

# The Encounter between Champa and Persia:

## *Research on The Impact of West-Asiatic Cosmology in Southeast Asia*

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The study of comparative civilizations, with focus on the culture of the Cham, a seafaring people of Sa Huynh origin (in Central Vietnam), has attracted much attention in field surveys. My examination of the 'Cham problem' is based on studies which were initiated during the period of my affiliation with the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Srinakharinwirot University at the Prasarnmit Campus, under the impact of Ajarn Plubplung Kongchana's lecture on Champa at the Siam Society on July 16th, 1995, and a period of field research in Vietnam and Cambodia during 1996.

It is probable that reform-based manifestations of the famed reign of Sasanian King Khosrow Anushirwan found firm roots in the legendary, and thus, literary heritage of the Champans, who as a Malay-speaking people in Vietnam retained numerous concepts in their traditions together with other peoples of the peninsular regions of Southeast Asia, where traditions for fairness and 'justice' are identifiable with the Malay sphere traditions regarding a legendary 'just prince' in whose image, Pan-Asian movements evolved in Southeast Asia in order to pursue socio-economoc reforms.

### **Persian Elements in the Cultural Heritage of Cham-Viet Peoples**

Our chief argument regarding a Persian-based inspiration and heritage for Malay-speaking peoples' models for 'just rule' and transmission of Zoroastrianism, thus, inclusion of cosmological concepts from Sasanid Iran into Champa is based on several factors: (a) An oral tradition by the 'Orang Bani', or the Islamicised



Map: showing the historic spots in Champa and Vietnam, Cochinchina and the Cambodian zone, all of which were under the symbolic sphere of Funan' and her extensive kinship courts of 'Cosmic Kingship' in the direction of the Malay Peninsula, where the sea trades of the 'Posse' became felt as of the 4th century AD

Cham of southern Vietnam (1); (b) Western scholarship regarding the "Book of Anushirvan", a cosmic text attributed to Cham compilation, derived from Persian-based metamorphosis; and (c) recent studies which indicate the impact of Sasanid Persia in Vietnamese territory (2). As Schafer has explained, among the Champan

enclaves scattered in various areas of Vietnam, there are some in the villages of Binh Thuan in southern Vietnam who identify themselves as 'Orang Bani' (3), a term which denotes the Islamic faith, and kin-Malay affiliation among the Cham ethnicity (4). These southern Vietnamese Muslim Chams hold on to a tradition regarding their ancestry, claiming that their first king was named "Noursavan", or 'Nourshavan', a name which, as Schafer has clarified, is the Champan version for 'Anushirwan the Just' of Sasanid Persia (5).

Moreover, French scholarly efforts have indicated another association between the Sasanians and Cham culture, being the so-called "Book of Anushirvan", a Cham work on cosmology, which Schafer pointed out as "sacred" to the Champan people (6).

We must primarily consider a tentative argument that Cham people's loyalty to an oral tradition involving Persia suggests that the history of Champa's Islamization is probably related to the appearance of West-Asian Muslim enclaves which were established in Cham-Viet homelands between the seventh and eighth centuries AD, at a time when the harbours of Tonkin were reportedly a terminus for the overseas trade of Arabian and Persian ship merchants (7). In this regard, we know that as early as AD 611 to 626, Islamic missions had

reached Guangzhou, a port in Southern China, in the city of "Canton" (8), and that by 748 AD, Hainan, an island in the China Sea had Persian and Arab merchant communities, whose movements penetrated northerly port-towns of China as well (9).

According to Cady, from AD 758 onward, and "for a generation thereafter", West-Asian traders from Arabia and Persia used Tonkin as a trading centre of maritime activities (10). Ships carrying goods and passengers travelled in the waterways of Cham-Viet kingdoms. These activities were recorded in a Chinese text 'Chiu T'ang-shu', a historical work which has provided some details on a Southeast Asian state known by its Sinicized name as P'an P'an, whose location was proximate to the coast of Thailand: "P'an P'an lies to the southwest of Lin-i [Champa] in a corner of the sea ... One can reach it by boat from Chiao-chou [Tonkin] in forty days" (11). Thus, there is ample literary evidence to indicate that Muslim trading ships could have reached Champan harbours from Tonkin or Chinese ports to establish settlements, and Muslim inter-marriage with the Far Eastern people resulted in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, inter-marriage was the institution or the basis upon which Islamization found momentum in China and South-

east Asian kingdoms' ports. In China proper, as gathered data seems to suggest, historical texts and family records of Chinese Muslims in Guangzhou, Xiamen, and Quangzhou may indicate that the propagation and popularization of Islam in China from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries AD., was via families who were descendants of Central-Asian, Mongolian, Arab, and Persian traders who were married to Chinese wives. Their population today is over ten million who still profess the Muslim faith, and are called 'Hui', together with some 33,000 Persian-speaking Tajik nomads who are dwellers in the Pamir Mountains in Xinjiang (12).

Consequently, trade and long-time residence via inter-marriage resulted in the preservation of loyalty to West and Central Asian husbands, and these ethno-cultural kinships helped to introduce Islamic concepts and traditions which were indigenous in West and Central Asia, but Islamicised (Zoroastrians were converted into Islam and a fusion of ideas under the name 'Persian' included Islamic and Southeast Asian notions). Such trends probably persisted among the seafaring people of Vietnam in Champan ports, where the 'Orang Bani' as a Islamicized group are probably a symbol of inter-marriage with West-Asian residents in Tonkin and Cham harbours. The discovery

of inscriptions in Southern Vietnam, depicting Kufic scripts dated from the latter half of the eleventh century AD (13), suggests that Islamic enclaves existed in Vietnam in earlier times, but when we consider the 'Orang Bani' and their oral tradition on 'Nour-shavan', their first king, it is in retrospect a reflection of a pre-Islamic encounter of Champa with Sasanid Persia.

### ***The Personage of Anushirwan And Sasanian Cosmology***

The most celebrated monarch of Persia in the Sasanian Period (AD 226- 651) was Khosrow Anushirwan (r.AD 531-579), whose age marked the zenith of Persian culture, symbolizing the 'Golden Age' of Iranian civilization (14). Anushirwan conducted socio-economic reforms, and supported agricultural projects; that benefitted farmers. This Sasanian King also built universities, and encouraged and promoted arts and international sciences. Anushirwan's court was the meeting place of scholars, and especially philosophers from Greece and India and the Roman world, whose polemics were famed as 'Conference of Philosophers'. As such, the fame of this Persian King had reached various parts of the East and the West (15). Percy Sykes has elaborated on the "splendour" and

luxury of this royal court, suggesting that its magnificence was "unsurpassed by that of any dynasty in world's history" (16).

In the Era of Khosrow Anushirwan, Persia was a Zoroastrian kingdom, and Iranian cosmology centred on Zoroastrian-derived interpretations of the official faith, 'Mazdaism'. The founder of this ancient faith was Zarathushtra, whose birthdate, as Mary Boyce suggests, is identifiable with BC 1400 to BC 1200 when Iranians were first experiencing the impact of their Bronze Age (17).

Under the Sasanian dynasty, the Mazdean clergy reformed the strict ethical dualism of prophet Zarathushtra's faith into a philosophical format in the 'Mazdean context', an 'official' doctrine in Sasanid Iran, which Hourani has clarified as being centred on 'Kingship', and Mazdaism is said to have "supported the power of the ruler regarded as a 'just king', who preserved harmony between the different classes of society" (18). Being a learned King, Anushirwan's ideal was to popularise his reign via most tolerant attitudes toward his subjects, so that every citizen would have the right to call upon him directly at his court, when deprived of a fair measure of justice.

Thus, this liberal policy of maintaining the position of a 'just king', as it was demanded

by Mazdean cosmology, led to the spread of the name and achievements of Khosrow Anushirwan of "The Immortal Soul", whose fame as 'Anushirwan the Just' became known in the East and West, especially in the East where the ideal for kingly charisma relied on strength and justice (19).

It is likely that in the days of maritime trade between the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea in the direction of the Indian Ocean and farther East, the oral traditions for a 'just king' who had brought about agricultural prosperity for his subjects spread across the Malay Peninsula, where its cosmology was retained in the literary heritage of Malay-speaking peoples in the 'Sejarah Melayu', or 'The Malay Annals', in which a direct reference to 'Nushirwan Adil' can be interpreted as the inclusion of a Sasanian ethical doctrine in the cosmology of Malay dynastic tradition; in an Islamicised version, it is identifiable with Champan derivation of Persian cosmic concepts in their "Book of Anushirvan" (20). In this regard, we know that contemporary dynastic traditions of the Sultans of Malaysia, in particular the genealogical records of the royal house of Perak, attest to preserved oral traditions that combine references to ancestral kinship that is identified with Persia as early as the Achaemenian Dynasty (BC 771- BC 331), and affiliation

to Partho-Sasanian elements in the genealogy of other Malay royalty (21).

### **Maritime Trade Exchanges of West-Asia with Southeast Asia**

After the third century AD, when Parthian Persia (BC 259-AD 226) gave way to the appearance of Sasanian dynasty as of AD 226 in Iran, maritime trade between the West and the Far East, and Vietnamese ports increased, with in-coming ships from other regions of Asia. From AD 150 to the third century, Tonkin played the role of a significant terminus of maritime activities between the Red Sea zone and Southeast Asia (22), as goods were shipped from Vietnamese ports to Champan harbours (a record from 'Liang-shu', dating from the early period of the seventh century AD., refers to the existence of ties between 'An-hsi', or 'Parthia', and Tun-sun, a trans-isthmian port in the Malay Peninsula) (23).

K'ang T'ai, who was China's envoy to 'Funan', a dynastic centre of Southeast Asia in the early years of the third century AD., had recorded in his diary that Tun-sun was involved in sea trade with Parthia and Tonkin (24). Parthian Persia was a great power of its age and a rival of East Roman Empire in trade routes (25).

In fact, trade rivalry between Parthia and East Rome was symbolized and reflected in the use of similar coinage in the overland and river routes that connected Hellenic Cappadocia and Iranic Syria and Babylonia (26). The Romans were in competition with Persia in the maritime routes of Southeast Asia as Roman vessels sailed to Tonkin from AD 166 carrying ivory and tortoise shells (27). Roman coins found in Southeast Asia, bearing the images of two emperors Antonius Pius (AD 133-162), and Marcus Aurelius (162-180), can probably explain a Western attempt to initiate sea trade with the Far East in the days of China's sphere in Southeast Asia (28).



*The discovery of a coin  
of Marcus Aurelius found at Oc-Eo  
evidences contact with the West  
(from The Museum of Vietnamese  
History, Ho Chi Minh City, pp.192,  
193, published in 1996)*

It was a basis of Iranian cosmology to intercept direct contact of China with the 'West' via Persian territory on geopolitical and doctrinal grounds, and Parthia's refusal to facilitate direct overland trade of China with the Roman world, that deprived the Sinitic nation from making direct gains in trade with the 'West' (29). Under these conditions, Emperor Wu (r.BC 140-87) sought a new, alternative route via Tonkin.

In earlier days, China's generals had annexed the southern provinces of 'Nam-Viet', and Emperor Wu's doctrine brought the outcome to his advantage, while Tonkin and the delta of the Red River were transformed into "an important centre of inter-Asian communication and international trade" (30).

Evidently, the Iranians also gained from Chinese measures, in particular from the early period of the third century AD., when innovations in the ship-building industry in the Persian Gulf led to the construction of 'deep sea ships. These were big ocean-going vessels large enough to carry up to seven hundred passengers, and had the capacity for many metric tons of cargo for exports. Chinese accounts of these skills, suggest that Far Eastern nations also adopted some of these techniques; junks which were constructed in the pattern of those from the Per-

sian Gulf (in which “the fore and aft rigging made sailing of ships possible close to the wind”) were another major innovation in the art of navigation that increased the volume of maritime trade from the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea through Southeast Asian routes (31).

Indeed, with such a capable marine fleet, Sasanid Persia initiated new sea route trades in Southeast Asia, and by the fourth century AD., Persian seafarers were reportedly in the harbours of ‘Nam-Viet’ (32), and Vietnamese mariners and merchants introduced their products to these Sasanian newcomers who used Vietnam’s quality woods “to provide planking for their ships” (33). It is said that Persian seafarers introduced the botanical products of Caucasia, India, and Persia to ‘Nam-Viet’ (34), and under these conditions, Persian settlements were established which prompted “extende intercourse with the Persian state of the Sasanides” (35).

When we consider the presence of Persian resident merchants in the Malay Peninsula at Tun-sun (36), and references to Sasanian cosmology in Malay and Champan texts, we can argue that the participation of Persia in Southeast Asia’s cultural transformation was significant in the Islamization age, probably because the Persians had arrived in Southeast Asia before the advent of Islam, and by-passed

a symbolic role in trade, which Wolters argues in “Early Indonesian Commerce” in an attempt to identify ‘Posse’. Chinese designation of the ‘Persian’ trade in the maritime routes of Sinitic Asia in pre-T’ang era as a role limited to export of products alone (37), and such references to Sasanid Persia and the “Book of Anu-shiravan” suggest a linkage between pre-Islamic Iran and Southeast Asia’s Islamicised literary heritage on oral traditions of Zoroastrianism. Such linkages indicate that the oral traditions in Southeast Asia had helped diffuse West-Asian cosmological concepts as ‘ideals’ in the peninsular coasts since antiquity.

### ***Diffusion of ‘Indo-Iranian’ Traditions to Funanese and Khmer Kingdoms***

European archaeologists in France, who are engaged in Southeast Asian studies, have discovered objects at Oc-Eo in western Cochinchina, dated from the era of ‘Funan’, which has shed further light on the heritage of the Zoroastrian epoch in Persia. One such find is an intaglio depicting “a libation to fire”, and another of a cabochon with a Sasanian effigy dated from the fourth century of the Christian era (38). These treasures and other ‘Persian Context’ discoveries, as Coedes has suggested, can point to Zoroastrian-based influences

that are “clearly of Iranian inspiration” (39), especially in the context of pre-Angkorean iconography of the images of ‘Surya’ in Cambodia (the ‘Sun-worship context’). Legend and literary references identify ‘Funan’ as the earliest state in Southeast Asia, whose centre was situated in Champa and ‘Kambuja’ (Cambodia), in the lower Mekong and its delta. The capital of Funan, ‘Ba Phnom’ was a hilly spot in the ‘Kambuja’ province called Prei Veng, and its main port Oc-Eo conducted trade with Indic, Persian and Mediterranean ships (40).

Champa was then under the jurisdiction of Funan’s sphere in the region, identifiable with the dynasty founded by the legendary ‘Kaundinya’, who married the indigenous Princess ‘Soma’, and whose ‘Saka-brahmana’ offspring ruled periodically in ‘Funan’, but whose background was probably Northern India (41), where ‘Saca’ princedoms were established in Punjab and other regions near the western coasts of India and leading into the Bay of Bengal (42). Champa probably fell under the sphere of courtly priesthood under ‘Saka-brahmana’, and was tolerant of fusion-oriented doctrines that allowed for courtly worship of Indic, Buddhist, Brahmanic, and later on also Zoroastrian notions. Aymonier explained (1891) that the extent of such syncretic

practices in the culture of Champa was centred in the side-by-side co-existence of the Cham converts to Sivaite, Buddhist, and Islamic religions during the ninth and tenth centuries AD (43).

Historically, Central-Asia was the world centre of syncretic practices involving religions and cultures of its various inhabitants, such as the dwellers in the Steppes of Inner Asia, most of whom at one time lived under the sphere of Cyrus the Great (r.BC 550-530), when many tribes of the Scythians such as the 'Saka', and 'Sacaе', and 'Saciаns', and Massagetae' lived under the cultural impact of Achaemenid Persia (44). Dr. Quaritch Wales clarified that, in the artistic realm, Achaemenian Persians initiated the fusion of arts and architecture with inspiration from the monumental arts of the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians, but it is equally important to note that Persian doctrine for artistic fusions also extended to cosmic and religious notions leading historian Richard Frye to propose the "Magian-Zoroastrian Achaemenid fusion" (45). Thus, it is probable that Scythians, in migrations to Northern India and elsewhere in farther East extending into Southeast Asia, did persist in maintaining such traditions in order to harmonise their rule with the indigenous inhabitants. This may be borne out by the characteristics of the

culture of Dian kingdom, site of a probable Southeast Asian-based enclave in Yunnan in China, which has the prototype aspects of a North Vietnamese ethnicity under Western Han Era (46). In its archaeology, there are suggestions that it had contact with the arts of the Scythians, and were culturally-influenced by them.

Dian culture underwent strong acculturating influences from the heritage of the Steppes, so that the nomadic impact of Central-Asia embraced the indigenous cultural symbols of Southeast Asia (47). The existence of syncretic beliefs in 'Funan' from its foundation date circa the first century AD., where Saivite and Buddhist rites were practiced side by side, and funerary rites included cremation and "exposure to the birds" (48), are elements which can explain the tolerant attitude of the dynasts in Champa and Cambodia.

It is noteworthy that Funan's culture had characteristics akin to Central-Asia, at least linguistically, and a description was provided of Funanese writing script by China's envoy K'ang T'ai, who in his official record noted the similarity of Funanese to the language of the 'Hu' people (49). It is also interesting to note that during the third century AD., 'Hu' people from Central-Asia were reported in Tun-sun, a peninsular port in the Malay waterways, where

Persians, Indians, and Brahmans were among the residents and settlers, and through inter-marriage with the indigenous people there had extended the impact of their customs and lifestyles in Southeast Asia, especially in funerary rites. As in Funan, rites akin to those of the 'Indo-Iranians' such as cremation and "exposure to the birds" were practiced by the Tun-sunians (50).

Regarding an 'Indo-Iranian' cultural impact in Funan, scholars have suggested that via fusion of arts, Scythian art elements were adopted in Khmer statuary works (51). It is probable that the entrance of Central-Asian-based Buddhist monks into Southeast Asia from circa AD 150 to 250, resulted in the transmission of artistic techniques in paintings, architecture, and statuary styles, which were appealing to the people under the sphere of Funan more than Hinduist ones, leading to the rise of 'Amaravati' Buddhist arts (52) in fusion with West and Central-Asian art heritage. Buddhist 'Amaravati' was popularised under the impact of monk-translators from the Scythians, Sogdians, Kuchans, Khotanese, Parthians, and Bactrians (53), who propagated Mahayanist traditions in China and Southeast Asia.

Indeed, Vietnam's role in the development of Mahayana Buddhism has a Sogdian significance attached to it, with Cen-

tral Asian monks and Brahman priests in Vietnam since an earlier time. The famed K'ang-Seng-hui (d.280), whose family had immigrated to Vietnam with other Central Asian traders, lived in Chiao province and introduced Dhyani Buddhism to Vietnam (54). K'ang Seng-hui's original homeland, Samarkand, was a centre of syncretic practices in association with Zoroastrianism (55). By the third century, another Central-Asian monk in Vietnam was the Indo-Scythian Kalyanaruchi who introduced other scriptures of Mahayana school to Chiao-chi. Around this time, Marajivka, a monk from India, sailed to Funan, and later on visited China at Lo-yang, paving the way for China to become an alternative route for Buddhist monks from Vietnam, who until then only used the Central Asian overland routes (56). It was from Chiao-chi that Buddhist teaching penetrated China, and resulted in the exchange of ideas between Central-Asian, Vietnamese, and Chinese peoples. By the latter half of the seventh century, another Sogdian monk, Samghavarma, arrived in Annam from China, and a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, named Dai-Thang-dang, reached D'varavati (57).

### ***Civilization Impact of the 'Cham' in Southeast Asian Sphere***

'Dongson', a term used to denote the Bronze Age in Southeast Asia, has often been described as 'proto-Cham', due to prevailing Cham styles (58). According to Davidson, there is a "marked Central Asian presence in the civilization of Dian in the second-first century B.C." (59), which can indicate that the Central-Asian art of the Steppes, under the sphere of the Scythians, was in favourable conditions to penetrate Southeast Asia, where 'proto-Cham' cultural elements played a leading role in the neolithic period.

The migration of Malayo-Indonesian speaking peoples to Southeast Asia is associated with the early and middle periods of the first millennium BC, and linguistic evidence show that the establishment of the 'Dongson' culture is identifiable with the region of Champa, Cochinchina, and Cambodia (60).

Moreover, it has been suggested that the mythology of the inhabitants of the Bronze age, or 'Dongson' culture, was "imbued with a cosmological dualism" (61). Historically, the period between the sixth to the fourth centuries BC is identified with the 'Zoroastrianization' of the Scythians of Central Asia under the Persian cultural orbit (62); we can thus argue that there was ample

time for the Scythians to diffuse their culture in the 'Dongson' cultural phase in the areas of Cochinchina, Champa, and Cambodia.

The homeland of the Chams was in the Central and Southern coasts of Annam including the northern districts of Thana Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh (63). Until AD 758, Champa was known as Lin-i; a Chinese influence (64). Its first king was Qulian, who is said to have founded this kingdom in AD 192, and its existence extended to AD 1471 when the 'Nam-Viet' (Di-Viet) state invaded Champa (65), and pushed the remnants of the Champan people into the mountains and forests (66), thus ending an age of great tradition in Southeast Asia.

The present population of the Cham people in Vietnam is estimated to be some one million inhabitants, most of whom reside in the southern areas of Vietnam (67). Champan ethnicity and character have been described as "tall with straight or wavy hair, light skins, relatively narrow and sometimes aquiline noses and non-Mongoloid eyes" (68). As regards their cultural and economical background, it has been suggested that the Cham myth of settlement was in relation to the deity 'Po Naga', or 'The Mother Goddess of the Land', which may point to a Cham awareness of the technology of rice cultivation and irri-

gation methods, attributed to the development of agriculturalism in the 'Dongson' phase of the first century AD, or earlier (69).

Original Cham worship is identified with shamanic practices including regard for celestial deities (70). The Neolithic characteristics of Cham culture were related to the cultivation of irrigated ricefields, the domestication of buffaloes and oxen, the rudimentary use of metals and sea-nomadism in the context of skills in navigation, which came to dominate Cham economy (71). It has been said that Cham skill in farming may indicate a "presence of a considerable Caspian-Mediterranean element", via the mixed cultural element of the Mon-Khmer people, which may have reached this region from the north along the Mekong Valley from the direction of the mountains and plateau of the Chinese-Tibetan borders (72).

Braddell commented that: "It is tempting to regard the Cham who appear to have been the earliest historical occupants of the Mekong delta as a relatively pure advance of Caspian-type, which mingling with the prehistoric Negroid and Negrito aborigines, formed the nucleus of the people who under the pressure of the Mon-Khmers, emigrated eastward" (73). According to Wolters, "The earliest form of trade known by the Chinese of the

Yellow River basin had been with Western Asia", and its origin is dated to the rise of the Achaemenian dynasty in the sixth century BC (74).

Still, seafaring between the Persian Gulf and the mouth of the Indus persisted long after this period "down to the Buddhist times" (75), when the Scythian seafarers were leading maritime trade activities between the Persian Gulf and the many ports and harbours of the Indian Ocean (76), from around the first to the end of the second century AD., when Greek seamen visited the ports of 'Scythia' in Western India, and Grecian geographers described the sea ports of India under the Scythians, who had established principalities and states in various areas of India via conquest (77). Indeed, the Scythians established cultural links with Southeast Asia in the Funan epoch during the fourth century AD., when 'Chandan' was an Indo-Scythian king in the delta of the Mekong (78), and his reign may account for earlier Scythian cultural element in Funan, both in the pre-Khmer era under the Kaundinya dynasty, and later on the "Iranian Kambojas", that could have influenced the rise of 'Kambuja' state of the Khmers (79).

The preservation of the Saka calendar in Champa, Cambodia, and Java until the twelfth century AD (80), together with references to the 'Saka-brahmana' in the inscrip-

tions of Angkor (81), are among the evidence which can demonstrate that Persia's role in Southeast Asia in the pre-T'ang era was beyond trade, and extended to cultural and cosmological relationships in the context of Persian mythic sphere of the Zoroastrian Era (82). When we consider the usage of the Saka calendar and the Indo-Scythian cultural phase in Southeast Asia, we can also take into account the literary and archaeological factors in the Malay Peninsula, Java, Cambodia and Vietnam. On these grounds, I am inclined to propose that the Cham cosmic text, the "Book of Anushirvan", and references to Sasanid Persia in 'Sejarah Melayu' and other Malay chronicles, and other folkloric literature of Southeast Asia on the background of Malay-speaking people, and their pre-Islamic as well as Islamicised oral traditions, are among the evidences that can support my hypotheses that the Zoroastrian epoch in Iran played a significant role in the enhancements that Southeast Asian history of thought has achieved in 'moral wisdom'.

Nowadays, one can look for such an impact in the Javanese ideal of 'Ratu Adil', or 'just prince', regarding the personage of a 'ruler' "who could restore harmony and prosperity to a disturbed society", which has been described by Sartono Kartodirdjo, as a theme for peasant protests in Java (83). Elsewhere in

Thailand, similar themes have been reported by Yoneo Ishi, and Chattip Nartsupha on the leadership of the 'men of merit', and 'holy men', who would revolt to safeguard 'justice' in Thailand (84). In this connection, David Chandler has also noted the existence of "a similar phenomenon in Cambodia" (85). It is a possibility that such themes in the 'just prince' context derive from descriptions of 'just prince' in literary works from former centuries of the Sultans of Melaka, and cosmic indoctrinations retained in such works as 'Sejara Melayu', 'Hikayat Marong Mahawangse', 'Hikayat Amir Hamza' and the Champan "Book of Anushirvan", representing oral traditions of the natives of peninsular zones in Southeast Asia. Similarly, the image of a heroic arrow-thrower who safeguards the independence of a kingdom (in the Kedah Annals) has been attributed by Winstedt to a "Malay indebtedness to Persian models" (86), which by all means can recall another image, that of 'Arash' in the 'Shah-Nameh' (87).

### Conclusion

Champa, a maritime nation in the delta of the Mekong, gained a metamorphosis from Sasanian-based traditions that

were diffused in the Malay-speaking world during the Islamizing phase of Peninsular zones of Southeast Asia, whose heritage found ample motivation in the compilation of the "Book of Anushirvan", a cosmological text of Cham people. On the theme of 'Persianization' in Southeast Asian history of ethical thought, and derivation of socio-political models from sacred and appreciated literary heritage (especially in the Malay literary context which in different times has utilised ideals for 'justice' and 'moral wisdom', resulting in the formation of socio-political protests



*Vishnu statues in the Mekong delta which possibly represent a symbolic impact of Indo-Scythians in Vietnam (from The Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, pp.192,193, published in 1996)*

and revolutions, via the Malayo-Indonesian ideal of 'just prince'), it can be interpreted as a Persian-based participation in the cosmological transformation, primarily amongst the Cham and Malay-type inhabitants of Southeast Asia whose courts and political administrations, since the era of the Sultans of Malaka, have retained doctrines and numerous ideals, some of which can be designated to be linkage points in relation to the transmission of cultural aspects and streams of ethical thought principles from the direction of 'Sasanian' civilization.

By the appearance of Persian seafarers in seaports of peninsular Southeast Asia, a new impetus was felt in sea trades in this region. The voyage of the monk I-Ching in AD 671, from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) to Southeast Asia aboard a ship said to have been Persian, that took him to Srivijaya for Buddhist studies, from a Vietnamese port (88), and that of Vajrabodhi to the same destination and China in 717, escorted by 35 Persian ships (89), suggest that 'Posse', China's term of reference to the monopoly of the Far Eastern sea routes by the 'Persians', from Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia and Chinese maritime zones (90), represented more than a trading status for the impact of Sasanid Persia in Sinitic Asia. The initial stage of Sasanian role in the maritime routes was said to be in relation to "dependence

of Southern Chinese dynasties on maritime trade of luxury goods from West Asia", which necessitated the use of an intermediary zone for transfer and shipment of goods, that Malay harbours and their cargo facilities and crewmen provided to the Persian ships from the third into the sixth centuries AD., in Southwestern Sumatra (91), as Persian goods in frankincense and myrrh (92), and especially ceramics and glassware (93), destined for the Chinese markets, were distributed to Malay intermediary cargo centres, whose close encounters with the Persians must have resulted in cultural exchange, and much give and take indicating diffusion of ideas in both directions.

By the sixth century AD., Persia's role in navigation and trade of the seas reached the Sri Lankan zones falling under Sasanian control, an event which resulted in Persian domination of markets for China's silk in the Persian Gulf region via Western Indian Ocean (94). In the final analysis, the heritage of Zoroastrian Persia and the Hindu-Buddhist sphere of the Indic world of South Asia have each in their own ways contributed to the enhancement of the indigenous cultures of Southeast Asia. Hindu culture in Funan, J.C. Van Leur emphasized, had to do with sacred rites and ritual, and court ceremonies, "which had a consecrated magical

character" (95), while on the other hand, we can describe Persia's contribution as having had a mythical basis that centred on doctrinal aspects, and a relationship to Zoroastrian-derived traditions based upon philosophical ideals and cosmological goals in which the worship of celestial deities, and architectural symbols of 'Divine Kingship', conveyed the Achaemenian visions in the 'Persepolitan context', where Persian kings expressed and

celebrated the cosmological aspirations of their Iranian, and Zoroastrian-based civilization.

In retrospect of the Cham context of such influences, we can conclude that Champa had an interface with pre-Islamic heritage of West and Central Asia, and after this stage also received motivation from the Islamization effects of West-Asians who arrived in Champa during the seventh century and afterwards, which in the context of Partho-Sasanid

trade roles, in Southeast Asia's water ways, can as a whole represent the fact that via Buddhist contacts of Central Asia with Cham-Viet peoples, and other symbols of West-Asian worship, both Zoroastrian and Islamic, the peoples of the delta of the Mekong probably gained a rich metamorphosis from the acculturating characteristics of Sasanian civilization and inter-marriage of post-Sasanian-age immigrants with the Cham-Viet peoples. Their literary heritage, together with those from other Funan-based culture in that region, preserved oral traditions that pursue a 'saviour' in times of crisis, a saviour in the image of Malay-type literature that is based on the



DOUBLE IDOL OF PO-NRAUP

*The Double Idol of Po-Nraup in Ninh Thuan Province in Southern Vietnam indicates an impact of West and Central Asia on Cham-Viet heritage (From the Book, Champa, A Short Sketch of Her Historical Evolution Based on Architectural Ruins, by Swami Sada-nanda, 1944, Calcutta Oriental Press*

personage of 'Adil', or 'just', indicating the Malay rendition of 'Nushirwan Adil', including texts which put different interpretations on manifestations of this 'just prince', and its orally transmitted windfall in the Khmer, Java- nese and Siamese contexts, and whatever impact of West-Asia on Central-Asia that the "Double idol of Po-Nraup" (96), transmitted to the Cham-Viet peoples, and whatever measures in 'moral wisdom' that men of capacity maintained when Champa fell to Di Viet rule, whose Vietnamese inhabitants have preserved since 1471 in Cham cosmic doctrines and gallantry that Cham civilization envisions even today.

Moreover, recent studies suggest that Zoroastrianism had prevailed in Cham ports (97), with Persian immigrants arriving in Champa (98), and whose presence in Southeast Asia resulted in the production of 'Persian Context' characteristics in arts, and culture (99), and indeed, it was after the advent of Islam that Sasanian culture persisted in maintaining her strong presence in Southeast Asian portowns, along with the transfer of Sasanian technology to the Far Eastern folks of China and her tributary zone in Southeast Asia.

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### **Illustrations**

#### **(Page 14)**

The Double Idol of Po-Nraup in Ninh Thuan Province in Southern Vietnam indicates an Impact of West and Central Asia on Cham-Viet heritage

(From the Book: *Champa, A Short Sketch of Her Historical Evolution Based on Architectural Ruins*, by: Swami Sada-nanda, 1944, Culcutta Oriental Press)

#### **(Page 5)**

Map: showing the historic spots in Champa and Vietnam, Cochinchina and the Cambodian zone, all of which were under the symbolic sphere of 'Funan' and her extensive kinship courts of 'Cosmic Kingship' in the direction of the Malay Peninsula, where the sea

trades of the 'Posse' became felt as of the 4th century AD (Map From: *The Art of Southeast Asia*, By: Philip Rawson, page 6), Thames And Hudson, reprinted 1995, London)

#### **(Page 8)**

The discovery of a coin of Marcus Aurelius found at Oc-Eo;

#### **(Page 13)**

Vishnu statues in the Mekong delta which possibly represent a symbolic impact of Indo-Scythians in Vietnam.

(both illustrations from *The Museum of Vietnamese History*, Ho Chi Minh City, pp.192,193, Published in 1996)

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S. Setudeh-Nejad, who is an Iranian academician and research associate in Thai and Southeast Asian Studies at Chiang Mai University, specializes in comparative aspects of civilizations East and West. His Academic works on Thai and area studies in the Southeast Asian field was initiated in Thailand's universities and their affiliated research centres in Bangkok and Chiang Mai since 1993. Mr. Setudeh-Nejad's focus on Thai studies led to his association with the scholars who are based at the Siam Society, where he has been affiliated since 1998, and to which he is contributing studies. He is currently a dissertation candidate.

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