

Maritime Trade History of Sindh: From Ancient Time till Second CE

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Abstract

There is an ample evidence available in the ancient literatures which inform us about the maritime trade activities of Sindh in ancient times which has been confirmed by archaeological discoveries in Sindh as well as in other parts of the world. The physical setting of Sindh has played a vital role during ancient time in the progress of international trade and commerce, as Sindh lies on the route between the west and the extreme East of the world. The ports of Sindh occupy the strategic location in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, being an important entity of this Ocean, this region has been playing an active role in navigation and maritime trade since the time immemorial. Moreover, the contribution of river Indus would also be worth mentioning with regard to the significance of Sindh as a crucial trading centre of the region. This paper aims to discuss trade activities carried out by the people of ancient Sindh. The classical works of Skylax, Strabo's *Geography*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, a un known Greek merchant's *Periplus of Erythranean Sea*, Ptolemy's *Geography* and many other classical writings has been utilized in this study which enlighten us that the cities of Mohen-jo-Daro and Barbaricon (Modern day Banmbhor) were the main port cities of Sindh. The local and international trade improved the financial stability of the cities which turned into full-size urban centres, evident from the archaeological sites of these cities.

Keywords: Spice route; silk route; barbarican; river indus; hippalus winds; urbanization.

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of human settlements, human beings have been involved in the exchange of goods. With the passage of time the small scale exchange of goods transformed into a large scale foreign trade activity. History informs us that there were two main reasons which helped in the growth and development of foreign trade relations among different areas. First, non-availability of certain articles in the area compelled its people to obtain those commodities from other areas (where they were present in abundance) and second, the improvement in the production techniques resulted in the extra production which required more markets. Thus an extensive system of exchange between the natives of different places and nations started and foreign trade came into being.

Archaeological evidence and ancient literature show that as early in the eighth century BCE human beings were involved in trade activity, both through land and sea. The people of Mesopotamia, Arabia, Phoenicia, Egypt and India were the earliest nations involved in the trade relations. They established land and sea routes, developed cities on the land routes and on coastal line and thus trade routes with a logistical network of pathways and stoppages used for the commercial transport of cargo were developed.

The geographical setting of India has played a vital role in the seaborne trade in ancient times. All the seafaring nations such as Mesopotamians, Arabs, Phoenicians and Egypt have considered this area as the chief sea route for their commercial activities towards the East. For thousands of years India's ports are major nodes in the Indian Ocean trade and beyond. Its ports served as "hinges" and entry ports for voyagers sailing these long Indian Ocean routes (Spodek and Louro, 2007).

Regarding Indian trade activities in ancient times, local ancient literature for example Rig Veda, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas provide ample evidence of seaborne trade of ancient India with her contemporary nations. Throughout India there were numerous trade centres but here Sindh has been selected as a case study.

2. Maritime trade of Sindh

Before reviewing the sea routes and foreign seaborne trade of ancient Sindh with other countries during ancient time, it is necessary to learn about the geopolitical features of Sindh in order to have a better understanding of the effects of geography on the sea route development and seaborne trade.

In ancient times the physical setting of Sindh has played a vital role in the progress of the trade and commerce of the region. The ports of Sindh occupy the strategic location in the Indian Ocean. Owing to this, being an important entity of this Ocean, this region has been playing an active role in navigation and maritime trade since time immemorial. There is hardly any dispute over the maritime legacy of Sindh. A sufficient number of histories (both literary and archaeological) evidences are available that substantiate the ports of Sindh as the world's important 'cosmopolitan maritime arena' in retrospect. The ancient historians, navigators, geographers and travellers of the world acclaimed the ports of Sindh and are witness that this region had been one of the ancient crossroads of the world where indigenous and foreign trade was carried on.

Since the earliest times, this significance of Sindh as one of the most important ports and maritime areas of the world is liable to acknowledge the existence of River Indus on its land. From the earliest known history, River Indus has been playing a vital role in shaping and enhancing the status of its adjoining areas as the centres of commerce and trade. To trace the origin of maritime trade in Sindh, and to estimate the value of this region for foreign maritime traders, it would be pertinent to highlight the history and importance of the River Indus since the ancient times.

2.1 Literary evidences

There are numerous ancient historical sources that provide adequate testimony about geography, natural wealth, navigation and trade of Sindh with reference to river Indus. A few classical texts are being discussed in the subsequent paragraphs to endorse the aforementioned facts.

In ancient times the Indus River was commonly known as the river Sindhu (Khuhro, 1981). In the Sanskrit language Sindhu means 'Ocean'. In fact the land of Sindh derives its name from the river Sindhu. A comparison of River Indus with River Ganges, another one of the most important rivers in this region, reveals a very interesting to note that in the world's oldest knowledge books *Vedas* (principle religious books of the Aryans) the name of River Indus appears more times than the name of River Ganges (The Sindhu World, n.a).

Sindh is mentioned in ancient local and foreign literature by various names. For example in the *Rig-Veda* and in *Parana's* it is referred as the *Sapta Sindhu*¹, a country lying on the west of the Indus River. During Harappan phase Sindh was known as *Meluhha*. Under the foreign rules of Achaemenians and Sarsanians, *Hindush*, *Indos*, *Prasania* and *Patalene*, under Greeks and Bactrians, and *Shakadvipa* under the Scythians. (Khuhro, 1981). In Ramayana it was termed as *Sangama*, in Mahabharata as *Sauvira*, *Sudra* and *Barbara*. In Kautilya's Arthashastra, Sindh is identified as *Prajuna* and *Sauvira*, whereas by Periplus as *Skythia*, *Indoskythia* by Ptolemy, and in Panini's Astradhyayi it has been termed as *Brahmanaka* and *Sauvira* (Lari, 2002).

The Chinese's traveller Hiunen-Tsang refers to Sindh as *Sin-tu* (Khuhro, 1981). Traveler from the Arabia and Persia informs that this subcontinent was composed of two countries Hind [entire ancient India] and Sindh [part of present Pakistan]. In fact the names Hind and Hindu have originated with Sind and Sindhu (Khuhro, 1981). Whereas, Hecataus (c.500 BCE) the Greek geographer called it *Indoi*.²

The ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Ramayana, and the Buddhist Jataka stories supply the sufficient evidences regarding regular maritime trade on the ports of Sindh during ancient times (Rais, 1987). One of the hymns of Rig Veda (c. 1200 – 900 B.C.) describes the natural wealth of river Sindhu in these words:

*“Rich in good steeds in Sindhu,
Rich in cars and robes,
Rich in gold, ' nobly-fashioned,
Rich in ample wealth” (Griffith, 2008)*

In another place, the hymns of Rig Veda commend adoration of Sindhu in these words:

*“Unstoppable, Irreversible, with strong flow, mighty Sindhu!
From mountain and plains,
You bring great expanse of water,
Lightning with a roar,
Like unchained horse,
Bewitching and beautiful Sindhu.
Sindhu is rich in strong horses,
In chariots and cloth of many designs,
Rich in golden ornaments,
Of unmeasured wealth,
The meadows of this land are a feast to the eyes,
Wool is unmatched,
And sweet syrup to drink,
The ultimate in taste” (Griffith, 2008)*

Jatakas, Buddhist sacred Books, also shed light on the marine communication between the South Asia and Babylon (Babiru or Bavera). The said description covers period from 500 BCE to Asokan times. From Jatakas we learn regarding export of horses from Sindh to Benares, via the sea to the Bay of Bengal then up-stream to Benares (Panhwar, 1981) Rhys Davids, the translator of Buddhist sacred books, mentions that sea going merchants availing themselves of monsoons at the beginning of 7 century BCE or perhaps at the end of 8 century BCE, were trading from the ports on the South west coast of the South Asia first from *Suvira* (Sindh) afterwards from *Bupparka* and *Bharukachachha* (Broach) to Babylon. These merchants were mostly Dravidians (Meds and other seamen on Kutch, Sindh and Makran coast) and not Aryans (Panhwar, 1981).

On the other hand, western historical sources also furnish evidences regarding river *Sindhu* (Indus). For example, Skylax³ is one of the earliest writers who provide us information about the river Indus in the account of his exploration voyage down to the Indus. His voyage connected Peshawar with the Red Sea and Egypt, via the Indus and the Arabian Sea. Regarding this expedition Herodotus (c. 450 - 420 B.C.) in his classical work *Histories* recounts:

‘Most part of Asia was discovered by Persian king Darius [c. 522-486 B.C.]. In this region, there is a river called Indus, famous for the production of crocodiles. Darius was eager to know where this Indus empties into the sea. For this purpose, [in 509 B.C.] he sent ships manned by Admiral Scylax and other trusted men. These ships sailed down the river toward the east and the sunrise until they came to the sea; and voyaging over the sea west, they came in the thirtieth month to that place from which the Egyptian king sent some Phoenicians to sail around Libya’ (Godley, 1920).

Similarly, Magasthenes⁴ in *Indika* (c. 300 B.C.) another important historical source provides evidence about the geography of river Indus in the light of maritime activities. Magasthenes writes:

“India, which is in shape quadrilateral, has its eastern as well as its western side bounded by the great sea, but on the north side it is divided by Mount Hemodos from that part of Skythia which is inhabited by those Skythians who are called the Sakai, while the fourth or western side is bounded by the river called the Indus, which is perhaps the largest of all rivers in the world after the Nile” (McCrindle, 1877).

Moreover, Historians of Alexander’s time also provide adequate evidences about this subject of study. One of the important historians of that time, Arrian narrator of the Voyage of Nearchus, the naval chief of Alexander, provides information about the navigation around the Lower Delta of Sindh. While narrating Nearchus Voyage, he says,

“Starting hence, they sailed but a short space, for a bar appeared at the spot where the Indus discharged itself into the sea; the waves too were breaking violently on the coast, and the coast itself was rugged. Then sailing a winding course (along the coast....., They came to anchor at Krokala, a sandy island, From Krokala they sailed, having on their right the hill called by them Eiros, and on the left a low flat island. This island, stretching along the face of the coast, rendered the (intervening) creek narrow. Clearing through this, they came to anchor in commodious harbor, and as it struck Nearchus as spacious and fine, he named it ‘Alexander’s Haven” (Haig, 1984).

According to author of *Periplus of Erythraean Sea*⁵, “Sindhu (the river Indus), is the beginning of India, which empties into the Persian Gulf, separates Persia from India. Sindhu was being one of the best-known market-town of India” (Schoff, 1912)

Strabo (64BCE- 21 BCE) a Greek geographer and historian in his book *Geography* which he wrote during the reign of Roman Emperor Augustus (c. 63 BCE- 14 BCE) describes the importance of river Indus in these words

“All the rivers ... unite in one, the Indus. It is said that there are altogether fifteen considerable rivers which flows into the Indus. After the Indus has been filled by all these rivers...it discharges itself by two mouths into the southern sea and forms the island called Patalene” (Williams, 1906).

2.2 Archaeological evidences

Other than aforementioned literary sources, we also find a number of archaeological evidences that strongly corroborate large scale maritime trade of Sindh. These include seals, crafts, coins, paintings, etc. It is reasonable to mention that a number of ships, including sailing ships, have been found depicting in ancient Indian art in the form of terracotta models, bas-reliefs, seals, sealing and plaques, paintings on pots and walls, sculptural panels, representation on coins, etc. These representations of ships are in different art media and are widely spread in time, which reveal useful information about the use of sails and development of sailing ships through the ages (Tripathi, 2006).

As far as archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization is concerned, ship representations found on a Harappan seal, terracotta tablet and a graffito on a potsherd from Mohen-Jo-daro, a terracotta boat model from Lothal and a seal from Kachchh are some of the direct evidences of their shipbuilding activities with reference to maritime trade. Moreover, one graffito on a potsherd shows a ship with upturned prow and a high mast with a yard that represents the first sailing ship. Besides, it has the figure of a steersman. This type of boat or ship was suitable for river traffic and also for sea voyages (Tripathi, 2006). The upturned prau is similar to the archaic representation on early Minoan Seals and the Cylinders of Sumer. On the basis of these seals Mackay (1998) in *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-Daro* believes that the Indus Valley was in close contact with Sumer and Elam by sea route. And thus he thinks that Indus had great commercial port carrying on trade with Ur, Kish, and also with Egypt.

Furthermore, a round seal found in the Pre-dynastic cemetery at Ur resembles in material and shape with the seals discovered from Mohenjo-Daro (Marshall, 1996). Marshall is also convinced that the occurrence of humped bull on the seals of both Susa and Mohenjo-Daro ensures that there was a communication between these two civilizations.

Similarly there is another seal found from Mohenjo-Daro which depicts two bulls in a combat. According to Mackay (1998) the depiction on the seal is much similar to that of Egyptian motif on the walls of tombs in Egypt and regarding one more seal bearing the figure of antelope Mackay suggests that it was perhaps imported from Elam to India.

Moreover, recent archaeological findings at Mayasar and Hili have furnished supportive evidence including triangularly prismatic and pear-shaped seals, Indus-type decorative patterns on pottery and rich sources of copper and chlorine. This indicates a link between Indus Valley civilization and Oman in a chain of maritime trade through the Persian Gulf. It is also worth-mentioning that very useful evidence has been obtained concerning the early smelting process of copper in the form of earthenware crucibles (Thapar, 1992).

Archeologists presume that all these seals belong to the traders of distinctive trade routes with their special trade marks. For instance seals with animals and other designed motifs indicate trade mark for land route trade whereas seals with ship or boat motif indicate the trade mark of sea born trade (Prasad, 1977).

Further, the Indus Valley ports were set up to trade overseas with ancient Mesopotamia (the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers corresponding to the regions of modern Iraq, northeastern Syria and southeastern Turkey) and Arabia along the Gulf of Cambay. These ports trans-shipped much sought after Indian products from upriver cities along ancient Indus Valley Rivers to the world market (Mookerji, 1999). As regards the coastal area of the Indus Civilization, it extended from the plains of Gujarat, through Kathiawad, Kutch and the Deltic plains of the Indus, to Makran (Thapar, 1992). Coastal distribution of Harappan sites indicates marked maritime orientation, as shown by Lothal, Prabhas, Somnath, Dholavira, Amra, Todio and Kuntasi. Although smaller sites may have been either refuelling stations or merchant outposts for procurement of raw material, Lothal and Dholavira seem to have been involved in long-distance. At the former site, an occurrence of a dockyard, a warehouse and a Persian Gulf seal testify to its having been a port town (Thapar, 1992).

3. The origins, nature and development of maritime trade of Sindh

Due to their strategic location in the Indian Ocean, the ports of Sindh have profound importance for all the regions around and have been plying a pivotal role in navigation and maritime trade since the centuries. The known history of these two developments dates back to 3rd millennium B.C. It was the time when three major contemporary civilizations were flourishing around this region such as the Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley in India, and the Chinese Civilization in China.

The discoveries of the Indus Valley Civilization have helped us to understand the trade relation of Indians with other trading nations of the ancient world. It is observed that the main cities of the Indus valley are situated near the 0073`123 stream basins. River Indus facilitated in the growth of sea trade which resulted in the development of highly urbanized commercialized cities such as Mohen-Jo-Daro and Lothal. The commercial interaction with the other areas up surged the wealth of the people which improved the living standard. The unearthing of the cities having well planned layout including many- storied houses, drainage system, granaries, straight roads, municipal system, items of gold and other luxury items are ample prove of wealth (Prasad, 1977).

It is peculiar to know that the earliest networks of seaborne commerce and cross-border interaction was made directly possible with the compact and closed character of the Indian Ocean, with its narrow entrances and exits vast and varied hinterlands, as well as climatic conditions upsurge favourable to both coastal and high-sea navigation (Chew, 2007). Particularly, the seasonal patterns of the monsoon winds, which demanded sailing at particular times, encouraged sailors to use this region for their oceanic activities (Spodek & Louro, 2007).

The earliest known maritime trade links between the Indus valley (Sindh) and the outer world is with the Sumerians. The first major culture to arise in Mesopotamia was that of the Sumerians, who arrived at the site of Babylon, around 4000BCE and remained in dominating position for the next 2000 years. (At the same, the Egyptians were independently developing a sophisticated culture in the valley of the Nile.)

It has already been discussed that the representation of a ship on a seal indicates maritime activity, and there is enough evidence to show that the peoples of the Sindhu (Indus) valley carried on trade not only with other parts of India but also with Sumer and the other centres of culture in Western Asia, and with

Egypt and Crete (Majumdar, 1952). The distance from the mouth of the Sindhu River to Mesopotamia was approximately 2000 kilometers (km) and probably covered by Sindhu merchants from sites such as Dholavira and Mohenjo-daro by sailing along the coast to various ports of the Arabian Gulf and Mesopotamia (Pisipaty, n.a). Moreover, the use of the word Sindhu for *muslin* in an old Babylonian list of clothes as the clearest proof that there was trade between Babylonia and people who lived in the country watered by the Indus. Undoubtedly, this trade must have been sea-borne, and the *muslin* must have been brought by sea. It is also to be noted that the Indus Valley is mentioned in Mesopotamian records as *Meluhha*, name that more specifically had reference to the Harappan Civilization, with which there was an intensive trade, mainly by the sea (Myths, hypothesis and facts concerning the origins of people: The Indus Valley history (untill 11 CE).

After Sumerians, Sindh developed its trade relation with Egyptians. Aromatic substances of various kinds were widely employed in ancient Egypt in the spheres of ritual, medicine, cosmetic, etc. Their main use however was in the service of gods on whose beneficence the power and prosperity of the land was thought to depend. The acquisition of fine aromatic substances and the maintenance of supplies was therefore not a matter of luxury but of major importance to the State. The chosen aroma of Egyptians was a fragrant gum-resin derived from one or more species of plant belonging to the family *Burseraceae*. It was known as *Antiuand* and was imported from the land of *Punt* (mentioned in Egyptian texts, which was in the Red sea area). However, it is widely accepted that the Egyptian voyages to *Punt*⁶ were actually the expeditions in the Indian Ocean (probably Sindh) before the first millennium B.C.

The writer of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* mentions that the earlier trade activities of Egyptians were very limited and had no direct sea trade link with India. It's the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty which developed trade with India using the Red Sea ports (Schoff, 1912). During Ptolemy-VII Sorter-II's rule (117-81 BC), his tutor Agatharchides wrote a geography (120-110 BC), which states that merchants of India (Sindh) brought their cargo to Aden (Arabia Eudaemon) and Muza (Mocha) on the Arabian Coast, wherefrom Egyptian merchants took it to Egypt via the Red Sea.

The voyages began by the times of the Pharaohs (2300 B.C.) and especially the Pharaohs of the fifth and sixth dynasties made great efforts to develop trade relations with this region (Prasad, 1977). It is reported by Athenaeus⁷ that women, hunting dogs, cows and spices etc., from the South Asia were carried on camels in a procession for Ptolemy-II Philadelphus (285-246 BC), an Egyptian king, and also of the king's yacht having a saloon lined with stone from the South Asia. Panhwar and Prasad believe that all these must have gone from Sindh's port Barbaricon (probably Banbhor) to MyosHormes (an ancient Egyptian port on the Red Sea), which had become an important port for the eastern trade (Prasad, 1977).

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Phoenicians were the people who occupied the coast of the *Levant* (eastern Mediterranean). Their major cities were *Tyre, Sidon, Byblos and Arwad*. All were independent, rival cities and unlike the neighbouring inland states, the Phoenicians represented a confederation of maritime traders rather than a defined country. It is presumed that in the first millennium BCE the word Phoenicians was used by the Greeks to describe these people (the Greek word *phoenix* mean purple colour) because of their production of a highly prized purple dye.

Phoenician cities were confined to a narrow coastal strip with limited agriculture resources; there, maritime trade was a natural development. Their trade centres existed from Late Bronze age (1550 BCE) until the Hellenistic Period around 300 BCE. By 8th century BCE, the Phoenicians, along with the Greeks, had founded trading posts around entire Mediterranean. Later, Phoenicians followed the suit of Egyptians and carried out their navigation into the Indian Ocean. They traded in gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks from *Ophir*.⁹

During the Achaemenid period trade developed enormously. According to Herodotus, the longest land trade in the empire was the Royal Road, which was nearly 2,400 km from Sardis in Asia Minor through

Mesopotamia and down the Tigris to Susa; stations with service facilities were located every 25-30 km along its length (Godley, 1920). In fourth century BCE after the occupation of Indus Valley (Sindh) by Achaemenid Empire (c. 550-330 BCE first Persian Empire), trade relation of Sindh begun with the empire. There were two trade routes connecting Sindh with the other parts of the empire, one connected Babylon, Ecbatana, Bactria, with India (Sindh), and the other linked Persia with the Indus valley by a road through Makrān (Khan, 1972).

After the military campaigns of Alexander (336 BCE-323 BCE) against the Persian Empire and the Indian rulers, more extensive trade routes were opened across Asia extending as far as Afghanistan and the Indus River Valley (Ancient Greek Colonization and their Influence on Greek Art).

Indo-Roman trade relations began in the early days of Roman Empire probably from King Augustus's time. Strabo in Book II of *Geography* informs that King Augustus after the conquest of Egypt send one hundred and twenty ships every year from the port of Myos Hormos¹⁰ to India (McCrindle, 1877). Regarding the ports of India he says that apart from the ports of *Korkai* and *Arikamedu*, *Barbaricum* and *Barygaza* were the main trade centres of India (McCrindle, 1877). With the establishment of Roman Egypt, the Romans took over sea routes and further developed the already existing trade using these ports.

During the first century BCE (around 20 BCE) Hippalus, a Greek navigator and merchant, discovered the direct route from the Red Sea to India over the Indian Ocean by plotting the scheme of the sea and the correct location of the trade ports along the Indian coast. Pliny the Elder claimed that Hippalus discovered not the route but the monsoon wind called Hippalus (the south-west monsoon wind). The majority of the historians are of the viewpoint that *Sindhian Winds* were known to Arabs before the discovery by Hippalus, but was undisclosed by Arab Merchants so to keep the monopoly of maritime trade of Indian Ocean. The discovery of the trade wind opened Indian Ocean to Greco-Egyptian trade which grew briskly and contributed to the prosperity of trade contacts between the Roman province of Aegyptus and India from the 1st century BCE onwards. During the late Roman period, Prasad (1977) is of the opinion that due to the decline in the agriculture, the demand for wheat was met by exporting wheat from Sindh.

Another point of view is that they were the Arabs who pioneered the seafaring activities in the Indian Ocean. The archaeological excavation of this (Indian Ocean) region indicates that ships were built in Megan (probably Oman) by the local Arab traders during the Sumerians times. In order to fulfil the needs, they had to import timber and other materials from India to build strong vessels. (Rais, 1987) It is imperative to note that the physical conditions of Arabia never did produce wood suitable for building strong seagoing ships. Neither did it contain iron for nailing them (Hourani, 1951). It may be argued that the Indian (Sindhians) were familiar with the concept of vessels making prior to the Arabs.

For ages, the spices, aromatics and other items were exported to the west from the South Asia by the Arabs. However, by the first century B.C., the Arabs became intermediaries between indigenous and foreign traders in this region. They sold goods from the South Asia to the Egyptians, Jews, Arabs, Syrians, Meds and Parthians. They (the Arabs) made full use of the sea [and desert routes] and helped the Africans to keep mostly Sindhians and occasional Indians off the Red Sea. It is certain that the Arabs' contacts with the South Asia must have been mainly through Sind ports and only some time via Kutch, Kathiawar and north-western Gujarat but never further South beyond Lothal (Panhwar, 1981).

Explaining this, Hourani (1951) opines that "Geography favoured the development of sailing from Arabian and Indian Ocean shores. Arabs might be in contact with two of the most ancient centres of wealth and civilization Egypt and Iran--- not to mention Mesopotamia, which they could reach either by sea or by land. Beyond Arabia to the southwest, it was easy to cross to East Africa and coast along it in search of tropical products; to the east, the coast of Iran led on to India—and eventually the monsoon winds were to assist voyages both to Africa and to India. Most important of all, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, supplemented by the Nile; the Euphrates and the Tigris, are natural channels for through traffic between the Mediterranean basin and Eastern Asia: the Arabs were astride two of the world's great trade routes' (Hourani, 1951).

4. Ancient sea routes

The different ancient sea routes connecting West with Sindh can be found and verified on the basis of the information available in the above mentioned ancient literary sources.

Hourani (1995) establishes two trade modes from Egypt. One by land on camels and another through canals to Egyptian ports of *Arsinoe* (Suez). *Myos Hormos* (*Abu Scha 'ar*) or *Berenice*, and then by ships to the Somalia coast at *Adulis* and from there southwards to *Muza* (Mocha) on the Arabian coast, and thence to *Acila* or *Cellaor Ocelis*, a probable place to water the ships. From there making a turnaround *the ships reached the port of Eudaemon Arabia* (Arabia Felix or Aden of today).

According to Pliny (23 AD), prior to the discovery of trade winds by Hippalus the western ships coasted along the Arabian Peninsula to the Persian Gulf, touching *Cape Syagnis* (*Ras Musanaanor Ras Fortak*) and then along the Makran coast to *Barbaricon* (Bambore). The discovery of winds resulted in the direct link of the port of Aden with the port city of Sindh- *Barbaricon* and thus increased the trade. Using the new information about the winds he further informs that from April to August the Vessels would navigate from Aden towards Sindh and then from October to February with the help of south westerly winds would sail back from Sindh (*Barbaricon*) to Red Sea. The discovery of monsoon winds not only developed direct maritime trade relation with *Barbaricon* (Sindh) but with *Barygaza* –the port of Gujrat also. As an outcome a competition for the Chinese Silk started between *Barbaricon* and *Barygaza*.

It was the time when the Indus route became the shortest available passage for commerce between China and the West. It evolved over several centuries as the direct trade route in this regard. Around the first century A.D. Khotan in Sinkiang became the meeting place of four civilizations, i.e., Greek, Iranian (Persian), Chinese and Indian and helped in trade, especially of the Chinese silk, to Rome. The silk came to *Barbaricon* on the Indus near the sea coast via Kashgar and Chitral and from there by flat bottom boats down the Indus to *Barbaricon*. This route from Kashgar to *Barbaricon* is termed as the Indus silk route (Hourani, 1951).

According to the description of Periplus of Erythraean Sea (71 AD), another trade route started from Sindh - *Barbaricon*, from where the goods were transported to Minnagara city ruled by Parthians.

Sindh was also part of another important trade route-*Silk Route* which was used for the transportation of Silk from China to Rome. By the first century CE the Chinese Silk reached *Barbaricon* (Bambore) through Kashgar and Chitral and from there it reached to *Barbaricon* by small boats down the river Indus. And then from here through sea route it was transported to Rome.

It may be gleaned from *Periplus* that goods were sent from *Barbaricon* (probably Bambore) at the mouth of the *Sindhus* (Sindhu or Indus) to Minnagara (probably Patala or Bahmanabad which was held by Parthians then). It is important to note that at *Barbaricon*, Indian, Tibetan, Persian (Khorasanian) and Chinese goods could be obtained (Panahwar, 1981).

By the end of the first century CE the maritime trade at Sindh's ports especially at *Barbaricon* started diminishing. The uncertain political conditions of India such as the tussle between the Chinese and the Kushans over the control of Sinkiang cut off the Indus Silk route across Chitral, and the discovery of trade winds that caused a fall in prices are assumed to be the main reason for the gradual decline of sea trade. As first, it broke the monopoly of *Barbaricon*, and secondly, it cuts down the cost of trans-shipment at *Barbaricon* (Puma, 1992). Thus, the concentration of trade activities at *Barbaricon* became limited and the new situation affected the whole region of Sind in this regard.

5. Trade item

Based on the classical works, a full account of Sindh's ancient Trade can be developed, as they adequately identify the trading items and names of places on the trade routes, which were used at that time. Of important trading items of Sindh's export item included muslin (whom the author of *Periplus of Erythraea* considers as the *sindon* of the Greeks, long a staple product of the Punjab and Sind). Copper, date, costus (a plant for perfume), bdellium (an aromatic gum) bycium (a cosmetic), nard (Naladaointment), turquoise (a kind of stone mainly came from "the countries lying back of India." (Or more definitely, Khorassan), lapis Lazuli (from Badakhshan). Sericskins (from China), cotton cloth, silk yarn (from China) and indigo (Schoff, 1912). As far as import items are concerned, these included silks (brought by various routes from N.W China), figured linen (probably from Egypt), topaz, coral, storax, frankincense, glass vessels, silver and gold plate and a little wine also (Panahwar, 1981). India exported gold, ivory, and aromatic oils to the Achaemenid Empire (Basham, 1954).

According to *Perpilus* the Greco-Roman merchants traded in Barbaricum the "thin clothing, figured linens, [topaz](#), [coral](#), [storax](#), [frankincense](#), vessels of glass, silver and gold plate, and a little wine" in exchange of "Costus(a plant for perfume), Bdellium(an aromatic gum), Lycium, Turquoise, Lapis-lazuli, Seric skins, Cotton cloth, Silk yarn, and indigo" ([Schoff, 1912](#)).

Thus, it can be concluded here that the above study confirms the theory that till the second century CE, Sindh has been the main trading centre of India with the rest of the known world.

Conclusion

The available archaeological and literary sources give sufficient proof of the extensive historical and commercial relations of Sindh with the West. The sea, the navigable river Indus and land route have helped in the development of trade and commerce of Sindh during ancient times.

It is held that the economic progress of a nation is primarily dependent upon her physical location. It is true to Sindh as the port cities such as *Mohenjo Daro* and *Barbarian* were located at the junction points of different seas and between the sea and the convoy routes, and were used as the centres of imports and exports of different inland products. These port cities, lying at the intersection of multiple merchant networks, served as markets for the local and intercontinental distribution of goods and performed the functions of transfer, taxation, export and distribution of goods. They also contributed to the financing of the State machinery.

The surplus wealth generated by regional and international trade led to economic growth which played a major role in the urbanization of the cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Banbhore which can be ascertain from the archaeological sites.

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End notes

¹Sapta Sindhu means seven rivers

²Hecataeus is the author of *Periodosgēs* "Survey of the Earth," a world map in which the earth is viewed as a circular plate.

³Skylax from Greece was the first western geographer. According to the Herodotus, Skylax (naval officer in Persia), was sent by King Dario to explore the estuaries of Indus river. He delivered to Darios records of his travel. Darios used this information to conquer India and set up naval bases and new harbours.

⁴Megasthenes was a diplomat, an envoy and a historian (c. 350-290 B.C.) sent out several times between 302 B.C. and 291 B.C. under Seleucus I, to northern India, where Chandragupta founded the Maurya kingdom. His geographical and ethnographical work *Indika*, was based on observation and information received through interpreters.

⁵This account is about the travel and trade in the Indian Ocean by a Greek merchant of the first century. A.D. The title *Erythraean Sea* was the term applied by Greek and Roman geographers to the Indian Ocean.

⁶According to Devendra Kaushik, *Punt* has been identified as either Mozambique or the Somalia Coast where Egyptian sailors used to go in search of gold and incense.

⁷Athenaeus, (AD 200, b.), Greek grammarian and author of *Deipnosophistai* ("The Gastronomers"), a work in the form of an aristocratic symposium, in which a number of learned men, meet at a banquet and discuss food and other subjects. It had information about all aspects of life in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

⁸Eudoxus (c. 408-347 BCE) was a Greek Astronomers, Mathematician and Student of Plato.

⁹G.F.Hourani considers *Ophir* as Sindh. The land of Ophis has been mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures (1 Kings 10:11; 1 Chronicles 9:10) which was touched by Phoenician vessels hired by the King Solomon of Israel is presumed as located in India. Some scholars identify Ophis with the name *Abhira* related to the people settled in the Indus Valley.

¹⁰An ancient Red Sea port of Egypt, located at present day site of Quseir-al-Qadim.