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IN SEARCH OF ARAB SHIPS AND SAILORS: A PERSONAL ODYSSEY.

(Text of a lecture delivered before the Sri Lanka Historical Association.)

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Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Historical Association for the invitation to speak to you today. I am appreciative of the honour but also feel somewhat inadequate in your midst. Whatever History I studied many years ago made no historian of me. It is, only as an amateur researcher in a somewhat specialized area, that I dare to place before you some of my own findings, in the hope that you will be able to improve on them. Therefore, what I am going to do today is to describe an experience that resulted from trying to find answers to certain questions that made practical sense to me; questions that occurred to me when I was in a "vacant and pensive mood". I will, therefore, be speaking not from an academic viewpoint but from a practical one. You will, no doubt, find many errors in what I say and if you do, please forgive me, because what I am about to talk to you on is only a narrative of a personal voyage of discovery, and is not a properly researched project.

The voyage began, unbeknowingly, on a hot afternoon in Trincomalee about thirty years ago. Twenty-five years later, when I found myself scrambling among the scaffolding of a traditional Arabian Dhow-building shipyard, it was not yet over. Even as I stand here tonight, new material, like the stone anchors we found in Galle, this year, constantly turns up: so I doubt if it will ever end.

It began at a time when I was a naval officer who, the Dockyard workers knew, was interested in all things old and wonderful. A worker attached to the Civil Engineer's section rushed up to me saying that, while they were clearing the undergrowth in the in their backyard, they had come across a stone slab inscribed in unknown letters. I lost no time in going there and what I saw was a beautifully engraved limestone Arab inscription. This was my introduction to Arab gravestones, and I knew nothing about them, except that I had to get this one deciphered. I knew of no-one in the country who could do so - though I now know that there were people who could - so, with my father's help, I sent a rubbing to Dr. Z.A. Desai, Superintending Epigraphist for Arabic and Persian Inscriptions, of the Indian Dept. of Archaeology. He identified it as the gravestone of "the noble, the pious (and) chaste lady....daughter of Amir Badru'd-Din Husain, son of Ali al-Halabi" who had died on Monday, the 17th. of September of the year 729 or 929 after Hijra (the slab is damaged here) which makes it either 12th. September, 1329 or 17th. September, 1523 of the Christian era. The full text and details were published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of 1970. Coincidentally, it turned out to be the only hard evidence that Arab ladies had come to this country: it was long thought the Arabs left their women-folk behind at home. This reference, in fact, even pre-dates the Gira Sandesaya's reference to "*yon liya*" in Beruwela.

My attempts at writing up that paper opened my eyes to other Arab inscriptions discovered in Sri Lanka. Their contents made sense to me in terms of a line of inquiry that had been taking shape in my

mind for some time. To my background of History and Archaeology, gathered at home, school, university and field, the Navy added a further dimension. In the Navy, if one has an inquiring mind, one becomes very conscious of history, as the seaman's calling is one of great antiquity, the echoes of which constantly surround him. I had, meanwhile, already begun to seek historical references to Sri Lankan ships, maritime activities and contacts with foreign seamen, and similar matters. I would watch fishermen going about the business tending to their craft and was able to recognize their very sure and professional approach. In Trincomalee, I found an Islamic community that was very specifically connected to fishing and coastal shipping and the use of a very distinctive craft.

All this raised many questions - what kind of ships did we Sri Lankans build and sail? What kind of seamen had we been? What contacts did we have with foreign ships and seamen? Did we have a special relationship with the Arabs who established their communities here, inter-married with our peoples and yet preserved a very specific identity of their own? Did we absorb elements of shipbuilding from them? Did we belong to the same tradition of shipbuilding as they or were we different?

My search for answers was not systematic. It was done in fits and starts, with references scribbled on bits of paper and stored till the paper yellowed. They, however, came together about many years later, when I had collected enough material to tie all this together.

I had already collected references to other Arabic inscriptions. Since they were few and had been read by epigraphists from many different parts of the world at long intervals of time, there was lack of uniformity in the way they had been studied. To clarify this, I carried on my correspondence with the Indian epigraphists, who were able to correct certain misconceptions that we, in Sri Lanka, had accepted over the years: for example, correcting an incorrectly identified slab in the Colombo Museum. I corresponded with other amateur researchers in the field and collected references, although some very learned persons did not divulge what they, alone, knew. The sum total of this line of inquiry was a paper embodying all my findings, titled "New Light on Arabic Lithic Records" in the 1990 publication: "Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea". The references I had collected were also published indexed by the Indian Archaeological Dept. in the "Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy 1972-73".

That ended that phase of inquiry and I will not repeat any of what has been published, except two matters the significance of which will become evident later in this paper. One is that we have Arabic inscriptions from all major areas that are, even now, connected with shipping: Trincomalee, Galle, Colombo, and Jaffna. The other is that in an isolated creek, or cove in the inner harbour of Trincomalee - presently called Nicholson's Cove - we have the site of a very specifically Arab maritime colony which had been continuously occupied for, at least, 200 years. From a seaman's point of view, this is an ideal spot for sailors to ride out the inter-monsoonal storm period, till the wind changed to enable them to sail the rest of the way across the Bay of Bengal. Nicholson's Cove is a narrow inlet, sheltered by parallel hilly ridges from the winds, with a shelving beach where the ships could be beached for repairs, and a plentiful supply of sweet water. Unfortunately, during the second world war, the availability of water made the British military authorities choose this site for a large camp: it is then that they discovered three gravestones, two readable, one of them being the one I reported on and the other of "the martyr Qadi 'Afifu'd-Din 'Abdu'llah son of 'Abdu'r-Rahman son of Muhammed son of Yusuf al-'Alawi" who had died on 16th. August, 1405 AD. The third, also discovered by me, is too defaced to read. The springs of sweet water that had proved the magnet to both Arabs and British, yet exist. Before I pass on from the subject of epigraphy, I must also mention that Dr.M.A.M.Shukri has now discovered 16th.century inscriptions at Talapitiya mosque in Galle, which are in (I quote) "an

ingenious synthesis of the Dravidian script with the Semitic, with the Dravidian element more pronounced. This is further countenanced by the content of this Arabic-Tamil inscription which for the first time refers to the Christian era." (end of quote.)

So much for inscriptions. During the years that followed, I desultorily carried on my search for answers to questions as they occurred to me. Gradually, my inquiries focused on the technology of ship-building and methods of navigation. I had to rely on what published works I could lay my hands on. Much of this time I was in Trincomalee, where I had no access to libraries. But the books I did find, though very few in number, did give me some idea of what shipping was like in those days. I was able to visualize the type of ships and the life that went on aboard them; appreciate the difficulties they experienced in sailing them; marvel at their audacity in sailing across the Indian Ocean - from the East African Coast to the Straits of Malacca - with Sri Lanka as their only landfall. At the beginning, they had sailed here after making a landfall in India and sailing coastwise Southwards. Later, they sailed right across to Beruwela using the south-westerly winds, coasted round the island to Trincomalee, and caught the next south-western monsoon to sail eastwards. Later, they learnt to call only at the southernmost ports and, later still, to by-pass Sri Lanka altogether. To do all this, they obviously needed maps or charts. The accepted Euro-centric view is that the Arabs were not great cartographers: they left no maps behind. But, certainly, they were great navigators. How, otherwise, did they find their way across the trackless Indian Ocean? The answer lay, I realized, not in maps, but in the sky. Arab sailors of the day were less interested in the shape of the lands they went to; than in where they were in relation to where they wanted to be. To do this, they had to plot the positions of every place they were interested in, in relation to a fixed point of reference. And what better point of reference was there than the sun, moon and stars?

Let me try to explain how navigation by the stars is done. Even if is already familiar to you, it bears repetition. The whole exercise involves taking, as a working proposition, the pre-Copernican belief that the Earth was the centre round which the stars revolved. The working assumption is that the Earth (or "Terrestrial sphere") is surrounded by a much larger sphere, which we call the sky (or "Celestial sphere"), on the inside surface of which various points of light, or "stars", were located. This "Celestial sphere", which has its own celestial equator and celestial poles, revolves round the earth, following a pre-ordained pattern, which make stars "rise" and "set" regularly, just like the Sun and the Moon. So, if you can determine your position in relation to a particular star at a particular time, you can establish your position on the earth's surface, even if there were no landmarks for miles around. Today, we plot our position in relation to a grid of vertical and horizontal lines, which are the parallels of latitude and the meridians of longitude. Every line of Latitude indicates angular distance from the centre of the earth, and is parallel to that imaginary line, the Equator, and shows us how many degrees north or south of it we are. In the case of Longitude, the role of the Equator is taken by the prime meridian at Greenwich and all the meridians meet at the North and South poles: the distance East or West of the Prime meridian indicates how many hours and minutes we are away from it. Thus, it is a measurement of position using Time as the unit. In this way, by finding how many degrees north or south of the equator we are (or Latitude) and by finding how far east or west of the prime meridian we are (or Longitude), we can plot our position on a navigational chart, just as we would plot a position on a graph paper, using the "X" and "Y" axes. In fact, the commonest map projection we use is the transverse Mercator's projection, which was evolved largely to help in navigation: any straight line drawn on it, as you know, is really an arc of a great circle.

Even today, in the age of satellite navigation and Differential Geographical Positioning Systems, we treat navigation satellites as stars. For this type of navigation, there is special equipment but, when we

do not have the equipment, we can yet use the traditional sextant to fix our position in relation to selected stars and planets. The Arabs were only one step behind us: they generally used one star, Polaris (also called the "Pole Star" or "North Star") which was stationary over the North Pole, with all other stars revolving round it; although they did know the regular movements of certain constellations, which they could use when necessary. In the northern hemisphere, Polaris is visible and, in order to find out your latitude, all you have to do is to measure how high Polaris is above the horizon: the lower it is, the nearer you are to the equator. To measure the height of Polaris above the horizon, the Arabs invented a very simple device called the "Kamal". It consisted of a square of wood, with a hole at the exact middle, through which was passed a string. To use it, you held the other end of the string between your teeth and held up the square towards Polaris and the horizon. You lengthened or shortened the string till the square fitted the space between Polaris and the horizon. And the length of the string indicated your latitude. If you were taking your reading from a known spot, let us say Colombo, you tied a knot in the string, and this was Colombo's latitude.

Unlike us today, the Arabs were not interested in longitude, but only in latitude. This was because no prime meridian had been established at that time. (This, incidentally, became necessary only after Pope Alexander VI drew a line dividing the world between the Portuguese and Spanish. In the Indian astrological works, they had meridians of longitude, and the prime meridian passed over our country. (In fact, one of the meanings of the word "Lanka" in Sanskrit, is "meridian"). Anyway, the Arabs only wanted to know how far south they were of Polaris which hovered over the North Pole. By keeping a sharp eye on Polaris, they knew whether they were sailing the desired latitude or not: if not, they changed course north or south, as necessary, till they reached the latitude that would take them to the place they wanted to go. This method of navigation, called "Latitudinizing" or "Sailing the Latitudes", is a very viable technique and used even now, when necessary. So, instead of drawing maps, they noted the latitudes of their ports of call, and also the distances between places. When these notations are superimposed on a Transverse Mercator's projection the degree of accuracy is very impressive. It is interesting to note that, between Kalutara and Trincomalee, no less than thirty positions along the coast have been plotted: much less have been plotted in the area north of the Colombo-Trincomalee axis.

In contrast to this system of plotting position, Mediterranean navigators depended on compass, chart and sailing directions to find their way. Stars were only used to confirm direction, not for finding position.

Thus it was in the Indian Ocean that the practice of celestial navigation, or navigation by the stars, began. Even today, fishermen in this country follow the movements of constellations. The celebrated Sinhalese ambassadors who Pliny reports as having come to Rome, had been surprised at the different starscape over Rome, remarking that Canopus, which was bright over Sri Lanka, was not to be seen. Even the controversial Marco Polo records, in his own way, the height of Polaris above the horizon at Cape Comorin, Malabar and Gujerat. How did the Arabs know to do this? The Arabs were by no means a backward civilization. Celestial navigation was first applied by them, not at sea, but in the desert where, even today, you navigate by the stars. The shepherds who watched their flocks by night, the sailors who kept a weather-eye on the horizon, and even the Wise Men from the East who sought the Son of God, all followed the movement of stars. The practice was only an exercise in Applied Mathematics: a product of the studies in mathematics being developed by Arab-Islamic scholars. In the latter part of the ninth century A.D., Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khawarizmi, the "father of Algebra" was summoned to Baghdad by Al-Ma'mun and appointed Court Astronomer. Muslim scholars were taking over the task of preserving and developing the work of earlier Greek and Indian scholars. When

the Islamic world spread from Arabia to Al-Andalus, as they called Spain, Sicily was part of the Islamic world, ruled from Palermo. Here scholars concentrated on the translation of Greek writings on Mathematics and Astronomy. During the "Dark Ages" in Europe, when education descended into the hands of an unenlightened clergy, the pagan Greek learning was decried and the pursuit of science and mathematics were left to the Syrians, the descendents of the Phoenicians, who were not slow to combine abstruse theory with their practical application. The Syrians translated the Greek texts to Syriac and developed the art and skill of making and using mathematical instruments. The Syrians had become Nestorian heretics by this time and the disapproving frowns of the churchmen did not worry them. As luck would, Syria was the first of the countries to be conquered by the Arabs and the conquerors saw the value of their new subjects and their friends, the Jews, in matters of scholarship and application. The Greek works were translated from Syriac to Arabic and an intellectual renaissance took place. Interestingly, these new Arabic works found their way to this island, too. In the "Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland," Vol.1 of 1824, Sir Alexander Johnstone, writing about the first Arabic inscription found here, makes several interesting footnotes, one of which bears repetition. I quote:

"One of the principal Arabic works on medicine which they introduced into Ceylon was the work of Avicenna; they also introduced Arabic translations of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Galen, and Ptolemy, extracts of which were frequently brought to me while I was on Ceylon by the Mohammedan priests and merchants, who stated that the works themselves had originally been procured from Baghdad by their ancestors and remained for some hundred years in their respective families in Ceylon, but had been subsequently been sold by them, when in distress, for some considerable sums of money to some merchants who traded between Ceylon and the eastern islands."

Before I leave Sir Alexander Johnstone, let me tell you that the footnote I quoted was to a translation of the oldest Arabic inscription yet found. It is the gravestone dated of a learned and pious priest, Khalid Ibn Abu Bakaya, who had been sent here by the Caliph of Baghdad upon hearing that the Mohammedan traders in Colombo were ignorant of and inattentive to the real tenets of their religion. The date of death was 337 after Hijra, that is, mid-10th.century,A.D. Johnstone's researches into the origin of these people led him to conclude (I quote):

"The first Mohammedans who settled in Ceylon were, according to the traditions that prevail among their descendents, a portion of those Arabs of the house of Hashim who were driven from Arabia in the early part of the 8th. century, by the tyranny of the Caliph Abd al Melek ben Merwan, and who, proceeding from the Euphrates southwards made settlements in the Concan, in the southern parts of the peninsula of India, on the island of Ceylon and at Malacca. The division of them that came to Ceylon formed eight considerable settlements in the north-east, north, and western coasts of the island: viz. one at Trincomalee, one at Jaffna, one at Mantotte and Mannar, one at Coodramalle, one at Puttalam, one at Colombo, one at Barbareen and one at Point de Galle".

It is a great pity that Johnstone's collection of texts were lost in a shipwreck and, since we are yet unable to trace the original gravestone, it, too, may have suffered the same fate.

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In 1990, I had the chance of working nearly one year in the Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates. My work on the Arab connection had, by this time, become focused on the structural characteristics of Sri Lankan craft and the influence of Arab techniques on them. Without going into much detail, I must say that it was obvious that we had borrowed, or we shared some common features. One was the fact that we - I mean both Sri Lankans and Arabs - did not use nails to fasten the ships' timbers, but "sewed" them together with coir rope. We both used oils for wood preservation, vegetable or fish oils. The ships were of shallow draught, enabling them to be beached or careened for self-refitting and repair. A definite adoption by us - in our larger, sea-going vessels - were the Arab-Indian lateen sail and fore-and-aft rigging used in combination with a fixed rudder astern. We had previously used square rigging in combination with steering-boards, outriggers and double-ended hulls. The new sailing rig and rudder improved ships' performance, enabling them to sail a long reach with a following wind and to tack effectively to windward: both essential requirements for long voyages. In these ways, we belonged to a particularly west-Asian technology zone. In other ways - such as the use of double-ended hulls with steering boards in our smaller craft, our attachment to the outrigger even on such large ships as the "Yathra Dhoni" which shows a triumph of tradition over technology, and the use of square sail - we were part of another technology zone that by-passed India, but linked us to south-east Asia and East Africa. It is for this reason that I am yet unconvinced by the reference to Sri Lankan ships being the largest ships to visit China, being several tens of feet in height, with stairways for loading and unloading. The Chinese, even in the 7th. century, described the K'un Lun ships of the southern sea as being sewn ships. As of now, I cannot reconcile the description of the large ships from the Lion Kingdom with any ship-building technology known in Sri Lanka. Other details of the description also appear to be of a Marco Polo-like character.

By the time I reached Sharjah, my prime interest was to locate a traditional Dhow-building yard and to follow the progress of a wooden ship being built in the traditional manner from the keel upwards. I was afraid that the traditional yards building wooden ships would have disappeared, as they did here during this century. As it turned out, I had no cause for worry: the yards were yet operational. The problems I faced were completely different ones. The first was the outbreak of the Gulf War: having come so near the Euphrates, I could not even dream of going the rest of the way. The other was language: I had to know Arabic to ask questions and learn. Or I had to know Hindi or Urdu, since most of the shipyard workers were Indians or Pakistanis. But I had none of these. All I had was a camera: not even a measuring tape. However, I was lucky enough to find a shipyard within walking distance from my flat, near Khan Post Office in Sharjah. So I decided to visit the yard every couple of weeks and photograph selected vessels under construction, judging height above ground in comparison with my own height and making linear measurements through pacing. For the rest, well, *Inshallah!* The result of all this was a copious album of photographs, following the construction of selected ships from keel-log upwards, some drawings following naval architectural conventions, and pictures of different types of vessels ashore and afloat and under maintenance.

The shipwrights, as I said, were Pakistani or Indian, the latter mostly from Cochin or Kerala. Initially I could not understand why, but later came to feel that they could have been traditionally a part of the scene. The world's oldest, commercial liner route, yet serviced by wooden ships, serves India, Pakistan, the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf area, and east Africa. This was one unified shipping area. Teak wood for the ships came from India. Coir rope for lashings came from India and Sri Lanka - the 1st. century coconut plantations probably serviced a demand for coir rope. West Indian and Arabic ships are very similar and the technology only marginally different. For more than centuries, regular maritime trade took place across the Arabian Sea. The West Indian shipwrights were so skilled that every colonial power used them to build their own ships, from Caravelles to East Indiamen. In British

colonial times, the U.A.E. - then called the Trucial States - was under the administrative control of the Viceroy, and British Indian currency were in use. So I came to accept that these shipwrights had been part of the scene for many centuries. They were useful to me, too: being more tolerant than Arabs of a fellow sub-continental and some even knowing a smattering of English.

The workers may have been Indian but the ships they built were emphatically Arabian: their lines were so very aesthetically pleasing. Traditional Indian sailing vessels, too are beautiful: in Gujarat, near Dwarka, I saw ships that brought to life the meaning of the poet's lines "I have seen old ships that sail like swans asleep". European artists, too, have long realized the curvilinear elegance of ship and boat design. In these Arabian ships, there was no single straight line to be seen. Sharp prows slanting upwards to a characteristic stem-post, then curving downwards and flaring outwards to a point just forward of midships, and then slanting sharply inwards and upwards to the poop-deck and characteristic fins aft. They were lowest in the water where they were broadest. Seen under sail from one side, they were curved crescents cleaving the water. They are an artist's dream. The type I saw being built were the common fishing craft, called "*baggarah*", though I have been told by an expert that they were "*sambuq*" – there are several types in use. They are not sailing ships, now, being fitted with inboard engines, but the lines have not changed: I examined several old hulks abandoned in the creeks and the beach - some even sea-going types with faded painted transoms. Obviously, the type is suited to the conditions in the Gulf, since fiberglass clones are now being built. Timber is, as usual, the problem there, and very inferior woods were being used in the yards, instead of the teak used for the sturdy workhorses of the commercial fleets. Scrambling around the partly-built ships I found shark and other fins laid out to dry on the decks: they were not only being dried for sale. The hot sun extracted the fish oil to be absorbed by the wood as a preservative, and to give these craft the fishy smell they have been renowned for throughout history. The builders made good use of the blistering heat of the sun: planks were bent into required shapes, using templates, and left to be warped into shape by the sun. Appropriate technology is the best description.

(To deviate slightly, on the subject of wood: I used to hang round their archaeologists rebuilding 100-year old houses of coral blocks, with the original carved teak Corinthian pillars, and they asked me if Sri Lanka could help them get certain types of wood they wanted. To give lateral strength to coral walls, there were embedded long mangrove poles very closely and tightly bound from end to end by coir rope, to prevent the radial splitting characteristic of this wood. One archaeologist was very interested in my copies of our Kufic inscriptions, as he was from the village of Kufa, near Baghdad, where this script had originated).

The older ships in use are looked after carefully: at regular intervals, they are sailed up the creeks and allowed to be beached by the ebbing tide. Then, when they are resting on a side the exposed ship's bottom is scraped, patched, painted, etc. Later, she is made to expose the other side for similar treatment. Well-made ships were treasured. How appropriate a haven, I realized, would Nicholson's Cove have been to these sons of Sinbad.

Apart from the Khan shipyard, I discovered a sand flat in a creek where very long boats, with nothing above the deck-line, were completely covered over, and kept on wheeled trailers. For many months, nobody came near them and I despaired of seeing them. But with Ramazan nearing, things began to happen. The boats were the property of an affluent Arab and were kept for the annual ceremonial boat races. When the cocooning was removed I found that they were rowing galleys made of good teakwood and beautiful pieces of workmanship. Using my usual methods, I measured them at over 82 feet in length and not more than 5 ft. at broadest point. They sat low in the water, at lowest

point, the gunwale, or edge of the boat was only 2 1/2 ft. above the keel: when fully loaded, it must have been much less. There were planks, or thwarts, for seats and footrests for the rowers and rowlocks for the oars. There was room for 47 oarsmen and, counting the steersman and the master, a crew of 50 was needed to race it! In preparation for the race, the boats were lowered into the water, allowed to get all timbers thoroughly soaked and swelled, cleaned, repaired, painted - all in a thoroughly seaman-like way. After the race, it went through the full treatment, in reverse, and the boats were cocooned again and laid up till the next year.

The ceremonial races did not involve rowing galleys only. There were races for sailing boats, very much like the Viking long-boats in general, and the event was to commemorate the race home of the pearling fleets at season's end. (In Mannar, too, during the pearling days, there was a race home every evening!) Only traditional technology was permitted. I missed a chance to see it from sea, as the weather was muggy and visibility too low for my friend to put out to sea in his own little yacht. At the last minute, visibility improved and he was able to sail, though I missed out. These boats, with huge single lateen sails, hoisted by block and tackle on for'ard raking masts, must need very good crews, and it was a very proud master who sailed first into port, through the haze, turning into wind at the last moment to stop dead in the water to secure. I realized that traditional Arab seamanship was yet very much alive.

By the time my work in Sharjah ended, many of the answers I had sought for had been found. There is too much for me to talk about here - for example, the similarities between certain types of Arabian and Sri Lankan craft, particularly in the north-east. But one has to stop sometime. I will, therefore, only add one more, very practical, dimension to the story. I spoke of the aesthetic beauty of the ships, but how did they perform at sea? I will quote from Capt. Allan Villiers, a veteran sailor who, preparing himself to sail the "Mayflower II" to America, acquired a feel for small sailing ships aboard Arabian Dhows and Maldivian Buggalows which were the nearest ships, in size, to the "Mayflower" that were yet in use. I will, therefore, end this talk with his words:

"I was crowded with something like 200 other passengers. The ship was about 180 tons, with a high poop...with a longboat cluttering up the deck, with little spare fresh water, with a small smoke-box for the only galley and a couple of small boxes slung outboard over the sea as the only bathroom and lavatory accommodation. She smelled. She rolled. She pitched. The passengers all lived on deck (except for the women who were crowded into a loathsome great cabin below the poop) and the smoke from their little fires and the clutter of their living and their cooking drifted over the whole vessel. They filled every nook and cranny, sleeping wherever they could.... Many...who were migrating either in small tribal groups or families, made up their own part of the deck..and set up house for the voyage. All prepared their own food and looked after themselves in all ways. The ship carried them, and that was the end of her obligation towards them...

"The sailors also lived in the same way, except for the fact that the ship fed them. All their work was in the open, on the main deck, round which they were wont to rush at headlong speed shifting the huge mainsail...or some such job and woe betide any stupid passenger who then got in the way! The 200-odd passengers lived full and eventful lives, punctuated by the five daily prayers of good Muslims and exalted by an awareness of God..."

And thus they sailed from Baghdad, past Seilediba, to distant Cathay.

Thank you, everyone for your patience. All that's now left to say is: *"As-salaam-allai-kum."*

