

Facharbeit

Influence of the trade between Asia and Europe on India

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1 Introduction

1.1 Summary

1.2 Thesis Statement

My thesis stament: the trade between Asia and Europe, in both directions, had a profound effect on India by introducing Islam, influencing the political structure, and forming the basis for colonisation.

1.3 Methodology

2 Trade up to the age of Islam

Trade in this time, before the trade movements were consolidated under the peace and security offered by the Islamic conquests of Arabia, moved both on the land route via the middle east and from India over the india ocean to the Red Sea, and from there on to Egypt or the eastern coast of the Medditeranean.¹ For both of these routes, the Medditeranean served as the distributor to Europe.²

2.1 Traded goods

While most of the goods traded were spice and other special, often medical, plants, luxuries like silk and gems were also increasingly in demand from a prosperous upper class in the Roman empire.³

2.1.1 Spice

At the time, spices were appreciated not just as enhancers of food, but primarily as medicine.⁴ The spices came from India, modern-day Indonesia, and China. Cinnamon, for example, is native to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the Malabar Coast of India itself.⁵

2.1.2 Precious stones

Some Gems could only be sourced outside Europe, and due to their compactness were attractive trade goods. However, as the demand for spice far outpaced that for percious stones,⁶ they were not the main focus of many merchants.

In this era, the stones were often engraved, a technique found in almost all early cultures. The craftsmen performing this work in Greece and Rome were so famous that

¹Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, Chapter 7.

²These routes are recorded in the first-century BC anonymous work *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.

³Veen and Morales, "The Roman and Islamic spice trade: New archaeological evidence".

⁴Freedman, "The medieval spice trade".

⁵Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Cinnamon*.

⁶Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*.

many of their names have survived to this day. Precious stones were given as state gifts and donated to temples.⁷

2.2 Trade routes

In this age, India was mostly a distribution hub for the spices and other luxury goods from Indonesia and China. Reports of trading fleets exchanging goods in Indian harbours even made it all the way to ancient Greece and Rome, where they were written down and are still preserved today, for example in the writings of Ptolemy.⁸

2.2.1 To India from Indonesia

Spices were mainly originating from the islands of Indonesia and Malaya, and, over their history, many empires and kingdoms thrived of controlling the trade routes between the isles. This trade also led to the colonisation of Madagascar by the Austronesians.⁹

The stories of their *Raft-men*, who came to India, on rudderless rafts to sell the spices and return home with traded goods, traveled along the trading routes to Europe. They are mentioned, for example, by Pliny.¹⁰

2.2.2 From China

From China, there were three main routes.

The northernmost, known as the *Scythian route*, went from the north of the yellow river, next to the central silk road. In modern-day northwest China, it separated, and made its way north of the Aral and Caspian Sea, passing through Volgograd and ending on the mouth of the river Don on the Black sea, the ancient Greek colony of Tanaïs. This, of course, opened the way to Byzantium via the Black Sea.¹¹

Most of the non-spices exported from China, primarily silk, were carried along the *Silk Road*. The route tended to start in northern China, bypassing Tibet, the Himalayas, and thus India, to the north. From there, it led through Persia to Mediterranean ports like Antioch.¹²

Many spices were imported into the southern ports of China like Canton, from where spices and other goods were also exported by sea to modern-day Sri Lanka. Furthermore, goods were also shipped overland from southern China to India.¹³ The importance of this route must not be underestimated; Chinese records describe Roman trade missions in

⁷Cornell Collections of Antiquities, *Gems*.

⁸Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, p. 148-150.

⁹Lonely Planet, *History of Madagascar*.

¹⁰Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, Chapter 8.

¹¹Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, p. 149.

¹²Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, Chapter 7, Maps 2 and 3.

¹³Miller, *The spice trade of the Roman Empire, 29 BC To AD 641*, Maps 4 and 5.

cities in modern-day northern Vietnam, and Ptolemy tells of a place called *Cattigara*, identified today as *Ôc Eo*, an archeological site in the Mekong River delta where Roman gods from the second century CE have been excavated.¹⁴

2.2.3 India as a hub

India, while producing many of the goods traded, also served as a trading centre and main hub of the Asia-Europe trade. This was due to its geographical advantages with access to Arabia and the Red Sea to the west, as well as the Indian ocean and land connections to China to the east.

In general, trade flowed mostly eastwards, while the recipients in Europe mostly paid in gold coin. India's position as a trading centre, especially after the emergence of the Roman empire, is demonstrated by the find of Roman-struck gold coinage from the imperial age.

2.2.4 From India to Europe

2.2.5 Development under the Romans

During the Roman empire, both diplomacy and war opened up new routes. Ships from Europe even made it to southern India, bringing home a new Spice: black pepper. In addition, the Romans were also willing to pay for spices to add them to their meals, making spice trade even more important in relation to other imports.

¹⁴[wiki:\IeC {\'}O}c _Eo.](#)

3 Networks of Trade up to the first European Outposts

4 Trading under colonial rule and up to Indian independence

5 Effects on India

6 Conclusion

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