

DZIEJE ORIENTU

Ahmad Nazmi

Commercial Relations between Arabs and Slavs

(9th - 11th centuries)



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DIALOG



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COMMERCIAL RELATIONS
BETWEEN
ARABS AND SLAVS

(9th–11th centuries)

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Dedicated to the memory
of *Tadeusz Lewicki and Józef Bielawski*

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Preface

Many scholars who have a profound knowledge of Arabic and other Oriental languages have written numerous works which touch directly or indirectly on Muslim civilization, its history, culture and the vicissitudes of the caliphate.

The scholars who have undertaken research into the history of the caliphate have employed the Muslim historical literature of this age. Some of them have taken an interest in the economic history of various periods throughout the Middle Ages. The works of Muslim geographical literature constitute a representative branch of Muslim and Arabic Medieval literature and contain, additionally, many accounts of Muslim activities in the field of trade.

The main aim of this study is to present through selected texts the major Muslim works of geographical and historical literature which deal with the matter of trade with northeastern Europe during the period from the 9th to the 11th centuries. There is an abundance of texts referring to the social and economic life during this period in general and the commercial life, types of merchandise and trade routes in particular which have been studied and analyzed from the literary and historical point of view.

This study not only presents texts and accounts mentioned in Muslim sources but also sheds light on the history of trade between the caliphate and these European regions. In order to make these sources more informative, it was necessary to carry out a comparative study between these sources so that a common reference point in the geographical and historical data of this époque could be found.

Most of the works on the economic history of the caliphate have dealt with the materials in a general manner or have been restricted to a study of the regional economic history. The study of economics in the Middle Ages in Islamic world and elsewhere has inevitably led to the question of trade. In the matter of commerce and foreign trade, much important research has focused on Muslim trade with the Far East (India and China). As far as commercial exchanges between the caliphate and the Occident are concerned, also many works have been

written. Generally, one might comment that some excellent studies have been written using the data gleaned largely from selected Muslim sources. The work of F. Heyd entitled *Histoire du Levant au Moyen-Age* is considered as one of the first major books which studied the commercial relations between the East and West. Undoubtedly, in many chapters of this work, the author based his conclusions indirectly on Muslim sources, but solely on those translations which were available at the end of the 19th century. His work also covered a long period extending from the 6th to the 14th centuries. Another work contemporary to Heyd's study was published by the German scholar G. Jacob in the year 1887 under the title of *Nordisch-baltischer Handel der Araber*. Although this work is devoted to Muslim trade with Europe during the early Middle Ages, the author had the tendency to place more importance on trade with the Germanic sphere. Jacob also utilized to a broad extent the Muslim sources available at this time. In Poland in 1909, A. Szelągowski published his work *Drogi z Polski na Wschód* which studied the commercial routes linking Poland with the East during the Middle Ages. His work was also written in the light of Byzantine and Muslim sources available in most European languages and with the aid of additional research. After the First World War, A. Mez furnished valuable research under the title of *Die Renaissance des Islam* (1922) by paying more attention to these Muslim sources. In general, his work was written on the subject of Muslim civilization, but he referred to the social and economic situation of the Caliphate and pointed out the commercial field of interest.

An early study on such sources was presented by J. Lelewel, entitled *Géographie du Moyen Age* (1852) which included Latin and Arabic geography. After the Second World War, Polish scholars have worked in the field of Muslim geographical literature. Since the time of T. Kowalski, many of these sources have been researched through translation and commentary. In 1946, the chapter on the Slavs in the work of Al-Bakrī was translated and commented on by T. Kowalski in a study under the title of *Relacja Ibrāhīma Ibn Ja'kūba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich w przekazie al-Bekriego*. In the year 1949, T. Lewicki published his work entitled *Świat słowiański w oczach*

pisarzy arabskich. T. Lewicki, carrying out a series of studies, presented many of the selected texts from Muslim geographical works which covered the field of Slavonic history in general. These works, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny* were published successively in three main volumes including Arabic texts with translations into Polish and supplemented by comments of a scholarly and comparative nature; the fourth volume contains an index which covers all of this study. Many other essays and monographs were also supplied by the author in the same field. Following the same trend, M. Kowalska presented her work entitled *Średniowieczna arabska literatura podróżnicza* (1973) which generally came to be a study on Muslim travel literature covering a long period extending from the 8th century up to the 16th century. A part of Kowalska's work sheds light on the activities of travellers who visited the Slavonic countries or on those whose works touched on this matter, such as Hārūn Ibn Yaḥyà, Ibn Ya'qūb, Ibn Faḍlān, and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġarnāṭī. Other Polish orientalists participated in these studies from different points of view, such as the works written by A. and F. Kmietowicz and M. Czapkiewicz in the field of numismatics and especially Muslim coins discovered in Poland.

E. Ashtor in his work *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* studied the economic structure of the 'Abbāsid empire as a whole, including agriculture, industry and trade. He also pays attention to the demographical growth, technological progress, foreign trade, expansion of Muslim gold and monetary problems during the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid periods. After a series of research studies on the commerce of the Middle Ages, M. Lombard published his work entitled *L'islam dans sa première grandeur*, translated into English as *The Golden Age of Islam*. This work dealt in detail with trade and commercial routes, monetary movement, the direction of urban evolution, economic developments in Muslim regions, production and trading commodities and with the commercial interchange within and beyond the Muslim countries during the Middle Ages.

Much other research in the field of the economic history of the Muslim caliphate has been published within the last several years, some of it is of use directly or indirectly to this study.

This work consists of five main chapters, a preface, an introductory chapter and a conclusion. There is a bibliography of quoted sources as well as a number of figures and maps serving to elucidate the text. An annex containing Arabic texts with English translations is planned to be published in a separate volume.

It was necessary to begin this work by collecting the data relating to the subject. The research presented here is primarily based on Muslim and Arabic sources written during the period of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries. Other sources which were compiled later have also been used because of the original information contained in them or because they can be used as a replacement for other missing works. Some of the texts in the annex are directly connected with the matter of trade relations with Europe; others may be considered as touching only indirectly upon the subject but these have been selected because of their overall importance. A verbatim translation is also supplied in addition to the original Arabic text.

It was also necessary to examine and investigate this data in conventional terms. This has been done by means of a descriptive, historical and comparative study of the sources. They have been presented and arranged in chronological order in the chapter devoted to the survey of sources. Analytic research on these sources can be found in the other chapters of this work. For this study, the geographical sources are of highest priority, therefore I have devoted special attention to them; next come the travel books, and finally historical and literary works.

* * *

The first chapter deals in general with the influence of Islam on the economy of the caliphate and with the Islamic component in the realm of commerce in particular. Here it became inevitable to discuss the problem of trade in the Mediterranean world with the coming of Islam in the light of the Pirenne theory. Finally, the economic competition between the Byzantine Empire and the caliphates on the one hand and

the Khazarian-Arab conflict on the other are discussed the latter conflict is considered because it can be placed within the framework of trade controversy between these two main powers.

The second chapter contains a philological study of the main terms and names, their meanings and etymology which are not yet agreed upon. Additionally, the geographical point of view of the Muslims towards the northeastern regions of Europe and the peoples inhabiting these regions is furnished here.

The third chapter deals mainly with the middlemen of trade, including the Jewish merchants and the role played by their communities, the Radanites and the Khazar state. Rūs, Bulḡār and Muslim merchants and their trade activities between Muslims and northeast Europeans are also focused on in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is allocated to the commerce and the commodities traded between the Muslim countries and Europe, including the slave trade as the main transaction undertaken during this period. The origin of slaves, the mediators and brokers of this trade and the slave markets is taken into consideration. (Other sections of this study have been earmarked to discuss the fur trade and other items of trade including raw materials and manufactured goods.

The last chapter deals with two main points, the first being the main trade routes linking the Muslim countries with eastern and central Europe and other axial roads. It was also necessary to mention here some main trade centers and enterpôts lying along these roads. The second point is a discussion of the monetary question in the Muslim lands and in Europe, which was also involved in this trade.

At the conclusion of this study, an outline is provided which summarizes the entire work, although a brief conclusion has also been included at the end of each chapter.

As mentioned, a few diagrams and maps have been attached to this work; some of them have been taken from old Muslim geographical sources, other, especially the maps, have been compiled with reference to these sources. All figures and maps can be found at the end of this study.

The book was conceived as a continuation of my studies begun by a PhD. thesis prepared in the Oriental Institute of the University of Warsaw under the supervision of Professor Janusz Danecki. The original idea has been enlarged and many aspects of the discussed problems are here presented in a new light. In a number of instances, however, the difficulties of obtaining important publications pertaining to my subject made it impossible to update some marginal questions. I still do hope to have presented in my monograph a clear picture of the commerce between the two important worlds.

Many persons have helped me in preparing this monograph. I owe much to the experience and knowledge of Professor Janusz Danecki. I am indebted to Ms. Amy Kahler and Ms. Teresa Opalińska for their patience in correcting my English. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Boguslaw R. Zagórski for his assistance in obtaining a number of important publications and introducing a uniform transliteration of Arabic. Needless to say that I am, of course, solely responsible for any shortcomings in this work.

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