

A NOTE ON THE GREEK NAMES FOR SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's significance as an entrepot of ancient commerce is reflected most conspicuously in the multitude of names by which the island has been known throughout the ages. These names testify, not only to the variety of the nations who visited its shores, but also to the extraordinary renown which this illustrious island enjoyed far and wide from antiquity down to modern times. Among the most ancient names are those given by the Greeks, who were doubtlessly the earliest Europeans to be acquainted with this island.

The best known among all Greek names is *Taprobane*. This is the regular name for the island in almost all Greek and Roman notices, which spread through a period of more than eight hundred years, from the end of the fourth century B.C. to the middle of the sixth century A.D. and beyond. Other names, such as *Palaisimoundou*, *Salike* and *Sieladiba*, are only given by Greek authors as alternatives to *Taprobane*. Latin authors, on the other hand, from first to last, know the island only under its classical name, *Taprobane*.

In this connection I should like to make a plea that we adopt "Ta-pro-ba-nie" as the regular pronunciation of this name in preference to "Ta-pro-bane", which is currently in favour. This would not only agree with the generally accepted derivation of the name from Sanskrit *Tamraparni* (Pali: *Tambapanni*), but also would be a more realistic approximation to the usage of the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as of prominent English poets such as John Milton, who, in the *Paradise Regained*, has the following lines:

From the Asian Kings and Parthian among these,
From India and the Golden Chersoness,
And utmost Indian ile Taprobane¹,
Dusk faces with white silk'n turbants wreath'd²

When the name occurs in Greek or Latin hexameter or elegiac verse, the last syllable is invariably long, while the three preceding syllables regularly form a dactyl. The following instances will bear this out³:

*Quid tibi, si calidae prosit laudere Syenae
Aut ubi Taprobanen Indica tingit aqua⁴?*

"Of what good would it be to you if you were praised in hot Syene or where the Indian waters bathe Taprobane?" - Ovid (43 B.C. - A.D. 18).

1. H.W. Whiting: "Milton's Taprobane" *Review of English Studies* vol. XIII (1937) pp. 209-212 has argued that the reference may be to Sumatra.
2. Milton: *Paradise Regained* iv. 73-76 [Carey and Fowler.].
3. Cf. D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Sri Lanka in Greek and Latin Verse" *Navasamskriti Cultural Quarterly* I.1 (1986) p. 39-46.
4. Ovid: *ex Ponto* i. 5. 79-60.

*Metera Taprobanen Asiogeneon elephanton*⁵.

"Taprobane, mother of Asian-born elephants" - Dionysius Periegetes (2nd century A.D.)

*Insula Taprobane gignit tetros elephantos*⁶

"The island Taprobane produces dread elephants" - Rufus Festus Avienus (4th century A.D.)

*Hanc tepidos proram convertens navis ad austros
Taprobanen venies generat quate magna elephantos
Per pnes Asiæ*⁷.

"From here turning the prow of your ship towards the south winds you will come to Taprobane which, great as it is, produces elephants on the borders of Asia." - Priscian (6th century A.D.)

It will be clear from the above lines that their authors considered the first and last syllables of Taprobane as long ones, while the two inner syllables were short. However, we find a quite different scansion in our earliest example of the word in a Greek verse. Alexander of Ephesus, nicknamed Lychnus, in the first century B.C., writes:

*Nēsos tetrapleuros, halistephanos Taprobanē
Thēronomos peplēthen eurhinōn elephantōn*⁸

"A four-sided island, sea-crowned Taprobane rearer of beasts, is full of fine-nosed elephants."

Here too the last syllable is long; but Alexander makes the first two short, using them to fill the second half of the dactyl, which usually occurs on the fifth foot of a hexameter, whereas almost all subsequent verse writers, both Greek and Latin, make the first syllable long. In fact, according to classical prosody, the first syllable could be either long or short, being followed by a mute and a liquid. But what is more interesting is the treatment of the third syllable, which is here counted long, so that the last two syllables make up the spondee with which a hexameter line normally ends. Subsequent writers, on the other hand, keep this third syllable short.

5. Dionysius: *Orbis Descriptio* 593 [C. Muller, *Geographi Graeci Minores*, Paris (1982) vol. II p. 142].

6. Avienus: *Descriptio Orbis Terrae* 778 [Muller: *op. cit.* p. 184].

7. Priscian: *Periegesis* 595-7 [Muller: *op. cit.* p. 195].

8. Alexander Lychnus, quoted by Stephanus of Byzantium: *Ethnica* s.v. "Taprobane" [Meineke].

Moreover, at the other extremity of the period under discussion, the *Verses on the Provinces of the Parts of the World*, a Latin cosmological poem of the 7th century A.D., written in a trochaic metre, stresses the second and fourth syllables exactly as Milton, a thousand years later, has done in his iambic line of the *Paradise Regained*:

*Insula quoque Taprobane elephantos nutricat*⁹

"The island of Taprobane too nurtures elephants."

All this goes to show that, although there may have been disagreements regarding the quantity of the first three syllables, ancient authors were unanimous regarding the length of the last syllable.

From Taprobane comes the ethnic name *Taprobanos* in Greek (attested by Plutarch, who gives the accusative plural *Taprobanous*) and *Taprobamus* in Latin (as attested by the *Historia Augusta*, which gives the dative plural *Taprobanis*). In Plutarch's dialogue *Concerning the Face which Appears on the Orb of the Moon* (early 2nd century A.D.) Lucius, one of the speakers, refers jestingly to the ancient belief that, whereas the earth is supported by Atlas, as Aeschylus says, or by steel-shod pillars, as Pindar puts it, the insubstantial stretch of air under the moon is incapable of supporting a solid mass:

*Kai dia touto Pharnakēs autos men en adea tou pesein tēn gēn estin,
oiktirei de tous lupokeimenous te (i) periphora (i) tēs selēnēs Aithiōpas ē
Taprobanous mē barus autois empese (i) tosouton*¹⁰.

"And therefore Pharnaces is himself without any fear, but is sorry for the Ethiopians or the Taprobanians who are situated under the circuit of the moon, lest such a great weight fall upon them."

In the life of the emperor Tacitus, occurring in the *Historia Augusta*, composed probably around A.D. 380-390 and which used to be attributed to Vopiscus, the author, describing an event supposed to have taken place about A. D. 275, records the prophecy of a soothsayer concerning a future emperor who would appoint judges to the Parthians and Persians, keep the Franks and the Alamani under Roman law, remove all barbarians from Africa, appoint a governor to the Taprobani (*qui Taprobanis praesidem imponat*), send a proconsul to Ireland, judge all Sarmatians,

9. *Versus de Provinciis Parcium Mundi* 18 [edited by Pertz in *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften* Berlin, Philologische-Historische Klasse (1845) pp. 256-270].
10. Plutarch: *De Facie Quae in Orbe Lunae Apparet* 926c [Loeb edition]. He goes on to say that the moon is safe from falling by its very motion and the rapidity of its revolution.

Moreover, at the other extremity of the period under discussion, the *Verses on the Provinces of the Parts of the World*, a Latin cosmological poem of the 7th century A.D., written in a trochaic metre, stresses the second and fourth syllables exactly as Milton, a thousand years later, has done in his iambic line of the *Paradise Regained*:

*'Insula quoque Taprobane elephantos nutrit'*⁹

"The island of Taprobane too nurtures elephants."

All this goes to show that, although there may have been disagreements regarding the quantity of the first three syllables, ancient authors were unanimous regarding the length of the last syllable.

From Taprobane comes the ethnic name *Taprobanos* in Greek (attested by Plutarch, who gives the accusative plural *Taprobanous*) and *Taprobamus* in Latin (as attested by the *Historia Augusta*, which gives the dative plural *Taprobanis*). In Plutarch's dialogue *Concerning the Face which Appears on the Orb of the Moon* (early 2nd century A.D.) Lucius, one of the speakers, refers jestingly to the ancient belief that, whereas the earth is supported by Atlas, as Aeschylus says, or by steel-shod pillars, as Pindar puts it, the insubstantial stretch of air under the moon is incapable of supporting a solid mass:

*Kai dia touto Pharnakēs autos men en adea tou pesēin tēn gēn estin,
oiktīrei de tous hupokeimenous te (i) periphora(i) tēs selēnēs Aithiopoulos ē
Taprobanous mē barus autois empese (i) tosouton*¹⁰.

"And therefore Pharnaces is himself without any fear, but is sorry for the Ethiopians or the Taprobanians who are situated under the circuit of the moon, lest such a great weight fall upon them."

In the life of the emperor Tacitus, occurring in the *Historia Augusta*, composed probably around A.D. 380-390 and which used to be attributed to Vopiscus, the author, describing an event supposed to have taken place about A. D. 275, records the prophecy of a soothsayer concerning a future emperor who would appoint judges to the Parthians and Persians, keep the Franks and the Alamani under Roman law, remove all barbarians from Africa, appoint a governor to the Taprobani (*qui Taprobanis praesidem imponat*), send a proconsul to Ireland, judge all Sarmatians,

9. *Versus de Provinciis Parcium Mundi* 18 [edited by Pertz in *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften* Berlin, Philologische-Historische Klasse (1845) pp. 256-270].
10. Plutarch: *De Facie Quae in Orbe Lunae Apparet* 926c [Loeb edition]. He goes on to say that the moon is safe from falling by its very motion and the rapidity of its revolution.

possess the entire earth surrounded by the ocean, all nations having been captured, but thereafter give power back to the senate and abide by the ancient laws, himself live for 120 years and die without an heir.¹¹ The last remarks seem to echo Pliny's description of the limited elected kingship of Sri Lanka and the longevity of its people¹².

Various observations have been made with regard to the derivation of this name, and the question has also been raised often as to whether Taprobane denoted Sri Lanka or Sumatra or some other island. In the Catalan Atlas of A.D. 1375, Taprobana is the name given to Sumatra¹³. However, among the scholars of the Renaissance, the identification of Taprobane with present-day Sri Lanka appears to have been the earlier view, as witnessed by the maps accompanying the printed editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* of 1482, 1490 and 1509; while in the 16th and 17th centuries its identification with Sumatra appears to have gained wider favour, as witnessed by the maps of the 1525, 1542 and 1562 editions of the same author, as well as by other geographical, historical and lexicographical works¹⁴. The same may be said of travel descriptions such as those of Varthema (1505) and Pigafetta (1521)¹⁵. There have also been more recent attempts to revive the Sumatra theory¹⁶.

The early European writers on the subject made wild guesses about the derivation of the name Taprobane, tracing connections, not only to Sanskrit roots, but even to Hebrew and Phoenician¹⁷. But these writers had no access to the indigenous chronicles of the island which use the Pali form *Tambapanni* to designate Sri Lanka. The *Mahavamsa* even offers an explanation for this name:

"When those who were commanded by Vijaya landed from their ship, they sat down wearied resting their hands upon the ground. And since their hands were reddened by touching the dust of the earth, that region, and also the island, were named Tambapanni."¹⁸

-
11. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae: Tacitus* xv. 2 [Loeb Edition].
 12. Cf. Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 90-91.
 13. G.E. Gerini: *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia*, London (1909) p. 422
 14. Whiting: *op. cit.* pp. 211-1212.
 15. Gerini: *op. cit.* p. 652.
 16. e.g. P. Paris: "A Note on Two Passages of Pliny and Strabo relating to Taprobane" (English Version) *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 1 (1951) pp. 297-301.
 17. For a discussion of these early opinions cf. C. Lassen: *Dissertation de Insula Taprobane Veteribus Cognita*, Bonn (1842) p. 5 note.
 18. *Mahavamsa* vii. 40-41 [tr. W. Geiger]; cf. *Dipavamsa* ix. 30-39 *spassim*.

This explanation in itself may not be entirely satisfactory, and may even be totally fictitious in view of the existence of the ancient river *Tamraparni* in South India; but it does establish the fact that the name *Tambapanni* was used to designate the island. The second and thirteenth Rock Edicts of Asoka also mention *Tambapanni*, and the context of these mentions makes it very probable that in each case Sri Lanka is meant¹⁹. Once the chronicles were published, *Tamraparni* (Pali: *Tambapanni*) was seized upon as the source of the Greek form *Taprobane*. This also gave added strength to the conviction that the Taprobane of the Greek and Roman writers was the island of Sri Lanka.

According to our evidence, the earliest writer to mention Taprobane in a Greek text was Onesicritus of Astypalaeia²⁰, whom Pliny introduces as the admiral (*praefetus*) of the fleet of Alexander the Great, and who appears to have written before the end of the fourth century B.C.²¹. Doubt has sometimes been expressed as to whether the Taprobane which he describes should be identified with Sri Lanka; and A. Herrmann is of the opinion that the description was intended for modern Sumatra²². Hermann's view is based on two statements of Onesicritus, namely, (1) that Taprobane was twenty days sail distant from the mainland, and (2) that there are other islands between India and Taprobane. But the starting-point of Onesicritus' voyage was not the southern tip of India but the mouth of the Indus; and, as Onesicritus himself says, the voyage used to be made in poorly equipped ships, so that twenty days would not be an exaggerated estimate of the sailing distance from that point to Sri Lanka. As for the islands between the Indus and Taprobane, they are attested by

19. W. Rahula: *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* Colombo (1956) pp. 10-11.
20. F. Jacoby: *F. Gr. H.* no. 134 Onesikritos fr. 12 = Strabo xv. 1. 15, fr. 13 = Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 81; F.F. Schwarz: "Onesikritos und Megasthenes uber den Tambapannidipa" *Grazer Beitrage* V (1976) pp. 234-263; D.P.M. Weerakkody: "The Earliest Greek Notices of Sri Lanka" *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* vol. X. no. 1 & 2 (1984) pp. 1-26.
21. N.D. Wijesekara: "The Historical Background of Sinhalese Foreign Relations from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century A.D." *The Ceylon Historical Journal* I (1951) pp. 172-192, at p. 187, erroneously says that the earliest Greek account is that of Callisthenes. This error is the more serious since he has attributed to the historical Callisthenes the treatise *On the Nations of India and the Brahmins*, a late version of which is inserted in one manuscript of the *Alexander Romance* of Pseudo-Callisthenes. The treatise probably belongs to the fifth century A.D. Cf. D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Adventures of a Theban Lawyer on his way to Sri Lanka" *J.R.A.S. (S.L.B.)* XXVI (1982) pp. 23-42.
22. A. Hermann: "Taprobane, die Insel Ceylon" in Pauly-Wissowa: *Real-Encyclopadie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaftens* 2nd ser. vol. IV, Stuttgart (1932) cols. 2260-2272.

other ancient writers such as Pliny and the author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*²³. Sumatra, on the other hand, is not mentioned in Greek sources before Ptolemy, who wrote in the mid second century A.D., and even the earliest Indian references to Southeast Asia cannot be dated earlier than the third century B.C. Among Latin authors, the earliest to mention Taprobane was, as far as we know, the Roman poet Ovid whom I have quoted above.

The first Greek writer to mention an alternative name for the island is the anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which is now generally accepted as a work dating from the latter half of the first century A.D. This is what he writes:

*Peri de tēn met' autēn chōran, ēdē pros anatolēn tou ploos aponeuontos, eis pelagos ekleitai pros autēn tēn dusin nēsos legomenē Palaisimoundou, para de tois archaiois autōn charēris*²⁴ Taprobane²⁵.

"And in the area after this, as our course now bends away eastwards, there lies out to sea towards the west an island called Palaisimoundou, but by the old native population Taprobane."

Thus, according to this author, Palaisimoundou was a new name current in his time, whereas Taprobane was the old local name. But the manuscript reading is very confused, while the name itself has given rise to speculative theorizing with regard to its significance, correct form and derivation.

Pliny (A.D. 23/24-79), quoting the envoys from Taprobane who, according to him, visited Rome during the reign of the emperor Claudius²⁶, gives Palaesimundum as the name of the capital city as well as of a river nearby²⁷; but according to the author of the *Periplus*, it was the name for the whole island. Herrmann²⁸ has suggested that Taprobane and Palaisimoundou were the capitals of two rival kingdoms on the island and that, depending on which of them was predominant at a given time, the island was known by each name in turn. As we shall see presently, this suggestion cannot be substantiated by the evidence of the Greek writers, and it is not borne out by local sources either. It would be more reasonable to assume that the name was originally used (if at all) for the king's residence, and that it was later extended to cover the whole island. Such indeed was the case, as we have already seen, with the name of *Tambapanni* itself, at least according to the author of the *Māhavaṃsa*.

23. Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 80; *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 53; cf. Schwarz: *op. cit.* p. 246n. 65.
24. *Chareris*, which is the manuscript reading, makes no sense. Muller has proposed the emendation *epichoriois*.

25. *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 61 [Frisk].

26. D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Sri Lanka's Diplomatic Mission to Rome, First Century A.D." *Palma II* (Classical Association of Sri Lanka, 1935-1985) pp. 67-80.

27. Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 85-86.

28. Hermann: *loc. cit.*

But the real difficulty is with regard to the correct form of the name. Pliny gives it as *Palaesimundum*. Ptolemy, however, as well as the manuscripts of the *Periplus*, separate *palai* and *Simoundou*, taking *palai* as the Greek adverb meaning "formerly"²⁹. Ptolemy even uses the contrasting particle *de*. Thus, according to him, Taprobane was formerly called Simoundou, but now Salikē (*Hē tis ekaleito palai Simoundou, nun de Salikē*). This interpretation is adopted by some later Greek writers, who followed the Ptolemaic tradition. For instance, the anonymous geographical summary attributed to Agathemerus (early third century A.D.) has *Hē palai men Simounda kaloumene nun de Salikē*³⁰. Similarly, Stephanus of Byzantium (6th century A.D.) says of Taprobane: *Hē palai men ekaleito Simoundou nun de Salikē*³¹. In both these cases, the insertion of the particle *men* guarantees that *palai* is kept separate and treated as an adverb.

On the other hand, we have the testimony of Marcian of Heracleia (4th or 5th century A.D.) who, three times in the course of his *Periplus of the Outer Sea* says that Taprobane was formerly (*proteron*) called Palaismoundou³². The insertion of this word *proteron* each time guarantees that *palai* will not be taken as an adverb; and this reiteration of the remark suggests that Marcian is desperately trying to correct an error which had been made current, perhaps by copyists of Ptolemy's text.

Moreover, as Pliny, who is our earliest evidence, gives the Latinized form as *Palaesimundum* (in the accusative), we may take *Palaisimoundou* as the true Greek form of the name in his time. Ptolemy's ambiguity, heightened by the two divergent interpretations of his successors, leads to the conclusion that (1) he did actually write *Palaisimoundou*; (2) that this was the current name as confirmed by Pliny's Latin, and (3) that, therefore, in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, its substitution in place of the manuscript-reading *palai Simoundou* by the editors is justified as the *lectio difficillior* and the true representation of the fact.

The derivation of this name has also been the subject of much speculation. There is no ancient name either for the whole island or for any part of it which has faintest resemblance to this name, unless of course one wished to see here a faint echo of *Simhala-dvipa*. Numerous unsubstantiated derivations based on conjectural and arbitrary philological reconstructions (such as the *Pāli-sīmanta* of Lassen and the *Palaisilamandalam* of Rasanayagam) may be dismissed out of hand. Only Raychaudhuri condescends to find support from ancient literature, quoting the commentary to the *Arthasastra*, which refers to *Simhala* as *Pārasamudra (ka)* ("beyond the sea"), and suggesting

29. Ptolemy: *Geography* vii. 4. 1; *Periplus Maris Erythraei* 61.

30. *Anonymi Geographi Expositio Compendiaria* = Agathemerus ii. vi. 25 [Muller: *G.G.M.* II. p. 500].

31. Stephanus: *Ethnica* s.v. "Taprobane" [Meineke].

32. Marcian: *Periplus* i. proem. *te(i) te Taprobanē(i) kaloumenē(i) Palaisimoundou legoumenē(i) proteron: ibid.* i. 1.8: *Hē Taprobanē nesos hē Palaisimoundou kaloumenē proteron nun de Salikē; ibid.* i. 35: *hē de Taprobanē nēsos proteron men ekaleito Palaisimoundou, nun de Salikē*. Cf. Muller: *op. cit.* I. p. 545 ff.

that this form may be the Sanskrit original of Palaesimoundou³³. His suggestion has been received with approval by several subsequent writers³⁴. Epa, Seneviratne draws our attention also to the un-compounded form *Pāre Samudrasya* given in the *Ramayana* as the site of Rama's wars (which may point to a variant form *Paresa-mudra*, and to the Pali form given by the author of the *Rasavahinī* in the phrase *pārasamudde Lamkāyaṃ* ("in Lanka beyond the ocean"), and argues that this term is a Sanskrit translation of the Austro-Asiatic word *lamka* (*lankā*) which, at least in the Mundari language, means "any distant country beyond the sea"³⁵. *Samudra* is also suggestive of Sumatra, for which Ortelius preferred the spelling *Samotra*³⁶; and Gerini, who derived the latter name from the city *Sumatra* or *Samudra* (founded circa A.D. 1020), has tried to connect it with Simundu, Palaesimundu and Simunda, in spite of the considerable time-gap involved. He suggests that Palaesimundu may derive from *valaya-samudra* "the encircling sea", or *mudrāvalaya* "the 'sea-girt'"³⁷. Sylvain Lévi also derives Simundu from *Samudra*³⁸, while Andre and Filliozat propose to derive it from Samanta, the name for Adam's Peak, seeing that the Tamil poem *Manimekalai* gives the form *Camantucci*³⁹. However, this poem is a late work, and is now thought to belong to the first half of the ninth century A.D.⁴⁰. It must however be pointed out that there is a parallel to the latter part of the name in Ptolemy, who refers to a location on the island by the name of Andrisimoundou; and cogent explanations for the first part of this name are still lacking, despite Renou's tendentious comparison with the Andrae (i.e. Andhra) mentioned by Pliny⁴¹.

33. H. Raychaudhuri: "Palaesimundu" *Indian Antiquary* vol. XLVIII (October 1919) pp. 195-196, quoting *Arthashastra* ii. 11. 28 and 59 with commentary.
34. E.G.E. Pieris: "Greek and Roman Contacts with Ceylon" *The Ceylon Historical Journal* Vol. X (1961) pp. 8-125. cf. p. 19; F.F. Schwarz: "Pliny the Elder on Ceylon" *Journal of Asian History* vol. VIII. 1 (1974) pp. 21-48. cf. p. 43.
35. S.W. Epa Seneviratne: "Sri Lanka, the Auspicious Island or Distant Country beyond the Seas" *Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume of the University of Kelaniya* (1986) p. 473-484, esp. 479-480, quoting *Ramayana* vii. 39. 51, and *Rasavahini* p. 97 [Jnanavimala].
36. Whiting: *op. cit.* pp. 209-210.
37. Gerini: *op. cit.* p. 642 with n. 2.
38. S. Lévi: "Kanishka et Satavahana" *J.A.* (1936.) p. 96.
39. J. Andre and J. Filliozat ed.: *Plin I Ancien: Histoire Naturelle* book vi, pt. 2, Paris (1980) p. 151, quoting *Manimekalai* xi. 22.
40. Epa Seneviratne: *op. cit.* note 17.
41. L. Renou: *La Géographie de Ptolemée: l'Inde*, Paris (1925) index s.v. "Andrisimoundou"; cf. Pliny: *N.H.* vi. 67.

Whatever may have been its origin, this name shows certain peculiarities. Unlike other Greek names for the island, such as Taprobane and Sielediba, it cannot be traced to any name mentioned in local sources. Moreover, its use seems to have been confined to a very short period in history. Not known to Strabo, first mentioned by Pliny and the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, it is already obsolete by the time of Ptolemy's sources. Although other local and Indian names for Sri Lanka have survived to the present day, there are no traces of this name in current popular usage (apart from its modern scientific use as a botanical species name).

I am therefore of the opinion that the use of this shortlived name was, in all probability, confined to foreigners who traded with the ports of the island at a particular time. It was a foreign word, which did not enter local speech. (Even the supposed original, *pārasamudra*, by its very nature, suggests that it must have been used mainly by foreigners.) In fact, if we adopt Muller's reconstruction of the text⁴², this is precisely what the *Periplus* says: that the island called Palaisimoundou has been known as Taprobane (i.e. Tambapanni) to the local people (of India as well as of Sri Lanka, I presume) from antiquity. Perhaps one may draw an analogy with the more recent name "Ceylon" as well as with many European place-names denoting localities on the island, none of which has entered local speech.

By Ptolemy's time, or at least by the time of his sources, a new name for the island had come into use, namely, Salike. Attempts have been made to explain the source of this name without however taking its real nature into account. Tennent, after noting Burnouf's derivation of Salike from Sri Lanka, proposes one of his own from the Egyptian Siele-keh, "the island of Sihala"⁴³. Sinnatamby proposes to derive both Salike and Salai (Ptolemy's name for the inhabitants of the land) from Saliur "a town on the Indian coast immediately opposite the island", and sees in this an extension of Tamil influence into Sri Lanka⁴⁴. In support he cites the known case of *Tamraparni*, which refers to a river in South India as well as being the name for Sri Lanka. But if the name was so transferred from Saliur, one would expect to find some evidence from other sources for its use in ancient Sri Lanka; but none exists, to our knowledge.

However, in actual fact, Salike is the place, name derived from Salai, the name given to the inhabitants. This derivation follows regular Greek practice: thus *Salikē* [*nēsos*] is "the island of the Salai". Thus it is the derivation of Salai, not of Salike, that must be explained; and I believe that it is most probably derived from *Sihala* (i.e. *Sinhala*) and may perhaps be compared with our terms *Elu* and *Hela*. If so, we have here an early instance of this name which was to be used increasingly in eastern writings of the subsequent period before reappearing in Cosmas as Sielediba. Ptolemy's familiarity with this term is instructive as a pointer to the good quality of the sources available to him.

42. Muller: *op. cit.* I, p. 247.

43. J.E. Tennent: *Ceylon* I, London (189,) p. 536 n. 2.

44. J.R. Sinnatamby: *Ceylon in Ptolemy's Geography* 1890 Colombo (1968) p. 67.

Jacqueline Pirenne, in attempting to prove that the *Periplus* was written after Ptolemy, argues that Ptolemy was wrong in believing that Salike was a contemporary name which had superseded the old name Simoundou, pointing out that it was only the third Sinhala name for the island, Sinhala-dvīpa, which the Greeks did not use. Pirenne supports this with the statement of Cosmas that the island was called Sielediba by the Indians and Taprobane by the Greeks. According to Pirenne, the truth therefore was that the island was *also* called Salike⁴⁵.

The purpose of Pirenne's argument is to show that if Salike is not a more recent name than the others, then one is not justified in placing the *Periplus* before Ptolemy on the ground that its author did not know that name. But one cannot accept Pirenne's proposal to substitute "also" for "formerly" i.e. *palat*, which, in any case, is not an adverb, as we have already seen, but only the first part of the name Palaisimoundou. Ptolemy was stating facts as known to him through his sources, and Salike was a new name as far as these western records were concerned.

It may be convenient at this point to say something about the prevailing misconception that the people of Sri Lanka were known to the Romans as Serendivi, since on it is based the view that Sri Lanka sent an embassy to the emperor Julian (A.D. 361-363). This view is based on a misunderstanding of a passage in the *History* of Ammianus Marcellinus (A.D. 390) which refers to the various nations who anticipated Julian's arrival in the East by sending delegations to him⁴⁶. The Divi and the Serendivi, who are mentioned among the Indian nations, cannot be the dwellers of the Maldives and Sri Lanka as widely believed, even though they are represented as the furthest of these nations. They are rather to be compared with the Dibenī and Sirindibenī mentioned in the *De Gemmis*, a letter written by Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus (A.D. 370) to Diodorus, Bishop of Tyre, concerning the twelve gems that, according to Scripture, were on the robes of Aaron. The actual reference, which would have been to *Dibēnoi and Sirindibēnoi*, has not come down to us among the fragments of the Greek original preserved by Anastasius of Sinai, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 563); but it occurs in the Latin version attributed to Facundus⁴⁷ as well as in the Coptic version⁴⁸.

Epiphanius says that the Indians were once known to have been divided into nine nations (which he proceeds to mention by name), but that now there are many more since the Dibenī have broken off their former alliance with the fish-eaters (Ichthyophagi), and the Sirindibenī have broken off theirs with the Evilai, i.e. the

45. J.Pirenne: "La Date du Periplus de la Mer Erythree" *Journal Asiatique* (1961) pp. 41-59.

46. Ammianus Marcellinus, xxii. 7. 10 [Loeb edition].

47. Migne: *Patrologia Graeca* vol. XLIII cols. 329-330.

48. Cf. E.O. Winstedt: "Some Coptic Legends About Roman Emperors" *Classical Quarterly* vol. III (1909) pp. 218-221.

Havilah of the Bible⁴⁹. Now, although it is true that Cosmas, nearly two centuries later, identifies Euilath of the Scriptures with India⁵⁰, it was generally supposed to be a place somewhere far to the northwest of it⁵¹. The fish-eaters also were usually located in East Africa. Moreover, the name Serendip, which was later used by the Arabians to designate Sri Lanka, is believed to have referred originally to the island of Sera (Serapis) or Masira off the Arabian coast⁵². In fact, all the other "Indian" nations mentioned by Epiphanius belong to the western regions of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf: the Alabastri, Homerites, Axumites (with the Adulitans), Bugaei, Tajani, Sabeni and Liberi⁵³. Around the fourth century A.D. the term "Indian" was often used as a blanket description for all the tribes east of Egypt; and even the "animals of India", whose description is promised in the title to the 11th book of Cosmas, include those of Africa as well as of India properly so-called. Thus the possibility of the Serendivi being the people of Sri Lanka is at best remote.

We are on far surer ground with regard to Siedidiba, which is the name under which Sri Lanka is known to Cosmas Indicopleustes, who wrote during the sixth century A.D.⁵⁴. There can be no doubt that this is a transformation of *Sihala-dīpa* (*Siṃhala-dvīpa*). Cosmas says that this is the Indian name the island which the Greeks call Taprobane. The correctness of this observation is borne out by the fact that the term *Siṃhala* is used during the several centuries before his time in Indian literary and epigraphical sources including the *Mahabharata*⁵⁵, the Alahabad Inscription of Samudragupta⁵⁶, and a copper plate grant of the Western Chalukya king, Pulakesin

49. Gen. ii. 10-12.

50. Cosmas, xi. 23 [Wolska-Conus].

51. See the introduction to J. Rouge's edition of the *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* Paris (1966).

52. Cf. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* tr. W.H. Schoff (1912) pp. 362-363 n. 37; compare also the Seria of Pausanias (vi. 26. 8 ff.) and the Serinda of Procopius (Bell. Goth. iv 17) which have nothing to do with Sri Lanka, contrary to the views of Winstedt and Herrmann cited *supra*.

53. Cf. Winstedt: *loc. cit.*

54. Cosmas, xi 13 ff. *passim*; F.F. Schwarz: "Kosmas und Siedidiba" *Ziva Antika* Vol. XXV. No. 1&2-(1975) pp. 469-490; D.P.M. Weerakkody: "Ancient Sri Lanka as Described by Cosmas" *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* vol. VII. no: 1 & 2 (1981) pp. 107-127.

55. *Mahabharata* tr. Pratap Chandra Roy, Calutta (1889) p. 614 ff.

56. Cf. D.Jatis Chandra: "Life in Eastern Asia during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries A.D. with special reference to Ceylon" *J.C.B.R.A.S.* xxxii no. 84 (1933) pp. 55-63.

I, dated 413 of the Saka era (A.D. 489-490)⁵⁷. Pearls from Sri Lanka are referred to as *Simhalaka* in the *Brhat-samhitā* of Varahamihira dated in the fifth century A.D.⁵⁸ Even earlier, inscriptions from the second/third centuries A.D. at Nagarjunakonda in the Krishna valley record the foundation of a monastery named Sihalahvihāra and the dedication of a *cetiya* to the fraternities of Tambapanni-dīpa⁵⁹. The early fifth century account of Fa-hsian also calls the island "The Kingdom of the Lion", reflecting the same name⁶⁰, while the *Mahavamsa*, which is usually placed in the fifth century, has preserved the local aetiological myth connecting the Sinhala race with the lion⁶¹.

Much earlier, in the third century B.C., Asoka had referred to the island as Tambapanni, while according to the tradition preserved in the *Mahavamsa* the name Lankā-dīpa goes at least as far back as the time of Gautama Buddha⁶², although the identification of the island with the Lanka of the *Ramayana* has been much debated. However, whereas *Tambapanni* is recognizable in the "Taprobane" of the Greeks, the name Lanka was not known to the Greeks, probably because it had not come into wide use outside the island at the time when the Greek sources were compiled. The oldest references to Lanka are found scattered in the *Mahabharata* (compiled between the 4th century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.⁶³) and the *Ramayana* (compiled between 3rd century B.C., and 2nd century A.D.⁶⁴), while the earliest Indian epigraphical reference is in a Sanskrit inscription of about the middle of the fourth century A.D., found at Buddhagaya, which records that a *thera* named Mahānāman from Lankadīpa caused a shrine to be built there⁶⁵. On the other hand, *Simhala-dvīpa*, with its wider use, had found its way into the records of the Greeks, who considered it as an alternative to the earlier name Taprobane. In this they are supported by a Sanskrit Buddhist work, the *Divyāvadāna*, which narrates how Tāmradvīpa became *Simhaladvīpa* on being conquered by *Simhala*, the son of an Indian merchant⁶⁶.

57. C. Rasanayagam: *Ancient Jaffna* Madras (1926) p. 230 citing *Indian Antiquary* VII p. 215. Rasanayagam erroneously describes this as perhaps the earliest mention of the word *Simhala* in an authority of Indian record.
58. *Brhat-samhitā* ch. 81 v. 2; cf. *The University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* vol. I pt. 1 p. 696.
59. *ibid* p. 37.
60. Fa-hsian, ch. 37 [S.Beal: *Travels of Fa-hsian and Sung-nun* New York (1964) p.148].
61. *Mahavamsa* vi. 1 ff.
62. This appears to be the implication of *Mahavamsa* ch. xv.
63. M. Winternitz: *History of Indian Literature* vol. I, pp. 454-457.
64. *ibid* pp. 500-517.
65. W.H. Fleet: *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* III pp. 274-278; cf. Epa Seneviratne *op. cit.* pp. 473-474.
66. *Divyavadana* 36; cf. Andre and Filliozat: *op. cit.* p. 152, who also point out that the term Sihalahdīpa occurs in 29 stories of the *Sahassavatthupakarana* while Tambapanni occurs in 22.

It is clear from this that, since the introduction of Buddhism to the island in the third century B.C., intensified contact with India had induced the standard usage of Simhaladvīpa as the name of Sri Lanka; and it is this usage of which we find a Greek echo in the work of Cosmas. This fact alone, I think, would suffice to prove beyond doubt that the Taprobane (Palaisimoundou, Salike, Sielediba) of the Greek and Roman writers is none other than the island of Sri Lanka.

D.P.M. Weerakkody.