

Claudius Ptolemaeus,
Geographia,
Straßburg 1513



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Taprobane: Mapping an Island of Paradoxes

A Realistic Depiction of Taprobane in Antiquity becomes a Mythical Representation in Christian Middle Ages

This essay concerns the depiction of Sri Lanka in medieval *mappaemundi* such as those of Beatus, the Isidore map, the maps of Hereford and Ebstorf, and those in the tradition of Catalan atlases from Majorca and Modena. It will show how these latter straddled a decisive transition, thus helping Fra Mauro to usher in a newer portrayal of the island Saylam (the fore-runner of pre-modern Ceylon, cf. plate p. 316 b).

Known to the ancient Greeks and Romans as Taprobane, Sri Lanka figures as a tiny insular speck on the modern map of the world. Nevertheless, the variety of dimensions, positions and mythical attributes (Fig. 1)¹ bestowed upon it in course of its long history by classical authors and medieval mapmakers had maintained with considerable emphasis, that it was a large land-mass of continental proportions, inhabited by *Antichthonos* (cf. Pliny, *n. h.* 6. 81), counter-balancing the *oikoumene* or the inhabited part of the globe. It appeared as such uninterruptedly in European maps ever since Ptolemy outlined it with the respective coordinates as the largest

¹ See the Anonymous Medieval Map circa 1500 (Woldan Collection, Vienna), described by E. Woldan, A circular, copper-engraved, medieval world map, in: *Imago Mundi* 11 (1967), 13-16 and T. Campbell, The Wieder-Woldan Incunable World Map, in: *Imago Mundi* 42 (1990), 83.

island in the world in the final regional map, the Twelfth Map of Asia, in his Geography. It always bulked large in the popular imagination of both Westerners and Easterners who had access to Ptolemy’s data directly or indirectly (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Claudius PTOLEMAEUS, Geographi[a]e opus novissima traductione e Gr[ae]corum archetypis castigatissime pressum: ceteris ante lucubrationum multo prestantius, Strassburg 1513, Woldan Collection, Academy of Sciences, Vienna, G-V: WE 10.

With the disappearance of the Roman Empire, a long period sets in during which contacts between the East and the West become rare. As it was no longer possible to travel to the East and learn *in situ*, the West was obliged to depend on the bits and pieces of information gathered from the storehouse of Greek and Roman learning. Thus were the Middle Ages gradually led to the conviction that ancient authors always knew all that was necessary and possible to

know about Taprobane. Consequent to the rise of Islam, Greek and Latin literature lost its hold on geography of Taprobane and the knowledge of the island became outdated: it was subsequently a legendary island of conspicuously mythical attributes in medieval geographical lore. If Taprobane was out of reach in the reality, it remained also inaccessible in the realm of imaginative geography. Most of the medieval *mappaemundi* such as those of the Hereford and Ebstorf, locate it in the eastern confines of the surrounding ocean in the vicinity of Paradise. What mattered most in these cartographic representations was not the depiction of a precise geographic knowledge of the island, but an imparting of an ideological perception of mythical attributes.

This great admiration for ancient authors, coupled with a fear inspired by the pagan literature, prompted Christian scribes to make compromises and borrow from classical sources. Clerics and scribes found themselves busy adapting, compiling and summarizing from them from the very outset itself of the decline of ancient world. They yearned for these substances gleaned from great works of ancient authors in order to quench their thirst for knowledge. Indeed, from this classical heritage, what they sorted out to pick and choose for such adaptations, compilations and summaries, was what's most entertaining and amusing in other words, things of little depth and rather of fabulous nature. To know about the wide world they turned towards the *Bestiaria*, *Lapidaria* and *Herbaria*: the *Bestiaria* described animals of different countries including of course fabulous animals and monstrous creatures, the *Lapidaria* concerned treatises that described the nature and virtues on precious stones and the *Herbaria*, in the manner of the *Physiologus*, an Alexandrian compilation of the second century, translated into Latin in the 4th and 5th century.

For all that, the knowledge of Taprobane was not so much sought in the works of Strabo (15, 1 17), Pliny (*n. b.* 6, 81), and even much less in Ptolemy (7, 4) than in the *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* of Julius Solinus, a compiler of the third century. The *Collectanea*, now embellished with new anecdotes and adjusted to cater to the taste of the changing times was going to be the principal source of inspiration for a number of medieval authors. The island of Taprobane thus found its way into the *Etymologiae* of Saint Isidore bishop of Seville, a leading ecclesiastic figure. Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636) is the one who launched Taprobane from the Iberian Peninsula on its protean

career by drawing scholarly attention to its description in two passages: 14, 3, 5 and 14, 6, 122.²

In the course of the thirteenth century, other encyclopedic works emerged and flourished, continuing to find inspiration from Solinus's compilations. The *Imago mundi* of Honorius d'Autun (Honorius Augustodunensis) who also speaks of Taprobane in this work³ was the most widely-known encyclopedic work because of the influence it exerted over a long period of time and over a vast number of countries of cultural and linguistic diversity. At the heyday of great medieval period when the encyclopedic compilations thrived particularly at the beginning of the thirteenth century people derived a great pleasure from the recitations of Solinus' and Honorius' translations. Pierre de Beauvais is considered to be the first to have translated Solinus into French and his *Mappemonde* dedicated to Robert, the count of Dreux, forms part of such works which largely catered to the popular taste of his day.

Here is Pierre de Beauvais's version of Taprobane: *Plus loin, l'Inde la grande, pays très chaud, baigné par l'Océan, avec l'île de Taprobane, où il y a pas moins de dix cités; les gens sont gigantesques et vivent très longtemps; ils ont une langue à part, que nul n'entend, et ils n'entendent celle de personne; pour faire du commerce avec les marchands étrangers, ils étalent leurs produits sur le rivage, et les trocs se font sans paroles. Il y a deux hivers et deux étés par an, et toujours de la verdure. Solin raconte que les montagnes sont d'or dans ces régions, mais personne n'y va, à cause de la multitude des serpents.*⁴

Another well-known work was the *Image du monde* of Gossuin, a poem of 6 600 verses. Its success was such that 4 000 new verses were soon added to it. Sixty-nine manuscripts of the work preserved to our day bears witness to its popularity. The passage relative to Taprobane is very similar to the description found in the *Mappemonde* of Pierre de Beauvais. However Gossuin steps back less than Pierre de Beauvais, notably with regard to the wealth of the island: *Après vient l'Inde, qui prend son nom d'un fleuve au Nord, entourée par la grande mer,*

² J. André – Jean Filliozat, *L'Inde vue de Rome. Textes latins de l'Antiquité relatifs à l'Inde*, Paris 1987, 322-324.

³ Honorius Augustodunensis, *De imagine mundi, libri tres*, lib. I, Migne, *Patrologia latina* 172, 123: *Hoc India ab Occidente clauditur. In quo etiam est sita Taprobanes insula, decem civitatibus inclita. Haec duas astatas et duas hiemes uno anno habet, et omni tempore viwet.*

⁴ C.-V. Langlois, *La vie en France au Moyen Age 3*, Genève 1970, 127-128.

*avec l'île de Taprobane. Ce pays a deux étés et deux hivers par an, mais si tempérés qu'il y a toujours de la verdure, des fleurs et des fruits. C'est la contrée de l'or et des pierres précieuses, dont les dragons et griffons, monstres capables d'emporter un homme armé à cheval, défendent les gisements dans les montagnes. Lieux si doux, et si délectables, et si 'espirituels' que c'est un paradis à habiter.*⁵

However the encyclopedia par excellence, the work of reference of the age is the *Li Livre dou Tresor* or *La Naissance de toutes choses* (The Book of the Treasure or The Birth of All Things) written in French by the Italian Brunetto Latini. This work is a very good illustration of what occurs to the original source in the course of adaptation. Brunetto Latini locates farther East the silent trade described by Pliny in his description of Taprobane, and what is more he gives the impression as if it is actually taking place in his time:

Yonder live men, the Seres, who from the leaves and barks of retting trees make wool of which they clothe themselves. They are live amiably and peacefully among themselves, but refuse to enter into contact with foreigners. They do not want any of our merchandise and sell theirs to our merchants without uttering a word: on the bank of a river they display them with labels on which the prices are marked: our traders carry them away after having deposited there the price requested.⁶

This passage also sheds light on the type of errors which frequently appear in medieval translations and adaptations based on classical accounts. Solinus, in his work, described Taprobane a few lines apart from the Red Sea. From this Brunetto Latini arrives at the conclusion that the island is situated in the Red Sea: *Au-delà vivent des hommes, les Sères, qui de feuilles et d'écorces d'arbres rouies font une laine dont ils s'habillent. Ils sont aimables et paisibles entre eux, mais refusent d'entrer en relations avec les étrangers. Ils ne veulent point de nos marchandises et vendent les leurs à nos marchands sans dire un mot: ils les déposent sur la rive d'un fleuve avec des étiquettes où le prix est marqué: les nôtres les emportent après avoir mis à la place le prix.*⁷

On reading these passages taken from the leading compilations, one may wonder whether the imagery of Taprobane had perpetuated itself, almost unchanged from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

⁵ Langlois, *La vie en France au Moyen Age* 3, 167.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 360-361.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 360-361.

The symbolism which permeates the Christian thought from its beginning is quite explicit in the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, needed to appear beneath the thing, - *res* -, the sense - *verbum* -, that it was necessary to find out. The conscience that the medieval man possessed of himself, of his relationship with the universe of God necessitated in order for him to become orderly and clear, to find his unity, a symbolic support: *Et toi, chrétien selon Dieu, partage aussi l'Écriture du Vieux Testament en deux parties, à savoir selon l'histoire et selon la signification spirituelle: sépare la vérité de sa figure, distingue les choses de l'esprit de celles du corps, conserve le sens spirituel qui vivifie, afin de ne pas mourir de faim parce que la lettre aurait pourri au temps d'hiver, c'est-à-dire au jour du jugement dernier, car l'Apôtre déclare: 'La loi de l'esprit n'est pas la loi du corps; la lettre tue et l'esprit vivifie'*.⁸

The vision of the world is thus integrated into this eschatological perspective in which what was significant were the facts and not their veracity which was not necessary. It is in this spirit, it seems to me, that we need to understand the medieval vision of the island.

If Taprobane is inaccessible in the reality, it is also inaccessible in the imaginary world of the West. It is a closed world, *surrounded by the great sea*, a zone of mystery imagined as a garden, of which one is unable to say whether it is Paradise or it is the foretaste of hell.

These three authors agree in depicting and find a sort of consensus in presenting an abundance of wealth in Taprobane: it is the *country of gold, of pearls and of precious stones*. It is an immense source of wealth yet inaccessible because it is defended by diabolical monsters, serpents, dragons, griffons and lion-bodied birds.

The prohibition that falls either on a sacred space of which the most known example of the Middle Ages was the Paradise, barred to men by a curtain of flames, either on a space considered impure, but always avoided by the community of men. It is the case of Taprobane: *no one dares go there, because of the vast number of serpents, the greater part of the island is desert because of the heat*. To attempt entering the space of Taprobane constitutes a grave transgression that will cause the death of the culpable: even «an armed man riding a horse» cannot escape the diabolical creatures. In other words, it is the hell, the eternal death.

⁸ G. Bianciotto (Ed.), *Bestiaires du Moyen Age*. Mis en français moderne, Paris 1980, 33-34.

In this forbidden world, in other words, in this fearsome world, the Middle Ages projected the antithesis of its world: the wealth, the enormity, the inhumane, the monstrosity. We had already seen the legendary wealth of the island and the presence of monstrous creatures such as the dragon and the griffon. The enormity, apprehended by the west is encountered firstly in the luxuriance of the nature: the island is evergreen and the trees and plants there blossom and bear fruits throughout the year because of its two summers and two winters the enormity is then seen in the gigantic stature of its inhabitants.

The giants, the Genesis informs us, are born of the union between the sons of gods and daughters of men. They evoke for the believers the ancient and heroic times of the history, the patriarchs. The giants inhabited the earth and the Lord bestowed upon men hundred and twenty years, in conformity with the most popular mythical conceptions. It is the superhuman, the opposite of the west which to quote the image of Dante⁹, diminishes such as *a mantle which shortens itself swiftly* because *the time turns its scissors*.

For Gossuin, this place *so tender and so delectable is a Paradise to live*, it is therefore a sacred place. It is the most beautiful venue, the wealth symbolizes the beauty and therefore the good, it is the most pleasant place to live because of its climate. Pierre de Beauvais's description seems to follow very closely this interpretation. On the other hand Brunetto Latini presents rather a paradisiacal land which can only be entered after one has crossed the sea unobstructed, following the flight of a bird of the country: *La mer est le symbole de notre monde. Les navires représentent les justes qui ont traversé sans danger, en toute confiance, les tourmentes et les tempêtes du monde, et qui ont convaincu les ondes mortelles, c'est-à-dire les puissances de ce monde*.¹⁰

Otherwise, it is a space separated by a large river, where elephants and other savage beasts roam. The elephants, tells us Pierre de Beauvais, represent Adam and Eve: *Quand arrive le temps où le mâle est pris du désir de procréer, il se dirige vers l'Orient avec sa femelle, près du Paradis où naquit Adam. Là se trouve un arbre qui est appelé 'mandragore'. La femelle mange la première le fruit de l'arbre, puis elle en donne au mâle afin qu'il en*

⁹ Dante, *La divine comédie*, translated H. Longon, Paris 1951, 151.

¹⁰ Beauvais, *Bestiaires*, 26.

*mange aussi. Aussitôt qu'il en a mangé, tous deux s'accouplent, et immédiatement la femelle conçoit.*¹¹

The elephants are there to recall the first sin of mankind that befell Adam and Eve. It is the foretaste of hell which awaits men who live in sin. One can therefore say that Brunetto Latini synthesizes in Taprobane what the world would be of, on the day of the Last Judgment¹². This place of the Antipodean beings which disconcerts the Middle Ages, is the reflection of the world, the opposite of the west; it is the reverse of the earth where some men are supposed to live with feet opposed to theirs: *L'émotion la plus ancienne et la plus forte chez l'homme est la peur, et la peur la plus ancienne et la plus forte est la peur de l'inconnu.*¹³

In linking the forbidden with the supernatural in the representation of Taprobane, these authors transpose the terror before the abnormal. The anomaly is always fearsome and suspicious, at the same time it is rejected from the familiar universe and integrated into the new world which the Christians await with dread, to put an end to their sufferings on earth. It may be the Paradise, but Paradise is only accessible to the chosen of God, to the others will be reserved the hell. These two possibilities characterize the other world of the Christians. It is with a similar image that the pioneering travelers of the west depart they will soon be adding to it images of other peoples.

Most of the medieval *mappae mundi* reflect this new vision of Christianity. They are of the T-O-type, in keeping with the Roman tradition but the division of the world into three parts is interpreted as the distribution of the world among the three sons of Noah.¹⁴ They are often east oriented with Paradise at the top and with Jerusalem at the centre. They are flat in design and the antipodes are not allowed, the only exception being the Beatus map from the

¹¹ Beauvais, Bestiaires, 59.

¹² G. Le Clerc, *La nature de l'éléphant, Bestiaire symbolique*, 14th century manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Français, 14969 - reproduced by J. Baltrusaitis *Réveils et Prodiges: Le gothique fantastique*, Paris 1984, 257.

¹³ H. P. Lovecraft, *Epouvante et surnaturel en littérature*, Paris 1969, 35.

¹⁴ Honorius Augustodunensis, *De imagine mundi, libri tres: lib. 1*, Migne, *Patrologia latina* 172, 166 A: *Hujus tempore divisum est genus humanum in tria: in liberos, milites, servos. Liberi de Sem, milites de Japhet, servi de Cham.*

Burgos de Osma (from Osma Cathedral, Spain)¹⁵. *Sans mappemondes, wrote the minor friar Paulin de Venice (towards 1270-1344) je dirais qu'il est impossible d'imaginer ni de comprendre tout ce que les textes tant sacrés que profanes rapportent au sujet des fils de Noé, des fils de leurs fils, des quatre monarchies et de tous les royaumes et provinces.*¹⁶

Now we are going to look at a few maps directly influenced by works culled and compiled from ancient authors.

The Reconstructed Ravenna Map and a map of the 9th century

The Ravenna-world map (so-called because of the name of the location where it was found) is dated to the late seventh century.¹⁷ Numerous are the reconstructions of this map by modern historians but the information it provides are so imprecise that it is difficult to determine its form (either rectangular, circular or oval). In the Eastern edges of the reconstructed Ravenna map appear two islands: one of which is Paradise, the other in its vicinity is Taprobane.



Fig. 3: An image inspired by Macrobius' Commentary on Scipion's Dream, reedited in the 15th century. Repr. from *Cartes et Figures de la Terre*, Paris 1980, plate 138.

- 15 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. lat. 1366, fol. 25; reproduced by K. Miller, *Die ältesten Weltkarten 2: Die Weltkarte des Beatus (776 n. Chr.)*, Stuttgart 1895, plate 2. – See also P. Barber, *The Hereford Mappae Mundi*, Hereford Cathedral 1999, 10.
- 16 Cited by D. Lecoq, *Rome ou Jérusalem: la cartographie médiévale entre l'influence antique et l'influence chrétienne*, in: *Bulletin du comité français de cartographie* 121 (Sept. 1989), 25.
- 17 Cf. J. Schnetz, *Cosmographia: Eine Erdbeschreibung um das Jahr 700*, Uppsala 1951.

The sketch of a *mappamundi*, dated to the ninth century, has been found contained in the Commentary on Scipio's Dream. This representation of the world was inspired by Macrobius, who flourished in the fifth century and wrote a commentary on Cicero's famous description of the cosmos. In this commentary (re-edited in the fifteenth century) the name of Taprobane appears abbreviated to *Tapro* and is shown in the south of India as rectangular in form. (Fig. 3)

The Munich 'Isidore' World Map. A Copy of Hugh of St. Victor's large World Map? (North France, circa 1130-1135)

A *mappamundi* is found in a copy of the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, Cod. Monac. lat. 10058, fol. 154 v, in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich. The legend inscribed on the Tapbana (sic!) shown on the northern edges of the *mappamundi* reads: *Taprobana insula plena feris et anibus. Taprobana insula habens ciuitates decem*¹⁸ (i.e. one part of the island is inhabited whereas the other part is full of animals). Although this *mappamundi* is circular, the island's location is identical with that of the preceding one which is rectangular in shape.¹⁹

The Anglo-Saxon, or Cottonian *mappamundi* illustrating the Roman Tradition and other manuscript maps of the 10th and 11th century

Of Anglo-Saxon origin (Canterbury) this map (preserved in the British Library, London, Cotton MS Tib. B. V. fol. 56) is dated to the eleventh century (ca. 1025-1050)²⁰ and was found in a manuscript copy of the *Periegesis* by Priscianus, but has no relevance to the text. Given the early date, the map indicates geographic contours of some sophistication. At the top of the *mappamundi* appears a large island whither the cartographer's knowledge about eastern Asia ends. Between the Indus and the Ganges a large island can be seen upon which bears the following legend: *Taprobane habet X ciuitates, bis in anno*

¹⁸ P. G. Dalché, La «Descriptio Mapae Mundi» de Hugues de Saint-Victor, Paris 1988, 193.

¹⁹ Reproduced by P. Barber, The Hereford Mappae Mundi, 11.

²⁰ Ibid., 4.

messe fruges (trans.: There are ten cities in Taprobane and twice a year fruits are harvested there).

The Beatus Map has been drawn at the Saint Sever abbey and it illustrates an eleventh century manuscript of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse of Beatus* who flourished in the eighth century. This is one of the medieval *mappamundi* which has vibrant colors.²¹ Let us note the spelling of the name form *Tapaprone* and the legend reads: *Insula tapaprone indie subiacens ad eurum, patens. In longitudine milia passum dccclxxv. Scinditur amne interfluo; tota margaritas et gemmis repleta est; pars eius bestiis et elefantis repleta est. Partem uero homines tenent. Habet enim civitates decem.*

The *mappamundi* that was found in a manuscript of Lambert of Saint Omer is dated to the tenth century and bears the following legend: *Taprobana est insula indiae ubi dicunt duas esse hiemes et duas aestates, et bis floribus vernare locum.*

The Hereford Mappa mundi by Richard of Haldingham

Of English origin it is dated to the thirteenth century and forms part of those maps which serve the purpose of decoration behind the altars of cathedrals. The Hereford *Mappamundi* distinguishes itself from those listed above because of its dimensions: 160 cm x 130 cm.

The legend on it reads Island of Tapobana. It is situated in the south of the river banks of India, in the part whither commences the Indian Ocean. Every year it has two summers and two winters and twice a year it is adorned with flowers. However the remotest part of it is full of elephants and dragons. The island has ten cities.²² Over the representation of Tapbana, two monsters are depicted with the mentioned dracones as if to insist on their presence in that part of the island. At the northern extremity is shown a mountain of gold which explains the presence of the two monsters in the role of guardians of treasures²³ (plate p. 316 a).²⁴

²¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Latin, 8878, fol. 45 ter.

²² Cf. Copie manuscrite de la carte d'Hereford faite d'après la copie de Thomas Ballard, s. l. 1847 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge. A. 649).

²³ Cf. V. de Santarem, *Essai sur l'histoire de la cosmographie et de la cartographie pendant le Moyen Age et sur le progrès de la géographie 2*, Paris 1852, 429-430.

²⁴ P. Barber, *The Hereford Mappae Mundi*, 34.

The Jerome map (of the East), dated to circa 1150

The Indian Ocean covers the upper part of the map (British Museum, Add. 10049, cf. fig. 4) where nine islands are shown, the biggest one being Taprobane marking the extremity of the ocean. A river drawn in the middle divides it into two parts upon which are the indications to the effect that a part of it is inhabited and the other is uninhabited.

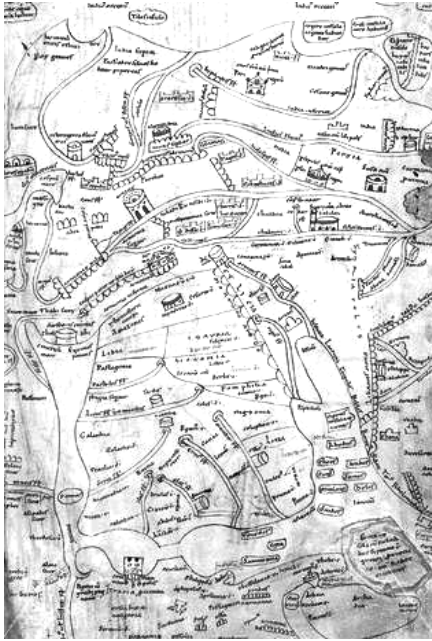


Fig. 4: The so-called Jerome map of the East, circa 1150 AD. London, The British Library, Add. 10049. Reproduced from Konrad Miller, *Mappaemundi II*, Stuttgart 1897, plate 11.

The Sawley World Map (or Henry of Mainz World Map)

The *mappae mundi* of Henry of Mainz, dated to the late twelfth century is in the Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Ms. 66, p. 2. The map is not superimposed over the body of Christ unlike the Ebstorf *mappamundi* but at the top features a scene of the Last Judgment.²⁵

²⁵ Reproduced P. Barber, *The Hereford Mappae Mundi*, 11.

The Ebstorf *Mappae mundi* dated to circa thirteenth century

It was discovered in 1830 in the Ebstorf monastery but was destroyed when Hannover was subject to bombardment in 1943. It measures 350 cm x 350 cm and was composed of thirty colored leaves of parchment. There does not exist without doubt a work hailing from the Middle Ages, wrote Walter Rosien, neither in art nor in literatures, that could give us in brief an image as lively and as complete as the Ebstorf representation gives of the world.²⁶ In the background of *mappamundi* is drawn the body of Christ and the terrestrial Paradise is shown as lying in the vicinity of the island of Taprobane. The inscription on the island reads: *This island is situated at the southern extremity of India and its length is 470 thousand feet. Its river divides branches off into five streams. It is full of pearls and gems... There are ten major cities and numerous other less important ones. This island has two summers and two winters in a year and twice the year round it remains fully verdant.*²⁷

The World Map in Antoine de la Salle's *La Salade nouvellement imprimée*, 1440

The *mappamundi* contained in the work of Antoine de la Salle called *La Salade nouvellement imprimée*. It was written in 1440. This wood-cut map was found in the manuscript the original of which is lost. At the eastern extremity is shown the Terrestrial Paradise. Not too far from it, to the south of India is shown the large island of Tapbana surrounded by a cluster of smaller islands bearing no names.

The Borgia world map

The Borgia world map is dated to circa 1430, and is preserved in the Apostolic Library in the Vatican City. To the south of the Indian Peninsula is Taprobana. Two town-vignettes symbolize cities.²⁸

²⁶ W. Rosien, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte*, Hannover 1952, 15; cf. also Harvey's article in this volume p. 130.

²⁷ E. Sommerbrodt, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte nebst Atlas von 25 Lichtdrucktafeln*, Hannover 1891, plate 10.

²⁸ Cf. Facsimile reproduced from the original: *Il mappamondo Bоргiano*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1980.

The Rudimentum novitiorum World Map, 1475 and the mappamundi in La Mer des Hystoires, 1506

The legend of the *mappamundi* found in *Rudimentum novitiorum* relevant to our discussion reads: *Trapo patane est insula indiae jacens ad austrum exquo oceanus indicus incipit. patens in longitudine octingentis lxx. milibus et .i. passuum in latitudine vero lxxv milia stadiorum. Scinditur autem amnis in ter fluvia tota repleta margaritis et gemmis bestis et elephantibus est repleta: partem vero homines tenent; in hac dicunt in anno duas estates et duas hyemes et bis floribus vernare locum utilissima insula est indiae virens omni tempore et folia eius sempre sunt virencia et nunquam cadunt ut dicit ipse li[ber] xiiii.*²⁹

Over the representation of the island both forms of the name *Tabobana* and *Trabobatha* appear. In line with the indication for some countries shown on the map two high buildings are shown in the upper portion. To the left of it is a silver mountain and to the right is a walled enclosure through the outlets of which flow downwards four rivers. Some scholars think that the two persons figuring upright and engaged in a discussion are a Christian and a Jew. But its location however indicates that it is the Paradise with its four rivers irrigating the earth below. The tree of the Moon is juxtaposed against the tree of the Sun. To the right of the Paradise is Persia, shown through the land feature of a hillock. This is the first ever *mappamundi* to have been printed in Europe and the woodcut was by Lucas Brandis (plate p. 317 a).

The *mappamundi* found in *La Mer des Hystoires*, 1506 edition, fol. lxiiii v, chapter iiclxxi offers the following legend: *De trapobatane est une yslle en la mer de inde assise vers la partie dassirie qui contient en longueur iiiii.c.xxv. lieues et xliiii. en longueur. Il y a moites riuieres couras p[ar] le tranvers dicelle yslle. Beaucoup de perles et autres pierres precieuses une partie de ceste yslle est pleine d'elephants et d'autres bestes l'autre partie est habitee des hommes. On dit qu'il y a deux estez et deux yuers en lan. Et que deux fois l'an produit fleurs et feuilles tousiours verdes que iamais ne cheet. Ceste yslle est la tres utiles de toute inde come dit Ysidore ou xiiii.*³⁰

²⁹ Rudimentum Novitiorum, Lübeck, Lukas Brandis, 1475, folio 144.

³⁰ La Mer des Hystoires, v. 1-2, Lyon 1506.

The Andreas Walsperger World Map, 1448

The *mappamundi* drawn by Andreas Walsperger is preserved in the Apostolic archives of the Vatican City, signature: Pal. Lat. 1362 B. It was drawn about the year 1448 by the Benedictine monk Andreas hailing from Constance. At the western extremity of the *mappamundi* a towering monument rising high is shown to designate the location of Terrestrial Paradise. Almost in front of it is found the island of Taprobana in the Indian Ocean (plate p. 317 b).

The Johannes Leardus World Map, 1448

The map drawn by Johannes Leardus of Venice is dated to 1448. The Terrestrial Paradise is shown as perching atop of the map. The island of Taprobane appears therein as located not far from it in the Indian Ocean (plate p. 317 c).

These *mappaemundi* furnish us already with a sufficient proportion of material in order for us to make an idea of how the image of Taprobane was perceived in the west during medieval times. What mattered most in these cartographic representations was not the depiction of a precise geographic knowledge of the world, but an imparting of an ideological perception. They illustrate more often than not religious works or serve as background to Biblical episodes or religious history (hence the conservation of some of the *mappaemundi* in cathedrals, monasteries and convents). In a word, we may say that they served to function as a symbolic support of the Faith of medieval men in their relationship with God and the Universe. What is significant is the Christian sense instilled into the representation of Taprobane, and not the matter-of-fact veracity of what is said about it by classical authors and geographers.

At that time, if Taprobane is out of reach in the reality, it remains also inaccessible in the imaginary world. Most of the medieval *mappaemundi* such as those of the Hereford and of Ebstorf, locate it in the eastern confines of the circumfluent ocean in the proximity of the Paradise. It is an island, in other words a place approachable with great difficulty, because it is surrounded by the ocean, the symbol of terrestrial world, a world full of treacherous traps and violent storms. Only the righteous who possessed the wisdom and knew how to wade through dangerous currents and cross the sea unhindered can get to the island.

The island, the very one thus depicted is also a world of mystery imagined as a great garden: a land of dales and vales pregnant with greenery, plants and seeds constantly sprouting, trees blossoming and bearing fruits twice the year by reason of its double winter and double summer. This charming garden is all the more so pleasant because of its lush, luxuriant vegetation: pearls are in plentiful, gems, jewels and precious stones are in profusion all over. This sumptuousness, the wealth symbolizes the beautiful, therefore the good and one has every reason to believe that the island represents the perfection in this world. The number of cities, almost always fixed to ten, comes doubtless also from this willingness to highlight and signify the perfection by a rounded off figure which enters into numerous arithmetical combinations.

However this world of the unknown that catches attention since it is the reverse of the terrestrial life and because it inspires as much fear as ever: it is inhabited by wild beasts, elephants and even by dragons. We learn from the *bestiaries* that the elephant is the symbol of Adam and Eve, and the beast is there to remind us of the original sin. The dragon, the diabolical creature par excellence, is associated with it to recall hell. The unknown, it needs to recall is also the new world which awaits the Christian after the Last Judgment.

In fact, during this eclipse of the west in that part of the world, the East takes over: Chinese monks set out on long journeys in search of their Buddhist origins and above all merchants and Arab geographers. As from the inception of High Middle Ages, Arab traders, who had founded a trading settlement in Colombo about 949, knew the island well enough to call it Serendib, transcription of the Prakrit form of Sihladipa (Siedediba) or from Sanskrit Sinhaladvîpa. The beauty and the wealth of the island struck their imagination to the extent of prompting them to figure it in the account of Sindbad the Sailors' sixth voyage³¹ and believing moreover that Adam lived upon the island after his banishment from the Paradise.

This perception of Taprobane begins to change only with the emergence of the Catalan atlas tradition after the conquest of Spain by Arabs, with the work of a new "Ptolemy" the geographer Al-Idrisi serving as a catalyser.

³¹ Cf. A. Galland, *Les Mille et Une Nuits* 1, ed. by G. Picard, Paris 1960, 213-222; first edition: 1706.

Taprobane à la Catalane: A Passe-partout Name

Now we are concerned with the representation of Taprobane in the Catalan cartographic tradition as preserved in two surviving maps commonly known as the *Catalan Atlas of Paris* (Fig. 5) and the Catalan Atlas of Modena.

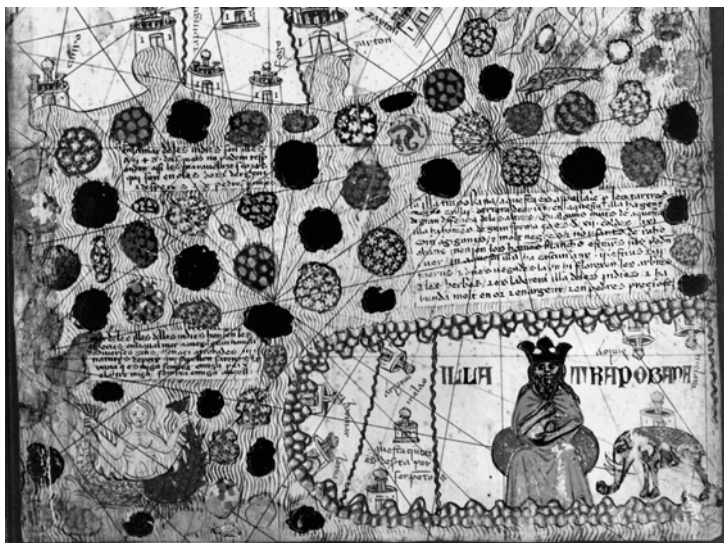


Fig. 5: Detail from the facsimile of the Catalan Atlas (1375) by Freiesleben.

Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

Catalonia, in the north-east of Spain, was occupied by the Arabs before it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Aragon in 1137. Later, in 1229, the Balearic Islands of Catalonia (including Majorca and Minorca) was annexed to the same Kingdom. During the Arab occupation of Catalonia, both Arabs and Jews were instrumental in promoting growth of a highly significant cartographic school which flourished for several centuries. These cartographers produced maps characterized by elaborate geographic features, rich in toponymy, ethnography, history and in lavish illustrations of cities, fauna, and effigies of foreign potentates.

The Catalan Atlas, dated to 1375, was drawn by a Majorcan mapmaker, sometimes attributed to Abraham Cresques and is of elongated proportions with a breadth of 69 cm and a length of 3,9

meters. The Atlas is composed of twelve sheets mounted on boards like a folding screen of which the first two are devoted to cosmological information while the remaining sheets form the map itself. These folding sheets of the screen can be spread out on a table top and may be viewed by going around the table; the legends upon the map are not oriented in a consistent manner.

For the Asiatic portion of the representation of his illuminated Atlas, the Catalan cosmographer from the Kingdom of Majorca found a great deal of inspiration from Marco Polo's description of the world. The depiction of the pearl-divers and fish-eating men seen in the Indian Ocean region of the Atlas demonstrate how much Marco Polo was a source of information, and the legends which accompany these human figures word for word attest the Catalan cosmographer's indebtedness to Marco Polo. However, even though Marco Polo did describe Seilan, the name by which the island was known to him in his day but did not make the least mention of Taprobane (the Hellenized name of Sri Lanka) in his Description of the World, the Catalan cosmographer could not dispense Taprobane in his Atlas, since it was so well attested by ancient and medieval geographers.

The existence of the name Taprobane was so much a part of the cartographic tradition and the medieval vision of the world that the Majorcan map-maker, contradicting Marco Polo, but complying with the image passed on to him down the ages, included a huge island entitled *Trapobana* in the extreme lower portion of the sixth panel of his world map. In this version of the name, the spelling follows closely the Latin form transmitted by some manuscripts of Isidore of Seville³², among others, but with a metathesis of *r* posited after the initial *T*. Thus spelt *Trapobana* became a peculiar linguistic feature commonly occurring in the medieval geographic literature of the Iberian Peninsula amounting almost to a Hispanization of the Hellenized name *Taprobane*. Let us point out at the outset that, *Trapobana* was exactly the name-form found in the writings of

³² Isidor de Sevilla, *Etymologiarum*, bilingual edition (Latin text and Spanish translation), ed. by J. Oroz Reta and M. A. Marcos 2 (Biblioteca de Autores christianos 14/3, 5 and 12), Madrid 1983, 167-168 and 194-195.

Columbus and persistently made all the way to the present day' Spain³³.

The rich configuration of *Trapobana* is even more highlighted by the prominence given to it in the atlas as an imposing immense island marking the boundaries of the eastern world. This island on the distant horizon becomes yet another occasion for the Catalan cosmographer to bring together all sorts of disparate information however loosely related to the Far-East, and present it under the name of *Trapobana*. This interpretation, or rather updating, of *Taprobane* by the Majorcan map-maker brings the island out of its legendary confines and confronts it with a variety of attempts at identification.

In the legend above the island we see how the Catalan cosmographer from Majorca mixes real and fictional indications of a number of diverse countries under the single name of *Trapobana*. Let us now dismantle the montage of the legend. First of all, the presentation of *Taprobane* - *This is called by the Tartars Magno Caulij the last in the east*³⁴. In this term *Magno Caulij*, Gerini saw the synonym of Menangkabau³⁵, or more correctly *Mánangkabo*, the name of an inland country of Sumatra³⁶. At the same time, with neither justification nor proper analysis, Gerini interprets the appellation to the credit of Sumatra³⁷, just as Cordier, Bouchon, and Tastu did before him: *Illa Trapobana = la Taprobane des anciens, aujourd'hui l'île de Sumatra. Celui-ci [Abraham Cresque] aussi bien informé que qui que ce soit, tout en suivant les traces de Ptolémée son maître, le corrige et l'interprète, en plaçant l'Illa Iana [...]*

³³ L. M. Meras, *Imagens de America*, Barcelona 1985, 237: *La mítica isla de Trapobana, según Ptolomeo*

³⁴ H.-Ch. Freiesleben, *Der katalanische Weltatlas vom Jahre 1375 nach dem in der Bibliothéque Nationale, Paris, verwahrten Original farbig wiedergegeben*, Stuttgart 1977.

³⁵ C. E. Gerini, *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia*, London 1909, 646.

³⁶ J. Crawford, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countries*, Benares 1974, 273-276, s.v. *Menangkabau* (reprint of the 1856 edition).

³⁷ ILLA TRAPOBANA (for *Taprobana* = Sumatra island), cf., Gerini, *Researches*, 647.

*là où se trouve Ceylan et l'Îlla trapobana à la place qu'occupe aujourd'hui l'île de Sumatra.*³⁸

There existed two Taprobanes, one of the Ancients and the other of the Middle Ages

Henry Cordier for his part writes, *Tastu, a raison de dire 'aujourd'hui l'île de Sumatra' mais il a tort de la marquer 'la Taprobane des anciens', et surtout de dire dans ses notes 'On le voit, je n'adopte pas ici le sentiment de savants tels que d'Anville, Gosselin, Barbié du Bocage, MM. le baron Walckenaer et Huot, continuateur de Maltebrun, lesquels veulent que l'antique Taprobana, ne soit autre que l'île de Ceylan. Je me range du côté du géographe catalan'. Tout le monde sait aujourd'hui qu'il y a eu deux Taprobane, celle des anciens, Ceylan, et celle du moyen âge, Sumatra, de même qu'il y a eu deux Java, Java mineure, cette même Sumatra, et Java majeure, Java meme.*³⁹

Trapobana, a Hybrid Medley of Japan and Korea

Yule, who saw in this *Trapobana* a hybrid mixture of Japan and Korea⁴⁰, derives the term Kaoli or Cauli, as we have it in the Catalan Atlas, from a Chinese name designating Korea.⁴¹ Indeed, Marco Polo uses the name Cauli in his travel account to denote one of the provinces surrendered to the Great Khan in the aftermath of a revolt led by a certain Nayan. Pauthier on the other hand, seems to ignore Yule's interpretation when he says: *Cauly must have been the country of*

³⁸ Cf. Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et d'autres bibliothèques, 1841, 138-139.

³⁹ H. Cordier, L'Extrême-Orient dans l'Atlas Catalan de Charles V roi de France, in: Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive 1895, 41-42.

⁴⁰ H. Yule, Cathay and the Way Thither 1, Nendeln/Liechtenstein 1967, 303 (reprint of the 1913-1916 edition).

⁴¹ Kaoli is the Chinese name Koli of Corea (Ibid. 3, 129, footnote 2). – Cf. also Ibid 1, The Book of Ser Marco Polo, London 1903, 345: Kauli is properly Corea, probably here district on the frontier thereof, as it is improbable that Nayan had any rule over Corea. The Korean kingdom proper could not be a part of the prince's appanage. Marco Polo might mean the northern part of Corea, which submitted to the Mongols in A. D. 1269, with sixty towns, and which was subordinated entirely to the central administration in Liao-yang. As to the southern part of Corea, it was left to the king of Korea, who however, was a vassal of the Mongols, (Palladius, 32.). The king of Corea (Korye, Kao-li) was in 1288 Choung wang (1274-1298); the capital was Syong-to, now Kâi syeng (k'ai-ch'eng).

*Kao-kiu-li, the primitive designation of the lou or the Circuit of Thboun-ning, a dependency of the same government.*⁴² Korean oceanographer Sangbok Hahn, in a paper presented at the International Seminar on the Korean Culture and the Silk Roads, took *Cresques's Caulij* legend as an account of Korea.⁴³ All these, references and attributions therefore, demonstrate that the ancient Taprobane evidently has nothing to do with the name Caulij of the Majorcan cosmographer.

As early as 1858, one of the pioneer historians of cartography Joachim Lelewel read the contentious terms as *Magna cavillatio* and attempted to interpret them as “the place where you were hoodwinked and where, there are big deceivers” (thinking the terms ought to be read as *magni cavilli?*). Entering the much debated issue, he stated that the Catalan Taprobana should rather be the Malay Peninsula.⁴⁴ Again, as recently as 1993, Mireille Pastoreau unhesitatingly identified *illa Trapobana* of the Catalans with Sumatra: *The island of Sumatra, bottom right, ends the painting where myths and reality get mixed up.*⁴⁵

Let us now move on to the next indication in the legend: In this island there are peoples different from all others. On some mountains in this island, there are men of great stature, twelve ells tall, like giants and very dark and who do not think, but eat white foreign men, if they can get hold of them. In his interpretation of this Taprobana, the Majorcan cosmographer attributes anthropophagy to the Taprobanians certainly through a borrowing from Marco Polo, who refers to cannibalism while describing the kingdoms of Ferlec and Dagroian, located on the large island of Sumatra, and also in his description of the Andaman Islands. Marco Polo says, They are very cruel men; they eat all men whom they can catch as long as they are not their own men. Apparently, it is Polo's description that the Majorcan cosmographer followed, but with a few additions from his

⁴² S. D. Hahn, *World Maps Compiled in Aid of the East-West Exchanges*, in: *Korean Culture and the Silk Roads*, Seoul 1991, 172: Taprobane in Ptolemy's world map in the middle of the Indian Ocean, indicates present Sri Lanka (Ceylon). However, Cresques' Taprobane indicates Korea by note.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 172: Taprobane in Ptolemy's world map in the middle of the Indian Ocean, indicates present Sri Lanka (Ceylon). However, Cresques' Taprobane indicates Korea by note.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. Lelewel, *Géographie du Moyen Age*, Brussels 1852, 58 and note 108.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Indes merveilleuses: l'ouverture du monde au XVIe siècle*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale 1993, 27.

own fantasy, mixing together a variety of Marco Polo's notes and arbitrarily squeezing them into his Taprobana.

Finally we arrive at the last indication of the legend, the only statement which corresponds to the legendary fame of the ancient Taprobane as interpreted by Isidore of Seville: In this island there are two summers and two winters, and twice a year the trees and plants flower. This is the utmost isle of the Indies. It is rich in gold and silver and abounds in precious stones. With a few variants, this is borrowed from the *Etymologiarum* of Isidore of Seville, who takes the legendary notions of the climate, flora, and harvesting seasons of India to be found in Pliny, Solinus and Martianus Capella and arbitrarily applies them to Taprobane of hallowed antiquity. The cartographic iconography of this novel interpretation of Taprobane is nuanced by the figure of an elephant coming from a *Bestiary* and also a distinctive feature from a *Lapidary* - a ruby held by a king, perhaps the king about whom Marco Polo speaks in his description of Ceylon: He possesses the grandest ruby that ever was seen, being a span in length, and the thickness of man's arm, brilliant beyond description.

The Majorcan cosmographer has made a hotchpotch, bringing together information clearly, concerning Korea, Sumatra (through the association of little kingdoms found on this island), the Andaman Islands, and Ceylon, all under the banner of *Taprobana*. As for the place-names such as Melaro, and Malao, it is without doubt that they come through borrowings from Marco Polo, possibly with a little twist of Catalan spelling, betraying their Malay origin as for instance the term Menlay (a place in southern Malaya). Much less impressive features of the Majorcan representation *Taprobana*, compared with the very ornate figure of the white elephant and the picturesquely turbaned eastern potentate, are banally serrated the chain of mountains that surround the island and the citadel vignette accompanying the legend *Aquesta ciutat és deserta per serpents*" (trans.: This city has been abandoned because of snakes). With the implied notion of a threat of reptiles to human habitat, we conclude our observations on the Catalan version of Taprobane, introduced by the Majorcan into Medieval cartography, where it acquired multifarious identities befitting an *All Encompassing Eternally Verdant Island in the Sun*. Thanks to the Majorcan cosmographer, the legendary Taprobane is now on its

way to absorb a geographic pliability hitherto unknown in the Western cartographic tradition.

Reaching Dominica and Guadeloupe on his second voyage in 1493, Columbus noted in his journal the appearance of snakes. This herpetological indication leads us to believe that he was probably familiar with cartographic documents similar to that of the Catalan Atlas, which records serpents along with gold and silver in Taprobane. The Catalan Atlas references to double seasons and snakes in Taprobane are echoed in the writings of Christopher Columbus, who in Hispaniola and the Northern Coast of Venezuela, believed he had reached that fabled isle.

When, after his third voyage, Columbus claimed to have reached Taprobane, his adversary, the “doctor” Cisneros, maintained that the islands of the Indies discovered by Columbus were not in the East but some islands in the Atlantic Ocean already known to so many classical writers. Hence any novelty. In the face of these criticisms by the “doctor” Cisneros the Catholic Monarchs in their letter of 16th August 1494, queried Columbus as to the climate of the islands just discovered.⁴⁶

In his letter of 26th February 1495 addressed to their Highnesses, Columbus emphasizes the climatic condition of the country as has been characterized by the Catalan Atlas, affirming that *We have proved that this land does bear fruit twice a year.*⁴⁷ With this assertion, Columbus not only responded to the query of the Court but also aimed at disproving and silencing the arguments of his enemies, who were increasingly questioning the true nature of the islands of the Indies just explored.

Another celebrated Catalan *mappaemundi*, a circular one on parchment, and made *circa* 1450, is in the Biblioteca Estense at Modena, from which it is known as the *Catalan Atlas of Modena* or simply as the *Este map*. On this map, Taprobane is placed at the far southern corner of the Indian Ocean and it is drawn, unlike any other feature on the map as a perfect triangle, left blank save a mountain range that surrounds its borders in a manner very similar to

⁴⁶ Cf. M. F. de Navarrete, *Coleccion de los viages y descubrimientos, que hicieron por mar les Españoles* 2, Madrid 1825, 154-155.

⁴⁷ J. Gil, *Mitos y utopías del Descubrimiento: Colon y su tiempo*, Madrid 1992, 77.

the *Illa Trapobana* of the Catalan Atlas of 1375. The legend attached to this oddly geometrical island reads: *Yla apellada trapobana [sic] en la qual a de agrestas montanyes en lo qual abita gent molt diferent del mon que no han nanguna rabo los quals son forts e grans com azagants e san nagres e si poden prendre nangun home de la terra ferma manjanlos se.* (trans.: Island called Trapobana [sic], where there are wild mountains, in which live people very different from others: they are strong and as big as giants, and are black, and if they can capture any people from the mainland, they eat them.). The Este map thus provides a strikingly graphic demonstration of how, for the Catalan mapmakers Taprobane becomes a *passé-partout*, a blank space into which could be foisted assorted exotic geographical and various other information.

Yet its draughtsman or the illuminator, despite the fact that he was able to finish drawing the vignettes of preening mermaids and full bellied vessels in the Indian Ocean, failed for some unknown reasons -either because he lacked inspiration or did not have the time necessary, to complete the illumination of the space the mapmaker reserved for the legendary island of Taprobane. It was obviously meant to encompass a dazzling iconographic feature of conspicuous excellence. What a pity! We missed thus another marvel of the East.

Furthermore, in the Indian Ocean, the Catalan Atlas of Modena features without much ado two islands beneath India, one called Silan and the other named Jaua. The latter is without a shadow of doubt instead the *Illa Jana* of the Catalan Atlas.⁴⁸ In fact this latter *Illa Jana* of the Majorcan cosmographer is the one that was taken by Bouchon and Tastu for Ceylon, but the Modena cartographer however gives the correct spelling *Jaua* for the Catalan *Iana* thus distinguishing it clearly from Silan that he locates facing *Jaua*, so as to exclude all eventual risks of assimilations and confusions.

Jean Michel Massing thought that the location of the island of Jana in *India* and its geographic position, suggested that it is instead Ceylon⁴⁹. Not far from Jana, a sober depiction of an island which Freiesleben thought stands for Haynan. A rhomb line emanating

⁴⁸ Carta Catalana, Biblioteca Estense at Modèna, C. G. A. 5d – Cf. G. H. Kimble, The Catalan World Map of the R. Biblioteca Estense at Modena, London 1934, plates 3 and 4.

⁴⁹ J. M. Massing, Observations and Beliefs: The World of the Catalan Atlas, in: J. A. Levenson (Ed.), Circa 1492: Art in the age of exploration, New Haven and London 1991, 26-33.

from a wind-rose is drawn across the island slightly obliterating a letter which renders the reading difficult leaving room for some to suppose that it stands for Haynan. On the other hand Java is found spelled Jana in the Spanish translations of Marco Polo, for example in the version used by C. Columbus which leads us to suggest that Jana in the Catalan atlas is a mere corruption of Java and it is as Java that we need to consider that term.

These two outstanding Catalan cartographic documents from Spain itself are perhaps the closest that we can get to the kind of pictorial depiction of Taprobane that would have been available to the cosmographers and royal experts who assessed the projects of Columbus's explorations of the Indies and counseled the King and the Queen when they were holding the Court at Barcelona, the port-city of Catalonia.

Epilogue

It is indeed not only a great pleasure but also an honor to me to be invited by the editors (whom I met at the recent ICHC held in Copenhagen) of the present volumes to contribute to this publication dedicated to Professor Johannes Dörflinger, the most helpful and kind scholar I had had the good fortune to come across at the bi-annual gatherings of the International Conference on the History of Cartography. Ever since the time he took the generous initiative to host me during a UNESCO-Austria sponsored fellowship (1988-1989) in the history of cartography at the Institute of History, University of Vienna, until now we remained good friends. The exceptional courtesies extended to me during my unforgettable *Viennese Days* were such that I was a guest of both him and his wife, including their children, bearing witness to the loyalty and trustworthiness he helped me cultivate in that warm and friendly atmosphere. As a token of this long-lasting affection nourished by mutual appreciation, I offer him this humble contribution of mine to the world's knowledge even though consisting of a precious few pages, nevertheless, being the results of research conducted in depth, linked to a quest and a passion to understand my country's pictorial representations viewed and imagined by people in map-producing cultures and their enigmas in the past which prompted me to undertake several

years of relentless work, the initial part of which I carried out at the Austrian National Library (ÖNB) and at other repositories of maps and globes in Vienna while enjoying an unusually congenial stay at his institute.

About the Author

Ananda Abeydeera took a Ph.D. from the University of Paris-Sorbonne in 1990 and works as a foreign research associate of the Research Centre on Travel Literature of the same university. After graduating from the University of Sri Lanka he held a teaching position there for several years. He also taught at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and at the School of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) in Paris as a visiting lecturer. He is the author of numerous contributions on Sri Lanka in ancient, medieval and pre-modern travel literature and in the history of cartography. He was a member of the international team of specialists of the five-months long UNESCO Maritime Route Expedition from Venice to Hakata (1990-1991).

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