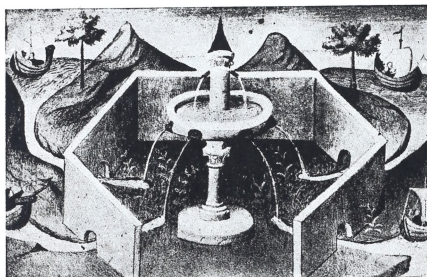


Old Malaysian Contacts with Western Europe



Sources of the Rivers of Paradise
(From Livre de Merveilles)

The Netherland Mail

... and as a constabulary-doctor friend was wont to say: "And then you wonder at crime and disorder in the Province!"

One of the simplest, but not really a very absurd, conception of the world as a whole was that of the Greek Ephoros, who lived around 350 B. C. According to him the world had the shape of an elongated rectangle which he conceived as being divided in four almost equal parts. At the left top corner, that is to say in the North-West, lay the Land of the Celts, in other words our present Europe, which was in fact, at that time, mainly inhabited by Celtic races. At the right top corner, that is to say in the North-East and adjoining the former, lay the Land of the Scythians, or present-day Russia and Siberia. That again was true enough. At the left lower end, South-West therefore, he placed Ethiopia, or Africa, which again is quite accurate. That left him with the fourth part of the world in which to place India. Of this latter country Ephoros says, however, that it was smaller than Ethiopia, and consequently also smaller than Europe. For even before his time Herodotus had laid it down that Europe by itself was much bigger than Africa and Asia put together—which, as a matter of fact, was quite apparent from the world-map of his day.

Ptolemy of Alexandria, the father of geography, was a man who combined Greek intelligence with Roman thoroughness. It was he who first tried to construct a world globe based on the geographical knowledge of his time. But he lacked material to do more than construct a kind of cape, which he could not make to meet at the back! That is really nothing to laugh about; it just shows what a conscientious man Ptolemy was. After all, he lacked the whole of the New-World and best part of China, to complete his globe; to say nothing of the two great oceans. So it was quite clear that his cape could not be made to reach right round. Neither did it stretch far enough in depth, for he did not believe that Africa was surrounded by the ocean, but held that it was joined on to the coast of Asia somewhere in the neighbourhood of Siam. In this way the Indian Ocean became an inland sea, just like the Mediterran-

*Through the shipping
that reached Sumatra
and Java the Philippines
may have had trade: as
in pearls and gold dust*



ean. Ptolemy's equator was consequently to be found only a short distance above the Southern edge of his world. The fact that he had not enough geographical material to fill in the bottom part of his globe, saved him the trouble of working out what such a bottom end of the world could possibly look like.

At the further end of his inland sea—which was the Indian Ocean—we can recognize Malacca and the Golden Peninsula. In the place where India should lie, we find an exaggeratedly large island, Ceylon, the land of marvels which was known in Antiquity as Taprobane.

If we find Ptolemy's map to be somewhat imperfect, let us not overlook how scanty was the material at his disposal. And let us also not forget that it would take almost fifteen centuries after his death, before any more accurate conception of the world's appearance was to gain currency. It was only when Bartolomeu Diaz doubled the Cape of Good Hope in

1487, that the suspicion revived that Africa might, after all, really be surrounded by the ocean. But people still went on believing that there must be a land connection between India and Asia, such as Ptolemy had indicated. And so, even then, the Indian Ocean was still looked upon as an inland sea, and one not much larger than the Mediterranean.

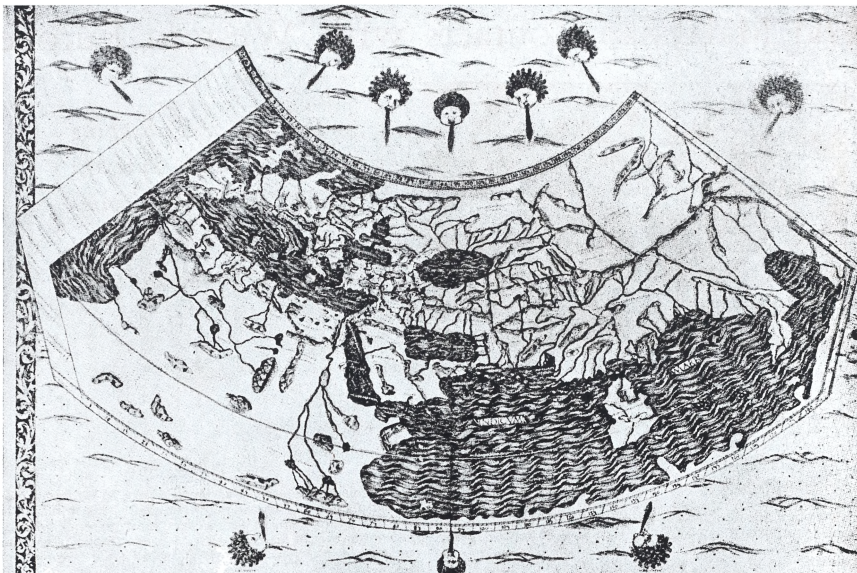
In the extreme East, that is to say beyond India, was the place where Paradise lay, and there, according to mediaeval ideas, the four great world rivers had their sources. On the unique map of the world, which was drawn by Dr. Wieder at Leyden in the interval between the voyages of Bartolomeu Diaz and those of Vasco da Gama, we see the Nile shown as flowing from somewhere in further India, while the Tigris and Euphrates also came from those parts. It was only the voyages of Vasco da Gama which put an end to these pleasant conceptions. By land India had been reached much earlier. Alexander the Great had marched his troops into it, and even he was not the



Babylonian World Map

The Netherland Mail

Showing their conception that the earth was round



Ptolemy's Map of the World
From the Original in Prince Yussuf Kamal's Library, Cairo

The Netherland Mail

first to be attracted by this land of marvels. After the great Macedonian's death, diplomatic relations were long maintained with India, for instance between his successor Seleucus of Antiochia and the court of Sandrokottos of Palibothra. In these words we can easily recognize the Indian names of Chandragupta and Baliputra. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes remained there for many years, so that his accounts of India should be reliable. And they were certainly believed in his day, as they agreed completely with everything which had long been known about the country.

Most curiously constructed people lived there: some had no heads, and carried their eyes in their breasts. Others had immense ears, so ample in fact, that at night they wrapped themselves in them as in blankets. Others again, known as the Skiapodes or Shadow-footed, enjoyed their siesta in the shadow of their own foot which they turned up and used as a sunshade.

Less remarkable, but still fairly interesting, were the numerous nations which consisted of people who had only one eye, or who lacked noses or mouths. The latter fed by inhaling the scent of flowers, and died when they were exposed to evil smells. In between all these miraculous things, this eyewitness reported several facts about Ceylon which were quite true, such for instance as that the elephants in the island were much bigger than those on the Continent of India, so that while the latter were only suitable for transport purposes, the former were used as fighting elephants.

During Roman times a regular and brisk trade was carried

on with India. The western extremity of the trade route was the port of Berenice on the Red Sea. From there ships used to follow the coast until they reached India. But one day a daring Greek merchant, Hippalos, availing himself of favourable winds, accomplished the feat of sailing right across the ocean to India. Since that event the voyage, when performed on the wings of this "hippalos" wind, took only forty days. It was only very much later that there came to be used for that particular wind the Arabic word maussim, which the English turned into monsoon, and the Dutch into moesson.

The Romans were businesslike, matter-of-fact people. They imported many kinds of wares from India, and paid for them in coined money, specimens of which are constantly being unearthed in various parts of India. They had already heard of Agathodaimon, the Land of the Good Spirits, that is to say of Sumatra; and also of an island called Jaba Diu which lay beyond it. Judging by these names, Europe's first information about Java would appear to have come from Ceylon, for there the world diva means island.

But accurate as the Romans tried to be in their accounts of distant lands, they nevertheless managed to disseminate strange tales, such for instance as those about the Ichthyophagi, the Fish-eaters of India. These were people who lived in a country where not only the human beings, but all the cattle too, lived exclusively on fish. These tales remained current throughout the Middle Ages, together with many other strange accounts.—Dr. W. J. v. BALEN in *The Netherland Mail*.