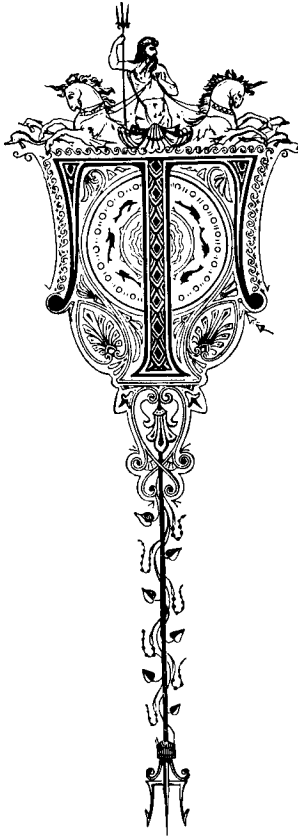


Taprobana

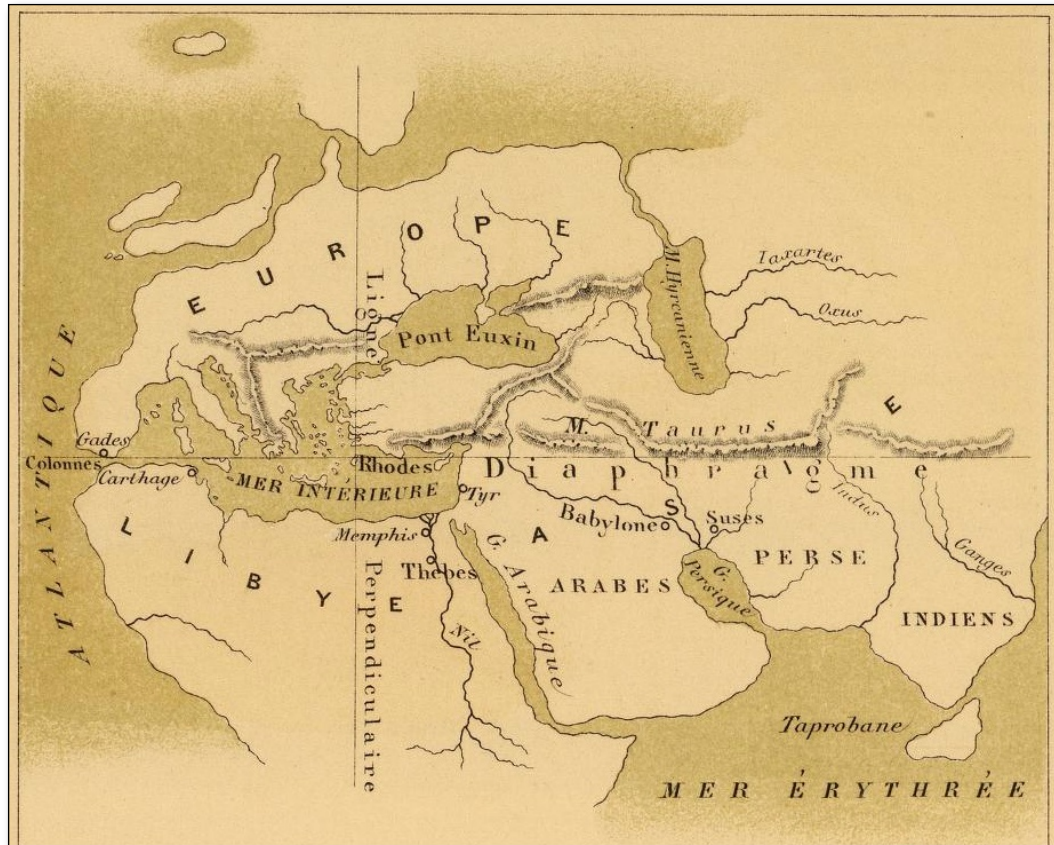


Ancient Sri Lankan chronicles describe a kingdom named *Tambapanni*. According to the chronicles Prince Vijaya landed on an island named *Lanka* after he was exiled from India. Prince Vijaya ruled the island from 543 BC to 505 BC and named it *Tambapanni*. It is theorized that the name *Taprobana* was a Greek or Roman alteration of *Tambapanni*. Based on the ancient Sinhalese chronicles and similarity of names, most historians today believe *Taprobana* was present day Sri Lanka.

Taprobana (ancient Greek: Ταπροβανῶ) or *Taprobane* (Ταπροβανῆ) was the historical name for an island in the Indian Ocean. Onesicritus (ca 360 BC – ca 290 BC) was the first author that mentioned the island of *Taprobana*. The name was also reported to Europeans by the Greek geographer Megasthenes around 290 BC, and was later adopted by Ptolemy in his own geographical treatise to identify a relatively large island south of continental Asia. Though the exact place to which the name referred remains uncertain, some scholars consider it to be a wild misinterpretation of any one of several islands, including Sumatra and Sri Lanka and, some, even the island of Borneo. The following world maps from antiquity are “reconstructed”, based upon the Greek authors’ writings.

Megasthenes wrote that *Taprobana* was divided by a river and abundant in pearls and gold. *Taprobana* was located somewhere in the Indian Ocean and usually shown on historical maps as a large island south of the subcontinent of India. There have been many theories about the identity of the island. Some thought *Taprobana* could have been a phantom island, Madagascar, or the lower peninsula of India; however, most geographers believed that the island was either Sumatra or Sri Lanka (previously Ceylon). And one recent writer believes *Taprobana* was actually the Indonesian island Kalimantan a.k.a. Borneo.

Taprobana

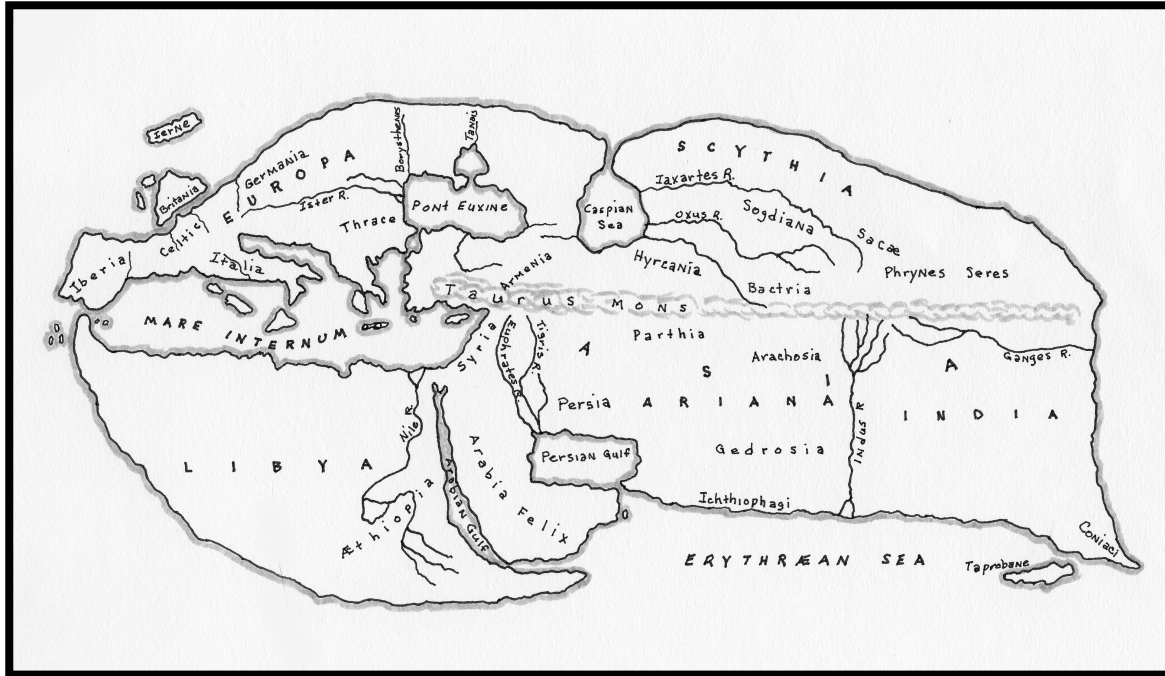


Taprobane on the reconstructed map of Dicæarchus of Messana, 300 B.C. (#111)

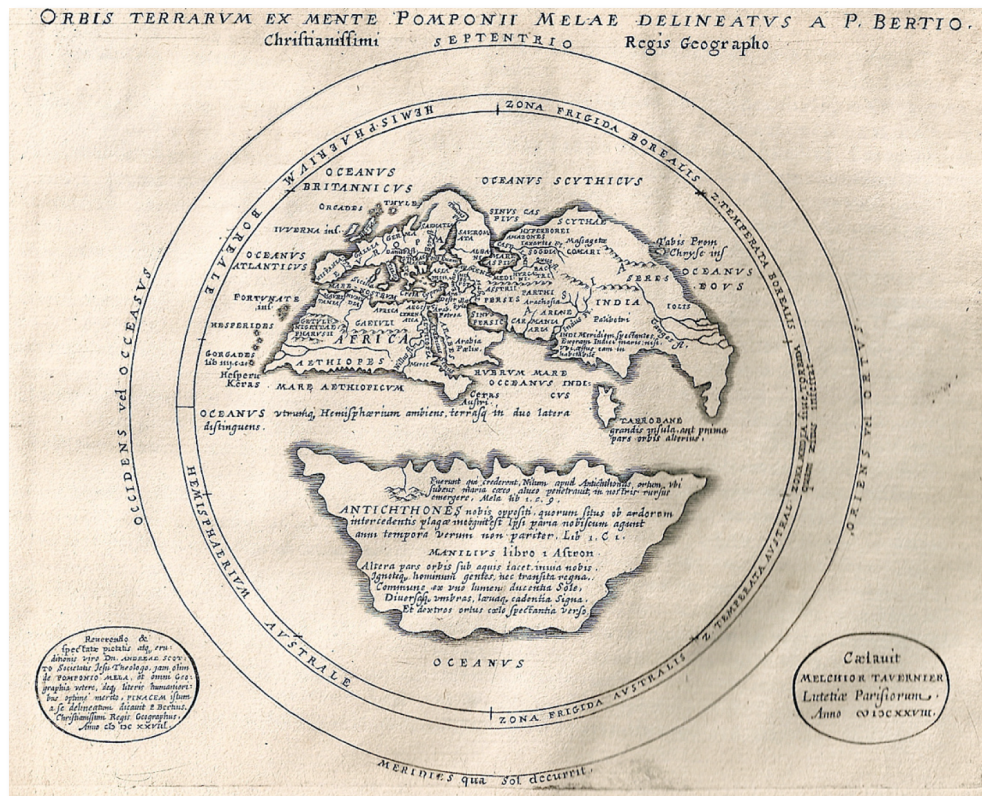


Taprobane on the reconstructed world map by Eratosthenes (#112), 184 B.C.

Taprobana



Taprobane on the reconstructed world map by Strabo (#115), AD 15



Taprobane on the reconstruction of Pomponius Mela (AD 37) world view, 1628, by Petrus Bertius (#116)

Taprobana

Claudius Ptolemy (#119) lived and worked between 100 CE and 170 CE. He wrote about places on *Taprobane* at a time of lively trade between Roman Egypt and today's Sri Lanka. As a kind of map for coastal sailors, Ptolemy's *Taprobane* followed the same tradition as that of the Roman Pomponius Mela (#116), who had written his book *De Chorographia libri tres* one century earlier. This had summarized the knowledge about the coasts of the known countries of the world, in the early days of the Roman Emperor Claudius. In the introduction to his book, Pomponius had added the following text, which already reads like an introduction to the geographical work of Ptolemy:

To start with, in fact, let me untangle what the shape of the whole is, what its greatest parts are, what the condition of its parts taken one at a time is, and how they are inhabited; then, back to the borders and the coasts of all lands [a] as they exist to the interior and on the seacoast, [b] to the extent that the sea enters them and washes up around them [...]"¹

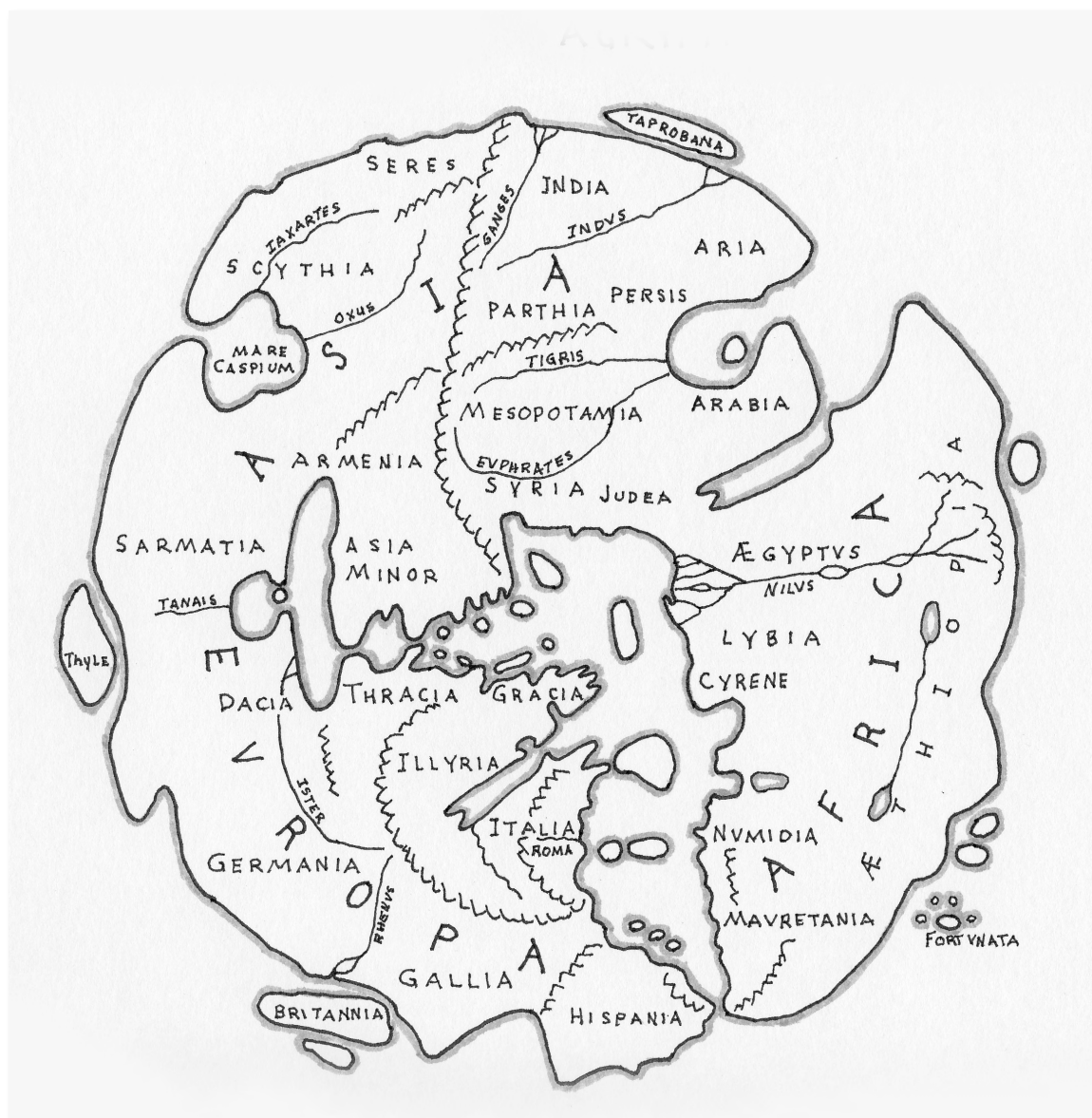


Map of Taprobane after Ptolemy's *Geographia* (Burney MS 111, f.102v)

Gregor Reisch writes that what is particularly noticeable on the *Taprobane* map of the *Burney 111* manuscript is the complete absence of the Jaffna Peninsula. It is as if this land area was taboo for seafarers or just too uninteresting for trade to be approached by ship. In fact, it is assumed that this area, which was known as *Nagadiba*, in the third century CE, was still inhabited by a group of people, distinct from the Sinhalese and Tamils, named *Nagas*. Even the Tamil king of the island in the second century BCE, named Elara, ruled the country from his residence in Anuradhapura, with its agricultural area, and not from the water-scarce region of the Jaffna Peninsula. It is odd, that on the *Taprobane* map, *Nagadiboi* is the name of a region, which can be located today between the rivers Yala Oya and Mahaweli Ganga. An error or deliberate deception can be suspected. Therefore, what can be seen first lying on the map in the north is the so-called *Galiboi* region, which corresponds to today's Northern District of Sri Lanka.

Apart from the coasts and the islands, only the navigable rivers had a real meaning in the life of the mariners, since their work consisted mainly of navigating waterways and not of visiting places inland. Therefore, only a few of them will have ever seen the interior of *Taprobane* themselves in their lives. For today's mariners, it may not be significantly different. Moreover, the fewest of the common sailors will have been Buddhists by faith, so that they probably paid little attention to the Buddhist temple buildings at the coast already existing in antiquity. Most of the important shrines were to be found in the interior of the country, anyway. On the map from *Burney MS 111*, the river bends are therefore reproduced much more precisely, than the positions of today's inland towns and cities, which had certainly already eye-catching monuments in ancient times.

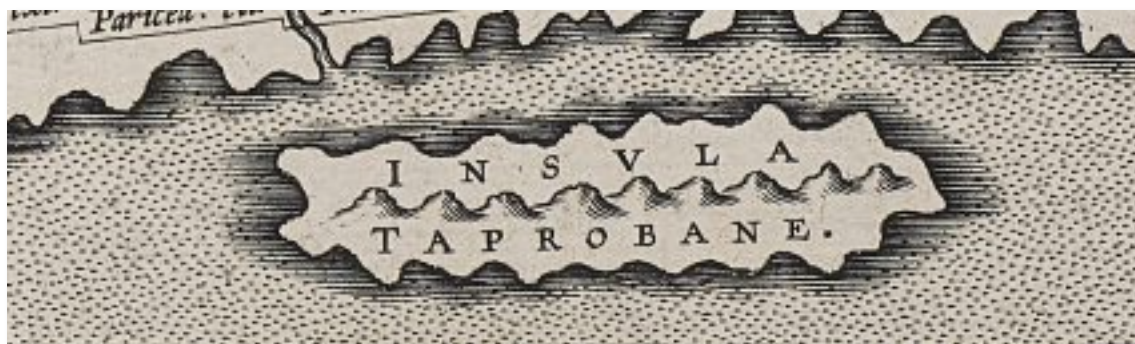
Taprobana

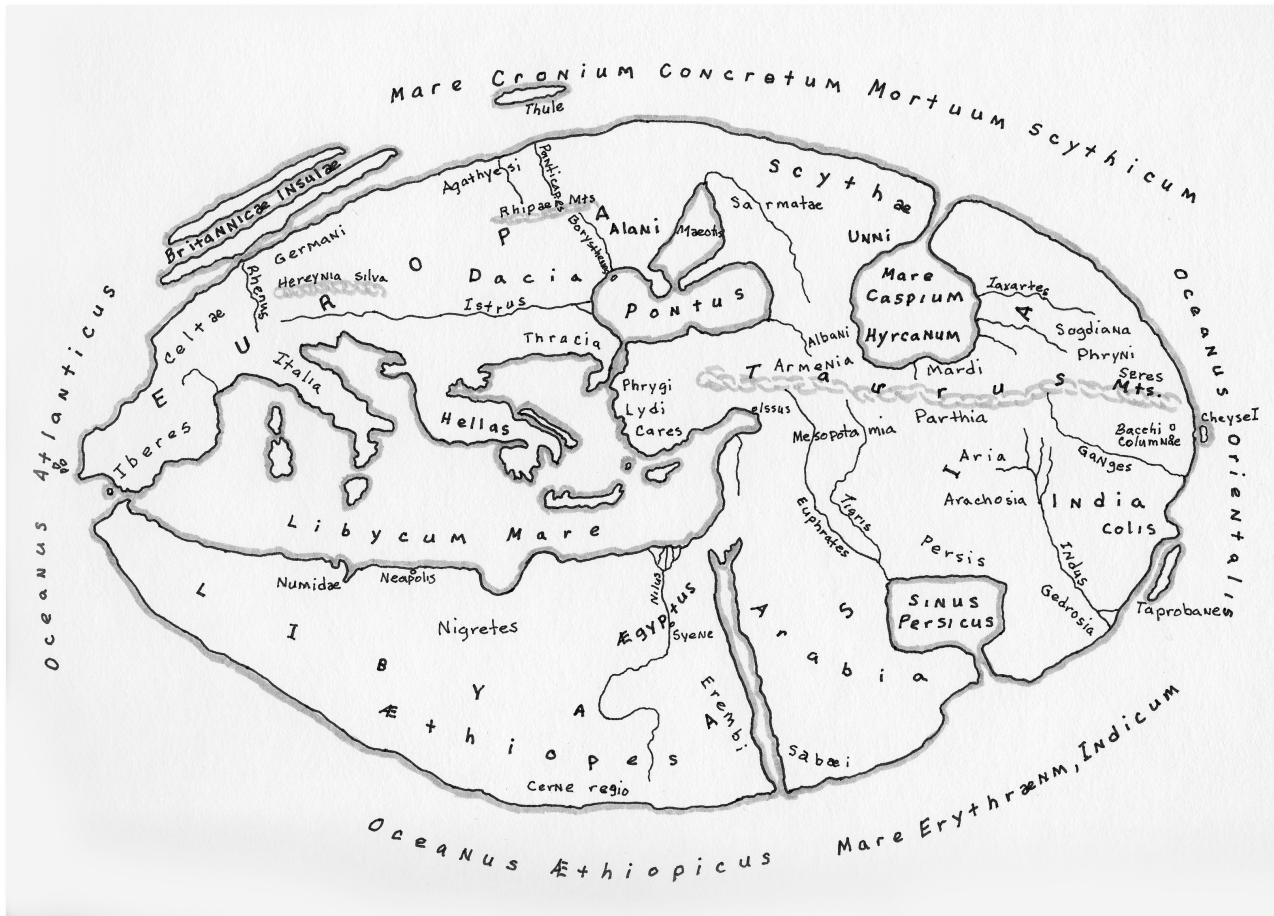


Taprobana on the reconstruction of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, AD 20 (#118)

Taprobana

Taprobana on the first century Peutinger Table (#120), Segmentum Octavum





Taprobana on the reconstruction of Dionysius Periegetes' world view AD 124 (#117)

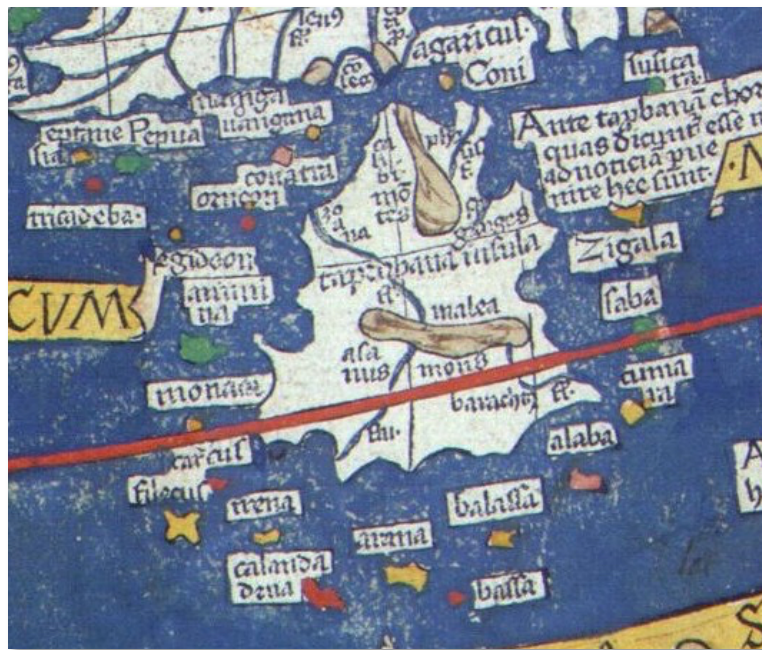
In AD 150 Claudius Ptolemy wrote his treatise *Geographia* that greatly influenced later geographers. The map below is based on Ptolemy's description of the world. *Taprobana* is shown as a very large island south of Asia. The map drawn by Nicolaus Germanus provides the most accurate congruence in comparison to a modern topographic map. Especially when the topographic map is rotated and thus provides a view as if the observer was looking at the peninsula from the east. This may be due to the fact, that the ancient seafarers had seen the form of the headland mainly from its eastern side, and remembered and reported this view.

Gregor Reisch concludes that the coastal region has always been the border to the world for today's island of Sri Lanka. But the ocean not only separated the people but also connected them at the same time with close and distant neighbors. A closer look reveals, that the map of Ptolemy does not provide an objective representation of the towns on the island, but rather a subjective, if not to say biased one. Mariners attributed a subjective meaning to places, which did not have to correspond to their meaning for a majority of the locals. The fact that also invented names found their way into Ptolemy's map should not be blamed on the scholar. Ptolemy's informants did not think about the possibility, that scholars of later times might be confused by place names.

Taprobana



Nicolas Germanus' Ptolemaic world map in the Ulm edition, 1482 (#119)



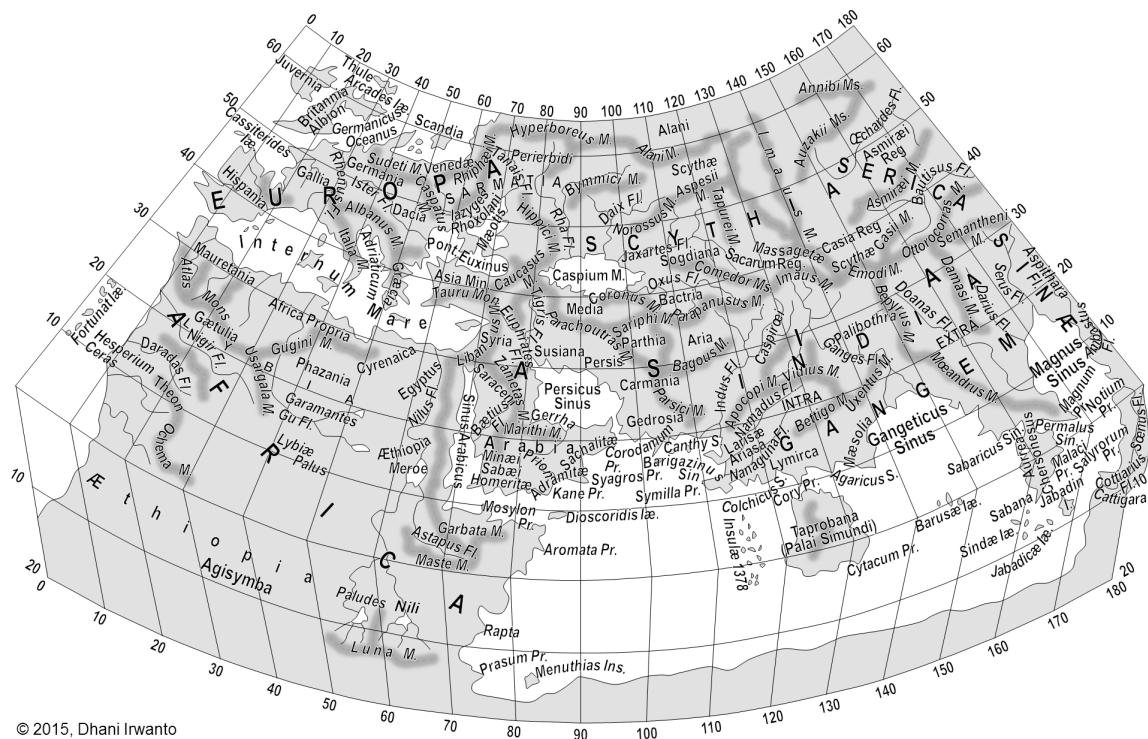
Also on the maps depicting *Taprobane*, colors seem to give information about the features of locations, for example, the color of the islands. A green island was thus

Taprobana

certainly a heavily overgrown island, while a pale yellow island was more likely to have stood for a sandy island. It is interesting to note, that in comparison with aerial and satellite images, such ones taken during the winter months show the most matches regarding the color of the islands on the maps. This season was the time of year when ancient sailors used the northeastern monsoon to sail from India to Egypt. Still today, sailors are advised to use the winds blowing from December until April to arrive safely in the Red Sea by April at the latest. Conversely, due to the southwestern monsoon, it is advisable to travel eastwards from June to October, even if it is dry in the east.

For many of the representations of the small islands surrounding *Taprobane*, their outlines seem to be very imprecise in comparison with today's islands belonging to Sri Lanka. Seafarers are therefore likely to have paid less attention to their shape, which can change over time by wind and waves, than to their peculiarities, such as animals living on them. These islands were identified by noticeable or predominant beasts. The handwritten copies made over the centuries may also have contributed to inaccuracies regarding the outlines of islands. Fortunately, some copyists were also so careful in their work, that they did not depict all the small islands surrounding *Taprobane* as having a pancake-like shape. This is why identification with islands of today is easier in these cases.

Naturally, there were also omissions on the maps, regarding the islands of *Taprobane*. For example, in the south of Sri Lanka. there are some rocks off the coast, of which not everyone was mentioned. What counted was the significance for shipping and the distinctiveness of the island. In this way, it was actually also possible, that tiny islands were displayed on the maps as being large sized.



Ptolemy also includes 26 regional maps and 67 maps of smaller, regional areas (#119). These maps are located in and around the Roman Empire, with a few regional

Taprobana

maps exhibiting *Greater India* and China, where among them is *Taprobana*. These regional maps and smaller area data are of better accuracy, whether they are obtained from his observations or data from other travelers or explorers. Incorporating these regions and areas on a world map derived from the older maps created his difficulty in locating their exact positions. Allegedly, Ptolemy locates *Taprobana* based on the older maps of either Eratosthenes (#112) or Strabo (#115), where no known island existed, or he deliberately puts it in the wrong place or floats its location so that not everyone can get there. However, since these maps were so far ahead of their time, they were used well into the Renaissance when, 13 centuries later, Christopher Columbus underestimated the distances to *Cathay* and India. The detailed map of *Taprobana* shown below was published in 1513. It was also based on Ptolemy's *Geographia*.

What still baffles everyone is the exaggerated size of *Taprobana* if Ptolemy really meant the isle to represent present day Sri Lanka. In contrast, the sub-continent of India that is shown in the map is far smaller in dimensions. It was true that Sri Lanka by Ptolemy's time was a well known island as it was centrally situated in the Indian Ocean. India and her products were equally known from the pre-Christian era, starting with the Persian occupation of territory up to the river Sind and Alexander's conquests following that as well as through sea-borne trade.

On the contrary, *Taprobana*, despite its sheer size, was assigned by Ptolemy with trade in elephants and golden spices. Both Sri Lanka and Sumatra were known for these two commodities, and the latter more so for spices but it is Sri Lanka that had a better historical record for elephants. The intelligence displayed by Sri Lankan elephants and easier transport across the Indian continent perhaps, accounted for preference for them. Sri Lankan elephants began to be exploited in a big way only after the East African resources dwindled.

There are no records of Sumatran elephants being sought after in Europe or India but elephants were known in Sumatra. This aspect, however, needs further investigation. Ptolemy based his knowledge on what Greek [and Persian] mariners had accumulated. Sri Lanka by that time (early Christian centuries), had a developed civilization with a continued dynastic rule and her reputation itself may have led the Egyptian cartographer to give exaggerated dimensions of the island, besides problems of calculating longitudes and latitudes. In contrast, the high civilization of Sumatra seems to be a latter day development though Aceh might have developed its sea borne contacts with Africa and the Gulf earlier. When Sebastian Münster produced his map in 1580, Sumatra, including Aceh, was, perhaps, better known in the West. Aceh, is now officially the Aceh Province in the westernmost province of Indonesia.

In AD 77 the author and naturalist, Pliny the Elder, wrote an encyclopedic book titled *Natural History*. Pliny wrote about the story of Annius Plocamus, a Roman tax collector who lived during the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54). Plocamus sent a freed slave to collect taxes in the Red Sea. His ship was blown off course and landed on *Taprobana*. The freedman described forests of trees that grew in the seas that surrounded the island. The trees broke the rudders of ships. People who lived on the island hunted elephants, tigers, and turtles with shells large enough to house whole families. Pliny also wrote that *Taprobana* was inhabited by *Sciapodes*, men with one giant foot that they used to shade themselves while lying on their backs.

The island entered European consciousness during the conquests of Alexander the Great. Alexander's admirals Nearchus and Onesicritus described *Taprobana* in their reports to their king. Nearchus sailed around the southern tip of India, describing the

Taprobana

smells of cinnamon that wafted from the fabulous island he passed along the way. Megasthenes, Seleucus's ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya, fleshed the place out a bit more. Several Roman cartographers and historians wrestled with the size, shape, and position of *Taprobana* before Claudius Ptolemy described an immense "*Taprobana*" in his *Geographia*, written about AD 150, six times the size of the Indian subcontinent and straddling the equator.

Taprobana, as it was called on most early maps, was an important post for trade between the east and the west, and was drawn too large on many maps because of its importance.

According to Reisch, one thing can already be said in summary after comparing the different maps of *Taprobane*. Namely, that there seems to have been most confusion among the map copyists, drawing the island of *Taprobane*, in regards to the two surrounding islands of Monakhe and Ammine.



Taprobana, 1525-1541, by Waldseemüller/Fries

This map is based on the slightly larger map from 1513 published in Ptolemy's *Geographia*. The atlas was reprinted in 1520, 1522, 1525, 1535 and 1541. From the last edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*, with maps by Laurens Fries and the text edited by Michael Servetus. Ptolemy's mythical island of *Taprobana* originally became associated with Sri Lanka although it was sometimes confused with Sumatra. *Taprobana*, as it was called on most early maps, was an important post for trade between the east and the west, and was drawn too large on many maps because of its importance. But Marco Polo states: *It has a circumference of some 2,400 miles. And I assure you that it used to be bigger than this. For it was once as much as 3,500 miles, as appears in the mariners' charts of this sea. But the north wind blows so strongly in these parts that it has submerged a great part of this island under the sea.* To the left a text box explaining that *Taprobana* is surrounded by 1,378 islands. The line across the lower part of the island represents the equator, and the

Taprobana

numbers below the line indicate the degrees east of Ptolemy's prime meridian in the Canary Islands.

In the 13th century Marco Polo states: *It has a circumference of some 2,400 miles. And I assure you that it used to be bigger than this. For it was once as much as 3,500 miles, as appears in the mariners' charts of this sea. But the north wind blows so strongly in these parts that it has submerged a great part of this island under the sea.*

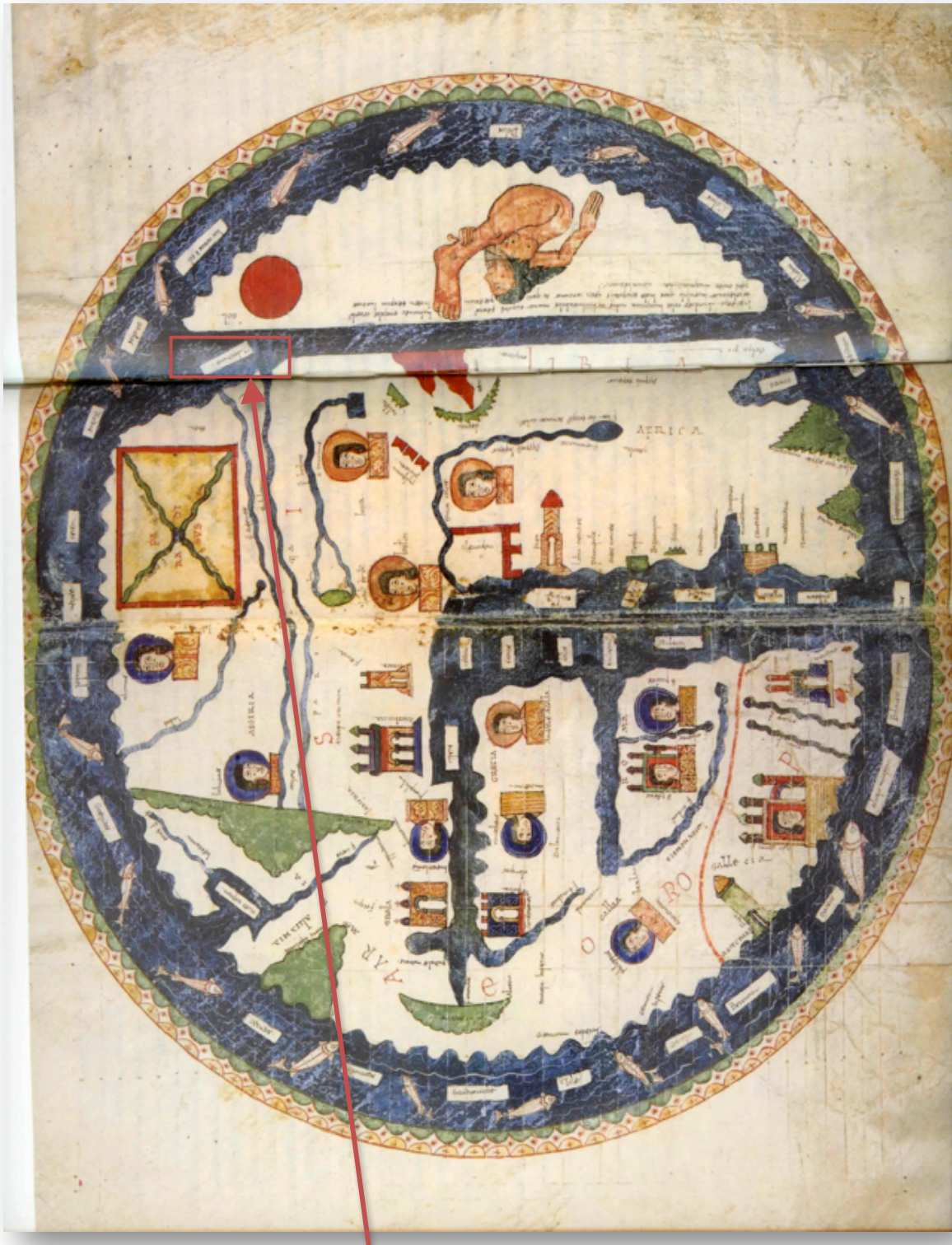
Many stories were written about *Taprobana*. The island was described in the 14th century book *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* as having mountains of pure gold that were guarded by giant man-eating ants. Ludovico di Varthema, an Italian traveler visited *Taprobana* in the early 16th century. Vathema wrote "it exports elephants that are larger and nobler than those found elsewhere." He also stated "the island of *Taprobane* is today called Sumatra."

Sciapode



With the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the land route to Asia became much more difficult and dangerous. This resulted in a lack of information of the area encompassed by the Indian Ocean, until the Portuguese explorers developed a passage to Asia by sailing around Africa and with the conquest of the Sultanate of Malaka in 1511. Thus, the Asian portion of the world maps after Ptolemy still continued to rely on his information found in the *Geographia*, while also incorporating the knowledge obtained from the Arab explores and unknown sources, as shown on the maps of al-Idrisi (#219), Martellus (#256), Cantino (#306), Caverio (#307), King Hamy (#307.1), Waldseemüller (#310), Fries and Apian (#331). Al-Idrisi incorporates the knowledge of Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Far East gathered by Arab merchants and explorers. Martellus' map shows heavy influences from Ptolemy but incorporates Africa. Cantino's map portrays Brazilian coast and depicts African coast of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans with a remarkable accuracy and detail. Caverio's map shows the east coast of North America with surprising detail where its sources are still a mystery. Waldseemüller's map is a new line of editions of Ptolemy's *Geographia* with the integration of new geographical information coming from the earliest of voyages of discovery. Fries and Apian's maps are the re-working of the Waldseemüller's map. Most of these maps locate *Taprobana* more or less on the same position as Ptolemy's map, except Cantino and Caverio's maps that portray it as Sumatra.

Taprobana



The Beatus El Burgo de Osma map of 1086 (#207.14)
Taprobane is displayed as one of 36 rectangular islands



St Sever Beatus mappamundi, 11th century, #207.13

The island of *Taprobane* is one of the most prominent ones among the geographical texts of Antiquity. Its importance endured until the Middle Ages, and it became one of the most frequently mentioned among the islands of the Indian ocean, and the most commonly depicted in the cartographic domain. The maps of the Beatus codices (#207) are no exception. *Taprobane* is shown in the easternmost corner of the encircling ocean in the Beatus Lorvao map (#207.22), as well as in the maps of Beatus Family IIb, except for *San Andres de Arroyo* where it does not feature. Elsewhere, in the maps of *El Burgo de Osma* (#207.14) and *St Sever* (#207.13) of Beatus Family I, it features in the far south-west. Perhaps the difference in location from one map to another is due to the fact that the latter would be following a geographical text alluding to *Taprobane* as an island of India, located in the southeasterly direction. Such is the case, for example, of the Isidorian *Etymologiae* (XIV, 6, 12) which remark of it:

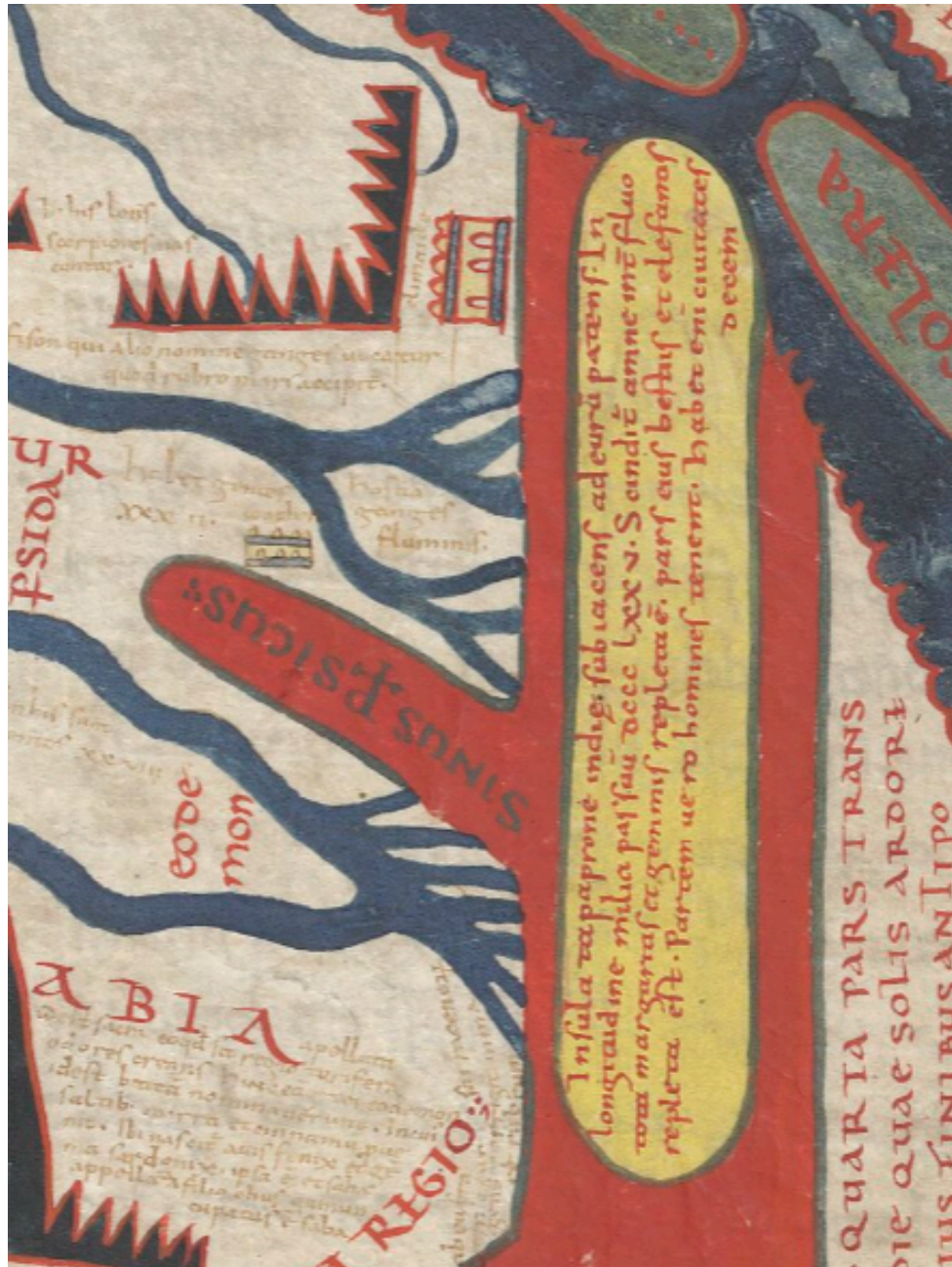
Taprobane insula Indiae subiaccens ad Eurum, [ex qua Oceanus Indicus incipit], patens in longitudine octingentis septuaginta quinque milibus passuum, [in latitudine sescenta viginti quinque milia stadiorum]. Scinditur amni interfluo; tota margaritis rep leta et gemmis: pars eius bestiis et elephantis rep leta est, partem vero homines tenent. [Taprobane is an island that lies to the southeast of India. (The Indian Ocean begins there.) It is 875 miles long (and 625,000 stades wide.) It is intersected by a river and everywhere full of pearls and precious stones. Part of it is full of wild beasts and elephants, while another part is occupied by human beings)].

Not surprisingly, out of all the maps which depict the island of *Taprobane* in this location, the one of Saint-Sever contains this Isidorian fragment, and adds as an epilogue the words of the *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (I, 2, 16) of Paulus Orosius referring to the number of cities: " ... insula Taprobane, quae habet decem civitates" [" ...

Taprobana

the island of *Taprobane* with its ten cities"]. The text of the map that is written across the island, states:

Insula Tapaprone indie subiacens ad eorum, patens in longitudine milia pasuum DCCCLXXV Scinditur amne interfluo; tota margaritis et gemis repleta est: pars eius bestiis et elefantis repleta est. Partem vero homines tenent. Habet enim ciuitates decem'
 [Taprobane is an island of India located in the easterly direction, it extends for a length of 875 miles. It is divided by a river that flows through it; it is replete with pearls and gems; one part is replete with wild beasts and elephants; but the other has men. There are even ten cities].



Taprobane on the Beatus St Sever mappamundi

Taprobana



A modern copy of al-Idrisi world map from the Nuzhat al-Mushtāq fi'khtirāq al-āfāq, a.k.a Tabula Rogeriana, oriented with South at the top, 1154, (#219)



Taprobana on the world map by al-Idrisi



Taprobana (left) on the world map Johannes Eschuidus, 1489 (#201C1)

WELTKARTE DES RAVENNATEN.



A reconstruction of the seventh century world map by the anonymous geographer of Ravenna, centered on Cyclades, with islands circling the sacred isle of Delos.

Taprobana is displayed as a triangular island.

from Konrad Miller's *Die ältesten Weltkarten*, Vol. VI, Map table 1, 1898

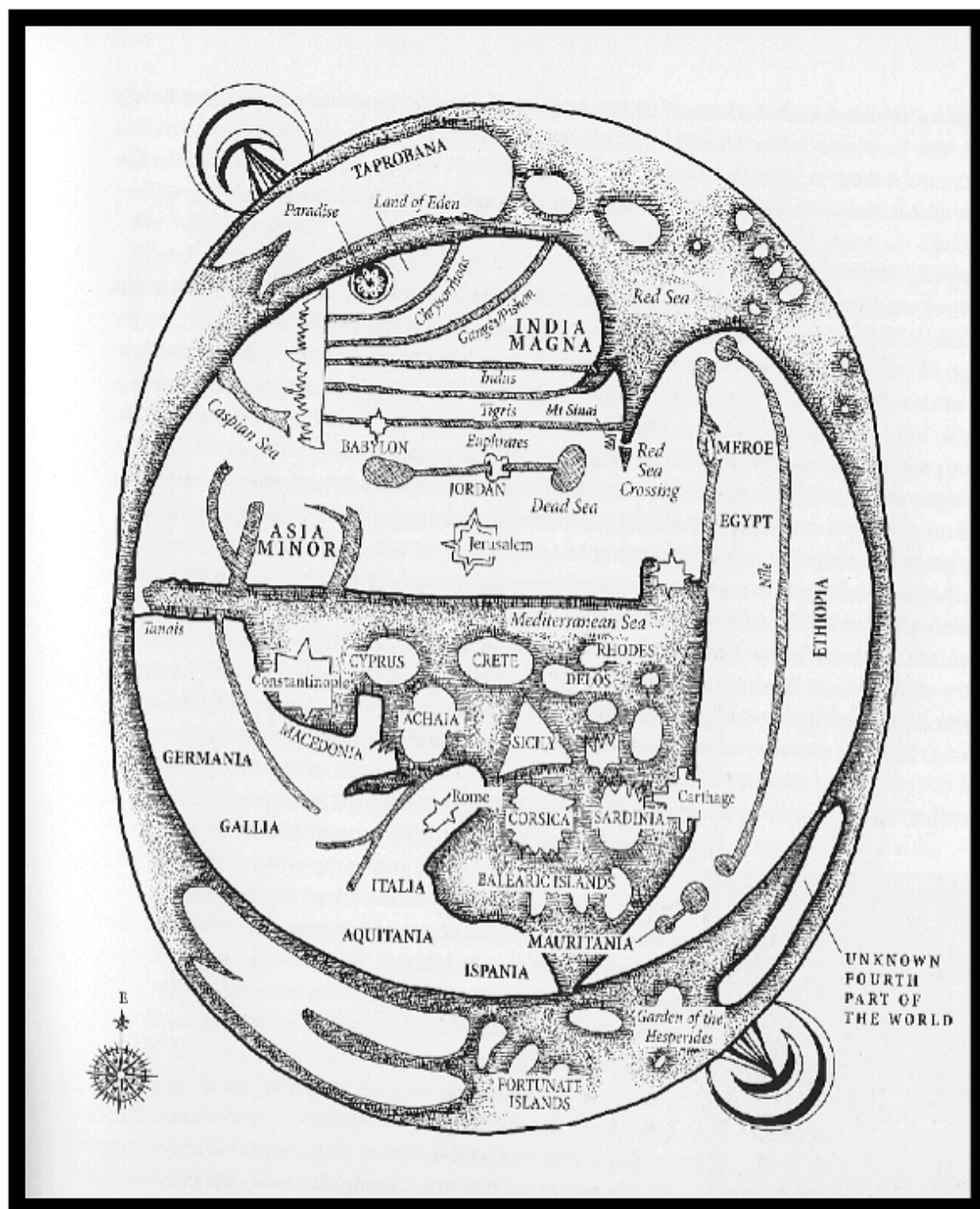
Taprobana

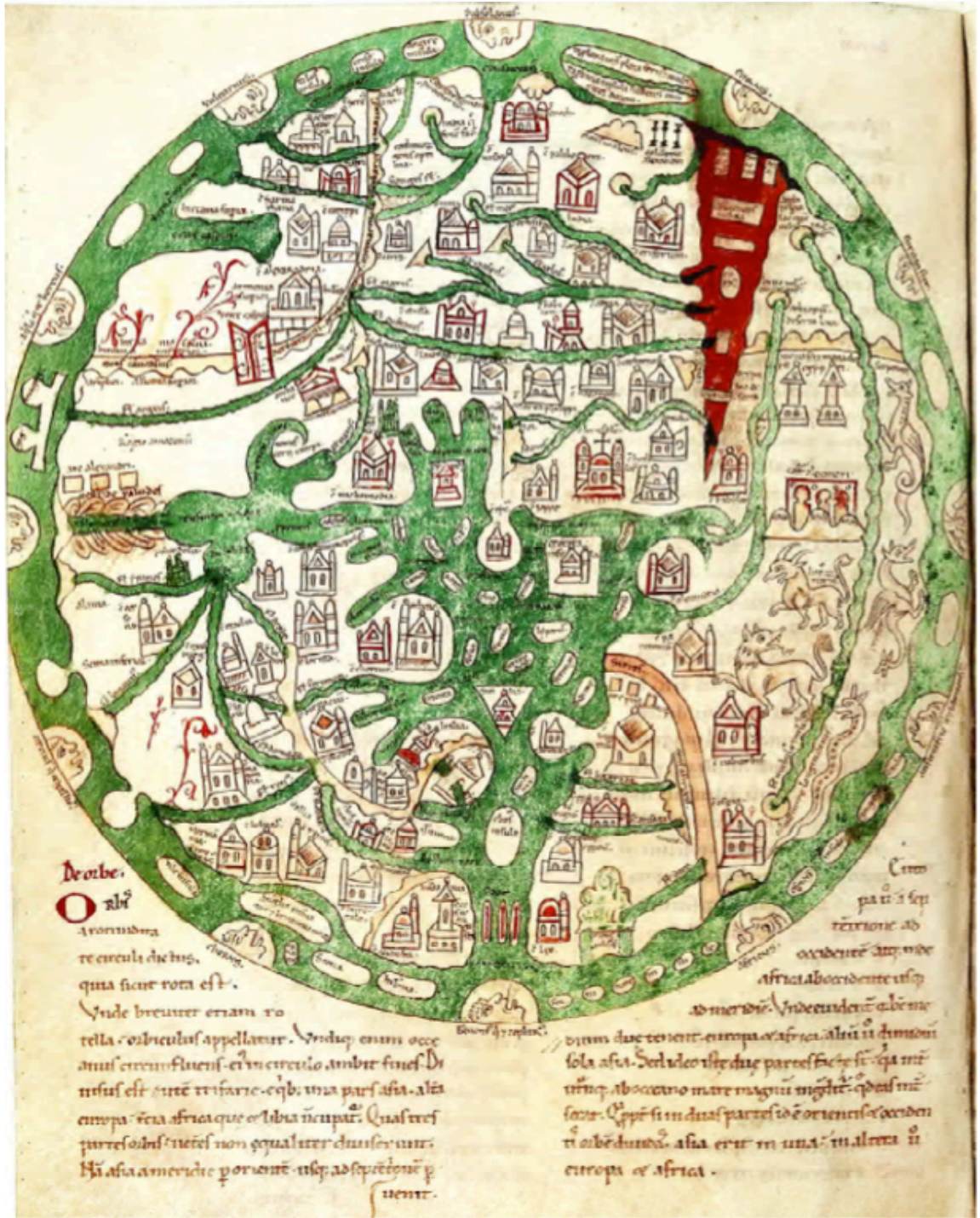


The "Vatican T-O", a.k.a. the "Easter Tables" map, an eighth century T-O map bound with Isidore's *Etymologiarum*, 21 x 14.5 cm. One of the oldest detailed world maps, placed with a group of computus materials. It shows the inhabited continents as a circle surrounded by the Ocean. To the southwest of Africa is the island that has been interpreted as a vestigial fourth continent. Paradise is represented by a rosette in the Far East. Two apparent islands in the northwest are both labeled with the names of seas: 'mare mortun' and 'oceanus occiduus' [dead sea, or sea of the dead, and western ocean].

Taprobana is displayed as a very large island at the top-left.

Oriented with East at the top. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Lat. 6018, ff 63^v-64 (#205M)





Isidore mappamundi, ca. 1130, known as the Munich map, 26 cm diameter (#205DD)
 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm 10058, f. 154v

Taprobana



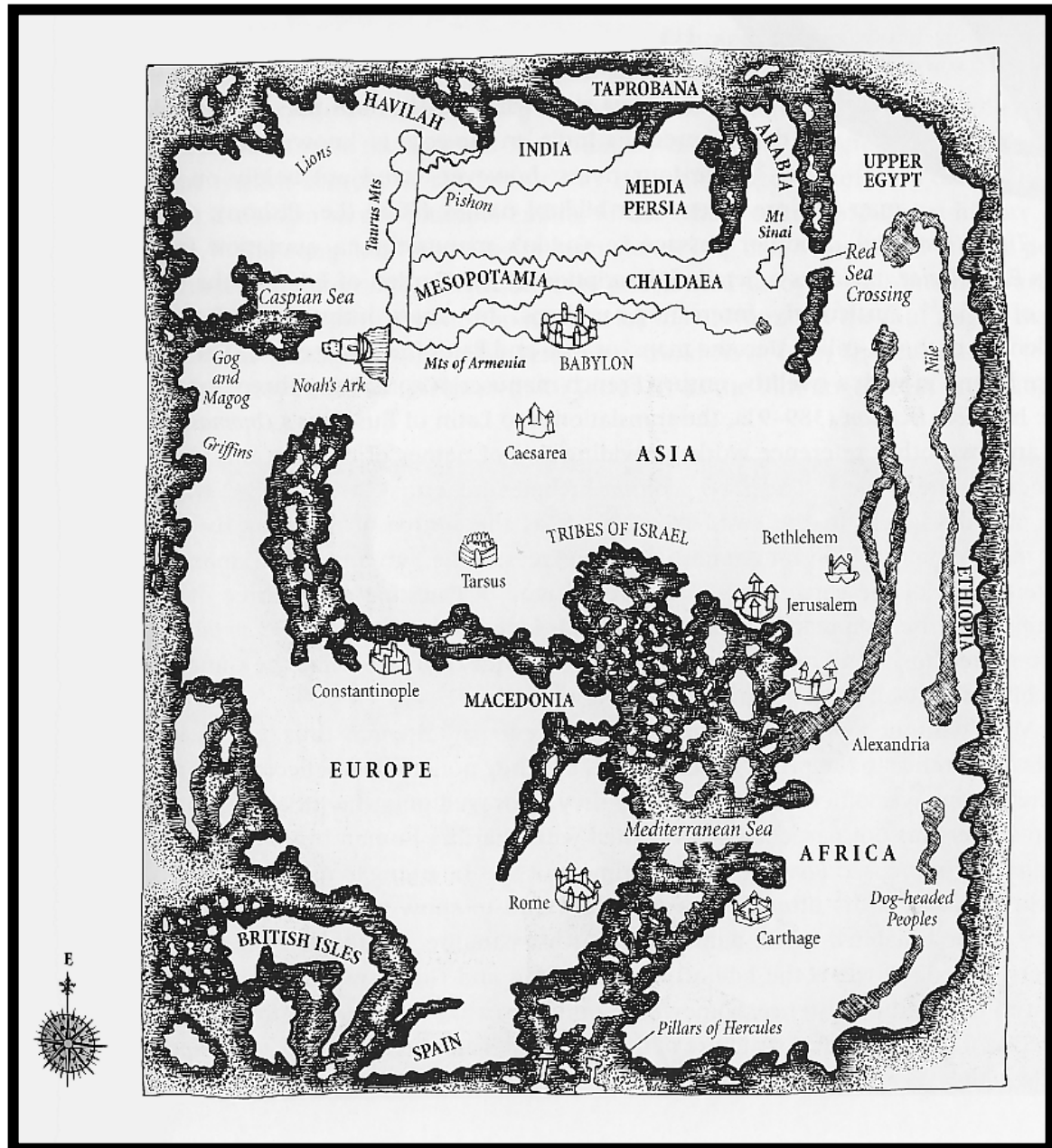
Re-drawing of the Munich map from Nathalie Bouloux
Taprobana is shown split in two at the top-right

Taprobana



*The Cottoniana or Anglo-Saxon Map, c. 995, 21.2 x 17.6 cm,
British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius BV, f.56v (#210)*

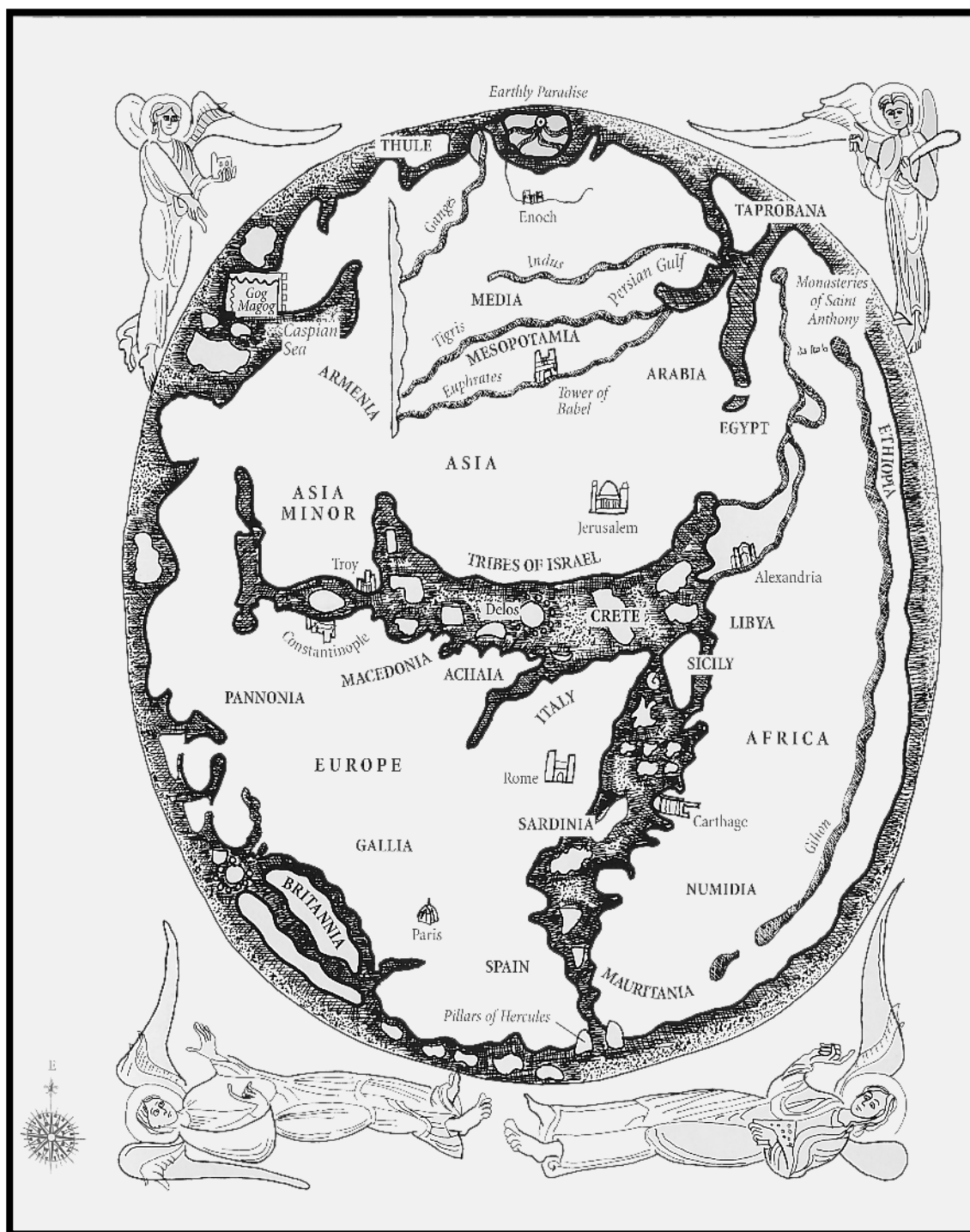
Taprobana





The Sawley Map, a.k.a. World Map of Henry of Mainz, 1188 (#215)

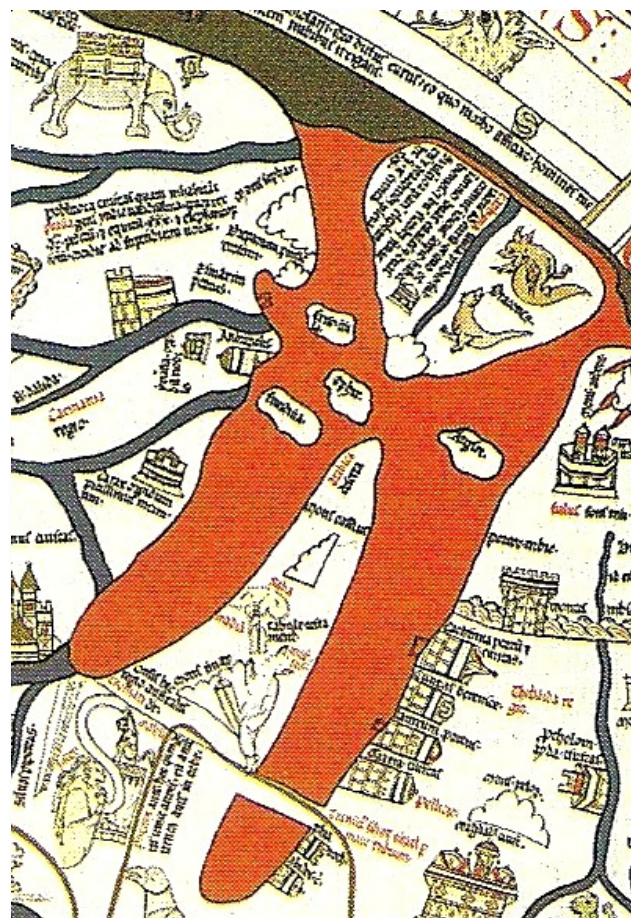
Taprobana



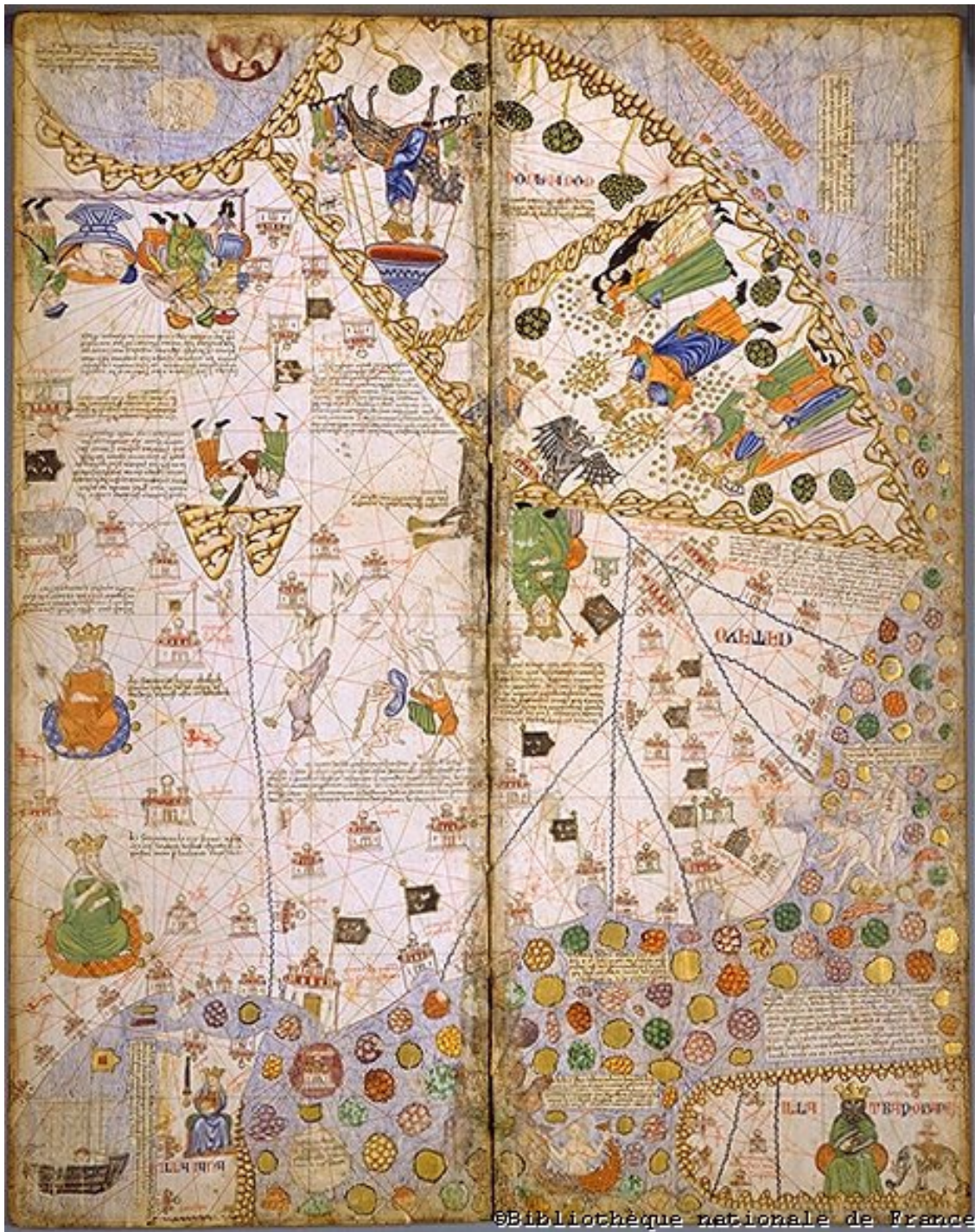
Taprobana



Taprobana as displayed on the Ebstorf mappamundi 1234 (#224)



Taprobana as displayed on a facsimile of the Hereford mappamundi (#226)

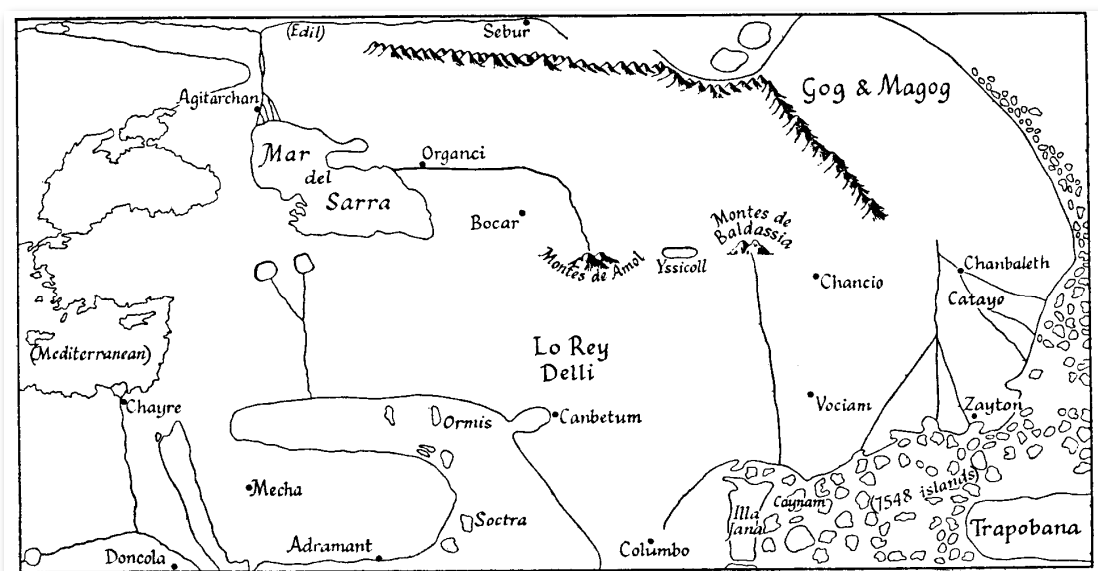


The Asian panel from the Catalan Atlas (#235)

The left panel displays the Khan of 'the Empire of Media [Chaghadai], the ruler of Gog and Magog (on horseback, top right), Lop, Tenduc, two men hunting for diamonds with eagles (center) and India (bottom).

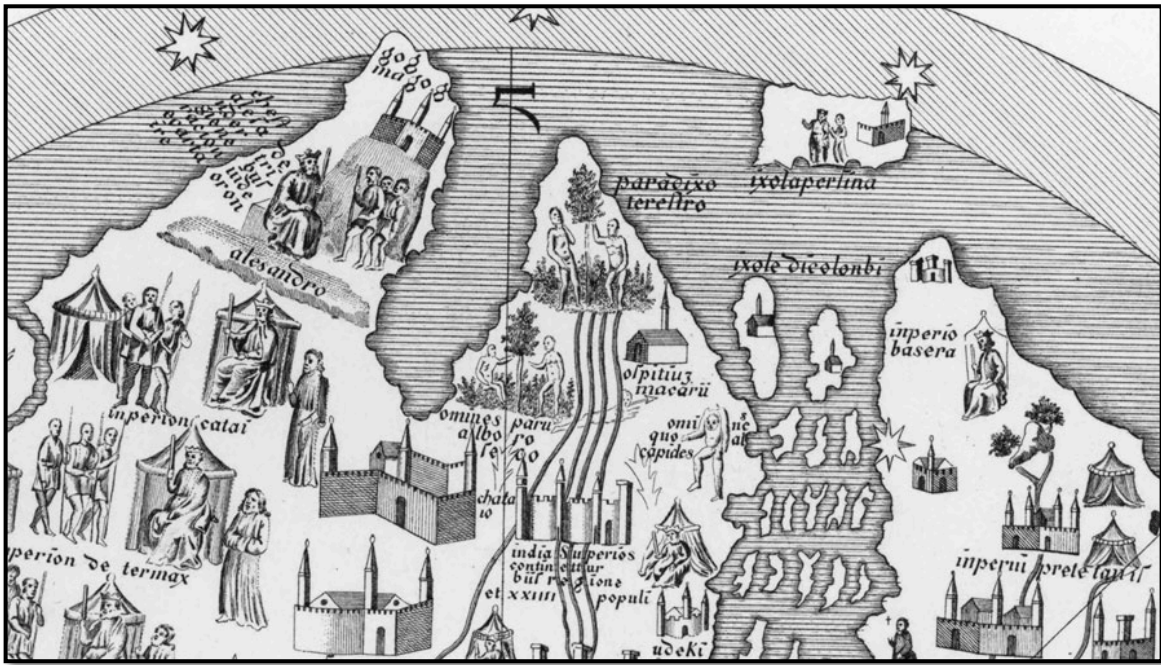
At the top of the second panel is Khanbalikh extending for two miles and to its left (upside down) is the Great Khan said to be guarded by 12,000 horsemen. One sees Quinsai, Fugu, Zaiton represented as a great port. In the Sea of Chin are Java and 7,458 islands with the promise of 'gold, silver, spices, precious stones'. Taprobana often taken in the West to be Sri Lanka [Ceylon], but here perhaps Java, has an impressive ruler and an Indian elephant, and to the left a Siren.

Taprobana



La Illa de Taprobana...

Taprobana



Taprobana as displayed at the top (East) on a facsimile of Andrea Bianco's world map (#241) also showing Adam & Eve, the Terrestrial Paradise and the four great rivers (right) and the location of the notorious Gog and Magog on a peninsula (left)



Taprobana as displayed on the world map of Andreas Walsperger, 1448 (#245)

Taprobana



Taprobana on the Borgia mappamundi (#237)

Taprobana



Catalan-Estense world map, 1450-60 (#246)

The peninsula of India is much less pronounced on the *Catalan-Estense* map, and, to the south is the large island of *Salam* or *Silan* [Ceylon/Sri Lanka]. A legend refers to its wealth in rubies and other precious stones. Of the many islands in the Indian Ocean the largest, to the southeast, has the shape of a rectangle surrounded by mountains with the legend, in translation: 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 capture any people from the mainland, they eat them... This refers not to Sri Lanka which appears as *Silan* (so it is not Ptolemy's *Taprobane*) but to Sumatra, called by the Genoese world map of 1457 *Taprobane* (#248) and *Ciamutera* and by Fra Mauro *Siomatra* or *Taprobana* (#249). The description of its alleged cannibals comes from Marco Polo, as does the similar description of Java, here named as *Jana*.



Taprobana as displayed on the world map known as the Genoese map, 1457 (#248)

In place of Ptolemy's *Taprobana*, two islands are represented on the Genoese map, the larger of which, though appearing in outline to be *Taprobana*, is rather to be taken as a representation of Sumatra, while the smaller bears the name *Ceylon*. A legend near this reads: *The island of Ceylon, having a circumference of three thousand miles, is rich in rubies, sapphires, and cat's-eyes, and produces cinnamon from trees similar to our willow tree. In this island there is a lake, in the middle of which is a noble city whose inhabitants, given over to astrology, predict all future events.* The position of Ceylon was now well known in Europe, being here placed to the east of a peninsula that we can recognize as the southern point of India. In this as well as in other parts of extreme southern Asia the Genoese cosmographer seems especially to exhibit an acquaintance with the record of the distinguished Italian traveler Nicolo di Conti who referred to Ceylon as *Zeilan*.

The lake mentioned above in the interior of Ceylon may owe its origin to a statement made by Pliny or maybe an attempt to represent some one or more of the numerous artificial reservoirs or tanks for which the island is famous.

In their outlines there is a certain similarity between the islands Ceylon and Sumatra as represented by our Genoese mapmaker and the same islands as they appear on the maps of Ptolemy. The somewhat lengthy legend here reads as follows: *Of the islands which are known, Taprobana is said to have a circumference of more than sixteen hundred miles, next to which is Anglia, then Java the Greater and Java the Less: after these islands Ceylon, then Sicily, and after this Sardinia, and following in order, Corsica, Cyprus and Candia. The inhabitants of this Taprobana, which in their language is called Ciamutera, are barbarians, having large ears in which they wear ornaments, and they dress in linen clothes. They are all idolaters. They have an abundance of pepper, camphor and much gold. The pepper tree when it bears has seeds like the juniper. Cannibals inhabit a part of this island, who, continually waging*

Taprobana

war with their neighbors, make a collection of human heads as treasures, and he who has the most heads is the richest. This description of *Taprobana* appears clearly to have been taken from Nicolo Conti, and it is very interesting to observe that our cartographer, not in a very successful manner, has attempted to bring the report of Conti into accord with Ptolemy. Ptolemy's *Taprobana*, by which we are to understand Ceylon/Sri Lanka, is to our author Sumatra, as the legend above indicates, and near by he places his Ceylon, although Conti expressly states that with favorable wind he traveled in twenty days from Ceylon to Sumatra, leaving Andaman, inhabited by cannibals, on the left of his course.

The name *Sumatra*, which our cosmographer, together with Conti, considers to be the native name, seems first to have become a more or less familiar one in Europe in the 14th century. In the story of Ibn Batuta it appears as the name of a city; Odorich of Pordenome refers to it as the name of a locality; while in the story of Conti for the first time it clearly appears as the name of an island. According to a conjecture of Yule, the name *Sumara*, which appears in a manuscript of Marco Polo as the name of one of the kingdoms of the island, is only a corruption of Sumatra. Marco Polo, the first traveler from the west who seems to have brought definite word from Sumatra, called it *Java the Less*, under which name, however, according to the Genoese cartographer, we are to understand Java or Borneo. Conti gives to the island a circumference of about two thousand miles, as does Marco Polo, which is very nearly correct. In its outlines *Further India*, *Ultra India* (Southeast Asia) is Ptolemaic, a fact which is especially noticeable in the very prominent peninsular character. It stretches toward the south, terminating in a prominent *Golden Chersonese*, a name that the legend suggests: *Here gold is found in abundance with jewels and precious stones.*



Fra Mauro mappamundi 1459 (#249)

Saylam [Sri Lanka/Ceylon] appears more or less correctly related to *Chomari*, with a note that Ptolemy had confused this island with *Taprobana*, and a representation of *Adam's Peak*. To the east of the Bay of Bengal is a very large island, *Sumatra* [*Taprobana* over *Siometra*], the first time that name appears unequivocally on a map. To the north of it, and somewhat squeezed together by the limit of the map, are many islands. As Fra Mauro states that in this region lack of space had compelled him to omit many islands, it no doubt also obliged him to alter their orientation drastically.

Taprobana



Taprobana on the Fra Mauro mappamundi, 149 (#249)

Taprobana



The island of Taprobane where is the tomb of St. Thomas, and here elephants are born and pepper grows.



The Wieder-Woldan world map, 1485.

Taprobana is found under an ill-shaped India in a land-locked Indian Ocean. (#255)

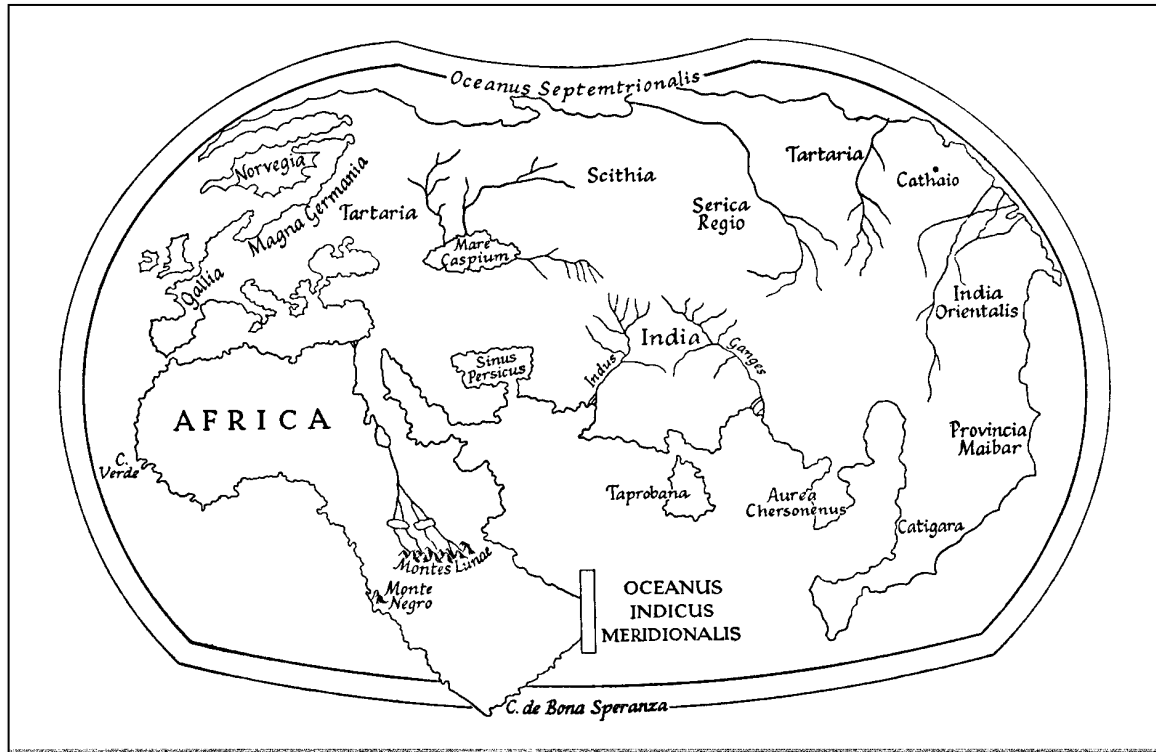
Observing and comparing Claudius Ptolemy's and Henricus Martellus' maps, we can clearly see that there were confusions in mapping the Indian Peninsula. Ptolemy describes it in two major regions, *India Intra Gangem* – where there are *Laricæ*, *Ariasa* and *Lymirca* – in the west that does not show a major protruding peninsula, and *India Extra Gangem* – where there is *Aurea Chersonesus* – in the east that shows a major protruding peninsula. He maps Indus and Ganges rivers on the west and east of *India Intra Gangem*, respectively, and *Magnus Sinus* and *Cattigara* on the further east. Martellus adds another peninsula on the east – where there is *Cattigara* – based on Ptolemy's data, and keeps the others similar to Ptolemy's. This peninsula is supposedly the Malay Peninsula so that the Indian Peninsula should be the Ptolemy's *India Extra Gangem*. Maps thereafter by such cartographers as Cantino, Caveri, Waldseemüller, Fries and Apian confirm this.

Taprobana



*Martellus World Map, 1489, from his Insularium illustratum (#256)
British Library, Add MS. 15760, fols. 68~69r, London, England; 46.5 x 30 cm/18.3"x11.8"*

Taprobana



Taprobana on the 1489 Martellus world map

Taprobana



The "Columbus" map of 1492-1500 (#257)



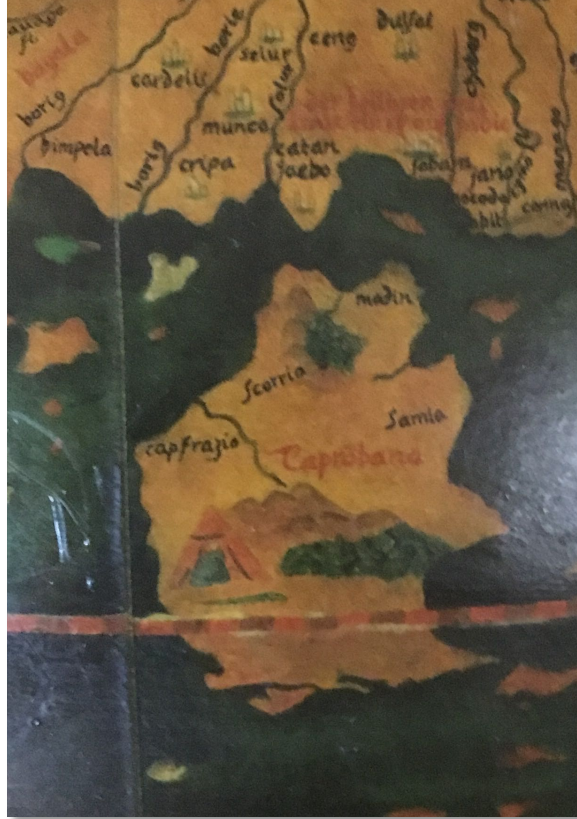
Taprobana

Taprobana



The Indian Ocean on the Martin Behaim globe, 1492 (#258)

Taprobana



Taprobana on the Behaim globe

The Behaim (#258), Waldseemüller (#310), Fries and Apian's (#331) maps show Sri Lanka ("Seilan", "Seillam", "Seyla") and Sumatra ("Jaba Minor", "Iava Minor"), beside *Taprobana* which is situated further west. For author Dhani Irwanto these become indications that *Taprobana* is not Sri Lanka nor Sumatra, and raise a presumption that it deliberately put on the wrong place or floated its location to make it a secrecy. It is allegedly that sailors tried to find *Taprobana* using Ptolemy based maps could not find it in the location but then sailed further, at the end they found Sumatra and assumed it as *Taprobana*. In spite of those, *Taprobana* is shown in the extreme southeast corner (Southeast Asia) on the Cresques' *Catalan Atlas* (#235, "*Trapobana*"), and in the Indian Ocean northeast of Java ("*Argeria*") and Sumatra ("*Crisa*") on the map of Walsperger (#245, "*Tapbana*").

Taprobana



Taprobana on the 1502 Cantino world map (#306)

The Indian sub-continent (shown here) is drawn as a sharply tapering triangle, on the western coast of which are names, (e.g., *Cambaya*, *Calecut*) and legends detailing the wealth of these parts, which were drawn from accounts of Vasco da Gama's voyage. These appear to mark the limit of first-hand knowledge; beyond, the outline must have been inserted largely by second-hand reports. That this was obtained from native seamen is probable from the circumstance that the term *pulgada* is used in place of a degree; it equaled about $1^{\circ} 42' 50''$. The places whose latitudes are given thus are inserted only approximately in their correct positions. East of India is a large gulf and then a southward-stretching peninsula, a relic of the coasts which Ptolemy believed to enclose the Indian Ocean. Near its extremity occurs the name *Malaqua* and off it the large island of *Taprobana* [here representing Sumatra].

Taprobana

Johannes Ruysch recognized that the old Ptolemaic coastline can no longer applied. Madagascar is properly reduced in size and located more precisely. Sri Lanka, under the name of *Prilam*, was laid down by Ruysch with about its proper size, and correctly as regards the southern point of India. *Taprobana* is placed further towards the East Indian peninsula, in which position this geographical remnant from the time of Alexander the Great was retained, down to the middle of the 16th century.



Universalior Cogniti Orbis Tabula, Ex recentibus confecta observationibus [A more universal map of the known world, constructed by means of recent observations], 1507-1508, Johannes Ruysch (#313). Here Ceylon/Sri Lanka is labeled "Prilam" and Taprobana is labeled on the large rectangular island southeast of Prilam,, in the area of Sumatra.

Taprobana

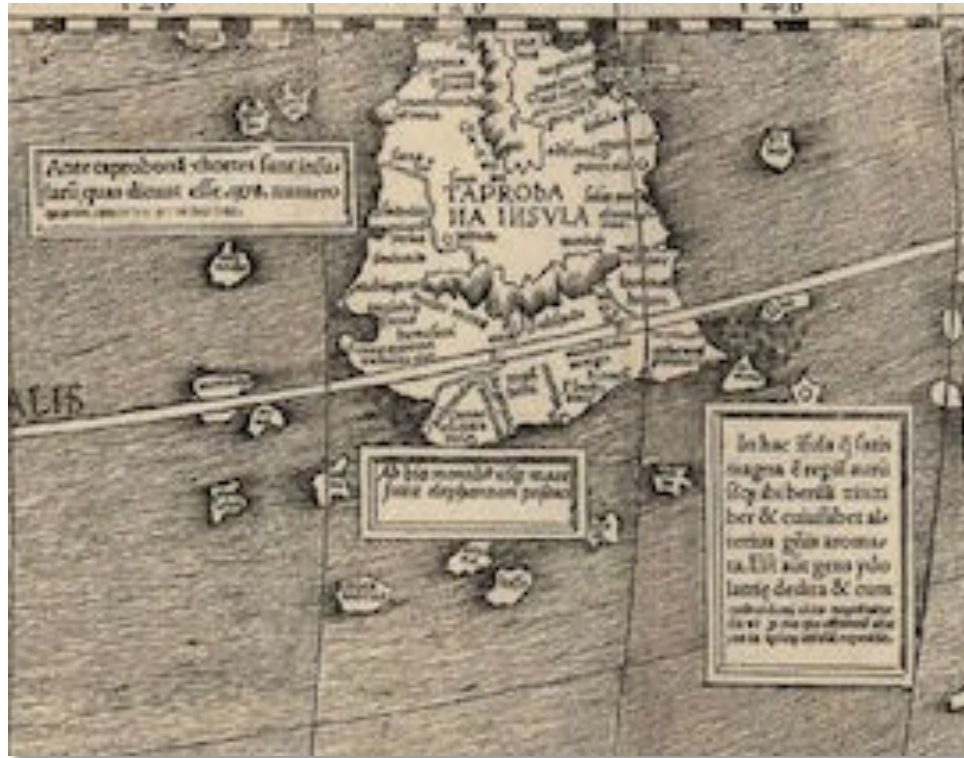


Taprobana as Sri Lanka in the King Hamy world map, 1502 (#307.1)



The world map, Universalis Cosmographia Secundum Ptholomei Traditionem e Et Americi Vesputii Aliorum Lustrationes, by Martin Waldseemüller, 1507 (#310)

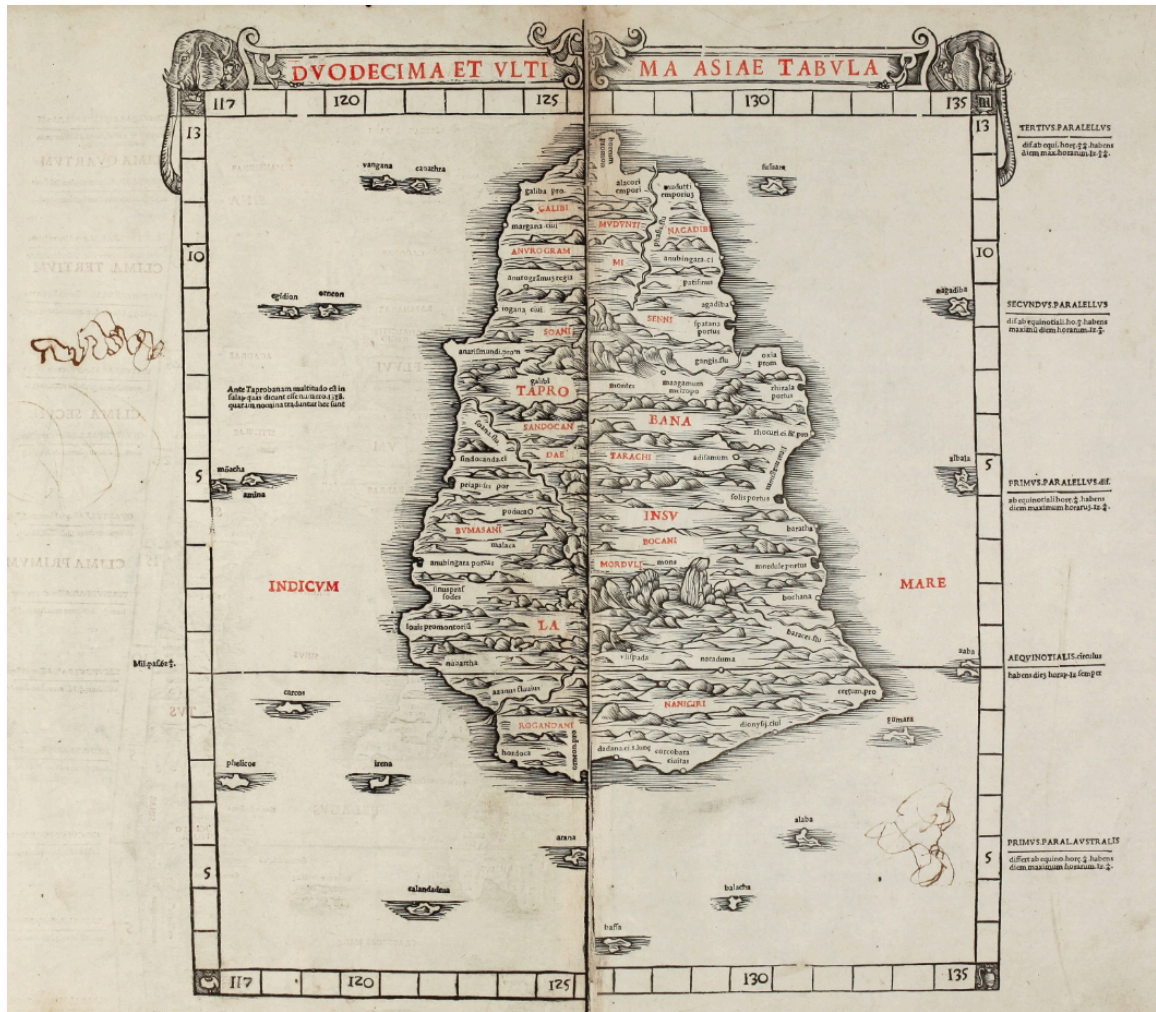
Taprobana



Taprobana as Sri Lanka on the 1507 Waldseemüller map

The Indian Ocean area is very representative of the Ptolemaic character, albeit re-interpreted by Martin Waldseemüller, showing a typically enlarged *Taprobana Insula* (the location of which represents a juxtaposition of this island with *Seylam* [Sri Lanka] as found on Fra Mauro's map, #249), a reduced Indian subcontinent, an exaggerated Madagascar and Zanzibar and a string of numerous islands (possibly representing confusion in the reports of the Maldivé Islands and the Malay Archipelago) that seem to form a series of stepping stones leading to a mysteriously elongated southeast Asian peninsula labeled *India*, located south and east of the *Aureus Chersonesus* [Malay Peninsula] - this extension of Indochina to 25 degrees South, unlike the Martellus map which extends to 33 degrees, is a remnant of the Ptolemaic land-link between Africa and Asia that had formerly enclosed the Indian Ocean (#119).

Taprobana

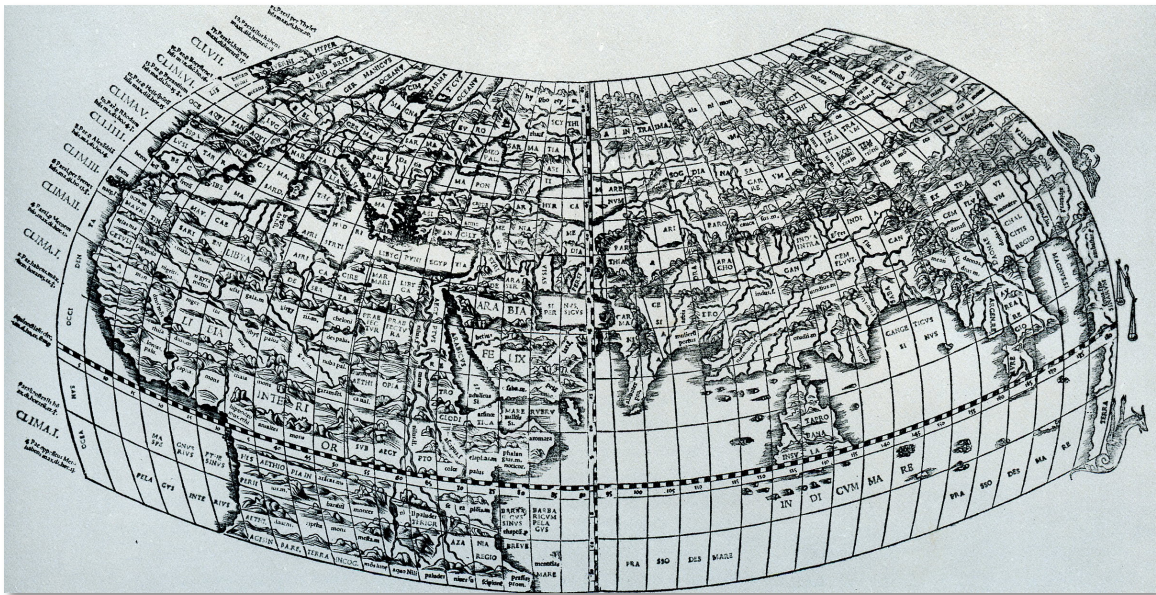


*Map of Taprobana, Sri Lanka, Ceylon. Duodecima et ultima Asiae tabula
Printed in Venice by J. Pentius de Leucho in 1511.*

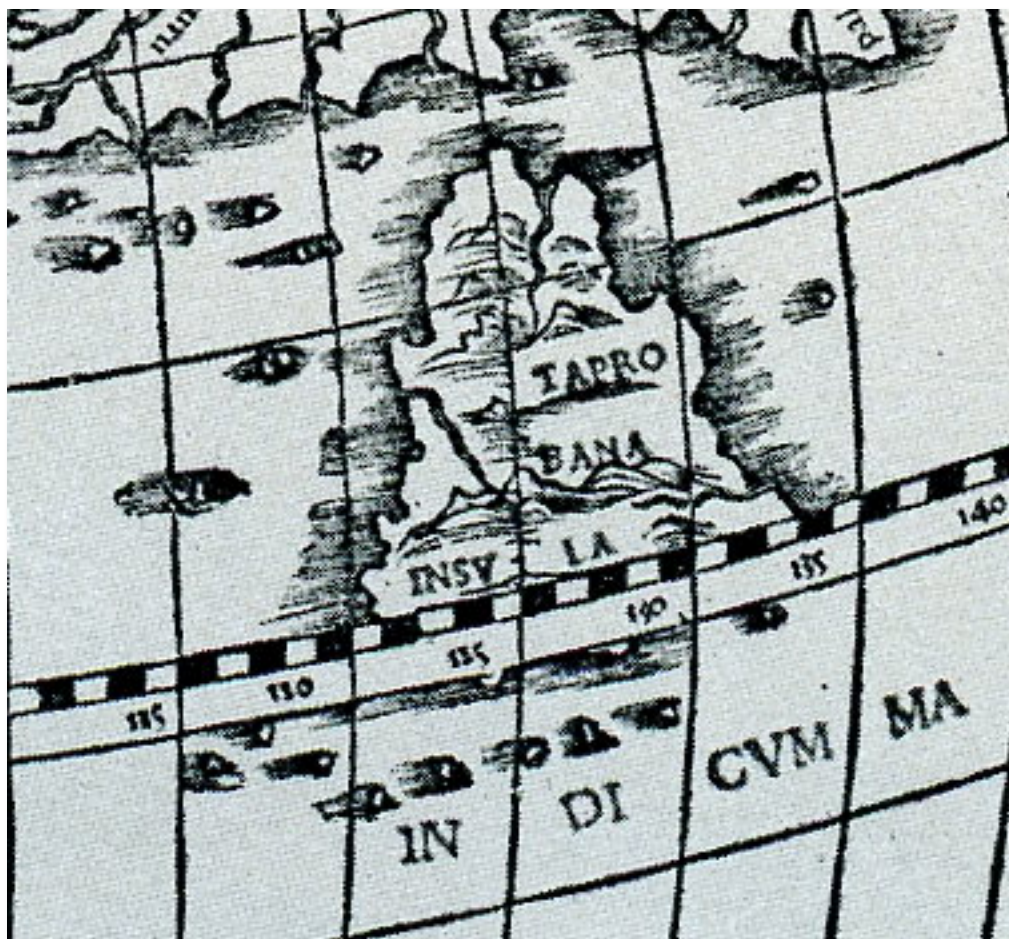
Early woodcut map of Ceylon/Sri Lanka printed in red and black. From Bernardus Sylvanus, also known as Bernardo Silvano of Eboli, the Ptolemy edition '*Claudii Ptholemaei Alexandrini liber Geographicae...*', printed 1511 in Venice. Sylvanus created a unique hybrid of classical and modern information on his maps for his 1511 edition. He fitted Ptolemy's list of provinces, towns, as they existed in the classical period to the modern geographical outline of the coasts, rivers, and mountains.

Each of the map sheets of Sylvanus are printed on both sides, so halves of two different maps are on the back side of this map. In this case, verso right half shows the map of India beyond the Ganges with the description of the Chinese Sea with Southeast Asia, titled '*Undecima Asiae Tabula*'.

Taprobana



Claudius Ptolemy, Bernard Sylvanus, 1511



Taprobana



Tuto il Mondo Tereno, Giovanni Vavassore, 1540





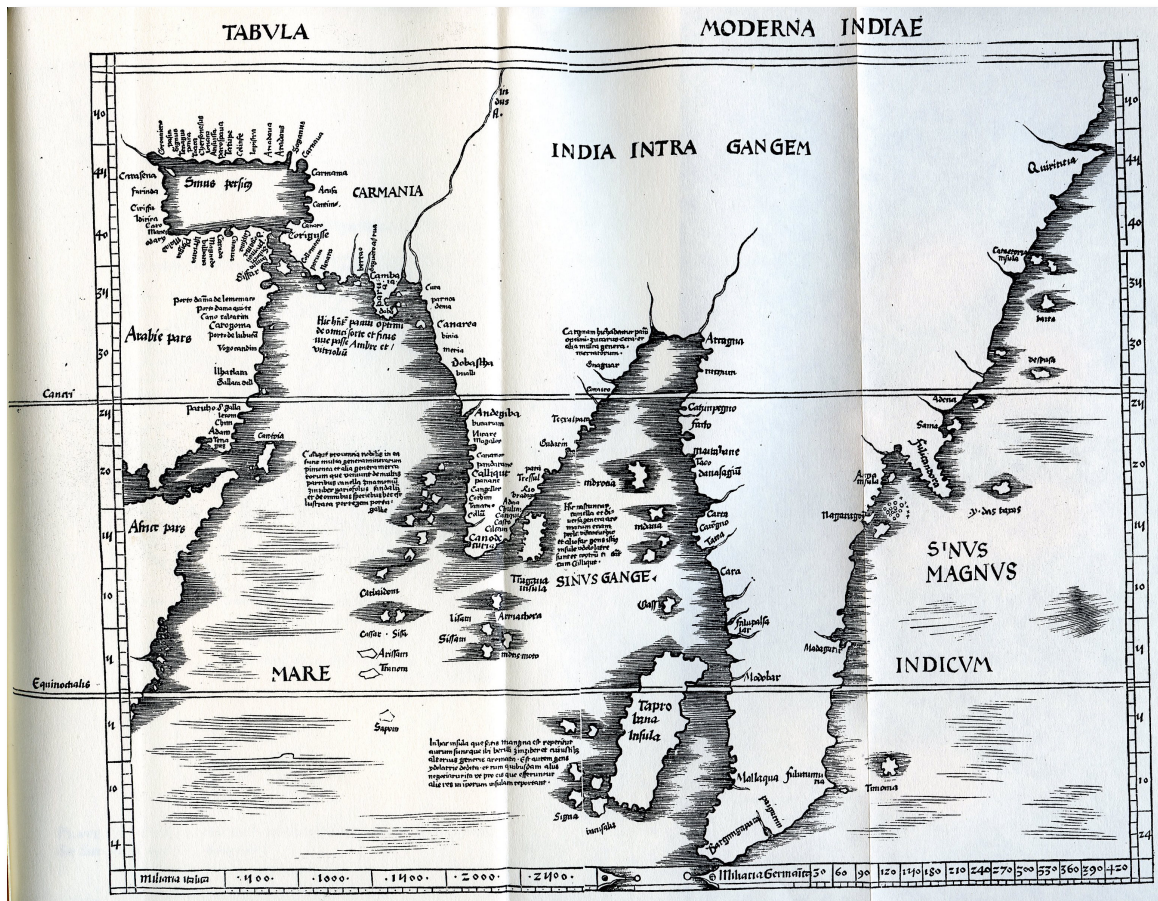
1513 Waldseemüller/Fries map of Taprobana

*Claudii Ptolemei viri Alexandrini mathematicae discipline philosophi doctissimi Geographiae opus
nouissima traductione e Graecorum archetypis castigatissime pressum, ceteris ante lucubrationum
multo prestantius ...*

Taprobana

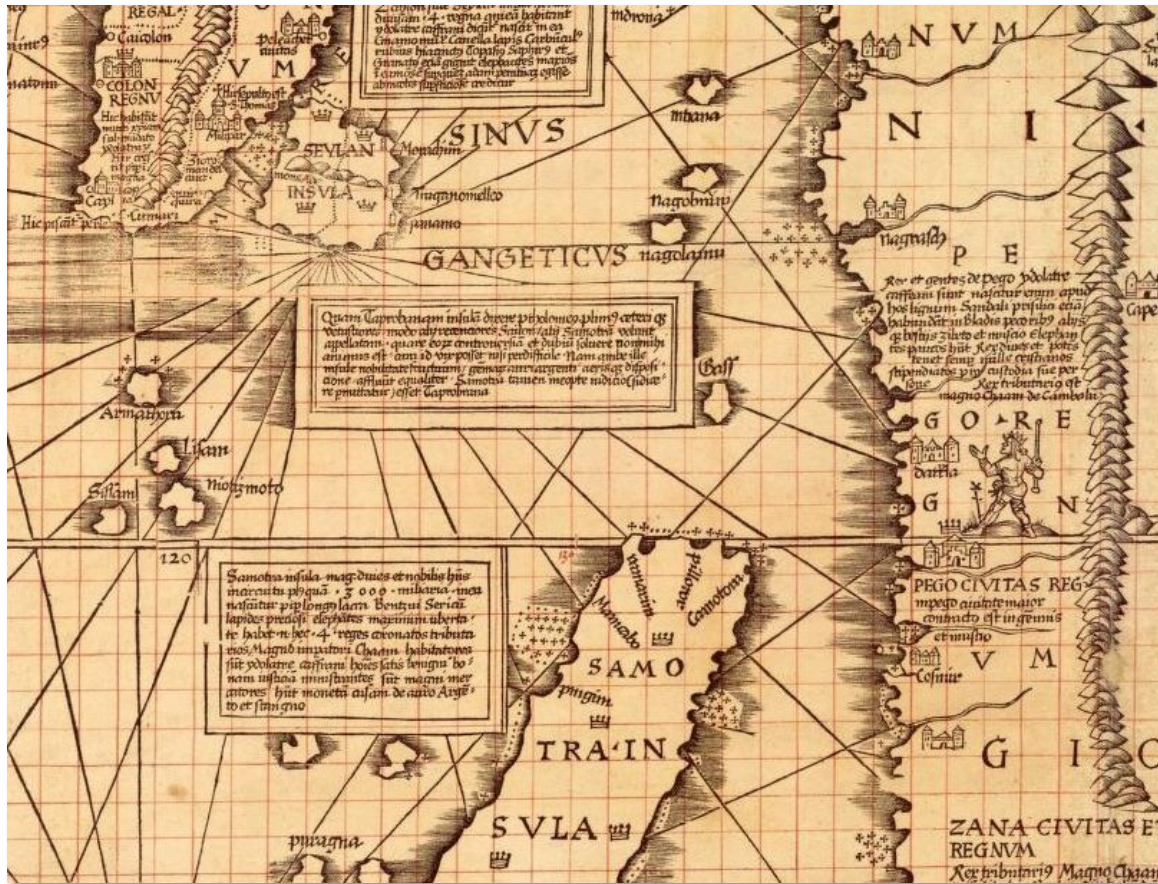


*Taprobana on the Bernard Sylvanus world map, 1511,
from an edition of Ptolemy's Geographia. (#318)*



The map of India included in the 1513 Ptolemy by Waldseemüller displaying Taprobana as Sumatra

Taprobana



Sheet #8 from the 1516 world map by Waldseemüller (#320). This portion of the world map was copied from the 1503 Caverio map (#307). Beside the tip of the Indian peninsula is Seylan, i.e. Ceylon, or modern Sri Lanka, and the legend just above tells of the island's spices, precious stones and elephants. In the legend below the island, Waldseemüller debates whether the island Taprobana of classical authors is to be identified with Sri Lanka (above the legend) or Sumatra (below the legend) and ends by favoring the latter view. Here one cartographer has presented Taprobana in both locations on his various maps.

Taprobana



Orbis Typus Universalis IVXTA Hydrographorum Traditionem.
 [A Map of the Entire World, According to the Teachings of Hydrographers].
 Martin Waldseemüller, circa 1505-06 (?) (but Strassburg, 1513).

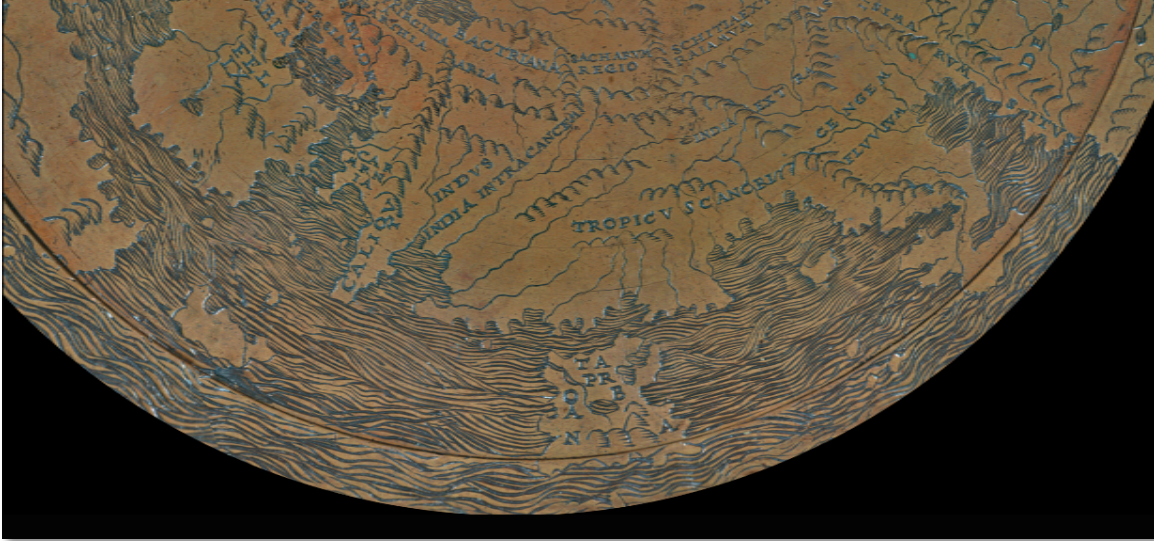


The map's rendering of India and Sri Lanka is "modern," while they were still shown in Ptolemaic fashion on Waldseemüller's large map and gores of 1507
 Taprobana is displayed in the position of Sumatra

Taprobana



Taprobana



Taprobana on the Lenox globe, 1507 (#314)

Seilan is the Borneo of our day, the former name having been taken from its proper place near India to make room for Taprobana, which was often applied to Sumatra.



The Atlas Miller, a.k.a. the Lopo Homem-Reineis Atlas, Insulindia, 1519 (#329.1)

As shown above, the entire western half of the Southeast Asian islands is chaotically portrayed as a vast labyrinth of islands, which may, again, be a means by the Portuguese of dissuading other competitors from exploring the Moluccas, as they would

be lost behind an impenetrable maze of island and islets. The map of East Indies and Moluccas reveals a recognizable Malacca Strait for the first time and locates the famous trading port of Malacca (center left). Curiously, however, two large, walled, multi-towered cities are shown, one labeled Malacca, the other falsely named *Mabacca*. Both symbols of major cities referred to the same emporium - Malacca. The importance of this principal market center for oriental spices and silks, the gateway to the Spice Islands, caused many reports of its prominence to reach Lisbon and led to this confusion. It was conquered by Albuquerque in 1511, the year the Portuguese reached Java, the Moluccas, and Celebes (Sulawesi). Progress in mapping the region is shown in the placement of *Singapura* (Singapore), then a minor landmark, at 2 degrees north latitude, its correct location. Perhaps the most important feature of these Homem-Reinel charts is the presence of the Moluccas, or Spice Islands, for the first time on a Western map (center right). A major target in the European exploration of Asia, the Moluccas were the main source of the spice trade and were the richest single prize during the establishment of the Portuguese East Indies. In 1511, based on explorations of Antonio de Abreu and his companions, who included Ferdinand Magellan, Lisbon began receiving coastal charts of the complicated archipelago that makes up the Moluccas. These charts enabled Homem and the Reinels to depict a relatively accurate delineation with these unique maps.

Prominently displayed throughout these islands are the Portuguese flags/standards. A caption on the northern tip of Sumatra, here designated *Taprobana Insula*, is a verbatim reproduction from Ptolemy's *Geography*: "*Before and after Taprobana, there is a host of islands, that they say number one thousand, three hundred and seventy and eight: of which these are those that have names*". It also somewhat reflects Marco Polo's description of 7,443 islands in this region. *Taprobana* is stretched too far south, since its southern tip - shown at 13° 45' S rather than 4° S - is some 9¾ degrees south. As in the *Cantino planisphere* (#306), *Comatra* is not the name of the island, but of a port: *Samudera*, located alongside *Pasai* (5° 10' N, 97° 12' E) and thus sometimes called *Samudera-Pasai*. This was the first state in the Southeast Asian islands to convert to Islam, in 1295. On Fra Mauro's map (#249), the two names appear as direct equivalents, as a caption explains, calling it "*Isola Siamotra over Taprobana*".

Ultimately, this terminological confusion stems from the fact that Sri Lanka/Ceylon has several Sanskrit names: *Tâmrâparna* or *Tâmrâparnî*, *Simhala*, *Ratnadvîpa* ("island of jewels"), *Lankâ* or *Srî Lankâ* ("the prosperous Lanca"), etc., of which the latter are more literary. Evidently, the first - recorded since c. 247 B.C. in the second rock edict of Asoka, the first unifier of India - resulted in the Greco-Roman toponym *Taprobana*, which was used by Pliny and many other authors after Onesicritus, a companion and chronicler of Alexander the Great. The name seems to have disappeared from use in India during the middle of the sixth century AD, at which time Cosmas Indicopleustes (#202) refers to the island, which he does several times, he carefully explains that what the Greeks called *Taprobana*, the Indians called *Seladiva* or *Sieladiva*. The last name is a loose transcription of *Simhaladvîpa* [island of Simhala], which led to the Latin form *Serendivae* (understood as *insulae*), used around 362 AD by Amianus Marcellinus. It also resulted in the Arab form *Sarandîb*, which commonly appears in mediaeval Islamic geographical texts after *Ahbâr al-Çîn wa'l-Hind* and *Kitâb al-masâlik w'al-mamâlik* [Book of itineraries and kingdoms] by Ibn Khurradâdhbih, both of which date from c. 850 AD, were still used in the 14th century by Ibn Battûta and are mentioned in passing by João de Barros.

Taprobana

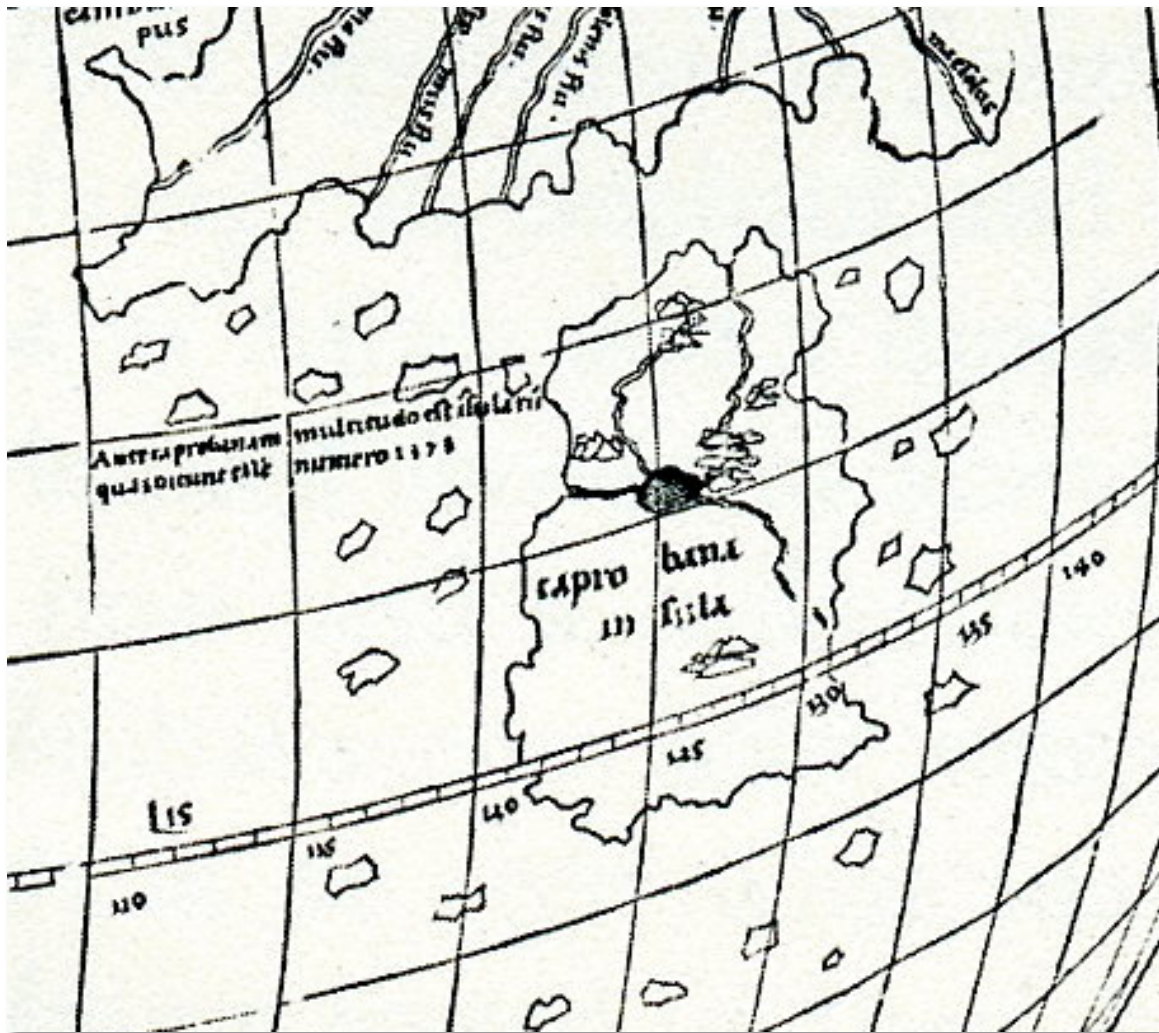
The simple form *Simhala* – meaning something like “home of the lions”, which led to the lion becoming the symbol of Sri Lanka – also resulted in the Portuguese expression “*chingala*” (clearly taken from Tamil, which has no *s* phoneme and generally confuses the *ss* pronunciation in Sanskrit with the voiceless palatal fricative *ch*) and the more sophisticated “*cingalês*” (both meaning from Ceylon). The form *Simhalana*, originally an adjective before being transformed into a noun, is also the basis for the Chinese name *Hsi-lan*, the Arabic *Saylân* (and hence the Portuguese *Ceilão*) etc. Recorded in Arabic since the geography written by Yaqut in the early 13th century, this became the most common term of reference for the island in the Middle Ages, and was used by Marco Polo, Odoricus of Pordenone, Giovanni de Marignoli, Nicolo de’ Conti, etc.

The difficulty in identifying classical writers’ *Taprobana* with Ceylon is not only the result of the difference in name, but also because those writers attributed the island with a size that was far greater size than its true dimensions. Onesicritus, the first Greek author known to mention *Taprobana*, states that it measured over 5,000 *stadia* (1,000 km); Strabo declares it to be “no less than Britannia”; the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written between 95 and 130 AD, states that the “island Palaesimundu, called by the ancients Taprobane (...), almost touches the opposite shore of Azania” (i.e., Western Africa); Pomponius Mela believes it to be part of a hidden continent, while Ptolemy had it straddling the equator, stretching from 12° 30’ N to 2° 30’ S, when it is actually located 9° 45’ N and 5° 58’ N. This detail led some authors erroneously to identify the *Taprobana* from classical writing with Sumatra, which is in fact crossed by the equator. Diogo do Couto blames this error on Poggio Bracciolini’s account of the voyage of Nicolo de’ Conti (1444), which formed the basis for Fra Mauro’s map from 1459. Couto was probably right, although the well known *Catalan Atlas* (1375, #235) already shows *Taprobana* well to the east of India, and even east of Java, demonstrating that the tendency to locate it in the Southeast Asian islands started early. It is interesting to note that King Manuel seems to have been well informed from the very start, as his *Letter to the Cardinal Protector*, dated August 1499, notes “the island Taprobana, which they there call Ceylon, lies some one hundred and fifty leagues from Calicut (...); they say it is of a size not so big as is considered here”. Nonetheless, the confusion took some time to clear. Although João de Barros, Diogo do Couto and Manuel de Faria e Sousa, following António Galvão, correctly identified *Taprobana* as Ceylon, Damião de Góis agreed with Castanheda and identified it as Sumatra. The confusion also persisted in European drawn and printed cartography, even occasionally continuing through to the late 16th century, when the arrival of the Dutch and English in the Indian Ocean brought a preference for local place-names.

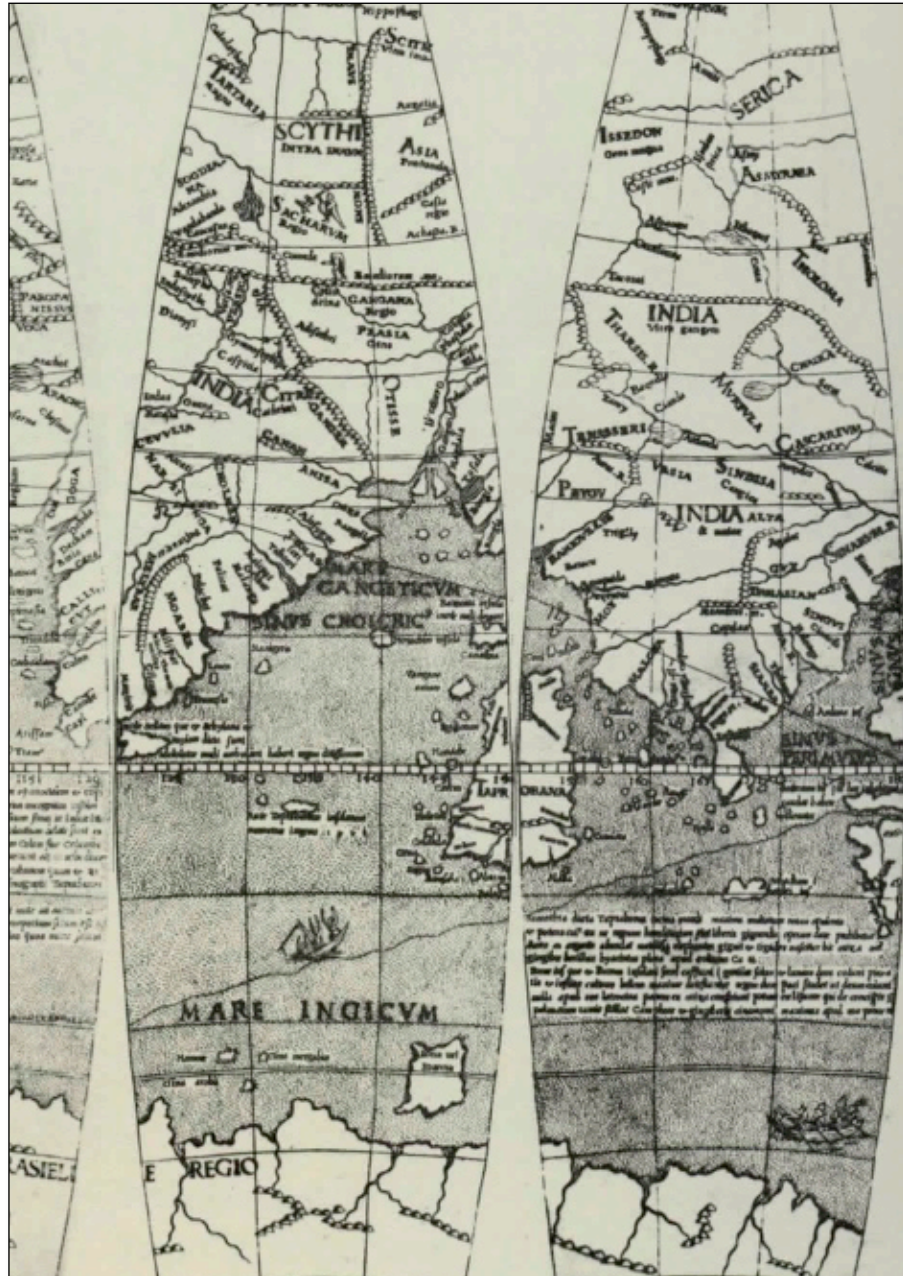
Taprobana



Albrecht Dürer and Johann Stabius, 1515



Taprobana

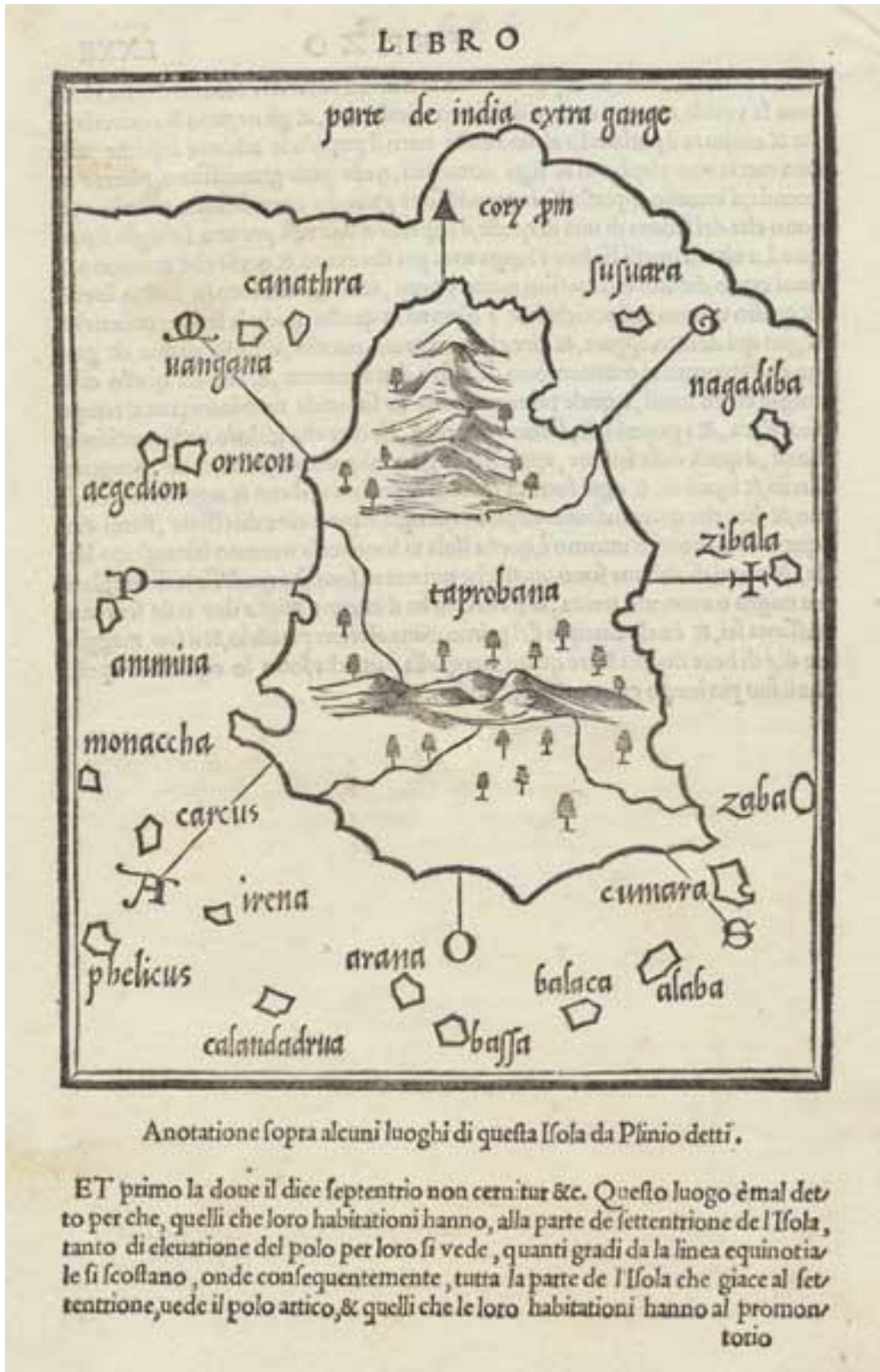


Represented as a Sumatra-labeled Taprobana. The island is the wrong shape and orientation on the Gilt globe gores, 1527 (#344)

Taprobana

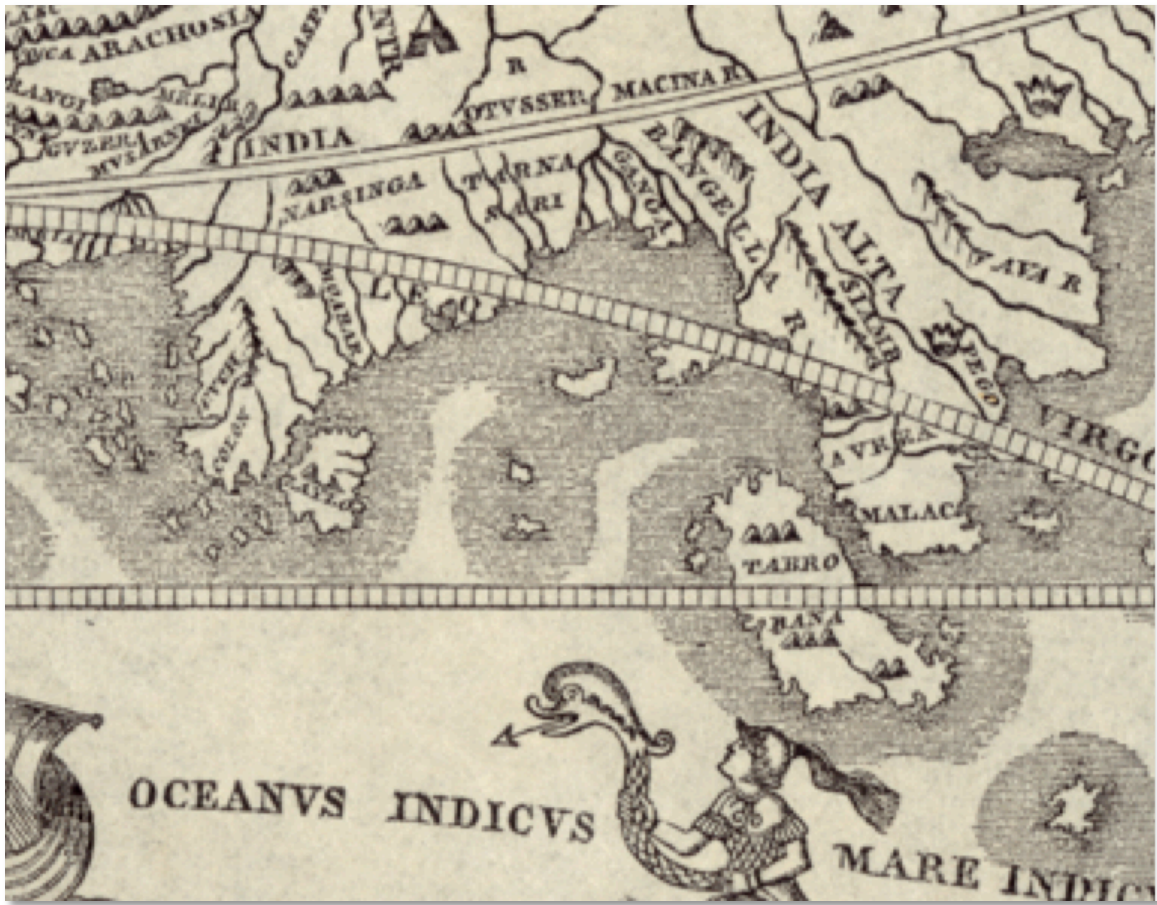


Taprobana on the world map known as the Vatican MS Urb. Lat. 274, 1530 (#352.2)
In the middle of the island of Taprobana on the Vatican map is a large lake. This feature derives from Pliny's *Natural History* 6.84– 91, where Pliny recounts the visit to Rome of four ambassadors from Taprobane, who describe a vast lake called Megisba in the interior of Taprobane. Just east of the tip of the southward-jutting Catigara peninsula in southeast Asia is an unnamed island. From its position we would expect it to be Seilan, that is, Ceylon/Sri Lanka, a doublet of Taprobane that is common on maps of this period, and the legends on the island prove this to be the case. In the northern part of the island we read *ichn Ad*, a reference to the footprint of Adam that was supposed to exist on a mountain on Ceylon called Adam's Peak. Marco Polo does not mention the footprint, but it is described by John Marignolli who visited the island in about 1349. Further south on the island we read *hic rubina*, a reference to the huge ruby owned by the King of Seilan which is described by Marco Polo.



Taprobana, 1534, by Benedetto Bordone

Taprobana



Taprobana placed as Sumatra on the Nancy globe, ca. 1540 (#363)



Taprobana by Nicolas Sanson, 1617

Taprobana

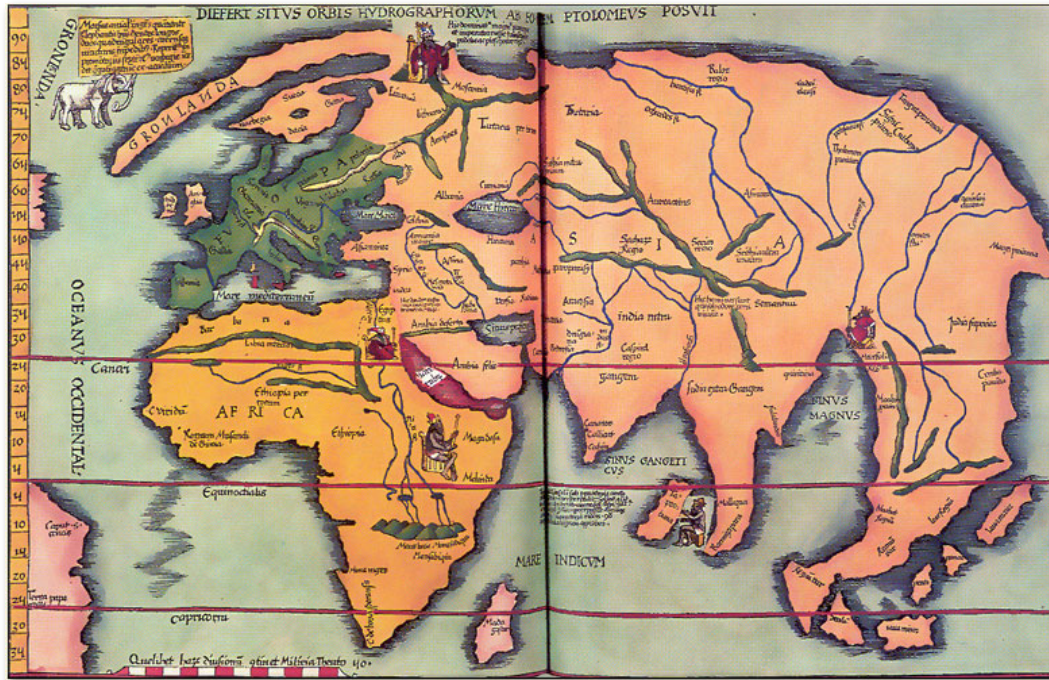


India Extrema XIX Nova Tabula, Sebastian Münster, 1540



Taprobana, like on the Nancy Globe, placed like Sumatra

Taprobana



*Tabula Nova Orbis/Diefert Situs Orbis Hydrographorum Ab Eo Quem Ptolomeus Posuit by
Laurent Fries, 1535*

Taprobana



Taprobana on the Jean Rotz map of 1542

Taprobana



*Taprobana as Sumatra on the 1553 Pierre Desceliers' Planispheres (#378)
With Borneo on the right shaped like to usual representation of Sri Lanka*

Taprobana



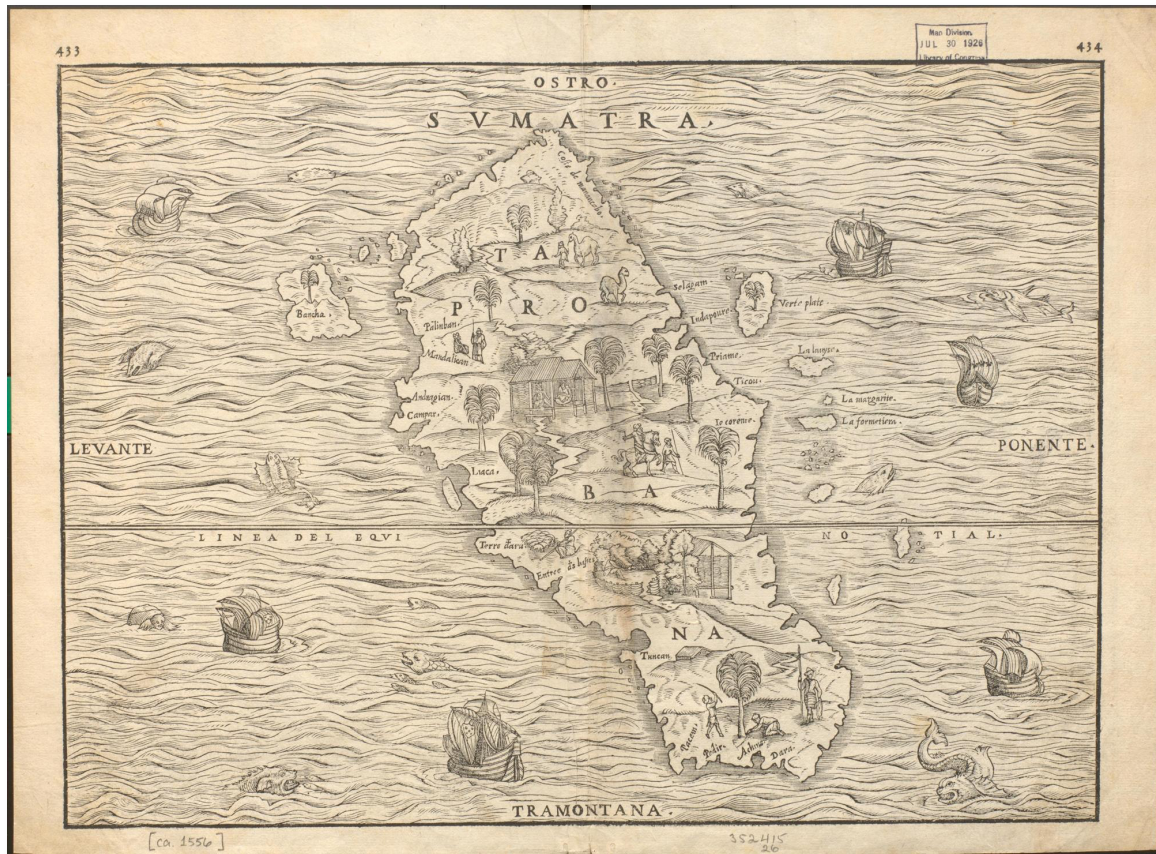
A 1555 map of the Indian Ocean from the *Cosmographie Universelle* by Guillaume Le Testu (#378)

Taprobana

Borneo on the Vallard Atlas, 1547 (#381.2)

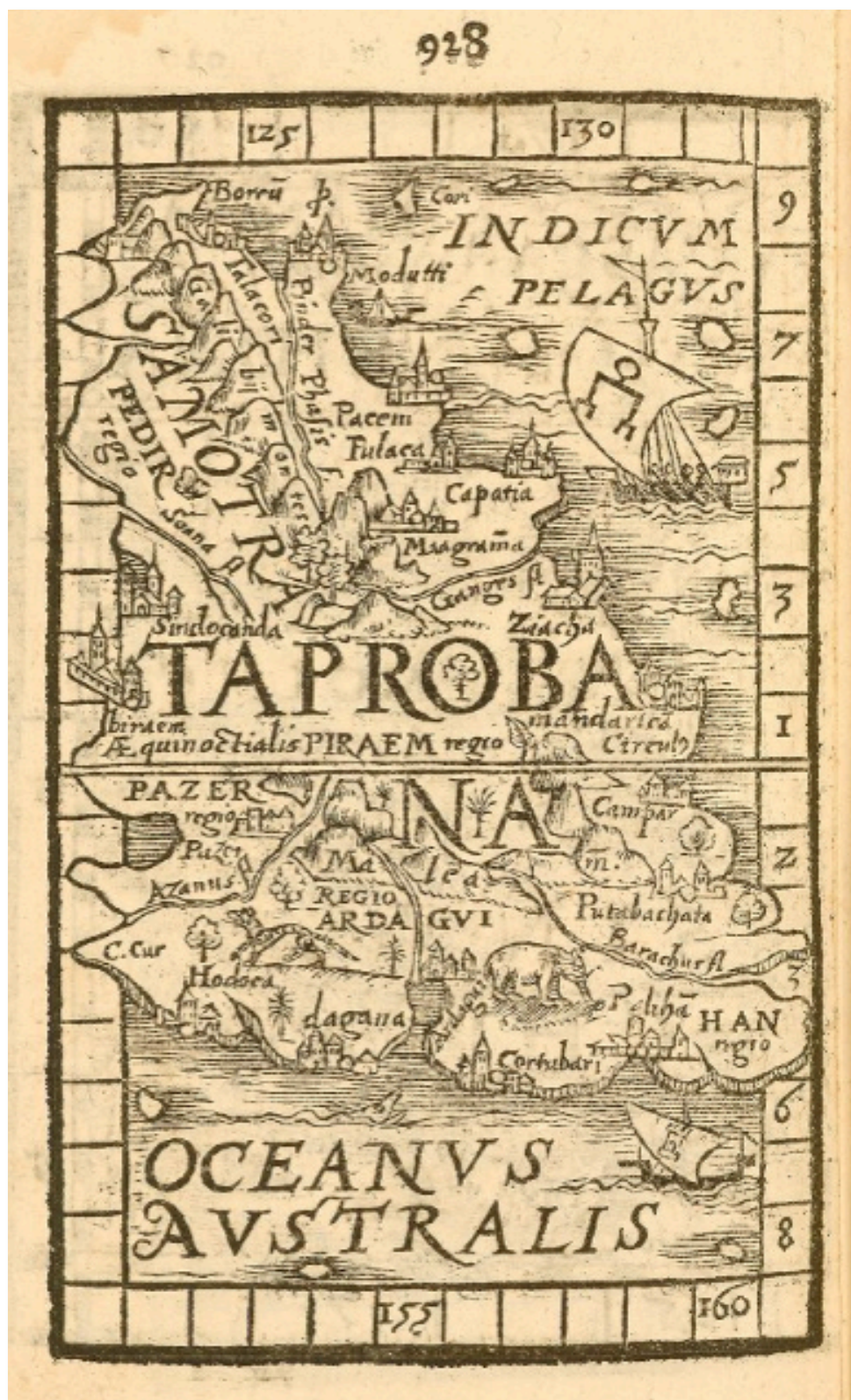


Taprobana



Taprobana is shown as Sumatra on the map below, published in 1556 by Giacomo Gastaldi.

The German cartographer Sebastian Münster may have caused confusion when he published the two maps featured below. The first map shows Sumatra as *Taprobana*. The second map is of a completely different island; however; it is also identified as *Taprobana*.



Tasprobana, 1561, Proclus

Taprobana

Southeast Asia by Abraham Ortelius, 1570



Sumatra olim Taprobana

Taprobana

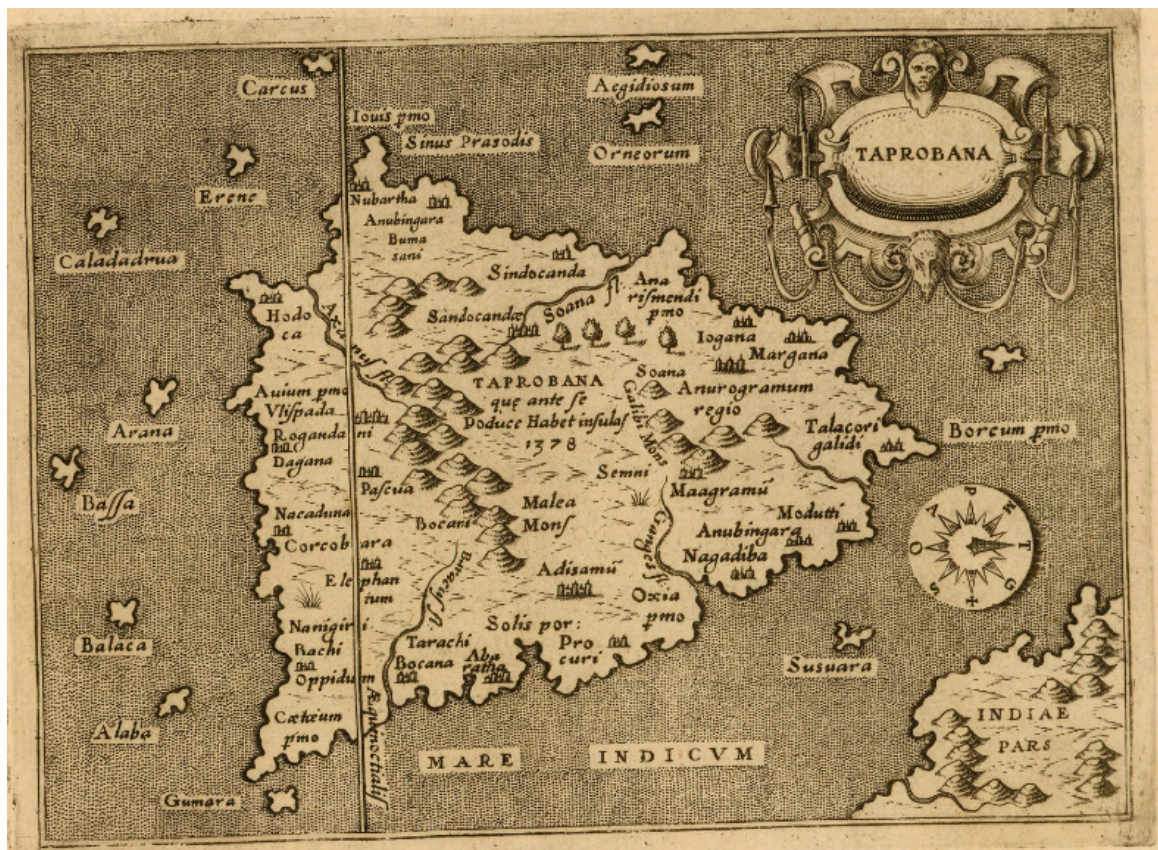


Asia by André Thevet, 1575



Tabrobane positioned like Sumatra

Taprobana



Taprobana, 1576, Thomaso Porcacchi

Taprobana



Sumatra Ein Grosse Insel / So Von Den alten Geographen Taprobana by Sebastian Münster, 1588. Geography and Map Division.

Taprobana



Geographiae Claudii Ptolemaei Alexandrini, ... Map by Sebastian Münster, 1552.
Geography and Map Division.

To *Tabula XII*, a map of 'Taprobana,' Münster added notes by the Italian traveler Lodovico di Varthema - 'Vartomannus', from his *Itinerario* of 1510. The *Taprobane* Varthema wrote about he called 'Sumatra,' however, for confusion between Ceylon and Sumatra and *Taprobane* was common in the 16th century. But whether Varthema meant Ceylon or Sumatra, in his *Taprobane* there were bigger elephants than anywhere else (Münster shows their 'pastures' as the '*Pascua Elephantum*'). What is more, there was pepper in '*astonishing abundance*' : whiter, hotter, and lighter than the sort that usually reached Europe. This was good news for traders: the lighter and more luxurious a cargo, the higher the profit.

During the 17th century cartographers sometimes identified Ceylon as the island formerly named *Taprobana*. For example, the title of the map above translates to *The Island of Ceylon, Once known to its Inhabitants as Taprobane, Tenarisin and Lankawa, most accurately mapped and very recently published by Nikolaas Visscher: Amsterdam; Holland.*

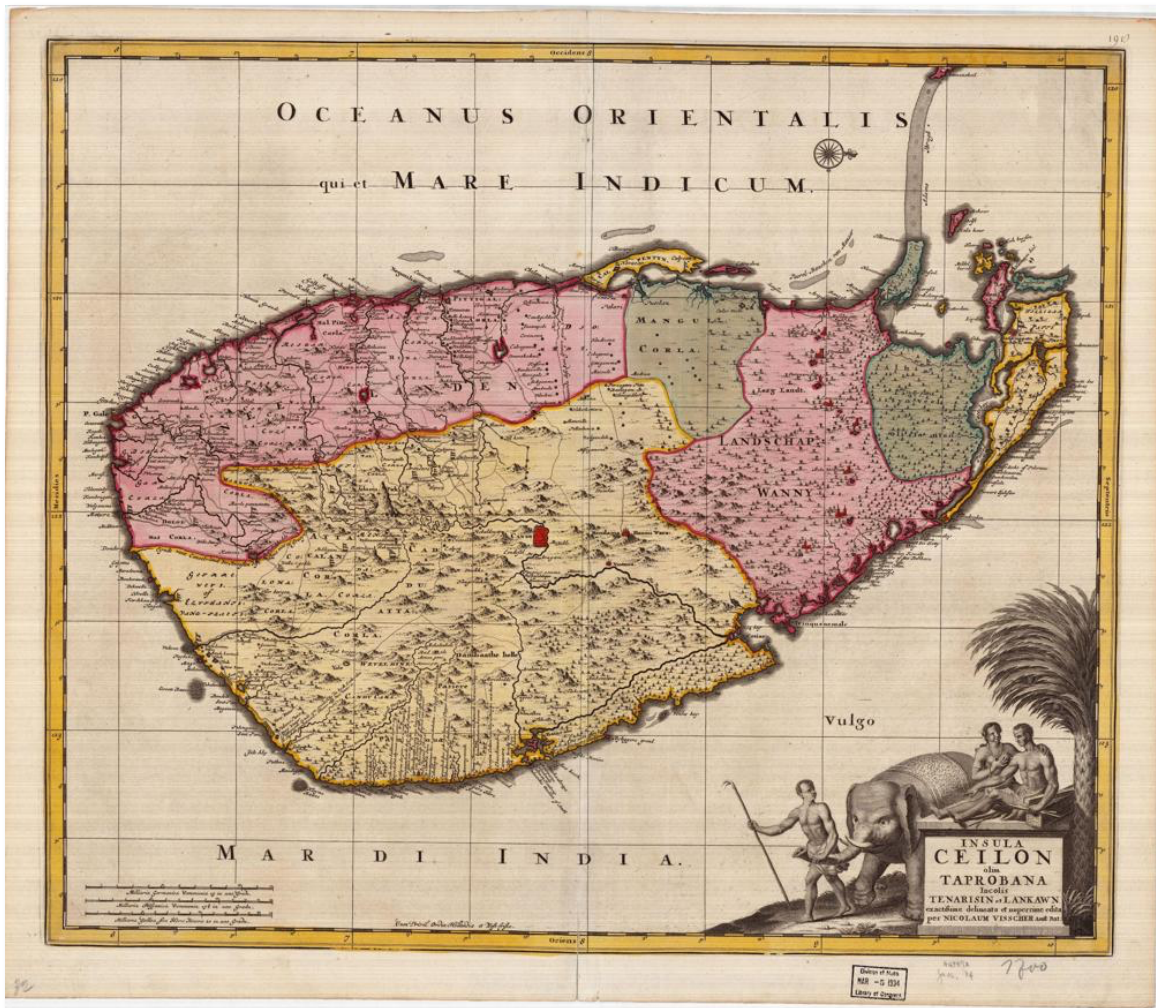
By the time Munster's map was produced based on Ptolemy's map, which had been lost since its production around the 2nd century A.D., and some copies were rediscovered in the Middle East around 1400 A.D., the Portuguese had made their way into Asia. They had knowledge of both Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and Sumatra, a knowledge that was at least 80 years old. So one may ask if Munster based his identification of *Taprobane* with Sumatra on 16th century knowledge.

Taprobana



India Vetus by Philip Cluver, 1661

Taprobana



Insula Ceilon olim Taprobana Incolis Tenarisin et Lankawn. Map by Nicolas Visscher, 1680.
Geography and Map Division.

This has been the primary subject of debate over *Taprobana*. Each succeeding generation has read vague descriptions of the island left by their predecessors, and wrangled over what their predecessors really meant. 18th and 19th century scholars began to think that Ptolemy confused Sri Lanka with Sumatra, or even the lower peninsula of India. In the end, it is impossible to assign a single place with all of the qualities that have been labeled with the name “*Taprobana*” over the ages.

The name *Taprobana* had been applied to Sumatra from the 15th century onwards, after a misunderstanding by the Italian traveler Nicolo di Conti. Conti was the first European traveler who distinguished Sri Lanka from *Taprobana* and identified the latter as Sumatra, which it will be noted, athwart the equator. Subsequent geographers, historians, cosmographers and thinkers alike became engaged in a controversy over its proper identification. Considerable confusion began to exist as to whether Sri Lanka or Sumatra was the island of *Taprobana* and depicted in the *Hereford*, *Ebstrof*, *Catalan Atlas’ mappaemundi* and on Fra Mauro’s planisphere and Martin Behaim’s globe. The maps such as “*Cantino*”, “*Caverio*” and “*Contarini*” have misled the contemporary viewers who in their turn transmitted this confusion either through implicitly casual discussions or even deliberately explicit instructions to mapmakers who in their turn propagated it just

as naively and with the same degree of intelligence as their informants through the documents they were producing for their immediate users.

The peculiar geographical vicissitudes of *Taprobana* drew the attention of leading figures from western history, Ramusio, Gossellin, Kant, and Cassini who concerned with the dilemma, attempted to resolve the question of *Taprobana's* identification with countries ranging from Sumatra to Madagascar. Venetian geographer, historian and humanist Ramusio relying on an account of an anonymous Portuguese and based on geographical and astronomical data sought to reconcile the location and dimensions of Sumatra with the position and size of the island that Iambulus the Greek merchant claimed to have discovered. The aim of his argument thereby was to determine that this island was precisely the *Taprobana* of the classical authors.

Sebastian Münster's map of *Taprobana* drawn in 1580 carries the German title, *Sumatra Ein Grosser Insel* [Sumatra, a large island]. The old debate was settled earlier in favor of Sri Lanka, but the more recent display of Münster's map with its title has reignited the debate. Münster's map was "a fine example" of the difficulties Renaissance map makers had in placing the continents of the world. It showed the cartographic confusion that Europeans had trying to understand the geography of Asia.

What still baffles everyone is the exaggerated size of *Taprobana* if Ptolemy really meant the isle to represent present day Sri Lanka. In contrast, the sub-continent of India which is shown in the map is far smaller in dimensions. It was true that Sri Lanka by Ptolemy's time was a well-known island as it was centrally situated in the Indian Ocean but India and her products were equally known from the pre-Christian era, starting with the Persian occupation of territory up to the river Sind and Alexander's conquests following that as well as through sea-borne trade.

On the contrary, *Taprobana*, despite its sheer size, was assigned by Ptolemy with trade in elephants and golden spices. Both Sri Lanka and Sumatra were known for these two commodities, and the latter more so for spices but it is Sri Lanka that had a better historical record for elephants. The intelligence displayed by Sri Lankan elephants and easier transport across the Indian continent perhaps, accounted for preference for them. Sri Lankan elephants began to be exploited in a big way only after the East African resources dwindled.

Ceilão, the name given to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese Empire when it arrived in 1505, was transliterated into English as Ceylon. Sri Lanka has decided to remove all remaining references to its British colonial name Ceylon from state institutions. Ceylon gained independence from Britain in 1948 and changed its name to Sri Lanka when it became a republic in 1972.



1686 Mallet map of Taprobana



*An eclectic world map, tempera on cloth, oriented with South at the top, 1770,
260 x 261 cm (8'6.25" x 8'6.75")
Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin (#226.2)*



Curiously, the island of Sri Lanka is depicted twice, possibly a throwback to the dual depiction of Tabrobane on some European reconstructions of Ptolemy's world map (#119) as well as on Sadiq Isfahani's (#204). Alternatively, the dual representation may be the result of copying from two different earlier maps, each depicting the island in a different place. (#226.2)

The development of trade was driven by the need for more accurate maps of trade routes heading to the world in the east, known as "The Silk Road", that is from the Mediterranean Sea, followed by the Red Sea, the Erythraean Sea, the Indian Ocean, and ending in China. During the early medieval period, only that overland trade route was the most widely known, while outside those regions only little information obtained that were from sailors who had visited them. The island of Kalimantan [Borneo] is outside that route so that the location was not exactly known, or possibly deliberately kept in secret because this island has lucrative resources with superior quality that are very alluring for trade commodities. These become the subjects of the author Dhani Irwanto to hypothesize that *Taprobana* was actually Kalimantan.

Therefore various locations and names of *Taprobana* was displayed on the ancient maps; including Ceylon/Sri Lanka [*Taprobane, Solis, Seilan, Seillam, Seylam, Seyla* or *Zeilan, Ciamutera, Seylam, Chomari, Prilam*]; Sumatra (*Chryse, Aurea Chersonesus, Barusæ, Illa Iana, Jaba Minor, Iava Mino, Java the Lessr or Siometra*); and Borneo/Kalimantan

Taprobana



*Ptolemy/Mercator Tab. XII. Asiae Taprobanam repraesentans Medius meridianus
Utrecht, François Halma, c.1695.*

Obviously European knowledge of southeast Asia was sparse at best before the Portuguese exploration in the early 16th century. The placement of *Taprobana* just south of the Indian subcontinent was certainly based upon the Greek and Ptolemaic writings. But in the early European medieval period additional information about this part of the world began to appear. These were collected from sailors, Arab sources and travelers like Marco Polo, Niccolo Conti, and cartographers began to question their previous estimates regarding the location of the classical *Taprobana*.

Dhani Irwanto has come up with an interesting theory that acknowledges the reasons why early cartographers confused Sri Lanka and Sumatra with *Taprobana*, but concludes that it was always the island of Kalimantan [Borneo]. Here are just some of his "proofs" as stated in his book *Taprobana*.

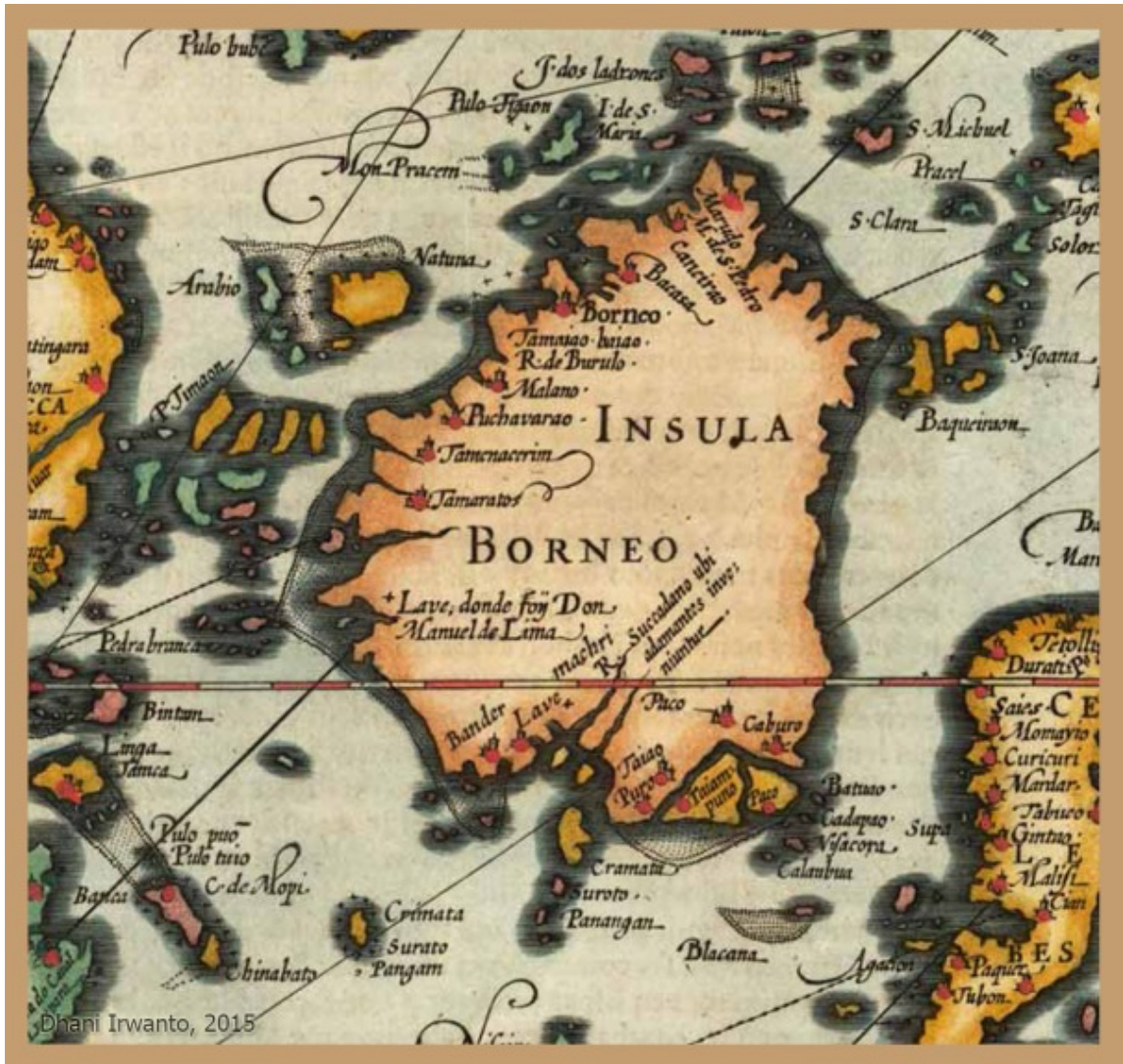
Taprobana

1. As described by Eratosthenes, *Taprobana* is located in the Eastern sea, lies extended opposite to Greater India, has dimensions of 7,000 stadia (~ 1,300 kilometers, 800 miles) in length and 5,000 stadia (~ 925 kilometers, 575 miles) in width. These dimensions are highly accurate if applied to Kalimantan.
2. Strabo states that *Taprobana* rises opposite to the cinnamon producing country (Sumatra) and lies toward the east on the same parallel.
3. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* indicates that the island Palaesimundu, called by the ancients *Taprobana*, is at the eastern sea. The northern part is a day's journey distant, the southern part trends gradually toward the west. It produces pearls, transparent stones, muslins and tortoise-shell. These are the true descriptions of Kalimantan.
4. The ambassadors dispatched to Rome, as written by Pliny and Strabo, stated that the country enjoying two summers and two winters, which clearly show that the country embraced on both sides of the equator.
5. The ambassadors stated that there were corals, pearls and precious stones; the soil was fruitful; life was prolonged to more than a hundred years; there was a trade with China overland. Their leaders wear clothes and accessories just like Father Liber. Their festivals are celebrated with the chase, the most valued sports being the pursuit of the tiger and the elephant. The lands are carefully tilled; the vine is not cultivated there, but of other fruits there is great abundance. They take great delight in fishing, and especially in catching turtles; beneath the shells of which whole families find an abode, of such vast size are they to be found. These are the true descriptions of the island of Kalimantan.
6. As stated by the ambassadors, the nearest point of the Greater Indian coast to *Taprobana* is a promontory known as *Coliacum* distant 4 days' sail, and midway between them laid "the island of the Sun". The sea was a greenish tint, having numerous coral at the bottom, which the rudders of vessels broke off as they came in contact when sailing over it. The *Coliacum* promontory is allegedly the Malay Peninsula. Between Kalimantan and the Malay Peninsula lays the Karimata Strait, where there are almost a hundred of islands and coral reefs. People in these islands are known for their sun worshiping. The sea is shallow and reefs are on its bottom so that it has greenish color and vessels have to be carefully prepared for such condition.
7. The ambassadors stated that in traversing their seas, the people of *Taprobana* take no observations of the stars, but they carry birds out to sea, which they let go from time to time, and so follow their course as they make for the land. These birds were apparently the hornbill admired by the Dayaks.
8. The Palaesimundus River as stated by Pliny and Strabo ran by the city by 3 channels each having width of between 5 and 15 stadia (about 0.9 and 2.8 kilometers, 0.6 and 1.7 miles). The three rivers are Barito, Kapuas-Murung and Kahayan Rivers. Barito River is nearly 3 kilometers (1.9 miles), Kapuas-Murung River is about 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) and Kahayan river is about 1.5 kilometers (0.9 mile) in width, in those parts near the sea, that show conformities There was a large lake named *Megisba* that could be a vast swampy region in the area.

Taprobana

9. The port of *Hippuri* mentioned by Pliny was probably the Tanjungpuri, a historical community near the present Tanjung town.
10. The name *Taprobana* could probably be derived from *Taiopuro Banua*, to match the four consonants for a name.
11. The name of the chief of the embassy to Roman as stated by Pliny, *Rachia*, is the "rajah", their social leader.
12. The name of *Salike* given by Ptolemy is derived from *salaka* meaning "white-colored metal", found naturally in southern Kalimantan.

As can be seen the following examples from Renaissance European cartography, there is a striking resemblance between the rendering of Borneo and earlier renderings of *Taprobana*/Ceylon/Sri Lanka



Gerard Mercator, 1619

Taprobana



Willem Blaeu, 1650



Johannes Cloppenburg, 1632

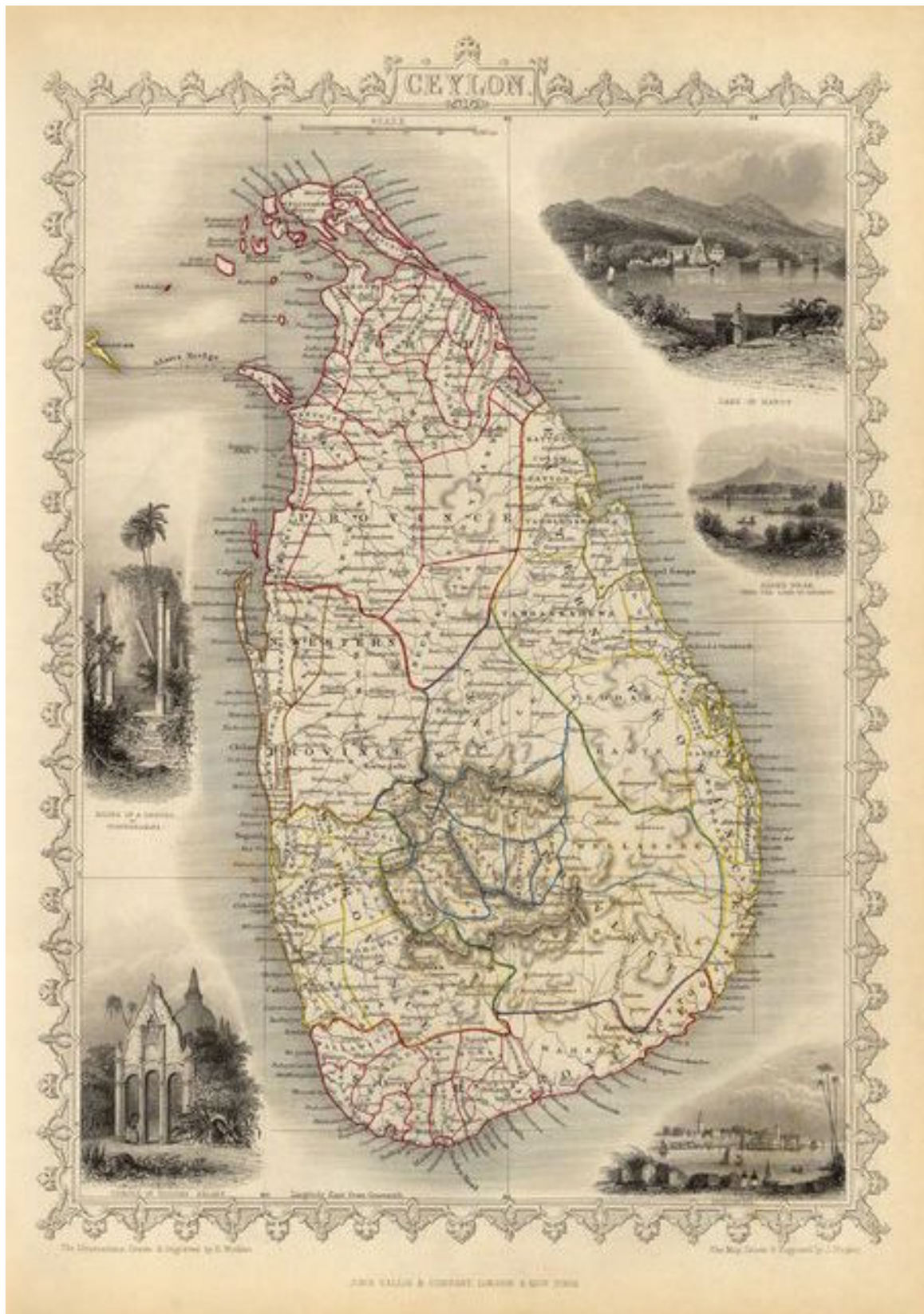
In his book, Dhani Irwanto concludes that the Western colonization in Asia involving Britain, France, Portugal and the Netherlands was allegedly inspired by the allurements of *Taprobana* as well as the mythical Atlantis. This was sparked early in the 15th century by the search for trade routes to the Far East that led directly to the Age of Discovery, and the introduction of early modern warfare. By the early 16th century, the Age of Sail greatly expanded Western European influence and development of the Spice Trade under colonialism. The cartographers of this era should have known that *Taprobana* is actually the island of Kalimantan [Borneo], visible in the great similarities of the geographic layout, locations, features, names and descriptions of the island and its surroundings among Ptolemy's and their maps.

Taprobana



Sri Lanka; Matthous Seutter - Ceylon olim Taprobana incolis Tenarisin et Lekawn dicta maxima et simul ditissima Maris Indici Insul, 1721-1750

Orientated with north to the right, the map locales early forts, temples, mountains, and Dutch sea ports. The title cartouche, which illustrates natives trading ivory and jewels with a European. The title still associates the island with the Ptolemaic myth of Tabrobana.



Ceylon, 1851, John Tallis

Taprobana

Explaining the confusion in application of the name *Taprobana* to three places, historians have explained that Ptolemy's atlas and earlier Greek cartographers' maps were lost, and Europeans looked inward for many years without really expanding beyond their borders, from about 400-500 A.D. up until about the early 1400s, when some copies of Ptolemy's atlas that had survived in the Middle East were found again. As the Europeans started to explore again they came across Sri Lanka, and thought well this must be *Taprobana*. But at the same time another route to the Indies was further south across the Indian Ocean and explorers came across Sumatra in Indonesia. ... So a debate began whether *Taprobana* was Sri Lanka or Sumatra, as both fit the description of an exotic island with golden spices and elephants. Because of the difficulties of calculating the longitude and distance they underestimated the size of the Indian Ocean. They initially thought it was the same place, so *Taprobana* started to be applied to two different places. When it became clear they were two different islands, the name was applied to both. In this case, to make things more muddled, a map of the island of Sri Lanka is actually called Sumatra and named *Taprobana* by some cartographers. Until the Portuguese exploration in the late 15th century, Europeans had only a vague understanding of southeast Asia as is evident by the early pre-15th century world maps. Most scholars today, and myself, agree that originally Sri Lanka was what the ancients called *Taprobana*, but at the time, the identity of the ancient island continues to be the subject of some debate as evidenced by Irwanto's book and the identification of *Taprobana* as Borneo.

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Taprobana





1561 Johannes Honter



Anotatione sopra alcuni luoghi di questa Isola da plinio detti.

ET primo la doue il dice settentrion non cernitur &c. Questo luogo è mal detto perche, quelli che loro habitationi hanno, alla parte de settentrione de l'Isola, tanto di eleuatione del polo per loro si uede, quãti gradi da la linea equinotiale si scostano, onde consequentemente, tutta la parte de l'Isola che giace al settentrione, uede il polo artico, & quelli che loro habitationi hanno al promontorio

Taprobana



Taprobana

