

NOTES AND QUERIES.

REMARKS ON THE LAND ROUTES ACROSS THE MALAY PENINSULA.

I met Mr. Henry George Scott, a very old friend, in December 1933. Our conversation turned on the question of the passes across the peninsula from the Bay of Bengal or the Gulf of Martaban to the Gulf of Siam. I was interested in this matter as I was convinced that communication between the ancient kingdoms of Sumatra, including Sri Vijaya and Cambodia was over the peninsula and not by the roundabout route to the Southern extremity of the peninsula and then up the Gulf. I had been over the territory between the Burmese Frontier at Victoria Point, (Maliwan), and Trang in January 1903, and over the territory lying to the East of this on the Gulf of Siam, the year before. When at Takuapa I was told of the place known as Tung Tük (တုံတိုက်) which means the plain with brick or stone building, but had no time to investigate the matter. When I met Mr. Scott who was well acquainted with the whole area having prospected for tin over it, I asked him if he knew anything of this place and the watershed between the Takuapa and Menam Laung rivers. He told me that he knew Tung Tük and the watershed and at my request prepared the accompanying note which I received on the 4th January 1934.

From what Mr. Scott said it seems quite clear that Tung Tük was a great emporium or mart where traders met, and it is probable that the gold dust which he refers to as having been found in the sand amongst the ruins was either an article of trade or the currency used.

Ptolemy mentions the existence of a place in this region which he calls Takula, Colonel Gerini in his work on Ptolemy's geography published in 1909, gives ample evidence to prove that Takula was Takuapa. Now, Tung Tük is a small island or high sandbank

situated at the mouth of the Takuapa river and was probably in the early years of the Christian era a part of the mainland. It may be that a part of the old town of Takula now lies under the sea. Ships from all parts of the Indian Ocean and further west came to Tung Tuk as well as ships from the Malayan Archipelago and Sumatra. The Takuapa river was probably deeper than now, and ships may have been able to go a considerable distance inland where goods would be landed and carried over the watershed to the head waters of the Menam Laung. The distance between the head waters of the two rivers is only a few miles as explained by Mr. Scott. The Menam Laung is a fine river finding its outlet in the Gulf of Siam at Bandon บ้านดอน where there is a good harbour, but perhaps, not quite as good as Takuapa. The whole of this region in ancient times was colonized by Indians and many of the names of places are of Indian origin. The people of to-day called the Menam Laung Nāti without any special appellation. The word Nāti is the Sanskrit for river. The only other river in Siam called the Nāti is the Mekhong, and here again the surrounding territory was under Indian influence.

I cannot do better than refer the reader to Colonel Gerini's remarks about Takula in his great work.

To prove his claim that Takula is Takuapa, Colonel Gerini brings forward a passage from the Chinese chronicles of the Wu dynasty in the year A. D. 229-265. I now quote from Colonel Gerini.

"Some two centuries later on—or, more exactly, during the Wu dynasty of China (A. D. 229-265)—an embassy having been despatched by the king of Fu-nan to India, it is stated in the Chinese records that it returned by the mouth of the Tau-kiao-le, continuing its route by sea in the great bay (Gulf of Martaban) in a north-westerly direction; it then entered the bay (of Bengal) and ultimately reached India. In this account, the mouth of the Tau-kiao-le has been by various translators taken to mean either the mouth of the Salwin or that of the Irāvati, which is evidently absurd. It seems to me if the identifications of the two bays named in the account prove correct, that we should read Tau-kiao-le as Takāla, and take it as a name given the Pāk-chān River, from the fact of the city of Takōla being situated at or near its mouth. The position of the Tau-kiao-le would then suit all requirements with respect to the great bay (Gulf of Martaban) and the kingdom of Fu-nan (Kamboja), which at the period the embassy took place included Lower Siam; and no doubt also the northern part, if not more, of the Malay Peninsula. It would then

seem but natural that the embassy in question, instead of taking the long sea-route round the southern extremity of the peninsula, should proceed in small skiffs or overland to C'hump'hōn, and thence across the Kra Isthmus to the mouth of the Pāk-chān, to embark at the famous port of Takōla on its journey to India. This is no doubt the usual route that was anciently followed by a great part of the trade between India and the Gulf of Siam, in order to avoid the difficulty and dangers of a long sea navigation through the Straits. The Kra Isthmus was the most northern point of the Malay Peninsula at which the latter could be most easily and speedily crossed. Hence it was chosen as the point of transit and transhipment of merchandise from the Bay of Bengal to the Gulf of Siam, and vice-versa; and the two harbours which formed the termini of the navigation on both sides, as well as the overland route that connected them, must have in consequence acquired great importance.

This evidence is to my mind of paramount importance and supports my theory that the trade route was over the watershed I have referred to. The ancient kingdom of Funan embraced within its frontiers the present day French Cochinchina. Colonel Gerini who did not know the peninsula believed that the trade route between Takula and the Gulf of Siam was over the Isthmus of Kra. I think he is wrong for I am convinced that the trade route was over the watershed of the Rivers Takuapa and Menam Laung. If Colonel Gerini's supposition is correct, ships would have had to move up North to the estuary of the Chan river and the cargoes then carried overland nearly 30 miles before coming to the Chumporn Creek or river. Chaya a town now inland on the Gulf of Siam was an important Indian settlement and many important ruins still exist to testify to this. Bandon the present day outlet of the Menam Laung is only a few miles south of Chaya. It therefore seems quite possible that the Menam Laung many centuries ago found its outlet at Chaya and if this were the case one could understand why Chaya was of such importance.

Another point I would like to draw attention to. Situated in the district of Panom Sarakram on the river now called Cholo, a small tributary of the Bangpakong river which flows through the province of Prachin, is a place called Tarajasan တာရာဆာ. This word means the landing place for the King's letters or dispatches. Letters brought to this place from Chaya or Sumatra were carried on to Sri Mahaphoti a small Cambodian fortress some 30 miles East and then on to

Nakorn Thom. It seems probable that Tarajasan was on the sea in those remote days for it is quite evident that the land between this place and the sea extending right up to the Rangsit area known as the Tong Laung is of comparatively recent formation.

There is another Takula in Burma not far from Thaton, formerly a port on the sea, but now some 12 miles inland. Some scholars believed this place to be Ptolemy's Takula, but this cannot be the case. Takula or whatever the real name is, was probably a name applied to places where Indian settlers lived.

F. H. GILES

Oriental Hotel, Bangkok, 4th January 1934.

My dear Giles,

You told me last Sunday that I must write a note for the Siam Society on the archaeological matters I was talking of to you.

I admit that for many years past I have felt a duty to have some record with the Society on one point that has probably escaped notice: that is the fact that in 1908 or 1909 a considerable amount of coarse and fine gold was recovered from the top two or three feet of the ground at Tong Teuk on the Island of Kow Kaow, Takuapa.

Tong Teuk is so called because it is a grass plain on which the remains of brick and stone buildings have been found. There is nothing standing; but some signs of foundations and broken materials can be noticed in the surface soil.

The gold was discovered in the place where the remains of buildings are common. The people of the district, being expert tin washers, had no difficulty in recovering the gold, and in a short time the whole area (of perhaps two or three acres) was pig-sooted, and denuded of the gold contents.

The first point of interest is that this gold was not a natural phenomenon. Human agency can alone account for its occurrence. The geological conditions are that Tong Teuk is a flat area consisting of sea sand from the surface down to at least 20 ft. The surface is about 2 ft. above high-water. The sand contains throughout an appreciable amount of tin ore, so extremely fine that it can only be recovered with great difficulty, and is therefore of no economic value. The fineness of the tin ore is natural to the situation, the deposit

being fine sand. If the neighbourhood had been gold-bearing instead of tin bearing, the gold in the sand, (if present at all) would have been so fine that individual pieces would have been invisible to the naked eye.

All practical miners and geologists would agree that the natural occurrence of coarse gold in such a position is unthinkable.

If there were no other evidence, the obvious explanation would be that Tong Teuk was the site of an ancient market where gold dust was a commercial product or the medium of exchange, and that the gold found in the soil represented the accumulated drippings of ages.

Doubtless the Society has full records of the Hindu images found in Takuapa Province. The Phra Narai figures and inscription are famous. I will only mention that the stone images that were for many years housed in a shed near the Government buildings at Yan Yow were conveyed there from Koh Larn, which is close to Tong Teuk, being separated by a deep-water tidal channel. These images are artistically inferior to the Phra Narai, but apparently of similar origin.

Many years ago (25 to 30) Colonel Gerini told H. W. Bourke and me that from very ancient Chinese writings he had evidence that Chinese merchants went by ship to a river-port on the east coast of the Peninsula, that they took their goods by boats up a river, then carried them over hills to another river and went again by boats to a great market to which people of many nations came in ships and engaged in commerce. Gerini did not know the Peninsula, but by comparing the Chinese description with modern maps, he had come to the conclusion that Bandon was probably the east-coast port, and that the "great market" was near the mouth of the Takuapa River.

As regards the land connection between rivers navigable by boats on the east and west coasts, I may mention that in one day I have walked from a place on the main branch of the Takuapa River (I think it is called Tahūn) to Ban Sok on a branch of the Bandon River, spent three or four hours there, and walked back again. The distance cannot be more than twelve miles, and I estimate the maximum elevation of the track above sea-level at 500 ft.

There is a string of islands along the coast of Takuapa separated from the mainland by tidal channels and enormous areas of mangrove. The river finds its way to the sea through several openings.

Modern shipping uses the "North" entrance only. Until a few years ago, the "South" entrance was also used. But another channel, which divides the southern end of Koh Kow Kaow from the mainland, is still used by launches and sailing lighters going from Takuapa to Puket or Penang. This entrance has the great advantage over the others of having no obstacle but a narrow, definite bar; with a deep passage through the bar that is well defined by the water breaking on the bar on each side. This entrance, and the reach of the river inside have been much silted-up by tailings from the hill mines, that have been actively worked for about a century, but it is still usable by ships of moderate draught, and must have been an excellent entrance in old days.

Tong Teuk is just round the corner from this entrance and is the nearest and most convenient spot where solid dry land reaches the edge of a navigable channel that is completely sheltered and affords good anchorage. Elsewhere there are thick fringes of mangrove swamp.

I suggest that Tong Teuk is Gerini's great market.

Yours sincerely,
George Scott.

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