

DID GERMANIC SEAFARERS REACH EASTER ISLAND?

by

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Summary

In 1639 a golden horn, dated circa 400 A.D., was excavated near Gallehus (South of Danmark). In the 20th century scholars showed again interest in the Gallehus-horn, because on its upper end two rows of characters were discovered, showing a surprising similarity with corresponding signs of the Easter Island script. The possibility of early maritime contacts between these two locations (Gallehus - Easter Island), having a distance of about 20000 km, forms a riddle.

Based on a scenario, composed of theories, hypotheses and facts connected with the Gallehus-horn, relevant real and/or possible maritime activities were analysed and evaluated, to support future researches on the Gallehus-riddle.

The analysis of relevant maritime activities revealed, that

- * in the period from 5th to 16th century maritime contacts between India/Sri Lanka and New Zealand/Easter Island already existed or from the then existing level of shipbuilding and navigation might have been possible,**
- * intense maritime interrelations between India and the Roman Empire existed around the beginning of the Christian era,**
- * sporadic early trade relations between India, Rome and northern Europe are provable.**

1. The story:

IN 1802 two Germanic horns (having served as drinking-vessels) were stolen from a museum in Copenhagen. These golden horns, dated circa 400 A.D. [1], with a total weight of 6,5 kg were probably melted down, because they never again appeared¹. The horns were excavated (horn A 1639 and horn

B 1734) near Gallehus in the south of Danmark [1] [2].

The horns were almost forgotten. Only in our days scholars (E. Oxenstierna 1956, W. Hartner 1969, N. Vlassa 1979 and A. Horedt 1984) showed interest in horn A [2]. This horn (see figure 1 [1]) had two rows of characters, showing a surprising resemblance with the Easter Island script (see figure 2 [2]). K. Horedt states, that the similarity of the characters on horn A to corresponding

¹Copies of both horns are existing

Figure 1: Characters of Gallehus-horn A resembling Easter Island script (1)

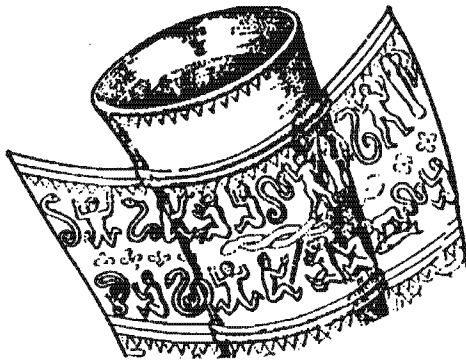


FIGURE 1

Figure 2: Comparison of the characters on horn A and the corresponding signs of Easter Island script (2)

1		345		354		356	
2		211		212		214	
3		380		381		382	
4							
5							
6		700		710			
7							
8							
9		720		721		724	
		733		781		782	

FIGURE 2

characters of the Easter Island script is almost attaining identity [2].

The author consulted the Polish scientist B. Z. Salek, who had done long years of research on the deciphering of the Easter Island script (e.g. [3], [4], [5], [6]). He confirmed the conformity of the characters on horn A with the Easter Island script and interpreted the inscription (being written in Tamil²) as follows [7]: „Offering to the almighty Bird-God”.

2. A hypothesis

ATTEMPTING to solve the riddle of the Gallehus-horn A the scholar K. Horedt [2] suggests the following hypothesis. To the early settlers of Easter Island belonged Northteutons. They must have reached Easter Island somewhere between 5th and 11th century coming from Europe via Greenland to North America and along the eastcoast southwards to South America. After crossing South America the Teutons finally reached Easter Island and brought with them the art of writing, namely the Easter Island script.

It is not the aim of this paper to give comments on Horedt's hypothesis. We will investigate the seafaring activities in the time under consideration, i.e. between about 5th and 16th century, and try to find support for an alternate (possibly simpler) explanation for the appearance of the Easter Island characters on the Germanic horn A.

B. Z. SZALEK states [3]: „My research ... reveals, that the Easter Island and Mohenjo Daro scripts are of common - Dravidian - origin.” Following these line we will first try to locate traces of the Mohenjo Daro script towards Easter Island. Moreover we will show that there is some scanty evidence for seafaring activities between India and the Polynesian triangle.

²Southindian language

When the Indus Valley civilisation began to decline after 1500 B. C. some meagre traces indicate, that the the Mohenjo Daro script was not wiped out completely. H. Heras [8] mentions struck and cast copper coins from Sri Lanka. He remarks: "I was most agreeably surprised when I realized that the signs found in all the early cast and struck coins of Ceylon were purely Mohenjo Daro signs ...". Heras ascribes the date of early first millenium B. C. to these coins. His explanation for the striking similarity of the two sets of symbols is worded thus: „Finally these inscriptions once more prove that the race that produced the marvellous civilization of the Indus Valley was spread over India down to Ceylon. The marks on postsherds of the pre-historic tombs of the Heyderabad State, the signs on rocks of the Nilgiris and the signs on other pieces of pottery found in the Tinnevely District are only steps in the long journey from the Indus Valley down to Ceylon.”[8].

THESE RESULTS are important for our further considerations because Sri Lanka was since earliest times an important tradingcentre with both East and West.

Regarding the script „of common origin” [3] New Zealand possibly forms an link between India and the Easter Island. The treaty of Waitangi which the Maori chiefs concluded with England in 1835 showed that the Maoris had a script as evidenced by the signature of the two Maori chiefs (see figure 3 [9]). The numbered signs are said to resemble those of Indus seals [9].

In 1770 a contract with Spain was signed by the Easter Island representatives. The signs of their signatures were recognized by Maori chiefs about 100 years later [10]. This can be considered as a further hint of an interlink in the chain „India - New Zealand - Easter Island”.

3. Indias early seafaring activities in the Pacific

3.1 An Indian ship depicted on the chest of an Easter Island moai

„THE MOST striking similarities (*of the Mohenjo Daro script*) are with the symbols used until comparatively recent times by the natives of Easter Island, in the eastern Pacific, but the distance in space ... between the two cultures is so great that there is scarcely any possibility of contact or influence” [11]. This is the common opinion of numerous authors. It seems therefore to be of importance to search for facts, which indicate early maritime contacts between India and the Easter Island.

During his archaeological expedition to Easter Island Thor Heyerdahl found a number of stone models and depictions of ships [12] [13]. Most interesting is a stone giant with a threemasted sailing vessel on its chest. The statue was partly covered with soil and the depiction of the ship was only recognicable after the excavation of the statue. Heyerdahl stated that the statue was already covered by soil **prior** to the arrival of the first Europeans [13].

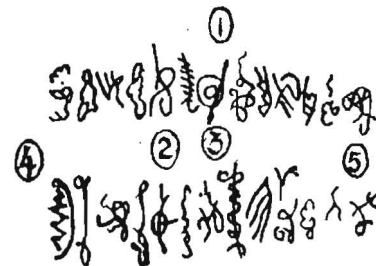


FIGURE 3

Figure 3: Signature of the two Maori chiefs who signed the treaty of Waitangi (9)

Figure 4: Comparison of a ship depicted by Easter Islands artists a) (13) with a European ship of late 18th century b) (14)

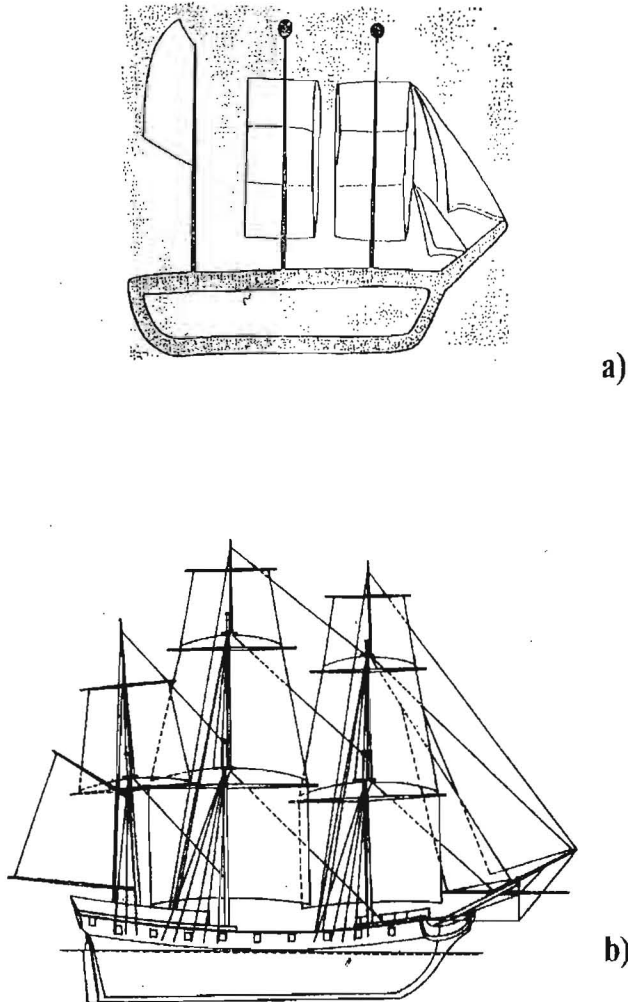


FIGURE 4

But before having a closer look at this illustration we shall take the opportunity to check the reliability of the ship depictions of Easter Island. A drawing discovered by Heyerdahl (see figure 4a [13]) shows a typical Europaen ship of the 18th century. For comparison in figure 4b a sailing vessel, built in 1793 [14], is added. Main- and foremast of the ship (figure 4a) are rigged

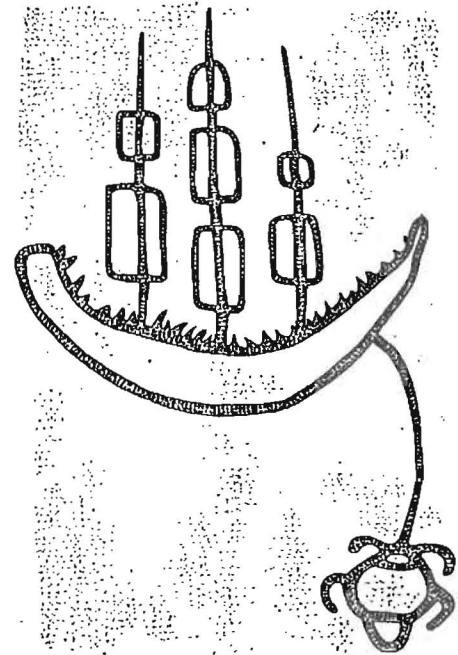


FIGURE 5

Figure 5: Depiction of a ship on a Moai's chest (13)

with three squaresails. The mizzenmast with its typical sail (it should have been drawn in a lower position) and the bowsprit with the foresails are depicted with sufficient accuracy. One typical feature, the stright keel, is clearly visible. This comparison leads to the conclusion that the picture contains the main features of an European ship and is thus reliable.

LET US NOW return to the ship on the giants chest (see figure 5, [13]). Heyerdahl [13] identified the ship with a reedboat. Gatermann [15] considered the rigg to be „European”. For comparison two European sailing ships (built prior to the landing of

Roggeveen at Easter Island in 1722) are given in figure 6 (after [16]).

Figure 6: Development towards the full-rigged sailing ship (after 16)

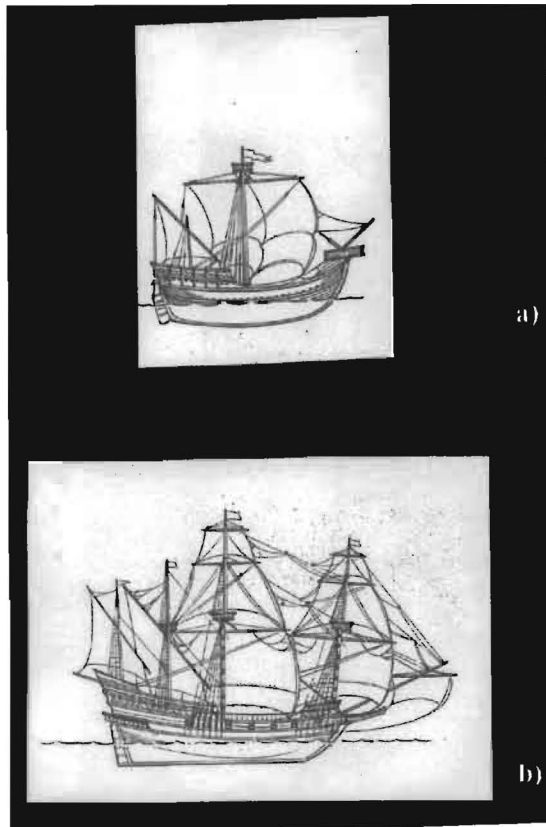


Figure 6

Figure 6a is an early fifteenth-century ship with mainmast and a primitive mizzen. The keel is slightly sickle shaped. Figure 6b represents a sixteenth-century ship. Within a century the rigg has developed from a basically single masted rigg (figure 6a) to a rigg with two full-rigged masts. The keel is stright. During the seventeenth century there is no significant change in the rigg of European sailing vessels. Important features

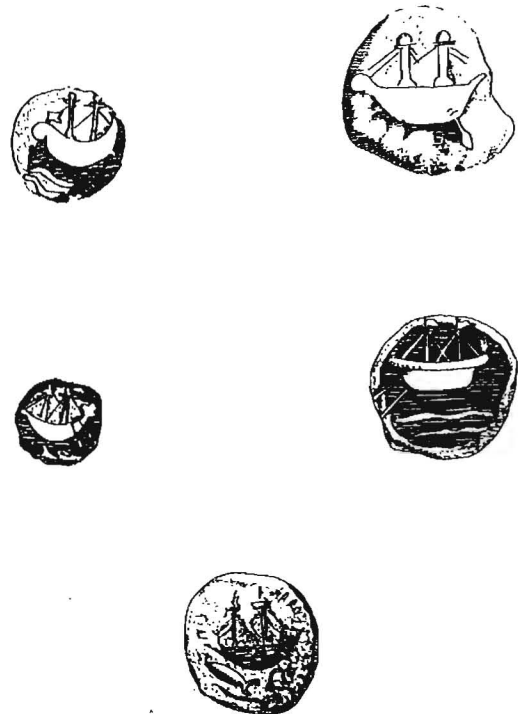


FIGURE 7

Figure 7: Indian coins with depictions of 2nd-century ships (after 17)

of the rigg of these ships clearly differ from the rigg in figure 5.

From this comparison it becomes evident that the rigg of the ship in figure 5 can not be identified with the rigg of European sailing ships prior to the time of Roggeveen.

IN FIGURE 5 no features of a reed boat (bundles of papyrus and the rope lashings

which held them together) are recognizable. Remembering the reliable depiction of the main features of the ship in figure 4a by the Easter Islanders we can not identify the ship in figure 5 with a reed boat. Moreover the reedboats have (see Ra, Ra II, Tigris, Abora) bipod masts and only one large sail. It seems however highly doubtful, that two or three small square sails anfastened to bipod masts could be handled properly wehn tacking.

The comparisons, outlined here for European ships, were also carried out for Chinese and Indonesian sailing ships without a positive result.

FINALLY THE comparison was extended to Indian ships. There are one-, two- and threemasted Indian ships (see figure 7 ; after [17]) on coins of the 2nd century, found in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In these early times we have to assume only one sail for each mast. In the Ajanta-temple there is a 6th-century painting of a threemasted seagoing Indian ship (see figure 8 [17]). Also in this case only one sail is attached to each mast.



FIGURE 8

Figure 8: A 6th-century threemasted seagoing ship (17)

Further investigations yielded finally a result. An old chart of coloured ship-drawings (17th century) shows Maratha-merchantships. These ships were definitely seaworthy, because it is on record, that they traded with Oman and Jemen and other places [18]. The rigg particularly of ship 9c (see figure 9 [18]) exactly fits into the pattern of the ship depicted on the giants chest (figure 5). The ships' keels in figure 9 are slightly sickle shaped (compare also figure 5).

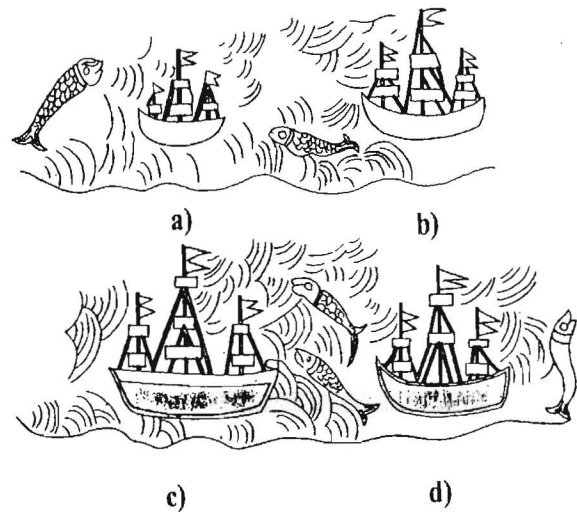


FIGURE 9

Figure 9: Maratha-merchantships 17th century (18)

FROM THESE comparisons we can conclude: The ship depicted on a statue of Easter Island is with high probability identifiable with a 17th century merchantship from the westcoast of India. Consequently the possibility of maritime contacts between

India and the Easter Island existed around the 17th century, most probably even earlier³.

3.2 An Indian ship at the shores of New Zealand around 14th/15th century [19]

IN 1955 SCHOLARS examined an ancient ship on the Ruapuke Beach near Raglan, New Zealand. It was a vessel at least 500 years old, built of teakwood. Prior to these investigations the ship's wreckage was sighted in 1875 and 1914. In 1875 an inscribed bronze plate was removed from the ship, in order to have the inscription deciphered. Unfortunately the plate got lost.

In 1836 in a Maori kitchen⁴ a bell (see figure 10 [19]), probably belonging to this ship, had been discovered. It carries the brief inscription „The bell of Moha Din Buksh's ship”, written in the Tamil style of some 500 years ago. The bell was found under the roots of a centuries old tree, when it was uprooted by a storm [20].

HAD THE SHIP come as far as New Zealand purposely or storm blown ? We do not know the answer. However this Indian ship off the shores of New Zealand indicates the possibility of early maritime contacts between India and New Zealand.

³ According to the few and incomplete available informations Indian ships with only one sail at each mast existed from the 6th century probably till to the 17th century (compare figure 8 and 9), i.e. for a period of about 1000 years. In Europe the transition from one to three sails (attached to one mast) took only about one century (compare figure 6). It seems therefore reasonable to assume that this development in India did not take a millenium. This means that we can assume that Indian ships, shown in figure 9, may have reached Easter Island well before the 17th century.

⁴ There the bell was used as cooking pot



FIGURE 10

Figure 10: A bell from a probably 500 years old Indian ship (19)

3.3 Indias maritime contacts with the East

THE BUDDHIST monk Fa-hien left a detailed report on his travels to India [21]. Fa-hien had come from China to India by a land route in 399 A.D. and left India in 414. Fa-hien embarked in Tamralipiti, a flourishing port town situated at the estuary of the River Ganga, and sailed down the coast to Sri Lanka. In this country Fa-hien remained for two years. Then he took passage on a large merchant-vessel, on which there were over 200 passengers. Astern of the ship there followed a smaller vessel that should, in case of an accident at sea, rescue passengers and crew of the large vessel. Due to storm and adverse winds it took the ship

100 days to reach Java. The voyage from Java to Canton (again due to adverse weather) lasted 70 days. The regular trade relations between India and China declined in 9th century, when the Arabs had sway over the whole sea trade between the Red Sea and the south of China. To a limited extent however Indias trade with China continued.

3.4 Summary

1. Seagoing Indian ships regularly navigated the Indian Ocean and partly the waters of the Pacific at least from the 5th century onwards.
2. THERE IS evidence that an Indian ship reached New Zealand probably in 15th century.
3. Clues indicate that Indian ships may have

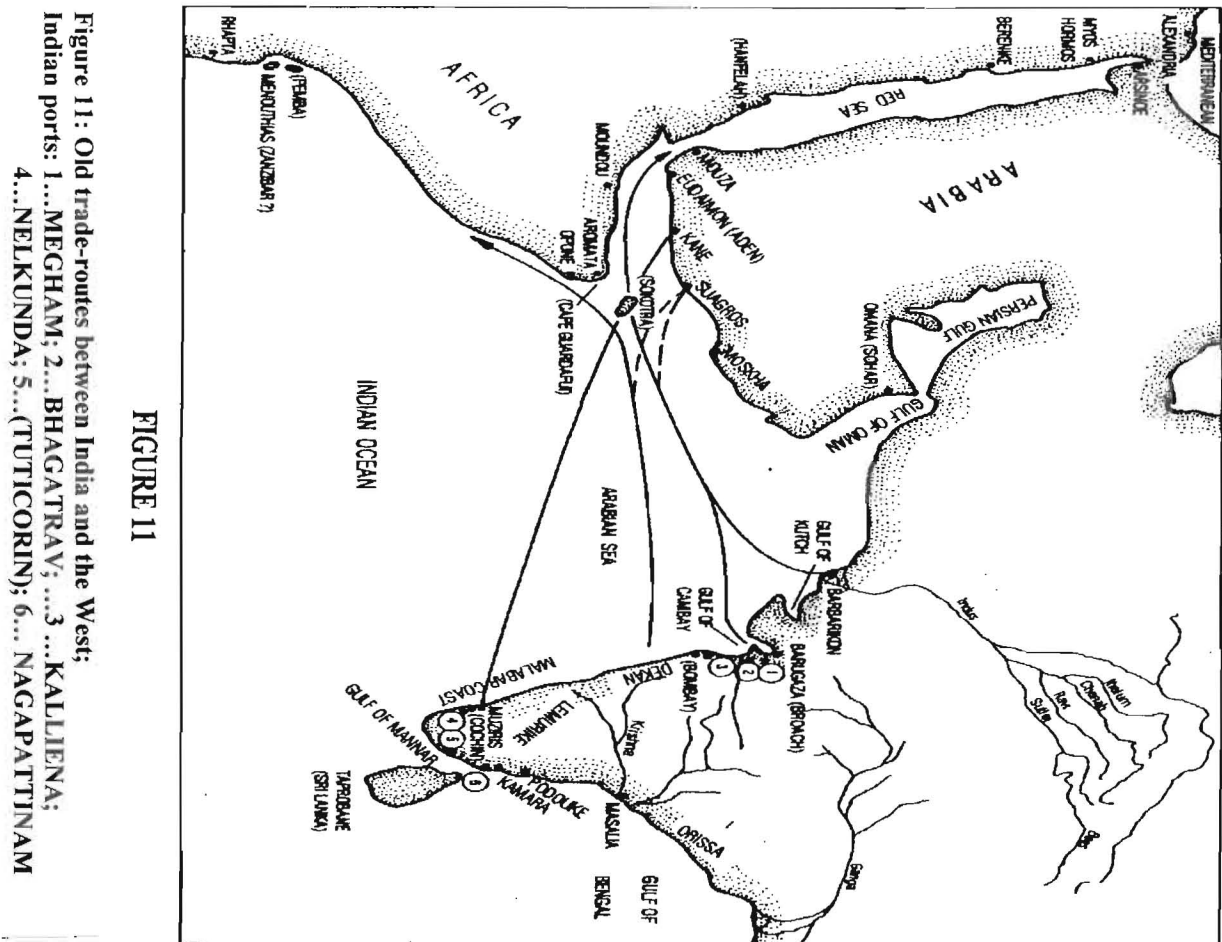
even reached Easter Island at about the same time or slightly later.

4. FROM THE seafaring point of view it is in the realm of possibility that the Mohenjo Daro script could have spread from India/Sri Lanka into the Polynesian Triangle. What really happened is however subject of future researches in other fields (e.g. archaeology, linguistics).

4. Ancient searoutes to the West - do they contribute to a reasonable explanation of the Gallehus-riddle?

4.1 No interlinks between Easter Island and Gallehus

The excavations and radiocarbon datings of Thor Heyerdahl's Easter Island expedition



revealed [22] that the first settlers came to Easter Island around 380 A.D.. This is the first date the „talking boards” could have reached Easter Island. However most scholars agree that king Hotu Matua came with the next wave of settlers between the 12th to 14th century [23] (at the latest in 15th century [10]) and brought 67 inscribed tablets to Easter Island. Considering the time gap between the dating of Gallehus horn A (ca. 400 A.D.) and the probable arrival of Hotu Matua we can exclude direct interrelations between the „talking boards” of Easter Island and horn A.

4.2 Could old seatriade-routes support a solution of the Gallehus-riddle ?

Searching for an less spectacular explanation of the Gallehus-riddle, than the hypothesis of K. Horedt, we will base our investigations on the following assumption: The inscription (see figure 1) engraved on an Indian object d'art might have been brought by tradesmen via the ancient traderoutes from India or Sri Lanka to the Roman Empire and from there to Danmark. The inscription (possibly misinterpreted as an ornament) was copied on the Gallehus-horn A.

Following seatriade and seatriade-routes of Ancient India with the Roman Empire are subject of a short review.

WHEN EGYPT became a Roman province in 30 B.C. a flourishing trade between India/Sri Lanka and the Roman Empire developed. The major Indian ports, involved in this trade, and the searoutes are given in figure 11. The most important Indian seaports were Barugaza and Muziris. The goods from India reached finally the Egypt ports Myos Hormos and Berenike. From these ports the goods were transported on landroutes and the river Nile to Alexandria, being in those times the most important trade centre of the Roman Empire with the East. Both Indian and Roman ships were involved in the trade.

Besides India Tabropane (Sri Lanka) was an important place of transshipment between East and West.

THE TRADE with luxuries reached its peak during the reign of Nero (37 - 68 A.D.). With the decline of the Roman Empire Indian trade with Rome gradually lost importance however continued.

Rome had also trade relations with Germanic tribes at the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. The merchandise, most desired by the Romans, was amber. Temporary amber was more valuable than gold. [24]. Two of the „amber-roads”, existing already B.C., started in Northern Italy and ended approximately in Southern Danmark [24], i.e. in an area where also Gallehus is located. Moreover excavations revealed, that merchandise (particularly luxuries) had come from India and the Maldives even further north, e.g. to Northern Norway [25].

THE TRADE relations between India/Sri Lanka and Europe, sketched above, indicate that Indian luxuries, with engraved Mohenjo Daro inscriptions or modifications thereof, may well have reached Gallehus in 400 A.D.

5. Summary:

It was not the aim of this contribution to solve the Gallehus-riddle. The aim was to highlight and to evaluate some important aspects of seafaring and shipbuilding possibly connected with the Gallehus-riddle, thus giving a maritime background of the matter that could support the researches of scholars in the field of linguistics, archaeology etc. in connection with a probable migration of the Mohenjo Daro script and with the Gallehus-riddle.

The results are:

1. Indian ships have reached New Zealand in the 15th century, probably even earlier.

2. It is likely, that Indian ships have reached Easter Island well before Roggeveen.
3. The maritime contacts of India/Sri Lanka with the Roman Empire in 1st to 4th century were well established. The trade relations extended further even to Northern Europe.
4. Some hints as to the „migration” of the Mohenjo Daro script towards the Polynesian Triangle were collected.

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Zusammenfassung

Im Jahre 1639 wurde bei Gallehus (Süddänemark) ein in das Jahr 400 datiertes goldenes Horn ausgegraben. Erst im 20. Jahrhundert interessierten sich erneut Wissenschaftler für dieses Horn, da auf ihm 23 Zeichen entdeckt wurden, die eine „an Identität grenzende Ähnlichkeit“ [2] mit entsprechenden Zeichen der Osterinselschrift aufwiesen. Die Möglichkeit früherer maritimer Kontakte dieser beiden rund 20000 Kilometer voneinander entfernten Orte (Gallehus - Osterinsel) gibt der Wissenschaft Rätsel auf.

Auf der Grundlage eines aus Theorien, Hypothesen und Fakten aufgebauten Szenarios wurden im Zusammenhang mit den Schriftzeichen auf dem Gallehus-Horn relevante vorhandene oder/und mögliche maritime Aktivitäten analysiert und bewertet, als Unterstützung künftiger Forschungen zur Lösung des Gallehus-Rätsels.

Die Analysen einschlägiger maritimer Aktivitäten ergaben, dass

- bereits im Zeitraum vom 5. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert maritime Kontakte zwischen Indien/Sri Lanka und Neuseeland/Osterinsel bestanden haben bzw. vom Stand des Schiffbaues und der Navigation in diesem Zeitraum möglich waren,
- intensive maritime Kontakte zwischen dem Imperium Romanum und Indien bereits um die Zeitenwende bestanden und
- vereinzelt Handelsbeziehungen von Indien über Rom bis hin nach Nordeuropa reichten.

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