

China. Passing through Calicuta, the Maldiv islands, Ceylon and Sumatra which he probably reached in 1344/745 A.H. At Sumatra, he took a Chinese junk to Canton which was still dominated by Muslim merchants. This remarkable traveller noticed that the Muslim quarter of Canton was inside the city, at Ts-uan-chou, they had a city of their own. Also, he noticed that the voyages from Malabar ports and other places to China was made only in Chinese junks. Ibn Battuta reached Cambaluc and Peking and left an important, though very strange, account about these regions Ibn-Battuta "sa relation de voyage en Inde trans gangétique et en Chine est tellement étrange qu'on peut plutôt qu'on doit la tenir pour inventée ou transformée au point qu'elle en est devenue inintelligible"(23).

Nodoubt that the activity of muslim merchants and travellers with these regions of the Far East brought more geographical information about these areas. Thus Arab travellers and geographical information about he India Ocean and China was wider and richer than any other contemporary writers. In this respect, they added many geographical notions, particularly those of the Greeks. Meanwhile the Arab achievements made it possible to unite the two arctrics of long-distance trade known in antiquity between the Indian Ocean, The Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Golf.

Notes

- (1) - S.D. Goiten, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden 1968, p. 239, Also see: S.D. Goiten. *From the Mediterranean to India (Documents of the trade to India South Arabia and East Africa, from the 11th and 12th Centuries)*. Speculum (1954).
- (2) - G.F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval times*. Princeton 1951, p. 64. Quoted from, *Tarikh al-Tabari (Histoire of al-Tabari)*, Tome 1, p. 272.
- (*) - Ras al-adjumdjuma "The Head of Bold" or the Ras al-Hadd "The Cap (head) of the Limite" (frontier), i.e. the South East of Oman.
- (**) - Larwi, The Sea of Lar.
- (3) - H.C. Grange, "Les Marins arabes au Moyen Age de certaines etoiles observées en Ocean Indien" *Arabica* 1977, tome XXIV, pp. 42-57.
- (4) - G. Ferraud, *Relations de voyages de Textes Geographiques (Arabes, Persians et Turks) relatifs à L'extreme-Orient du VIIIe au XVIIIe siècle*, in 2 vols, Paris, 1913, pp. 49-50.
- (5) - G. Ferraud, *Relations de voyages*, vol. 1, Paris, 1913, p. 38.
- (6) - Š.S Nadiwi, "Arab Navigation", *Islamic Culture*, 1942, p. 79.
- (7) - Ibid, p. 80.
- (8) - Chau Ju-Kua, *Chu-fan-chi, "On the Chinese and Arab Trade"* ed.by F. Hirth and W.W. Rockhill, Amesterdam, 1966.
- (9) - Ibid, p. 16.
- (*) - By "foreigner" (fan) the author understands Muslim of all nationalities. He says they did not eat pork and only ate domestic animals, etc.



Abu-Abdullah Muhammed surnamed Ibn-Battuta (1304-1377/704-779 A.H) is probably the greatest traveller in history. He visited all the lands under the influence of Islam including India and China. One scholar points out that if he has any rival, it is Marco Polo, but even Polo had not a more insatiable passion for exploring new countries(19). Ibn Battuta was not a man to stay long in one place, he travelled almost thirty years. His personal curiosity drew him to cross the Black Sea to Caffa (Frodosia) and to explore Asia Minor and Southern Russia, "I have heard of the city of Bulgar and desired to go to it to see for my self what they tell of the extreme shortness of the night there and the shortness of the day in the opposite season"(20). He visited the region and left an important account about its people and their tradition, customs, etc. Ibn-Battuta travelled by land and by sea and visited many countries. In his sea voyages which started on the Red Sea ("I was frightened of this, never having travelled by sea before") drew him to believe that Muslim sea faring had completely dominated the maritime activity on these waters.

Despite the Mongol conquest of China in 1280, the Empire's maritime connections seem to have been strengthened rather than weakened. Both Chan Ju-Kuas and Marco Polo witnessed the wealth of China and the occupation of large parts of the Eastern countries by the Mongols. Before Ibn-Battuta had sailed on the Indian Ocean, he crossed the eastern Mediterranean sea, from Asia Minor on a Genoese ship. "from al-ladhiqiya we embarked on a large vessel belonging to Genoese "... We travelled on the sea for ten nights with a favouring wind, and the Christians treated us honourably and took no passage from us"(21).

But he did not say that some principal ports such as Jaffa in the Levant and Asia Minor were in the hands of Genoese merchants. After the collapse of the last stronghold of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, Acre to the Muslim Mamluk of Egypt in 1291/691 A.H. Genoese, Venetian and Persian merchants kept good commercial relationships with the Seljuk Turks of Anatolia and the Muslims of the Levant. And this is why Ibn-Battuta was honourably treated, as were other Muslims probably, and sailed in a Genoese ship.

After his short visit to the court of Muhammed Uzbeg Khan, the Prince of Bukhara, and after visiting Constantinople, he determined to set out to India. He crossed Central Asia, Bukhara again, Samarkand and reached India (Delhi) around 1339/739 A.H. In India, Ibn Battuta entered the service of the Monarch, Muhammed Tughlak as Kadi. Ibn-Battuta showed a great kindness to the Indian Monarch who chose him among his vassals as an ambassador to the King of China. Ibn-Battuta said that "when I presented my self before the Sultan "... said to me: "I have expressly sent for you to go as my ambassador to the King, of China, for I know you love travel and sightseeing"(22). The Indian Monarch's attitude towards the Arab traveller Ibn-Battuta could be understood through the Indo-Arab relationship which characterized the period. Ibn-Battuta took this opportunity and sailed to

Arabs second. Some argue that Persian traders were the first Muslims to have settlements in Canton which is in fact not far from the truth, if we would take into consideration their great experience and heritage in seafaring. An examination of medieval Arabic texts would show that the Persians had left many words and traces on the maritime life of the times(11). As G.F. Hourani remarked, even the Chinese knew the Arabs as Ta-shich which comes from the Persian ta-zik "a man of the Tayy-tribe"(12). G.R. Tribbetts adds that I. Tsing was the first Chinese scholar to mention the Arabs under this form, "to-shih" and they appear under this name in connection with the first Arab Embassy to the Chinese Court A.D 651(13).

By the end of the tenth century, Arab knowledge of South-East Asia seems to have reached its limit. Ibn-Kurdahbih gives details of such places on the eastern coast of the island of Sumatra (Salahit, Jaba and Hurang). Al-Masudi was an excellent observer and seemed to have travelled widely through all lands under the influence of Islam at the time except North Africa and Spain. He certainly visited India, and East Africa but it is doubtful if he ever reached China as he claimed: "we have visited the Sind, Zanzibar, Sinf (South of Cochinchine) China and Zebedj (Jawa)"(14).

However, the new geographical information which is found in his excellent works is related entirely to India. He visited this country in 915/303 A.H and he stayed around two years there. The geographical information that he gives about India was partly derived from his own observation and partly from what he had heard from its inhabitants(15). But his information on China was evidently borrowed from merchants and other travellers. In this respect, al-Masudi did not add much information about countries east of India to that of Ibn-Khurdahbih or Sulaiman the sailor.

There is little information to be found in the writings of the geographers of the eleventh century until we come to al-Idrissi. This wide Arab interest in the Far East was shattered by the revolts of the Turks in the eleventh century and the mongols in the thirteenth century. Arab geographical literature like other sciences was undergoing a dark period.

With al-Idrissi(16) (d. 1156/562 A.H) who lived and worked at the court of Roger II (d. 1154), the Norman King of Sicily, the situation changes. He added much information about the sea routes between Aden and China on the one side and between East Africa (Zanj) and Sumatra (Zalaj) on the other. He calls Aden the port of China while he calls kish the port of East Africa only. Whereas his information about the Far East (china) is not as important as that of North Africa and Europe, al-Idrissi's work is still regarded as the greatest Muslim achievement in the development of geographical study. Thus, he gives further limits to the Indian Ocean, and mentioned Karimata and al-Anam. The first place almost certainly the largest of Anambas(17). There were many geographical writers in the next centuries, but all copied earlier authors as far as South East Asia was concerned. In the first half of the fourteenth century we meet the great traveller of Islam, Ibn-Battuta(18).



wonderful things. The sixth sea is called kurdung "...". The seventh is called the sea of Cankhay or the sea of Kangli. This is the Chinese Sea, where we could only sail with the south wind".(4)

Most Ships of the Arabs which sailed to China went from the Persian Gulf (Siraf and Basra) and the Red sea (Aden and Jedda) passing through the Indian Ocean . In his famous work: Relations de voyages, Gabriel Ferrand shows how Muslim geographers, travelers and merchants had explored the countries and the islands of the Indian Ocean before the arrival of the Portuguese in the East in the 16th century. No doubt, the commercial and political relations of the Caliphate with China, Indonesia and India left considerable traces in Arabic geographical literature. Some details were may be learned from the tales of Sulaiman, the Sailor, trader of the ninth century (3rd A.H) The "Arabian Nights" echo the commercial activity of merchants from Arabia and Persia to China. Sulaiman sailed several times on the Indian Ocean and possibly reached China. According to Ferrand, Sulaiman edited his work, Silsilatu-l-Tawarikh (the Chain of Chronicles) in the ninth century (851/237 A.H). But the book was completed later on (916/304 A.H) by a certain learned man, Abu Zaid Hussan al-Siraf(5). Sulaiman the sailor described the sea-route from the Persian Gulf to China. In one place, when he stopped at Singapore (Sander Faulat) on his way to China, he says: "Sailing from here ships stay at jinji (Chinji) and then anchor near the Gate of China. Here several hills have arisen from beneath the sea-ships pass between pairs of hills and reach China from Sander Faulat in one month. After this, they enter the Chinese Gulf and they anchor in that city of China which is called khaufua (Khaupua)(6). At Khaufua (Canton), Sulaiman was amazed by the presence of large numbers of muslim communities to whom the Chinese authorities had granted privileges and facilitated their life, in return for some commercial profits. "Khaufa is a harbour and center of Arabian commerce "...". There is a Muslim (Kadi) Judge appointed by the Emperor of China to decide the case of Muslims, and the merchants of Iraq submit to his decision(7). Moreover, the Chinese contemporary sources give many details about Muslim influence in Canton. The editor of Chu-fan-chi(8) argue that this organisation was extended at a later date to the foreign settlements at tsuan-Chou, Hang-chou and elsewhere, in all of which the Muslims and their Kadi (Judge) and their sheikhs, their mosques and their bazaars(9). Chan-Ju-Kua says about the foreign(*) settlment of Canton as follows. "In the foreign quarter in Kuang-chou (Canton) reside all the people from beyond the seas. A foreign head-man is appointed over them and he has charge of all public matters connected with them"(10).

Nevertheless, this long sea-route from the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea to Canton in China had been known to Muslim travellers and merchants perhaps as early as the sixth century and it merits attention as a remarkable achievement of the Persians first and the

willingness to have strong ties with the Chinese trade. Therefore the Arabs opened long routes voyages by seas; in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of China, and then wrote their chronicles and diaries that were rich with geographical information. In this respect too, the Arabs were superior to the Greek vision of the Ancient world.

Large number of Muslim geographers obtained their information on the Far East (India and China) from merchants and travellers and other informants such as missionaries who had been in contact with these "foreign" territories.

An examination of Arab geographical tests shows a steady growth of the Arabs knowledge of these Chinese and Indian territories during the Middle Ages.

As Goitein points out, the India trade was the backbone of international economy of the Middle Ages in general and inside the Islamic world in particular(1). There is no doubt that the greatest wealth came to the Muslims from two regions: the first is the Far East, India and China; the second is west Africa, particularly Ghana "the country of gold". In this respect we have to deal with the Far East and its relation to the Arab world.

The position of the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad at the crossroads of commerce between the Indian Ocean and Central Asia on the one hand and the Mediterranean countries and North Europe on the other, determined its outstanding international significance. "This is the Tigris", the Caliph al-Mansur had said, according to al-Tabari, "there is no obstacle between us and China. Every thing on the sea can come to us on it"(2). The geographical position of Baghdad between the shores and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates plus the Persian Gulf facilitated sea-borne trade and communication with the Eastern countries in general and to India and Eastern Africa in particular. Arab ships sailed from the ports of Arabia, Mesopotamia to the Persian gulf, India Ocean, China Sea, Red Sea and Abyssinia (Habasha) Sea. Around the ninth century (875 or 880 A.D) al-Yaquiubi described the sea-route to China. He says:

China is a vast country. if we would like to travel to China by sea, we have to cross seven seas "...". The first is the sea of Furs (the Persian gulf) where we embark to Siraf and its ends at Ras al-Djumdjuma(). "... the second sea which begins at Ras al-Djumdjuma(*) is named the sea of Larwri(**), it is a great sea; there are some islands in it (waqwaq) and other peoples, the Zanj. In these Islands, there are many Kings. We could not sail freely in this sea without the guidance of the stars(3) "... the following is the third sea, which we call the sea of Harkand, where the island of Sirandib is and which contains precious stones. The fourth sea is called Kalah Bar "... the fifth is called Salahat. It is a great sea with a lot of*

◆ THE ARAB TRAVELLERS IN THE INDIA OCEAN AND CHINA DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

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ملخص:

يعالج هذا الموضوع الملاحة البحرية العربية في الشرق الأقصى (الهند والصين)، كما يتطرق إلى الفارق الزمني بين الاتصالات الأوروبية «المتأخرة» والمسلمين بالشرق الجنوبي للقارة الآسيوية. والدارس لكتب الرحالة المسلمين والصينيين يدرك جيدا تلك العلاقات المبكرة والمميزة التي رسمها المسلمون مع الصين ابتداء من القرن التاسع الميلادي، حيث اتضحت ملامح تنظيمهم الاجتماعي (أسواق، مساجد، قضاة ...) حين إقامتهم بكانتون (Canton) وهي نفس الملامح التي يشير إليها الإدريسي وابن بطوطة وغيرهم.

ولعل هذا المقال الذي يحمل البعد الإنساني والحضاري بين دار الإسلام وبين الشرق الأقصى سيجد أفاقا جديدة للبحث في ظل العلاقات الدولية المعاصرة.

Abstract:

This article deals with the achievements of the Arab - Islamic civilisation in the world of navigation. Since the ninth century, the Arabs opened a world wide-routes which lead to the South (East Africa), to the North (Europe), to the East via the Central Sahara and Asia (they followed the Silk route). As far as the Far East is concerned, the writer look up on the Arab