

## Kumar Mitra (Centu)

### Ancient Asian trade and commerce

When the first account of Srivijaya was published by G. Coedes in 1918 scholars readily agreed that the power and prosperity of the Srivijayan empire were derived from its mastery of the straits of Malacca, an ocean throughfare famous in the history of trade. Centuries earlier Raffles saw in today's Singapore at the southern entrance to the straits a harbour superlatively placed astride the international shipping lines and also capable of attracting to itself the "country trade" of South East Asia. Perhaps no one has described in more ringing language than Tome Pires the advantages of a port commanding the straits :

Whoever is lord of Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice. As far as from Malacca, and from Malacca to China, and from China to the Moluccas, and from Moluccas to Java, and from Java to Malacca and Sumatra, all is in your power.

One may be dazzled and misled by the later prestige of the Straits and may imagine that when traders in ancient times had succeeded in reaching these calm waters, they were able before long to complete the maritime route between India and China. The evidence of early seafaring in South East Asian waters suggests a different conclusion: the voyage across the Bay of Bengal to Indonesia through the Straits and voyage from Indonesia to China were two distinct feats of navigation, achieved at different times. The former preceded the latter by several centuries and, even when the all-sea route had come into being, the journey from the Bay of Bengal to China took the form of two separate voyages. Ships on their way to the Far East first sailed to Sumatran harbours lying some distance south of the straits rather than by the shortest route to China, which passes the neighbourhood of modern Singapore. <sup>1</sup> Historians may have given insufficient attention to the relatively late development of the voyage from Indonesia to China in comparison with voyage from the Indian Ocean through the Straits to Indonesia (**see map 1**).

There can be little doubt that the Straits, providing access to Indonesia from India, were used for the purpose of trade in the early centuries of the Christian era, but unfortunately there are no means of knowing when this first occurred. The evidence of the epics and the Buddhist canon does not take one very far. The Jataka tales describe dangerous voyages to Suvannabhumi, "the Gold Country", which Levi prudently suggested was no more than the countries to the east of the Bay of Bengal.

The Kiskindha Kanda in the Ramayana refers to Suvarnadvipa, which in later centuries certainly means Sumatra. The Tamil narrative poem Pattinappalai, probably composed in the early centuries A.D., describes a flourishing trade between southern India and Kalagam, usually identified with Kedah. But from the historian's point of view the usefulness of these sources is compromised because he does not know when the present versions of the texts were written, how ancient was the information about foreign countries originally made available by sailors, or how far, if at all, the writers of these texts understood the geographical terms they incorporated. Only further textual criticism can throw light on these problems.

Even of the Pattinappalai, one of the earliest Tamil poems, no more may be said than that "it cannot be placed much later than the end of the second century A.D. or the beginning of the third century". Of all the ancient Indian texts most confidence may be placed in the information contained in the geographical list in the Mahanidessa, a commentary of the Atthavagga. This list supplies a number of Far Eastern place names thought by Levi to reflect a state of knowledge available in the second and third centuries A.D. One of the places it mentions is Yavadipa, or "Java".

We do not know when the Mahanidessa's toponyms were first current in Indian ports, but, if Levi's conclusion is correct, this text provides a terminus ante quem for their currency. Perhaps a Greek text supplies the earliest certain reference to traffic across the Bay of Bengal, though the text does not make it clear that ships were then also sailing into the Straits of Malacca. The reference is in the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, probably a compilation of material acquired throughout the second

half of the first century A.D., and it describes ships sailing from ports on the south-east coast of India: "Those ships which make the voyage to Chryse and to the Ganges, they are called Colandia and are very large". Chryse is usually understood to mean South East Asia and perhaps the Malay Peninsula. But the author of the *Periplus* also describes the flourishing overland silk route from China through Bactria to Ba-rygaza in western India and by way of the Ganges, and one suspects that, in comparison with the overland route, there was still very little commerce between China and India via any route through South East Asia in the first century A.D. There is certainly no Mediterranean evidence concerning the use of the Straits of Malacca at that time, though this does not mean that Indians were not occasionally sailing to the Straits.

The Chinese, like the Greeks and Romans, were capable of writing matter-of-fact accounts of foreign parts. Moreover, they were much closer to South East Asia. There is a well-known passage in the *Ch'ien Han shu*, to which special significance has been attached by some historians as evidence of early maritime communication between China and India. The passage describes a mission sent by Han Wu Ti (141-87 B.C.) to Huang-chih, but the value of the evidence is vitiated by the uncertainty of the location of Huang-chih. Ferrand reconstructed the name as Kanci, inland from the Coroman-del coast, but there is no certain evidence in southern Indian records that Kanci was a toponym at so early a date. And even if Huang-chih was Kanci, there is still no reason for believing that the Chinese envoys crossed the Bay of Bengal from the Straits of Malacca or they had first sailed to the Straits across the South China Sea.

The earliest Chinese references are therefore no more helpful than the Indian or Mediterranean ones for fixing the time when the Straits were first used by foreign ships. It must remain a matter of opinion whether Han Wu Ti's mission inaugurated a continuous maritime trade between India and China, and as evidence of trade between Indonesia and China the Huang-chih episode is worthless. Nevertheless, probably in the first and second centuries A.D. Indian ships were occasionally sailing down the Straits to Indonesia from southern India as well as from the Ganges and down the coast of Burma.

But when one considers the voyage from Indonesia to China there are grounds for believing that it began much later than the voyage from India to Indonesia, implied in the evidence of the *Periplus* and the *Mahanidessa* commentary. The first certain evidence for the voyage from Indonesia to China is in fact not earlier than the fifth century A.D. Moreover it is possible to indicate a time later than the second century A.D. When merchants reaching the neighbourhood of the Straits of Malacca from India were still unlikely to have found their way to China by any all-sea route. The evidence points to some date between the third century and the fifth century when the voyage across the South China Sea was first undertaken by merchant ships.

The sailing situation as it had developed by the early fifth century is reflected in the records of two pilgrims, Fa Hsien and Gu-navarman. The former returned from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to China in 413 and travelled by sea all the way; the latter, a prince from Kashmir, a few years later travelled to China from the Indian Ocean by the same means. Fa Hsien sailed in May from Yeh-p'o-t'i in Indonesia to China. Yeh-p'o-t'i has usually been taken to mean Yavadvipa, though not necessarily the island known today as "Java"; this is not the only time a "Java-like" toponym in foreign records has caused confusion in early South East Asian studies. Fa Hsien's illuminating evidence, however, is the anxious conversation of the merchants on board his ship who, after more than a month at sea, endured about 40 days of stormy weather:

The ordinary time for the voyage to Canton (from Yeh-p'o-t'i) is about fifty days. We have now exceeded that limit by many days; must we not have gone out of our course? There is no hint in Fa Hsien's account that the ship intended to break its journey at an intermediate port, and it is clear from the comments of the unhappy travellers that a non-stop voyage was habitual.

Gunavarman's evidence is equally helpful. He sailed from She-p'o, the best-known Chinese transcription of "Java". The Liu Sung emperor Wen Ti (424-453) had ordered a ship to fetch the illustrious Buddhist, but before it arrived Gunavarman, "having no fear of voyaging", boarded a

merchant ship with the intention of making for " a small kingdom ". The wind, however, was found to be favourable and the ship sailed non-stop to China. The " small kingdom" may have been Champa on the Annam coast or instead some harbour in western Indonesia, but the original intention of the captain is immaterial; he was clearly capable of sailing directly to China when the wind was favourable, and it is hardly likely that he had never done so before. Gunaverman's evidence is therefore consistent with Fa Hsien's; in both cases ships made an unbroken voyage across the South China Sea. Nor should it be forgotten that the Liu Sung emperor was prepared to send a ship to She-p'o, though the crew who would have manned it is unknown. The same emperor also sent envoys to three Indonesian kingdoms in 449 to confer titles on the rulers. Thus there is some evidence that in the first half of the fifth century the voyage between Indonesia and China was being undertaken regularly.

The earliest Chinese interest in South East Asia, apart from their province of Tongking, was on account of a trade route which passed through Funan and across the Malay Peninsula, but not through the Straits of Malacca, and led to the Indian Ocean. Communication with more distant parts of Asia, and not the resources of nearby South East Asia, was the reason for their earliest connection with parts of South East Asia.

### **Trade-routes between India and Indonesia**

Ko-ying imported Yueh-chih horses from north-western India, and this is all the Chinese evidence reveals about the contents of the trade between western Indonesia and India in the early third century A.D. No doubt by then this trade was already at least a century old and involved much more than horse-dealing, but the Indian sources of information are such that little can be said of it. The regions in India from which the merchants came and their motives are unknown. The periplus' reference to colandia sailing from the coromandel coast to Chryse indicates that in the first century A.D. some trade already existed between southern India and parts of South East Asia; on the other hand, it is evident that by the early third century there were also well established trading links with north-western India. A search for gold has been regarded by a number of scholars as an important motive for the original Indian interest in South East Asia, operating in the last centuries before the Christian era, when the movement of barbarians across central Asia deprived the Indians of Siberian gold and in the second half of the first century A.D., when Vespasian cut off supplies of Roman bullion to India. Suvarnabhumi and Suvarnavipa, "the Gold Land" and "the Gold Islands", may merely have been colourful expressions which exemplified the wealth of South East Asia, though it is significant that the Chinese records of the third century A.D. also mention gold-producing areas in the region; these references may reflect the genuine reputation of South East Asia as an important source of gold.

On what terms was the early Indian trade conducted ? To what extent should the Indonesians be pictured as simple folk, fascinated by foreigners and delighted to have the chance of bartering their minerals and jungle wealth for Indian manufactured goods ? A reaction has taken place among some historians against the view that the original trading contact took place between people of greatly unequal cultural status. The persistent identity and vitality of Indonesian society are now acknowledged. The reaction against the traditional rendering of early Indonesian trade has also been reinforced by the economic historian, van Leur, who argued that the Indian traders belonged to the lower social groups and included foreigners from various countries . They were "peddlers", and people such as these are unlikely to have been carriers of Brahmanic culture.

In the earliest trading period transactions between Indians and Indonesians may before long have been conducted on terms of equality, with metal-using Indonesians capable of driving bargains and even of taking their trade to India. And in Indonesia as in India, foreigners would have come to terms with the local rulers. The early Indian merchants in Indonesia have certainly left no evidence of themselves. Nor did their colloquial languages leave any impression on the Indonesian vocabulary, from which the conclusion has been drawn that not only was there no Indian political domination, but probably there were no permanent and powerfully organized Indian settlements by

the time the first inscriptions appear in the fifth century A.D. The linguistic evidence does not suggest that the Indians taught the Indonesians how to trade. In one respect van Leur's description of the Indian "peddlers" may be amplified. He did not take into account the likelihood that some of them were sympathetic towards Buddhism or were indeed Buddhists themselves. The Yueh-chih who visited Ko-ying may have had Buddhist connections, and the type of merchant found during the early centuries of the Christian era in the oasis cities of Turkestan probably turned up in South East Asia as well.

The castless and cosmopolitan influence of Buddhism would have assisted in promoting tolerance among Indian merchants on their dealings with South East Asian peoples. But not only does uncertainty exist about the terms on which the original commerce between Indonesia and India was conducted. Indian sources provide no means of reconstructing a comprehensive inventory of the Indonesian exports in this early period, and the deficiency makes it difficult to examine the extent to which the later Indonesian trade with China was an expansion in volume of the Indian-type trade or was entirely different in character. It is significant, however, that the earliest Indian references to South East Asian products have little to say about the goods which were to become the basis of the later trade between western Indonesia and China. The early Indian texts mention gharu wood and sandalwood as coming from foreign parts, presumably from South East Asia. Yet Indonesian gharu wood never became a famous trade product.

White sandalwood of eastern Indonesia is much more valuable (*Santalum album* Linn.), and Indonesian ships may have brought it from Timor or Sumba to ports in western Indonesia for shipment to India. In the fourth century A.D. the Chinese seem to have known of "red sandalwood", the Angsana tree (*Pterocarpus indicus*). It was said to come from Funan. The Chinese, like the Indians, called it sandalwood. By that time South East Asian traders may have learnt from the Indians the habit of giving the Angsana tree the name of "sandalwood"; the Indians called their *Pterocarpus santalinus* "red" sandalwood. The early Indian traders may also have been anxious to obtain cloves (*Eugenia aromatica* Kuntze), another excellent product of eastern Indonesia. The clove (*Lavanga*) of the *dvipantara*, "the other island(s)", undoubtedly meaning the Indonesian archipelago, is mentioned by Kalidasa, who is generally believed to have been alive about A.D. 400. The clove is also mentioned in the early medical treatise traditionally ascribed to Caraka. Caraka was almost certainly the physician of the Kusana king Kaniska, of the first or second century A.D., though the extant version of Caraka's *samahita* was reconstructed much later. It is probably safer to regard Kalidasa's reference to *lavanga* from the *dvipantara* as the first assured reference to the Indonesian clove. The Chinese are unlikely to have owed their knowledge of the clove to the Indians, for they probably obtained it from the Funanese, who were trading with the islands of eastern Indonesia.

Centuries later western Indonesia became famous as a pepper-producing region, but in the ancient world the Indians had no rivals as pepper cultivators, users, and traders. One of their medical recipes, involving the use of long pepper, was adopted by Greek doctors before Alexander's expedition to northern India. Innumerable medical preparations of pepper are recommended in the *samahita* of Caraka and Susruta, and the pepper-conscious Indian traders may have become interested in the many wild-growing peppers which flourish in the moist climate of western Indonesia. They may sometimes have used Indonesian peppers to boost their exports to Rome in booming trade years during the first centuries of the Christian era. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to prove that the Indians imported Indonesian peppers.

Only one hint suggests that western Indonesia before about A.D. 400 had acquired the reputation of being a pepper-growing area. In a passage in a Chinese translation of the Sutra of the Twelve Stages of Buddha, undertaken by Kalodaka in 392, it is stated that the king of She-yeh possessed both long and black pepper. Levi thought that She-yeh was a reference to Java. The kingdom was certainly in the maritime world of South East Asia.

The wild-growing cubeb pepper (pepper cubeba) has the best chance of any Indonesian pepper of

appearing in the early Indian trade. In the first half of the eighth century the materia medica writer Ch'en Ts'ang-ch'i states that it grew in Srivijaya (Fo-shih), and he calls it Pi-teng-chia. Laufer reconstructed this word as a transcription of vidanga, the Sanskrit word for *Embelia ribes*, a climbing bush found in India and eastwards as far as Java. Laufer pointed out that the seeds of *Embelia ribes* are extensively used as an adulterant for black pepper, and he suggested that the Indonesian cubeb was given the name of vidanga because it resembled *Embelia ribes* in appearance and properties. Laufer's explanation is a likely one, and in Ku Wei's *Kuang chou chi*, written not later than the early sixth century, it is said that "Teng-chia grows in several ocean countries; it is a tender black pepper". The similarity between cubeb and black pepper is re-iterated by Li Shih-chen, the author of the great materia medica at the end of the sixth century. This brief review of what is known of the contents of the early Indonesian trade with India has been depressingly negative in its conclusions.

One is left with the feeling that the trade could not have been considerable or one which comprised those Indonesian goods which later became the basis of western Indonesia's foreign commerce. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to underestimate the significance of the early Indian trade with Indonesia, even though so little can be said about it. As a result Indonesian merchants probably became increasingly aware of the commercial value of some of their natural produce in the form of drugs. It is possible, though it cannot be demonstrated, that the Indians were interested in Indonesian plants with a medical efficacy similar to that of their own plants. The Ayurvedic medical tradition was flourishing at the beginning of the Christian era, and in India there was plenty of experience relating to the medical functions of plants. Fresh specimens were often needed for decoctions, and here would have been a practical motive for noting the presence of species available overseas for safeguarding the health of Indian merchants and crews.

There is another and more general reason for emphasising the importance of the earliest Indian period of Indonesian foreign trade. It would have been a period of apprenticeship for the Indonesians, when they learnt to look across the Bay of Bengal for commercial profits and the rewards of adventurous sailing; even occasional visits by Indian ships must have opened up new horizons for the coastal inhabitants of Ko-ying and stimulated among them a curiosity about the homeland of the foreign traders, a curiosity which eventually led to Indonesian voyages to India. The habit of looking overseas, acquired in the first centuries of the Christian era, helped to mould a race of traders on the south-eastern coast of Sumatra and possibly elsewhere in western Indonesia. Although evidence is lacking in the records of this early period about the activities of Indonesian merchants, the sequel will show that by the fifth century they had become sensitive to the changing circumstances of Asian maritime trade and able to turn those circumstances to their own advantage. Their commercial aptitude at that time, backed by seafaring enterprise, is inexplicable unless for many years before then they were becoming more confident travellers overseas and had edged their way into the trade with India. We now have reached the threshold of decisively important commercial developments affecting Indonesia in the fifth and sixth centuries. The evidence is somewhat more ample, but unfortunately it spills into several fields and the extent of its relevance to the subject of early Indonesian commerce is rarely unmistakable. This evidence will be broached by investigation of the reasons why certain Indonesian tree produce, unnoticed by the Chinese in the third century, originally appeared on the Chinese market. This development, coinciding with use of the all-sea route between the Indian Ocean, and China, including the voyage across the South China Sea, throws light on the expansion of Indonesian commerce which took place some time after the first half of the third century A.D. and especially during the two hundred years before the rise of Srivijaya.

### **The development of Asian maritime trade from the fourth to the sixth century**

The appearance of certain Indonesian tree products on the Chinese market seems at first to have been only an indirect and minor consequence of adjustments in trade communications being made by merchants in eastern and western Asia to changing political circumstances affecting each other's markets. These markets had long been linked through Turkestan. By the fifth century,

however, the sea was becoming a more important trading facility, a tendency already foreshadowed in the third century, and especially to the markets of southern China.

By the end of the sixth century, Sassanid Persia had acquired great prestige among the Chinese as a source of wealth. Hsuan Tsang's biographer, probably written between 664 and 667, states that, before the pilgrim visited India, China had been known there for a long time by hearsay and that there was a tradition in India that the world was governed by four kings. In that country (India), it was always said that Jambudvīpa was governed by four kings. In the east the country was China, whose ruler governed men. In the west the country was Persia, whose ruler governed precious things. In the south it was India, whose ruler governed elephants. In the north it was Hsien-yun (the Turks), whose ruler governed horses. Such was said to be the basis of the rule of these four countries. This is the reason for the saying. A similar saying was at least as old as the third century, though then only three kingdoms had been mentioned and it was Ta-ch'in, the Roman Orient and the Middle East, which originally enjoyed the reputation of being the source of precious things. And for a more matter-of-fact assessment of the wealth which Persia was believed to possess in the sixth century, there is an impressive list of products attributed to that country in the Hou Chou shu, the records of the northern Chinese dynasty which ruled from 556 to 581. The list includes not only genuine Persian textiles and minerals but also precious objects such as coral, pearls, amber, and especially glassware, which had formerly been considered characteristic wealth of Ta-ch'in. Black and long pepper, the produce of India, were also attributed to Persia, though they were only imports.

But the evidence in the Hou Chou shu reflects a late impression of Sassanid Persia, when the dynasty was reaching its apogee. Its account can be compared with Theophanes' description of the luxury-packed Sassanid city of Dastgard, which Heraclius sacked in 628. Moreover the Hou Chou shu's account is a northern Chinese one and an echo of the reputation of Persia on the overland trade route. As such it throws little light on the extent of Persian commerce at sea by that time.

Singularly little is known of the history of Sassanid maritime activity, and the absence of information is unfortunate. About A.D. 400 the voyages of Fa Hsien and Gunavarman provide evidence that a trade route between the Indian Ocean and China was passing through western Indonesia. There can be no doubt that the Sassanids, from the foundation of their dynasty in the early third century, had an unassailable strong position in the organisation of continental trade between China and western Asia. As a result of their occupation of the former Kusana territories astride the Pamirs, they controlled not only the route through Persia from Turkestan but also its diversion to the Indus, formerly tapped at Barbaricon by Roman traders to offset Parthian exactions on the route leading to Syria. By means of Sogdian middlemen the Sassanids had access to the silk of northern China. Their merchants were also able to exploit a number of botanical products, including species of myrrh (Cammiphora) growing in the region once controlled by the Kusanas, and especially in north-western India and on the Makran coast of Beluchistan: this coast, known as "Gadrosia", had been famous for its aromatic resins as long ago as the time of Alexander the Great. The existence of valuable resins in the Sassanid empire contributed considerably to the reputation enjoyed by Persia among southern Chinese in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The extent to which the early Sassanids were interested in the sea is, however, by no means clear. Their conquest of Persia seems to have been a southern Persian reaction against Parthian ascendancy. The dynasty came from a region much closer to the Persian Gulf than its predecessor had been, and this circumstance probably led to an interest in maritime affairs. Sassanid dynastic traditions relate that the first ruler, Ardashir I (226/7-242), improved some of the ports on the Gulf. The Pei shih states that Persia was the former T'iao-chih, or Mesene kingdom of the lower Tigris and Euphrates known in Han times as a dependency of the Arsacid empire, and here may be vague acknowledgement by the Chinese of the prominence of southern Persian influence in the Sassanid period.

No one has ever imagined that the Persians themselves suddenly took to the sea, but among the subjects were those capable of navigation. Arabs on the western shores of the Persian Gulf and the

traders of the former Kusana ports of north-west India would have continued to do business under their new masters just as the population of the eastern Mediterranean had done when their countries were annexed by the Romans. K`ang T`ai's description of the maritime route from north-west India to Ta-ch`in was written during the first years of the Sassanid dynasty. Moreover, the former Ku-sana ports had trading links down the west coast of India, and these would have been inherited by the Sassanid empire, though the chronology of Persian influence in southern India cannot be established by the Pahlevi inscriptions found there. Nevertheless the earliest satisfactory evidence of Persian shipping on a considerable scale in the western Indian Ocean is as late as the first half of the sixth century, when Cosmas Indicopleustes, drawing on information probably acquired in 522 or 525 or a few years later, describes how the Persians were entrenched in Ceylon and enjoyed special privileges for their horse imports. Procopius, writing of the 530-531 period, refers unambiguously to the monopoly the Persians now had in the disposal of the silk arriving in the western Indian Ocean from China, a monopoly from which the Aksumites were unable to dislodge them. Nor by this time were the Persian traders confining their activities to Ceylon; according to the Greek version of the Martyrdom of St. Arethas, their ships were trading with Aksum itself.

In view of what Cosmas and Procopius have to say, the fifth century probably saw a gradual growth in Persian maritime activity. Nothing is known in that century about their rivals, the Aksumites, and it may be that after the expansion of Aksum under its great king Ezana in the fourth century there was a period of political depression. It is nowhere stated that Aksumite ships brought silk to the Byzantine ports at the head of the Red Sea on an important scale, and the loan of ships by Justin I to Ella Asbeha for the Himyarite campaign in 523 may mean that Aksumite sea power was no longer considerable. Nor is there any evidence that the Persians had to fight the Aksumites for control of the Ceylon silk trade. But though Persian ships were no doubt obtaining a greater share of the trade within the western Indian Ocean during the fifth century, it cannot be assumed that their merchants were exceptionally anxious to increase their maritime trade with China whether by direct voyages or through middlemen. Even Cosmas, who mentions silk arriving in Ceylon, is at pains to point out that overland was a much quicker means of bringing silk to Persia. It is doubtful whether the Persians at any time before the seventh century ceased to regard the journey through Turkestan as the normal one to China, in spite of periods when travelling conditions were difficult. There was, for example, a collapse of political authority in northern China early in the fourth century and depression among the Sogdian middlemen as a result of the sack of Lo-yang in 311 by the Huns. One Sogdian wrote to a prominent merchant in Samarkand: "And, Sir, it is three years since a Sogdian came from "inside" (China)... And, Sir, if I wrote (and told you) all the details of how China fared (what happened to the China trade), it would be (a story of) debts and woe; you have no wealth from it". Yet, in spite of this distressing situation, another Sogdian letter in the same period states that in the three previous years the road had been open not less than five times. It is unlikely, except during the Hephthalite occupation of central Asia in the first half of the sixth century, that the overland route was ever closed for long stretches of time. All that would have happened was that the volume of trade was sometimes affected and that, in the fourth century, there was a steep falling off in the demand of western luxuries in the barbarian camps of northern China, though a little trade may have made its way through Kansu and Szechuan to the capital of the Eastern Chin dynasty on the lower Yangtze. The survival of the overland route even in that disturbed country is indicated by Ammianus Marcellinus, writing about 363, when he states that beyond the Sogdians and the Sacae "a very long road extends, which is the route taken by the traders who journey from time to time to the land of the Seres". Whatever interruptions there were in the fourth century, trade would certainly have picked up in the following century with the return of more settled conditions in northern China and eastern Turkestan under the Toba Wei dynasty.

An illustration of the persistent manner in which the trade was then conducted is again provided by the Sogdians. Many merchants of Su-t`e (north-west of K`ang-chu or Sogdiana) had gone to the Liang country (Kansu in north-western China) to trade. When the Wei captured Ku-tsang (in 439),

all these merchants were taken prisoner. At the beginning of (the Wei emperor) Wen Ch'eng's reign (he succeeded in 452) the ruler of Su-t'e sent envoys and asked that the prisoners should be ransomed and beheaded. His request was granted.

Silk no doubt travelled westwards to help finance the trade, and there is one reference to silk exports in the records of the southern Ch'i dynasty (479-502). The foreign merchants in question came from South East Asia. The passage mentions Chang Ching-chen, "who calculated carefully the silks and brocades he used to trade with (the merchants of) the K'un-lun ships". The Liu Sung dynasty controlled the silk-producing region of north-eastern China until 469, when it lost it to the Wei dynasty of northern China, but in the sixth century more relaxed political relations between the southern dynasties and the eastern Wei (534-550) and the Northern Ch'i (550-577) in north-eastern China would have ensured silk supplies for the south.

Yet one suspects that only in the second half of the fifth century were the Persians becoming more interested in increasing their silk imports from southern China. By that time the Hephthalites were powerful in western Turkestan and had established themselves in the commercial centres of Sogdiana and Bactria. In 484 they were sufficiently strong to be able to defeat and kill the Sassanid ruler Peroz. At the end of the century they were in occupation of Gandhara, and as a result of their conquests they controlled Sogdiana, Khotan, Kashgar, and Bukhara. Cosmas heard that they "oppressed the people", and Theophanes recalled that they deprived the Persians of the trading centres used by the "Seres". Here is the immediate background to the situation in Ceylon described by Cosmas and to Justinian's attempt to persuade the Aksumites to compete with the Persians in buying silk in Ceylon.

As a result of the Hephthalite occupation of central Asia in the first half of the sixth century, southern China may have been for some years the main access to the outside world for much of northern China as well. The dependence of north-eastern China on the overseas contacts of southern China has been suggested by a recent study of the origins of Gupta influence on Buddhist art in north-eastern China in the first half of the sixth century. Styles of Buddhist iconography in that region have been attributed to the example of Liang dynasty artists in southern China, who, aware of Indian or even of South East Asian styles, specialised in adapting these foreign sculptural effects. It would be fanciful to suppose that the maritime route in these centuries was free of man-made obstacles to merchants. Flourishing trade would have encouraged piracy at sea and reports by officials to this effect were frequent. Tabari states that the governor of Ul-Uballah had to fight Indian pirates. Fa Hsien complained of pirates in the Bay of Bengal. The Chams were probably a major nuisance off the coast of Annam until the Liu Sung government punished them in 446 in a campaign which reflects the concern of the government to protect shipping in the waters approaching southern China. Intervention of the officials in most harbours on the route must have been a frequent cause of increased trading costs, and not least in the harbours of southern China. But none of these difficulties could have weakened the attraction of trading with an increasingly populous, prosperous, and productive southern China.

The increased tempo of maritime trade inevitably improved the fortunes of those countries with harbours along the sea route, and this is borne out by the little that is known of Sinhalese commerce in these centuries. The great port of Ceylon was Mahatittha, and it is unfortunate that the results of the excavations there by Hocart in 1925-1928 have not been published in detail. But there is other evidence of the commercial status of Ceylon in this period. In the fifth century Roman coins were being used as currency and have been found at almost every little port on the island with the exception of Trincomalee. The most numerous issues are of the eastern Roman emperor Arcadius (395-408) and of his predecessor and successor. There are only a few isolated coins earlier than the reign of Valentinian I (364-375).

Evidently in the fifth century middlemen in touch with Byzantium were trading in Ceylon. But Ceylon was an important commercial centre long before that time. The following passage appears in the T'ai p'ing yü lan: "The T'ang tzü states: Shih-tzü country (Ceylon) produces cinnabar, mercury,

hsün-lu, tur-meric, storax, costus, and such perfumes". There can be no doubt that the list of products associated with Ceylon included some from the Middle East, and this makes the identification of Shih-tzü with Ceylon more convincing.

The Wei lüeh of the third century, in its account of the products of Ta-ch`in, mentions hsün-lu, turmeric, and storax, and these articles must have been imports of Ceylon known by hearsay to the southern Chinese in the first half of the third century - a comment on the growing trade of that island. The maritime route between western Asia and China, in which Wu government and K`ang T`ai were interested, could not fail to involve Ceylon, and already by that time southern China would have been receiving goods which passed through Ceylon. With the growth in the tempo of maritime trade, the importance of Ceylon increased, and it is not surprising that by the early fifth century Ceylon was in direct touch with China. Envoys were sent to the eastern Chin dynasty at the beginning of the 405-419 period and to the Liu Sung in 428, 429 and 435. Both Fa Hsien and Gunavarman sailed from Ceylon to Indonesia and then to China.

By the first half of the sixth century Persian traders, according to Procopius, had established themselves in Ceylon, where they received the Far Eastern trade arriving at that island. One enquires when the Persians first became interested in the Ceylon trade, and for this reason a Chinese fragment, noted by Pelliot, deserves to be quoted. The fragment comes from Liu Hsin-ch`i's Chiao chou chi: "The Po-ssü (Persian) king asked for the hand of the daughter of the king of Ssü-t`iao (Ceylon) and sent a gold bracelet as a present". Po-ssü was certainly used by the northern Chinese to transcribe "Persia", and the earliest instance of this in northern texts is in connexion with the first Sassanid mission to the Wei dynasty in 455. The name is believed to be derived from Parsa, the region of southern Persia associated with the Sassanids, and Pelliot suggested that the form the transcription took indicated a Sogdian pronunciation. When Po-ssü became current as the name for "Persia", the earlier word An-hsi, probably derived from Arsak or "Arsacid" and meaning "Parthia", was abandoned. Gossip about Persians in Ceylon may have been reaching China by the sea route early in the fifth century, when Persian merchants operating in the western Indian Ocean were already responding to the needs of the southern Chinese by bringing produce as far east as Ceylon for re-shipment to China.

Such, then, were the general factors likely to have promoted maritime trade from the fourth to the sixth century. The main factor was the needs of the southern Chinese market certainly from the early decades of the fifth century, if not earlier. In the second half of the fifth century, when the Hephthalites were conquerors, the Persians themselves would also have had reason for looking to the sea for access to Chinese silk. Moreover, an Indian market for Chinese silk existed in this period. According to Kali-dasa, Chinese silk was one of the most fashionable textiles among the richer sections of society. Not all of the silk would have come to India by the overland route, and there is evidence in the Tamil poem Silappadigaram, composed in the early centuries of the Christian era, that silk was arriving in southern India by sea. Yet neither the Persians nor the Indians were so dependent on sea trade for luxuries as the southern Chinese were, and the statement in the Liu Sung shu that "the rulers coveted" precious goods suggests better than anything else the economic background to the expansion in South East Asian commerce described in various Chinese documents. Because of the Chinese dependence on maritime trade for their luxury imports, news about centres of production in western Asia reached them by means of the merchants who brought the precious cargoes to their shores. They would have known by hearsay of the Persians, or of subject peoples trading under the name of "Persians", certainly as early as 530-531, when Procopius describes the Persian monopoly of the silk trade in Ceylon, and the Chiao chou chi fragment may be an illustration of the way a century earlier news about the Persians was already trickling through by sea. Evidence about "Po-ssü" is likely to be increasingly authentic information about the Persians the closer in time it is to the beginning of the sixth century.

Whatever extended or different meaning the term Po-ssü may have had, there can be no doubt that it normally meant "Persia" or "Persian". Until the end of his life Pelliot insisted on this, and he therefore rejected Laufer's view, formulated in 1919, that the Chinese before Sung times (960-

1279) were capable of using the ex-pression to mean something other than "Persia". Yet when, on botanical grounds, Laufer called attention to certain South East Asian aspects of the usage of the expression Po-ssü, he was making a useful contribution to the history of early Asian commerce. The discussion of the Po-ssü problem deserves re-ex-amination, and this will be done by analysing the Po-ssü products in the sequence which most readily elucidates the significance of the expression in the context of Indonesian and southern Chinese history. A beginning will be made with what seems to be the clea-rest example of an Indonesian reaction to the maritime trade bet-ween western and eastern Asia, a trade which in this instance was old enough to be associated with Ta-ch`in, the Han toponym for the Roman Orient. A further, though less distinct, example of the same reaction will then be considered. In both cases western Indonesian tree resins came on to the southern Chinese market as substitutes for western Asian resins. By these means the nature of the trade in Po-ssü natural products will be described, and the sense in which Po-ssü was used by the Chinese during the fifth and sixth centuries established. Then, and only then, does it seem possible to explain how it was that a connexion came into being between we-sterne Indonesia and Po-ssü, or "Persia". By treating the subject in this way progress may be made in exposing the special contribution of western Indonesia to Asian maritime trade in the centuries before the rise of Srivijaya. ( will be continued ...)

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