CHAPTER II

ARAB TRADE BEFORE THE COMING OF THE PORTUGUESE
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Reference of Arab trade with Malabar has already been made as a study facilitating the propagation and spread of Islam.

As referred in literature Arabia was an Island (Jazirat-al-Arab), surrounded by water on three sides. On the west bordered by the Red Sea and on the East by the Persian Gulf; and on the South by the Indian Ocean. Except some territories in the Southern Arabia, parts of Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine- 'the Fertile Crescent' were infertile. The communication among these areas overland was extremely difficult due to the hindering mountains and long stretching desert. Certainly this situation favoured the mariner life of the Arabs.

During the period of Sumerians the merchants from Makaran and Baluchistan were present in the Mesopotamian regions. Their trade was coast-winded rather than over the land. The Persian Gulf played a vital role in the early commerce between India and Babylonia. Indian cotton and drugs along with other spices were boarded on ships bound to Babylon. Between 2300 and 2000 BC, the Indus trade with West-Asian countries was established. As Stuart Piggot observed, "Cotton cloth is likely to have been an important article of commerce for the Harappan civilization."
As mentioned earlier, the presence of Malabar teakwood in the ruins of Ur of Chaldees suggests a ninth century tradition of trade by Indians particularly *Malabaris* (Keralites) prior to Christian era. The ancestors of Phoenicians had migrated to Southern Arabia, Hadramaunt around 1800 BC due to the belligerence by the successors of Joktan (Qahtan). They played an important intermediary role in Indo-Roman and Egyptian trade. They supplied precious stones, spices and frankincense to the Egyptians and Romans for their luxurious life and religious practices. The magnificent Sabaean Culture and civilization was born out of this enormous wealth accumulated through their intermediary role in the Western trade.

As truly observed by Agatharchides (C.113 BC) “There was no nation upon earth so wealthy as Gerrhaeans and Sabaeans, because of their situation in the centre of all the commerce which passes between Asia and Europe”.

European trade with India across the Mediterranean was also carried through intermediaries like Phoenicians, Arabs, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Jews, Armenians, Caucasians, Auxumites and Somalis. These intermediaries were reluctant to leave the trade with west to others. It is probable that they kept the secret of Monsoon and of oriental spices from the westerners. Also the presence of Parthians in Iran was posed as a blockade in the passage of Roman’s to India.

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10 S. Mqbool Ahmad, *op cit*, p.7.
12 Haripada Chakraborti, *op cit*, p.4.
Atleast from the middle of the Bronze Age 3000-1000 BC, these sailors were familiar with the Monsoon, though it said to have been ‘discovered’ by Hippalus in first century AD. Michael Pearson is of the view that even if we lack hard evidence of its use so early, certainly, the direct passage from the Red Sea mouth to India was being sailed in the second half of the 2nd century BC., or even in the 3rd century BC by Indian and Arab sailors. Warmington is of the opinion that, the use of Monsoon had been discovered early and then kept as secret by Arabs from the Greeks to continue their monopoly of Arabian commerce.

One of the earliest references on sales of Soloman’s (974-932 BC) ships to Ophir for spice trade can be seen in Old Testament. It Reads;

And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Eziongeber, which is beside Elloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom; and Hiram sent in the navy his servants, ship men that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from them gold ..... and brought it to King Solomon.

It again says; once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks.

And evidences of early Arab contacts with Southern India have already been made. We also have evidence for the settlement of Indian merchants in Socotra. The construction of Alexandria, the port-city in Northern Egypt became a boom to the

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15 Michael Pearson, *op cit*, p.51.
eastern trade of Arabians and Egyptians. Unequivocally this novelty of Alexander
further boosted the economic structure of Indians as well as Arabians\textsuperscript{20}.

In time, intermediaries of this lucrative oriental trade were replaced one after
another. Earlier the Sabeans of Southern Arabia were in high hand on Red Sea and
it’s commerce. They lost their power and prestige around 320 BC, when they were
subjugated by North Arabian tribes\textsuperscript{21}. The Minaens were also deprived from their
privilege of Eastern Commerce. In South-west Arabia, by the establishment of
Himyarites in 115 BC, they inherited the Eastern Commerce. The Nabateans from the
Petra in North Western parts of Arabia brought the areas of Suez, and Euphratese in
the east and up to the Red Sea, also downward in the south under their control. They
also extended their trade to the Persian Gulf and with Sabeans and Hadarmouth\textsuperscript{22}.

The Auxumites of Swahili coast based from Aulia port in the Red Sea
practiced their trade with Gujrat. Probably their presence in Red Sea denied the
chance of Indians beyond South East Arabia and eastern coasts of Africa\textsuperscript{23}. The
thriving Roman trade with Malabar is attested by the presence of Roman coins in
South India\textsuperscript{24}. Pliny (69-79 AD) assessed the Roman trade with India at 125,000,000
dinar and Arabian and Chinese trade at 12,500,00 dinari\textsuperscript{25}. It demonstrates the
heyday of Roman trade with India. It was at this time that Roman statesmen began to

\textsuperscript{19} S. Maqbool Ahamed, \textit{op cit.}, p 79
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
\textsuperscript{22} Warmington, \textit{op cit.} p.11
\textsuperscript{24} K.M. Panikkar, \textit{op cit.}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{25} Warmington, \textit{op cit.}, p 274.
exchange precious metals for luxurious items like muslin and spices. Myus Hormuz and Bernice were the leading Egyptian trade ports.\footnote{Maqbool Ahmad, \textit{op cit}, p 79}

The ships from Alexandria to Malabar were taken through the Nile to Coptus. From there the merchandise were transported overland to Myus Hormuz or Berniece. From Berniece using large ships the goods were taken to Ocelis (Cane 30 days sail from Berneice). And then they cut across the sea to Muziris (Cranganore)\footnote{Hourani inaccurately identified Muziris with Mysore, \textit{op cit} p 29 It also known as ‘Muyirikkodu’ in Kerala}. As proposed by Pliny the voyage from Ocelis to Muziris consumed 40 days\footnote{G F Hourani, \textit{op cit} p 29}. The ships bound to Baryagaza were anchored at the cape of Syagrus before crossing the ocean. They exchanged wine, bronze, tin, gold and manufactured articles against silk, cotton, fine cloths from North India; and jewels, precious stones, pepper and other spices from South India\footnote{Ibid p 35}. The Greeks enjoyed a leading position in eastern parts of Roman Empire, and they were not quite familiar with a number of Markets in South Arabia, East Africa, Ceylon, Bay of Bengal, Malay Peninsula, Southern India and the mouth of Ganges\footnote{Warmington, \textit{op cit}, p 64 Yazdani, (ed.,) \textit{Early History of Deccan}, London, 1960, p.788.}.

On the death of Marcus Aurilius in 180 AD, the Roman shipping in the Indian Ocean began to decline\footnote{S Maqbool Ahamad, \textit{op cit} p 79}. Like wise under the weak Ptolemic rulers, the Egyptian trade with India faced a setback\footnote{Ibid p 79}. The Roman economic instability weakened the
Western trade of India. The complete absence of Roman coins in India after Caracalla (212-217 AD) corroborates the end of the Roman Indian commerce.  

Petra and Muza were the two market towns in the Arabian Peninsula. Ports like Cana and Mocha on the Red Sea were the centers of import and export. Apologus (Ubullah) on the Euphrates and Charax Spasini (Muhammad) on the shat-al-'Arab were the important ports in the Persian Gulf. These ports exported clothes, wine, pearls, dates, gold and slaves to Baryagaza and to other important ports like Barbaricum (Karachi), Muziris (Cranganore) and Nelcynda (Kottayam) on South West coast; to Camara (Kaveripattam), Poduca (Pondicheri) and Sopatma (Markanam) on the South East and to Ganges on the delta of Ganges. The Arabian ports imported large quantities of pepper, malabathrum and other aromatics, pearls and silk from Muziris and Nelcynda; copper, sandalwood, teakwood, blackwood and ebony from Baryagaza. Probably these were obtained at Baryagaza from Malabar and South Eastern ports of India for reshipment to Arabian ports.  

The period between 3 to 7 centuries of Christian era witnessed important political changes in the Arab world. It is significant that by the 3rd century AD the monopoly of Greo-Roman trade came to an end. By the 7th century AD Islam became a mighty political force in Arab world. In Iran around 225 AD, the Sasanian rule was established under Ardashir Papakan, who built his imperial capital Ctesiphon or Madain on the loft bank of Tigris. The Iranians (Mazdeans) surpassed the Arabs in

35 S. Maqbool Ahamad, *op cit*, p.80.  
37 Ibid  
38 S. Maqbool Ahamad, *op cit*, p.80.  
prosperity and splendor and their capital Ctesiphon enjoyed the status of premier entrepot of eastern trade till the emergence of Islam\textsuperscript{40}.

As commented, "The days indeed, had come when the Arabian element was to be sought in the Persian trade, and not the Persian element in the Arabian", says Hadi Hasan\textsuperscript{41}. Even if the Arabs were driven out from the Persian Gulf, their dominance in Indian Ocean has been attested by Fa-hian. During his visit to Ceylon 413/414 AD, he noticed that "the houses of Sa-poh (Sabean) merchants are very beautifully adorned"\textsuperscript{42} and scholars maintained difference of opinion on the Persian conquest of Ceylon\textsuperscript{43}. Wherewith, it can be safely assumed that the Arabs and Persians were active as intermediaries in Indo-European trade. Ceylon became the entrepot for maritime commerce between China and the Persians\textsuperscript{44}.

Hourani mentions the probability of Persian ship sailing from Ubullah to China, in pre-Islamic period; and the possibility of the presence of Chinese ships in Persian Gulf\textsuperscript{45}. He supplemented that, the Arabs in 6\textsuperscript{th} century played no important role on the high seas. The reason as suggested is, it was due to the general economic decline of South Arabia in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century on one side, and the political subjugation of Hymayar by non-Arab powers which lasted till the advent of Islam on the other\textsuperscript{46}.  

\textsuperscript{40} ibid
\textsuperscript{41} ibid
\textsuperscript{43} For a detailed discussion see Hadi Hasan, \textit{op cit}, pp.65-68
\textsuperscript{44} G.F. Hourani, \textit{op cit} pp 39-40.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{ibid}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{ibid}, p.43
Himyarite ruler of Yaman, Dhu Nuwas after his conversion to Judaism began to maltreat the Christians of Najran. This act of Dhu Nuwas invited the hostility of the Abyssinian ruler. Consequently, the Himyarites were conquered by Ela Atzbeha, a Christian king of Auxum (Abyssinia) in 524/25 AD. Their domination on Hymayar had ceased when the Sassanian ruler Khusraw Nurshirwan had sent his general Wahiriz with 800 released prisoners after the request made from Himyarites.

Wahiriz attacked the Abyssinian King Masruk, who was the son of Abraha, the first Abyssinian Governor of Yemen, and defeated him between C.570-579 AD. Infact, at first the Himayarite ruled as a vassal of the Persians. Later due to their inability to protect Abyssinians (Auxumites), the Sasanian Governors ruled it until the Muslim conquest in 628 AD. The double impact of the untimely absence of Himyarites is reflected in the Sasanian high-handedness on the Arabian Sea. Also it resulted in a set back of the Indo-Arab trade. Above all, it transferred the longstanding littoral traffic between India and Egypt in to the hands of Persia.

Naturally, Indian harbors of Konkan, Malabar and Coromondal coasts were frequented by the Persian navigators and ships and some even settled on these coasts. Prior to these Persian settlements, Indian coasts were largely settled by Arab colonies. With the advent of Islam the settlements, especially on the Indian coasts of Malabar and Ceylon became larger and enormous. Philological evidence from Malabar

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47 Hadi Hasan, *op cit.*, pp.71-77, S. Maqbool Ahmad *op cit.*, p.81
48 Precopius, Book I, Chapter 20, Section 1-2, cf Hourani, p.43.
50 Hadi Hasan, *op cit.*, p.76.
51 S. Sulaiman Nadwi, *Muslim Colonies in India before the Muslim Conquest*, IC, July 1934, pp.144-46.
suggests the intimate trade relations of Persians with South India. Among the Mappila Muslims of Malabar, words like Bank⁴, Mulla⁵, Shirini⁵, Sabeena⁶, Nishan Kallu⁶ etc. substantially prove the Persian influence⁵².

We also have the evidence of Arabian settlement at Canton by 300 AD⁵³. What it undoubtedly proves is that, in the West Asian Maritime activity the Arab had a significant role, though the Persians had held an upperhand for almost a period of 100 years till the rise of Islam.

As Tabari reported Khusraue Parwiz, Iranian ruler received an ambassador from Indian King Pulikeshin II in the year of 625-626 AD⁴. Though the literatures are insufficient to prove a return embassy from Kusraw Purvez, the fresco painting in the cave I at Ajanta is identified as the representation of the aforesaid return embassy. This painting corroborates the continuity of Persian maritime intercourse with south India in the second half of the 7th century AD⁵⁵.

With the pioneering author of Persian navigation, we can make a conclusion that “it would be grave error to estimate Sasanian navigation without acknowledging the share of the Arab merchants who had made the Indian Ocean safe and familiar by climbing up on the climbing waves annually for a thousand years”⁵⁶.

In the 6th century AD spices and other aromatics trade was controlled by Abyssinians and probably shared by Southern Arabians, despite the silk trade was

⁵² Kunhali.V., Sufism in Kerala, op cit., p.39, a - Call for Prayers, b - the man who teaches Quran, c-sweet dishes, d - pious songs sung in nights, e-the stones placed at the head or front of a grave.
⁵⁵ Hadi Hasan, op cit., p.89.
⁵⁶ Ibid., p.85
managed by Persians and other Gulf Arabs. During this period Indian and Chinese commodities were passed through Iran while we notice the absence of Chinese silk in Alexandria. Even if the Romans tried to get silks through the Abyssinians in 531 AD, they failed in it due to the superiority of Persian Merchants in Indian markets.

Tibbets is of the view that Arab or Arabised Persian element was prominent in Egypt in the markets of the Red Sea and South Arabia. Regular sailing of Arab ships to and from India was thus established by the evidences of Greek and Latin authority.

Arab Trade During 7th and 10th Century

Arab trade during the period between 7th and 10th century may be termed as 'Golden Age'. The authentic Islamic sources provide plenty of evidences for the navigational capacity of the Arabs and it implies the benevolence of God towards mankind.

Surly in the creation of the heavens and the Earth; in the alteration of the night and the day; in the sailing of ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind… (Here) Indeed are signs for a people that are wise.

Quran: 2:164

It is He Who has made the sea subject (to you), that ye may eat thereof flesh, that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract therefrom ornaments to wear; and thou seest the ships therein that plough the

57 Christian Topography, cf Simkin op cit, p.65.
58 G.F. Hourani, op cit, p.42.
waves, that ye may seek (thus) of the boundy of Allah and that ye may be grateful.

Quran: 16:14

The sayings of Prophet (Hadith) also ascribe to a truthful merchant

The Truthful, honest merchant is (on a level with or in the company of) Prophets and the Truthful ones and the Martyrs⁶¹.

In the age of Prophet we have evidences of navigation against the notion that they failed to pay attention towards maritime activities⁶². Due to the severe persecution by Qureish on Prophet and his followers, a group of eleven men and four women left Mecca and shifted to Abyssinia. They were followed by the Qureish but failed to get back them from Abyssinia⁶³.

During the migration of Prophet to Madina, there he was joined by some Muslims from Abyssinia. In 6⁶ AH Prophet sent Amr, son of Omayya Damri with a letter of congratulation to the ruler of Abyssinia. The return embassy of sixty people unfortunately failed to reach the Prophet after their ship sank on its way⁶⁴.

Another instance shows that, a ship boarded by fifty two new converts of Ash'ar tribe sailed from Yemen to Medina. However, they were mislead by strong wind and reached at Abyssinia, where they were received by Muslims who had earlier migrated from Mecca. Eventually, they jointly came to Medina when the battle of Kheibar was being fought in 7 AH. This group of people are known as ‘the people of the ship’⁶⁵.

⁶¹ Ibn Majah: Kitab-al-Taajir, Hadeth No. 2130.
⁶² Hadi Hasan, op cit, pp.95-96
Under the Prophet’s rule Islam was confined to the land of Arabia, even though during the two years rule of Abu Bakr, Iraq and Syria came under its sway. Further expansion towards Persia and Persian Gulf on the one side, and Palestine, Egypt and Alexandria on the other, was made during the period of Caliph Umar\(^6\).

The Arabs of Hijaz were the chief merchants of the incense route, which passed from the Syria in the north to the Yemen in the southern Arabia\(^7\). Mecca was their centre of commercial activities and as the *Qureish* were the custodians of *Ka'aba* also held an upper hand in its trade. The annual trade conducted in Mecca and the neighbouring towns facilitated to flourish their trade\(^8\).

They brought Indian and other eastern merchandise like spices, slaves and ivory at Aden in Yemen and supplied to Mecca and other towns. Also they carried some share to the Mediterranean and these commodities fetched 100 percent profit. Meanwhile they engaged in maritime trade and performed the intermediary role between Egyptians and the Abyssinians from their port at Jeddah\(^9\).

The notion that *Caliph* Umar had prohibited sea-ventures is unlikely to be correct. At the same time we have enough circumstantial evidences to refute the argument. As he had constructed of a canal from River Nile to the Red Sea with sixty-nine miles in length. It was constructed mainly to import corn from Egypt at the time of famine, which ravaged Arabia in 18 AH. *Caliph* Umar brought 69000 *ardabs* corns boarded in 20 ships through this canal to the port of Jar near Medina. This route

\(^{66}\) *Ibid*


\(^{68}\) Maqbool Ahamad, *op cit.*, p.81.

\(^{69}\) *Ibid*
was the principal way of maritime trade between Arabia and Egypt and it benefited till the time of Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz 100 AH\textsuperscript{70}.

Jar was an important port of this period, located on the Arabian coast of the Red Sea. The conquest of Egypt and Syria added its importance. Cargoes from Abyssinia, Egypt, Aden, India and China called here and it highly flourished\textsuperscript{71}. Ubalah was another important port in Persian Gulf, located near Basara. Arab had occupied it in 14 AH. Earlier under the Persians it was a port of commercial importance, now it became famous as a military cantonment till the onslaught of Abyssinians in 256 AH\textsuperscript{72}.

Basara was another important port built at the head of the Persian Gulf in the rule of Umar in 14AH/635 AD\textsuperscript{73}.

The real age of Arab navigation began with the rule of the third Caliph Usman. Abdulla Ibn Qais Harithi was the first Arab Admiral. From 28 AH onwards he conducted 50 naval raids against the Romans. And the Mediterranean was almost under the control of the Arabs\textsuperscript{74}. During this period naval raids were made on Thana in 636 AD by the vicegerent of Bahrain, Hakam, brother of Usman. Debal and Broach were also attacked in the same period\textsuperscript{75}.

\textsuperscript{70} S Sulaiman Nadwi, \textit{Arab Navigation in IC}, Vol 15, Jan 1941, pp 445-6, Due to the negligence under the successors of Umar Ibn Abdul Azz, it had lost its importance and finally Caliph Mansur closed it after political consideration, though it was renovated and utilised in later periods.

\textsuperscript{71} Mujma-ul-Buldan, cited by S Sulaiman Nadwi, \textit{op cit.}, p 446

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Tariikh-e-Basarah}, Azzami P H (Baghdad Edition) cf, Sulaiman Nadwi, \textit{Arab Navigation, op cit.}, p 446-47, This port completely destroyed in the battle of Zangyan.

\textsuperscript{73} Aminesh Roy, \textit{Maritime India Ports and Shipping}, Delhi, 1993, p 20

\textsuperscript{74} Taban, Events of 28 AH, cf, S Sulaiman Nadwi, \textit{op cit.}, p 447

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Futuh-ul-Buldan}, p 431 cf, Sulaiman Nadwi, pp 447-48
The important article of import from India along with other mercantile to the Arabian port Basara was sword called *Al Muhammad* (Mentioned in Pre-Islamic Poems). They also imported iron from India to Yemen and manufactured swords and other weapons. Indian swords were held in high esteem for its shining and sharpness\(^{76}\). The high appreciation of Indian goods in Arabia can be summarised from the words of a sailor,

"Bah'rah a durr wa Jabalha yaqut

*Wa shajarha 'itr*

('Its rivers are pearls and its mountains rubies, its trees perfumes') which he made in reply to a question aroused by Caliph Umar on India.\(^{77}\) Another important port in Persian Gulf was Syraf. Its grandeur in the 4\(^{th}\) century AH is given by Bashari Maqdisi:

I have not seen more handsome buildings anywhere in the Islamic world. They are made of bricks and of wood of *sal* tree and they are very high. In many cases one building has cost a hundred thousand dhirhams.\(^{78}\)

In the Persian Gulf, an Island Qeys, (Keysh) 140 Kms away from Syraf, was under Oman diminished in its importance. Indian commerce brought it ahead in


\(^{77}\) Quoted by S. Sulaiman Nadwi, *Commercial Relations of India with Arabia*, IC, Vol.7, 1933, p.284.

\(^{78}\) Situated in Banatar Tahir 27°38' N Latitude, It was destroyed by an earthquake in 977 AD S Maqbool Ahamad, *Commercial Relations of India with Arabia*, op cit, p.146.

\(^{79}\) Ahsanul-Taqasim (Leiden), p 462 quoted by S Sulaiman Nadwi, *Commercial Relations of India with Arabia*, op cit, p 285
maritime commerce. All western bound ships anchored here. It dominated till the end of 13th century.

Yaqut observes,

The Arab ruler of this little Island is held in great esteem by the Indian Rajas, and he has in his possession plenty of ships and boats.\(^{80}\)

Qazwini (686 AD) observed,

Qeys is the emporium of Indian commerce and is the harbour for Indian ships. Every nice thing found in India brought here.\(^{81}\)

Under the Umayyads (660-749) the borders of Arab Empire extended from Spain to Sind. Sind was annexed by Muhammed Ibn Qasim in 711/12, which further encouraged over land trade with India.\(^{82}\) Also the spread of Islam boosted the urbanisation in strategic areas of the empire.\(^{83}\)

The Urbanisation and the probable profits which can be attained by supplying eastern luxuries and essentials to the increasing population motivated the Arabs to voyage from Persian Gulf to Canton, touching Kawlam Mali in Malabar.\(^{84}\)

The formation of Abbasid dynasty in 750 AD added a new fillip to the Arab trade with India. Also the foundation of Baghdad by Caliph Abu Ja’far al Mansoor and the subsequent shift of capital from Syrian Damascus to Baghdad in 762 AD had


\(^{82}\) Maqbool Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, op cit., p.82.

\(^{83}\) Patricia Risso, op cit., p.14.

\(^{84}\) G.F Hourani, op cit., pp. 61-62; Hadi Hasan, op cit., pp. 102-103
far reaching effect on Indo Arab trade. Now for the first time, the capital of Islamic Empire benefited from direct access to the Arabian Sea through the waters of Tigris and Euphrates which flowed to the Persian Gulf. Though the old ports like Ubula, Daryan and Sohar continued, Basara attained predominance and valued as Liverpool of the Arabs, and it became the entrepot of East and West. Though in the eight century the long distance trade with China was dominated by Persians, soon after the Arabs over powered them. This long and risky trade resulted in mutual economic stability and prosperity to the Abbasid Arabia, and Tang China (618-907).

The Arabs brought spices and other Luxuries from India, China, Egypt and Africa and other countries to Basara and supplied them to the Arabian towns. The purchasing capacity of the ruling middle class was very high. This mobilisation of wide consuming class enormously contributed to the thriving Middle Eastern trade. At the same time they were busy in their trade with western countries. They carried their cargoes by caravan to Levant and reshipped to the Europe. However, their income from trade with India and China was much higher than of Mediterranean trade.

Merchant Sulaiman (3AH/849 AD) provided the eastern commercial route of Arabs.

All the wares and commodities came from Basara and Oman to Seyraf and here they are loaded on ships. The traders take drinking water with

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85 G.E. Hourani, *op cit*, p.71, Patricia Risso, *op cit*, p.15
86 Maqbool Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, *op cit*, p.82.
88 Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, *op cit*, pp 88-89.
89 S. Maqbool Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, *op cit*, p.83.
90 S. Sulaiman Nadwi, *Commercial Relations of India with Arabia*, *op cit*, p. 287.
them and then they sail off. Then they anchor down at Maskat\textsuperscript{91} and here again they take drinking water with them. The ships leave Maskat for India and reach Kolam Mali in a month from whence the ships bound for China sail off to China\textsuperscript{92}

In this period the important ports of Arab trade in India were Bombay, Broach, Thana, Sindapur, Quilon on the West Coast, Ballin Kanja (Kancheepuram), Samandar, (Probably Sounargam) on the east coast\textsuperscript{93}. As already noticed the role of south India, especially Malabar coastal emporiums were the main centres of Arab trade\textsuperscript{94}. The rulers of the land warmly welcomed the Arab traders and Arab settlements emerged in these coastal areas\textsuperscript{95}. Thus accounts of Arab geographers and travellers contain profuse flattering on the South Indian rulers. This further attests the cordiality in relation between the Arab merchants and Indian rulers.

The Arab settlement in the coastal regions of Southern India resulted in the emergence of new social groups like Nawayats, on the Konkan and Labbaís in Tamil areas. The more powerful group among them was Mappilas on the Malabar Coast, of whom discussion have already been made. With the foundation of Baghdad (754), the Abbasid Caliph Al Mansur, established \textit{Baith-ul-Hikmah}. It acted as a bureau of translation and a centre of higher learning and had an observatory attached to it. Here all the ancient lore of knowledge from Greek, Latin, Persian, Coptic and Sanskrit works were translated into Arabic. In about hundred years the Arabs studied and

\textsuperscript{91} Masudi also mentioned the importance of Maskat, ‘here ships bounded to Malabar restored their provisions, water and Mutton cited by Rita Rose De Meglio \textit{Arab trade with Indonesia and Malay Peninsula from the 8\textsuperscript{th}-16\textsuperscript{th} century} in D S Richards (ed.) \textit{Islam and Trade in Asia}, Oxford, 1970. p 106
\textsuperscript{92} Quoted by S. Sulaiman Nadwi, \textit{Commercial Relations of India with Arabia}, op cit , p 287
\textsuperscript{93} S Maqbool Ahmad, \textit{Indo-Arab Relations}, op cit , p 83
\textsuperscript{94} Michael Pearson, \textit{op cit} , p 88
\textsuperscript{95} S M H Nainar , \textit{Arab Geographers Knowledge of south India}, \textit{op cit} , pp 162-164
assimilated these treasures of knowledge. Then originated the real Arab sciences. As all the seats of ancient civilisation and knowledge except China from Europe to India, were under their banner they were the heirs of culture, civilisation and knowledge.

Being the subjects of the most powerful king on earth (Abbasid Caliph) the Arabs moved elegantly and proudly commanding great wealth. The Arab dress and fashions were even emulated in Spain by the younger generation, soon after the conquest, just as the European dress and ways of life were followed by in colonies as marks of superior culture. In short the Arabs moved in the world in medieval times as Europeans moved in their colonies in 18th and 19th centuries. Thus the cosmopolitan character of Islam attracted large number of people in different parts of the world. Moreover, the Arabs were joined by a large number of local converts in the various realms of trade\(^\text{96}\).

With their navigational techniques and nautical expertise, the Arabs were established in Korea and Canton by the second half of the 9th century\(^\text{97}\). A revolt and anarchic situation in 878 AD put on check to the Perso-Arab commercial activities in China. Since then they sailed up to Kalabbar (Kedah) where Perso-Arab traders exchanged their goods\(^\text{98}\).

The early 10th century witnessed the emergence of Fatimids in North Africa. Building a strong navy they conquered Egypt in 969 AD. They established a new capital Qahira (Cairo) near old Fustat\(^\text{99}\). The establishment of Cairo partly diverted the Persian Gulf trade to the Red Sea route. Now the Egyptian and other harbours of

\[^{96}\text{Michael Pearson, op cit, p.95.}\]
\[^{97}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{98}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{99}\text{Patricia Risso, op cit, p.22.}\]
Arabian Peninsula attained importance\textsuperscript{100}. The stiff competition in Mediterranean pushed the Fatimids to dive into the South-Eastern waters of Indian Ocean and they benefited from the existing Ismailite settlement in Gujarat and Sind\textsuperscript{101}.

Ships from the Levant, Byzantine Empire and southern Italy sailed to Cairo. It acted as an emporium for mercantile from Mecca, Medina, Sana, Aden, Oman, Shihr, India, Ceylon, China and many other countries till the fall of Fatimids in 1171 AD\textsuperscript{102}. Excavation at Fustat shows the larger presence of Chinese ceramics for the period between 1000-1300 AD. Evidently, it attests to the shift of eastward trade from Persian Gulf to the Red Sea\textsuperscript{103}.

In 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries Jews played an important role in eastern trade. Ibn Kurdadhibh (825-911) mentions that the Jews called Radhnites brought merchandise from Western Europe to near east and from China and India to Mediterranean. They engaged in luxury trade but not of considerable volume, since they belonged neither to the Christian nor to the Muslim world\textsuperscript{104}.

The great Fatimid Sultan Salahuddin and his nephew Taqi-ul-din Umar expelled the Jews merchants from the emporiums of the Red Sea. Thus the Arabs retained the upper hand on the lucrative Arabian Sea trade. Now a new merchant guild called \textit{Karimi} was in operation. Sultan Taqi-ul-din Umar opened a transaction house known as \textit{Funduk-al-Karim} at Fustat to facilitate the commerce of Karimi

\textsuperscript{100} Bernard Lewis, \textit{Arabs in History}, London, 1954,p.27.
\textsuperscript{101} Patricia Risso. \textit{op.cit.}, p.22.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibn Khurdadhbih, cited by Ashtor Elliahu, \textit{op.cit.}, p.112
merchants. From the study of Geniza records, SD Goitein observed that during 11th and 12th centuries Karimi merchants were active between Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. They engaged in mercantile activities in Malabar Coast between 1132-49 AD. Another Muslim merchant, Abdul Qasim Ramishti was very wealthy and his ships sailed as far as China. It is not an exaggeration to state that, the silver plates used by his family weighed about one tonne.

In this period, Aleppo with its chief port Scandarone acted as the main entrepot of East and the West. Different nationalities like Persians, Indians, Armenians and Egyptians brought various mercantile to the emporium and exchanged each other.

Geniza records further throw light up on the long voyages of Tunisian, Moroccan Spanish and Sicilian Muslim merchants to India. On the other hand in the Middle Eastern trade of 11th and 12th centuries merchants from western coast of India were actively engaged.

In February 1258, the Mongols under Halagu stormed Baghdad. Abbasid Caliph al Mustaqim was assassinated and the Caliphate was abolished. Collapse of Baghdad fatally affected the Persian Gulf trade. It had lost its importance. Red Sea

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106 S D Goitein, cited from his article From Mediterranean to India, Document on the Trade to India South Arabia and East Africa from 11th at 12th Century in *SPECTULAM*, Cambridge, April 1954, JESHO (1), 1958, p.176.
107 S.D. Goitein, From Aden to India, Specimens of the Correspondence of Indian Traders of the Twelfth Century in Ranabir Chakraborti (ed,) *Trade in Early India, OUP*, 2001, pp.417-34.
109 JESHO, 1958 (1) p. 183.
110 S D Goitein, Study in Islamic History and Institutions, Leiden, 1966, p.50.
111 JESHO, 1958 (1) p. 183.
and Cairo attained dominance under the Mamluks of Egypt. Aden revived its eastern trade with newly emerged Malabar entrepot, Calicut.\textsuperscript{112}

After the Fatimids, the Mamluk Sultans like Baybar (1260-77), Qalawun (1279-90) and Nasir Muhammed favoured and facilitated the Egyptian and subsequently the Yemeni trade and commercial activities.\textsuperscript{113}

At the same, active presence of Merchants from Yemen, India, Indo-China and China in Egypt had been clearly attested by the decision taken by Qalawun in 1288 AD. Who directed to issue passports to Egyptian merchants who travelled to India and Far East, and they were ordered to distribute it to any merchants of the aforesaid countries if they were interested to visit Egypt.\textsuperscript{114}

Earlier the traders from Persian Gulf region directly sailed to Quilon, which was the entrepot of westward and eastward trade. Calicut attained more importance due to the domination of Cairo merchants and Persian Gulf trade with India.\textsuperscript{115} Egyptian Karimi merchants expelled Chinese merchants from Calicut port. The recent excavations show that Quilon (Quilandy, 20 miles north of Calicut, where Vasco-da-Gama landed.) was a Chinese centre and the last port on the western coast visited by Chinese ships during the period of Ibn Battuta.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112} Ashin Das Gupta, \textit{Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800}, Delhi, 1967, p.5; Bernard Lewis, \textit{op.cit.}, p.154.

\textsuperscript{113} Rita, Rose De Meglio, \textit{op.cit.}, p.107.


\textsuperscript{115} Ashin Das Gupta, \textit{op.cit.}, p.5.

\textsuperscript{116} Recent excavations conducted by M.R. Ragavavariar and Subharayalu; Also see Henry Yule (ed.,) \textit{Book of Ser Macro Polo}, 11, p.391, fn.5.
Describing the trade scenario in Indian Ocean prior to the appearance of Portuguese, Michael Pearson observed,

The trade of Indian Ocean till 15th century was dominated by Muslims; The Ocean was a 'Muslim Lake', it has much truth in this. It was not a matter of wonder that Islam had spread from the heartland of Red Sea (Mecca) all around the Indian Ocean over water117.

117 The Indian Ocean, op.cit., p.95.