

Welcome to the Thousand Islands

(Damian May)

Extract from the Journal of Damprong Kak of Batuban, Captain of the junk Śakra.

Seven days later, after altogether 21 days of sailing, we arrived in Garuda. The anchorage was on the west. I put down a small boat and I and the steersman boarded it. Some crew members rowed us ashore. On shore, I and the steersman looked for a trade store. We came to the store of Captain Pantam. Captain Pantam asked me where we were from. I told him that the junk was from Krung Mar. Captain Pantam was pleased. In the evening, the Captain fed me and the steersman some rice and let me stay overnight at the store.

On the third day of the waning moon of the Fourth Month of the Year of the Dragon, in the morning, Captain Pantam brought two boats to tow my junk to an anchorage in front of the store. That evening, at around midnight, there was a big storm. Coconut trees, betel nut trees and many other big trees were snapped. Four anchors were let down to hold the junk against the wind.

At three o'clock the storm died down. The next day, the fourth day of the waning moon of the Fourth Month, I prepared four sets of presents and loaded them in a boat. We rowed for 320 cubits and landed at the anchorage by the Captain's store. I gave the Captain eight gifts; dried longan, dried plums, Khitan tangerines, Khitan truffles, pickled garlic, tea leaves, fish and rice-sticks. The house of the Captain was made of brick and plaster and roofed with tiles. There were five Khitans and fifteen Garudans in the house of the Captain. There was a market there, where satin, white cloth, umbrellas, bowls, dishes, vegetables, fish, bananas, oranges and food were sold. There were many people, but only males; from dawn to dusk they numbered from 40 to 60 men at a time.

I asked the Captain to take me to the deputy ruler; I wanted to give him eight gifts. I went out of the house of the Captain and walked along a wide path.

Then there was a flat path for 400 cubits and then another terraced area 5 cubits high. Before we reached the house of the deputy ruler, we had passed twenty terraces. Along both sides of the path were houses with clay walls in front. The path was shaded by trees-jack-fruit, tamarind, ilang-ilang, coconut, banyan, and mango-planted on every terrace up to the house of the deputy ruler. Village houses were built of clay, the roofs of straw thatch.

There were rice fields behind the houses, but no walls. In the back of their houses they kept banteng and water buffalo.

When I had arrived at the home of the deputy ruler, I carried the gifts up to the house. The deputy ruler asked the Captain where I was from. The Captain said that Svasvari of Krung Mar, the financial backer of the junk, had appointed me master of the junk to come and trade in Garuda. The deputy ruler asked me what kinds of goods I wanted from Garuda. I told him that I wished to buy large, valuable diamonds, rubies and emeralds to present to the Lord Buddha of Krung Mar. He told me that this island, called Tala, was still forest and had no diamonds or other precious gems, only rice, beans, sesame, coffee, tobacco, and fresh fruit-durian, mangosteens, langsat, rambutan, pomelo, sour oranges and others.

I saw that the house was surrounded by a clay wall, about 240 cubits long. Outside the wall, there were three pavilions. Each pavilion had square roofbeams about 9 cubits long. The beams were made of teak with four corner-struts. The doors had bamboo bolts and latches. All three were roofed with

straw thatch. The one which was a guest house had no walls. built on an earth platform.

There were two long low tables, each placed in a corner. I saw about 40 bows on a rack and about 40 spears, placed on the roofbeams. The master sat on one low table; he wore a checked silk cloth wrapped around his waist. His hair was cut short and he was about 40 years old. He was seated on a red pillow placed on a bamboo mat. About 30 attendants, male and female servants, sat on the floor - the same level as I. There were about eleven to twelve young girls sitting beside the low tables. One group wore silk cloth; some wore checked cotton cloth. Around the upper part of their bodies, some wore different coloured checked cloths, some wore cloth dyed with turmeric.

The male servants of the deputy ruler carried in an unpainted wooden table with legs carved like an elephant's feet. The table was covered with fresh banana leaves. In the middle was rice surrounded by seven banana-leaf cups; one cup contained barbecued pork, another salt, the next four fried dishes, pig's liver, pig's intestines, soybeans, and hot pepper and onion, another salt, and another cucumber. There were also two dishes of steamed rice.

I and the Captain ate with our hands similar to the custom in my homeland. All the men and women watched us as we ate. They talked in Garudan and smiled and laughed. When I finished, the deputy ruler asked me what would follow rice in Krung Mar. I said we had fresh fruit. So he ordered his men to bring me another table on which there were durian, mangosteens, oranges, custard-apples, and short bananas. There were betel nut and leaf in small silver containers inside a small brass box.

I was told I would be introduced to the ruler of the island once we had shared betel nut and talked some more.

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