

“This same Sielediba then, set, as it were, in the central point of the Indies, and possessing the Hyacinth, receiving imports from all the seats of commerce, and exporting to them in return, is itself a great seat of commerce. Here let me relate what there befel one of the merchants accustomed to trade thither. His name was Sopatrus, and he has been dead, to my knowledge, these thirty-five years past. Well, he had gone to the island of Taprobane on a trading adventure, and a ship from Persia happened to put in there at the same time. So when the Adule people, with whom Sopatrus was, went ashore, the people from Persia went ashore likewise, and with them they had a certain venerable personage of their nation.<sup>1</sup> And then, as their way is, the chief men of the place and the officers of the custom-house received the party, and conducted them before the king. The king having granted them an audience, after receiving their salutations, desired them to be seated, and then asked, ‘In what state are your countries? and how go your own affairs?’ They answered, ‘Well.’ And so as the conversation proceeded, the king put the question, ‘Which of you has the greatest and most powerful king?’ The Persian elder snatching the word, answered, ‘Our king is the greatest and the most powerful and the wealthiest, and indeed is the king of kings; and whatever he desires, that he is able to accomplish.’ But Sopatrus held his peace. Then, quoth the king, ‘Well, Roman! hast thou not a word to say?’ Said Sopatrus, ‘Why, what is there for me to say, after this man hath spoken as he hath done? But if thou wouldst know the real truth of the matter thou hast both the kings here; examine both, and thou shalt see thyself which is the more magnificent and potent.’ When the prince heard that, he was amazed at the words, and said, ‘How make you out that I have both the kings here?’ The other replied, ‘Well, thou hast the coins of both—of the one the *nomisma*, and of the other the *dirhem* (i.e., the *miliaresion*). Look at the effigy on each, and you will see the truth.’ The king approved of the suggestion, nodding assent, and ordered both coins to be produced. Now, the *nomisma* was a coin of right good ring and fine ruddy gold, bright in metal and elegant in execution, for such coins are picked on purpose to take thither, whilst the *miliaresion*, to say it in one word, was of silver, and of course bore no comparison with the gold coin. So the king, after he had turned them this way and that, and had studied both with attention, highly extolled the *nomisma*,<sup>2</sup> saying that in truth the Romans were a splendid, powerful, and sagacious people. So he ordered great honour to be paid to Sopatrus, causing him to be set on an ele-

<sup>1</sup> “πρεσβύτης.” A *Shaikh*? Montfaucon’s Latin has *orator*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nomisma* was usually applied to the gold solidus, as here. The *miliaresion* or *miliarensis* was a silver coin, the twelfth part of the solidus (*Ducange, de Inf. Aevi Numism.*). The latter coin continued to be well known in the Mediterranean probably to the end of the Byzantine Empire. *Migliaresi* are frequently mentioned by Pegolotti *circa* 1340.