

THE TRAVELS OF LUDOVICO DI VARTHEMA

and his visit to Siam, Banghella and Pegu A.D. 1505.

By

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Introduction:

We possess many valuable reports about Siam in the seventeenth century. Contemporary foreign writers, Dutch such as Mandelslo (1640), van Schouten (1663), van Vliet (1647) as well as Frenchmen such as de Choisy (1687), de Chaumont (1687), Tachard (1688) and de la Loubère (1691) have left us detailed and vivid accounts of the political events in this country, as well as descriptions of the land, the people, their trade and their customs. Among the English authors we find Purchas (1613) and A. and S. Churchill (1690), who have contributed to our knowledge of seventeenth century Siam. Of more modern writers John Anderson's *English Intercourse with Siam* (1890) is outstanding, and the National Library in Bangkok in 1915 published the *Records of the Relations between Siam and Foreign Countries in the Seventeenth Century* which with its five volumes is an inexhaustible source for research work. The Journals of the Siam Society contain many valuable contributions from the pen of learned authors. The latest books are Maurice Collis, *Siamese White*—a fascinating tale—and E. W. Hutchinson's *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (1940), a profound work on Siam, based on our present knowledge of that time.

I am especially indebted to the last named books for many details about Mergui and Tenasserim which Ludovico di Varthema visited A.D. 1505.

Whereas we have abundant sources for investigations regarding the relations of South East Asia from the seventeenth century onwards, reports of foreign eye-witnesses, if we go back to the

sixteenth century and earlier, are scarce. In the seventeenth century, when Siam widened her political and commercial relations with foreign powers, the influx of foreigners was considerable. First came the Dutch, then the French, the English and later the Danes. But during the sixteenth century, at a time, when the Portuguese held the mastery of the Eastern Seas, travellers from foreign countries but seldom reached the coasts of Siam, with the exception of the Portuguese. The late Dr. de Campos in his article *Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand* (JSS XXXII, 1) has ably described the early intercourse between the Portuguese and the Siamese and has collected valuable material from Portuguese sources. Real Portuguese contact with Siam was however only established after the conquest of Malacca in 1511.

I therefore thought that any additional account of Siam and her neighbours, dating still further back than the Portuguese missions to the Court of Ayuthia, might be welcomed by the readers of the *Journal of the Siam Society*. This hope has encouraged me to translate thirteen chapters from Ludovico di Varthema's itinerary relating to his visits to Tenasserim, Baughella, Pegu and Malacca in 1505.

Of the early Portuguese sources which I have perused for this monograph are the *Roteiro of the Sea* by Alvaro Velho concerning the voyage of Vasco da Gama, published by the Hakluyt Society, Duarte Barbosa's book, Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação* and several others which I have quoted in the foot-notes.

Before however quoting Ludovico di Varthema's own words, some information concerning his person and his book, as well as a short survey of the historical background against which we see him travelling from place to place, meeting strange people and seeing strange sights, may be appropriate. This above all, since the itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema seems to me not so remarkable from the point of view that it enables us to increase our knowledge of the history, geography or ethnology of Siam, but because it is a true

document of human nature which changes so little—if at all—during the ages. I believe, therefore, that the following extract of his book will appeal not only to historians, naturalists and other scientists, but likewise to politicians and merchants—and, above all, to the lover of travel and adventure.

PART ONE.

The man.

Who was Ludovico die Varthema? There is scarcely any record of him except what we can gather from his book. He was a Bolognese by birth, and the father was a physician. He was married and had several children. As a soldier he had taken part in divers campaigns. He left Venice on his long journey in 1502, returning to Lisbon in 1508 from where he proceeded to the court of the King of Portugal. The latter confirmed the knighthood conferred on Varthema by the then Viceroy of India, Don Francisco de Almeyda, after the battle of Ponani. This is the scanty knowledge we possess. We do not know when he was born or where and when he died, but he has left us his book which bestows fame and immortality upon him.

His book enables us to some degree to form a picture of his character. Varthema appears as a man of courage and endurance. His predominant traits are honesty, truthfulness and modesty. He couples a keen sense of observation with a gift for writing. He adapts himself easily to strange circumstances and possesses ready wit and humour. The most outstanding traits of his character are however his insatiable desire for travel and adventure and his ingenuousness in describing strange events during his wanderings. George Percy Badger who edited the itinerary of Varthema for the Hakluyt Society in London in 1863, writes: "Through what medium did Varthema acquire all this information, so diffuse in detail and yet so authentic? He had no books of reference, and his prejudiced Mussulman companions alone would undoubtedly have led him into frequent misrepresentations regarding the Kafirs. The only inference

we can draw is that he did not confine his inquiries to them, but associated familiarly with the Hindus also, and being endowed with uncommon perspicacity, was enabled to separate the true from the false, and to present us with a narrative, almost unrivalled for originality of investigation and accuracy of statement among the published travels of his age."

The Travels,

Since I shall only render the translation of a limited part of his travel accounts, I propose to give a brief story of his entire journey so remarkable for its length and the distant places visited under the difficult circumstances of that time. The motives which led Varthema to undertake his travels are set forth by him in the dedication of his book to "The most illustrious and most excellent Lady, the Countess of Albi and Duchess of Tagliacozzo, Madame Agnesina Feltria Colonna", who was a daughter of Federico, Duke of Urbino, and the wife of Signor Fabrizio Colonna. In this dedication Varthema writes: "There have been many men who have devoted themselves to the investigations of the things of the world, and by the aid of divers studies, journeys and very exact relations, have endeavoured to accomplish their desire. Others, again, of more perspicacious understandings, to whom the earth has not sufficed, such as the Chaldeans and the Phoenicians, have begun to traverse the highest regions of Heaven with careful observations and watchings, from all which I know that each has gained most deserved and high praise from others and abundant satisfaction to themselves. Wherefore I, feeling a very great desire for similar results and leaving alone the Heavens as a burthen more suitable for the shoulders of Atlas and Hercules, determined to investigate some small portion of this our terrestrial globe, and not having any inclination (knowing myself to be of very slender understanding) to arrive at my desire by study or conjectures, I determined, personally, and with my own eyes, to endeavour to ascertain the situation of places, the qualities of people; the diversities of animals, the

varieties of the fruit-bearing and odoriferous trees of Egypt, Syria, Arabia *deserta and felix*, Persia, India, Ethiopia, remembering well, that the testimony of one eye-witness is worth more than ten hearsays."

Varthema left Venice in 1502, reached Alexandria early in 1503 and went by the Nile to Cairo. From Egypt he sailed to Syria, landed at Beyrut and journeyed to Aleppo. Then he went to Damascus, from where he set out in April 1503 towards El-Medīnah. Thence to Mecca, which he describes in detail. Referring to Varthema's visit to Mecca, George Percy Badger writes: "Considering that our author is the first European traveller on record who visited the holy places of the Muhammedans, and taking into account how scanty must have been his previous knowledge of the history and distinctive doctrines of Islam, his description of Mecca and of the Hajj may fairly claim to be regarded as a literary wonder."

From Mecca Varthema proceeded to Juddah on the Red Sea. He sailed down the Red Sea to Aden where he was suspected as a spy and placed in confinement. Later he was transported to Radāa and questioned by the Sultan who put him in prison. By the intervention of one of the Sultan's wives he was released and after some time able to escape to Aden. From Aden he made a long excursion into Arabia, visiting the towns of Damt, Yerīm, Sanāa, Ta'ez, Zebīd and Dhamār, a journey of about six hundred miles. Varthema is the first European who has given us a description of this part of Arabia. After his return to Aden he boarded a ship bound for the Persian Gulf, but a storm drove them into Zaila, on the north-east coast of Africa, from where they proceeded to Berbera. After their departure from this place they reached the small island of Diu in Guzerat. Then they sailed up the Gulf of Cambay to Gogo. From there Varthema crossed the Indian Ocean to Julfār and thence via Mascat to Hormuz. After a sojourn of several days our traveller penetrated into the interior of Persia, reaching Shirāz, but failing to make Samarkand owing to the disturbed state of the

country. From Shirâz Varthema left for Hormuz. Later he embarked for India and reached the estuary of the Indus at a small place, called Joah. From there he went to Cambay. Then he sailed to Goa and Bijapûr and later to Cannanore. After a journey to Biyanagâr he travelled along the coast and finally reached Calicut. To this place he devoted a whole book of his itinerary. Quilon was the next town and then Coromandel (probably Negapatam). From there the journey took him to Ceylon where he remained for some days. He then sailed to Pulicat north of Madras.

Leaving Pulicat Varthema boarded a ship for Tenasserim and arrived at this place after fourteen days.

It is at this stage of Varthema's journey that the translation of his book in this monograph begins, and I can therefore omit to describe the route from Tenasserim to the old city of Banghella and thence to Pegu and back to Malacca.

From Malacca Varthema crossed over to Sumatra where he spent some time. He then left this island on a journey which has never been described by any other European before him. After fifteen days he and his companions arrived at Bandan, one of the islands of the Nutmeg group. Another twelve days brought them to the Molucca Islands. From there they sailed for Borneo and then crossed over to Java in five days, landing on the northern coast of the island.

After having spent some time in Java the party started on the return journey via Malacca, Negapatam, Quilon to Calicut. Here Varthema placed himself under the protection of the Portuguese. He subsequently was employed as factor in Cochin and held this post for one and a half year.

On the 6th of December, 1507, Varthema left Cannanore bound for Lisbon. Via Mozambique, Madagascar, the Cape and the Azores he finally arrived at Lisbon after an absence from home of about six years. He then proceeded to Rome.

I am afraid that the above short summary of Varthema's peregrinations makes somewhat dry reading. I meant however to

impress the reader with the truly admirable performance of our traveller, considering the very primitive means of conveyance at that time and the manifold dangers to which he was exposed on land and at sea.

This brief summary may perhaps also induce one or the other reader to peruse the book by George Percy Badger and John Winter Jones, written for the Hakluyt Society and printed in 1863. From that book the above description was compiled.

The book.

Varthema's book, according to Jones, was first printed in Rome in 1510. It attracted wide-spread attention and was immediately translated into Latin, German, French, Dutch, Spanish and, finally, English. All these first translations are extremely rare and costly. Years ago, by some extraordinary stroke of luck, I came into possession of a copy of one of the first German editions. From this copy I have translated the thirteen chapters which follow. It is a small book of about 150 pages. Cover and title-page are missing, but a careful examination, based on the details given by Jones and carried out by the late Dr. de Campos, permits of the conclusion that the book is a copy of the first German edition, printed in Augsburg in 1515. It is illustrated by forty-three *engravings on wood* — only the first and second German editions have engravings on wood — and the number of pages as well as the method of numbering by letters correspond to the first German edition.

It is impossible to read this book and not be convinced that the author is telling the truth, that he writes about events which actually took place and that he describes things which he saw with his own eyes. His style is dry and in its simplicity charming. The whole itinerary proves that Varthema was a keen observer and an ingenuous and honest reporter. His way of writing has the freshness of a diary. The German translation is written in the curious language of Luther's first translation of the Bible and printed in the same way. The accompanying wood-cuts are somewhat primitive

but full of life. They must have been made by a real artist as shown by the examples given in this article.

Although there are critics who have doubted some of Varthema's statements, the large majority of scientists to-day agree that Varthema has written the truth, strange as many of his observations may seem. Allowing now and then for exaggerations which are typical for all early writers—e.g. Mendez Pinto—nearly all facts which Varthema relates, and scenes which he describes have been corroborated by statements of contemporary or subsequent writers and travellers.

I shall now answer the question, why I have gone to the work of translating thirteen chapters of the itinerary from the German copy in my possession, instead of simply giving an extract of John Winter Jones's translation or quoting passages from the latter's and Badger's book. The reasons are as follows:

1) As I have at present no access to the libraries of the world, I am unable to compare my copy with other copies. This copy may represent the first German edition, but it may also be a so far unknown translation. I could compare my copy only with the translation of Jones with the result that there are quite a number of divergencies, some immaterial some more important. It is a well-known fact that translations of the originals into different languages greatly vary, and that later translations of old books are still more at variance with the original.

Jones states that the Italian edition of 1510 is the "only one which gives Varthema's text truly", and that this edition is the first edition. Jones however does not prove his statement. After careful examination I am inclined to presume that my copy is a translation of an earlier edition, because it contains not less than three full chapters more than the translation of Jones, and I find it extremely unlikely that the three chapters should have been added afterwards.

However this may be, I hope that the readers of the *Journal* will be satisfied to read a part of Varthema's voyages in a version which has not yet been published and which is different from Jones' translation.

2) The reproductions of the engravings on wood are published here for the first time.

3) Varthema's travels, published by the Hakluyt Society, were printed in 1863, and I believe that this book is long out of print and not easily obtainable.

4) New investigations concerning certain facts mentioned in the itinerary have been made since 1863, the result of which I have included in this article.

These are briefly the reasons, why I preferred to adhere to the text of my own copy. For the rest I have narrowly followed the excellent translation of Jones, who so admirably succeeded in maintaining the special quaint dry style of Varthema's writing. As far as the text of my copy permitted, I have used similar words and expressions, and in the foot-notes I have perused all sources of information which Badger has offered to his readers. As this is to be a monograph, not a book, I have reduced the number of notes as far as possible without embarking too much on scientific problems.

PART TWO.

What did the world look like at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century?

In Europe the Middle Ages had come to an end—the Renaissance was at its height. The beginning of the sixteenth century marks the beginning of a new time, of the "New Age". We learned at school that the birth of this so-called "New Age" was the effect of the discovery of America, by Christopher Columbus in 1492. But in reality things happened just in the opposite way. The *genus*

hominum, living at the time of Varthema, with re-awakened realism free from prejudice and convention, was filled with an unrestrainable thirst for knowledge, with desire for adventure and *wanderlust*. And as much as a painting or a poem seems to me the product of the age in which it has been created, so the generation of that time was, by its spiritual forces, unconsciously but by necessity, driven to make new inventions and new discoveries. The spiritual condition of men, the *zeitgeist*, is the primary factor—artistic achievements, as well as technical and nautical performances are only of secondary nature and the natural consequences of the spiritual forces. America would have been discovered in any case, sooner or later. After all, the Venetian Giovanni Gabotto (John Cabot) reached Labrador under the British flag in 1497, i.e. he touched American soil one year before Columbus reached the mouth of the Orinoco.

Ludovico di Varthema truly lived during a great age. As an Italian he was a compatriot and contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci, of Michel Angelo, Tizian and Raphael. He lived at the same time as Luther and Duerer. Our friend, however, was probably not very much inspired by the masterpieces of the Cinquecento, nor was he much interested in Luther's Reformation. It were the reports of all the famous travellers of his time and the discoveries of foreign lands and their descriptions in books—the art of printing was just invented – that must have fired his imagination. We try to picture him in his youth, when he learned of the brave Portuguese travellers and explorers – how he must have marvelled at the exploits of those great navigators !

The Infante of Portugal, Prince Henry, the Navigator, was then the spiritual leader and supporter of Portuguese explorers. Ships were sent to the coast of Africa in order to discover countries yet unknown. In 1445 these ships reached Cap Verde. In 1482 the mouth of the Congo river was discovered, and in 1486 Bartolomeo Diaz reached the most southern point of Africa, which was named by King João II “Cabo de boa esperança”, the Cape of Good Hope.

And this good hope was soon fulfilled, for twelve years later Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape and discovered the sea-route to India, reaching Calicut, the capital of Malabar. In 1500 Pedro Cabal on the way to the Cape, but driven off to the west, discovered Brazil.

How the deeds of these brave navigators must have inspired young Ludovico! He too wanted to become an explorer, he too desired to discover unknown countries, he longed for fame. Varthema became a true representative of his time. He had the insatiable desire to wander, to penetrate into strange territories, to see new things with his own eyes, to be the first European in foreign lands! And this spiritual attitude, this tendency to penetrate and to discover were the primary factors for his achievements. His discoveries were only an outcome of his *wanderlust*. The Portuguese soon established their supremacy in the East. They held the monopoly in trade and flew their flag, unchallenged by other European powers, in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese supremacy in the East lasted until the end of the sixteenth century.

Spain was engaged in America. In 1521 Mexico was conquered, in 1532 Peru occupied.

All the other European powers were too occupied with the situation in Europe, where the great powers began to consolidate themselves—France in the west, England in the north and the Hapsburgs in the centre.

How was the situation in Siam at the time of Varthema's travels? After the foundation of Ayuthia in 1350 the kings of Siam were consolidating their kingdom. In the fifteenth century Siam was constantly at war with Cambodia, until finally Angkor, the capital of Cambodia, was destroyed in 1431.

In 1491 King Ramatibodi II ascended the throne. He reigned at the time of Varthema's travels. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Siam was several times at war with the princes of Chiangmai. After a relatively peaceful period between 1516 and 1538, trouble arose with Burma, and the wars against this country lasted until

the end of the century. From 1564 to 1583 Siam was a vassal state of Burma.

After the defeat of Cambodia, Siamese influence extended far down the Malay Peninsula. Whereas Mergui in the twelfth and thirteenth century had belonged to Burma, the Peninsula at the time of our traveller was divided into a number of provinces and principalities. They were governed either by viceroys, appointed by the King of Siam, or by native rulers. The latter although nominally vassals of Siam, were actually largely independent. There was the kingdom of Tenasserim, which was ruled by a Siamese Buddhist, then Ligor, which belonged to Siam and was governed by a Siamese viceroy of the Buddhist faith. Keddah's ruler was a Moham-medan. Pahang, Padang, Trengganu, Kelantan, Keddah, and Selangor were tributary to Siam, as well as Malacca, which latter remained nominally under the authority of the King of Siam until in 1509 d'Albuquerque forced the surrender of the town and occupied the city for Portugal.

Although Colonel Yule's map of Burma in 1500 shows Tenasserim as an independent kingdom, I agree with Badger and others that Tenasserim at that time was a dependent state, subject to Siam. This is confirmed by Duarte Barbosa who was the factor of Cannanore between 1500 and 1516, and mentions Tenasserim as *a great port of Siam*.

But it must be remembered that at that time the more powerful kings had a tendency to claim the dependency of smaller principalities, even if they had no control over them, did not receive any tribute, nor yielded any authority over such small states.

Trade at Varthema's time was brisk and almost exclusively in the hands of powerful Mohammedan traders, merchants and rich shipowners. The most important Siamese port was then the port of Mergui, or Mergwy, near the city of Tenasserim on the bay of Bengal. From there the goods from China and Siam were shipped to Indian ports and further to Europe. Collis calls Siam *an emporium of Trade* and especially so Mergui. Favourite goods

were silk yarn and porcelain from China, wood, elephants, elephant-tusks, buffalo—and rhinoceros-horns from Siam. In return large shipments arrived at Tenasserim from India. Cotton was the main article. Trade in both directions favoured the so-called *overland-route*: from Mergui about fifty miles to Tenasserim, from there up the Tenasserim river to Ban Hué where the goods were transferred to small boats, then over the Den-noi pass to Jalinga and from there to Prachuap Khirikan on the east-coast of the Peninsula. Ships brought the merchandise from here to the mouth of the Menam and up the river to Ayuthia. The entire journey took between ten to twenty days. This route was also frequented by travellers in spite of its difficulties especially great during the rainy season, when in addition to the normal hazards of tigers and robbers, the trail was sodden and leeches abundant. The overland-route was generally preferred to the sea-voyage around the Malay Peninsula, because the latter was about three times as far and lasted about six times as long. In addition it was often threatened by pirates.

So much about the historical background. I have included in my translation three chapters about Varthema's visits to Banghella and Pegu. I shall briefly comment on the history of these two places in the foot-notes added to the respective chapters.

And now, I think, it is time to let Ludovico di Varthema speak and tell the tale of his observations and adventures in person.

PART THREE.

1. *The Chapter concerning Tarnasseri, a city of India.*

Tarnasseri, the city, is situated near to the sea, on a level place, well surrounded by walls, and has a good port at the mouth of a river, which is to the east.⁽¹⁾

(1) *The city described by Varthema is the city of Mergui of present days. The name of Mergui did apparently not yet exist at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Mergui in Siamese is "Marit" and Tenasserim is "Tanaosri". The spelling of*

The King of this city is very powerful and rich in land, people and goods. He is constantly at war with the King of Narsinga and

Tenasserim is different through the centuries. Conti in 1440 calls it "Ternasseri", Varthema "Tarnasseri", or "Tarnassery." On the old Admiralty chart, published in Collis' book, we find "Tanasary", but de la Loubère in 1691 spells it "Tenasserim", as we call it now. On the latter's map we also find "Mergwy".—According to Prince Dhani Nivat and Major Seidenfaden "Early Trade Relations between Denmark and Siam" (JSS XXXI, 1) the place was called "Tranauwasri" in 1621, when the state was governed by an Okya Jaiyathibodi.

With the exception of Conti who has no more to say about Tenasserim than that "the land abounds in elephants and produces much brazilwood", Varthema's is the first authentic account which we possess of the province of Tenasserim. As I said in part two, Tenasserim was a province of Siam at the time of Varthema's visit. It ranked in the old law of King Boromatrailokanath, as a second class province under the King's direct jurisdiction, and not among the tributary states, the others being Sawankalok, Sukhothai, Kamp'aeong p'ech, P'echabun, and Korat. Only two—P'isnulok and Srithammara j—were superior, being put in the first class. It had belonged to Siam since the beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1568 Tenasserim was lost to Burma and in 1593 recaptured by Phya Chakri, a general of King Naresuen. Many travellers passed Tenasserim during the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century, most of them taking the overland-route into Siam from Tenasserim to Ayuthia. The English had a settlement at Tenasserim at the time when "Siamese White" was viceroy of the King of Siam there. After the fall of Ayuthia in 1767 Tenasserim was definitely lost to Burma. It was ceded to the British in 1826, when by the treaty of Yandaboo Burma lost the southern provinces of Aracan, Martaban, Tavoy and Tenasserim. Now, that the occupation by Japan which lasted from 1942 to 1945, has come to an end, it is, British once more.

the King of Banghella. (2) He has up to a hundred armed elephants, larger than I have ever seen. He always maintains near 100,000 soldiers, foot and horse. Their arms are small swords, shields made of some sort of bark, a great quantity of bows and lances of cane. They wear dresses stuffed with cotton instead of a harness. The houses of this city are made of brick, nearly as with us. There grows good corn and a large quantity of silk is made here. (3) They also have much brazil-wood (4), many good fruits, honey, oranges

- (2) *Notwithstanding my endeavours I have been unable to find any corroborative evidence about this statement. Narsinga, in the old Kingdom of Bijayanagâr, now a ruined place, was formerly the capital of the ancient Brahmanical kingdom of the Carnatic which extended over the greater part of the Malabar and Coromandel coasts. Regarding Banghella see Chapter 9. Vart Thema is positive about this war between Tarnasseri and Narsinga and, when describing Paleachat (Pulicat) which was subject to the King of Narsinga, mentions that "the country was at fierce war with the King of Tarnasseri". Cf. Badger (HS) page 195.*
- (3) *Vart Thema says that they made silk here, not that they produced it. Silk was an export article from China and went to India in considerable quantities via Ayuthia, Mergui. It seems likely that weaving of silk was partly a business transacted by the people of Tenasserim.*
- (4) *The Brazil-wood referred to is undoubtedly the Sappan-wood which yields red and yellow dyes. A similar kind of wood in South America was called "Brazil", from which that country derived its name. Cf. John Winter Jones' (HS) page 205, who says: "There is early evidence to prove that the wood gave the name to the country (Brazil) and not the country to the wood". There are large Sappan wood forests on the hills not far from Tenasserim. According to Jeremias van Vliet "Beschryving van het Koningryk Siam" (Leiden 1692) the yearly export of "Sappanhouw" from Siam amounted to "30 000 - 40 000 picol".*

and other kinds. And there are many beautiful pleasure-gardens with strange and delicate things in them.

2. *The Chapter concerning the wild beasts and domestic animals of Tarnasseri.*

In this country and city of Tarnasseri is an abundance of good food for mankind. There are oxen, cows, sheep and goats in large numbers. Also wild hog, deer, wolves and cats, and the civet, lions and hares in great multitudes. There are falcons, hawks, pea-cocks and white parrots, also other parrots with seven colours, very pretty. There are starlings, unlike ours, and ravens larger than our mountain-eagles. And of the upper part of the beak of this bird they make sword-hilts, which beak is yellow and red and, very pretty to behold.⁽⁵⁾ I have seen there also hens and cocks, the largest I have ever come across, of admirable colour and as large as about three of ours. In this city we had much amusement in a few days from the strange things which we saw in the street. We saw also some cock-fights, one lasting continuously for five hours and going on so fiercely that at last both cocks dropped dead.⁽⁶⁾ Such a cock-fight is sometimes worth fifty or hundred Ducats⁽⁷⁾ to the owner of the cocks. Whosoever's cock beats the other's, draws the money. The goats they have in this city are much larger and more handsome than ours and they have always three or four kids in one litter. One gives there ten or twelve good sheep for one Ducat. There are also sheep of another kind with horns like deer.⁽⁸⁾ They are larger than ours and fight fiercely. The buffaloes are misshapen and larger than in Italy. One can obtain many good fish almost like

(5) *Probably the beak of a great horn-bill.*

(6) *A sport still very popular with the Siamese people.*

(7) *A European gold coin of that time, worth about nine shillings.*

(8) *This seems a fable. There are no sheep with horns like a deer.—When Varthema speaks of lions, he obviously refers to tigers which were very common in the forests and often met with by travellers on the overland route.*

ours. I have seen there one single fish-bone weighing ten cantari.⁽⁹⁾ As regards the customs of the rich, they eat all kinds of meat, excepting that of cows and oxen. They eat on the ground, without cloth, from wooden vessels, very beautiful. Their drink is water mixed with sugar. Their beds are quite high from the ground, made of cotton, and the covers are of silk or cotton. The dresses are long, made of quilted cloth of silk or cotton. Some merchants and nobles wear very beautiful shirts. In general they do not wear anything on their feet. Only the Brahmins, their priests, wear caps on their heads, made of silk, or camelots, which are two spans high. On top of the said cap there is a string like a garland, worked all around with gold. They also wear two strings of silk, two fingers wide, which they hang around the neck. They have their ears full of jewels, but have none on their hands. The colour of this people is semi-white, because the air there is fresher and cooler than at Calicut. Their houses are similar to ours, and also the manner of collecting fruits.

3. The Chapter showing how the King causes his wife to be deflowered before sleeping with her, and also the other nobles of this city.

The King of the said city of Tarnasseri follows this custom of old: When he takes a virgin for his wife, he does not permit a Brahmin to sleep with her the first night as does the King of Calicut.^(9a) He chooses a white man who must be a commoner, not

(9) *The Italian Cantaro is about a hundredweight English. It might have been a bone of a stray whale, though whales are not common in this part, but are sometimes met with in the more eastern part of the Archipelago.*

(9a) *In a preceding chapter of his itinerary about the Brahmins in Calicut Varthema relates: "You must know that the Brahmins are the chief persons of the faith. And when the King takes a wife, he selects the most worthy and the most honoured of these Brahmins and makes him sleep the first*

a noble. The white man may be a Christian or a Moor. This man sleeps with the King's wife in order to rob her of her virginity. The same is arranged by the nobles of this city. Before they conduct their wives to their house, they find a white man of whatever language or faith he may be. They take him to the house of the bride to make him deflower her. This happened to me and my companion. When we arrived at the city, we met after a few days three merchants who asked my companion: *Langalli ni pardesi*, that is "Friends are you strangers?" He answered: "Yes!" Said they: *Ethera nali ni benno*, that is: "How many days have you been in this city?" We replied: *Mun nalgnao banno*, "It is four days that we arrived." Then one of the merchants said: *Biti banno gnan pigamanathon ouno*, "Come with me to my house, I am a good friend of strangers." We went with him. When we arrived there he gave us a good collation and said to us: "Dear friends, *palanci nale bannognan penna periti in penna orangono panna penni corto*, that is: "I have taken a bride whom I wish to

night with his wife, in order that he may deflower her. Do not imagine however that the Brahmin goes willingly to perform this operation. The King is even obliged to pay him four hundred or five hundred Ducats."

According to Badger (HS) page 141, Hamillon says: "When the Samorin married he must not cohabit with his wife till the Nambourie, or chief priest, has enjoyed her, and, if he pleases, he may have three nights of her company because the first fruits of her nuptials must be a holy oblation to the God she worships."—Buchanan confirms the statement as follows: "The ladies of the Tamari family are generally impregnated by Namburis. Although, if they choose, they may employ the higher ranks of Nairs. But the sacred character of the Namburis always procures them a preference." (See Pinkerton's *Voyages* Vol. VIII, pp. 374, 734.)—Cf. also the old custom of the "*ius primae noctis*" in Europe.

bring home in fifteen days, and I wish that one of you shall sleep with her the first night and shall deflower her for me." After hearing such a thing we looked at each other and turned red for shame. Then he said: *Turcimamo, you must not be ashamed, because this is the custom of the country.* Then my companion said: *If we do no evil we shall do as you wish, but we were afraid that it was a mockery.* When the merchant noticed that we were thus undecided, he said: *O langal limanan conia ille ocnar manezar irichenu,* that is: *Do not be dissipated, for all this country follows this custom.* Finding that such really was the custom as one who was in our company confirmed by oath, who said also that we need have no fear, my companion said to the merchant he would be willing to undergo this fatigue. Whereupon the merchant was delighted and said to us: *I wish you to remain at my house until I bring the bride home.* Therefore he took us to his house, all five of us, together with our goods, and treated us well with food and drinks and was very friendly to us. And on the fifteenth day he led my companion to his bride and the latter slept with her the first night. And my companion did himself well, as he told me later, for he said that he had wished that the one night would have lasted a month. She was a pretty brown child of sixteen years. But after this night, if found again with her, he would have forfeited his life. The merchant having received such a service from my companion, offered to retain us for four or five months at his own expense, for the food is very cheap here and the people liberal and agreeable.⁽¹⁰⁾

(10) *There is no reason to doubt the veracity of Varthema when he describes this extraordinary usage, repulsive as it must seem to us. There is however nothing to confirm that this custom was at any time prevalent in Siam. Extravagant and obscene, as this custom must appear to us at present, there is clear evidence that it existed in Burma up to a fairly recent period. The following quotation from Richard in describing*

4. *The Chapter showing how the dead bodies are preserved in this city.*

All the Kings and Brahmins in this city of Tarnasseri are burnt after death. They make great sacrifices to the devil to save the souls of the dead. They preserve the ashes in special earthen vessels, glazed and formed like a urine-bottle.⁽¹¹⁾ They then bury this vessel with the ashes of the body in their palaces and houses. When they make their sacrifices, they make them under some tree after the manner of Calicut. And for burning the body they light a fire of most odoriferous things and they place on the body benzoin, aloes-wood, storax⁽¹²⁾ and amber and many precious things so that a pleasant odour is spread all over the city. And in addition they play all sorts of instruments so that there is a big noise in the town. There are always present fifteen or twenty men, made up like devils in an awe inspiring manner, who make great rejoicing. And the dead man's wife is always present, but no other woman and she makes most exceedingly great lamentations. Such are their doings until one or two o'clock at night.

5. *The Chapter showing how the wives are burnt alive after the death of their husbands.*

There is also another custom in this city. Fifteen days after the death of the husband the widow arranges a large banquet for her relatives and the friends of her husband. After the banquet she

a similar usage as prevailing in Aracan, is given by Badger (HS page 205): "Virginity is not an esteemed virtue with them. Husbands prefer running the risk of fathering the children of others, rather than marry a novice. It is generally Dutch sailors, who are liberally paid for this infamous prostitution."

(11) *The German text from which I translated reads "geformyret wie die haren glass". The Italian word in the original is "scutella". The upper part of such a vessel is drawn into a narrow mouth.*

(12) *A tree yielding a resinous vanilla-scented balsam.*

goes with all the relatives and friends to the place where the body of her husband was burnt. She puts on a most beautiful dress of silk and wears all her jewellery and gold. In the meantime her friends have made a pit, similar to a shallow well, approximately to the height of a human being. Around this pit they place five or six canes on which they put a cloth of silk. Then they make a fire in the pit with the same odoriferous things as used in the pile erected for the burning of her husband's body. At the banquet the widow eats so much betel-fruit that she loses her wits.⁽¹³⁾ There are also present pipers and street-musicians in great numbers, singing and making a big noise, and the men, made up like devils, spit fire from their mouths and perform strange antics. They also offer a sacrifice to Deumo⁽¹⁴⁾ or the devil. Then the said woman who wants to burn herself, walks up and down the place, jumping and dancing around the fire with the other women of whom there are many there. Many times she approaches the men, dressed like devils, entreating them to pray to the the devil that he will graciously accept her as his own. And the men promise her that they will do as she has asked. All this the woman does without any fear and even joyfully, for she believes that now she will be led straight to heaven. And thus with much crying and noise she seizes the silken cloth and throws herself into the fire's midst with all her clothes and jewellery. Immediately her friends fall upon her with long sticks and beat her with full force and throw balls of pitch, so that she may die sooner. She is then burnt to ashes like her husband. If the woman would not do this, she would be despised and looked upon as with us a common prostitute. She would be killed by the hands of her own friends. When such an event takes place, the King honours the occasion with his presence. And in this way act

(13) *The German text is "thöbig im haupt."*

(14) *cf. Badger (HS page 137) The word "Deumo" or "Dev" means indefinitely a dweller in the upper world and, more particularly, an inhabitant of Sverga, the Paradise where Indra rules.*

only the prominent persons, not the common people.⁽¹⁵⁾

6. *The Chapter concerning the love-making of the young men.*

There is another custom in this city which I have seen myself. There is a young man making love to a lady and speaking to her declaring, how he loves her and that there is nothing he would not do for her. And to prove his words he takes a piece of cloth, well saturated with oil, which he sets on fire and places it on his naked arm. And then he lets the rag burn, simultaneously talking to the lady all the while. But what she said to him and what his reply was, I did not hear.⁽¹⁶⁾

7. *The Chapter concerning the administration of justice in Tarnasseri.*

He who kills another, will, if caught, be put to death as in Calicut.⁽¹⁷⁾ With respect to money-debts, the creditor must have

(15) *It appears from this narrative that the practice of Sati at Tenasserim at that time was still a custom, but confined to a particular sect. It was never in use in Siam proper — as far as my knowledge goes — neither with the Royal Family nor with the nobles of the country.*

(16) *The proof by fire, in default of written or testimonial evidence, was part of the judiciary system of Siam. This is confirmed by many authors, for instance de la Loubère. I have, however, never met with any evidence to corroborate its use in love-making.*

(17) *That is by impalement. In a preceeding chapter about Calicut Varthema describes the process as follows: "If one kills another, the King causes a stake to be taken four paces long and well pointed at one end, and has two sticks fixed across the said stake two spans from the top, and then the said wood is fixed in the middle of the back of the malefactor and passes through his body, and in this way he dies." (Cf. Badger HS page 147).*

proof in writing or by witness. Their writing is on paper like ours, not on leaves of trees like in Calicut. They then go to the Governor of the city who administers justice and decides the amount to be paid. If a foreign merchant dies who has no wife or children, he cannot leave his property to whomsoever he pleases, but the King

Turpin in his "History of Siam" gives the following description: "The criminal is made to lie down on his belly, and after being securely tied, a stake of wood is forced up his fundament by the blows of a club, And it is driven till it comes out, either through the stomach or through the shoulders. They afterwards raise this stake and fix it in the earth. It often happens that the sufferer dies under the operation, but sometimes the stake passes through the body without injuring any of the noble parts, and then the poor wretch endures for several days the most agonizing torments."

A special form of impalement against members of the Royal Family in Siam, is described by many authors, e.g. van Vliet. Cf. JSS Vol. XXX/II, where the process is described as follows: "Thereupon the Prince was led away to the temple —opposite the court. They laid him on a piece of red cloth and drove a piece of sandal wood into his stomach, a form of execution that is used in Siam only in the case of Princes of the blood."

With regard to the punishment of impalement inflicted upon commoners or members of the Royal Family, I have come to the conclusion that no such punishment was ever practiced in Siam, even in those days, in spite of Varthema's statement and those of other authors. The procedure would have been revolting both to the monarch and his Buddhist subjects. Prince Dhani Nivat has kindly supplied me with the following information: "I have looked through the text of the old oath of allegiance in which dire punishments were enumerated for the defaulter, and impalement was not among them. Capital punishment for the members of the Royal Family used to be by the way of

is his heir.⁽¹⁸⁾ If the King dies and leaves a son, the latter becomes King as in Calicut. If a Moorish merchant dies, very great expense is incurred in odoriferous substances, in order to preserve the body from decay. And the body is placed in a wooden coffin and is buried, the face towards Mecca, i.e. to the north. If the deceased has left children, they are his heirs.

8. *The Chapter concerning the ships at Tarnasseri.*

In this city and on the sea they make use of very large boats and ships of various shapes. Firstly there are some with nearly flat bottoms. They can go to places with little and shallow water. Another kind has two prows before and aft and these carry two helms and two masts and are uncovered. The third kind of ships is very large and each has a tonnage of a thousand barrels. In addition to those they have very small vessels which they use to go to Melacha⁽¹⁹⁾ to procure small spices of which you shall know when the time comes.

being clubbed to death, the victim being put into a sack to prevent his body being defiled by a punitive instrument."

I infer from Francis H. Giles' "Analysis of van Vliet's Account of Siam" (JSS Vol. XXX/III page 334), that "One understands from this system (the system of "sakdina") that capital punishment was not inflicted for murder, although it seems that capital punishment was inflicted for offences against the person of the King, against the State, for cowardice etc. in time of war and for certain breaches of the Palace Code."

I conclude from the divergency between Varthema's statement and the result of Giles' investigations that there was no uniform law in the capital and the provinces, but that the administration of justice as well as the various punishments differed in the provinces from those in Ayuthia.

(18) *Having no access to respective books of reference, I have not been able to check the correctness of this statement.*

(19) *i. e. Malacca.*

9. *The Chapter concerning the city of Banghella its relations and its faith.*

After we had been for some time in the said city of Tarnasseri and had rested and well enjoyed life, we had the desire to sail farther on. And I agreed with my companion who had sold part of his merchandise to go on board ship again. We took the route towards the city of Banghella which is distant from Tarnasseri seven hundred miles.⁽²⁰⁾ We arrived there with favourable winds after eleven days. This city is one of the best I have seen and has a great realm in a powerful Kingdom. The Sultan of this place is Mohammedan. He is in a position to send to battle two hundred thousand men on foot and on horse. As all people in his kingdom are Mohammedans, he is constantly at war with the King of Narsinga.⁽²¹⁾ This country, I believe, is the most perfect place for grain and meat of every kind. They have a great quantity of sugar, ginger and cotton and are the richest merchants I have ever met. Fifty ships are laden here every year with cotton and silken cloth which later are called beyram, nannone, lizari, ciantar, doazar and synabaff. These stuffs go to and are sold in Turkey, Syria, Persia,

(20) *The existence of a city called Banghella, or Bangala, at that time, has been proved by Barbosa who travelled there only a few years after Varthema. It was a seaport of considerable trade and was situated at the eastern mouth of the Ganges, at the head of the Gulf of Bengal. The place is mentioned by Purchas and Mandelslo and appears on the principal maps of the time. After 1740 the name of this place is however no more mentioned on the maps, and it must have ceased to exist in about the middle of the eighteenth century. Renell in his "Memoirs of a Map of Hindostan" writes about Banghella: "I conceive that the site of the city has been carried away by the river, as in my remembrance a vast tract of land disappeared thereabouts."*

(21) *cf. Note (2)*

in both Arabias, in Ethiopia and all over India.⁽²²⁾ There are also in this city many merchants who come from other countries to buy jewels found here in great quantities.

10. *The Chapter concerning some Christian merchants in Banghella.*

In this city I also met some Christian merchants. They said they were from a city called Sernau.⁽²³⁾ They had brought for sale silken cloth, also wood, benzoin and musk. Which Christians said that in their country there were many princes and rich lords, but that they were subject to the King of Cathay, a great Khan.⁽²⁴⁾ As to the dress of these Christians, they were clothed in camelots,^(25, 26) with folds, and the sleeves were quilted with cotton. On their heads they wore a barret, one and a half spans high and made of red cloth. These men are white and confess that they are Christians and believe in the Holy Trinity, likewise in the Twelve Apostles and all

(22) *These technical terms for piecegoods are of Arabic or Persian origin. Some of them are still in use. "Synabaff" might be Sina baft, viz. China woven cloth.*

(23) *Varthema's "Sarnau" is undoubtedly Siam. Ferdinand Mendez Pinto designates the Kingdom of Siam "The Empire of Sornau". Nicolo Conti in 1480 mentions "Cernove". A similar name is found in the "Roteiro" of Vasco da Gama in 1498. Detailed information about this name and its origin is offered in de Campos' article "Early Portuguese Accounts of Thailand" (JSS Vol. XXXII/I).*

(24) *The ancient Kingdom of Cathay is fully described by Marco Polo. It comprised not only China, but also Tartary, Turkestan and parts of India. China, at Varthema's time, considered Siam as a tributary state, though it yielded no authority there whatsoever.*

(25) *I presume from the description that the Christians were Nestorians.*

(26) *A costly eastern stuff of silk and camel's hair.*

the Four Evangelists. They are baptised with water. They keep the Nativity and the Passion of Christ and observe Lent and many Holy Days and Vigils during the year. They write contrariwise to us after the manner of the Armenians.⁽²⁷⁾ They do not wear shoes made of leather but of silk with many jewels on them.⁽²⁸⁾ They eat at a table as we do and not on the ground like the pagans. They eat all kinds of meat. These people also said that they knew that on the frontier of the Grand Turk there were powerful Christian Kings and Lords.

11. The Chapter concerning Pego, a city of India.

The city of Pego⁽²⁹⁾ is situated on the mainland, but near the sea. On the left hand of this, that is towards the east, there is a beautiful river, by which very many ships come and go. The King's manner of living and his customs are after the manner of Tarnassery. But with respect to their colour, they are somewhat more white, for the air is a little more cold. Their dwellings are like ours. The city is walled and has very good houses and beautiful palaces built of stone with lime. The King is very powerful in men, booth foot and horse, and he keeps always, for his own person, more than one thousand Christians of the country aforementioned.⁽³⁰⁾ To each he

(27) *This is an error. The Armenians write in the same way as we do, i.e. from left to right.*

(28) *Captain John Saris in 1612 mentions among the articles most vendible in the Indian Archipelago "Coral in large branches, five and six Ryals the Malayan Tael."*

(29) *The city of Pegu was the capital of the kingdom of the same name. Burma at that time was divided, the principal kingdoms were Ava, Toungu, Pegu and Prome.*

(30) *I.e. Christians from Sarnau? It is very unlikely that there were any Christians at the court of Pegu before the arrival of the Portuguese. Varthema probably refers to soldiers of the Buddhist faith. He may have heard that the soldiers believe in*

gives six pardey a month and the food extra. In this country there is an abundance of grain, meat and many kinds of fruit, such as found in Calicut. There are not so many elephants, but many other animals and birds. Above all, there are to be found the most beautiful parrots I had ever seen. Timber grows in this country in great quantities with the best wood for boats and ships. The canes which grow there are as thick as a barrel. I have never seen thicker ones anywhere. Civet-cats are also found in the country, three or four of which are sold for a ducat. But most of the merchandise of this city consists of jewels, for the greater part rubies, which come from another place, called Capellan, a thirty days journey distant from Pego. Not that I have seen it, but by what I have heard from other merchants.⁽³²⁾ You must also know that the diamonds and large pearls in this city are worth more than with us, and likewise the emeralds. When we arrived there, the King was fifteen days journey distant, at war with another King,

a Trinity and thus believed they were Christians. Probably he mistook the Christian Trinity for the Buddhist Triad of Buddha, Darma and Sanga, the "Three Precious Ones."

(31) *Pardao, an old gold coin approximately equal to the ducat.*

(32) *Fitch mentions the same locality as Varthema and calls it Caplan, "where they find the rubies, the sapphires and the spinelles." Tavernier says: "It is a mountain about a dozen days journey from Sirian on the north-east, and is called Capellan," and "this is the mine which produces the greater quantity of rubies and spinels."—As Siam for Sapphires, Burma is still by far the most important country for rubies which are found in several places, especially at Mogok, about ninety miles north-east of Mandalay at an altitude of 4000 feet. Most of the famous rubies in the world have come from Burma. — I have however not been able to find out where this place Capellan is to-day and whether it still exists.*

the King of Ava.⁽³³⁾ Hearing of this, we undertook to go and find the King (of Pegu), in order to try and sell the corals to him at a price as high, as we had been made to expect. So we departed on a small ship, made all of one piece of wood, not more than fifteen or sixteen paces long. The oars of this vessel were made of cane. And you must understand in what manner the oars were made: Where the oar takes the water, it is cloven, and they insert a flat piece of wooden board, fastened by cords, so that the vessel moves faster than a brigantine. The mast of this vessel, to which the ropes are fastened, is as thick as a barrel. In three days we arrived at a village where we found some merchants who had not been able to enter the city of Ava on account of the war. Hearing this we returned with them to Pegu. Five days afterwards the King arrived at the said city. He had won a great victory over his enemy. And on the other day our Christian companions took us to the King to speak with him.

12. The Chapter concerning the dress of the King of Pegu.

When we went to the King of Pegu, we found him standing with some of his Lords and he behaved to us in a very amiable and friendly manner. Since he is not by far as haughty and proud as the King of Calicut, so that even a little boy may speak to him about his wants. The King wore more rubies and other jewels on him, than a powerful large country with all its goods could pay for. His ears hang down half a span through the weight of the jewels. He also wears jewels on his arms and fingers, likewise on his toes.

(33) *Pegu at that time was constantly at war with Ava. In 1544 and again in 1556 it was subjugated by the King of Tounghu. In 1600 Pegu was taken by the Kings of Aracan and Tounghu, and the King of Pegu was put to death. In 1618 the King of Ava was crowned at Pegu, and from this period dates the predominance of the Avan monarchy over the lower provinces. Cf. Yule, "Narrative of a mission to the court of Ava."*

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On his calves he has pieces of golden cloth, set with most beautiful rubies. He is adorned and covered with so many rubies, that the lustre and shine of them at night make him appear to be a sun.⁽³⁴⁾ — So the said Christians went to him and told him about our merchandise. The King replied that he would send for us on the following day. Because on this day he had to make a great sacrifice to the devil on account of the victory he had gained. On the next day the King sent for us and the Christians and demanded that we should bring our merchandise with us. This we did.—And when the King saw such beautiful corals, especially two branches, the like of which had never before been brought to India, he asked what people we were. The Christians answered: *Almighty Lord, they are Persians.* Then the King spoke to his interpreter: *Ask them if they are willing to sell them.* Said my companion: *Powerful King, these articles are at your disposal.* Then the King said that he had been at war with the King of Ava for two years and on that account he had no money but that, if we were willing to barter for so many rubies, he would amply satisfy us.

Then we caused him to be told that we desired nothing from him but his grace and friendship and that he could take the goods and do with them as he pleased. The Christians were frightfully surprised on hearing my companion make such an offer, that the King should take the beautiful corals without money or barter for jewels. But the King, when hearing of this liberality, said: *I know very well that the Persians are liberal and honest, but people like you I have never met, and I swear by the head of God and the devil that I will see who is the more liberal, I, the King, or two Persians.* And then he commanded one of his servants to bring him a small casket, two spans long, very beautifully made of gold and set all

(34) *All the contemporary and later writers describe the richness of the King of Pegu's dress, as well as the splendour of his jewels, mostly rubies and sapphires. Cf. Gasparo Balbi and Ralph Fitch,*

around with precious stones. And when the King opened this casket, I perceived therein six separate divisions, all full of rubies. This box he placed before us and said: *Now take thereof what and as much as you like.* My companion answered: *Oh, Powerful Lord, you show me so much kindness that by the faith which I owe to Mohammed I make Your Honour a present of all the things which I have.* And, he continued, *know, Sire, that I do not travel about the world to gain much property and profit, but only to see various countries and different people and their custom.* Said the King: *If then I cannot conquer you with liberality, I am sorry, but you take what I will give you.* So he took a good handful of the precious rubies from each of the divisions of the said casket and gave them to my companion – and these rubies might be about two hundred in numbers. And the King said: *Take the gift of a King of Pego for your honesty and liberality which you have shown me.* And in the like manner he gave to each of the Christians two rubies which were estimated later at a thousand ducats each. I believe that the rubies of my companion were worth one hundred thousand ducats, for this is the amount at which they were later estimated.⁽³⁵⁾ My companion and I expressed to the King our profound gratitude as it was only fit and suitable, because, I believe, that all over the world you cannot find a King so liberal. He has an income of about one million gold every year, excluding the precious stones which are delivered up to him each year.⁽³⁶⁾

(35) *A typical eastern way of making a good bargain. The device is as old as the trade, but still as good as new in a bargain with the proper customers.*

(36) *Up to recent times all precious stones in Burma, exceeding a certain weight, had to be delivered to the King who had his inspectors at the various mines to control the digging. But in many cases larger stones were hidden and clandestinely sold in – what we would call to-day the “black market”, or smuggled out of the country. – In a preceding chapter on the Island of Ceylon Varthema describes the custom there with reference to the digging of precious stones. This chapter is of special interest in connection with the relation to Pegu. I therefore would like to quote a few sentences of the original German text, in*

In this country there is found much lac (37), sandalwood, brazilwood, cotton and silk. The King gives all his income to his soldiers.

order to give an example of the quaint and singular way of writing at that time, and to add a translation of the respective passage: "So sach ich da s^uchen und fynden den edlen st^ain rubin bey ainem grossen perg zwⁱ meyl vom m^er gelegen/Zu vnderst an dem selben fynt man die gemelten rubin/Vnd wan ein Kauffman dar kumbt von diser st^ain wegen so m^uss er handeln mit dem k^uinig vñ von im kaufen das erdtrich da selbst nach der elen auff allen orten rings weys die selb elen wirt genant molan/ Dem selben weytle erdtreych kauft er vñb so vil geltz als f^unff ducaten ist/Dann so may er da selb eingraben yedoch so ist allerzeyt ein man darpey von des k^unigs wegen/Vñ wa ainer ein Edel gestayn Vyndt Das/an dem gewicht zechen carat hat oder dar i^uber/ So nympt es der k^unig fur sich die ander^e all last er d^e kaufman frey volgen es w^achst auch an aynem andere ort bey dem gemelten perg n^achst vnd bey aynem fast grossen flyessenden wasser vil Granaten auch Sophir Jacyneten vnd thopaci/-----"

Translation of the above passage: "We also saw people seek and find rubies there, the precious stone, near a large mountain, at a distance of two miles from the sea, at the foot of which the said rubies are found. And when a merchant comes to look for these stones, he is obliged to deal with the King and to purchase the land all around measured in ells, which ell is called molan (36a). This plot he buys for five ducats. Then he may dig there, but there is always a man present on behalf of the King. And if one finds a precious stone which weighs ten carats or more, the King claims it for himself and leaves all the rest to the merchant. There is also produced at another place near the said mountain, where there is a very large river, a great quantity of Garnets, also Sapphires, Hyacinths and Topazes-----"

(36a) perhaps for Ammonan, which according to Pridham "Ceylon and its Dependencies" was equal to two acres, two square rods, thirty-seven and a half square inches.

(37) This is apparently sticklac.

The people in this country are very immoral. —After some days we went to see the King again, to thank him once more, and the two Christians took leave of him in their own, and in our name. The King ordered a room to be prepared for us and everything we required put at our disposal for so long as we wished to remain there. We therefore, remained another five days at Pego. During this time news was received that the King of Ava was coming again with a great army. On hearing this he (the King of Pego) went to meet him half way with many soldiers on foot and on horseback. — On the next day we saw two women burnt alive in the same manner as I have described it at Tarnasseri.

13. *The Chapter concerning the city of Melacha, the river Gaza and the trade there.*

The next day we embarked on board a ship and went to a city called Melacha⁽³⁸⁾ which is situated towards the west and we arrived there in eight days. Near to the said city we found a great flowing water, as large as any we had ever seen. This is called Gaza⁽³⁹⁾ and is about twenty-five miles wide. On the opposite side of this river there is a very large island, called Sumatra.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The natives say its circumference is four thousand miles. Later on I shall report about this island. When we arrived at the city of Melacha we were immediately questioned and brought before the Sultan who is a pagan or Mohammedan like all his people. The city mentioned is on the main land and has about twenty thousand dwellings, but in very poor condition. The city gives and pays

(38) *Varthema was the first European to make Europe acquainted with Malacca, its name and location.*

(39) *The Straits opposite Malacca. The name Gaza is probably a contraction of the Arabic word Boghāz, meaning a strait.*

(40) *Varthema is the first to give the name to the island as we write it now,*

tribute to the King or Cini⁽⁴¹⁾ whose predecessors caused this place to be built about eighty years ago because it is a suitable place and has a very good port on the sea. This port is considered the principle port on the ocean. And, truly, I believe, that more ships arrive here than in any other port of the world. Here are brought all kinds of spices and other merchandise in great quantities.⁽⁴²⁾ This country is not very fertile.⁽⁴³⁾ There is no grain and but little meat. But they have timber and birds like in Calicut. A great quantity of sandalwood is here as well as a mine producing good tin.⁽⁴⁴⁾ There are also many elephants, horses and buffaloes, cows, leopards, as well as peacocks in great numbers. They trade mainly in spices and silken ware. The people are of brown colour and have long hair. They dress in a similar fashion as in Cairo. Their faces are broad, their eyes round and

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- (41) The word "Cini" in this connection is another word for Siam. The origin of the word "Cini" is difficult to trace. Cf. Badger (HS page 236). Crawford corroborates Varthema's statement. The author of the Commentaries of Albuquerque describes Malacca as follows: "The kingdom of Malacca on one side borders on Queda, and on the other side on Pam (Pahang). It had one hundred leagues of coast, and inland extends to a chain of mountains, where it is parted from Siam a breath of ten leagues. All this land was anciently subject to Siam."
- (42) The importance of the port of Malacca may be exaggerated by Varthema, but it was undoubtedly a place of considerable importance at that time. Ships from Japan, China and the Philippines arrived there, interchanging commodities, brought from India, Burma, Siam and Java.
- (43) This corresponds to facts.
- (44) According to van Vliet, loco citato, the yearly export of tin from Siam amounted to "1500-2000 picol".

their noses flat. They descend from a people and nation of Giavai.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Generally speaking they are a bad people, and nobody dares walk about at night in this city, because they strangle and kill each other like dogs. All merchants who arrive there, sleep at night on their ships. The King is represented by a Governor who administers justice to foreigners. If the King attempts to interfere with the people of the country proper, and tries to punish them, they say they are free men of the sea, and if the King coerces them against their will, they say that they will leave the country.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The air there is temperate. Our companions, the two Christians, said that we ought not to remain here long because the people are an evil race. We therefore took a junk, that is a ship so called,⁽⁴⁷⁾ and

(45) *Java. Considering the short time Varthema spent at Malacca, it is surprising how strikingly accurate his brief remarks are. All scientists agree that not only the founders of Malacca, but even of Singapore, were Javanese and not Malays.*

(46) *The population of Malacca, mostly Malays, must have been a dangerous and unruly lot at Varthema's time. As to their character, Barbosa describes them as "very skilful and exquisite workmen, but very malevolent and treacherous". It is again interesting to note the gift of keen observation in Varthema. "The men of the sea", the "orang-laut", in Malay, is still to-day the usual name given to this class of Malays, who, like gipsies of the sea live in their boats, roaming the Archipelago and living on the products of the sea or in former times by the robberies they committed on sea. Through the ages they have developed a sense of independence and liberty which made them difficult, unruly and troublesome subjects.*

(47) *The name of a large trading vessel in Malay and Javanese is "jung", which the Portuguese converted into "junco" and the English into "junk". The word in the German translation, apparently taken from the Italian original is "giuncho."*

went to Sumatra, to a city called Pider⁽⁴⁸⁾ situated eighty miles from the mainland.

Conclusions:

We have come to the end of the tale. I should have liked the reader of this monograph to peruse the original. Much charm of it is lost by translation.—It might be suitable to close this paper, with a quotation from the dedication of Varthema's book. As I said before, his book was dedicated to Madame Colonna. But the following words might have been addressed to any reader of his itinerary:

"Your kindness will easily supply all want of skill in the connection of the narrative, grasping only the truth of the facts. And if these, my labours, should prove agreeable to you and meet with your approbation, I shall consider that I have received sufficient praise and satisfaction for my long wanderings--."

I believe that Ludovico di Varthema would have been well satisfied, had he known that people in the far away countries which he visited, would read his book four centuries after he, the old traveller, had gone on his long last journey — the journey from which there is no return.

(48) *Pider or Pedir is the name of a Malay state in the eastern part of Sumatra.*

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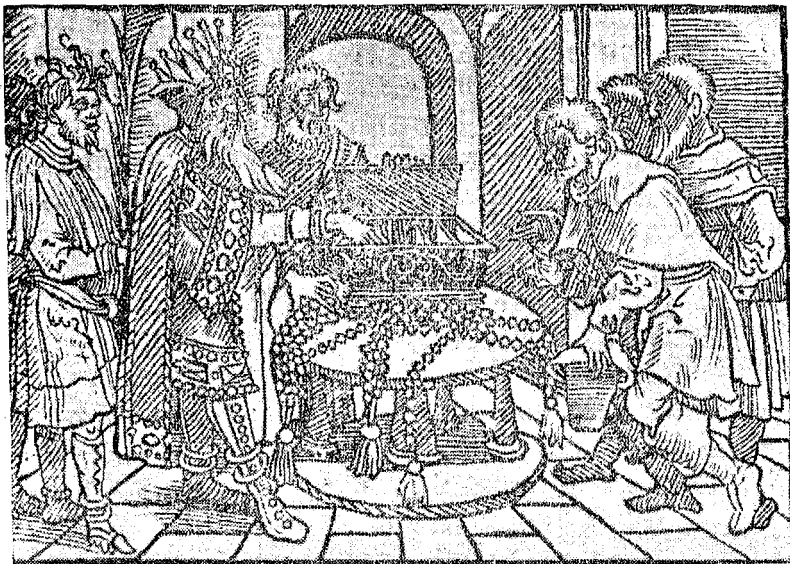
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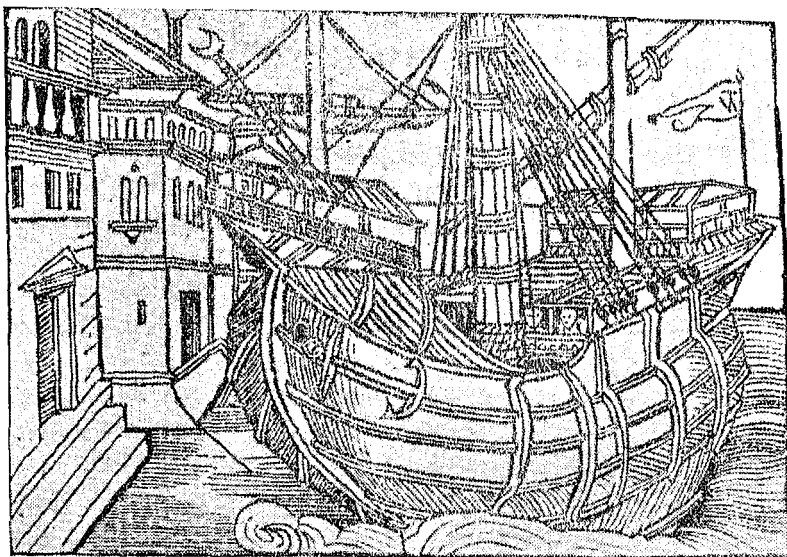
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The King of Pegu giving rubies to Varthema and his companions. (See page 145)



*A large ship in the port of Malacca.
(See page 146)*