshi*. The bulk of its compilation was accomplished during the Qing dynasty Kangxi emperor's reign (1661–1722) and its formal presentation to the throne only took place in 1739, a full century after the collapse of the Ming state.<sup>59</sup> By then, sizeable Fujianese and Cantonese trading communities had long thrived in major ports around South-east Asia, including Melaka, Manila, and Batavia, and any rumour overheard there could have reached the ears of officials in Chinese coastal provinces. The story of Jan Pieterszoon Coen's sly Carthaginian land grab that would lead to the Dutch conquest of Jayakarta, subsequently the VOC headquarters Batavia, actually appeared in an eighteenth-century text written by a Chinese sojourner in Java, probably echoing local lore. This source is known to have found its way to the Hanlin Academy in Beijing, an imperial institution with ties to the Historiographical Office.<sup>60</sup>

Some of these port cities moreover belonged to the broad sphere of the Chinese world order, formally classified as tributary states with notional claim to protection in exchange for formal acknowledgment of the Chinese emperor's suzerainty. The Ming government was aware of the hostile actions of the 'red barbarians' (Portuguese) at Melaka as it received appeal for aid from the ousted sultan and even mulled retaliation. The *Ming shilu* 明實錄, the running *Veritable records of the Ming reign*, one of the main sources for the official dynastic annals, contain much topical coverage of the geopolitics of the south seas.<sup>61</sup>

## XI

How the ox-hide story model had arrived in South-east Asia in the first place is also a question that can only be answered conjecturally, but again there is no shortage of plausible connections. An early instance of the trick deployed in a historical narrative away from its classical home turf was in relating the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453. It was recorded by a Moldovan prince and refugee man of letters, Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), in his

<sup>59</sup> For a concise overview, see Achim Mittag, 'Chinese official historical writing under the Ming and Qing', in José Rabasa, Masayuki Sato, Edoardo Tortarolo, and Daniel Woolf, eds., *The Oxford history of historical writing, volume 3: 1400–1800* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 24–42.

<sup>60</sup> For *Ge-la-ba jilüe* 嘎喇吧紀略 (*A brief account of Galaba [i.e. Jakarta]*), by Cheng Xunwo 程遜我, see Claudine Lombard-Salmon, 'Un Chinois à Java (1729–1736)', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 59 (1972), pp. 279–318; for a more recent translation into English see also Leonard Blussé and Dening Nie, eds. and trans., *The Chinese annals of Batavia, the Kai ba lidai shiji and other stories (1610–1795)* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 205–18.

<sup>61</sup> Geoffrey P. Wade, ed. and trans, *The Ming Shi-lu as a source in Southeast Asian history: an open access resource* (Singapore, 2005), <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>.

*History of the growth and decay of the Ottoman empire.*<sup>62</sup> Cantemir ascribed the ploy to Mehmed II, ‘the Conqueror’, who allegedly used it to cheat the Byzantines into letting him obtain land enough to build a fort on the western shore of the Bosphorus, thus cutting off waterborne supplies and tightening the noose on Constantinople prior to the final siege.<sup>63</sup>

A careful reader of Cantemir, Edward Gibbon recognized the Virgilian trope and deemed it a fable.<sup>64</sup> That is probably correct, although Mehmed – who, like several victorious generals before him, had himself proclaimed *kayser-i Rûm*, caesar of Rome, after the conquest of the city<sup>65</sup> – was reputedly an avid consumer of Greek and Roman classics.<sup>66</sup> Overall, however, Gibbon praised Cantemir as a noteworthy source ‘conversant with the language, the annals, and institutions of the Turks’ and compared him favourably with other histories of the Ottomans available to an anglophone reader.<sup>67</sup> If Cantemir was really reporting a story that had existed in older Ottoman tradition, regardless of whether it got there through Mehmed’s reading of Latin epics or via another Mediterranean circuit, then that story may well have also travelled with Ottoman fleets far into the Indian Ocean, to the coasts of Gujarat, Malabar, and Aceh.<sup>68</sup>

One can easily imagine tales passed around the decks and in the sailors’ quarters among the mixed Malay–Fujianese–Dutch–Arakanese–Portuguese–Gujarati–Japanese crews of the innumerable vessels plying the seas of the South-east Asian trading oecumene. One imagines the stories repeated among commoners who eavesdropped on the sailors’ banter in the ports. And one imagines these second-, third-, or even fourth-hand rumours echoed on the coasts and in the hinterland, overheard by spies and making their way to courtiers, officials, and chroniclers.

Then there were the Jesuits, who carried Virgil in their physical and metaphorical luggage wherever they went, from Canada and Mexico to Siam, China, and Japan. Jesuits employed Virgil in their didactic theatre plays, poetry exercises, and emblem books, and as example sentences in grammar

<sup>62</sup> The Latin manuscript *Demetrii Principis Cantemirii incrementorum et decrementorum Aulae Othman[n]icae sive Aliothman[n]icae Historiae a prima gentis origine ad nostra usque tempora deductae libri tres* was translated into English and first published as Demetrius Cantemir, *The history of the growth and decay of the Othman empire*, trans. N. Tindal (London, 1734); the French and German re-translations followed promptly.

<sup>63</sup> Cantemir, *History of the growth and decay*, p. 97.

<sup>64</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire*, ed. David Womersley (3 vols., London, 1995), III, pp. 940–1.

<sup>65</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim kingship: power and the sacred in Muslim, Christian, and pagan polities* (London, 1997), p. 47.

<sup>66</sup> Jerry Brotton, *The renaissance bazaar: from the silk road to Michelangelo* (Oxford, 2003), p. 50. See also Cantemir, *History of the growth and decay*, p. 97, and Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 935.

<sup>67</sup> Gibbon, *Decline and fall*, III, p. 810.

<sup>68</sup> Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman age of exploration* (Oxford, 2010); and İsmail Hakkı Göksoy, ‘Ottoman–Aceh relations as documented in Turkish sources’, in Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, and Anthony Reid, eds., *Mapping the Acehnese past* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 65–96.

manuals and dictionaries of the Latin they taught their pupils.<sup>69</sup> The code of the Society of Jesus pedagogy, the *Ratio studiorum* of 1599, prescribed reading of the *Aeneid* for intermediate grammar classes as well as for the eloquence-cultivating humanities, both part of the curriculum that made the Jesuits the foremost purveyors of education in Catholic Christendom.<sup>70</sup> The *Aeneid*, with Dido's story in it, would end up on the shelves of Jesuit libraries around the East Indies and would be taught from Goa and Macao to Funai and Nagasaki to indigenous seminarians, including younger sons of Kyushu pirate warlords who wished to cultivate links to Christian shipping as a business opportunity.<sup>71</sup> The edition of Manuel Álvares's handbook of Latin grammar, *De institutione grammatica*, produced in 1594 in the Jesuit seminary at Amakusa, on Kyushu, for use in the instruction of the Japanese pupils there, contained 296 quotes from Virgil, second only to Cicero and just ahead of Ovid, with the *Aeneid* as the chief source of examples.<sup>72</sup> This is another conceivable channel by which the ox-hide trope may have jumped between tongues and contexts.

Clearly, none of this leaves the realm of imaginative conjecture. But there is no doubt that the infrastructure for such a long-distance traffic in stories and texts was firmly in place, in a way that is well documented and not at all speculative. When we do encounter a tale that has assumed a life of its own at the opposite end of Eurasia, therefore, there is no lack of explanations. Some have proposed that, being so widespread around Eurasia, the ox-hide motif must represent some sort of common archetype.<sup>73</sup> However, at least for the sequence of its uses we have followed here, a historical rather than an anthropological explanation seems more likely.

It is not overly surprising that some of the earlier iterations of the tale reached attentive readers of East Asian histories which contained reports from the south

<sup>69</sup> Yasmin Haskell, 'Practicing what they preach? Vergil and the Jesuits', in Joseph Farrell and Michael Putnam, eds., *A companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its tradition* (Oxford and Chichester, 2010), pp. 203–16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*, see Allan P. Farrell, ed. and trans., *The Jesuit Ratio studiorum* (Washington, DC, 1970), pp. 80 and 85. Anthony Grafton, 'Entrepreneurs of soul, impresarios of learning: the Jesuits', in *Worlds made by words: scholarship and community in the modern West* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), pp. 160–75.

<sup>71</sup> Jesús López Gay, 'La primera biblioteca de los Jesuitas en el Japón (1556): su contenido y su influencia', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 1 (1938), pp. 350–79; María de Deus Manso and Leonor Seabra, 'Jesuit schools and missions in the Orient', in Clara Sarmento, Sara Brusaca, and Silvia Sousa, eds., *In permanent transit: discourses and maps of the intercultural experience* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012), pp. 179–80; Peter Kornicki, *The book in Japan: a cultural history from the beginnings to the nineteenth century* (Leiden, 1998), p. 126. Maria Petrucci, 'Pirates, gunpowder, and Christianity in late sixteenth-century Japan', in Robert Anthony, ed., *Elusive pirates, pervasive smugglers: violence and clandestine trade in the greater China seas* (Hong Kong, 2010), pp. 59–71.

<sup>72</sup> Carlos Assunção, 'The edition of Latin grammar of Father Manuel Álvares, Japan, 1594: brief note and bibliographical references', *Todas as Letras*, 16 (2014), pp. 17–24, at p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> See Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, mediaeval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends* (Bloomington, IN, and Copenhagen, 1955–8), where Dido's trick is listed as story type K.185.1: 'Deceptive land purchase: oxhide measure'.

seas. What is unusual is that Yamamura was able to access the story at the same time via the other circuit, that of Dutch translations of European histories culled from classics including Trogus, Justin, and Virgil.

## XII

By the time that Yamamura had figured out the supposed descent of Dido's ox-hide trick, and that his commented translations had started to circulate among his contemporaries, Tokugawa Japan was becoming worryingly exposed to visits of Carthaginian-like sea-roving foreigners asking for permission to settle and trade. Three years after Yamamura finished his Gottfried digest, a Russian ship sailed into Nagasaki harbour, carrying on board Tsar Alexander I's plenipotentiary Nicolai Rezanov, who was desperate to negotiate a trade deal on behalf of the newly chartered Russian American Company.<sup>74</sup> The frustration of the rebuffed embassy caused the first Russo-Japanese mini-war of sorts, as Rezanov's disgruntled officers attacked Tokugawa outposts in the northern Ezo region. In 1808, a year after Yamamura's untimely death, the British warship *Phaeton* entered the same port with the hostile intent of intercepting any VOC vessels there, as the Napoleonic wars rippled through global maritime space. Through the 1820s, incidents of unwarranted contacts between the local populations of coastal domains and mainly American whalers further raised the sense of a security crisis. The greatest shock, however, came in the 1840s, as the news started arriving through Dutch and Chinese channels of the defeat of the Qing empire at the hands of a British expeditionary force in what would come to be called the First Opium War (1839–42).

This was ostensibly a conflict between the claim to the right to free trade, upheld by Her Majesty's combative foreign secretary Lord Palmerston on behalf of the British opium traders in Guangzhou, and the attempt to enforce a ban on mass imports of an addictive substance, upheld by the Qing administration.<sup>75</sup> Just as François Quesnay argued, the prominence of maritime trading interests in shaping the foreign policy of the British state could indeed bring to mind Carthage, although Palmerston, along with any number of Victorian gentlemen, preferred to see himself as an heir of Rome rather than a descendant of Dido.

The conflict was unmistakably singled out by Japanese observers as the most epoch-making event of their lifetime. Soon after the conclusion of hostilities, Japanese histories of the war started to appear.<sup>76</sup> Writers of two of these early

<sup>74</sup> Owen Matthews, *Glorious misadventures: Nicolai Rezanov and the dream of Russian America* (London, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> For a useful overview of the background of the conflict, see Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: drugs, dreams and the making of China* (London, 2011). For the Whig government's decision-making, see Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China policy and the opium crisis: balancing drugs, violence and national honour, 1833–1840* (London, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Ozawa, *Kindai Nihon shigakushi no kenkyū*, pp. 421–6.

histories, Saitō Chikudō 斎藤竹堂 (1815–52) and Nagayama Choēn 長山樗園 (or Kan 貫, dates unknown), were also authors of general overviews of the Western past that provided a long-term account of what lay behind the stunning advances of the occidentals.<sup>77</sup> Neither was apparently able to directly consult Dutch-language sources and both looked to Yamamura's excerpts from Gottfried for the interpretive framework. Nagayama explicitly credited Yamamura as his source, while Saitō simply summarized Yamamura's Japanese text and transposed it into the classical Chinese (or 'Sino-Japanese') *kanbun* register.

Let us briefly outline Nagayama Choēn's historical understanding of the Occident – gleaned from Gottfried in Yamamura's digest – in his attempt to make sense of the inconceivable fact that a small kingdom from the Far West was capable of defeating at a distance the fleets and armies of the vast Qing realm right on its doorstep. Nagayama was a diligent but not great or famous historian. What makes him noteworthy is rather the way he selectively appropriated the second- and third-hand accounts of the occidental histories, from the dawn of time to the post-classical present, in the particular context of the shockwave that the Opium War generated across East Asia.

After the biblical Flood, Nagayama informed his readers, the Western world had passed through four successive stages of the universal empire. Following Gottfried in Yamamura's rendering, these are identified as Babylonian, Persian, Greek (that is, Macedonian), and finally, Roman. Neither Yamamura himself nor his readers Nagayama and Saitō hesitated to equate the name of these political formations, *imperium* (or the Dutch vernacular *keyzerrijk*), with the graph 帝 (Chinese *dì*; Japanese *tei*), the title for the august Son of Heaven, that is, the 'emperor', in their own universal – 'Chinese' – political theology. In this, they followed a well-established convention in pre-existing Hollandological practice of translation, the result of a sort of tacit comparison of the great world polities. Relying on that convention which pragmatically assumed a functional parity between *caesars*, *keyzers*, *caliphs*, *khans*, and *huangdi* as variant modes of universal sovereignty, Nagayama could subsequently apply common modalities of East Asian historiography to making sense of the West's sociopolitical trajectory.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Saitō Chikudō authored the *Ahen shinmatsu* 鴉片始末 (*The opium affair*), and *Banshi* 蕃史 (*Barbarian histories*) (1851); while Nagayama Choēn wrote almost simultaneously the *Shin-ei senki* 清英戰記 (*A record of the Qing-British war*), and *Seiyō shōshi* 西洋小史 (*A brief history of the West*) (both 1848–9).

<sup>78</sup> The summary is based on Nagayama's *kanbun* prefaces to *Shin-ei senki* and *Seiyō shōshi*. The unpaginated manuscript copies consulted come respectively from the book collection of the house of Hori, *daimyo* of Iida, preserved in Iida Municipal Library (call number 堀家蔵書 62), and from the collection of the Tokugawa branch house of Kii, now in the library of the University of Wakayama (call number 紀州藩文庫 230–1). Subsequent references are to these manuscript copies.

He observed that, in East Asia, periods of unification under *emperor*-like rulers commonly emerged after periods of fragmentation, disorder, and strife, or the ‘Warring States’ (戰國 Chinese *zhanguo*; Japanese *sengoku*) period, as the historiographical convention terms it.<sup>79</sup> In Europe, by contrast, this standard direction of history (standard by the assumptions current around the Sinosphere) from fragmentation and anarchy to unification and order appeared to be reversed. The West—as Nagayama understood it through Yamamura—emerged right from the dawn of time as a sequence of reasonably organized and properly ruled imperial entities. With the decline and fall of the last universal empire of the Romans, however, a plethora of small competing polities emerged. This was exactly the Warring Kingdoms scenario familiar from Chinese (and later Japanese) histories. This accounted for the later development of the West and its current predominance in the arts of war. The cutthroat competition among the small European kingdoms which arose from the ruins of the empire made them expert in warfare and related skills such as metallurgy, ballistics, and surgery. Moreover, the natural barrenness of their lands and the necessity to secure supplies for the intermittent conflict drove them overseas in search of resources and made them expert in navigation, piracy, and related skills such as astronomy, and in other exploits linked to disturbing the peace of faraway lands. Now—in Nagayama’s 1840s—the occidentals encroached upon Asia like so many ‘silkworms chewing a mulberry leaf’ (not perhaps the scariest image, but a thoroughly respectable classical motif, lifted straight from Sima Qian). Britain was by far the most formidable among them.

Yet, even though Britain reportedly owned extensive parts of several continents and could beat the Qing on their home turf, neither Nagayama nor any of his contemporaries would think of calling it an ‘empire’. Their reading of both Gottfried and the classical and post-classical Chinese histories seemed to confirm them in the assumption that empires were by definition the source of order and stability. This was decidedly not the case of Britain (or for that matter Portugal, Spain, or Holland), which—in the eyes of these educated East Asian observers concerned about world affairs—clearly continued to operate on the conquest-desperate, destabilizing, Warring States logic of one small kingdom among many.

Sly ruses, like the ox-hide ploy, belonged squarely to the arsenal of Warring Kingdoms’ stratagems, where goals justified the means. It might no longer be feasible to trick the Qing or Tokugawa authorities into the sale of an ox-hide-

<sup>79</sup> The ‘Warring States’ terminology emerged as a historical description of a concrete situation between the fifth and third centuries BCE, namely the decline of the late Zhou dynasty’s authority and the competition among a group of states increasingly acting as independent kingdoms struggling for supremacy. The authority of the classical precedent shared around the broad East Asian Sinosphere meant that the period marker could subsequently be detached from that setting and redeployed for similar constellations occurring within the East Asian historical context, for example to describe the situation of political fragmentation of fourteenth-to sixteenth-century Japan.

sized bridgehead. But the Westerners kept trying to achieve the same objective by only slightly modified methods. The Nanjing treaty of 1842, which ended the Anglo-Qing conflict, ostensibly granted the victorious occidentals – aside from the ceding of Hong Kong and the payment of reparations – merely the right to settle and peacefully trade without restrictions and under the jurisdiction of their nations' consuls in the designated harbours, the so-called treaty ports of Guangzhou, Ningbo, Amoy, Fuzhou, and Shanghai. But Nagayama, who copied the full Chinese text of the treaty into the second volume of his contemporary history, warned his readers where all this was headed:

I have read the histories of the Westerners and know their voraciousness. In the beginning they come begging for trade, all meek and deferential; once permitted to trade, they offer plentiful gifts in return for a lease of land; once granted the land, they fortify it and put garrisons in place; then they wait for an unguarded moment to avail themselves of the opportunity. This is the stratagem by which they have made themselves masters of all the countries in the south seas.<sup>80</sup>

For the benefit of a reader who might still be missing the point, Nagayama spelt it out: 'Guangzhou, Ningbo, Amoy, Fuzhou, Shanghai: ah, are these ports anything but so many plots of land encompassed by an ox hide?'<sup>81</sup> Two and a half millennia after Dido's foundation of Carthage, the neo-Carthaginian Britons took a cue from her yet again as they disembarked on the coast of Qing China.

### X III

Yamamura Masanaga found himself at the point of intersection of two distinct lines of relay of a story that spread by emulation, imitation, and creative appropriation, and morphed as it travelled through different media and contexts. The odds of this intersection materializing on the Japanese archipelago at the end of the eighteenth century reveal something about the nature of this worldwide web of transmission. Its synapses not only delivered to the desk of a provincial *daimyo*'s retainer a German Protestant clergyman's digest of the Virgilian myth from early imperial Rome, Daniel's biblical prophecy, Ming dynastic histories, and the chronicles of the Zheng pirate overlords of Taiwan. They also linked him to the sources of linguistic, philological, and historiographical knowhow that enabled him to read, translate, and creatively cross-reference these different bodies of sources.

Yamamura's cross-archival and cross-cultural philological detective work led him to the discovery of what he took to be an ancient stratagem that the various occidentals (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and, as others would later add, British) had cunningly employed down through history to the present to establish their first footholds around the East Indies. In deciding to produce

<sup>80</sup> Nagayama, *Shin-ei senki*, fo. 4r.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

an annotated translation of the excerpts of the book before him, recycling an early seventeenth-century biblical scheme of Protestant universal history, Yamamura effectively offered the strange fables of Western antiquity as a repository of patterns that could recur or be redeployed in the present, just as the attempts of the occidentals to achieve full diplomatic acceptance by the East Asian polities grew more persistent. In subsequent decades, these fables received attention as valuable intelligence amid the increasingly fluid geopolitical situation that enveloped the archipelago and the wider East Asian region. Both anecdotal stories like that of Dido's foundation of Carthage and the overall framework of the division of history into the four ages of universal empire and the aftermath of its decline, which Yamamura extracted from Gottfried and Merian's *Chronicle*, went on to inform later attempts to make sense of a 'West' that was ever more insistently present as a factor in domestic and regional thought and politics.

By the 1840s, Gottfried's history was being enlisted as the long-term explanation for the shocking defeat of the Qing realm in the First Opium War and for the unsettling ability of occidentals to dictate their own conditions wherever they set foot. One possible account – the result of reading the record of the Western past through the conventional conceptual prism of classical 'Chinese' historiography – was that the Western powers, having left the stable age of imperial unity behind them, now operated in the hegemony-seeking mode of the fractured and anarchical era of the Warring Kingdoms of Chinese antiquity and the Japanese middle ages. Instead of being propelled forward, into an age of global modernity and high imperialism, many observers in East Asia could justifiably feel that they were being dragged backwards, into the age of the Warring States, which most of East Asia had happily left behind. Despite the lofty imperial titles that various Western sovereigns claimed, East Asian commentators did not see themselves confronted with 'imperialism'. Rather than the age of empire, the nineteenth century in East Asia was more likely – and quite logically, given the shape of historiographical common sense – to be experienced as the return of the age of the Warring Kingdoms. A surprising revival of Virgil's Carthaginian myth in the Indies, the tale of the port city built on an ox-hide perimeter, had a small but telling role to play in confirming this view.