

THE

HISTORY OF SUMATRA

Situation—Name—General Description of the Country, its Mountains, Lakes, and Rivers—Air and Meteors—Monsoons, and Land and Sea-Breezes—Minerals and Fossils—Volcanos—Earthquakes—Surfs and Tides.

IF antiquity holds up to us some models, in different arts and sciences, which have been found inimitable; the moderns, on the other hand, have carried their inventions and improvements, in a variety of instances, to an extent and a degree of perfection, of which the former could entertain no ideas. Among those discoveries in which we have stept so far beyond our masters, there is none more striking, or more eminently useful, than the means which the ingenuity of some, and the experience of others, have taught mankind, of determining with certainty and precision the relative situation of the various countries of the earth. What was formerly the subject of mere conjecture, or at best of vague and arbitrary computation, is now the clear result of settled rule, founded upon principles demonstratively just. It only remains for the liberality of princes and states, and the persevering industry of navigators and travellers, to effect the application of these means to their proper end, by continuing to ascertain the unknown and uncertain positions of all the parts of the world, which the barriers of nature will allow the skill and industry of man to approach.

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| Situation of the island. | <p>SUMATRA, the subject of the present work, is an extensive island in the East Indies, the most western of those which may be termed the Malayan Archipelago, and constituting its boundary on that side. The equator divides it obliquely, its general direction being north-west and south-east, into almost equal parts; the one extremity lying in five degrees thirty-three minutes north, and the other, in five degrees fifty-six minutes south latitude. In respect to relative position, its northern point stretches into the bay of Bengal; its south-west coast is exposed to the great Indian ocean; towards the south it is separated by the straits of Sunda from the island of Java; on the east, by the commencement of the Eastern and China seas, from Borneo and other islands; and on the north-east, by the straits of <i>Malacca</i>, from the peninsula of <i>Malayo</i>, to which, according to a tradition noticed by the Portuguese historians, it is supposed to have been anciently united.</p> |
| Latitude. | |
| Longitude. | <p>The only point of the island whose longitude has been settled by actual observation, is Fort Marlborough, near Bencoolen, the principal English settlement, standing in three degrees forty-six minutes of south latitude. From eclipses of Jupiter's satellites observed in June 1769, preparatory to an observation of the transit of the planet Venus over the sun's disc, Mr. Robert Nairne calculated its longitude to be 101° 42' 45"; which was afterwards corrected by the Astronomer Royal to 102° east of Greenwich. The situation of <i>Achin</i> Head is pretty accurately fixed by computation at 95° 34'; and longitudes of places in the straits of Sunda are well ascertained by the short runs from Batavia, which city has the advantage of an observatory. By the general use of chronometers in latter times, the means have been afforded of determining the positions of many prominent points both on the eastern and western coasts, by which the map of the island has been considerably improved: but particular surveys, such as those of the bays and islets from <i>Batang-kapas</i> to <i>Padang</i>, made with great ability by Captain (now Lt. Col.) John Macdonald; of the coast from <i>Priaman</i> to the islands off <i>Achin</i> by Capt. George Robertson; and of <i>Siak</i> River by Mr. Francis Lynch, are much wanted; and the interior of the country is still very imperfectly known. From sketches of the routes of Mr. Charles Campbell and of Lieut. Hastings Dare, I have been enabled to delineate the principal features of the <i>Sarampei</i>, <i>Suñgei</i> <i>Tenang</i></p> |
| Map. | |

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Tenang and *Korinchi* countries, inland of *Ipu*, *Moco-Moco*, and *Indrapura*; and advantage has been taken of all other information that could be procured. For the general materials from which the map is constructed, I am chiefly indebted to the kindness of my friend, the late Mr. Alexander Dalrymple, whose indefatigable labours during a long life, have contributed more than those of any other person to the improvement of Indian Hydrography. It may be proper to observe, that the map of Sumatra, to be found in the fifth volume of Valentyn's great work, is so extremely incorrect, even in regard to those parts immediately subject to the Dutch government, as to be quite useless.

Notwithstanding the obvious situation of this island, in the direct track from the ports of India to the spice islands and to China, it seems to have been unknown to the Greek and Roman geographers, whose information or conjectures carried them no farther than *Selan-dib* or Ceylon, which has claims to be considered as their *Taprobane*; although, during the middle ages, that celebrated name was almost uniformly applied to Sumatra. The single circumstance, indeed, of the latter being intersected by the equator (as *Taprobane* was said to be) is sufficient to justify the doubts of those who were disinclined to apply it to the former; and whether in fact the obscure and contradictory descriptions given by Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Pliny, and Ptolemy, belonged to any actual place, however imperfectly known; or whether, observing that a number of rare and valuable commodities were brought from an island or islands in the supposed extremity of the East, they might have been led to give place in their charts to one of vast extent, which should stand as the representative of the whole, is a question not to be hastily decided.

The idea of Sumatra being the country of *Ophir*, whither Solomon sent his fleets for cargoes of gold and ivory, rather than to the coast of *Sofala*, or other part of Africa, is too vague, and the subject wrapt in a veil of too remote antiquity, to allow of satisfactory discussion; and I shall only observe, that no inference can be drawn from the name of *Ophir* found in maps, as belonging to a mountain in this island and to another in the peninsula; these having been applied to them by European navigators, and the word being unknown to the natives.

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Until the discovery of the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope, the identity of this island as described or alluded to by writers, is often equivocal, or to be inferred only from corresponding circumstances.

Arabian travellers. The first of the two Arabian travellers of the ninth century, the account of whose voyages to India and China was translated by Renaudot from a manuscript written about the year 1173, speaks of a large island called *Ramni*, in the track between *Sarandib* and *Sin* (or China), that from the similarity of productions has been generally supposed to mean Sumatra; and this probability is strengthened by a circumstance I believe not hitherto noticed by commentators. It is said to divide the sea of *Herkend*, or Indian ocean, from the sea of *Sheluhet* (*Salahet* in Edrisi), and *Salát* being the Malayan term both for a strait in general, and for the well-known passage within the island of *Singapura* in particular, this may be fairly presumed to refer to the straits of Malacca.

Edrisi. *Edrisi*, improperly called the Nubian geographer, who dedicated his work to Roger, king of Sicily, in the middle of the twelfth century, describes the same island, in the first climate, by the name of *Al-Rami*; but the particulars so nearly correspond with those given by the Arabian traveller, as to shew that the one account was borrowed from the other. He, very erroneously, however, makes the distance between *Sarandib* and that island to be no more than three days' sail, instead of fifteen. The island of *Soborma*, which he places in the same climate, is evidently *Borneo*, and the two passages leading to it, are the straits of Malacca and of Sunda. What is mentioned of *Sumandar*, in the second climate, has no relation whatever to Sumatra, although from the name we are led to expect it.

Marco Polo. MARCO POLO, the celebrated Venetian traveller of the thirteenth century, is the first European who speaks of this island, but under the appellation of *Java minor*, which he gave to it by a sort of analogy, having forgotten, or not having learned from the natives, its appropriate name. His relation, though for a long time undervalued, and by many considered as a romantic tale, and liable as it is to the charge of errors and

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and omissions, with some improbabilities, possesses, notwithstanding, strong internal evidence of genuineness and good faith. Containing few dates, the exact period of his visit to Sumatra cannot be ascertained, but as he returned to Venice in 1295, and possibly five years might have elapsed in his subsequent tedious voyages and journeys by Ceylon, the Karnatick, Malabar, Guzerat, Persia, the shores of the Caspian and Euxine, to Genoa (in a prison at which place he is said to have dictated his narrative), we may venture to refer it to the year 1290.

Taking his departure, with a considerable equipment, from a southern port of China, which he (or his transcriber) named *Zaitum*, they proceeded to *Ziamba* (*Tsiampa* or *Champa*, adjoining to the southern part of *Cochin-china*) which he had previously visited in 1280, being then in the service of the emperor *Kublai Khan*. From thence, he says, to the island of *Java major* is a course of fifteen hundred miles, but it is evident that he speaks of it only from the information of others, and not as an eye-witness; nor is it probable that the expedition should have deviated so far from its proper route. He states truly that it is a mart for spices, and much frequented by traders from the southern provinces of China. He then mentions in succession the small uninhabited islands of *Sondur* and *Condur* (perhaps *Pulo Condore*); the province of *Boëach* otherwise *Lochac* (apparently *Camboja*, near to which *Condore* is situated); the island of *Petan* (either *Patani* or *Pahang* in the peninsula), the passage to which, from *Boëach*, is across a gulf (that of *Siam*); and the kingdom called *Malaiur* in the Italian, and *Maletur* in the Latin version, which we can scarcely doubt to be the *Malayan* kingdom of *Singapura*, at the extremity of the peninsula, or *Malacca*, then beginning to flourish. It is not, however, asserted that he touched at all these places, nor does he seem to speak from personal knowledge, until his arrival at *Java minor* (as he calls it) or Sumatra. This island, lying in a south-eastern direction from *Petan* (if he does not rather mean from *Malaiur*, the place last mentioned) he expressly says he visited, and describes it as being in circumference two thousand miles (not very wide of the truth in a matter so vague), extending to the southward so far as to render the polar star invisible, and divided into eight kingdoms, two of which he did not see,
and

and the six others he enumerates as follows: *Ferlech*, which I apprehend to be *Parlak*, at the eastern extremity of the northern coast, where they were likely to have first made the land. Here he says the people in general were idolaters; but the Saracen merchants who frequented the place had converted to the faith of Mahomet the inhabitants of the towns, whilst those of the mountains lived like beasts, and were in the practice of eating human flesh. *Basma* or *Basman*: this nearly approaches in sound to *Pasaman* on the western coast, but I should be more inclined to refer it to *Pasē* (by the Portuguese written *Paçem*) on the northern. The manners of the people here, as in the other kingdoms, are represented as savage; and such they might well appear to one who had long resided in China. Wild elephants are mentioned, and the rhinoceros is well described. *Samara*: this I suppose to be *Samar-lañga*, likewise on the northern coast, and noted for its bay. Here, he says, the expedition, consisting of two thousand persons, was constrained to remain five months, waiting the change of the monsoon; and being apprehensive of injury from the barbarous natives, they secured themselves, by means of a deep ditch, on the land side, with its extremities embracing the port, and strengthened by bulwarks of timber. With provisions they were supplied in abundance, particularly the finest fish. There is no wheat, and the people live on rice. They are without vines, but extract an excellent liquor from trees of the palm kind, by cutting off a branch, and applying to it a vessel, which is filled in the course of a day and night. A description is then given of the Indian or coco-nut. *Dragoian*, a name bearing some, though not much resemblance to *Indra-giri*, on the eastern coast; but I doubt his having proceeded so far to the southward as that river. The customs of the natives are painted as still more atrocious in this district. When any of them are afflicted with disorders pronounced by their magicians to be incurable, their relations cause them to be suffocated, and then dress and eat their flesh; justifying the practice by this argument, that if it were suffered to corrupt and breed worms, these must presently perish, and by their deaths subject the soul of the deceased to great torments. They also kill and devour such strangers caught amongst them as cannot pay a ransom. *Lambri* might be presumed a corruption of *Jambi*, but the circumstances related do not justify the analogy. It is said to produce camphor, which is not found
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to the southward of the equinoctial line; and also *verzino*, or red-wood, (though I suspect *benzuin* to be the word intended), together with a plant which he names *birci*, supposed to be the *bakam* of the Arabs, or sappan wood of the eastern islands, the seeds of which he carried with him to Venice. In the mountainous parts were men with tails a palm long; also the rhinoceros, and other wild animals. Lastly, *Fanfur* or *Fansur*, which corresponds better to *Campar* than to the island of *Panchur*, which some have supposed it. Here the finest camphor was produced, equal in value to its weight in gold. The inhabitants live on rice, and draw liquor from certain trees, in the manner before described. There are likewise trees that yield a species of meal. They are of a large size, have a thin bark, under which is a hard wood about three inches in thickness, and within this the pith, from which, by means of steeping and straining it, the meal (or sago) is procured, of which he had often eaten with satisfaction. Each of these kingdoms is said to have had its peculiar language. Departing from *Lambri*, and steering northward from *Java minor*, one hundred and fifty miles, they reached a small island named *Necuram* or *Norcueran* (probably *Nancowry*, one of the *Nicobars*), and afterwards an island named *Angaman* (*Andaman*), from whence steering to the southward of west a thousand miles, they arrived at that of *Zeilan* or *Seilam*, one of the most considerable in the world.—The editions consulted are chiefly the Italian of Ramusio, 1583, Latin of Müller, 1671, and French of Bergeron, 1735, varying much from each other in the orthography of proper names.

ODORICUS, a friar, who commenced his travels in 1318, and died at Padua in 1331, had visited many parts of the East. From the southern part of the coast of Coromandel he proceeded by a navigation of twenty days, to a country named *Lamori* (perhaps a corruption of the Arabian *Al-rami*), to the southward of which is another kingdom named *Sumoltra*, and not far from thence a large island named Java. His account, which was delivered orally to the person by whom it was written down, is extremely meagre and unsatisfactory.

MANDEVILLE, who travelled in the fourteenth century, seems to have

have adopted the account of Odoricus, when he says, “Beside the yslé of *Lemery* is another that is clept *Sumobor*; and fast beside, a great yslé clept *Java*.”

N. di Conti. NICOLO DI CONTI, of Venice, returned from his oriental travels in 1449, and communicated to the secretary of Pope Eugenius IV. a much more consistent and satisfactory account of what he had seen, than any of his predecessors. After giving a description of the cinnamon and other productions of *Zeilam*, he says he sailed to a great island named *Sumatra*, called by the ancients *Taprobana*, where he was detained one year. His account of the pepper-plant, of the *durian* fruit, and of the extraordinary customs, now well ascertained, of the *Batech* or *Batta* people, prove him to have been an intelligent observer.

Itinerarium Portugallens. A small work entitled *Itinerarium Portugallensium*, printed at Milan in 1508, after speaking of the island of *Sayla*, says, that to the eastward of this there is another called *Samotra*, which we name *Taprobane*, distant from the city of *Calechut* about three months’ voyage. The information appears to have been obtained from an Indian of *Cranganore*, on the coast of *Malabar*, who visited *Lisbon* in 1501.

Ludovico Bar-thema. LUDOVICO BARTHEMA (*Vartoma*) of *Bologna*, began his travels in 1503, and in 1505, after visiting *Malacca*, which he describes as being the resort of a greater quantity of shipping than any other port in the world, passed over to *Pedir* in *Sumatra*, which he concludes to be *Taprobane*. The productions of the island, he says, were chiefly exported to *Catai* or *China*. From *Sumatra* he proceeded to *Banda* and the *Moluccas*, from thence returned by *Java* and *Malacca* to the west of *India*, and arrived at *Lisbon* in 1508.

Odoardus Bar-bosa. ODOARDUS BARBOSA, of *Lisbon*, who concluded the journal of his voyage in 1516, speaks with much precision of *Sumatra*. He enumerates many places, both upon the coast, and inland, by the names they now bear, among which he considers *Pedir* as the principal; distinguishes between the *Mahometan* inhabitants of the coast and the *Pagans* of the inland

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inland country ; and mentions the extensive trade carried on by the former with *Cambaia* in the west of India.

In the account given by Antonio Pigafetta, the companion of Ferdinando de Magaglianes, of the famous circumnavigatory voyage performed by the Spaniards in the years 1519—22, it is stated, that from their apprehension of falling in with Portuguese ships, they pursued their westerly route from the island of *Timor*, by the *Laut Kidol*, or southern ocean, leaving on their right hand the island of *Zamatra* (written in another part of the journal, *Somatra*) or Taprobana of the ancients. Mention is also made of a native of that island being on board, who served them usefully as an interpreter in many of the places they visited ; and we are here furnished with the earliest specimen of the Malayan language.

Previously, however, to this Spanish navigation of the Indian seas, by the way of South America, the expeditions of the Portuguese round the Cape of Good Hope, had rendered the island well known, both in regard to its local circumstances and the manners of its inhabitants. In a letter from Emanuel king of Portugal to Pope Leo the tenth, dated in 1513, he speaks of the discovery of *Zamatra* by his subjects ; and the writings of Joano de Barros, Castanheda, Osorius, and Maffæus, detail the operations of Diogo Lopez *Sequeira* at *Pedir* and *Pasé* in 1509, and those of the great Affonso d’Albuquerque at the same places, in 1511, immediately before his attack upon Malacca. De Barros also enumerates the names of twenty of the principal places of the island with considerable precision, and observes, that the peninsula or *chersonesus* had the epithet of “ *aurea*” given to it on account of the abundance of gold carried thither from *Monancabo* and *Barros*, countries in the island of *C,amatra*.

Having thus noticed what has been written by persons who actually visited this part of India at an early period, or published from their oral communication by cotemporaries, it will not be thought necessary to multiply authorities by quoting the works of subsequent commentators

tors and geographers, who must have formed their judgments from the same original materials.

Name of Su-
matra.

With respect to the name of Sumatra, we perceive that it was unknown both to the Arabian travellers and to Marco Polo, who indeed was not likely to acquire it from the savage natives with whom he had intercourse. The appellation of *Java* minor, which he gives to the island, seems to have been quite arbitrary, and not grounded upon any authority, European or Oriental, unless we can suppose that he had determined it to be the *Γαλαδία νήσος* of Ptolemy ; but from the other parts of his relation it does not appear that he was acquainted with the work of that great geographer, nor could he have used it with any practical advantage. At all events it could not have led him to the distinction of a greater and a lesser *Java* ; and we may rather conclude, that having visited (or heard of) the great island properly so called, and not being able to learn the real name of another, which from its situation and size might well be regarded as a sister island, he applied the same to both, with the relative epithets of *major* and *minor*. That Ptolemy's *Jaba-dib* or *dio* was intended, however vaguely, for the island of *Java*, cannot be doubted. It must have been known to the Arabian merchants, and he was indefatigable in his inquiries ; but at the same time that they communicated the name, they might be ill qualified to describe its geographical position.

In the rude narrative of Odoricus we perceive the first approach to the modern name in the word *Sumoltra*. Those who immediately followed him write it with a slight, and often inconsistent, variation in the orthography, *Sumotra*, *Samotra*, *Zamatra*, and *Sumatra*. But none of these travellers inform us from whom they learned it ; whether from the natives or from persons who had been in the habits of frequenting it from the continent of India ; which latter I think the more probable. Reland, an able oriental scholar, who directed his attention to the languages of the islands, says it obtains its appellation from a certain high land called *Samadra*, which he supposes to signify in the language of the country, a “large ant;” but in fact there is not any spot so named ; and although there is some resemblance between *semut*, the word for an ant,