

RAKI'S MISSION TO ROMANUKHARATTHA.  
NEW EVIDENCE IN FAVOR OF PLINY'S ACCOUNT OF  
TAPROBANÊ, *N.H.* 6.84-91

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*To the memories of D. Meredith and S. Paranavitana\**

Este ensayo se ocupa de la llegada a Roma de un cierto Rachias, embajador de Taprobanê, según es narrado por Plinio. Queríamos esclarecer algunos aspectos acerca del nombre Rachias, que podría ser entonces el mismo que el Raki mencionado en las inscripciones de dos cuevas en Sri Lanka. Es un nombre singalés que se refiere a un importante personaje contemporáneo de Claudio. Se puede, así, confirmar, mediante la confrontación con epígrafes singaleses, la historicidad del episodio que Plinio había preservado. Así, examinando el origen singalés del nombre damos valor a la narración de un historiador romano que la justifica. Intentamos satisfacer nuestra deuda con Plinio refutando las acusaciones dirigidas a él por algunos investigadores como Raschke, que dice que Plinio es para el crédulo, acusándole de creer en historias de marinos y presentándolas como verdaderos hechos históricos. Intentaremos, por un lado, dar una interpretación de las fuentes epigráficas singalesas así como de las crónicas que mencionan el envío de una embajada al país de los romanos por el rey Bhâtikâbhaya; por otro lado, resaltar lo que está tras el nombre: Rachias, citado por Plinio aludiendo a estas mismas inscripciones pétreas. Como resultado podemos establecer una conexión entre los diferentes

\* The reason why the author dedicates this essay to Meredith is that he instilled in him a strong sense that the Sinhalese embassy arrived in Rome during the reign of Claudius. Paranavitana's indefatigable work related to the collecting of the Sinhalese epigraphic records and the minute analyses and interpretations thereof helped him to acquire tools to make this breakthrough which Prof. Juan Gil of the University of Sevilla enthusiastically calls an "important and marvellous discovery" (oral. comm. 12.11. 2008, Seville).

elementos, partiendo de los grafiti bilingües descubiertos en el desierto oriental de Egipto, que habían sido grabados por Paminis Heraklêls Lysas, liberto griego de Publius Annus Plocamus, cuyo nombre aparece en Plinio en el mismo pasaje en el que se evoca al embajador Rachias. Se trata de dar el valor apropiado a ese episodio, digno de interés en la historia de los vínculos entre la Roma de los Césares y Sri Lanka.

This essay is all about the arrival in Rome of a certain Rachias, an ambassador from Taprobanê, as recounted by Pliny. We would still like to clear up some facts about name Rachias which then, could be the same as Raki mentioned in the cave inscriptions in Sri Lanka. It is a Sinhalese name, indicating an important personage, the contemporary of Claudius. One can thus confirm, through a confrontation with Sinhalese epigraphs, the historicity of the episode Pliny had preserved. Thus questioning the Sinhalese origin of the name we will valorise the account of a Roman historian justifying it. We will try to pay our debt to Pliny by refuting the accusations directed at him by some scholars such as Raschke, saying that Pliny is for the gullible, accusing him of believing in deep-sea yarns and presenting them as truly historical facts. We shall try on the one hand, to give an interpretation of Sinhalese epigraphic sources as well as chronicles mentioning sending of an embassy to the country of the Romans by the king Bhâtikâbhaya. On the other hand, to bring to the fore what lies behind the name: Rachias, cited by Pliny alluding to these very rock inscriptions. Following that, we could establish a connexion between the different elements, starting with the bilingual graffiti discovered in the eastern desert of Egypt, which had been cut by Paminis Heraklêlou Lysas, the Greek freedman of Publius Annus Plocamus, whose name appears in Pliny in the same passage in which he calls up the ambassador Rachias. It's all about giving the appropriate value to that episode worthy of interest in the history of links between the Rome of Cesars and Sri Lanka.

In Book six of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, we find an account of the embassy of a certain *Rachias* from distant Taprobanê, today's Sri Lanka, to Rome during the principate of Claudius (41-54 A.D.). The arrival of Indian ambassadors to Rome under Augustus (27 B.C.-14 A.D.) is mentioned in his own account of his reign (*Res gestae divi augusti* V. 31. 1)<sup>1</sup>, and attested in the *Geography* (15.1.4) of Strabo as well as in the *Divus Augustus* 21.3 of Suetonius, and in the *Roman History* (54.9.8) of Dio Cassius, but Pliny (23/4-79 A.D.) is the only classical author who mentions the dispatching of a Sinhalese embassy to Rome. This is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing episodes in the annals of diplomatic missions between

<sup>1</sup> D. F. Lach's assertion that ambassadors from Sri Lanka waited upon Augustus court', in *Asia in the Making of Europe. Vol. I, The Century of Discovery, Book One* (Chicago 1993) 12, and the statement "In the time of Augustus an embassy from Rome actually visited it [i. e. Taprobanê]" in H. T. Peck, *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* (New York 1897) 1524, are not substantiated by any classical source.

the Mediterranean and Sri Lanka in ancient times, given the “oddities” involved in it and the doubts raised by skeptics concerning its authenticity<sup>2</sup>.

It is not our concern to deal with all the complex problems raised by this account to which have been devoted several substantial recent studies<sup>3</sup>, but to focus on the ambassador Rachias, whose name, in our view, could be connected with two rock inscriptions found at Sässeruwa (80° 5' E., 8° N) at the border of the present day Anuradhapura district. After summarizing the information (§§ 81-83) he could gather about Taprobanê from authorities such as Onesicritus, Megasthenes, and Eratosthenes -all of which are attested in sources of the early Hellenistic period-, Pliny proudly records the more detailed information -inordinate in length (§§ 84-91)- which he himself could have obtained from this embassy or from a source very close to the court circles of Emperor Claudius, because Pliny was a member of Vespasian's (69-79 A.D.) cabinet. Let us cite the two passages in which occur the ambassador's<sup>4</sup> name as recorded by Pliny<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> J. Needham, Pierre Paris and Donald Ferguson deny that Sri Lanka was meant: “Until convinced to the contrary, I shall continue to believe (1) that Pliny's Taprobanian embassy did not come from Ceylon, and (2) that Ptolemy's Taprobane was probably Sumatra”, D. Ferguson, “The Taprobane of Pliny and Ptolemy”, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1904) 541; J. Needham, W. Ling, L. Gwei-Djen, *Science and Civilisation in China, Vol. 4: Physics and Physical Technology Part III: Civil Engineering and Nautics* (Cambridge 1971) 612; “M. Coedès lit une communication de M. P. Paris sur deux passages de Strabon et de Pline intéressant l'Extrême-Orient”: ‘Cette ambassade de Ceylan à l'empereur Claude serait venue, en réalité, d'un royaume situé dans la partie sud de Sumatra’”, *Journal Asiatique* 262. 1-2 (1974) 72-73.

<sup>3</sup> A. Judd, “The Trade with India through the Eastern Desert of Egypt under the Roman Empire” (pers. comm. 9. 2. 2009); T. M. Murphy, *Pliny's Natural History. The Empire in the Encyclopaedia* (Cambridge 2004) 105-113; S. Faller, *Taprobane im Wandel der Zeit* (Stuttgart 2000) 51-110; D. P. M. Weerakkody, *Taprobanê: Ancient Sri Lanka as known to Greeks and Romans* (Turnhout 1997) 51-77; F. De Romanis, “Romanukharattha e Taprobane: sui rapporti Roma-Ceylon nel I sec. D.C.”, *Helikon* 28 (1988) 5-58; English trans. with additions, “Romanukharattha and Taprobane: Relations between Rome and Sri Lanka in the First Century AD.”, F. De Romanis, A. Tcherina (ed.), *Crossings. Early Mediterranean Contacts with India* (New Delhi 1997) 161-237; F. F. Schwarz, “Ein singhalesischer Prinz in Rom”, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 11 (1974) 166-176; *ibid.*, “Pliny the Elder on Ceylon”, *Journal of Asian History* 8 (1974) 21-48; Ch. G. Starr, “The Roman Emperor and the King of Ceylon”, *Classical Philology* 51,1 (1956) 27-29; W. T. Keble, “A Ceylon Embassy to Rome”, *New Lanka* 1.1 (1949) 30-35; H. Cordier, *Yule's Cathay and the Way Thither, revised by H. Cordier* (London 1916) I, 198-200; J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature* (Westminster 1901) 102-106; S. E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa, 30 B.C.-A.D. 217* (Leiden 1986) 32-33; R. Hennig, “Ein Römer in Ceylon und eine Gesandtschaft aus Ceylon in Rom (etwa zwischen 50 un 55 n. Chr.)”, *Terrae incognitae. Altertum bis Ptolemäus* (Leiden 1944), Zweite verbesserte Auflage, 348-351; E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (London-New York 1974<sup>2</sup>) 43.

<sup>4</sup> Valérie Naas refers to him and his suite as “ambassadeurs romains”, see *Le projet encyclopédique de Pline l'Ancien* (Rome 2002) 159, 180 n. 48.

<sup>5</sup> “Hactenus a priscis memorata. nobis diligentior notitia Claudi principatu contigit legatis etiam ex ea insula [scil. Taprobanê] advectis. id accidit hoc modo: Anni Plocami, qui Maris Rubri vectigal a fisco redemerat, libertus circa Arabiam navigans aquilonibus raptus praeter Carmaniam, XV die Hippuros portum eius inventus, hospitali regis clementia sex mensum tempore inbutus adloquio

“So far the facts stated have been recorded by the early writers. We however have obtained more accurate information during the principate of Claudius, when an embassy actually came to Rome from the island of Ceylon. The circumstances were as follows: Annius Plocamus had obtained a contract from the Treasury to collect the taxes from the Red Sea; a freedman of his while sailing round Arabia was carried by gales of the north beyond the coast of Carmania, and after a fortnight made the harbour of Hippuri in Taprobanê, where he was entertained with kindly hospitality by the king, and in a period of six months acquired a thorough knowledge of the language; and afterwards in reply to the king’s enquiries he gave an account of the Romans and their emperor. The king among all that he heard was remarkably struck with admiration for Roman honesty, on the ground that among the money found on the captive the denarii were all in equal weight, although the various figures on them showed that they had been coined by several emperors. This strongly attracted his friendship, and he sent four envoys, the chief of whom was **Rachias**. [...] They also told us that [...] beyond the Himalayas they also face towards the country of the Chinese, who are known to them by intercourse in trade as well, the father of **Rachia** having travelled there, and that when they arrived there the Chinese always hastened down to the beach to meet them”<sup>6</sup>.

percontanti postea narravit Romanos et Caesarem. mirum in modum in auditis iustitiam ille suspexit, quod parvis pondere denarii essent in captiva pecunia, cum diversae imagines indicarent a pluribus factos. et hoc maxime sollicitatus ad amicitiam legatos quattuor misit principe eorum **Rachia**” [6.84-85]. “Iidem narravere latus insulae quod praetenderetur India X stadiorum esse ab oriente hiberno, ultra ultra montes Hemodos Seras quoque ab ipsis aspici notos etiam commercio, patrem **Rachiae** commeasse eo [...]” [6.88], D. Detlefsen (ed.), *Die geographischen Bücher (II, 242 - VI Schluss) der Naturalis Historia des C. Plinius Secundus mit vollständigem kritischen Apparat* (Berlin 1904) 146-147 (text authorized by D. J. Campbell in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford 1953) s. v. “Pliny the Elder”, 704. The bold type used here and the quotation above for the ambassador’s name is due to the author of this article. Tim Severin who sailed on an Arab dhow from the coast of Oman to China in 1989 informs the author of this article of the suitability of northern gales for such a rapid journey (pers. comm. 9.11.2006).

<sup>6</sup> Pliny, *Natural History, Volume III, Libri VIII-XI* (London 1967) VI, 85, p. 403. The author’s purpose here is neither to give an accurate translation of Pliny’s text, nor to reproduce a faulty one but to cite the two passages taken from Rackham’s translation to show why Rackham hesitated between the two forms of the same name (an example of the potential ambiguity in the Latin text). Rackham’s translation in the Loeb Classical Library is read all over the world by all English readers from Cairo to Colombo. When focussing on Rackham’s ambivalence with respect to the nominative, the present author noticed several discrepancies in the translation. Thinking that a few of them are well worth mentioning (far from belittling Rackham’s well deserving work citing the Loeb Classical Library translation further along the essay) so as to caution the reader not to take the Pliny translation as the absolute ultimate. For example, the Latin expression *captiva pecunia* rendered as “the money found on the captive” by Rackham is a mistranslation whereas it should be “money collected”. See H. Baxter, C. Johnson, *Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London 1947) s.v. *capt/ale* [...] “captor, collector of royal dues, 1248, 1419”. J. W. M’Crindle, *op. cit.* 104, made the same error when he translated “among the money taken from the captive”, and Sidebotham, *op. cit.* 32: “the money found on the captive”. F. De Romanis, *op. cit.* 173, who subjected Pliny’s account to some scrutiny, has “the money seized from the captive”. D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.*, 32, has “acquired”, “captured”, “confiscated” and “seized”. O. De Beauvoir, *art. cit.*, 351, has: the

We have cited these two passages from H. Rackham's translation along with the original in Latin (see below) to show the ambiguity encountered by translators in rendering the nominative form of the ambassador's name, because Pliny's text does not provide that opportunity, whereas the nominative forms to be deduced for the other two personal names occurring in the account, viz. Claudius and Annus Plocamus, do not pose any difficulty.

1. PLINY'S "HIPPUROS" ("HORSE MOUNTAIN") IS THE OLD SINHALESE EQUIVALENT OF "SINDU KANDA" ("HORSE MOUNTAIN") MENTIONED BY PTOLEMY AS Σινδοκάνδα (Fig. 1)

From the outset one essential point should, however, be pointed out: the inappropriateness of Rackham's rendering of the proper name "Hippuros", (or, Ἴππουρος, ἵππου + ὄρος = "Horse Mountain" from ἵππος, ου (ὄ)<sup>7</sup> "horse" and ὄρος (τὸ)<sup>8</sup> "mountain") as "Hippuri". This is of key importance to our argument as "Hippouros" which Pliny transcribes here as "Hippuros" is neuter and the accusative case which is the same as the nominative<sup>9</sup> whilst it can be considered as invariable<sup>10</sup>. "Hippuros" is the direct Greek rendering of "Sindu Kanda", a place-name in Old Sinhalese literally denoting "Horse Mountain", a name attested as Σινδοκάνδα on the western coast of Taprobanê on the map drawn by Ptolemy<sup>11</sup> near in time to Pliny. The present-day Tamil place-name on the western coast of Sri Lanka "Kudiramalai" (literally meaning "Horse Mountain") is a direct translation from the Old Sinhalese "Sindu kanda". Ptolemy transcribed it letter for letter, except for the "u" which he rendered as "o". The same vowel shift occurs in the Greek transcription of the Sanskrit vocable "Sindhu" or "Sindu" rendered by Ptolemy as Σινθον in his *Geography*, 7.1.2; 110°20' 19°50'. Although Ptolemy does not show Σινδοκάνδα πόλις (122° 5') as a port, he does show Πιριάπιος λιμὴν (122° 3° 20') -a harbour in its vicinity (*Geography*, 7.4.3). Hence its relevance

seizure and confiscation of the contents of the freedman's ship to the King's use. The implication of this mistranslation and misunderstanding is that each and every skipper or sailor who made port in ancient Sri Lanka would be made a captive. Let us remind the reader in passing that the King of Taprobanê was portrayed by Pliny as a just ruler, and hence the obvious incompatibility with the idea of a "plunderer" and an ill reputation of the most pious king of ancient Sri Lanka, conveyed by this inappropriate translation.

<sup>7</sup> A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire grec-français* (Paris 1895) 976 s.v. ἵππος.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*, 1406 s.v. ὄρος.

<sup>9</sup> "In Pliny's version 'Hippuros' is not a person but a place in Sri Lanka"!, G. Parker, *The Making of Roman India* (Cambridge 2008) 194.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Fiaccadori, "Hippuros Portus", *La Parola del Passato* 38 (1938) 441. Fiaccadori does not mention the relevance of "Sindu Kanda" = Σινδοκάνδα to the discussion.

<sup>11</sup> See C. F. A. Nobbe (ed.), *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* (Hildesheim 1990) 173 for the place-name Σινδοκάνδα πόλις, and 174 for ethnic name Σανδοκάνδαι.

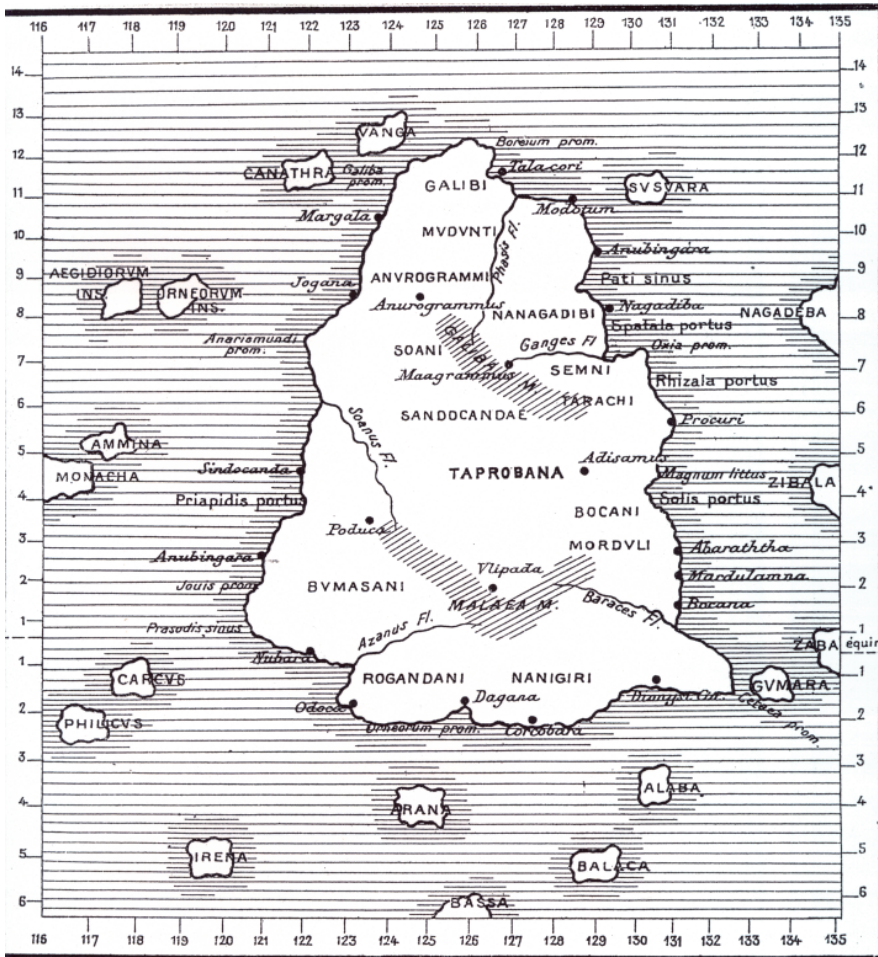


Fig. 1. “Duodecima Asiae tabula” from Claudius Ptolemy, *Geography*. Map based on the recension Venetus 516 (R). Reproduced from Louis Renou’s *La Géographie de Ptolémée. L’Inde (VII, 1-4)*, Paris, Edouard Champion, 1925, “CARTE de TAPROBANE d’après le Venetus 516 (R)”.

to our purpose. It is of great significance to emphasize that this name “Hippuro” alone -which is only mentioned by Pliny- tells a great deal about the Greco-Roman sailor’s origin for we shall soon show that he was, in all probability, either an Egyptian Greek or a Greek living in Egypt who learned Sinhalese and Hellenized the Sinhalese ambassador’s name.



## 2. RACHIA, RACHIAS OR RAKI : HIS NAME AND HIS IDENTITY

In Rackham's translation he uses the nominative form *Rachias* in one passage but in another constructs the nominative form *Rachia*, probably by analogy with a Latin term such as *agricola* ("farmer"). Rackham thus kept the form *Rachia* in the ablative and *Rachiae* in the genitive from the nominative form *Rachias*, as required by the Greek morphology of the name. J. Filliozat and J. André kept the form *Rachias* in their partial translation of book 6 of the *Natural History* published by the Guillaume Budé Association<sup>12</sup>, assuming that this name had been transmitted through Greek sources and restored to it the nominative ending *-as* in conformity with masculine Greek nouns of the type of νεανίας ("young man"), since it is impossible to have in that language a nominative masculine with an ending *-a*.

Pliny's mention of the ambassador's name gave rise to a long-running discussion regarding the identity and the origin of the person. Weerakkody<sup>13</sup> and Faller<sup>14</sup> in their recent studies provide detailed commentaries on the possible transcription and the provenance of the ambassador's name but without taking into consideration the evidence which Sri Lankan epigraphic records afford. One of the earliest attempts at identification was made by Fr. Paolino who thought that the name of the chief ambassador, "Rachia" was a transcription of "Râgia", and hence he concluded that the embassy was led by a king<sup>15</sup> (Sanskrit "raja" / "râjan", Sinhalese "raja" or "rajha"). William Vincent, the dean of Westminster, followed suit and popularized this conjecture widely through his translation of the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, which was translated into French and German<sup>16</sup>. Yet Pliny's

<sup>12</sup> J. André, J. Filliozat (eds.), *Pline l'Ancien, Histoire naturelle, text, trans. and commentary* (Paris 1980) livre VI, 2<sup>e</sup> partie, 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.* 57-59.

<sup>14</sup> S. Faller, *op. cit.* 75-78.

<sup>15</sup> P. da S. Bartolomeo, *Viaggio all'Indie Orientali* (Rome 1796) 376.

<sup>16</sup> "I have more than once noticed the Rajah, who, as Pliny informs us, attended the embassy from the king of Ceylon to Claudius, and who asserted, that his father had visited the Seres. I once thought that this Rajah went by sea [...]", W. Vincent, *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea. Part Second of Vol. II* (London 1805) 436; "And thirdly, I observe that this freedman who so correctly translates the more difficult and compound Kudramale seems, according to Lassen's own showing, quite unaware that *Rachias*, a simple word and in general use, is not a name but a title, and one borne by the members of the royal family", O. De Beauvoir Priaux, "On the Second Embassy to Rome (Pliny, Nat. Hist. VI, 24.)", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 18 (1861) 351-352; see H. Yule, A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson. A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, new edition edited by W. Crooke (London 1968) s.v. Raja, Rajah. "[...] It is curious that the term Râjâ cannot be traced, so far as we know, in any of the Greek or Latin references to India, unless the very questionable instance of Pliny's *Rachias* be an exception", p. 754; "[...] the chief was called *Rachia*, and appellation from which we may infer that he held the rank of a Râja", J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Ptolemy* (London 1885) 254; H. Rackham, *op. cit.* 402, "(perhaps a title, Rajah)"; "un râjan mais anonyme", E. Lamotte, "Les premières relations entre l'Inde et l'Orient", *Nouvelle Clío* 5 (1953) 108; "Raquias: Algunos estudiosos han pensado que el nombre de *Rachias* podría ser la transcripción del sánscrito *racha* 'rey' concluyendo que se trataba de un simple título", A. Fontán et al. (transl.), *Plinio el Viejo*,

text as edited and translated by scholars clearly states that Rachias (the capital letter “R” is conspicuous in Latin as compared with the term “rex” e.g. in the expressions *hospitali regis* ... and ... *eligi regem*) was sent by the king of Taprobanê, which excludes Rachias being a king himself. None of the common personal names attested in early and late Brâhmî inscriptions brought to light so far bear the Sinhalese words “yuvaraja” or “uparaja” meaning “viceroy”, “raja” or “rajha”, “king” or “maharaja” or “maharajha”, “great king” except concerning those who ruled petty kingdoms and the whole island, respectively.

A few decades after W. Vincent, Emerson Tennent made a *rapprochement* of “Rachia” with “Rakkha”, but quite recently Weerakkody, while exploring the possibility that the name could be equated with “ratthika”<sup>17</sup>, expresses doubts about Tennent’s view, saying that this conjecture will only be proven when it can be demonstrated that “Rakkha” was used as a proper noun in ancient Sri Lanka in Pliny’s time. In fact, “Rakkha” was a proper name in Pali, a name that was borne by a general in medieval Sri Lanka, as can be seen in the Pali chronicles<sup>18</sup>. Its early Sinhalese form “Raka” moreover appears in a rock inscription<sup>19</sup> contemporary with Pliny. So there is ample evidence that “Raka” was a name used in Sri Lanka during Pliny’s time, but we have yet to explain the supposed shift from -ka to -chias (i.e. from “Raka” to “Rachias”). Nevertheless, Weerakkody fails to clarify the difficulties presented by Tennent’s proposition: the passage from -*kkha* to -*chia* (from “Rakkha” to “Rachia”), difficulties to which attention had already been drawn by André and Filliozat<sup>20</sup> and by Donald Ferguson more than a century ago: “But why should the *j* in *râja* have been pronounced by the Romans as a guttural; [...]? Tennent’s own suggestion that ‘Rachia’ may represent the proper name Rakkha [...], is more plausible, and might be worthy of consideration were the whole story of the alleged Taprobanian embassy not so utterly incredible [!]”<sup>21</sup>.

Among the derivations proposed to explain this name is that of the historian, palaeographer and archaeologist Paranavitana, which gained currency for some time. He suggested that the name may be a form of the Sinhalese word *ratiya* or

*Historia natural Libros III-VI* (Madrid 1998) 340 n. 309; “Rachias: Vielleicht eine Verwechslung des Namens mit dem Herrschertitel Radscha”, K. Brodersen, *C. Plinius Secundus d. Ä., Naturkunde, Buch VI* (Darmstadt 1996) 204 n. 85; “Rachia: Potrebbe trattarsi di un titolo (rajâ) o dell’effettivo nome di un re”, A. Barchiesi et al., *Gaio Plinio Secondo, Storia naturale Libri I-6* (Torino 1982) 701, n. 3.

<sup>17</sup> D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.* 58.

<sup>18</sup> *Cûlavamsa*, trans. by Wilhelm Geiger (Colombo 1953) lxx, 5, Part I, 287.

<sup>19</sup> See for example inscription n° 72 [1], “Parumaka-Raka-puta parumaka-Paraka”, S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon. Volume I. Early Brâhmî Inscriptions* (Colombo 1970) 6. “Rakka” is a name of man in the *Rajatarangani*, M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford 1899) 851, s. v. “rakka”; see also G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* (London 1974) II, 702, s. v. “Rakkha”.

<sup>20</sup> J. André, J. Filliozat, *op. cit.* 115, § 85 note 3. See also S. Faller, *op. cit.* 77-78.

<sup>21</sup> D. Ferguson, *art. cit.* 540.



*ratika*, which has been found in an inscription of early 1st century A.D. at Gala-bâva in Sri Lanka and which means “a district chieftain”<sup>22</sup>. The Pali equivalent of this word is *ratthika*. But this conjecture does not explain the supposed passage of *t / tth* to *chi / χ*. Moreover, Pliny indicated that *Rachias* was a proper name, not a title or appellation of a dignitary. There is no basis for treating it as a title. It is noteworthy to point out that Pliny mentioned that the father of *Rachias* was a voyager who had been to the country of the Seres for trade<sup>23</sup>; the implication is that *Rachias* was not a title but a person. However, the name of Raki appears with some frequency in the masculine as well as in the feminine form<sup>24</sup> in several early and late Brâhmî inscriptions of Sri Lanka which refer to a few individuals who donate caves to the Buddhist monks by the epithet “*parumaka*” (“chief”) or “*bata*” (“lord”); for example in that found at Niyandavaragala in the Batticaloa District (in the east of the island), the name occurs with a title prefixed, translated by Parānavitana as “lord Raki”:

Transcript: “Bata-Rakiya lene”.

Translation: The cave of lord **Raki**<sup>25</sup>.

and in those of n° 994 [1], and n° 1000 [7] (see below) the name Raki appears with an epithet, rendered by him as “chief” and by Wickremasinghe as “His Eminence”<sup>26</sup>. In fact, the word Raki is the proper name of the individual, his title being “*parumaka*” which precedes the name and signifies “chief” or “premier”, i.e. one of the premiers, the pioneers, who in the historical tradition of Sri Lanka were the founders of a city or a settlement when they were newly settled on the island.

In these inscriptions the name Raki is always associated with a donation or an offering. So it seems clear that the person who bore this name believed his generosity was worth commemorating for posterity. In this context, the name definitely connoted a high official, or a person belonging to a higher social grade, or indeed a royal family, as may be observed in the following inscription found in Sâsseruva, a fertile area situated about thirty-five km south of today’s Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka, which was founded in the third century B.C.

<sup>22</sup> S. Parānavitana, C. W. Nicholas, *A Concise History of Ceylon. From the Earliest Times to the Arrival of the Portuguese in 1505* (Colombo 1961) 8; C. W. Nicholas, “Some Offices and Titles in the Early Sinhalese Kingdom”, *University of Ceylon Review* 8 (1950) 127: “Pliny’s ‘Rachias’ was very probably a *Ratiya*, an officer administering a territorial division called a Rata”.

<sup>23</sup> O. Bopearachchi locates this barter in the interior of Sri Lanka! See his “Foreword” to D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.* xi.

<sup>24</sup> See for example inscription n° 832 [2], “The cave of the female lay-devotee **Raki**, wife of prince **Tissa**, son of the **Pâcina** king, is given to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent”, S. Parānavitana, *op. cit.* 64.

<sup>25</sup> Inscription n° 399 [1], *ibid.* 31.

<sup>26</sup> D. M. D. Z. Wickremasinghe, *Epigraphia Zeylanica being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Ceylon* (London 1912) I, 17, 146.

Although in the first century A.D, Anuradhapura had a circumference of fifty-five km, it may not have included Sāsseruva within its perimeter<sup>27</sup>. It is to be noted that Sāsseruva is of great antiquity; it had an ancient Buddhist monastery containing numerous cells, with inscriptions dating from the second century B.C<sup>28</sup>. It is now a historical sanctuary, and the colossal standing statue of the Buddha<sup>29</sup> is still an important pilgrimage site, which in the past provided caves as shelter from rain and sun to mendicant and forest-dwelling monks<sup>30</sup>. Bestowing caves as donations and offerings to those who renounced worldly pleasures is an ancient custom and its widespread practice in Buddhist India and Sri Lanka is attested by inscriptions incised above and below the drip ledges of such refuges. The following two epigraphs are examples:

Inscription n° 994 [1] (Fig. 2)

Transcript: “Devanapiya-maharajhaha Gamani-Abayaha jhita Abi-Anuradiya parumaka-Raki-jhaya”.

Translation: “The cave of Princess (**Abi**) **Anuradhi**, daughter of the great king **Gamani Abhaya**, the friend of the gods, and wife of the Chief **Raki**”.

Inscription n° 1000 [7] (Fig. 3)

Transcript: “Parumuka..... [pu]ta parumuka-Rakiya (lene) sagasa ni[yate]”.

Translation: “The cave of the chief **Raki**, son of the chief... is dedicated to the Sangha”<sup>31</sup>.

In a footnote, Paranavitana draws attention to a minor feature in the redaction of inscription n° 994 [1]: he thinks that the three words occurring in the final sequence *parumaka-Raki-jhaya*, according to the norms of the epigraphic idiom of the Sinhalese Prakrit, should have preceded *Abi-Anuridiya* and not come at the end of the phrase<sup>32</sup>. Two explanations are possible: either the final mention of “the wife of the chief Raki” (*parumaka-Raki-jhaya*) was added because the identification of the princess needed completing by the mention of her husband, or the husband wished by this addition to appear alongside the donor and thus take part in her pious act. We thus are led to infer that Raki considered it important to cause his name to figure side by side with his wife’s because the donation of this cave to monks

<sup>27</sup> C. Reynolds, *Ceylan. L’île sacrée du bouddhisme* (Paris 1984) 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

<sup>29</sup> See J. Boisselier, *Archaeologia mundi. Ceylan* (Geneva 1980) illustration n° 115 facing 145.

<sup>30</sup> N. Chutiwongs, L. Prematilleke, R. Silva, *Paintings of Sri Lanka: Sāsseruwa* (Colombo 1990) 119.

<sup>31</sup> S. Paranavitana, *op. cit.* 78. Note: the Roman characters in bold type used here for personal names are those of S. Paranavitana.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 78 note 1.

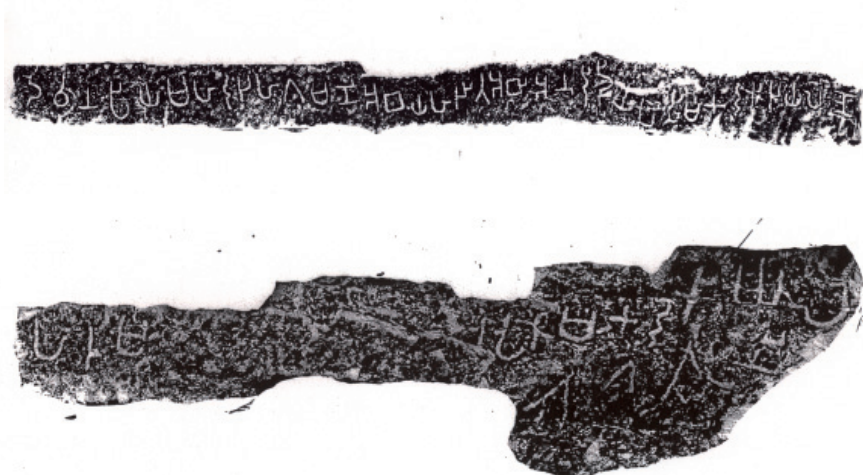


Fig. 2. y Fig. 3. Reproduced by kind permission of the Director General of Archaeology of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

concerned property they jointly owned, or they were responsible for cutting the drip-ledges and for preparing the caves on crown lands. Let us note that this sole mention, which ends the inscription, informs us about Raki's kinship, established by marrying into the king's family. It is to this happy coincidence that we owe a significant indication of the identity of the "chief Raki", who appears also in inscription n° 1000 [7], and his status in the society of the epoch.

Raki is the singular masculine nominative form (Rakiya is the genitive) occurring in the above-mentioned ancient inscriptions of Sri Lanka from the third century before Christ down to the first century of our era (i.e. up to the time of Pliny) and it could have been the one used as the basis for the Greek form of the name, which then could have become a declinable name in Greek as often happened with other borrowed names. The Greek rendering of Raki as *Rachias* reproduces by  $\chi$  / *chi* the light aspirate, which can be found even in present-day Sinhalese verbs such as "rakinava" (meaning "to guard", "to keep", "to protect", "to preserve", "to cherish", etc.). Our conjecture finds further support from Albrecht Weber, who, writing about the aspirate  $\chi$  in Greek pronunciation of "Hindu" words as early as in 1876, pointed out that it stands for *k* in *Χαβηρίς* ("Kavera" in Sanskrit and "Kaveri" in Tamil, name of a river in South India appearing in Ptolemy's *Geography*<sup>33</sup>), *Κουδοχάτης*, *Μόσχος* and considering *Rachias* as a

<sup>33</sup> See *Geog.* 7.1.13: *Χαβήρου ποτάμου ἐκβολαὶ* 129° 15' 15"; *Χαβηρὶς ἐμπόριον* 129° 20' 15" 20'.

historical name, identifies it as a Greek rendering of “\**rakkhasa* (? *rākshasa*)”<sup>34</sup>. The common Sanskrit word for demon *rāksas* (that Weber signaled with a question mark) means “to be guarded against”. If we consider Weber’s conjecture that the Greek aspirate  $\chi$  represents the Indian “k” in the above examples, without simply accepting it at face value, we need to correct his error that the Greek  $\chi$  represents *kh* in *Κόλχοι* (which he wrongly transcribes as *Kūrkhī*)<sup>35</sup> because in Tamil the place-name is “Korkai”<sup>36</sup>. It is quite possible that the Greek words of common usage such as *ῥαχιαίς* meaning “rocky stretches” (in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, § 20) and *ῥάχισ* (Herodotus 3.50) and personal names such as *Ῥαχίης* or *Ῥαχίας* (founder of Syracuse according to Thucydides 6.33) may have influenced the Hellenization of the early Brahmi Sinhalese name “Raki” by the Egyptian Greek.

According to Paranavitana, the two “Rakis” mentioned in the inscriptions are the same individual. It is quite possible that the individual of these two inscriptions is the Rachias that Pliny mentions, given the fact that he was the son-in-law of the reigning monarch and he may have lived in the region just south of the capital. The donation of the cave made by Raki’s wife and the offering made by Raki himself indicate that the Raki family had close connections with the region just south of Anuradhapura. The other alternative is to suppose that this same Raki, who was a younger son-in-law of the reigning monarch, later served in an important capacity as a senior diplomat during the reign of the king’s son.

It is also of vital importance to note that in the second inscription above (n° 1000 [7]) the individual in question is described not only as the chief Raki, but also as the son of the chief of so-and-so (the name is unfortunately obliterated), suggesting that he bore the title of the “parumaka”, inheriting it from his father, who was also a “parumaka”. We must recall here Pliny’s assertion that Rachias’ father had frequently travelled to the country of the Seres, for thus both Rachias’ father and Raki’s father were of some importance. Combining the pieces of evidence gives us a consistent picture of a senior (“parumaka”) Raki travelling abroad, very probably in an important mission, and a junior (“parumaka”) Raki coming to Rome on a similar mission and also in an official capacity. If they are not the same person, the functions they carried out were clearly similar: playing the role of an ambassador or an envoy overseas. Without the knowledge of these inscriptions Weerakkody

<sup>34</sup> A. Weber, “Hindu Pronunciation of Greek, and Greek Pronunciation of Hindu Words”, *Indian Antiquary* 2 (1873) 150 and 148 (trans by E. Rehatsek). See the original article in German language “Indische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Aussprache des Griechischen”, *Monatsbericht der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1971) 613-632. Note: in both these articles almost all the Greek terms cited appear without accents.

<sup>35</sup> A. Weber, *art. cit.* 150 and 147.

<sup>36</sup> See R. Caldwell, “Explorations at Korkai and Kayal”, *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely* (Madras 1881) 282-288.

intuitively arrives at a similar conclusion, which is an insight worthy of note<sup>37</sup>. We can therefore be confident that the chief of the embassy sent to Rome was a person of high rank, related to the monarch or else very close to him. Our identification of this Raki with Rachias can now be firmly corroborated with the aid of historical records because among the kings of Anuradhapura who bore the royal title “Devânapiya-maharaja” and the personal name “Gâmani-Abaya” there was just one king who had a son named Bhâtikâbhaya (also written Bhâtika Abhaya and Bhâtiya Tissa) who ascended the throne after his father, a fact well attested in the chronicles<sup>38</sup>. The same sources also bear witness to the proverbial reputation that the king Bhâtikâbhaya enjoyed for having imported vermilion coral from the land of the Romans<sup>39</sup>.

We find the key to the enigma posed by the identity of this Raki in the clarifications of Paranavitana himself. In ten donative inscriptions (n° 1018 to n° 1027) made by the prince Tissa at Gallena-vihâra (literally “troglodytic temple”) situated about 10 km from Sâsseruwa and about 35 km south of Anuradhapura, the then capital of the island, the donor declares that he is the son of the king Devânapiya-maharaja Gâmani-Abaya. In 1883, when epigraphic and historical studies in Sri Lanka were in their infancy, Edward Müller identified this latter with Vattagâmanî Abhaya<sup>40</sup>, taking Tissa for Mahâcûlî Mahâtissa, who in fact was the son of Khallâta-Nâga but was adopted as a son by Vattagâmanî, according to the self-same Paranavitana<sup>41</sup>. He wonders if Mahâcûlî himself would have referred to Vattagâmanî, as his father, ignoring altogether Khallâta-Nâga, who was in fact his true father. Furthermore, Paranavitana emphasizes the absence of mention of Mahâcûlî’s father in any of his own inscriptions<sup>42</sup>.

This, and other paleographic and linguistic evidence, prompts Paranavitana to reject the identity established by E. Müller, and, on the other hand, to consider Devânapiya-maharaja Gâmani-Abaya, mentioned in the ten inscriptions (n° 1018 to n° 1027), as the king Kutakanna Abhaya who styles himself Putakana Gâmini

<sup>37</sup> “[...] we have here a father and a son, both of whom have served as envoys abroad. This evokes the suggestion of a family inheriting some high state of office which entails service as envoys of the king in foreign countries”, *op. cit.* 59.

<sup>38</sup> “After his death [i. e. Kutakanna-Tissa’s] his son, the prince named Bhâtikâbhaya, reigned twenty-two years”, *Mahāvamsa* 34.37; “Prince named [Bhâtika] Abhaya, the son of Kutakanna [Tissa] [...] reigned twenty-eight years”, *Dīpavamsa* 21.1-30.

<sup>39</sup> G. P. Malalasekera (ed.), *Vamsathappakāsini Commentary on the Mahāvamsa* (London 1935) ii, 630.

<sup>40</sup> E. Müller, *Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon* (New Delhi 1984) 73 (first published 1883).

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed discussion of this identification, see “No. 20. Gallena-Vihara Inscriptions”, *Epigraphia Zeylanica being Lithic and Other Inscriptions of Ceylon. Vol. V* (Colombo 1963) 253-259 + plates 26, 27 and 28.

<sup>42</sup> See C. W. Nicholas, “Texts of Brâhmî Inscriptions in the Ruhunu National Park”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon)* 2 (1952) 131-132.

Abaya in several inscriptions of his own, and the prince Tissa, appearing as the donor in the same above-mentioned ten inscriptions, as his son who ascended the throne under the name of Bhâtika Tissa<sup>43</sup>. Lamotte<sup>44</sup> and Geiger<sup>45</sup> accept the genealogical tree thus established for this royal duo in another inscription by Paranavitana<sup>46</sup> and implicitly endorse his rejection of E. Müller's conclusions.

Now we are in a position to reinforce our argument which consists of showing that the son-in-law of Kutakanna Abhaya, and the brother-in-law of his son and successor to the throne, Tissa, is well and truly the Raki sent to Rome during the principate of Claudius. The paternity of the king Kutakanna Abhaya (from 16 to 38 A.D. according to Geiger and 13-35 A.D. according to E. Lamotte) and his son Tissa (from 38 to 66 A.D. according to Geiger and 35-63 A.D. according to Lamotte and 38-66 A.D. according to Malalasekera<sup>47</sup>) is well attested by perfectly tallying inscriptions<sup>48</sup>, enabling us to provide reasonably precise time-brackets (differing only by a few years according to the chronological indicators one adopts) for the regnal years of these two kings. We then keep to the conclusion made by Meredith, who, following Ziegler<sup>49</sup>, placed Pliny's stay in Rome (including the first three years of Claudius' reign from 41 to 44 A.D.) at the time of the arrival of the embassy of Taprobanê in the court of Claudius. We also accept the idea put forward by De Romanis, to consider the reign of Claudius, as a reference point for the dating of that of Bhatikabhaya, who cannot have preceded the reign of Claudius or rather that of Caligula. Regrettably, De Romanis does not bring Meredith's invaluable deductive insights into the discussion when advancing his own proposal to accept Pliny's explicit statement that the embassy was received at the court of Claudius.

Referring back to inscriptions n° 994 [1] and n° 1000 [7], the unique Raki mentioned within the purview of these royal paternal ties, given that the donations in question were made near the capital, seems in fact to be Rachias the chief of the ambassadors of Taprobanê sent to Rome during the early forties of the first century A. D., Pliny's Red Sea tax farmer Annius Plocamus left no surviving traces except for his slaves or freedmen, who indirectly attest to his existence and the position he

<sup>43</sup> See S. Paranavitana's discussion about the "Identification of the kings figuring in the inscriptions", *op. cit.* lxii.

<sup>44</sup> E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère Saka* (Leuven 1958) 535.

<sup>45</sup> W. Geiger, "Königsnamen in den Brâhmi - Inschriften Ceylons", O. Stein, W. Gampert (hrsg.), *Festschrift Moritz Winternitz* (Leipzig 1933) 317-318.

<sup>46</sup> See "N° 18. Molâhitiyavelêgala Inscriptions of King Abhaya and King Nâga", S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon. Volume II Part I. Late Brâhmi Inscriptions* (Colombo 1983) 27-28.

<sup>47</sup> G. P. Malalasekera, *op. cit.* I, 370-371, s.v. "Bhâtikâbhaya".

<sup>48</sup> See "N° 5. Puliyanakadawala Rock-Inscription", 6-7 (inscription is not reproduced); and "N° 9. Dunumandalakanda Rock- Inscription of Bhâtika", 9-10 + plate V, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> D. Meredith, "Annius Plocamus: Two Inscriptions from the Berenice Road", *JRS* 43 (1953) 39.



held. As for Raki, it is through his spouse, the princess Anuridi, that his existence is known because he is associated with the donation she made. He left a trace of himself by engraving a record of his donation upon the rock, separated only by a short distance from the rock-inscription of his wife. Hence he is not alone.

3. THE OCCURRENCE OF *VERY* RED CORAL FROM “ROMANUKHARATTA” IN THE *VAMSATTHAPPAKASINI*

This rediscovery of Raki prompts us to examine briefly the occurrence of the Pali place-name “romanukharatta” in the *Vamsatthappakāsini* (generally called *Mahāvamsa-Tikā*), the redaction of which is dated between the years 1000 and 1250 A.D. by Geiger<sup>50</sup>, while Malalasekera assumes an earlier date. This text comments upon the royal chronicles entitled the *Mahāvamsa* (the “Great Chronicle”)<sup>51</sup> which mentions a ritual of religious fervor performed by King Bhâtikâbhaya in the following terms:

“He had a priceless net of coral [pavâljâla] prepared and cast over the cetiya”.

“He ordered a priceless net-work of corals [pavâljâla] to be made, covering the surface of the Mahâthûpa as if it were dressed in a garment”<sup>52</sup>.

To explain the term “pavâljâla” (“net-work of coral” or “net of coral”) which describes the covering of the great *stûpa* (hemispherical domed building enclosing relic-chambers and erected as a Buddhist shrine) by King Bhâtikâbhaya mentioned in the *Dîpavamsa* and in the *Mahāvamsa*, the commentary on this chronicle, namely the *Vamsatthappakāsini* provides us with a gloss which states that: “He [sc. Bhâtikâbhaya] had a net ornament of coral prepared, that is, having sent [without naming a person] to the country named Romanukha overseas, he had *very* red coral brought and had a great coral-*flamed* net prepared large enough to cover it entirely”<sup>53</sup> [the *cetiya*], namely the Buddhist edifice par excellence, still

<sup>50</sup> W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Medieval Times* (Wiesbaden 1960) 72 (ed. by H. Bechert).

<sup>51</sup> *Mahāvamsa* 34.50. W. Geiger, M. H. Bode (ed., trans.), *The Mahāvamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (Colombo 1950).

<sup>52</sup> *Dîpavamsa* 21.13. H. Oldenberg (ed., trans.), *The Dîpavamsa: an Ancient Buddhist Historical Record* (London 1879).

<sup>53</sup> “Pavâljâlam kâretvâ ti paratîre Romanukharattham nâma pesetvâ surattapavâlam âharâpetvâ sabbâvantam parikkhepâraham mahantam pavâlacchikajâlam kârâpetvâ”, G. P. Malalasekera (ed.), *op. cit.* 630.

venerated at Anuradhapura<sup>54</sup>. It is not out of place to mention the omission of two crucial attributive terms qualifying the intense redness of coral, a conspicuous feature which none of the commentators of the passage including Peiris, Schwarz, Weerakkody, and De Romanis who, while professing to translate it from the original text in Pali, have rendered appropriately: *suratta* (su+ratta) as “very red” and *pavâlacchikajâla* (pavâla+acchika+jâla) lit. as a “coral of blazing-flames”<sup>55</sup>. Hence the unequivocal relevance of those terms to our purpose. This explains the reason why Raki was sent to Rome; because coral of this intense redness was not found in the Indian Ocean.

#### 4. THE LATIN ADJECTIVE “ROMANUS” IS EQUATED WITH THE SINHALESE ADJECTIVE “ROMANUKA”

Paranavitana points out that the name “Romanukha” in Pali and “Romanuka” in Sinhalese with its pleonastic suffix -ka, is modelled on the Latin adjective “Romanus”<sup>56</sup>. To this, we may add the observation that in Pali, place-names and proper names often end with an aspirated -kha, or -kkha. For example, the Sinhalese name Raka which becomes Rakha or Rakkha, much as the Sinhalese term “romanuka” becomes “romanukha”. If we may be allowed a conjecture -“Romanukha” might have been at the outset simply “romanuka” without aspiration in the suffix. This is because the tendency among the ancient Sinhalese was to de-aspirate words such as “rattha” (“country”, “land”) whence our hypothesis that “Romanukha-rattha” must have been simply “romanuka-rata” (without aspiration and gemination in each part of the compound respectively) in the language spoken by Raki.

According to De Romanis the “Indianisation” of the first element of the compound “romanukha-rattha” is *hapax legomenon* in all the ancient literature of India; further he notes that this word explicitly associates the Roman empire with red coral, and is thus an authentic, precious relic of the popular memory. Isn’t this Sinhalization much more important as a relic of the first Sri Lankan diplomatic mission to Rome than as a relic of trade or of folk memory? De Romanis further notes that this *hapax legomenon* is all the more important since the Buddhist historiography of Sri Lanka apparently preserved nothing about the flourishing con-

<sup>54</sup> See R. Beny, “Ruwanweli dagoba at Anuradhapura”, *Island Ceylon* (New York 1970) 58; S. Bandaranayake, *Sri Lanka Ceylon. Eine Insel Zivilisation* (Paris 1980) plate 61.

<sup>55</sup> See for example, “Ha fatto fare una rete di corallo, cioè: egli ha inviato qualcuno al cosiddetto *romanukharattha*, oltre il mare, ha fatto venire il corallo rosso ed ha fatto fare una grande rete di corallo, perché fosse posta tutta intorno”, F. De Romanis, *art. cit.* 40; “*Er ließ ein Netz aus Korallen fertigen*, das heißt, er schickte (jemanden) in das Romanukha-Reich jenseits des Meeres und holte von dort rote Korallen und ließ ein herrliches Netz aus Korallen fertigen, das würdig genug war, über (das Heiligtum) geworfen zu werden”, S. Faller translating from Peiris’ citation, *op. cit.* 75.

<sup>56</sup> S. Paranavitana, *The University of Ceylon. History of Ceylon* (Colombo 1959) i, 225.

tacts that existed between it and China<sup>57</sup>, and it is thanks to the Chinese sources that we learn about successive missions between the two countries. It is regrettable that De Romanis fails to acknowledge Paranavitana's remarkable insight into that *hapax legomenon*. It was he who brought to light its conspicuousness. Thus Paranavitana drove home the point that the Sinhalese word "Romanuka" is merely a transposition of the Latin "Romanus"!

In the survival of this name, "romanukharattha", Weerakkody sees an indication of the exceptional importance and official character of Rachias' embassy. Raschke, who wrote about Pliny's account of Taprobanê, referring to this episode, quotes Edmund Peiris as saying that the king of Sri Lanka "sent a present of coral net to *Romanuka* across the sea"<sup>58</sup>, which is not only counter-intuitive but also an obvious falsification of Peiris' statement<sup>59</sup>. To send coral to the Mediterranean would be to "carry coals to Newcastle", as the English say, for it was from the Mediterranean that red coral was exported to India. Raschke does not mention the *redness* of the coral which is important to our argument<sup>60</sup>. Red coral was harvested in the Mediterranean from early antiquity<sup>61</sup>, and Pliny mentions this activity more than once. In fact in *NH* 32.23, he expresses amazement regarding how highly red coral of Roman origin was prized by the Indians: "Coral berries are no less valued by Indian men than are large Indian pearls by Roman women. Indian soothsayers and seers think that coral is a very powerful amulet for warding off dangers. Accordingly they take pleasure in it both as a thing of beauty and as a thing of religious power"<sup>62</sup>.

This confirms the influence that red coral imported from the Mediterranean exerted in the culture and ritual cults of ancient Sri Lanka. Weerakkody drew attention to this incorrect citation by Raschke but he did not emphasize the import of this mistake and its consequences. By considering the unintended journey of Annius Plocamus' freedman to Taprobanê and Raki's mission to Rome as mere figments of the imagination, Raschke deprives not only chronicles of Sri Lanka, but also Pliny, of two invaluable testimonies without which we would never have

<sup>57</sup> "Pali sources from Ceylon are silent regarding this commerce", S. E. Sidebotham, *op. cit.* 70. See M. Werake, "Sino-Sri Lankan Relations During the Pre-Colonial Times", S. Bandaranayake, R. Silva (eds.), *Sri Lanka and the Silk Roads of the Sea* (Colombo 1990) 221-231; "A New Date for the Beginning of Sino-Sri Lankan Relations", *Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities* 4.1 & 2 (1978) 64-72.

<sup>58</sup> M. G. Raschke, "New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East", H. Temporini (hrsg.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin 1978) II.9.2, 576 n<sup>o</sup> 1315.

<sup>59</sup> See E. Peiris, "Greek and Roman Contacts with Ceylon", *Ceylon Historical Journal* 10.1-4 (July 1960-April 1961) 18.

<sup>60</sup> "Coral, especially red coral" writes Peiris quoting S. Paranavitana "was, and is, a well known product of the Mediterranean [...]", *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> P. Mouton, *Corail rouge* (Marseilles 1993) 175. See 84, 85 and 87 for color illustrations of red coral.

<sup>62</sup> Pliny, *Natural History. Volume VII, Libri XXVIII-XXXII* (London 1963) 478-479.

known anything about this remarkable episode. But a careful interpretation of Sri Lankan epigraphic sources and Pali chronicles on the one hand, and the manuscript tradition of the Latin text of Pliny along with the bilingual inscriptions from the Egyptian Red Sea coast on the other, gives a clear picture of an embassy's path-finding mission involving cross-cultural communication between East and West in the ancient world (Fig.4).

5. BHĀTIKĀBHAYA (35/8 - 63/6 A.D.) WAS CONTEMPORARY WITH CLAUDIUS (43-51 A.D.)

Pliny's account of Rachias' embassy to Rome is thus illuminated by the epigraphic records which shed light on the identity of its leader and thus on an important episode in the history of Sri Lanka. The only record of this diplomatic overture



Fig. 4. Detail. Raki and his suite at the court of Claudius in the view of the veteran Sri Lankan artist Stanley Kirindé.

in the Sri Lankan chronicles is preserved in the name “romanukharattha”, meaning the Roman-country or the Roman Empire, which recalls the pious installation of a net ornament made of very red coral brought from the Roman-country. We find here support for Pliny’s statement that Raki was received at the court of Claudius, and corroboration of the conjecture of Faller and De Romanis that Bhâtikâbhaya (according to Geiger, 38-66 A.D.<sup>63</sup>; and according to Wickremasinghe, 42-70 A.D.<sup>64</sup>; and according to E. Lamotte, 35-63 A.D.<sup>65</sup>) was contemporary with Claudius (43-51 A.D.). These dates correspond to the chronology of the kings of Sri Lanka established by Lamotte and Geiger, which are based exclusively on the *Dîpavamsa* (21.30) and the *Mahāvamsa* (34.37).

Raschke asserts that there is nothing in this “sailor’s yarn” that sheds any light on the date of the discovery and use of the south-west monsoon<sup>66</sup>. But Raki and his suite arrived at Rome and came back to his country safe and sound bringing very red coral. In fact there can be little doubt that he used the monsoon for his return voyage from the Egyptian Red Sea coast to Sri Lanka. Thus Cary and Warmington are not far from the mark when they state that this episode may have given the Egyptian Greeks an impetus to use the navigational winds and directions to reach farther shores that were thus brought within the sphere of expanding Roman knowledge of the Indian Ocean<sup>67</sup>.

The monetary aspect of the episode, in which the King of Taprobanê scrutinizes the Roman coins minted by various emperors, was cited by Raschke as highly dubious because it comes from a sailor’s yarn. The credit belongs to De Romanis for having brought to light several passages from Sri Lankan chronicles, bearing upon the numismatic culture prevalent among the ancient Sinhalese. This, he does by way of a few pertinent and groundbreaking observations on the *rupasutta* (the “science of coinage”)<sup>68</sup> of the Sinhalese which could provide a probable background to understanding why the Roman money was subjected to close scrutiny by the King of Taprobanê.

There is a way to be certain how the freedman and his crew sailed back home accompanying Raki to Rome and then how the ambassador regained his homeland from Egyptian Red Sea Coast bringing an immense quantity of red coral to the Sri Lankan capital Anuradhapura, as there is evidence which suggests that the use of the monsoon was known to the Egyptian Greeks. This evidence is found in

<sup>63</sup> See H. Geiger, M. H. Bode (ed., trans.), “List of the Ancient Kings of Ceylon”, *op. cit.* XXXVI-XXXVII.

<sup>64</sup> D. M. D. Z. Wickremasinghe, *op. cit.* [the chronology of the kings] between pp. 142-143.

<sup>65</sup> E. Lamotte, *op. cit.* 534.

<sup>66</sup> M. G. Raschke, *op. cit.* 644, 662, 976.

<sup>67</sup> M. Cary, E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers* (Harmondsworth 1963) 97.

<sup>68</sup> F. De Romanis, A. Tcherina (ed.), *op. cit.* 184.

Ptolemy's account of Taprobanê, abounding in place-names and of the islands surrounding it -although misinterpreted by him in order to fit a preconceived system of latitude and longitude-, in the *Geography*, written a century after Pliny. This data could only have been compiled from actual circumnavigation of the island and from familiarity with its coasts as well as its hinterland<sup>69</sup>.

The evidence presented here indicates that the name Raki neither came out of the blue nor was invented as a part of a "sailor's yarn", as was asserted by Raschke three times, as well as being "half heartedly" claimed by Dihle<sup>70</sup>. We say "half-heartedly" because Dihle, less vehement than Raschke, thinks that this "sailor's yarn" has a kernel of truth in it, as the Annius Plocamus whom Pliny mentions is attested in the inscriptions found in Eastern Egypt. Casson, who devotes some passages to Eastern embassies received in Rome (in his discussion about the dating of the *Periplus*), makes no mention whatever of the embassy which Pliny describes<sup>71</sup>. His silence prompts us to infer that he blindly adhered to the view of Raschke because when examining the evidence for embassies from India he chose to cite the latter ("see Raschke p. 1045, note 1623"). Otherwise, there is no reason for Casson to keep silent about this episode<sup>72</sup>, which serves as a key for dating the *Periplus* which we venture to place immediately prior to the despatching of the Taprobanê embassy to Rome.

In fact our evidence would seem to bolster Meredith's contention that the main statements in Pliny's account cannot be doubted unless firm new contradictory evidence is provided<sup>73</sup> and De Romanis' assertion that we need to place greater confidence in Pliny's words. This is how Weerakkody states the foregoing: "The embassy must therefore be assigned to the reign of Claudius. The specific statement of Pliny is undoubtedly more worthy of trust than a number of implications derived from external evidence"<sup>74</sup>. Those few scholars who still cling to the way of reasoning of Raschke, one of the most vociferous of those who disparage Pliny<sup>75</sup> and deny the endeavors of Sinhalese Kings to initiate diplomatic overtures,

<sup>69</sup> See L. Renou, *La Géographie de Ptolémée. L'Inde (VII, 1-4)* (Paris 1925), "Carte de Taprobane d'après le Venetus 516 (R)".

<sup>70</sup> "solcher Seemannsgeschichten...", A. Dihle, "Die Entdeckungs geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen des Indienhandels der römischer Kaiserzeit", H. Temporini (hrsg.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin 1978) II.9.2, 567-573, at 569.

<sup>71</sup> "It is worthwhile to examine the evidence for embassies in some detail"; "Next, the embassies from India", L. Casson (transl.), *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton 1989) 37 and p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Casson's answer to the question we addressed to him: "I have no opinion about the embassy mentioned by Pliny" (pers. comm. 8.2.2008).

<sup>73</sup> D. Meredith, *art. cit.* 39.

<sup>74</sup> D. P. M. Weerakkody, *op. cit.* 53.

<sup>75</sup> "A curious story told by Pliny in his description of Ceylon has also been drawn into the argument. Our author *parades* as new information the story of a freedman of Annius Plocamus [...]", M. G. Raschke, *art. cit.* 662. The Italic type is ours.



must now, of course, in one way or another explain the mention of Raki in Sri Lankan inscriptions and must mount another operation to “salvage something” out of this “sailor’s yarn” just as they did for Annius Plocamus mentioned in the bilingual inscriptions found in Egypt in 1953<sup>76</sup>. Our evidence confirms that Pliny’s episode took place under Claudius in Rome, places the freedman of Annius Plocamus on the Egyptian Red Sea coast and Raki in Taprobanê, thus corroborating the roles of the three key persons in this remarkable story of contact between ancient Sri Lanka and the Mediterranean.

We conclude, therefore, that Pliny is well justified when he states that he had acquired new information about the affairs of Taprobanê from the freedman and from the ambassadors who arrived from there in Rome while he was still in the capital. It is thus no longer tenable to subscribe to Raschke’s assertion that the Roman historian swallowed a tall tale by virtue of which he took pride in “parading” such a “*curious* story” as a new acquisition to his knowledge of the world. Let us then give thanks to Pliny, as, without him, we would not have been able to identify Rachias or make any connection with Sinhalese chronicles. On the other hand, it is thanks to these chronicles, as well as to the Sinhalese inscriptions, that we have been able to support, helped by exterior onomastic information, the text of Pliny, which is thus a most precious relic in which the name Rachias figures<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> Referring to D. Meredith’s contribution to the *JRS* 43 (1953), Raschke writes “Despite the apparent distortions of the tale, something may be salvaged”, M. G. Raschke, *op. cit.* 644 and 849 n<sup>o</sup> 10.

<sup>77</sup> This paper was presented as a lecture to the Seminar for Roman Culture and History of Religions of the University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany, on 4th December 2007 at the invitation of Prof. Dr. Veit Rosenberger and Dr. Katharina Waldner and to the Faculty of Arts Seminar Series, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka on 30th January 2008 at the invitation of Emeritus Professor Ashley Halpé. Reflecting on the discussion that followed, Prof. Halpé, who presided over the lecture, expressed amazement at how Mr. Bandula Karunaratna without batting an eyelid, claimed “Raki” as a find of his, thus sweeping aside years of the lecturer’s research as if they’d never been. Having read only a preliminary draft of the present essay, Dr. Stefan Faller of the Department of Classical Philology of the Albert-Ludwigs-University, Freiburg, had the kindness to state that “This is a *very big jump* in Pliny Studies”, oral communication, 3rd December 2007.

The author of this contribution wishes to thank Prof. Juan Gil, formerly of the Departamento de Filología Latina, Facultad de Filología, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain, for his genuinely keen interest in the subject dealt with (especially after having read only a preliminary draft). In fact, his enthusiasm was so great that (without actually being requested), he unhesitatingly offered to publish it in *Habis*, the classical review of the University of Seville. It is with much pleasure and delight that the author recalls the memorable chance meeting, when about ten years ago, in the Museu de Arte Antigua, in Lisbon, he had asked a passerby to lend him a pencil so as to take note on the Sri Lankan ivory chest on display. This passerby happened to be Prof. Gil, and the other passerby who pulled out a pencil from her handbag was Prof. Consuelo Varela, his wife.