

**The Pearl Trade Economic Power
Directed by the Regional Hegemony in
the Indian Ocean from the 11th to the
15th Centuries AD
(Special reference to Sri Lanka)**

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Dr. Nayomi Kekulawala

Department of History, University of Kelaniya.

Abstract: Sri Lanka is best known for its pearl oysters and the famous Pearl Bank was born from the highly nutritious water flowing into the sea from Manna Bay. These natural pearls have been valued for centuries for their excellent quality as gems and jewelry. As a result, the pearl has become a metaphor for something rare, delicate, admirable and precious. Sri Lanka in the past was famous for precious pearls and it was one of the main sources that induced foreign invaders to the Island. Accordingly, Sri Lanka has been involved in the active pearl trade since ancient times by connecting with various political powers in the Indian Ocean. At one time it was an intermediate trading center and at other times an Island with natural pearl reefs, the sources record important information. However, the purpose of this research paper is to further explore whether the importance of Sri Lankan pearls increases or decreases in the hegemony that operated in the eastern and western parts of the Indian Ocean during the relevant period. Accordingly, the importance of Sri Lanka's pearl trade and Sri Lanka's contribution to that trade in the regional flexibility of the Indian Ocean trade from the 8th to the 15th century AD is to be studied. Local and foreign literary sources will be discussed to obtain relevant information. Further analysis of available data to identify pearl reefs, pearl trading centers, demand elasticities and monopolies in the Indian Ocean.

Keywords: pearl, trade, Indian ocean, hegemony, Sri Lanka

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Research Methodology

This research paper, which has been conducted in seven major regions of the Indian Ocean, has collected and comparatively studied qualitative data on pearl trade in import and export trade networks. Primary sources, foreign records and secondary sources have been discussed in obtaining the data.

Introduction

Pearls have an important place among the trading activities that took place in the Indian Ocean. Roman interest in this goes back to the Hellenistic period, and found in many ancient jewels date back to the Syracuse-Roman period. Ptolemy mentions the pearl trade in the Colchican Gulf in his work (Ptolemy, 1885;57). According to Pliny's reference, the pearl trade is shown as a profitable trade in the Indian Ocean, and Ceylon (Taprobane) and the Persian Gulf can be pointed out as important areas (Pliny, 1961-1968; vol.3;234-235). Due to the uniqueness of pearls, work was carried out in different areas as shown in Map No. 01 and the value increased due to necessity, rarity and demand. Fernand Braudel noted that the development of maritime trade did not begin with the arrival of Europeans in Asian seas. After the 11th century AD, a new trend emerged in the trade routes of the Indian Ocean. This was influenced by the development of trade centered on the Bay of Bengal (Kekulawala, 2017). W. Pointing out that the 13th century is a turning point in world history, Lughod points out the relationship with China and Northwestern Europe (Lughod, 1989:64). Also, these trade forces were active in Europe, the Mediterranean region, the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea region. The following descriptions discuss the background of the pearl trade in trade activities in each area.

Results & Discussion

This discussion has been conducted with reference to seven major regions (Map 01) and an analytical study has been conducted on the variables of trade activities in the Arabian Sea region and the Bay of Bengal region and the performance of Sri Lanka, based on the available data.

India

Akoya pearl oysters are spread all over the Indian subcontinent. The Malabar Coast (Bombay) South of Mumbai, India and the Gulf of Kutch to the south are notable in this regard. The history of the pearl trade in India goes back to the pre-Christian era and this research paper will focus only on factors related to the time frame. Trade groups organized in central India carried on this trade. The Malabar *Chetti* can be cited as an example (Silva, 1978: 25). In addition, there is evidence that Brahmin traders brought pearls with horses and elephants (ibid). The best lingua franca in the lingua duhida essay (Donkin, 1998: 232) by Shao rogue in 1178 AD is said to have been imported from Ceylon. But the Arab countries, East Sumatra, Java, the southeastern and southwestern coasts of India, Baghdad, the Philippines and southern China are important as additional pearl producing countries (ibid). Evidence suggests that the finest pearls were found in India and Sri Lanka during the pearl diving period, and that merchants from all over the world were attracted to pearls in Sri Lanka and India (Teixeira, 1902: 179 and Ribeiro, 1925: 77).

The counters in Delhi's Chandni Chowk market are filled with pearls and precious stones. Especially under the rule of Delhi Sultan (1206-1526 AD) and Mughal in India (1526-1857 AD), the pearl trade was done well and later with the arrival of the Europeans, under the control of the companies, this trading force was placed in another direction. Kayal, Kaveri Patta and Mamallapuram in India became major trading centers of Malabar and the finest pearls are found here. According to the Mahuan report, the water here is stagnant and about ten to twelve feet deep. Pearl diving is done by their best boats. According to the Mahuan report, Malabar pearls and other local products were regularly shipped from the ports of Calicut and Cochin, and traders waited for ships from arriving abroad (Mahuan, 1979: 136). Chetti traders have taken the lead in this work (ibid). About 100 years ago (1349) the Wang Ta Yuan Report mentions a pearl harbor 75 km north of here (JRAS (CB), 1920, Xxvii, no.73, p.31). The report further states that Sinhala traders engaged in direct trade with this port (ibid). One can guess that this port could be Kuvilan or Kayalpattinam. But there is evidence that India got pearls from Sri Lanka. By the 10th century AD, Bengal had obtained pearls from Sri Lanka

by exchanging rice (Tompkins I, 1944: 86, 93). According to Babosa, the pearl of the Vijayanagara Empire (1340-1545) in central India came from the port of Kayalpattinam in the south and from Persia (Barbosa, 1918-1921: 93-95,203). In 1420 AD, the traveler Pri Natha named the city of Vijayanagar as "Pearl Pavilions" (Arunachalam, 1952: 186).

Sri Lanka

By the eleventh century AD, pearl diving was a royal monopoly in Sri Lanka. The period of the reign of Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 AD) mentions an area where pearls were found called "Utthararaththa" (Cv, 395). Dambulla, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa rock inscriptions from the twelfth century AD state that pearls, gold, silver and gems were given as gifts (Muller 1883: 125-129,133-134; EZ 1912-1943, I.131-133.2; 110-117, 140, 142, 161, 163, 172, 176; 3; 151-152). According to Marco Polo's, the finest pearls were found in the Indian subcontinent and around the Sri Lankan ocean, and were distributed throughout the world. It is said that the pearls were so fine that pearl divers transferred them to their smaller boats by larger boats, stopped diving from the beginning of April to the middle of May, and gave the tenth of the produce to the king (Marco Polo, 1903: 331-332). According to Ibn Battuta's report, when he came to Sri Lanka, the Aryan emperors of Jaffna were sorting pearls after redemption (Ibn Battuta, 217-218). According to the Babosa report, large and fine pearls were given to the king (Babosa Duarte 170). The king paid fixed wages to the pearl divers, and the government made a large income from the pearl monopoly (ibid).

The beaches from Mannar to Chilaw in Sri Lanka are famous for pearls. The Mahavamsa states that pearls the size of *Nellie* were obtained during the reign of Dutugemunu (MV Xviii: 36). *Kautilya Arthasastraya* refers to pearls found in one part of Sri Lanka. A commentary on Kautilya's economics states that this area is a river near the village of Mayura in the Sinhala Island (Arthasastra, 83). Since the Fahian monks also refer to the pearl diving that took place in the early fifth century AD before the period of our protection, it can be said that pearl diving in this era was one of the main sources of livelihood in Sri Lanka (CH, Vol.II: No.1, p.215). Thus, it is clear that Sri Lanka has a long history of pearl diving. There is further evidence that this trade was controlled by the government. Mahuan's report

on pearl diving in the Gulf of Mannar. According to the report, on the surface of the white snow-floating sand of the ocean, the pearls of the sun or moon shine brightly among the sand. Every day the collection of gorgeous pearls on the sand is done. The king had built a pearl pool for this purpose. Once every two or three years the king ordered the people to dig for pearls, and the people took the water out of the pool and searched for pearls. The king deployed guards to completely protect the pool. The precious pearls obtained and refined were confiscated by government officials and sold to other countries and stolen by some. People waited on the surrounding shore until they met decaying and decaying pearls (Mills, 1970: 128). King Bhuvanekabahu I (1272-1284 AD) established trade relations with Egypt. For this purpose, the King of Ceylon sent an envoy named Al al-Haj Abu Urman to the royal palace in Egypt, and according to the message he carried, he had invited the Sultan to come and buy some of the most amazing pearls in Sri Lanka. The memorandum further states, "Pearls are in the possession of the diver and all pearls obtained from them are in my possession" (Codrington, 1919: 82-85). According to Ibn Battuta's account, a large number of boats came to Sri Lanka to dive for pearls with various merchants (Ibn Battuta, 1958-2000, II: 126,408). These precious pearls were exchanged for other goods then sold in the Indian Ocean. For example, according to the Mahuan Report of the 15th century (1433 AD), the Chinese provided musk, hemp, dyed silk, thin silk cloth, blue porcelain pots, cups, copper coins, and mint for gems and pearls obtained from Sri Lanka. (Ma Huan, 1970: 136). According to the Wang Ta Yuan Report, half of the proceeds from pearl diving were to be paid to the king (Wang Ta Yuan, 31). Alexander Johnston's account of the pearling of the Kudiramalai area by the Muslims (Johnstone, Vol. I: part I) shows that various nations were engaged in pearl diving.

According to Ibn Battuta, Baththala (Puttalam), located in the central part of the west coast of Sri Lanka, is now an important pearl-finding area in Puttalam (Ibn Battuta, 166). By the 14th century AD, the area was owned by the Kingdom of Jaffna (Ibid, 217). When Ibn Battuta came to Ceylon, the Aryan emperors were exploring the resources available for pearl diving. He adds that the pearl divers here were very busy and they were also involved in pearl sorting (ibid). The city is located a short distance from the confluence of the ancient port of

Uruvela (Magama) or the Kala Oya (Gona River) and the Mahavamsa reveals that it was important for pearls in the area (Geiger, 1912: 189). Generally, pearl diving is practiced on the northwestern coast of Sri Lanka between Mannar and Chilaw. Chilaw is known as Sanduna and in Tamil as Salabbam, a periodical pearl diving area. Also nearby is Kalpitiya, an important coastal area where pearl trade was recorded even in the 17th and 18th centuries AD (Silva, 1932: 433).

Persian Gulf

The hegemony of pearl trade activity created in the Persian Gulf region as a developed area by the 13th century AD. The port of Julfar, now known as Abdal malik, controls Oman through this specific port. The port is known as a major pearl diving and trading center and is managed by several families. Al Idrisi also points to the port of Sohar as a place of pearl diving (Al idrisi, 1994.I: 150,157-158,162). The report further states that this port was second only to the Holmes port (ibid). However, Babosa mentions the port of Julfar in 1517 AD. According to that reference, it was inhabited by skilled merchants and sailors. It is also said that among the pearl divers and pearl sorters, Muslims bought pearls and took them to other places, including India (Barbosa 1918-1921, I: 73-74). These pearl diving activities were carried out jointly by the Arabs and the Persians and this was another reason to bring special value and wealth to those cities. Pearls are often reported to have been exported to Homes Port (Miles, 1966: 167). Excavations have also revealed that Julfar was once a prosperous area. Excavations at various tools in China, India, Africa, Yemen, Persia, and Iraq reveal that it further developed into a major port (Hardy Guilbert, 1991: 161-203). However, during the developed period of Arabia between the 14th and 16th centuries AD, the city developed into a prosperous trading city.

By this time the Port of Homes Ferry was more important than the Port of Kish Ferry. This importance was due to the fact that the port of Homes was originally located on the coast close to the Persian Peninsula. According to Marco Polo (1293) merchants arrived at Homes from India and filled the ship with spices, gems and pearls (Marco Polo, 1903, I: 107). The size of the pearl Mahuan saw at Homes Field was 4.5mm (Mills, 1970.170). It weighs about 1.3 pounds (ibid). The

value is close to 3.73 silver (ibid, 136). Ibn Battuta also reports on trade in the New Homes in 1330 (Ibn Battuta 1958-1971: II, 400). The port was later conquered by the Portuguese (1507-1514 AD) and a hundred years later it continued to grow as a custom and gemstone became a major export item (Teixeira, 1902: 252).

Although pearls were obtained from the Persian Gulf, there is evidence that the Arabs traveled to South and Southeast Asia to obtain pearls as intermediaries. Al Idrisi reports that Arab traders in the region dominated trade in Indonesia (Tibbetts, 1979: 60). This shows that the Arab traders acted as intermediaries in the pearl trade. The Arabs acted as intermediaries in the transportation of pearls to Europe. In the 12th and 13th centuries AD, Alexandria became the center of trade between Germany and northern Italy (Devon, 1837: 2,209). Evidence suggests that these were used by European nobles. For example, sources say that Alice Perrers, queen of King Edward III (1312-1377 AD) had as much as 211,100 (Ibid) sources.

East Africa

Al-Biruni (1030) points out that “in the past there were pearls on the coast of Sri Lanka, but nowadays they have been abandoned. Sarandib (Sri Lanka) pearls have disappeared, other pearls have been found at Sufala in the country of the Zani,” these people say that Sarandib pearls are found in Sufala.(Mukaddasi, 148) In the 10th century AD, it is clear from two mentions that these pearls were spread in a very wide area of Aden and those pearls were loaded on ships. Mahuvan points out that these pearls were taken to China (1421-1422).(Mahuan,1970:155) In the early 14th century, Italian traders, mainly Genoese, who resided in Zeytinin, also frequented the ports of Syria and Egypt.(Barker,1931; p.41) Growing demand for pearls, especially in Africa. W. It is seen from the 15th century.

China and Southeast Asia

The Chinese are also reported to be intermediaries in the pearl trade, receiving pearl donations from South Asia, Arabia and Southeast Asia (Map 01). Mr. Jayapala of Chilaw led the expedition from Sri Lanka to China in 1445 AD and the donations included pearls and gems (Hsing Ming His Yi Kao, 6). By this

time, the Chilaw area had become famous for diving and it was important for Mr. Jayapala to stay in the Chilaw area and serve as an important government official.

When King Pagan opened the pagoda called Mingalazedi (1274), pearls were scattered between the statues of princes and princesses (Harvey, 1925: 63). The Italian explorer Lodovico di varthema (1503) describes King Pegu as being rich in jewels (Verthema, 1577,354-421). The pearl trade of Malaya, Sumatra and Java joined the European market. Nicolo de Canerio explains that Sumatra had a huge market for pearls. Sumatra's market transports pearls east and west of the Indian Ocean. This market has been created as an intermediate center on the Ocean Trade Route.

There is evidence that the rulers of Sri Vijaya in the Indian Ocean maintained a monopoly over pearls. Song (960-1279) Dynasty: During the reign of the Pharisees, pearls were given to China as ransom (Duyvendak, 1949: 16). The Song su report is an example of this. According to this report, in 1156 AD, King Sri Vijaya presented pearls to the Chinese emperor as a valuable treasure (Groeneveldt, 1880: 66). It further states that the messenger was unable to reach China before the emperor's death (ibid, 67). The Srivijayas were accustomed to buy pearls from Arabia and other places as the head of pearl diving.



Map 1 : The areas of pearl fishing and pearl markets of the Indian Ocean (before 1500 AD)

1. Mediterranean regional area - Alexandria,Acre,Aleppo, Kairo
2. Kish,musket, Homus
3. Persian Gulf with Cairo, Oman and Arabian Sea (Aden)
4. East Africa - Sofala, Zeila
5. India and Sri Lanka- Gulf of Mannar,Chilaw,Makran, Coromandel, Cochin, Maldives,
6. Southeast Asia- Sumatra, Java, Champa,
7. China

Conclusion

Thus, it is clear to us that despite pearl diving in many countries of the world, the pearl market has been established through coastal trade routes. In many countries, middlemen as well as controllers have turned to the process of enabling intervention and making profits. Accordingly, the main market of the relevant period is shown on the map. From the 8th to the 11th century AD, the trading force was created centered on the Arabian Sea, from the 11th to the 13th century AD, the trading power was centered on the Bay of Bengal and again until the 15th century, centered on the area around the Arabian Sea (Kekulawala 2017). By the 13th to 15th century AD, the demand for pearls was drawn to Africa, America and Arab regions and often European companies became mediators in this trade. The source points out that the demand for pearls in Sri Lanka is decreasing and the demand for pearls in Africa and the Arabian Sea is increasing. Pearls were often found during explorations under the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) in China. Spanish, French and English explorers recorded the consumption of shells and pearls by indigenous people in the southeastern regions of North America. By the 16th century, the pearl market seems to have moved in a different direction as Europe found the best pearls from Africa, the Persian Gulf, the Americas, and companies controlled the Indian Ocean trade. The respective companies focused on sourcing spices and tropical goods mostly from Sri Lanka and the Asian region.

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