

Nunn, Patrick & Kumar Roselyn, University of the Sunshine Coast (Australia), *The role of earthquakes in changing patterns of Europe-India trade along the Malabar coast (Kerala, India) in the 14-16th centuries*

Abstract

Following the visit of Vasco da Gama to the Zamorin of Calicut in May 1498, European trade with Malabar (India) increased sharply, leading eventually to the British annexation of India in 1874. During the 14-16th centuries in particular, Europe-India commerce depended on ships being able to reach Malabar ports like Calicut (now Kozhikode), Cochin (now Kochi) and Muziris. The location of the latter is uncertain for, even though its presence was routinely documented up until the year AD 1341, after that it disappears from history; in particular, it failed to be mentioned by the travellers Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo who visited the area shortly after this time.

The disappearance of Muziris is commonly explained by a great flood of the Periyar River but this seems implausible for several reasons, not least the contemporaneous appearance of a low elongate coastal island (Vypin Island). This island blocked the mouth of the Periyar but opened sea access to Cochin which then became favoured by European traders. Since Vypin Island still exists, it is unlikely to have been formed (solely) by a river flood. More likely, this ‘flood’ was tsunamigenic – an earthquake raising part of the coast to form Vypin Island and possibly also dropping that part of the coast where Muziris stood. Seismo-tectonic changes may also explain the (abrupt) subsidence of the old part of Calicut by AD 1703.