

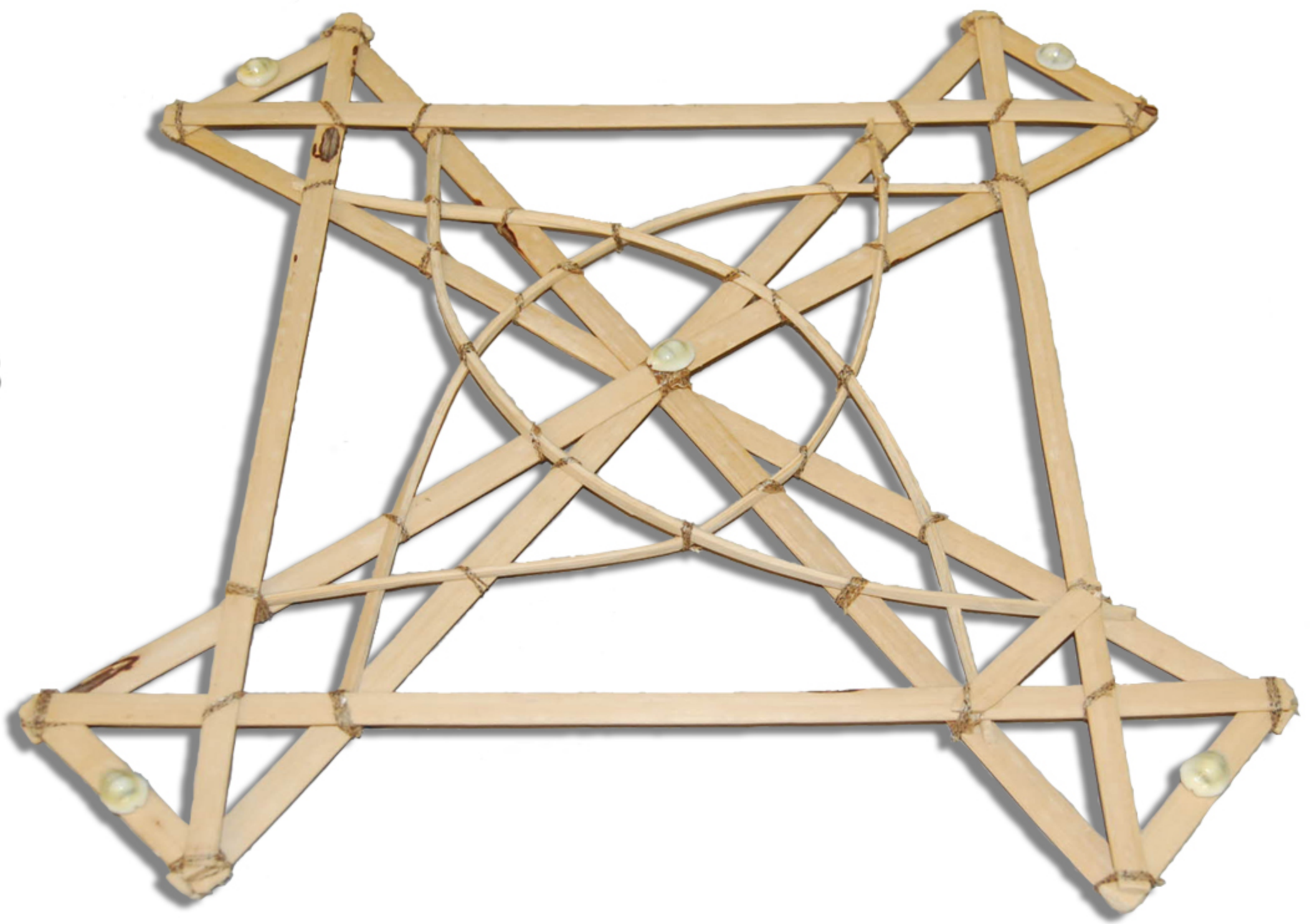
Object in Focus

The British  
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# Wayfinder: Journeys on the Ocean

## Navigation chart from the Marshall Islands

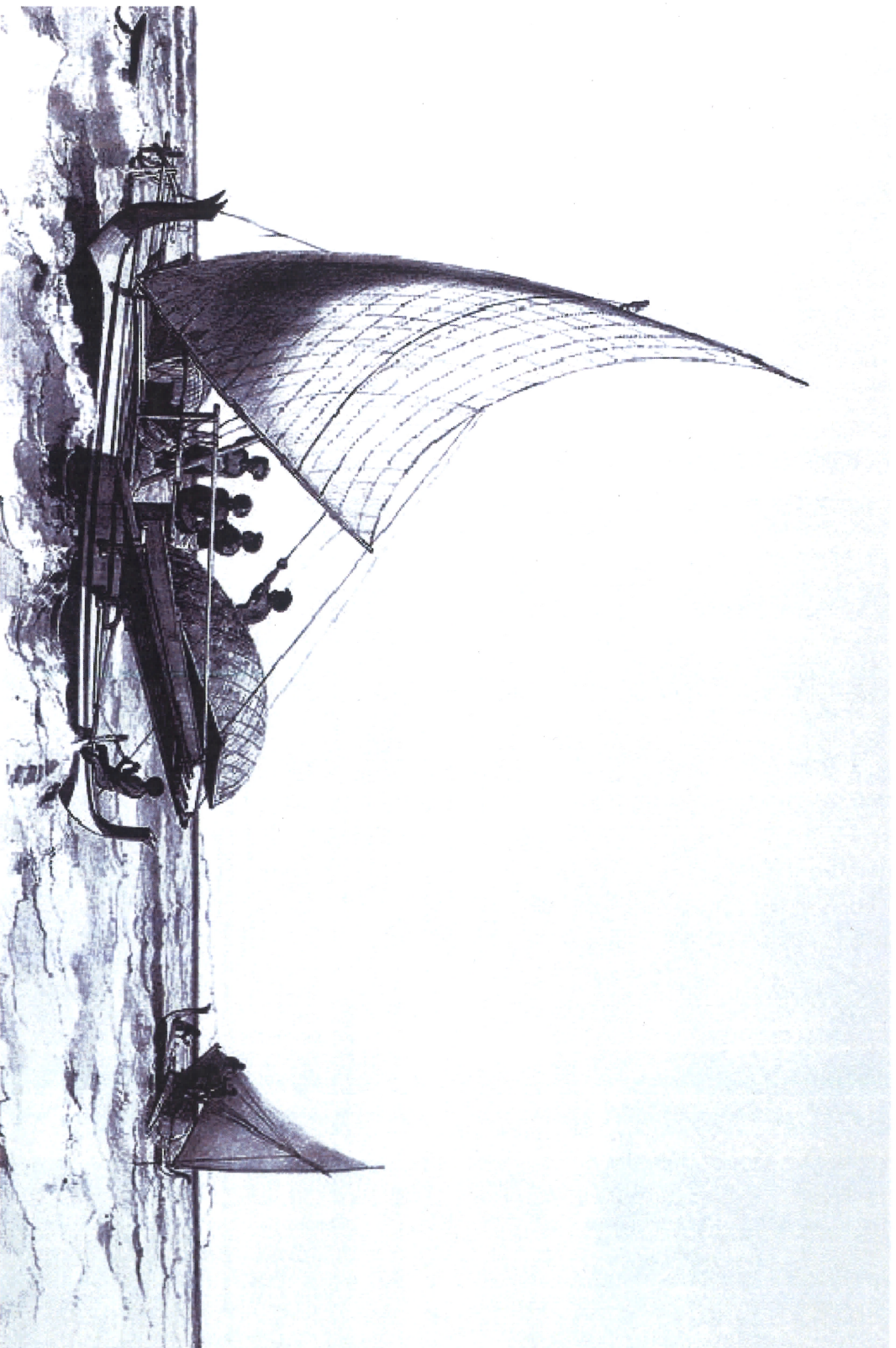
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## Wayfinder: Journeys on the Ocean

### Navigation Chart from the Marshall Islands

Imagine yourself on a canoe drifting on the vast Pacific Ocean, how do you know your position and your destination without a compass, GPS, smart phone or any other modern devices? Sailing is a matter of life and death.

Thousands of years ago, voyagers set sail from Southeast Asia in their wooden canoes towards the vast blue, settling the islands of the Pacific with their knowledge and experience of sea, stars, winds, fish and birds. The Marshallese chart summarised such knowledge.

The Marshall Islands are located in the Micronesia region in the northwest Pacific. The Marshallese may have used these charts for centuries before their first contact with European explorers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to today's complicated charts of sea currents, Marshallese navigation charts have a succinct beauty in themselves. The Marshallese would memorise the charts to prepare for sailing the sea. Rituals and dancing would be performed for those brave sailors to ensure return or landfall. The journeys to the vast ocean were for survival, for exploring the unknown.

## Navigation Chart

Marshall Islands

20th century

Wood, cowrie shell, fibre

Navigation charts have been exclusively used by Marshall Islanders for sailing for centuries. The sticks bound together by coconut-tree rib represent sea currents and swell patterns interrupted by islands which are represented by cowrie shells. This chart is a model of a *mattang* chart, as used to teach young sailors. Islanders would memorise the charts before they set out to sea.

AOA Oc1987,03.59



