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# Unveiling the Enigmatic Past: Exploration of Ancient India through Western Eyes

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## ABSTRACT

*History is like a mosaic, the more we try to decode, the more we get to know its crypticness. Western kingdoms started the sea expeditions that eventually connected them to the Indian subcontinent because of their quest for wealth and exotic goods. These encounters resulted in the transfer of ideas, products, and expertise between the two areas, which had a significant impact on the blending of cultures. The thriving trade lines between ancient India and European kingdoms allowed for the flow of goods such as spices, textiles, valuable stones, and other items, which improved the economies of both regions. Through economic growth, cultural exchange, and cross-pollination, this transcontinental commercial network influenced the cultures it connected. The discovery of ancient India from Europe is evidence of the never-ending spirit of discovery and the never-ending search to comprehend the wonders of our common human history.*

**Keywords:** Trade, Silk route, Roman Empire, Egypt India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

History is everywhere, from the legend and myth to the inscription and carving in random walls. Everywhere we can find the trace of history and it is telling its story in an infinite loop. History is an odyssey. A legit source is the foundation of all history. Due to the rapid advancement of science and technology, historical sources are now accessible in a variety of other contexts, such as the internet. There were few historical materials available in the prehistoric era, when human culture, society, and the economy were still in their early stages of development.

We are able to comprehend the significance of coins in historical research through a comparative assessment of their sources and archaeological data. Coin analysis offers further proof to verify historical chronology. Coins serve as tangible artifacts that provide invaluable insights into the economic, political, and cultural aspects of a particular time period. Numismatic research allows historians to trace the development of civilizations, their trade networks, and the rise and fall of empires through the analysis of coinage. Numismatic evidence often fills gaps in historical records, providing a tangible connection to events and individuals

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that may have otherwise been lost to time, enriching our understanding of the past.

Ancient India significantly influenced trade in the West, especially in terms of currency. The invention of the idea of coinage is one notable example. The Indian subcontinent saw the introduction of the earliest coins, known as punch-marked coins, about the sixth century BCE. These silver coins had numerous marks and symbols hammered into them to indicate their value. Trade was revolutionized by this system of standardized currency since it offered a practical and commonly used form of payment. It promoted long-distance trade between India and the Western world, including nations like Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire, and it facilitated business and improved economic interactions.

The Western world adopted the Indian idea of coinage, which had an impact on the creation of monetary systems that still have an impact on modern-day global economies. The rise of trade and commerce in the Western world was greatly aided by the monetary contribution of the ancient Indians.

## **II. DISCOVERING INDIA AND TRADE**

A network of commercial routes that permitted the interchange of goods, ideas, and cultural influences connected ancient India and Europe. These trading ties, which date more back to the first millennium BCE, had a significant impact on the development of both regions' economies and cultures. The development and sway of this ancient religion were greatly aided by the exchange of Cultural philosophy like Buddhism through trading relations between India and the rest of the world. The inscriptions of the emperors of the Achaemenid empire in Persia provide one of the earliest accounts of India. Greek explorer and author Scylax of Caryanda lived in the late sixth and early fifth century BCE. Though his original writings have been lost, later Greek and Roman authors have occasionally acknowledged or quoted him. He was the first to write about Indian vegetation, geographical concepts like climate, the Indus River and its basin, and Indian people.

Since the third millennium BCE, it is known that the merchants of the Indus Valley were highly familiar with the route to Mesopotamia, where they most likely had some colonies. Scylax's Periplus gave the West its first description of the inhabitants of the east and served as a template for following Greek authors. It gave India its name, which was more significant. Due to the phonetic change from Proto-Iranian Sindhu, Hindu or Hindush was the Persian name for the inhabitants of the Indus region. Scylax would have changed it to Indos (plural: Indoi) if he had written in the Ionic dialect of Greek, which did not enunciate the first h sound. They labeled their country as Indike (the adjectival form, which means "Indian"). Although generalized these

names to all people residing east of Persia, creating significant ambiguity, he nonetheless uses them as equivalents to the Persian terms Hindu and Hindush.

Herodotus was well-known in antiquity. Many ancient writers such as Strabo referred to him as an "ancient writer." Herodotus referred to himself as an Ionian marine captain. At the command of the Achaemenid emperor Darius I (522-486 BCE), he is claimed to have sailed down the Indus River before circumnavigating the Arabian Peninsula to reach Suez. The Greek philosopher and orator Cicero regarded Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BC) as the founder of history (father of History). The first author to provide a thorough analysis of historical events was .

Herodotus is known for having written the *Histories*— a detailed account of the Greco-Persian Wars. The lives of notable monarchs and well-known conflicts like Marathon, Thermopylae, Artemisium, Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale are predominantly covered in the *Histories*. His work diverges from the primary subjects to provide a foundation in culture, ethnography, geography, and history that is crucial to the narrative and a wealth of supplementary information for readers. Napoleon was right when he stated, "History is agreeable," since it is never a precise account of actual events. Humans report it from the standpoint of their education, knowledge, norms, ideologies, and understandings and legit sources and sometimes from the myth and legends.

The fragments of Afghan lapis lazuli found in predynastic tombs attest to indirect exchanges between Egypt and the Hindu Kush region since prehistory. By the account of Pliny the Elder, he describes that, "the arrival at the court of an Indian monarch of a Greek diplomat by the name of Dionysius who had been dispatched by monarch Philadelphus. His goal was to gather data about India's strength and resources in order to perhaps assess the potential for future ties. He is obviously referring to Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BCE) in his book. The Indian king who would have greeted him is typically thought to have been Ashoka (c. 304–232 BCE), the most significant ruler of the Mauryan dynasty, or, less likely, Bindusara. Pataliputra, today's Patna, in the contemporary state of Bihar in northwest India, served as the capital of the Mauryan Empire.

#### **(A) Silk Route-**

India had created enormous trading networks by the third century BCE, including the well-known Silk Road, which permitted the flow of products, concepts, and cultures over great distances. Buddhist traders transported Buddhism's teachings to far-off places together with their precious goods. These traders interacted with local populations as they traveled into other continents, including Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, imparting their expertise and introducing Buddhist teachings. These trading ties evolved through time into channels for the

diffusion of Buddhist texts, works of art, and philosophical ideas, which helped to broaden and diversify Buddhist practices around the globe. Greece and India exchanged cultural ideas during the time of Alexander the Great's invasion of India in the fourth century BCE. Greek sculptural styles and methods clearly influenced Indian art, especially in the Gandhara region. Many ideas from Hellenistic culture were adapted and further developed by Indian astronomers and mathematicians, including astronomical computations and mathematical methods. And it was vice-versa.

Hippalus, a Greek navigator, is sometimes credited with having taught Europe about the monsoon wind path to India. He has occasionally been assumed to have taken part in Eudoxus' journeys.

By the text of Callixenus in Atheneus, we get the information of the first conclusive evidence of an Indian presence in Egypt. In particular, in his account of Ptolemy II Philadelphus' triumphal march, Callixenus mentions some 'Indian girls' and 'Indian pets specially dogs' among the 'wonders' displayed by the king. They are therefore presented as exotic items at the disposal of the mighty king, which suggests that their appearance serves a propagandistic aim.

Direct exchanges between Egypt and India don't seem to have started until much later. The earliest encounter between Indians and Egyptians may have occurred during the Persian era (Herodotus claims that Indian archers were present in the Persian troops), although there is no evidence of this. Egypt and India didn't begin to engage directly and frequently until the Ptolemaic and Early Roman eras. An in-depth investigation of the Roman trade with India has already been the subject of numerous specialized studies, and given the volume of evidence supporting it, it is plainly beyond the scope of this dissertation. Additionally, as will be discussed below, it is necessary to treat the processes that characterized Roman trade differently from those that underlie Egyptian connections with India. Megasthenes depicted the Mauryan Empire in his treatise *Indica*, as a strong empire with diplomatic ties reaching to far-off places, especially during the administration of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and his grandson Ashoka.

As evidence of the existence of political and cultural relations between ancient India and the Hellenistic world, Megasthenes emphasized the presence of Greek settlers and diplomats in India, notably in the Punjab region. The pact between Emperor Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus I Nicator shows that the Mauryan Empire kept up diplomatic ties with the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire.

Megasthenes stated that there were numerous Indian kingdoms and tribes, each of which

interacted politically and economically with nearby areas. India and the Persian Empire were able to have frequent commercial interactions and cultural impacts thanks to their close proximity.

The growth of direct marine trade with the East and the abolition of the tariffs previously levied by the middlemen of several land-based commercial routes resulted from the Roman Empire succeeding Greece as the administrator of the Mediterranean basin. The fact that Strabo mentions how trade increased significantly after Egypt was annexed by the Romans suggests that he was aware of the monsoon season and how to use it to his advantage.

A sophisticated network of trade with India was governed by the Seleucid dynasty, which had earlier been influenced by the Persian Achaemenid dynasty. The Greek Ptolemaic dynasty had started to take advantage of trade opportunities with India before the Roman involvement, controlling the western and northern ends of other trade routes to Southern Arabia and India, but historian Strabo claims that the volume of trade between India and Greece was insignificant in comparison to later Indian-Roman trade.

The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* describes a time when indirect sailings were used for sea trade between Egypt and India. The shipment was transported to Aden in those circumstances.

Eudaimon Arabia was referred to as lucky because, at one time, it was a city that, unlike Alexandria, received cargo from both outside and inside Egypt because neither ships from Egypt nor those from India dared to travel further than this location.

Using the ports on the Red Sea, the Ptolemaic monarchy fostered trade with India. Roman Egypt came into being, and the Romans took over and expanded the trade that was already taking place through those ports.

Strabo described winged scorpions, small flying reptiles with bodies resembling snakes and wings resembling bats in India, a land he never visited. He also mentioned mythological creatures such as winged scorpions and other flying scorpions. Similar monsters were mentioned by other historians like Herodotus, Aristotle, and Flavius Josephus.

Around the beginning of the Common Era, after Augustus' rule and his conquest of Egypt, Roman trade with India began. Trade between India and Rome was boosted by the utilization of monsoon winds, which made travel safer than on a protracted and perilous coastal journey. The Greco-Roman world had been using the Red Sea ports since the Ptolemaic dynasty to secure trade with India, but the Roman trade diaspora stopped there, establishing trading settlements that persisted long after the fall of the Roman empire and Rome's loss of those ports.

More than was previously believed, the Greco-Roman Empire had considerable contact. Before Christ, an Indo-Greek dynasty was created in northwest India as a result of Alexander the Great's unsuccessful invasion of that country in the fourth century B.C.E. Rome established a commercial route by water to southwest India that allowed for the flow of goods and ideas that may have had a significant influence on Christianity, Judaism in Israel, and the intellectual outlook of the Roman Empire. The doctrines of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism were known to Roman traders. It is conceivable that Jesus sailed on a Roman commercial ship from a Red Sea port to journey to southern India. Stronger evidence backs up the apostle Thomas' journey to India to launch a Christian mission. India may have had a significant influence on Israel, Christianity, and the Greco-Roman empire before, during, and after the time of Christ.

According to Strabo in his book, the trade that Eudoxus of Cyzicus began in 130 BCE continued to grow and in his reference he stated,

"At any rate, when Gallus was prefect of Egypt, I accompanied him and ascended the Nile as far as Syene and the frontiers of Ethiopia, and I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise."

By the time of Augustus, up to 120 vessels per year were leaving Myos Hormos for India, according to Strabo. Pliny the Elder criticized the loss of species to India since Rome consumed so much gold for that trade, which the Kushans allegedly recycled for their particular coinage. Strabo calculated on a conservative estimate, the cost of our pleasures and women is one hundred million sesterces every year from our empire to India, China, and the Arabian peninsula. What portion of these imports are used as offerings to the gods or the souls of the deceased?

Additionally, there were a number of cultural exchanges during the Rome-India trade that had an impact on both the trading civilizations and others. With the aid of Roman and Indian architectural influences, the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum participated in the Indian Ocean trading network. Indian influences can be seen in Roman ivory and silver sculptures as well as Egyptian cotton and silk fabrics sold in Europe. There are little records about how Alexandria's Indian population affected culture, however it is possible that it did. The Buddha is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria in his works, and other Indian religions are mentioned in other historical records.

Long after the collapse in bilateral trade, Roman Christians and Jews continued to reside in

India. Roman currency hoards of considerable size have been discovered all across India, but particularly in the southern coastal commercial hubs. After defacing the coins to symbolize their dominion, the South Indian kings reprinted Roman money in their own names. India's Tamil Sangam literature made reference to the traders. In one instance, it is written: "The beautifully built ships of the Yavanas came with gold and returned with pepper, and Muziris resounded with the noise."

Poseidonius later stated that Eudoxus of Cyzicus was the first person to sail the Indian Ocean's monsoon wind pattern, which was later recorded in Strabo's Geography. A shipwrecked Indian seaman was saved in the Red Sea, according to Poseidon, and brought to Ptolemy VIII at Alexandria. The unidentified Indian offered to help Greek explorers find India. Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who conducted two journeys from Egypt to India, was chosen by Ptolemy. The Indian sailor led the first one, which took place around 118 BC. A second journey was made in 116 BC after Eudoxus had returned with a cargo of aromatics and precious stones. On the second journey, Eudoxus sailed by himself.

Strabo, whose Geography is the story's primary surviving source, has doubts about its veracity. Modern research typically views it as being somewhat plausible. At ports in Arabia, including Aden (which the Greeks referred to as Eudaemon), Greek and Indian ships engaged in commerce throughout the second century BC. Rare, discouraged, and requiring a protracted, exhausting journey along the coast, attempts to sail beyond Aden were made. The monsoon winds have long been known to navigators. They were employed by Indian ships to travel to Arabia, but no Greek ships had yet to accomplish the same. Having an Indian pilot's experience gave the Greeks the option to circumvent Arabian ports and create direct trade relations with India.

Regardless of the veracity of Poseidonius' account of an Indian pilot who taught Eudoxus about the monsoon winds after becoming shipwrecked, Greek ships were soon using the winds to sail to India. Greek and Roman ships began to travel from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean in greater numbers by 50 BC.

Coins serve as a means of exchange but also serve as historical markers. One such region was the relationship between India and Rome, where coinage was crucial to forging and preserving bonds.

History dates the beginning of trade between ancient Rome and India to the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (27 BC–14 AD). The Romans traveled to India in search of peacocks, sandalwood, silk, cotton, ivory, spices (pepper and cardamom), jewels (mostly beryl), and other



natural resources. In exchange, India received metals including gold, silver, and copper as well as coral, wine, and olive oil. The majority of the hoards of Roman coins discovered in India are ceramic pots buried underground.

### **III. DECLINE**

Khosrow I of the Persian Sassanid Dynasty conquered the territories ruled by the Roman Byzantine Empire after the Roman-Persian Wars. In late 639 or early 640 CE, the Arabs entered Egypt under the leadership of 'Amr ibn al-'As. That advance signaled the start of the Islamic conquest of Egypt and the fall of ports like Alexandria, which the Greco-Roman world had been using since the Ptolemaic dynasty to ensure trade with India.

Due to the fall in trade, Southern India turned to Southeast Asia for international trade, where it had a stronger cultural impact than Rome. Ottoman Turkish hegemony over the most direct trade routes connecting Europe and Asia began with their conquest of Constantinople in the fifteenth century.

### **IV. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

Due to their desire for wealth and exotic products, kingdoms from the west launched maritime voyages that finally linked them to the Indian subcontinent. These interactions led to the exchange of goods, concepts, and knowledge between the two regions, which greatly influenced the mixing of cultures. Spices, textiles, precious stones, and other goods could be exchanged along the booming trade routes between ancient India and European kingdoms, which boosted the economies of both areas. This transcontinental trading network helped to shape the societies involved by boosting their economies and allowing for cultural dispersion and cross-pollination. During this time, European writers who visited India were extremely important in recording their encounters, views, and interactions with the locals. Their writings offer a window into the daily life of its residents and give us a firsthand picture of old Indian rituals, traditions, and social systems.

We have obtained remarkable insights into the various civilizations that flourished in ancient India during this period through the eyes of European traders and writers. Through these connections, we have learned about the contributions of Indian civilization to a variety of disciplines, including mathematics, astronomy, art, and philosophy.

Several distinct sources imply that Roman time, especially Egypt and India had direct ties during the Ptolemaic era. The data appear to indicate that Ptolemy II's rule marked the beginning of contacts. In the centuries that followed, other sailor(s) may have traveled across the Indian

Ocean (see, for example, the account of Eudoxus recounted by Strabo II), but in general the exchanges seem relatively intermittent until the reign of Ptolemy II. The situation changes under his rule: the formulation of an "Indian Ocean strategy" and Cleopatra VII's intention to send her son to India appear to signify a significant escalation in the ties between the two regions. The lyrics of Virgil that allude to the presence of Indian mercenaries in the Egyptian navy and those of Lucan that describe the exotic opulence of Cleopatra's palace demonstrate that the relationship with India was strong enough to find its way into the Roman literary heritage. The fact that a period of erratic, frequently perilous, and daring missions preceded the formation of regular commercial routes, in my opinion, is not surprising. These journeys are sometimes remembered and described as tremendous feats. This appears to be a recurring theme. For instance, the legendary Jason expedition memorialized in the *Argonautika* predated the development of Greek trade routes in the Black Sea, the Viking exploratory trading expeditions and raids in the Baltic Sea predated the development of regular trade routes in the Baltic and Northern Seas, later inherited by the Hanseatic League, or the various expeditions during the so-called Agora.

Similar to this, throughout the reigns of Ptolemy II and Cleopatra VII, and subsequently in Roman and medieval periods, India changed from being a "terra incognita," a "new world," to becoming a well-known and extremely significant economic partner.

This evolution included modifications to the objectives and methods of the interactions themselves, in addition to the volume of the exchanges. The knowledge that it was feasible to use monsoon winds (whenever they occurred) to traverse the Indian Ocean aided in the growth of this commercial network by making it easier to do so.

But this was by no means the sole contributing aspect. In reality, this change in Egypt and India's relationships appears to have at least some relationship to the overall geopolitical situation in the Mediterranean. Particularly affluent and successful periods of Ptolemaic Egypt can be attributed to the reigns of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III. Egypt experienced economic success, territorial expansion, and intellectual dynamism throughout this time. An exploratory journey to India would not have been out of place in such a cultural and historical setting.

In addition to fostering important commercial and cultural exchanges, historical relations between Ancient India and the Roman Empire also shed light on the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the time. We now have a better knowledge of the wonders of ancient Indian culture, its thriving trade lines, and its enormous wealth in natural resources and luxuries thanks to the reports of authors like Pliny the Elder and others. These works also reveal the significant

influence of Indian philosophy, science, and literature on the West. The exchanges between Roman emperors and Indian kings revealed the interplay between power and diplomacy and showed how highly the Romans regarded and admired Indian culture. The two civilizations' diplomatic relations and exchange of envoys and gifts demonstrated their shared desire for collaboration.

Additionally, the prosperous trading ties between Ancient India and the Roman Empire had a significant role in promoting the transfer of products, concepts, and technologies. These exchanges helped both societies advance and established strong linkages between the East and the West.

In conclusion, our knowledge of historical global linkages and the tremendous influence of India's culture on the rest of the globe has been improved by the discovery of ancient India through the lens of European kingdoms, trade, and literature. We can continue to unravel the intricate tapestry of human history and appreciate the enduring legacy of ancient Indian civilization by looking at these historical interactions.

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