THE PLACE NAMED SURI ON AFANASIJ NIKITIN’S RETURN JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA

1. In four previous papers, we traced the fascinating journey by Russian 15th century merchant Afanasij Nikitin from Tver’ to India and back (1468–1474/75). Three of the papers (Kempgen 2008, 2009a, 2009b) were devoted to his route through India itself several stops of which had not been identified before. The fourth paper (Kempgen 2010) was devoted to his journey through Persia; in it, we identified the first stop Afanasij Nikitin made (or was forced to make) after crossing the Caspian Sea, Čebokar / Čapakur. All of these papers are part of a larger on-going project to publish a diplomatic edition of Afanasij Nikitin’s text. In the present paper, we will offer an identification for one of the two stops on his return journey through India, from Aland to Konkan coastal port Dabhol, that hitherto remained a mystery, namely Suri/Sur’, and offer a hypothesis for Kynarjas/Narjas.

2. Afanasij describes the return journey he undertook from Aland back to the coast very briefly, essentially mentioning only place names: Kamendrij – Narjas/Kynarjas – Suri (Sur’) – Dabyl’. Except for the well-known harbour, none of the other places had properly identified before. This is Afanasij’s full (laconic) account of his return journey to the coast, essentially only three lines of text:

“A ṡ Кельбергу пондох до Коуроули [...]. И тóух бых 5 мъс[а- цев]ъ, а ётоуды ж[е] пондох Калики, и тóу же бозаръ велми великъ. А ётоуды пондох Конакельберга, а ṡ Каанаберга пондохъ ших Аладиноу. А ṡ ших Аладиная пондох Каминдръе, а ṡ Каминдръ к Нарасу, а ṡ Кынарасоу к Соуря. А ṡ Соуря пондох к Дабили, пристанище великаго мора Ин- дьискаго. Дабыл же есъ град велми великъ...” (Troickij spisok l. 390ob)

1 The project page is at http://www.uni-bamberg.de/slavling/leistungen/forschung/projekte/afanasij-nikitin/. It offers all papers published so far for download.
In our previous article, we argued that on a plausible route from Aland to the Dabhol the old city of Pandharpur could be identified as Kamendrij. The linguistic reasoning behind this was that Pandharpur is also known as Chandrabhaga, and Kamendrij is a sufficiently close rendition of Chandra- ‘half moon’. Pandharpur also meets other requirements for a route Afanasij Nikitin would have taken – lying at just the right distance from his starting point is one of them, being an old city and hosting many pilgrims is another.

However, the rest of the place names Afanasij mentions could not be explained then: Narjas/Kynarjas and Suri (Sur’) remained mysterious for the time being. We will return to them below to offer a (partly) solution. In the light of our new findings, the route from Kamendrij (= Pandharpur) to Dabhol (Dabul) looks like this (Fig. 1):

![Fig. 1: The Route from Pandharpur to Dabhol](image1)

Compare this to the hypothetical line that Semenov (1980) was only able to draw on his map of Afanasij’s route (Fig. 2):

![Fig. 2: A Section from Semenov’s map (1980)](image2)
3. One of the three stops that Afanasij Nikitin on this route is Suri (or Sur’) – see the original text cited above. Until now, no town or place had been found by that name that could match the order of the stops on the journey. It was noted, however, that suri means ‘sun’ in Sanskrit – and thus probably influenced Afanasij when mishearing or misspelling or falsely remembering an actual place name. ‘Sun’, it can assumed, is a word any traveller in India will surely come across, even if not speaking Hindi. In our earlier article, we already assumed that Suri must be located in the area of Satara, the region’s largest town.

![Fig. 3: The route from Surur to coastal port Dabhol](http://www.konkanyatra.com/images/konkan-road-map.png)

While revisiting some of the web sources we used for our previous papers on Afanasij’s travel through India, we found a modern road map which led to the solution – see an edited version above (Fig. 3). It corroborates our general as-

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sumption while slightly revising it. This map shows a place named Surur 36 km north of Satara. Linguistically, there can be no doubt that Afanasij’s place Suri / Sur’ can be identified with Surur. Further investigation reveals that Surur is a (historic) village, not a city – one possible explanation why it has been overlooked before. On Google Earth or Wikimapia it will only show up when zooming in close to the ground (see Fig. 4; the coordinates are: 17°57'55"N 73°59'4"E). Surur is not far away from Wai, a historic city with picturesque temples on the river Krishna; today it is well-known for the multitude of Bollywood movies that have been shot there.

Fig. 3: The Village Surur on Wikimapia

Why would Afanasiy Nikitin mention a small place like Surur when a nearby city (Satara) is much larger and would be a natural stop on his journey? The
answer is, we think, already included in the road map shown above: mentioning Surur makes sense (apart from remembering it because of its similarity to the word for ‘sun’) only if taken as the place where the company of merchants travelling together would turn West instead of going further South first.

The Western direction would have led the caravan to the old city of Mahabaleshwar (known to exist since the 13th century) and further on to Poladpur, crossing the mountain range of the Western Ghats. From Poladpur, the route would have led to Khed and (probably) Dapoli, before reaching the port Dabhol from the north. This newly reconstructed route (see blue line in the map) essentially only differs from our previously assumed route in that it reaches the coast using the next mountain pass to the north. The village Surur is part of both routes – it simply wasn’t recognized as Afanasij’s Suri before.

4. After Suri has successfully identified as Surur, the question of course remain which city would then correspond to Kynarjas/Narjas on the way between Pandharpur (= Kamindrej) and Surur (= Suri). Our best guess is that this would be Phaltan which offers itself in this function.³ Phaltan (earlier called Phalapattan) was the capital of an independent state in medieval times and as such a natural stop for any travellers, the more so for merchants travelling together. However, we could not find any name in conjunction with this city, its buildings or surroundings that even remotely resembles the place name Narjas (or Kynarjas) as given by Afanasij (resp. the scribes that copied his travel notes). It is obvious that any route between Pandharpur and Dabhol (totalling ca. 350 km) would include Phaltan as an intermediate stop (as, in fact, our previous reconstruction of this route also did), and we are fully convinced that Phaltan can be considered a good candidate for Kynarjas/Narjas, although no ‘proof’ can be offered at this time for its identification.

Following below are the relevant travelling distances⁴ between the stops on Afanasij’s journey back to the coast (with corresponding places mentioned by our Russian traveller):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contemporary place names</th>
<th>Places mentioned by Afanasij Nikitin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pandharpur – Phaltan: 106 km</td>
<td>Kamindrej – Narjas/Kynarjas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaltan – Surur: 64 km</td>
<td>Narjas/Kynarjas – Suri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surur – Dabhol: 180 km</td>
<td>Suri / Sur’ – Dabul’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. With the newly-discovered Suri / Surur and its sole merit to be named as a stop on Afanasij’s journey as being the location where the journey turned West

to cross the mountain range, the last section of his Indian journey can now be revised to reflect our new findings.

6. Lastly, we would also like to present the reader with an updated version of our complete reconstruction of Afanasij’s journey through India. Only the last segment has changed, everything else is identical to the original version published in Kempgen (2009a, 164).
‘Suri’ on Afanasij Nikitin’s journey through India

Literature


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[All web pages: last accessed Dec. 4, 2016]