CHAPTER 7

‘Regions that Look Seaward’: Changing Fortunes, Submerged Histories, and the Slow Capitalism of the Sea

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All scholars are familiar with the fascinating passage in Procopius where he tells us that ‘it was impossible for the Ethiopians to buy silk from the Indians, because Persian merchants would always locate themselves at the very harbours (hormoi) where the Indian ships first put in and were used to buying up whole cargoes’.1 By suggesting that ‘the Iranians’ near-monopoly in the markets of South India and Ceylon’2 was a drastic limitation on Byzantine access to South Asian ports, the least it implies is that by late Antiquity trade networks in the Indian Ocean had been radically reconfigured to eliminate any significant Roman/Byzantine presence. Sasanian dominance of the sea lanes in the western Indian Ocean, which was firmly established by the late sixth century, is a major part of why Islam was able to expand in the Indian Ocean in the way it did, by extending and consolidating links established in the Sasanian centuries.3 Moreover, Procopius also documents the commercial strategies used by Sasanian traders in buying up whole cargoes, a fascinating allusion to the way merchants worked in the maritime trade. But there are two other features of this passage that have gone largely unnoticed. Procopius tells us that it was Indian ships that imported the cargoes that were subsequently bought by Iranian merchants, and he implies that the harbours where these transactions took place were South Asian.

Among classical sources and leaving Ptolemy aside, the most informative accounts of South Asian ports are certainly those in the Periplus and in Cosmas. If we disregard Barbarikon (which was in Sind) and start south of the Gulf of Barake (Dwarka?), the following local and major ports are listed: Barygaza, Akabaru, Suppara, Kalliena, Sêmylla, Mandagora, Palaipatmai, Melizeigara, Byzantion, Toparon (?), Tyrannosboas (?), Naura, Tyndis, Muziris,

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1 Procop., Pers. 1.20.12.
2 Whitehouse and Williamson 1973, 44.
3 E.g., Williamson 1972.
Nelkynda, Bakarê, Balita, Komar, Kolchoi, Kamara, Podukê, and Sôpatma.\textsuperscript{4} Of the twenty-two ports listed here, roughly half are either known to us or susceptible to identification, while two of the place names are clearly corrupt. In Cosmas (again disregarding ‘Sindou’) the crucial passage in Book xi mentions eleven place names: Orrothâ, Kalliana, Sibôr, Malé, Parti, Mangarouth, Salopatana, Nalopatana, Poudapatana, Marallo, and Kaber (with an epsilon).\textsuperscript{5} Of these, two are the names of regions: Orrothâ is Saurashtra, i.e. Kathiawar, and Malé is the Malabar coast. Excluding these, Cosmas seems to list a total of nine ports (five of these in Malé/Malabar), of which five are known or can be found. Since Kalliana occurs in both lists, we have a net total of fifteen Indian ports whose locations are either well established or can be surmised with some certainty or probability.

I’d like to start this paper by considering some of these uncertain-looking place names whose locations can be mapped with more confidence. In the Cosmas/\textit{Periplus} lists there are six in particular that are worth sorting out. These are Mandagora (\textit{Periplus}), Mangarouth (Cosmas), Sibôr (Cosmas), Poudapatana (Cosmas), Bakarê (\textit{Periplus}), and Kaber (Cosmas). Mandagora was either Mandwa, 18 km north of Alibag in Raigad district, near its northern tip, or, as Vasant Shinde has suggested, Kuda-Mandad at the head of the Janjira creek, a short distance south of Chaul.\textsuperscript{6} Since it is listed after Sêmylla in both the \textit{Periplus} and Ptolemy, and Sêmylla was medieval Saimur, that is, Chaul in Raigad (today Revdanda), Shinde’s suggestion preserves the sequence of both sources. Mangarouth in Cosmas was almost certainly Mangalore.\textsuperscript{7} In Cosmas it is the second Malé (Malabar) location after Parti (unknown but possibly Barçelore), and before Salopatana and Nalopatana (both unknown). This gives us some idea of how far \textit{up} the west coast Malé/Malabar was thought to extend, at least in the circles Cosmas moved in.

In Cosmas, Sibôr is sandwiched between Kalliana and Malé and was almost certainly his name for Sindâbûr of the Arabic sources, namely, Goa.\textsuperscript{8} In other words, Cosmas’ description of the west coast of India divided it into four major segments: Saurashtra or Kathiawar in Gujarat, Kalyan just north of Bombay, Sindâbûr or Goa, and the Malabar ports ending with Poudapatana. This last location can be identified with ‘Budfattan’ in Ibn Baṭṭ̣ūta\textsuperscript{9} or modern

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Peripl. M. Rubr.} 49, 52–60.
\textsuperscript{5} Cosmas Indicopleustes 11.16.
\textsuperscript{6} Shinde, Gupta, Rajgor 2002, 78.
\textsuperscript{7} Yule 1915, i 228, n. 1; iv 73.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. iv 65; Sindabur ‘substantially identical with the port of Goa’; Tibbetts 1971, 455.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibn Baṭṭ̣ūta, \textit{Travels} iv 811.