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Mahuan's account of Cochin, Calicut and Aden

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ART. VIII.—*Mahuan's Account of Cochin, Calicut, and Aden.* By GEO. PHILLIPS, M.R.A.S.

IN the July, 1895, number of this Journal I gave a description of the kingdom of Bengala (Bengal) from the pen of a Muhammadan Chinaman named Mahuan, who on account of his knowledge of Arabic was attached as Interpreter to the suite of Chêng Ho, when he made his voyages to India and other places in the Eastern seas at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

His accounts of the places he visited are in many particulars not perhaps quite new, but coming as they do midway between the descriptions of the East, given us by mediæval travellers, and those given us by the early Portuguese voyagers, they form, I think, a link connecting these two periods. To give a lengthy translation of these travels would, I fear, take up too much valuable space; therefore I propose in this paper to give a *précis* of the most important details contained in the description of the seaports of Cochin, Calicut, and Aden, to be followed later on by an account of Ormus, the Maldives, and Arabia.

柯枝國 *Ko-chih*, COCHIN (A.D. 1409).

Cochin, the first port of which we shall treat, is described as a day and a night's sail from Coilum 小葛蘭, the present Quilon, most probably the Kaulam Malai of the Arabs (*vide* Yule's Glossary under Malabar), known to the Chinese navigators of the Tang dynasty, A.D. 618-913, as Muhlai 沒來.

The king or ruler is of the Solar race,¹ and is a sincere believer in Buddhism,² and has the greatest reverence for elephants and oxen; and every morning at daylight prostrates himself before an image of Buddha. The king wears no clothing on the upper part of his person; he has simply a square of silk wound round his loins, kept in place by a coloured waist-band of the same material, and on his head a turban of yellow or white cotton cloth. The dress of the officers and the rich differs but little from that of the king. The houses are built of the wood of the cocoanut-tree, and are thatched with its leaves, which render them perfectly water-tight.

There are five classes of men in this kingdom. The Nairs³ rank with the king. In the first class are those

¹ Mahuan's text has Wang-so-li-jen-shih 王鎖儂人氏, and the Ming history has Wang-su-li-jen 王所里人. So-li and Su-li=Suri are, I venture to suggest, intended to represent Surya, or Surya Vansa, or Race of the Sun.

王
崇
信
佛
教

尊
釋
教

² Our traveller makes no distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism. The Chinese text, which I give at the side from Mahuan's text and the Ming history, is clear as to Buddhism being meant.

³ The characters which I have interpreted as representing the Nairs, the ruling class of Malabar, are written Nan-k'uên 南昆 in Mahuan's text. A Chinese scholar suggested to me that the characters in question might probably be an error in transcription for Nan-li 南麗. The Ming history, as quoted in the Hai-kuo-t'u-chih, Keuen 17, when speaking of the castes of Ko-chih (Cochin), also writes Nan-k'uên, and states that the ruler of that country belongs to that class. Another work, the Huang-ming-szû-i-k'ao 皇明四夷考, when speaking of the ruler of Calicut, calls him a Nan-p'i-jen 南毗人, but his brother of Cochin is styled of the Nan-k'uên class. Here is great confusion, and it is difficult to say which reading is the right one.

Dr. F. Hirth has in his paper, "Das Reich Malabar," which appeared in the T'oung-pao in May, 1895, treated of a kingdom called Nan-p'i 南毗國. Dr. Hirth seems to think that this kingdom stands for the country of the

who shave their heads, and have a thread or string hanging over their shoulder; these are looked upon as belonging to the noblest families.¹ In the second are the Muhammadans; in the third the Chittis, who are the capitalists; in the fourth the Kolings, who act as commission agents; in the fifth the Mukuas, who are the lowest and poorest of all. The Mukuas live in houses which are forbidden by the Government to be more than three feet high, and they are not allowed to wear long garments; when abroad, if they happen to meet a Nair or a Chitti they at once prostrate themselves on the ground, and dare not rise until they have passed by; these Mukuas get their living by fishing and carrying burdens.

The merchants of this country carry on their business like pedlars do in China. Here also is another class of men, called Chokis 濁騰 (Yogi), who lead austere lives like the Taoists of China, but who, however, are married. These men from the time they are born do not have their heads shaved or combed, but plait their hair into several tails, which hang over their shoulders; they wear no clothes, but round their waists they fasten a strip of rattan, over which they hang a piece of white calico; they carry a conch-shell, which they blow as they go along the road; they are accompanied by their wives, who simply wear a small bit of cotton cloth round their loins. Alms of rice

Namburi Brahmins of Malabar. There is nothing unlikely in this, but whether their country has any connection with the Nan-k'uên of Mahuan and the Nan-p'i of the Huang-ming-szû-i-k'ao I am not prepared to say.

It is well known that the rulers of Cochin and Calicut were Nairs, and such being the case I have ventured to assume that Mahuan intended to speak of them when he uses the characters Nan-k'uên. I would also suggest that by Nan-k'uên, Mahuan may possibly have intended to represent the title Naik. *Vide* Yule's Glossary under Naik, p. 470.

¹ Most probably the Brahmins. "The Zennâr, or sacred string" (worn by Brahmins), says Craufurd, is hung round the body from the left shoulder (Marsden's "Marco Polo," p. 666). 回回 Hui-hui, Muhammadans. 哲地 Chih-ti, Chittis; 革令 Ko-ling, Kling; 水爪 Mu-kua (*vide* Yule's Glossary).

and money are given to them by the people whose houses they visit.

In this country there are two seasons, the wet and the dry. In the first two months of the rainy season there are only passing showers, during which time the people lay in a stock of provisions; in the next two months there is a continual downpour day and night, so that the streets and market-places are like rivers, and no one is able to go out of doors; during the last two months the rain gradually ceases, and then not a drop falls for another six months. The soil is unproductive; pepper, however, grows on the hills and is extensively cultivated; this article is sold at five taels the P'o-ho,¹ which is 400 cattis of Chinese weight.

All trading transactions are carried on by the Chittis, who buy the pepper from the farmers when it is ripe, and sell it to foreign ships when they pass by. They also buy and collect precious stones and other costly wares. A pearl weighing three-and-a-half candareens can be bought for a hundred ounces of silver. Coral is sold by the cattis; inferior pieces of coral are cut into beads and polished by skilled workmen; these are also sold by weight. The coinage of the country is a gold piece, called a Fa-nan,² weighing one candareen; there is also a little silver coin called a Ta-urh,² which is used for making small purchases in the market. Fifteen Ta-urhs make a Fa-nan. There are no asses or geese in this country, and there is neither wheat nor barley; rice, maize, hemp, and millet abound. Articles of tribute are sent to China by our ships on their return voyage.

¹ 播荷 P'o-ho. Bahar. A commercial weight which differs greatly in many places. Pepper at Cochin apparently sold, reckoning the tael at 6s. 8d., at £1 13s. 4d. for 534 lbs., or less than a penny a pound.

² 法南 Fa-nan. The Fanam is a small piece of gold worth fifteen Tāris. 苔兒 Ta-urh. The Tāri is a small coin worth a halfpenny. (Extract from Dr. Dillon in Elliott's "Coins of Southern India," p. 57.)—I am indebted to Dr. Codrington for the above note, and also for other valuable help.

古里國 *Ku-li*, CALICUT (A.D. 1409).

This seaport, of which Mahuan gives us a most lengthy account, is described as a great emporium of trade frequented by merchants from all quarters. It is three days' sail from Cochin, by which it is bordered on the south; on the north it adjoins Cannanore (狼奴兒 *K'ân-nu-urh*); it has the sea on the west; and on the east, through the mountains, at a distance of 500 *li* (167 miles), is the kingdom or city of *K'an-pa-mei*,¹ a great seat of cotton manufacture, where is made, as also in the surrounding districts, a cloth called *Chih-li* (指黎布 *Chih-li-pu*) cloth. It is made up into pieces, four feet five inches wide and twenty-five feet long; it is sold there for eight or ten gold pieces of their money. They also prepare raw silk for the loom, which they dye various shades of colour and then weave into flowered pattern goods, made up into pieces four to five feet wide and twelve to thirteen feet long. Each length is sold for one hundred gold pieces of their money.

To return to Calicut, much pepper is grown on the hills. Cocoanuts are extensively cultivated, many farmers owning a thousand trees; those having a plantation of three thousand are looked upon as wealthy proprietors. The king belongs to the Nair class, and, like his brother of Cochin, is a sincere follower of Buddha, and as such does not eat beef; his overseer, being a Muhammadan, does not eat pork. This led, it is said in times past, to a compact being made between the king and his overseer, to the

¹ *K'an-pa-mei* 坎巴美, read also *K'an-pa-i* 坎巴夷, and in the Amoy dialect *K'am-pa-i*, may possibly be a Chinese rendering of *Koyampadi*, a former name of Coimbatore, a town and district in the Madras Presidency, a great centre of weaving and cotton manufacture.

Ibn Batuta informs us that at *Shâlyêt*, a town a little to the south of Calicut, they make the stuffs that bear its name (*Yule's Glossary*, p. 139). This stuff made at *Shâlyêt* must be, I think, the *Chih-li* cloth of our Chinese traveller, but he says it was made at *Kampamei* and its district; he may possibly include *Shâlyêt* in the term district.

effect that if the king would give up eating pork the overseer would give up eating beef. This compact has been most scrupulously observed by the successors of both parties up to the present day. The king at his devotions prostrates himself before an image of Buddha every morning; which being over, his attendants collect all the cow-dung about the place, and smear it over the image of the god. Some of the dung the king orders to be burnt to ashes and put into a small cotton bag, which he continually wears upon his person; and when his morning ablutions are over, he mixes some of the powdered dung with water and smears it over his forehead and limbs; by so doing he considers he is showing Buddha the greatest reverence.

Many of the king's subjects are Muhammadans, and there are twenty or thirty mosques in the kingdom, to which the people resort every seventh day for worship. On this day, during the morning, the people being at the mosques, no business whatever is transacted; and in the after part of the day, the services being over, business is resumed.

When a ship arrives from China, the king's overseer with a Chitti go on board and make an invoice of the goods, and a day is settled for valuing the cargo. On the day appointed the silk goods, more especially the Khinkis (Kincobs), are first inspected and valued, which when decided on, all present join hands, whereupon the broker says, "The price of your goods is now fixed, and cannot in any way be altered."

The price to be paid for pearls and precious stones is arranged by the Weinaki broker,¹ and the value of the

¹ 哲地未訥九 Chitti Weinaki. Chittis are merchants who are called in when anything is to be sold, and who are retained by the king to conduct his trading transactions ashore and afloat. These Chittis are divided into four classes, each dealing in their own particular wares. The Waligi Chitti (doubtless the Chinese Weinaki Chitti) trades in corals, rubies, and bangles made of glass, earth, lead, tin, copper, or any kind of metals. (Valenty, "Description of Ceylon," vol. v, p. 8.)

Chinese goods taken in exchange for them is that previously fixed by the broker in the way above stated.

They have no abacus on which to make their calculations, but in its place they use their toes and fingers, and, what is very wonderful, they are never wrong in their reckonings.

The succession to the throne is settled in a somewhat curious manner. The king is not succeeded by his son, but by his sister's son, because his nephew, being born of his sister's body, is considered nearer to him by blood. If the king has no sister the succession goes to his brother; if he has no brother it goes to a man of ability and worth. Such has been the rule for many generations.¹

Trial by ordeal is much practised in this country, such as thrusting the finger of the accused into boiling oil, and then keeping him in jail for two or three days. If after that time the finger is ulcerated he is pronounced guilty and sentenced to punishment; but if his finger has received no injury he is at once set free, and escorted home by musicians engaged by the overseer. On his arrival home his relatives, neighbours, and friends make him presents, and rejoice and feast together.

The jack fruit and the plantain abound in this country, which is also well supplied with melons, gourds, and turnips, and every other kind of vegetable. Ducks, herons, and swallows are numbered among the feathered tribe, and there are bats as large as vultures, which hang suspended from the trees.

As in Cochin, the money in circulation is the Fa-nan and the Ta-urh. Their weights are the P'o-ho and the Fan-la-shih, and there is a measure called a Tang-ko-li.²

¹ This is still the order of succession in Travancore.

² 番刺失 Fan-la-sek. An error in transcription, most probably for Fan-sek-la. The Arab Farsala, a weight formerly much used in trade in the Indian seas; it seems to have run from 20 to 30 lbs. (Yule's Glossary, p. 273). 亮憂黎 Tang-ko-li. This may possibly represent the Curia of Varthema, p. 170. In a note on the same page Curia is said to stand undoubtedly for Kôraja.

The king's present to the Emperor is usually a gold-plated girdle set with all kinds of precious stones and pearls.

It may not be out of place to note that Mahuan states that the commander of the Chinese fleet which left China in 1408, did on his arrival at Calicut erect a stone with a Chinese inscription on it to commemorate his visit. Are there any traces of it still remaining?

阿丹 *Ahtan*, ADEN (A.D. 1423).

This kingdom can be reached from Calicut in a month with a favourable wind by shaping a due westerly course.

The country is rich, and the people prosperous. The king and his subjects are all Muhammadans, who speak Ah-la-pek (Arabic); they are haughty and overbearing in their manners. They have a force of seven or eight thousand military, consisting of infantry and cavalry, which causes them to be greatly feared and respected by their neighbours.

In the nineteenth year of Yung-lo (1422) an Imperial envoy, the eunuch Li, was sent from China to this country with a letter and presents to the king. On his arrival he was most honourably received, and was met by the king on landing and conducted by him to his palace. During the stay of the embassy the people who had rarities were permitted to offer them for sale. Cat's-eyes of extraordinary size, rubies, and other precious stones, large branches of coral, amber, and attar of roses were among the articles purchased. Giraffes, lions, zebras, leopards, ostriches, and white pigeons were also offered for sale.

The dress usually worn by the king is a long white garment, and a turban of fine white cloth, with a knob of brocade on the top; when he goes to the mosque to worship he changes this dress for a yellow robe, fastened at the waist by a girdle adorned with precious stones, and on his head he wears a golden crown. He goes abroad in

a carriage escorted by a company of soldiers. His officers have each a particular dress appertaining to their rank. The head-dress of the men is a turban; their garment is made of woollen, silk, or cotton stuff. The women wear a long robe; from their shoulders hangs a chain made of pearls and precious stones with silken tassels at the end like that worn by the Goddess of Mercy; from each of their ears hang four pairs of gold inlaid ear-rings,¹ golden bracelets on their arms, and rings on their fingers. They also wear a silk brocaded handkerchief over their heads, merely showing the upper part of their faces.

The jewellers of this country are skilled in the manufacture of gold enamelled hair-pins, and other gold and silver ornaments for the hair, which are lifelike in their representation of natural objects. There are in the town market-places, bathing establishments, eating-houses, and shops for the sale of sundry wares. The coinage of the country is a gold piece called a *Poololi*, engraved on both sides; there is also in circulation for small purchases a copper coin called *Pu-kio-szû*.²

The climate of the country is always warm, with a temperature like our eighth and ninth months. The year is made up of a certain fixed number of days and months, twelve of the latter making a year, and these are divided into great and small months. They have no intercalary

¹ "Ear-rings. 'Tankisa' exactly resembles the *Khusfa*, but is one inch in diameter, and is frequently bound with gold wire half its circumference. Six of these rings are worn in the upper membrane of each ear." (Hunter's "Statistical Account of Aden," pp. 58, 59.)

² Poo-lo-li } 哺 嚙 嚙.
 Poo-kio-szû } 哺 哺 斯.

I am indebted to Professor de Goeje, of Leiden, for the following explanation of the above names of the Aden coins, which he has kindly given me through Professor G. Schlegel, also of Leiden.

The syllable *Poo*, says the Professor, represents the Arabic *Abu*, Father. It occurs in many vulgar names of coins, as in *Abu Madfu*, Gun Father, or rather Father Gun, the name of the Pillar Dollar, which the Arabs compare to two guns.

Poo-lo-li is *Abu Loo-loo*, Pearl Father, possibly so called on account of there being a circle on the coin resembling beads or pearls.

Poo-kio-szû is *Abu Kaus* or *Kos*, Father Arch or Bow, on account of the coin having the figure of an arch or bow on it.

months; the first day of the month is the day following the night on which they first see the new moon.¹ Their four seasons are not fixed, but are regulated by an astronomer, who reckons the time for their commencement; the eclipses of the sun and moon are also foretold by him, as well as the time for wind and rain and the ebb and flow of the tide: he is never at fault in his calculations.

The necessaries of life of all kinds are abundant. Much butter, oil, and honey are to be had there; rice and other cereals, pulse, and every kind of vegetable are obtainable. Their fruits are the date, almond,² dried grapes, walnuts, a kind of wild apple, pomegranates, peaches, apricots, and a seedless white grape.

The animals found there are elephants, camels, mules, asses, sheep, cows, dogs, and cats; they have also fowls and ducks, but no pigs or geese. There is a kind of sheep found here with white hair, but without horns; where they should be they have two round black spots; the flesh underneath the neck hangs like the dewlap of a cow; the hair is short like that of a dog, and the tail is as big as a bason. Here also is found the zebra, 化福鹿 Hua-fu-lu: this animal is about the size of a mule; its body and face are white, lined with dark stripes, which begin in the middle of its forehead, and are distributed at regular intervals over its whole body and down its legs, just as if they were painted. The giraffe is also found in this country: its fore legs are nine feet high, and its hind legs about six feet; its neck is sixteen feet long; owing to its fore-quarters being high and its hind-quarters low it cannot be ridden. It has two short horns at the side of its ears; the tail is like that of a cow, and the body like that of a deer; the hoof is divided into three sections, the mouth is flat, and it feeds on millet and pulse. The

¹ Les Mahometans comptent leur mois selon le cours de la lune; le premier soir où ils voient la nouvelle lune, est le premier jour du mois. Quand le soir où elle doit paraître, le temps est couvert, ils ne sembarassent pas de commencer le mois un jour plus tard. (Niebuhr, "Description de l'Arabie," p. 96. Amsterdam, 1774.)

² Badan. Persian Bādām (Bretschneider).

lions resemble tigers; they are black and yellow, but without stripes; they have large heads, wide mouths, and pointed tails, on which hang tufts of long black hair; their roar is like thunder, and when heard by other beasts, these latter crouch with fear and dare not stir. Truly this is the king of beasts, says the traveller.

Their houses are built of stone, roofed in with tiles or earth; some of their buildings are forty to fifty feet high, and have three storeys.

Their king, grateful for the condescension shown him by the Chinese Emperor, had specially made for His Majesty two gold enamelled belts, set with pearls and precious stones. These, with a cap of gold, rubies, and every other kind of precious stones, two rhinoceros horns, and a letter written on gold leaf, were sent as tribute by our fleet on its homeward voyage.

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