

of their religions. In Sogdiana they decorated their homes with inspirational murals from many different religions as well as from secular traditions. In their trading diasporas, they often followed the religious trends of the time, and they used both Zoroastrian temples and Manichaean shrines to practice their faith and to carry out their business.

When, late in the Tang dynasty, the empire's economy declined, Emperor Wuzong (r. 841–847) blamed its troubles on foreign religious institutions that had appropriated much wealth and land, and eventually he banished all foreign religious institutions from China, including those of the Buddhists (Document 24). This drastic policy began over a conflict with the Uighurs and what Wuzong claimed was an imbalance in the horse-silk trade that was causing the economic decline. He banned their Manichaean religion and in 845 extended his attacks to all foreign religions. He closed Buddhist monasteries, confiscated their properties, and sent monks back to their homes, whether they were from outside or inside the empire. Within in a very short time, however, he had to restore the Buddhist institutions, for it soon became obvious that neither the state nor the Chinese people could function without the many services that the Buddhist monasteries provided. Wuzong ruled for only a few years. Buddhism recovered fully after his reign, but the other religions either disappeared from China or retreated to remote areas.

## MUSLIM BAGHDAD IN THE EURASIAN MARKET, NINTH-ELEVENTH CENTURIES

After the emergence of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century, friction between its leaders and nearby empires soon led to hostilities and, thereafter, to the Muslim conquest of large portions of Eurasia and Africa. These conquests obviously had a major political impact, but also important were the economic changes they brought. Islam introduced a new set of aesthetic values regarding material culture. In its early days, Islam frowned upon luxuries, and so its spread had a significant impact on the marketing of silks and other Silk Roads goods. Because this religion maintains that all people are equal before God, Muslim society rejected both the religious and the political hierarchies that then flourished, as well as the restrictions and material symbols that marked their ranks. Muslims and their converts thus discontinued many of the Byzantine and Tang practices regarding the wearing of silk.

The ruling caliphs of Islam, known as the commanders of the faithful, also changed practices regarding the production of silk in territories they seized from the Byzantines and the Persian Sassanids. Silk-weaving was no longer a royal monopoly, and the caliphs did not control the production of even the rarest and most valuable silk textiles, such as those dyed purple and brocades made with golden threads. Aesthetically, Muslims strongly disliked the color purple, which they called the "blood color." The caliphate did order all weaving shops to inscribe silk products with a sentence praising Allah, as well as the place and time of production and the name of the vizier, or prime minister, who was in charge of taxation. This practice, called the *tiraz*, put a specific "brand name" on every textile product, facilitating the government's ability to tax the industry and the market and to supervise the quality of the product. The unintended result of this policy was the development of a brand-oriented market that created a new dynamic in textile production and distribution.

The Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims were Arabs, either the residents of towns known for their caravan traders or Bedouin nomads who lived in tents as they moved their herds from one locale to another. Even after they became rulers of agricultural societies, they preferred their tent culture, and so they decorated their urban palaces and mansions with the same sort of upholsteries and rugs they had used to furnish their tents. In short, they moved their tent culture into their palaces. Outside the Arabian Peninsula, the first Muslim political center—the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate—had been at Damascus in Syria, where Arabic languages were indigenous. After a civil war within the ranks of the caliphate in the middle of the eighth century, the political center of the Muslim empire moved eastward to Baghdad—the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate—which had been ruled for centuries by the Persian Sassanids. Thereafter, Muslims who spoke Persian asserted their economic as well as their political influence.

Persians had a long tradition of weaving woolen and silk carpets and tapestries, and their textiles soon came to dominate the market in home furnishings (Document 27). Carpets and tapestries brightened the brick and pebble walls of the palaces and mansions of the caliphs and princes in Baghdad, Samara, and other cities,<sup>10</sup> and bureaucrats, generals, and wealthy residents were soon caught up in this fashion trend, especially as there was no sumptuary law that forbade their using the same luxurious materials that the caliphs used. Thus, in the Muslim world, the market for textiles, especially silk textiles, expanded rapidly.

The Abbasid Caliphate soon incorporated yet another nomadic material culture that put a high value on textiles. Turkic tribes, originally from the Mongolian steppe, were now migrating westward, and they, too, became involved in the political and economic dynamics of the Muslim world. As early as the seventh century, this Turkish migration had already reached Sogdiana in Central Asia. After the Abbasid conquest of Central Asia in the eighth century, many Turks moved to Baghdad to pursue civic, intellectual, and military careers within the Abbasid Caliphate. The Turkish soldiers' bravery and sturdiness were well known. Thus, when the caliph Mu'tasim (r. 833-842) believed he was being oppressed by court politicians, he brought Turkish slave-soldiers, recruited from captured slaves or war prisoners, into Baghdad to serve his needs (Document 26). The Turkish tribes, still moving westward, thus had even more access to the center of power in the Muslim world and eventually became the major force battling the Christian Crusades.

Islamic institutions had only a marginal role in the large markets of northern China, but Muslim merchants actively traded in the ports of China's southern coast, where they arrived by sea. In Canton they established their own neighborhood, where they traded and practiced their religion (Document 25). During the Tang religious persecution of the mid-ninth century, the Muslim community in China suffered relatively little due to its limited presence in the capital region, and the Muslim merchant community in Canton was largely immune. But it was almost wiped out during an uprising of southern peasants that eventually brought down the Tang dynasty. Some of the Muslim merchants who survived the rebellion moved their establishments to Quanzhou, a port north of Canton, near modern Xiamen in the province of Fujian.

### TRADE NETWORKS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, TENTH-THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

By the tenth century, Muslim traders had created large mercantile networks that connected the Mediterranean to the east coast of Africa and to various ports in the Indian Ocean, in Southeast Asia, and on the South China Sea. From that time on, sea routes south of Eurasia gradually replaced land routes as the main commercial artery of trade. This fundamental change in trading patterns was not a result of warfare or political instability, nor was it due to the weakness of economies. Throughout the centuries that the Silk Roads had flourished, continuous warfare and

political upheavals never stopped trade. However, agricultural developments from East Asia to western Europe had created wealthy societies and thus more surpluses for trade. Now staple goods such as cotton textiles, rice and other grains, timber, tea, and porcelain and ceramics became part of long-distance trade in addition to highly valued luxuries such as silks, gemstones, and fragrances. These staple goods were bulky, such as tea, or heavy, such as timber, or fragile, such as porcelain, which had to be packed in heavy crates. Overland caravans could not manage their transport. Meanwhile, ships had been improved for long-distance seafaring, and merchant communities in many countries thus increasingly depended on ships to carry their goods.

Three ports served as the key depots for this extensive maritime trading network. In the west, Cairo linked the Mediterranean traffic to ships on the Red and Arabian Seas. After Baghdad lost control of some of its distant territories, the Fatimids, a Shiite Muslim lineage, arose in North Africa and took over Egypt in 969. In very little time, Cairo became a new center of Muslim culture. Muslim and Jewish trading communities that migrated to Cairo oversaw the transport of goods arriving at Alexandria by ship, mostly from Italy, and then up the Nile River to Cairo. From there, these goods were dispatched overland to ports on the Red Sea, where they were loaded onto ships bound for India.

The ships that plied the Arabian Sea were called dhows. They were medium-sized vessels with triangular sails, later known as a lateen rig. Since ancient times, Arab peoples on the southern coasts of the peninsula had sailed the Arabian Sea, taking advantage of the monsoon winds. Once the dhows anchored at Quilon (in modern-day Kerala), the designated port on India's southwest coast, the traders unloaded their cargo. Hindu chiefs in Quilon welcomed foreign traders, especially Muslim traders. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, this coast was under the dominion of the Chola Empire based in southeastern India. Quilon was, nevertheless, a haven of commerce where traders from the West could sell their goods to the local people or to traders who came on ships from as far away as China. Quilon's markets were filled with valuable and often rare goods from many lands.

The ships that came to Quilon from China were known as "junks." They were huge vessels built with transverse bulkheads that made them especially strong. Horizontal partitions in the holds created sealed compartments that would keep a ship afloat even if one compartment was damaged and filled with water. In Quilon, traders could board junks bound for Quanzhou on China's southeastern coast. The Song dynasty (960-1279) moved its import-export office from Canton to Quanzhou

to collect taxes and to guide and protect ships entering and leaving the port (Document 29). The Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), which was established by the Mongols, a power that first arose from the steppe under Genghis Khan (1167?-1227), followed the same policies. Genghis Khan's grandson, Khubilai Khan (1215-1294), declared himself the first Yuan emperor and encouraged foreign commerce (Document 34). In the process of conquering China, the Mongols had to build a navy and learn the craft of shipbuilding. They also tried to become a sea power. Although their efforts to conquer Japan and Java failed, they were efficient at collecting revenue from the maritime trade centered in the port of Quanzhou.

Commercial communities from many countries were active in all three ports, where traders of various religious affiliations found hospitality and set up their own facilities. Quanzhou, especially, was a haven for traders from a wide variety of religious communities. The Mongols had their own financial systems and stationed representatives and agents in all the ports, and they frequently formed close commercial relationships with trading firms of other nationalities. These trading communities, not the governments, controlled the commercial activity.

Muslim traders owned most of the ships on the Mediterranean Sea, which were based in North African ports, and the dhows on the Arabian Sea.<sup>11</sup> To safeguard navigation on the Arabian Sea, the Fatimid government in Cairo started an armed escort system called the *karim*. Three or four armed vessels regularly guarded merchant fleets going to and from India. Since their departures were regularly scheduled, merchants who did not own ships could sail on the karim ships or put their cargoes on them for delivery elsewhere. Traders who joined the karim trade were known as *karimis*. Usually they were family trading firms who assigned their goods and staffs to the fleets. In the Muslim community, the only obstacle to trade was the Islamic prohibition on moneylending, especially on collecting interest on loans. To avoid the stigma of moneylending, Muslims created partnerships between financiers and the traders who traveled with their goods. When a trader returned from a commercial voyage with a profit, he paid back the money he had borrowed and also shared the profit with his partner. If the goods were lost due to shipwrecks or other unpredictable events, the loss was shared. This credit system worked well and was copied by others, including Jewish traders.

At this time, a Jewish community based in Fustat, the old part of Cairo, was also very much involved in the maritime trade on the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas. Jewish traders owned large consignments

that they put on ships owned by Muslims, and they also boarded karim ships destined for ports on the Arabian Sea. Jewish traders had a relatively good relationship with the Fatimids, and some even collected the government's taxes from the local people in the areas around the North African ports where they traded. Jewish bankers also played an essential role in the long-distance trade, since they were experts in sorting and evaluating coins from many different lands. Jewish traders who lived in Arabic lands learned to speak and write in Arabic, but when corresponding with each other they wrote Arabic in the Hebrew script (Document 31). Jews generally lived peacefully under the Muslim caliphates. Although a few Muslim rulers occasionally restricted their business or religious activities, Jews could still pursue profits and purchase and enjoy whatever luxuries they desired, including silk clothing (Document 28).

Cairo traders, including Jews, Coptic Christians, and Muslims, shared similar commercial ethics and practices and generally cooperated with each other. Their religious calendars were different, however. When traveling on the land routes, each group ceased work on a different holy day—Muslims on Friday, Jews on Saturday, and Christians on Sunday. Because of these differences, determining ships' departure schedules was a complicated matter until the Coptic Christian calendar was adopted by all the trading communities.

During the time of the Fatimids, merchants from Venice, and then from other Italian cities, came to Alexandria to buy silk, paper, and spices. There they learned trading techniques and banking practices from Jewish and Muslim traders. The Venetians also built ships, which they supplied to the Crusaders of western Europe, who, beginning in 1096, sought to reconquer Jerusalem and sacred shrines in the Holy Land that were now in the hands of Muslim Turks. Their campaigns, which continued into the thirteenth century, were ultimately a failure, although at various times they captured Jerusalem and ruled Crusader states in Palestine. Despite the warfare, the Crusaders did not hinder trade (Document 30). In fact, once they learned the real sources of spices and textiles, they actually stimulated trade. Demand for these goods and for a new "spice" called sugar increased in western Europe upon their return, and Italian merchants grew rich and powerful from this trade. In 1271, Marco Polo, a trader from Venice, set off with his father and uncle on a journey to the Mongol court of Khubilai Khan, and his report of their travels on his return more than twenty years later did much to stimulate interest in China and its riches for generations to come (Document 33).

In Quanzhou, Muslims formed a large community that dominated trade. The largest shipping firms in Quanzhou were owned by several different Muslim families, who had purchased thousands of junks from their Chinese manufacturers to maintain connections with Muslim communities in Arabia, Persia, and the islands of Southeast Asia. The eminent Muslim families residing in Quanzhou served the interests of the court during Song times, but immediately switched their loyalty to the Mongol Yuan dynasty when the latter took over the country. They acted as the new regime's liaison to overseas trading partners, using their Islamic networks and language skills (Document 34). Jewish merchants also migrated to Quanzhou and to other parts of China. Nestorian Christians, who had been expelled from China during the late Tang, reestablished themselves under Mongol rule in the thirteenth century, and they, too, became active in the maritime trade. Manichaeans, also suppressed by the late Tang persecution, had survived in southeastern China, and they likewise became active traders. There were also Hindu traders from India on China's southeastern coast. They must have found it hard to explain to the Chinese that they were not Buddhists, but members of a separate (not to mention competing) religion, and they apparently failed to get this message across. Enshrined in the largest Buddhist monastery in Quanzhou are statues of the Hindu deities Vishnu, Shiva, and Hanuman, an example of the religious diffusion often evident in trading communities.

Literally tons of herbs, spices, and aromatic resins used to make incense as well as medicines arrived at Quanzhou by ship. These items were no longer only for the use of religious institutions and royal families, but were commodities sold in even the most ordinary markets of China (Document 32). Large numbers of people in Asia and in the Mediterranean world were now wealthy enough to use spices in their cooking, incense in their devotions, and medicines made with imported herbs. Shiploads of silk textiles, tea, and porcelain departed from the port of Quanzhou. Some were highly valued products for the elites, and some were affordable for ordinary people to use, at least on some occasions.

Thus after fifteen hundred years of the Silk Roads, even as traffic shifted from the old land routes to the sea, the trade that had begun as an imperial exchange for rare luxuries was now driven by commerce and profit and by the desires of ordinary people rather than only by elites. As the trade broadened and widened, so did exchange of ideas, religions, and technologies. With the West ever more interested in the commodities of the East, and merchants and sailors ever more adventuresome in

their search for new routes and higher profits, the stage was set for the modern era.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For the variety of silk textiles from Han China, see Address Schmidt-Clinet, Annette Stauffer, and Khaleel Al-As'ad, *Die Textilien aus Palmyra* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2000), especially for the numerous high-quality plates and figures that reveal the styles of the second century CE.

<sup>2</sup>This Yumen, sometimes seen on maps as Yumenquan, was located west of Dunhuang and should not be confused with the present-day city of Yumen, which is located east of Dunhuang.

<sup>3</sup>For information regarding this international trade studied from the perspective of the Roman Empire, see Gary K. Young, *Rome's Eastern Trade: International Commerce and Imperial Policy, 31 BC-AD 305* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>This number is probably an estimation by Zhang Qian and was recorded by Sima Qian. Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 2: 267.

<sup>5</sup>The excavations of Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan revealed a wealth of golden ornaments and other valuable goods that were buried with the Kushan rulers. See Victor Sardin, *The Golden Hoard of Bactria* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, and Lemingrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>For an analysis of the relationship between the theological development of Mahayana Buddhism and the Silk Road trade, see Xinnu Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, AD 1-600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 88-102.

<sup>7</sup>For a good survey of Buddhist cave monasteries and their engagement in trade, see Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Lerner, eds., *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, with the Asia Society, 2001).

<sup>8</sup>For a comprehensive analysis of the Byzantine silk industry and its political significance, see R. S. Lopez, "Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire," *Speculum* 20 (1945): 1-43.

<sup>9</sup>Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History*, trans. James Ward (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), is a collection of essays on recent discoveries of Sogdian graves and remains in China.

<sup>10</sup>Hugh Kennedy describes the splendid court decoration when the caliph Muqtadir received a delegation from Constantinople in 917. See *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2005), 152-56.

<sup>11</sup>For more technical details about Arab dhows and seafaring, see George Fadio Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, rev. and expanded by John Carswell (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

## 7

## Muslim Baghdad in the Eurasian Market, Ninth–Eleventh Centuries

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SULAYMAN AL-TAJIR AND OTHERS

### *An Account of China and India*

ca. 851

*In the ninth-century Indian Ocean trading world, Siraf, a port on the Persian Gulf, was one place where sailors and traders gathered around a lamp in an inn and told stories about what they had seen or heard on their journeys. Sometime around 851, Sulayman al-Tajir, whose cousin was the governor of Siraf, and some of his fellow Arab merchants compiled an account about China and India. Their stories, like all those collected by sailors and merchants, represented firsthand information as well as fantasies heard from others. Whatever the truth of their stories, they noticed that the Chinese ate many of the same fruits and vegetables that people in their own homeland enjoyed. They were much impressed by the abundance of silk clothing in China and by the Chinese beverage tea. They reported the way Chinese produced porcelain—yet to become China's top export. The traders did not object to government regulations and tariffs. They were law-abiding foreigners who applied for and obtained travel documents and trading permits, just as their predecessors had done centuries before during the Han dynasty. How accurate was the commercial information obtained by the Arab maritime traders?*

Sulaymān al-Tājir and Others, *An Account of China and India*, in *Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China*, trans. S. Maqbul Ahmad (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1989), 41–42, 46, 49–50.

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The dress of the people of China, young and old, consists of silk during winter as well as summer. As for the kings they wear fine silk. Those below them [wear] what they can afford. In winter, they wear two, three, four, five and even more trousers according to what they can afford. Their objects [*sic*] is to keep the lower parts [of their body] warm due to intense cold which they fear. But in summer they wear a single silk shirt or something like that. They do not wear turbans.

Their food consists of rice, and sometimes they cook stew, which they pour over the rice and then eat it. The members of royal houses eat wheat bread and meat of all the animals and pork and [meat] of other [animals]. Among the fruits they have apple, peach, citron, pomegranate, quince, pear, banana, sugar-cane, melon, fig, grape, cucumber, glossy cucumber, crab-apple, walnut, almond, hazel-nut, pistachio, plum, apricot, sorb and coconut. They do not have in their country many date-palms except a [solitary] date-palm tree in the house of one of them. Their drink consists of the intoxicating drink prepared from rice. They do not have wine in their country, nor is it exported to them. They neither know about it, nor do they drink it. It is from rice that vinegar, the intoxicating wine, sweet-meat and things resembling them are prepared. . . .

They [the Chinese] conduct their transactions in cowries,<sup>1</sup> and their treasures are similar to those of the other kings. None of the kings except these has cowries which form the special currency of the land. They also have gold, silver, pearls, brocade and silk: all these they possess in abundance except that these form their property while the cowries are the currency. Their imports consist of ivory, incense, [and] ingots of copper. . . . They possess numerous beasts of burden; they do not have the Arabian horse but other [breeds]; they have donkeys and the two-humped camels in plenty. They have excellent cohesive green clay out of which they manufacture goblets as thin as the flasks, through which the sparkle of the water can be seen. . . . When the sailors enter [China] from the sea, the Chinese hold their goods and store them in godowns,<sup>2</sup> and leave them under the custody of police for six months till the next batch of sailors come in. Then, 3/10th of the goods is taken [as duty] and remaining part is restored to the merchants. Then, whatever the government wishes to take, [it] buys at the highest price and pays the amount immediately, and in this transaction they do not act unjustly. . . . Among the important sources of revenue of the king are salt and an herb which they mix in hot water and then drink. It [the hot drink]

<sup>1</sup> Small copper coins issued by the Chinese government.  
<sup>2</sup> Warehouses.

is sold in every town at a very high price. . . . It is more leaty than the green trefoil and slightly more perfumed, and has a soury taste. [For preparing it] they boil water and then sprinkle the leaves over it. It is a cure for them for everything. All that goes into the treasury consists of the poll-tax, salt and this herb. . . .

Anyone intending to travel from one place to the other has to have two documents: one from the king and the other from the eunuch. The royal document is meant for the journey and has the name of the person, names of the persons accompanying him, his age, age of his companion, and the name of his tribe [entered] in it. It is incumbent upon everyone living in China whether they be its inhabitants, Arabs or anyone else to trace back their origin to something for identification. As for the document issued by the eunuch, it contains a description of the money and the merchandise carried by the traveller. This is because along their route there are armed guards who examine the two documents. So, when anyone reaches them, they write: "So and so son of so and so, belonging to such and such [a tribe], reached us on such and such a day, such and such a month, and such and such a year, and he had such and such things with him." This is done so that the money or the merchandise of the person does not get lost; if it does or if the person dies, it becomes known how it is lost and it is returned to him or to his descendants after him.

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## MAS'UDI

*The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*

ca. 947

*Mas'udi (896–956) was born in Baghdad, the capital of Abbasid Caliphate, and died in Egypt. He wrote about his extensive travels in the Islamic world, the Byzantine Empire, and India, and his early years in Baghdad also enabled him to write a candid history of Abbasid court life. The*

Mas'udi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, trans. and ed. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul, 1989), 228–29.

*Following account records how Mu'tasim, a younger son of Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809), started to recruit Turkish slaves from Central Asia to strengthen his power even before he became caliph in 833. These Turks came from a steppe background where nomadic horsemen flourished, and they were loyal and well-trained soldiers. Hoping this alien military force could be imposed on the various peoples within the well-established Islamic empire, Mu'tasim treated them well and dressed them in bright silk brocade to distinguish them from the regular army. What does this account reveal about imperial expansion?*

Mu'tasim sought out Turks and had them bought by his freedmen. He thus gathered together a troop of 4,000, whom he dressed in brocade with gilded belts and ornaments, distinguishing them by their costume from the rest of the army. He also formed for his service a corps made up of soldiers from the two districts of Egypt, the district of Yemen and that of Qais, and he called them the Maghribis—"Westerners." He also fitted out men from Khurasan and in particular Fergana and Ushrusana. These Turks soon made up a numerous army. They subjected the inhabitants of Baghdad to great annoyance, riding their horses at full gallop through the middle of the markets and doing much harm to the infirm and to children. On several occasions the people took vengeance and killed more than one horseman who had knocked over a woman, an old man, a child or someone blind.

Mu'tasim therefore decided to move the Turks away from his capital and to settle them on a great plain. He encamped first at Baradan, four parasangs from Baghdad, but finding this place neither sufficiently healthy, nor yet sufficiently large, he continued to move about, exploring different areas along the Tigris and elsewhere. In this way, he came to a place named Qatul, the climate of which pleased him. There was a village there inhabited by the Jaramiqa—a Persian tribe which had settled near Mosul during the early years of Islam—and by Nabateans. It stood on the edge of the Qatul Canal, which is one of the canals which flows out of the Tigris. He built a palace and soon the people of Baghdad, responding to his summons, emigrated there, leaving the capital almost abandoned. It is to this event that one of the "vagabond" poets refers in the piece in which he reproaches Mu'tasim for his desertion of his subjects, saying:

Oh you who live in Qatul in the midst of the Jaramiqa,  
You have left none in Baghdad but arrogant noblemen.

Meanwhile, the troops which had followed the Caliph were suffering cruelly from the cold of that place. The earth was hard and made construction work difficult. One of the soldiers in his suite said on this subject:

They told us Qatib would be our winter encampment,  
But we count on the intervention of God, our master,  
Men make their plans, but each day  
God causes some new disaster to take place.

Discouraged by the drawbacks of the place and the difficulties of building there, Mu'tasim left it and, continuing his search, reached Samarra. At this place, there was an old Christian monastery. The Caliph asked one of the monks who lived there what the place was called. He answered:

"Samarra."

"And what does Samarra mean?" went on the Caliph.

"We find it given," said the monk, "in our ancient books and in the traditions of the past, as meaning the city of Shem, the son of Noah."

"What country is it and of which province is it a part?"

"It is of the country of al-T'hran, to which it belongs."

Mu'tasim examined the countryside carefully. Vast plains unfolded before his eyes. The air was healthy, the soil fertile. Struck by these advantages and the mildness of the climate, he stopped there for three days, which he spent hunting. He noticed that his appetite was stronger and that he ate more than usual, which he did not fail to attribute to the effect of the climate and the soil and water. He liked it. Then, summoning the people from the monastery, he bought their land for 4,000 dinars. He chose a site to build his palace and the foundations were laid. This is the quarter of Samarra, known as Wazirya, and hence the name "Waziri" given to a quality of fig which is superior to any other, thanks to its sweetness, the smoothness of its flesh and the smallness of its seeds. Neither the figs of Syria, nor those of Hulwan can be compared to this kind.

The building began to rise. He had masons, workmen and craftsmen come from every country, and obtained seedlings and young trees from all around. He distributed land to the Turks in different areas and gave them as neighbours soldiers originally from Fergana, Ushrusana and the cities of Khurasan, always bearing in mind the relative geographical positions of their native lands. Ashnas, the Turk, and his companions were given a grant of the area known as Karh Samarra and some of the

men from Fergana were established in the quarters known as al-Umari and al-Jisir—the Bridge.

The plan of the city was laid out. The different estates, quarters and roads were marked. Each trade and each branch of commerce had its separate market. Everyone began to build his house. Things were going up on every side—houses and solidly built palaces. Agriculture flourished and canals leading from the Tigris and other water courses were dug. When people learned that a new capital was being built, they came crowding in, bringing with them every kind of merchandise and the vast quantities of provisions necessary for the existence of men and animals. Life became rich and easy. Equity, justice and prosperity spread through the land.

The Caliph Mu'tasim began the works we have just described in 221 AH/836 AD.

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*Book of Gifts and Rarities**Eleventh Century*

*This eleventh-century manuscript by an unknown author who lived in the port city of Timnis in Egypt between ca. 1052 and 1071 came to light in the fifteenth century, when it was translated by Ahmad ibn al-Rashid Ibn al-Zubayr. According to this manuscript, the author witnessed the exchange of gifts between the Fatimid Caliphate and the Byzantines and had conversations with officials of various levels in various countries about gifts and rare goods in Islamic history. He obviously also collected archives and records about these events. This passage is an account by the vizier (prime minister) of the treasures of Harun al-Rashid, the most powerful ruler of the Abbasid Caliphate when he died in 809. In the stories of the Arabian Nights, Caliph Harun al-Rashid was a legendary figure who amassed great wealth by presiding over an empire whose trade routes encompassed much of Africa and Eurasia. What did his treasures consist of, and how did they reflect the geographic extent of the Abbasid Caliphate?*

*Ibn al-Zubayr, Kitab al-Dhakhair wa'l-Tuhaf, trans. Chada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi, as Book of Gifts and Rarities (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 207–8.*

Al-Fadl b. al-Rabi' says,

When, in the year 193 [809], al-Amin assumed the caliphate in succession to his father Harun al-Rashid, he ordered me to count the contents of the treasures with respect to clothing, furnishings, vessels, and equipment. I brought in the scribes and the treasury keepers and kept on counting for four months. I had never imagined that the treasures of the caliphate could contain all the things I oversaw [there]! Then I ordered them to write a statement for each category. The treasures contained [the following articles]:

Four thousand long outer garments [with open front and wide sleeves] made of richly colored fabric; four thousand long outer garments [with open front and long sleeves] made of pure silk lined with sable fur, desert-fox fur, and other kinds of soft hair; ten thousand knee-length closed shirts [with round opening and ample sleeves], along with undergarments; ten thousand long [wide closed] garments; two thousand drawers made of all types of fabric; four thousand turbans; one thousand hooded mantles [worn over the shoulders]; one thousand wraps [not cut or sewn] in various fabrics; five thousand kerchiefs of various kinds; five hundred velvet garments; one hundred thousand *mithqals*<sup>2</sup> of musk; one hundred thousand vessels of ambergris; one thousand baskets of Indian aloeswood; one thousand vessels of baked clay full of costly [strong mixed] scents; many kinds of perfume; precious stones that were valued by the jewelers at four million five hundred thousand dinars;<sup>3</sup> one thousand rings [set with] precious stones; one thousand Armenian carpets; four thousand curtains; five thousand cushions; five thousand pillows; fifteen hundred pile-rugs of pure silk; 100 decorative [pure silk rugs to be placed over] carpets; one thousand cushions and pillows of pure silk; 300 Maysan carpets; one thousand Darabjirdi carpets; one thousand brocade cushions; one thousand cushions of striped pure silk; one thousand pure silk curtains; three hundred brocade curtains; five hundred Tabari carpets; one thousand Tabari cushions; one thousand small arm bolsters; one thousand pillows; one thousand basins [of metal]; one thousand ewers; three hundred braziers; one thousand candlesticks [or candelabra]; two thousand [metalwork] articles in all types of bronze; one thousand [gold or silver] girdles; ten thousand adorned swords; fifty thousand swords for the Shakiriyah<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Al-Fadl b. al-Rabi' (755-824), chamberlain of Caliph Harun al-Rashid before becoming his vizier, or chief minister. [Translator's note.]

<sup>2</sup> A weight that varied from country to country, but in the range of 4.3-4.7 grams.

<sup>3</sup> Gold coins, each about 4.2 grams, the currency of the Abbasids.

<sup>4</sup> Bodyguards.

and the slave soldiers; one hundred fifty thousand spears; one hundred thousand bows; one thousand [pieces of] special plate armor; fifty thousand [pieces of] ordinary plate armor; ten thousand [egg-shaped] helmets; twenty thousand coats of mail; one hundred fifty thousand shields; four thousand special saddles; 30,000 ordinary saddles; four thousand pairs of high boots, most of them lined with sable and desert fox fur, or other kinds of fur. Inside each boot there was a knife and kerchief; four thousand pairs of socks; four thousand [ceremonial] tents with their equipment; and one hundred fifty thousand camping tents.



## 8

## Trade Networks from the Mediterranean to the South China Sea, Tenth-Thirteenth Centuries

28

CAPTAIN BUZURG IBN SHAHRIYAR

### *The Book of the Wonders of India*

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*Captain Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar from Ramhormuz, in the Persian province of Khuzistan, was a shipmaster who lived in the port of Siraf on the Persian Gulf and collected "yarns"—the stories sailors spread from port to port when they gathered in inns near the harbor where their ships were anchored. This story from his collection tells of a Jewish trader called Ishaq who made a fortune while trading in China and India but aroused much jealousy in merchant circles, which almost cost him his life. It reveals the goods, the profits, and the rivalries among the merchants in the Indian Ocean trade. How did Arabs and Jews cooperate and compete in the Indian Ocean trade?*

Among curious stories about seafaring merchants, travellers and men who have made their fortunes at sea, is that of Ishaq b. Yahuda.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> His name, the biblical Isaac, is pronounced in Arabic in two syllables as Ishaq. [Translator's note.]

Captain Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar: *The Book of the Wonders of India*, ed. and trans. G. S. P. Preenan-Greenville (London and the Hague: East-West Publications, 1981), 2-64.

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was a man who earned his living among brokers in Oman. Following a dispute with a Jew, he left Oman and went to India. He had no more than about 200 dinars. After thirty years, during which no one had news of him, he came back to Oman in 300/912. I learnt from several of my seafaring friends that he came from China on a ship that was his own, with all it contained. To avoid customs and the tax of one-tenth, he made an arrangement with the ruler of Oman, Ahmad b. Hilal, for more than one million dirhams. On a single occasion, he sold Ahmad b. Marwan 100,000 mithqals<sup>2</sup> of musk of top quality. The purchaser reckoned it was all he had. He sold the same man 40,000 dinars<sup>3</sup> worth of material, and then did a 20,000 dinar deal with another man. At Ahmad b. Marwan's request, Ishaq agreed to a discount of a silver dirham<sup>4</sup> per mithqal, and this amounted to 100,000 dirhams.

His enormous fortune was the talk of the country, and aroused jealousy. An evil man, who had not been able to get out of Ishaq what he wanted, went to Baghdad to see the vizier, Ali b. Muhammad b. Furat. He did all he could to ruin the Jew's reputation, but the vizier paid no attention. Then the man wormed his way into the confidence of an evil man at the court of [the Caliph] al-Muqtadir-billah. He pretended to give him information, and gave him his own account of the Jew's history. The man, said he, had left Oman without anything, and had come back with a ship loaded with musk worth a million dinars, and silk and porcelain worth the same, and an equal amount in jewels and stones, as well as many rarities from China of incalculable value. He was a childless old man, he added. Ahmad b. Hilal had received 500,000 dinars worth of goods from him.

All this was told to al-Muqtadir, who found it very surprising, and immediately sent one of his black eunuchs, called Fulful<sup>5</sup> with thirty servants, bearing a message for Ahmad b. Hilal in Oman, ordering him to hand over the Jew to the eunuch, and to send him to himself. When the eunuch got to Oman, and Ahmad b. Hilal learnt the Caliph's orders, he had the Jew arrested, but at the same time promised to get him out of the affair for a substantial sum that he asked for himself. Then he let the merchants know secretly that the Jew's arrest was prejudicial to them, to all foreigners, and to all local business men, if they were to be at the

<sup>2</sup> A weight that varied from country to country, but in the range of 4.3-4.7 grams.

<sup>3</sup> Gold coins, each about 4.2 grams, the currency of the Abbasids.

<sup>4</sup> Silver coins, each about 2.7 grams, the currency of the Abbasids.

<sup>5</sup> This is a nickname, Pepper. [Translator's note.]

whim of arbitrary power and the jealousy of the poor and the wicked. Thereon the markets shut. The townsfolk and foreigners signed petitions, complaining that, after the Jew's arrest, vessels would no longer land in Oman, that merchants would leave, that they would advise one another not to frequent the coasts of Iraq, and that there was no longer any security for property. Oman, they added, was a town where there were many very wealthy merchants, but that they had no other guarantee of their security than the justice of the Commander of the Faithful and his Amir, their solicitude for merchants, and their protection against envious and wicked men.

The merchants rioted in the town, crying out against Ahmad b. Hlial. They revolted, so much that the eunuch Fulful and his companions got ready to go and make their farewells. Ahmad b. Hlial wrote to the Caliph, describing what had happened, how the merchants had drawn up their vessels at the quays, and were reloading them to carry their goods away, and that resident business men were upset, saying:

We shall be deprived of our living when ships no longer come here, because Oman is a town where men get everything from the sea. If small men among us are treated like this, it will be worse for the great. Sultans are like a fire that devours everything it touches. We cannot resist it, and it is much better to go away.

The eunuch and his men took 2,000 dinars from the Jew and went away. The Jew was outraged, and made haste to get together all he possessed. He fitted out a ship, and went back to China without leaving a single dirham behind in Oman. At Sarira the ruler asked him for 20,000 dinars transit dues, to let him carry on with his voyage to China. The Jew declined to give anything. The ruler sent men to assassinate him by night, and took his ship and all his property.

Ishaq had lived for three years in Oman. Men who saw him have told me personally that they had seen a black porcelain vase that he had given Ahmad b. Hlial as a present. It had a cover that sparkled like gold.

What is in that vase? Asked Ahmad.

A dish of *sikhsaj* [?] that I cooked for you in China, said the Jew.

*Sikhsaj* cooked in China! Two years ago! It must be in a fine state.

He took the cover off the vase, and there were golden fish with ruby eyes, surrounded by musk of the first quality. The contents of the vase were worth 50,000 dinars.

### *Inscription on a Cliff in the Port of Quanzhou*

1183

*During the Song dynasty (960-1279) and the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), Quanzhou was the most important port for China's international trade. Local government officials were responsible for protecting commercial vessels coming in and going out of the port. One of their tasks was to perform the annual ritual that called for winds favorable for sailing. The following is a record of one such ritual inscribed on a cliff overlooking the harbor. How did the ritual of calling winds benefit Song China's overseas trade?*

In the tenth year of the Chunxi era, the year of Zhaoyan Danyu, the year of Guimao,<sup>1</sup> on the twenty-fourth day of the leap month, Sima Juntong the governor, Zhao Zhaio the officer of rites, Lin Shao the customs officer, and Han Jun the military commander, for the purpose of calling the winds to ensure safe sailings of the ships, arrived at Yanfusi Monastery. At the shrine of the "King of Reaching Faraway Lands and Bringing Profit and Welfare to a Vast Population," the rituals were performed. Afterward, while waiting for the tides to change so that they could return home, they visited all the scenic spots and took a brief rest in the Hall of Huaigutang.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The author of the inscription uses three calendrical ways to mark the year, which is 1183.

<sup>2</sup>The hall in memory of ancient times.

IBN JUBAYR

*The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*

ca. 1185

*Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), a Muslim scholar born in Valencia, Spain, was a secretary to the governor of the Islamic Moorish kingdom of Grenada. In 1183 he began a pilgrimage to Mecca and traveled for two years, reaching Baghdad as well as many cities on or near the Mediterranean coast, including the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. In this passage from his journal of his travels, he observes that the hostilities between the Christian Crusaders of Western Europe and the Muslim powers in the Holy Lands did not inhibit trade. Why did the Crusaders and Muslim rulers let traders cross the borders to trade?*

Any stranger in these parts whom God has rendered fit for solitude may, if he wishes, attach himself to a farm and live there the pleasantest life with the most contented mind. Bread in plenty will be given to him by the people of the farm, and he may engage himself in the duties of an imam<sup>1</sup> or in teaching, or what he will, and when he is wearied of the place, he may remove to another farm, or climb Mount Lebanon or Mount Judi and there find the saintly hermits who nothing seek but to please Great and Glorious God, and remain with them so long as he wishes, and then go where he wills. It is strange how the Christians round Mount Lebanon, when they see any Muslim hermits, bring them food and treat them kindly, saying that these men are dedicated to Great and Glorious God and that they should therefore share with them. This mountain is one of the most fertile in the world, having all kinds of fruits, running waters, and ample shade, and rarely is it without a hermit or an ascetic. And if the Christians treat the opponents of their religion in this fashion, what think you of the treatment that the Muslims give each other?

<sup>1</sup> A Muslim leader for prayer, or an authority on scholarship.

Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr, 1183–1185*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 300–301.

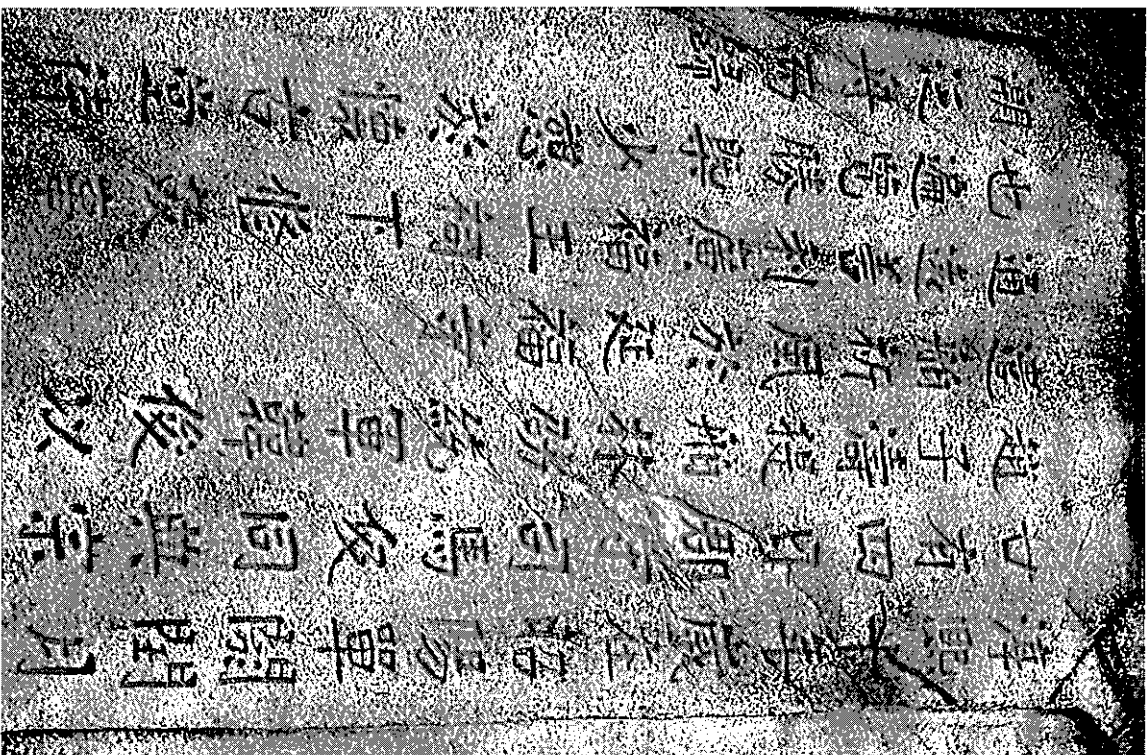


Figure 4. Inscription on a Cliff in the Port of Quanzhou, 1183

One of the astonishing things that is talked of is that through the fires of discord burn between the two parties, Muslim and Christian, two armies of them may meet and dispose themselves in battle array, and yet Muslim and Christian travellers will come and go between them without interference. In this connection we saw at this time, that is the month of Jumada 1-Ula, the departure of Saladin<sup>2</sup> with all the Muslims troops to lay siege to the fortress of Kerak, one of the greatest of the Christian strongholds lying astride the Hejaz road and hindering the overland passage of the Muslims. Between it and Jerusalem lies a day's journey or a little more. It occupies the choicest part of the land in Palestine, and has a very wide dominion with continuous settlements, it being said that the number of villages reaches four hundred. This Sultan invested it, and put it to sore straits, and long the siege lasted, but still the caravans passed successively from Egypt to Damascus, going through the lands of the Franks without impediment from them. In the same way the Muslims continuously journeyed from Damascus to Acre (through Frankish territory), and likewise not one of the Christian merchants was stopped or hindered (in Muslim territories).

The Christians impose a tax on the Muslims in their land which gives them full security; and likewise the Christian merchants pay a tax upon their goods in Muslim lands. Agreement exists between them, and there is equal treatment in all cases. The soldiers engage themselves in their war, while the people are at peace and the world goes to him who conquers. Such is the usage in war of the people of these lands; and in the dispute existing between the Muslim Emirs and their kings it is the same, the subjects and the merchants interfering not. Security never leaves them in any circumstance, neither in peace nor in war. The state of these countries in this regard is truly more astonishing than our story can fully convey. May God by His favour exalt the word of Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Saladin (1137?-1193) was a Muslim warrior, the great opponent of the Crusaders.

### *Letter from a Jewish Trader in India to His Wife in Cairo*

1204

*This personal letter reveals the tensions and misunderstandings that could arise in families long separated by the necessities of foreign trade. The translator observes that "the letter was not sent, but reached Fustat nonetheless, which can only mean that the writer succeeded in coming home. I do not believe that he would have returned to Fustat had his wife accepted the reputation. He then would have stayed in Aden and married there. Thus the long years of suffering had not been in vain. The India traveler was finally united with his wife." The letter also reveals financial arrangements and relationships among traders and within a trading family. How did the Indian Ocean trade impact Jewish traders' family life?*

#### **Escape of the Family from the Plague**

Would I try to describe the extent of my feelings of longing and yearning for you all the time, my letter would become too long and the words too many. But He who knows the secrets of the heart has the might to bring about relief for each of us by uniting us in joy.

Your precious letters have arrived! I have read and scrutinized them, and was happy to learn from them that you are well and healthy and that you have escaped from those great terrors, the like of which have not been experienced for many generations.<sup>1</sup> Praise be to God for your deliverance and for granting you respite until you might be recompensed in a measure commensurate with your sufferings.

<sup>1</sup> There were both famine and plague in Egypt in 1202-1203. This letter is dated 1204.

*Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, trans. and ed. S. D. Goitein (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 220-26.

### The Dedicated Husband

In your letters you alternately rebuke and offend me or put me to shame and use harsh words all the time.<sup>2</sup> I have not deserved any of this. I swear by God, I do not believe that the heart of anyone traveling away from his wife has remained like mine, all the time and during all the years—from the moment of our separation to the very hour of writing this letter—so constantly thinking of you and yearning after you and regretting to be unable to provide you with what I so much desire: your legal rights on every Sabbath<sup>3</sup> and holiday, and to fulfill all your wishes, great and small, with regard to dresses or food or anything else. And you write about me as if I had forgotten you and would not remember you had it not been for your rebukes, and as if, had you not warned me that the public would reprove me, I would not have thought of you. Put this out of your mind and do not impute such things to me. And if what you think or say about my dedication to you is the product of your mind, believing that words of rebuke will increase my yearning—no, in such a way God will not let me reach the fulfillment of my hope, although in my heart there is twice as much as I am able to write. But he is able to have us both reach compensation for our sufferings and then, when we shall be saved, we shall remember in what situation we are now.

### Travel beyond the Coromandel Coast

You rebuke me with regard to the ambergris.<sup>4</sup> You poor ones!!! Had you known how much trouble and expenses I have incurred to get this ambergris for you, you would have said: there is nothing like it in the world. This is the story: After I was resurrected from the dead and had lost all that I carried with me I took a loan of [. . .] dinars and traveled

<sup>2</sup>This seems to show that the letters had been written by the trader's wife herself. In a letter dictated to a clerk or a relative she would not have gone to such length. [Translator's note.]

<sup>3</sup>A Jewish scholar is bound by law to visit his wife once a week, namely on the night of the Sabbath, that is, Friday night (Rahmad Bah, Ketubot 62b). For other occupations other rules are set, but our Indian trader and his wife clearly regarded themselves as belonging to the learned class. [Translator's note.]

<sup>4</sup>A highly valued perfume and medicine, one variety coming from the Indian Ocean and one from the Atlantic. The wife was not satisfied with the quality or quantity of the ambergris sent. [Translator's note.]

to countries beyond al-Ma'bar.<sup>5</sup> I checked my accounts<sup>6</sup> and found [?] with "the decimals."<sup>7</sup> I took them and paid to one of our coreligionists who traveled back from al-Ma'bar to Aden. . . . and for it he bought for you. . . . [Three lines and the beginning of the words written in the margin damaged.]

### Drunk But Pious

This was my way of life from the moment I left you until I arrived in Aden (and from there to India) and from India back to Aden.<sup>8</sup> Day and night I was constantly drinking, not of my free will,<sup>9</sup> but I conducted myself in an exemplary way<sup>10</sup> and if anyone poked fun in foul speech in my presence, I became furious with him, until he became silent, he and others. I constantly fulfilled what God knows, and cured my soul by fasting during the days and praying during the nights. The congregations in Aden and in India often asked me to lead them in prayer, and I am regarded by them and regard myself as a pious man.

[Here begins the reverse side; the twenty-four first lines are damaged beyond repair. *Madmun*, meaning no doubt *Madmun b. David* the trustee of the merchants in Aden, and a shipment of clove are mentioned.—Translator's note.]

### As to Divorce—The Choice Is Left to the Wife

Now in one of your letters you adjure me to set you free, then letters arrived from the old man<sup>11</sup> saying the same. Later Ma'ani ["Eloquent"] b. al-Dajaji ["Seller of Fowl"] met me and told me that you came to his house before he set out on his travel. You had given him nutmeg paste as a collateral on a loan of 100 dirhems, but he released 20 dirhems to

<sup>5</sup>This is the Coromandel coast of southeastern India. Very few of the thousand or so Jewish India travelers mentioned in the Geniza went as far as the Coromandel coast, but beyond it next to none. Our traveler had to take this exceptional trouble in order to replace his losses. [Translator's note.]

<sup>6</sup>An Arab proverb says: "When a Jew is broke, he checks his grandfather's old accounts," meaning that he always finds someone owing him something. This seems to be the situation alluded to here. [Translator's note.]

<sup>7</sup>Arabic *deqat*. A counting machine, it seems, derived from Greek *deka*, ten. [Translator's note.]

<sup>8</sup>It seems that our letter was written there. [Translator's note.]

<sup>9</sup>But because of the grief over the separation from his beloved wife. [Translator's note.]

<sup>10</sup>No slave girls or whores. [Translator's note.]

<sup>11</sup>Her late father. [Translator's note.]

you. Please let me know whether this is correct, in which case I shall return this sum to him. He reported also that you had asked him to return to you letters which your late father—may God have mercy on him—had sent with him, but he had said to you: "I have already packed them away on the boat."<sup>12</sup> Then you said that these letters were not written with your consent and you asked him not to deliver them to me. On this Ma'ani had replied: The judge might have meanwhile sent a message demanding something from the elder,<sup>13</sup> in which case the delivery of these letters might be useful to him.

Now, if this<sup>14</sup> is your wish, I cannot blame you. For the waiting has been long. And I do not know whether the Creator will grant relief immediately so that I can come home, or whether matters will take time, for I cannot come home with nothing. Therefore I resolved to issue a writ which sets you free.<sup>15</sup> Now the matter is in your hand. If you wish separation from me, accept *the bill of repudiation* and you are free. But if this is not your decision and not your desire, do not lose these long years of waiting: perhaps relief is at hand and you will regret at a time when regret will be of no avail.

And please do not blame me, for I never neglected you from the time when those things happened and made an effort to save you and me from people talking and impairing my honor. The refusal<sup>16</sup> was on your side, not on mine. I do not know whether this<sup>17</sup> is your decision or that of someone else, but after all this, please do not say, you or someone else: this<sup>18</sup> is our reward from him and recompense. All day long I have a lonely heart and am pained by our separation. I feel that pain while writing these lines. But the choice is with you; the decision is in your hand: if you wish to carry the matter through, do so; if you wish to leave things as they are, do so. But do not act after the first impulse. Ask the advice of good people and act as you think will be the best for you. May God inspire you with the right decision.

<sup>12</sup> From Cairo-Fustat up to Qus one traveled on the Nile. [Translator's note.]

<sup>13</sup> The writer of our letter. [Translator's note.]

<sup>14</sup> Meaning a divorce. [Translator's note.]

<sup>15</sup> A conditional bill of repudiation, which becomes valid as soon as she agrees.

[Translator's note.]

<sup>16</sup> To accept a divorce offered by him before when his absence from home became too protracted. [Translator's note.]

<sup>17</sup> Demanding a divorce. [Translator's note.]

<sup>18</sup> The dispatch of the conditional bill of repudiation. [Translator's note.]

### Greetings, Errands, Gifts

[The concluding part is very much damaged. It began in the margin, much of which is lost, continued in the main part of the page and returned to the margin, but was never completed. Clearly the letter was not dispatched, see also the introduction. Only continuous sentences are translated.—Translator's note.]

[Best regards to my sister] and her husband, the illustrious elder Abu 'I-Fada'il, the scholar, to Ma'ani, the scholar [?], and his son. I have exerted myself for him to a degree that only God knows. The elder Abu 'I-Khayr ["Mr. Good"] agreed to pay him 10 mithqals [Egyptian dinars], which the elder Abu 'I-Makarim ["Noble Character"] will deliver to him.<sup>19</sup> Convey my greetings to the elder Abu Ishaq, the son of your paternal uncle, to his mother, to the elder Abu 'Imran and his children, to [..] the daughter of your paternal uncle, and to all those whom you know, my most sincere regards.

I sent you 7½ mann of nutmeg, which is better than anything found in the Karim<sup>20</sup> and worth more than other sorts of it by 1 dinar, 11 mann of good galingale;<sup>21</sup> two futa cloths for the children; 2½ ofcelandine and 25 of odoriferous wood; fourteen pieces in number.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Probably a case of inheritance of a merchant who had died in Aden. Abu 'I-Khayr was in Aden and Abu 'I-Makarim in Cairo-Fustat. [Translator's note.]

<sup>20</sup> The goods going from India to the West. [Translator's note.]

<sup>21</sup> Arabic *khawlati*, from which the English word is derived; a plant from the ginger family serving as an aphrodisiac or as a constituent in narcotics. [Translator's note.]

<sup>22</sup> These quantities of costly Oriental products were not really "gifts," but destined to be sold and to serve for the upkeep of the family. [Translator's note.]

32

ZHAO RUIKUO

*Records concerning Foreign Countries*

1225

Zhao Rukuo (1170-1231) wrote a book about foreign countries when he was the administrator of overseas trade for Fujian Province. Quanzhou, the most important port in the province, was under his direct supervision, and there he gathered information from both Chinese and foreign traders and sailors. In this passage he writes about Hainan, China's second largest island and the southern frontier of its imperial power since the Han dynasty. The island supplied tropical goods to the Chinese mainland. People sailing from Hainan to Quanzhou used the compass to guide them. The compass had been invented in China many centuries before for use in locating auspicious sites for residences and burials. By the thirteenth century, it was also used to guide navigation on the long and complicated voyages of international trade. In this account, notice the local products that had now entered the international market.

During Han times Hainan was called Zhuya and Dar'er. During the military campaign in the southern Yue region, Emperor Wudi of the Han sent an expedition that left from Xuwen Peninsula and crossed the strait in order to occupy the island. . . . From the fifth year of the Zhenyuan era<sup>1</sup> to the present, Qiong has been the headquarters of the local government.

A port called Dijiaochang on the Xuwen Peninsula<sup>2</sup> faces Qiong on Hainan, which lies about 360 li<sup>3</sup> across the sea. It takes half a day to sail across the strait with a good wind. A location called Sanheilü<sup>4</sup> in the middle of the route is so dangerous that the sailors raise their hands to

<sup>1</sup> 1789.

<sup>2</sup> On the mainland.

<sup>3</sup> About one hundred miles.

<sup>4</sup> Literally, the meeting of three currents.

Zhao Rukuo, *Zhu Fan Zhi* [Records concerning Foreign Countries], ed. Yang Bowen (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2000), 216. Translated by Xinru Liu.

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congratulate each other if they do not run into any storms. After reaching Jiyang, one realizes that one is on the [Southern] Ocean, and there are no more landmarks to guide the way. In the ocean there are islands called Wuli, Sumi, and Jilang. Looking farther south, there is Champa,<sup>5</sup> toward the west there is Zhenla,<sup>6</sup> and toward the east there are vast coral reefs.<sup>7</sup> Sailing on the ocean one sees no horizon, since the colors of the sky and the water merge together. The ships that come and go on the ocean have no means of guidance except for the directions given by the needle of the compass. Sailors watch the compass day and night without pause, since the smallest negligence could cost them their lives.

The four prefectures with eleven counties under them are subject to the administration of the Western Circuit of Guangnan. The administrative regions circle around Limu Mountain, where the barbarian Li people dwell. Some Li people are savages, and some are more civilized. Many parts of their land are not claimed, and the limited rice crops are not enough to feed the population. In order to get more food to feed themselves, they plant much taro and other cereal for making porridge. Therefore it is common for the people to trade all kinds of fragrant materials to make a living. Local products include:

Fragrance wood from agallocha<sup>8</sup>  
 Fragrance made from *Ponglái* [?]  
 Fragrance made from *Zhegunan* [?]  
*Zhanrang*<sup>9</sup>  
*Shengxiang*<sup>10</sup>  
 Clover  
 Areca or betel nut  
 Coconut  
 Kapok, or tree cotton  
 Rammie  
 Paper made with mulberry bark  
 Red and white rattan  
 Multicolored rough cloth  
 Lemons  
 Dark cassia wood

<sup>5</sup> The central and southern areas of modern Vietnam.

<sup>6</sup> Cambodia.

<sup>7</sup> The modern Xisha and Nansha archipelagos in the South China Sea.

<sup>8</sup> *Chenxiang* in the Chinese record.

<sup>9</sup> A lower quality of *chenxiang*.

<sup>10</sup> Another variety of *chenxiang*.

*Huaili* wood<sup>11</sup>  
 Oil of sea plum [?]  
 Agar plant<sup>12</sup>  
 Sea lacquer [?]  
 Pepper  
 Galangal<sup>13</sup>  
 Fish air bladder  
 Yellow wax  
 Stone crab  
 Etc.

All these goods are obtained from the communities of the Li people. Other people who live nearby buy these items from the Li with salt, iron, fish, and rice, and then trade these regional goods to the [long-distance] traders who come into their ports. Merchant ships from Quanzhou carry liquor, rice, wheat flour, gauze silk, lacquerware, porcelain ware, and so forth to Hainan in order to trade for the tropical goods there. These ships depart China at the end of the year or during the first month of the new year, and return around the fifth or sixth month of the year. If a ship has loaded fresh betel nuts, it sails back north before the others in order to arrive in the fourth month of the year.

<sup>11</sup> *Dalbergia hainanensis*, a fragrant wood.

<sup>12</sup> A marine algae.

<sup>13</sup> A tropical ginger, one of the products the Jewish trader traveled to southern India to obtain. See Document 31, note 21.

## 33

## MARCO POLO

*The Travels of Marco Polo, the Venetian*

ca. 1298

*Marco Polo (ca. 1254–1324) is famous in modern times, but when stories of his travels from Venice to the court of Kubilai Khan in China were recorded and compiled into a book by Rusticello of Pisa, a fellow prisoner in Genoese captivity, no one took him seriously. Some of*

Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo, the Venetian*, trans. W. Marsden, rev. and ed. Thomas Wright, Esq. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 336–37.

*Polo's descriptions, such as burning a "black stone" for fuel, were simply unimaginable to thirteenth-century Europeans, even well-traveled Italians. By the fifteenth century, however, The Travels of Marco Polo was one of the first books printed in Europe and was immensely influential. All the great adventurers, including Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama, read it and carried a copy on their voyages. Marco Polo was a shrewd merchant and keen observer of commodities and markets. Everywhere he traveled he paid attention to government regulations and taxes. The following passage is his observation of tax collection in a large city of the Mongol Empire. Marco Polo had a hard time convincing his country people at that time what he had told about China was true. Do you believe what he said here?*

**Of the Revenues of the Grand Khan**

We shall now speak of the revenue which the grand khan draws from the city of Kin-sai<sup>1</sup> and the places within its jurisdiction, constituting the ninth division or kingdom of Manji. In the first place, upon salt, the most productive article, he levies a yearly duty of eighty tomans of gold, each toman being eighty thousand saggi, and each saggio fully equal to a gold florin, and consequently amounting to six millions four hundred thousand ducats.<sup>2</sup> This vast produce is occasioned by the vicinity of the province to the sea, and the number of salt lakes or marshes, in which, during the heat of summer, the water becomes crystallized, and from whence a quantity of salt is taken, sufficient for the supply of five of the other divisions of the province. There is here cultivated and manufactured a large quantity of sugar, which pays, as do all other groceries, three and one-third per cent. The same is also levied upon the wine, or fermented liquor, made of rice. The twelve classes of artisans, of whom we have already spoken, as having each a thousand shops, and also the merchants, as well those who import the goods into the city, in the first instance, as those who carry them from thence to the interior, or who export them by sea, pay, in like manner, a duty of three and one-third per cent., but goods coming by sea from distant countries and regions, such as from India, pay ten per cent. So likewise all native articles of the

<sup>1</sup> Chinese Xingzai, another name for Hangzhou or Lin'an, the capital of the Southern Song dynasty. It was part of the Mongol Empire when Marco Polo visited there, and the Mongol government collected large revenues by taxing both agriculture and trade.

<sup>2</sup> One Venetian saggio (plural saggi) weighed a sixth of a British ounce. A ducat was a gold coin widely used in Europe. [Translator's note.]



country, as cattle, the vegetable produce of the soil, and silk, pay a tithe to the king. The account being made up in the presence of Marco Polo, he had an opportunity of seeing that the revenue of his majesty, exclusively of that arising from salt, already stated, amounted in the year to the sum of two hundred and ten tomans (each toman being eighty thousand saggi of gold), or sixteen million eight hundred thousand ducats.

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## SONG LIAN AND OTHERS

*History of the Yuan Dynasty*

1370

*Song Lian (1310–1381) was a famous scholar in the imperial academy of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) who was in charge of compiling the official history of the previous Yuan dynasty. He led a group of scholars in selecting significant documents from the archives left by the Mongol court and produced the book in just three years. This history records that after the Mongol regime established its capital in Dadu (modern Beijing), Kubilai declared himself emperor of the Yuan dynasty of China (1271). He soon became interested in gaining control of the flourishing maritime trade along China's southeastern coast. Ever since Genghis Khan's reign, Mongol rulers had been employing Muslim traders to bring precious goods east to their courts by way of overland routes. Kubilai now expanded the flow of goods by using experienced Muslim traders already based in Quanzhou, the major seaport on China's southeastern coast. Thereafter they carried out Mongol trade on the vast overseas networks of Southeast Asia. The following passage from the official history records a decree issued in 1278 by Kubilai welcoming foreign traders and travelers. Why did Kubilai send Muslim traders as his envoys to Southeast Asian countries?*

Song Lian and Others, *Yuan Shi* [History of the Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 10: 204. Translated by Xinru Liu.

In the fifteenth year of the Zhiyuan era<sup>1</sup> . . . his majesty summoned Suodu, Pu Shougeng,<sup>2</sup> and other officials in [Jiangzhe] Province and issued the following order:

Among the numerous countries located on the islands that are southeast of us, there are many people who admire my country. You may send my message to these people by giving it to travelers on foreign ships. Whenever they come to this land to offer us tribute, I will be their patron. They may come and go and carry out their business as they like.

<sup>1</sup> 1278.

<sup>2</sup> An eminent Muslim trader in Quanzhou. He welcomed the Mongol army's takeover of the city and agreed to serve the Mongol regime.