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# Roman Control and Influence on the Spice Trade Scenario of Indian Ocean World: A Re-Assessment of Evidences

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to discuss various historical as well as archaeological evidences to know the certainty of the Roman presence and monopoly of Indian Ocean spice trade. Most of the unearthed artifacts from various places of South India has been reinforced by them of a peak of Roman contact and argues that the Romans could have travelled to Malabar with trade goods and settled here. Hundreds of artifacts belonging different cultures have been found at these excavated sites, including Pattanam, whose exact names we do not know, however, such artifacts were named commonly as Mediterranean or Roman and argued that they unearthed interesting material evidences for Indo-Roman trade. Actually many of these artifacts and coins were brought here by Arabs and Auximites who act as intermediaries between Malabar and outside the world, and monopolized the trade to feed the Roman markets. We are not sure about what are the aims of these imaginations of Roman monopoly, but we do know that the “Roman” connection has no authenticity.

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**Keywords:** Sea-faring, Monopoly, Nabateans, Parthians, Intermediaries, Seasonal, Land Route

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## Introduction

Kerala has had the distinction of being an independent geographical entity and no doubt its position at the centre of the Indian Ocean made it a natural location for commerce and transshipping. History stipulated that from time immemorial Malabar; present day Kerala was a centre of trade in spices and known as the ‘Spice Garden of India’ and she played such as profound role in shaping global trade relations. On the other hand, these peculiar products of the country attracted sea-faring people from foreign lands to anchor on the shores of Kerala (Arthur Mee 1908), because it offered an abundance of goods that were not available in Europe and other parts of the world (Margret 2003). Here, the humid air, fertile soil and tropical rain forests nurture over 500 species of rare medicinal herbs. Exchange of these goods, promoted maritime trade relations between the countries and the general notion that they monopolized our spice trade. Throughout history, the presences of the Europeans in the scenario of spice trade

have been objects of admiration by impartial observers. However, most of the information sources like historical works, papers, and last but not least, the school and college text books, contained incorrect and malicious material about them and their presence and monopoly, often deliberately and with an evil motive. Even the archaeologists who engaged in the excavations of Muziris Project are intentionally trying to establish the European connections, particularly Roman monopoly and referred Muziris as an Indo-Roman port. They high lightened on the front page of the fifth season field report that “Evidence for urban life with multi-cultural characteristics, Roman and West Asian contacts predominate” (Cherian 2011). Similarly, the members of the team attended the first conference of the International Association for Asian Heritage at Colombo, Sri Lanka, and presented a paper, which discussing the evidence of the early historic exchanges between India and the Mediterranean world; with Muziris and Berenike ports, and pinned them as part of Roman Peak Phase. This paper’s abstract is also attached with the above noticed report of KCHR. Here people may connect Muziris with India and Berenike with the Mediterranean world. Interestingly, Berenike was not a Mediterranean port, but was the southernmost and most active Egyptian Red sea port, founded by Ptolemy II Philadelphus early in his reign, who named it after his mother. In this situation the present work mainly covers the certainty of the Roman monopoly and her presence, as well as the truth related to the discovery of the monsoon winds; because we believe that after the discovery of this natural phenomenon the Romans controlled the Indian Ocean trades.

### **Yavana: A Misunderstood Term**

It has been believed by several historians that the presence of the Romans on the Malabar region was a great thing. No doubt, archeological discoveries of Roman coins and amphorae were the fruit of this heroic endeavour. Many amphoras have been found at Pattanam and they describe them as Roman amphoras. How do we know that the foreign amphorae at Pattanam were brought by the Romans? It is difficult to agree on this point after having analysed the sources available for the periods. These amphorae or a sort of jars were used to hold wine, sauce or olive oil. These things might have been shipped to here for foreign traders who lived here and missed the kind of things they were used to at home (Singh 2002). These evidences are no longer sure about whether traders from the Roman Empire actually lived at Pattanam in large numbers or not. Apart from the archeological indications the most important other reference behind such a notion not other than but a Tamil poem *Akananuru*, an anthology of early Tamil poems in the Sangam collection of *Ettuttokai*, speaks of the thriving town Muchiri, “Where the fine large ships of the Yavana come bearing gold, making the water white with foam, and return laden with pepper” (*Akananuru*, Poem number.149, 7-11). Here the word ‘Yavana’ interpreted by the later historians as the represents the people of Greek, which originally derived from the word ‘Ionians’; the early emigrated Aryan race of Greek from the areas of Danube River. But the word ‘Yavanas’ was not applied to all Greeks; it was only used people after Ptolemy of Egypt. Historical works suggests that after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC,

Ptolemy, a general in Alexander the Great's army, opened the commercial relations with India and ruled Egypt; and he was called as 'Yavana' or 'Yona' by others (Saletore, 1978) and later periods the term 'Yavana' applied to denote all Egyptians or Arabs who engaged commercial activities in the Indian Ocean world or most probably as a 'foreigner'. Otherwise there is no reason to connect the Yavanas with Greeks or Romans and the most notable fact is that Ptolemy was not a Greek in origin but a Macedonian. I believe the author of *Akananuru* described the foreigners who associated with the spice trade as Yavanas.

The history of the Ptolomies; all descendants of Ptolemy, is highly connected with Alexander the Great, a Macedonian ruler, the most magnificent hero of antiquity; and keep in mind that much of us believe that he was a Greek. The Macedonians were not Greeks, though having no culture of their own, they absorbed as much as they could from their Greek vassals (*The Lands and People* 1976). During his period Greece was united, but united under a foreign monarch. Then the Greek language was universally used by him in trade, politics and literature (*The Lands and People* 1976). As a result of it we created a new notion that the Greeks monopolized the spice trade. At that time Alexander founded a city on the Mediterranean coast, northwest of Cairo in 332 BC (Everest Heath 2005), bearing his own name and called as Alexandria (Jayachandran 1998). It flourished under Ptolemaic rule and became the inevitable entre pot between East and West and a commercial meeting place for the place of three continents.

Alexander was not a mere military adventure, but from the very beginning he was to develop the immense commercial resource of his kingdom (Rawlinson 1926) and organised many mercantile expeditions to link Egypt and India by sea as well as by land. He sent back part of his army by sea in Indian built ships, (Naravane 1998) and he is believed to have brought pepper back from his expeditions. He introduced its Sanskrit name *pippali*, from which the Greek *pipperi* was derived and passed on to the European languages through the Latin *piper*. Accordingly his generals and others of his army recorded the names of many of the plants growing in the regions through which they were marching. It was Onesicritus, who piloted Alexander's ship during their return journey, who reported for the first time that cinnamon grew in South India (Bunbury 1959). Earlier, they believed that cinnamon was an Arab plant, as that was being brought to Europe by Arabs. They believed it came from Arabia, without knowing that it too came originally from Malabar, although via Arabia.

## **The Roman History of Spices**

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his vast empire had been divided and subdivided and the centre of political power moved slowly westward to the Italian peninsula, especially in the city of Rome. Rome was a small territory at the tip of the boot shaped peninsula that extends into the Mediterranean Sea. Rome gradually dominated the entire peninsula and conquered Egypt in 30 BC and it is believed that she got access to the already flourishing trading networks in South Asia (Ray 1994). It is true that Indian connection with Rome is well-known for the spice trade and the

import of pepper in particular. It was neither highly valued nor significant in Kerala, but she seems to have possessed a world monopoly for this natural product, and having great demand in ancient Europe not only as a luxury item but as a form of staple product. Aside from its culinary function of spicing up foods, pepper was also valued for its supposed medicinal properties, in particular as an antidote to poisoning and as a cure for impotency. Pepper had become one of the necessities to quite a large circle in Rome (Childe 1960) and it becomes a symbol of luxurious cookery. Romans' love of pepper is mentioning in *Apicius*; a collection of Roman cookery recipes, usually thought to have been compiled in the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. They constructed storehouses, *Horrea piperataria*, principally used for the storage of pepper, were erected in the vicinity of Rome and could contain thousands of pounds of pepper (Meijer and Van Nijf 1992). Historical works prove that in pre-Christian times it was mainly through Egyptian ports, the merchants of Romans carried out the bulk spices with the help of Arabs, since it held multiple qualities including as a preservative and aphrodisiac. Like Alexandria, Berenike, an Egyptian Red Sea port proved to be rich in commercial relations with Kerala and fulfilled the needs of the Romans. Berenike proved to be rich in archaeological remains, reflecting both food supply and long distance trade. Archaeological evidence proved that 1600 peppercorns and teak wood were unearthed in Berenike; clearly shows that the pepper trade must have been enormous (Vermeeren 1998). *Periplus Maris Erythraei* or Periplus of the Erythrian Sea, a merchant practical guide book for Indian seas by an anonymous Alexandrian Mariner describes in great detail the trade routes from Berenike to India, including many harbors along the African, Arabian and Indian coast (Casson 1989).

These above mentioned facts indicate that the Roman market and hunger for these spices was enormous, she imported all kinds of exotic commodities including a wide range of botanical products (Cappers 1999) and it is quite natural that they become part of the spice trade. But keep in mind that the Romans were less commercial by nature. But the establishment of the Roman Empire was of great importance in the history of commerce. In fact, the first two centuries of the Common Era indicate this increase in trade between present-day western India and Rome. This expansion of trade was due to the comparative peace established by the Roman Empire during the time of Augustus (23 September 63 BC – 19 August AD 14), which known 'Pax Romana', Latin for Roman peace, and span approximately 206 years (27 BC to AD 180). It is said to have been a 'miracle' because prior to it there had never been peace for so many centuries in a given period of human history and two events of this period might have serious blows at Rome's oriental trade; one was the Great Fire of AD 64, the other event was the chaos of AD 69 (Warmington 1928). One more thing the most important geographical fact about Rome as a whole is that two third of its land surface is covered with mountains and hills. The Apennine range, the 'spine' of Rome, are known for their volcanic characteristics- lava fields, earthquakes, and active volcanoes, such as Vesuvius. The earliest recorded eruption of Vesuvius occurred in AD 79 and destroyed everything, wiping out towns and lives in minutes. Even though, most of the historians believe that they were active participants, but there is no solid evidence to prove their

direct involvement in the Indian Ocean trade system during the 'Pax Romana' and it does not mean that it was a closed chapter to the European traders. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese traveler certifies that prior to their arrival the Indian Ocean was a free one, where everybody could navigate, no one claimed that the sea as a hereditary or conquered property. There being no proceeding title, there was no present or future right of passage (Barros 1973). And keep in mind that the Indian Ocean constituted at least for four thousand years a great sea route for commercial intercourse (Prasad 1977).

The following two centuries after 'Pax Romana', witnessed the slow decline of Roman control over its outlying territories and commerce. The breakdown of Roman society was dramatic. The social effects of the fracture of the Roman state were manifold. Cities and merchants lost the economic benefits of safe conditions for trade and manufacture. They lost their premiership in every field and were forced to go back to the shadows, which also resulted in the loss of their contact with other society. Egypt under the Emperor Diocletian suffered more than ever, and Romans were no longer taking any real interest in trade. Diocletian split the empire into separately administered eastern and western halves in AD 286. This division between east and west was encouraged by Constantine, who rebuilt the city of Byzantium as the new capital, Constantinople, in AD 330 (Tim Dowley 1977).

For many long years, Rome made many people in the world cry. The world has discovered that the strength of the oppressed is great when the situation becomes unbearable. Around AD 200 Barbarians begin attacking frontiers of the Roman Empire. The defeat in AD 378 at the Battle of Adrianople, at the hands of mounted Gothic lancers, destroyed much of the Roman army and left the Western Empire undefended. The city of Rome was attacked, looted and burned. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD the Roman Empire was ended. As a result of individualistic system feudalism arose outside the cities which gave rise to constant wars. They never cared for commercial outputs; rather they destroyed the commercial cities. Trade between Europe and Asia, which had been a feature of the antique world of Romans, had very nearly destroyed the barbarian invasions of the fifth century, and by subsequent conflicts between Muslims and Christians, so that several centuries the old trade-routes were traveled by only a few Asians and there is no presence of Romans (Verma 2011), in other sense the Indian Ocean world during the feudalistic period trade was well protected by the Arabs; the strong intermediaries. It does not mean that the Romans abandoned the spices use. How do we know all this? Actually we do not. But circumstantial evidence against the Romans is overwhelming. We know that Rome was the consuming market because it was duly populated by nobles or kings who led luxurious life and the prosperous Roman citizens proved to be the best customers for foreign luxuries. Spices could be used to buy mortgage or coat of arms. Having spices was like having hard cash. When Alaric invaded Rome in 408, he demanded and obtained, as part of the ransom. According to Gibbon, Alaric obtained three thousand pounds of pepper as part of the ransom of Rome (Gibbon 1974). The last emperor of the west, Romulus

Agustulus, was deposed by the barbarian king Odoacer in AD 476, it is the most commonly given start date of the Middle Ages. The city of Rome, with its political and military symbols, has collapsed and buried with the establishment of feudalism. After the dissolution of the Roman Empire, the Arab control fully dominated the sea lanes. It is also worth noting that, after the absences of Roman invaders, with the coming of peace and prosperity at the Red sea region raised and the demand for oriental luxuries in the west were satisfactorily fulfilled by the intermediaries who were collecting the spices from the Malabar Coast. F.C. Danvers recorded this incident in his work as “on the fall of the Roman Empire the commerce of the world had passed into other hands and the great Indo-European trade was now principally carried on by the Moors or Arabs” (Danvers 1966). Barbosa upholds the same view on his travelogue that navigation in the Indian Ocean was pioneered by the Arabs, and they were the dominant players throughout history, as far as sailing ships in the western part of the basin are concerned (Dames 1918).

Any spices trade history of the Romans of the middle ages is handicapped by the nature and presence. However, there is little evidence of there actually being the Roman monopoly of spice trade. Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as the first emperor of the Romans in AD 800. After Charlemagne’s death, the kingdom he had built was divided and subdivided. Rome itself was chopped into a thousand fragmented units that were either poorly governed or not governed at all. Misery was the rule for the mass of people. Invaders struck from all sides. Although the peninsula seemed ungovernable, various nobles took the title of King of Rome. In actually, the empire was impossible to rule efficiently in those days. The result was that Rome was part of the empire in name only, and they could not have the ability to organize spice trade.

### **Roman Coins: African or Asian Made**

The Indian elite historians are up holding the reference of Pliny and the discovery of gold coins from various places of South India to strengthen their baseless notion about the Roman monopoly. Pliny explains of the hard-currency drain in exchange for the pepper corns, is illustrated of both its substantial and expensive character (Pliny 1855). It is reported that there was a noisy debate into the Roman senate as it was a lucrative trade for adventurous merchants about the drain of gold to India (Mathew 2003). We know that Rome was a consumer state and the Roman Empire was unable to counter balance the inflow of Indian products by a return of imperial products. Historical works prove that the Indian traders may have conducted their trade chiefly by barter and they were unused to coined currency, India did not need much from Rome, but the Romans have no other choice, she had only rough woollen cloths, arsenic and antimony to give (Verma 2011), with the result that the Romans adopted a system of metal coinage and sent out coined money in gold and silver which never returned to them, not even in the form of Indian money (Warmington 1928). The barbarians too in the West fell victims to the allurements of spices, as is shown for instance by the inclusion of three thousand pounds of pepper in the demands made by Alaric, which already

mentioned, that pressed the Roman authorities to brought enough pepper, and I strongly believe that the frequency of the coins in south India as well is due to the fresh demand for spices created by the barbarians, as a result true Romans helping the intermediaries with moneyed capital when spices was needed. This fact also resulted heavily drained off the wealth of Rome in the shape of gold in to India and the precious money or metal may have been melted down ultimately by the Indian authorities for ornaments or dedication. There is a chance that a few coins may lose from their custody that has been found throughout South India, especially in Tirunelveli district and in the Island of Mannar (Arunachalam 1952). From the time of Claudius' reign to the beginning of the third century about a dozen coins have been found, one of Nero, three of Vespasian, two of Trajan, five of Hadrian and a few of the Antonines. However, keep in mind that the Romans were not trading extensively and directly with Malabar but were still content to pass by without paying a visit, and Roman coins were brought by the middle men. It is strange that Roman coins of base metal, being of small value, and rough workmanship. Most of the coins were struck not at Rome, but at Alexandria and other places. According to Warmington, "This Roman coins minted in Ceylon and South India but imitating in size and appearance contemporary "Roman" issues, the middlemen deemed the quantity of currency sufficient, and ceased to import". The Arab middlemen especially the Sabeans and Himyarites, put the head of Augustus on their coins and used the Roman name to persuade the South Indian rulers to send all their commodities to the Roman Empire. Warmington also certifies that the so- called Roman trade with the "Indians" was in reality trade with the Ethiopians and they visited not India so much as Arabia and the Axumite realm.

### **Roman Diasporas?**

It is said that considerable Roman settlement existed at Kodungallur and Madura. Besides, European soldiers, described as Roman soldiers and powerful Yavanas and Mleccha clad in complete armour were also employed to guard the gates of the fort of Madura and enlisted in the service of Pandyan king named Chezhiyan. There is an also further reference which indicates that even as far back as 20 BC we know of a Pandyan king who entered into an alliance with Augustus Caesar (Rear Admiral 1982). This was basically due to diplomatic and military relations between India and western world. Further, Warmington indicates that the Yavana traders, soldiers and body guards in the service of Tamil kings, the temple of Augustus at Kodungallur not of true Romans (Warmington 1928). Strabo points out that Chandragupta Maurya kept himself in the palace under the protection of female guards who might have been imported from outside. The practice of appointing Yavana female slaves in the service of the Indian kings is supported by Kalidasa in his famous work, *Sakuntala*. Further, Weber says that in Indian inscriptions also we find Yavana girls specified as tribute (Prasad 1977). I already stated that the word Yavana representing to a foreigner only, in that sense, the evidence seems to contradict the idea of a Roman colony holding on in such places namely at Kodungallur and Madura. I believe that the import of Greek

or Roman girls to India probably owed its origin to the vast increase of slave-trading. These slaves were captured mainly from seaside European villages of Mediterranean Sea, including Italy, Spain, and Portugal etc. We know that the slave Ayesilas was exported from Greece to India. He was an expert architect and built Kanishka's stupa near Taxila.

## **Role of Venetians**

We are familiar with wealthy Italian merchants like Genoese and Venetians who controlled the spice trade in European parts. Many don't even know that they came into the scene only after the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. There is enough evidence to prove that Venice was founded by refugees fleeing from barbarian invaders in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The refugees chose well. Their hiding place grew into a city. Venetians called their city the Bride of the Adriatic and proudly spoke of being wedded to the sea, for it was the sea that brought them wealth. In the tenth century, however, a group of towns in southern Italy- Bari, Taranto- began to send ships to the eastern Mediterranean and were soon imitated by Venice and later by Genoa (Verma 2011). With its strategic location at the cross-roads of east-west trade, Venice grew into a great maritime power in Europe especially during the crusades that Venice gained numerous coastal districts and islands in the Aegean beside immunities and privileges in Constantinople.

## **Role of Nabateans**

During that period, commercial and cultural influences of India particularly Malabar were carried over by transoceanic interventions. Because, travel and traffic by water in that time has always been cheaper and easier than by land (Mahan 1980). The main sea-routes that were used for the purpose of trade with Malabar Coast were two: one through the Persian Gulf and the other through the Red Sea (Mathew, 1997). In comparison with Malabar, it is said to be believed that the commerce of Romans had three ways viz. Persian desert, around Africa and Red Sea and we believe they came to Malabar by the Red Sea route, but the obstacle being great. Between the Red Sea and Persian Gulf routes, there existed a continual rivalry from earlier times (Danvers 1966). In addition to this there were physical difficulties of sailing on the Red Sea. The Red Sea is dotted with many rocky shores, coral reefs and is also susceptible to powerful winds from the south west and even though the coastal navigation through Red Sea was tedious, dangerous and more expensive. Red Sea was also famous for its pirates, especially by the Nabateans.

From historical records it is evident that most of the early Arab maritime traders were of Nabatean origin, they were the central powers and they did not allow anybody to enter the sea business. Petra was their capital, in the Wadi Musa between the Dead Sea and the Aelanitic Gulf giving them great advantages (Warmington 1928). From 1900 - 600 BC, the Nabateans were engaged in trading along the water and land and developed their own trade routes. But in the period from 600 - 250 BC they first began using boats to pirate on the Red Sea and they later engaged in extensive trade on the Red Sea. Beyond the very rough geographical constraints prevailed in the Red Sea, inexperienced sailors



definitely had encountered these pirates too. They prowled in all the bays, harbours along the sea's edge or raided sailors' settlements in the coastal regions. They did this by maintaining a pirate station in Eudaimon in Arabia, later period popularly known as Aden and it played an important meeting place of traders in those days. Apparently it was a Nabatean policy to not allow foreign ships to pass beyond the southern end of the Red Sea. Historical works describe that during 20-30 BC a Roman campaign to south Yemen to discover the source of spices was destroyed by the Nabateans. Thus it was very difficult for others, except Arabians, to do trade on the Red Sea during these times.

Aden was a prosperous and wealthy meeting place of merchants, however, peculiar attitudes of Arabs in maintaining control of the Red Sea, and was vital to their being able to maintain a monopoly on their commerce. Marco Polo indicates that great numbers of Indian merchants flock at Aden; but the Indians sent no ships farther westward than the Red Sea mouth (Aldo Ricci 2002). In short; both India and Egypt did not allow each other any of their vessels to cross Aden (Casson 1989). That means Indian merchandise from Sind, Cambay, Kozhikode and Bengal was shipped to Aden only, and then to the East African port of Aydhab by the Arabs, from where it was taken by caravans of camels and slaves to Upper Egypt (Ibn Jubayr 1952). Any attempts by Alexandrian ships to sail beyond Aden were also strongly discouraged. It was not only in the case of Aden, but the Egypt also maltreated and spoiled the merchants from India and others, if they reached the Egyptian region. According to Warmington, Indians did not visit Alexandria, as Cleopatra only interacts with Ethiopians, Hebrews, Arabs, Syrians, Trogodytes, Medes and Parthians (Warmington 1928). This statement strengthens the absence of Indians in any of the Egyptian association in that time. However, there is a rare excavation proof of Indian influence in the Mediterranean region at Memphis, dating back to 200 BC (Rear Admiral 1982) and according to the versions it was not evidence to the flow of Indians but an accidental incident. But in due course of time the situation changed when the Mamluk state increased its control in AD 1288. Sulthan Qulawan ordered to issue sea-passes to Hindus, Chinese and Yemenites (Irwin 1986), that intended to visit Egypt for trading purposes. After this, Indian merchants began to enter beyond Aden without fear. In such a situation how the Romans could cross the Aden.

### **Parthians: A Stumbling Block to Roman Expansion**

The Indian Ocean region and the Mediterranean were closely linked by caravan routes across Arabia and between the Near East and the Middle East (De Souza 2001), and the spices were transported to Rome over land using camel caravans, Arab boats and mules. European merchants like Genoese and Venetians purchased Malabar spices from Muslim traders and distributed in the various parts of European continent and Constantinople acted as the dynamic center of Euro-Asian business deals. European merchant's involvements in the trade of Asian goods began only after the goods had reached their spot. They made fortunes out of trade in spices with Malabar Coast,

interestingly, even if five cargoes out of six were lost, the merchant ran a profit by selling the sixth, even though they had no direct relation with Malabar.

Besides, there was a route along which Indian goods were rarely sent to Russia and to the West, it left Central Asia by the river Oxus and proceed across or around the Caspian to Black sea. Apart from this Indian pepper was exported to Seleucia over land to Syria where it was known to the Romans when they had annexed it in 64 BC (Prasad 1977) and collected the spices from the intermediaries (Tarn 1966). After beginning of the second century an excellent road was constructed from the boundaries of Syria through Palestine and Petra to the Red Sea for the smooth operation. Although Rome was at a disadvantage due to the position of its main rival, the Persian Empire, under the Parthians and the anarchy in Syria created a barrier between Romans and direct trade with India, diverted the Roman interests to sea route. There was much trouble in Parthia; they were in a state of war with Rome (Warmington 1928), so that the land routes were disturbed. Apart from this, the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf were linked with West coast of India, but both coasts of these being controlled by Parthians. Not only was this but long caravan travel difficult and uncomfortable for reasons of climate and distance. As a result of this, the Romans concentrated their interests to Red Sea route only.

The existing situations in the Red Sea region slowly came to an end in AD 106. At this point of time, the Roman Empire acquired, not conquered the Nabatean Empire as it appears that the Nabateans sold their empire to the Roman ruler Trajan in order to gain Roman citizenship for their nobility. It is believed that prior to Trajan the Romans did not proceed beyond the mart of southern Arabia, because, where the Malabar goods were available, brought by the Arabians and their peculiar attitudes. After this the Romans settled in the Arabian world with a view to gaining monopoly over the Indian Ocean trade system. Trajan, better known as Second Augustus in Roman history, established Roman control over the traffic existing between the great commercial towns of the Tigris and the Euphrates and he turned his eyes towards Indian seas and India. His ambitions were thoroughly aroused, he interviewed the pilots of the Persian Gulf and people who had visited India, remarked that if he were young he would sail to India himself (Warmington 1928). In view of the above mentioned literary evidence, there is no archaeological or literary evidence for maritime trade between India and Rome prior to Trajan. Rome's Indian Ocean trade flourished and probably reached the highest point, as we believe, though we can trace only indications of it. The conquest of Egypt in 30 BC and the discovery of monsoon winds which made them masters of the trade route to the east as we believe. If Rome could secure control over Red Sea routes, there was no need to retain Nabatian's territories. If Rome could secure influence in the Madura and Kodungallur regions, there was no need to hold Armenia or Palmyra or Syria as a province.

## **Revealing the Secret of Monsoon**

When the Axumites, an African tribal group ascended from Abyssinia, made a strong

relationship with Arabians, they have developed navigational secrets and sea trade skills from Arabs. Their remarkable contact with Arabs helped them to know the secrets of monsoon and they did not wish to let the Romans or others to know about monsoon. So the secret of monsoon became a possession of three races- Indian, Arabian and Axumite (Warmington 1928). When the Axumites encountered Rome they shared the knowledge of seasonal monsoons of the Indian Ocean with Roman merchants (Fage 1975). That secret was rediscovered by Hippalus and observed the changes in wind direction in certain months. Hippalus was a pilot of Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who was sent out for the discovery of the sea route to India towards the end of the reign of Ptolemy Euergetes II (Sastri 1976). Later, during the year of AD 45, Hippalus introduced the benefit of climatic riddles in navigation to the Europeans firstly (*Visvavijnanakosham*, 1970). He contributed the knowledge of how to exploit the wind in the Indian Ocean in great detail. Thus in Indian ocean, Hippalus was a respectful memory and it is attributed to him by the base of Strabo's story. It is interesting to note that, in the reign of Clodius the secret of the monsoon was revealed finally by an Egyptian to a Western power. The practical usage of these winds was unknown to Romans or Europeans until the reign of Clodius. As an honor to him the monsoon winds bear his name as *Hippalus* referred by early historians. But there is a contradiction; I believe the Europeans had already realized the monsoon winds but the Romans did not realize the contribution of Alexander the Great. Alexander ordered his Admiral Nearchus to sail from the mouth of the Indus to the Euphrates, a destination of nearly 1500 miles. At last he reached Ormuz with the help of Indian built ships by a tribe known as Ksatri (Rear Admiral 1982). This incident indicates that even more than three hundred years before Roman time the seamen of the Europe were already quite familiar with the navigation of the Indian Ocean and aware about the proper season of the year. According to one version an Indian sailor stranded on the shores of the Arabian Sea reached Alexandria and revealed the sea route to India. Based on this information, Eudoxus of Cyzicus was ordered by Euergetus II to set out to India.

## Suez Canal

The study of the history of the Indian Ocean trade world reveals how geographical factors have influenced the connection of different countries over the years. In this sense nature has rendered intercourse between Rome and Malabar exceedingly difficult. Her geographical position not affords her a natural advantage for attaining maritime dominance in Indian Ocean. However, there are references about canals which connecting the Red Sea and it is believed that the first canal in the area was constructed between the Nile River delta and the Red Sea in the 13th Century BC. The Suez region was geographically different from what we know it as of today. Wadi Tamlat Canal which linked the Nile with Red Sea was the first and very early version of the Suez Canal (Prasad 1977); which opened recently on 17 November 1869. The annexation of the Red Sea and Mediterranean was a historical event of the greatest importance. The opening of the Suez Canal had a decisive influence on the commercial history of the world. However Wadi Tamlat Canal was an irrigation channel navigable

only at flood period and most of the time it was neglected. So in the case of Romans travel not only was fraught with hardship; it was expensive. We believe travel through water is easy, but not at all-water route to the Malabar from Rome (Verma 2011). During the early ages, and indeed in later periods, the northern part of the Red Sea was considered effective barrier which stemmed Roman aggression or connection with Indian Ocean ports and the Suez region was considered the natural boundaries of Rome's expansion. Thus there is no record that the Romans wished to explore the southern approach of the Red Sea leading to the ports of the Arabian Sea. If there was connection between these seas, the Romans may try to establish control of the Indian Ocean ports, and directly influence India's destiny. The controls of the Indian Ocean by a foreign power undoubtedly help to change India's maritime structure. But there are no historical records to prove the Roman's power who claimed the monopoly of using the Indian seas to their own advantage. The historians were content to simply call Arabians, Africans and Europeans "Romans or Greek" and didn't bother to denote tribe, nationality or even their ports of origin. The biggest challenges that Roman sailors faced were geographical barriers such as mountains or deserts or oceans which limited their movement. Now we can conclude that nature has separated Rome from the trade scenario because it is clear that Indian Ocean was 'land-locked' and it is true that Rome was separated from it, if they like to travel through desert routes they were blocked by the Persians, therefore, have not their monopoly on the history of the Malabar spice trade.

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