

urban centres in the valleys of the Chao Phraya, Irrawaddy, and Mekong rivers. Since coinage was absent in Southeast Asia till the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, the trade with India must have been via barter or the use of cowrie shells.

On the basis of literary and archaeological evidence, the following list of exports from Southeast Asia to India can be compiled: gold, spices such as cinnamon and cloves, aromatics, sandalwood, and camphor. Some of these items were shipped on to Western markets from India, as there was a demand for them in the Mediterranean region as well. It is also possible that tin was exported to the subcontinent from the Malay peninsula. Exports from India to Southeast Asia included cotton cloth, sugar, beads, and certain kinds of pottery. The trade was clearly not confined to luxury goods.

Ray (1994: 7) argues that there were a number of changes in international trade patterns in the 3rd and 4th centuries. These included the splitting up of long-distance trade networks into regional and local circuits. There was a southward shift in Roman trade interests. There was also an expansion of India's trade with West Asia. The ports of Sri Lanka increased in importance with the development of a direct route between Sri Lanka and China.

INDO-ROMAN TRADE

As mentioned earlier, the term *yavana* was initially used in ancient Indian texts to refer to the Greeks, but soon came to refer to all foreigners who came from the regions lying to the west of the subcontinent. In Ashoka's inscriptions, the *yavanas* appear as a people who lived on the north-western borders of the Maurya empire. During c. 200 BCE–300 CE, they appear as 'westerners' involved in trade. Early Tamil literature frequently refers to them. Sangam poems mention their large ships sailing on the Periyar river, bringing in gold and wine and sailing away with cargoes of black pepper. A poem in the *Pattuppattu* compares the noise made by the weavers of Madurai with that made by workers who loaded and unloaded merchandise onto *yavana* ships at midnight. A poem by

translation, and commentary, points out
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The period between the 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE saw flourishing trade between India and the Roman Empire. Apart from the export of Indian goods to the Mediterranean, India also played an important role in the Chinese silk trade. From the time of the Roman emperor Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), there was a tendency for traders to avoid the section of the Silk Route that passed through Parthia in central Asia, due to the turbulent conditions there. A part of the trade was diverted overland to India and onwards from the Indian ports to the Roman empire via the sea route. This trade declined after the time of Marcus Aurelius in the late 2nd century BCE, partly as a result of the internal vicissitudes of the Roman empire; however, it did not come to an end.

The *Periplus* gives a list of goods exported to the Roman empire from Indian ports on the Indus delta and the Gujarat coast. Pliny and Dio Chrysostom refer to the drain of Roman gold into India. The Vienna Papyrus, which records the terms of a business deal between two shippers of Alexandria and Muchiri, seems to refer to a loan for the acquisition of goods including nard (aromatic balsam), ivory and textiles.

The large number of Roman coins discovered in India comprise almost 170 finds from about 130 sites (Suresh, 2004: 27–88, 153–59). Most of the coins belong to the reigns of emperors Augustus (31 BCE–14 CE) and Tiberius (14–37 CE), and there are also imitations of these coins. There are silver coins known as *denarii* and gold ones known as *aurei*. The silver coins are more numerous, both in Rome and India. There is a concentration of finds in the Coimbatore area of Tamil Nadu and the Krishna valley in Andhra Pradesh. Although some Roman coins have been found at sites in western India, for example, near Sholapur, Waghoda, Vadgaon-Madhavpur, and Kondapur, they are relatively few in number. Apart from a handful of finds at sites such as Taxila, Manikyala, and Mathura, scarcely any Roman coins have been found in north India. While the Kushanas may well have melted down and re-minted Roman gold coins, this does not explain the virtual absence of silver coins in the north. Only one coin hoard of gold *aurei* has been

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reported in eastern India (in Singhbhum). Some of the Roman coins in India are marked by slash marks and small countermarks which include dots, stars, and curves. The precise reasons for the slashes are not clear; they may have been ownership marks.

In areas where well-established systems of currency already existed—for instance in the Kushana and Satavahana kingdoms—Roman coins may have been melted down for bullion, whereas in the eastern Deccan, where indigenous currency systems were weaker, they may have been used as currency. Recently, it has been shown that Roman coins made their way to India well after the reigns of the kings in whose reigns they were issued. P. Berghaus (1991) also points to the finds of Roman copper coins in Gujarat from the 2nd half of the 3rd century CE. Roman bronze coins are found at several places in India, mostly in Tamil Nadu, in contexts dating from the latter half of the 4th century CE. Thousands of them have also been found in Sri Lanka. This clearly shows the southward shift of maritime networks.

Apart from coins, valuable information regarding Indo-Mediterranean contacts comes from pottery. The two types of Roman pottery found in India are amphorae jars and terra sigillata. Amphorae are jars with a large oval body, narrow cylindrical neck, and two handles. Terra sigillata is a red glazed pottery, decorated by being pressed into



a mould. Scholars used to call it 'arretine ware', after Arezzo, an important centre for the production of such pottery. However, not all pottery of this type found at Arikamedu in fact came from Arezzo. Hence, the use of the more appropriate term *terra sigillata*, which includes moulded, decorated wares as well as undecorated, wheel-made ones made in Italy or imitations thereof. Rouletted ware is a pottery with a smooth surface and usually a metallic lustre, with concentric bands of rouletted designs. Pottery of this type found at several Indian sites, especially in eastern and south-eastern India (both on the coast and in the interiors) was once thought to be a foreign ware; however, it is now considered to be locally produced. Red polished ware, which is found at many sites in Gujarat, was also once considered a foreign ware, but is now considered to have been locally made.

Valuable evidence of India's maritime trade links comes from the site of Arikamedu on the Coromandal coast, 4 km from Pondicherry, on the right bank of the Ariyankuppam river, just where it enters the Bay of Bengal. Excavations conducted in 1945 revealed an occupation stretching from the end of the 1st century BCE to the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Northern and southern sectors of the settlement were identified. A brick structure in the northern sector was identified as a warehouse. In the southern sector, two walled courtyards associated with tanks and drains were tentatively identified as dying vats where muslin cloth was dyed and prepared for export. Locally produced pottery was found, but there were also some Mediterranean wares—amphorae and arretine ware (which, as mentioned earlier, is now usually referred to as *terra sigillata*). The amphorae were jars with a pink body, yellow slip, and two handles. There was also a rouletted black ware which showed some foreign influence. Other finds included over 200 beads of shell, bone, gold, terracotta, and semi-precious stones. A Graeco-Roman gem bore what could be an intaglio carving of the emperor Augustus. A fragment of a Roman lamp made of a fine red ware was also found. On the basis of these discoveries, Mortimer Wheeler concluded that Arikamedu was Poduke, one of the *yavana* emporia (trading stations)

mentioned in classical accounts. Recent excavations at Arikamedu have led to the revision of some of these ideas.

Apart from Arikamedu, Mediterranean amphorae and terra sigillata have been found at other southern sites such as Uraiyur, Kanchipuram, and Vasavasamudram (both in Chingleput district). They have also been found at sites in Gujarat and western India—such as Dwarka, Prabhas Patan, Ajabpura, Sathod, Jalat, and Nagara. Other sorts of objects that may possibly be of Roman origin have also been reported—e.g. terracotta objects, glassware, metal artefacts, and jewellery. However, many of these seem to be imitations of Roman objects. Clay bullae made in clay moulds imitating Roman coins are quite common all over the subcontinent. The bullae have a loop or perforation suggesting that they were worn around the neck. Brahmपुरi, in the western part of Kolhapur town (in Maharashtra), yielded a large hoard of 'Roman' bronzes, including a statuette of Poseidon, the Roman sea god. Suresh (2004: 153–55) points out that the distribution pattern of Roman artefacts in India indicates that while the trade was initially concentrated on the western coast, the Coromandel coast soon became more important. Excavations at Berenike on the Egyptian coast, which have yielded black pepper and beads of South Indian and Sri Lankan manufacture in a 4th century CE context, reflect the flourishing East–West trade.

THE WIDER ROLES OF TRADE AND TRADERS

Merchants appear as donors in inscriptions from different parts of the subcontinent in this period. The increasing affluence of sections of the merchant community coincided with religious institutions getting more institutionalized and organized. Patronizing such institutions by extending financial support was simultaneously an expression of devotion and piety as well as a quest for the validation of social status.⁵

Seafaring merchants can be identified in sculptures at several religious establishments. For instance, a railing medallion from Bharhut depicts a huge sea monster on the verge of swallowing a boat and its crew. An inscription suggests that this was a scene depicting the Jataka story of the merchant Vasugupta, who was saved from disaster by meditating on the Buddha. A Mathura sculpture depicts a *bodhisattva* in the form of a horse saving shipwrecked sailors from ravenous *yakshis*. A more graphic reflection of the perils faced by mortal seafarers are the hero stones found on the Konkan coast, sculpted with scenes of sea battles, set up by survivors in honour of those who had lost their lives.

It has been argued that a close relationship soon developed between Buddhist monasteries, traders, and guilds. Liu (1988: 122–23) has argued that as monasteries expanded and received more gifts, they were forced to get involved in various kinds of financial activities, and this led to the forging of a reciprocal relationship between monks and traders. Passing traders provided donations to monasteries, and monasteries in turn provided services for traders. Liu gives two examples to substantiate this point. The residue of what may be wine sedimentation (alternatively, it could be the residue of some sort of medicine) was found in amphorae sherds at the monastic site of Devnimori in Gujarat. The second example comes from Shaikhan Dheri, the site of ancient Pushkalavati. Here, a workshop or storeroom of what appears to be a liquor distillation apparatus was found in a Buddhist monastery. Liu argues that the evidence from these two sites shows that Buddhist monks were engaged in liquor trade. They may also have traded in items such as incense and precious stones, which may have been used for liturgical purposes. However, the evidence of direct links between Buddhist monasteries and trade is not in the whole very substantial. The location of monasteries along trade routes does not itself constitute conclusive evidence. The hypothesis of the connections between Buddhist monasteries and guilds in ancient India seems to be based more on analogies with patterns that emerged in East Asia in a later period.

⁵ This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Other important issues relate to the cultural impact of trade and trade as a vehicle of cultural transmission. Liu has demonstrated the connections between long-distance trade, urbanization, developments in Buddhist theology, and the spread of Buddhism in China. She shows how the demand for relics, images, and ceremonial objects played an important sustaining role in Sino-Indian trade. Ray (1994) too argues for links between Buddhism and trade in this period, directing attention to possible Buddhist symbols and legends on coinage, seals, and pottery, and to the emergence of the idea of the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara as the saviour of travellers and seafarers. She argues that trade networks between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia were initially dominated by trading groups owing allegiance to Buddhism and that Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia through trading channels. However, while trade was an important vehicle of cultural transmission, there were other agents as well. The activities of Chinese and Indian monks are an important part of the story of the spread of Buddhism to China. And the fact that rituals in Southeast Asian courts were dominated (as in India) by Brahmanical practices points to the presence of Brahmana ritual specialists in those courts.

Aspects of Social Change in North India and the Deccan:
 Varna, Caste, Gender