

ආ ව්‍යාජ narrations  
Volume 01 | Issue 02 | July – December 2016 | Article 04  
ISBN 2478-0642

On-line Refereed Journal of the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Community Studies  
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

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**Recommended Citation**

Dasanayake, Rohitha (2016) " Cinnamon: A Spice of an Indigenous Origin- Historical Study". *Narrations*: : Vol. 01: Iss. 2, Article 04.  
Available at: [www.sab.ac.lk](http://www.sab.ac.lk)

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## Cinnamon: A Spice of an Indigenous Origin- Historical Study

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### Abstract

Cinnamon has been used by humans for thousands of years- as early as 3,000 B.C. Despite of its exotic, distant origin, cinnamon was known and widely used in the ancient world. The Arabs were the first to introduce it to the west and dominated the trade for centuries via their network of trading routes that went as far as China. Their account of where and how cinnamon was obtained proves that exaggerated marketing techniques were not invented in the past. In spite of its widespread use, the origins of cinnamon was the Arab merchants' best-kept secret until the early 10th century. To maintain their monopoly on cinnamon trade and justify its exorbitant price, Arab traders' interlaced colorful stories for their buyers about where and how they obtained the luxurious spice. Therefore, they furnished details on the origin of cinnamon which were not true. Many scholars believe that cinnamon was brought from Sri Lanka during that period and it needs to be investigated.

Cinnamon<sup>6</sup>, kurundu, davoul kurundoo (Sinhala), karruwa, lavanga pattai (Tamil)<sup>7</sup>, sanalinga (Telugu)<sup>8</sup>, lavanga patte (Malayalam)<sup>9</sup> dala-chini (Kannada)<sup>10</sup>, darasita, gudatvak (Sanskrit)<sup>11</sup>, dar-chini (Persian)<sup>12</sup>, darsini, qirfa-t, sailaniyah (Arabic)<sup>13</sup>, qaumi,<sup>14</sup> sin-amun<sup>15</sup> (Urdu) yuh or juh-kwei (Chinese)<sup>16</sup>, kanil (Dutch), cinnamomum (Latin)<sup>17</sup>, canella (French)<sup>18</sup>, is an aromatic bark, reddish or yellowish brown bark of topical trees of the

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- <sup>6</sup>. Cinnamon contains sugar, mannite, starch, mucilage and tannic acid. Cinnamon is stated to possess antispasmodic, carminative, orexigenic, antidiarrheal, antimicrobial, refrigerant, and anthelmintic properties. It has been used for anorexia, intestinal colic, infantile diarrhea, common cold, influenza, and specifically for flatulent colic and for dyspepsia with nausea. Cinnamon bark is also stated to be astringent, and cinnamon oil is reported to possess carminative and antiseptic properties. See Manuchair Ebadi, **Pharmacodynamic Basis of Herbal Medicine**, New York, CRC Press, 2001, p. 31; James A. Duke and Others, **Hand Book of Medicinal Herbs**, New York, CRC Press, 2002, pp. 159-160; <http://homecooking.about.com/od/foodhistory/a/cinnamonhistory.htm> and see [foodreference.com](http://foodreference.com)
- <sup>7</sup>. **Tamil-English Dictionary**, (ed.), C. Chidambaranatha Chettiar, Madras, University of Madras, 1992, p. 197
- <sup>8</sup>. **Dictionary, English and Telugu**, (ed.), J.C. Morriss, Vol. I, Madras, Printed at the Asian Herald Press, 1835, p. 182; **Dictionary English-Telugu**, (ed.), Charles Philip Brown, Madras, Asian Educational Services, 1992, p. 168 reprint
- <sup>9</sup>. **English Malayalam Dictionary**, (ed.), Tobias Zacharias, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1984, p. 87
- <sup>10</sup>. **English Kannada Dictionary**, G. Venkatasubbaiah, Bangalore, Prism Book Pvt. Ltd., 2001, p. 70; S.P. Ambasta and Others, **The Useful Plants of India**, New Delhi, CSIR, 1992, p. 126
- <sup>11</sup>. **A Dictionary English and Sanskrit**, (ed.), Monier Williams, Lucknow, Akhila Bharatiya Sanskrit Parishad, 1957, p. 95; **Dictionary English and Sanskrit**, (ed.), Monier Williams, Delhi, Motilal Benarasidass, 1976, p. 95
- <sup>12</sup>. **An English Persian Dictionary**, (ed.), Arthur N. Wollaston, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1991, p. 54
- <sup>13</sup>. **A learner's English Arabic Dictionary**, (ed.), F. Steingass, New Delhi, Asian Publishers, 1978, 60; **Dictionary of the Economic Products of India**, (ed.), George Watt, Vol. II, Delhi, Periodical Expert, 1972, p. 326
- <sup>14</sup>. **English Urdu Dictionary**, (ed.), Jamail Jalibi, New Delhi, Educational Publishing House, 2002, p. 357
- <sup>15</sup>. **Advanced 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary: English into English and Urdu**, (ed.), Bashir Ahmad Qureshi, New Delhi, Educational Publishing House, 2000, 114
- <sup>16</sup>. **Encyclopaedia Asiatica: Comprising Indian Subcontinent, Eastern and Southern Asia**, (ed.), Edward Balfour, Vol. II, New Delhi, Cosmo Publication, 1976, p. 732
- <sup>17</sup>. **Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged**, Vol. I, London, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1961, p. 407
- <sup>18</sup>. **Dictionary of the French and English Languages**, (ed.), J.O. Kettridge, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1936, p. 304; **The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary**, (ed.), Marie Helene Correard, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 1089

genus *cinnamomum*<sup>19</sup> or *cinnamomum zeylanicum*.<sup>20</sup> Cinnomon has long been valued as a spice which was used by the ancient Egyptians in embalming mummies (mummification), witchery and the manufacture of perfumes<sup>21</sup> and malabathrum oil. Chinese also use cinnabar in preserving the body of the dead.<sup>22</sup>

According to Warmington “much malabathrum oil<sup>23</sup> was produced in Egypt from raw stuff imported from India, malabathrum<sup>24</sup> (*Cinnamomum tamala* Sanskrit-*tamalapatra*) being the leaves of cinnamon.<sup>25</sup> Even the author of the Periplus did not know that malabathrum was only the leaf of cinnamon. He says that malabathrum<sup>26</sup> was exported from the coast of Bacare.<sup>27</sup> Pliny says that Syria also exported malabathrum and stating that cinnamon ‘grows in the country of the Ethiopians’,<sup>28</sup> which, however, is not so.

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19. **The Encyclopedia Americana: International Edition**, Vol. VI, New York, Americana Corporation, 1829, p. 730; **Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the World**, (eds.), A.S. Rapport, R.F. Patterson and John Dougall, New Delhi, Akashdeep Pub., 1989, p. 113
20. The medicinal qualities of *cinnamomum zeylanicum* as a stomachic and carminative are recognized in the West and East alike. See R. Thomas, **Natural Ways to Health, Alternative Medicine: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Natural Healing**, Alexandria, Time-Life Books, 1997, p. 220
21. **Encyclopaedia Britannica**, Vol. 5, London, Encyclopaedia Britannica Ltd., 1960, p.713
22. Cheng Te-K'un, **Archaeology in China**, Vol. II, Cambridge, W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1960, p. 66
23. In the Roman Empire the cinnamon-leaves as raw product generally fetched 60 denarii a pound, but as much as 300 or 400 denarii could be obtained for one pound of the manufactured oil. E.H. Warmington, **Commerce between the Roman Empire and India**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 189
24. This plant has never been satisfactory identified. S.K. Maity suggests the betel leaf. Bus it is not. **Economic Life in Northern India: In the Gupta Period (cir. A.D. 300-550)**, New Delhi, Motilal Benarsidass, 1970, p. 177
25. E.H. Warmington, **Commerce between the Roman Empire and India**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 186
26. Malabathrum was frequently used to flavour wines and foods such as oyster-sauce and (like the bark) was valued in medicines and as a protection for clothes against moth-caterpillars.
27. **The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchants of the First Century**, Translated from the Greek and Annotated by Wilfred H. Schoff, New York, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912, p. 56
28. Prakash Charan Prasad, **Foreign Trade and Commerce in Ancient India**, New Delhi, Abhinav Publications, 1977, p. 204

The quantity of cinnamon and pepper which passes through Alexandria must have been enormous, as it consisted of supplies for almost the whole of the Roman Empire, including perhaps large consignments of cinnamon for manufacture into unguents and perfumes in Syrian towns.<sup>29</sup> Egypt also produced it in still greater quantity. In Breasted's<sup>30</sup> translations of Egyptian texts, notably in his version of the Harris papyrus, cassia<sup>31</sup> wood, and cinnamon wood are frequently mentioned. While it is possible that these translations may, in fact, be correct, they cannot be regarded as altogether certain, and are therefore of doubtful value as evidence for the use of these products by the Egyptians.

Egyptian perfumes are described by both Theophrastus and Pliny and are mentioned by Athenaeus, who calls them the best, and expensive. Theophrastus states that one was made from several ingredients, including cinnamon and myrrh (the other ingredients not being named) and that a certain perfumer "had had Egyptian perfume in his shop for eight years."<sup>32</sup> The Greeks also used it as an ingredient in ointments<sup>33</sup> and perfumes<sup>34</sup> as well as a

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<sup>29</sup>. E.H. Warmington, *op.cit.*, p. 194

<sup>30</sup>. Quoted from A. Lucas and J.R. Harris, **Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries**, London, Edward Arnold Publisher, 1962, p. 308

<sup>31</sup>. Cassia and cinnamon are very similar to one another, both being the dried bark of certain varieties of laurel that grow in India, Sri Lanka and China (cassia being from *Cinnamomum cassia* and cinnamon from *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*), cassia, however, being more pungent, more astringent, less delicate in flavour and thicker than cinnamon. Anciently both cassia and cinnamon consisted not only of the bark, but included also flower-tops, twigs and wood; the leaves were called *malabathrum*.

<sup>32</sup>. A. Lucas and J.R. Harris, **Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries**, London, Edward Arnold Publisher, 1962, pp. 86-87

<sup>33</sup>. Ariston's salve for gout (Nard, cinnamon, cassia, chameleon and rush: 32 gr. each; goat grease (lanolin) in liquid *Irinum* oil: 80 gr. Iris soaked in vinegar for 20 days: 4gr. (Celsus, V.18, 33) Pills for pain in the vulva (silis, acoris, seeds of wild rue, castoreum, cinnamon, pepper, opium, *panax root*, mandragora dried fruits, round rush flowers. The ingredients were pounded in a mortar each one by itself, then they were mixed together adding a little sweet wine, just the necessary to obtain a consistent malm. *Per os* (Celsus, V.25.2) see E. Salza Prina Ricotti, "Indian Plants in Graeco-Roman Medicinal Art", in R.M. Cimino, "Indian Products Exported to the West", in Rosa Maria Cimino, (ed.), **Ancient Rome and India: Commercial and Cultural Contacts between the Roman World and India**, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994, pp. 88-100

<sup>34</sup>. Kinnamominon was based on cardamom and cinnamon. It was made with behen oil, xylobalsam, sweet flag, schoenus, cinnamon, carpobalsam, myrrh and honey. (Dioscurides, I, 74) see E. Salza Prina Ricotti, "Indian products in Roman Cosmetics", in Rosa Maria Cimino, *op.cit.*, pp. 110-118

medicine.<sup>35</sup> Trade between the Seleucid domains and India was by both land and sea, and included items such as teak, spices, jewels, incense, and certainly costus and cinnamon.<sup>36</sup>

Cinnamon also was reported to cure various ailments during the Middle Ages, including coughs and indigestion.<sup>37</sup> Beyond its importance as a status symbol and curative, cinnamon was used by those who could afford it for the enjoyable flavor it added to food and drink. Cinnamon is mentioned as one of the ingredients of the sacred anointing oil of the Hebrew priests. The Egyptian inscriptions of Queen Hatshepsut's expedition, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C., mention cinnamon wood as one of the "marvels of the country of Punt" which were brought back to Egypt.<sup>38</sup> Cinnamon is mentioned in several books of the Bible, for instance as an ingredient in Moses' anointing oils and as a token of friendship between lovers or friends<sup>39</sup> and in Exodus (30:23) where Moses is commanded to use both sweet cinnamon and cassia, and in proverbs 7:17-18, where the Lover's bed is perfumed with myrrh, aloe and cinnamon. It is also alluded Herodotus and other classical writers.

According to an inscription the 'royal linen', besides precious stones and cinnamon which were among yearly tributes of Punt to Pharaoh Rameses III (12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)<sup>40</sup>,

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<sup>35</sup>. Himanshu Prabha Ray, **The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia**, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 56

<sup>36</sup>. Nayanjot Lahiri, **The Archaeology of Indian Trade Routes up to c. 200 B.C.: Resource Use, Resource Access and Lines of Communication**, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992; Himanshu Prabha Ray, **The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 8

<sup>37</sup>. Sindney W. Mintz, **Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History**, New York, Viking, 1985, p. 103

<sup>38</sup>. "Very heavily with marvels of the country of Punt; all goodly fragrant woods of God's Land, heaps of myrrh-resin, of fresh myrrh-trees, ivory, with ebony and pure ivory with green gold of Emu, with cinnamon-wood, with incense.....See James Hendry Breasted, **A History of Egypt from the Earliest times to the Persian Conquest**, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1905, p. 276; Shereen Ratnagar, **Trading Encounters: from the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age**, (A radically revised edition), New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 210

<sup>39</sup>. Charles Corn, **The Scents of Eden: A Narrative of the Spice Trade**, New York, Kodansha International, 1998, p. 202.

<sup>40</sup>. K.P. Jayaswal, "*Proclamation of Asoka as a Buddhist and His Jambudipa*", **Indian Antiquary**, Vol. LXII-62, London, 1933, p. 170 and see Shashi Asthana, **History and Archaeology of India's Contacts with Other Countries: From Earliest Times to 300 B.C.**, Delhi, B.R. Publication, 1947, p. 165

might have been obtained from India where along they were available in those days. Hornell believes that cinnamon was brought from Sri Lanka during that period.<sup>41</sup> In ancient Rome, mourners burnt cinnamon in funeral pyres in order to cover the scent of burning flesh.<sup>42</sup> Emperor Nero consumed a year's worth of the spice in the pyre for his wife Poppaea in 65 AD.<sup>43</sup>

In his Law Digest Justinian gives a long list of imported merchandise in connection with his regulation on customs duties. Among the items there were pearls, cinnamon, long pepper, white pepper, ginger, malabathrum, cardamom, cinnamon-wood and ivory.<sup>44</sup> Chief among these imports were possibly the cinnamon, pepper and silk. Spices as condiments and for burning as incense had become virtual necessities among the Byzantine upper classes, and had to be procured at all cost. Alike in the ceremonial of the court and in the ritual of the church, incense was badly needed, and the requisite spice could be obtained only through Indian and Arabian traders<sup>45</sup>.

There seems to be a difference of opinion among scholars regarding the original habitat of cinnamon and cassia.<sup>46</sup> Both cinnamon and cassia are the dried bark of Asia evergreen that belong to the laurel family. Sri Lanka is the major source of cinnamon (true cinnamon-*Cinnamomum Zeylanicum*<sup>47</sup>) and Portuguese who settled there did so to

<sup>41</sup>. James Hornell, "Naval Activities in the Days Solomon and Rameses", in *Antiquity*, Vol. XXI, No. 81, March 1947, pp. 66-73

<sup>42</sup>. Richard M. Klein, **The Green World: An Introduction to Plants and People**, New York, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 306.

<sup>43</sup>. Pliny (XII-XLI, 18) narrated that during the funeral of Poppea, Nero's wife, who was assassinated by her own husband, as many perfumes were consumed as Rome imported in a year. R.M. Cimino, "Indian Products Exported to the West", in Rosa Maria Cimino, (ed.), **Ancient Rome and India: Commercial and Cultural contacts between the Roman World and India**, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994, pp. 80-87

<sup>44</sup>. S.K. Maity, **Economic Life In Northern India: In the Gupta Period (cir. A.D. 300-550)**, Delhi, Motilal Benarsidass, 1970, p. 177

<sup>45</sup>. De Lacy O'Leary, **Arabs before Muhamad**, New York, Pub. not given, 1927, p. 113

<sup>46</sup>. P. Crone, **Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 253-63; L. Casson, **Ancient Trade and Society**, Detroit, 1984, pp. 225-247

<sup>47</sup>. See **Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the World**, (eds.), A.S. Rapport, R.F. Patterson and John Dougall, New Delhi, Akashdeep Pub., 1989, p. 113

exploit the rich resource of cinnamon<sup>48</sup>. But there is remotest allusion to cinnamon as an indigenous production, or even as an article of commerce in Sri Lanka.

Vincent, in scrutinizing the writings of the classical authors, anterior to Cosmas who treated of Taprobane, was surprised to discover that no mention of cinnamon as a production of Sri Lanka was to be met with Iambulus, Pliny, Dioscorides, or Ptolemy, and that even the author of the mercantile Periplus was silent regarding it.<sup>49</sup> This unexpected result has served to cast a suspicion on the title of Sri Lanka to be designated *par excellence* the “Cinnamon Isle”, and even with the knowledge that the cinnamon laurel is indigenous there, it admits of but little doubt that the spice which in the earlier ages was imported into Europe through Arabia, was obtained, first from Africa, and afterwards from India; and that it was not till after the twelfth or thirteenth century that its existence in Sri Lanka became known to the merchants resorting to the island.<sup>50</sup>

Theophrastus (370-285 B.C.), a contemporary writer of Ptolemy I, and extant papyri refer to items of import, some of them being products of India. Theophrastus gives extensive descriptions of plant like rice, cotton, Indian barley, pepper, frankincense, myrrh, balsam, cassia and cinnamon.<sup>51</sup> Aristobulos states that spikenard, cinnamon and other aromatics were produced in India.<sup>52</sup> The letter of Seleucus dated 288-7 B.C. contains a list of offerings to the Apollo temple in Didyma and includes frankincense from South Arabia and cinnamon and *Costus speciosus* from India.<sup>53</sup> In Katesias's *Indica*<sup>54</sup> (400 B.C.) a Dravidian word *karpian* can be noticed for ‘cinnamon’. According to Caldwell, it can be identified with the Tamil Malayalam word *Karppu* or *Karuppa* similar to Sanskrit *Karpara*.<sup>55</sup> Phile, who composed his *Michael XI* (Palaeologus),

<sup>48</sup>. M.N.H. Pearson, (ed.), **Spices in the Indian Ocean World**, Brookfield, Variorum, 1996, p. xxv

<sup>49</sup>. William Vincent, **The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean**, Vol. II, London, Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies in the Strand, 1807, p. 512

<sup>50</sup>. Sir James Emerson Tennent, **Ceylon: An Account of Island Physical, Historical, and Topographical with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions**, London, Longman, Green Longman and Roberts, 1859, p. 555

<sup>51</sup>. Himanshu Prabha Ray, **The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia**, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 57

<sup>52</sup>. J.W. McCrindle, J.W., **Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature**, Archibald Constable, Westminster, 1901, p. 28

<sup>53</sup>. J.F. Salles, “*The Arab – Persian Gulf under the Seleucids*”, in A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, (eds.), **Hellenism in the East**, Duckworth, 1987, p. 90

<sup>54</sup>. J.W. MacCrindle, **Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Kindian**, Calcutta, 1882, p. 29 Quoted from Shashi Asthana, **History and Archaeology of India's Contacts with Other Countries: From Earliest Times to 300 B.C.**, Delhi, B.R. Publication, 1947, p. 180

<sup>55</sup>. R. Caldwell, **Grammar of the Dravidians**, Language, Madras University, Madras, 1956, p. 105

about the year 1310 A.D., repeats the ancient fable of Herodotus that the Arabians informed Herodotus that they obtained cinnamon in marshes guarded by winged serpents, and in the nests of birds. He says the birds made their nests of cinnamon sticks fastened together with mud, and that the Arabians did not know where the sticks came from.<sup>56</sup> Eratosthenes, librarian of Alexandria (B.C.194), Hipparchus, and Ptolemy place the cinnamon region in the north eastern corner of Africa or Cape Guardafui.<sup>57</sup>

But the problem is that right from Herodotus onwards classical sources mention cinnamon and cassia together with frankincense and myrrh as products of south Arabia. Strabo, on the other hand mentions Ethiopia and India as the likely sources. South Arabia and Ethiopia can be dismissed straight away as the plants require far more moisture than is available there. They could not have come from India as there is no mention of the two in the detailed list of commodities given in the *Periplus*.<sup>58</sup>

Strabo draws a parallel to indicate the “*Regio Cinnamoniferae*”, or countries where the spice was supposed to grow, passing on one side a little to the south of Taprobana, (Sri Lanka) and at the other across Lybia.<sup>59</sup> Laufer says that the greatest part of cinnamon supply came from Ceylon and India.<sup>60</sup> King Buvanekabahu, the first (A.D.1273-1284) in Sri Lanka, had sent a mission of ambassadors to Mamluk state council in Egypt during A.D. 1283. This event needs to be considered in this regard.

A detailed account of this mission has been recorded by al Maqrizi in his book *History of Sultans of Mamluk*.<sup>61</sup> In it appears the following account of an embassy from Sri Lanka. “On the 14<sup>th</sup> of Muharram 682 (14<sup>th</sup> April 1283) envoys arrived in Egypt from the ruler of Ceylon, which is part of India. This prince was called Abu Nekkah

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<sup>56</sup>. Rifles, **Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical**, Vol. II, Chapman & Hall, (London, 1876), p. 331

<sup>57</sup>. **Ibid** and Shereen Ratnagar, **Trading Encounters: from the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age**, (A radically revised edition) New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 210

<sup>58</sup>. Himanshu P. Ray, 1994, **The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia**, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 56

<sup>59</sup>. William Vincent, **The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean**, Vol. II, London, Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies in the Strand, 1807, p. 511

<sup>60</sup>. Laufer, **Sino-Iranica**, Chicago, Berthold, 1919, p. 374

<sup>61</sup>. In M. Quatremere’s “*Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks*”, Translated from Maqrizi, under the reign of al-Mansur Sayfu’d-din Qalaun, **Maqrizi**, (ed.), Quatremere, Vol. 11, part 1, pp. 59-60; A further account of this embassy is to be found in M.S. de Gem 118 (2) translated (from Arabic to French-Arabian MSS. at St. Germain) in Quatremere’s “*Memoires Sur l’Egypte*”, Vol.II, p. 284- Quoted from Henry H. Howorth, “*A Singhalese Prince in Egypt*”, **Indian Antiquary**, Vol. XIV, (Bombay, 1885), February, p. 61



Lebadahs” In the Egyptian records the name appears as “Abou-Nekbah-Lebabah”<sup>62</sup> H.W. Codrington says<sup>63</sup> that Abou-Nekbah is a fair version of “Bhuvaneka Bau”, or “Bhuvaneka Bahu”. Later historians have identified the name with Buvaneka Bahu I (A.D. 1271-1283). This mission took place on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1283 as recorded in the Hijira year 682 (14 of Muharram 682) during the contemporary reign of Al mansur sayfu din Qulaun, the king of Egypt in the A.D. 1279-1290. King Buvanekabahu’s message to the Sultanate of Egypt contained details of products of the country and about the King himself. The leader of the mission sent to Egypt by the Sinhalese king was a Muslim man, named al- Haj Abu’ Uthman. Al Maqrizi describes the, Sinhalese mission in the following words:

“Ceylon is Egypt and Egypt is Ceylon. I desire that an Egyptian ambassador accompany mine on his return and that another be sent to reside in the town of Aden. I possess a prodigious quantity of pearls and precious stones of every kind. I have vessels, elephants, muslins, and other stuffs, wood of baqam (Brazil wood), cinnamon, and all the objects of commerce, which are brought to you by Banian merchants.”<sup>64</sup> The record of cinnamon as a commercial crop in the above mission had shown that cinnamon had grown an export crop in Sri Lanka to a certain extent. It is believed that, first of all, records in history before that cinnamon was grown as an export crop which was not recorded anywhere in local historical documents.

<sup>62</sup> . “L’an 682 de l’hégira on vit arriver à la cour d’Egypte une ambassade du prince de Ceylon, roi de l’nde. Le depute, qui se nommait Al-hadj Abou-Othman, étoit accompagné de plusieurs personnes. Suivant ce qu’ils recontèrent ils étoient embarqués par ordre de leur prince sur un vaisseau de Ceylon, et, après avoir touché à cette ils étoient venus aborder au port d’Ormus.....La lettre étoit enfermée dans une boîte d’or, et enveloppée d’une étoffe qui ressembloit au touz (l’écorce d’arbre). La letter du Roi étoit écrite en caractères indigenes sur l’écorce d’arbre..... Je possède une quantité prodigieuse de perles et de Pirreries de toute espèce. J’ai des vaisseaux, des elephants, des mousselines et autres étoffes, du bois de bakam, de la cannelle, et tous les objets de commerce qui vous sont apportès par les marchands Banians.” Quatremere’s “**Memoires Sur l’Egypt**”, Vol. II, p. 284-Quoted from Rifles, **Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical**, Two Vols, Chapman & Hall, (London, 1876), Vol. II, p. 248

<sup>63</sup> H.W. Codrington, “*A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt*”, in **Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)**, Vol. XXVIII, No. 72, 1919, pp. 82-85

<sup>64</sup> Rifles, **Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical**, Vol. II, London, Chapman & Hall, 1876, pp. 246-249; Henry H. Howorth, “*A Singhalese Prince in Egypt*”, **Indian Antiquary**, Vol. XIV, Bombay, 1885 February, p. 61; H.W. Codrington, “*A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt*”, in **Journal of Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch)**, Vol. XXVIII, No. 72, 1919, pp. 83; Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam, **Ancient Jaffna: Being A Research into the History of Jaffna from Early Times to the Portuguese Period**, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1984, pp. 352-354 reprint; Wilfred Mendis Gunasekara, “*Ceylon Mission that visit Egypt in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*”, in **Ceylon Today**, Vol. 8, Colombo, 1956 August, p. 27

The earliest Sinhalese literature in the *Sikhavalanda* of the 10<sup>th</sup> century contains the first reference to cinnamon in local literature<sup>65</sup> and Buzurg Ibn Shahryar's "*Ajaib al-Hind*" (Wonders of India) book, recorded about the cinnamon of Sri Lanka in even as early as 10<sup>th</sup> century. Though he had not mentioned as an export crop he says that Sinhalese cinnamon is so famous.<sup>66</sup> But Wolters refers to a Chinese text *Tai Ping Yu Lan* written by Yang Tzu in the third century A.D. which states "Shihtze country (Sri Lanka) produces cinnabar, mercury, hsun-lun, tumeric, slorax, costus and such perfumes."<sup>67</sup> Nafis Ahamad says that no one with the exception of Buzurg Ibn Shahryar spoke of its production as being indigenous to the island prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier it was supposed that Ibn Battuta was the first to make mention of its production in the island, and on the basis of this view it was believed that cinnamon was earlier indigenous to North Africa and was taken from there to Sri Lanka by the Arabs, where it thrived well and was found growing in the island after the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>68</sup>

The reference in the *Periplus*<sup>69</sup> to the export of cinnamon from the Horn is puzzling (Somali land). Strabo and other Roman writers refer as the *region cinnamomifea* in the same belief. It appears that Roman merchants had little direct contact with Indian merchants, whose ships were kept out of the Red Sea, and the Arab and African merchants, middlemen found it profitable to conceal the source of cinnamon so that their near-monopoly of its trade could not be threatened. In fact, this trade secret was kept so well that

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<sup>65</sup>. *Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar, Kitab 'Ajayab-ul-Hind or The Book of the Marvels of India*, English Translation by L. Marcel Devic, London, The Golden Dragon Library, 1928, p. 155; B.J Perera, "*The Foreign Trade and Commerce of ancient Ceylon: IV- The Exports and Imports of Ancient Ceylon*", in **The Ceylon Historical Journal**, No. 1&2, 1952 July and October, 1952, pp. 15-22

<sup>66</sup>. S.M. Yusuf, **Studies in Islamic History and Culture**, Lahore, Al-Ishak, 1970, p. 185

<sup>67</sup>. O.W. Wolters, **Early Indonesian Commerce: The Study of the Origins of Srivijaya**, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 73-74

<sup>68</sup>. Nafis Ahmad, "*The Arabs Knowledge of Ceylon*", **Islamic Culture**, Vol. 19, Hyderabad, Islamic Cultural Board, 1945, p. 17

<sup>69</sup>. **The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchants of the First Century**, Translated from the Greek and Annotated by Wilfred H. Schoff, New York, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912, pp. 25-27, 82-83

when the Romans saw cinnamon leaves in India they failed to recognize them.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the Phoenicians kept secret their sources of the tin and lead which they traded over appreciable distances as middlemen.<sup>71</sup> Neville Chittick says that cinnamon would seem to be a substance only produced in South East Asia, and there appears here to be evidence of trade from that to the Horn.<sup>72</sup> But Romila Thapar clearly points out and explains that it as an Indian product.<sup>73</sup> However, *Periplus*'s reference may be an ill-informed reflection of the fact that cinnamon from Asia was probably transshipped in southern Arabia.

Abu Dulaf (940 A.D.) says, that the cinnamon tree belongs to everyone communally and has no particular owner<sup>74</sup> regarding Asia. *Masalik-ul-Absarfi Mamalik-ul-Amsar* (10<sup>th</sup> century) mentions that cinnamon as a Indian product.<sup>75</sup> W. Ousley, quoting a manuscript Persian dictionary called 'Berhan Katta' which has, Sailan (Sri Lanka) the well-known region from which is brought the fine cinnamon, says, "it has been doubted from the silence of Pliny, Ptolemy, Dioscorides, and other early writers, whether cinnamon, which in the dictionary quoted seems particularly indicated as a staple commodity of Sri Lanka, was known among its ancients products"<sup>76</sup>. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Sindbad also mention several

<sup>70</sup>. E.H. Warmington, **The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928, pp. 186-9

<sup>71</sup>. G.W. van Beek, "Frankincense and Myrrh in Ancient South Arabia", **Journal of the American Oriental Society**, Vol. 72, 1958, pp. 141-51

<sup>72</sup>. Neville Chittick, "East Africa and the Orient: ports and trade before the arrival of the Portuguese", **Historical Relations across the Indian Ocean: The general history of Africa studies and documents 3**, Belgium, UNESCO, 1980, p. 17

<sup>73</sup>. As early as the fourth century B.C. the Egyptian brought back cinnamon believing it to be a product of Southern Arabia, whereas it came from India. Romila Thapar, "Epigraphic evidence and some Indo-Hellenistic contacts during the Mauryan Period.", in S.K. Maity and Upendra Thakur, (eds.), **Professor D.C. Sircar Commemoration Volume**, New Delhi, Abhinav Publication, 1987, pp. 15-21

<sup>74</sup>. Paul Wheatley, **The Golden Khersonese: Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before A.D. 1500**, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1961, p. 217

<sup>75</sup>. Muhammad Zaki, (ed.), **Arabs accounts India**, Delhi, 1981, pp. 5, 9, -Quoted from MJoginder K. Chawla, **India's Overland Trade with Central Asia and Persia During the Thirteenth Century and Fourteenth Centuries**, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 2006, pp. 57-59

<sup>76</sup>. Quoted from Rifles, **Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical**, Vol. II, London, Chapman & Hall, 1876, p. 332

cinnamon countries with Sri Lanka, those belong to the Asia<sup>77</sup> and Benjamin of Tudela also gives same idea.<sup>78</sup> Ibn Khodadbeh's account of Jewish merchants from Persia says that "on their returns from China they carry musk, aloes, camphor, cinnamon and other products of the eastern countries."<sup>79</sup> Anyway Ibn Shahiryar records might be possible to accept, especially, Jewish traders negotiated large purchases on the west coast of Sri Lanka. In 1130, a letter from a Jewish trader in Goitein's collection of letter of Medieval Jewish Traders speaks of acquiring 6,000 Ibs. of Sri Lanka cinnamon.<sup>80</sup>

Kazwini Zacharie-ben-Mohammed, an Arabian naturalist and geographer (1275 A.D.) says that "from it are brought sandal-wood, spikenard, cinnamon, cloves, brazil-wood (coesalpinia Sappan), and various aromatics" from Sri Lanka.<sup>81</sup> Another early foreign reference to cinnamon of Sri Lanka is found in one of the letters of a thirteenth century missionary John of Montecorvino (c.1292 A.D) who mentions that "The cinnamon tree is of a medium bulk, not very high, and in trunk, bark, and foliage is like the laurel; indeed, altogether it resembleth the laurel greatly in appearance. Great store of it is carried forth of the island which is hard-by Maabar."<sup>82</sup> Marco Polo describes cinnamon as growing in Malabar, Ceylon and Tibet<sup>83</sup> and Ibn Battuta stated in the fourteenth century that people

<sup>77</sup>. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, (trans.), Powys Mathers and J.C. Mardrus, London, Routledge, 1949, 7<sup>th</sup> impression, Vol. II, pp. 250, 261, 287-9, 303-4

<sup>78</sup>. *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, (ed.), A. Asher, Vol. II, New York, "Hakesheth" Publishing Co., 1840, p. 140

<sup>79</sup>. *Kitab Al-Masalik Wa' l-Mamalik, Abu'l-Kasim Obaidallah Ibn Abdallah Ibn Khoradbeh*, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, Vol. VI, (ed.), M.J De Goeje, Lugduni-Batavorum, Leiden, Apud E.J. Brill, 1889. p. 114

<sup>80</sup>. S.D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 185

<sup>81</sup>. Rifles, *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical*, Vol. II, London, Chapman & Hall, 1876. p. 246

<sup>82</sup>. H. Yule, *Cathay and Way Thither*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1864, p. 213; Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of Island Physical, Historical, and Topographical with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions*, Vol. I, London, Longman, Green Longman and Roberts, 1859, pp. 578-579; Nilakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India from Megasthenes to Mahuan*, Madras, University of Madras, 1942, p. 188

<sup>83</sup>. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Translated into English from the text of L.F. Benedetto by Aldo Ricci, London, Gorge Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1931, pp. 319-321

from Ma'bar took away cinnamon from Sri Lanka by “gifting” cloth to the king.<sup>84</sup> Later the Persian navigator Sulaiman also mentions about Serandib cinnamon on his way from Persian Gulf to Siam.<sup>85</sup>

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century account of the journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano a Genovese says that “after a navigation of twenty –six days we arrived at a large island call Ceylon which grow the Cinnamon trees, which resemble the laurel even in the leaf.....”<sup>86</sup> From these it is quite clear, that during the rule of king Buvanekabhahu’s time Sri Lankan Cinnamon, was popular and a commodity of high demand in the international trade and commerce between East and West.

According to the furnished details given by historical sources, cinnamon originated in Sri Lanka. The consumption of cinnamon already had a long history in Sri Lanka and by the time the Portuguese arrived at it became one of the main spices in the early years of the sixteenth century.

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<sup>84</sup>. *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, (trans. and commentary), Mahadi Hussain, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1953, p. 217; “The whole of its (Battala-Puttelam) coasts are covered with cinnamon tress brought down by torrents and heaped up like hills on the shore. They are taken without payment by the people of Ma’bar and Mulaybar, but in return for this they give presents of woven stuffs and similar articles to the sultan.” *Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, (trans.), H.A.R. Gibb, London, George Routledge Sons, Ltd., 1929, pp. 254-55

<sup>85</sup>. *The Ship of Sulaiman* translated from the Persian by John O’kane, Persian Heritage Series, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. 168-173- The ship of Sulaiman relates the visit of an envoy of Shah Sulaiman the Safavid (1666-94 A.D.) to Siam and to a Persian community, as a response to a friendly letter by the enlightened Siamese king, Phra Narai to the Shah. That Journey began on 27 June 1685 at Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. On the way describes some contemporary events in Sri Lanka and India.

<sup>86</sup>. *Account of the Journey of Hieronimo di Santo Stefano a Genovese in India in the Fifteenth Century being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages: The Century Preceding the Portuguese discovery of the Cape of Good Hope from Latin, Persian, Russian and Italian Sources*, (ed.), R.H. Major, London, Hakluyt Society, 1859. Ch. IV, p. 5