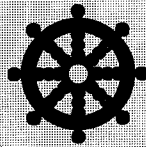


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# ANALYSIS OF ARAB In Russian Oriental

Ahmed Ibn Majid "The Last Lion of

By  
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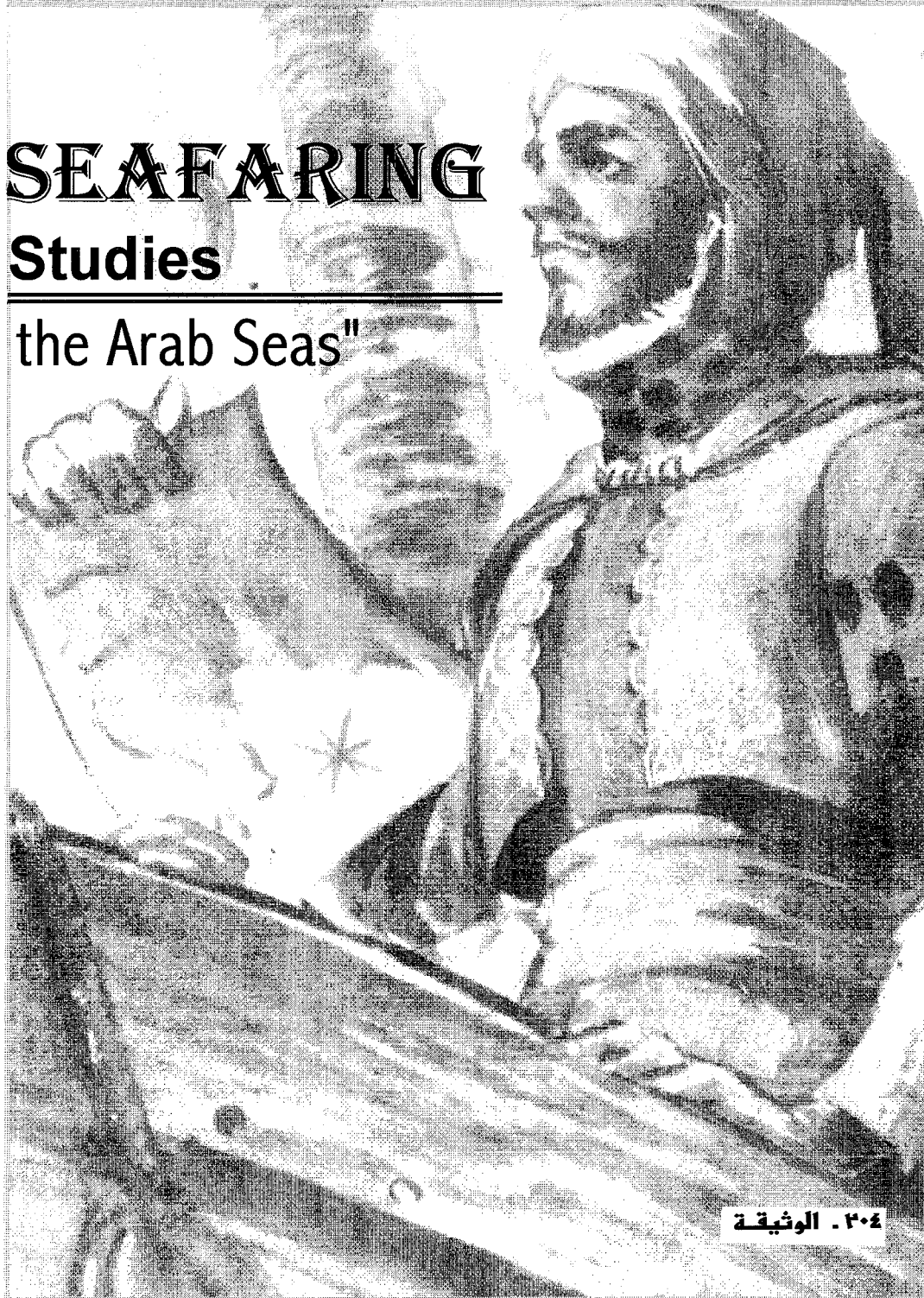
*Arabs were traditionally considered in Western thought to be people attached to land and living primarily in deserts or in a number of rare oases. The major Arabists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as G. Reinaud and M. de Slane shared this opinion. M. Hartman, B. Carra de Vaux and Ignatius Kratchkovski were already writing about the dislike of the sea by the Arabs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

# SEAFARING

## Studies

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the Arab Seas"



٣٠٤ . الوثيقة

*Following this tradition of thinking, one should believe that the sea which is circling Arabia did not link it to the continent but separated it from the rest of the world. For this reason, the geographical location has contributed to the uniqueness of the Arab nation. In this perspective isolationism could explain the different phenomena of Arabic culture such as the centrality of the camel in Arabic poetry as well as the lack of sea-related lexics in major dictionaries. It also helps us understand why the major Arabic sources in geography give detailed descriptions of land routes but mention only sketchily the sea. On many medieval Arabic maps China faces Abyssinia .*

But what are the seven travels of Sindbad in this perspective? Is it a fairy tale helping to narrate the story of an adventurous merchant? What is the meaning of the numerous sea related accounts in Arabic literature? It is possible to find them in the “*Wonders of India*” written by the ship-owner Buzurg ibn Shahriar, in “*The Legends about China and India*” originating from Siraf and in the reports of Ibn Battuta about the port of Calicut. Interesting details

can be found in the story about the pilot Maffan by al-Biruni, reports of al-Idrisi about the sea travel of the “tempted” (“mugarrun”) in the Atlantic and in the memoirs of al-Mas’udi about his voyage from the coast of East Africa in the company of the two ship-owners.

In addition to that less known authors were also speaking about Arab endeavours in the sea. The writings of al-Nuwairi, Ibn Tuwair, Jahya from Antiokhia, al-Kalkashandi

and al-Maqdisi are among the most important in this regard.

Significant linguistic data also supports the idea of the particular importance of the sea for the Arabs. Numerous borrowings of the sea-related lexics in the European, African and Asian languages provide enough evidence of that.

Unfortunately, for a long time these accounts were considered unsystematic and insufficient to suppose any marked activity of the Arabs related to the sea. It was long considered that the Arabs were not sophisticated enough as to sail in the open sea.

In fact, the situation was quite different: First of all, the recent archeological data gives various kinds of evidence that Arabia was relatively a fertile territory in the III-IV centuries BC. It was linked with Babylonia,

India and Egypt with a number of sea routes. "*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*" which was written in the First century AD and some writings of Ptolemy give more detailed information about Arab seafaring. Its development was closely connected with the Phoenician and later Greek navigation bordering their spheres of influence.

Already at that time the Arabs were acquainted with the conditions of monsoons. This knowledge enabled them to undertake trade expeditions by sea up to East of Africa as well as to Malabar, Ceylon and Sumatra. The diversity of traded goods increased significantly over the next period but still the most important were gold, spices and slaves.

The introduction of Islam in Arabia and the expansion of the caliphate did not ruin

the existing traditions of trade, but on the contrary, brought together many significant ports of antiquity under the same rule. The most important among them were Uballa, Siraf, Kish, Muscat, Aden, Alexandria and Almeria.

A further period of sea colonization enlarged the opportunities for Arab sea-trade. Muslim colonies emerged on vast territories from Africa to Indonesia and China facilitating the economic growth of the Abbasid Caliphate. Numerous uprisings and wars could not stop Arab seafaring which intensively developed up to the end of the XV century. After that the Portuguese took the place of the Arabs in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese domination forced them to move back to the shores.

All through the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only important

source of knowledge of the history of the Arabian art of navigation was the famous "*Muhit*" (Encyclopedia) by Sidi Ali Chelebi, the Turkish admiral of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This source was discovered by Joseph Hammer-Purgstall in the 1820's. At that time Arabic geographic literature was thought, to contain mainly a description of overland itineraries. The accounts of the sea voyage were considered to have only an occasional and exotic character.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the situation changed. The manuscripts discovered in 1912 contained 18 works on the art of navigation written by Ahmad ibn Majid from Oman and Sulaiman ibn Ahmad from Mahra (in South Arabia). In fact, one of these sources has been kept in the Bibliotheque National without stirring any interest from 1860 and another one

already from the beginning the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Seven of these works which were considered to be the most important acted as a major source for the "*Muht*", as Chelebi admits it himself in the preface to his encyclopedic work. For this reason, the traditional high value of this work attributed to it in Europe had to be reconsidered. G.Ferrand went so far as to deny any independent significance for this Turkish source in the history of geographic knowledge.

The comparison of various data which Ferrand found in the writings of Kutbaddin al-Nahravali, the Turkish admiral Sidi Ali Chelebi as well as the books of Portuguese historians Barros, Goes and Castanheda enabled him to conclude that Ahmad ibn Majid was a pilot of the first -"peaceful" expedition of

Vasco de Gama to India on its way from Malindi (East Africa) to Calicut (West India).

An analysis of the manuscripts of Ahmad ibn Majid in this perspective gives a new interpretation of Portuguese medieval cartography. It appeared to be closely related to Arab sources. M. Bittner and W. Tomasek (Vienna) were the first who supposed this relationship.

They analyzed the encyclopedia of the Turkish admiral Sidi Ali Chelebi as well. It appeared that his works were only an intermediate version of the original Arabic navigation documents under way to the Portuguese.

The works of Ferrand concerned with the analysis of the various aspects of the Arabic manuscripts acted as a basis for Arabic thalassography which became

a new branch of Arabic philology. In addition to his analysis of the specific characteristics of these texts, Ferrand published a phototypic edition of both Arabic navigation manuscripts which he had discovered earlier in Bibliotheque National. His premature death prevented him from bringing out a critical edition of the major texts of the Arabic marine literature. His unique knowledge of African, Indian and Far-Eastern languages as well as his significant experience in studying parallel texts would have given him an excellent opportunity to do this work on a qualitatively new level.

A major result of his study was his identification of the more distinguished author of the two manuscripts discovered, the steersman Ahmad ibn Majid of Oman. This discovery

made by Ferrand unexpectedly revealed a new aspect in the history of the epoch of great discoveries.

Still it was impossible to come to a well-grounded conclusion in this regard without a thorough analysis and comparison between the Paris manuscript (copies found in Damascus and Jeddah) and St. Petersburg (unique) manuscript. These are thirty writings of two seafarers -Shihabaddin ibn Ahmad ibn Majid from Oman (XV century) and Sulaiman ibn Ahmad al-Muhammadi from Mahra (XVI century).

From the beginning of 1930s the studies of Arabic marine literature were continued in Russia. In the middle of the 1920s I. Kratchkovski discovered three unique manuscripts of Ahmad ibn Majid, and supervised their further study. This rare manuscript was received by the Asiatic



Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1819. In 1957 this document was published by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences with a Russian translation, and a commentary by Prof. Shumowski.

This book attracted significant international interest. Thirteen reviews of this publication appeared in the different countries of the world. It was translated into Portuguese in 1960, twice into Arabic - in 1966 in Brazil and in 1970 in Egypt. The state of Kenya gave the name of Ahmad ibn Majid to one of the streets of the ports of Malindi.

The largest and the most significant work of Ahmad ibn Majid appeared sometime later. Its publication and critical analysis were preceded by a thorough research of the

different elements of Arab Seafaring. My major publications in this regard were the following:

*"Ibn Majid, The Arabic pilot of Vasco de Gama"* (1948),

*"Arabic navigation in the Middle Ages"* (1957),

*"Arabic seafaring prior to Islam"* (1959),

*"Arabic sailing directions as literary-historical sources of a new kind"* (1960),

*"Sinbad and Ahmad ibn Majid"* (1961),

*"Theory and practice in Arabic geography"* (1961),

*"The problem of identification of two Muslim maps in the Russian translation of "Safar-Name" by Nasir Khusrow"* (1962),

*"The beginning of research concerned with the Arabic sailing directions of*

*the XV-XVIth centuries”* (1964),

*“Arab seafaring in the age of Islam in the Mediterranean”* (1964),

*“Studies concerned with Arab seafaring in the XVth century”* (1965),

*“Who is Dabavkara?”* (1965),

*“The new problem in the medieval history of the Arabs”* (1966), and *“Some elements of antiquity in the Arabic encyclopedia”* (1966).

All this work enabled me to provide a critical analysis of the *“Book of useful chapters on fundamentals and rules of the maritime science”*. Its diverse subject matter and the author’s thorough treatment of each theme make the *“Book of useful chapters”* an encyclopedia of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Middle Eastern art of navigation.

This manuscript is a compendium of various navigation experiences of different nations living in the basin of the Indian Ocean, from East Africa up to Southern China.

This book which was published in 1985 in Russia consists of three major parts:

1. Introduction

2. Arabic texts with Russian translations and commentaries.

3. Indices.

The introduction provides a historical analysis of the navigation literature in Arabic. It draws a general outline of the development of the art of sailing by pre-Islamic and then the Moslem Arabs and sums up the impressions created by the text.

The Arabic text of the edition of the *“Book of useful chapters”* has been prepared

on the basis of two manuscripts known at the present time. The first one is a part of the collection of the Bibliotheque National in Paris and the other in the Library of the Arabian Academy of Sciences in Damascus.

The Paris manuscript (No. 2292 in de Slane's catalogue) was obtained by the Bibliotheque National in 1860. It was discovered by Gabriel Ferrand and Maurice Gaudetfroy-Demombynes in 1912 and published by photo-type in 1920-1923. This manuscript dates back to 1576. "*The book of useful chapters*" equals in its volume the other 18 writings of Ahmad ibn Majid.

The Damascus manuscript was copied from the Paris manuscript and it is provided with more recent data. Its existence became known in 1921 from the report of Sa'id al-Karmi

which was published in the bulletin of the Arabian Academy of Sciences.

"*The book of useful chapters*" was compiled between 1475 and 1490 by Ahmad ibn Majid. It covers in the basic text 176 closely written pages in small hand writing. It consists of twelve "*useful chapters*" with the following contents:

1. The origin of navigation and of the magnetic needle.
2. Professional and ethical requirements for the pilots.
3. The lunar mansions.
4. The windrose and the 32 rumb.
5. Ancient geographers and astronomers.
6. The sea routes.
7. Observation of stars.
8. Navigation of a ship.
9. Different sea-coasts; three categories of pilots.

10. The world's ten greatest islands -Arabia, Java, Madagascar, Sumatra, Taiwan, Ceylon, Zanzibar, Bahrain, Socotra, Ibn Gawan (in the Arab Gulf).

11. Monsoons and sailing.

12. A descriptive chart of the Red Sea.

According to Ahmad ibn Majid, navigation originated in the Biblical times -"*ships observing the course of the stars sailed the Red Sea as far back as the time of Prophets*" ("*Book of useful chapters*", ff. 14a-14b). This verse could remind the reader about the voyage to Ophir and the famous Phoenician-Egyptian sea expedition round Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century not to mention the earlier voyages to the Punt.

The first step was the Arc of Noah. The astrolabe was invented by the Prophet Idris; the lunar mansions and the stars connected with them

were discovered by Daniel, and the magnetic inclination by David, "*because he had an idea of iron and its properties*" (f.5r). The last remark reflects the widespread tradition of perceiving David as a patron of metallurgy. This fact was mentioned also in Quraan.

Ahmad ibn Majid has mentioned the names of some outstanding Muslim pilots. The very first pages of the book demonstrate the characteristic features permeating the entire encyclopedia of the Arabian seafarer, namely, his reference to the accounts of other pilots to the traditional island. "*They are writers and not creators*", says the author about his predecessors.

He points out that they steered ships only on limited parts of the seas and received their information primarily

from secondary sources. For this reason descriptions have contained the defects of fiction stories and their data needed verification. "*The book of useful chapters*" was precisely authentic because it was based from the beginning to the end on the personal experiences of its author.

The idea of verification by personal experience runs all through the encyclopedia of Ahmad ibn Majid. It is this concept which is the fundamental difference between the literature on navigation and works on general geography. It requires a complex combination of professional skills and moral qualities from a pilot. This notion is brought out in detail in the second "*Useful chapter*".

A pilot must be aware of all capabilities of his ship and

of all the features of his route. He must be absolutely correct in his "*reading the book of the sea*"; he must be both humane and relentless. The additional sources denote that these requirements were similar in the Indian concept of a pilot. Such, for instance, was Boddhisatva from the city of Bharuccha and the port of Barygaza which became famous in the Hellenistic period. This pilot was mentioned in the well known book of Sylvian Levi concerned with the "*Ramayana*".

The main subject of the encyclopedia of Ahmad ibn Majid is a description of the practical conditions of navigation in the Indian Ocean. It provides primarily practical guidance in this area derived from the personal experience of the author. "*Knowledge... rests only on what you*

*experienced yourself and saw with your own eyes"* (f.59v). *"It is impossible to know about a land without visiting it"* (f.62r). Characterizing the art of navigation as a special sphere of human activity with peculiar methods of study, the author repeatedly emphasizes: *"This science is based on intelligence and experience, and not on tradition"* (f.16r), *"In this science experience is everything"* (f.48r), and *"Experience is something that cannot be excelled by anything"*. These statements and a long series of similar ones were by no means declarative formulas but firm principles tested by life.

This stress on practical utility which justifies the existence of the resultant principles is one of the major philosophical dimensions of this work. Following Abd-al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, his

older contemporary, Ahmad ibn Majid appears as a brilliant forerunner of the rationalist movement. Whereas such stories as that of Sindbad the Seafarer, or the *"Wonders of India"* by Buzurg ibn Shahriyar give primarily a romantic account of outward events, the *"Book of useful chapters"* depicts on its pages the grim, unvarnished everyday life of the sea as it really is. But there is also a place for romance in the difficult and dangerous life of a seaman dedicated to self-perfection.

The encyclopedia is a rich source of geographical, astronomical and literary knowledge as well.

The toponymic glossary of this text constitutes a body of 1,072 names, of which many are unique, i.e. not confirmed by other historical sources. Especially elaborate is the toponymy of Malaya and the islands of Indonesia.

It shows the geographical range of the Arab seafarers in the middle ages.

The list of marine terms consists of almost 1,000 words. It substantially supplements the existing dictionaries in this field and denotes the high level of navigational expertise among the Arabs at this time.

The contents of the astronomical glossary equals in quantity the terminological list of the specialized work on this subject of Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi.

The large number of names and literary references demonstrates the extensive cultural background of the author. The text of the encyclopedia runs in prose interspersed with 140 versified inclusions from one to nineteen lines each. The latter include verses of famous poets, such as Abu Nuwas or Al-Ahktal as well as those of less renown.

Sometimes verses are anonymous.

Quotations from the other works of Ahmad ibn Majid constitute a special group. Usually they originate from his first book "*Concise course of the principles of navigation*" which was finished in 1462. The encyclopedia lists thirteen other books of Ahmad ibn Majid which are not mentioned in any other source. "*The Book of useful chapters*" gives only their titles and one or two lines of quotations from each of them. Thus Ahmad ibn Majid appears to be the author of 38 navigation manuals. Some of them did not lose their practical value for a long period of time. For example, Ferrand supposes that the descriptive chart of the Red Sea which constitutes the 12<sup>th</sup> and the last "*Useful chapter*" has not been excelled either in accuracy or

in detail by any European manual on navigation by sails.

The contents of the encyclopedia is interdisciplinary and the language is very complicated. De Slane, one of the prominent orientalists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has abandoned the idea of working on this manuscript saying that "*its language was too verbose and abounding in technical terms intelligible only to the seamen of the Indian Ocean*". Indeed, it presents sometimes a genuine riddle and requires great effort to solve it .

The author's thoughts are at times half-concealed, technical designations are quite often implied and therefore omitted, and the language sometimes is not up to the classical standard. For this reason it is not always possible to give indisputable solutions. In this perspective

the publication of the text of the "*Book of useful chapters*", collated with the both existing manuscripts and supplied with extensive notes presents a unique opportunity for a further analysis of Arabic marine literature.

This study of Ahmad ibn Majid enables us to reconstruct in general the outline of his life and work. He was born in 1440. His father and grandfather were also pilots, and came from Najd in central Arabia. They were mainly engaged in coastal navigation in the Red Sea.

Ahmad was born in Gulfar, a seaport in Oman. He worked on his father's ship while still a boy. In 1462 he wrote his first work "*Concise Course of principles of Navigation*". It already contained descriptions of different places lying outside the Arabian waters.



The majority of his works are mainly descriptive charts of various routes. The "*Book of useful chapters*" was completed in 1490, eight years before the author's participation in the expedition of Vasco da Gama. Ferrand describes this book as the most brilliant and mature work of the Arabian seafarer.

As a matter of fact, by the time the author finished it, he had about 40 years' experience in sailing the vast expanses of the Indian Ocean. He spent fifteen years in writing this book. The most important event in the author's life after that was his participation in the voyage of Vasco da Gama. It was he who brought the Portuguese ships of Vasco da Gama direct through the Indian Ocean to India. The travel took 26 days. Soon after that the author died

sometime early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The work of the Arab pilot was glorified in the verses of the "*Os Luisiadas*" by Luiz de Camoes whose name had been familiar to the Russian reader since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*"The helmsman steering the ship,*

*There was nothing untrue about him;*

*He sailed ahead showing the right course,*

*And this course was pursued with greater confidence*

*Than before"*

(Canto VI, Stanza V)

Until now historians held that Ahmad ibn Majid had joined the expedition of his free will, being favorably disposed to the foreign travelers. The latest data provides the assumption that he was not a free man, as was formerly believed, but a liberated slave acting under

the orders of his master, whose name was mentioned once - Ahmad ibn al-Gamal. This circumstance gives a new perspective on his statements and actions.

Ahmad ibn Majid was the last and the most significant Arab seafarer.

In addition to extending the routes of his father - Majid ibn Muhammed and his grandfather- Muhammed ibn Amr, Ahmed ibn Majid initiated a significant advance in the theory of navigation. He introduced the ultimate scheme of the 32 rhombus in its application to the windrose and put into practice the magnetic needle in the open sea. He developed the system of moving on different tacks and brought up some new applications of astronomy for navigation. He also explained to the Europeans the significance of the regular

monsoons in the Indian Ocean.

The major successor of Ahmad ibn Majid was Sulaiman ibn Ahmad of Mahra. Al-Mahri wrote five studies on the theory and practice of navigation. Both of them represented the unique Arab art of navigation. Professor Ignatius Kratchkovski wrote in this regard: *"In the books of Ibn Majid and even Sulaiman, both of whom lived and wrote mostly at the time of Portuguese rule, only Oriental sources and methods are used. No influence of Portuguese sources can be traced. In contrast, a reverse influence is strongly felt, since the very first advances of the Portuguese east of the Cape of Good Hope acquainted them with the experience of the Arabs. Their oldest works in this field bear clear traces of borrowing"*.

Joao Barros, the 16<sup>th</sup> century historian, notes that when Vasco Da Gama showed the European navigation instruments to Ahmad ibn Majid "*the Moor was not even surprised*". The Arab pilot in his turn has demonstrated different complex instruments for the measuring the elevation of the sun and stars which were broadly used by the Red Sea navigators.

The high standard of the Arab navigation was a natural result of its long history. These were the Arab seafarers who invented a lateen which enabled the ships to sail against the wind. It significantly assisted the Europeans in their overseas voyages in the XV and XVI centuries.

Arabic marine literature has exerted even a greater influence in the East. It was

particularly pronounced in the works of the Turkish navigators of a subsequent period.

Mankind owes to the Arab marine culture such concepts as admiral, arsenal, mizzen, cable, monsoon, galley, felucca, and anchor. Arabian astronomy has provided the basis for navigation under sails. It gave more than 200 names of stars to European astronomy. These include such well-known stars as Algol, Aldabaran, Altair, Arharnar, Betelgeuse, Vega, Mirzam, Riguel, and Famalhut. The Arabic designation of the astronomical degree "*'isba*" (finger) was adopted by the Europeans in the form of its Latin equivalent-"*pollex*". It corresponds to the early Portuguese "*pollegada*" ("*pulgada*"). The Arabian "*bandar*" is reflected in the Portuguese "*bandel*".

Arab navigation, continued the long tradition of the Middle East, which had started at the period of Babylonian and Phoenician seafaring expeditions. It facilitated economic and cultural relations between the different nations of the Indian Ocean. On the ships fastened with coir, Muslim merchants reached East Africa, Madagascar, India, Malacca, the islands of Indonesia, and the ports of South and Central China. They established numerous trade colonies in all these places. At the time of the Baghdad caliphate and later dynasties, before the first Europeans came East, the Arab sea trade led to the creation of a united Indian Ocean market which included the Moslem Mediterranean possessions.

In the Mediterranean the Arab rulers - from the Fatimids in the East to the

Spanish Omayyads in the West - had powerful navies which on many occasions fought the armed forces of the Christian world. Military expedience led to constant technological improvements. Henri the Navigator, the prince of Portugal whose name is associated with the first geographical discoveries of the Portuguese in West Africa, made use of the experience of the Mediterranean Arab captains to improve his navigation instruments and charts. Arabian influence was also observed in the rigging of European caravels.

The subsequent penetration of the Europeans in India and the establishment of Western trade monopoly in the Eastern seas brought about the fall of traditional Arab trade. Ahmad ibn Majid for whom the steerage of his country's merchant ships was

his life-work, rued the fact that he had shown to the European travelers the sea route to India, "oh, if only I had known what they are capable of !" he says in one of his last descriptive charts. (This chart is kept currently in the St. Petersburg collection of rare manuscripts.) This heart-felt cry essentially alters the conception of the personality of Ahmad ibn Majid. His image was primarily formed on the basis of Ferrand's studies.

Recently I have written a book entitled "*The last lion of the Arab Seas*" dealing not only with the seafaring activities of Ahmad ibn Majid but also giving his analysis an individuality. He is described there not as an abstract pilot who led the ships of Vasco Da Gama but as a real human being with thoughts, feelings and desires. I wrote this book to

mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the voyage of Vasco Da Gama. My purpose in this regard was also to throw new light on his discovery involving a direct participation of the Arab pilot. This book is based on all my work with major Arabic manuscripts concerned with Arab seafaring and various supporting sources. This book is currently prepared for publication.

Ahmad ibn Majid also wrote many poetic pieces in addition to his marine manuscripts. This poetry is concerned with different events in his life and different philosophical reflections. I have interpreted them in poetic form as well and included in my book of poetic translations. This book is entitled "*The human spirit*". In addition to the poetry of Ahmad ibn Majid it contains poetic translations

from different languages into Russian which I have done all my life. Poems of Ahmad ibn Majid in Arabic can be found in the second volume of the "*Book of useful chapters*".

A linguistic analysis of the Arabic marine lexics in the Russian and other foreign languages can be found in my book "*Reflections on the subject of Western-Eastern Philology*". This book is also prepared for publication.

The major work of Sulaiman al-Mahri "*Assistance in the understanding of seafaring*" was prepared for publication in 1974 but has not appeared until now due to lack of funds.

Beyond my purely academic publications such as articles which I have discussed above and the critical editions of the "*Book*

*of useful chapters*" and "*Three unknown charts of Ahmad ibn Majid*" I have published some books on this topic targeting more general readers. The more important of them were "*The Arabs and the Sea*" (1964). "*The Memories of the Arabist*" (1977). "*After Sindbad the Seafarer. The Oceanic Arabia*" (1986).

Around a year ago my poetic translation of the Quraan into Russian was published in Moscow. I believe that this translation will make the Islamic culture more understandable in Russia where so many religious groups live in everyday contact. I suppose that a lot of interfaith and political tension there, is a result of false interpretations of other cultures, first of all of the Islamic civilization.

My academic activities were always closely connected with my general

thinking. Islam, Arab seafaring, Ahmad ibn Majid were never abstract academic formulas for me but living realities. At least, I tried to bring about a broader understanding in this way.

I believe that science has a distinct social responsibility. Scholars as people having an opportunity to look more closely on some events should try to avoid traditional thinking and popular misconceptions which are still so vital to our life. They should bring out the truth about the subject of their study ignoring immediate, pragmatic or political considerations.

The Arabs have played a decisive role in the development of seafaring. It was the Arab pilot Ahmad ibn Majid who showed the way from Africa to India to the Europeans. Unfortunately, it was not that easy to convince traditional

scholarship. Still, there is still so much left to be done in this direction.

Medieval Arab seafaring was the major theme of my academic activities. Its importance and significance enabled me to go through many difficulties during my life. I would be happy if the results of my studies will reach a larger international audience. I believe that Arab countries naturally will have a major interest in this topic.

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