

MARITIME HISTORY OF INDIA

- Indian maritime history predates the Common Era by at least two and a half millennia, when the Indus Valley inhabitants had maritime trading contact with early civilizations like that of Mesopotamia.
- The world's first tidal dock Lothal, established in 2400 BCE during the Harappan Civilisation, is fully equipped to berth and service several ships. The dock at Lothal, requires great oceanographic and hydrographic knowledge, especially regarding tides, and maritime engineering know-how to build such a dock on the course of the Sabarmati that was ever-shifting.



- According to Mesopotamian inscriptions, Indian traders from the Indus Valley area delivered copper, carnelian, ivory, pearls, hardwoods and gold during the reign of Emperor Sargon of Akkad around 2300 BCE. Evidence is available on the bulk shipping of timber and costly woods and luxury items such as lapis lazuli from Badakshan mines from Lothal to Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Oman and Bahrain.
- The Roman historian Strabo mentions an increase in Roman trade with India following the Roman annexation of Egypt. At the time of the first Roman Emperor Augustus every year, 120 ships were setting sail from Myos Hormos to India. From the descriptions of Marco Polo written in 1292 CE, Indian ships were among the most sea-worthy vessels of that time.
- Two Indian astronomers of repute, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira, having accurately mapped the positions of celestial bodies, developed a method of computing a ship's position from the stars. A crude forerunner of the modern magnetic compass was being used around the fourth or fifth century AD, called Matsya Yantra, comprised an iron fish that floated in a vessel of oil and pointed North.
- India's maritime history predates the birth of western civilisation. During the 4th century BC, Alexander the

Great shipped the bulk of his army from North Western India (Patala or Xyleneopolis) to Egypt via the Indian Ocean led by his friend, Nearchus who also wrote the book, Indikê about the voyage.

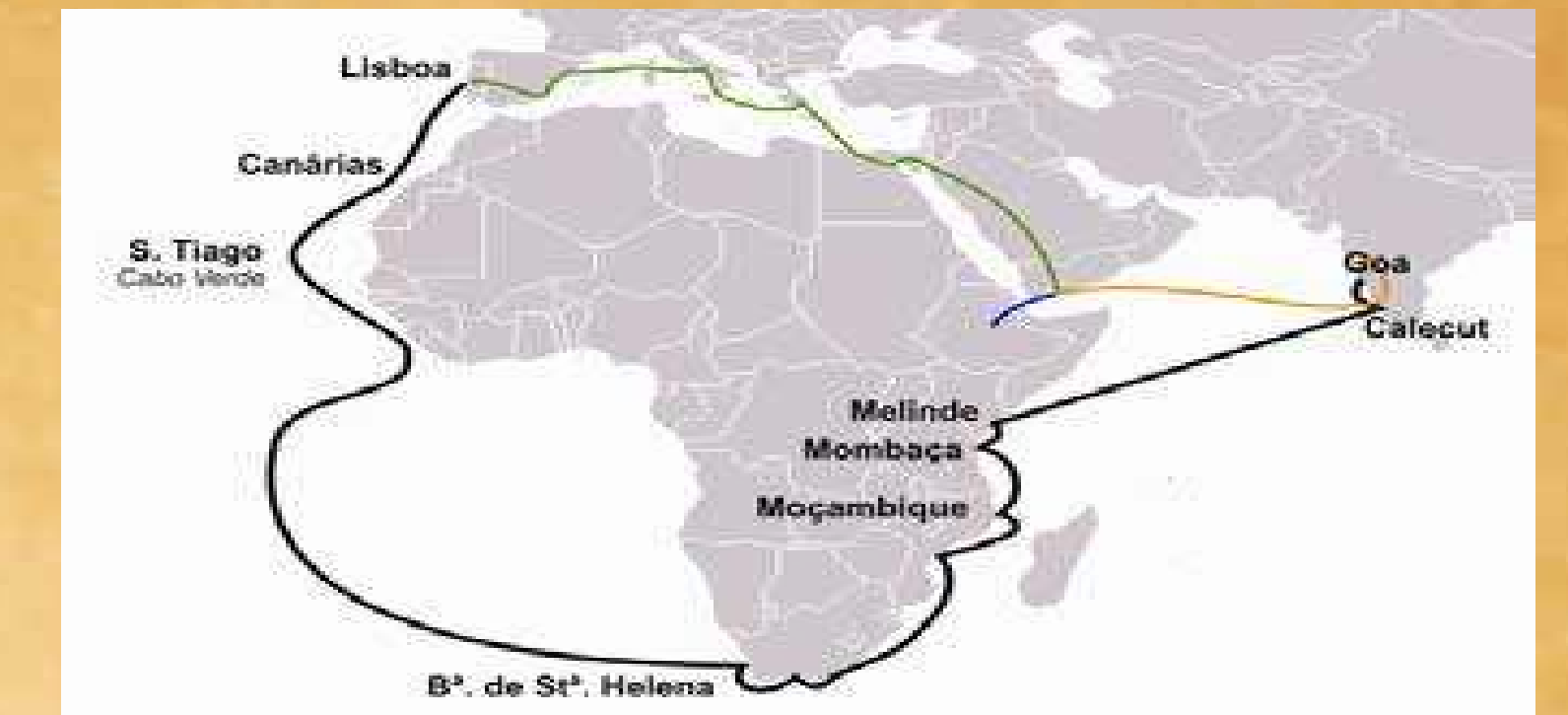
- Emperor Chandragupta Maurya's Prime Minister Kautilya's Arthashastra devotes a full chapter on the state department of waterways under navadhyaksha (Sanskrit for Superintendent of ships) and also the complete arrangements of boats maintained by the navy and the state. It also contains information on the duties of the various personnel on a ship.



- Around 116 BC a shipwrecked Indian sailor was discovered, half-dead, by coast guards on the Red Sea, and was brought to the Egyptian King Physkon. The sailor said he was the sole survivor of a ship that had sailed from India.
- The Romans opened sea routes to India through the Red Sea, where they could buy Chinese silk, bypassing war-torn areas and diminishing the role of Persians and Arabs who previously dominated the trade.
- The Indian commercial connection with South East Asia proved vital to the merchants of Arabia and Persia during the 7th-8th century. In 1292 CE, when Marco Polo came to India, he described Indian ships as built of fir timber, having a sheath of boards laid over the planking in every part, caulked with iron nails. On orders of Manuel I of Portugal, four vessels under the command of Vasco da Gama sailed around Africa and across the Indian Ocean to arrive Kappad near Calicut (Kozhikode) on May 20, 1498.
- The port cities included such places as Nagapattinam, Arikamedu (near Pondicherry), Udipi, Kollam, Tuticorin, Mamallapuram, Mangalore, Kannur, Thane, and others, which facilitated trade with many foreign areas, such as Indonesia, China, Arabia, Rome, and countries in Africa. Many other inland towns and cities contributed to this trade, such as Madurai, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Ellora, Melkote, Nasik, and so on, which became large centers of trade. Silk, cotton, sandalwood, woodwork, and various types of produce were the main items of trade. Trades of this volume could not have been conducted over the countries without appropriate navigational skills.
- According to records, the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, and the Cheras had large naval fleets of ocean-bound ships because these rulers also led expeditions against



Roman trade with India according to the Periplus Maris Erythraei (1st century CE)



Path of Vasco da Gama's course to India (black), the first to go around Africa. Voyages of Pêro da Covilhã (orange) and Afonso de Paiva (blue) are also shown with common routes marked in green



Image of Calicut, India from Georg Braun and Frans Hogenbergs atlas Civitates orbis terrarum, 1572.

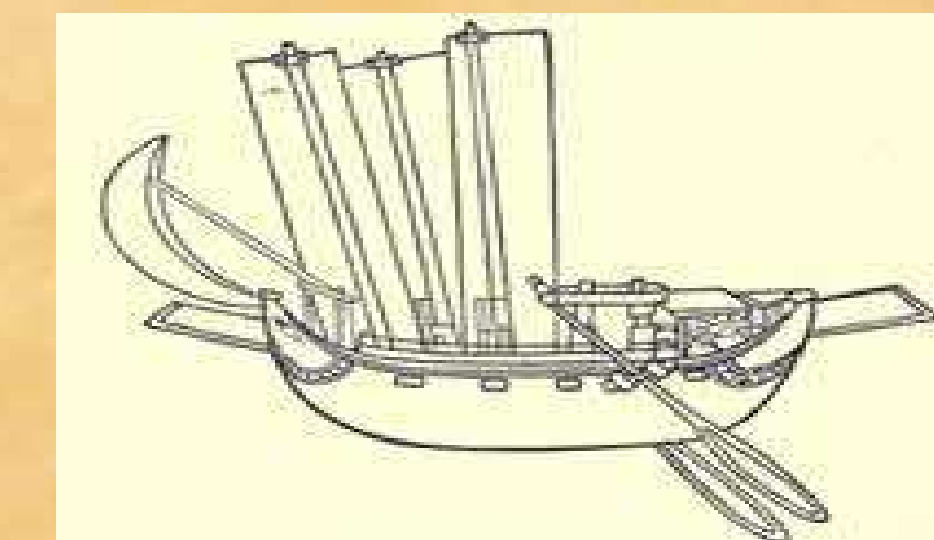


Port of Quilon & Calicut C.1500

- other places, such as Malayasia, Bali, and Ceylon.
- The decline of Indian maritime power commenced in the thirteenth century, and Indian sea power had almost disappeared when the Portuguese arrived in

India. They later imposed a system of license for trade, and set upon all Asian vessels not holding permits from them.

- In 1811, Lt. Walker writes, The ships in the British fleet had to be repaired every 12th year. But the Indian ships made of teak would function for more than 50 years without any repair. The East India Company had a ship called Dariya Daulat which worked for 87 years without



Boat of Hindus

any repairs. Durable woods like rosewood, sal and teak were used for this purpose. The French traveller Waltzer Salvins writes in his book *Le Hindu*, in 1811, Hindus were in the forefront of ship-

building and even today they can teach a lesson or two to the Europeans. The British, learnt a lot of things about ship building from the Hindus.

- Between 1736 and 1863, 300 ships were built at factories in Mumbai. Many of them were included in the Royal Fleet. Of these, the ship called Asia was 2289 tonnes and had 84 cannons. Ship building factories were set up in Hoogly, Sihat, Chittagong, Dacca, etc.

COCHIN NOW AND THEN

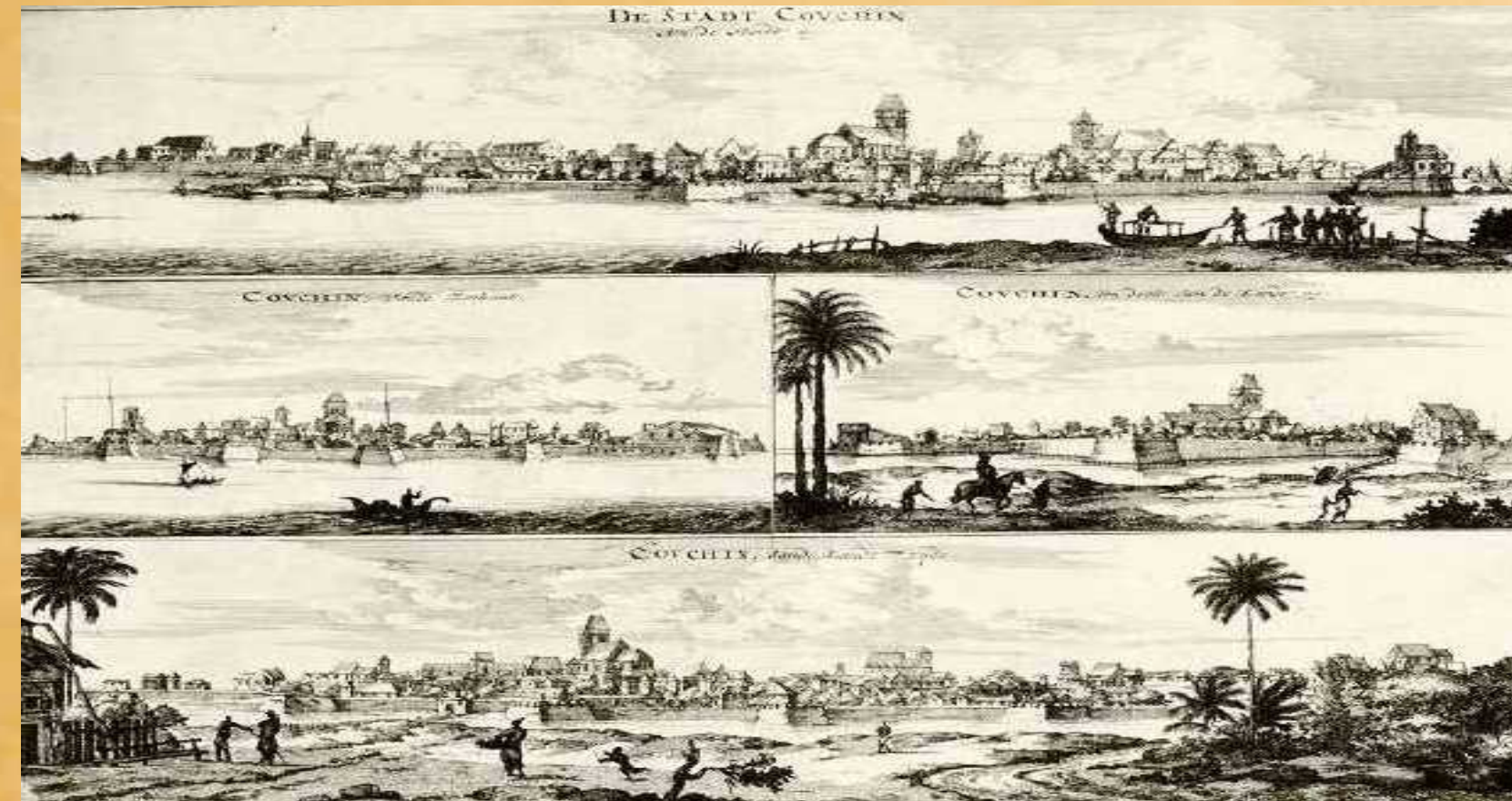
COCHIN- PORTRAITS OF THE PAST



From a Portuguese atlas, 1630 (Source: ebay, Mar. 2007)



Over-Winningh van de Stadt Cotchin op de Kust van Mallabaer (Victory over the city of Kochi on the coast of Malabar), from Gedenkweerdige Brasiliaense Zee en Lantreize ... by Johan Nieuwhof, published by Jacob van Meurs, Amsterdam, 1682. First and only Dutch edition. Later amended English edition published by Churchill in 1744.



The City of Cochin all sides, a panoramic view from A True and Exact Description of the most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel; as also of the Isle of Ceylon by Philip Baldaeus, London, 1752 (orig. ed. 1672)



The Chinese fishing nets of Fort Cochin, from Das Buch der Welt, Stuttgart, 1842-48

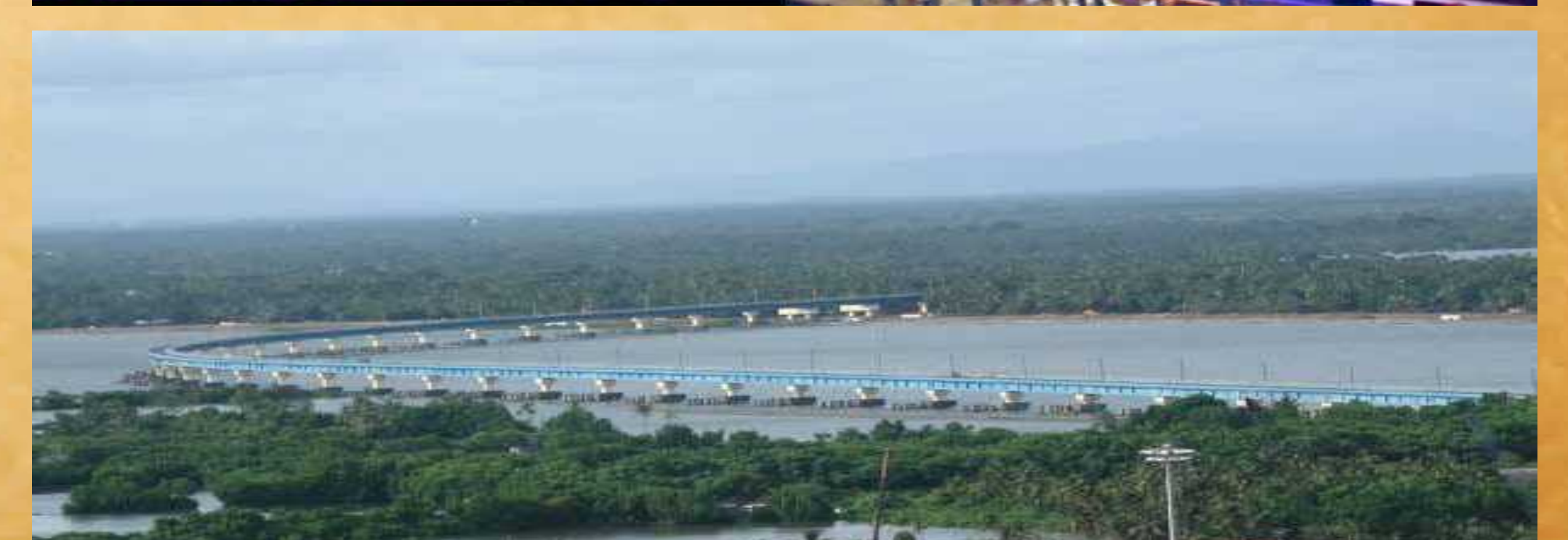


The King of Cochin riding on an Elephant, attended by his Nayros, and Small Indian Vessels used on the coast of Malabar, from Thomas Astley, A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels, London, 1745; larger scans (with modern hand coloring) of the *upper view* and the *lower view*

A view from La galerie agreable du monde (â!). Tome premier des Indes Orientales, published by P. van der Aa, Leyden, c. 1725

Courtesy: www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1700_1799/malabar/cochin/cochin.html

COCHIN: THE PRESENT SCENARIO



ALAPPUZHA: THE VENICE OF THE SOUTH NOW AND THEN



Inland water ways of Alappuzha in 1950s.



Fishermen with Nets at Alappuzha (Alleppey), Kerala - India 1928



Fishermen with Nets at Alappuzha 2016



Inland water ways of Alappuzha in 2016

TRAVANCORE NOW AND THEN



News on the stone bridge that appeared in Mathrubhumi Daily



Karamana Stone Bridge, Thiruvananthapuram

The illustration of the opening of new stone bridge at Karamana, in Travancore that appeared in *The Illustrated London News*, 5 August 1854.

The inauguration was done on 17th December 1953. The illustrator depicts the picture of the chariot of UthramThirunal Maharaja travelling in a chariot through the bridge.



Karamana stone bridge across Karamana River, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

HINDUS AND THE OCEAN TABOO



- ¢ Indias medieval maritime history, the real seafarers were rarely Hindus. There were many mentions of sailors from Malabar, Coromandel, Gujarat and Bengal in earlier times though. In those days the concept of borders was not definite and people of many nations intermingled, primarily at the ports of India.
- ¢ Calicut and Gujarat (Cambay) were considered great ports. Vedic text recounts the sea farers and recent discoveries cement that line of thought.
- ¢ Like the ports of Muziris and Calicut, Mahabalipuram was a port where the Kalinga ships ventured out into South East Asia and perhaps even the Pacific. From early times the inhabitants of Gauda in (Murshirabad) Bengal were known as seafarers. So ancient Hindus had a very good knowledge of the oceans, possibly even magnetic compass and star charting, resulting in brisk maritime trade.
- ¢ In Hindu mythology that the Ocean is a resting place for gods and they shall never be disturbed. So one may not venture out into the oceans and incur their wrath and thus face fierce demons & monsters.
- ¢ Both Manu Smriti and the Baudhayana Dharma Sutra specifically dissuaded Brahmins from sea travels, and the penalties and penances if one did so were very severe
- ¢ Manusmriti (written circa 200BCE, Chapter 3, verse 158) mentions the rules - if a Brahmin did cross the waters, he is to be denied a Shrardha (the annual appeasement of spirits - Shrardha - serves to remind one at important times throughout ones life that death does not sever the link between the present and the past, between the living and the dead).
- ¢ With these strictures in place, noblemen and

higher castes lived well away from water. Looking at Malabar, you would see from historic days that only houses of Muslims, Mukkuvars and foreigners were located close to the beaches or coastline.

- ¢ Some who have incurred religious wrath for crossing the seas are notables like Tagore, Gandhiji, Vivekananda and Ramanujan. However it must be pointed out that this became a noteworthy issue only around the time when white foreigners came to India and trade contact ensued. This was probably when (13th to 20th century) the Hindu clergy started to impose the strictures of religion on the masses.
- ¢ However, according to KM Panikkar the historian Millenniums before Columbus sailed the Atlantic and Magellan crossed the Pacific, the Indian Ocean had become a thoroughfare of commercial and cultural traffic between the west coast of India and Babylon, as well as the Levant. Hindus had in use a matsyayantra (magnetic compass) and possessed the skills to construct ocean-going ships, sturdy enough to venture into the distant reaches of the Arabian Sea.
- ¢ Debunking the commonly held belief that all Hindus had a religious objection to crossing the seas, he says, It was never true of the people of the South. Panikkar then recounts the continuum of colonisation as well as cultural and religious osmosis by sea from Indias east coast to SE Asia.
- ¢ Starting with the Mauryan emperors, he traces Indian maritime activism through the Andhra, Pallava, Pandya, Chalukya and Chola dynasties. He concludes that Hindu influence could not have prevailed so far from home from the 5th to the 13th century without resolute and substantive maritime sustenance from the

mother country.

- ¢ Rig Vedic references to early seafarers - The oldest evidence on record is supplied by the Rig Veda, which contains several references to sea voyages undertaken for commercial purposes.
- ¢ One passage (I. 25.7) represents Varuna having a full knowledge of the sea routes, and another (I. 56.2) speaks of merchants, under the influence of greed, sending ships to foreign countries. A third passage (I. 56.2) mentions merchants whose field of activity known no bounds, who go everywhere in pursuit of gain, and frequent every part of the sea.
- ¢ The fourth passage (VII. 88.3 and 4) alludes to a voyage undertaken by Vasishta and Varuna in a ship skillfully fitted out, and their undulating happily in the prosperous swing.
- ¢ The fifth, which is the most interesting passage (I. 116. 3), mentions a naval expedition on which Tugra the Rishi king sent his son Bhujyu against some of his enemies in the distant islands; Bhujyu, however, is ship wrecked by a storm, with all his followers, on the ocean, where there is no support, no rest for the foot or the hand, from which he is rescued by the twin brethren, the Asvins, in their hundred-oared galley.
- ¢ The Panis in the Vedas and later classical literature were the merchant class who were the pioneers and who dared to set their course from unknown lands and succeeded in throwing bridges between many and diverse nations. The Phoenicians were no other than the Panis of the Rig Veda. They were called Phoeni in Latin which is very similar to the Sanskrit Pani.
- ¢ Subsequently reed boats were recovered from the Indus valley civilization.

(Courtesy: <http://historicalleys.blogspot.in/2009/01/hindus-and-ocean-taboo.html>)

THE SPICE ROUTE INITIATIVE

- ☞ Spice Route Project is Kerala Tourism's highly ambitious plan to bring the ancient 2000-year-old Spice Route back to life, for helping the modern day travellers to traverse the path used by traders and explorers.
- ☞ Archaeological evidence from excavations carried out in Muziris, near Kochi, has already given a good start for the Spice Route project. The excavations at Muziris have pointed to spice trade between Muziris and the West, before it mysteriously disappeared.
- ☞ Through this project Kerala Tourism is trying to link the Spice Route with the Muziris Heritage Project, featuring the ancient port town of Kodungalloor and nearby areas in Central Kerala, which were the focus of India's spice trade with West Asia and Europe.
- ☞ The most defining moment in the history of Spice Route was Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's eventful journey to Malabar. It opened the doors to the New World, laid the foundation for colonization and caused the rise and fall of mighty empires. Traversed by explorers and traders of yore, the Spice Route is one of history's most significant and enigmatic trade routes.
- ☞ Along the historic Spice Route, several places emerged as bustling centres of trade including the ancient port of Muziris and some of the

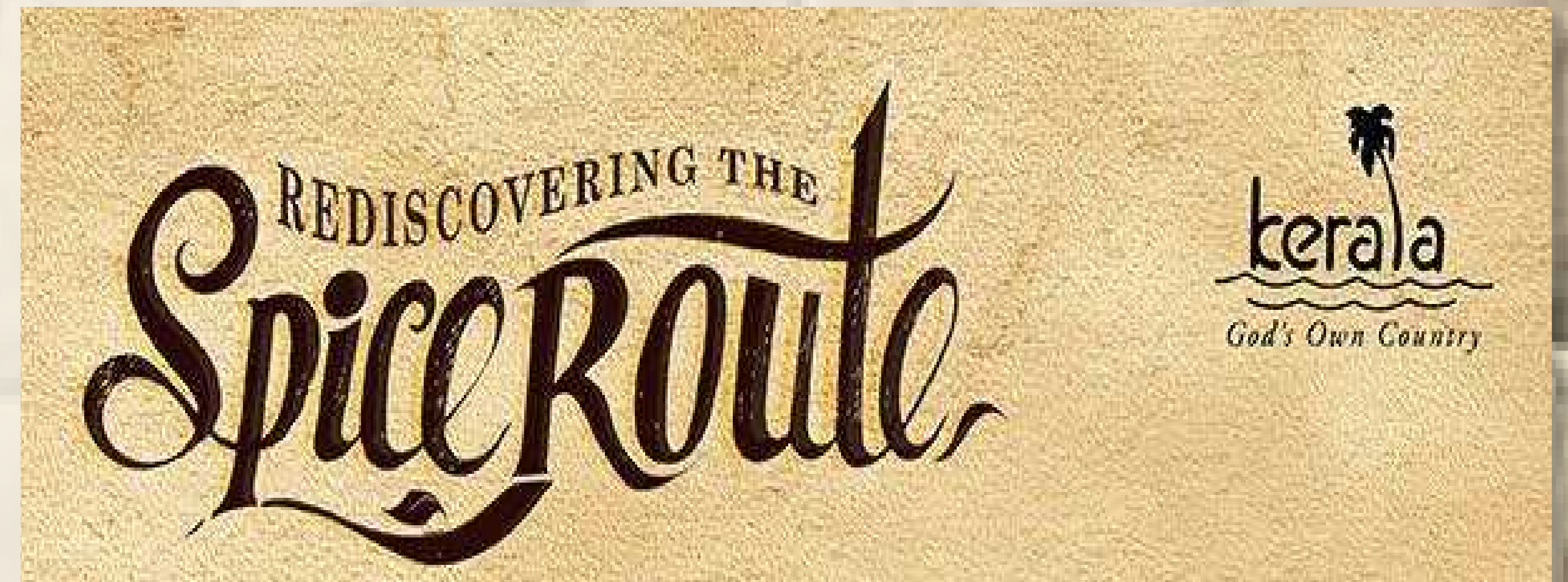


today's tourist hotspots like Fort Kochi and Kozhikode. These spots stood witness to civilisations being shaped, wars being fought, vast riches being exchanged and history being rewritten. Historical records reveal that 31 countries in Europe, Asia and Far East had spice trade with ancient Kerala, including Afghanistan, Burma, China, Denmark, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Oman, Portugal and Spain. A journey along the Spice Route is a journey to rediscover some of history's magnificent stopovers.

- ☞ When Kerala established itself as a major center for spice, it was the ancient port of Muziris that emerged as its hub. Sangam literature describes Roman ships coming to Muziris laden with gold to be exchanged for pepper.
- ☞ According to the first century annals of Pliny, the Elder and the author of

Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Muziris could be reached in 14 days time from the Red Sea ports in Egyptian coast purely depending on the monsoon winds.

- ☞ The tragedy struck in 1341, when the profile of the water bodies in the Periyar River basin on the Malabar Coast underwent a major transformation - and Muziris dropped off the map due to flood and earthquake. However, the remnants of the port and its erstwhile glory still remain as reminders of an eventful past. They are being conserved and preserved for future generations through one of India's largest conservation projects - the Muziris Heritage Project. Supplementing the Muziris heritage sites are 21 museums and other landmarks that aim to educate people about 2000 years of Kerala history.



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BEYPUR: URUS CARRYING LIFE OVER WAVES

- ¢ Beypur-a Small coastal town 12 km south of Kozhikode, on the mouth of River Chaliyar in Kerala, India
- ¢ Beypore was one of the prominent ports and fishing harbours of ancient Kerala was an important trade and maritime centre in first century AD
- ¢ Place was formerly known as Vaypura/Vandaparappanad; Tippu Sultan Named the town Sultan Pattanam
- ¢ Beypore port is one of the oldest ports in Kerala from where trading was done to the Middle East
- ¢ Had direct trade links with Mesopotamia and was a prominent link on the maritime silk route
- ¢ Historically, it has a special place as being one of the prominent ports and fishing harbours, and was also an important trade and maritime centre during the days of the early Arab and Chinese travellers and later the Europeans.
- ¢ Beypore- very famous for building wooden ships called **ows** or
- ¢ Usually bought by Arab merchants for trading fishing and now as tourist ships
- ¢ Apart from urus, boats, huge vessels called Pathemari were also constructed in the yards here.
- ¢ Beypore still carries on that tradition of ship building. It is said that the building of an uru costs about two crore rupees and takes the efforts of many workers for months.
- ¢ The Khalasis, the traditional shipbuilders of Beypore, in Kozhikode (Calicut) district, were the highly



Beypore, an Oil painting on paper by Marianne North, who has visited Beypore during 1877-79

skilled craftsmen who made these sturdy ships at a time when none of the tools available in modern times existed.

- ¢ Usually an *uru* is built by a team of fifty men over a period of at least four years.
- ¢ No blueprints are made and the entire aspect of ship building is embedded in the minds of the highly skilled shipwrights.
- ¢ It is a team work undertaken with minimum of sophistication, following strict and orderly work ethics and also discipline.
- ¢ The first mariners from the Middle East who came to Beypore for trade were amazed by their skill in making the urus and by the timber wealth of Kerala.
- ¢ They placed many orders for these ships were reliable vessels to journey back and forth from their homes far away.
- ¢ In course of time, the Khalasis had a secure market among the traders of



Uru ready for its first sail

A view of Beypore beach



the Middle East.

- ¢ Uru is extremely large and well-built vessel, made by connecting together teak planks, manually.
- ¢ Creating an Uru was a tremendous task demanding the skill and the efforts of more than forty Khalasis over a period of at least four years.
- ¢ During medieval times, Uru or dhow was built using the teak from the Nilambur forest and they had a large market in the Middle East.
- ¢ Though the Uru lost its past glory, Beypore has not bid farewell to the industry yet.
- ¢ There are Khalasis still building Uru, though not in huge numbers as in the past.
- ¢ Efforts are on to revive the Uru tradition which played a key role in the Indo-Persian relationship.
- ¢ But the wood used for constructing Uru is now mainly the teak imported from Malaysia.

THE BATTLE OF COLACHEL: THE FIRST DEFEAT OF EUROPEAN NAVAL FORCE BY INDIA

- ☞ India became the first power to defeat a European power in a naval battle at the Battle of Colachel in 1742 CE.
- ☞ The Battle of Colachel was fought on 10 August 1741 [O.S. 31 July 1741] between the military, of the Indian kingdom of Travancore and the Dutch East India Company, during the Travancore-Dutch War.
- ☞ The ruler of Travancore, Marthanda Varma, routed an invading Dutch fleet; the Dutch commander, Delannoy, joined the Travancore army and served for decades; the Dutch never recovered from this debacle and were never again a colonial threat to India.
- ☞ In 1753, the Dutch signed the Treaty of Mavelikkara, agreeing not to interfere in the expansion of the Kingdom of Travancore and also in turn sell him arms and ammunition. This is the beginning of the Ending of Dutch monopoly in India.
- ☞ Also after the battle, the pepper trade was takeover by the Travancore state Colachel was then, and still is, a fishing village.

Unrecorded in the history textbooks and the Victory Column is the part played by the local fishing community who responded to the Kings call and joined the fight against the foreigners.



Eustachius De Lannoys surrender at the Battle of Colachel

- ☞ However, it is on record that when the Dutch threatened to attack his state, Marthanda Varma retorted that he and his people could seek the safety of forests (which he had done earlier when he was engaged in a succession battle with his cousins who had the backing of some feudal chieftains) and that he would plan an invasion of Europe

with the help of fishermen.

- ☞ One lesson the Maharaja could have learnt from the Colachel battle was that the best way to ensure the safety of the land was to involve the ordinary people in its defence. He could not do so because the Dharma he was committed to uphold was based on division of the people and their subjugation.

Victory Pillar

Near the coast of Colachel stand the Pillar of victory which gives details about the war. This Pillar is made of Granite and is 15 feet in height. On the top of the pillar, the Kingdom of Travancore symbol of Valampuri Shank is engraved. Also the following inscription is found: In remembrance of all the brave men of Travancore Army who laid down their lives in defeating the superior Dutch forces during the Battle of Colachel in July 1741.



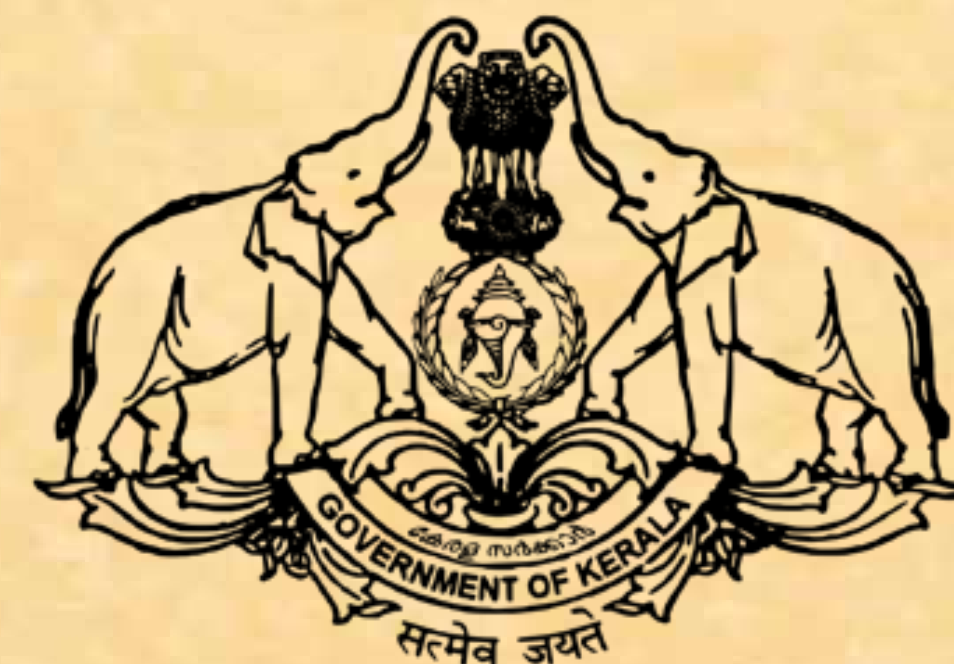
TRAVANCORE KINGDOM, KERALA AND SACRED CHANK

Travancore Kingdom (1729-1947 AD) with its capital at Padmanabhapuram was ruled by the Travancore Royal Family. The Kingdom of Travancore comprised most of modern day southern Kerala and Kanyakumari district, the southernmost part of Tamil Nadu.

The sacred conch shell (*Turbinella pyrum*) was the national emblem of Travancore Kingdom. The image of chank was also stamped in coins and sculptured over the gateway of the palace.



Later, the image of sacred chank was also adopted in the logo of Kerala State and University of Kerala.



Sacred chank: Sinistral (left) and dextral (right) forms

The chank or sacred chank is a sea snail of the family Turbinellidae in the Phylum Mollusca. The shell of this species is massive, with three or four prominent columellar plicae. It is usually pure white under a heavy brown periostracum. The periostracum is removed and the shell is polished for decorative and religious purposes. Rarely you may also get a shell dotted with dark brown. Good fishery of this species exists in southwest and southeast coasts of India. Both left-handed (sinistral) and right-handed (dextral) coiling are seen in shell. The very rare valampuri sangu is considered sacred; it is sinistrally coiled, with siphonal opening on left side when held spire up or coiled right or clockwise when held apex towards you.

VIZHINJAM

THE ANCIENT PORT OF INDIA

- ¢ Excavations conducted by a team of archaeologists under the leadership of Dr. Ajithkumar, Department of Archaeology showed that Vizhinjam is indeed Balitha, an ancient port.
- ¢ It had significant trade relations with the Romans and Mesopotamians.
- ¢ The excavated materials from the site included Turquoise Glazed Pottery (TGP), Amphora (vase-shaped ceramic container), Torpedo pottery, pearls and glass beads of different kinds to support that Vizhinjam was engaged in major trade relations with other countries.
- ¢ These are constructive evidence authenticating the maritime trade links of Vizhinjam extending from the Red Sea to the eastern littoral region of peninsular India and beyond to Far East Asia.
- ¢ It supported earlier suggestions that

this port could have been Balita, a port that finds mention in The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a Greco-Roman account of maritime travel and trade in the Indian Ocean by a merchant of the first century AD, or Blinca, mentioned in the Peutinger Tables (fourth Century AD).

- ¢ Iron slag and crucibles recovered from the site supported medieval epigraphic records highlighting the importance of Vizhinjam as a prominent arms manufacturing station of the Ay chieftains. The discovery of the broken leg of a figurine datable to the eighth or ninth century provided evidence of the lost wax technique for casting bronze images in this region in early medieval times.
- ¢ No other port boasts a continued or continuous maritime history and trade of over 2,000 years.

