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SRĪVIJAYA, YĀVA EN KATĀHA

By
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UITGEGEVEN DOOR HET

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An abridged translation by
R. J. de TOUCHE

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I SRIVIJAYA.
(with map No. 1).

Coeës’ famous works of 1918 are a milestone in historical investigations of the East Indies. He caused the resurrection of the forgotten Malay Empire of the Indies which lasted a short time only, from the end of the 7th century until the end of the 9th century, a period far more important than hitherto appreciated. Coës did not seek a solution of the geographical problem, “which country was meant by the name of Srivijaya.” To the theories of Beal, Groeneveldt, Takakusu, Schlegel and Pelliot, all of whom insisted that Srivijaya must have been located near Palembang, he merely added “more substantial arguments to prove it,” adding “I do not pretend that Palembang has always been its capital.” When, however, Majumdar insists that such a theory is without any solid foundation Coës is not inclined to abandon his opinion about the role of Palembang. Only recently he announced his intention “to submit further arguments regarding his favouring of Palembang……” in a publication of the Journal of the Malayan Branch R. A. S.

The Empire of Palembang did indeed play a great part during the 6th and 7th centuries. In the following paragraph further particulars will be given as to its name. Palembang and west Java situated on the Sunda Straits, the southern entrance gate to the East Indies, and southern passage of the way from the Indies to China—were the most important localities in those centuries.

In the northern part of the Malay archipelago Fou-nan and Cho-p’o dominated the Malay peninsula. They were the northern gates for a great trade route and it was there that they were paramount. With far-sightedness Srivijaya realized in the last quarter of the 7th century that it had to safeguard its sea trade against northern and southern competition by gaining supremacy in the Straits of Malacca. Toward the end of the 7th century it moves its centre of power to Malayu, succeeds completely in its southern strategy, and turns the Straits of Malacca into an integral part of the India-China trade route. By controlling the Peninsula it keeps its northern rivals in check until the end of the 8th century. The only resistance is experienced from Cho-p’o. Only toward the end of the 9th century a third power, San-fo-ts’i, gains complete control over the western part of the Archipelago.

By means of known sources, not based entirely on geographical data, I will attempt to prove where one must look for the capital of Srivijaya. For this purpose, chronology and the dates of sources

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1 Le royaume de Srivijaya, Befeo XVIII.
2 Ibid. p. 3 note 5.
3 BEFEO XXXIII p. 136.
5 BEFEO XXXV p. 380.

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are of supreme importance. Pelliot’s work is very useful, namely, "Deux Itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la Dîn du VIIIe Siècle". Here it should be remembered that maps of those times were not stabilized and geographical differences in them are not shown on our present-day maps of the Archipelago. It has frequently been found that Chinese and Arabs believed the centre line of the Malay Peninsula (except the part where the peninsula joins the continent) to run parallel with Sumatra, from west to east, whereas in reality the centre line runs from northwest to southeast. The wind directions have to be allowed for for identification purposes, as they were based on the above erroneous assumptions. This same error places Java (which lies southeast of Sumatra) more eastward, so that the Chinese even believed it to be to the southeast of Canton, the right position being southwest. The length of journeys varies with the monsoon seasons and the types of ships; for calculating distances such sources are, therefore, of little value.

We read in the Yi-tsing records of the Buddhist Religion (692 A.D.) "travelling from west to east one reaches first P’o-lou-che, then Mo-lo-yegou (Malayu), which is now the Empire of Che-li-fo-che (Srivijaya)". At some other place he mentions: "that the Empire of P’o-lou-che lies to the west of Srivijaya", while the new T’ang annals (618-908 A.D.) state that the western part of the Srivijaya Empire bears the name Lang-p’o-lou-sseu. Possibly Kern’s identification of the names P’o-lou-che or P’o-lousseu is the only correct one; according to native transcription of the name Baros, it is situated on Sumatra’s west coast. Since according to Chinese orientation the west coast of Sumatra would coincide with northwest upon our maps, it must be concluded that Srivijaya or Sumatra must be expected to have been closer to the equator than Baros, possibly even to the south of the equator.

According to this source the capital may have been situated either on the western or the eastern coast of Sumatra. It is more probable that it was on the eastern coast, because of the gradual switching over of the trade route to the Straits of Malacca. For the same reason one must expect it to have been

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1BEFEO 1904.
2Ferrand, Relations de Voyages et Textes Geographiques.
3Pelliot p. 265. I merely specify.
4Takakusu p. 10.
5Chavannes p. 36-37. This work of Yi-tsing’s was also completed in 692 A.D.
6Lang-Lam (Achinese for landscape).
7And not in Malaya, because the Chinese account places Baros not to the west but to the south of Srivijaya. Pelliot (p. 339) places Srivijaya on Sumatra because: "the annals of T’ang prevent us mistaking, politically, Ho-ling or Java for Sriboja; they are never mentioned elsewhere as two empires situated upon one island." Ho-ling is, however, not Java as we will show in the next chapter, but Malaya.

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in middle rather than in south Sumatra. Yi-tsing describes the geographical situation of Srivijaya as being on the east coast of Sumatra (in an account dated 692 A.D., the date of completion of his “records”).

Is it not noteworthy that six centuries later the later report of Kazwini (13th century) still points to the same situation? He states that Sribuza lay at the southern end of the “island” of Lambri.¹ North Sumatra is always called by Arab geographers Lambri, Lamuri, or Rami. Abu Zayd (916 A.D.) also mentions next to Rami the “island” of Sribuza and according to Kazwini this borders on the former. Ibn Sa-id, a contemporary of Kazwini calls the northern “island” Jawa and its capital Lamuri.²

Abdulfida (1273-1331 A.D.) places the city of Fancur (Baros) to the south of the “island” Jawa.³ Abu Zayd, Kazwini, and Abdulfida therefore contradict the T'ang annals and seem more reliable; their opinion coincides with that of Mas-udi (943 A.D.)⁴ in regarding Baros as part of Lambri; Kazwini mentions Sribuza as being on the southern end of Lambri but not Fancur. Kazwini’s statement is identical with that of Yi-tsing that Srivijaya lies to the southeast of Baros and therefore would be situated in middle Sumatra.

If, however, one is guided by Pelliot, who supposes that Lambri is not the name for north Sumatra but for the whole island, (“as we ourselves called the island ‘Samadra’ after its north western province”), one would have to seek Sribuza on the southern end of Sumatra. In that case one may as well let imagination run wild and place the capital in Jambi or better still, Palembang, entirely according to the current theory!

In any case the “records” of Yi-tsing refer to the period after the transfer of Srivijaya to the old country of Malayu, whereof the exact location was not certain. Yi-tsing only mentions: “Malayu is now Srivijaya”. He does not mention that the new Empire had its capital in Malayu. The old “Malayu” which sent, in Yi-tsing’s time (644-5 A.D.), a deputation to China (under the name Mo-lo-yeou) was mentioned in Chinese chronicles a century earlier, as will be seen from the following paragraph. The capital of Malayu, revived five centuries later, was not situated in Srivijaya.

Where was Srivijaya situated before? The sea journey from Tonkin to Nagapattam on the southeast coast of Dekhan took 90 days according to Yi-tsing,⁵ Tonkin to Srivijaya 30 days; Srivijaya

¹Pelliot P. 339. ²Srivijaya p. 71. ³Reinaud, Géogr. d’Aboulfeda II, 2 p. 127. ⁴Ferrand p. 97 “Ramīn—in the neighbourhood of the country of Fanẓūr, famous for its camphor.” ⁵Chavannes p. 110 and 144, where the same distances are cited for the outward journey.
to Malayu 15 days; Malayu to Kedah 15 days; Kedah to Negapatnam 30 days. This account refers to the period before the conquest of Malayu, because Malayu and Srivijaya were mentioned in it as two different Empires, separated from each other by 15 days sea journey.

From another account of this period it appears that the King of Srivijaya (where Yi-tsing remained in 671 A.D. for 6 months coming from Canton and on the way to Nalanda in order to learn Sanscrit) helped him with a ship's passage, where by Yi-tsing could travel to the capital of Malayu. The transfer of Srivijaya must, therefore, have taken place between 621 and 692 A.D. when Srivijaya was already established in Malayu. Very likely this event had taken place between 672 and 685 A.D. during the year that Yi-tsing returned from Nalanda to Srivijaya, because there is no proof that the capital was transferred during the period of his second sojourn (685-692 A.D.).

After going for a few months to China in 689 A.D. to fetch a few assistant writers he returns to the same Srivijaya to complete his "Record" and "Relieux Eminents" in 692 A.D. The inscription on the Kedukan Bukit found at the foot of Bukit Seguntang near Palembang makes it possible to place the then capital of Srivijaya within narrower confines. Chhabra mentions: "Srivijaya is successful in all undertakings and is in a flourishing condition". The connection between this and the wording of the inscription of 683 A.D. is not the year of the founding of Srivijaya in Palembang but the capture of Palembang during that year by Srivijaya with a force of 20,000 men! Coedes formulates his theory as follows: "if the embarkation took place beyond the sea, a journey of 25 days had taken place by a foreign prince accompanied by a group of immigrants (his military force) who unshipped at the mouth of the Musi and reached some by land, others by way of the river, the site of Palembang. After a month (or longer) following their arrival a new power was established, conferring victory, success and riches upon Srivijaya". He, however, doubted this as a romantic interpretation. Two years later he was more inclined to take it for granted and believed that the word "Sriwijayajaya" in the text "may have signified a victory for Sriwijaya". With the geographical picture which I shall unfold, I hope to remove Coedes' last doubts. Srivijaya could only establish itself in Malayu after it had captured the capital Palembang and removed the ruling dynasty from there, 

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1Beal (T. R. A. S. 1881 p. 552) identified Yi-tsing's Kie-tch'a rightly with Kedah.
2Chavannes p. 119.
4See o.m. Krom p. 121.
5BEFEO XXXIII p. 1002 and further.
6BEFEO XXXV p. 380.

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to establish its seat of power elsewhere in the land of Malayu in the north, close to the Straits, which it would henceforth dominate!

The transfer of the capital must have taken place between 683 and 685 A.D. and the warning (3 years later) to the population of Upper Jambi and Banka not to resist the authorities of Srivijaya, must have been issued from the new capital.

From the aforementioned works of Yi-tsing (Rel. Eminents) we gather further geographical indications hitherto generally disregarded. After staying for 2 months in Malayu (671-2 A.D.) he leaves for old Kedah on Malayu’s west coast. As will be seen later, this is the old city of that name close to the present-day Kedah (6° 5' N.), judging from contemporary sun measurements. 1 The direction Malayu—Kedah is opposite to Srivijaya—Malayu, because Yi-tsing says: “I changed the direction in order to go to Kie-tch’a (Kedah)”. As the direction Malayu—Kedah is S.E.—N. W. the direction Srivijaya—Malayu should be N. W.—S. E. in accordance with Yi-tsing’s repeated statements that the route from Tonkin first touched Srivijaya and subsequently Malayu; 2 this part of the journey must have taken place along the other coast of Malayu! As a result of the above conclusions the old Srivijaya must have existed on the east coast of Malayu. Judging from the length of the journeys from Malayu to Srivijaya as well as to Kedah—each 15 days along the coast of the peninsula—we may conclude that old Srivijaya was situated practically upon the same latitude as Kedah, 6° N. 3

Does all this agree with data from known old Chinese chronicles? The new annals of the T’ang dynasty (618-906 A.D.) mention: 4 a sundial of 8’ length casts in Srivijaya at 12 o’clock noon on the day of the summer solstium a shadow southward of 2° 5" length, wherefrom we may conclude that this place of astronomical observation must have been situated on 5° 50’ latitude, 5 I believe approximately near the latitude of Kelantan.

This latest account of the oldest Srivijaya appears to tally geographically with the city mentioned by Yi-tsing in 671-2 A.D.! Pelliot refers 6 to this observation taken literally, as unacceptable” He suspects the possibility of a double error by the chroniclers of the T’ang annals who may have borrowed the observation of a northward shadow during midwinter, though Srivijaya then should have been situated in 6° south latitude—somewhere in Java—which possibility, however, he discounts. 6 Also Barth

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1 See Yava.
2 Pelliot p. 322.
3 That Srivijaya (according to the inscription of Kedukan Bukit) required 25 days for its conquest expedition of 20,000 men to Palembang for a distance which took normally 15 days, is acceptable.
4 Pelliot p. 334.
5 Gerini p. 482.
6 Pelliot p. 333-4.
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and Chavannes thought Srivijaya to be in (west) Java because it took 15 days from Palembang to Java in a southeastern direction and they thought Mo-lo-yeou to be Palembang. Why expect Malayu to be in the prolonged direction of Kedah-Palembang if Yi-tsing states that the direction Malayu-Srivijaya was opposite? Besides, Java was far out of the way of the Tonkin-Nagapattam route. There is nothing inadmissible in my solution! And why should one think of errors when a reasonable solution is at hand from available information, and all this without opposition to other positive data?

There is other information available, which would have disagreed with these astronomical data, if Srivijaya had not been transferred in the meantime. This circumstance has been misleading for those who ignored this historically established transfer. The contradictory statement, however, also comes to us from Yi-tsing. He mentions it in his "Record" (692 A.D.). He says that in the (new) capital where he lived for ten years (and where he was well known) no shadows could be observed from the sundial or man at (mid-summer and mid-winter) 12 o'clock noon. Also the maximum shadows (which happen in a year) north and southward are practically similar. This points to Srivijaya (after its transfer) having been very close to the equator.

Five and a half centuries later Yakut (1224 A.D.) mentions in his Encyclopaedia: "Sribuza (meaning Srivijaya) is an island in the land of the Indies which is situated on the equator".²

Finally I wish to cite Pelliot, who wrote about the material provided by Kia Tan (785-805 A.D.)³ wherein he mentions that after 7 days of journeying from the southeastern coast of Annam a narrow strait is reached, called by the barbarians "Tche", which has a width of 100 li from north to south.⁴ The Straits of Malacca at its narrower part, which Pelliot recognizes in the above, were therefore believed by the Chinese to run from west to east. According to this source the empire of Fo-che or Srivijaya⁵ (a century since transferred) was situated on the south coast of that narrow strait; as I believe, on the east coast of central Sumatra.

The empire of Lo-yue, not yet identified, lay according to this source on the opposite coast in the north. It seems evident that the latter must have existed near the great, wide Johore river,

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¹Takakusu p. 143.
²Srivijaya p. 66-7.
³Pelliot p. 217.
⁴ibid p. 218. This, I believe, is only possible during the N.E. monsoon with a good wind filling the sails. Pelliot says: "this journey was decidedly rapid, with a good wind for the junks".
⁵Vajrabodhi reached this same Fo-che in 717 A.D. in one month's journey from Ceylon (Pelliot p. 336) within the same time therefore that Yi-tsing required to sail from Kedah to Negapattam.

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which was strategically easy to defend. One easily finds a transcrip­tion for the Chinese name of Lo-yue. At the northern mouth of the Johore river one finds a tributary Sungai Seluyut, near Bukit Seluyut. The land cut by this tributary is named Seluyut kana n and Seluyut kiri respectively. The distance from the coast is 20 English miles. Also other geographical data cited by Pelliot from Chinese sources tally with this situation;¹ he himself opined that the empire of Lo-yue included Johore.

According to Kia Tan, Lo-yue was reached from Cambodia after traversing the Gulf of Siam "by traversing a small sea". The new T'ang annals mention that the city of Lo-yue lay 50 li (20-30 klm.) from the seashore. The Sung annals (960-1278 A.D.) state that it lay 15 stages to the south of Tambralinga (identified by Coedes) near Taiya on the Bay of Bandon, and 30 stages from Cho-p'o (Java) which was in its southeast. We may therefore safely conclude that Lo-yue represented the empire of (Se)luyut on the Johore river.² From the reports of Kia Tan we may gather that Srivijaya had no (more) control over this state. Was this an outpost of Cho-p'o (Kedah) which on this side of the Straits attracted the China trade in competition to Srivijaya? We shall presently see that after the trade route was diverted to the Straits of Malacca, a strife for supremacy was continuously waged between the States in these Straits, especially near the southern inlet. Presently Kataha and Srivijaya began to compete, until both States came under one control of this part of the archipelago, first as San-fo-ts'i, and then later as Malayu (end of 12th century).

Are we now in the position to identify the capital of Srivijaya after it had been transferred to Malayu? This capital was very likely situated near one of the large rivers, where shipping was possible far inland. Most likely near the Kampar river, because this is the southern-most river of the three, Rokan, Siak, and Kampar, which flow into the Straits of Malacca from the east coast of Sumatra where the Strait is at its narrowest. Srivijaya must have been situated (according to above sources) on the Straits and also close to the equator.

The local conditions in the marshy Kampar river delta³ justify the assumption that large mud deposits have silted up previous sea surfaces during the period of twelve centuries. The accounts of Sribuza (Srivijaya) in Arab geographers are very apposite in

¹Pelliot p. 232-3.
²I mention for comparison Li-kian for (Se) leukis (Franke), P'o-li for (S)phati(ka) (Pelliot). According to Franke p. 273: "there is nothing unusual in discarding the s or the weakly accentuated se in Chinese". Pelliot refers to yue as an ancient "dental" final p. 237 so that the transcription yut is also accounted for.
³The marsh bush growing on this morass has a depth of 50 klm. inland from the coast. (Tideman, Land en Volk van Bengkalis, T. Kon. Aardr. Gen. 1935 p. 788).
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this relation. Bozorg writes in his Ajaib a-I-Hind (955 A.D.):
"The estuary of Serbuza penetrates for 50 'parasangs'
(200 klm.) into the island. It is a river far wider than the Tigris
at Basra; its waters are fresh. There is no deeper bay (not
penetrating far inland) in the whole island. Tidal influence makes
itself felt at intervals of 12 hours.... Some dwellings are built on
shore, but the majority are floating houses, supported by rafts,
made of timber tied together...." 1 Ibn Sa'id (1208-1274 A.D.):
"its city Sribuza is situated in the middle of the island, where a
gulf penetrates into the island." 2 Abuclid (1273-1331 A.D.):
"its capital is situated in its middle on the estuary of a river." 3
From Arab sources one would conclude that even after the fall
of the last empire it still went on to maintain itself, but this is
doubtful.

For contemporary craft of those times, the Kampar river was
open to shipping up to the capital. The city was easy to defend
owing to the numerous creeks in the river delta, where a large
fleet could hide unobserved. The large number of creeks issuing
into the sea were likewise useful as points of vantage for attacks
and control of the straits.

Very important, too, is the road inland, which must have
existed for centuries (not via Kota Bahru, Payakumbuh, Fort de
Kock and Padang Panjang). This road constituted the connec-
tion with the old port of Priaman, passing through the widest
parts of the Padang highlands (plateau). In this manner Srivi-
jaya was connected with the Straits of Malacca and the Indian
Ocean. The rich produce could be shipped to India as well as
China. A more favourable position could hardly be wished for a
prosperous empire, and it was in every way preferable to any
position on the east coast of Malaya. Indeed, until recently a
lively trade existed between the lands along the Kampar river and
Singapore (before the Emmahaven was completed near Padang)
which was conducted by means of native craft. Downstream,
below the point where the Kampar and Batang Mahat rivers meet,
where the dreaded rapids bating gadang negotiated by Malays are
situated, the lowlands are reached near Kuwo; from here on the
Kampar is suitable for large craft until the port of Pelalawan,
from where merchandise is transhipped to Singapore. Farther
downstream from Kuwo, near Bangkinang, exists an old communi-
cation route with Patapahan on the Siak river 4 constituting a
second way to reach the sea. This is used during the beno, 3 days
after full moon, when the Kampar river gains a great speed in its

1Gerini p. 564.
2Srivijaya p. 70.
3ibid p. 74.
4Van Rijn van Alkemade, Verslag van een reis van Siak naar Pajakombo
T. B. G. 1884 p. 220.
5The connection farther downstream near Taratak Buloh on the Kampar
(near Pekan-baru on the Siak) is preferred nowadays.

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