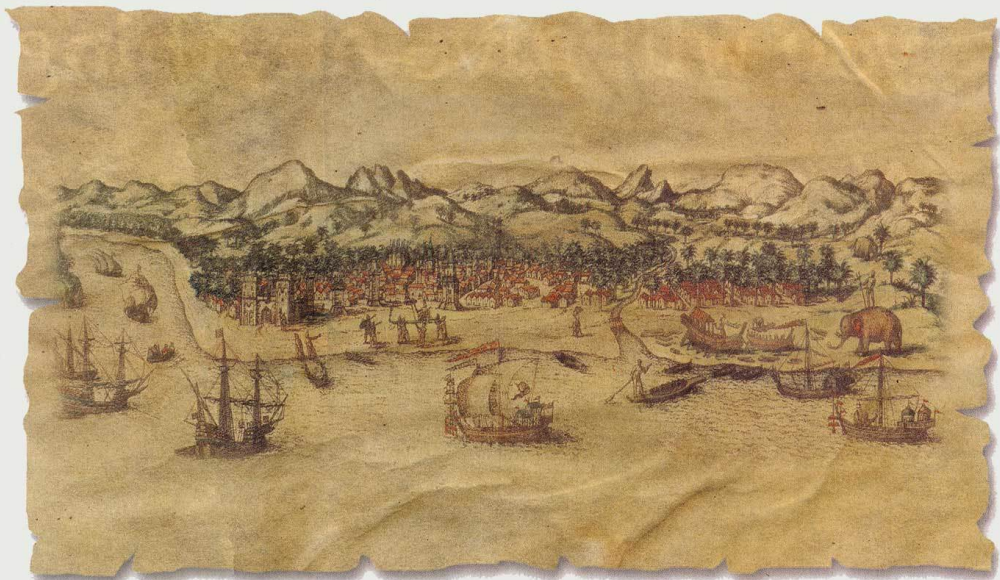


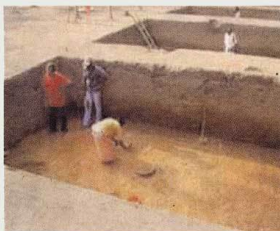


The Muziris Heritage project will spellbind the world once it is fully operational. In a world that finds a reason to conflict on just about any pretext, this heritage site will become Kerala's gift to the planet



of Condiments and Civilizations

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MUZIRIS HOLDS ONE IN AWE - WITHIN MINUTES OF EACH OTHER ARE THE FIRST MOSQUE, CHURCH, JEWISH SYNAGOGUE AND ANCIENT TEMPLES



the seeds were sown thousands of years ago. Today, the world needs to learn how trade, commerce, faith and culture can all live and breathe together happily. Taking a tour around the ruins of Muziris which are being restored by the tourism department, an archaeological newbie like me can't help being astounded by the fact that one gets to see monument after monument that is a marker in the history of India. It is India's best kept secret. This story needs to be shared with a world at loggerheads with itself over race and commerce. It begins with the spice trail. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Salman Rushdie famously wrote "if it

had not been for the peppercorns, then what is ending now in east and west may have never begun. Pepper is what brought Vasco da Gama's tall ships across the ocean, from Lisbon's Tower of Belem to the Malabar coast...they came looking for the hot stuff.

Destination Muziris was once the world's voyage plan. Even before that, when history opened her eyes, she was there, verily flourishing three thousand years ago. Vyasa, Valmiki and Kalidasa wrote about it. The *Sangam* literature discusses it. Pliny and Ptolemy, early visitors from across the seas, talk about it.

Muziris was a port city, among the earliest in the world. Even today, in modern Kodangal one can easily see where ships harboured. The ancient ruins of forts, markets all spring vivid images of a thriving transnational culture

The city, as an idea and a reality grew with Muziris, which was commonly referred to Murachipattanam, the Spice City.

Past let us say, is present, in a manner of speaking. Muziris still lives as Pattanam. Recent archaeological excavations have yielded evidence for the ancient glory of Muziris as a world mall. Archaeologists believe that it was occupied by indigenous population around 1000 BC.

It was from Muziris that the Cheras held sway over the Sahya mountain ranges. Their capital, Mahodayapuram, city of the great rise, came to be known later by its modern name, Kodangallur, more famous for its goddess shrine. A flood in the 14th century threw into disuse the great global harbour.

The gospel of Jesus was heard here no later than it reached anybody outside His native land. The second mosque in the world, after the first in the Prophets homeland, was raised in Muziris. Every world religion found its votaries in Muziris. Early Jews and Christians and Muslims found their way, as much as Jainism and Buddhism influenced people. Muziris held every school of thought.

As I wander the roads of modern Kodangallur, I find it incredible to be able to visit these shrines within minutes of each other. Its ancient walls hold stories and the archeological ruins speak of its commercial importance in the world of global trade.

What delights me is that there is a Muziris Heritage Project being put together by the government of Kerala which endeavours to bring to the people a taste of this 3000 years of this evolved culture. The entire area, its monuments, shrines, forts, seminaries, cemeteries, courtyards, markets, the list is endless can open your eyes to a new world. Wires run through some of these to museums for a touch and hear display system, to tell the story of Muziris. There are new amphitheatres in construction on the banks of the river, to bring live the sights and sounds of that time.

Tourism Secretary Manoj Kumar, IAS, says a both tour will connect all these incredible sights by the middle of this year.

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