

# Ports and Harbours of Travancore

(A. D. 50-150)

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## Ancient Political Divisions

ABOUT the middle of the first century A. D. the portion of modern Travancore north of the river Pampa was under Kero bothra, *i. e.* Chera-man, the Chera King, while the portion south of it belonged to the Pandyan King. This we know from sections 53 to 55 of the *Periplus* (written c. 81 A. D.), the author of which had visited Travancore in about 60 A. D. at least as far south as the two Pampa ports called by him Bakare (=Purakkad) and Nelkynda (=Naakkida). The Chera kingdom extended beyond Travancore to some boundary line north of Naura (=Canna-nore), while the Pandyan kingdom extended beyond Kolkhi (=modern Kolkai on the Tinnevely coast) perhaps as far as Point Calimere (=Kalli-medu), or even further north. The Chera kingdom was in what the *Periplus* calls Dimyrike, the Damiric, or Tamilic region stretching down to Purakkad south of Alleppey, thus suggesting that the language there was Tamil in the first century. But we know that the Pandyan and Chola (Ptolemy's Sora or Tsoringon) regions too were then "Damiric."

## Capitals Vanchi and Madura

Both the above kings "lived in the interior" says the *Periplus* (S. 55). Ptolemy (c. 150) gives us precise information by mentioning Karoura as "the royal seat of Kero-bothros", and Modoura as the seat of the Pandionoi. The former is Karuvur or Vanchi (=Tiruvanchikkulam in Crauganore, Cochin) of the Tamil poems, and the

latter Madura (which Ptolemy seems to have noted down also as the yet unidentified "Morounda, inland town of the Aioi").

## The Aioi, Ay-Vel Vassals

In the country of these Aioi (singular, Aios) of the Pandyan kingdom, western and eastern, Ptolemy locates the market-places from his Melkynda (=Naakkida on the Pampa, near Niranam, Tiruvalla taluk) to Komaria (Comorin) and mentions Morounda (=Marudai, மருதை; மதுரை, Madurai) as their inland town. They were most probably the ancient Ay or Ay-Vel kinglets of the west and east coasts of South India, latterly known by the Sanskrit title Yadavas, Yadus, or Yadu-Vamsyas (Tamil *Vanchiyar*), which title reminds one of the famous Yadava rulers of Devagiri (Daulatabad in Hyderabad State), who rose to prominence in about 1187 A. D., and of the Yadava Varmans (about 1060 A. D.) of Eastern Bengal. These Ays south of the Pampa were the uncrowned (Tamil *Vel*) under-kings or Samantas of the Pandyan. Near Naakkida on the Pampa there is now a Srayi (ശ്രായി) chief's family, whose name is a corrupt form of Tamil *chiru-ay* (சிறு ஆய்), meaning little Ay. North of Quilon (Venad, Vel-nad) also there are several localities called Venad, a Vel's *nad* or territory.

North of the Pampa too there must have been Samantas of the Chera up to some parts beyond Tundis (=modern Kadalundi) and Naura (modern Canna-nore). But no mention of them is made in the *Periplus*, Pliny (A. D. 23-79), or Ptolemy.

The Tamil Sangham poems, however, tell us of the Chera's vassals Nedumidal or Anchi, perhaps of Takadur in Salem District, and of Nannan, chief of Pooli (പൂലി) nadu, which was one of the 12 Tamil dialect regions including Kuttanadu, No. 8 of List I *infra*. Later Malabar tradition speaks of 18 *nadus* and 8 *samantas*, and in Arabic and Portuguese writings several Malabar chiefs are mentioned. These are probably survivals from the Kerala Ays or Vels of the pre-Ptolemaic centuries.

**Ports and Marts, Littoral, Northern**

The ports and marts on or near the coast of Travancore mentioned by the Peripluser, Pliny, and Ptolemy, and recorded in *Tabula Peutingeriana* are given below in List I conflated in the order from north to south. The inland localities east of the Travancore coast will be given in List II, at the end.

**List I : Littoral Localities**

1. (Periplus): *Muziris*, "market-town of leading importance". Ptolemy: *Mouziris*, emporium near the mouth of No. 2; "20 stadia" (or 2 miles) "up the river from the shore", says the *Periplus*, S. 54. "Muziris" the river-port mentioned even later by pre-Portuguese European writers, and appearing as *Muyiri-kodu* (മുയിരിക്കോടു) in the Cochin Jew's copper-plate of 11th cent. A. D., may now be under water. (There are 2 *Musiri*'s in the Tamil country now, and a *Musiris* in Cappadocia.)

2. (Ptolemy): *Mouth* of the river *Pseudostomos*, the Periyar river.

3. (Ptolemy): *Podoperoura*, probably *Vada-Paravur* (വടപറവൂർ), now *Vadakkan Parur*. Coins of Augustus (B. C. 39—14 A. D.) and of some other Roman emperors were dug up there about 20 years ago, and identified at the Madras Museum.

4. (Ptolemy): *Semne*, probably *Chemmanad* (ചെമ്മനാട്) a little east of the eastern edge of the backwaters. (Alternatives: *Chengamanad*, *Asamannur*—ചെമ്മനാട്, അശമന്നൂർ.) Is it *Semve*? (ചെമ്മൂട്?)

5. (Ptolemy): *Koreoura*, probably *Kattur*, കട്ടൂർ, south of *Mararikkulam* in *Sherthala taluk*. (If it be *Toreoura*, there is *Toravur* in *Sherthala* to tally.)

6. (Periplus): *Bakare*, village at the mouth of a river. Pliny: "*Barake* ... a port in the territory of the people called *Neacyndi*"=people of *Naakkida*, No. 7 here. Ptolemy: *Bakarei* at the mouth of the *Baris* river.

*Bakare*, originally perhaps *Barakare*, is undoubtedly modern *Purakkad* on the coast south of *Alleppey*, and *not* *Vayakkara* in *Kottayam*, *Travancore*. *Baris* is the *Pam—payaar* river, or boat-river, Greek *baris* meaning boat. Pliny mentions single-log *barises*, boats, bringing down pepper from *Kottonara*, No. 8 here.

7. (Periplus): *Nelkynda*, "market-town of leading importance" (like *Muziris*, No. 1 *supra*). It was 120 stadia up the same river, and was "of another kingdom the Pandian." Ptolemy: *Melkynda*. *Tabula Peut*: *Nincylda*. These stand for *Naakkida* (നാക്കിട, നാക്കിയിട) near *Niranam*, about 13 miles ("120 stadia") east of *Purakkad*. *Neakylda* may have been the original spelling, *ld* (instead of the then usual *r*) standing for the un-Greek, Tamil cerebral *t* (டகரம்). The late Mr. E. J. John, Principal, Law College, had a coin of Emperor Augustus picked up from *Naakkida* or *Niranam*.

At *Naakkida*, in *Tiruvalla taluk*, the *Pampa* river bifurcates, and a little below the angle the *Manimala* river joins the northern branch, and the *Kulakkada* (or

Atchankovil) river joins the southern, so that pepper could be brought down the three rivers to Nakkida "of leading importance", from Kottonara, No. 8 of this list.

8. (Periplus): *Kottonara*, a "district" near the two market-towns Muziris and Nakkida, both of leading importance (Nos. 1 and 7), in which "region" alone "pepper is produced in quantity" (S 56). Pliny, VI 26: "*Kottonara*, the district from which pepper is carried down to Barace in boats hollowed out of a single tree." Ptolemy does not mention this district, but most of his inland localities between the Periyar and the Pampa seem to be in that region. See List II, A.

At present also the principal pepper producing region of Travancore (the region where the Portuguese found the Pepper Queen of Vadakkumkōor) is that between Nakkida and Muziris, *i. e.* between the two biggest rivers of Travancore. There are in that area five places with names somewhat like Kottonara, *viz.*—

(a) *Kuttanadu* (കുട്ടനാടു), a water-logged area growing no pepper. But in 1816-20, during Ward and Conner's survey of Travancore and Cochin, "Kutanaad" "comprises 22 proverties, 12 in Ampalappula, 4 in Kottayam, 3 in Changanasery, and 3 in Ettumanoor" (pp. 57 and 58 of the reprint of 1863). The last 10 'proverties' (portions) are now pepper growing.

(b) (Thekkum—, and Vadakkum)—*Koottunadu* (കൂട്ടുനാടു) between the Periyar and Pampa rivers. The Pepper Queen was ruling the northern (the latter) Koottunadu.

(c) *Kadanadu* (കടനാടു) in Meenachil taluk, a small old principality.

(d) *Kottanadu* (കോട്ടനാടു) in Pattanathitta taluk, a few miles above Nakkida.

(e) 2 or 3 *Koottanadus* (കൂട്ടനാടുകൾ) north and south of Kottayam, Travancore:

Tamil Grammars mention a *Kuttanadu* (குட்டம்—நாடு) where a dialect of Tamil was spoken. This is most probably the Kottonara of the *Periplus* and Pliny. The Tamil name may mean the low (coast) land, குட்டம் in Tamil having the sense of depth. It may or may not be that No. 8 (a) *supra* (modern Kuttanadu) retains the first century Tamil name; and Kuttuvan perhaps originally meant the king of Kuttam, strictly Kuttavan (குட்டவன்). In the literary form Kuttuvan (குட்டுவன்) it occurs first as the name of the Chera king Palyanai Kuttuvan (c. 75-100) of Pliny's and the Peripluser's century. Other Kuttuvans of Chera are Chem—Kuttuvan (the just Kuttuvan, c. 125—180), Kuttuvan Kodai (c. 180—205) and Ilam Kuttuvan (c. 206—230) as per Mr. Sesha Aiyar's chronology (*Cera Kings*, 1937, p. 128).

### Littoral, Southern

9. (Periplus): the *Purrhon Mountain* (usually translated as the dark-red mountain) south of Purakkad, but not necessarily on the seashore. It is most probably the Greek form of Sanskrit Purva (Parvata), eastern (mountain), and must be identified with the southern portion of the Travancore Ghats, visible from ships sailing south from Purakkad. (Purrhon was previously identified with the "Red Bluffs" of Warkala and those below Anjengo. But these bluffs cannot be called 'mountain'.)

10. (Periplus): *Paralia*, "another district stretching along the coast towards the south" from the southern end of the district of Damirica, which the author seems to have regarded as ending at Purakkad. Ptolemy's *Limyrike* (Damirica, Tamilica, rather than *Tamil-akam*) too extended from

somewhere north of Kadalundi (near Calicut) down to the mouth of the Pampa, *i. e.* to Purakkad itself.

Section 51 says : from Barygaza (Broach) "the whole course to the end of Damirika is 7000 stadia ; but the distance is greater to the Coast Country", *i. e.*, to Paralia, No. 10 here.

Greek *paralia*, not a proper noun, means coast country, and has nothing to do with the small inland river Parali (പരളി = wild), the first part of Palayar river in South Travancore, or with Purali (പുരളി), name for Kottayam in British Malabar.

Paralia (coast) country of the *Periplus* stretched from Purakkad down to Cape Comorin and further on to Kolkai on the "Pearl Fishery" coast, and to Calimere. But the *Peripulser* supposed that even from the Cape to Kolkai the Paralia coast stretched *southwards* ! This mistake is, to be sure, not more egregious than that of Ptolemy whose notion was that the coast of India up to Cape Kory (*Dhanush-Kodi*) stretched from *west to east* !! The Purrhon Mountain (No. 9 *ante*) divided the Paralia of the *Periplus* into two parts, western and eastern. Ptolemy's Paralia was north of the eastern Paralia of the *Periplus*. See in No. 11 here below.

11. (*Periplus*) : *Balita*, "the first place" in the paralia district, having "a fine harbour and a village by the shore" (S. 58). This is most probably Viliinjam harbour, on which see *Travancore Information and Listener* for Nov. 1946, pp. 33-35, and p. 23, col. 2.

In his *Cera Kings*, p. 20, Mr. Sessa Aiyar says of Veliyattu belonging to the Chera king Vanavarampan (= Vanavarapan = "Devanam Priya", title) of c. 17 A. D. that Veliyattu or "Veliyam is most probably the modern Viliinjam.....Balita,

which appears to be a corruption of Veliyattu, is said in the *Periplus* to be in the Cola Kingdom".....No, the *Periplus* locates Balita on the Travancore shore (*paralia*) of the then Pandyan kingdom, and it did not belong to the Chera or Chola king. In the Chera kingdom north of the Pampa there are Veliya-nadu, Veliyan-ur, etc., one of which may be Vanavarapan's Veliyam, and not Viliinjam (= ? Viliyam ?)

Mr. Sessa Aiyar must have mistaken the Paralia of the *Periplus* for Ptolemy's "Paralia, properly so called" which is the broad, mountainless Chola (Coro)-mandal coast mentioned under the Greek heading : "**Tes idios kaloumenes paralias Sorington**",

which means In the properly called *paralia* (sea coast) of the Chola (Sora) king (= Tsorington, *Cholan-kon*, രാജ്യമുഖം ദേശം). Some Christian writers before 636 A. D. seem to have misread *kaloumenes* as a place-name Kalamenes, and wrongly called the Chola coast Kalamine (of St. Thomas, 1st century), just as others mistook *paralia* of the same Greek heading as a place-name.

12. (Ptolemy) : Elangkon, or—kor, a mart north of Kottiar, No. 13. Elangkor is most probably the latter half of Tiruv—edaangkor, *i. e.*, Tiruvetamkodu (തിരുവതംകുട) the capital of ancient Travancore, which name (unlike Englishmen) the other Europeans like the Greeks and the Portuguese pronounced like Travaankoude (ത്രവാങ്കൂട). There is also Elamkada, near Kottar—(കൂട്ടകട).

13. (Ptolemy) : "Kottiyara, the metropolis", modern Kottar (കൂട്ടകട).

14. (Ptolemy) : *Bammala*. This is (Marut)—*Vaamala*, a conspicuous hill near No. 13, Kottar.

#### **Kanyaa**

15. (*Periplus*) : *Komari*, modern Comorin. Beyond Balita, No. 11, "there is another place called Comari at which are the Cape of Comari and a harbour ; hither come those men who wish to consecrate themselves for the rest of their lives, and bathe and dwell in celibacy ; and women also do the same ; for it is told that a goddess once dwelt here and bathed," says the *Periplus*, S. 58. In Tamil *kumari* (கும்பரி)

is a kind of aloe plant also. If Kanya-tirtha of *Mahabharata* was recorded after 1st cent; *Periplus* has the earliest written reference to the cape of Komari (=? of aloe plants!), and the goddess Kanya there, called Kumari-kanyaa Bhagavati in later inscriptions. The place-name Kumari may be pre-Aryan, pure Tamil.

**List II : Inland Localities**

From Ptolemy we get the following names of inland localities, most probably pepper market places.

A. In *Limyrike* (Damerica) where he had already located the places from his Tyndis (Kadal-Tundi) down to the mouth of his Baris river, i. e. to Purakkad.

**Northern**

11 inland cities between Periyar and Pampa rivers :—

1. *Pasage* (Pilagu, or Paika—പിഴക, പൊഴക, both in Meenachil taluk).
2. *Mastanour* (Maluvannur, മഴുവന്നൂർ; or Ettumanur, എട്ടുമാനൂർ).
3. *Kourellour* (Kudallur 'in Meenachil, or Kumaranallur in Kottayam: കൂടല്ലൂർ, കുമാര(കാ)നല്ലൂർ.)
4. *Pounnata*, "where there is beryl" (Punnatra or Poonjattil, both in Meenachil; or Tru-punittura near Ernakulam, Cochin—പുന്നത്ര, പൂഞ്ഞാറ്റം, തൃപ്പുണിത്തൂർ). *Punittura* may mean the sea port of the *Puni*, ancient Phoenicians. Is this Megasthenes' "Tropina on the sea coast" ?
5. *Aloe* (Alwaye, or Elur, the latter in Meenachil—ആലുവയ, എഴുർ, എളൂർ.)
6. **KAROURA**, "the royal seat of the Kerobothros" (Karuvur, *alias* Vanchi, *alias* modern Tiruvanchikkulam in Cranganore, Cochin). This is not the same as Muzuris, No. 1 of List I.
7. *Arenbour* (Athirampula, അതിരമ്പുഴ; or Arannula, അറന്നൂള).
8. *Bideris* (Vadayar in Vycome; or Vadakara near it—വടയാർ, വടകര).
9. *Pantipolis* (Pannippalli in Thodupula; or Pantappalli—പന്തിപ്പള്ളി, പന്തപ്പള്ളി. Tamil പன்றிப்பள்ளി).
10. *Adarinx* (not identified).

11. *Koreour* (Tru-kkarur near Kothamangalam). കോരൂർ, far inland, unlike Karoura, No. 6 above, and Koreoura, No. 5 of List I, viz. കരൂർ, and കാട്ടൂർ.

**Southern**

B. Inland Town of the Aioi (in whose country were the places from Nak-kida to Cape Comorin) :—

1. *Morounda* (perhaps another spelling for Modoura, Madura, the Pandyan capital). In Tamil itself there are two usual forms Madurai, and Marudai—மதுரை, மருதநகர்.

The names in (in) List II are possible identifications. There may be other places with names sounding like the names in Ptolemy's lists. He gives the Longitudes and Latitudes; but they are not reliable.