

NOTES AND COMMENTS

TWO PORTS OF SUVARṆABHŪMI: A BRIEF NOTE

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Suvarṇabhūmi—the Land of Gold, the Indian El Dorado—is frequently mentioned in Indian and Buddhist literature.¹ The setting of the *Supārāga Jātaka*, number 14 in the *Jātakamālā* of Ārya-śūra (4th century A.C. ?), recently translated by Peter Khoroché,² is a voyage from Bharukaccha (modern Broach in the Gulf of Cambay) to Suvarṇabhūmi. The ship is driven astray by bad weather; at one point Supārāga, hero of the tale, says "we have been driven far off from both ports...so try and turn back" (XIV 13, *sudūram-apakṛṣṭāḥ smaḥ pattanadvitayādapi...tadyatadhvaṃ nivartitum*). An (unpublished) Sanskrit commentary, the *Jātakamālā Ṭikā*, commenting on the phrase "both ports", says *suvarṇabhūmi-pattanna-dvayaṃ laṅkāśobhaḥ kaṭahadvīpaṃ* "the two ports of Suvarṇabhūmi, Laṅkāśobha and Kaṭahadvīpa". Khoroché notes that Laṅkāśobha must refer to Langkasuka, and Kaṭahadvīpa to Kaṭāha = Kedah.

I dare not venture far into the maze of maritime Southeast Asian history, except to note that both places are in the central Malay peninsula. Archaeological and literary evidence shows that Kedah had a long history, and retained its importance as a port up to at least the 13th century.⁴ Langkasuka also had a long history; although the location of

its capital has not been determined, it is generally placed in the region of Pattani.⁵ While Kaṭāha is frequently mentioned, the present reference to Langkasuka seems to be only the second so far traced in Indian literature or inscriptions.⁶

All evidence suggests that Suvarṇabhūmi was a foreign (that is, Indian) and general name for the region of Southeast Asia, rather like the latter English term itself, or the earlier "Further India", "Insulinde", and "Indochina." That is, there was no kingdom or state named "Suvarṇabhūmi," although the term was sometimes used in inscriptions, such as the 9th century Nālandā inscription that mentions King Bālaputra of Suvarṇadvīpa (taking Suvarṇadvīpa to equal Suvarṇabhūmi) or the late 15th century Kalyāṇi-simā inscription from Pegu. The *Ṭikā* is undated; Khoroché (p. xi) states that it is "probably to be assigned to the fourteenth century". Its sources could, however, be much earlier; at one point, for example, it refers to Daṇḍin (late seventh century?) as authority.⁷ Therefore the present passage only tells us that, at the time of the source used by the *Ṭikā*, Langkasuka and Kedah were recognized in India as important Southeast Asian ports.

NOTES

1. For references, see Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese*, Kuala Lumpur [1961] 1980, pp. 177-184, and Paul Wheatley, *Nāgara and Commandery: Origins of the South-east Asian Urban Traditions*, Chicago, 1983, pp. 263-269.
2. See the review of *Once the Buddha was a Monkey* (p. 136 this issue).
3. Quoted from Khoroché, p. 263, n. 6.
4. Cf. Kenneth P. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development*

in Early Southeast Asia, Honolulu, 1985, pp. 199-200, 202; O. W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A study of the origins of Śrīvijaya*, Ithaca and London, 1967, pp. 251-252; O. W. Wolters, *The Fall of Śrīvijaya in Malay History*, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, 1970, p. 188.

5. For Langkasuka see Wheatley 1980, pp. 252-267.
6. See Wheatley 1980, p. 259.
7. See Khoroché, p. 256, n. 17.

