

A Traveller in Thirteenth-Century Arabia

Ibn Al-Mujāwir's Tārīkh Al-Mustabṣir

*Translated from Oscar Löfgren's
Arabic text and edited with revisions
and annotations by*

G. Rex Smith



Hakluyt Society, Third Series

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A TRAVELLER IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ARABIA

Ibn al-Mujāwir's *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*

THIRD SERIES

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Grants made to assist the publication of specific volumes are acknowledged in those volumes and in the Annual Report.



The medieval port of Aden. Huqqāt bay and Şirah island. Courtesy of Salma Samar Damluji

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IBN AL-MUJĀWIR'S *TĀRĪKH AL-MUSTABŞIR*

Translated from Oscar Löfgren's Arabic text
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To the memory of
Oscar Löfgren and Robert Bertram Serjeant,
two great Mustabsirologists,
and
Charles Beckingham,
a wise counsellor

We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.
(Bernard de Chartres)

Also to the memory of
CWS,
who wanted this translation published as much as I did,
and to AMM-S, this volume is dedicated.



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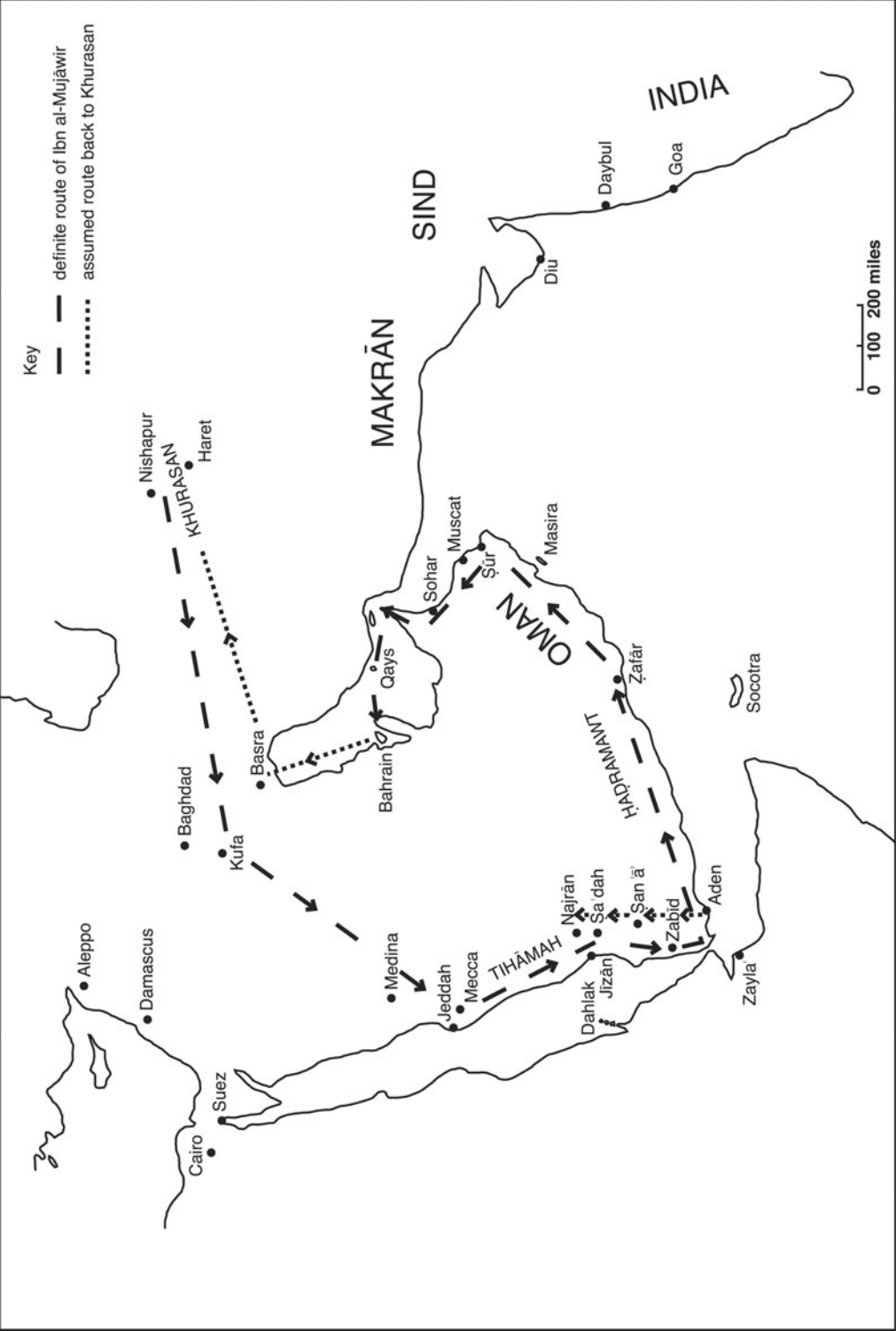
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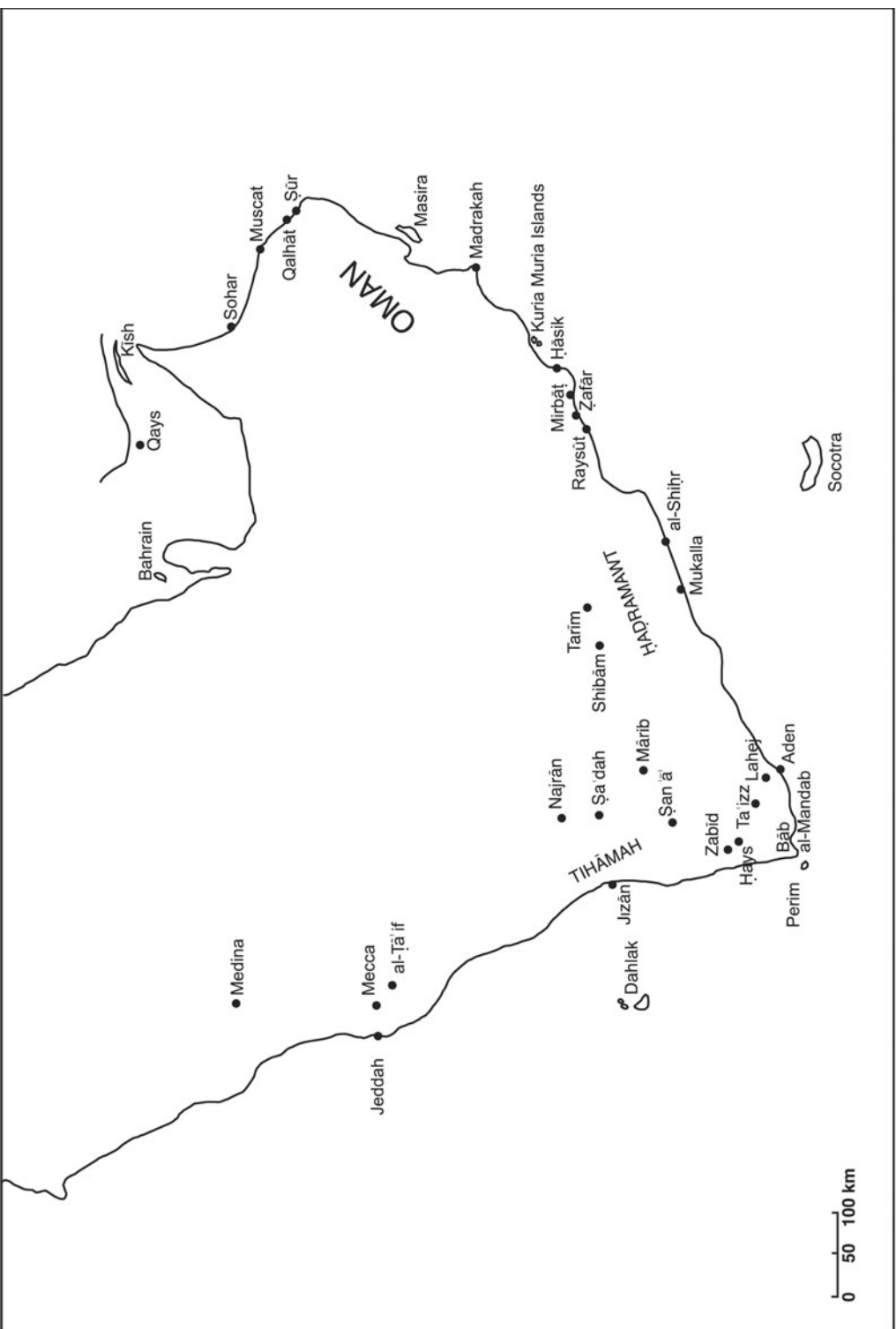
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LIST OF PLANS AND DIAGRAMS ACCOMPANYING THE TEXT

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PREFACE

There is ample fodder for the [Hakluyt] Society in these three languages, [Arabic, Persian and Turkish], but I hope I have convinced you that it is rather indigestible fodder. If they are to deal with it adequately our editors will need all a cow's stomachs and ample time to chew the cud.

Beckingham, 'Arabic Texts', p. 13.

I have been chewing the cud and operating on all stomachs for well over twenty years now and, blemishes and all, it is high time that Ibn al-Mujāwir's *Tāriḫ al-Mustaṣir* saw the light of day in the English language.

I first discovered the edited text in the University Library in Cambridge in about 1965 after it had been recommended to me by the late Robert Bertram Serjeant, my then PhD supervisor, primarily as a good source of Yemeni place names. Oscar Löfgren's published Leiden edition of the Arabic text¹ contains only a brief list of contents and no indices of any kind and one had to work hard to find exactly what one was looking for. However, compensation came in the reading of this amazing account of an early seventh/thirteenth-century traveller in Arabia, a stranger from the East, no great scholar he, though a man with a curiosity for all things wonderful and unusual, commercial and economic, agricultural, historical and social. I suppose I was captivated from the start.

I can no longer be sure when I began to think of serious work on *Tāriḫ al-Mustaṣir*, but it must have been over twenty years ago. Although he had carried his copy faithfully for years during his stays in the Arabian Peninsula and had annotated it copiously, Serjeant told me that he could have no plans for further work on it and he willingly handed over his copy to me so that I could make use of all the notes taken over a period of many years. He suggested that I should consult Oscar Löfgren, the original editor, and I learned from the latter that he too had no plans to work more on the text. With great generosity he sent me draft indices and many valuable notes he had made, material which had not been published in the Leiden edition.

It was not difficult to see which way my work would proceed. Had other manuscripts appeared over the years, a new edition of the Arabic text might have been possible. It was clear to me at an early point, however, after exhaustive and futile attempts to track down manuscripts other than those which Oscar Löfgren had used, that an annotated translation based on Oscar Löfgren's edition, where some gaps could be plugged, some suggestions and corrections made, a translation proposed and at times possible alternative readings noted, was the only possible course to follow.

¹ Oscar Löfgren, *Ibn al-Muḡāwir: Descriptio Arabiae meridionalis, praemissis capitibus de Mecca et parte regionis Hiḡāz. qui liber inscribitur Ta'riḫ al-Mustaṣir*. Secundum codicem Constantinopolitanum Hagiae Sophiae 3080 collate Codice leidensi or. 5572. Cum adnotatione critica, Leiden, Brill, 1951–4.

Work has continued on and off ever since. Years of heavy teaching loads, endless committees and other research demands delayed the project seriously until my retirement in 1997. Even then Fate continued to intervene and my wife's illness and death in 1998 inevitably caused further postponements. Acceptance in 1999 by the Hakluyt Society of my proposal of an annotated translation in their rolling publication programme gave the project a great fillip and serious full-time work has been possible for some time now.

The difficulties presented by the text are many and will become clearer as the reader passes through the introduction, the translation and the notes below. Suffice it to say here that Ibn al-Mujāwir's strange language (even by Middle Arabic standards, and doubtless much mutilated over the centuries by well-meaning scribes who thought they were doing the world a favour by 'correcting' the original), his frequent habit of getting hold of the wrong end of the stick, his myriad oblique references to any number of persons, places, events and so forth, all these contributed to adding to my work and prolonging completion. Heavy annotation has been absolutely necessary and I make no apology for a total of more than 2,800 notes, some of them of some length. Perhaps unusually for a Hakluyt publication, many of these concern lexicographical and other linguistic and textual matters. Yet they are too important to allow to slip through unobserved.

So broad are the contents of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* they ideally require the treatment of a whole committee of scholars. In the absence of such a committee, I asked the following to cast their eagle eyes over my manuscript before it was submitted for publication and they all agreed to read it in full: Dionisius Agius, Clive Smith, Francine Stone and Daniel Varisco. Numerous suggestions for improvement and corrections were proposed by them, the majority of which I have been able to incorporate into my work. I shall never be able to thank them adequately for all their time and for their wonderful scholarly efforts.

The full list of all those others worthy of my thanks follows. They are Hussein al-Amri, Edmund Bosworth, Bill Donaldson, Bernard Haykel, John Healey, Leila Ingrams, Paul Luft, Charles Melville, Fatima al-Muhairi, Venetia Porter, Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle, Noha Sadek, Jack Smart, Yasir Suleiman and Mohammed Thenayian. I also extend my gratitude to all those PhD students in Durham and Manchester who, over the years, humoured me and my obsession with the text and who appeared to enjoy reading it with me almost as much as I did (Ali al-Dosari, Moshalleh al-Moraekhi and Mohammed Thenayian spring particularly to mind in this context) and also to those MA students who took my Middle Arabic Texts course in Manchester and from whom I learned much.

Much as all these kind friends and colleagues have helped me, responsibility for the final translation and the notes, as well as for the introductory essays, lies solely with me. Many problems and lacunae remain and I can make no claim to comprehensiveness in this work. Perhaps someone in the future will be inspired by these pages to make an attempt to solve at least some of the problems, complete some of the lacunae and confirm or otherwise some of the educated guesses. I fear, however, we shall never arrive at comprehensiveness after all this time with the sources now available to us.

I acknowledge with particular pleasure the cheerful assistance rendered to me by the staff of two libraries where I have worked for the most part on this book: both the staff of the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, UK, and that of the Branford Price Millar Library at Portland State University, Oregon, US – I should mention by

name in the context of the latter the Director, Tom Pfingsten, and also Kristen Kern, Rex Marshall and Kay Sellman. I wish also to place on record here the warm welcome extended to me by Jon Mandaville and Jean Campbell in the Middle East Studies Center at Portland State University.

I must add a word of particular gratitude to my original Hakluyt series editor, Robin Law, and to my main series editor, Michael Brennan, who answered my sometimes silly questions with great patience and humour and did so much to improve this work, and to Will Ryan who wrestled with the diacritics and prepared the final version for publication. My gratitude is also extended to the Society for accepting this annotated translation for publication.

Bronwen and Stuart Campbell have helped in a number of practical matters and I am very grateful to them. Muammer Ülker, then director of the Sülaymaniye Kütüphanesi, kindly permitted me to see the Istanbul manuscript in 1996 and I am much in his debt. On that occasion my son Jonathan proved an invaluable and highly competent interpreter and I record my thanks to him here. Dr E. van Donzel, then secretary of the Stichting De Goeje, with great courtesy informed me in 2000 of the Foundation's authority to use the Löfgren printed text for this translation. I acknowledge with pleasure his help in this matter and thank the Foundation warmly. Dr J. J. Witkam of the University Library, Leiden, personally arranged for me to have a microfilm of the Leiden manuscript and to him I offer my sincere thanks.

Finally I dedicate this volume to the memory of Oscar Löfgren and Robert Bertram Serjeant, both of whom had already done so much to tease out the problems of this difficult text; to the memory of Charles Frasier Beckingham, who generously dispensed wisdom; and to the memory of my dear, late wife, Cerries, who over the years protected me from interruptions and distractions and who rendered more help than she ever realized. I also dedicate it with much love to my wife and new inspiration, Maggie.

Dyserth, Denbighshire, 2005

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CHIr</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Iran</i>
<i>CHIs</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Islam</i>
DMV	Daniel Martin Varisco
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd edition
<i>EIran</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Iran</i>
<i>Ej</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
FLS	Francine Stone
I MS	Istanbul MS of <i>Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir</i>
L MS	Leiden MS of <i>Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir</i>
OL	Oscar Löfgren
RBS	R. B. Serjeant
<i>SEI</i>	<i>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</i>



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INTRODUCTION

The text of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* is the early thirteenth-century account of a journey made by a businessman (or someone profoundly interested in business) in the Arabian Peninsula. The author undoubtedly came from the east of the Islamic world. The annotated translation published here is based in the edited text of Oscar Löfgren and the two important manuscripts, that of Istanbul (late sixteenth century), here designated I MS, and that of Leiden (nineteenth century), here designated L MS.

THE AUTHOR

It was in 1864 that the text of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* first appears to have come to the attention of scholars when Aloys Sprenger took over a copy of it from ‘M. Schefer’ and used it extensively for the Arabian section of his work.¹ Thereafter, three other scholars entered into a discussion of the important question of the true authorship of the work. De Goeje in 1899,² questioning the correct identification of Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb as author, Derenbourg in 1901,³ supporting the identification of Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb as it is found on the title page of the manuscripts and the 1950s printed edition, and Jawad in 1938,⁴ agreeing with De Goeje’s view, all expressed their opinions on the matter. Having read their arguments and, perhaps more importantly, having studied very carefully the internal evidence of the text, I am of the opinion that we may now state as follows regarding the author of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*. Despite the title page as it appears in all the manuscripts I am able to check, and in Oscar Löfgren’s printed edition of 1951–4, the author was Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn al-Mujāwir al-Baghdādī al-Nisābūrī.⁵ The name provided on the title pages, Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Mujāwir al-Shaybānī al-Dimashqī, was, I suggest, an error which crept in at some point in the copying process which went on through the centuries and was slavishly repeated from scribe to scribe. It found permanence because there was a known scholar of that name who died

¹ De Goeje, ‘Communication’, pp. 23, 30. Schefer’s copy used by Sprenger is of the Istanbul manuscript. See also Sprenger, *Reiserouten*, pp. 125 ff. and my ‘Dhofar and Socotra’, pp. 79–80; ‘Eastern Connection’, pp. 78–9.

² ‘Communication’, pp. 30 ff., where he has spotted the references in the text to Ibn al-Mujāwir’s father, brother and uncle.

³ *Manuscripts arabes*, p. 18, very brief and with no evidence for his disagreement with De Goeje.

⁴ ‘Petites découvertes’, p. 286, his argument focusing on the *early* 7th/13th-century dates in the text and reminding the reader that Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb died in 690/1291. It might be added here that Landberg with the publication of his *Études* (1901–13) and *Glossaire datinois* (1920–42) was the first after Sprenger to exploit the text for scholarly purposes.

⁵ This can be deduced by reference to the text at p. 220 below, where on this one occasion the author writes, ‘qāla Abū Bakr ...’ (he usually writes, ‘qāla Ibn al-Mujāwir ...’) and by reference to his mention of his brother, p. 121 and of his father, p. 254.

in 690/1291.¹ In fact, the Yūsuf b. Ya'qūb, of whom we read in the biographies, was rather a scholar of the Islamic discipline of the sayings and doings of the Prophet (our author was certainly no *muḥaddith*!) and there is no evidence in them of any particular interest on his part in the Arabian Peninsula.²

Not only does the text itself tell us who wrote *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, but we should perhaps remember that the figure whose name occurs on the title pages died more than sixty years after the final date mentioned in the text: 627 (1229–30). He would have been a remarkably young man making his Arabian journeys in the early seventh/thirteenth century – and then he wrote nothing else for the rest of his life.³

If more evidence is required in order to establish the true author, it surely comes from almost every page of the text. The writer was connected and acquainted with the east of the Islamic world.⁴ He was in all probability a native Persian-speaker (see 'The language' below) and he quotes Persian poetry on occasions, some of it, he says, of his own composition. All his comparisons are with the Islamic east. Scrutiny of the names of Ibn al-Mujāwir's informants shows a noticeable minority from the east, as compared with a negligible number of Syrians.⁵ On p. 14 of Oscar Löffgren's edition of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, Ibn al-Mujāwir tells us Khurasan was his home. Baghdad too is of some importance to him and all this evidence adds up to the appropriateness of the two *nishabs* al-Baghdādī and al-Nīsābūrī rather than al-Shaybānī and al-Dimashqī.

What else do we know about the author? Our sole source in trying to answer this question is *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* itself. Perhaps the first thing which strikes the reader of the text is the author's great interest in trade and commerce. If he was not a businessman himself, who travelled firstly to perform the pilgrimage and then on from the Hejaz into the Yemen via Tihāmah and who from time to time visited India and East Africa to ply his trade, then he must surely have been someone with a remarkably keen interest in business wherever he found himself. From such an interest, it might be suggested that he held the distinct philosophy that one should know the people with whom business might be done. He was thus a keen student of humankind and the clothes, the food, the agriculture and the social customs of the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula are all observed with a particularly keen eye. In view of this passion for trade, it is not at all surprising that he tells his reader of such things as the prices and customs taxes of the different commodities which passed in and out of the area, of the markets and currencies, and the weights and measures.

Another golden thread running through the whole of the text is Ibn al-Mujāwir's love for – one might even say obsession with – magic and the bizarre, sorcery and the jinn, and weird and wonderful tales from the distant past. Equally, he displays an extraordinary sense of humour and fun, for no opportunity is lost to tell the amusing anecdote, the funny story, perhaps after long hours rehearsing it and perhaps even stealing it from friends and acquaintances. There is the distinct feeling that many such tales are the product of all-male gatherings where they are told and told again, with additions and exaggerations each time they are recounted.

¹ See Ibn Tīrghī Birdī, *Nujūm*, VIII, p. 33; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadbar*, V, p. 417; Ziriklī, *ʿĀlām*, IX, p. 341.

² Smith, 'Eastern Connection', pp. 85–6.

³ Smith, 'Dhofar and Socotra', pp. 79–80.

⁴ Smith, 'Eastern Connection', pp. 80 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–82.

It should perhaps finally be said that our author was no great scholar or deep religious thinker. He does, it is true, quote from several literary texts (some identifiable, some not, see ‘The Text, Ibn al-Mujāwir’s sources – literary works’ and Appendix C below), but these do not constitute a large proportion of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*. He is not averse to a little poetry now and again, and some of it he says he has composed himself. Even his Quranic quotations can be off the mark and the opportunities to elaborate on the tenets and ideas of the religious groups he encounters are not seized. Rather, more often than not there appears some rather absurd, tongue-in-cheek caricature of the group or one of its members.

To sum up, it is suggested that our author was Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn al-Mujāwir al-Baghdādī al-Nisābūrī. He may have come from Khurasan or at least he lived there at some point in his life and he knew the eastern provinces of the Islamic world well. He knew Persian and was in all probability a native Persian-speaker. Since the dates in the text are the 620s/1220s, the latest being 627/1229–30, we can assume that he was born in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century and that he died in the first half of the seventh/thirteenth. The contents of the text (see ‘The Contents’ below) indicate that he was either a businessman himself, or at least someone with an enormous interest in business. A man of some humour and with a deep interest in the world of magic and those who practised it, he travelled to the Arabian Peninsula on at least one occasion and visited the Hejaz, Tihāmah, the southern coastal area of Arabia, the Gulf region and some inland locations. The text is essentially his account of those travels.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We can safely assume from several clues in the text that Ibn al-Mujāwir was on his travels in the first quarter of the seventh/thirteenth century and was writing his account at some time perhaps during the years 624–27/1226–30, just as Ayyubid rule over much of the Yemen was coming to an end and just before their successors, the Rasulids, assumed power. To be sure, he travelled in areas of Arabia outside the Yemen and not controlled from the Yemen. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is the Yemen which must hold our major attention here in order to understand well the historical background of his journey and the historical comments he makes in the text before us. Perhaps the other part of the Peninsula which requires such an introduction is the region of the Holy Cities. The reader’s attention is drawn to Appendixes B.2–B.11 below. Any other historical remarks in the text can be dealt with adequately in the footnotes.¹

The Yemen

Ibn al-Mujāwir mentions the following Yemenite ruling families in *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* in sufficient detail to warrant our attention here: the Ziyadids, the Najahids, the

¹This includes the immensely important Zaydis who are mentioned but rarely by Ibn al-Mujāwir, no doubt because he did not travel in their territory in the northern highlands of the Yemen. I have assigned Appendix B.2 to them, however, and have attempted a dynastic list of the imams of the relevant period.

Sulayhids, the Zuray'ids, the Mahdids and finally the Ayyubids.¹ Relying on previous publications,² I now proceed with some brief notes on these dynasties which I hope will be useful for the reader's greater understanding and appreciation of the translated text. In the case of the last in the list, the Ayyubids, they would have been in control of Tihāmah and the southern highlands, including Aden, even as Ibn al-Mujāwir went on his travels.

The Ziyadids, 203–409(?) / 818–1018

The dynasty takes its name from Muḥammad b. Ziyād who in Iraq became the protégé of al-Faḍl b. Sahl, the vizier of the Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mūn. In 202/817, news reached the Abbasid court in Baghdad that two Arab tribes of Tihāmah, the Red Sea coastal plain of the Yemen, had rebelled against the Abbasid governor in Ṣan'ā' and against the caliphal house. Al-Faḍl b. Sahl suggested to the caliph that Ibn Ziyād be despatched to the Yemen to quell the revolt. The latter thus left Iraq and was given the additional command to found and build a new capital in Tihāmah. After attending to his pilgrimage duties in 203/819, Ibn Ziyād travelled south into the Yemen and fought many hard battles before he could assert his control over the coastal plain. In 204/819, he built the new capital, to be called Zabīd.

Ibn Ziyād died in 245/859, by which time, we are told, he had extended his territories as far as Ḥaḍramawt, along the southern Indian Ocean coast to Mirbāt in modern-day Oman, and also north along the Red Sea coast as far as Ḥaḷy Ibn Ya'qūb.

We know little more of Ziyadid history than a list of rulers who followed the dynasty's founder: his son, Ibrāhīm (d. 283/896), the latter's son, Ziyād (d. 289/902), another Ibn Ziyād (d. 299/911) who was finally succeeded by the last name history records in connection with the dynasty, Abū al-Jaysh. The latter died in 371/981 and this is the last firm date we have. There is an indication in our sources that the house finally fell in 409/1018.

The Najahids, 412–551 / 1021–1156

This was a black Abyssinian slave dynasty with sovereignty over Zabīd and northern Tihāmah. From 412/1021, the area fell into the hands of two brothers, Najāḥ and Nafīs, the latter soon ousted by the former. Najāḥ received an official diploma from the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad and struck his own coins. He was murdered by the Sulayhids in 452/1060 and Tihāmah passed into their hands for a while.

Najāḥ's son, Sa'īd al-Aḥwal, attacked and killed the Sulayhid ruler, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, and kidnapped his wife, though later she was rescued and Sa'īd compelled to flee to the Red Sea island of Dahlak. Tihāmah swung to and fro under the control of the Najahids and the Sulayhids until Sa'īd's death in 481/1088. His brother,

¹ A check on the text of *Tārīkh al-Mustashīr* with my dynastic lists in 'Political History', pp. 138–9, reveals that he all but ignores the Yū'firids (232–387/847–997) and makes very brief mention of the Sulaymanids (latter half of 6th/12th century) and the Hamdanid sultans (492–c. 569/1098–c. 1173).

² In particular, my *Ayyubids and Early Rasulids*, II, 'Political History' and the following *El* entries: 'Ziyādids', 'Najādids', 'Sulayhids', 'Zuray'ids', 'Mahdids', 'Tūrānshāh b. Ayyūb'.

Jayyāsh, succeeded him and built up the town of Ḥays, purposely bringing over Abyssinians to populate it, Ibn al-Mujāwir tells us. Jayyāsh died in 498/1104 and Najahid power was then exercised by his son and two grandsons, all named Fātik, and then a series of slave ministers. The last of these was murdered by the Mahdids in c. 551/1156 and the Najahids passed from history.

The Sulayhids, 439–532/1047–1138

This Fatimid Ismāʿīlī dynasty can be divided between the Ṣanʿāʾ (439–c. 480/1047–c. 1087) and the Dhū Jiblah periods (ca. 480–532/ca. 1087–1138). The founder who figures on more than one occasion in the text of *Tārīkh al-Mustaṣṣir* was ʿAlī b. Muḥammad who had been brought up an orthodox Sunnī in the mountains of Ḥarāz, south-west of Ṣanʿāʾ, and later converted by a Fatimid *dāʿī*. From 439/1047, he rose to arms and took the Ḥarāz region. By 455/1063, he controlled the whole of the south of the Yemen below Ṣanʿāʾ and the capital itself. When he was murdered by Saʿīd al-Aḥwal, the Najahid, in about 473/1080, his son, Aḥmad, succeeded him.

A long struggle with the Najahids ensued and at times they made serious inroads into Sulayhid territory. In about 479/1086, Aḥmad handed over the affairs of state to his wife, Arwā bint Aḥmad, who, perhaps in 480/1087, moved the capital to Dhū Jiblah. Thus began Sulayhid rule from there over Tihāmah and southern Yemen, a period of some brilliance, presided over by this legendary queen known as ‘Bilqis the Younger’.

The rest of the history of the dynasty centres on the queen and her trusty henchmen and the continuing struggles against the arch-enemy, the Najahids. Arwā died in 532/1138 at the ripe old age of eighty-eight. There was no one to continue the dynasty.

The Zurayʿids, 473–569/1080–1173

A Fatimid Ismāʿīlī dynasty centered on the southern port of Aden, the Zurayʿids were installed as representatives of the Sulayhids in 473/1080 in recognition of their past services to the family, and their joint leaders were brothers, al-ʿAbbās, and al-Masʿūd, sons of al-Mukarram b. al-Dhiʿb. Al-ʿAbbās died in 477/1084 and his son, Zurayʿ, who gave his name to the dynasty, took over as joint ruler with his uncle, al-Masʿūd. In 504/1110, the Zurayʿids decided to cast off their agreement with the Sulayhids and declared independence.

The period of rule was dogged by family quarrels resulting from the rivalry between its two branches, the descendants of al-ʿAbbās on the one side and those of al-Masʿūd on the other. It was only in 533/1138 that ʿAlī b. Sabaʾ b. Abī Suʿūd b. Zurayʿ united the family, and his brother and successor, Muḥammad b. Sabaʾ, took sole control over Aden, much of southern Arabia and Ḥaḍramawt.

Muḥammad’s son and successor, ʿImrān, died in 561/1166 and the affairs of state fell into the hands of their slave ministers, including one Yāsir b. Bilāl, who was put to death after the entry of the Ayyubids and their vast army from Egypt into Aden in 569/1173.

The Mahdids, 554–569/1159–73

This short-lived Tihāmah-based dynasty was, like the Zuray'ids, brought to an end by the arrival of the powerful Ayyubids in the country.

The first date in fact marks the entry into Zabid of 'Alī b. Mahdi after some years of struggle in Najahid Tihāmah where he had endeavoured to spread his religious message. He died soon after taking the town and his son, 'Abd al-Nabī, continued the policy of cruel plundering and looting undertaken by his father before him. Combining a policy of peace making here and armed struggle there, 'Abd al-Nabī gained much territory for the Mahdids, even outside Tihāmah in the southern highlands. His exploits were brought to a sudden halt when he and his brother, Aḥmad, were arrested by the conquering Ayyubids and were finally strangled by them in 571/1176.

The Mahdids were commonly branded Khawārij, particularly because of their doctrine that all sin is infidelity.

The Ayyubids, 569–628/1173–1230

IM must have been undertaking his journey (or journeys) in southern Arabia during the time the Ayyubids firmly controlled Tihāmah and the southern highlands of the Yemen. This family was by origin Kurdish and its high-ranking officers were mostly Kurds and Turks. For the first time in the Islamic history of the Yemen, we see the entry into the country of a major foreign force. The Ayyubid army under Tūrānshāh b. Ayyūb, the brother of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin), was vast, well equipped, well disciplined and with exceptionally large numbers of horse. They were to sweep away the local dynasties and to establish a strictly Sunnī unity within their territory. The date 569/1173 is of great significance in Yemenite history, for here surely are the beginnings of a single political unit called the Yemen, controlled by the Sunnī Ayyubids in the south and in Tihāmah and by the Zaydis in the northern highlands.

These brief historical notes cannot include a comprehensive discussion of why this Ayyubid army marched out of Egypt against southern Arabia in 569/1173.¹ Strategic and commercial reasons may have been well to the fore in the thinking of the Ayyubids. It had also been reported to them that the Yemen had more than its fair share of Ismā'īlīs, religiously and politically closely linked with the Fatimids in Egypt, whose caliphate Saladin, the brother of the conqueror of the Yemen, Tūrānshāh, had brought to an end two years earlier in 567/1171.

The Ayyubid sultans of the Yemen, with their steady supply of men, materials and horse from Egypt, conquered southern Yemen and Tihāmah as it had never been conquered before. With military successes came administrative development: a system of governors and government officials, the institution of fiefs and the regularization of customs dues and taxes, sometimes building on earlier Zuray'id models, though more often than not they brought in innovations imported from Ayyubid lands to the north.

There were six Ayyubid sultans in the Yemen and their list can be consulted below in Appendix B.1. When the final one, al-Mas'ūd Yūsuf, left the Yemen for the last time in 626/1228, he cast around among his senior Ayyubid amirs, but found no one of the

¹ See in particular on this question Smith, *Ayyubids*, II, pp. 31–49.

family to hold the fort. The Rasulid, Nūr al-Dīn ‘Umar, of Turkish origin incidentally, was finally appointed his deputy to hold the country in the name of the Ayyubid house until relieved by another member. But no Ayyubid was ever to set foot in the Yemen again. By the year 628/1230 after Ibn al-Mujāwir had composed *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, one can assume, the new Rasulid regime was officially confirmed in authority by the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad.

The Hejaz

The historical background of the Hejaz need not detain us long. Ibn al-Mujāwir, like all good Muslim travellers and businessmen, no doubt performed the pilgrimage on his way through the Hejaz down into the Yemen. He has much to say about Mecca, some of his data of immense social and economic interest, though there is also much unoriginal material concerning the etymology of the name. He mentions the sharifs in his writings and for this reason I append some remarks on them here and direct the reader's attention also to Appendixes B.9–B.11 below.¹

We may perhaps suggest that the sharifs under review in the context of the *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* can be divided into three houses: the Musawids (mid-fourth/tenth century to the second half of fifth/eleventh century), B. Hāshim (from the second half of fifth/eleventh century to 597/1201) and B. Qatādah (from 597/1201 to the mid-seventh/thirteenth century). All were descended from Mūsā al-Jawn, a direct ancestor of ‘Alī b. Abi Ṭālib, through his son al-Ḥasan (see p. 36, n. 6 below). It might be stressed here that frequently during the early seventh/thirteenth century the Ayyubids from Egypt and from the Yemen (and the Rasulids after them from the latter) played an active role in Meccan affairs and directly and indirectly controlled the city.

The Musawids, 350s–450s/960s–1060s

The first to make himself master of Mecca and to become known as sharif had been Ja‘far b. Muḥammad in the early years of the second half of the fourth/tenth century. The sharifate during this period made every attempt to assert its independence and the third ruler of the house, Abū al-Futūḥ (reg. 384–432/994–1039), proclaimed himself caliph in 402/1011. The last ruler of the dynasty, Shukr, died without heirs in 453/1061 and power passed to the B. Hāshim.

B. Hāshim, 455–597/1063–1201

The name was taken from Abū Hāshim Muḥammad, the first ruler of the line, in 455/1063. He had originally been appointed deputy by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣulayḥī (see Sulayhids above), who had gone on pilgrimage to Mecca in 455/1063 and remained

¹ See in particular the Arabic histories in Wüstenfeld's *Chroniken*, Ibn Fahd's *Ghāyah*, Snouck Hurgronje's *Mekka*, De Gaury's, *Rulers* and *EL*, ‘Hāshimids’, ‘Qatāda b. Idris’, ‘Makka’.

there as ruler. It is sufficient here to refer the reader to the list of their amirs which can be found below in Appendix B.10.

B. Qatādah, 597/1201 – mid-seventh/thirteenth century

In 597/1201, Qatādah b. Idris, then lord of Yanbu', himself an ardent Arabian 'nationalist' and invited by those of Mecca tired of outside interference, seized the city from the last Hashimite, Mukthir, and the latter and his immediate family left the town for good. Qatādah was already over the age of seventy when he became ruler and died in 617/1220, when he was succeeded by his son, Ḥasan. The latter, expelled from Mecca by Ayyubid forces, left for Baghdad to seek the aid of the Abbasid caliph. He died there and never returned to Arabia. As the Ayyubids lost their control of the Yemen to the Rasulid amirs and as quarrels between the two houses over the Holy Cities continued to rage, Rājih, another son of Qatādah, ruled as a Rasulid governor until he was finally ousted by direct Ayyubid intervention in 638/1240.

THE CONTENTS

We cannot be sure how many visits Ibn al-Mujāwir made to the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, there may have been only one. I am assuming that, coming from the north-east, he would have followed either the Kufa–Mecca road, the Darb Zubaydah, or the Basra–Mecca road and Map 1, 'Ibn al-Mujāwir's World', is marked accordingly.¹ He then presumably did first what all Muslim travellers to the area would wish to do, namely perform the pilgrimage. Assuming that he was there on business, this would appear to be a classic case of *ḥajj wa-ḥājah* ('pilgrimage and business'), an age-old Arabian practice.

From Mecca and al-Ṭā'if (he says nothing of Medina), he travelled south, down into Tihāmat al-Yaman, the Yemen section of the Red Sea coastal plain, where he has much to say of Zabīd, traditionally a centre of learning. He continued south to the Bāb al-Mandab, the extreme south-western point of the Peninsula, whence a route along the southern coast of Arabia brought him to Aden which, given his keen observations of all aspects of trade and markets, one might suggest is the highlight of his expedition.² We cannot be sure to what extent, or even if, Ibn al-Mujāwir travelled into the mountains of the Yemen, for how much of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* is personal observation and how much second hand we can only surmise, relying on the hints, and nothing stronger, which we find in the text (see below, 'The Text, Ibn al-Mujāwir's sources'). He certainly mentions important places in the southern highlands like Ta'izz and Dhū Jiblah; further north, Dhamār and the chief town, Ṣan'ā', and further north still, Ṣa'dah, about which he says a great deal, and Najrān in present-day Saudi Arabia.

¹ For an excellent study of the Kufa pilgrim route, see al-Rashid, *Darb Zubaydah*, *passim*. Rashid's inside rear cover map of al-Rabadhah indicate the two routes extremely well. In order not to confuse the issue, my own Map 1 shows the route of the Darb Zubaydah from Kufa only.

² Apart from the relevant sections of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, see also my articles, 'Trade and Commerce' and 'Port Practices'.

He then proceeded along the southern coast. He perhaps cut inland and continued his way via Wādī Ḥaḍramawt, for he writes of Shibām and Tarim there. Then he travelled down into the area of present-day southern Oman. The medieval town of Zafār which gave its name to what is now the whole area of Dhofar features in the text. Ibn al-Mujāwir then made his way as far as Ra's al-Ḥadd, the furthest easterly point on the map of the Arabian Peninsula. Turning left into the Gulf of Oman, he called in, we assume, at Ṣūr and Qalhāt, then Muscat and Sohar before travelling the length of the Musandam Peninsula on the eastern side right to the tip at Kumzār. From somewhere on the western side, now in the Gulf proper, he takes us over the sea to the island of Qays, only a few miles off the coast of present-day Iran. We leave him as he tells us something of the island of Bahrain and perhaps we should assume that he returned home (to Khurasan?) through the head of the Gulf and eastwards. This is a quick summary of the ground covered by Ibn al-Mujāwir in *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*.

Ibn al-Mujāwir's introduction

Ibn al-Mujāwir's own introduction to his text is couched in an elevated classical Arabic rhymed prose (*saḥf*) style which promises a much more orthodox and staid geographical text to follow.¹ He is engaged in the superior discipline of *fann al-tārīkh*, he tells us, which I translate historical geography or topography:

The discipline of historical topography (*fann al-tārīkh*), especially what concerns the inhabited parts of the earth, the lengths and breadths of its territories, the sites of its buildings, the distances between its settlements, the presentation of its countries and the explanation of the conditions of its towns ... is one of the most marvellous, the most extraordinary, the most intellectual ... and the most pleasing.²

There is then, he is clearly saying here, a real historical approach in what he is writing. That and the elevated style deceive the reader for the time being into believing that this is a geographical reference book in the long tradition of such works in Arabic and perhaps one to be assigned to the 'post-classical' genre of Arabic geographical writings (see section below on 'The Place of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* in Arabic Geographical and Travel Literature'). I am even inclined to suggest (and I hope I am not unduly maligning him) that he has lifted his introduction, or at least the inspiration for his introduction, from another source (as he sometimes did lift the words of others). Or, I suppose we may admit, this was in truth his own articulation of his idealistic intention, namely to produce a geographical reference work in the traditional mould with a bias towards the historical, an intention which, as he composed his work, he was unable to fulfil.

He further stresses the historical in his work:

The old pages [of historical topography] renew for you razed towns with their archaeological remains and castles while the lifeless sections and chapters bring to life within their letters and lines centuries long gone by.³

¹ See also below, section: 'The Place of *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* in Arabic Geographical and Travel Literature'.

² P. 1 of Oscar Löfgren's published Arabic text.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

The following, while still a little too lofty for the main text which follows, lacks the historical emphasis and begins to tell us a little more genuinely and more accurately what is in store:

So in this book I have concentrated on the following two areas [Mecca and the Yemen] by recording what is related to them in this field of study, a statement concerning [different] sites, areas, towns, mountains and seas and also an explanation of [different] dwelling places and settlements, as well as the measurements of distances across both deserts and centres of habitation. ... [There is also] a picture of every place, so that it is as if you can actually see it with your own eyes and you become acquainted with it in its entirety, so meanwhile you are relieved of your fatigue. Every place has its own rare piece of poetry which has been strung together of old. But now it is the time to begin [to tackle] the objectives of the book, to ease back the curtain and open the door.¹

By highlighting the most important of the contents of the text below, we shall see that it did not emerge quite as he describes.

Ibn al-Mujāwir's route descriptions

Below in Appendix A, I have provided a comprehensive list of the forty-two routes described by Ibn al-Mujāwir in *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*. These route descriptions form the foundations of the structure of the work and are usually in the following pattern: to place A – x parasangs; to place B – y parasangs; and to place C – z parasangs. To be sure, he does on occasions abandon the route before completion, seemingly forgetting that he has started. Some of his routes too, it should be said, are highly doubtful, possibly composites of more than one route, and I have drawn attention to such in my notes.² I get the feeling that some of his Hejazi and 'Asiri itineraries in particular are second-hand (and frankly second rate) and that confusion, whoever is at fault, he or his informant(s), has entered into the equation. Often he completes a fairly lengthy list without distraction; more often than not he starts his list, digresses at a certain point, sometimes at great length, for one thing often reminds him of another;³ then he picks the itinerary up again several pages on when his digression is over. Usually, the route is summarized in a simple heading: from place A to place B. An elaboration of the digressions, the true contents of the work, will follow below after mention of Ibn al-Mujāwir's measurement of distance, the parasang.

Ibn al-Mujāwir's parasang

It is of interest to note that the original meaning of the word *farsakh* (plural *farāsikh*) which Ibn al-Mujāwir employs in all his route lists is the distance covered on foot in

¹ Ibid., p. 2.

² Such problems are not confined to Ibn al-Mujāwir. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, the North African 8th/14th-century traveller, similarly baffles scholars: where exactly did he travel and where did he take his information second-hand? See Dunn, *Adventures*, pp. 314–16.

³ In a sort of stream of consciousness and I am much reminded of al-Mubarrad's remark in his *al-Kāmil fī al-lughab*: 'al-shay' yudhkaru bi-al-shay', 'one thing is brought to mind by [another similar] thing'.

one hour.¹ It had disturbed me from the start that the *farsakh* was generally taken as a fixed measurement of distance² and this set me off on a series of calculations in order to try at least to discover what precisely Ibn al-Mujāwir means by the word.³ Selecting twenty routes given by Ibn al-Mujāwir in *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, I calculated the distances in miles as best I could, though often as the crow flies. My calculations, necessarily rough, revealed an average of 4.42 miles per parasang, which is high, and a figure below three miles per parasang had been expected. The outcome of these calculations was, however, the strong belief that we are dealing here with a word, *farsakh*, whose precise meaning we should trace back to its origin; I am now fairly confident that Ibn al-Mujāwir's parasang is the distance he found he could travel in one hour.⁴ It goes without saying that this is a sensible way of expressing his distances; in this way his figures reflect the ease or difficulty of the terrain over which the traveller passes.

Place names in the text

Not surprisingly in a work of this nature, something in excess of 1,200 place names are mentioned in *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*, most of them situated in the west and south of the Arabian Peninsula. Unfortunately, many of these remain of dubious reading. Many too cannot be traced in other geographical and allied sources and I deliberately draw the reader's attention to this fact by a one-word note, unidentified.⁵ Tedious as this may appear, it seems to me important that this fact is highlighted in this way and it should indicate that there is the strong possibility that Ibn al-Mujāwir's recording of the name in question is unique.

As evidence of Ibn al-Mujāwir's keen sense of humour, I have already discussed his amusing attempts to provide the derivations of certain place names.⁶ His ingenious etymologies of places such as Zabīd,⁷ Ḥays⁸ and Qalhāt⁹ may be mentioned, again¹⁰ comparing them to those of the famous Iraqi third/ninth-century belletrist, al-Jāhiz.¹¹

¹ Except on p. 42 of the published text, where the mile (*mīl*) is used (on three occasions), a sure indication that Ibn al-Mujāwir is taking the route from an informant, and on p. 83, the stage (*marḥalah*), though not in a route list. The word *farsakh* is Parthian in origin: *frasakh*; Greek παρασάγγελος (Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, s.v.) and Syriac *parsehā* (Payne Smith, *Dictionary*, s.v. See also *EL*, 'farsakh').

² Hinz (*Masse*, p. 62) gives 'about 3 miles, 1000 *bā'* or approximately 6 km'.

³ See my 'Dhofar', pp. 82–3.

⁴ Discussing this problem with Dr Francine Stone, she suggests that walking with a good, fit donkey, even laden, rather than walking without, could well push up the average distance covered in an hour.

⁵ I do not include Sprenger's *Reiserouten* in these sources, as he takes the whole of his Arabian section direct from Ibn al-Mujāwir's *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir*.

⁶ 'Wondrous', pp. 115–17.

⁷ See p. 96 below.

⁸ See p. 238 below.

⁹ See p. 269 below.

¹⁰ See 'Wondrous', p. 115.

¹¹ See *al-Bukhālā'*, p. 106, with such tongue-in-cheek derivations as *yaṣṭalḥu wa-yulqī* for *salūqī*, the Arabian hound, and *ʿaṣā wa-FaRra*, for *ʿsfūr*, the sparrow or any small bird.

Agriculture, crops, fruits, vegetables and food

As part of his interest in trade and also in the people he meets on his travels, Ibn al-Mujāwir often catalogues their agricultural produce and their food. Lists of wells may be provided, including the assessment of the salinity of each – or at least whether they are brackish or sweet. Flood irrigation is mentioned but very rarely, in detail at any rate, and one might deduce from the text that almost all agriculture was well- or *ghayl*-watered. Surprisingly, nothing is said of terraced agriculture. Lists of cereal crops (wheat, barley, sorghum, millet and so on) occur, as do those of fruits (particularly the citrus varieties) and vegetables (for example, cucumber, radish, leeks, Chinese chives). Such catalogues of produce often lead neatly into a description of the food a particular people eat. We may be told of the different types of bread available from the cereals and lists of fish occur on more than one occasion. *Harisah*, not surprisingly in the coastal areas usually made with fish rather than the more common meat, is the dish which he recalls most frequently.

Dress and social customs

The two fit neatly together in Ibn al-Mujāwir's text and can overlap. It is true, our author does tend to emphasize the sartorially bizarre, or at least the unusual. There are, however, statements that leather is worn because it is warm in a cold mountain winter. But for the most part he delights in teasing his readers with somewhat ridiculous descriptions of strange, and often titillating, costumes. The female leather garment which is simply a rectangle with a hole in the centre for the head and which without a belt is embarrassingly revealing to the visitor not used to such displays of flesh is described with some gusto.¹ So too is the *futūḥī*, also a lady's dress, worn as the sole garment and so abundant and with such ample sleeves that a man is described as slipping inside the garment of one woman and round a complete circle of women, remaining inside their garments and emerging only after doing the complete round.²

Perhaps Ibn al-Mujāwir's descriptions of the social customs of those with whom he came into contact are some of the most interesting, as well as entertaining, aspects of the book. To be realistic, however, those which highlight sexual behaviour can be nothing more than an illustration of Ibn al-Mujāwir's puckish and humorous nature. His coterie of friends, all assembled to enjoy the company and the stories they produce, is brought to mind and one can imagine how such tales become stranger and stranger and more and more salacious as they are repeated time and time again.

To be charitable, we can perhaps say that this is just a part of Ibn al-Mujāwir's endeavours to understand people of different backgrounds, religious affiliations (including non-Muslims) and cultures from his own and the anecdotal aspect of his social comment should not be overemphasized. My 1993 contribution to the Dostal Festschrift, "Anthropological" Passages' was only to some extent written with tongue in cheek, for such subjects as dress, preferred names, marriage ceremony traditions,

¹ Arabic text, p. 52.

² Ibid., p. 189.

burial customs, Jewish purification rituals and how to marry off both virgin and non-virgin, to mention but a few, are of genuine social interest in the context of seventh/thirteenth-century Arabia.

Magic, the wondrous and the bizarre

I have previously written on this subject¹ and can once again deal with it in general terms under four sub-headings: magic,² the jinn,³ the supernatural⁴ and amazing geographical changes.⁵

Examples of magic abound: a woman enormous enough to sit in the wadi bed and divert with her body the flood waters on to the land prepared for crops;⁶ humans turning into lions to terrorize their fellow human beings;⁷ how to become a sorceress;⁸ women who can travel all the way to Java and return in one night;⁹ the Socotrans in particular are all sorcerers, as well as Christians, and so powerful is their magic that they can make the island disappear as Ayyubid warships patrol up and down seeking it out in order to make a landing and capture it.¹⁰

The jinn appear in different shapes and sizes. Three mountains in Tihāmāh are in fact three jinn metamorphosed. The jinn build; they dig canals and underground tunnels. One participates with a poet in a poetic competition and, in a fit of rage, tears the poet's favourite young she-camel to pieces.¹¹ In a wadi where flows of water are allocated on a tribal basis (when the wrong tribe tries to take the water, it dries up), we are told it is a jinni who has been appointed agent over the wadi in order to control and allocate the flow appropriately.¹²

Supernatural happenings often occur in nature: flowers which bloom with the flashing of lightning; flowers which open only on moonlit nights; plants which turn with the sun. There are no snakes or scorpions in Dhamār, Ibn al-Mujāwir tells us, for they die as they enter through the gates; what is more, soil taken from Dhamār and sprinkled over snakes will kill them instantly. Birds are described which dance as they sing and even birds with two bills.

There are, according to Ibn al-Mujāwir, three major amazing geographical changes which in effect bring into being the Red Sea, separating Arabia from Africa, the Gulf of Aden and the island of Socotra. One such change is wrought by the hand of God, whereas the other two through the deeds of the legendary figure Dhū al-Qarnayn.

¹ See 'Magic', *passim*.

² Ibid., pp. 9–11.

³ Ibid., pp. 11–13.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 13–14.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 14–16.

⁶ Arabic text, p. 100.

⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

⁹ Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 266. Another story which fits neatly also into the humorous category. Perhaps one of the themes of the evening's conversation with his friends was the poor standard of Ayyubid navigation – and so the story developed.

¹¹ Arabic text p. 207.

¹² Ibid., p. 255.

History and buildings

The two are perhaps best linked in this introductory essay, as the buildings which exercise Ibn al-Mujāwir mind are often historic.

Surprisingly, in view of his introduction which focuses so precisely on his intended historical bias, it has to be admitted that Ibn al-Mujāwir is not a reliable historian. Fairly frequent remarks to that effect will be found below in my notes and I regularly correct his careless historical comments. Anything which it is possible to get wrong, he may get wrong, be it a date, the name of a person or place, or the details of some particular event. One example will suffice here.¹ He tells us of the slaying of al-Malik al-Mas'ūd Ismā'il b. Ṭughtakin b. Ayyūb in Wādī al-'Irq. Firstly, he provides no date of death. Now Ismā'il b. Ṭughtakin was the nephew of the famous Saladin and the third Ayyubid ruler of the Yemen. His cognomen was in fact al-Malik al-Mu'izz, not al-Mas'ūd. We know well too from reliable sources that al-Mu'izz was killed at a place called al-Qawz close to Wādī al-'Irq in Rajab 598/April 1202. This was only, of course, less than thirty years prior to the writing of *Tārīkh al-Mustabshir* and was almost certainly during the lifetime of Ibn al-Mujāwir. The irony concerning his lack of accuracy with dates is that he tells us from time to time of his dreams which he invariably dates precisely.² The moral of this observation is that Ibn al-Mujāwir's text, at least when he purports to pass on his own piece of historical information, must be very carefully checked against other sources. Fortunately, such sources do exist and the reader accepts Ibn al-Mujāwir's historical comments without further investigation at his peril.

One more observation is necessary under the heading of history. This is to highlight Ibn al-Mujāwir's propensity for lifting historical texts verbatim and sometimes he quotes from them at great length. There are two or three lengthy quotations from 'Umārah's *Tārīkh al-Yaman*, for example, which we can keep an eye on, as well as quotations from one work which is no longer extant.³ He does tell us his source (see below 'The Text, Ibn al-Mujāwir's sources'), it should be pointed out, and it is true that the finger of suspicion in the cases of the occasional *lapsus calami* which occurs might well be pointed in the direction of the scribes of the manuscripts over the centuries, rather than at Ibn al-Mujāwir himself.

Buildings are a favourite topic of Ibn al-Mujāwir: castles, walls, sometimes houses and the structures of wells. In the main, they are ancient curiosities, although some contemporary structures are mentioned, albeit with little detail, except perhaps of the materials, and sometimes with the dimensions of the stone or brick, if it is used.

¹ The passage is on p. 63 of the Arabic published text. See also my 'Eastern Connection', p. 77. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, is equally accused of such lapses (Dunn, *Adventures*, p. 313).

² E.g. p. 186 below, 'On 22 Ramaḍān 620 [19 October 1223], I saw in a dream ...' and there follows a description of the contents of some fairly trivial dream.

³ The work of 'Umārah is called *Kitāb al-Mufīd fī akbbār Zabīd* in the text, but it appears to read exactly as that of his *Tārīkh al-Yaman*. The best edition of 'Umārah's history is that of Kay, *Yaman*, and my notes keep the reader *au fait* with any differences that have been discovered between the two texts. An example of a work no longer extant is *Kitāb al-Mufīd fī akbbār Zabīd* of Jayyāsh, the third Najahid ruler in Tihāmah (reg. 482–500/1089–1107) (see Appendix M below). There is nothing really surprising or new to be found in this text, though it is always good to rescue snippets of lost works in this way. Medieval Yemenite historians had no compunction in copying their predecessors verbatim, with or without acknowledgement, and plagiarism did not exist in their culture. I am not therefore making a value judgement here.

More in keeping with the subject of this section of the introduction is his passion for the building and renovation of ancient buildings and in particular of town walls (see next section). Materials used (stone, gypsum, mud, mud brick, baked brick etc.), dimensions and the builder or renovator are all usually presented, the latter perhaps one of the rulers of old: Decius, a Sasanian emperor, or a *tubba'* for example. It is of little import who, for all these names merely signify the ancient, usually pre-Islamic, foundation of the building and whichever name he happens to choose can be taken with a pinch of salt. We are usually told of the number of gates in the town wall and their names. It is the subject of building and renovation which brings us closest to Ibn al-Mujāwir's stated historical aims in his introduction.

Maps and plans and diagrams

Integrated into the text are thirteen town plans or maps and these are reproduced with this translation.¹ Full captions have been written for each, rather than comprehensive translations of the notes. Briefly they are as follows: the town plans of Mecca, Jeddah, Zabīd, Jabal Ḥariz, Aden, Ta'izz, al-Janad, Mārib, Ṣa'dah, Bi'r al-ʿĀṣimiyyah, Ḥafār and Qalhāt and the map of Socotra. In addition, there are two diagrams to illustrate features of the text: a pointed hat and what is in all probability a levelling board to be pulled by oxen preparing land for cultivation (p. 69 of the Arabic text) and also benches used for relaxation and reclining (*ibid.*, p. 259).

Trade and commerce

There are three aspects of trade and commerce in seventh/thirteenth-century Arabia with which Ibn al-Mujāwir deals. The first and most obvious is his lengthy description of the port of Aden and its administration, the second his mention of commercial land routes and the third his catalogues of currencies and exchange rates and weights and measures.

Pages 138–46 of the published Arabic text are given over to Ibn al-Mujāwir's detailed description of trade in Aden, the most important port in the Peninsula at the time of his writing.² The lowly look-out who is supposed to spot arriving merchant ships, the chain of events after his correct recognition of an Aden-bound ship, the official arrangements once the ship has anchored in the harbour, the off-loading of commodities, the institution of the galley-tax, the goods for which taxes are payable, the goods for which they are not, other taxes and dues to which merchants are liable, the market of slave-girls and the law of sale and defect in action; all these topics are dealt with by our author. My instant comment on all this information is that he must have spent a great deal of time in Aden investigating all aspects of the port administration and how imports were handled. My further observation is how valuable the information is (see below '*Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* as a source of social and economic history').

¹ See pp. 11, 44, 77 (Zabīd, reproduced here), 103, 129, 157, 162, 198, 205, 220, 261, 269 and 273. Noha Sadek ('Zabīd', p. 215) refers to them as 'schematic maps with varying degrees of detail, they offer the reader additional information not found in the text proper'.

² See my 'Maritime Trade', especially pp. 129–34.

Before moving on to land routes – the second aspect of Ibn al-Mujāwir's treatment of commercial matters – it should be stressed that Ibn al-Mujāwir writes from the merchant's point of view and he articulates the resentment and unhappiness felt by merchants when they were confronted by the Ayyubid customs administration in Aden.¹ Unlike their successors, the Rasulids, who established a relatively benign customs regime in later years, the Ayyubids in the Yemen, who, it must always be remembered, were still trying to bring about military and political stability there, had not yet had the opportunity to develop and refine their administration and to win the confidence of the merchant classes.

Ibn al-Mujāwir describes to us a number of commercial land routes. For example, there is the old route from Zafār, in the extreme south of what is now Oman, to Baghdad² and he tells us how the bedouin traders brought in horses from Iraq and took away perfume and cloths (or perhaps, though less likely, wheat). He also recalls a paved(?) route from Raysūt, across the bay from Zafār, to Baghdad,³ along which commodities were brought from Iraq and brass, cinnabar, rose-water and silver originating in India taken back there.

Thirdly, Ibn al-Mujāwir's keen interest in exchange rates, commodities and weights and measures is particularly evident when he writes of Mecca, where he clearly spent some time examining the market places, and Zabīd.⁴ In a passage of some complexity, he looks first at units of currency in Mecca and compares them with values in Egypt, the headquarters of the Ayyubid house. He then turns to the Yemen, telling us what unit of measurement is used for what commodity. Reverting to Mecca, he makes the interesting comment that measurements change in and out of the pilgrimage season. Further comparisons with the commercial situation in Iraq follow, before he turns his attention for some time to the trade in leather. He writes of the quality of different leathers, how they are sold in Mecca and how in the Yemen. He informs us of the different types of leather and which are preferred where. Equally valuable is his description of the markets of Zabīd, the commodities found there and the units of measurement used.

Tārīkh al-Mustashir as a source of the economic and social history of Ayyubid Yemen

Tūrānshāh, the brother of Saladin, and his Ayyubid successors gradually imposed firm political control over Tihāmāh and the southern highlands of the Yemen over a period of time beginning with the arrival of their large army in the north of the Red Sea coastal plain in 569/1173. They remained in the country for a period of only about fifty-seven/fifty-five years (569–626/1173–1228), when, by default almost, the Rasulids, their protégés, took over this same territory. Perhaps because they were only in the country for such a relatively short time, all the efforts of the Ayyubids appear to have been directed at a thorough military conquest of Tihāmāh and southern Yemen. Local states,

¹ 'Maritime Trade', p. 130 and note 15.

² Arabic text, p. 263, and see my 'Eastern Connection', pp. 82–3.

³ Arabic text, p. 268, and see my 'Dhofar and Socotra', p. 87.

⁴ Arabic text, pp. 12–14, for Mecca and pp. 88–9 for Zabīd.