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Sindābūr of the Arab Writers 1932

BY

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In the works of the Arab Writers of the Middle Ages, one often comes across the mention of a city called Sindābūr, which is described by them as an important commercial centre on the West Coast of India. It is very clearly mentioned by the Arab traveller Al Masudi as early as the 10th century of the Christian era.¹ Its location is suggested by Al Biruni² and Ibn Idrisi³ in their works, the former in his enumeration of the cities on the Western sea-board of India, and the latter while specifying that it was at four days' journey from Baruh along the coast. However, in spite of the unmistakable hints afforded by these writers the location of this city has long remained a disputed point in the mediæval geography of Western India. Scholars had for a long time held widely divergent opinions as regards its identity, some confounding it with Sindan, which according to Rawlinson has been corrupted into St. John, the modern St. John's Point of Rennel, between Daman and Bombay, and others with Sidhapur in North Kanara, frequently referred to in the local inscriptional records.⁴ Ibn Batuta's description of Sindābūr as an island consisting of thirty-six villages in contradistinction to the description of it by the previous writers as a city, seems to have aggravated rather than helped the solution of this difficulty. Nevertheless, the geographical position assigned to it by Ibn Batuta as being at three days' sail to the south of Koṭṭak (i.e., Gogo in Kathiawar) and at a day's journey to the north of Honawar⁵ inclined Prof. Gildemeister to locate it in the neighbourhood of Goa, and it was later identified with Goa itself by Colonel Yule.⁶ In the course of his identification this author remarked

¹ Elliot-Dowson, *History of India*, I, p. 21.

² *Ibid.*, p. 68. 'Of the cities on the shore the first is Sindābūr, then Faknur, then the country of Manjarūr.'

³ *Ibid.*, p. 89. Baruh is Barūch, i.e., Broach.

⁴ *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, XV, p. 198.

⁵ Deffenery-Sanguinetti, *Voyages D' Ibn Batoutah*, IV, pp. 61-2. Prof. Gibbs' translation, *Broadway Travellers Series*, is now quite serviceable. (Editor).

⁶ Yule, *Cathay*, p. 444.

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that 'Sindābūr' could be from the use of the *ḡwād* by the earlier writers, and from the Chintabor of the European maps, *Chandāpur* rather than *Sundāpur*,¹ but added that 'no Indian name like this has yet been recovered from inscriptions as attaching to Goa.'¹

It is the purpose of this paper to show that the identity of *Sindābūr* with *Chandrapur* as suggested by Colonel Yule has been fully borne out by the researches that have been recently made in the History of the *Koṅkan*.

To begin with, Ibn Batuta's description of *Sindābūr* as an island consisting of 36 villages; and surrounded by a gulf the waters of which were fresh and agreeable at low tide, but salt and bitter at high tide; and the fact that there were two towns in the centre of the island, one ancient built by the Infidels, and the other built by the Muhammadans, when they first conquered the island;² remove all doubts about its identification with the Goa territory. For we know from Ferishta's account of the Muhammadan occupation of Goa, that in or about A.D. 1310 Mallik Kafur overran the whole of this country, penetrating as far as *Ramēśwar* on the sea coast, i.e., *cabo de Rama*, the southernmost point of the *Koṅkan*.³ He left the territory soon after the conquest, entrusting its government to one *Mullik Tubliga*, who remained at the head of the administration till A.D. 1320, in which year he was recalled by the Emperor to Delhi in order to prove the charges brought by him against the viceroy of the Dekkan *Mallik Khusru*.⁴ After the withdrawal of *Mallik Tubliga*, the Muhammadans seem to have relinquished their hold over the *Koṅkan*, since it had to be conquered again by Muhammad bin Tuglak in 1327.⁵ It is very probable that during their first occupation of Goa the Muhammadans built a new capital not far from *Gōpakapaṭṭana*, the old city of the *Kadambas*, the dynasty conquered by them, so that when Ibn Batuta passed by that island, he saw the two cities. The description of the country as a delta island surrounded by a gulf with its concomitants of ebb and flow perfectly agrees with the description of a delta island like Goa. Moreover the fact referred to by Ibn Batuta

¹ Hobson-Jobson, p. 838.

² Defremery-Sanguinetti, *Voyages D'Ibn Batoutah*, IV, pp. 61-2.

³ Ferishta-Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, I, pp. 373-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 391-2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

that it contained 36 villages—when speaking of Goa which he was Tiswade,¹ a name signifying identification with Goa. To the stance mentioned by Al Masudi crocodiles, a fact that finds support in the Portuguese historians such as Castanheda when speaking of Goa there are many water lizards, That these water lizards were the following words of this author: 'When those who had been condemned to the river to the din of bugles and pe (crocodiles) in the long run as they are man-eaters and gather sounds'.⁴

Having thus far determined the island of Goa, it now remains to see whether *Chandrapur* ever existed in this the Arab travellers spoken of as

In our study of the history across a city of no mean importance easily be identified with modern Goa. It has been suggested that it derived its name from the Chalukya king who was founded by the Chalukya king who was the *Koṅkan* as viceroy of

¹ Barros, *Da Asia*, Dec. II, liv, V. [The name Tiswade seems corrupted. It may be a contraction of 'Shāḡ-trimśadv' of villages contained in the island.—F.]

² *Ibid.*, pp. 433-4.

³ Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento do Brasil pelos Portugueses*, Livro III, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. Moraes, *The Kadamba-Kulasekara Chandor Boletim do Instituto I.*

⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. I. A., viii, p. 45.

that it contained 36 villages—which is also mentioned by Barros while speaking of Goa which he writes was known to the natives as Tiswade,¹ a name signifying 30 villages—is another proof of its identification with Goa. To this may be added the curious circumstance mentioned by Al Masudi that the bay of Sindābūr abounded in crocodiles, a fact that finds singular confirmation in the accounts of the Portuguese historians such as Barros, Castanheda, and Correia. According to the first of these writers the crocodiles were introduced there as a 'guard against surprises and the escape of slaves'.² Castanheda when speaking of Goa and its river says that 'in this river there are many water lizards, which also exist in other rivers'.³ That these water lizards were but crocodiles is obvious from the following words of this author: 'After the Cabayo (Bijapur Sultan) took possession of this island, he ordered, when fortifying it, that all those who had been condemned to death should be thrown into the river to the din of bugles and panderettes, which was to serve them (crocodiles) in the long run as a sign that the meal was ready; for they are man-eaters and gathered at once as soon as they heard those sounds'.⁴

Having thus far determined the identity of Sindābūr with the island of Goa, it now remains for us to see if a city of the name of Chandrapur ever existed in this territory during the period covered by the Arab travellers spoken of above.

In our study of the history of the Koṅkaṇ, we have often come across a city of no mean importance, called Chandrapur, which may easily be identified with modern Chandor in Salsette, Goa.⁵ It has been suggested that it derived this appellation from the fact that it was founded by the Chalukya prince Chandrāditya, who was governing the Koṅkaṇ as viceroy on behalf of his father Pulikēsi II.⁶

¹ Barros, *Da Asia*, Dec. II, liv, V, c. I, vol. II, part I, p. 432 (Ed. 1777).

[The name Tiswade seems corrupted from Sans. Trīṃśadvati, which may even be a contraction of 'Shad-trīṃśadvati', the 30 in the one case and 36 in another of villages contained in the island.—Editor.]

² *Ibid.*, pp. 433-4.

³ Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento & Conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, Livro III, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. Moraes, *The Kadamba-Kula*, p. 392. Stuart Gomes, *Chandrapur não sera Chandor Boletim do Instituto Vasco da Gama*, No. 7, pp. 41-2.

⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. I. A., viii, p. 45.

However that may be, the ancient importance of the place cannot be called in question, for we know from the documents that the Kadambas of Goa made it the capital of their kingdom, when they emerged as feudatory chiefs in the 10th century of the Christian era. We have specific mention of this city, in a 11th century inscription of Shashtha-dēva II of this dynasty, and in the *Dvyāsharāya*, a Sanskrit work, probably written by the Jaina guru Hēmachandra in the 12th century. The first of these records states that in splendour this city 'excelled even the metropolis of the gods';¹ while the *Dvyāsharāya* implies that it was the capital of Jayakēśi.² It is needless to say that these chiefs selected it for their capital, because of its ancient importance no less than its excellent situation on the bank of a river, easily accessible to maritime commerce. This river known as the river of Parodā is at present a struggling rivulet, but there is no doubt that it was quite navigable in those early days of which we are speaking. For it is observed that in this river the silt deposits of succeeding years have filled up the bed much more rapidly than in any other in Goa, as may be seen from the fact that even as late as the latter half of the 19th century large-sized country crafts used to ply between Chandor and the mouth of the river, which has since been entirely closed for purposes of navigation.

The great prosperity of this city which the above-mentioned record of Shashtha-dēva II attests, was undoubtedly due to the commerce that was carried on between this city and the outside world. Just as Goa became in later times the entrepot of the east, so Chandrapur must have been the rendezvous of traders from far and near in the early mediæval times, and it was thus that it came to be known to the Arab travellers. In the time of Ibn Batuta, however, it was eclipsed by other cities, though it did not entirely escape from men's memories. For the country about Sindābūr, was still called by that name and not after the new city that had risen to prominence. Indeed it took a long time for Chandrapur to be completely dissociated from the commercial geography of Western India, for even in the sixteenth century, Goa which had long superseded the old port of Chandrapur, was known as Guvah-Sindābūr to the foreign traders. This becomes

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¹ Moraes, *The Kadamba-Kula*, p. 390 ; 392. चंद्रपुरमिंद्रपुरातिरेकं ॥

² *I. A.* iv, p. 233.

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, v, p. 1

² *Archivo da Secre*
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apparent from Sidi Ali's Turkish book of navigation called the *Mohit*, where the author devotes a section under the caption '24th voyage from Guvah-Sindābūr to Aden'.¹

The decline of this city would appear to have begun in the reign of Jayakēśi I, for it was in this king's reign that the capital of the Kadambas was transferred from Chandrapur to Goa. It may be inferred from his Goa charter that this city was developed at the cost of Chandrapur.² Though the whole volume of trade was not diverted from the latter it is nevertheless evident that it had thenceforth to be content with the rôle of playing second fiddle to Goa. Towards the close of the Kadamba period, however, the fortunes of Chandrapur would seem to have revived. On the overthrow of their rule in the island of Goa by the Delhi Muhammadans, the Kadambas retired to the mountain fastnesses, whence after the withdrawal of the Muhammadan troops they returned and settled down at Chandrapur and fortified the city. During the first expedition of the Muhammadans this city had, not being then the capital, probably escaped destruction at their hands. But the second expedition of 1327 under Muhammad bin Tuglak spelt disaster to this ancient capital. However, Chandrapur appears to have soon outgrown the effects of the Muhammadan invasion. What with the weakness of the central government and the infidelity of the provincial governors, the outlying provinces of the Empire were soon lost to the Delhi sovereign, and thereupon the Konkan once more came under the rule of the Kadambas. But the end of this dynasty was not long delayed. Hostility broke out in 1343 between the reigning Kadamba King and his son, and the latter invited the Nawab Jamal-ud-Din of Honawar to seize Chandrapur, promising that he would embrace Islam and marry the Nawab's sister. Jamal-ud-Din accordingly equipped a strong fleet of fifty-two vessels and sailed to Chandrapur and carried the place by assault.³

This is the last mention of Chandrapur we have met in the historical records. The powers that ruled over the Konkan after the Kadambas bestowed their care, doubtless for reasons of trade, exclusively on the new city that had come into being and in consequence of this policy Chandrapura eventually passed into oblivion.

¹ *J.A.S.B.*, v, p. 464.

² *Arquivo da Secretaria Geral do Governo, Pangim, Monções do Reino*, No. 93, fol. 1396.

³ Defremery-Sanguinetti, *Voyages D'Ibn Batoutah*, iv, pp. 106-8.