

# INDIA

IN THE

## FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

BEING A COLLECTION OF

### NARRATIVES OF VOYAGES TO INDIA,

IN

THE CENTURY PRECEDING THE PORTUGUESE DISCOVERY  
OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE;

FROM

Latin, Persian, Russian, and Italian Sources,

NOW FIRST TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH.

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

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of Mabel was separated from China by mountains, which gives M. Reinaud the belief that it corresponds with the kingdom of Siam. From this point the Arabian ships took their course towards China.

We have thus closely followed the course of this voyage with the comments made thereupon not only by the cotemporaneous writer Abú Said, but its more recent commentators, because unquestionably it is the most important, when its details and its early period are considered, that we possess before the grand epoch of the discoveries of Marco Polo, of whose account we shall hereafter have to speak.

The Baron Walckenaer, in a paper read before the Academie des Belles Lettres, on 22nd July, 1831, and published in the *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages*, tom. liii, p. 6, calls attention to another document preserved to us in Arabic, whose importance in a geographical point of view had been previously ignored. He claims for it a value equal to the narratives of Solimán and Abú Said. The voyages of *Sindbad the Sailor* have by most of us been regarded as nothing better than one of the responses of the fair princess Sheherazade to the never ending request of her sister, Dinarzade. "Sister, if you are not sleepy, tell us one of those beautiful stories of yours." The learned Baron Walckenaer was by no means of the same opinion. Although the voyages of *Sindbad the Sailor* have been inserted into the *Thousand and One Nights*, they form in Arabic a distinct and separate work, a translation of which into French was made by M. Langlès, and published in Paris in 1814.



In his second voyage Sindbad mentions but one country, namely, the peninsula of Riha, in which were high mountains, and which produced camphor. He describes with great correctness the mode of extracting the camphor by making incisions in the tree which produces it. He also describes minutely the rhinoceros and the elephant. The Arabs were the first to mention camphor, which was unknown to the Greeks and Romans. The best is procured from Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay peninsula. It may therefore be inferred that the latter, which is the nearest of these countries to Persia, where camphor is gathered and where the elephant and rhinoceros are found, was the country visited by Sindbad in his second voyage.

In his third voyage Sindbad lands on an island of tattooed and ferocious savages, which would seem exactly to correspond with the character which orientalisists and European navigators have always ascribed to the Andamán Islands. It has been already stated that Selaheth, or the island of the strait mentioned by Soliman, was supposed by M. Maury to mean the Straits of Malacca. This opinion had been already propounded by the Baron Walckenaer. Sindbad speaks of a fish in the Island of Selaheth, partaking of the nature of the ox, and breeding and milking its young in like manner. It has been stated by Marsden that the hippopotamus exists in Sumatra, but this is now known, from the researches of modern naturalists, to be the Malacca tapir, and it may be accepted almost with certainty that Sindbad's descrip-

cover a house, were to be found near the island of Taprobana. Pliny and Strabo mention the same circumstance (*Nat. Hist.*, l. ix, c. 10): they likewise turn them upside down, and say, that men used to row in them as in a boat (*Geog.*, l. xvi, 16). Diodorus Siculus adds to their testimony, and assures us, on the faith of an historian, that the *chelonophagi* (shell fish eaters, L. iiiii, c. 1), derived a threefold advantage from the tortoise, which occasionally supplied them with a roof to their houses, a boat, and a dinner.

In this colossal tortoise we recognize the *Colossochelys Atlas*, the first fossil remains of which were discovered by Dr. Falconer and Major Cautley in 1835, in the tertiary strata of the Sewalik Hills or Sub-Himalayahs, skirting the southern foot of the great Himalayah chain. They were found associated with the remains of four extinct species of mastodon and elephant, species of rhinoceros, hippopotamus, horse, and a vast number of other mammalia.

The remains of the *Colossochelys* were collected during a period of eight or nine years, along a range of eighty miles of hilly country; they belong, in consequence, to a great number of different animals, varying in size and age. From the circumstances under which they are met with, in crushed fragments contained in elevated strata, which have undergone great disturbance, there is little room for hope that a perfect shell, or anything approaching a complete skeleton, will ever be found in the Sewalik Hills. It is to be mentioned, however, that remains of many of the animals associated with the



THE TRAVELS  
OF  
NICOLÒ CONTI, IN THE EAST,  
IN THE  
EARLY PART OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY,  
AS RELATED BY POGGIO BRACCIOLINI, IN HIS WORK ENTITLED  
"HISTORIA DE VARIETATE FORTUNE." LIB. IV.

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A CERTAIN Venetian named Nicolò, who had penetrated to the interior of India, came to pope Eugenius (he being then for the second time at Florence) for the purpose of craving absolution, inasmuch as, when, on his return from India, he had arrived at the confines of Egypt, on the Red Sea, he was compelled to renounce his faith, not so much from the fear of death to himself, as from the danger which threatened his wife and children who accompanied him. I being very desirous of his conversation (for I had heard of many things related by him which were well worth knowing), questioned him diligently, both in the meetings of learned men and at my own house, upon many matters which seemed very deserving to be committed to memory and also to writing. He discoursed learnedly and gravely concerning his journey to such remote nations, of the situation and different manners and customs of the Indians, also of their animals and trees

The king of this province rides on a white elephant, round the neck of which is fastened a chain of gold ornamented with precious stones, which reaches to its feet.

The men of this country are satisfied with one wife ; and all the inhabitants, as well men as women, puncture their flesh with pins of iron, and rub into these punctures pigments which cannot be obliterated, and so they remain painted for ever. All worship idols : nevertheless when they rise in the morning from their beds they turn towards the east, and with their hands joined together say, " God in Trinity and His law defend us."

In this country there is a kind of apple, very similar to a pomegranate, full of juice and sweet.<sup>1</sup> There is also a tree called *tal*,<sup>2</sup> the leaves of which are extremely large, and upon which they write, for throughout all India they do not use paper excepting in the city of Cambay. This tree bears fruit like large turnips, the juice contained under the bark becoming solid, forms very agreeable sweet food.

This country produces frightful serpents<sup>3</sup> without feet, as thick as a man, and six cubits in length. The inhabitants eat them roasted, and hold them in great esteem as food. They also eat a kind of red ant, of the size of a small crab, which they consider a great delicacy seasoned with pepper.

There is here also an animal which has a head resembling that of a pig, a tail like that of an ox, and on his forehead a horn similar to that of the unicorn, but shorter, being about a cubit in length.<sup>4</sup> It resembles the elephant in size and colour, with which it is constantly at war. It is said that its horn is an antidote against poisons, and is on that account much esteemed.

In the upper part of this country, towards Cathay, there

<sup>1</sup> Probably the Jamboo apple : *Eugenia Jambos*. L.

<sup>2</sup> The Fan Palm. See *ante*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> A species of python.

<sup>4</sup> The rhinoceros.



never suffers from pestilence ; so that the numbers increase from the freedom from disease and the longevity of the people. Their customs also vary according to the difference of region. All however, both men and women, wear linen and silken garments (for they have no wool) : in some places the women wear long trains, which they bear after them fastened by girdles of the width of a palm, adorned with gold and gems. Some cover the head with pieces of cloth, interwoven with gold ; some wear the hair at the back of the head flowing, others tie it up. They abound much more in gold and silver than we do ; the men wear rings, the women wear armlets enriched with various precious stones. The period from Christmas to Lent is kept by them as a festival, being devoted to feasting and dancing. They use small tables so that two or three may eat together, using tablecloths and napkins after the European manner. They have one king, who calls himself, after God, the king of kings. They say that there are many kings subject to him.

They report that they have amongst them many kinds of animals. Their cattle have a hump on the shoulder, in the manner of camels, with horns extending backwards three cubits in length, and so large that one of them can contain an amphora of wine.<sup>1</sup> They have some dogs, which are as large as our asses, and which will hunt down lions. Their elephants are large in size and very numerous. Some keep them for the purpose of display and pleasure, some as animals useful in war. They are captured when young and brought up tame, the larger ones when taken are killed. Their tusks grow to the length of six cubits. They also rear lions for display, rendering them so tame that they can be introduced into their theatres. There is a kind of beast of various colours, very like to an elephant, excepting that it has no proboscis

<sup>1</sup> Sanga or Galla oxen, described and figured by Salt in his "Voyage to Abyssinia," pp. 258, 259. The horns mentioned by him as being in the collection of Lord Valentia, are now in the British Museum.



and that its feet resemble those of the camel: it has two horns, very sharp at the extremity, one cubit in length, one of which is situate on the forehead and the other on the nose.<sup>1</sup> They have another animal called *zebed*, rather longer than a hare, and resembling it in other respects;<sup>2</sup> possessing such a peculiar odour, that if it lean against a tree for the purpose of scratching itself, it imparts to it a smell so extremely sweet, that persons passing near shortly afterwards and guided by the scent, cut out the part against which it had supported itself, and dividing it into minute portions sell them dearer than gold. They informed me that there was also another animal,<sup>3</sup> nine cubits long and six in height, with cloven hoofs like those of an ox, the body not more than a cubit in thickness, with hair very like to that of a leopard and a head resembling that of the camel, with a neck four cubits long and a hairy tail: the hairs are purchased at a high price, and worn by the women suspended from their arms, and ornamented with various sorts of gems. Another wild animal is hunted by them for food. It is as large as an ass, with stripes of a red and green colour, and has horns three cubits in length and spiral from the top.<sup>4</sup> Another also, resembling a hare, has small horns, is of a red colour, and can surpass a horse in leaping.<sup>5</sup> There is yet another, similar to a goat, with horns more than two cubits in length extending over the back, which are sold for more than forty gold pieces, because their smoke is beneficial in cases of fever.<sup>6</sup> Another, like the last, without horns but with red hair, and the neck more than two cubits in length. They also mentioned another of the size of a camel and of the

<sup>1</sup> The rhinoceros.

<sup>2</sup> Doubtless the zibett (*viverra civetta*), the well-known producer of the "civet."

<sup>3</sup> The giraffe.

<sup>4</sup> Probably the koodoo (*Strepsiceros Kudu*).

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the Modoqua antelope (*neotragus Saltianus*), a small Abyssinian species named in compliment to the late Mr. Salt.

<sup>6</sup> Ibex.



colour of the leopard, with a neck six cubits in length, and having a head like that of a roebuck.<sup>1</sup> To these they added an account of a bird standing six cubits in height from the ground, with slender legs, feet resembling those of a goose, the neck and head small, and the beak like that of a hen. It flies but little, but in running surpasses the swiftness of the horse.<sup>2</sup>

Many other things which they told me I have omitted, in order that I might not weary the reader; for they stated that there were some desert places which were inhabited by serpents, some of which were fifty cubits long, without feet and with a scorpion's tail, and which would swallow a whole calf at once.<sup>3</sup> As almost all of them agreed in these statements, and they appeared to be worthy men, who could have no object in deceiving me, I have thought it good that the information they gave me should be handed down for the common advantage of posterity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Another description of the giraffe.

<sup>2</sup> The ostrich.

<sup>3</sup> *Boa constrictor*.

<sup>4</sup> These references to animals are particularly valuable, as they seem to indicate that our travellers had penetrated farther south than even Abyssinia. The "Mountains of the Moon" have wonderfully disappeared or diminished, and it almost seems as if our travellers may have reached the lands within the Mozambique Coast, or further south towards Lattakoo, or the country between the N'gami and Natal, where the fine Koodoo antelope and the rarer striped *Inagelaphus Angasii*, figured and described by Dr. Gray, is found. The rhinoceros seems to be found in Darfur, but rarely, whereas the *R. Keitloa*, *R. Sinus*, and another species, abound in some parts of the more southern lands.