

five-pointed star. Michael Feener, a Singapore-based expert on Middle Eastern maritime history, suggests that the star could be interpreted as the 'seal of Solomon', an emblem that was ubiquitous across the medieval and early modern Muslim world, and carried with it magical and talismanic qualities in many contexts.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest Arab accounts of Champa are included in the *Kitab al-masalik wa'l-mamalik* of Ibn Khurdadhbih and in the *Akbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind*, which dated to around 850 CE.<sup>12</sup> The first describes a journey of three days from Cambodia ('Qmar') to Champa ('Sanf'), before sailing to Long Biên ('Luqin') in the Red river valley. The second account describes an itinerary of ten days from Kadrang (probably coastal Cambodia) to Sanf, where they collected fresh water. The Middle Eastern merchants then sailed via Sundur Fulat (the island of Hainan) to the 'Gates of China' at Guangzhou (Canton). William Southworth suggests this journey probably stopped in Quảng Nam Province, where the large amount of Middle Eastern pottery sherds from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries was found on Cù Lao Chàm Island.<sup>13</sup> In these Middle Eastern accounts, the main product of Champa was Sanfi (aloe wood), noted by Arab author Ya'qubi to be the finest of the aromatic woods and having the richest and most lasting perfume.

In the Chinese travelling accounts, Champa ports also regarded as important stopovers for long-distance ships sailing from south China ports to the Southern Seas. In about 800 CE, the warrior/bureaucrat Jia Dan left his description of the maritime trade route and its Champa ports:

Sailing from Canton, it is 200 li to the south-east, to T'un-men Shan [an anchorage south of Pao-an and opposite the north coast of Lantao Island], and two days towards the west to Chiuchou Shih [Ch'I islands or Taya Islands, north-east point of Hainan], and two days towards the south to Hsiang Shih [Tu-chu-shen or Tinhosa Island, or even further south], and three days towards the south-west to Chan-pu-lau Shan [Cù Lao Chàm], which is in the sea 200 li east of Huanwang, and two days towards the south to Ling Shan and one day [towards the south] to Men-tu Kuo and one more day [towards the south] to Ku-ta Kuo and half a day [towards the south] to Pen-t'o-land Chou ...<sup>14</sup>

Jia Dan's suggested maritime route from South China to the Straits of Melaka is sustained by currently available inscriptions and archaeological evidence recovered from the

coastline of central Vietnam allows the identity of important mercantile ports of Champa during the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. The maritime route of that time originated in Guanzhou, the most important port of south China for centuries, especially during the Tang era. From Guanzhou, it took several days to reach the first stopover on the coast of Champa at Chan-pu-lau Shan. Jia Dan suggests that Cù Lao Chàm is 'in the sea' and its exact location is '200 li east of Huanwang'. The Chan-pu-lao Shan, thus, could be identified as the Cù Lao Chàm Island, off the coast of modern Hội An port city. Huanwang, as Chinese accounts and archaeological evidence document, is undoubtedly the Trà Kiệu citadel that served as the political centre of the polity of *nagara* Amarāvati in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Based on a set of combined evidence, one can sketch out the possible itinerary of the unfortunate Châu Tấn ship. Guanzhou was the port of departure, where Middle Eastern and Persian diaspora traders had firmly established a trading colony by the end of Tang period. The ship might have called at Hainan Island for fresh water and goods before arriving on the coast of Champa. Although the Châu Tấn ship unfortunately sank off the coast of Quảng Ngãi, roughly 100 km south of Thu Bồn estuary and Cù Lao Chàm Island, scholars believe that the vessel had called at either Cù Lao Chàm Island or the Thu Bồn river estuary before it set sail towards the south. Information from Champa inscriptions and the discovery of Chinese and Middle Eastern artifacts along the Thu Bồn river banks suggest that short stays by Middle Eastern and Chinese traders for the purpose of exchanging goods and visiting the local rulers is arguably imaginable. Leaving the port of Amarāvati and sailing along the coast, the ship soon sank due to a desperate ocean storm or hitting a reef. The latter appears to be more likely when we consider the many shipwrecks have been discovered off the coast of Quảng Ngãi in recent years. If the ship had not gone down, its next destination would probably have been the mercantile port of Pāṇḍuraṅga in the south of Champa before leaving for Pulau Condore (Côn Sơn). After leaving the Champa coastline, the ship might have followed the same itinerary as the contemporary Balitung shipwreck and thus might have anchored at a mercantile port on the Java Sea coastline.<sup>15</sup> The abundance of Arabic and Indic inscriptions written on the recovered ceramics suggests that the final destination of this ship would likely be the Persian Gulf, or more precisely the Ambarak, north of