

NEW LIGHT ON THE FIRST SRI LANKAN EMBASSY TO ROME MENTIONED BY PLINY THE ELDER¹

In Book VI of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, we find an account of the embassy of a certain *Rachias* from distant Taprobanê, today's Sri Lanka, to Rome during the principate of Claudius who reigned from 41 to 54 A. D. The arrival of Indian ambassadors to Rome during the reign of Augustus (27 B. C. - 14 A. D.) is mentioned in his own account of his reign (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti* V. 31. 1)², and attested in the *Geography* (XV, 1, 4) of Strabo³ as well as in the *Divus Augustus* XXI. 3 of Suetonius⁴, and in the *Roman History* (LIV, 9, 8) of Dio Cassius⁵. But Pliny is the only classical author who mentions the arrival of the embassy from Sri Lanka to Rome⁶. This is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing episodes in the history of diplomatic missions between the Mediterranean and Sri Lanka in ancient times given the "oddities" involved in it and the doubts raised by skeptics concerning its authenticity.

¹ To the memories of David Meredith and Senarath Paranavitana and in appreciation of the encouragement bestowed to me by Emeritus Professor Ashley Halpé.

² "Embassies were often sent to me from the kings of India, a thing never seen before in the camp of any general of the Romans", *Res gestae divi augusti*, with an English translation by Frederick W. Shipley, London, William Heinemann, 1924, p. 395. Cf., Wilhelm Krause, "Gesandtschaften indischer Fürsten in der römischer Kaiserzeit, *Litterae Latinae*, XXV, Fol. I et II, 1971, pp. 34-39.

³ "But from India, from one place and from one king, I mean Pandion, or another Porus, there came to Caesar Augustus presents and gifts of honour and the Indian who burnt himself up at Athens", *The Geography of Strabo*, with an English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, London, Harvard University Press, 1983, vol. VII, pp. 4-7. Cf., Wilhelm Krause, *art. cited.*

⁴ "The reputation for prowess and moderation which he thus gained led even the Indians and the Scythians, nations known to us only by hearsay, to send envoys of their own free will and sue for his friendship and that of the Roman people", *Suetonius*, with an English translation by J. C. Rolfe, London, William Heinemann, 1920, p. 153. Cf., Wilhelm Krause, *art. cited.*, p. 36.

⁵ "For a great many embassies came to him, and the people of India, who had already made overtures, now made a treaty of friendship, sending among other gifts tigers, which were then for the first time seen by the Romans, as also, I think, by the Greeks", *Dio's Roman History*, with an English translation by Earnest Cary, London, Harvard University Press, 1980, vol. VI, pp. 304-305. Cf., Wilhelm Krause, *art. cited.*, p. 37.

⁶ The statement "In the time of Augustus an embassy from Rome actually visited it [i. e. Taprobanê]" in the *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, New York, Harper, ed. by Henry Thurston Peck, 1897, p. 1524, and Lach's assertion that ambassadors from Sri Lanka waited upon Augustus' court are not substantiated by any classical source. See D. F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. I, *The Century of Discovery*, Book One, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 12.

It is not our concern here to deal with all the complex problems raised by this account to which is devoted several substantial recent studies⁷, but to focus on the ambassador Rachias, whose name, in our view, could be connected with two rock inscriptions found at Sässeruwa (80° 5' E., 8° N. See fig. 1. Map of Sri Lanka) at the border of the present-day Anuradhapura district. After summarizing the information he could gather about Taprobanê from authorities such as Onesicritus, Megasthenes, and Eratosthenes—all of which are attested in sources of the early Hellenistic period—Pliny proudly records the more detailed information, inordinate in extension (§§ 84-91), which he himself could have obtained from this embassy or from a source very close to the court circles of Emperor Claudius, because Pliny was a member of Vespasian's (69 - 79 A. D.) cabinet. Let us cite the two passages in which the ambassador's⁸ name as recorded by Pliny occurs:

So far the facts stated have been recorded by the early writers. We however have obtained more accurate information during the principate of Claudius, when an embassy actually came to Rome from the island of Taprobanê. The circumstances were as follows: Annius Plocamus had obtained a contract from the treasury to collect the taxes from the Red Sea; a freedman of his while sailing round Arabia was carried by gales of the north beyond the coast of Caramania, and after a fortnight made the harbour of Hippuri in Taprobanê, where he was entertained with kindly hospitality by the king, and in a period of six months acquired a thorough

⁷Juan Gil, *Mundo Viejo : Mundo Nuevo. Selección de Mapas del siglo XVI*, Junta de Andalucía Consejería de Cultura - Cabildo Catedral de Sevilla Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, 1989, pp. 48-50; Stefan Faller, *Taprobane im Wandel der Zeit: Das Sri-Lanka-Bild in griechischen und lateinischen Quellen zwischen Alexanderzug und Spätantike*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000, pp. 51-110; D. P. M. Weerakkody, *Taprobanê: Ancient Sri Lanka as known to Greeks and Romans*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1997, 51-77; Federico De Romanis, "Romanukharattha e Taprobane : sui rapporti Roma-Ceylon nel 1 sec. D.C.", *Helikon*, Anno XXVIII, 1988, pp. 5-58; English trans. with additions, "Romanukharattha and Taprobane : Relations between Rome and Sri Lanka in the First Century AD.", *Crossings. Early Mediterranean Contacts with India*, F. De Romanis and A. Tcherina, (eds.), New Delhi, Manohar, 1997, pp. 161-237; F. F. Schwarz, "Ein singhalesischer Prinz in Rom", *RhM*, 11, 1974, pp. 166-176; *ibid.*, "Pliny the Elder on Ceylon", *Journal of Asian History*, 8, 1974, pp. 21-48; Chester G. Starr, "The Roman Emperor and the King of Ceylon", *Classical Philology*, Vol. LI, Number 1, 1956, pp. 27-29; Wilhelm Krause, "II. Gesandtschaft von Ceylon an Kaiser Claudius (41 - 54 n. Chr.)", *art. cited.*, pp. 38-39. W. T. Keble, "A Ceylon Embassy to Rome", *New Lanka*, Vol. 1, Number 1, 1949, pp. 30-35.

⁸ Valérie Naas refers to him and his suite as "ambassadeurs romains", see *Le projet encyclopédique de Pline l'Ancien*, Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 2002, p. 159 and p. 180 n. 48.

knowledge of the language; and afterwards in reply to the king's enquiries he gave an account of the Romans and their emperor. The king among all that he heard was remarkably struck with admiration for Roman honesty, on the ground that among the money found on the captive the denarii were all in equal weight, although the various figures on them showed that they had been coined by several emperors. This strongly attracted his friendship, and he sent four envoys, the chief of whom was **Rachias**. [...] They also told us that [...] beyond the Hemodi mountains they also face towards the country of the Seres, who are known to them by intercourse in trade as well, the father of **Rachia** having travelled there, and that when they arrived there the Seres always hastened down to the beach to meet them⁹.

We have cited these two passages from Rackham's translation instead of the original in Latin to show the ambiguity encountered by translators in rendering the nominative form of the ambassador's name because Pliny's text makes such a task difficult whereas the nominative forms to be deduced for the other two personal names occurring in the account, viz. Claudius and Annius Plocamus, do not pose any difficulty.

One essential point should, however, be noted at the outset: the Latin expression *captiva pecunia* rendered as "the money found on the captive" by Rackham is a mistranslation whereas it should be "money collected"¹⁰. M'Crindle makes the same error when he translates "among the money taken from the captive"¹¹ and Sidebotham: "the money found on the captive"¹². Cordier has "some Roman money that had been taken"¹³ and Weerakkody has:

⁹Pliny, *Natural History* with an English translation in ten volumes: Volume III, Libri VIII-XI, London, William Heinemann, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1967, VI, 85 p. 403. We have taken the liberty of substituting "Taprobane" for Rackham's "Ceylon", "Hemodi mountains" for "Himalayas" and "Seres" for "Chinese" in conformity with the Latin text. The bold type used here for the ambassador's name is due to the author of this article.

Tim Severin who sailed in an Arab dhow from the coast of Oman to China in 1989 informs the author of this article of the suitability of northern gales for such a rapid journey (pers. com., 9. 11. 2006).

¹⁰See Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources, prepared by J. H. Baxter and Charles Johnson, (London, 1947), s.v. *capt/ale* [...] "captor, collector of royal dues, 1248, 1419".

¹¹*Ancient India As Described in Classical Literature*, Westminster, Archibald Constable, 1901, p. 104.

¹²Steven E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa, 30 B.C. - A.D. 217*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1986, p. 32.

¹³*Yule's Cathay and the Way Thither*, revised by H. Cordier, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1916, Vol. 1, p. 199.

"among the captured money", "acquired", "confiscated" and "seized"¹⁴. De Romanis, who subjected Pliny's account to a close scrutiny, has "the money seized from the captive"¹⁵. The implication of this mistranslation is that each and every skipper or sailor who made port in ancient Sri Lanka would be made a captive. Let us remind the reader in passing that the king of Taprobanê was portrayed by Pliny as a just ruler, and hence the obvious incompatibility with the idea of a "plunderer", conveyed by this inappropriate translation.

Pliny's "Hippuros" ("Horse Mountain") and the Old Sinhalese "Sindu Kanda" ("Horse Mountain")

We must also point out the inappropriateness of Rackham's Latinization and declination of the Greek place-name "Hippuros", a port of Taprobanê, as "Hippuri". This is also of key importance to our argument because Pliny leaves it as "Hippuros", non-Latinized and without declining in the nominative form, presumably because he recognized that it is a local, indigenous name. "Hippuros" is the direct Greek rendering of "Sindu Kanda", a place-name in Old Sinhalese literally denoting "Horse Mountain", a name attested as Σινδοκάνδα on the western coast of Taprobanê on the map drawn by Ptolemy¹⁶ (see fig. 2. Map of Taprobanê by Claudius Ptolemy), near in time to Pliny. The present-day Tamil place-name on the western coast of Ceylon "Kudiramalai" (literally meaning "Horse Mountain") is a direct translation from the Old Sinhalese "Sindu Kanda", transcribed letter for letter, except for the "u" rendered as "o" in Greek by Ptolemy (the same vowel shift occurs in the Sanskrit vocable 'Sindhu' or 'Sindu', rendered in Greek as Σίνθον by Ptolemy (*Geography*, VII, I, 2; 110° 20' 19° 50')¹⁷. Although Ptolemy does not show Σινδοκάνδα πόλις (122° 5°) as

¹⁴Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, p. 226 and p. 32.

¹⁵Federico De Romanis, "Romanukharattha and Taprobane...", *Crossings, op. cit.*, p. 173.

¹⁶See *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia*, Edidit C. F. A. Nobbe cum introductione a Aubrey Diller, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 1990, p. 173 for the place-name Σινδοκάνδα πόλις, p. 174 for ethnic name Σανδοκάνδαι. See also the text established by Louis Renou, *La Géographie de Ptolémée. L'Inde (VII, 1-4)*, Paris, Edouard Champion, 1925, Σινδοκάνδα πόλις = Sindokanda, ville 122° 5°, p. 67 and Σινδοκάνδαι = Sindokandai, p. 71. Faller overlooks the significance of Σινδοκάνδα and erroneously suggests that the freedman learned Tamil and then made use of an interpreter to converse with the king. The entire discussion on this point is thus led astray.

¹⁷It is to be noted that there is no evidence of continuous transmission of Ptolemy's maps from antiquity to the present. The maps which appear in Ptolemaic MSS are thought to have been reconstructed in the thirteenth century, although in the ninth century we have proof of the existence of Ptolemaic maps because Masudi, the "Arab Pliny", mentions having seen rivers, cities and mountains attractively shown on maps based upon Ptolemy's data. See J. B. Harley and David Woodward, *The History of Cartography, Vol.*

a port, he does show Πριάπιος λιμὴν (122° 3° 20') - a harbour in its vicinity (*Geography*, VII, IV, 3). Hence its relevance to our purpose. It is of great significance to emphasize that this name "Hippuros" alone -which is only mentioned by Pliny- tells a great deal about the Greco-Roman sailor's origin for, as we shall soon show that he was, in all probability, either an Egyptian Greek or a Greek living in Egypt who learned Sinhalese and Hellenized the Sinhalese ambassador's name.

In his translation Rackham uses the nominative form *Rachias* in one passage but in another constructs the nominative form *Rachia*, probably by analogy with a Latin term such as *agricola* ("farmer"). Rackham thus retained the form *Rachia* in the ablative and *Rachiae* in the genitive from the nominative form *Rachias*, as required by the Greek morphology of the name. J. Filliozat and J. André used the form *Rachias* in their translation of Book VI of the *Natural History* published by the Guillaume Budé Association¹⁸, assuming that this name had been transmitted through Greek sources and restored to it the nominative ending *-as* in conformity with masculine Greek nouns of the type of νεανίας ("young man"), since it is impossible to have in that language, a nominative masculine with an ending *-a*.

Pliny's mention of the ambassador's name gave rise to long-running discussions regarding the identity and the origin of this person. Weerakkody¹⁹ and Faller²⁰ in their recent studies provide detailed commentaries on the possible transcription and the provenance of the ambassador's name but without taking into consideration the evidence which Sri Lankan epigraphic records affords. The earliest attempt at identification was made by Fr. Paolino, who thought that the name of the chief ambassador, "Rachia" was a transcription of "Râgia", and hence he concluded that the embassy was led by a king²¹ (Sanskrit "râja" / "râjan", Sinhalese "raja" or "rajha"). William Vincent, the Dean of Westminster, followed suit and popularized this conjecture widely through his translation of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, which was translated into French and German²². Yet Pliny's text clearly states that *Rachias* (the capital

I, Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, particularly "The Greek Revival and Ptolemy's *Geography*", pp. 266-267 and "The Greek Manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Geography*", pp. 267-269.

¹⁸Pline l'Ancien, *Histoire naturelle*, text, trans. and commentary by Jacques André and Jean Filliozat, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1980, LIVRE VI, 2e partie, pp. 46-47.

¹⁹Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-59.

²⁰Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-78.

²¹Paolino da S. Bartolomeo, *Viaggio all Indie Orientali*, Rome, Antonio Fulgoni, 1796 p. 376; Paulin de S. Barthélemy, *Voyage aux Indes orientales*, trans. by Anquetil Du Perron, J. R. Forster and Silvestre De Sacy, Paris, Tourneisen, 1808, 3 vols.

²²"I have more than once noticed the Rajah, who, as Pliny informs us, attended the embassy from the king of Ceylon to Claudius, and who asserted, that his father had

letter "R" is conspicuous in Latin) was sent by the king (e.g. *hospitali regis ...* and ... *eligi regem*) of Taprobanê, which rules out Rachias being a king himself. None of the common personal names attested in early and later Brahmi inscriptions brought to light so far, bear the Sinhalese words "yuvaraja" or "uparaja" meaning "viceroy", "raja" or "rajha", "king" and "maharaja" or "maharajha", "great king" except concerning those who ruled, petty kingdoms and the whole island, respectively.

A few decades after Vincent, Emerson Tennent made a *rapprochement* of "Rachia" with "Rakkha", but quite recently Weerakkody, while exploring the possibility that the name could be equated with "rattika"²³, expresses doubts

visited the Seres. I once thought that this Rajah went by sea [...]", William Vincent, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea. Part the Second. Containing an Account of the Navigation of the Ancients from the Gulph of Elana, in the Red Sea, to the Island of Ceylon with Dissertations*, London, T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1805, 469, at 436; William Vincent, *Voyage de Néarque des bouches de l'Indus jusqu'à l'Euphrate*, trans. by Billecoq Paris, Imprimerie de la République, l'an VII, 3 volumes; "Vincent's Periplus des rothen Meeres, oder Nachricht von der Schiffahrt der Alten and der Ostküste Afrikas", in *Untersuchungen über einzelne Gegenstände der alten Geschichte, Geographie und Chronologie*, trans. by G. G. Bredow, Altona, J. F. Hammerich, 1800-1802, Stück 2, pp. 715-797; *Sammlung kleiner Schriften aus dem Gebiete der mathematischen und alten Geographie*, Güns, Reichard, 1836. This includes Vincent's *Periplus* trans. by C. G. Reichard, pp. 374-425 and 438-496. See Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, new edition edited by William Crooke, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, s.v. Raja, Rajah. "[...] It is curious that the term Rājā cannot be traced, so far as we know, in any of the Greek or Latin references to India, unless the very questionable instance of Pliny's *Rachias* be an exception", p. 754; "Rachia (i.e. Rajah)", J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature*, Westminster, Archibald Constable, 1901, 102-106; Rackham, "(perhaps a title, Rajah)", *op. cit.*, p. 402; "un rājan mais anonyme", E. Lamotte, "Les premières relations entre l'Inde et l'Orient", *Nouvelle Clio*, 1953, 1-4, p. 108; "Raquias : Algunos estudiosos han pensado que el nombre de *Rachias* podría ser la transcripción del sánscrito *racha* "rey" concluyendo que se trataba de un simple título", Plinio el Viejo, *Historia natural Libros III-VI*, traducción y notas de Antonio Fontán, Ignacio García Arribas, Encarnación del Barrio, Luisa Arribas, Madrid, Editorial Gredos, 1998, p. 340 n. 309; "Rachias: Vielleicht eine Verwechslung des Namens mit dem Herrschertitel Radscha", C. Plinius Secundus d. Ä., *Naturkunde*, Lateinisch-deutsch, Buch VI, Geographie: Asien, trans. by Kai Brodersen, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996, p. 204 n. 85; "Rachia : Potrebbe trattarsi di un titolo (rajà) o dell'effettivo nome di un re", Gaio Plinio Secondo, *Storia naturale I, Cosmologia e Geografia Libri I-6*, trans. by Alessandro Barchiesi, Roberto Centi, Mauro Corsaro, Arnaldo Marcone and Giuliano Ranucci, Torino, Giulio Einaudi, 1982, p. 701, n. 3.

²³The term *ratiya* or *ratika* is derived from the Pali *rattika* or *rattiya*, Sanskrit *rastrikha* or *rastriya*. The Junagad rock inscription of Rudradaman used the word *Rastriya* in referring to Pushyagupta, the high commissioner of Chandragupta Maurya in Surashtra. It is thus reasonable to assume that officials entrusted with territorial administration were sometimes engaged on diplomatic missions as well, and that the identification of *Rachia*

about Tennent's view, saying that this conjecture will only be proven when it can be demonstrated that "Rakkha" was used as a proper noun in ancient Sri Lanka in Pliny's time. In fact, "Rakkha" was a proper name in Pali, a name that was borne by a general in medieval Sri Lanka, as can be seen in the Pali chronicles. Its early Sinhalese form "Raka" moreover appears in several rock inscriptions contemporary with Pliny. So there is ample evidence that Raka was a name used in Sri Lanka during Pliny's time, but we have yet to explain the supposed shift from -ka to -chias (i.e. from "Raka" to "Rachias"). Nevertheless, Weerakkody fails to clarify the difficulties presented by Tennent's proposition: the passage from -kkha to -chia (from "Rakkha" to "Rachia"), difficulties to which attention had already been drawn by André and Filliozat years ago²⁴.

Among the derivations proposed to explain this name is that of the historian, palaeographer and archaeologist Paranavitana, which gained currency for some time. He suggested that the name may be a form of the Sinhalese word *ratiya* or *ratika*, which has been found in inscriptions in Sri Lanka and which means "a district chieftain"²⁵. The Pali equivalent of this word is *ratthika*. But this conjecture does not explain the supposed passage of *t / tth* to *chi / χ*. Moreover, Pliny indicated that *Rachias* was a proper name, not a title or appellation of a dignitary. There is no basis for treating it as a title. It is noteworthy to point out that Pliny mentioned that the father of Rachias was a voyager who had been to the country of the Seres for trade²⁶; the implication is that Rachias was not a title but a person. However, the name of Raki appears with some frequency in the masculine as well as in the feminine form²⁷ in several early and later Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka which refer to a few individuals who donated caves to the Buddhist monks by the epithet "parumaka" ("chief") or "bata" ("lord"); for example in that found at Niyandavaragala in the Batticaloa District (in the east of the island), the name occurs with a title prefixed, translated by Paranavitana as «lord Raki» :

Inscription n° 399 [1]

Transcript : Bata-Rakiya lene

with *ratiya* may be correct", Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²⁴André and Filliozat, *op. cit.*, p. 115, § 85. note 3. See also Faller, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

²⁵S. Paranavitana and C. W. Nicholas, *A Concise History of Ceylon. From the Earliest Times to the Arrival of the Portuguese in 1505*, Colombo, Ceylon University Press, 1961, 8.

²⁶O. Bopearachchi, locates this barter in the interior of Sri Lanka! : "Pline l'Ancien, déjà bien informé sur l'île (VI, 88), parle du commerce intérieur du pays", see http://archeo.ens.fr/8546-5_Gren/osmundB/OsmundENSMai98.html; See his « Foreward » to D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

²⁷See for example inscription n° 832 [2], "The cave of the female lay-devotee **Raki**, wife of prince **Tissa**, son of the **Pâcina** king, is given to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent", S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 64.

Translation : The cave of lord **Raki**²⁸ .

And in those of n° 994 [1], and n° 1000 [7] (see below) the name Raki appears with an epithet, rendered by him as "chief" and by Wickremasinghe as "His Eminence"²⁹. In fact, the word Raki is the proper name of the individual, his title being "parumaka", which precedes the name and signifies "chief" or "premier", i.e. one of the premiers, the pioneers, who in the historical tradition of Sri Lanka were the founders of a city or a settlement when they were newly settled on the island.

In these inscriptions the name Raki is always associated with a donation or an offering. So it seems clear that the person who bore this name believed his generosity was worth commemorating for posterity. In this context, the name definitely connoted a high official, or a person belonging to a higher social grade, or indeed a royal family, as may be observed in the following inscription found in Sässeruva, a fertile area situated about thirty-five km south of today's Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka, which was founded in the third century B. C. Although in the first century A. D, Anuradhapura had a circumference of fifty-five kilometres, it may not have included Sässeruva within its perimeter³⁰. It is to be noted that Sässeruva is of great antiquity; it had an ancient Buddhist monastery containing numerous cells, with inscriptions dating from the second century B. C³¹. It is now a historical sanctuary, and the colossal standing statue of the Buddha³² is still an important pilgrimage site. In the past this site provided caves as shelter from rain and sun to mendicant and forest-dwelling monks³³. Bestowing caves as donations and offerings to those who renounced worldly pleasures is an ancient custom and its widespread practice in Buddhist India and Sri Lanka is attested by inscriptions incised above and below the drip ledges of such refuge. The following two epigraphs are examples:

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁹ D. M. D. Z. Wickremasinghe, *Epigraphia Zeylanica being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Ceylon*, London, Oxford University Press, 1912, Vol. I 1904-1912, p. 17 and p. 146.

³⁰ Christopher Reynolds, *Ceylan. L'île sacrée du bouddhisme*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1984, p. 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³² See Jean Boisselier, *Archaeologia mundi: Ceylan*, Geneva, Nagel, 1980, illustration n° 115 facing p. 145.

³³ Cf. N. Chutiwongs, L. Prematilleke, Roland Silva, *Paintings of Sri Lanka: Sässeruva*, Colombo, Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka Centenary Publications, Central Cultural-Fund, 1990, 119 pp.

Inscription n° 994 [1]

Transcript: "Devanapiya-maharajhaha Gamani-Abayaha jhita Abi-Anuridiya parumaka-Raki-jhaya". [Fig. 3]

Translation: "The cave of Princess (**Abi**) **Anuradhi**, daughter of the great king **Gamani Abhaya**, the friend of the gods, and wife of the Chief **Raki**".

Inscription n° 1000 [7]

Transcript: "Parumuka..... [pu]ta parumuka-Rakiya (lene) sagasa ni[yate]". [Fig. 4]

Translation: "The cave of the chief **Raki**, son of the chief.... is dedicated to the Sangha"³⁴.

Paranavitana draws attention to a noteworthy feature in the redaction of inscription n° 994 [1]: the three words occurring in the final sequence *Parumaka-Raki-jhaya*, according to the norms of the syntax of the early Prakrit, should have preceded *Abi-Anuridiya* and not come at the end of the phrase³⁵. Two explanations are possible: either the final mention of "the wife of the chief Raki" (*parumaka-Raki-jhaya*) was added because the identification of the princess needed completing by the mention of her husband, or the husband wished by this addition to appear alongside the donor and thus take part in her pious act. We are thus led to infer that Raki was considered important enough to cause his name to figure side by side with his wife's because the donation of this cave to monks concerned property they jointly owned, or they were responsible for cutting the drip-ledges and for preparing the caves on crown land. Let us note that this sole mention, which ends the inscription, informs us about Raki's kinship, established by marrying into the king's family. It is to this happy coincidence that we owe a significant indication of the identity of the "chief Raki", who appears also in inscription n° 1000 [7], and his status in the society of the epoch.

Raki is the singular masculine nominative form (Rakiya is the genitive) occurring in the above-mentioned ancient inscriptions of Sri Lanka from the third century before Christ down to the first century of our era (i.e. up to the time of Pliny) and it could have been the one used as the basis for the Greek form of the name, which then could have become a declinable name in Greek, as often happened with other borrowed names. The Greek rendering of Raki as *Rachias* reproduces by the usage of χ / *chi* the light aspiration, which can be found even in present-day Sinhalese. To strengthen the argument we are advancing, it suffices to state here that the consonant "ki" in the Sinhalese verb "rakinava" (meaning "to guard", "to keep", "to protect", "to preserve", "to

³⁴S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 78. Note: the Roman characters in bold type used here for personal names are those of Senarath Paranavitana.

³⁵*Ibid*, p. 78 note 1.

cherish", etc.) *still* has a light aspiration³⁶. Our conjecture finds further support from Albrecht Weber, who, writing about the aspirate χ in Greek pronunciation of "Hindu" words as early as in 1876, pointed out that it stands for k in $\chi\alpha\beta\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ("Kavera" in Sanskrit and "Kaveri" in Tamil, name of a river in South India appearing in Ptolemy's *Geography*, VII, 1, 13³⁷), $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\delta\omicron\chi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\varsigma$, $\mu\acute{o}\sigma\chi\omicron\varsigma$ and considering *Rachias* as a historical name, identifies it as a Greek rendering of "**rakkhasa* (? *râkshasa*, *râjan* according to Lassen)"³⁸.

The Sanskrit "râkshasa" that Weber signaled with a question mark in fact derives from the root "râksas" meaning "to be guarded against", (although it is also used deprecatively of demonic beings when referring to the original inhabitants both in India and Ceylon -the King Râvana of the *Râmâyana* being a well-known case in point). According to Soma Basu, this is probably because of their professed hostility to the sacrificial cults of the Aryans³⁹. If we consider Weber's conjecture that the Greek aspirate χ represents the Indian "k" in the above examples, without simply accepting it at face value, we need to correct his error that the Greek c represents kh in $\kappa\acute{o}\lambda\chi\omicron\iota$ (which he wrongly transcribes as *Kûrkhi*)⁴⁰ because in Tamil the place-name is "Korkai"⁴¹. In the phonological analysis of inscriptions carried out by Parānavitana, "Raki" is shown as being derived from the Sanskrit "Raksya" (meaning "to be guarded", "to be protected") and the consonant cluster "sya" yielding "i"⁴². The Raki mentioned in the two inscriptions n° 994 [1] and n° 1000 [7] above deserves our attention because they suggest that he probably lived at (or at least owned land in) Sâsseruva in the present day Kurunegala district, bordering the Anuradhapura district to the south (*see* fig. 2. Map of Taprobanê by Claudius

³⁶The author of this contribution is a Sinhalese and taught that language at the School of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) and at the School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHSS) in Paris.

³⁷L. Renou, *op. cit.*, : $\chi\alpha\beta\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ποτάμου έκβολαι 129° 15' 15', p. 7; $\chi\alpha\beta\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ ἐμπόριον 129° 20' 15' 20', p. 8.

³⁸Albrecht Weber, "Hindu Pronunciation of Greek, and Greek Pronunciation of Hindu Words", trans by E. Rehatsek, *Indian Antiquary*, 2, 1873, p. 150 and p. 148. See the original article in German language in *Monatsbericht der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, December 1971, pp. 613-632. Note: in both these articles almost all the Greek terms cited appear without accent. Cf. Faller, *op. cit.*, p. 77 n. 378.

³⁹Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *Encyclopedia of Ancient India*, Delhi, p. 310, s.v. Râksasa.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 150 and p. 147.

⁴¹See "Explorations at Korkai and Kayal" in Bishop Caldwell, *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely, in the Presidency of Madras, from the Earliest Period to its Cession to the English Government in A. D. 1801*, Madras, Government Press, 1881, (Reprint by Asian Educational Service, New Delhi, 1982).

⁴²S. Parānavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. xxxvii.

Ptolemy, showing Anuradhapura as Ἐνουρόγραμμα βασιλείου 124° 30' 8° 20', *Geography*, VII, chap. IV)⁴³.

According to Paranavitana, the two "Raki's mentioned in the inscriptions are the same individual. It is quite possible that the individual of these two inscriptions is the Rachias that Pliny mentions, given the fact that he was the son-in-law of the reigning monarch and he may have lived in the region just south of the capital. The donation of the cave made by Raki's wife and the offering made by Raki himself indicate that the Raki family had close connections with the region just south of Anuradhapura. The other alternative is to suppose that this same Raki, who was a younger son-in-law of the reigning monarch, later served in an important capacity as a senior diplomat during the reign of the king's son. If this Raki could be the right person, he might have been chosen as a fitting dignitary to represent the king and the country at the court of the Roman emperor, whose might and prestige had impressed the king of Taprobané.

It is also of vital importance to note that in the second inscription above (n° 1000 [7]) the individual in question is described not only as the chief Raki, but also as the son of the chief of so-and-so (the name is unfortunately obliterated), suggesting that he bore the title of the "parumaka", inheriting it from his father who was also a "parumaka". We must recall here Pliny's assertion that Rachias' father had frequently travelled to the country of the Seres, for thus both Rachias' father and Raki's father were of some importance. Combining the pieces of evidence gives us a consistent picture of a senior ("parumaka") Raki travelling abroad, very probably on an important mission, and a junior ("parumaka") Raki coming to Rome on a similar mission and also in an official capacity. If they are not the same person, the functions they carried out were clearly similar: playing the role of an ambassador or an envoy overseas. Without the knowledge of these inscriptions Weerakkody intuitively arrives at a similar conclusion, which is an insight worthy of note⁴⁴. We can therefore be confident that the chief of the embassy sent to Rome was a person of high rank, related to the monarch or else very close to him. It goes without saying that this Raki could be the right candidate for Pliny's ambassador Rachias.

Our identification of this Raki with Rachias can now be firmly corroborated with the aid of historical records because among the kings of Anuradhapura who bore the royal title "Devānapiya-maharajha" and the personal name "Gāmani-Abaya" there was just one king who had a son named Bhâtikābhaya (also written Bhâtika Abhaya and Bhâtiya Tissa) who ascended

⁴³L. Renou, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁴⁴"[...] we have here a father and a son, both of whom have served as envoys abroad. This evokes the suggestion of a family inheriting some high state of office which entails service as envoys of the king in foreign countries", *op. cit.*, p. 59.

the throne after his father, a fact well attested in the chronicles⁴⁵. The same sources also bear witness to the proverbial reputation that the king Bhâtikabhaya enjoyed for having imported vermilion coral from the land of the Romans⁴⁶.

We find the key to the enigma posed by the identity of this Raki in the clarifications of Paranavitana himself. In ten donatory inscriptions (n° 1018 to n° 1027) made by the prince Tisa or Tissa at Gallena-vihâra (literally "troglodytic temple") situated about 10 km from Sâsseruwa and about 35 km south of Anuradhapura, the then capital of the island, the donor declares that he is the son of the king Devânapiya-maharaja Gâmani-Abaya. In 1883, when epigraphic and historical studies in Ceylon were in their infancy, Edward Müller identified this latter with Vattagâmani Abhaya⁴⁷, taking Tissa for Mahâcûli Mahatissa, who in fact was the son of Khallata Naga but was adopted as a son by Vattagamani, according to Paranavitana himself⁴⁸. He wonders if Mahâcûli himself would have referred to Vattagâmani, as his father, ignoring altogether Khallata-Nâga, who was in fact his true father. Furthermore, Paranavitana emphasizes the absence of mention of Mahâcûli's father in any of his own inscriptions⁴⁹.

This, and other paleographic and linguistic evidence, prompts Paranavitana to reject the identity established by Ed. Müller (and accepted by Wickremasinghe), and, on the other hand, to consider Devanapiya-maharaja Gâmani-Abaya, mentioned in the ten inscriptions (n° 1018 to n° 1027), as the king Kutakanna Abhaya who styles himself Putakana Gâmani Abaya in several inscriptions of his own, and the prince Tisa or Tissa, appearing as the donor in the same above-mentioned ten inscriptions, as his son who ascended the throne under the name of Bhâtika Tissa⁵⁰. Lamotte⁵¹ and Geiger⁵² accept the

⁴⁵"After his death [i. e. Kutakanna-Tissa's] his son, the prince named Bhâtikâbhaya, reigned twenty-two years", *Mahâvamsa*, XXXIV, 37; "Prince named [Bhâtika]Abhaya, the son of Kutakanna[Tissa] [...] reigned twenty-eight years", *Dîpavamsa*, XXI, 1-30.

⁴⁶*Vamsatthappakâsnî Commentary on the Mahâvamsa*, G. P. Malalasekera (ed.), London, The Pali Text Society, 1935, 2 Vols., p. 630.

⁴⁷Edward Müller, *Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon*, New Delhi, Asian educational Services, 1984, p. 73. (First published 1883).

⁴⁸For a detailed discussion of this identification, see "No. 20. Gallena-Vihara Inscriptions", *Epigraphia Zeylanica being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. V, 1963, pp. 253-259 + plates 26, 27 and 28.

⁴⁹See C. W. Nicholas, "Texts of Brâhmî Inscriptions in the Ruhunu National Park", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon)*, Vol. II, (New Series), 1952, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁰See S. Paranavitana's discussion about the "Identification of the kings figuring in the inscriptions", *op. cit.*, p. lxii.

⁵¹Etienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère Saka*, Leuven, Institut Orientaliste, 1958, p. 535.

genealogical tree thus established for this royal duo in another inscription by Paranavitana⁵³ and implicitly endorse his rejection of Ed. Müller's conclusions.

Now we are in a position to reinforce our argument, which consists of showing that the son-in-law of Kutakanna Abhaya and the brother-in-law of his son and successor to the throne, Tissa, is well and truly the Raki sent to Rome during the principate of Claudius. The paternity of king Kutakanna Abhaya (from 16 to 38 A. D. according to Geiger and 13-35 A. D. according to E. Lamotte) and his son Tissa (from 38 to 66 A. D. according to Geiger and 35-63 A. D. according to E. Lamotte) are well attested by perfectly tallying inscriptions⁵⁴, enabling us to provide reasonably precise time-brackets (differing only by a few years according to the chronological indicators one adopts) for the regnal years of these two kings. We then concur with Meredith who, following Ziegler⁵⁵, placed Pliny's stay in Rome (including the first three years of Claudius' reign from 41 to 44 A. D.) at the time of the arrival of the embassy of Taprobanê in the court of Claudius and also the idea put forward by De Romanis, to consider the reign of Claudius as a reference point for the dating of that of Bhâtikâbhaya who cannot have preceded the reign of Claudius, or rather that of Caligula. Regrettably, De Romanis does not bring Meredith's valuable deductive insights into the discussion when advancing his own proposal to accept Pliny's explicit statement that the embassy was received at the court of Claudius.

Referring back to inscriptions n° 994 [1] and n° 1000 [7], the unique Raki mentioned within the purview of these royal paternal ties, given that the donations in question were made near the capital, seems in fact to be Rachias the chief of the ambassadors of Taprobanê sent to Rome during the early forties of the first century A. D. Pliny's Red Sea tax farmer Annius Plocamus left no surviving traces behind (at least in the records brought to light so far) except for his freedmen, who indirectly attest to his existence and the position he held. As for Raki, it is through his spouse, the princess Anuridi, that his existence is known because he is associated with the donation she made. He left a trace of himself by engraving a record of his donation upon the rock, separated only by a

⁵²Wilhelm Geiger, "Königsnamen in den Brâhmi - Inschriften Ceylons", Festschrift Moritz Winternitz, edited by Otto Stein and Wilhelm Gampert, Leipzig, Otto Harrassowitz, 1933 pp. 317-318.

⁵³See "No. 18. Molâhitiyavelêgala Inscriptions of King Abhaya and King Nâga", S. Paranavitana's *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume I Part I Late Brâhmi Inscriptions*, Colombo, Department of Archaeology, 1983, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁴See "No. 5. Puliyankadawala Rock-Inscription", p. 6 (inscription is not reproduced); and "No. 9. Dunumandalakanda Rock- Inscription of Bhâtika", pp. 10-11 + plate V, S. Paranavitana's *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume II Part I Late Brâhmi Inscriptions*, Colombo, Department of Archaeology, 1983.

⁵⁵D. Meredith, *art. cit.*, p. 39.

short distance from the rock-inscription of his wife. Hence he is not alone in having a rock inscription. We can legitimately think that it is thus the ambassador to Rome, prince by marriage, who left his trace upon the rock side by side with his wife.

**The Occurrence of *Very Red Coral* from "Romanukharatta" in
the *Vamsatthappakâsini***

This rediscovery of Raki prompts us to examine briefly the occurrence of the Pali place-name "romanukharatta" in the *Vamsatthappakâsini* (generally called *Mahâvamsa-Tîka*), the redaction of which is dated between the years 1000 and 1250 A. D. by Geiger⁵⁶, while Malalasekera assumes an earlier date. This text comments upon the royal chronicles entitled the *Mahâvamsa* (the "Great Chronicle") and the *Dîpavamsa* (the "Chronicle of the Island"), which mention a ritual of religious fervor performed by King Bhâtikabhaya in the following terms:

"He had a priceless net of coral [pavâljâla] prepared and cast **over** the *cetiya*" (*Mahâvamsa*, XXXIV, 50).

"He ordered a priceless net-work of corals [pavâljâla] to be made, covering the surface of the Mahâthûpa as if it were dressed in a garment" (*Dîpavamsa*, XXI, 13).

To explain the term "pavâljâla" ("net-work of corals" or "net of coral") which describes the covering of the great *stûpa* (hemispherical domed building enclosing relic-chambers and erected as a Buddhist shrine) by King Bhâtikabhaya mentioned in the *Dîpavamsa* and in the *Mahâvamsa*, the commentary on this chronicle, namely the *Vamsatthappakâsini* provides us with a gloss which states that:

he [sc. Bhâtikâbhaya] had a net of coral prepared, that is, having sent [without naming a person] to the country named Romanukha overseas, he had *very red coral* brought and had a great coral-*flamed* net prepared large enough to cover it entirely⁵⁷,

[the *cetiya*], namely the Buddhist edifice par excellence, still venerated at Anuradhapura. (It comes under one of the UNESCO conservation projects of

⁵⁶Wilhelm Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Medieval Times*, Heinz Bechert, (ed.), Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1960, p. 72.

⁵⁷"Pavâljâlam kâretvâ ti paratîre Romanukharattham nâma pesetvâ surattapavâlam âharâpetvâ sabbâvantam parikkhepâraham mahantam pavâlacchikâjalam karâpetvâ", *Vamsatthappakâsini Commentary on the Mahâvamsa*, op. cit., p. 630.

the heritage of humanity⁵⁸. It is not out of place to mention the omission of two crucial attributive terms qualifying the intense redness of coral, a conspicuous feature which none of the commentators of the passage including Peiris, Schwarz, Weerakkody, and De Romanis who, while professing to translate it from the original text in Pali, have rendered appropriately : *suratta* (su+ratta) as "very red" and *pavâlacchikâjala* (pavâla+acchikâ+jâla) lit. as a "coral / net of blazing-flames"⁵⁹. Hence the unequivocal relevance of those terms to our discussion.

The Latin adjective "Romanus" and the Sinhalese "Romanuka"

Paranavitana in the *History of Ceylon*, points out that the name "Romanukha" in Pali and "Romanuka" in Sinhalese with its pleonastic suffix -ka, is modeled on the Latin adjective "Romanus". To this, we may add the observation that in Pali, place-names and proper names often end with an aspirated -kha, or -kkha. For example, the Sinhalese name Raka which becomes Rakha, much as the Sinhalese term "romanuka" becomes "romanukha". If we may be allowed a conjecture - "Romanukha" might have been at the outset simply "romanuka" without aspiration in the suffix. This is because the tendency among the ancient Sinhalese was to de-aspirate words such as "rattha" ("country", "land"), whence our hypothesis that "Romanukha-rattha" must have been simply "romanuka-rata" (without aspiration and gemination in each part of the compound respectively) in the language spoken by Raki. One other minor detail is worthy of note : in "Romanukha" the vowel "o" is long, corresponding to the long vowel of the Latin "Romanus" ("Roman" as in English) which is significant for our purpose, because it shows how the transposition places it exactly as it should be: "Romanus" = "Romanukha".

According to the Italian historian F. De Romanis the "Indianisation" of the first element of the compound "romanukha-rattha" is *hapax legomenon* in all the ancient literature of India; further he notes that this word explicitly associates the Roman empire with red coral, and is thus an authentic, precious

⁵⁸See "Ruwanweli dagoba at Anuradhapura", in Roloff Beny, *Island Ceylon*, New York, The Viking Press, 1970, p. 58; Senake Bandaranayake, *Sri Lanka Ceylon : Eine Insel Zivilisation*, Paris, Delroisse, 1980, plate 61.

⁵⁹See for example, "Ha fatto fare una rete di corallo, cioè : egli ha inviato qualcuno al cosiddetto *romanukharattha*, oltre il mare, ha fatto venire il corallo rosso ed ha fatto fare una grande rete di corallo, perché fosse posta tutta intorno", De Romanis, "Romanukharattha e Taprobane", *art. cit.*, p. 40; "Er ließ ein Netz aus Korallen fertigen, das heißt, er schickte (jemanden) in das Romanukha-Reich jenseits des Meeres und holte von dort rote Korallen und ließ ein herrliches Netz aus Korallen fertigen, das würdig genug war, über (das Heiligtum) geworfen zu werden)", S. Faller translating from Peiris' citation, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

relic of the popular memory. Isn't this Sinhalization much more important as a relic of the first Sri Lankan diplomatic mission to Rome than as a relic of trade or of folk memory? De Romanis further notes that this *hapax legomenon* is all the more important since the Buddhist historiography of Sri Lanka apparently preserved nothing about the flourishing contacts that existed between it and China⁶⁰, and it is thanks to the Chinese sources that we learn about successive missions between the two countries. It is regrettable that De Romanis fails to acknowledge Paranavitana's remarkable insight into that *hapax legomenon*. It was he who brought to light its conspicuousness by using a capital "R" in "Romanukha", notwithstanding the fact that neither the Sinhalese nor the Pali has capital letters for proper names. Thus Paranavitana drove home the point that the Sinhalese word "Romanuka" is merely a transposition of the Latin "Romanus"!

In the survival of this name, "romanukharattha", Weerakkody sees an indication of the exceptional importance and official character of Rachias' embassy. Raschke who wrote about Pliny's account of Taprobanê, referring to this episode, quotes Edmund Peiris as saying that the king of Sri Lanka "sent a present of a coral net to *Romanuka* across the sea"⁶¹, which is not only counter-intuitive but also an obvious falsification of Peiris' statement⁶². To send coral to the Mediterranean would be to 'carry coals to Newcastle', as the English say, for it was from the Mediterranean that red coral was exported to India. Raschke does not mention the *redness* of the coral which is important to our argument⁶³. Red coral was harvested in the Mediterranean from early antiquity⁶⁴, and Pliny mentions this activity more than once. In fact in *Nat. hist.*, XXXII, 23, he expresses amazement regarding how highly red coral of Roman origin was prized by the Indians:

"Coral berries are no less valued by Indian men than are large Indian pearls by Roman women. Indian soothsayers and seers think that coral is a very

⁶⁰Mahinda Werake, "Sino-Sri Lankan Relations During the Pre-Colonial Times", *Sri Lanka and the Silk Roads of the Sea*, Senake Bandaranayake, Roland Silva *et al* (ed.) Colombo, Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO and the Central Cultural Fund, 1990, pp. 221-231; "A New Date for the Beginning of Sino-Sri Lankan Relations", *Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, Vol. IV, numbers 1 & 2, 1978, pp. 64-72.

⁶¹Manfred G. Raschke, "New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East", in H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Berlin, New York, 1978, II, 9, 2, 604-1365, at 576 n. 1315.

⁶²See E. Peiris, "Greek and Roman Contacts with Ceylon", *Ceylon Historical Journal*, Vol. X, Numbers 1 to 4, July 1960 to April 1961, p. 18.

⁶³"Coral, especially red coral" writes Peiris quoting S. Paranavitana "was, and is, a well known product of the Mediterranean [...]", *ibid*.

⁶⁴Patrick Mouton, *Corail rouge*, Marseilles, Editions Autres temps, 1993, 175 pp. See pp. 84, 85 and 87 for colour illustrations of red coral.

powerful amulet for warding off dangers. Accordingly they take pleasure in it both as a thing of beauty and as a thing of religious power"⁶⁵.

This confirms the influence that red coral imported from the Mediterranean exerted on the culture and ritual cults of ancient Sri Lanka. Weerakkody drew attention to this incorrect citation by Raschke but he did not emphasize the import of this mistake and its consequences. By considering the unintended journey of Annius Plocamus' freedman to Taprobanê and Raki's mission to Rome as mere figments of the imagination, Raschke deprives not only chronicles of Sri Lanka, but also Pliny, of two invaluable testimonies without which we would never have known anything about this remarkable episode. But a careful interpretation of Sri Lankan epigraphic sources and Pali chronicles on the one hand, and the manuscript tradition of the Latin text of Pliny along with the bilingual inscriptions from the Egyptian Red Sea coast on the other, gives a clear picture of an embassy's path-finding mission involving cross-cultural communication between East and West in the ancient world.

Bhâtikâbhaya (35/8 - 63/6 A. D.), a Contemporary of Claudius (43 - 51 A. D.)

Pliny's account of Rachias' embassy to Rome is thus illuminated by the epigraphic records which shed light on the identity of its leader and thus on an important episode in the history of Sri Lanka. The only record of this diplomatic overture in the Sri Lankan chronicles is preserved in the name "romanukharattha", meaning the Roman-country or the Roman Empire, which recalls the pious installation of a net made of very red coral brought from the Roman-country. We find here support for Pliny's statement that Raki was received at the court of Claudius, and corroboration of the conjecture of Fallér and De Romanis that Bhâtikâbhaya (according to Geiger, 38-66 A. D.⁶⁶; and according to Wickremasinghe, 42-70 A. D.⁶⁷; and according to E. Lamotte, 35-63 A. D.⁶⁸) was contemporary with Claudius (43-51 A. D.). These dates

⁶⁵"auctoritas bacaram eius non minus Indorum viris quoque pretiosa est quam feminis nostris uniones Indici. haruspices eorum vatesque inprimis religiosum id gestamen amoliendis periculis arbitrantur. ita et decore et religione gaudent", Pliny, *Natural History* with an English translation in ten volumes: Volume VII, Libri XXVIII-XXXII, London, William Heinemann, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 478-479.

⁶⁶*The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, trans. by Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Haynes Bode, Colombo, The Ceylon Information Department, 1950, see "List of the Ancient Kings of Ceylon", pp. XXXVI-XXXVII.

⁶⁷D. M. D. Z. Wickremasinghe, *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, *op. cit.*, [the chronology of the kings] between pp. 142-143.

⁶⁸Etienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme.. op. cit.*, p. 534.

correspond to the chronology of the kings of Sri Lanka established by Lamotte and Geiger, which are based exclusively on the *Dīpavamsa* (XXI, 30) and the *Mahāvamsa* (XXXIV, 37).

Raschke asserts that there is nothing in this "sailor's yarn" that sheds any light on the date of the discovery and use of the south-west monsoon⁶⁹. But Raki and his suite arrived at Rome and came back to his country safe and sound bringing *very* red coral. In fact there can be little doubt that he used the monsoon for his return voyage from the Egyptian Red Sea coast to Sri Lanka. Thus Cary and Warmington are not far from the mark when they state that this episode may have given the Egyptian Greeks an impetus to use the navigational winds and directions to reach farther shores that were thus brought within the sphere of expanding Roman knowledge of the Indian Ocean⁷⁰.

The monetary aspect of the episode, in which the King of Taprobanê scrutinizes the Roman coins minted by various emperors, was cited by Raschke as highly dubious because it comes from a sailor's yarn. The credit belongs to De Romanis for having brought to light several passages from Sri Lankan chronicles bearing upon the numismatic culture prevalent among the ancient Sinhalese. This he does by way of a few pertinent and groundbreaking observations on the *rupasutta* (the "science of coinage")⁷¹ of the Sinhalese which could provide a probable background to understanding why the Roman money was subjected to close scrutiny by the King of Taprobanê.

There is no way to be certain how the freedman and his crew sailed back home accompanying Raki to Rome and then how the ambassador regained his homeland from Egyptian Red Sea Coast bringing an immense quantity of red coral to the Sri Lankan capital Anuradhapura, but there is evidence which suggests that the use of the monsoon was known to the Egyptian Greeks. This evidence is found in Ptolemy's account of Taprobanê abounding in place-names and of the islands surrounding it in the *Geography*, written a century after Pliny. This data could only have been compiled from actual circumnavigation of the island and from familiarity with its coasts as well as its hinterland⁷².

The evidence presented here indicates that the name Raki neither came out of the blue nor was invented as a part of a "sailor's yarn", as was asserted by Raschke three times, as well as being "half heartedly" claimed by Dihle⁷³. We

⁶⁹Manfred G. Raschke, "New Studies.....", at p. 644, p. 662 and p. 976.

⁷⁰M. Cary and E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, p. 97.

⁷¹De Romanis, *Crossings*, *op. cit.*, p. 184 ff.

⁷²See Louis Renou, *La Géographie de Ptolémée. L'Inde*, *op. cit.*, "CARTE de TAPROBANE d'après le Venetus 516 (R)".

⁷³solcher Seemannsgeschichten ... ", Albrecht Dihle, "Die entdeckungs geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen des Indienhandels der römischer Kaiserzeit", in H. Temporini (ed.),

say "half-heartedly" because Dihle, less vehement than Raschke, thinks that this "sailor's yarn" has a kernel of truth in it, as the Annius Plocamus whom Pliny mentions is attested in the inscriptions found in Eastern Egypt. Casson, who devotes some passages to Eastern embassies received in Rome (in his discussion about the dating of the *Periplus*), makes no mention whatever of the embassy which Pliny describes⁷⁴. His silence prompts us to infer that he blindly adhered to the view of Raschke because when examining the evidence for embassies from India he chose to cite the latter ("see Raschke p. 1045, note 1623"). Otherwise, there is no reason for Casson to keep silent about this episode⁷⁵ which serves as a key for dating the *Periplus* which we venture to place immediately prior to the despatching of the Taprobanê embassy to Rome.

In fact our evidence would seem to bolster Meredith's contention that the main statements in Pliny's account cannot be doubted unless firm new contradictory evidence is provided⁷⁶ and De Romanis' assertion that we need to place greater confidence in Pliny's words. This is how Weerakkody states the foregoing: "The embassy must therefore be assigned to the reign of Claudius. The specific statement of Pliny is undoubtedly more worthy of trust than a number of implications derived from external evidence"⁷⁷.

Those few scholars who still cling to the way of reasoning of Raschke, one of the most vociferous of those who disparage Pliny⁷⁸ and deny the endeavors of Sinhalese Kings to initiate diplomatic overtures, must now, of course, in one way or another explain the mention of Raki in Sri Lankan inscriptions and must mount another operation to "salvage something" out of this "sailor's yarn" just as they did for Annius Plocamus mentioned in the bilingual inscriptions found in Egypt in 1953⁷⁹. Our evidence confirms that Pliny's episode took place under Claudius in Rome, places the freedman of Annius Plocamus on the Egyptian Red Sea coast and Raki in Taprobanê,

Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, Berlin, New York, 1978, II, 9, 2, 567-573, at 569.

⁷⁴"It is worthwhile to examine the evidence for embassies in some detail"; "Next, the embassies from India", *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, trans. by L. Casson, Princeton, N. J. 1989, p. 37 and p. 38.

⁷⁵Casson's answer to the question we addressed to him: "I have no opinion about the embassy mentioned by Pliny", pers. comm. 8. 2. 2008.

⁷⁶D. Meredith, *art. cit.*, p. 39.

⁷⁷D. P. M. W. Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷⁸"A curious story told by Pliny in his description of Ceylon has also been drawn into the argument. Our author parade as new information the story of a freedman of Annius Plocamus [...]", Raschke, *op. cit.*, p. 662. The Italic type is ours.

⁷⁹Referring to D. Meredith's contribution to *JRS*, 43, 1943, Raschke writes "Despite the apparent distortions of the tale, something may be salvaged", *article. cited.*, p. 644 and p. 849 n. 10.

thus corroborating the roles of the three key persons in this remarkable story of contact between ancient Sri Lanka and the Mediterranean.

We conclude, therefore, that Pliny is well justified when he states that he had acquired new information about the affairs of Taprobanê from the freedman and from the ambassadors who arrived from there in Rome while he was still in the capital. It is thus no longer tenable to subscribe to Raschke's assertion that the Roman historian swallowed a tall story by virtue of which he took pride in «parading» such a "*curious* story" as a new acquisition to his knowledge of the world. Let us then give thanks to Pliny, as, without him, we would not have been able to identify Rachias or make any connection with Sinhalese chronicles. On the other hand, it is thanks to these chronicles, as well as to the Sinhalese inscriptions, that we have been able to support, helped by exterior onomastic information, the text of Pliny, which is thus a most precious relic in which the name Rachias figures⁸⁰.

ANANDA ABEYDEERA

⁸⁰This paper was presented as a lecture to the Seminar for Roman Culture and History of Religions of the University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany, on 4th December 2007 at the invitation of Prof. Dr. Veit Rosenberger and Dr. Katharina Waldner and to the Faculty of Arts Seminar Series, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka on 30th January 2008 at the invitation of Professor Emeritus Ashley Halpé.

CEYLON

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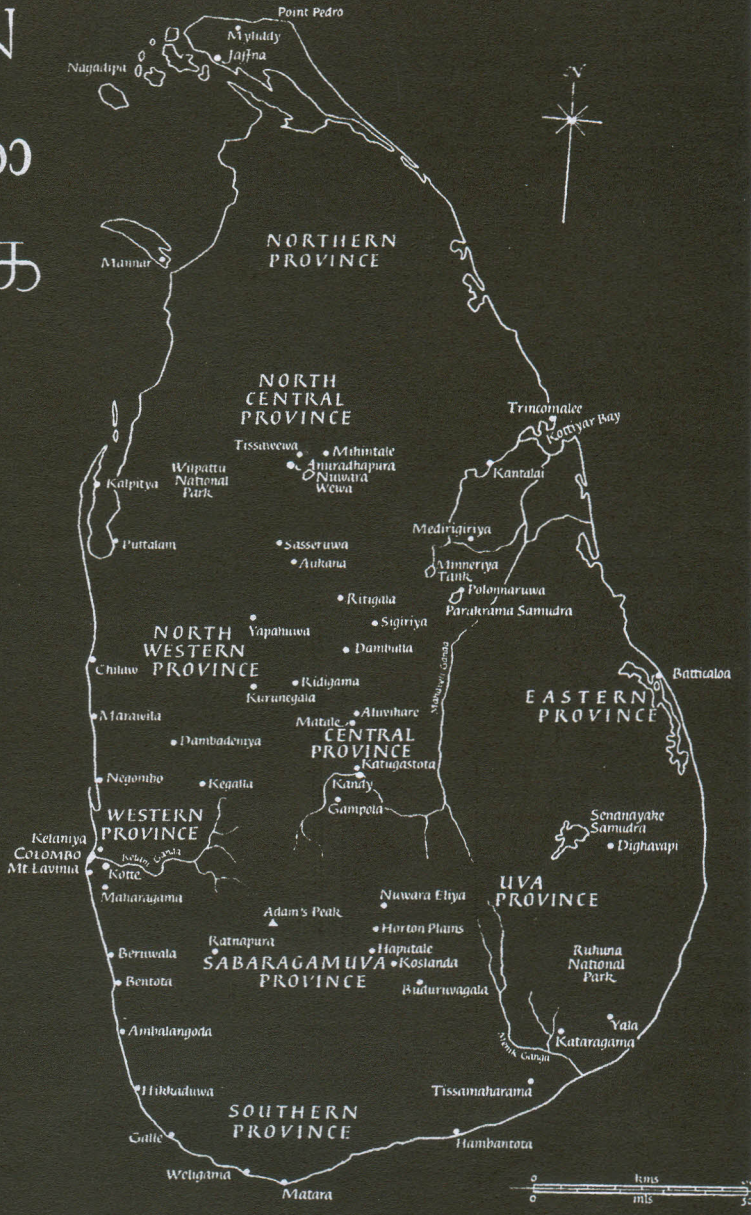


Figure 1, Map of Sri Lanka

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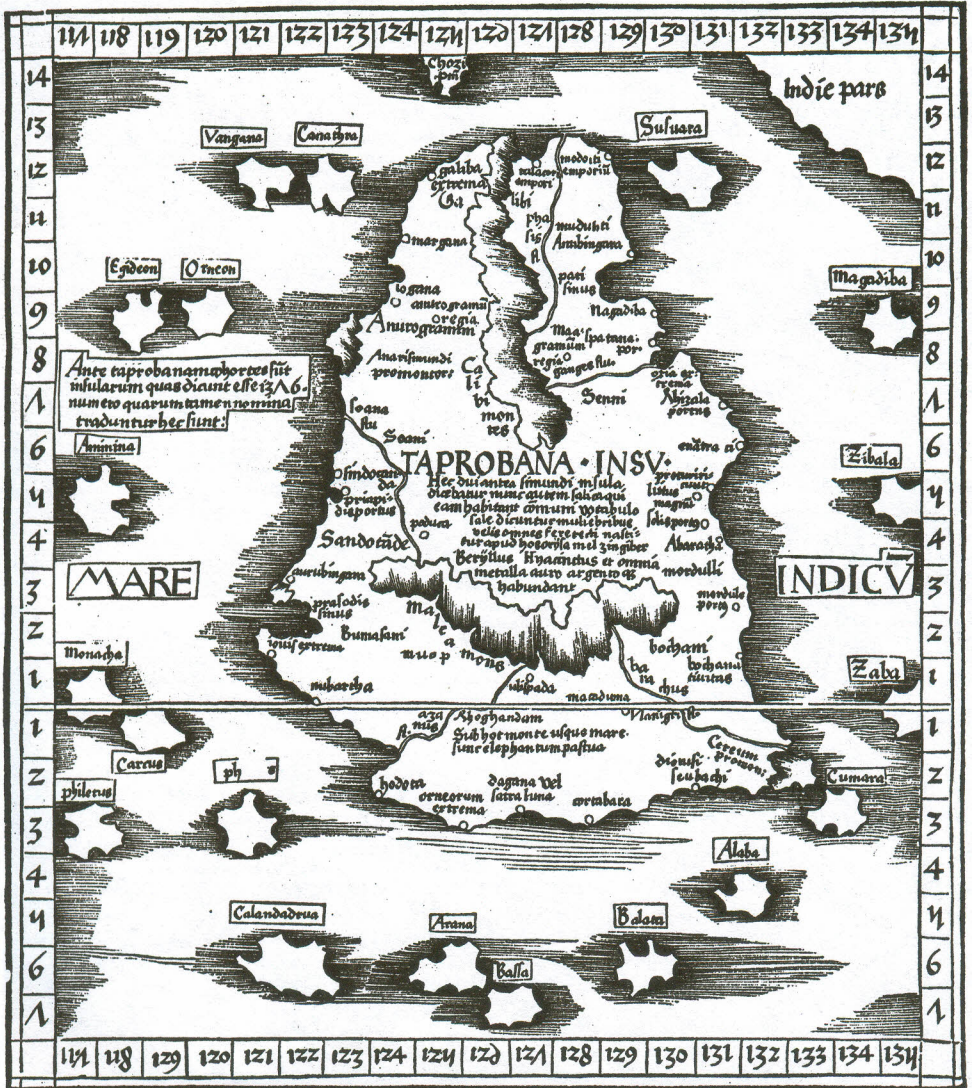


Figure 2