‘IFRANJALISM’: THE [EUROPEAN] OTHER IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 9th -12th CENTURY (A.D.)

by

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Many western scholars of the Middle East such as Bernard Lewis have too often claimed that medieval Arabs/Muslims did not exhibit any significant desire to discover the cultures, literatures and religions of non-Muslim peoples. Perhaps no less troubling is their assertion that only Europeans are endowed with the gift of studying foreign cultures and traveling into alien lands. In the same connection, without intending to ‘add fire’ to the already fiery polemic over Edward Said’s Orientalism, it must be said that very few of Said’s critics and defenders alike have discussed the counter, or reverse, tradition of Orientalism especially as found in the rich corpus of Classical Arabic Literature.

Through introducing and exploring a cross-generic selection of non-religious Arabic prose and poetic texts such as the geo-cosmographical literature, récits de voyages, diplomatic memoirs, captivity narratives, pre-Crusade and Crusade poetry, all of which were written from the 9th to the 12th century (A.D.), this dissertation will present both an argument for and a demonstration of the proposition that there was no shortage of medieval Muslims who cast curious eyes and minds towards the Other and that more than a handful of them were textually and physically interested in Europe and the Euro-Christians they encountered inside and outside dār al-Islām. Contrary to the monolithic impression left by postcolonial theories of Orientalism, this thesis also makes a strong case that Orientals did not exist solely to be gazed at. Before this came to be so, they too
had directed their gaze toward the European Other(s) in a way that mirrored in reverse the subject/object relationship described as Orientalism.
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الحمد لله الذي نعمته تتم الصلاحات
Dedication

For my family, friends and professors *Here and There!*
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Note on Transliteration

For the purpose of consistency, I have used the system of Arabic transliteration adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 
Note on the Translation of Arabic Poetry

In light of the variety of approaches to the translation of classical Arabic poetry, I think it proper to clarify my own stance. In the present book, I have aimed not at producing a literal translation, which at best would serve some instructional purposes, but rather at capturing in the English literary idiom, the meaning and, above all, the poeticality of the Arabic originals.

Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in The Classical Arabic Nasib*

Translating the idiosyncratically rhymed and metered classical Arabic poetry into modern western languages is notoriously difficult, to say the least. One spends hours and hours to decide what to keep and what to sacrifice especially amidst the seemingly never ending debate between the ‘literal’, or ‘word-for-word’, translation and ‘interpretive’, or ‘sense-for sense’, translation (France 16). Briefly stated, while I have done my best to capture ‘quite literally’ a number of the most essential keywords of a particular poem, I have somehow leaned to the second approach especially as, of course in my personal view, masterfully laid out and practiced by Professor Jaroslav Stetkevych and a number of his ‘students’ such as Michael Sells and Emil Homerin. In the present dissertation, I do share the concern that what we need most in translating classical Arabic poetry are translations that “stand on their own as poems that can be enjoyed and appreciated” (2), to quote Emil Homerin. In short, I struggled to be ‘faithful’ not only to the what but also to the how famous poets such as Abu Dulaf, Abu Firas, Ibn Hazm, and Ibn al-Qaysarani said, but at the same time, I have to acknowledge that I strove, perhaps more, to translate those poets in, hopefully, enjoyable English poems that stand on their own. For readers of Arabic, the original Arabic poems appear in the Appendix of Translated Works.
Introduction: Be(yond)fore Orientalism: Medieval Muslims and the Other: Redrawing the Essentialist Boundaries

Casting one’s curious eye toward the Other in the view of a number of western scholars of the Middle East is a distinctively European virtue, a gift of Europeans to humanity at large. It is the ultimate result of an "intellectual curiosity," which is, as Bernard Lewis once put it in *Islam and the West* (1993), "still peculiar to western Europe, and to the inheritors and emulators of the European scholarly tradition in countries such as the United States and Japan" (124). In Lewis’ view, it is not surprising that the world had to wait until the European Renaissance to see "a human society for the first time [that] developed the sophistication, the detachment and, above all, the curiosity to study and appreciate the cultures of alien and even hostile societies" (*The Muslim Discovery of Europe* 301).

Understandably, contrary to Edward Said’s contention in *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978), it is this very "curiosity to study and appreciate the cultures of alien and even hostile societies," that has been the impetus behind the phenomenal interest of Europeans in the Orient. In stark contrast, Orientals in general and Muslims in particular during the peak of their power, Lewis finds no reason to hide it, have lacked the curiosity of Europeans in studying foreign cultures. As he puts it in *Islam and the West* "Europeans at one time or another have studied virtually all the languages and all the histories of Asia, by contrast Asia did not study Europe. They did not even study each other (italics mine)" (123).

Indeed, time and again, and in a plethora of stimulating books he has authored on the medieval, early modern, and modern encounters between Islam and the West such as
The Muslim Discovery of Europe (1982), Islam and the West (1993), A Middle East Mosaic: Fragments of Life, Letters and History (2000), What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response (2002) and From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East (2004), Bernard Lewis, one of the West’s most renowned scholars of the Middle East, has strongly espoused the essentialist view that medieval and early modern Muslims, contrary to Europeans, were never curious to know about non-Muslim cultures that flourished outside dār al-Islām in general and those of Europeans in particular. As Roxanne E. Euben points out "Lewis repeatedly notes the lack of curiosity or desire for knowledge among Muslims about languages, literatures, religions or cultures beyond Islamic lands" (12). In From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East, for example, Lewis writes:

Muslim historians were not interested in the outside world, which as they understood the value and purpose of history, lacked both value and purpose. Muslim theologians were little concerned with Christian doctrines—why after all should they be interested in an earlier and superseded form of God’s revelation? And for the few that were interested, better information was more easily accessible among the many Christian communities living in the lands of Islam. There was no interest in the sciences and arts of Europe. They knew there was nothing of the one; they assumed there was nothing of the other. Only the geographers show some interest in the West, and even that a limited one. One geographical writer even apologizes for devoting some attention to these remote and uninteresting places. (206)

In Lewis’ opinion, it is disappointing, but ultimately unsurprising that during the concerned centuries "we have almost no information about Muslim travelers to Europe" (From Babel to Dragomans 210). Consequently, as he phrases it in another place,
"[w]hile European travelers to the East—soldiers, pilgrims, merchants, captives—had already produced a considerable literature, there was nothing comparable in the Muslim side" (From Babel to Dragomans 210).

All in all and until the seventeenth, if not the nineteenth, century, less than a handful Muslims saw Europe with their own eyes, usually against their own will. 

"An Arab prisoner of war in Rome in the ninth century, an Andalusian diplomatic visitor to France and Germany in the tenth, a princely Ottoman exile in France and Italy in the fifteenth," Lewis tells us, "[these] and one or two others have left a few notes and fragments which constitute almost the whole of the Muslim travel literature in Europe" (From Babel to Dragomans 210). 

Needless to say, this handful of involuntary Muslims who found themselves in European lands, "had nothing to say after their ransom and return, and perhaps no one to listen" (From Babel to Dragomans 210). "In this," Lewis goes on to conclude, "they differed markedly from their European counterparts, whose reports seem to have been in some demand" (From Babel to Dragomans 210).

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1 In Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery (1999), by contrast, Matar would affirm that "During the period under study [1580-1630], thousands of Turks and Moors visited and traded in English and Welsh ports; hundreds were captured on the high seas and brought to stand trial in English courts; scores of ambassadors and emissaries dazzled the London populace with their charm, cuisine, and "Araby" horses"(6). 

2 For the details, see Bernard Lewis, A Middle East Mosaic (New York: Random House, 2000), pp. 27-34.
Paradoxically, when the very few medieval or early modern Muslims found themselves obliged to know something about "the Greeks, the Romans, and other Christians," all that they wrote and said was, as he puts it, "manifest lies and grotesque fables"(The Muslim Discovery of Europe 280). In another place he has the following to add:

For most Middle Easterners, as one can see very clearly from the references in historical and geographical writings, western Europe was an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief, inhabited by primitive peoples with nasty and dirty habits, who they saw much as Victorian Englishmen might have seen the inhabitants of the central African jungles or the tribes beyond the north west frontier of India(A Middle East Mosaic 24).

Most troublesome of all, when Europeans offered Middle Easterners a golden chance to learn about them and their cultures during the Crusades, they [Middle Easterners] did not seize the chance. The fact of the matter, according to Lewis, is that Muslims were not even aware of the Crusades. As Hadia Dajani-Shakeel points out in her essay "A Reassessment of Some Medieval and Modern Perceptions of the Counter-Crusade." Bernard Lewis has been one of the leading western scholars who undermined "the degree of Muslim awareness of the Crusades"(The Jihad and its Times 14).

Dajani-Shakeel goes on to say that according to Lewis, the presumed disinterest of Muslims in the Crusades in general and the Crusaders in particular is no better proved than in their supposed insularity in relation to the Franks who for more than two hundred years became their closest neighbours. "For two centuries the Muslims of the Middle East," Lewis once asserted in his essay "The Use by Muslim Historians of Non-Muslim
Sources"(1962), "were in intimate if hostile contact with groups of the Franks established among them— yet, at no time do they seem to have developed the least interest in them (italics mine)"(The Jihad and its Times 41).

Unfortunately, as Nabil Matar has argued in the introduction to his book In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century (2003), a growing number of scholars have echoed Professor Lewis’ aforementioned views (xiv). "For most of the Middle Ages," David Morgan, as quoted by Matar, has contended that "writers in the Islamic world did not rate western Europe very highly, if indeed they thought about that part of the world at all" (In the Lands of the Christians iv).

Perhaps more troublesome is Franco Cardini’s statement in Europa e Islam; Storia di un Malinteso (2002), that the disinterest in the civilizations of the Other is "una caratteristia della cultura uscita dalla rivoluzione religiosa di Muhammad"(23). Speaking about the Abbasids and the foundation of their capital Baghdad, one of Italy’s most eminent historians of the Middle Ages comes to the following conclusion:

[T]he city was founded in 762 and at first was given the name of Medinat as-Salam, City of Peace. Here the seeds of that lack of interest in civilizations other than Islamic that was so much a feature of the culture born of Mohammed’s religious revolution may already have taken root; with distant hindsight it could be identified as a possible component of today’s crisis. In addition, a close watch was kept on Byzantium, India and China, whilst much less attention (quite justified at the period) was paid to the barbarous inhabitants of the extreme north-west who appeared hardly worthy of consideration at the time. (13)(Trans. Caroline Beamish)

Obviously, medieval Muslims had neither sent a ‘Napoleonic’ expedition to discover and study Europe, nor had they hired an army of interpreters and scholars to translate and explore, let us say, a number of medieval Frankish or Germanic manuscripts
as Napoleon did, for instance, in 1798. The lack of such an expedition and the absence of such manuscripts, however, do not mean that medieval, and by the same token, early modern Muslim politicians, travelers, and writers were totally unaware of this inhabited continent north and west of dār al-Īslām. Nor should it lead us to believe that Muslims had had to wait for the nineteenth century to discover Europe and the Europeans, a ‘discovery’, Bernard Lewis and other scholars have exaggeratedly compared to that of Europe’s discovery of the New World. "Lewis so totally discredited Renaissance Muslims’ curiosity," Matar declares, "that when the Ottoman Empire opened up to western institutions in the nineteenth century, he compared that opening to a discovery not unlike Christopher Columbus’s of America" (In the Lands of the Christians xiv).

In Matar’s view, the problem lies rather in western neglect of the corpus of Arabic writings about the Other and about the Euro-Christians in particular. In his article "Arab Views of Europeans 1578-1727: the Western Mediterranean." (2005), although focusing on the early modern period and the Maghribi (North African) tradition, he tells us that, "With the exception of Alastair Hamilton and G. A. Weigers, scholars have ignored the corpus of western Arabic writings in the early modern period, specifically those writings that describe the meetings and encounters with the Europeans" (127). British historian William Dalrymple shares Matar’s view:

[B]ut discoveries over the last thirty years have shown that this apparent lacuna was more the result of lack of archival research on the part of Lewis and other scholars than any failing by Muslim writers. Lewis’ findings, while always well argued, now appear somewhat dated. It is true that the Muslim world fell behind the West, and that (as Fletcher nicely puts it) the "cultural suppleness [and] adaptability" shown by the early Muslim states that absorbed the learning of Byzantium and ancient Persia
"seemed to run out in later epochs"; but it is not true that the reason for this was a lofty disdain or a generalized hatred for the West, or that Muslims failed to take an intense and often enthusiastic interest in developments there. (1)

According to Roxanne L. Euben, Matar’s *In the Lands of the Christians*, was a direct response to many of Lewis’ views on the alleged Muslim disinterest in the Euro-Christians and the assumed absence of an Arabic-Islamic tradition of travel for study in particular. As she puts it, "Lewis’ insistence that a sense of Muslim superiority prior to the 19th century meant that the question of travel for study did not arise, since clearly there was nothing to be learnt from the benighted infidels of the outer wilderness" is directly contradicted by Nabil Matar’s meticulous translations of 16th and 17th century Arabic travel texts"(12).

In the same connection, one is increasingly convinced that in spite of the incontestable erudition of its author, the late Edward Said, and his groundbreaking influence on a number of disciplines, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978) has failed to capture some of the most important complexities of the relation between Islam and the West. Not only is this true of Said’s relegation of the multifaceted relation between Islam and the West to the latter’s colonialist ventures in North Africa and the Middle East, but also, and most importantly, at least for the present thesis, of his neglect of the Orient’s own tradition of alterity and the reverse/counter Arabic-Islamic views and perceptions of the Euro-Christian Other.

While a detailed discussion of Said’s book and the seemingly never-ending polemic it has sparked since 1978 is beyond the scope of this introduction, a summary of the book’s general thesis and some of the most genuine questions raised not only by
Said’s severest critics, but also less polemical and more literary ones, seems indispensable in better contextualizing and understanding several of the issues that will be explored throughout the following chapters.

In broader terms, drawing on Michel Foucault’s theory of the "power/knowledge axis"(Rastegar 50) and Antonio Gramsci’s concept of "cultural hegemony", and informed by a score of other poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida, Said launched a vituperative critique of the West’s knowledge of the Orient, especially of Islam (Oxfeldt 11). In Said’s opinion, far from being an ‘innocent’ epistemological enterprise, Orientalism has always been "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Orientalism 3). In another passage he defines it as "fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness" (Orientalism 204).

Said has no compunction in asserting that each Orientalist, whether manifestedly or latently, "in what he could say about the Orient was consequently a racist, an

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3 Said’s somewhat peculiar use of the above names has been criticized by several established critics. Towering over them is Marxist literary theorist Aijaz Ahmad who in his essay "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said."(1994), among other things, describes Said’s use of Foucault as "not only ahistorical in the ordinary sense but specifically anti-Foucauldian in a methodological sense"(In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures 166).

4 Earlier in the book he describes it as a "way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western Experience"(Orientalism 1).
imperialist"("Orientalism" 86). Fortunately, in *Europe’s Myths of the Orient: Devise and Rule* (1986), Rana Kabbani, one of the earliest and most vociferous advocates of Said, has expressed Said’s unwarranted conclusion, in a much more tactful way. "In the European narration of the Orient," she tells us, "there was a deliberate stress on those qualities that made the East different from the West, exiled it into an irretrievable state of otherness"(6).

Sharon Kinoshita’s excellent summary of Said’s most central ideas stands well in this regard:

In 1978, Edward Said defined Orientalism as, among other things, a style of thought based on "an ontological and epistemological distinction" between East and West, a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Though focusing primarily on the strategic use of knowledge as power in the age of European expansionism,

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5 In reference to Said’s differentiation between two forms of Orientalism: latent and manifest. In Said’s own words: "The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity, which I shall call latent Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call manifest Orientalism. Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant" (*Orientalism* 206).

he repeatedly gestures towards what he implies is Orientalism’s very long history, stretching from Aeschylus to Silvestre de Sacy. For Said, the proto-Orientalism of the Middle Ages is concretized in the representation of Mohammed as a disseminator of false revelation, "the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy [and] treacheries." And when in Canto 28 of the *Inferno* Dante places Mohammed in the eighth circle of Hell, Said suggests, it exemplifies the structural continuities of unchanging western discourse of demonization and domination. ("Deprovincializing the Middle Ages" 75)

To summarize, Said has been fervently advocated and championed, by a staggering number of intellectuals across the globe. No wonder then that the departed critic has been hailed as not only one of the most influential figures of postcolonial criticism and studies but also as one of the most outspoken defenders of *Les Damnés de la terre*, as the no less influential Frantz Fanon once phrased it. It is no surprise that his *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, as Irmin Vinson observes, "has become the bible of fashionable Third Worldism and the central document of postcolonial studies, which it did much to spawn"(3).

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7 Said has defended his main thesis in several other books such as *Covering Islam, Culture and Imperialism* and essays such as "Islam Through Western Eyes."(1980), "Orientalism: An Afterword." (1994).

It is important to remember here that the critique of Orientalism did not begin with Said. Nor did it begin with Anouar ‘Abdel Malek’s "L'Orientalisme en Crise." (1963) or with A. L. Tibawi’s article "English-speaking Orientalists: A Critique of Their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism." (1964). It should be seen as a much older phenomenon that goes back to the medieval responses of Muslim scholars to Euro-Christian polemics against Islam. However, no one can deny that Said, in the first degree, and Abdel Malek and Tibawi, among others, in the second degree, have been instrumental in bringing the debate to its current international level.

As demonstrated by Daniel Martin Varisco in Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid (2007), Said has had his share of severe critics. Indeed, regardless of those who...
"attacked the man and what he stood for"(xii), a number of mostly orthodox western scholars, have launched their own assault on his book.¹⁰ Many of these scholars were established living Orientalists who have felt assaulted by Said. The most towering figure among them is certainly Bernard Lewis, who, as Varisco tells us, was not only depicted by Said "as the archetypal living Orientalist," but he is singled out in Orientalism "for half a dozen pages of invasive invective"(269).¹¹ The result has been "a comic and at times tragic sideshow to the issues underlying the polemic"(Varisco 273).

As Mathew Scott reminds us in his article "Edward Said’s Orientalism." (2008), some of Said’s severest critics "have themselves reserved their strongest language for what they perceive to be an attack upon a host of honorable endeavours, which did more than merely make the East a constructed object for specious scientific analysis"(68-69).

essentialist as those of western Orientalists. “I submit that this Islamic view of Islam is in essence, and in light of its logical consequences,” he wrote, “no different from the metaphysical preachings of Ontological Orientalism”( Macfie 235-236). Needless to say, that part and parcel of al-ʿAzm’s main argument is that Said’s Orientalism must be seen as a real example of what he called “Orientalism in Reverse.”

¹⁰ In Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America (2001), Martin Kramer, among other exaggerated statements, has gone so far as to accuse Said and his book of crippling Middle Eastern studies.

In *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies* (2006), to cite not only one of the most recent but perhaps one of the most severe critiques of Said’s *Orientalism*, Robert Irwin has spent an inordinate amount of time defending the Orientalists against Said’s assault. While asserting that he has nothing personal against the man, Irwin expresses no reserve in questioning the fame of his book before "setting his cards on the table" by blatantly calling it "a work of malignant charlatanry in which it is hard to distinguish honest mistakes from wilful misrepresentations" (4). In broader terms, Irwin’s main project is to refute Said’s claim that western Orientalists have always been there to advance the West’s agendas in North Africa and the Middle East.

In short, he does this mainly by positing that although some of them could have unconsciously been influenced by some of their cultures’ prejudices, western Orientalists, in what they could write and say about the Orient, doubtlessly against Said’s central arguments, were mostly, if not solely, driven by a genuine "lust of knowing" about Islam, its cultures, peoples, and languages. Phrased differently, western Orientalists have never been "tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact," as Said strongly believes (*Orientalism* 11).

Indeed, there is no way that Orientalism can be seen, as Said does, as being "fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient" (*Orientalism* 204). It is rather, as Irwin puts it, "mostly a story of individual scholars, often lonely and eccentric men

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12 In another place he describes it as "written in a hurry. It is repetitious and contains lots of factual mistakes" (282). By contrast, he praises Lewis’ response to Said as "[u]nsurprisingly the most magisterial response to *Orientalism*" (*For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies* 301).
"In its most important aspect," he explains elsewhere, "[it] was founded upon academic drudgery and close attention to philological detail" by scholars who not only "were often ruthless in denouncing each other’s translations and editing decisions" (7), but who were also "—dabblers, obsessives, freethinkers, madmen, charlatans, pedants, romantics" (7). This makes it clear that "there was no overreaching and constraining discourse of Orientalism"(7) and that "there was hardly an Orientalist type or a common Orientalist discourse"(197).

By claiming that Orientalism is a story of scholars who as much as they "had little in common"(197), they had little, if anything at all, to do with the politics of their time, Irwin, has unquestionably weakend his main thesis. In a review of the book, Terry Eagleton, faithful to his own materialist interpretation and ironical style, has the following to say:

Irwin, by contrast [to Said], believes in his gentle, ivory-tower way that orientalism "is mostly a story of individual scholars." He gives the impression that he could recognise an ideological formation about as readily as he could identify Green Day’s greatest hits. He thus dooms his study to partial irrelevance from the outset. It is like trying to refute the

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13 See also his Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents (New York: Overlook Press, 2006).

14 By contrast, Said declares that he studies Orientalism "as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires—British, French, and American—in. whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced"(Orientalism 14-15).
charge that Christianity has been a hugely destructive force for social evil by producing an admiring study of St Thomas Aquinas. (2)

Irwin does mention several pertinent points, some of which have been repeated by a growing number of critics. This is true, for example of his statement that Said has focused on Anglo-French Orientalists, overlooking not only German and Russian, but also Dutch, Hungarian, Spanish and Italian Orientalists.  

Said, according to Irwin does this deliberately, if not malevolently, for he knows that these Orientalists defy several of the most central of his arguments especially when we know that many of these countries, particularly Germany, had no colonies in the Orient.

In *Nordic Orientalism: Paris and the Cosmopolitan Imagination 1800-1900* (2005), Elizabeth Oxfledt, who is generally sympathetic to Said’s views, albeit focusing on the forgotten Danish and Norwegian orientalist traditions, has summarized this shortcoming in Said’s *Orientalism*:

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15 In reference to Said’s following statement: "To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a long tradition of colonial administrators, a formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental "experts" and "hands", an Oriental professorate, a complex array of "Oriental" ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use—the list can be extended more or less indefinitely" (*Orientalism* 4).
One of the major criticisms of Said’s theory has been of his monolithic treatment of the West. The totalizing gesture of covering two hundred years' worth of French and British representations of the Orient as one discourse is problematic in itself. Equally troublesome is that his focus ignores the Orientalist endeavors of marginalized western countries. By viewing imaginary geography and the role it played in western nation building in strictly dichotomous terms, one overlooks the more complex intra-European struggles that left smaller nations, peripheral to the European mainstream, to define themselves in relation to their domineering neighbors as well as the Orient (12).

Likewise, Irwin has every right to challenge Said for failing to acknowledge that prior to the seventeenth century, Europe was not in a superior position to seek a cultural justification for a presumed colonial domination of Muslim lands. Citing the examples of Mughal India, Safavid Persia, Mamluk Egypt and Syria, and specifically Ottoman Turkey, he argues that for centuries it was the Muslim Orient, and not the other way around, that had colonial agendas vis-à-vis the Christian West (60). Referring to those he describes as "critics who have inaccurately applied a postcolonial theory to a precolonial period in British history" (10), Matar while discussing English/Muslim relations in the Renaissance has the following to say:

[…] Britons never used the term colonization to describe their relations with the Muslims. In the Americas, Ireland, and elsewhere in the western hemisphere, words such as colony, plantation, and settlement were used to define the status of Britons there, […] Such words do not appear in the English discourse about the Muslim Empire. While Englishmen went as "colonists" to America, they went as "factors" to Islam. As Richard
Beacon was well aware in colonies in which they reduced Christians to servitude. (Turks, Moors, and Englishmen 11)\textsuperscript{16}

Perhaps Irwin’s boldest assertion is when, contrary to what a host of influential scholars have convincingly demonstrated, he claims that during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Islam was not important in European poetics and politics of alterity. As he puts it "But though a handful of churchmen composed libelous polemics or prophesies directed against Islam, the essential fact was that most Christians had no interest at all in the new religion"(21)."A similar lack of curiosity about Islam and the Arab way," he writes in another place, "is also characteristic of more serious literature in the medieval period"(43).

Equally troublesome, however, is the fact that in the last chapter of his book, Irwin falls into the same trap he has so vehemently chided Said for.\textsuperscript{17} In my view, he does this by implicitly claiming that every single Oriental, whether fundamentalist or secular, traditionalist or modernist, Muslim or Copt, Egyptian or Indian, in what he/she could say and write about western Orientalism is not only an enemy of western


\textsuperscript{17} As quoted by Varisco, in an earlier review of Orientalism, Irwin says that "Said’s vision of the Orient is in fact as monolithic and ethnocentric as that of any of the Orientalists he denounces"(Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid 252).
Orientalists, if not the West, but that he/she is intellectually doomed because he/she lacks the sophistication of western Orientalists.

To return to the critique of Said’s *Orientalism*, as Kinoshita has suggested, without forgetting to highlight "Said’s effectiveness isolating and discrediting an array of stereotypes" of the Orient(75), a number of less controversial scholars" generally sympathetic to Said’s project" "called into question the rigidity of his(Said’s) binary construct"(75). Indeed, it is my contention that at least as far as "pure" literary criticism is concerned, Said’s first and foremost field, a number of literary critics have been the most effective and the least controversial in pointing to several lacunae in Said’s *Orientalism*, especially when it comes to initial literary/critical terrains. One is thinking here of somewhat forgotten names such as Lisa Lowe, Mohammed Sharafuddin, and Ali Behdad, to name but a few.

Indeed, in *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (1991), Lisa Lowe has strongly questioned what she conceives as Said’s "totalizing framework," and his critical failure to identify the discursive instability of literary Orientalism (x). The discursive foundation of Orientalism, according to Lowe, has never been as monolithic as Said claimed. The Orient, she has convincingly pointed out, has never been fashioned as one single terrain. In other words, the Orient of the Orientalists has been constructed through different sites and competing discourses that have always intersected at its crossroads. Turning one of Said’s most effective weapons against him (i.e., Foucault and his concept of hetertopicality), Lowe has highlighted the fact that the heterogeneity and
ambivalence within Orientalism has created a space of discursive negotiations and even subversions.  

Similarly, it is not going too far to say that Mohammed Sharafuddin’s Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient (1994) can be seen as a ‘soft’ post-Saidian reading of Orientalism and its ideological significance in the history of the literary and cultural encounter between Islam and the West. From the beginning of his book, Sharafuddin makes it very clear that "while not denying Said’s argument that Orientalism served as a political ideology to make the Orient unreal, and therefore open to western exploitation and control," he has, like many other scholars, expressed his unease with what he has described as Said’s essentialism. Sharafuddin goes on to assert that there have always been a number of Orientalists whose scholarship challenges some of the most unwarranted generalizations of Said. The Orient, according to Sharafuddin, has always offered many western writers and the Romantics in particular "an effective vantage point from which to condemn the reactionary forces at home and the prevailing spirit of intolerance reflected in relations with a culture such as that of Islam" (ix).  

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18 Said was also convincingly criticized by Billie Melman in Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918 for disregarding western women’s writing on the Orient in general and harem literature in particular. In her view, "[w]hat is culturally significant" about this forgotten tradition is "its resistance to the essentialist topos of the sensual Orient and the mythically libidinous orientale" (17).  

19 See also Nigel Leask, British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge P, 1992), Saree Makdisi, Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and
Last but not least, in *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (1994), Ali Behdad, has relied on Lowe’s assertion that Orientalism has discursively been heterogeneous and ambivalent, to foreground the discursive anxiety of western writers who traveled to the Orient in a time when much of its referential exoticism had been transformed into what he described as "the familiar signs of Western hegemony" (13). Flaubert, one of the most exemplary cases used by Said, Behdad has maintained, was among these belated travelers and his text, or *Notes de Voyage*, as he prefers to call it, shows its fragmentary and plural nature, and does resist a single "structured form of criticism" (13).

As Varisco has recently declared, far from intending to "add fire" to the already fiery polemic over *Orientalism*, and while acknowledging the legitimacy of several of the concerns highlighted by Said’s critics and advocates, it is my contention that, very few of them called into question Said’s neglect of those who have been most concerned with this debate (i.e., the Orientals).

If Said used some "textual gaps," in speaking of a domestic novel such as *Mansfield Park* (1814) in order to question, if not denounce, Jane Austen for her negligence of the indigenous Others and her discursive silence over Sir Thomas Bertram’s imperialist enterprise, economic exploitation, and sexual dalliances on the sugar plantation he owns in Antigua, one may legitimately question Said’s own negligence and silencing of the Orientals. Said, with or without intending it, fell into the

same ‘orientalist’ discourse he did all he could to debunk. Expressing his surprise at Said’s failure to see beyond his own theoretical confines in such a modern Arabic novel of an East/West encounter as Tayyeb Saleh’s *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamal* (Season of Migration of the North), which in the broadest of terms, is fraught with tropes of "reverse Orientalism"(154), Varisco raises some of the same questions as those proposed in this dissertation.

Gone is the time when the mere *argumentum ad hominem* of Said or Lewis would add something constructive to the complex and sensitive subject of Orientalism. The simple reason, in my view, lies in the unfortunate fact that the majority of critics and defenders of Orientalism were unreasonably theory-bound and logocentric. As Varisco puts it, "It is time to move beyond PhD cataloguing of what the West did to the East and self-unfulfilling political punditry about what real individuals in the East say they want to do to the West "(xii).\(^\text{20}\)

No one can dare to interrogate Lewis’ and Said’s life-long interest in the Middle East and Orientalism. However, it is unfortunate that neither of them, or their followers, has ever gone beyond their own theories when it is undeniable that the encounter between Islam and the West has always been too complex to be monopolized by one theory or the

\(^{20}\) German scholar Isolde Kurz seems to be among the earliest to call for an end to this *intellectual cul-de-sac*. As she puts it in the conclusion of her book *Vom Umgang Mit Dem Anderen: Die Orientalismus-Debatte wischen Alteritätsdiskurs und interlektueller Kommunikation*(2000): "Zwanzig Jahre Orientalismus-Debatte und keine Ende.Wo steht wir? Wie denken wir heute den „anderen“? Des Konses des alten Orientalismus ist zerstört —aber gibt es einen neuen?"(229).
other, especially when we know that every group has its own ideological intentions and political motivations. Be that as it may, the two sides of the debate seem to have forgotten that the encounter between Islam and the West since the Middle Ages has not only influenced the literatures and cultures of the West, but also that it has had an enormous impact on the medieval, early modern and modern Islamic literatures and cultures it confronted (mainly Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) and has contributed thereby in shaping their generally anti-Western world view and in providing Muslim writers with a rich terrain for religious, cultural, and political propaganda of their own. As Varisco says:

Yes, the Orient was imagined by the West. Logically, the West has also imagined itself in the process. The real Orient has also created imaginaries subsumed under its discourse on the West, just as it (rather, many of its many constituent parts) defines itself against an imperial history of recent commercial conquest and political contest. (xvi)

As Varisco affirms in another passage, it is time to steer the helm of Orientalism towards the Oriental scene. "Why the critique of Eurocentrism," he suggests, "must be confined to the avowedly Western academic scene" (154).

By directing our gaze toward medieval Arabic literature and culture, it is the goal of the present thesis to introduce western readers to the forgotten corpus of medieval Arabic literature that describes Muslim encounters with the non-Muslim Other and Europeans in particular. In fact, much effort will be devoted to exploring Muslim views of Euro-Christians as portrayed in a cross-generic selection of medieval non-religious prose and poetic texts such as the geo-cosmographical literature, *récits de voyages,*
diplomatic memoirs, captivity narratives, pre-Crusade and Crusade poetry, all of which were written from the 9th to the 12th century by a wide range of Muslim scholars east and west of dār al-Islām.

In the first chapter "Translation, Travel, and the Other: the Fascination with Greek and Oriental Cultures." I will try to challenge some of the views advocated by Lewis and other scholars in regard to medieval Muslims, specifically ideas concerning their presumed lack of intellectual curiosity, their disinterest in knowing about non-Muslim cultures, religions and languages, and the absence of a Muslim tradition of travel for study.

In the second and the third chapters entitled respectively "European Barbarity and Civilization in some Medieval Arabic Geographical Sources." and "Writing the North: Europe and Europeans in Medieval Arabic Travel Literature." I will try to show how through a plethora of textual and physical journeys, many medieval Muslims from the Mashriq (Muslim East) and the Maghrib (Muslim West) ventured into different parts of medieval Europe, leaving to posterity some of the most genuine accounts of various European races and nations such as the Vikings, the Franks, the Galicians, the Lombards, the Bulgars, Hungarians and the Slavs. It is my biggest hope to prove that Europe was not as ‘remote’ and as ‘benighted’ for medieval Arabs as a number of scholars have claimed.

Muslims were also interested, sometimes to fearful extremes, in knowing about the Euro-Christians who were adjacent to them, as was the case with the Byzantines, or those who conquered some of their lands, that is to say the Franks during the Crusades. Nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the Arabic poetry known as Al- Rūmiyyat (for the Byzantines) and the poetry of the counter-Crusades (for the Franks). Arabic poetry,
we have to remember, has always been seen as the most genuine diwān (archive/register) wherein the Arabs, especially during the period under study, have recorded their "life stories, aspirations, feats, and wars,"(1) as Muhsin Jassim al Musawi phrases it in the introduction to Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition(2006). This is also true of their Others, as I will try to demonstrate in the fourth chapter entitled "Poetry, Frontiers and Alterity: Views and Perceptions of al-Rūm and al-Ifranja."

In the course of these chapters, I will try to prove, contrary to the impression left after reading Said’s Orientalism, that the Oriental has not existed solely to be ‘orientalized’. In his/her turn, the Oriental has always been an ‘Othering’ Other. Indeed, one should be left with no doubt that if the West has always had its ‘Orient’, the East, in turn, has had its own ‘Occident’. In the same vein, it is to be stressed that the variety of European ajnās (peoples)—such as the Vikings, the Bulgars, the Slavs, the Franks, and the Galicians, to name but a few—encountered physically and textually by medieval Muslims outside, and even inside, dār al-Islām were different in several important respects, not least in their geographical locations, religious practices, linguistic traditions, and political loyalties. Yet, as we shall see, it is striking that the majority, if not all, of those travelers and writers had unanimously highlighted what they conceived as a number of mathālib (demerits) which can be seen as common denominators of the overall medieval Muslim views of Europe and the Euro-Christians. This is mainly true of the presumed lack of proper hygiene, sexual freedom of women, and absence of manly jealousy among Euro-Christian men.

Ifranjalism is the term I have coined to describe the forgotten premodern Arabic corpus of writing about the Euro-Christians. I have preferred it to the more familiar term
Occidentalism which was coined by Egyptian scholar Hasan Hanafi in *Mugaddima fi-‘Ilm al-Istīghrab* (An Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism) to describe the modern interest of Middle Eastern intellectuals in the West.  

The word Occidentalism has been used by a growing number of western and eastern scholars to depict global anti-Westernism in general and anti-Americanism in particular, as Jouhki Jukka notes in "Imagining the Other: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil-European relations in South India." (2006):

> Actually, there is a kind of Occidentalism, at least in today’s Orient, comparable to some extent to Orientalism in the West. In fact, if one were to apply one of Said’s definitions of Orientalism to the definition of Occidentalism, one could easily claim there indeed is Occidentalism in the Orient. Just as Said defines Orientalism as "coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience," one might contrastingly define the Occident’s special place in Asian Eastern experience. Thus, in my view, it is safe to say different forms of Occidentalism have existed since there has been any interaction between "the East" and "the West."(49)

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21 Inspired by Sadiq Jalal al-ʿAzm, others have opted for *al-istishrāq maʿkūsan* (Orientalism in reverse).

22 Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, to cite an example in *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004) suggest that Occidentalism/ anti-Westernism has manifested itself in different forms: "from Counter-Reformation to the Counter-Enlightenment in Europe, to the many varieties of nationalism and social fascism in East and West, to anti-capitalism and anti-globalization, and finally to religious extremism that rages in so many places today"(11).
Yet the fact that the Arabic word *al-gharb* (Occident) in the medieval and early modern Islamic context means nothing but Muslim Spain and North Africa has convinced me to look for a more historically and culturally relevant term.\textsuperscript{23} After all, as we shall see in the fourth chapter, since the Crusades, *al-Ifranja* (spelled interchangeably *al-Faranja*/al-Firanj), has become the most common Arabic word with which Muslims and Arabs have described Europeans.

As Adrian J. Boas has shown, the word Frank in Muslim sources is "a generic term" and "it does not necessarily mean someone originating in France or even in francophone lands. Indeed, and since the Crusades, Arab-Muslims have been using it to refer to European Christians whether they be French, Germans, Spaniards, Italians, or other European nationalities" (37).\textsuperscript{24} In this context, it should be noted that until the present day, whether one is in Casa Blanca, Tunis, Cairo, Damascus, Riyadh, or Baghdad, modern Arabic expressions such as *al-libās al-Ifranjī*, *al-qanūn al-Firanjī*, *al-tarīkh al-Ifranjī*, to cite some examples, mean respectively European (western) clothes, law and calendar.

\textsuperscript{23} Until the present day North African Arabs and Berbers, including myself, identify themselves as *maghāriba* (Occidentals/Westerners) in contrast to *mashārika*, or Arabs of the East.

\textsuperscript{24} Before the Crusades, it was more common to use the word *al-Rūm* (Romans/Byzantines). This is in addition to purely religious words such as *al-naṣārā* (Christians), *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book), *al-kuffār* (non-believers), *al-mushrikīn* (the polytheists).
Last but far from least, since this thesis, as my co-supervisors Professors Roland LeHuenen and John Fleming have always gently reminded me, is comparative in essence, I shall say from the outset that whenever possible and pertinent, Muslim views and perceptions of the Other will be juxtaposed to those of the much more familiar European views of Islam and Muslims of the Middle Ages and the early modern period. This is for example the case in the second section of the first chapter "The Orient’s Medieval ‘Orient(alism)’: The Riḥla of Sulayman al-Tajir." wherein al-Tajir’s remarkable account of India and China will be compared to that of Marco Polo. References will also be made to other works such as Robinson Crusoe and Moby Dick, to name but a few.

Similarly, in the second chapter, medieval Muslim geo-cosmographical views such as the division of the earth will not only be related to certain ancient Greek theories, but they will also be juxtaposed to European ones. Finally, in the second, third and fourth chapters, Muslim views of the Euro-Christian others will be weighed against medieval, early modern, and even dominant modern European views of Muslims (Saracens/Mohammedans, Moors, Turks/Orientals) as depicted not only in familiar works such as La Chanson de Roland, Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, Elizabeth Carey’s The Tragedy of Mariam, Gustave Flaubert’s Voyage en Orient, but also in less familiar texts such as Mirabilia Urbis Romæ, The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, and German anti-Turkish pamphlets known as the Türkenbüchlein.

This is in addition to the appearance of a plethora of literary chefs-d’-œuvre that have been h(a)unting me ever since I met Heathcliff and Hester Prynne as an undergraduate student of English Language and Literature at the University of Tunis in 1991. Indeed, as some titles of my chapters and sections attest—and as Professor
Fleming once reminded me— works such as Shakespeare’s *Othello*, James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Mark Twain’s *An American Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, perhaps more than *Wuthering Heights* and *The Scarlet Letter*, seem to have journeyed with me during the more than one thousand and one nights that I have spent thousands of miles away from Tunisian shores.
Chapter I: Translation, Travel, and the Other: the Fascination with Greek and Oriental Cultures
A. The Curious Minds and Eyes of Medieval Muslims: Translation and Travel for Study

Traveling in search of knowledge is essential for the acquisition of useful learning and of perfection through meeting authoritative teachers and having contact with scholarly personalities.  

Ibn Khaldun’s *Al-Muqaddima*

During the classical age of Islam, described hereafter with reservations as medieval Islam, Muslim politicians and scholars alike were keenly interested in knowing about and learning from the Other. Indeed, as we shall see through argument and example, there was no shortage of Muslims who cast curious minds and eyes toward the various *thaqafāt* (cultures) that flourished east and west of *dār al-Islām*. Through translation into Arabic of hundreds, if not thousands, of foreign manuscripts, Muslim scholars studied enthusiastically and appreciated greatly the alien cultures of the Greeks, Persians, and Indians, to cite a few specific examples. In the same vein, one may argue that contrary to the presumptions of many, travel for study played a crucial role in shaping the culture of learning in medieval Islam. Of course, similar to other cultural encounters, medieval Muslims in their contact with the Other were residually informed by many of their own peculiar views and concepts of the world (Affaya 15), although in general they exhibited an impressive cultural relativism and a spontaneous readiness to acknowledge the Other and several of his/her cultural virtues.  

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Notwithstanding their fascination with their own Orient, medieval Muslims' interest in knowing about alien cultures is to be seen nowhere more conspicuously than in the phenomenal ḥarakat al-tarjama (translation movement). As it has been demonstrated by a number of researchers, during what was known in medieval Arabic sources as ʿaṣr al-tarjama (the age of translation), Muslim libraries were filled with hundreds, if not thousands, of Arabic versions of "the best which has been thought and said" by various non-Muslim peoples especially the Greeks, the Persians, and the Indians.27

It was so phenomenal a movement that bibliographer Ibn al-Nadim (d.1000), for example, devoted a whole section of his encyclopedia Al-Fihrist (The Index) to exploring the reasons that led to it.28 Ibn al-Nadim mentioned that the interest in translation from Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit into Arabic began with the Umayyad prince Khalid ibn Yezid ibn Muʿawiya (d. 704), who because of his love of knowledge and

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26 ʿAbdullah Ibrahim in his somewhat ‘anachronistically postcolonial’ Al-Markaziyya al-Islamiyya: Al-Akhar fi al-Adab al-ʿArabi al-Wasit (2001), speaks of a ‘manifest and latent’ markaziyya islamiyya (Islamocentricism) in the same way that Said speaks of Eurocentrism. Ibrahim appears to be more interested in enforcing some of the most radical postcolonial views, and Said’s in particular on classical Arabic writings. By most accounts, the result is evocative of Said’s interpretation of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park.

27 As Mathew Arnold once defined culture in his seminal Culture and Anarchy.

patronage of scholars, was known as ḥakīm Al-Marwān (the Sage of the Marwanites/Umayyads).

As Demitri Gutas has amply demonstrated in *Greek Thought, Arab Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (1998), however, the interest of the early Umayyad in Greek was rather a necessity dictated by the fact that many of their subjects were Greek speakers. For reasons of continuity, he points out, the early Umayyads were obliged to keep "both the Greek-speaking functionaries and Greek in their imperial administration in Damascus" (23). Owing to this reality, Gutas goes on to explain, cross-translation between Arabic and Greek throughout the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750), was "a quotidian reality" in the heavily Greek-speaking regions of Egypt and Syro-Palestine (23).²⁹

In spite of the fact that Ibn al-Nadim and other medieval historians did not seem to find any dearth of literary, and even scientific, titles that had been translated, mainly from Greek, Syriac, Sanskrit and Pahlavi into Arabic, the Umayyad interest in translation according to Gutas, lacked the "deliberate and scholarly interest" which became the distinctive feature of their successors the Abbasids (24). As he puts it:

Deliberate and planned scholarly interest in the translation of Greek works (and Syriac works inspired by Greek) into Arabic appears not to have been present in Umayyad times. Only with the earliest ‘Abbasid caliphs was

²⁹ Greek had remained the official language of the Umayyad diwān (administration) until it was replaced by Arabic during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwan. At the order of the latter, the translator Sulayman ibn Saʿid translated the whole diwān into Arabic.
there set into motion a deliberate translation movement that had profound historical, social, and cultural consequences (24).

Needless to say that what is interesting to this study is the fact that this "deliberate translation movement," as we shall see, provides compelling historical evidence that medieval Muslims were indeed curious to know about non-Muslim peoples, cultures, languages, and religions.

By most accounts this curiosity had become a salient feature of the Abbasids during the reign of al-Mansur (754-775), al-Mahdi (775-786), Harun al-Rashid (786-809) and al-Maʾmun (809-833), who is credited with the foundation of the famous Bayt al-Ḥikma (house of wisdom) in Baghdad. It is mainly during their reign that "almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books, including such diverse topics as astrology, alchemy, physics, botany and medicine, that were not available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic" (Gutas 43). 30 Gutas goes on to explain that during the reign of al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid, there developed a new wave of translations from Greek, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit into Arabic. It dealt mainly with medicine, natural sciences, and logic. Among the translators/scholars who worked for al-Mansur and al-Rashid, there was Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d.757), credited with an excellent translation from Pahlavi into Arabic of the Indian fables Kalila wa-Dimna, which has become one of the prose masterpieces of Classical Arabic Literature (Gutas 34).

30 For a comprehensive English list of the works translated from Greek into Arabic, see R. Walzer’s Greek into Arabic (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1962).
For L.E. Goodman, it is mainly during the reign of al-Maʿmūn, however, that the Abbasids witnessed an unprecedented interest in non-Muslim sciences and cultures. According to Goodman "Al-Maʿmūn went far beyond his father in establishing routine support for the translation of Greek works. His famous Bayt al-Ḥikma, formally instituted at Baghdad in 830, sponsored translation as its main activity and employed a regular staff of scholars" (484). In fact, as recorded by Ibn al-Nadim and other chroniclers, al-Mamun did his best to procure all kinds of manuscripts. Among other things, he is said to have sent official envoys to the emperor Leon the Armenian (813-820) to purchase Greek manuscripts. Al-Maʿmūn’s envoys were most of the time scholars and translators like Ibn al-Batriq (d.806), al-Hajjaj ibn Matar (d.833), Yuhanna ibn Masawayh (d.857), and the famous Banu Musa Brothers (Goodman 485). These scholars and others "[f]ar from being mere passive translators," Thabit ʿAbdullah tells us in A Short History of Iraq: From 636 to the Present (2003), "contributed their own commentaries followed by original works" (21).

Conversely, one must not forget that this fascination with Greek culture and philosophy in particular had its own backlash. Contrary to another essentialist view held by a number of western Arabists and Muslim apologists alike, the archives of Islam are teeming with entries that record strong opposition to Greek philosophy by a number of mostly Sunni imāms (religious leaders) and ʿulamaʾ (scholars). Ahmad ibn Hanbal’s miḥna (predicament) is the most illustrative example.

Ibn al-Nadim and other medieval historians mention that Aristotle came to al-Maʿmūn in a dream urging him to diffuse Greek philosophy and science in his empire (Codes: The Guide to Secrecy from Ancient to Modern Times 46).
Ibn Hanbal was imprisoned and severely tortured by the three Abbasid caliphs al-Maʿmun, al-Muʿtassim, and al-Wathiq who all embraced the theological precepts of al-Muʿtazila (the Mutazilite). The latter were a group of rational scholars who, among other things, championed al-qiyāṣ al-ʿaqli (rational [Aristotelian] syllogism) in their interpretation of the Qurʾan and Sunna (Prophetic tradition) and called themselves ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tauḥīd (people of monotheism and justice). This led them, according to traditionists to propound ideas that are inherently unacceptable to Islam (A History of Islamic Philosophy 47). When the Mutazilite gained strong influence during the reign of al-Maʿmun, the greatest patron of Greek philosophy in the history of Islam, they established a ‘court of inquisition” to prosecute all those who did not profess their creed (Gutas 99).

Briefly stated, as shown by I. A. Bello in The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy (1989), one of the most vituperative attacks on philosophy came from al-Ghazali (d.1111) in Tahafut al-Falasifa (The Rebuttal of Philosophers) and Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa-l-Zandaqa (The Difference Between Islam and Hereticism)(1). Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), known in the west as Averroes, wrote a response to al-Ghazali in Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Rebuttal of the Rebuttal)(Bello 5). Later, it was mainly Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) who perpetuated the attack on Greek philosophy and wrote "one of the most powerful and ambitious assaults on Aristotelian logic" (Islamic Philosophy 99). The same was true, although to a lesser degree, of his fervent follower Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350). Surprisingly enough, Ibn Khaldun...

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32 For example their assertion that the Qur’an is makhlūq (created).

33 Kitab al-Rad ʿala al-Mantiqiyyin (Refutation of the Logicians).
(d. 1406) devoted the thirty-first chapter of *Al-Muqaddima* (Prolegomena) to a strong attack on philosophy and philosophers.\(^\text{34}\) “Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), perhaps the greatest intellectual produced by medieval Islam,” David Grant writes in *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (2007), “was convinced, as was al-Ghazali and Ibn al-Salah before, that philosophy and logic were great potential danger to the Islamic religion” (89).\(^\text{35}\)

\[\text{34} \text{ This chapter is entitled "Faṣl fi Ibīl al-Falsafa wa Fasād Muntaḥiliha." (Refutation of Philosophy and the Corruption of its Adherent). While acknowledging that al-falsafa (philosophy) has thamra wāḥida (one single fruit) which is shahān al-dhihn fi tartīb al-adilla wa-l-hujaj (training the intellect in using arguments and proofs), it is inherently suppositious and erroneous. Because of this, al-falsafa is all ḍarar (harm) especially, as was the case of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina—whom he singles out in the chapter—, when sed to interpret theological issues. Ibn Khaldun concludes his chapter by calling upon fellow Muslim scholars to champion al-naql (tradition) and satisfy themselves with the Qur’an and the Sunna in understanding the fundamentals of faith.}\]

\[\text{35} \text{ It is noteworthy that the backlash against Greek culture and philosophy was the main impetus behind the rise of a number of influential theological and intellectual schools such as al-Ashʿariyya and al-Māturīdiyya in theology and al-Istishrāqiyya movement in mysticism, to name but a few. For more information on these groups and others, see Tim Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).}\]
As far as Lewis’ assertion that Muslims had never traveled to study is concerned, it is important to note that al-riḥla al-ʿilmiyya (scientific travel), alternatively known as al-riḥla fi ṭalab al-ʿilm (travel in search of knowledge), was "a leitmotiv of Islam from its earliest days" and "a cliché in mediaeval islamic intellectual life," to quote Ian Richard Netton’s Seek Knowledge: Thought and Travel in the House of Islam (vii). In fact, as Netton and others have shown, this was owing not only to the Qur’anic injunction to seek knowledge, but also to the numerous aḥādīth (plural of hadith) attributed to the Prophet in which he encouraged Muslims to seek knowledge and travel in search of it. The two sayings attributed to Muhammad, "Seek knowledge even in China" and "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" are among the most quoted references in Arabic-Islamic culture.

In addition to the above Islamic influences, scholars cite other influences which were as instrumental. This is true, for example, of pre-Islamic Sassanian traditions which encourage traveling in search of knowledge.

Despite the quasi-legendary fame of these two sayings, the majority of Sunni muḥaddithīn (expert scholars of hadith) declared both of them as either daʿīf (weak) or mauḍūʿ (fabricated). An example of a ṣaḥīḥ (authentic) hadith that highlights the virtue of travel for the sake of knowledge is the following:

"If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge, the inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned man over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the
As shown by a growing number of western and Muslim scholars, numerous injunctions in the Qur’an and aḥādīth, urge Muslims to travel over lands and seas, contemplate differences in languages and races, and meet learned men in order to acquire ʿilm (knowledge). The latter, as Franz Rosenthal once put it in his classic Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam (1970), "is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and compelexion"(2). According to Hmeida, it is not surprising for early generations of Muslims who used to recite the Qur’an and read the aḥādīth day and night to stop at the numerous verses and sayings that repeatedly exhorted them to be mobile by traveling in different parts of the earth to seek knowledge, to wonder about the marvels of creation, and to draw lessons from vanished nations and civilizations (34).

Needless to say, Muslim mobility was further encouraged under the Umayyad caliphs (661-750) in whose era the territorial expansion of dār al-Islām was unprecedented. After a number of successful military campaigns east and west, the Umayyads found themselves ruling over a vast empire that expanded west into North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula and east to the borders of China. The Umayyads are credited with establishing a strong navy, developing a postal system, and encouraging scholars to acquire information about remote countries and their inhabitants (Ahmad 5). It is with the Abbasids (750-1258), however, that Muslim mobility reached its zenith. From the beginning of their reign, travel within and outside the extended borders of dār

Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dīnār nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion"( Sunan Abi Dawud 3634).
al-Islām became not only "une des caractéristiques de la société musulmane (italics mine)" (M’Ghirbi 13), but also "une nécessité et une dignité (italics mine)” (Miquel 114).

Within dār al-Islām, Muslims traveled not only to perform the religious duty of hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, but also for reasons as various as seeking knowledge, amassing fortunes, satisfying personal curiosity, or collecting data for geographical studies, diplomacy, or spying and wars (Muwafi 82). As Euben points out, "some travelers undertook journeys for such mundane and less religiously specific purposes as job-seeking, trade, diplomatic missions for sultans, desire for status, or just plain wanderlust–and wanderers throughout the dār al-Islām"(17).

As demonstrated by Sam I. Gellens in "The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach.", the particular emphasis given to attaining knowledge in medieval Islam, led a considerable number of scholars to embark on long journeys in search for knowledge (50). Although the latter "is unquestionably religious," Euben reminds us in Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge (2006), "a hard and fast distinction between secular and religious knowledge misses the scope of ‘ilm”(35). In fact, traveling for study was so popular, especially among scholars of hadith, that the prolific and polyvalent al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d.1072), wrote an entire book Al-Rihla fi Talab al-Hadith (Travel for Learning hadith) exploring this genre and the sacrifices many had to endure through their lifetime (52).

As argued by a Michael Karl Lenker in "The Importance of the Riḥla for the Islamization of Spain.", the majority of prominent Muslim scholars of hadith traveled for decades away from their home countries not only to study the sciences of the Qur’an and
the Prophetic tradition but also to acquire knowledge of rhetoric, jurisprudence, history, genealogy, literature, sectology, polemics, mathematics, etc. For Lenker, these learned men were not restricted to the collection and criticism of hadith since, for the majority of them the *riḥla* was "a many-sided intellectual endeavour, a true ‘Wanderjahre’ spent with the best scholars in various parts of [the] Islamic world" (129). In the words of Euben:

> The scope of *ʿilm* in the exhortation to travel in search of knowledge is reflected in the extensive and varied types of Muslim travel, every one of which may entail both physical movement and spiritual transformation: the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), *hijra* (emigration), *riḥla* (travel in pursuit of knowledge) and *ziyāra* (visits to shrines). Any single journey, moreover, might incorporate all four of these purposes...Sanctioned by divine exhortations, tied to the promise of baraka ("blessings," but also charisma), and nourished by a complex and cosmopolitan civilization "which in the fullest sense owed its vibrancy to constant movement," travel in pursuit of knowledge is more than merely a recurrent theme in Islam, but rather an ethos. (36-37)

It must be stressed in passing that the desire to seek knowledge and travel is universal. History teaches us that civilizations in times of power, and irrespective of the driving ideology, have always produced curious travelers who have physically and intellectually ventured into unknown places and foreign lands to discover, meet, and study different Others with different cultures. Most of the time, the result has been a journey back to rediscover, re-meet, and ultimately re-consider the Self (Israeli 313). Medieval Islam was no exception and such curious travelers did certainly exist in considerable numbers. Indeed, driven by the same "intellectual curiosity" that impelled several renowned western travelers to venture in the "non-West,"(Euben 26), many

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38 I am indebted to Euben for this reference.
medieval Muslims traveled to alien lands and gave evidence of their curiosity and interest in different worlds. Al-Masʿudī (d. 896) and al-Biruni (d.1048), as will be briefly shown, stand as two compelling examples.

Al-Masʿudī, hailed by many as the Herodotus of the Arabs and the Pliny of the Muslim world, was not only a great geographer, historian, adīb (littérature) and scientist, but also a great traveler for study who embarked at a very young age on a lifelong journey of intellectual quest inside and outside dār al-Islām (Hmeida 254). "In his exuberance and love of travel," J.F.P. Hopkins comments, "he resembles his junior contemporary al-Muqaddasi, while in his combining of different disciplines in one work [Al-Muruj] he has something of the character of the earlier adab-writers, but also of the later encyclopaedists"(315).

At the age of twenty, al-Masʿudi found himself in Persia around 915. In the following years, he explored India and China. Then he crossed to West Africa and visited Zanzibar, Madagascar, Mozambique, Sudan, etc. In 926, he appeared in Palestine from which he traveled to Arabia for ḥajj, followed by Syria from which he crossed to the vast Byzantine Empire. From there he embarked on a European itinerary which took him as far as the lands of the Slavs and other eastern and central European medieval countries (Miquel 259). Al-Masʿudi then settled in Egypt where he died in 956 (Hmeida 252).

It is al-Masʿudi’s penchant for a life of wandering and travels for study to collect historical, geographical and ethnographical data about different peoples, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, that made him one of the towering intellectual figures of classical Islam. As Giancarlo Pizzi puts it, al-Masʿudi was one of the paragons of "l'umanesimo arabo" who, as a curious traveler, had benefited a great deal from his extensive mobility.
In his graceful words, al-Masʿudi was "un uomo indubbiamente colto, ma soprattutto dotato di una granda che lo spingeva a esplorare dirrettamente ogni campo delle umane conoscenze compiendo lunghi viaggi"(7).

In the opening lines of his *Muruj al-Dhahab* (Meadows of Gold), al-Masʿudi informs us that he exhausted himself "by long and difficult journeys over land and sea," not to seek political power, as Ibn Khaldun did centuries later, but to learn for himself and see with his own eyes, "all the remarkable things which exist among different peoples and to study the particular characteristics of each country" (1). In his accounts of the non-Muslim Other, he did his best to be as objective as possible. "In dealing with non-Muslim peoples, their lands, history, religions, and other aspects," Ahmad Shboul affirms, "Al-Masʿudi is anxious to have recourse to the views of the people concerned"(302).

Owing to his strong conviction that "true knowledge can only be acquired through practice and observation"(Ahmad 63), al-Masʿudi used to criticize severely ‘arm-chair’ scholars who did not travel to verify what they reported in their books no matter how famous and intelligent they were. In this respect, it is important to mention his harsh criticism of the great *adīb* al-Jahiz (d.869), the ‘shakespeare’ of classical Arabic literature and one of Islam’s most talented encyclopedic writers, in spite of his appreciation of his [al-Jahiz’s] masterful prose and remarkable knowledge (Shboul 35).

In a section entitled *Baʿd Awham al-Jahiz* (Some of al-Jahiz’s Illusions), Al-Masʿudi derided al-Jahiz’s unfounded statement that the River Sind (India) springs from the Nile in his book *Kitab al-Amsar wa Tafadhul al-Buldan* (Regions of the World and
Al-Jahiz contended that the Mahran River (the Indus), which is the river of Sind, does originate in the Nile. He justifies his claim by highlighting the existence of crocodiles in the river. Indeed, I cannot understand how he came to this unfounded conclusion which he mentioned in his book, *Regions of the World and Marvels of the Lands*. The latter, is an extremely inadequate (poor) work because the author had never taken to the seas, nor was he known for travel, nor was he knowledgeable about roads and regions (Italics mine). He was, however, a night collector of firewood (careless copier) who copies carelessly from other books! (37)(Trans. mine)

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39 One is surprised by Caroline Stone’s translation of the aforementioned quotation in her article on al-Mas’udi, "the Role of Historians". Stone has completely mistranslated the text. This is owing to her failure in recognizing the meaning of the idiomatic Arabic expression *fi-nihāyat al-ghathātha*, literally for ‘an end in badness’ denoting something ‘extremely bad/ inadequate/poor’. She has also failed in translating the medieval expression *ḥāṭib layl* (literally a night collector of wood), which means someone who cannot distinguish the adequate from the inadequate. Here is Stone’s translation:

Al Jahiz claims that the Indus, the river of Sind, comes from the Nile and adduces the presence of crocodiles in the Indus as proof. I do not know where he could have found such an argument, but he puts the theory forward in his book *Great Cities and Marvels of the Earth. It is an excellent work*, but since the author never sailed, nor indeed, traveled sufficiently to be acquainted with the kingdoms and cities, he did not
Equally suggestive is al-Maṣʿudi’s severe criticism of al-Jahiz’s statement, based on reports from some Indian merchants, that female rhinoceros have the habit of keeping "their young in their stomachs for a period of seven years during which it came out to graze the grass and went back into it again till it was fully grown, and then finally laid it down" (Ahmad 65).

Certainly, the *tajriba* (experience) of al-Maṣʿudi confirms that the ‘un-traveled’ al-Jahiz used to mix up many scientific *qadāya* (issues/problems) for the animal that is known for guarding its young in this way is none but the kangaroo (Ahmad 65). A great and reliable scholar, in al-Maṣʿudi’s eyes, should not deal with any scientific issues if he has not studied them personally through real experiences. Such, it seems, was al-Maṣʿudi’s firm motto. At least, that is what one can draw from the title of his, unfortunately lost, travel account *Kitab al-Qadaya wa-l-Tajarib* (the Book of Problems and Experiences) (Khalidi 157).

Like al-Maṣʿudi, al-Biruni is another example of a medieval Muslim scholar who did not only travel extensively for study but who also exhibited a remarkable curiosity "to study and appreciate," the cultures, religions, and languages of the non-Muslim Other described by Bernard Lewis and others as an exclusively European phenomenon. Similarly, al-Biruni was known for his unquenchable thirst for knowledge *per se*. "It is knowledge in general," he writes in the introduction to *Tahdid Nihayat al-Amakin* (Defining the Ends of Regions), "that is pursued solely by men, and what is pursued for know that the Indus in Sind has perfectly well-known sources (Italics mine)."
the sake of knowledge itself because its acquisition is truly delightful and unlike other pleasures derivable from other pursuits" (2).

According to J.J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson, al-Biruni was one of the most versatile scholars of Islam who was "amazingly well read, having knowledge of Sanskrit literature on topics such as astrology, astronomy, chronology, geography, grammar, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, religion, and weights and measures"(3).

As Ali al-Shahat has argued, al-Biruni’s twenty-year long travels in India influenced him the most (21). Al-Shahat goes on to tell us that al-Biruni left for India somehow unwillingly with the sultan Mahmud al-Ghaznavi (d.1030) in 1017. When he arrived there, he was so fascinated by the indigenous culture that he learned Sanskrit and engaged in an intensive intellectual investigation of India’s geography, people, culture, religion, philosophy, and sciences. Commenting on his long sojourn in India, S.M. Ahmad, tells us that al-Biruni "must have considered this a god-sent opportunity for he was already conversant with some of the Indian sciences through Arabic translations of the Brahmasphutasiddhanta, Khandakhadyaka, etc." (137).

The fruit of this scholarly interest and real experience in India was his encyclopedic work entitled Tahqiq ma li-l-Hind min Maqula Maqbula fi-l-‘Aql aw Marthula (Ascertaining of Statements to be Accorded Intellectual Acceptance or to be Rejected Regarding India). The latter, more commonly known as Kitab al-Hind (The Book of India), was not only "written with utmost objectivity" but it "forms one of the most authentic surveys of ancient Indian culture, and is a reference book on ancient India used by scholars today"(Ahmad 36). In the opening lines of the book, al-Biruni assures
us that "My book is nothing but a simple historic record of facts. I shall place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are"(7).

Throughout *Kitab al-Hind*, al-Biruni proved an exceptionally objective scholar, constantly restless in his detached curiosity about the Other, and deeply preoccupied with ‘scientifically’ recording all that he saw and knew during his long travels in medieval India. It is therefore understandable that he has been highly praised for his detached and objective erudition by a number of western scholars. As demonstrated by Kemal Ataman, German Arabist Anne-Marie Schimmel hailed al-Biruni’s *Book of India* as "the first objective book ever written on the history of religion"(2). A. Embree had a similar opinion. Indeed, as we are told by Hopkins, he considered al-Biruni’s *Book of India* as "one the most penetrating accounts we have of Indian society"(417). Mehmet Aydin is also worth quoting in this respect:

> This great man stands as a model of the thinker who was able to harmonize with his own intellectual world various forms of knowledge from the science of nature to religion to philosophy. Al-Biruni has an extremely international outlook and worked to remove the misunderstandings between various religions and bring humanity close in their outlook upon the world. He was a key figure in bringing about real cultural contacts between different races and nations. It is because of his great contributions to many fields, especially to the scientific spirit in general, that George Sarton, the well known historian of sciences, wishes to name the eleventh century ‘the age of al-Biruni.’ (16)

In telling contrast to Lord Macaulay and the Orientalists whom he consulted on the value of Indian and Arabic literatures, al-Biruni nine centuries earlier had expressed his positive appreciation both of the language(s) and the literature of the India he visited.
in almost the same colonial conditions and role.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, at the end of Kitab al-Hind, he reveals to us that he translated into Arabic two Sanskrit books dealing with Indian theology and cosmology entitled Sakaya and Patanja and that he wrote several critical notes on a number of Sanskrit literary masterpieces such as the Yogasutra, the Bhagavadgita and the Sankhyakarika.

As in the case of al-Biruni and to a lesser degree al-Masʿudi, who wrote on Hinduism and Zoroastrianism with detachment and objectivity, medieval Muslims were never neglectful of other religions, despite the proliferation of polemical anti-Christian writings after the Crusades. Indeed, and contrary to Lewis’ statements in this respect, there was no dearth of material on this subject that has come to be known as Comparative Religion and the science of Sectology in the bulk of medieval Arabic-Islamic writings.

Here one thinks in particular of al-Nubakhti (d. 912) who wrote Al- Araʾ wa-l-Adyan (Religions and Beliefs), al-Ashʿari (d. 930) Maqalat al-Islamiyyin (On Muslim Doctrines), and al-Misbahi (d. 1030), who authored a huge book entitled Idrak al-Bughya fi Wasf al-Adyan wa-l-Ibadat (Achieving the Goals in Describing Religions and

\textsuperscript{40} In Minute on Education (1835), Lord Macaulay wrote the following:

I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia (Italics mine) (2).
Worships). Medieval Arab sources mention that this tome numbers three thousand leaves. The sectologist Abu al-Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 1025) wrote in this same perspective *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* (Differences among Sects).

Andalusian Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) also wrote a monumental work, *Al-Fisal fi-l- Milal wa-l-Ahwa’ wa-l-Nihal* (On Religions, Beliefs, and Sects) in the same century. The latter has been hailed by many western Arabists and historians of religion as one the world’s pioneering studies of Comparative Religion. The same is true of another well known work by al-Shahrastani (d. 1153) entitled *Al-Milal wa-l-Nihal* (Religions and Sects), Abu al-Ma’ali’s *Bayn al-Adyan* (Between Religions), Fakhruddine al-Razi’s *‘Itiqadat al-Muslimin wa-l-Mushrikin* (On Muslim and Polytheist Beliefs).

Furthermore, during the Crusades, there was a meteoric surge in polemical writing about Christianity, and to a lesser degree Judaism. Of interest are Shihabuddine al-Qarafi’s *Al-Ajwiba al-Fakhira ‘ala al-As’ila al-Fajira* (Efficacious Answers to Arrogant Questions), Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-Jawab al-Sahih ‘ala man Baddal Din al-Masih* (The Pertinent Reply to the One who Altered the Faith of Christ), and Ibn al Qayyim’s *Hidayat al-Ḥayara fi Ajwibat al-Yahud wa-l-Nasara* (Enlightening the Perplexed to the Answers of the Jews and Christians). \footnote{For a comprehensive study of some of these writers, see Jacques Waardenberg’s "Muslim Studies of Other Religions." In *The Middle East and Europe: Encounters and Exchanges*. Ed. Geert Jan Van Gelder and Ed de Moor (Amsterdam: Orientations, 1992).}

In sum, it is no exaggeration to say that the great movement of translation especially from Greek, Sanskrit, and Persian into Arabic, the paramount importance of
al-riḥla fi ṭalab al ‘ilm, the humanistic intellectualism and detached curiosity of several scholars of the classical age of Islam, and the proliferation of writings about the religions and cultures of non-Muslims, constitute abundant and compelling evidence that should leave us with no doubt that medieval Muslims were not disinterested in the Other. Although most of the time painfully aware of the unbridgeable religious ikhtilāf (difference), a good many medieval Muslims were particularly keen to study and appreciate foreign and alien cultures and, as we shall see in the following section, in comparison with their own Orient.

As for the interest in Euro-Christians, the main focus of this study, one can argue that through the aforementioned translation of almost the entire corpus of the classical heritage of the Greeks, medieval Muslims appear to have been more or less conversant with one of the most basic aspects of the Euro-Christian Other. The European Renaissance has always been defined as a rediscovery of its Greek heritage and a touchstone of western civilization and European culture lost during the intellectual vacuum of the so-called European Dark Ages.

The fact that this rediscovery was made possible much of the time through the medium of Arabic translations and Muslim commentators especially during the Great Debate of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries cannot be ignored. As French Historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle puts it in Europe: A History of its People, "But this new Renaissance, the precursor of that which ended the Middle Ages also arose from the fact that Europeans were now discovering lost Greek texts, and above all further fragments from Aristotle. These came to Europe not from the Byzantines, but from the Arabs"(153). This is in addition to Muslim contacts with medieval Euro-Christendom, knowledge of
Christianity, their particular interest in Byzantium, and their encounter with the Crusaders. "Europe," in the words of Lewis, "is a European idea, conceived in Greece, nurtured in Rome, and now after a long and troubled childhood and adolescence in Christendom, approaching maturity in a secular, supranational continuity"*(From Babel to Dragomans 121).*
B. The Orient’s Medieval ‘Orient(alism)’: The Riḥla of Sulayman al-Tajir

And whoever sees himself really free.
Let him experience the meaning of the word!
Away from home, I spent most of my life,
Witnessing wonders of ancient times.
My adventurous soul finds peace in alien things.
Not in the comfort of the known world.
For indeed we are the people of lands and seas,
Amassing poll taxes form Egyptians and Chinese.
In Tangiers, indeed in all places, our horses race.
If bored in a space, we travel to another place.
Muslim and non-Muslim lands are at our hands,
In summers we resort to snow.
In winters the oasis we enjoy!

Abu Dulaf (Trans. mine)

Nabil Matar deplores the fact that Anthony Pagden’s voluminous collection of articles published under the title Facing Each Other: The World’s Perception of Europe and Europe’s Perception of the World (2000), fails to include "a single entry about the perception of or by any of the civilizations of Islam" (In the Lands of the Christians xv).
He has, however, overlooked a ‘single’ exception: it is Jacques Le Goff’s reference to the medieval Arabs’ perception of the Indian Ocean in his article "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean: An Oneiric Horizon." 42

For Le Goff, medieval Westerners’ ignorance of the Indian Ocean and India in particular was in part the result of a negative Arabic influence. To the medieval Arabs,

Le Goff states, "It is possible that the Indian Ocean was a forbidden and unknown world"(3). This lack of information about the Indian Ocean on the part of medieval Arabs, Le Goff goes on to observe, did nothing but reinforce the "illusions" of medieval western writers and merchants who "sometimes turned to them for information"(3). Fortunately Le Goff’s statement does not represent the scholarly attitude of the vast majority of western Arabists, many of whose efforts have been instrumental in both introducing and safeguarding the rich heritage of medieval Arab-Islamic geo-cosmographical, historiographical and travel literature.  

It would hardly be an overstatement to say that during their own age of discovery and expansion, poetically captured by the above-mentioned lines of the poet/traveler Abu Dulaf(d.1012), medieval Muslims showed an enormous interest in their own 'Orient' especially after the conquest of Al-Sind (modern Pakistan) in 711 by Muhammad ibn Qasim. "By the 8th Century Arabian seafarers," Peter Boxhall notes, "were travelling frequently, in the wake of the great Islamic incursion by land into the Sind Province, and

43 Scholars such as De Goje, Blachère, Khrachkovski, Kimble, Miquel, Achoy, Gibe, Palencia, Reinaud, Bartold, Wussienfeld, Sarton.

44 Abu Dulaf was a poet and a traveler named by Ibn al-Nadim and other medieval chroniclers as a jawwāla, or globe-trotter. In spite of the debate over its authenticity, he is thought to be the author of his own account of India. This account was published with a Latin translation in Berlin in 1845(Ahmad 115).
by sea along the Malabar Coast, to far-distant ‘As-Sīn’ [China]")(291). In a general sense, outside the borders of dār al-Islām, it was mainly al-Hind (India) and al-Ṣīn (China) that drew the closest attention of Muslim politicians, geographers, merchants, and travelers alike (Khan 112).

Although this ‘Orient’ was predominantly conceived as "an actual space," to use Iain Macleod Higgins' phrase, some elements of "the imaginary and the conceptual," were unquestionably present, without, however, attaining the imaginary and the conceptual Orient "envisioned, elaborated, and encountered in the corpus of western writing about the East"(6). Indeed, in addition to the economic, political, and religious motives behind the interest in al-Sharq (East), the Indo-Chinese inspiration of al-ʿajīb/al-gharīb (the marvelous/ the unfamiliar) made the Indian Ocean ‘a desirable destination,’ and not a "taboo," as Le Goff has assumed (Wink 17).

The interest of Muslims in the East dates back to the early days of Islam wherein "the caliphs, were probably for political reasons, interested in acquiring information about different countries, their inhabitants and special features of their Lands"(Ahmad 38). It was with the Abbasids, however, that this interest reached its historical climax through the expedition sent to India by Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki (d.805), the competent wazīr of Harun al-Rashid.

According to Muhammad Zaki, the expedition was the direct result of the "intellectual awakening and frequent religious debates encouraged by the Abbasid

45 As demonstrated by Hourani in his classic Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times, even long before Islam, Arab seafarers and traders were familiar with the the Indian Ocean.
caliphs” which, in his own words, "stimulated an urge in the hearts of the Arabs to make enquiries and researches into the religion of the Hindus" (6). Seen in this light, this expedition to study the East’s own East, in spite of the almost ten centuries that separate them, conjures up to some extent the French expedition to Egypt in 1789. The outcome of this older non-military expedition was an intriguing report "that covered various arts, skills and scientific achievements of the Indians and a detailed account of the castes and religious practices" (Ahmad 38).

In this same period, an independent traveler by the name of ʿAbdullah Muhammad ibn Ishaq made his way as far as Khmer (Cambodia) where he lived for two years. Although Ishaq’s report is mostly lost, he is credited with leaving a number of valuable comments not only on the ancient kings of India, but also on Ceylon and Khmer which were used by later historians and geographers (Ahmad 38). Years later, the Abbasid polyglot/translator Sallam al Turjuman is reported to have reached the Great Wall of China (Malallah 31).46

In his geographical encyclopedia Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik, ibn Khurdadbeh (d.911) reported on the authority of al-Turjuman himself that the latter left for China at the request of the caliph al-Wathiq (d.847) who was terrified by a nightmare in which he saw a hole in al-sudd (dam) which the Qur’anic character Dhū al-Qarnayn is said to have built to prevent the apocalyptic nations of Yaʿjūj wa Maʿjūj (the biblical Gog

46 He was known as al-Turjuman, Arabic and Persian for translator. Ibn Khurdadbeh mentions that his mastery of many languages was the primary reason he was chosen by al-Wathiq for this mission of discovery (Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik 163).
and Magog) from invading and ravaging the adjacent territories (Hassan 15). Although one cannot totally exclude the story of the nightmare, Malallah, has argued convincingly that this nightmare was used rather by al-Wathiq as a pretext to expose his political and military power by showing that he could reach any corner he wished to reach (31).

In defense of the historical accuracy of the trip against the doubt leveled by some western Arabists such as Sprenver, Grigorev and mainly, Minorski, who described al Turjuman’s trip as "a wondertale interspersed with three or four geographical names," Zaki Muhammad Hasan, one of the world’s most respected scholars of medieval Arab-Islamic geographical and travel literature, has argued that what people should doubt is rather some of the mythical descriptions found in certain reports on the trip and whether Sallam reached the Great Wall of China or had just stopped in modern Dagestan(18).

As pointed out by Hasan, this is the position espoused by the French Arabist Carde Vaux who although he defended ardently the authenticity of the trip, used to argue that al Turjuman did not see the Great Wall of China, his prime objective. Others reasoned that he did not go beyond the fortresses located in the remote and northern mountains of modern Dagestan (Hassan 18). Referring to Arabists such as De Goje, Tomashek, and Vasmev, who confirmed the authenticity of the trip, Malallah has

47 The literal translation of the Arabic name would mean: the one possessing two horns. The historical identity of Dhū al-Qarnayn has generated a heated debate among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike, some of whom identify him as Alexander the Great. Owing to the many differences between the Qur’anic character who is described as pure monotheist and a faithful follower of God and the historical Alexander the Great, many Muslim scholars refuse this identification.
asserted that the very fact that Ibn Khurdadbeh, who was one of the closest advisors of al-Wathiq, mentioned that he heard directly much of the report from his friend al Turjuman appears to prove that the latter had indeed embarked on such a trip (31).

This fascination with India and China manifested itself in the publication in 916 of Silsilat al-Tawarikh (Chain of Histories), the first ‘anthology’ of Arabic accounts of India and China by Abu Zayd al-Hasan al-Sirafi (d.950), who most likely traveled to both countries (Hassan 9). Because he was also "an ardent collector of information from travelers visiting in India and China and other parts of the East" (Ahmad 42), al Sirafi after exhaustive editing and correcting, incorporated in Silsilat al-Tawarikh a number of accounts and reports of Muslim travelers, sailors, and merchants who visited India and China (42).  

The most interesting of these accounts is Akhbar al-Sin w-al-Hind (Account of China and India) still attributed by the majority of Middle Eastern scholars to Sulayman


49 In addition to the accounts of al-Mas’udī, al-Beiruni, Abu Dulaf, Ibn Battuta, other major accounts include those of al-Ya’qubi(d.880), ibn al-Faqqih(d.902), al-Maqdisi(d.980), al-Gardizi(d.1060), al-Marwazi(d.1125), al-Idrissi(d.1165), al-Gharnati(d.1170), al-Hamawi(d.1229), and al-Qazwini(d.1283). Gabriel Ferrand, the most renowned scholar in this field, counted approximately thirty-nine medieval Muslim reports of India and China, most of which are in Arabic (three), five in Persian, and one in Turkish.
Al-Tajir’s account of China and India, according to Zaki, is not only one of the world’s most interesting and authentic texts concerning medieval India and China but "the earliest known travel diary of an Arab that has come to us" (8).

Little is known about Sulyaman al-Tajir other than his own text and the fact that he was, as the second part of his name confirms, a tājir, that is to say a merchant. Indeed, what strikes the reader most on reading the opening pages of Akhbar al Sin wa-l-Hind is the remarkable reticence of the author on the subject of his own life and career during his journey in the East. Most probably, however, like his editor abu Zayd al Sirafi, he was from the coast city of Siraf. From the latter, as mentioned by some reports, he sailed across the Indian Ocean before reaching India and journeying into China.

Al-Tajir’s account is a mine of socio-cultural, religious, political, and economic information about India and China in the ninth century. In fact, from the beginning of his journey, the merchant seems to abandon his initial trade and become a keen observer and a preoccupied explorer who finds himself captivated not only by the spectacle of the Oriental Other he will soon meet, but also by the authentic ʿajāʾib/gharāʾib (marvels/wonders) of the Indian Ocean.

The opening pages of the account are full of rich maritime information about "this sea," as he calls it. It is the detailed and fascinating description of the sperm whale that

50 A growing number of mostly western scholars have maintained that the source of the account is anonymous. This argument has been rejected by a majority of scholars especially those from the Middle East and India, citing the fact that medieval Muslim historians regarded al-Tajir not only as the person who recorded the account, but as its uncontested author.
proved the most valuable in his entire account of the Indian Ocean. "In this sea is found a fish that appears occasionally," he tells us in his opening paragraph: "It has herbs and shells growing on it back. The captains of boats, sometimes, lay anchor against it thinking it to be an island, but when they realize their mistake they set sail from it"(33). Without the necessity of calling [him] Ishmael, for certainly he was, Moby Dick must have loomed large in the oceans of our memory conjuring up the lampoons of Queequeq, the destructive revenge of Captain Ahab, and more importantly le plaisir of navigating through foreign texts.

Perhaps it is not going too far to state that the remainder of the description of al-Tajir’s factual moby-dick, however, appears too classical to fit in the novelistic structure, if not the colonialist discourse of Herman Melville, for it is Longinian in essence. Capturing the Muslim sailors' feelings of the ‘sublime', whenever they encounter the sublime sperm whale, al-Tajir writes:

Sometimes, when this fish spreads out one of its two wings on its back, it appears like the sail of a ship. When it raises its head above water, you can see it as an enormous object. Sometimes it blows out water from its 'mouth', which resembles a lofty tower. Whenever the sea is calm and the fish[es] gather together, it collects them round with the help of its tail. Then it opens its mouth and the fish[es] dive into its belly as if diving into a well. The boats sailing on this sea are scared of it, so during the nightfall they blow the trumpets resembling those of the Christians, for they are afraid that it might lean heavily against their boat and cause it to be drowned. (Ahmad 33)

The un-Ahabian al-Tajir was fully aware of the tragic doom of chasing the sperm whale. Hence, he opted for a comic Sindbadian adventure that uses the sea as a means and never an end per se. Apart from the rhapsodic reference to the cannibalistic
Andaman, to which we will return later, the awkward opening of *Akhbar al-Sin wa-l-Hind* resembles closely the medieval and Renaissance western *isolari* (catalogue of islands) especially when al-Tajir consumes many pages to list clumsily the numerous islands of the Indian Ocean. Fortunately, however, with the approach to the nearest Indian shore, al-Tajir embarks on a rather pleasant Oriental journey wherein he gratifies the curious reader with a mine of information about ninth century India and China.

Throughout the remaining pages, al-Tajir, engages in a ‘comparative’ description of the religious, social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the Indians and the Chinese. He has proved particularly keen in exploring and mapping the *topos* of ‘Difference’ and ‘sameness’ between these two non-Muslim peoples most of the time, as his comments are without polemical addition or omission. Yet at other times, he is quick in reporting with implied disapproval, but without much moralizing, what he deems to be religious aberrations and social vices that utterly contradict his own religion and his cultural traditions.

It goes almost without saying that al-Tajir, as is the habit of the "religious minded" Arabs (45), to use Zaki’s phrase, seems to be particularly interested in Indian religions and sects. Relatively aware of the differences among the major Hindu castes and main sects such the Brahmans, Samanis, and Buddhists, al-Tajir, unlike more scholarly medieval Muslim writers about Indian religions, does not explain in detail many of the Hindu tenets and beliefs. Nevertheless, he has filled his account with valuable information on common Hindu religious and social practices, rituals of death, marriage, asceticism, women, justice, and politics.
In several important respects, the most salient aspect of his commentary is the comparative mode that dominates the entire account. This can be seen in the traveler’s thorough analysis of a number of similarities and differences between the Indians and the Chinese. These latter in spite of their ‘superiority’ in matters of education, culture, and civilization in general are, religiously speaking, depicted by al-Tajir as ‘blind’ followers of the Indians. This led apparently to the existence of several socio-cultural similarities between the two otherwise different peoples.

In Hindu Sarandib, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), for instance, which he describes as "the last of the islands and is one of the lands of India"(Ahmad 53), al-Tajir informs us that when a Hindu king dies and before his cremation, a woman engages in a number of sacramental rituals wherein she pronounces a moving tathkira, a type of a short but very meaningful admonition on the ineluctability of death. After the cremation, she repeats the same admonition for three consecutive days. Significant too is al-Tajir’s accurate exposition of the Hindu practice of sati, or the burning of wives with the bodies of their dead husbands. Shunning hasty conclusions and easy generalizations, he proves himself objective in emphasizing the fact that Hindu wives have the ultimate choice when it comes to this highly valued Hindu practice. Evidently, he could have easily made us believe that all Hindu wives must be burnt along with their dead husbands.

Centuries later, this same detail is highlighted almost verbatim by Marco Polo (d.1324) and Ibn Battuta (d.1369), the world’s best known globe-totters: "When a man is dead and his body is being cremated Marco Polo tells us, "his wife flings herself into the same fire and lets herself be burnt with her husband. The ladies who do this are highly praised by all. And I assure you that there are many who do as I have told you"(133).
Similarly, Ibn Batutta, notes that "The burning of the wife after her husband’s death is regarded by them[Indians] as a commendable act, but is not compulsory, for when a widow burns herself her family acquires a certain prestige by it and gains a reputation for fidelity"(158). Soon, however, he emphasizes the enormous social pressure on all women to practice the sati for as he concludes, " a widow who does not burn herself dresses in coarse garments and lives with her own people in misery, despised for her lack of fidelity"(158).

It should be mentioned that, at least in this religious cult of burial and self-immolation, the Hindus have not changed much from the time al-Tajir visited India in the ninth century and the time Marco Polo and ibn Battuta were there. Even more interesting is this rare medieval moment of agreement between two Mashriqi and Maghribi Muslims and a Euro-Christian on the crucial issue of religious Otherness.

Among the several factual wonders that drew the keen eyes of al-Tajir is the life of a number of Hindu gurus (enlightened masters). These mystics, al-Tajir tells us, dedicate their lives to wandering in uninhabited places such as forests and mountains without having any connections or communication with other human beings (53). They starve themselves as much as they can and it is understood that they are strict vegetarians for they survive by feeding occasionally on herbs and fruits (53). They also abstain from sexual congress with women by covering their penises with iron rings (53). Al-Tajir’s testimony can perhaps be seen as evidence for a Hindu influence on the rise of Sufism in medieval Islam. Among other things, this is especially significant when it comes to the cult of siyāḥa (wandering) and khalwa (isolation) that bear close similarities to the aforementioned Hindu cults as reported by al-Tajir.
Indeed, in addition to a number of monistic and pantheistic tendencies among some Sufi shuyūkh (masters) such as al-Hallaj (d. 922), Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), Ibn Sab’in (d. 1269), and Ibn al-Farīd (d. 1353), Sufi shuyūkh and murīds (disciples) chose to wander for years, in some cases for life, in the ṣahra (desert) and khala (uninhabited places) without taking provisions, a practice that continues today in some Muslim countries in search of kashf (enlightenment), ḥaqīqa (inner truth) and other mystical karāmāt (miracles). This is in addition to the spread of 'uzūbiyya (celibacy) and tabattul (sexual abstinence) among some of these masters and disciples.  

In al-Tajir’s view, the religious influence of the Indians over their eastern neighbors the Chinese is uncontested. Acknowledging some small differences in minor practices he calls them furūʿ, Arabic for minor issues, and observes that the sciences of religion never developed in China for "their religion originated in India" (53), in an apparent reference to the fact that the predominant religion of medieval Chinese was Buddhism, which is Sanskrit for enlightenment, again a concept of fundamental importance in Sufism.

Owing to the religious dependence of the Chinese on the Indians, several social customs related to marriage, hygiene, and food are similar in both countries. Marriage, for instance, is enacted in same way: "When the Indians and the Chinese wish to perform a marriage," al-Tajir remarks, "they felicitate each other, then exchange presents, and then they make the marriage public by playing on cymbals and drums. Their present consists of money, according to their means" (Ahmad 54). In a similar fashion, he informs

us that neither of them practises circumcision nor do they take a bath after *janāba* (sexual intercourse). This is in addition to the fact that the Chinese and the Indians do not slaughter their animals as Muslims do. Instead, they kill them by a blow to the skull. The Indians and Chinese, however, have different views in other issues of hygiene.

All in all, however, al-Tajir does not hesitate to imply that the Indians are not only clean but they are unquestionably "cleaner" than the Chinese for a number of reasons that are intrinsically inspired by his own culture such as their(Indians) daily bathing and teeth cleaning. Others are quite obvious, despite slight differences with Islamic practice. This recalls his statement that contrary to the Chinese who have sexual intercourse with menstruating women, the Indians, more similar to the Jews than to Muslims, not only do not cohabit with them but "they make them leave their homes and keep away from them"(56).52

52 In Islamic law, although *al-ḥayḍ* (menstruation) is seen as a time of *janāba* (ritual impurity) during which women, like men after sexual intercourse, are prohibited from staying in mosques and exempted from some obligatory *ʿibadāt* (acts of worship) such as *ṣalāt* (prayer) and *ṣaum* (fasting), they are not considered, as many think, *najis* (religiously impure), thus ‘untouchable’ as in Judaism’s ritual of *niddah*, Hebrew for separation. In fact, while being *junub* (ritually impure) during *al-ḥayḍ*, it is permissible for Muslim women to engage in their regular lives such as cooking, touching food, clothes, etc. In addition, they stay in their homes and sleep in their regular beds with their husbands. As for marital sex, physical intimacy is allowed and the couple has a normal sexual life with the exception of *īlāj* (full penetration of the penis into the vagina).
We may say, then, that when it comes to the matters of conjugal and sexual life of the Indians and the Chinese, al-Tajir never seems indifferent. Of significance is his accurate statement that the Indians, contrary to the Muslims and like the Catholics, consider marriage a religious sacrament that joins the Hindu couple not only for life, but as we saw earlier, in the afterlife. Divorce therefore is not allowed and at the death of husbands, wives who do not practice the *sati*, are not allowed to remarry.\(^{53}\) It is because, and in stark contrast to Marco Polo’s affirmation that the Indians "do not regard any form of sexual indulgence a sin"(131), *zināʾ* (adultery/fornication) is considered as an extremely serious crime that can end with death. Throughout India, as observed by al-Tajir, consensual adultery among married couples is punished with death for both men and women.

Interestingly, al-Tajir mentions that if a married woman is forced to engage in adultery, she is saved and only the man is killed (54). The severe punishment of adulterous married couples does not mean that other forms of sexual relations are inexisten in India. Indeed, prostitution among both the Indians and the Chinese is tolerated. As he tells us, in China not only prostitution, but also *liwāṭ* (sodomy) with young boys is widely practised in places built for the purpose (55). In India, legal prostitution is common in Hindu temples through the *devadasis* (temple girls) (55). According to Zaki and others, these women were not only "attached with the temple," but they also "traded in flesh and offered their income to the custodians of the temples"(47).

\(^{53}\) Divorce has been recently introduced into Hindu law as we are told by Ahmad (77).
Interestingly enough, al-Tajir does not describe the *fitna* (sexual temptation) of the temple *devadasis* as does Marco Polo, who in his account mentions that the Hindu temple girls were "completely naked except for their private parts" (132). "Marco was quite taken with the temple girls," Jonathan Clements humorously tells us, "and noted with great interest their pert, firm bosoms and their taut, tight flesh—*for a penny they will allow a man to pinch them as hard as he can*, he[Polo] adds, without daring to suggest that he had the right change"(115).

In general, if the Indians encountered by al-Tajir were, in his eyes, far superior to their neighbors the Chinese in matters related to spirituality, wisdom, hygiene, and to some extent morality, the Chinese excelled over their spiritual masters in matters related to culture. This impression was the outcome of al-Tajir’s fascination with ninth-century China’s "Universal literacy," political justice, social equality, agricultural and economic abundance and their unequalled artistic skills in craftsmanship and painting.

For obvious reasons, al-Tajir notes with fascination what he saw of widespread literacy among Chinese men and women. Whether poor or rich, young or old, he tells us, the Chinese learn calligraphy and the art of writing (47). This was the outcome of an effective political policy of decentralized promulgation of education on the part of the Chinese politicians. "In every town," al-Tajir writes, "There are scribes and teachers who impart education to the poor and their children; they receive their maintenance from the treasury" (52).

Since everybody knows how to read and to write, all the disputes and complaints must reach the king not only in documents written by a *kātib* (scribe) licensed by the *ḥikam* (laws), but to our surprise and amazement, in perfect spelling (51). "[And] before
the plaintiff (sahib-al-qiss) is presented in the audience of the king," al-Tajir tells us, "a person who is stationed at the gate of the house looks into the written [complaint] of the person. If he finds that there are some mistakes in it he rejects it" (51). Universal literacy does not seem to be the invention of our modern times and "the Literall advantage," to the detriment of the seventeenth-century English traveler Samuel Purchas (d. 1626), is God’s gift to all.

In Marvelous Possession: the Wonder of the New World (1992), critic Stephen Greenblatt has persuasively argued that according to Purchas, author of Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrims, it is writing that sets the boundaries between civilization and barbarism. "God hath added herein a further grace, that as Men by the former exceed Beasts," Purchas declares, "so hereby one man may excell another; and amongst Men, some are accounted Civill, and more Sociable and religious, by the Use of letters and of Writing, which others wanting are esteemed Brutish, Savage, Barbarous" (10). In addition to "the Christians’ conviction that they possessed an absolute and exclusive religious truth," and the possession of "navigational instruments, ships, warhorses, attack dogs, effective armour, and highly lethal weapons, including gunpowder," Greenblatt observes, it is this very Literall advantage that provided Europeans, "with a very few exceptions," as Greenblatt does not forget to observe, with a most powerful feeling of superiority towards "virtually all the people they encountered, even those like the Aztecs who had technological and organizational skills" (9).

For Purchas and other Europeans, Greenblatt goes on to say, the possession of writing was equated with the possession of "a past, a history, that those without access to letters necessarily lack’’ (10). Through the support of some scholars like Tzvetan
Todorov, Greeblatt reveals that "Purchas’s notion of the Literall advantage," has survived with considerable vigour in certain academic circles. In his seminal book *The Conquest of America*, described by Greenblatt as not only "thoughtful" and "disturbing", but also as the book that was the inspiration behind *Marvelous Possession: the Wonder of the New World*, Todorov, in the view of Greenblatt, has argued that "the crucial cultural difference between European and American peoples was the presence or absence of writing and that this difference virtually determined the outcome of their encounter" (11).

During the older cultural encounter between medieval Arabs and Chinese, "the presence or absence of writing," was not a crucial cultural difference between Muslims and Chinese. Nor was it, as attested by al-Tajir and other medieval Muslim travelers, an "important," let alone "the most important element" in the medieval situation of the two "lettered" cultures as it was the case with the European-American "situation," at least as delineated by Todorov(160).

In the same connection, despite its brevity, al-Tajir’s account of Chinese justice is particularly remarkable. Not only does the Muslim traveler notice with admiration the absence of bureaucracy but also he speaks with awe of the Chinese *al-dāra*: "Every town has a thing called *al-dāra*. This is a bell placed near (lit. ‘at the head of’) the ruler of the town and is tied to a cord stretching as far as the road for the [benefit] of the common people"(49). If a person is wronged by another person, he/she shakes the cord that is linked to *al-dāra*. When doing so, al-Tajir observes, "the bell near the ruler starts ringing. So he is allowed to enter [the palace] to relate personally what the matter is and to explain the wrong done to him" (49).
The result of this medieval Chinese ‘wonder’ was the amazing accessibility of the public to the political and judicial hierarchy. In medieval China, it seems, injustice was ‘panoptically’ controlled and justice was impressively disseminated. This conjures up the modern theory of ‘panopticism’. Whereas modern states, as understood by Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, function through this panoptical controlling of their citizens, the medieval Chinese state, to the surprise of all, used ‘panopticism’, to repress injustice. Not found even in the most democratic of modern societies, the Chinese al-dāra, it seems, is a more utopian wor(l)d.

Al-Tajir was also very much interested in Chinese political institutions for he seems to be convinced that such a successful government, dealing with its subjects with impressive justice and providing them with numerous economic and social services, must have behind it a very effective political system. This can be inferred from the numerous passages he devotes to the political hierarchy especially that of the emperor and the regional mulūk (kings). Among the reasons that lay behind the success of the Chinese political system was the age of the regional governors. "Among them," he says, "no one becomes a ruler unless he is forty years of age, for they say that [at this age] a person becomes mature due to his experiences"(48). Even more interesting are discipline, judicial accountability, discreteness, financial transparency, and healthy diets. "The king does not sit [in session] to mete out justice,"al-Tajir notes, "unless he eats and drinks beforehand, so that he may not commit an error"(48).

These excellent governing qualities of the Chinese in addition to other natural qualities made of the China visited by al-Tajir, especially when compared to India, not only thriving but also pleasant and healthy. "China is more pleasant and beautiful than..."
India. In most parts of India there are no towns, while the Chinese have large fortified cities everywhere. China is healthier, has few diseases and is most pleasant climatically"(57). It is no accident therefore that in this, at least in worldly terms, ideal medieval country "One cannot find a blind or one-eyed person there nor anyone suffering from a disease, but these are found in large numbers in India"(57). Perhaps knowing that al-Tajir was describing the China of the T'ang Dynasty (618-906), hailed by Herbert Gowen in An Outline History of China as "the most powerful, and the most economically and culturally developed empire in the world" (111), al-Tajir’s fascination is perhaps justified.54

In this medieval ‘Chinatopia’, ‘socialism’ was a royal matter. "Wherever there is a rise in prices," al-Tajir observes, "the king releases food [food grains] from his stores and sells it at a rate cheaper than the current prices in the market"(Ahmad 49). Likewise, al-Tajir was impressed by the free health services provided by the Chinese authorities to the poor. "If a person is poor," al-Tajir informs us "he is given the price of the medicine from the treasury"(52).

Even more ‘modern’ is the financial assistance enjoyed by aged persons who receive pensions from the treasury. These pensions are provided from the taxes aged people used to pay when they were active in the work force. Indeed, al-Tajir tells us with accuracy that although the government does not impose any taxes on lands and other private properties, from the age of eighteen to eighty all working men provide the treasury with a percentage proportional to what they earn. When they reach the age of eighty, in turn, the government is obliged to pay them back and provide for their living.

54 I am indebted to S. Maqbul Ahmad for this reference.
Behind this 'modern' social pension, lies the government’s firm belief in justice and equity for al-Tajir puts it thus: "They say: we took from him when he was a youth, and we pay him a salary when he is old’ (52).

In addition to these taxes, the rich and equitably managed treasure of the Chinese government relies heavily on the revenues of a wondrous herb the Chinese produce abundantly and transform into China’s not only most popular but most expensive drink. This herb according al-Tajir is "leafier than green trefoil and slightly more perfumed, and has a soury taste." In order to transform it into drink, the Chinese "boil water and then sprinkle the leaves over it." This hot drink that the Chinese take as a cure for many diseases "is called al-sakh." Such is al-Tajir’s description of China’s universally valued tea. This passage about tea by al-Tajir does not only make him the first Muslim traveler to mention tea in his account but it also proves the authenticity of his account of China. This is in stark opposition to Marco Polo whose omission of tea, among other things, has led many people to question the authenticity of the latter’s visit to China.

Finally, al-Tajir’s description of the Andaman Islands may be the most inviting passage in the entire Akhbar al-Sin wa-l-Hind. This is especially true in relation to the dissertation’s attempt to revisit some of the essentialist views of a number of postcolonial theorists and their dismissal of traditions and ‘discourses’ of Otherness in medieval Arabic literature and culture. As we shall see, al-Tajir’s description of the island and its inhabitants conjures up Robinson Crusoe (1719) and other western narratives of encounters with non-Europeans especially during the height of colonialism. The specific passage runs as follows:

On the other side of these [islands] there are two islands, and between them there is the sea. They are called Andaman. Their inhabitants are
cannibals. They are black with curly hair, and have ugly faces and eyes and long legs. Each one had pudenda, that is to say, his penis, nearly a cubit long; and they are naked. They have no canoes, and if they had them, they would have eaten up anyone passing by them. Sometimes it so happens that the boats slow down, and their speed is retarded due to the [strong] wind. The drinking water in the boats gets used up; and so they [sailors] approach these [islands] and refill the water. Hence, sometimes they [the cannibals] capture some of them [the sailors], but most of them escape. (Ahmad 36)

Not only is one stunned by al-Tajir’s, or probably his editor al-Sirafi’s, ‘scientific’ confirmation of the cannibalistic activities of these hamaj (uncivilized/barbarian) islanders, but also by his implicit equation between their barbarism/cannibalism, their presumed qubh (ugliness) and their manifest sawād (blackness).55

55 There is a rich body of medieval Arabic literature that deals with Arab-Muslim views and perceptions of al-Sūd (Blacks) that is yet to be explored and investigated. In addition to the brief, but succinct, reference to this rich corpus by al Azmeh in Al-Arab wa-l-Barabira, the most comprehensive study, in my view, came to light quite recently with the publication of Nadir Khadhim’s book Tamthilat al-Akhar: Surat al-Sud fi-l-Mutakhayyal al-Arabi al-Wasit (Beirut: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l Nashr, 2007). For a western study, see G. Rotter’s PhD dissertation Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gesellschaft bis zum XVI. Jahrhundert (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich- Wilhelms-Universitat, 1976) and David M. Goldenberg’s The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).
Indeed, the islands are there, the ‘Cannibals/Calibans’ are there, the gaze of power and the power of gaze are there, but it is obvious that al-Tajir’s report of this human mirabilia is rather in his ‘innocent' interest in and fascination with the marvelous and the unfamiliar. Evidently, many postcolonial readers may legitimately see in this excerpt a textual proof that betrays not only al-Tajir’s orientalist/colonialist discourse but also a medieval Muslim Orientalism/colonialism. Although none can impose a single interpretation upon literary texts, it seems that al-Tajir in the quoted passage is too ‘innocent’ to be an orientalist/colonialist. Perhaps, one should direct some of this textual 'innocence' toward the assessment of a number of westerners who have described the East.

The obvious example is Marco Polo himself. Like al-Tajir and his editor/co-author al Sirafi, in his description of the Andamans "as cruel cannibals who liked their strangers raw and highly spiced," he, or perhaps Rustichello of Pisa his own editor/co-author, as argued convincingly by Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park in Wonders and the Orders of Things,1150-1750 (1998), was/were keenly interested in the "grandsimes mervoilles et les grant diversités." of the East in 'innocently' embracing their own culture’s "topography of wonder" (34). In contrast to al-Tajir and al Sirafi’s description of the cannibalism of some Eastern/African races, Polo and Rustichello "were more taken by the monstrosity of the mythical dog-headed Cynocephali that were "among the most widely discussed and variously described of the exotic human races"

(31).
It seems evident therefore that *Akhbar al-Sin wa-l-Hind* illustrates a cultural relativism that foreshadows, for instance, Montaigne’s *Essais*. Apart from his repulsion at what he deemed un-Islamic rituals, lack or rather imperfection in matters of cleanliness, *un-halal* meat, widespread and legalized heterosexual and homosexual prostitution, al-Tajir does not find any reason not to extol many of the cultural, political, economic, and social achievements of those ‘infidels’ he met.

In general, al-Tajir does not make any use of suffixed formulae such as *la ʿanahum Allah* (may God curse them) or *dammarahum Allah* (may God destroy them), a common practice in Muslim writings about *al-Rūm* (Byzantines) and *al-Ifranj* (Franks) during the hostile times of the pre/Crusades. This makes more ideological sense when one remembers the Qur’anic injunction to Muslims to favor *ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book) over the *mushrikīn* (polytheists) of China and India. "On est surpris, du reste,‘‘ André Miquel writes, "que rien dans ces voyages n’atteste le sentiment d’une dégradation des choses et des êtres à mesure qu’on s’éloigne du centre vivant du monde et de la foi vers les terres mystérieuses de l’infidélité"(73).

In many other instances, the ‘Orient of the Orient’ served as a space of socio-political self-criticism and cultural experimentalism. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, contrary to the monolithic impression of modern postcolonial theories of Orientalism which have not only limited the complex relations between East and West to the latter’s colonialist ambitions in the lands of the Other, they have also forgotten that every Self has its own Other, and that every literature has its own alterity. Throughout Islam’s classical age of discovery and expansion evocative of Europe in early modern
times, the ‘Orient’ had its own ‘Orient’, but not, it seems to me, its own ‘Orientalism’ in the essentialist Saidian sense.

Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the various accounts of India and China especially during the golden age of the Abbasids. Although none can deny the fact that this interest was in many ways instigated, perpetuated, consolidated and driven by religious propaganda, territorial expansion, economic interest, or political endorsement, not every Muslim in the age of expansion who wrote about the Orient’s own Orient was ‘supremacist’, ‘colonialist’, or racist’. It is more related, perhaps, to the centrality of the literary and cultural leitmotif of al-ʿajīb/al-gharīb in medieval and early modern Arabic travel literature.

Of course one could challenge this seemingly ‘innocent’ Arabic tradition of al-ʿajīb/al-gharīb through, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt’s deconstructive critique of the poetics and politics of wonder in Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World.

With an historically and culturally, and ideologically stimulating awareness, Greenblatt probes the ‘cultural poetics’ of what we have always perceived as a mere human emotion (i.e. wonder). This is particularly true of his exploration of the cultural and discursive [in the Foucauldian sense] foundations of wonder as illustrated by the European encounter with the New World—especially as exemplified by Cortes’ encounter, contact, and military clash with the Aztecs (128). Wonder, Greenblatt argues, was an indispensable stage in the ‘othering’ of the Other for it subverts and ultimately contains all possible spaces of ‘sameness’ in that very Other. Indeed, it is the discursive response of the ‘same’ that overwhelms the emotions of wonder. By conjuring up his/her ‘sameness’, the intruder, explorer, or traveler sets a boundary between ‘self’ and ‘Other’.
Such a ‘cultural’ boundary would certainly construct the possible space of what Mary Louise Pratt has aptly termed in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) as "contact zone"(6). In Greenblatt’s view, this "contact zone", however successful in setting a space of cultural exchange, fails at the end to destroy the "red lines" that protect the ‘self’ from the different ‘Other’ (128).

Greenblatt goes on to assert that wonder was crucial in the ultimate "dispossessing" of the natives by a possessive/ing Other. The latter comes to the shores, intrudes into native territory, meets the native, wonders at his/her appearance, habits, speech, etc. Through an ‘imperialist’ consciousness and unconsciousness of the ‘self’, the intruder confers his/her ‘sameness’, intrudes into the difference of the Native, differs in a Derridean sense and infers through "descriptions judgments, and actions"(135) his/her Otherness. Fortunately, Greenblatt has somewhat questioned his own essentialism when he exempts figures such as Herodotus, Jean de Léry, Montaigne, and Mandeville from the artful manoeuvre of the experience of wonder for colonial appropriation and consolidation. These authors, Greenblatt concludes, found in the experience of wonder a vehicle for cultural relativism and understanding.

Perhaps it is no exaggeration to suggest that had Greenblatt been familiar with the Arab Islamic tradition of wonder in cultural encounters, the list of exemptions would have been longer. Otherwise, one would be likely to concur with Nabil Matar’s position, however debatable it may appear to some, on the theoretical ineffectiveness of some western theorists when applied to the Arabic tradition. "The Arabic travel accounts

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56 As Pratt puts it, it is "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact" (6).
cannot therefore be approached through the theoretical models," Matar writes, "with which European accounts have been studied by writers as different as Stephen Greenblatt, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. They belong to a tradition that is different not only in its history but epistemology" (In the Lands of the Christians xxxii).

In sum, in addition to showing that medieval Muslims were not uninterested in the non-Muslim Other, my main objective in referring to the ‘Oriental theme’ in medieval Arabic *adab al-riḥla* (travel writings) is to question, if not challenge, the postcolonial equation of travel literature and the traveler’s gaze with dominant discourses of power such as Orientalism and Colonialism. Cultural Othering is one way, among many, of constructing self definition and identification. Cultural encounters between different humans in different contexts, however, are too complex a phenomenon to be ‘essentialized’ in restrictive western theoretical models let alone through a set of binary opposites—Self/Other, civilized/barbaric White/Black, West/East, etc.

Not only does Islam’s encounter with its own Orient challenge such essentialism, but also, as I hope to show in the following chapters, its own medieval encounter with Europe and the Euro-Christians, a subject which has been neglected in the ongoing and heated debate about relations between Islam and the West. Medieval Muslims were not interested solely in the Far East, but through a number of textual and physical journeys, many medieval Muslim writers, cosmographers, travelers, envoys, and captives from the Mashriq and the Maghrib through their curious pens and inquiring eyes ventured into different parts of medieval Europe as well and left us with extraordinary accounts of what they saw and experienced.
Chapter II: European Barbarity and Civilization in some Medieval Arabic Geographical Sources: Al-Masʿudi and al-Bekri as Two Case Studies
A. Earliest References to ʾUrūfa (Europe) in Medieval Arabic Sources: Brief Survey

As a growing number of scholars have demonstrated, medieval Muslims produced a rich corpus of geo-cosmographical literature, much of which has not yet been thoroughly explored. Indeed, it should be noted that in addition to purely religious factors that were often the most important impetus behind producing such a corpus, there were certainly other economic and political reasons. As briefly mentioned earlier, the great interest of the caliphs in mapping their dominions and extending their empire east and west of dār al-Islām was particularly influential.

Perhaps more pertinent to this study is the rise of an entire geographical scholarship that dealt with al-masālik (routes) and al-mamālik (kingdoms), known interchangeably as al-buldān (countries), and the fact that Ibn Khurdadbeh and al-Istarkhi’s books Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik (the Book of Routes and Kingdoms) along with al-Ya‘qubi’s Kitab al-Buldan (the Book of Countries), opened new vistas of paramount importance (Alavi 28).

This ‘Renaissance’ of interest in geography ushered in the rise of Muslim cartography called by some Arabists "Atlas Islamicus" especially in the hands of scholars Reinaud, Barthold, Kramers, Khrachkovski, and André Miquel.

Such as the determination of al-qibla and al-waqt, that is to say the correct orientation and time, judged by Islamic law as indispensable for the performance of the mandatory daily ʿsalāt (prayer) and the mapping of the routes for the hajj.

that made up what is known as the Balkhi School of geography (Brauer 3). Of significant value are Ibn Hawqal’s and al-Khawarezmi’s texts that bear the identical title of Surat al-ʾArḍ (Image of the Earth). "In general the term ṣūrat al-ʾarḍ," Ahmad Nazmi informs us, "refers to an approach in which data dealing with cosmography and geography together is being gathered"(88). It is at this period that several Greek concepts such as al-qism al-maʿmūr (the inhabited world) versus al-qism al-ghayr maʿmūr (the uninhabited world) and the ensuing theories of al-aqālīm al-sabaʿa (the seven zones), or with some writers, al-aqālīm al-arbaʿa (the four zones) started to gain favour within the broader medieval Muslim divisions of the world (Meri 137).

It should be remembered that owing to their fascination with human and cultural geography, some of these geographers in their exploration of taqsīm al-ʾard (the division of the world) and taṣnīf al-umam (classification of nations), began to exhibit an enormous interest in knowing about non-Muslim peoples who lived outside their own geographical zones. Not only was this suggestive of their interest in the ‘Orient’ or to a lesser degree Bilād al-Zinj (Africa), but also, as we will show, of their efforts to know about and study non-Muslim peoples who lived west and north of dār al-Islām in what some of them used to call, in imitation of their revered Greek teachers, ʾurūfa/arūfa (Europe) (Ziada 27).

As a number of scholars have pointed out, the first reference to ʾurūfa/arūfa (Europe) in medieval Arabic literature dates back to the ninth century. Certainly, it is not to be found either in the rich theological writing or adab (literature) of the period. As stated by Miquel, medieval Muslim cosmographers such as al-Khawarizmi (d.847), Ibn al- Faqih (d.903), Ibn Rusta (d.910), Ibn Khurdadbeh (d.911) and the anonymous Persian author of Hudud al-ʾAlam (The Regions of the World), inherited from the Greeks the

Bernard Lewis maintains that Muslim writers of history and geography knew nothing of the names that Europeans (including of course the Greeks) had given the continents as a system of division of the world. To the contrary, the Muslim view of the world during the first centuries of the Islamic era was influenced by many different cultural trends. The notion of dividing the world into mainlands or continents was also known to most Muslim writers of geography, even after the Umayyad period. (141-142)

As Miquel has also argued, this division gave Europe not only al-Andalus (Spain), the different Slavic nations, *al-Rūm* (Romans and Byzantines alike), and the Franks, but also many ‘remote’ eastern regions such as the countries of the Volga where the Bulgars, the Rus and the Khazars were settled (257).

In the earliest descriptions of Europe and Europeans, however, medieval Muslim geographers in the view of Hanna E. Kassis were largely satisfied with their reliance on Ptolemy’s *Geography* (9). This was in part, Kassis explains in "Images of Europe and Europeans in some Medieval Arabic Sources.", the result of the fact that these scholars were writing before the availability of the Arabic translation of Paulus Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri Septem* (10). As pointed out by Hussein Mu’nis in *Tarikh al-Jughrafiya wa-l-Jughrafiyyin fi-l-Andalus*, contrary to the prevalent assumptions, medieval Muslim cosmo-geographers in their early accounts of Europe owed more to the Latin Orosius than to the Greek Ptolemy.
In Mu’nis’ view the most important influence upon medieval Muslim perceptions of Europe and the Europeans occurred in the very lands of Europe: the translation of Paulus Orosius into Arabic in al-Andalus. This event, as Mu’nis points out, was the fruit of a diplomatic exchange of presents between the caliph of Cordoba abd al Rahman III and the Byzantine emperor Romanus (40).

As several-Andalusian historians have mentioned, among the presents received by ‘Abd al-Rahman, was Orosius’ Latin *magnum opus*. This book had to await the succession of al-Hakam II (961-976) to be translated into Arabic as *Tarikh al-ʿAlam*, that is to say, *History of the World* (Kasssis 21). Although scholars have differed on the first translator(s) of this book, they have agreed that Qasim ibn Isbagh must have contributed enormously by directing the translation process and editing the Arabic translation (Mu’nis 40).

With the completion of the translation of the *Historiarum*, medieval Muslims, according to Munis, began to know more and more about Europe and the Europeans. Possibly, as advocated by Kassis, the translation of Orosius, led succeeding Muslim geographers and historians "to echo the same type of information about Europe" (10). Yet as Mu’nis has acknowledged, several-Andalusian geographers had gone beyond Orosius just as their colleagues of the East had in several respects gone beyond Ptolomy (42). This is particularly evident in their exploration of "the unknown aspects of human geography of medieval Europe especially by studying medieval Europe’s customs, peoples, geographical features, languages, industries, and trade" (42).

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60 The original Greek title is *Emegal Mathematike*
To support his view, Mu’nis cites the example of the Andalusian cosmographer al Razi (d. 973) by comparing his depiction of Spain to that of Orosius. Whereas the latter, in the eyes of Munis, stops at mentioning the borders of Spain and its towns, al Razi includes a very long introduction on the general geography of the peninsula and engages in a detailed description of its towns, its rivers and mountains.

Al-Razi, Mu’nis notes, went so far as to speak about the different religious denominations that characterized each town. Another Andalusian scholar by the name of al-Udri, expands on al-Razi and focuses on aspects of life as varied as agriculture, irrigation systems, taxing, trade and a number of socio-cultural practices of al-Andalus. These two scholars ushered in the rise of medieval-Andalusian human geography which reached its peak mainly with al-Bekri (d.1094), and al-Idrissi (d. 1154).

As shown by A. I. Samarra’i in "Some Geographical and Political Information on Western Europe in the Medieval Arabic Sources."(1972), the earliest interest of Muslims in medieval Europe was largely political. In his view, it began with their exclusive reference to certain eastern European kings.

Ibn Khurdabeh, for instance, who is among the earliest Arabic authors to refer in his writings to western European nations in "On the Kings of the World." in Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik, while speaking quite accurately of the Khaqan of the Khazars, the Basileus of the Romans, the Kniazh of the Slavs, and the chieftains of the Turks, did not seem to care either about the Franks or about the Lombards of Italy. This led Samarra’i to argue that for mostly economic reasons, medieval Muslim geographers, at least in the beginning, cared more about Eastern Europe. In spite of their military enterprises and diplomatic activities in western Europe during the Umayyad and Abbasid reigns, decades
after the conquest of Spain, discussion of the latter was still scarce in comparison to their interest in some eastern European nations (17).

This is no best exemplified than by their earlier nomenclature concerning the Mediterranean Sea (Samarra‘i 17). In early medieval Muslim geographical writing, Samarra‘i tells us, there was much said about this sea that medieval Arabs used to describe in different suggestive ways. Although they most commonly and significantly used to call it *baḥr al-Rūm* (the Roman Sea), others named it as *baḥr al-Maghrib* (the Western Sea). Still others, it seems, tried to 'arabize' it and preferred either *al baḥr al-Shāmi* (the Syrian Sea) or *al-baḥr al-Misrī* (the Egyptian Sea). As Nazmi puts it:

> Of all the above-mentioned names, the Sea of Rum from an early date was the name most in use to denote the Mediterranean Sea. It has always been regarded by Muslim geographers as one of the main seas in the inhabited quarter (...) Muslims often pictured the Mediterranean Sea as a large sea with many gulfs branching out of it. Usually they described the Mediterranean Sea from the west to east or from as-Sus al-Aqsā (western Morocco) to the Syrian coast. The northern coast was usually named Bilad ar-Rum or the countries of the Christians, (among them the coast of Asia Minor). (222)

Some Muslim geographers used to link the Mediterranean Sea to *baḥr al-ẓalām* (the Sea of Darkness), the appellation most suggestive of the Atlantic Ocean, and this turned the discussion of others to the possibility of navigating westward and northward over the Atlantic Sea (Samarra‘i 17). 61

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61 As mentioned by several medieval chronicles in the course of their exploration of the Atlantic Ocean, a group of adventurous young cousins are thought to have sailed
It seems clear therefore that classical Greek Ptolemaic ideas in the first instance and Roman Orosian views in the second, came to dominate much of the medieval Arab-Islamic *taqsīm al-ʾarḍ* (division of the world) and *taṣnīf al-umam* (classification of nations) along with some minor Persian and Hindu influences. Briefly speaking, as shown by Nazmi, some classical Muslim geographers “from the eastern caliphate” (145) were influenced by the Persian Kishwar system dividing the world “into seven circles of equal size” (143). Few others, however, opted for the Indian system of dividing the world “into three squares (instead of circles) which lead out three by three” and corresponding to different nations and countries (145).

This brief historical introduction is important since it highlights the fact that many of the stereotypes and generalizations that dominate some medieval Muslim sources on Europe and the Europeans are more Greek than they are Muslim. This is true of al-Masʿudi and al-Bekri, as we shall see in the following two of the richest and most interesting accounts of medieval Europe in the corpus of classical Arabic geocosmographical literature.

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into the Atlantic Ocean and landed on the Canary Islands. They were called *al-fitya al-mugharrarīn* (literally the seduced young men).
B. Transcending the Stereotypes: the Barbarian *Ahl al-Shamāl* (People of the North) versus the Civilized *Ifranj* (Franks) in al-Mas‘udi’s Account of Medieval Europe

Not only was al-Mas‘udi among the earliest Muslim scholars to probe into the histories and cultures of various non-Muslim peoples, but he was also among the first classical cosmographers to study a wide range of ancient and contemporary European *ajnās* (peoples) and *umam* (nations) (Shboul 52). This is not surprising if one remembers his intellectual gifts, versatile scholarship, extensive travels east and west of *dār al-Islām*, and his interest in non-Muslim cultures. As his two most famous geo-cosmographical works *Muruj al-Dhahab* (the Meadows of Gold) and *Al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf* (Warning and Supervision) clearly reveal, medieval Europe appears in a positive light in his overall exploration of the world.

In fact, in addition to his increasingly debated reference to *ahl al-Shamāl* (people of the North), a phrase he and other medieval Muslim cosmographers used to refer to northern Europeans who settled in what was known interchangeably as *ʿarḍ al-Shamāl* (land of the North) and *ʿarḍ al-ḍalām* (land of darkness), al-Mas‘udi has left behind one of the richest depictions of Europe and Europeans in medieval Arabic-Islamic geo-cosmographical literature (Kassis 13).

As Alavi and others have emphasized, although it is evident that al-Mas‘udi in his exploration of human geography acknowledged some purely natural factors such as "the availability of water, natural vegetation and topography"(53), he ultimately adopted a number of classical Greek deterministic theories. Indeed, like most classical Muslim cosmographers, in keeping with Hipparchian and Ptolemaic ideas, he divided the world
into a *qism ma’mūr* (inhabited world) and a *qism ghayr ma’mūr* (uninhabited world). Borrowing Greek concepts *verbatim*, he divided the inhabited world into *saba’a aqālīm* (seven latitudinal zones), which in turn, corresponded to *al-nujūm al-saba’a* (the Seven Stars). These seven latitudinal zones, al-ʿAzmeh writes, "began slightly north of the equator and ended in the realms of perpetual darkness in the north"(3). Likewise, al-Masʿudi was always eager about, if not obsessed by, differences in *ṭibā‘ al-bashar* (human characters), *laun al-bashra* (skin colour), *al-lugha* (language), and even *al-dīn* (religion) as well as *ḥarakat al-nujūm* (movements of the stars), *al-abrāj* (zodiacs) and other astral or planetary influences (al-Kilani 46).

Perhaps more interesting is the fact that al-Masʿudi, like most medieval Muslim cosmographers, emphasized the determining role of the climate in shaping the attributes of humans and in the classification of nations. As Thabit ʿAbdullah has demonstrated in "Arab Views of Northern Europeans in Medieval History and Geography."(1996), al-Masʿudi was one of the medieval Arab geographers who used to believe that the climate "was the primary determinant of human characteristics"(74). In keeping with this "widely held belief" (ʿAbdullah 74), al-Masʿudi opined that *al-ḥadhāra* (civilization) cannot be produced outside *al-aqālīm al-muʿtadila*, that is to say the temperate zones, excluding thus, in the most common sevenfold division for instance, the first and seventh zones

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62 Al-Masʿudi and other medieval Muslim cosmographers believed that the first climate was under the influence of Saturn, the second under Jupiter, the third under Mars, the fourth under the Sun, the fifth under Venus, the sixth under Mercury and the seventh under the Moon (Ahmad 68).

63 From the Greek *klimata*.  

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universally described by classical cosmographers as being most extreme either in ḥarāra (heat) or burūda (cold). In other words, both are equally remote from al-i’tidāl (temperance) the sine qua non not only for the cultivation of decent, if not perfect, human behavior but also for the production of [human] civilization (al-Kilani 94).

This i’tidāl is descriptive of al-aqālīm al-wusṭa (the central zones) represented perfectly in al-iqlīm al-thalith (the third zone) and al-iqlīm al-rāba’ (the fourth zone), comprising, certainly Greece, in addition to other Mediterranean countries, many of which became part and parcel of dār al-Islām: Persia, parts of China, parts of India, and by ideological association, the extremely hot Arabia and Iraq, the latter made temperate through the tempering nature of the surrounding seas and great rivers dominant in the natural geography of the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, or perhaps more suggestively described as Bilād al-Rāfidayn (that is to say the country of the two rivers).64

It is ultimately surprising, however, to discover that amidst this ideological manipulation of Greek climatic and deterministic theories, the politically tempering effect of the Tigris and Euphrates was more powerful than the islamically tempering effect of the sacred Arabian seas. Indeed, in the cosmological view of al-Mas‘udi and other Abbasid scholars, it was ultimately caliphal Baghdad, not Mecca or, at least, Medina, that was viewed as the indisputable centre of the earth.65 “This climatic principle

64 From the Greek Mesopotamia(between two rivers)

65 This highly political cosmo-geographical view was not popular among non-Abbasid scholars, many of whom found no reason to favor Baghdad over Mecca. In fact, it was not uncommon to find Mecca-centered mappa mundi, especially among non Iraqi cosmo-geographers.
was not applied too rigidly,” Shahid Alam tells us, "[a]lthough much of India and Arabia fell within the first and second zones, both were peninsulas, which allowed for cooling and brought them closer to the temperate climate of the central zones"(10).

In *Al Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf*, for example, while describing the European ajnās (peoples) living in the extremely cold *al-iqlīm al-saba‘* (seventh zone), al-Mas‘udi comes to the essentializing conclusion that because of the climate they live in, these Northerners are inherently *hamal* (uncivilized) and *hamaj* (unlawful). In these qualities, they are comparable only to *al- Zinj* (Africans) who inhabit the asymmetrically first zone known for its extreme heat. The fact that the sun is extremely low in the seventh zone made these specific European ajnās lead a life of ultimate *tawāḥhus* (bestiality) in the same way that the scorching sun determines the bestial attributes, according to him, of the medieval Black Africans, with the exceptions of the more civilized Ethiopians and Sudanese.

Moreover, the weakness of the sun affected enormously *ahl al-Shamāl* and manifested itself in several physical and linguistic *nagā‘iš* (defects), conceived as absolute markers of inferiority and depravity. Among them, al-Mas‘udi cites enormity of bodies, extreme skin whiteness, heaviness of tongue, coarseness of language, sexual lasciviousness, moral depravity, unlawfulness, gluttony, savagery, lack of intelligence, and incapacity of theological reasoning (181).

No wonder then that al-Mas‘udi’s controversial passage on *ahl al-Shamāl* has not only been the *locus classicus* but also the only quoted reference in recent studies by scholars from different academic backgrounds and interests. In addition to Bernard
Lewis, as seen earlier one can cite, for instance, Dinesh D’Souza, Mona Najjar, and Carole Hillenbrand.

In *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (1995), while discussing the issue of racism in Arabic-Islamic culture and literature, D’Souza does not find any more compelling textual evidence which succinctly epitomizes classical Islam’s racism and xenophobia than al-Masʿudi’s specific passage on *ahl al-Shamāl*. Predictably, the conclusion that he draws is that Arab-Muslim thinkers, through the example of one of their icons (that is, al-Masʿudi), universally "found the Franks and Slavs of Europe to be the ultimate barbarians"(112).

Echoing D’Souza, after quoting the same passage, Mona Naggar has reiterated the same claim. Indeed, after quoting al-Masʿudi’s statement on *ahl al-Shamāl*, she hastily concludes: "Thus describes Arab historian and geographer Al-Masudi the inhabitants of Europe – more precisely, the Slavs, Francs and their neighbors"(1).66 Perhaps more surprising is Carole Hillenbrand’s option to use the passage in the section entitled "Muslim Stereotypes of the Franks: The Formation of an Image before the Crusades" in her study *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (2000) where after mentioning the exact passage of *ahl al-Shamāl*, she has this to say:

The above account emphasizes the excessive cold and dampness of the clime within which the Franks reside: it is the climatic characteristics that render the inhabitants dull of understanding, gross of nature, lumbering in stature and coarse in manners. These negative qualities became rooted in

the Muslim mind in relation to the Franks. Indeed, they reappear, for example, in a work on the categories of nations written in 1086 by a Muslim judge in Toledo, Sa'id ibn Ahmad. He describes the barbarians who live in the north (that is, Europe) as more like beasts than men. (270)

There is however no doubt that from his numerous references to the Franks and the kaleidoscopic Slavs, among other European peoples and nations, that al-Mas'udi did not have such a monolithic perception of medieval Europe. Nor did he seem to confine, let alone to equate, the entire European continent to the land of the North/land of Darkness, as one may understand from the above mentioned statements. It may be surmised rather that he did not intend to cast all European peoples and nations, ancient and medieval, as utterly barbarian and bestial. Samar 'Attar is worth quoting in this regard:

It is true that some medievalist Arabs and Muslims have described certain Europeans as ‘beasts’, or ‘baha’im’, a description that Bernard Lewis likes to quote whenever he talks about the attitude of Middle Easterners to Europeans [...] The truth lies somewhere else. One has to understand the context in which this word, ‘baha’im’ has been used. The tone is not that of contempt, but rather of pity. The Arab geographers who used the term were faithful to their rationalist belief. Man has reason and is expected to use it, but not everyone does. The implicit distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or the ‘self and the Other’ in a variety of medieval Arabic texts expresses some bewilderment at God’s work and the inability of man to explain everything in this universe. (26)

Similarly, it is of importance to stress that the term al-Ifranj (Franks), at least in al-Mas'udi’s writings, is not a stock term for medieval Europeans and it does not relate in

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67 This is true also of his less common fourfold division of the world and his references to al- rub' al-shamālī, which is the northern quadrant (Europe).
any way to the controversial *ahl al-Shamāl*. "Earlier Arabic authors (and also later ones)," as we are told by Ahmad Shboul, "usually apply the name *Ifranj*, or *Ifranja* generally and often vaguely to all western Europeans. Al-Mas’udi, as a rule, clearly singles out the *Ifranja*, the Franks proper, as a nation distinct from other western European nations" (190).

Moreover, al-Mas’udi, as demonstrated by Shboul, in the same *Al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf*, has an entire chapter entitled "On the Seven Nations in Ancient Times, their Languages, Opinions, Lands, and the Distinguishing Characteristics of each Nation and other Matters Relating to This." As this long title suggests, the text is a rich examination, based on different ideas he gleaned from his extensive reading of Muslim and mostly non-Muslim sources, mainly Greek, Persian, and Hindu, historical, cosmographical, philosophical, and religious, of the great civilized nations that, according to him, had contributed enormously to the making of human history (Shboul 126).

In addition to the Greeks and the Romans, al-Mas’udi unequivocally placed the Franks and Slavs, perhaps contrary to the suggestions of the above cited scholars, among these civilized nations. It is of interest as well that in this al-Mas’udi opposed the dominant view espoused by many of his contemporaries who used to confine civilization within the walls of four great nations, the Arabs, the Persians, the Indians and the Byzantines. This view was not shared by al-Mas’udi whose fascination with the number seven seemed to benefit the medieval Franks and Slavs. Shboul comments as follows:

The seven nations, or rather groups of nations, are enumerated by al-Masudi in the following order: the Persians (*al-Furs*); the Chaldeans (al-

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68 Many Muslim scholars considered China as a fifth “great nation.”
Kaldaniyyūn wa- hum al-Siraniyyūn), under the heading al-Mas‘ūdi includes also the Hebrews (al-Ibraniyyūn) and the Arabs; al Yunaniyyūn[the Greeks], al-Rūm, al-Ṣaqāliba, al-Ifranja, and other neighboring countries in the south, and the land of al-Maghrib as far as the Atlantic Ocean; the Turkic peoples(ajnās al-Turk); the peoples of India, the Indus valley and their neighbors (ajnās al-Hind w-al-Sind wa- ma ittaṣal bi- thalik), the people of China, al-Sila (Korean peninsula) and other adjacent nations.(126)

In light of this passage, it is unlikely that Ibn Sa‘ed al-Andalusi (d. 1070) had based his Kitab Tabaqat al-Umam (the Book of the Categories of Nations) on al-Mas‘ūdi’s Al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf as a growing number of scholars have asserted. Centuries before Ernest Renan’s controversial Sorbonne lecture L’Islam et la Science, in which he argued that Muslims are incapable of producing science, Ibn Sa‘ed had already taken the opposite controversial view. Ibn Sa‘ed’s main thesis is that nations of the world are to be divided into two ṭabaqāt (classes) in accordance with their interest in and production of al-ʿilm (science). Although he casts the ancient Greeks among the first group, he paradoxically includes all remaining European nations, among them the Franks and the Slavs, within the second category.69

Overlooked is the fact that al-Mas‘ūdi in his account of mostly northern, central, and western Europe and his brief reference to ahl al-Shamāl, and contrary to his account of Byzantium, seems to echo strongly ancient Greek views rather than medieval Arab ones. Indeed, as far as his stereotypical description of Northerners is concerned, it is

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evident that he adopted Greek views of the *Barbaroi* of the North, most likely in reference to ancient Germanic/Icelandic tribes. It appears that Herodotus has been a direct influence especially through the following description of the northern barbarians:

Barbarians can neither think nor act rationally; theological controversies are Greek to them, incapable of living according to written laws and only reluctantly tolerating kings. Their lust for gold is immense, their love of drink boundless. Barbarians are without restraint. They run dirty and barefoot, even in the winter. They grease their blond hair with butter and care not that it smells rancid. Their reproductive energy is inexhaustible; the Northern climate of their native land, with its long winter nights favors their fantastic urge to procreate. If a barbarian people is driven back or destroyed, another already emerges from the marshes and forests of Germany[...]. Indeed, there are no new barbarian peoples—descendants of the same tribes keep appearing. (*The History of the Goths* 6)

Drawing on all these, we should not stop at the controversial passage of *ahl al-Shamāl*, as many have done, if we really want to arrive at a comprehensive picture of al-Masʿudi’s views and perceptions of various medieval European peoples and nations. This is extremely important given that al-Masʿudi, as correctly stated by Kassis, "had a definite influence on subsequent Arabic writers and on the image of Europe that they portrayed" (13). Such was no doubt true of his depiction of *al-Ṣaqāliba, al-Ifraqī, al-Jalāliqa* and *al-Nukbard* referring to the multi-ethnic Slavs, French, northern Spanish, and northern Italians.

There should be no doubt that al-Masʿudi’s account of *al-Ṣaqāliba* is among the most original of medieval Muslim writings about the Slavs. It is not surprising therefore that it has been highly regarded by western medievalists and Slavists in particular.
Like most of his contemporaries, he uses the word *al-Ṣaqāliba*, to refer to various Slavic peoples.

Without proving or disproving, in apparent conformity to the orthodox Muslim position concerning what is known in Muslim law as *al-riwāyāt al-Israʾiliyya* (Judaico-Christian histories), al-Masʿudi briefly mentions that all Slavic peoples, like all European races and nations, trace back their genealogical ancestry to Noah’s son Japheth through the latter’s son Mar. In spite of their interest in relating races and nations to the three sons of Noah in conformity with dominant religious narratives, however, medieval Muslim cosmographers were not excited about what Suzanne Conklin Akbari describes in her article "From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation." as the "standard distribution of the three continents among the sons of Noah," as were their western colleagues such as Hrabanus Maurus, Vincent of Beauvais, and Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Akbari 22). Hence, it seems safe to propose that among Muslim cosmographers, in spite of the multiplicity of theories, the threefold division was never popular.

It should be noted however that despite their apparent shared genealogical origin, at least in religious terms, the predominance of Christianity, and the unifying nomenclature (i.e, the stock word Slav), medieval Slavs, like their contemporary descendants, are portrayed by al-Masʿudi as multiracial and multinational.

In *Al-Muruj*, after observing that the Slavs "are made up of different nations and races," al-Masʿudi quickly adds that it is beyond the scope of his book to probe into the multifarious reasons that led to such a diverse European people (181). He goes on to assert that at one particular historical moment, the Volonian king Majek was the king of
all the Slavs who after a period of political unity and economic prosperity, fell prey to long civil wars which resulted in their ultimate disintegration. Al-Masʿudi implies that it is *al-qabaliyya* (tribalism) that caused the downfall of this great European race.

In Miquel’s view, the general picture given by al-Masʿudi of medieval Slavs, although in many ways confusing, did not lack in accuracy. "Malgré les incertitudes fréquentes de graphie," he argues, "le panorama esquissé par Masudi n’est pas exempt de logique. Il va du nord au sud, depuis les pays de Brandebourg et Mecklembourg jusqu’aux Croates des plaines danubiennes, en passant par le bloc central composé de la plaines-Moravie ainsi que de la Serbie et la Croatie Blanches"(314). Among these widespread Slavic groups, al-Masʿudi refers with accuracy to the Walinana, the Astabrane, the Namdjin, the Menabi, the Sarbin, the Marwa, and the Khorwatin, respectively identified with the Volinians, the Stodorans, Germans, Bohemians, Serbs, and Croats (Shboul 182). In referring to the racial diversity of the Slavs, al-Masʿudi is echoed in all modern encyclopedias that define the word Slav(s) ‘universally’ portrayed not only as ethnically and linguistically diverse but also as the largest ethnic and linguistic group in Europe.

Al-Masʿudi also gives us a brief account of a number of Slavic achievements. Speaking of their powerful kings, he tells us that many of them are strong and popular, priding themselves on possessing cultivated provinces and several bustling towns. Among the towns mentioned by al-Masʿudi, Miquel has identified Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Kiev, Dvornik, and Cracow (314), all of which were familiar to medieval Muslim merchants and travelers, used for trade in different types of goods and commodities. Yet it is the military side that drew the particular attention of al-Masʿudi
who ends his account of the Slavs by stressing that their kings were courageous warriors who boasted of having numerous troops and ample military resources. This made of the Slavs a continuous threat to many of their neighbors since they were always ready to launch military assaults against not only the Byzantines, but also against the western Franks and Lombards, who represented in the corpus of medieval Arabic writing western Europe *par excellence*.

Contrary to the widely scattered Slavs, *al-Ifranja* (the Franks) and *al-Jalāliqa* (the Galicians), are portrayed as more united. Like the Slavs, however, he relates them to Japheth and he correctly remarks that most of them are strict *melkite*, that is to say Catholics who follow *al-bāb* (the Pope) in *Rūmiyya* (Rome). Apart from his much-praised account of Frankish kings from Clovis to Louis IV, his pioneering reference to Paris as the capital of the Franks, and his informed reference to numerous wars that took place between the Northern Spaniards and Andalusian Muslims, al-Masʿudi is credited by a growing number of scholars for much other interesting information on medieval France and northern Spain (al-Kilani 319). 70 In Newman’s words al-Masʿudi is the author "of the single most important Arabic source for the history of the *Ifranj* (and indeed other foreign peoples), their rulers and kingdoms"(15).

Among all the medieval European nations, kings, and civilizations al-Masʿudi singles out, it was ʾ*arḍ al-Firanja* (land of the Franks), the Frankish *mulūk* (kings), and Frankish civilization that drew his particular attention. He does not hesitate to hail them

70 As he tells us in *Muruj al-Dhahab*, he based this account on an Arabic translation of the book attributed to Gotmar, bishop of Gerona (Spain) which he came across while he lived in Egypt.
as the most civilized *jins* (race) of medieval Europe. As pointed out by Newman and others, *ʾard al-Firanja*, despite its vague usage in most premodern Arabic-Islamic literature, incorporated most of present-day western Europe which during the time of al-Masʿudi was still ruled by the Carolingians (751-987). Indeed, apart from France, it included "the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxemburg, as well as a narrow strip of northern Spain, much of Germany and Austria, and much of the northern half of Italy" (Solsten 7).

In the long section devoted to the Franks in *Muruj al-Dhahab*, he portrays them as excelling over all their neighbors not merely in courage and military strength, but also in political stability, social order, prosperity and other aspects of civilized achievement. Commenting on their military power and organization, an eternal marker of national merit and pride, he tells us that the Franks "are the most courageous among these[European] peoples, those who defend themselves better, the most equipped" (*Muruj al-Dhahab* 181). The Franks in the view of al-Masʿudi are also known for their social harmony. This is related to the fact that the [Carolingian] Franks are as he put it "subject to one king and in this there is no dispute or faction among them." Furthermore that they are, as he put it, "the most submissive and obedient to their kings" (*Muruj al-Dhahab* 181).

Although verification of the historical accuracy of al-Masʿudi’s statements concerning these particular characteristics of the Franks goes beyond the scope of the
present study, historians have agreed that the Carolingian Dynasty was one of the most unifying in the entire premodern history of Europe. \(^{71}\)

The Franks, al-Masʿudi goes on, pride themselves on living in a vast country that has "the most extensive lands," and contains "the most numerous cities" (Mūruj al-Dhahab 181). Counting about one hundred and fifty cities, in addition to what he describes as country towns and villages, he singles out Barīza, that is Paris, by noting that it is the biggest city of the Franks and their great capital. According to Shboul, al-Masʿudi may be credited with being among the earliest, if not the first, medieval Muslim writer to refer with accuracy to Paris as the capital city of the Franks(190).

Paris was to become legendary and would later captivate the imagination of generations of modern, and even pre-modern, Arab-Muslim visitors to Europe. An everlastingly ambivalent love/hate reaction in visitors to Paris, has for centuries been the favoured locus of many of the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Arab-European encounters described in modern Arabic literature and the Arabic riwāya (novel) in particular.\(^{72}\)

Given this perception, one may conclude that al-Masʿudi, as the above passage suggests, represents a pre-modern anticipation of the positive impression, if not the


\(^{72}\) One can cite Tawfiq al-Hakim’s ‘Usfur min al-Sharq (Bird from the East), and Suhayl Idriss’ *Al-Hayy al-Latini* (The Latin Quarter). For a comprehensive study of these two novels and others, see Rashid el Enany’s recent study *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006).
persistent maḥabba (love), to use Matar’s phrase (In the Lands of the Christians 199), with which several pre-modern and modern Arab-Muslim travelers/writers approached French civilization and tout ce qui est français. Important figures such as the Moroccan ‘Abdullah bin ‘A’isha (d. 1700), the Egyptian Rifā‘a Rafi’ al-Tahtawi (d. 1873), the Syrian Francis Marrash (d. 1873), and the Tunisian Khayruddine al-Tunisi (d.1881), are among the most well known examples.\(^\text{73}\)

Al Tahtawi, for instance, in Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Baris (The Refinement of the Gold in a Comprehensive Depiction of Paris), in spite of the dissimilar times and contexts, seems to quote al-Mas‘udi verbatim:

The power of the Franks multiplied on account of their skills, organization, their knowledge of an adaptability and inventiveness of warfare. If Islam had not been protected by the might of God—praise be to Him the Almighty—it would be nothing compared to their [the Franks] prowess, population, wealth, [and] skills. (9)\(^\text{74}\)

In the same context of al-Mas‘udi’s praise of the Franks' political stability, lack of factions, social harmony and especially, their loyalty to a single leader, perhaps it is legitimate to add that by doing so, he seems to deplore, if not implicitly to criticize, the volatility which characterised Abbasid politics throughout much of his life. Indeed, in spite of their numerous military successes, robust economic policies, cultural and scientific achievements, especially during the Abbasid golden age, and most importantly

\(^{73}\) See Nazik Saba Yared’s Arab Travellers and Western Civilization (London: Saqi Books, 1996).

\(^{74}\) I am indebted to Roxanne L. Euben for this quoted passage (Journeys to the Other Shore p.101).
their endeavours in publicly marketing their piety, the Abbasid caliphs had suffered from continuous *fitan* (schisms) and witnessed numerous *thaurāt* (revolts) fomented by religious-political and socio-ethnic groups and minorities.\(^75\)

Despite the fact that "the symbolic importance of the caliph as the head of the entire Sunni Muslim community never waned" (ʿAbdullāh 22), the schisms and revolts led ultimately to the weakening of the political power of the caliphs and their loyal governors in different parts of the empire. Conversely, there was a surge in the political influence of the military and the extremely powerful Seljuk Turks. Eventually, the Seljuk Turks took Baghdad in 1055 and established an independent principality, although contrary to other usurpers, they swore (honorary) allegiances to succeeding Abbasid caliphs. The weakening of the caliphs helped the rise of, mostly Shiite, anti-Abbasid independent principalities east and west of Baghdad. Chief among them, were the Fatimids and the Idrisids in North Africa, and the Buwayhids in Persia and Iraq. The

\(^75\) In addition to the rebellion of the Indians known as the uprising of the Zutt (820-835) and the Qaramatian movement (ʿAbdullah 22-23), there was mainly *thaurat al-Zinj*, that is the rebellion of African slaves (868-883), which the young al-Masʿūdī must have witnessed or at least heard about. This uprising started in the salt marshes in the southern city of Basra mostly by a group of angry African slaves under the leadership of ʿAli ibn Muhammad. After numerous confrontations in Basra and other southern towns, the angry protesters attacked Baghdad and were close to taking over the caliphal seat. This situation changed dramatically, however, when the caliph al-Muwaaffaq and his loyal forces succeeded in killing ʿAli bin Muhammad and crushing the rebels in 883 (ʿAbdullah 23).
disintegration of Abbasid politics continued until the ultimate fall of their rule and the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 (Goldschmidt 76).

As to the ‘ferocious’ Jalāliqa, that is to say the Spanish Galicians, the epitome of European barbarity portrayed in medieval Arabic literature, al-Masʿudi does not seem to add anything new to their story. He too portrays them as inherently ferocious and bellicose. Their most idiosyncratic attribute is their enmity toward the Muslims of al-Andalus. Al-Masʿudi briefly tells us that they were particularly known for their constant wars with Andalusi Muslims who are universally depicted in medieval Arabic sources as the innocent victims of Galician atrocity. Reinforcing this view, al-Masʿudi refers to the military support offered by the Galicians, and the Basques whom al-Masʿudi seems to consider as Galicians, to Umayya ibn Ishaq during the reign of ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Nasir (d.961). In spite of the proximity of the Franks and their own Christianity, the Galicians are not only the Other of the Muslim Self, but also the opposites of the civilised Franks.

Although not as valuable as his account of medieval France, al-Masʿudi has also left behind some useful information on medieval Italy. In Muruj al-Dhahab, and to a

76 It is the story of the military support offered by the Galicians to Umayya ibn Ishaq during the reign of ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Nasir. The latter, medieval chroniclers state, put to death his wazīr Ahmad ibn Ishaq as a just penalty for a major crime he had committed. In order to avenge the blood of his brother, Umayya defected to the Galicians and sought the help of their king Ramiro II. They did so wholeheartedly and they succeeded in several battles before they were crushed in 940. Umayya asked for and received clemency (Al-Kilani 360).
lesser degree Al-Tanbih, he speaks of the al-Nunkbard (the Lombards) as the most powerful and dominant ethnic group in medieval Italy. Although as Miquel has noted, al-Masʿudi, similar to Ibn Rusta and Qudama, does not distinguish between "Longbards, envahisseurs du VI siècle, des Lombards, qui sont les mêmes Sans doute, mais installés" (364), his overall account of the Italian Lombards in the view of Shboul is accurate especially in his implicit linking of the Lombards to the Franks, a link that finds strong support in the medieval history of northern Italy through Charlemagne, known as the King of the Franks and the Lombards. Upon numerous occasions al-Masʿudi portrays the Lombards as not only geographically the nearest neighbours of the Franks, but also socio-culturally speaking as their closest look-alikes. "Generally, Italy, or at least the central and northern parts of the peninsula," Newman informs, "was included in the lands of the Franks (ʿard al-Ifranj), or more rarely, into the Byzantine (Rūm) empire"(201).

Apart from their origin and faith, since both, as emphasised by al-Masʿudi, are descendants of Japheth and both are strict followers of ʿāhib Rūmiyya, that is to say the Pope, these medieval Italians are also depicted as no less courageous in battle and no less civilized than their coreligionists. The Lombards are also known for political stability and boasted strong leadership through the powerful Adākīs, identified by Miquel and others as the famous dukes of medieval Italy. Although only briefly mentioning the majesty that Rūmiyya (Rome) was, particularly before the decision of Constantine the Great to move his imperial seat to its eastern archrival (Constantinople), al-Masʿudi focuses rather on Rome as the unmatched capital of the naṣāra (Christians). Indeed, he seems to stress the fact that the Rūmiyya of his time owes much of its fame to the fact that it is the seat of al-bāb, that is the Pope, perhaps more widely known in early medieval Arabic sources as
ṣāḥib Rūmiyya, the Master of Rome, or even, as pointed out by Newman, King of Rome (199).

Medieval Italy, however, at least as represented by al-Mas’udi, is not solely Rome. Al-Mas’udi tells us that medieval Italy, not unlike France, has many great towns. He mentions with accuracy for instance, bāri (Bari), tārniyyu (Taranto), and shabrāma (Sardinia). He incorporates somewhat confusing information on the capital of the Lombards as well. He correctly states that it is mostly known for its great river which he calls in Arabic saybat, unquestionably a distorted Arabic form for the famous Sabato River. As demonstrated by Shboul, al-Mas’udi in his account of medieval Italy provides, albeit sparse, useful information on the expulsion of Muslims from central Italy (193), but it is surprising how little interest he has in the then extremely important relations between Muslims and Italians and Muslim Sicily, unlike his attitude concerning the Spanish Galicians.77

In sum, it is safe to say that in addition to al-Mas’udi’s keen interest in Byzantium, India, China, and Africa, various medieval European ajnās and buldān (countries) appear relatively often in his overall commentary about non-Muslims (Shboul 152). Not only is this typical of his examination of many eastern, central, and most importantly for us, western European ajnās such as the Rus, Slavs, Franks Galicians,

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77 The invasion of Sicily started in 827 A.D., but the conquest of the island was not achieved before 878.
Basques, Lombards and in passing the Bretons, but also of his controversial references to European barbarism through his stereotypical depiction of some Northern Europeans.  

One must not stop at al-Masʿudi’s controversial *locus classicus*, if one really wants to establish a comprehensive idea of his views and perceptions of medieval Europe especially if, as correctly concluded by Kassis, al-Masʿudi "had a definite influence on subsequent Arabic writers, and on the image of Europe that they portrayed" (13). In other words, al-Masʿudi’s influence was not confined to the Muslim East. His views of Europeans found a strong echo in the Muslim Occident (i.e., al-Andalus) in spite of the calls of many Andalucentric scholars to resist what they saw as the cultural hegemony of eastern Baghdad and Damascus over western Cordoba and Granada.

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78 Al-Masʿudi is among the earliest Muslim authors to refer "in passing," to use Shboul’s phrase, to medieval Britain. While speaking about the Atlantic Ocean, he briefly states that to the north of this large ocean lie a number of *juzur* (islands) which make up *Brītaniya* (Shboul 193 ).
C. The Wrongs of the Galicians and the Tongues of the Prussians: European Barbarity and Civilization through al-Bekri’s Andalucentric Eyes

Nowadays, Andalusi geographer and traveler Abu ʿUbayd al-Bekri (d.1094) is mainly remembered for his remarkable account of medieval West Africa. Unfortunately, from the bulk of his monumental *Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik* (Routes and Kingdoms), no other section, aside from his African account, has been completely translated into a European language. While one can always appreciate the particular interest of al-Bekri’s account of Africa, one must as well regret the fact that a plethora of other fascinating accounts have been unjustifiably neglected. This is particularly true of his exploration of medieval Europe, which can be described as one of the richest of its genre.

As demonstrated by Abdurrahmane al-Hajji and others, al-Bekri has bequeathed to us the most detailed of all Arabic accounts of medieval Spain and Muslim al-Andalus. He entitles a special chapter in *Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik* ”On the Iberian Peninsula.” In addition to several accurate geographical details related to its location, he also provides us with etymological details on the history of its naming.


80 Translated in French as *Description de l’Afrique Septentrionale* by the French Arabist De Slane in 1857.
Al-Bekri states with accuracy that Iberia originates etymologically in the word *ibra*, which, in his view, refers to the greatest river in the entire peninsula. No doubt he is referring to the River Ebro, still considered one of the longest rivers in modern Spain. He goes on to add, that for later centuries, it was named rather *Bātika*, in relation to the Baetis River, which medieval Arabs called *al-wād al-kābīr*, Arabic for the big/great river, later known by its Arabic name as the Guadalquivir River, Spain’s second longest river.

As far the word Spain is concerned, al-Bekri tells us that it finds its origin in the name of the ancient ruler Ishban. He then lists a number of the major Iberian towns that spread across the peninsula. His focus, however, falls on numerous Andalusian towns associated with the Golden Age of al-Andalus such as Almería, Málaga, Cadiz, Játiva, Valencia, Sevilla, Córdoba, Jaén and Granada.

The otherwise prosaic al-Bekri, when ‘narrating’ his own nation, does not only seem at his poetic best, but he proves "impossibly romantic and exceedingly metaphorical"(1), to use Homi Bhabha at his *postcolonial best*. Representing the best of East and West, al-Andalus has ended up in al-Bekri’s text as the ultimate metaphor of excellence and superiority. Thus it becomes in his words not only "Levantine in its air" and "Yemenite in its temperance," but also "Indian in its fragrance," "Chinese in its metals," and "Adenese in its coasts"(80).\(^{81}\) As far as its culture is concerned, in al-Andalus, he goes on, one can find "the wonders of the Greeks, people of wisdom and philosophy" (80) (Trans. mine).

While not the focus of this thesis, it is worth noting that al-Bekri’s description of al-Andalus does not only evoke the overriding nationalism/patriotism of the writer but it \(^{81}\) In reference to Aden, the coast city in modern Yemen.
also conjures up the *topoi* of Andalucentric rhetoric dominant in much of classical-Andalusi culture and literature. In its pure Andalusi context, these metaphors are remarkable in their poetic articulation of the prosaic *fāḍāʾ il al-Andalus* genre. The latter refers to the corpus of classical-Andalusi literature through which writers not only narrated romantically the virtues of their homeland, but also unwaveringly advocated its superiority over Maghribi (North African) and, mainly, Mashriqi (Eastern) Muslim countries.  

Towerling above all this is a contemporary of al-Bekri, the polymath Ibn Hazm (d.1064). As we are told by Maria Rosa Menocal and Raymond P. Scheindlin in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, Ibn Hazm "composed the first of the series of essays on the virtues of al-Andalus praising Andalusi accomplishments in all fields of learning"(114). This refers to his *Risala fi Fadl al-Andalus* (Epistle On the Excellency/Superiority of al-Andalus), which he wrote as a refutation of the Tunisian scholar Ibn al-Rabib al-Qayrawani, who in a letter to one of Ibn Hazm’s cousins, had belittled the cultural and scientific achievements of the Andalusi especially in comparison to their Maghribi and Mashriqi coreligionists (Awis 239). Two centuries later, in keeping with Ibn Hazm, al-

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82 A feeling of Andalusi superiority is still dominant in some Maghribi communities of Andalusi descent in regard to their co-citizens and coreligionists of Eastern Arab and Berber descents. Although not as strong as it once was, this mentality is still manifested in the refusal of intermarriages with indigenous Maghribi men and women with whom they have been living since their expulsion from Spain in the early fifteenth century.
Shaqundi (d.1232) wrote a similar epistle as an answer to the Moroccan Ibn al-Mu‘allam al-Tanji.  

In its most radical aspect, however, this Andalucentricism found its most vocal opposition in the calls of a number of Andalusi scholars to resist what they saw as the literary and cultural *tasalluṭ* (hegemony) of the East and to denounce several of their compatriots for their blind imitation of their ‘eastern masters.’ The most eloquent was certainly Ibn-Bassam (d 1147), hailed by J. A. Abu Haidar as "one of the earliest and foremost anthologists and literary historians of al-Andalus"(140). In *Al-Dhakhira fi Mahasin Ahl al-Jazira* (The Treasury in Proclaiming the Merits of the People of Iberia), he says the following:

> The people of these lands refuse but to follow in the footsteps of the Easterners. If a crow should croak in those lands, or flies buzz somewhere in Syria or Iraq, they would kneel before the latter as before an idol, and treat the crowing of the former as an authoritative text…I was enraged by all this, and full of contempt of such an attitude, so I took it upon myself to highlight the merits of my own time, and the achievements of the people of my own country. Whoever, I wish I knew, restricted learning to

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83 Other names include Ibn Sa‘ed al-Andalusi, who incorporated a separate chapter on the virtues of al-Andalus in *Tabaqat al-Uumam* and Ibn al-Khatib (d. 1375) who composed a *risāla* (epistle) in which he argued for the superiority of al-Andalus over North Africa.
a particular period of time, and made (literary) excellence an Eastern preserve (469).\(^8^4\)

This particular passage is fascinating in a number of ways, not least because it conjures up the modern debate on nationalism and literature over which much ink has been spilled especially during the heyday of postcolonial criticism at the turn of the twentieth century.\(^8^5\)

Like his ‘eastern’ predecessor al-Mas‘udi, however, in his account of medieval Spain, the most ideologically "mortal enemies," to quote Alzeh’s article "Mortal Enemies, Invisible Neighbours: Northerners in Andalusi Eyes."(1996), come neither from the south nor from the east. Indeed, they are none other than the visible Galicians, universally portrayed in Andalusi sources, at least before the rise of the Castilians, as the most notorious and feared Others par excellence. "Altogether, the Galicians," al-ʿAzmeh tells us, "are the representative type of northern barbarity, in whom are conjoined the inversion of reason in foolhardy bellicosity, the subversion of the proper order of gender relations and the inversion of the hygienic requirements of refined society"(268).

It is via this ‘historicist’ course that al-ʿAzmeh (with due respect to his pioneering scholarship) might have found a possible, if not convincing answer, to the uncertainty he

\(^{8^4}\)Quoted by J. A. Abu-Haidar in Hispano-Arabic Literature and the Early Provençal Lyrics (Curzon: Richmond, 2001) p 140.

\(^{8^5}\) Ibn Bassam’s promotion of an independent Andalusian canon, is perhaps similar in circumstance to the example of the USA and Canada in their cultural and literary relations with England. See Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1997).
has highlighted concerning the predominance of the Galicians in Andalusi sources, as he puts it "in Andalusian eyes"(268). "It is unclear why the Galicians in particular should have acquired a privileged position in accounts of Northern Spaniards"(268).

Al-Bekri, who is unquestionably more versed in Iberian affairs than his "eastern master," to use ibn Bassam’s ironic expression, devotes a separate section to the Galicians. Like al-Masʿudi, he focuses squarely on the revolt of Umayya ibn Ishaq. The telos of this historical incident, aside from al-Bekri’s praise for the emir’s goodness, righteousness, and rahma (mercy) in his acceptance of the tauba (repentance) of Umayya, is the perpetuation of the ‘demonic’ and ‘barbaric’ picture of the Galicians. In al-Bekri’s own words the foremost manifestation of the otherness of the Galicians is that "They are people of distrust and misdemeanour"(43). These demonic attributes are informed by their barbaric nature and confirmed by their barbaric nurture.

As shown in the fitna of Umayya, the Galicians represented a constant threat not only to the political, social and cultural stability of al-Andalus, but also to the very existence of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula.86 Their physical prowess and invincibility in battle, even in al Azmeh’s choice of words must not be seen as proof of bravery and strength that is theirs alone, for bravery and courage are also attributes of the human and the civilized. Certainly, the bravery of the Franks, as mentioned earlier, is universally acknowledged by medieval Muslim writers, even at the time of the Crusades, and serves

86 These same Galicians would engage in a long struggle for revenge upon Muslims and it is predominately the Galicians who would reconquer many northwestern territories and regain most of modern Portugal by 1200.
as a kind of *affidavit* of their humanity and civilization, although none of these writers ever dared to extend what they deemed the highest level of human bravery, that is Muslim *al-fiurūsiyya* (chivalry), to a non-Muslim Other.

If such are their natural tendencies and in accord with historical realities, al-Bekri’s last judgement on the Galicians in which he harks back to their utter *tawahhush* (bestiality) and *takhalluf* (backwardness) should be understood as accurate, at least by the discerning ‘civilized’ reader. In the end there is nothing more repugnant for the refined Andalusi than to discover that there are some people who are unashamedly unclean and blatantly rude. This is in addition to the fact that they, most appalling for Muslims, do not have any prohibition about exposing their *ʿawrāt* (private parts) for *al-taʿarī* (nakedness) seems to be routine:

They lack hygiene since they wash themselves only once or twice a year with cold water. As for their clothes, they do not wash them until they are torn in the wearing and they are so tight and so open that their private parts are often exposed. They claim that their bodies get healthier because of their sweat (43). (Trans. mine)

This passage is particularly interesting in that one may see it as an ethno-political transposition of the dominant rhetoric of *al-tawahhush* in ‘Muslim’ climatic ethnography. The threat posed by the Galicians made them, in spite of their geographical and religious proximity, not only among the remotest and most unfamiliar Others, but by ideological association, the ultimate personification of *ahl al-Shamāl* of the seventh zone.

If, however, it was the Galicians who so succinctly epitomized the paranoiac fear of the Other in medieval-Andalusi culture and literature which made al-Bekri unequivocal in his categorical denial of any positive attributes of his neighbours in northern Iberia, it was the Franks, as with al-Masʿudi, who enjoyed his highest regard for
Although al-Bekri does not seem to be as conversant with the ancient and contemporary history of the Franks as al-Masʿudi was, he equalled in many ways the Eastern encyclopaedist in the following lengthy passage on the geography of ʿarḍ al-

_Firanj:

Its (southern) limits extend as far as the Mediterranean Sea. Whereas, from the North it is the Atlantic. From the south east, it is also bordered by the land of Rome (Italy) and the country of the Slavs. From which they are separated by a thick forest which requires many days to cross and separates them. From the East, it is also the land of the Slavs that borders it, while from the west, it is the land of the Basques.(144).(Trans mine)

Likewise, he speaks with admiration of the numerous towns spread across Francia. All in all, in his words Francia was "a land abundant in fruits. It has many rivers which spring from the melting snow. Also, it has well built towns with strong fortresses" (144). In the same context, he asserts the superiority of the Frankish sword to that of (civilized) India, hailed as unmatched in the Muslim East.

This description[of the Frankish sword] as much as it tells us about the great value of the sword in medieval Arabic culture—perhaps competing only with the horse and the pen— shows us as well how open medieval-Andalusi society was at least to non-Muslim economies. It seems equally appropriate to stress the significance of medieval trading competition between East and West, as illustrated in the _mufāḍala_ (comparison) between Frankish and Indian swords, a competition that many still see as the product of a

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87 This impression is dealt with in a separate section in _Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik_ devoted to ʿarḍ al-Firanj, which is Francia.
modern world.

Most interesting of all is al-Bekri’s statement that the civilized Franks, like the civilized Andalusians, confronted by the barbarian Galicians, were constantly threatened by their own northern enemies. If the Galicians were the foremost threat to the civilization of the Andalusians, the no less barbarian Briṭāniyyūn, that is the Bretons, were the first danger for their most civilized neighbours the Franks.

Perhaps echoing Frankish [Roman] views of the Bretons rather than his own, al-Bekri concludes that the Bretons "have a language that offends the ears, ugly faces, and bad manners"(86). "Among them," he goes on to affirm, "There are thieves who raid the Franks and rob them." "Franks, in turn, crucify any one they could capture"(86). Conversely, in the war between civilization and barbarism, the Franks' cruel crucifixion of the Bretons is as justified as the [wishful] extermination of the Galicians by the civilized.

As far as his interest in medieval Spain is concerned, it is clear that al-Bekri sums it up in his negative depiction of al-Jalāliqa (Galicians) and, to a lesser degree, al-Washkansh (Basques). It is safe to say that at least in his brief account of medieval Spain, al-Bekri seems to employ several modern discourses of representation. This is shown, for example, by his demonization of the two European peoples known for their unbounded animosity against Islam and their fierce resistance to the Muslim conquest of Spain.

It is unsurprising therefore to see al-Bekri, at least in his depiction of the medieval Spanish, practising a kind of *double standard*. While it may be complimentary, to recognize that on the battlefield, a single Galician is worth several Franks, his conclusion is derogatory. Apparently what is applauded as Frankish courage becomes
Galician ferocity, in other words, a marker of their closeness to northern tawāḥhush (barbarity) rather than to Frankish tamaddun (civilization). Certainly, as shown in other Arabic sources, the Franks, contrary to their initial response to the conquering Arabs, had later opted, especially during the reign of Charlemagne, for diplomacy and political subtlety.

Inasmuch as Galician resistance is juxtaposed with Frankish diplomacy and Galicians’ bravery and martial prowess become cruelty and bestiality, contrary to the civilized Frank, medieval Muslim writers seem to have been more impressed with the passive Charlemagne than the militant Charles Martel (d. 741). The silent functioning of the horologe presumably presented by Harun al-Rashid to the submissive delegation of Charlemagne (d. 814) seems to find a much stronger echo in al-Bekri’s account of medieval western Europe, as was undeniably the case in the Abbasid dīwān (court), than the resisting hammer of Charles and his Frankish armies during the Battle of Tours (732).

Perhaps most significant from the vantage point of post-9/11 international politics especially in light of Richard Jackson’s Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism (2005), it seems not too far fetched to argue that al-Bekri, not only in his tapping into "a plethora of tropes and narratives," related to the civilization and barbarism dichotomy, but also by his adoption of the Franks’ dominant "discourse of threat and danger," conjures up modern discourses of international wars and present war on terrorism (154). Irrespective of era politics, culture, race, gender, and religion, dominant nations have always invented barbarian Others deserving of annihilation in contrast to their own protection of civilized values.
Al-Bekri also incorporates a brief but intriguing section on medieval Prussians, which he had certainly gleaned from Ibrahim ibn Ya’qub’s account, and calls them Brūs, focusing entirely on their swords and tongues, that is to say on their impressive bravery and unimpressive language. The Prussians, al-Bekri tells us, are known for their constant wars with their neighbours. Most often they fight the Rus which in this context refers to the Russian tribes who used to attack them from the east and the Northmen who assaulted them from the west (Spekke 157). During these assaults, the Prussians proved particularly courageous and valiant. Indeed, as soon as a single Brūs would hear about an imminent assault from some of their enemies, he would not wait for his fellows, or any command, to engage in battle to the last drop of his blood (168).

The fascination of medieval Muslims with the courage of the Prussians seems to be related to their cultural ‘horizons of expectation.’ After all, in the Arabian cult of al-furūsiyya, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, willingness to fight the enemy and the eagerness to die in battle are placed among the most praised qualities of a fāris (knight). In highlighting this faḍīla (virtue), it seems that al-Bekri is referring to the famous Teutonic Knights of medieval Prussia. Chivalry and swords are directly juxtaposed to their pens and words. In addition to the fact that the Prussians were ignorant of their neighbours’ languages, al-Bekri believes that there is no mathlaba (demirit) as terrible as speaking a harsh language (68).

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88 Al-Bekri seems to predate by centuries Mark Twain in his severe criticism of the German tongue in "The Awful German Language.", the appendix to his book Tramp Abroad (1880).
Most detailed of all is al-Bekri’s account of medieval Italy and Rome. As did his eastern predecessor al-Mas‘udi, al-Bekri briefly and somewhat confusingly, speaks of the Lombards. He portrays them as the most dominant ethnic group of medieval Italy. He also tells us that the capital of the Lombards is divided by one of the greatest rivers of the world. In even more confusing and distorted language, he calls this river Sanīṭ and, as with al-Mas‘udi, misnames the Sabato River. If so, and in light of Miquel’s postulation, the town meant by Arabic sources could very likely be Benevento, capital of the province of Benevento (northeast of Naples).

Al-Bekri’s focus falls on the worldly achievements of Rome. He insists that it is one of the greatest cities of the world, majestic in architecture, and full of material wonders. Apart from its hundred gates, for instance, he tells us that Rome is one of the strongest fortified cities in the world. But this should not be understood to mean that Rome is impregnable. On the other hand, al-Bekri reminds his readers that in spite of its strong fortifications, Rome has often been conquered by different peoples. If such is Rome’s profane history, its sacred destiny is beyond doubt.⁸⁹

The Romans, he tells us, are ruled by al-bābā (the Pope) who is not only respected by his people but almost worshipped. With the same apprehension that contemporary Muslims exhibit in response to the cult of Catholic sainthood and the

⁸⁹ After the conquest of Sicily by the Arabs in 827, a number of Muslim soldiers attacked Rome. As mentioned by the historian Damien Simonis in Italy (2004), after this assault Pope Leo IV ordered the construction of the famous "Leonine" walls in reference to the high and robust protective walls that used to surround the Vatican, and whose remains are still visible (114).
Catholic veneration of the Pope, al-Bekri disapprovingly points out that Christians bow down and kiss the Pope’s feet. None, he goes on, would dare to raise his head until the Pope has given him/her the order to do so. For al-Bekri this is compelling evidence of the *shirk* (polytheism) of his Christian neighbors.

Al-Bekri then discusses at length certain Christian precepts and rituals without polemical comment. He tells us that Christians venerate Sunday because they believe that Jesus rose up to heaven from his tomb on a Sunday after meeting his apostles. Like the Chinese and the Hindus, Christians, al-Bekri continues, do not respect the obligation of cleansing oneself after intercourse and they do not practice ablution before their prayers. They only accept sacrifice after saying *hādha laḥmuk hādha damuk* (This is your body, this is your blood) in reference to Jesus.

Al-Bekri is describing with precision here the Catholic rite of transubstantiation during celebration of the Eucharist. He also remarks with admiration that Christians, like Muslims, disallow drunkenness. However, contrary to the polygamous Muslims, they allow only one wife. *Zināʾ* (adultery) is prohibited and if a husband finds out that his wife is unfaithful, he will punish her by selling her as a slave.

With accuracy, al-Bekri points out that divorce is not permitted among the Christians of Rome. He mentions too that Christians have their own ritual of fasting. Contrary to the more difficult Ramadan, Christian Lent, he observes, is extremely easy. Although in theory it is longer than the Muslim Ramadan, a fact that he emphasizes, Christians neither fast the whole day nor the whole night but rather they fast no more than half the day. Unlike Muslims, a Christian, al-Bekri remarks, is not obliged to attend religious services and no one would ever blame him for not doing so. The Bible
according to al-Bekri has five hundred and fifty seven subject elements, many of which, he comments, are mistaken and apocryphal since they are not part of authentic revelations (208).

By most accounts, Andalusi al-Bekri has bequeathed to us one of the most accurate reports of medieval Europe of the time. It is no exaggeration to say that he surpassed his eastern predecessor al-Masʿudi in the breadth of geo-historical information he incorporated in *Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik*. Not only is this true of his record of the Iberian Peninsula and his native al-Andalus, but also of the sections he devoted to certain western and central countries such as France, Bohemia, Poland, Prussia, and Italy. In his text about the latter, however, without acknowledging it as he does with Ibn Yaʿqub concerning central Europe, he seems to rely on the eyes of the ninth-century Muslim captive Harun ibn Yahya, as we shall see in the following chapter.
Chapter III: Writing the North: Europe and Europeans in Medieval Arabic Travel Literature
A. Captives and Emissaries from the Mashriq:

1. Mirabilia Urbis Romae through the Eyes of a Ninth-Century Arab Captive

Almost three centuries before the publication of Mirabilia Urbis Romæ (The Marvels of Rome 1143) attributed to a canon of St. Peter’s by the name of Benedict in which, the author described the city’s magnificent monuments, churches, palaces, walls, gates, arches, and markets, Muslim geographer ibn Khurdadhbeh (d.885) had already devoted an entire section of Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik to la Città Eterna. Coincidently, the title Ibn Khurdadhbeh chose for his entry on Rome was nearly an Arabic translation of Benedict’s much later title: Sifat Rumiyya wa ma Fiha min al-ʿAjaʾib (Rome and its Marvels).\(^90\)

Opening his entry with some plausible information on Rome especially in what relates to its location, parts, and two surrounding walls, Ibn Khurdadhbeh included some dazzling numbers related to Rome’s monuments. Naively, for example, he speaks of \(\text{al}f \text{ wa- miʿatayn kanīsa}\) (1200 churches), \(\text{arbaʿūn alf ḥammām}\) (4000 public baths), and a colossal wall made up of \(\text{al}f \text{ wa- miʿatayn wa-ʾishrīn ʿamūd fiha ruhbān}\) (1200 pillars atop of each one of them there is a statue of a monk). These and other ‘ajāʾib such as the copper-covered river which he describes with the enigmatic word qastitalīs and the strange shajara min nuḥās (copper-tree) made Rome one of the ‘ajāʾib al-dunyā al arbaʿa (the four wonders of the world).\(^91\)

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\(^91\) While De Goeje had in mind Ostia Tiberis, Miquel spoke of Fitulatus (La géographie humaine du monde musulman, 373).
D. L. Newman is more correct when he notes that Ibn Khurdabeh’s description of Rome, which in his view is not only "the very first description of Rome" but also "the first of any Western European town," is that of "a mythical place" (198). Newman goes on to add that "Ibn Khurdabeh’s description of Rome would serve as a template for subsequent travelers and geographers, with very little of substance being added, except more mirabilia" (199). Newman’s statement would have certainly been true had subsequent Arab writers not come across the more historical and plausible first-hand account of Rome attributed to the ninth-century Muslim captive/traveler Harun ibn 'Ali ibn Yahya.

Since Italian scholar Ignazio Guidi published an article on "la descrizione di Roma nei geographi arabi" in 1878, the name of Harun ibn Yahya has become to some extent recognized in the West. This is because ibn Yahya is commonly said to be among the very few, if not the only known medieval Arab, to visit voluntarily this European metropolis and see with his own eyes several of the mirabilia urbis Romae. "Parmi tous les géographes arabes qui nous ont parlé de Rome," Francesco Gabrieli wrote "il n'y a eu peut-être qu'un seul qui ait réellement vu de ses propres yeux les bords du Tibre, et tiré de sa propre observation les chiffres qu'il nous fournit sur les lieux, les monuments, les habitants de Rome" (43).

Failing however to mention the Andalusian Ibn Ya'qub (d.999), who is also said to have visited Rome a number of decades after his Mashriqi predecessor, Gabrieli went on to add that "il y a cependant une exception, ou au moin un cas, qui se présente comme telle: c'est celui de l'énigmatique Harun ibn Yahya, un arabe syrien du IX siècle" (43).
Most likely a little before 886 or as al-Kilani put it, "almost fifty years after Muslim al Jarmi"(al-Kilani 177), perhaps the most famous Muslim captive of the Middle Ages, a Syrian man by the name of Harun ibn Yahya was captured by Byzantine pirates in the seaport town of Ascalon (al-Kilani 177). After his capture, he was taken to Constantinople where he was held as an asīr (prisoner of war) for an unknown period of time. After his ransom in 886, he did not return home preferring instead to embark upon a long European journey. Harun ibn Yahya, as we are told by M. ʿIzzidin "left Constantinople for Slaukiya (Thessalonica), from where he traveled to Venice and later Rome, of which [too] he left a description"( 232).

Fortunately, some fragments of Ibn Yahya’s account of Rome were preserved by geographer Ibn Rusta in Al-Aʿlaq al-Nafīsa (The Precious Things) before later geographers began to incorporate several of its passages sometimes verbatim without acknowledging Ibn Yahya as the original source. According to Gabrieli, who is among a handful of scholars who wrote on Ibn Yahya’s account of Rome:

De même que les voyages d'Ibrahim ibn Yaʿqub en Europe occidentale et centrale nous sont parvenus en extrait chez al Bakri et Qazwini, ainsi l'aventure Byzantine, balkanique et italienne de ce Harun ibn Yahya…Ce texte reste précieux à plusieurs égards, pour sa haute antiquité (dernières décennies du IX siècle), et pour son contenu, qui se présente, répétons-le, l'expérience directe de son auteur. Nous lui sommes en effet redevables, entre d'autres données, de la description des deux métropoles de son temps en dehors du monde musulman, Constantinople et Rome. (44)

It is unfortunate that Ibn Yahya’s account of Rome has not only been eclipsed but somewhat confused with that of his undoubtedly more robust description of
Constantinople, hailed by ʿIzzidin as "one of the most—if not the most—important accounts left by visitors to the Byzantine capital in the Middle Ages"(232).\(^\text{92}\)

As with his description of Constantinople, the importance of his account of Rome cannot be undervalued. Despite its brevity and fragmentation, there can be no doubt that Ibn Yahya’s description of Rome is among the most valuable of its kind, not least because it captures well medieval Muslims’ fascination with Rome, which was related to Rome’s place in Muslim apocalyptic beliefs and because Harun provides a unique first-hand account of Rome from the perspective of a Muslim traveler. Indeed, regardless of some mirabilia à la Ibn Khurdadbeh, it would turn out to be "unicum pour son âge," to use Gabrieli’s phrase (44).

As mentioned earlier, in their accounts of medieval Italy Muslim geographers such as Al-Masʿudi and al-Bekri tended to picture medieval Italians (Lombards) along with the medieval French (Franks) as the strictest followers of al-bābā (the Pope). To the latter however they most often devoted separate sections, thus leaving the impression that Rome is a daula (country/state) and not a madīna (town/city). Overall, with the exception of ibn Khurdadbeh, the above-mentioned geographers were satisfied to rely on the description of Rome by Harun ibn Yahya.

As al-Kilani notes, Harun begins his account of Rome by providing some general information on its geography and location (174). He states that it is huge with a length that equals its width (forty miles). In the western part of Rome, there is a river (the Tiber)\(^\text{92}\)

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\(^{92}\)For a summary and discussion of this account see Nadia Maria el Cheikh’s *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2004), 142-50.
which divides it into two parts. Along this river he cites the existence of many jusūr (bridges). On the outskirts of the city, he speaks of beautiful basātīn (gardens) and numerous zayātīn (olive trees) (Ibn Rusta 131).

Contrary to most medieval Muslim views of non-Muslim cleanliness and hygiene, ibn Yahya is impressed by the cleanliness of the city and its people. He cites the existence of numerous hammāmāt and the abundance of running water thanks to its great qanāwāt (canals). Harun goes on to say that Rome is surrounded by two walls made of hijāra (stone) and it has many majestic abwāb (doors). He seems particularly impressed by two gates both of which he describes in detail. The first is bāb al-dhahab (the golden gate) and the second is bāb al-malik (the king’s gate). Between these two gates he tells us, there is a huge sūq (market place) which he claims to be twelve miles in length.

Ibn Yahya was also greatly impressed with the rich economic and cultural life of Rome. He was particularly taken by Rome’s markets, evoking the later western fascination with oriental aswāq. In his own words, he says that in Rome there are majāmiʿ aswāq yuqām fīha al-tijarāt (groups of markets where people engage in trade). After counting ninety-two mauḍiʿan (locales) for these markets, he observes that all markets in Rome are closed during Sundays. This is because during this particular day yansārif ahlūha fīhi li-l-ṣalāt (the people devote it to prayer) (Ibn Rusta 131).

As for the cultural life of the city, Harun presents Rome as a madīnat ʿilm (a town of knowledge/culture). With admiration, he speaks of more than one hundred and twenty majmaʿ ʿilmī (scientific institutions). Because of these institutions, Rome was a Mecca liman yurīd an yaltamas ṣunūf al-ʿilm wa-l-hikma, that is, for every person who is taken by the desire for learning all branches of knowledge and wisdom (Ibn Rusta 128). No
doubt a comparison to Baghdad first and them to other Muslim cities such as Damascus, al-Qayrawan and Cordoba must have been inevitable in the mind of Ibn Yahya.

Other non-Christian medieval travelers were equally fascinated with many of the buildings and institutions referred to by Ibn Yahya. The Jewish traveler Benjamin of Todela, to cite an example, who visited Rome in the twelfth century, had the following to say concerning the city he called "the metropolis of all Christendom":

The city contains numerous buildings and structures entirely different from all other buildings upon the face of the earth. The extent of ground covered by ruined and inhabited parts of Rome amounts to four and twenty miles…Rome contains many other remarkable buildings and works, the whole of which nobody can enumerate. (87-88)

It is surprising to discover that non-Christian medieval travelers, in spite of their fascination with the architectural marvels of the city, did not speak much of the riches and treasures said to be hidden in many of its remarkable buildings, unlike earlier and later Muslim travelers. In his "Letter from Rome." for example, Benjamin, known for his curiosity, did not even seem to be aware of the riches and marvels Ibn Harun claimed to see with his own eyes in some of Romes’ famous churches.

As with his account of Constantinople, Ibn Yahya, in spite of religious and historical sensitivities, found reason to devote the biggest part of his otherwise short account of Rome to its majestic kanāʾis (churches). “What drew Harun’s utmost attention,” al-Kilani points out, “was the number and majesty of its churches” (185). He singled out, however, what he called in Arabic al-kanāṣa al-ʿuẓma (the great church) in reference to St. Peter’s Basilica, which is one of the historical icons of Rome and also one of the largest, if not the largest, churches in the world.
Ibn Yahya speaks with wonder about its size and grandeur. He claims that it is two *farsakh* (12 to 14 kms) in length and that it has three hundred and sixty doors. In the middle of the church, he speaks of a high *burj* (tower) rising almost one hundred arms in the air. Atop this tower there is a huge *qubba mabniyya min-al-raṣāṣ* (a dome made of lead). He goes on to say that most of the church’s interior walls and doors are covered with *dhahab* (gold) while its exterior walls and doors are made of *nuḥās ṣīnī* (Chinese copper). He says that in every corner of the church, there are high structures atop which there are silver domes in which the monks ring *al-nawāqīs* (bells).

Similarly, Ibn Yahya speaks with awe of the strange and beautiful *tašāwīr* (drawings), *tamāthīl* (statues), the twenty-four *madhābih* (altars) before he catalogues the riches and treasures found inside the church: *alf marwaḥa dhahab muraṣṣa’ bi-l-durri wa-l-yāqūt* (one thousand golden fans encrusted with pearls and rubies), *situmī‘at ṣalīb min-al-dhahab* (six hundred golden crosses), *alf wa-mi‘atayn ka’s dhahabī muraṣṣa’ bi-l-jauhar* (one thousand and two hundred cups encrusted with pearls). He finishes this passage by stating that in this great church there live about three thousand two hundred priests and monks (128-129).

At the end of the text, Ibn Yahya claims that in Rome, there were *arba‘ wa-ishrīn kanīsa* (twenty-four churches), *thalāthatun wa-ishrīn alf dīr* (twenty-three thousand monasteries), and even more *kahana wa-shamāmisa* (monks and priests), of whom he counted no fewer than *thamāniya wa-arba ‘ūn alf* (forty-eight thousand). These exaggerated numbers as well as other *mirabilia* appear to be the addition of ibn Rusta and taken from Ibn Khurdadbeh who must have been the principal source.
As pointed out by Gabrieli, the exaggerated figures suggested by the traveler should not cast doubt on the authenticity overall of Ibn Yahya’s account and the information reported to the reader. "Toutefois, le goût du merveilleux (typique de l'homme médiéval)," Gabrieli noted, "n'exclut pas chez Harun le souci de la vérité, et assure à sa relation un peu décevante une valeur toute particulière pour cette image de Rome d'il y a désormais onze siècles"(45).

Among the real merveilles, however, that drew the attention of Harun ibn Yahya is the appearance of ahl Rūmiyya (the people of Rome or the Romans). In an extremely interesting passage, he tells us with a sense of confusion that men, young and old, shave their beards and heads and they do not leave a single hair of them (Ibn Rusta 130).

Ibn Yahya was not satisfied with recounting this Roman oddity, he was curious to know about the reasons for it. He says that he asked some of them in person about this "strange" custom especially when in his understanding inna zīnat al-rijāl fi-l- liḥā (the beauty of men lies in their beards"(Ibn Rusta 130). "L'importance de ce passage, à notre avis," according to Gabrieli "n'est pas dans la question elle-même, ni dans la réponse reçue, mais plutôt dans le fait de l'enquête elle-même, soulevée en première personne par le voyageur étranger, un témoignage direct de son contact avec le milieu qu'il nous décrit"(45).

Ibn Yahya transmits the Romans’ own point of view leaving it for the reader to judge whether it is convincing or not. For the Romans, he tells us, it was an issue of religious kaffāra (expiation). He reports further that he was told by the Romans that when Shamʿūn (Simon) and his poor companions came to Rome to propagate Christianity, the then pagan Romans tortured them and humiliated them by shaving their beards and
heads. At their conversion to Christianity, the Romans decided to shave their own beards kaffāra limā irtakabnāh min- ḥalq liḥāhim, that is to say, in expiation for shaving the beards of Simon and his companions (ibn Rusta 130).

To a medieval Muslim (Arab), the fact that a man shaves his beard is not only shocking, it can be a source of homosexual fitna. Regardless of the Islamic ruling on shaving beards which ranges from muḥarram (prohibited) to makrūh (reproachable), Ibn Yahya must have thought of the beardless male Romans as mirdān (singular amrad).  

An amrad for many medieval Muslims could be a source of sexual fitna in the same way, or even more for some, as that which women were generally thought to provoke. In short, this type of sexual fitna spread among some classes of medieval Muslims, leading to the rise of homoerotic adab (literature) and the poetry of al- mudhakkarāt and especially al- ghilmāniyyāt (love of boys).  

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93 In classical Muslim jurisprudence, shaving the beard for a man is not only interpreted as taghyīr li- khalq Allah (changing God’s creation), tashabbuh bi-l- nissa‘ (imitating women) tashabbuh bi-l- Majūs (imitating Zorastrians), and naqd li-l- murū‘a (opposing socio-cultural decorum). It can also be seen as proof of a Muslim’s disinterest in ittiba‘ (imitation) and ḥubb (love) of the Prophet. One should mention that shaving the beard was equally unacceptable to non-Muslim Arabs.

It is understandable, then, why Ibn Yahya, like many Muslim writers after him in their accounts of the Romans and the Byzantines alike, appeared tireless in recounting the *fitna* of Roman/Byzantine men and women. As demonstrated by el-Cheikh, classical Muslim authors used to assert that "the king of the Rum is called the king of human beings because his subjects, among all human beings are those who have the most beautiful faces, the best built bodies and the most robust constitution" (132).

While this conveys a positive view and general appreciation of the Romans/Byzantines, it could also hide a rather negative connotation that could, in my view, be related not only to a possible *takhnīth* (effeminization) of Roman/Byzantine males, but also to a consolidation of some dominant Arab views on female slavery and sexuality, for as shown by the Syrian-Christian physician Ibn Butlan (d.1066) in his bizarre *Risāla Jamiʿa li Funun Naḍiʿa fi Shīraʾ al-Raqiq* (Epistle on the Arts of Purchasing Slaves), Roman (Byzantine) slave girls were among the most preferred for both their physical appeal and domestic prowess (el-Cheikh 239).

After reading Ibn Yahya’s account of Rome, one may wonder about the reasons that made the traveler, and before him Ibn Khurdadhbeh, become obsessed with enumerating the marvels and cataloguing the riches of Rome although Rome, like any other great city, had more things to offer for its visitors.

In addition to its economic importance as one of the greatest city of the time, the answer should be sought within Muslim apocalyptic beliefs and relates to what is known in classical Muslim sources as *fīqh al-saʿa* (jurisprudence of the end of the world) in
which an ultimate Muslim conquest of Rome is believed to be one of the major signs and portents of the end of the world.

As mentioned in the Qur’an and the Sunna, al-ṣa’a (the Hour), which refers to the end of the world, is preceded by ashrāt ṣughrā (minor signs and portents) and ashrāt kubra (major signs and portents). The first refers to a number of events that had already taken place and others that are ongoing and will continue for the coming centuries. Chief among the events of the past, Muslim scholars, based on a number of Qur’anic verses and ahādīth, cite the coming and death of Muhammad, early triumphs of Islam, the conquest of Jerusalem, the appearance of fitan (tribulations/trials/dissensions) among Muslim sects, the emergence of claimants to prophethood, the conquest of Constantinople, etc.

As for the ongoing signs and portents, they mention the ghurba (estrangement) of Islam, the dominance of jahl (ignorance), the spread of all types of fisq (vices), the spread of zinā’ (unlawful sex), lack of modesty among men and women, the dominance of women, drinking of wine, the spread of ribā’ (usury, interest), the deterioration of akhlāq (morals and manners), loss of trust, spread of music, attachment to the world. These minor signs and portents will continue for centuries until the approach of the major signs.95

Apart from a number of important battles, among them the battle and conquest of Rome, one of the most major of the signs and portents, Muslim scholars mention ten signs based on several sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, including ten signs

such as the appearance of *al-Mahdī* (the Guided One), *al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl* (the Antichrist), the descent of ‘Īsā (Jesus), *Ya’jūj wa- Ma’jūj* (Gog and Magog), and the rising of the sun from the West.\(^\text{96}\) As for the conquest of Rome, Muslim sources often refer to the following hadith attributed to Muhammad and narrated by the famous hadith collector al Hakim:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{‘Abdullah ibn Amr said: } & \text{While we were around the Messenger of Allah writing (the hadith), the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was asked "Which of these two cities will be conquered first, Constantinople or Rūmiyya (Rome)?" He said, 'The city of Heraclius (Constantinople) will first be conquered. (Al Mustadrak 508)}
\end{align*}\]

This hadith makes it clear why many medieval Muslim travelers, contrary to others, were tireless in their devotion to describing the riches of Rome.

Far from being a mere fascination with the great city, such devotion was, it appears, religiously related and ideologically motivated. After centuries of *fitan* and defeats, there will come the time of *malāḥim* (major victories and triumphs). One of these *malāḥim* will take place in Rome. This battle will end in the *fāth* (conquest) of this

\(^{96}\) For example the hadith narrated by Hudhayfah ibn Usayd: "The Prophet came upon us whilst, we were busy in discussion. He asked us, "What are you talking about?" We said "We are discussing the Hour." He said, "It will not come until you see ten signs: the smoke, the Dajjal, the beast, the sun rising from the West, the descent of Jesus son of Mary, Gog and Magog, and three land-slides: one in the East, one in the West, and one in Arabia, at the end of which fire will burst forth from the direction of Aden (Yemen) and drive people to the place of their final assembly." (Muslim 6932).
legendary city, thus ushering in the ultimate triumph of what Muslims believe as pure tauḥīd (monotheism) over what they see as distorted tauḥīd, a direct reference to the Christian belief that the Prophet Jesus is a son and partner of Allah.

Last but not least, although Ibn Yahya is famous today largely for his description of Constantinople and to a lesser degree Rome, he is thought to be the first medieval Arab traveler to refer in writing to Britain and its capital London. Without claiming to have visited the British Isles, while speaking of Rome’s location he has the following interesting information to convey:

From this city (c. Rome) you sail the sea and journey for three months, till you reach the land of the king of the Burjan (here Burgundians). You journey hence through mountains and ravines for a month, till you reach the land of the Franks. From here you go forth and journey for four months, till you reach the city (capital) of Bartiniyah (Britain). It is a great city on the shore of the Western Ocean, ruled by seven kings…They are Christians. They are the last of the lands of the Greeks [Romans/Europeans], and there is no civilization [imrān] beyond them. (Dunlop 12).

Ibn Yahya’s brief reference to Britain and London and his emphasis on its ʿimrān (civilization) should be seen as further compelling evidence that for medieval Muslims the majority of European nations and countries were not synonymous with the barbarian ahl al-Shamāl (people of the North), as we saw earlier in light of al-Masʿudi’s growingly (mis)quoted passage from Al-Tanbih wal-Ishraf. Equally, it shows us how Muslim captives played an important role in providing Muslim geographers with valuable information on different regions outside dār al-Islām. Although very few of them left their own written accounts, these captives were instrumental in fashioning medieval Muslim views and perceptions of the Other.
As with Harun ibn Yahya, to give another example, perhaps the most well known Muslim captive of the Middle Ages is Muslim al-Jarmi, who was captured by the Byzantines before being transferred to Constantinople where he was held a prisoner for several years (al-ʿAdawi 20). After his ransom, paid by the Abbasid caliph al-Wathiq, he was set free in 847. Al-Jarmi is said to have traveled extensively in the Byzantine Empire—the arch-rival of the Abbasid caliphate as we will see in the last chapter—and several adjacent Euro-Asian lands. After his return to Baghdad, he wrote an account of his travels which became the most valuable first-hand narrative on the Byzantines, Khazars and Slavs. His account of Byzantium and some fragments of his report on the Khazars and the Slavs were preserved by Ibn Khurdadbeh and al-Masʿudi and extensively used by others such as Ibn Rusta and Ibn al Faqih (al- Kilani 162).

To conclude, it is evident that ever since the rise of Islam, Rome had captivated the imagination of medieval Muslims and gained a place that evokes, albeit in different ways, the place of Baghdad in The Arabian Nights in the western orientalist imagination. Similarly, one can say that if Paris, for example, has been the most captivating city in modern Arabic secular literature and Arabic fiction in particular, in many ways Rome was the Paris of medieval Arabic-Islamic culture and literature.

Given what we have seen of medieval Muslim descriptions of Rome as a city of worldly riches, marvels and wonders, one is tempted to suggest that if the Baghdad of western Orientalism conjured up images of cruel Saracens and lustful Moors, eunuchs, naked harems, idols of Muhammad, crowns of Apollo, carbuncles of Tervagant, exotic flutes and lutes, and mosques inundated by the cacophonous voices of turbaned mulla, the Rome of medieval Muslim Ifranjalism, conjured up extravagant bābā adored by
beardless ghilmān (young men) and Roman ghuzlān (damsels), churches filled with exotic crosses, strange words and drawings, awash in gold, silver and pearls, and drowned within the tumultuous melodies of a Christian organ.
2. Utter Alterity or Pure Humanity: Barbarian Turks, Bulgars and Rus (Vikings) in the Remarkable Risāla of Ibn Fadlan

Recently the name of Ibn Fadlan has surfaced as one of the most quoted ‘Oriental’ names in the West. As shown by Tabish Khair, this tenth century Arab traveler owes much of his current international fame to Michael Creighton’s novel *Eaters of the Dead* (1976) and perhaps mostly to its 1993 filmic adaptation *The 13th Warrior* (274) of John McTiernan. No doubt both Creighton’s novel and McTiernan’s film were partly and freely inspired by Ibn Fadlan’s *Risāla* (Epistle) whose main section had fortunately been preserved by a number of medieval Arabic-Islamic chroniclers before Turkish scholar Zaki Validi Togan discovered the most complete and reliable manuscript in the library of the Iranian city of Mashhad in 1923. In a broader view, as outlined by Ibn Fadlan himself in the exordium of his *Risāla* this cultured and sophisticated Baghdadi faqīh and dāʿīya (missionary) was selected by the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (d.932) to be among the leading members of an important delegation he dispatched to the city of Bulgar, near modern Kazan (central European Russia) in the year 921.

What is known about Ahmad ibn Fadlan derives chiefly from the scanty autobiographical notes bequeathed to us by a number of chroniclers such as Yaqut al-Hamawi (Hmeida 199). With the increasing interest in his account of this journey, more

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97 For more details on the discovery, history, and western interest in the manuscript, see James E. McKeithen’s introduction in "The *Risāla* of Ibn Fadlan: An Annotated Translation with Introduction". Unpublished dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1979).
autobiographical information has surfaced. According to Hmeida, Ahmad ibn Fadlan ibn al-ʿAbbas ibn Rashid ibn Hammad was one of the most trusted clergy of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir and his military chief Muhammad ibn Sulayman. In spite of the paucity of information about Ibn Fadlan, what one can glean from his text is that he was a man of integrity and piety, who was endowed with a respectable amount of religious knowledge and an exquisite literary style. This is in addition to a great willingness to advance the cause of Islam (al-Dahhan 4).

Hailed by several scholars as one of the world’s earliest classics of ethnography and anthropology, Ibn Fadlan’s Risāla proved particularly valuable in describing some of the customs and manners of the many Eurasian peoples, mainly Turkic, Slavic, and Northern (Rus) whom he encountered in the course of his fascinating journey. "Ibn Fadlan is unique in that he has left us virtually the only eyewitness account," J. E. McKeithen notes, "of the composition of peoples and forces in the Eurasian Steppe region between the time of Herodotus and the Dominican and Franciscan missions to the Mongols in the thirteenth century" (3). Indeed, Ibn Fadlan’s Risāla is one of the richest, medieval Arabic-Islamic sources wherein one can explore and examine the topoi and ‘discourses’ of alterity in medieval Arabic literature and culture.

Ibn Fadlan opens his text with a brief exordium in which he provides the reader with a detailed description of the mission he was selected to be part of by the caliph in response to a letter that was sent by Almish ibn Yaltwar, the recently converted Muslim malik (king) of the Bulgars of the Middle Volga. The latter, Ibn Fadlan explains, had, in turn, sent an embassy to Baghdad to meet the caliph al-Muqtadir (908-932). It was led by a Muslim Khazar by the name of ʿAbdullah ibn Bashtu al-Khazari. The letter handed to
the caliph by the envoy of Almish, Ibn Fadlan reveals, contained a number of demands from the King of the Bulgars.

Among these demands Ibn Fadlan mentions a request for a knowledgeable *faqīh*, or a scholar of Muslim law, who will instruct the newly converted Bulgars in the laws of Islam and will help the king in managing the religious affairs of his kingdom. In addition, there is the demand to build a *masjid* (mosque) and erect a *minbar* (pulpit) to ensure the daily prayers and the weekly Friday sermon and prayer. Last but not least, the king asks for help in constructing a strong *hiṣn* (fortress) that will protect Yaltawar’s realm from the growing assaults of the powerful Jewish Khazars, their southern neighbors (al-Kilani 195).

Ibn Fadlan tells us that the embassy left Baghdad on the eleventh of *ṣafar* 309 A.H (June 21, 921 A.D.) and reached the city of Bulgar on the twelfth of *muḥarram* 310 A.H (May 12, 922 AD). Throughout this long Eurasian journey, the embassy had had to cross thousands of miles through what is now Iran, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tataristan, Bashkoritan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine and probably Scandinavia.

As pointed out by al-Kilani, the embassy was well planned and prepared by Nadir al-Harami (195). The latter, who did not participate in the journey, selected many non-Arabs as essential members for the mission. With the exception of Ibn Fadlan, these men came originally from several regions crossed by the delegation and they were conversant with many of the languages spoken by different peoples they met *en route* to Volga Bulgaria. This was the case with Ibn Sawsan al-Rassi, an ex-Russian slave, Tekin al-Turki, a Muslim Turk, and Bares al-Saqlabi, that is the Slav, in addition to Almish’s
envoy ʿAbdullah ibn Bashtu al-Khazari (the Khazar) who journeyed back home with the caliph’s delegation (al-Kilani 195).

Ibn Fadlan mentions that the caliph in person had appointed him to read the letter he wrote for the Bulgar king, to present the caliphal gifts, and to hand over the requested money to build the mosque and the fortress. He emphasizes as well that he would supervise the fuqahāʾ and muʿālimīn (the instructors) dispatched by the caliph to instruct the Bulgars in the teachings of Islam as requested by the Bulgar king (al-ʿAdawi 52). We have no reasons to doubt some of these roles, or to disbelieve what is said about the many peoples he came across during his journey.

After leaving Baghdad, the hub of tenth-century Muslim civilization and the place which ninth- and tenth-century Iraqi cosmographers made the indisputable markaz (centre) of the civilized world, Ibn Fadlan and his companions took an indirect route that allowed them not only to visit a number of major cities of central Asia such as Hamadan, Ray, Nishapur, Sarakhs, and Bukhara, Khwarezm, and Jurjaniya but also, to encounter a number of semi-nomadic Turkic tribes. After passing various Iranian and Caucasian cities, the group headed to Bukhara, the famous Silk Road city which was also hailed as one of the richest cultural centres of the Abbasid caliphate.

As the long route stretched from Baghdad to Bukhara, the keen eyes of Ibn Fadlan apparently did not discover any significant change be it in the environment or the customs and manners of the various non-Arab [Muslim] peoples the traveler and his comrades encountered in the dozens of cities, towns, and villages they passed by. As soon as the delegation began to leave the realm of the Abbasids, however, Ibn Fadlan’s unprecedented powers came in play, not only observing but also recording and exploring,
most often with an impressive ethnographical talent, the many changes and numerous differences he encountered. Although this started in the border regions between 'ard al-Islām and 'ard al-Turk (land of the Turks), it reached its full power during the embassy’s meeting with three Turkic tribes namely the Oghuz, Pechenegs, and Bashkirs.

After a few days in Bukhara, Ibn Fadlan and his companions headed towards the city of Jurjaniyya (Urgench). The latter, as we are told by Caroline Stone, is presently located in Uzbekistan, "near modern Kungrad just south of the Aral Sea" (1). Because of the freezing of the Jaihun River, whose crossing was necessary for the continuation of the journey, the delegation had to hibernate almost three months grappling with the extreme cold.

Ibn Fadlan, who could not hide his nostalgia for the warmth of the East, has movingly captured the hardships endured by the local inhabitants during this cold weather. He speaks sympathetically of frozen cattle, empty markets and vacant streets, native beggars who had to find shelter and sit by the fire before asking for bread. The cold was so extreme that it was considered a great act of generosity if one man invited another to sit by his fire (Frye 31). Ibn Fadlan’s personal experience of the cold of Jurjaniyya was bitter and unpleasant. He complains that because of the severe cold he had to thaw his own beard before the fire every time he had to use the bath which was outside the main house (Frye 31).

This versatile Iraqi scholar who must have been conversant with the dominant cosmographical views outlined earlier, does not evoke any theories in his perception of the Jurjanis in spite of the fact that he seems to acknowledge the enormous influence of cold on the everyday life of the Jurjani. Nor does he appear to find any tawahhush
(barbarity) in the local people’s ṭibāʿ (attributes). Contrary to his description of their climate, Ibn Fadlan’s portrayal of the Jurjanis is unquestionably positive. He mentions with admiration that throughout the months he lived with them they were always kind, compassionate, and hospitable. Perhaps the fact that the Jurjani were predominately Muslims made them ‘similar’ in his eyes. During the relatively long period of three months, there seemed nothing gharīb (strange) or worth recording about Jurjani manners, customs, beliefs, or women. This is not the case with the Oghuz, the Petchenegs, and the Bashkirs, the three Turkic tribes the embassy encountered after leaving the town of Jurjaniyya.

There is little doubt that Ibn Fadlan’s firsthand account of the Oghuz Turks is one of the most detailed of its kind in classical Arabic writing. In keeping with Arabic sources, he calls them al-Ghuzziyya. Commenting on their way of life, he states that they are all nomads who live in tents made of felt and survive by breeding cattle. Although he notes that some of them are extremely rich, possessing thousands of horses and sheep, the majority of the Oghuz are not only poor but living in utter shaqā’, a strong Arabic word that denotes complete wretchedness.

Even more disturbing for Ibn Fadlan is that instead of turning to God, the poor Oghuz chose to lead a life divorced from religion and reason. In his own harsh words, the Oghuz are like al-ḥamīr al-dhālla (strayed asses). Lacking a monotheistic dīn (religion) and uncaring about ‘aql (reason), it is no wonder that the Oghuz count their chieftains as gods.

After Ibn Fadlan fails to convince one of the powerful Oghuz chieftains to convert to Islam, he denies them any positive attributes in religious affairs. Perhaps the
result of this failure had pushed him to accuse all Oghuz of religious ignorance. Doubting possible future conversions to Islam, Ibn Fadlan warns his readers that the Oghuz care more about filling their own purses than enlightening their souls and minds. Every time an Oghuz man, he tells us, wants to gain money or gifts from Muslim merchants, he pretends to be Muslim by saying *bir tengrich* means "there is only one God" (Frye 43).

How prophetic was Ibn Fadlan in his cynicism about a possible and sincere Oghuz future with Islam? Contrary to this traveler’s prediction, no more than a century after his journey, the Oghuz turned into some of the most fervent Muslims in the entire history of Islam. As demonstrated by historians, it all started when an Oghuz chieftain by the name of Seljuk "embraced Islam with deep fervour" (Sykes 8). "The Seljuks with the fervour of recent converts revitalized Islam as the Norsemen revitalized Christendom," Percy Molesworth Sykes tells us, "and when Europe under Norman leaders attacked the East under the impulse of the Crusades it was the light horse of the Seljuks which met the heavy horse of the Crusaders" (28).

Equally unacceptable to Ibn Fadlan are Oghuz hygiene and sanitary customs. Recalling the Chinese, and to a lesser degree the Hindus of al-Tajir’s account as well as the Galicians of al-Bekri, and anticipating the Franks of ibn Munqidh, Ibn Fadlan seems to adopt an extreme view of Oghuz relations with water. In keeping with Muslim opinions of non-Muslim hygiene, he expresses his disgust at what he describes as not merely a lack of cleanliness but rather an inherent *water*phobia dominant among these Turkic nomads. They do not wash themselves after defecation, urination, and sexual intercourse, he observes reproachfully. Without any details, however, he ends his notes.
on Oghuz hygiene by denying them any relations at all with water: "They have nothing whatsoever to do with water, especially in winter" (Frye 43), he comments.

Ibn Fadlan’s description of the embassy’s meeting with one of the leading Oghuz chieftains convinces us that these are more than preconceived prejudices and hasty stereotypes. While taking off "the coat of brocade, which he wore to don the garment of honour" (Frye 40) presented to him by the embassy, the Oghuz luminary gave his sophisticated guest an unsolicited chance to notice with disgust that his underclothes were "fraying apart from dirt" and to assert that "it is their custom that no one shall take off the garment which he wears on his body until it disintegrates" (Frye 40).

Yet, the most horrifying thing that Ibn Fadlan noticed about the Oghuz was their permissiveness and shamelessness. These are no more brutally represented than in the unprecedented *takashshuf* (exposedness/nudity) of their women and the unmatched *dayātha* (lack of jealousy) of their men. In one shocking passage, the conservative Baghdadī *faqīh* describes himself in a situation that perhaps no other pre-modern or even modern, Muslim traveler ever witnessed in a non-Muslim land. This took place when he accepted an invitation from an Oghuz family. The outcome of this invitation turned dramatic:

Their women do not veil themselves before their men nor before others, and in the same way, does a woman not conceal any part of her body from any man whatsoever. When we happened to be staying with a man of them as guests, we came and sat down. The man’s wife was with us, and while she was talking to us, she uncovered her pudendum and scratched it, while we were looking at her. We covered our faces saying "I seek forgiveness of God (astaghfir Allah.)" Her husband laughed and said to the interpreter: "Tell them, she uncovers it in your presence and you see it, but she
safeguards it, and it is not attainable. This is better than if she were to cover it, while making it accessible." (McKeithen 54-55)

Perhaps even more illustrative than al-Tajir’s encounter with the Orient, this passage conjures up the cultural poetics of wonder as we saw earlier. Indeed, Ibn Fadlan especially after describing this first encounter with Oghuz women, quickly gave his own cultural judgment of the [scandalous] behaviour he had just seen.

The question that one may raise here is why has Ibn Fadlan asked for repentance especially if we know that according to Islamic law al-naẓra al-ūla (that is, the first inadvertent sight of a foreign woman) is mubāḥ (permissible). Hence, it does not necessitate istighfār, which is asking for repentance). What is certain is that he has not just seen but rather gazed at the Oghuz woman’s private parts, a thing that is haram (forbidden), thus it necessitates an act of repentance. If it is, islamically speaking, illicit to look at unveiled women out of fear of fitna (sexual attraction), it is a graver maṣiya (disobedience) to gaze at the most sexual of [foreign] women’s parts.

What tells us more when it comes to the character of Ibn Fadlan is the fact that he is not inclined towards unfounded generalization and stereotyping about Oghuz women. Contrary to our expectations, he soon informs us that the excessive bodily display of Oghuz women and the shamelessness of Oghuz men should not be interpreted as sexual promiscuity or tolerance of zinā’ (adultery). Against all odds, Ibn Fadlan gives full authorial voice to the Oghuz themselves to explain the underlying philosophy behind letting their women freely and shamelessly expose their bodies. As articulated by the Oghuz husband himself, Oghuz women are as chaste as Ibn Fadlan would think veiled Muslim women are: "Tell them, she uncovers it in your presence so that you see it and be
abashed, but it is not to be attained," the Oghuz man complacently asserts "This, however, is better than when you cover it up and yet it is reachable" (Frye 43).

This strong statement betrays not only an Oghuz philosophy of body exposure that is ultimately congruous with the Muslim philosophy of body covering, but it hides implicitly at the same time a strong Oghuz critique of the veil that brings to mind the mostly western critique of female Muslim attire. If Muslim men cover the bodies of their women to prevent them from engaging in any illegal sexual relations, Oghuz men expose the most private parts of their women to attain the same objective. Contrary to our expectations, soon Ibn Fadlan will confirm this Oghuz philosophy when he writes that, like Muslims, the Oghuz are extremely intolerant of *zināʾ*. As a matter of fact, all Oghuz men and women found guilty of *zināʾ* are sentenced to death by tearing their bodies into two halves after being tied between two trees (Frye 43).

Ibn Fadlan’s perception of the Petchenegs and the Bashkirs does not differ greatly from that of the Oghuz. All in all, their manners and customs are as barbaric as the latter. For obvious reasons, however, Ibn Fadlan chooses to single out the Bashkirs as the most savage of all the tribes the embassy met in its journey. With all possible disgust, he pictures them as beardless, dirty, and bloodthirsty. With horror, he writes that eating *qaml* (lice) is considered a delicacy: "One of them will examine the seam of his tunic and grind the lice with his teeth"(Frye 42). In a possible reference to their cannibalism, although perhaps exaggeratedly, he writes that it is common among the Bashkirs that one will cut off another’s head and take it home(42).

Throughout his negative account of the Bashkirs, Ibn Fadlan does everything to convince us that their savagery is intrinsically related to their paganism. Far worse than
the Oghuz, the Bashkirs are depicted by Ibn Fadlan as the most religiously confounded and confounding of all Turkic tribes. He writes with disgust that he saw with his own eyes Bashkirs who claimed that for every thing in the world there is a *rabb* (god), others who worshipped snakes, fish, cranes, etc. Nevertheless, there is nothing quite so unimaginable in the mind of Ibn Fadlan as the suggestion that there exist some humans who worship what he calls in Arabic *al-iḥlīl*, that is the phallus:

Each of them sculpts a piece of wood the size of a phallus and hangs it on himself. If he is to undertake a trip or to meet an enemy, he kisses it and prostrates himself before it saying: "Oh my Lord do unto me such and such." I said to the interpreter: "Ask one of them as to their justification to this, and why he believes it to be his lord." He said: "I came out of something similar to it, and I do not know any creator of myself other than it (Frye 43).

In addition to a number of Muslim travelers to India who recorded with shock the existence of this phallus-worship or phallism in medieval India, Ibn Fadlan is among the earliest Muslim travelers to mention the existence of this same ancient cult outside India. Along with the accuracy of the information he provided about phallus-worship, Ibn Fadlan’s keenness and curiosity are also remarkable. In fact, his strict belief in monotheistic Islam does not appear to interfere with his pursuit of questions about many aspects of what he undoubtedly saw as ultimate *dalāl* (misguidance). No wonder the

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98 As historians of religions mention, phallus-worship (phallism) is an ancient rite that was practised (mainly) in ancient India, Egypt, and Greece. It is still practised by a number of Hindu sects among other modern pagan cults. See for example, Hodder W. Westropp et al. *Ancient Symbol Worship. Influence of the Phallic Idea in the Religions of Antiquity* (New Delhi: Kumar Bros., 1970).
concluding and formulaic statement \textit{ta'āla allah ʿamma yaqūl al-zālimīn ʿuluwwan kabīran} (May God be greatly exalted above what the iniquitous say) (Frye 43) expresses his reaction.

After another long journey during which they crossed many rivers, such as the Jaramshan, Uran, Uram, Watigh, Niyasnah, and Jaushir, Ibn Fadlan and his companions reached their final destination in the City of Bulgar. The embassy seems to have been eagerly awaited by Almish, the king of the Bulgars. As mentioned by Ibn Fadlan, the impatient Almish commissioned four of his top officers, his brothers and his own sons, to meet the embassy before its arrival in the city. Initially impressed by Bulgar hospitality, Ibn Fadlan marks with a sense of appreciation Almish’s move to meet the caliph’s honourable envoys at the outskirts of his capital and to supervise the setting up of tents for them. Ibn Fadlan’s first impressions did not linger long.

After resting for four days, Ibn Fadlan and his companions were summoned by Almish to read the caliph’s letter in the presence of his wife, family, top officers, and a throng of the common people. After displaying the caliphal presents to the Bulgar king and his wife, Ibn Fadlan read the letter which was well written and full of religious and political rhetoric. Not much interested in the caliph’s words, Almish seemed to have cared more about the huge amount of money mentioned in the letter which for some reason Ibn Fadlan did not hand to him.

The day after the reading of the letter which coincided with the first Friday the embassy spent in the city, Ibn Fadlan after attending the \textit{jumuʿa} prayer, demanded that the Bulgar king Almish ask his \textit{khūṭaba’} (preachers) to stop calling him \textit{malik} (King): "Verily God is the king, and no one but He, majesty and might be His, should be called
by this name from the pulpit"(Frye 46). Citing the supreme example of the then caliph, as well as previous Abbasid—not Umayyad—caliphs and referring to a hadith by the Prophet Muhammad, Ibn Fadlan suggested to Almish to take rather the title of ʿAbdullah, that is, the servant of God. Almish accepted the suggestion and changed his name to Jaʿfar in imitation of the caliph himself. No doubt Ibn Fadlan proved to be sincere in instructing the Bulgars concerning the teaching of Islam in accordance with the stated raison d'être of the embassy.

The newly named Jaʿfar ibn ʿAbdullah, Emir of the Bulgars, "Servant of Allah" and client of amir al-muʾminīn (the commander of the faithful), that is, the Abbasid caliph, soon grew impatient with the mission. Wary about the money, he summoned Ibn Fadlan for another meeting which turned dramatic. It ended in the unfortunate detention of Ibn Fadlan by Almish, but it represented a good opportunity for the keen Abbasid observer to note some bizarre Bulgar customs:

He called for a table and it was brought, and on it was roast meat only. He himself began, took a knife, cut off a bite-size morsel and ate it. Then he cut off a piece and gave it to Sawsan the ambassador. As the latter took it, a small table was brought and placed in front of him. Such is the custom, no one extends his hand to the food until the king gives him a bite, and as soon as he takes it a table is brought to him…We ate, each one from his own table, no one sharing it with him, and no one taking anything from a table other than his own (McKeithen 87-88).

Obviously one expects that in the lands of the Muslim Bulgars, Ibn Fadlan will feel more culturally relaxed than he proved to be during his journey into the land of the pagan Turks. Although it is clear that the almost ‘Manichean’ rhetoric of Muslim civilization versus pagan savagery which coloured Ibn Fadlan’s perception of the Turks
had dramatically diminished, the Abbasid traveler never ceased to depict the Bulgars as "scarcely civilized, barbarians but for their embrace of Islam" (17), to use Montgomery’s conclusion. All through his Bulgar narrative, Ibn Fadlan pictures the Muslim Bulgars as culturally non-Muslim. As the above passage illustrates, Bulgar customs and manners are too utterly un-Abbasid to pass unnoticed by the culturally inquisitive Ibn Fadlan.

Not eating a bite of the food that was blessed by the Bulgar king’s saliva foretold the cultural unease that characterized Ibn Fadlan during his encounter with his royal brother. Nor did it seem to be a good omen for the fortune of Ibn Fadlan and his companions. Indeed, as soon as Ibn Fadlan revealed to Almish that for a number of reasons the embassy had not brought the money, the Bulgar king dropped all signs of brotherly akhlāq (manners):

He [Almish] threw the letter of the Commander of the Faithful and said: "Who brought this letter?" I replied: "I did." He then threw the letter of the wazīr and said: "And this one too?" I replied: "I did." He [then] said: "And the money that has been mentioned in both of them, what has been done with it?" I said "it was impossible to collect it. Time was short, and we feared lest we fail to gain entry [into the lands of the Turks on time]. We left the money behind to catch up with us later." He said: "You came, the whole lot of you, and my master spent on you, only in order that this money be brought to me, so that I might build a fortress which would protect me from the Jews who have enslaved me. As for the gifts, gulam [servant] would have been able to bring them (italics mine). (McKeithen 89-90)

This passage is remarkable, not least because it leaves us with no doubt that what was ultimately sought by Almish had more to do with politics and money than with spirituality and religion.
As a growing number of scholars have asserted, there seemed to be a political agreement between the Bulgar king and the Abbasid caliph. With this arrangement, the former would receive financial and military help in exchange for paying religious-political homage to the Abbasids. Russian Arabist A.P Kovalevsky, as we are told by historian Mirfātykh Zakiev, alluded to the political connotations of a number of idiosyncratic religio-cultural complexes such as *al-minbar* (pulpit), *khutba* sermon), *duʿāʾ li-l-sulṭān* (invocation of allegiance), which are all related to the importance of *ṣalāt al-jumuʿa* (Friday prayer). 99

Kovalevsky refers to two Friday sermons mentioned by Ibn Fadlan in his account. The first was prepared by Ibn Fadlan before his arrival in the realm of the Bulgars, apparently to serve as his first *khutba*. In the latter, he incorporated a *duʿāʾ* (invocation) in which he invokes the name of the Bulgar emir. The second refers to a *khutba* presumably given at a later time by the Bulgar emir, now called Jafar. In this sermon, the Bulgar king declares himself to be "the vassal of the emir of faithful," as we saw earlier (85).

Others have alluded to strategic and economic objectives behind the Bulgar request and the quick response of the Abbasid caliph. Without questioning the initial religious motivation for the embassy, James E. Montgomery, for instance, has suggested that caliph al-Muqtadir must have thought of strengthening the northern borders of his

caliphate and reducing "the influence of the Samanids by diverting northern trade in slaves, Furs, and silver from Transoxania to Iraq" (Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia 579).

Historian Thomas S. Noonan has revealed more thoroughly the socio-political and economic motifs behind the ‘eastern’ move of the Bulgar king. Firstly, there was certainly a necessity for internal power consolidation related to his unease with the continuous challenge represented by the powerful "tribal leaders" and "the ruling elite which included 500 prominent families"(505). Secondly and more vital there was the external pressure which was related to the Bulgar king’s frustration with the Khazars. As convincingly explained by Noonan, the Bulgars were unfairly exhausted by the excessive yearly tax they had to pay to the Khazars, who had taken the king’s own son as a hostage (505). "The Bulgars sought independence in order to control and sell their own pelts," Noonan affirms, "and in part, [as] a means to obtain support from co-religionists against Khazar domination"(505).

Ibn Fadlan’s quarrel with Almish ended amicably. After further disputes over certain jurisprudential issues, the tenacious Almish was won over by Ibn Fadlan’s knowledge and integrity. "He began to favor me [over others] and to draw me close to his person, while keeping my companions at a distance"(Frye 49), Ibn Fadlan tells us quite conceitedly. Almish had nothing to hide from the one whom he had recently called Abu Bakr al-Siddiq regarded by many Sunnis as Muhammad’s greatest supporter and closest companion. Ibn Fadlan leaves us no doubt as to the pertinence of many of the above critical speculations in relation to his own status with Almish.
In the concluding paragraphs of the section on the Bulgars, Ibn Fadlan recounts that he knew from Almish that the Bulgars were suffering all types of exploitation and intimidation from the Khazars. In addition to his son held hostage by the Khazar king, Almish told Ibn Fadlan that the Khazar king, knowing of the beauty of his two daughters, had asked for one of them in marriage. At the refusal of Almish, the Jewish Khazar king sent his troops and seized her by force. Refusing to marry the Khazar king, the first daughter died in the Khazar court. After the death of the first beautiful daughter of Almish, the Khazar king asked for the second. To prevent another tragedy, Almish gave his daughter to the king of the Eskel, who was one of his subjects (Frye 62).

To history’s delight, Ibn Fadlan was lucky enough to accompany his now close friend Ja’far ibn ‘Abdullah (Almish) in his seasonal journey to the Bulgar heartlands. The inquisitive Ibn Fadlan exploited this opportunity to the full. The outcome has been one of the most fascinating documents about tenth-century Volga Bulgars and Rus (Vikings), then active around the Volga River. Ibn Fadlan has given us a spectacular sketch of many aspects of the socio-economic and cultural life of the Volga Bulgars at that time as well as a marvellous description of Bulgar fauna and flora. However, it is to be noted that the highly religious Ibn Fadlan had mixed feelings about some of the customs and manners of his Bulgar coreligionists although he does not seem to doubt their sincere attachment to Islam.

In contrast to the Turks, at least economically speaking, the Volga Bulgars are portrayed as enjoying life. This is the result of their rich agricultural resources. Ibn Fadlan cites with admiration the abundance of hazelnut trees, the delectable berries, the sour apples which made young women plump, and many other trees which he failed to
identify. He goes on to notice with a sense of comparative surprise that in spite of the abundance of wheat and barley, the Bulgars feed principally on millet and horse meat. This abundance does not mean that the Bulgars had everything. Ibn Fadlan highlights things lacking in comparison to what he was used to. This is shown by his discovery that the Bulgars use fish oil but they know "neither olive oil, nor sesame oil, nor cooking oil of any kind" (105). This statement certainly has more cultural significance if one remembers the place of olive oil in particular in the dietary customs of the Arabs past and present.

Perhaps the most interesting information he records when it comes to the Bulgar diet is its class implications. Knowing beforehand that Islam makes it incumbent on Muslim men and women to feed their slaves and servants from the same food they themselves eat, Ibn Fadlan notices with disapproval that his Bulgar coreligionists, with the confusing exception of goats’ heads, do not allow their slaves to eat any type of laḥm (meat). The Bulgar treatment of their slaves, at least when it comes to food, is inconsistent with Islamic laws whose promulgation and implementation among the Bulgars was Ibn Fadlan’s most urgent business. Surprisingly he seems to have preferred silence on this specific issue contrary to his obsessive ‘activism’ in matters of

100 There are a number of ahādīth on this subject, as for example the hadith reported by al Bukhari: "Your slaves are your brothers and Allah has put them under your command. So whoever has a brother under his command should feed him of what he eats and dress him of what he wears. Do not ask them (slaves) to do things beyond their capacity (power) and if you do so, then help them" (Bukhari 1013).
gender and sexuality. Inasmuch as this prohibition appears to be related to a Bulgar belief that eating meat decreases the productivity of slaves, it tells us much about the condition of slaves in tenth century Volga Bulgaria.

Quite priggishly, Ibn Fadlan does not always seem satisfied with Bulgar beliefs and customs even when they are insignificant. He refers to their superstitious appreciation of dogs barking and their lack of fear of snakes. He also expresses his confusion at their strange *qalānīs* (head caps) especially when the *ʿawām* (populace) appeared to him obliged to take them off in the presence of their king: "whoever sits in the presence of the king seats in a kneeling posture, and does not take out his cap, nor does he make it visible until he leaves the presence of the king"(Frye 55).

Read in light of Ibn Fadlan’s abovementioned request that Almish should change his title from the King of the Bulgars to the Servant of Allah, it becomes clear that Ibn Fadlan is wary of the cult of *taʿdīm* (human veneration) deemed inconsistent with pure *tauḥīd* (monotheism) for it can be seen as an act of *shirk* (associationism). This passage recalls al-Bekri’s previously mentioned condemnation of the Romans’ veneration of *al-bāb* (the Pope).

What is even more repugnant in Ibn Fadlan’s eyes is the fact that Bulgar men and women bathe together naked in the river in opposition to Muslim modesty and decency. Perhaps anticipating condemnation of his presence in such a place, Ibn Fadlan soon reminds his readers that he was there so as to order the Bulgar women to cover themselves while swimming. As the religious authority of the embassy, Ibn Fadlan must prove that he has done his duty in *al-amr bi-l-marʿūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*, which is enjoining proper behaviour and prohibiting inappropriateness. The question that raises
itself here is why Ibn Fadlan has singled out the Bulgar women when he knows well that islamically speaking both men and women must be reminded of their religious obligations in this respect.

As with the Oghuz Turks, the exposure of their bodies by Bulgar women should not make readers think that the Bulgars are liberal in sexual matters. Similar to the Oghuz attitudes concerning adultery, Ibn Fadlan tells us that the Bulgars abhor adultery and they sentence those who commit it to a death more horrifying than the one practised by the Oghuz. As described by Ibn Fadlan, the adulterer and the adulteress are cleft with an axe from the scruff of their necks to their thighs. Then the pieces of their bodies are hung on trees (110).

As demonstrated by Montgomery, in the course of his account of the Bulgars, Ibn Fadlan has shown an insatiable appetite for plausible ʿajāʾib (marvels) seen with his own eyes during his tour with Almish. In his own words, Ibn Fadlan tells his readers that he had seen so many ʿajāʾib that he is unable to enumerate them (94). In addition to his notes on the strangeness of Bulgar nights and days, and unfamiliar Bulgar flora and fauna, his quasi-surrealist description and interpretation of the northern lights and what were likely thunderbolts proved particularly startling: "I beheld a red, fire-like cloud close to me, and the hum and the noises seemed to be issuing from it"(McKeithen 94).

Against our expectation, the otherwise unsuperstitious Ibn Fadlan stuns us by claiming that "within it there seemed to be something similar to men and horses, and in the hands of these phantoms resembling men there were spears and swords which I could both clearly make out and envision myself" (McKeithen 94). This bizarre interpretation of otherwise purely meteorological phenomena, it seems to me, is a rare attempt on the
part of the author to flavor his rigid *Risāla* with the highly regarded literary and cultural leitmotif of the 'ajīb/gharīb.

Similarly, the juxtaposition of the ‘scientific' response of the locals to the superstitious interpretation and the ensuing religious reaction of the foreigners adds more flavor to the *gharāba* (strangeness) of the event: "We were frightened by this phenomenon and turned to supplication and prayer," Ibn Fadlan writes "*while the people [of the town] laughed at us and expressed their astonishment at our actions* (italics mine)" (McKeithen 94-95). This is similar to his description of a fallen Bulgar tree in which he saw a frightening and agile snake that, he made himself and his readers believe, started to move (Frye 53). When it comes to the distant lands of the Bulgars, these are as real and familiar as the sunny days of Baghdad. And one must be an Ibn Fadlan to see with one’s own eyes and give credence to, such marvels and wonders.

Ibn Fadlan’s rare resort to the implausible should not encourage us to relegate the *Risāla* to the genre of ‘ajāʾib/gharāʾib literature as a number of medieval Muslim and modern western scholars such as Yaqut al-Hamawi and Regis Blachere have done as pointed out by J. E. Montgomery in "Traveling Autopsies: Ibn Fadlan and the Bulgars." (7). Although failing to mention the above examples, Caroline Stone is correct when she asserts that "Unlike later medieval travelers, whose accounts tend to run riot with implausible detail, Ibn Fadlan mentions only one marvel: the bones of a "giant" –possibly the remains of a mammoth"(5).

Among the many cultural encounters that fill Ibn Fadlan’s *Risala*, it is his "remarkable account," to use Frye’s phrase (ix), of the people called *al-Rūsiyya* (Rus) whom he met around the Volga River that has proved of enduring value and has recently
rekindled worldwide attention: "Ibn Fadlan’s account has proved to be an invaluable source of information for modern scholars," Montgomery notes, "interested in, among other subjects, the birth and formation of the Russian state, in the Viking involvement in northern and eastern Europe, in the Slavs and the Khazars" (1). In spite of the once heated debate over their real European identity, the Rus, in the view of Caroline Stone, are more and more acknowledged to be "one of the Scandinavian tribes" of whom "the most famous of these tribes were the Vikings".(4).

Describing the circumstances of his historic encounter with the Rus, Ibn Fadlan tells us that he saw their encampments by the River Itel (Volga) while they were visiting the city of Bulgar for trade. The first thing that struck him was their perfect physique. Asserting with the utmost rhetorical force that he has never "seen people with a more developed bodily stature," he soon goes further to claim that they "are as tall as date palms, blond and ruddy"(Frye 63). Especially intriguing here is Ibn Fadlan’s reliance on the genuinely archetypal figure of the palm tree in his description of the physique of the Rus. The fact that the Qur’an and the Sunna are full of such similes adds greatly to the cultural and religious significance of this rhetorical borrowing.

Besides the numerous references to the tall, strong palm trees that God created for Man, among the rewards righteous believers will enjoy in al-janna (paradise), are "tall (and stately) palm trees, with shoots of fruit-stalks piled one over another" (Qur’an

101 Known in academic circles as the Normanist (Pro-Viking)/Anti-Normanist (Pro-Slav) debate. As demonstrated by Montgomery, "The Rus have now been the subject of heated debate for more than one and a half centuries, though in later years the balance has swung in favour of the Normanists" (1).
50:10). In fact, the Qur’an and the Sunna, like the Bible, usually compare steadfast believers who endure all trials and tribulations to *al-shajara al-tayyiba* (the good tree) which is one of the Qur’anic appellations of the palm tree.

It is, however, in the hadith narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn Umar, one of Muhammad’s close companions, that this comparison is most directly addressed. In light of these *ḥādīth* and other Qur’anic verses, Ibn Fadlan seems to construe the Other’s rare familiarity through common *topoi* of his own culture. It also shows the resonance of religious rhetoric in his portrayal of the Other(s) in general and his sketch of Rus defects as will be shown below.

In contrast to their perfect physique the first defect that loomed within the cultural horizon of Ibn Fadlan when it comes to the Rus was the semi-nakedness of their men and women. Defying Muslim and Eastern standards of clothing and challenging what he believed to be appropriate dress codes, Ibn Fadlan notes with dissatisfaction that in contrast to the many weapons and metal items, Rus clothing is sparse and underdeveloped. Rus men wear neither tunics nor *kaftāns* (cloaks) leaving half of their

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102 "We were with the Messenger of Allah when he asked, “Tell me about a tree that resembles the believer, the leaves of which do not fall in the summer nor the winter, and it yields its fruit at all times by the leave of its Lord.” I thought of the date palm tree, but felt shy to answer when I saw that Abu Bakr and ʿUmar did not speak. And when they did not give an answer, the Messenger of Allah said, “It is the date palm tree” (Bukhari 2001).

bodies uncovered as he observes. This makes some of their ʿawrāt, that is, prohibited parts of the body exposed to view.

More threatening, however, is the exotic and erotic metal-covered breasts and gold and silver adorned necks of the beautiful Viking women (120). For Ibn Fadlan the faqīh, who is obliged to lower his gaze when seeing foreign women, the exotic and erotic Viking women proved too alluring to pass unnoticed. The temptation must have been inevitable for the pious Ibn Fadlan.

In contrast to the Oghuz and the Bulgars, lack of appropriate clothing among the Rus reveals much when it comes to what he portrays as the unprecedented sexual shamelessness and promiscuity that dominate their life. Particularly appalling, however, is their disrespect of privacy and their ‘savage’ sexual practices especially when it comes to their engagement in sexual intercourse in front of each other: "One of them may have sexual relations with his slave girl while his comrades look on. Sometimes a whole group of them may come together and engage in such action opposite each other," he relates (131). It is to be noted that for a pious Muslim, which Ibn Fadlan appears to be, there is nothing more shameful for a man than having [legal] sex with one’s wife or slave-girl in front of other men or women.104

No less disturbing in Ibn Fadlan’s eyes is Rus hygiene. Although they seem to have a closer relationship with water than the Oghuz, many of their hygiene customs appeared ultimately disgusting to him. In addition to the ‘always and already’ reasons

104 "The wicked among the people in the sight of God on the Day of Judgement is the man who goes to his wife and she comes to him, and then he divulges her secret." (Muslim 369).
that make non-Muslim Others unclean, the Rus’ practice of what Stone has identified as an ancient Germanic custom of communal bathing (7) made them in Ibn Fadlan’s eyes "the filthiest of God’s creatures":

Everyday, without fail, they wash their faces and heads in the filthiest and most foul water possible. A slave girl comes every morning carrying a large bowl filled with water. She presents it to her master, and he washes his hands and face, and the hair of his head which he also washes and combs into the bowl with a comb. Then he blows his nose and spits into it, and indeed there is no filthy deed that he refrains from doing in that water when he has finished whatever is necessary, the girl carries the bowl to the one next him, who engages in the same activity as his colleague. She continues to pass it around from one to the other until she will have taken it to all those in the house, each one of them would in turn blow his nose, spit and wash his face and hair in it (McKeithen 132).

No doubt Ibn Fadlan’s condemnation of Viking hygiene and his exaggeration concerning their filthiness are clearly a projection of his religion’s conception of perfect hygiene and the importance of flowing water. This makes sense if one remembers as well that ibn Rusta, for example, does not seem to be as appalled as Ibn Fadlan by their hygiene (Stone 7).

Moreover, the Baghdadi Ibn Fadlan expresses his dissatisfaction with Rus medicine. The Rus, Ibn Fadlan implies, are not only incompetent but unreservedly backward in the art of medicine. If a Rus falls sick, the only thing they afford to him/her is to isolate him/her until he/she is cured or meets his/her destiny. What is particularly

105 According to James E. Montgomery, the Vikings were particularly known for their "lack of proper burial for slaves and social inferiors" (11).
strange to Ibn Fadlan, however, is the fact that the Rus conceived of visiting a sick person and the incineration of the dead as a class privilege. Reproachfully, he states that the Rus abandon a sick person, "[nor] do they speak to him. Rather they do not visit him throughout the period of his illness, especially if he happens to be poor or a slave" (McKeithen 136).

As pointed out by Caroline Stone, Ibn Fadlan, who comes from Baghdad which at the time had not only several hospitals but also a number of medical schools, is appalled at the Rus’ maltreatment of their sick, their ignorance of medical sciences and their unawareness of the existence of an institution called the hospital. During this period, one must not forget, hospitals and medical colleges were commonplace in major cities east and west of dār al-Islām.

Indeed, cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Tunis, Marrakech, Cordoba, and the like, possessed many bimaristāns (hospitals) with thousands of beds, where physicians from different religious backgrounds and cultures, took care of their patients. "Hospitals served all peoples irrespective of colour, religion, or background," writes Sharif K. al-Ghazal in "The Influence of Islamic Philosophy and Ethics on the Development of Medicine During the Islamic Renaissance" (2007). He goes on to explain that "[t]he government ran them, as opposed to religious groups, and their directors were usually physicians who were assisted by persons who had no religious colour. In hospitals, physicians of all faiths worked together with one aim in common—the well-being of patients" (3). Patients were treated by highly qualified physicians (al-Ghazal 4). This was particularly true of physicians in the time of the caliph al-Muqtadir, who is credited with establishing two large hospitals in the city of Baghdad: Al-Sayyida
Finally, Ibn Fadlan’s detailed and accurate description of the funeral cremation of one of the Rus’ chieftains and the concomitant sacrificial rituals has turned out to be perhaps the most invaluable and enduring anthropological information in the entire text. At the beginning of his report, Ibn Fadlan reveals to us that since the time he first heard that the Rus cremate their dead, he had been curious to witness such a strange custom with his own eyes. When the chance came he did not hesitate to exploit it to the full. As he puts it "I used to be told that at the time of death they do certain things to their chiefs, the least of which is burning. I was eager to find out about such matters"(McKeithen 137).

As much as the above statement leaves no doubt as to the curiosity of Ibn Fadlan, it also convinces us that that he was not a gullible collector of hearsay especially when he assures us that when the day on which the chief and female slave were to be cremated, he went to the river to witness with his own eyes the Rus’ funeral rites (McKeithen 140).

Ibn Fadlan proceeds to report to us every ritual performed by the Rus with an eye-catching interest in the most singular of the details, from the clothes of the dead chieftain, to the numerous animals they cut in two and throw into his boat, to the human sacrifice of the slave-girl, which is the most dramatic episode of the entire account. "His oft-quoted description of this rite," asserts Stone "is one of the most remarkable documents of the Viking Age, filled as it is with grim details of the dead leader laid out in his boat amid a treasury of expensive items"(13). When the time for the human sacrifice comes, the slave
girl is raised to the top of the boat. To bid farewell to her companions, she gets drunk and engages in singing.

With fascinating detail, Ibn Fadlan has movingly captured the macabre atmosphere that preceded the inevitable death of the poor slave girl:

I saw her overcome with confusion. She wanted to enter the tent, but had inserted her head between it and the ship...Six men then entered the tent, all of whom had sexual intercourse with the girl. Then laid her down at the side of her master, and two of them seized her feet, and two of them her hands while the old woman, who is called the [A]ngel of [D]eath, placed a rope around her neck, the two ends of which pointed in opposite directions, and handed it to two men to pull on. She stepped forward, holding a dagger with a wide blade, and began sticking it in and pulling it out in different places between the ribs of the girl. Meanwhile, the two men were simultaneously strangling her with the rope until she was dead (McKeithen 147).

Notwithstanding the shameless fuḥsh (lewdness/obscenity) that took place inside the tent, the appalling paganism, the demonic Angel of Death, and the utter savagery of the six Rus men, Ibn Fadlan seems to be more concerned with the ineluctability of death. As a matter of fact, the hedonistic festivities that preceded the killing of the slave girl, like the latter’s feigned willingness to be sacrificed, have done nothing to hide the petrifying subtext of death and Ibn Fadlan’s overwhelming stress at witnessing the distress of a dying human soul. As the passage strongly conveys, the sheer human fear of death convinces us that, at least in the end, there is more of humanity than alterity in the Risāla of Ibn Fadlan.

No doubt Ibn Fadlan’s Risāla is a remarkable example of premodern Arabic writings about the Other and one of the richest of its kind in world literature. There is
growing interest in its author and his account in the West and the Middle East alike. At the same time this tenth-century text has negatively eclipsed many other accounts left to posterity by Arab travelers, captives, and envoys. Not only is this true of other Mashriqi writers, but also and mainly of several Maghribi authors. This is the case with Andalusi scholars such as al-Ghazal (d.864), Ibn Ya’qub (d.999), and al-Gharnati (d.1170), as we shall see in the coming sections.
B. Medieval-Andalusians in/and the Heartland of Europe:

1. The Moor’s First Sight: An Arab Poet in a Ninth-Century Viking Court

Lauded by Andalusian historian ibn Hayan (d.1076) as *shāʿir al-Andalus* (Poet-Laureate of al-Andalus) and ḥakīm al-Aandalus (the Sage of al-Andalus), poet and polyvalent courtier abu Zakariya Yahya ibn al-Hakam al-Bekri (d.864) traces his noble lineage to the powerful Arab tribe of Bakr ibn Wael (al-Kilani 251). 106 Mostly known however by the alias al-Ghazal (the gazelle) for his good looks, he was famed for wit, charisma, and competence.

According to al-Hajji, al-Ghazal "was a distinguished and shrewd personality famous for his sociable nature, gaiety, smartness, adroitness, and quickness of wit"(167). Given these qualities, it is not surprising that the doors of five consecutive Umayyad caliphs were wide open for al-Ghazal. Two of these caliphs selected him for two important diplomatic missions first to Byzantium (Constantinople) in 840 and then to the land of al-Majūs (the Vikings) in 846(most probably Denmark). 107

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106 His summary of the history of al-Andalus is contained in a long (epic) poem of remarkable poetic genius.

107 Some Arabists have expressed their skepticism in regard to the historical reality of al-Ghazal’s journey. This skepticism was triggered and advocated by prominent French Arabist Lévi-Provençal. In *L' Espagne musulmane au Xième Siècle, institutions et vie sociale* (1932), he argued that al-Ghazal took part only in an embassy to Constantinople speculating that his presumed journey to the land of the Majūs (Vikings) was nothing but "une contamination postérieure du voyage officiel d' al-Ghazal à Constantinople ”(253). Quite recently, both Sara M. Ponz-Sanz (2004) and A. K.
In his account of the life and achievements of al-Ghazal, Andalusian literary chronicler ibn Dihya (d.1235) seems to focus more on al-Ghazal’s contribution to Andalusian history than on his poetry. This may be seen in *Al-Mutrib min Ashʿar Ahl al-Maghrib* (The Melodious Compilation of the Poetry of the People of the West) wherein he describes at length the strained relations between the Muslims of al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) and the *Majūs* of the North (Vikings).  

108 As Sara M. Ponz-Sanz puts it, "The Vikings terrorised most of western Europe from the end of the eighth century to approximately the middle of the eleventh century. The Iberian Peninsula was no exception, though the Viking raids there were much less significant than those on the British Isles and Frankia" (5). Such was no doubt especially true of their series of assaults against many Andalusian towns along the Guadalquivir River in 844.

The main targets of these raids were the three affluent Muslim cities of Seville, Cadiz, and Cordoba (*Al-Mutrib* 130). According to German scholar A. Dietrich, the most successful of Viking campaigns was against Seville in August 844 when a score of their

Bennison (2007) have inclined towards Levi-Provençal’s position. The latter, has been strongly refuted, however, by a score of scholars such as Jacob, Fabricus, Stefansson, Krachovsky, Vasiliev, Wikander, Zaeel, Allen, Dunlop, Wikander, and most forcefully by al-Hajjī. "Contrary to the view of Levi-Provençal," Allen, for example, asserted that "Scandinavian and English specialists of the Viking period are in general agreement in accepting the validity of the report of al-Ghazal’s embassy to the north" (1).

108 Scholars have translated the Arabic word *al-Majūs* interchangeably, and somewhat confusingly, as Vikings, Normans, Norsemen, and Scandinavians. I shall henceforward use only the word Vikings for the Arabic *al-Majus*.  

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ships raided it by means of its river (64). "Die Normannen waren am 20. 8. 844," Dietrich writes, "erstmalig in Andalusien gelandet, plunderten Sevilla" (64). Overwhelmed by the Vikings, the people of Seville fled their city which was sacked and looted (Hmeida 140). 109 Emboldened by this great victory, the Vikings headed towards Cadiz and Cordoba, the capital of Muslim Spain. If Cadiz fell easily to them, as ibn Dihya and others have told us, it was mainly the Muslim fire catapults that made a difference in Cordoba (Al-Mutrib 130).

In short, the battle of Cordoba ended in such a humiliating defeat for the Vikings that their king now feared the rage of his Muslim enemies. To avoid further humiliation, according to ibn Dihya, he opted for diplomacy by sending an embassy to Cordoba to negotiate for truce and peace (Hmeida 141). Months later in the year 845 the Umayyad governor of al-Andalus 'Abdurahmane II (d.852), deemed it advantageous to strengthen ties with the Vikings through ordering an embassy to accompany the Viking delegation back to where it came from (al-'Adawi 21).

Introducing al-Ghazal’s mission, Ibn Dihya mentions that the Umayyad emir selected the poet for many reasons, not least of which were his "sharpness of mind, quickness of wit, skill in repartee, courage, and knowledge of how to behave in every situation" (al-Hajji 176). Certainly this is in addition to the fact that he had "proved to

109 As noted by Sara M. Ponz-Sanz, the sacking of Seville by the Vikings was also recorded by non-Muslim Spanish chroniclers. "The Chronicon Rotensis, one of the earliest chronicles of the kingdom of Asturias (c.883) (Ruiz de la Peña 1985, 38.41)," she tells us, "explains that in the year 844 nordomanorum gens antea nobis incognita, gens pagana et nimis crudelissima, nabali [sic] exercitu nostris peruenerunt in partibus" (5).
have great diplomatic skills when he was sent to the Byzantine emperor Theophilus in 840" (Ponz-Sanz 6). As Allen once put it, "[A]-Ghazal had the experience of his fifty years; and he was still ardent, quick witted and adventurous; a perfect choice for the perilous voyage to the Viking north"(13).

To secure this unprecedented mission, the emir presented al-Ghazal and his comrades with a stout ship loaded with provisions and regal gifts. Apart from the crew, al-Ghazal was accompanied mainly by an assistant named Yahya ibn Habib. As far as the Viking envoys are concerned, ibn Dihya and other historians record that they sailed back home on their Viking vessel from the same place and at the same time as their Andalusian colleagues. As correctly stated by D. M. Dunlop, the two vessels sailed "from Silves, then the chief town and port of the province of Algarve (south-west Spain) in a ship specially built for them"(13). 110

The narrative focuses solely on the Andalusian ship. Without giving us much information about the circumstances of its departure, the sea dominates most of the introductory pages of the account. Indeed, as soon as the ship left the port of Silves, troubles began to loom on its uncertain way. Most likely while sailing "pass Cape Finnisterre"(Harvey 486), a strong wind came up and the once-calm sea suddenly turned into a raging storm. This terrifying experience was captured by al-Ghazal in a poem he improvised, or as such his confidant the wazīr Tammam ibn ‘Alqama, reported:

All of a sudden, Yahya told me what he thought:

Between waves like mountains we are caught!

110 Algarve is a distortion of the Arabic word *al-gharb*, which as mentioned in the introduction, means ‘the west’.
Overwhelmed by winds from West and North,
That split the mast and tore the rope.
The Angel of Death toward us walked forth!
I saw at once our doom and fate.
As for our lives! O my poor mate!

Our kinfolk seemed to have no hope! (Al-Mutrib 130)(Tran. mine)

It should be mentioned that this short poem is remarkable in a number of respects, not least because it emphasizes the Arabic leitmotif of *al-khauf min-al-bahr* (the fear of the sea) quite common in classical Arabic literature in and *jāhili* (pre-Islamic) poetry in particular. Perhaps more central is the poem’s stress on the trope of the known/safe homeland versus the unknown/perilous land(s) of the Other(s) which does not only emphasizes the Otherness of the remote and dangerous Viking lands, but also serves as a perfect template for perpetuating the rhetoric of Differences between the Muslim/Andalusian Self and the Majūs/Viking Other.

Al-Ghazal’s use of the sea and the tempest as tropes of what Ponz-Sanz has aptly called "the abandonment of the known territory and the entrance into the realms of the unknown" (22) is by no means unique. It is rather a universal theme that has been articulated often in literatures of travel, exploration and colonialism. As A. K. Bennison puts it, "The world beyond Frankish and German territories was the most distant from Andalusian experience, and barely entered into their imagination before the Viking raids of the mid-ninth century"(14).

Evocative of the Arabic genre of *al-faraj ba’d al-shidda* (relief after tension/hardship) and the story of Robinson Crusoe, at least in his miraculous survival
and arrival upon an unknown island after a series of hardships at sea, al-Ghazal and his companion reached the first of the Viking islands ‘safe and sound’. After staying for several days to repair the ship and enjoy a little rest, the embassy continued its way to meet the king of the Vikings who was said to live on "a large island in the ocean, with flowing streams and gardens. The distance between it and the mainland is three days’ sailing, that is three hundred miles (al-Hajji 177).

As mentioned earlier, there has been much speculation and debate over the identification of this major northern island (or peninsula) and the northern people he met. The only specific information given by al-Ghazal or rather recorded by Andalusian chroniclers is that this island, like the many small and large islands around it, was

111 Some scholars have argued that Daniel Defoe modeled Robinson Crusoe (1719) on Hayy ibn Yaqdan by the twelfth-century Andalusian writer Ibn Tufayl. Set on an isolated island in the Indian Ocean, the story narrates the material survival and spiritual quest of the solitary protagonist Hayy (Alive). These scholars have postulated that Defoe might have been familiar with ibn Tufayl’s story of survival citing the fact that before Defoe wrote his novel, Hayy ibn Yaqdan was popular in England especially after the appearance of three translations into English: 1674 by G.Keith, 1686 by G. Ashwell, and 1708 by Simon Ockley. For more on this issue, see Samar ‘Attar, The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl’s Influence on Modern Western Thought (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), G. A. Russell’s The Arabic Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England (Leiden: Brill, 1994), and in particular Nawal Muhammad Hassan Hayy bin Yaqzan and Robinson Crusoe: A Study of an Early Arabic Impact on English Literature (Baghdad: al Rashid House, 1980).
inhabited by *al-Majūs* (Vikings). More specific is the fact that the majority of these *al-Majūs* with the exception of a number of tribes living on remote islands, had converted to Christianity. Of historical importance is al-Ghazal’s indication that the Christianized Vikings used to attack and enslave the Vikings who chose to keep to their old faith (fire-worship) and what al-Ghazal has described as heinous practices in reference mainly to the incestuous marriages of brothers and sisters (*Al-Mutrib* 133).\(^{112}\)

As demonstrated by al-Hajji, one of the leading scholars in the field of Andalusian/western relations, medieval [Andalusian] Muslims used the word *majūs*, the same term their eastern coreligionists used primarily in referring to Persian Zoroastrians, to describe all northern non-Christians who used fire so frequently in their religious rituals.\(^{113}\) This, he goes on, makes it clear that although in theory it may well include the Swedes, the Norwegians, the Danes, and the Icelanders, the specific context of the embassy (peace negotiations), in addition to several other historical realities about the different northern European *Majūs* (Vikings), proves convincingly that al-Ghazal’s final destination was the headquarters of King Horic (d.854) in Denmark (157).

According to al-Hajji, historians of the Viking age concur on the fact that Viking Swedes and Norwegians centralized most of their activities in Eastern Europe, Scotland

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\(^{112}\) Since, as mentioned earlier, incestuous marriages were akin to that of the Zoroastrians, some may wonder whether al-Ghazal, or perhaps his editor, is trying to relate *al-Majūs* (Vikings) to the Zoroastrians.

\(^{113}\) As we saw with Ibn Fadlan, unlike their western coreligionists, Muslims of the East used the term *Rūssiyya* (Rus) for the Vikings.
and Ireland. In contrast, Danish Vikings were known for both their trades and raids in Western Europe and the Iberian Peninsula (156). These facts have convinced al-Hajji of the weakness of the view, advocated insistently by British scholars Allen and Dunlop, that the destination of al-Ghazal’s embassy was Ireland. "All these arguments," al-Hajji has affirmed, "rule out the hypothesis that the first attack and the embassy both came from the Norwegian Vikings in Ireland, where they locate the embassy"(186).  

Knowing about their arrival, King Horic gave an order to his advisors to meet these important Arab visitors and to show them the best of Viking hospitality. At his command, a nice dwelling was provided for al-Ghazal and his companions. The first appearance of the Arab poet and his comrades proved dramatic. As mentioned by ibn Dihya on the authority of al-Ghazal, the Vikings were taken by the encounter. Particularly significant, especially if one takes as accurate ibn Dihya’s report of the arrival of the Andalusian embassy in the land of the Vikings, is their reaction to the appearance and dress of the Arabs. According to ibn Dihya’s text, "The Vikings thronged to look at them [the Arabs], and they wondered at their appearance and their garb"(Allen 20).

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114 According to Ponz-Sanz, "The identification of the destination of the embassy with Denmark has also been suggested by Vasiliev (1946, 44–45) and Wikander (1978, 15–17), according to whom the embassy could also have been sent to Norway, Jesch (1991, 93), Kendrick (1968, 202) and Smyth (1977, 162–63).
One can almost imagine the amazing, if not purely comic, scene of this would-be first Vikings' sigh at the Saracen/Moor's first sight. Beyond the binary opposites of colonizer/colonized, civilized/barbarian, superior/inferior frequently present in early modern and modern encounters describing primarily the western first gaze at and discovery of the Other, the Viking gaze and discovery of the Arab Other and *vice versa*, seem to be too 'innocent' to conjure up, for instance, what Peter R. Beardsell has described as "the earliest example of a European casting his gaze upon America"(26), in reference to Columbus’ first sight of the indigenous peoples on October, 12, 1492.

Two days after its historic arrival in the land of the Vikings, the Arab embassy was summoned to meet the Viking king. As was reported to ibn Dihya by al-Ghazal’s confidant Tammam ibn ‘Alqama, al-Ghazal did not accept the royal invitation until he was assured that the Viking king would not oblige him to kneel to him, nor would he push them to engage in anything *ḥarām* (un-Islamic). As stated in Ibn Dihya’s text, the Viking king accepted al-Ghazal’s conditions and requests. Through his delegates, he ensured his Muslim guests that he and his people would be "culturally sensitive" to use the pertinent modern phrase.

As demonstrated by Nabil Matar, one should perhaps acknowledge the reality of al-Ghazal’s above-mentioned demands in light of the numerous religious and cultural challenges medieval and early Muslim travelers had to confront while venturing outside *dār al-Islām (In the Lands of the Christians xxvi)*. It is no exaggeration to suggest that this medieval Muslim-Viking cultural encounter foretells in a way the ongoing debate
over the significance of multicultural encounters in our contemporary world in general and in western countries with huge immigrant populations.\(^{115}\)

Not entirely convinced perhaps by this ‘*accommodement raisonnable*’ with his Muslim guests, the Viking king opted for northern cunnings, or this is how al-Ghazal and later Andalusian chroniclers wanted their contemporaries to believe. When al-Ghazal tried to enter the royal court, he found that the Viking king had deliberately made the entrance door so low that his Muslim guests could enter only by kneeling in front of him. To the Viking’s surprise, the ‘clever’ Arab "sat on the ground, and with feet foremost, slid forward on his posterior. Having passed through the door, he got up on his feet" (al-Hajji 178).

One does not need much imagination when it comes to the reaction of the Viking King. As stated in Ibn Dihya’s text, the king was *bouche bée*. Soon, the king is said to have ordered his interpreter to praise the Arab envoy for his wisdom and intelligence. In front of his people, he avowed that "This is one of the wise and clever men of his people. We wished to humiliate him, and he displayed his shoes in our face" (al-Hajji 178).

As much as one may be surprised by Allen’s assertion that "the story might express the mixture of arrogance and almost boyish buffoonery which was the humour of the Vikings"(43), it seems that the underlying lesson of this fascinating anecdote is to show what Bennison aptly describes as the Arab envoy’s "sophistication and superior intelligence in his encounters with the Majūs rulers"(15). This would make more sense if

\(^{115}\)Most pertinent is the current debate in some parts of Canada concerning *L'accommodement raisonnable*. 
we remember that al-Ghazal boasted that during his twenty-month stay in the land of the Vikings he met several Viking nobles and learned people with whom he engaged in religious and cultural debates (*Al-Mutrib* 135).

Upon every occasion, al-Ghazal had not only impressed his non-Muslim adversaries but he had triumphed over them. Obviously al-Ghazal’s self-aggrandizement was intended for home consumption by presenting his unbound attachment to Islam and proving his success in advancing his country’s political interest in the land of the Vikings. Behind al-Ghazal’s rather frivolous self-promotion is a diplomat’s desire for self-advertisement, a universal human quality, that is neither peculiar to the Arab-Muslim diplomatic tradition nor is it idiosyncratic in the premodern world.

The climax to al-Ghazal’s journey is his encounter and love affair with Nud, the beautiful and coquettish Viking queen. In fact, there has been a kind of consensus among scholars that the affair between the Arab poet and the Viking queen represents the single most moving episode of what is left of al-Ghazal’s account of his embassy to the North. Not only is this true of its fascinating literary thread that reminds one of several enduring Arabian love romances and tales, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it tells us much of the "cultural work" of the earliest known journey of a Muslim traveler to western Europe. Introducing us to this encounter and affair, ibn Dihya on the authority of Tammam, gives the following information:

When he went to the land of al-Majūs, he was approaching fifty, and his hair was turning grey. He was strong, of straight body, and of handsome appearance. The King’s wife, whose name was Nud, asked him one day what was his age, and he said in jest: "Twenty!" She said to the interpreter: ‘And how does he have grey hair at the age of twenty’? He said to the interpreter: ‘Why does she deny it? Has she never seen a foal
with grey hair’? Nud laughed, and wondered at the words. Al-Ghazal extemporized on this occasion with a poem. (al-Hajji 181)

This poem turned out to be of impressive poetic genius. Fortunately, Allen’s translation of the poem is no less brilliant:

You are burned, O my heart, with a wearying passion
With which you struggle as if with a lion.
I am in love with a Viking woman.
Who will not let the sun of beauty set.
Who lives at the limit of God’s world, where he
Who goes towards her, finds no path.
O Nud, O young and fair one,
From whose buttons a star rises,
O you, by my father, than whom I see
None sweeter or pleasanter to my heart,
If I should say one day that my eye has seen
Any one like you, I would surely be lying.
She said: "I see that your locks have turned white"
In jest, she caused me to jest also,
I answered: "by my father,
The foal is born grey like this."
And she laughed and admired my words
--Which I only spoke that she might admire. (Allen 24).

Allen is definitely correct when he notes that if this fascinating love poem was the work of any renowned Mashriqi poet "it would have been highly estimated"(24). It should be noted, however, that contrary to the well regarded Arabic tradition of *al-hub al'-udhrī*, the equivalent to the western tradition of courtly love, wherein chivalrous and powerful male poet-lovers fall in love with chaste, submissive, and beautiful [unmarried] females, the love affair of al-Ghazal and Nud challenges in a negative way several of the
favourite *topoi* of the Arabic tradition of romantic love. This is true of the account’s discursive emphasis upon the sexual forwardness of the Viking woman in contrast to famous Arab love heroines and the enduring ‘Abla, Layla and ‘Azza in particular.\[^{116}\]

Andalusian chroniclers tend to portray Nud’s infatuation with al-Ghazal as more the physical lust of an unflatteringly promiscuous non-Muslim woman than anything else. Based on al-Ghazal’s own version, they usually relate the *fitna* (sexual seduction and failure) of al-Ghazal both to the promiscuity of Viking women and to the sexual liberalism of Viking men. Between the lines, it is easy to understand the sexual nature of the affair between the Viking queen and the Arab poet in the libertine Viking court. On the authority of Tammam, we are told that:

> The wife of the king of al-Majūs was infatuated with al-Ghazal, and could not pass a single day without sending for him. He used to stay with her, talking of the lives of the Muslims, their histories and their lands, and of the neighboring peoples. Never did he leave without her sending a gift after him as a sign of good-will, either a garment, some food or some perfume, until her relationship with him became notorious. His companions disapproved of it, and he was warned of it (al-Hajji 180).

Had it not been for the intellectualism of the poet and his "talking of the Muslims, their histories and their lands, and of the neighboring peoples," one would have jumped to the conclusion that unlike the Venetian Desdemona who was in many ways truthful when she used to avow that she saw "Othello’s visage in his mind," the Viking Nud appears to be satisfied with seeing al-Ghazal’s mind in his visage, if not in his body. This

\[^{116}\] Names of the most famous female loves in Arabic culture and literature. Their lovers ‘Antara, Kuthayyir, Qays, were all poets of great stature and tragic character à la Othello.
image is evoked primarily by the plethora of physical, if not erotic, words that dominate Ibn Dihya’s description of the nature of Nud’s love of al-Ghazal.

As far as Nud’s gifts of ‘good-will’ are concerned, one should be left with no doubts that those intimate gifts of garments, food, and perfume are signs of another type of will. When it comes to Arabic culture of physical love, these objects are too intimate to be mere signs of ‘good-will.’ No wonder then that al-Ghazal’s highly cultured companions were acutely aware of the fitna their Muslim fellow was subjected to. Somewhat analogous to the Qur’anic/Biblical story of the seduction of the Prophet Yusuf, known in the Bible as Joseph, by the beautiful imra’t al-ʿazīz (Potifar’s wife), known also in some Islamic sources as Queen Zulaikha, the blame should have also, if not primarily, fallen on al-Ghazal. Unlike Yusuf, mainly through his poetic moves, he was equally a seducer.

Al-Ghazal and later Andalusian chroniclers seem to forget that what he[al-Ghazal] is obliged to do in such a situation, as Yusuf is reported to have said to Zulaikha, "Allah forbid! Truly (thy husband) is my lord! He made my sojourn agreeable! Truly to no good come those who do wrong!" (Qur’an 12:23). Judged by his own religious convictions, al-Ghazal proved unrighteous in not avoiding the fitna of the Viking woman.

Whether al-Ghazal’s love, or rather sexual desire, for Nud is real or not, one cannot reach a definitive conclusion. His avowal that he flirted with the Viking queen for nothing but diplomatic ends was surely meant for home consumption. He must certainly have used the last line of the above poem as a poetic affidavit that his otherwise scandalous flirtations with Nud were nothing but intrigues made to serve his country’s interest. This makes sense especially if we remember that as much as his affair with the
Viking queen is surrounded by doubts, his poem appears to be more ambiguous. In short, the licentious content and words might be seen as contradicting the initial image of a righteous and strict Muslim.

Such a poem must have tempted many of his envious competitors who could have cast doubt on his moral integrity, a thing that was common in the cultural circles of medieval Islam. Whether one believes him or not, it is fascinating to see how the interaction between [successful] diplomacy, intrigues, and romantic/sexual affairs in his account conjures up a contemporary facet of modern diplomacy. The question that may arise here is to think of Nud’s presumed seduction of al-Ghazal as a counter-diplomatic Viking intrigue aimed at securing Viking interests; If so, this would make French diplomat Rene Gallimard, namely as dramatized in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1993), fortunate enough to have a medieval precedent.

Furthermore, it should be noted that a close exploration of some textual and cultural gaps in al-Ghazal’s account may convince us that this Arab diplomat was by his own acknowledgment the real culprit in the affair with the married Viking queen. Nowhere is this clearer than in the report of their first meeting. As Ibn Dihya and other chroniclers mention, as soon as al-Ghazal entered the queen’s headquarters, he deliberately fixed his eyes on the queen’s face, an improper deed that goes against the Qur’anic injunction of *ghadd al-basar* (lowering the gaze). Quite perplexed by his ‘gaze’ the queen is said to have demanded her interpreter to ask al-Ghazal about the meaning of this gaze.

Ignoring the specific requirement that Muslim males must steer away from all indecent behavior with foreign women, al-Ghazal opted for emotional manipulation and
inappropriate flirtation by ordering the interpreter to inform Nud that he is struck by her unmatched beauty. Expectedly, the compliment weighed heavily on the heart of the Viking queen. As reported by Ibn Dihya:

She said to her interpreter: ‘Ask him whether he is serious or jesting’. He said: ‘I am in earnest,’ She said: ‘There is no beauty in their land’. Al-Ghazal said: ‘show me some of your women so that I may compare them’. The queen sent for women well-known for their beauty. They came, and he looked at them carefully up and down, and said: ‘There is beauty among them, but not like the beauty of the queen, for her beauty and fine attributes cannot be perceived by everyone, and can only be expressed by poets. If the Queen wishes me to describe her beauty, her lineage and her intelligence in a poem to be recited throughout our land, then I shall do so.’ (al-Hajji 179)

To show her feelings, the now enamoured queen ordered her enticer a gift. Al-Ghazal refused to take the queen’s gift. This saddened the queen enormously and pushed her to ask about the reasons behind his refusal. The manipulative al-Ghazal resorted once again to his wits, and replied that "her present is indeed magnificent, and to accept it would be an honour, for she is a queen and the daughter of a king, but to look at her and to be received by her is an adequate gift for me"(al-Hajji 180). With these textual proofs in hand, one is surprised to see that Andalusian chroniclers and many contemporary scholars have tended to believe that al-Ghazal was a mere object of the Viking queen’s lustful eyes and flirtatious manners.

To go back to the warning of his friends, we are told that al-Ghazal is said to have accepted the warning and have decided to be more careful in his dealings with the Viking queen. When the latter noticed the change in her Arab lover, she reprimanded him. When al-Ghazal informed her about the warnings of his friends, she laughed and said "we do
not have such things in our religion, nor do we have such jealousy. Our women are with our men only of their own choice. A woman stays with her husband as long as it pleases her to do so, and leaves him if it no longer pleases her"(Allen 23). As Ponz-Sanz put it, "the behaviour described by Nud has some similarities with that presented in the Icelandic sagas"(17).

In the context of Arabic-Islamic views and perceptions of the Euro-Christians, Nud’s statement is suggestive mainly in two respects. Firstly, it captures perfectly that single most stereotypical image of Euro-Christian women as shamelessly accessible and characteristically forward. Secondly, it betrays typical Muslim views of Euro-Christian male jealousy still dominant today in the stereotyped perception of the West.

Throughout the centuries Muslims have been tireless in not only noticing with horror and condemnation but also in caricaturing what they have deemed to be a lack of jealousy among Euro-Christian males. Nevertheless, it is not going too far to suggest that no Arab-Muslim writer past or present has stigmatized this stereotype in Arabic-Islamic culture and literature other than writer and warrior Usamah ibn Munqidh (d.1188) through a plethora of qiṣaṣ (anecdotes) and nawādir (jokes) which he included in the increasingly popular Kitab al ʿitibar (Book of Instructive Example).

Although Usamah claimed that this nādira (joke) was a real waqiʿa (event) that he witnessed when he visited the then Frankish occupied city of Nablus it is perhaps even as powerful as the usually quoted anecdote of the Arab bath-keeper Selim and the
Usamah recounts the story of his visits to Nablus where he takes lodgings in a house owned by a man named Muʿiz whose front neighbor was a Euro-Christian wine merchant. One day the merchant is said to have found a strange man in bed with his wife. The presumed response of the Euro-Christian, as translated by Philip K Hitti, is worth quoting:

He asked him, "What could have made thee enter into my wife’s room?"
The man replied "I was tired, so I slept in it." But," said he, "my wife was sleeping together with thee!" The other replied, "Well, the bed is hers. How could I therefore have prevented her from using her own bed?"[83] "By the truth of my religion," said the husband, "if thou shouldst do it again, thou and I would have a quarrel."(165)

Most significant in the above quotation is indubitably Ibn Munqidh’s highly ironical statement: "Such was for the Frank the entire expression of his disproval and the limit of his jealousy." This phrase has not only captured the author’s ridicule of Frankish jealousy, but it has also reflected the sometime extreme Levantine cultural understanding of family honour. Although it is doubtful that ‘honour killing’ was quite as common among some Levantine Arabs during ibn Munqidh’s own age, it seems that the author and certainly many of his readers, at least in their ‘cultural horizons’ considered the only

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117 For an excellent English translation of this relatively long anecdote, see Hitti’s *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades* (New York: Columbia U P, 2000), pp. 165-166.
satisfactory show of male jealousy in such circumstances, to be killing the wife and the man.\textsuperscript{118}

If it is now commonplace that western writings about the Orient has made of the ‘oriental harem’ one of the favourite \textit{topoi} of cultural differences between the [Christian] West and the [Muslim] East, perhaps the older Arabic writings about the West as in the example of al-Ghazal’s account, or let us say even invented story, have in turn made of the ‘occidental harem’ one of their favourite sites through which they have not only explored themes of difference between the Self and the Other but also constructed and perpetuated stereotypes and stock images about the Euro-Christian that are still dominant in the contemporary "learned" and "popular" occidentalist, or \textit{ifranjalist}, views and perceptions of the West.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118} Contrary to some prevailing western prejudices, ‘honor killing’ is a cultural phenomenon that has been on the rise in many Middle Eastern countries. Some of these killings are common mainly in rural and tribal regions with both Muslim and Christian populations. This is despite the fact that Muslim jurisprudents have always condemned ‘honor killing’ as un-Islamic.

\textsuperscript{119} Here I am referring to, and using creatively, Daniel J. Vitkus’ article "Early Modern Orientalism." published in \textit{Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe}, Eds. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: Saint Martins, 1999). Vitkus differentiates between the "learned" and the "popular" accounts of Islam. Referring to the works of Norman Daniel and Montgomery Watt, Vitkus contends that since the Middle Ages, Islam has been the target of two different, but ideologically complementary, patterns of Orientalism: "popular" and "learned". The first is largely
In spite of the scepticism of some western Arabists in regard to its authenticity and the heated debate over the final destination, what remains of al-Ghazal’s account has recently drawn more attention. This is true not only because it is the earliest known Muslim account of medieval Europe, but also because it is a rare first-hand report of a Muslim visit most likely to ninth-century Denmark. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the fact that al-Ghazal’s account, especially as preserved by Ibn Dihya, without doubting its great cultural and literary value, is somewhat lacking in the ethnographical and anthropological richness of not only the Easterner Ibn Fadlan’s remarkable account of western Vikings, but even those of his two Andalusian successors Ibn Yaʿqub and al-Gharnati, whose texts we will explore in the two coming sections. At times, one feels pushed to agree with Miquel, who although accepting it as historical, did not hide his perplexity at the impression that al-Ghazal’s Vikings appear more like "fantômes" than real Vikings (345).

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found in the romances that recount the heroic deeds of Christian knights and crusaders. The second is contained in the extensive study of Islam done by many Western theologians and writers, who, despite their "learning," have established "an entire tradition of polemical misrepresentation," that distorted Islam and depicted it "as heresy or fraud, and Muhammad as an impostor"(208).
2. From Real Prague to the Fabulous "Town of Women": Northern Facts and Fables in the Remarkable Account of Ibn Yaʿqub

Thanks mainly to Andalusian geographer al-Bekri some important fragments of the tenth century European riḥla of Andalusian merchant, and probably diplomat, Ibrahim ibn Yaʿqub (d.999) have reached us. Acknowledged to be one of the world’s greatest premodern travelers, Ibn Yaʿqub is said to have penetrated deep into Europe in a remarkable journey that most likely took place between 965 and 967(Consta bile 79). As al-Hajji has noted, during his European journey Ibn Yaʿqub traversed France, Holland and Germany, where he is said to have met German Emperor Otto the Great in the town of Magdeburg. He then traveled through many Slav countries such as Bohemia, Moravia and mainly Poland, ruled at the time by the legendary Mieszko I, founder of the Piast Dynasty (966-1375) who introduced Christianity in Poland (271).120

There has been heated debate over his religion, profession, and the chief motive behind his extensive travel. Although practically nothing is known of the life and family of Ibn Yaʿqub, it appears, however, that he was born at the beginning of the tenth century (A.D.) in the Spanish town of Tortosa, near present day Barcelona. To the latter he owes the nisba (designation) of al-Tartouchi by which he was mostly known in medieval Arabic sources. Nevertheless, the other nisba of al-Israʿili, that is, the Israelite used by some Andalusian chroniclers, among them al-Bekri, has encouraged a considerable number, if not the majority of western Arabists to conclude that he was an Arab Jew.

120 Some scholars have suggested that he visited Italy and met Pope John XII in Rome in 961.
Citing the presence of the exclusively Muslim name Ahmad (Muhammad) in his name, other scholars such as al-Hajji have strongly contested this view, arguing rather that Ibn Yaʿqub, although of Jewish origin, was in reality an Andalusian Muslim. In al-Hajji’s own words, "The presence of Ahmad in his name indicates that he may have descended from a Muslim convert from Judaism or adopted Ahmad after embracing Islam"(230). A minority of scholars like Lewis have opted for a more reserved interpretation highlighting instead the insufficient biographical information about this Andalusian traveler. "There is some uncertainty to whether he was a professing Jew or a Muslim of Jewish origin," Lewis tells us before concluding that "The form of his name would allow either possibility"(95).

Whether an Arab Jew or an Arab Muslim, a merchant or an envoy, a physician or a slave or mine trader, Ibn Yaʿqub, as Rapoport put it, must have been "a very trustworthy, learned and observant writer" (333). In al-Hajji’s view "The detailed information about many Slav countries and his wide and first-hand knowledge of these countries suggest that he was a man of culture" (233). Unfortunately loss of the section(s) concerning his embassy to the German emperor Otto the Great and probably his meeting with Pope John XII, if they really existed and were found, would have added greatly to the historical importance of Ibn Yaʿqub. As Miquel writes "the date of the original work and the quality of the fragments which survive, notably those about the Slavs, show how greatly to be regretted is the loss of so much of it"(Encyclopaedia of Islam 999).

Despite this loss scholars have agreed that Ibn Yaʿqub has bequeathed to posterity one of the world’s most valuable and reliable accounts of early Slavs and Slavic countries such as Poland and Bohemia-Moravia (Spekke 158). This is in addition to his presumed
dissemination in medieval Arabic ‘ajāʾ ib/gharāʾ ib literature of the marvelous and strange madīnat/jazīrat al-nisaʾ (the town/island of women), which as we shall see, refers to the Amazons of Greek mythology.

Similar to other vague terms with which medieval Muslims described Europeans, namely al-Rūm and al-Ifranja, the term al-Ṣaqāliba, as Daniel Newman says, "at times denoted Germanic, Finnish, Turkic, and other non-Slavic peoples"(12). Similarly, ṣārḍ al-Ṣaqāliba (the land of the Slavs), was vaguely located "somewhere beyond the land of the Byzantines or to the north of Muslim Spain"(Shboul 179).

In contrast Ibn Yaʿqub’s text marks an enormous advance especially through his concentration on the Slavonic countries that now make up modern Slavic states such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bohemia, and Poland. "Ibrahim b. Yaʿqub, qui visita l’Europe de l’ouest et centrale dans les années 345/965," writes Miquel "nous a laissé un tableau des slaves occidentaux qui représente un incontestable progrès par rapport aux données de Mas'udi: époques et dates se lisent, enfin, à peu près en clair" (316).

In general terms, Ibn Yaʿqub admired much of what he saw in the lands of the Slavs: wealth, agriculture, industry, trade, and military might. Indeed, on the authority of al-Bekri and others, he states that the Slavs "inhabit countries very rich in dwellings and in provisions. They are diligent in agriculture and in other industries and in this they surpass all nations of the North. Their wares by land and sea reach the Rus"(Rapoport 334). Similarly, he mentions with fascination their exceptional bravery and prowess in war. All in all, had it not been for their destructive tribalism, the Slavs would have been the masters of the world. "If not for their disunion on account of their splitting into
numerous branches and tribal dispersion," he asserts, "no nation in the world could equal them in power" (Rapoport 334).

Ibn Ya’qub does, however, criticize some major Slavic tribes for not speaking their "national" language. Although he stressed the fact that several powerful Slavic tribes spoke Slavonic, many others preferred to speak the "foreign" languages of some neighboring enemy nations. He cites as examples the Slavic tribes of the Trshkin who prefer to speak Tedeski (German), the Ankli who speak Hungarian, and the Badjankia who speak the language of the Petchenegs (Turkic) (Rapoport 334). With these few statements, Ibn Ya’qub seems to indicate that a unifying national language is essential for the rise and survival of a cohesive and strong nation.

In this connection, perhaps it is pertinent to suggest that Ibn Ya’qub’s above observations evoke Johann Gottfried Herder’s theory of "linguistic nationalism," still relevant in modern studies of nationalism and nation-building.\(^{121}\) As Leigh Oakes remarks in *Language and National Identity: Comparing France and Sweden*, "For Johann Gottfried Herder, language was the core value of a people’s Volksgeist (national spirit), so that to speak a foreign language was to lead an artificial life, detached from one’s own spontaneous and distinctive personality" (22). Long before German francophobe Herder called upon the Germans to speak German in *An Die Deutschen* (Oakes 22), the Arab "Slavophone" Ibn Ya’qub enticed the foreign Slavs to speak Slavonic and to be proud of their language.

\(^{121}\) This theory was most firmly espoused by German philosophers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Wilhelm von Humboldt.
Ibn Yaʿqub fills his report on the Slavs with other valuable ethnographic and anthropological details, especially in what relates to their preferred clothing, culinary habits, and musical instruments. Commenting on their dress, for instance, he notes that the Slavs prefer loose garments and only the lower part of their sleeves is narrow (339). As for their food, he says that they enjoy eating the meat of cows and geese, but they avoid poultry in fear for erysipelas (339). As for liquids, he states that the Slavs are obsessed with drinking different varieties of mead beverages that contain honey. As noted by a growing number of Slavists, Ibn Yaʿqub is arguably the first to mention in writing the popular Slavic mead or honey-wine. As for Slav music, he noted that although the Slavs have various wind and string musical instruments, they particularly enjoy two of them. The first he describes is a long flute while the second is an eight-stringed lute whose inner side is flat and not convex. This could very well be a variant of the famous Torban.

Even when it comes to hygiene and sanitary customs, ‘against the grain’ of most medieval Arabic-Islamic writers about the Other, Ibn Yaʿqub portrays the Slavs as clean. He seems particularly taken by what he calls al-atbāʾ. The latter is the word with which he refers to what one might describe as the Slavs' own version of the hammam (public bath). The description of this Slavic sanitary marvel is worth quoting at length:

They have no bath houses, but they build a house of wood and caulk its chinks with some material which is obtained from their trees and is like a green marsh moss which they call mokh. Instead of tar they use it for their boats. Then they erect a stove of stones in one of the corners (of this house) and at the very top opposite the stove they open a window to let out the smoke. When the stove becomes red-hot they shut this window and close the doors, and in this house are kept basins with water which
they pour over the red-hot stove, and then the steam rises. Each one holds in his arm a bundle of dried branches by which they move the air, opened and out of their body comes what is superfluous and rivers run out of them. And no traces of a rash or abscess are left on any of them. And they call this house *al-atbaa* (Rapoport 334).

In contrast to western accounts of the oriental hammam, Ibn Yaʿqub has not only proved reticent in providing us with more specific details about the manners and behaviours of Slav men and women inside the *atbāʿ*, he has also proved discursively disinterested in sensualising this otherwise rich site of alterity. As Billie Melman has argued in *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918*, western [male] accounts, both real and imaginative, have portrayed Muslim *hammams* as quintessentially "*loci sensuales*" (89). "In western culture," Melman notes, the *hammams* "were identified as the erotically charged landscape of the Orient," and "came to apotheosize the sensual, effeminate Orient" (89).

The apparent disinterest in Slavic sexuality on the part of Ibn Yaʿqub vanishes as soon as he turns to Slavic women. In a broader perspective, Ibn Yaʿqub does not seem to add anything novel regarding the presumed moral inferiority and the alleged sexual promiscuity of Slavic women. In fact, he records with a sense of condemnation the premarital sexual freedom of young Slavic women. Without having any religious, social, or familial qualms or inhibitions, he claims that Slavic women before marriage commit *zināʾ* (illegal intercourse) with as many men as they desire. In his own words, "when a girl falls in love with someone she goes to him and satisfies her passion with him" (340).

Even more condemnable for Ibn Yaʿqub, is the fact that the Slavs, in his eyes, are gravely ignorant of the meaning of jealousy and shamelessly blind to the virtues of premarital virginity. Reminiscent of al-Ghazal’s and Ibn Munqidh’s notes on Viking and
Frankish male jealousy, Ibn Yaʿqub claims that "when a [Slav] man marries and finds his wife to be a virgin he says to her: "If there was any good in you, men would love you and you would choose one who would possess you, and drives her away and renounces her"(340).

According to al-ʿAzmeh, in their attempts "to convey distinction by enumerating tokens of difference and implying inversions of order," Andalusi writers, exactly like their Mashriqi counterparts, "had long dwelt on the freedom of European (and other) women"(267). Citing Ibn Yaʿqub, al-Ghazal, and Ibn Dihya, al-ʿAzmeh goes on to add that "Most noteworthy, for these and other authors, was the lack of jealousy among the men and the sexual freedom of unmarried women"(267). Echoing al-ʿAzmeh, Nadia Maria el-Icheikh has noted that "[T]he absence of jealousy on the part of a cuckolded husband is a constant accusation levelled against Byzantine men, as well as the Slavs and other Europeans, and later, the crusaders"(182).

In light of this, one is left with the impression that Ibn Yaʿqub’s explicit comments on Slavic women quoted above lend themselves well to the overall Muslim attitude concerning non-Muslim women, but they also appear as Islamocentric as those of the more religiously conscious Ibn Fadlan on Oghuz and Viking women. This textual proof may convince many that Ibn Yaʿqub, if not Muslim by faith, is Muslim by culture. Nevertheless, one can legitimately suggest that as much as the passage may reflect Muslim views of non-Muslim morality and sexuality, it may equally mirror Jewish perceptions of the same issues.

As much as there is a striking similarity between Judaism and Islam in regard to morality and sexuality, generally speaking, premarital virginity, the focus of Ibn Yaʿqub
snotes on Slavic women, seems to be more emphasized in the Jewish tradition than in the Islamic one. Indeed, while there is a specific hadith interpreted to mean that it is mustahabb (preferable) for Muslim men to marry virgins, there are no texts in the Qur’an and the Sunna that prohibit them from marrying non-virgins.122

In fact, with the exception of ‘A’isha, all Prophet Muhammad’s wives were non-virgin widows and one divorcee. This is certainly not the case with Jewish priests who are not permitted to marry non-virgins. In Sex and Salvation: Virginity as a Soteriological Paradigm in Ancient Jewish Writings, Roger Steven Evans sums up this prohibition as follows: "The priests of Israel, the men who handled the things of God, i.e., sacrifices, incense, blood, showbread, etc., and who daily entered into the Holy place of the Sanctuary," were instructed to "take a wife in her virginity"(Lev 21 13.14)"(19). Evans goes on to add that "The priests of God could not allow themselves to be "one" sexually with a woman who had previously been "one," sexually, with another man"(19).

With remarkable attention to detail, Ibn Ya’qub explores and observes the fauna and flora of the land of the Slavs. He was so much impressed by the wealth of the land, its agricultural resources, rich vegetation, varied fruit-trees, and kinds of cattle, that he

122 "Narrated by Jabir: My father died and left seven or nine girls and I married a matron. Allah’s Apostle said to me, "O Jabir! Have you married?" I said, "Yes." He said, "A virgin or a matron?" I replied, "A matron." he said, "Why not a virgin, so that you might play with her and she with you, and you might amuse her and she amuse you." I said, "‘Abdullah (my father) died and left girls, and I dislike to marry a girl like them, so I married a lady (matron) so that she may look after them." On that he said, "May Allah bless you," or "That is good." (Bukhari: V 7, 280)
unhesitatingly described it as one of the richest in the world. He was particularly taken by
two birds which he called the sba and the tra:

And there is in their country a remarkable bird which on the upper part is
dark green. It imitates all sounds of men and animals which it hears. Sometimes, they succeed in catching it; they hunt it and its name in Slavonic is sba. Then, there is a wild fowl which is called in Slavonic ttra (wood-cock). Its flesh is tasty and its cries one hears from the tops of trees at a distance of one farsang (about 6 or 7 km) and more. There are two kinds of it; black and motley, which are more beautiful than peacocks (Rapoport 340).

Like other Arab travelers before and after him, Ibn Ya’qub has left a lively
description of the unfamiliar northern climate to which he devotes a relatively lengthy
section. He noted with surprise the extreme ease with which the Slavs survive the
unbearable cold. Observing that since the Slavs are used to extreme cold, they cannot
survive even the rather moderate heat of northern Italy (Lombardy). It is not surprising,
he goes on to claim, that the Slavs do not dare to visit northern Italy (339). In a passage
that recalls Ibn Fadlan’s description of the cold of the city of Jurjaniyya (Urgench), Ibn
Ya’qub tells us that:

The countries of the Slavs are very cold, and the cold here is greatest
when the nights are moonlit and the days clear. Then the cold increases
and the frost get stronger. The soil becomes then like stone and all the
liquids become frozen, and the well and the canal become covered as if
with plaster so that they become like stone. And when people let water
through their nose their beards become covered with a layer of ice as if
with glass, so that one has to break them till one gets warm or enters the
room. And when the nights are dark and the days foggy then the frost
decreases and the cold weakens and at that time ships are broken and they
who are on them perish, because out of the ice of the rivers in these
countries get loose on them (on the ships) blocks like hard mountains
Sometimes a youth or a strong man is able to cling to such a block and to
escape on it. (Rapoport 341)

Although there is nothing in the passage to suggest that Ibn Yaʿqub is echoing the
earlier mentioned dominant Arab-Muslim geo-cosmographical views of barbarity and
civilization, in this particular passage, he can be seen as offering further compelling
evidence that medieval Arab writers, Maghribi and Mashriqi alike, conventionally
perceived of difference in climate as one of the most critical markers of distance between
the Self and the Other.

Ibn Yaʿqub goes on to give a great deal more information on the political life of
the Slavs. He states that before their division, the Slavs were ruled by a single king (mā-
ha). After the death of one of these monarchs, major Slav tribes quarreled among
themselves and fought each other. The result was the splitting of their once unified
dominion into four independent kingdoms (Rapoport 334). Much as he expressed his
disapproval of their disunity, Ibn Yaʿqub was even more direct in conveying his
criticism, if not denunciation, of these kings, not least because of what he saw as their
great wealth and luxurious lifestyle in comparison to the lives of the common people.

Reminiscent of some modern western accounts of oriental potentates and most
contemporary western reports of some Middle Eastern rulers, Ibn Yaʿqub was appalled
by the fact that while Slav kings ride on big, high carts running on four wheels with
frames wrapped with silk, "there is not so much," for Slav peasants and sick persons
(Rapoport 341). In spite of this criticism, Ibn Yaʿqub does not hide his overall admiration
for what he calls in Arabic bilād meshke (Poland) and bowīma (Bohemia).
Without doubt Ibn Ya’qub has given us a marvelous description of Poland under Mieszko I (962–92), whom historians hail as one of the central figures in the history of Poland. Increasingly cited by a growing number of contemporary historians of Poland, Ibn Ya’qub has become an essential written source for this crucial period of Polish history and of the army of Mieszko I. On the authority of al-Bekri, Ibn Ya’qub tells us the following:

Concerning the country of Meshke, it is the greatest of their [of the Slavs] countries. It is rich in bread and meat and honey and fish. The taxes which are collected by him (by Meshke) are paid in Byzantine money. They also (form) the salary of his men. Every month each of them receives a fixed number of *mitkals*. And he has 3000 men in armour, *and these are warriors of whom a hundred is equal to ten hundred of others* (italics mine). And he gives to those men dress, horses, armament and everything they need. (Rapoport 336)

As exaggerated as the italicized comparison appears, historians W. Sarnecki and D. Nicolle have recently shown in *Medieval Polish Armies 966-1500*, that Mieszko I’s soldiers proved to be powerful warriors in medieval Europe. Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki have noted that Mieszko’s "retinue of warriors," did not only enable him to "annex Silesia from his former Bohemians in-Laws" and to "found the home port of Gdansk around 980," but also made his son Boleslaw I Chrobry (992-1026), "able to impose his rule over Bohemia, Moravia, and much of modern day Slovakia"(11). Luckily, Ibn Ya’qub had the chance to visit Bohemia and Moravia before they were conquered by Boleslaw, "the Valiant".

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that this Arab traveler bequeathed to posterity an exceptional account of the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia, now the modern
Ibn Ya’qub refers to Bohemia with the slightly distorted Arabic word *bowīma*. He describes it as a wealthy country, large and bounteous, whose inhabitants enjoy a high standard of living, noting the excellence of its agriculture and the strength of its trade. He was particularly impressed by its majestic capital city, which he calls in Arabic *frāgha* (Prague). He mentions that its architecture is splendid and that most of its great buildings were made of limestone. He speaks of merchants and visitors who flocked to the bustling city from not only neighbouring countries such as Poland and Russia, but also from the more distant al-Andalus and the Muslim East.

As is the case with Krakow in Poland, some slavists have argued that Ibn Ya’qub is the first to mention in writing the city of Prague. Czech historian Eva Semotanová in *The Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages* (2001), for example, has noted that "The rise of the town of Prague during the early Middle Ages is related in an account by the Arab-Jewish merchant Ibrahim ibn Jacoub (965-966)" (1117).

Most interesting of all is Ibn Ya’qub’s remark that the Bohemians, contrary to other Europeans, were not fair of complexion. "It is strange that the Bohemians," he observes "have black hair and that fairness is a rarity among them" (167). In the absence of any single study of Ibn Ya’qub’s account of medieval Bohemia and the above-mentioned statement, this observation remains a puzzle. Inasmuch as medieval Czechs, as demonstrated by Czech historians, were mainly of Slavic, Germanic, and Celtic origins, it seems unlikely that these dark-skinned men and women could be as dominant as recorded by Ibn Ya’qub.

Conversely, owing to the existence of dark-skinned gypsies, or Roma as they call themselves, with considerable numbers in medieval Bohemia, it is possible that none but
the Gypsies were referred to by Ibn Yaʿqub. Yet this view is challenged by several prominent Slovak gypsiologists, as we are told by Wadim Strielkowski of Charles University in Prague, who have argued that "The Roma first entered Bohemia via Hungary with the army of King Andrew II(1205-1235) after he returned from the Crusades in the Holy Lands in 1217-1218"(6).\textsuperscript{123} Perhaps it is time for these historians to reconsider the history of the Roma of Bohemia in light of Ibn Yaʿqub’s observations.

Last but not least, it is of crucial importance to mention that unlike many of his Arab [Muslim] predecessors and successors, Ibn Yaʿqub, never seems to be interested in flavoring his writing with fables and tall tales of the ‘strange and marvellous.’ Nevertheless, his name shows up not only in books of ʿajāʾib/gharāʾib but also in a plethora of later geo-cosmographical works as the chief source of one of the most fantastic ʿajība/gharība in classical Arabic-Islamic literature and culture, namely, the madīnat or jazīrat al-nisaā’ (the town/island of women).\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{124} It should be stated that through the course of the centuries, its locations have changed dramatically reflecting perhaps the constant change in interest in different unknown and distant lands (al-ʿAzmeh 202). Always citing Ibn Yaʿqub, al-Idrisi (d.1150) located the Amazons on an island in the Atlantic. Al-Qazwini (d.1203), while claiming in Athar al-Bilad, that the Amazons lived in the Mediterranean Sea, in his book
In *Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik*, for example, al-Bekri, who as stated earlier, is credited with preserving the most authentic fragments of Ibn Yaʿqub’s travel account, surprises us by claiming that during their presumed meeting, the German emperor Otto the Great told Ibn Yaʿqub that "West to the land of the Rus [Bruss], there exists a city of women who rule over a vast territory and dominion"(169). "These women get pregnant by their own male slaves," Ibn Yaʿqub is said to have added "But, when they give birth to a male, they kill him. They also ride horses and fight in wars and they are known for their courage and braveness"(169).

This is undoubtedly so Greek a mirabilia as to make one think of *The Arabian Nights* as a possible source, although Scheherazade would have enjoyed the idea of further taming, if not threatening, the otherwise misogynist Shahrayar by empowering women in tales of the fearsome "a-mazos(without [one breast] or a-masos(not touching[men]) (Clements 87). 

"In the earliest Greek accounts," Albert Rosenthal told us in his classic article "The Isle of the Amazons: A Marvel of Travelers"(1938), "the Amazons are a tribe of female warriors who have mutilated their right breasts to facilitate the use of the bow. This is supposed to be implied in their name: a=without, mazos=breast"(257). The Amazons, Rosenthal goes on to add, "inhabited an exclusively female town which was surrounded by a river. Once a year they cross this river to mingle with neighboring men to have female children"(257).

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on marvels entitled ʿAjāʾib al-Makhluqat, he had them living on an island in China (al-Hajji 170).

125 Some suggest the Persian word hamazan, that is to say warrior, as the origin of the Greek word.
No wonder then that the remaining details about these warrior women convince us that al-Bekri, rather than Ibn Ya’qub, was quoting verbatim from an Arabic translation of a Greek or possibly a Latin source.\textsuperscript{126} Fortunately, if al-Bekri seems reluctant to acknowledge the Greek origin of the fable he wanted us to believe as fact, contrary to his account of the no less marvelous \textit{jazāʾir al-saʿada} (islands of happiness),\textsuperscript{127} his Eastern contemporary al-Marwazi explained it all:

Hippocrates has mentioned these women in some of his works. He calls them Amazuns, which means "those who possess but one breast," for they cut off the other, and they are only prevented from cutting off the race. The reason they cut off one breast is in order that it may not hamper them in shooting arrows on horseback. (Nazmi 251)

Josine Block noted in \textit{The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth}, that in spite of the long and seemingly never-ending debate over its

\textsuperscript{126} In light of what we said earlier regarding the familiarity of Andalusian chroniclers with Orosius and in the absence of any research in this regard, one can surmise that the name Orisius is a more likely direct source of al-Bekri. This makes sense if we remember that Orisius is always cited among the later Roman chroniclers who spoke of the Amazons as a historical fact based on the accounts of previous Roman historians such as Pliny and Justin.

\textsuperscript{127} "The islands called fortunate by the Greeks, which means in their language "the happy one," are situated near Tanga [Morocco]. They are called this because their trees and shrubs produce all sorts of delicious fruits having been planted or cultivated, and their ground bears corn instead of grass and different sorts of aromatic plants instead of thorns"(Nazmi 257).
origin, its possible existence in reality and its various locations in the course of time, the Amazons have turned into a recurrent motif [Amazonology] in ancient culture in general and early Greek culture in particular (viii).

As Block has explained, although the Amazon motif in Greek was initially shown "to embody an otherness to the rest of masculinity and femininity in epic-heroic life," it became later imbued "with the meaning of ethnographic alterity"(vii). In other words, the Amazons became an "an emblem of Otherness in its many guises"(vii) especially when it became commonplace among Greek writers to compare the Amazons with non-Greek peoples." "This ethnographic Amazonology was an attempt to give the Amazons a tangible form," and Block goes on to conclude, "by connecting them with various peoples among whom the Greeks detected unusual customs: a high level of female mobility; sexual or marital which apparently failed to assign men authority over women and children; and the practice of horseriding and bearing arms by women"(85).

Constantly interested in conveying their own ‘discourses’ of ethnographic alterity, medieval Arab-Muslim writers had employed a foreign and initially subversive motif to consolidate the dominant poetics and politics of femininity and sexuality as they confronted it in the European panoply of lands and peoples beyond their borders. There should be no doubt that medieval Arab-Muslim readers, women before men, would have been shocked and appalled by the physique and étique of these un-natural, abnormal, and masculine women who epitomized all that natural, normal, and feminine [Arab-Muslim] women do not and shall not do. At the same time madīnat/jazīrat al-nisaā’ would turn out to be, as mentioned by al-ʿAzmeh in Al-ʿArab wa-l-Barabīra, the single most popular khurāfa (legend) in the Arabic tradition of ‘ajāʿib/gharāʾib (202), but also,
as he puts it "The logical termini" of the typological motif of the "inversion of order" in Arabic writing"("Mortal Enemies" 267).

In my view, this "typological motif of the "inversion of order," is nowhere more clearly expressed in medieval Arabic literature than in the description of Frankish women warriors, the so-called "Amazons of the Crusades," by some Muslim chroniclers, and in particular Imaduddine. "Amongst the Franks are women knights (fawāris)," wrote Salahuddine’s scribe in this frequently quoted passage, "They have coats of mail and helmets. They are in men’s garb and they are prominent in the thick of the fray. They act in the manner of those endowed with intellect [i.e. men] although they are ladies"(The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives 348). By the same token, while the natural/normal/virtuous al-madīna al-fāḍila (utopia), is quintessentially madīnat al-rijāl (the town of men), madīnat nisaā’ is inherently a madīna fāsida (a dystopia). If it ever existed, one should never imagine it to be within the confines of dār al-Islām.

Another important point that springs to mind in connection with Ibn Yaʿqub’s reference to the fantastic madīnat/jazīrat al-nisaā’ and his location of this ʿajība/gharība in the [European] North is the tendency of some major medieval Arab-Muslim writers to employ consciously or unconsciously the topoi of fables and legends as a template for the articulation of geo-cosmographical difference between dār al-Islām and the unknown and remote lands of the Other.

Thabit ʿAbdullah has even noted that some medieval Arab writers "believed that in the remote northern regions there lived monster-like creatures"(79). Citing al-Qazwini, and Abu Hīs ibn Shahin, author of Kitab al-ʿAjaʿib wa-l- Gharaʿib (Book of Marvelous and Strange Things), ʿAbdullah has maintained that whereas the former claimed the
existence in the European North of a town named Kartanah where humans exist whose faces are differently coloured, the latter mentions an island in the Atlantic Ocean named ‘qlahat’ inhabited by humans with fishlike faces (79).

It is fascinating to discover that medieval Arab-Muslim writers did not hesitate to borrow creatively and to adapt culturally Greek geo-cosmographical legends and motifs as well as fables of marvelous and monstrous juzur (islands). In Nazmi’s view, one is here speaking literally of dozens of such as al-jazāʾir al-khālida (the islands of the Blest), jazāʾir al-saʿāda (the islands of happiness) and jazīrat al-waqwāq made popular by Ibn Battuta and identified by V. Minorsky and others as Japan. Interestingly with the exception of the latter and other African islands, most of these islands were imagined to exist in the North and the West (The Muslim Geographical Image of the World in the Middle Ages 269).

Of course, there has always been a literary fascination with fables, myths and legends per se from both writers and readers alike. For reasons related mainly to the centrality of perceptions of Self and Other in these writings, it becomes evident that there is some truth in these texts when it comes to the discursive background of such accounts and their contribution in fashioning non-Muslim territory as territories of the fantastic and the abnormal especially when we know that these ajāʾīb/gharāʾīb were never located even in the remotest parts of dār al-Islām. Like many of their medieval western counterparts, strange islands imagined to exist in the North and West appear "to pander to a medieval audience’s appetite for the strange and marvelous," to use Paul Smethurst’s phrase.
The strange and wondrous marvels of the East, as Smethurst and others have shown, was instrumental in mapping an East that is "either exotically different, or monstrously different," and presenting it as "other, populated by monsters, plants and strange human forms that belonged to a different system of Nature" (11), while the similar marvels of the North/West that one encounters in some medieval Arabic sources, must have been just as instrumental in fashioning and constructing a North/West that is no less different, exotic, and fabled.
3. Skiing, Giants, and Hungarian Maghribis: Marvelous Europe in the ‘Tall Tales’ of Abu Ḫamid al-Gharnati

Long overshadowed by his more world-famed two Maghribi successors Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta, Abu Ḫamid al-Gharnati, has surpassed both of them in bequeathing to posterity invaluable eyewitness accounts of medieval Europe. Although not much is known about the life of al-Gharnati, who was hailed by the Arabist E. Lévi-Provençal (1894-1956), as "the perfect type of the occidental raḥalla [traveler/explorer]" (125), from a number of autobiographical references he incorporated in some of his works, it is clear that he was born in the city of Granada in the year 1080 A.D.

This occidental adventurer, as he used to identify himself in the Muslim East, tells us in Al-Muʿrib ‘an baʿd ‘Ajāʾib al-Maghrib that he was born in the "extreme West, in an island called Andalus, which has forty cities" (el-Manssouri 43). After going through the "usual schooling available to a [western] Muslim of his time,” al-Gharnati, "fired by wanderlust," to use el Manssoury’s phrase, decided to embark on a long journey east and west of his native al-Andalus (43).

In the year 1117 A.D., al-Gharnati engaged in his first overseas trip which took him to Egypt through Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Sardinia and Sicily. Of great interest during this stage of his travels are his remarkable descriptions of the volcano of Mount Etna and the storied Lighthouse of Alexandria. After spending almost five years in Cairo, he took the road to Damascus where he stayed for a number of months before he decided to continue on to Baghdad, the capital of the East, which he reached in 1123.

While in Baghdad, al-Gharnati attended the durūs (lectures) of several famous scholars and secured the patronage of a future wazīr by the name of Yahya ibn
Ashaybani (Wahb 12). After a number of years in Baghdad wanderlust took over again and pushed him to embark in what C. E. Dubler has called al-Gharnati’s "Euro-Asian journey." After leaving Baghdad, he crossed Iran, and for more than thirty years he journeyed through the lands of the Turks, the Caucasus, Russia, Ukraine, the lands of the Bulgars, and at greater length the lands of the Magyars (Hungary). "Mais voilà que l'auteur traverse," Jean-Charles Ducène tells us, "la Caucase est passé près de trente ans de sa vie en Eurasie où il devient un témoin privilégié des populations bulgares, turques, ouraliennes, slaves et hongroises"(14).

As pointed out by Qasim Wahb in his introduction to the most recent and most comprehensive Arabic edition of al-Gharnati’s riḥla, the latter, although not particularly known for his prolific production nor much appreciated for his language and style, left a number of interesting texts which, in spite of several "tall tales," are filled with accurate geographical, historical, and ethnographical information (14). This is true of his Tuhfat al-Albab wa-Nukhbat al ʿIjab, a compendium of wondrous information, news, and tales of different countries, towns, rivers, humans, non-humans and animals. The author’s obsessive fascination with the wonders of the world encouraged many medieval scholars such as the Damascene Ibn ʿAsakir(Whab 14) to cast al-Gharnati as an utter kadhdhāb (liar) and to castigate his works as books of khawāriq (fables) and asāṭīr (myths) unsuited for serious study.

Of interest to us, however, is al-Gharnati’s forgotten récit de voyage for which he chose the title of Al-Muʾrib ʿan bʿad ʿAjaʾib al-Maghrib, which could be translated as
"On the Marvels of the West." This récit contains the traveler’s eyewitness account of his Euro-Asian journey.\(^{128}\)

Aside from early interest in his text by several leading Arabists such as Krachovsky, Fraehen, and Jacob, *Al-Mu’rib* has never competed with other occidental *raḥalāt* such as those of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta. Nevertheless, as early as 1925, French Arabist Gabriel Ferrand edited and published the first modern Arabic edition. In 1953, the Spanish Arabist Cesar E. Dubler published an edition in Spanish translation of the Eurasian account under the title *Abu Ḥamid el granadino y su relación de Viaje por tierras euroasiáticas*. Then in 2003, the most complete and comprehensive Arabic edition was published by Qasim Wahb in the United Arab Emirates under the title *Riḥlat al-Gharnati*. Recently, Jean-Charles Ducène produced the first full French translation of the *riḥla*: *De Grenade à Bagdad: la relation de voyage d’Abû Hâmid al-Gharnâti* (2006).

There can be no doubt that in *Al-Mu’rib* and, to a lesser degree, in *Al-Tuhfa*, al-Gharnati has left behind some remarkable passages concerning varied eastern and central European countries as well as the lands of the Bulgars and the Magyars. An unexpected reference to skiing as a medieval means of transport in northern/central Europe, the controversial issue of a witchcraft hunt as he witnessed it in the city of Kiev, the mysterious Maghribi communities of Unquria (Hungary), have all proved to be of great historical importance and contributed eventually to a present interest in al-Gharnati’s long forgotten European *riḥla*.

\(^{128}\) Literally, "A Succinct Account Regarding some Marvels of the West." Jean-Charles Ducène translated it in French as "Exposition claire sur les merveilles de l'Occident."
Al-Gharnati, like several of his Eastern and Western predecessors such as Ibn Fadlan, al-Masʿudi, and Ibn Yaʿqub, had the chance to visit what medieval Muslims used to call in Arabic ʾard al-Bilghār, that is, the land of the Bulgars. The latter included the medieval Volga Bulgars, as well various other now modern Russian territories. In the view of el Manssouri, author of a rare and excellent English article on al-Gharnati, the land of the Bulgars in Arabic sources "extended westward to the Dnieper and the Kiev area and southward to the Caucasus" (47). It included many modern east European towns such as Smirks, Kazan, Strakhan, and Kiev. Although not anthropologically speaking as detailed as that of the report of Ibn Fadlan, al-Gharnati’s first-hand account of the socio-economic and religious life of the Volga Bulgar State in the twelfth century and its then Muslim capital, that is the city of Bulgar, has been of great value for modern scholarship.

Echoing Ibn Fadlan, among the conspicuous wonders of the lands of the Bulgars that al-Gharnati witnessed with his own eyes and experienced with his own body, is the extreme qisar (shortness) of the night and the burūda (cold) of the weather. Al-Gharnati writes the following:

> And I've heard that in the City of the Bulgar –situated at the remote North of the Muslim lands—the day during the summer can last as many as twenty hours, whereas the night is only four hours. Since the weather is extremely cold, it is impossible to bury a dead person before the period of six months. This is mainly due to the fact that the earth becomes as hard as iron. Therefore, no one is able to dig a grave. (*Al-Tuhfa* 95) (Trans mine)

Inasmuch as this climate was an unquestionable marker of difference between the temperately warm to hot dār al-Islām, both eastern and western, and this part of Europe, it represented in real life a religious challenge for these Muslim travelers who had to grapple daily not only with the extreme cold water indispensable for wuḍūʿ (ablution).
and *ghusl* (bathing after sexual intercourse) but also with identifying the exact time of the five daily mandatory prayers. Of practical concern as well was the intermittent challenge of burying Muslims according to the prescribed rules and rituals of Islamic law.

This is what happened to al-Gharnati during his stay in the city of Bulgar, where the polygamous traveler lived for a number of years with his Bulgar wife with whom, as he confesses, he had many children (el-Manssouri 47). Since the weather is extremely cold, al-Gharnati explains to us, it is impossible to bury a dead person quickly. Speaking about the difficulty he personally experienced when burying one of his sons, he tells us that he was obliged to wait three months to bury him (95).

Contrary to the theoretical geo-cosmographical views concerning the extreme cold of northern Europe (i.e., *ʿard al-Shamāl*) as we saw with al-Masʿudi, with al-Gharnati, and as a matter of fact Ibn Yaʿqub and other eyewitness travelers to the European heartlands, the issue was practical. Indeed, in the eyes of al-Gharnati, the cold weather is not to be taken as one of the ultimate markers of barbarity as some ‘armchair’ classical geo-cosmographers would have it.

Al-Gharnati tells us with admiration, however, that the extreme cold did not hinder the Bulgars from leading an active life. Shunning *al-kasal* (laziness), chastised in the Qur’an and the Sunna as being not only one of the worst human attributes but as a proof of weakness of *imān* (faith), the industrious Bulgars, in addition to an excellent diet based mainly on honey and squirrel or horse meat, invented a marvelous instrument which facilitated their movement and filled their land with life.

In the course of this description of several tribes he encountered in the land of the Bulgars, he expresses his admiration for the *nashāṭ* (vivacity) and *hayawīyya* (liveliness)
of the northern tribes he met near a Bulgar region he called in Arabic al-yūra and in particular the techniques used by these northern tribes to adapt to the cold weather and lead an active life in spite of the cold.\(^{129}\) Al-Gharnati’s total unfamiliarity with a certain wooden instrument widely used by these northern people did not prevent him from engaging in an attempt to describe it:

> The people make with their own hands wooden boards to walk with. Each board is one arm’s length and a handbreadth wide. The beginning and the end of the board rise above the level of the ground. In the middle of it, there is a place where the walker can put his foot. On it there are a number of holes through which they fasten leather belts to their feet. The two boards are tied on with a long strap similar to the one attached to the bridle of a horse. The walker holds the strap with his left hand. He also holds a stick as long as a man’s leg. At the bottom of the stick there is a device that looks like a ball that is stuffed with wool as big as a man’s head. The people rely on this stick to move on the snow by pushing it from behind like the paddling of the sailor. Were it not for this trick, none would be able to move for this snowy land is similar to sand and it does not harden.

\(^{(Al-Tuhfa 96) (Trans mine)}\)

Al-Gharnati’s complete unfamiliarity with this medieval Bulgarian ʿajība (marvel) did not prevent him from bequeathing to us not only the first Arabic description of skis but also one of the medieval world’s most fascinating technologies.\(^{130}\) This

\(^{129}\) As demonstrated by several scholars such as Dubler, al-Hajji, and Hmeida, Al-Gharnati most likely meant the Siberian tribes of the Ogor, the Woguls, and Yorak, who lived north of the Volga River.

precise account of skis must have been hastily branded by al-Gharnati’s contemporary Muslim critics as yet another unfounded *khurāfa* (fiction). Yet one cannot but share el-Manssouri’s concern about the ongoing neglect of al-Gharnati’s texts because of his "predilection for telling tall tales"(57). Of course this concern becomes less justifiable when it is now established that many of the "tall tales" were not as tall as his critics past and present, Muslims and non-Muslims, have always thought.

Such severely cold weather did not discourage Muslim merchants from being active in Bulgar Lands and the city itself. The latter is described by al-Gharnati as a Muslim town wherein he saw many big mosques and met several *fuqahā’* from both the Hanafi and Maliki schools of thought (el-Manssouri 47). Here we should remember Ibn Fadlan’s mission and the ensuing *Islamicization* of the Volga-Kama region after the decision of Almish to adopt Islam as we saw in a previous section.

At that time, as we are told by Z. Rorlich, Islam had become the dominant feature of Bulgar life. According to Rorlich, "Islam became the nucleus around which the spiritual life of the Bulgar state developed after the tenth century"(10), while Muslim merchants dominated much of the economic life of the city. From the East, they used to bring spices, precious stones, gold and silver which they traded for varied goods such as furs, grains, honey, beeswax, and leather items. This is in addition to trade in European slaves (Rorlich 6). The city of Bulgar was bustling with oriental-like *aswāq* (markets), *bazaaris* (fairs) and *fanādiq* (inns) (Rorlich 10).
Al-Gharnati was also known for his fascination with what el-Manssouri aptly calls "tall tales," to which his account of the Land of the Bulgars seems to testify. One of such tales is about his presumed friendship with a giant Bulgar named Dange. In the words of al-Gharnati, this fourteen-foot-tall man was capable not only of holding a horse under his arm but also of breaking its body as a normal man would break a bundle of vegetables. His fantastic strength pushed the Amir of the Bulgars to provide him with a monstrous shield which used to be carried on a cart. His helmet was as big as a giant pot. In times of war, Dange fought with a great wooden bar made of oak which he would hold easily in one hand and when he struck with it, he could kill an elephant.

Al-Gharnati insisted that he did not only see this giant with his own eyes but that he developed a strong friendship with him and his sister. Speaking about the kind of human being this otherwise ‘monstrous’ giant was, al-Gharnati sympathetically reminds us that his friend was just a normal human being:

He was very kind and modest. Indeed, every time he meets me he would greet me and treat me very generously. My head does not reach his groin. Throughout the land of the Bulgars, there is only one public bath that he can visit since it has a huge door. Undeniably, he was one of the most wonderful humans I have ever seen. Dange had a sister who was as huge as he whom I saw many times. Once, I was told by the Judge Ya’qub ibn al Numan that this very tall woman killed her husband. The latter was called Adam and he, in turn, was one of the strongest men in the country. Once she hugged him until she broke his ribs and he passed away (Al-Tuhfa 133) (Trans. mine)

Although it is such ‘tall tales’ that must have encouraged some medieval Muslim scholars to chastise al-Gharnati as a fabricator of lies and unfounded stories, it seems there may be some truth behind the story of the Bulgar giant. Dange could certainly be a
reality inasmuch as giant humans have always been a reality. What is rather ‘tall’ perhaps is the hyperbolic language and exaggerated metaphors with which al-Gharnati seasoned his description of Dange, most likely for literary purposes if one remembers the no less tall ‘horizons of expectation’ of avid readers of the classical Arabic ʿajaʾib genre of which al-Gharnati was a master.

Al-Gharnati devotes an entire section to his journey to the land of the Ṣaqāliba, the term with which medieval Arabs, with the exception of ibn Yaʿqub, designated vaguely many eastern and central European countries. In the context of al-Gharnati’s works, the main focus was upon what is now modern Ukraine. After expressing his admiration for the country’s varied fauna and flora, he informs us that it was particularly known for its agriculture. As with modern Ukraine, agriculture was the cornerstone of the Ukrainian economy in the twelfth century. Ukrainian farmers, we are told, grew mainly spelt, wheat, barley and apples, and they also kept bees.

Along with this prosperity, there was a strong political system that guaranteed both Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians their fundamental rights and protected their personal property. Al-Gharnati does not see any religious or cultural taboo against praising Ukrainians for what he saw as just treatment of Muslims. Indeed, he emphasizes the fact that this Slavic country was a very safe place to live in, and above all, Muslims such as himself were treated equally. "Their country is very secure," he concludes, "and whenever a Slav transgresses financially upon a Muslim, he or one of his sons, or his house, is sold and the money is given back to the Muslim"(Al-Tuhfa 149).

In a language full of laudatory remarks when it comes to the rule and sanctity of law, al-Gharnati gives us a few specific examples of twelfth-century Ukrainian justice. Its
most salient feature is its connection with slavery which seems to be widespread among medieval Ukrainians as was the case with other Slavonic races. For example, al-Gharnati mentions that every time a man transgresses upon another man’s properties or relatives, he is obliged by law to pay a fixed fine. If he does not give the prescribed amount, the authorities will sell his sons or daughters to collect the fine. If, however, he does not have a family, he himself is sold and will stay a slave until he dies (Al-Tuhfa 146).

Twelfth-century Ukraine was not immune, however, from a number of social problems. Chief among them, as we are told by al-Gharnati, is the widespread practice of *sihr* (that is to say witchcraft) among their old women. After telling us that the Ukrainians, like other Slavs, are *Melkite* (Catholics), he underlines the fact that many old women were seen to represent a persistent danger to their Christian society because of their pagan practices and propensity to witchcraft. "I was told that every ten years, witchcraft dramatically increases and witches muddle and harm their women"(149), he reports before showing the kind of measures taken by the authorities.

The Ukrainians would arrest every old woman in their provinces and after tying their hands and feet, they would throw them in rivers. Every woman who sank in the water would be declared innocent and released. Those who floated, however, would be judged witches and burnt alive. Without being aware of what was known in medieval and early modern European countries as the ‘Great Witch Hunt’ or ‘the Burning Time’ al-Gharnati left a valuable document concerning the medieval origin of this puzzling phenomenon that is still engendering a heated debate.\footnote{See Darren Oldridge, ed, *The Witchcraft Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).} Al-Gharnati could be an
alternative source adding an outsider’s point of view to the issue, and of particular interest would be his reference to the trial of witches through the ‘water ordeal’ also known as ‘the swimming of witches.’\footnote{See Russell Zguta, "The Ordeal by Water (Swimming of Witches) in the East Slavic World," \textit{Slavic Review.} 36. 2. (1977), 220-230.}

Nonetheless, it is al-Gharnati’s account of his stay in the Land of the Magyars (Hungarians), described by el-Manssouri as "the high-water of his career"\footnote{In reference to Alexander Pope’s famous line "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread" in "An Essay on Criticism"(1711), which almost two hundred years later inspired the title of E.M Forster’s novel \textit{Where Angels Fear to Tread} (1905).}, that has proved most valuable for a number of reasons, not least of which because it represents the single most important classical Arabic account of life in medieval Hungary.

This is in addition to the fact that it sheds light on the existence of thousands of Muslims in this European country, a phenomenon if given its due importance in the growing field of Islam/West encounters, that will certainly redraw several theoretical boundaries especially when it comes to the claims discussed earlier that made of medieval Europe a forbidden zone where medieval Muslims feared to tread.\footnote{In reference to Alexander Pope’s famous line "For fools rush in where angels fear to tread" in "An Essay on Criticism"(1711), which almost two hundred years later inspired the title of E.M Forster’s novel \textit{Where Angels Fear to Tread} (1905).}

In the twelfth century al-Gharnati encountered and lived in a Hungary that he described as not only affluent and rich, but also exceptionally convivial for Muslims. With admiration and love, he recorded his pleasant sojourn in this medieval Christian kingdom which stretched over the Carpathian basin and "in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, occupied a
larger tract of territory than did the Byzantine Empire" (el Manssouri 48). In both *Al-Tuhfa* and *Al-Muʿrib* he tells us that he lived three years in the country he interchangeably calls in Arabic *bashghurd* and *anquriya*. The former, as pointed out by Dubler, refers to the strongest of their founding tribes at the time of Hungaria Magna (Dubler 233), whereas the latter is a slight Arabic distortion of the word Hungaria itself.

Throughout the two accounts, al-Gharnati expresses his admiration for the Hungarians for their courage in wars and their civilized achievements and tolerance for Islam and Muslims. Hailing their great towns, he even dares to compare some of them to Baghdad and Isfahan. All in all, Hungary in al-Gharnati’s eyes appears to be the most prosperous and most welcoming east-central European country he has visited during his long Euro-Asian journey.

Reminiscent in some ways of al-Tajir’s description of ninth-century China, al-Gharnati portrays Hungary as a European utopia where he has enjoyed life to the full. With worldly satisfaction, he speaks more than once of the abundance of gold and silver, he cites the cheap prices of lamb, goat and honey, traditionally thought to be among the favoured delicacies in an Arab diet, and he speaks obsessively as well of the beauty of European women.

With great joy, al-Gharnati praises the beautiful *jawārī* (slave girls) he bought and sexually enjoyed, he implies, during his stay in Hungary. He writes that one can buy a beautiful and industrious slave girl for no more than ten *dinars*, and in times of war, the price can be as little as three *dinār* (*Al-Tuhfa* 154). Al-Gharnati describes the situation in this way:

I bought a young and beautiful slave girl from her master with the sum of ten *dinār*. Her father, mother, and sister are all alive. She was fifteen years
old and was more beautiful than the moon with black hair and black eyes, yet, she was as white as camphor. She knew cooking, sewing, and writing. I bought also another eight-year old Rūmiyya (Roman/Byzantine) slave girl for only five dinār. She was so industrious that she used to extract five beeswax honeycombs as pure as gold from two clay pots of honey. When she gave birth to a boy who died I liberated her. I really wanted her to travel with me to Sejestin but I was afraid my Turkish wives would do her harm. (Al-Tuhfa 154) (Trans mine)

As much as modern readers may be disturbed by al-Gharnati’s preferred themes which do not sit comfortably with dominant worldviews especially in the West, one has to remember that as the passage clearly shows, al-Gharnati is fashioned by and is fashioning a totally different worldview, with its own values and its own standards.

Of interest to mention here that, in Muslim law, when a concubine gives birth to a child (male or female), her legal status changes into that of the more prestigious um-walad (mother of child). In Sunni jurisprudence, upon the death of her master, she is automatically freed. However, an um-walad can be freed as soon as she gave birth to a child. That is exactly what al-Gharnati did with his slave girl in the above passage. The latter also tells us much about the hidden competition between legal wives (maximum four) and what is known in classical Islamic law as mulk al-aymān (one’s ownership) in reference to the female slaves that a Muslim male is allowed to have with precise conditions, a profound analysis of which is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

In the larger context of the prosperity of Hungary in the twelfth century, there is much truth in al-Gharnati’s account. As pointed out by Hungarian historian Pál Engel in The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895-1526(2001), at that time in spite of the intermittent quarrels among the members of the royal family, Hungary
reached the height of its military, economic, and cultural strengths. Similarly, Nora Berend in "Hungary in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century," in The New Cambridge Medieval History (2005), has maintained that during much of the twelfth century Hungary was not only one of the richest and most powerful Christian kingdoms in Europe but also one of the leading international powers of the day.

It is this good life full of abundance that seemed to encourage al-Gharnati’s son Ḥamid and a surprising number of Muslims to settle there in the twelfth century. Thousands of Maghribi and Mashriqi Muslims chose to live in Hungary in harmony with the indigenous Christian population and under the direct protection and patronage of the Hungarian king. This makes al-Gharnati unique in reporting a pre-modern "season of migration" to the North which was, however, different from the one eternalized by Tayyeb Saleh in Mawsim al-Hijra il-a al-Shamal (Season of Migration to the North).

As pointed out by el-Manssouri, "the question that remains unanswered in his [al-Gharnati’s] narrative concerns the reason behind the presence of the Maghribis in the 12th century Hungary"(48). Although this question is legitimate given the dominant view concerning the insularity of medieval Muslims in regard to Europe, and the dearth of research related to this interesting issue, the most compelling answer seems to be found in the narrative itself, a possibility that el-Manssouri does not seem to take into consideration.

That that these thousands of Muslims living in Hungarian towns and villages were all "engaged in the lucrative and widespread mamluk trade exporting young Slavs, Teutons, Huns, Georgians, Greeks, Armenians, Khazars, Georgians, and Tartars"(50) appears unfounded and without proof. Still more surprising is her statement that her
The immediacy and uncharacteristic directness of al-Gharnati when mentioning these events make it clear that these thousands of Muslims had little to do with the mamlūk trade. Their seeming willingness to fight for the king because of his tolerance of Islam and Muslims stands in contrast to the Byzantines, universally acknowledged by...
pre-Crusade Muslims as the archenemy of Islam. As Berend has pointed out, these Muslims belonged to the *hospites* (foreign settlers) who flocked to Hungary to enjoy a privileged status in Hungarian society. Living in royal lands and holding high ranking military and political positions at the direct patronage of the king, these foreign settlers, Berend goes to explain, felt part and parcel of the "*gens Ungarorum*" (314).

As attested by al-Gharnati, foreign settlers and Muslims in particular, enjoyed unprecedented cultural and religious tolerance. Al-Gharnati writes that he was told by a number of Muslims who fell captive to the Byzantines that they were asked by the Byzantine emperor about the reasons that encouraged them to fight along with the king. They all answered that they did so because, in contrast to the Byzantines who obliged Muslims to convert to Christianity, the king granted them the freedom to practise their religion and he built mosques for them (*Al-Tuhfa* 155).

This king is also lauded by al-Gharnati for his presumed curiosity to learn about Islam and his fascination with the author’s *ḥikma* (wisdom). In the course of al-Gharnati’s account, it is the theological and political debate that had seemingly taken place between the two men that is featured. Al-Gharnati tells us that the King once summoned him to ask about the logic behind his actions in encouraging Muslim *hospites* to practise polygamy while discouraging them from drinking alcohol.

With a language full of conceit and self-advertisement, al-Gharnati tells us that in his effort to vindicate the superiority of Islamic law, he reminded the king that Muslims, contrary to Christians, cannot drink moderately. Here al-Gharnati does appear to forget that this statement could be seen as an assault on Muslims and praise of Christians. Indeed, he goes further to state that these same Muslims when drunk, lose their mind and
behave like beasts. Hence, they may engage in sexual assaults, killings, and all types of blasphemy. This is in addition to wasting their arms and horses.

When it comes to polygamy, al-Gharnati mentions that he told the King that engaging in [legal] sexual relations with four wives and multiple slave girls goes with the inherent temperament of Muslim soldiers, a further criticism of Muslims. The ‘wise’ al-Gharnati comes to the conclusion that the more children Muslim men will have, the more soldiers the Hungarian king will possess! What should one expect from such a Shehrezedian tale of Muslim intrigue and wit except that the Hungarian Shahrayar will find himself not only convinced but utterly mesmerized by the tales of the Arabian shaykh. Before the coming of the day, the Hungarian king will not only allow his Muslim soldiers to practise polygamy but he himself will disregard the laws of his religion by vowing to enjoy as many slave girls as his temperament will allow (Al-Tuhfa 155).

In light of all this, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that al-Gharnati is the author of the richest Arabic account of medieval Hungary. This neglected eyewitness account of his sojourn in Hungary has been particularly important in the broad field of medieval Arabic literature about central Europe and Slavic countries. This is true especially if one remembers that, before al-Gharnati, the majority of Muslim writers tended to speak about eastern and central, and even northern Europe, somewhat en bloc in their accounts of Slavs and the Bulgars.
Chapter IV: Poetry, Frontiers, and Alterity: Views and Perceptions of 
_al-Rūm_ (Byzantines) and _al-Ifranja_ (Franks)
A. Byzantium and the Byzantines in Medieval Arabic Poetry: Abu Firas’ Al-Rumiyyat and the Poetic Responses of Al-Qaffal and Ibn Hazm to Nicephore Phocas’ Al-Qasida al-Arminiyya al-Mal’una (The Armenian Cursed Ode)

Long before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Arabs had already established strong relations with al-Rūm (the Byzantines), who along with al-Furs (the Persians), were considered to be the two most powerful empires of late antiquity. As demonstrated by Irfan Shahid, author of a number of studies on Arab-Byzantine relations before Islam, several Arab tribes were satisfied with a passive role, that is to say, accepting of the will of both these imperial powers in Oriens, although many of the most influential tribes, owing to religious affinities, favored the Christian Byzantines (33).

According to Shahid, mostly sedentary and Christian Arab tribes such as the Tanuhkids, the Salihids, the Kindites, and the Ghassanids served as Byzantium’s principal foederati (mercenaries) in Oriens. By signing a foedus (treaty) in return for anonna (allowances), Arab tribes such as the Ghassanids in the sixth century, during an unprecedented period of antagonism between the two empires, in addition to forming a “buffer zone” between their allies and their most antagonistic rivals the Persians, were also expected to repel anti-Byzantine Arab raiders “from the Peninsula outside the limes [borders]” (Shahid 33). 134

Understandably, pre-Islamic Arabs admired the Byzantines for their cultural achievements, military might, their ‘wonderful’ artistry, and their excellent craftsmanship. According to Ahmad Shboul and N. M. el Cheikh, the Arabs’ high esteem for Byzantine civilization was even alluded to in imagery used by a number of jahili (pre-

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134 This antagonism culminated in the long Byzantine-Sassanid wars (602-628).
Islamic) poets. Also among the most valued of these images were the Byzantine silver coins portraying scarce pools of water in the desert and gold coins depicting beautiful human faces (Shboul 46 and el-Cheikh 56).

The most striking imagery, however, lies in the comparison by some poets of their healthy she-camels to Byzantine bridges and palace arches (Shboul 46). If on the one hand the Arabs were fully aware of the greatness of their Byzantine patrons, the civilized Byzantines, on the other, were equally conscious of their allies’ barbarismus. "Whereas the Arabs saw the Byzantines as palace-dwellers and architects and builders par excellence," Shboul tells us, "the Byzantines thought conventionally of the pre-Islamic Arabs as nomads and tent-dwellers" (46). The ‘haughty’ Byzantine perception of their foederati of the deserts would unquestionably change with the advent of Mohammed.

It should be mentioned that in spite of the Qur’an’s initially positive view of al-Rūm wherein the nascent Muslim community is divinely summoned to sympathize with the Byzantines by applauding a pending victory of the Byzantine ahl al-Kitāb (people of the Book) over the Persian majūs (fire worshippers), the ‘physical’ encounter between Muslims and Byzantines, proved to be dramatically Huntingdonian.¹³⁵ This sympathy

¹³⁵ The opening verses of chapter al-Rūm (Byzantines) is worth mentioning here: "Alif, Lām, Mīm. The Byzantines (Romans) have been defeated in the nearer land, and they, after their defeat, will be victorious within ten years, Allah’s is the command in the former case and in the latter and on that day believers will rejoice (1-4). In this context, although most exegetes of the Qur’an read and interpreted the verses as abovementioned, some medieval Muslim scholars had another interpretation according to a variance in the
would vanish when Muslims and Byzantines found themselves competing for the vast area that makes up the entire modern Middle East and North Africa thereby ushering in a new area of Muslim-Byzantine enmity that would colour their relations until the dramatic Conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453.

This was true in spite of intermittent truces, ransoms, exchanges of captives, and the ensuing diplomatic negotiations as well as the ‘latent’ manifestations of cultural influences represented on the Muslim side in the appreciation of Byzantine craftsmanship, architecture and Byzantine (fe)male beauty. From the Byzantine side, it was most strongly felt in the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries.136

As mentioned earlier, in 750 A.D the Abbasids succeeded in ousting their archrivals the Umayyads. The latter, in spite of their wars with the Byzantines, had initially had strong cultural, diplomatic, and economic ties with them. Indeed, not only

\textit{qirā’ reading} of the key words of those verses: \textit{ghulibat al-Rūm} or \textit{ghalabat al-Rūm}. The first would mean that the Byzantines have been defeated and after their defeat they will be victorious. The second would mean that the Byzantines have defeated the Persians and after their victory they will be defeated—by Muslims. For a comprehensive account of this controversy, see Nadia Maria el-Cheikh’s "Surat Al-Rum: A Study of the Exegetical Literature." \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society}. 118 (1998), 356-364.

had the Umayyad, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, retained Greek as their administrative language, but they had also learned from the Byzantines the arts of civil service and political governance by relying fully on Byzantine "administrative, legal, and numismatic traditions" (el-Cheikh 55). In the words of el-Cheikh, "the administrative patterns and the political framework that were chosen by the Umayyad were Byzantine in origin" (55).

It is, however, in the domains of architecture and craftsmanship that the Byzantines were hailed by Muslims as the unequalled masters. To the implied detriment of Byzantine science and philosophy, al-Jahiz’s much quoted statement, for instance, sums it up well: "In the domains of construction, carpentry, craftsmanship, and turnery, the Byzantines have no equal" (el Cheikh 109). In the example of al-Jahiz, "Arabic authors," Shboul remarks, "acknowledge this debt in various ways. Reporting traditions about Byzantine material and technical help in the building of some of the great early mosques of the Umayyad period is only one aspect of this" (52).

The Byzantines, contrary to their near defeat by the Umayyad troops who were twice on the verge of conquering Constantinople in 674/78 and 717/18, chose to attack by engaging in offensive skirmishes and sometimes full assaults across their southern borders. This pushed the early Abbasid caliphs, as demonstrated by Michael Bonne in *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies on the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier*, to invest in the strengthening of their positions along *al-thughūr* through establishing strong "buffer towns," known in Arabic as *al-ʿawāsim* in northern Syria.
These efforts were consolidated by the powerful caliphs/Ghazis (warriors) such as Harun al-Rashid, al-Ma’mun, and al Mu’tasam. The latter’s triumph over the Byzantines, for instance, in Amoriyya (Amorium) in 838 was celebrated by the poet Abu Tammam (d.846) in a powerful qaṣīda (long poem) in the Arabic genre of madīḥ (panegyric-eulogy).  

Clearly, throughout the Abbasid era, and irrespective of the internal strife which led to the rise of a number of independent dynasties and principalities, Muslim enmity with the Byzantines had never decreased. One is left with no doubt that, at least until the Crusades, medieval Muslims whether rulers or ruled, used to consider Byzantium and the Byzantines as the eternal arch-enemies of Islam and Muslims.

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138 The opening hemistich of this qaṣīda (i.e, al-sayfu aṣdaqu anbāʾan min al-kutubi/ the sword is truer in telling than books) has become among the most quoted verses of Arabic poetry. On this poem, see M.M. Badawi’s "The Function of Rhetoric in Medieval Arabic Poetry: Abu Tammam’s ode on Amorium." Journal of Arabic Literature, 9 (1978), 43-56.

139 One can cite the Fatimids in North Africa and Egypt and the Buwayhids in Iraq.
As shown by al-Kilani and others, this feeling was no better illustrated at the time than in the much quoted warning of the Abbasid polyvalent scholar, kātib (official scribe), nāqid (literary critic) and geo-political Abbasid strategist Qudama ibn Ja’far(d.948). In Al-Kharaj, and after reminding Muslims that threats could emanate from all the umam al-kufr (nations of infidelity), he singled out the Byzantines as the hereditary enemy of the Islamic faith and the traditional opponents of Muslims (al-Kilani 116).

As with Qudama, Abbasid scholars motivated by the generous support of the caliphs initiated a systematic study of Byzantium’s political, economic and military systems both to comprehend the reasons that made Byzantium impregnable to Muslim armies and to contain any Byzantine danger looming from the thughūr region. As el-I Cheikh says, "Knowledge of Byzantium was imperative for the survival and prestige of the Islamic empire"(102). If seen from the same perspective as that from which Said saw the rise of oriental studies in the West, one might posit that the Abbasid interest in Byzantium and the Byzantines anticipated the western project of Orientalism. In any case, one cannot deny the fact that as Orientalism has actively participated in the construction of the Oriental as the Other of the early/modern European, this older

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Qudama was the author of a foundational book on criticism of poetry by the title of Kitab Naqd al-Shi’r (Book of Poetic Criticism). For a comprehensive study of this Abbasid scholar, see Paul L. Heck’s The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudama b. Ja’far and his Kitab al-Kharaj wa Sina’at al-Kitab a (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
medieval Muslim tradition indubitably bore a similar ideological responsibility in fashioning *al-Rūm* as the Muslim Other.

No wonder then that a close look at medieval Arabic literature and Arabic poetry in particular will convince us that *al-Rūm*, interchangeably called *banū al-asfar* (the Yellow Ones)—and derogatorily *ʿulūj*, plural *ʿilj* (barbarians, unknown, and by implication ‘bastards’)— are depicted as *al-akhar* (the Other) *par excellence*.¹⁴¹ Not only was medieval Arabic poetry the favorite ‘ideological apparatus’ of the Abassid state, but also, of the common Muslim east and west of *dār al-Islām* wherein the colloquial words *rūmī* (masculine) and *rūmiyya* (feminine) in many Arabic dialects especially in the Maghreb still denote the non-Muslim European Other whether German, French, Italian, Spanish, English, or Scandinavian. Abbasid literature, certainly in its Hamdanid branch, and poetry in particular, waged an ideological war against political and military arch-rivals. Anti-Byzantine poetry in the words of Shboul, "may be seen as an interesting illustration of Muslim public opinion, with no small amount of the mass media flavor especially when one considers the Arabs’ appreciation of poetry" (54).

Throughout these times, a highly emotional type of poetry that encompassed almost all the classical genres such as *madīḥ* (eulogy-panegyrics), *hijāʿ* (lampoon-invective), *munāqadhāt* (polemics-debates), *rīthāʾ* (elegy), *fakhr* (praise), *ḥanīn ila al-auṭān* (homesickness) became so culturally and politically à la mode that court poets competed ferociously to come up with the most impressive *madīḥ* of Muslim notables who had engaged in fighting the Byzantine ‘infidels’. The preoccupation with the Byzantines as the Arabs’ chief enemy," Shboul asserts, "is particularly reflected in

¹⁴¹ The Crusaders were also called *ʿulūj*. 
Arabic poetry of the late seventh, eighth, and tenth century. This poetry is mainly in praise of Muslim caliphs, emirs or generals who waged war against the Byzantines and restored the prestige of Islam" (55).

This war-poetry came to be known in most medieval Arabic critical circles as *Al-Rūmiyyat* (poems about *al-Rūm*), and ‘Byzantinesque’ in my view, could be an excellent translation. Other critics, however, preferred to describe it with the no less suggestive appellation of *al-thugūriyyāt*, or poems about borders. Although this type of poetry deals predominately with the *gesta* of Muslim leaders who engaged in jihad against the Byzantines, many of the poems written in this tradition focus on the ‘common people’ and deal directly either with the life of Muslims in *mudun al-thughūr*, or the border towns especially Tarsus, or narrate the plight of *al-asrā āl-muslimīn* (Muslim captives), as is the case with the majority of Abu Firas’ *Rumiyyat*.

The middle of the ninth century witnessed an increasing decline in the central power of the Abbasid caliphate over its vast territories. Mentioned earlier, this led to the rise of a number of independent and semi-independent dynasties and principalities. Chief among these was the Hamdanid Emirate of Aleppo founded by the Hamdanid prince Sayf al-Dawla in 944. In addition to his patronage of learning and poetry which made his court a magnet for the greatest poets of his time such as al-Mutanabi, Abu Firas, and others, Sayf al-Daula is remembered for his wars with the Byzantines. Because of his principality’s proximity to the Byzantine frontiers, Sayf al-Daula, in the words of Mahmud Ibrahim, "found himself playing the role of defending the lands of Islam against Byzantium, the historical enemy of the Muslims since the days of Heraclius"(17).
The challenge, was daunting since the Byzantines he was confronting were already enjoying an unprecedented military resurgence which reached its apogee with Nicephore Phocas (d. 969), the very personification of the Byzantine Other in medieval Arabic-Islamic poetry and *hijāʾ* (invective/lampoon) in particular as will be seen in a number of Abu Firas’ poems and in al-Qaffal’s and Ibn Hazm’s poetic responses to the vituperative assault on Islam in the poem attributed to him known in some Muslim chronicles as *Al-Qasida al-Arminiyya al Mal ‘una*, or the Armenian Cursed Ode.

1. **Abu Firas’ *Al-Rumiyyat*: or the Byzantines Are Coming!**

As Shboul correctly observed, it is misleading to think that the majority of ‘professional’ poets of *Al-Rumiyyat*, who wrote predominately in the *madīḥ* (eulogy-panegyric) genre, "[I]n praise of caliphs, emirs, or generals" (54), were ideologically engaged and wholeheartedly committed to their patrons’ ‘divine mission’ of defending the *thugūr* of *dār al-Islām* from the Byzantines and their ṭawāghīt, or their ungodly leaders (4). Many of them, if not the majority, ‘used and abused their muses,’ to gain their livelihood and provide for "their bread and butter" (3), to borrow A.F. L. Beeston’s  

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142 The word *tawaghīt* (singular *taghūt*) is the most common word that medieval Muslim writers used to refer to the Byzantine emperors. In essence, it is a Qur’anic word which designates all types of idols worshipped other than or in addition to Allah (God). Thus, it is synonymous either with *kufr* (infidelity) or *shirk* (associationism/polytheism). However, in the context of medieval literature and contemporary jihadist rhetoric, it denotes more than its original theological meaning. Today, it is commonly translated as “tyrant”.

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phrase with which he describes the setbacks that *badiʿ* (innovative) poet Bashar (d. 784) had to face because of his challenge to many of the prevailing norms of poetry in the early Abbasid period through his extensive usage of new rhetorical devices and poetic styles invented by him and other later *muhdath* (modern) poets such as abu Tammam and ibn al-Muʿtaz (d.908). 143

It would be apposite to affirm, however, that some of those poets, especially the ones who were not in dire need of patronage, which is the case of prince/poet Abu Firas al-Hamdani (d.968), found themselves deep in the mayhem of Arab-Byzantine rivalry. This does not mean, however, that this second type of poet of *Al- Rūmiyyat* was engaged through literature in the modernist sense of *l’engagement littéraire* especially as delineated by Jean Paul Sartre, for it cannot be denied that those poets "*restent quand meme des poètes,*" in a culture that traditionally adores poets.

This is certainly true of Abu Firas, contrary to the majority of the panegyrists such as his arch-rival al Mutanabi, who were characteristically covetous of money and power. Abu Firas wrote his *Al-Rumiyyat* to record the excruciating experience of captivity at the hands of those he consciously called *akhwālī* (my maternal uncles) in reference to his Byzantine mother who after giving birth to him was manumitted through gaining the legal status of *um-walad*, which as we saw earlier, literally means the mother of a child (Farrukh 23). 144


144 As mentioned earlier, this refers to the legal privilege given by medieval Shari’a law to a concubine-slave who bore a child (son or daughter) to her master. With
Abu Firas was born most probably in the city of Mosul in northern modern Iraq in 932. He belonged to the famous Arab tribe of Bani Hamdan, who came to legendary fame through the poet’s cousin, mentor and brother-in-law Sayf al-Daula, founder of the Hamdanid dynasty and one of the most admired emirs in medieval Arabic war-poetry for the impressive bravery he showed during his numerous struggles with the Byzantines (Hamud 12).

At a very young age, Abu Firas demonstrated extraordinary aptitude in the arts of poetry and war. As A. el-Tayib pointed out, "In appreciation of his valour and brilliance" his cousin Sayf al Dawla appointed him governor of the town of Manbej when he was only sixteen (317). It is in this town that he fell captive to the Byzantines. This captivity at the hands of his akhwāl represented the turning point of his short life for he died in 968 at the age of 34. In fact, captivity was the impetus behind his most famous poems known as Rūmiyyat. "It is the so well documented captivity of 962," observes el-Tayib, "that we owe the group of qasāʾid [poems] called Al-Rumiyyat, in which is to be found some of abu Firas’ finest poetry"(317).

It comes as no surprise then, that in addition to the emotional thrust that inspired abu Firas to produce some of the finest poems of the period, the experience of captivity at the hands of the Byzantines also supplied the poet with the ideological mindset that made him stereotypical in his portrayal of the Byzantine as not only the Hamdanids’ military

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the status of um-walad, it becomes illegal for her master to sell her or give her away. Upon her master’s death, she would be freed.
arch-rivals but as the umma’s (Muslim nation) religious Other par excellence.\textsuperscript{145} The impact of the poet’s captivity in Constantinople and its literary manifestation invokes in many ways that of Cervantes’ five-year captivity in Algiers and his description of the Moors in El Trato de Argel and Don Quixote.

In abu Firas’ Al-Rumiyyat, one can find many poems that succinctly illustrate the captive’s feelings of estrangement in the Byzantine lands. The two texts "Mother of the Captive." and "the Cooing of a Dove." are the most moving in their description of the emotional turmoil inflicted upon the captive.

In my view, however, it is Abu Firas’ qiṭaʿ (short poems) such as "A Captive’s Suffering.", "Separation.", both love poems, "The Byzantines are Coming.", a tahrīḍ (literally instigation, call to revenge), and "How Dare you Claim.", a hijā’ (invective-lampoon) of the Byzantine emperor Nicephore Phocas, that should draw our attention if we want to explore the poet’s anti-Byzantine rhetoric of alterity.

Very simple in structure and economical in diction, yet rhetorically and thematically robust, in "A Captive’s Suffering." and "Separation.", the poet has successfully utilized a number of conventional topoi of the classical Arabic qaṣīda in his effort to depict ʾard al-Rūm (the land of the Byzantine) as not only inherently foreign and unfamiliar, indubitably in the negative sense, but also as a space of ightirāb (alienation) and firāq (separation):

\begin{quote}
In captivity, a lover suffers in disgrace.
And tears flood down his lonely face.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} This is true for his best known love poem "Arāka ʿaṣīyya al damʿi" brought to unprecedented fame by Arab singer Um Kulthum.
In Byzantine land, his body must reside.
Though in Syrian land his heart does still abide.
A lonesome stranger and out of place!
Where none with love may him embrace. (Trans. mine)\textsuperscript{146}

And:

In the past, separation, I could not withstand.
Although with a camel’s swiftest space,
At will, it was easy to find your trace.
But now, what separates us is Byzantine land.
And hope of reunion never looms in my face!

Unlike the traditional \textit{nasīb} or introductory passage of the \textit{qaṣīda} in which poets would conventionally weep over \textit{al-ātlāl} (abandoned campsites) of their absent beloved in a nostalgically laden setting evocative of the western \textit{ubi sunt} formula, Abu Firas, while keeping the nostalgic mood of the \textit{nasīb} by referring to his captivity at the hands of the Byzantines, has opted not only for a more realistic and historical setting, but also for a highly political content.\textsuperscript{147}

The \textit{nasīb}’s nostalgic emphasis on the lovers’s \textit{ghiyāb} (absence), \textit{firāq} (separation), and the longing for \textit{wiṣāl} (reunion), which represent the gist of this topos, is

\textsuperscript{146} All poems in this section are taken from \textit{Diwān Abu Firas al-Himdani}. Ed. ʿAbbas ʿAbdulsatir (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983). See the appendix for the Arabic originals.

\textsuperscript{147} For an excellent study, see Jaroslav Stetkevych’s \textit{The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb} (Chicago: U of Chicago P: 1993).
powerfully captured by Abu Firas’ rapid reference to his captivity in the ṣadr (literally front), or the first hemistich of the first bayt (literally tent), or couplet of the first qiṭʿa. In the second poem, it is strongly centralized also through the powerful imagery of the camel in al-ʿajuz (literally back), while the second hemistich of the second bayt of the second qiṭʿa, is most commonly used in Arabic literature to denote al-safar (travel), al-raḥīl (leaving), and al-maut (death).

The traditional metaphorical use of nasīb imagery is of paramount importance in these two poems especially when it comes to Abu Firas’ playing on the concepts of al-zamān (time), al-makān (place), ḥuḍūr (presence) and ghiyāb (absence), and al-shiʿr (poetry) itself, especially when one remembers that the Arabic word is derived from al-shuʿūr, which means emotions, whose power is, by itself, a hymn to al-ʿanā, the ‘I’ or the ‘self’.

Most of the time, the metaphors of al-māḍi (past) are driven by the mnemotopic power of the Arabic language itself, which is forcefully translated in the linguistic jiāns (paronomasia) that connect a number of lexical items belonging to the semantic fields of memory such as al-tadhakkur (the faculty of memory), al-dhākira (memory), and al-dhikrā (souvenir or remembrance). The outcome for the reader, or at least what S. B. Yeats would call "the discerning reader," would be to find himself/herself consciously or unconsciously a captive of the poem’s antithetical fluctuation between al-wāqiʿ (reality) and al-khayāl (fiction/illusion) especially when the love poem through its intermittent flashbacks dramatizes the poet/lover’s fear of al-nihāya (end) of his ḥayāt (life) owing to his shakk (doubt) concerning al-wiṣāl (reunion) with his beloved.
The absence of the loved one is the thematic leitmotif that provides the perfect mood for the hanīn (nostalgia) for the known land, i.e. dār al-Islām and Syria in particular. Of rhetorical importance in this regard, is the poet’s reliance on tibāq (antithesis) between physical existence and emotional states. The striking thing, however, is that the poet moves so quickly to emphasize the fact that, unlike the conventional absence of the loved one in such poems which denotes an eternal absence, the lover in this poem is aware that absence is temporary.

In other words, the abode of the beloved could be regained in reality, if the poet/lover succeeds in convincing his cousin Sayf al-Daula to ransom him. Contrary to the conventional nasīb of love poems wherein the physical place represents the poetic locus, it is clear, and owing to the strong tibāq between body/heart and Byzantine/Syrian lands, abu Firas' emphasis here falls rather on the excruciating experience of ghurba (foreignness), which is in essence a temporary experience. Whereas the physical locus of conventional love poetry is a place that is well known and familiar, in these love poems, the foreignness and unfamiliarity of al makān adds surely to the poet’s depression and alienation.

By virtue of the rhetorical importance of tadmīn (implication of meaning)—which refers to the fact that the accurate meaning of the current bayt is to be found in the following one—in both qiṭa‘, the poet appears to juxtapose masterfully the traditional ‘udhāl (adversaries/enemies) of the poet/lover (in)famous in classical Arabic love poetry.
to the historical enemies of the captive/lover. This dramatizes the antagonistic nature of al-makān and the people (al-Rūm) who are implied to represent the prime cause of firāq (separation).

If the apparent dominant theme is the recurring love motifs of lost happiness, lovesickness, and longings for al-mahbūb (the beloved), the poet’s implied emphasis on the Byzantine lands as the barrier between him and his beloved makes it clear that there is more than the traditional topos of firāq in these poems. Likewise, the archetypal enmity of al-ḥabīb (the lover) to al-ʿudhāl who do everything to ruin his relationship with his mahbūb, is brilliantly transfigured to depict the captive’s karāha (hatred) towards his captors. By implication, the Byzantines are plotting against Muslims in the same way that al-ʿudhāl plot against lovers.

If lovers in the classical qaṣīda, however, are most of the time alert to the plots of their enemies, Muslims in the poet’s view, are not. It is his duty, therefore, to remind them of the danger looming from these foreign and inimical lands. This is the explicit and straightforward message of the following lines:

As many a Byzantine troop is rolling towards your land.
Cheering infidelity and raising crosses in the hand.
Their horses carry nothing but injustice full of hate.
And injustice is man’s most destructive trait.
They are staunch and committed! So you must understand!

For the unprepared, only their like can them withstand!

If you do not rise in anger for God’s true faith,

No swords for its sake shall be drawn. (Trans. mine)

Conspicuous as it is, this powerful taḥrīḍ (instigation to revenge/war) is replete with expressions of mubālagha (hyperbole) and ziyādāt (exaggerations) especially when it comes to the number of the Byzantine troops and their diabolical plots to invade Muslim lands and destroy the dīn (religion) of Allah (God).

Of rhetorical importance here is the effective and appropriate tikrār (repetition) of the word ghayy (injustice/wrong/ transgression) which the poet deliberately employs as a kināya (metonymy) not only to depict the Byzantines’ deeds but also to describe their most idiosyncratic feature. Certainly, the striking majāz (metaphor)of Byzantine horses carrying their masters’ ghayy to the Muslim land, in addition to the powerful ḥikma (aphorism) "And injustice is man’s most destructive trait," prove extremely effective in conveying this message. In this way, the Byzantine Other becomes an allegory of Otherness. He represents all that is contrary to the Muslim Self. He is depicted as the agent of kufr (infidelity) and he is associated with sharr (evil) and fasād (corruption).

Abu Firas’ "hyperbolic accounting," to use Jonathan Burton’s phrase, of the Byzantine forces finds a strong echo in western medieval and early modern depictions of the raging Saracen and Turkish armies. As a matter of fact, it is unexpectedly expressed by Elizabethan dramatist Christopher Marlowe in Tamburlaine. The following lines are comparatively speaking, analogous:

As many circumcised Turks we have,

And warlike bands of Christians renied,
As hath the ocean or the Terrene sea
Small drops of water, when the moon begins
To join in one her semi-circled horns. (8-12)

Certainly Abu Firas’ hyperbolic description of Byzantine troops in his effort to warn Muslims of the impending "Yellow Peril" is comparable to Marlowe’s description of the Turkish Bajazeth’s Muslim troops as "the drops of the ocean" in his attempt to alert Europe to "the raging and expansionist Turk" (Burton 73).

Abu Firas’ stress upon the religious identity of the approaching Byzantine troops through the figure of the Cross, the principal icon of Christianity is very similar to Marlowe’s foregrounding of the figures of the circumcised Turk, the Christian renegades, and the crescent moon. This, according to Jonathan Burton not only "confirm[s] European fears of immense Ottoman armies,"but it steadily broadcast "Bajazeth’s Islamism and his threat to European Christendom" (73).

Abu Firas’ deep belief in the "Manichean division" between Muslims and Byzantines and his stereotypical demonization of the Byzantines would become especially evident in his hijā’ of Nicephore Phocas, one of the most loathsome figures in medieval Arabic-Islamic writing. The opening lines of this hijā’ are a challenge:

How dare you claim!
Oh you huge-throated rogue,
That we lions of war,
Are ignorant of wars! (Trans. mine)

Both uncharacteristic of his chivalrous character and unrepresentative of his ‘romantic’ poetry, Abu Firas’ facetious assault on Nicephore sums up neatly the mood of
nervousness that must have characterized the Hamdanids’ response to the military threats of Nicephore and his ‘raging army’. This can be easily discerned from the absurd invective and abusive *ad hominem* argument in the following lines that have certainly compromised the otherwise highly poetic *Al- Rūmiyyat*:

How dare you threaten us with wars?

As though our hearts and yours,

Have never been tied at their cores!

Indeed, both of us in wars did meet,

Every time, we were lions,

Whereas you proved a dog! (Trans. mine)

Abu Firas’ unprincely and unpoetic resort to *fuḥsh* (impropriety) and *badhā’a* (vulgar language) especially through his shocking *tashbīh* (comparison) of Nicephore to a dog, an animal that denotes *najāsa* (uncleanness) and *ḥaqāra* (baseness) in Arabic-Islamic culture. In this, the dog is second only to the pig. In calling Nicephore "a dog" the prince Abu Firas had a predecessor who is none other than Harun al-Rashīd.

149 This refers to the reply of Harun al-Rashid to the letter sent by Byzantine emperor Nicephore I (d.803) in which he condemns the truce signed by his predecessor Irene with the Abbasid caliph and he declares not only his refusal to pay a tribute to the caliph but also his readiness to settle the matter with the sword. The insulting reply of al Rashid starts as follows "from Harun al-Rashid, Commander of the Faithful to Nicephore kalb al-Rūm, the dog of the Romans." For more on this letter, see el-Cheikh’s *Byzantium Viewd by the Arabs* (94-97) and Hugh Kennedy’s "Byzantine-Arab Diplomacy in the
Abu Firas’ lack of decorum is perhaps understandable if one remembers his almost xenophobic Arabism and extreme self-pride evocative of the pre-Islamic jāhili culture. His assault seems to be a direct reaction to Nicephore’s provocative denigration of the Arabs in his presence. As many medieval Arabic sources mention, Abu Firas wrote his hijā’ of Nicephore most probably as a later response to the latter’s derisive remark while visiting Abu Firas in his captivity during which he said to the captive that contrary to the Byzantines, "the Arabs are born for pens and not for swords." This is reflected in the closing lines of the poem:

Was it then our pens,

Or perhaps our swords!

That made you shiver in your holes!

In the midst of the desert,

You hid your face

Like a jerboa burrowing in the earth. (Trans. mine)

Paradoxically, if seen from a modern perspective, it seems that Nicephore was indirectly praising the Arabs. But in the medieval age of the sword and in the context of Muslim/Byzantine enmity, Nicephore’s remark, if as reported, was certainly an invective, which proved enormously successful.

Without the powerful figures of speech dominant in the above poems, Abu Firas’ focus in this lampoon of Nicephore falls directly on a number of mathālib (demerits) and ʿuyūb (shortcomings) of the Byzantines such as qubḥ (ugliness), kibr (pride), taʾāli

(arrogance), *kadhib* (lies), and *jubn* (cowardice). These negative characteristics conjure up
the figure of the *shaytān* (the devil). Abu Firas through his vicious *hijā’* of Nicephore
sums it all up as he denigrates the *mahjū* (object of invective) and strips him of any
‘Arab’ quality.

The antithetical symmetry between Arab/Muslim on the one hand and
Byzantine/Christian on the other is the *ethos* and *telos* of the poem, if not the entire
*Rūmiyyat*. In other words, Abu Firas wants to convey the message that the Byzantines
stand for everything that Muslims do not stand for. In this, the poet has implemented
literally what medieval Arabic critics theorized when it comes to the power of *hijā’* in not
only degrading the Other but utterly negating him/her.

Abu Firas’ *hijā’* of Nicephore will serve as an introduction to the more compact
polemical invectives directed against Nicephore and the Byzantines that dominate the
poetic responses of al-Qaffal (d. 946) and Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) to a poetic diatribe against
Islam and its prophet attributed to Nicephore.

Because of the length and complexity of the texts in question, a full exploration of
the poems’ rhetoric of otherness is beyond the scope of this thesis. Accordingly, the focus
will be on the poets’ use of the Islamic division of *tahāra* (purity) of the Self versus the
*najāsa* (impurity/pollution/contamination) of the Other, their anti-Christian polemics,
their assertion of the political and military domination of Muslims over Byzantines, and
their foregrounding of the religious motif of the Other as the scourge of God.
2. The Impure Scourge of God: the Byzantines in the Poetic Responses of al-Qaffal and Ibn Hazm to Nicephore’s *Al-Qasida al-Malʿūna*

In addition to the obsessive interest in *al-Naqfūr*, Arabic for Nicephore, that dominates a number of medieval Muslim texts on Byzantine/Muslim relations, it is the bizarre name of *Al-Qasida al-Malʿūna* that haunts several others. This is true, for instance, of Ibn Kathir’s entry on Nicephore. Ibn Kathir devotes many pages to the poem which he calls *malʿūna* (cursed), a word that not only captures vividly the rage felt by Muslims in knowing about this poem but also shows perfectly the efficacy of Nicephore’s propaganda in his psychological war against his enemies. "This cursed *Naqfūr*,” Ibn Kathir angrily informs his readers, "sent a poem to the caliph al-Muti‘ in which he defames Islam, derides the Prophet, and vows to conquer all the lands of Islam and turn them into Christian dominions" (260).

Unfamiliar with the response of al-Qaffal, Ibn Kathir proceeds to comment that no Muslim had ever before written a response to the poem until the Andalusian Ibn Hazm had penned a poem he hailed as *al-farīda al-islamiyya al-manṣūra al-maymūna* (the unmatched and triumphant Islamic masterpiece).\(^{150}\)

\(^{150}\) Although quite slowly, news of the ‘cursed poem’ spread west of Baghdad until it reached the Iberian Peninsula decades after it was first heard of in the Abbasid court. The Andalusian historian Ibn Khayr al-Ishbili was the first in the Muslim west to refer to the poem in *Al-Fihris* (al-Munajjid 38). Ibn Kathir mentions that two Andalusian scholars responded to Nicephore. The first is Ibn Hazm and the second is Ibn Zarwal. Of the two, al-Munajjid remarks, only the response of Ibn Hazm survived. Ibn Hazm was at the court of al-Mu‘tad Billah al-Umawi, the last of the Umayyad emirs of Muslim Spain.
As demonstrated by al-Munajjid, *Al-Qasida al-Arminiyya* is well structured since it can easily be divided into five sections. In the first section, the poet-proxy catalogues the deeds and victories of Nicephore and his ancestors in Muslim lands. Of particular significance is the focus on the humiliation of Muslims especially through dramatizing the capture of Muslim women, a claim which is insulting and dishonoring for Muslims. In the second section, the poet strongly vows that Christian knights will continue their assaults on Muslim lands until they have subdued Egypt, Arabia, Iraq, Persia and Yemen. No doubt, however, the most serious threat is the conquest of Mecca and the extermination of Muslims from the face of the earth. In the third section, the poet is surprising since he attributes the defeat of Muslims to their imperfect practice of Islam’s tenets.

While the reader was expecting that the poet would link the Christian victories to the truth of their faith and their courage, he relates it intrinsically to the moral depravity of Muslims. It is as if God chastised them after their ruler and judges had transgressed the Islamic laws of governorship and justice. Section four is another pledge to propagate Christianity with the power of the sword. Finally, the last section is in praise of Christianity and Jesus and a diatribe against Islam and its prophet. The opening and closing lines of this long poem summarize it well:

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when the poem was mentioned. Ibn Hazm, as reported by Ibn Kathir and al-Subki, was so enraged by its mockery of Islam and its prophet that he improvised a response to it. Ibn Hazm was particularly known for his improvised poetry and the Andalusian historian al Humeidi used to say that no one could improvise poetry with the ease and prowess of Ibn Hazm (al-Munajjid 38).
From Nicephore, the pure Christian king to the remnant of the Hashimites.

His Excellency al Mutee, who is doomed to endless plights.

Haven’t your ears heard what I’ve been doing in recent fights!

Or too feeble you are to act the unyielding knight!

If, however, you know, yet deliberately uncaring,

I’m sleepless planning what I’m planning. (Trans. mine)

And:

East and west of God’s earth shall be mine.

Christianity will triumph with my sword.

Jesus is exulted and his crown sits high in the heavens.

Victorious is the one who sides with the Lord.

While your prophet is dead in the earth.

And his disciples’ reputations are torn and soiled. (Trans.mine)

The anti-Islamic rhetoric and the crusading spirit of this poem made it notorious in Baghdad. It is said that the first response to the poem in the Mashriq came from the faqih Abu Bakr al-Qaffal, who must have been taken by religious zeal upon hearing the anti-Islamic propaganda and the assault on his prophet. The opening lines of al-Qaffal’s qaṣīda are powerful especially when it comes to capturing the highly ‘othering’ religious rhetoric of al- anā al- ṭāhira (the pure Self) versus al-akhar al-najis (the impure Other):

Like that of Nicephore, al-Qaffal’s response is thematically well structured. In the introductory lines, he responds to Nicephore’s claims of purity and reprimands him
News came to me of a man who, in times of quarrels,
Is ill-bred in the arts of the word.
Pompously claiming titles he has not.
And great deeds he has never done.
Calling himself pure when, in truth,
He is an infidel, most impure.
His garments are polluted with impurity.
Pretending to be a good Christian. In fact, he is not! (Trans. mine)

for bragging about a number of great deeds, many of which, according to al-Qaffal, he
did not do. The real victories of Nicephore were in the view of al-Qaffal, the result of
Nicephore’s deceit and treachery. Al-Qaffal then reminds Nicephore of the power of
Muslims throughout the centuries by cataloguing the victories of Muslims against the
Byzantines. In this part, al-Qaffal has also highlighted the fact it was the Prophet who
ordered Muslims to treat the Christians well. Otherwise, they would have exterminated
them. After that, he refutes the claim that the Byzantines have captured thousands of
Muslim women and reminds Nicephore of the humane treatment of captives by Muslims
and rebukes him for his treatment of Muslim prisoners of war. He then mocks
Nicephore’s statement that Muslims were humiliated by the Byzantines because of the
injustices of their rulers and judges. If so, al-Qaffal adduces, then that is a compelling
sign of the truth of Islam. The last part is a polemical response to the Trinitarian doctrine
of Christianity and an attempt by the poet to refute Christianity and prove the truthfulness
of the message of Muhammad.
As a non-Muslim Other, Nicephore who, in turn, attributes to himself his own religious purity (from the Pure Christian), is depicted by al-Qaffal as grouping three types of *najāsa* (impurity/pollution/uncleanness).

The first one is islamically speaking, the most revolting for it is synonymous with *kufr* (infidelity/unbelief) and *shirk* (associationism/polytheism). It is perceived as *najāsa ma’nawiyya* (abstract impurity), and it denotes the uncompromisingly Other of the pure monotheistic and submissive Self. Second, *al-najāsa al-ḥissiyya* (physical/tangible) which is perfectly alluded to in al Qaffal’s reference to Nicephore’s unclean/polluted garments and it is one of the most recurring *topoi* of differences in medieval Muslim writing about the Other. Most often it deals with the issues of *al-ṭahāra al-kubrā* (major purity) after *jima‘* (sexual intercourse) and *ḥayd* (menstruation) for women. The third one, it seems, is the invention of al Qaffal and it refers to *al-najāsa al-akhlāqiyya* (moral/ethical uncleanness), through which al Qaffal alludes to the cruelty of the Byzantines during their wars. This was to become very much the central theme in Muslims’ perception of *a-Ifranj* during the Crusades.

The distinction of the pure Self versus the impure Other is not unique to the religious-cultural consciousness of Islam. Indeed, it is universal. However, this polarity has maintained a dominant place in the religious discourses of Judaism,

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Christianity and Islam. In *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (1994), for instance, Sacha Stern has demonstrated the paramount importance of the polarity of the pure Jew versus the impure non-Jew in the construction of Jewishness and concomitant dialectics of Self and Other.

In western literature in general and English literature in particular, the polarity of purity and impurity is strongly echoed in numerous medieval and early modern works. In Elizabeth Carey’s *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry* (1613) for example, this polarity is central in the religious and racial discourse of the first English play ever to be published by an English woman. In order to delineate the doomed marriage of a pure Christian woman represented by the protagonist of the play to an impure non-Christian, the antagonist Herod, the playwright designs a tragic encounter of the Arab Silleus and the half-Jewish Salome. After discovering the love-affair of his wife Salome and her intention to leave him for Silleus, the Jewish Constabarus’ words illustrate this opposition explicitly:

> Oh Salome, how much you wrong your name,  
> Your race, your country, and your husband most!  
> A stranger’s private conference is shame,  
> I blush for you, that have your blushing lost.  
> Oft have I found, and found you to my grief  
> Consulted with this base Arabian here  
> Heavens knows that you have been my grief  
> Then do not now my greater plague appear.  

(1.6.1-6)
In short, as a Jewish husband, Constabarus is concerned with his name and honour. Nonetheless, as he reveals it, his "greater plague" lies in the fact that his wife has given him up, he who is a pure Jew, for the sake of an impure gentile, a stranger, a "base Arabian," as he bluntly puts it.

Like Constabarus, al-Qaffal in his poetic process of self-assertion and self-identification highlights the impurity/pollution of the Other, an impurity that does not only denote the religious-cultural inferiority of the Byzantine but also invokes their baseness and lack of human compassion. In this, they are the same both in times of war and peace. The primary contrast that the poet creates is between the insatiable cruelty of the Byzantines and the humane heroism of Muslims as in the following lines:

Our power and pride lie in our faith
By God, soon our birds will fly over in your lands.
The number of our captured women you did overplay.
Forgetting that thousands of yours are in our hands.
We are the most merciful when we triumph in the fray.
But you are the cruelest when you win the day.(Trans.mine)

Ibn Hazm’s polemical invective is strikingly similar to that of al-Qaffal. Although there is nothing to indicate that Ibn Hazm might have been familiar with al
Qaffal’s response, it is clear that the religious background and fervor of both poets was the foremost motivation behind their poems. This is illustrated largely by their assault on the theological foundations of Christianity. Ibn Hazm writes:

How dare you brag of a Trinitarian faith?
So removed from reason, so out of place.
Worshipping a being who has a worshipping face!
Woe to you! Where is your sanity and brain?
Your gospels are tampered with in every place.
And in them, words of truth are often slain.
You bow still to a wooden cross.
Woe to you! Where is your sanity and brain?(Trans.mine)

In Ibn Hazm’s view, because of their adherence to Christianity, the Byzantines are irrational and intellectually feeble. Reason, he argues, does not seem to have any place for the Byzantines when, as he maintains, the basic tenet of their "faulty" religion (i.e, the Trinity) is essentially removed from reason. This message is consolidated by questioning rhetorically their worship of Jesus who, in Muslim understanding, although a venerated Prophet and source of many miracles, worships in turn his Creator.

Constantinople, China, and all India since, as he mentions, it is the promise of God and the Prophecy of Muhammad. Then he embarks on a polemical refutation of the Trinity, the Bible, and the Christian doctrine of the crucifixion of Jesus. He then compares the Trinity to the pure monotheistic belief of Islam. The last part is rather a eulogy of Muhammad. He catalogues his victories and mentions his miracles.
The *hijā‘* of the Christian Byzantines and their faith shifts to *madīḥ* whenever Ibn Hazm —and by the same token al Qaffal— refers to the Muslim faith or the Prophet of Islam. Evidently, ridicule of Christianity and the ensuing denial of the Other is ultimately an indirect celebration of Islam and a final affirmation of the Self. "Thus while the surface elements of the *hijā‘* are the opposite of those in *iftikhār* [praise]," S. P. Stetkevych asserts, "the ultimate purpose is the reaffirmation of those same values"(335).

With Ibn Hazm and al-Qaffal, when it comes to the *mahjū* (object of invective), the main rhetorical and ideological focus of *hijā‘* lies the description of their Otherness with a special insistence on their religious *ḍalāl* (misguidance), moral inferiority, and the ensuing military and cultural weaknesses. In contrast, the Muslim *mamdūh* (the praised one) is cherished for his/her religious truthfulness, moral superiority and the resulting military and cultural achievement which should be thought of as divine proof of these qualities. Certainly when the reality of the battlefield indicates otherwise, as we will see later, there is always the universal idea of God’s affliction and disapproval.

As demonstrated by a number of scholars, in the Arabic literary tradition, especially in times of wars and enmities, *hijā‘* has been part and parcel of conflicts. It was, for example, the most effective weapon in the tribal wars and rivalries of the Arabs before Islam. Similarly, since the time Prophet Muhammad called his poets to attack their enemies with their words, it has become central in the propaganda of jihad. Given that, it seems clear why Ibn Hazm and al-Qaffal have foregrounded the links between the explicit *hijā‘* concerning the Byzantines and their religion and the implicit *madīḥ* of the Arabs and their religion. S. P. Stetkevych’s reference to Ibn-Rashiq’s explanation of the underlying function of *hijā‘* is worth considering:
According to medieval critic ibn Rashiq, *hijā’* (invective) can be termed the censure, blame, or ridicule for the absence of those virtues. The dictum "all poetry can be summed up in three phrases: when you praise, you say ‘you are’; when you lampoon, you say ‘you are not, and when you elegize you say ‘you were’. (335)

Furthermore, it should be noted that within the thematic and rhetorical battle of the Self and the Other, the obsessive reference to the other *ḥarīm* (womenfolk) is crucial in understanding the nature of Muslim/Byzantine rivalry and the underlying *topoi* of the medieval Arabic-Islamic rhetoric of alterity.

The emphasis on capturing, enslaving, and —implicitly— sexually enjoying the Other’s women is central to this alterity. It all starts with Nicephore’s, islamically speaking, insulting reference to "the noble and sumptuous ladies descendents of your Prophet" who according to the poem attributed to Nicephore "were captured and gave themselves without contracts and dowries." Unsurprisingly, al-Qaffal and Ibn Hazm responded with a defensive rhetoric of apology that reveals the success of Nicephore’s psychological war and his deep knowledge of the Muslim psyche. Echoing al-Qaffal, Ibn Hazm writes:

Of our women, you did not capture many.

Whereas of yours, we have as many as the drops of rain.

Indeed, counting them is an endless task.

Like a man counting the pigeons' feathers.

And:

Your emperors’ daughters, we herded with our hands,

As a hunter herds a desert’s deer to his own field.

Ask Heraclius about our deeds in your Lands.
And other kings of yours who were made to yield.
For they can tell you about our troops deployed
And the countless Byzantine women we have enjoyed.

Echoing several other Rūmiyyāt especially those texts of abu Tammam’s madīḥ of al-Muʿtasim’s fath (opening, conquest) of Amuriyya (Amorium) and al-Mutanabi’s madīḥ of Sayf al-Daula, the above lines of al-Qaffal and of Ibn Hazm illustrate the central role played by "the sexual gender-based imagery," to borrow S. P. Stetkevych’s phrase in the description of Muslim military and political domination of the Byzantine Other (176). Although there is no explicit reference to rape, as is the case with abu Tammam and others, the references to the sexual enjoyment of female Byzantine captives, can be seen as metaphors for the poets’ final declaration and ultimate celebration of Muslim superiority over the Byzantine Other. As S. P. Stetkevych puts it "[T]he image of sexually defiled womanhood, however, varied in detail and powerfully achieved is the conventional means for expressing the ultimate (male) dishonor and degradation" (176).

Last, but not least is the poets’ use of the trope of the infidel Other as the "scourge of God" in their efforts to justify the Byzantine threat and to downplay the military, even temporary, superiority of the Other. If the Byzantines defeated the Muslims, it is neither because they are believers in the true faith nor because they are militarily superior, let alone invincible. Rather, they are used by God to alert Muslims to their neglect and transgression of Muslim values. Confirming Nicephore’s criticism of Muslim corruption, al-Qaffal replies:

You triumphed thanks to our leaders’ misconduct.
Indeed, that is exactly what you said,
If so! That is a proof of the accuracy of our faith;
For it is a law when we transgress,
We are transgressed upon. (Trans.mine)

The recurrence of this theme made Ibn Hazm transfer his lampoon of the Byzantines not only to Kafur, but also and unexpectedly to the Hamdanids in spite of all their efforts in fighting the Byzantines: "With the Hamdanids and Kafur you triumphed/Who were but ill-bred, impure and weak." The Umayyad Ibn Hazm does not let the chance go by to attack his political opponents. It is clear that in his view, the Byzantine resurgence is a direct and severe punishment from God precisely because those who fight in his name are in essence usurpers, if not heretics.

From another perspective, al-Qaffal’s and Ibn Hazm’s perception of the ‘Byzantine Peril’ as a scourge inflicted by Allah on disobedient Muslims recalls the western medieval and early modern tradition of the "Infidel Saracen/Turk" as a Scourge of God and that of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German anti-Turkish pamphlets known as the Türkenbüchlein. In short, as shown by John W Bohnstedt, these German Lutheran and Catholic pamphleteers interpreted "[T]he Turkish peril as a scourge inflicted by God upon a sinful Christendom and many of them seem to have been more concerned with the sins of the Christians than with the Turkish danger per se" (3). \footnote{155 It is interesting to note here that after the outburst of the Mongols and their invasions of many Muslim and European countries in the thirteenth-century, both Muslims and Europeans would consider them the ultimate “Scourge of God” ascribing to them all possible topoi of otherness. For example, they were depicted in Muslim and}
The three abovementioned forgotten poems, and to a lesser degree Abu Firas’ texts, are characteristically violent in tone, if not indeed sadistic. This very violence, however, does capture well the nature of the historical and religious enmity between Islam and Byzantium during the Middle Ages. Undoubtedly a modern reader in spite of the ongoing wars of the moment, will be perplexed by the apparent enjoyment of violence in these works. Nevertheless, if one approaches the ‘Cursed Poem’ in relation to al-Qaffal’s and Ibn Hazm’s responses within their historical context and literary form, one can better appreciate their content. It must be remembered also that what we consider nowadays useless violence was, as the poems suggest, based in examples of courage and heroism.

The texts studied here are reminiscent of classical epics east and west such as Gilgamesh, the Iliad, the Odyssey, Beowulf; the Chansons de Geste, the Arthurian romances and the popular hamasa genre in the Arabic tradition such as Sirat ʿ Antar, as well as the poetry of Abu Tammam and al-Buhturi. The western epic and Arabic-Islamic hamāsa poems are founded upon the veneration of heroism, chivalry, courage and sacrifice for one’s faith, country, friends, and lovers, etc. Many of these qualities western sources alike as unimaginably cruel, bloodthirsty, bestial, and as God’s just punishment for their respective sins.

The reader is referred to the anthologies of hamāsa collected by Abu Tammam and al Buhturi. Hamāsa in Reynold A. Nicholson’s words, "denotes the virtues most highly prized by the Arabs—bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge, protection of the weak and defiance of the strong"(79).
cannot be realized without invoking violence in some form. Certainly, the western epic, and to a lesser degree the Arabic-Islamic tradition of *hamāsa*, have also been often related to legendary battles and combats where the hero has had to fight gods, monsters, dragons, and the like. This is not the case with the poem attributed to Nicephore and the responses of al-Qaffāl and Ibn Hazm for the very reason that they were most often describing violence that was historical and real.

The players in this violence and the reciprocal-demonization of the Other, in spite of some instances of ruptures and negotiations, intensified with the coming of the Crusades and changed with time. Indeed, as we shall see, *al-Ifranja* would take the place of *al-Rūm* as the Other, interestingly, in the same manner that Turks had taken the place of Saracens in European literature with the rise of the Ottomans and the ensuing danger they represented for early modern Europe.
B. Ifranjalism: Crusades and Crusaders in Arabic Medieval Poetry: Stereotypes and Ruptures: Ibn al-Qaysarani as a Case Study

It is certainly true that the Crusades did not only usher in what Sari J. Nasir once described as "[the] beginning of a period of direct contact between Arabs and Europeans"(7), but they also provided both sides of the conflict with an unprecedented opportunity to experiment culturally and literarily with 'the always and already’ issues of the Self and the Other. In a broader view, it is no exaggeration to say that the Crusades constitute a unique historical event through which to explore the medieval cross-perceptions of Euro-Christians and Arab-Muslims, the ideological heritage of which still has a profound impact on the modern world. The Crusades, Carole Hillenbrand tells us,

\[\text{\underline{157}}\] As stated by Carole Hillenbrand and other scholars, the Arabic \textit{al-ḥurūb al-ṣalībiyya}, which is a close equivalent to the English word Crusades, and \textit{al-ṣalībiyyūn} (Crusaders) are modern expressions that came into common usage in the nineteenth century (31). "Interestingly enough, "Hillenbrand explains "the etymology of both terms, Crusaders from the Latin crux(cross) and \textit{ṣalībiyyūn} (from the Arabic \textit{ṣalīb}, or cross), stresses the centrality of the symbolism of the cross underlying the European military campaigns which came to be known as the Crusades (in modern Arabic called ‘the Crusading wars’(\textit{al-ḥurūb al-ṣalībiyya})"(31). It is noteworthy, however, that some scholars still prefer the English phrase “holy war” to describe the Crusades and they suggest that the Arabic word \textit{al-ṣalībiyyūn} is better translated as “those bearing a cross” highlighting the latter’s derogative nuances.
"shaped western European perceptions of the Muslim world just as decisively as they formed Muslim views of the West"(3).

In the western world, the Crusades were well recorded in a number of Euro-Christian chronicles such as Fulcher of Chartres’ *History of the Expedition to Jerusalem*, Raymond d'Aguilers’ *The Deeds of the Franks*, William of Tyre’s *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, and Guibert de Nogent’s *The Deeds of God through the Franks*. Even more impressive, however, was the literary manifestation, and in many ways the historical transfiguration, of the Crusades in medieval western literature and in French and English epics/romances in particular.

It should be mentioned from the outset, however, that contrary to the dominant view held by a number of western scholars, in the ‘saracen’ world the picture was not that different. Unfortunately some of these scholars, as much as they have incessantly deplored the lack of medieval Arabic historical and literary sources on the Crusades, have even more emphatically claimed that, in contrast to Europeans, Muslims were characteristically disinterested in this unequalled historical phenomenon.\(^{158}\) Nowhere is

\(^{158}\) Fortunately, however, scholars such as Francesco Gabrieli, Amin Ma’louf, and Carole Hillenbrand have already shown that there exists a huge body of Arabic historical literature that dealt with the Crusades from a Muslim perspective. Hence, there should be no doubt that contrary to the above views, a considerable number of medieval Muslim historians, politicians, theologians, travelers, prose writers, and poets exhibited an enormous interest in the Crusades. One is thinking particularly of names such as al-Sulami(d.1106), Ibn al-Qalanisi(d.1160) al-Azimi(d.1161), Ibn ʿAsakir(d.1167), Ibn Munqidh(d.1188), al-Isfahani(d.1206), Ibn al-Athir(d.1231), Ibn Shaddad(d.1285), Ibn
This clearer than in Thomas F. Madden’s book *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (2005). Among several other surprising statements, Madden has claimed that "The first Arabic history of the [C]rusades was not written until 1899"; "In the Islamic grand sweeps of Islamic history the [C]rusades simply did not matter"; and "The [C]rusades were virtually unknown in the Muslim world even a century ago" (218). These claims made him perfunctorily conclude that "[a]lthough the [C]rusades were of monumental importance to Europeans, they were a minor, largely insignificant thing to the Muslim world" (218).

There can be no doubt that Arabic historical and literary sources dealing with the Crusades were never as sparse as these scholars have claimed. The existence of a series of personal memoirs, travel accounts, diplomatic reports, religious (polemical) epistles, official letters, and most important for this thesis, poetry clearly proves that this claim is untrue. As we shall see through argument and example, Arabic poetry of the Crusades, very similar to its medieval western (epic) counterpart, was animated by the spirit of *jihad* and driven by strong anti-Christian propaganda (Khattab 23). The result was not only a demonic depiction *à la Saracen* of the European Crusaders but also a zealous call to annihilate them *à la Kurtz*, thus echoing one of the Crusaders’ most cherished slogans: "To kill the Muslim Arab was to slay for God’s love" (Nasir 7).

The Crusades resulted not only in the occupation of Jerusalem and the humiliating defilement of al Aqsa mosque but also in the massacre of thousands of Muslims (Hillenbrand, 75). Those who survived had no other choice but to flee to cities which had

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Jubayr (d.1217), Ibn al-Jawzi (d.1256), Abu Shama (d.1267), Ibn Kathir (d.1372), and Ibn Khaldun (d.1406).
not been attacked by the Crusaders such as Aleppo and Damascus in Syria, Mosul and Baghdad in Iraq, and Cairo in Egypt (Hillenbrand 75). Indeed, chroniclers, both Muslim and, paradoxically, Euro-Christian have movingly transmitted to us, albeit sometimes with exaggeration, the plight of Muslims in the wake of the Crusaders' sacking of Jerusalem in 1099. Raymond d’Aguilera\textsuperscript{s}, an eyewitness chronicler of the First Crusade wrote the following:

When our men took the main defences, we saw then some astonishing things amongst Saracens. Some were beheaded, and that’s the least that could happen to them...We could see in the roads and in the places of Jerusalem bits and pieces of heads, hands and feet...But all that was only little…There was so much blood in the old temple of Solomon that dead corpses swam in it. We could see hands floating and arms that went to glue themselves to bodies that were not theirs; we could not distinguish which arm belonged to which body. (284)

Contemporary Radulph of Caen does not only admit this genocide, but also adds with pride the following horrifying words: "In Ma'arra our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots; they impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled" (\textit{The Crusades Tthrough Arab Eyes} 26). Chronicler Albert of Aix, who took part in the carnage of Maarra, in turn acknowledges that "[not] only did our troops not shrink from eating dead Turks and Saracens [Arabs]; they also ate dogs!"(\textit{The Crusades Through Arab Eyes} 26).

No wonder then that Muslim chronicler ibn al Athir’s record of the onslaught on Jerusalem would be by no means the invention of his fertile mind:

The population of the holy city was put to the sword, and the Firanj spent a week massacring Muslims. They killed more than seventy thousand people in Al Aqsa Mosque. The Jews had gathered in their synagogue and the crusaders burned them alive. They also destroyed the monuments of
saints, the mosque of Umar and the tomb of Abraham, may peace be upon him. (*The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* 34)

Quite conventionally, in their attempts to capture the first Muslim responses to the Crusades and the ensuing shock that engulfed *dār al-Islām*, medieval Muslim chroniclers could not find a more moving entry than the speech uttered by the Damascene *qāḍi al-quḍāt* (supreme judge) Zinuddine abu Said al-Harawi (d.1124) in the caliphate court of Baghdad. As several sources mention, after the stunning subjugation of several Levantine towns, a delegation of Sunni luminaries led by al-Harawi left Damascus for Baghdad to "prick the conscience," of the then weak caliph al-Mustadhir (1078-1118) and his military chiefs (Kilani 123). It is said that the delegation members were so touched by what had befallen their religious fellows that as soon as they were led into the caliphal court they wept bitterly and made the listeners weep (al-Saris 24).

The climax of the meeting, however, was al-Harawi’s stirring sermon in which he reminded the Abbasid dignitaries and officers of their religious duty toward their Levantine brethren. He also warned them of the imminent disaster that would befall Islam and Muslims if they did not act firmly and swiftly. In addition to the quotations from the Qur’an and the Sunna, al-Harawi peppered his speech with lines from a heartbreaking poem which most scholars attribute to the contemporary Iraqi poet al-Abyawardi(d.1113). It is this particular poem that is of interest to us since it movingly captures early Muslim responses to the Crusades.159

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159 See the appendix of translated works for the original Arabic poems.
The opening stanza of the poem depicts the state of shock and disbelief that struck contemporary Muslims who, as the poet implies, instead of fighting back, responded with pity and tears in a time of swords and deeds:

We mixed blood with flooding tears,
Until we were bereft of mourning words!
Tears are a man’s weakest arms,
When flames of war are kindled,
With the thrusts of mighty swords! (Trans mine).

Alerting the dignitaries to their religious duty of defending the faith and honour of their Levantine brethren who had been witness to all types of humiliation at the hands of the Crusaders, the poet utilizes skillfully the trope of ṭibāq (antithesis) to prick the conscience of Muslims and to juxtapose the frivolous life they were leading so joyously with the fate of their Muslim brothers:

Wake up Muslims! For ahead of you,
Are unruly challenges and intractable deals!
Have you opted for slumber in cosiness and peace?
Like garden flowers in the shade of the trees!
While in the Levant, your brethrens are lying,
On the backs of slaughter boards and in the bellies of beasts!
The base Franks tyrannize them and tease!
While you enjoy a life of comfort and ease! (Trans. mine)

What is needed therefore is a concrete response, a jihad to stop the misery of their brethren and to expel the invaders. If Iraqi Muslims, whether Arabs or Persians, are not
agitated enough to rise up out of religious obligation, he reminds them, their culture ought to stir them to action. Indeed, it is the ultimate shame for an Arab, not to fight for family honour since this is an absolute duty. So it should and must be the task of the chivalrous Arab to do the deed:

Our arrows fly past the forms of the foe.
And our faith is so weak in this moment of woe.
Avoiding fire and fearing death are now the law!
And in our thoughts, honour has fallen so low.
Have the great Arabs yielded to humiliation and shame!
Have the great Persians accepted dishonour and stain!
If we ‘ve lost the fervour to fight for our faith,
Let us unleash our swords for our family name! (Trans. mine)

Here the poet cleverly invokes the classical codes of *al-furūssiya* in which fighting for one’s tribe and family honour is highly praised. Sacrificing one’s life in order to save the reputation and honour of *al-ḥarīm* (women) is especially heroic.

Not only did *al-shi’r* (poetry) long hailed as *dīwān al-ʿArab* (the true record of the Arabs) in the example of the above poem and the following ones, capture with power the general shock felt by Muslims, it also recorded the plight of the Muslims of the Levant. Other poets, some of whom preferred to write anonymously, flavoured their poetry with the emotional and melancholic tradition of *al-bukāʿ ala al-aṭlāl* (weeping over the ruins/standing over the ruins). The following poem attributed to ibn al Mujawer is an example:

Oh my eyes do not stop your tears!
With weeping and cries,
Weave your mornings into your nights!
Let the flowing tears soothe the sigh,
And rekindle the embers of the heart.
For the lost al Aqsa mosque.
Place of prayers, most venerable site.
Let all the Muslim lands mourn Jerusalem,
And declare their grief over its plight. (Trans. mine)

Intensely morose and meticulous in depicting the defilement of Muslim (holy) places, massacring of men, and dishonouring of Muslim women, Arabic poetry of the Crusades employs the convention of *al-bukāʿ ʿala al-āṭlāl*, the equivalent of the Latin *ubi sunt* tradition as mentioned earlier. Here the leitmotifs of *bukāʿ* (wailing), ḥuzn (sorrow) and *khauf* (fear) from the present condense a wide array of religious and socio-cultural alienations, longings, and nostalgias, and alert the reader to the threat of a totally catastrophic future if Muslims do not accept the challenge seriously and rise up for jihad.

This is the case with the following poem as well whose author remains anonymous. Thanks to ibn Taghrbardi and other chroniclers, however, it is still available to us:

The infidels have inflicted an unprecedented injustice upon Islam!
That for long we shall wail in excruciating pain.
A lost right, a defiled land.
A scourging sword, and running blood.
Many a Muslim man they wronged,
Many a Muslim woman they dishonoured.
Many a mosque they converted into churches,
In prayer niches, they erected their crosses¹⁶⁰
With the blood of pigs they filled them!
With burning Qur’ans, they perfumed the air!
If a pondering child some reason seeks,
White hairs will soon hide his youthful cheeks! (Trans. mine)

Of paramount importance in this text is the stress on the horrifying fracture between the life of Levantine Muslims in the past and the present caused by the ‘barbarity’ of the invaders and their unimaginable enmity to Islam and Muslims. The poet Ibn al-Khayyat excelled in expressing this situation:

For how long will you stay unmoved!
While the infidels are streaming as a tide.
As massive as an ocean wide!
Huge armies, like collapsing mountains
Are moving from the Frankish side.
For how long will you accept oppression?
Overlooking those whose currency is war!
You sleep in comfort, ignore the foe,
In times of sorrow and tinged with woe! (Trans. mine)

The Crusaders, he reminds his readers, have flocked from ʾarḍ al-Ifranja (the lands of the Franks) with a definite aim which is the humiliation of Islam and the

¹⁶⁰ A niche in a mosque which indicates the qibla (the orientation of Mecca).
extermination of Muslims. The Franks, he argues, speak only the language of war. Driven by a natural propensity to evil, they are determined not only to spread their shirk in the monotheistic lands of Islam, but also to spread all types of fasād (vice/evil):

    The infidels do not forbid vice,
    Nor do they set a limit to what is wrong.
    When killing, they do not spare a soul.
    Nor do they show mercy at all. (Trans. mine)

The overriding images and metaphors of war and destruction effectively project doom for Muslims if they do not assume their religious obligation to defend their faith and honour in the face of an enemy who is inherently evil. By continuously highlighting their religious identity and constantly invoking their shirk, In al-Khayyat alerts Muslims to the real nature of the enemy.

The Crusaders came en masse not only to pillage and plunder Muslim and Jewish sites they meet on their way, they flocked to dār al-Islām "to exterminate all the Brutes," to use Joseph Conrad’s revelatory phrase. Indeed he utilizes brilliantly al-ṭibāq (antithesis/paradox), a highly regarded figure of speech in Arabic poetry, to place the Frankish fasād in the binary context of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and posits the otherness of the Franks within the framework of the clash between truth and falsehood created by the advent of Islam in the seventh century. Obviously the stock image used by these poets when speaking of al-Ifranja was negative and related to a Manichean-like understanding of the (Muslim) Self and the non-Muslim Other.

Muslims, however, had gradually begun to forget about the shock of the fall of Jerusalem, for they had come to the conclusion that what they needed was a rekindling of
the flame of the religious fervour of Muslim rulers by reminding them of the value of jihad (‘Awadh 23). According to scholar ‘Abd al-Mahdi, it was the historian/poet Ibn al-Adhimi who inaugurated this poetic tradition that dominated much of the literary expression of Arab-Muslims throughout the Crusades (217).

Disappointed with the defeatism and fatalism of many Muslims, Ibn al-Adhimi addressed the once ‘libertine’ governor of Aleppo, Najmuddine ibn Ortoq (d. 1122), and urged him to raise the banner of jihad and called upon him to take revenge on the polytheistic tyrants. He says: "The polytheistic tyrants must soon know/ that you will seek revenge and more" (1). These lines of poetry, we are told by a number of chroniclers, had deeply touched the once indifferent ruler of Aleppo before engaging the Crusaders in a major battle between the Crusader Principality of Antioch and Aleppo in 1119. The result was the first major victory for Muslims at the battle known in Arabic sources as sāḥat al-dam (field of blood) and in western sources as the Battle of Ager Sanguinis.

With this battle, hope was restored and the future loomed much brighter for Muslims. It is not surprising therefore that the most optimistic poem of Arabic medieval poetry came to the surface. It is the poem known as Al-Qasida al-munfarija (An Ode of Hope) and attributed to ibn al-Nahawi (d.1119). The popular first lines begin:

The starker a crisis gets,

The closer it is to the end!

When the night gets most dark,

The day looms most bright.

And the black clouds breed pure rain,
When the storm comes in sight.

God’s decrees are but lessons,

That soothe our hearts and brains. (Trans. mine)

Such a hope was rekindled by a call to jihad. Contemporary poets played a leading role in this call by enticing Levantine emirs to embrace the cause of jihad and fulfill their religious and moral obligation to help their brethrens in need. Through their eloquent words, contemporary poets helped foster the jihadist spirit and furnished the ideal setting for it, by extolling and idealizing the Jihadist rulers.

Addressing Imaddudine after his liberation of Edessa, poet Ibn al-Qaysarani (d.1153), for example, extolled him for using force against a bloodthirsty enemy that understood nothing but the language of the sword:

Nothing will make powerful a man,

But the thrusts of a scourging sword!

Nothing will protect the land!

If a sword is not in hand. (Trans. mine)

In a style and diction that are reminiscent of Abu Tammam’s earlier mentioned line of ḥamāsa poetry: *al-sayfu aṣdaqu anbā`an min al- kutubi* (the sword is truer in telling than the books,” the verses of Ibn al-Qaysarani, have now become among the most quoted lines of medieval Arabic-Islamic poetry of the Crusades.

Perplexed by what he sees as an inherent religious gullibility, ibn al-Qaysarani, at least in this poem, depicts the Franks as *asrā al-dalāla* (prisoners of misguidance). According to him, they (the Franks) are not able to draw lessons from previous Muslim-Christian conflicts. This is in addition to the actual signs which, he believes, predict the
failure of the Crusades and the imminent humiliation of the Cross. God has already chosen the side that professes the true faith. The liberation of al-Raha (Edessa) is the turning point:

Verily in the liberation of al-Raha,

There are miraculous signs that belie,

All that the 'uluj have believed.

In the birth(day) of the son of Mary,

They have expected victories and glories.

When nothing has miraculously changed!

For our study, however, the most important word in these lines is the insulting al-‘uluj (barbarians/uncivilized) for it tells us much when it comes to ibn al-Qaysarani’s early stereotyping of the Franks and the ensuing perception of their mathālib (demerits).

As mentioned earlier, the word ‘ilj was also used to designate a person who is born out of wedlock. This means that he/she is the outcome of zināʾ (fornication) which in turn denotes that his/her mother is a zāniya (prostitute). In other words, the Franks, in the eyes of Ibn al-Qaysarani, are all the fruit of zināʾ. Unexpectedly, however, Ibn al-Qaysarani would refute many of these stereotypes when he came into direct contact with the Franks during his real encounter with them in the town of Antioch.

Glorification of Jihad and the idealization of al-mujāhid (holy warrior) became the dominant themes of Jihadist poets as a consequence of these events. As God’s mission only godly emirs were capable of engaging in it. No wonder then that poets of the period filled their lines with images of major battles and heroes of early Islam wherein the mujāhidin are depicted as envoys of God come to defend al-bilād al-ṭāhira
(the pure land) from the *shirk* (polytheism) and *najāsa* (impurity) of the *kuffār* (unbelievers). Poet Shihabuddine Mahmud addressing the legendary leader Salahuddine after the liberation of Akka (Acre), said:

> All praises are due to the only God!
> By whose grace, the state of the Cross is lost.
> And at the hands of the brave Turks,
> The religion of the Arab Prophet has carried the fray.
> A thing that was so beyond our scope.
> That even as a dream in the night,
> One would not dare to hope! Trans. mine).

The emphasis on the *naʿīm* (delights) that await the *shahīd* in the hereafter is also of paramount importance.\(^\text{161}\) As D. Ephrat and M.D. Kabha put it, "Long passages, composed during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/twelfth centuries are devoted to depicting paradise: its castles, gates, buildings, tents, gardens and inhabitants, especially the women awaiting Muslim martyrs’”(31).

Medieval western literature, in turn, had played a no less significant propagandist role during the centuries of the Crusades. According to Ziaddin Sardar, medieval western writers "gave the contemporary Crusades a history, locating their motifs, concerns, and rationale by harking back to the time of Charlemagne when the Muslim tide had been

turned back from the heart of Europe" (37). This is particularly true with regard to their role in fashioning and perpetuating a demonic image of Islam and Muslims.

Although a comprehensive analysis of medieval western views of Islam and Muslims is beyond the scope of the present thesis, it should be noted that since the appearance of the pioneering work of Norman Daniel in *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960), and Richard Southern’s *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962), numerous scholars from different backgrounds and interests have convincingly argued that medieval Europe was in many ways haunted by the spectre of the Saracens (Muslims). The Saracens, as Dorothee Metlitzki once phrased it, became "a crucial public theme," that permeated the religious, political, military and social life of Christian Europe (116).

A growing number of scholars have demonstrated that during the Middle Ages, Christian "discourse" had dominated the textual and had thus actively participated in the actual Crusades. In *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (2003), Geraldine Heng has shown that throughout the Middle Age, the Crusades were obsessively produced, revised and copied in "biographies, national and regional histories, and texts" (41). This may be seen in such medieval masterpieces as the *Chanson de Roland, L’entrée de Spagne, Chanson de Jerusalem, Richard Coer de Lion*,

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Here I use the word "discourse" with the very "comparable vagueness" highlighted by Suzanne Conklin Akbari in the introduction to her article "Orientation and Nation in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*" (102).
Sir Ferumbras, Sowdone of Babylone, King Horn, and The King Alisaunder, to name but a few.

Through her examination of the depictions of Muslims as idolaters in some of the above texts and others such as Le Jeu de saint Nicholas and The Digby Mary Magdalen play, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, for instance, has come to the conclusion that "[T]he depiction of Muslims in western European texts is designed to hold up a mirror to medieval Christian practice, showing the readers of those texts what they are not so that they may understand what they are" ("Imagining Islam: The Role of Images in Medieval Depictions of Muslim." 20). Echoing Akbari, Leona F. Cordery in "The Saracens in Middle English Literature: a Definition of Otherness." has argued that medieval western attempts to construct a crusading identity were dependent on the literary fashioning of a physically and spiritually vilified and a threatening Saracen. As she put it, "The Saracens, who were the chosen enemy of Christendom, were seen to be both a physical and spiritual threat to Christendom. Physical because they represented a ferocious enemy in battle and spiritually because should the Saracens be victorious then the very souls of the Christians would be in mortal peril"(89).

John V. Tolan has argued in Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination (2002), that nowhere was the above more emotionally captured than in the following "prose monologue" by thirteenth-century Florentine traveler and missionary Riccoldo da Montecroce:

Suddenly, in this sadness, swept up into an unaccustomed astonishment, I began, stupefied, to ponder God’s judgment concerning the government of the world, especially concerning the Saracens and the Christians. What could be the cause of such massacre and such degradation of the Christian
people? Of so much worldly prosperity for the perfidious Saracen people? Since I could not simply be amazed, nor could I find a solution to this problem, I decided to write to God and his celestial court, to express the cause of my astonishment, to open my desire through prayer, so that God might confirm me in the truth and sincerity of the Faith, that he quickly put an end to the law, or rather, the perfidy, of the Saracens, and more than anything else that he liberate the Christian captives from the hands of the enemies. (xiii)

Nevertheless, as we shall see with Ibn al-Qaysarani’s questioning and disruption of medieval Arabic dominant views of the Franks, in there did exist in medieval western literature as well some literary and cultural negotiation of the dominant Euro-Christian views of the Saracens. Not least because of what she considers to be a "monolithic and monologic" interpretation of the role of the Saracens in medieval western literatures (80), Sharon Kinoshita in a provocative book, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (2006), and an essay "Discrepant Medievalisms: Deprovincializing the Middle Ages," has called for "acknowledging the historical complexities of the Middle Ages," against what she describes as "the dominant discourse of postcolonial medievalism"(80).

In Kinoshita’s view, medieval Iberian literature—which according to her was "at best addressed only in passing in some central works of the emerging field of postcolonial medievalism—can be suggested as a possible "privileged site from which to disrupt reductive notions of the "European" Middle Ages"(80). Citing the "little 'orientalism' in medieval Spain’s posturing toward the Moors," and the absence of "overriding compulsion towards abjection," Kinoshita has gone so far as to contend that the Spanish medieval masterpiece the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, "retrospectively constructed as
the Spanish national epic" contained rather "a pragmatic give-and-take that lines itself up only exceptionally along the battle lines of crusade." In *Cantar de Mio Cid*, she goes on to explain, it is not the Muslims who are portrayed as "the protagonist’s most troublesome enemies." The latter in her view are rather "his sons-in-law, the counts of Carrion" (85).

In light of what Kinoshita has suggested and in spite of the tense religious atmosphere that dominated much of the encounter between Levantine Muslims and Euro-Christians during the Crusades, a number of Muslim writers exhibited a readiness to revise many of the stereotypes and prejudices they themselves had for a long time embraced, endorsed and perpetuated. This was the outcome of direct contact with the Other and his/her ‘real’ culture, and as a consequence, many of these writers dared to cast doubt openly on some of these prejudices and stereotypes.

Such was no doubt true of Ibn al-Qaysarani, whose direct contact with the Franks of Antioch had driven him to reconsider certain of the stereotypes he had himself propagated in a number of earlier jihadist poems. Literarily speaking, this encounter culminated in a *dīwān* (collection of poems) for which he chose the title of *Al-Thaghriyyat* (Borderlands or Poems Written in Borderlands). Indeed, after crossing the territorial borders, Ibn al-Qaysarani found himself obliged to disavow several of his culture’s proscriptions. Nowhere is this more evident than in his encounter with the ‘real’ Frankish women whom he had imprisoned in a ‘jezebel stereotype.’

As early as the moment he reached the first Frankish town of ʿAzzaz (60km north of Aleppo), Ibn al-Qaysarani found no reason not to reveal his stereotypical perception of Frankish women. Upon meeting the very first "herd" of them as he says, he directs his
scopophilic/voyeuristic eyes upon them, thus turning them into mere objects of erotic desire:

While passing by the Frankish town of ʿAzzaz
I recalled my bygone youth with weeping eyes.
For I stalked a herd of lively Frankish gazelles
Young and slender, they were gracefully quick.
With their scent, the air was pleasurably thick.
Their languid eyes as mesmerizing as the past.
Their busts are perfect with perfect size.
And above them, let fall a liquid kiss,
As sweet as the sugar of the Ahwaz.
If their faces give signs of bliss to come,

The ultimate miracle lies in their comely bums! (Trans. mine)

The poem begins with the conventional comparison of women’s beauty to gazelles. Indeed, in medieval Arabic poetry that of ghazal (love) in particular, the gazelle/antelope is one of the most common archetypal epithets/similes used to celebrate a woman’s physical beauty. Swiftly, however, the poem turns into an overtly erotic piece wherein the Frankish women become mere objects of sexual desire and stimulation. The graphic focus on Frankish women’s erogenous parts and the poet’s usage of somewhat licentious diction convince us of his initial views and perceptions of Frankish women.

Ibn al-Qaysarani would thus portray the realm of the Franks, at least in the beginning, as a world of moral wantonness, bacchic escapism, and sexual adventurism. Nowhere is this more evident than in the following poem:
If one must drink and sin!
Let the hands that serve the fest,
Be those of the waitress of al Jisr’s Inn!
A waitress from whose swelling breast,
A white palm pith does show itself in quest!
When she is not within my sight,
The drink is not empowered in its true might.
She brings to the moon the sun’s full light.
And when she approaches with her lovely face,
Her eyes turn wine useless and a waste.
And if I'm there, so well placed,
With my hand and in great haste,
I play the belt around her waist. (Trans. mine)

In his quest for sexual gratification in the territory of the Other, Ibn al-Qaysarani seems to have in mind what some European travelers had centuries later while physically or imaginatively crossing the borderlands into the Orient. As Said put it in *Orientalism*, albeit too generally, "[So] the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest" (190).

The eroticization of Frankish women and the "Orientalization" of the Frankish land would vanish as soon as Ibn al-Qaysarani found himself in the town of Antioch. It is there that the Arab-Muslim poet had a perfect chance to encounter a real Christian
woman, one completely antithetical to those he initially fantasized about and presumably conquered sexually. It comes as no surprise then that the angelic image of the Christian Maria came to reign in his heart, ushering in a radical change in the poet’s perception of Frankish women. The chastity and purity of this Christian woman would make her worthy of nothing but *al-ḥub al-ʿudhri* (platonic/romantic love). No doubt the poet’s infatuation with Maria is a pure experience of *al-ḥub al-ʿudhri*:

Every time I visit Maria,
I feel pure bliss when her I see.
A maid that resembles the Ben-oil tree,
With her youth and vigor.
She has so Christian a face,
It brings life to a dead figure! (Trans. mine)

The poet’s fascination with Christian Maria became the impetus behind his interest in the Christian town and the Christian symbols which, in turn, have a direct impact on the diction as poet. Now in every Christian woman he sees Maria, the epitome of piety, purity, and love:

In churches, many a chaste virgin does reside!
Like antelopes, in their shyness their beauties lie!
To Mary’s icon in devotion they bow,
If, themselves, hung, to them the icons would bow!
Slender necked and short-waisted in saintly poses.
On whose cheeks, timidity has planted roses,
Whose branches they water with their innocent eyes. (Trans. mine)
Taken by what he saw in the Frankish churches, at one point he hesitantly suggested that: "Had it not been for my religion’s sake! /To them, I would have appeared in my hooded cloak/And emotively, I would have orchestrated their mass! (Trans. mine). More daring, however, is his open acknowledgement that during his stay in the town of Antioch he attended a mass at a church called Dīr Samʿan (the abbey of Samʿan):

Haven't you heard of Dīr Samʿan!
And the marvels that delight the eye!
I’m still wondering about its sanctuary!
Is it a place of worship or Beauty’s nursery!
That night! How shall I forget!
Wherein my fire with their own had met.
Fire and light illuminated the night,
By that which shone on the Son of Imraan.
Till daylight invaded the churches.
Revealing male and female worshippers,
Fully enjoying their spiritual delight. (Trans. mine)

No doubt the Muslim poet’s absolute immersion in this Christian ambiance must have been considered at least unorthodox, if not heretical. Describing his sadness at the ending of the celebration, he says:

My soul departed, to my regret!
With every departing Christian I met.
Indeed, so beautiful was the Cross' fete!
That I pray my life be filled with Christian feasts. (Trans. mine)
The above poems are remarkable in a number of respects, not least because they lend themselves to different, if not oppositional, interpretations.

If read from an orthodox Muslim theological perspective, Ibn al-Qaysarani would have certainly been chastised, if not ‘excommunicated’, for declaring his love for the enemies of Islam and revealing his taʿẓīm (veneration) of their religious festivities, icons and holy places.

Conversely, a more esoteric approach, would perhaps lead us to an association of ibn al-Qaysarani with the then growing Unitarian Sufism which highlighted the absolute unity of all creatures believed to be the ultimate manifestations of God, and emphasized love of all beings as the most important proof of attachment to God. Perhaps even before the Sufi icon Ibn-ʿArabi (d.1240) had written on this subject, Ibn al-Qaysarani’s heart, if not "for every form," had become capable of embracing everything Christian he encountered in the then Frankish town of Antioch. 163

Finally, if read in light of P. Oliner’s *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on Altruism*, one might be convinced that Ibn al-Qaysarani had lived an epiphanous moment with the Franks whom he once demonized to the point of calling for their annihilation. This change of heart manifested itself in the form of an emotional bond with a real Frankish woman. The latter, in turn, drove him to

163 In reference to ibn Arabi’s often quoted poem which R.A.Nicholson in *Mystics of Islam* translated as follows: "My heart has become capable of every form/ It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks/ And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim’s Kaʿba/And the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran"(67).
embrace many of the Franks’ thoughts and feelings, and, at least metaphorically, their religion.
Conclusion

All of mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white—except by al-taqwā (piety) and good action.

The above quotation from Prophet Muhammad’s last sermon seems to make it clear that, at least in theory, the binary prism through which the Self views the Other is al-muṭābaqa (sameness) or al-ikhtilāf (difference) of al-dīn (religion), expressed above by the Arabic word al-taqwā (piety). The latter is not only a central landscape feature of the Muslim community, it is rather the significant marker that shapes its identity, maintains its boundaries, and ensures its existence.

In a sense, all other common markers such as al-qawmiyya (nationalism), al-ʿirq (ethnicity/race), al-jins (gender), al-laun (colour), al-waṭan (homeland), al-nasab (ancestry), al-ḥasab (class) are considered jāhilī (un-Islamic). When compared with the religious marker described in the Qur’ān and the Sunna as taqwā (piety), they all pale into insignificance.

As Carolyn Moxley Rouse puts it in Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam (2004):

Many [Sunni] Muslims believe that instead of privileging racial/ethnic, gender or class identity, their faith is the umbrella under which all their identities can be expressed without coming into conflict. At the women’s entrance to Masjid al-Mutaqim there were always several copies of Prophet Muhammad’s last sermon, and the continual availability of the sermon is no accident. The sermon resonates so powerfully with this
community that it is used to represent the essence of the faith to both new and old converts. (101)

To a varying extent, therefore, the Muslim umma (community/nation), especially during the period studied in the present dissertation, was thought to be exclusively faith-based. In fact, so long as Islam, as fashioned in the Qur’an and the Sunna, is a divine message to all humans irrespective of their differences, those who accept it become al-anā (the Self), whereas those who reject it are doomed to embody al-ākhar (the Other) par excellence.

This message is far from imagining a community that is based on territory, history, race, language, common customs, or socio-economic interests, especially as delineated by a number of contemporary western theorists of nationalism and nation-

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164 In many ways the reality has proved otherwise especially since the eruption in the ninth century of the previously mentioned al-shuʿūbiyya (ethnic tensions) which among other things, rekindled the animosity between Arabs and Persians. For more on the manifestations of this animosity see, for example, Tahir Labib (ed.) Surat al-Akhar: al-Arabi Nadhiran wa Mandhuran Ilayh (Cairo: Markaz Dirasat al Wihda al Arabiyya, 1999). Fortunately, the publishing house I.B.Tauris has recently published an English translation of the conference proceedings as Imagining the Arab Other: How Arabs and Non-Arabs View Each Other (2008).

165 See for example, "O Mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you" (Qur’an 49:13).
building such as Elie Kedourie, Anthony D Smith, E. J. Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Earnest Gellner, and Dudley Seers, to name but a few. Paradoxically, in light of his controversial views of Islam, it seems that Ernest Renan’s older concept of "un plebiscite de tous les jours" (a daily plebiscite), islamically speaking makes more sense, especially if one considers answering *al-adhān*, or the call to the five obligatory prayers as a daily proclamation of the plebiscite described by Renan.\(^{166}\)

Yet as much as the Qur’an and the Sunna acknowledge that Muslims differ in their Sameness in light of their differences in the degree of attachment to their faith and practice of its teachings, non-Muslims, in turn, are not the same. As a matter of fact, their Difference or Otherness from the Muslim Self is proportional to the degree of their *kufr* (disbelief) and their ‘idā’ (enmity) to the faith and its adherents.\(^{167}\)

In other words, if what makes the Self, is the level of *imān* (belief) and its implementation in *aʿmāl* (deeds), what makes the Other is the level of departure from Islam and its implementation in deeds. This can range from conspiring against Muslims to fighting them. On this basis, the *kuffār* (literally, those from whom the truth [Islam] is hidden) are divided into two categories: those who fight Muslims and those who do not.

\(^{166}\) See Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Mille Et Une Nuits, 1997.

\(^{167}\) "Allah forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers. Allah forbiddeth you only those who warred against you on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them. Whosoever maketh friends of them (All) such are wrong doers." (Al-Mumtahina: 8-9).
This distinction is extremely important for a better understanding of the growing polemic over an alleged Muslim binary, if not Manichean, division of the world into two eternally warring spheres: \textit{dār al-Islām} versus \textit{dār al-ḥarb} (the abode of war). In broader terms, the picture is much more multifaceted and complex. In fact, contrary to the dominant monolithic views espoused by Muslim jihadists and certain western experts of the Middle East, the majority of classical Muslim jurisprudents, as well as contemporary ones, have argued that the binary division of the world into \textit{dār al-Islām} (the abode of Islam) versus \textit{dār al-ḥarb} (the abode of war) is not only an \textit{ijtihād} (legal choice) on the part of a number of Hanafi jurisprudents, but also a \textit{raʾy marjūh} (a weak view).

This is regardless of the fact that for many \textit{dār al-ḥarb} (abode of war) could well mean a Muslim country in the same way that \textit{dār al-Islām} could in some circumstances mean a non-Muslim country. As demonstrated by Hilmi Zawati in \textit{Is Jihad a Just War?: War, Peace, and Human Rights Under Islamic and Public International Law} (2001), major Muslim jurisprudents (jurists) who wrote about this particular issue such as ibn Qutayba, al-Mawardi, Ibn-Qudama, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Shawkani, to name but a few, opted for and adopted the more flexible and complex triple division of the world.\footnote{This is in addition to other concepts such as \textit{dār al-silm} (abode of peace), \textit{dār al-ṣulḥ} (abode of truce), \textit{dar al-hudna} (abode of calm), \textit{dār al-daʿwa} (abode of call).}

As Zawati puts it:

In discussing the jihad theory, Muslim jurists divided the world into three parts: the territory of Islam (\textit{dār al-Islām} or \textit{dār al-salām} or \textit{dār al-ʿadl}): the territory of covenant (\textit{dār al-ʿahd} or \textit{dār al-muʿahada} or \textit{dār al-ṣulḥ}): and the territory of war (\textit{dār al-ḥarb}).
In this respect, al Shawkani argues that a territory can be considered *dār al-Islām*, as long as a Muslim can reside here in safety and fulfill his religious obligations. Conversely, *dār al-ḥarb*, which stands in opposition to *dār al-Islām*, can be defined as a territory which does not apply Islamic rules, and where a Muslim cannot publicly adhere to ritual practices of his faith. (50)

As I have tried to show throughout the chapters of this dissertation, medieval Muslim writers, some of whom as we saw, were not only pious persons but also distinguished jurisprudents, in their accounts of non-Muslim Others they imagined and encountered in their textual and physical journeys, seemed to go beyond the above religious markers and jurisprudential views of the division of the world.

Names such as al-Maṣʿudi, al-Biruni, al-Tajir, al-Bekri, al-Ghazal, Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Yahya, Ibn Yaʿqub, al-Gharnati, built their perceptions and attitudes of non-Muslim ‘Orientals’ and ‘Occidentals’ alike rather on anthropo-ethnographic and socio-cultural blueprints: civilization, climatic ethnology, environmental determinism, character, physical appearance, women, language, hygiene, dress, dietary rules, education, justice, social services and political systems.

Of course, like all other cultural meetings, medieval Muslims’ encounters with the Other in general and the Euro-Christian in particular brought out some elements of prejudice, exaggeration, and in some cases, whether consciously or unconsciously, tropes of ethnocentrism that made some writers judge the Other in relation to their own cultural notions and conceptions. As we saw through the course of the chapters, notwithstanding *al-qaswa* (cruelty) that, for example, served as the most common denominator between *al-Rūm* (Byzantines) and *al-Ifranja* (European Crusaders) as reflected in medieval Arabic
poetry, Muslims were duly struck by what they conceived as lack of hygiene among medieval Europeans, sexual freedom of their women, and absence of jealousy among their men. No wonder then these specific European features served as the most common denominators of the overall Muslim views and perception of the otherwise heterogeneous European ajnās.

In spite of this, however, the most important lesson that one learns from the texts studied in this dissertation is that medieval Muslims were curious to know about alien thaqafāt (cultures) and willing to appreciate them. As I have shown in the first chapter, this curiosity and willingness to study and appreciate foreign cultures was the main impetus behind ḥarakat al-tarjama (the movement of translation) by which, as al-Jahiz records in Al-Hayawan (On Animals), not only ḥikmat al-Ighrīq (Greek wisdom), but also adab al-Furs (Persian literature) and kutub al-Hind (Indian books) were ardently translated into Arabic.

Perhaps a no less important conclusion is the fact that more than a handful of medieval Muslims were textually and physically interested in medieval Europe. As I demonstrated in the second and third chapters, generally speaking there was no shortage of Muslims who cast curious eyes and minds towards Europe and the Europeans. Contrary to the assumptions of some, medieval Muslim scholars did not appear to see the entire European continent as "an outer darkness of barbarism" or as an "African jungle" and at no moment did we come across a single Muslim writer who felt the need to apologize to his readers "for devoting some attention" to Europe and the Europeans ( *A Middle East Mosaic* 24).
By most accounts, and notwithstanding the much more publicized enmities, conflicts and wars, there were negotiations, embassies, truces, exchanges of captives, ransoms, and even as we saw with al-Ghazal and the Viking Queen, love and romance. It is of interest to propose that perhaps the proximity of Arab-Muslims of al-Andalus to the Euro-Christians created its own record of deeds and discoveries. Faithful to their spirit of tolerance and multiculturalism the former appeared more adventurous, if not bolder, in their encounters with the Other. It is not surprising therefore that from the very land of Europe, medieval Arab-Muslims drew some of the most detailed accounts of Europe and the Euro-Christians during the pre-Crusade encounter between Islam and the West.

Even the Byzantines and the Franks, in the dominant views and perceptions expressed in medieval Arabic literature, as I tried to show in the fourth chapter, resemble in several respects those of the Saracens and Moors (Turks) as found in western medieval and early modern literature which made both of them al-ākhar (the Other). Be that as it may, several Muslim writers acknowledged a number of their fadāʿil (qualities/virtues). In addition to Byzantine and Frankish beauty, this was true especially of craftsmanship and architecture for the former and courage and perseverance for the latter.

In connection to the important period of the Crusades within the history of relations between Islam and the West past and present, it is not going too far to say that in spite of the tense religious atmosphere that dominated much of the encounter between Levantine Muslims and Euro-Christians during the Crusades and the ensuing demonization of the Franks in medieval Arabic literature, a number of Muslim writers exhibited a readiness to question religiously and culturally many of the stereotypes and prejudices they themselves had for a long time embraced, endorsed and perpetuated.
As we saw with the once celebrated poet of jihad against the Franks Ibn al-Qaysarani, this was mainly the outcome of direct contact with the Other and his/her ‘real’ culture. After this direct contact, some of these writers not only dared to cast doubt on several of the prejudices and stereotypes they held concerning al-Ifranja, but they, metaphorically at least, embraced their most salient features of Otherness.

In the same vein, and akin to their early modern successors, medieval Muslims were no less eager "to ask questions about bilad al-nasara and to record answers–and then to turn their impressions into documents"(In the Lands of the Christians xxii). Without question, Arabs did not wait until the years following 1831 to write "the first influential Arab account of a European country," as Lewis asserted in From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East (128). 169

It is my contention therefore that almost nine hundred years before the date suggested by Lewis and others, Ibn Fadlan had already done so. Indeed, I will always remember, how a few months ago, a Tunisian friend of mine found himself in my room where he read through the edge titles of the books that I had. Among the titles that caught his attention was Richard Frye’s Ibn Fadlan’s Journey to Russia (2005).

Not able to understand the time of the journey without the subtitle, my friend thought that Ibn Fadlan was the alias of a contemporary Arab writer who had recently visited Russia.170 When I introduced him to the man, his tenth-century European journey,

169 In an obvious reference to the previously mentioned visit of al-Tahtawi to Paris (1826-1831) and his travel account Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz.

170 The full cover title is Ibn Fadlan’s Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River.
and spoke to him about Ibn Fadlan’s encounter with the Vikings, he grew more cynical. In fact, quite mockingly, he replied to me by posing the following questions: How was he able to reach Russia at that time and how come the Vikings did not eat him?

Could it be that the medieval world with all its shortcomings, and despite decades, if not centuries of bad publicity, was not that barbaric! Perhaps the answer(s) will be found if, as it has been the main objective of the present thesis, we steer ourselves toward the shores of undiscovered non-western equivalents of Orientalism in general and medieval Arabic traditions of alterity in particular. I have coined the word Ifranjalism hoping to provoke not only more interest but further work by others in this neglected direction.

In several important respects, however, statements such as the one quoted below by versatile tenth-century Baghdadi adīb (littérateur) Abu Hayyan al-Tauhidi are tantalizingly inviting:171 Replying to a wazīr who asked him whether he favors the Arabs over non-Arabs or vice versa, al-Tauhidi as one may read in his great literary work Al-Imtaʾ w-a-l Muʾanasa (Enjoyment and Conviviality), had this to say:

In essence, all nations have merits and demerits in the same way that they have always shared many common things and concepts of life. Yet, each nation has cultivated some specific traits that its sister has not. Of course, in what they share, there is the good and there is the bad. Needless to remember the commonplace that every nation has its merits and virtues. Thorough research, sharp understanding, and deep thought are characteristic of the Greeks. By contrast, Indians are known for their fertile imagination, perception, wisdom, tricks, and magic. As for the

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Arabs, they excelled in rhetoric, eloquence, encyclopedism, and the magic of the tongue. The Persians are the best when it comes to moderation, manners, politics, order, drawing, and servitude [to God]. As for the Turks, they are famous for courage and bravery (italics mine) (25). (Trans. mine).

Al-Tauhidi’s statement is significant in several respects, not least because it betrays a spontaneous acknowledgement of cultural relativism and a courageous recognition of the Other. In a sense, Tarif Khalidi was not exaggerating when he stated that classical Muslim civilization was characterized by "an unparalleled capacity to learn from other cultures, an open and oft-expressed willingness to acknowledge its cultural debt to Indians, Persians, Greeks, and so forth" (36).

In light of al-Tauhidi’s views, perhaps it is time to acknowledge and recognize the fact that casting one’s curious eye toward the Other is too universal to be construed as an exclusive virtue of one particular culture. Indeed, one should be convinced that throughout the course of human history, different cultures across the globe have produced their own curious writers and travelers who ventured textually and physically into alien worlds and foreign words.
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Appendix of Translated Works

Chapter I:

1. Al-Mas'udi on al-Jahiz

وقد زعم عمرو بن بحر الجاحظ أن نهر مهران الذي هو نهر السند من نيل مصر ويستدل على أنه من النيل يوجد التماسك فيه، فلست أريد كيف وقع له هذا الدليل، وذكر ذلك في كتابه المترجم بكتاب الأمصار وعجائب البلدان، وهو كتاب في نهاية الغلاة لأن الرجل لم يسك البحار، ولا كثير الأسفار، ولا تقرئ المساكن والأمصار وإنما كان حاطب ليل، ينقل من كتب الوراقيين.

2. Al-Biruni on his book

إن كتابي ليس كتاب جدل أو حجاج وإنما هو كتاب حكاية أورد فيه كلام الهند على وجهه، مضيفاً ما لليونانيين من مثله لتعريف المقاربة بينهم فإن فلاسفة وان تحروا التحقيق فانهم لم يخرجوا فيما اتصلا بعومهم عن رموز نحلتهم ومواصفات ناموسهم.

3. Abu Dulaf’s poem

ومن كان من الأحرا ريسلو سلوا البحر **وسليما في الغربة أودي أكثر العمر وشاهدت أعجباً وألواناً من الدهر ***فطابت بالنووي نساى الإمساك والفطر فنحن الناس كلا الناس في البر وفي البحر **فخرنا جزية الخلق من الصين إلى مصر إلى منحة **بل في كل أرض خيلنا تسري ***إذا ضاق لنا قطر نزل عنه إلى قطر لنا الدنيا بما فيها من الإسلام والكفر **فنصطف على الثلج ونشتو بدل التمر
Chapter II

1. Al-Mas'udi

A. On the People of the North

وما أهل الربع الشمالي، وهم الذين بعد الشمس عن سماتهم من الواقفين في الشمال كالصقالي والأفنية ومن جاورهم من الأمم، فإن سلطان الشمس ضعف عنهم وطهروا منها فغلب عليهم نواحيهم البارد والرطوبة وتوارث اللوح عندهم والجليد، فقلت مزاج الحرارة فيهم فعَظمت أجسادهم وخفت طبائعهم وتوارثت أخلاقهم وتبلدت أفهامهم وقلبوا أستمهم، وابيضت ألوانهم حتى أفرطت فخرجت من البيضاء ورقت جلودهم وغلظت لحومهم، وأزرقت أعينهم أيضاً، فلم تخرج من طبع ألوانهم وسبطت شعرهم، وصارت صهباً لغيلة البخار الرطب ولم يكن في مذاهبهم متناة، وذلك لطبيعة البارد وعدم الحرارة ومن كان منهم أو غل في الشمال فغالب عليه الغباوة والجفاء والبهيمة وتزايد ذلك فيهم في الأبعد فالأبعد إلى الشمال.

B. On the Slavs

الصقاليّة: من ولد مار بن يافث بن نوح، وإليه يرجع سائر أجناس الصقاليّة، وله يلحقون في أسسهم، هذا قول كثير من أهل الدراية ممن عني بهذا الشأن، ومساكمهم بالحدي إلى أن يتصلكوا بالغرب، وهم أجنس مختلفه وبيئتهم حروب، ولهم ملوك، ومنهم ينقاد إلى دين النصرانية إلى رأي اليقوقية، ومنهم من لا كتّاب له ولا ينقاد إلى شريعة، وهم جاهزية لا يعرفون شيئًا من الشرائع.

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والصقاليّة أجنس كثير، وأنواع واسعة، لا يأتي كتابنا هذا على وصف أجناههم وتفريع أنواعهم، وقد قدمنا الأخبار عن الملك الذي كان ينقاد إليه ملوكهم في قديم الزمان، وهو ماجك ملك ولبنان، و هذا الجنس أصل من أصول الصقاليّة مُعظم في أجناههم، وله قدم فيهم. ثم اختلفت الكلمة بين أجناسهم، فزال نظرهم م، وتحرّبت أجناههم، وملك كل جنس منهم ملكًا على حسب ما ذكرنا من ملوكهم لأمور يطول ذكرها، وقد أتينا على جمل من شرحها وكثير من مبسوطها في كتابنا أختبار الزمان من الأمم الماضية، والأجليات الخالية، والممالك الدائرة.

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الجنس الذي سمياء المعروف بسرتين يحرقون أنفسهم بالنار إذا مات فيهم الملك والرئيسي ويحرقون دوابه، ولهم أفعال مثل أعمال الهند، وقد قدمنا فيما سلف من هذا الكتاب طرقاً من ذكرنا عند ذكرنا لجلب القفيق والخزر، وأن في بلاد الخزر مع الخزر خلقاً من السقالية والروس، وأنهم يحرقون أنفسهم بالنيران، وهذا الجنس من السقالية وغيرهم متصلون بالشرق، ويعرون من المغرب.

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فالأول من ملوك السقالية ملك الدبر، وله مدن واسعة، وعمائر كثيرة، وتجار المسلمين يقصدون دار ملكه بأنواع التجاراتهم يلي هذا الملك من ملوك السقالية ملك الأوانج، وله مدن وعمائر واسعة، وجيوش كثيرة، وتجار العرب والفرنج والنوك برد، وغير هؤلاء من الأمم، والحركة بينهم يجتأش يلي هذا.

C. On the Franks and the Galicians

الإفرنجية أشد هؤلاء الأجانب باشاً، وأثمانهم هيبة، وأكثرهم عادة، وأسهمهم ملكاً، وأكثرهم مندأ. وأحسنهم نظاماً وانتقائداً لملكهم، وأكثرهم طاعة، إذ أن الجالقة أشد من الإفرنجية باشاً وأعظم منهم نكائية، والرجل من الجالقة يقام عده من الإفرنجية، وكلمة الإفرنجية متقنة على ملك واحد، لا تتنازع بينهم في ذلك، ولا تجبر، واسم دار ملكتهم في وقتنا هذا بويرة، وهي مدينة عظيمة، ولهما من المدن نحو من خمسين ومانة مدينة غير العمار والكور.

2. Al-Bekri

A. On al-Andalus

والأندلس شامية في طبيها وهواها، يمائية في اعتدالها واستواها، هندية في عطرها وذكائها، اهوازية في عظيم جباليها، صينية في جواهر معادنها، عدنية في منافع سواحلها، فيها أثار عظيمة للبيزنطيين أهل الحكمة وحامي الفلسفة.

B. On the Land of the Franks

وهو بلد كثير اللافاكية غزير الأنهار منبسطة من ذوب التلوج. ومداه سلسة الاوسور محكمة البناء. وهو آخر حدودها بحر الشام، وحده آخر البحر المحيط. البحر الشامي قبل بلبه، والبحر المحيط بجوفها. ويتصل ببلاد روما أيضاً من ناحية الجوف بلاد السقالية بينهما شعراء ملتفة، مسيرة الأيام الكبيرة، ويتصل بالشرق أيضاً بالصقالية ويتصل بالغرب بالبتشكين.
C. On the Galicians

And now, to deal with the Spanish, it is clear that they are not expected to follow the customs and ways of the barbarians. They observe their own traditions, and their customs and ways differ from those of the barbarians.

D. On the Britons

The language used by the British is a mixture of speech and customs, and they use their own customs. They use their own language, and the Britons, in turn, use their own customs.

E. On the Prussians

And the Prussians are also a people who have their own customs and ways, but they are not expected to follow the customs of the barbarians. They use their own customs, and the Prussians, in turn, use their own customs.

Chapter III

1. Ibn Fadlan’s exordium

Since we have reached the end of the book, the king and the learned scholars have been taught the knowledge that is necessary for them to understand the book.

And the ruler of the Prussians has sent a letter to Ibn Fadlan, the learned scholar, informing him that he has written a book on the customs of the barbarians.

And the ruler of the Prussians has sent a letter to Ibn Fadlan, the learned scholar, informing him that he has written a book on the customs of the barbarians.

And the ruler of the Prussians has sent a letter to Ibn Fadlan, the learned scholar, informing him that he has written a book on the customs of the barbarians.

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2. Al-Ghazal’s poem

قال لي يحي وسرنا بين موج كالجبال***وتتلتنا رياح من دوبر و شمال
شفت القلعين وانبتت عري تلك الجبال***وتمتي ملك الموت إلينا عن حيال
فرأت الموت رأس العين حالا بعد حال***لم يكن للقوم فينا يا رفيقي رأس مال

3. Al-Gharnati

A. On the cold climate of City of the Bulgar

وسعت بلغار وهي مدينة في آخر بلاد الإسلام في الشتاء يكون النهار في الصيف عشرين ساعة، و الليل أربع ساعات و يشتد البرد فيها، حتى إذا مات أحد ميتا لا يقدر أن يدفنه ستة شهور، لأن الأرض تصير كالخضرة لا تستطيع أن يحفر بها قبر، ولقد مات لي بها ولد، وكان في آخر الشتاء، فلم أقدر على دفنه في البيت ثلاثة أشهر حتى أمكن دفنه. و بقي الميت كالحجر.

B. On the Ski

و يتخذ الناس لأرجلهم ألواجا يحتونها، طول كل لوح باغ، و عرضه شير، مقدّم ذلك اللوح و مؤخره مرتفع عن الأرض، وفي وسط اللوح موضوع يضع الماني فيه رجل، وفيه تلبث قد شدو فيه سيور من جلود قوية يُشدوها على أرجلهم، و يقرن الرجل بين اللوحين اللذين يكونان في رجله بشندال طويل مثل عنان الفرس، يمسكه في يده الشمال، و في يده اليمنى عصا بطول الرجل، و في أسفل العصا مثل كرة من الثياب محشوة بصوف كثير مثل رأس الإنسان خفيفة، و يعتمد على تلك العصا فوق الثلج، و يدفع العصا خلف ظهره كما يصنع الملاح في السفينة، فيدهب على ذلك الثلج بسرعة و لو لولأ تلك الحيلة لم يمكن أحدا أن يمشي هناك البينة لأن الثلج على الأرض مثال الرمل لا يتيّد وأي حيوان مشى عليه يغوص فيه فيموت إلا الكلاب و الحيوانات الخفيفة كالثعلب و الأرانب فإنها تمشي عليه بخفة و بسرعة و الثعلب و الأرانب في تلك البلاد تبيض جلودها في زمن الشتاء.
C. On the Giant Bulgar Dange

كان من نسل العاديين رجالا طويلين، كان طوله أكثر من سبعة أذرع، كان يسمى دنقى (أو دفعى أو ونقى) يأخذ الفرس تحت أبطه كما يأخذ الإنسان الحمل الصغير، وكان من قوته يكسر ساق الفرس بيده، وقطع حسده واعتماده كما يقطع باقة البقل، وكان صاحب بلغار قد اتخذ له درعا بحمل على عجلة وبيضة لرأسه كأنها مرجه، وكان إذا وقع القابل بقتل بخشية من شجر البلوط يمسكها كالعصا في (لو ضرب بها الفيل قلته) وكان خبرًا متواضعا، كان إذا التقاني يسلم على ويرحب بي ويكمني، ز كان رأسي لا يصل إلى حقوه رحمه الله. ولم يكن بلغار حمام يمكن أن يدخل فيها إلا حمام واحدة واسعة الأبواب، وكان من أعجب بني آدم، لم أشاهده قت مثله. وكان له أخت على طوله ورايتها مرارا عدة في بلغار، وقال لي في بلغار القاضي يعقوب بن النعمان أن هذه المرأة الطويلة العادية قلتها زوجها، وكان اسمه آدم و[كان] من أقوي أهل بلغار، ضمتها إلى صدرها فكسرت أضلاعه، فمات في ساعته.

D. On the Slavs

والصقالية سياسات عظيمة، إذا تعرض أحد لجارية عبره أو ولده أو دابته أو تدعه، بلأي شيء من التعدى كان، أخذ من المعتدي جملة من المال، فإن لم يكن له بيع أولاده وبناته وأولاده في تلك الجناية، فإن لم يكن له أهل ولا أولاد بيع هو، فلما يزال عبدا يخدم من يكون عنده حتى يموت..وبلادهم آمنة. وإذا عامل المسلم منهم أحدا وألفس الصقليين بيع هو وأولاده وداره. ويعطي لذلك التاجر دينه.

E. On Great Witch Hunt/the Burning Time

وحذرت عنهم أنهما كل عشر سنين بكثر السحر عندهم وتفسد عليهم نساؤهم بالعجائز السحر، فیأخذون كل عجوز في ولايتهم، فيشدون أيديهن وأرجلهن ويفقهن في النهر، فكل من رست من العجائز في الماء ربطوها، وعلموا أنها ليست ساحرة، التي تطفو على الماء يحرقونها بالقُطر.

F. On the Christian Kingdom of Hungary

-أتمت بينهم ثلاث سنين، لم أقدر أن أدخل إلى أربعة من المدناء، وثلك الوليدة (أي البلاد المجر) من رومية العظمى، وقبيها جبال يخرج منها الذهب والفضة، وبلد البلاد من أكثر البلاد رخاه ونعمته، يكون الغنم عشرين دينارًا، و
الحملان و الإجادة ثلاثين بدينار، و العمل خمس مانة رطل بدينار، و الجارية الحسناء بعشرة دنانير، و في وقت
الغزو تشترى الجارية الجيدة بثلاثة دنانير، و العلام الرومي.

F. On his Hungarian Slave Girl

واشتريت جارية مولدة، أبوها وأما و إخوتها بالحياة، اشتريتها من سيدها بعشرة دنانير. بنت خمس عشرة سنة،
أحسن من القمر، سوداء الشعر و العين، بضاء كالكرير، تعرف الطبخ و الخياطة و الرقم، و اشتريت جارية أخرى
و جاء منها ولد و مات، فأخذتها و سميته مريم، و رضيت أن تجيء إلى سجينين، فخشيت عليها من أمهات
الأولاد الترك الذين في سجينين.

G. On the Hungarian king

وكان ملك باشغورد يخرب بلاد الروم فقلت لولوك المسلمين، اجتهدوا في الجهاد مع هذا الملك، فأنه يكتب لكم فيه
ثواب الجهاد، فخرجوا معه إلى بلاد قسطنطينية، وهزموا لملك الروم الثاني عشر عشر عسكرا، فجاء صاحب قسطنطينية
طلبًا للصالح، و بذل أموالاً كثيرة ... و حدثني بعض الآسراء من المسلمين ممن كان في الروم أن ملك الروم سال: ما
سبب في خروج ملك باشغورد و تخريبهما؟ وما كان بهذا عادة. فقيل له: ملك باشغورد عندما عسكر من المسلمين. فقد
بركهم يظهرون دينهم. فهم الذين أخرجه إلى لاينك . و خبره بلاده و عندي مسلمون لا يقاتلون معه. فقيل له: 
أنت تقدرهم على النصارية. فقال: لن أقرح مسلماً على ديني أبداً، و أبني لهم المساجد حتى يقاتلون معي.

H. On polygamy

لما سمع أنى منعت المسلمين من شرب الخمر، و أبتاج الجوامع وأربعة من الحرائر قال: "ليس هذا من العقل ،
لأن الخمر يقوي الجسد، و كثرة النساء تضعف قلبه للترحمان: "قل للملك: شريعة المسلمين ليست مثل شريعة
النصارى: و النصارى يشرب الخمر على الطعام بمنزلة الماء، ولا يسكر، و ذلك يزيد في القوة: و المسلم الذي
يشرب الخمر إما يطلب منه غاية السكر : فيذهب عقله، و يصير كالملجعون، يزني و يقتل و يكرر ، ولا خير عنده.
و يعني سلاحه و فرسه، و يضيع ماله في طلب ذلك، و هم ها هنا جندك، و إذا أمرته بالعروف لا يكون له فرس ولا
سلاح ولا مال، قد أهلكه في الشراب، إذا أعلمت إما تقتله، أو تضربه، أو تطرده، أو تعطيه خياما و سلاحا يفسده
أيضاً. و أبا الجوامع و النساء، فإن المسلمين يوقفهم النكاح لحرارة طباعهم: و أيضاً فإنهم جندك " فقال: " اسمعوا
Chapter IV:

1. Abu Firas’ poems

A. "A Captive’s Suffering."

إنّ في الأسرى نصباً، دمعةً في الخدّ صبّ
هو في الرومّ مقيم، وله في الشامّ قلبّ
مُستجداًّ لم يصافح، عوضاً بمن يحبّ

B. "Separation."

لقد كنت أشكو البعد ملك وبيّن بلاد إذا ماتّ قربها الوحد
فكيف فيما بيننا ملك قيصر؟ ولا أمر يحي النفس ولا عد

C. "The Byzantines are Coming"

هذة الجيوش تجري نحو بلادكم محفوقة بالكفر والصلبان
لبيّ انْكِّ تقلب خيولهم والبغي شرّ مصاحب الإنسان
ليسوا ينون فلانوّا في أمركم لاينهض الواني لغير الواني
غضاً لدين الله إن لاغضبوا لم يشترى في نصره سيفان

D. Selected lines from the hijā’ of Nicephore Phocas

أتّمّ عام يا فاضح اللغادي أتّمّ ونحن أسود الحرب لا يعرف الحربا
أتوعدنا بالحرب حتى كأننا وإليك لم يعصب بها قلبنا عصبا
لقد جمعتنا الحرب من قبل هذه فكنا بها آسداً وكنت بيا كليبا
بأعلامنا أحرجت أم بسيوفنا وأسد الشرى قدنا إلىك أم الكليبا
تركناك في بطن الفلاة تجرّبها كما اتفق الربوع بثّ الثرب

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2. Selections from *Al-Qasida al-Mal`una* (The Cursed Poem)

A.

من الملك الطاهر المسيحي مالك *** إلى خلف الإملاك من ال هائم
الملك الفضيل المطيع أخي العلاء*** ومن يرتجي للمعضلات العظائم
اما سمعت اذنا ما تصنع *** ولكن دهان الوهن عن فعل حازم
فإن تلك عما قد تقلدت نائما *** فإنني عما خمني غير نائم

B.

سافتح أرض الله شرقا ومعربا *** وانشر دينا للصليب بصارمي
فيعيسي علا فوق السماوات عرشه *** يفوز الذي والاه يوم التخصام
وصاحبكم بالتراب اودى به الثرى *** فصار رقانٌ بين تلك الرمان
تناوتم اصحابه بعد موتته *** بسب وقذف وانتهال المحارم

3. Selections from the Response of al-Qaffal to *Al-Qasida al-Mal`una*

A.

أتاني مقال لمري غر عالم *** بطرق مجازي القول عند التخصام
تخرَص ألبان له جد كاذب *** وعد أثارا له جد واهم
تسلمي بطرير وهو أنجب مشرع*** مذنسة أثره بالمداسم
وقال مسيحي وليس كذاكم *** آخر قسوة لايحذٍ في عالم راحم -

B.

نحن على فضل بما في أفغنا *** وفخرعلكم بالأصول الجسام
ونرجو وشكنا أن تسهل رينا *** لرود خوافي الرئش تحت الولاد.
وعظمت من أمر النساء وعندنا *** لكم ألف ألف من إماء وحخدم

ولكن كرمنا إذا ظفروا وأنتم *** ظفرتم فكانت قدوة للإنام

C.

وقلت ملكناكم بجور قضاكم *** وبيعهم أحكامهم بالذراهم.

وفي ذاك إقرار بصحة ديننا *** ونأنا ظلمنا فابلينا

4. Selections from the Response of Ibn Ḥazm

A.

أقرن يا مخلوق دينا مثلنا *** بعيدا عن المعقول بادي المائم

تدين لمخلوقين لغيره *** فيك سحبا ليس يخفي لعالم

أنا جيلكم مصنوعة قد تشابهت*** كلام الأولى فيها أنها بالنظام

وعود صليب ما تزالون سجدا *** له يا عقول الهلالات السوان

B.

سبيتم سبيا يحصر العدو دونها *** وسيكم فينا كنفر الغمان

خلق عدها رام معجزا *** وأنتي بتدفع لرش الحنام فلو رام

ليلي قادوكم كما اقتادكم *** أقيال جراحان بحز الحلاقم

رمل بنات ملوككم *** سبيا كما سيقت طياء الصرام وسابوا على

C.

لكم من ملوك مكرمين فمأقم *** ولكن سلوا عنا هرقلا ومن خلي

كرانم يخبركم عن التنو وقيصر *** وكم قد سبينا من نساء

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IV.II. Arabic Poetry of the Crusades

1. Al-Abyaward’s poem

مزجنا دما بالدموع السواجٍ *** فلم بيق منها عرضة للمراحم
وشر سلاح المرء دمع يفسقه *** إذا الحرب تبكي نارها بالصوارم
فبالها يبني الإسلام إن وراءكم *** وقائع بلحن الذرى بالمناسم
أنهيمة في ظل أمن وعبيلة *** وعيش كنوار الخميلة ناعم
واخوانكم بالشام أضحى مقيلهم *** ظهور المذاكي أو بطول القشاعم
تسومهم الروم الهوان وأتتم *** تجرون ذيل الخفض فعال المسلمين
أرى متي لا يشرعون إلى العدي *** رماحهم والدين وأهي الدعائم
ويجتبتون النار خوفًا من الردى *** ولا يحسنون العار ضربة لأزم
أبرى صناديق الأعريب بالأذى *** ويضمي إلى ذل كم الأعجام
فليتهم إذ لا يذونوا حمية *** عن الدين ضلوا غيرة بالمحارم

2. Ibn al-Mujawir’s poem

أعيني لا ترمي من العبرات *** صلي في البا الأصال بالبكوات
لعل سبيل الدمع يطغى فيضتها *** توقع ما في القلب من جمرات
على المسجد الأقصى الذي جل قدره *** على موطن الإخبات والصلوات
لتبك على القدس البلاد بأسرها *** وتعلن بالأحزان والترحات

3. Anonymous poem

أحل الكفر بالإسلام ضمي *** يطول عليه للدين التحبيب
فحق ضائع وحمي مباح *** وسيف قاطع ودم صسبب
4. Ibn al-Khayyat’s poem

إليكم وقد زخر المشتركون ** سبل يهال له السيل ميّداً
وقد جال في أرض إفرينجة ** جيشه كمثل جبال ترّذى
تراخون من يجيري شدة ** وتسون من يجعل الحرب نقداً
أناّما على مثل هذا الصفا ** وهزا وقد أصبح اليوم جدًا
بنو الشرك لا ينكرون الفساد ** ولا يعرفون مع الجور قدّا
ولا يردون على القتال نفياً ** ولا يتركون من الفتك جهداً

5. Selections from Al-Qaṣida al-Munfarīja (An Ode of Hope)

اشتدي أزّة تنفرجي ** قد آذن ليلك بالبلاب
وطلام الليل له سرح ** حتى يغشاه أبو السرح
وسحاب الخير لها مطر ** فدا جاء الإبان تجي
وفوائد مولانا جمل ** لسروح الأنفس والمهج

6. Selections from ibn al-Qaysarani’s poem on the liberation of Edessa

وهل طوق الأملاك إلا نجاده ** هو السيف لا يغنيك إلا جلاد
لقد كان في فتح الرهاء دلاله ** على غير ما عند العلوج اعتقاده
و لم يذع عند القوم عنه ولاده *** يرجون ميلاد ابن مريم نصرة
7. Shihabuddine Mahmud on the liberation of 'Akka

الحمد لله ذات دولة الصلّب *** وعَرَّ بالترك دين المصطفى العربي

هذا الذي كانت الأمال لو طلبت *** رؤياه في النوم لاستحيت من الطلِب

8. Ibn al-Qaysarani on the Franks

A. "In the City of 'Azzaz."

أين عَزّي من روحتي بعزّز *** وجوازي على الْطُبْاء الجوازي

واليعافير ساحرات المغاففين*** رَّ علني كأنْ رَبّ المجتمع

بعيون كالمهبات المواضي *** وقدِّد مثل الفناء الهزاز

وبحور تغذّت بعِور *** ريفها ذُوب سكر الأُهْزاز

وجوهها لهَ نبُوّة *** غير أنَّ الإعجاز في الأعجاز

B. "The Frankish Waitress."

إن كان لابدً من السكر *** فمن يدي خمارة الجس

خمارة تُطلُع من نَحْرها *** خمارة بضاء من نَحْر

نَمسي فُلمسي الرّازح في راحها *** تهدى سنا الشمس إلى النَّبدر

حتى إذا دارت على شرّبها *** أحلاظها أغْنِت عن الخمار

ما زربتها إلاّ وبائنت يدي *** أولى من الزَّنار بالْخَصر

C. "On Maria."

إذا ما زربت ماريًا *** فما سعدي وماريا

فتاة كفَنْسب البأ *** نَبَينها السّبا طبيا

لِها وجه مسيحي *** ترى الميت به حيّا
D. "The Virgins of the Church."

كم بالكناس من مبتلدة *** مثل المها بزينة الخفر
من كل ساحة لصورتها *** لو ألمست سجدت لها الصور
قدِّسة في حبل عائتها *** طول وفي زيارتها قصر
غرس الحياة بصحن وجناتها *** ورداسقي أخصائي النظر

E. "Wish."

فلولا التخرج في مثني *** طلعت عينين في برسن
وقمت ألكن قداسين *** غير بليد ولا أخسر
ولم تكن فرسانها في الطعان *** بأشجع مثني ولا أفرس

F. "On Dir Sam'an."

يا هل سمعتم بدير سمعان *** وما به للعيون من عيان
أموَّل للصلاة هيكله *** أم منبت من منابت البان
في ليلة لم تزل بها حروفي *** تلفج نيرانهم بنيران
نار ونور كان إنهم *** في الليل ما أنس ابن عمران
حتى انجلى الصبح في كنادسها *** عن كل نشوة ونشوان
واصرفوا والفؤاد أفده *** مع كل نصران ونصران
يحبسن عبد الصليبة لو أن كا *** ن الذَّهر فيهم أعياد صلبان

Conclusion

Al-Tauhidi: On the Virtues of Nations

اشتركت الأمم في جميع الخيرات والشرور، وفي جميع المعاني والأمور، ثم استبدلت كل أمة بقولاب ليست لاختتها،
واستثراهم فيها كالأصول، واستبدادهم كالفروع، فيما استثروا المحمود والمئوم... إلا أنهم مع هذه الأصول
وقواعد تقاسموا أشياء بين الفطرة والتښيه، وبين الاختيار والتقدمة، فصار: الاستنباط والغوص والتنثر والبحث
والاستكشاف والاستقصاء والفكر ليونان، والوهم والخدس والطين والخليل والشعيدة للهند، والحبصة واللفظ والاستعارة والإيجاز والاتساع والسحر باللسان للعرب، والروية والأدب والسياسة والأمن والترتيب والرسوم والعبدية والربوبة للفرس، فأما الترك ففها الشجاعة.