

## Book Review

### PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS OF MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY IN INDIA (1987)

By S. R. Rao, National Institute of Oceanography, Dona Paula, Goa 403 004.

India has had a hoary past and a maritime history extending to over 4500 years. We have practically no information on this rich heritage. Ship-wrecks within coastal waters hold documentary evidence of great importance and possibly also treasures of immense value. We, therefore, welcome the pioneering efforts of S. R. Rao, the noted archaeologist, well-known for his studies of Lothal and the Indus civilization. It is largely through his initiative India has organized underwater archaeological research since 1981. This is an expensive and risky venture, but to a nation which had specialised in pearl fishing, this should not be a formidable task. We are informed that already this new unit has identified no less than 210 ship-wrecks of which at least 30 are of historical significance. What is more important, Rao and his group have 'discovered the essential features of the legendary city of Dwaraka off the coast of Gujarat, submerged in the Arabian sea'.

A recent issue of the National Geographic (December 1987, pp. 693-734) has described one of the oldest known ship-wrecks, which seems to have occurred 3400 years ago, a trading vessel carrying copper and tin ingots. An astonishing number of priceless articles have been recovered bringing back the glory and achievements of ancient Egypt. We do sincerely trust the researches of S. R. Rao and his group of dedicated men will bring to light equally spectacular finds from the coastal waters of India, reminiscent of the glory of Indian maritime civilization. This will be the surest way of successfully sifting myth from reality and presenting a continuous history of Indian civilization.

In the present publication, Rao has given us a brief summary of maritime activity in India extending from 2500 B.C. to 1900 A.D. He has pointed out that the first tidal dock of the world was excavated and lined with bricks as far back as 2300 B.C. at Lothal by the Harappans.

A brief mention is also made of the technique employed in underwater exploration. The most interesting part of this absorbing pamphlet is the historical description of the development of Dwaraka in Jamnager District of Gujarat, the city built by Lord Krishna himself nearly 5000 years ago. Beautiful photographs in colour add interest to the description. The origin of early alphabets is another off-shoot of this study. The report also makes a brief mention of the excavation at Kaveripatnam along the east coast. This port, known as Poompuhar in ancient Tamil literature, was a famous ancient port which is now submerged.

India has not paid particular attention to eustatic changes in sea level. To geologists, therefore, the study undertaken by the Marine Archaeology Unit will be of particular interest as it will throw light on sea level fluctuations in the past.

The plea of the author to put marine archaeological studies in India on a permanent footing and for the organization of a maritime museum with a centre for marine archaeological research will be endorsed by all right thinking men. We look forward to more detailed studies of a similar nature in future. The booklet has been very well produced.

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