

## Background of the Ancient Indo – Western trade: An historical point of view

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The big maritime quarter of commerce stretching from the red Sea to the verge of the South China Sea had grown to be, by means of the 1st century advert, a fact for the Mediterranean world. through this time, Westerners had been voyaging throughout a widespread part of the red Sea – northern Indian Ocean or the seas they knew because the Erythra Thalass (Erythraean Sea).

The accounts of the early Roman crusing within the northern Indian Ocean / Erythraean Sea are graphically presented within the Periplus Maris Erythraei a sea – manual to ports on the Egypt – India route compiled by means of an anonymous Greek mariner in the 1st century AD. Occidental expertise approximately the Orient is likewise expressed in detail within the great work of cartography, the Geographia (henceforth Geog.) compiled by Claudius Ptolemy within the 2nd century AD.<sup>1</sup>

But, it ought to be borne in thoughts that normal voyaging in the northern Indian Ocean or the Erythraean Sea' represents the culmination of an extended endeavour by Mediterranean civilizations to are seeking for direct get entry to to lands beyond the horrific el – Mandeb (strait connecting the red Sea with the Indian Ocean).<sup>2</sup>

The endeavour may additionally have started whilst the Israeli King Solomon built a fleet of service provider ships within the tenth century BC to alternate with the fabled port of Ophir, which, amongst other areas, has been concept to be placed in India. Subsequently, early Hellenic missions to find out the vintage maritime routes and buying and selling stations of the western Indian Ocean are pondered in instances which include the pioneering voyages of the Greek mariner Scylax who sailed from the Indus to the red Sea in 512 BC<sup>3</sup> and of Alexander's admiral Nearchus who surveyed the Makran coast in 325 BC.<sup>4</sup> Alexander himself, getting ready to emulate Scylax'

circumnavigation of Arabia, had despatched out expeditions to reconnoiter the Persian Gulf simply before his demise in 323 BC.

Inside the years following Alexander's demise the successor dynasties, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of West Asia, carved out respective 'spheres of impact' inside the red Sea and the Persian Gulf inside the third – first centuries BC. Ptolemaic kings consolidated their reach right as much as the Bab el – Mandeb wherein they built a string of harbours on the African aspect of the straits.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Seleucids hooked up their presence inside the Persian Gulf through an energetic policy of colonization and the advent of army outposts inside the long way Oman.<sup>6</sup>

A vital knowledge approximately sailing inside the Indian Ocean acquired with the aid of sailors from the Mediterranean became the use of the seasonal southwest monsoon winds to traverse the excessive seas to India. The Periplus informs us that the Greeks knew this wind as hippalus, from the name of the 'pilot who, via gazing the region of ports and conditions of the sea, first located how to lay his course instantly throughout the ocean'.

Its miles nonetheless no longer clear precisely when Mediterranean sea – men came to apply the south – west exchange winds. Likely the discovery took place inside the context of early Greek voyages inside the last centuries BC, mainly the day trip of Eudoxus of Cyzicus with whom the story of hippalus is associated.<sup>7</sup>

However, even though the direct sea direction from Egypt to India had turn out to be regarded via late 1st millennium BC, its use seems to have been infrequent and sporadic. The geographer Strabo, having heard of Roman buying and selling vessels equipped to set sail for India from the harbor of Myos Hormos in 25 BC says that 'before below the Ptolemaic king only a few vessels undertook to sail there and carry back Indian merchandise.'<sup>8</sup>

In the absence of normal contact, the predominant flow of commodities between Ptolemaic Egypt and India became treated by means of Arab middlemen via important entrepots at the south Arabian coast. The Periplus makes this clear by describing the

situation on the port of Eudamon Arabia (modern-day Aden) in which 'inside the early days of the city whilst the voyage changed into now not but crafted from India to Egypt and once they did no longer dare sail from Egypt to ports throughout this ocean, however all got here collectively at this place. The Gulf of Aden appears to had been the region where Mediterranean – Indian commercial pastimes met in the 1st millennium BC.<sup>9</sup>

With the conquest of Egypt via Augustus Caesar in 31 BC and the consolidation of Roman authority in the red sea within the wake of Aelius Gallus invasion of south Arabia in 25 BC, the extent of business interest on the Egypt – India sea rout escalated. On this regard we once more depend upon cross the testimony of Strabo who says: 'formerly not twenty ships dared to move the Arabian Gulf a ways enough to appearance outside the straits (Bable – Mandeb). Now huge fleets are sent as a long way as India and to jthe furthest ends of Ethiopia from which the maximum precious cargoes are carried to Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

Archaeological corroboration of Strabo's testimony for Roman initiation of direct sea – borne trade with India become first recommend through Mortimer Wheeler, who approaches of the proof from his excavation on the Indo – Roman buying and selling station of Arikamedu on the Tamil coast: 'The historic indicators are that the consolidation and development of Roman alternate with the East was a manufactured from the unification of the Western world under Augustus (23 BC – ad 14), and it's far affordable to think that previous exchange... became of a spasmodic and indirect type – not likely, for instance, to have produced a continuous deliver of amphorae at Arikamedu.<sup>11</sup>

The ports, anchorages and buying and selling – stations positioned along the red Sea, the Gulf of Aden qand the Gulf of Oman provided business possibilities and safe haven toi mariners, traders and middlemen the usage of the Egypt – India corridor and venturing past. There may be multiple purposes to believe that the commencement of direct and ordinary commerce between Roman Egypt and India grew into an increasing network of change in those littoral areas of the northern Indian Ocean now not without

delay positioned on the Egypt – India route. These associated sub – regions are the Persian Gulf vicinity, the Gulf of Aden area, the Swahili coast and Southeast Asia.

At the same time, the conventional conduits, which linked these Indian Ocean regions, endured to characteristic as earlier than. a number of these conduits (Persian Gulf – India, Southeast Asia – India), lengthy predated the establishment of Indo – Roman maritime touch.

#### References:

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- <sup>8</sup> . Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> . Ibid.
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