

Trade relations between the Far East and the Islamic West in the Middle Ages

Mazari Abdessameud Toufik 1, Touazi Fadila²

¹ University YAHIA Fares de Medea, mazari.toufik@univ-medea.dz

² University YAHIA Fares de médéa, touazi.fadila@univ-medea.dz

Laboratory of Mediterranean Historical Studies Through the Ages

Received: 29./09/2025

Accepted: 19./12/2025

Published: 26./01/2026

Abstract:

The study addresses the topic of trade relations between the Far East and the Islamic West in the Middle Ages. From a historical perspective, this is of paramount importance for understanding the backgrounds of the formation of historical relations. This requires a re-reading of various historical sources to monitor the most important trade routes, particularly the Silk Road and commercial exchanges, and the implications of all this for cultural and civilizational exchanges between the Islamic West and the Far East. This enables us to analyze the development of current events, including China's attempt to revive the Silk Road within the framework of what is known as the "soft narrative."

Keywords: Far East, Islamic West, Trade, Silk Road.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the significant cultural and commercial connections that linked the Western Islamic world with the Far East during the medieval period, these connections remain relatively obscure and understudied. This is largely due to the scarcity of foundational documentation, with the exception of brief and incidental references made by travelers and geographers. These references often appear in their descriptions of the regions they passed through or the

urban centers they visited in China and India—destinations sought by adventurous merchants and travel enthusiasts. Nonetheless, the writings of these travelers continue to serve as indispensable sources for scholars striving to uncover and illuminate various historical truths.

The presence of Western Islamic peoples in Central Asia and the outskirts of China dates back to earlier times, especially during periods of political stability and the security of commercial routes—most notably the Silk Road, which functioned as a vital artery for trade between the Islamic world and the Far East.

However, the security of these trade routes deteriorated by the end of the 5th century AH / 11th century CE, particularly for Maghrebi merchants traveling eastward via the Silk Road. This decline was exacerbated by the Crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem in 491 AH / 1098 CE, which redirected commercial pathways toward the southern regions—from Alexandria to Jeddah and Aden, across the Indian Ocean. The Mongol invasions that swept across the Islamic East and Europe throughout the 7th and 8th centuries AH / 13th and 14th centuries CE further disrupted these routes. Nevertheless, commercial ties between the Western Islamic world and the Far East persisted through both land and sea routes, continuing via the ports of Alexandria, Jeddah, and Aden to Calicut and various Chinese harbors. Trade remained vibrant, involving a wide array of goods and products from China and India.

❖ **Historiography & Sources:**

- Adel Zaytoun's study, *Economic Relations between East and West in the Middle Ages* (1st ed., Damascus Press, 1400 AH / 1980 CE), focused primarily on the economic relations between the Italian republics and Islamic powers in Egypt and the Levant, as well as their interactions with Constantinople and Crusader entities. While it offers only brief references to the Western Islamic world's connections with the Far East, the study remains valuable due to its diverse array of Arabic and European sources—some of which have informed the current research.

- Atiya alQawsi's work, *Egypt's Red Sea Trade from the Dawn of Islam until the Fall of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Dar alNahda alArabia, Cairo, 1976), is particularly noteworthy for its treatment of Kanem trade, based on Geniza documents. The book highlights the role of Kanem merchants in Egypt as

intermediaries for trade between the Western Islamic world and the Far East, especially during the 5th and 6th centuries AH / 11th and 12th centuries CE. It also discusses the main goods exchanged between the “Lands of Wonders” and the Islamic West.

- Adel alNaffati’s article, *Peaceful and Violent Relations between East and West at the End of the Medieval Period*, published in *Historical Visions Journal of Research and Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (June 2020), examines the challenges of communication and concord between East and West. He argues that since the 7th century AH, Arabic historiography increasingly classified the Far East as a "domain of war" (Dar alHarb), and that the Far East’s isolation after the Crusades negatively impacted its ties with the Islamic West.

- Abdullah Muhammad Said AlSuwaidi’s article, *Trade Relations between the Islamic World and China in the Medieval Era*, published in *Journal of Arts, Literature, Humanities and Sociology*, Issue 109, 2024, analyzes economic conditions in both the Islamic world and China. It outlines trade routes and treaties and discusses how trade contributed to cultural and civilizational exchange. However, it overlooks the specific role played by the Western Islamic world, despite relying on several important sources.

- A significant article by Lotfi Ben Milad, published in *Annales Islamologiques* (2017) and based on a lecture delivered at the International Conference “The Silk Road Between China and Morocco” (Faculty of Letters, Ain Chock, Hassan II University, Casablanca, November 21–24, 2015), is titled *The Maghrebis and Indian Trade from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and China (End of the 5th AH / 11th CE to End of the 9th AH / 15th CE)*. It focuses on the role of Moroccan Muslims and Jews from Morocco and alAndalus in Indian Ocean and Far Eastern trade. Drawing on Geniza documents, it highlights the roles of specific families in commercial relations linking Moroccan and Andalusian cities with Egypt, the Levant, Basra, and Baghdad, extending all the way to India and China.

❖ Research Problem:

The central question of this study is: To what extent did commercial exchanges between the Western Islamic world and the Far East contribute to

the development of economic relations and the strengthening of civilizational ties during the medieval period?

From this main question, several subquestions emerge:

- What was the nature of these relations?
- What were the major obstacles encountered?
- Who were the key actors in these connections?

And how do these historical relations echo in contemporary initiatives such as the revival of the Silk Road and the practice of soft power?

❖ **Methodology:**

This study adopts a historical methodology, drawing its material from primary historical sources through a descriptive approach. The material is then organized and analyzed using comparative and analytical methods to derive the findings presented in the conclusion.

The structure of the study is as follows:

- Introduction
- Trade Relations in the Geniza Documents
- The Role of Jewish Radhanite Merchants in Far Eastern Trade
- Moroccan Involvement in “Tijarat alKarim” (Indian Ocean Trade)
- The Western Islamic World and Trade with the Far East
- The Importance of Reviving Far Eastern Trade Routes
- Conclusion

❖ **Analytical Overview of Primary Sources:**

Among the most significant primary sources used in this research are the travelogues of Muslim travelers who documented the Far East and its trade with the Western Islamic world:

• Abu Hamid alGharnati in *Tuhfat alAlbab wa Nukhbat alIjab*, ed. Ali Omar, Maktabat al-Thaqafa alDiniyya, Cairo, 1st ed., 1463 AH / 2003 CE. He provides details on timber production areas in Morocco and alAndalus and their importance in shipbuilding, as well as imports from India and China.

• AlZuhri (Abu Ubayd Allah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr) (d. before 550 AH / 1161 CE), in his *Geography*, ed. Muhammad Haj Sadiq, Maktabat alThaqafa alDiniyya, Cairo. A key source on maritime routes, particularly

between the two shores (Maghrib and Andalusia), and on commercial activity along the Atlantic coasts and with the Far East, Armenia, and Finland.

- AlQalqashandi (Abu alAbbas Ahmad ibn Ali) (d. 821 AH / 1418 CE), in *Subh alAsha fi Sina'at alInsha'*, ed. Nabil Khalid alKhatib, Amiri Press, Cairo, 1332 AH / 1914 CE, vol. 3. This encyclopedic work includes valuable data on maritime trade systems and correspondence involving Maghrebi and Mashriqi merchants under the Mamluks.

- Ibn Battuta (Shams alDin Abu Abdullah alLawati alTanji) (d. 1377 CE), in *Tuhfat alNuzzar fi Ghara'ib alAmsar*, ed. Abdulhadi alTazi, Royal Academy of Morocco, 1417 AH / 1997 CE. His travelogue offers critical insights into the breadth of Western Islamic maritime trade and the fame of Maghrebi merchants in the Islamic East and Far East.

- Ibn Jubayr (Abu alHusayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad alKinani alAndalusi alBalansi) (d. 614 AH / 1213 CE), in *Tadhkirah biAkhbar Ittifaqat alAsfar* (The Travelogue), Dar Sader, Beirut. He provides important descriptions of maritime routes, sea trade, piracy, navigational hazards, seasonal winds, and exchanged goods.

- Ibn Rustah (Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Umar), in *AlA'laq alNafisa*, vol. 7, Leiden edition, 1892 CE. An essential source for studying goods imported from the Far East—especially India and Chi-na—their routes to Egypt, the Levant, and the Western Islamic world, as well as the commodities carried from Andalusian ports to the East via the Hijaz.

❖ References:

Due to the abundance of references, we will limit ourselves to the most significant ones:

- Atiyya alQawsi, *Trade of Egypt in the Red Sea from the Dawn of Islam to the Fall of the Ab-basid Caliphate*, Cairo, 1976. This important book studies the Qarim trade and the role of Egyptian merchants as intermediaries between the Islamic West and the Far East, relying especially on the Geniza documents, which illuminated many obscure issues in trade relations and highlighted prominent Maghrebi and Andalusian families.

- Maurice Lombard, *Historical Geography of the Islamic World During the First Four Centuries*, trans. Abd alRahman Humaida, 2nd ed., Dar alFikr, Damascus, 1992. This work contains important information on the role and

monopoly of Jewish traders, especially the Radhanites, in Far Eastern trade.

- Lotfi bin Milad, *The Maghrebis and Trade with India from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean and China — From the End of the 5th/11th Century to the Beginning of the 9th/15th Century*. This study discusses the role of West Islamic agents in Far Eastern trade, highlighting certain families and their specialization in trade with India and China.

- Najah Basha, *Trade in the Islamic Maghreb from the 4th to the 8th Century Hijri*, Tunisian University Publications, 1976. This book touches on dual trade routes linking land and sea, a specialty of the Jewish Radhanites from Provence who monopolized global trade.

- Baghdadi Gharbi, *Commercial Relations of the Almohad State*, Ph.D. Thesis under the super-vision of Muhammad bin Muammar, Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Civilization, University of Oran 1. This thesis provides important information on the Islamic West's trade with the Far East and commercial routes during the Almohad era, as an excellent model of Maghrebi interaction with the Far Eastern civilization.

2. The Unseen Silk Road

Despite the historical significance of cultural and commercial ties between the Islamic West and the Far East during the medieval period, these relations have remained obscure and understudied due to a lack of foundational documents—except for what was noted by travelers and geographers. Most of what is known about these ties was recorded by 5thcentury Hijri Arab geographers in the socalled Books of Routes and Realms (*Kutub alMasalik wa alMamalik*), who documented their observations from travel and firsthand experiences (Picard, 1994, p. 76). These accounts were often brief and incidental, describing regions they passed through or cities visited in China and India—the destinations of adventurous merchants and travel enthusiasts.

Nonetheless, their writings remain primary sources for researchers seeking to uncover truths and insights into those relationships. The presence of Islamic Westerners in Central Asia and near China dates back to early periods, especially during times of political stability and secure trade routes, most notably the Silk Road, the lifeline of trade between the Islamic world

and the Far East.

However, by the end of the 5th century Hijri / 11th century CE, disruptions in these trade routes occurred. Western Muslims (Maghrebis) could no longer traverse the Silk Road toward the Far East due to the Crusader capture of Jerusalem in 491 H / 1098 CE. Consequently, the routes shifted southward, from Alexandria to Jeddah and Aden, into the Indian Ocean. Later, the Mongol invasions of the Islamic East and Europe during the 7th and 8th centuries Hijri / 13th and 14th centuries CE further disrupted overland routes.

Despite these challenges, commercial ties between the Islamic West and the Far East persisted through land and maritime routes via Alexandria, Jeddah, Aden, Calicut, and Chinese ports. Trade volumes remained high, encompassing various goods from China and India.

3. Trade Relations in the Geniza Documents:

Researchers owe much to the efforts of certain Orientalists who collected a significant body of documents related to Egypt's trade in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean during the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods. These are the ArabicHebrew Geniza documents—written in Arabic but in Hebrew script.

The most relevant group concerning Far Eastern trade was uncovered by the scholar S.D. Goitein, a specialist in these documents. He found valuable information on trade relations involving Egypt, the Levant, and the Islamic West. The main collection is held at Cambridge University Library in England, and another is at Oxford University in the USA.

One of the key documents relates to a Libyan merchant from Leptis named Yusuf alLibdi, who journeyed to the Far East during the 5th century Hijri (491–492 H) (Qawsi, n.d, p. 84).

Goitein uncovered over 300 documents revealing trade relations between Islamic countries and the Far East via the Red Sea, reaching the shores of Sumatra and Indonesia. These include correspondence between merchants in the Far East and their families in the Islamic West, shedding light on goods traded, travel dangers, homesickness, and fears of the Indian Ocean voyage.

The documents mention diverse gifts sent from India and China to

families—ranging from spices to luxurious Chinese textiles and expensive porcelain—suggesting that traders left their families behind for months or even years.

Several notable merchants are mentioned, such as:

- Halfon ibn Nethanel alDumyati, a prominent merchant from Fustat active between 539–541 H, wellconnected with trade routes from the Far East to Yemen, Morocco, and alAndalus (Qawsi, n.d, p. 87).

- Arous ibn Yusuf, from Mahdia in Tunisia, was active between 533–537 H along the Red Sea and Mediterranean to the Far East.

- Abu Dhikra Kohen alSijmasi, who undertook extensive journeys to the Far East during the same period.

These documents provide detailed accounts of the goods imported from the Far East—types, quantities, prices, and customs duties. Indian spices were most prominent, along with Chinese porcelain and timber used in shipbuilding (Qawsi, n.d, p. 89), reflecting the vibrant commercial activity in these regions.

4. The Role of Jewish Radhanite Merchants in Far Eastern Trade:

The Radhanite Jews played a crucial role in trade between the Islamic West and the Far East via the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (Lombard, 1992, p. 134). They were primary intermediaries in importing valuable Eastern goods to the Islamic West—a trade known as "Radhanite trade."

These Jewish merchants monopolized trade routes and ports, leveraging favorable geopolitical conditions, capital wealth, multilingual proficiency, and their global Jewish network—especially in Europe and the East (Bouamama, 2011, pp. 2003–2006).

According to Geniza documents studied by Jewish Orientalists like Goitein and Edovič, these merchants, facing growing restrictions, transferred their wealth from the western Mediterranean (Maghreb and alAndalus) to the Red Sea and particularly to Aden. They appointed agents in Fustat to handle trade to the Indian Ocean and the Far East, without severing ties to their homelands. Many settled permanently or temporarily (Bin Milad, 2017, p. 7).

Maghrebis also participated in this trade alongside other nationalities—

especially Egyptians—through trade routes from Aydhab to Alexandria. Certain prominent families monopolized this trade, such as:

- Judge Abd alRahim ibn Ali ibn alHasan ibn alLakhmi alBaysani alAsqalani, later Egyptian (529–595 H / 1134–1197 CE), who lost fifty thousand dinars in trade between India and Mo-rocco.
- Amin alDin ibn alAlamah alMaghribi (d. 669 H / 1270 CE).

5. The Maghrebis and the Qarimi Trade:

As revealed in Geniza documents, the Qarimi merchants were a group who specialized in Far Eastern trade, particularly in spices and related goods. Although their origin date is unclear, it is known that they emerged in the Indian Ocean and initially operated as a dispersed network, later evolving into a powerful commercial group dominating Far Eastern markets (Tasili, 1967, p. 217).

According to alQalqashandi in *Subh alA'sha*, Qarimi trade was a revenue source for the Egyptian state. He notes that the most profitable trade arrived via the Qatiya route (part of the Silk Road), with strict taxes imposed on merchants (alQalqashandi, 1914, vol. 3, p. 470). The Qarimis had a fleet of five ships to protect their goods from Red Sea pirates (alQalqashandi, 1914, vol. 3, p. 522).

Qarimi merchants achieved greatness by facilitating EastWest contact and became key players in global trade, especially in highvalue goods from the East. They acted as intermediaries with the Islamic West.

Maghrebis and Andalusians were active participants in Qarimi trade. An example is:

Abd Allah ibn Abd alJabbar alUmawi alUmani alIskandarani, originally a cloth merchant from Shatiba in alAndalus, who became a Qarimi trader and influenced the pricing of Eastern goods (Qawsi, n.d, p. 213).

Jews from the Islamic West also participated in Qarimi trade alongside Muslims, sometimes forming partnerships and even marital alliances to expand their ventures. Geniza documents confirm widespread Jewish involvement in Far Eastern trade and note the immense wealth some accumulated—such as the Banu Sahl family (alQalqashandi, 1914, vol. 3, p. 522).

One document mentions a Jewish merchant from Morocco involved in Qarimi trade who migrated to Ceylon in 535 H / 1140 CE. The documents also state that many Aden merchants in the 6th century Hijri were Jewish immigrants from the Islamic Maghreb.

6. The Islamic West and Far Eastern Trade

Based on the accounts of AlZuhri (d. 556 AH / 1161 CE) and Abu Hamid AlGharnati (d. 565 AH), we can discern that trade between the Islamic West and the Far East was prosperous and lucrative. The Fatimid rulers of Egypt, recognizing this, encouraged Moroccan merchants to come to Egypt to benefit from their commercial expertise and pushed them toward trade with India and China. Moroccan merchants played a significant role in the "Karimi" trade, as AlQawsi notes (n.d., p. 100). Abu Hamid AlGharnati highlighted this by stating:

"A merchant who had traveled by sea to China, stayed there for a while, and returned to Morocco with immense wealth." (AlGharnati, 2003, p. 77)

The flourishing trade between the Far East and Morocco through Egypt—which acted as an intermediary—might have inspired, as AlZuhri notes, King AlAfdal to consider digging a canal between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. He even began the project but was dissuaded:

"He was told: while your lands connect to the Levant, Iraq, and Yemen via the main road, opening such a canal would expose you to attacks from the Magians of India, the Franks, the Venetians, and the Armenians. So, he abandoned the excavation." (AlZuhri, n.d., p. 38)

Despite this, Alexandria remained the gateway for Morocco and alAndalus to the East, from where Chinese, Indian, Sindhi, and Iraqi products were brought. (Gharbi, 2015, p. 258)

Several Moroccan merchants dominated commercial activity between the East, the Islamic East, and the Maghreb, offering remarkable services across all branches of trade. (AlZuhri, n.d., p. 38)

The pilgrimage journey and the role of Moroccan pilgrims played a major part in energizing trade relations between the Far East and the Islamic West. Pilgrims would engage in various commercial activities and exchange of precious goods. Merchantpilgrims transported exotic products. Ibn Jubayr

vividly depicted this:

"People's hearts yearn for [Mecca] from distant lands... It is a convergence of arrivals and departures... Fruits and goods pour in from all directions. During the pilgrimage season, the East and West converge. In a single day, precious commodities—jewels, rubies, all kinds of gems, musk, camphor, amber, Indian aloes, and medicines—are bought and sold. There are also goods from India, Abyssinia, Iraq, Yemen, Khurasan, and the Maghreb. These transactions, completed over just eight days, could supply thriving markets across the world." (Ibn Jubayr, n.d., p. 97)

A notable example of Western Islamic involvement in Far Eastern trade is the Moroccan physician Yusuf ibn Yahya ibn Ishaq AlSabti. Upon arriving in Aleppo, he engaged in extensive commercial operations reaching Iraq, Persia, India, and the borders of China. He amassed great wealth and allocated part of it to build a medical institution in Aleppo. Another Moroccan doctor, known as "AlKilli," abandoned medicine to engage in trade, importing goods needed by Mamluk rulers at competitive prices. (AlQifti, 1322 AH, p. 257)

Among Morocco's main imports from India were various spices like cloves, coconuts, cinnamon (AlGharnati, 2003, p. 19), herbal medicines, camphor wood, and blue myrrh. Also, sandalwood, rare herbs, jewels (AlZuhri, 1982, p. 50), and saffron (Pasha, 1976, p. 49). Musk was derived from an animal resembling a deer with long necks and horns. The civet cat, another animal, produced a substance with a scent stronger than musk in the Maghreb. (AlGharnati, 2003, p. 36)

In Chinese markets, Muslims held a privileged position, exempted from taxes on buying and selling. AlGharnati recounts meeting a merchant in Egypt in 512 AH named "Sheikh Abu AlAbbas AlHijazi," who had received ten ships laden with goods from China and India. (AlGharnati, 2003, p. 76)

China's main exports to Morocco and alAndalus included luxurious Chinese handkerchiefs used by kings. AlZuhri described them as being made from the fur of the "Samandal" animal, larger than a mouse. These elegant cloths were not washed but perfumed with incense to clean them. (AlZuhri, 1982, p. 51). China also exported camphor and gold powder. (AlZuhri, 1982, p. 14)

According to AlAlaq alNafisa, musk from China came in various kinds, with the Tibetan variety considered the finest. It was believed that the best musk came from deer that grazed on a specific herb called "Kadhmas" in Tibet and Kashmir. Indian musk came from the region between Tibet and India, carried to China's Khanqu port and then shipped by Muslim merchants across the maritime strait. (Ibn Rusta, 1892, p. 366)

Some goods imported by Moroccans from China were considered wondrous. AlGharnati, citing Abu AlAbbas AlHijazi who lived in India and China for over forty years, said:

"I've seen many things I cannot even talk about—people would think I was lying."

He mentioned, for example, a magical ointment in Sarandib that made the body impervious to blades. A Chinese king gifted him a syruplike substance that instantly healed wounds. He tried to bring it to Egypt to sell or gift to AlAfdal bin Amir AlJuyush, but he was unsuccessful. (AlGharnati, 1993, p. 131)

From Morocco and alAndalus, merchants exported to India items like mercury, red sulfur, and finelywoven silk garments (AlZuhri, 1982, p. 31). Coral was also a major export (AlNabrawi, 1948, pp. 255–256). Indian amber was imported to Basra and other Islamic lands, while Moroccan amber, considered inferior, was shipped from the Atlantic to Egypt and often passed off as the better quality variety. (Ibn Rusta, 1892, p. 374)

Andalusian embroidered garments made in Malaga and Almeria were highly sought after in India. Ibn Rusta noted that ships loaded with wheat sailed from the port of Masamah to Apologus and from there to China. (Ibn Rusta, 1892, p. 360)

In a letter from a merchant named Mahrous AlLabadi from Libya's Labda town to his son in Cairo, he mentioned buying Chinese crystal and entrusting it to a Karimi merchant for delivery. (AlQawsi, 1976, p. 43)

Another letter from a traveler returning from the Malabar Coast to his wife mentioned sending her gifts: emerald bracelets, red Indian iron, a bronze vessel, and a ewer. A different letter from a merchant in Southeast India to his wife in Cairo boasted about the spices, fruits, and nuts he sent her, saying: "There is nothing like it among the Karimis." (AlQawsi, 1976, p. 95)

According to travel writings, geographical sources, and Geniza documents, many highvalue goods were imported from India and China and sold at steep prices in Egypt and the Islamic West: black and white pepper—closely monitored by market inspectors (AlShirazi, 1946, p. 48) due to the price disparity—cinnamon (equal in value to pepper), ginger, incense, turmeric (used in medicine), saffron, camphor, indigo dye, sandalwood, wax, and musk. (AlQawsi, 1976, p. 43)

Trade connections extended beyond India and China to other parts of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. AlZuhri stated that woolen garments from Finland, near Armenia, were exported to alAndalus. These elaborately crafted clothes rivaled brocade (khazz) and were used for making robes. (AlZuhri, 1986, p. 76; Makki, 1962, p. 100)

From alAndalus, furs of “qanliyat” and black foxes were exported to Daylam in Persia due to their cold climate. (AlQawsi, 1976, p. 66) The people of Abyssinia, who only knew sugarcane among fruits, imported dates, raisins, palm fronds, textiles, and brocade from Egypt and Morocco. From Ifriqiya and alAndalus, they received mercury, saffron, Marseilles fabrics, brocade, and silk. (AlZuhri, 1986, p. 124)

Along with these goods came many ideas and cultural elements, leading to profound intellectual and civilizational exchange between the Islamic West and the Far East—traces of which still exist today. Notably, the spread of Islam and the presence of Muslim communities in those regions continue to facilitate cultural and economic ties and lay the groundwork for alternative economic poles outside of Western-dominated, colonialist systems of control and monopoly.

7. The Importance of Reviving Far Eastern Trade Routes

Through this discussion, it has become clear that the Silk Road played a crucial role as a distinguished trade route. Dating back to the 2nd century BCE and lasting until the 14th century CE, it encompassed global trade due to its integration with the Mediterranean Sea's maritime routes before the Age of Geographical Discoveries. As the ancient artery of world commerce, the Silk Road stretched from Asia—through China and India—to Persia, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and the shores of the Mediterranean Basin, extending

toward Europe and the fringes of Africa. It monopolized the marketing of rare goods in Western Europe and the Islamic world, the roots of which were mainly in China or India, such as paper, silk, and even gunpowder according to some accounts.

However, the importance of the route declined due to the imbalance of civilizational power between East and West, as well as the dominance of Western imperial powers—initially European and later American—from the 15th century until the present day. This has ensured continued Western control over the global trade apparatus.

Chinese President Xi Jinping recognized the significance of reviving the route to recalibrate the global economic landscape and establish new economic poles through what he termed the "Project of the Century." In 2013, he launched the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), aiming to resurrect the ancient Silk Road by constructing a network of trade routes and infrastructure that links China with numerous countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. The project includes an expansive network of roads, railways, seaports, energy grids, information networks, oil and gas pipelines, and even military bases. (Matawa', 2020, p. 29)

The focus of the initiative is on including countries with strong economic potential or strategic geographic locations to ensure the project's efficiency and success while overcoming anticipated obstacles from the dominant traditional powers. This is particularly relevant following the BRICS agreement of 2010, where BRICS leaders proposed launching their own currency to challenge the dominance of the US dollar.

Western reactions have been clear in their attempts to hinder the initiative through various means—by casting doubt on China's intentions and labeling it as a vast colonial project (Lukhadhari, 2023, p. 496), or by inciting wars aimed at disrupting the Silk Road and taking control of its critical junctions. The war in Ukraine and the US-Israeli aggression on Gaza—the beating heart and vital artery of the route—are perceived as threats to US national security. The situation remains prone to escalation and could lead to direct confrontation and fullscale war.

Historically, however, the chances of success appear strong. China has drawn upon its historical legacy of old relationships and is working to revive

them through what it terms "soft power" tools. It has set a longterm horizon for this effort, aiming for 2050, without entering into hot conflicts or military confrontations. Instead, it is betting on slow, deliberate work grounded in solid and wellstudied foundations. The Islamic West is expected to play a crucial role in this endeavor—whether through the African Unity Road, the Lobito Corridor, the TransAfrican Railway, or through strategic economic partnerships and investments. Hence, the new Silk Road can be seen as a struggle for the future rooted in historical and civilizational foundations.

8. CONCLUSION

Thus, it becomes evident that the trade relations between the Islamic West and the Far East continued through various phases and political circumstances. These relations were only affected by the availability of security along trade routes or by their transformation into alternative routes, enabling the continuation of exchange and complementarity—particularly due to differences in agricultural products shaped by diverse climatic zones.

It also appears that these trade connections were accompanied by civilizational ties that deserve deeper study. These ties were a natural result of cultural interaction, notably the spread of Islam and Islamic culture in parts of Sind, India, and China, and the influence of these civilizations on Islamic culture. Therefore, there is a pressing need to revive these connections today, as peoples strive to escape Western hegemony and build new economic poles by expanding trade partnerships and reviving ancient trade routes—especially the Silk Road—within a thoughtful strategy that takes into account contemporary changes and realworld constraints.

Bibliography.

*** Primary Sources:**

1. Ibn Jubayr alAndalusi (Abu alHusayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr alKinani) (540 AH – 614 AH / 1145 – 1217 CE): *Tadhkirah biAkhbar Ittifaqat alAsfar*, known as *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr*, Dar Sader, Beirut, n.d.
2. Ibn Rusta (Ahmad ibn Umar, Abu Ali) (d. ca. 300 AH / 912 CE): *AlAlaq alNafisa*, Vol. 7, Leiden edition, 1892.

3. AlZuhri (Abu Ubayd Allah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr) (d. before 550 AH / 1161 CE): *Kitab alJughrafia*, ed. Muhammad Hajj Sadiq, Maktabat alThaqafa alDiniyya, Cairo, n.d.
4. Abu Hamid alGharnati alAndalusi (473–565 AH / 1080–1170 CE): *Tuhfat alAlbab wa Nukhbat alI'jab*, ed. Ali Umar, Maktabat alThaqafa alDiniyya, Cairo, 1st ed., 1463 AH / 2003 CE.
5. AlQifti (Jamal alDin Abu alHasan Ali ibn Yusuf) (568–646 AH / 1172–1248 CE): *Ikhbar alUlama bi Akhbar alHukama*, Matba'at alSa'ada, Cairo, 1322 AH.
6. AlQalqashandi (Shihab alDin Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Ahmad) (756–821 AH / 1355–1418 CE): *Subh alA'sha*, AlAmiriya Press, Cairo, 1332 AH / 1914 CE.

*** Secondary Sources:**

7. Basha, Najat: *Trade in the Islamic Maghreb from the 4th to 8th Century AH*, Tunis University Publications, 1976.
8. Bouamama, Fatima: *Jews in the Islamic Maghreb during the 7th–8th Centuries AH (14th–15th CE)*, Dar alHikma, 1432 AH / 2011.
9. Hasan, Ali Hasan: *Islamic Civilization in the Maghreb and alAndalus: Almoravid and Almohad Era*, 1st ed., Maktabat alKhanji, Egypt, 1980.
10. Salem, Abdul Aziz: *History and Civilization of Alexandria in the Islamic Era*, Alexandria, 1982.
11. AlShirazi (Abdul Rahman ibn Nasr): *Nihayat alRutba fi Talab alHisba*, ed. AlBaz alArini, Cairo, 1946.
12. AlQawsi, Atiyya: *Egypt's Trade in the Red Sea from the Dawn of Islam until the Fall of the Abbasid Caliphate*, Dar alNahda alArabiyya, Cairo, n.d.
13. Lombard, Maurice: *Historical Geography of the Islamic World during the First Four Centuries*, trans. Abdul Rahman Hamida, 2nd ed., Dar alFikr, Damascus, 1992.
14. Ben Milad, Lotfi: *Moroccans and Indian Ocean Trade (Red Sea to China), late 5th–early9thCenturyAH*, <https://doi.org/10.4000/anisl.3884>
15. AlNabrawi, Rashid: *Egypt's Economic Condition in the Fatimid Era*, Dar alNahda alMisriyya, 1948.

*** Articles:**

16. Tasily alShater: "AlKarimiyya," *Egyptian Society for Historical Studies*, No. 13, 1967.

17. Matawa, Muhammad: The New Silk Road in Chinese Strategy: Grand Goals, Strategic Weight, and Challenges, Arab Politics Journal, Issue 16, September 2020.
18. Lukhadhari, Jalul & Gharbi, Muhammad: The New Silk Road Initiative between Chinese Strategy and American Challenge, AlMi'yar Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2, December 2023.
19. Makki, Mahmoud: Review of Ibn Zidan's "AlSawla", Journal of the Egyptian Institute in Madrid, Vols. 9–10, 1961–1962.

*** Academic Theses:**

20. Gharbi Baghdad: Trade Relations of the Almohad State, PhD Thesis, supervised by Muhammad bin Ma'mar, Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Civilization, University of Oran 1, 2014/2015.

*** Foreign References:**

21. Picard, Christophe, “Récits merveilleux et réalité d'une navigation en océan atlantique chez les auteurs musulmans,” in Miracles, prodiges et merveilles au Moyen Âge, Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public, Publications de la Sorbonne, Orléans, 1994.
22. Goitein, S.D. & Friedman, Mordechai A., India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents From the Cairo Geniza, Brill, Leiden, 2008.