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Two Eastern Christian Sources on Medieval Nusantara

Data on the Malay-Indonesian world (Nusantara) in eastern Christian traditions (Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Old Russian, and so on) are only very rarely used in studies of the history and culture of the region. A handful of sporadic references in the publications of H. Yule (1866), G.E. Gerini (1909) and G. Coedès (1910: some Byzantine sources) and in the more recent publications of P. Wheatley (1961: the treatise of Palladius) and B.E. Colless (1969, 1971, 1978: some Syriac and Armenian materials) make up the entire – alas, practically exhaustive – list of examples. However, the legendary isles lying somewhere 'beyond India', which according to our contemporary geographical understanding cannot have been located anywhere but in Southeast Asia, and more especially Nusantara, played an important role in these traditions, as they did incidentally also in the cultures of western Christianity. This 'Nusantara' of the Middle Ages – legendary and still unrecognized as a real and topographically concrete region constituting the archipelago of what was later to become Indonesia – figured as the sum total of 'lands' associated with the contrasting notions of Paradise and 'outer darkness', which were inhabited by righteous Brahmins (the naked philosophers of the romance of Alexander) and 'pagan' peoples and were treasuries crammed with precious stones and the home of great multitudes of allegorical beasts and birds embodying a variety of Christian ideas.

Sometimes legends of this sort might contain small grains of truth. Thus, the Latin 'Expositio totius mundi et gentium' (Coedès 1910:104-8) and the Greek 'Odoiporiai apo Edem mekhri (?) tön Rōmaiōn' (Itineraries from Eden to [the lands of] the Byzantines) (Klotz 1910; Pigulevskaya 1951:115-28, 408-10) and their Georgian versions (Avalichvili 1928) contain lengthy references to the land of the Camarini, located not far from Eden. The name Camarini used in the 'Expositio' is often taken to be a metathetically corrupted form of

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the Greek Makarinoi, 'the blessed, the purified (ones)' (Pigulevskaya 1951:116). One cannot, however, rule out a reverse corruption, that is, the metathesis of Camarini into Makarinoi – this is all the more feasible as the 'Expositio' is, in all likelihood, older than the 'Odoiporiai', and it describes the Camarini as pious creatures living lives of genuine bliss. Arabic records refer to the land of the Khmer not only as Qimar and Qamar, but also as Qamarûn – most likely as a result of confusion with another toponym, namely that for a region in Assam (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986:230). Idrisi refers to a ruler of the island of Tioman, near the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, as Qâm-rûn. This title probably derives from Old Khmer *kurung*, 'king' (Wheatley 1961:229). Arab authors also underscore the high moral standards of the Khmer, as a result of which they resemble the mythical Camarini: 'The rulers of India and its denizens deem adultery permissible, but they forbid wine – except for the ruler of Qimar, who forbids both adultery and wine' (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986:80).

However that may be, the legends of an 'unrecognized Nusantara' and their significance in medieval Christian cultures constitute a special subject of study, which I will go into elsewhere. In this article I will confine myself to a discussion of two eastern Christian sources on the real Nusantara, which have been neglected by Indonesianists for a long time. They are the Armenian 'Description of cities, Indian and Persian' – a work dating from the 12th century A.D. – and the Old Russian 'Voyage beyond the three seas' by Afanasiy (Athanasius) Nikitin, written in the 15th century.

'Description of cities, Indian and Persian': Reminzar, the Land of Gold

The Armenian 'Description of cities, Indian and Persian' is a valuable source of information on Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. This anonymous work, an itinerary for merchants setting out for the 'Land of Gold' from the cities south of Ghazna (in Afghanistan) via India and Ceylon, is preserved in seven manuscripts kept in the library of Matenadaran (Armenia). The oldest of these manuscripts dates from the 13th century. However, the capture of Lohor by Mahmud of Ghazna in 1006 is mentioned in this work as an event which 'took place a hundred years ago', while the Ghaznavids are described by the author as the dynasty that was still in power. Proceeding from these facts, the editor and translator of the work, R. Abramyan (1958:317-8), inferred that it was written some time between 1106 and 1161. Unfortunately, under the influence of maps of contemporary India, he placed the Land of Gold – the Reminzar of the 'Description of cities' – somewhere on the tiny islands between India and Ceylon (Abramyan 1958:328), though the toponyms mentioned in connection with this country (for example, Kala, Kakule,

Lamrin, Panchur, and so on) leave no room for doubt that it should be localized on the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. Therefore, the value of this Armenian source consists in its providing information, though quite concise, on the cities of Srivijaya in the first half of the 12th century.

The text of the passage on Srivijaya, which follows a description of Ceylon (Sarntip = Arabic Sarandib), with its famous precious stones, runs as follows in translation:

'The region called Reminzar, or Land of Gold, because gold is found there in large quantities – as much gold is mined there as is humanly possible – lies there. The names [of the cities] of the Land of Gold are:

Lamrin, the principal city and island. Large quantities of silk[worms], much timber, called *pkam*, and other excellent goods are shipped from there.

From here, the traveller comes to Panchur, which is an island city of great wealth. The noble camphor is obtained there.

Near Lamrin lies [another] island, named Krut, where cheap cardamom is grown and exported.

Krudai, the great city. Near it lies a remarkable and prosperous island named Samavi. Below that lies another island, called Pure. Excellent goods of every description, apt to meet every man's needs, are found in that isle.

Below that is located the island of Yepanes. Large quantities of camphor are produced on that island.

And below [the latter island] lies the isle of Plaioi – the crown of the country [namely the capital of the Land of Gold? – V.B.]. In the isle of Plaioi lives [literally: 'sits'] the king of the [tribe of the] Zapech. When his father or mother dies, he makes life-sized gold idols to replace his parents [to represent them]. They are pagans, and not of the Indian faith. They are called Zapech, and they live on carrion, devouring all they find. They eat both their own dead and [those of] foreigners, if they can get them; they consider them their prey. And when they wage war on other tribes and score a victory, they eat all those who have fallen in battle – both their own [fighters] and their foes'. However, they do not touch merchants and travellers, as they live by trade.

Rambi is an island, and below it is another island, with a city named Panchi. Yet another island lies next to that. Much tin is shipped from the latter island. Various excellent goods are found there, goods fit for kings. Near that isle are [the islands of] Yala, Kala and Kakule.

Here are the cities and islands, the regions and the tribes of the Land of Gold [listed] for you, which are inhabited by a people who speak the Zapech language.' (Abramyan 1958:326-7.)

The majority of the toponyms mentioned in connection with the Land of Gold correspond, albeit in a somewhat modified form¹, with their Arabic

¹ Often through the substitution of voiced consonants with the corresponding voiceless ones, for example: Armenian Zapech – Arabic Zabaj; Armenian Sarntip – Arabic Sarandib, and so on.

equivalents. This, coupled with the correspondence between some details of the 'Description of cities' and of the Arabic accounts of Sumatra², enables us to assume a certain connection between the Armenian text and the Arabic geographical literature of the 9th to 11th centuries. Just like the Arabs (Tibbetts 1971:489), the 12th-century Armenian merchants were mainly familiar with the ports of northern Sumatra. At least four toponyms mentioned in the 'Description of cities' (Lamrin, Panchur, Krut, and Samavi) undoubtedly relate to that part of the island. At the same time, the place-names Samavi, Krut, Krudai, and Yepanes seem to be absent in the contemporary Arabic sources – which testifies to the unique character of the 'Description of cities', as well as, probably, providing evidence for early commercial ties between Armenia and Nusantara (on Armenian trade in Malacca in later times see Thomaz 1993:81-2). On the whole, the subject of Armenian connections with the Malay-Indonesian world deserves much more attention than it has received so far.³

The 'Description of cities', which has been published more than once and was translated into French in 1882 (in the journal *Bazmavep*, pp. 311-3), into German in 1902 (in *Zeitschrift für armenische philologie*, pp. 195-8), and into Russian in 1958 (in the journal *Vestnik Matenaderana*, Vol. 4, pp. 317-28), has been ignored by Indonesianists until now.⁴ The main reasons for this neglect appear to be the facts that publications of the work appeared in specialist journals for Armenian studies and that the name 'India' has been taken in its contemporary sense. Meanwhile, the work holds great interest in more than one respect. Suffice it to say that the 'Description of cities' contains information about the state of Samavi, apparently an early-14th-century predecessor of Samudra, about silk production in North Sumatra as early as the 12th century, about the state of Panai, about which very little is known, and so on. Here I will confine myself to a provisional identification of the toponyms encountered in the work. It is noticeable that they fall into three groups and are listed in a specific order: first the toponyms of northern Sumatra, then those of south-eastern Sumatra, and finally those of the Malay Peninsula.

Lamrin – Arabic Lamuri (see Tibbetts 1979:138-40) (North Sumatra, Aceh);

² Such as the existence of cannibalism in Zapech; the making of gold statues of the Zapech kings' deceased parents; the killing and eating of prisoners of war, over against a positive attitude to merchants in this respect, as the people of Zapech are dependent on trade for their living; and so on. See Tibbetts 1979.

³ On 'unrecognized Nusantara' in Armenian literature see, for example, Patkanov 1877:79-84; on Armenians in Indonesia see the articles by Ter-Mkrtychyan and Geokchyan (1963:313-6) and Colless (1971, 1978).

⁴ The present author is most grateful to Dr. D.V. Deopik of the Institute of Asian and African Countries of Moscow State University for drawing his attention to this work.

Panchur – Arabic Fansur (see Tibbetts 1979:140-1) (north-western Sumatra, modern Barus);

Krut – modern Lho' Kruet (North Sumatra, Aceh);

Krudai – probably Daya (see Hill 1960:6; Cortesão 1967:135-6, 163) (north-western Sumatra, to the south of Lho' Kruet);

Pure – it is difficult to ascertain which of the Sumatran place-names incorporating the component *pura* or *puri* (city) is implied here; it is probably either Indrapuri, on the right bank of the Krueng Aceh, in the XXII Mukim (see McKinnon 1988:115), or the small town of Indrapura, north of the Asahan River, in the Batak area of Simalungun, in the vicinity of which there existed an Indianized state that in the 14th century was called Tanah Jawa (see Parkin 1978:79-81) (north-eastern Sumatra);

Yepanes – probably the old state of Panai, which, according to Slamet-mulyana (1976:215), was located 'in the estuary of the Barumun river', and which is mentioned in both the Tanjore inscription of Rajendra Chola (1030) and the 'Nagarakertagama' (1365) (see Coedès 1968:142, 244); it may be the same as the Batak state of Penaiu described by Mendes Pinto (1969:18 ff.) in 1539 (for this date see Schurhammer 1926) (north-eastern Sumatra);

Plaioi – this city, portrayed in the 'Description of cities' as the capital of the kingdom of Zapech (Zabaj), must be Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya (south-eastern Sumatra);

Rambi – Jambi, on the Batang Hari River (south-eastern Sumatra);

Panchi – judging from its location near Jambi, the island of Banka/Bangka must be meant; as has been noted above, the substitution of voiced consonants with voiceless ones is characteristic of the 'Description of cities', while the substitution of 'ng' in Malay toponyms with 'nj' – for example, Banja for Banga, Falimbanj for Palembang, Dinjdinj for Dinding – is frequent in Arabic geographical works (see Tibbetts 1979:228, 1971:483), and lastly, according to 15th-century Arabic authors (see Tibbetts 1979:126, 251) the City/Fortress (*kota*) of Bangka was located on the island of Bangka (compare '... island, with a city named Panchi' in the Armenian work);

Yala – evidently the modern town of Yala, located to the south of Pattani, on the north-eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula (southern Thailand);

Kala – Arabic Kalah, which according to Wheatley (1961:216-24) was the name of a city located on the Tenasserim coast, in the Mergui district of Burma, although an older location in Kedah (on the west coast of the

⁵ The majority of scholars from the mid 19th century onward (from Alfred Maury to Nilakanta Sastri and Jean Sauvaget) identified Kalah with Kedah in the north-west of the Malay Peninsula (see Wheatley 1961:222-3). However, in 1960 S.Q. Fatimi and in 1969 B. Colless tried

Malay Peninsula) seems more plausible⁵ (see Tibbetts 1979:118-28); *Kakule* – Arabic Qaqulla (Gagulla, Jajulla); according to Wheatley (1961:228) this city was located on the Tenasserim coast in Burma, and according to Colless (1969:37) between Trang and Kra, on the Takuapa River (in the northern part of the Malay Peninsula) (see Tibbetts 1979:128-35).

The 'Voyage beyond the three seas': Shabat

In the early 1470s Afanasiy Nikitin, a merchant of Tver, the centre of an important principality in central Russia to the north-west of Moscow, undertook his famous 'voyage beyond the three seas'. After being robbed near Astrakhan, he was unable to return home and decided to go to India. He thus became the first Russian to visit that distant, fabulous country. He spent four years in India travelling from city to city, trading a little (and without much success) and learning much about his new environment. It seems that, while travelling, Nikitin kept a kind of diary, which on his way back to Tver he revised and turned into a literary work. However, the traveller never returned home: he died in about 1475. His work was handed over to the *dyak* (czar's scribe) Vasily Mamyrev, and was incorporated into the 'Lvov chronicle' and the 'Sofia II chronicle' (which two chronicles reflected, be it indirectly, the content of the Code of Chronicles compiled in the 1480s), as well as in the late-15th-century Troitsky (Yermolinsky) Collection and a number of other collections.⁶

Nikitin's 'Voyage beyond the three seas' is a sufficiently well-known work to render a detailed analysis here superfluous. Suffice it to observe that Nikitin himself was relatively well-read and interested in literature. This is corroborated in the first place by the very fact that he committed his adventures in India to writing, and in the second place by his reference to books

to identify Kalah with Kelang, now the port of Kuala Lumpur, while Wheatley (1961:224), as was said above, believed that Kalah should be located on the Tenasserim coast of southern Burma. Colless, in a letter to the present author of 30 April 1997, rejected his earlier identification, noting that Kalah 'has to be Kedah, otherwise Kedah would not be mentioned in the West Asian geographers, when there is plenty of evidence of West Asian presence there'. However, 'S.Q. Fatimi ... still supports the Kalah = Kelang equation'.

⁶ The most recent scholarly edition of the 'Voyage beyond the three seas' (Nikitin 1986) contains all the extant versions of Nikitin's work with a list of variant readings, as well as a translation of this work into contemporary Russian. An excellent, detailed commentary, fundamental articles by Ya.S. Lurye and L.S. Semenov discussing various aspects of the work, and a biography of its author are also added, as well as an extensive bibliography of the various editions of the 'Voyage', works dealing with it, and translations into foreign languages.

that were stolen from him near Astrakhan (these definitely included a church calendar of sorts, but most probably also other works, as he speaks of stolen books rather than just a single book). Even more important was the indubitable influence of "the pilgrimages" and "the voyages to holy lands" which existed at the time' (Nikitin 1986:74) and of the 'Christian topography' by Cosmas Indicopleustes (Nikitin 1986:165, 167 ff.). As we shall see, Nikitin may also have been familiar with the 'Explanatory Paleya' (not later than the 14th century) and with several other Old Russian works relating to India, such as the 'Tale of the Indian kingdom' (A Russian version of Presbyter John's epistle)⁷ and 'Zosima's voyage to the Rahmans', which became particularly popular in Russia in his time and considerable excerpts from which were included in the 'Alexandria 2' (that is, the second of the four Russian versions of the romance of Alexander⁸), a composition which was well-known in the 15th century. As Lurye notes (and as we have already seen

⁷ Though it is the only piece of literature that Lurye finds it necessary to mention in this connection, as characterizing the typical perception of India of Nikitin's contemporaries, he notes that Nikitin himself 'nowhere reveals his familiarity with this literary work' (Nikitin 1986:75). It is true that Nikitin's 'Voyage' lacks any direct quotations from the 'Tale of the Indian kingdom', but his descriptions of the palace of the Sultan of Bahmanid, with its gold decorations and its carvings, of the ceremonial pageantry there, of the departure of the sultan's army for an encounter with his enemies, of the magnificent meals at *malik at-tujar's* palace, of India's vast stocks of precious stones, and of diamonds extracted from the mountains of Pegu (Nikitin 1986:48-55), all echo the corresponding descriptions in the 'Tale'. Compare the following passages, for instance: 'And every day I have dining with me, seated around my table, twelve patriarchs, ten kings, three hundred priests, a hundred deans, fifty singers, nine hundred choristers, three hundred and sixty-five abbots, and three hundred princes' (*Pamyatniki* 1981:471); and 'Every day there are five hundred men dining at *malik at-tujar's* table. He has three viziers, each with fifty men, and besides a hundred *boyar*, his closest retainers, sitting down to meals with him' (Nikitin 1986:54). It goes without saying that these descriptions of Nikitin's may have been suggested by certain subconscious ideas about the Indian world inspired by the 'Tale'. The relevant associations may then have partially determined both the choice of subjects which he decided to describe (for example, he had never himself witnessed those meals of *malik at-tujar's* which he portrayed so vividly) and the style of these descriptions (for example, the inclusion in them of images of formidable warriors, table companions, and so on). One may well wonder whether these descriptions, at the same time realistic and literary as they are, reflect an inner dialogue Nikitin may have carried on, also perhaps subconsciously, with the image of India presented by the 'Tale' and a few other similar literary works. It seems likely that in the course of that dialogue Nikitin, proceeding partly from personal experience, confirmed, not without some correction, certain features of the traditional Russian image of India, while resolutely rejecting others, particularly the notions of general opulence and of a Christian ruler in that country. So the vexation and embarrassment which one senses in many parts of Nikitin's story might be connected with the fact, for instance, that the real India, ruled by Muslim sultans and nobles, proved so utterly different from the romantic notions about this land of innumerable treasures that had once so fascinated and misled him.

⁸ On the four versions of this romance, included in historiographic compilations (so-called 'Khronograf', that is, Histories of the World) from the 13th century at the latest, see Istrin 1893, Tvorogov 1975.

above), 'India, according to the ideas of Nikitin's contemporaries, was first and foremost the happy land located close to paradise, where "there are no thieves or robbers or jealous men", as it is "full of every kind of wealth"' (Nikitin 1986:75). Was it not this romantic notion of India that encouraged the robbed merchant of Tver to try his luck in that fabulously wealthy country allegedly ruled by a mighty Christian king ('czar and priest Ioann', that is, Presbyter John), while his less well-educated but more practical fellows in misfortune preferred to earn the necessary money for their return trip much closer to Russia, in Shemaha and Baku in Azerbaijan (Nikitin 1986:45)?

The part of Nikitin's book pertaining to the land of Shabat (Shaibat, Shabait), lying on the Great Sea Route from the Middle East to China, somewhere between Ceylon and Pegu (a Mon state in southern Burma), is of special interest to us. As Nikitin never went to Shabat in person, all his information on that country was second-hand, being supplied to him by an informant (or several informants?) during his stay in Bidar, in the state of the Bahmanides. The time when he was given these data can be ascertained with astonishing accuracy: between 5 and 19 May 1472 (Nikitin 1986:161, note 132).

In translation the fragments about Shabat in Nikitin's 'Voyage' run:

1.

'To Kalhat it is six days' sailing from Hormuz, from Kalhat to Dega six days' sailing, from Dega to Mascat also six days, and to Gujarat ten days, from Gujarat to Cambay four days, from Cambay to Chaul twelve days, and from Chaul to Dabhol six days. As for Dabhol, it is the last Arab port in Hindustan. And to Kojikode it is twenty-five days' travel from Dabhol, and from Kojikode to Ceylon fifteen days, and from Ceylon to Shabat one has to travel one month, and from Shabat to Pegu twenty days, and from Pegu to southern China one month – one has to travel by sea all the way. From southern to northern China it is six months' travel by land or four days by sea. May the Lord provide me with a roof over my head!'

2.

'The port of Shabat on the Indian Ocean is very big. Citizens of Khurasan, both old and young, are paid a salary of one *tenka*⁹ a day there. When a man from Khurasan gets married, the Prince of Shabat gives him a thousand *tenka* for the sacrificial rites and pays him an allowance of fifty *tenka* a month. In Shabat, silk, sandal and pearls are produced – all these commodities are cheap there.

The port of Pegu is likewise far from small. It is inhabited by Indian dervishes: Precious stones like *manik*¹⁰, *yakhont* [meaning both 'ruby' and 'sapphire' – V.B.] and *kirpuk* [carbuncle – V.B.] are mined there and sold by the dervishes.'

⁹ A silver coin with different values in different parts of India.

¹⁰ Either a precious stone in general or a ruby.

3.

'From Bidar to Shabat is a journey of three months; and from Dabhol to Shabat it is two months' sailing. From Bidar one has to sail four months to get to southern China; where chinaware is manufactured and is cheap; it is two months' sailing to Ceylon and one month's to Kojikode.

At Shabat silk is produced, and also *yinchi* – a kind of pearls – as well as sandalwood; elephants are priced according to size.'

4.

'When the Jews say that the inhabitants of Shabat are members of their faith, they lie: these people are neither Jews nor Muslims, nor Christians, but have a different – Indian – faith; they do not drink or eat together with Jews or Muslims, nor do they eat meat. Everything is cheap in Shabat. Silk and very cheap sugar are produced there. In their forests *mamon* [a large species of *Felidæ*, see below – V.B.] and apes roam and attack people on the roads; for fear of *mamon* and apes, no one dares travel by road at night.

From Shabat one has to travel ten months by land or four months [obscure passage follows, probably "by boat"¹¹ – V.B.]. They cut off the navels of domestic deer – these contain musk; the wild deer shed their navels everywhere in fields and woods, but these lose their aroma because the musk in them is no longer fresh.' (Nikitin 1986:50-2.)

The land of Shabat and the route to it

Modern scholars have identified Shabat with several different countries: Champa (Minaev 1881:150-1), a region in Bengal (Sreznevsky 1856:58; Nikitin 1986:163), and the island of Saba, which Henry Yule (1866:321-5), basing himself on the account of the 14th-century Italian traveller Marignolli, localized near either Java or Sumatra. In my opinion, Yule, and later I.P. Petrushevsky (1958:228) – who noted that the name Shabat resembles the Arab name for Java; Jawat – and Colless (1968:329) – who assumed that Shabat actually meant Java – were the closest to a plausible solution of the problem of the identification of Shabat. It appears that when Afanasiy Nikitin speaks of Shabat, he is referring not to Java, however, but to Sumatra, or, to be more exact, to the northern part of the island, which the Arabs and early European travellers called Jabat/ Jawat/ Java (Minor).¹²

¹¹ Probably large sailing ships (*gunk*, *junk* = Russian *aukyik*) of the type sailing between India and China are implied here (see Nikitin 1986:167).

¹² Colless, after reading an earlier version of the present article, admitted in a letter to the author of 30 April 1997 that 'the idea that Nikitin meant North Sumatra makes good sense, I would now think':

Ibn Khurdadbih (9th century) and Idrisi (12th century) used the name *Jabat* most likely to refer to a specific part of Sumatra (apparently either East or north-eastern Sumatra); Ibn Sa'id (latter half of the 13th century) unequivocally used the name *Jawat* with reference to Sumatra; and when Ibn Battuta in the late 14th century wrote about *Jawat-Sumatra* (as opposed to *Mul Jawa*, or *Java proper*), that name applied to North Sumatra, a part of which (the state of *Samudra-Pasai*) he had visited (Tibbetts 1979:108-10, 114-5, 97-8). The two *Javas* – *Java Minor* (Sumatra) and *Java Major*, that is, *Java proper* – were differentiated by both Marco Polo (Polo 1936:334-7) and Niccolo Conti (15th century; Penzer 1929:133). Persian authors (with whose works Nikitin's informant was probably familiar) based themselves on the books of Idrisi and Ibn Sa'id, in which the names *Jabat* and *Jawat* were used to refer to a part of Sumatra and the whole of Sumatra respectively (Tibbetts 1979:96-7). Hence the names *Jabat/Jawat*, which phonetically resemble Nikitin's *Shabat*, were regularly applied to Sumatra, especially to the north and/or east coasts of that island.

Nikitin's description of the route to *Shabat* appears not to confirm the identification of this country with Bengal or Champa, but to corroborate the equation *Shabat* = *Jabat/Jawat* (Sumatra). As I have had occasion to note, this itinerary represents a version of the famous sea route to China, slightly abridged as far as its eastern end is concerned, as it had been described to Nikitin (Hormuz – Kalhat – Dega – Mascat – Gujarat – Cambay¹³ – Chaul – Dabhol – Kojikode – Ceylon – *Shabat* – Pegu – Chin [South China] – Machin [North China]). It is known that even the earliest Indian seafarers who sailed a part of that route to 'the lands of gold' (the Malay Peninsula)

'did not coast along the shores of Bengal but risked crossing the high seas [and] were able to make use of either the 10-degree channel between Andaman and Nicobar or, farther south, the channel between Nicobar and the headland of Achin' (Coedès 1968:28).

Arab seafarers bound for China did not have to 'coast along the shores of Bengal' either. They skirted the southern coast of Ceylon, sailed past the Nicobar Islands to Kalah (on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula; Tibbetts 1979:118-28), and then to North or north-western Sumatra (namely to Balus, see Tibbetts 1979:141-3). From there they proceeded to the ports of South China by sailing through the Straits of Malacca and past the island of Tiuman and the coasts of Cambodia, Champa, and Vietnam. There was one other route, however, namely from South-East India to Ceylon and on to Ramni (= Lamuri) in North Sumatra (see Ibn Khordadbeh 1986:78-9). The same

¹³ This is the order in which the ports are listed by Nikitin; their real order is different, however, namely: Hormuz – Mascat or Kalhat – Dega – Cambay.

route (Ceylon - North Sumatra) is mentioned in a 12th-century Armenian itinerary which, as has already been noted, probably derives from Arab or Persian sources (Abramyan 1958:325-7). Marco Polo (1936:229-350) also used this route in the 13th century – though he sailed it in the opposite direction, from China to India – and after him Niccolo Conti (Penzer 1929:129-35) in the 15th century, when he set out from the western coast of India (Malabar) for Sumatra. The significance of this route may have diminished somewhat for Muslim seafarers in the 11th to 13th centuries.¹⁴ In the 15th century, however, when Gujarat and Pegu¹⁵ began to play a more important role in the trans-oceanic trade, (Tibbetts 1979:231) and Malacca was founded, the earlier route from the Malabar coast via the Straits of Malacca became significant again, and it remained so until at least the 17th century (Lombard 1967: *carte* 4).

When we take the above-described route into account, it becomes clear that Shabat can hardly be identifiable with either one of the Bengalese ports (since China-bound ships did not as a rule make calls in Bengal) or Champa (since it would have been absolutely preposterous to travel from Champa to China via Pegu). On the other hand, if one admits the possibility of Shabat being North Sumatra, a voyage there from Ceylon with the aim of sailing on to Pegu and then to China would seem quite logical. It is worth noting that Nikitin's mention of a sailing-time of one month from Ceylon to Shabat is corroborated (if Shabat = North Sumatra) by Arab and Chinese authors (Tibbetts 1979:28; Ferrand 1919:200; Hirth and Rockhill 1911:72).¹⁶ What is more, Conti, who after visiting Ceylon went to Samudra in North Sumatra

¹⁴ According to Hall (1977:218-23), the route leading from Aden to the east, past Coromandel and the coast of India to Sumatra, then along the western coast of Sumatra to Java (evidently through the Sunda Straits, as Hall denies the significance of the Straits of Malacca in that period) and finally to China, was particularly important for the international trade between East and West in the 11th to 13th centuries. It is worth noting that this route did not make it necessary for ships to call at any of the ports of Bengal either. The latter formed a separate regional trading network with the ports of Ceylon, Burma and the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. Distinguishing this regional network from the international one described above, Hall writes: 'Ports of Java and Sumatra drew the major international trade south and west, while the rise to prominence of the Pagan dynasty in Burma drew the regional trade of the Bay of Bengal north' (Hall 1977:221). The route from the Coromandel coast to China described in the second half of the 13th century by the prominent Arab geographer Ibn Said (Tibbetts 1979:95-6) led via the Andaman and Nicobar islands to Jabat, that is, Sumatra, and then first north and then south-east, then to turn to the coast of Champa and terminate in the Chinese port of Zaytun. This route did not make a stopover in Bengal necessary, either. The only traveller to have sailed from Bengal to Sumatra and allegedly China was Ibn Battuta. About this route Tibbetts writes: 'he arrives in South-East Asia from the direction of Bengal, *an unaccustomed approach* [my italics - V.B.]' (Tibbetts 1979:97).

¹⁵ Both states are mentioned by Nikitin in connection with the route to China.

¹⁶ According to Khurdadbih, the trip from Ceylon to Kalah took 21 days, then to Ramni in North Sumatra two more days, and from Ramni to Jabat in north-eastern Sumatra another two

and finally on to Burma – where he landed not at Pegu, but at the lower reaches of the Tenasserim River, that is, a little further to the south (see Henning 1939:53-4) – must have been following a route very similar to that we have just described, at least in part.

Afanasiy Nikitin's list of goods

Speaking of trade in Shabat, Nikitin gives a list of goods which are easily obtainable there at low prices (silk, sandalwood, musk, sugar, elephants and pearls). This list of items that were common in Shabat is additional proof that the identification of Shabat with Sumatra (especially the north or north-eastern coast of that island) that is suggested above is correct.

Silk. The earliest work mentioning silk, or to be more precise, silkworms, in Lamrin (Lamuri in North Sumatra) is the Armenian 'Description of cities, Indian and Persian' (12th century, see above). Though the 15th-century Chinese author Ma Huan (1970:119) confirmed that silkworms were bred in Samudra-Pasai, he stated that the inhabitants of that country 'do not understand how to reel off silk [thread]'. The North Sumatrans had evidently mastered the art of weaving silk cloth by the second half of the 15th century, however, since the Italian Ludovico de Varthema, who visited the North Sumatran city of Pedir between 1503 and 1508, wrote that 'an immense quantity of silk is produced in this country' (Jones 1863:234). Only a few years later, the Portuguese Tomé Pires provided copious data on large-scale silk manufacture in Pedir, Pirada and Pasai, as well as in Barus, the city on the western coast of the island that had close connections with the North Sumatran ports (Cortêsão 1967:140-1, 143-4, 161). Silk production in the archipelago was restricted to North and north-western Sumatra. Until as late as the 17th century, silk and silk cloth remained one of the principal export items of North Sumatra, which supplied many markets inside and outside Nusantara – even Indian ones (Lombard 1967:66; Reid 1988:92-3).

Sandalwood. In the 10th century Ibn al-Faqih and Masudi wrote that the rulers of Ramni (= Lamuri) grew sandalwood in their country and sold it abroad (Tibbetts 1979:30, 38). In the 10th to 13th centuries Salahit, which Tibbetts places on the North Sumatran coast, between Aceh and Indragiri¹⁷, was especially renowned for its sandalwood (Tibbetts 1979:42, 49, 57). The

to three days, hence the whole trip took 25-26 days (Tibbetts 1979:28). Chau Ju-kua reported that the sailing-time from Lan-wu-li (Lamuri = Ramni) to Ceylon was 'twenty odd days' (Hirth and Rockhill 1911:72).

¹⁷ More precisely, near Diamond Point, or 'in the area of Bengkalis' (Tibbetts 1979:145).

author of the 'Hikayat Aceh' mentions sandalwood among the products of the Acehnese jungle (Lombard 1967:62; Iskandar 1958:164-5). It was an export item, for the 'Adat Aceh' refers to the customs duty that was paid on it (Drewes and Voorhoeve 1958:156, 158; Lombard 1967:110).

Musk. Ibn Majid wrote in the 15th century (1475-1490) that Sumatra 'is the land of white elephants, camphor, mace and musk, which can only be bought by weight of gold' (Tibbetts 1971:220). Shumovsky's translation contains the phrase '... and of cats that contain a special musk, which is bought by weight of gold' (Ahmad ibn Majid 1985:366). In the 16th and 17th centuries musk was an Acehnese export item, as the 'Hikayat Aceh' informs us (Iskandar 1958:164-5). Instead of musk cats (certain Viverridae species, for example, civet), Nikitin mentions musk deer – an animal 'borrowed' from the 'Christian topography' of Cosmas Indicopleustes.¹⁸ This part of the narrative apparently is an addition to the story of Nikitin's informant(s?) about Shabat which was contributed by the author of the 'Voyage' himself, who wished to explain to the reader where musk came from and knew of no other explanation than that provided by Cosmas.

Sugar. Sugar and sugarcane in North Sumatra were repeatedly mentioned by 9th- to 12th-century Arab authors (Tibbetts 1979:28-9, 49, 51-2). In the 15th century Ma Huan (1970:118) also referred to sugarcane in Samudra-Pasai. It is difficult to decide on the basis of their data, however, whether sugar was produced as a marketable commodity in that part of the island. At least in the 16th and 17th centuries sugar was not exported from Aceh, but, on the contrary, was imported in large quantities in this principal state of North Sumatra, both for domestic consumption and for re-export (Lombard 1967:110). Therefore, Nikitin's informant may well have been talking about either local sugarcane or imported sugar, which may have been as easily procurable on the markets of Samudra-Pasai at that time as at the markets of Aceh later.

Elephants. Early Arab writers describe elephant hunting in Ramni, North Sumatra¹⁹, as well as the taming of these animals and their use by local rulers (Tibbetts 1979:30, 62). Ibn Majid (15th century), in his list of goods exported from Sumatra, refers to white elephants (Tibbetts 1971:220). In the early 16th century Varthema wrote that 'elephants in immense quantities' were produced in Pedir (Jones 1863:232). In the 16th and 17th centuries large numbers of elephants were exported from Aceh (Lombard 1967:88-9). Interestingly enough Nikitin, speaking of the elephant trade in Shabat, repeats a phrase he

¹⁸ 'The small[er] animal is musk [sic!]. [...] After chasing it, they shoot it and cut off the navel portion of the belly, where the blood gathers. For that part is fragrant, that is the musk we talk about.' (Nikitin 1986:167, note 153.)

¹⁹ A vivid description of such a hunt in the Sultanate of Aceh is given by ar-Raniri in his 'Bustan as-Salatin' (Iskandar 1966:55-6).

has already used in his account of the elephant trade in Ceylon ('The elephants are priced according to their height'). This phrase – like the musk deer story – eventually derives from Cosmas Indicopleustes' 'Christian topography'.²⁰

Pearls. In the 13th century Chau Ju-kua mentions pearls among the commodities procurable in Kampar, the state on the east coast of Sumatra which maintained close trade links with Samudra-Pasai (Hirth and Rockhill 1911:71). The Portuguese Mendes Pinto, in his account of events in North Sumatra in 1539, writes with reference to the Batak king about pearl fishing between 'Pullo Tiquos and Pullo Quenim', two small islands off the north-eastern coast of Sumatra. He adds:

'in times past [the pearls] were carried by the Bataes (= Bataks) to Pazem (= Pasai) and Pedir to be exchanged with the Turks from the Strait of Mecqua (= Mecca) and the ships from Judaa (= Jidda) for such merchandise as they brought from Grand Cairo and the ports of Arabia Foelix' (Mendes Pinto 1969:25).

The presence of pearls in Nikitin's list could additionally be influenced by Cosmas Indicopleustes' work (see the passage on the elephant trade above) and its reflections in 'Alexandria 2'.²¹

A study of the list of goods from Shabat provided by Nikitin shows that all were really obtainable in North Sumatra in the 1470s, particularly in Samudra-Pasai, the principal port at the time, where goods were collected from both the west and the east coast of the island. An especially interesting detail is the occurrence on the list of silk, which was probably produced in Bengal but was definitely not a Javanese product, and elephants, which were an export commodity neither of Bengal nor of Java. Therefore this list, along with the description of the route to Shabat, confirms its location in Sumatra rather than Bengal or Java.

In addition to the commodities of Shabat, Nikitin mentions other remarkable things he has heard about that country. This information provided by the Russian traveller is not only interesting in its own right, but is also sometimes helpful in verifying the above-suggested location of Shabat. One example of this is, for instance, the story of the animals inhabiting that country.

²⁰ 'For the elephants are purchased according to [height in] cubits ... from top to toe – the deal is negotiated according to cubits, it is said, 50 or 100 gold [pieces] or more' (Nikitin 1986:165, note 145).

²¹ Cosmas Indicopleustes mentions pearls in his description of Ceylon, which Nikitin, as we have seen above, knew well enough and sometimes confused with Shabat. The said description, incidentally, influenced the *Khronograf* versions of 'Alexandria 2' as well (see the reference to Ceylonese pearls), and the story of their 'birth' in shells lit by the sun somewhere near Ceylon (Istrin:1893:199–200) was quite popular in Old Russian literature (see *Pamyatniki* 1982:209, 'On the constitution of the earth'; Sakharov 1849:5–191, 'Azbukovniki'; and so on).

The 'mamon' and the apes

Nikitin states that *mamon* and apes roam the forests of Shabat and attack people travelling by road, so that no one dares to travel there by night. His account shows a remarkable similarity to the tale told about monkeys and *zarafa* in the land of Lamuri (North Sumatra) by the ship's master Muhammad ibn Babishad. The latter story was incorporated in 'The miracles of India' by the late-10th-century Arabic writer Buzurg ibn Shahriyar (see Fück 1960).

'In the *Lamuri* [my italics – V.B.] and Qaqula valleys, there live *monkeys of extraordinary size* ... From time to time they leave the jungle and come out *onto the roads and paths. They attack travellers* ...

... On *Lamuri Island* there are *zarafa* of enormous size. It is said that shipwrecked sailors forced to travel along the Fansur coast to Lamuri *do not travel by night for fear of the zarafa*. For these animals do not show themselves in the daytime.'

To be safe from these *zarafa*, travellers would climb trees and spend the night in the treetops, where they could hear the sound of *zarafa* roaming about below. In the morning they would find their footprints in the nearby sand (Freeman-Grenville 1981:73, 39).

The term *zarafa* is normally taken as a name for the Sumatran rhinoceros (see, for example, Lith 1883-1886:236). However, neither Khurdadbih, who refers to rhinoceroses (*al-karkaddan*) in Ramni (= Lamuri) (Tibbetts 1979:27-8), nor Sindbad, who states that these animals live in places where camphor is found, that is, in Fansur (Salys 1958:285-6), says anything that might indicate that they were night creatures dangerous to man. Judging from other passages in Nikitin's 'Voyage', he uses the term *mamon* (Russian, plural *mamóny*) to refer to various Felidae species, including big cats (Nikitin 1986:155, note 101).²² It is hard to say which of the meanings attributed to the word *zarafa* is the right one; but if Nikitin understood his informant correctly, then his version undoubtedly has as much value and deserves as much attention as any

²² Perhaps the word *mamon* is traceable to Old Javanese *mamong* (plural of *mong*), designating 'tigers'. This etymology, for which I am most indebted to Professor B. Arps of Leiden University, might corroborate the identification of Shabat with Java. However, as is well-known, in the 14th and, to a lesser degree, in the 15th century Samudra-Pasai was an important port of call for Javanese merchants, who met their Islamic counterparts from India, Persia, and the Arab countries there. The latter preferred purchasing the valuable commodities of eastern Indonesia, particularly spices, from the Javanese to making the dangerous journeys into the interior of the Archipelago themselves to obtain these (see Wolters 1970:157-8). It therefore seems probable that the Javanese word for tigers became known to Nikitin's informant through the Muslim merchants who frequented North Sumatra.

other. A more surprising fact still that is worth mentioning is that the stories from the 'Miracles of India' either were circulating in the East in oral form as late as the 15th century or were known to the informant of the merchant of Tver from a book, and penetrated to Russia for the first time via him.

The Khurasanians in Shabat

Nikitin reports that there were Khurasanians in the service of the ruler of Shabat, who paid them a considerable wage and sought to keep them in his country as long as possible, encouraging marriages to native women among them. Commentators of Nikitin's work note that he took the name 'Khurasanians' to refer not only to Iranians from Khurasan but in a much broader sense to 'Muslims of non-Indian origin, emigrants from different countries in Asia and Africa' (Nikitin 1986:149). This appears to be true. However, even if Nikitin meant Khurasanians in the narrower sense, his information still tallies with what we know of the close ties between Pasai and the Iranian world. These contacts took place both by way of Muslim India, with its substantial Iranian ethnic element (including, of course, natives of Khurasan), and directly (Marrison 1955:52-3). In 1336 Ibn Battuta met several Persians – military men, theologians, and lawyers – at the court of the Sultan of Pasai (Marrison 1955:63). In around 1480 theologians of Pasai (including Khurasanians) reportedly answered questions put to them by the Malay Sultan (Marrison 1955:63). In the early 16th century the Portuguese Tomé Pires reported having seen large numbers of Persian merchants in Pasai and Barus (Cortésão 1967:142-3, 163). It was in Pasai, finally, that such Malay classics as 'Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyah' and 'Hikayat Amir Hamzah' were translated from Persian into Malay in the late 14th to the 15th century (Brakel 1975; Van Ronkel 1895).²³

It is worth noting that among the foreigners Ibn Battuta met in Pasai there were many Persian and Arab military men, some of them of high rank. Evidently they took part in the wars against 'the infidels' of the interior which, according to Ibn Battuta, the Sultan of Pasai constantly waged (Gibb 1957: 273-6). If this is so, then these Persians and Arabs were the forerunners of the numerous Muslim mercenaries – Turks, Gujaratis²⁴, Malabarese, and Abyssinians (that is, 'Khurasanians' in the broader sense of the word as used by

²³ For Persian influence on traditional Malay literary works, especially those produced in Pasai, see also Brakel 1970.

²⁴ Not all of these Gujaratis were Indians. As Meilink-Roelofs (1962:63) observes, in the 15th century the populations of the cities of Gujarat included a large number of foreigners, namely Arabs, Turks and Persians. Data on them are scattered throughout Nikitin's book.

Nikitin) – who served in the armies of Acehnese sultans in the first half of the 16th century (Mendes Pinto 1969:19). If Nikitin's data on Shabat really refer to North Sumatra, then the above-mentioned attempt by the ruler of Shabat to settle the Khurasanians in his country for longer periods could be explained by his wish to increase the number of such mercenaries in his service.

'Indian faith' in Shabat

The identification of Shabat with North Sumatra (for instance, Samudra-Pasai, the most important political, mercantile, religious and cultural centre in this part of the island in the 14th to 15th centuries; see Hill 1960:7-24, Ma Huan 1970:115-21, Cortesão 1967:142-5) appears to be corroborated by Nikitin's description of the route to Shabat, his list of goods available there, and his notes on the fauna of the country and the Khurasanians in the service of its ruler. Needless to say, the argument with regard to the latter gains in validity only in connection with that relating to the former. On the other hand, in the passage on the religion of Shabat, Nikitin certainly does not refer to its inhabitants as Muslims, although it is only too well-known that the process of Islamization of the North Sumatran ports had been under way since the late 13th century, so that by Nikitin's time most of them had already been Islamized. After an extremely vehement denial that the inhabitants of Shabat were of the Judaic faith, as was the 'opinion of the Jews', he asserts that they were neither Jews, nor Christians, nor Muslims, but embraced a different, 'Indian faith'. In accordance with their faith, they did not eat or drink with either Jews or Muslims, and 'do not eat meat of any kind'.²⁵ An identification of Shabat with Bengal or Java does not help us solve the problem of the 'Indian faith' of its people, as the religious situation there and that in North Sumatra were very much alike. The East Bengalese ports were Islamized as early as the 13th century (Fatimi 1963), almost two centuries before Nikitin's journey to India. As for Java, only the Sundanese ports (Kalapa, Bantam, Chi Manuk, and so on) remained Hindu in his time. On the other hand, the Sundanese rulers of the 15th to early 16th centuries by no means encouraged Khurasanians to stay in their country. On the contrary, they practically closed their ports to Muslims (Cortesão 1967:173). What is more important, the goods mentioned in Nikitin's list are totally different from those available in the Sundanese ports (Cortesão 1967:168-9). At the same time, the ports of Central and East Java (Tuban, Gresik, Surabaya) had

²⁵ Nikitin's account of the Khurasanians and his remark that the people of Shabat did not eat or drink with Muslims testify to the presence of at least an Islamic population segment in Shabat.

been Islamized long before the 1470s (see De Graaf and Pigeaud 1974).

To understand how Shabat, in spite of Nikitin's denial that its people were Muslims, could nevertheless be localized in Sumatra, we need to take a closer look at the nature of his account. It should be noted in this connection that a number of important features of the actual contemporary situation are passed over here. In the first place, Nikitin nowhere mentions Malacca, which in the 15th century it would have been impossible for any ship bound for China from Pegu to ignore, especially if it had called anywhere in Sumatra before stopping in Pegu. Both this omission of all mention of Malacca and the story of the apes and *mamon* attacking people on the roads bring Nikitin's account closer to the tradition of the Arab-Muslim geographers before Ahmad ibn Majid and Sulaiman (the 15th century). At the same time, Nikitin's observation on the abundance of silk in Shabat – which deviates from Ma Huan's account (1433) but agrees with that of Varthema (1503-8) –, his mention of Pegu, the name of which is found only in Ahmad ibn Majid in the Arab geographical tradition (Tibbetts 1979:194, 208, 229)²⁶, and his story of the Khurasanians are all testimony that there are also contemporary elements included in his account, or, to be more precise, in the story told him by his informant.

In general, Nikitin's informant appears not to have visited Shabat-Jabat (Sumatra) in person, but to have compiled his account from data from both old works and new, surprisingly incomplete²⁷, descriptions by contemporary merchants. It is possible that all of these data had already been brought together in a single oral tradition known to the informant. Unfortunately, the question of who or what was responsible for this evident incompleteness of Nikitin's account has to remain unanswered. It may have been either forgetfulness on the part of the Russian traveller or his informant, or inadequacy of the sources the latter drew on. However that may be, some of Nikitin's statements are only explainable if we take the composite nature of his informant's story into consideration.

Needless to say, the early Arabic tradition that still formed the basis of Muslim geography in Nikitin's time confirms the fact of the 'Indian faith' of

²⁶ Nevertheless, the absence of the place-name Pegu from the earlier Arab geographical works does not mean that the Arabs were totally ignorant of the Mon states in southern Burma before Ibn Majid. They only called them by different names: Rahma, Arman, Larman, Fawfal (Tibbetts 1979:58, 129, 133). Interestingly, it was Pegu and Gujarat which became the main trading partners of the North Sumatran states in the early 16th century (Cortêsão 1967:139, 144). Nikitin further implies that there were trade links between Shabat and Pegu, Gujarat and the ports on the Malabar coast.

²⁷ Thus, although all the articles mentioned in Nikitin's list were available in North Sumatra, a number of the most characteristic commodities of this area (such as pepper, camphor, aromatic resins, gold) are not mentioned here.

the people of Shabat, if these were in fact Sumatrans. Khurdadbihi is the first author to report on Buddhism in Jabat, that is, north-eastern Sumatra (Tibbetts 1979:29). Idrisi – who, together with Ibn Said, was regarded as the principal authority on geography even as late as the 15th century – describes the island of Jabat as constituting the centre of the insular system, which would thus make it correspond approximately to the east coast of Sumatra (Tibbetts 1979:87-8, 90). According to him, there was a Buddhist temple complex in the interior of Jabat.

'He [the king of Jabat – V.B.] shows much respect to Buddha. This word *budd* signifies temple in the Indian language. That of the king is very beautiful and is covered externally with marble. Inside and all around Buddha, can be seen idols made of white marble, the head of each with golden crowns. The prayers in these temples are accompanied by songs, which take place with much pomp and order. Young and beautiful girls [*devadasi*? – V.B.] execute dances and other pleasing games, before the people who pray or are in the temple.' (Tibbetts 1979:53.)

The information provided by 7th-century Chinese authors (Takakusu 1896: xxxix, 10), the rather scant archaeological evidence (Milner, McKinnon, and Tengku Luckman Sinar 1978; McKinnon 1988; Nurhakim 1989; Drakard 1989), and local legends (Zainuddin 1961, 1:25, 27, 42 ff.) seem also to corroborate a relatively early Hinduization of North Sumatra.²⁸

Passing from the rather antiquated information of written geographical texts to the accounts of travellers who visited North Sumatra, one cannot but notice that in the 15th, and even in the 16th century, the Islamic character of the island seemed quite vague and superficial to many of them. Thus in 1488, fifteen years after Nikitin's departure for Russia from India, Ibn Majid, who knew both Islam and Sumatra only too well, still wrote: 'Sumatra has a large number of infidel kings ... All its governors are infidels.' (Tibbetts 1979:210-1.) Another fifteen years later, between 1503 and 1508, this information was corroborated by Varthema, who had called at Pedir (which city, in the view of many scholars, had been Islamized long before the early 16th century). Varthema wrote:

'I think that it [that is, Pedir, or Sumatra generally – V.B.] is Taprobana, in which there are three crowned kings who are Pagans, and their faith, their manner of living, dress, and customs, are the same as in Tarnassari [Tenasserim – V.B.], and their wives also are burnt alive' (Jones 1863:229-31).

²⁸ Perhaps it should be pointed out here that the principal Sumatran temple complex, which was built in the 11th to 14th centuries and included Buddhist, Hindu, and syncretistic Hindu-Buddhist shrines, was located in Padang Lawas, in the interior of north-western Sumatra (see Schnitger 1937:16-37).

There can be little doubt that Varthema spent enough time in the Middle East and India to be able to distinguish between Islam and paganism by their outward trappings (though early European travellers used the term 'paganism' indiscriminately for both animism and Hinduism; as the above reference to suttee testifies).

Between 1512 and 1516 Tomé Pires characterized the religious situation in Sumatra as follows:

'In the island of Sumatra most of the kings are Moors and some are heathens ... The kings on the channel side from Achin to Palembang are Moors, and from Palembang going around Gamispola are mostly heathens, and those of the hinterland and who live inland are heathens also.' (Cortêsão 1967:137.)

Hence according to Pires the inhabitants of Aceh and the ports to the east of it were Muslims, and those of the neighbouring city of Daya and the other important centres of trade on the west coast (Singkel, Tiko, Pariaman, and so on; the data on Barus, unfortunately, are lacking) were either pagans or Hindus (Hindu-Buddhists). As regards his remark about paganism/Hinduism in the interior of Sumatra, this reflects a view that was common in all 15th- to 16th-century sources.

Duarte Barbosa (Dames 1921:187-8) provides important corrections to Pires' 'map of Sumatran religions' when writing in 1518 that the population of Aru and that of Indragiri (both of them principalities on Sumatra's east coast) were pagan.²⁹ Interestingly, de Barros, whose description of Sumatra dates from 1536-1563, mentions a great pagan temple in Aceh, which was famous for its gold (Dion 1970:158), while the famous Sumatran Sufi poet Hamzah Fansuri carried on a polemic against the adherents of Tantric yoga in Barus as late as the end of the 16th century (al-Attas 1970:18-20; Brakel 1979:73-7), and François Martin gives relatively detailed information on Hindus in Aceh as late as 1602 (Reid 1995:62-3).³⁰

This evidence has by no means been adduced with a view to discrediting the generally accepted picture of the Islamization of North Sumatra in the

²⁹ In fact, Aru evidently was one of the first Muslim states in Sumatra. However, some modern historians speak of a rather dubious character of Islam here (Milner, McKinnon, and Tengku Luckman Sinar 1978:13).

³⁰ Reid expresses some doubt about whether Martin's account reflects 'some relics of Hindu Sumatra to be found in Aceh at that time, or whether he is simply describing what he learned of Hinduism from Indian traders' (Reid 1995:55). The former of these assumptions seems to be confirmed, however, not only by Martin's statement that he stayed in the house of a Hindu woman in Aceh, but also by the fact that his words about incest between fathers and daughters among Acehnese Hindus ('... when a man has grown a tree, if it produces some fruits it is reasonable for him to enjoy them', Reid 1995:62) are very similar to what the fifteenth-century 'Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai' says in a similar context ('If it were we who had spent our time planting crops, we also should have first claim to eat what had been grown', Hill 1960:135).

15th century. However, it shows that this process was far from universal, even in the ports, and that the local population was perceived as pagan or Hindu (Hindu-Buddhist) by travellers who had actually visited that part of the island, and hence not only by Nikitin's informant.

De Barros appears to have found a simple explanation, though not the only possible one, for this. He writes:

'The land is inhabited by two kinds of people, Moros [Moors, that is, Muslims – V.B.] and *gentios* (heathens); the latter are natives [of the island], while the former were foreigners who came for reasons of commerce and began to settle and populate the maritime region, multiplying so quickly that in less than 150 years they had established themselves as *senhores* (lords) and began calling themselves kings. The heathens, leaving the coast, took refuge in the interior of the island and live there today.' (Dion 1970:143.)

One cannot rule out the possibility that it was these 'natives' whom Nikitin's informant meant when he told the Russian traveller that the people of Shabat professed the 'Indian faith'.³¹

A brief historical excursion may be helpful in giving us a better insight into possible other reasons for the informant's ideas on Hinduism/Buddhism among the native inhabitants of Sumatra. In the 7th century a number of small principalities in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula were united into a Buddhist empire of sorts under the aegis of the realm of Srivijaya, the capital of which was located in the area of Palembang, in south-eastern Sumatra. From the 11th century onward, when the hegemony passed to the realm of Malayu, the capital of this empire gradually shifted inland, up the Batang Hari River (see Wolters 1966; Coedès 1968:201, 366 note 72), until in the late

³¹ Although this account by de Barros sheds some light on the subject, it only corresponds to the facts in part. It is true that part of the native population did flee from the Muslim ports on the coast (see, for example, Hill 1960:119–20). Nevertheless, mutual estrangement and warfare between 'the faithful' and 'the infidel' by no means represented the only form of relationship between the inhabitants of the coast and those of the interior. The well-being of both groups was completely dependent on an orderly barter between the ports on the river estuaries and the upstream settlements in the interior, which together formed a single economic network (see Bronson 1977:39–54). Consequently, it was only too easy to meet the natives mentioned by de Barros in the ports. The Muslim rulers of coastal principalities were not all foreigners, either. Most of them were former local chieftains, sometimes superficially Hinduized, who still shared the ideas and attitudes of their compatriots in the interior, in particular the typical concept of the legitimization of power (see Hall 1977:223–6). A Hinduized, or only superficially Islamized, aristocracy also continued to play an important role at their courts. This combination of indigenous religious elements, Hindu-Buddhism and Islam, both in the cities and at the courts, made it difficult for travellers to gain a clear insight into what religion predominated here. In this kind of context, the presence of a large number of foreign Muslims in the ports could well have given rise to the false notion that they were the only followers of Islam in Sumatra.

14th century it was located in Minangkabau, almost in the centre of Sumatra. Although the list of Malayu's vassals in the first third of the 13th century still included a number of Sumatran principalities, inter alia Lamuri (Lambri) at the northern tip of the island (Hirth and Rockhill 1911:62), by the time the capital was established in Minangkabau all of them had become independent of this Hindu-Buddhist state, which nonetheless remained the major political force in Sumatra (Coedès 1968:201-3, 231-2). In the early 16th century Pires described the vast realm of Minangkabau under the rule of three Hindu kings as covering the major part of Sumatra, as this country was 'favoured with gold, the metal which God chose'. According to him, the ports of both the west (Barus, Tiko, Pariaman) and the east (Kampar, Indragiri, Jambi) coasts had close links with Minangkabau, since this gold was exported through them (Cortese 1967:151-4, 160-1, 163-5).

The above historico-geographical situation was portrayed, though in a somewhat simplified form, by Ibn Saïd (d. 1274), one of the two principal authorities for the 15th- to 16th-century Muslim geographers. To him Jawat represented the whole of the island of Sumatra, which was rectangular in shape. Lamuri was located in its upper left-hand corner, Fansur in the lower left-hand corner, Malayur (the port of Malayu) in the upper right-hand corner, and Kalah (erroneously!) in the lower right-hand corner. In the centre of the rectangle lay the capital of the island, which was also called Jawat. It is quite possible that this capital was none other than Idrisi's city in the centre of Jabat where the Buddhist temples were located (see Tibbetts 1979:94 and Fig. 4). Although Nikitin's informant described the route to North Sumatra, as well as the trade items, fauna, and so on, in that part of the island, it is likely that, together with Ibn Saïd, he took Shabat/Jabat/Jawat to be the name for Sumatra as a whole. This is corroborated by the fact that Nikitin's list of ports on the route to China suddenly comes to an end with Kojikode, after which only entire countries or regions are enumerated: Ceylon, Shabat, Pegu, Chin, and Machin, with their ports being referred to simply as 'the port of Ceylon', 'the port of Shabat', and so on. Evidently, the port of Shabat was one of the North Sumatran ports, while the name Shabat stood for Sumatra as a whole.

To conclude, proceeding from the premise of the composite nature of Nikitin's account and basing ourselves on the sum total of the data adduced above, I could suggest two explanations for the Russian traveller's failure to mention Islam in Sumatra. The first is that, although Nikitin's informant knew of the sea route to China, the trade items available in the North Sumatran ports, and so on, from merchants, he collated their information with Ibn Saïd's idea of Jabat/Jawat as referring to the whole of Sumatra and Idrisi's account of Buddhism in Jabat. The second explanation is that, like some travellers, the informant believed that Islam in Shabat/Sumatra was

the religion of foreigners, while the natives of Shabat professed the 'Indian faith' (Hinduism or Buddhism, if he was able to distinguish between these). His ideas could only have been strengthened by the merchants' stories of the natives of Jabat/Jawat/Shabat living in the interior of the island – though they sometimes appeared in the cities – being in some way connected with, if not subject to, the powerful Minangkabau kings, the lords of the gold-mines. The two explanations seem to be mutually complementary rather than contradictory and to reflect the same combination of old (literary) and new (realistic) elements that was so characteristic of the informant's story, and eventually of Nikitin's.

Shabat and Judaism

The statement about the Jews claiming that the inhabitants of Shabat were of their faith is the most enigmatic in the whole of Nikitin's passage on the religion of these people. There are no unambiguous indications as to who these Jews may have been. They could, of course, have been some Jewish merchants whom Nikitin or his informant encountered in India and who told one of them this story. Such an encounter is quite likely, since Jewish merchants, who had been particularly active in the trade with the Malabar coast and Nusantara in the 11th to 13th centuries (see Goitein 1963), still maintained commercial relations with these regions in the 15th century.³² In this particular case the idea of Judaism in Shabat may derive from a mix-up between Shabat and Shambation, the legendary river in the far east of 'India' near which, according to a Jewish tradition, the descendants of Moses lived (Marcon 1922:324-5). Nikitin's informant, however, who knew about Hinduism (Buddhism) in Jabat/Jawat/Shabat, could hardly have regarded the Jewish merchant's account as being reliable. On the other hand, if the mer-

³² Jewish merchants are reported as plying their trade between India and China as early as the 9th century by Ibn Khurdadbeh, for example (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986:123-4). Jewish settlements in 12th-century India and Ceylon are mentioned by Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (Komroff 1937:308-12). Documents of the Cairo Geniza (see Goitein 1963; Hall 1977:219-20, 229) contain some data regarding Jewish merchants who established regular commercial relations with the ports of Malabar and travelled to Nusantara from the Coromandel coast of India in the 11th to 13th centuries. One of these documents tells of a Jewish trader from Cairo who died in Fansur, in north-western Sumatra (Wolters 1967:43, note 34). Another Jewish merchant, Ishaq of Oman, is mentioned in a stimulating book on early medieval Jewish trade (Rabinowitz 1984:119). This particular merchant was detained at Serbloza (Seribuza = Srivijaya, South Sumatra) on account of a sum of 20,000 dinars he owed in customs duty. What is even more important, Jewish merchants and moneylenders (for example, a certain Khoja Azedim) from both the Middle East and Malabar were active in Malacca in the 15th to early 16th centuries (see Thomaz 1993:82).

chants told Nikitin himself about Judaism in Shabat, he might later, on the basis of his informant's story about the 'Indian faith' of the people of Shabat, have accused them of telling lies.

At the same time, the idea that Judaism was falsely attributed to the people of Shabat could well have occurred to the Russian traveller even if he had no direct contacts with Jewish merchants. Long before Nikitin, but particularly in his time as well, there were numerous written and oral traditions circulating in which biblical countries and peoples had shifted, so to speak, from their original positions, 'migrating' farther and farther eastward, to the extreme limits of 'India', which more often than not proved to be Indonesia. So there were stories about the descendants of Moses on the Shambation River, about 'Rechab's sons' on the island of the Rahmans (that is, Brahmins, or gymnosophists) or somewhere in that vicinity, and about Saba – often mixed up with Jabat/Jawat – as the country of the Queen of Sheba, who visited Solomon and gave birth to his son, either Nebuchadnezzar or the ancestor of the Ethiopian kings, to mention just a few of the legends about Jews or pseudo-Jews in the insular world.³³

Nikitin may well have been aware of the latter two legends when still in Russia, for the story of the Rechabites was included in 'Zosima's voyage' and 'Alexandria 2'³⁴, and the tales of the Queen of Sheba in the Bible and 'Solomon's trials' (see *Pamyatniki* 1981:66-87). 'Solomon's trials' was included in the 'Explanatory Paleya', a work in which the books of the Old Testament were retold, 'with polemical anti-Judaic comments and copious notes', which was written not later than the early 14th century (Likhachev 1987-9; 1:285). Interestingly, Nikitin's refutation of the existence of Judaism in Shabat is rather stylized in character, bearing a strong resemblance to the polemical attacks on false statements by the Jews in the 'Explanatory Paleya', 'Physiologus', 'Azbukovniki' (that is, alphabetical glossaries), and other works of Old Russian literature, containing such statements as: 'And the uncomprehending Jews believe not ...' (*Pamyatniki* 1981:479), or 'And the Jews have

³³ It is worth noting that Magellan, in his famous circumnavigation of the world in 1519-1522, was trying to find the western passage not only to the spice islands, that is, the Moluccas, but also to the lands of Ophir and Tarshish that were familiar to Solomon and Hiram of Tyre. Magellan supposed them to be located to the north of the Moluccas and evidently identified them with the Ryukyus and Taiwan (Nowell 1962:9-23).

³⁴ Incidentally, after quoting the story of the Rechabites, the 'Alexandria 2' gives an elucidation of the difference between these people and the Rahmans which resembles Nikitin's refutation of the claim that the Shabatians were Judaists (see Shokhin 1988:227).

³⁵ According to some 12th- and 13th-century western European authors, Saba, the Queen of Sheba's capital, was located in eastern Ethiopia, which was inhabited by the Indians and corresponded to the eastern limits of the world (Wright 1925:303). In the 14th century, Marignolli located Saba on Java, where he still found a queen on the throne, whom he even gave his Catholic blessing (Yule 1866, 2:321-5, 383, 388-92; for a detailed analysis of Marignolli's account of Saba,

become even as this Aspis ...' (Karpov 1878:274), and so on.

Perhaps, like many other authors, Nikitin associated the country of Shabat with Saba³⁵, which then evoked memories of the Bible, Judaism and the anti-Judaic comments of the 'Paleya' in his mind. These in their turn could have reminded him of the Rahmans/Rechabites, who originated from Jerusalem but even in the new country, located, like Shabat, far beyond India, observed the Judaic commandments of their ancestor strictly.³⁶ Therefore, the intertwining of the associations of Shabat with Saba and of Shabatians with Rahmans/Rechabites³⁷ may have given rise to the motif of Judaism in Shabat. From his Indian experience, Nikitin knew only too well that the Rahmans/Brahmans were Hindu priests and were by no means the same as the Judaic righteous, while his informant told him about the 'Indian faith' of the Shabatians. This knowledge could have prompted him to accuse the

see Colless 1968). It was this mention of a queen that prevented Yule from finally accepting the theory that Marignolli's Saba was on either Java or Sumatra and made him give up the solution of this 'knot ... in something like despair' (Yule 1866, 2:321). However, in 1348-9, at the time of Marignolli's visit to Saba, there really was a queen, Tribhuwanatunggadewi (1329-50), reigning in Java, namely in Majapahit (Colless 1968:331). Marignolli writes, *inter alia*, that the Queen of Sheba was the only daughter of Semiramis, who had conquered India and made her daughter the first ruler 'of the finest island in the world, Saba by name' (Yule 1866, 2:389). Interestingly, the story of Semiramis' conquest and rule of India is found in the 15th-century Russian 'Serbian Alexandria' (*Pamyatniki* 1982:103-5). Quite often Saba is also associated with Sumatra. That is why Ibn Majid insisted that the suzerain of the Sumatran rulers was the king of Abyssinia, who, according to the most popular tradition, was descended from the Queen of Sheba and Solomon (Tibbetts 1979:210). Particularly interesting is the account of Mendes Pinto (1969:25), dating from the 1530s: 'I made him a recital likewise of many different Nations, which inhabit all along this Ocean, and the river of Lampon, from whence the Gold of Menancabo is transported to the Kingdom of Campar, upon the waters of Jambes and Broteo. For the inhabitants affirm out of their Chronicles, how in this very Town of Lampon there was anciently a Factory of Merchants, established by the Queen of Sheba, whereof one, named Nausem, sent her a great quantity of Gold, which she carried to the Temple of Jerusalem, at such time as she went to visit the wise King Solomon; From whence, some say, she returned with child of son, that afterwards succeeded to the Empire of Æthiopia, whom now we call Prester-John, of whose race the Abissins vaunt they are descended.' Incidentally, an Acehnese legend tells of the visit to North Sumatra of 'a certain saintly person (*wali*), the brother of the Queen of Sheba (Puteri Bulukis), who was Solomon's (Nabi Sulaiman) wife' (Zainuddin 1961:27), while the 'Story of Balukih' (that is, the Queen of Sheba) enjoyed great popularity among the Minangkabau of Central Sumatra (this story is known to be included in a dozen MSS, see Van Ronkel 1909:483-4, 1921:213-7, and was published by Gerth van Wijk as early as 1881). However, in the latter work the Queen of Sheba, appropriately, is the ruler of Yemen. Interestingly, the Bugis royal house in South Sulawesi claimed that its genealogy could be traced back to Bilkis = Bulukis (= the Queen of Sheba) (Colless 1968:329).

³⁶ Benjamin of Tudela gives a detailed account of 'the children of Rechab' and their holy men, whose settlements stretch in a wide arc from Yemen to India (Komroff 1937:295-7). An interesting comparison of Rechabite and Rahmanian asceticism is given in Shokhin 1988:250-2.

³⁷ Nikitin's statement that the inhabitants of Shabat eat no meat deserves special notice: this same characteristic occurs in all the stories about the Brahmins/Rahmans.

Jews, quite in the spirit of the 'Paleya', of telling lies when they created the myth of Judaism on the islands at the eastern limits of the world. At the same time, in mentally connecting Shabat – which according to all the available evidence was identical with either North Sumatra or Sumatra as a whole – with the land of the Rahmans, Nikitin in a way corroborated the possibility of the latter's location among the islands of 'unrecognized Nusantara'.

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