

of this kingdom was Mankir¹ (Malkhed),² situated south of Gulbarga in Hyderabad (Deccan), which probably he did not visit. Among the various towns which he visited were Chaul (Simur),³ Subarah,⁴ and Sindan.⁵ According to him Chaul was inhabited by about ten thousand Muslims, consisting of 'Baysarah' (people born of Muslim parents in India) and Arab settlers from Siraf, 'Uman, Basrah, Baghdad and other places. There were many merchants among them. These Muslims had their own officials probably appointed by the ruler to administer their affairs. Al-Mas'udi lived with them and observed their customs and practices. He records his visit to Cambay in 303/915, and gives a vivid description of the geographical features of this region. He says that the Gulf of Cambay is broader than the Nile and resembles the Tigris of the Euphrates. Many towns and villages are situated on either side of the Gulf, with flourishing populations and gardens. Between these gardens and the sea-shore, there were coconut trees and Indian birds such as peacocks and parrots were found. It took him two days to travel from the city of Cambay to the seashore. Here he observed how strong the ebb of the tide was, and to illustrate this point he narrates the incident of a dog which had been sitting at the edge of the water: the tide came in so swiftly that the dog could not escape, and was drowned.⁶

Although al-Mas'udi did not travel far into the interior of India, he nevertheless gained an impression of the vast size of the country. Its limits, he said, stretch up to the kingdom of Mahraj (Sumatra, Java?) on one side, and adjoined *Khurasan*, Sind and Tibet on the other.⁷ He considered the soil of the country very fertile.⁸

On the whole the geographical information that he gives about India was partly derived from his own observation and partly from what he had heard from its inhabitants.⁹ There is also a good deal of information which he later gathered from sailors and merchants, and from the material with which his friend Abu Zayd as-Sirafi furnished him.

Sind

According to al-Mas'udi Sind was the border region between Islamic lands and India.¹⁰ Multan and Mansurah were the two cities of Sind

1. *M. I.*, pp. 178, 381.

2. *H. A.* p. 238.

3. In the Kolaba district of Bombay (*H. A.* p. 245).

4. In the Thana district of Bombay (*ibid.*, p. 245).

5. *M. I.*, p. 254; II, p. 85, St. John of English maps, lay south of Daman in the Thana district of Bombay, (*H. A.* p. 245).

6. *M. I.*, pp. 254-5.

7. *Ibid.* pp. 162-3.

8. *M. I.*, p. 386.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

which lay along the line of demarcation which marked the beginning of Indian territory. He visited both these towns somewhere between 303/915 and 304/916,¹ and also travelled from one to the other. He mentions that Multan was one of the biggest frontier towns of Islam, with nearly 120,000 villages around it, and speaks of the idol called 'Multan' (Aditya, the Sun God), which was visited by thousands of pilgrims from all over the country.² In Mansurah he met a number of people, some of whom were the descendants of 'Ali b. Abi Talib.³ He says that the number of rural districts and villages was nearly 300,000, with farms, plantations and a continuous population.⁴

*The Seven Seas*⁵

It seems that al-Mas'udi sailed only on the first two of the Seven Seas, viz. the Sea of Persia and the Larvi Sea. Although he claims that he sailed on the Sea of China and also travelled in that country, there is little or no evidence in his extant works to support this claim.⁶ This statement may have been made by him when carried away by pride in his extensive travels. His information on China was evidently borrowed from merchants and sailors and other travellers.

Of the countries about which al-Mas'udi gives us information, one may easily distinguish between those which he had actually visited and those which he had not, by his manner of presenting the material, and by the note of assertion in the former case which is absent in the latter. Al-Mas'udi gives a detailed description of the physical features of the first two seas, and there is a note of intimacy in the way in which he describes them.⁷ This intimacy is absent in the description of the other

1. Although according to him he visited these towns after 300/912, he must have, in fact, done so only during or after 303/915, as in that year we find him travelling in Fars.

2. *M. I.*, pp. 375-6.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 377.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 234.

5. The Seven Seas were divisions of the area known by the Arabs as the Great Abyssinian Sea, which covered the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, part of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal, Malacca Strait and the China Sea, in fact, the waters through which the Arab maritime trade from Basrah to China lay. According to al-Mas'udi these Seven Seas were called: the Sea of Persia, Larvi, Harkand, Kalahbar, Kardanj Sanf and the Sea of China. (*M. I.*, pp. 330-1). He gives the limits of the first of these as from Basrah to Ra's al-Jumjumah (probably modern Ra's al-Hadd), which coincides with the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of 'Uman (*M. I.*, pp. 331-2); v. also M. Reinaud, *R. V. I.*, p. 54). The second Sea stretched from the Ra's al-Jumjumah to the Laccadive Islands, and also included the Sea of Zanj, off the northern parts of the coast of East Africa. (*M. I.*, pp. 332-3, 335). Thus it roughly coincides with the modern Arabian Sea. In the opinion of M. Reinaud it stretched only from the mouth of the Indus to Goa. (*R. V.*, I, p. 54).

6. *M. I.*, pp. 5, 234.

7. *M. I.*, pp. 238-41.

five seas, and there is also less detail. Moreover, in his description of these five seas, there is frequent reference to what the sailors described or saw, which is not so in the case of the first two seas. These two facts show that his description of the Sea of Persia and the Larvi Sea are genuine and based on personal knowledge, whereas that of the other five seas was drawn from some other sources, such as the account of the merchant Sulayman,¹ and from contact with merchants and sailors.

Sea of Zanj

Al-Mas'udi sailed on this sea twice. The date of his first voyage is not known, but the second and the last one was made in 304/916. He considered it as part of the Sea of Larvi,² and describes it as the Gulf of Barbary, 500 miles long and 100 miles wide.³ He describes it as a very rough sea, and the most dangerous he had ever sailed on. An idea of its perilous nature is given by the fact that the captains of all the boats on which he sailed were subsequently drowned and their vessels sunk in its waves. Al-Mas'udi observes that the sailors called its waves 'the blind waves,' because of their roughness. He then gives an interesting description of the different kinds of fish found in this sea, especially of one called 'Al-Uwal' (the black whale),⁴ which, because of its enormous size, was dangerous to boats, and of how the sailors drove it away by beating drums and making all sorts of noises.⁵

While speaking of the Sea of Zanj, al-Mas'udi states that he made his last voyage in this region from Qambalu to 'Uman. He says that Qambalu is an island situated at one or two days' sea-journey from the coast of Zanj and 500 *farsakhs* from 'Uman.⁶ There were many Muslim settlers on this island and they spoke the native language, Zanji.⁷ Qambalu has usually been identified with Madagascar, but it is more probable that it was one of the islands off the coast of present-day

1. Sulayman's description of the first two seas is missing from the extant account, but from references to the first sea in other parts of the work, it is clear that it differed from that given by al-Mas'udi as regards the routes and practices followed by the merchant ships. This can be explained by the time factor, as al-Mas'udi lived nearly a hundred years after Sulayman. For example, according to Sulayman, boats bound for India sailed from Muscat, whereas al-Mas'udi states that in his own time they called at one more port, Ra's al-Jumjumah. (*M. I.*, p. 332, and Reinaud, *R. V.* II, p. 16. For further examples, c. f. *M. I.*, pp. 240, 308, and Reinaud, II, pp. 14-16).
2. *M. I.*, p. 333.
3. *M. I.*, p. 231.
4. Merchant Sulayman speaks of this fish as al-Wal. (Reinaud, *R. V.* II, pp. 3-4).
5. *M. I.*, pp. 231-7.
6. *M. I.*, p. 205; *Tanb.* ed, de Goeje, p. 51.
7. *Ibid.*, I, p. 205; *Tanb.* ed, Cairo, p. 51.

Tanganyika.¹

II. TRAVELS BETWEEN 304-915 AND 330-941

Khurasan

During this period Al-Mas'udi visited many countries, and among them was *Khurasan*.² He went to the city of *Balkh*, where he mentions having met an aged traveller who had visited China many times, always making the journey by land, and never by sea. From him and from other travellers, al-Mas'udi learned about *Jabal al-Buttam*, the mountain of sal-ammoniac which lay between *Samarqand* and *Bukhara* in the *Sogha* country, on the route to China.³ He wrongly places *Banjhir*, the mountain of silver mines, in *Khurasan*, instead of in *Sijistan*.⁴

*Sijistan*⁵

Al-Mas'udi travelled in this land widely, and describes it as a

My reasons for saying that *Qambalu* should not be identified with *Madagascar* are as follows: a) *Madagascar* is so large (995 mls., long and 250 mls. average breadth), that it is unlikely that the Arabs would have realised that it was an island, unless they had circumnavigated it, in which case some remark would have been made about its great size. They would otherwise consider it as part of the Eastern coast of Africa. b) It is situated 260 mls., from the mainland at the nearest point. Allowing for deviations due to winds and tides, this could hardly have been described as 'one or two days' 'voyage.' There are various islands in this vicinity which more accurately answer the description given by al-Mas'udi. (M. I, pp. 205, 231-33; III, p. 31; *Tanb.* ed. de Goeje, p. 51). Abu 'I-fida' mentions *Qambalu* Island as being the last point reached by the sailors in the *Barbary Gulf* (the sea stretching along the east coast of Africa from the *Gulf of Aden* upto the *Mozambique Channel*) and that it belonged to the *Zanj* (Negroes) people and had a Muslim population in it (Reinaud, *Aboulfeda*, Arabic text, Paris, 1840, pp. 25-26). Again, he mentions a *Qumbulu* Island, the pronunciation of which he does not fix and on the authority of *al-Qanun* of al-Biruni, he gives its long, 52°. 0' and lat. S. (i.e. South of the Equator) and mentions that it has an equal length and breadth of 2° (ibid, p. 73). Now, an Arab degree was=81.616 Eng. mls. (1 Ar-degree—18 8/9 farsakhs; fr.—3 Ar. mls.; 1 Ar. ml.—6474 ft, or 1.2242 Eng. mls.). Hence, 2° will be just over 163 Eng. mls. Now, the *Comoro Island* or *Angaziya*, the principal of the *Comoro* group of Islands, lying between the Northern point of *Madagascar* and the East coast of Africa, is 36 mls., long from North to South, and 15 to 20 mls. in breadth; lat. (N. E. point) 11° 19' 30" S.; long, 43° 33' E. (R). The inhabitants are of a mixed Arab and Malagasy descent and speak the Arabic language. The island is volcanic. (The Imperial Gazetteer, vol. I, London, 1860, p. 729). I have not been able to identify *Qambalu* with certainty, but it may have been this Island. Phonetically, the words *Qambalu* or *Qumbuluh* and *Comoro* seem to have some resemblance.

2. *Tanb.* ed. de Goeje, p. 353.

3. *M. I.*, pp. 347-9. See Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. 467. (Abbr. L.E.C.)

4. *M. II.*, p. 15. See Le Strange, L.E.C. p. 350.

5. The lowland country lying around and to the east of the *Zarah* lake, more especially the deltas of the *Helmund* and other rivers. (Le Strange, *L.F.C.* p. 334).