

### **Ancient map of South Asia**

The Indian chapter (VI.56-106) of "Natural History" by Pliny the Elder is not so popular in indological studies as Arrian's "Indike" or Strabo's "Geography". It does not contain any picturesque scenes, any vivid descriptions of exotic animals or peculiar customs of Indians. The Roman geographer gives mainly dry lists of countries and peoples (*locorum nuda nomina* - III.I). It is not easy to find any system in these endless enumerations - and modern scholars think even, that there is not such a system at all. Pliny's geography is regarded as a chaotic and uncritical compilation from various sources. According to the late Prof. P.H.L.Eggermont<sup>1</sup>, it is possible to speak only about "pseudo-geography". We'll try to refute this statement and to show, that "Natural Geography" is a valuable source to reconstruct the map of ancient India.

It is important to take into consideration two points: 1) Pliny used the works of Hellenistic authors (*auctoribus Graecis* - VI.58); 2) the Greeks had at their disposal Indian oral sources of information. So it is necessary to reconstruct the Greek original of the Latin toponymic or ethnic names. And the latter is to be compared with the forms met in vernacular languages of Ancient India, i.e. in local (Prakrit) dialects.

The composition of the chapter is not a bit chaotic one: the first part (VI.61-63) contains itinerary from Punjab to the mouth of the Ganges, the second one (VI.64-78) - the above mentioned lists of Indian peoples, the third one (VI.80-106) is devoted to the description of

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<sup>1</sup> P.H.L.Eggermont, *Alexander's campaigns in Sind and Baluchistan...*, Leuven, 1975. p.164

Taprobana (Lanka) and navigation in Indian Ocean between South India and the Mediterranean area. The sources of information, used for every part were different ones. Up to the river Sutlej the way was measured by the companions of Alexander the Great (Alexandri Magni comites, *itinerum eius mensores* - VI.59, 61). The measurements from that point and up to the mouth of the Ganges were made for his successor Seleucus Nicator by the ambassadors (e.g. famous Megasthenes) sent to the city of Pataliputra (*reliqua inde Seleuco Nicatori peragrata sunt* - VI.63). The maritime trade with South Indian rulers Keralaputra and Pandya (Pliny's *Caelobothras, Pandion* - VI.105) flourished from the Augustan times - Pliny used here quite recent information, acquired through some merchants and navigators. The central part of the chapter is especially interesting for indological studies. Its sources are not clear, but A.Dihle<sup>2</sup> was sure, that they belonged to the Early Hellenistic Period.

The starting point for the Pliny's enumeration of the Indian peoples is again the North-West frontiers of the country, the mountains of Hindukush (Hemodus), inhabited by the tribes of Isari, Cosiri and Izi (VI.64). Cosiri (Casiri) were mentioned earlier (VI.55) as the people of Central Asia, neighbouring to Phocari (Tokharians, *Toῡαροι*, skr. Tukhara) and Thuni (Chineses, *Θιναι*, skr. Cina). Casiri were regarded as "Indians" (*iam Indorum*), but not civilized ones, because they practised cannibalism (*humanis corporibus vescuntur*). This tribe occupied the central part of Hindukush, near the pass between India and "Scythia" - the nomads went regularly through this pass (*nomades quoque Indiae vagantur huc* -

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<sup>2</sup> A.Dihle, *Die entdeckungsgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen des Indienhandels der römischen Kaiserzeit//Aufstieg und Niedergang der*

VI.55). Identification of Casiri/Cosiri is uncertain, but they are to be compared with Prakrit Kasira (skr. Khasira - Mahabharata, Vulgata, VI.10.66: khasirasca tukharasca; Matsya-purana 114.34, Markandeya-purana 57.34: cinascaiva tusarasca bahula bahyato narah). The tribe is to be localized near the modern Nuristan (kafiristan), where even today the nomads cross Hindukush on their way to India.

The next name Izi may be compared with Yidga-speaking population of Chitral. So the tribes are enumerated in the direction of Himalayas (Imaus) - i.e. to the North-East. We can guess only, that unidentified tribe of Isari occupied the Southern part of Hindukush.

To the tribes of Himalayas Pliny gives the name Chiratosagi. Without any doubt Chirato here corresponds to the Indian name Kirata, denoting Himalaya mountaineers. In the eastern part of Himalayas, where the Blessed One Sakyamuni was born, lived the famous clan of the Sakyas (Pali:Sakya, Prakrit:Sakkia), corresponding to Latin -sagi.

Then follows the region bordered by the Eastern Himalayas, the Bay of Bengal and the Gangetic delta. According to Pliny, it was inhabited by Maccocalingae, "nearest to the Ocean" (mari proximi). To the North from them the tribe of Malli was situated - close to the "mountain Mallus". This tribe (Malla) and the mountain of that name (Mallagiri) are frequently met in the legends about the life and Nirvana of the Lord Buddha Sakyamuni (Jataka IV.438, 439, Malalasekara DPPN s.v.). In any case the territory of Maccocalingae is identical with modern Bangladesh (ancient Bango or Vanga). But interpretation of the name is uncertain. In the MSS of "Natural History" "C" is often confused with "G" (e.g.

Calinga/Galinga, bragmanae/bracmanae etc). Perhaps in this case too we may assume Maggo (Greek Μαγγο). But double γ in Greek is pronounced as "ng". In the ancient dialects of Eastern India the sounds "b" and "v" were confused with "m" and we'll see further on that an anonymous Indian informant pronounced Pulinda as Molinda. If this reasoning is acceptable, Pliny's Maccocalingae represent skr. Vangakalinga, met several times in Mahabharata (e.g. VII.10.15; VI.10.46, cf. VIII.12.59;49.79). The Roman geographer gives precise definition of this locality: "the river Ganges is the boundary of this region" (VI.64: finisque tractus eius Ganges).

Immediately his itinerary transcends this limit, going to the South. On the coast of the Bay of Bengal was situated the country of Kalingas. According to Pliny, the king of this race (Calingarum - VI.65) has 60 000 infantry, 1 000 cavalry and 700 elephants. But the next monarch is even mightier, he has 4 000 cavalry, 4 000 elephants and 50 000 infantry. He rules over the "spacious island" in the river (insula... magnae amplitudinis), containing a single race named the Modogalinga (gentem continens unam nomine Modogalinga). The term "insula" is misleading - it is difficult to imagine an island in the river so densely populated. Perhaps it was result of interpreters mistake: skr. dvipa (Prakrit dipa) denotes not only "island", but also a country between two rivers (e.g. Kurudvipa - "the land of the Kurus", cf. Brahmanda-purana 53.140: dvirapastvat smrto dvipah). The second element of ethnic name - Galinga is obviously with Kalinga identical. The first element (Modo) is more difficult to interpret. Latin "o" not rarely stands for Indian "u" (e.g. in the words: Pataliputra - Παλιβοθρα, Candragupta - Σανδροκοιτιος,

pulinda - molinda etc.). So Indian original for modo must be mudu. I agree with J. Filliozat<sup>3</sup>, that Latin form Modogalinga may be reconstructed as Mudukalinga. The word mudu in Telugu language means "three". Mudukalinga is nothing but skr. Trikalinga, i.e. Telugu-speaking population of Andhra Pradesh, or Telingana. So the "spacious island" of Modogalinga race is Andhra kingdom between Godavari and Krishna rivers.

Next follows (VI.67) the long list of peoples: "beyond it are situated the Modubae, the Molindae...the Modressae,... the Calissae, Sasuri, Passalae, Colobae, Orumcolae, Abali and Thalutae". The first two names are identical with skr. Mutiba and Pulinda, the neighbours of Andhra (cf. Aitareya Brahmana VII.18: andhrah pulinda mutibah and also andhrapalida in Asokan XIII RE). The series goes on from Andhra to the North, after Molindae follow Modressae. They are not to be identified with Madra - famous tribe of Punjab. There was another tribe - Madraka, mentioned in Mahabharata (xii.200.39) among the races of Deccan: daksinapathajanmanah sarve... andhrakah... pulindah... madrakaih saha.

The next pair in the given list: Calissae and Sasuri. If the source of information was connected with the eastern regions of India (like Andhra, forming the starting point of this series), we must take into consideration some phonetic peculiarities of the local dialects. Kalinga Edicts of Asoka contain the form pulisa, corresponding to skr. purusa. By analogy we can expect Prakrit kalisa (Latin Calissa) from skr. Karusa. Karusa (or Karusa) is the tribe well attested in Mahabharata and located in the modern district Rewa, to the South of Prayaga. Their neighbours were Surasena (Prakrit Surasena) with the capital in the city of

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<sup>3</sup> Plin l'ancien, Histoire Naturelle, Livre VI, P.1980, p.97

Mathura. They are to be compared with Sasuri, mentioned by Pliny (cf. transposition of the syllables in Prakrit: Varanasi/Vanarasi etc).

In the next pair - Passalae and Colobae - the first one is identical with the Pancalae in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Pancalae are usually associated with the Kurus. The Prakrit form of the word "Kuru race" (Kauravya) is Korabbo. Since we must expect the peculiar features of the Eastern dialects, it would be pronounced as Kolabbo (= Colobae of Pliny the Elder). But if these Colobae = skr. Kauravya, the next name of Orumcolae is to be compared with skr. Uttarakuru. The same transformations we see in Greek Παλιμποθρα, Latin Palibothri from skr. Pataliputra: dropping of the syllable "ta" (cf. AMg.: bori=badari), nasalization of the vowel, "o" instead "u". It is a well known fact, that the word Uttarakuru has two meanings: 1) the mythical people of Trans-Himalaya region, 2) the Northern branch of the Kurus. Orumcolae is a real tribe, situated in the Northern part of Ganga-Yamuna Doab. But the mythical people was also mentioned by the Roman scholar. He cited (VI.55) a certain Amometus, who composed a book about these "Attacores", comparing them with Hyperborei of the Greek mythology.

We can't identify the last pair - Abali and Thalutae - with any degree of certainty. But their location must be somewhere to the North from the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Abali may be compared with Ambara (modern Ambala ? - one more instance of dialectal confusion between "r" and "l"). Many years ago W. Tomaschek in his article for Pauly's Real-Enzyklopaedie proposed to identify Thalutae with skr. Kauluta (i.e. inhabitants of the Kulu valley). I am not capable of explaining, how skr. "k" is changed to Latin "th" (may be through Prakrit "c"? - cf. AMg. Cilaya = kirata; "c" - Greek "θ", as in Cina - Θιναι -Thuni), but

association of Thalutae with the Kulu valley seems to be probable.

After this long list of peoples Pliny comes back to the king of Andhra (Modogalinga) and his enormous army. This passage has an interesting continuation: "But the tribe of Andarae (gens Andarae) is even more powerful (validior), with a great many villages and thirty towns fortified with walls and towers; they furnish their king with 100 000 infantry, 2 000 cavalry and 1 000 elephants, the people of Dardae is very rich in gold". Andara is usually identified with Andhra-Pradesh, but we have arguments to refuse this identification: 1) Andhra was already mentioned under the name Modogalinga (= Trikalinga), 2) It is not easy to deduce Andara from the Prakrit Andha (i.e. Andhra), 3) It would be absurd to mention Dardae - the famous people of Dardistan (North-Western India) as a part of Andhra kingdom, situated in the South-Eastern India. I agree with P.H.L.Eggermont, that Pliny's Andara corresponds to Gandara (skr. Gandhara) in NW India and E Afghanistan. The first letter was dropped out of MSS in the same manner, as in the name of Candragupta, preserved by Plutarch - Ανδροκοτιτος, instead of Σανδροκοτιτος. Gandhara included Dardistan and was actually famous by fortified towns and a lot of villages.

In the Greek literature the kingdoms of Punjab, visited by the troops of Alexander, traditionally were compared with an Empire in the Gangetic basin (Prasii, i.e. skr. Pracya, the "Eastern peoples", or Palibothri - from skr. Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha). Pliny also asserts, that "almost the whole of the peoples of India are surpassed in power and glory by the Prasii" (VI.68). He gives a short description of "their very large and wealthy city of Palibothra" and the army

of their king with 600 000 infantry, 30 000 cavalry and 9 000 elephants.

Then follows (VI.69) an additional remark: "Further up country from these (ab his in interiore situ) are... the Suari, in whose dominion is Mount Maleus upon which shadows fall towards the north in winter and towards the south in summer, for periods of six months alternatively". The last detail shows, that the point in question lies in the South of India, near the equator (only at the equator shadows fall towards the south just six months). Mount Maleus is to be identified with skr. Malaya (Southern part of the Western Ghats, Kerala - cf. Mahamayuri 40: malaye... Keralesu; the name - from Dravidian "Malai", i.e. "mountain"). In the second book of "Natural History" (II.184) Pliny wrote: "There is Mount Maleus in the country of the Indian tribe Oretes (gens Oretum), where the shadows fall towards the north in winter and towards the south in summer". More than hundred years ago Christian Lassen<sup>4</sup> formed a pretty good idea, that Latin expression "gens Oretum" reflects the Greek εθνος ορειτων, i.e. the people of mountaineers". And we should only add, that the last one seems to be translation of the Indian word Malayalam - designation of inhabitants of Kerala region.

The Eastern part of Far South (modern Tamilnadu) is the land of Colas. This name was reproduced by Claudius Ptolemaeus (VII.1.68) as Σωραϊ- without any doubt an original form for Pliny's Suari (cf. Pliny VI.75 Suaratta from Prakrit Sorattha).

After excursus about the southern regions of Kerala and Tamilnadu the author comes back to the Magadhan empire. He says (VI.70), that the river Yamuna flows through the territory of this country (Palibothri)

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<sup>4</sup> Ch.Lassen, Indische Altertumskunde, Bd.2, Bonn, 1849, S.667.



between two towns of Methora (Mathura) and Chrisobora. The second element of the last word represents apparently skr. pura ("town", cf. putra - βοθρα in the name of Pataliputra). The first one may be identified with the ethnicon occurred before: karisa - karusa (cf. purisa - purusa in Asokan inscriptions from Girnar). Pliny used here the source with western dialectal features (in contrast with the previous case: Calissae, cf. Κλεισοβορα, Arrian's "Indike" VIII.5). I suppose as Sanskrit original Karusapura (Prakrit Karisapura and Kalisapura), i.e. "the town of the Karusas", moulded upon such known names as Kalinganagari or Pulindanagara.

This passage was important for Pliny to determine the frontiers of Magadha. The tribe of the Karusas lived at the confluence of the rivers Yamuna and Ganges. So if Yamuna basin between the towns of Methora and Chrisobora belonged to the Palibothri, their kings dominions did not extend Mathura. In any case Indus river was just outside this empire (VI.70 - Indus statim a Prasiolorum gente).

Drifting from the Eastern to the Western part of India, the Latin geographer draws a diagram of the country as a whole. He reckons the distance between the (mouths of) the rivers Indus and Ganges as comprising 2 100 Roman miles (VI.70). The maritime route is sketched from the delta of the Ganges by coasting navigation up to the mouth of the Indus giving all the distances between the sea-ports (with the sum about 3220 miles).

The series of the races of the Western India (VI.73) starts with the same point, where the author made stop before; i.e. from the northern region between the rivers Indus and Ganges, in the foothills of Himalayas, near the Kulu valley. The list contains Caesi, Caetriboni, Siluestres, Megallae, Chrysei, Parasangae and Asmagi. After Latin word Caesi the Greek καισοι can be

reconstructed, which is to be identified with skr. Khasa (Prakrit Khasa) the people of Himachal Pradesh. Caetri may be compared with Catriei in the Latin MSS of Claudius Ptolemaeus (VII.O.64). The Greek original of the latter has Χατριαιιοι, located in the region of Kuruksetra. Siluestres (lit. "the tribes of the jungles", jangala in Bhismaparva 10.3; atavi in Brhatsamhita XIV.29 = boni, skr. vana, vanarastra?) must be placed farther to the south. Vanarastra?).

On firm ground we are with Megallae and Asmagi - skr. Mekala and Asmaka (with characteristic vocalization in both cases: k - g). Mekala was a country near the sources of Narmada river, Asmaka was lying on the banks of Godavari. Pliny (VI.73) says, that the region of Asmagi is abundant in the wild beast-tiger (tigri fera scatentes). This detail is very suitable for Asmakas. Their lineage even was deduced from a certain Kalmasapada (lit. "one with spotted feet"), a cannibal, searching the jungles for human flesh "like tiger for cattle" (vyaghras pasum iva - Mahabharata I.166.36).

Just as for grammarian Panini, the land of Asmakas forms a southern limit of Pliny's geographical horizon. From this point he starts going to the West and North-West. In the middle of the great desert (Thar) is located the tribe of Suri. It is identical with skr. Sura (Prakrit Sura). According to Mahabharata (IX.36.1) Sura lived in the region of Vinasana, in the vicinity of Abhiras (tato vinasanam rajanajagama halayudhah surabhiran prati dvesad yatra nasta sarasvati). The tribe of Abhiras (Αβερια in Periplus of Erythrean Sea, 41) occupied the area near the Great Rann of Kutch, Suras inhabited some place to the North, in western part of Rajasthan.

Brahma-purana (XIX.17) gives enumeration of some "Western peoples": surastra, sura, abhira, arbuda, maruka, malava. Some of them are present also in the "Natural History" Pliny tells: "below these deserts are the Maltaecorae, Singae, Maroae, Rarungae, Masugae (MS versions: Morum, Moruni). These peoples are the inhabitants of the mountains that stretch in a continuous range on the coast of the ocean; they are free people having no kings, and they occupy the mountain slopes with a number of cities". This colourful description looks like the picture of Rajasthan in the Early Medieval times. It is sure, that Malwa and neighbouring regions are meant here.

In the Western dialects "l" was pronounced as "r" (e.g. in Asoka's XIII RE from Girnar: parimda instead of palida/pulinda). The ethnic name of Malava could be transformed into Marava - the people of Maroae in "Natural History". It is well known fact that this tribe was actually "free people having no kings" - in ancient Indian texts it was called Malavagana. The coins of this clan and republic are discovered mostly in the region of Jaipur.

The name of Masugae (Moruni) can be compared with Maruka in the above mentioned list from Brahmapurana. Rarungae correspond to Roruka - the capital of the Sauvira tribe, inhabitants of the Southern part of Sind.

One of the famous races of Rajasthan was the people of Salva (Mahabharata V.54.18). According to Kasika on Panini(IV.I.173), this union included six tribes: Udumbarasa, Tilakhala, Madrakara, Yugandhara, Bhulinga and Saradatta. Two of them Pliny enumerates here (VI.75 and VI.77): Bolingae=Bhulinga and Odonbeorae=Udumbara. It is possible also to identify Madrakara with the above-mentioned people of Malthaecorae.

Pliny mentions also in this region "Capitalia - the highest of the mountains of India". This Capitalia is identical with the Mount Abu (=Arbuda, cf. Brahma-purana about the tribe of Arbuda between Abhira and Maruka). Mount Abu is not actually the highest mountain in India, some mountains in the South are higher, but Greek authors give the name of "India" to the North only, not to the extreme South, or Limyrike (the country of Dravidas).

The route continues farther to the West, where little kingdoms of Oratae and Suarattaratae are located. The latter one is Surastra on Kathiawar peninsula. Pliny says, that local king does not use war elephants (VI.75) In the corresponding passage of Arthasastra is said, that war elephants in Surastra are of bad quality. Northern Kathiawar was occupied by the people of Anarta - may be it is identical with Pliny's Oratae.

But especially interesting in this context seems to be "the fine city Thorax", "guarded by marshy canals which crocodiles, creatures with an insatiable appetite for human flesh, render impassible save by way of a bridge". The name of "Thorax" (Greek Θορακ- or Θωρακ- ?) may be compared with Sanskrit Dvaraka (i.e. Dwarka in the NW part of Surastra). Dvaraka was the capital of Krishna. It was described in Mahabharata (III.16) as a fine city surrounded by canals. Historical Dwarka situated on the ways to Arabia Felix and its richness was caused by the flourishing maritime trade in the last decades B.C.

The mention of "Thorax" reminds Pliny about any other "fine city". The Roman geographer reproduces its name as Automula/ Its description makes it impossible to localize this town in the region of Gujarat (Surastra): "Another town in their country is also highly spoken of, Automula,

which is situated on the coast, at the point of confluence of five rivers and has a celebrated market".

There is no confluence of the five rivers in Surastra, there is not any big river there at all. The author has in mind not Gujarat, but the region of Punjab (literally "the country of five rivers"). The town situated there, at the confluence of five rivers, and famous as a centre of international trade is Multan (Sanskrit Mulashana). We can presume only, that there was a mistake in the Greek text used by Pliny the Elder: the name of the town Mula was amalgamated with the word αὐτο.

Then follows a long list of Indian peoples (VI.76): Derangae, Posingae, Butae, Gogoraei, Umbrae, Nereae, Brangosi, Nobundae, Cocondae, Nesei, Palatitae, Salobriasae, Orostrae, "the last people being adjacent to the island of Patala". This remark makes it evident, that enumeration goes in direction from Multan up to the mouths of the Indus.

The second list includes the peoples: Mathoae, Bolingae, Gallitalutae, Dimuri, Megari, Ardabae, Mesae, Abisari, Silae. This time direction is given by Pliny himself: "from the same point onward the tribes dwelling on the Indus - our enumeration proceeding up stream". Some of the names can be identified: Mathoae - Μαθαῖ (Arrian, Indika, 4) - Prakrit Maccha - Sanskrit Matsya, Bolingae = Bhulinga etc. At the end of the list we find the tribe of Abisari (Sanskrit Abhisara). They were inhabitants of Kashmir region and their king Abisares was mentioned many times by the Greek writers in connection with Indian expedition of Alexander the Great.

The last list of the peoples includes the well-known names of the towns :Taxila, Peucolitae (Puskalavati), the capital of the tribe of Asini named by Alexander "Bucephala" , founded to be a burial-place of his horse

etc. So the Roman geographer comes back to the same point, he started his description of India with.

The next passage about the island of Taprobana begins with the information derived from the works by Megasthenes and Alexander's companion Onesicritus. And Pliny adds an interesting remark: "so far the facts stated have been recorded by the early writers" (*hactenus a priscis memorata*). Thereafter he continues with the recent information, quoting one of his contemporaries visited Ceylon "during the principate of Claudius". "The facts recorded by the early writers" were not improved by modern traveller or mixed with the reports made by the latter. Contemporaries could give only some additions to the established tradition formed by earlier scholars.

This distinctive feature of the "Natural History" is to be demonstrated in the description of India too. In the last part of the Indian Chapter (VI.104-105) Pliny reproduces the facts acquired by navigators of the I c. A.D., at the peak of Indo-Roman trade. But such an information was not included in the core of his Indian Chapter - Pliny used there quite different sources: the works written by the companions of Alexander the Great and by the Greek ambassadors sent to the Indian court in the Early Hellenistic period.

The core of Indian Chapter (VI.64-78) seems to be homogenous. Its distinctive features are the lists of Indian tribes and also pieces of information about military forces of the local kings (every time following one and the same scheme: the number of infantry, cavalry and elephants). This information is one-sided: the author shows no interest in Indian strategy or customs, military equipment or fortifications.

The lists of the peoples are present also in other chapters of "Natural History". But this statistics of

Indian armies is unique. Such a characteristic detail makes it possible to suppose, that the whole passage was composed on the base of a single source.

At the very beginning of his book on Geography (III.1) Pliny himself tells us about his manner to write a scholarly work. He made a selection from various books on particular topic and based his own research on the work, he considered especially reliable one. Some details only he added from other sources.

Geography of India is described by Pliny with remarkable accuracy. The German philologists of the last century tried to find in this text the traces of many sources, but without any success. If Pliny himself could compose it as a kind of mosaic, we must presume, that he was an excellent specialist on India - but he was not!

Pliny (VII.58) names two Greek writers, which were for him the best authorities on India: Megasthenes and a certain Dionysius, "sent by Philadelphus". Some scholars thought, Pliny's description of India was based mainly on Megasthenes' "Indika". We can't agree with this hypothesis. Some short quotations from Megasthenes the Roman scholar actually has - and every time we can find corresponding passages in the works of other ancient writers, by which Megasthenes was cited: Strabo, Arrian, Diodor. But the main part of Pliny's Chapter on India with above mentioned lists of peoples and enumerations of military forces is unique.

Some peoples of India were mentioned by both: Megasthenes and Pliny the Elder. And we can note, that they give different spelling of their names. Quoting from Megasthenes, Pliny gives the name of Himalayan mountaineers (kirata) as Sciritas. But in the general description of Indian tribes, we analysed on previous pages, he uses quite different form - Chirato and was not

able to recognise them as the same people. So he gives a sketch of Indian map following some other work, not Megasthenes.

We may suppose that this source of information could be above-mentioned Dionysius. The official character of the latter's diplomatic mission to India can explain the distinctive features of the text. The author's attention was focussed on ethnic and political geography of India - not on physical one. The work by Dionysius was more an official report, than literary production.

The statement, that we are not informed about this person, Dionysius, is not true. The famous astronomer Claudius Ptolemy cites many times his book and his observations on planets (Ptol. Synt. IX.168, 169, 170, 187, X.236, XI.263). These astronomical observations were made between the dates 272 and 240 B.C. So his scholarly activity coincides with the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus and his son. Dionysius was a court astronomer and invented a new era, starting from 285 B.C. (date of Philadelphus' coronation)/

The last date cited from Dionysius by Claudius Ptolemy, is 240 B.C. So the work by Dionysius was published in the 30-ths of the III c. D.C. If he was active as a scholar from the 70-ths of the same century, we can give approximate dates of his life as 300 - 230 B.C. It is more likely, that he was sent as ambassador to the court of Asoka Maurya, because during the reign of his father Bindusara he was too young.

But the diplomatic contacts between India and Ptolemaic Egypt could be established only after the II Syrian war was ended (253 B.C.). Philadelphus died in 246 B.C. So the date of his embassy to India may be established around 250 B.C. May be it was Ptolemy's



answer to Asokan mission, mentioned in his edicts and dated by the same period.

An official report by Dionysius was preserved in Alexandria and used by Pliny. May be, it was the main source for Roman scholar to compose the Indian chapter of his "Natural History".

In the middle of the III c. B.C. an Egyptian amassador had more reliable sources of information, than Megasthenes or companions of Alexander the Great. Two generations of the Greeks lived already in the dominions of Indian king Dionysius could meet Greek merchants, which had information about real geography of the country, not about fabulous creatures.

So Pliny gives us a rare chance to reconstruct the political situation in India in the III c. B.C. The political map was marked by the incontestable hegemony of the Magadhan king, whose dominions were the whole Ganga basin. But the Greek writer of the early Hellenistic age mentions also some other mighty kings: those of Kalinga and Trikalinga (Andhra), Mekala and Asmaka, Gandhara and Punjab (Mulasthana), Surastra etc., as well as autonomous tribes inhabiting the lands of modern Rajasthan. This information preserved by Latin geographer, makes it possible to reconsider the nature of the so-called all-Indian empire. Pliny knows Magadhan hegemony, but he has no idea about any "Imperial unity".

tribe mountains, forming the SE boundary of the great desert, are inhabited by the autonomous tribes ("free peoples having no kings" - *incolae liberi et regum expertes*, VI.74), i.e. ganas and sanghas, like Malavagana (Pliny's Maroae ?).

Next come Suarattaratae (skr.Saurashtra, Prakrit Sorattha) and Odonbaeores (skr. Udumbara) in the Kathiawar peninsula, Gujarat. Pliny says (VI.75), that

the local king has a large force of infantry, but does not keep elephants. It is worth remembering, that according to Arhasastra (II.5.15-16) the military elephants were very bad in that part of India. The Latin geographer mentions here also the "fine city" Thorax, guarded by canals - may be famous Dvaraka (Dwarka), the birth-place of the Lord Krishna.

He compares this city with another one - Automula, which is "situated at the point of confluence of five rivers and has a celebrated market". It is impossible to find such a place on a map of Gujarat; - the region of Punjab (lit. "the country of five rivers") is apparently meant. At the point of confluence of these rivers the city of Multan (ancient Mula-sthana) is situated. We can only guess, that the Indian toponym Mula ("sthana" is "place") and the Greek word *αυτο* were merged.

This hypothesis is corroborated by two lists of tribes, which follow immediately. The first one begins with the Southern Punjab and contains ethnic names of the region of Sind - up to the delta of Indus (with the island of Patala - VI.76). The second one (VI.77) goes just from the same point (from the city of Multan), but goes on in the opposite direction, it enumerates the nations proceeding up stream (*adverso eo scandente*). At the end of the last series we find many places well known from the Greek writings about Alexander the Great: the city of Taxila (skr. Taksasila, Pali Takhasila), the city of Peucolitae (skr. Puskalavati, Pali Pukkalavati) and Bucephala - the town, built by Alexander in honour of his beloved horse. So the Roman scholar comes back to the region, his description of India started with.

"Natural History" contains a valuable report on the geography of Ancient India. We can't of course identify all the tribes mentioned by the author (and can't even

hope, that all the corresponding names are preserved in Indian texts). But Pliny the Elder apparently does not give any "pseudo-geography", he sketches the map of the country with remarkable accuracy. Being free from serious discrepancies, this drawing goes back to some anonymous Hellenistic source. The distribution of ethnic groups on this map resembles the picture, reconstructed from the literary documents in Sanskrit and Pali and from the mediaeval ethnographical records. The last but not least, this Latin book makes it possible to see in a different light some characteristics of Indian political history.