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978-1-108-05583-3 - The History of India, as Told by its Own Historians:

The Muhammadan Period: Volume 1

Henry Miers Elliot Edited by John Dowson

Excerpt

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EARLY ARAB GEOGRAPHERS.

I.

SALSILATU-T TAWÁRÍKH

OF THE

MERCHANT SULAIMÁN,

WITH ADDITIONS BY

ABU' ZAIDU-L HASAN, OF SYRÁF.

THE earliest information which Europe derived from the writings of the Arabs upon India and the lands adjacent, was that which the Abbé Renaudot published, in the year 1718, under the title "*Anciennes Relations des Indes et de la Chine de deux voyageurs Mahométans qui y allerent dans le ix^e siècle de notre ère.*" By a curious coincidence the work so translated happened to be the earliest work extant of the Arab geographers relating to India. So novel and unexpected was the light thus thrown upon the farther East, that the translator was accused of all sorts of literary crimes. Some asserted his inaccuracy, and pointed out the discrepancies between the statements of his work and the accounts of the Jesuit missionaries in China. He had given no precise account of his manuscripts, hence some did not hesitate to accuse him of downright forgery. Time has shown the emptiness of most of these charges. From error he certainly was not exempt, but his faults and mistakes were those of a man who had to deal with a difficult subject, one which, even a century later, long deterred M. Reinaud from grappling with it.

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The MS. from which Renaudot made his translation was found by him in the library formed by the minister Colbert. This collection descended to the Comte de Seignelay; and subsequently merged into the Bibliotheque Royale. Here in 1764 the celebrated scholar Deguignes found the MS., and wrote more than one article upon it.¹

In the year 1811 M. Langlès printed the text, and promised a translation; but he had made no progress with the latter at the time of his death in 1824. The text so printed remained in the stores of the Imprimerie Royale until the year 1844, when M. Reinaud published it with a translation and notes, prefacing the whole with a Preliminary Discourse on the early Geography of the East, full of valuable information and criticism. The following observations upon the work are condensed from M. Reinaud's; the translation is also taken from his.²

The title which Renaudot gave to his book is not quite accurate. He speaks of two travellers, while there was only one who wrote an account of his own travels. The basis of the work and that which bears in the text the title of Book I, is the account written by a merchant named Sulaimán, who embarked on the Persian Gulf, and made several voyages to India and China. This bears the date 237 A.H. (851 A.D.). The second part of the work was written by Abú Zaidu-l Hasan, of Síráf, a connoisseur, who, although he never travelled in India and China, as he himself expressly states, made it his business to modify and complete the work of Sulaimán, by reading, and by questioning travellers to those countries. Mas'údí met this Abú Zaid at Basra, in 303 A.H. (916 A.D.), and acknowledges to have derived information from him, some of which he reproduced in

¹ Jour. des Sav., Novembre, 1764. Notices et Extraits des MSS., Tome i. See also Mem. de l'Acad. des Inscriptions, Tome xxxvii.; Jour. Asiatique, iv serie, T. viii., 161; Asiatic Journal, vol. xxxiii., p. 234.

² "Relations des Voyages faites par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chiue." 2 Tom., 24mo., Paris, 1845.

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his "Meadows of Gold,"¹ as a comparison of the following extracts will show. On the other hand, Abú Zaid was indebted to Mas'údí for some of his statements. He never mentions him by name, but refers to him as a "trustworthy person." The two works have much in common, but Mas'údí is generally more detailed. Abú Zaid finishes his work with these words: "Such is the most interesting matter that I have heard, among the many accounts to which maritime adventure has given birth. I have refrained from recording the false stories which sailors tell, and which the narrators themselves do not believe. A faithful account although short, is preferable to all. It is God who guides us in the right way."

EXTRACTS.

Observations on the Countries of India and China, and their Sovereigns.

The inhabitants of India and China agree that there are four great or principal kings in the world. They place the king of the Arabs (Khalif of Baghdád) at the head of these, for it is admitted without dispute that he is the greatest of kings. First in wealth, and in the splendour of his Court; but above all, as chief of that sublime religion which nothing excels. The king of China reckons himself next after the king of the Arabs. After him comes the king of the Greeks,² and lastly the Balhará, prince of the men who have their ears pierced.

The Balhará³ is the most eminent of the princes of India, and the Indians acknowledge his superiority. Every prince in India is master in his own state, but all pay homage to the supremacy of the Balhará. The representatives sent by the Balhará to other princes are received with most profound respect in order to show him honour. He gives regular pay to his troops, as the practice is among the Arabs. He has many horses and elephants, and immense wealth. The coins which pass in his country are the Tátariya dirhams,⁴ each

¹ [See Reinaud's Mem. sur l'Inde, p. 19, and Aboulféda, I., liii.]

² [Rúm.]

³ [See note A in Appendix.]

⁴ [These dirhams are mentioned by almost all these early writers. Idrisi says they were in use at Mansúra, and also current in the Malay Archipelago (Jaubert, p. 86

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of which weighs a dirham and a half of the coinage of the king. They are dated from the year in which the dynasty acquired the throne. They do not, like the Arabs, use the Hijra of the prophet, but date their eras from the beginning of their kings' reigns; and their kings live long, frequently reigning for fifty years. The inhabitants of the Balhará's country say that if their kings reign and live for a long time, it is solely in consequence of the favour shown to the Arabs. In fact, among all the kings there is no one to be found who is so partial to the Arabs as the Balhará; and his subjects follow his example.

Balhará is the title borne by all the kings of this dynasty. It is similar to the Cosroes (of the Persians), and is not a proper name. The kingdom of the Balhará commences on the sea side, at the country of Komkam [Konkan], on the tongue of land which stretches to China. The Balhará has around him several kings with whom he is at war, but whom he greatly excels. Among them is the king of Jurz.² This king maintains numerous forces, and no other Indian prince has so fine a cavalry. He is unfriendly to the Arabs, still he acknowledges that the king of the Arabs is the greatest of kings. Among the princes of India there is no greater foe of the Muhammadan faith than he. His territories form a tongue of land. He has great riches, and his camels and horses are numerous. Exchanges are carried on in his states with silver (and gold) in dust, and there are said to be mines (of these metals) in the country. There is no country in India more safe from robbers.

By the side of this kingdom lies that of Tá fak, which is but a

and 162). Reinaud suggests that the term is intended to represent "statère," and that the coins were tetrachmas. (Mem. sur l'Inde, p. 235; Rel. des Voy., ii., 16; Thomas's Prinsep, i., 86.) In the Paris edition of Mas'údi they are called "Táhiriya," and Prof. Cowell states that the same word is used in the Oxford MS. of Ibn Khurdádba. This reading gives weight to a suggestion made by Mr. Thomas, that these dirhams were coins of the Tahirides, who were reigning in Khurásán, and exercised authority over Sistán in the time of our author Sulaimán.]

¹ [This agrees with Ibn Khurdádba and Idrisi, but differs from Ibn Haukal; see *post.*]

² Ibn Khurdádba concurs in this reading, but Mas'údi has "Juzr," a near approach to "Guzerat." Reinaud suggests Kanauj as the seat of this monarchy (Rel. des Voy., xcv.), but Mas'údi places the Bauúra or Bodha there at the same period. The question is discussed in note A in Appendix.]

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small state. The women are white, and the most beautiful in India. The king lives at peace with his neighbours, because his soldiers are so few. He esteems the Arabs as highly as the Balhará does.

These three states border on a kingdom called Ruhmi,¹ which is at war with that of Jurz. The king is not held in very high estimation. He is at war with the Balhará as he is with the king of Jurz. His troops are more numerous than those of the Balhará, the king of Jurz, or the king of Táfak. It is said that when he goes out to battle he is followed by about 50,000 elephants. He takes the field only in winter, because elephants cannot endure thirst, and can only go out in the cold season. It is stated that there are from ten to fifteen thousand men in his army who are employed in fulling and washing cloths. There is a stuff made in his country which is not to be found elsewhere; so fine and delicate is this material that a dress made of it may be passed through a signet-ring. It is made of cotton, and we have seen a piece of it. Trade is carried on by means of kauris, which are the current money of the country. They have gold and silver in the country, aloes, and the stuff called *samara*, of which *madabs* are made. The striped *bushán* or *karkaddan* is found in this country. It is an animal which has a single horn in the middle of its forehead, and in this horn there is a figure like unto that of a man.² * * * * *

After this kingdom there is another situated in the interior of the country, away from the sea. It is called Káshbín. The people are white, and pierce their ears. They are handsome, and dwell in the wilds and mountains.

Afterwards comes a sea, on the shores of which there is a kingdom called Kiranj.³ Its king is poor and proud. He collects large

¹ [رهمي]. The position of these kingdoms is discussed in nota A in Appendix.]

² [Mas'údí gives these passages with a few verbal alterations. The translation of the Paris edition says, "They export from this country the hair called Samara, from which fly-whisks are made, with handles of ivory and silver. These are held over the heads of princes when they give audience. It is in this country that the animal called *an nishán*, 'the marked,' or vulgarly *karkaddan*, is found. It has one horn in the middle of its forehead." Maçoudi, vol. i., 385.]

³ [Mas'údí writes "Firanj," see *post*, page 25. Reinaud says "the coast of Coromandel;" perhaps it is the country of Kalinga on that coast.]

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quantities of amber, and is equally well provided with elephants' teeth. They eat pepper green in this country because it is scarce.

* * * *

When the king of Sarandib dies, his corpse is carried on a low carriage very near the ground, with the head so attached to the back of the vehicle that the occiput touches the ground, and the hair drags in the dust. A woman follows with a broom, who sweeps the dust on to the face of the corpse, and cries out, "O men, behold! This man yesterday was your king; he reigned over you and you obeyed his orders. See now to what he is brought; he has bid farewell to the world, and the angel of death has carried off his soul. Do not allow yourselves to be led astray by the pleasures of this life," and such like words. The ceremony lasts for three days, after which the body is burnt with sandal, camphor and saffron, and the ashes scattered to the winds.¹ All the Indians burn their dead. Sarandib is the last of the islands dependent on India. Sometimes when the corpse of a king is burnt, his wives cast themselves upon the pile and burn with it; but it is for them to choose whether they will do so or not.

In India there are persons who, in accordance with their profession, wander in the woods and mountains, and rarely communicate with the rest of mankind. Sometimes they have nothing to eat but herbs and the fruits of the forest. * * * * Some of them go about naked. Others stand naked with the face turned to the sun, having nothing on but a panther's skin. In my travels I saw a man in the position I have described; sixteen years afterwards I returned to that country and found him in the same posture. What astonished me was that he was not melted by the heat of the sun.

In all these kingdoms the nobility is considered to form but one family. Power resides in it alone. The princes name their own successors. It is the same with learned men and physicians. They form a distinct caste, and the profession never goes out of the caste.

The princes of India do not recognise the supremacy of any one

¹ [Mas'ûdî and Idrîsî gave the same account. The former says he had witnessed the ceremony himself. Idrîsî refers the custom to the kings of India. Maçoudî, Tome i., 69. Idrîsî, *post.*]

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sovereign. Each one is his own master. Still the Balhará has the title of “king of kings.”

The Chinese are men of pleasure; but the Indians condemn pleasure, and abstain from it. They do not take wine, nor do they take vinegar which is made of wine. This does not arise from religious scruples, but from their disdain of it. They say “The prince who drinks wine is no true king.” The Indians are surrounded by enemies, who war against them, and they say “How can a man who inebriates himself conduct the business of a kingdom?”

The Indians sometimes go to war for conquest, but the occasions are rare. I have never seen the people of one country submit to the authority of another, except in the case of that country which comes next to the country of pepper.¹ When a king subdues a neighbouring state, he places over it a man belonging to the family of the fallen prince, who carries on the government in the name of the conqueror. The inhabitants would not suffer it to be otherwise.

The principles of the religion of China were derived from India. The Chinese say that the Indians brought buddhas into the country, and that they have been the real masters in matters of religion. In both countries they believe in the metempsychosis, but there are some differences upon matters of detail.

The troops of the kings of India are numerous, but they do not receive pay. The king assembles them only in case of a religious war. They then come out, and maintain themselves without receiving anything from the king.²

Book II.—*The words of Abú Zaidu-l Hasan, of Siráf.*—I have carefully read this book, that is to say the first book, having resolved to examine it and to add to it such observations as I have gathered in the course of my reading about voyages and the kings of the maritime countries, and their peculiarities, collecting all the information I could upon those matters about which the author has not spoken.

* * * *

Among the stories³ which are current in the country (of Zábaj)

¹ [Malabar.]

² [It has been previously remarked that the Balhará paid his troops.]

³ [Mas'údi relates this story also. Maçoudi, Tome i., 62.]

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about ancient times, there is one concerning a king of Kumár,¹ the country which produces the aloes called kumárí. This country is not an island, but is situated (on the continent of India) on that side which faces the country of the Arabs. There is no kingdom which has a more dense population than Kumár. Here every one walks on foot. The inhabitants abstain from licentiousness, and from all sorts of wine. Nothing indecent is to be seen in this country. Kumár is in the direction of the kingdom of the Mahárája, of the island of Zábaj. There is about ten days' sailing between the two kingdoms, * * * * but when the wind is light the journey takes as much as twenty days. It is said that in years gone by the country of Kumár came into the hands of a young prince of very hasty temper. This prince was one day seated in his palace, situated on the banks of a river, the water of which was sweet like that of the Tigris of 'Irák. There was the distance of a day's journey between the palace and the sea. The wazír was near the king, and the conversation turned upon the empire of the Mahárája, of its splendour, the number of its subjects, and of the islands subordinate to it. All at once the king said to the wazír, "I have taken a fancy into my head which I should much like to gratify. * * * I should like to see before me the head of the king of Zábaj in a dish." * * * * These words passed from mouth to mouth, and so spread that they at length reached the ears of the Mahárája. * * * * That king ordered his wazír to have a thousand vessels of medium size prepared, with their engines of war, and to put on board of each vessel as many arms and soldiers as it could carry. * * * * When the preparations were ended, and everything was ready, the king went on board his fleet, and proceeded with his troops to Kumár. The king and his warriors all carried tooth-brushes, and every man cleaned his teeth several times a day. Each one carried his own brush on his person, and never parted from it, unless he entrusted it to his servant. The king of Kumár knew nothing of the impending danger until the fleet had entered the river which led to his capital, and the troops of the Mahárája had landed. The Mahárája thus took the king of Kumár unawares, and seized

¹ [The country about Cape Kumári, or Comorin.]

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upon his palace, for the officers had taken flight. He then made a proclamation assuring safety to every one, and seated himself on the throne of Kumar. He had the king brought forth, * * * and had his head cut off. The Mahárája then addressed the wazír, "I know that you have borne yourself like a true minister; receive now the recompense of your conduct. I know that you have given good advice to your master if he would but have heeded it. Seek out a man fit to occupy the throne, and seat him thereon instead of this foolish fellow." The Mahárája returned immediately to his country, and neither he nor any of his men touched anything belonging to the king of Kumár. * * * * Afterwards the Mahárája had the head washed and embalmed, then putting it in a vase, he sent it to the prince who then occupied the throne of Kumár, with a letter. * * * * When the news of these events spread among the kings of India and China the Mahárája rose greatly in their estimation. From this time the kings of Kumár, when they rise in the morning, always turn towards the country of Zábaj, and bow themselves to the ground as a mark of respect to the Mahárája.

In the states of the Balhará, and in other provinces of India, one may see men burn themselves on a pile. This arises from the faith of the Indians in the metempsychosis, a faith which is rooted in their hearts, and about which they have not the slightest doubt.

Some of the kings of India, when they ascend the throne, have a quantity of rice cooked and served on banana leaves. Attached to the king's person are three or four hundred companions, who have joined him of their own free will without compulsion. When the king has eaten some of the rice, he gives it to his companions. Each in his turn approaches, takes a small quantity and eats it. All those who so eat the rice are obliged, when the king dies, or is slain, to burn themselves to the very last man on the very day of the king's decease. This is a duty which admits of no delay, and not a vestige of these men ought to be left.¹

* * * * *

When a person, either woman or man, becomes old, and the senses are enfeebled, he begs some one of his family to throw him into the

¹ [Reinaudot and Reinaud refer this to the Nairs of Malabar.]

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fire, or to drown him in the water; so firmly are the Indians persuaded that they shall return to (life upon) the earth. In India they burn the dead.

The island of Sarandīb contains the mountain of precious stones, the pearl fisheries, etc, * * * * Precious stones, red, green, and yellow, are obtained from the mountain which rises over the island of Sarandīb. The greater part of the stones that are found are brought up by the tide. The water carries them into caverns and grottoes, and into the places where torrents descend. There are men appointed to watch the gathering of these stones on behalf of the king. Sometimes precious stones are dug from the depths of the earth, as in mines; these stones are accompanied by earthy matter, which has to be separated from them.

The kingdom of Sarandīb has a law, and its doctors assemble from time to time like as among us the men assemble who collect the traditions of the Prophet. The Indians go to the doctors, and write from their dictation the lives of the prophets, and the precepts of the law. There is in the island a great idol of pure gold, the size of which has been exaggerated by travellers. There are also temples which must have cost considerable sums of money. There is a numerous colony of Jews in Sarandīb, and people of other religions, especially Manicheans. The king allows each sect to follow its own religion.¹ Great licentiousness prevails in this country among the women as well as the men. Sometimes a newly arrived merchant will make advances to the daughter of a king, and she, with the knowledge of her father, will go to meet him in some woody place. The more serious of the merchants of Siráf avoid sending their ships here, especially if there are young men on board.

Among the Indians there are men who are devoted to religion and men of science, whom they call Brahmans. They have also their poets who live at the courts of their kings, astronomers, philosophers, diviners, and those who draw omens from the flight of crows, etc. Among them are diviners and jugglers, who perform most astonishing feats. These observations are especially applicable to Kanauj, a large country forming the empire of Jurz.

¹ [See Jaubert's Idrisi, p. 71.]