

ENGAGING WITH THE NON-MUSLIM OTHER: THE PORTRAYAL OF SRI
LANKA IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM, C.800-1500 CE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims not only to investigate how Sri Lanka, an Asian country in the Indian Ocean, which was generally considered an object of curiosity in ancient times, is portrayed in the works of medieval Arab writers, but also to challenge the prevalent views of Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014), who argues that Arabs showed a lack of interest in matters related to the Indian Ocean. Similarly, Houari Touati (2010) notes the lack of significant Arab exploration outside the geographical space of their own religious belief, completely discrediting the contribution of Arab travel writers of medieval Islam in exploring unfamiliar lands outside the *dār al-Islām* (Touati, 2010, p. 259). While denouncing these views, the study adopts a twofold method to show Arab interest in Sri Lanka as demonstrated in their writings. Firstly, through an archival study, the researcher accumulated unedited manuscripts such as *Kitāb Rabī‘ al-Anwār*, a thirteenth-century work of al-Baṭalyawsī, and *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā’if al-Mawjūdāt*, a twelfth-century work attributed to an anonymous Arab writer. Secondly, fifteen lesser-known travel, geographic, and poetic texts were selected as case studies to investigate how Arab writers constructed an Islamic “Self” against a non-Islamic “Other,” by employing the three alterity dimensions: sophisticated, crude, and quasi, introduced by the modern philosopher Lajos Brons (2015, p. 86).

Throughout this dissertation, the researcher argues that Sri Lanka, a country in the Indian Ocean, was not in conflict with the medieval Muslim world and did not pose an immediate

political, religious, or military threat to them like European Christendom did in the medieval period. Instead, Sri Lanka established fruitful commercial and cultural exchanges with the Arab world. Consequently, it was praised and portrayed by Arabs as a land of wonders, marvels, and mysteries and rated as one of the richest territories in the Indian Ocean. Notably, Muslim writers who wrote on Sri Lanka exhibited neutral depictions, avoiding derogatory characterizations. More importantly, they presented a balanced view of the 'other', which suggests an effort to maintain a respectful and objective quality in their observations.

Keywords: *Sarandīb, portrayal, representation, Arabic literature, 'ajā'ib and gharā'ib.*

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TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM AND ABBREVIATION

The researcher used the transliteration system of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) to ensure an accurate pronunciation of Arabic words, which are transcribed using the Latin alphabet. It is generally applied to Arabic book titles, terms, and proper names. The frequent repetition of certain terms and proper nouns necessitates the use of abbreviations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

When the Portuguese General Francisco Dom de Almeida (1450-1510) arrived in Sri Lanka¹ in 1505 together with his son Dom Lourenco de Almeida (1480-1508) (De Silva, 1981, p.100), he perceived Arab Muslims as the possible rulers of this island (Ahmad, 1945, p. 223). During this period, the local Sinhalese of Sri Lanka identified Arab-Muslims as *marakkala minissu*², a phrase used for mariners who facilitated the transport of commodities from one place to another in the Indian Ocean region (Ali, 1984, p. 66). This record shows how Arabs played a role in Sri Lanka as mariners and merchants at the beginning of the 16th century, well before the arrival of the Portuguese in the island. In fact, not only was the Arab population involved in trade and cultural activities, but also a considerable number of their descendants settled in the island during the medieval era.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the familiarity of the Arabic-speaking West Asian Muslims with Sri Lanka during the medieval period. Medieval Muslim writers, including geographers, travelers, and poets, appeared to transcend religious markers and geographical boundaries and recorded their religio-geocultural images and perceptions of

¹Presently known as Sri Lanka and formally called Ceylon, it is a South Asian nation located in the Indian Ocean, just southeast of India.

²This Sinhalese phrase, which was used to refer to Arab-Muslims, means boatmen who travel in the ocean.

this island. This research, therefore, investigates how Sri Lanka, known to Arabs as a distant Asian country and an intriguing place, was portrayed by medieval Arabs, using early Arabic non-religious texts, including travel documents, memoirs, and geographical and poetic sources, written from the 8th to the 15th century.

Arabs recognized Sri Lanka for its remarkable supply of luxury goods, which is similar to the records of the Greeks, the Chinese, and the Europeans. For instance, the Greek geographer Ptolemy (85-165) admired Sri Lanka for its metals, elephants, and tigers (Stevenson, 1991, p. 158); the Chinese traveler Fa-Hien (337-422) noted this place as the ‘island of precious stones’ (Legge, 1971, p. 101); and the European writer Marco Polo (1254-1324) praised the island for its rubies (Komroff, 1980, p. 158). Historically perceived as a land that invoked curiosity because of its variety of commodities and religious affinity, Sri Lanka has been referred to by the Arab writers in different names: *Sīlān*, *Sahīlān*, and *Sankādīb*. Geographers such as Buzurg ibn Shahrayār (900-956) used the names *Sahīlān* and *Sarandīb* interchangeably in the tenth century (Ahmad, 1945, p. 223). But most Arab writers frequently use *Sarandīb* as the typical name, and this name to be derived from the Persian term ‘*Serendivi*’. According to al-Birūnī (973-1050), *dīb* has two meanings: 1) island and 2) *dībājāt*, which means silk or brocade (Al-Birūnī, 1985, p. 191). Another common name used for Sri Lanka is *Jazīrat al-Yāqūt* (island of sapphire), which was frequently used by al-Idrīsī (1099-1165) (al-Idrīsī, 2002, p. 71). Sapphires, including rubies were often referred to as the “master of minerals” (*insān al-*

ma'ādin) and the “chief of gems” (*sayyid al-ahjār*). As such, these gems held immense value globally, and Sri Lanka was a main source of these precious gems (Al-Dimashqī, 1865, p. 61). Moreover, Ibn Rustah also refers to the island as ‘*Taprobane*’ (Ibn Rustah, 189, p. 84), a term introduced by the Romans (Székely, 2018, p. 49). Furthermore, some rare names are also used to refer to the country. Some of them are *Singaladīb* by al-Birūnī (Al-Birūnī, 1985, p. 191), which was derived from the Pali term *Sinhaladwipa* (Dasanayaka, 2017, p. 16); and *Tabarnā*, possibly a Greek term, used by the author of *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, an Arabic manuscript composed in the late 10th century (Minorsky, 1937, p. 57). Further, al-Khwārizmī (790-850) introduced Sri Lanka as *Siyalān*, a name often used by Arab writers (De Geoe, 1982, p. 110), and Abū al-Fidā’ (1273-1331) uses *Samkāḍīb* and *Sankāḍīb*³, a form possibly originating from the Pali language, a language that was introduced to Sri Lanka along with Buddhism (Abū al-Fidā’, 1860, p. 22). Thus, these names and terms of identification show that the island was not only known for its attractions and valuable commodities but also for its religious affinity throughout the medieval period.

The earliest description of *Sarandīb* in Arabic literature could have been reported in the early seventh century during the period of the Prophet Muhammad’s companion Abdullah ibn Abbās (c.619-687), who according to al-Maydānī, was the first person to portray *Sarandīb* as the first location on Earth where humans were created (Al-Maydānī,

³ J. Dodiya, *Critical Perspectives on the Rāmāyana*, Sarup & Sons, 2001, p. 166-181

1996, p. 16). Later, al-Shāfi‘ī (767-820) composed a poem hailing *Sarandīb* as the wealthiest and the most peaceful country (Abu Ghudda, 2012, p. 154). Subsequently, numerous literary genres, including geographical, historical, travel, and poetic writings emerged. Al-Khwārizmī (790-850), influenced by Ptolemy’s (85-165) geography, identified Sri Lanka as the cupola to measure the first province of his geography that includes the Indian subcontinent as well. Ibn Khurdadhbīh (820-912), in his *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*, provided geographic data to the rulers and travelers who ventured to Asia for commercial and cultural endeavors. Furthermore, travelers like Sulymān al-Tājir (c. 851), al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956), and al-Birūnī (973-1050) visited Sri Lanka for commercial, cultural, and anthropological reasons.

Arabic sources on *Sarandīb* examines various aspects of the Sri Lankan geographical, political, cultural, social, and economic sectors. However, many such texts remain understudied, thus leaving a gap in our understanding of multiple perspectives concerning the reality of Sri Lanka as viewed by Arabs in this period. Hence, the discussion of the selected texts in this study would provide crucial insights for constructing a new image of Sri Lanka. The existing sources include but not limited to the works of prominent poets such as al-Shāfi‘ī (767-820), al-Tha‘labī (961-1038), and al-Ma‘arrī (973-1057). The list also includes eminent geographers such as al-Khwārizmī (790-850), Ibn Khurdadhbīh (820-912), Muhammed al-Ḥasīb al-Baghdādī (c.821), Yaḥya bin Māsuweyah (c. 857), Aḥmad ibn Rustah (d. 903), al-Marwazī (818-906), al-Dinawārī (828-896), Aḥmad al-

Ya‘qūbī (D.897), al-Iṣṭakhrī (850-957), Ibn Shahrayār (900-956), al-Maqdisī (945-991), al-Hamadhānī (967-1007), al-Harwī (1006-1088), al-Gharnāṭī (1080-1170), al-Bakrī (1014-1094), al-Zuhrī (1130-1161), Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1179-1229), al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283), al-Dimashqī (1256-1327), Abū al-Fidā’ (1273-1331), and al-Ḥanafī (1448-1524). In addition to the above, the travel accounts of prominent travellers including Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851), al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956), al-Birūnī (973-1050), al-Idrīsī (1099-1165), Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), al-‘Umrī (1300-1349), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1368), and Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf ibn Taghrī-Birdī (1410-1470) were also examined.

In addition, this research also uses newly examined sources like Ibn Athīr al-Jazarī’s (1160-1233) *Tuḥfat al-‘Ajā’ib wa Ṭurfat al-Gharā’ib*, al-Baṭalyawsī’s (c.1240) *Rabī‘ al-Anwār*, and al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn’s (d.1286) *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab‘a*. These diverse genres from different fields like geography, history, poetry, and travel are used to map how Sri Lanka has been depicted in Arabic texts, providing valuable information on its geography, history, and anthropology of diverse cultural landscapes, trade, beliefs, customs, politics, and cross-cultural relations.

1.2. Research Problem

The research problem spans both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, this research challenges the claim that the year 1492, in which Vasco da Gama (1460-1524) started his journeys to explore unfamiliar lands in Africa and Asia, is the initial effort in history to

make expeditions to other shores. Some scholars like Bernard Lewis (1982) argues that Arab travelers were not involved in finding the “other” in the Indian Ocean. Echoing Bernard Lewis, Touati (2010) maintains that medieval Arab-Muslims did not travel to the frontiers outside the *dār al-Islām* to find the non-Muslim “other”. Similarly, Jacques Le Goff asserts that Muslim travelers were not interested in travelling to foreign lands in the Indian Oceanic regions (Le Goff, 2009). However, Le Goff and his proponents have overlooked the diverse materials produced by Arab writers on the frontiers of the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka, from the 8th to the 15th century.

On the micro level, research on Arab perspectives of smaller frontiers in Asia is wanting. On the one hand, while extant research shows how Arabs perceived Europe during the medieval and pre-modern periods, their portrayal of Asian cultures and societies has not received sufficient scholarly attention. On the other hand, the number of studies using medieval Arabic travel and geographic texts on Sri Lanka is very limited. Specifically, most of the existing literature predominantly adopt a utopian style as they strive to portray positive trade and cultural exchanges between Arabs and Sri Lankans. The literature survey indicates that prominent scholars such as Ibn Nafis (c.1945), Lorna Dewaraja (1929-2014), and Mohamed Shukri (1940-2020) indicate the positive trade and cultural relations that prevailed between Arabs and Sri Lankans. However, a comprehensive study accommodating both positive and negative portrayals, perceptions, and representations has not been conducted. In addition, Sulaiman Bashear (1997) shows a methodological issue

that exists in scholarships because the extant research has not dealt with the subject beyond the discourses of the conqueror and the conquered relationship (Bashear, 1997, p. 112). In other words, much of the research undertaken focuses on the conflicting relationship between Arabs and the “other”, highlighting the relationship between invaders and conquered lands. This is mainly because the Arabs conquered and ruled territories in Asia, Africa, and Europe mainly during the Abbasid period.

The author’s argument in this dissertation is that Sri Lanka, a country in the Indian Ocean, was not in conflict with the medieval Muslim world and did not pose an immediate political, religious, or military threat to them like European Christendom did in the medieval period. The relationship between these two territories, however, was based on mutual commercial and cultural ties. Arabs admired Sri Lanka for its wonders, marvels, and mysteries and they rated it as one of the richest territories in the Indian Ocean during the medieval period. While the Arab portrayal of Sri Lanka has produced a range of reactions, including positive, negative, and ambivalent (mixed), they have consistently refrained from showing an obstructive and demonizing image of the Sri Lankans and their cultural landscapes in their accounts.

1.2.1. Research Questions

Arab writers, who are primarily from West Asian countries, generally speak Arabic,⁴ adopt Islam as their way of life and they represent values, customs, languages, and beliefs that are different from those of the Sri Lankan non-Islamic people. Considering this fact, the present research aims to answer one major research question and four sub questions:

The Primary Question

How do medieval Arab writers portray Sri Lanka in terms of its geography, religion, culture, customs, traditions, and civilization in their travel, geographic, and poetic texts, composed from the 8th to the 15th century?

Sub Questions:

The dissertation investigates the following four research questions:

- How do different Arab writers portray the Sri Lankan “other” who is different in terms of religion, culture, and language?
- How do Arab writers show this multiple otherness in terms of religion, language, and culture in their accounts of the Sri Lankan non-Islamic people?
- What factors contribute to shaping these religio-geocultural perceptions and views?
- Do Arab writers show any hatred, suspicion, and outright hostile relationship towards the non-Islamic people of Sri Lanka?

⁴Being the *lingua franca* in the Indian Oceanic world, Arabic was used for trading purposes throughout the medieval era.

To examine these questions, this dissertation predominantly uses travel, geographic, and poetic materials written from the 8th to the 15th centuries.

1.3. Significance of Study

Studies on the religio-geocultural images of Sri Lanka using primary Arabic texts are exceptionally limited, and the researcher did not find any studies that examine the Arab perception of Sri Lanka and its people during medieval times. Therefore, this study uses newly examined materials, would generate unique, innovative, and original contributions to Arabic and Islamic studies.

Additionally, exploring the positive exchanges between West Asia and Sri Lanka throughout history is significant because it will promote the relationship between the two territories. This study is also significant in providing a foundation for the historical relationship between Arabs and Sri Lanka in terms of trade and religio-cultural exchanges.

1.4. Scope and Limitation

This research uses several geographic, travel, and poetic sources to explore the image of Sri Lanka created by Arabs between the 8th and the 15th centuries. The earliest account used for the case study is al-Shāfi‘ī’s *Dīwān*, which was probably written in the mid-eighth century. The latest account is al-Ḥalabī’s *Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār Fī Ma’rifat al-Jawāhir Wa*

al-Aḥjār, an unedited manuscript, which was composed probably at the end of the fifteenth century.

This research focuses on Sri Lanka as depicted in the medieval Arabic sources, produced in the Arab-Islamic West. The term “Arabic” or “Arabs” refers to the Arab-Islamic West and West Asia to accommodate medieval territories, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Islamic Spain. The researcher emphasizes the *Maghribī* context due to the distinct cultural influence that the region experienced during the medieval era, influenced by its proximity to Europe. Nevertheless, West Asia covers a broad area with different geopolitical borders including Gulf countries, Persia (Iran), Iraq, and *Jazīrat al-Arab* (today known as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Yemen) (Farah, 2005, p. 15). Scholars also include certain Asian and North African countries within West Asia. Today, West Asia and the Middle East are often used interchangeably to include countries such as Turkey (Anatolia), Iran (Persia), Khorasan (Afghanistan), Syria, and Iraq, establishing a region between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.

According to Akhtarul Wasey (2003), the West Asian region includes lands from Khorasan (Afghanistan) to Egypt. The area involves the mountainous areas of Afghanistan, parts of Persia (Iran), and the Arab lands, which comprise the arid lands of Arabia alongside the green valleys of the rivers of Euphrates and Nile (Wasey, 2003, p. 269). Vohra presents a new terminology, WANA, to indicate West Asia and North Africa. His description highlights the complex nature of the lands under consideration, which goes beyond their

initial boundaries (Vohra, 2003, p. 7). The present study uses “West Asia” and “North Africa” instead of “Middle East” to avoid any Eurocentric interpretation related to the term. Nevertheless, the drawback of this interpretation is that it does not include the territories in Europe, such as Spain, where a number of Arabic manuscripts were composed during the medieval period. Therefore, this research takes into consideration the Arabic materials written in Islamic Spain during the medieval era.

1.5. Methodology and Sources

Primarily, a physical archival survey was conducted in the United Kingdom to obtain fresh sources. Materials were collected from the Cadbury Research Library, British Library, and Wellcome Trust. In addition, some unedited online texts were also accumulated from the collections of Oxford Bodleian, Cambridge University Library, Qatar National Library, German National Library, Princeton University Library, and the Quazi Trust Library. For example, eight fresh sources were explored from the British Library, including *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā’if al Mawjūdāt*, a twelfth-century work of an anonymous author. Further, two more unedited manuscripts were explored, including the fourteenth century work *Kitāb Rawḍat al-Manāẓir*, from the Cadbury Research Library. The reference section has a separate list of the unedited manuscripts used in this study.

The materials used in the study are both prose and poetic texts and they can be categorized into major four types: geographic sources, travel memoirs and compendiums, poetic

sources, and miscellaneous. The first genre, geographic texts, includes three different types of sources containing information about Sri Lanka. The first type of sources is marvels (*'ajā'ib*) and wonders (*gharā'ib*) of the Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka, including the marvels and mysteries of Adam's Peak. The second type of sources is the literature of *aqālīm* (provinces), known as the *masālik and mamālik* sources in classical Arabic geography. Sources related to this genre have two attributes, and the first characteristic is that the *masālik and mamālik* literature had been significantly influenced by Greek writings, especially by Ptolemy (c.85-165 AD). Early Arab geographers, from the seventh to the ninth century, principally adopted Ptolemy's geographic perspectives of the division of inhabited world. However, at times, they altered his concepts to suit their needs and geographic perspectives. Al-Mas'ūdī, for instance, altered the copula of the earth (centrality) from Persia to Baghdad in his geography (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1948, p. 36). The second characteristic shows a pattern originating from Ptolemy to produce fresh geographic views. This trend is noticeable with the rise of the Balkhī school of geographers in the tenth century. The third category of sources is *ahjār* (stones) materials that primarily deals with the gemstones of Sri Lanka.

The second genre is written by Arab travelers who voyaged to the island. It is significant that they produced compendiums based on their direct observations (*'iyān*). This type of literature could be further categorized into three types. The first type is commercial travels, i.e. journeys of Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851). The second type involves anthropological

travels, i.e. explorations of al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956) and al-Birūnī. The third type is pilgrimage narratives, i.e. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s (1304-1368) pilgrimage account of Sri Lanka.

The third genre is poetry. It appears that Arabic poets did not travel to Sri Lanka. However, they depicted the island based on their imagination under four separate themes: swords, gems and pearls, fragrance, and idolatry. The fourth genre, miscellaneous works, include materials from the scientific fields related to medicine, botany, and zoology, such as al-Dinawārī’s (828-896) *Kitāb al-Nabāt* on botany.

Thus, this research uses both edited and newly explored sources from travel, geographic, and poetic texts to examine how Arab writers imagined an Islamic “self” against a non-Islamic “other”, using the conceptual framework of the modern philosopher Lajos Brons, which consists of three alterity dimensions, i.e., sophisticated, crude, and quasi (Brons, 2015).

1.5.1. Choice of Materials and Case Studies

As explained in the previous section, the researcher selected the materials from travel, geographic, and poetic texts based on his judgement considering the suitability of the materials for the portrayal of Sri Lanka. Due to dearth of materials, more accounts were selected for this research. This research primarily considers seventeen prominent narratives supported by the texts written in Arabic and other languages as well. The analysis of the

study presents a content analysis in the third and the fifth chapters, and some case studies in the fourth chapter. The following eminent resources are employed for this analysis.

Table 1.1. Selection of Materials for the Study

Author	Period	Source	Type of texts
Sulaymān al-Tājir (c.851)	9 th century	<i>‘Ajā’ib al-Dunya Wa-Qiyās al-Buldān</i>	Travel
Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1369)	14 th century	<i>Riḥla Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓār</i>	Travel
Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sardārī (d.1027)	11 th century	<i>Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik</i> of al-Bakrī	Travel/Geography
Abul Abbās al-Ḥijāzī (c.1118)	12 th century	<i>Tuhfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-‘Ijāb</i> of al-Qarnāṭī	Travel
Al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956)	9 th century	<i>Murūj al-Dhahab, Akhbār al-Zamān, Al-Tanbīh Wa al-Isḥrāf</i>	Geography/Aqālīm
Al-Bakrī (1014-1094)	11 th century	<i>Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik</i>	Geography/Aqālīm
Al-Zuhrī (1130-1161)	11 th century	<i>Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya</i>	Geography/Aqālīm

Ibn Shahrayār (900-956)	10 th century	<i>‘Ajā’ib al-Hind</i>	Geography/ <i>‘Ajā’ib</i>
Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (1160-1233)	12 th century	<i>Tuhfat al-‘Ajā’ib Wa Ṭurfat al-Gharā’ib</i>	Geography/ <i>‘Ajā’ib</i>
A‘lām al-Baṭalyawsī (c.1240)	13 th century	<i>Rabī‘ al-Anwār</i>	Geography/ <i>‘Ajā’ib</i>
Aḥmad al-Tayfāshī (1184-1253)	12 th century	<i>Al-Aḥjār al-Mulūkiyya</i>	Geography/ <i>Aḥjār</i>
Al-Ḥalabī (1475-1529)	15 th century	<i>Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār Fī Ma‘rifat al-Jawāhir Wa al-Aḥjār</i>	Geography/ <i>Aḥjār</i>
Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī (767-820)	8 th century	<i>Dīwān al-Shāfi‘ī</i>	Poetry/Gems
Al-Ma‘arrī (973-1057)	10 th century	<i>Al-Luzūmiyyāt</i>	Poetry/Gems
Al-Naysābūrī (961-1038)	10 th century	<i>Thimār al-Qulūb</i>	Prose and Poetry/ Sword
Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawārī (828-889)	9 th century	<i>Kitāb al-Ma‘ārif</i>	Poetry/Fragrance

Abdul Raḥmān (792-852)	9 th century	<i>Kitāb al-Juḡhrāfiyya of al-Zuhrī</i>	Poetry/Idols
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One drawback of these materials is that the researcher did not find a single book dedicated entirely to Sri Lanka. However, the sources used here partially cover Sri Lanka in their narration and portrayal.

1.6. Review of Literature

Extant research on Arab-Sri Lankan engagements generally focuses on two main areas. Firstly, Arab-Sri Lanka commercial contacts, and secondly, Arab-Sri Lanka social and cultural engagements. Although the extant studies largely display positive relationships between Arabs and Sri Lankans, there is an obvious gap in research regarding the possible negative portrayals and views shown by Arabs towards the people and cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka, during the medieval period.

1.6.1. Arab-Sri Lankan Commercial Contacts

Researchers have conducted numerous studies on the nature and impact of trade contact between Arabs and *Sarandīb* from the 8th to 15th centuries. Mahroof (1999), for instance, explores the maritime commercial ties Arabs maintained with *Sarandīb* in the above period. He showed that Arab sailors used their knowledge of monsoon seasons optimally to take rest between voyages and travel inward into the country to collect commodities for

the next cycle of travel. According to Mahroof (1999), Arab traders acted as supervisor of the ports, including Mantai, Galle, and Colombo to collect taxes and dispatch them to the Sri Lankan rulers. Mahroof demonstrates that, despite their control over Sri Lanka's export trade, Arabs did not interfere with the country's internal politics which explains the long-standing peaceful relationship between Arabia and Sri Lanka (Mahroof, 1999, p. 23).

Apart from Mahroof (1999), Kiribamune (2003) also traces commercial connection Arabs maintained with Sri Lanka to create a list of commodities that were exchanged between Arabia and Sri Lanka. Arab travelers and merchants were attracted to this island mainly because of its gems, pearls, cinnamon, treacle, scented wood, elephants, and herbs. According to Kiribamune, Muslim merchants came to Sri Lanka to distribute silk and porcelain, and in return, Sri Lankans bought 'horses, clothes, incense, perfumes, wine, gold, and silver' from them (Kiribamune, 2003, p. 176-177). Kiribamune traces the commercial contact of the island with Arabs, but leaves other forms of connections, such as cultural and political unexplored.

Similarly, another notable and recent publication of Rohitha Dasanayaka (2017) examines the trade relations between Sri Lanka and the Middle East from ancient times to the medieval period, using evidence from history, archaeology, and numismatics, including Arabic travel and geographic literature of al-Idrīsī (1099-1165), al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283), and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1369). Rohitha Dasanayaka challenges RALH Gunawardana's (2003) claim that due to the arrival of Arabs in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lankans lost their

dominant status and economic opportunities in maritime trade, which that they had enjoyed in the Indian Ocean before the seventh-century. According to Gunawardana, Sri Lankan business groups lost their opportunities in sea trade because Arabs and Persians carried the role of ‘middlemen’ instead of Sri Lankans (Dasanayaka, 2017, p. 156). Refuting Gunawardana’s claim, Dasanayaka (2017) states that the loss of opportunities for the Sri Lankan traders is not entirely due to the to the arrival of Arabs, because causes like the rise of the Sri Vijaya kingdom⁵ as a ‘maritime empire’ also paved the way for the loss of economic prospects of Sri Lankans in maritime trade. He adds that Arabic sources show an opposite picture of what is stated by Gunawardana and emphasizes that the presence of Arabs on this island facilitated the establishment of the Muslim settlements⁶ during the medieval period (Dasanayaka, 2017, p. 157).

Like Mahroof (1999) and Kriribamune (2003), Dasanayaka also faces constraints in his research because he does not extract information directly from Arabic travel and geographical literature to which he refers in his work. He depends on numerous editions and translations of these sources. A direct engagement with the unedited Arabic manuscripts, however, would provide new insights into the history of the island. Further,

⁵Sri Vijaya kingdom was a Buddhist empire on the island of Sumatra of modern-day Indonesia from the 7th to the 11th century CE. This kingdom had significant commercial influence across Southeast Asia. This kingdom also played a crucial role in the spread of Buddhism.

⁶Aziz provides information on eight Muslims settlements in the coastal cities of Sri Lanka: Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mantota (Mannar), Kudiramalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwala and Galle.

this group of scholars rarely examines the religious, social, and political contacts that Arabs had with Sri Lanka, and Arabs' negative or ambivalent reactions towards Sri Lanka.

1.6.2. Arab-Sri Lankan Social and Cultural Engagements

The commercial ties between Arabs and Sri Lanka led to the proliferation of relations in religion, culture, politics, and science. In this regard, S.A. Imam's (1965) survey is instrumental when tracing Arab connections with Sri Lanka beyond the so-called commercial ties. He found that the origin of Muslims in Sri Lanka can be directly traced to Arab ancestry. In doing so, he refutes the claims made by Paulus Edward Pieris (1983), i.e., it was in the year 1281 that the first generation of the "Moor (Muslim) population" arrived in Ceylon, when Kader Shah, a ruler of the Coromandel Coast, brought his soldiers for a war against Sri Lanka. When Kadar Shah lost, his soldiers were scattered leaving "some of them to settle down in Sri Lanka" and married local women of coastal areas (Imam, 1965, p. 11). However, it is unclear whom Pieris refers to as the "Moor population," and whether they were Arabs from the Middle East or the Coastal Muslims from India. Imam (1965) does not differentiate between these two groups when he argues against Pieris. Nevertheless, his analysis is significant because it provides necessary information to understand the social, religious and cultural aspects of medieval Sri Lanka to a certain extend.

Similarly, Shukri (2000), while admitting the need to explore added archival evidence to write the history of Muslims in Sri Lanka, traces the early Arab connections with the island in order to find the historical roots and genesis of Muslim settlements in *Sarandīb* during the first century of Islam using several texts. His study is significant because of his use of Arabic inscriptions and other archeological materials that set a new trend in analyzing these matters using new sources. According to Shukri (2000), commercial contacts between Arabia and Sri Lanka dates to the pre-Christian era, and these commercial ties ultimately led to the growth of cultural relations. Although Arabs voyaged to Sri Lanka for commercial reasons, they settled down in port cities and introduced their faith, Islam, in Sri Lanka. Shukri (2000) highlights a significant aspect of the Muslim history of the island by tracing the ancestry to Arabs. However, though his work used a few Arabic manuscripts in his portrayal of the island, there is a pressing need to accommodate fresh and unedited manuscripts, which remain largely unstudied in the manuscript libraries in Europe and the Middle East.

Lorna Dewaraja (1994) argues that the connections between Sri Lanka and Arabia were not only for trade, but they took a socio- cultural turn when Arabs began to interact with Sri Lankans for commercial and social necessities. For instance, Arab pilgrims undertook travels to Adam's Peak, a mountain in the Sabaragamuwa province of Sri Lanka, possibly to visit the place on Earth where Adam first set foot after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This reveals a cultural necessity of traveling to *Sarandīb*. This mountain is a sacred

place to Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians for religious rituals, and it unites all leading faith groups who make visits to *Sarandīb* since ancient times. Further, Dewaraja (1994) brings evidence from the writings of al-Idrīsī to show that the relationship between the two territories was significant because they had close and cordial political connections.⁷

Mention must be made to a limited number of works that contain investigations on how Arabs perceived *Sarandīb* in their writing using ethnographic, social, and cultural descriptors. Nafis Ahmad (1945) specifically examines the commercial ties that Arabs maintained with Sri Lanka. The author is a pioneering researcher on this subject who extracted valuable information from ancient Arabic travelogues and geographic literature written by early travelers, geographers, sailors, and navigators, such as Sulaymān al-Tājir, al-Mas‘ūdī, Ibn Khurdadhbīh (c 845), al-Iṣṭakhrī (850-957), and a few other writers. Nafis Ahmed’s research is significant, but it provides very little information on the religio-geocultural presentation of Sri Lanka because he depended only on a smaller sample of Arabic texts.

To summarize, Imam (1965) traced the Sri Lankan Muslim history to their Arab ancestors and Shukri supported Imam’s views with archaeological evidence from Sri Lanka. Both scholars used Arabic sources that are quite well known in academia—the majority of which

⁷Al-Idrīsī is a 12th century Arab traveler, geographer, and map maker who provides information on a “a council of 16 ministers at the royal court, with four Buddhists, four Muslims, four Christians, and four Jews”. This council was tasked with advising the ruler on commercial affairs. (al-Idrīsī, 2002, pp. 73-74).

are published. Lorna Dewaraja (1994), too, largely used secondary sources for her study. These scholars' arguments attempt to trace the Sri Lankan Muslim history back to Arab traders. Despite being historical surveys of Muslims of Sri Lanka, the existing studies fail to consider the negative perceptions of Arabs of non-Muslim Sri Lankan people. Further, most of these studies are re-narrations of selected Arabic accounts with little discussion and analysis, and they focus on mutual commercial and cultural exchanges between Arabia and Sri Lanka.

In short, these extant research primarily investigates the Arab connection with Sri Lanka in commerce, religion, and culture during the medieval period. However, a comprehensive understanding of the image of Sri Lanka in the eyes of Arabs is still lacking because the existing studies do not reflect on both positive and negative perspectives. Additionally, there is a dearth of studies examining Arab views of the idol-worshipping Sri Lankan community. Therefore, the researcher tries to argue that previous scholarship on the early history of *Sarandīb* has hitherto not taken full account of the contribution of Arabic literature to examine the perceptions and representations of the Arabs on *Sarandīb* between the 8th to 15th centuries. By directing the research trajectory towards medieval Arabic literature, including geographical compendiums, memoirs, travel books, and poetic works, the present work introduces the forgotten corpus of medieval Arabic literature that describes Arabs' encounters with the non-Muslim cultures and societies of Sri Lanka.

1.7. Theoretical Framework: The Concept of the “Other”

The term alterity refers to the state of being “other” or different from oneself. Recent philosophical and anthropological studies consider the “other” to understand how people perceive those who are different from themselves. Crang (1998) claims that alterity is the process through which identities are determined in an unequal relationship (Crang, 1998, p. 61). Similarly, Brons (2015) suggests that alterity emerges through the identification of desirable characteristics within oneself or a group based on some traits that are perceived as superior to those of others or the out-group (Brons, 2015, p. 70). Othering establishes a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, yet this superiority/inferiority is typically left implicit (Brons, 2015, p. 70). Through the observation and perception of the “other,” a person constructs both his own identity and the identity of others by differentiating himself from others. This ultimately leads to both positive and negative portrayals, and in some cases, it results in creating stereotypes and prejudices.

Since 1960, studying cultural and religious otherness has gained increased attention both in pre-modern and modern times (Bentley, 2011, p. 294). The discussion on the “other,” however, goes back to the period of Plato, as he brings an account of a stranger who participates in a dialogue on the ontological problems of being and non-being, of the “one” and the “other” (Pelt, 2005, p. 01). Initially Hegel (1770-1831) reflected on how self-awareness is linked to the construction of otherness and since then scholars have been

investigating how the representation of the “other” becomes a crucial and essential component of the perception and description of the “self”. However, as demonstrated by Brons (2015), the alterity concept of Hegel primarily concentrated on the ‘Master-Slave dialectic’ rather than on other forms of conception of the “other” (Brons, 2015, p. 69).

Social theorist Simone de Beauvoir’s (1908-1986) notion of the “other” as a construction opposing and thereby constructing “self”, and the concepts of “other”, “othering”, and “otherness” have taken root in areas of thought and inquiry ranging from nursing science to cultural geography (Brons, 2015, p. 69). De Beauvoir’s “other” was not an entirely new idea; however, as she herself acknowledged, it was heavily influenced by Hegel’s ideas of identification and instantiation. De Beauvoir seeks to examine how majority and minority identities are constructed, and the representation of a different social group is controlled by those who hold a greater level of political power.

With the proliferation of studies on the “other” in recent decades, the focus has mainly concentrated on the encounters between the West and the Islamic world (Jaberalfaify, 2013, p. 13) Labīb (1999) shows that the relationship between the Islamic world and the West was paradoxical in cultural dimensions, particularly in the cognitive, social, political, and religious spheres (Labīb, 1999, p. 221). With the publication of Edward W. Said’s (1935-2003) seminal work on Orientalism in 1978, this field of study defined the relationship between diverse cultures based on binary terms, such as superiority vs. inferiority, Orient vs. Occident, self vs. other, and ultimately, his research focused on how

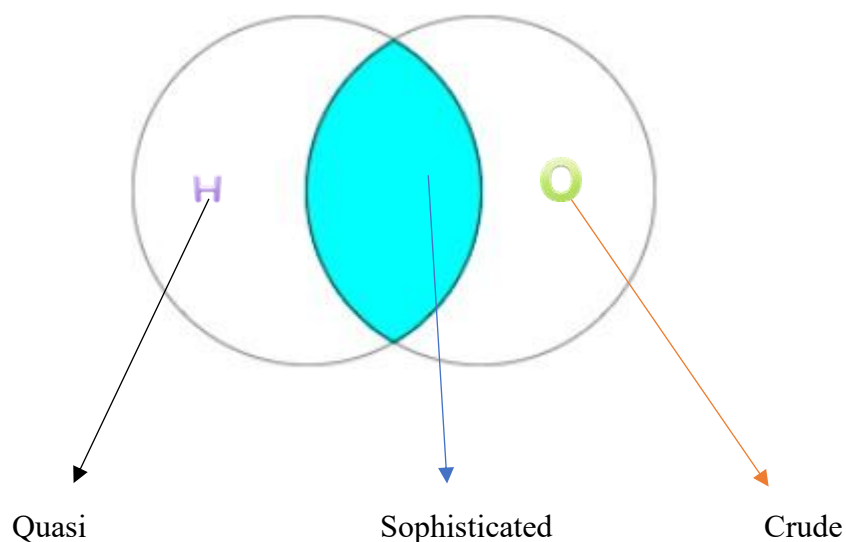
Europe's hegemonic interests served on its counterpart, i.e., Western Asia (Said, 1978). Said (1978) analyzed the nexus between the Western "self" and the Eastern "other," and the differentiation became closer and more evident which undeniably impacted literature on both thematic and artistic levels. The discussion of Occidentalism often in juxtaposed with that of Orientalism, and it raised important questions about the Western hegemonic power in shaping the imagery of the Oriental "other." Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism* paved the way for the proliferation of more studies on East-West encounters based on power relations. The concept of Occidentalism, an "Eastern" reply to Orientalism, as termed by Abdullah Metin (Metin, 2020, p. 181), gained momentum with the publication of the book *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism* by the Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī (Metin, 2020, p. 182).

However, the understanding of the "other" is not limited to the East-West encounters as it encompasses multiple forms of ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and political fronts. Numerous studies in the recent past have considered how the "East" perceives its "Eastern other", which is as important as the "Western other". Hermes' chapter (2013) titled *The Orient's Medieval 'Orient(alism)'* *The Riḥla of Sulaymān al-Tājir* and Roxanne Euben's chapter (2008) titled *Liars, Travelers, Theorists: Herodotus and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa* demonstrated how eastern travelers perceived the cultural landscapes of the eastern world testing theoretical models such as "nested polarities" a production of Roxanne Euben (Euben, 2008, p. 83), as well as "binary opposites", a term coined by Hermes (Hermes, 2013, p.

37). Thus, the need to concentrate on different categories of the “other”, i.e., “other” that is not solely based on encounters between the Eastern Islamic world and the Western Christian territories becomes evident.

Modern philosopher Lajos Brons’s (2015) three alterity dimensions of sophisticated, crude, and quasi serve as a theoretical model for the present research and it illustrates that the othering is the construction and identification of the “self” and the “other” in mutual, unequal opposition by attributing relative inferiority or radical alienness to the other group. The Venn diagram developed by Brons (2015) describes the alterity approach and clearly depicts the different alterity models. Given below is the othering model of Lajos Brons with a slight alteration:

Figure 1.1. Lajos Brons’ Alterity Model



Venn diagram, Alterity model of Lajos Brons, Othering, An Analysis, 2015, p. 86

According to Brons' (2015) Venn diagram, the overlap between H and O is sophisticated alterity; crude othering is in O, but not in H; quasi-othering is in H, but not in O. Hence, crude othering seems to be the paradigmatic form of othering, and quasi-othering, seems to be the closest to not othering, but it is just the recognition of othering. According to Brons (2015), quasi-othering is closely related to sophisticated othering in its logical form (Brons, 2015, p. 86).

Brons' categorizes the alterity model into three types. Firstly, according to Brons (2015), the crude othering is the self-other distancing which basically differentiates between the two (Brons, 2015, p. 86). This understanding shows the alterity as a fixed concept, where individuals or groups are either completely different or completely the same. Crude alterity sees difference as something to be feared, avoided, or even eliminated, which may lead to stereotypes and discrimination. Secondly, in Brons' (2015) view, the sophisticated alterity approach is totally different from the crude dimension, and it lies on the self-other identification (Brons, 2015, p. 86). This alterity approach admits diverse cultural perspectives and seeks to bridge gaps in understanding through communication and dialogue. Finally, there is the quasi-alterity approach, which is a less detectable approach. It lacks a clear differentiation of othering. This approach recognizes the importance of acknowledging differences but does not necessarily seek to understand or appreciate them. The quasi-alterity approach may simply tolerate differences rather than embrace them and

allow the differences to continue as a sense of “otherness.” This approach, therefore, does not involve promoting understanding and inclusivity.

Overall, the crude alterity is distinctly different from the other two models, and the second and the third models are similar and inter-related to each other. The essential difference between the two kinds of othering is that crude othering is a self-other distancing, while sophisticated othering, as well as quasi-othering partially depend on the self-other identification. Due to the intricate nature of Brons’s (2015) theory, a slight modification incorporating elements of acceptance and rejection is needed. Therefore, the “sophisticated” and “quasi” model can be considered the “identification” or “accommodating” model, and the “crude alterity” can be considered the “distancing” or “rejection” approach.

Similar to Brons (2015), Taylor (2022) classifies the “other” as the obvious and obstructive understanding in shaping identity (Taylor, 2022, p. 33). The ‘obvious’ model seeks to identify the “self” and the “other” in an unavoidable and apparent manner. For instance, constructing identity-based religious markers, such as *muslim* (believer) and *kāfir* (unbeliever), is unavoidable. The second model suggests that harmful and obstructive alterity contributes to conflicts and wars, and, at times, apocalyptic beliefs that lead to antagonistic tendencies. In fact, Taylor’s (2022) approach is similar to the present understanding of the other based on the approaches of accommodation and rejection.

Considering the revised model of Brons (2015), the present research aims to document the Arab scholarly encounter with the Sri Lankan culture during the medieval period from c. 8th century to 15th century to see how an Arab Islamic “self” vs. Eastern non-Islamic “other” is constructed in relation to Sri Lanka. The researcher’s primary argument is that Sri Lanka had a fruitful relationship with Arabs, characterized by a lack of obstructive or rejective alterity in their encounters. Hence, the constructed alterity has been largely quasi or in some instances a sophisticated approach, not a crude identification.

1.8. Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters, including separate chapters for the introduction and conclusion to show the Arabs’ perception and representation of Sri Lanka through travel, geographic, and poetic texts. Each chapter considers both their concrete manifestations as well as representative signification.

The introductory chapter elaborates on the issues and gaps in the existing literature, highlighting and justifying the need to use fresh sources for the study. The second chapter examines the views of medieval Arabists on the apathy of Arab travelers in the Indian Ocean and Asian frontiers, focusing on Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014) and Touati (2010), who articulate that Arabs did not find the non-Muslim ‘other’ in the Indian Ocean, possibly because it is outside the *dār al-Islam*. While discussing these views, the chapter focuses on the level of interest of Arabs in Sri Lanka beginning from the pre-Christian era and its

expansion soon after the conquest of Sind in 711, employing numerous materials including geographic maps and Arabic inscriptions explored in Sri Lanka.

The third chapter examines the images created by Arabs about Sri Lanka using geographic materials. This chapter primarily considers three types of geographic materials: *'ajā'ib* (marvels), *aqālīm* (provinces), and *ahjār* (stones), and critically examines two important themes that emerged from the analysis. The first theme shows how the Sri Lankan *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* has been portrayed and represented in Arabic geography, using examples of Ibn Shahrayār, al-Qazwīnī, al-Jazarī, and al-Baṭalyawsī, who deal with both earth and sea marvels and mysteries. The second theme examines the religious and cultural identities of the Sri Lankan Buddhists, Hindus, and Vedda communities.

The fourth chapter revolves around two interconnected themes related to Arabs' perceptions of Sri Lanka. The first part examines the religio-geocultural images of Sri Lanka using travel accounts. To achieve this purpose, this section compares the travels of Sulaymān al-Tājir with the voyages of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. The second part investigates the political image of the Sri Lankans by Arab voyagers using selected examples.

The fifth chapter is an analysis of poetic materials. An examination of the sources reveals four thematic folds: gem, sword, perfume, and idolatry. The first section deals with poems related to pearls and gems, for which Imam Shāfi'ī's works are used along with some other writers. The second section deals with sword poetry. As Sri Lanka was identified as a sword

producing territory in Arabic poetry, this section uses poetry compiled based on this reputation. This section considers the poems of al-Naysābūrī along with some other poets, including al-Ma‘arrī. The third part examines the image inspired by the fragrance, using Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawārī’s account. The fourth theme is about the idols found in Sri Lanka, which is discussed using the poems of the Spanish poet Abdul Raḥmān. The final chapter of this dissertation presents the conclusions of the research, appended with maps, figures, tables, and a list of bibliographies.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARABS' KNOWLEDGE OF SRI LANKA

The introductory chapter highlighted the dearth of research on Sri Lanka using early Arabic non-religious texts, including travel documents, memoirs, and geographical and poetic sources, written from the 8th to the 15th century. This chapter examines two significant themes related to the Arab engagement with the Asian communities during the medieval times. The first theme investigates the claims made by some contemporary scholars regarding the Arabs' apathy towards Asia. While presenting literature that shows the level of the Arabs' interest in Sri Lanka, this study argues that Arab writers not only showed interest in the major territories of the East, such as India and China, but also engaged with smaller territories, including Sri Lanka and Maldives. The second theme indicates that Arabs engaged with Sri Lanka not to occupy or invade the island, but to pursue commercial, social, and cultural endeavours.

2.1. The Arabs' Presumed Apathy Towards the Eastern Other: Claims and Controversies

Some Western scholars of the Middle East do not give credit to early Arab explorations of alien cultures in Africa, Asia, and Europe and they view medieval explorations and distant journeys as solely a European monopoly in the world. Understandably, Bernard Lewis (1982) argues that the exploration and voyages represent European values and have

contributed greatly to the progress of world civilizations, particularly during the early modern societies. He further notes that looking at an alien culture with critical lenses is a gift of Europeans to humanity which led to the study of foreign languages and analysis of classical manuscripts (Lewis, 1982, p. 301). According to Lewis, Arabs did not exert an effort to keenly engage with distant European lands, languages, and cultures in the medieval and the early modern period, nor did they travel to foreign lands to learn from other cultures and civilizations. By most accounts, he points out a lack of curiosity among them to travel to Europe and discover their cultural values. He maintains that Arabs did not even try to study cultures, religions, and languages even within the Islamic empire until a need to capture foreign lands arose and preach their religious faith, Islam (Lewis, 1982, p. 301). Remarkably, when Europeans offered Muslim travelers and writers a chance to learn about them, these Middle Easterners failed to seize this opportunity with both hands. As Lewis notes, all they wrote and said was as “lies and grotesque fables” (Lewis, 1982, p. 301).

While Lewis highlights the apathy of Arab writers toward European people and cultures in general, Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014), a French historian and a medievalist, on the other hand, shows their apathy toward the Indian Oceanic world. While denouncing Arab awareness of the Indian Ocean, he states that when Western scholars moved towards Arab writers to learn about the Indian Ocean, the latter did not present the required information because they lacked expertise and enthusiasm in this region. This lack of knowledge, as he

admits, prevailed not only among the Western Arabists but is among the Arab scholars of the Middle East. He assumes that the history of this region is predominantly written based on imagination, tales, and fables. Le Goff relates his ‘oneiric horizon’ to imagination and dreaming that never merit scientific value. While denouncing the role of these sources in narrating a scientific history, Le Goff overlooks the contribution of medieval Arab writers on the Indian Ocean regions (Le Goff, 2009, pp. 158-159).

The views expressed by Le Goff have a recurrent influence on several medievalists who engage with Arabic travel and geographic texts of the medieval era. Echoing Le Goff, Touati, (2010) believes that medieval Muslims rarely undertook journeys outside the *dār al-Islām*. He notes in his book, *Islam, and Travel in the Middle Ages*,

“In the West, the model for the traveler is one who crosses his own cultural frontier and goes “elsewhere” to find himself and to translate his experience of the “other” into the text of his own culture. In Islam, those who were great travelers and (they were called, literally, tourists) never or almost never went out of the geographical space of their religious belief. Moreover, rather than making exclusive use of narrative form, they elaborated other expressions of travel writing. Thus, we are struck by the contrast between the extraordinary richness of their experience of going from one place to another and the little urgency they display about composing a narrative to tell of that experience. What we see is travelers who did not leave home to explore their own identity

in the eyes of the ‘other’, but rather to confront what should be and adjust themselves to it. Rather than going elsewhere, Islamic travelers traveled in the space of the same, and their chief preoccupation was to create more of the same. Their main aim was dogmatic in nature” (Touati, 2010, p. 259).

There is perhaps no more suitable example than Franco Cardini’s (2001) statement that apathy is a characteristic of the culture that emerged from Muhammad’s religious revolution (Cardini, 2001). Importantly, Le Goff’s views have been rejected by a vast number of Western Arabists who argue that Arabs hugely engaged with foreign cultures, thereby, exploring unknown territories or to satisfy a personal wanderlust. In instances, in addition to administrative purposes, they embarked on voyages to trade and propagate their new religion (Newman, 2001, p. 197).

Through questioning the contestation of Le Goff and his proponents, this part shows the allegation of apathy is not true upon closer examination of materials related to Arab depiction of East in their travel, geographic and poetic accounts. Needless to state that during medieval Islam, Muslim rulers and scholars alike were keen to study other religions, and cultures, involving not only in translation of scientific manuscripts from Greek heritage, but writing on the anthropology of Asian societies and cultures, such as India, China, Cambodia, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. In fact, there was no shortage of Muslims who cast curious minds and eyes toward the various cultures (*thaqāfāt*) that flourished East and West of *dār al-Islām*. Through translating hundreds of foreign manuscripts into Arabic, Muslim

scholars studied enthusiastically and appreciated greatly the alien cultures of the Greeks, Persians, and Indians, to cite two specific examples.

Abū Rayḥān Aḥmad Al-Birūnī (d. 1048) is one of the earliest scholars who were interested in the Indology⁸, in his book *Kitāb al-Birūnī Fī Taḥqīq Ma Li-l-Hind*, known as *Kitāb al-Hind*. This book is a comprehensive account of India, written based on an inspection tour (*taḥqīq*) undertaken in the subcontinent for thirteen years between 1017 and 1031 to verify information on the Indian cultural, scientific, social, and religious data, provided by his predecessors like al-Tājir and al-Mas‘ūdī (Ahmed, 1984, p. 09). Al-Birūnī emphasizes the prominence of direct observation over oral transmission for collecting data for his book. He notes:

The oral transmission (*al-khabar*) is not like eyewitness (*al-‘iyān*) accounts
(Al-Birūnī, 1985, p. 01).

Citing the importance of his travels to collect information, he blended physical geography with human environments to make his anthropological account of India a credible source. His description of caste matters such as rites and customs of different castes, and women’s issues such as matrimony, menstrual courses, fetuses, and childbirth, indicates that al-Birūnī had dealt with the scope of anthropology in depth (Ahmed, 1984. P. 09). Bruce B. Lawrence (1973) shows that Ghaznavid scholar al-Birūnī has no parallel in the medieval Islamic

⁸ Indology refers to the study of Indian religions, cultures, customs, and social norms.

scholarship of India, as his work, composed in 1038, is a ‘haven of truth’ for Indian religions and cultures (Lawrence, 1973, p. 63).

Similarly, twelfth century scholar Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Shahrastānī (d.1153) is another insightful writer of Indian religious traditions and faith-based societies. His work *Kitāb al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal* treats not only major religious societies in the West Asian fold like Jews, Magians, Manichaeans and pre-Muslim Arabs, but also provides rich information on Indian religions (Lawrence, 1973, p. 65). Although Bruce B Lawrence refutes the travels undertaken by Shahrastānī, he admits that the latter has provided original and unique information on Šābians to portray Indian idolatry (Lawrence, 1973, p. 65).

Meanwhile, Shahrastānī provides advanced and accurate information on Brahmins, Buddhists, and Dualists⁹ of India and Sri Lanka. His narrative examines the unique perspective regarding the origin of Brahmins. Shahrastānī notes:

“The scholarly claim of connecting Brahmins to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) is incorrect because the former denies prophethood. So how does Brahmins claim affiliation with Ibrahim while being against his fundamentals? Brahmins are from India. Among them are those who adhere to the doctrine of light and darkness, integrating both beliefs. We have mentioned their

⁹Shahrastānī informs us about the dualists (*thānaviyya*) who believe in the omnipotence of darkness (*ẓalām*) and light (*nūr*), much like how people in the Abrahamic period believed in the power of light. (Shahrastānī, 1992, p. 607)

doctrines. However, these ‘Brahmins’ are attributed to a man among them known as Brahma, who paved the way for them to deny prophethood altogether and established the impossibility of prophethood in their minds” (Shahrastānī, 1992, p. 607).

Shahrastānī informs that Brahmins are the descendants of Brahma, who refutes prophethood, not descendants of Abraham as claimed by some Indian scholars.

Shahrastānī discusses the Buddhist concept of *moksha* or *nirvana*¹⁰ (*Martabat al-Bardīs ‘iyya*), which is the status of becoming a perfect wiseman in mundane life by ending of suffering from this world. Shahrastānī notes:

“*Nirvāna* is a status of becoming flawless humanhood. To reach this rank, a person needs to be patient, generous, and possess the willingness to desire what he wishes to attain with abstention and renunciation of worldly affairs, refraining from its desires and pleasures, abstaining from indulgence and clashes, showing mercy to all creatures, and avoiding the ten sins: killing a life, capturing others’ wealth illegally, adultery, lying, gossiping, obscenity, cursing, giving derogatory names, foolishness, and denying eternity, and completing ten desired qualities: 1) generosity, 2) pardoning the offenders and suppressing anger with forbearance, 3) avoidance of worldly pleasures,

¹⁰*Moksha* or *Nirvana* is a term used in Buddhism for various forms of emancipation, liberation or attaining perfect wisdom.

4) seeking refuge in the eternal knowledge from this temporary world, 5) exercising the mind through seeking knowledge and considering the consequences of matters, 6) controlling oneself from seeking lofty goals, 7) gentleness in speech and kindness in words, 8) friendship with brothers by prioritizing their choices over one's own 9) turning away from creation with misconception and shifting towards truth, 10) sacrificing one's soul seeking truth" (Shahrastānī, 1992, p. 612).

Shahrastānī demonstrates the virtues one should embrace to attain *nirvana* and highlights the vices one must avoid. The remarks of Shahrastānī on the Indian and the Sri Lankan religions, including Brahmanism (Hinduism) and Buddhism, show his heightened level of understanding in social and religious concepts. This is a more advanced analysis than that of his contemporaries from both the Islamic and the European world, including Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851), al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), al-Bakrī (d. 1094), al-Zuhri (c. 1154), al-Idrīsī (d. 1165), Marco Polo (d. 1324) and John Mandeville (c. 1357).

In addition to al-Birūnī and al-Shahrastānī, in the following chapters, we will discuss the interest that Arab voyagers have shown in finding the Sri Lankan "other", including Abu Dulaf (d. 840), and Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851) who undertook commercial voyages to the East. Men of letters such as al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1369) undertook journeys to India and China and stayed an extended period in both territories for geographic and anthropological reasons.

The texts of al-Birūnī and al-Shahrastānī show that, unlike the European voyagers in the Indian Ocean, Arabs showed no interest in colonizing Sri Lanka; rather they were drawn to the island for its commercial and cultural significance. The allegation of apathy on the part of Arabs cannot be sustained when we examine materials written by Arabs on Sri Lanka. In fact, Sri Lanka maintained mutual social, cultural and economic relationship with the Islamic world through non-military expeditions and positive cultural and commercial exchanges.

2.2.The Arabs' Fascination with Sri Lanka

Well before Vasco da Gama (1460-1524), the celebrated Portuguese navigator, embarked on his voyage to find new frontiers in Asia, people from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia engaged in strong cross-cultural contacts across the Indian Ocean. When da Gama reached Calicut in 1498, he found the active engagement of Arabs, Persians, and Chinese in trade in the Indian Ocean (Park, 2013, p.1). Additionally, da Gama's travel itinerary was well-assisted by an Arab navigator, Aḥmad ibn Mājīd (1421-1500)¹¹, who possessed a wealth of knowledge on the Indian Ocean maritime trade routes before the arrival of the Europeans to Asia (Tibbetts, 1971, p. 13). Arabs used shipbuilding technology to facilitate their travels

¹¹Ibn Mājīd al-Najdī, known *Asad al-Baḥr* (lion of the sea), was a geographer and voyager in the Red Sea, Chinese Sea, Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Berbera (Aden). He authored more than eight books, among them his work, *Kitāb Fawā'id Fī Uṣūl 'Ilm al-Baḥr wa al-Qawā'id* (The Book of Benefits Concerning the Principles and Foundations of the Science the Ocean) identified ten large islands in the Indian Ocean, including Madagascar, Sumatra, Java, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Zandjbār, al-Baḥrayn, the Island of Arabia. (Farnini, 1998, p. 266)

and according to Andalusian geographer al-Bakrī (1014-1094), they used ropes instead of nails made of iron in shipbuilding technology¹² (Al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 144). These examples show that Arabs were interested in the Indian Ocean even before the beginning of European domination in the region in the 15th century.

2.2.1. Arab Engagement with *Sarandīb* before the Advent of Islam

Ibn Nafis claims that the Arabs were the first navigators in the Indian Ocean well before the arrival of Islam in the seventh century, as they carried products from the territories of the Indian Ocean, even before the Persians, Indians, Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans engaged in sea-centered voyages. According to him, Arabs were the first people who brought mariners and carriers to the Indian Ocean and that the geography of Arabian Peninsula (*Jazīrat al-Arab*) has oceanic boundaries in three areas: the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. This facilitated maritime voyages to Asia, Africa, and Europe and contributed towards their early travels and exploration in the Indian Ocean. He further adds that Arabia connects Europe and Asia, enabling people of almost all racial, linguistic, religious and cultural groups to interact with others. Ibn Nafis shows that the ships from the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka, traversed Yemen, and Egypt, exchanging pepper, gold, silver, and tin, and these maritime sea trade mainly connected a sea route from Egypt to China via Madagascar and Sumatra (Ahmad, 1945, p. 225). However, Melinda Székely

¹²The purpose of using ropes is to avoid oxidizing iron due to exposure to saltwater.

advances a different opinion to state that the Romans explored Sri Lanka accidentally to reach the island's shores in their trading voyages to Asia, probably in the first century CE. According to Székely, Roman traders shared a mutual relationship with the Sri Lankan rulers when they first met with the Sri Lankan king (Székely, 2018, p. 49). D.P.M. Weerakkody (1997), in his recent work titled *Taprobane: Ancient Sri Lanka as Known by Greeks and Romans*, supports this view claiming that Roman mariners were the initial explorers during their trade voyages at sea. Despite the merits and drawbacks of these arguments, Ibn Nafis, Weerakkody, and Székely agree on one point that not only Romans but also the Arabs from West Asia involved with Sri Lanka in the maritime trading activities from the ancient time.

Ibn Nafis and Shukri claim that Arabs showed knowledge of Sri Lanka well before the pre-Christian era, giving evidence to validate that claim. Mahavamsa,¹³ one of the foremost chronicles of Sri Lanka, is arguably the earliest source to provide information regarding Arabs in Sri Lanka. The chronicle clearly refers to a separate place allocated for *Yonas*, a group of individuals who are not native to Sri Lanka by king Pandukabhaya¹⁴ (437 BC – 367 BC)¹⁵ (Geiger, 2000, p. 08). Dineshchandra Sarkar (1907-1985) and Marvin Weerakkodi (1945-2013) opine that they were the Greeks who traveled to Sri Lanka for

¹³Mahavamsa is a historical chronicle of early history of Sri Lanka, was written probably by Mahānāma in the fifth-century in a style of epic poem. This work records the religious and the political history of Sri Lanka, beginning from the arrival of Prince Vijaya to Sri Lanka until the period of king Mahasena, who ruled in Anuradhapura as his capital.

¹⁴He reigned the island from 437 BC – 367 BC as the first ruler of Anuradhapura Kingdom of Sri Lanka and the sixth overall ruler of the island of Sri Lanka since the arrival of Vijaya.

¹⁵Chapter X, verse. 90 of Mahavamsa provides this information.

trading purposes (Sircar, 1971, p. 230; Weerakkody, 1997). However, Wilhelm Geiger, the translator of Mahavamsa in English, Kayal Mohammed Sharīf (1993), and Takya Shu'ayb Ālim identify them as Arabs. Geiger did not show any evidence to prove his point, but Sharīf and Shu'ayb Ālim did so in their books. Ālim quoting Sharif claims that *Yona* or *Yonar* were Arabs who traveled to South India and Sri Lanka, citing evidence from the popular Tamil poetic anthology known as *Pattuppāṭṭu*¹⁶ (Ten Idylls or Ten Layers) and *Eṭṭuttokai* (The Eight Anthologies)¹⁷ that show these terms probably refer to Arabs (Ālim, 1993, p. 01). Muhammed Uwais echoes Sharif's perspective as follows: "Arabs have had knowledge of Sri Lanka for over 2500 years due to its association with an ancient mountain called Adam's peak linked to Adam and Eve, as well as the presence of valuable commodities in this island, such as precious stones and fragrances" (Uwaise, 1979, p. 174). Uwais probably traces the Arab knowledge of Sri Lanka back to the pre-Christian era.

Likewise, the second century Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy, in his map of Sri Lanka drawn in 150 AD, remarks on the settlements of West Asian people in Sri Lanka, including Persians, pre-Islamic Arabs, and Azanians during the second century. His geography provides specific information to identify the settlements based on racial and ethnic

¹⁶In the Sangam Tamil literature of ancient period, *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten lays) was considered as prominent anthology consisting of ten longer poems. Some poems from this anthology were composed between 1st and 2nd century in India. Other poems were between 3rd and 5th century CE.

¹⁷*Eṭṭuttokai*, similar to *Pattuppāṭṭu*, is also compiled in the Sangam period., which consists of Eighteen Greater poems based on *Patineṇmēlkaṇakku*.

identities. According to Ptolemy, *Phasis*¹⁸ *Flavius*, *Soana*¹⁹ *Flavia*, *Azana*²⁰ were settlements established near Sri Lankan rivers. *Flavius* refers to the Persians, *Soana* denotes the Arabs, and *Azana* to the Azanians, respectively (Stevenson, 1991, p. 158). According to Ptolemy, the Persians resided on the banks of Mahaweli Ganga, in the northeastern part of Sri Lanka, and *Soanoi* people, who were probably Arabs, lived in and around the north of Deduru Oya banks, probably in present-day Puttalam²¹. The third group could be identified as the Yemeni and the East African Ethiopian community who resided around the banks of Gin Ganga, probably, present-day Beruwala of Sri Lanka (Fernando, 1995, pp. 100-101). Ptolemy's account records the presence of West Asian people in Sri Lanka at least from the beginning of the second century and identifies the places based on ethnic and racial identity, which is an advancement in the Sri Lankan geography at that time, a factor even al-Idrīsī did not consider in his eleventh-century map of Sri Lanka.

The Chinese traveler Fā-Hien (337-422)²² indicates the interaction of diverse communities within Sri Lanka in his travelogue titled *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fā-Hien*. He identifies the Sri Lankan local people as *Nagas*, with

¹⁸The term *Phasis* likely refers to Persian, and *Flavius* p. *Fluvia* means river in Latin. Fernando identifies *Phasis* as Persian people who lived around the banks of Mahaweli Ganga. The Sri Lankan chronicle Mahavamsa indicates *Yakkas*, a group of unfamiliar people who lived in the area around the sixth-century BC. (Fernando A. D., 1995, p. 100)

¹⁹Given the meaning of the term *Soana*, it would be pre-Islamic Arabs who resided near the northern part of Deduruoya, a river which goes through northwestern part of Sri Lanka. This coastal area includes Puttalam, Chilaw and Madampe as its main land spaces. (Fernando A. D., 1995, p. 100)

²⁰The term Azanian indicates both people of Yemen and Ethiopia of East Africa.

²¹This is a coastal city in the northwestern part of the island.

²²The Chinese Monk is a native of Wūyang in Ping-yang of China, undertook a voyage to Sri Lanka in 408 or 409.

whom mercantile communities of various countries, including Arabs and Persians engaged in trade. Fā-Hien notes:

“When the trafficking was taking place, the sprits did not show themselves. They simply set forth their precious commodities, with labels of the price attached to them; while the merchants made their purchases according to the price; and took the things away” (Legge, 1971, p. 101).

Fā-Hien’s remark indicates the presence of Arabs and Persians in Sri Lanka before the advent of Islam.

An ambiguity exists in particulars recorded by *Mahavamsa*, Ptolemy, and Fā-Hien regarding the identity of *Yonas*. *Mahavamsa* is implicit in its interpretation of *Yonas* because it offers conflicting interpretations. Similarly, although Ptolemy furnishes accurate information on settlements in Sri Lanka, his map shows a location of Sumatra instead of the location that he intended to show in Sri Lanka. Fā-Hien did not specifically remark on the Arabs’ presence in Sri Lanka, instead it is alluded to the account of al-Gharnāṭī, who considered those foreigners as Arab merchants in his *Kitāb Mu’rib Fī Ajā’ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr*. These factors raise doubts about the credibility of the evidence provided.

2.2.2. Arab Involvement in *Sarandīb* - Post Islamic Era

Dimitri Gutas (1999) identifies four primary factors that motivated and facilitated travel and exploration in the medieval Islamic society. First, the Islamic religious scriptures motivated such travels in the Holy Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*). Second, by 732, the *dār al-Islām* extended up to the Indian Subcontinent in the East and Spain in the West, which created a favorable environment for safe journeys to different territories in both directions. Third, the patronage of Islamic rulers led to the proliferation of travel and discovery of others. Indeed, Gutas argues that each group in the society including religious, sectarian, tribal, linguistic, and political, contributed to travel and translation including Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims, and non-Muslims, Sunnis, and Shi'ites with such patronage (Gutas, 1999, p. 2). Finally, in 751, Chinese prisoners of war introduced the technology of papermaking to the Islamic empire that replaced all other writing materials. This development facilitated travelers, writers, and translators using paper technology to make their work convenient (Gutas, 1999, p. 13). All this contributing towards making travel convenient and enabled Muslim travelers to record their images and perceptions of other territories and communities.

The Arabs voyaged to the frontiers of the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka for diverse reasons. The interest of early Arabs before the advent of Islam in the Indian Ocean was principally for trade and exchange of goods (Kiribamune, 2003, p. 175). With the advent of Islam in Arabia during the seventh century, its spread extended beyond Arabs to Persians,

who not only embraced the religion but also adopted the Arabic script. The spread of Islam brought new energy to Arab Muslims to increase their participation in economic activities, leading to a better social life. The journey for seeking knowledge (*Rihla Li Talab al-‘Ilm*), commerce, and missionary activities were also encouraged during this era. As demonstrated by Netton (2005), medieval Muslim travelers journeyed to the frontiers of the Indian Ocean primarily for three reasons: 1) to engage in trade; 2) to perform pilgrimage in the religiously sacred sites seeking blessings from the saints; and 3) to seek knowledge in prominent countries in the Indian Ocean, such as India and the neighbouring places (Netton, 2005, pp. 62-63). Despite the inherent dangers associated with travel, particularly the risks to life and the threat of robbery, Arabs were motivated by mundane factors like trade and also by social, religious, and cultural considerations.

A faction of the Islamic society, including merchants, mariners, geographers, and pilgrims, traveled to Asia to document information on its inhabitants' history, beliefs, customs, way of life, and living conditions, in other terms, anthropological characteristics. Among these travelers, there were merchants like ninth-century merchant Sulaymān al-Tājir from Ammān, who started his journey to Kanton in 851 AD, and some were mariners (*al-Biḥārā*) like Ibn Shahrīyār (900-956) who extensively traveled in the Indian Ocean in the year of 953, and others were ambassadors who undertook political journeys like Sallām Tarjumān (c.860), who went in his quest for knowledge on the Great Wall of China or Alexander's wall and Abu Dulaf who traversed up to China crossing India and Sri Lanka. Travelling

geographers such as al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 988), al-Idrīsī (d. 1165), and Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī (d.1286) too embarked on journeys to East Asia. Interestingly, traveling geographers like al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956), al-Birūnī (d. 1048), al-Idrīsī (d. 1165) and 12th century merchant and traveler Abul 'Abbas al-Ḥijāzī and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1368) touched India and Sri Lanka as well.

Initially, the stories related to Asia is mainly hearsay, because Arab seafarers, mariners, and travelers, at first were not interested in recording information on foreigners. With a new turn in the ninth century, the Arabs began to record geographic materials of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Al-Fakhūrī (1986) points out that during the Abbasid period, the “travel Movement” in the Arab countries infused an encouragement for a new literary genre called travel literature (Fakhūrī, 1986, p. 359). To be more accurate, it can be counted that between 800-1100 AD, more than one hundred geographical, travel, and historical works were compiled. Further, between 1100 and 1500 AD, around 526 accounts were written that have survived as travel narratives in many languages (Howard, 1980, p. 10).

Apart from Arab enthusiasm for India as being one of the major Indian Ocean territories, Arab travelers, and geographers like Aḥmad ibn Mājid were interested in small territories like *Sarandīb*, for its geographical, commercial, and religious significance. In fact, as argued by Prange, Sri Lanka was central for its strategic location in the Indian Ocean for trade in the Southwestern monsoon (*mawsim al-khawṣ*), which begins in March and lasts until May, and the Northeastern monsoon (*rīḥ al-ṣaba*) that starts in late October and

continues until February (Prange, 2018, p. 27). To corroborate Prange's observation of Sri Lanka's centrality in maritime trade routes, Melinda Székely underlines three reasons to highlight the importance of Sri Lanka as a trading center, connecting East-West trade routes and networks, linked with Africa, and indirectly connecting them to Europe from ancient times (Székely, 2018, p. 55). The first reason is the favorable location of Sri Lanka in the southwest of the Indian subcontinent, connecting Africa and southwest Asia as well as between southeast Asia and up to Asia. Sri Lanka was an entrepot and a commercial emporium in the east-west trade and a destination through which commercial voyages were undertaken to China through this island (al-Mas'ūdī, 1938, p. 23).

Secondly, Sri Lanka's geographical features greatly facilitated the maritime sea-centered trade routes. It provided natural harbors and bays like Trincomalee for the transport of ships, travel networks primarily focusing on river-based settlements and road networks that enabled the transportation of goods from the interior parts of Sri Lanka to the coastal areas and subsequent shipments to overseas. Gunawardana (2000) records that Sri Lanka's North-Western coastal area has been known throughout history for its pearl banks (Gunawardana, 2000, p. 109). Pearl reefs are present in the Gulf of Mannar both in the zones India and Sri Lanka, including around twenty such banks in Kondachchi and Arippu²³ in the Northern Province (Bastianpillai, 2006, p. 209).

²³These two sites are located in the present-day Mannar district of Sri Lanka, in the Northern Province.

The third reason is the importance of valuable items such as pearls, gems, spices, scents, ivory, turtle shells, and elephants, a point Shukri (2000) emphasizes very seriously much like Székely (Shukri, 2000, p. 11). In addition, Siriweera (2003) shows the prominence of Sri Lankan spices such as peppers and cardamom in the list of exported items (Siriweera, 2003, p. 120). Schwarz (1976) shows that the war elephants in Sri Lanka were notably much bigger compared to those in India, and its gold is much richer than India (Schwarz, 1976, pp. 233-263). Ptolemy similar to Székely and Schwarz furnishes information on commodities that Sri Lanka offers, including rice, honey, ginger, beryl, amethyst, gold, silver, tigers and elephants (Stevenson, 1991). However, Székely underestimates or even ignores the significance of monsoons in providing shelters to merchants and travelers to halt ships for a considerable period until the change of Monsoons.

Sri Lanka's importance for Arabs has not been limited to trade, but extends to other aspects like social, religious, and cultural. Lorna Dewaraja argues that this relationship is not merely a trade contact, but it went to other social spheres, such as religious and cultural (Dewaraja, 1994). S. Pranavitana observes Sri Lanka had received high esteem among the territories of Indian Ocean not only for its commodities but for its religious affinity. He notes,

“Among the peoples of the Indian civilization, the island of Simhala was held in an esteem much greater than was its due if the extent of its territory and its material sources were sole determining factors Though not unaffected by the revolutionary changes in religious doctrines which the neighboring

continent witnessed from time to time, the people of Ceylon, throughout this long period, considered it of paramount importance to preserve the form of religions including Buddhism” (Paranavitana, 1959, p. xxvii).

This religious secrecy cannot be limited only to Buddhism as argued by Pranavitana, but it goes to other religions and faiths, such as Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. This refers to the significance of Adam’s Peak. Mahroof (1996) exhibits the religious significance of Adam’s Peak, a mountain sacred not only to Muslims but also to Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians (Mahroof, 1999, p. 6). This mountain is believed throughout the Muslim world to be the first spot on earth where Adam set foot when he was expelled from paradise. Muslim travelers, saints, and merchants from West Asia and Europe, especially from Persia, Arabia, Egypt, and Spain voyaged to Sri Lanka for the veneration of Adam’s foot that is immersed on the top of the mountain. These reasons motivated Arab travelers, pilgrims, merchants, and Sufi saints to undertake distant voyages to Sri Lanka in the Middle Ages.

Arab-Sri Lankan relations grew after the conquest of Sind in 711. This victory helped Arab rulers to dominate the sea routes located in the Indian Ocean. Subsequently, Arab merchants established a strong relationship with *Sarandīb* for various reasons, including commercial and cultural endeavours. They established religious places to practice their religion or faith. Later, most of them settled down in commercial centers in and around the vicinity of coastal cities: Galle, Beruwala, Puttalam, Mannar, Jaffna, and Colombo. These West Asian traders

adapted to the language and lifestyles of their fellow Sinhalese and Tamils and were absorbed into the Sri Lankan society.

2.2.3. The Development of Arab Engagement with Sri Lanka

The first contact between Sri Lanka and the Islamic Caliphate at Medina occurred at the time of Caliph Umar (d. 644), the leader of the Islamic state between 656 and 664, with the dispatch of a mission to Arabia as mentioned by Ibn Shahrayār in *‘Ajaib-al-Hind* (Marvels of India). This mission sent to Arabia by King Dathopa Tissa II in the seventh century.²⁴ This delegation met Caliph Umar, and on its return to Sri Lanka the leader died in Makran, a city in present-day Pakistan. It brought the message of the oneness of God. Ibn Shahrayār clarifies that the message sent from Arabia regarding monotheism (*tawḥīd*) received a promising response among the islanders. Given the diplomatic exchanges between Arabia and Sri Lanka, Sri Lankans learned about Islam, probably during the 660s with this fact-finding mission.

No concrete evidence has been found to demonstrate the methods by which Islam was propagated in the region. However, the researcher suggests that the Islamic merchants played a significant role in this process. It seems that Sebastian R. Prange’s (2018) “Monsoon Islam,” a distinct form of Islam developed in the Malabar Coast (present-day Kerala) of India, would be an ideal explanation for the spread of Islam in Sri Lanka. Prange

²⁴He reigned between 664-673 with Anuradhapura as his capital.

argues that the Islamic thought and practice expanded in the Malabar Coast due to the presence of Arab-Muslims during the monsoon seasons primarily for their commercial endeavors. According to him, Monsoon Islam was shaped by merchants, not rulers or marauders and advanced by commercial interests and was adopted by Muslims living within non-Muslim communities (Prange, 2018, p. 03). Thus, merchants played a key role to function as vectors of Monsoon Islam. Although Prange's explanation lacks clarity on certain aspects, notably he does not mention anything about the contribution of pilgrims, *ṣūfī* saints, travelling geographers and anthropologists in propagating Islam in the Indian Ocean region. However, his explanation would be suitable to identify the spread of Islam in Sri Lanka because the island is situated close to the Coromandel coast. Further, Monsoon Islam provides a different religious, political, and cultural context to engage with the Sri Lankan "other".

The diplomatic exchange between Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (c. 661-714), the governor of Ḥijāz and Iraq in the Eastern province of the Umayyad Empire, and the Sri Lankan monarch Manavamma who reigned from 691-726, with Anuradhapura as his capital, probably at the beginning of the eighth century is crucial. Aḥmad al-Balādurī (c. 820-892) is the earliest known writer to recount a mission sent by king Manavamma to Muhammad ibn Hārūn, who was the *amīr* of Makran at that time, seeking a friendly association with Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (c. 661-714), the governor of Hijaz and Iraq in the Eastern province of Umayyad Empire. The king dispatched a ship with valuable gifts and some women with their children

whose fathers²⁵ died in Sri Lanka. This ship was seized by pirates from Dubail enroute to Makran through the Western Coast of India. Among the passengers was a woman whose name is Tamīmīya sought assistance from Hajjaj ibn Yusuf. He responded to her plea and sent a letter to the king of Dubail and Sind (Debal), Rajah Dāhir, to release the hostages. When Rajah Dahir failed to act against the sea pirates, Ḥajjāj sent a mission to capture the Sind (Al-Balādurī, 1987, pp. 612-613; Shamrī, 1993, pp. 37-38). These sources are in corroboration with Ibn Shahrayār's view that an Arab Muslim settlement was in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the eighth century. However, there is no conclusive evidence to identify the location of this settlement and its characteristics.

Azees (2007) claims that during the early eighth century, eight Muslim settlements were found in the coastal cities of Sri Lanka adjacent to influential towns like Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mantota (Mannar), Kudiramalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwala and Galle that transshipped commodities to other shores (Azees, 2007). Numerous Arabic inscriptions explored around the island support this view. Shukri (2010) shows that around twenty-four (24) such inscriptions have been found around the island, with the timelines of the inscriptions spanning from the 9th century to the 15th century.

²⁵These Arab merchants went to Sri Lanka as traders (*tujjār*) and preachers (*du'ār*).

Table 2.1. List of Key Inscriptions Found in Sri Lanka, 9th to 15th Century

N o.	Inscription	Date	Location found	Remarks	Referen ce	Script
01	Puttalam- Anuradhapu ra Road inscription	9 th century	Puttalam	A tombstone erected in remembranc e of Bint Ḥassūn.	Dasana yaka, 2007	Kufic
02	Puliyantivu inscription	9 th century	Puliyantivu, Mannar	A tombstone of an anonymous person.	Dasana yaka, 2007	Kufic
03	Ellupitty inscription	10 th century	Ellupitty, Mannar	A tombstone erected in remembranc e of an anonymous person.	Shukri, 2010	Kufic
04	Mantai inscription, A Fragmented	11 th century	Thiruketheesw aram, Mannar.	A tombstone erected in remembranc	Dasana yaka, 2007	Kufic

	Arabic inscription			e of Marsubān's son Yazīd.		
05	Vettiyamaru ppu inscription	Probably 10-11 th century	Vettiyamaruppu, Mannar	Ambiguous	Shukri, 2010	Kufic
06	Colombo Arabic inscription	10 th century Fifth of Rajab, 317/337 or 948 AD	Jawatta Jumma Mosque cemetery, Colombo.	A tombstone erected in remembrance of Khalid Ibn Baqāya or Khalid Ibn Naqāba.	Lee, 1826, pp. 542-552	Kufic
07	Trincomalee Nicholson Cove Inscription	12 th September 1329 A.D.	Trincomalee	A tombstone erected in remembrance of Ḥurra al-Ṭāḥir Bint Amīr Badruddīn Hussain	Devendra, 1968	Rayḥān ²⁶

²⁶The inscription employs *Rayḥānī*, a script used in early Eastern Islamic world, between the 5th and the 7th centuries after Hijra (Dasanayaka, 2017; Kalus & Guillot, 2006). *Rayḥānī* originated during the Abbasid era and is credited to Ibn As-Sitri, who dedicated his career to refining existing calligraphy scripts. Ibn As-Sitri memorized the entire Quran and is said to have meticulously handcrafted 64 copies. One distinguishing feature of *Rayḥānī* writing is the pronounced spike on the initial letters of words, setting it apart from other scripts. Additionally, its letters exhibit sharper points compared to the *Naskh* style.

08	Trincomalee dockyard inscription	1405 A.D.	Trincomalee	A gravestone erected in remembrance of Qāḍī Afīfuddīn	Shukri, 2010	Rayḥānī
09	Balangoda inscription	718/1339	Balangoda, Ratnapura	Ambiguous	Shukri, 2010	Farisī
10	Adam's Peak Bhagavalen a Arabic Inscription	13 th century	Adam's Peak	A religious text written in memory of Abul Bashar (Father of Humans).	Shukri, 2010	Naskhī ²⁷
11	Hemmathagama inscriptions (Two gravestones)	8 th century. The first stone belongs to H 133/750 and the second to H 135/752	Madulbowa, Kegalle	Gravestones probably erected in remembrance of two anonymous Muslims	Persona 1 visit	Naskhī

²⁷*Naskh* style dates back to the first century following the establishment of Islam. It is a rounded and flowing style of script primarily employed for transcribing the Quran and various Islamic texts, along with literary and cultural manuscripts. This style is slightly smaller than other calligraphic styles, helping to produce a number of texts on a single page. Abbasid calligrapher and minister Ibn Muqla al-Shirazi developed the style in the ninth century, deriving from the Kufic script.

Any detailed study of inscriptions would go beyond the scope of the present research. However, the table shows that early gravestones written in Arabic were found in the coastal cities. The inscriptions numbered 01-08, dated from the 8th century to the 14th century, were found in Puttalam, Mannar, Colombo, and Trincomalee. The ninth and the tenth are related to Adam's Peak. These manuscripts confirm the views of Azeez. The final inscription is a recent exploration uncovered in Hemmathagama in Kegalle district.

An examination of the inscriptions shows three characteristics in common. Firstly, unlike inscriptions explored in Brahmi, Sanskrit, and Sinhala languages, which predominantly reported the monarch's declarations, orders, and gifts (Shukri, 2010, p. 109), Arabic inscriptions fundamentally were on tombstones erected beside the graves of Muslims who would have been residents of the island. Secondly, Arabic inscription in Sri Lanka furnishes information only on Muslims. Information on non-Muslims or travelers is wanting. Finally, these Arabic inscriptions frequently adopt Angular *Kufic* letters, with occasional usage of *Nashkī and Fārisī* (Persian) scripts. This information suggests that Arab travelers and pilgrims who visited Sri Lanka had cultural and religious interactions with the island.

Figure 2.1. The Illustration of Hemmathagama Gravestones



Gravestones found in the cemetery of a mosque in Hemmathagama would be the earliest stone carvings found in Sri Lanka. The trustees of the mosque recovered these two stones during a reconstruction work in 1974 and kept them for a long time in the mosque. In 2023, information about these stones reemerged. These stones likely mention two saints who probably died during their journeys to the Adam's Peak. However, no information exists on the identity or the travel itinerary of the buried. The tombstones mention the dates of the demised in Hijri calendar. The dates inscribed on the stones are critical in identifying the period of erection. The use of Hijri years in the stones suggest that the buried individuals would be Muslims because the graves were used by the Muslim population. The left stone

clearly indicates a Hijri date most likely 30/03/133. This date suggests the thirtieth day of the third month, possibly Rabi Al-Awwal, in the year 133/751. Likewise, the stone on the right clearly states the Hijri year as 135/753. Considering this fact, the researcher assumes that stone on the left was placed first, followed by a gap of two years before the placement of the second stone. The discovery of these tombstones provides intriguing but ambiguous insights into the burial practices of Muslims in Sri Lanka, probably during the second century of Islam. Although precise details regarding the tombstones may remain vague, the presence of these graves indicates a significant historical link of Muslims with Sri Lanka. These findings broaden our understanding of the cultural and religious interaction of Muslim in Sri Lanka who used Arabic. Given the date of the stones, the researcher assumes that they were Arab Muslims who frequently visited Sri Lanka for their religious, cultural, and social needs.

The references to Arab-Persian contacts with Sri Lanka from the 7th century until about the 10th century do not indicate firm or extended settlements of Muslims in Sri Lanka. There may have been coastal residences of itinerant traders to rest and undertake their sea voyages. However, from the late 11th century, evidence emerged about permanent settlements of Muslims in both the coastal and interior parts of Sri Lanka actively assisted by the local Sinhalese rulers. This pattern fits well with the similar growth of Islam and spread in the archipelago of Southeast Asian countries, especially in present-day Malaysia and Indonesia.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d.1368), the Moroccan traveler-pilgrim who arrived in Sri Lanka in 1344 AD, offers crucial information about Muslim settlements. His travel narrative states the presence of Arab-Persian traders and settlers on the island. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited port cities, such as Mannar (*Mandai*), Kurunegala (*Konakar*), and Colombo. These cities had a considerable amount of the Islamic population. In the south, he met another Muslim merchant community in Devundara, and he identified Galle and Colombo²⁸ as primary Muslim towns.

In sum, the first contact between West Asia and Sri Lanka occurred in the seventh century. However, we do not have indications of how these exchanges developed into meaningful interactions or how Islam developed in the regions except for the theory of monsoon Islam. Although Muslim travelers visited the island and provided information on its cultural composition, they did not mention much about the Muslims who lived in Sri Lanka. Travelers like Sulaymān al-Tājir, who is silent on the Muslim identity on the island and tenth-century writer Ibn Shahrīyār did not provide comprehensive information on the Muslim identity in the region. However, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa provides noteworthy information on the Sri Lankan Muslim settlements and their commercial and cultural activities. We could assume that Arabs were not interested in establishing permanent settlements in Sri Lanka until the end of the eleventh century, and their settlements more or less were coastal dwellings, primarily for trading purposes.

²⁸He mentions that a person called Jalasti controlled the city of Colombo with the help of 500 hundred Abyssinian soldiers.

2.2.4. The Sri Lankan Maps in Arab Geography

Arabic geographic sources produced numerous map on Sri Lanka during medieval times. However, a preliminary examination of these maps shows an inconsistency among Arab geographers in identifying the island. Although al-Mas‘ūdī who is one of the earliest map maker in the Islamic world, created a map of the inhabited world, he did not design a specific map of Sri Lanka. *Kitāb Gharā’ib al-Funūn Wa-Mulaḥ al-‘Uyūn*, a work probably compiled in Egypt between 1020 and 1050 CE, by an anonymous map maker, did not mark *Sarandīb* as a separate entity. A closer look at this map shows that the author brings Sri Lanka under the first province of the division that includes India and China without bring a separate map of Sri Lanka (*Kitāb Gharā’ib al-Funūn Wa-Mulaḥ al-‘Uyūn*, unknown, p. 24b). Similarly, al-Ṣifāqṣī’s regional map on the inhabited regions (*aqālīm*) is not intended to identify any territories.

Al-Idrīsī (d. 1165) would be the first Muslim geographer who drew a comprehensive geographical map of Sri Lanka in 1150, marking six rivers, four mountains, and fourteen prominent places. Al-Idrīsī’s *Kitāb Nuzhat al-Mushtāq Fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq* explored the inhabited world from the equator to the Baltic Sea and from Atlantic Ocean to Siberia. Al-Idrīsī’s map in some ways resembles that of Ptolemy’s work²⁹, which was drawn ten centuries earlier than al-Mas‘ūdī’s atlas. Importantly, al-Idrīsī’s marks the landscapes such as mountains, water sources, and oceans of Sri Lanka like Ptolemy. His map includes rivers,

²⁹ This map was drawn in 150 AD

major cities, and neighbouring territories such as some part of India (Kolamalai), *Jazīrat al-Rāminī* (Sumatra), *Jazīrat al-Qimar* (Cambodia) and *Jazīrat Dhabīhāt* (Maldives). These land features were clearly marked. The names mentioned by al-Idrīsī probably coincide with the names of present-day cities of Sri Lanka (Fernando, 1995, p. 123). The use of widely used symbols and sketches is a unique feature of this map. The names of all places mentioned are written in Arabic script (Fernando, 1995, p. 123).

Figure: 2.2 Al-Idrīsī's Sri Lankan Map



Al-Idrīsī's map shows Sri Lanka quite clearly.

Al-Idrīsī's Sri Lankan map,

Bodleian Library MS. Pococke375 : Uri (Arab. Moh.) 887, University of Oxford Online

sources, folio v & r 34.

A comparison of Ptolemy's Sri Lankan geographic map with al-Idrisi's work reveals some similarities and differences. Importantly, Ptolemy too identifies the Sri Lankan settlements based on the rivers. Meanwhile, Ptolemy marks the vertical axis and the horizontal axis with degrees, unlike al-Idrisi did not have such marks.

Rohitha Dasanayaka (2017) identifies places in al-Idrīsī's map using the interpretation of R.L. Brohier. However, his identification has some omissions. Dissanayaka (2017) left *Jazīrat Baliq* (Polk Strait) unmarked. It is an area that includes Delft Island in the Palk Strait. The places denoted by al-Idrīsī below *Jazīrat al-Balq* would be the islands of Mannar³⁰. The inclusion of the Palk Strait would present a comprehensive understanding of the Sri Lankan landscapes which is crucial for our overall understanding of Arab portrayals of Sri Lanka.

Table 2.2. Places mentioned by al-Idrīsī in his Map of Sri Lanka

No	Name in original map As identified by researcher	Al-Idrisi's book edited by Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya al-Dīniyya in 2002.	Al-Idrisi's book, edited by Medici Printing Press, Rome in 1591.	Name mentioned by Brohier /Dasanayaka	Dasanayaka's identification	Researcher's identification
1	Jabal al-Rahūn جبل الرهون	Jabal al-Rahūn جبل الرهون	Jabal al-Rahūn جبل الرهون	Jabal al-Rahin	Adam's Peak	Adam's Peak
2	Sandarwī (سندروي)	Sandūra (سندورا)	Sandāwī (سندوي)	Sadi	Thiriyai	Mantota

³⁰This place is located in the northern part of the island.

3	Sanīdarya (سنیدریا)	Sandūna (سندونا)	Sandūna (سندونا)	Sandun a	Mantota/ Pomparipp u	Pomparippu
4	Qalmādi (قلمادی)	Qalmādhi (قلمادی)	Qalmādhi (قلمادی)	Talmad i	Karaitivu/ Kudramalai	Kudramalai
5	Hānrī (حانری)	Hāmrī (حامری)	Hāmrī (حامری)	Hamri	Puttalam/ Karaitivu	Puttalam/ Karaitivu
6	Nībrī/ Bībrī نیبری/بیبری	Nībrī (نیبری)	Sirī (سری)	Labiri	Badulla	Kurunegala. This place is situated in the west of Adam's Peak not in the eastern part as claimed by Dasanayaka.
7	Manāhaq (ماناھق)	Makhūlūn (ماخولون)	Makhūlūn (ماخولون)	Mahulu m	Madampe	Madampe
8	Ibdī (ابدی)	Ibdadhī (ابدی)	Ibdī (ابدی)	Aidi	Colombo	Colombo
9	Aghnā (اغنا)	Aghnā (اغنا)	Aghnā (اغنا)	Agna	Devundara	Devundara
10	Marqāyā (مرقايا)	Marqāyā (مرقايا)	Marnābā (مرنابا)	Marnab a	Hambantot a	Hambantota
11	Asarnā (اسرنی)	Farsaqūrī (فرسفوری)	Yarsaqūrī (یرسفوری)	Asara	Arugambay	Arugambay
12	Madūna (مدونه)	Marūna (مرونه)	Marūba (مروبه)	Madun a	Seruwila	Seruwila
13	Kanbalī (کنبلی)	Kanbalī (کنبلی)	Kanbalī (کنبلی)	Kasli	Polonnaru wa	Polonnaruw a
14	Marashlī (مرنشلی)	Baransilī (برنسلی)	Baransilī (برنسلی)	Barislī	Balangoda and Ratnapura	Balangoda and Ratnapura

Al-Idrīsī marks a big mountain called Adam's Peak and three more small mountains. He also marks five rivers and fifteen prominent places in Sri Lanka. The main hills, including

Adam's Peak, central hills were clearly marked with symbols and names. Al-Idrīsī identified the hill ranges, and rivers with widely used symbols.

Dasanayaka (2017) identified many places more accurately, coinciding with our current identification. Yet, certain inaccuracies occur in the second and sixth places. The second place was marked as Tiriyāi. The present analysis reveals that this place is not Tiriyāi, because it is placed near Aruvi River, formerly known as (Malwathu Oya). This river flows through Mantota, present-day Mannar in the northern part of Sri Lanka. His sixth place has been identified as Badulla, situated just east of Adam's Peak (*Jabal al-Rahūn*). However, this place has been clearly marked just west of Adam's Peak which could be identified as Kurunegala. Despite these inaccuracies, Dasanayaka's information has a degree of advancement in identifying the places in Sri Lanka during the medieval times. Al-Idrīsī's map reveals how Arab geographers displayed Sri Lanka their early maps.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter consists of two sections. The first part contested the claims made by Lewis, Touati, and Le Geoff on the Arab apathy in finding the "other" in Asia. In doing so, the researcher presented two textual examples to show that Arab writers paid sufficient attention to the communities in the Indian Ocean because they ventured into the region not only textually but also physically as evidenced in the texts of al-Birūnī and Shahrastānī who produced detailed anthropological accounts about India, China, and Sri Lanka, examining

religious traditions, cultural norms, ethical practices, and customs. Apart from the manuscripts of al-Birūnī and Shahrastānī, the researcher, in the following chapters, brings numerous Arabic texts of various genres to show the level of Arab interest in Sri Lanka during the medieval era.

The second part displayed that Arabs came to Sri Lanka during the monsoon periods to engage in trade, and they stayed in the island collecting commodities until they embarked on in the next cycle of travels. In addition to trade, they also had strong cultural reasons to visit the island, especially to undertake the pilgrimage to Adam's Peak, which is situated on this island. The Arabic inscriptions found mainly in the coastal lines of Sri Lanka assert that Muslim travels and saints ventured into the island for religious and cultural reasons. During this period, Muslims travellers and merchants maintained a cordial relationship with Sri Lankans. Muslim engagement with Sri Lanka paved the way for their permanent settlement on the island. The next chapter on Arab geography will examine Arab perceptions of Sri Lanka using geographic materials produced by Arab writers during the medieval era.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SRI LANKAN OTHER IN ARAB GEOGRAPHIC LITERATURE

3.1. An Overview of Arab Geographic Literature

In the Western world, numerous studies exist on geographic literature especially that of *mirabilia* (marvels) genre. But in Arabic literature, this type of study is still in the early stages. Recognizing this scholarly lacuna, Persis Berlekamp and Sally Abed state that new efforts are being made to study geographic (marvel) literature written in Arabic language particularly literary works produced in the medieval period (Berlekamp, 2011, p. 24; Abed, 2022, p. 448). Dionisius A. Agius (2020), for instance, investigates the group or the communal identities in Ibn Shahrīyār's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind*, applying the methodology of the story model. Agius argued that even though the stories that the *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind* furnished are mostly fictitious, they offer a glimpse of the perceptions and views of medieval Arabs on societies in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean region, providing extensive knowledge on their cultural landscapes (Agius, 2020, p. 21). However, no previous research has focused exclusively on Sri Lanka, and hence, a study using geographic materials, including *'ajā'ib* stories to understand the religio-geocultural image of Sri Lanka is possibly a new and timely effort.

Arabs considered Sri Lankans as the “other” in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and culture. At present, Sri Lankan ethnicity, consists of Sinhalese,³¹ Tamils,³² Vedda,³³ Muslims,³⁴ and Burghers³⁵ and Malays. The ethnic composition that existed in medieval Sri Lanka was almost the same as the present composition except for the Burgher community who are the descendants of Portuguese, Dutch, and British people who came to Sri Lanka after the sixteenth century, mainly as invaders. The religiosity of Sinhalese is primarily Buddhism while Tamils are largely followers of Hinduism and Muslims and Malays adopt Islam as their religion. It should also be noted that in addition to Burghers who follow Christianity or Catholicism, a subset of Christians or Catholics exist among the Sinhalese and Tamils as well. Shams al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (1256-1327) illustrates the religious composition of Sri Lanka during the thirteenth-century that includes Christians and Jews as well (Al-Dimashqī S., 1875, p. 160). However, no extensive information is found on the existence of Christian and Jewish communities except for the frequent visits of merchant groups and diplomatic delegations from *Rūm* (ancient Byzantine empire). Arabic sources commonly identify non-Islamic Sri Lankans as idol worshippers who do not follow any Abrahamic religions including Islam.

³¹Sinhalese people are known as Indo-Aryan ethno-linguistic group indigenous to India. Their history starts with the arrival of Prince Vijaya (643-505 BC) in Sri Lanka in 543.

³²The Dravidian ethno-linguistic group who are native speakers of Tamil. They trace their origin, primarily to South India and Sri Lanka.

³³The *Vedda*, is an indigenous population of Sri Lanka who inhabited the island for centuries. They have sub-communities, including Coastal *Veddas*, Anuradhapura *Veddas*, and Binetenne *Veddas*.

³⁴Arab Muslim traders probably reached the island, possibly in the 8th century. They brought with them the message of Islam, settled, and became a larger community in Sri Lanka. Muslims from South India, and Southeast Asia also migrated to Sri Lanka to make Muslim populations a mixture of Indians, Moors and Malays.

³⁵The Burghers are descendants of Portuguese, Dutch, British, and various other European settlers who colonized Sri Lanka beginning from the sixteenth century.

Muslim geographers, who are primarily from West Asian countries and Muslim Spain, generally speak Arabic,³⁶ adopt Islam as their way of life and strongly represent values, customs, languages, and beliefs that are different from those held by non-Islamic Sri Lankans. Is this drastic alterity in terms of religion, language, and culture, reflected in the accounts written by Arabs on non-Islamic Sri Lankans? Do Arab writers show overt hatred, suspicious, or hostile relationships towards the non-Islamic people of Sri Lanka? This chapter uses geographic literature written by Arabs from the 8th to 15th centuries, to examine the Sri Lankan religio-geocultural imagery, through its narrative of the “other”.

An examination of geographic literature provides a certain intensity to the scope of the study. Therefore, this chapter uses seventeen accounts to examine the Sri Lankan religio-geocultural imagery. Many of the selected sources are fresh and not readily accessible materials to many scholars since these texts have not been translated into a western language yet, nor used for a study on any scope of religio-geocultural imagery of Sri Lanka. The researcher categorizes available geographic accounts into three broader types: *aqālīm* (literature of provinces); *ahjār* (literature of gemstones); and *‘ājā’ib* and *gharā’ib* (literature of marvels and mysteries).

3.1.1. *Aqālīm* Sources (Literature of Provinces)

³⁶Arabic as a *lingua franca* used for trading purposes in the Indian Oceanic world during the medieval era.

The first type of source analyzed in this study is *aqālīm*, which is the earliest genre that presents a practical geography of routes and realms of the inhabited world. This genre was developed in the early ninth century, involving people who traveled to India and China for commercial purposes. With the expansion of Islamic territory during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, Arab geographers practiced writing in this genre, largely drawing inspiration from Ptolemy. Newman argues that the *aqālīm* literature was initially used for practical purposes such as to govern newly captured lands, conduct trade, and spread the faith (Newman, 2001, p. 197). In the beginning, the literature was generally framed as travel narratives that included the tradition of routes (*masālik*) and realms (*mamālik*) literature. Its primary objective was to popularize knowledge about foreign lands and deliver the information needed to establish and develop stable Arab trade relations in new frontiers (Kowalska, 1987, p. 397). Thus, the literature on *masālik* and *mamālik* recorded information on routes, cities, inhabitants, commodities, and noteworthy events.

The earliest scholarly work has been attributed to the early 9th century with the work of Muhammad al-Khwārizmī (780-850) in the period of Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833). Indeed, al-Khwārizmī compiled his book titled *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ* (*Image of the World*) based on the works by the Greek geographer Ptolemy (85-165). The contribution of the Persian geographer Ibn Khurdadhbīh (820-912)³⁷ is also significant because he initially documented routes (*masālik*) and realms (*mamālik*) in his manuscript, *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa*

³⁷He served as the postmaster general to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid (870-892).

al-Mamālik. Similarly, Muhammed al-Ḥasīb al-Baghdādī (c. 821), Yaḥya ibn Māsuweiah (c. 857), and the tenth-century Persian explorer Ibn Rustah contributed to the *aqālīm* genre. The next generation of geographers, including al-Marwazī (818-906), al-Iṣṭakhrī (850-957), al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956), al-Maqdisī (945-991), al-Birūnī (973-1050), al-Harwī (1006-1088), al-Gharnāṭī (1080-1170) al-Idrīsī (1099-1165), al-Bakrī (1014-1094), al-Zuhrī (1130-1161), and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (1179-1229) primarily examined seven *mamālik* (realms) as the division of the world, but some of them introduced further divisions (14, 16, and even 20) based on the climates. Amongst them, al-Iṣṭakhrī divided the world into twenty segments, adding a world map and twenty regional maps to his text, *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* (Danilenko, p. 1). This genre, which also defined independent cultural or political territories, eventually provided information on towns, cities, mountains, and rivers as well.

3.1.2. *Aḥjār* Literature (Gemstones)

The second type of source is *aḥjār*³⁸ literature, which is a branch of geography as well as chemistry. This genre basically involves the study of chemical composition, geological formations, and its distribution. Although *aḥjār* developed in the Islamic world as a scientific field during the ninth century, this literature provided information on gemstones, combining ‘*ajā’ib*’ with *gharā’ib* stories. Remarkably, Muslim geographers produced books

³⁸ This genre could be identified as mineralogy and lithology literature.

on gemstones and their work including, mining, cutting, and polishing. Imad Rauf, the editor of Ibn Māsuweyah's work, shows that the study of precious stones (*ahjar*) is a part of chemical science (Ibn Māsuweyah, 1388, p. 9). Presently, this genre has a multidisciplinary approach involving geography, geology, chemistry, and mineralogy.

A significant number of compendiums were composed in this genre during medieval times. Jābir ibn Ḥayyān al-Kūfī (d. 815), who compiled two fresh works, *Kitāb al-Aḥjār* (Book of Stones) and *Kitāb al-Aḥjār al-Kabīr* (Book of Big Stones), in the ninth century could be considered the father of the *Aḥjār* genre. However, his works vanished over the years. Further, Ibn Ḥayyān's colleague Aṭārid ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī (d. 821) produced a work titled *Kitāb Manāfi' al-Aḥjār* (Benefits of Stones), in which he examined each precious stone for its medical benefits; Yaḥya ibn Māsuweiah produced a book titled *Kitāb al-Jawāhir Wa Ṣifātuhā* (Book of Stones and Their Characteristics); and Muhammad Shādhān al-Jawharī compiled a work titled *Kitāb al-Jawāhir Wa Aṣnāfuhu* (Book of Stones and Their Types) to be presented to Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'taḍid Billah (892-902).

During the tenth-century, three major developments occurred in the genre. Firstly, the stones gained commercial value as they came be used in place of money. The book titled *Kanz al-Tujjār Fī Ma'rifat al-Aḥjār* (Treasure of Merchants in Understanding Stones) provided information regarding the monetary values of stones. Secondly, Arab geographers such as the tenth century-scholar Lūqā ibn Sarabiyūn translated Greek works, including the compendiums of Aristotle and Pliny on precious stones into the Arabic language. Thirdly,

Muslim geographers brought the books found in Asian societies to the Arab world. For instance, al-Birūnī obtained information from *Kitāb al-Saghd*, a famous medieval compendium of India, to write his manual on stones. Moreover, Zakariyya al-Rāzī (d. 923) involved in extensive research of precious stones in his two books: *Kitāb al-Khawass* and *Kitāb ‘Ilal al-Ma‘ādin*. Ya‘qūb al-Kindī (d. 873) produced three works: *al-Jawāhir Wa al-Ashbāh*, *Anwā‘ al-Jawāhir al-Thamīna*, and *Risāla Fī Anwā‘ al-Ḥijāra*. Abū Ja‘far al-Qayrawānī, (d. 961) known as Ibn al-Jazzār, also compiled a book titled *Fī al-Aḥjār al-Karīma*.

Imad Rauf, the editor of Ibn Māsuweyah’s book, claims that al-Birūnī and al-Tayfāshī (d. 1293) produced more comprehensive accounts than any other writers in this genre. (Ibn Māsuweyah, 1388, p. 11) Al-Tayfāshī’s work *Azhār al-Afkār Fī Jawāhir al-Aḥjār* contains intertextual contents to Abū Rayḥān al-Birūnī’s (d. 1048), *al-Jamāhir Fī Ma‘rifat al-Jawāhir*, a comprehensive compendium of *aḥjār* genre, employing a variety of sources including Greek and Indian literature. Both al-Birūnī and al-Tayfāshī provide information on various matters relating to stones, such as their characteristics, types, composition, place of exploration, weight, and values. Reflecting al-Tayfāshī, the 14th century geographer Ibn Akfānī (1348) produced a genuine scientific work of precious stones titled *Nukhab al-Dhakhā’ir Fī Aḥwāl al-Jawāhir*, distancing himself from unscientific information, such as ‘*ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* stories (Ibn Māsuweyah, 1388, p. 11). In fact, among the group of *aḥjar* writers, Jabir ibn Ḥayyān, al-Birūnī, al-Tayfāshī, Ibn Māsuweyah, and Ibn Akfānī and al-

Ḥalabī were the prominent geographers. Both al-Tayfāshī and al-Ḥalabī produced more advanced accounts than al-Birūnī as they adopted concepts and views from their predecessors.

The *ahjār* genre provides two types of narratives. The first type is entirely devoted to gemstones, as seen in the works of al-Birūnī, al-Tayfāshī, and al-Ḥalabī (1475-1529). Meanwhile, the second type examines gemstones as one of the subjects in a geographic account as noted in the work of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, who includes information on gemstones, animals and plants in his *Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr*. Similarly, al-Dimashqī brings narratives of precious stones with information of rivers, oceans, water resources, islands, and territories in his *Kitāb Nukhbat al-Dahr Fī ‘Ajā’ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr*. Although gemstone literature offers valuable information on physical geography, its narration of the Sri Lankan racial and cultural aspects is very limited.

Amongst the earliest sources that has survived is Abū Mūsā Jābir ibn Ḥayyān’s (721-815) *Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr*,³⁹ a newly explored manuscript, probably written in 812 (Ibn Ḥayyān, 812, p. r 100). Being a Ṣufī alchemist, Ibn Ḥayyān did not entirely devote his work to *ahjār* narratives, and he preferred to link his book predominantly to chemistry (*kīmīyya*). A significant portion of information in his works deals with the *yāqūt* (Sapphire) found in

³⁹*Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr* is a manuscript found in the British Library Oriental manuscripts under Or 4041. Its copy has been kept in the Qatar National Library in digital form. The book deals with animals, plants, and precious stones. (Ibn Ḥayyān, 812, p. r 01) Eduard Glase (1855-1908) visited Yemen in 1887-1888 to examine the manuscript (Charles Rieu, 1894, p. 534) The book has seventy-one chapters, out of which Kraus initially edited six parts.

Sri Lanka. Ibn Ḥayyān's work is similar to al-Dimashqī's *Nukhbat al-Dahr Fī 'Aja'ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr* (Ibn Ḥayyān, 812, p. r 100) because it covers not only information related to *aḥjār*, but also information on the celestial world, animals, and plants.

Figure 3.1 Jābir ibn Ḥayyān's *Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr*

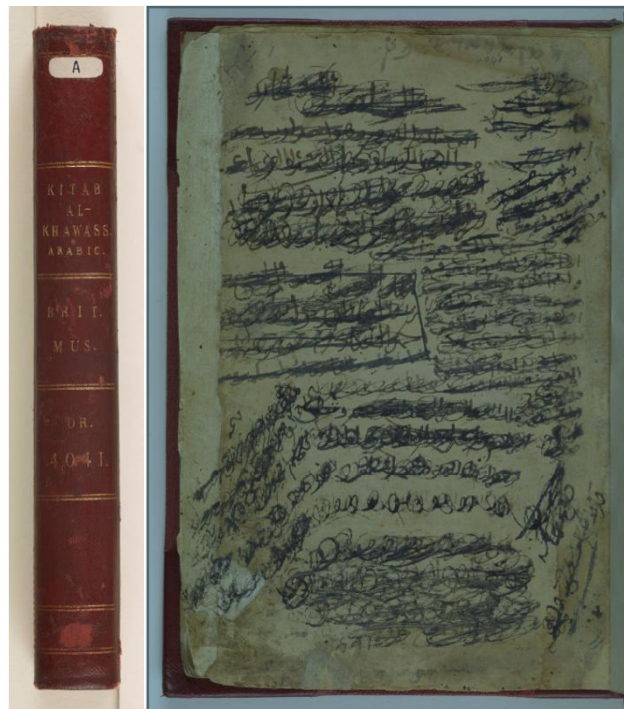


Figure 3.2. Jābir ibn Ḥayyān's *Kitāb al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr*, page r and v1



Like Ibn Ḥayyān, Yaḥyā Ibn Māsuwayh is another one among the earliest authors who contributed to *ahjār* literature. Although contemporary scholars such as Edward Crowds and Satr Salosan list more than seventy types of different gemstones, Yaḥyā Ibn Māsuwayh notes only twenty five types found in various parts of the world (Ibn Māsuwayh, 1388, p. 75). According to Ibn Māsuwayh (1388), the stones found in Sri Lanka includes *al-Wardī* *Aḥmar* (Pink-reddish stone) (p. 22); *Jawhar al-Qaṭarī* or *Nāndī* (Qatari gems) (p. 39); *Yāqūt* (Sapphire)⁴⁰ and its verities of *Aḥmar* (red), *Āasmānjūnī* (blue), *Aṣfar* (yellow), *Abyaḍ* (white) (p. 44); *al-Mās* (diamond) (p. 48); *Aflūj* (p. 54); *al-Bajādhī* (garnet) (p. 64); and *Aqīq* (p. 67).

⁴⁰*Yāqūt* is a special gemstone indigenous to Sri Lanka. (Ibn Māsuwayh, 1388, p. 44), For this reason, Sri Lanka could have been identified as *Jazīrā al-Yāqūt*.

Apart from the above text, Al-Dimashqī's (1256-1327) *Nukhbat al-Dahr Fī 'Aja'ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr*⁴¹ also makes significant contributions to the knowledge of gemstones. This book includes eight chapters based on the division of the inhabited world, and although al-Dimashqī's book is not entirely devoted to the *aḥjar* genre, it includes information on a considerable number of materials of gems. The second chapter of the book deals explicitly with precious stones, their characteristics, benefits, locations of discovery, and reasons for their formation (Al-difa', 1989, pp. 195-196). According to al-Dimashqī, Sri Lanka produced valuable gems including *Yāqūt* (Sapphire), *al-Mās* (diamond) and *al-Sinbādij* (emerald) (Al-Dimashqī, 1865, p. 61).

3.1.3. '*Ajā'ib* and *Gharā'ib* Literature

The third genre is '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* literature', which is possibly not an independent genre. According to Maria Kowalska (1987), this is a sub-genre derived from the literature on routes and realms in the tenth century. '*Ajā'ib*' means "marvels" or "wonders" in Arabic and captures stories that describe extraordinary phenomena, events, and creatures. Similarly, the *gharā'ib* involves narratives featuring extraordinary things. This genre aims to narrow down the gap between the mystical and the unmythical, the believable and unbelievable (Sariyannis, 2015, p. 445). Travelers, geographers, and storytellers found a

⁴¹Al-Dimashqī is a fourteenth-century cosmographer from Damascus who lived during the period of the Mongols' conquest of Baghdad in 1258. He also served as an Imam of the mosque in Radwa, Damascus and compiled his book on cosmography in the year H 725, using the maps of the inhabited world drawn by him (Al-Difa', 1989, p. 194). In the year H 1214, Norberg published a part of al-Dimashqī's manuscript (Al-Difa', 1989, p. 195). Denmark orientalist Mehrer fully edited this manuscript in the year H 1342 (Kratchkovsky, 1963, p. 388).

way to mix facts with fables to create fascinating narratives that entertain audiences (Kowalska, 1987, p. 397).

Mohammad Khalīl classifies ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ as an independent genre in Arabic literature, which is not part of a geographical or historical source. He further states that this genre mostly mixes facts with fables and truth with marvels and wonders (Khalīl, p. 1). The arguments of Khalīl and Berlekamp (2011) differ from that of Dupler, who separates ‘*ajā’ib*’ from ‘*gharā’ib*’, asserting that these terms are binomial. Khalīl and Berlekamp (2011) posit that ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ cannot be separated because they are creations of God, not of man (Berlekamp, 2011, p. 151). Khalīl divides the genre into three types: 1) The things that includes miracles and marvels of God; 2) Supernatural affairs that the human mind cannot comprehend; and 3) Rare and unusual phenomena and affairs that received the attention of writers in the secular world (Khalīl, p. 1). In addition to Khalīl, Zadeh (2011) also states that the ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ are essential elements of medieval Arabic and Persian geography, which is descriptive in nature, and that they often grow together with marvels and wonders (Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers Across Medieval Islam*, 2011, p. 1). However, neither Khalīl nor Zadeh proved how this genre differs from geography and history.

The ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ genre differs from geography or history in terms of its nature and verifiability. Geographical or historical data can be subjected to scrutiny, and they could be established as true or false based on evidence and documentation. In contrast, ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ revolve around the marvels and wonders of the world. Consequently, it falls within the category of things that are hard to verify. These accounts often involve elements that are

difficult to confirm or reject, making them less susceptible to traditional methods of verification. Touati (2010) rightly states that these writings depict extraordinary monuments and factual occurrences that are similar to those found in geography and history. While their authenticity cannot be established, they cannot be dismissed fully as falsehood either (Touati, 2010, p. 164). The potential benefits of these stories lie in their ability to foster wanderlust, stimulate trade, and facilitate acquisition of knowledge.

A few seminal scholars show that *'ajā'ib and gharā'ib* literature is an Arabo-Islamic literary genre related to sea-centered stories, particularly those based on the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea (Ahmad, 1995, p. 39; Agius, 2020, p. 2; Berlekamp, 2011, p. 22). After the fall of Persia in the hands of Arabs, it is likely that they inherited the Persian art of shipbuilding and seafaring. In 712, the Arabs conquered Sind, which expanded their naval influence from Egypt to India. During this period, the ports of Baṣra and Sīrāf played a crucial role in Arab seafaring. However, it was only after Baghdad became the capital that Arab-Islamic maritime activity spread over the vast stretches of the Indian Ocean. Against this historical backdrop, *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* genre found ample space for development (Ahmad, 1995, p. 41). However, contrary to Maqbul Ahmad (1995), Persis Berlekamp (2011), and Dionisius A. Agius (2020), the present study claims that the marvel genre is not only related to sea-centered stories, but also to land-related topographic marvels as well, as outlined in the following section.

The Nature of *'Ajā'ib* and *Gharā'ib*

Scholars frequently debate whether the *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* genre is a medieval genre, or a modern fictitious element. Syrinx von Hees (2005) argues that linking *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* to the medieval era is an act of anachronism on the part of Arab medievalists as this genre did not exist at that time because it is a construction of the modern era (Hees, 2005, p. 102). Hees (2005) further argues that the things that were considered as wonders in medieval times no longer exist as wonders nowadays because the criteria used by medieval writers to determine something as wondrous are not the same in the modern era. The changes that occurred over time in measuring wonders or oddities have changed. Rainbows, horses, and rain, for instance, were considered by al-Qazwīnī as marvels in the medieval times as these were perceived as rare and fantastical things. But these are real and scientifically proven phenomena in the modern world. Therefore, Syrinx von Hees claims that it is not suitable to place the works on natural history like al-Qazwīnī's *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt* in the *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* genre (Hees, 2005, p. 104).

However, it is essential to acknowledge the value of *ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* without completely dismissing their significance within the context of the medieval period. The stories of “*Arabian Nights*” and the tales of “*Sindbad the Sailor*” are presented in a fascinating way to grab the attention of the audience. However, both collections are yet to prove their authenticity, leaving space to place them as mysteries. Similarly, it is not possible to verify whether the stories narrated by Arab geographers are true or false, which permits them to be mysteries. Modern science has presented several discoveries to prove the authenticity of

‘ajā’ib and gharā’ib, and most of the stories that were considered as *‘ajā’ib and gharā’ib* in the medieval era are no longer an oddity today because numerous stories are now proven. However, few collections, including “Sindbad the Sailor”, still require verification.

Berlekamp claims that God has placed *‘ajā’ib and gharā’ib* in every creation to indicate His omnipotence. He supports the key point made by C.E. Doubler in 1954 that the association of wonders and mysteries in Islamic literature had been a topic of conversation well before al-Qazwīnī’s (1203-1283) works on *‘ajā’ib* (Berlekamp, 2011, p. 24). Aḥmad ibn Rustah (d. 903), a medieval Islamic philosopher, also links wonders to creations of God. The association between wonders and creation is particularly important in the bestiary texts, or *adab* (literary texts) or in the texts presented in an entertaining manner (Berlekamp, 2011, p. 24).

Accepting and rejecting are the two extremes of *‘ajā’ib and ghara’ib* literature. The first group is represented by early Islamic geographers and travelers who treated this genre without much criticism. In fact, this group was known for mixing facts with fictional elements with the primary aim of entertaining the reader. This genre had also been considered as a part of transmitted science (*‘Ilm al-Naqliyya*), such as theological or legal studies, rather than as a rational one (*‘Ilm al-‘Aqliyya*). Rational reasoning and critique of the source should have been adopted to categorize these stories as reasonable rather than just labeling them as extraordinary (*gharā’ib*) based on the belief of the omnipotence of God. This approach was also adopted by some western scholars like Louis de Jaucourt

(1765), who considered stories of vampires and apparitions as real (D'Alembert, n.d., p. 828). This stance, however, was severely criticized by the second group of medievalists.

The second group criticized the above-mentioned stance stating that the literature produced by the first group was full of 'grotesque fable' and 'manifested lies' (Le Goff, 2009). Kātib Celebi (1607-1657) is one of the prominent scholars who transcends the scope of the earlier scholars of '*ajā'ib*' literature and critically analyzed the stories. In doing so, he adopted a critical approach which resembles a quasi-modern scientific approach to question the rationality of early Arab scholars of '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib*', and he believes that most of the wonders or miraculous things that they narrated are non-existent. He rejected the notion that every '*ajā'ib*' is restricted by the omnipotence of God (Sariyannis, 2015, p. 453) and undertook the task of differentiating scientific stories from literary narratives. Following the same approach as Kātib Celebi, Dom Calmet (1746) critically evaluated the stories of vampires in his work titled *Treatise on Apparitions and Vampires* in order to completely reject the explanations and causes of cases of vampirism. It is important to note that Calmet (1746), too, dismisses these stories as "superstition" (Sariyannis, 2015, p. 453).

The genre of '*ajā'ib*' and *gharā'ib*' based on the sea-born stories of Sri Lanka, mixes facts with fables, and it holds significance for the present discussion about the cultural landscape of Sri Lanka regardless of its scientific value. Authors such as Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283) sometimes suspect the veracity of wonders and oddities (Zadeh, 2010, p. 21). These authors accept the imaginary elements found in these stories but reject the necessity

to accept everything presented in literature. Notably, this genre is useful for understanding the image of the Sri Lankan ‘other’, irrespective of the question of authenticity.

Feray Coşkun (2011) believes that *‘ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* are used to represent admirable and strange aspects that exist, particularly in natural artistry, ancient landmarks, and distant lands filled with different plants, animals, and minerals. She further links the omnipotence of God to *‘ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* stories. In other words, objects and creatures are significant because they are creations of God, operating under His control and wisdom. Omnipotence of God is a foundation on which this literature has been built (Coşkun, 2011, p. 56), but this point of view is unacceptable because some of the stories or oddities that are not explained by God are creations of humans. For instance, *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt* of al-Qazwīnī states that when Adam landed on a mountain in Sri Lanka, he placed one foot on this mountain and the other in Jedda. Although al-Qazwīnī’s understanding of Adam’s Peak reflects fascination, it is a production of humans, not God.

Marinos Sariyannis cites exotic places, monuments, flora, and fauna as examples for several *‘ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib*. His explanation of marvel and mystery not only includes natural artistry, but also covers magic, sorcery, divination, and miracles driven by humans (Sariyannis, 2015, p. 442). Sariyannis posits that the ‘supernatural’ refers to all that defies explanation through natural laws established by rational sciences (Sariyannis, 2015, p. 443). Hence, *‘ajā’ib* could be understood as amazing facts or secrets of creatures, while *gharā’ib* refers to extraordinary incidents or miracles.

3.1.4. Analysis and Critique of Materials

This research uses both existing and newly discovered Arabic manuscripts. Sources such as Ibn Shahrāyār's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind*; al-Qazwīnī's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*; Ibn al-Wardī's *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*; al-Mas'ūdī's three main sources including *Kitāb Murūj al-Dhahab Wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*; al-Idrīsī's *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq Fī Ikhtirāq al-'Āfāq* are the existing manuscripts. The fresh, unedited Arabic manuscripts used in the study include A'lām al-Baṭalyawāsī's *Rabī' al-Anwār*; 'Abd al-Rashīd ibn Ṣaliḥ al-Bākūwī's *Kitāb Talkhīṣ al-Āthār*;⁴² Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn's (d. 1286) *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'a*;⁴³ Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī's (1160-1233) *Tuḥfat al-'Ajā'ib Wa Ṭurfat al-Gharā'ib*; and *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt* of an unknown author, a source attributed to the 14th century. The following table includes examples from various genres utilized in this study, though it is not limited to the ones mentioned below, and considers a wide variety of other sources as well.

Table 3.1. List of Key Geographical Manuscripts

Name of the Author	Book/Manuscript	Genre	Nature
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⁴²The manuscript titled *Talkhīṣ al-Āthār wa 'Ajā'ib al-Malik al-Qaḥḥār*, was found in the British Library, Oriental Manuscripts, under the reference Or 8350. It seems that this work is an abstract of the thirteenth-century writer al-Qazwīnī's work titled *al-Āthār al-Bilād Wa Akhbār al-'Ibād*, with some added geographic information of longitudes and latitudes for the locations mentioned in the text. This manuscript has 107 folios.

⁴³This unedited manuscript titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'a* was found in the British library under the reference Or 1524: ca 1300. The manuscript has 74 folios.

Jābir ibn Ḥayyān (d. 815)	<i>Kitāb al-Aḥjār</i> <i>Kitāb al-Aḥjār al-Kābīr</i>	<i>Aḥjār</i> (gemstones)	Edited
Al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956)	<i>Kitāb Murūj al-Dhahab Wa</i> <i>Ma‘ādin al-Jawhar,</i> <i>Kitāb al-Tanbīh Wa al-</i> <i>Ishrāf,</i> <i>Kitāb Akhbār al-Zamān</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i> (realms)	Edited
Al-Birūnī (973-104)	<i>Kitāb al-Qānūn al-Mas‘ūdī</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Unedited
Al-Hamadhānī (d. 951)	<i>Kitāb al-Buldān</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Edited
Al-Bakrī (1014-1094)	<i>Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-</i> <i>Mamālik</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Edited
Al-Idrīsī (1099-1165)	<i>Nuzhat al-Mushtāq Fī</i> <i>Ikhtirāq al-’Āfāq</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Edited
Al-Zuhrī (1130-1161)	<i>Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Edited
Aḥmad Al-Tayfāshī (1184-1253)	<i>Kitāb al-Aḥjār al-</i> <i>Mulūkiyya</i>	<i>Aḥjār</i>	Unedited
Ibn Shahrāyār	<i>Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind</i>	<i>‘Ajā’ib</i>	Edited

(900-956)		(<i>marvels</i>)	
Al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283)	<i>‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt</i>	<i>‘Ajā’ib</i>	Edited
Al-Dimashqī (1256-1327)	<i>Nukhbat al-Dahr Fī ‘Aja’ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr</i>	<i>Aḥjār</i>	Edited
Ibn al-Athīr al- Jazarī (1160-1233)	<i>Tuḥfat al-‘Ajā’ib Wa Ṭurfat al-Ghara’ib</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Unedited
Unknown scholar (14 th century)	<i>Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā’if al-Mawjūdāt</i>	<i>‘Ajā’ib and Gharā’ib</i>	Unedited
Ibn al-Wardī (1292-1349)	<i>‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt</i>	<i>‘Ajā’ib and Gharā’ib</i>	Edited
Ibn Shimā’ Al- Ḥalabī (1475-1529)	<i>Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār Fī Ma’rifat al-Jawāhir Wa al- Aḥjār</i>	<i>Aḥjār</i>	Unedited
A‘lām al- Baṭalyawasī (c. 1239)	<i>Rabī‘ al-Anwār</i>	<i>‘Ajā’ib and Gharā’ib</i>	Unedited
‘Abd al-Rashīd ibn Ṣaliḥ al-Bākūwī (14 th century)	<i>Talkhīṣ al-Āthār</i>	<i>Aqālīm/‘Ajā’ib</i>	Unedited

Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1286)	<i>Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab‘a</i>	<i>Aqālīm</i>	Unedited
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An examination of geographic resources reveals four general issues in the materials. One obvious issue encountered during the analysis is how to distinguish ‘*ajā’ib*’ sources from other geographic materials. In fact, it is difficult to determine whether most of the sources are ‘*ajā’ib*’ literature or authentic geographic sources, using the name mentioned in the book. For example, judging by its title, Suhrāb Mustafā ibn Suhrāb’s manuscript seems to be a work that falls under the category of ‘*ajā’ib*’. Yet, the source is solely written by Suhrāb for summarizing the geographic data recorded by his predecessors (Suhrāb, 1929, p. 5). To overcome this problem, the author verifies the accounts using the classification of Abdulla Yusuf al-Ghanīm, who produced a manual⁴⁴ for geographic manuscripts found in the British Library and the Cambridge University Library (Al-Ghanīm, 1999).

The second issue encountered is that the authors of ‘*ajā’ib*’ genre were not directly involved with the Sri Lankan “Other”, nor recorded eye-witness accounts. Accounts such as *Rabi’ al-Anwār* and ‘*Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt*’, did not mention the original sources from which they collected information. Ibn Shahrayār, for instance, uses the phrase ‘*ḥaddathanī*’ (he told me) when he reports the royal procession of the Sri Lankan king. His reference suggests

⁴⁴The name of the manual is *Al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-Jughrāfiyya al-‘Arabiyya Fī Maktaba al-Birṭāniyya Wa Maktaba Jāmi‘a Kambirij* and it was published in 1999.

that he received the information from the traveling merchants in the Indian Ocean (Ibn Shahrayār, 1908, pp. 88-89). However, despite this indirect approach, Ibn Shahrayār and other writers provide accurate information regarding the Sri Lankan non-Islamic people.

The third issue is that some writers were accused of plagiarism. For example, given the similarity of text, it seems that the fourteenth-century writer al-Wardī might have copied information on Sri Lanka verbatim from *Rabi' al-Anwār*, a 13th-century manuscript. Since plagiarism was not a concern during medieval times, Arab geographers often copied information from their predecessors without giving due credit to the original writers. Finally, most of the sources in this genre offer scant information on the cultural landscapes of the respective kingdoms and spaces. Crucially, these sources mostly consider the physical aspects of Sri Lanka such as geography, marvels, and commodities and they have largely ignored the characteristics and conducts of its people.

A critical examination of the materials highlights two significant features in the data. Firstly, marvel stories related to Sri Lanka are included in all three genres: *aqālīm*, *'ajā'ib*, and *ahjār* literature. For example, al-Zuhrī's *Kitāb al-Jughrafiyya*, which is an *aqālīm* source, contains stories of topographic marvels of musk producing deer, and Ibn Shahrayār's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind* contains stories related to both sacred geographical marvels like the mysterious Adam's Peak and sea-born oddities such as marvels of strange fish found in the Indian Ocean. Secondly, Arab writers' accounts of gems are centralized around the sapphires (*yāqūt*) found in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be claimed that the *ahjār* genre

essentially developed by accumulating information about sapphires found in Sri Lanka. Geographers and anthropologists, including al-Birūnī traveled across the Polk Strait to study gemstones. Al-Kindī identifies Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka and its surroundings as the premier location which produced sapphires (*yāqūt*) (Al-Ḥalabī, H936, p. v 2). Evidently, the information related to sapphires (*yāqūt*) and overall materials related to the *ahjār* genre focuses on Sri Lanka more than any other kingdom.

Arab writers viewed Sri Lanka with fascination, often constructing a romanticized image of the country, using stories of '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib*'. In doing so, they construct a neutral portrayal that ranges from positive to negative religio-geocultural images. However, they refrained from depicting Sri Lankans, particularly non-Muslims, as a demonized 'other', displaying their biases. Instead, they focused on Sri Lanka's beauty and marvels. Considering this fact, two main themes emerge from the collected data. The first theme explores how Arab geographers praise and compliment the Sri Lankan geo-cultural landscapes, with captivating '*ajā'ib* (marvels) and *gharā'ib* (mysteries) stories. The second theme examines how Arab writers perceive various communities, including Hindus, Vedda, and Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

3.2. The '*Ajā'ib* and *Gharā'ib* of Sri Lanka in Arab Geography

Arabic geographic writings clearly depict a striking picture of the topographical and cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka, which are mingled with '*ajā'ib* (marvels) and *gharā'ib* (mysteries)

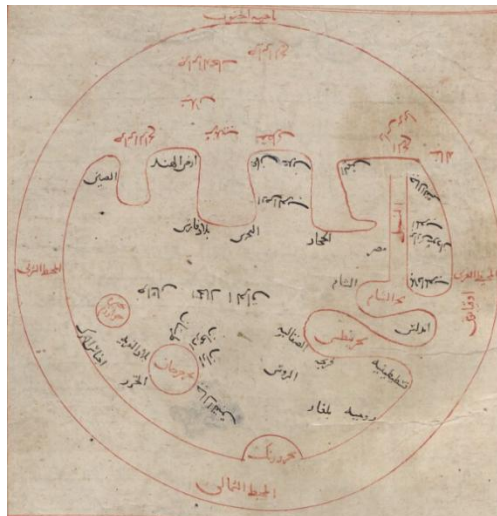
stories. In fact, the religio-geocultural images of the island have been produced while asserting the attractiveness of the island. Arab writers voyaged to obtain '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* stories related to their travels in the Indian Ocean. In order to promote their books, these writers often aimed to present strange phenomena which were unfamiliar to their audience, which largely depended on incorporating marvels and mysteries into their narratives. For instance, al-Gharnāṭī traveled to meet al-Ḥijāzī to collect '*ajā'ib* stories when he learned that al-Ḥijāzī had frequently traveled to China for his trading endeavours (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129).

Initially, Arab geographers employed '*aja'ib* and *gharā'ib* stories in their writing, a practice that can be traced back to the 8th century. Sulayman al-Tājir is one of the earliest writers to use such stories to portray the beauty of Adam's Peak. His work titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Dunyā*, produced in 851, marks the earliest account that explores the marvels of Adam's Peak. The expansion of Arab geography during the tenth century contributed to the emergence of sea-centered stories. Ibn Shahrīyār, who was the first writer to introduce sea-centered '*ajā'ib*' stories in Arab geography, could be regarded as the father of '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* stories. After Ibn Shahrīyār, a lack of information is observed on the Sri Lankan maritime communities until the arrival of al-Qazwīnī who described the island with his maps. Although Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283) is an eminent scholar in the '*ajā'ib* genre, his accounts do not give insightful information on the Sri Lankan maritime communities for two reasons. Firstly, this is because his account of the Sri Lankan cultural

landscapes, such as Adam's Peak, and the practice of *Sati*, was an imitation of the stories that were narrated by al-Tājir, al-Sīrāfī, and al-Mas'ūdī (Zadeh, 2010, p. 22). Secondly, because of the disparities that exist between the two geographic maps of Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī. The first map, which is recorded in the *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt*, is different from his second map, which is found in *Kitāb 'Āthār al-Bilād Wa Akhbār al-'Ibād*. Evidently, both maps do not provide a clear picture of Sri Lanka.

Figure 3.3. Al-Qazwīnī's World Map - 01

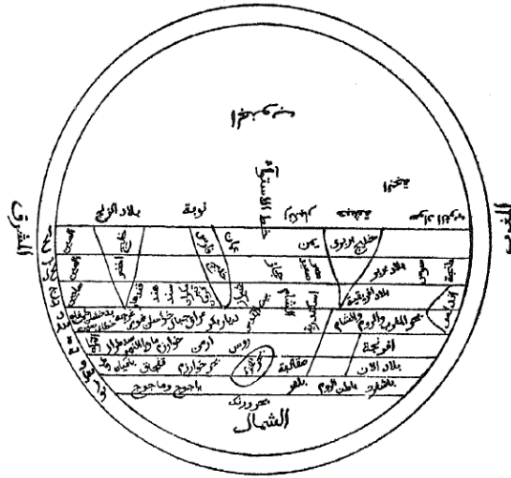
Al- Qazwīnī's first world map shows both *Sarandīb* and *Sīlān* in his book titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt* found in Online sources of Bavarian State Library, Munich- Cod.arab. 464, Folio, 58r.



Map: 01

Figure 3.4 Al-Qazwīnī's World Map – 02

Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī's second geographic map showed neither *Sarandīb* nor *Sīlān* in his book titled *Kitāb Āthār al-Bilād Wa Akhbar al-Ibad*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir.



Map: 02

Al-Qazwīnī clearly mentions *Sarandīb* in his first map, with *Sīlān* as a separate territory. The reason behind this development is that he supposedly believed that *Sarandīb* is a part of the large island named *Sīlān* (Ceylon). The area denoted by him as “*Sarandīb*” refers to Adam’s Peak, and *Sīlān* refers to the entire island. However, no mention of Sri Lanka can be seen in the second map. Yet, in his textual description of the seven provinces, he explicitly references Sri Lanka as part of the first province. After al-Qazwīnī, a group of Arab geographers who followed in his footsteps produced maritime stories to entertain their audience.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the proliferation of *ajā'ib* genre in the Islamic world, with notable contributions from Abū Ḥāmid al-Qarnāṭī whose two works titled *Tuḥfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-'Tjāb* and *al-Mu'rib 'An Ba'd 'Ajā'ib al-Baḥr*, provided insights into Sri Lankan marvels, although to a lesser degree than Ibn Shahrīyār's work. The works by Arab geographers such as Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (1160-1233), Ibrāhīm Wasīf Shah (d. 1203), Qarnāṭī Nūruddīn (d. 1286), Al-Baṭalyawsī (13th century), Sirājuddīn Ibn al-Wardī (1291-1447), and another work titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt* by an unknown author from the fourteenth century were produced during this period. These works particularly focused on marvels of the sea.

According to Northrop (1887), the universe can be divided into three categories: earth, sea, and sky. In the same way, marvels could also be divided into three categories (Northrop, 1887, p. iii). Since Sri Lanka was a source of curiosity for Arab geographers, it inspired them to collect adventurous, and marvelous stories about the island based on their fascination. An examination of such capitulative materials reveals two types of marvel stories related to Sri Lanka. First, *'Ajā'ib of Barr* (earth marvels), and second, *'Ajā'ib of Baḥr* (sea marvels). Notably, there is no mention of sky marvels relating to Sri Lanka in Arabic literature.

3.2.1. *'Ajā'ib al-Barr* (Earth Marvels)

The earth marvels can be further divided into two subsections: sacred geographical marvels and topographical marvels, as described by Travis Zadeh (Zadeh, 2010, p. 21). The *'ajā'ib*

and *gharā'ib* of Adam's Peak could be considered sacred geographic marvels, and the *ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* of gemstones could be considered as topographical marvels. The next section begins with an analysis of the images related to earth marvels and it will be followed by an analysis of sea-centered marvels.

3.2.1.1. The Sacred Geographic Marvels: '*Ajā'ib* of Adam's Peak

Muslim writers often idealize the Adam's Peak, referring to it by various names such as '*Jabal Sarandīb*', '*Jabal al-Ruhūn*', '*Jabal Adam*' and, '*Jabal Wāsim*' (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1948, pp. 91-92). '*Jabal Sarandīb*' tends to present this mountain as a significant landmark of the country, emphasizing its broad character in its religio-geocultural imagery. Secondly, al-Idrīsī's identification of '*Jabal al-Ruhūn*' narrows the term to signify the mountain with the province in which Adam's Peak is located (Al-Idrīsī, 2002, pp. 73-74). In contrast, the third term, '*Jabal Adam*' is more focused on an individual as it is often associated with the belief that this person, Adam, was among the first to arrive on the island. Finally, Adam's Peak is also referred to as '*Jabal Wāshim*', possibly a proper name, which is specifically introduced by al-Bakrī in his geographic compendium, *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*. These are widely used names because '*Jabal Sarandīb*' is highlighted as a prominent landmark for Arab writers to identify the island. On the other hand, the second term, '*Jabal al-Ruhūn*', specifically identifies its location. The third term, '*Jabal Adam*' idealizes the island for the genesis of human history in the region (Al-Idrīsī, 2002, pp. 73-74). The final term, *Jabal Wāshim*, however, remains unfamiliar as it is not widely used as a name for Adam's Peak by other

Arab or foreign travelers including Ibn Shahrayār, al-Mas‘ūdī, and al-Zuhrī. However, this proper name could be used to refer to Prophet Adam.

The Persian Sea captain and merchant, Ibn Shahrayār shows fascination with Adam’s Peak in his comprehensive insights into the sacred geography of Sri Lanka and narratives that blend facts with marvels. Arguably, no account has been discovered thus far in ‘*ajā’ib*’ genre that surpasses the richness of Ibn Shahrayār’s work⁴⁵. His masterpiece, which is a restoration of a manuscript found in Aya Sophia mosque in Istanbul, contains numerous sea-born stories (Behl, 2013). Most of these stories were narrated by sea captains and seafarers. However, Ibn Shahrayār introduced these stories in his book, which was written around 341/953, for entertainment rather than pedagogical purposes.

Although *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind* falls within the domain of marvel (‘*ajā’ib*’) literature, the narrated stories about Sri Lanka were mostly real. According to Aditya Behl and Nanang Nurcholis, the stories are sailors’ tales, which is a reproduction of ‘Sindbad the Sailor’. Notably, Sindbad’s stories have starting and ending points, but this book does not have such an arrangement or order. Moreover, it lacks any arrangements in terms of listing the materials available in the islands in the Indian Ocean (Hees, 2005, p. 102; Meisami, 1998, pp. 166-167). Agius (2020) contradicts Aditya Behl (2013) and notes that most of the stories that ‘*Ajā’ib al-Hind*’ contains are true and only a few exemptions have been found. This

⁴⁵He is from *Ramahurmuz*. His manuscript exists in Aya Sophia mosque in Istanbul, and it contains sea-born stories (Behl, 2013).

statement is particularly true when considering stories related to Sri Lanka. Out of the 136 tales in *'Ajā'ib al-Hind*, only a few stories are related to Sri Lanka. These are based on accounts by Ibn Shahrīyār's key informants, and most of the stories provide facts, albeit being mixed with marvels and mysteries.

Ibn Shahrīyār (1908) presents basic information of Adam's footprint, and no other scholars have challenged his legacy in this regard. According to Ibn Shahrīyār, Adam's footprint, which is embedded on the top of the mountain, is measured seventy feet long, which is an intriguing identification. Ibn Shahrīyār notes,

“*Sarandīb* has pearl fishery sites which collect pearls, and the small pearls survive, and the large pearls perish. Its mountain is fortified, and it is the mountain that contains ruby and garnet. It is stated that this mountain is the one on which Adam descended, and there is a footprint that is about seventy feet. The people of this island say that this footprint belongs to the Prophet Adam and that he placed one foot here and the other in the sea (Ibn Shahrīyār, 1908, pp. 135-136).

Despite the accuracy of information that Ibn Shahrīyār (1908) provides to his audience, he mystifies the mountain of *Sarandīb* when narrating the arrival of Adam following his banishment from Paradise.

Similarly, the twelfth-century Andalusian geographer, Abu Ubaid al-Bakrī,⁴⁶ records the sacred geography of Adam's Peak. His account *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*, is recognized as a comprehensive work with a flawless methodology and precise information (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 276). Al-Bakrī is also praised for his pioneering effort in adopting the lexicographical method of the ninth century to compile his account (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 276). Crucially, al-Bakrī confirms Ibn Shahrayār's (1908) measurement of the footprint of Adam, which is 50 cubits in length, estimated around 225 meters, and is embedded at the top of this mountain (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 145). Both writers provide similar information on the measurements of the impression of Adam's foot. Ibn Shahrayār further notes that Adam has placed one foot on this mountain and the other in the sea (Ibn Shahrayār, 1908, pp. 135-136), which is another instance of mystification. Importantly, Muslim geographers including al-Mas'ūdī, al-Bakrī, and al-Idrīsī generally support the idea that Adam placed one foot on the peak and the other in the sea. While this might not serve as an accurate portrayal, it is a form of attraction to their readers (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 32). Thus, it is evident that these images were generally popular among the Arab writers of the medieval period.

⁴⁶Al-Bakrī was a prominent geographer from the city of Seville of Spain during the 12th century. He was called as *al-Muḥaqqiq* (investigator) because he did not accept any finding or conclusion without considering concrete evidence.

Alī Ibn al-Husayn al-Mas‘ūdī, a tenth-century Arab geographer, was among the first Arab Muslim geocosmographers to cast a curious eye on Adam’s Peak. Being a *Shī‘ī*⁴⁷ geographer cum historian, it is important to understand his perceptions of the sacred geography of the mountain. Despite the heated debate over whether al-Mas‘ūdī traveled to Sri Lanka, the three renowned and surviving geocosmographical works by him, namely, *Kitāb Murūj al-Dhahab Wa Ma‘ādin al-Jawhar* (The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems), *Kitāb al-Tanbīh Wa al-Ishrāf* (Warning and Supervision), and *Kitāb Akhbār al-Zamān* (Messages of the periods) remain significant. In fact, a new manuscript on al-Mas‘ūdī’s astronomy, written by al-Birūnī (973-104) titled *al-Qānūn al-Mas‘ūdī*⁴⁸ (Codes of al-Mas‘ūdī), provides further insights into his understanding of Adam’s Peak.

Al-Mas‘ūdī shows the island as a source of curiosity to his audience. The section on Adam’s Peak in his book, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, which shares intertextual content with Ibn Shahrayār’s compendium *‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*, affirms that the island is a fascination to Arab geographers for three reasons. Firstly, he believes that Sri Lanka is the place where humankind originated following the arrival of Adam. Like al-Bakrī, al-Mas‘ūdī notes that Adam landed on *Sarandib*, which was a part of India at the time (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, pp. 91). Secondly, according to al-Mas‘ūdī, the Indians possessed wisdom in astronomy. They compiled *al-*

⁴⁷Maysam al-Faruqī argues that al-Mas‘ūdī is a geographer who adopts Twelver *Shī‘ī* principles and his affiliation to these ideologies does not affect his interpretation of the Qur’ān and early Islamic political history (Al-Fārūqī, 2006, p. 23).

⁴⁸Al-Birūnī (973-1048) produced a manuscript on al-Mas‘ūdī’s geography titled *al-Qanūn al-Mas‘ūdī*. This newly explored manuscript is found in *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, (Berlin State Library) in its Digital Collections. In this book, al-Birūnī identifies Sri Lanka with a new name as *Sankadalīb*.

Sind hind, which paved the way for the compilation of *Kitāb al-Mages̥ti* of Ptolemy (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, pp. 91-92). Finally, this island produced luxury items such as pearls, essences, and addax (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1938, p. 23). These factors indicate how al-Mas‘ūdī has identified the island and its landmarks including Adam’s Peak, with positive remarks.

In contrast to the scholars mentioned above, Al-Zuhrī in his *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*⁴⁹ moves from describing the physical landscapes of Sri Lanka to describing the sceneries of Adam’s Peak. He is an Andalusian geographer, who is criticized for his overdependence on al-Mas‘ūdī for information to intrigue the readers of his book (Al-Fārūqī, 2006, p. 23). Al-Zuhrī’s book *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*, as argued by al-Difā‘, serves the practical needs of people as it provides information on routes and realms of inhabited lands, especially within the *dār al-Islām* (Al-Difa‘, 1989, p. 141). The book stands as one of the earliest sources to

⁴⁹A critique of al-Zuhrī’s compendium reveals two fundamental issues related to the work. The first is related to the authorship of *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*. Mohammed Haj Sādik, the editor of al-Zuhrī’s work, claims that no direct link has been found between al-Zuhrī, the author, and his work *Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*, as the nine manuscripts of his work which were found in libraries around the world did not match his time of living. Many of the works, including the earliest manuscript found in Peris, also did not mention the authorship of al-Zuhrī. Each manuscript found was written two centuries after the demise of al-Zuhrī (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. ๑). Yet the manuscript found in Paris that was brought to the King of Spain in the thirteenth century and kept in his treasury revealed the author’s name as al-Zuhrī. The second concern is related to the nature of the work. In medieval Islam, *al-Rihla Fi Ṭalab al-‘Ilm* is the primary source of knowledge. As Sam Gallens (1990) shows, travel is the most authentic way of study in classical Islam in the medieval ages; it is often regarded as the embellishment of the mind and establishment of travelers’ identities. (Gellens, 1990, p. 121). However, in terms of al-Zuhrī’s work, it is not a travel account, but a geographic compendium written primarily using secondary sources, defying the expectation of a medieval standard practice of scholars. While al-Zuhrī provides significant geographic information drawing from Ptolemy, al-Fazārī, and al-Mas‘ūdī. Firstly, al-Zuhrī admits that his geography covers entire worlds (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 01). Yet no information found suggesting that he was interested in Europe and America, which was not discovered at that time. Indeed, he might have intended to cover the inhabited world within the *dār al-Islām* but stated that he covered every corner of the world. Secondly, the division of the world⁴⁹ is problematic. Ignaty Krachkovsky (1883-1951) in his book *Tārīkh al-Adab al-Jughrāfi al-‘Arabī* erroneously contests that al-Zuhrī has divided the world into six and his division goes against the traditional geographic theories adopted by al-Birūnī (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 279). A closer look, however, reveals that al-Zuhrī divided the world into seven provinces. Finally, al-Zuhrī’s information contains some historical inaccuracies like the idols he found in Sri Lanka were erected by Alexander, which seems an incredible statement (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 29).

emerge in Islamic Spain, outside the Islamic heartland (*dār al-Islam*), with a degree of authenticity in the narration of Spanish events through al-Zuhrī's direct observation (*'iyān*). Al-Difā' asserts that twelfth-century merchants, travelers, and seafarers were very keen on al-Zuhrī's book because it fulfilled their practical needs by providing information on routes and realms of inhabited lands, especially within the *dār al-Islām* (Al-Difā', 1989, p. 141). In fact, al-Zuhrī furnished details on the inhabited world of *dār al-Islam* (al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 02), yet it lacks firsthand information on Sri Lanka⁵⁰.

Essentially, al-Zuhrī moves from describing the natural artistry of the mountain to man-made beauty found in adornments and decorations. He emphasizes not just the mountain itself but also the breathtaking views and scenery that surround it and observes that some of these have been made by humans. This suggests that the attraction of Adam's Peak is not only in its natural beauty, but also in how people were involved in beautifying the landscape surrounding the peak. Al-Zuhrī describes:

”إن في هذا الجبل شجرا له أوراق، للورقة منه وجه أحمر، وباطنها أخضر، مكتوب في الحمرة بالبياض لا إله إلا الله وحده لا شريك له، وفي الخضرة مكتوب بالحمرة 'سبحان الله العظيم'. وكل ورقة من هذه الأشجار على هذه الصفة. وفيها أطيّار على قدر اليمام، مرشقة ألوانها، تسبح الله تعالى باللسنة عربية وسريانية. غير أنها إذا أخذ منها واحد وسجن في قفص لم ينطق ولم يتكلم ولم يمكث أكثر من يومين ويموت. ولهذه الأطيّار أصوات حنيّنة، يبكي المستمع إليها شوقا وخيفة عند سماعها.“

⁵⁰No evidence has been found to suggest that al-Zuhrī traveled to Sri Lanka.

“In this mountain, there is a tree with leaves, the front is red-colored, and its inside is green. It is written on the reddish side in white as, “*Lā Ilāha Illā Allāh, Wahdah Lā Sharīka Lah*” (There is no god but Allah alone, He has no partner) and on the greenish side, it is written in red as follows “*Subhanallah al-‘azīm*” (Glory be to Allah the Great). Each leaf of these trees has this trait. In this mountain, there are birds colored bright as sized as doves glorify Allah in Arabic and Syriac languages. If anyone captures these birds and places them in a cage, they will fall silent, refrain from making any sounds, endure for two days, and eventually succumb. These birds make extremely sweet sounds, as the listener cries when he hears the voices” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 28).

Al-Zuhrī describes the natural beauty of the mountain in two ways. Firstly, he highlights the types of plants and flowers, and fruits they produce. The following description of a citron by al-Zuhri is a case in point:

“It has fruits of citron, its taste is good, its colour is green, it has a bright light, and it has a smell like the smell of cloves. This citron, outwardly and inwardly, is hot and humid, unlike the rest of the citron in other countries” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 28).

Secondly, he showcases the marvels of local birds that exist in the mountain, citing doves’ skills of speaking Arabic and Syriac languages. Such descriptions attempt to capture the essence of the place, highlighting the tremendous experiences it offers to those who visit

there. In addition to these natural sceneries, he is fascinated by the decorations, particularly the written phrases such as, “*Lā Ilāha Illā Allāh, Wahdah Lā Sharīka Lahu*” and “*Subhanallah al- ‘Aẓīm*”, inscribed on leaves (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 28). Consequently, al-Zuhrī is able to cleverly stimulate and coerce his audience into imagining the beauty of *Sarandīb*’s mountain along with its religious mysticism.

Al-Zuhrī’s romanticized image of Adam’s Peak is similar to the fourteenth-century British traveler John Mandeville’s depiction of the same. Despite perceiving *Silha* (Sri Lanka) as a no man’s land,⁵¹ John Mandeville,⁵² on the one hand, partially agrees with al-Zuhrī about the scenery of Adam’s Peak. In his account, the mountain is described as ‘lofty’, and the surrounding lake filled with water is described as ‘fair’. On the other hand, he perceives the island as a mythological symbol for evil, full of serpents, dragons, crocodiles, and wild beasts (Mandeville, 1915, pp. 131-132). He elaborates on that,

“Adam and Eve wept upon that mount a hundred years, when they were driven out of Paradise, and that water, they tell, is of their tears; for so much water they wept, that made the aforesaid lake” (Mandeville, 1915, pp. 131-132).

⁵¹The fourteenth-century Christian traveler Mandeville notes: “...that land is full of waste, for it is full of serpents, of dragons and of crocodiles, that no man dares dwell there. These crocodiles are serpents, yellow and rayed above, and have four feet and short thighs, and great nails as claws or talons. And there are some that have five fathoms in length, and some of six and of eight and of ten. And when they go by places that be gravelly, it seemeth as though men had drawn a great tree through the gravelly place. And there are also many wild beasts, namely elephants” (Mandeville, 1915, p. 131).

⁵²Mandeville identified the island as *Silha* (Mandeville, 1915, p. 131). However, there is some confusion over the ownership of the book, i.e., whether the book was originally written by John Mandeville or by someone else who was introduced in the name of Mandeville to get popularity.

Mandeville's narrative that a lake emerged from the tears of Adam and Eve after they were driven out of paradise, is a fable that Arab writers have not mentioned in any of their accounts. But his agreement with al-Zuhrī regarding the beauty of Adam's Peak confirms that the mountain was indeed a fabulous spectacle. This may serve as a continued inspiration for the captivating stories associated with Adam's Peak.

As indicated above, Arab geographers used different names like '*jabal Adam*', '*jabal Sarandīb*', and '*jabal wasim*' in their writings to denote Adam's Peak. This was done probably to identify the country by this mountain as its premier landmark. Due to the widely held belief that Adam's Peak was where the first man landed, this mountain received great attention from Arab geographers, who mixed fact with fables, like Ibn Shahrīyār's (1908) remark of Adam keeping one sacred foot on the peak and the other on the sea. It is important to note that other writers such as al-Zuhrī, too, combine facts with fables, especially when he writes that the mountain not only has natural beauty, but man-made decorations like the phrase "*Lā Ilāha Illā Allāh*" written on tree leaves.

3.2.1.2. Topographic Marvels: '*Ajā'ib* of Gemstones

Precious stones held significant value in the medieval era. The exchange of precious stones, in particular, was a sign of high diplomatic relationship to demonstrate mutual respect among the kings at that time. It is said that the monarch of Rome presented a reddish sapphire (*yāqūt aḥmar*) as a gift to Caliph al-Hakim of Egypt to strengthen their mutual relationship (Al-Ḥalabī, H936, p. r 5); and

that *Mu‘izz al-Dawla* presented a ruby of three mithqals to his brother *Rukn al-Dawla*, to show his familial bonds (Ḥalabī, H936, p. v 8). Furthermore, wearing jewelry of high value that were made of gemstones has been considered as a symbol of pride as well as means of drawing numerous mysterious benefits, including protection from dangers and evils.

In general, Arab geographers link marvels attributed to different gemstones, which are topographic in nature, along with their places of origin. In their records and narratives of Sri Lanka, they associate gemstones specifically with Adam’s Peak because precious stones are primarily collected from rivers, mountains, and valleys, where Adam’s Peak is located. However, there are descriptions about extracting pearls and stones along the Sri Lankan coast, known as ‘Harkand.’⁵³ Regardless of whether the gemstones are from Adam’s Peak or not, the marvel stories primarily revolve around gems, pearls, crystal, glasses, animals, and other living species.

Ibn Shahrayār presents the commodities found in Sri Lanka in a fascinating manner in his plausible narratives. His compendium primarily addresses sea-centered marvels in Arabic literature. This book shows that Sri Lanka is home to valuable pearls, pearl fishery, precious stones, medical herbs, and fragrances. These topographical marvels were found in many places in Sri Lanka including Adam’s Peak. Ibn Shahrayār notes,

“*Sarandīb* has pearl fishery sites to collect pearls. Small pearls endure while large ones vanish. Its mountain is fortified, and it is the mountain that contains ruby and garnet. The island also has red crystals, glass, and

⁵³Harkand’ is the name used by Arab geographers to refer to the Indian Ocean in the medieval era.

cinnamon bark which are converted into red dye. The grass on this island is also red and is used to dye clothes and thread. This dye surpasses madder, saffron, and ambergris in quality. Many strange and rare plants exist on this island” (Ibn Shahrīyār, 1908, pp. 135-136).

Thus, Ibn Shahrīyār introduces to his audience the Sri Lankan commodities, including pearls, rubies, garnets, glass, dye, and herbs, in a fascinating way. However, he does not specify how these commodities serve as marvels.

The British traveler Mandeville’s remarks on these commodities also resemble what was narrated by Ibn Shahrīyār (1908), as he notes the availability of precious stones, pearls, reeds, and canes in Sri Lanka (Mandeville, 1915, pp. 131-132). Ibn Shahrīyār informs his audience that the red grass that grows in this island is used to dye clothes and thread (Ibn Shahrīyār, 1908, pp. 135-136). While Mandeville’s account also records the practice of dyeing clothes in Sri Lanka, he shows the use of other materials such as reeds and canes for the same purpose. Notably, both Ibn Shahrīyār (1906) and Mandeville (1915) generally describe the marvels of commodities found in Sri Lanka in a similar way, displaying the same level of enthusiasm.

Further, Aḥmad al-Tayfāshī, too, romanticizes Adam’s Peak for its stunning precious stones. His book reproduced significant information from Ibn Māsūweyāh regarding the appearance of gemstones and the central role of Adam’s Peak as their source in Sri Lanka.

In addition to the preliminary information furnished by Ibn Māsuweyah, al-Tayfāshī provides further information on the places that produce and supply gems to other places. Al-Tayfāshī notes that minerals were brought from a place called *Suḥayrān* from the island of *Sarandīb*, where the Adam's Peak is located. According to him, water flows from this mountain called *jabal rahūn* (*Ruhuna* mountain) and stones were transported via the flowing water, stones were brought. He adds that when the sun sets in this place, rays of light set on the stones of sapphires, which is called *Barq al-Rāhūn*. Al-Tayfāshī states that people who entered Sri Lanka informed him that the river water does not bring stones, and therefore, they engaged in the collection of stones using cunning attempts. He writes:

”إنّ الجبل الذي فيه الياقوت جبل شاهق صعب المسلك لا يمكن الوصول إلى أعلاه وفي أعلاه نسور كثيرة تعيش فيه وتتخذ مساكنها به بخلوه من الأنس فيعمد أهل ذلك الموضع إلى حيوان ويسلخون جلده ويقطعون قطعاً كباراً ويتركونه في سفح جبل الرهون ويبعدون عنه يرقبون فتأتي النسور فترفع ذلك اللحم وتنزل به عند أوكارها فإذا وضعت على الأرض علق به حصا الياقوت ولصق فيه ثم يأتي نسور أخرى فتجتمع على اللحم لتحفظه فيأخذه بعضها ويطير به في الجبل فيسقط منه الياقوت لثقله فيلقطه الذي يرقبون من الموضع الذي يسقط فيه ويذكر أن في أسفل الجبل غياضا عظيمة وخنادق عميقة وأشجار شاهقة تسكن فيها حيات عظام فتبتلع الحية منها الإنسان ورأس البقر وعينه من الحيوانات صحيحا فإذا ابتلعت عمدة به إلى أصل شجرة فالتوت عليه واشتدت فيتكسر في يطنها مت تبتلعت وتندق عظامه فيتهضم لها فا جل ذلك أيضا لا يستطاع سلوك هذا الجبل ولا الوصول إلى ما فيه من الأحجار والياقوت منه ما يوجد في هذه الجزيرة.“

“The mountain of *Sarandīb* is difficult to reach its peak at its top, there are many eagles [that] live away from humans. The people of that place deliberately hunt animals, remove their skin, cut it into pieces, and place those parts on the top of the mountain. They go away while monitoring. Then the eagle lifts that meat and takes it to her lair. When she places it on the ground, a ruby clings to it, and it sticks to it. Then other eagles come and gather around the meat to guard it. Some of them take it and fly with it. Due to its weight, the ruby falls from it, and those monitoring the incident, collect it from where it falls. It is mentioned that at the bottom of the mountain, there are vast pits, deep trenches, and towering trees inhabited by great creatures. Snakes swallow humans, cattle, and some animals as whole. When it swallows them, it climbs to the top of a tree, and thorns pierce it, causing it to break, and it dies. Its bones are then digested. Because of all this, one cannot climb this mountain or capture what is in it, including its stones and rubies, some of which are found on this island” (al-Tayfāshī, r: 17).

This text discusses two significant points. Firstly, it informs the readers of the methods used by people to collect stones such as using eagles, which is a cunning maneuver. His portrayal compels his audience to view the mountain as a site of *gharā'ib*, suggesting that experiencing its marvels is an unavoidable aspect of a visit. Secondly, it also mentions the dangerous snakes associated with Adam's Peak. Mandeville (1915) reports that these

dangers are applicable only to local people, not to foreigners. But al-Tayfāshī informs us of the dangers those snakes pose to humans irrespective of whether they are locals or foreigners. This could be a potential textual strategy by al-Tayfāshī to circumvent the alienation an outsider feels when they read about the dangers associated with Adam's Peak.

Arab geographers also explored how the use of gemstones influences human characters, impacting them both physically and psychologically. They view gemstones as protective charms against certain misfortunes, issues, illnesses, and catastrophes such as plague, heart palpitations, obsession, malice, harm, sadness, and poverty. These interpretations highlight the extraordinary and multifaceted nature of the marvels associated with *ahjār* literature. These benefits are stated by al-Tājir, al-Bakrī, al-Ḥalabī, and al-Tayfāshī.

Arab geographer Sulaymān al-Tājir (851) suggests that gemstones possess not only aesthetic beauty but also contain spiritual, physical, and physiological benefits. Touching stones could foster personal growth (*baraka*) and fortunes (*khair*). Al-Tājir informs us that gemstones are a chief crystal found in Sri Lanka, noting 'if a man touches it, he will not ever get sadness' (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 112). This perspective is echoed by the Andalusian geographer al-Bakrī (2003), who is undoubtedly referring to a popular belief of the Sri Lankan people, which is endorsed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle as well; that is, if anyone wears a stone or seeks help from the three idols from different parts of Sri Lanka, which is made of rubies, he will not be affected by the plague even if it affects other people (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 145). It is noteworthy that al-Tājir, al-Bakrī and Mandeville agree on the

mysterious powers of these stones, stating that handling such a gemstone gives protection from evil, worries, and illness.

Al-Ḥalabī's (H 936) explanation of the mysteries of gemstones has two layers. The first layer shows the general mysterious benefits associated with precious stones. According to al-Ḥalabī, whoever wears a ring of gems, will not be affected by mental illnesses such as obsession (*waswas*) and heart palpitation (*khafaqān*). He further states that the Indians believed that a person who has gemstones made of *yāqūt*, has a strong mind compared to a person without one, and wearing a jewel made of gemstones gives a person self-confidence— an opinion reflected by al-Tayfāshī as well (al-Tayfāshī, r: 17). Further, al-Ḥalabī asserts that the Sri Lankans were among the most intelligent people when it came to the affairs of gemstones, which is a positive portrayal of the Sri Lankan people. Al-Ḥalabī notes:

وفي الياقوت ما يكون على غاية من الحسن والنقا وفيه ما يكون من جوهرة مثل الملح وأشياء تذهب بحسنه فتفتت تلك المواضع وتجلى لتحسن وليس أحد أحق من أهل سرنديب بهذا المعنى.

In gemstones, stones of utmost beauty and purity exist, and items are similar to salt, whose usefulness may disappear. The beauty of stones shines in different lights. No one is more competent at this understanding than the people of Sri Lanka (Al-Ḥalabī, H 936, p. r 4)

Al-Ḥalabī also records that the Sri Lankan people were more competent than any other people in the affairs related to gems, such as collection, cutting, painting, polishing, and selling of gems. In addition, al-Ḥalabī states that whoever has a stone or wears a ring of ruby (*al-mas*), which largely comes from India and Sri Lanka, is safe from harm and malice. In another place, al-Ḥalabī citing Aristotle notes that having a gemstone protects a person from scheming (Al-Ḥalabī, H936, p. r 9). Despite being considered a symbol of myths and irrational beliefs, jewels made of precious stones were considered as a magical tool.

Secondly, al-Ḥalabī attempts to portray gemstones as part of the sacred Islamic tradition.

This perspective is largely imaginative yet fascinating. He notes:

”قال الرسول صلى الله عليه السلام إذا كانت يوم القيامة ينصب لي منبر ياقوت أحمر وتحشر فاطمة على ناقه من لؤلؤة بيضا وقال الحسن عليه السلام يا بني نختم بالياقوت والعقيق فإنه ميمونه مبارك وكلما نظر الرجل إليه زاد وجهه نورا أو الصلاة به سبعون صلاة وقال علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه التختم بالياقوت أمان من الفقر وقيل كان له رون قميص فيه اثنا عشر نوعا من الجواهر وكان يلبسه إذا أراد الدخول إلى بيت المقدس وقيل إن الخاتم كان لسيمان عليه السلام ياقوتا كله وسئل عليه الصلاة والسلام عن البيت المعمور فقيل إن من ياقوت أحمر وقيل إن العرس من ياقوت والكرسي من لؤلؤة بيضاء وقيل إن شجرة طوبى جوهراً.“

“The Prophet Muhammad states that during the Day of Resurrection, a pulpit (*minbar*) will be set for me made of red sapphire, and Fatima will be awakened on a camel of white pearls. Companion Hasan states: oh, son wear

a ring of sapphire, it is auspicious and blessed. Whenever people look at it, it increases brightness and offers blessings equal to seventy blessings. Ali ibn Abu Talib states: that wearing a ring of sapphire protects you from poverty. He had a wardrobe with twelve diverse types of shirts made of gemstones. He used to wear it when he wanted to enter the *Bayt al-Maqdis*⁵⁴ The ring of Prophet Sulaymān was entirely made of sapphire (*yāgūt*). When Prophet Muhammad was asked about the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr*, he replied it was made of sapphire. It is believed that *al-Ars* (The Throne) was made of sapphire and *the al-Kursī* (The Footstool) was made of white pearls. The tree of blessings was made of jewel.” (Al-Ḥalabī, H936, p. r 9)

Prophet Muhammad’s pulpit made of gold and Sulaymān’s ring made of sapphire (*yāgūt*) were examples to show how high the fascination of Arab writers was as they related sapphires to the Prophets. In addition, using sapphires to build *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* and *al-Kursī* of God shows the fascinating approach of connecting precious stones with Islamic beliefs. It also shows the captivating image of Sri Lanka created by Arab geographers.

⁵⁴ The mosque situated in Jerusalem is known as *Masjid al-Aqsa*.

The twelfth-century Yemeni Arab traveler al-Ḥijāzī⁵⁵ (c.1118) takes a cautious stance when narrating stories related to ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*. Al-Ghirmāṭī in his account *Tuḥfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-‘Ijāb* recounts the circumstances of his meeting with al-Hijāzī (c.1118) along with Imām Abū Bakr al-Fahrī to inquire about the ‘*aja’ib* that he found in his travels. Al-Ḥijāzī’s position in narrating stories related to oddities is clear. Al-Ghirmāṭī notes:

”وكننت بمصر سنة اثني عشرة وخمسمائة فاجتمعت بها الشيخ أبي العباس الحجازي، وكان ممن أقام بأرض الصين والهند أربعين سنة وكان الناس يحدثون عنه العجائب فقلت له: يا أبا العباس، إني سمعت عنك أشياء كثيرة من العجائب والآن أريد أن اسمع منك شيئاً من عجائب خلق الله تعالى، وكان الشيخ الإمام أبوبكر محمد بن الوليد الفهري حاضراً فقال أبو العباس: قد رأيت أشياء كثيرة لا يمكنني أن أحدث بها لأن أكثر الناس يحسبون أنها كذب. فقال الشيخ أبو بكر: يكون ذلك من العوام والجهال. وأما العقلاء وأهل العلم، فإنهم يعرفون الجائز والمستحيل. وذكر عجائب مخلوقاته. قد رأيت أشياء كثيرة لا يمكنني أن أحدث بها لأن أكثر الناس يحسبون أنها كذب“.

“I was in Egypt in 512/1118. I met Abul Abbas al-Hijāzī, who stayed in India and China for more than forty years. Al-Hijāzī was known among the people as someone who told ‘*ajā’ib* stories. I asked him “O! Abul Abbas, I heard that you are telling some *ajā’ib* stories. I would like to hear from you some stories from the creation of the Almighty God. Imām Abū Bakr al Fahrī was also present with us. Abul Abbas replied: I have seen many things which I cannot share because

⁵⁵He was a merchant, and sailor who engaged in trading of the Indian Oceanic world leading to China. He spent forty years not only in trading but meeting rulers and religious leaders around the world. He traversed to Sri Lanka and spent a considerable time in the Island brings a marvel story related to the gemstones. (Al-Gharmāṭī A. H., 1993, p. 129)

most people believe it to be a lie. Imām Abū Bakr mentioned: those would be public and ignorant of these types of stories. In terms of intelligence, they know what is possible and what is impossible” (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129).

It is clear that Al-Ḥijāzī (c.1118) takes a cautious approach when narrating *‘ajā’ib* stories of his travel to his audiences. He hesitated to share his observations from his journeys, fearing that ordinary people might dismiss his stories as falsehood.

Despite taking a cautious position regarding *‘ajā’ib*, *gharā’ib* and *aṣāṭīr*, al-Ḥijāzī (c.1118) presents Sri Lanka with *‘ajā’ib* and *āyāt* understanding, perceiving the realm as a territory known for marvels, mysteries, and oddities. For instance, al-Hijāzī (c.1118) highlights the unique quality of the sesame oil used for gem polishing:

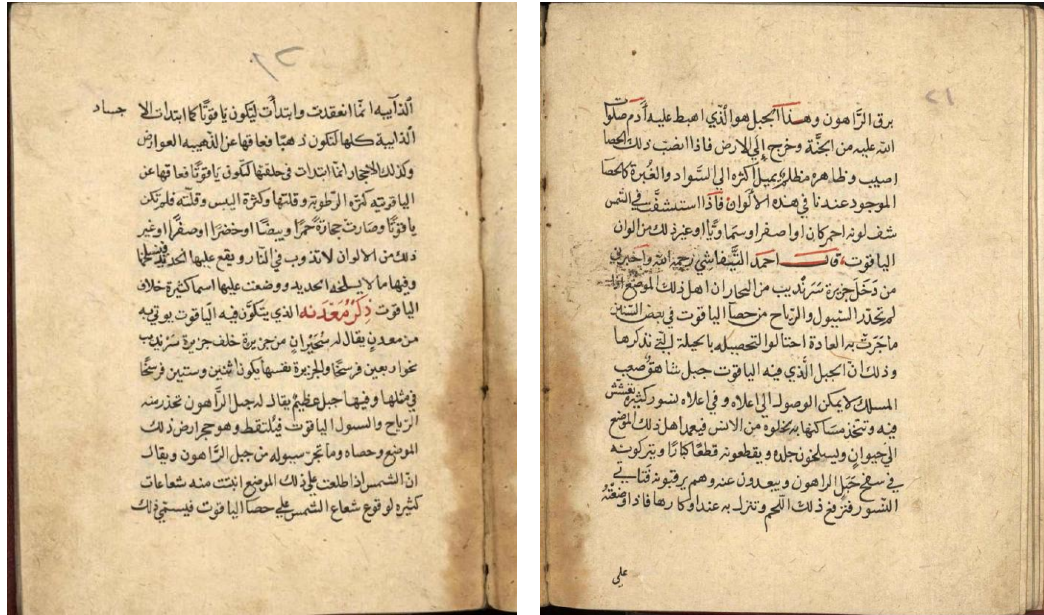
يؤخذ الشيرج فيغلى حتى يذهب نصفه ويجعل هذان الحجران في الدهن ومن دهن بذلك الدهن لم يؤثر
الحديد فيه شيئاً حتى يغسل جسده. ومن شرب من ذلك الدهن عشرة دراهم ولا يأكل لبناً ولا مايتخذ من
اللبن لم يضره الحديد البتة.

“After heating the sesame oil until half of it evaporates, two stones were placed. Whoever applies that ointment on his body, fire (iron) does not affect it until he washes his body. Whoever drinks the ointment worth ten dirham, avoids the milk, the fire (iron) never affects him. My servant drank the oil, and some others cut his arm using a knife. However, it did not cause an injury” (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129).

The text shows that applying the sesame oil infused with gemstones prevents fire and knife cuts from harming the body or causing injury. Regardless of whether the story is true, it is evident that Arab geographers present the matter in a captivating way, rather than verifying its truth.

Evidently, Arab geographers viewed Sri Lanka with amazement for the gems that this territory offered during medieval times. They highlighted numerous physical, mental, psychological benefits attributed to various gemstones. Especially, possessing gemstones was not only considered a sign of greater intelligence, power, and fortune, but also it was believed that they offer benefits such as protection against dangers, poverty, and misfortunes. Although these benefits are deemed unscientific, Muslim geographers' representations of Sri Lanka romanticize the island, showing their positive attitudes towards the island and islanders.

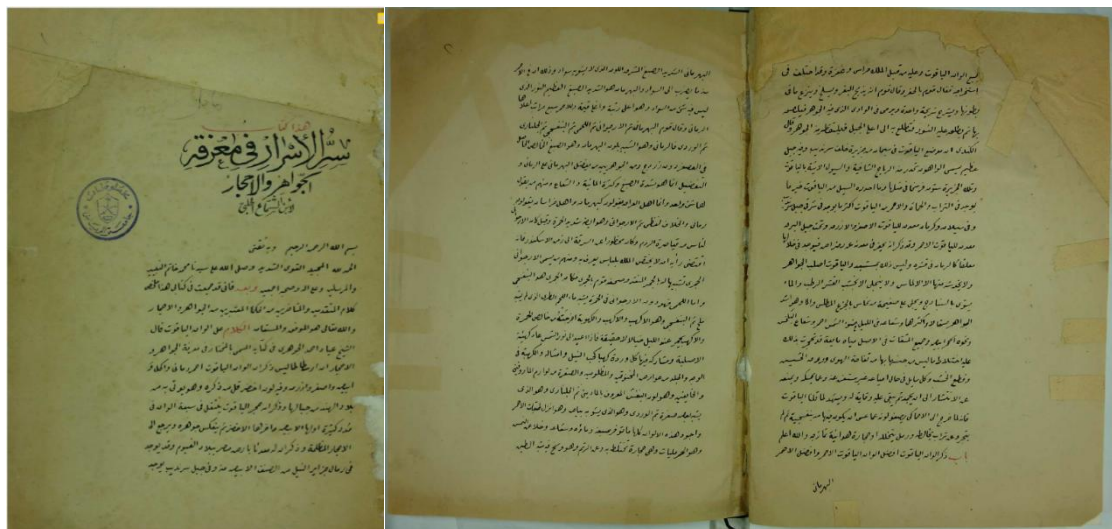
Figure 3.5. Excerpts from Al-Tayfāshī's *Kitāb al-Aḥjār al-Mulūkiyya*



V. 20

R. 21

Figure 3.6. Al-Ḥalabī's *Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār Fī Ma'rifa al-Jawāhir Wa al-Aḥjār*.



page: r1, r. and v. 2

3.2.2. ‘*Ajā’ib al-Baḥr* (Marvels of the Sea)

In sea marvels, two distinct types of stories related to Sri Lanka can be observed. The first category includes stories related to sites such as temples with golden idols and palaces made of crystal which are built near the sea. The marvels of places are described as part of the sea-centered marvels. The second type consists of species such as birds, fish, and sea beasts, forming a different narrative than the first type of story. However, Arab geographers do not discuss these two categories separately.

Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī is one of the prominent writers who narrated sea-centered ‘*ajā’ib*’ stories, citing four new stories. His *Tuhfat al-‘Ajā’ib Wa Ṭurfat al-Ghara’ib*,⁵⁶ an unedited manuscript, is a cosmographical work highlighting a combination of both marvels of places and species related to wonders of Sri Lanka. The first story is about the beauty of idols, and it conveys the artistry of idols found near the sea. According to al-Jazarī, the unknown ruler of Sri Lanka possessed a golden idol adorned with jewels, and no other king has as many precious stones as he does (Al-Jazarī, p. 133 v & r). The second story is about a white house made of crystal. According to al-Jazarī, in Sri Lanka, there is a white crystal palace which lights up throughout the day, and this light never extinguishes at night or during daytime

⁵⁶This manuscript was found in the online sources of the Prince Ghazi Trust for Quranic Thought, a Jordan based non-profitable trust. The manuscript provides information collected from al-Qazwīnī’s manuscript, *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Ḡharā’ib al-Mawjūdāt*; al-Mas’ūdī’s *Kitāb al-‘Ajā’ib*, al-Jaiḥānī’s two works: *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik al-Sharqiyya* and *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik al-Gharbiyya*; and Ibn al-Baitār’s *Kitāb al-Nabāt*. Ibn al-Athīr’s manuscript partially covers marvels and wonders of the world in one chapter out of four chapters. Chapter one deals with terrestrial and celestial arrangements of the world including the sun, moon and astronomy, the next chapter provides information on time and space, the third chapter explores wonders and oddities of the world, and the final chapter is a piece of writing on minerals. The wonders of *Sarandīb* are highlighted in the third chapter of this book.

(Al-Jazarī, p. 133 v & r). Al-Jazarī's first two stories are related to two sites, while the remaining two stories are related to species.

The first story on species is about a round-shaped tortoise. Al-Jazarī provides information regarding a round-shaped turtle, measured as forty cubits, and that each turtle lays a thousand eggs, and its back resembles a luxurious tail. He further adds that people of Yemen use their shells as basins for washing and eating (Al-Jazarī, p. 133 v & r). In his second story, al-Jazarī informs his audience of a flying bird living in the sea, made of light that no one can look at. He further adds that when it rises above the boats, the wind stops, and the waves of the sea calm down, a sign of safety (Al-Jazarī, p. 133 v & r). Significantly, al-Jazarī's '*ajā'ib*' of birds is stated as ordinary marvels and not as an extraordinary (*gharā'ib*) element.

Rabī' al-Anwār is a newly discovered manuscript which deals exclusively with sea-born '*ajā'ib*' stories,⁵⁷ arguably a rich account like the work of Ibn Shahrīyār. Also, Al-Baṭalyawsī's work⁵⁸ provides more sea-centered stories to further explain the narratives

⁵⁷This manuscript begins by stating the wonders of stones, their types and peculiarities, and lists a variety of precious stones: *Al-Ḥajar al-Abyaḍ*, *al-Aḥmar*, *al-Banfisjī*, *al-Aswad*, *al-Ḥajar al-Aṣḡar*, *al-Ṣamūr*, *Ḥamūr*, *al-Khaṭṭāb*, *al-Raḥa*, *al-Sanbar*, *al-Fār*, *al-Maṭar*, *al-Jāh*, *al-Shaikh*, *al-Sinbādij*, *al-Mās*, *al-Jasā'*, *al-Baht*, and *al-Mighnāṭis*.

⁵⁸*Rabī' al-Anwār* is a thirteenth-century manuscript found in the Islamic Manuscript collections of Princeton University. This work is attributed to Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad Al-Baṭalyawsī and was written either in 1239 or 1240. The manuscript has been written in Maghribī script, and it is focused on exploring the wonders of creation, including gems, and the locations where precious stones were collected, as well as different varieties of plants and fruits, characteristics of wildlife, marvels of the seas, particulars of prominent rivers and water sources, peculiarities of seasons and details of mountains. The manuscript specifies two oceans: the western sea, also known as 'the sea of darkness', which is associated with wonders, and the sea of China. The manuscript contains marginal notes that provide explanations for the main content. These notes may include missing parts of the original text or corrections to the original text, as well as omissions from the original text that have been added later by the author.

introduced by Ibn Athīr al-Jazarī. A simple question arises on what kind of manuscript *Rabī' al-Anwār* is; Is it a travelogue or a geographic compendium or a maritime *ajā'ib* genre? A critique of the manuscripts reveals that this source is not a travelogue of al-Baṭalyawsī. Rather, it is a maritime *ajā'ib* genre containing geographic information and maritime stories of seafarers who have voyaged in the Indian Ocean. In addition to the marvels of the sea, *Rabī' al-Anwār* provides information on geography, communal or group identity, and religious and political affairs of the Indian Ocean. More accurately, this manuscript follows a similar trajectory as Ibn Shahrīyār's *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* in recording *'ajā'ib* stories of the Indian Ocean. An obvious difference in the way the writers handle narrators' information becomes evident when comparing *Rabī' al-Anwār* and *'Ajā'ib al-Hind*. The former does not provide a narrator list (*ruwwāt*) for his stories. For instance, when narrating the peculiarity of the date palm, *Rabī' al-Anwār* simply begins the narrative by bringing in a tradition (*ḥadīth*). Al-Baṭalyawsī writes, "Prophet Mohammed narrated that 'honour your aunt, the palm tree'. This prophetic tradition was narrated without a narrator or a list of narrators in *Rabī' al-Anwār*. On the other hand, in most cases, *'Ajā'ib al-Hind* usually brings a narrator or a list of narrators before recording the message. For example, when narrating the incident of the execution of a slave, Ibn Shahrīyār notes, "[t]he Omani Muhammad told me: I saw in the wilderness of India a slave boy from India who was taken by the king for theft or something similar, and he ordered his slaughter while he was speaking and singing and did not even know until the slaughterer reached his throat, and when they cut it, he died" (Ibn

Shahrayār, 1908, p. 130). In this story, Ibn Shahrayār clearly notes the narrator from whom he heard the story, providing some sort of authenticity to the narrative.

In addition, al-Baṭalyawsī's unedited source serves as an extension of the narratives presented by Ibn Athīr al-Jazarī. It includes the latest information on sea-born marvels and wonders related sea creatures such as the bird Artic turn (Kharshana), musk deer,⁵⁹ beast "*Malakat*",⁶⁰ "*Silan*" fish⁶¹, fish "*al-Atem*",⁶² crab,⁶³ beast "*Hayat al-Azam*,"⁶⁴ and fish "*Mubirim*."⁶⁵ In addition, an examination of these stories show that al-Baṭalyawsī not only informs his audience about ordinary marvels but also shows the extraordinary creatures of the ocean. For instance, al-Baṭalyawsī informs the readers about the bird Artic turn (Kharshana), which is larger than a pigeon. According to him, when this bird flies, another bird called a crane (Karka) flies under it. He adds that Karka opens its mouth, expecting

⁵⁹The musk deer are animals that emerge in significant numbers from the sea every year for a season. Hunters slaughter them to find musk in its navel-look blood, and it is the best kind of musk of all. Usually, when they get out of their habitat, they produce the scent. The farther it goes, the stronger its scent becomes (Al-Baṭalyawsī, 1239/1240, pp. 55-56).

⁶⁰"*Malakat*" is an animal that inhabits the island. It has many heads and different faces, incisor teeth, and two wings. It feeds on sea creatures. It is said that some people draw it in the form of the king's ships there, and when the king rides, they present it to him in front of his ship, adorned with splendor and silk. There is also a fish that exceeds five hundred feet in size and is found near the island of Waqwāq. When it spreads its wings, it is like a huge mountain, and ships are afraid of it. When they see it, they shout and beat the drums and scream until it flees from them (Al-Baṭalyawsī, 1239/1240, p. 56).

⁶¹"*Silan*" is a fish that takes two days to die after being taken out of the water. When cooked, if the pot is covered, it becomes ripe and perfect, but if left uncovered, it jumps out of the pot and disappears, and nobody knows where it goes.

⁶²Another fish is called "*Al-Atem*". Its face resembles that of a pig, and it has a vagina like a woman. It has a layer of meat, and a layer of fat and people desire to eat it for the taste of its meat. There is also a crab, each one shaped like a small shield that moves quickly in water, but when it comes to land, it becomes as still as a stone.

⁶³A crab that is like a small shield that moves quickly in water, but when it comes to land, it becomes as still as a stone.

⁶⁴"*Hayat Al-Azam*" comes out of the sea and reaches the height of an elephant. It wraps itself around a giant tree or rock and breaks the bones of the elephant in its belly with a loud noise that can be heard from afar.

⁶⁵"*Mubirim*" has a head like a shield and many eyes, its body is as long as a snake and has many legs. Its tail is like a saw and its teeth are as sharp as iron. It cannot be approached by any boat or vessel without being destroyed.

Kharshana to drop some food for it (Al-Baṭalyawsī, 1239/1240, p. 55). This story is explicitly recorded as an ordinary marvel.

Furthermore, another story on a fish called “*Al-Atem*” is intriguing because the characteristics of fish are compared to both humans and animals. Al-Baṭalyawsī writes,

“Its face resembles that of a pig, and it has a vagina like a woman. It has a layer of meat, and a layer of fat and people desire to eat it for the taste of its meat. There is also a crab, each one is like a small shield that moves quickly in water, but when it comes to land, it becomes as still as a stone” (Al-Baṭalyawsī, 1239/1240, p. 56).

The depiction of this fish includes a comparison to a land animal, as ‘[i]ts face resembles that of a pig’, and a comparison to humans, “it has a vagina like a woman”. By describing a sea creature that is a hybrid between a pig and a female human, this example elevates the status of an ordinary marvel to something extraordinary.

Further, two fourteenth-century sources corroborate with *Rabī‘ al-Anwār*. The first source is a well-known account, namely, Sirāj al-Dīn al-Wardī’s (1291-1457) *Kitāb Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib Wa Fārīdat al-Gharā’ib*,⁶⁶ which is a geographic compendium written by al-Wardī,

⁶⁶Its full title is *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhluqāt Wa Laṭā’if al-Mawjudāt Wa Siyāsāt al-Mulūk wa Riyāḍat al-Ufūs Wa Balāghat al-Shu‘arā’ Wa Naṣīhat al-Umarā’ Wa Manāfi’ al-Nabātāt Wa Khawāṣ al-Ḥayawānāt Wa Ghairi Dhālika Mimmā Sataqifu ‘Alayhi Wa Yaltaddu Ṭarafuha Allāhu Bi al-Takrār ‘Ilayhi*, and it includes seven chapters. It is a 14th century manuscript which has numerous editions and publications. One such recent work was done by Anwar Mahmūd Zanāti in 2008. *Kharīdat al-‘Ajā’ib* is a work which contains a combination of information on several subjects including geography,

explaining the inhabited world along with a geographic map. Al-Wardī's map, which is regarded a near perfect world map that is better than the maps created by al-Iṣṭakhrī and al-Idrīsī, has been preserved by Berlin State Library. However, it seems that al-Wardī might have copied verbatim a considerable amount of information from *Rabī' al-Anwār*. The second work is a new manuscript titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt*.⁶⁷ This manuscript was discovered in the British Library and is believed to date back to the 15th century (Charles Rieu, 1894, p. 474). Like *'Ajā'ib al-Hind, and Rabī' al-Anwār*, the author of the second book also combines facts with marvels and wonders, making it a unique book in the *'aja'ib* genre. However, the accuracy of the information contained in the *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt* is somewhat questionable.⁶⁸

history, botany, astronomy, tales, and fables. The book deals with the terrestrial world and its wonders such as the characteristics of oceans, islands, rivers, water sources, walls, mountains, plants, animals, and minerals. The author blends facts with marvels and wonders, making it a unique feature of the book.

⁶⁷The manuscript is a valuable geographic work that advances our knowledge of world geography. Its full title is *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt Wa Siyāsāt al-Mulūk Wa Riyaḍat al-Ufūs Wa Balāghat al-Shu'arā' Wa Naṣīhat al-Umarā' Wa Manāfi' al-Nabātāt wa Khawāṣṣ al-Ḥayawānāt Wa Ghairi Dhālika Mimmā Sataqifu 'Alayhi Wa Yaltaddu Ṭarafuka Allāhu Bī al-Takrār 'Ilayhi*, and it includes seven chapters. The book deals with the terrestrial world and its wonders such as the characteristics of oceans, islands, rivers, water sources, walls, mountains, plants, animals, and minerals.

⁶⁸The manuscript mentions seven seas: *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (the surrounding sea in the known world), *Baḥr al-Šīn* (the Chinese Sea), *Baḥr al-Hind* (the Indian Ocean), *Baḥr Fāris* (the Persian sea), *Baḥr Qalzūm* (the Red Sea), *Baḥr al-Shām* (the Levantine Sea), and *Baḥr al-Kharāṣ* (the Caspian Sea). However, this division of the oceans is problematic. Firstly, it is important to note that no clear distinction has been drawn between *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (the surrounding sea in the known world), and *Baḥr al-Hind* (the Indian Ocean). The manuscript itself admits that the former (*Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*) does not have a specific geographic boundary. The text suggests that this part of the sea covers the wider areas of the southeastern part of the Indian Ocean, including the seashores of Indonesia and Malaysia (*Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt*, n.d., p. 1b). Secondly, the book includes Sri Lanka under the Chinese Sea (*Baḥr al-Šīn*), which is an inaccurate information. Another apparent shortcoming of *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā'if al-Mawjūdāt* is that this source apparently copied verbatim many stories recorded in *'Rabī' al-Anwār*.

Al-Baṭalyawasī, al-Wardī, and *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Laṭā’if al-Mawjūdāt* from the 14th century offer similar facts. Their portrayal of the Sri Lankan “other” became less negative, or even positive. Their language never featured anything derogatory. According to these accounts, the Sri Lankan king possesses a golden idol adorned with jewels, and no other king has as many precious stones as he does, and all these jewels are found in the mountains of the islands. The wine from all around the world is brought to him, as well as musk from Iraq (Al-Baṭalyawasī, 1239/1240, pp. 55-56). Although the author refers to the worshipping of idols and drinking of wine, acts that are prohibited by Islam, Baṭalyawasī and other writers did not construct any rejective alterity towards the society.

In addition, al-Zuhrī provides information regarding the musk deer, which is a land-centered topographic marvel in his geographic⁶⁹ compendium *Kitab al-Jughrafiyya* for the inhabited world. He describes the musk deer in his account as follows:

⁶⁹Despite the lack of information on uninhabited lands, al-Zuhrī predominantly shows a world to his audiences with only an inhabited part of the world, neglecting the entire world regions. His geography is all about the inhabited world (*al-Ma ‘mūr*), which is generally known as the territories of the world where people live. Like al-Mas‘ūdī does, he divides the inhabited world into seven *aqālīm* (provinces). Al-Zuhrī’s seven provinces include India and China as the first regions; Mecca, Medina, Egypt as the second region; and the third region includes Ghaznā, Iraq and Khurasan. The fourth region includes Balakhān, parts of Iran, Daylam, and Turkey. The fifth region is Anṭākiya, ‘Umūriyya, Constantinople and Spain. The sixth region is North Africa including Morocco. The final region is areas of South Africa that includes Nawba and Ethiopia. Al-Zuhrī places Sri Lanka as his first province along with China and India. This region has been divided into three parts: *Bilād al- Šīn* (China), *Bilād al-Hind* (India), *Bilād al-Sind* (Pakistan). He begins his account of Sri Lanka by providing its geographic location. According to him, *Sarandīb* is connected to India by land, and the island is surrounded by the sea from all sides except for the peninsula (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 29).

”وفي صحراء هذه المدينة توجد دواب المسك الأذفر. وهو أطيب من كل مسك. وصفة هذه الدابة هي حيوان أكبر من الهر مدنر بأسود في صفرة. يخرج وراءه الصيادون بالخيول والسلاح فإن كانت فيه سرّة من المسك هرب ولم يلحقه أحد في اليوم أو اليومين أو الثلاثة. فإذا أخذ وجد على ملتسمه سرّة قدر بيضة الرخمة وأكبر. فتقطع ويترك هذا الحيوان. فإذا كان في العام الثاني أخلف كانها أخرى، فإن لم تكن عند هذا الحيوان سرّة لم يهرب. ويؤخذ باليد فيطلق حتى تكون له سرّة. فإذا أخذت تلك السرّة دفنت سبعة أيام، ثم تخرج فتفتح. فيخرج منها المسك العليّك. وإنما يقال له العليّك لأنه يخرج مثل الصابون ولا يجف أبدا. وهذا هو المعروف بالمسك الأذفر. وهو مسك دارين. وقد قيل إن اسم هذا الحيوان دارين، وقيل إنما نسب للصحراء صحراء دارين. وهو أطيب من المسك النثير. وكذلك يوجد المسك النثير في حيوان يوجد في بلاد سرنديب“

“Animal of musk is a dark-yellow colored animal larger than a cat in size, producing the best perfume in the world. According to al-Zuhrī, hunters with horses and sharp weapons go to the jungle to hunt them, and if there is a deer that bears musk, will flee and no one can catch them. It will disappear for a couple of days from human attention if it escapes from the hunters. If they can catch one, they remove the naval from the belly button and leave the animal. The following year this deer will produce another musk. If this animal did not have a naval, it would run away. When that navel was taken by hand, it was buried for seven days, then it was opened to produce the musk. From this musk, a soap that never dries out is produced. According to

al-Zuhrī, Sri Lanka produced the most valuable musk in the city of “Boudān”⁷⁰ at the Adams’ peak” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 27).

In al-Zuhrī’s description of deer musk provides a compelling narrative on the diverse range of topographic marvels found in Sri Lanka. The vivid imagery of the musk collection, integral to the island, highlights the island’s exceptional beauty and its topographic wonders. Al-Baṭalyawsī, too, supports al-Zuhrī’s account of the musk deer that emerge in significant numbers from the sea every year for a season. It is said that hunters slaughtered them to find musk in their navel-looking blood, and that it was the best kind of musk in the world. Usually, when these animals get out of their habitats, they produce the scent. It is also said that the farther it goes, the stronger its scent becomes (Al-Baṭalyawsī, 1239/1240, pp. 55-56). One obvious difference between the two writers is that al-Zuhrī relates the musk deer to land-centered *‘ajā’ib* and Baṭalyawsī relates them to sea-centered marvels.

Remarkably, Muslim geographers identify the physical landscape of Sri Lanka as full of *‘ajā’ib and gharā’ib*, primarily based on earth and sea marvels. As established previously, Arab geographers show two distinct varieties of marvels. Topographical (marvels of gemstones) and sacred marvels (marvels of Adam’s Peak) are presented in land (earth) centered *‘ajā’ib* stories. In sea-centered stories, two more categories of marvels were identified, i.e., marvels related to sea-based landmarks and sea species. It is important to

⁷⁰The city “Boudān,” probably denotes present-day Rathnapura, a hill capital in Sri Lanka.

note that most of the discussed stories portray Sri Lanka as a place of intrigue for travelers who voyaged across the seas as exemplified by al-Ḥijāzī (year). They collected plausible, adventurous, and marvelous stories regarding the island, and presented these narratives in a positive manner, without giving negative remarks.

3.3. Depicting Religious and Communal Identities: Hindus, Veddas and Buddhists

The identities and images of the three main native ethnic groups of Sri Lanka, namely, Hindus, Veddas, and Buddhists, can be traced based on Arabs' portrayals during the tenth century. The first group is worshippers and ascetics of the Hindu tradition who are either Brahmin or Bikūr. According to al-Mas'ūdī, the Brahmins are predominantly Hindu migrants from India who are of a higher social status and are considered the most honored and respected caste in their society, which follows a strict hierarchy of castes (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1948, p. 93). Two opinion exist on the identity of the Bikūr community. Firstly, Bikūr the possibly belongs to the Polonnaruwa kingdom⁷¹ of Sri Lanka, and they adopted Hindu religious traditions. This community, however, seems to hold a lower rank in the Hindu class structure. Secondly, their identity could be traced to a faction of the Buddhist community who served as the Buddhist monks (Bhikkus) in Sri Lanka, and they were identified as Jain monks (Bhikkus). The second group is Veddas, an indigenous minority community of Sri Lanka, led by a tribal leader known by the title Wanniyalaeto. The final

⁷¹Polonnaruwa is a city which functioned as the ancient capital of Sri Lanka from the 11th to the 13th century.

group is the Buddhists, who are the majority among the population in present-day Sri Lanka. All three communities are categorized as non-Muslims. The following section examines how Arab geographers construct a perception of these different groups, citing various accounts.

3.3.1. Hindu and Vedda Communities

Firstly, the Hindu ascetics, Brahmin, are known for their henotheistic beliefs, civility, and humility in their dealings. This group was the most honored and respected caste in medieval Hindu society. The twelfth-century Spanish geographer Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī⁷² (1080-1170) in his geographic work, *Tuhfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-ʿIjāb*⁷³, a compendium for *ʿajāʾib* stories (Hees, 2005, p. 102), states that Brahmins worship a single deity, known as ‘Brahman,’ while also recognizing other gods and goddesses (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1999, p. 21). Al-Gharnāṭī’s probable identification of the Brahmins by their glamorous dresses and use of fragrances before approaching idols is a sign of the luxurious and elegant life they led (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1999, p. 129). This point is amply supported by Ibn Shahrīyār who notes their civility and advancement, ‘people of this land wear tasteful and beautiful clothing’, a statement that details the civilized status of the Sri Lankan Brahmins (Ibn Shahrīyār, 1908,

⁷²Hees (2005) identifies Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī as a prominent Spanish scholar in the *ʿajāʾib* genre in the eleventh century. Al-Gharnāṭī adds few valuable and advanced data to the account of Ibn Faṭḥ al-Hamadhānī to enrich the understanding of the Sri Lankan “other” (Hees, 2005, p. 102).

⁷³The text was edited and translated into French in 1925, and the book describes four main themes: *jinn* (demons); men, countries and buildings; oceans and aquatic animals; and excavations and graves. G. Ducatez identifies this source as a collection of marvelous stories (Hees, 2005, p. 102).

pp. 5-6). More importantly, al-Gharnāṭī's reference is not limited to their civility as it extends to their modesty of not having intercourse with women, and refraining from eating meat or slaughtering animals, which are some examples of modest behavior in the Hindu religion (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1999, p. 129). Remarkably, depicting Brahmins with humility and civility demonstrates that Muslim geographers admired and had a high regard for the Sri Lankan Brahmins.

Although the 10th century 'ajā'ib writer, Ibn Shahrīyār's depiction of Hindu self-immolation practices shows some negative traits of the 'other', he demonstrates empathy towards the Brahmins who commit self-destruction as a form of renunciation. Evidently, in his *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind*, Ibn Shahrīyār mentions a mountain in Sri Lanka, where an enormous idol in the shape of a Black African (*zinjī*) is found. Ibn Shahrīyār notes that

”إن بأغباب سرنديب بلاد يقال لها أبرير بلد عظيم، فيه نيف وثلاثون سوقا كل سوق منها طولها نصف ميل، وبه الثياب العبية المرتفعة الحسنة، وهل بلد راكب على نهر كبير يصب في بحر الأغباب ولأهل هذا البلد نحو من ستمائة صنم جليلة سوى الصغار، وهو نحو أربعمئة بريد، وبظاهر البلد جبل جبل يجري تحته عين ماء، وإلى جانب الجبل شجرة من نحاس وصفر عظيمة فيها شوك مثل السفافيد أو المسال وبإزائها صنم عظيم، في صورة زنجي عيناه من زبرجد، ولهم يوم عيد في كل سنة عند ذلك الصنم، فيخرجون إليه ويصعدون فوق الجبل فمن أحب التقريب إلى ربه شرب وغنى وسجد للصنم مرارا ورمى بنفسه من فوق الجبل وعلى تلك الشجرة، فينقطع منها قطاعا، ومنهم من يرمي بنفسه على دماغه فوق حجر يجري، عليه ماء العين تحت الصنم الأسود فيطحن فوق الحجر إلى نار الله.“

“[i]n the basin of *Sarandīb*, a great country, situated a city called *Ibrīr*. It has thirty-three markets, each market being half a mile long. The people of this land wear elegant and beautiful clothing. The city is situated near the large river that flows into the sea of *Ibrīr*. The inhabitants of the city worship around six hundred big idols, besides the smaller ones. The city has around four hundred temples, and on the outskirts, there is a mountain with a flowing spring underneath it. Beside the mountain stands a massive tree made of brass and iron, with thorns like spears or spear grass, and near it, there is an enormous idol in the shape of Black African (*zinjī*) with eyes made of the white of an egg. Every year, they celebrate a festival in honour of this idol. During the celebration, they gather around the mountain, and whoever desires to get closer to their deity will drink, sing, and prostrate themselves before the idol. Then they throw themselves from the top of the mountain onto the tree, where their bodies are shattered into pieces. Some of them throw themselves on a stone that is washed by the water of the spring beneath the black idol, and their bodies go into the hellfire” (Ibn Shahrayār, 1908, pp. 5-6) .

Ibn Shahrayār expresses his amazement at the prominence of the Sri Lankan markets in trading of cloths, as evidenced by his statement that Sri Lanka had thirty-three markets, and each one was half a mile in length which facilitated the trading. Then he turns his description towards the idols he saw on the outskirts and the religious rituals associated with idol worship. Ibn Shahrayār portrays an image of the Hindu religious practices of idol worship and self-immolation rituals. In the passage, he compares the big black Krishna idol to the shape of a native African. In addition, he goes on to state that every year, Hindu devotees

climb a nearby mountain to approach their God, drink, sing, and bow down multiple times before the idol, before throwing themselves down from the peak to be torn into pieces or jumping off the cliff facing a large stone under the black idol to sacrifice themselves in front of the deity, subsequently reaching the hellfire of God (*Nār Allāh*). It is worth mentioning that self-sacrifice or suicide was allowed under certain circumstances in ancient Hindu traditions, but only in the final phases of spiritual practices, as the final act of renunciation. In some Hindu sects, the self-sacrifice of the body by a devotee to a personal deity was practiced as the highest form of devotion. Importantly, regardless of whether the story is true or not, the images created by Arabs of the trading activities in Sri Lanka are captivating. Precision and detail in both these descriptions suggest the importance of the subject to the author and that he has a deep desire to persuade the reader to imagine the scene as it was, or perhaps even better than it was.

Two centuries later, Ibn Faḍlullāh al-‘Umrī (1300-1349), in his scant geography, describes the idols found in Sri Lanka. Though his descriptions are more or less similar to Ibn Shahrīyār’s descriptions, his descriptions are laced with negative commentary. Yet, both Ibn Shahrīyār and al-‘Umrī have written similar texts with a slight difference in sentences but without much difference in meaning. In fact, al-‘Umrī’s text resembles Ibn Shahrīyār’s narrative of self-immolation practices of Hindus in Sri Lanka. This is not a sign of imitation, but it reflects Ibn Shahrīyār’s influence on his successors (Al-‘Umrī, 2010, p. 201). Both Ibn Shahrīyār and al-‘Umrī imply that the big idol resembles a native African, which can

be construed as a personal negative remark added when describing the idol. But this remark is not aimed at demonizing the Sri Lankan ‘other’ because the aim of the author appears to be showing his empathetic stance towards the self-immolation practices of the Hindu communities in Sri Lanka.

It needs to be noted how both writers’ portrayal of Sri Lankans had been associated with cultural images of their society to shape their perspectives on Sri Lankan society. Phrases like “*Nār Allāh*”, and “*Zinjī*” clearly distinguish Arabs from the idol worshipping Hindu devotees. It is important to note that Ibn Shahrayār and al-‘Umrī use the term “*zinjī*” as a simile (*tashbīh*) to compare the appearance of the idols to native Africans. In fact, their usage of *Nār Allāh* may serve as an unfair cultural verdict from both writers showing displeasure over the self-immolation practices of Hindu devotees. However, this term is not used in a derogatory sense, but rather to show their pity and sympathy for the Hindu idol worshippers in their overall neutral perceptions.

Being an Andalusian geographer from Gharnāṭā (Granada), a city in present-day Spain, al-Zuhrī shows a substantial knowledge and awareness of the Sri Lankan religions and cultures especially that of Hindu religious pilgrimages, practices, and events. His compendium uses a different term to identify Brahmins in Sri Lanka. He refers to the Sri Lankan Hindu people as *al-Sārima*, which is a new term because no other Arab writer uses this name to identify the Sri Lankan Hindu people. Al-Zuhrī states that

“A group of people called *al-Sārīma* who are Hindu worshippers (‘Ubbād al-Hind) reside in this mountain” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 28).

Remarkably, al-Zuhrī uses eyewitness accounts frequently employing first-person language, such as “I saw,” and “I observed,” in his text (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 95). However, there appears an issue in the usage of terminology. The term used by the al-Zuhrī comes from his own understanding because Arab writers such as al-Idrīsī, al-Shahrastānī, al-Qarnāfī, al-Umrī, and al-Dimashqī use *al-Barāhima* (Brahmins) to denote the Sri Lankan Hindu community. Al-Idrīsī in his *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq Fī ‘Ikhtirāq al- Āfāq*, identifies the Hindu (Indian) worshippers as Barāhima (Brahmin) (Al-Idrisi, 2002, p. 73). It is not clear whether al-Zuhri’s use of *al-Sārīma* (الصارمة) is related to the concept of *Ṣārīma* (قوانين صارمة) (Al-Shahrastani, 1992, p. 706). Al-Shahrastānī, in his *Kitab al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal* traces the ancestry of *al-Barāhima* (Brahmins) to their ancestor Barhām, who rejected the prophethood outright (Al-Shahrastani, 1992, p. 706). According to al-Mas‘ūdī, King Brahman and his children were known as ‘Brahmans’. In his view, both male and female Brahmins wear a yellow thread around their necks, which symbolizes them as carriers of swords to distinguish them from others. He reports that during the period of King al-Brahman, seven wise men (*ḥukamā’*) gathered in the golden house (*al-Bayt al-Dhahab*) and discussed the story of the world and its secrets, “from where we originated, and to where we go” (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, p. 93).

The two texts by Al-Zuhrī demonstrate the economic status and religious rituals of Brahmins. The first text specifies that Brahmins were wealthy Hindu devotees who voyaged to pay homage to a particular deity and perform rituals. As al-Zuhri puts it,

“[i]t is reported to us (*akhbaranā*) by al-Hajj Abu Muhammad al-Baṭṭāṭ in the Mosque of Al-Mariya (*Jami’ al-Mariyya*) that, in the year 534, he saw this idol and noticed the Hindu people (*Ahl al-Hind*) coming to see it through their journeys which took between twenty to forty days. Among them (*wa minhum*) some come to this idol using their stomach in honor of the idols. I asked him how it was. May God have mercy on you (*rahimaka Allah*). He replied yes and said, surely these (*Ha’ulā’i*) people come as I have described them as rich (*wa innahum qawm aghniya’*) who have slaves, so they bring slaves with them. Each one has an Indian reed, thirty to forty cubits, an ancient measure of length, approximately equal to a forearm in length, which is 44 cm in present-day scale. The man places his forehead at the beginning of the reed and walks until he completes one and enters the second. The first is taken and returned to him from the front, so he remains like that until he reaches the fetish. He stood on the reed and pulled on his back as the first act until he reached that idol” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 29).

Not only does Al-Zuhrī inform the readers that Brahmans were an affluent community during his time by employing phrases like *aghniyā* (rich) and *‘abīd* (bringing slaves), he also demonstrates that they were different from his Islamic identity by using phrases like *Raḥimaka Allah* (God have mercy on you), and mentioning the mosque of al-Mariya (*Jami’ al-Mariyya*) to inform us about his Islamic identity. He also uses phrases such as *minhum* (among them), *Hā’ulā’i* (they), and Hindu people (*Ahl al-Hind*) to remark on his non-Muslim counterparts. Though he shows differences between him and the ‘other’, his descriptions of the Hindus are devoid of any derogatory identifications.

Al-Zuhri’s second text explains the rituals associated with religious practices, including *Kavadi* ceremonies. Al-Zuhri writes:

“The narrator informed me that among them are people who pierce holes in their arms and insert long sticks into them. [They pierce themselves] with the citron-dredger, and they put on the heads of those sticks plates with oil and fire like torches with which they walk day and night. In some cases, they die when they overdo it” (Al-Zuhrī, n.d., p. 29)

As described by Naidoo (1981), the popularity of Lord *Muruga* as a deity in the Hindu religious traditions is unquestionable. The worship of Lord *Muruga* takes many forms, and one of the most important aspects of this celebration is connected to the *kāvadi* (dance).⁷⁴

⁷⁴This is a Hindu religious dance called “*Kāvadi*,” which has been practiced for a long time by Hindu devotees.

This festival celebrates the power of Lord *Muruga* appraising his name and eulogizing his exploits. People participate in the worship for greater mental, spiritual, physical, and even material benefits (Naidoo, 1981, pp. 03-04).

Al-Zuhrī describes the idols in *Sīr*, a city in Sri Lanka, worshipped by the Indian (Hindu) people, and the text subtly marks a distinction between Muslims and idolaters though the description remains unbiased and non-discriminatory. Al-Zuhrī's portrayal of *Kavadi*, for instance, is a neutral description because he merely explains what is unfamiliar to him. This dance is associated with piercing holes in arms and inserting long sticks into them, sticking them with the citron-reader, and placing on their heads the sticks' plates of oil to make fire. The dancers walked day and night while carrying these plates of fire on their heads. Al-Zuhrī records that due to the fire, their bodies were burnt sometimes, and some of them died because of overdoing it, in honor of the deity. He attempts to explain what is unfamiliar to him and shows his sympathy for those devotees who die due to this practice, but his description is devoid of any derogatory remarks.

Al-Zuhrī's adherence to Islām, coupled with his preference for Andalusian norms serves as the criteria to distinguish between his Islamic "self" and the non-Islamic "other." The identification of his "self" revolves around the acceptance of Allah and becoming a Muslim, and the non-Islamic "other" has been linked to idol worship or polytheism, which is contradictory to his monotheistic belief. Al-Zuhrī develops a grid to differentiate between him and the 'other' on certain levels, for instance, Allah (monotheism) vs. Idols

polytheism); and Muslim (believer) vs. idolator (infidel). Yet, the description is matter of fact and devoid of negative portrayal of the ‘other,’ which indicates that the author does not discriminate against the ‘other’ based on their differences.

For al-Zuhrī, the Sri Lankan non-Muslim people were the “other” in ethnic, linguistic, social, religious, and cultural terms. Al-Zuhrī adopted Islam, a different religion from his counterparts, in this case the Hindus, who embraced Hinduism as their religion by birth. However, the understanding of the “other” between al-Zuhrī and the Sri Lankan people was not antithetical to each other. Al-Zuhrī never directly engaged with the Sri Lankan non-Muslim, i.e., the “other”. Therefore, his understanding of the Sri Lankan people comes from the oral transmission of narratives which he gathered from other geographers and travelers. It seems that his intention is to present a subtle portrayal of the “other” to his Arab readers. It is significant to note that he does this without demonizing the “other”, and without creating an antithesis to the “self”. Having amassed substantial knowledge of the Sri Lankan Hindu pilgrims and worshippers, Al-Zuhrī has consistently refrained from portraying them in a negative light despite their differences.

In sharp contrast, Arab geographers depict Brahmins in a completely different light from the Vedda populace, who are portrayed as uncivilized and barbaric. Al-Gharnāṭī notes that the Sri Lankan Vedda community is “cruel” and “nude” and flee from other people when they see them. He further adds that their height is around six feet, and their bodies are covered with hair which protects their nudeness. According to him, their food is fruits, and

they lie down on trees using only their hands (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1999, p. 22). Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī's depiction is supported by 'Alī ibn Mūsā Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn⁷⁵ (d.1286) whose newly discovered geographic work *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'ah*⁷⁶ arguably records the nudity of the Vedda people of Sri Lanka, which is different from Ibn Shahrāyār's narration who links the "nudity" to Bikūr inhabitants.

Although al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn's text is brief, he presents his account with an annotated map like those produced by al-Idrīsī (d. ca 1165). Another important aspect of his work is his knowledge of the Sri Lankan indigenous sources such as *Ramayana*, which shows his adept use of indigenous sources. This aspect lends his work a higher level of versatility when compiling the compendium (Nūr al-Dīn, p. f.25). Further, his compendium is not a production of 'ajā'ib but is a work that falls within the domain of geography. The manuscript of al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn states that

“وفي أطرافها العراة الذين يثبون على الشجر”

“[i]n the outskirts of Sri Lanka, nudes who jump into trees, live” (Nūr al-Dīn, p. f.25).

⁷⁵'Alī ibn Mūsā Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn's (d.1286) unedited manuscript titled *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'ah al-Ma'mūra Wa Anhāruhā Wa Alwānu Makhluqātihā Wa Jibālīhā Wa Mudunihā Wama Yahduthu Min al-'Ajā'ib Wa al-Gharā'ib* was found in the British library. The earliest-known copy of this geographical manual, written after 1260 by Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Muḥammad ibn ad al-Malik ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī al-Andalusī al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1286). The present copy can be dated to around 1300 based on a collation note on folio 99v which gives the date 700/1300-01. The text was copied by Muḥammad ibn al-Mu'ayyad.

⁷⁶Nūr al-Dīn's geography has been developed based on Ptolemy's Geography. This fact is evident when he begins his work referencing al-Khwārizmī to elucidate the world by bringing a simile to the shape of a ball, citing that the Earth is in the middle of the sky and it is like the shape of a ball” (Nūr al-Dīn, p. f.25)

Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn gives some insights to construct an image of the Vedda. With its references to nudity and habitats of the Vedda community, this text shares an element of intertextuality with earlier texts by Abū Ḥāmid al-Qarnāṭī. Though writers including Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn, Abū Ḥāmid al-Qarnāṭī, and Ibn Shahrīyār allude to nudity, the distinction in the works of Nūr al-Dīn and Abū Ḥāmid al-Qarnāṭī lies in the fact that they specifically ascribe nudity to the Vedda community, who are an Indigenous population, and speak different language than the language used by the majority of Sri Lankans of the time. Ibn Shahrīyār refers explicitly to the Hindu community of Sri Lanka and highlights them as affluent and civilized. But Ibn Suhrāb's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'ah Ilā Nihāyat al-'Imāra*, which is a geographic account of the tenth century, confirms Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn, citing evidence that Sri Lanka is the island of the nudes (*Jazīrat al-'Urāt*) (Suhrāb, 1929, p. 79).

‘Alī Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mas‘ūdī⁷⁷ (896-956), being a tenth-century Shī‘ī⁷⁸ geographer, casts a curious eye on the Vedda community. It is possible that his understanding of the Vedda people is probably a result of his adaptation of Ptolemy's geography. Like Ptolemy, al-

⁷⁷‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Hadhālī has been identified as al-Mas‘ūdī. His nickname is Abū al-Ḥasan. Al-Mas‘ūdī learned many different branches of knowledge including sciences of the Holy Quran and Hadith (‘Āṣī, 1993, p. 49).

⁷⁸It seems that al-Mas‘ūdī is a scholar who is connected to Shī‘ī ideologies and traditions. His attachment to Shī‘ī tradition appears when he uses the phrase *Karramallāhu Wajhahu* after the name of Caliph ‘Alī, simply an expression that the *Shī‘i* texts frequently use (Al-Mas‘ūdī & Akhbār al-Zamān, 1938, p. 11).

Mas'ūdī identifies the Sri Lankan people as the descendants of *al-Nisnan*.⁷⁹ According to him:

“In this green sea (*al-Bahr al-Akhḍar*), twenty-seven islands both inhabited and uninhabited exist. In one of the islands, people from the descendent of *al-Nisnas* (النسنان) live. They use the tree of al-lub, they eat its fruits, wear its leaves and eat meat of animals” (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1948, p. 28).

In the eyes of al-Mas'ūdī, the Sri Lankan *ajnās* (people) were people who wore leaves as clothing and consumed food like meats and fruits. This is a clear sign of his presence in the island. Although al-Mas'ūdī seems to construct an obvious alterity of the Sri Lankan “other”, he did not intend to demonize them, and his intention is to express his pity and compassion towards this primitive community of the island, who lived in forest areas, avoiding strangers.

Notably, Ibn Shahrīyār offers fundamental information regarding the Bikūr, a subsection of the Hindu community in Sri Lanka during the 10th century. He identifies them with uncivilized behavior, associating them with nudity and barefooting to invoke pity on this community. Ibn Shahrīyār notes:

⁷⁹Monopods means “one-footed” and “shadow-foot”. They were mythological dwarf-like creatures with a single large foot, extending from a leg attached to the middle of their bodies.

”ذكرت في فصل قبل هذا أمر عباد الهند وزهادهم وهم عدة أصناف منهم البيكور وأصلهم من سرنديب وهم يحبون المسلمين ويميلون اليهم ميلا شديدا وهم في الصيف عراة حفاة لا يسترون بشيء وربما جعل الواحد منهم على سواته خرقة أربع أصابع في مثل ذلك مشدودة بخيط على في الوسط وفي الشتاء يتشحون في الحصر الحشيشة ومنهم من يلبسون الازار مرقعا من كل لون على لون المرقعة للشهرة ويلوثون أبدانهم برماد عظام الموتى من الهند الذين أحرقوا ويحلقون رؤسهم وينتقون لحاهم وشواربهم ولم يحلقون شعر العانة ولا شعر الإبطين في الأكثر يقصون أظفارهم ومع الواحد منهم قحف رأس انسان ميت يأكل فيه ويشرب على سبيل الاتعاض بذلك والتواضع“.

“In a previous chapter, I mentioned the worshippers and ascetics of Hindu people, who are several types. *‘Bīkūr* is one of them. They love Muslims and have a strong inclination towards them. During the summer, they are naked (*‘urāt*) and barefoot (*hufāt*), not covering themselves with anything. Some of them may wear a four-fingered rag that is tied with a string in the middle. In the winter, they wrap themselves in hashish sacks, and some of them wear patchwork loincloths of assorted colours. They defile their bodies with ashes of dead bodies that have been burned, and they shave their heads and remove their beards and mustaches. They do not shave their pubic or armpit hair, and they usually trim their nails. One of them may even have the skull of a dead human being as a bowl for eating and drinking, as a lesson in humility” (Ibn Shahrāyār, 1908, p. 117).

Ibn Shahrayār clearly identifies '*Bīkūr*' society as Hindu idol worshippers, who are religiously and culturally different from his Islamic "self". His description of them as a community that loves Muslims and has a strong leaning towards them is an obvious indication of his sympathetic and friendly stance in this text. This helps overcome any sense of alienation the reader might experience when reading about their practices, which are different from those practiced by Muslims. Remarkably, the practices of nudity and walking barefooted were a point of difference that drew Ibn Shahrayār's attention to the *Bīkūr* community. Wearing fore lap, shaving their heads and beards while keeping unshaven pubic and armpit hair are some physical attributes that distinguish his Islamic "self" from the non-Islamic "other". Even the practice of using a skull as a bowl is shown as a sign of humility rather than a barbaric practice. All these behaviours of *Bīkūr* are different from the Brahmins, who were shown as a civilized people by Ibn Shahryar.

Hermes (2012) argues that al-Mas'ūdī believes in the impact of climatic factors on the characteristics and habits of the people in the lands of the Franks and the Slavs in Europe. Hermes notes:

"The extreme cold, the abundance of snow, and especially the scarcity of sunlight enormously affected the people living in this northern quadrant. This manifested itself in several physical and linguistic defects (*naqa'id*), such as lack of humor, largeness of bodies, extreme skin whiteness, heaviness of tongue, coarseness of language, and lack of firmness in matters

of religious beliefs. He ends the passage by concluding that the farther people settled in the extreme north of the northern quadrant, in reference to *ahl al-shamal*, the more stupid, harsh, and barbarian they become”. (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1938, p. 47; Hermes, 2012, p. 48).

Evidently, Al-Mas‘ūdī believes that defects such as lack of humor, largeness of bodies, extreme whiteness of the skin, and heaviness of the tongue, which were common among European people were due to climatic factors such as extreme cold and snow, and the scarcity of sunlight. However, al-Mas‘ūdī does not display such an attitude towards the Sri Lankan people. In fact, al-Mas‘ūdī does not attribute any such demerits resulting from climatic factors to Sri Lankans. However, he gives the Sri Lankan Bīkūr community a racial identification in his most authentic book, *Kitāb al-Murūj*. Moreover, Al-Mas‘ūdī comments that Sri Lankan men have rather feminine features because they do not have beards, and they are shy of appearing in front of others. Al-Mas‘ūdī writes:

“In this island, a tribe of yellow colored people without beards live wearing dresses like females.⁸⁰ They are hesitant to attend gatherings because they are sensitive when traders occupy the harbour for a period. Then these people do not bring cloves because they are shy of the people whom they watch.

⁸⁰Al-Mas‘ūdī believes that a male should have a beard as this is a feature of a medieval Muslim man. This feature reflected in al Mas‘ūdī’s remarks on the Sri Lankan men because they do not have beards. This distinguishes an Islamic self based on the appearance of a Muslim and a non-Islamic other.

Their clothes are made of leaves, and they cover their bodies without showing them to others” (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948).

Al-Mas‘ūdī’s Islamic ‘self’ identifies males with a beard and their female counterparts without it. Based on Islamic traditions, he may have assumed that Sri Lankan men also had beards. The absence of beards on their faces therefore made him identify the Sri Lankan men as effeminate. His observation of the Sri Lankan people, who wore attires made of leaves, makes him pity the Sri Lankan *ajnās* (people). In addition, there are a few questions that need answers: is it justifiable for al-Mas‘ūdī to make a subjective judgement on the Bikūr community based on their shyness? Is every Sri Lankan shy and unsociable? Did al-Mas‘ūdī ignore the variability among the Sri Lankan people? Ultimately, what is al-Mas‘ūdī’s intention in describing the Sri Lankan people with these *naqā’id* (demerits)? The responses to the first three questions seem to be quite objective because al-Mas‘ūdī reports what is unfamiliar to him based on his observation of Sri Lankan society from the vantage point of a Muslim. However, the last question bears relevance for the discussion below.

Hermes (2012) also expresses a similar view as al-Mas‘ūdī when he comments on al-Mas‘ūdī’s negative comments on the European people as ‘beasts’ ⁸¹(*bahā’im*), and

⁸¹Some Western writers such as D’Souza (year), Mona Naggar (year), and Carole Hillenbrand (year) find racism and xenophobia in the work of al-Mas‘ūdī, especially on European people and races. Al-Mas‘ūdī considers the Franks and Slavs as extreme barbarians, as these Arab writers use the term “*bahā’im*,” (beasts) in their accounts (Hermes, 2012, p. 49). However, Hermes contradicts D’souza, Naggar and Hillenbrand and states that these authors failed in their arguments. Hermes states that al-Mas‘ūdī never states the barbarism and lack of civilization in the European continent. Nizar states, “[i]t is true that some medievalist Arabs and Muslims have described certain Europeans as “beasts,” or “*bahā’im*, a description that Bernard Lewis likes to quote whenever he talks about the attitudes of Middle Easterners towards Europeans. The truth lies somewhere else. One must understand the context in which this word, “*bahā’im*” has been used.

barbarians (*wahshī*). Hermes argues that al-Mas‘ūdī’s portrayal is intended to show pity on the European people who led an uncivilized life (Hermes, 2012, p. 49). Evidently, this portrayal is not intended as an insult or a derogatory comment on them. Hermes’ perspective is quite relevant to al-Mas‘ūdī’s comments on the Sri Lankan people as well. This is because al-Mas‘ūdī also uses negative comments on the islanders by way of showing his empathy and pity, rather than for demonizing them.

The main feature in the work of al-Mas‘ūdī is that there are no derogatory remarks on Sri Lankan ethnic groups and religions. Despite the society being composed of diverse religious and cultural groups like Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, there were no conflicts based on religious principles (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, pp. 91-92). Being a Muslim and a practitioner of Shī‘ī religious principles, al-Mas‘ūdī’s identification of Sri Lankans is simply an allegory of the non-Islamic “other”. Further, he identifies that the Sri Lankan society was what Muslims refer to as *kufī* (infidelity), and he also records some non-Islamic religious practices such as funeral rituals including *Sati* and drinking wine (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, p. 99), which are contrary to his Islamic “self”.

Thus, al-Mas‘ūdī distinguishes himself from Hindu individuals who are culturally different from his Islamic ‘self.’ The passages above demonstrate no signs of racism, nor do they

The tone is not that of contempt, but rather of pity. The Arab geographers who used the term were faithful to their rationalist belief” (Hermes, 2012, p. 49). Hermes concludes that it is not the aim of Arab writers to hold Europeans in contempt, as D’souza, Naggar, Hillenbrand and Bernard Lewis believe. Instead, Arab writers showed some sort of pity on the European people of that time.

contain any phrases suggesting derogatory comments on idol worshippers. Additionally, no iconoclastic controversies have been reported in his overall presentation and representation of the island. In addition, his attachment to Shi'ism or mu'tazili principles did not make him project a negative image of the Sri Lankan "other," namely, Muslims who represent a different sect within the Islamic society like Sunni or non-Muslim groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians. This shows that he has transcended racism and prejudices.

The thirteenth century Venetian traveler Marco Polo describes Sri Lankans as "poor" and "cowardly creatures." Although the existing information is insufficient to determine whether Marco Polo traveled to Sri Lanka, his portrayal of Sri Lankans coincided with what was portrayed Ibn Faqīh al-Hamadhānī (d. 951). Marco Polo notes:

"It is governed by a king whose name is Sendernaz. The people worship idols and are independent of every state. Both men and women go nearly in a state of nudity, only wrapping a cloth around the middle part of their bodies. The people of this island are not soldiers, but, on the contrary, are poor and cowardly creatures" (Komroff, 1980, p. 159).

Marco Polo's description generally associates "nudity" as a characteristic of the Sri Lankan inhabitants and does not confirm whether his portrayal pertains to the Hindu community or Vedda people. Additionally, he identified the Sri Lankans as "poor," which denotes his understanding of the island's economic state of affairs. But his usage of the derogatory term

“cowardly creatures” is a cultural verdict and indicates a prejudiced image like the statement of Ibn Faqīh al-Hamadhānī (d. 951), a contemporary of Ibn Shahrīyār, who makes similar commentary on the nakedness and certain traits of the Sri Lankan populace. He not only comments negatively on them but also makes some derogatory remarks regarding the Sri Lankan populace. Al-Hamadhānī notes:

”ومنتهاه ارض سرنديب وسكانه سود قباح الوجوه عراة كالسباع وأعمارهم طويلة ودوابهم وطيورهم
أعظم من عامة البهائم“

“Its end of the land of *Sarandīb*, inhabited by black-skinned people (*Sūd*), with ugly faces (*Qibāh al-Wujūh*), naked (*‘Urāt*) like animals, and they have long lifespans. Their animals and birds are larger than most creatures” (Al-Hamadhānī, 1997, p. 5).

Al-Hamadhānī constructed a negative portrayal of the Sri Lankan “other” by describing them as “black-skinned” people with “ugly faces” who were “naked like animals. In this account, the terms *qabīh* (ugliness), *‘urāt* (nudes), and *sūd* (black-skinned) are clearly associated with the physical appearance of the Sri Lankan populace. Al-Hamadhānī’s remark about “ugly faces” shows a negative perception of the Sri Lankan “other”. Although Ibn Shahrīyār considers Sri Lankans as “nudes”, he does not exhibit any negativity towards them by depicting them as “ugly”, nor does he use any other derogatory terms which signifies a point difference between him and the Sri Lankan non-Islamic “other”. Unfortunately, much like Marco Polo, Al-Hamadhānī fails to indicate

whom he refers to with these derogatory comments—Brahmins or Bikūr or the Vedda population.

Although the themes of ‘nudity’, ‘ugliness’ and being ‘barefooted’, were a point of discussion among Ibn Shahrayār, al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn, al-Hamadhānī and Suhrāb Muṣṭafā ibn Suhrāb vis-à-vis the Bikūr and Vedda communities of Sri Lanka, they clearly avoided these qualities when it comes to descriptions of the Brahmins, who were often characterized as ‘wise’, ‘glamorous’, and ‘wealthy’. Such positive images of Brahmins depicted by Arab geographers including Abu Hamid al-Qarnāṭī, Ibn Shahryar, and al-Zuhrī demonstrate that Brahmins were generally identified as civilized communities.

3.3.2. Buddhist Community

The eleventh century Andalusian geographer Abu Ubaid Al-Bakrī⁸² (1014-1094) provides a portrayal of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in his book titled *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*,⁸³ a comprehensive geographic compendium known for its

⁸²Hailed as one of the prominent geographers of Spain in the 12th century from the city of Seville of Spain, Al-Bakrī remained twenty-five years at the city of Seville, studying and researching conflicting geographical theories with other scholars of his time with the support of its ruler al-Mu'tamid Muhammad ibn Abbād (1040-1095) who promoted scientific discussions among Spanish scholars. Al-Bakrī was called as *al-Muḥaqqiq* (investigator) because he did not accept any finding or conclusion without considering concrete evidence.

⁸³His works can be categorized into two major sections: First, literary, and linguistic publications. He published three major works in this field: *al-Iḥsā' Li Tabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*, *Ishtiḳāq al-Asmā'*, *Kitāb al-Shifa' al-'līl al-Arabiyya*, *Kitāb al-'Alī Fī Sharah Amālī al-Qāḍī*. Second: geography and botany. He authored works such as *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*, *Kitāb Mu'jam Mā Ista'jama Min Asmā' al-Bilād Wa al-Mawādi'*, *Kitāb A'yan al-Nabāt Wa al-Shajariyāt al-Andalūsiyya*. (Al-Difā', 1989, p. 138). Although, most of his writings are lost, except for his two colossal works: *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*, (Routes and Kingdoms) and *Kitāb Mu'jam Ma Ista'jama min Asmā' al-Bilād wa al-Mawādi'*. The former analyzes the physical and human geography of the territories in Asia, Africa, and Europe and the latter deduced names for unknown places of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia from old Arabic poems.

methodology and precision of information. However, this account was criticized by Kratschkovsky for its limited scope compared to the *Jazīrat al-Arab* and its uninteresting style of presentation, i.e., deviating from the main theme to discuss unrelated geographic matters (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 275). Despite praising *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*, Gilliot (2006) asserts that al-Bakrī does not appear to have visited Asia or even North Africa. He based his work on *Al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*⁸⁴ by Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Warrāq (d. 973), which is hard to be found at present. According to Gilliot (2006), al-Bakrī included geographic information of kingdoms including distances between towns and posts, and most of his descriptions of towns are remarkably precise. Further, his toponymic material for Muslim Spain, Morocco, Northern Africa etc. is no less worthy of interest and his historical notices and remarks are also invaluable (Gilliot, 2006, pp. 95-96). Despite this limitation, it appears that al-Bakrī is one of the prominent Arab geographers who provided an in-depth knowledge of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community.

The image of Sri Lanka in the eyes of al-Bakrī seems to be more rooted in facts than in fables and fantasy. *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* has been considered a source that depicts the Buddhist community which constitutes the majority community in present-day Sri Lanka. His account resembles the work of Fā-Hien (337-422) in terms of the image of the Buddhist community of the island. Fā-Hien's travel account titled *Memoirs of Eminent*

⁸⁴This book was a principal source for the history of North African countries, including Sudān.

Monks was compiled in 519. Another work was compiled based on the previous work in the 15th century during the period of the third emperor of the Ming dynasty (1403-1424 AD). This was titled *Memoirs of Marvelous Monks* and much of its content had been heavily borrowed from the works of authors that preceded him.

Needless to say, unlike Faxian or Fā-Hien⁸⁵ who traveled to Sri Lanka, al-Bakrī did not undertake a physical journey to Sri Lanka in the 11th century. Tansen Sen claims that Faxian was one of the primary and maybe the most seasoned Chinese priest who traveled to India and Sri Lanka while journeying from the then Chinese capital Chang'an, present-day Xi'an in Shaanxi province (Tansen Sen, 2006, p. 25). The purpose of his trip was to collect religious texts related to the monastic rules including *Vinaya* scriptures needed for the establishment of Buddhist monastic institutions in China (Tansen Sen, 2006. p. 25). Given al-Bakrī did not undertake such a journey to Sri Lanka, his account cannot be considered as an eyewitness account that furnishes direct information on Sri Lanka.

In contrast to Fā-Hien who shows an island without people where only spirits and devil *jinn* live, Al-Bakrī's account furnishes detailed information of the Sri Lankan political, social and cultural lives. Merchants from various countries engaged in trade with Sri Lanka. Fā-Hien notes:

⁸⁵Tansen Sen questions the veracity of date regarding his lifetime spanning from 337 to 422. (Tansen Sen, Winter 2006)

“When the trafficking was taking place, the spirits did not show themselves. They simply set forth their precious commodities, with labels of the price attached to them; while the merchants made their purchases according to the price; and took the things away” (Fā-Hien, 422, quoted in Legge, 1971, p. 101).

This information is similar to what al-Qarnāṭī states in his *Kitāb Mu’rib Fī Ajā’ib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr*. However, al-Bakrī does not recognize the information of Fā-Hien even in the 11th century.

Al-Bakrī, much like Fā-Hien, provides a detailed account of the Buddhist king of Sri Lanka. He notes the name of the king as *al-Bahl*, who could be identified as Vijaya Bahu-I (1055-1110 AC), who reigned with Polonnaruwa as his capital, which is known as the ancient capital of Sri Lanka in the 11th century. While discussing the virtues and defects of the rulers of his time, Al-Bakrī states that the Sri Lankan king drinks alcohol which was imported from Arab lands, and he also allows his compatriots to drink it if they prefer drinking. He further adds that no kings from the Indian subcontinent consumed alcohol, which might be an inaccurate fact (Al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 145). He further notes that *Sarandīb’s* monarchs resided in the city of *Baṭhūr*,⁸⁶ surrounded by two walls and had four entrances. The first gate was on the southern side, and it was called *Bāb Balādij*, which had a large pool to store the rainwater. The second gate was known as *Bāb Hūstah*, and the Christians used this gate

⁸⁶This could be Polonnaruwa, the second capital of Sri Lanka, as mentioned earlier.

to bring their crosses. The third gate was called *Bāb al-‘Ashūr*, and this gate was used to transport the goods of merchants. However, the book does not provide any information on the fourth gate. It is assumed that it can be the gate used by the king for entering and leaving his palace and other administrative matters. This description indicates that Sri Lanka was a trading hub. Al-Bakrī could be referring to King Vijaya Bahu-I, the longest-serving king of the island, who had a strong military in his powerful kingdom.

Unlike Sulaymān al-Tājir, al-Mas‘ūdī and al-Idrīsī who insisted on the promotion of interfaith relationship in Sri Lanka, al-Bakrī accurately identified the religious and cultural images of Sri Lanka during his time. He notes:

“In the city of *Baīhūr* [*Polonnaruwa*], many religious groups resided including Muslims (*muslimūn*), Jews (*al-Yahūdiya*), Christians (*al-Naṣāra*) fire worshippers (*majūs probably* Manichaeans), and dualists (*al-Thanawīyya*). The Buddhist clergy [*Mahānayaka Thero*]⁸⁷ is the closest person to the king among the religious leaders. The king built a house for the use of the Buddhist Thero near his palace” (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 144).

Arab writers before al-Bakrī never mentioned the identity of the Buddhist clergies or their role in the state in their accounts. Given the detailed narratives that al-Bakrī provides, it seems that he might have obtained the information through well-informed sources or would

⁸⁷Sri Lanka being a Theravada Buddhist country, the Buddhist monks have a significant authority in religious affairs.

have undertaken a journey to Sri Lanka. Quite interestingly, al-Bakrī's account did not provide any information on the religious gathering of the different faiths at the king's palaces.

Fā-Hien gives a negative portrayal of Sri Lankan people in his first encounter with Sri Lanka. He describes the Sri Lankan people as the 'wicked nagas,' a derogatory term used for demonizing people. Fā-Hien states:

“When Buddha came to this country,⁸⁸ wishing to transform the wicked *nagas*, by his supernatural power he planted one foot at the north of the royal city, and the other on the top of a mountain, the two being fifteen yojanas apart. Over the footprint at the north of the city the king built a large tope, four hundred cubits high, grandly adorned with gold and silver, and finished with a combination of all the precious substances” (Fā-Hien, 422, quoted in Legge, 1971, p. 102).

Despite al-Bakrī's extensive remarks on the Buddhist king of Sri Lanka, no evidence has been found to suggest the demonization of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka in his *Kitāb al-Mamalik Wa al-Masālik*. This contradicts Fā-Hien's reference to the Sri Lankan people as 'wicked *nagas*', which could be interpreted as a derogatory comment. In addition, although

⁸⁸There is a contention whether Lord Buddha visited Sri Lanka or not. However, the principles of Buddhism were introduced in Sri Lanka by king Asoka's religious mission chaired by his son Mahinda, during the reign of Sri Lankan king Devanampiya Tissa (reigned from 250-230 BC) in Anuradhapura.

al-Bakrī's *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* may not contain his direct observations of Sri Lanka, he furnishes advanced information about the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in the eleventh-century. Thus, the account offers crucial insights to support the views expressed by his predecessors such as al-Mas'ūdī, al-Idrīsī, John Mandeville, and Marco Polo, particularly regarding the religious composition of the country.

Despite the significant time gap between the two writers, Al-Bakrī's account resembles Fā-Hien's description in depicting the Sri Lankan Buddhist, the "other" in his book *Kitāb al-Mamalik Wa al-Masālik*. The former's account is not an eyewitness account, and the latter produced his portrayal based on his travels to Sri Lanka. Though al-Bakrī made extensive remarks on the Sri Lankan Buddhist society, he avoided demonizing the alterity of Sri Lankans, which is not the case of Fā-Hien, who depicted them as 'wicked', which could be interpreted as a derogatory comment.

3.4. Conclusion

For medieval Muslim geographers, Sri Lankans were the "other" in terms of ethnic, linguistic, social, religious, and cultural terms. These two groups did not share commonalities such as having the same religion, language, or culture, which could have provided a potential means of identification and shared experiences. Considering this fact, this chapter examined how Arabs constructed a religio-geocultural image of the island and islanders in three types of geographic literature, specifically *aqālīm*, *ahjār*, and *'ajā'ib* sources. The chapter sought to understand whether Arabs produced neutral and unbiased

attitudes or whether they made attempts at demonizing the “other,” i.e., the non-Islamic population of Sri Lanka.

During the analysis two themes emerged from the sources. The first theme explores how Arab geographers praise and compliment the Sri Lankan geo-cultural landscapes, with captivating *‘ajā’ib* (marvels) and *gharā’ib* (mysteries) stories. Remarkably, Muslim geographers identify the physical landscape of Sri Lanka as full of *‘ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib*, primarily based on earth and sea marvels. Arab geographers show two distinct narrative varieties. The first is the land (earth) centered *‘ajā’ib* stories that contain topographical marvels (marvels of gemstones), and sacred marvels (marvels of Adam’s Peak). The second is the sea-centered stories, in which two more subcategories were identified, namely, marvels related to sea-based landmarks, and marvels related to sea species. It is important to note that most of the discussed stories portray Sri Lanka as a mysterious place to intrigue the readers and encourage travelers to voyage.

The second theme examines how Arab writers perceive various communities in Sri Lanka, including the Hindus, Veddas, and Buddhists. Arab geographers’ portrayals of the native communities of Sri Lanka reflect mixed perceptions. Ibn Shahrīyār (d. 956), al-Zuhārī (d. 1161), and Abu Hamid al-Qarnātī (d. 1170), for instance, depict the Sri Lankan ‘Brahmins’ as civilized, rich, and upper-class Hindu people. However, writers such as al-Hamadhānī (d. 951), Ibn Shahrīyār (d. 956), al-Gharnātī Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1286), and Suhrāb Mustafā ibn Suhrāb perceive communities such as Bīkūr and Vedda as uncivilized, wild, and cruel. In

certain descriptions they use negative descriptors such as ‘nudity,’ being ‘barefooted,’ and ‘ugliness’ to describe Veddas, which displays Arab writers’ negative perception of this indigenous community. These remarks and images are significant because Arab geographers constructed two different perceptions of the Sri Lankan people based on caste and class identification. While they found Brahmins as civilized upper-class people and the other two groups, namely, Bīkūr and Veddas, as uncivilized populace, their portrayal of the third group, i.e., the Buddhist population is muted, ambiguous, and not clearly identified. For example, al-Bakrī, though considered a chief writer on the Buddhist community, only provides a general description of the community, and does not report any detailed accounts of their religious or cultural practices. Similar to the Buddhist community, the image of Muslims (*muslimūn*), one of the migrant groups that settled in the island during the medieval era, does not receive much attention. Moreover, depictions of Jews (*al-Yahūdiya*), Christians (*al-Naṣāra*), fire worshippers (*majūs probably* Manichaeans), and dualists (*al-Thanawiyya*) are also scant and need further analysis and deliberation. These groups were largely identified as commercial traveling groups who came to Sri Lanka before the arrival of the Portuguese in the island.

As the analysis indicates, Muslim geographers constructed a rather neutral portrayal of Sri Lankans that ranges from positive to negative religio-geocultural images. Evidently, they did not reveal any biases or derision towards the non-Muslims of Sri Lanka during the medieval period for two reasons. Firstly, due to the mutually benefiting, strong economic

and political relationship that prevailed between Arabs and Sri Lankans, they were never in an adversarial position that could have led to the construction of a negative image of the “other”. Secondly, the ‘*ajā’ib and gharā’ib*’ stories by Arab geographers were written predominantly to grab the attention of their audiences and promote their compendiums to a wider readership. Therefore, these authors collected plausible, adventurous, and marvelous stories about the island and presented them in a captivating manner without making any derogatory remarks about the islanders.

Most of the geographic literature by Arabs are not direct eyewitness accounts, and this is because the authors from the medieval era relied on travelers for the collection of information. In other words, they depended heavily on other travelers such as merchants, explorers, and writers when collecting materials for their books. The fact that many manuscripts do not exhibit a sense of otherness towards the Sri Lankan society could be attributed to the limited information and lack of firsthand experiences available to most writers. Consequently, they often had to rely on received information without a thorough critical analysis. In most accounts, the writers’ voice is hidden, and it is devoid of any critical comments.

Despite the prevailing medieval Islamic attitudes against idolatry, consumption wine, and nudeness, this perspective was not consistently evident in the narratives of Ibn al-Athīr āl-Jazarī (d. 1233), al-Baṭalyawsī (d. 1239), al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283), and al-Wardī (d. 1349), resulting in a receptive and non-demonic portrayal of the Sri Lankan communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SRI LANKAN OTHER IN ARABIC TRAVEL ACCOUNTS

The previous chapter examined how Arab geographers constructed an image of Sri Lanka in their geographic literature of *‘ajā’ib*, *aqālīm*, and *aḥjār* genres. The chapter concluded that although Arab writers made some negative remarks about the idol worshippers of Sri Lanka, they did not display a derogatory attitude towards the Sri Lankan ‘other’.

This chapter discusses how Arab travelers portrayed Sri Lanka in their traveler accounts during the medieval era. The researcher has divided the chapter into two main parts. The first section draws a comparison between Sulaymān al-Tājir, who undertook a commercial voyage to Sri Lanka, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited Adam’s Peak as a pilgrim. The second part examines the perception of Arab writers about Sri Lankan rulers and envoys who went to West Asia as diplomats. This section mainly considers the stories related to al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa’d, al-Sardārī, and Abul Abbās al-Ḥijāzī.

4.1. Introduction to Travel Texts

Traveling to new frontiers has both positive and negative consequences. People need to travel to obtain firsthand experiences and record eye-witness information, observing diverse territories, societies, cultures and events. Traveling also gives pleasure to a traveler while increasing their understanding of the subjects they are interested in. According to Touati,

medieval ‘men of letters’ traveled for learning, ‘metamorphoses,’ and to promote their ‘scientific institutions’ (Touati, 2010, p.1). Despite the benefits that travel offers, there are certain challenges associated with it. For example, a traveler could face financial difficulties, and in some instances, even face life-threatening dangers during their travels.

Moroccan proverbs underscore the value of travel for understanding the real meaning of life. Edward Westermarck (1930), in his book *Wit and Wisdom in Morocco*, highlights the importance of travel by introducing two Moroccan proverbs. The first proverb reads as follows: ‘Those who do not travel will not understand the truth of the people’, and the second proverb reads ‘Voyage, you will find the truth of life’ (Westermarck, 1930, p. 136). These proverbs highlight that obtaining firsthand information through travel is necessary for understanding the secrets of life conditions and cultural landscapes, and to obtain practical knowledge.

Traveling to seek knowledge has been emphasized in prophetic traditions as well. According to Netton (1996), one prophetic tradition urges the quest for knowledge through voyages even if the journey extends offshore places like China. Netton adds that this directive is not limited to seeking prophetic traditions alone; rather, it includes a broad range of human and natural sciences, including astronomy, medicine, physics, and mathematics (Netton, 1996, p. vii). The justification behind the prophetic emphasis, as argued by Touati,

is that ‘travel and subsequent exile are intellectually fertile’ (Touati, 2010, p. 1) to a traveller.

The journey is undoubtedly an integral aspect of writing narratives. Casey Blanton and Peter Hulme (2013) note that the literary journey is a crucial element for collecting data for recording accounts. According to them, “a piece of work to qualify as travel literature, travelers should undertake a journey” (Blanton and Hulme as cited in Youngs, 2013, p. 4). If someone declares that they traveled to a specific place, only to be discovered later that they never visited there, their report will be omitted from travel narratives and recategorized as imaginative storytelling. Therefore, Hulme concludes that ‘travel writing is certainly literature but is never fiction’ (Blanton and Hulme as cited in Youngs, 2013, p. 5). He further argues that ‘the travelogue must furnish information on a journey that has been undertaken by its author’ (Blanton and Hulme as cited in Youngs, 2013, p. 5) and insists that an author needs to record original firsthand information obtained during their journeys and voyages.

Euben (2008) observes that people travel throughout their lives for several reasons, including literary, touristic, pilgrimage, and commercial motivations. However, traveling in pursuit of knowledge is not limited to any culture or period (Euben, 2008, p. 51). As claimed by Youngs, the recording of travel information started in the third century BCE (Youngs, 2013, p. 19), and Harkūf, a third-century Egyptian traveler and a companion of Pharaohs, was the first voyager to record travels. It is said that he recorded four journeys. The

development of modern travel literature has its roots in ancient travel sources, such as the work of four-thousand-year-old Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia. According to Youngs he undertook this journey in the second century BCE to purify his soul and correct his moral behavior. Gilgamesh also encouraged people to believe in the eternity of God and the unpredictable nature of human life (Youngs, 2013, p. 19). This evidence shows that people embark on journeys for various reasons, ranging from spiritual, political, and a multitude of other reasons.

Maria Pretzler (2007) claims that travel literature originated with the emergence of ‘seafarers’ logs,’ which were maintained to record and furnish information on distances, topography, and ports. Initially, seafarers’ logs served as guides to future oceanic travel. Pretzler (2007) believes these sea-centered travel logs laid the foundation for the emergence of *periplous*, a genre that deals with the coastal zones. She further states that “most periploi are plain lists of places and the distances between them, sometimes with a few added details about settlements or landscapes. Selected explorers used this form to record specific, unique journeys, producing early versions of logbooks or travelogues” (Pretzler, 2007, p. 49). Carthaginian Hanno’s account, which contains information on African coastal lands, is an early account written in the fifth century BCE (Youngs, 2013, p. 20). Another genre, *stadiasmus*, refers to a text written in the fourth century BCE for the purpose of recording names of frontiers one encounters when journeying via overland routes.

Evidently, the first work, *periplous*, refers to sea voyages and the second work, *stadiasmus*, mentions overland travels.

Since traveling to foreign lands played a significant role in ancient Greek culture, Pretzler (2007) observes a connection between the emergence of early travel books and Greek culture. She argues that during the early Greek period, three ideas—*theōria* (traveling to see), *sophia* (traveling to acquire wisdom), and *autopsia* (personal experience)—were frequently used to verify the accuracy of knowledge associated with travels. According to Elsner and Rubies (1999), these ideas show the importance of travel to study and observe unknown territories in the ancient Greek civilization during the second century CE. People undertook travels for ‘antiquarian,’ literary, and touristic interests with a strong emphasis on pilgrimage to ‘oracles, healing sanctuaries, and major temples’ (Elsner & Rubies, 1999, pp. 9-10). More importantly, the odysseys narrated by Homer greatly influenced the literary journeys for nearly 300 years. They revolved around the themes of “terrible danger, exotic others, fantastic creatures, and sexual longing” (Youngs, 2013, p. 20). As argued by Noreen Humble (2011), Herodotus’s *Histories*⁸⁹ provides eye-witness accounts on the war between the Persian empire and Greeks. Humble writes: “The way Herodotus presents his narrative, in particular, his insistence on autopsy (i.e., seeing things for himself), gives the impression that he has traveled widely” (Humble, 2011, p. 14).

⁸⁹Herodotus’ major work is *Histories*, and it was produced in the fifth century BCE.

Similar to Greek culture, traveling was the ‘leitmotiv’ of Islam since its early days. Netton notes that seeking knowledge was a part of medieval Islamic intellectual life (Netton, 1996, p. vii), and Euben (2008) argues that the purpose of travel is to acquire knowledge (*ṭalab al-‘ilm*) of other people rather than finding one’s own culture as a traveler. This view is well-supported by Touati (2010) as well. The importance of travel lies in the exchange and learning among people, and voyaging to other shores is an opportunity to construct identities based on ‘the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ (Euben, 2008, p. 10). Euben shows that the *riḥla* genre functions as a unique genre for exploring the connection between travel and knowledge. In fact, this genre has rarely been explored beyond the Euro-American understanding (Euben, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, like Hermes, Euben also encouraged moving from the essentialized binary opposites initiated by Western theorists⁹⁰ in order to find a mutual ‘other’ in foreign lands (Hermes, 2013, p.37; Euben, 2009, p. 83).

Travel writing primarily contains factual, first-person prose that describes the traveler’s experiences. Generally, this genre contains various forms, such as ethnographies, maritime narratives, memoirs, road and aviation literature, travel journalism, and war reporting. This genre basically depends on eyewitness accounts, whereas other genres like novels and poetry mainly rely on imagination (*khiyāl*) (Youngs, 2013, p. 3). However, the geographic accounts of routes, realms, and territories were initially categorized as travel accounts. This category included geographic compendiums, historical works, ‘*ajā’ib*’ accounts, or similar

⁹⁰ E.g. Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831), Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986), and Edward Said (1935-2003).

genres rather than traditional travel accounts. However, an examination of these geographic accounts shows that travel accounts are totally different from the above-mentioned geographic literature because the former basically depends on direct sight while the latter is generally composed based on *sima*’ (hearing) from others. It is important to note that travel writing is a valuable tool for expressing perceptions related to the “self” and the “other”. This tool enables travelers to construct images and present them to their audience quite accurately.

An examination of early travel accounts composed in the eighth century shows that early Arab travelers probably did not record any information regarding Sri Lanka. Being travelers, merchants, and pilgrims, Muslim geographers and writers went to Sri Lanka to record the information of the islanders’ beliefs, customs, norms, and living conditions. However, most of such travel records are not preserved. For instance, although Mak’khūl (d.730) voyaged to Asia in the eighth century, crossing Sri Lanka. However, his work does not provide any specific information regarding the island. It is the Arab geographer, Ibn Khuzyma (d.857) who recorded Mak’khūl’s voyages in his famous book *Kitāb al-‘Ilm* and informed about this journey to his audience. Similarly, the Omani traveler and merchant Abdullah ibn al-Qāsim went up to Canton in 750 (Kaylāni, 2008, p. 18). Nevertheless, his travels did not provide specific details about the cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka. In addition, Hyunhee Park (2013), in her recent study titled *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds, Cross-*

cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia, refers to Ibn Khurdadhbih's⁹¹ (870-912) voyages to Sri Lanka on his way to China in the 9th century (Ibn Khurdadhbih, H 1306). However, no evidence has been found to suggest that such a journey was undertaken by Ibn Khurdadhbih. It is important to note that Ibn Khurdadhbih's discussion of the Sri Lankan geography is probably not original because his travels were undertaken only in *dār al-Islām*, and he largely depends on ancient Ptolemaic geographical data to write his book, *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik*.

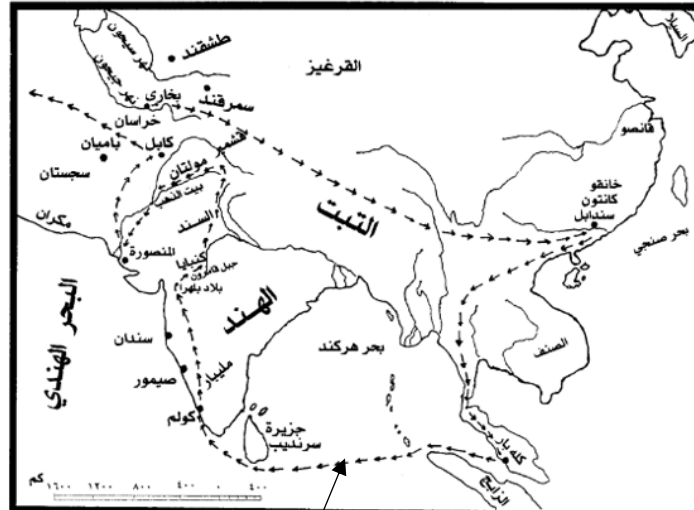
Similarly, Abu Dulaf al-Khazrajī (c.943) undertook two journeys beyond the so-called Islamic heartland (*dār al-Islam*) in Asian lands ('Āsiri, 1995, p. 12). He started his first journey from Bukhara, crossing Turkistan to reach China. Subsequently, he traveled to South India. Then he went to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iran for his second journey in 952. ('Āsiri, 1995, p. 16) According to Morozin 'Āsiri, Abu Dulaf went to learn about the social, economic, and literary position of different countries, reporting back to the empire what he observed in Asia, including marvels of gemstones, herbs, and species. Despite reporting various information about his travels, he does not mention specific details about his first journey. Interestingly, however, he narrates some stories related to his first journey in his second book.

⁹¹He is a ninth-century geographer, and he served as the postmaster general during the Abbasid empire.

Abu Dulaf visited several territories in Asia including China, and India to collect information not only on geographic landscapes but also on cultural domain (‘Āsiri, 1995, p. 19). He not only recorded stories of *‘ajā’ib and gharā’ib* that were collected through direct observation but also gathered practical geographic information from other travelers. Some of his stories fall under the category of *Aṣāṭīr* (legendry), and he presented these stories to make the reader interested in his book (‘Āsiri, 1995, p. 19). Morozin ‘Āsiri, the editor of Abu Dulaf’s book, includes a map of Abu Dulaf’s travel routes, drawn with the support of George Hourani’s (1975) book *al-‘Arab al-Milāḥā Fī al-Muḥīt al-Hindī*. ‘Āsiri consulted other sources including Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Al-Fihraṣṭ*, and William C. Brice’s⁹² (1921-2007) book titled *An Historical Atlas of Islam* to draw this map, tracing Abu Dulaf’s journey through Sri Lanka.

⁹²British ethnographer and linguist, William C. Brice believes that Abu Dulaf crossed Sri Lanka on his way to South India.

Figure: 4.1. Morozin ‘Āsiri’s Map of Abu Dulaf’s Travel Routes



The Line Arrow shows the route used by Abī Dulaf in his travel to Asia.

Morozin ‘Āsiri, *Al-Risāla al-’ ūlā Li Abī Dulaf al-Khazraji*.

Remarkably, ‘Āsiri’s map shows that in his first journey Abu Dulaf crossed Sri Lanka on his way back to South India. Hence, Morozin ‘Āsiri’s claim would be correct. However, he did not mention the locations Abu Dulaf visited in Sri Lanka or any other landmarks in the island that he came across. In addition, his book does not give any insights into the Sri Lankan people by way of Abu Dulaf’s perceptions and ideas.

Since the ninth century, several travelers have described their travel experiences related to Sri Lanka. These journeys were occasionally driven by commercial pursuits such as the journey of the ninth-century merchant Sulaymān al-Tājir to Sri Lanka in 851. Some travelers

were motivated for religious reasons. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, for instance, undertook a journey to Sri Lanka to visit Adam's Peak. Other travelers including al-Mas'ūdī and al-Birūnī aimed to record the anthropology of Indic people including the inhabitants of Sri Lanka. Evidently, Muslim travelers explored frontiers beyond *Dār al-Islam* for religious, anthropological, and commercial purposes.

Table: 4.1. List of Prominent Arab Travelers to Sri Lanka (8th to 14th century)

Arab Travelers/Merchants to Sri Lanka						
Traveler	Era	Reporting Source	Travel er Home	Identity	Reason for journey	Ruler involved
Al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa'd (c.100/718)	8 th century	Al-Gharūlī (d. H 815), <i>Maṭāli' al-Budūr Wa Manāzil al-Surūr</i> .	Kūfa/Iraq	Muslim/ <i>Ḥanaḥī</i>	Unknown	Probably, King Manavamma who reigned from 691 to 726 in Anuradhapura.
Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851)	9 th century	Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851) <i>Akhbār al-Ṣīn Wa al-Hind</i>	Sirāf/Persia	Muslim	Trade	Probably King Sena-I who reigned from 846 to 866 in Anuradhapura.

Anonymou s Baṣrī person	9 th century	Abū Ḥanīfa al- Dinawārī (828- 896), <i>Kitāb al- Nabāt</i>	Baṣra/ Iraq	Muslim	Trade	Probably, King Aggabodhi IX was in Anuradhapura. (846 to 866)
Al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956)	10 th century	Al-Mas‘ūdī (896-956) <i>Murūj al- Dhahab</i>	Iraq/ Egypt	Muslim/ <i>Shī’a</i>	To study the characterist ics of people.	Probably, King Kassapa IV, who reigned from 912 to 929 in Anuradhapura.
Muhamma d ibn Aḥmad al- Maqdisī (945-991)	10 th century	Al-Maqdisī, <i>Aḥsan al- Taqāsim Fī Ma‘rifat al- Aqālīm</i> , compiled in 1300	Jerusal em	Muslim	To study <i>Buldān and Aqālīm</i> (territories and climes)	Unknown
Al-Birūnī (973-1048)	10 th century	Al-Birūnī, <i>Kitāb al-Birūnī Fī Taḥqīq Ma Li al-Hind</i>	Khware zmian	Muslim	To study the anthropolo gy of	Unknown

					Indian people	
Al-Sardī (d.1027)	11 th century	Abū Ubayd Al-Bakrī (1040-1094), <i>Kitab al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik</i>	Bukhār a	Muslim/ <i>Ḥanafī</i>	Trade/ Service providing (transport)	Probably, King Mahinda who reigned from 1001 to 1029 in Anuradhapura.
Abul Abbas al-Hijāzī (c.1118)	12 th century	Al-Gharnāṭī (1080-1170), <i>Tuḥfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-ʿIjāb</i>	Yemen	Muslim/ No madhha b	Trade/ Service providing (transport)	Probably, King Vikramabahu I who reigned from 1111 to 1132 in Polonnaruwa.
Shamsuddīn al-Dimashqī (1256-1327)	13 th century	Al-Dimashqī, <i>Nukhbat al-Dahr Fī ʿAjāʾib al-Barr Wa al-Baḥr</i>	Damas cus	Muslim	To study <i>Buldān and Aqālīm</i> (territories and climes)	Unknown

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1369)	14 th century	Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, <i>Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār</i>	Tangier Morocco	Muslim/ <i>Mālikis</i> <i>m</i>	Pilgrimage/ Embassy	King Aryacakravarti (c.1344) who ruled Jaffna Kingdom during Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's visit.
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This table shows two significant points. First, albeit being prominent voyagers in the Indian Ocean, travelers such as al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa'd (c.100/718), al-Sardārī (d.1027) and Abul Abbas al-Ḥijāzī (c.1118) did not produce unique accounts based on their travels. Secondly, Muslim travellers went to Sri Lanka for four key reasons. Trade was the main reason for these voyages, but they also visited the island to collect data for their geographical and anthropological accounts. Another reason is religious pilgrimages like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travel to Adam's Peak. Finally, narrators (*muḥaddithūn*) traveled to Asia for the collection and verification of prophetic traditions. Notably, Ibn Rustah reports that Ibn Munda⁹³ (H.310-395) traveled to Cambodia (*Qimār*) and stayed there for two years. But his record does not show any travels to Sri Lanka undertaken by Ibn Munda or Ibn Rustah. Yet, Ibn Munda describes an episode of a Sri Lankan king who consumed wine, and he allowed his people to drink it as well (Ibn Rustah, 1891, pp. 132-133).

Ibn Munda states:

⁹³Al-Dhahabi mentions in his *Siyar 'A'lām al-Nubala'* that Ibn Munda was a traveler and a *muḥaddith*. His full name is Abū Abdulla Muhammad ibn Ishāq ibn Muhammad.

“I observed Indian traders who do not drink alcohol. They produce vinegar from drinks and the water of cooked rice. When a Muslim drinks wine, he is considered [...] vicious, and people generally do not care for him. At times, they demoralize him saying this person does not have dignity in his country nor follows his religion (Ibn Rustah, 1891, pp. 132-133).

No specific information exists to prove Ibn Munda’s travel to Sri Lanka except his statement about the island. Likewise, it is clear that al-Maḡdisī also traveled to Sri Lanka. However, he does not leave any record of his voyage in his *Kitāb Aḥsan al-Taḡāsīm Fī Ma’rifat al-Aḡālīm*. His reference only cites the distance between Sri Lanka and *Sandān* as ten *marāḡil*, a unit of measurement used by Arabs (Al-Maḡdisī, 1906, p. 486).

Furthermore, Kaylānī believes (2008) that al-Idrīsī, Ibn Ḥawḡal, and Ibn Sayid al-Maḡhribī traveled to Sri Lanka (Kaylānī, 2008, p. 18). Yet, although Ibn Sayid al-Maḡhribī’s (1958) work *Kitāb Baṣṭ al-Arḡ* provides significant information on Sri Lankan geography, it does not show any evidence to claim that he physically ventured into the island. Similarly, despite extensive travels throughout the Islamic heartland to collect geographic materials, Ibn Hawḡal (1872) does not provide any information of his voyages to Sri Lanka in his either of the two major surviving works by him *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* and *Kitāb Surat al-Arḡ*. Thus, it can be argued that neither Ibn Hawḡal nor al-Maḡhribī offers substantial information to confirm their travels to the island.

In this context, Akbar S. Ahmed (1984) argues that Abū Rayḥān Aḥmad al-Birūnī is the first Muslim anthropologist interested in Indology who records information on the religious and cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka. His book titled *Kitāb al-Hind*⁹⁴ is a comprehensive account of his extensive travels in India for thirteen years between 1017 and 1031 (Ahmed, 1984, p. 09). Al-Birūnī combines physical environments with human geography to make his anthropological account of India a specific anthropological account. His description of caste matters such as rites and customs of different castes and women's issues such as matrimony, menstrual courses, embryos, and childbirth suggests that al-Birūnī has thoroughly examined the scope of anthropology. (Ahmed, 1984, p. 09). Similarly, al-Mas'ūdī undertook a journey to Sri Lanka which is evident in his account titled *Kitāb al-Jamāhir Fī Ma'rifat al-Jawāhir*. He states that he reached the island after traveling for fifteen days in the ocean between Jordan and China, and reached the island just as the setting sun shone on the basin of Sri Lanka (Al-Biruni, 1900, p. 281). However, the specific locations that al-Mas'ūdī visited in Sri Lanka remain obscure.

A central question that arises is how these Muslim travelers portrayed their Islamic "self" vs. the non-Islamic "other" in their accounts of Sri Lanka. In order to answer this question, the researcher divided the available literature into two categories. Accordingly, the first section deals with the travelers who provided information on religio-geocultural images of

⁹⁴The full title of his work is *Kitāb al-Birūnī Fī Taḥqīq Ma Li al-Hind*.

Sri Lanka. Two eminent travelers were selected as case studies for this section, namely, Sulaymān al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. The former visited Sri Lanka for commercial purposes, and the latter visited Sri Lanka as a pilgrim keen on going to Adam's Peak to pay homage to the sacred foot. The second section predominantly discusses the political landscape of Sri Lanka, while potentially examining the images portrayed by Arab writers of the Sri Lankan rulers and their envoys.

4.2. The Religio-Geocultural Images

4.2.1. Al-Tājir's Mixed Portrayals: From Utopian to Dystopian Reality

Newman (2001) argues that early travels and geographic observations of Arabs served a practical purpose and were undertaken within the *dār al-Islām* well before Sulaymān al-Tājir (c. 851). They were employed to administrate newly acquired regions, facilitate trade, and propagate the Islamic faith. According to Newman, “[w]hile the early geographers were civil servants who wrote in the comfort of their offices, [...] their successors were travelers who ventured out to explore what they had read about or to fulfill a personal wanderlust” (Newman, 2001, p. 197). Newman (2001) clearly demonstrates that the early geographic records served practical needs, and subsequently, travelers voyaged both inside and outside of *dār al-Islām* to advance knowledge and address emerging issues.

Arab writers were first motivated by Ptolemy's conventional geography, which had become available due to translations produced in the 9th century CE. As stated before, the first generation of geographers, including the Persian scholar Muhammad ibn Musā al-Khwārizmī, compiled a geographic manual titled *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ* (Image of the World), using the maps by Claudius Ptolemy (85-165). Like al-Khwārizmī, Ibn Khurdadhbīh (870-912 AD), a ninth-century geographer, adopted Ptolemy's concepts to divide the inhabited world into seven separate provinces. Yet very few travels were undertaken in the ninth century outside the *dār al-Islām*. One notable exception is Sallām al-Tarjumān's travel to China undertaken in the 840s, which highlights occasional travels outside the *dār al-Islām*.

It would hardly be an overstatement to assert that al-Tājir is arguably one of the early Arab travelers who embarked on voyages outside the abode of Islam in the first half of the ninth century in order to find the non-Muslim "other" in Asia. According to Hermes, being an early travel memoir, al-Tājir's manuscript is not only reliable but also a fascinating account that summarizes the marvels of India and China (Hermes N. F., 2013, p. 209). Therefore, this account proves that al-Tājir was interested in Asia (up to China) for his commercial and cultural endeavors, which contradicts the claims made by Le Goff (2009) and Touati (2010) on Arabs' lack of interest in the Indian Ocean region during the medieval era.

Yet, there is a debate regarding whether al-Tājir's account is travel literature or fiction. The evidence in the text is not sufficient to suggest that *'Ajā'ib al-Dunya Wa Qiyās al-Buldān* is

an eye-witness account. However, it could be deduced from the book that his stories are written based on his travels to Asia, including Sri Lanka. When he reflects on what Irāqī Muslim traders enjoyed in China during his stay in the city of *Khānfu*, for example, he recounts that Muslim traders participated in a congregational festival prayer and made supplication (*du'ā'*) to their ruler. Additionally, al-Tājir reports that Muslims had someone who could resolve their disputes. It is obvious that without participating in a festival prayer, al-Tājir might not be able to identify the activities performed there and determine the nature of the supplication asked for the Muslim ruler. This remark from al-Tājir could prove that his account is a result of his voyages.

However, al-Tājir's travel account gives scant information about him. Much of the available knowledge about him comes from the Arab geographers who succeeded him. Ibn Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, is one such author who provides some information about al-Tājir in his compendium *Kitāb al-Buldān*. It is also observed that al-Tājir, being an enthusiastic merchant from *Siraf*, probably gave up his initial intention of trading and assumed a new role as a keen observer of the communities of the Indian Ocean (Hermes N. F., 2013, p. 209). Interestingly, Sulayman al-Tājir did not assign any name or title to his book and focused solely on its contents⁹⁵. The content of al-Tājir's work reads as follows:

⁹⁵ A confusion arises regarding the title of al-Tājir's work. Abu Zayd al-Sirāfi (d. 950) initially edited al-Tājir's account naming it *Silsila al-Tawārīkh*. Al-Sirāfi edited the same work under a different name in the year 916 under the title, *Min Akhbār al-Šīn Wa al-Hind*. The modern-day editor Sayf Shāhīn al-Marīkhī have a new edition titled '*Ajā'ib al-Dunya Wa Qiyās al-Buldān*'. Ibrahim Khawrī's edition has been considered as the fourth work titled as *Akhbār al-Šīn Wa al-Hind*. Despite numerous editions and modifications to al-Tājir's work, the account provides the same information.

“Being a precious early work, this book contains a series of chronicles (*Silsilat al-Tawārīkh*), information about countries, seas, and types of fish. It also includes astronomy, world wonders, measurements of lands (*Ajā’ib al-Dunya Wa Qiyās al-Buldān*), particulars related to the inhabited and the uninhabited regions, monsters, and marvels (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 28).

The book has been edited several times, and it is evident that each editor contributed to a separate aspect of the work, assigning a unique name based on their perspectives. This is how al-Tājir’s work acquired different names.

It seems that *Silsilat al-Tawārīkh* comprises two different parts: the first part explains the stories narrated by Sulayman al-Tājir. This section does not specify whose work it is, while the second part is explicitly credited to Abu Zayd al-Sirāfi. In fact, al-Sirāfi investigated the first book because he wanted to verify what he had found about the affairs of the sea and its species. Therefore, it is assumed that the first part of the *Silsila* is al-Tājir’s work, which was reviewed and edited by Abu Zayd al-Sirāfi, and the second part of the *Silsila* is directly written by Abu Zayd al-Sirāfi. This view is well-supported by Hyunhee Park (2013), who argues that *Akhbār al-Šīn Wa al-Hind* (Accounts of China and India) attributed to the Abu Zayd al-Ḥasan al-Sirāfi has two parts. The first part has been copied entirely from Sulaymān al-Tājir, and the second part is done by al-Sirāfi based on the information he collected from other sources (Park, 2013, p. 65).

Sulaymān al-Tājir's Identity

Although the world had numerous great dynasties and kingdoms during his time, al-Tājir identifies himself with his native place, Sīraf, a medieval city in Persia just like Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, a voyager from Tangier, identified himself by his native place. Not only Arab writers followed this practice, but their counterparts, European travelers such as Marcopolo also adopted the same strategy to identify him as Venetian. In this manner, similar to his editor Abu Zayd al-Sīrāfī, al-Tājir identifies himself as Sirafian (Hermes, 2013, p. 209).

Sayf Shāhīn al-Marīkhī (2005), the editor of Sulayman's work *Ajā'ib al-Dunya wa Qiyās al-Buldān*, notes that al-Tājir was a Muslim who showed great awareness of his Islamic traditions, justice system, and the sources of Islamic religion. When he portrays the Chinese legal system, he emphasizes that the Chinese kings appointed a judge in the city of *Khānfu* to run religious and social affairs of the Muslims. However, the Irāqī traders never opposed to any judgment delivered by the aforementioned *qāḍī* (jurisconsult) when he delivered judgements according to the guidance of Allah (Al-Tājir, 851, p. 36). The latest information regarding al-Tājir's praise of God suggests he was a Muslim.

Al-Tājir witnessed certain unusual practices that were entirely different from Islamic values. He observed a clear difference between his Islamic nomoi and the practices of the Indians and the Chinese communities. Al-Tājir informs his audience:

والصين والهند يقتلون ما يريدون أكله ولا يذبحون فيضربون هامته حتى تموت. ولا يغتسل الهند ولا الصين من جنابة وأهل الصين لا يستنجون إلا بالقرطيس والهند يغتسلون كل يوم قبل الغداء ثم يأكلون. والهند لا يأتون النساء في الحيض ويخرجونهن عن منازلهم تفرزا منهم والصين يأتونهن في المحيض ولا يخرجونهن“.

“The people of China and India kill animals when they want to eat. However, they do not do a proper slaughter but kill them by hitting the skull. They do not take a bath after *janāba* (sexual intercourse). Chinese [people] use papers to clean after urination and Indians bathe every day before lunch and then they eat. Chinese [people] have intercourse with menstruating women, while Indians do not involve in such practice, but they make their women leave their homes and maintain a distance from them [during menstruation]”
(Al-Tājir, 851, p. 58).

Thus, al-Tajir identifies himself as a Muslim, and he reports activities that contradict his religious beliefs and cultural norms or are new to him. These include drinking alcohol and the absence of circumcision, intercourse with menstruating women, and not adhering to proper methods of animal slaughter, which are unfamiliar to him and conflicting with the usual values and practices he accustomed to.

Al-Tājir's Odyssey to *Sarandīb*

Al-Tājir's odyssey into foreign lands and unfamiliar territories in Asia, including India (*al-Hind*), China (*al-Šīn*), Sri Lanka (*Sarandīb*), Maldives (*Maldīf*), and Cambodia (*Qimār*) paved the way for the compilation of his travel diary. He started his journey from Sīrāf to India and Sri Lanka through the maritime silk route in 851 CE (Sauvaget, 2009, p. 1). The French Orientalist Gabriel Ferrand states that Sulaymān al-Tājir is an exemplary traveler among the Arab and Persian merchants who engaged in travel to China. He started his sea voyages from Sīrāf to Muscut in the Arabian Gulf and then voyaged to Kollam of Millibar. After that, al-Tājir went to Sri Lanka, crossing the Palk Strait. From Sri Lanka he went to Langablush, a tiny island in Nicobar, crossing the Bay of Bengal. From Nicobar he went to the western coast of Malaysia from where he voyaged to a small city called Tayomin in Malca. Next, he embarked on a journey to Ra al-Qadi Ya'qūb of Sa'ijūn and then *Khānfu* (Guangzhou) in China through the island of Hainan. The travel to China from Sīrāf could take more than four months (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 141), and though al-Tājir did not specify his travel itinerary, he recorded information about the coastal areas he visited, the people he encountered, and the production and commodities he gathered or sold" (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 141).

There is uncertainty about whether al-Tājir traveled to Sri Lanka or if his journey was merely an 'imaginative journey,' to use the phrase of Tim Youngs (2013). In fact, numerous

reasons exist for doubting his *riḥla* and his book, and whether the compilation was done by him or his successor, al-Sīrāfī. Yet, no concrete evidence is available to prove his travel beyond the information his book *Akḥbār al-Ṣīn Wa al-Hind* provides. Ferrand (2021) asserts that al-Tājir undertook a journey to the East, employing the account of Ibn Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, a tenth-century Arab geographer and traveler because al-Hamadhānī uses the phrases “*haddathani*” (he informed me), “*haddatha*” (narrated), “*sa’alnāhu*” (we asked him), and “*dhakara*” (told) to mention the source of information in his compilation, *Kitāb al-Buldān* (Al-Hamadhānī, 1996, p. 1). Al-Hamadhānī’s frequent use of “*dhakara*” which means “to recall past events and experiences”, to cite his source of information from al-Tājir, suggests a direct oral transmission. Considering al-Hamadhānī’s demise in 950 and al-Tājir’s death in 871, there remains only a slim chance for a meeting between the two. Al-Hamadhānī probably saw the travel diary of al-Tājir written in 851 CE. After that, al-Sīrāfī edited this work in the tenth century under the title *Akḥbār al-Ṣīn Wa al-Hind*. In addition, Yousuf al-Hādī, the editor of *Kitāb al-Buldān*, states that *Akḥbār al- Ṣīn Wa al-Hind* is al-Tājir’s original work based on his travels (Al-Hamadhānī, 1996, p. 14). However, according to Yousuf al-Hādī, al-Sīrāfī was neither a traveler nor a scholar. He was a collector of stories both from his native Sīrāf and Baṣra. Further, he met the geographer al-Mas‘ūdī in the year 916. In addition to his contribution to editing al-Tājir’s travel diary, al-Sīrāfī himself compiled a book titled *Silsila al-Tawārikh* (Chain of Histories) on Asia. The information that he presents in *Silsila al-Tawarikh* was primarily gathered from al-Tajir (Kratschkovsky, 1963, p. 143).

Al-Tājir's Romanticization of *Sarandīb*

Al-Tājir is the pioneering scholar who provides a romanticized understanding of Sri Lanka during the ninth century. His predecessors, such as al-Khwarizmī and Ibn Khardhudhbih, presented the practical geography of the island in their accounts. Al-Tājir seems to have presented his views of Sri Lanka with a touch of romanticization, even before Abū Naṣr al-Farābī (872-950), who presented his views on the utopian characteristics of the island in his *Kitāb al-Madīnā al-Fāḍila* (the Utopian city).⁹⁶ Unlike Andaman, a society that al-Tājir perceives as a cultural 'other' for its addiction to cannibalism, he tends to portray Sri Lanka as a wonderland in the Indian Ocean.

Al-Tājir described Sri Lanka as the closest place to paradise on Earth. He names it as *Jazīrat al-Dhibājāt* (Silk Island). He notes that the island was the last and the chief island (*ra's al-Jazā'ir*) in the Indian subcontinent and called it the "Silk Island" (*Jazīrāt al-Dhibājāt*) to denote "silk brocade" (Smith, 2016, p. 9). According to al-Tājir, *Sarandīb* in the Middle Ages possessed some basic traits of a utopian⁹⁷ city (al-Madīnā al-Fāḍila) due to its richness,

⁹⁶Al-Farābī's utopian characteristics includes abundance of resources, unity among population, ideal qualities of the Utopian leaders, and human mobility.

⁹⁷Thomas More (1478-1535) coined the term "Utopia" in 1516 in his book, "Utopia". Before him, Plato (427 BCE -347) initiated this discussion in his "Republic", and then Abū Naṣr al Farābī (872-950) used it. The 10th century scholar Farābī (872-950), in his famous compendium titled *al-Madīnā al-fāḍila* (Utopian city), discusses the characteristics of a Utopian society in detail. Al-Farabi identifies unity, exemplary qualities of Utopian leaders, and human mobility as the primary features of a flourishing Utopian society. His dystopia includes issues such as overcrowding and Thomas More probably developed al-Farābī's idea and introduced it to Europe.

possession of numerous resources, and cultural implications. He describes his fascination under five key points.

Firstly, al-Tājir examines *Sarandīb*’s xenophilia displayed by the selling of luxurious items in medieval commercial trading. Being a place of intrigue for travelers, Sri Lanka supplied pearls, shanks, fragrances, and precious stones. The availability of such valuable commodities indicates that the island was an affluent and wealthy place. In addition to showing the ocean resources of Sri Lanka, Sulaymān exhibits the resources of the inlands. Al-Tājir writes:

”منها مغاص اللؤلؤ بحرها كله حولها..... وحول هذا الجبل معدن الجواهر الأحمر والأصفر
والآسمانجوني.... فيها العود والذهب والجوهر في بحرها اللؤلؤ والشنك“

“Sri Lanka has multiple sites for pearl fishery.... Its mountains yield gems [of] different varieties: red (diamond), yellow (citrine), and pasingal gems.⁹⁸ It has fragrances, gold, gemstones, and pearls and shanks. It also has Āasmānjūnī, a precious stone of high quality. When a person touches it, he will never feel sorrow” (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 32).

Al-Tājir’s statement is a clear portrayal of the island as a source of interest to foreign traders keen on collecting the valuable commodities Sri Lanka offered. According to al-Kindi, the

⁹⁸It is an exceedingly rare gemstone found in Sri Lanka. It is said to exhibit two colors: one color in the daylight and aluminous shade in the nighttime.

most valuable commodity in the world at that time was Sapphire, which shows the thriving economy of Sri Lanka at that time. Al-Tājir writes that when a person touches an Āasmānjūnī, a valuable type of gemstone, their troubles will ease. Hence, this narrative is also an indication of marvels and mysteries of precious stones. Marco Polo, too, offers similar information regarding the gemstones found in Sri Lanka, telling his readers that Sri Lanka had costumes, clothes, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, and jewels of outstanding quality (Komroff, 1980, p. 04).

Secondly, al-Tājir consider Sri Lanka as the sacred geographic space where human beings originated. He records that it is believed that Adam landed on the mountain called *Jabal al-Ruhūn* (Adam's Peak), when he was banished from paradise. This place is not only a sacred space for Muslims as Buddhists and Hindus also venerate the mountain, which resembles the utopian characterization of a united society. It is said that Adam placed one foot on the summit of this mountain, and the impression of this foot measured seventy cubits in length. The other foot is said to have been placed in the sea (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 32).

Thirdly, al-Tajir notes that the people of *Sarandīb* enjoyed their life, often pursuing leisure activities like playing musical instruments like Sank and Buk (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 19). Al-Tājir's statement indicates that people were happy and enjoyed their life, which is another trait of an ideal society. Finally, al-Tajir emphasizes the unity among the Sri Lankan races

and cultures during his time. According to him, interfaith relationships were a distinct feature of Sri Lankan society at that time. Al-Tājir notes:

“Sri Lankan king has religious traditions (*sharī‘a*) and religious elites (*mashā’ikh*). Their gatherings resemble (*majālis*)—the gatherings of eminent scholars of *Hadith* (*muhaddithūn*). Scholars assemble to write on conducts and biographies of their prophets and religious traditions” (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 33).

Al-Tājir was also impressed by the religious freedom that prevailed in the country and the tolerance shown by the rulers towards diverse groups of faith. Al-Tājir’s writes:

“In this island, a large group of Jews and other religious groups live, including dualists. (*thānaviyya*) The king allows each religious or faith group to practice their respective traditions” (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 33).

Notably, al-Tājir not only recognizes his Islamic “self” but provides information on the religious and cultural “others” of the island. When doing so, however, he never made a derogatory comment on the idols worshippers who revered several deities. Al-Tājir notes:

“A big statue, made of bris gold and a big temple (*haikal*), built with a huge money is exciting monuments” (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 33).

In other words, the reference explicitly highlights al-Tajir's excitement about the gigantic idols that he found in Sri Lanka. This shows that he never made a derogatory portrayal of the Sri Lankan idol worshippers, and instead, he showed understanding and tolerance towards the differences of the "other".

Although al-Farābī's utopia is an imaginative perspective, al-Tājir's clever and romanticized portrayal shows a realistic picture of Sri Lanka with distinctive qualities such as abundance of luxurious items, religious harmony, sacred geography, marvels of gemstones, having good living conditions and the leisure to pursue various hobbies. Remarkably, these utopian qualities are narrated in a fascinating way, and these characterizations are important to support that al-Tājir's depiction of Sri Lanka is positive and engaging.

Towards a Dystopian Reality: Adultery and Sati

Sri Lanka is a place where Muslims and non-Muslims intermingle, coexist, and collaborate not only in their trading endeavors but also in other aspects of their social and cultural lives. During his visit to the island, al-Tājir observed all these markers and recorded them in his descriptions. In doing so, his *riḥla* not only shows the utopian characteristics of the Sri Lankan people but also depicts certain undesired realities pertaining to the island, including adultery and *Sati*.

An important aspect of al-Tājir's portrayal is that he perceives Sri Lanka as a home for adultery. Al-Tājir writes in his account:

“Notable illicit affairs among women had been observed in this place. When one of the sea traders invites a daughter of their king for adulteration, the woman will respond with the knowledge of her father. Therefore, [the] elders (*masā'ikh*) of Sirāf prevented their youngsters from traveling to this area” (Al-Sirafī, 1999, p. 83).

It is assumed that this book brings fresh insights into the women's behavior in the country and Sulaymān questions the immoral behavior of the Sri Lankan women. This portrayal has been supported by al-Bakrī, whose portrayal of women closely resembles that of al-Tājir. Al-Bakrī indicates that the Sri Lankan kings allowed adultery to take place in their kingdom, as opposed to the Cambodian king who punished his citizens for drinking alcohol and committing adultery (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 145). As a Muslim, al-Tājir passionately believes that adultery, a practice contrary to his Islamic belief, as a negative action. Similarly, the act of drinking wine is also portrayed as undesirable conduct, something a Muslim observer would never approve of. Through these portrayals, al-Tājir is not only revealing his Islamic identity but also highlighting the stark contrast that he observes between his Islamic “self” and the “others” of the island. Moreover, Ibn Faḍlullāh al-‘Umrī (1300-1349) in his account *Masālik al-Abṣār Fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, supports al-Tājir regarding women's sexual behavior in Sri Lanka and India. He writes:

”إن الزنا لا يتحاشى سائر بلاد الهند. وأن الزنا في كل بلد في أهل بيت بأعيانهم ينسبون فيه فلانة بنت فلانة زانية بنت زانية، فأما من سواهم، فإنهم يضبطون أنفسهم غاية الضبط، ويعاقبون على الزنا أشد العقوبة، من زنى بغير زانية أو امرأة زنت ليست من الزواني المعرفات المكتوبات في ديوان الممتلك بالناحية، فإن المرأة من غير الزواني إذا أصبت أن تدخل في الزواني انتفى أهلها منها وكتبوا الكتاب بذلك وطردوها، ولم يسلموا عليها أبدا“

“Adultery is a common conduct in other areas of India (including *Sarandīb*). This exists in every country among families and their prominent members. People identify women who [are involved] in adultery as prostitutes. Others protect themselves from this conduct and punish those who engage in it. If a [woman], who is not identified as [a] prostitute, engages in adultery, her family would isolate [...] her. They write a witness account on her and chase her away. They never greet her” (Al-‘Umrī, 2010, p.201).

Al-‘Umrī gives a fascinating account related to fornication and adultery in Sri Lanka and India. According to him, in every region of India, professional fornicators exist, and they offer service to their customers. Al-‘Umrī further adds that when a man agrees to pay a certain amount of money to a prostitute, her service will be provided. However, if someone else comes later and offers the woman more money, she is not obligated to the first person.

Supporting the facts recorded by al-Tājir, al-Mas‘ūdī, too, considers adultery as an accepted practice among the Sri Lankan populace. Al-Mas‘ūdī writes:

“In this country, many valleys (*aghbāb*) [are] found. [They are] called the valleys of *Sarandīb*. The price of a goat is half a dirham. They mostly play gambling with backgammon/dice and chess (*Shatranj*). Men invite women for adultery with the knowledge [of] her family” (Al-Mas‘ūdī, 1948, p. 38).

In this text, al-Mas‘ūdī clearly shows that the *zinā* was an accepted practice among Sri Lankans during this era, and the island was a destination known for such conduct. The fourteenth-century Islamic scholar and jurisconsult from Aleppo, Ibn Shaḥna al-Ḥanafī’s (1348-1412) *Kitāb Tārīkh Rawḍat al-Manāẓir*⁹⁹, a newly explored manuscript, adds an explanation to the account of al-Tājir, regarding the sexual behavior of women (Al-Hanafī, p. r. 56). In sum, although al-Tājir did not provide a comprehensive account regarding women who are involved in fornication, he clearly observes that this conduct is a violation of his Islamic nomoi.

The second point that al-Tājir disagrees with is the practice of *Sati* that prevailed in Sri Lanka during the medieval era. The practice of sacramental rituals of the Sri Lankan king

⁹⁹This manuscript is available at the University of Birmingham, catalogued under number 1377. The scribe is Muṣṭafā ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiḍ ibn Aḥmad ibn Makkiya.

and the subsequent practice of *Sati* is not in agreement with his Islamic beliefs. Al-Tajir states:

"وإذا مات الملك ببلاد سرنديب صير على عجلة قريبا من الأرض وعلق في مؤخرها مستلقيا على قفاه يجر شعر رأسه التراب عن الأرض وامرأة بيدها مكنسة تحثوا التراب على رأسه وتنادي: "أيها الناس هذا ملككم بالأمس قد ملككم وكان أمره نافذا فيكم وقد صار إلى ما ترون عن ترك الدنيا وأخذ روحه ملك الموت فلا تغتروا بالحياة بعده." وكلاما نحو هذا ثلاثة أيام، ثم يهيأ له الصندل والكافور والزعفران فيحرق له ثم يرمى برماده في الريح. والهند كلهم يحرقون موتاهم بالنار. وسرنديب آخر الجزائر وهي من بلاد الهند. وربما أحرق الملك فتدخل نساؤه فيحرقن معه وإن شئن لم يفعلن"

"When a king dies in *Sarandīb*, his body is simply kept in his cart, lying on the back, his hair [...] touching the ground. A woman in the cart with a broom puts sand on his face and recites an admonition: Oh people! this is your king, who ruled you earlier, you followed his orders, he died today and left the world, and his soul was captured by *Malak al-Maut* (angel of death). Therefore, do not [be] deceived by this life. She repeats the same admonition for three days. Then, his body is kept under sandalwood (*al-Sandal*), camphor (*al-Kāfūr*), saffron (*al-Za‘farān*), and burnt. Then the ash will be thrown in [the] air. All Indians burn the bodies of their deceased. Sometimes, when a king dies, his wife also burns herself. If she wishes, she does not burn" (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 55).

Evidently, this information suggests that al-Tajir makes us believe that every Sri Lankan woman burns herself when her husband dies. Interestingly, Al-Hamadhānī clarifies that this practice was not adopted by each and every woman in Sri Lanka. Al-Hamadhānī notes:

“In this island, three kings reigned. When the eldest king died, he was pieced into four parts and burnt by fire. His men followed to burn themselves” (Al-Hamadhani, 1996, pp. 65-66).

A question arises on who burned themselves when performing *Sati*. Is it the king's spouse alone or his kith and kin as well? In many accounts, it is the king's wife who practiced *Sati*, not his admirers or followers. In addition, it is important to consider the reason for practicing *Sati* even among the royal family. Perhaps, the religious belief of Hindus in reincarnation could have been the reason for this practice (Al-Sirafi, 1999, p. 71). To show her faithfulness and fidelity towards her husband, the medieval women including the king's wife did it voluntarily because they believed in reincarnation and hoped for a better eternal life by performing this act.

Being a Muslim in an idol-worshipping Sri Lankan society, al-Tājir employs his curiosity and keen mind to witness and subsequently report of an unfamiliar incident involving the sacred religious practices of the Sri Lankan king. Al-Tājir, as an outsider to Sri Lanka, observed the event from an Islamic perspective. He informs us that the Angel of Death, (*Malak al-Mawt*), has come to capture the king's soul, a belief shared by Muslims regarding

death. He further describes that the people used sandalwood (*al-Ṣandal*), camphor (*al-Kāfūr*), and saffron (*al-Za'farān*) to wash the king's body. It is evident that al-Tājir informs his readers that the funeral practices adopted in Sri Lanka in his time show similarity to the Muslim funeral rites practiced in most of the countries in *dār al-Islam*. These portrayals reveal that al-Tājir's description of the Sri Lankan society is mixed with his Islamic values and traits.

Prominent writers including Marco Polo (d. 1324), al-Qazwīnī¹⁰⁰, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1369), largely agree with al-Tājir in their accounts, but in some instances, they added new insights. Marco Polo, for example, notes that when a person dies, his body is burnt, and his wife also jumps into the same fire and burns along with her husband. He further adds that the ladies who practice *Sati* receive high recognition in the society (Clemens, 2007, p. 33). Al-Qazwīnī also supports al-Tājir's descriptions and provides another dimension to *Satī* by showing that the deceased body of the king will be cut into pieces, placed in a box made of sandalwood, and burnt (Al-Qazwīnī', p. 85v). Al-Qazwīnī's account probably suggests the postmortem practices that existed during the eleventh century. Similar information has been shared by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who confirms the information shared by al-Tājir, Marco Polo, and al-Qazwīnī regarding this matter. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa believes that the Sri Lankan society pressurized women

¹⁰⁰Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī produced two manuscripts, namely, *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt*, and *Kitāb Āthār al-Bilād Wa Akhbār al-'Ibād* which contain visual presentations and images (Berlekamp, 2011, p. 153).

to perform *Sati* because a widow who avoids performing *Sati* no longer receives respect in the society and she will be accused of her lack of fidelity (Smith, 2002, p. 158).

Despite al-Tājir's neutral stance as an observer, he portrays the practice of *Sati* as a cruel act on the part of the Sri Lankan people. This is his second negative illustration of the Sri Lankan "other". Although the act could be construed as extremely unjustifiable, he does not criticize the Hindu society for practicing *Sati*.

4.2.2. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's Reaction: From Polarities to Intercultural Relationship

The following is an analysis of how Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1369) portrayed Sri Lanka in his religio-geocultural images. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in his travel account *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓār Fī Gharā'ib al-Amṣār Wa 'Ajā'ib al-Aqṭār* clearly differentiate his Islamic "self" from the non-Islamic "other" to construct images of the island in terms of religious and interfaith relationships. However, a case can be made to articulate that in his travel account Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, attempts to find a common ground between the Muslims and the non-Muslims of Sri Lanka rather than stressing upon their differences and conflicts.

Ross E. Dunn (1993) shows that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is a well-known literary frontiersman who traveled extensively to explore foreign lands to satisfy his "personal wanderlust," and not only because of his Islamic legal expertise or his love of Sufism (EDunn, 1993, p. 62). His long travels through Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were predominantly undertaken for

three reasons. First, he intended to perform pilgrimage in the Islamic holy city of Mecca for at least four times in his lifetime. Second, being a scholar of *mālikī madhhab*, he voyaged to study critical legal issues. Third, as a ṣufī devotee, he visited important religious sites to seek blessings from the saints within and outside the Islamic heartlands (EDunn, 1993, pp. 62-63). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also embarked on a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka to fulfill his desire of visiting the Adam's Peak.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Sri Lanka in the year 1345, and in his records, constructed an image of the islanders. He traveled to Sri Lanka for two main reasons. Firstly, as an ambassador from the king of *Ma'bar* (Coromandel Coast), and as such, he presented the royal gift to king Aryachakravarti.¹⁰¹ He landed, initially, in the city of *Baṭṭālā*,¹⁰² the capital of the kingdom at that time¹⁰³ (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987, p. 605). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's records show how he approached different kings and rulers of his time. In most cases, he acted as an envoy of a fellow ruler, similar to how he acted on behalf of *Ma'bar's* ruler.¹⁰⁴ Upon landing in Sri Lanka, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Adam's Peak and concluded his travel by visiting Colombo, from where he departed to the Coromandel coast.

¹⁰¹Aryachakravarti's territory is an independent kingdom that originated during the late thirteenth-century in Northern Sri Lanka.

¹⁰²This city could be identified as present-day Puttalam that is situated in the northwestern part of the island. In the 14th century, a part of area was called *Baṭṭālā* which is mountainous area where fishing and pearl fishery were undertaken.

¹⁰³There is a second opinion in identifying the place as Jaffna in the northern part of the island.

¹⁰⁴*Ma'bar*, which literally means a ford, was the name given by the Arabs to the Coromandel coast (Vide The Rise and Fall of Muhammad bin Tughluq, pp. 91-92.).

There is a question as to the type of genre Ibn Baṭṭūṭa produced as his *riḥla*: Is it a personal diary to record information about people, activities, affairs, events, customs, architecture, geography, and territories? Euben (2008) believes that it is a romanticized piece of literature to provide travel details, mixed with marvel stories. He terms the account as “utopian literature” (Euben, 2008, p. 48). However, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa attempted to authenticate his compendium as an accurate geography by incorporating eyewitness accounts and by verifying the veracity of information that he collected from other storytellers.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa followed in the footsteps of Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217) in his *riḥla*. Ibn Jubayr’s *riḥla* was done between 1183-1185 as a pilgrimage to Mecca for the purpose of “expiation (*kaffārā*) for drinking wine”. In the same vein, the literate frontiersman Ibn Baṭṭūṭa voyaged to Mecca for his first journey (EDunn, 2005, p. 63). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa traveled far and wide for almost 30 years to various parts of the inhabited world within both *Dār al-Islam* and outside of it, covering more than seventy thousand miles. His travel started as a traditional travel to Ḥijāz (*al-Riḥla al-Ḥijāziyya*), a journey to the Islamic holy lands (Mecca and Medina). Eventually, he visited most territories of the world and provided a portrayal of the societies he encountered.

Although Ibn Baṭṭūṭa has been called the “Prince of Travelers” and the “Marco Polo of Islam,” in a Eurocentric perspective on Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, he was accused of lying and plagiarism.

Euben claims that similar to Herodotus¹⁰⁵, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also records falsehood in certain places (Euben, 2008, p. 46). Euben (2008) states that “many who heard about Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s stories assumed he was lying”, particularly when it comes to unfamiliar lands, people, and practices. Moreover, Euben and Allouche argue that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa often provided “inconsistent dating and confusing chronicles” in his compendium (Euben, 2008, p. 29; Allouche, 1990, p. 283). Euben (2008) further adds that “some scholars have concluded based on historical, geographical, and archaeological evidence that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa simply lied about several of his trips, fabricated encounters, and he heavily plagiarized from earlier travel accounts. One scholar has attributed these failings to a combination of laziness, dishonesty, and a certain slovenliness of mind. Others suggest that for Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, accuracy was simply less important than adhering to certain literary rituals like exaggerating his own accomplishments or providing a *maghribi* audience with the range of tales they expect and enjoy” (Euben, 2008, p. 29).

It was noted earlier in the chapter that Sulaymān al-Tājir, Abu Dulaf, and al-Mas‘ūdī were accused of their failure to travel to Sri Lanka. The same accusation has been levelled at Ibn Baṭṭūṭa by some scholars who claim that he did not voyage to Sri Lanka. In fact, certain scholars cast doubts on Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s travel to Asia, especially to China and India, claiming

¹⁰⁵ Herodotus’ major work is *Histories*. Cicero accused Herodotus of telling lies in his poetry. Therefore, he distinguishes between history and poetry to state that Herodotus is the “Father of History.” But in another place when he refers to his poetry, he refers to Herodotus as the ‘author of innumerable fabulous tales’ (Euben, 2008, p. 29).

his account of India is not trustworthy,¹⁰⁶ while other scholars argue that his account is genuine.¹⁰⁷ Despite doubts raised by certain medievalists regarding Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's supposed eastern travels, it seems that his travels to Sri Lanka could be authentic because the places he mentions in Sri Lanka are quite verifiable and his itinerary to Adam's Peak corroborates with the current travel routes to Adam's Peak.

Gibb argues that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa shows more interest in depicting people than idealizing places (Gibb, 1929, p. 12), and this view is significant because the current scholarship needs more detailed portrayals of the social, cultural, and religious images of the island in the eyes of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa than information about its physical images. It is noteworthy that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was initially interested in highlighting a distinct otherness between Muslims and non-Muslims in Sri Lanka. However, upon learning about the issues that the Muslim community in Sri Lanka faced, he gradually moved towards promoting unity and mutual relationships among diverse faiths, ignoring previous concerns and conflicts.

Prominence of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Tuhfat*

Overall, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's depiction of Sri Lanka seems to be authentic. Although he accommodated some incidents which fall under the category of 'mysteries' in his book, he

¹⁰⁶Abdel Majed Khan, "The Historicity of ibn Baṭṭūṭa re: Shamsuddin Firuz Shah, the so-called Balbani King of Bengal," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 18 (March 1942): pp. 65–70.

¹⁰⁷Umesh Kumar Singh, "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *rehla*," *The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (1978–79): pp. 192–96; Mahdi Husain, *The rehla* of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, pp. vii–lxxvii. 97.

shows accuracy of information. This is probably because his travel book was written in a first-person narrative style based on the journey he undertook to Sri Lanka. It can be assumed that he actually set foot on the island because of the accuracy of the information and because there seems to be no concrete reason to indicate a fabrication regarding the island. What makes Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's account credible is that none of his contemporaries or predecessors have provided such rich information and fresh descriptions on the cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka at that time. It is rational to assume that this kind of detail and accuracy would be impossible without paying an actual physical visit to Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's account stands out for its unique contribution to our understanding of the Sri Lankan culture and geography. However, his accounts are not without flaws. In fact, one strong critique of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa shows that he tends to accept unverified stories. This is evident when Ibn Baṭṭūṭa accepted the '*ajā'ib and gharā'ib* stories.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also records several '*ajā'ib and gharā'ib* stories to make his audience interested in his work. Among these are two important stories related to Sri Lanka. The first story is about a troupe of lustful monkeys in the island, and the second is about a tree called *Darakth Rawān*. The first story is presented as follows:

” والقروء بتلك الجبال كثيرة جداً، وهي سود الألوان، لها أذنان طوال. ولذكورها لحى كما للآدميين. وأخبرني الشيخ عثمان وولده وسواهما أن هذه القروء لها مقدم تتبعه كأنه سلطان، يشد على رأسه عصاية من أوراق الأشجار، يتوكأ على عصا، ويكون عن يمينه ويساره أربعة من القروء ولها عصى

بأيديها. وأنه إذا جلس القرد المقدم تقف القروء الأربعة على رأسه، وتأتي أنثاه وأولاده فتتعد بين يديه كل يوم، وتأتي القروء فتتعد على بعد منه. ثم يكلمها أحد القروء الأربعة فتتصرف القروء كلها. ثم يأتي كل فرد منها بموزة أو ليمونة أو شبه ذلك، فيأكل القرد المقدم وأولاده والقروء الأربعة. وأخبرني بعض الجوكية أنه رأى القروء الأربعة بين يدي مقدمها، وهي تضرب بعض القروء بالعصي، ثم نتفت وبره بعد ضربه. وذكر لي الثقات أنه إذا ظفر قرد من هذه القروء بصيبة لا تستطيع الدفاع عن نفسها جامعها. وأخبرني بعض أهل هذه الجزيرة أنه كان بداره قرد منها، فدخلت بنت له بعض البيوت، فدخل عليها، فصاحت به، فغلبها، قال: ودخلنا عليها وهو بين رجليها فقتلناه“.

“Monkeys [live] in great numbers in these hills; they are of black colour with long tails, and their males have beards like men. Shaikh ‘Uthman and his son as well as other people informed me that these monkeys have a chief to whom they make obedience. The chief monkey wears on its head a headband made of leaves and supports itself with a stick. Four monkeys with four sticks in their hands stand to his right and to [the] left and when the chief sits, they stand behind him. His female and young ones come and sit in front of him every day, while other monkeys come and sit at a distance from him. At that time one of the said four monkeys addresses[ed] her, and then all left. Afterwards each monkey brings a banana or a lemon or the like and the chief monkey, his young ones and the said four monkeys eat them. One of the *jogis* told me that he had seen the four monkeys sitting in front of their chief while she was beating a monkey with a stick, and that after the beating she pulled out his hair. Some reliable people told me that when any one of these monkeys seizes

a girl, she cannot protect herself from his lust. One of the inhabitants of the island told me that he had such a monkey in his house. Incidentally one of his girls entered some room and was followed by the monkey. She cried but was overpowered by him. When we entered, continued the islander, ‘we found the monkey busy with her, and we killed him’” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: 1987, P. 612).

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa narrates the second story as follows:

"وعند أصل الجبل في هذا الطريق درخت روان، هي شجرة عادية لا يسقط لها ورق. ولم أر من رأى ورقها،.....من جملتها أن من أكل من أوراقها عاد له الشباب إن كان شيخا. وذلك باطل.

“A tree called *Darakth Rawān* is found on the road near the mountain, which does not produce leaves. I have never seen anyone who has seen the leaves of that tree. Its distinctive feature is, if anyone eats the leave, [it] will confer youth on even the oldest man, which is a lie” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: 1987, p. 612).

The key lesson from the two ‘*ajā’ib*’ stories is that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa distinguishes between the true marvels (‘*ajā’ib*’) and falsehood or lies. He considers the first story about the punishing of an errant monkey by its chief and the sexual assault of another monkey on a girl as marvels (‘*ajā’ib*’). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa did not know much about the sexual practices of the Sri Lankan women at the time. Being a *mālikī* scholar, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s portrayal of sexual norms is deeply rooted in his Islamic belief which upholds the relationship between husband and wife as the only acceptable and regulated form of sexual practice. In Islam, *Nikāḥ* is the legal form of

the sexual relationship between men and women. This practice earns a significant reward in Islam when they are conducted according to the Islamic regulations. Any form of sexual relationship outside this limit would be considered illegal. Bestiality, i.e., sexual contact with animals or seeking sexual satisfaction by using them as sexual objects, is considered to violate both legal and religious norms as well as the social and moral codes in Islam (Darwis et al., 2021, p.118). Burn believes that those who stray from these norms are punished (Burn, 2019, p. 98). In Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's perspective, any deviant sexual relationship, including those involving animals, or overpowering of a girl by a monkey, is entirely unacceptable. This view is also confirmed in an incident relating to the *jogis* who accompanied Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on the trip to Adam's Peak. When both Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and *jogis* discovered the monkey's sexual relationship with the girl, they responded by killing the monkey. This act suggests that bestiality was not considered acceptable in Sri Lanka at the time, which aligned with Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's moral and religious stance on sexual conduct. Although the actual sexual practices of the Sri Lankan people at that time are not known, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's perspective on such conduct can be clearly understood from his account.

While Ibn Baṭṭūṭa rejects the second story about the tree, which states that whoever eats its fruits will regain their youthfulness. Euben confirms that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa never believed in the story of the tree considering it to be a falsehood (Euben, 2008, p. 76). Thus, it is apparent that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is critical of fantastical narratives like the second narrative and tends to verify the accuracy of the information he received from others.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's Perceptions of Sri Lanka

When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes the Sri Lankan people, he offers a perspective shaped by his background as a Sunni Muslim from the *Maghribi* frontier of *Dār al-Islam* as well as a strict follower of *Mālikism*. His geographical and religious identities serve as the criteria for distinguishing between his Islamic “self” and the non-Islamic “other” in his travels. The criteria for such identification lie in Islam and its virtues such as “generosity, affection for strangers, asceticism, piety, cleanliness, courage, rigorous devotion to knowledge, feeding, unity, avoidance of alcohol, and non-cannibalism” (Euben, 2008, p. 76). These *nomoi* serve as criteria for determining virtuous qualities based on his Islamic identity. Any attributes contradicting these standards are regarded as undesirable or immoral qualities.

Despite Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's failure, at times, to differentiate between Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka and their cultural landscapes,¹⁰⁸ and his incomplete knowledge of the two kingdoms that existed in Sri Lanka during his visit¹⁰⁹, he presents a wealth of information on the island. Moreover, he clearly presents his perceptions of the Sri Lankan ‘other.’ His initial reaction to the Sri Lankan cultural landscape seems to resemble a ‘utopian model’ because Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, like his predecessors al-Tajir and al-Mas‘ūdī, proudly highlights the affluence of Sri Lanka in pearl fishery. He observes that pearls are brought in large numbers and then

¹⁰⁸This failure stems from the fact that he did not have previous knowledge of the religious and cultural landscapes of Hindu and Buddhist communities.

¹⁰⁹He only recognizes the Hindu Aryachakravarti kingdom which was in the northern part of the Island. He shows a lack of understanding of the Sinhalese kingdom in Kurunegala in the southern part of Sri Lanka at the time.

sent to the king. According to him, comparatively, the Sri Lankan pearls were the best he had ever seen in the region. However, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa did not consider only the physical landscapes as he paid close attention to human conditions and activities. His accounts on the latter show a mixed reaction about people, religions, and cultures in Sri Lanka.

Having clearly distinguished between his Islamic “self” and non-Islamic “other,” Ibn Baṭṭūṭa explicitly considers himself as a Muslim and the king he visited as a *kāfir* (infidel). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa landed in the coastal area, and he described the Sri Lankan king as “a vicious tyrant who owns ships which undertake piracy in the Indian Ocean” (Ibn Battuta. 1987, p. 605). He initially feared landing in the Aryachakravarti kingdom. But, having no alternatives, he informed his fellow sailors to land him on the coast, and he went on to seek the protection of the king. He writes:

"فأتانا الكفار، فقالوا: من أنتم؟ فأخبرتهم أنني سلف سلطان المعبر وصاحبه، جئت لزيارته، وأن الذي في هذا المركب هدية له"

“The infidels came towards us calling, ‘Who are you?’ I informed them that I am a brother-in-law to the *Sultan* of *Ma‘bar* and his friend. I am on my way to visit the king and what was on the ship is an offer for him” (Ibn Battuta. 1987, p. 605).

This portrayal clearly shows how Ibn Baṭṭūṭa perceived Sri Lankans as infidels and insisted on his friendly contact with the Sultan of Ma‘bar, who had a mutual relationship with the

Sri Lankan king of that time. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa projected himself as a ‘Muslim’ and the king and his citizens as a ‘*kāfir*’ (infidel). His understanding of the races and religious practices in Sri Lanka is notable because he recognizes people based on their racial and cultural identities.

Yet, Ibn Battuta does not try to insulate himself from these infidels like distanced himself from the Chinese culture that prevailed at that time due to their mischief and wrongdoings. However, there is insufficient evidence to show an insularity on the part of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa regarding the Sri Lankan populace. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa writes about China as follows:

“Despite all that is good in it, the land of China did not appeal to me. On the contrary, I was profoundly offended that unbelief was widespread there. Whenever I went outside my residence, I encountered disturbing situations that deeply troubled me. Therefore, I remained indoors and refrained from leaving unless [I had] an obligation outside. When I see Muslims, I felt that I am with my family and kids” (Euben, 2008, p. 84).

This text suggests that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa deliberately avoided interactions with Chinese individuals due to their bad behavior. On the contrary, when it came to Muslims, he found joy and satisfaction in their company. This strongly indicates his preference for Muslims and isolation from unbelievers primarily due to their undesirable behavior.

However, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa did not show such aversion to the Sri Lankan non-Muslim “other.” His *riḥla* tells us that he frequently enjoyed the companionship of non-Muslim people. For instance, he was accompanied by some non-Muslim servants on his journey to Adam’s Peak. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa undertook his pilgrimage to Adam’s Peak under the full patronage of King Aryachakravarti, who facilitated his journey by sending guides to take him to Adam’s peak and made necessary arrangements such as food and carriers. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes the king’s support as follows:

“فأعطاني دولة يحملها عبيده على أعناقهم، وبعث معي أربعة من الجوكية الذين عادتهم السفر كل عام الى زيارة القدم، وثلاثة من البراهمة، وعشرة من سائر أصحابه، وخمسة عشر رجلا يحملون الزاد.”

“King gave him a *dola* with his servants to carry that. He sent with me four *Jogis*, who go, every year on a pilgrimage on foot, three Brahmins and ten others to carry provisions” (Ibn Battuta, 1987, p. 606).

The text clearly highlights the meaningful friendship that Ibn Battuta established with the Sri Lankan *jogis* during his pilgrimage to Adam’s Peak. Although he distanced himself from the Chinese in numerous situations due to their misbehavior, he formed close and cordial relationships with Sri Lankans.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa portrays a weak and distant relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in Sri Lanka. However, this hostile relationship was converted into a mutual understating by a

Ṣūfī saint. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa reported that before his arrival in Sri Lanka, the Buddhist community had angered the Muslims by not allowing them to visit Adam's Peak, and they neither accommodated Muslims nor dined with them. But with the blessing of the *Ṣūfī* saint Shaikh Abu Abdullah bin Khafif, this situation had changed and the route to Adam's Peak was reopened for Muslims who wished to visit the sacred foot. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa recognizes Abdullah bin Khafif as an individual who facilitated the coexistence between the Muslims and Buddhists. He writes:

وبها الفيلة الكثيرة، إلا أنها لا تؤذي الزوار والغرباء. وذلك ببركة الشيخ أبي عبد الله بن خفيف رحمه الله، وهو أول من فتح هذا الطريق إلى زيارة القدم. وكان هؤلاء الكفار يمنعون المسلمين من ذلك، ويؤذونهم ولا يؤاكلونهم ولا يباعونهم. فلما اتفق للشيخ أبي عبد الله ما ذكرنا في السفر الأول من قتل الفيلة لأصحابه، وسلامته من بينهم، وحمل الفيل على ظهره، صار الكفار من ذلك العهد يعظمون المسلمين، ويدخلونهم دورهم، ويطعمون معهم ويظمنون لهم بأهلهم وأولادهم. وهم إلى الآن يعظمون الشيخ المذكور أشد تعظيم، ويسمون الشيخ الكبير.

“When companions of *Shaykh* Abu Abdullah bin Khafif (882-982) undertook a journey to Adam's Peak [d]uring the visit, due to extreme hunger, they killed a small elephant and dined, ignoring *Shaykh's* advice not to do so. During the night, the mother elephant killed his companions and left the *shaykh* unharmed. It carried him on its back towards an indigenous village. As a result of this incident, non-believers began to show respect for *shaykh*, [and] subsequently, they shared a mutual understanding with

Muslims. The Sinhalese community considered this incident a wonder, and they hugely respected the *shaykh* hereafter, and they opened the way to the visit to Adam's Peak" (Ibn Battuta, 1987, p. 607).

The story about an elephant's revenge on visitors who killed and consumed a baby elephant carries key insights. Firstly, it shows the prolonged conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims in Sri Lanka, highlighting their outcomes such as anger, fear, distrust, and attacks, which led to a division between the two groups. Secondly, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa differentiates between Muslims and non-believers (*kāfir*) based on religious identities. Finally, he informs his readers that, over time, this polarity between Muslims and Sinhalese largely disappeared, and a fruitful relationship between two communities was established. One main reason for this outcome is the efforts of *Shaykh* Abu Abdullah bin Khafīf, who cleared the misconceptions that prevailed with his exemplary action.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa has seen certain obstacles to the peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in Sri Lanka. He gives specific examples for this by citing actual incidents. For example, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentions that Shaikh Usman of Shiraz, known as *Shaush*, a popular Muslim religious Shaikh, was subjected to the mutilation of a hand and foot for slaughtering a cow, a sacred animal in Hinduism. Here, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa comments on the fourteenth-century Sri Lankan Hindu legal system and highlights its connection to the Hindu religion or belief system as its most significant feature. As Hinduism adopted the veneration

of cows since the fourth century BCE, Hindu law “prescribes that one who slaughters a cow must either be slaughtered in the same way or closed up in the cow’s skin and burnt” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987, p. 607). Accordingly, Sri Lankan Hindu rulers punished anyone who slaughtered cows by hanging them to death or burning them alive. However, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa notes that since Shaikh Usman was held in high esteem by the Hindus, they only cut off his hand and foot. Then, they assigned him the responsibility of collecting taxes from a market. This incident is a clear indication of Muslim and non-Muslim religious encounters in Sri Lanka at that time. The opposing religious views regarding the consumption of beef were a point of controversy at that time. In Islam, eating beef is allowed, and it was an integral part of a Muslim’s diet since ancient times. However, Hindu religious principles do not approve such activity. One significant point is that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa shows that the Hindu rulers of the time were lenient in applying certain punishments as demonstrated by their leniency towards Shaykh Uthmān considering his social status.

Needless to say, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s polarity aligns more with Hermes’ (2012) perspective than with Euben’s (2008) idea of ‘nested polarities.’ Euben shows that the knowledge among diverse people, religions, and cultures has been constructed based on nested polarities— for example, between the Greek and non-Greek, Sunni and Shi’ite, barbarians and civilized, male and female, Muslim heartland, and frontier” (Euben, 2008, p. 51). Euben’s nested polarities is a strict alterity model introduced by some Western theorists such as Hegel

(1831) and Edward Said (1978) for dealing with cultural encounters. Rejecting ‘binary opposites,’ Hermes (2012) highlights the opposite aspect of nested polarities:

“Cultural encounters between different humans in different contexts, however, are too complex a phenomenon to be “essentialized” in restrictive Western theoretical models, let alone through a set of binary opposites—Self/Other, civilized/barbaric, white/black, West/East, and so forth” (Hermes, 2012, p. 37).

Hermes (2012) explicitly underscores the idea of similarity and rejects the categorization of people based on essentialized and constructed forms of differentiation. Similarly, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s identification needs to be interpreted in this context as he did not distinguish people based on various constructed criteria such as color, race, region, or ethnicity that accommodate binary opposites such as Muslims in *Dār al-Islam* versus non-Muslims in *Dār al-Ḥarb*, or Islamic East versus non-Islamic East, Arab versus non-Arabs, black versus white. Rather than focusing on such binaries, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s only criterion is what is natural, apparent, and inevitable.

The interesting point in this story is that after this incident, a close and cordial relationship was established between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist people admitted Muslims into their houses, dined with them, and entrusted them with their wives and children.

Interfaith Relationship

Despite Ibn Battuta's distinct identification of Muslims from non-Muslims, he clearly attempts to set aside differences to promote unity and intercultural relationships among various communities in Sri Lanka. Verkuyten et al. (2020) argue that interculturalism or intercultural communication comprises three interconnected elements, namely, "dialogue," "identity flexibility," and a "sense of unity." Firstly, the intergroup contact highlights the positive relationship among separate groups which can reduce prejudices and promote tolerance (Verkuyten et al., 2020, p. 506). Secondly, this concept shows the way for interventions and social programs aimed at facilitating intergroup dialogue. Lastly, interculturalism emphasizes the crucial role of dialogue and interaction in developing harmonious relationships among diverse groups in a pluralistic society. It further recognizes that meaningful engagement and communication are essential for building understanding and promoting unity in a multicultural context (Verkuyten et al., 2020, p. 507).

Although Ibn Baṭṭūṭa identifies the Sri Lankan society as infidel when citing certain episodes of conflicts, he tries to transcend differences and find a common ground by reducing differences and conflicting situations. It is clear that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa glosses over episodes of conflicts such as the attacks on Muslim pilgrims who came to visit Adam's Peak and amputation of *Shaykh* Uthmān's hand and leg, which posed a threat to peaceful coexistence. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, in the first case, navigates the challenges posed by the Buddhists to Muslim pilgrims, accommodating the *karāmat* (miracle) of the *shaykh* to sympathize with

his *ṣufi* loyalty and promote *ṣufi* universalism in Sri Lanka. The conclusion drawn by Ibn Baṭṭūṭā at the end of this episode is important for the present discussion. He explicitly states that Sinhalese people allowed Muslims to visit Adam's Peak after the *karāmat* of the *ṣufi shaykh*, which is a clear indication that he attempts to end his writing on a positive note. Ibn Baṭṭūṭā's work reads as follows:

وكان هؤلاء الكفار يمنعون المسلمين من ذلك، ويؤذونهم ولا يؤاكلونهم ولا يباعنوههم. فلما اتفق للشيخ أبي عبد الله ما ذكرنا في السفر الأول من قتل الفيلة لأصحابه، وسلامته من بينهم، وحمل الفيل له على ظهره، صار الكفار من ذلك العهد يعظمون المسلمين، ويدخلونهم دورهم، ويطعمون معهم ويطمننون لهم بأهلهم وأولادهم. وهم إلى الآن يعظمون الشيخ المذكور أشد تعظيم، ويسمونه الشيخ الكبير.

“Initially, the infidels prohibited Muslims from visiting Adam's peak. They attacked Muslims and avoided contacts. When Sheikh Abu Abdullah was agreed—as we mentioned in the first journey, this involved killing the elephant, ensuring his safety among them, and the elephant carrying Sheikh on his back—from that day onward to Sinhalese honor[ed] the Muslims. They admitted them into their houses, dined with them, and would entrust them with their wives and children. Up to this day, they profoundly revere the said and call him the “Great Shaikh” (Ibn Battuta, 1987, p. 607).

Ibn Baṭṭūṭā's conclusion to the story reveals that following the miracle, Muslims and nonbelievers developed a close and cordial relationship which resembled the conduct of respectable Muslims.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's story provides certain insights into the Muslim-non-Muslim relationship in Sri Lanka during the fourteenth century. Firstly, the transformation of hostility through personal integrity and courage shown by Sheikh Abu Abdullah can be considered. Initially, the infidels (non-Muslims) displayed hostility towards Muslims even to the extent of attacking them and avoiding all contact with them. However, after Sheikh Abu Abdullah showed bravery and miraculous act, the Sinhalese people, completely changed their attitude towards Muslims. This shows how extraordinary actions grounded in faith and courage can break down barriers and change perceptions, even in hostile environments. The turning point in the relationship came not through negotiation or force, but through Sheikh Abu Abdullah's actions, which displayed strength, leadership, and spiritual power. As a result, respect and trust were earned, not demanded. This suggests that genuine respect arises from conduct, not titles or affiliations. Secondly, once they were impressed by Sheikh Abu Abdullah, the indigenous Sinhalese did not just tolerate Muslims; they honored them, invited them into their homes, shared meals, and even entrusted them with their families. This shows how deep-seated prejudices can be replaced with trust and reverence when people recognize shared values or witness noble actions. Finally, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa notes that Sheikh Abu Abdullah was called "the Master" and held in high regard. This indicates how a single individual's righteousness and bravery can leave a legacy, impacting generations to come.

The second story on the amputation of Shaikh Uthmān's hands, in contrast, indicates a devastating action of certain non-Islamic believers, potentially Hindus. It suggests a clear

hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims. Nonetheless, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa tries to depict his unique viewpoint by highlighting that despite the amputation, the king of the region assigned that old man some duties related to tax collection. This textual detail suggests that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa attempts to reduce tension and present an alternative view, showing some positive development after a conflicting event. These two stories obviously indicate that the author's intention is not only to portray a hostile relationship, but to conclude his narrative on a positive note, showing a clear effort to transcend polarities and promote mutual understanding and harmonious relationships. Evidently, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa employs the narrative techniques that involve recounting stories related to conflicts with care and precaution. His aim seems to be avoiding the provocation of anger and division within society by encouraging a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship.

Furthermore, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa offers more advanced and precise information on Sri Lanka compared to Marco Polo's travel (EDunn, 1993, p. 62). Whether Marco Polo traveled to Sri Lanka remains dubious because even though he had traveled to China, no evidence exists to suggest that he undertook a journey to Sri Lanka to make observations of the Sri Lankan "other" or their cultural and religious landscapes. However, when it comes to knowledge and eyewitness accounts of Sri Lanka, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa surpasses the information provided by Marco Polo as a traveler. First, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's account is an eyewitness account which shows a travel route he followed in his journey. Secondly, his information on the Sri Lankan kings, places, mountains, and other aspects largely corroborate with the local sources and present

landmarks. In contrast, Marco Polo's narratives of Sri Lanka resemble what Ibn Shahrayar and al-Hamadhānī describe in their respective non-direct accounts of Sri Lanka. Therefore, it appears that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa embarked on a journey to Sri Lanka, while Marco Polo, who probably did not undertake a journey to Sri Lanka, reproduced what other writers such as Pliny, Cosmos, Ibn Shahrayar, and al-Hamadhānī wrote about Sri Lanka.

4.2.3. Al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: A Comparison

This section compares two different travel writings produced in the medieval Islamic world by two Arab writers from the abode of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*) in different time periods. The first traveler, Sualymān al-Tājir, comes from Sīrāf, a city in present-day Iran, while the second is Ibn Baṭṭūṭa from Tangier of Morocco, a North African city. Both voyaged not only through Islamic territories but also through the frontiers outside the *Dār al-Islām* such as China, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka. Although al-Tājir seems to be a Muslim, no information on his religious and cultural background exists in his account. Yet, his rejection of non-Islamic practices such as drinking wine and engaging in adultery is indicative of his identification as a Muslim. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was a *Maghribī* Sunni Muslim who practiced Sufism and educated in the *Mālikī* legal school. Although both scholars were Muslims and outsiders to Sri Lanka, the eras in which they lived, backgrounds, and motives for their respective travels were significantly different. Therefore, a comparison of these two travelers is deemed essential.

While Sulaymān al-Tājir ventured through the Indian Ocean for commercial endeavors, probably aiming at collecting precious stones, spices and other valuable commodities from Sri Lanka, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travel was a religious voyage, i.e., a pilgrimage to pay homage to Adam's Peak. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes his meeting with the Sri Lankan king Aryachakravarti regarding his intention of traveling as follows:

“My aim for this call is to explore the possibility of [paying] a visit to Adam's peak” (Ibn Battuta, 1987, p. 606).

Al-Tājir, like al-Mas'ūdī, was interested in the physical and commercial aspects of Sri Lanka, while Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was more interested in humans and cultural landscapes than physical features (Gibb, 1958).

Though one significant similarity between al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is their roles as travelers, they differ in the manner in which they provide firsthand accounts of events and incidents during their physical and textual voyages to Sri Lanka, using the first-person language in their descriptions. Al-Tājir rarely uses the first-person narrative in order to maintain the validity of his eyewitness records. Personal remarks such as “we caught the fish in this sea” (Al-Tajir, 851, p. 01) are not a common style in his account. In contrast, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa repeatedly utilizes the first-person language, often combined with specific time limits, to establish his authority over the text. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa writes:

وفي التاسع منها خرجنا الى جزيرة سرنديب، ورأينا جبل سرنديب.

“[On] the ninth-day we departed to Sri Lanka, and we saw its mountain”

(Ibn Battuta, 1987, p. 604).

In this text, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentions his arrival in Sri Lanka after a nine-day stay in Ma‘bar, a city in present-day South India. He informs that he physically traveled to Sri Lanka in the third week of Rabi‘ al- Ākhir in 1345. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s statement shows the precision of details which his predecessors did not have.

Another similarity is both Sulaymān al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa agree on the utopian nature of the Sri Lankan geography for its strategic importance and the commodities it produces, such as pearls and precious stones, animal musk, and elephants, which were greatly admired by Arab traders. This perspective was also demonstrated by other European and Chinese travelers like cosmo, Mandeville, and Marco Polo who had undertaken journeys to Sri Lanka in medieval times.

An analysis of the two writers reveals that they both define themselves as Islamic, showing a mixed reaction towards defining “self” and “other” in their respective accounts. Notably, their construction of “self” and “other” occurs primarily based on religious markers. These travel sources show that the alterity created between the Islamic “self” and the non-Islamic “other” was natural and obvious, as argued by Hermes (year), who rejects the binary opposites of West vs East, barbarian vs civilized, male vs female, Muslim vs infidel etc. in the discourse of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Both al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa are Muslims, and they wrote about some anti-Islamic religious practices like *Sati* in their accounts. Similarly Christian travelers like Marco Polo, Mandeville, and Columbus also mention the same information about *Sati* in their accounts. This information is probably derived from Arab writers because there is no evidence to prove the voyages of Marco Polo, Mandeville, and Columbus to the island. However, all accounts by these travelers represent the prevailing knowledge about the Sri Lankan society during medieval times.

Al-Tājir brings fresh insights into the women's behavior in the country, questioning their behavior. He was unimpressed about the sexual behavior of Sri Lankan women, and had a negative perspective of them. In the same vein, al-Bakrī states that the women in Sri Lanka were permitted to engage in adultery (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 145). However, though a distinct construction of the “alterity” of the Sri Lankan society can be determined within the writings of al-Tājir, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa has not given any information on adultery in his compendium.

Information on intercultural communication was initially furnished by al-Tājir and it was developed and given more in-depth details by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. In this way, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa provides a more comprehensive account of the island than any other traveler who visited Sri Lanka. In addition, he shows a peaceful political and diplomatic relationship between Aryachakravarti and the ruler of Malabar during his time. This is a clear statement by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on the friendly nature of Sri Lankan rulers.

In summary, contrary to al-Tājir's visit to Sri Lanka, which was more or less a commercial voyage, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, undertook a pilgrimage to pay homage to Adam's Peak. Being a Persian traveler, al-Tājir traversed the Indian Ocean up to China for commercial motives and crossed the island accidentally on his way to China. In contrast, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travel is a well-planned journey, aiming to meet the Sri Lankan king Aryachakravarti and then to see the sacred foot of Adam. Al-Tājir reported what he learned about this society overlooking the religious and cultural identities of the people he encountered, thus making his report more ambiguous than Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Tuhfat*. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, in contrast, traveled to the island, meeting people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, employing direct witness, and making his compendium more specific. However, the difference in time between al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa which spans more than five centuries might have impacted their unique ways of narrating the events and people they witnessed in Sri Lanka.

4.3. The Political Images: Arab Perceptions of Sri Lankan Rulers

The exploration of the 'other' in foreign territories using Arabic sources provides a comprehensive picture of the Sri Lankan kings who were adherents of either Buddhism or Hinduism. Like Arabic poetry in which Sri Lankan communities were portrayed as a non-demonizing "other", the traversing merchants, envoys, and ambassadors also developed a similar perspective of Sri Lankans through their exchanges and encounters with rulers of Sri Lanka. Arabs constructed their images of the Sri Lankan rulers based on the political

relationship prevalent at the time—as their allies, not adversaries. Religious, cultural, and political factors significantly shape a kingdom’s relationship with other entities. Since the rulers from West Asia and Sri Lanka maintained a cordial relationship during the medieval era, Muslim writers did not report any conflicts between these two regions. Consequently, no derogatory remarks were made on Sri Lankan rulers by Muslim writers in their chronicles.

The general issue encountered in most sources by the traversing merchants who visited the Sri Lankan kings during the medieval period is that the travelers themselves do not report much of the information related to their journeys except for Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. The fourteenth-century scholar, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī Ibn Abdullah al-Bahā’ī al-Gharūlī in his *Kitāb Maṭāli’ al-Budūr Wa Manāzil al-Surūr*, reports an incident related to al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa’d’s (c.100/718) meeting with the Sri Lankan monarch, probably King Manavamma¹¹⁰. Similarly, two centuries later, al-Ghirnāṭī reports about the twelfth-century Yemeni Arab traveler, merchant, and sailor Abul Abbas al-Ḥijāzī’s encounter with the Sri Lankan monarch, King Vikramabahu I.¹¹¹ In addition, Ibn Shahrāyār’s (900-956) account of the Sri Lankan king’s mission to the Prophet Mohammed during the reign of the King Dathopa Tissa II¹¹² is another account that provides detailed information about the cultural exchanges

¹¹⁰Given the time frame of this meeting, it is likely that the king in question is Manavamma, who reigned from 691-726, with Anuradhapura as his capital.

¹¹¹Given the timeline on which the incident happened, the king referred to is likely be Vikramabahu I, who reigned from 1111-1132, with Polonnaruwa as his capital.

¹¹²King Dathopa Tissa II reigned from 664 to 673, with Anuradhapura as his capital.

between Sri Lanka and Arab. Among these, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's mission to see the Sri Lankan king, Aryachakravarti on behalf of the Islamic ruler of the Coromandel Coast and his subsequent pilgrimage to Adam's Peak stand out as a unique traveling experience of a Moroccan traveler to the court of Sri Lanka. Hence, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa provides unique information on Sri Lanka that is not provided by other Arab writers from West Asia, Islamic Spain, or any other European writers, including the thirteenth-century traveler Marco Polo and the fourteenth-century traveler John Mandeville.

4.3.1. Wisdom vs Ignorance

Arab travelers generally portray the Sri Lankan kings with a neutral view, emphasizing their traits and flaws. There are two separate examples in particular where the king was portrayed differently. The first example shows that the king was wise and intelligent, and the second example shows that he was ignorant. These opposing views are significant because they convey the neutrality of Arab writers in depicting the Sri Lankan king.

Al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd¹¹³ (c.100/718) states that he had an audience with the Sri Lankan king (probably King Manavamma). Although the visit took place in the 8th century, al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd did not report the story at the time because he did not have a unique book to convey

¹¹³Al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd (c.100/718) has been identified as a *tābi'ī* from Kūfa and a narrator (*rāwī*) of prophetic traditions (*hadith*). He is well-known in the Shī'ī domain as Abū Yaḥyā and in the Sunni circle as Abū Tiḥyā. As his name suggests, he had affiliations to both factions. Indeed, he has been identified as a practitioner of *Ḥanafī* school of legal thought. He participated in the battle of Nahrawan along with Caliph 'Alī in 658 (Al-Dhahabī, 2003, p. 901).

the message. Instead, it was al-Ghazūlī (1881) who reported the incident in his subsequent book *Maṭāli' al-Budūr Wa Manāzil al-Surūr*, a newly discovered manuscript¹¹⁴ written in the fourteenth-century. Al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd clearly expresses the content of the message, but details on the venue and the timeline of the meeting remain obscure. However, al- al-Ghazūlī presents the story of al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa'd in the first-person language, adding authenticity to the story. Al-Ghazūlī writes:

” وقال الحكيم بن سعد قال لي ملك بسرنديب صف لي معاش أهل البصرة فقلت قوم منهم لهم فضول ومنازل يكرهونها وقوم لهم أرقاء يستعملونها وقوم لهم رؤوس أموال يغدون إلى أسواقهم فيأكلون فضولها وقوم لهم نخيل يأكلون ثمارها فقال من كان معاشه من كرى فلئام الناس ومن استعمل الأرقاء فكلاب الناس والذين يغدون إلى أسواقهم فذئاب الناس ولكن أصحاب النخل“.

“Al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa'd narrates, *Sarandīb's* king asked me to describe the living conditions of people of Basra. I replied to him, ‘Among them are people who dislike status, among them [are] people who have slaves, among them [are] people who have money to go to [the] market and earn a profit, among them [are] individuals who have palm trees to eat its fruits’. The king replied, ‘people living in poverty are often criticized, those who use slaves are masters of others, and those engaged in business are cunning, except for the people who [are] involved in palm cultivation’” (Al-Ghazūlī, 1881, p. 09).

¹¹⁴This manuscript is found in the New York Bobst Library under its online sources. Its serial number is A31142028860248B.

The story is brief yet significant though it was reported five centuries after it occurred. In an engaging and meaningful conversation, al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa‘d informs the Sri Lankan king about the socio-economic classes that Baṣra had during his time, including scholars, masters, business elites, and farmers. The king provided an informed response to him, categorizing the poor as ‘vulnerable’, the rich as ‘masters’, traders as ‘cunning’, and farmers as ‘good’ people. This story shows that the Sri Lankan king was ‘wise’ because he draws a careful distinction between good and bad people based on the nature of their professions. He displays a general awareness of the societies around him.

Secondly, in contrast to al-Ḥukaym ibn Sa‘ad’s account, the Persian botanist Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dinawārī,¹¹⁵ (828-896) notes a dialogue between a Baṣrī man and the Sri Lankan monarch in his book *Kitāb al-Nabāt*. The person involved in the story is anonymous and the king could be identified as Aggabodhi IX who reigned from 846-866 in Sri Lanka with Anuradhapura as his capital. The conversation with the king has been an enthusiastic discussion on the nature of animal behaviors and their dietary habits. Al-Dinawārī recounts the incident as follows:

“An Irāqī merchant attended the king of *Sarandīb*. Being a foreigner to the island, in his conversation, this man spoke about stone-eating ostriches and

¹¹⁵Abu Haniffa al-Dinawārī’s *Kitāb al-Nabāt* is a work dedicated to recording the scientific names of different plants and animals. Albeit being an Iranian agriculturalist and botanist from *Dinawār*, a city in Iran, he spent most of his life studying in Kūfa and Baṣra of Iraq. Being a *Ḥanafī*, he wrote more than 18 books on linguistics, grammar, astronomy, botany, and Islamic law. Most of Dinawārī’s works have been lost except for two books: *al-Akḥbār al-Tiwāl* and some parts of his book, *al-Nabāt*.

their habit of eating coals. The Sri Lankan king was skeptical of this person's statement because Sri Lanka reportedly did not have ostriches, and he was unfamiliar with their eating habits. The Baṣrī person had an excellent reputation in the court for his integrity. He felt ashamed of himself; therefore, he did not enter the palace for a while after this incident. To prove himself, he wrote to Baṣra asking to deliver an ostrich. Subsequently, he went to the king's court to show the eating habits of ostriches. Through this, he proved his claim in front of the audience" (Al-Dinawārī, 1947, p. 46).

This incident shows a disagreement that occurred between the king and the merchant over an ostrich for its ability to eat coal. To support his claim, the merchant presented an ostrich to the palace. This incident illustrates that the king in question was ignorant about the living and eating habits of certain species.

4.3.2. Richness and Affluence

The eleventh-century scholar 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan Abdul Raḥmān al-Bukhārī al-Sardārī (d.1027) frequently traveled across the Indian Ocean and also reached Sri Lanka. Being a narrator of prophetic traditions¹¹⁶ (Al-Samarqandī, 1994, p. 302), his role as both a traveler

¹¹⁶According to Abu Layth al-Samarqandī (d.374), al-Sardārī, originally from Sardārī, a medieval in Bukhāra, was known for narrating prophetic traditions.

and a transport facilitator highlights dual objectives: his search of knowledge and his commitment in trade (Al-Suyūṭī, nd, p. 15).

Similar to al-Sardārī, al-Ḥijāzī (c.1118) is a twelfth-century Yemeni Arab traveler, merchant, sailor, and transport facilitator who traveled to Sri Lanka to spend a considerable period in the Island. He engaged in trading in the Indian Ocean region leading to China. He spent forty years not only trading but meeting rulers and religious leaders from around the world (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129). As some part of his name suggests, he is believed to be from Yemen, and he had stationed his entire family in seven separate places in Yemen to look after his trade and exchange of commodities from overseas markets. In fact, it is said that Al-Ḥijāzī¹¹⁷ had seven sons whom he accommodated to undertake his trade on seven different commercial centers in Yemen. He lost ten ships in the Indian Ocean, but it is said that his fortunes turned around when his eleventh ship arrived safely from China with a cargo of porcelain and aloewood, which helped him recover (Khamouch, 2005, p. 14).

¹¹⁷Abulafia claims that Abul Abbas al-Ḥijāzī was a ‘pre-*Kārīmī*’ merchant, who traversed around the Indian Ocean (Abulafia, 2008, p. 441). Ashtor (1956) shows that *Kārīmī* merchants were a powerful merchant family who undertook the trade between Egypt and the East, including China, India, and Sri Lanka under the Bahri Mamluk rulers who reigned between 1250-1382. *Kārīmī* merchants came to Egypt in 1181 and had paid taxes for some time (Ashtor, Apr., 1956, p. 52). Under the rule of the *Bahri* Mamluks, the *Kārīmī* monopolized the spice-trade between Yemen and Egypt or at least their preponderance was overwhelming. There was a significant difference between the Indian spice trade of the Fatimid and the Mamluk periods. The small capitalists previously engaged in it were gradually supplanted by the *Kārīmī* merchants who accumulated enormous wealth. This was the result of the economic policy of the Mamluk government, which oppressed small traders by its system of taxes and monopolies. We do not hear, however, that in the first half of the Bahri period the Mamlūk government asked the *Kārīmī* to raise funds in case of emergency (Ashtor, Apr., 1956, pp. 52-53). Although both al-Ḥijāzī and *Kārīmī* merchants hailed from the same region, Yemen, there is no conclusive evidence to confirm that al-Ḥijāzī is of *Kārīmī* lineage.

While ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sardārī is a Ḥanafī jurisconsult, no information was found regarding Abul Abbas al-Ḥijāzī’s allegiance to a particular *madhhab* (legal thought). Al-Sardārī is a scholar in Ḥanafī jurisprudence who learned from the tenth-century Ḥanafī scholar Abu al-Ḥasan al-Kharkiv (d. 952), and he frequently traveled to Naysābūr and Egypt and died in Bukhāra in 357/ 1027 (Al-Bayrūtī, 2006, p. 325). Muhyuddīn al-Ḥanafī includes him as one of the generational Ḥanafī jurisconsults in his work *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍiyya Fī Tabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya* (Al-Ḥanafī, 1993, p. 552). Scholars including al-Suyūṭī, al-Samarqandī and al-Naysābūrī recognize al-Sardārī as a Ḥanafī scholar proficient in *fiqh* and *ḥadith*, contributing significantly to *ḥadith* transmission in Bukhāra. However, while being a devoted Muslim who frequented Egypt and enjoyed the great company of several Islamic theologians of his time including Imām Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-Walīd al Fahrī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129), scholars are uncertain about al-Ḥijāzī’s allegiance to particular *madhhab*, just as they lack information about al-Gharnāṭī.

Evidently, Arab authors went to voyagers who traveled to the Indian Ocean to obtain information about geography. Ibn Shahrīyār, for instance, closely followed mariners, seafarers, and sailing captains to obtain information for geography, and so, his account extensively used the term *nākhudhā* p. *nawākhidha* to refer to ship captains or owners. Similarly, Al-Bakrī and Gharnāṭī also closely followed the travelers in the Indian Ocean to obtain information. This is also the case with al-Idrīsī who invited the voyagers who traversed frontiers not only within the abode of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) but also non-Islamic

frontiers such as Sicily to verify the information he collected from his predecessors such as Ibn Khardhudhbih, al-Mas‘ūdī, and al-Yāqūbī. The only well-known exceptions to this are al-Birūnī who voyaged to India to collect information and stayed in the subcontinent for over 13 years; and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who traveled most of the realms in the Indian Ocean region to explore the geographical and cultural landscapes of the region. A cohort of writers may have undertaken such journeys, but records exist only of several travelers who do not have a book under their name. However, these authors also reported significant information on the realms of the Indian subcontinent including Sri Lanka.

Al-Sardārī does not record his travel experiences in a separate compendium; but the eleventh-century Andalusian geographer Abū Ubayd al-Bakrī (1040-1094) included a story in his *Kitāb al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* about al-Sardārī’s possible meeting with *Mahinda*, the ruler of Sri Lanka from 1001-1029. So, al-Sardārī could be a voyager who not only engaged in trade, but also in narrating stories to Arab writers from the West Asian countries. Nevertheless, as indicated in his biography, he is not an author with any separate books under his name. Similar to al-Sardārī, several travelers involved in trade as their primary objective and they informed their experiences to fellow writers, contributing to a collective narrative of their journeys. Al-Ḥijāzī, similar to al-Sardārī, did not author a distinct account detailing his travel experiences to Sri Lanka and his encounter possibly with the King Vikramabahu I, who reigned a kingdom in Polonnaruwa from 1111-1132. Al-Ḥijāzī’s travel to Sri Lanka and his engagement with the Sri Lankan monarch was recorded by Al-Ghirmāṭī

in his travel account *Tuḥfat al-Albāb Wa Nukhbat al-ʿIjāb*. Yet, Al-Ḥijāzī¹¹⁸ is recognized by al-Ghirnāṭī as one the key informants who described his travel experience in Sri Lanka with a significant amount of data. This data helped his fellow writers to construct comprehensive and insightful accounts on Sri Lankan geography.

Al-Sardārī describes his experience with a sense of admiration regarding the ornaments produced from pearls and gems. Al-Sardārī, the trader, traveled to the palace of the king in his caravan (*Maṭiyya*), accompanied by other caravan holders. Al-Bukhārī describes what he observed regarding the beauty of the ornaments the king was wearing. As he notes:

”ورأينا في يده ياقوتتين حمراوين تتقدان كالجمرتين، زنة كل واحدة منهما خمسون مثقالا، وهو يلعب بهما من يد الى يد. وأخبرني الملك أنه مما يتوارثه ملوك ذلك البلد في قديم الدهر، وأنه لا يوجد مثلهما في جميع بلاد الدنيا. ورأينا في عنقه سلك جوهر فيه ثلاثون حبة مثل بيض الحجل، زنة كل حبة منها عشرة مثاقيل كأنها قد خرطت خرطا مع تصدع بياضها وجودة فريدها، إلا أن في بعضها حبتين متصلتين غير منفصلتين. قال: وأمر الملك فوزنت بين يديه ونحن شهود“.

“We witnessed in the hand of the king, two red-gem pieces (*yāqūt*) gleaming like twin coals, each of them weighing fifty *mithqāl*¹¹⁸ and he skillfully played with them from one hand to the other. The king informed me that these two red rubies are royal inheritance; no other monarchs in different

¹¹⁸A *mithqāl* is a unit of mass equal to 4.25 grams, primarily employed for measuring precious metals like gold and other valuable commodities such as saffron.

realms inherited similar gems. We noticed an ornament adorning the king's neck. This ornament is adorned with thirty seeds shaped like partridges, and each weighed around ten *mithqāl*. As if it had been deftly turned with a subtle crack, it appeared luminous and distinguished in style, with intricately connected gold accents enhancing its beauty. I observed the ornament weighted while we were watching according to the king's order" (Al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 188).

King Mahinda's jewelry, particularly the two red-gem ornaments each weighing fifty *mithqāl* and consisting of thirty seeds of ten *mithqāl* apiece, evoked significant admiration in al-Sardārī. This admiration was noteworthy as al-Sardārī, throughout his travels in the Indian Ocean, had not encountered jewelry of similar design or craftsmanship. The account highlights a clear appreciation for the aesthetic and material qualities of the jewelry, underscoring its unique status in al-Sardārī's experience. However, it is important to note that this admiration is grounded in observable attributes and does not involve any fantastical or implausible elements, such as *'ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib*, which might otherwise suggest exaggeration or myth. The focus remains on the remarkable aspects of the jewelry, reinforcing its exceptional nature within the context of al-Sardārī's journey.

Al-Hijāzī's description of his encounter with the Sri Lankan king resembles what was narrated by al-Sardārī about Sri Lankan monarchs in terms of gems. However, it is not an imitation. Al-Hijāzī presented a gift to the sister of the Sri Lankan king and subsequently

met the king and received two precious gems from his majesty. He describes his encounter with the Sri Lankan non-Islamic queen as follows:

فأهديت إلى أخت الملك هدية وتوسلت بها إلى الملك فأعطاني حجرين، كل واحد كالبيضة الصغيرة
الواحد أبيض منقط بحمرة والآخر منقط بسواد.

“I gifted [it] to the king’s sister and subsequently she took me to the king.

The king presented me with two white egg-shaped gemstones, one polished as red and the other as black” (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129).

The meeting between al-Ḥijāzī and the king was fruitful. The former received a gift from the latter that consisted of two valuable gems, which highlights a sign of respect and accommodation for Arab merchants and travelers at the kings’ palaces. In addition, the fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s travel experiences to Sri Lanka and his encounter with the Monarch Aryachakravarti also shows a respect and fruitful relationship between him and the king. It is recorded that the king gifted several valuable pearls to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987, p. 605).

The gifts provided to al-Sardārī, al-Ḥijāzī, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa by the Sri Lankan rulers demonstrate a healthy relationship between the king and visitors to his kingdom. They also offer intertextual commentary on the richness of the kings and the affluence of their territories. Moreover, these writers offer high praise to the rulers to display the noble status of the island. These images are a result of a continuing perception of the island from ancient

times through what Arab traders and travelers learned, experienced, and heard from fellow writers. In addition, Arab travelers were Muslims and their counterparts were infidels. However, these travelers remained silent, refraining from making a visible distinction between the Islamic ‘self’ and the non-Islamic ‘other,’ and they never made any derogatory comments about the king or the citizens of Sri Lanka. Even though there was ample room for critical comments and prejudices as the Sri Lankan society consisted of predominantly non-Islamic factions: Buddhists and Hindus. Yet, though the travelers were mostly Muslims with Islamic values, no derogatory characterizations were reported in their accounts, which indicated a cordial relationship.

4.3.3. Impurity and Uncleanliness

According to the Islamic perspective, a person is in a state of minor ritual impurity if something exits from the front or rear private parts (i.e. urine, feces, or gasses). The Prophetic traditions decree that human urine, feces, and vomit are major filth whether from man, woman, or child (Madani, 2001. 103). While urinating, it is extremely important to ensure that urine does not splash on the body or clothes because such carelessness may result in punishments in the grave, as is evident from the Prophetic Traditions mentioned in the *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Madani, 2001, p. 103). The urine, excrement, and other bodily discharges must be cleansed with water until the unclean matter is removed. The water used for purification is water that is pure, and therefore, can purify other things. Removal of

bodily filth can also be executed using stones, cloth, tissue paper and the like. The use of three clean stones for removing filthy matter is minimum. If it is not removed, the number of stones will increase until cleanliness is achieved. Today, toilet paper is the normal substitute for stones which were used in the past (Al-Sheha, 1438, p. 18).

Uncleanliness is a point of difference between Ibn Shahrayār and the Sri Lankan king he describes. Ibn Shahrayār in his *Kitāb ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*, a work in ‘*ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* genre, remarks the untidiness of the Sri Lankan king, which is a distinguishing factor that set him apart as the non-Islamic “other.” Ibn Shahriyār did not mention where he got this information, and it is surely not his own direct observation. He reports that the convoy of the Sri Lankan king entered his capital city to observe his people. When he started his parade, the king felt the urge to urinate, and he came out of the convoy and urinated in the street. After urinating, he did not clean or wipe. This incident was clearly noted by Ibn Shahrayar as follows:

” وحدثني أن الملوك بسرنديب ومن يجري مجراهم، يحملون في الهندول، وهو منتل محفة، على أعناق الرجال، وكرنذة من ذهب فيه ورق التانبول وحوائجه يحملها غلام آخر، والغلمان والأصحاب معه. ويطوف في البلد، أو يمضي في حاجة، وهو يمضغ التانبول، ويبصق في المبصقة، فربما جاءه البول وهو في مسيره ذاك، فيخرج من الهندول، ويبول في الطريق، أو السوق، أو حيث اتفق له، وهو مع ذلك سائر ليس يقف. فإذا فرغ من بوله رد إلى ثيابه ولم يمسه “.

And I was told that the kings of *Sarandīb*, along with their entourage, carry a chariot resembling a pitcher on their necks. It contains betel leaves and their accessories, which are carried by another servant. The servants and companions are also with them. They roam around the country or go on a pilgrimage, chewing betel leaves and spitting into a spittoon. Sometimes, while walking, they may feel the urge to urinate, so they take out the chariot and urinate on the road, in the market, or wherever they agree upon, without stopping. After finishing urinating, they return to their clothes without wiping”. (Ibn Shahrīyār, 1908, pp. 88-89).

This culturally sensitive matter offers multiple insights into social, cultural, and moral norms of the time and place it describes. Firstly, the procession involving a king and his entourage, carrying ornate items (like a chariot for betel), reveals how monarchical or aristocratic societies used elaborate rituals and symbols to maintain prestige and separation from ordinary people. Even personal activities like chewing and spitting were made public and ceremonial, symbolizing power. Secondly, depending on the source of the narrative, the description may reflect a critical or exoticizing view of Southeast Asian customs by an outsider. The emphasis on bodily functions, public urination, and lack of wiping may be intended to portray the local royalty as uncivilized or strange, which reflects the biases of the observer. It reminds scholars to always read such accounts critically, questioning the lens through which a culture is being represented.

Ibn Shahrayār believes that he had his Islamic way of cleaning after urinating. However, his depiction of the Sri Lankan king who did not clean himself after urination, compels him to find the behavior of the king as un-Islamic. His cultural affiliation is the primary factor in his disparagement of the behavior of the king. Being a Muslim, Ibn Shahrayar describes the importance of cleanliness after urinating. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan people may not have cleaned themselves after urinating, which is an unfamiliar matter to Ibn Shahrayār. Therefore, the author presents an image of the Sri Lankan “other” to entice the audience by describing in detail the appearance, customs, behavior, and activities of the Sri Lankan *ajnās*.

4.3.4. Diplomacy and Collaboration

The main limitation in this section is the lack of sufficient accounts to have a content analysis of texts pertaining to diplomacy and collaboration between Arabs and Sri Lankans. Despite the scarcity of sources, the researcher explores four accounts on the Sri Lankan ambassadors who traversed the *dār al-Islam* finding the “other”. Among the accounts, Ibn Shahrayār’s *‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*, Aḥmad al-Balādhurī’s *Kitab Futūh al-Buldān*, Ibn al-Athīr al-Shāfi’ī’s (d. 1299) *Ibrat ‘Ulī al-Abṣār Fī Mulūk al-Amṣār*, and al-Maqrīsī’s (1364-1442) *Kitāb al-Mawa’iz Wa-‘Ttibār* were notable works both in *‘ajā’ib* and *aqālīm* literature. These accounts show that the Sri Lankan rulers are portrayed as collaborative and diplomatic, sharing a healthy relationship with West Asia.

The earliest travel record that shows an embassy to the *dār al-Islām* is a recount by Ibn Shahrayār¹¹⁹ of a mission sent to Arabia during the initial stages of his work *Kitab ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind*. Contrary to the views of scholars who attribute the authorship of *Kitab ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind* to Ibn Shahrayār, Yūsuf Hādī claims that it is the work of Mūsā ibn Rabāḥ al-’Awsī al-Sīrāfī (Al-Hādī, 2000). Despite these arguments on the authorship of the book, Ibn Shahrayār claims that in the early days of Islam, a Sri Lankan king, probably King Dathopa Tissa II,¹²⁰ sent a mission to Arabia to inquire about the truthfulness of the Prophet Mohammed’s message of Islam. The envoy reached Medina and brought information, but due to the unfortunate demise of the envoy, it was his servant that conveyed the message to Sri Lankans. *Kitab ‘Ajā’ib al-Hind* presents a comprehensive account of the incident as follows:

“Indigenous people of *Sarandīb* and their ruler when they heard the message of [the]appearance of Prophet Muhammad, [...] selected a judicious person among them to bring the message about him and his message of da’wa (call). The messenger faced several difficulties on his way to reach Medina after the demise of Prophet Muhammad and Caliph Abu Bakr, and he found Caliph Umar as the ruler, he queried about the Prophet Muhammed from Caliph Umar

¹¹⁹Ibn Shahrayār is a Muslim seafarer, traveler, and sea captain from *Ramahurmuz* of Iran, who frequently traveled across the Indian Ocean.

¹²⁰According to S.A. Imam, the king in question would be King Dathopa Tissa II, who reigned Sri Lanka from 664 to 673, with Anuradhapura as his capital (Imam S. , 1965, p. 11). Given the time of this event, which probably aligns with the reign of King Dathopa Tissa II, it is plausible to consider Imam’s opinion.

and returned, [during his return journey], he died in Makran (the present day-Pakistan). A servant who accompanied the envoy reached Sri Lanka and conveyed the message about Prophet Muhammed and Caliph Abu Bakr, [and] he informed about Caliph Umar and his modesty as he used to wear patched clothing and sleep in the mosque. Sri Lankan people adopted a modest life due to what the servant told them and wore patched garments like how Caliph Umar wore. And their love is in their hearts for the Muslims and their inclination towards them because of what that servant narrated about Caliph Umar” (Ibn Shahrayār, 1908, pp. 117-118).

Not only is the story very brief, but also lacks sufficient information to establish the definite identity of the king and the envoy involved. However, the timeline of the message related to the mission pertains to the seventh century. In fact, it is worth noting that Ibn Shahrayār writes in the tenth century, which necessitates to know from where Ibn Shahrayār collected this story for his marvel literature. Notably, Ibn Shahrayār not only mentions about the Sri Lankan kings’ intention to know about the message of Islam, but he reveals to his readers that the Sri Lankan people were influenced by the servant’s statements and committed to establishing a mutual relationship with West Asia.

Apart from the above record, Aḥmad al-Balādhurī¹²¹ (c. 820-892), a Muslim historian residing in the heartland of Islam, notes a mission of the Sri Lankan king, Manavamma,¹²² sent to Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf to establish diplomatic relationships with the Islamic heartland. This mission initially approached the ruler of Makran, Muhammad ibn Hārūn, to get close to Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (c. 661-714), the governor of Ḥijaz and Iraq in the Eastern province of Umayyad Empire. The king arranged a ship with valuable gifts, and he dispatched some women with their children whose fathers died in Sri Lanka, sending them to their native places. This ship was directed to Makran through the Western Coast of India. Pirates from Dubal captured the ship along with the dispatched gifts, and one of the women in the ship called Tamīmīya of Yarbū‘ tribe called Ḥajjaj ibn Yusuf for help. Ḥajjaj replied to her call. He sent a letter to the king of Dubal and Sind (Debal), Rajah Dāhir, requesting to release the hostages. When Rajah Dahir wanted to act against the sea pirates, a mission was sent to battle against Rajah Dāhir (Al-Balādhurī, 1987, pp. 612-613; Shamrī, 1993, pp. 37-38).

Although the description provided by al-Balādhurī is quite short, it appears to follow a clear and chronological organization of events. Al-Balādhurī’s depiction not only shows a fruitful

¹²¹Ahmad al-Balādhurī has been identified as one of the well-known Muslim historians of the third century/tenth century from Baghdad. His nickname was al-Balādhurī because he liked cashew (anacardium) a lot.¹²¹ He frequently traveled to Syria and Iraq (Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Jumal Min Ansāf al-Ashrāf*, 1996, p. ٣) He had a close and cordial relationship with Abbasid Califs al-Mutawakkil (H 232-247), al-Musta‘īn (H 248-251), and al-Mu’tazz (H 251-255). (Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Jumal Min Ansāf al-Ashrāf*, 1996, p. ٤). His famous historical works includes *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Book of the Conquests of Lands), *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* (Lineage of the Nobles).

¹²²Given the time frame of this meeting, it is likely that the king in question is King Manavamma who reigned from 691-726, with Anuradhapura as his capital.

diplomatic exchange of sending gifts to Hajjaj but also it shows the romanticized attractiveness of the island, due the elegance of their women. Al-Balādurī notes

“إنما سميت هذه الجزيرة جزيرة الياقوت لحسن وجوه نسائه.”

“The island is called the island of rubies for the beautiful faces of its women”

(Al-Balādurī, 1987, pp. 37-38)

In this example, the ‘*wujūh nisa*’ (faces of women) is the reference object (likened-to/*mushabbah bihi*), while the ‘*Jazīrat al-Yāqūt*’ (*Sri Lanka*) is the subject of comparison (likened/*mushabbah*), with ‘*ḥusn*’ (gorgeousness) serving as the common attribute. The comparison highlights the attractiveness of Sri Lanka, drawing a parallel between the beautiful country and the comely faces of its women, thus emphasizing Sri Lanka’s appeal. This use of analogy underscores the aesthetic fascination of the island. It is noteworthy that Ibn Shahrāyār avoids any erotic descriptions of women and titillating or any other explicit content. This restraint is also evident in poetic works, possibly reflecting the influence of Islamic values on medieval Muslim writers.

The thirteenth-century traveler and scholar Ibn al-Athīr al-Shāfi‘ī’s (d. 1299) second volume of records is another newly explored manuscript in this study. It is titled *Kitāb ‘Ibrat Ulī -l-Abṣār Fī Mulūk al-Amṣār* and is found in the British Library.¹²³ This manuscript contains a

¹²³This manuscript is found in the British Library Orient Manuscript section, under the Oriental manuscripts, Or 7914. This manuscript was initially placed in the British Museum and then brought to the British Library. It is the second volume of the source, and no information is found in the British library catalogue about its first section. As is evident in the content

story related to the embassy of King Buvanikabahu who reigned Sri Lanka in the 13th century¹²⁴ (Codrington, 1919, p. 84). The delegation had been sent to Egypt under the ambassador Abū ‘Uthmān, and they arrived at the palace of Sulṭān Qalāwūn¹²⁵ to convey a congratulatory message from the Sri Lankan king. Ismā‘īl ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-Athīr notes:

”أفهم الملك أحمد أنه يصلح له السلطان الملك المنصور فيها حضر رسول الهند إلى السلطان واسم ملك الهند ابو بكر صاحب سلان واسم رسوله ابو عثمان ورفيقه وقالوا إن صاحبهم على طريق هرمز في مركب السلافي ومضمون رسالته الإعلام لمحبه السلطان.“

“While the Sulṭān, King al-Manṣūr was involved in solving a problem related king Aḥmad, a delegation arrived from India. The name of the king in India is Abū Bakr, the King of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The King’s ambassador was Abū ‘Uzmān and his delegation. The delegation said that their master is on his way to King of Ormus in a Sri Lankan ship.¹²⁶ The content of his letter is an expression of love and appreciation to the *sulṭān*” (Ibn al-Athīr, nd).

of the book which predominantly focuses on the political history of Abbasid khilafat from the days of Abbasid ruler Imām Mustadī or Billah or al-Mustadī Bi-Amrillāh (reigned 1170-1180), the thirty third Caliph of the Abbasid ancestry to the Caliph. Although the first part of the book had been lost, this would be a piece of political history of the early Abbasid Caliphs from the Abul Abbās al-Saffāh, who reigned from 750-754, to al-Mustanjid Bi Allah, who ruled from 1160-1170. Aḥmad ibn Ali known as copyist (*nāsikh*) Ḍuhār, copied this manuscript in Muḥarram of H730/1329. Several individuals have owned this at different points in time, with Faḍlūn al-Ghanī Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ramlī, Isma‘īl al-Fara al-‘Āmirī, Sayyid Husayn and Subjāna Abdi being specifically mentioned in the book. However, details about them remain largely unknown. Round stamps with the names of Faḍlūn al-Ghanī Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ramlī, Sayyid Husayn and Abdi have been found in the book. It seems that the aforementioned individuals had copies of the book in their possessions.

¹²⁴Bhuvanakabahu-I ruled Dambadeniya of Sri Lanka from 1271-1284. He predominantly had control over the west and central part of Sri Lanka in his time.

¹²⁵Qalāwūn al-Šāliḥ is also known as al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn was the seventh Baḥrī Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt, reigning from 1280-1290. According to Rabbat, when Qalāwūn assumed the throne in 1280, he took the regnal title *al-Manṣūr* (the victorious) (Rabbat, 1995, p. 136)

¹²⁶The kingdom/emirate of Ormuz was established in the Persian Gulf region in southern Iran in the eleventh century. Bahrain also came into this kingdom in 1440.

The description provided by Ibn al-Athīr is quite short and it is not known whether this account is an eyewitness report or a non-direct geographic compendium. Although the mission went to the palace of the Sulṭān to hand over the message, the content of the message is not known.

Abū ‘Uthmān’s delegation to Egypt consisted of numerous members, yet their identities are unknown except for Abū ‘Uthmān, who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim king’s selection of the former could be attributed to his proficiency in Arabic to some extent and his knowledge about the Islamic cultural values that could help the delegation to maintain a close and cordial relationship with the Arabs. The name of the Sri Lankan king is erroneously identified as Abū Bakr, which is mentioned in Maqrīsī’s work *Kitāb al-Mawa‘iz Wa-‘I’tibār as Abou Nekabah-Lebebah*. Given the timeline of the event and the monarch who ruled at that time, *Abou Nekabah-Lebebah* is the most likely to align with Buwanaikabahu I, as corroborated by Codrington (year), Corea (year), and the French Orientalist Par Macr Quatremère (1782-1857).

In addition, al-Maqrīsī’s (1364-1442) *Kitāb al-Mawa‘iz Wa-‘I’tibār*, is the latest account that narrates about a Sri Lankan delegation to Egypt. This mission had been sent to convey a message from the king of Sri Lanka to his counterpart, the Sultan. Although the persons involved are clearly mentioned in this story, the content of the message remains unclear.

Codrington (1919) brings some insights into this matter based on al-Maqrīsī's account. He writes:

“Ceylon is Egypt and Egypt is Ceylon. I desire that an Egyptian ambassador accompany mine on his return and that another be sent to reside in the town of Aden. I possess a prodigious quantity of pearls and precious stones of every kind. I have vessels, elephants, muslins, and other stuff, Brazil wood (*Bagam*), cinnamon, and all the objects of commerce, which are brought to you by the banian merchants. My kingdom produces trees, the wood of which is fit for making spears. If the Sultan asks me for twenty vessels yearly, I shall be in a position to supply them. Further, the merchants of his dominions can with all freedom come to trade in my kingdom. I have received an ambassador of the prince of Yemen, who comes on the part of his master to make me proposals of alliance. But I have sent him away through my affection for the Sultan. I possess twenty-seven castles, of which the treasuries are filled with precious stones of all kinds. The pearl fisheries are part of my dominions, and all that is taken therefrom belongs to me”

(Quatremère, 1875, p. 284; Codrington, 1919, pp. 83-84).

The first few lines of the letter convey the words of solidarity of the Sri Lankan king to the Bahri Mamluk dynasty of the thirteenth-century, and it is followed by an invitation to Karīmī traders to involve in commerce in Sri Lanka, informing them of the valuable

commodities that exist in the country. The letter confirms the ongoing fruitful relationship between Sri Lanka and Egypt at that time.

Evidently, Ibn Athīr's portrayal is engaging and positive regarding the Sri Lankan delegation and is devoid of any derogatory comments. Abū Uthmān's delegation to Egypt implies a mutually beneficial diplomatic relationship between Mamluks and Sri Lanka, and al-Maqrīzī also shows his side of the story to his readers. These texts confirm the fruitful exchanges that existed between the two rulers during the medieval times.

4.4.Conclusion

This chapter employed travel accounts produced by Arab writers in the medieval times. Being eyewitness accounts of travelers, these compendiums provided a wealth of information on the Sri Lankan people and the rulers. This chapter examined two types of images: religio-geocultural imagery, and portrayals of the political landscape.

Firstly, using the accounts of al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the researcher showed the perception and attitudes of Arab writers towards the religions in Sri Lanka, geography, and cultural aspects. Remarkably, al-Tājir presented the island as a utopian nation because it has shared some characteristics of utopia, such as the island's affluency, prosperity, ancientness, and unity among the people. He then moves on to show some negative qualities such as practice of adultery and *Sati*. But he presents an impartial portrayal of the island for his readers

showing both positive and negative aspects alike, without making any derogatory remarks on the islanders.

Similarly, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa follows in the footsteps of al-Tājir in his account that shows both episodes of conflicts and harmonious relationship. He adopts a unique approach to promote interfaith relationships in Sri Lanka. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's identification of Muslims and non-Muslims is clear, but more importantly, he tries to reduce the tension that prevailed in Sri Lanka between Muslims and non-Muslims. The way in which he narrates the story of amputation exemplifies his attempts at promoting a fruitful relationship between Muslims and Hindus.

The second part of the chapter investigated the portrayal of Sri Lankan rulers in Arabic texts. There are some issues in these accounts because they were not written by the travelers themselves, such as the stories of al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd, al-Sardārī, and al-Ḥijāzī. However, these accounts show positive exchanges and mutually beneficial relationships between Sri Lankan kings and Muslim merchants. In fact, Sri Lanka was not involved in any conflict or warfare with West Asia during the medieval times. This favorable situation led to the proliferation of mutual exchanges between the two territories.

A careful analysis of various accounts discloses four perceptions on the rulers of Sri Lanka. These images are both positive and negative depictions. Al-Hukaym ibn Sa'd's account depicts King Manavamma as wise and clever, while al-Dinawārī's portrayal presents the Sri

Lankan king Aggabodhi IX as ignorant of some facts beyond his realm. This is clearly a different yet neutral perspective from al-Dinawārī. Additionally, the accounts by al-Sardārī, al-Hijāzī, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa consistently depict these kings as wealthy, emphasizing on the king's state of affluence. Ibn Shahrīyār, on the contrary, gives some negative depictions by portraying an unknown ruler as unclean and Islamically impure, a clear negative observation. Meanwhile, Ibn Shahrīyār, al-Balādhurī, and Ibn al-Athīr al-Shāfi'ī emphasize that the rulers preferred to maintain diplomatic ties rather than following military approaches. This suggests the kings' preference for negotiation and diplomacy. These varied themes illustrate a complex image of the Sri Lankan rulers: ranging from 'wisdom' to 'ignorance', 'richness', and 'impurity'. Notably, Muslim travelers who visited the Sri Lankan king's palace exhibited limitations in their narratives, avoiding derogatory remarks and presenting a balanced view of the 'other'. This was probably done to maintain a respectful and objective portrayal in their descriptions.

Although the information that these accounts provide seems largely unspecific yet plausible, it shows a favorable position towards the majestic kings of Sri Lanka and their subjects. This position resembles the approach that the Romans adopted when they first explored the island. Pliny, the elder, writes¹²⁷:

¹²⁷Pliny is the first author to record information on Sri Lanka in his *Natural History*, employing evidence provided by the Greeks and Romans and the envoys from Taprobane to Rome.

“Anni Plocami, qui Maris Rubri vectigal a fisco redemerat, libertus circa Arabiam navigans aquilonibus raptus practer Carmaniam, xv die Hippuros portum eius invectus, hospitali regis elementia sex mensum tempore inbutus adloquio percontanti postea narravit Romanos et Caesarem. mirum in modum in auditis iustitiam ille suspexit, quod paris pondere denariessent in captiva pecunia, cum diversae imagines indicarent a pluribus factos. et hoc maxime sollicitatus ad amicitiam legatos quattuor misit principe eorum Rachia”.

“Annius Plocamus had obtained a contract from the Treasury to collect the taxes from the Red Sea; a freedman of his while sailing round Arabia was carried by gales from the north beyond the coast of Carmania, and after a fortnight made the harbour of Hippuri in Ceylon, where he was entertained with kindly hospitality by the king, and in a period of six months acquired a thorough knowledge of the language; and afterwards in reply to the king’s enquiries he gave him an account of the Romans and their emperor. The king among all that he heard was remarkably struck with admiration for Roman honesty, on the ground that among the money found on the captive the denarii were all equal in weight, although the various figures on them showed that they had been coined by several emperors. This strongly

attracted his friendship, and he sent four envoys, the chief of whom was Rachias” (Rackham, 1961, p. 401).

Pliny (d. 79) not only shows the favorable hospitality received by the servants of Annius Plocamus in Sri Lanka upon accidentally arriving there but also describes the mutual exchanges between the Sri Lankan king and Roman emperor as they sought an alliance. The dispatch of a delegation led by Rachia further indicates the existence of positive relations between the two rulers (Székely, 2018, pp. 51-52).

This chapter has highlighted the close and cordial relationship between Sri Lanka and the Arab world through travel literature written in Arabic during the medieval era. The next chapter will discuss the portrayal of Sri Lanka using poetic works written in Arabic language.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF SRI LANKA IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC POETRY

5.1. A Critique of Arabic Poetic Texts Written on Sri Lanka

Sarandīb had not received much attention in early Arabic poetic production. In his impressive study, Reuven Snir (2021) shows the cities in Asia that attracted the attention of Arab poets, which he claims included Baghdad, a major cultural centre of the world during the Abbasid era (Snir, 2021, p. 12). However, his reference did not present Sri Lanka as a prominent place at that time. Being one of the principal islands in the Indic world and a trading entrepot on the way to China, Arabs portrayed the island in their poetic imaginations after the conquest of Sind in 711. Abul Qāsim al-Daylamī asserts that Sri Lanka was a prominent place in the world at the end of the eighth century, but to a lesser degree than Baghdad. He further notes: “I traveled to several destinations, from *Samarkand* to *Qayrawān*,¹²⁸ and from *Sarandīb* to Rome, I did not see a better and thriving city than Baghdad” (Al-Baghdadi, p. 73). Not only al-Daylamī’s reference, but several Arab writers, including al-Mas‘ūdī, al-Bakrī, al-Idrīsī, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa show Sri Lanka as a medieval utopia for its religious tolerance, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and amicable coexistence between all branches of society. Yet the island remained a fabled horizon in the

¹²⁸Also called *Kairouan* is a city in northern Tunisia’s inland desert. It became a powerful trading hub and center of Islamic scholarship during the 9th century when the Aghlabid dynasty ruled *Kairouan* and established many of its monuments.

tales of “Thousand and One Nights” which attracted cohorts of poets, travelers, geographers, and writers to depict the island as a heavenly landscape on Earth.

Similarly, Arabic sources identify Sri Lanka as one of the wealthiest and the most fertile destinations of the medieval world. Ample evidence can be traced in poetic anthologies to prove this richness. In his *Kitāb al-Khabar an al-Bashar*, Aḥmad Al-Maqrīzī shows, “*Sarandīb* was the wealthiest land in the world, and it was more fertile than the *Nawādh*¹²⁹ and attractive than the valley of *Barhūt*¹³⁰ (Al-Maqrīzī, 2013, p. 108). Indeed, al-Maqrīzī’s records display that Sri Lanka’s identity has been formulated through its natural location, resources, and connection with foreign countries.

To illustrate the above point, Abū Abdulla Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī brings a poem in his celebrated anthology *Mu‘jam al-Buldān* to depict the island as a *maqsad* (destination) for Arab travelers and traders.

I was determined, as Almighty Allah knows,

to depart *Sarandīb* for my destination.

(Al-Ḥamawī, nd., p. 215)

¹²⁹*Nawādh* is one of the prominent villages situated in Yemen.

¹³⁰A valley in *Ḥaḍramawt*, an ancient name given to parts of the eastern and western parts of Yemen and Southern Saudi Arabia.

Sri Lanka was a destination for al-Ḥamawī, and he considered departing from this place to another destination. Rather than al-Ḥamawī's poem, it is his subsequent reference that shows why Sri Lanka became a destination that captivated Arab poets and travelers. Arab poets captured Sri Lanka in their portrayals due to the insights they acquired from the merchants regarding the religious mystique of Adam's peak and the abundant resources, including rubies, diamonds, oud, and scented plants the country offered during medieval times (Al-Ḥamawī, nd., p. 216; Sudharmawathei, 2017, p. 191).

The genre of Arabic *qasīda* (ode poetry) of Sri Lanka represents an original, non-imitative, and distinctive form of poetic composition, which predominantly concentrates on the Sri Lankan cosmopolitan character as its signifier in pre-modern literary cultures. This genre can be characterized as “*Sarandībiyyāt*” (poems about *Sarandīb*)¹³¹ and this appellation can be compared to Hermas' reference to poetry about *al-Rūm* (Byzantine empire), known as *al-Rumiyyāt*, is a form of border poetry focused on *al-Rūm*. *Sarandībiyyat* would forms a part of *al-thuguriyyāt* or poems about borders,¹³² which was developed during the medieval Islamic period.

Stephanides and Karayanni (2015) view border poetry as a platform for poets to express image of homelands and frontiers. This border literature aims to rearrange the political and

¹³¹The author uses this term to denote poems narrated on *Sarandīb*.

¹³²A genre of poetry potentially deals with borders of Islamic heartlands such as *Al-Rumiyyāt*, which denotes the poetry about *al-rum*, a poetic composition by Arabs in the Byzantine Empire.

the ethical factors of cosmopolitan cultural order and indigenous culture (Stephanides & Karayanni, 2015, p. xii). Likewise, Sheldon Pollock (1998) showed conflicting tendencies in the boarder poems composed by Arab poets (Pollock, 1998, p. 33). In this way, *al-Rumiyyāt*, a literature from Arabs on the Byzantines, shows the antagonism towards the latter. As advocated by Nizar Hermes:

“[this] type of poetry deals predominately with the Muslim leaders who engaged in *jihād* against the Byzantines. Many of the poems written in this tradition focus on ordinary people and either deal directly with the life of Muslims in border towns or narrate the plight of Muslim captives” (Hermes, 2012, p. 139).

According to Hermas, *al-thuguriyyāt* emerged outside the so-called *dār al-Islām*. However, it had been based on an antagonistic relationship with the non-Muslim “other”. It can be indicated that the interactions between Arab poets and the imagined lands were not necessarily a conflicting relationship as argued by Nizar F. Hermes. However, this description has been alluded to because of the political, religious, cultural, and commercial interactions between *dār al-Islām* where the poets predominantly lived, and the imagined horizon. Evidently, the researcher could not find evidence to specify that *Sarandībiyyāt* showed crude alterity towards the non-Islamic “other,” nor did it produce satirical poetry criticizing the infidels, similar to *al-Rūmiyyāt* which criticized Christendom and the Byzantines.

Sarandībiyyāt were initially composed by a group of Arab poets who were intrigued by the Indian Ocean. Their imagination was stirred by narrations of travelers, geographers, pilgrims, and navigators who voyaged different frontiers in the Indian Ocean. As articulated by Netton (2005), Arab merchants, mariners, geographers, and pilgrims undertook journeys in this region principally for three reasons: 1) to engage in trade; 2) to perform pilgrimage in the religiously sacred sites seeking blessings from the saints; and 3) to seek knowledge from prominent countries (Netton, 2005, pp. 62-63). Subsequently, these narrations were transmitted hearsay among travelers, geographers, pilgrims, and navigators. There are indications that these poems were recited to apprise the fellow travelers and broader segments of the public to inform the richness of the wonderlands in the Indic world and to motivate future travels (Kaylāni, 2008, p. 18).

Besides being the official language of Umayyad caliphate and in most cases in Abbasid empire, Arabic was the widely spoken language used for trade in the ancient silk road. Therefore, Arabic poetry enabled writers, readers, and listeners to learn and disseminate knowledge on the Sri Lankan societies, cultures, and religions. No evidence of Arabic poetry about Sri Lanka has been identified before the advent of Islam. Nevertheless, reference to the fragrance of *qaranful* (cinnamon)¹³³ is seen in the ode composed by Imru' al-Qais (501-544) (Imru' al-Qais, 1969, p. 15). The first Arabic poem on Sri Lanka was composed in the eighth century by al-Shāfi'ī (767-820). One of the reasons for the

¹³³Cinnamon tree is a native plant to the Indic world, which is also found in Sri Lanka.

composition of such poems was that Arabic for centuries was the *lingua franca* in an area stretching from the south of Spain to the Chinese border. Also, the Middle Eastern region was the hub not only for trade but also for scientific development during the medieval Islamic era. Michael Pearson observes that Arabic as a *lingua franca* functioned as a second language in the said frontiers in addition to the presence of local languages (Pearson, 2009, p. 18). The influence of Arabic as a trading language in major ports of Sri Lanka was a reason for Arabs to gain knowledge on local cultures and interact with the indigenous people who speak a language other than Arabic.

This chapter examines how *Sarandībiyyāt*, portrays the Sri Lankan *ajnās* (people) of non-Islamic origin in its portrayal and manifestation. In fact, through a reciprocal commercial and cultural exchange, Sri Lanka had been portrayed on a positive note as a cosmopolitan wonderland and a commercial emporium in the world for pearls, gems, scents, and swords, during the medieval period. Moreover, the chance to find any evidence to suggest a demonizing non-Islamic alterity in Arabic poetic representation is slim.

A drawback of this analysis was the lack of written materials needed for it and the non-availability of such materials. Most written sources concentrate on trade contacts and exchanges of commodities. To deal with these limitations, new manuscripts were examined. For instance, *Kitāb Matāli' al-Budūr Fī Manāzil al-Surūr* of 'Alāuddīn al-Qharūḍī; *Kitāb Dīwān of al-Mutanabbī*; and *Kitāb Dīwān* of Imam al-Shāfi'ī were used.

Another limitation is the nonavailability of any academic research especially analyzing Arabic poems on Sri Lanka.

Secondly, *Sarandībiyyāt* is not a unique anthology compiled on *Sarandīb*. Most chosen poems reveal that these are fragments used in odes by famous Arab poets aimed at royal commendation, eulogy of nobles, satire of enemies, and polemic debates. Most of the captured images on Sri Lanka were utilized as similes (*al-Tashbīh*), allegories (*al-Majāz*), metonymies (*al-Kināyah*), and embellishments (*al-Muḥāsīnāt*). In fact, no unique poetic compilation solely devoted to Sri Lanka exist in Arabic literature.

Another factor revolves around the authorship of the poems is some were compiled by unknown authors, and others were quoted by prominent Arab writers in their respective accounts. Considering these constraints, the explored poems could be divided into three distinct categories based on the nature of authorship. First: poems constructed by the Arab authors themselves in their respective works. Al-Ma'arrī's (973-1057) works titled *Dīwān Saqṭ al-Zand*, and his second book *al-Luzūmiyyat* are prominent primary sources that contain poems on Sri Lanka. Secondly, poems cited by an author who produced a geographical, travel, or historical compendium. For instance, Yāqūt al Hamawī (1179-1229) cites in his *Mu'jam al-Buldān* a poem from an unknown author. Finally, poems of famous scholars and poets which were found in another prominent author's book, or an author cites a poem of another well-known author in his compendium, like the poem by Imam al-Shāfi'ī

was cited in *Ṣafhāt Min Ṣabr al-‘Ulamā’*, a work of Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudhdha (1336-1417). Al-Tha‘ālabī al-Naysābūrī (961-1038) cites in his famous compendium *Thimār al-Qulūb* several famous poets, such as Jahiliyya poet Ibn al-Aṭnābā, Ṣāhib ‘Ibād (947-995), al-Farazdaq (d. 728), and Muṭrān.

A preliminary survey of the literature offers depth to the scope of the research. Among the explored poems, twelve were chosen for analysis. The selected poems are non-accessible materials to many scholars since they have not been translated into a western language yet nor used for study on any scope of the Sri Lankan history, culture, and religion. These poems were brought under one thematic area to be called as “*Sarandībiyyāt*.” An examination of *Sarandībiyyāt* reveals that the poems were focused on commodities such as pearls, gems, swords, and fragrances. Accordingly, three distinctive categorizations were made considering the contents and aims of the selected poems. They are as follows: Firstly: Poems on the prominence of pearls and gems. Secondly: Poems on the sharpness of Sri Lankan swords. Finally: Poems related to spices, ouds, and perfumes. Some categories are intertwined with others.

5.2. Poems on Pearls/Gems: Al-Shāfi‘ī (767-820) and Al-Ma‘arrī (973-1057)

The ode poetry on the Sri Lankan pearls and gems displays cosmopolitan images and ideas of the island to romanticize it as the hub of pearl collection and distribution. The pearls of Sri Lanka were well-known for their high esteem among merchants wherein the knowledge

was transmitted to Arab poets to motivate poetic compositions. According to Kriribamune (2003), the Arab's high esteem for the Sri Lankan pearls was even alluded to in imagery used by several pre-Islamic, Islamic, Umayyad, and Abbasid poets (Kiribamune, 2003). Al-Naysābūrī asserts the value of the Sri Lankan gems as follows:

“It is believed by the jewelry producers that the precious stones were obtainable from the mountain of *Sarandīb*, which was a part of India.¹³⁴ Red rubies were the best stones, next was pink sapphire stones and then pinkish Padparadscha Sapphire. The value of a red ruby was weighted at half *mithqāl*¹³⁵ and estimated as five thousand *dīnārs*. Caliph Maṣṣūr possessed a ring that weighed at two *mithqāl* and valued at a hundred thousand *dīnārs*. He had purchased it for forty thousand *dīnārs*” (Al-Naysābūrī, 1985, p. 534).

Understandably, the pearls of Sri Lanka were considered a prominent commodity in the eyes of Arab writers especially of two prominent poets such, as Imam al-Shāfi‘ī and al-Ma‘arrī.

The first poem reveals how a person could keep faith to receive fortunes from *Sarandīb*. In fact, this island was blessed with numerous precious commodities and fortunes. *Dīwān al-Shāfi‘ī* is a mid-eight-century work of Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī who was considered

¹³⁴Some part of Sri Lanka including the northern province was a part of the Chola kingdom of India during the 11th to 12th century.

¹³⁵One *mithqāl* of stone is equal to 4.5 grams.

one of the most eloquent in Arabic language and a famous Arab poet.¹³⁶ His compendium is the oldest literary text to portray Sri Lanka as the cradle for pearl business and pearl fishery. Although this text was the earliest surviving account on Sri Lanka, some writers claim that this poem was composed by al-Baroudi. This claim is refuted by Abd al Mun'im al-Khafājī in his interpretation of the *Dīwān al-Shāfi'ī*. Al-Khafājī maintains that al-Baroudi did not compile the poem but only used it to support his understanding of Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century (al-Khafājī, 1985, p. 76). Imām Shāfi'ī counters the hardship of poverty with patience and breaks its severity with his patience in the following lines:

امطري لؤلؤا جبال ¹³⁷ سرندي	ب وفيضي آبار تكرر تبرا
أنا إن عشت لست أعدم قوتا	وإن مت لست أعدم قبراً
همتي همة الملوك ونفسي	نفس حر ترى الذلة كفراً
وإذا ما قنعت بالقوت عمري	فلماذا أزور زيدا وعمرا ؟

Oh, mountain of *Sarandīb*, let a shower of pearl

Fill the walls of *Takrūr*¹³⁸ with pure gold

If I live, I will not lack strength

If I die, I will not be denied a grave

¹³⁶Born in Gaza, Imam Muhammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, is a jurist and poet, whom people learned Arabic language. He undertook educational journeys to Yaman, Mecca, Medinā, Fustāt, and Egypt to learn and teach Arabic language and Islamic jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*). He learned Arabic language from the famous Arab *Qabīlā Hudhail*, a tribe that was considered one of the tribes who speak the pure Arabic language.

¹³⁷Abughudda in his book *Safhat Min Sabr al-'Ulama'* brings a different word, *سماء*, *Samā'* (sky) instead of *جبال*, *Jibāl* (mountain) (Abughudda, 1983, p. 157).

¹³⁸*Al-Takrūr* was a medieval kingdom in the region of West Africa between Morocco and Ghana. Historian Abu al-Abbās al-Qalqashandī (1355-1418) notes that *Takrūr* was a big kingdom with fourteen provinces. North African traders bring wool, copper, and beads, and buy pure gold.

My eagerness reflects the endeavors of kings

My soul sees humiliation as infidelity

If I am dissatisfied with my livelihood

Then why should I visit Zayd and Umar?

Although the poem is scant in length, it gives insights to construct an image of the island. Firstly: Two places in the medieval world were idealized for pearls and gold. Sri Lanka was famous for pearls and Takrūr was for gold. Al-Shāfi‘ī admires the Sri Lankan pearls and he wished to have fortunes from two prominent resources of his time ‘pearl’ and ‘pure gold’, the former is from Sri Lanka, and the latter is from Ghana. He wished to have been blessed with these valuables to eradicate his poverty. Though this kind of wish is a form of despair, it is not a sign of hope which could be achieved by effort and determination. Nevertheless, the poet never lived in *Sarandīb*, nor did he visit the island. His depiction is perhaps an imaginative geography. This portrayal was likely based on what he learned from travelers, merchants, administrators, warriors, and pilgrims who frequently visited Sri Lanka for commercial, political, and religious purposes. Secondly, Shāfi‘ī’s poem uses personification¹³⁹ to attract the attention of his audience. Such poetic compositions comprise one of the pre-eminent cosmopolitan genres of Arabic literature. Berkwitz rightly describes that ‘one finds numerous works in which messages are carried out by various flying

¹³⁹Personification in poetry is a fascinating and widely used literary device that breathes life into inanimate objects, ideas, and animals by attributing human characteristics to them.

creatures or atmospheric phenomena such as clouds or wind from one individual to another (Berkwitz, 2017, p. 96). Accordingly, al-Shāfi‘ī uses ‘mountain’ (*jibāl*) as an inanimate messenger to carry his message. The linguistic ethos followed by al-Shāfi‘ī, is not new to Arabic language as it was previously espoused by prominent pre-Islamic poets like Imru’ al-Qais. Finally: *Dīwān al-Shāfi‘ī* makes use of the distinctive Arabic rhetoric feature of lexical embellishments (*al-Muḥāsīnāt al-Lafẓīyyah*) to the addressee to attract attention and to beautify the scenery of the place. Therefore, “*Tadwīr*” was placed in two parts through the term سرندیب (*Sarandīb*). The first part, “سرندی” (*Sarandī*) was placed in the first line of the poem and the second part which is “ب” placed separately in the second line of the poem. The noticeable element in this poem is that by stressing the word *Sarandīb*, the poet grabs the attention of the readers to emphasize the importance that Sri Lanka received in this poetic composition. Additionally, the internal rhymes were repeated in each line to add aesthetic richness to the text.

The second poem is a work of al-Ma‘arrī,¹⁴⁰ which is an intertextuality of the previous poem by al-Shāfi‘ī. Igbaria and Abu Jaber (2017) argue that intertextuality can happen in a poetic representation, and this is not a sign of imitation but an influence of others on poets and writers. As Igbaria (2017) states: “Being influenced by others is a general human trait that does not necessarily mean imitation. But it does mean deep knowledge and education that

¹⁴⁰Abul ‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, a prominent philosophical poet, who possessed immense knowledge of the history of different communities had devised a new path for Arabic poetry and was someone who devoted most of his life to Arabic poetry.

could lead to creativity. Intertextuality reflects the influence of others on writers and poets. Although intertextuality is an ancient fictional phenomenon, it gained significant importance because of recent researchers and intellectuals who follow it throughout poetry and fiction investigating its functions and approaches” (Igbaria, Jaber, & Saleem, 2017, p. 1). Al-M‘arrī’s poem belongs to a distinctive genre of poetry that resembles Imam al Shāfi‘ī’s poem on *Sarandīb*’s pearls. Al-Shāfi‘ī’s eight-century work, in which his petition to a mountain or cloud to bestow wealth upon him helps to frame the broader context for the composition of his *dīwān*. Al-M‘arrī’s work also customarily follows an inanimate messenger this time as “*Sarandīb*”. This messenger was called and asked for a favor to be delivered. Such poetic characteristics are not only prevalent in Arabic but also in the Sri Lankan indigenous languages such as Sanskrit and Sinhala which indicates the similarity between Arabic and Sinhala.

In his famous compendium *al-Luzūmiyyat*, al-Ma‘arrī offers a more valuable account of what was represented by al-Shāfi‘ī. Al-M‘arrī states:

عصى كل آس في البرية سيرها	نوائب ألفت في النفس جرائحا
من الدر أو يكثر بغانة تبرها	لي القوت فليعمر سرنديب حظها

Calamities cause traumas in soul

Every wild plants in the wilderness resists its course

With my sustenance secured, I let *Sarandīb* enjoy her shares

of pearl or increase Ghana its shares of gold

Al-Ma‘arrī states that to receive his sustenance, *Sarandīb* ought to provide its shares of pearl and Ghana should increase its portion of pure gold. This account clearly shows that Arabic poets who made depictions of Sri Lanka, give similar information for its richness and wonders. Evidently, al-Ma‘arrī delivered what was demonstrated by al-Shāfi‘ī in the first poem. Both poems as imagery render high praise to Sri Lanka for its commercial connection with the outside world through trade. These images reflect a continuous perception of the island since ancient times through what Arab traders and travelers learned, experienced, and heard from others.

5.3. Sword Poetry: Al-Tha‘ālabī al-Naysābūrī (961-1038)

The sword¹⁴¹ was the symbol of Arab culture. Arabs used swords as investiture to honor or rank others. Keeping a sword is a maker of recognition. *Saif Badawi*, a type of investiture, was used by the Mamluks during the Abbasid period to pay tribute to Caliph, Amir, and royal (Alexander, 2001, p. 193) As shown by Alexander with textual and material evidence that the earliest representations in sculpture and on coinage, always show Arabs with swords. This is the case with two eighth-century examples from the Umayyad period, both represent rulers who hold swords, which are called *Dhū al-Faqār*. The first example is on

¹⁴¹A sword is a weapon with a straight double-edged blade, generally pointed at its tip, which can be used for both cutting and thrusting; the hilt of a sword is generally symmetrical in form. A saber can be defined as a weapon with a single-edged blade, sometimes sharpened additionally along the lower part of its back edge, designed for cutting and slashing. Sabers are usually curved; earlier examples are less so and some are virtually straight. Sabers hilts are asymmetrical in conformity with the asymmetrical nature of its blades” (Alexander, 2001, p. 193).

the coinage of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik where a figure is depicted holding a sword with a scabbard. The second example from the Umayyad palace at *Khirbat al-Majjar* in the Jordan Valley is a plaster statue of a ruler holding a sword. (Alexander, 2001, p. 193). There are various brands of swords that were produced in the medieval Abbasid period. Al-Kindī lists a number of places where swords were produced that includes Khurāsān, Damascus, Egypt, *Rūm* (Byzantium), Sri Lanka, and Malaysia (Alexander, 2001, p. 201). The *Mashrafiyya* swords were produced in Mu’tah near the Dead Sea. Yemeni and ‘old’¹⁴² swords were made in Yemen. *Khurāsānī*¹⁴³ swords were produced in Khurāsān. *Sarandibī* swords were produced using a mixture of iron imported from Sri Lanka and *Salmānī* iron which is imported from Iran (Alexander, 2001, p. 200). This reference shows why Sri Lankan swords received the attention of the Arab poets because they were made using a type of iron found in the island. These swords were exported to other parts of the world during the 11th to 12th century.

Before commencing a critical analysis of the contents of the selected poems, attention should be drawn to the interchangeable nature of the Sri Lankan sword poetry with Indian poetry. It is not an overstatement to consider the Sri Lankan poetry in general and sword poetry in particular, as part of Arabic poetic tradition of India. Sri Lanka was a combined

¹⁴²This type of sword was produced in high quality to recognize the nobleness. These swords were differentiated from other types by simply fixing a knot-like pattern zig-zagged over the length of their blades.

¹⁴³The term ‘*muhammad*’, which means swords made of Indian steel is a proverbial expression in Arabic Literature (Hamidulla, 1941, p. 246).

territory of the wider Indic world, especially after the Chola invention¹⁴⁴ of the northern part of Sri Lanka in the tenth century. The poems constructed during this period considered Sri Lanka as an entity of India. Therefore, poets like al-Farazdaq did not use Sri Lanka as a separate country in their description. Thus, in many cases, a differentiation between the sword poetry of Sri Lanka and India is not possible.

A critique of sword poetry reveals that Sri Lankan swords were idealized and romanticized as one the best swords produced in the world. Al-Tha‘ālabī al-Naysābūrī (961-1038) who bring several sword poems of India and Sri Lanka in his famous compendium *Thimār al-Qulūb* to include several prominent poets like Ibn al-Aṭnābā¹⁴⁵, Ṣāhib ibn ‘Ibād (947-995), al-Farazdaq (d. 728), Ibn Muṭrān, and Abdul Raḥmān. *Thimār al-Qulūb* was edited by Muhamed Ibrahim who laid out the unique productions of each country of the world. In this way, the medieval worldview portrays that Egypt was famous for taxing, linen, and paper. Syria was for glass and oil. Rome for clothes and *Naysābūr* for clay. Yemen for swords, India was for sword and perfume, and Sri Lanka was for pearls (Al-Naysābūrī, 1985, p. 530). Al-Tha‘ālabī quotes Farazdaq to exemplify the Indian swords more generally which includes Sri Lankan swords as well for their usefulness as follows:

ويقطعن أحيانا مناط القلائد

كذاك سيوف الهند تنبو ظبباتها

¹⁴⁴The Chola kingdom is a Tamil dynasty from southern India, from 848 to 1279, invaded the capital of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, in 993. Their rule lasted until 1070.

¹⁴⁵He is an Arab poet from Jahiliyya period.

Likewise, Indian swords cut sharply,

occasionally, they cut off frames of necklaces

In addition to showing the sharpness of the swords and their severity in cutting the heads of the enemies on the battlefield, this poem shows that India supplied swords for battles waged by the Caliphate dynasties. Moreover, sword poetry uses similes, an Arabic rhetoric feature in figures of speech (*‘Ilm al-Bayān*). Poet Ṣāhib ibn ‘Ibād brings a poem:

أجفان هند كسيوف الهند.

Eyelids of “Hind” is like Indian swords (Al-Naysābūrī, 1985, p. 534).

This poem brings two distinctive elements of *‘Ilm al-Balāgha* (Arabic rhetoric). Firstly: A simile (*al-Tashbīh*) is used to describe *Hind bint Bayaḍha*, a prominent pre-Islamic Arabic female poet whose eyelids were compared to Indian swords for their effect and purity. The likened-to (*Mushabbah Bihi*) is an Indian sword and the likened (*Mushabbah*) is *Hind*, the female poet. Secondly: embellishment (*‘Ilm al-Badī‘*) has been a feature of *Sarandībiyat* especially lexical embellishments (*al-Muḥāsīnāt al-Lafẓīyyah*) were frequently used. In the above-mentioned poem, we have lexical embellishment of “pun”¹⁴⁶ which is represented by the lexical items. The researcher noted how the first term “hind” differs from the second word “al-hind,” the same word that contains “al” to specify the definiteness (*al-Ta‘rīf*). The

¹⁴⁶The term “pun” refers to a literary device that is described as a play on words. This term means using words in an amusing and tricky manner, to produce a pun.

first term denotes a lady's name, while the second word notes a specific place; India to refer to the Indic world in which Sri Lanka is a part of it.

Similar embellishments are also evident in the *Dīwān al-Mutanabbī*. Al-Mutanabbī notes:

سرى السيف مما تطبع الهند صاحبي إلى السيف مما يطبع الله لا للهند

My friend! The sword carried what India recorded

to al-Saif (Saif al-Dawla) from what Allah did record about Hind.

(*Hind bint Bayaḍha*)

Indian swords were brought to the use of Amīr Sayf al-Dawlat (916-967). The swords contain information that was recorded in India. However, this information is not necessarily on any matter of the Indic world. This poem shows the cosmopolitan nature of Indian swords which were brought to several territories of the world including West Asia. Another poem of al-Mutanabbī in praising *Saif al-Dawla* displays the greatness of Indian swords.

تهاب سيوف الهند وهي حدائد فكيف إذا كانت نزارية عربا

Indian swords made of iron are feared how would it be if he were a Nazāri Arabian

As enemies fear iron swords much, then how much do they fear ruler Sayf al-Dawla, who is of descent from Nazāri Arabian origin? His severity and greatness are much higher than the sharpness of Indian swords. Collectively, all evidence suggest that the Sri Lankan

swords were idealized as one of the best swords produced in the world which caught the attention of the poets and writers.

It is important to note how sword poetry brings into discussion the portrayal of women and their beauty. Some of the poems contain the image of Arab women perhaps in a non-erotic sense which was depicted fixedly. As these women were named as ideal women for their distinct qualities, such as beauty, prowess, and determination. Poet Abu Muhammed al-Khāzīn notes as follows:

هند ترى بسيوف مقلتها ما لا ترى بسيوفها الهند

Hind (*Hind bint Bayaḍha*) saw her eyelids with swords

what she could not see in her Indian swords

A closer look reveals that this poetry aims to romanticize *Hind bint Bayaḍha* as a beautiful woman, and her eyelids were more striking than the Indian swords. Further, Al-Ma'arrī in his book titled *Diwān Saḳṭ al-Zind* composed a poem on swords to describe the images of Arab women comparing their eyelids to the Indian swords to signify their beauty. As al-Ma'arrī writes:

هات الحديث عن الزوراء أوهيتا وموقد النار لا تكرى بتكريتا
ليست، كنار عدي، نار عادية باتت تشب على أيدي مصاليتا
وما لبيني وإن عزت بريتها لكن غدتها رجال الهند ترتيبا

أذكت سرنديب أولاهها وآخرها
وعدتها بنات القين تشميتا
حتى أتت وكان الله قال لها
حوطي الممالك تمكينا وتنبيتا

Bring news from al-Zawrā' (Baghdad) or the city of Hīt

and from fire sites, do not rush (to bring news) from Takrīt

Swords bear no resemblance to 'Adi's words

It prospers in the hands of ancestors

Instead of following their original rearing

They were fostered by the Indians

Sarandīb sharpened both the first and the last of it

Qayn's Daughters (*Banāt al-Qayn*) seek protection from misfortunes

Until it becomes as almighty God has ordained

To defend kings with strength and stability

Al-M'arrī's poem clearly shows that Sri Lanka was a center to produce, sharpen, and polishing swords (Alexander, 2001, p. 204). Al-Ma'arrī asserts the reputation of 'Adī's sword, a famous philanthropist and poet, who lived in the *Jahiliya* and Islamic period. In other words, 'Adi's swords were the best swords, which was made by the Indians and sharpened in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Al-Ma'arrī adds that *Banāt al-Qayn* (daughter of *al-Qayn*) seeks protection from the dangers caused by the sword. Fazārā bint Qays, a woman from the tribe of *Banī Kalb*, had been portrayed as *Banāt al-Qayn*. She shows her prowess

and determination to seeking protection from the misfortunes of her enemies. Al-Ma'arrī portrayed the characteristics of Arab women for their determination and ability to seeking protection as distinct human qualities. Nevertheless, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry adopted erotic scenes as one of the features of literature to depict women as attractive and versatile in dancing and sport. Not only *Jāhilī* but local Sinhala *sandēśa* poetry also depicted women as sensual. However, any evidence to suggest that al-M'arrī's poetry displayed erotic scenes of women was not found.

5.4. Poem on Perfumes: Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawārī (828-889)

As a prominent trade center, Sri Lanka was an exporter of fragrant items during the medieval era. Hamidullah maintains that Sri Lanka was a place of perfumery export to all parts of the world, and its spices have given Arabic language many words that are used both in Sri Lanka and India. For instance, the word *qaranful* (cinnamon) which is originated from Tamil language, reflects the vernacular influence of Tamil on Arabic poetry (Hamidulla, 1941, p. 246). Al-Naysābūrī brings a list of commodities that were exported from Sri Lanka. “The best oud is produced in Indian-Mannar. India has some specialties which most countries do not have, such as elephants, rhinos, tigers, peafowl, hen, pinkish ruby, ivory, calamine, and herbals such as white sandalwood, teak, cinnamon, ear of rice, and pepper” (Al-Naysābūrī, 1985, p. 533).¹⁴⁷ Al-Bakrī in his *al-Masālik Wa al-Mamālik* writes that Anbar is from Sri

¹⁴⁷ al-Shahr is an island from Amman.

Lankan Sea which is a minerals derived from a sea animal. The best Anbar is gray, then it is blue, and the lowest is black. Every year, 80 pounds of Anbar, 4000 types of fabric cloths and 300 vehicles of raisins brought to the Caliph (of Bagdad) (Al-Naysābūrī, 1985, p. 536). All Arabic sources show Sri Lanka as a globalized commercial center in Asia.

The conspicuous effort of the *Sarandībiyyāt* to map and track the cosmopolitan imagery and ideals cannot, however, conceal the local influence and some vernacular features of the poems. In other words, the impact of local places of Sri Lanka has been idealized as a commodity revealing how far Sri Lanka received the cosmopolitan qualities in the Arabic poetic culture. For example, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawārī al-Marwazī (828-889), a well-known Islamic scholar from Persia, displays the following poem describing a woman in his book *Kitāb al-Ma‘ārif*. The poet describes:

إذا برزت نادى بما في ثيابها ذكى الشذا والمندلي¹⁴⁸ المطير

When she appeared, he called her, her dress

perfumed with delicate scents of *Mandal* and oud

(Ibn Qutayba, p. 09)

This poem reveals the types of fragrant commodities found in Sri Lanka and romanticizes *Mandal* or *Mandalī*. This city, located in the northern part of Sri Lanka during the 12th century, is presently called Mannar. The indigenous people call this city as *Mahāthitta* or

¹⁴⁸It denotes to the oud of *al-Mandalī*, (Mannar), is northern part of Sri Lanka just near India.

Mantai and Arabs as *Mandal* or *Mandalī*. Ibn Qutayba shows Adam and Eve landed on a mountain called *Wāsim*, a place in Sri Lanka, which is situated between *Dahnaj* and al-Mandal (Ibn Qutayba, p. 9). It is difficult to identify the present-day city referred to as *Dahnaj*, but al-Mandal is present-day Mannar. Moreover, the place *mandal* was referred to by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in his famous compendium *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓār* as a romanticized and rich spot in Sri Lanka during the fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta writes as follows,

“Then we left for *Mannar Mandalī* (from the city of *Baṭṭāla*). It is a beautiful city located at the extremity of the king’s (Arya Chakravarty) realm. Its inhabitants gave us a splendid meal which consisted of young buffaloes whom they had hunted in the neighbouring jungle with rice, quail, fish, poultry, and milk” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987, p. 606).

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s account of the reception that he received in the city of *Manar Mandalī* highlighted the richness of Arya Chakravarty’s kingdom. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa recounted a meal hosted by the inhabitants of *Manar Mandalī*. He continues to introduce a *Khurāsānī* Muslim, who accompanied him on his journey to *Bandar Salawāt*, another city near the *Manar Mandalī*. The researcher understands through these references that this place was idealized to create a name for fragrance. Moreover, ‘Ali Bin ‘Abd Allāh Al-Ghuzūlī (d. 1412), a Syrian scholar and poet, in his famous compendium titled *Matāli‘ al-Budūr Fī*

*Manāzil al-Surūr*¹⁴⁹, brings the following poetry to make a point. Ḍiya'u al-Dīn al-Manāwī writes on oud:

سقى له ولغرسه	المندي كريم
الهند نسبة جنسه	لما أراد يرينا
يجود فيها بنفسه	غدا على النار ملقى

Oud plant of <i>Mandal</i> is generous scent tree	for planting and watering
Looking at India shows us	its ancestral roots
Tomorrow, its meeting place will be fire;	all will be well

(Al-Ghuzūlī, 1981, p. 63)

Like the previous poem, Ḍiya'u al-dīn al-Manāwī, idealized *Mandal* to be a famous oud or fragrant tree. Another reason for the claim is that according to al-Marwazī, the oud plant is a native tree not only to India but also to Sri Lanka. This tree symbolizes the ancient heritage and distinctive character of India. Understandably, as stated above, *al-mandal* is not only denoting to oud, but it refers to *Mandalī* or *Manthai*. This poem clearly indicates the romanticized portrayal of *Manthai* in the Indic world, idealizing a vernacular place to a famous fragrance.

¹⁴⁹This book has three volumes.

Some poems related to *Sarandīb* specify local landscapes of the Island. This literary mapping of landscapes encourages what Hopkins termed “religio-geocultural imaginary” that is related to the sanctity of the island. Although Anoma Peris argues that most of the indigenous Sinhala poetic productions like *sandēśa* poetry focused on the salient features of geographical affiliation and politically constructed ethno-cultural loyalties, the researcher contends that Arabic poetic works of the medieval period were not politically motivated. Muhammad Bin Ahmad Al-Shāfi‘ī al-Qāhirī (d. 1569) in his book *Tuhfat al-Ḥabīb ‘Ala Sharah al-Khātib* notes:

وآدم معه أهبط العود والعصا	لموسى من الآس النبات المكرم
وأوراق تين واليمين بمكة	وختم سليمان النبي المعظم

Adam whom with oud and stick was sent,

Moses came with noble *myrtle* tree

The leaves of fig and baobab are in Mecca,

Also, the ring of Sulayman, the great prophet, (is in Mecca).

(Al-Shāfi‘ī al-Qāhirī, 1990, p. 205)

In this poem, al-Qāhirī clearly indicates that the place where Adam, the first human being, is believed to have set foot on Earth is Sri Lanka. He brought with him oud. Moses possessed a stick of myrtle tree. The leaves of fig and baobab, and Sulayman’s ring are in Mecca. As this poem has demonstrated an obvious religious identity which clearly states that *Sarandīb*

is sacred geography. This poem shows Sri Lanka as a cosmopolitan territory in the world, and it has religious prominence outside the Sri Lanka, particularly in West Asia.

5.5. The Sri Lankan Idolaters in *Sarandībiyāt*: Poet Abd al-Raḥmān

The depiction of Sri Lanka in poetic composition, produced in the form of geographic, economic, and cultural expression is a statement to claim universal reputation to the island. Apparently, such composition, primarily, lies in praise of nature and commodities of Sri Lanka, to offer the cosmopolitan characteristics to the island. No emotional poetic elements like *hija'* (lampoon-invective), *munāqaḍāt* (polemic-debates), *rithā'* (elegy), *fakhr* (praise of character) and *ḥanīn al-waṭan* (homesickness) were found. Therefore, the description of a horizon without human interaction will not blend with the aristocratic character of Arabic poetry.

Despite being a legendary island in the eyes of Arab poets, a few chosen poems considered ordinary person and his religious/belief identity. Although Nizar Hermes claims that medieval Arabic poetry, as the favorite apparatus, not only described the Abbasid empire but also extended across the East and West of *dār al-Islām*, wherein the representation made of the non-Muslim other is less common (Hermes, 2012, p. 138). A closer inspection of chosen poems revealed that the islanders were largely idolaters. However, such portrayals do not necessarily imply an antagonistic alterity of Arabs toward the Sri Lankans.

The text written by poet Abd al-Rahman, to be cited by al-Zuhri (1130-1161), shows how Sri Lankan deities were venerated and worshiped not only by the indigenous people but also by the people from the Indic world. As Abd al-Rahman notes:

وكم بسرنديب رأيت أباددا	موشحة تبراً مكللة درا
إذا عاين الهندي منها سموها	يخر لها في الحين من خشية خرا

How many idols I saw in *Sarandīb*,

draped with daffodils decorated with pearls

If an Indian recognizes its eminence,

he will prostrate completely obedient at once

(Al-Zuhri, nd, pp. 29-30)

The poem in question brought some elements of the religious characteristics of an idol worshiping non-Islamic society. The poet, on one hand, is mindful of the civilized nature of Sri Lanka, on the other, he is aware of their infidelity through their paganism. We can suggest from this poem that the non-Islamic “other” had been represented by the following words and phrases: idles (*abādud*), eminence of idols (*sumuvvu*), prostrate (*yakhirru*), and fear (*khashya*). Although kneeling to idols is a prohibited act of worship in Islamic traditions, the poet did not show any positive impression or negative reaction to this behavior of the Sri Lankan worshippers.

It should be noted from the outset that despite Sri Lanka being identified as a land of idolaters, we cannot see any evidence in the *Sarandībiyyat* to portray a religious controversy by Arab-Islamic poets on the Buddhist or Hindu worshippers. It is no surprise then that the poem in question contains negative expressions like *al-suwād*, (blacks), *kuffār* (non-believer), *qabīh al-wajh* (dirty faces), and *ḍālim* (oppressive) as shown by Arabs portraying Byzantines as the “other”, nor did it include satirical phrases criticizing infidels. The omission of such expressions in *Sarandībiyāt* inevitably implies a close and cordial relations between the worshippers and the poet who necessarily visited Sri Lanka at that time because the poet admitted that he himself witnessed the occasion.

A comparison of Arabic poetry with the Sri Lankan indigenous poetic productions could reveal a comprehensive description of the narrative. As in Sri Lanka from the sixth century onwards Sanskrit poetic norms which primarily revolved around court poetry (*kavya*) and royal panegyric (*prasastī*) had a profound influence on the development of the Sinhala *sandēśa* poetry, a poetic production of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century. This poem shares a similar narrative of deity worship. It is interesting to note that in classical Sinhala *sandēśa* poem, the statue of the deity God *Upulvan*¹⁵⁰ has been described as follows:

¹⁵⁰It is a deity erected in the shape of the Buddhist God *Upulvan* who appears in a local shrine to be worshipped.

“The noble, heavenly tree of this king of the gods [Upulvan], presents the highest splendor,

Adorned with the bees of his garland made of pleasing blue sapphire gems,

And heaps of the flowers of pearls made heavy with the fruits of great gifts,

Being decorated with the branches of his hands and the luminous shoots of his very red fingers.”

(Paññātissa, 1945, p. v.26)

God *Upulvan* has been portrayed with great praise and well adorned with a “garland of blue sapphire gems” and “heaps of the flowers of pearls”. These phrases are similar to the imagery of poet Abd al-Raḥman. The only visible anomaly in the description is that Arabic poetry defines the “idol” as a statue, potentially with no godly powers while classical *sandēśa* poems portray the idol as divine element. The language used by the poet Abd al-Raḥman shows that he was aware of heathenism that was in practice among the non-Islamic community of Sri Lanka.

More examples of such kind from the indigenous *sandēśa* poems elaborate on the physical features of the deity, which was adopted by native people, to show some similarity to the characteristics shown by the poet Abd al-Raḥmān. In *Savulsandesaya*, a fifteenth-century Sinhalese poet Alagiyavanna, in his description of God Saman, an idol venerated by the

Buddhists, which is in a shrine near Adam's Peak comparing its arms to the branches of a heavenly tree.

“The arms of the lord of the gods display the appearance of branches on the heavenly tree,

Always bestowing all forms of wealth, pleasing gods, and human

Upon which the bumblebees of delightful ornaments of blue sapphire gems reside

With heaps of flowers of fingernails and the shoots of exceptionally long, very red fingers”.

(Dhoyī, Gosvāmin, & trans. Mallinson, 2006, p. vv195)

By describing Saman's body (eyes, ears, arms, chest, thigh, feet), the text powerfully reconstructs his physical presence within his shrine. The poem shows that the portrayal used by Alagiyavanna is similar to what was used by poet Abd al-Rahman,¹⁵¹ in terms of describing the idol, to have worn the “ornaments of blue sapphire gems”. This case signifies that the usage of gems, pearls, and fragrances in Arabic poetry precedes the genre of Sinhala *sandēśa*.

Muslim writers have shown a clash with their European counterpart, the Byzantines. However, despite religious, linguistic and cultural differences, Arabs did not wage war against Sri Lanka, nor did they display an iconoclastic disagreement towards the Sri Lankan “other”.

¹⁵¹ This poet is believed to have lived in the eleventh century in Islamic Spain.

Most Sri Lankans were Buddhists and Hindus, while a small portion were Muslims and Christians. In fact, Arab poets did not satirize Sri Lankans in their overall presentation and representation.

5.6.Conclusion

M Hamidulla (1941) holds the contentious view that the importance of foreign sources in narrating the history of a region is diminishing (Hamidulla, 1941, p. 246). However, Arabic poetic texts are the primary authentic sources on Sri Lanka and valuable material to complement the narration of history, culture, and society of the country. They are also an important source for the present study due to insufficient indigenous evidence. Thus, Arabic poems which have been scattered in several Arabic compendiums as fragments provide valuable information to enrich the image of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the selected materials provide crucial insights to construct an image of Sri Lanka during the medieval era. In most cases, *Sarandībīyyāt* evoke a sense of cosmopolitanism and the translocal nature of the island.

This chapter dealt with the reproduction of Sri Lankan religions and cultures in Arabic poetry. Arab poets constructed an alterity on European society based on their *Rūmiyyāt*. The prolonged struggle between Islam and Christendom during the medieval period led to this situation. Nizar Hermes notes:

“In connection to the important period of the Crusades within the history of relations between Islam and the West in past and present, it is not going too

far to say that despite the tense religious atmosphere that dominated much of the encounter between Levantine Muslims and Euro-Christians during the Crusades and the ensuing demonization of the Franks in medieval Arabic literature, several Muslim writers exhibited a readiness to question religiously and culturally many of the stereotypes and prejudices they had for a long time embraced, endorsed, and perpetuated” (Hermes N. F., 2012, p. 174).

Nizar Hermes shows the antagonistic tendencies between Arab writers and European world during the medieval times. However, no such antagonism existed between Arabs and *Sarandīb* at that time. Arab relationship was primarily built through close and mutual understanding based on trade endeavors of both factions despite Sri Lanka being a land of infidels.

Throughout the Abbasid period and irrespective of the internal strife that led to the rise of several independent dynasties and principalities, Arab world never showed antipathy towards the Sri Lankans, nor did it engage in any conflict with Sri Lanka. Therefore, we cannot see evidence to suggest an antagonistic non-Islamic alterity in Arabic poetic representations primarily for two reasons: Firstly, a critique of these poems reveals the images constructed around *Sarandīb* are based on received knowledge from the merchants, travelers, geographers, and pilgrims, rather than an understanding drawn from direct experience or traveling undertaken by poets to Sri Lanka. Even the records of traveling

poets, such as poet Abd al-Raḥmān did not reveal any such expressions. But he admired the physical beauty of the deities found in Sri Lanka. Secondly, *al-Thuguriyyāt* predominantly turned into satirical poetry preliminary based on political conflicts in Europe, not based on religious orthodoxy or any other reasons. The Christians had close affinity to Muslims as both communities are adherents of revealed texts unlike the Sri Lankan majority were worshippers of idols. But political conflicts between the Islamic Caliphate and the Byzantine empire, along with the Crusades between 1095 and 1291, were the reasons behind the emergence of the satirical *thuguriyyāt*. For this reason, *al-Rūmiyyāt* adopted *hijā'* poetry. Although Sri Lanka is a land of idol worshippers, it did not experience any political conflicts or commercial strife with Arabs. Therefore, no satirical genre emerged to portray the Sri Lankans as an “other.”

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the perceptions of Arab writers on the Sri Lankan ‘other’ from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. It illustrated how medieval Muslim writers expressed their views about Sri Lanka and its inhabitants via their portrayals of the island and its people in various texts they produced. More importantly, the study also examined the reasons behind these portrayals in order to understand the attitudes and perceptions that informed such portrayals in their accounts. This was achieved by using fresh theoretical and methodological techniques and conducting thematic analyses (See chapters 3 and 5), and several case studies (See Chapter 4).

This dissertation adopted Brons’ revised theoretical framework to analyze the materials. His framework could be categorized into two main types: 1) Sophisticated alterity and 2) Quasi alterity. The sophisticated alterity approach is a more complex understanding of differences. According to Brons, sophisticated othering partially depends on self-other identification (Brons, 2015, p. 86). This approach acknowledges that individuals and groups can share similarities as well as differences, and that difference is not a fixed or static concept. The sophisticated alterity approach also recognizes the importance of acknowledging and understanding diverse cultural perspectives and seeks to bridge gaps in understanding through communication and dialogue. As shown in the first chapter containing the

theoretical framework, unlike “crude alterity,” which is a “distancing” or “rejection” approach, the “sophisticated” approach along with the “quasi” model has been presented by the researcher. It is important to note that this model does not portray a demonizing “other.”

The perspectives of Arab writers regarding Sri Lankans from different religious and cultural backgrounds were analyzed in this thesis. The Sri Lankan cultural landscape during the medieval era was mainly dominated by religions of non-Abrahamic faiths as Buddhism and Hinduism were followed by most of the population while the minority were Muslims and Christians. In contrast, Arab writers who wrote about Sri Lanka, were predominantly Sunni Muslims except for al-Mas‘ūdī and Yohanna Ibn Masuweyah, a Shī‘ī geographer cum historian and a Muslim convert from Christianity respectively.

The medieval attitude of idolatry is evident in most Islamic sources since Islam is a monotheistic religion which strictly prohibits idol worship. In fact, the communities that worshipped idols were considered ‘morally debased’ (Hawting, 2009, p. 03), and Prophet Muhammed was sent to salvage them. The Qur’ān uses the terms *mushrikūn* (*associators*) and *kuffār* (*unbelievers*) to denote idolaters. G.R. Hawting (2009) states that the Qur’ān identifies idolaters in general and the Meccan idol worshippers in particular as its opponents. Further, the Qur’ānic texts shows negative attitude towards the associators (*mushrikūn*) and the infidels (*kuffār*) (Hawting, 2009, p. 04). Therefore, it is important to understand whether

traditional Arabic texts written on Sri Lanka are consistent and compatible with these Muslim attitudes.

This research showed that Arabs' interest in Sri Lanka was unwavering since the advent of Islam. Sri Lanka, despite being identified as a land of *majūs* (Zoroastrians) (al-Bakrī, 2003, p. 144), maintained a cordial relationship with West Asian Arabs for a long time. There is ample evidence to prove that Arab traders and merchants frequently visited ports, palaces, and markets to interact with Sri Lankans, conduct their trade, and collect commodities (Al-Gharnāṭī, 1993, p. 129). Moreover, there is evidence of ancient diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and West Asia. A Sri Lankan ambassador's visit to Mecca to learn about the message of Islam in the middle of the seventh century (Ibn Shahrayār, 1908, pp. 117-118) is a case in point. Thus, it is clear that the mutually beneficial relationship between Sri Lankans and Arabs was not only for commercial reasons but also for cultural and religious reasons. The flourishing trade and cultural exchanges between West Asia and Sri Lanka, in turn, significantly influenced Arab writers' portrayal of the island and its inhabitants.

The present study identified that the historical background has also influenced Arabs' perceptions and portrayals of the cultures, religions, and societies in Sri Lanka. No political or religious conflicts were reported between Arabs and Sri Lanka during the medieval times. Neither was Sri Lanka known for its military strength or vast territory with a large population. After the conquest of Sind in 711 CE, Arabs eliminated any threats to their

commercial activities in the Indian Ocean. Like the Umayyad-Byzantine wars between 674-678 and 717-718, there were no other battles between Arabs and India or its neighboring territories after the battle of Sind. Therefore, no need had arisen to strengthen their borders or buffer towns (Bonner, 1996). As noted by Nafis Ahmad (1945) in his book titled *The Arabs' Knowledge of Ceylon*, Arab relations with Sri Lanka had never reached a point of conflict. He notes:

“The vast Arab historic geographical literature dealing with this corner of the world gives us a revealing picture of these peaceful commercial relations. There is not a single instance of discord between the Muslims and the non-Muslim rulers or peoples culminating in war” (Ahmad, 1945, p. 227).

Throughout the Abbasid period, Muslim enmity never reached a point where the two territories, i.e., Sri Lanka and West Asia, were to clash in the Indian Ocean. These historical and cultural backgrounds shaped a positive and cordial exchange between the two territories.

This research primarily adopted a thematic analysis approach to answer the research questions, dividing the materials into travel, geography, and poetry texts. Each thematic area included sub-sections. For instance, the materials on geography are further divided into three areas, namely, *‘ajā’ib*, *aqālīm*, and *ahjār* genres. A comparative analysis of primary sources was conducted, facilitating a deeper understanding through comparison and

contrast, involving two or more prominent manuscripts or writers. For instance, the comparative examination attempted between Sulaymān al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. In some chapters, a thematic analysis involving various sources was done. The third chapter on geographic texts, for example, involves a thematic analysis of two distinct patterns. Since Arab geography shows Sri Lanka as a source of curiosity for numerous '*ajā'ib* and *gharā'ib* stories, this section basically discussed '*ajā'ib al-barr* (Earth marvels), along with two subcategories: sacred geographic marvels, i.e., '*ajā'ib* of Adam's Peak, and topographic marvels, i.e. '*ajā'ib* of *ahjār* (gemstones). In addition to that, this section examines '*ajā'ib al-bahr* (sea marvels) along with two more categories: marvels of landscape, i.e., temples with golden idols, and marvels of species, i.e., the bird artic turn (*Kharsana*).

Muslim travelers being outsiders to the island constructed their attitudes and perceptions largely based on their religious identification. Since Sri Lankans were predominantly non-Muslims, Arab writers did not share many common factors such as religion, culture, and language with them. The alterity has been constructed primarily on religious and cultural markers: Muslim-infidel basis. Arab travelers to the island and their subsequent writing clearly distinguished their Islamic religious "self" from non-Islamic religious identities and practices of the islanders. This is obvious and unavoidable because Arab writers were either *sunnī*, *shī'ī* (al-Mas'ūdī, al-Ya'qubi), or converts (Yuhanna ibn Masuweiāh). Therefore, the determiners of identification lie largely in religious markers.

Despite Sri Lanka being a land of idolatry, most Arab writers portray the island as unbiased, showing positive,¹⁵² negative,¹⁵³ and mixed (ambivalent)¹⁵⁴ reactions, and sometimes a neutral voice. In most examples used in this research, the portrayal of Sri Lanka is positive. This positive portrayal can be viewed as a quasi-alterity, a non-derogatory “other” which lacks a distinct otherness on the part of the writer (Brons, 2015, p. 86). The absence of otherness in some cases indicates that the writer is receptive to the “other” and shows the readers that the writer does not present a negative or racist attitude towards his counterpart, the quasi other. While recognizing the otherness of the non-Islamic communities of Sri Lanka, the writers imbued positive notes of the cultural landscape of Sri Lanka or used a neutral voice that refrained from making any derogatory comments about idol-worshippers. This is evident in the geographic (*aḥjar*) section, where writers like Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, Ibn Masuweiḥ, al-Birūnī, al-Tayfāshī, and al-Ḥalabī depict positive portrayals of the Sri Lankan geography for its valuable commodities, namely, gems and pearls. They praised the Sri Lankans for being the most knowledgeable individuals (*aḥḍak al-Nās*) in the affairs of gems and tolerant towards strangers. This is also evident in *‘ajā’ib* and *gharā’ib* stories of Zakariyya al-Qazwīnī (1203-1284), Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī (1160-1233), al-Baṭalyawsī (1240), and al-Wardī (1291-1457) who illustrate the marvels and mysteries of the island in a fascinating manner. The third chapter on religious and cultural identities of the indigenous

¹⁵²The phrase ‘positive depiction’ generally aims to praise and appreciate a person, place, or an object. This includes traits, strengths, virtues, achievements, admirable characteristics, and values.

¹⁵³A negative portrayal is to show an unfavorable and unimpressed condition or situation. This includes weaknesses, shortcomings, injustices, immoral behaviours, and discriminations.

¹⁵⁴The term ambivalent refers to a mixed reaction of both positive and negative depictions, showing a mixed and uncertain feeling about a person, place or an object.

people of Sri Lanka is particularly significant in this regard. Writers like al-Bakrī and al-Zuhrī (1130-1161), for instance, portrayed Sri Lanka in a positive light overall, despite its drawbacks. This is also applicable to poets like al-Ma‘arrī (973-1057), Yāqūt al Hamawī (1179-1229), al-Shāfi‘ī (767-820), Abū Ghudhdha (1336-1417), al-Tha‘ālabī al-Naysābūrī (961-1038), Ṣāhib Ibn ‘Ibād (947-995), Farazdaq (d. 728), Ibn Muṭrān, and Abdul Raḥmān, who adopted similar approaches. These writers rarely incorporated their opinions into the texts as they did not make any personal remarks or observations. This stance is mainly for two reasons. Firstly, Arab writers did not find any religious, cultural, or political reasons to construct an invective “other” of the Sri Lankan *ajnās*. Secondly, their neutral voice suggests that the narrator’s perspective remains obscured within the text because of their avoidance of any personal reactions to the details. Early Islamic geographic and historical sources often relied on compiling material by extracting information from earlier texts. When writers made decisions about what to include or omit from earlier sources, they revealed their interpretations of those texts. Early Muslim historians occasionally excluded certain sections from older sources to conceal the voice of the previous writer or to present information without revealing their own understandings or opinions of the text. Poets, too, mainly composed their poems based on the information that they heard from the travelers and merchants who had voyaged to Sri Lanka.

However, a negative or critical perspective associated with sophisticated alterity is evident in the works of Ibn Shahrīyār, al-Mas‘ūdī, al-Hamadhānī, and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī

(1080-1170). This perspective is based on religio-geocultural and political images of Sri Lanka, which shows that Arab writers were unbiased when expressing their findings about Sri Lankan societies. Arab writers predominantly show negative terms and ideas of some communities in Sri Lanka. Ibn Shahrāyār, al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn, al-Hamadhānī, and Suhrāb Muṣṭafā ibn Suhrāb perceive communities such as Bīkūr and Vedda as ‘uncivilized’, ‘wild’, and ‘cruel’ based on observations on their appearance and behavior patterns. They use negative descriptors such as ‘nudity’ ‘barefooted’, and ‘ugliness’ to display this attitude. Moreover, they use similes such as *zanjī* (Black Africans), *wahshī* (cruel), *al-suwad* (black-skinned), ‘*Urāt ka al-Sibā*’ (naked like animals), and *qabīh al-wajh* (ugly faces) to show this negativity. This resembles Marco Polo’s (c. 1260) portrayal of the Sri Lankans as “poor” and “cowardly creatures” and Fā-Hien’s (c. 408) identification of them as “wicked nagas”. However, it seems that these writers had a clear idea of the diverse communities that constituted the Sri Lankan society of the time because they also portrayed the Brahmin community as ‘civilized’, ‘rich’, and belonging to the ‘upper-class’. Thus, the balanced portrayal of different communities in Sri Lanka proves that Arab writers were neutral and unbiased in depicting religio-geocultural aspects of the island. More importantly, though they depicted the differences between the non-Muslims of Sri Lanka and Muslims from their own region, their portrayals did not escalate to the point of fostering animosity and enmity among Arabic communities towards the idol-worshipping population Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, Arab travelers Sulaymān al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa show a mixed (ambivalent) reaction, displaying both positive and negative qualities of the Sri Lankan non-Muslim “other”. Al-Tājir constructs a shifting panoply of others from positive to negative perceptions of them. In general, *Sarandīb* was depicted as a medieval utopia that had several characteristics of an ideal city (*al-Madīnā al-Fāḍila*) as envisaged by Abū Naṣr al-Farābī (872-950) and Thomas More (1478-1535). These characteristics included the abundance of natural resources, the use of music as a sign of prosperity, unity among diverse religious and cultural entities, and using intercultural communication to solve issues. It seems that al-Tājir initially gives examples to show the utopian traits found in Sri Lanka, mixed with utopian captivity. Then, he gradually moves to show the dystopian qualities through his identification of the country as a place for adultery and confusing sacramental rituals of the people. Similarly, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa initially shows religious controversy, but moves on to find a common ground between the Muslims and non-Muslims who lived in the island at that time in order to promote interfaith relations. However, two contrasting patterns have emerged between al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. While al-Tājir moves from the utopian understanding of Sri Lanka towards dystopian qualities, such as adultery and weird sacramental rituals, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa moves from negative behaviors displayed by the Sri Lankans, such as the iconoclastic tendencies and aggravating of strangers, towards promoting intercultural engagements. One important point that this research found is the episodes of conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslim people in Sri Lanka. However, the reporting strategy

adopted by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa seems to focus on turning the conflict into a positive relation, which is an impressive approach.

In addition, this research did not find evidence to support the argument brought by RALP Gunawardena (2003), who claims that due to the presence of Arabs in the ports of Sri Lanka, the indigenous people of Sri Lanka lost their opportunities to serve as middlemen (business agents) in trade. This claim implies avenues to a business rivalry between Arab merchants and Sri Lankans. A closer analysis of evidence, however, did not show any such antagonistic relationship between Sri Lankans and Arab merchants. Hence, it can be concluded that alterity did not arise through political or economic factors as RALP Gunawardana (2003) argues. Instead, evidence showed a picture contrary to that of Gunawardena (2003), particularly by revealing the cordial relations between Arabs and Sri Lankans. Dasanayaka (2017) stated that the loss of business opportunity for Sri Lankans was not due to the presence of Arabs in Sri Lanka, but because of the influence of *Vijayanagara* kings, who dominated the business in Asia. Due to their control of sea routes to China, the commercial voyages to China were affected. This seems correct because it is agreed that despite Arab control over Sri Lanka's export trade, they did not interfere with the country's internal politics which explains the long-standing peaceful relationship between Arabs and Sri Lankans (Mahroof, 1999, p. 23).

Medieval Arabic poetry was the favorite “ideological apparatus” not only of the Abbasid state but also of the common Muslim East and West of *dār al-Islam*. However not much representation was used to denote the non-Muslim “other” in terms of Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians in medieval Arabic poetry. Arabic poetry did not wage an ideological war against the non-Islamic “other” of Sri Lanka. The poems composed by medieval Arab poets mostly convey positive depictions of the products and commodities that Sri Lanka had to offer. In fact, only one poem records the tendency for idol worshipping among the islanders, and even then, no attempt at demonizing ‘the other’ is evident. Moreover, emotional type of poetry that encompassed the classical genres such as *madih* (eulogy-panegyrics), *hijā’* (lampoon-invective), *munāqaḍāt* (polemic-debates), *rithā’* (elegy), *fakhr* (praise), and *ḥanīn al-waṭan* (homesickness) were not known. Similarly, Arabs did not present *hijā’* to criticize the “infidels”. However, they praised the beauty of the idols as exemplified in the works by the Andalusian poet Abd al-Raḥmān (c.1160). This suggests that neither antagonism nor captivity was a component in the poetry about Sri Lanka, and that it was the norm of the Arabs who composed *madīḥ* poetry (eulogy-panegyric) to praise kings, rulers, military leaders, and other elites. Therefore, no *hijā’* poetry on Sarandib was found.

Another noteworthy outcome of the present research is that no evidence was found to support the argument that Arabs constructed a crude alterity of the Sri Lankan “other” in the selected materials or any other auxiliary materials. Crude alterity in this context means Arabs’ outright rejection of non-Muslim people, resulting in war or expedition. An example

of crude alterity is the tension between Muslims and Christians following the crusades that lasted from the 11th to 13th century. Although alterity based on religious factors is visible in the works of Ibn Shahrīyār, al-Hamadhānī, and al-Qarnāṭī, it did not lead to a demonized depiction of the idol-worshipping communities in Sri Lanka. Also, it did not create tension between the Islamic rulers and the Sri Lankan monarch. Furthermore, no religious war, political conquest, or dramatic huntingdonian clash, or a Napoleonic expedition on the part of Arab warriors have been reported. This suggests that the Arab population had cordial relations with Sri Lanka, which in turn, shaped their portrayals of the island and its inhabitants as largely positive with rare derogatory remarks.

The chapter on travel clearly showed close and cordial relations between the Sri Lankan kings and visitors to the palace (al-Hukaym ibn Sa‘d, al-Sardārī, al-Ḥijāzī), traversing merchants, and pilgrims. This thesis also showed the positive and mutual exchanges between the Sri Lankan rulers and the rulers of *dār al-Islam*, beginning from the time of the four Caliphs, as exemplified by Ibn Shahrīyār, Aḥmad al-Balādurī, and Ibn al-Athīr al-Shāfi‘ī. This led to the favorable reception of merchants, travelers, guests, and ambassadors from both regions. In terms of depictions of the Sri Lankan rulers in their texts, Arab writers were neutral in displaying both positive and negative qualities of the Sri Lankan rulers. For example, al-Hukaym ibn Sa‘d described the king that he met as ‘wise’ and Ibn Shahrīyār showed the king he met as ‘impure’. Interestingly, though they created both positive and negative portrayals in their accounts, these depictions were quite neutral.

A notable issue or limitation of the study is the absence of any comprehensive account or manuscript written by Arab writers during the medieval period, that is solely dedicated to Sri Lanka. However, a considerable number of travel writings include sections on Sri Lanka as eyewitness accounts, including those of al-Tājir and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. Yet the geographic materials are largely second-hand information collected from Arab geographers. Similarly, in terms of poetry, Arab poets constructed their images of Sri Lanka based on imagination and secondhand information gathered from travelers.

The present research showed that travel sources furnished more engaging narratives and eyewitness accounts on Sri Lanka. However, only a few sources which are archived in the British Library and other libraries of the United Kingdom were used for this research. Unfortunately, some of the explored sources are beyond the scope of the present study. For instance, *Riḥla Ilyās Ibn Ḥannā Muṣilī* by the 18th century scholar Ilyās Muṣilī' is one such text. Though *Riḥla Ilyās Ibn Ḥannā Muṣilī* is an elite source among the Arabic texts compiled in 1786, which was written by a Christian traveler to India, it could not be used in this study for the above reason. A future study employing new archival materials would further enhance our understanding of Arab writers' perceptions of Sri Lanka. In addition, more studies need to be conducted on Sri Lanka using premodern Arabic sources. Conducting such studies would be a promising endeavor for future researchers.

In summary, the analysis found that because of the cordial political and diplomatic relations between Arabs (mainly from West Asia) and Sri Lanka, the portrayal of the island and its inhabitants is largely positive. In fact, the study found only a few exceptions where the portrayal was centered between the Muslim religious self and Sri Lankan non-Islamic idolaters. However, these negative portrayals did not demonize the ‘other’. This finding aligns with Ibn Nafis’s observation that Arab writers did not record a single instance of conflict between the Muslims and the non-Muslim rulers or peoples culminating in war or conflict with Sri Lanka (Ahmad, 1945, p. 227) as they show constant positive and reciprocal exchanges between these two groups of people. Evidently, the occasional identification and differentiation of non-Islamic idolaters is largely due to the significant influence of Islam on Arab writers, and not due to any political power struggle to control trade in the ports of Sri Lanka. However, these findings also reject the claim that Arabs only had a positive perception of Sri Lanka as demonstrated in their writings of Ibn Nafis (1945). On the contrary, this research shows a spectrum of perceptions including positive, negative, and ambivalent.

While many Arabic sources provide inconclusive portrayals and show quasi-otherness of the non-Islamic communities in Sri Lanka, Ibn Shahrāyār, al-Zuhārī, and al-‘Umrī show a noticeable ‘otherness’ in their narratives, which highlights the difference between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, this alterity did not escalate to the level of hatred and hostility towards the non-Muslim population of Sri Lanka. Consequently, my contention is that the

Arabic sources about Sri Lanka did not exhibit sinister and crude cultural distinctiveness by demonizing the non-Islamic populace, nor do they depict them as wicked, malevolent, and threatening. Instead, through their depictions, these sources attempt to delineate the non-Muslim otherness in order to promote interfaith relationships.

APPENDICES

Appendix 3.1 A 'lām al-Baṭalyawsī's *Rabī' al-Anwār*



Folio, 1v

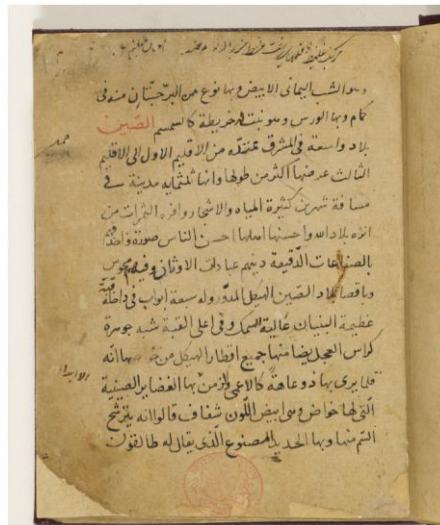
Folio, 1r



Folio, 55v

Folio, 56

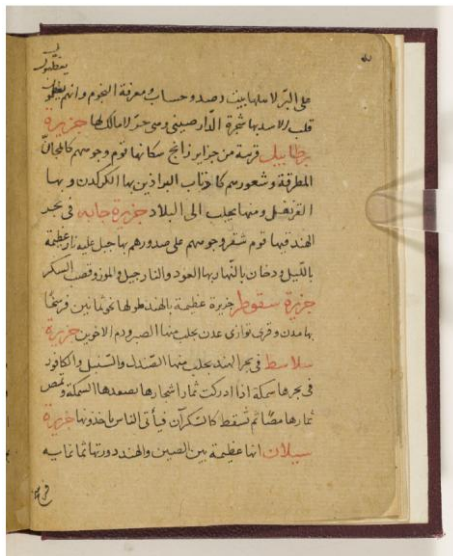
Appendix 3.2 ‘Abd al-Rashīd Ibn Šālih al-Bākūwī’s *Kitāb Talkhīṣ Al- Āthār*



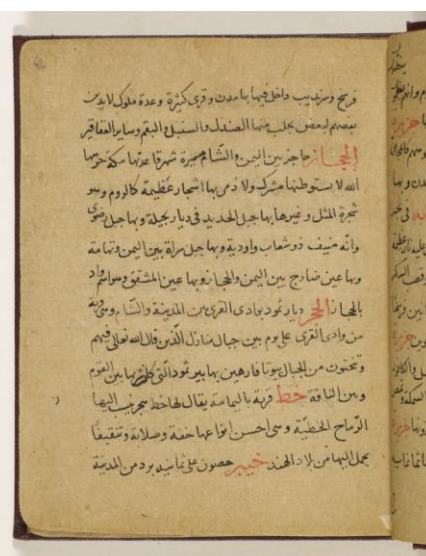
Folio, 2v



Folio, 12v

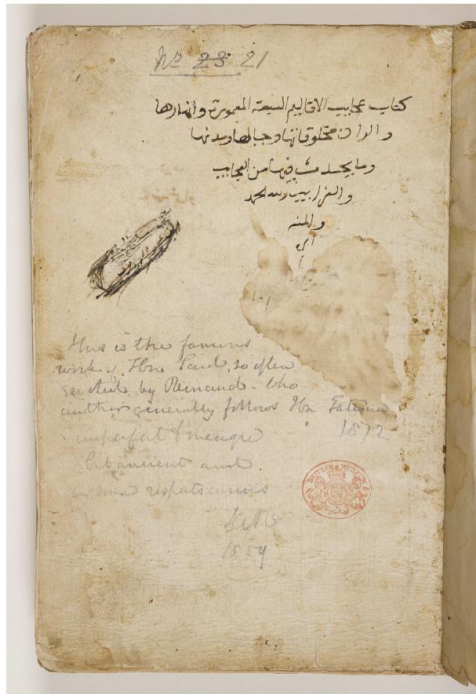


Folio, 4 r

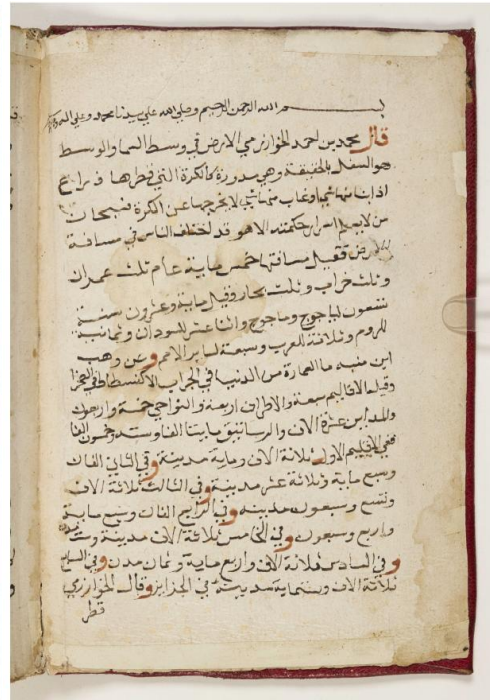


Folio, 4 v

Appendix 3.3 Al-Gharnāṭī Nūr al-Dīn's (d. 1286) *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'ah*, Or 1524: ca 1300, London, British Library.



Cover page



Folio. 1r

Appendix 3.4 *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Aqālīm al-Sab'ah*. Or 1524: ca 1300, London, British Library.



Folio. 7v

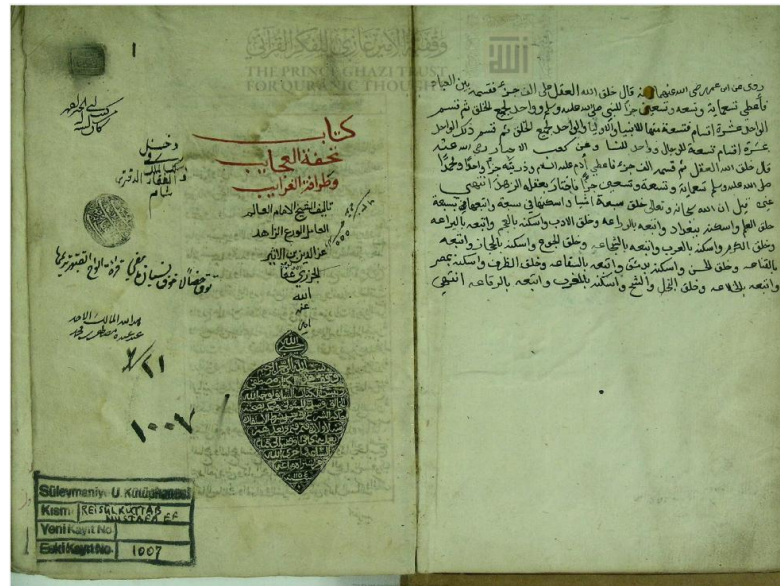
Folio. 7r



Folio. 24r

Folio. 25v

Appendix 3.5 Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī's (1160-1233) *Tuhfat al-'Ajā'ib Wa Ṭurfat al-Ghara'ib*, 1007, Jordan, Prince Ghazi Trust for Quranic Thought.



First page

Folio, 1r.



Wonders of Sarandīb, Fol. 132 v & r.

Appendix 3.6 Excerpt from al-Qazwīnī's manuscript that provides information on nudity of Sumatra populace, *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa-Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt*, Bavarian State Library, Munich-Cod.arab. 464.



Folio, 62r and v.

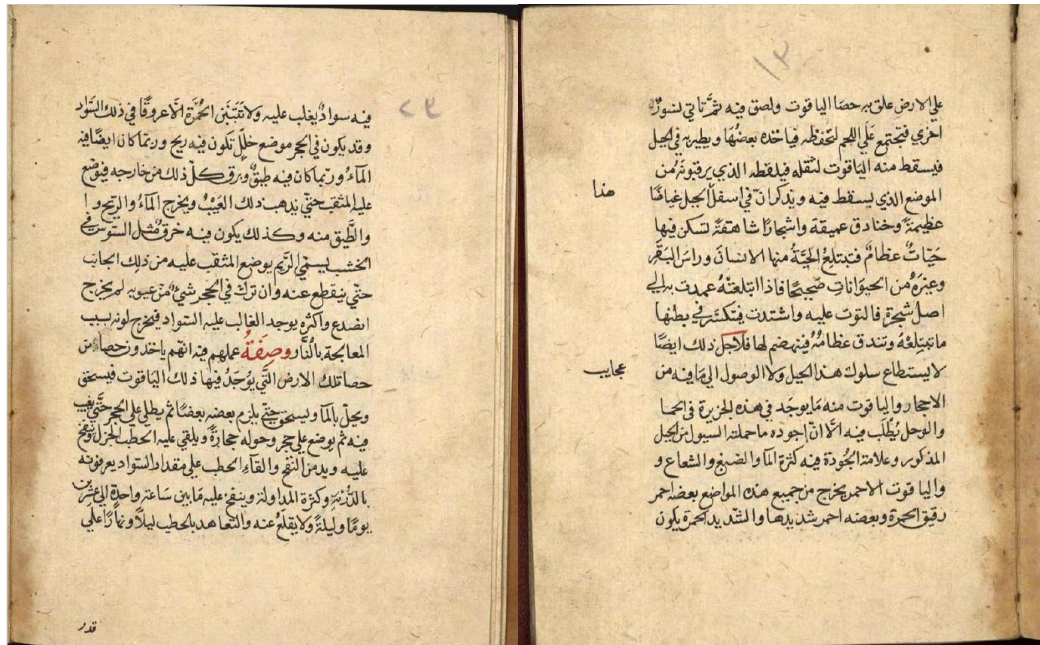


Folio 59v and r.

Appendix 3.7 Excerpt from Al-Qazwīnī's practice of *Sati* in Sri Lanka, Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt Wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt, Bavarian State Library, Munich-Cod.arab. 464.



Appendix 3.8. Excerpts from Al-Tayfāshī's *Kitāb al-Aḥjār al-Mulūkiyya*



الذي يصير إلى لون الزمرد ولبس في السنوري وكذلك
الذي يلبس في الرتي وادي الوان الياقوت الاصفر
بعض لونه يضرب إلى البياض وادي اصناف جميعه في الحلة
في الشكل والتعبير والظلال والنفور ويسمى السنور
طبع الياقوت وقوة الياقوت على قدر معادته
المتلون فيها وعلى قدر صيغته والوانه فالاحمر حار
يابس والاصفر قريبها إلى الاحمر وفيه فضل حار ولذلك
صار اصفر والاسم الجوني ابرد وايس والابيض بارد
البواقي واطرها **خواص الياقوت في ذاته**
من خواص الياقوت انه يقطع كل الحكة وشبهها يقطع الماء
وليس يقطع شي غير الماس ولذلك ان ركب منه
قطعة عطف شقبيد فانه شقبيد كالثقب الحثي
ومن خواص الياقوت انه لا يتحلل على خشت القشرا التي يحل
عليه كل شيء الا الياقوت فانه لا يحل عليه شيء الا على صيغته
خاص كسائر الخرج المائي ويجرد حتى يصير كالنورة ثم ليح

ملا

إلى ان يقرب من البياض فالخبري وهو احمر مشرق
بعدة فيرته يكون ورد احمر وامر في فريته وهو يتماثل
في قوة الصنع وضعفه إلى ان يقرب من البياض ثم الاحمر وهو
يكون كلون العصفرا الشديدا الحرة وهو ايضا يتماثل في
قوة الصنع حتى إلى لون العصفرا لما يصير في القوة إلى القرب
من الوردية في الضعف فالله في وهو الاحمر في الحرة
لا يشوبها غايبه وهو يتماثل ايضا في قوة الصنع وضعفه
حتى يتجلى إلى لون العصفرا الشديدا الحرة انما صيغته القوة وال
قوي من لون الزمرد في الضعف والمهرمان اسم العصفرا
سمي هذا الصنف من الياقوت واثن الياقوت الذي في
لون الحرة وهو المهرماني واثن كل واحد من بقية اصناف
اشدها صبغة او رقا مستشقا واشدها شغافا واسمها
من الصوب التي ذكرها فيما بعد فانما الياقوت الاصفر
منه الرقيق وهو قليل الصفة كثير الماس طالع الشغاف والخالقي
وهو اشهر صفة من الرقيق والخالقي وهو اشبع من الرقيق

والشغاف

انما انبسط في البحر فسقته من تلك الحرة وحسنته وان كان
فيه نكتة سوداء انقص ردها وهو حجر زرد اخضر او
وصفاء عند النخ عليه في النار واذا كان احمر وحمر في
النار قد هبت حمرته فليس بياقوت تلك احدا الاشياء
او هو مصنوع مدلس وقد رايته بسوق الجوهر في
بالقاهرة العزيز حاما الله تعالى حجارة تباع على انها
ياقوت مصبوغة ازرق واصفر وهي مصنوعة
مدلسة كان اصلها ياقوتا ابيض ومن خواصه انه لا
تفعل فيه المبارد والحديد ولا يلصق بشيء من جسمه
من جميع الوان احمر واصفر وسماوية فان من خواصه
قطع الحارة المشقة غير الماس ولا في جميع هذه الخواص
زايل على جميع الوان في القوة **خواص الياقوت في منافع**
من خواصه ما ذكره ارسطو وذلك انه من تغلج في او شربه
من اجناس المواقيت الذي وصفنا وكان في بله ولم ينه
الطاعون منع ان يصيبه ما اصاب اهل ذلك البلد

الطاعون

بالماء حتى يصير كانه الغرام يحل به على وجع الصفة الخامس
حجر الياقوت فيحل حتى يصير اشدا كالجوهر صغارا ومن
خواص الياقوت الشجاع فانه ليس شيء من الشدة شعاع
مثله ومن خواصه الثقل فانه ثقل الماء به المقدار في العظم
ومن خواصه صبره على النار فانه لا يكتسب كالمسك من
الحجارة المثقبة كالمزود ويترد من الاحجار ومن خواصه
انه يقبل البرودة لسرعته في الخرج من النار ويجلذ عن
سائر الاحجار فانما اصباح الياقوت فانما يتبعها على
النار الحرة فقطع وانما عنهما من سائر الوان كالصنف
والاسم الجوني والمستوا فانما تتسلخ كالحما بالنار ويبقى
حرا ايضا او يكتسب وينتقب ان اوطت عليه النار والصنف
ابعدا انشلائها والسودا اقلها ثباتا على النار فانما الحرة
وحدها فانها لا تنقل ولكن تراد وموقدة كراستطوي
كاه في الاحجار إلى الياقوت الاحمر اذا نفع عليه في النار اذا
حسنا وحرر اذا كان فيه نكتة شديدة الحرة ونفع عليه

Appendix 3.9. The world map found in *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-Funūn Wa-Mulaḥ al-'Uyūn*, probably drawn between AD 1020 and 1050.



The world map found in *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-Funūn Wa-Mulaḥ al-'Uyūn*, Bodleian Library MS. Arab. c. 90, University of Oxford. Fol. 23b and 24a.

Appendix 3.10

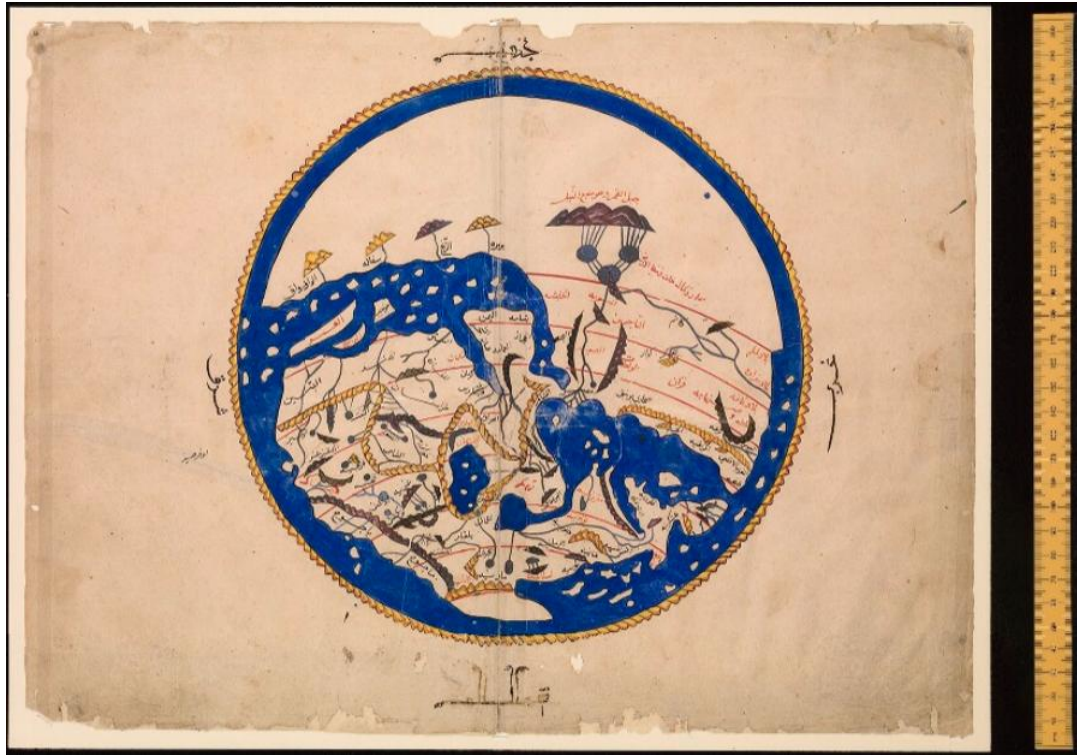
Sharafī al-Ṣifāqṣī's Regional Map drawn in 1570



Sharafī al-Ṣifāqṣī, ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad, fl. c. 1570 world map, Bodleian Library MS. Marsh

294, fol.5b

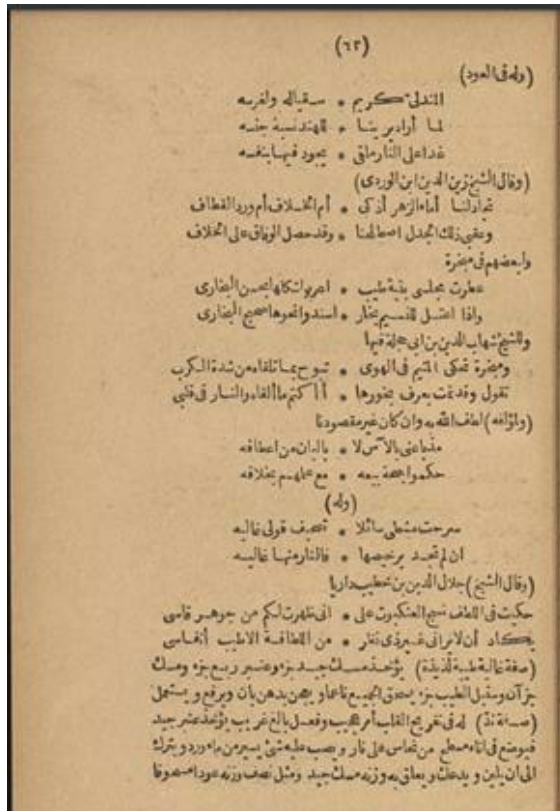
Appendix: 3.11 Al-Idrīsī's World Map



Idrisi's world map, Bodleian Library MS. Pococke375, : Uri (Arab. Moh.) 887, University of Oxford Online sources, folio v & r 4.

Appendix 5.1.

Kitāb Matāli‘ al-Budūr Fī Manāzil al-Surūr found in the New York University Library.



Appendix 5.2

Al-Shāfi‘ī’s Kitāb *Dīwān* al-Shāfi‘ī found in the New York University Library





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