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THEATRICAL DANCE AND CONTACTS BETWEEN SOUTH INDIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

During early Christian times there was some interchange between the Mediterranean and Farther Asia. In a way everything started with Alexander who opened both a sea route and an overland route to India. Before the sea route could be used to advantage, the monsoons needed to be discovered, and this happened during the time of Augustus.

The interchange which is known includes silk, wine and wine cups, but I think there is more to be discovered. The important dance drama, Bharata Nāṭyam, started near Pondicherry in South India at that time.

In the Mediterranean countries there was, during Early Imperial times, an explosion of theatre-building, the aim of which is simply not known. I want to draw attention to a unique literary treatment of the theatre, undeservedly forgotten, Lucian's treatise on dance, and mimic performances of myths. There is some connection between these and the beginning of the still popular Bharata Nāṭyam in Tamil Nadu, especially the mimic parts. Since the audiences, especially those at Antioch, the endpoint of the overland route of Farther Asia, were trained and sophisticated, I think there must have been special contacts between India and the Mediterranean. To illustrate this one can simply refer to parts of Lucian's treatise or an ancient description of a theatre spectacle at Corinth, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* X 29, which is a description of a mimic performance of a well-known myth, the judgement of Paris. I think that these two texts explain much of the otherwise unknown theatre of the Mediterranean World in Imperial times, and they may reveal a hitherto unnoticed but important cultural connection between East and West.