

THE VOYAGE
OF
FRANÇOIS PYRARD

OF LAVAL

TO THE EAST INDIES, THE MALDIVES, THE
MOLUCCAS AND BRAZIL.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FROM THE THIRD FRENCH EDITION OF 1619,
AND EDITED, WITH NOTES,

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Christy, W. Wain

9/21/14

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY,
1, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

M.DCCC.LXXVII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The kingdom of Bengal, and some observations thereon.

After a month's voyage we arrived at Chartican,¹ a port of the kingdom of Bengal, where we were received by the inhabitants with much rejoicing. On landing, they took me with them to salute the king, who is not, however, the great king of Bengal, but a petty king of this province, or rather a governor, with the title of king,² as is generally the case in those parts. The great king of Bengal lives higher up the country, thirty or forty leagues off. On being presented to this petty king, he received me with great kindness, and gave me my full liberty, saying that if I would remain with him he would do great things for me: and, indeed, he bade bring me raiment and food day by day in great abundance. But after a month's sojourn there I found a ship of Calcut, whose master asked if I would go with him, saying that the Hollanders' ships often came to Calcut, and there might be some in which I could get a passage to France, since I was minded to return thither; whereto I gladly agreed, seeing I had no other aim but that, and on that score I declined all other favours. I therefore took my leave of the king, which was granted me without difficulty.

I was so short a time in Bengal, that I cannot record many of its characteristics; however, here is what I picked up.

¹ Chittagong, properly *Chatigam*; in the Portuguese books, *Chutigão* and *Porto Grande*; to be distinguished from *Satyānuc*, or *Porto Pequeno*, the two ports being regarded as the eastern and western limits of the Ganges' mouth. See *Linschoten*, Hak. Soc.; *Correa, Lendas*, iii, 649; and Yule, *Glossary*, s. v. *Chittagong*, *Porto Pequeno*, and (in Suppl.) *Satigam*.

² This petty Raja was probably the "Mugg" (*Magh*), or king of Arakan (Yule, *Gloss.*, s. v.); the Portuguese called him *o moço*, and the people *os moços* (*Livro das Monç.*, i, 348, 350, 353; ii, 226, 392.)

wherever they fall, but never break it, however tender it may be. They are neatly shaped, and are naturally of a mottled colour, white, yellow, and black: there is great trade in them to all parts of India, for they are found nowhere else. By rubbing hard two sticks of this cane together, fire is produced as from a match: and they are used for this purpose. There is yet another sort of cane, which never grows thicker than the little finger, of the same form and growth as the other; it is as pliant as an osier, and is called *Rotan*.¹ Ships' cables are made of it, and many kinds of neatly plaited baskets, and other wicker things. In short, it is used as cord, and can be split into any number of strips. It is a fathom and a half in length. It is trafficked in everywhere, and is in great demand for its use in manufacture; it is white, and not mottled.

This country abounds with elephants, which are exported hence to all parts of India. There are rhinoceros² also, and some say unicorns, too, which are said to be found in this land only. They say other animals will not drink at a well until a female unicorn has steeped her horn in the water, so they all wait on the bank till she comes and does so.³

¹ Malay, *Rotan*; Correa, De Orta, and Linschoten all write *rota*. The English form *rattan* appears in Fryer (1673).

² I use the word as a plural, as in orig. and in the English version of *Linschoten*.

³ The unicorn localized in those parts was no doubt the rhinoceros itself: see *Marco Polo*, bk. iii, ch. ix, and note by Col. Yule, and the following passage from Linschoten:—"Some thinke it (the rhinoceros) is the right unicorne, because that as yet there hath no other bin found, but only by hearsay, and by the pictures of them. The Portugales and those of Bengala affirme, that by the river Ganges, in the kingdome of Bengala, are many of these rhinoceros, which when they will drinke, the other beasta stand and waite upon them, till the rhinoceros hath drunke, and thrust his horn into the water, for he cannot drink but his horne must be under the water, because it standeth so close unto his nose and muzzle; and then after him all the other beasta doe drinke" (*Linsch.*, ii, 9). As to the right of first drinking, Pyrrard's myth pictures

In short, I find no country in all the East Indies more abundantly supplied with all things needful for food, with the riches of nature and art; and were not the navigation so dangerous, it would be the fairest, most pleasant, fertile, and profitable in the whole world. They usually keep an ambassador at Goa; but when I was preparing to leave Goa to come home, there arrived an ambassador extraordinary at the court of the viceroy, and it was said that he had come to ask some assistance.¹

One of the greatest trades in Bengal is in slaves; for there is a certain land subject to this king where fathers sell their children, and give them to the king as tribute; so most of the slaves in India are got from hence. Many of the merchants castrate them, cutting them when they are young, and not only the testicles, but also the entire organ.² I have seen many of this kind, who appeared to have but a little hole for the passage of water. This is in order to put them in charge of the women, and of the keys of the house; they trust them in all things, and never their wives. Such is the custom among Mahometans, for they quit their wives very frequently. Nowhere in India are slaves of so little value, for they are all old and knavish villains, both men and women.

The people are well formed in body, the women are pretty, but more shameless than elsewhere in India. The men are much given to trafficking in merchandise, and not to war or arms,—a soft, courteous, clever people, but having the repute of great cheats, thieves, and liars. They trade in

as a polite gallantry on the part of the other animals (*place aux dames!*) what in Linschoten appears as subservience to a male tyrant. I have no space here to discuss the unicorn generally; those who are disposed to entertain his existence may consult the note of Mr. Badger (*Varthema*, Hak. Soc., pp. 46-8).

¹ This embassy is not mentioned in the royal despatches, and perhaps was not reported by the viceroy.

² See *Barbosa* (Hak. Soc., p. 180); *Varthema* (Hak. Soc., p. 258); Beckmann (*Litt. der Alt. Besch.*, ii, 132).