

Networks of Trade and Faith in the Indian Ocean: A Study on the Muslims of Medieval Malabar

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MOHAMMED SHAMEEM. K. K



Centre for Historical Studies

School of Social Sciences

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

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DECLARATION

I, MOHAMMED SHAMEEM. K. K, hereby declare that the dissertation titled "Networks of Trade and Faith in the Indian Ocean: A Study on the Muslims of Medieval Malabar" submitted by me in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university.


Mohammed Shameem. K. K

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Prof. Pius Malekandathil

(Supervisor)


Dr. Pius Malekandathil
Professor
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, (India)

Prof. Sucheta Mahajan

(Chairperson)


CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, INDIA

To my parents

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Introduction

The absence of apparent references to the aspects of maritime history in our literary sources had led historians for long to concentrate their attention on the history of inland or terrestrial spaces at the cost of maritime spaces. Recently, however, the trend is changing remarkably as the importance of the various maritime circuits and their role in shaping the consciousness of maritime spaces have begun to be realized in the light of diverse genres of source materials. Sea has always been a connecting force, and as such, the long centuries before nationalistic feelings would bring chains of territorial constraints had witnessed people living in different and distant maritime spaces getting connected with each other by making use of seas. Due to the consistent voyage of people from place to place with distinct motives, many coastal and trans-oceanic networks were created with or without their knowledge.¹

The Indian Ocean was one of the most active spaces with lots of back and forth of people from its several rims. The inter-connected nature of the ocean was such that events happening at its one end would have reflections at the other end. In the centuries-long maritime history of the ocean, Malabar Coast on the south-western side of the Indian subcontinent had a unique position. Because of its physical centrality in the Indian Ocean, the coast was a natural point of halting for the ships which sailed the western and eastern segments of the ocean in accordance with the nature of the monsoon winds. Besides, Malabar acted also as a promoter of trade by supplying many of the sought-after commodities particularly spices and by being a market for products from outside, not least metallic money. These factors, along with the enthusiasm of its political elites, paved the way for the emergence of many maritime nodal points along the coast of Malabar at different points of time. Such nodal points or ports, however, were not of equal importance as far as the economy of the Malabar region was concerned since there was often hierarchization or gradation among the ports developed as a part of the various

¹ For a conceptual understanding of maritime history in the context of the Indian Ocean see Michael Pearson, *Indian Ocean*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003.

strategies of the political rulers.² There were merchant groups of diverse geographical and religious origins who happened to be active on the ports of Malabar for conducting commerce and who in turn were very much connected to the larger networks and circuits in the Indian Ocean. As the natural seasonality of the monsoon wind system shaped the travelling schedule and the sailing routes of these mercantile communities, there developed many diasporas of merchants and sailors on the coast. With the passage of time, such diasporas found converts or produced off brings from among the indigenous people who would help the former in various roles of trade, or themselves would establish their own webs of trade networks. Due to its ever-increasing sea-orientation realized through the presence of the outward-looking mercantile communities and the thalassocratic-type polities, the Malabar Coast stood remarkably distinct in many ways from its counterparts in the agrarian belts of the Indian subcontinent.

The present study is an attempt to understand the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast during the medieval period. As the available sources testify, expatriate Muslim merchants were present in Malabar from the beginning of their oceanic voyage unto the early sixteenth century or even after that, and these merchants were carrying various types of commodities from and to Malabar by making use of the different kinds of networks in the western and eastern segments of the Indian Ocean. The study discerns the major trade routes which were utilized by the Muslim merchants in Malabar in their conduct of trade with the various ports on the rims of the ocean. It asks if there were continuities and ruptures in the operation of the commercial networks and what the reasons could be for the fluctuating nature of trade through such networks. While doing so, it strives also to historically locate the major ports on the Malabar Coast which had served as maritime nodal points or outlets for the Muslim merchants and to comprehend the possible gradation and competition among such ports over time. The study, besides, addresses some other issues which the historians dealing with the trade-related aspects of the maritime history have been wrestling with: the

² See Pius Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity and the Changing Port-Hierarchy of Kerala', in *Coastal Histories: Society and Ecology in pre-Modern India*, ed. Yogesh Sharma, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 75-91.

organization of the Muslim trade and the commodity circulation. Attempts will be made to analyse the types of commodities in circulation and their possible volume and value. In this sense, this study will be an economic history. Nonetheless, it also aims to deal with the faith networks of the Muslims of Malabar. It argues that the existing trade networks facilitated for the emergence of many faith-related networks which in turn often cemented and reinforced the networks of trade emanating from Malabar. By describing these faith networks in detail, the study intends to find out the nuances in and the points of intersection between the operation of the trade networks and the historical development of Islam on the Malabar Coast. Overall, by locating the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims in Malabar during the medieval ages this dissertation purposes to mark an enhancement to our understanding of and approach to the integrated world of the Indian Ocean.

1. Temporal and Spatial Setting of the Study

Identifying the area of study seems to be important because the name Malabar is a bit baffling one as it has got more than one connotations at various periods. Examining the nomenclature Malabar, it appears that the word has a hybrid etymology as it was formed of the Dravidian word *mala* which meant hill and the Persian word *bār* (بار)³ meaning coast, and that the name is of an exogenous construction as it was first applied to the south-western coast of the Indian subcontinent likely by the Persian or Arab seafarers. The Alexandrian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes in 540 AD uses the word *Male* as a place where pepper grows,⁴ and the same is seen followed by Ibn Khurdadhba in the

³ It is unlikely that the affix derived from the Arabic word *barr* (land or country) because the medieval accounts often use the alternative name *Malībārāt* or *Munībārāt* with the plural form of the word *bār*, and in the Arabic language the plural form of the word *barr* is *barar* not *bārāt*. For the meaning of the word *bār*, see the Persian encyclopaedic dictionary Farhang Lughat Mueen by Mohammed Mueen. For the usage of *Munībārāt*, see for instance, Ahmad ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid fi ma'rifat ilm al-bahr wa-al-qawaid*, VK551, Library of Congress, MS. No. 2008401696, f. 67r. In the ninth century text *Silsilat al-tawarikh* there is reference to a coastal area somewhere in the Southeast Asia called *Kalahbār* (most probably Java), and thus it seems that the affix *bār* was often added to many of the coastal areas. For reference to *Kalahbār* see S. H. al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya wa qiyas al-buldan al-mansoob li sulaiman al-tajir*, Markaz Zaid li al-Turas wa-al-Tarikh, al-Ain, 2005, p. 39.

⁴ It is clear that he meant by it the Malabar Coast. See Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, ed. and trans. J. W. McCrindle, Hakluyt Society, New York, 1897, p. 366.

ninth century.⁵ The earliest recorded usage of the name Malabar is found in the proceedings of a session of the Rabbinical court of Fustat dated AD 1097, which forms part of the Cairo Geniza papers,⁶ and the name then appears in many of the Arab accounts written from the second half of the twelfth century onwards.⁷ This would mean that the name Malabar was started to be applied to the south-western coast of India in a period between the ninth and eleventh centuries. In the subsequent periods, this name with little variations was used by outsiders other than the Arabs and Persians. Thus, the Chinese Chau Ju-Kua renders it *Ma-li-pat* and the Venetian Marco Polo has it as *Melibar*. Later, the Portuguese too adopted the name as *Malavar*. Under the British colonial administration, the name Malabar was used to refer those districts in the south-western coast which were under their direct rule. However, this was not the case in the medieval times. Quite often, the medieval sources particularly the Arab accounts apply the name to mean the whole stretch of the south-western coast of Indian subcontinent laying approximately between the south of Honavar in the north and Quilon in the south. The present study employs the term Malabar with this later connotation so as to correspond with its historical usage. In fact, the whole area between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea from the medieval port of Fakanur in the north to Quilon in the south was known for the production of the black pepper, the single most important item among the spices of the Indian Ocean trade. My choice of Malabar as the vantage point is partly because of its crucial role in the trans-oceanic networks of the Indian Ocean and partly due to my familiarity with the sources from or about the area.

As for the temporal limit of the study, the starting point of it is around 800 AD when the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants began to be crystalized after the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate in the Middle East and when the available source materials such as the literary and epigraphic accounts commence to reflect on the aspects

⁵ Ibn Khurdadhba, *al-Masalik wa-al-mamalik*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1889, p. 62.

⁶ The name is used as *Manībār*. See S. D. Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza 'India Book'*, Brill, Leiden, 2008, p. 172.

⁷ Al-Idrisi in the mid-twelfth century renders it as *Manībār*. See Mohammed al-Sharif al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-aafaq*, 2 vols., Aalam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1988, vol. 2, p. 191. For the near-contemporary rendering as *Malibar* see Abulqasim Ali ibn Asakir, *Tarikh dimishq*. 80 vols., ed. Amr ibn Garama al-Amravi, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1995, vol. 29, p. 339; Shihabuddin Yaqoot al-Rumi al-Hamavi, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, 7 vols., 2nd ed., Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1995, vol. 5, p. 196.

of trade and faith networks of the Muslims. Then, the terminal point is around 1600 AD when the hitherto pre-dominantly commercial community of Muslims in Malabar gradually began to seek new occupations other than commerce, particularly in the inland regions. Thus, the study considers a long period of time, and such a long-term approach is taken for some tempting reasons. As no single phase of time out of the period considered for the study has ample source materials to allow for a deeper of study of it, the least possible thing is to rigorously make use of the available sources pertaining to diverse nature and period in order to draw broader conclusions on the theme. The approach taken here makes it feasible to examine the changes and continuities in the economic organization and activities of the mercantile community of Muslims in medieval Malabar in a long-term context. The conventional way in the maritime historiography of the Indian Ocean, which focuses on the period of European expansion in Asia, is set aside here by taking up the preceding centuries, and the century of the Portuguese intervention is observed with a view to understanding its possible reflections on the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar during the sixteenth century.

2. Historiographical Survey

Here it is pertinent to take a survey of the antecedent historical literature on the subject so as to reflect on the arguments already made and on the way the present study contributes to the historiography. While engaging with the existing literature on the subject of the trade and faith-related networks of Muslims in Malabar, mainly two strands of historiography need to be taken into account: studies of Muslims in Malabar and the vibrant field of Indian Ocean studies. Malabar Muslims mattered little to the major studies undertaken on Islam and Muslims in India probably because of their geographical and cultural isolation from their counterparts in the rest of the country and their absence from the Persian and Urdu source materials.⁸ As for the historical write-ups on Malabar,

⁸ Tangent references to Islam in Malabar are made by such scholars as T. W. Arnold and S. A. A. Rizvi. One remarkable point which all of them make is the role expatriate merchants from Arabia and Persia in the spread of Islam in Malabar. Rizvi was probably the first to acknowledge the presence of Sufi networks on the Malabar Coast operating in connection with the merchants. See T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam, A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, 2nd edition, rev., Constable & Company, London,

it was William Logan who, out of the administrative exigencies of the British colonial government, made the first seminal attempt to write a comprehensive history of Malabar in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the same tune was adopted by C. A. Innes when he prepared his gazetteer.⁹ They narrated the contemporary social and cultural life of the Muslims in Malabar and recorded some of the extant local traditions and legends about them. However, their writings as they were from the point view of the British administration led to the portrayal of Muslims as fanatic and poor. Their endeavors were followed by the ‘court-centric’ histories written by the indigenous scholars like Shungoonny Menon, Nagam Aiya, Achyuta Menon, Velu Pillai, K. V. Krishna Ayyar, etc. whose analytical framework more or less remained to be that of dynastic eulogies.¹⁰ Concomitantly there was the pioneering effort by K. M. Panikkar to make use of new European source materials to reconstruct the history of Malabar’s encounter with the Portuguese and the Dutch powers.¹¹ The next development in the Kerala historiography was the increasing influence of the Marxist ideas in the writing of Kerala history. Typical of this trend was the Malayalam work by E. M. S. Nambootirippad.¹² O. K. Nambiyar’s *Portuguese Pirates and Indian Seamen* (1955) represent the kind of historical writing inspired by the nationalistic feeling.¹³ P. K. S. Raja’s *Medieval Kerala* (1955) and the writings of Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai are

1913, pp. 263-7; S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 2 vols., Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 409-11.

⁹ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, 2 vols., Government Press, Madras, 1951; C. A. Innes, *Madras District Gazetteer, Malabar and Anjengo*, 2 vols., ed. F. B. Evans, Government Press, Madras, 1908.

¹⁰ P. Shungoonny Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, Higginbotham & Co., Madras, 1878; V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, 3 vols., Travancore Government Press, Trivandrum, 1906; C. Achyuta Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, Cochin Government Press, Ernakulam, 1911; T. K. Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, 4 vols., Travancore Government, Trivandrum, 1940; K. V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut: From the Earliest Times Down to A. D. 1806*, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938.

¹¹ K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, Taraporevala, Bombay, 1931; *Idem, Malabar and the Portuguese: Being a History of the Relations of the Portuguese with Malabar from 1500 to 1663*, Taraporevala, Bombay, 1929.

¹² E. M. S. Nambootirippadu, *Collected Works of E M S Nambootirippadu*, Vol. 9 (1948), ed. P. Govinda Pillai, Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000.

¹³ Later this work was published under the title ‘The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut’. See O. K. Nambiyar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut*, Asia Publishing House, London, 1963.

noteworthy for the understanding of the pre-colonial history of Kerala.¹⁴ However, the hitherto mentioned scholarly accomplishments, apart from giving cursory references, do not offer any significant insight into the history of the various aspects of the Muslim life in Malabar.

A major shift in this direction appeared only from the 1970s onwards when specific and deeper studies on the Muslims of Malabar began to come out, and a special feature of many of these studies was the attempt to correct the misinterpretations and distortions made by the colonial historiography. Many indigenous Muslim scholars such as P. P. Mohammed Koya, K.K. Mohammed Abdul Kareem, P. K. Mohammed Kunji, A. P. Ibrahim Kunju, C. K. Kareem, K. M. Bahaudhin, Hussain Randathani and Abdullah Anchilath have made remarkable efforts to study the socio-cultural history and contributions of the Kerala Muslims and to locate them in the larger history of Kerala.¹⁵ Some of these writings stand apart for they introduce some of the less known indigenous sources including epigraphic ones. However, the emphasis in many of such works is often limited to such discourses as Islam's introduction and development in Malabar and the 'peaceful' co-existence of Muslims with Hindus in the pre-European era. K. K. N. Kurup's short monograph studied the Ali Rajas of Cannanore, the only Muslim rulers in the history of Malabar.¹⁶ The author has dealt only with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and rarely uses documents dating from the pre-colonial period, thus inviting further scholarly engagements to locate the history of the Ali Rajas' thalassocracy appropriately. K. N. Panikkar's study *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant*

¹⁴ P. K. S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 1953. Kunjan Pillai's some of important articles have been published in English, see Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1970.

¹⁵ P.P. Muhammad Koya, *Kozhikkotte Muslinkalude Charitram*, Focus Publications, Calicut, 1994; C. N. Ahamad Maulvi and K.K. Muhammad Abdul Karim, eds., *Mahatthaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam*, (Published by the authors) Calicut, 1978; P.K. Muhammad Kunnhi, *Muslingalum Kerala Samskaravum*, Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Trichur, 1982; A. P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: Their History and Culture*, Sandhya Publications, Chennai, 1989; C. K. Kareem, *Kerala Muslim History, Statistics and Directory*, Charithram Publications, Cochin, 1991; K. M. Bahaudhin, *Kerala Muslim History: A Revisit*, Other Books, Calicut, 2012; Abdullah Anchilath, *Malabarile Islaminte Aadunika Poorva Charithram*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2015; Hussain Randathani, *Mappila Muslims, A Study on Society and Anti-colonial Struggles*, 2nd ed., Other Books, Calicut, 2016.

¹⁶ K. K. N. Kurup, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*, College Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1975.

Uprisings in Malabar (1836-1921) examines the history of Mappila peasant resistance to the colonial regime and argues that the rebellions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were predominantly agrarian conflicts which sporadically turned into religious scuffles.¹⁷ L. R. S. Lakshmi's study has introduced certain new avenues and sources in the study of Kerala Muslims and made attempts to examine some of the social and institutional changes within the Muslim community of Malabar under the colonial administration.¹⁸ J. B. P. More's monograph repeats the conventional themes of advent and growth of Islam in Kerala without giving any insight to the economic organization of the community in the medieval times.¹⁹

Western scholars too have got interested in the history of the Muslims in Malabar, and the socio-cultural and political aspects of their life form the major theme addressed by these scholars. Probably, the earliest in the series came from Ronald E. Miller.²⁰ Miller's work is special for he tried to study the Muslims of Kerala by living in between them for quite a long time and by learning Malayalam and Arabic, which are the linguistic keys to their cultural and religious life. The author has striven to provide a general survey of Kerala's Muslim community from its earlier times to the 1970s, yet two-thirds of the monograph has been devoted to the study of the years following the Mappila Rebellion of 1921-1922, and thus their medieval past has not been detailed. Subsequently, Stephen Frederic Dale took efforts to explore and study the Mappila Muslims' communal relations with the other communities in the light of their confrontation with the European powers as well as the predominantly Hindu community of Kerala and the study is almost on the history of the colonial period.²¹ Conrad Wood's work was also focused on the modern times and it studied the economic causes behind the Mappila peasant uprisings in Malabar.²² Miller's recent study has provided with a

¹⁷ K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989.

¹⁸ L. S. R. Lakshmi, *The Malabar Muslims: A Different Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2012.

¹⁹ J. B. P. More, *Origin and Early History of the Muslims of Kerala 700 AD-1600 AD*, Other Books, Calicut, 2011.

²⁰ Ronald Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*, Orient Longman, Madras, 1976.

²¹ Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society in the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980.

²² Conrad Wood, *The Mappila Rebellion and its Genesis*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1987.

comprehensive account of the distinct culture of the Mappila Muslims, which, he argues, was formed through adaptation and interaction, but again the economic aspects of the Muslims in medieval times have not been explored.²³ Overall, what comes out from this survey of historical works on Malabar and its Muslims is that there is an apparent dearth of studies on the community's medieval past. The focus of many of the surveyed works is on the socio-cultural aspects of the Malabar Muslims in the modern context when there was already considerable realignment in the socio-economic formations of the community. As such, in these studies, there was little effort to explore the larger connections and networks of the community during the medieval times. The fewer studies which touch on the medieval period are limited in scope as their emphasis is on such aspects as the advent and growth of Islam in Malabar. Besides, these studies have not tried to make use of the crucial Arabic sources from across the sea, for many of which English translations are not available.

The other strand of historiography which deserves to be surveyed for the present study is the literature from the flourishing field of Indian Ocean studies. The historical scholarship, particularly the western one, was very slow in recognizing that the Indian Ocean and its maritime spaces were a complex region with extensive inter-regional economic and cultural exchanges much before the European intervention in Asia, and in acknowledging the role and agency of the region in the economies of the pre-modern world.²⁴ A Eurocentric point of view had pre-dominated the historical studies and as a result what had more mattered to the scholars was the 'discovery' of America by Columbus and that of India by Vasco da Gama and their subsequent experiments in those locales, rather than what drove or pushed them to those 'new lands' and what had been

²³ Ronald Miller, *Mappila Muslim Culture*, State University of New York, New York, 2015.

²⁴ Among the few exceptions was R. K. Mookerji, who in 1912 wrote a monograph on the maritime activities of Indians from the very early time onwards and the work has some references to the commercial aspects of Malabar which are mostly quotations from the accounts of travellers and geographers. Overall, the work is more descriptive than annalistic. It is quite clear that Mookerji's writing was an outcome of the spirit of Indian nationalism of the time. See Radhakumud Mookerji, *Indian Shipping, A History of the Sea-borne Trade and Maritime Activity of Indians from the Earliest Times*, Longmans, Green and co., Bombay, 1912.

lost to the Asia because of their 'discovery'.²⁵ Indian Ocean was discussed as a theater for the colonial experiments of European mercantilist trade companies such as the Dutch *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) and the British East India Company. Even K.M. Panikkar, the veteran scholar of twentieth-century India, could not come out of the contemporary academic ethos as he focused his writing more on the colonial exploitations of and aggressions on the subordinated Indians rather than giving agency to the people of Asia.²⁶ In the gradual shift from a Euro-centric viewpoint to a more holistic approach, George Hourani's *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* would perhaps be the first academic path-breaking effort to seriously study and assess the Indian Ocean world from a non-European perspective.²⁷ It stands out as important because it tried to acknowledge the autonomous agency of the people of Indian Ocean world. The author has shed some light on, among other things, the shipping technology of the Arabs and their trade routes from the Persian Gulf to the Far East via-Malabar in both the pre-Islamic and the Caliphate times. However, the work could not fully satisfy the students of Indian Ocean studies, as it was very brief and only a preliminary effort in the regard.

The coming of Fernand Braudel in 1966 with his conceptualization of 'Mediterranean world' was a very remarkable move as it began to invite scholars' attention towards the idea of taking maritime spaces as the basis for studying large-scale and long-term historical processes.²⁸ As a result, in the subsequent years of the second half of the twentieth century, there came growing number of publications by such scholars as Ashin Das Gupta, K. N. Chaudhuri, M. N. Pearson, McPherson and Andre Wink who focused on the history of Indian Ocean, and the scholarly accomplishments of these historians, in turn, helped to bring newer perspectives to the Indian Ocean studies.

²⁵ The longevity of the Eurocentric view well into the last decades of the twentieth century is manifested in Wallerstein's writings. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Academic Press, New York, 1974.

²⁶ K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1953.

²⁷ G. F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, rev. and exp. J. Carswell, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1995.

²⁸ However, Ashin Das Gupta had already laid the foundation of maritime studies in India way back in 1960 with a study of the merchants of pre-modern maritime India. See Ashin Das Gupta, *Merchants of Maritime India 1500-1800*, Variorum Publishing, London, 1994 (reprint of 1960 edition).

Ashin Das Gupta in 1967 came up with his *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*.²⁹ Though the focus of the monograph is on the early modern period, the author in the first chapter has made some observations about the maritime trade of medieval Malabar. He was one of the earliest to argue that the character of Asian trade in what may be referred to as its high medieval period (AD 1300-1500) was essentially peaceful and the arrival of the Portuguese and later the Dutch saw the emergence of sustainable and systematic violence in the Indian Ocean. The new kind of trade, which the Portuguese introduced in Asia, consisted of a very complex system of compulsion with two aspects: a series of treaties with the local princes and an elaborate pass system. Although the Dutch were eager followers of the Portuguese, Das Gupta argues that they had not replaced the massive naval watch system by a similar control mechanism. He further adds that when the English appeared on the commercial scene of Malabar ‘they carried on trade much as any Asian merchant with a substantial capital to invest would have done’ with no effort at claiming monopoly or imposing restrictions. However, the scope of the study did not permit the author to elaborate on the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar.

K. N. Chaudhuri’s *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* was the next noteworthy effort in introducing the Indian Ocean to the wider world of scholarship.³⁰ It was the first systematic attempt to apply the Braudelian framework to study the developments in the Indian Ocean, and thus the author took a *longueduree* approach by examining a time span of almost one millennium. Chaudhuri considered the trade networks of the Indian Ocean in their full form, viz. networks both in the Western and Eastern fractions of Indian Ocean and has assumed full autonomy among its actors and cultures. He has suggested a trajectory of trade networks in the Indian Ocean region: in the middle and later half of the first millennium the Arab traders formed a trading network that stretched all the way from the port cities of the East African coast to the great emporia of south China, but by the course of time this trade ecumene broke into regionalized trade zones or “circuits”, centred on

²⁹ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967.

³⁰ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. Although these circuits, Chaudhuri argues, operated autonomously, they were linked and integrated each other through the medium of the on-going exchange activities at their intersecting points, most importantly the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent and the straits of Malacca. Thus, he points out that, there was continuity in the integrated nature of the trade networks in the Indian Ocean even after its division into various circuits.

The conventional Whiggish writings on the Indian Ocean had put forward a linear view of European ascendancy in Asia, in which was assumed a natural progression from the Portuguese discovery of the new sea route in 1498 to the British colonial domination. This approach, which was of course affected by the inherent bias in the European sources, projected the European expansion to the static Indian Ocean as the most important juncture, thus calling for a division of the history of the Ocean into pre-European and European periods. However, this approach began to be questioned when there appeared new studies which subjected the European sources for critical evaluation and tried to make use of the available Asian sources. The findings of these studies paved the way for a re-evaluation of the conceived notions about the early-European impact on the Indian Ocean world. They argued that the impact of the Portuguese intervention in Asia, despite the sophistication in the naval warfare, was less than what was traditionally conceived for the newcomers were very much dependents on the cooperation of the local rulers, intermediaries and other agents, and thus were compelled to adapt to the existing structures in Asia. This development in the historiography of Indian Ocean was manifested in the collection of articles titled *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800* (1987), which was edited by Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson.³¹ The main focus of the work is 'India and the Indian Ocean, not the Indian Ocean in general' and in that sense, it represents an Indo-centric approach. Yet, the main sources used by the contributors of the work are European due to the dearth of other sources available at that point of time. The studies in the work cover the period between 1500 and 1800 AD, though there is some cursory reference to the fifteenth century which seemed to have been made in order to illustrate the general argument of the work, viz., the continuance of

³¹ Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson, eds., *India and the Indian Ocean 1500-1800*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987.

the trading networks of the fifteenth century coastal India well into the 16th-17th centuries despite the European competition. The joint article by Denys Lombard and Genevieve Bouchon strives to draw a picture of the Indian Ocean trade in the pre-Portuguese period. They argue that in the pre-Portuguese period there was the presence of ‘a group of fairly autonomous’ mercantile communities on the various port cities throughout the Indian Ocean and ‘these maritime cities often had closer links with each other than with the centres of power in the states of which they formed a part’. Their conclusion is that despite the centuries’ long presence of the Europeans in Asia, the roots of the traditional commercial structure of the fifteenth century Indian Ocean managed to survive well into the later periods. Bouchon’s separate article on the sixteenth century Malabar looks into the ways by which the local merchants of the place reacted to the Portuguese and managed to escape their surveillance in the region.

Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony: The World System A. D. 1250-1350* (1989) was the other major effort towards asserting the importance of the Indian Ocean to the economies of the medieval world.³² The author was applying the analysis of world-systems to study the pre-modern world and suggested a predecessor in the 13th-14th centuries for the capitalist world-system of modern times. While Chaudhuri’s attempt was to establish the Indian Ocean region as a sphere of economic activity in its own right by focusing on its trading networks, Abu-Lughod’s aim was to project it as an important part of a larger trading phenomenon which linked the Eurasian world into an economic whole. As such, in her view, the trade zones of the Indian Ocean were just part of a complex of seven trade zones which ranged from Western Europe all the way across the Eurasian continent.

Andre Wink produced three volumes of *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World* as part of his ambitiously conceived project of writing the history of the Islamic encounter with the lands bordering the Indian Ocean particularly South Asia.³³ His

³² J. L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

³³ Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World*, vol.1 *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th-11th Centuries*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990; *Idem*, *Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World*, vol.2 *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest, 11th-13th Centuries*, Brill, Leiden, 1997;

project was to cover in five volumes the history of the Indo-Islamic world of a long period from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries. The author points out that the Arab notion of 'al-Hind', unlike the Greco-Roman and the Renaissance European perceptions of 'India', stood for those parts of the inhabited world which were under the political control of the Hindu or Buddhist rulers, viz., South Asia and the Indianized Southeast Asia. According to Wink, the rise and fall of the 'Maharajas of India' such as the Rashtrakutas of the Gujarat and the western Deccan corresponds to the rise and decline of the Persian Gulf trading system between the eighth and eleventh centuries, and the superiority of the Rashtrakutas among the Indian kings was lost to the Cholas of South India as a consequence, among other things, of the decline of the trading system of the Persian Gulf. This induces the author to infer that Islam in the early medieval period, rather than creating any discontinuity in the Indian history, 'merely accelerated a process which had set in before its rise', viz., the growth of urban centres. Wink sees the Indo-Muslim history of the medieval times as the fusion of two contrasting worlds: on the one hand, the world of the conservative agrarian societies with fixed wealth and hierarchical ideologies and on the other, the nomadic and maritime zones of mobile elites and long-distance trade. It was in the latter world, according to him, that change and innovation occurred. Malabar's Muslims have been mentioned in the volumes where Wink discusses the emergence of new societies on the rim of the Indian Ocean, which occurred parallel to the rise of the 'post-nomadic' power in South Asia. However, the scope of his envisioned project did not allow the author to provide a detailed account of the commercial networks of Muslims in Malabar. Besides, the Muslims of Malabar have been treated as a monolithic group, thereby neglecting the nuances within the community, and their faith-related networks have seldom been described.

Another monograph where Braudelian influence can be seen is *The Indian Ocean; A History of the People and the Sea* (1993) written by Kenneth McPherson who remarked about the seaborne trade of Indian Ocean that it was 'determined by what Braudel called

Idem., Al-Hind: The Making of Indo-Islamic World, vol.3 Indo-Islamic Society 14th-15th Centuries, Brill, Leiden, 2004.

longueduree or long-term rhythms of the natural and human developments'.³⁴ The author studied a long period of time from the ancient era to the twentieth century and suggested that the Indian Ocean region for quite a long period was an integrated maritime 'world' with a complex web of relationships which was underpinned by trade and was articulated by the flow of religions, cultures and technologies. This 'world', according to him, was joined by the Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards as partners in trade with the indigenous people but was fragmented by the eighteenth century when it began to be linked to the capitalist economy of the colonial powers. In his discussion on the integrated maritime 'world' of the pre-capitalist phase, McPherson identifies various sorts of networks that operated in the Indian Ocean, in which were involved not only the merchants but also the fishermen and sailors.

In 2003 appeared M. N. Pearson's stimulating monograph *Indian Ocean* where he reversed many of the traditional perceptions about maritime history, including those possessed by himself in his earlier writings.³⁵ The author admits himself to have been influenced by Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* which had helped to revise many of the Braudelian frameworks on the study of the Mediterranean.³⁶ *Indian Ocean* differs from the earlier accomplishments on the maritime history in many respects. Hitherto most of the works, including his own ones, had concentrated on the period after the European appearance in the Indian Ocean, but Pearson now tries to 'write about the whole of the Indian Ocean over the whole of its recorded history'. Earlier works had concentrated on the material aspects in the sea like ships, long-distance trade, towns, etc., but the author has striven to 'describe both material and mental frameworks, the psychological as well as the geographical'.³⁷ He looks beyond the histories of trade to explore 'lots of connections, the ocean acting as a transmitter for disease, religion, tourists, goods, information, not just pepper and cotton cloths'. Rather than looking at the seas or oceans from the lands, Pearson now urges to 'look from the sea to the land and

³⁴ Kenneth McPherson, *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993.

³⁵ Pearson, *Indian Ocean*.

³⁶ Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000.

³⁷ Pearson, *Indian Ocean*, p. 5.

most obviously to the coast'. A maritime historian has to 'cover inland events only to the extent that they impinge directly on the ocean' so that his focus will be the sea itself, and the coast.³⁸ While discussing the character of the port cities and their connections, Pearson introduces some of the concepts. The term 'umland' stands for an area which is culturally, economically and politically related to a particular town, and can be seen as transitional between the dominant town and the pure countryside. A foreland is the area of the overseas world with which the port city is linked through shipping, passenger traffic and trade, and will be separated from the port city by maritime space. The hinterland means the landed area beginning at the end of the umland, to which the imports of the port go and from which come its exports. Pearson further clarifies that while all cities have umland and hinterlands, only port cities also have forelands. The relationship, he points out, of port cities or emporia with their surrounding areas varies greatly; port cities such as Aden, Malacca and Hormuz were 'entrepots' working as merely redistribution centres and therefore were little affected by the events in the hinterlands, whereas port cities like Colombo, Surat, etc., were drawing goods from the hinterlands and thus were clearly affected by the changes there.

Pearson has devoted the fourth chapter of his *Indian Ocean* for a discussion on the ways in which the rise of Islam and Muslims from the early seventh century onwards affected the Indian Ocean. He argues that though the notion of an Islamic period or ocean is problematic, 'over a few centuries most of the populations of the coasts of the Indian Ocean became Muslims, so that a large share of both coastal and oceanic trade was handled by the adherents of this new religion'.³⁹ The author strives to find answers to some of the important questions regarding the Muslim sailing in the Indian Ocean: what was Islam's attitude towards sea matters and merchants? What were the characteristics and technologies of the ships venturing out over the seas and their local variations? How did the captains of the ships find their way over the ocean? While looking at the creation of the Islamic community in various coastal areas of the Indian Ocean, Pearson opines that it is more accurate to speak of 'acceptance' of Islam in place of conversion which pre-supposes a dramatic shift from one to another, since what often appeared in the case

³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

of those who got attracted to the new religion was additive changes rather than substitutive changes. He makes some cursory references to the circulation of religious specialists from Yemen, Oman, etc. to the littoral peripheries, where he warns against exaggerating 'the extent to which there was, in this time of still primitive communications, a really dense coming and going'.⁴⁰ He considers *Hajj* as an important factor which 'served to solidify Islam, and create *communitas* amongst the diverse community'. The author has also provided with a not lengthy discussion on the mundane matters in the Indian Ocean, viz., trade. He argues that the fact that porcelain, precious stones and spices are the sorts of trade items which have left record or remains behind should not lead us to negate the role of the much more basic things which were also traded through the same commercial networks. In his reflection on the important trade routes and ports of the time, Pearson considers the major port cities of Malabar in the category of 'entrepots' which, though were not centres for manufacturing, worked as centres both for the transshipment of foreign commodities and the collection of spices from the interior. He is of the view that there is little evidence of the use of force in the Indian Ocean before the arrival of the Portuguese and that the 'Asian port cities prospered not by compulsion, but by providing facilities for trade freely undertaken by a vast array of merchants'.⁴¹ According to him, the whole concept of diaspora looks inappropriate in describing the base of the merchant communities in medieval times, and in its place, he opines that various merchant groups operated by making use of agents, often kin, who were located in the major trading centres. The author is sceptic on giving much emphasis to the connections between political factors and the state of trade, instead what he seeks to keep in mind is that 'there were much more constant and important matters which affected merchants engaged in sea trade', viz. factors such as the danger from the pirates and corsairs and the perils of the sea.⁴²

Archaeological explorations and studies have turned out to be significant in our understanding of the activities in the Indian Ocean. H. P. Ray's *The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia* is the by-product of the author's studies of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 80-1.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 104-11.

archaeological sources for examining the maritime orientation of the communities of the Indian subcontinent.⁴³ The monograph takes the maritime history in its broader sense and thus it discusses not only the maritime trade and shipping but also seafaring and fishing activities, religious travels and political economy of early times. The author questions the perception that Indian Ocean's commerce was restricted to the luxury or prestige items, and argues that the ocean had witnessed regular sailing and maritime activity which was sustained by the traffic in timber, cloth, salt, metal, dried fish, etc. The journal *World Archaeology* has published many reports of the archaeological excavations conducted on the sites of shipwrecks as well as coastlines. Whitehouse's report on the excavations at the medieval port city of Siraf on the Persian Gulf shows the city's importance as a centre of trade and exchange.⁴⁴ The archaeological findings from the site included Chinese coins, pottery and a decorated bronze mirror, Egyptian glass, East African ivory, Mesopotamian pottery, Afghani lapis, and Persian glass, pottery and turquoise. Michael Flecker's report on the excavation of a ninth-century shipwreck between Sumatra and Borneo furnishes us with probably the first archaeological evidence to corroborate our literary sources on the prevalence of direct trade contacts between the western Indian Ocean and China in the ninth century.⁴⁵

The literary accomplishments by Genevieve Bouchon, K. S. Mathew, Pius Malekandathil and Binu Malaparambil have tried to examine Malabar's commercial activities in the period after the advent of the Europeans. Most of them stand apart for their use of the Portuguese, the Dutch or the German sources in the study of the maritime trade of Malabar. Genevieve Bouchon's *Mamale de Cananor; Un Adversaire de L'Inde Portugaise (1507-1528)* was the first major attempt to look into the history of pre-

⁴³ Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

⁴⁴ David Whitehouse, 'Siraf: A Medieval Port on the Persian Gulf', *World Archaeology* 2, no.2, October 1970, pp. 141-58.

⁴⁵ Michael Flecker, 'A ninth-century AD Arab or Indian shipwreck in Indonesia: First evidence for direct trade with India', *World Archaeology* 32, no. 3, Feb.2001, pp. 335-54.

colonial Cannanore on the basis of European source materials.⁴⁶ The main focus of the author is Mamale, a grand Muslim merchant magnate of Cannanore who was the predecessor of the Ali Rajas of Cannanore and who was given by the Portuguese the title '*Regedor do mar*' (Regent of the Sea). She has tried to show how Mamale was able to build a large commercial network which extended up to the Islands of Maldives and how the profit accumulated through those networks helped him to emerge as the governor of Cannanore by replacing the Natuvazhi, the royal governor of the place. K. S. Mathew shows how the Portuguese trade introduced certain new elements which altered the already existing Asian pattern of trade to a great extent.⁴⁷ A highly centralized bureaucracy, fortified fortresses and factories, international diplomacy at the service of trade, annual accounts to the king, etc. were the new elements brought by the Portuguese. The author argues that the Portuguese trade constituted the early phase of classical mercantilism as can be gauged from the presence of such factors as state-regulated trade, the system of protectionism for the sake of merchants and new conceptions of society. Pius Malekandathil's monograph on Cochin, the first political headquarters of the *Estado da India* till 1530 and later their commercial capital, looks into the role the city played in the maritime commerce of India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁸ Though such aspects as the administration, the social life and the ecclesiastical institutions of Cochin are discussed, the work is mostly about the city's commerce in its various forms: local, inter-local, overland and maritime. The author's command over the Portuguese and German languages has helped him make use of sources in those languages in order to catch up the larger developments and nuances within the Portuguese circles and then to link them with the commerce of Cochin. The study has detailed how the Muslim merchants of Cochin assisted the Portuguese in their trade during the early years of their

⁴⁶ Oxford University Press has published an English translation of this book in 1988. Geneviève Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea: Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion 1507–1528*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1988.

⁴⁷ K. S. Mathew, *Maritime Trade of the Malabar Coast and the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2016.

⁴⁸ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001.

presence in the city and then turned out to be their crucial enemy basing in Calicut when they were victimized on the pretext of the Portuguese surveillance.⁴⁹

Binu Malaparambil's monograph has tried to show the unique role played by maritime trade in the shaping of the political landscape in pre-colonial northern Kerala by focusing on the maritime networks and exploits of the Arakkal Ali Rajas, who were able to dominate the commercial networks of Muslims in Cannanore and its satellite ports such as Maday, Baliyapattanam, Dharmadam and Nileswaram.⁵⁰ The author analyses the rise of the Mappila Muslims of Cannanore under the Ali Rajas into the socio-political prominence of the region from the point view of what he calls 'a locally entrenched concept of power, viz. *Shakti*', in contrast to the general tendencies in Kerala historiography of studying the Islamic community with the so-called 'frontier community' approach and of analysing kingship as a problematic concept which needs some external legitimacy particularly that which was provided by the Brahmins. Binu argues that until the Dutch and the English came to establish their presence in the region, the Ali Rajas had possessed an unchallenged position in the political economy of Cannanore as they could prove their *sakti*, which was the legitimizing factor in the traditional power concept of the region, by mobilizing resources through the maritime trade. He goes on to say that though the Dutch initially wished to demolish the extended commercial network of Ali Rajas, the VOC, foreseeing the heavy cost that it would have to pay, left the plan and entered into co-operation with the Rajas.

Of course, these antecedent secondary literatures help us a lot in discerning the meanings of the various sorts of trade circuits which had operated in the larger Indian Ocean world during the pre-modern times. Importantly, some of them have put forward

⁴⁹ The same author has other write-ups where he elaborates on the ways in which the Muslim merchants of Malabar responded to the Portuguese intervention in the commerce of the region. See for example Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2014; *Idem*, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no.2, 2007, pp. 259-286.

⁵⁰ Binu John Malaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar, 1663-1723*, Brill, Leiden, 2012.

certain conceptual frameworks which could be utilized in future studies. Yet, these literatures also have limitations as they have left certain gaps which call for further contributions towards a better understanding of the mercantile world of medieval Indian Ocean. The scope and nature of most of the existing literatures do not allow their authors to go for detailed studies on particular locations. Any deeper study basing on a specific location which was a major player in the medieval mercantile world such as Malabar would be welcomed as such study will help in unfolding many of the nuances and complexities involved in the operation of trade in that location in particular and in maritime Asia in general. The antecedent accomplishments have not made any rigorous use of the remarkable data contained in the Arabic texts of various genres from the across the ocean, many of which, though not basically commercial in nature, have bearings on the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims in Malabar. While maritime Asia is studied widely for the modern times, its medieval history has not been given justice. The bulk of studies undertaken for Malabar region mainly revolve around the period after the advent of the Europeans. Besides, very few of the existing literature shed light on Malabar's inland and regional or coastal trade networks and the Muslims' involvement in them, aspects which are very much linked to the trans-oceanic trade networks in the processes of the collection and distribution of the commodities. Last but not least, in the previous studies, due attention has not been paid to an important aspect of the medieval Indian Ocean world, viz. the different faith networks which operated alongside the trade networks of the ocean in a complex web of relationship. Faith networks of the medieval times cannot be taken for granted as they had mattered to the actors and players of the mercantile world of that time in many ways. Besides, examining of such faith networks of medieval times will help us unfold some of the socio-religious aspects of people's life today. Patricia Risso's monograph *Merchants and Faith* forms a slight exception to the general trend as it has tried to address the issue of how faith mattered in the commercial world.⁵¹ However, it has not elaborated the issue and therefore more works need to be accomplished on this aspect. Elizabeth Lambourn has striven to interpret the detailed list of stipends given from Aden's treasury to the Muslim communities on the coastal areas

⁵¹ Patricia Risso, *Merchants and Faith, Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean*, Westview Press, San Francisco & Oxford, 1995.

of India during the late thirteenth century, which is contained in the Yemeni chronicle *Nur al-ma'ārif*. She examines the connection of this stipend-giving mechanism with the larger *Khutba* or *Dua* networks, which linked the Muslim communities outside the Islamic world with the *Dar al-Islam*.⁵² Her effort, yet, is a preliminary one and more attention of scholars on this piece of information is awaited. The present study is an endeavour to address these issues by making use of the less utilized Arabic sources relevant to the subject and the papers about the India trade from the Cairo Geniza.

3. Design of the Study

This study consists of four main chapters in addition to the introductory and conclusive portions. The introductory part tries to situate the present study within the historiography by stating the research questions, objectives and the spatial and temporal setting of the study, and by analysing the strength and weakness of the antecedent literary accomplishments. It also mentions the methodology and sources of the study and summarizes the issues which are dealt with in the succeeding chapters.

The first chapter aims to provide a contextual understanding for the succeeding chapters. It looks into the socio-economic and political background of medieval Malabar within which trade and faith networks of the Muslims developed. The changing political equations of Malabar because of external attacks on the territories of the later Cheras, the subsequent fragmentation of the centralized polity and the emergence of the new successor-*swarupams* are detailed, as these developments have to be kept in mind while dealing with the aspects of trade and concerns of political elites. Besides, the socio-economic formations of the region and the castes or classes within the Malabar society are described. It appears that since the region lacked a flourishing indigenous mercantile class, exogenous mercantile communities like the Christians, the Jewish and the Muslims from West Asia and the Chettis from the Coromandel Coast were always welcomed on

⁵² E. Lambourn, 'India from Aden: Khutba and Muslim Urban Networks in Late Thirteenth-Century India', in *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400-1800*, ed. K.R. Hall, Lexington Books, New York, 2008, pp. 55-99.

the Malabar Coast in order to carry out its commercial activities, particularly the maritime and coastal trade. An attempt is made also to discuss the reasons behind the appearance of various nodal points or outlets on the long stretch of the coast. It is shown that in the development of the several ports on the Malabar Coast due role was played by all such factors as the ability of the ports to get connected with the important production centres in the hinterlands, the geophysical setting of the region with the potential to provide the sailing ships with decent anchorage facility as well as the provisions of travel and the active participation of the local polities in the maritime affairs of the region. Many of the contemporary travellers noted the keen attention being paid by the local political elites in ensuring the security of men and material sailing through their adjoining waters. As the whole seafaring of the Indian Ocean depended on the seasonality of the monsoon system, it was necessary for the merchants to stop on their most-favoured nodal point of the ocean waiting for the right season for the continuance of their sail or for the return journey, and the ports of Malabar were often chosen by the sailors as their ports of call. Since the monsoon system was very crucial to the medieval seagoing, the chapter sees it pertinent to give a description of it. It utilizes the nautical treatises written by the contemporaries like Ibn Majid for a proper understanding of the system which is seen sometimes as being confused in the secondary literature. This chapter also proposes to locate historically the various ports on the Malabar Coast which were connected to the commercial and faith networks of the Muslims. This is done particularly by making use of the Arab geographical accounts as well as the navigational treatises of the medieval times. As these ports were not of equal importance as far as the economy of the region was concerned the chapter attempts to examine the differing hierarchization among these ports at different points of time. At last but not least, it surveys those maritime trade networks of the Indian Ocean which were already underway connecting the Malabar Coast much before the Muslims became active in maritime Asia. This helps in discerning the aspects of continuity and the way how existing networks were adapted by the Muslim merchants.

The second chapter explores the maritime commercial networks formed by the Muslims on the Malabar Coast during the medieval period. The primary sources available for the period under study show that the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast had

managed to develop wide-ranging commercial connections with the several ports on the rims of the Indian Ocean, like Basra, Siraf, Aydab, Aden, Jidda, Cambay, Canton, Khalabar, and the Maldives. However, they also reveal that there were ruptures and continuities in the operation of their trade networks in accordance with the geo-political circumstances in Malabar and in its forelands. During the heyday of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf region undertook to trade with the Far East, and these merchants, due to the seasonal realities of the monsoon system, had to call on the entrepot of Kollam which was developed by the later Cheras as their chief port in Malabar at the dawn of the ninth century. Apart from gathering the provisions necessary for the further journey, the merchants during the waiting period used to involve in exchange activities at the port of Kollam by the way of purchasing locally available goods and selling the commodities they brought in their ships. At the same time, the ports of the Malabar Coast must have attracted such Muslim merchants who, instead of resorting to sail the whole length of the Indian Ocean, confined their commercial activities to the western segment of the ocean—an aspect which is often overshadowed by the narratives on the China trade of the time. In this chapter, an attempt is made to explore this latter possibility, particularly in the light of epigraphic evidence. As the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt during the tenth century led to a renewal of trade via the old Red Sea route, there appeared changes in the orientation of the trade networks of the Muslims in Malabar. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Aden and the ports in the Red Sea area, rather than the ports in the Persian Gulf, emerged as the core area of trade in West Asia. Thus, during these times, Malabar witnessed the presence of those Muslim merchants who carried out trade with the port of Aden as can be understood from the papers of the Cairo Geniza. Concomitantly, the number of Muslim merchants sailing with the Arab *dhow*s as far as the Far East round the Malabar Coast began to shrink due to the hazards of the time-consuming China voyage and the increasing presence and availability of the Kling and Chinese merchants in the eastern Indian Ocean. As a consequence, some sort of segmentation occurred in the operation of the commercial networks of the Muslims, and the ports of Malabar got new role as transshipment centres. However, this study refrains from any essentialising approach regarding such a segmentation in the commercial world of the Indian Ocean because our sources speak about many Muslim

merchants from West Asia like *nakhuda* Ramisht whose trade networks still extended as far as China. After the gloominess of a few centuries, the ports on the Persian Gulf region re-emerged on the scene particularly because of the commercial interest of the Ilkhanid Mongols, and thus the Muslim merchants from such ports as Hormuz and Kish increasingly traded with the coastal areas of South Asia often in the horses. As the contemporary travel accounts demonstrate, the ports of the Malabar Coast had been the destination for the Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf, though not to the extent the ports of Ma'abar attracted them due to the presence of the cavalry based dynasties over there. Aden and the adjoining ports like Dhofar, anyway, remained the major ports with which the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast maintained their commercial relationship well unto the early decades of the fifteenth century. The commodities exported to Aden were further taken to the emporia of Egypt such as Alexandria and Damietta after passing through Aydab, Qus and Fustat/ Cairo in order to be re-exported to the markets of Europe. In the 1420s, due to the commercial inconveniences caused by the policies of the Rasulids, the Muslim merchants from Malabar began to bypass the port of Aden and went up to the Red Sea port of Jidda which was under the control of the Mamluks of Egypt. Prior to this, the Muslim merchants from India with their ships had rarely ventured to sail up to as far as the ports of the Red Sea. The new move, in turn, led to an alteration in the commercial map of West Asia as Aden lost its previous importance in the Indian Ocean trade. Jidda throughout the remaining decades of the fifteenth century competed with Aden in attracting Indian Ocean merchants, and our sources speak of some of the Muslim merchants who were involved in this trade between Jidda and the Malabar Coast.

The commercial frontier of the Muslim merchants in Malabar during the first half of the second millennium was not limited to the Arabian Sea; instead, it extended also up to the eastern Indian Ocean. As the studies on the commercial policies of the Chinese and their involvement in the Indian Ocean during the reigns of the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties reveal, the Muslim sojourning merchants from West Asia who based their operations in such ports as Canton, as well as the Muslim merchants of Chinese origin, had considerable role in carrying China's international trade with the ports of the South and Southeast Asia. When in the 1340s Ibn Batuta was heading the Delhi sultan's

delegation to the Yuan court, at the port of Calicut the local ruler Zamorin arranged for them one among the thirteen junks anchored in his port, and this junk was captained by a Muslim who had in the same junk some of his relatives too. That Muslim merchants performed the function of *wakil al-markab* or captains of the Chinese junks which as the Moroccan traveller describes was a highly esteemed position underscores their reckonable presence in the trade between China and India. Chronicles from West Asia such as *Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya* speak about some of the sojourning Muslim merchants who before returning to the Islamic lands earned huge profits by trading between China and Malabar. In addition, the local Muslim merchants of Malabar were involved in trans-oceanic trade with the Southeast Asia particularly after the withdrawal of the Chinese from the commerce of the Malabar Coast in the mid-fifteenth century. Moreover, the medieval Malabar also witnessed the active involvement of the Muslims in its coastal or regional trade. As the European sources from the early sixteenth century testify, the coastal trade was mainly in the hands of the indigenous Muslim merchants. The Marakkar merchants from the Coromandel Coast traded with the ports of Malabar in such commodities as rice, and eventually many of them settled on the Malabar Coast. Meanwhile, many were involved in coastal trade with the ports of Gujarat as well as ports within the Malabar Coast. The Muslims also had commercial connections with the Maldives and Laccadive islands, and it was such connections which subsequently in the sixteenth century enabled the Muslims of Cannanore under the leadership of Mamali and his successors to establish a thalassocracy of their own.

With the entry of the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean world and their attempts to monopolize its spice trade, the expatriate Muslim merchants (*paradesis*) who had been commercially active for the last many centuries in the trans-oceanic trade of Malabar began to desert the ports of the coast. This gap, however, began to be filled by the indigenous Muslims of Malabar who by taking the *cartaz* or passports from the Portuguese carried out trans-oceanic trade with the ports of West Asia. The prominent among these Muslims were the Marakkars of Cochin as well as Cannanore. The present study, nonetheless, shows that during the sixteenth century the foreign Muslim merchants had not disappeared totally from the commerce of the Malabar Coast. There were still prominent *paradesi* Muslim merchants who figured in the commercial realm of Malabar

as can be discerned from the Portuguese and other sources. In the course of the sixteenth century, the misuse of the *cartaz* system by the Portuguese angered the indigenous Muslim merchants who had initially extended their help to the former, and thus the Marakkar Muslims of Cochin soon started re-locating themselves to Calicut in order to fight and oust their enemy with the support of the Zamorin. At the same time, the merchants of Cannanore strove to find new outlets for reaching to the ports of West Asia, viz., through the Maldives islands, and thus marked an exception to the Muslims of Calicut region.

The third chapter explores the circulation of commodities from and to Malabar through the trade networks of the Muslims. The contemporary sources help us in identifying the various commodities involved in their trade, and all of them unanimously demonstrate that pepper constituted the most important and largest single item exported from Malabar eastward and westward. Some of the travel accounts indicate that what had been exported from Malabar towards the west was just one-tenth of what was taken to the ports of the east. It is a matter of fact that our sources for the period under review do not provide us with any clear-cut idea about the aspects of the volume and value of the commodities in transmission. Yet, an attempt is made here to gather some sorts of quantitative data about the commodities by deeply engaging with such sources as the Geniza papers and the chronicles and administrative accounts from West Asia. *Nur al-ma'ārif*, the recently explored Yemeni chronicle which recorded the administrative affairs of the Rasulid Sultan al-Muzaffar Yusuf (r. 1249-95), is extremely noteworthy as it offers crucial information on the various commodities taken from the ports of Malabar to Aden around the late thirteenth century and the customs duties levied on their import and export at the Yemeni port. Interestingly, the work even mentions the customs levied on the import of horses at some of the ports on the Malabar Coast in addition to informing us about the currencies prevalent at the different ports of Malabar and their corresponding value to the currencies of West Asia.

Moreover, the chapter intends to discuss the organization of the Muslim trade in medieval Malabar. It examines the various types of diaspora within the mercantile community of Muslims in Malabar and the gradation among the merchants. The sources

from across the ocean inform us that there was certain hierarchization among the Muslim merchants who traded between Malabar and its overseas lands and that there were occasions when tussles occurred among the Muslim merchants during their commercial operations ultimately even leading to the murder of some merchants. They contain biographical descriptions about some of the Muslim merchants who moved back and forth between the ports of West Asia and Malabar, but their base of operation was somewhere in West Asia. This sort of merchants resided on the ports of Malabar only temporarily awaiting proper seasons for their return journey. However, this chapter shows that a similar or even more important section among the Muslim merchants who carried Malabar's trans-oceanic commerce was those sojourners from West Asia who settled on the ports of Malabar continuously for long years. The Arabic chronicles designate such sojourners as *ahl al-hind* (Indians) due to their long stay in the Indian lands, but at the same time the verb the chroniclers use to describe their stay in India is *iqāmat* which is to dwell in a place with an intention to return eventually to their homelands, rather than *istītan* which denotes a permanent settlement. In contrast to the conventional views, this study contends that the much-celebrated Kārimi merchants from Egypt had lesser role in the maritime trade of Malabar than what is often being ascribed to them. A close reading of the sources reveals that the commercial horizon of what had come to be known as the Kārimi trade was the Red Sea area, not the Arabian Sea or the eastern Indian Ocean.

Employing of slave-agents was one of the main features in the organization of Muslim trade in medieval times, and this aspect is also discussed in the chapter. This chapter looks also into the ways by which the Muslim merchants could strengthen and sustain their commercial networks despite the geo-political changes occurring in their areas of operation. The merchants sometimes tried to involve in the local polities by extending financial as well as diplomatic help to the rulers. It is demonstrated here that the polities on the Malabar Coast as well as in West Asia were keen in sustaining the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants by resorting to diplomatic measures. The sources talk about the instances when the local polities of Malabar such as the Zamorins of Calicut sent their letters and gifts via messengers to the rulers of West Asia with a view to consolidating the existing commercial connections. Utilization of religious

networks such as the *khutba* network was an important aspect in strengthening the commercial networks, but this theme is separately discussed in the next chapter.

The fourth chapter seeks to examine the faith networks of the Muslims on the Malabar Coast. There was seemingly an overlap between the trade and faith networks of the Muslims, as the actors or agencies were in many cases one and the same. This chapter discusses the faith networks in detail and discretely but not in isolation from the commercial ones, with a view to finding out the nuances within the formation of the Islamic culture during the medieval Malabar which is often treated wrongly as monolithic. This will also help in discerning the ways in which people active in the commercial world of medieval times benefitted from and made use of religion in their material life. The existing maritime trade networks which connected Malabar with the many ports on the rims of the Indian Ocean had facilitated the development of various sorts of faith-related networks of the Muslims. Unlike the lands under Islamic rule where the rulers themselves or their deputies made appointments of and payments to the men who held the religious offices within their country, in places outside the political control of Islam like Malabar such appointments and payments were made by the congregations of Muslims. However, in the Yemeni chronicle *Nur al-ma'ārif* we come to notice an interesting account about the Rasulid Sultan al-Muzaffar's involvement in the payment of the religious office-bearers of the Muslims in Malabar. The chronicle details the stipends which were sent from the treasury of Aden to the *khatībs* and *qādis* who served the Muslim communities on the various coastal areas of India, and more than twenty persons from about ten ports on the Malabar Coast are mentioned to have received the grants. That such a bond between Malabar and Yemen was already an established fact around the thirteenth century can also be gauged from *Qissat Shakarvati Farmad*. This text, which as said earlier was compiled sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, states at its concluding part that one of those who was involved in building mosques along the Malabar Coast finally departed from Kollam to Aden for meeting the sultan there in order to demand provisions for the built mosques, and thus twelve and half Egyptian *mithqal* along with dresses were granted for each mosque. An attempt is made in this chapter to contextualize this piece of faith-related network of the Muslims in Malabar and its likely connection with the existing commercial networks.

However, this network, which revolved around the stipends, is studied here as part of the larger *Khutba* or *Dua* network mechanism of the medieval Muslim world. Just like the Muslims living within the political control of Islam included the names and attributes of their sultans in the Friday or Eid sermons (*khutbas*) and prayed (made *dua*) for them, the Muslim communities outside of the Islamic lands also resorted to mention the names of sultans in their *khutbas* and *duas* almost from the early centuries of Islam. From the contemporary sources, especially from the Yemeni chronicle *Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, we come across how the Muslim communities in Malabar organized such *khutba* and *dua* networks by which they ensured and benefited from giving allegiance to particular Muslim sultans or rulers of the time. In the Yemeni chronicle is preserved a letter from the *qadi* of Calicut which he wrote around 1390 to the Rasulid sultan on the advice of the Muslim *jama'ath* (body of dignitaries) of Calicut, and in which he asks the sultan the permission to mention his name and attributes in the city's *khutba* just like it was given for some other eleven locales in Malabar including Nilambur. However, from the travel account of Abdul Razzaq Samarqandi, we read that the Zamorin of Calicut had sent a messenger to the Timurid court of Shahrukh promising on behalf of the city's Muslims that its Friday and Eid *khutbas* would be read in the name of the sultan if it was allowed by him. Later, in the sixteenth century, the Muslims of the twenty-seven cities in and around Calicut read *khutba* in the name of the Ottoman sultan as can be testified from an edict issued by the Grand Vizier Soqullu Mehmed to his governor in Egypt. This raises an important question: why did the Muslims of Calicut keep on shifting their religious allegiances from one sultan or polity to another? The chapter tries to find answer for this by examining if there were any material stimuli behind such networking.

Sufi network is the other kind of important faith-related network. Instead of the conventional way of excluding the Malabar region from the discourse on Sufism in the Indian subcontinent, the present study strives to explore from the primary sources the possible Sufi networks which the Muslims on the Malabar Coast would have had established. Given the pre-dominantly mercantile character of the Muslim community in medieval times and the unpredictable perils and piracy in the oceanic spaces, Malabar Coast likely was a fertile ground for the development of various sorts of Sufi networks which could act as a confidence-building mechanism for the sea-going people. The

available sources speak about the presence in Malabar of institutionalized as well as non-institutionalized forms of Sufi networks revolving around hospices (*zawiya*) and mosques situated on the important port-cities and around particular pious individuals who were widely regarded as possessing divine blessing (*baraka*). The mystic treatises from Malabar like *Maslak al-atqiya* of Abdul Azeez reveal that on the Malabar Coast there were saints who had affiliation with the well-known Sufi orders of medieval times such as Chishtiya, Shattariya and Qadiriya.

Moreover, the chapter also purposes to analyse the scholarly connections across the sea by the Muslims in Malabar. The coast was a crossroads for the Islamic scholarly networks of the western and eastern segments of the Indian Ocean. There was circulation of scholars from and to Malabar with different purposes. The Muslim merchants who settled down on the coast were in need of Islamic experts who could explain to them the religious tenets and rules regarding the conduct of trade both with their co-religionists and others. During the period under review, Malabar was still lacking a sizable class of indigenous religious scholars, and as such, there was always room for experts from outside, particularly from West Asia. Concomitantly, Muslim scholars born and brought up on the Malabar Coast also tried to establish scholarly contacts with the religious circles in the Islamic heartlands. Biographical notes on scholars like Zainuddin Ibn Ali (d.1522) demonstrate that scholars from Malabar visited the Islamic lands for acquiring higher studies or scholarship in Islamic theology. Besides, scholars on the coast maintained intellectual contacts with the renowned Islamic scholars of their times such as Ibn Hajar Haithami (one of the most important authorities in the Shafi'i school who settled down in Mecca) as can be understood from the *fatawa* (religious rules) literatures produced by the scholars in and out of Malabar. The *fatawa* collection of Zainuddin Ibn Muhammed titled *Ajwibathul Ajeebath* is the best example of how scholars from Malabar strived to accommodate the universal Islam to the local realities, and in that process, they had to be in touch with the scholars of the Islamic lands in order to clear all the doubts and conundrums. In addition to all, there was circulation in Malabar of important scholarly texts produced in the Islamic countries, as can be discerned from the frequent references to such texts in the religious treatises written by scholars on the Malabar Coast. Apart from exploring the aforementioned types of scholarly connections of the

Muslims, this chapter also attempts to examine the relationships which the *Ulema* networks had with the contemporary commercial circles. Interestingly, our sources reveal that the *qadis* and *khatibs* of Malabar very often had played a not insignificant role in the administration of the commercial affairs of the port cities.

The major findings of the research are summarized in the conclusion.

4. Methodology and Sources of the Study

The study of any aspect of a pre-modern time is often a challenging task, as historians have to face a dearth of sufficient source materials for the study. This is very true in the case of studying the material and faith-related aspects of the Muslims in medieval Malabar for the community, which primarily was involved in mercantile affairs, was not much interested in preserving the accounts of its day-to-day life for the use of future generations, and the frequent wars and encounters on the Malabar Coast along with the nature of writing material (very often palm leafs which would not survive for a long time due to the local climatic factors) reduced the chances of survival of historical information into our times. Such a problem could be overcome to some extent if the historian makes use of a variety of qualitative methods and takes into account the multi-disciplinary character of source materials available in front of him. The present study is undertaken after a fair understanding of this fact about the historical writing. The qualitative research strategy involved spending several days in the field collecting archival materials, examining inscriptions and conducting interviews. A considerable array of primary and secondary sources was collected from various repositories, both public and personal: Mappila Heritage Library (University of Calicut), Kozhikode Regional Archives, Moinkutty Vaidyar Smaraka Library (Kondotty), CHMK Library (University of Calicut), Indian Council of Historical Research, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Central Library of JNU, CHS Library of JNU, Azhariya Library (Chaliyam), Library of Tanur Islahul Uloom Arabic College, etc. In fact, most of the primary sources, which could be collected for the study of the Muslim mercantile community of medieval Malabar, originate from outsiders and consist mainly of those in the Arabic, Persian, Chinese and European languages. However, for corroborating and counterbalancing these

exogenous sources, there are some sources of indigenous origin, which are in the form of accounts written in Arabic and Malayalam, inscriptions and material remains. For studying the Chinese, Persian, French and Portuguese sources, I have relied on their available English translations, whereas in the case of most of the Arabic and Malayalam sources attempt has been made to take advantage of the present writer's knowledge in those languages for reading their original texts in order to keep away from the problems of translation. Besides the qualitative research strategy, some quantitative analysis has also been undertaken while studying such issues as the volume and value of the merchandise in circulation.

The secondary literature collected from the aforementioned repositories relating to the subject consist of those written by both the Asian and Western scholars and are helpful in discerning the broader themes in the Indian Ocean studies, which have to be kept in mind while trying to locate the Muslim mercantile community of medieval Malabar in the wider realm of maritime Asia. Studies by indigenous scholars on various aspects of Malabar, though mostly undertaken for relatively modern times, are utilized in order to capture the available data for the reconstruction of the trajectories of trade and faith networks of the Muslims in Malabar. The historical data collected from the repositories are complemented by a pool of interviews conducted with those indigenous scholars who have knowledge of the history of Malabar Muslims as well as with many local individuals residing in the historical Muslim settlements of Malabar, whose sayings or oral literature could be useful if utilized critically and positively. The visit to some of the historical sites, which were linked with the Malabar Muslims and which still have a few of the remnants of their material culture, helped considerably in the mapping of the trade and faith networks.

The primary sources used for the present study consist of various categories: epigraphy, indigenous textual accounts, merchants' letters, travel accounts, accounts from across the ocean, European sources and archaeology.⁵³ Inscriptions or epigraphic

⁵³ This categorization of primary sources made following Sebastian Prange in Sebastian Raphael Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*, Doctoral Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2008, pp. 20-31.

evidence form an important genre of source for the study. Although not many inscriptions are found in Malabar directly pertaining to the mercantile activities, copper-plate grants such as the Tharisappalli deed which recorded the privileges granted to the foreign merchants by the local ruler, and the inscriptions found in the local mosques and graveyards of the merchants are utilized to draw inferences on the presence and role of the expatriate merchants in Malabar.⁵⁴ Another genre of source is the rarely found, but fairly important textual accounts of indigenous origin in medieval times. This includes those written in the Arabic language such as *Tuhfathul Mujahideen* (a sixteenth century anonymous account written basically with the purpose of inducing Muslim rulers outside of Malabar to fight against the Portuguese)⁵⁵, *Maslak al-atqiya'* (a commentary on Sheikh Zainuddin's mystic treatise *Hidayat al-azkiya*) of Abdul Azeez,⁵⁶ *Fathul Muin* and *Ajwibathul Ajeebath* (both are theological treatises compiled in the sixteenth century as part of accommodating the universal Islam into the local realities of Malabar) of Sheikh Zainudhin⁵⁷ and *Fat'h al-Mubin* (a sixteenth century verse remembering the victory over the Portuguese fort in Chaliyam) of Muhammed Kalikuti.⁵⁸ These texts are helpful in reconstructing the trajectories of the trade and faith networks of the Muslims in Medieval Malabar. *Qissat Shakarvati Farmad* (an Arabic text of anonymous authorship), though generally ignored by the scholars for being a mere legend about the advent of Islam in Malabar, is utilized for the present study after subjecting it for vigorous textual criticism, as the text sheds some important light on the aspects of the Muslim networks of the pre-

⁵⁴ For a study of the Tharisappalli deed see M. R. R. Varier and K. Veluthat, *Tharisappalli Pattayam*, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society, Kottayam, 2015 (reprint).

⁵⁵ A manuscript of the text is found in the British Library, *Tuhfah al-mujahidin fi ba'd_ akhbar al-purtukalin*, British Library, MS. IO Islamic 2807e. The manuscript in the private collection of the late K. K. Abdul Kareem was the one copied from another manuscript, which was reproduced (not authored) by Zaynudhin ibn Abdul Azeez in the year 1621. See Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin fi ba'd akhbar al-burtughalin*, ed. Hamza, al-Huda Bookstall, Calicut, 1996.

⁵⁶ Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya' wa manhaj al-asfiya' fi sharh hidayat al-adkiya' ila tariq al-auliya*, ed. Hamid Abdullah al-Tamimi, Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah, Beirut, 2013.

⁵⁷ A. Z. al-Malabari, *Fath al-mu'een bi sharh qurrat al-ain bi muhimmat al-dhin*, ed. Bassam A. al-Jabi, Dar Ibn Hazam, Beirut, 2004; *Idem, al-Ajwibat al-ajeebath an al-asilat al-ghareeba*, ed. A. A. al-Shafi al-Malabari, Dar al-Dhiya', Kuwait, 2012.

⁵⁸ A manuscript of the text is found in the British Library, see M. al-Kālikūtī, *al-Fatḥ al-mubīn lil-sāmūrī alladhī yuḥibb al-muslimīn*, British Library, MS. IO Islamic 2807n., fols. 274-278. For the published version see al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin, A Contemporary Account of the Portuguese Invasion on Malabar in Arabic Verse*, ed. K. S. Shamseer, Other Books, Calicut, 2015.

modern times.⁵⁹ Among the Malayalam texts useful for the study is the *Granthavari* literature, the dominant genre of historical writing favoured by the Brahmins of Kerala. Of the *Granthavari* genre is the rarely used Wye manuscript, which is an English translation (1800) by the British officer John William Wye of a palm-leaf manuscript from Calicut originally written on leaves of the *ola* or Brab tree in the Malayalam language.⁶⁰ My own close reading of the text leads me to the contention that it was a translation of some portions of the sixteenth-century Arabic text *Tuhfathul Mujahideen*. However, the author of the text has not failed to make a few but crucial add and drops in order to make his write-up fit to the political ethos of the Zamorin's court and as such the account could be used as a counterbalance to the narrations of the contemporary Arabic texts.

The next important genre of source used for the study is the records or accounts pertaining to the medieval traders. Typical of this genre is what came to be known as the Cairo Geniza records which contained, among other things, records and correspondence of Jewish merchants active in Egypt, Maghrib, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and the socio-economic aspects of which have been painstakingly explored and studied by Shlomo Goitein.⁶¹ Though they basically belonged to the Jewish merchants of the

⁵⁹ Yohanan Friedmann has tried to contextualize the text with a small commentary in Yohanan Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad: A Tradition Concerning the Introduction of Islam to Malabar', *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, 1975, pp. 233-58. From a comparative and close reading of this text and the *Tuhfah al-mujahidin* it appears that the author of the later must have had availed this text as he is seen as loosely copied some portions of it in the second part of his work, and thus the tradition was already available to the readers in the compiled form well in or before the sixteenth century. The contemporary socio-cultural and economic setting is very much reflected throughout the compilation of the tradition, and hence many of the important ports of the Malabar Coast which at that point of time might have had Muslim settlements and the fragmented political situation of the region are referred in the text. As Calicut is missing from the text, it seems safe to say that the tradition was compiled sometimes between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. As for the manuscripts of the text, one is found in the British Library, which is given by Friedmann in his article and another one is kept in the old Mosque of Maday near the mount Eli, Kannur. Colin Mackenzie in the early 19th century appeared to have noticed one manuscript of the text in his tour of the south India as can be understood from H. H. Wilson, *Mackenzie Collection, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental Manuscripts and Other Articles Illustrative of the Literature, History, Statistics and Antiquities of the South of India*, 2 vols., Asiatic Press, Calcutta, 1828, vol.2, p. 119.

⁶⁰ The manuscript was published in a journal from London. See J. W. Wye, 'Translation of a History of the Portuguese Landing in India, Written on Leaves of the Brab Tree, or Ola, in the Malabar Language' *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for the British Indian and Its Dependencies*, 3, 1817, pp. 27-32.

⁶¹ Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*.

eleventh and twelfth centuries, these records are also important for studying the commercial aspects of the other communities of the time, not least the Muslims as they included documents which illustrate the Jewish interaction with men of other communities.

The next sort of source is the travel accounts which are crucial for studying the mercantile activities of the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast. Since the travelogues consulted for the present study belonged to various periods and backgrounds, an attempt has been made to truly historicize them and deal with them carefully. Travel accounts, apart from shedding light on the material aspects of the merchants, are useful in tracing the faith networks of the Muslims in medieval times. Malabar was visited by a number of travellers, significantly because of its strategic position in the Indian Ocean seafaring. For the early medieval period, we have what is often referred to as *Silsilat al-tawarikh* which contained the accounts of the Indian Ocean sailors including one Sulaiman al-Thajir.⁶² In the tenth century, Abu Dulaf al-Khazraji in his India and China tour visited the coastal areas of India including Malabar.⁶³ Then, for the twelfth century there is the account of Benjamin of Tudela⁶⁴, and for the thirteenth century, the travelogues of John of Montecorvino and Marco Polo furnish us with their experiences.⁶⁵ When it comes to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there is relatively a substantial corpus of travel accounts. In the fourteenth century, Malabar was visited by the friar

⁶² The Arabic version found in the Paris National Library is published in Par M. Reinaud, ed. and trans., *Relation des voyages faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine dans le IXe siècle de l'ère chrétienne: Texte arabe imprimé en 1811 par les soins de feu Langlès, pub. avec de corrections et additions et accompagné d'une traduction française et d'éclaircissements par M. Reinaud...* vol.2., Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1845. See also Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, al-Majma' al-Saqafi, Abu Debi, 1999; Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*.

⁶³ M. S. Muraizin Aseeri, ed., *al-Risalathul ula li abi dulafmusa'ar ibn al-muhalhal al-khazraji*, ed. M. S. Muraizin Aseeri, Ummul Qura University, Saudi Arabia, 1995.

⁶⁴ However it should be said that some scholars have raised doubt over Benjamin's visit to India and China. See for example S. D. Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 3, 1987, p. 461n 59.

⁶⁵ Benjamin de Tudela, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. A. Asher, Hakesheth Publishing Co., New York, 19--; Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, 2 vols., eds. and trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, Routledge & Sons Limited, London, 1938. For John of Montecorvino's remarks on Malabar see K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *Foreign Notices of South India from Megasthenes to Ma Huan*, University of Madras, Madras, 1939.

Odoric of Pordenone, the friar Jordanus, Wang Dayuan of China, Ibn Battuta of Morocco and John of Marignolli.⁶⁶ Among them, Ibn Battuta is significantly helpful for the present study due to the vast array of information he provides about the aspects of trade and faith in Maritime Asia. In the first half of the fifteenth century, Ma Huan and Fei Hsin visited Malabar as part of the official Ming expeditions in the Indian Ocean and they have recorded some of the important material aspects of the place.⁶⁷ Besides, the Venetian traveller Niccolo di Conti and the Timurid chronicler Abd al-Razzaq also were on the coast of Malabar in the fifteenth century and their accounts form source of information for the present study.⁶⁸ For the subsequent period, which the study covers, accounts of such travellers as Ludovico de Varthema, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, Francois Pyrard de Laval and Pietro della Valle are utilized since they help us in understanding the continuities and discontinuities in the patterns of Indian Ocean trade.⁶⁹

The accounts from across the ocean form the next important category of primary source for the study. Such accounts become significant because of the fact that many of them were produced in those places which were connected to the trade and faith networks

⁶⁶ Friar Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta: The Wonders of the East*, trans. Henry Yule, Hakluyt Society, London, 1863; Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta al-musammāt tuhfāt al-nullar fī garaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfar*, 5 vols., ed. A. al-Thazi, Acadamiya al-Mamlakat al-Maghribiyya, Morocco, 1997. For Wang Dayuan's account of Malabar see Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', in *Explorations in the History of South Asia: Essays in Honour of Dietmar Rothermund*, eds. G. Berkemer, Tilman Frasch, et al., Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001. For the remarks on Malabar by Odoric of Pordenone and John of Marignolli see Sastri, ed., *Foreign Notices*.

⁶⁷ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan, 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970; Fei Hsin, *Hsing-C'a Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, trans. J. V. G. Mills and ed. Roderich Ptak, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1996.

⁶⁸ R. H. Major, ed. *Indian in the Fifteenth Century, being a collection of narratives of voyages to India*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1857; W. M. Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq Samarqandi: Mission to Calicut and Vijayanagar', in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. W. M. Thackston, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, MA, 1989.

⁶⁹ Ludovico di Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1502-1508*, trans. John Winter Jones and ed. Norman Mosely Penzer, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1997 (reprint); Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies: From the Old English Translation of 1598*, 2 vols., ed. Arthur Coke Burnell, Hakluyt Society, London, 1885; Pietro Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India: from the old English translation of 1664*, 2 vols., trans. G. Havers and ed. Edward Grey, Hakluyt Society, London, 1892; Francois Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. Albert Grey, Hakluyt Society, London, 1887.

of the Muslim traders in their role as centres of export, import or transshipment. *Chu-fan-shi* of Chau Ju-Kua exemplifies the view from the Far East, with which the Muslim traders on the Malabar Coast had commercial relation for along time.⁷⁰ It is from the west, however, that we get a significant number of accounts which have references to the aspects of trade and faith networks of medieval times. Noteworthy among them are the geographical accounts by Ibn Khurdadhbeh, Al-Yaqubi, Ibnul Faqih, Ibn Rusta, Abu Zaid, Al-Masudi, Al-Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal, Al-Maqdisi, Al-Idrisi, Yaqut, Al-Qazwini, Al-Dimishqi, Rashīd al-Dīn Hamadani, Abul Fida, etc., of whom some had the first-hand experience of maritime Asia and its commerce through their extensive travels. The medieval travel accounts of West Asia are also important for studying the mercantile world of the Muslims as they provide valuable information on the commercial activities of the major port towns of Yemen, Egypt, Oman, etc. The present study uses the travelogues of Ibn Jubair and Ibn al-Mujawir.⁷¹ The recent shift in the study of the history of Yemen from political and cultural fields to the economic and administrative realms has brought into light the significance of some of the medieval accounts from Yemen, with the ports of which the Muslim merchants from Malabar had active trade relations. *Nur al-ma'ārif*, the archive of the administrative affairs of the reign of the Rasulid Sultan al-Muzaffar Yusuf, is one of the sources which have come into light as part of the new interest in the economic history of pre-modern Yemen and the present study makes use of this source as it contains some important documents pertaining to the maritime commercial as well as faith relations between Yemen and Malabar Coast.⁷² This source provides with some crucial references to the Kārimi trade which help in discerning how and where this branch of the medieval Indian Ocean commerce operated. Ali Ibn al-Hasan al-Khazraji's history of the Rasulids of Yemen written around AD 1400 is the other source of information for the present study as it contains, among other things, the

⁷⁰ Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, eds. and trans., *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries entitled as Chu-fan-chi*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, 1911.

⁷¹ Ab al-Hasan Mohammed ibn Ahmed ibn Jubair, *Rihlatu Ibn Jubair*, Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, Beirut, 1981; Ibn al-Mujawir, *Sifat bilad al-yemen wa makka wa ba'l al-hijaz al-musammāt tarikh al-mustabsar*, ed. M. H. Mohammed, Maktabat al-Saqafa al-Diniyya, Cairo, 1996.

⁷² M. 'A. Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif fī nuḥum wa-qawānīn wa-a'rāf al-yaman fī al-'ahd al-muzaffarī al-wārif*, 2 vols., al-Ma'had al-Faransi li al-Aasar wa-al-Uloom al-Ijtima'iya bi Sana'a, Sana'a, 2003-2005.

record of a letter sent by the *qadi* of Calicut on behalf of the Muslim merchants of Malabar.⁷³ The study also utilizes an anonymous history of Yemen from 1048 AD to 1436 AD, which has references to the commercial aspects of Malabar.⁷⁴ Historical works produced in the Mamluk period from Egypt and Hijaz, particularly in the fifteenth century, are also significant for this study as they inform us the efforts of the rulers in maintaining the trade networks between West Asia and Malabar and introduce some of the important merchants who were active in such trade networks. The works of this sort utilized for the present study include those by Al-Maqrizi, Salahudin Al-Safadi, Al-Sakhavi, Shamsudin Al-Dhahabi, Umar Ibn Fahad, Al-Qalqashandi, Ibn Taghribirdi, etc.⁷⁵ In addition, the nautical treatises of the medieval period, particularly those by Ibn Majid, are useful for the study as they help in identifying the important ports of the times and the landmarks by which the seafarers located them during their voyage.⁷⁶

European sources are the other category of sources relevant to the present study. The Portuguese accounts from the early sixteenth century composed by the officials who stayed on the Malabar Coast are extremely important for the understanding of the hitherto

⁷³ Ali Ibn al-Hasan al-Khazraji, *al-Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya fi tarikh al-dawla al-rasooliya*, 2 vols., eds. M. B. Asal and Mohammed al-Hawali, Markaz al-Dirasat wa-al-Buhoos al-Yamani, Yemen, 1983, vol. 2, pp. 203-6.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, *Tarikh al-daulat al-rasooliyya fi al-yemen li muallif majhool a'sh fi al-qarn al-tasi' al-hijri*, ed. Abdullah Mohammed al-Habshi, Dar al-Jil, Sana'a, 1984.

⁷⁵ Taqyuddin al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma'rifat duwal al-mulook*, 8 vols., ed. M. A. Ata, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1997; *Idem, al-Mawaid wa-al-I'tibar bi dibr al-khutut wa-al-asar*, 4 vols., Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1997; Salahuddin al-Safadi, *al-Wafi bi al-Wafayat*, 29 vols., eds. Ahmed al-Arnaut and Turki Mustafa, Dar Ihya' al-Turas al-Arabi, Beirut, 2000; Shamsuddin al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw' al-lami' li ahl al-qarn al-tasi'*, 6 vols., Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, Beirut, 1900; Shamsudin al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-islam wa wafayat al-mashahir wa-al-a'lam*, 15 vols., ed. B. A. Ma'roof, Dar al-Garb al-Islami, Beirut, 2003; *Idem., al-'Ibar fi khabar man ghabar*, vols. 4, ed. Abu Hajar Mohammed, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1985; Al-Najm Umar ibn Fahad, *Ithāf al-warā bi akhbar umm al-qura*, 5 vols., ed. Fahim ibn Mohammed Shaltut, Umm al-Qura University, Mecca, 1983; *Idem, al-Durr al-kamīn bi dhail al-a'qd al-samin fi tarikh al-balad al-amin*, 3 vols., ed. Abdulmalik ibn Abdullah, Dar Khair li al-Twaba'at wa-al-Nashr, Beirut, 2000; Ahmad al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-a'sha fi sana't al-insh*, 15 vols., ed. M. H. Shamsuddin, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1988; Yusuf Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Manhal al-safi wa-al-mustaufi ba'da al-wafi*, 7 vols., ed. M. M. Ameen, al-Haiat al-Misriyya al-A'mma li al-Kitab, Cairo, 1984; *Idem, Hawadis al-duhoor fi mada al-ayyam wa-al-shuhoor*, 2 vols., ed. M. K. Izzuddin, Aalam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1990; *Idem, al-Nujoom al-zahira fi mulook misr wa-al-qahira*, 16 vols., Dar al-Kutub, Misr, 1963.

⁷⁶ Ahmad ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid fi ma'rifat ilm al-bahr wa-al-qawaid*, VK551, Library of Congress, MS. No. 2008401696. Along with this text, the same manuscript contains many other short treatises of Ibn Majid such as *Hawiyat al-ikhtisar*, *al-Qaseeda al-makkiyya*, and *Qiblat al-islam*.

existing commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in maritime Asia. The accounts by Duarte Barbosa and Tomé Pires, and the records of the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Pedro Alvares Cabral come under this category.⁷⁷ Then, the European accounts from the subsequent periods such as the official records, letters and chronicles are quite relevant for the present study in comprehending the changes which occurred in the economic organization and the commercial networks of the Muslims in medieval Malabar.⁷⁸ Finally, the study takes into account the significance of the archaeological evidences. The material remains like ceramics, stone anchors, etc. from the various port-cities, dockyards and shipwreck sites can provide with some sorts of at least quantitative data for the trade of pre-European era, if they are suitably analysed. As such, they could be utilized to verify and substantiate the conclusions drawn from the other genres of sources. Here, attempt has been made to make use of the available archaeological reports and studies concerning those regions, which were once part of the wide-ranging commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in medieval Malabar.⁷⁹ Overall, the study strives to juxtapose various genres of source materials pertaining to the subject in order to bring balance and to make the arguments sounder.

⁷⁷ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and Their Inhabitants*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, London, 1918- 1921; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, 2 vols., Hakluyt Society, London, 1944; H. E. J. Stanley, trans., *The three voyages of Vasco da Gama, and his viceroyalty, from the Lendas da India of Gaspar Correa*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1869; William Brooks Greenlee, trans., *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1967.

⁷⁸ Specimens of this type of sources are: Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalbuquerque, Second Viceroy of India*, 4 vols., Hakluyt Society, London, 1875; Manuel de Fariya e Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia: Or the History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese*, 3 vols., trans. John Stevens, C. Brom, London, 1695; Antonio de Gouvea, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar*, ed. Pius Malekandathil, LRC Publications, Kochin, 2003.

⁷⁹ An example of this is S. Tripathi, A. Manikfan and M. Mohamed, 'An Indo-Arabian Type of Stone Anchor from Kannur, Kerala, West Coast of India', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 34, no.1, April 2005, pp. 131-7.

Chapter I

One Coast with Many Outlets: Locating the Malabar Coast and its Ports

This chapter aims to engage with four themes with a view to providing a contextual understanding for the remaining two main chapters. Firstly, it tries to discuss the political and socio-economic background of Malabar, in which there evolved trade and faith-related networks of the Muslim merchants. Secondly, it locates the chief port-cities of the Malabar Coast especially with regard to the Muslim engagement in them. This is done by deeply engaging with the contemporary source materials relevant to the subject. Mentioning is made of the changing hierarchical structuring of the ports in Malabar. Here attempts would be made also to examine the reasons behind the appearance of various nodal points on the long stretch of the coast. Thirdly, the chapter studies monsoon wind system, which was decisive in the shaping of the nature of seafaring in the Indian Ocean and in the formation of nodal points followed by eventual formulation of mercantile diasporas along the rims of the ocean. Finally, it analyses the nature of the existing maritime trade networks in the eastern and western segments of the Indian Ocean, so as to know the aspects of continuity in the trade networks yet to be formed by the Muslim merchants in the subsequent period.

1. The Political and Socio-Economic Background of Medieval Malabar

The political history of Malabar after the decline of the early Chera dynasty still lies in obscurity for lack of sufficient source materials. However, with the help particularly of epigraphic evidences, we are now in a position to reconstruct the political history of the region for the period from the dawn of the ninth century onwards, when what is called as later Cheras or Kulasekhara dynasty was founded. The Kulasekharas ruled over a large portion of the Malabar Coast for more than three centuries with their capital at Tiruvanchikulam or Mahodayapuram, and during their reign, the whole region

was divided into a number of *nadus* or provinces. Among the *nadus*, Venad was the southern-most province, and in the north, the farthest one was Kolathunad (Cannanore-Kasarkode area). Each *nadu* was under one *naduvazhi* and was further divided into many *desams*, which were under *desavazhis*. The lowest territorial unit was *kara*, the administration of which was carried through *panchayaths*.¹ In the early twelfth century, the later Chera dynasty came to an end mainly because of the series of conflicts with the neighbouring Chola rulers of Tamil region. The Chera-Chola conflict commenced with the battle of Kandalur Salai in the late tenth century, and then the power struggle continued throughout much of the eleventh century. As a result of the long war and the eventual decline of the Cheras, Malabar lost its political unity as the erstwhile *nadus* now resorted to assert their independence and emerged as distinct *swarupams* (states). Significant among the *swarupams* were Venad, Perumpadappu, Nedyiruppu, and Kolathunadu, all of which in the subsequent centuries remained as important political entities of Malabar by subjugating their adjacent minor *swarupams*. The fragmented political state of Malabar can be discerned from the contemporary accounts such as that of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta.² By the end of the fifteenth century, however, Eradis, who already had shifted their power centre from the inland Nedyiruppu into the coastal Calicut and begun to be known as *Sāmiris* (Engl. Zamorins),³ appeared as the most

¹ A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1967, p. 138.

² Both of these travellers have described about independent character of various *swarupams* of Malabar. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta al-musammāt tuḥfat al-nullar fī garaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfār*, 5 vols., ed. A. al-Thazi, Acadamiya al-Mamlakat al-Maghribiyya, Morocco, 1997, vol. 4, p. 38; Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 414-9.

³ As to the etymology of *Samutiri*, various possibilities have been put forward. See, K. V. Krishna Ayyar, 'The Importance of the Zamorins of Calicut', *Proceedings of the Indian History of Congress* 37, 1976, pp. 252-3. Here, I would like to add another possibility. The contemporary Arabic texts, both indigenous and exogenous ones, render the title as *Samiri*. In the Quranic verses is a quite known *Samiri* who lived during the days of the Prophet Moses and who had induced some of the Israelites to worship cows. Thus, it is possible that when they visited Calicut and happened to see its ruler's obsession with cows and their veneration, the Muslim merchants from West Asia felt it bizarre and used to call the ruler *Samiri*. Substantiating this inference is the statement of Ibn Taghribirdi about Calicut. He remarks, 'The ruler of Calicut is *samiri* (cow worshiper), all of his subjects are *samirat* (cow worshippers), yet in it are merchants who are not *samirat* and the majority of these merchants are Muslims'. See, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 15, p. 427. Besides, agreeing with this kind of an interpretation, the sixteenth century Malabari writer Mohammed al-Kalikuti in his versified text *Fath al-mubeen* has two lines, which can roughly be translated as this: During the times of Moses there was a *Samiri* who had first established the system of

powerful *swarupam* in Malabar because of their conquests of neighbouring principalities. On the eve of the Portuguese arrival in Malabar, a major part of even the powerful Kolathunadu and Permpadappu *swarupams* were brought under the Zamorins's sphere of influence.⁴ Another political development in Malabar during the period under study was the changes that came as aftermath of the Portuguese intervention in Asia. In the south, as it allowed the European newcomers to have their commercial headquarters at Cochin, the Permpadappu *swarupam* wasso on relieved out of the political influence of the Zamorins and rose in prominence than ever before. Whereas in the north, the Kolathunadu *swarupam* was overshadowed by the Ali Rajas of Cannanore during the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The latter, utilizing the new commercial scenario in Malabar after the retreat of the West Asian *paradesi* merchants, carved out a thalassocracy of their own by mobilizing resources through maritime trade, and thus eventually evolved as the only Muslim state in the long history of Kerala.

It may seem that the changing political equations of Malabar might have affected the on-going trans-oceanic and coastal trade emanating from the coast. However, the paucity of sources on the history of the maritime trade does not allow us to draw any conclusive statement on the impact of the Chola aggressions on Malabar. It has been suggested that a more promising approach would be to think in terms to the Cholas taking over and reconfiguring trade networks of the time.⁵ In fact, the first ever Chola embassy to the Sung court in 1015 AD had one Muslim merchant from West Asia named Pu Jiaxin (Abu Qasim?) as second in command, and this is indicative of the way how the Cholas reconfigured in their favour the trade networks involved by the foreign merchants. However, the Chola campaigns across South and Southeast Asia, along with other factors, seem to have had some repercussions on the restructuring of the existing maritime trade circuits because from about the dawn of the eleventh century onwards

worshipping calf, which then became a religion, and this *Samiri* (of Calicut) seems to be of the kind of that *Samiri*. See, al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin*, p. 8, (Arabic text line nos. 45-46).

⁴ Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, pp. 177-8. For details, consult also Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut: From the Earliest Times Down to A. D. 1806*, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938, pp. 121-37.

⁵ Elizabeth Lambourn, 'Describing a lost camel'—Clues for West Asian Mercantile Networks in South Asian Maritime Trade (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries AD)' in *Ports of the ancient Indian Ocean*, eds. Marie-Françoise Boussac, Jean-François Salles, and Jean-Baptiste Yon, Primus Books, Delhi, 2016, pp. 387-8.

there was a considerable diminution in the direct sailing and trade of the West Asian merchants with China. The emergence of various *swarupams* after the disintegration of the later Cheras of course had affected the trajectory of maritime trade on the Malabar Coast. Unlike earlier, now there must have been a segmentation of resources from maritime trade among the newly emerged independent polities. Many of these *swarupams* were very much aware of the geographical advantages and trading prospects of maritime Malabar that did not favour extensive agricultural production, and thus they resorted to enthusiastically respond to the opportunities and fortunes offered by maritime trade. As each independent polity now wanted to strengthen its power vis-à-vis its enemies or counterparts, there was an increasing effort to encourage maritime trade in their respective territories by opening up new ports or by rejuvenating the existing ones, so as to accumulate adequate wealth for their state building and structuring endeavours. Some of the *swarupams* even undertook to shift their headquarters from the land-locked interiors into the coastal areas. Nonetheless, again it is difficult to ascertain the impact of the mutual skirmishes and aggressions of the *swarupams* on the state of maritime trade on the Malabar Coast.

By the ninth century, Malabar society had undergone considerable changes because of the new socio-economic order formulated by the newly arrived Brahmins.. Hinduism was now slowly turning out to be the major religion of the people in Malabar, and thus the earlier faiths such as Buddhism, Jainism and the Dravidian forms of worship were relegated to the background. Adding to the fortune of Hinduism was the reign of the Kulasekhara rulers who contributed to the making of it as the predominant faith of the region.⁶ The age of the later Cheras saw the establishment of temples on a large scale and the introduction of many temple arts and festivals with a view to popularizing Hinduism. With the new development came the caste system, which divided the Hindu society into several hierarchical castes based on the Brahmanical idea of *Chaturvarnya*. Thus, the priestly Brahmins and the warrior Nayars were regarded as the superior castes, whereas the toiling classes, who had occupied decent status in society in the preceding social order, were now looked upon as lower castes. By the sixteenth century, caste system had

⁶ Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, p. 143.

taken very rigid form in the Malabar society as can be discerned from such accounts as those of Barbosa and Tome Pires.⁷ What was the impact of such stratification of society on the commercial history of Malabar? The erstwhile mercantile class of the region was now categorized almost as Vaishyas in the new hierarchical order, and we have contemporary evidence to prove the existence of commercial class in Malabar. As Barbosa describes, the local Hindu merchants were known as *vyaparis*, who were involved in trade both on the seaports and in the inland markets.⁸ They were acting mainly as collectors of the commodities from interior markets and gardens as well as distributors of the goods imported to the seaports from the various forelands. These *Vyaparis* had storehouses on the seaports to keep the collected commodities for the proper season of sale.

However, in his description of the *vyapari* caste, Barbosa does not introduce them as merchants taking up maritime trade. It appears that the local Hindu mercantile class on the Malabar Coast refrained from oceanic trade likely because of the religious taboos propounded by the upper castes. As Tome Pires evidences, the Brahmins and Nayars of Malabar kept aloof from seafaring,⁹ and such an attitude on their part might have created negative impression about those who used to take up oceanic trade. Consequently, the native mercantile class among the Hindus rarely undertook seafaring and oceanic trade, thereby opening up chances for the outsiders to fill up the gap in the maritime history of Malabar. It is here that the ever-increasing presence of foreign merchants of diverse geographical and religious origins on the Malabar Coast during the medieval period has to be located. The rulers of Malabar, both the Kulasekharas and their successor *swarupam* polities, encouraged exogenous merchants to come and settle down in their port-cities for carrying out coastal and trans-oceanic trade from there. The epigraphic evidences from such inscriptions as Tarisappalli Copper Plates, Tazhakad Inscription, Vira Raghava Plate and Jewish Copper Plate of 1000 AD demonstrate how the Christian and Jewish merchants from West Asia were patronized by the rulers of Malabar with a

⁷ A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, pp. 67-72; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 33-70.

⁸ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 55-7.

⁹ For Pires, see, A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, p. 81.

view to mobilizing resources from maritime trade.¹⁰ The offer was not limited to the foreigners from West Asia, instead, the merchants from the eastern and northwestern coasts of India were also encouraged to take up the maritime trade of Malabar. Important among such merchants were the *Chettis* from the Coromandel Coast and the *Baniyas* from Gujarat. In the Geniza letters, we have references to an important ship-owner named or designated *Fatan Swami*, who had shipping service from Panthalayani Kollam to Aden.¹¹ On account of the native people's indifference towards seafaring, it is not unsafe to assume that *Fatan Swami* was one of the important merchants in Malabar, who had migrated from the eastern or north-western coast of India. Ibn Battuta informs us that the Hindu merchants of Quilon were known as *Chuliyani*, which would imply that the southern port of Malabar was home to many merchants from the Coromandel Coast.¹² Ma Huan's description of Calicut and Cochin clearly reveals the role played by the Chetti merchants in those ports of Malabar.

2. Locating the Ports on the Malabar Coast

During the period under study, Malabar was a coast with a clear maritime orientation and active trade with the various ports on the rims of the Indian Ocean. Its maritime face was moulded to a large extent by its geo-physical location vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean, where the monsoon system had a crucial role in the shaping of seafaring. At the same time, that it was a fertile land for many of the sought-after spices of the world made Malabar a chief destination for the merchants from all parts of the maritime Asia. Illuminating the maritime orientation of the coast is the presence of a number of nodal points on the long stretch of the land, which were developed in accordance with the trajectory of the evolution of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. In order to situate Malabar in the maritime history of the ocean, it is imperative to historically locate each of the main port-cities of the coast. The emergence of nodal points on the coast was not incidental, but outcome of the prevalence of certain prompting factors. It appears that in

¹⁰ For a short introduction to these inscriptions see, Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History*, pp. 65-71.

¹¹ Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 599.

¹² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta al-musammāt tuḥfāt al-nullar fī garaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfār*, 5 vols., ed. A. al-Thazi, Acadamiya al-Mamlakat al-Maghribiyya, Morocco, 1997, vol. 4, p. 49.

the rise of port-cities in Malabar due role was played by such factors as the ability of the ports to get connected with the important production centres in the hinterlands, the geophysical setting of the region with the potential to provide the sailing ships with decent anchorage facility as well as the provisions of travel, and the active participation of the local polities in the maritime affairs of the region. Interestingly, most of the ports that are examined in this section were located at the estuaries of the major westward flowing rivers of Malabar, which were sailable up to the interiors either whole the year or seasonably. Port-cities like Quilon and Cochin had the advantage of wonderful backwaters, where *tonis* and boats could be used for transportation. The availability of river-channels and backwaters significantly eased the transportation from and to the port-cities of Malabar, and thus it was quite feasible for the ports to get connected with the interior *angadis* (marts) and the rich spice and timber hinterlands. In the case of the port-cities of Calicut and Cannanore, although they had no significant river or backwater to their credit, reaching out to their hinterlands and umlands was possible as they had major rivers that flowed into their satellite ports, from which commodities could be taken to them with the help of small ships and boats. The advantage of riverine-routes was in addition to the presence in Malabar of intricate network of land-routes, which were linked either directly with the port-cities or with the rivers and backwaters and which could be traversed with the help of the caravans of oxen and porters.¹³ Therefore, it appears that in the rise of nodal points in Malabar, their ability to be connected with their umlands and hinterlands had been a big advantage.

Adding to the advantage of having water-channels and land-routes was the geophysical and natural setting of the ports. Loading and unloading of commodities of ships in a port needed safer anchorage and shelter facility apart from the fact that the seasonality of the monsoon system in the Indian Ocean compelled the ships to spend substantial period of time on certain ports awaiting proper seasons for the return journey or for the continuance of voyage. Most of the port-cities on the Malabar Coast had the ability to provide safer anchorage for the sailing ships as they were situated on the

¹³ Due to the geophysical nature of Malabar, it was difficult for the merchants to make use of the wheeled traffic. As the cost of land traffic was heavy, the merchants seemed to have preferred the riverine traffic whenever it was possible to avail.

estuaries or shores of the major rivers, where ships could be brought and anchored. In some cases as that of Cannanore, there were bays where ships could be sheltered because of the less-intense oceanic waves. Moreover, the presence of mud banks on the Malabar Coast was a formative force in the growth of certain nodal points. The characteristic feature of this natural phenomenon is that an unctuous mud rises from the bottom of the sea, becomes dispersed in water, and then stills the surf, and hence it enabled ships to load and discharge cargos in calm water on the open coast.¹⁴ Pantalayani Kollam and Aleppey were the major spots of Malabar, where mud banks were formed. It was during the peak of the south-west monsoon that the mud banks facilitated anchorage for ships in these places, and therefore it turned out to be a big advantage for these nodal points as the other ports of the Malabar Coast used to remain closed in the heyday of the monsoon due to the heavy rain and surfs. For those foreign ships, which sailed to the Malabar Coast in the beginning of the southwest monsoon or unexpectedly had to spend the summer on the coast, the mud bank ports must have been extremely helpful for the sheltering. It is likely that the ships, which visited the port of Quilon in its flourishing days, made use of the mud bank factor to anchor in the nearby Aleppey region while they waited their return or further journey. Furthermore, certain port-cities had the privilege of having some exceptional geographical landmarks, which eased the process of anchorage of ships. As will be discussed below, the port of Calicut was identified by a mountain peak situated on the Western Ghats, which, as Ibn Majid testifies, was conspicuous from far out at the Arabian Sea.¹⁵ The port of Madayi was located in the vicinity of Ezhimala, the mountain of great height and round, which could be noticed easily from the sea, thereby easing the landfall at the port. This latter port had an additional advantage, viz., the availability of wood and drinking water from Ezhimala and the adjacent rivers, which were collected by merchants before they sailed far into the Arabian Sea.¹⁶ As noted by a ninth century traveller, the port of Quilon also had the ability to deliver provisions of travel for the oceangoing ships not least in those days when there was direct sailing between West Asia and the Far East, in which Quilon was used as a transit point.¹⁷

¹⁴ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, pp. 35-6.

¹⁵ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid*, ff. 68v-69r, 161v.

¹⁶ Barbosa has noted this fact. See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 79.

¹⁷ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38.

At last but not least, the involvement of local polities in maritime affairs was also a decisive factor in the rise of nodal points along the coast of Malabar. Since the land of Malabar was not conducive for extensive paddy cultivation, the local rulers could not expect from levying on agricultural goods much revenue enough for their state building and for maintaining their political projects. As such, they had to seek other ways for mobilizing resources, and many of them found maritime trade as a best alternative or substitute. It is probable that some of the rulers themselves were involved in maritime trade by owning ocean-going ships and running them between their respective port and its forelands. Such a possibility is vindicated by the scanty references in our sources to the rulers owning ships. In his account of Jurfattan (Cannanore), Ibn Battuta says that the local ruler owned many ships, which sailed to the ports of Persian Gulf and Yemen.¹⁸ However, most often the local rulers of Malabar left the task of conducting maritime trade at their ports to the merchants from outside, and then accumulated wealth out of the customs duties on ships and commodities. The more ships visited the port of a ruler, the more wealth he could accumulate from the port. As such, the main concern of the ruler had to be ensuring safety and accountability to the visiting merchants.

Our sources introduce Malabar Coast as having the presence of well-organized piracy in its waters. Such a piracy on the coast called for the rulers' efforts to chase the pirates and provide the sailors with safety of life and merchandise in their waters. From the Yemeni chronicle *Nur al-ma'ārif*, we come to know that the Rasulid sultans had made official arrangements against piracy in the waters of Yemen. This was in the form of royal fleet, which gave protection particularly for the ships that came to Yemen with Indian commodities, and a special tax, called *Shavvani*, was levied on those products which reached Yemen under the royal protection.¹⁹ Similar efforts from any ruler of Malabar to curb piracy in the Indian waters were not known to have been taken. However, our sources demonstrate the attempts made by some of the rulers of Malabar to protect merchants' property rights on their ports as well as in the adjacent waters. Quilon and Calicut, the two most important port-cities on the Malabar Coast that remained in prominence for quite a long time, are known to have been keen in providing safety

¹⁸ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 42.

¹⁹ For the *Shavvani* tax levied at Aden on various goods see for example, Jāzīm, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, pp. 409-60.

especially for the foreign merchants. A Geniza letter of early twelfth century speaks about an incident, in which the ruler of Quilon resorted to settle the issue of ownership of a ship, which accidentally had lost its captain while on a sail to Aden and thus was brought back to the Malabari port by the passengers on board.²⁰ References to the great security enjoyed by the merchants at the Zamorins' port Calicut are found in many of the contemporary accounts including that of Ibn Battuta, Abdul Razzaq, and Pyrard de Laval, and *Keralolpathi*.²¹ The Moroccan Ibn Battuta has it that in Calicut the merchandise of the wrecked ships were not taken by the ruler nor by any of his subjects, instead, they were returned to the real owners, and that the same was the main reason for the flourishing trade at this port.²² Thus, it appears that the involvement or intervention of rulers in the maritime affairs of ports not least in protecting the property rights of the visiting merchants had much to do in deciding the fate of nodal points.

Now it seems pertinent to have a discussion on the major port cities of the Malabar Coast which were important to the commercial world of the Muslims. A proper understanding of the commercial and faith-related networks of the Muslims in Malabar calls for locating historically the main exchange centres of the coast by examining their geographical locations and features, and by discerning the way how they figured in the contemporary sources. During the period under consideration, different ports emerged on the Malabar Coast at various points of time. But the relevance of these ports in the regional as well as trans-oceanic commerce varied in the course of time in accordance with the geo-political equations of Malabar and the nature of Indian Ocean commercial networks. It is true that appropriate archaeological excavations have not been carried out in the region to facilitate an accurate identification of the sites of its historical ports, nor the contemporary literary sources do provide with any substantial topographical description of them. Some of the sources just refer to the Malabar Coast as a whole

²⁰ This is detailed in the below discussion on Quilon.

²¹ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 48; W. M. Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq Samarqandi: Mission to Calicut and Vijayanagar', in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. W.M. Thackston, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, MA, 1989, p. 304; Francois Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. Albert Grey, Hakluyt Society, London, 1887, vol. 1, p. 403; H. Gundart, *Keralolpatti: The Origin of Malabar*, 2nd ed., Pfeleiderer & Riehm, Mangalore, 1868, pp. 83-7.

²² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 48.

without describing its individual ports.²³ Yet, the sources at our disposal, especially the Arab geographers' accounts and the nautical treatises, enable us to gather some sorts of idea about the plausible locations of the ports on the medieval map of Malabar and their corresponding modern names, and to comprehend how they were reflected on the commercial scene of the coast at various time periods. Here, the ports are studied in a sequence conforming to their geographic location from the south to the north. While trying to locate the ports, instead of confining to a particular source one has to consider and juxtapose as many geographies and travelogues as possible because there were many ambiguities among the medieval writers in describing the locations of the ports. Obscurities were more likely in the case of those like Al-Idrisi who described the ports without having first-hand experience of them.²⁴

2.1 Quilon

Quilon (Ar. *Kūlam*) is the earliest port on the Malabar Coast to be identified by the literary and epigraphic sources as to have had the presence of Muslim merchants involved in the trans-oceanic trade of the Indian Ocean. Although a port in the region might already have existed, Quilon transformed as a burgeoning entrepot only in the first half of the ninth century when the Kulasekharas, the rulers of Malabar wanted to develop in it an alternative port to Vizhinjam, which had been captured by the neighbouring Pandyas. The Cheras aimed at making Quilon as their provincial headquarters (under the control of their feudatory Ay kingdom) so as to check the commercial and political imperialism of the Pandyas, and the conferring of various economic privileges on the immigrant Christian merchants in the mid-ninth century was part of their concern for intensifying the commercial prominence of the port in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean.²⁵ What appears from a reading of the Tharisappally copper plate of 849 AD is that by this time the Muslim merchants from West Asia had

²³ Ibn Khordadbeh's account of the ninth century speaks about Male (Malabar) as the country of pepper, but does not introduce its ports. See Ibn Khurdadhba, *al-Masalik*, pp. 62-3.

²⁴ A critical note on Al-Idrisi's cartography and placement of ports see S. Maqbul Ahmad, trans., *India and the Neighboring Territories in the Kitab Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi' Khtiraq al-Afaq of al-Sharif al-Idrisi*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1960, pp. 9-10.

²⁵ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 39-42.

become one of the chief foreign elements active in the operation of trade from and to the port of Quilon, though not as important as the Christian merchants were.²⁶ This fact is also borne out by the contemporary literary source *Silsilat al-thawarikh* which describes how West Asian merchants on their way back and forth China frequented the port of Kulam Male (Quilon) where provisions of journey were gathered and customs duties were levied from each ship.²⁷ Ibn al-Faqih's account of the tenth century informs that the port had a flourishing industry of vases though not at par in quality with the Chinese vases, and it was the Kulami vases which were sold in the West Asian markets as Chinese vases.²⁸ That Quilon continued to be an exporter of local vases can be gauged from the accounts of Abu Dulaf, Yaqut and Qazwini who all mention that Kulami vases were sold in their countries as Chinese ones.²⁹ Friar Odoric in the first half of the fourteenth century felt about the wares in Quilon that 'the variety and abundance of wares for sale in that city is so great that it would seem past belief to many folk'.³⁰ Abu Dulaf, who visited the entrepot in the mid-tenth century, has noted many other products it supplied: teak, bamboo, sandarac, rhubarb, aloe, camphor, myrobalan, sulphur, and copper, and as he and the later writers pointed out, many of these products were gathered from its surrounding localities.³¹

²⁶ An appraisal of this epigraphic source will be taken up in the following chapter.

²⁷ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38.

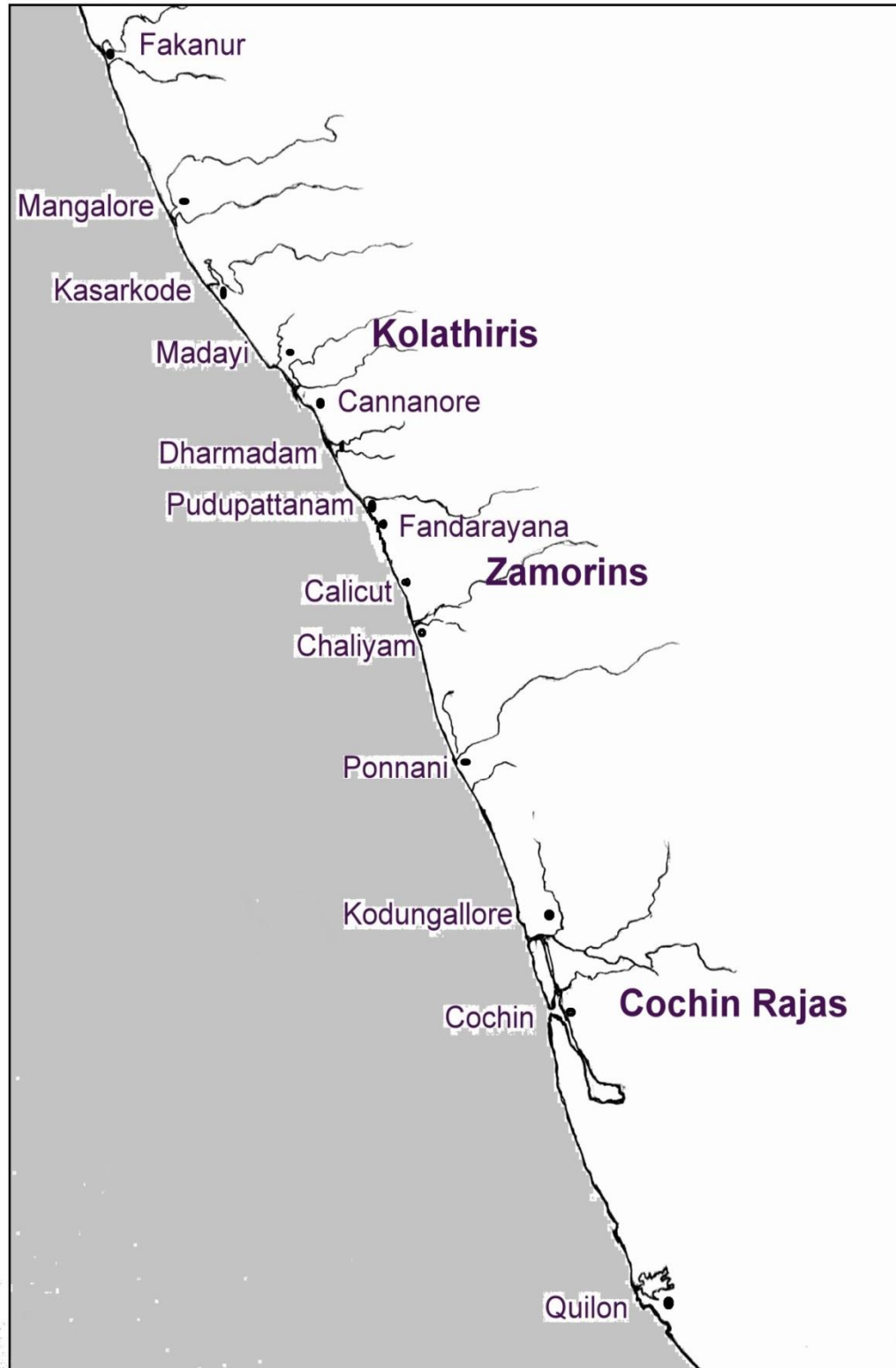
²⁸ A. A. Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-buldan*, ed. Yusuf al-Hadi, Aalam al-Kutub, Beirut, 1996, p. 70.

²⁹ Aseeri, ed., *al-Risalathul ula li abi dulaf*, p. 67; S. A. Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, 7 vols., 2nd ed., Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1995, vol. 3, p. 446; Zakariyya al-Qazwini, *Aasar al-bilad wa akhbar al-'ibad*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1960, p. 55.

³⁰ It should, however, be noted that some of these wares might have been exported from the ports of China. See Sastri, ed., *Foreign Notices of South India*, p. 194.

³¹ Abu Dulaf observed that the aloes found in Quilon were originally from islands situated beyond the equator and were brought by water into the northern direction where people picked them up on the beaches. He also noted that the camphor of the port was brought from the slope of a mountain between Kulam and Mandurqin (Madura). See Aseeri, ed., *al-Risalathul ula li abi dulaf*, pp. 63-8.

Map 1: The Malabar Coast in the fifteenth century.



The little references to Quilon found in the Cairo Geniza papers shed light not only on some of its products of export like silk materials but also on the management of trade at the port. In a letter sent to his family members in Egypt in the early twelfth century, the India trader Allan b. Hassun details how he along with his co-travellers were trapped amid the sea on their way from Quilon to Aden when their ship encountered peril at the sea and lost its captain. When the travellers without a captain managed to come back to Quilon, three officers of the port including one *karidar* (manager) came on board and took the ship from them. The officers settled the ownership of the ship to its proprietor *nakhuda* Ali Nawak, arranged two new captains for the ship to allow its passengers continue their journey, provided them with water and wood, and finally signed the concerned documents.¹ Thus, what appears from the description is the legal procedures and other government care in Quilon for merchants, not least the foreigners, a fact which can be corroborated by the travel accounts of later periods. Benjamin of Tudela in the late twelfth century remarked about Quilon:

This nation is very trustworthy in matters of trade and whenever foreign merchants enter their port, three secretaries of the king immediately repair on board their vessels, write down their names and report them to him. The king thereupon grants them security for their property, which they may even leave in the open fields without any guard. One of the king's officers sits in the markets, and receives goods that may have been found anywhere, and which he returns to those applicants, who can minutely describe them. This custom is observed in the whole empire of the king.²

If we accept the view that Benjamin had never been to India, then the other possibility would be that he gathered such information on Quilon through his inquiries with the India traders while being somewhere in West Asia, which in turn would imply that the port administration and provision of security in the city were wellknown in West Asia atleast among its commercial circles. Besides, the aforesaid Jewish merchant Allan b. Hassun in his letter to the family wrote the titles of port officials in Quilon such as *karidar* without detailing them likely because the family in Egypt were familiar with the officials and their titles at the Indian port. In the mid-fourteenth century when he was in

¹ The original letter was in Hebrew characters, but it has been transcribed into Arabic by Goitein in S. D. Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader: Three Letters from the Cairo Geniza', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 3, 1987, pp. 455-6.

² Benjamin, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin*, vol. 1, pp. 138-9.

the port of Quilon, Ibn Battuta also felt that the local ruler was very keen in ensuring safety and justice in his port city.³

As far as the geographical setting of Quilon was concerned, the dominant perception among the contemporary geographers and travellers was that it was the last port city in the *bilad al-fulful* (pepper land) from a north to south axis.⁴ However, many of the Arab geographers of the second millennium were baffled over the exact geographic nature of the port. Geographers like Al-Idrisi, Yaqut and Al-Dimishqi designated Quilon as a *jazira* (island) in India.⁵ In Al-Idrisi's map of Indian lands, Quilon is portrayed explicitly as an island situated in the open sea.⁶ Shihabudhin Al-Umari observed that the Ma'abar province of the Delhi Sultanate consisted of several islands such as Kulam, Fatan and Mulaibar, each of which had a great kingdom.⁷ Given the fact that these geographers or historians had never visited the port in person and none of the contemporary travel accounts narrates Quilon as an island, it is very unlikely that the port once was situated on an island space. Instead, it was part of the mainland Malabar Coast but located between the Arabian sea and the backwaters of Astamuti Lake. While the sea provided the port with access to the wider Indian Ocean world, the different branches of Astamuti Kayal must have enabled it to be connected with its pepper and other hinterlands. This can be vindicated by the reference in the Tharisappalli deed to the

³ See, Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta (India, Maldiv Islands and Ceylon)*, 2nd ed. (reprint), trans. Mahdi Husain, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1976, pp. 193-4.

⁴ Shamsudhin Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr fi ajaib al-barr wa-al-bahr*, Imperial Academy Press, St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 173; Imadudhin, Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, Dar al-Taba' al-Sultaniyya, Paris, 1840, p. 355; Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta al-musammata tuhfah al-nullar fi garaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfar*, 5 vols., ed. A. al-Thazi, Acadamiya al-Mamlakat al-Maghribiyya, Morocco, 1997, vol. 4, p. 49. However, some of the writers like Friar Jordanus (French bishop who had been in Malabar in the first half of the fourteenth century) and Shihabudhin al-Umari (14th century Arab historian) projected Quilon as being part of Ma'abar region possibly because of the Chola and Pandya attacks and temporary takeover of Kollam's political control. See Friar Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, pp. 40-1; for Al-Umari's remark see Shihabudhin Al-Umari, *Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar*, 27 vols., al-Majma' al-Saqafi, Abu Dhabi, 2002, vol. 3, p. 46.

⁵ See Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol. 1, p. 180; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, vol. 1, p. 346; Shamsudhin Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr fi ajaib al-barr wa-al-bahr*, Imperial Academy Press, St. Petersburg, 1865, p. 159.

⁶ Al-Idrisi's map is given in S. Maqbul Ahmad, trans., *India and the Neighboring Territories in the Kitab Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi' Khtiraq al-Afaq of al-Sharif al-Idrisi*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1960, plate no.1.

⁷ Al-Umari, *Masalik al-absar*, vol.3, p. 46.

collection of tolls from boats and carts visiting the port of Quilon. That the region had fine drinking water might have been a factor in attracting merchants sailing the eastern and western segments of the Indian Ocean. *Silsilat al-thawarikh* and Ibn al-Faqih have pointed out the fresh water available at the port for the seafarers.⁸ On the testimony of travellers to Quilon, Abul-Fida writes that the port ‘is on a gulf....It is situated on a plane land, and its earth is sandy. And there are many gardens’.⁹ Among the local products which the port supplied, the one most celebrated by the contemporary writers is pepper, about which many of them have given vivid descriptions. Al-Dimishqi felt that pepper in Quilon was in ample stock that it could supply the spice even though all the ships gather on the same day.¹⁰ Marco Polo’s account of the late thirteenth century, apart from informing us of the availability in Quilon of Coilomin ginger and brazilwood, speaks about the abundance of good quality indigo in the port. He has detailed the way how indigo dye was produced in the region.¹¹

As for the Muslim involvement in the trade of Quilon, we have a relatively good number of sources for the period from the late thirteenth century onwards. Muslim merchants’ presence at the port in the 1280s was such that when the Yuan diplomat Yang Tingbi visited Quilon, he was consulted by the representative of the Muslim community there to ask permission for sending annual tributary missions to the Chinese court.¹² The absence of Quilon in the list of the stipend receiving areas of the Rasulid dynasty cannot be taken to mean an absence of Muslim community there because, as will be seen in the later chapters, this might have occurred due to the different religious and commercial allegiance which the Kulami Muslims had maintained. About the people of the port Marco Polo remarked, ‘they are all idolaters and there are also many Christians, and Nestorians and Saracens (Muslims) and many Jews.’¹³ When he wrote his geography in the early fourteenth century Abbul-Fida informs that in the city of Quilon there was a

⁸ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38; Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-buldan*, p. 67.

⁹ Abu’l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 361.

¹⁰ Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 159.

¹¹ Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 414-5.

¹² Tansen Sen, *The Yuan Khanate and India: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, *Asia Major* 19, no. 1/2, 2006, p. 308.

¹³ Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 414.

separate quarter for Muslims along with a congregational mosque.¹⁴ By the mid-fourteenth century the participation of the Muslims in the spice trade of the port in comparison with other religious groups seemed to have risen considerably that when he undertook to correct many misconceptions about pepper spread in the far-off markets the European traveller John de Marignolli commented,

These are the things that I have seen with mine eyes and handled with my hands during the fourteen months that I stayed there. And there is no roasting of the pepper, as authors have falsely asserted.....nor are the Saracens (Muslims) the proprietors but the Christians of St. Thomas.¹⁵

Above all, Ibn Battuta has left a detailed note on the Muslim community who resided at the port of Quilon. He observed, ‘There live a number of Muslim merchants whose head is ‘Ala-ud-din al-Awachi (*al-Awaji*) from Awah in the country of Iraq.....Here the Muslims are honoured and respected...He (the local ruler) holds the Muslims in high regard...’¹⁶ He also informs that the port city was linked to the Kazarooni Sufi network which spread across the important outlets on the rims of the Indian Ocean, likely because of the port’s relevance to the Muslim commercial world of the time. Although the rise of the adjoining ports such as Calicut and Cochin would cause Quilon’s prominence in the trans-oceanic and coastal trade networks to diminish,¹⁷ during the fifteenth century the port still maintained a decent commercial profile. While the Chinese recorder Xin Fei who visited the port in the first half of the fifteenth century felt that Quilon was a principal port for all the countries of the Western Indian Ocean¹⁸, Ma Huan observed that the local ruler of the port undertook to send tributary missions to the Chinese court.¹⁹ When he prepared his authoritative nautical treatise *Kitab al-Fawaid*

¹⁴ Abu’l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 361.

¹⁵ For his remarks see Sastri, ed., *Foreign Notices*, p. 286.

¹⁶ Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, (1976) p. 193.

¹⁷ Quilon’s diminishing role can be understood from Nicolo de Conti’s account of the first half of the fifteenth century, in which the Italian has provided with the circumferential size of various ports on the western coast of India. While the circumference of Quilon is said to be 3 miles, Cambayat was of 12 miles, Calicut 8 miles and Cochin 5 miles. See N. M. Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo together with the Travels of Nicolo de Conti*, 2nd ed., Adam and Charles Black, London, 1937, pp. 134-5.

¹⁸ Fei Hsin, *Hsing-Ch’a*, pp. 65-6.

¹⁹ The sending of tributary missions to China might have been motivated by the commercial imperatives. See Ma Huan, *Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, p. 132.

in the late fifteenth century, Ibn Majid counted the port of Quilon as one among the important landfalls on the west coast of India.²⁰

2.2. Cochin

Cochin is among those ports on the Malabar Coast which came to prominence in a relatively later phase within the period under review. As such, the Arab geographers' accounts are not helpful in locating this port; instead, we have to turn towards other genres of sources such as the Chinese and European travel accounts and the indigenous literary sources. The rise of this port is generally attributed to the important geophysical changes happened due to the flood in the river Periyar in 1341. While one branch of the river silted up the city of Cranganore, the other branch that terminated at the Vembanadu Lake widened the entrance between the backwaters and the sea and thus paved the way for the emergence of the Cochin harbour. When the flood and the consequent siltation relegated the earlier port of Cranganore, a new port city began to evolve in the south because of the newly created water-passage, which as it could provide safer anchorage attracted the ocean-going ships. The new port came to be known as *Kochi*, probably a contraction of the Malayalam word *Kochazhi*, meaning small or new harbour in contrast to the old or large harbour Cranganore.²¹ The backwater system encircling Cochin, known in the north as Cranganore Lake and in the south as Vembanadu Lake was crucial in connecting the port with the pepper and other hinterlands. Into these backwaters flowed seven rivers; Periyar, Chalakkudy, Muvattupuzha, Meenachil, Manimala, Pampa and Achankovil. These rivers, along with the land routes, facilitated the movement of merchandise from the interior *angadis* or markets into the long stretching backwaters where they were further carried to the port of Cochin with the help of big boats and barges.²²

In fact, the dearth of adequate source materials hinders us from drawing any conclusion on the early decades of Cochin's evolution. Yet, in the light of the

²⁰ G. R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese, being a translation of Kitab al-Fawaid fi usul al-bahr wa 'l-qawaid of Ahmad b. Majid al-Najdi*, The Royal Asiatic of Great Britain and Ireland, London, 1981, p. 202.

²¹ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin*, pp. 41-2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

contemporary Chinese accounts, it can safely be said that by the dawn of the fifteenth century the port had already emerged as a notable exchange centre on the Malabar Coast. The accounts by Ma Huan, Fei Hsin, etc., reveal that Cochin by the early fifteenth century was so important a port in Malabar that it invited consecutively five of the total seven expeditions of the great Chinese admiral Cheng Ho.²³ Besides, the shifting of its capital in 1405 from Mahodayapuram (in Cranganore) to Cochin by the Perumpadappu *swarupam* can be taken to underline the commercial significance the later port had already acquired by this time.²⁴ By such a shift, the rulers must have thought of the possibility of accumulating substantial income by levying customs duties on the mercantile groups of the emerging port. When he visited Cochin around 1440, Nicolo de Conti noted that the port was of five miles in circumference and situated at the mouth of a river.²⁵ Seemingly, what Nicolo meant by such a substantial circumference could not be the size of the proper city, but that of the whole area under the urban influence of Cochin. If in the Italian's estimate, Cochin got a size of five miles in comparison to the three miles of Quilon, this would mean that the former port's commercial importance in Malabar had risen considerably within one century of its formation. Interestingly, Nicolo also has referred to the riverine shipping system in Cochin when he described his experience of seeing nocturnal monsters in human form while he along with some of the locals was sailing in a river nearby the port.²⁶ As for the conduct of trade in Cochin, again it is the Chinese sources, which furnish us with some insights into the theme. Both Ma Huan and Fei Hsin point out the existence of warehouses in Cochin established by the big pepper-collectors of the place with a view to storing the merchandise until the foreign merchants come to buy. At the same time, As Ma Huan noted, the Chetti merchants of

²³ The seven missions of Cheng Ho (1405-1433) were commissioned by the Ming rulers with a view to boosting the diplomatic relations with the various countries on the rims of the Indian Ocean and to making their rulers or delegates and traders visit China for submitting tributes and for conducting trade. The first visit to Cochin was in 1408 during the second expedition of Cheng Ho, and then the port attracted rest of all the expeditions except the seventh one. See J. V. G. Mills, trans., introduction to *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan, 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 8-19.

²⁴ That Cheng Ho and his mission visited Cochin in 1408 even though hardly half a decade had passed from the arrival of *Perumpadapu* ruler at the port points to the already existing commercial importance of the port. For the shift of capital to Cochin, see Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, pp. 173-4.

²⁵ Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels*, p. 135.

²⁶ This river may be either the backwaters of Cochin or one of the rivers which merged into the backwaters. See, *Ibid*, p. 135.

the port would collect such commodities as gemstones, pearls, and aromatic goods, and wait for the arrival of the foreigners.²⁷

Ma Huan, whose first visit to the Malabar Coast was in 1413-15 during the fourth expedition of Cheng Ho and who wrote his account of it after his return to China from the same expedition, observed that Cochin

contains five kinds of people. The first kind are named Nan-k'un; [they belong to] the same rank as the king ...they form the most honourable order. The second kind are the Muslims. The third kind of people are named Che-ti; they are the moneyed property-owners. The fourth kind of people are named Ko-ling; they specialize in acting as brokers for people. The fifth kind of people are named Mu-kua; the Mu-kua are the lowest of men....²⁸

From the ranking of Muslims as the second important group among the population of Cochin, it appears that the community had a significant role in the development of the port as a commercial centre in Malabar. Ma Huan repeatedly talks about foreign merchants of different countries present at the port who were involved in the purchase of pepper, gemstones, pearls, etc. Surely, an important component of these foreigners at Cochin was the Muslim merchants from West Asia.²⁹ More noteworthy among the Muslims of the port, however, was the merchants from such places as Gujarat and Coromandel who concentrated during the pre-Portuguese era on the regional trade along the coasts of India. The Marakkars, for instance, were the Muslim merchants from the Coromandel Coast who traded with Cochin in various commodities, and many of them by the course of time permanently settled on the port ultimately to become the prominent segment of its Muslim community. Alluding to these Muslims, Barbosa in the early sixteenth century remarked,

On the banks of this river (backwaters of Cochin) is a city of the Moors natives of the land, wherein also live Heathen Chatims, and great merchants. They have many ships and trade with Charamandel, the great kingdom of Cambaia, Dabul and Chaul in *areca*, cocos, pepper, *jagara* and palm sugar.³⁰

²⁷ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan:Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, pp. 135-6; Fei Hsin, *Hsing-Ch'a*, p. 67.

²⁸ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan:Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, pp. 132-3.

²⁹ Yet, it should be stated that during the fifteenth century, Cochin never attracted as much foreign Muslims as did the port of Calicut. When Barbosa spoke about the *paradesi* Muslim merchants of Malabar, it was in the context of Calicut that he described their activities rather than any other port on the Malabar Coast. See M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 75-6.

³⁰ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 93.

These Muslim merchants often patronized religious scholars and institutions at the port of Cochin. The Makhdoom family of *Ulema* had their ancestors migrated from the Coromandel region into Cochin where was born Sheikh Zainudhin b. Ali, popularly known among the Muslims of Malabar as Maqhdoom I.³¹ Certainly, it was the Marakkars who facilitated the migration and settlement of this family of Muslim scholars in Malabar. After the arrival of the Portuguese, the Muslim merchants of Cochin resorted to co-operate with the newcomers, and even ventured to trade with the ports of West Asia. However, the nexus no longer remained as the merchants felt embarrassed by the Portuguese who utilized the *cartas* mechanism for patrolling the coastal areas, and following this, many of the Marakkar merchants of Cochin migrated to other ports in Malabar. Nevertheless, the port appeared by the course of the sixteenth century as the most important entrepot on the Malabar Coast as it was commercial centre of the Portuguese, and in that process it relegated many of the hitherto prominent ports.

2.3 Kodungallur

Kodungallur is one among the earliest port-cities in Malabar, which figured in the maritime history of the Indian Ocean, albeit with lesser significance as far as the commercial world of the Muslims was concerned. It is a matter of fact that Muziris on the side of the river Periyar was one of the most important ports of ancient India with a brisk trade in spices and other commodities with the Greco-Roman ports as can be testified from the contemporary foreign accounts as well as Sangam literature. However, the exact location of this historical port on the geography of Malabar is still a puzzle among the scholars. Despite the archaeological excavations carried out at the site of Pattanam, which unearthed several material remnants indicating the region's commercial relations with the Mediterranean world, there are scholars like M. G. S. Narayanan who opine that it is too early to suggest categorically that the excavated site was the actual location of Muziris.³² In fact, references in our sources to the port of Muziris completely disappear

³¹ Insights about the backgrounds of the Makhdoom family of scholars can be drawn from the work of Abdul Azeez al-Ma'abari who was the son of Sheikh Zainudhin I. See Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya*, pp. 48-52.

³² For a recent study on Muziris with new perspectives see Mathew, K. S., ed., *Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: New Perspective on Maritime Trade*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2015.

from about the fourth century onwards. The only plausible evidence for the survival of a place with a somewhat similar name is the eleventh century copperplate inscription belonging to the Chera ruler Bhaskara Ravi Varman that speaks about his shorter stay at Muyirikkodu and granting of privileges to the head of the Jewish mercantile community there.³³ It may be that Muyirikkodu, which likely was evolved from Muziris, acted as a secondary base of the later Cheras whose official power centre was the well-known Mahodayapuram. Some of the scholars have suggested that Pattanam, which must have been a manufacturing centre in the vicinity of Muziris during the days of early Roman contacts, was later developed, particularly with the help of the Christian merchants from Sassanid Persia, as a full-fledged port town so as to be named 'Puthupattanam' (new Pattanam). The basis of such a proposition is the reference in the sixth century text of Cosmas Indicopleustes to one Poudopatana as one among the five pepper exporting marts of Malabar, and the discovery of Persian artefacts of Sassanid era from the Pattanam archaeological site.³⁴

Setting aside the matter of identifying Muziris, what appears from the medieval sources at our disposal is that a port named *Shinkli* was located somewhere between the ports of Quilon in south and Shaliyath in north. Since no other significant port existed between these ports around the late thirteenth century, it is safe to identify *Shinkli* with Kodungallur. In fact, indigenous sources introduce the port as Kodungallur, whereas outsiders' accounts, particularly those of the fourteenth century, call it as *Shinkli*. Probably, the first recorded reference to Kodungallur is found in the copperplate inscription of Vira Raghava Chakravarthi of the Perumpadappu *swarupam*, who circa. 1225 conferred the title of Manigramam on Iravikkorran, an important merchant of the Mahodayapuram region, and gave several other privileges to the same (During this time Perumpadappu rulers were still in Mahodayapuram as they moved to Cochin only by

³³ E. Hultzsch, ed., *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*, ASI, Delhi, 1979 (reprint), vol. 3, p. 69.

³⁴ J. W. McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, Hakluyt Society, New York, 1897, p. 367; Pius Malekandathil, 'Muziris and the Trajectories of Maritime Trade in the Indian Ocean in the First Millennium CE' in *Imperial Rome, Indian Ocean Regions and Muziris: New Perspective on Maritime Trade*, ed. K. S. Mathew, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 360-1.

1405).³⁵ *Qissat Shakarvati* of around the thirteenth century speaks about Kolunkallur as an active port visited by foreigners from Hormuz, Al-Shihr, etc.³⁶ The earliest mentioning of *Shinkli* is found in *Nur al-ma'arif* of the late thirteenth century.³⁷ In the Yemeni chronicle, the port is rendered as *Shinjal*, and it is mentioned while discussing the monetary systems prevailed in the various ports on the Malabar Coast. Then *Shinkli* was referred to by many of the fourteenth century geographers and travellers such as Rashidudhin, Abul-Fida, Al-Dimishqi, Friar Odoric, Friar Jordanus and John de Marignolli.³⁸ That Friar Jordanus has mentioned *Shinkli* as one of the important kingdoms of Malabar suggests that *Shinkli* was identical with Kodungallur, not just a quarter of it.³⁹ Interestingly, John de Marignolli has provided an etymology of the name

³⁵ Iravikkorran was given authority over the region of Kodungallur. A close reading of the inscription would help us understand that Mahodayapuram was not identical with Kodungallur, instead was just a quarter of it. Although the name and title of this merchant do not reveal his religious affiliation, the fact that this copper plate has been possessed by the Syrian Christians of Kottayam may indicate that he was a Christian. See, E. Hultzsch, ed., *Epigraphia Indica*, ASI, Calcutta, 1896-7, vol. 4, pp. 290-7. Sreedhara Menon says that Vira Raghava Chakravarti was the Perumpadappu Muppil, viz. the ruler of Perumpadappu *swarupam*. See A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, 2nd ed., DC Books, Kottayam, 2016, p. 67.

³⁶ Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad', pp. 249-50.

³⁷ Jāzīm, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol.1, p. 262. It is not sure what Benjamin of Tudela has meant by his reference to Gingaleh. In fact, he has spoken of this place while introducing China, but just before returning to the description of West Asian lands, putting the reader in confusion. Though he speaks of a Jewish community in Gingaleh, this may be the Sin Kalan (Canton) of China, where too there was historically known Jewish population and about which the fourteenth century travelers like Ibn Battuta and John of Marignolli have given descriptions. For his reference, see Benjamin, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin*, vol. 1, p. 144. Husayn Nainar's suggestion that Ibn Khurdadhba's Sanjla stands for *Shinki* is problematic because the geographer in fact has mentioned this place along with many others while counting the localities on the southeastern and eastern coastal areas of the Indian subcontinent, not on its western side. Al-Idrisi's cartographic mistakes and the misreading of Ibn Khurdadhba's geography on India by taking wrongly the southeastern port of Babatan to mean the southwestern port of Jurbattan (later Cannanore) led him to consider the port of *Zanja* as a neighboring port of Jurbattan. This, in turn, drove scholars like Husayn Nainar to take a-Idrisi's *Zanja* to stand for *Shinki*, which is not so. For Husayn Nainar's inferences see Nainar, *Arab Geographers*, pp. 75-6, and for Al-Idrisi's reference to *Zanja* see Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, p.192.

³⁸ Jahn, Karl, *Rashid al-Din's History of India, Collected Essays with Facsimiles and Indices*, Mouton and Co., London, 1965, p. 12; Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 354-5; Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173; Friar Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, p. 40; H. Yule, ed. and trans., *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a collection of Medieval Notices of China*, 4 vols., rev. Henri Cordier, Hakluyt Society, London, 1913-16, vol. 2, p. 133 and vol. 3, p. 249.

³⁹ Therefore, identifying *Shinkli* with Chennamangalam seems to be problematic. For such identification, see for instance, Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p. 43.

of *Cynkali* in Malabar that it meant Little China, in contrast to Cynkalan, the Greater China (Canton) as the word *kalan* signified greater, whereas *kali* stood for little.⁴⁰

The location of Kodungallur was very much conducive to the development of a trading centre. The navigable Periyar river provided the seafarers with a smooth anchorage, in addition to facilitating with its various tributaries the collection and transportation of pepper and other commodities from the hinterlands of the port. When he visited the Malabar Coast in the early fourteenth century, Friar Odoric felt that Kodungallur was one of the two most important pepper markets of the coast, the other being Panthalayani Kollam.⁴¹ Around the same time, the Chinese traveller Wang Dayuan visited the port, and noted that the place produced pepper, which is superior to the pepper of all other countries. The traveller also alludes to the export of surplus pepper from Kodungallur to the foreign countries.⁴² The presence of oceanic and riverine trade emanating from the port can be attested to from the royal grants found in the copper plate inscriptions.⁴³ Among the privileges and rights conferred on the important merchants of the port was the right to collect customs duties (*chungam*) on vehicles and boats, which took commodities to or from the port, as they headed its *anjuvannam* and *manigramam* organizations. From the epigraphic and literary sources, what appears is that the Jewish community was a major occupant of Kodungallur at least up to the silting up of the harbour because of the flood in Periyar and their subsequent migration to Cochin and the like.⁴⁴ However, Muslims too seemed to have played a role in the commerce of the port.

⁴⁰ It is not clear which language the traveler meant here. The etymology suggested by him is not beyond probability as the sailors and merchants from West Asia or the like might have found factors of similarity between Kodungallur region of Malabar and Canton, which was a major destination of them in the Far East.

⁴¹ Sastri, ed., *Foreign Notices of South India*, p. 193.

⁴² Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 44. Ptak has identified Xiali of Wang Dayuan with Alwaye. However, I am inclined to identify this port with *Shinkli* or Kodungallur. The Chinese traveler informs that the port was called "Small Port" and was situated between Quilon and Calicut. Taking into account the fame of Kodungallur as a good supplier of pepper as testified by the other contemporary accounts, and the location of the port as one among the few ports between Calicut and Quilon, it seems safe to say that Wang Dayuan's Xiali must be *Shinkli*, rather than an interior locality like Alwaye.

⁴³ E. Hultzsch, ed., *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*, ASI, Delhi, 1979 (reprint), vol. 3, pp. 68-9; E. Hultzsch, ed., *Epigraphia Indica*, ASI, Calcutta, 1896-7, vol. 4, p. 297.

⁴⁴ Al-Dimishqi recorded that most of the population in *Shinkli* was Jews. Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173. This can be corroborated by the account of Abu'l-Fida. See Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 355.

Apart from the fact that *Shinkli* has found a place as a major exchange centre in Malabar in the texts of the Arab geographers who gathered their data from travellers to the port, the text *Qissat Shakarvati* speaks about Muslims from foreign lands trading with the port and sometimes even settling down there.⁴⁵ When he visited the area in the early sixteenth century, Barbosa noted, 'In these places (Cranganore) dwell many Moors, Christians, and Heathen Indians'.⁴⁶ It should, however, be stated that with the flooding of Periyar river in the mid-fourteenth century the commercial profile of Kodungallur was severely affected, not least after the Perumpadappu *swarupam*'s leaving of the port-city for Cochin in the early fifteenth century.⁴⁷

2.4 Ponnani

Ponnani (Ar. *Funnāni*) was the other important medieval port as far as the commercial and faith-related networks of the Muslims in Malabar were concerned. Though the port with such a name began to figure in the contemporary sources only from the fifteenth century onwards, a port seemed to have had existed much earlier at the same spot as its geographical position indicates. Ponnani is located at the mouth of Bharathappuzha, the renowned river of Malabar, on the shore of which at Thirunavayi was conducted the traditional Mamankam festival once in every twelve years and which had acted as the water-channel connecting with the Arabian Sea not only the hinterlands within Malabar but also even the plains of Coimbatore across the Ghats mountains. As the studies on the Mamankam festival have shown, it was not only devotional in nature, but also acted as a commercial stimulus. The Mamankam along with other cyclical festivals on monthly and annual basis centred on the Brahmanical temples and non-Brahmanical *kavus* on either sides of the river Bharathappuzha used to stimulate the

⁴⁵ The text also talks about the conflicts that occurred between the Muslim settlers of the port as well as its Jewish community. This not only indicates to the dominant position held by the Jewish in the port of Kodungallur, but also explains the possible reason for the Muslim merchants from West Asia preferring a fresh port like Calicut to carry out their commercial enterprise. See Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farnad', pp. 249-50, 254.

⁴⁶ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 88-9.

⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Cranganore had not disappeared fully from the commercial scene of Malabar as can be discerned from the account of Nicolo Conti who in the mid-fourteenth century visited the city of *Calonguria* which was north of Cochin and which was situated at the entering of a river into the sea. See Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels*, p. 135.

processes of agrarian production and artisanal activities destined for the markets of festival celebrations.⁴⁸ A good share of the commodities collected through such festive markets was taken to the outer world through the waterway of Bharathappuzha, and this fact must have had necessitated the existence of a port on the estuary of the river. We find references to the port-city of Ponnani from around the mid-fifteenth century when it had already come under the possession of the Zamorin of Calicut as a reward for the protection he gave to its original ruler, the Raja of Tirumanasseri.⁴⁹

When Nicolo Conti was on the Malabar Coast sometimes around 1440, on his way from Kodungallur to Calicut he came across an important city called *Meliancota*. This city, he describes, is nine miles in circumference and its name in the local language signified a great city.⁵⁰ It is easy to identify this city with Veliyankode. Nevertheless, since Veliyankode today is just a coastal village under Ponnani tehsil, it is likely that Nicolo mistakenly applied the name of a suburb to the whole urban area of Ponnani. The size of the city (nine miles) suggested by the Italian, though seems to be problematic as it is higher than his figures for Cochin and Calicut, indicates to the commercial and political significance Ponnani by the time had acquired. It appears that it acted as a major satellite port of Calicut, supplying pepper and other commodities from its hinterlands collected particularly through the festive markets around temples and *kavus*. It might also have acted as a secondary political centre of the Zamorins as it was here that the Thrikkavil *kovilakam*, where they alternatively stayed and the Vairanelloor *kovilakam* where the Eralpad, the heir-apparent used to live, were located.⁵¹ When he prepared his nautical treatise, Ibn Majid counted Ponnani as one among the important ports on the Malabar Coast. He has warned the sailors to Ponnani and the adjacent areas against the

⁴⁸ N.M. Namboodiri, ed., *Mamanka Rekhakal*, Vallathol Vidyapeedam, Shukhapuram, 2005, pp. 30-1.

⁴⁹ Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut: From the Earliest Times Down to A. D. 1806*, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938, p. 102. It has been suggested that the Zamorin's conquest of Thirunavayi, with which had synchronized the cession of Ponnani, happened sometime in the late thirteenth century. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History*, p. 92.

⁵⁰ Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels*, p. 135.

⁵¹ Namboodiri, *Mamanka Rekhakal*, p. 25. However, in contrast to what Ayyar had suggested, Ponnani does not seem to have acted as the military capital of the Zamorins during the pre-sixteenth century phase. It was likely with the migration of the Marakkar merchants from Cochin to Ponnani in 1520s and their subsequent settling there involving in anti-Portuguese struggle that the port-city got the fame as the arsenal base of the Zamorins. For Ayyar's view, see Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, p. 292.

al-Kabkuris, who were the gang of well-organized pirates from somewhere between Cochin and Quilon.⁵² The presence of such pirates from south in the waters of Ponnani alludes to the commercial importance of this port-city that the increasing trafficking of mercantile ships here might have attracted pirates from far lands to frequent the waters of the port.

The presence of Muslims in Ponnani engaging in its commercial and other affairs appeared to have been substantial during the fifteenth century so much that it attracted to the port such religious institutions as *qadi* who could serve in the legal and other matters of the pre-dominantly mercantile community. From the biographies of contemporary religious scholars, we come to know that they had acted as *qadis* and *mudarris* (religious teachers at mosques) in Ponnani.⁵³ Alluding to the commerce at Ponnani and the role of the Muslims in it, Barbosa in the early sixteenth century remarked,

Beyond these (Tanur) on the coast southward is a river, whereon stands a city of the Moors natives of the land, also some Heathen, which they call *Pananee*. In it are many merchants who possess ships in large numbers, and from it the king of Calicut draws a great revenue in dues.⁵⁴

During the course of the sixteenth century, port-city began to evolve as an important centre of theological learning and jurisprudential authority for the Muslims on the Malabar Coast as can be testified from the *fatwa* literature of the time. *Al-Ajwibat al-funnaniyya ala asi'lat al-kushiyya*, the text produced in Ponnani during the second half of the sixteenth century comprising the answers (*fatwas*) given by Sheikh Zainudhin ibn Muhammed to the various faith-related questions from Cochin, is a manifestation of how Ponnani was regarded as a centre of learning and religious authority.⁵⁵ As the third

⁵² Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 202. It seems that Ibn Majid's *al-Kabkuris* are the same band of pirates from Porakkad, against whom Barbosa warned a few decades later. See M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 95-6.

⁵³ Zainudhin Ibn Ahmed, for instance, served as *qadi* of Ponnani around 1480s and it was under his tutorship that his nephew Zainudhin Ibn Ali acquired his basic education. This we read from the biographical note about the later written by his son Abdul Azeez. See, Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya*, p. 51.

⁵⁴ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 88.

⁵⁵ A manuscript of this unpublished text is found in Azhariya Library which is a personal library located at Chaliyam, Calicut and I am highly thankful to Usthad Usman al-Amjadi for facilitating me to see and photograph the text for this study. The text is kept in the Fiqh section of the library. Since the collections of

chapter details, there were many other *fatwa* literature from Ponnani, which show how its scholars engaged in scholastic discourses with the eminent scholars of the time from the Islamic heartlands such as Mecca and Yemen.⁵⁶ However, it cannot be said that Ponnani was the sole centre of Islamic learning in the sixteenth century Malabar, as the sources at our disposal reveal that other places like Calicut also had been involved in scholarly negotiations with the outer Islamic world. Meanwhile, Ponnani had emerged during the sixteenth century as the military capital of the Zamorins of Calicut. In that process, the major role was played by the Marakkar Muslims who had migrated from Cochin in the 1520s because of the increasing Portuguese surveillance along the Malabar Coast.

2.5 Chaliyam

Chaliyam (*Shaliyat* of Arabic sources) is located at the estuary of the Chaliyar river and figures in our sources even before the immediate port of Calicut emerges into the limelight. Its position is very much indicative of its importance in the commercial scene of Malabar. The pepper and timber hinterlands on the sides of the Chaliyar river and its tributaries were connected to the sea mainly through the water-channel, and this fact makes it possible that a port existed on the estuary of the river from very ancient times. Cosmas Indicopleustes has spoken about one Salopatana as one of the five important pepper marts of Malabar and this has been identified as Chaliyam.⁵⁷ Then the port appears after long time in the *Nur al-ma'arif* of the late thirteenth century, in which it is counted as one among the places receiving stipends from the Rasulid sultan.⁵⁸ The same source has also described the currency system prevailing in *Shaliyat*.⁵⁹ Thus, it appears that, by the end of the thirteenth century, Chaliyam had a considerable number of Muslim population whose *qadi* and *khatib* were recorded in the royal list of the Rasulid sultan for disbursing annual stipends. This, in turn, indicates the prevailing commercial

the library haven't been catalogued so far systematically, it is not possible to provide any further details about the text.

⁵⁶ See A. Z. al-Malabari, *al-Ajwibat al-ajeeth an al-asilat al-qhareeba*, ed. A. A. al-Shafi al-Malabari, Dar al-Dhiya', Kuwait, 2012. Some of the other *fatwa* texts are kept in Azhariya Library, but they have not been published. I am again thankful to Usthad Usman al-Amjadi for allowing me to access these rare manuscripts.

⁵⁷ McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography*, p. 367.

⁵⁸ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol.1, p. 517.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-3.

relations of the port with the Yemeni entrepot. The Muslim presence in the port can also be validated by the Arabic text *Qissat Shakarvati*, which describes the location of the mosque found there.⁶⁰ Chaliyam is also mentioned in the list of the ports on the Malabar Coast given by the early fourteenth century geography of Abul-Fida.⁶¹ Besides, two Arabic inscriptions, one found on an Islamic tombstone and the other on the wall of a mosque both belonging to the fourteenth century, have been recorded from the place.⁶² The mosque inscription, dated 1355 A.D, informs us that it was re-constructed by Muhammed Ibn Ahmad who was known by the title Kunj-Baidal, well-known as Koyamutti and born at Chaliyam. The details given by the inscription alludes to that Chaliyam's Muslim population consisted chiefly of natives of the place and the rich among them were sound enough to build and re-build its religious establishments. Talking of them, Barbosa says, 'To the south of this city (Calicut) there is a river on which lies another town called *Chiliate*, where dwell many Moors, natives of the land who are merchants, and have many ships in which they sail'.⁶³ It appears that Chaliyam acted not only as a collection centre of spices and other commodities from the hinterland areas transported through the Chaliyar river, but also as a production centre in itself. Ibn Battuta, who stayed in the city for some long time, noted that it is one of the beautiful cities, which produced the dress known in its name.⁶⁴ In the post-Chera political situation of Malabar, Chaliyam seemed to have had a local ruler or *raja* who by the course of time was forced to accept the suzerainty of the neighbouring Zamorins of Calicut as can be discerned from the developments happened after the arrival of the Portuguese.⁶⁵ The Portuguese in the 1530s had managed to erect a fortress in Chaliyam, which for the subsequent forty years stood as a big blow to the commerce of Calicut.⁶⁶ However, the fortress, after many occasional battles, was destroyed in 1571, and the memory of this

⁶⁰ Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad', pp. 255-6.

⁶¹ Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 354.

⁶² Ziyaud-din A. Desai, *A Topographical List of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Inscriptions of South India*, ICHR and Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1989, p. 35.

⁶³ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 87.

⁶⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, pp. 202-3.

⁶⁶ Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin*, pp. 48-9.

victory over the Portuguese entered into a number of Arabic texts produced on the Malabar Coast.⁶⁷

2.6 Calicut

Calicut (Malayal. Kozhikode and Ar. *Kalikūt*) is a major port-city on the Malabar Coast with regard to the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims figuring throughout the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The first literary evidence to the port comes from the Chinese travel account of Wang Dayuan who visited it in the 1320s or 1330s, and described it as the principal port for all the merchants of the Western Ocean.⁶⁸ Soon after him, Ibn Battuta furnishes us with his interesting account of Calicut, in which he has termed it as one of the greatest ports of the world in his time.⁶⁹ However, to become such a port of remarkable eminence, it must have had taken many decades in its trajectory. A close perusal of the available primary sources may help us to trace back the history of the port to the times before the accounts of Wang or Ibn Battuta. The bilingual stone inscription from the Muccunti mosque at Kuttichira (Calicut) is an interesting piece of information in this regard. The inscription is partly in Vatteluttu script and of early Malayalam language, whereas the rest is in the Arabic language. Epigraphic and palaeographical studies of the inscription have revealed that it belonged to the thirteenth century and speaks about a permanent grant of property by *Punturakkon*, the ruler of Calicut, to the *Mucciyan* mosque at Kuttichira.⁷⁰ The Arabic portion denotes that certain Shihabudhin Raihan, who was a freed slave of the late Masu'd, purchased out of his own money a piece of land and thereon built this mosque and well. It also says that he made provision for the *imam* and the *mu'adhin* (caller to prayer) of the mosque by

⁶⁷ See, for example, al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin, A Contemporary Account of the Portuguese Invasion on Malabar in Arabic Verse*, ed. K. S. Shamseer, Other Books, Calicut, 2015. The extent to which the erection of a port at Chaliyam had angered the Muslim community in Malabar can be understood from the active and physical participation of the important *ulema* of the time in the battle of 1571.

⁶⁸ Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 49.

⁶⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 45.

⁷⁰ The Vatteluttu portion of the inscription is studied by M. G. S. Narayanan and M. R. Raghava Varier. See Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis*, pp. 38-42. *Punturakkon* was the family name of the rulers of Calicut, which began to be applied likely after their arrival at the site of the port from the landlocked area of Eranadu.

building an edifice.⁷¹ The inscription, thus, testifies that at least by the late thirteenth century the Eradis had already shifted from the land-locked agrarian enclave of Eranadu to the coastal area, and begun to develop a new port by attracting foreign merchants particularly the Muslims by patronizing their religious establishments. The content of the Arabic text that the founder of the mosque was a freed slave of the late Masu'd indicates that before he made his fortune out of the trade from Calicut the former was acting as a slave-agent of the latter at the port.⁷² Masu'd himself seemed to have been a big merchant known among the people in Calicut, but in his time Muslims' trade at the port might have been still in its very nascent stage lacking in number to be in need of building a mosque. The role of the Muslim merchants in the initial phase of the development of the port can also be attested to by the story of the Koya of Calicut as recorded in *Keralolpathi*.⁷³



Figure 1: Bilingual inscription from Muccunti Mosque, dated to the 13th century.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Desai, A *Topographical List*, p. 102; Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Muslim Architecture of South India: The Sultanate of Ma'bar and the Traditions of Maritime Settlers on the Malabar and Coromandel Coasts (Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Goa)*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 194-5.

⁷² Employing of slave-agents was an established norm in the organization of trade among the Muslims of medieval time as will be discussed in the third chapter.

⁷³ The story is about how a Muslim merchant (a *Khwaja*) from Mascot visited the port of *Punturakkon* and was impressed by the honesty of the ruler tempting him to settle in the port of Calicut. See, H. Gundart, *Keralolpatti: The Origin of Malabar*, 2nd ed., Pfeleiderer & Riehm, Mangalore, 1868, pp. 86-7. For an English translation of the story see, Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis*, p. 97.

⁷⁴ Image taken from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2d/Muccunti_Mosque_Iscription_%28cropped%29.JPG (accessed on 21/07/2018)

It is true that in the list of the receivers of the Rasulid stipend a port named Calicut is not found. However, this absence cannot be taken to mean that by the time of the *Nur al-ma'arif* the port of Calicut had not come to the limelight. As will be detailed later, Calicut's absence may be because of many possible reasons. In fact, Quilon, the well-known Malabar port of the time is also missing in the list of the Yemeni chronicle. It might be that the religious allegiance of the Muslims of Calicut and Quilon was not to the Rasulid sultan, but to someone else, and thus their Friday and Eid sermons were not read in the name of the Yemeni sultan. Besides, in the *Nur al-ma'arif* itself one can find reference to one *al-Thagr al-wasiti* (الثغر الواسطي), the middle port, in Malabar.⁷⁵ It is mentioned in the context of the honouring of many Indian merchants at Aden, and thus one *nakhuda* Amber, who was the chief of the middle port in Malabar, was honoured with green jubbah embroidered with silk and other things. Since the names of almost all other ports on the Malabar Coast have been mentioned in the Yemeni chronicle and thus were familiar to the administrative circles at Aden, the reference to the anonymous middle port can be taken to allude to a new emerging port like Calicut which still had not got a popular name. The chief of this emerging port was honoured so as to attract to Aden all the merchandise emanating from his port. Moreover, Friar Jordanus, in his description (of c. 1320s) of India the Greater, speaks of the three kingdoms on the Malabar Coast, viz. the kingdoms of *Molebar*, *Singuyli* and *Columbum*. He says, 'there is one very powerful king in the country where pepper grows, and his country is called *Molebar*.'⁷⁶ As Wang Dayuan and Ibn Battuta a few years later felt Calicut as a great port-city in the western Indian Ocean region, we cannot but identify Jordanus's *Molebar* kingdom with the kingdom of the Zamorins, who by the time he visited the coast must have had gained the fame of being the king of Malabar because of his conquests.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol.1, p. 516.

⁷⁶ Jordanus, *Mirabilia Descripta*, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁷ If Calicut by 1330s or 1340s had developed as a major destination point for the massive Chinese junks as well as the dhows from West Asia, it is safe to assume that the Zamorins by this time had brought under their control some of the major pepper and other hinterlands of Malabar, including the belts of Bharathappuzha river. Krishna Ayyar opines that the Zamorin's conquest of Tirunavayi had happened at

Various reasons have been suggested for the rise and prosperity of Calicut, which by the mid-fourteenth century had become Malabar's most prosperous city, attracting contemporary travellers' comparison with the well-known entrepôts of the world such as Alexandria and Zaitoon.⁷⁸ Among the reasons, the security of property rights ensured by the rulers of Calicut has been increasingly accepted as a satisfactory explanation.⁷⁹ In fact, several of the medieval writers such as Wang Dayuan, Ibn Battuta, Abdul Razzaq, and Pyrard de Laval have commended the safety and security provided by the city to the visiting merchants.⁸⁰ However, the security factor should not relegate other possibilities for the rise of Calicut. Arabic chronicles from West Asia help us to know that diplomatic moves on the part of the Zamorins of Calicut also had their due role in promoting trade at the port-city. Diplomacy included sending of letters and gifts to the rulers of the forelands or their deputies, and involving in matters affecting the normal conduct of trade even in the foreign markets. The fifteenth century Egyptian chronicler Ibn Taghribirdi was astonished to see many correspondences at the disposal of Janibak, the Mamluki viceroy at Jidda, which were sent by the Zamorins of Calicut along with several gifts.⁸¹ Although the chronicler does not furnish us with the details of the contents of the correspondences, that the rulers of Calicut had sent letters to Jidda, which had already replaced Aden as the major entrepôt in the region, and not to Cairo, the seat of the Mamluk sultans, suggests the commercial incentives behind such diplomatic moves. The same chronicler also

the beginning of the fourteenth century and soon he had begun to celebrate the Mamankam festival. See, Ayyar, 'The Importance of the Zamorins of Calicut', p. 253.

⁷⁸ Ibn Battuta while describing Alexandria says that it has a marvelous harbour, the like of which he had not seen anywhere except the harbours of Quilon, Calicut, Surdaq and Zaitoon. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 1, p. 179. For a brief analysis of the reasons for the rise of Calicut, see, Archa. N. G., *Movement of Spices, People, Faith: Role of Indian Ocean in the Making and Unmaking of Calicut c. 1300-1750 A. D.*, M.Phil. Dissertation, CHS, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2016, pp. 28-35.

⁷⁹ See for instance, Sebastian Raphael Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*, dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2008, pp. 86-91.

⁸⁰ Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 49; Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 48; Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', p. 304; Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, vol. 1, p. 403.

⁸¹ Each correspondence, the chronicler says, included poems, proses, beautiful remarks, etc. the writer of which – whether the Zamorins themselves or his officials – was not clear to him. It was a surprise for him to notice a list of the gifts to the Egyptian viceroy written on *ola* or palm leaf in the local language (most probably Malayalam), which only Malabaris could read. See, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 15, p. 427.

informs us about the involvement of the Zamorin in dealing with Timras al-Muayyad, the rebel Amir of the Mamluki court who had fled the country stealing huge amount of money from the treasury of the sultan. As will be detailed later, Timras had left Jidda for India, where he was rejected everywhere and finally had anchored at Calicut. The Zamorin, after having received complaints from the merchants that if the Egyptian Amir were allowed to stay at the port their trade with Jidda would be adversely affected and their wealth at that port would be confiscated by its Mamluki viceroy, detained Timras and forced him to buy pepper for the Mamluk sultan with the whole money he had taken. This incident sheds light on the political economy of the Zamorins. The rulers of Calicut were not passive beneficiaries of the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean; instead, they were actively involving in its operation by getting rid of obstacles confronting the merchants of Calicut.⁸² Such a policy of the Zamorins must have helped the rise of Calicut into prominence.

It is often said that the geo-physical setting of Calicut was not conducive to the rise of a port, as it had no natural harbour, thus entailing the cumbersome lighterage and posing risks for the anchored ships.⁸³ However, what appears from a perusal of the nautical treatises of Ibn Majid, the renowned *muallim* of the Indian Ocean, is that a certain geo-physical feature of Calicut might have had due role in the development of the port. Ibn Majid repeatedly talks about a mountain peak called '*Marqad*', which acted as a landmark for the sailors to identify the port of Calicut.⁸⁴ He says that this peak is unique in the whole region, which is situated between the *totta* (plantations) and the high mountains, and which could be seen from the sea facilitating the travellers to find out the

⁸² Interestingly, the chronicler Ibn Taghribirdi says that he was precluding what had happened to Timras on the Indian ports, until he was shown the correspondences from the Zamorin by the Amir Janibak, the Mamluki viceroy at Jidda. For the incident of Amir Timras, see, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 15, pp. 427-9.

⁸³ See for instance Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p. 50.

⁸⁴ Ibn Majid has talked about this mountain peak and its significance in identifying Calicut in two of his important nautical treatises; *Fawaid al-fuad* (prose) and *al-Qseeda al-makkiyya* (poem). Although no peak with the name *Marqad* is found today, it is safe to identify it with the Vavul Mala in the Vellarimala range of Kerala, which is the highest peak (2,339 m) in the Western Ghats northwards beyond the Nilgiris. William Logan has noted that Vavul Mala is the highest peak in the Wynad, which is a landmark conspicuous from far out at the Arabian sea. See, Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, p. 6.

port of Calicut, not least during the nighttime.⁸⁵ It seems pertinent here to quote Ibn Majid's own lines from his *al-Qseeda al-makkiyya*;

The Harbours of <i>Kalikut</i> have a sign	Y Seen from bar or even more depth.
It's a hill, nothing else is to be at night	Y As guide for the traveller to find <i>Kalikut</i> .
With steep sides, it's called <i>Marqad</i>	Y Make use of it as it's the best sign.
Will see it if you go by the coast	Y But can't if you fleet in deep sea. ⁸⁶

Although the advantage of having a good landmark is not enough for the rise of a port, it must have had a role in enticing more and more merchants from the far seas to set Calicut as their destination and thus in making it eventually as an international port. Moreover, Ibn Majid's treatises contain some cursory references to the port orientation at Calicut. While describing the landfall of the ships coming to Calicut from the side of Hormuz, he remarks, 'then you will see ships in the Gujarati harbour, and sometimes you can see Meccan ships in the big harbour especially in the moonlight'.⁸⁷ Thus, it appears that at least by the time of the *muallim*, Calicut had more than one harbour built likely with the help of breakwaters.⁸⁸

The port of Calicut had one river to its credit, viz. the Kallai river which flowed to its vicinity. However, its shortness in terms of length and width and its seasonality made the river not so significant as far as the commerce of the port was concerned.⁸⁹ As such, in the transportation of commodities from and to the hinterlands and umlands, the land routes must have played an important role. Ma Huan in the early fifteenth century has indicated to such a land route between Calicut and Coimbatore, which might have been

⁸⁵ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawa'id*, ff. 68v-69r. The word *totta* is of indigenous origin meaning the plantations. By the high mountains, the Nilgiri Mountains are meant. Apart from its height, what appears to have made Vavul Mala unique is its position between the plantations and the Nilgiri Mountains, and thus the sailors could easily identify it from the sea. Today, this can be observed with the help of Google Earth.

⁸⁶ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawa'id*, f. 161v. (Translation mine)

⁸⁷ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawa'id*, f. 68v. (Translation mine)

⁸⁸ The Gujarati harbour might have been specifically for the Gujarati ships, which sailed between Gujarat and Calicut or the Southeast Asia. Whereas, the ships coming from Mecca and the like places had to anchor at the big harbour.

⁸⁹ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, p. 13.

the route cutting across the Palakkad gap.⁹⁰ However, more important to Calicut's trade were the rivers like Chaliyar, which flowed into its satellite ports. Small size ships or boats were utilized for transporting to Calicut various commodities from the nearby satellite ports such as Chaliyam, Kappad and Panthalayani. As for the presence of Muslims in the commerce of Calicut, almost all the sources at our disposal have pointed out the crucial role that the Muslim merchants of indigenous and exogenous origin had played in the trade of the port. Suffice to quote what Barbosa has to say in the early sixteenth century,

There are many other foreign Moors as well in the town of Calicut, who are called *paradesis*, natives of diverse lands, Arabs, Persians, Guzarates, Khurasanis, and Daquanis, who are settled here. As the trade of this country is very large, they gathered here in great numbers with their wives and sons, and seem to have increased. They sail everywhere with goods of many kinds and have in the town itself a Moorish governor of their own who rules and punishes them without interference from the king.⁹¹

2.7 Panthalayani Kollam

Panthalayani Kollam (Ar. *Fandarāyina*) was one the most active ports of the Malabar Coast especially in the early centuries of the second millennium, which has been mentioned frequently in our sources with regard to the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims. The city was a good cosmopolitan space with the presence of people belonging to Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity as can be testified from the account of Al-Dimishqi, who in the early fourteenth century explicitly said, 'most of its people are Jews, Hindus and Muslims, and its Christians are few'.⁹² The first recorded literary reference to the port is found in the Cairo Geniza papers, in which are mentioned some of the Muslim, Jewish and Hindu merchants as having involved in its commerce. Some of the merchants like Ramisht and Fatanswami had ship services between Panthalayani and the entrepots of West Asia. What can be drawn from the Geniza papers is that by the early twelfth century Panthalayani had evolved as a bourgeoning exchange

⁹⁰ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan*, p. 137.

⁹¹ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 75-6.

⁹² Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173.

centre attracting merchants from diverse geographical and religious backgrounds.⁹³ The location of the port was quite favourable for a flourishing trade. It was located at a bay near to the small hill called *Mayyathukunnu*, which acted as a landmark for landfalling.⁹⁴ As the area belonged to the well-known mud bank zones of Malabar, Panthalayani was safe and preferable for anchorage during the southwest monsoon. Ibn Battuta informs us that it was in the harbour of Panthalayani that the Chinese junks spent the rainy season awaiting proper wind for their return journey.⁹⁵ The port was particularly famed for its supply of cardamom, and Al-Idrisi has alluded to its source or origin when he stated that beyond the city is a big mountain, which has many trees, villages and paths, and in which grows cardamom.⁹⁶ Friar Odoric felt that Panthalayani was one of the two most important pepper marts of Malabar and the spice was cultivated in the forests, which are blessed with many rivers.⁹⁷ Of course, the chief way of transporting the commodities from the uplands and slopes of the Wynadu Ghats to the port must have been the water channel of Kotta river.⁹⁸ Maqbul Ahmed has interpreted Al-Idrisi's statement *ala khuri wadin ya'ti min nahiyati munibar* to mean that the port was situated on an estuary of a river flowing down from the direction of Manibar.⁹⁹ If we accept this, then it is probable that the Kottariver once was entering to the Arabian sea near the port of Panthalayani or was at least connected to the Akalappuzha river located behind the port.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ This can also be borne out by the mid-twelfth century account of Al-Idrisi, who has spoken about the inter-regional and coastal trade at Panthalayani as well as the wealth of its inhabitants. See, Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, p.191. In fact, a Chera inscription of early eleventh century speaks about the existence of mercantile corporations of *Manigramam* and *Valanciars* at Panthalayani, which in turn suggests that the port by that time itself had well-organized trade, in which foreign merchants likely took part. See, M.Vijayalekshmi, *Trade and Trading Centres in Kerala (AD 800-1500)*, Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of Calicut, 1997, pp. 148-9.

⁹⁴ Al-Idrisi has indicated to this hill when he recorded that Panthalayani was on a bay situated at a mountain valley. See, Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, p.191.

⁹⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, pp.191-2. It's clear that the geographer is pointing towards the uplands and slopes of the Wynadu Ghats.

⁹⁷ Yule, ed. and trans., *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 2, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Odoric's mentioning of the presence of rivers in the forests of Malabar while describing the cultivation and collection of pepper is indicative of the existing riverine transportation system.

⁹⁹ Ahmad, trans., *India and the Neighboring Territories*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ William Logan also has casted such a doubt. See, Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, p. 12. Strengthening this doubt is the emergence of a port with the name *Pudupattanam* (literally meaning new town) at the site where the *Kotta* river later entered the sea. This is discussed in the next section on *Pudupattanam*.

Nur al-ma'ārif's reference to Panthalayani's currency system as well as to its inclusion in the Khutba network emanating from the Rasulid Yemen underscores the active trade relation that the port had maintained with Aden.¹⁰¹ Vindicating the same is Ibn Battuta's mentioning in the context of Aden that it was the harbour of the Indian ships coming from such marts as Panthalayani.¹⁰² The Moroccan's account of Panthalayani points out that by his time the port consisted of a substantial Muslim population who had three *mahall* or quarters, each with separate mosques in addition to one beautiful congregational mosque.¹⁰³ However, with the bourgeoning of the neighbouring emporium of Calicut, Panthalayani's commercial importance had fallen, and by the passage of time, it was relegated to be just one among the many feeding satellite port ports of the Zamorins' entrepot, Calicut.

2.8 Pudupattanam

Pudupattanam was located at the mouth of the Kotta river (present day Kuttiady river). This river was navigable at all seasons for boats as far as the Kuttiady area, from where a pack-bullock road was running up the mountains into the north Wynadu.¹⁰⁴ Due to the adequate rainfall and drainage, the areas on the sides of the Kotta river as well as those on the slopes of the Wynadu Ghats were productive zones conducive for pepper and other cultivation. This fact is indicative of the commercial importance of the port of Pudupattanam. The sixth century Alexandrian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes had spoken about one Poudopatana as one of the five important pepper marts of Malabar.¹⁰⁵ However, as already mentioned, Cosmas's Pudupattanam may also be interpreted as the port of Pattanam, which had thriven after the weakening of Muziris.¹⁰⁶ From the late thirteenth century onwards, we have a pool of literary references to *Budfattan*, the Arabized form of Pudupattanam. However, it is often wrongly located in the secondary

¹⁰¹ āzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, p. 262 and 517.

¹⁰² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 2, p. 113.

¹⁰³ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 44.

¹⁰⁴ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, pp. 11-2.

¹⁰⁵ McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography*, p. 367.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, local names such as *Pudupattanam*, *Putiyangadi*, and *Payangadi* were widely used in south India to denote emerging, new, or old towns.

literature.¹⁰⁷ A close reading of the available sources shows that it was situated between Panthalayani and Dharmadam, viz. at the estuary of the Kotta river. It is probable that some alterations had happened in the course of the river Kotta, due to which commerce at the port of Panthalayani was affected, and a new port had to be developed at the site where the river now entered the sea.¹⁰⁸ A town called *Bud* is found in *Nur al-ma'ārif*'s list of stipend-receiving towns of Malabar, and the same has been identified as Pudupattanam.¹⁰⁹ As the Yemeni chronicle suggests, Pudupattanam by the late thirteenth century had a good number of Muslims who had built a mosque there and availed the services of *khatibs* and *qadis*. Their faith-related connection with Yemen alludes to the existing commercial network of the port with Aden. However, by the time Ibn Battuta visited Pudupattanam, situations had changed a bit. The traveller narrates that communal clashes had occurred between the Muslims and the Brahmans of the town, and as a result, Muslims had completely disappeared from the place.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, he also notes that foreign Muslim merchants still visited the port, which had one of the beautiful harbours, and during their visit, they resorted to a mosque located outside the city. By the course of time, Muslims again appear to have had settled at Pudupattanam, and hence, when Barbosa visited the port he felt it to be Moorish town.¹¹¹ When the Marakkar Muslims left Ponnani in the second half of the sixteenth century, it was at Pudupattanam that they settled and built their fort in order to carry on the fight against the Portuguese.

2.9 Dharmadom

The port of Dharmadom (Ar. *Dahfattan*) was located at the estuary of the Anjarakandi river, surrounded by the two branches of the river. The Anjarakandi river, which originated in the forest lands on the slopes of the Waynadu Ghats and which drained some of the best pepper, cinnamon, and the like hinterlands such as the

¹⁰⁷ While Lambourn has located it somewhere between Mount Eli and Cannanore, Prange identified it with Valappattanam. See, Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p. 49. Prange's suggestion that Conti's *Peudifetania* corresponds to Pudupattanam of Malabar is also problematic, because a close reading of Conti's account will show that what he has meant is Pudupattanam of the Coromandel Coast, not anything on the Malabar Coast. See, Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ In fact, the literary meaning of *Pudupattanam* in Tamil or Malayalam is new town.

¹⁰⁹ Lambourn, 'India from Aden', p. 87.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, pp. 43-4.

¹¹¹ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 85.

Anjarakandi village, was navigable by boats at all seasons up to about Vengad region.¹¹² Thus, its location allowed Dharmadom to become an important exchange centre during the medieval times. It has been suggested that Cosmas's *Nalopatana* might be Dharmadom, but we lack corroborative account for such an earlier period.¹¹³ An exchange centre on the Malabar Coast with the name *Dahbattan* figures in the Cairo Geniza papers of early twelfth century, and this can be safely identified as Dharmadom with the help of the later Arabic accounts.¹¹⁴ It is clear that by the twelfth century, Dharmadom had emerged as an important port in the northern Malabar with the active presence of foreign merchants, particularly Jews and Muslims, and some of them had ship service between the port and Aden. By the late thirteenth century, the Muslims of the port had been part of the Khutba network of the Yemeni Rasulids. Ibn Battuta's account, apart from informing us of the availability in the port of such items as pepper, coconut, areca nut, and banana, describes some of the traditions existing among the Muslims of the region pertaining to their *jami* mosque and its magnificent step well.¹¹⁵ In the early sixteenth century, Barbosa noted that Dharmadom had evolved as a major Moorish town, occupied chiefly by the native *mappila* Muslims who had very much trade and were so powerful that they sometimes dared to threaten the authority of their sovereign, the Kolathiri raja of Cannanore.¹¹⁶

2.10 Jurfattan

Jurfattan is a medieval port, which figures in our sources from the twelfth century onwards, and a perusal of the sources shows that it was the same port, which later came to be known as Cannanore. We hear about it for the first time in a letter from the Cairo Geniza, which was sent in the mid-twelfth century from Aden to the Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju and which speaks about two previous letters sent to the same in two

¹¹² See, Logan, *Malabar Manual*, vol. 1, p. 11.

¹¹³ Pius Malekandathil, 'Muziris and the Trajectories', p. 360.

¹¹⁴ In fact, in a letter from the Geniza itself *Dahbattan* has been rendered as *Darmattan*. See, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 598 and 639. Friedman's identification of *Dahbattan* with Valarpattanam (p. 57) seems to be problematic.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, pp. 42-3.

¹¹⁶ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 82.

different ships while he along with family was residing in Jurfattan.¹¹⁷ Around the same time, Al-Idrisi described it as a populated town that was situated at a small bay.¹¹⁸ It seems that around the beginning of the twelfth century Jurfattan was developed by the rulers of Ezhimala (either Mushikas or their successor Kolathiris¹¹⁹) as a supplementary port to the existing port of Madayi, which was lacking a proper harbourage facility due to the siltation problem. In the Geniza letter, mention is made to a ship called ‘Jurbattani’, which belonged to ‘the sultan’, but there is no clarification as to which sultan it belonged. On the testimony of Ibn Battuta’s later statement that the sultan of Jurfattan owned many ships which travel to the ports of West Asia, there is some possibility that the ship referred to in the Jewish letter might be that of the sultan or ruler of Kolathunadu.¹²⁰ Al-Idrisi’s misclaim that in the port were found rice and other grains in abundance and that the food provisions of Sarandib were supplied from here seems to be the result of his misinterpretation of Ibn Khordadbeh’s *Babatan* of the Coromandel Coast for Jurfattan.¹²¹ The port is found in Al-Dimishqi’s list of important ports of Malabar. By the time of Ibn Battuta, the Kolathiris had already shifted their base from Madayi to Jurfattan region,¹²² and it is likely that in the subsequent period this port flourished more than the adjacent ones such as Madayi and Dharmadom. With the course of time, the name of the port had changed from Jurfattan to Cannanore, and the first recorded usage of the new name is found in Ibn Majid’s treatise of late fifteenth century.¹²³

Muslim’s presence at Jurfattan can be traced back to the time of the Geniza letters, in which is found references to Muslim merchants who were involved in trade

¹¹⁷ Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, pp. 623-4.

¹¹⁸ Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, p.192.

¹¹⁹ For a recent study on the Mushika lineage of the Kolathiris, see, M. R. Varma, *The Kolaswaroopam in Historical Perspective: Political and Cultural Formations under the Kolathiris of North Malabar*, Doctoral Dissertation, IRISH, Kannur University, 2012, pp. 17-42.

¹²⁰ Marco Polo after visiting the city has noted that the King of Eli, though was not strong in military, was very rich in treasure. It might be that the king became so rich because, apart from levying customs duties on the visiting ships, himself owned ships which traded with the distant ports. For Polo, see, Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 416. For Ibn Battuta’s statement see, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 42.

¹²¹ For Ibn Khordadbeh’s *Babatan*, see, Ibn Khurdadhba, *al-Masalik*, p. 63.

¹²² The new fort was built in Jurfattan’s suburban area of Valappattanam.

¹²³ See, Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid*, f. 68r&v.

with the port. *Qissat Shakarvati* attests to the existence of a *jami* mosque at the town.¹²⁴ In the *Nur al-ma'arif*, the town along with Hīlī figures as the horse importing ports of the Kolathiri domain, which in turn indicates the inter-regional trade connections across the Ghats route.¹²⁵ Ibn Battuta speaks of merchant magnates from West Asia being active at the port and of Islamic scholars from foreign lands who served here.¹²⁶ As Barbosa testifies, by the late fifteenth century, the Muslims of the port, chiefly the natives of the land, had wide-ranging commercial networks extending up to the ports of Gujarat, Coromandel, and the Maldives.¹²⁷ During the course of the sixteenth century, the Muslims of Cannanore under the leadership of Mamale and his successors, instead of going for an open tussle with the Portuguese, preferred to expand their commercial networks by finding alternative trade routes that were free from the direct surveillance of the Portuguese, and eventually carved out a thalassocracy for their own. Substantiating the impression left by the literary sources is the discovery at Cannanore of an Indo-Arabian type of stone anchor. The anchor is found half-buried in the south-east corner of Hydross Palli mosque, one of the oldest mosques of the city located close to the shore, and is for the time being dated to the medieval period.¹²⁸ The discovery of such a stone anchor of Indo-Arabian style indicates that Arabian ships or at least ships inspired by the Arab mariners used to visit the port of Cannanore, and its location near the mosque suggests that it was of the Muslim mariners.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad', p. 255.

¹²⁵ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol.1, p. 265.

¹²⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 41.

¹²⁷ See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 81.

¹²⁸ S. Tripathi, A. Manikfan and M. Mohamed, 'An Indo-Arabian Type of Stone Anchor from Kannur, Kerala, West Coast of India', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 34, no.1, April 2005, pp. 133-4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134. However, it is yet to be known if there was any symbolic meaning behind the burying of a stone anchor near to a mosque. More accomplishments are awaited on this piece of archaeological material.



Figure 2: The stone anchor belonging to Indo-Arabian style discovered from Cannanore.¹³⁰

2.11 Hīlī

Identification of the place known in the medieval Arabic sources as Hīlī has been a puzzling task. In fact, the historical Eli region had a wider connotation as it included not only the hill on the coast, but also the adjacent areas such as Madayi and Kunhimangalam. The problem is in locating the much talked-of port-city in Eli. A close examination of the available literary as well as inscriptional evidences allows us to infer that this medieval port-city was located at Madayi region.¹³¹ The most probable location of it is what is today known as Pazhangadi as the nomenclature itself alludes to.¹³² The first literary reference to *Marahi*, from which was evolved the name Madayi,¹³³ is found in the eleventh century Sanskrit poem *Mushikavamsakavya* of Atula, which ascribes to

¹³⁰ Reproduced from *Ibid.*, p.133.

¹³¹ It is likely that after its emergence, Madayi became popular among the foreigners in the name of the whole region, viz. Hīlī.

¹³² The meaning of Pazhangadi in the local language is old town, which indicates that some old township had existed at the site.

¹³³ It is not clear when the name began to be rendered as Madayi. Ibn Majid in the late fifteenth century and the author of *Tufathul Mujahidin* in the late sixteenth century still have the name as *Maravi*. See, Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid*, f. 68r ; Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin fi ba'd akhbar al-burtughalin*, ed. Hamza, al-Huda Bookstall, Calicut, 1996, p. 28.

the town a relatively recent development.¹³⁴ The text refers Madayi as the seat of the ruling power, and describes it as being on the confluence of river and ocean and as having a market place, which accumulated wealth from maritime trade. The river referred to is Taliparambu river, which was navigable at all seasons as far as the lower slopes of the Western Ghats, and thus was used for transporting commodities from and to the cultivable hinterlands and the interior markets such as Taliparambu.¹³⁵ Both Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta in their descriptions of the port denote that it was located on an estuary, to which ships entered.¹³⁶ However, such an estuary at the port had disappeared, as of now, at least by the late fifteenth century as can be discerned from the accounts of Ibn Majid and Barbosa.¹³⁷ What appears is that the continuous littoral currents at the region had thrown up large sand shoals, which in turn diverted the Taliparambu river dummifying up its mouth at Madayi.¹³⁸

Scholars like M. G. S. Narayanan have attributed the Arabic inscription found at the *jami* Mosque of Madayi to a date of as late as early twelfth century to substantiate, among other things, their argument for the late arrival of Muslims at the port. However, a recent perusal of the same inscription with the help of paleology has suggested that it belonged to a much earlier period, viz. seventh century,¹³⁹ and given the commercial

¹³⁴ See, Vijayalekshmi, *Trade and Trading Centres*, pp. 162-6. Atula's ascription to *Marahi* a recent development cannot be taken to mean that the town emerged only by that time. In fact, the Madayi region must have already been a flourishing exchange centre, the prosperity of which in turn might have induced the Mushika rulers to shift their royal residence to the port, just like their successor Kolathiris would later shift their capital from Madayi to Jurfattan when the later port had already be an emerging commercial centre in Malabar.

¹³⁵ Taliparambu's commercial importance in the trade across the Western Ghats can be gauged from the account of Barbosa, who describes it as a 'town of both Moors and Heathen which has great traffic with the merchants of the kingdom of Narsyngua'. See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 80.

¹³⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 40; Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 416.

¹³⁷ These authors never indicate to the presence of an estuary at Madayi.

¹³⁸ The silting problem must have been one of the reasons for the Kolathiris' shift of royal seat from Madayi to Jurfattan by the time of Ibn Battuta.

¹³⁹ See, Abdullah Anchilath, 'Marakkanavilla madayilikhithathilecharitrasathyam', *Samakalika Malayalam Weekly*, 30th October 2017, pp. 60-7. However, it must be stated that this inscriptional evidence is not well enough to prove the validity of the local tradition that argues the construction of ten mosques in Malabar by Malik ibn Dinar and companions during the time of the Prophet Muhammed. Interestingly, in *Qissat Shakarvati Farmad* itself, where this local tradition has been found in its composed form, there is

significance of the Ezhimala region, such an evidence cannot be taken for granted. We have more reflective evidences from the thirteenth century onwards to demonstrate the presence of Muslims at Madayi, and indeed, it is one of the most frequently mentioned ports of Malabar. Graveyard inscriptions from the town evidence the presence of foreign Muslims of Persian and African origin who lived in the thirteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Madayi figures in the *Nur al-ma'arif* not only as port whose Muslims received stipends from Aden, but also as place whose local ruler Kolathiri used to receive gifts from the Yemeni court, underscoring the existing commercial ties between the places.¹⁴¹ Ibn Battuta's description of the port gives crucial information on how it was incorporated into the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims.¹⁴² For the period after the mid-fourteenth century, we do not have any substantial evidence on the aspects of Muslim presence at the port, and it is likely that during this period, not least with the diversion of the Taliparambu river and the bourgeoning of Cannanore, Madayi began to lose its previous significance.¹⁴³

2.12 Kasarkode

Located on the estuary of the Chandragiri river that originated in the Kudagu area of the Western Ghats, Kasarkode is one of those ports which figure very little in our sources. However, this absence cannot be taken to mean its insignificance in the commercial networks of the Indian Ocean. In the few available references, the port is named as *Harqiliyya*, and it was part of the ancient Tuluva kingdom.¹⁴⁴ The port-city is found in the Rasulid sultan's list of stipend receivers on the Malabar Coast, and this in turn indicates that it was important to the commercial sphere of Yemen. It is also

indication to the presence of Muslim merchants and scholars on the Malabar Coast even before the celebrated departure of Cheraman Perumal and the subsequent arrival of Malik ibn Dinar and companions.

¹⁴⁰ See, Desai, *A Topographical List*, p.110.

¹⁴¹ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol.1, pp. 517-8.

¹⁴² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, pp. 40-1.

¹⁴³ When he wrote his account of the port, Barbosa felt nothing impressive in it, though he denotes its past glory. See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 79-80. However, that Nicolo Conti's could travel to the city of Vijayanagar through an inland route from Madayi in the mid-fifteenth century points out the cross-regional commercial connections across the Ghats routes, which had been established by the course of time. See, Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁴ Nainar, *Arab Geographers*, p. 39.

mentioned in the Arabic text *Qissat Shakarvati* as one of the places where Muslims had settlement and religious institutions.¹⁴⁵ Al-Dimishqi in the early fourteenth century described it as a coastal town of considerable size, which had hundreds of villages on both the coastal and hilly areas.¹⁴⁶ Although this reference suggests Kasarkode as an important exchange centre, we do not have corroborative accounts to substantiate this. In fact, during the remaining period under review, the town does not appear significantly in any of the sources.

2.13 Mangalore

Mangalore was one of the most important port-cities of the region then mentioned as Malabar Coast (even though now it is a part of south Karnataka), which appears in almost all the major sources for the present study. The port was situated at the estuary formed by the confluence of the Netravati and Gurupura rivers, which originate in the Western Ghats, and which drained the major pepper and other hinterlands. During most of the period under study, the port-city was under the political control of the Alupa dynasty, which often ruled as feudatory of other neighbouring powers. Cosmas Indicopleustes's Mangarouth has been identified as Mangalore.¹⁴⁷ Letters from the Cairo Geniza pertaining to India trade are mostly centred on Mangalore, as it was the chief centre of Abraham Ben Yiju's commercial activities in India, and as such, much can be discerned from these letters on the contemporary trade at the port. It figures as a major pepper supplier in the geographies of Yaqut, Ibn Saeed, Al-Dimishqi and Abul-Fida.¹⁴⁸ *Nur al-ma'arif* describes its currency system and the gifts sent to its ruler from Yemen. Marco Polo, after describing the kingdoms of Quilon and Eli, has spoken of certain *Melibar* kingdom as a great kingdom, with the port of which merchants from China and West Asia had brisk trade in various commodities.¹⁴⁹ It seems that this mighty *Melibar*

¹⁴⁵ Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad', p. 255.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁷ McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography*, p. 367.

¹⁴⁸ Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, vol.5, p. 196; Ibn Saeed al-Maghribi, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, ed. Ismail al-Arabi, al-Maktaba al-Tijariyya li a-Taba' wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi', Beirut, 1970, p. 106; Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173; Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 354.

¹⁴⁹ Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 417-8.

kingdom was Mangalore,¹⁵⁰ and that during the time of the Italian, Chinese ships used to visit its port.¹⁵¹ However, Ibn Battuta a few decades later informs us that the Chinese junks never went northward beyond the port of Hīlī. Although the exact reasons behind such a development are not clear, it can be assumed that the fierce piracy in the Mangalore region, which had been vividly described by Polo, might have had prompted the Chinese to desert the Canarese port for a safer port like Calicut, which soon would emerge as a major emporium in the western Indian Ocean. The Moroccan has pointed out that Mangalore was a major destination of the merchants from Yemen as well as Persian Gulf.¹⁵² How the port-city was connected to the major interior markets of the time can be gauged from the account of Abdul Razzaq who could make an interesting inland journey to the royal city of Vijayanagar touching on the way many cities and markets.¹⁵³ As for the presence of Muslim merchants at the port of Mangalore, we have evidence from the time of the Geniza papers, in which are found incidental references to some of the individual Muslim merchants who traded with the port. *Qissat Shakarvati* and *Nur al-ma'ārif* inform us of the existence of Muslim religious institutions at the town, and the latter includes the port in the stipend receivers. Ibn Battuta has given the impression of a substantial Muslim community at Mangalore, which according to him had around 4000 members and was commercially very crucial to the port.¹⁵⁴

2.14 Fākanūr

Fākanūr, today known as Barkur, was regarded by many of the contemporaries as the first major port of Malabar from the northern side. It was located at the estuary of the Sita river which originated in the slopes of the Western Ghats.¹⁵⁵ The political control

¹⁵⁰ The accounts of Abul-Fida and Ibn Battuta also depict the kingdom of Mangalore as the mightiest on the Malabar Coast.

¹⁵¹ Interestingly, copper, which figures in the Geniza papers as an important trade item at Mangalore during the twelfth century, is mentioned by Polo as a major item of import to the port from the eastern countries like China. Moreover, that Abdul Razzaq could notice a marvelous bronze temple in the neighborhood of Mangalore points to the high consumption of copper in the region. For Abdul Razzaq, see, Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', p. 306.

¹⁵² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 40.

¹⁵³ Abdul Razzaq, see, Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', p. 306.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 40.

¹⁵⁵ Although today's Barkur is situated some kilometers inland from the coast, our sources introduce Fākanūr as a coastal town located on an estuary.

over it changed from time to time, and from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, it was under the suzerainty of the Vijayanagara Empire. Fākanūr first appears in the Geniza papers belonging to the early twelfth century as a customary port of landfalling and trade.¹⁵⁶ The geographies of Yaqut, Ibn Saeed, and Al-Dhimishqi describe it as an important pepper market.¹⁵⁷ Ibn Saeed's account of the mid-thirteenth century has it that Fākanūr was the most known town among the travellers, and in the *Nur al-ma'ārif* it is designated as *Misr al-Hind* (Misr/Egypt of India).¹⁵⁸ The Yemeni chronicle speaks of horse trade at Fākanūr and of the gifts sent to its ruler. Ibn Battuta has detailed the well-organized system of enforced tribute, which was followed by the local ruler of the town and by which every sailing ship was forced to call on his port to pay the right of the harbour (*haqq al-bandar*).¹⁵⁹ Such organized protection racket, in turn, appears to have affected the port adversely, as the safer port of Calicut would soon emerge as the most preferable emporium on the Malabar Coast for spice trade as well as for transshipment. However, Fākanūr later too remained crucial in the horse trade, not least with the rise of Vijayanagar Empire. Abdul Razzaq, while leaving Vijayanagara for Persia in the company of Indian emissaries, followed the established land-route from the imperial city to the port of Fākanūr and spent the month of Ramadan at the port-city.¹⁶⁰ That the *mu'llim* Ibn Majid has detailed the ways of landfalling at this port points to its existing relevance in the Indian Ocean maritime trade.¹⁶¹

The Geniza letters have alluded to the presence of Muslims as merchants at the port of Barkur. *Nur al-ma'ārif* and *Qissat Shakarvati* evidence the existence of Islamic edifices and institutions at the port. Al-Dimishqi reports that Barkur's population

¹⁵⁶ See for example, Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader', pp. 455-6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Saeed, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, pp. 105-6; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, vol. 5, p. 196; Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn Saeed, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, pp. 105-6; Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, p. 265. Travellers' familiarity with Barkur might have been because; it was the first major town in the pepper country, and it was a major outlet for the inland kingdoms like the Hoysala and Vijayanagar Empires, not least for the horse trade. Since the port has been called as *Misr al-Hind* in the *Nūr al-ma'ārif* while it discussed the horse trade with India, such a designation is likely because of Barkur's intermediary role in the transportation of horses from the Persian and Arabian lands to the interior dynasties and kingdoms of India.

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 39.

¹⁶⁰ Abdul Razzaq, see, Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', pp. 316-7.

¹⁶¹ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid*, f. 68r.

included Muslims of Persian and Arabian origin.¹⁶² By the time of Ibn Battuta, the town's Muslims had been organized into *jama't*, which was led by one Husai al-Sallath, most probably an influential mercantile magnate involved in horse trade. Abdul Razzaq shares his experience of meeting an aged mystic saint at the port, who was held in high esteem by both the Muslims and non-Muslims of the place, thereby indicating how the port was incorporated into the faith-related networks of Muslims.

The above-examined port-cities of Malabar appear not to have been of equal importance as far as the economy of the coast was concerned. As Pius Malekandathil suggests, there must have been a hierarchical structuring of the ports, which changed over time in accordance with the changing political equations of Malabar.¹⁶³ The port-hierarchy was such that one port used to emerge as the pivotal port attracting the bulk of overseas and coastal trade, whereas the other ports of the region were made to depend on the pivotal one in their role as feeding satellite ports or minor distribution centres. Maintaining such a port-hierarchy was very much part of the coastal polities' ambition to maximize exchange activities in their pivotal port at the cost of its satellite ones and thus to accumulate maximum material gains through customs duties, apart from desiring to seek from the sojourning merchant magnates the economic and military aid in times of need. In that sense, the political rulers of the region were instrumental in the shaping and re-shaping of the port-hierarchy on the Malabar Coast. From the ninth century onwards, the port of Quilon appeared to have been made the pivotal port of the region, whereas the Cranganore, Madayi, Fandarayana, and the like were relegated to background as satellite ports. Seeing the new developments in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean where direct trade between West Asia and the Far East has increasingly been taken up with the help of the monsoon wind system and thus there was the need for a good transit point in the middle of the two segments of the ocean, the later Cheras undertook to develop Quilon as the pivotal trade centre of Malabar. This was done at the cost of Muziris, the erstwhile pivotal trade centre of Malabar when there existed brisk trade relations with the ports of Roman Egypt. Even after the decline of the Cheras, Quilon remained the most important port unto about the fourteenth century under the political control of Venad

¹⁶² Al-Dimishqi, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, p. 173.

¹⁶³ Pius Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity', pp. 75-91.

swarupam. When the Zamorins began to rise into prominence in the political map of Malabar, a new port-hierarchy emerged on the scene, where Calicut was developed as the leading port and the rest like Quilon, Cochin, Cannanore, etc., were treated as the minor centres of sea-borne trade. As already seen, the Zamorins' commercial policy which ensured to protect the property rights of the merchants helped significantly in making Calicut as the foremost port of Malabar. With the enormous resources mobilized through maritime trade, Calicut's rulers were able to expand their political boundaries, which in turn eased the process of the subjugation of other ports like the emerging port of Cochin. However, Calicut's fortune began to wane in the sixteenth century with the appearance of the Portuguese, who with the help of sophisticated weaponry, a series of fortresses, and regular patrolling along the coast strove to make the flow of commodities from and to Malabar in a Cochin-Lisbon axis. Consequently, Cochin, which was made the commercial capital of the Portuguese, emerged as the leading port of Malabar, and the other ports eventually turned out to be the feeding ones. Even Calicut, which from the beginning objected to the Portuguese moves, was incorporated into the Cochin based new commercial order, although not all through the period.

3. The Monsoon Winds: Setting the Rhythm

Monsoon wind system was one of the most important deep structural elements in the Indian Ocean, which had enormous implications before the discovery of steamships changed the maritime world.¹⁶⁴ Apart from shaping in many areas the patterns of rainfall, agricultural farming and fisheries, the monsoon winds in a crucial way determined the movement of people through the oceanic spaces. They decided when people could travel in the Indian Ocean waters, where they went and settled, and what the extent of their multi-faceted networks was. The winds mattered not only to the men of commerce and religion, but also to the pirates who moved in accordance with the seasonality of the winds. The monsoon wind system consisted of two winds: the southwest monsoon and the northeast monsoon, which followed a quite regular and predictable pattern. These winds occurred in an annual sequence, with the former blew in one direction for about six months and the latter in the opposite direction for the rest of the year, and therefore,

¹⁶⁴ Pearson, *Indian Ocean*, p. 19.

people could travel to one side by making use of a favourable wind at the same time every year, knowing for sure that in the next six months' time they would get an opposite wind to take them back to their home. Since the monsoon wind system had significant role in the shaping of the commercial and faith-related networks of Muslims on the Malabar Coast, here it seems pertinent to have discussion on the formation and directions of the winds, and the ensuing timings of sailing towards various routes and destinations. Although references to usage of the monsoon winds for sailing from and to the Malabar Coast can be found in historical texts from the early centuries of the first millennium onwards, it is only the nautical treatises of the well-known medieval navigators such as Ibn Majid and Sulaiman al-Mahri which offer us a more nuanced picture of the wind system and its implications on the seafaring.¹⁶⁵

The monsoon winds are the result of the asymmetric heating of land and sea during the summer and winter seasons. During the summer months, the continental lands in the north of the Indian Ocean are warmed and thus low-pressure zones are created over their surface, which in turn causes winds to blow from the high-pressure zones at the ocean in a north-easterly direction. In the winter season, the pressure zones and the wind direction reverse; the ocean cools slower than the land, and so the high pressures over the lands produce winds that blow out to the sea in a south-westerly direction.¹⁶⁶ The former wind was called as southwest monsoon, whereas the later came to be known as northeast monsoon. The word 'monsoon' is derived likely from the Arabic word *mawsim*, which literally meant a time or season. Technically, the term *mawsim* was used by the navigators to mean the actual date for sailing from one port to another one. A port normally had three different periods in a year: the season of sailing, the season when ships returned and then the closed period. The opening of the season for sailing from Arabia to the Indian lands was termed as *Futuh mawsim al-bahr al-hindi*, whereas the closed season was described as *al-ghalq*.¹⁶⁷ What can be observed from the nautical treatises of the medieval navigators is that since the lunar year based Islamic method of

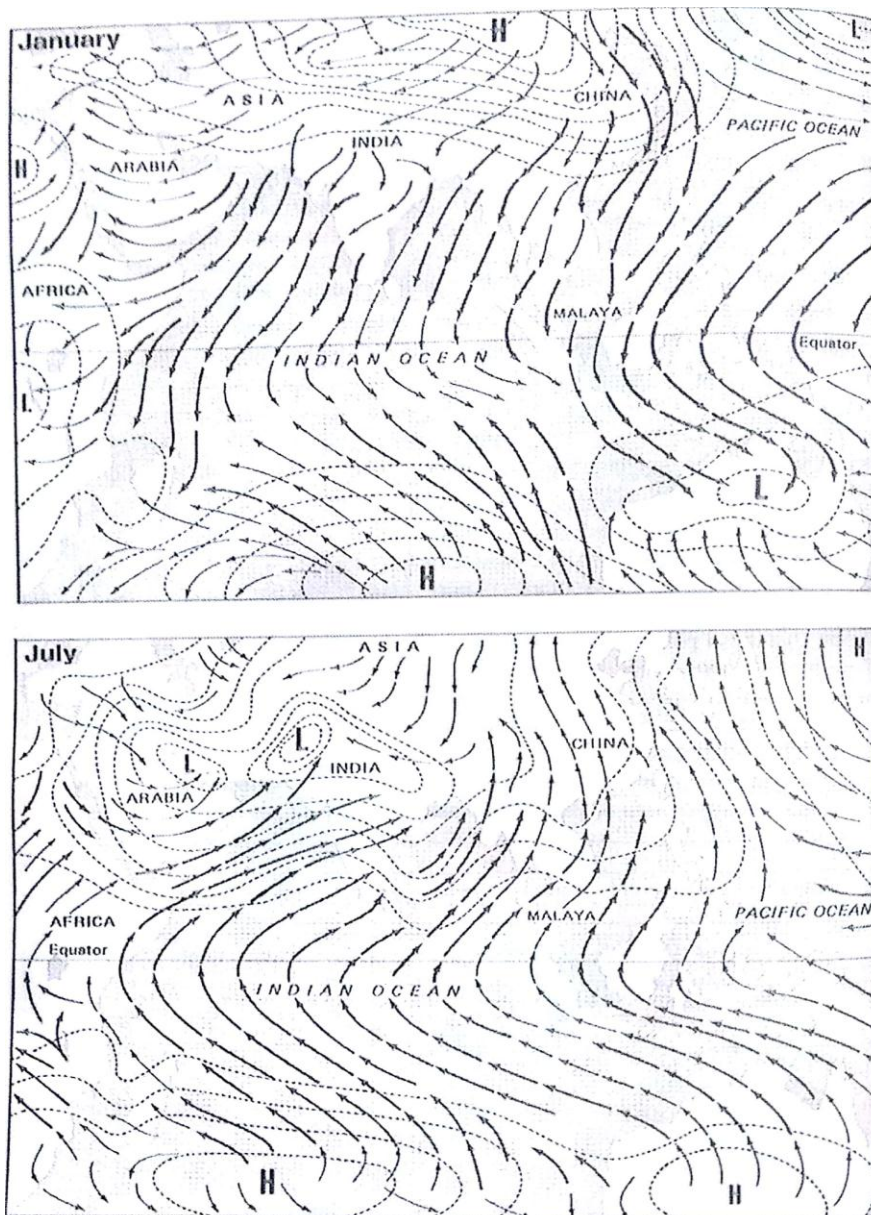
¹⁶⁵ The present discussion is mainly based on the analysis of the treatises of Ibn Majid, Sulaiman al-Mahri and Sidi Celebi made by Tibbets in G. R. Tibbets, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 360-82.

¹⁶⁶ Pearson, *Indian Ocean*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁷ Tibbets, *Arab Navigation*, p. 361.

dating had no relation to the seasons of sailing, they had to resort to a method of dating based on the solar year while they prepared the tables of seasons for sailing. Thus, the navigators made use of a system that numbered the days from *Nairuz*, the first day of the year, without using divisions for months. Here, an attempt is made to discern from the medieval nautical treatises the important seasons of sailing from and to the Malabar Coast.

Map 2: Monsoon Wind Patterns in the Indian Ocean¹⁶⁸



¹⁶⁸ Reproduced from Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, p. 254.

The main season for sailing from Arabia eastward to India and beyond was that of the southwest monsoon, which was known to the Arabs as the *Rih al-Kaws* or *Rih al-Dabur*, and which began in March on the East African coast slowly spreading eastwards reaching its maximum strength in June (in Malabar it was felt by the early June). In the Bay of Bengal also, the wind had a similar movement from west to east reaching Bengal in the latter half of June. However, as the monsoon wind blew in its full strength during the months of June and July bringing heavy rain to the west coast of India and to the coast of India eastwards of the Godavari delta, sailing was not possible on the Indian coast. Thus, there was a *ghalq* or closed season on the Indian coast that occurred during the months of June and July. Concomitantly, the harbours on the Arabian coast also had a closed season during the height of the Southwest monsoon.¹⁶⁹ By the early August, however, the strong wind and the ensuing rain on the Indian coast ceased, thereby making it possible for the sailors to utilize the remaining winds of the Southwest monsoon to venture eastwards. In short, the sailing season of Southwest monsoon in the Arabian Sea can be divided into two separate phases with a *ghalq* in between. The first phase was the *Mawsim al-Kaws* or *Awwal al-Kaws*, which stretched from the onset of the monsoon to the closure of the Indian ports (departure from the Arabian coast to India takes place from the end of March or the beginning of April to the first week of May). The second was the *Damani* season, beginning after the closure of the ports when the heavy rain and wind slackened off (departure from Arabia can be made in the late August and during September). The *Damani* season comes to end with a burst of rainfall of a week or so in the Maldives and southern India, which happened at the end of September or the first week of October and was known as *matar al-fil* (the rain of the Elephant).¹⁷⁰

However, while making use of the Southwest monsoon for the eastward journey the implications of the non-monsoon winds in the West Asian region had to be considered. The predominant wind in the Gulf of Aden was always easterly, except for

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 367 and 373.

¹⁷⁰ Tibbetts argues that the *Bishkal* rains (Indian *varshakala*) found in the medieval Arab accounts was same as the rain of the Elephant, which was a rain of a week or so. But, after my own perusal of the these accounts, including that of Ibn Majid, I am inclined to suggest that the *Bishkal* was the main rain of the SW monsoon season which extended at least two months, not the short rainfall of a week or so at the end of the *Damani* season.

the short period from June-September when it was westerly. As such, ships which wish to utilize the first part of the Southwest monsoon to make eastward traffic (which was possible from Aden during the month of April) had to manage this easterly wind at the Gulf region. Due to this fact, ships preferred to leave the port of Aden for India or Malacca during the Damani season (August-September) rather than in the *Awwal al-Kaws* (April).¹⁷¹ Ships departing for India from the Red Sea ports such as Jidda had to face more restrictions. The north wind of the Red Sea, known to the sailors as *Shimal*, was available at the southern part of the Red Sea only during the period from May to September, and therefore in the rest of the year traffic from such ports as Jidda to the Gulf of Aden and the far cannot be made. Given this, ships hailing from the Red Sea ports had little chance to make use of the *Awwal al-Kaws* (April) to sail for India; instead, they had to rely on the Damani season. The ideal time suggested by the medieval *mu'llims* to leave the port of Jidda was July-August and the port of Suakin in the mid-August; in both the cases, ships could reach Aden and make use of the Damani wind to leave for India and the like.¹⁷² Sailing to India from Oman, however, was possible all the times except when the Southwest monsoon was at its full strength when the ports on both the Arabian and Indian ports were closed. The travel from the west coast of India to Bengal and Southeast Asia took place twice during the Southwest monsoon. Firstly, the ships from the north-western ports began the voyage in April, and by utilizing the north-westerly winds of the time, they reached the southern coast of India. These ships and those from the Malabar Coast then crossed the Bay of Bengal by taking advantage of the Southwest monsoon, which was felt in May at this latitude. Secondly, the ships from the west coast of India made use of the *Damani* season to cross the Bay of Bengal, although this time the voyage could be tricky for one was liable to meet the squally rain storms off the Malabar Coast which marked the end of the Southwest monsoon and was likely to face the Northeastern monsoon in the Bay of Bengal and the cyclones of October there.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 368.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 373.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 377.

As for the season to travel from India and the Far East to the Arabian ports, it was the period of the northeast monsoon which was used for the purpose. This monsoon was known to the medieval navigators as the *Rih Azyab* or the *Rih al-Saba*. The Northeastern monsoon begins in early October in Bengal and Sind reaching Ceylon by the end of the month (Malabar Coast also got the wind around this latter time), and comes to end sometime during April and May.¹⁷⁴ During this monsoon, sailing was possible throughout the whole period of the wind, because this monsoon emanating from the mainland bore no rain or high swells, which in fact had closed the ports during the Southwest monsoon. Importantly, as this monsoon wind continued into the Gulf of Aden and through the Bab al-Mandeb entered the Red Sea where it blew as a Southeast wind halfway up the sea, it was possible for ships to travel from Malacca almost to Jidda on one wind. Although the general date to leave India for Arabia was from the middle of October to the early April, Malabar's case was somewhat different. Due to the prevalence of *matar al-fil* (the rain of the Elephant) with squalls on the Malabar Coast in the late September-October, leaving it for Arabia had to be delayed for sometimes.¹⁷⁵ Besides, in the months of March and April, the weather off the Malabar Coast was not conducive for sailing due to the presence of thunderstorms, and therefore the departure from the coast had to be made by the dawn of March, except if the ship sailed along the coast of India to the north.¹⁷⁶ Ibn Majid has underlined this fact while he said,

He who leaves India (Malabar?) on the 100th day (2nd March) is a sound man, he who leaves on the 110th will be all right. However, he who leaves on the 120th is stretching the bounds of possibility and he who leaves on the 130th is inexperienced and an ignorant gambler.¹⁷⁷

The *mu'llim* further says that if the ship was destined for Jidda, then March 2 must be the latest to leave India so that the ships would not have to face the north wind of the Red Sea.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 375.

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawaid*, f. 82 v.

¹⁷⁶ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 375.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁷⁸ Speaking of the sailing time the *paradesi* Muslim merchants at Calicut, Barbosa remarked, 'They started (from the Malabar Coast) in February and returned from the middle of August up to the middle of October of the same year'. See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 77.

Ibn Majid describes that the date of sailing from Bengal to the west was from January to the early February. From the Chinese ports, ships left for the Southeast Asian side in between January and mid-February, and if the ship had departed from China in the early season, it could meet at Malacca ships from the West Asian ports as well as Calicut, which are set to return to their homeports. Since the Northeastern monsoon hardly reached Sumatra until January, the journey from Southeast Asia to the west could not be made before this time.¹⁷⁹ Ibn Majid informs us of an astonishing voyage for reaching Sind from Malabar during the Northeastern monsoon. This was made by sailing out into the deep Arabian Sea as far as Socotra taking advantage of the Northeastern winds and then the Northwestern winds off the Arabian coast would take the ship past Ra's al-Hadd towards Sind reaching the same before the onset of the Southwest monsoon.¹⁸⁰ The voyage from the Maldives and Laccadives to Malabar was possible even during the rainy season of the Southwest monsoon because of the proximity of the regions.¹⁸¹

4. The Legacies of the Past: Existing Trade Networks of the Indian Ocean

The spread of Islam in West Asia and beyond was synchronized by an expansion of Muslim commercial activities into maritime Asia. This expansion process, it is argued, was taken on the substratum of the existing maritime trade networks of the Indian Ocean. While they entered the commercial world of the Indian Ocean, the Muslim merchants from West Asia tried to adapt those trade circuits, which were already under way for the past many centuries. By so doing, they contributed to the continuity of trade circuits and routes in the Indian Ocean. From the available sources, we come to know that by the time the Muslims appeared in maritime Asia, both the western and eastern segments of the Indian Ocean had already an extensive network of trade, which were operated by the merchants from the Sassanid Persia, South Asia and the Far East. The commercial scene of the Arabian Sea on the eve of the entrance of Muslim merchants can be gauged from

¹⁷⁹ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, pp. 370-1.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-7.

¹⁸¹ Ibn Majid, *Kitab al-fawa'id*, f. 84 r & v.

the account of Procopius, which records a sixth century Byzantine embassy to the Ethiopian court. The Byzantine king Justinian requests the Abyssinians

that they should buy silk from the Indians [of India] and sell it to the Romans; thus they would make a lot of money, while they would only be bringing this gain to the Romans, that they [the Romans] would no longer be forced to send their own money to their enemies [the Persians].¹⁸²

What appears is that the Persians, mainly the Pahlavi-speaking Christian merchants, were the chief actors in the commerce of the Arabian Sea, who acted as intermediaries between the marts of India and the Mediterranean region. The Byzantines had to depend on the Persians to have access for the oriental commodities such as pepper and silk, thereby causing them considerable economic loss. The king wanted to bring a solution to the problem by seeking the help of his ally in the African country, whose subjects too had some agency in the Arabian Sea waters and whose influence in the Red Sea region had recently increased after his subjugation of Himyar on the Arabian Peninsula. The Abyssinians agreed to the demand of the Byzantine king, but they were not able to fulfil the promise for, as Procopius notes,

it was impossible for the Ethiopians to buy silk from the Indians, because the Persian merchants present at the very ports [of Ceylon] where first the ships of the Indians put in, since they inhabit a neighbouring country, were always accustomed to buy the entire cargo.¹⁸³

Thus, it can be discerned that around the sixth century the merchants from the Sassanid Persia were the major mercantile power in the western segment of the Indian Ocean, where they established their sway not only on the international entrepot of Ceylon, but also on the several exchange centres on the coastal areas of the peninsular India.

The active participation of the Christian merchants from the Sassanid Persia in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean during the first half of the first millennium can be comprehended from the contemporary accounts such as that of Palladius and the Nestorian annals. These accounts testify that the Christian presence in the trans-oceanic trade was such that they had to establish settlements on the important ports on the rim of

¹⁸² Quoted in Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 43.

¹⁸³ Besides, the Ethiopian kings were not able to maintain their control in Arabia as the Persian king ousted their tributary principdom from there in the second half of the sixth century. See, *Ibid.*, p. 44.

the Indian Ocean mainly because of the monsoon factors, and these settlements consequently attracted Christian religious institutions, which could cater to the spiritual needs of the mercantile class.¹⁸⁴ While the main maritime bases of the Persians on the Gulf side were al-Ubullah (Apologus), Siraf, Rew Ardashir and Kharg Island,¹⁸⁵ they, on the other side of the sea, had several trading centres, which they used to visit. The sixth century account of the Alexandrian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes reveals the important commercial centres of South Asia, which were frequented by, among others, the Christian traders from Persia. The main marts on the Malabar Coast are said to be Parti (?), Mangaruth (Mangalore), Salopatana (?), Nalopatana (Valappattanam?) and Pudopatana (Puthupattanam). The greatest South Asian emporium of the time, as Cosmas describes, was Taprobane (Ceylon), in which gathered merchants from all parts of the Indian Ocean such as Sind, Kalyan, Malabar, China, Persia and Arabia.¹⁸⁶ The Persian and other merchants from the West Asian side exported from Ceylon local commodities as well as those imported from the Southeast Asia and China. Cosmas evidences that the Nestorian Christians from Persia had a settlement in the island with religious institutions such as Church and priest, who was appointed from Persia. The presence of the Christians from Persia in south-west India and Sri Lanka can also be borne out by the discovery there of stone crosses with Pahlavi inscriptions.¹⁸⁷ Among the inscriptions so far found, the ones from Anuradhapuram (Sri Lanka) and Mylapore, which are traced to the sixth century, seem to be the oldest specimens. It appears that the Persian Christians were helped in their mercantile enterprises in the Indian Ocean by the native St. Thomas Christians of Malabar and Mylapore in view of the commonality of their religion. The native Christians of Malabar made use of the increasing external demand from the west to expand the land under cultivation to produce more spices, thereby eventually developing a strong rapport between the agriculturalists and the traders.¹⁸⁸

It seems that the commercial horizon of the Persian merchants was even wider than what has already been described. Apart from the ports on the Persian Gulf, the

¹⁸⁴ See, Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ For Cosmas's account of Ceylon see, McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography*, pp. 363-72.

¹⁸⁷ For a short introduction of the inscriptions, see Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

western boundary of the merchants extended to the ports on the Red Sea side such as Adulis and Himyar, especially after the Sassanid conquest of the south Arabia in the second half of the sixth century.¹⁸⁹ However, the major outlet of the Persians to the Mediterranean world remained to be the emporiums of the Persian Gulf. As for the eastern boundary of the Persian merchants, it is likely that some of them even went beyond the emporium of Ceylon to the marts of Southeast Asia and China. This can be discerned from the resounding title of the Nestorian bishop (early fifth century) 'Metropolitan of the Islands, Sea and Interior, of Dabag, Chin and Macin'. Chin and Macin are identified to be parts of China and Dabag was an island, probably Java.¹⁹⁰ Near-contemporary sources also strengthen this inference. A Chinese traveller could travel in A D 671 from Canton to Sumatra in a *Po-sse* ship, i.e. ship of some Persian merchant, and it is unlikely that the Persians started to sail as far China immediately after their defeat by the Arabs.¹⁹¹ Al-Baladhuri and Al-Tabari state that the port of al-Ubullah at the time of the Muslim conquest was a port for the ships from China, India, Oman and al-Bahrain.¹⁹² The intention of the Arab geographers must have been the China-going ships of the Persians. Above all, in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, merchants other than the Persian Christians also appear to have had some role. Cosmas has noted that Ethiopian merchants, whose chief outlet on the Red Sea shore was Adulis, visited the emporium of Ceylon in their role as importers and exporters.¹⁹³ The *Po-sse* (Persian) of the Chinese accounts can also be the *Majusis* or Zoroastrians from the Sassanid Persia. Abu Zaid al-Sirafi informs that in the ninth century revolt at Canton were killed several Zoroastrians who were there as sojourning merchants.¹⁹⁴ Although this is of a very later phase, Zoroastrians must have been part of Indian Ocean maritime trade from much earlier period. However, during the period under review, the merchants from West Asia, be it the Nestorian Christians, Zoroastrians or Ethiopians, had not had any considerable role in the maritime commerce of the eastern segment of the Indian Ocean; instead, their main concentration was in the Arabian Sea.

¹⁸⁹ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 41.

¹⁹⁰ Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹¹ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 46-7.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁹³ McCrindle, trans., *The Christian Topography*, p. 365.

¹⁹⁴ Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, p. 54.

Prior to the emergence of the Muslim traders, there was trans-oceanic trade in the eastern segment of the Indian Ocean, and this trade was mainly in the hands of the merchants from India and Sri Lanka. Many of these merchants were followers and patrons of Buddhism. What appears from the Buddhist annals and the account of Cosmas is that on the western side Ceylon was the most important emporium of the merchants involved in trade with the Far East. Whereas, ports such as Jiaozhi (Hanoi), Guangzhou and Jiankang (Nanjing) were their furthest destination on the eastern side. The main transit centre for the maritime trade between South Asia and China was the port of Oc Eo in Funan, which was reached by crossing the land strip across the Isthmus of Kra on the Malayan Peninsula. However, by the sixth century, the maritime transportation began to be carried out through the Straits of Malacca, and thus Kedah on the Malayan Peninsula and the islands of Sumatra and Java turned out to be the chief transit points.¹⁹⁵ The dissemination of Buddhist doctrines in China had developed an interdependent relationship between Buddhist monks and merchants: while the merchants facilitated the Buddhist monks' travel between South Asia and China, met their demand for the ritual items and patronized their religious activities, the monks, in turn, created demand for new items of trade and catered to the spiritual needs of the travelling merchants.¹⁹⁶ For instance, a fifth century South Asian monk named Zhu Nanti is said to have given passage to the famous Kashmiri monk Gunavarman and to two groups of Sri Lankan nuns travelling to Guangzhou.¹⁹⁷ Indicative of the growing maritime trade between South Asia and China is the increasing number of monks travelling on this route and their establishment of Buddhist monasteries in such port-cities as Guangzhou.¹⁹⁸

Thus, what appears from the above perusal is that before the appearance of the Muslim merchants, the Indian Ocean had maritime commercial networks, which were operated in the Arabian Sea mainly by the Nestorian Christians from the Sassanid Persia

¹⁹⁵ Tansen Sen, 'Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings' in *China and Beyond in the Medieval Period: Cultural Crossings and Inter-regional Connections*, eds. Dorothy C. Wong and Gustav Heldt, Cambria Press and Manohar, Amherst and Delhi, 2014, p. 45.

¹⁹⁶ Tansen Sen, 'Maritime Interactions between China and India: Coastal India and the Ascendancy of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean', *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 2, 2011, pp. 43-4.

¹⁹⁷ Tansen Sen, 'Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings', p. 44.

¹⁹⁸ Tansen Sen, 'Maritime Interactions', pp. 44-5.

and in the eastern segment of the ocean by the South Asian merchants often linked with Buddhism. Notwithstanding the lesser possibilities of merchants from Persia trading directly with China, sailing in the pre-Islamic times was in a segmented way where different circuits existed in the segments of the Indian Ocean. In these trans-oceanic commercial networks, Sri Lanka operated as the main transshipping point where merchants and commodities from the east and west converged. Many ports as those on the Malabar Coast acted mainly as centres for procuring local commodities like spices and as markets for the foreign goods. While the Muslim merchants from Arabia and Persia took up maritime trade, they drew a lot from these existing commercial networks of the Indian Ocean. The Persian influence on the Muslim navigation of the ocean can be gleaned from that while the Arab traders of the late Abbasid period prepared their 'Nautical Instructions', they had Persian antecedents as their basis and borrowed from them elements of nautical science.¹⁹⁹ With the emergence of Islamic kingdoms in the west, by which the Mediterranean was linked with the Indian Ocean by a single political power, and that of the Tang dynasty in the east, Muslim merchants along with Jewish and Christian counterparts could develop a long distance trade network involving direct trade between West Asia and the Far East. However, in the newly emerged commercial scenario, alongside Ceylon or overshadowing it the entrepots of Malabar, chiefly Quilon, evolved as the main transit point for the long-stretching trans-oceanic trade networks.

In the forgoing discussion, we saw that during the early medieval period, Malabar had a centralized political structure under the later Chera dynasty, which realizing the geographical setting of the region that did not favour extensive paddy cultivation and the follow-on bulky revenue extraction found maritime commercial sector as a complementary way of mobilizing resources. However, due to the series of territorial aggressions from the neighbouring states, the Chera polity was disintegrated by the mid twelfth century, and thus the erstwhile *nadus* or provinces had now appeared as independent polities (known as *swarupams*). Many of these polities, stimulated by their possession of sought-after spices and by the limited possibility of revenue from paddy cultivation, enthusiastically responded to maritime trade opportunities with a view to

¹⁹⁹ Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 1, p. 49.

finding resources for the maintenance of their political structures. As the newly emerged social order of Malabar based on the *Chaturvarnya* idea of Hinduism did not produce an active indigenous mercantile class who would take up sea-borne trade, the polities always welcomed outsiders to carry out the maritime trade of the region. During the period under review, the long stretch of the Malabar Coast witnessed the development of various port-cities, and in the historical trajectory of these ports due role was played by such factors as their ability to be connected with their unlands and hinterlands particularly through the riverine-channels, their geo-physical setting which could provide with anchorage facility as well as provisions of travel, and the active intervention of the local polities to ensure the protection of property rights of the visiting merchants. Besides, there was changing hierarchical structuring among these port-cities, where Quilon remained as the pivotal port of Malabar until about the early fourteenth century, after which Calicut took over this position until the Portuguese helped Cochin to emerge as the leading port of the region during the sixteenth century. The medieval seafaring of the Indian Ocean very much depended on the monsoon system, and as such, the winds decided when and where to sail in the ocean, apart from shaping many other activities related to agricultural farming and fisheries. A perusal of the medieval nautical treatises reveals that the two seasons to sail from the West Asian ports to Malabar and beyond were the beginning of the Southwest monsoon (*Awwal al-Kaws*, end of March to early May) and the end of the same (*Damani* season, late August-September), with a closed season in between. The westward journey from the Malabar Coast was made during the Northeaster monsoon (*Rih Azyab*, end of October to April-May), and the ideal timing of departure was from after the season of 'rain of Elephant' (late September-October) to the dawn of March. The chapter finally showed that by the time Muslims appeared in the sea-borne trade of the Indian Ocean, both the eastern and western segments of the ocean had already vibrant trans-oceanic trade networks, which were operated by merchants from the Sassanid Persia and South Asia, not least the Nestorian Christians and the South Asian merchants linked with Buddhism, and such trade-networks in turn formed the substratum for the later trade networks to be formed by the Muslim traders from West Asia.

Chapter II

Seeking the Bounties of God: Muslim Merchants and Their Networks of Trade

'it is a providential ordinance of God that the western world should continue in want of eastern products, and the eastern world of western products, and that the north should with labour procure the goods of the south, and the south be furnished in like manner with commodities brought in ships from the north.'—Wassāf al-Hadrat¹

This chapter is an attempt to study the wide-stretching maritime trade networks of Muslims in Malabar. By the time the Portuguese had entered into the Indian Ocean waters, Muslims were crucial actors both in the trans-oceanic and the coastal trade of the various nodal points on the rims of the ocean. However, identification of these Muslim actors and their trans-regional connections has often been an arduous task for the scholars working on maritime history. This study, nonetheless, tries to make an enhancement to our understanding of Malabar's Muslim traders and their commercial networks by deeply engaging with the primary sources. The discussion would revolve around three main themes. Firstly, it examines the trans-oceanic trade networks of the Muslims in the pre-sixteenth century phase. It will be shown that their networks had extended from the ports of West Asia up to that of the Far East and that those networks kept changing during the course of the period under review. Attempts would be made to discern the continuities and discontinuities in the networks and the underlying reasons behind the fluctuations. Secondly, the chapter looks into the coastal trade networks of the Muslim merchants. By the early sixteenth century, the local Muslim merchants of the Malabar Coast had become inevitable players in the coastal trade of the coast so much that the Europeans even had to depend on them during the initial years of their presence in Malabar. Thirdly, the

¹ Stated by the fourteenth century Persian historian Wassaf on the thriving horse trade between the Persian Gulf and India c. 1330. See, Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India*, vol. 3, p. 34.

changing fortunes of trade in the sixteenth century following the arrival of the Portuguese are discerned. It is argued that the response of the Muslim merchants towards the newcomers was manifold.

1. Trans-Oceanic Trade Networks

The historical trajectory of Muslim mercantile activities on the Malabar Coast during the medieval period is very much linked to the developments in West Asia and the Far East. It is true that the historical sources at our disposal begin to reflect on the Muslim presence in the commerce of Malabar only from the mid-ninth century onwards. However, taking into account its geophysical location vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean and its potentiality to supply some of the sought-after commodities of international trade, it is not difficult to assume that the South Indian coast witnessed their presence almost concomitant to the diffusion of trade networks on the rims of the Indian Ocean from the Islamized West Asia. With the rise and rapid expansion of Islam, the political and commercial rivalry between the Sassanid Persians and the Byzantines that had marked the pre-Islamic phase up to the early seventh century came to an end, and now a single political power could connect the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean worlds easing the conduct of trans-continental trade. The successive Islamic caliphates based in West Asia, apart from themselves creating considerable demand for the commodities from India and the Far East, facilitated the smooth conduct of trade with the Mediterranean world, which catered to the European and North African demand for oriental goods. On the other end of the spectrum, the T'ang dynasty came to power in China in the early seventh century and the same ruled for around three centuries with decent political stability. The presence in China of a big political entity, along with the ever-increasing Buddhist influences in the region, meant greater demand for western commodities especially the luxury items. Thus, the stage was now set for the evolution of trans-oceanic trade networks connecting the geographies at the two ends of the Indian Ocean. As shown in the previous chapter, merchants from the Persian Gulf had had already-existing trade networks particularly in the western segment of the ocean. After the rise of Islam, these merchants continued to be

active in the seaborne trade with India and beyond.² However, they were now increasingly joined by the Muslim and Jewish merchants from the Arabian and Persian lands. The Muslim merchants consisted not only of Arabs but also of Persian converts, who by the course of time would overshadow the Zoroastrian and other elements among the Persians. The Persian Muslims hailed not only from the proper Persian lands but also from the southern littoral of the Gulf like the ports of Oman, where Persians had been living along with Arabs from the pre-Islamic times and whose multi-ethnic population has been noted by contemporary writers.³ In fact, Persian Muslims were to have some sort of dominance in the seaborne trade emanating from the Persian Gulf region as can be testified from the tenth-century accounts of Buzurg ibn-Shahriyar and Al-Maqdisi.⁴ However, this Persian dominance might have been not necessarily because of their dictating numbers, but due to their expertise in shipbuilding and navigation, something that can be validated by the survival of Persian navigational treatises (*rahnamas*) and terminologies into as later times as is reflected in the treatises of the fifteenth-century *mu'allim* Ibn Majid.⁵ Important among the Arabs active in the Gulf's seaborne trade were the merchants belonging to the Azdi tribe based mainly in Oman and Al-Ubulla, who had great mercantile legacy going back to the Sassanid times and whose

² Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 62.

³ D. A. Agius, 'Omani Seafaring Identity before the Early 1600s: Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity', in *Oman and Overseas*, eds. M. Hoffmann-Ruff and Abdulrahman al-Salimi, Georg Olms Verlag, New York, 2013, p. 48.

⁴ In Buzurg's account of the wonders of Indian Ocean lands and waters that he collected from the seagoing mariners of the Persian Gulf, most of the captains are Persians. For a critical study of Buzurg's account, see, H. S. Shihab, *Ajaib al-hind li Buzurg ibn-Shahriyar bayn al-haqeeq wa-al-ustoora*, National Library, Abu Dhabi, 2010. Al-Maqdisi notes that many people call a large part of the Arabian Sea as far as the coast of Yemen as the sea of Fars as most of the shipbuilders and navigators are Persians. See, Muhammed Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem fi ma'arif al-aqalim*, 2nd ed., Brill, Leiden, 1906, p. 18.

⁵ Ibn Majid while preparing his Arabic nautical treatises relied on some of the earlier Persian *rahnamas*. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 5. That in terms of number Arabs were the major element among the Muslim merchants even before the re-routing of trade from the Persian Gulf to Red Sea can be gleaned, for instance, from the ninth century anonymous text *Silsilat al-thawarikh* and the tenth century account of Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, both of which introduce the enterpots of the Indian Ocean on the basis of Arab merchants travelling to there and the treatment of local rulers towards them. However, it should be added that medieval writers might have used the term 'Arabs' as an umbrella word to encompass all the Muslim traders as Arabic was the language of commerce during those times regardless of a person's ethnic background.

eagerness to expand their commercial boundaries can be gleaned from the instrumental role that they had played in the early Islamic conquests of Fars, Makran and Sind.⁶

Although substantial evidence for the prevalence of regular voyages from west to east is found only for the period from the ninth century onwards, it is probable that at least occasional seafaring had taken place in the waters of the Indian Ocean much before this time. Apart from a few contemporary evidence, there are some of the near contemporary and later accounts, which were written relying on earlier sources that have not survived and reached us and which prove that there were earlier voyages up to as far as China undertaken by people from the Persian Gulf region. Some of the Chinese accounts of the seventh and eighth centuries speak about *Po-sse* ships trading with the ports of China, and these ships have been interpreted as the ships of the Persian merchants.⁷ The tenth-century Chinese account *Old Book of Tang* testifies that a diplomatic delegation was sent from Arabia in the mid-seventh century, which was the first official envoy of the Arabs to visit China.⁸ It is not unlikely that this delegation reached China through the existing maritime route. The same source has it that in the year AD 758, the *Ta-shi* (Arabs) and *Po-sse* (Persians) together sacked and burnt the city of Canton and went back by sea.⁹ This would mean that by the time the Abbasid dynasty was established in the west, the ports of the Far East had a sizeable population of Arabs and Persians who would dare to sack a port-city like Canton. Besides, Muslim writers assert that the main reason behind the Arab conquest of Sind was the piracy in the waters of Debal and the adjacent areas.¹⁰ Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the Umayyad governor of Iraq was angered by a raid off the coast of Debal, in which were captured Muslim females and gifts sent by the ruler of Ceylon to Arabia. Hajjaj sent his army to Sindh and captured it in AD 711. The incident and the underlying reason are indicative of two things. Firstly, it appears that by the early eighth century, considerable commercial activities were

⁶ Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 1, p. 52.

⁷ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 62-3.

⁸ Cited in A. A. Ziaee, 'Omani Trade and Cultural Relations with East Asian Countries', in *Oman and Overseas*, eds. M. Hoffmann-Ruff and Abdulrahman al-Salimi, Georg Olms Verlag, New York, 2013, p. 220.

⁹ Cited in Hadi Hasan, *A History of Persian Navigation*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1928, p. 99.

¹⁰ See for example Ahmed Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, Dar wa-Maktaba al-Hilal, Beirut, 1988. p. 419.

undertaken in the waters of the Indian Ocean to the extent that they attracted persistent piracy from the Indian side. The Umayyad governor of Iraq, who must have been one of the beneficiaries of such a trade, wanted to take revenge on the pirates and to ensure the safety of the seafarers in the waters of the Arabian Sea. Secondly, the story of Ceylon's Muslim females, who are reported to be the relatives of deceased foreign Muslim merchants, informs us that the ports of this place by this time had the presence of Muslims who must have been sojourning there for conducting trade or staying temporarily awaiting proper monsoon winds for return journey or for continuing voyage as far as the Far East.¹¹ Moreover, later writings of Ibadi sect record traditions regarding some of the eighth century Ibadi Muslims from Oman who had trade relations with the ports of China.¹² That the Arab rulers of the time were well aware of the economic advantages of the ever-increasing maritime trade can be gauged from some of the statements, which are ascribed by Muslim writers to the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far Al-Mansur (r. AD 754-775).¹³ It appears that Al-Mansur, who is regarded as the real founder of the Abbasid Caliphate and who established the imperial city of Baghdad shifting the capital from Damascus, was cognizant of the geographical position of his new capital, which was located between the Tigris and Euphrates, and to which boats could bring commodities from diverse lands. In short, the impression which is given by such evidences that have survived to us is that at least by the end of the eighth century merchants from the littorals of the Persian Gulf had managed to make regular voyages to the entrepots of South Asia and the Far East for conducting trade, and it is the same impression that we get from the later corpus of Muslim geographical and travel accounts, but with much more details and accuracy.

Parallel to the development of long-distance maritime trade between the west and east, there emerged new transit points where oceangoing ships had to call at primarily because of the monsoon factors. Due to its centrality in the Indian Ocean, the Malabar Coast turned out to be one among such important transit points for the seafarers from the

¹¹ As mentioned in the first chapter, Ceylon was the chief transit centre for the merchants of the Indian Ocean during the pre-Islamic times. Its ports must have continued to enjoy the same role until other centres such as Quilon would emerge to attract China going merchants.

¹² Ziaee, 'Omani Trade and Cultural Relations', p. 221.

¹³ Some of the statements are cited in Hourani's work. See, Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 64.

Persian Gulf on their way back and forth the Far East. However, Malabar's rise to such a role appears to have been a slow process for the sources on Ceylon show that the island continued to be transit centre for the trans-oceanic traders from the Sassanid period to the early years of Muslim maritime experience.¹⁴ The sources at our disposal demonstrate that by the mid-ninth century the Malabari port of Quilon was the chief halting point for China going ships before sailing further towards the Bay of Bengal. However, Vizhinjam, a port further south on the same coast, seemed to have attracted foreign merchants at least for some time until it was conquered by the Pandyas and hence the Kulasekharas thought of developing an alternative port in Quilon.¹⁵ While Ibn Khurdadhba mentions Quilon as a port that was visited by those ships which sailed from the Persian Gulf to the Far East along the coastal route,¹⁶ the contemporary text *Silsilat al-thawarikh* has it as the destination of those who sailed from the Gulf directly across the Arabian Sea.¹⁷ This would mean that the Malabar Coast was a chief halting point for the medieval China traders, whatever be their route, i.e. coastal navigation or sailing across the open seas. The monsoon reality was such that the Arab or Persian ships after a long journey of around one month from the Gulf region using the *Damani* season of the Southwest monsoon reached the port of Quilon by the beginning of October, and then the forward journey to the east was not possible in the next few months as the Southwest monsoon winds of the year was already over. The ships would spend the winter season at Quilon until about the month of May when the next year's Southwest monsoon wind begins to blow at this region and the same could be utilized to cross the waters of the Bay of Bengal. In the return journey from the east to west, some of the traders are said to have sailed from the ports of Southeast Asia to the Persian Gulf directly without touching

¹⁴ As just mentioned above, the presence in Ceylon of Muslim merchants accompanied by families is a manifestation of the region's continued relevance to the trans-oceanic networks.

¹⁵ Ibn Khurdadhba's mid-ninth century account indicates that *Billin*, which can be identified as Vizhinjam, was still a port worth visiting at least for those ships that preferred to sail from west to east along the coasts rather than cutting across the deep seas. See, Ibn Khurdadhba, *al-Masalik*, p. 63. That the port of Vizhinjam was entrenched in the China trade of the time can also be discerned from the Chinese potteries discovered from the port, among which are some that belonged to the ninth century. See, Ajit Kumar and others, 'Indian Ocean Maritime Trade: Evidences from Vizhinjam, South Kerala, India', *Journal of Indian Ocean Archaeology*, no. 9, 2013, p. 198.

¹⁶ Ibn Khurdadhba, *al-Masalik*, p. 62.

¹⁷ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38.

South Asia and this was possible by a proper use of the Northeastern monsoon wind.¹⁸ However, such direct sails do not appear, at least for the early medieval phase, to have been a normal case; instead, they were confined to those occasions when ships had already got enough cargos from the Chinese or Southeast Asian ports and so did not require further loading. Otherwise, returning ships used to visit the Malabar Coast or Ceylon for purchasing locally available spices, precious stones, etc., and for selling the commodities on board their ships. Indicative of this fact is the discovery on the Malabar Coast of Chinese wares, one of the chief trade items of the West Asian merchants. As the contemporary Arab writers indicate, the increasing association of the Malabari people with the China-going merchants even led to the diffusion on the coast of the technology of making Chinese vases, and thus, there started in Quilon the production of duplicate vases of the Chinese model, which were then exported to the marts of West Asia to be sold in the name of Chinese vases.¹⁹ During their stay at the transit point, the Arab and Persian merchants, apart from involving in exchange activities like the purchasing of pepper, prepared the provisions for the further journey particularly fresh water for the drinking purpose. *Silsilat al-thawarikh* speaks about the presence of fresh water wells at the port of Quilon, which might have been built especially with a view to providing the visiting seafarers with drinking water.²⁰

As for the taxing of maritime trade at the port of Quilon, what appears from the testimony of the Tharisappalli Plate and the account of Benjamin of Tudela is that an organized-tax system was maintained at the port by the local rulers at least from the ninth century onwards. The system was such that with the arrival of mercantile ships, the port officials would go on board the ships, note down the arrived merchants and their commodities, and then levy tax on cargos according to their nature.²¹ Not only were the

¹⁸ Buzurg, for example, notes that the *nakhuda* Ismailuvia sailed in the early tenth century from Kalah on the Malayan peninsula to the Arabian coast directly by taking only forty-one days. See, Buzurg ibn Shahriyar, *Kitab ajaib al-hind barrih wa bahrih wa jazairi*, ed. P. A. Van Der Lith, Brill, Leiden, 1883-1886, pp. 129-30.

¹⁹ Arab writers ask their readers to be aware of these Kulami vases sold in the name of Chinese ones. See for example Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-buldan*, p. 70.

²⁰ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38.

²¹ For the Tharisappalli Plate, see Varier and K. Veluthat, *Tharisappalli Pattayam*, especially pp. 109-15. For Benajamin, see Benjamin, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin*, vol. 1, pp. 138-9.

commodities that entered the market taxed, but also the visiting ships and boats even had to pay special tolls for the entry to and exit from the port. However, our sources give somewhat baffling statements about such tolls. The Tharisappalli Plate which is dated to AD 849 has it that Quilon's Syrian Christians under Mar Sapir Iso were granted the right to collect four *kasuat* the port from the incoming and outgoing boats (*tonis*), both small and large ones.²² Whereas, the reference found in the contemporary Arab text *Silsilat al-thawarikh* that can be corroborated by the tenth-century account of Ibn al-Faqih, is that in Quilon was a military outpost which collected a toll of 1000 *dirhams* from China going ships and 10-20 *dinars* from others at the time of departing the port.²³ It is unlikely that the tolls mentioned in the Plate and the Arab accounts are the same, as the seemingly big difference in the corresponding values of *kasus* and *dirhams/dinars* precludes such a possibility.²⁴ Nor is it plausible that they belonged to different periods since both the sources are of almost the same time.²⁵ A possible interpretation seems to be that the toll referred to in the Tharisappalli Plate is the one which was supposed to be collected by the Syrian Christians from the boats plying locally, whereas the toll from the ships sailing to China and the like was directly collected by the officials of the Venad ruler. The latter toll was comparatively higher than those collected from the local boats, and the foreign merchants probably felt such a toll on ships to be something unusual in the entrepots of the Indian Ocean. And it might be because of its unusualness that Quilon's toll on ships, unlike the usual customs and excise duties, has been exclusively mentioned by the Arab writers.²⁶

The most important emporium in West Asia for the goods flowing from Malabar during the early medieval period was Baghdad that had emerged in the mid-eighth

²² Varier and K. Veluthat, *Tharisappalli Pattayam*, pp. 114-5. *Kasu* must have been the local coin of the Venad minted of copper.

²³ See, Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 38; Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-buldan*, p. 67.

²⁴ If we assume that *kasu* must have been a locally minted copper coin. The gold *dinar* of Islamic lands at this time was of high value each containing 4.25 grams. For details see, Zarra Nezhad, 'A Brief History of Money in Islam and Estimating the Value of Dirham and Dinar', *Review of Islamic Economics* 8, no. 2, 2004, pp. 51-65.

²⁵ It is Abu Zaid Al-Sirafi of early tenth century who informed us that the text *Silsilat al-thawarikh* was written in AD 851. See, Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, p. 53.

²⁶ Nowhere else such tax on ships is mentioned in *Silsilat al-thawarikh*.

century after the accession of the Abbasids and their abandoning of Damascus.²⁷ Baghdad, however, was not reachable for the large China-going ships, and therefore, it was the Sassanid founded port of Al-Ubulla as well as the newly founded Basra, both located on the Tigris, which attracted much of the ocean-going ships from the mid-seventh century onwards.²⁸ However, by the mid-ninth century, Basra and Al-Ubulla had already begun to be replaced by Siraf on the Persian coast as the dominant harbour in the Gulf region. By the time of the author of the *Silsilat al-thawarikh*, the commercial scene in the Gulf was such that most of the China-going ships made Siraf as the starting and returning point of their more than one-year-long China trade, to which cargos were brought from Basra, Oman, etc. using small vessels.²⁹ The port reached its peak after the coming in Persia of the rule of the Buyids (932-1044), who had eased the traffic of the Persian Gulf by controlling the major part of its northern littoral and by crushing the Baluchi tribes that had been creating threats in the region.³⁰ However, the Buyids by the course of time had also brought the ports of Oman under their control, which in turn tempted numerous merchants from Siraf to relocate to the Omani ports not least Suhar and thus brought a diminishing role for Siraf.³¹

²⁷ Baghdad, with its famous Round City *Madinat al-salam*, was a planned city, where outside the administrative area had developed a vibrant population of traders, artisans, workers, scholars, etc. along with markets and mosques. See, Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, p. 47.

²⁸ As an outlet for West Asia's Indian Ocean trade, Basra had all chances to prosper, to the extent that some of the contemporary writers even felt that the city's glory in terms of resources and the number of pious inhabitants exceeded that of Baghdad. See, Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, p. 47.

²⁹ Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 36. The choice of Siraf by the China-going ships was mainly because of the navigational hitches prevailing in the waters of the Persian Gulf: the delta system near Basra, the treacherous shallows at the mouth of the river Tigris and the sudden storms in the Gulf all made larger ships prefer a harbour more south in the Gulf and nearer to the Arabian Sea. See, Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 69. Adding to the bad fate of Basra and Al-Ubulla were the so-called Zanj rebellion extending from AD 869-883, which claimed tens of thousands of lives in Iraq and disrupted the normal trade and transportation of commodities in the place prompting many to relocate to the port of Siraf. Abu Zaid has reported the story of one Ibn Wahab Al-Qurashi who migrated from Basra to Siraf after the chaos in the former place, and then later found a fortune out of trip to China. See, Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, pp. 60-4.

³⁰ Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 1, p. 55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55. See also, Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem*, p. 426. The biggest setback to the Persian port came in AD 977 with the massive earthquake that devastated the port-city and forced the surviving people to flee the place. Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem*, pp. 426-7. Although it had started to recover by the end of the century, Siraf never appeared to have regained its past glory, and much of the seaborne trade of the Gulf region thereafter was diverted to the then thriving Omani port Suhar.

During the early phase of the long-stretching China trade, the ports on the Omani coast, where predominantly lived Muslims belonging to the Azdi tribe and Ibadism, were acting mainly as transit points for the India-China going ships. Masqat was the most important among such ports, and the author of *Silsilat al-thawarikh* has it that before sailing for the Malabar Coast Sirafi ships called at the port of Masqat to take the provisions for the further journey.³² Besides, the Omani ports acted also as feeding ports for the major harbours of the Persian Gulf like Siraf, to which commodities were imported from the former ones to be re-exported eastward to the Indian and Far Eastern markets. However, after the rise of the Buyids and their attempts to consolidate control over the littorals of the Gulf, the Omani port of Suhar began to flourish unprecedentedly, and with the devastation of Siraf, it even turned out to be the major entrepot of the Gulf region. In the mid-tenth century itself, Al-Istakhri felt that in the whole littorals of the Persian Gulf there would be no city more rich and populous than Suhar.³³ Whereas Al-Maqdisi's late tenth-century account notes that by the time of its writing, there was not on the Sea of China a town more important than Suhar in terms of richness, population, and trade, and it was the gateway to China apart from being the emporium of the East and Iraq.³⁴

Although the trans-oceanic trade of the Muslim merchants in the early medieval period was in a Persian Gulf-India-the Far East axis, this should not be taken to mean an absolute absence of maritime commercial activity in the Red Sea region and off the coast of East Africa. There are references in the contemporary accounts to the regional seaborne trade carried out between the ports of these latter regions and that of the Persian Gulf.³⁵ It appears that this regional trade was mainly for distributing in the markets of the Red Sea area and East Africa the eastern commodities, which had arrived in the Gulf through the India-China trade. Besides, products from those regions were transported to the Gulf destined either to be consumed in the markets of the Abbasid Caliphate or to be

³² Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, pp. 36-7.

³³ Al-Istakhri, *Al-masalik wa-al-mamluk*, p. 25.

³⁴ Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem*, p. 92.

³⁵ For instance, Abu Zaid speaks about one Imran Al-A'raj who sailed from Oman to Jidda in the convoy of many ships. See Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, pp. 93-4. Al-Istakhri says that the woods used in the constructions at Siraf were imported from the African lands. See, Al-Istakhri, *Al-masalik wa-al-mamluk*, p. 127.

re-exported to the ports of India and the Far East. However, we lack solid evidence to prove any eastward maritime activity emanating from the Red Sea region and stretching as far as the Far East, and as such, it can be safely assumed that the Red Sea region's maritime trade during the early medieval times was comparatively less important.

At the other end of the orbit, the chief entrepot for the long-distance maritime trade of Muslim merchants was the southern Chinese port Canton (or Guangzhou), which was called Khanfu. As already mentioned, by the mid-eighth century, the range of Arab and Persian trade at Canton was such that at one occasion the expatriate merchants dared to sack and burn the city. However, this sack consequently led to the prohibition of the port for foreign merchants for some decades unto AD 792 when it was reopened, and during the interim period, Tongking was their eastern terminus.³⁶ Canton continued to attract sizeable corpus of Arab and Persian merchants in the early decades of the ninth century, and the presence and influence of Muslim merchants by the middle of the century was such that the Chinese government even resorted to appointing one from among the Muslims as their head, who led them in their religious affairs. However, as Abu Zaid testifies, the rebellion in AD 878 against the T'ang dynasty created huge chaos in China in general and in the commercial centre of Canton in particular.³⁷ In the event, a large number of foreign merchants including Muslims, who consisted not only of merchants awaiting their return journey to the west but also of those who had been sojourning in Canton for some long time, was massacred. Although the T'ang king finally succeeded in ousting the rebel, the event turned out to be disastrous for the Chinese as well as the foreigners. To recover from the loss of the rebellion, the Chinese began to impose new taxes on the foreigners and sometimes even robbed their merchandise, thereby threatening the safety of their property rights. This was apart from the decrease in the supply of Chinese silks, a major item of trade between east and west, as a consequence of the burning of mulberry trees during the rebellion. The result was that western merchants stopped sailing directly as far as the ports of China; instead, they now found an alternative emporium in the port of Kalah Bar on the eastern side of the

³⁶ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, p. 66.

³⁷ For Abu Zaid's narration of the event and its consequences, see, Abu Zaid al-Sirafi, *Rihlat al-sirafi*, pp. 53-6.

Malayan archipelago. The new role of Kalah Bar, which otherwise had been just a transit point for the voyage between South Asia and China, has been attested by contemporary writers.³⁸ Although some merchants still ventured to sail up to China,³⁹ regular trade directly with the ports of China appeared not to have renewed until the times of the Song Dynasty.

Apart from witnessing the presence of those Muslim merchants who called at it on their way back and forth the Far East, the Malabar Coast during the early medieval period also had Muslims whose commercial involvement was confined to the Arabian Sea circuit. This aspect of Muslim trade in Malabar has often been overshadowed by the narratives on the long-distance China trade. Here it is the inscriptional evidence rather than literary ones which help us examine this less known aspect. Exploring of the Muslim trade in Malabar other than the China-going one must involve an attempt to find out their exchange centres on the coasts other than Quilon. As already mentioned, the neighbouring places of the Malabar Coast such as Ceylon had the presence of Muslim merchants from the early centuries after the rise of Islam.⁴⁰ As the author of *Silsilat al-thawarikh* and later writers attest, the maritime trade of the Arab merchants in the Konkan region had become so important that the resources mobilized out of their trade were instrumental for the Balharas (i.e. the Rashtrakutas) to maintain political stability in their domain.⁴¹ There is some evidence recorded in a later source that talks of Muslims from west having a settlement in Kayalapattanam on the Coromandel Coast during the second half of the ninth century.⁴² Taking into account this reality, i.e. the Muslims had commercial connections with the ports in the neighbouring regions of Malabar during the early medieval period, there is little reason to reject the possibility of Muslim commercial involvements on the Malabar Coast independent of the long-distance China trade. The

³⁸ See for instance Al-Masu'di, *Muruj al-dhahab wa-ma'adin al-jawhar*, Arabic text in C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, *Les Prairies d'or*, 9 vols., Paris, 1861-77, vol. 1, p. 308.

³⁹ In Buzurg's account, there are stories of some of those who undertook to sail directly up to the ports of China.

⁴⁰ In Ceylon's case, the presence there of Muslim females who were the relatives of the deceased Muslim merchants indicates to the fact that the Sri Kankan coast was already entrenched into the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean well by the early eighth century.

⁴¹ See, Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 45; Al-Masu'di, *Muruj al-dhahab*, vol. 1, p. 382.

⁴² E. Lambourn, "Describing a Lost Camel", pp. 377-8.

coast was fairly known among the commercial circles of West Asia as *bilad al-fulful*, the pepper land.⁴³ In fact, at that point of time, the only major source of black pepper in the world was the Malabar Coast. As such, the Muslim merchants must have tried to access, among other things, this sought-after spice from the ports of Malabar especially from the exchange-centres inherited from the times of the Sassanids.⁴⁴ The chief entrepots in the east of these merchants must have been same as that of the Far East-going merchants, which have already been introduced.

As will be shown later, foreign Muslims present on the Malabar Coast during the medieval times were of two categories. Some of them were those who stayed on the coast for some days or months awaiting proper monsoon season for their return journey, whereas others were sojourners who settled on the coast for pretty long time basing their commercial operation at some of its ports. It seems that in the early medieval period itself, Muslim merchants of both these types were present on the Malabar Coast. Buzurg ibn-Shahriyar has recorded a bizarre incident that happened to one Mardanshah in the waters of the Indian Ocean.⁴⁵ This Mardanshah is described as a Persian Muslim ship-owner from the Persian Gulf region, who used to trade with the ports on the Malabar Coast (*bilad al-fulful*) particularly Quilon sometime in the ninth-tenth centuries and could be included among the first type of Muslim merchants. The author's description of Mardanshah's commercial horizon as *bilad al-fulful* is indicative of that the merchant's chief trade item was pepper. The *nākhudā* Mardanshah's son Marzban is said to have had become a business magnate of high repute based in Oman possessing his own ships, and though his area of operation is not revealed by our author, it is probable that like his father he also traded mainly between the Gulf region and the Malabar Coast. Besides, the presence of sojourning merchants in Malabar can be gleaned from some of the inscriptional evidence. Tharisappalli inscription of the mid-ninth century contains a long list of witnesses to the grants given to the Syrian Christians, and out of the total

⁴³ The author of *Silsilat al-thawarikh* has introduced the Malabar Coast as *bilad al-fulful*. See, Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 56.

⁴⁴ The important pepper marts in the sixth century Malabar as mentioned by Cosmos have already been discussed in the first chapter.

⁴⁵ This incident is about the missing of Mardanshah's beloved little child Marzban while on a voyage from the Persian Gulf to the Malabari port of Quilon along with his family and then luckily finding him from the rudder of the ship without injuries. See, Buzurg, *Kitab ajaib al-hind*, pp. 94-5.

witnesses, eleven appear to be Muslims whose names have been inscribed in the Arabic language with Kufic script.⁴⁶ The names of these eleven witnesses are Maymun bin Ibrahim, Mohammed bin Muti', Sulh bin Ali, Usman bin Marzban, Mohammed bin Yahiya, 'Amr bin Ibrahim, Ibrahim bin al-Tay, Bakr bin Mansur, Al-Qasim bin Hamid, Mansur bin 'Isa and Ima'il bin Ya'qub. The list raises some important questions: Who were these Muslims? If they were merchants, then which type of merchants were they? Why were they included among the signatories to the grants of the Syrian Christians? As their names suggest, these Muslims were of foreign origin and consisted not only of Arabs but also of Persians.⁴⁷ Since their names are found attached with a grant that had provisions affecting the commercial affairs of Quilon, it can be assumed that these foreign Muslims were part of the various mercantile groups active in the commerce of the Malabari port. It is true that one cannot rule out the possibility of these foreign Muslims being the China-going merchants who had called at Quilon in between their long-distance sea journey and who, while being in their waiting period, were asked to be witnesses to the grants. However, what is more likely is that these Arab and Persian Muslims were sojourning merchants who had been carrying out trade for quite some time between Malabar and the Persian Gulf basing their operation at Quilon. Unlike Muslim merchants involved in China trade who would call at the Malabari port amid their long journey and would depart it soon after finding a proper wind, these sojourning merchants, due to their longstanding attachment with the port, had become an inevitable element within it, and therefore were invited by the local rulers to be witnesses on the occasion of bestowing royal grants on someone. The presence of sojourning merchants at the port, in turn, must have necessitated Muslim religious institutions like *imams* (leader of worship) in accordance with the strength of the settlement. Although we do not have sufficient sources to prove the presence of any mosque at Quilon during the early medieval times, an incidental reference from Buzurg's account is suggestive of the existence there of the office of *imam*. The writer on the testimony of one merchant who had been to Quilon reports that at the port was a Muslim priest, who led prayers at the place and who was

⁴⁶ For the Arabic script, see, Varier and K. Veluthat, *Tharisappalli Pattayam*, p. 138.

⁴⁷ The names of Muslims of local origin in Malabar often had some local slang, which is absent in the case of the names in the inscription. That the list included Persian Muslims can be gauged from the name Usman bin Marzban, as Marzban is a Persian name.

popular among the local people because of his power to heal from the bite of an insane serpent found at the place.⁴⁸ The emerging impression is that during the early medieval period Quilon was entrenched not only to the long-distance oceanic trade stretching as far as the Far East but also to the maritime trade networks within the Arabian Sea.

In addition to Quilon, some of Malabar's northern ports also appear to have had commercial connections with the ports of West Asia from the early medieval period itself. Madayi is one among such ports, which was located in the Ezhimala region, the seat of the ancient Mushika kingdom. The presence of a polity was a plus point for the Ezhimala region to attract maritime trade in addition to the resources such as pepper and ginger found in its hinterlands. Some of the pottery shreds like Turquoise Glazed Pottery Shreds have been unearthed from Madayi and it has been suggested that they are the remnants of the potteries made in West Asia during the period between the fifth and eighth centuries.⁴⁹ This is indicative of the region's early trade relation with West Asia. In the *jami* mosque of Madayi is found an Arabic inscription, which is inscribed on a wood plank and which has been interpreted in secondary literature as belonging to early twelfth century.⁵⁰ The content of the inscription is a Quranic verse that encourages the construction of mosques and a Hijri date (*sana khams*). In contrast to the previous notions that seem to have been made without directly observing the inscription, there are some who on the basis of a new perusal of it hold the view that it records the construction of the mosque in the year Hijra 5, viz. AD 627.⁵¹ They say that the inscription is written in the old Hijazi script, something that was replaced by the Kufi script by the mid-seventh century, and that it resembles in many ways to the other contemporary inscriptions written in the Hijazi script.⁵² If the authenticity and dating of the inscription is true, then it would suggest that Muslim merchants from West Asia had very old trade relation with

⁴⁸ Buzurg, *Kitab ajaib al-hind*, pp. 120-1.

⁴⁹ Abdullah Anchilath, 'Marakkanavilla madayi lakhithathile charitrasathyam', p. 67.

⁵⁰ For such an interpretation, see for instance Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p. 48, 112, 133.

⁵¹ Abdullah Anchilath, 'Reflections on Madayi Mosque', in *Souvenir of 43rd Session of Epigraphic Society of India and 37th Session of Place Names Society of India*, 9-11 February 2018, Calicut, p. 76.

⁵² One such is the Arabic inscription from Petra in Jordan, which is written on a wood plank in the Hijazi script. For more details, see Abdullah Anchilath, 'Marakkanavilla madayi lakhithathile charitrasathyam', pp. 60-7; *Idem*, 'Reflections on Madayi Mosque', in *Souvenir of 43rd Session of Epigraphic Society of India and 37th Session of Place Names Society of India*, 9-11 February 2018, Calicut, pp. 75-7.

Madayi region dating back to the early centuries of Islam. Substantiating the possibility of early Muslim contact with Madayi is the other graveyard inscriptions, which are found from here itself or from its neighbour lands and which can also be dated back to the early centuries of Islam. Among these, an inscription found at Sreekandapuram, a hinterland area of Madayi en route Western Ghat pass, records that the person buried there is Aleem bin Haneem in the month of Rabi' al-Akhr, Hijra 74 (AD. 693).⁵³ Drawing on such rather dispersed evidences, it can be said that Muslim mercantile contact with the Malabar Coast was not limited to the southern port of Quilon which had the advantage of attracting China-going ships.

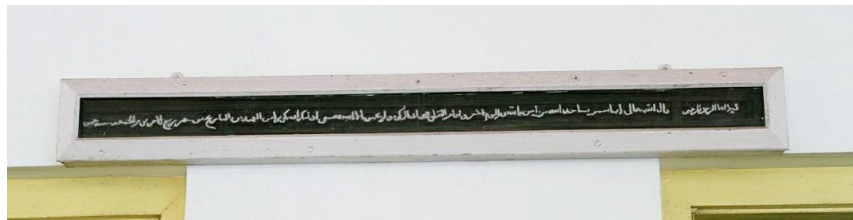


Figure 3: Wood plank inscription preserved in the *jami* mosque of Madayi⁵⁴

Concomitant to the development of Suhar on the Omani coast as the most important entrepot in the Persian Gulf region, Aden on the Red Sea side was emerging as a busy harbour during the second half of the tenth century, and within the course of the next centuries, it outshined all the entrepots of the Gulf region. As far as the Muslim merchants of the Malabar Coast were concerned, it was Aden which remained their most important entrepot in the west during the first half of the second millennium until it was relegated by Jidda in the fifteenth century. Al-Maqdisi, who talked about the flourishing town of Suhar in the late tenth century, has also spoken of the thriving port of Aden. He

⁵³ Abdullah Anchilath, 'Marakkanavilla madayi likhithathile charitrasathyam', p. 66. From the other contemporary gravestones unearthed from West Asia, it appears that gravestones culture was present among Muslims during the early centuries of Islam itself. For a tombstone inscription (dated as AD 691) found from Aswan in Egypt, see H. Mahmood El-Hawary, 'The Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known, Dated A. H. 71 (A. D. 691). From the Time of the Omayyad Calif 'Abd-el-Malik ibn Marwan' *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2, April 1932, pp. 289-93.

⁵⁴ Picture credit goes to Abdullah Anchilath.

considered it along with Suhar as a gateway to China and as a best destination for those who wished to conduct trade.⁵⁵ The rise of Aden and the re-routing of the trans-oceanic trade from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea axis appeared, to a large extent, to be the outcome of certain political developments happening at different places. The Fatimids, who succeeded in founding in the early tenth century a dynasty of their own independent from that of the Abbasids, had conquered Egypt in AD 969 and soon shifted their capital from Tunisia to Fustat.⁵⁶ The new dynasty, which was rooted in the Ismaili Shia Islam in contrast to its rival Abbasids that belonged to the Sunni Islam, undertook to encourage long-distance seaborne trade both in the Indian Ocean and in the Mediterranean Sea. In their effort to promote trade, they took advantage of their control over the large chunk of the southern littorals of the Mediterranean Sea and of the Ismaili *da'wa* or missionary networks in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁷ By trying to shift the direction of trade on the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean sides, the Fatimids wished to mobilize resources out of levying customs and excise duties on that merchandise which were exchanged at the emporium of Fustat or which passed through such entrepots as Alexandria, Damietta, and Aydhab.⁵⁸ They are said to have even provided special protection for the commercial ships against piracy and robbery in their entrepots as well as the adjacent waters by maintaining royal fleets of several ships.⁵⁹ How hastily the Fatimids could activate trade via the Red Sea route and make Fustat superior to Baghdad can be gauged from Al-Maqdisi's words of the late tenth century. He has it that 'Baghdad was a magnificent city in old days, but is now in ruin and has lost its splendour....Fustat of Egypt today is like Baghdad in earlier days. I do not know a city superior than it (Fustat).'⁶⁰ In fact, the writer, who had

⁵⁵ Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem*, pp. 34-5.

⁵⁶ Although the Fathimids had built the new city of Cairo, during most of their reign it remained just as a royal enclosure, and their actual administrative and economic capital was Fustat.

⁵⁷ Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 1, p. 216.

⁵⁸ The material benefits were not limited to the customs and excise duties; instead, the rulers could collect *zakat* from the merchants, and could borrow money from them in times of need. For an instance of the Egyptian ruler collecting four years' *zakat* from the *Al-Kārimī* merchants after their arrival from Aden in AD 1181, see, Al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma'rifati*, vol. 1, p. 185.

⁵⁹ Al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-a'sha*, vol.3, pp. 596-7.

⁶⁰ Al-Maqdisi, *Ahsan al-taqaseem*, p. 36. (Translation mine)

extensively traveled throughout West Asia, has a lot of praise for the burgeoning Egyptian city comparing it often with the fading Baghdad.⁶¹

The rise of the Fatimids and their promotion of trans-oceanic trade was not the only impulse behind the re-routing of trade to the Red Sea side. The political developments in the Persian Gulf region had their impact on the trade via the Gulf route. The centralized character of the Abbasid Caliphate had begun to disappear especially from the early tenth century onwards with the emergence of several separatist dynasties at different parts of the Caliphate. With this, the importance of the imperial city of Baghdad was decreasing, and therefore the trade it so far had been attracting began to diminish. Al-Maqdisi felt that Baghdad

was the best city of Muslims....Then it declined after the weakening of the Caliphs, and its population shrank. The City of Peace (*Madinat al-Salam*) is in ruin.....The city every day is going from bad to worse, and I am afraid that one day it would become (abandoned) like Samara.⁶²

Thus, the contemporaries were well aware of how political chaos within the Caliphate was affecting the fate of the imperial city. In a fragmented political scenario, trade would not flourish particularly because of the possibilities of increased taxations on the way of the transportation of commodities.⁶³ Furthermore, the transition of power from the hands of the Buyids to that of the Turkish Seljuqs in the mid-eleventh century had a bad effect on the seaborne trade of the Gulf region. Besides hastening the decline of the Abbasid power and its imperial capital, the accession of the Seljuqs caused prolonging turmoil in the Fars province and its cities like Shiraz when the local Shabankara tribes turned against the Turkish with armed struggles lasting almost throughout the Seljuq period.⁶⁴ Consequently, the caravan routes linking the Gulf with the Iranian cities were disturbed, and economic activity and urban life in the Fars were paralyzed, in turn adversely affecting the oceanic trade towards the Gulf region. During the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, it was the island of Kish and Old Hormuz (in Kirman, the Iranian

⁶¹ See for example *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 120. (Translation mine)

⁶³ Al-Idrisi in the twelfth century says that travelling in the Persian Gulf waters was very difficult because of the decentralised political scenario of the region. See, Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol. 1, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 1, p. 58.

province that was little affected by the Shabankara revolts) which attracted whatever was left of the Persian Gulf trade.⁶⁵

An important contemporary change within the commercial sphere of the Indian Ocean was the reduction in the direct oceanic trade up to the Far East. From around the early eleventh century onwards West Asian ships rarely sailed beyond the western Indian Ocean; instead, they preferred to stop over the South Indian coasts, where the merchants sold their cargoes to the traders of the eastern Indian Ocean who would then tranship those cargoes to the ports of the Far East. Thus, in the newly emerged commercial scenario, the ports on the Malabar Coast - initially Quilon and then joined by other ports like Calicut, Madayi, etc. - began to have new role, viz., that of transshipment centres, where cargoes coming from the west were unloaded and then reloaded to the ships plying in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean. This type of segmented maritime trade was the result of the combination of many factors. The long-distance direct trade was a time-taking task, as the monsoon reality forced sailing ships to spend several months on transit points and destination ports awaiting favourable winds, in addition to the more than six months that they had to pass sailing in the oceanic waters.⁶⁶ For a ship sailing from the Persian Gulf to China, it would take normally around one and half year to complete a round trip journey and reach safely at his starting point. Besides consuming time, the direct trade was very risky as it was difficult to maintain the ocean-going ships safely at the harbours during the months of waiting, apart from the unpredictable perils of the deep sea, the widespread piracy and the psychological problems that might arise because of the long separation from homelands. As such, traders from West Asia must have looked for an alternative, the segmented form of commerce, with a view to minimizing sailing duration as well as risks of travel. The limited sources at our disposal for the eleventh and twelfth centuries rarely talk about merchants from the west taking up direct trade as far as the Far East. Concomitant to the decline in the range of seaborne trade emanating from the Persian Gulf side and the resultant shrinking in the number of traders with the experience to sail in the same ships as far as the Far East, the Fatimids of Egypt seemed not to have

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁶ Hourani, *Arab Seafaring*, pp. 74-5.

encouraged merchants to go beyond the western Indian Ocean.⁶⁷ However, that does not mean that the Fatimids or the far way markets of Europe stopped consuming or demanding commodities from the Far East. Instead, what appears is that in the eastern segment of the Indian Ocean, new trading groups actively took part in the oceanic trade particularly between the South Indian ports and the ports of the Far East, which in turn mitigated western merchants' need to cross the waters of the Bay of Bengal for acquiring goods from the east or for selling their own ones there. Most important among such emergent trading groups was the 'Klings' or South Asian merchants especially from the Coromandel Coast and Ceylon, whose entry into and operation in the Indian Ocean must have been facilitated by the maritime expeditions of the Cholas and their dispatching of embassies to China in their own craft from the early eleventh century onwards.⁶⁸ It is not unlikely that the Chola interventions in Southeast Asia affected, at least for sometimes, West Asian merchants' trading links with the Far East, and in fact, there was a break in the tribute missions to China from the Arab lands for some long years in the first half of the eleventh century.⁶⁹ As a contemporary Chinese account attests, in the early twelfth century much of the seaborne trade of China was carried out by the Kling merchants with their large and small ships.⁷⁰

However, we have to be careful about taking any essentializing approach regarding the segmentation of maritime activity in the Indian Ocean. Although Kling merchants had sway over the trade between India and the Far East during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Muslim merchants from the west appeared to have got eventually

⁶⁷ In the Geniza papers related to India trade, there is little reference to merchants from the west carrying trade directly with the ports of the Far East.

⁶⁸ See, Simon Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India' in *The Cambridge Economic History of India Vol-1*, eds. T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 (reprint), p. 129. 'Kling' was the term used by the people of Southeast Asia to denote Indians in general, though originally it might have been used for those from the Kalinga or Orissa region. 'Klings' must have included mainly the Chetti and Chuliya merchants from South India. For the connotation of 'Kling', see N. B. Dennys, *A Descriptive Dictionary of British Malaya*, London and China Telegraph Office, London, 1894, pp. 182-4.

⁶⁹ E. Lambourn, "Describing a Lost Camel", p. 388.

⁷⁰ This information is provided by P'ing-chou-k'o-t'an, the relevant part of whose account is given in the introduction to the translation of Chau Ju-Kua's work. See, F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, eds. and trans., *Chau Ju-Kua*, pp. 30-1.

integrated into the commercial world of the eastern Indian Ocean.⁷¹ During the course of the twelfth century, West Asian merchants began to involve increasingly in the trade with Southeast Asia and China, and later on, along with the Chinese merchants even outclassed the Kling merchants.⁷² Zhou Qufei, the author of the late twelfth century Chinese text on maritime exchanges known as *Lingwai daida*, observes, '(Traders) coming from the country of the Ta-shi, after travelling south to Quilon (Ku-lin) on small vessels, transfer to big ships, and, proceeding east, they make Palembang (San-fo-tsi). After this, they came to China by the same routes as the Palembang ships'.⁷³ What appears is that at least by the twelfth century West Asian merchants resumed to find their way to China, either as part of direct trade between the west and the east, or to be sojourners in such Chinese ports as Canton (Guangzhou) and Zaytun (Quanzhou)⁷⁴ trading with the ports of South and Southeast Asia. However, as *Lingwai daida* undoubtedly reveals, Muslim merchants who wished to trade with or in China sailed in the Eastern Indian Ocean not in the same Arab dhows by which they had reached the Malabar Coast; instead, they shifted into 'big ships' from South India and then proceeded to the east. The reference to 'big ships' in the context of the twelfth century is a baffling one as it is not clear whether the large Kling ships or the Chinese junks are meant here. While Kling ships are known to have plied from the eleventh century onwards, the exact time when the Chinese junks began to extend their operation into the Indian Ocean is not clear. The concrete evidence for the Chinese entry into the shipping sector of the Indian

⁷¹ We have evidence of the Chinese diplomatic records that as early as the eleventh century, Muslim merchants were included in the Chola tribute missions to the Song court, which may indicate that West Asian merchants could never be neglected absolutely in the commercial world of the eastern Indian Ocean. See, E. Lambourn, "'Describing a Lost Camel'", pp. 387-8.

⁷² During the reign of the Southern Song dynasty (AD 1127-1279), foreign trade in China was promoted as part of the state's plan to mobilise resources to cope with the attacks of enemies, and it might be on the backdrop of such an incentive that West Asian merchants again started to make their way up to China. Besides, there was a boom in the Chinese shipbuilding industry happening mainly because of the political necessity to establish a strong naval force for the state. See, Simon Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India', p. 131.

⁷³ F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, eds. and trans., *Chau Ju-Kua*, (introduction), p. 24.

⁷⁴ Zaytun (Quanzhou) was the Chinese port, which rose into prominence in the 10th-11th centuries and which in next few centuries remained the most important Chinese port of international fame to be commended by the contemporary travellers such as Ibn Battuta.

Ocean come from the second half of the thirteenth century,⁷⁵ and then by the mid-fourteenth century, the main shipping service to the ports of China was carried out in the Chinese junks.⁷⁶ It can be assumed that when they wanted to cross the Bay of Bengal for having trade with or in China, the Muslim merchants initially made use of the Kling ships and then later on the Chinese junks.

In the Fatimid ‘sponsored’ trade, merchants belonging to various religious groups such as Jews, Muslims and Hindus took part. The chief source of information for the Fatimid period trade from the Malabar Coast towards the Red Sea angle is the papers from the Cairo Geniza, which testify the cosmopolitan character of the commercial activities of the time. The papers of the ‘India Trade’ are essentially correspondences and documents of the Jewish traders with mercantile networks extending up to coastal India not least the western coast, but they also contain references to the commercial activities of other religious groups. Interestingly, there are found some of the rarest early references to the Hindu merchants and ship owners from the Malabar Coast, whose trade networks stretched as far as the ports of West Asia. Totally, the Geniza documents of India trade have references to around two dozen Muslims, though a few of the names can also be interpreted as that of other religionists. These Muslims acted in various roles of trade between the ports of Malabar and that of West Asia particularly Aden, and the recurrent appearance of the Muslim names in the documents related to India trade indicates to their noteworthy role in the commerce of the Malabar Coast during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Some of the referred Muslims were ship-owning merchants whose ships plied between Malabar and Aden and carried cargos belonging either to themselves or to other merchants. Ship-owners sometimes did not travel themselves in their ships; instead, they sent their agents as deputy captains,⁷⁷ and as the renowned lexicographer Fairuzabadi (d.

⁷⁵ Thirteenth century geographer Ibn Saeed talks about the Chinese junks and their entry into the Indian Ocean during his time. See, Ibn Saeed, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, p. 122. Another evidence is provided by a shipwreck belonging to the late thirteenth century. See, Tansen Sen, ‘Maritime Interactions between China and India: Coastal India and the Ascendancy of Chinese Maritime Power in the Indian Ocean’, *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies* 2, 2011, pp. 51-3.

⁷⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 46.

⁷⁷ If a ship-owner himself travelled in his ship, then he would be the captain of the ship, who will administer all the affairs. Whereas, if he were not sailing, then he would send his agent as the deputy captain who would then administer the affairs of the ship on behalf of the ship-owner.

1414) informs us, during the medieval days both the owner of a ship and his deputy were called by the title *nākhudā*.⁷⁸ *Nākhudā* Ramisht was one of the most important ship-owning merchants of the twelfth century, whose enormous fortunes out of the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean can be gleaned from medieval chronicles and inscriptions.⁷⁹ Although he originally belonged to the Persian port of Siraf, Ramisht's ships plied mainly in the route between Aden and the Malabar Coast (particularly such ports as Pantalayani and Mangalore). The Persian appears to have had many ships, and therefore, the wreck of one or two ships did not matter him much nor did pull him back from his commercial ventures.⁸⁰ Not only Ramisht, but his son and son-in-law also owned ships, which sailed along with the former's ships between Malabar and Aden.⁸¹ That the *nākhudā* himself sometimes sailed in his ships to India can be gleaned from the account of Ibn al-Mujawir, who has it that Ramisht on his way from India to perform *hajj* at Mecca constructed a new harbour on the Yemeni coast called al-Ahwab with the help of the timbers that he transported from India.⁸² Noteworthy among those who served the magnate in his business enterprise was Ali al-Nili, the clerk-agent who hailed from Iraq and who eventually turned out to be a very rich merchant close with the political circles of Yemen.⁸³ *Nākhudā* Ahmed bin Bakhtiyar, who is said to have carried merchandise from

⁷⁸ It is because of this that we find in documents the same ship having a *nakhuda* who is its owner and another *nakhuda* who is not so. In fact, the term *nakhuda* has often been a puzzle among scholars dealing with medieval Indian Ocean trade. However, the words of Fairuzabadi who had extensively travelled in the medieval world clear the doubt about the connotation of the title *nakhuda*, and the eighteenth century lexicographer Murtada al-Zabidi agrees with the former's view. See, Majdudhin al-Fairuzabadi, *al-Qamoos al-muheet*, 2nd ed., ed. M. N. al-Arqasoozi, Muassasa al-Risala li-Taba' wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tausi', Beirut, 2005, p. 339; Al-Zabidi, Muhammed Murtaza, *Taj al-uroos min jawahir al-qamoos*, 40 vols., 2nd ed., al-Majlis al-Watani li-al-Saqafa wa-al-Funun, Kuwait, 2004, vol. 9, p. 486.

⁷⁹ Stern has collected them in S. M. Stern, 'Ramisht of Siraf, a Merchant Millionaire of the Twelfth Century', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. ½, April 1967, pp. 10-4.

⁸⁰ From a Jewish letter (c. 1137-40), we read that two of Ramisht's ships were perished while on a journey from Malabar to Aden. See, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 555.

⁸¹ This can be discerned from a letter of c. 1135. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 348-9.

⁸² Ibn al-Mujawir, *Sifat bilad al-yemen*, p. 275.

⁸³ The highly respected Muslim merchant Ali bin Muhammed al-Nili mentioned in a Jewish letter (after 1138) as having trade with the Malabar Coast must be the same Ali al-Nili introduced by the twelfth century anonymous author who made the epitome of Bin Hawqal's geography. See, Muhammed bin Hawqal, *Surat al-aladh*, 2 vols., Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1938, vol. 2, p. 282; Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 603. Al-Dhahabi reports that Ali al-Nili once happened to be among the special invitees to a

Aden to Malabar on behalf of Jewish merchants in the ship of Ramisht, was likely another servant of the Persian ship-owner acting as his representative/deputy captain in his ship that plied in the western Indian Ocean.⁸⁴ Another important Muslim ship-owner was *nākhudā* Abu al-Hasan bin Abu al-Kata'ib who traded between Aden and Mangalore. What appears from the Geniza documents is that he himself often sailed in his ships, and sometimes he was assisted by his son *nākhudā* Abu Abdullah bin Abu al-Kata'ib.⁸⁵ The son is seen also as sailing in other ships such as the Jurfattani ship which was the ship owned by one sultan and which was wrecked on the way from Aden to Jurfattan.⁸⁶ A Jewish letter reveals Abu Abdullah's connections with the local agents of Mangalore who acted as suppliers of local commodities to the foreign merchants.⁸⁷

Sheikh Abu al-Hasan bin Ja'far was an important Muslim merchant active on the ports of Malabar like Panthalayani, who often worked as an agent for others including Jewish merchants such as Ben Yiju and Khalaf bin Isaac and sent for them merchandise to the port of Aden.⁸⁸ *Nākhudā* Ali Nawak was yet another ship-owning merchant who seemed to have been very influential at the ports of Malabar and whose commercial horizon in Malabar appeared to have extended to the whole stretch of the coast. A Geniza letter informs us that once a ship of Nawak was brought back to the port of Quilon from a trip to Aden as the captain of the ship had died amid the journey and the port officials at Quilon soon took the ship and confirmed its proprietorship, 'being afraid of Ali Nawak'.⁸⁹ Ibn al-Muqaddam was a ship-owner possessing more than one ship that sailed Yemen-Malabar Coast (Dahbattan) route, and one of those who served as his deputy in his ships was *nākhudā* Jawahar al-Muqaddami.⁹⁰ Ali bin Mansur al-Fawfali was a ship-owner and business associate of many Jewish merchants in Malabar and Aden. He seemed to have been a specialist, at least for some time, in the trade of betel nut, which

royal function in Yemen, which in turn indicates his reputation as a wealthy merchant of Aden. See, Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-islam*, vol. 12, p. 419.

⁸⁴ For Ahmed, see, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 332.

⁸⁵ See, *Ibid.*, p. 323, 577, and 597.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 599, 603.

⁸⁹ Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader', pp. 455-6.

⁹⁰ See, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, pp. 364-5.

gave him the title '*al-Fawfali*'. Though Aden was his chief destination port in the west, Al-Fawfali sometimes preferred the port of Zabid which was inside the Red Sea region.⁹¹ Interestingly, some of the political entities also had taken part in the maritime trade of the western Indian Ocean. Bilal ibn Jarir, the prince-governor of Aden, in partnership with a Jewish business tycoon, had a ship which serviced between Aden and Ceylon, but we do not know whether this duo had any ship that sailed to the ports of Malabar.⁹² Geniza papers also speak about a 'Jurfattani ship', which sailed in the first half of the twelfth century between Aden and the Malabari port Jurfattan and which was owned by one Sultan.⁹³ But, it is not clear who this sultan was; notwithstanding the little possibility that the ship might be of the Mushika/Kolathiri 'sultan' of Cannanore who on the testimony of Ibn Battuta after two centuries owned many ocean-going ships, it must have been owned by some of the minor/major sultans of West Asia, more probably that of Yemen.⁹⁴ Thus, the emerging picture is that during the reign of the Fatimids itself the Malabar Coast was well entrenched into the Muslim maritime trade networks emanating from the Red Sea area. Underscoring the triumph of the Red Sea route trade and the role of the Muslim merchants in it, Benjamin of Tudela who visited Egypt when the Fatimids were still in power remarked about the Egyptian emporium of Alexandria,

The city is very mercantile and affords an excellent market to all nations. People from all Christian kingdoms resort to Alexandria ..From the west you meet Mohammedans from Andalusia, Algarve...as well as from the countries towards India, Savila, Abyssinia...From India they import all sorts of spices, which are bought by Christian merchants.⁹⁵

The Fatimid dynasty centred in Egypt was succeeded by the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1250), which also encouraged maritime trade stretching into the western Indian Ocean. Against the backdrop of the on-going Crusade wars, the Ayyubids had developed a new commercial policy that tended to close the Red Sea realm for foreign merchants and make it a purely Islamic waterway, which in turn gave more impetus to the Muslim

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 592.

⁹² Ibid., p. 611.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 623.

⁹⁴ In the context of the Mediterranean there were ships owned by sultans and *qadis*. See, Ibid., 623n10. For Ibn Battuta, see, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 42.

⁹⁵ Benjamin, *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin*, vol. 1, p. 157.

commercial activities.⁹⁶ Unlike the Fatimid times, during the reign of the Ayyubid rulers, the protection given to the mercantile ships was extended to the Arabian Sea waters too. As the medieval traveller Ibn al-Mujawir testifies, it was from the time of the Ayyubid governor of Yemen Tughtakin bin Ayyub (r. 1182-1197) that the system of marine patrols to guard merchant ships against pirate raids was instituted, and in lieu of the state protection a special 'galley tax' (*shawani*) was collected from the merchants visiting the port of Aden.⁹⁷ The system of state protection for mercantile ships continued for long in the subsequent centuries. By the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, the Ayyubids lost their sway over coastal Yemen as a new dynasty called the Rasulids (1229-1454) rose to power in the region. The Rasulids, however, rather than disrupting the maritime trade of the Red Sea route, facilitated it to outclass the rival trade on the Persian Gulf side.⁹⁸ It was imperative for the Rasulids all through their reign to encourage the seaborne trade via their entrepôts not least Aden since the coastal polity's only major source of income was the resources mobilized through the customs and excise duties in the ports.⁹⁹ Contemporary sources like *Nur al-ma'ārif* demonstrate how systematically organized was the Rasulid taxation at Aden.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, in Egypt, the Ayyubids were replaced by the Mamluk dynasty (1250-1517) in the mid-thirteenth century. The Mamluks, like their predecessors, were well aware of the material gains from promoting maritime trade in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The income through taxes levied on the merchandise brought by the influential Kārimī traders from the Yemeni ports and further exported mainly by the Italian merchants was such that its ever-increasing proportion induced the Mamluki government at Cairo to create new offices and departments,

⁹⁶ Walter J. Fischel, 'The spice trade in Mamluk Egypt: a Contribution to the Economic History of Medieval Islam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1, no. 2, 1958, p. 160.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Mujawir, *Sifat bilad al-yemen*, pp. 160-1.

⁹⁸ However, it should not be forgotten that the shift of power in Yemen must have had some adverse effect on the maritime trade via Aden. The account of Ibn Mujawir informs us of the harsh treatment meted by the first Rasulid sultan in his early days out to the Kārimīs of the Red Sea and the traders from India. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

⁹⁹ This is attested by many contemporary writers. See, for instance, Al-Umari, Shihabudhin, *Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar*, 27 vols., al-Majma' al-Saqafi, Abu Dhabi, 2002, vol. 4, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ The administrative record *Nur al-ma'ārif* has a long list of various commodities entered the port of Aden, which details separately the taxes and tolls collected on them.

designated exclusively to supervise and tax the trade of the Kārimis.¹⁰¹ Egyptian writer Al-Qalqashandi has given details of the various taxes and tolls collected by the Mamluks from the merchants trading in or with Egypt. The most important Egyptian outlets on the Red Sea side where the Kārimi merchants coming from Yemen and Hijaz were levied are said to be Aydhab, Qusair, Tur, and Suwais.¹⁰² Our sources give the impression that by the late thirteenth century the various Islamic polities particularly the Mamluks and the Rasulids on the Red Sea side were competing each other in attracting the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. While *Nur al-ma'ārif* speaks about the attempts of the Rasulid Sultan Al-Muzaffar Yusuf (r. 1249-95) to lure to Aden more and more merchants from the rims of the ocean especially from the Malabar Coast, in the work of the Al-Qalqashandi is preserved a security ordinance of the Mamluk Sultan Al-Mansur Qalāwun (r. 1279-1290), whereby he invites merchants sojourning in India, China, Sind, etc. to come to Egypt with spices and other merchandise and promises them security for their property rights.¹⁰³ In the same Arabic account is also found a letter sent by the ruler of Ceylon to the court of Qalāwun informing the sultan of his intention to end ties with the ruler of Yemen and send the products of his island to Egypt.¹⁰⁴ The letter has it that although the Yemeni sultan had sent his messenger to Ceylon pleading its ruler to send merchandise to Aden, the ruler of the island no more wanted to continue his connection with Yemen and instead, thought of befriending the Mamluk sultan so as to send the sought-after commodities of his land to Yemen. Thus, what appears is that while the Rasulids wanted the Indian Ocean merchants to call at Aden so that they could tax them and manipulate the cargos brought by them, the Mamluks wished to see more and more merchants coming to or passing through their nodal points and markets not least directly without touching the entrepots of Yemen.¹⁰⁵

After the activation of trade via the Red Sea route, the main entrepots on the Arabian and Egyptian coasts, with which merchants from Malabar and other rims of the

¹⁰¹ Fischel, 'The spice trade in Mamluk Egypt', p. 167. A discussion on the Kārimi merchants will be taken up below.

¹⁰² Al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-a'sha*, vol. 3, pp. 536-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. 13, pp. 339-41.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, pp. 78-9.

¹⁰⁵ As will be further shown, the Rasulids had made attempts to control the shipping through the Babul Mandab Strait and the merchandise brought by the Indian Ocean merchants at the port of Aden.

Indian Ocean had connections, were Dhofar, Al-Shihr, Aden, Ghalāfiqa and Aydhab. Dhofar and Al-Shihr were sources of frankincense and ambergris, two of the sought-after commodities used as perfumes or incenses particularly in Buddhist China.¹⁰⁶ Besides, they were the chief outlets for the Arabian horses that were exported particularly to the realms of the South Indian kingdoms.¹⁰⁷ However, as far as the commercial networks of the merchants from the Malabar Coast were concerned these ports were not so important as they were just departure points or landfalls on the Arabian coast before and after their long-distance oceanic journey.¹⁰⁸ Ghalāfiqa on the Tihamah coast of Arabia was the main port of Zabid, which was the capital of such Yemeni dynasties as the Rasulids. Mainly because of its proximity to the imperial capital, Ghalāfiqa was visited by some of the ships of the India merchants. In the Geniza documents, there are references to merchants having shipping service between this Yemeni port and the Malabar Coast.¹⁰⁹ Aydhab, the entrepot preferred by most of the merchants going from Hijaz and Yemen to the Egyptian emporiums, was also visited by some of the merchants from India. Ibn Jubair, the Arab geographer from Spain who traversed through the chief trade route of Egypt in the late twelfth century during his pilgrimage to Mecca, attests to the presence at Aydhad of the ships coming from India.¹¹⁰ Aden, however, was undoubtedly the most important entrepot on the Red Sea side as far as the trade networks of the merchants from India were concerned. As already noted, Al-Maqdisi in the late tenth century itself counted the port as West Asia's major gateway to China. With the burgeoning of maritime trade during the Fatimid era, the Jewish merchants emanating from Egypt and the like places used Aden as the chief transit point on their way back and forth India. Besides, most of the sojourning as well as indigenous merchants on the Malabar Coast made Aden as their destination port in West Asia. Both of these facts are very clear from the Geniza

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Saeed, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, p. 102; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan*, vol. 4, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Saeed, *Kitab al-jughrafiyya*, p. 102; Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 442, 444.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Battuta on his return journey from Malabar to his homeland travelled in ship that went from Calicut to or via Dhofar. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 169. That Indian ships, at least some if not all, sailed to India via Dhofar can be gleaned from, for instance, Daniel Martin Varisco, 'An Anonymous 14th Century Almanac from Rasulid Yemen', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 9, 1994, pp. 212.

¹⁰⁹ See for example, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, pp. 666-7.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Jubair, *Rihlatu Ibn Jubair*, p. 41.

documents. Most of the ship owners referred in the 'India Book' had their shipping service between the Malabar Coast and Aden. Al-Idrisi in the mid-twelfth century says that Aden, though not a big city by size, was famous because it was the harbour, from which merchants destined for the east departed and to which commodities from India and the Far East were imported.¹¹¹ During the reign of the Rasulids, Aden reached its peak in attracting maritime traders particularly those from the ports of the Malabar Coast as a result of the various mechanisms adopted by the Yemeni rulers.¹¹² Marco Polo felt that because of the great quantity of duties collected from the merchants who bring pepper and other spices to Aden and export horses to the Indian marts, the Rasulid sultan had become 'one of the richest kings of the world'.¹¹³ In the mid-fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta categorically remarked, 'It (Aden) is the harbour for Indian merchants, to which come large ships from Cambay, Tana, Quilon, Calicut, Pantalayani, Chaliyam, Mangalore, Fākanūr,...Indian and Egyptian merchants are staying in this port'.¹¹⁴ On the testimony of *Nur al-ma'ārif*, it can be said that by the late thirteenth century, each of Malabar's important ports was separately linked to the commercial world of Aden.¹¹⁵

The Yemeni chronicle introduces some of the important merchants of the Malabar Coast who had trade network with Aden. With a view to boosting the maritime trade of their country, the Rasulid sultans had the practice of honoring important merchants involved in trade with Yemen and of sending gifts to local rulers in foreign lands who were the sovereigns of the major nodal points linked with the trade of Aden. It is in the context of demonstrating this practice of the Yemeni rulers that the thirteenth-century chronicle mentions the names of some of the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast. When important merchants had been to Aden, they were honoured at that port itself in accordance to their status, whereas if they had not come to the port, the Rasulids used to send valuable gifts to them.¹¹⁶ Among the merchants, who were honoured at Aden and

¹¹¹ Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq*, vol.1, p. 54.

¹¹² These mechanisms will be discussed later.

¹¹³ Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 441.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta* (1987), vol. 1, p. 260.

¹¹⁵ In the thirteenth century account is found details of annual stipends sent from Yemen to the each port of Malabar and of the currencies, by which transactions in these port were made.

¹¹⁶ In the 1290s, *nakhuda* Taqyuddin Abdul Rahman bin Mohammed al-Tibi, otherwise known through the account of the Persian writer Wassaf to have been a merchant magnet active on the Coromandel Coast with

who are clearly mentioned by the chronicle to be from Malabar, were *nākhudā* Bilal al-Tanishi and *nākhudā* Ambar, the chief of the middle port in Malabar.¹¹⁷ These must have been two of the important ship-owning merchants of the Malabar Coast, who sailed back and forth Aden trading in pepper and other commodities. Another name that appears in the chronicle is Al-Shihab bin Bailaqani. Not only was Al-Shihab, who resided on the Malabar Coast, sent gifts for himself, but also the Rasulids asked him to hand over their gifts to the local rulers of Hīlī, Fākanūr, and Mangalore (three of the important exchange centres of the coast).¹¹⁸ It is not mentioned in the chronicle whether this Muslim of Persian origin was a merchant or a religious functionary such as *qadi*. Nor is he designated with any title like *nākhudā*. However, considering the fact that his name is found in the list of merchants receiving honors from Yemen and that he had wide-ranging connections with the various port-cities of Malabar and their local rulers, it can be assumed that Al-Shihab was an important sojourning merchant on the coast with trade networks extending up to the Yemeni ports. Ibn Battuta introduces some of the fourteenth century sojourning merchants of the Malabar Coast, but the Moroccan traveller did not often reveal the commercial horizons of these Muslim merchants. But, it is likely that the port of Aden was a major destination for many of them. *Nākhudā* Mithqal, the rich merchant magnet in Calicut who is believed to have built the historic Mithqal mosque of the port and whom Ibn Battuta knew during his stay in Malabar, was one among such sojourning Muslim merchants possessing ships that sailed to Yemen.¹¹⁹ Yemeni writer Al-Burayhi informs us of a fourteenth-century Muslim merchant from Maghrib (Spain), who traded for some years basing in Aden and then shifted to the Malabar Coast where he later died.¹²⁰ It is likely that this Maghribi merchant was someone who carried out

high esteem in the court circles of the Pandyas, seemed to have been honoured by the Rasulids sometimes at the port of Aden and other times by sending gifts for him to Coromandel. See, Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, p. 515, 519. For Wassaf, see, H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, 8 vols., Trübner and Company, London, 1867–1877, vol. 3, pp. 32-5.

¹¹⁷ Al already suggested in the first chapter, the anonymous middle port mentioned in the chronicle might be a reference to the emerging port of Calicut. See, Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, pp. 515-6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 518-9.

¹¹⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 45.

¹²⁰ Abdul Wahhab al-Burayhi, *Tabaqat sulaha' al-yemen al-ma'roof bi tarikh al-burayhi*, ed. Mohammed al-Habshi, Maktabat al-Irshad, Sana'a, 1994, p. 338.

trans-oceanic trade between Aden and the Malabar Coast, initially sojourning at the former place and then at the latter. Yet another Yemeni historian Al-Tayyib Ba-Makhrama speaks about an influential business tycoon of Aden called Salah bin Ali, who had built a remarkable house at the Yemeni port. Because of the political chaos in Yemen during the early fifteenth century, many of Aden's merchants had to leave the port and settle in Jidda and the ports of India. Salah bin Ali is said to have fled to the Malabar Coast and settled there.¹²¹ It is plausible that before he left Aden, this important Muslim merchant had active seaborne trade with the ports of the Malabar Coast and such a commercial network eventually determined his choice of Malabar as the base of his future commercial operations when he had to flee Yemen. Moreover, Calicut *qadi's* letter to the Rasulid court helps us to know some of the most important Muslim merchants who were active in the port of Calicut during the late fourteenth century carrying its trade with the entrepot of Aden.¹²² These were Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Gassani, Nuruddhin Ali al-Quwi, Zain Ali al-Rumi, Nuruddhin Sheikh Ali al-Ardabili, Sa'aduddin Masu'd and Shihabuddin Ahmed al-Hiwari. All the names mentioned in the letter are those of *paradesi* Muslim merchants, who hailed from diverse lands and who were sojourning at the port of Calicut.

After the gloominess of some centuries when the Red Sea route under the 'patronage' of the Fatimids and their successors attracted the major share of the westward trade of the western Indian Ocean, trade through the Persian Gulf side re-emerged on the scene around the second half of the thirteenth century. When the Ilkhanids rose into power in the mid-thirteenth century, they appear not to have missed any chance to encourage maritime trade in the Gulf region.¹²³ Marco Polo, who visited Old Hormuz on his way back from China, described about the harbour, 'all the merchants come there from all the different parts of India with their ships, bringing there all spiceries and other merchandise, that is precious stones and peals and cloth of silk...It is in truth a town of

¹²¹ Abu Abdullah al-Tayyib Ba-Makhrama, *Tarikh thagr yemen wa tarajim ulam'iha*, 2nd ed., Dar al-Jil, Beirut and Dar 'Ammar, Oman, 1987, p. 22.

¹²² For the letter see, Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, pp. 203-6.

¹²³ Eastern commodities reaching at the port of Old Hormuz entered into the hands of the Europeans via the Mongol capital of Tabriz.

various and great trade.’¹²⁴ In the early fourteenth century, the population of Kish and Old Hormuz had moved to the island of Jarun, where a New Hormuz was constructed, and this New Hormuz, then, dominated the maritime trade of the Gulf almost all through the next two centuries unto the arrival of the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century.¹²⁵ In the rejuvenated trade towards the Gulf side, merchants from the Malabar Coast must have taken part, though not to the extent traders from the Coromandel or north-western coasts of India were involved in.¹²⁶ The Turkish ambassador Abdul Razzaq, apart from travelling himself from Hormuz to Malabar using the existing commercial networks between the regions, informs us that Malabar was one among the many areas within the Indian Ocean realm, with which the emporium of Hormuz had trans-oceanic trade contacts.¹²⁷ Horse trade seemed to have constituted a major part of the commerce between Malabar and Hormuz. During his journey from Hormuz to the Zamorin’s port of Calicut, Abdul Razzaq’s ship was accompanied by another ship laden with several horses.¹²⁸ However, it should be stated that up to the arrival of the Portuguese it was the trade via the Red Sea route, rather than the one destined towards the Persian Gulf, which mattered more to the merchants of Malabar in their westward trade.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 123. Wassaf’s account furnishes with the active trade particularly in horse that existed between the island of Kish and the Coromandel Coast in the late thirteenth century under the aegis of the Tibi brothers. See, Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India*, vol. 3, pp. 32-5.

¹²⁵ See, Abu’l-Fida, *Taqwim al-buldan*, p. 339; Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 2, p. 19. From the emporium of Hormuz, cargos from India and the Far East were further taken to the marts of Iran and Iraq. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 2, p. 140.

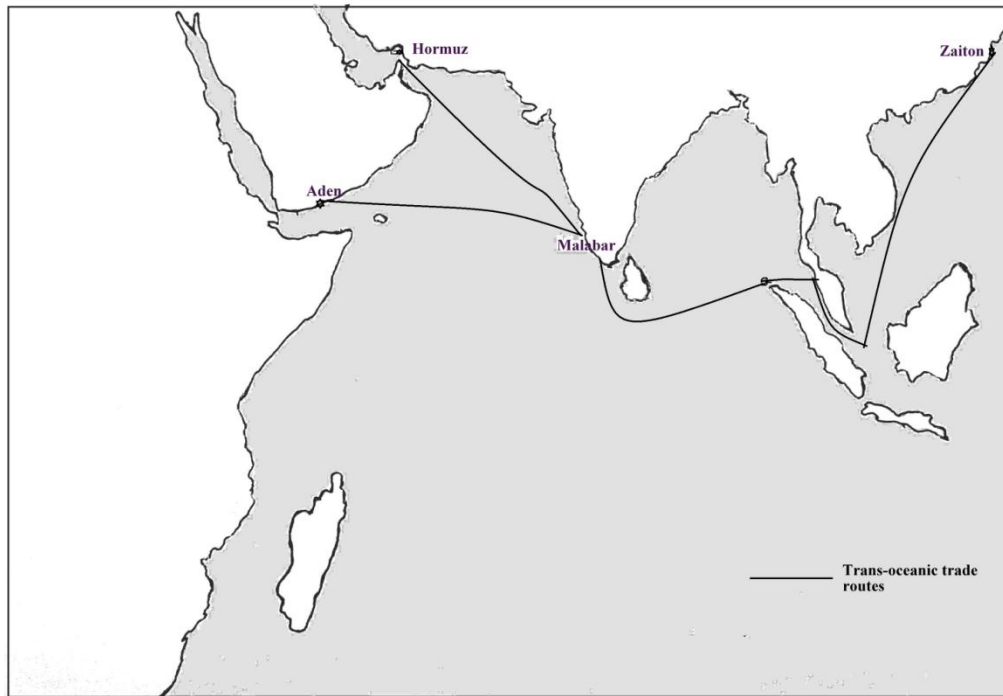
¹²⁶ Ibn Battuta gives some incidental evidences for the trade network between Malabar and the Persian Gulf. He reports that while a Chinese junk was perished in the waters of Calicut, a slave woman, who was in that junk and was crying for help, was rescued by some of the mariners from Hormuz. This in turn is suggestive of the presence on the Malabar Coast of ships and traders from Hormuz. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 48.

¹²⁷ Thackston, trans., ‘Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq’, pp. 300-3.

¹²⁸ Thackston, trans., ‘Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq’, p. 300, 305. Although the merchandise of that ship had not reached the Malabar Coast as they were seized by the pirates on the way, it is suggestive of the horse trade between the regions. The local Muslim merchants of Malabar must have transhipped the horses imported to Calicut to the other neighbouring ports like Cannanore and Mangalore, from where passage to the cavalry based polities could easily be made.

¹²⁹ Marco Polo in his description of Malabar’s westward maritime trade appears to be familiar only with the trade that went towards the Red Sea side and did not mention about the trade with the Persian Gulf. And when Barbosa in his description of Malabar spoke of its *paradesi* Muslim traders, what felt to him worthy of note was their long-distance trans-oceanic trade extending towards the Red Sea as far as the port of

Map 3: The overseas destinations of the Muslim merchants in Malabar c. 14th century.



Aden during the first half of the second millennium remained the key entrepot on the Red Sea route for the merchants from the Malabar Coast and other regions on the rims of the Indian Ocean. However, Arabic chronicles from West Asia demonstrate that its supremacy was challenged from the early fifteenth century (1420s) onwards by the Hijazi port of Jidda and that it was the merchants from the Malabar Coast who brought the turning point for the new development in the commercial sphere of the western Indian Ocean. As the contemporary sources reveal, the situation in the Gulf of Aden was such that for about two centuries ships coming from the various ports of India and the Far East were restricted by the Rasulid sultans from entering into the Red Sea, and so they had to anchor and unload at the port of Aden paying whatever customs were sought by the Yemeni rulers.¹³⁰ In the early fifteenth century, the political uprisings and rebellions in Yemen made the Rasulid Sultan Al-Nasir Ahmed (r. 1400-1424) resort to arbitrary

Jidda. See, Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 419; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 76-7.

¹³⁰ This argument will be illustrated later.

policies which were anti-mercantile in nature and which therefore forced many merchants to desert the port of Aden.¹³¹ *Nākhudā* Ibrahim was an important ship-owning merchant from Calicut, who had been trading with Aden for some time during the reign of the Sultan Al-Nasir Ahmed and who was getting disturbed by the tax regime of the Yemeni sultan. In the year 1422, this merchant from Calicut—one of the chief port-cities of South Asia networked with the commercial world of Aden—came with his ship laden mainly with pepper and dared to cross the Bab-el Mandab Strait to venture in the Red Sea as far as the port of Jidda.¹³² As his ship was devoid of any royal protection from the Rasulid sultan, Ibrahim had the bad luck of its load being taken away in Jidda by the local potentate of Mecca Al-Sharif Hassan bin ‘Ajlan.¹³³ However, the merchant was not dissuaded from trying his good luck. In the next year again, *nākhudā* Ibrahim with his loaded ship avoided Aden and came to Dahlak Island, but unfortunately, its ruler also maltreated the merchant. Meanwhile, the Mamluk Sultan Barsbay had already warned the Sharif of Mecca against the assault on the Indian merchant and had asked him to return the taken cargos to the merchant.¹³⁴ In the year 1424, Ibrahim again came with his ship, which this time was accompanied by a cruiser. His plan was to go as far as Yanbu’, a port that lied beyond Jidda. Luckily for him, Al-Emir Qurqmas, sent by the Egyptian sultan, was in Jidda to welcome him and persuade him to anchor at that port. Seeing the proper treatment by the Emir, Ibrahim unloaded his cargo at Jidda and sold them safely.¹³⁵ Hopeful of the same kind of treatment in future, the *nākhudā* returned to Calicut happily, and in the next year, 1425, came back to Jidda with fourteen ships with many loads and in the company of other Indian merchants.¹³⁶ The Mamluk sultan was aware of Ibrahim’s arrival and so had sent his officials to Jidda for levying tax on the merchandise that he

¹³¹ Ba-Makhrama, *Tarikh thagr yemen*, p. 22.

¹³² The path-breaking move by the *nakhuda* Ibrahim has passed almost unnoticed by the Indian or Arab writers. the only contemporary authors who have recorded the event are the Egyptian chronicler Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442) and the Hijazi historian Ibn Fahad al-Makki (d. 1480).

¹³³ See, Al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma’rifat*, vol. 7, p. 111; Ibn Fahad, *Ithāfal-warā*, vol. 3, p. 588.

¹³⁴ Mecca and its port Jidda had already been under the sovereignty of the Mamluks of Egypt. For Barsbay’s warning see, Ibn Fahad, *Ithāfal-warā*, vol. 3, p. 593.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 606.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 620-1. That *nakhuda* Ibrahim could go to Jidda with his fourteen ships in 1425 when situations at that port were welcoming is, in turn, indicative of the considerable volume of trade with the port of Aden in the past years, which now increasingly got diverted to the Hijazi port.

brings. Other merchants also began to follow Ibrahim's move, and as a result, in the coming year, 1426, there arrived in Jidda forty ships from the different Indian ports having laden with a variety of commodities.¹³⁷ The contemporary Egyptian chronicler Al-Maqrizi reports that following *nākhudā* Ibrahim's unprecedented step, merchants from diverse countries began to cross the Bab-el Mandab Strait and go as far as Jidda as they found this port to be more comfortable than the erstwhile Aden, where political chaos was still going on. He also has it that as more and more ships arrived at Jidda, the supervision of the port became an important concern of the Mamluk sultan, who now onwards paid more attention towards the revenue collected through taxes on the merchandise arriving at the port.¹³⁸ The Arab writers testify that Jidda, at the cost of Aden, now transformed from a mini-port to be a port of international importance and that by the year 1426 the revenue which reached the Mamluk treasury through the taxes at Jidda was more than 70,000 *dinars*, excluding what had not reached Cairo and what was taken by the Sharif of Mecca as his share.¹³⁹ Thus, what turns out from these developments is the significance that the *nākhudās* and merchants from Calicut or the Malabar Coast, who took the initiative of circumvention of Aden, had acquired in the maritime trade via the Red Sea route. The seaborne trade emanating from the Malabar Coast, not least in its spice items, was so powerful that the ship-owners and merchants, who carried out it, could bring enduring changes in the orientation of international trade via the Red Sea waters. Until the early sixteenth century, Jidda remained to be an active port visited by ships from India and the like. The cargos that reached Jidda from India and the Far East were further taken to Cairo mainly not through the earlier important Egyptian outlets like Aydhab or Qusair but through the port of Al-Tur on the Gulf of Suez.¹⁴⁰

However, the sources leave certain questions with regard to the aforementioned *nākhudā* Ibrahim unanswered. Was Ibrahim himself the owner of all the ships that he

¹³⁷ Al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma'rifat*, vol. 7, p. 128.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129; Ibn Fahad, *Ithāfal-warā*, vol. 3, p. 621.

¹⁴⁰ As the early sixteenth century European writer Tomé Pires attests, after the rise of Jidda, even the ships that sailed from Aden to Egypt preferred to go to Jidda and then Al-Tur, rather than following the earlier route of Aden-Aydhab/Qusair-Cairo. See, A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 18.

brought to the port of Jidda, or was he just one among the many ship-owners from Calicut, but headed the group of merchants who sailed to Jidda? Were all the cargos transported in his ships belonged to Ibrahim himself, or had there been shares that belonged to other merchants? The sources simply give the impression that all the ships that sailed from Calicut to the Red Sea belonged to *nākhudā* Ibrahim. Nonetheless, it is not unlikely that at least out of the fourteen ships that came to Jidda with Ibrahim in the year 1425 some were owned by others. In fact, Ibn Fahad gives clue to this inference when he says that Ibrahim reached Jidda in 1425 in the company of a group of Indians (*ma'ajama'th min al-hunūd*).¹⁴¹ If this 'group of Indians' was just the crews of Ibrahim's ships, then the Arab writer would not have mentioned that specifically as he did when spoke of the *nākhudā*'s previous trips to Jidda with one or two vessels. On the other hand, if all the fourteen ships were owned by Ibrahim himself, then that would, in turn, imply the commendable power of Calicut's *nākhudās*, a single one out of whom could own as many ocean-going ships as fourteen. As to the question of cargos in Ibrahim's ships, some of them must have belonged to other merchants who traveled in the *nākhudā*'s ships. This would be more likely if we accept the inference that some of the ships headed by Ibrahim were in fact owned by other *nākhudās* from Calicut. Besides, as will be discussed below, we have an explicit evidence of other merchants making use of the shipping service of *nākhudā* Ibrahim in their journey from Calicut to Jidda.

Our sources for the fifteenth century are relatively more laudable as they help us to unravel the Muslim trade network between the Malabar Coast and the port of Jidda by introducing some of the important merchants who were involved in it. Ibn Fahad in his *Ithāf al-warā* reports an incident of 1428 involving *nākhudā* Ibrahim of Calicut and Khwaja Daywana al-Kīlanī, another merchant of Persian origin.¹⁴² In the ship that sailed from Calicut to Jidda in 1428, there occurred a scuffle between Ibrahim, the owner of the ship and Daywana, who appears to be an important merchant known among the political circles of Egypt and Hijaz and who was coming back from Malabar after a trade there. The scuffle finally led to the murder of Daywana by the *nākhudā* and some other merchants aboard the ship, who dumped the former's body in the sea and instead of

¹⁴¹ Ibn Fahad, *Ithāf al-warā*, vol. 3, p. 620.

¹⁴² See, Ibn Fahad, *Ithāf al-warā*, vol. 4, pp. 17-8.

anchoring at Jidda, went as far as the port of Yanbu. However, Ibrahim and his aides were arrested and brought to Jidda, where they were hanged by the order of the Mamluk sultan in the presence of the Indians sojourning there. The ship of the *nākhudā* and his property along with the wealth of the slain Daywana were all confiscated and taken to the sultan in Cairo. Here, *nākhudā* Ibrahim of the incident must be the same ship-owner who had paved the way to Jidda for the Indian Ocean merchants a few years ago, though the chronicler does not say it explicitly.¹⁴³ Then, why did the Mamluk sultan dare to take action against such an influential ship-owning merchant at the cost of the trade that he facilitated between Jidda and Calicut? Our source does not reveal the cause of the tussle between the two merchants. Khwaja Daywana al-Kīlanī was, of course, a rich merchant, and soon after the news of the murder of this merchant had reached Egypt, the sultan had sent a special agent to Yanbu for collecting the wealth of the merchant.¹⁴⁴ However, what seemed to have prompted the sultan to take very stringent kind of action in the incident was, despite his intimacy with Khwaja Daywana, his determination to ensure justice among the merchants who sailed to or traded with his port of Jidda.¹⁴⁵

Another important incident, which throws light on the commercial network between Calicut and Jidda, was the escape to India in 1450 of Timraz al-Muayyadi, one of the top-most Emirs of the Mamluki court. The most detailed account of the incident is given by the contemporary Egyptian chronicler Ibn Taghribirdi, who repeatedly mentions it in many of his works.¹⁴⁶ Timraz was the one who led Egypt's official Hajj delegation to Mecca, and after performing the Hajj, the Emir at Jidda bought a ship from an Indian merchant called Yusuf al-Rasawi and arranged the crew for it, giving the impression that

¹⁴³ That it was not a new *nakhuda* but the old experienced one can be gleaned from the influence that this Ibrahim had among the expatriate Indians at the port of Jidda. After being brought into Jidda, *Nakhuda* Ibrahim had in fact hidden away in a night somewhere among the expatriate Indians, and it was after spending lots of money and time that the *nakhuda* was traced to be hanged along with some others.

¹⁴⁴ If Daywana was just a normal merchant, the Mamluk sultan would not have had sent an agent to collect the meagre wealth of him. One year later, in 1429, Daywana's slave agent Iyas was summoned to Cairo to enquire about the wealth of his master. See, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁵ Hanging of *nakhuda* Ibrahim and his aids in the presence of the Indians sojourning at the port of Jidda might be a warning to all of them and to those in their friendship circle that the sultan would not compromise any act of injustice.

¹⁴⁶ See for instance, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Manhal al-safi*, vol. 4, pp. 152-3, 246-7; *Idem*, *Hawadis al-duhoor*, vol. 2, p. 324; *Idem*, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 15, pp. 426-9.

he was getting ready to return to Cairo. However, Timraz along with some of his supporters secretly fled Jidda for India taking, apart from his own wealth, the Mamluk sultan's wealth worth some 30,000 *dinars*. Though the Emir anchored at various ports of India, everywhere the local rulers rejected him after getting complaints from the merchants that giving asylum to Timraz would be detrimental to their trade with Jidda. Finally, he came to Calicut and anchored at its harbour. Soon, its Muslim merchants, who had well-established trade with the port of Jidda, too complained of the Egyptian rebel Emir and convinced the Zamorin that if the Mamluk sultan knows of Timraz's stay at Calicut, their wealth at Jidda would be confiscated by the sultan and their trade with that port would be in danger. Despite the Emir's effort to appease the ruler of Calicut by sending attractive gifts to him, the Zamorin could not forsake the interests of his Muslim traders and so, forced the Emir to buy pepper at Calicut with entire wealth of the sultan. Thus, Timraz bought pepper and loaded it in two ships belonging to the merchants of Calicut, the remaining load being put in the ship that he had bought at Jidda and by which he had fled to India. On his way to Jidda, Timraz got involved in an on-going political combat in Yemen, in which he was killed. But, soon after knowing of the death of the Emir, the Mamluk sultan sent his agent to Yemen and got all the wealth carried by Timraz and the ship that he was traveling in brought into his custody. The chronicler Ibn Taghribirdi says that he was doubting the authenticity of Timraz's incident, but confirmed it when he saw many correspondences with the Mamluki viceroy at Jidda Janibak, which were sent from the court of the Zamorin, and some of which contained the report of what had happened to the rebel Emir at the port of Calicut. The incident, apart from letting us know about the Zamorin rulers' care for the Muslim merchants of Calicut, throws light on the existing trade network of the same merchants with the port of Jidda. Within two-three decades after the first direct contact with Jidda, the commercial ties between the Malabar Coast and the Hijazi port seemed to have got a well-organized form that the Muslim merchants from Calicut had begun to keep their wealth at Jidda entrusted likely with their slave-agents.¹⁴⁷ The 'patron' at Calicut was very keen in sustaining these commercial ties by resorting to diplomatic moves. When he was forced to buy pepper

¹⁴⁷ This can be discerned from the complaint of Calicut's merchants that giving asylum to Timraz would induce the Mamluk sultan to confiscate their wealth at Jidda.

with the whole money in his hands which were enormous in value, Timraz did not find it tough to get enough load of pepper at the port of Calicut, nor to acquire adequate shipping service for taking his merchandise to Jidda.

The biographical dictionaries of the Arab writers who noted down the biographic details of their contemporaries who were men of power, wealth or scholarship are noteworthy among our sources for the fifteenth century. The notable biographical dictionaries that have details of Muslim merchants who were involved in the commercial networks between the Malabar Coast and Jidda are *al-Durr al-kamīn* of Ibn Fahad (d. 1480) and *al-Dhaw' al-lāmi'* of Al-Sakhavi (d. 1497).¹⁴⁸ Here we are bringing separately the important figures mentioned in these texts and the relevant details about them.

- Khwaja Shamsuddin al-Iskandari (d. 1460): This was an important merchant, who hailed originally from Egypt and then settled in Mecca.¹⁴⁹ From Mecca, Khwaja Shamsuddin frequented the port of Calicut trading in spices and other commodities, and out of the fortunes of this trade, the merchant is said to have become rich enough to be able to purchase a ship for himself and send his slave-agent in that.¹⁵⁰

- Khwaja Badruddin al-Yemeni (d. 1467): This was a merchant from Yemen, whose trade extended to, apart from Egypt and Hormuz, the Malabari ports of Calicut and Cochin.¹⁵¹ After making a decent earning out of this trade, he permanently settled down in Mecca.¹⁵² Although the Arab writers do not say anything about his commercial activities after settling down in Mecca, they have it that there he had become a highly reputed merchant magnate with lots of charitable works. It can be assumed that Badruddin, after settling down at Mecca, conducted trade by sending his servants or agents to those places, with which he himself had personally traded such as the ports of Malabar.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Najm Umar ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn bi dhail al-a'qd al-samin fi tarikh al-balad al-amin*, 3 vols, ed. Abdulmalik ibn Abdullah, Dar Khair li al-Twaba'at wa-al-Nashr, Beirut, 2000; Shamsuddin al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw' al-lami' li ahl al-qarn al-tasi'*, 6 vols., Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, Beirut, 1900

¹⁴⁹ See, Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 1, p. 69; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw' al-lami'*, vol. 7, p. 101.

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 1, p. 69.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 1, pp. 694; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw' al-lami'*, vol. 3, p. 127.

¹⁵² Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 1, pp. 694-5.

- Khwaja Zainuddin Ibn Qayyum al-Jawzi al-Dimishqi (d. 1452): Originally hailing from Dimishq, Khwaja Zainuddin permanently settled down in Mecca, from where he got involved in trade with the port of Calicut.¹⁵³ At the time of death, he is said to have left many houses/apartments that he had built with the earnings from his trade with Malabar.¹⁵⁴
- Khwaja Zainuddin al-Sawwaf al-Dimishqi (d. 1453): This merchant also hailed from Dimishq and settled in Mecca. From Mecca, he was involved in trade with India and is said to have died in Calicut while on a trip to there.¹⁵⁵
- Abdul Lathif al-Makki (d. 1460): Abdul Lathif was from Mecca and left along with his son Abdul Azeez for trade between Aden and the ports of India such as Calicut and Cambay.¹⁵⁶ His death occurred at Cambay.
- ‘Ata Shujauddhin al-Basari (d. 1456): A merchant from Iraq who later settled down in Mecca and conducted trade with the port of Yemen and India. He was popular by the nickname ‘Ibn al-Looka’ for he had a great business in cotton. He is reported to have died in Calicut.¹⁵⁷
- Umar Ibn Mohammed Sirajuddin (d. 1475): Born in a scholarly family of Mecca, Umar is said to have been engaged in Islamic learning for many years, but later turned to business. He sailed to India twice. Though he could earn a decent wealth out of his first trip to India, the second one was a failure as he perished in a shipwreck that happened in the waters between Cochin and Quilon while on a journey to Bengal.¹⁵⁸
- Mohammed Jalaluddin (b. 1449): This was a scholar, who while sojourning in Mecca got interested in trade and thus sailed to Yemen and Calicut.¹⁵⁹
- Ibrahim bin al-Najmal-Dimishqi: Ibrahim was born in Dimishq and brought up in Mecca, where he was involved in trade. Later he sailed to, besides some other places, Calicut, where he sojourned and carried out trade henceforth.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, p. 794; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw’ al-lami’*, vol. 4, p. 55.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, p. 794.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, p. 883; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw’ al-lami’*, vol. 4, p. 316.

¹⁵⁶ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, p. 892; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw’ al-lami’*, vol. 4, p. 321.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, pp. 969-70; Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw’ al-lami’*, vol. 5, p. 147.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn Fahad, *al-Durr al-kamīn*, vol. 2, pp. 1115-6.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Sakhavi, *al-Dhaw’ al-lami’*, vol. 8, p. 64.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 69.

▪ Abdullah bin Sulaiman al-Haurani(d. 1483): Hewas originally from Syria and settled in Mecca for long. Al-Sakhavi reports that Abdullah passed away in Calicut in a poor condition.¹⁶¹ It can be assumed that he wanted to find a fortune out of the trade in or with Calicut, but was unsuccessful in his venture and so, died poorly in Calicut.

The above list contains the names of those whose trade connection with the ports of Malabar is explicitly mentioned by Ibn Fahad and Al-Sakhavi. There are yet other merchants who are said to have traded with the ports of India, but it is not clear which ports they were.¹⁶² Out of all the merchants described above, most appear to be those who were based in Mecca, the nearest city of Jidda and were sailing back and forth the Malabar Coast. However, this cannot be taken to imply that most of the trade of Malabar in the fifteenth century was carried out by this sort of merchants, since the chroniclers could have noted down the details of only those merchants who were based in Mecca or at least returned to there, and therefore the details of the sojourning merchants based on the Malabar Coast would be missing in their accounts. European sources also introduce some of the sojourning merchants of Calicut who were active in the maritime trade between Malabar and Jidda at the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Noteworthy among them was one Khwaja Qasim, who sojourned at Calicut along with his wives and children.¹⁶³

Jidda's rise from the early fifteenth century onwards, however, should not be taken to mean a complete blow to the trade at Aden or to the trade network of Muslim merchants from Malabar with that port. We have contemporary sources from Yemen that reveal the efforts of the Rasulid sultans to bring back merchants coming from the ports of the Indian Ocean to their entrepot Aden. *Jawwara* is the term that the Arab writers generally use to describe the act of deviation by the merchants, i.e. their deviation from Aden, the normal destination point in the Red Sea side, to the other ports such as Jidda. Those merchants who deviated from Aden to Jidda are called *mujawwir*, i.e.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 21.

¹⁶² However, since Calicut was one of the most important emporiums of trade on the western coast of India, the other being Cambay, it can be safely stated that at least some of these merchants must be those who had trade on the Malabar Coast.

¹⁶³ For Khwaja Qasim, see, H. E. J. Stanley, trans., *The three voyages of Vasco da Gama*, p. 315n1, 332, 372.

deviants.¹⁶⁴ In the 1430s, viz. within a few years after *nākhudā* Ibrahim of Calicut ‘opened up’ the way to Jidda, there were occasions when *mujawwir nākhudās* and merchants went to Yemen either voluntarily or after being forced by the galleys of the Rasulids. They were called *mujawwirs* because in the previous years they had sailed as far as Jidda without calling at Aden. The anonymous author of a fifteenth-century text from Yemen informs us that in the year 1430 there came to Yemen some of the ships of the *mujawwirs*, who now went to the court of the sultan in Zabid.¹⁶⁵ The merchants presented gifts, whereas the sultan pardoned their sin of deviating from Yemen to Jidda. In the same year itself, the galleys of the Rasulids were able to capture at the Bab-el Mandab Strait a ship of merchants from Sumatra who were planning to go to Jidda and forced the ship to anchor at Aden.¹⁶⁶ In the next year, a group of *nākhudās* and merchants is reported to have gone to the royal court to present precious gifts and treasures to the sultan.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, the anonymous text reports an event of the year 1433, which is suggestive of Malabar’s still existing commercial ties with the ports of Yemen and which demonstrates how crucial the prevalence of such ties was for the Rasulids of Yemen. In 1433, there arrived in the court of the sultan *qadi* Raziyyuddin, the officer in charge of the port of Aden, with plentiful gifts which were presented by the merchants of that port and which were worth 100,000 *dinars*.¹⁶⁸ He was accompanied to the court by one *nākhudā* Kirwa from the port of Calicut, who wished to visit the Rasulid court on behalf of the merchants from Calicut. Apart from bestowing on the *nākhudā* much honors and granting him special concession in customs duties at Aden, the sultan gave an official ordinance to the *qadi* Raziyyuddin, which directed that from the merchants of Calicut nothing other than tithe would be collected at Aden. Besides, Calicut merchants were given many special concessions in the rules at the Yemeni port, which the anonymous author felt to be the biggest concession the Rasulid sultans even gave and by which the merchants were very happy. What turns out is that merchants from the Malabar Coast still visited the Yemeni port. Then, what could be the underlying reason behind some merchants still

¹⁶⁴ For the usage of the term *jawwara*, see for instance, Ibn Fahad, *Ithāf al-warā*, vol. 3, p. 588.

¹⁶⁵ Anonymous, *Tarikh al-daulat al-rasooliyya fi al-yemen li muallif majhool a’sh fi al-qarn al tasi’ al-hijri*, ed. Abdullah Mohammed al-Habshi, Dar al-Jil, Sana’a, 1984, pp. 216-7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

preferring to go to Aden? The chronicler Al-Maqrizi gives clue to the answer. Commenting on the tax regime of the Mamluks at Jidda, he notes,

From the merchants coming from India were collected, apart from the tithe, many extra tolls meant for the superintendent (*al-nazir*), inspector (*shādd*), weight controllers (*shuhood al-qubban*), moneychanger (*swayrafi*) and other aides... Thus, the merchants were tired of such collections, and in the previous year (1434) a group of the Indian merchants had called at Aden (rather than coming to Jidda). The sultan of Egypt got angry over that as he missed taxing them.¹⁶⁹

The Hijazi historian Izzuddin Ibn Fahad (d. 516) has noted how political struggles (in the 1440s) in Mecca among the various Sharifs had caused excessive taxation at Jidda on the Indian merchants by various claimants.¹⁷⁰ What appears is that for the Indian Ocean merchants what mattered more was, rather than the nature of the ports or their sovereigns, the tax system prevailing in their ports of call. Whenever they felt inconvenience in a port because of the heavy taxation, they dared to change their destination port. As such, a more balancing approach with regard to the state of the entrepots of Aden and Jidda during the fifteenth century would be to say that their sovereigns competed each other to attract maximum number of Indian Ocean merchants to their respective ports until the early sixteenth century. In Yemen, the Tahirids had replaced the Rasulids in the mid-fifteenth century and were eager to revive the trade at the port of Aden, despite the competition from the Mamluks of Egypt. Izzuddin Ibn Fahad reports that an ordinance issued by the Egyptian sultan to the Sharif of Mecca, which reveals the Mamluks' continued concern over the Indian ships stopping at Aden without going as far as Jidda. The content of the ordinance (dated as 1497) is that some of the *nākhudās* from India are seen as going with their ships to Aden without coming to Jidda, which if not prevented would lead to the decline of the Hijazi port.¹⁷¹ Among the measures taken by the Mamluks to discourage Indian Ocean merchants from going to Aden was to impose high tax on or confiscate the commodities imported from Yemen to Jidda so as to create low demand for the Indian and the Far Eastern commodities at the

¹⁶⁹ Al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma'rifati*, vol. 7, p. 278 (Translation mine).

¹⁷⁰ It is said that from each ship the Sharifs sought a tax of 4,000 *dinars*. See, Izzuddin Ibn Fahad, *Ghayat al-maram bi akhbar saltanat al-balad al-haram*, 3 vols., ed. Fahim Mohammed Shaltut, Umm al-Qura University, Mecca, 1988, vol. 2, pp. 422-3.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 595.

Yemeni port.¹⁷² However, Aden kept on attracting merchants from India and the Far East well into the early sixteenth century as can be discerned from the accounts of Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa, both of whom attest to the commercial ties between the Malabar Coast and Aden.¹⁷³

The commercial horizon of the Muslim merchants in Malabar during the centuries of the second millennium was not confined to the western Indian Ocean; instead, it also extended to the eastern segment of the ocean. However, as already noted, West Asian merchants who wanted to sail back and forth China or sojourn in its ports preferred from around the eleventh century onwards to cross the eastern Indian Ocean not in the same Arab dhows that they used to sail in the Arabian Sea but in the 'big ships' of the Kling and Chinese merchants. Although there were Muslim merchants from West Asia who undertook direct trade with the ports of the Far East and who must have called at the ports of Malabar for the transshipment purpose in their back and forth journey, little about them have survived in our sources for illustrating the case. However, what is more overt from the sources is the case of the Arab and Persian merchants who sailed to China to sojourn on its port-cities for some long time and basing there to trade with the ports of the South and Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁴ The Arab chronicles have references to many Muslim merchants who spent several years in China and after making a decent fortune out of trade from there, went back to their home countries. For instance, the twelfth-century Andalusian traveller Abu Hamid al-Gharnati has narrated the story of one Sheikh Abul Abbas al-Hijazi, whom he had met from Egypt in AD 1117. This Al-Hijazi is said to have spent forty years trading between the ports of China and India and had eventually become a notable wealthy merchant with close ties with the Chinese political circles and with many servants and children who were born out of his slaves from the Coromandel

¹⁷² Al-Maqrizi has reported an ordinance of the Mamluks in this regard. See, Al-Maqrizi, *al-Sulook li ma'rifati*, vol. 7, p. 277.

¹⁷³ For the reference of these writers, see, A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, pp. 16-8; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 55-7.

¹⁷⁴ For a brief study of the Muslim diasporas in China, see, John Chaffee, 'Diasporic Identities in the Historical Development of the Maritime Muslim Communities of Song-Yuan China', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49, no. 4, 2006, pp. 395-420.

Coast, Ceylon, China, etc. and each of whom spoke different languages.¹⁷⁵ *Nākhudā* Ramisht, whose shipping service between West Asia and the Malabar Coast is known through the Geniza documents, had got his commercial sphere extended to China with the help of his servants, notably one Ali al-Nili who is reported to have amassed for himself out of trade in the Far East an amount of wealth worth half a million *dinars*.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, the Malabar Coast, like its counterpart on the south-eastern coast of India, was one of the main destinations for the sojourners from China, who sailed by making use of the Chinese junks and sometimes even acted as the deputy captains of the Chinese ship-owners in their junks that plied in the eastern Indian Ocean. They transported the commodities procured from or produced in China into the Malabar Coast, from where, apart from the locally available spice items, merchandise imported from West Asia were taken to the Chinese ports like Canton and Zaytun. At least some of the merchants who are said by the Arab accounts to have stayed at the ports of China for long and traded with India must have been those who sailed back and forth Malabar ports. On the other hand, some of the Muslim merchants sojourning at the ports of Malabar had also carried out trade with the port of China. *Nākhudā* Mithqal of Calicut was one among such merchants who had traded with, apart from the ports on the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, the entrepots of the Far East.¹⁷⁷ Quilon for a long time, before being joined by other ports like Calicut and Maday, was the main transshipment centre in Malabar where Muslim merchants involved in China trade were found. As the Chinese account *Yuanshi* informs, when the Yuan diplomat Yang Tingbi visited Quilon in the 1280s, he was consulted by the representative of the Muslim community there to ask permission for sending annual tributary missions to the Chinese court.¹⁷⁸ This, in turn, is indicative of the mercantile relations of the Muslim merchants in Quilon with the marts of China. For, sending of tributary missions to China must have been instigated by their desire to boost the existing

¹⁷⁵ Al-Hijazi finally left China for his homeland with ten ships laden with various merchandise and rarities, but once he reached the Red Sea, he had already lost all the ships in wreck except one small ship, in which he and some of his servants were escaped. See, Abu Hamid al-Gharnati, *Tuhfat al-albab wa nukhbat al-I'jab*, ed. Ismail al-Arabi, Dar al-Āfaq al-Jadīda, Morocco, 1993, pp. 129-31.

¹⁷⁶ Muhammed bin Hawqal, *Surat al-aldh*, vol. 2, p. 282.

¹⁷⁷ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 45.

¹⁷⁸ Cited in Tansen Sen, *The Yuan Khanate and India*, p. 308.

maritime trade with the Far East, in which they themselves were personally taking part or were acting as agents to the sojourning and other merchants from China.

Medieval chronicles from Egypt and Yemen introduce an extraordinary Muslim merchant named Khwaja Izzuddin al-Kūlami al-Tājir al-Kārimi, who lived at the turn of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries and who appears to have taken part in the trans-oceanic trade between Quilon and China.¹⁷⁹ This merchant was originally from Aleppo, and in the later years of his life, he lived in Alexandria being involved in the lucrative Kārimi trade of Egypt with the help of his servants.¹⁸⁰ However, before making a name in Egypt as a reputed Kārimi merchant with many generous alms, Izzuddin had a successful career in the Far East, and it was because of this career that the chroniclers at Yemen knew him. The merchant is reported to have had arrived at the port of Aden from China in the early fourteenth century with an immense possession of the Far Eastern commodities, which included 300 *bahār* of silk (each *bahār* worth 300 Baghdadi rotl), 450 rotl of musk in small lead vessels, large quantities of Chinese porcelain, celadon vessels (inlaid with gold) and big trays, fabrics of different colors, many male and female slaves and 5 rotl of diamonds.¹⁸¹ The total tithes, which he had to pay for the enormous cargos that he brought to Aden astonishing people in Yemen for their extraordinary volume, were 300,000 *dirhams*. What appears is that Izzuddin had amassed huge fortunes out of his trade basing at the ports of China and then wanted to go back to his homeland and invest them in the highly profitable Kārimi trade of Egypt. Although the details of his successful commercial career in China are not found in the medieval sources, some clues about his trade between the Far East and South Asia can be gleaned from the available accounts. The sources have it that Izzuddin left his homeland Aleppo for China and then disappeared for many years, during which he earned huge wealth visiting China and India

¹⁷⁹ The most detailed and oldest account of Khwaja Izzuddin al-Kūlami al-Tājir al-Kārimi is provided by a contemporary Yemeni writer Ibn ‘Abdul Majid, who himself was probably an eyewitness to the events that occurred in Yemen after the advent of this merchant from China in the early fourteenth century. Although it could not access that version of Ibn ‘Abdul Majid’s *Bahjat al-zaman fi tarikh al-yemen* which contained the part dealing with Izzuddin, the present study makes use of Al-Khazraji’s *al-‘Uqood al-lu’lu’iyya*, in which the author has cited portions from the former.

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, *al-Durar al-kamina fi a’yan al-mi’a al-samina*, 2nd ed., vols. 6, ed. Mohammed Abdul Mu’eed, Majlis Dairat al-Ma’arif al-Usmaniya, Hyderabad, 1972, vol. 3, p. 182.

¹⁸¹ Al-Khazraji, *al-‘Uqood al-lu’lu’iyya*, vol. 1, p. 290.

many times.¹⁸² Adding to this information is the demonym *al-Kūlami*, which is given to him by the chroniclers and which might be because of his regular contacts with the port of Quilon.¹⁸³ It can be inferred that before he returned to West Asia via Aden, Izzuddin's commercial networks had stretched, though might not be limited to, in a China-Malabar axis. Interestingly, it was also the time, when there was a regular exchange of embassies between South India and Yuan China easing the conduct of maritime trade between the regions, and the Muslim merchant under discussion must have benefited a lot from such maritime policies of the time adopted by the Chinese and Indian polities.

The extent of the Muslim participation in the maritime trade between the Malabar Coast and China by the mid-fourteenth century can be discerned from the account of Ibn Battuta, who speaks about West Asian sojourners acting as deputy captains of the Chinese ship-owners (*wakīl al-markab*). The post of the *wakīl al-markab*, as the Moroccan testifies, was of considerable importance and high esteem, and those who held that were accorded royal-like treatment on the Malabar Coast as long as they stayed in their quarters. They acted as the representatives of the Chinese ship-owners, with the duty to administer all the affairs of the Chinese junks, which were marvellous in manufacturing and which were manned by a large number of crews. When the Delhi sultan's delegation under Ibn Battuta was about to depart for China, the Zamorin of Calicut arranged a junk for them from out of the thirteen Chinese junks that had come to the Malabari port, and the *wakīl al-markab* of this officially chosen junk was an Arab from Syria named Sulaiman al-Safadi al-Shāmi.¹⁸⁴ When the Moroccan had some inconvenience with the cabin he got in the junk, Sulaiman arranged another cabin that was already hired by one of his relatives (*sahr*, i.e. son-in-law or brother-in-law). What appears is that Sulaiman was a sojourner for some time in some of the entrepots of China, and because of his intimacy with the ship-owners there, he was hired by them to be the captains of their junks that sailed to Calicut. When he traversed to Malabar, he was joined by some of his relatives, who must have been an assistant of him or a normal merchant

¹⁸² Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Manhal al-safi*, vol. 7, pp. 292-3;

¹⁸³ For the usage of the demonym *al-Kulami*, see for example, Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 9, p. 229; Al-Dhahabi, *al-'Ibar fi khabar*, vol. 4, p. 37.

¹⁸⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 47.

just like others. It is unlikely that the case of Sulaiman was an exception. Instead, there must have been other sojourners from West Asia or the like, who too participated in the maritime trade between Malabar and the Far East by taking up various roles in Chinese junks, apart from normal traders like the aforementioned Khwaja Izzuddin al-Kūlami.

By the mid-fifteenth century, however, the Chinese junks sailing to the Malabar Coast began to disappear. The retreat of the Chinese might have been the result of multiple factors. The last major wave of the Chinese mercantile activity on the Malabar Coast appears to have happened during the Ming maritime expeditions in the early fifteenth century. Nonetheless, these majestic voyages commissioned by the Mings ceased in the 1430s, thus ending the three decades long Chinese imperial dominance over the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean. Concomitantly, there appears to have occurred a drastic change in the attitude of the Zamorins, the sovereigns of the most important entrepot on the Malabar Coast, towards the Chinese merchants. In the early sixteenth century, when the memories of the Chinese people were still extant in Malabar, Joseph of Cranganore remarked about them,

These people are men of remarkable energy, and formerly drove a first-rate trade at the city of Calicut. But the King of Calicut having treated them badly, they quitted that city, and returning shortly after inflicted no small slaughter on the people of Calicut, and after that returned no more.¹⁸⁵

What exactly prompted the rulers of Calicut to turn against the Chinese is not clear from our sources. Yet, it can be assumed that the Ming court's move during the great maritime expeditions to support the course of Cochin, the archenemy of the Zamorins, might have infuriated the rulers of Calicut.¹⁸⁶ Besides, the pre-dominant Muslim traders of Calicut must have tried to persuade their 'patron' on ousting from the port the Chinese who were their crucial competitors in the spice trade of the Malabar Coast.¹⁸⁷ However, the vacuum created by the retreat of the Chinese junks from the coast

¹⁸⁵ Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Henry Yule, John Murray, London, 1903, vol. 2, p. 391n5.

¹⁸⁶ Tansen Sen, 'Maritime Interactions', p. 64.

¹⁸⁷ Yet, it should also be kept in mind that by this time the Southeastern countries had joined the Malabar Coast in producing the sought-after spice items, and as such, from now onwards it was not imperative for the Chinese to cross the Bay of Bengal for purchasing pepper and the like spices.

was eventually filled by the local mercantile community of Malabar, which consisted largely of Muslim merchants. As the account of Tome Pires testifies, the Malabari merchants were involved in trade with the Southeast Asian port of Malacca, which they did by sailing first to a port on the Coromandel Coast like Pulicat and then, accompanying the merchants from those places crossed the Bay of Bengal aiming the Malay Peninsula.¹⁸⁸ Once reached the port of Malacca, they were known not as Malabaris, but as Klings. However, this trade route touching the ports of Coromandel as described by Tome Pires must have been a development that became more relevant after the Portuguese started surveillance in the waters off the Malabar Coast. Portuguese sources themselves report that the important Malabari merchants such as Chirina marakkar and Mamali marakkar had ships that sailed directly to Malacca in the early sixteenth century, which must have been a continuation of the trade pattern of pre-Portuguese days. Besides, the Gujarati ships, in which several Muslim merchants from West Asia accompanied the Gujarati merchants in their back and forth journey, sometimes called at the port of Calicut in their return journey from Malacca to Gujarat and traded in items that they brought in from Southeast Asia and in the locally available commodities such as spices.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, merchants from the Southeast Asian countries also sailed to the Malabar Coast for conducting trade with it as is attested to by Varthema, who in the early sixteenth century claims to have noticed in Calicut several Muslim merchants from such places as Sumatra.¹⁹⁰ In his nautical instructions for the eastern Indian Ocean, Ibn Majid speaks about the departure of an important fleet from Malacca to Calicut on regular basis.¹⁹¹ It is plausible that the great *mu'allim* of the Indian Ocean is alluding to the Gujarati fleet that sailed to the Malabar Coast before proceeding further to Gujarat or the fleet fitted by the Malabari merchants or the merchants from Malacca, Sumatra and the like.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 2, p. 268, 271.

¹⁸⁹ However, the Gujarati ships sometimes visited the Maldives Islands rather than Malabar in their return journey from Malacca to Gujarat. See, *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁹⁰ Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 61.

¹⁹¹ Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation*, p. 233.

¹⁹² We do not have any substantial evidence to prove that the *paradesi* or local merchants of Calicut fitted any special fleet for sailing to Malacca before the sixteenth century in a way fleet was sent back and forth West Asian ports.

2. Coastal Trade Networks

Another important aspect of the commercial networks of Muslims in Malabar is the coastal trade within and outside the Malabar Coast. The Malabar's merchants had coastal-based trade networks stretching as far as Gujarat on western India and Bengal on the eastern side of the subcontinent.¹⁹³ Although the trade with Ceylon and the Maldives and Laccadive Islands was in fact trans-oceanic in nature, it is treated here as part of the coastal trade due to the proximity of those regions with the Malabar Coast. The sources at our disposal begin to reflect considerably on this aspect of trade only from the fifteenth century onwards. However, there are chances of Muslims taking part in Malabar's coastal trade with the neighbouring areas and islands much before the fifteenth century, and in this regard, we have some scanty references. In a Geniza document dating back to the mid-twelfth century, one important Muslim merchant named Sheikh Abul Qasim Ibn Qattan is referred to as traveling between Baruch and Mangalore.¹⁹⁴ This Abul Qasim, who is addressed by a Jewish merchant at Mangalore as 'my lord' with much esteem, was likely involved, as his title *Ibn Qattan* indicates, in the trade of cotton transporting it from Gujarat to the Malabar Coast.¹⁹⁵ Ibn Battuta introduces a merchant magnate named Tajuddin Ibn al-Kūlami, who was very close to the Delhi Sultan Muhammed Ibn Tughluq and was appointed by him as in charge of the famous Gujarati harbour Cambay. While being in Cambay, Ibn al-Kūlami is said to have carried out a brisk trade by dispatching ships (likely owned by him) to various places including the Malabar Coast and earned a good fortune out of that.¹⁹⁶ What appears is that he was one among those who were actively involved in coastal trade with the ports of Malabar, apart from the implications of the merchant's title *Ibn al-Kūlami* that he himself or his father had a close connection with the Malabari port of Quilon. The Moroccan traveller has many other incidental

¹⁹³ Suggestive of Malabar's coastal trade is, for instance, the reference in the Tharisappalli Plates to the small boats at the port of Quilon that must have plied in the local waters from port to port. See, Varier and K. Veluthat, *Tharisappalli Pattayam*, pp. 114-5.

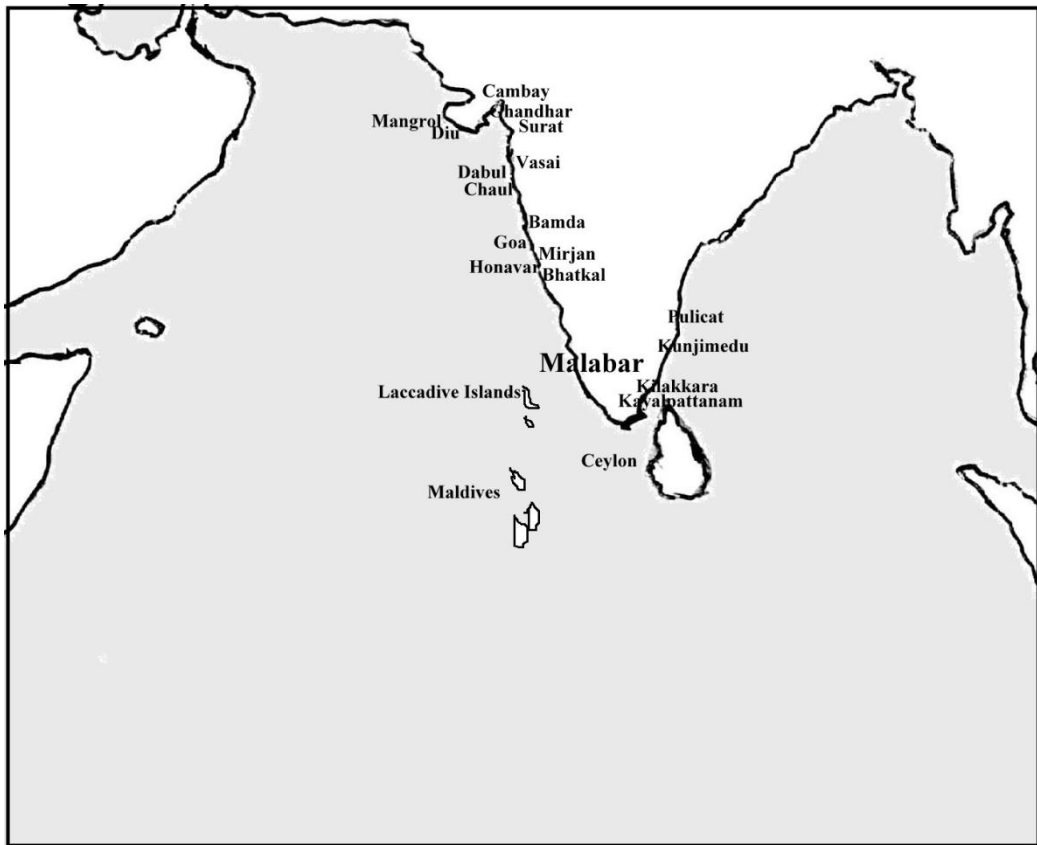
¹⁹⁴ Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 476.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibn Qattan* literally meant son of cotton. From the sources of the fifteenth century, we come to know that by that time cotton trade was one of the main components of the coastal trade between Malabar and Gujarati ports.

¹⁹⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 3, p. 222.

references to the coastal trade of Malabar. Once he happened to travel from Quilon to Honavar in a ship that serviced between those ports.¹⁹⁷ The description of his journey to the Maldives Islands has many indications to the established trade network between those islands and the Malabar Coast. It was in ships, which plied from Calicut to the Maldives that Ibn Battuta entered the islands, where he happened to notice many commodities transported from the Malabar Coast apart from those exported from there to Malabar and the like.¹⁹⁸

Map 4: Ports entrenched into the coastal trade networks of the Malabari Muslim traders in the late 15th century.



¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁹⁸ For Ibn Battuta's travel from Calicut to the Maldives, see, Ibid., p. 53, 98. And for the products transported from or to the islands see, Ibid., p. 55, 59-60, 70, 73.

However, for the coastal trade networks of Malabar as they evolved by the late fifteenth century and the presence of Muslim merchants in them, the early sixteenth-century European writers such as Ludovico di Varthema, Barbosa, and Tome Pires furnish us with the more clear-cut picture.¹⁹⁹ What appears from their accounts is that the major players in the coastal trade by the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries were the local merchants from Malabar rather than the traders from outside. The latter category included the Gujarati and Deccani merchants who imported into the Malabar Coast their own commodities such as cotton cloths while taking back from the coast spices and the like.²⁰⁰ Barbosa counts the Gujarati and Deccani Muslim merchants, who were active in such ports as Calicut, among the *paradesi* Muslims of Malabar. Muslim merchants from Bengal also traded with Calicut as is attested to by Varthema.²⁰¹ From the Coromandel Coast, the most important Muslim group with commercial ties with the Malabar Coast was the Marakkar merchants, who were involved chiefly in transporting such commodities as rice and textiles to Malabar while taking back pepper and other spices. During the course of the fifteenth century, the prominent among these Marakkar merchants appear to have migrated to Malabar and settled permanently on some of its ports. Among those settled in Cannanore was Mamali Marakkar, whom Varthema described as the richest merchant in the country.²⁰² Cochin was the main centre of the Marakkar merchants, and among the most important ones settled there were Cherina Marakkar, Mamali Marakkar, Ahmed Marakkar, Kunhi Ali Marakkar, etc.²⁰³ Cherina Marakkar and Mamali Marakkar are described in European sources as the richest

¹⁹⁹ Both Barbosa and Tome Pires give the impression that by the early sixteenth century, Malabar's coastal trade was dominated by its local Muslim population. Barbosa calls such Muslims as *Mapuleres* (Mappilas). Although the influential Marakkar merchants of the Malabar Coast were outsiders as they hailed from the Coromandel Coast, the European writers did not differentiate them from the Mappila Muslims of the coast likely because by their time the Marakkars had migrated to the ports of Malabar and thus were well entrenched into the Muslim community of the coast. See, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 74-5; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 82.

²⁰⁰ Apart from Barbosa, Varthema also attests to the presence in Malabar of Deccani and Gujarati Muslim merchants. See, Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 61.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 106. See also, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 2, p. 204.

²⁰³ Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 56; Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin*, p. 45.

merchants in the whole of Malabar.²⁰⁴ Another Marakkar merchant of repute, who was also the brother of Cherina Marakkar of Cochin, is reported to have settled in Quilon.²⁰⁵ What appears from the settlement pattern of the Malakkar merchants in Malabar is that during the pre-Portuguese times, they were based in ports other than Calicut, the probable reason being that the latter port was under the dominance of the *paradesi* Muslim merchants. Yet, their coastal trade network must have extended to Calicut too. Although many of the Marakkar merchants eventually migrated to the Malabar Coast and were assimilated to the Malabari Muslim community, their family networks and partnerships extending along the Coromandel Coast helped them to ensure regular supply of rice and other commodities destined for the markets of Malabar.²⁰⁶

Speaking of the coastal trade networks of the Malabari merchants including the Marakkars, Tome Pires noted,

The merchants of Malabar trade as far as Cambay and the Rajputs on the Persian side, and as far as Pulicat on the Coromandel side, and also in Ceylon and the Maldiva (*Diva*) Islands. All the merchants in Malabar who trade on the sea are Moors, and they have the whole of the trade. They are great merchants and accountants.²⁰⁷

Barbosa provides with a more detailed account of the port-cities, with which the Malabari merchants had traded. Their major destination ports on the western coast of India were Surat, Mangrol, Diu, Gogha, Ghandhar, Cambay, Dinuy (near Daman), Vasai, Chaul, Danda Rajpur, Mandaba, Dabul, Sangameshwar, Bamda (Vengorla), Goa, Mirjan, Honavar, and Bhatkal.²⁰⁸ The Portuguese writer reports that the Malabari merchants made enormous fortunes out of transporting spices, areca nuts, coconuts, etc., into these ports and taking back from them such merchandise as horses, cotton and silk cloths, wheat and rice. Whereas, on the Coromandel Coast the important ports entrenched into the coastal trade network of the Malabari merchants were Kilakkara, Kayalpattanam,

²⁰⁴ Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 56; George Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, vol. 2 *India 1541-1545*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, S. J., The Jesuit Historical Institute, Rome, 1977, p. 262n481.

²⁰⁵ Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 1, p. 11.

²⁰⁶ Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India: 1500-1663*, Doctoral Dissertation, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 1998, p. 190.

²⁰⁷ A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 82.

²⁰⁸ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 127-189.

Kunjimedu, Pulicat, etc. from which mostly cargos of rice and cloths were taken to Malabar.²⁰⁹ Besides, Muslim merchants of Malabar also had trade networks with the nearby islands such as Ceylon, Maldives, and Laccadive Islands. They travelled to Ceylon for buying chiefly elephants, cinnamon, and jewels.²¹⁰ Concerning the trade with the Maldives and Laccadive Islands, noteworthy among the Malabari merchants were the Muslim merchants of Cannanore under the leadership of Mamali Marakkar. These merchants supplied those islands with the provisions of food in exchange for the cargos of coir, and their trade network by the end of the fifteenth century appears to have enabled them to gain supremacy over the political affairs of the islands.²¹¹ Moreover, the local Muslim merchants were involved in trade within the various ports on the Malabar Coast. Thus, merchants from the ports of Chaliyam, Calicut, Cannanore, etc. sailed with their ships and boats to what were later known as Canarese ports such as Fākanūr, Mangalore, and Kumbala in order to carry varieties of rice into their homeports.²¹² Likewise, there must have been many local merchants who were involved in transporting commodities between a central port and its satellite ones.

3. The Coming of the Portuguese and the Changing Fortunes

After the entry of the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean waters, there appeared certain changes in the commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar, which are discussed hereafter. What drove the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean waters and entrepots has been a matter of discourse, and a more holistic view tries to approach the subject from various dimensions. Instead of being pre-occupied with the merely materialistic interpretation, scholars now look into other aspects too, such as the religious and idealist motives behind the Portuguese overseas expansion. Thus, C. R. Boxer has put forward four main motives that inspired the Portuguese for the overseas expansion. They are: 1) crusading zeal against the Muslims, 2) the desire for Guinea gold, 3) the

²⁰⁹ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 120-132.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 111-3.

²¹¹ Barbosa attests that in the Maldives islands, the king was chosen by the Muslim merchants of Cannanore, who, in lieu, received annual tributes from the king. See, Ibid., pp. 104-5.

²¹² M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 194-7; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 76.

quest for Pester John and 4) the search for Oriental spices.²¹³ Once succeeded in opening up the way to the realm of the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese endeavoured to put an end to the centuries-long hegemony of the Asians over the maritime trade of the ocean, which due to the involvement of a host of middlemen who took their cuts from the profits had been making the oriental commodities too much expensive throughout the markets of the Europe. Since it was the Muslims who constituted the major element within the Asians undertaking seaborne trade, the religious animosity that was inherited from the years-long crusade wars combined with the material drives to make the Portuguese turn against the Muslim traders not least those from West Asia who were involved in the long-distance trans-oceanic trade. The result was that the Europeans targeted the principal nodal points on the rims of the Indian Ocean where the Muslim merchants were based such as Aden, Hormuz, Calicut, and Malacca. In their attempt to oust the Muslim traders from the trans-oceanic trade of the Malabar Coast, the newcomers resorted to various control mechanisms.²¹⁴ These included the surveillance fleet aimed at patrolling the coast for capturing those ships which were owned by the Muslim merchants trading with West Asia. And with a view to sparing the vessels of those who were in friendship with the Portuguese, there was introduced the *cartaz* system, under which those ships that were not to be plundered were required to carry a certificate or passport duly signed by the Portuguese authorities, namely the royal factor, or the captain of the fortresses. Commenting on the strict surveillance put on the Muslim merchants, Linschoten remarked,

Among these Malabaris the white Mores do inhabite that beleeve in Mohomet, and their greatest traffic is unto the redde sea, although they may not do it, neyther any (other) Indian without the Portingallers passport, otherwise the Portingalles army (which yearly saileth along the coasts, to keepe them cleare from sea rovers) for the safetie of their merchants, finding them or any other Indian or nation (whatsoever) at sea without a passport, would take them for a prize, as oftentimes it happeneth that they bring shippes from Cambaia, Malabar or from the Ile of Sumatra, and other places that traffic to the redde sea.²¹⁵

Another control mechanism was the fixation of prices, by which the Portuguese wanted to get the prices of the various commodities in Malabar fixed by the local rulers,

²¹³ C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1828*, Carcanet Press, London, 1988. p.18

²¹⁴ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp. 9-10.

²¹⁵ Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, vol. 1, pp. 67-8.

whom they initially thought to be the sole owners of the whole merchandise of the place. The Portuguese officials in India were entrusted to involve in diplomatic relations with the local rulers of Malabar for getting the prices fixed, and after much intimidation, they managed to get the prices fixed for quite a long time, though the local merchants were discontent with the under-pricing. Yet another mechanism was that of establishing well-fortified fortresses on the important nodal points to thwart any possible encroachment to their claims of monopoly, and in Malabar, they were able to erect fortresses in Cochin, Cannanore, Quilon, and Cranganore at various points of time. In Calicut and its vicinity too, the Portuguese had managed to build forts, though they could not sustain them. As all such control mechanisms were systematised within a few years of the Portuguese appearance in Asia, Muslim merchants of Malabar, in general, had to suffer as they henceforward missed the freedom of mobility in the Indian Ocean waters which they had been enjoying for long, and their cargo ships were often prone to be caught by the Portuguese armadas.²¹⁶ The *paradesi* Muslim merchants of Calicut, on their part, did their level best in persuading the Zamorins not to allow their Lusitanian enemy establish in the maritime trade of Malabar.²¹⁷ Amid the strict surveillance, the merchants had to find out loopholes in order to carry merchandise from Malabar to the West Asian entrepôts, meanwhile many of them desperately started deserting the Malabar Coast for their own homelands or for safer entrepôts such as Cambay.²¹⁸ Thus, in the year 1511, the Muslims of Calicut sailed to the Red Sea side with many shiploads as they got an opportunity when Manuel de Lacerda, the chief captain of the Portuguese fleet with the duty to cruise off the harbour of Calicut, had left northward for thwarting the Turks who

²¹⁶ We have a pool of contemporary Muslim authors from Malabar, whose accounts are the manifestations of the wrathful feelings of the Muslims when their freedom of mobility was curtailed by the control mechanisms of the Portuguese. See, Sheikh Zainuddin Ibn Ali, *Tahrid ahlil iman 'ala jihadi abadati sulban*, trans. K. M. Mohamed, foreword by Michael N Pearson, Other Books, Calicut, 2012, pp. 51-60; Al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin*, pp. 5-36; Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin*, pp. 36-67.

²¹⁷ Portuguese writers in their characteristic way complained that the foreign Muslim merchants in Malabar, not least those from Cairo, often 'corrupted' the Zamorins and their governors by extending mush bribes to them for fear of losing the trade to the European newcomers. See, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 1, p. 1-2 and vol. 3, p. 34.

²¹⁸ Despite the Portuguese surveillance system, the Muslim merchants of Malabar sometimes managed to escape such obstacles and transported commodities to the Red Sea area. In 1509, six vessels of Calicut merchants are said to have sailed to Jidda laden with the cargos of pepper escaping the Portuguese surveillance system. See, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 2, p. 49.

were approaching to besiege Goa.²¹⁹ Muhammed al-Misri was the most important among this group of *paradesi* merchants who sailed from Calicut in the said year. This Muhammed appears to be a big merchant magnate originally hailing from Egypt, who sojourned at Calicut along with his family and traded with West Asia using the ships that he himself owned. Bras de Albuquerque reports that Muhammed was instrumental in the diplomacy between the Rumis/Turks and the Zamorins of Calicut and in bringing them to India in order to fight against the Portuguese.²²⁰ In 1511, when the Portuguese armadas were out of the waters of Malabar, Muhammed al-Misri, deciding to end his commercial career in India, set out from Calicut to the Red Sea in three of his ships laden with his entire property and family apart from the cargos of spices. However, Al-Misri, like his co-travellers of the same year, lost most of the merchandise in shipwrecks on the way from Calicut to West Asia. Alluding to the retreat of the Muslim merchants like Muhammed al-Misri, Bras de Albuquerque states,

When the Moorish merchants, who lived in Calicut, perceived that their trade and navigation was thus cut off, they departed with their wares, some to Cairo, others to Cambay, others to Ormuz and to other parts, in such wise that very few who were not natives of that place were left remaining in Calicut.²²¹

Bras de Albuquerque speaks about yet another occasion when Calicut's surviving *paradesi* Muslim merchants strove to escape the Portuguese surveillance and carry merchandise to Jidda. This was in 1513 when Calicut merchants set out in six large ships laden with spices aiming Jidda, and since the sailing season of the year was already too late when they got a chance to move out of the Portuguese patrolling, all the ships were struck by severe storm. The merchants were forced to take shelter in some of the ports along the western coast of India such as Chaul, Dabul, Bhatkal, and Mangalore, where all the ships and their cargos were forcefully confiscated by the Portuguese for being ships belonging to 'the enemies of the king' (Dom Manuel I).²²² The final blow to the *paradesi* merchants of Calicut came in 1513, the same year, when Afonso de Albuquerque, the Governor of Portuguese India, managed to replace the existing Zamorin of Calicut who

²¹⁹ Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 33.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-4.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²²² Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 4, pp. 61-2.

was their enemy with a new loyal one through some plot and to get the permission for erecting a fortress at the heart of Calicut. By this time, the Portuguese seemed to have well understood the commercial realities on the Malabar Coast, and the Governor is reported to have stated that by the building of the fortress 'we should drive away out of the land the Moorish agents from Cairo, for they are really the cause of all these troubles'.²²³ Since now the Portuguese surveillance system had reached the very spot which so far was their chief commercial centre in Malabar, the *paradesi* Muslim merchants became hopeless of any more fortunes out of the trade with Malabar and so left one by one for safer entrepôts.²²⁴ Portuguese sources have it that after signing a peace treaty with the new Zamorin, Afonso de Albuquerque gave safe-conducts for the remaining *paradesi* Muslim merchants of Calicut to get out of the port-city forever, and accordingly, the ruler of Calicut provided them and their family with shipping as far as Jidda.²²⁵ It is said that it was in a ship captained by one reputed Muslim merchant of the town named Caliph that the last band of the foreign Muslim merchants sojourning at Calicut left the Malabar Coast for Jidda.²²⁶

However, what appears from a perusal of the Portuguese interventions on the Malabar Coast and their repercussions on the trade networks of the Muslim merchants is that no essentializing approach can be taken in this regard. The contemporary sources evidence that the Portuguese ambition of eliminating absolutely the West Asian elements from the Indian Ocean trade particularly the trade with the Malabar Coast remained unrealized. During the course of the sixteenth century and later, on the Malabar Coast

²²³ Ibid., pp. 65-6.

²²⁴ Afonso de Albuquerque once happened to meet a Muslim merchant who was involved in the seaborne trade between the Red Sea and Calicut and enquired him how West Asian merchants dared to venture from far-off places to Calicut which was sandwiched by Cochin and Cannanore, where were stationed Portuguese fortresses and patrolling armadas. The merchant replied that the profits out of trade with Calicut was so great that they would take any risk to reach the Malabari port and transport from it spices and other merchandise. However, once the Portuguese built a fortress at the very heart of Calicut, it was now deadly for the foreign merchants to conduct any more trade with this port. See, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 34.

²²⁵ Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 4, p. 73; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 48-9, 48n1.

²²⁶ Bras de Albuquerque recalls that the most noteworthy benefit of the fortress in Calicut was that the Portuguese now could curb the flow of the West Asian Muslim merchants to Malabar, one of their most important destinations in India. See, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 4, p. 74.

there were still some of the prominent *paradesi* Muslim merchants from West Asia, who were active in the maritime trade of the coast. Noteworthy among them was Khwaja Shamsuddin al-Jilani who hailed originally from Jilan in Iran. Though he went unnoticed by the indigenous sources, Khwaja Shamsuddin figures in some of the contemporary or near-contemporary European sources. This *paradesi* Muslim was one of the wealthiest merchants of his time who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century basing his commercial operations in Cannanore.²²⁷ While being a merchant magnate, he was also serving as the trusted treasurer of Asad Khan, the most powerful captain of the Adil Shahi sultans of Bijapur, and by the virtue of that, he was bequeathed the whole assets of Asad Khan after the captain's death in 1543, which accounted for some ten millions of gold and which helped him further expand his commercial frontier.²²⁸ The whole wealth was carried to Cannanore, where Shamsuddin kept it safely inside his well-guarded mansion.²²⁹ As a merchant capitalist based in Cannanore, he was also in close contact with the local rulers of what would later revolve as the Arakkal dynasty.²³⁰ The commercial horizon of the merchant was very fascinating: it stretched, apart from the coastal port-cities of India such as Calicut, Cochin, Diu, Bhatkal, Chaul, and Dabul, to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports as well as the Southeast Asian ports.²³¹ In Arabia, it was his brother Abdul Jabbar who looked after Shamsuddin's commercial interests.²³² What appears to have worked to the advantage of this foreign merchant in his successful commercial venture was his attitude, which differentiated him from other contemporary *paradesi* Muslim merchants. Unlike other foreigners, Khwaja Shamsuddin could sustain his wide-ranging trade networks because he rendered in many ways services to the Portuguese commercial and political enterprises in the Indian Ocean realm during the sixteenth century. In the absence of sufficient money and material from their home country, the Portuguese were always depended on the merchant financiers of Europe and

²²⁷ Fariya e Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia*, tom.2, pp. 88.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

²²⁹ K. S. Mathew, 'Khwaja Shams-ud-din Giloni of Cannanore and the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century' in *Winds of Spices; Essays on Portuguese Establishments in Medieval India with Special Reference to Cannanore*, eds. K.S. Mathew and Joy Varkey, IRISH, Tellicherry, 2006, 38-9; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, vol. 2, pp. 399-402.

²³⁰ Fariya e Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia*, tom.2, p. 88.

²³¹ Mathew, 'Khwaja Shams-ud-din Giloni of Cannanore', pp. 36-7.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

India, and Khwaja Shamsuddin was one among the important financiers from India who generously helped the Lusitanians in times of need and who is described by the contemporary Portuguese officials as the richest merchant of India.²³³ In the 1540s, there were many occasions when the merchant extended financial aid to the Portuguese, and sometimes even the Portuguese Governor of India himself visited Shamsuddin's residence at Cannanore for seeking loans.²³⁴ Besides, the merchant helped the Europeans diplomatically. When the Turks as well as the sultan of Gujarat were making plans to fight against the Portuguese, Shamsuddin by the help of his spies and agents residing at the various Red Sea and Indian ports got to know of the move and informed the Portuguese of the same.²³⁵ On account of the valuable helps rendered by this Muslim merchant, the Portuguese as a reciprocity not only allowed him to carry on his maritime trade networks like the one passing through the Red Sea which was not usually permitted to the *paradesi* merchants, but also exempted him from paying customs duties in all the customs houses under their control.²³⁶ It is said that Shamsuddin's vessels were repaired under the supervision of the Portuguese at the port of Cannanore and were given all kinds of protection by them.²³⁷ Thus, in the person of Khwaja Shamsuddin al-Jilani, one can find an exception to the general trend among the *paradesi* Muslim merchants of the time. Yet, he must have been only one among the many such merchant magnets whose services were unavoidable for the Portuguese in order to sustain their commercial and political ventures in Asia. Of the surviving *paradesi* merchants of Calicut was Umar al-Antabi who hailed from Anteb in Turkey and was active in the port of the Zamorins during the second half of the sixteenth century.²³⁸ Umar appears to have been a very influential merchant that he was made the Shahbandar of the harbour at Calicut. Muhammed al-Kalikuti informs us that Umar was one among the prominent men of Malabar who had

²³³ Ibid., p. 36.

²³⁴ In fact there were occasions when the Portuguese arranged plots for extorting the wealth of Shamsuddin, but with the help of his wide-ranging networks, the merchant always evaded all such attempts. See, Ibid., pp. 39-42. See also, Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, vol. 2, pp. 496-8.

²³⁵ Ibid., pp. 38-9.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

²³⁸ For this merchant, see, Al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin*, p. 19, (Arabic text line no. 248).

personally taken part in the Battle of Chaliyam (AD 1571), in which was destroyed the Portuguese fortress at Chaliyam.²³⁹

Moreover, the Portuguese from the very onset of their presence in India had begun to realize that their prospects of establishing hegemony over the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean would remain a dream if they approach all the Muslims on the rims of the ocean with the same 'crusading spirit'. During the early stage of their Asian exploration, the understanding of the local realities in Malabar impelled the Portuguese to resort to a mixed kind of response towards the predominant position of the Muslim merchants in the littorals of the ocean. When the Lusitanians appeared on the Malabar Coast, it was mainly the local Muslims of the coast who supplied the food-deficient region with the basic provisions not least rice and who were an inevitable element in the procurement of spices from the production centres of the interior. The newcomers soon realized this, and thus tried to assimilate those Muslim merchants into their commercial system as partners and collaborators in contrast to the general treatment meted out to the *paradesi* Muslim merchants.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, the local Muslim merchants of Malabar themselves were desirous of expanding their commercial frontiers from the coastal or regional trade to the lucrative trans-oceanic trade with the entrepots of West Asia, which hitherto was dominated by the *paradesi* merchants. As such, the Portuguese idea of eliminating foreign Muslim merchants from the trade of the Indian Ocean seemed well for many of the local Muslim merchants. These merchants, by being partners or collaborators of the Lusitanians, wished to survive their existing commercial networks and to mark their own identity in the long-distant trade with the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports.²⁴¹ Thus, our sources introduce some of the important collaborators of the early decades of the sixteenth century, who actively co-operated with the Portuguese in more

²³⁹ Merchants from Turkey's Anteb continued to be present at Calicut even during the seventeenth century. An inscription (dated AD 1677-78) found in Calicut's Mithqal mosque has it that the pulpit of the mosque was constructed by the chief among the Muslims, Khwaja Shahbandar Umar al-Antabi. See, Desai, *A Topographical List*, p. 102.

²⁴⁰ Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 134.

²⁴¹ However, there were yet many other local Muslim merchants in Malabar not least in Calicut, who from the very beginning itself opposed the Portuguese intervention in the Indian Ocean and saw the fight against them as *jihad*/war against the enemies of their religion. The sentiments of this group of local Muslims are well manifested in the early sixteenth century Arabic poem titled *Tahrid ahlil iman*, which was written by Sheikh Zainuddin Senior (d. 1521) and which invokes *jihad* against the Portuguese.

than one ways. These included Cherina Marakkar, who is said to have begun supplying spices to the Portuguese from 1503 onwards, Muhammed Marakkar, who distributed food materials from the Coromandel Coast to the Portuguese settlements, Mitos Marakkar, who supplied for the Lisbon-bound ships with cinnamon from Ceylon, Coje Mapilla, Abraham Mapilla and Ali Apule, all the latter three procured loads of pepper from the inland markets of Edappally in order to supply them for the Portuguese factory at Cochin.²⁴² Nino Marakkar helped the Lusitanians by supplying cinnamon from Ceylon, and Chilay Marakkar arranged his own ships for the Portuguese in order to transport commodities to Goa.²⁴³ In Calicut, Coje Pakki, who was one of the richest Mappila merchants of the city with many ships and trade, represented the group of collaborators and rendered help to the Europeans in many ways particularly by giving asylum to some of the Portuguese men of the port at times of tragedy.²⁴⁴ On account of the collaboration that the local Muslim merchants of Malabar extended, the Portuguese in reciprocity gave considerable freedom to them in their maritime trade networks, provided that they took *cartazes* or safe-conducts from the Portuguese factors before setting sail. A notable development of the time was that some of the local Muslim merchants of Malabar, who collaborated with the Portuguese in various capacities, started to send their ships as far as the ports of the Red Sea after managing to secure the Portuguese safe-conducts.²⁴⁵ By this, these merchants, in turn, began to fill the gap that had been created by the retreat of the *paradesi* Muslim merchants from the Malabar Coast especially after the Portuguese managed to gain permission for erecting a fortress in Calicut. In the peace treaty of 1513, the Portuguese had formally agreed to the Zamorin's demand that four ships of the local Muslim merchants must be given permission to sail annually from Calicut to Jidda, and accordingly, in the next year's sailing season, the Mappila merchants carried spices in four ships to the Red Sea port.²⁴⁶ In their attempts to strengthen maritime commercial ties with the ports of the Red Sea, the local Muslim merchants of Malabar were extended help

²⁴² Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity', p. 270.

²⁴³ Pius Malakandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 135.

²⁴⁴ Stanley, trans., *The three voyages of Vasco da Gama*, pp. 358-60.

²⁴⁵ Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity', pp. 270-1.

²⁴⁶ Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin*, p. 43; J. W. Wye, 'Translation of a History of the Portuguese Landing in India, Written on Leaves of the Brab Tree, or Ola, in the Malabar Language' *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for the British Indian and Its Dependencies*, 3, 1817, p. 30.

by the private trading lobby among the Portuguese officials, who on the other hand began to develop their own network of private trade penetrating into the ports of the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia.²⁴⁷

However, the trajectory of the trade networks of the local Muslim merchants in Malabar changed significantly from the third decade of the sixteenth century onwards. This was primarily because of the clash of interests between the Muslim traders and the Portuguese. The former's attempts to expand their maritime trade networks to the ports of the Red Sea had posed a great challenge to the latter's claim of royal monopoly over the spice-trade and thus could not be tolerated for long by the Lusitanians. Besides, the end of the tenure of Afonso de Albuquerque in 1515 and the appointment of those governors who advocated less state intervention and more free trade gave great impetus to the private trading lobby among the Portuguese officials.²⁴⁸ Despite the initial rapport between the Portuguese *casado* entrepreneurs and the local Muslim merchants of Malabar, there emerged clash of interest between the two as the former increasingly wished to develop their intra-Asian trade networks, which began to stretch even to the ports of the Red Sea and to challenge the very existence of the local Muslim traders.²⁴⁹ The result was that the *Estado* officials, especially at the instigation of the *casados*, began to exploit the *cartaz* system as a convenient tool for frequently checking and confiscating the vessels of the indigenous merchants so as to weaken their trade networks.²⁵⁰ Such misuse of the *cartaz* system angered the Muslim merchants particularly the Marakkars, who felt as being cheated by the Portuguese and so decided to take revenge against them. The leading Marakkar merchants of Cochin such as Kunjali Marakkar, Ahmed Marakkar, Muhammed Ali Marakkar and Pate Marakkar, who had so far co-operated with the Portuguese at various levels, left Cochin along with their followers and decided to settle for the rest of life in the realm of the Zamorins of Calicut. Meanwhile, the Zamorins of Calicut and their Mappila Muslim subjects were already anguished with the presence of

²⁴⁷ Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity', p. 271; *Idem, Maritime India*, p. 135.

²⁴⁸ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 136.

²⁴⁹ With the increasing involvement of the *casados* in the intra-Asian trade, the Portuguese dependency on the local Muslim merchants for availing provisions of food decreased and therefore the officials could challenge the Muslims' trade with the ports of the Red Sea. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁵⁰ There were instances of confiscating the vessels of the local merchants though they carried the safe-conducts of the Portuguese factors.

the Portuguese off the Malabar Coast ever since the Lusitanians breached the clause of the peace treaty of 1513 that had promised to allow four ships of the Mappilas to set sail annually to the port of Jidda.²⁵¹ As such, the Marakkars were warmly welcomed in Calicut by the Zamorins and his subjects, who would soon hold the former to spearhead their decades-long joint fight against the Portuguese. The lacuna and the fiscal loss to the treasury of the Zamorins created after the retreat of the *paradesi* merchants from Calicut was eventually filled by the Marakkars and their followers, who would spend much of their time and energy in organizing guerrilla warfare and corsair activities against the Portuguese with the support of the Calicut rulers. However, it must be added here that concomitant to the developments in Calicut under the Kunjalis, there were still some of the Muslim merchants belonging to the Marakkar family or Mappilas who continued to undertake commercial activities from Cochin and who sometimes even co-operated with the Portuguese in supplying them with cargos for the Lisbon-oriented maritime trade. The well-known Cherina Marakkar continues to figure in the sources as having trade activities based in Cochin even during the 1530s.²⁵² In a commercial contract of 1560, Cochin's Chaudela Marakkar, Ade Ramao, Ali Poera and Coje Ahmed are seen as taking up to the task of supplying coir annually from the Maldives to the Portuguese factory at Cochin.²⁵³

Moreover, the local Muslim merchants of Cannanore under the leadership of Mamali Marakkar and his descendants had marked an exception to the Muslims of Calicut from the very early sixteenth century onwards. Unlike their counterparts at Calicut who persisted on their adamant opposition to the *Estado da India* until the close of the sixteenth century, Cannanore's merchants preferred to respond cautiously and to adjust themselves to the changing commercial constellation in the Indian Ocean. Understanding that the trade motives of the Portuguese in Asia were not as detrimental to their own commercial interests as they were to that of the *paradesi* merchants, the Muslims of Cannanore decided to cooperate with the newcomer by agreeing to carry the Portuguese *cartazes* or safe-conducts during their sailings. In addition, by siding with the

²⁵¹ The Portuguese are reported to have breached the treaty within few years of its signing when they had finished the construction of their fortress at Calicut. See, Wye, 'Translation of a History of the Portuguese Landing in India', p. 30; Anonymous, *Tuhafi al-mujahidin*, p. 43.

²⁵² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, vol. 2, p. 262.

²⁵³ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 140.

Lusitanians, the merchants along with the Kolathiri Rajas must have contemplated of enriching the trade fortunes of Cannanore at the cost of Calicut. They seemed also not to have chosen to antagonize the Portuguese by openly joining hands with the Muslim traders of Calicut in their guerrilla warfare and corsair activities, and the riots in Cannanore against the Portuguese were rather sporadic and surreptitious occurring only at times when there was any high-handedness on the part of the Portuguese authority.²⁵⁴ As the Portuguese accounts of the early sixteenth century testify, the Mappilas of Cannanore and the surrounding ports by the late fifteenth century were already emerging as a potential mercantile community with substantial political and economic power gained mainly through their hold over the Maldives and Laccadive Islands.²⁵⁵ After the Portuguese intervention, their pragmatic approach towards the changing commercial realities helped the Mappilas to develop an alternative commercial network via the Maldives, which extended to the port of the Red Sea and which bypassed the Lusitanian control mechanisms, and it was the wealth generated out of this alternative commercial network which eventually facilitated the Ali Rajas of Cannanore to carve out a thalassocracy of their own sidelining the traditional rulers of the region Kolathiris.²⁵⁶ Scholars working on the Venetian economy of the sixteenth century such as Frederic C. Lane have shown that the traditional Venetian trade supplying the spice products of the Orient to the markets of the West using such emporiums as Alexandria and Beirut had once again revived from the 1540s.²⁵⁷ It can be assumed that this revival was possible to a large extent because of the presence of an alternative spice route via the Maldives, which evaded the control system of the Portuguese *Estado da India* and in which one of the major actors happened to be the Muslim merchants of Cannanore.

What we saw in the preceding pages are the various sorts of maritime trade networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar. In the westward trade, the chief destination of the merchants was the Persian Gulf ports as long as the Abbasid Caliphate

²⁵⁴ Binu John, *Lords of the Sea*, p. 58.

²⁵⁵ See, A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 77; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 81, 104-5.

²⁵⁶ Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, pp. 139-40.

²⁵⁷ Fredric C. Lane, 'The Mediterranean Spice Trade: Further Evidence of its Revival in the Sixteenth Century', *The American Historical View* 45, No. 3, April 1940, pp. 581-90.

had a centralised political structure. However, with the disintegration of the Caliphate polity and the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt, the orientation of maritime trade underwent major change as in the subsequent centuries the chief destination of the merchants from Malabar was the entrepots in the Red Sea region. In the early fifteenth century, the position of the merchants from Malabar in the maritime trade of the western Indian Ocean was such that they could bring a diminishing role to the hitherto flourishing entrepot Aden and pave the way for the rise of Jidda when they felt more convenience in the latter port. In Malabar's eastward trade also, Muslim merchants appeared to have played important role. Early, this was as part of the long-distance China trade and then mainly through the agency of the merchants sojourning in Malabar or China. The commercial frontier of the local Muslim merchants in Malabar was the ports on the eastern and western coasts of India and the nearby islands. However, after the arrival of the Portuguese and the subsequent retreat of the *paradesi* merchants from Malabar, the local merchants increasingly took up the trans-oceanic trade too. Yet, due to clash of interest with the Lusitanians, a fraction of the merchants turned to be archenemies of them while others strove to find alternative channels of trade to carry on their maritime trade networks. Although most of them left the coast for safer ports, there were still some of the *paradesi* Muslim merchants active in the maritime trade of Malabar during the course of the sixteenth century. What induced them to continue to conduct trade in Malabar must be the reckonable proceeds that they used to get from such trade, which are discussed in the following chapter while observing the aspects of the volume and value of the Muslim trade.

Chapter III

The Circulation of Commodities and the Organization of Muslim Trade

This chapter understands the circulation of commodities between Malabar and its overseas lands through the networks of the Muslims. By pondering on such sources as the Geniza letters, *Nur al-ma'ārif*, and other chronicles from West Asia, it tries to find out the various items of commodities which were in transmission, and their possible values and volumes. What is shown is that the profits of the merchants out of their trade in such commodities as spices and horses were substantial, which in turn continued to prompt them to sustain their trade networks despite the huge shipping risks and the high customs and tolls. Organizational aspects of the Muslim trade are also investigated here. The section addresses such issues as the categories and hierarchization among the Muslim merchants, the agency of sojourning merchants, the enigma of the Kārini merchants in the eastern trade, and the mechanisms that helped to sustain commercial networks. Besides, it also analyses the employment of slave-agents, one of the main features in the organization of Muslim trade in Malabar. All these are done mainly by making use of the sources from outside, not least the Arabic ones.

1. The Circulation of Commodities

The wide-ranging commercial networks of the Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast facilitated the transmission of various sorts of commodities from and to the coast. It is true that India was largely a self-sufficient land without much need to depend on the import of foreign products. Nonetheless, its surplus products not least the spices and textiles were highly demanded in the foreign markets and therefore were transported through the maritime trade networks. Besides, Malabar's geographical position vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean made it witness the transmission of many sorts of foreign commodities

as the entrepôts of the coast were regarded by the seaborne traders as best stopovers and transshipment points. What will appear from a perusal of the circulation of commodities from and to Malabar is that despite the changes in the port orientation of both the coast and its forelands, the items of wares in transmission were not subject to substantial changes. Before beginning the discussion, it must be admitted that the sources at our disposal, though they name the products circulated through maritime trade routes, do not give adequate information with regard to the quantitative aspects of the commodities in circulation during the period under study. Although the medieval travellers often speak about the products found on the Malabar Coast, it is tough to comprehend whether or not those products had entered into the maritime trade of the Muslim merchants. All the more entangling is the task of distinguishing the products specific to the maritime trade of Malabar from among the commodities that are ascribed by the sources generally as coming from or reaching India. Yet, some sort of qualitative and quantitative data about the commodities on the move can be gathered by deeply engaging with such sources as the Geniza papers and the chronicles and administrative accounts from West Asia.

To begin with, all of our sources unanimously demonstrate that pepper constituted the most important and largest single item exported from the Malabar Coast through the trans-oceanic and coastal trade routes. The fame, which the coast had among the foreigners as the *bilad al-fulful* (“the pepper land”) much before it began to be known as Malabar, is a testimony to that pepper was an import item of the maritime trade emanating from the coast. For the large span of time out of the period under review, the hinterlands of Malabar were the only principal source of pepper in the world, and even after the beginning of its production in Southeast Asian lands, Malabar pepper was highly demanded due to its better quality.¹ Late in the fifteenth century, it was mainly the thirst to procure pepper from its source of origin rather than from the host of intermediaries, which induced the Portuguese to undertake their Asian exploration. On the production and collection of pepper in Malabar Ma Huan remarked, ‘The people mostly establish gardens to cultivate pepper for a living. Every year when the pepper is ripe, of course, big pepper-collectors of the locality make their purchases and establish warehouses to store

¹ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 227.

it; [then] they wait until the foreign merchants from various places come to buy it'.² The *Beledi* ginger mainly from the surroundings of Calicut and the *Dely* ginger from Cannanore region were the types of ginger exported from the Malabar Coast.³ The other important spice items exported from the coast were cinnamon (though not of better quality), cardamom, myrobalans, tamarind, etc.⁴ Among the palm-tree products of export were dried coconut, areca nut, coir, coconut oil, etc.⁵ Commodities like teak, bamboo, etc. were exported to the West Asian ports where they were used for construction purposes.⁶ Among the most important items of import to the Malabar Coast were varieties of rice, wheat, cotton and silk cloths, opium, etc. which were transported from the western and eastern coasts of India chiefly by the local Muslim merchants.⁷ Besides, there is a long list of commodities that were taken to the Malabar Coast for the transshipment purpose: many drug items from Southeast Asia,⁸ cinnamon and elephant from Ceylon,⁹ coir and dried fish from the Maldives and Laccadive Islands,¹⁰ horses, frankincense, etc. from Arabia,¹¹ silk, porcelain, ironware, coloured beads, etc. from China,¹² precious stones like ruby, diamond, sapphire, topaz, jacinth, etc. from wide-range of areas like Ceylon, and so on.¹³ Moreover, considerable amounts of precious

² J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, p. 135.

³ For the types of ginger grown in Malabar, see, M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 228; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 83.

⁴ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 77; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 83.

⁵ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 90-2; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, pp. 83-4.

⁶ Simon Digby, 'The Maritime Trade of India', p. 147.

⁷ Fei Hsin, *Hsing-Ch'a*, p. 66; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 128-9, 159, 169-70, 185-6, 194-7, vol. 2, p. 121, 125, 132; A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, pp. 76-7.

⁸ William Brooks Greenlee, trans., *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, Hakluyt Society, London, 1967, pp. 93-4; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, p. 93.

⁹ W. B. Greenlee, trans., *The Voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral*, p. 93; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1,

¹⁰ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 104-5, 108.

¹¹ Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 49,

¹² M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, p. 129; Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 418-9; Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 42, 47.

¹³ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 217-25.

metals like gold and silver and base metals for the brass industry were imported to the ports of Malabar.¹⁴

As for the quantitative aspects of the commodities in circulation, although they often asserted that Muslim merchants earned substantial profits out of taking part in the maritime trade of the Malabar Coast, the medieval accounts have furnished very little data about the values of the various commodities taken to and from the coast. Yet, some rough idea about the values of certain commodities and the profits the merchants made from them can be gauged from the cursory references found in the available sources. Studies on the prices of eastern commodities such as pepper in the Egyptian markets have shown that there were considerable disparities in their prices from year to year due to various reasons.¹⁵ This would, in turn, imply that the prices of those commodities in their sources of origin such as the marts of the Malabar Coast were subject to fluctuations due to the possible effect of the demand-price relationship. However, the periodic differences in the prices might not have necessarily been always in an ascending or descending order; instead, they must have returned to the same level after some years' increase or decrease. It appears that transactions in Malabar were carried out both by barter and cash. The market system, at least in Calicut, was such that first, the money-prices of the commodities brought to the market from the hinterlands and forelands were fixed with meticulous care, and then the merchandises were exchanged either by paying cash or by bartering goods.¹⁶ Various sorts of coins were available locally on the Malabar Coast. An important one among them was *panam* which was of gold and which was found in the different ports of the coast with varying intrinsic value. The exchange value of it during the early sixteenth century in Calicut, Cochin, and Cannanore was such that 19 *panams* formed one Portuguese *cruzado* or one Venetian ducat.¹⁷ For the payment purpose, the

¹⁴ Roderich Ptak, 'Wang Da-Yuan on Kerala', p. 47; Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, pp. 418-9; M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, p. 47, vol. 2, p. 77.

¹⁵ See for example, E. Ashtor, 'Spice Prices in the Near East in the 15th Century', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1, 1976, pp. 26-41.

¹⁶ See Ma Huan's description in J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, pp. 140-1.

¹⁷ Pius Malekandathil, 'Merchants, Markets and Commodities: Some Aspects of Portuguese Commerce with Malabar' in *The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and European Bridgeheads 1500-1800: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. K. S. Mathew*, eds. Pius Malekandathil and J. Muhammed, Institute for Research in Social Science and Humanities of MESHAR, Tellicherry, 2001, p. 244.

merchants who brought various foreign coins such as Egyptian Dinar, Venetian Ducat, and Gujarati *Tangas* had to seek the help of moneychangers for getting those coins exchanged for the local *panam* and the like coins.¹⁸ Pepper and horse are the two merchandises, about the prices of which our sources have left at least some data and which were among the high-value goods in transmission through the trade networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar. A perusal of those data would help us in understanding the profits that the medieval merchants had accumulated through their trade. To know the profits of the trade, it is necessary to have clue about the prices prevailing not only in the marts of Malabar but also in the port-cities of its forelands such as Aden and Jidda. All the more complicating is the fact that the prices of the same commodities and their weights within the Malabar Coast had varied from place to place.¹⁹ Yet, we shall take the case of a major port-city like Calicut as a vantage point to look into the range of fortunes made by the medieval merchants.

Afonso de Albuquerque is reported to have been told once by one of the Muslim traders from Malabar who used to visit the ports of West Asia that the profit they gained from the spice trade was so great that for every *cruzado* spent in Calicut they used to get twelve or thirteen in the ports of the Red Sea.²⁰ It meant that the Muslim merchants were making almost 1200-1300% profit out of their trade with the ports of the Red Sea. Notwithstanding the possibilities of exaggeration by the Portuguese writer in giving such a huge figure, an examination of the actual profits shows that the proceeds of the maritime trade was not far below such estimates. As far as the price of pepper in Malabar before the European intervention was concerned, Barbosa in the early sixteenth century recorded that during the days when *paradesi* Muslim merchants were active in the spice trade of Calicut, pepper at Calicut was sold for 200-230 *fanam* per *bahar* (208.15 kgs).²¹

¹⁸ Varthema has praised the cunningness of Calicut's moneychangers. See, Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 67.

¹⁹ Ma Huan's account of commodity prices in Malabar clearly demonstrates the variations in the price of pepper in Cochin and Calicut. See, J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, p. 135, 143.

²⁰ It is reported by the Portuguese Governor's son Bras de Albuquerque. See, Walter de Gray Brich, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, p. 34.

²¹ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, p. 227. *Bhar* was the weight used in large trading transactions throughout maritime Asia, and it varied in from place to place. In Malabar itself,

Whereas M Huan in the early fifteenth century had noted that in Calicut one *po-ho* (i. e. *bahar*) of pepper was sold for 200 *fanam*.²² This indicates that even after the passage of almost one century, Calicut's pepper price had remained same without any considerable change.

19 *panam* = 1 ducat

200 *panam* = 10.5 ducats

200 *panam* would be equal in value to 10.5 Portuguese *cruzados* or Venetian ducats, which corresponds to 8.6 Egyptian *dinars* of the time.²³ If in Calicut one *bahar* pepper's price c. 1400s was 10.5 ducats/8.6 *dinars*, then what must have the merchants got when the commodity was taken into the Red Sea ports such as Aden and Jidda? We do not have the kind of data on the prices of pepper in these ports that are available for the Egyptian entrepots like Alexandria. Yet incidental references can give us some clue. The Egyptian writer Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani reports that in the year 1413, pepper was sold in Jidda for 35 *dinars* per 100 *mann* (one *mann* equals to 0.8125 kg).²⁴ As per this detail, one *bahar* (208.15 kgs) of pepper must have been sold in Jidda during the said year for 89.6 *dinars*. This suggests that during the early fifteenth century a merchant who took one *bahar* of pepper in Calicut for 8.6 *dinars* would be able to sell the same volume in Jidda for almost 90 *dinars*, which was 1000% of what was spent in Calicut. But, those *paradesi* Muslim merchants who at this point of time (before Calicut's ships started bypassing Aden to venture as far as Jidda) confined their trade between Malabar and Aden and did not go up to Jidda, would not have got at the Yemeni port the same range of money. Yet, it can be safely assumed that their proceeds must have been very near to the same range, viz. around 1000% of what was spent in Calicut. Interestingly, if some

its weight was different in various ports. In Calicut, it was calculated to be equal to 208.15 kgs. See, Mathew, *Maritime Trade of the Malabar Coast*, p. 340.

²² J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, p. 143.

²³ One ducat was equal in value to 0.82 Egyptian *dinar* (which was current before the introduction of Ashrafi gold coin in 1425), and so 10.5 ducats would be 8.6 *dinars*. See, J. L. Bacharach, 'The Dinar versus the Ducat', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1, January 1973, p. 96.

²⁴ Ibn Har al-Asqalani, *Inbā' al-gumr bi abnā' al-umr*, 4 vols, al-Majlis al-A'la li-Shu'n al-Islamiyya, Egypt, 1969, vol. 2, p. 521. One Egyptian *mann* was equal in value to 0.8125 kg. See, Ashtor, 'Spice Prices in the Near East', p. 27.

merchants had carried their journey further into the Egyptian marts in the same year (1413), then their profits would have been even more amazing because there during that year pepper's price per *himl* (almost equal in weight to Calicut's *bahar*²⁵) was 220 *dinars*, which was a quite abnormal price in Egypt.²⁶

However, pepper price in the pre-fifteenth century phase seemed not to have been as high as what we have seen for the fifteenth century. Although we do not have any precise data about the prices in Malabar for that period, some idea can be derived from the prices prevailing at the port of Aden. From a Geniza document of c. 1140-45, we know that one *bahar* of pepper arriving at Aden during that time costs 7 *mithqals* (Egyptian *dinars*).²⁷ *Bahar* mentioned in the Geniza documents, however, was far less in weight compared to the *bahar* of Calicut of later period.²⁸ If we consider the given price figure in accordance with the weight of Calicut's *bahar*, then it would appear that in the mid-twelfth century pepper's cost at Aden per *bahar* (208 kgs) was 10.7 *mithqals*.²⁹ From another Jewish letter of c. 1199, we read that pepper price per *bahar* at Aden was 52 *Maliki dinars*, which after converting in accordance with the weight of Calicut's *bahar* would be 17.6 *mithqals*.³⁰ Then, after the passage of almost one century, *Nur al-ma'arif* talks about 48 *ratal*s of pepper being bought at Aden sometime in the late thirteenth century for a total of 12 *Maliki dinars*.³¹ This can be converted as per the weight of Calicut's *bahar* into 28.8 *mithqals* (per *bahar* of 208 kgs).³² Thus, these figures from

²⁵ One *himl* was equal in weight to one Venetian *sporta*, which corresponded to 210-216 kgs. See, Ashtor, 'Spice Prices in the Near East', p. 27.

²⁶ Ashtor's study of spice prices of Egypt during the fifteenth century has shown that pepper price in the Egyptian marts went beyond 200 *dinars* only in one or two times. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

²⁷ Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 649. Typical Egyptian *dinars* were equal to the weight of *mithqal*, and therefore they were often called *mithqals*.

²⁸ *Bahar* of the Geniza letters usually weighed 300 pounds (i. e. 136 kgs). See, *Ibid.*, p. xviii (preface).

²⁹ If 7 *mithqals* was the price of 300 pound/ 136 kgs of pepper, then 208 kgs of the commodity would require 10.7 *mithqals*.

³⁰ The exchange value of *Maliki dinar* with the Egyptian *dinar* around this time was 4.5:1. See, Ibn al-Mujawir, *Sifat bilad al-yemen*, p. 164. When 52 *Maliki dinars* are converted, it would be equal to 11.5 *Egyptian dinars*. If 11.5 *mithqal* was the price of 300 pound/ 136 kgs of pepper, then 208 kgs of the commodity would require 17.6 *mithqals*.

³¹ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol. 1, pp. 542-3.

³² One Baghdadi *ratal* was around 400 g. See, Eric Vallet, *L'Arabie marchande: État et commerce sous les sultans rasūlides du Yémen (626-858/1229-1454)*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2010, p. 838. 48 *ratal*s

Aden, viz. 10.7 (c. 1140-5), 17.6 (c. 1199) and 28.8 (c. 1290) *dinars* show that though the price of pepper increased with the passage of time, it was not as high as 90 *dinars* of the early fifteenth century, and a similar development must have happened in the case of pepper price in Malabar too.

Trade in horse appears to be one of the extremely profitable businesses of the Muslim merchants in Malabar. Unlike the case of pepper, it was an import trade which catered to the military requirements of the land-based South Indian polities, who were looking towards the war-horses from Persia and Arabia as vital military material for maintaining the balance of power. However, the role of the local polities of Malabar in this trade was, rather than themselves being customers for the horses, facilitating the transportation of the imported horses from their respective ports to the inland polities such as Hoysala and Vijayanagara dynasties. This role seemed to have prompted the Rasulids of Yemen, whose entrepot of Aden had been one of the important outlets for the Arabian and Persian horses, to be exceptionally in close relationship with the local rulers of Mangalore, Fākanūr, and Cannanore. As we already saw, these rulers, unlike their counterparts in the southern Malabar region, were annually sent gifts from Aden so that they continue to facilitate the supply of horses for the Hoysalas and later for the Vijayanagara rulers. As facilitators for the import of a decisive material, the local rulers of Mangalore, Fākanūr, and Cannanore accumulated a large sum of money in the form of customs on the imported horses. Our sources shed light on the huge tax imposed on the import of horses to these port-cities. *Nūr al-ma'ārif* has it that in Mangalore merchants had to pay 400 *mīnīs* for every young horse devoid of any fault, whereas in Fākanūr a fresh horse was levied 450 *mīnīs*.³³ The Yemeni chronicle itself has explained what these *mīnīs* were. The *mīnī* was the local gold coin prevailing in such places as Honavar, Fākanūr, Mangalore, Hīlī, Jurfattan and Fandarayana, and its exchange value with the Egyptian *mithqal* was 2.25:1 (2.25 *mīnīs* were equal to one *mithqal*).³⁴ Converting the

would be 19.2 kgs, and 12 *Maliki* dinars would be equal to 2.6 *mithqals*. If 19.2 kgs of pepper cost 2.6 *mithqals*, then 208 kgs would require 28.8 *mithqals*.

³³ Jāzīm, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, p. 265.

³⁴ *Nūr al-ma'ārif* discusses it in the section where it details the currencies prevailing in all the major coastal areas of India entrenched to the maritime trade network of Yemen. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 261-2. The chronicle has also given a simplified exchange rate; one *mīnī* was half of the Egyptian *mithqal*. See, *Ibid.*, p. 265.

mānī rate into *mithqal*, it would appear that Mangalore levied 177.7 *mithqals* on each fine horse and Fākanūr did 186.6 *mithqals*. These figures of customs on horses look extremely high comparing with the other high-value products in circulation such as pepper. However, in the case of the more southern ports Hīlī and Jurfattan, *Nur al-ma'ārīf* does not state the exact taxes levied; instead, it says that there horses were not imported in large numbers.³⁵ The reason behind the merchants' aversion towards these ports must have been the difficulties of inland transportation via the passes of the Western Ghats. Varthema's account, however, furnishes us with the tax rate of Cannanore: each horse was paid twenty-five ducats before they were taken to Vijayanagara through the mainland.³⁶ If only 25 ducats (roughly 20 *mithqals*) was Cannanore's customs duty on horses even in the early sixteenth century, then that may indicate to the tactic move of its rulers, viz. to attract more horse trade to their port by levying comparatively less customs on the merchandise. It was not only the Malabar ports which levied huge taxes on horses, but also the Rasulids themselves were collecting similar amount for transporting horses through their ports. If we believe *Nur al-ma'ārīf*, the Yemeni rulers were imposing a customary tax of 800 *Maliki dinars* (around 177 *mithqals*) on each horse bought by the merchants at Aden in the second half of the thirteenth century.³⁷ As for the profit of the merchants involved in the horse trade, it appears that if they imported horses from West Asia to Malabar despite the huge taxes imposed in the outlets on both the sides and other risks of transportation, their proceeds must have been enormous. The Yemeni chronicle has given a list of prices, by which were bought horses in Yemen during the late thirteenth century. The prices were 2000, 1600, 1500, 1400, 1300 and 1200 *Maliki dinars* (corresponding to 444, 355, 333, 311, 288 and 266 *mithqals* respectively) varying as per the quality of horses.³⁸ Although we do not have any details about the contemporary prices on the Malabar Coast, Marco Polo has spoken of the prices on the Coromandel Coast, which must have been almost same in Malabar too. The merchants of Coromandel, who are often praised by *Nur al-ma'ārīf* for they were the biggest horse customers in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁶ Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema*, p. 50.

³⁷ Jāzīm, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārīf*, vol. 1, pp. 189-90. The account says that the same amount of tax was collected from all types of horses. This statement however looks problematic, and more corroborative accounts are called for.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

Yemen,³⁹ used to get some 500 *saggi* of gold (around 500 *mithqals*) for a horse of average quality, and this price might increase or decrease as per the quality of horses.⁴⁰ This indicates that even after reducing the costs of customs, a merchant who took some number of horses to India would get large sums of *mithqals* as profit, and due to substantial yearly demand for horses from the cavalry based polities of India, there were chances for increasing the fortunes on a constant basis. As Wassaf testifies, all the more promising for the horse traders was the assurance given by the Indian rulers that ‘if any horses should sustain any injury during the voyage, or should happen to die, the value of them should be paid from the royal treasury’.⁴¹

With regards to the aspect of the volume of trade, our sources are even more fragile, and we have to depend upon some vague references. The early sixteenth century estimations of the Europeans about the quantitative aspects of spice production in Malabar may give us some clue to the volume of commodities in circulation through the trade networks of the Muslim merchants in the pre-European phase. Though there are problems with these estimations as they were incomplete due to the inaccessibility of proper data, they could be relied on as they were made at a time when Malabar’s spice production was not yet substantially affected by the entry of the Portuguese. Tome Pires noted that annually in Malabar around 20,000 *bahars* (c. 3628738 kgs.) of pepper and 2,000 quintals of ginger were produced. Other estimations show that by 1519, the annual pepper export from Cochin to Lisbon was 56,000 quintals.⁴² In the pre-Portuguese phase also, cargo of pepper closer to this figure must have been exported especially through the Muslim trade networks. Studies on the volume of the Italian trade in the Mediterranean region have shown substantial quantities of spice being exported from the Egyptian and

³⁹ Once the chronicle says, ‘among the whole Indians, nobody would reach near to the *suliyans* (merchants of Coromandel) in the purchasing of horses’. See, *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁰ Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 386. As the commentators of Polo have suggested, the Venetian traveller used *saggi* of gold to express the Egyptian *mithqal* of the time. See, Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition*, 2 vols., Dover Publications, New York, 1993, vol. 2, p. 217. In the early sixteenth century, Tome Pires notes that in Goa the price of a horse was around 800 *pardao*, and each *pardao* consisted of 335 *reis*. See, A. N. Cortesão, ed. and trans., *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, vol. 1, p. 58. 800 *pardao* would be equal in value to around 560 *mithqals*, a little more than what Polo noted for two centuries ago.

⁴¹ Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India*, vol. 3, p. 33.

⁴² Pius Malekandathil, ‘Muziris and the Trajectories’, p. 355.

Syrian emporia to Europe.⁴³ Of course, a major share of those spices must have been from the Malabar Coast transported by, among others, the Muslim merchants involved in maritime trade. While traveling in the late twelfth century through the Egyptian deserts located between the ports of Qus and Aydhab, Ibn Jubair was astonished to see myriad of caravans that were transporting cargos from India to Qus, and alluding to the brisk trade in Indian spices the traveller commented,

Most of what we saw (en route) was loads of pepper, which due to its abundance seemed to be equal in value to the soil. It was amazing to see loads of pepper, cinnamon and other goods left without anyone to guard them either for feeding the camels carrying those loads or for some other reasons. And until their owners come to take them, those loads would remain there without any damage and despite many people passing through that way.⁴⁴

The Geniza documents provide us with some sort of quantitative data on the volume of commodities transported by the Muslim merchants. However, what they furnish us is the details of just a fraction of their trade, viz. that which was somehow related to the contemporary Jewish merchants being active between Malabar and West Asia, and as such, they do not help us to draw any substantial inference. Speaking of the bygone days of the *paradesi* trade in Calicut, Barbosa noted that every monsoon there used to sail from the port ten or fifteen ships laden with loads of spices towards the Red Sea ports.⁴⁵ These ships, as the Portuguese writer himself describes, were keeled ones with a capacity of about two hundred tons. Barbosa's statement seems not to contain any exaggeration because, as we have already seen, *nākhudā* Ibrahim of Calicut had gone to Jidda in the company of fourteen ships while he was in his fourth attempt to bypass Aden and pave the way to the Hijazi port.⁴⁶ Those fourteen ships, which Ibrahim took to Jidda in the early fifteenth century only when he was confident of the safety of the route and anchorage, must have been typical of the kind of ships Barbosa described, and therefore must have carried huge cargo of spices. But, we do not have any idea of which items of spices were they and what were their respective volumes. The story of Timraz al-Muayyadi, the rebel Emir of Mamluki court who fled to Calicut in 1450 with 30,000 *dinars* belonging to the sultan, appears to confirm Barbosa's statement with regards to the

⁴³ See, Mathew, *Maritime Trade of the Malabar Coast*, pp. 43-4.

⁴⁴ Ibn Jubair, *Rihlatu Ibn Jubair*, pp. 39-40 (Translation mine).

⁴⁵ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 1, pp. 76-7.

⁴⁶ Ibn Fahad, *Ithāfal-warā*, vol. 3, pp. 620-1.

tonnage of the ships used by the *paradesi* Muslim merchants of Malabar. Timraz was forced by the Zamorin to buy pepper for the whole wealth of the Egyptian sultan, and accordingly, the spice was bought and transported in two ships of Calicut's merchants, the remaining load being put in the ship that he had bought at Jidda from an Indian merchant in order to flee from there. If we believe it, then what he could have bought at Calicut with 30,000 *dinars* must be pepper of around five hundred and a half tons assuming the port's pepper price as 200 *panam* in those times.⁴⁷ This much load of pepper in terms of weight could be transported only in two full ships of Calicut (each worth 200 tons) and some space of another one, and the same was exactly what Timraz had done. However, our knowledge of the quantitative aspects of the commodities in circulation during the pre-Portuguese phase, despite the random inferences shown above, still awaits more enlightenment especially with the exploration of new source materials pertaining to the subject.

2. The Organization of Muslim Trade

In the organization of Malabar's maritime trade, various types of Muslim merchants were involved. On the one hand, there were the local Muslim merchants who consisted of those who were born on the Malabar Coast and were indigenous to the land (known as Mappilas) and those who had migrated from the nearby Coromandel Coast and settled on the ports of Malabar permanently. The most important among the latter category were the Marakkar merchants, who by the late fifteenth century had in considerable numbers migrated to and settled down on such Malabari ports as Cochin and Cannanore. The contemporary sources do not differentiate this migrant Marakkar family from the indigenous Muslims of Malabar likely because they had been assimilated in the course of time to the indigenous Mappila Muslim community. It might be this assimilation, which ultimately helped the Kunjali Marakkars of Calicut to gain the support of the Mappilas in their fight against the Portuguese. By the time the Europeans

⁴⁷ The *dinars* brought by Timraz must have been Ashrafi *dinar* of the fifteenth century, the exchange value of which with the Venetian ducats was 0.97:1. See, Mathew, *Maritime Trade of the Malabar Coast*, p. 342. 30,000 *dinars* would be equal to 29100 ducats, with which 2,771 *bahars* of pepper could be bought if Calicut's price was 10.5 ducats.

entered the Indian Ocean to bring re-orientations in its maritime trade, Malabar's coastal trade was dominated by the local Muslim merchants, who often benefited from the family affiliations and religious commonalities in their trade with the several ports on the western and eastern coasts of India. On the other hand, in the trans-oceanic maritime trade of Malabar, it was the foreign Muslim merchants (known as *paradesi* Muslims) belonging to diverse geographical origins who played a major role for a quite long time during the period under study. Conventionally, the foreign Muslim diaspora in Malabar is conceived as those Arab merchants who lived temporally on the Malabar Coast awaiting proper monsoon winds for the further or return journey. However, this is a very selective interpretation of the Muslim diaspora in medieval Malabar. A perusal of the contemporary sources calls for a wider understanding of the identity and formation of the foreign Muslim merchants in Malabar.

Philip D. Curtin in his study of cross-cultural trade across the world has suggested that trade diasporas usually included two types of merchants: those 'who moved and settled and those who continued to move back and forth'.⁴⁸ While dealing with the Muslim trade diasporas of medieval Malabar, both of these types, viz. stayers and movers have to be considered. On the one hand, there were those foreigners of the West Asian origin who called at the ports of Malabar during their long-distance journey back and forth the ports of West Asia and the Far East or who sailed between the entrepôts of West Asia or the Far East and the Malabar Coast. Such merchants based their commercial operations somewhere in West Asia or the Far East and then sailed back and forth the Malabar Coast. They stayed on the ports of Malabar temporally for some months as they awaited their return or further journey, and during the days of their stay, the merchants were involved in exchange activities such as purchasing the locally available spices or selling the merchandise that they had carried to the coast. These merchants made their way to and from Malabar by fitting their own ships or by utilizing the shipping service of other merchants traveling in the same route. Many instances of this type of moving merchants have survived in our sources, and those have already been mentioned in the foregoing discussions. While Mardanshah was a Persian Muslim merchant who based his

⁴⁸ Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 2.

commerce in the Persian Gulf region and used to trade in the ninth-tenth centuries with the ports of Malabar using his own ships,⁴⁹ Khwaja Daywana al-Kīlānī was another merchant of Persian origin who traded in the fifteenth century with Calicut making use of the shipping service of *nākhudā* Ibrahim of Calicut.⁵⁰ Most of the fifteenth century merchants, whose biographical details found in such contemporary Arab accounts as *al-Durr al-kamīn* of Ibn Fahad (d. 1480) and *al-Dhaw' al-lāmi'* of Al-Sakhavi (d. 1497) describe them as having trade with the ports of Malabar, are those who had based their ventures somewhere in the Red Sea region (mostly Mecca) and then sailed back and forth the Malabar Coast. These moving merchants, as they stayed in Malabar temporally and were not in a position to procure spices and other merchandise on the right time, had to employ their servants or slave-agents in the ports of Malabar or seek the help of local merchants or the foreigners who sojourned in India.

On the other hand, there were many other foreigners of the West Asian origin, who were sojourning on the Malabar Coast for some long years and whose role in the maritime trade of Malabar had become very crucial during the centuries of the second millennium. Such merchants left their home-countries that included diverse lands such as Persia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Oman and Hijaz, and then settled down on the Malabar Coast for long years, very often accompanied by their wives and children. While sojourning in Malabar, they fitted fleets with a view to conducting trade with the ports of West Asia such as Aden and Jidda, and after making a decent fortune out of that trade based on the ports of Malabar, they eventually returned to their homelands or other comfortable places, where again some continued to be involved in trade. In the secondary literature on Malabar's history, the role of this type of merchants is often overshadowed by that of the first type of foreign merchants discussed above. What appears from the contemporary Arab and European accounts is that this sort of sojourning trade was a general trend among the medieval Muslim merchants. Chronicles from West Asia are abundant with references to those merchants who left their homelands for India or China and then, after the disappearance of several years, they came back to the motherlands with many earnings. Suggestive of this trend among the West Asian merchants is the

⁴⁹ Buzurg, *Kitab ajaib al-hind*, pp. 94-5.

⁵⁰ See, Ibn Fahad, *Ithāfal-warā*, vol. 4, pp. 17-8.

already introduced security ordinance of the Mamluk Sultan Al-Mansur Qalāwun (r. 1279-1290), whereby the sultan invites merchants sojourning in India, China, Sind, etc. to come to Egypt with spices and other merchandise and promises them security for their property rights.⁵¹ Due to their years long settlement on the port-cities of India, the West Asian chronicles often designate such sojourning merchants as *ahl al-hind* (Indians), though they hailed originally from the West Asian lands.⁵² However, the verb that the chroniclers use to describe their stay in India is the various forms of the root word *iqāmat*, which is to dwell in a place with an intention to return eventually to their homelands, rather than the forms of the root word *istītan*, which denotes a permanent settlement.

Clues to the presence of sojourning Muslim merchants on the Malabar Coast can be found from the ninth century onwards. As already said, the Arab and Persian Muslims, who were witnesses to the granting of the Tharisappalli Plates to the Syrian Christians of Malabar, are likely to be sojourning merchants, who had been carrying out trade for quite some time between Malabar and the Persian Gulf basing their operation at Quilon. Their longstanding at the port, unlike the moving merchants who called at the port temporally, made them an inevitable element to be invited by the local rulers for being witnesses to the bestowing of royal grants on an important mercantile group. Some of the Muslim merchants referred to in the 'India Book' of the Geniza documents, which is revolved mainly around Ben Yiju, an important Jewish merchant sojourning on the Malabar Coast, must have been sojourning traders who based their operations in Malabar and traded with the western port of Aden and the like. One such was *nākhudā* Ali Nawak, who figures in a Jewish letter as a ship-owning merchant who sends his ship from Malabar to Aden with his agents/servants serving as its captains.⁵³ *Nur al-ma'ārif* from Yemen also furnishes with clues to the presence of sojourning merchants in Malabar. For instance, Shihab bin Bailaqani was a foreigner sojourning on the Malabar Coast who was sent gifts by the Rasulid sultan and was entrusted by him to hand over gifts to the many local rulers of

⁵¹ Al-Qalqashandi, *Subh al-a'sha*, vol. 13, pp. 339-41.

⁵² See for instance, Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, pp. 515-6.

⁵³ Goitein, 'Portrait of a Medieval India Trader', pp. 455-6.

Malabar.⁵⁴ By the time Ibn Battuta visited the Malabar Coast, the noteworthy sojourning merchants of the coast were *nākhudā* Mithqal, ‘Alauddin al-Awji, Husain al-Sallat, the anonymous brother of Faqih al-Sarsari, etc., many of whom owned ships that plied to the various forelands of Malabar. Barbosa, who had great experience of the commercial realities of the Malabar Coast and was very much familiar with its Muslim trade, provides one of the best descriptions of the sojourning Muslim merchants’ trade at Calicut as it evolved by the late fifteenth century. The Portuguese writer notes,

There are many other foreign Moors as well in the town of Calecut, who are called *Paradesis*, natives of diverse lands...who are settled here. As the trade of this country is very large, they gathered here in great numbers with their wives and children, and seem to have increased...In the days of their prosperity in trade and navigation they built in the city keeled ships of a thousand and a thousand and two hundred *baharesburden*...Here they took on board goods for every place, and every monsoon ten or fifteen of these ships sailed for the Red Sea, Aden and Mecca,...They started in February, and returned from the middle of August up to the middle of October of the same year. In this trade they became extremely wealthy. And on their return voyages they would bring with them other foreign merchants who settled in the city, beginning to build ships and trade, on which the King received heavy duties...They had very fine houses and many servants. They were luxurious in eating, drinking and sleeping. Thus they continued to thrive until the Portuguese came to India.⁵⁵

Bras de Albuquerque, speaking of the sojourning merchants of Calicut, puts in other words,

these used to come from Cufim (North Africa), from Ourao (Oran), from Tremecim (a town near to Oran), and from Tripoli, with their wares, to Cairo, and from Cairo they used to make their way to Juda, and from Juda to Calicut, with ready money, and there they used to build new ships, and load them with spiceries.⁵⁶

Typical of the kind of merchants described in the above accounts was *nākhudā* Ibrahim, who lived in Calicut owing many ships and is reported by the Arab chronicles to have sailed from Malabar to Jidda in 1425 with fourteen ships laden with the cargos of spices. Although the ship-owning sojourners of Malabar are often seen as sailing themselves in their ships, our sources apprise that sometimes they sent their servants or slave-agents as the captains of their ships.⁵⁷ Besides, the merchants used to employ agents for looking after their money and merchandise in the ports of the forelands. When

⁵⁴ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma‘ārif*, vol.1, pp. 518-9.

⁵⁵ M. L. Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, vol. 2, pp. 75-8.

⁵⁶ Walter de Gray Birch, trans., *The Commentaries*, vol. 3, pp. 33-4.

⁵⁷ See the coming discussion on slave-agents.

Timraz al-Muayyadi reached Calicut in 1450 after fleeing with the wealth of the Mamluk sultan, the main worry of Calicut's Muslim merchants was that the sultan would confiscate their wealth at Jidda if he knows of Timraz's presence at Calicut. This, in turn, is suggestive of the system of keeping wealth entrusted with agents at distant ports. In addition, *Nur al-ma'arif* explicitly speaks about the Indian merchants' practice of leaving at Aden their merchandise with their slave-agents, who would then sell them to the merchants coming from Egypt.⁵⁸ It appears that it was the sojourning Muslim merchants based in Malabar rather than the visiting ones from West Asia, who actively took part in the maintenance of the religious affairs of the port-cities in Malabar. Apart from financing religious establishments such as mosques and hospices, they often took initiatives to link the religious institutions of Malabar with the larger Islamic faith networks of the Indian Ocean, which in turn benefited them in their maritime trade networks.⁵⁹ It was at the request of the city's sojourning merchants such as Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Gassani, Nuruddhin Ali al-Quwi, Zain Ali al-Rumi and Nuruddhin Sheikh Ali al-Ardabili that Calicut's *qadi* wrote in the late fourteenth century a letter to the Rasulid court asking the sultan's permission for mentioning his name in the city's Friday and Eid prayers.⁶⁰ When the Portuguese arrived on the Malabar Coast and resorted to various control mechanisms with an ambition of establishing their monopoly over the spice trade of the Indian Ocean, sojourners at Calicut were most affected and were forced to leave Malabar with their ships laden with the whole wealth, wives and children.

Our sources give the impression that among the Muslim merchants of Malabar, both the movers and stayers, there had evolved some sort of hierarchization. Although they do not reveal the exact basis of this hierarchization, one can assume that it was the wealth of the merchants and the value and volume of the merchandise they traded in, rather than their racial or ethnic identities, which decided their status. At the Yemeni port of Aden, the Rasulid sultans had the practice of honoring merchants from India, and thus

⁵⁸ This will be detailed in the discussion on the practice of employing slave-agents.

⁵⁹ Sojourners often took initiative of building mosques at the port-cities of Malabar. Thus, one of Calicut's main *jami* mosques was built by *nakhuda* Mithqal, and it was Khwaja Muhadhab al-Tajir who built the *jami* mosque of Quilon. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 49; Anonymous, *Tuhaft al-mujahidin*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ For the letter see, Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, pp. 203-6.

the merchants were honoured in accordance with their status. *Nūr al-ma'ārif* has it, 'Whoever from among the *nākhudās* is present at the protected harbour (Aden) would be honoured in the port according to his status'.⁶¹ Indicating that the basis of this status was the merchants' wealth, the Yemeni chronicle says, 'Those *nākhudās* who leave Aden in the early phase of the *Damani* season would not be honoured. Only those departing late would be honoured in accordance with the profit that they bring to the port...'⁶² Thus, the merchant magnets from India who transported to Aden merchandise of considerable value and volume would be held in high esteem and were honoured by the Rasulid sultans with many valuable gifts unlike the petty merchants with mediocre cargos. The existence of disparities among the merchants is also attested to by the fact that during the times of the Rasulids, Indian ship-owners reaching Aden with their ships were allowed to pass into the Red Sea only if they were notable ones (*mu'tabar*), unlike those who were not so (*ghairmu'tabar*).⁶³ Such disparities among the merchants must have complicated their mutual relationships not least while being aboard the ships sailing across the deep seas. Although we still lack adequate sources to shed light on the aspects of the daily life of medieval merchants on-board their ships, the fact that there existed disparities among the merchants may help us to unfold the instances of tussles among merchants, like the one happened in 1428 among the merchants of Calicut amid their journey to the port of Jidda.⁶⁴ This tussle, which, as already seen, involved the merchant Khwaja Daywana al-Kīlanī and the ship-owner *nākhudā* Ibrahim of Calicut who ultimately murdered the former, might be a reflection of the complexities in the relations of merchants aboard ships, which was resultant of the disparities between 'notables' and 'non-notables', viz. between the ship-owner Ibrahim and the client merchant Khwaja Daywana.

Another matter with regard to the Muslim merchants taking part in the maritime trade of Malabar is the Kārimi trade, which has remained a puzzle among the scholars for the past many decades. Scholars working on the maritime history of the Indian Ocean

⁶¹ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, p. 516.

⁶² By the profit, what is meant is the customs duties that the merchants had to pay at Aden according to the value and volume of their merchandise. See, *Ibid.*, p. 502.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 492-3. On other occasions too, *Nūr al-ma'ārif* uses such terms as *mu'tabar* to distinguish the notable merchants and ship-owners from other ones. See for example, *Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁶⁴ For the incident between Ibrahim and Khwaja Daywana, see, Ibn Fahad, *Ithāf al-warā*, vol. 4, pp. 17-8.

have conventionally held that the Kārimi merchants constituted the predominant element among the foreign Muslim merchants (*paradesis*) involved in the maritime trade of the Malabar Coast, particularly the emporium of Calicut, during the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries and that their trade was terminated after the advent of the Portuguese.⁶⁵ However, a closer examination of the contemporary sources calls for revisiting this viewpoint. The origin of the problematic view seems to lie in the way of understanding the medieval Kārimi trade as well as in perceiving the *paradesi* merchants of Malabar as consisting chiefly of the foreign Muslim merchants based in the Mamluki Egypt who sailed back and forth the Malabar Coast for carrying out trade in spices. But, as just shown above, the perception about the *paradesi* Muslim merchants of Malabar has to be modified since the group was made up significantly of sojourning merchants who settled on the Malabar Coast for long years and based on the same conducted trade with the ports of West Asia. In the light of such sources as the Geniza documents and *Nur al-ma'ārif*, it is argued here that the Kārimi trade of medieval times was something specific to the Red Sea realm. It should be noted that this argument in fact was already echoed in the writings of Walter J. Fischel when he remarked about the Kārimi merchants,

Yemen seems to have been their supply-centre and the starting point of their commercial transactions, although some of the spices they brought from Yemen to Egypt were most likely of Indian origin; it seems that they were bought by them not directly in India but were shipped by Indian merchants to Yemen, before the Kārimi took them over and transported them to Egypt.⁶⁶

Out of at least ten references to the term *al-kārim* that Goitein has explored from the letters of the Cairo Geniza, none appears to have been used in the context outside of the Red Sea zone.⁶⁷ One of the references found in a letter sent by a Jewish merchant

⁶⁵ See for example, S. D. Goitein, 'The Beginnings of the Karim Merchants and the Character of Their Organization' in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Brill, Leiden, 2010 (originally published in 1966), p. 351; Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p. 5; Wink, *Al-Hind*, vol. 2, p. 23, 40-1, 276, vol. 3, p. 204; K. S. Mathew, 'Calicut, the International Emporium of Maritime Trade and the Portuguese during the Sixteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 67, 2006-2007, p. 253; Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, Lit, Munster, 1999, p. 9; *Idem*, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity', pp. 266-7.

⁶⁶ Walter J. Fischel, 'The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt: A Contribution to the Economic History of Medieval Islam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1, no. 2, April, 1958, pp. 161.

⁶⁷ For the references to the *Kārim* in the Geniza documents, I have relied on those that are cited in Goitein, 'The Beginnings of the Karim Merchants', pp. 353-7.

from the Coromandel Coast to his wife in Cairo has it that the merchant was sending many oriental rarities, among which were seven and a half *mann* of *jawza* (nutmeg),

'mā fi 'l-kārim mithluhā' ("the like of which cannot be found in the *kārim*").⁶⁸

However, it is easy to understand that the merchant's intention was the convoy that took from Aden to Cairo among other things the commodities sent to the Yemeni port from India including the ones he himself was planning to send.⁶⁹ Besides, the usage *kārim al-sana* (meaning *kārim* of this year) found in a letter of c. 1140 indicates that *al-kārim* of the twelfth century was a convoy of merchants from Egypt that annually undertook to travel to Yemen for bringing various commodities reaching the Yemeni ports.⁷⁰ An anonymous fourteenth-century almanac from the Rasulid Yemen has furnished us with the exact times when *al-Kārim* convoy traveled to and from Yemen. It mentions that the Egyptian Kārimi merchants begin to sail towards Yemen from the late June of a year and start returning to Egypt from the mid-October of the same year.⁷¹

Ibn al-Mujawir has indirectly revealed to us the commercial frontier of the Kārimi traders when he reported that Umar bin Ali, the first Rasulid sultan, once took all the merchandise brought to Aden by the Indian merchants and forced the Kārimi merchants

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 357.

⁶⁹ The reference, which Goitein thought to indicate a convoy that did not touch Yemen on its way homewards to Egypt, also looks fragile one as it can be interpreted other way. It is found in a letter sent by Abu Zikri Kohen, the Cairene representative of the Jewish merchants, to his business partner informing him of the volume of trade carried in that year by the Kārim and of the addressee's business friends who had safely arrived at the Red Sea port of Sawakin on their way homewards. As Goitein himself admits, it is not clear from the survived fragment of the letter what the name and location of the addressee were, and yet, he interpreted that it was Halfon b. Nethalen, who often lived at Aden (and so the possibility that the merchant had to be informed of the details of a Kārim convoy which did not touch Aden). However, there is an equivalent possibility that Halfon during that year was out of Aden and so was informed of the details of the Kārim that sailed from Yemen to Egypt. For this reference see, Ibid., pp. 354-5.

⁷⁰ For the letter see, Ibid., p. 356.

⁷¹ Varisco, 'An Anonymous 14th Century Almanac', p. 199, 209. *Nur al-ma'ārif* notes in more than one places that the Kārimi merchants from Egypt used to reach Aden when the Indian merchants would already have departed from the port. This would imply that although the season of sailing to Aden started from the late June, the Kārimis preferred to sail in the later part of the sailing season, which was around August so that they would reach Aden when the Indian ships would already have left the port. This is also suggestive of the important role that the trade-agents must have played in the port of Aden since the Indians and Egyptians were in need of employing agents to collect and sell merchandise in their absence. See, Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, pp. 495-6, 506-7.

from Egypt to buy them at the price he arbitrarily fixed, whereas the cargos taken to Aden by the Kārimi merchants were sold to the Indian merchants at a price he arbitrated.⁷² In addition, *Nur al-ma'ārif* provides us with much more clear picture about the nature of the Kārimi trade and their scale of operation. The account lists separately the various commodities that were brought to Aden by the Kārimi merchants and were then taken further to the east by the merchants from India, and vice versa.⁷³ It also informs us that the Rasulid sultans had made efforts to keep control over the seaborne trade via Aden. Not only did they take at customs certain commodities transported to Aden by the Indian and Kārimi merchants as exclusively reserved for the royal use,⁷⁴ but the sultans also strove to manipulate the movement of merchants through the Gulf of Aden. Thus, the Rasulids dictated that the Kārimi merchants could not fit or hire ships on their own part for sailing in the Red Sea; instead, they should make use of the Yemeni royal ships (*marākib al-dīwān*) that would be available for service during the seasons of navigation, except in case there was a paucity of enough royal ships.⁷⁵ Besides, the Indian merchants, if they wished to sail with their ships as far the ports of the Red Sea, also were restricted from crossing the Strait of Bab-el Mandab.⁷⁶ It seems that our conventional notion of a Mamluk sponsored Indian Ocean trade that was carried out by the Kārimi merchants of Egypt has to be modified in the light of such references, which indicate to the active involvement by the Rasulids in controlling the seaborne trade via the Red Sea.

⁷² Ibn al-Mujawir, *Sifat bilad al-yemen*, p. 167.

⁷³ For commodities brought to Aden by the Kārimis, see Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, p. 478 and for those transported to Yemen by the Indians, *Ibid.*, p. 485.

⁷⁴ The Yemeni rulers did this because they wanted to use such reserved commodities as royal gifts to the various polities not least those, which somehow were connected to the trans-regional trade via Yemen. See for example, *Ibid.*, p. 498, where is mentioned that the Egyptian glasses imported to Aden were not allowed for the merchants to be taken to India nor to Ethiopia as that was reserved as gift for the rulers of Tana and some other places.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 492-4.

⁷⁶ Only influential ones from among the Indian merchants were allowed to sail with their ships as far as Aydhab and the like ports, but no other merchant who wishes to go from Aden to Egypt should travel in their ships: only the permitted Indian merchant and a few of his employees and relatives could sail in a ship. See, *Ibid.*, p. 493. As *Nur al-ma'ārif* itself explains, these dictates of the Rasulids were driven on the one hand by the fiscal motive, viz. enriching their treasury through freight charges on the Kārimi merchants, and on the other hand, by naval security concerns. By not allowing the Kārimi and Indian merchants to navigate in the Red Sea with their ships and thereby reserving the space for the royal ships, the Yemeni rulers could avoid any possible intrusion of the Egyptian naval forces into the waters of the sea and the proper Indian Ocean. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 492-3.

If the Mamluks and their client Kārimi merchants had any grip over the Indian Ocean trade, then they would not have had to wait until the early fifteenth century to make a port under their control like Jidda an international emporium competing or outclassing other emporiums such as Aden and Hormuz. More importantly, what appears from the narrated evidence is that the Kārimi trade was something limited to the Red Sea circuit. Moreover, if the Kārimi traders had any direct role in the seaborne trade of the Malabar Coast, then that must have been noted by a contemporary traveller like Ibn Battuta who spent substantial time on the coast and had the chance of meeting merchants of diverse lands and categories. The Moroccan was, of course, aware of the Kārimi trade of the Red Sea zone and thus he has referred twice to the Kārimi merchants of Egypt (*al-akarim* and *al-kārimi*).⁷⁷ However, both of the references were made not to speak of the Kārimis' trade with India or China, but to draw a comparison between them and the rich merchants of Daulatabad and China.

Employing of slave-agents was one of the main features in the organization of Muslim trade in medieval times. Due to the monsoon factor, upon which was depended most of the medieval seaborne trade, and the long distance movements between various exchange centres, it was imperative for the Muslim merchants, who were involved in maritime trade, to make use of agents for the smooth conduct of their trade. Agents were entrusted with diverse tasks: traversing to distant places, buying or selling of commodities on behalf of a principal trader who stayed at a distant place, ensuring of enough supply of goods for the time when principal trader comes for shipment, engaging in bargaining and other profit-making activities on behalf of principal trader, resolving legal disputes regarding principal trader's transactions, and so on. Agents who rendered help to merchants were of various sorts. They could be fellow merchants who carried out transactions and rendered other services for their principal merchants expecting reciprocal help in times of need. The Geniza letters are abundant with instances of this sort of agent-principal trader relationship, which took place cutting across religious or denominational barriers. In the letters are found references to Muslim merchants, who rendered help in various capacities to Jewish merchants located in Aden. For example,

⁷⁷ For the references, see, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 25, 127.

when c. 1134 Umar al-Bundari carried from Aden in the ship of *nākhudā* Ramisht a bag of red copper for Ben Yiju, who was in Malabar, Sheikh Abu al-Hasan bin Ja'far, an important Muslim merchant sojourning on the Malabar Coast, is often seen as collecting commodities from such ports as Pantalayani and sending them for Khalaf bin Isaac, a Jewish merchant based in Aden.⁷⁸ Agents could also be servants employed by a principal trader in order to work for him. Merchants would send such agents to distant places entrusted with capital for the purpose of trade. Sometimes, merchants sent their own children as agents as in such cases more trustworthiness could be guaranteed. With the experience and expertise acquired through serving his principal trader, an agent of this type may eventually become a merchant by himself. For instance, Ali bin Muhammed al-Nili had initially served as an agent of the reputed merchant *nākhudā* Ramisht travelling on behalf of him to various places including the Malabar Coast and China, and then, with the wealth and connections that he had managed to make while being a servant of the *nākhudā*, he himself later turned out to be a merchant magnet of Aden.⁷⁹ Yet another type of agents used by medieval merchants was slave-agents, an important aspect of Muslim trade that still calls for further explorations. Notwithstanding the paucity of adequate sources to investigate this aspect, a modest attempt is made here in this regard by looking into the cursory references found in our available sources.

The practice of slavery has always been part of Muslim history until the recent centuries, and many seminal works have already appeared on the theme, particularly on the usage of slaves in military services.⁸⁰ Muslim merchants, particularly those who were involved in the trans-oceanic trade, appear to have extensively made use of slaves in the conduct of commerce. Slaves procured from diverse geographical lands were bought by Muslim merchants, who converted them to Islam and taught them the basic beliefs and practices of Islam. Once trained in the basic Islamic knowledge, such slaves seemed to have been the easy and preferable choice of the merchants who utilized them commercially in various capacities of trade. Merchants' preference of slaves in business

⁷⁸ See, Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 355, 599, 603.

⁷⁹ See, Muhammed bin Hawqal, *Surat al-aldh*, 2 vols., Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1938, vol. 2, p. 282; Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 603; Al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-islam*, vol. 12, p. 419.

⁸⁰ See for example, B. Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

over other kinds of agents might be due to the relatively cheaper maintenance cost and because slaves ensured more loyalty as their purchasing and training from very young age in masters' family and religious backgrounds must have abstracted them from all allegiances other than that to the masters. Just like in the case of other types of agents, slaves too could use of their expertise and networks that they acquired while being in the service of their masters to make their own fortunes out of trade once they were manumitted from slavery. Although the history of slaves is often missing in contemporary sources, we get a substantial clue into their role in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean from the non-scarce occurrence of their names in the available sources. It is easy to distinguish between freemen and slaves by seeing their names: unlike the names of freemen, slaves usually had single names without patronymics and cognomen, and without tribal, regional and other identifications.⁸¹ These single names used to be like Rayhan ("basil"), Jawhar ("jewel"), Lu'Lu' ("pearls"), Bakhtiyar, etc. If a slave had served as deputy captain of a ship on behalf of its ship-owner (mostly his master) or had himself become a ship-owning merchant after manumission, then the title *nākhudā* was added to his name.

In the Geniza letters are found some of the slave-agents who had acted in various roles of trade for the Muslim merchants active in the maritime trade of the Malabar Coast. In a mid-twelfth century letter sent by a Jewish merchant from Aden to Malabar, there are references to three slaves who appear to have worked as agents not only for their masters but also for the Jewish merchants active on the Malabar Coast and Aden. One of the figures is Jawhar who was the slave agent of one Dāfir and who is mentioned in the letter as carrying from Malabar to Aden cargo of betel nuts on behalf of the Jewish merchant Khalaf bin Isaac.⁸² Another figure is *rubban* Masu'ud al-Habshi, who was a slave from Ethiopia and who appears to have worked as the chief navigator/pilot of a ship that plied between Aden and Malabar.⁸³ Masu'ud is seen as being entrusted by the Adeni

⁸¹ This might be because their origins and belongings were very often unknown to those who bought them. See, *Ibid.*, p. 113n5.

⁸² Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 598.

⁸³ For the meaning of the word *rubban*, I have relied on the medieval lexicographer Fairuzabadi, who defined it as chief navigator (*ra'ees al-mallāh*) of a ship. For *rubban* Masu'ud al-Habshi, see, *Ibid.*, p. 603, and for the meaning of *rubban*, Al-Fairuzabadi, *al-Qamoos al-muheet*, p. 88.

merchant Khalaf bin Isaac with funds to purchase unspecified goods from Malabar and transport them to Aden. The third slave that figures in the Jewish letter is Bakhtiyar, who was the slave-agent of Sheikh Abu al-Hasan bin Ja'far, the Muslim merchant sojourning on the Malabar Coast.⁸⁴ Abu al-Hasan appears to have sent Bakhtiyar as his agent to Aden, where the latter is seen as making arrangements to get back Khalaf bin Isaac's money deposited with his master. In another Geniza letter of c. 1145, we come to know of one *nākhudā* Jawhar al-Muqaddami, who appears to be the slave-agent of the ship-owning merchant Ibn al-Muqaddam.⁸⁵ Jawhar seemed to have been his master's deputy captain (and therefore the title *nākhudā*) in the ship that plied between Malabar and Aden and is mentioned as carrying merchandise and money back and forth these regions on behalf of Jewish merchants.

The thirteenth century *Nūr al-ma'ārif* also sheds light on the employment of slave-agent by the Muslim merchants of Malabar. The account says that by the end of the season for sailing to India, Indian *nākhudās* used to leave Aden keeping their merchandise with their slaves-agents (*ghilmān*) who would then sell them to the Kārimi merchants arriving at the Yemeni port.⁸⁶ These agents were also entrusted by the *nākhudās* to pay, out of the earnings from the trade with the Kārimi merchants, to the Adeni customs house the tithe of the horses that were already taken to India by the *nākhudās*. This apart, the account speaks of the honoring at Aden of two Indian *nākhudās*, viz. *nākhudā* Bilal and *nākhudā* Ambar.⁸⁷ The names of these *nākhudās* indicate to their slave origin. However, the source does not say explicitly whether they came to Aden as independent ship-owning merchants or as agents of some other ship-owning merchants of Malabar.⁸⁸ Yet, Ambar's identification as the chief of the middle port (*mawla al-thagr al-wasiti*) in Malabar suggests that he had already become a merchant magnet by himself. It is likely that *nākhudā* Ambar had earlier served some other merchant who was his master, and using that experience, he after being manumitted

⁸⁴ Goitein and M. A. Friedman, *India Traders*, p. 603.

⁸⁵ See, *Ibid.*, pp. 364-5.

⁸⁶ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol. 1, pp. 506-7

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 515-6.

⁸⁸ At Aden, it was not only ship-owners who were honoured but also their slave-agents. Thus, *Nūr al-ma'ārif* itself speaks of the honoring of one Jawhar, who is identified as the slave (*mawla*) of Al-Karki bin al-A'sar. See, *Ibid.*, p. 616.

strove to make his own fortunes by carrying out seaborne trade from the Malabar Coast. We have another slave-agent from Malabar, who seems to be a contemporary of Ambar and Bilal. It is Shihabuddin Rayhan mentioned in the Arabic portion of the bilingual inscription found in Muccunti mosque at Kuttichira (Calicut). The inscription, as already discussed in the first chapter, records that Shihabuddin Rayhan, the freed slave (*'atīq*) of the late (*al-marhum*) Masu'ud, bought a piece of land out of his own funds and built a mosque and well along with arranging the provisions for the *imam* and the *mu'adhin* of the mosque.⁸⁹ What appears is that Rayhan had been working as a slave-agent of Masu'ud who must have been an important *paradesi* merchant active in the seaborne trade of Calicut. After his manumission, he developed his own commercial networks basing in the same port and accumulated a decent wealth enough to be able to sponsor the city's first recorded mosque. In the very next century, we have another figure from Calicut itself with the similar or much brighter profile. This is *nākhudā* Mithqal, whose single name as it appears in all the available sources denotes that he had a slave origin. Ibn Battuta testifies that by the time he had visited the Malabar Coast, Mithqal had already gained much fame as a *paradesi* merchant of Calicut with wide-ranging trans-oceanic trade networks. As the anonymous author of *Tuhaft al-mujahidin* records, it was *nākhudā* Mithqal who built the city's historic mosque called Mithqal Palli. It can be safely assumed that like Rayhan, Mithqal also had served an important merchant in business capacities, and using the expertise gained under his service, he later made his own fortunes by actively taking part in the maritime trade of Calicut. In short, what turns out from these instances is that employing of slave-agents was one of the main features of Muslim trade in Malabar, and the slave-agents not only had rendered services to their masters in various business capacities but also had eventually become by themselves wealthy merchants being actively involved in the seaborne trade of the Malabar Coast.

Finally, we look into the ways, by which the maritime commercial networks of the Muslim merchants in Malabar were strengthened and sustained despite the geopolitical changes occurring in the areas of their operation. From the available sources, we do not know if the Muslim merchants involved in the maritime trade of Malabar had

⁸⁹ Desai, *A Topographical List*, p. 102; Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Muslim Architecture*, pp. 194-5.

ever tried to capture political power on the Malabar Coast so as to safeguard their commercial interests or to negotiate any treaty with the local polities with a view to ensuring the regular supply of local commodities—mechanisms Europeans often resorted to in their experiments in Asia from the sixteenth century onwards. The impression left by our sources is that Muslim merchants sometimes financed the political experiments of the local rulers, which in turn made their endurance on the coast desirable for the local polities. The expansionist moves of the Zamorins of Calicut against the neighbouring territories such as Tirunavayi and Cochin were extended both financial and physical help by the Muslims based at Calicut.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the Malabar polities not least the Zamorins of Calicut, as the resources mobilized through maritime trade constituted one of the major sources of their income, were keen in developing diplomatic relations with the polities on the overseas markets of Malabar so as to strengthen and sustain the maritime trade with those lands. Before Calicut's chief destination port in the Red Sea side was shifted from Aden to Jidda in the fifteenth century, its rulers appear to have recurrently sent valuable gifts to the Rasulid court in Yemen. Luckily, one such instance has survived in our sources. The medieval Yemeni chronicles record that in the year 1369 there came to the Rasulid court the gift of Calicut's ruler (named Dāfi), which contained, among other things, varieties of trees and birds.⁹¹ With the shift of maritime trade from Aden to Jidda, the Zamorins too appeared to have changed the target of their gifts from the Rasulids to the Mamluks of Egypt, under whose control was the entrepot of Jidda. As already mentioned in the first chapter, the fifteenth-century Egyptian chronicler Ibn Taghribirdi was astonished to notice many correspondences at the hands of Janibak, the Mamluki viceroy at Jidda, which were sent by the rulers of Calicut accompanied with several gifts.⁹² It was through one of such correspondences that the Zamorin informed Janibak of the way he had dealt with Timraz al-Muayyadi, the rebel Emir of the Mamluki court who had fled to India and who was forced at Calicut by its ruler to buy spices with

⁹⁰ There are various traditions regarding the way the Muslims of Calicut helped its ruler. Though many of them are mutually contradicting, one fact turns out from each of them, viz. the Muslim merchants had extended their support to the Zamorins in their political experiments. See, Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, pp. 93-6, 103; K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, 4 vols., Cochin Government Press, Ernakulam, 1924-1937, vol. 1, p. 167.

⁹¹ Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, p. 120; Anonymous, *Tarikh al-daulat al-rasooliyya*, p. 70.

⁹² Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujoom al-zahira*, vol. 15, p. 427.

the whole money that he had taken from the Mamluk sultan. The polities in the overseas destinations of Malabar too had resorted to the practice of sending of correspondences and gifts to the various chieftains on the rims of the Indian Ocean. *Nur al-ma'arif* testifies that the Rasulids had the practice of sending gifts to the several principality chieftains on the littoral India, which were entrenched into the maritime commercial network of Aden. Thus, in the year 1294, several gifts were sent to the local rulers of Hīfī, Fākanūr, and Mangalore through the medium of Al-Shihab bin Bailaqani, a West Asian sojourner on the Malabar Coast.⁹³

Quite varied were the ways by which the commercial network of the Islamicate world was maintained and the mercantile identity of the Malabar Muslims, who operated and evolved as merchant magnets within this larger system of trade, was crystallized. An obviously important mechanism by which the medieval Muslim merchants sought to strengthen their trade networks , and formulate the kind of Islamic individuality that this community was slowly shaping ,was the *Khutba* or *Dua* networks. However, this faith-related network is detailed in the following chapter.

⁹³ Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'arif*, vol. 1, p. 518.

Chapter IV

Faith-Related Networks of Muslims in Malabar

Concomitant to the process, by which the Malabar Coast was entrenched into the maritime trade networks of the Muslim merchants, there had developed on the coast various sorts of faith-related networks of the Muslims, whose branches stretched as far as Southeast Asia on the one side and West Asia on the other. In fact, it was the existing commercial networks which to large extent facilitated the development of those faith-related networks, and often the actors or agencies in both the cases were one and the same. This may seem to give us the impression that there was an overlap between the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims. However, this chapter tries to discuss the faith networks discretely and in much detail but not in isolation from the commercial ones, so as to find out the nuances within the formation of the Islamic culture in medieval Malabar. Unravelling of those networks would make us to depart with the historiographical trend that treats Islam in pre-modern Malabar as monolithic composed exclusively of Sunni-Shafi'i-Shari'a stream. The study would also help in discerning the ways, in which people active in the commercial world of medieval times benefitted from and made use of religion in their day-to-day material life. It will be shown that for the Muslims in Malabar, to be part of the larger Islamic *khutba*¹ networks was not just a matter of faith but it was believed also to strengthen their existing commercial networks. This chapter is based mainly on four themes. Firstly, it will examine the network revolved around the sending of stipends from the Islamic lands to the Muslim religious officials on the Malabar Coast. Secondly, it discusses the *khutba* network mechanism, by which the Muslims of Malabar tried to convey their allegiance to the Muslim rulers in various places by reading their names in the Friday and Eid sermons and by praying for them in the *dua* ("pray") part of the those sermons. Thirdly, the chapter strives to unearth the possible Sufi networks, which operated in medieval Malabar being part of the wider

¹ *Kuhtba* (خطبة) literally meant a speech, but it was widely used to denote specifically the sermons given at various occasions not least the Friday and *Eid* congregations. Throughout this chapter, the word is used in this latter sense.

Sufi networks in the world—an aspect in the history of Malabar Muslims that still calls the attention of scholars. Fourthly, it deals with the scholarly connections of the Muslims that cut across regional and oceanic boundaries at a time when many of the indigenous people in Malabar were seeing seafaring as taboo.

1. Stipends from Across the Ocean

With the escalation of maritime commercial activity between the Malabar Coast and West Asia, there began to appear in the major entrepôts of the coast increasing number of Muslim settlements, which included that of both the *paradesi* and local Muslims. The size of the settlements grew to such an extent that the community began to have religious institutions particularly congregational mosques (*masjid jāmi'*) for the Friday prayer, which in turn required the employment of such religious offices as *imām* (leader of prayer at mosque), *khatīb* (preacher) and *qādi* (judge). From a source like *Nur al-ma'ārif*, it becomes evident that at least by the mid-thirteenth century, most of the important nodal points on the coast had had established Muslim settlements accompanied by congregational mosques and their religious officials.² In places where there was Muslim rule, the common practice was that the rulers themselves or their deputies carried out the task of appointing *imams*, *khatībs*, *qādis*, etc. in the mosques of those places, and the payments to these officials were dispersed from the treasury of the rulers.³ However, in places out of the political control of Muslims, the practice was different as in such places it was the *jamā'ths* (congregations/assemblies) of Muslims which made the appointments and payments of the religious officials.⁴ The congregations of the Muslims

² As will be shown soon, the Yemeni chronicle informs us of some of the important Muslim settlements on the Malabar Coast, as they existed in the second half of the thirteenth century.

³ Chronicles from West Asia are abundant with the references to Muslim rulers officially appointing *qādis*. Even in the Maldives where there was Muslim rule when Ibn Battuta had been there *qādis* were officially appointed by the rulers, and the Moroccan himself was appointed as *qādi* there for some while. See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 73.

⁴ It should not however be neglected that on some occasions, the non-Muslim rulers of the places, where there had diasporas of Muslim merchants, made appointments and payments of the Muslim religious officials. From *Silsilat al-thawarikh*, we come to know that as early as the ninth century the religious leader of the Muslim diaspora in China, who was their *qādi* and *imam*, was officially appointed by the ruler of China. See, Al-Mirikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 36. The Vatteluttu portion of the inscription found in the Muchundi mosque in Calicut testifies that Punturakkon, the ruler of the place ordered to make grant for the

settling on the various rims of the Indian Ocean during the medieval times used to be composed of the important merchants living or sojourning in those places. Malabar Muslims' case was a typical example of this sort of arrangement as in its ports their religious officials were appointed and paid by the congregations of Muslim merchants.⁵ As these congregations had many wealthy merchants from foreign lands, finding of eligible religious personnel for the posts of *imams*, *khatībs*, and *qādis*, or of enough funds for making the payments of the religious officials was not at all a challenging task.

Yet, the Rasulid sultans of Yemen, as we come to notice from the Yemeni chronicle *Nur al-ma'ārif*, are seen as getting involved in the payment of the religious officials of the Muslims settling in the littorals of India including the Malabar Coast. The Yemeni chronicle contains a list of stipends sent to the various port cities of India during the reign of the Rasulid Sultan al-Muzaffar Yusuf (r. 1249-95).⁶ The list provides us with the details of the number of religious officials staying in each region and the items sent to them as stipends, which included commodities as well as money (Egyptian *mithqal* and Maliki *dinar*). It appears from the list that nine places on the Malabar Coast were considered eligible for the stipends (see table 1), and a total of two hundred Egyptian *mithqals* was sent to the twenty persons serving in those nine places.⁷ Each of the *khatībs* and *qādis* in Malabar would get ten *mithqals* (each coin was worth 4.25 grams of gold), which was a considerable amount in terms of value.

daily expenses of the mosque. This may indicate that the *imams* and *khatībs* of Calicut's Muchundi mosque were paid from the grants extended by the Zamorin, which he might have done to attract more and more Muslim merchants to his emerging port-city. See M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1972, p. 96.

⁵ The letter sent by the *qadi* of Calicut to the Rasulid court in the late thirteenth century, which is further discussed below, throws light on the existence of the Muslim congregations in Malabar.

⁶ For the list see, Jāzim, ed., *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, vol.1, pp. 516-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

Table 1: Places in Malabar that are mentioned in Nur al-ma'ārif as receiving the Rasulid stipends.

Names as in the Chronicle	Possible Identification
<i>Bud</i>	Pudupattanam ⁸
<i>Hilī</i>	Maday in Ezhimala region ⁹
<i>Hartīlī</i>	Kasaragod ¹⁰
<i>Hawrash</i>	Jurfattan ¹¹
<i>Fandarīna</i>	Panathalayani Kollam
<i>Mangalūr</i>	Mangalore
<i>Al-Shaliyāt</i>	Chaliyam
<i>Fākanūr</i>	Barkur
<i>Nūr Dhahbattan</i>	Dharmadam ¹²

Here, the Rasulid list leaves certain questions. Why were only nine places from Malabar selected for the stipends and an important port like Quilon is missing from the list? Prange suggests that the omission of such ports as Quilon, Calicut and Cochin from the Rasulid list is a reflection of the contemporary commercial realities on the Malabar Coast.¹³ He has it that by the late thirteenth century Calicut and Cochin had not risen into commercial significance in Malabar, whereas in Quilon there was no presence of Muslim

⁸ Pudupattanam was rendered in Arabic texts as *Budfattan* and this *Bud* must be a truncated form of *Budfattan*. Pudupattanam, as detailed in the first chapter, was the port located at the estuary of the river Kotta (today's Kuttyadi river), which later became the headquarters of the Kunjali Marakkars.

⁹ As seen in the first chapter, the name *Hilī* is found in many of the Arabic sources, and the port-city intended by those references might be today's Madayi.

¹⁰ *Hartīlī* must be *Harqiliyya*, which is identified as Kasaragod.

¹¹ The name *Hawrash* or any other name with similar tune is not found in any other sources. Scholars have suggested that it could be a misreading of Jurfattan. See, Lambourn, 'India from Aden', p. 88.

¹² In the list of *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, the place named *Nūr Dhahbattan* is found not along with the other places of the Malabar coast; instead it is found in the very next section where the stipends of such ports as Tana are detailed. Lambourn, however, has suggested that it must be *Dahbattan* (Dharmadam) of other contemporary accounts. See, *Ibid.*, p. 88. Here, for the time being we are following her inference.

¹³ Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p. 211.

merchants. However, here it is interpreted in other way. That Quilon had no presence of Muslims during the late thirteenth century is not convincing since, as we discussed in the first chapter, we have a good number of sources, which vindicates that the port by this time had the presence of Muslim merchants though the major actors in its commerce might still have been the Christian merchants.¹⁴ By the time Ibn Battuta had visited it, the port's relevance to the maritime trade networks of the Muslims was so much that it was even incorporated into the the Kazarooni Sufi network which, as will be detailed later, was a well-known Sufi network of the time based on the important maritime commercial centres of the Indian Ocean.¹⁵ Interestingly, the Moroccan traveller gives us a clue into the possible reason for the disappearance of Quilon from the Rasulid list of stipend-receivers. He reports, 'In it (Quilon) is a group of Muslim merchants, the greatest among them is Alauddin al-Awaji from Awah in the country of Iraq. He is *arāfidī* and has colleagues there of the same creed, who all profess it openly'.¹⁶ Here, by the reference '*rāfidī*' Ibn Battuta's intention must be that Alauddin and his colleagues in Quilon were not Sunnis, but Shias who hailed from Iraq and who were not hesitating to profess the creed openly in the Malabari port.¹⁷ If Alauddin and his fellow Iraqis could profess Shia Islam openly in Quilon, it in turn indicates that people of the same creed must have been there for quite some time and that by the course of time, the creed had become unquestionable.¹⁸ Then, could not this *rāfidī* legacy of Quilon's Muslims be a reason for the disappearance of the port from the list of the Rasulids who were of the Sunni creed? It does not seem to be beyond the realms of possibility. It might be that the port's *rāfidī* Muslim merchants did not want their *khutbas* read in the name of a Sunni sultan nor to accept his stipends for their *khatībs* and *qādis*, or that the Rasulids did not want to send stipends to Quilon which, if sent, might ultimately go to the spread of *rāfidīsm*. In short, Quilon's omission seems likely to be because of the different

¹⁴ For the sources, see the discussion on the port of Quilon.

¹⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49 (Translation mine).

¹⁷ The term *rāfidī* had different connotations in various periods. Yet, it was generally used to denote a faction among the Shia Muslims. See, Al- Fairuzabadi, *al-Qamoos al-muheet*, p. 643.

¹⁸ Ibn Battuta's further description of Quilon gives the impression that the Iraqi merchants under Awaji were men of much wealth and power in the port though the local ruler of the place never compromised any act of injustice from them. See, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

allegiance of its Muslim merchants (i. e. a good number of them, if not all). Then, could there be similar reason for Calicut's absence from the Rasulid list? We have already said in the first chapter that this omission cannot be taken to vindicate that Calicut had not emerged during the late thirteenth century since there are possibilities of such a port of commercial importance be there much before the visit of Wang Dayuan or Ibn Battuta though it had not been popular in the name Calicut. Although we do not have any reference to the presence of *rāfidīs* at Calicut, what appears from the late fourteenth century letter (which is detailed further in the next section) sent by the *qadi* of the port to the Rasulid court is that its Muslims were always hesitant to give their religious allegiance to any Muslim ruler from outside until they themselves finally decided to apply to the Yemeni court.¹⁹ So, it was the prolonged hesitation on the part of the port's Muslim merchants rather than the absence of the port itself which seems to offer a more plausible explanation for the non-appearance of Calicut in the list of the receivers of stipends from Yemen.

Then, had the Muslim congregations of Malabar not had enough funds to pay their religious leaders instead of depending on the Rasulid stipends? The answer of this question has to be sought in the commercial imperatives of the network revolved around stipend sending. By projecting themselves as the patrons of the *khatībs* and *qādis* serving in the important nodal points of India, the Rasulids must have wished to get the maximum share of the eastern commodities flowed towards their own entrepot Aden, rather than towards the ports of the Persian Gulf or that of the eastern Indian Ocean.²⁰ On the other hand, when the Indian ports were linked with the Rasulid network system, the merchants conducting maritime trade between those ports and Yemen could expect proper treatment at Aden particularly in matters of price and taxation.²¹ However, in

¹⁹ The possible reason for the prolonged hesitation on the part of Calicut Muslims is discussed in the next section.

²⁰ This has to be understood in the context of the contemporary writers' remark that what flowed from the Malabar Coast westward was just one tenth of what was flowing eastward. For the remark, see for instance, Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, vol. 1, p. 419.

²¹ As already seen in the second chapter, on account of commercial motivations the Rasulids had the practice of giving special treatment for certain group of merchants coming into Aden, and in a special ordinance of 1433, the Rasulid sultan asked the officer in-charge of Aden to extend several concessions on the merchants coming from Calicut. See the second chapter.

order to understand this piece of faith-related network properly, it has to be dealt along with the *khutba* network mechanism, which is detailed in the next section. That the Yemeni rulers were involved in the formation of networks based on sending of stipends from Aden to Malabar has the backing of local traditions on the Malabar Coast. *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*, which as already said is the compiled form of one of the oft-quoted traditions on the Malabar Coast and the compilation of which can be dated to sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, has recorded an instance of Muslims in Malabar receiving Yemen's aids for the religious institutions. The text says that one of those who had undertaken the building of mosques along the stretch of the Malabar Coast finally sailed from the port of Kollam to Aden for meeting the sultan there and for demanding provisions for all the built mosques, and thus twelve and a half Egyptian *mithqals* along with dresses were granted for each mosque.²² Whatever be the authenticity of the incident, such traditions strengthen the impression given by the historical sources that during the medieval times there were attempts to form bonds between Malabar and the external polities based on the sending or receiving of stipends, which in turn were beneficial for both the sides.

2. *Khutba* Networks

Khutba in Islam, technically speaking, is the sermon given on various occasions particularly during the Friday and *Eid* congregations. Although they were not integral part (*rukhn*) of the *khutbas*, the inclusion of the names and attributes of sultans and making *dua* (prayer) for them had become quite customary in places under the direct political control of Muslims.²³ With the dissemination of Islamic diasporas and communities on the rims of the Indian Ocean, there too the Muslims resorted to mention the names of sultans in their *khutbas*. That the practice was there from the early centuries of Islam itself can be borne out from *Silsilat al-tawarikh*, in which Sulaiman al-Tajir, who had

²² Yohanan Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad: A Tradition Concerning the Introduction of Islam to Malabar', *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, 1975, pp. 256-7.

²³ Although they are divided on the validity of *al-dua* (prayer) for sultans in *khutbas*, the Islamic scholars of different schools are unanimous in that it was not an integral part (*rukhn*) of the sermons. For the stands of various schools on *al-dua* (prayer) for sultans in *khutbas*, see, Abdul Rahman al-Juzri, *al-Fiqh 'ala al-madahib al-arba'*, 5 vols., Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2003, vol. 1, pp. 357-9.

been to China in the early ninth century, is quoted as saying that the Iraqi merchants in Canton used to pray for the sultan of Muslims (obviously Abbasid Caliph) in their *khutbas*.²⁴ The case of the Muslims on the Malabar Coast appears not to have been different. Thanks to the Yemeni chronicler Ali Ibn al-Hasan al-Khazraji, who in his history of the Rasulid dynasty has preserved for us a letter sent to the Rasulid court by Calicut's *qadi* on behalf of the city's Muslim *jama'ath* (assembly).²⁵ The letter written in AD 1393 sheds crucial light on how Malabar was incorporated into the larger *khutba* network of the Yemeni rulers and helps us considerably in unravelling the piece of information contained in *Nur al-ma'arif* about the Yemeni stipends to the Indian *khatibs* and *qadis*. Although the chief aim of writing this letter was to promise Calicut Muslims' religious allegiance to the Rasulid sultan so as to get the official recognition for reading the city's *khutba* in his name, the *qadi* has furnished us with many additional information of much importance. The content of the letter can be briefed as follows. Just like the eleven places (most probably on the Malabar Coast²⁶) where *khutbas* were read in the name of the Yemeni rulers, Calicut also now wished to read *khutba* in the name of the Rasulid sultan, upon which there was a unanimous opinion among the members of the city's Muslim *jama'th*.²⁷ Earlier, various groups hailing from different areas like Bengal, Hormuz, Sumatra, etc. had strived and spent lots of money for getting the *khutba* of Calicut read in the name of their own respective sultans, but their attempts were in vain.²⁸ The leading members of the city's *jama'th* who now unanimously sought to give allegiance to the Rasulids included such merchants as Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Gassani, Nuruddhin Ali al-Quwi, Zain Ali al-Rumi, Nuruddhin Sheikh Ali al-Ardabili, Sa'aduddin

²⁴ See Al-Mirrikhi, ed., *Ajaib al-dunya*, p. 36.

²⁵ For the letter and the chronicler's introductory note see, Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, pp. 203-6.

²⁶ The letter has not detailed which are those eleven places nor is it clear from the letter which region they belonged to. But it says that among those eleven places was Nilambur, where the Muslims had started reading *khutba* in the name of the Rasulid sultan from the beginning of the same year after they received the sultan's permission. This exemplifying suggests that those eleven places were of the Malabar Coast. The reference to Nilambur is striking as it is probably the earliest reference to a Muslim settlement in that interior region. However, it is not unlikely that by the late fourteenth century, in Nilambur, which was situated on the banks of the Chaliyar river, had developed a settlement of Muslim merchants who were involved in the riverine trade transporting the much famed teakwood and other commodities of the hinterland downward up to Chaliyam on the sea coast.

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 204-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 205.

Masu'd and Shihabuddin Ahmed al-Hiwari.²⁹ What the *qadi* of Calicut ultimately wanted from the Yemeni sultan was that he gave an official order to the royal officers asking them to add his name to the list of the notable *khatibs* (preachers) of the sultan so that the *qadi* would get great reward and fame (*al-ajr al-jazīl wa-al-dhikr al-jamīl*).³⁰ Apart from these details found in the letter, the Yemeni chronicler in his introductory note to the letter remarked that in Calicut *khutba* was never read in the name of any Muslim ruler except for some time in the beginning of the century when *khutba* was read simultaneously in the names of the sultans of Delhi and Hormuz after the city was brought under their influence.³¹ He added that when the letter of Calicut's Muslims reached the Yemeni court, the Rasulid sultan after going through it accepted their allegiance and gave them the permission for *khutba* in his name.³²

To unpack these details, certain questions have to be asked. Why did the Muslims of Calicut wait until the late fourteenth century to extend their allegiance to the Rasulids, despite their co-religionists in the neighbouring places had already begun to read *khutbas* in the names of the Yemeni rulers much before? Could the delay be because the Zamorin had not given the permission to extend allegiance to the Yemeni rulers?³³ No indication to such a reason is given in the letter of the *qadi*. Nor was the hesitation due to any special aversion towards the Rasulids because if that was the case the city's Muslims could have allied with some other Muslim polities, and because, as noted in the third chapter, there were already in the fourteenth century diplomatic exchanges between Yemen and Calicut rulers with a view to strengthening maritime trade. A probable reason for the delay appears to be that as Calicut was an international emporium where foreign

²⁹ Ibid. p. 205.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 205.

³¹ Ibid. p. 204. Probably, this is the only reference we have on the extension of the power of the Delhi Sultanate to the Malabar Coast. The intention of the Yemeni chronicler must be the times when the Tughlaq sultans of Delhi had extended their power towards the vast areas of South India. See, Lambourn, 'India from Aden', p. 76.

³² Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, p. 204.

³³ That the local rulers' permission for extending religious allegiance to the external polities and reading *khutbas* in their names was something uncompromised can be discerned from Muhammed al-Kalikuti's sixteenth century poem *Fat'h al-Mubin* dedicated to the ruler of Calicut. In the poem, Al-Kalikuti considers the permission by the Zamorins to read *khutba* in the name of the Muslim sultans as one of the noteworthy benevolences of the Calicut rulers towards their Muslim subject. See, Al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin*, p. 6, (Arabic text line no. 18).

merchant groups from diverse countries gathered and all of them wanted to get the port-city's *khutba* read in the names of their own Muslim rulers so as to augment the commerce between Calicut and their respective countries, a unanimous decision as to whom the allegiance must be given could not have been taken for quite a long time. Finally, when the members of Calicut's Muslim *jama'ath* could take a unanimous decision, the *qadi* in his letter to the Rasulid sultan did not fail to make a special mention of such a decision (*kulluhum qad ittafaqu bidalik*).³⁴ Another question is why the *qadi* in his letter specifically mentioned the names of certain members of the Muslim *jama'ath*. It seems that the named members were the noteworthy sojourning merchants of Calicut, who were involved in the maritime trade between Malabar and Yemen and who must have been quite familiar in the commercial circles of the Rasulid port of Aden, and thus, by invoking their names, the *qadi* must have hoped an easy approval of his demand. Although these merchants originally hailed from diverse geographical regions (see table 2), at Calicut they appeared to have had bonded together with similar commercial interests that were oriented in a Calicut-Aden axis, and by taking a unanimous decision to extend religious allegiance to the Rasulids, they must have expected to increase their fortunes out of the trade with Aden.

Table 2: Merchants of Calicut named in the letter of the *qadi* to the Rasulid sultan.

Merchants	Place of Origin
Zain Ali al-Rūmī	Turkey
Nuruddhin Sheikh Ali al-Ardabilī	Iran
Jamaluddin Yusuf al-Gassānī	Arabia ³⁵
Shihabuddin Ahmed al-Hūrī	Levant/Iraq ³⁶
Nuruddhin Ali al-Qawī	North Africa ³⁷
Sa'aduddin Masu'd	-----(<i>A paradesi</i>) ³⁸

³⁴ Al-Khazraji, *al-'Uqood al-lu'lu'iyya*, vol. 2, p. 205.

³⁵ Al-Gassānī is the name of a tribe which was basically from Yemen and then spread to other parts of Arabia. See, Al-Fairuzabadi, *al-Qamoos al-muheet*, p. 561.

From the letter of the *qadi*, it is evident that the initiative to link Calicut with the *khutba* network of the Rasulids was taken by the Muslims of the Malabari port rather than the Yemeni rulers. By so doing, the *qadi* of the port expected from the Rasulid sultan great material reward (*al-ajr al-jazīl*), by which the intention must be the annual stipends sent to the *khatibs* and *qadis*, whereas the merchant members of Calicut's Muslim *jama'ath* aspired to get proper treatment at Aden when they approach that Yemeni port. On the other hand, the Rasulids, as they must have been waiting long time for the eminent Indian port Calicut to come under their patronage system, appear not to have made any delay in accepting the request from the *qadi* of that port. Now, can't we generalize the case of Calicut to the other ports? It is very likely that the other ports on the Malabar Coast were also linked to the Yemeni *khutba* network after the Muslims settling in those ports took initiatives in this regard, and that the *khatibs* and *qadis* of those ports too received stipends from the Rasulids. If the Rasulid stipends were rewards for reading *khutbas* in their names, then this would suggest that the nine ports in Malabar, which are mentioned by *Nur al-ma'ārif* as receiving stipends from Yemen in the late thirteenth century, must have extended their religious allegiance to the Rasulids and read *khutbas* in their names. Moreover, if the eleven places in Malabar referred to by the letter of Calicut's *qadi* as already being linked to the Yemeni *khutba* network included the nine places mentioned by *Nur al-ma'ārif* almost one century ago, then that might indicate that in the operation of the *khutba* network mechanism, continuity was maintained for long decades.

That the Malabar Coast continued to be linked with the *khutba* networks of the Muslim polities well into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be gauged from the account of Abdul Razzaq as well as from an Ottoman edict. The Timurid ambassador to the court of the Zamorin informs us that some time before 1442, the ruler of Calicut had sent a messenger to the court of Shahrukh promising on behalf of the city's Muslims that

³⁶ The *nisbah* 'Al-Hūrī' may be either from Hūrī, a place in Iraq, or from Hūra, a place in Syria. For the identification of these places, see, *Ibid.*, p. 381.

³⁷ This merchant probably belonged to the Banu Abd al-Qawi tribe, which was spread in North Africa. For the tribe, see, Al-Umari, *Masalik al-absar*, vol. 4, p. 172.

³⁸ No *nisbah* is given along with the name of Masu'ud. But the name looks very much like the names of *paradesis* rather than the names of local Muslim merchants.

their *khutbas* would be read in the name of the Timurid sultan if it was allowed by him.³⁹ If we believe Abdul Razzaq's account, then certain questions would arise. Did the Muslims of Calicut give up reading *khutbas* in the name of the Rasulid sultans, which they had started just half a century ago? It is not unlikely that since a good number of the *nākhudās* of Calicut had begun to choose Jidda in place of Aden as their destination port from the 1420s onwards, the city's Muslims might have shifted their religious allegiance from the Rasulids to the Mamluk sultans. If the case were so, then why would they again in the 1440s want to switch their allegiance and promise to read *khutba* in the name of the Timurid Sultan Shahrukh? There is a light possibility that the Hanafi fraction among the Muslims of Calicut,⁴⁰ which did not want to extend religious allegiance to the Egyptian Mamluks (who were Shafi'is), might have asked the Zamorin to seek on their behalf Shahrukh's permission so that in his name *khutba* could be read in one of the congregational mosques of the city.⁴¹ However, what seems more likely is that though Jidda was rising as an international entrepot in the Red Sea area, the political scuffles (in the 1440s) in Mecca among the various Sharifs and the resultant excessive taxation at Jidda along with the monopolistic policies of the Mamluk sultans must have prompted the merchants of Calicut to think of an alternative destination port in the Persian Gulf area. And since the northern littorals of the Gulf during that time were under the control of the Timurids, the Muslims of Calicut might have appealed to the Zamorin to send his

³⁹ Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', p. 304.

⁴⁰ It is very likely that among the Muslim merchants of Calicut there was not an insignificant number of those who belonged to the Hanafi School as there were merchants hailing from Central Asian and Turkish lands where this school was the dominant one. In the letter of Calicut's *qadi*, we have already noticed some of the leading merchants of the port who were active in the late fourteenth century and who had hailed from Turkey and Persia. From the surviving mosque inscriptions at Calicut, we come to know about one Khwaja Badruddin Hassan al-Si'rudi, son of late Abu Bakr. This merchant hailed from Siirt of Turkey and appeared to have been one of the most leading merchants of Calicut during the mid-fifteenth century. It was this merchant who renovated two of the city's most important mosques, viz. the Muccunti mosque and *jami* mosque around 1480. For the inscriptions, see, Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Muslim Architecture*, p. 179, 195. It is not beyond possibility that such leading merchants of Calicut belonging to the Hanafi School might have had clash of interest over extending religious allegiance to the Muslim rulers belonging to the Shafi'i School.

⁴¹ As Abdul Razzaq testifies, by the mid-fifteenth century Calicut already had two congregational mosques. See, *Ibid.*, p. 303. However, it is not clear why two congregational mosques were needed in the city. Although it may well be because of the increasing population of the Muslims in the city, the possibility that those belonging to Schools other than Shafi'i opening up a separate congregation for them cannot be neglected.

messenger to the court of Shahrukh promising the sultan of their religious allegiance so as to get their plan of finding a favourable entrepot in the Gulf region realized.⁴²

However, with the massive expansionist moves of the Ottoman Empire including the conquest of Mamluk Egypt in the early sixteenth century, the Muslims of Malabar appears to have switched their religious allegiance from the older ones to the new political power. Since most of the outlets to the Mediterranean world had been brought under the control of the Ottomans, the Muslims must have felt the need to be networked with the Turks so that their maritime trade bypassing the naval surveillance of the Portuguese armadas could thrive. Our information in this regard comes from the Ottoman sources. The report (of 1566) of Lutfi, who was one of the chief Ottoman sea captains and the official envoy to the Acehnese court, has the following to say,

Likewise, the ruler of Calicut is a famous infidel ruler known as the “Samuri.” Most of the inhabitants of his country are Muslims, and they have built twenty-four mosques and also read the call to prayer in the noble name of your most high and blessed Imperial Majesty, refuge of the world, and pray for the longevity and prosperity of [your Majesty’s] state.⁴³

So, the call to prayer (*khutba*) of the twenty-four mosques in the kingdom of the Zamorin was read in the name of the Ottoman sultans. This figure of mosques seems not to be exaggeration as more than a century ago Ma Huan had reported that for the Muslims of the country of Calicut ‘There are twenty or thirty temples of worship’.⁴⁴ Furthermore, about one decade after the report of Lutfi, the Ottoman sultan’s Grand Vizier Soqullu Mehmed (r. 1565-1579) sent an edict to the Governor-general of Egypt in 1576, the content of which shows more overtly how the Muslims of Calicut and the surrounding areas were incorporated into the *khutba* networks of the Ottoman Turks. Due to the relevance of the edict, it is quoted here,

In times past, one hundred gold pieces [a year] were sent to the mosques of the twenty-seven cities located in the Indian port of Calicut for the Friday sermon [*hutbe*]. However, it has

⁴² However, the merchants of Calicut seemed not to have realized their goal as Abdul Razzaq’s mission to Calicut was ultimately a failure. We have seen in the second chapter that the entrepots of the Red Sea continued to be the main destination of the Muslim merchants.

⁴³ Translated in Giancarlo Casale, ‘His Majesty’s Servant Lutfi: The Career of a Previously Unknown Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Envoy to Sumatra Based on an Account of His Travels from Topkapi Palace Archives’, *Turcica* 37, 2005, p. 66.

⁴⁴ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan*, p. 140.

been reported that for the last few years only fifty gold pieces have been sent, and sometimes not even that amount...Be diligent in this affair and see it that, in fulfilment of the requirements of my orders, one hundred florins are sent every year without fail and in perpetuity from the port of Jiddah for the abovementioned sermons. As far as any payments that have still not been made from the previous years are concerned, these also should be paid in full from the revenues of Jiddah.⁴⁵

It appears from the edict that the Ottoman Grand Vizier had come to know of the frauds committed by the officials at Jidda with regard to the annual stipends for the mosques of Calicut and so he warned against it. The picture about the operation of the Ottoman *khutba* network mechanism that comes out of the edict is very much in conformity with what we have seen for the preceding centuries. *Khutbas* were read in the names of the Turkish sultans in the mosques of Calicut, and as a reward for that, hundred gold coins were dispersed each year from the treasury of Jidda to those mosques. Such networks, apart from strengthening the Ottoman attempts at forming a pan-Islamic front against the Portuguese, must have helped the Muslim merchants of Malabar in their trans-oceanic trade with the ports of the Red Sea area which had come under the control of the Turks.

3. Sufi Networks

Sufi network forms another important faith-related network that the Muslims in Malabar were able to form during the medieval times. This particular trajectory of Islam in Malabar is often neglected in secondary literature mainly because of the lack of sufficient source materials, which otherwise are found for the other regions of the Indian subcontinent. This is more so in the case of the period under review in this study. Yet, a careful perusal of the available primary sources would help us to explore the possible Sufi networks developed on the Malabar Coast. Sufism or *Tasawwuf* is the mystical trend in Islam that developed mainly as a reaction against the worldliness of the believers, and those who practiced this trend are referred as Sufis.⁴⁶ Due to their asceticism, Sufis were widely regarded as people closer to God (*walīs*) and so possessing the ability to satisfy the needs of the common believers. After an initial phase of its development, Sufism

⁴⁵ Cited in Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, p. 148.

⁴⁶ Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 18.

began to be increasingly institutionalized under various *silsilās* (“chains” or “orders”), each *silsilā* having its own hospices (technically known in different terms such as *zawiya*, *khanqah*, and *jama’ath-khana*), masters (*sheikhs/pīrs*) and followers (*murīds*).⁴⁷ *Baraka* is a term often associated with Sufism and it denoted the blessing or spiritual power communicated by Sufis to those who try to be in their proximity.⁴⁸ The popular believe among the seekers of *baraka* was that Sufis possessed the ability to impart spiritual blessings not only during their lifetime but also after their departure from the material world, and such believe led to the dissemination of tomb culture among Muslims. Another term associated with Islamic mysticism is *wilāya*, which meant either sainthood or the territory under the spiritual control of a Sufi.⁴⁹ The Sufi masters used to assign to their disciples (*murīds*) separate *wilāyas* or spiritual territories where the latter would look after the spiritual and material concerns of the devotees. Such a system of assigning *wilāyas* in turn paved the way for the development of various networks of Sufism.

Before we begin to examine the Sufi networks developed on the Malabar Coast, the nature of the Muslims settling on the coast and their local realities have to be borne in mind. The Muslims of Malabar during the period under study were pre-dominantly mercantile community involved both in maritime and inland trade. For those who undertook the inland trade collecting and distributing various commodities from and to the umlands and hinterlands, the medieval land or riverine routes that they traversed between the seacoasts and interiors were not always safe. In those routes, there were many spaces of wilderness, which, apart from being prone to human robbery, were perceived by the traders as haunted places where sheltered different types of negative forces like *yakshis*, *jinn*s, etc. Whereas, piracy, perils, and uncertainties of the coastal and oceanic waters often generated sense of insecurity among those who were involved in maritime trade. Given these realities, the merchants were always looking for some confidence building mechanisms that would help them traverse through those haunting spaces. It was against this backdrop that various sorts of Sufi networks developed on the Malabar Coast, which were revolving around hospices, mosques, and men of piety, and

⁴⁷ For more details refer, Ibid., pp. 83-103

⁴⁸ John Renard, *The A to Z of Sufism*, The Scarecrow Press, Toronto, etc., 2009, pp. 54-5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 90-1; Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, vol. 1, p. 98.

which acted as psychological mechanisms bolstering the confidence level and sense of security of the traders. How medieval seafarers benefited from associating themselves with Sufi networks can probably be best understood from the experience of Nu'man al-Mahdi, a sixteenth century seafarer who while on a voyage to India along with some other seafarers was about to be perished but escaped due to the blessings of his Sheikh. Nu'man's account reads as follows,

While we were sailing in a ship to India, there appeared a big break on the ship. All the travellers were sure that they would perish, and so all started involving in prayers and supplications to God Almighty. All evoked their own particular Sheikhs, and I evoked my Sheikh Abu Bakr al-'Aydarus. I soon took to napping for some time, during which I saw the Sheikh having appeared in the ship with a white kerchief and moving towards the site of the break. I suddenly woke up with much excitement, and called in high voice 'Oh sailors, relief have come'. They all asked me what you have seen, and I explained to them what I saw. Then they looked at the site of the break but it was already disappeared. That is how we all escaped with the blessings [*baraka*] of the Sheikh.⁵⁰

As someone who had travelled through most of the important Indian Ocean emporia of the mid-fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta is one of our chief sources for exploring the Sufi networks of Malabar. What the Moroccan felt most striking was the operation of the Kazaruni Sufi order, which was named after the famous mystic saint Sheikh Abu Ishaq al-Kazaruni (963-1033) buried in Kazarun of Persia. This Sufi saint was highly respected by the seagoing merchants of the Indian Ocean, and underscoring this fact, the Moroccan traveller noted,

I then left Shiraz intending to make Kazerun, situated at the distance of two days' journey, in order to visit the tomb of the Sheikh Abu Is-hak El-Kazeruni. This Sheikh is held high in esteem both in India and China: and even the sailors, when labouring under adverse winds, make great vows to him, which they pay to the servants of his cell, as soon as they get safely to shore. I accordingly visited the tomb of the Sheikh.⁵¹

What seems is that during the days when the trade via the Persian Gulf was still active, some of the seagoing merchants must have escaped from the perils of the sea due to the blessings (*baraka*) of Sheikh Abu Ishaq who was based in Kazarun, a place not far away from the waters of the Gulf, and then the hagiographical accounts of this miraculous saving power of the Sheikh might have spread among the seafarers of the

⁵⁰ Muhyuddinal-'Aydarus, *Al-Nur al-safir 'an akhbar al-qarn al-ashir*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1985. p. 80 (Translation mine).

⁵¹ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, Oriental Translations Committee, London, 1829, p. 43.

Indian Ocean. By the fourteenth century, such hagiographical stories appear to have widely spread so much that there were found hospices (*zawiya*) in the name of the Sheikh in many of the important nodal points of the Indian Ocean in accordance with the increased demand among the seagoing Muslim merchants. In these hospices served those who were either descendants of the Sheikh or followers (*murīds*) of the Kazaruni order, whose main task was to collect from the seafarers the vows (*nuzūr*) they made in the name of Sheikh Abu Ishaq. On the Malabar Coast, the most important emporia of trade in the mid-fourteenth century were Quilon and Calicut, and Ibn Battuta testifies that in both of these emporia, Kazaruni hospices were found. In Calicut, at the time of the visit of the Moroccan, one Sheikh Shihabuddin al-Kazaruni was the servant of the city's hospice (*sahib al-zawiya*), who collected vows from the Muslim merchants travelling in the Arab dhows and Chinese junks.⁵² Whereas, Quilon's Kazaruni hospice was under the supervision of Sheikh Fakhruddin al-Kazaruni.⁵³ Interestingly, we are told that this Fakhruddin was the son of Sheikh Shihabuddin, the servant in charge of Calicut's hospice, and it seems that such kin relationships among the followers of the Kazaruni order spread over the rims of the Indian Ocean must have added to the cohesiveness of the mystic order. Although hospices were not something unique with the Kazaruni order during the medieval times, what must have made Ibn Battuta furnish us with the details of this Persia based Sufi order might be its exceptional acceptance among the seafarers and the widespread presence at the major confluences of international trade.

This sort of details has not survived for any other Sufi order in Malabar during the period under review. But that cannot be taken to mean their absence on the coast. The Arabic accounts from Malabar, both legendary and historical ones, shed light on the connection of the Muslims with the mystic orders and saints from across the ocean. *Qissat Shakarwati Farmad* records that Malik bin Dinar, one of those involved in the construction of mosques on the Malabar Coast, departed from Quilon for Khurasan in order to pay visit to the distinguished Sheikhs there (*li ziyarat al-mashaikh al-mutaqaddimin*).⁵⁴ Whatever be the authenticity of it, the recording of such stories

⁵² Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 45.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁴ Friedmann, 'Qissat Shakarwati Farmad'. P. 256.

indicates to the Muslims' trans-regional associations with the mystic circles of Khurasan, one of the famous centres of Sufism in medieval times. Besides, Abdul Azeez's *Maslak al-atqiya'*, which he wrote as a commentary on his father Sheikh Zainudin al-Funnani's (d. 1521 and buried in Ponnani) mystic treatise *Hidayat al-azkiya*, has referred in its introductory part to some of the Sufi orders, with which his father was associated.⁵⁵ Thus, the text says that Zainudin was of the Chishti *silsila*, to which he was formally enrolled (*akhada al-irada*) by Sheikh Ibn Fariduddin al-Ajodani who was in the chain of the famous Sufi saint Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar of Pakpattan.⁵⁶ Zainudin is said to have been honoured by his Sheikh with *khirqa* (a cloak that marked Sufi initiation) and *ijaza* (the license to disseminate the principles and practices of the Chishti order).⁵⁷ Besides, he was associated also with the Qadiri and Shattari orders, the former through the medium of Sheikh Ibn Fariduddin and the latter through one Sheikh Sabith Ibn 'Ain al-Zahidi.⁵⁸ What appears is that Sheikh Zainudin, after being enrolled into the important contemporary Sufi orders of India likely from the main centres of those orders, must have come and settled down at Ponnani, where he could look after the spiritual and material needs of the local Muslim mercantile community active in the coast's maritime and inland trade. That mystic saints associated with the Shattari order continued to be active on the Malabar Coast can be discerned from *Fat'h al-Mubin*, the late sixteenth century text of Muhammed al-Kalikuti. The author says that among the dignitaries of Calicut who took part in the Battle of Chaliyam (AD 1571) was 'Abul Wafa Muhammed al-Shattari, our well-known Sheikh, possessor of mysterious powers'.⁵⁹ It can be assumed that Abul Wafa al-Shattari, who was of the Shattari order and whose tomb near the harbour of Calicut has been a site of devotional visits by the Muslims, might have been one of the

⁵⁵ Abdul Azeez has added in his work a biographical note on Sheikh Zainudin, who is generally believed by the Muslims in Malabar as the first Makhdoom and whose tomb in Ponnani has been a site for frequent devotional visits. See, Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya' wa manhaj al-asfiya' fi sharh hidayat al-adkiya' ila tariq al-auliya*, ed. Hamid Abdullah al-Tamimi, Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah, Beirut, 2013, pp. 48-52.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵⁹ Al-Qadi Muhammed, *Fat'h al-Mubin*, p. 19, (Arabic text line no. 247).

chief saints of the sixteenth century Calicut, who by locating himself near the port of the city could have served the Muslims active at the port.⁶⁰

In addition, pious individuals from among the *sayyids* and *ulema*, whose association with the important Sufi orders is not known from our sources, and certain mosques also had acted as confidence-building mechanisms in the key centres of trade in Malabar. Thus, in Calicut is found a tomb of one Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, whose death happened in 1403 as per the head-stone inscription.⁶¹ Abdul Razzaq al-Samarqandi during his visit to India happened to meet at Fakanur an age-old *sayyid* of Persian origin named Sayyid Abd al-Rahman Mashhadi.⁶² This pious man was from Mashhad, the famous pilgrimage centre in Iran and is said to have been revered at Fakanur by the Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Ibn Battuta has it that the city of Hili (which is identified for the time being as Madayi) was much admired by both the Muslims and the non-Muslims because of the city's congregational mosque, to which seafarers offered enormous vows, as the mosque was believed to have possessed huge *baraka*.⁶³ What distinguished Hili's mosque from other mosques on the Malabar Coast is not clear from the account of the traveller, nor from any other source. Yet, it can be assumed that the mosque came to be ascribed extra holiness because of the religious centre which, as Ibn Battuta himself attests, was attached to the mosque and in which were educated many students. Interestingly, the Moroccan had not found any Kazaruni hospice in Hili despite it being an important trade centre visited by the Arab dhows and Chinese junks, and that might be because the city already had a holy centre in the form of a unique mosque, to which vows of the seafaring merchants could be offered. In short, the Malabar Coast during the medieval times witnessed the development of both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of Sufi trends, which in turn could act as mechanisms strengthening the confidence level of people involved in maritime and inland trade.

⁶⁰ An inscription found at the tomb of Sheikh Abul Wafa indicates that he was of foreign origin. For the inscription see, Desai, *A Topographical List*, p. 102.

⁶¹ For the inscription see, Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Muslim Architecture*, p. 210.

⁶² Thackston, trans., 'Kamaluddin Abdul-Razzaq', p. 316.

⁶³ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 41.

4. Scholarly Networks

Last, but not least there were various sorts of scholarly networks of the Muslims in Malabar. With the escalation of Islamic trade networks in the Indian Ocean and the resultant appearance of several Muslim settlements on its nodal points, the Malabar Coast appeared to have witnessed the presence of increasing number of Islamic religious scholars and experts (*ulema*). The Muslim mercantile community on the coast was in need of the service of these experts in various roles. Firstly, scholars were in demand in order to serve as *imams*, *khatibs*, and *qadis* in the Muslim settlements of the coast. Secondly, since the merchants themselves were not always scholarly persons, they had to seek the help of Islamic experts who could explain to them the religious rules and regulations of Islam particularly with regard to the conduct of trade both with their co-religionists and with others. Then, scholars were also demanded for imparting religious education to the children of the Muslim settlers of the coast. Since during most of the period under study there had not developed in Malabar enough religious scholars of native origin, there was always room for Islamic experts from outside lands.

Thus, we come to know from our sources about many religious luminaries who had made their way to the important Muslim settlements on the ports of Malabar from places as diverse as Mogadishu, Oman, Bagdad, Qazwin (Iran), Ma'abar (Coromandel Coast) and Zaitun (China). Ibn Battuta testifies that during the time he visited Mangalore, the city's chief *qadi* was Badruddin al-Ma'abari.⁶⁴ The *nisbah* of this scholar indicates that he was originally from the Coromandel Coast. Scholars from the Coromandel Coast continued to arrive in Malabar during the later periods particularly through the networks of the Marakkar merchants. The ancestors and the first generations of the Makhdooms, the well-known scholarly family in Malabar, were often identified as *al-ma'abari* likely because of their origin from the Coromandel region.⁶⁵ Ibn Battuta happened to meet in the *jami* mosque of Hili an African jurist named Saeed who hailed from Mogadishu.⁶⁶ It seems that Saeed, who had spent several years in West Asian centres of learning, had

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶⁵ For such identification, see for instance, Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya*, p. 48, 51.

⁶⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 41.

been in the Malabari port as a teacher in the religious centre attached with the *jami* mosque of the city.⁶⁷ In Jurfattan, the Moroccan traveller met one jurist from Baghdad named Al-Sarsari.⁶⁸ We are told that in Jurfattan, Al-Sarsari was living along with his brother, who was a wealthy merchant but died in Malabar leaving his small children orphans. What appears from the case of these figures is that the existing commercial networks of the time as well as family relationships often eased the religious scholars' way into the Muslim settlements of the Malabar Coast. In Pantalayani, the person who served as the *khatīb* and *qādi* of the *jami* mosque during the mid-fourteenth century was someone from Oman, who like the aforesaid Al-Sarsari had a brother active in the trade of the port.⁶⁹ Whereas, the *qādi* of the Muslims in Quilon was a scholar who hailed from Qazwin in Persia.⁷⁰ What turns out is that the Malabar Coast by the fourteenth century had become a crossroads for scholars hailing from across the seas.

Concomitantly, Muslim scholars born and brought up on the Malabar Coast tried to establish scholarly contacts with the religious circles in the Islamic heartlands. Considering the existing commercial contacts between the regions, it was not a big deal for the Malabari scholars to visit or to be in touch with the religious luminaries of Hijaz and Egypt. Abdul Azeez informs us that among the teachers of Sheikh Zainudin al-Funnani (d.1522) was Sheikh Zakariyya al-Ansari (d. 1520), a well-known Shafi'i scholar based in Egypt.⁷¹ His grandson Zainuddin Ibn Muhammed is believed to have spent substantial time in the scholarly circles of Hijaz, and in his work *Al-Ajwibathul Ajeebath*, the scholar speaks of occasions when he was at Mecca.⁷² Since the religious laws of Islam as they evolved in the Islamic heartlands could not be applied as such in the peripheries where the religion had to confront various other beliefs and practices, the religious scholars of the Malabar Coast often had to reform many of the laws in accordance with the local realities of the coast, and in that process, they had to be in

⁶⁷ It appears that Hili's fourteenth century Islamic religious centre was a prototype of what would later develop as *palli dars* on the Malabar Coast.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

⁷¹ Abdul Azeez, *Maslak al-atqiya*, p. 52.

⁷² See for example, A. Z. al-Malabari, *al-Ajwibat al-ajeebath an al-asilat al-ghareeba*, ed. A. A. al-Shafi al-Malabari, Dar al-Dhiya', Kuwait, 2012, p. 154.

touch with the scholars of the Islamic lands in order to clear all the doubts and conundrums. The *fatawa* (religious rules) literature produced by the scholars in and out of Malabar throws considerable light on this aspect of trans-regional intellectual contacts of the Muslim scholars. For instance, Ibn Hajar al-Haithami (d. 1567), one of the most important authorities in the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence who was based in Mecca, had dealt in his *Al-Fatawa al-Fiqhiya al-Kubra* with around twelve religious issues concerning the Malabar Coast.⁷³ The scholars from Malabar must have raised these issues to him in the form of questions either directly or through correspondences. Zainuddin's *Al-Ajwibathul Ajeebath* is abundant with questions that he asked to the various religious scholars of West Asia and the answers given by them.⁷⁴ These types of trans-regional networks are the manifestations of how religious scholars strived to accommodate the universal Islam to the local realities of the Malabar Coast. Moreover, there was in Malabar circulation of the important scholarly texts produced in the Islamic countries, as can be discerned from the frequent references to such texts in the religious treatises written by the scholars from Malabar. For instance, *Fathul Muin*, a treatise on Shafi'i jurisprudence produced in Malabar by Zainuddin Ibn Muhammed, has frequent references to the works of the thirteenth century Shafi'i jurist Yahya al-Nawawi (d. 1277), which must have been possible because of the dissemination of those works on the Malabar Coast.⁷⁵

However, Islamic scholars of the Malabar Coast were not confined to the world of religious affairs; instead, many of them played a not insignificant role in the port cities of the coast. In the West Asian ports of medieval times, it was quite normal that *qādis* were appointed as officers in-charge of port-cities.⁷⁶ In the context of Malabar, though they might not have had the same role that their counterparts in West Asia used to play in the

⁷³ See for example, Ibn Hajar al-Haithami, *Al-Fatawa al-Fiqhiya al-Kubra*, 4 vols., al-Maktaba al-Islamiya, Turkey, vol. 1, p. 25, 174, 270.

⁷⁴ In addition to *Al-Ajwibathul Ajeebath*, Zainuddin has many other *fatawa* literature, which, however, have not been published yet. Their manuscripts are found in the Azhariyya Library of Chaliyam, and I am thankful to Usman al-Amjadi for allowing me to see those manuscripts.

⁷⁵ For more details on this aspect, refer, Mahmood Kooria, *Cosmopolis of Law: Islamic Legal Ideas and Texts across the Indian Ocean and Eastern Mediterranean Worlds*, Doctoral Dissertation, Leiden University, 2016, esp. pp. 117-264.

⁷⁶ We have already noted an example from Yemen, where *qadi* Raziuddin was the officer in charge of the port of Aden.

administration of port-cities, *qādis* appear to have had at least some nominal powers in the administration of the entrepots. Ibn Battuta testifies that in certain ports of Malabar, *qādis* often accompanied officers while they went to welcome visiting ships. Thus, the ship in which the Moroccan and his companions travelled from Gujarat to Malabar was greeted in Mangalore at first by the *qādi* of the place Badruddin al-Ma'abari, whereas in Calicut the city's *qādi* Fakhrudin Usman along with others welcomed their ship.⁷⁷

The above discussion highlights the way how the Muslims of Malabar got continuously shaped and reshaped under the influence of the network of scholars and religious personalities who used to help them to adapt universal Islam to the requirements of the locality, giving proper corrections, justifications and required legitimacy to local experiments. The channels of trade happened to be the channels for the movements of saints, scholars and religious personalities, wherein reinforcement of religious ideologies went hand in hand with reinforcement of commercial bonds. Though the entire mercantile world of the Muslims appeared to be on the move, with equal amount of mobility of scholars and saints, Islam was getting deep-rooted in Malabar in its localized form.

⁷⁷ See, Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat Ibn batuta*, vol. 4, p. 40, 45.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken with a view to exploring the trade and faith-related networks of Muslims on the Malabar Coast during the medieval times. Although the maritime history of India is a burgeoning area of study for the last few decades, the focus has often been on the European phase that began with the entry of the Portuguese into the waters of the Indian Ocean and to some extent, on the classical phase when the Romans had maritime contacts with the Indian subcontinent. The in-between period in the maritime history of India, roughly from the 4th century unto the late fifteenth century, still lacked rigorous researches mainly because of a conventionally held reason, viz. paucity of source materials. This is even more so in the case of the Malabar Coast as the non-survival of indigenous sources pertaining to the trans-regional contacts of people on the coast gave the scholars the impression that the maritime history of medieval Malabar could not be unearthed satisfactorily. Researchers often chose to work on that phase of the history, for which data available in European languages have been preserved in archives. The result was that write-ups on the pre-sixteenth century phase of Malabar's maritime history, in which the most important role was played by West Asian merchants particularly the Muslim traders, could not be devoid of several illusions that were based mainly on the early sixteenth century accounts of European officials and some contemporary travel accounts. I undertook to write this dissertation as a humble attempt towards tackling this historiographical imbalance by productively making use of the Arabic sources, which have several references to the aspects of the maritime history of the Malabar Coast although they were not written in the context of coast nor were commercial in nature. It is true that this study also have utilised the early sixteenth century European sources and the contemporary travelogues, but the point of departure from the previous accomplishments lies in the way it tried to juxtapose the information provided by them with those data in the Arabic sources that still remain unutilised by the scholars working on the history of Malabar.

The prime argument of the study was that during the period under review the Muslims on the Malabar Coast were able to form wide-ranging commercial and faith-related networks, which used to shift in accordance with the larger political and commercial developments occurring in the Indian Ocean world. By pondering the references found in the contemporary Arabic sources about the aspects of the history of pre-modern Malabar, I tried to shed light on the various aspects of the maritime trade of the region such as the people involved in the trade, their wide-ranging trans-regional connections, and the quantitative aspects of their trade. I also strove to understand the faith related networks of the Muslims on the coast that looked striking ones considering the fact that a large chunk of the indigenous population in those times was seeing the oceanic spaces and seafaring as taboos and so was reluctant to make such trans-regional networks. While dealing with the primary sources, several questions arose, and the foregoing chapters tried to bring possible answers to those questions. In the forthcoming paragraphs, the major findings of the study are summarised.

The foregoing discussions showed that during the long period considered for the study, Malabar had witnessed changing political structures. Under the later Chera dynasty, there was a centralised political structure, which however got disappeared by the course of the twelfth century and each of the erstwhile *nadus* or provinces of the coast rose as independent political entities. Under both the political structures, what was common to the region was that the political rulers enthusiastically responded to the maritime trade of coast realising the limited chances of mobilising resources out of agriculture and inspired by their possession of some of the sought-after commodities of international trade. Many of the *swarupam* polities strove to make their headquarters somewhere in the coastal areas, which when coincided with their ability to be connected with the productive hinterlands and with their geo-physical nature that could provide decent anchorage and provisions of travel eventually developed as important nodal points of Malabar. Since the social formation of the place that was primarily based on the *Chaturvarnya* idea of Hinduism did not favour the rise of a flourishing indigenous mercantile class, there was on the coast always room for the merchant groups from outside, who were eagerly welcomed by the local polities by extending to them religious freedom and at some occasions even royal grants. These outsiders, of whom the Muslim

merchants constituted a major segment, could thrive in their commercial ventures as they had large networks in the overseas markets of Malabar based on the commonalities of religion and the kin relationships. By digging on the various primary sources, the study has painstakingly tried to locate historically the important nodal points of the coast. It found that in all the major outlets of the coast, Muslim merchants, either the foreign *paradesis* or the local ones, had their presence and commercial participation at some point of time during the centuries under review. While Quilon was the most important port on the coast for long time especially because of its geophysical position vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean, the southern port was eventually surpassed from about the fourteenth century onwards by Calicut, the port of the Zamorins, with whose patronage maritime trade rose concomitantly promoting its political ascendancy on the Malabar Coast. In the rise and continuity of the nodal points especially Calicut, it has been shown that decisive role was played by the local rulers' ability to ensure the regular visit and trading activities of the foreign merchants who then were not reluctant to change their favourite port in Malabar in accordance with the changing fortunes offered by the local polities.

In the centuries preceding the entry of Muslims into the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, the merchants from the Sassanid Persia and the South Asian traders linked with Buddhism already had active trans-oceanic trade networks, the main convergent zone of them was Ceylon. These preceding networks eventually eased the way for Muslim merchants when they tried to form their own networks in the western and eastern segments of the ocean. Moreover, an examination of the medieval nautical treatises has shown that the sailing of the Indian Ocean in medieval times was largely depended upon the pace of the monsoon winds and that the most preferred time of sailing from West Asian ports to the Malabar Coast was the *Damani* season, i.e. the ending part of the Southwest monsoon (late August-September). The westward sailing from Malabar was undertaken during the Northeastern monsoon (*Rih Azyab*, end of October to April-May) season, and though the entire season could be utilised for the sailing, the medieval mariners held the months after the timing of the 'rain of Elephant' (late September-October) to the dawn of March as the ideal time for leaving Malabar. Merchants who wanted to travel from Malabar towards Southeast Asia preferred to cross the Bay of Bengal in the early phase of the Southwest monsoon though travelling in its later phase

was also possible if ready to take the possible risks of the squally rainstorms off the Malabar Coast and the cyclones of the Bay. The journey from Southeast Asia to Malabar was made by utilizing the Northeastern monsoon that however reached Sumatra and the nearby areas only by January.

While discussing the maritime networks, attempts were made to bring out from the contemporary sources those Muslim merchants who were the real actors in the Indian Ocean networks. With regard to the trans-oceanic trade networks prior to the pre-sixteenth century, the Muslim merchants of Malabar had trade relations with diverse overseas entrepôts extending from West Asia up to the Far East and that their chief destination port in each region often changed due to various reasons. Unlike the conventional historiographical trend, in which segmented forms of trade were overshadowed by the emphasis given to the China trade, this study has shown that concomitant to the development of long-distance China trade, the Malabar Coast was getting entrenched into the networks of those merchants whose commercial activities were concentrated in the Arabian Sea realm. Until the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in the second half of the tenth century, it was the entrepôts situated in the Persian Gulf side which attracted the bulk of Malabar's westward trade, and then in the centuries of the second millennium this advantage was taken over by the ports of the Red Sea area. What turned out from a perusal of the Geniza documents is that during the reign of the Fatimids itself active trans-oceanic trade was carried out between Aden and the ports of Malabar and that considerable number of Muslim merchants, besides Jews, had taken part in that trade. This trade network escalated more intensely after the rise of the Rasulids in Yemen and of the Mamluks in Egypt, who all strove to systematise the trade passing through their respective entrepôts, and during the process, Malabar's position vis-à-vis the international trade got consolidated unprecedentedly. By the early fifteenth century, the role of Malabar and the Muslim merchants involved in its maritime trade was such that the *nākhudas* and merchants emanating from Calicut could bring enduring changes in the orientation of the international trade via the Red Sea area by paving the way for the rise of Jidda at the cost of Aden. Until the early sixteenth century, this Hijazi port competed with Aden in attracting the maximum share of the shiploads from India, and the same was the chief destination port of Malabar's *paradesi* merchants when the Portuguese arrived

in the Indian Ocean waters. As for the eastward trade of the Malabar Coast, the study found that barring some occasional breaks, the Muslim merchants had maintained direct trade relations between the coast and the port-cities of China until the Ming dynasty brought significant changes in its maritime policy and attitude towards foreigners. Initially, the merchants sailed to the Far East in the same dhows that they had used to traverse the Arabian Sea waters, but from around the eleventh century onwards, they utilised the shipping service of the Kling merchants and the Chinese junks, which in turn brought to the Malabar Coast the new role of being transshipment centre.

In Malabar's coastal trade networks, which stretched from Gujarat up to Bengal and to the Laccadive and Maldives Islands, the role of the local Muslim merchants had become very crucial by the late fifteenth century, and among these merchants, the Marakkars from the Coromandel Coast were the leading figures. However, after the arrival of the Portuguese, the fortunes of the *paradesi* and local Muslim merchants altered significantly. As the Lusitanians resorted to various mechanisms for monopolising the spice trade, the *paradesi* merchants could not withstand them and therefore had to leave Malabar for safer ports. On the other hand, a major section of the local Muslim merchants initially collaborated with the newcomers, as their commercial interests appeared not to have been mutually contradicting. However, once they tried to fill the vacuum in the trans-oceanic trade with the Red Sea ports, the Portuguese, especially at the instigation of the *casado* elements, could not tolerate it and found the exploitation of the *cartaz* system as a convenient tool for frequently checking and confiscating the vessels fitted by the Muslim merchants. The result was that these merchants soon turned out to be one of the biggest foes of the Portuguese in Asia and stood adamant in their opposition throughout the sixteenth century. However, on the Malabar Coast were still present some of the prominent *paradesi* merchants who survived because of their tactic moves, and that certain groups among the local Muslim merchants preferred not to go for direct confrontation with the Portuguese so as to realise their long term plan of finding alternative channels of trade.

With regard to the items and wares in transmission through Muslim trade networks, Malabar's pepper and other spices constituted the regular items of export from

the coast through both trans-oceanic and coastal trade networks. As for the import items, while precious and base metals were the commodities mostly demanded on the coast through the trans-oceanic networks, bulk of what was imported happened to be rice and other provisions as the coast unlike rest of the country lacked in food materials. However, due to its ideal geophysical position in the Indian Ocean world, several other wares were imported to the coast not for its own consumptions, but to be transhipped to other marts in its forelands. An examination of the pepper price in Malabar and its overseas marts in the early fifteenth century showed that the merchants used to get in the Red Sea ports around 1000% of what was spent in purchasing pepper from the Malabar Coast, which in turn indicated that their profits from the pepper trade were substantial. In the case of the import of horses, though the merchants did not get in Malabar such high percentage of what was spent in Arabia or Persia in the purchase of the war animal, their proceeds still accounted to be amazing since the commodity in itself was a highly valued one and therefore a large number of horses, if taken to Malabar, used to give a merchant huge profits. As far as the volume of trade was concerned, the study through a rough estimation found that during the fifteenth century, annually an average of 10-15 ships (each with a capacity of about two hundred tons) were fitted for transporting wares particularly pepper from Malabar to the ports of the Red Sea ports when situations at both the ends of the trade were safe. This in turn suggested that the volume of commodities in circulation through the Islamicate trade networks was substantial. Yet, further rigorous researches have to be accomplished on the quantitative aspects of the pre-sixteenth century Indian Ocean trade, which would be possible only if new source materials are explored.

With regard to the organization of Muslim trade, one of the main arguments was that in the maritime trade of the Malabar Coast, the sojourning merchants from West Asia, who based their commerce somewhere on the coast for years and then eventually left for homelands after making huge fortunes, had a role that was similar to or even more important than the role played by the moving merchants who had their base in the overseas lands. On the basis of their wealth and the volume and value of the trade they conducted, there had developed disparities among the Muslim merchants, which in turn sometimes complicated their mutual relationships. It also showed that the emphasis conventionally given to the Kārīmi merchants from Egypt in the trans-oceanic trade of

the Malabar Coast has to be reconsidered since our sources vindicate that the chief realm of their trade was the Red Sea zone rather than the proper Indian Ocean. Another point that the chapter demonstrated is the significant role of slave-agents in the maritime trade of medieval times. From the recurrent references to slaves in our sources, who could be distinguished from freemen from their usual single names unaccompanied by any patronymics and cognomen, and without tribal, regional and other identities, it is found that employing of slaves as their agents in the various roles of trade had become a normal practice among the Muslim merchants of Malabar. By making use of the expertise and networks that they acquired while serving their masters in various business capacities, some of these slave-agents eventually turned out to be merchant magnets wealthy enough to sponsor some of Malabar's earliest mosques. The study shows that in sustaining the maritime trade networks between West Asian ports and a Malabari port like Calicut, the diplomatic correspondences and exchanges by the respective political sovereigns have often had stimulating effect.

The circuits of trade used to converge at the nodal points of the faith-related networks of Muslims in Malabar. The study found that despite they themselves being able to pay their religious officials such as *imams*, *khatībs*, and *qādis* employed in the major nodal mercantile points of Malabar, the Muslim congregations (*jamā'ths*) of the port-cities sought to be linked with the Rasulid rulers of Yemen by accepting their annual stipends to the religious officials . As the late fourteenth century letter sent to the Yemeni court by Calicut's *qādi* on behalf of its Muslim *jamā'th* suggests that, these annual stipends were follow-ons of the *khutba* network mechanism, by which the Muslims settling down on the Malabar Coast promised their religious allegiance to the external Muslim polities and agreed to read *khutbas* in their names. This sort of bonds based on the reading of *khutbas* in the name of sultans and on the acceptance of stipends to the religious leaders was motivated by their material advantages for the both sides. On the one hand, by projecting themselves as the patrons of religious officials employed on the nodal points of the Indian Ocean, the Muslim polities hoped to get the maximum share of the commodities emanating from those points of coastal India flowed towards their own entrepots. On the other hand, by extending their religious allegiances to those polities, the Muslim congregations, which were composed chiefly of merchants, could expect proper

treatment at their entrepots. What could be understood from the repeated shifts in religious allegiance (first to the Rasulids, then to the Mamluks, then to the Timurids, and finally to the Ottomans) is that the Muslim merchants of Malabar were not hesitant to change the names of sultans mentioned in their *khutbas* or the source of stipends in accordance with the changing fates of the Muslim polities and the commercial prospects and fortunes they offered.

Besides, during the medieval times the Malabar Coast witnessed the development of various Sufi networks, most of which were linked with the larger Sufi networks of the world. These Sufi networks revolved around hospices, mosques, and men of piety, and a typical example of them was the Kazaruni order named after and centred on the mystic saint Sheikh Abu Ishaq al-Kazaruni (963-1033). From their positioning in some of Malabar's major nodal points and convergences of trade it becomes clear that the chief patrons and beneficiaries of these Sufi networks were the Muslim merchants involved in the maritime and inland trade of the coast. The merchants offered enormous vows to the hospices, mosques, and tombs (*dargas* and *jarams*) situated on the port-cities, as these were believed by them to have possessed the spiritual power to protect them from the perils and devils on their routes and to provide them with confidence and sense of security to traverse through the spaces of wilderness. Moreover, since the Malabar Coast for long time had not had sizeable number of indigenous scholars to serve in various religious roles, there was recurring migration of religious personnel to the coast from diverse lands particularly West Asia. As the Islamic scholars situated on the coast constantly encountered many conundrums while trying to adapt the universal Islam into the local situations, they could not but be in regular touch with the overseas religious experts, for which they made use of the existing networks and channels of trade.

Of course, this study has not explored even a single drop of what constituted the trade and faith-related networks of the Muslims in medieval Malabar as I have been able to utilise only a few of the Arabic sources that are published and could be accessed from India. However, it evidently shows that the material basis of the Malabar Muslim community got evolved, shaped and reshaped by wealth from their trade in the Indian Ocean during this period, whereas their spiritual and religious orientations were

formulated by the scholars , saints and sufis on the move who confirmed them in their localized forms of Islam and enabled them to articulate a regional understanding and practice for their religion.

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