

## The Impact of the Currents and Wind Systems in the Indian Ocean on the Probable Routes of the Ancient Seafarers

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This paper attempts to have a preliminary look at some recorded tales of ancient mariners and their probable routes across the oceans with particular reference to the Indian Ocean currents including some actually experienced by a modern day seafarer and Ship Captain.

According to Pliny Annius Proclamus the Collector of the Red Sea dues under the Roman Emperor Claudius was carried away by torrents until he reached Sri Lanka. There he was received by the Sinhalese King, who subsequently sent four ambassadors to the Roman Emperor. The Mahawamsa tika mentions that king Bhaktika Abhaya (B.C. 22 to A.D.7) sent envoys to the country of Romanukka and obtained large quantities of coral to make a net to adorn the Maha Thupa at Anuradhapura. The country mentioned in both accounts is the Roman Empire and both refer to the same mission.

It is very probable that Annius Proclamus' vessel got into difficulties due to stormy weather associated with the South West monsoon or a cyclone and got carried away in the Somali current which flows strongly along the North African coast in a north easterly direction and curves easterly in the middle Arabian Sea in a clockwise direction turning south east along the coast of Pakistan and India and turning east around the southern coast of Sri Lanka. If we are to assume that no significant global weather changes took place since that period the ocean currents would have been similar to what is found today.

The Parthians who ruled the Persian empire from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. had contact with Sri Lanka. Codrington (1924) had reported on finds of Parthian coins. A Parthian coin previously unpublished in Sri Lanka has been tentatively identified by the writer as that of Mithradates the 3<sup>rd</sup>, (the younger son of Mihradates the 2<sup>nd</sup>), who ascended the throne around 88-87 B.C. Our Ancient Tradition has it that after the sea flooded the land, the king of Kelaniya set his daughter Viharamahadevi adrift in a boat as a sacrifice to appease the gods, and she drifted and landed at Kirinde. This can be explained with knowledge of the present coastal currents. Vasco Da Gamas' 1<sup>st</sup> Voyage took 23 days to cross the Arabian Sea. His return voyage took three months less 3 days. The reason was the seasonal winds and currents. The Chinese travelers could have made use of the exceptionally strong seasonal ocean currents from the Mallaca Straits direct to Sri Lanka.

Ancient Sri Lankan mariners who visited China in their own ships could have made use of these seasonal winds and currents to make quicker passages. An understanding of the present ocean currents and wind systems will help explain the routes taken by the ancient seafarers.

Key Words : Wind Systems ; Indian Ocean ; Ancient Seafarers