

### 3.1 al-Idrīsī 12c.

The most brilliant author of the twelfth century was al-Idrīsī who was employed by Roger II (1101-1154) ruler of Sicily to compose a description of the known world. Roger II was the son of Roger I who together with his brother Robert Guiscard established Norman supremacy of the island from the Moslems.

al-Idrīsī<sup>1</sup> updated Ptolemy's geographical work and used the writings of others such as al-Mas'ūdī to produce 'Kitab Rujar' or 'Roger's Book'. The Book of Roger of 1154 was engraved on silver in the tradition of Ptolemy.<sup>2</sup> This work, one of the best known medieval geographical books was printed in summarised form in Rome in 1592 and in a complete Latin translation in Paris in 1615.<sup>3</sup> The world map shows the Persian Gulf without any constriction for the Strait of Hormuz.

Of Siraf, al-Idrīsī writes:

Among the dependencies of the province of Ardešhīr is also Sīrāf, a considerable town, situated on the shore of the Persian Sea, rich and commercial, the inhabitants of which are noted for their thirst after gain and for their activity in business... This town is the great market of Fars. The houses are built of the trunks of palms, are well inhabited and very regular, for the inhabitant of Sīrāf take great pains and spend large sums of money in the construction of their houses. Water and vegetables are brought from the mountains of Kham, which command the city and extend in a chain along the shores of the Persian Sea, but where there is no cultivation. The climate of Sīrāf is very hot. On this town depend the following places where the *Khutbah* [the Friday exhortation] is made, namely, Najīram, a small town situated on the seacoast and 'Eidjān, a strong place and the market of the territory called Dast-Barnic,<sup>4</sup>

Of Qeshm al-Idrīsī writes:

In that island [Kīsh] is a town, also called Kīsh, which a certain ruler of Yemen [all the country on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf went by that name] captured. He fortified it and equipped a fleet there, by means of which he made himself master of the littoral of Yemen. This man did much damage to voyagers and merchants, despoiling them of their goods, and so weakened the country that the trade was turned from the route by 'Omān and reverted to Aden. With his fleet he ravaged the coasts of Zanj and those of Ghāmerān. The inhabitants of India feared him, and could not resist him, except by means of their vessels called Masheyī'aāt ... some of which were as long as a galley, sixty cubits long, made of one piece of wood, and capable of carrying two hundred men. A contemporary traveller informed me that the ruler of Kīsh possesses fifty of these ships made of one piece, without reckoning those constructed of pieces put together. This man continues his depredations still; he is very rich, and no one can resist him. At Kīsh there are cultivated fields, cattle, sheep, vines, and good pearl fisheries... It belongs to Yemen and Máskāt, from which it is one day's sail,<sup>5</sup>

Of Hormuz al-Idrīsī writes:

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<sup>1</sup> EI<sup>2</sup> III:1032b and #368 Donzel, E. van, Islamic Desk Reference, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1994 ~ p.165.

<sup>2</sup> #195 ed. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, The Times Atlas of World Exploration, Times Books, London, 1991 ~ pp. 30-1

<sup>3</sup> #167 Burman, Edward, The World Before Columbus 1100-1492, W. H. Allen & Co Plc, London, 1989 ~ p. 25

<sup>4</sup> #482 Badger, George Percy (trans.), History of the Imams and Seyyids of 'Oman by Salil-ibn-Razik from A.D. 661-1856, Darf Publishers Limited, London, 1986 ~ p. 413 in which the reference is given Geographie d'Édrisi, Ed. M. Joubert, tom. I pp. 397-8

<sup>5</sup> #482 p. 413 in which the reference is given Geographie d'Édrisi, Ed. M. Joubert, tom. I pp. 152-3

Hormuz is the principal market of Kirman and a large and well-built city. The climate being hot, the palm grows in abundance in its environs; cumin and indigo are also cultivated; this last is of such incomparable quality that it has become proverbial, and large quantities are exported. The people of Maun and Welasjird specialize in the cultivation of this plant and give so much care to it that it is a source of very considerable profit to them. Much sugar of the cane and candy sugar are made; barley forms the staple food of the people and is the principal agricultural product; the region produces excellent dates. Hormuz is built on the banks of a creek called Heiz, derived from the Persian Gulf. Vessels reach the town by this channel.<sup>6</sup>

The Spanish Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela in Naverre started his wanderings eastward about 1168. Travelling through Europe, Africa and Asia his primary object was to visit the synagogues of the principal cities and his accounts give us the fullest account of the state and number of Jews in the twelfth century. He was also a merchant. In Baghdad he noted:

he also learned that the two main East-West trading posts at that time were Kish and Kulam: Kish is an island in the Persian Gulf with 500 Jewish residents, where merchants from India, Persia and Yemen take their goods, such as silk, purple and flax, cotton hemp, worked wood, lentils and spices; Kulam, modern Quillon, at the southern end of the Malabar coast of India ... He returned to the West by sea from Kulam to Aden.<sup>7</sup>

A more full account is as follows:

From thence I returned to the country of Khuzistan, which lies on the Tigris; this runs down and falls into the Indian Sea [Persian Gulf] in the vicinity of an island called Kish. The extent of this island is six miles, and its inhabitants do not carry on any agriculture, principally because they have no rivers nor more than one spring in the whole island, and are consequently obliged to drink rain water. It is, however, a considerable market, being the point to which the Indian merchants and those of the islands bring their commodities; while the traders of Mesopotamia, Yemen, and Persia import all sort of silk and purple cloths, flax, cotton, hemp, *māsh*, wheat, barley, millet, rye, and all sorts of comestibles and pulses, which articles form objects of barter. Those from India import great quantities of spices, and the inhabitants of the island live by what they gain in their capacity of brokers to both parties. The island contains about five hundred Jews.<sup>8</sup>

Purchas relates in his book of the 'peregrination of Benjamin the son of Ionas, a Jew' the following account:

And when I departed out of thefe Countries, I went into the Country Cheuazthaan, nigh unto which the River Tigris runneth, which falling from thence runneth downe into Hodu, that is, the Indian Sea, and compaffeth the lland Nekrokis about the mouth thereof, contayning the fpace of fixe dayes journey, in which there is only one Fountaine, and they drink no other water then what is gathered from the fflowers; for it wanteth Rivers, and that land is neither fowed, not tilled: yet it is very famous through the Trading of the Indians, and llands feated in the Indian Sea, and Merchants of the Country of Senaar, and Æliman, and Perfia, bringing thither all forts of Silken and Purple Garments, Hempe and Cotton, Flaxe, and Indian Cloth, which they call Moch, Wheate, Barley, Millet, and Oats great plentie, alfo all forts of meates and Pulfe, which they barter and fell among themfelves. But the Indian Merchants bring exceeding great plentie of Spices thither.

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<sup>6</sup> #187 Wilson, Arnold T., *The Persian Gulf*, George Allen & Unwin, Oxford, 1928 ~ pp. 103-4

<sup>7</sup> #167 Burman, Edward, *The World Before Columbus 1100-1492*, W. H. Allen & Co Plc, London, 1989 ~ pp. 43-47

<sup>8</sup> #482 Badger, George Percy (trans.), *History of the Imams and Seyyids of 'Oman* by Salil-ibn-Razik from A.D. 661-1856, Darf Publishers Limited, London, 1986 ~ p. 414 in which the reference given is Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, by A. Asher, vol. I. pp. 136-7

And the Ilanders execute the office of Factors and Interpreters among the reft, and by this art only they live. But in that place there are about five hundred lewes.<sup>9</sup>

Nekrokis, perhaps Ormus.<sup>10</sup>

And continues with the following:

And prefently this Pachaturunxa fubdued the Iland of baren, in punifhment for the favour that hee gave to the Goazil of Cays: and fo the Kings of Hormuz were properous, fo that they subdued all the Ilands that were in all the ftraight and all the countrie along the coaft of Arabia unto Laffa and Catiffa, and others alfo on the fide of Persia, whereby it was made a very great kingdome and a rich and very properous: chiefly that all the traffick of Cays was paffed to the Iland, which now is called Hormuz: whereby Cays was utterly loft, as well in her buildings as in her riches, and now it is altogether defroyed and uninhabited, having beene the principall Iland in all thofe pafte. And Hormuz being a barren and uninhabited Iland, and a Montaine of Salt, is among the richeft countries of the India - one of richeft, for the many and great merchandize that come to it from all places of India, and from all Arabia, and from all Perfia, even of the Mogores, and from Ruffia and Europe I faw merchants in it, and from Venice. And fo the Inhabiters of Hormuz doe fay, that all the world is a ring, and Hormuz is the ftone of it.<sup>11</sup>

There is some doubt that he visited Persia but his description of Qais in the Persian Gulf which preceded Hormuz as an international centre of trade is worth noting:

[The extent of Qais] is six miles, and the inhabitants do not carry on any agriculture, principally because they have no rivers, nor more than one spring in the whole island. and are consequently obliged to drink rainwater. It is, however, a considerable market, being the point to which the India merchants and those of the islands bring their commodities; while the traders of Mesopotamia, Yemen, and Persia import all sorts of silk and purple cloths, flax, cotton, hemp, mash, barley, millet, rye, and all other sorts of comestibles and pulse, which articles form objects of exchange; those from India import great quantities of spices, and the inhabitants of the island live by what they gain in their capacity of brokers to both parties.

Ten days passage by sea lies El Qatif, a city with about five thousand Israelites. In this vicinity the pearls are found .... About the twenty-fourth of the month Nisan large drops of rain are observed upon the surface of the water, which are swallowed by the reptiles, after this they close their shells and fall upon the bottom of the sea; about the middle of the month of Thishri some people dive with the assistance of ropes and bring them up with them, after which they are opened and the pearls taken out.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> #239 Purchas, Purchas, his pilgrims in five books, William Stansby for Henry Fetherstone, London, 1625 ~ chapter IX, §1, p. 1787.

Note that on p. 1188 Hondias in his map of Asia indicates Lima

<sup>10</sup> #239 Purchas, Purchas, his pilgrims in five books, William Stansby for Henry Fetherstone, London, 1625 ~

<sup>11</sup> #239 Purchas, Purchas, his pilgrims in five books, William Stansby for Henry Fetherstone, London, 1625 ~ chapter V, §5, p. 1458

<sup>12</sup> #220 Wilson, Arnold T., Early Spanish and Portuguese Travellers in Persia, private, London, 1928? ~