
UNIT 16 TRADING WORLD OF ASIA AND THE ARABS*

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16.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the role played by Islam in the growth of Arab trade and rise of urban centres,
- appreciate the nomadic contribution in the urban economy of the Arabs,
- analyze changes in the world trade during the period under study,
- examine the trading relations of the Arabs with other regions of the world such as China, India and the Southeast Asian countries,
- discuss the nature of these trade exchanges and other factors involved therein, and
- comprehend the fact that the Arab world had elements of both the East and the West.

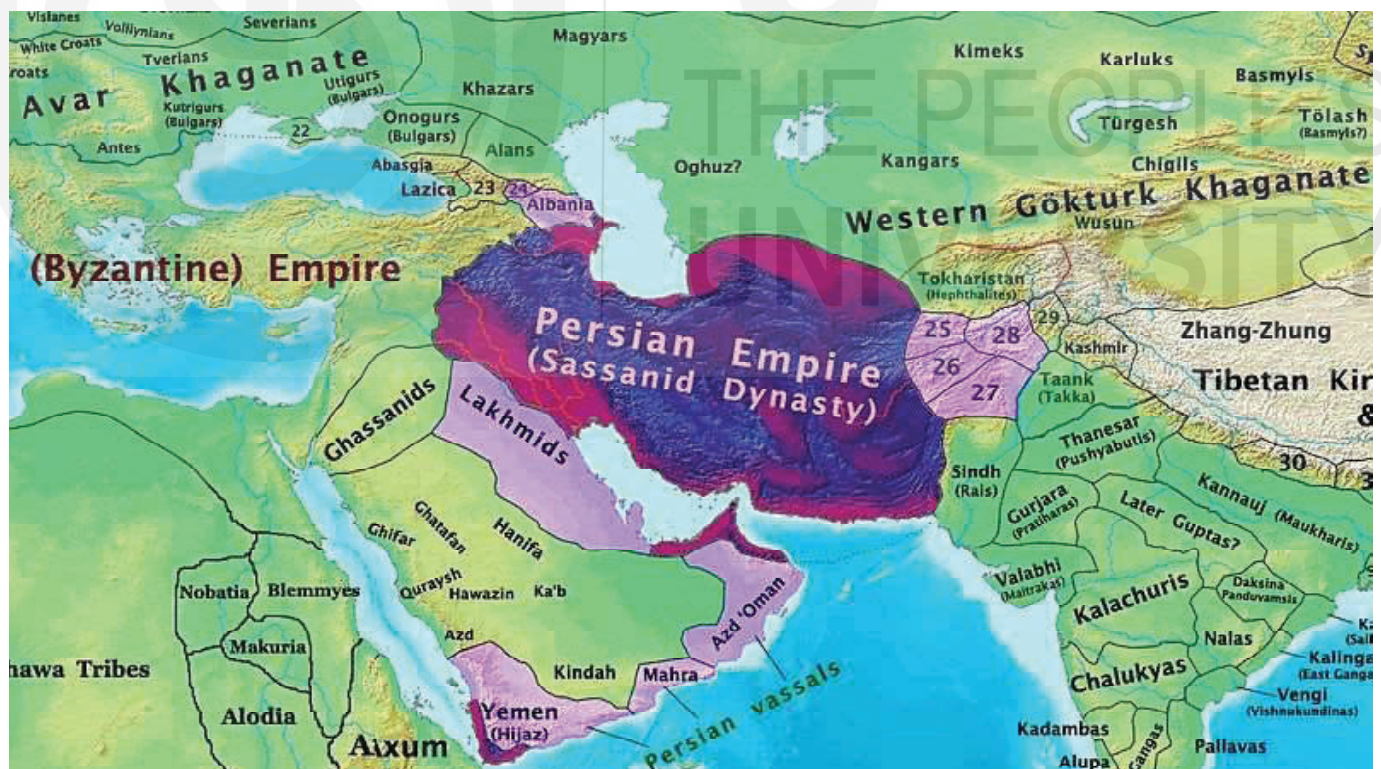
16.1 INTRODUCTION

Cities have been the centre of trading activities in every civilization. Most of the civilizations have been deeply connected with the development of urban centres; and trade is one of the most important factors for the growth of cities. Perhaps, this is the reason why cities are generally situated along the main trade routes. We can say that

trade is one of the main driving force in the development of urban centers. When feudal economy prevailed in European countries, especially after the decline of the Roman Empire, the era marked the development of trading activities in the Asian world. The rise of Islam facilitated massive growth in maritime trade, and Arab¹ traders established themselves as middlemen between the Asian and European markets. The economic foundations of the Arab world rested on settled agriculture; urbanization; and long-distance trade (Chaudhuri, 1996: 124). After the rise of Islam and expansion of the Islamic empire, the Arab trade was unified and regulated across the empire. The Arab traders had monopoly over the Asian trade even before the beginning of European sea voyages or the foundation of the British East India Company; and Portuguese, French, and Dutch trading missions. Here we will discuss in detail the trading activities of the Arabs.

16.2 ARAB TRADE AND COMMERCIAL EXPANSION AFTER THE RISE OF ISLAM

The geographical location of Arab world helped the Arab traders dominate the sea as well as the land trade of Asia. Nodal port towns such as Hijaz (see **Map 16.1** below), a barren land that was located at the middle coastline of the Arabian Peninsula in the Red Sea, seldom received the southwestern monsoon winds. This created avenues of trade which became a social and economic necessity of the region. Before the discovery of America and Australia, the Asian trade was confined to other two continents, namely Africa and Europe. The Arabian Peninsula was the meeting point of all three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe. It touches the boundary of both Europe and Africa.



Map 16.1: The Arabs and the Persian Sassanid Empire in 600 CE

Credit: Thomas Lessman

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Persia_600ad.jpg

¹ Initially, the term Arabs denoted the people residing in the Arabian Peninsula. It consisted of nomads – Bedouins (about whom you have read in **Unit 11, BHIC-102**) and city-dwellers who were engaged in trade throughout the Peninsula. Therefore, calling someone as Arabs until recently in history was considered to denote the simple nomadic people.

The land of Persia was considered the main land route for the Indian and Chinese traders to other continents. The coastal area of Arab countries touches the coast of almost all main sea trade routes, whether it is the Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, or for that matter Persian Gulf. The geographical advantage of *Jazirat-ul Arab* helped in establishing the domination of Arab traders in the world trade.

Before the birth of Islam in the first half of the seventh century, the Middle East comprising West Asia, and parts of North East Africa, was divided between two power centers – the Byzantine and the Sasanian. However, the year 629 CE marked the presence of another power in the region, and that was Arab Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad. Muhammad sent his first expedition to Byzantine Syria in 629 CE. His expedition alarmed both the powers, Sasanian and Byzantine. Within ten years after the death of Muhammad, by 642 CE, the Muslim Arabs gained control of a larger part of the Iranian territory, including Iraq, as well as Byzantine Syria. By the end of sixth decade of the seventh century, both the Iranian and the Byzantine Empires were toppled by the Muslim Arabs. Trade was perhaps the most important aspect of the economic life of Islamic civilization. The control over Byzantine Egypt, Syria, Iranian Iraq, and Iran by the Arab Muslims encouraged the Arab traders to expand their trading activities because almost all the important coastal areas or the sea routes came under the direct control of Islamic empire. Now, given that the Arab coastal territories of Syria and Egypt touched the boundaries of Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Eden opened the way from Yemen to East African Somalia; and control over Arabian Sea made it possible for Arab traders to establish their monopoly over the Indian Ocean trade. The Persian Gulf helped the Arab traders to pour the Iraqi and Iranian luxury items into the Chinese and Indian markets. Now all the sea routes as well as land routes from Asia to Europe were directly controlled by the Islamic Empire which encouraged the Arab traders to expand their trading activities.

One of the most important features of Islamic civilization is the emergence and growth of urban centers. The demand for luxurious items, spices as well as clothes by the urban inhabitants encouraged long-distance or trans-oceanic trade. The consumption of luxury items by urban dwellers of Islamic capital cities forced the Arab traders to expand their trading activities. Now Arab trade was not just confined to Middle East countries, but reached the heaven of spices – Indonesia and Malaysia. Islamic rulers knew the importance of trade in the economic life of Islamic-urban civilization. The powerful Islamic rulers succeeded in giving protection to their traders from marauders. Sea routes as well as land routes were well protected under the Islamic rulers. Islamic rulers should be given credit to revive the old sea and land routes with the greater ability to protect these routes from any kind of violence and attacks of pirates and looters. Merchants and traders in the Islamic lands were given much freedom and autonomy in comparison to pre-Islamic era. Islamic theology also imposed upon the traders a certain sense of ‘morality’ and ‘honesty’ which the pre-Islamic traders were not very scrupulous about. The advent of Islam changed the business atmosphere making dishonesty in business an un-Islamic practice. Many verses of *Quran* and *Hadith* instructed the traders to do their business with honesty. Muhammad also appointed officers to keep eyes on such traders who used mischievous methods in their business. On one occasion, he warned traders, ‘O you traders, beware of telling lies in your business transaction’. The law was well codified as compared to the previous times, which ultimately helped the Arabs expand their trade not just within the political boundaries of Islamic world, but also to the other territories such as Far East countries and India. The cultural homogeneity – religious as well as the linguistic – provided by the Ummayyad and Abbasid caliphates helped in breaking the various restrictions and barricades to the internal trade within the Islamic region.

The growth of economic production and consumption in the enlarged market of the Muslim world was made possible by three parallel developments. First, the Islamization of the conquered people created a partially homogenous religion, moral and juridical system. Secondly, the Arabization of the army and the administration helped to breakdown ethnic and national barriers by recruiting local entrants or by the incorporation of the warlike steppe people. Finally, the Semitization process was completed through the adoption of Arabic as the universal language of communication, education, literary expression and government.

(Chaudhuri, 1996: 127)

The political stability provided by the Islamic rulers stabilized the economic life of the inhabitants of the capital cities and increased the purchasing power, and hence, encouraged the demand for important articles or items from non-Arabian markets, especially from markets of India and the Far East comprising Indonesia, Malaysia and China.

The trading networks of the Islamic world encouraged the emergence of geographical studies, for instance, the one done by Arab al-Idrisi (1100-66). The flourishing trade of Arab world encouraged migration of Arabs to non-Arabic countries. This era, therefore, is marked by cultural diffusion. The Arabs, who migrated to other places, learned new languages; had encounters with different cultures; gained knowledge of different places – their technologies, literature and science. They equipped themselves with new ideas which ultimately resulted in the technological advancement of ships and other means of transportation. The Arab traders who travelled to different places beyond their political or cultural boundaries, came back home with new ideas and knowledge. Arab cities became the center of international trade. Traders from different places assembled in these cities and ultimately transformed the status of these cities from a commercial center to the center of world knowledge. Every trader who travelled these cities did not land just with their commercial items but also with new knowledge systems, and transformed these places from being merely financial capitals to new cultural hubs.



Figure 16.1: Al-Idrisi's World Map

Credit: Leinad-Z~commonswiki

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Idrisi%27s_world_map.JPG

The pilgrimage to the twin cities of Mecca and Medina led people to converge at the Red Sea, thereby, making trade an economic and social necessity of the region. All these economic, geographical and social factors lent the Red Sea its historical significance. Not only this, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf were part of the larger Indian Ocean and Mediterranean trade network. Thus, Arabs became the people with navigational skills. Also, as noticed in the previous **Units (12,13,14 and 15)**, historically the Arab world had elements of both the East and the West. The Portuguese economic onslaught on the Arab trade began in 1415 with the conquest of Centa, a Moroccan caravan town. The Arabs decisively lost the trans oceanic trade by 1700. You shall learn about the influence and activities of the Portuguese, English and Dutch empires in our Course **BHIC-108**.

16.3 INTERNAL TRADE AND THE RISE OF URBAN CENTERS

One of the most important developments between the seventh and tenth century in the Arab world was the rise of urban centers in the region. K N Chaudhuri asserts that ‘the economic foundation of the Muslim world system created by the Umayyads and the Abbasids in the first century of Islam rested on three factors: settled agriculture, urbanization and long distance trade’. All three factors were interlinked. Sustained agricultural growth fulfilled the food requirements of urban dwellers, while the commercial activities in the urban centers, and the demand for luxurious items by its population encouraged the long-distance trade. Agriculture did not merely play the role of subsistence economy for Arabs, but it also had commercial importance. Sustained agricultural growth supported the smooth development of handicraft industries which ultimately resulted in the flourishing trading activities of the Arab world.

Arab traders played an important role of middlemen between the Asian and European trade and the cities of the region served as storehouse of Asian items. These items were exported to different regions of Europe by the Arab traders. The development of urban centres or the rise of cities is directly associated with the development of trading and commercial activities. The sheer necessities of life and trading of luxurious items have enabled cities to thrive despite of all geographical and economic odds. We can see the emergence of cities in Arabian Peninsula as well as Iran, Iraq and Syria as commercial centers in this context. After 660 CE the trading activities of Arab world shifted to Syria and Iraq when Damascus became the capital of newly founded Islamic Empire. This changing environment encouraged the development of towns and cities in both the countries. The rise of Basra is the best example of this changing environment. Basra, one of the prominent cities of Islamic world, served as an important port. It was also situated on the strategically important trade route between Iraq and Iran. It was one of the earliest Islamic cities that was located outside the Arabian Peninsula. With the shift of capital to Damascus in 660, Basra benefitted from this development. With the expansion of the Caliphate, trade received an impetus in the entire region. The exchanges between the Arab, Christian and Frankish European worlds had an impact on their social and technological lives.

The trading activities in the Persian Gulf revived with the foundation of the most important city of Iraq – Baghdad – in the mid-eighth century and became the capital of the Abbasids. From its foundation, till the tenth century, Baghdad maintained its status as a main commercial hub of the Islamic world. Developing itself as a commercial metropolis in these three centuries, Baghdad had monopolistic control over Arab trade. Another important commercial city of this region was Samarra. Samarra was founded in 836

CE and served as a new capital of the Abbasid **Caliphs**. It was a coastal city located on the bank of Tigris River. But by the mid-tenth century, Baghdad started losing its monopolistic control over Arab business, and later the commercial activities of Islamic world shifted from Iraq to Egypt. At this time Cairo replaced Baghdad as a leading center of commerce and business of the Islamic world. The commercial and trading importance of the Persian Gulf was replaced by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This economic development marked the rise of Karimi traders of Egypt. Karimis extended their trading activities from Egypt to Syria, Iran and Iraq. From the port cities such as Basra, Jeddah and Ubul, the cargo was transported inland via camel caravans.

16.3.1 The Connection Between Trade, Religion and Development of Cities

The role of religion in the growth of economic activities in the region was immense. The founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad himself was from a trading background. The Quraysh tribe, to which he belonged, had control over Meccan trade from pre-Islamic times. The flourishing trade of Mecca and Medina benefited from the religious duties of Muslims to visit these two cities – Mecca being the birth place of Muhammad, and Medina where he migrated to. Umar, the son of Al-Khattab, who became the caliph after the death of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, tried to connect the Mediterranean Sea with Red Sea. Despite being the most dangerous sea to sail in, Red Sea maintained its importance because of the compulsory Hajj ritual among the Muslims. Mocha or Al-Mukha, a port city of Yemen, located on the coast of Red Sea, was one of the most important stations on the way to Mecca. Hajj pilgrims who travelled through Arabian Sea via Indian Ocean used to stay there for some days. In its early days, the economy of this port city was fully dependent on Hajj pilgrims. For South and South-East Asian pilgrims, it was one of the last key halts to Mecca. The traffic was irregular, but indeed significant. Highlighting the importance of pilgrim cities, K. N. Chaudhuri explains the significance of Jeddah as both a pilgrim and a commercial center. Jeddah, a coastal city, situated on the Red Sea was the gateway to Mecca for African and Indian Hajj pilgrims. He says that ‘each year with the arrival of ships from Egypt, Iran and India, local and foreign merchants engaged in commercial transactions of considerable value, selling linen from Damietta, cotton textile woven in Gujarat, Iranian carpets and many other goods from Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe.’ Other Arab cities having religious importance were Najaf, Karbala and Rabat. The amalgam of religion and trade created many cities between 7th and 10th centuries.

16.3.2 Development of Cities as Centres of Production

Arab cities were not just consumer cities but production centres as well. Prosperous trade of the region made the Arab cities the primary producers and suppliers of luxurious as well as daily use items. Al-Muqaddasi, an Arab geographer provided a detailed list of items that were produced and supplied by the cities and towns of Khurasan and Baghdad to the markets of other cities of the Islamic Empire in the tenth century. The town of Nishapur used to produce different types of garments; Marw was the center of veils made by silk; Kohistan was famous for its fine dates and rugs; Walwalij was famous for its walnuts, sesame oil, chickpeas and almonds, Balkh, the prominent commercial center of Iran, was well known for its dried grapes, soaps and skins. Samarqand was the main exporter of copper vessels and silver-coloured fabrics. Baghdad was the leading manufacturer of expensive royal garments. Special varieties of melon, and meat products of Bukhara were very famous in Arab world. The above detail destroys the myth of Arab cities as being merely consumer cities.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Discuss the role of Islamic rulers in promoting trade and commerce.

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- 2) How far do you agree that Arab cities were the main consumer cities?

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- 3) Explain the role of trade in the development of urban centres.

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16.4 ARAB TRADE WITH INDIA

The trading relations between India and Arab world are not new. The evidence of such activities between these two geographical regions points to trade from proto-historical times. The archeological evidence clearly shows the trade relations between two great civilizations of ancient world, i.e. Indus Valley Civilization and Mesopotamian Civilization. During the time of Solomon, as mentioned in the Old Testament, Arab traders frequently used to visit the South Indian coastal areas to buy spices. Some other Indian items like *pan*, *chandam* and coconut were also very popular amongst Arab people. Horses, jewellery and date were among the prominent Arab items which had a huge demand in Indian markets. The Arab traders settled down along the coastal area of both Eastern and Western Ghats of South India. The traditional commercial relations between these two regions should be understood with the fact that the permanent settlements were built by Arab traders along the western coast of South India to facilitate a sustained growth in the trade. In the pre-Islamic times, the barter system of trade was practiced on the south-eastern coast of Arabian Peninsula, where Indian items were exchanged with Syrian and Egyptian goods.

In addition to the issue of distance and geographical hindrances, the problem of protection for the overland traders remained an issue for the trans-continental trade with India. The volume of trade between the two regions, India and Arab, mainly increased after the rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. Arab Muslim merchants benefited by the trading structures created on maritime trade routes between West Asia and India by pre-Islamic Sassanid merchants. They managed to establish

their monopoly over the Asian trade because of their strategic geographical location. The economic instability of Mediterranean economy, especially after the decline of Roman Empire, enhanced the significance of Arab traders as the middlemen between the South-East European and Asian markets. The Gulf of Eden, Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf emerged as the hub of trading activities between India and Arab world. Revival of the port of Alexandria led to the unification of Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean. This trade connection also facilitated the cultural exchange between these two regions. From the eighth to sixteenth century, the Arabs and Persians dominated the Indian Ocean trade routes.

The Mongol attack on Baghdad in mid-thirteenth century not only affected the political structure of the Arab world, but also greatly impacted commercial affairs of the region. It changed the character of maritime trade of the region. The major economic consequence of this attack lies in changing of sea trade route between India and the Islamic world. However, this crisis also created an opportunity to look for another maritime trade route. This marked the rise of Egyptian trade with India and dominance of Egyptian merchants, especially a group of Karimi merchants, over the Indian Ocean trade. Just after the two years of successful expedition to Baghdad, the Mongolian army was badly defeated by the Mamluk army of Cairo at Ayn Jalut in September 1260. This defeat of Mongols at the hands of Mamluks halted the westward Mongol expansion and saved Egypt and Islamic influence over the North African countries. This event resulted in elevating the status of Cairo as the international center of trade. Another International trade route was developed by the Mamluk ruler of Cairo. Karimi merchants, after getting patronage from the ruling class of Cairo, established themselves as the middlemen between the Asian and European markets.

Karimi merchants had established very close links with the merchants of Malabar region. Their frequent visits to Kannur and Calicut strengthened the commercial ties between India and the Islamic world. Karimi merchants who monopolized the trade routes of Indian Ocean and Red Sea were also providing financial help to the **Zamorin**, the local ruler of Calicut, to enable them in consolidating commercial and political power in the region. The motive of this financial support was to control the spice trade with the help of these local powers. It also must be remarked that at this time, a sense of harmony prevailed between South Indian Hindu traders and Arab Muslim traders. They developed an environment of mutual trust and cooperation amongst themselves. The Indian Ocean was relatively a conflict free zone except some hindrances created by pirates.

We also cannot ignore the contribution and significance of international trade in the cultural and economic growth of Muslim cities in Sind. The renovation and expansion of the ancient ruined city of Banbhore and the construction of Mansura, the capital of Islamic rule in Sind in the early eighth century after the successful expedition of Mohammad Qasim should be seen in the context of international trade. Banbhore, which was situated near the sea, facilitated the demand for maritime trade of the region, while Mansura developed as a center of land trade. At this time, some important coastal cities were Manda, the coastal city of Kenya; Banbhore in Sindh; and Siraf on the north shore of Persian Gulf that controlled three ports – Bandar-e-Kangan, Bandar-e-Taheri and Bandar-Dayer; Suhar of Oman; and Mantai located on the north coast of Ceylon. These port cities developed a maritime trade network, of which Banbhore was a beneficiary. Banbhore fulfilled the demand of luxurious items in Sind through its maritime trading networks with Syria, Iraq, China, Ceylon and Kenya. The rise of Mongolian power and obstruction created by the Mongols in the trade routes proved to be one of main causes for the decline of these cities.

16.5 ARAB TRADE WITH CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

From the mid-tenth to the fifteenth century, Islamic trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea was restructured into three segments based on Aden and Hormuz, Cambay and Calicut, and Malacca and Guangzhou. In the first area, already by al-Muqaddasi's time in the 980s, Mecca, Jidda, Suhar, and Bahrain were large trading towns that handled a range of commodities, both local products and imported items; and in the fifteenth century the commercial life of the two great eastern cities of Cambay in India and Malacca in Southeast Asia turned on the emporia trade of Aden and Hormuz. Many other lesser towns and cities in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf were equally flourishing and prosperous.

(Chaudhuri, 1996: 132)

By the time Baghdad was founded by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (762 CE), the Arab sailors had been sailing to China and India for nearly half a century. Arabic travel literature of medieval times provides comprehensive information on Arab trading connections with China and Southeast Asian countries. Description of cities, lifestyle of urban population, and extensive information of trade routes, local politics and administration are amongst the main contents of such literature. *The Story of Sindbad the Sailor* perhaps best exemplifies this sort of literature. It did not just provide insight into the activities of merchants, knowledge of maritime trade route, and livelihood practices of coastal communities, but also demonstrated strategies against attacks of pirates and other enemies. The early tenth century book *Silsilat al-Tawarikh* written by Sulayman al-Tajir and Abu Zayd Sirafi – translated into English with the title of *Ancient Accounts of India and China: By Two Mohammedan Travellers, Who Went to Those Parts in the 9th Century*, by Eusebiu Renaudot – provides firsthand information of Arab traders trading with India and China. The two other important works of Arabic literature of those times which carry accounts of Arab Muslim merchants were *Akhbar a-Sin wal-Hind* written in ninth century, and *Ajaib al-Hind* of tenth century.

16.5.1 Arab Trade with China

The genesis of trade relations of Arab world with China, are from an antiquarian time. The Sasanid rulers had very keen trading interest with the Chinese territory. When the Arab world was getting consolidated under early Islamic rulers, China was witnessing the rise of T'ang dynasty. The beginning of T'ang dynasty and rise of Islam are nearly simultaneous. The Iranian and the early Muslim Arab traders mostly relied upon the land route to trade with China. However, this prosperous caravan trade did not continue for long, and by the end of eighth century, it was almost abandoned due to obstacles created by Tibetan tribes. This economic chaos created stimuli to figure out other ways, and that is how maritime trade got a fillip. The commercial activities in the Persian Gulf were revived by the Abbasid rulers and by the mid- eighth century, a Muslim colony at Canton (Guangzhou) was established by the Muslim traders. Abbasid Caliphs also sent tribute missions to China to strengthen the trading relations between the two regions. Sohar, the birthplace of the mythical character Sindbad, as also the port city of Oman located on the Gulf of Oman, was popularly known as gateway to China. According to Chaudhuri, it took ninety days to reach Canton from Sohar via Quilon and Qalah. One of the notable commodity of the Arab trade was Chinese porcelain.

The period between ninth and thirteenth centuries, during the regime of Song and Yuan dynasties in China, was the golden age for Arab-Chinese maritime trade. Though, the trade between these two regions had to face some difficulties between third and fifth decades of eleventh century when the forces of Rajendra Chola, the most important ruler of Chola Dynasty of south India invaded Champa, the coastal area of central and

southern Vietnam. Despite the fact that Arab traders were the main supplier of horses to the Chola kingdom, Rajendra Chola did not allow the Arab traders to trade with China through Champa. After these three decades, the trade between Arab and China again revived and Quanzhou became the meeting point of Muslim and Chinese traders by replacing Guangzhou. During the Yuan rule, most of the maritime trade of China was controlled by Muslim traders. In this period, a joint-venture system between the government and the merchants was established, and the venture was majorly financed by the Yuan government.



Figure 16.2: Early Chinese blue and white porcelain, c. 1335

Credit: Musee Guimet

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_influences_on_Islamic_pottery#/media/File:Early_blue_and_white_ware_circa_1335_Jingdezhen.jpg

16.5.2 Arab Trade with Southeast Asian Countries

The dominance of Muslim traders on the Southeast Asian trade between the second half of the eighth century and eleventh century, has been very candidly put up by Andre Wink: ‘The eight to eleventh centuries constituted a period of expansion of Muslim commerce on all major routes in the Indian Ocean, turning the Indian Ocean into an Arab Mediterranean’. It was the main trade route between Arab world and China. Arab traders had to cross Qalah located on Strait of Malacca in Malay region, via India, to reach Canton. Quilon situated in Kerala; Ceylon; archipelago of Java and Sumatra; sea ports located on the Strait of Malacca; Champa, the coastal area of central and southern Vietnam – were the important halts between Arab and China maritime trade routes. Muslim community that settled in Champa played an important role between China and Southeast Asian countries during Song and Yuan dynasties. A Chinese record dated tenth century, mentions arrival of Arab traders in Song court from Champa and Zabaj (a kingdom located between Cambodia and Java). Thus, the record also provides a picture of trade route between Arab world and China via southern India, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, Strait of Malacca and Vietnam. The decline of the Chola Empire in south India provided an opportunity for the rise of Islamic states in the

archipelago of Sumatra in the thirteenth century. These states established themselves as an important link between Arab and Southeast Asian maritime trade. But the islands of Southeast Asia were incorporated in the Arab world only in the fifteenth century. The merchants brought back aloeswood, teak, porcelain, brazilwood and Malayian tin from this sea lane. Ships on the home voyage sailed from India to Arabia or detoured along the east coast of Africa before returning to the Persian Gulf (*History of Humanity*, 2000: 305).

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Discuss the nature of Arab trade with India.

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- 2) Examine the nature of trade between the Arabs and China. Name one of the notable commodity of this trade.

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- 3) Explain the dominance of Muslim traders on the Southeast Asian trade.

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16.6 SUMMARY

The first half of the seventh century witnessed the rise of Islam in the geographically important region, *Jazirat-ul Arab*. Over time the elements of being Bedouin came to be regarded in opposition to the Islamic identity. Urban elements of existence entered their lives. The nomadic contribution to this urban economy needs to be understood well. Urban centres and caravan trade were not new to the Arabs. Islam provided a homogeneous identity and political stability to the Arab world which ultimately resulted in the massive growth in maritime trade in Asia and North Africa. The centralized authority of the Caliphs encouraged the rise of urban centers in the region which served as a meeting point for different traders of Asia, North and East Africa and Eastern European countries. These cities situated on the coastal areas of Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea and Red Sea developed a maritime trade network consisting of Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. The peasants and the nomads

also contributed to the urban success of Islam. Prosperous trade of the Arab world stimulated the migration of Arabs to non-Arab regions, specially along the coastal areas of Arab Sea and Indian Ocean. This migrant population settled down in the different parts of South India and Southeast Asian countries, and not only diffused the Islamic culture in the South Asian region, but also served as an important link of the rhythmic growth of maritime trade between Arab, India, China and other Southeast Asian countries.

16.7 KEYWORDS

Caliph	: Religious and political head in the Islamic world. Abn Bakr became the first Caliph after the death of Muhammad.
Jazirat ul Arab	: <i>Jazirat-ul Arab</i> comprises of the following regions: Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and parts of Jordan and Iraq.
Zamorin	: The local ruler of Calicut.

16.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 16.2
- 2) See Section 16.3
- 3) See Section 16.3, especially both the Sub-sections 16.3.1 and 16.3.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 16.4
- 2) See Sub-section 16.5.1
- 3) See Sub-section 16.5.2

16.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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16.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hajj | National Geographic

<https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/00000144-0a40-d3cb-a96c-7b4dd49c0000>