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IBN FADLĀN

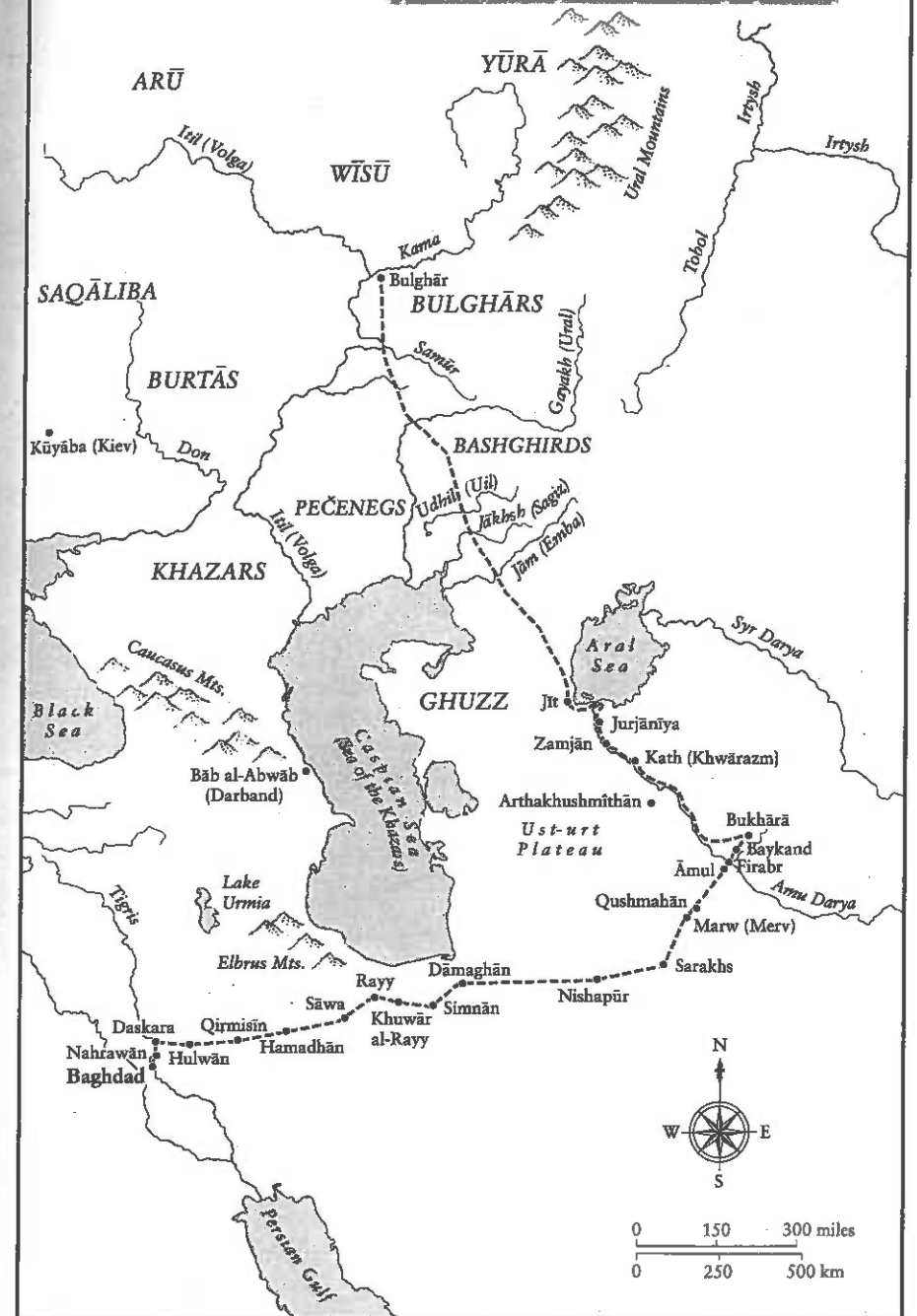
Ibn Fadlān and the
Land of Darkness
Arab Travellers in the Far North

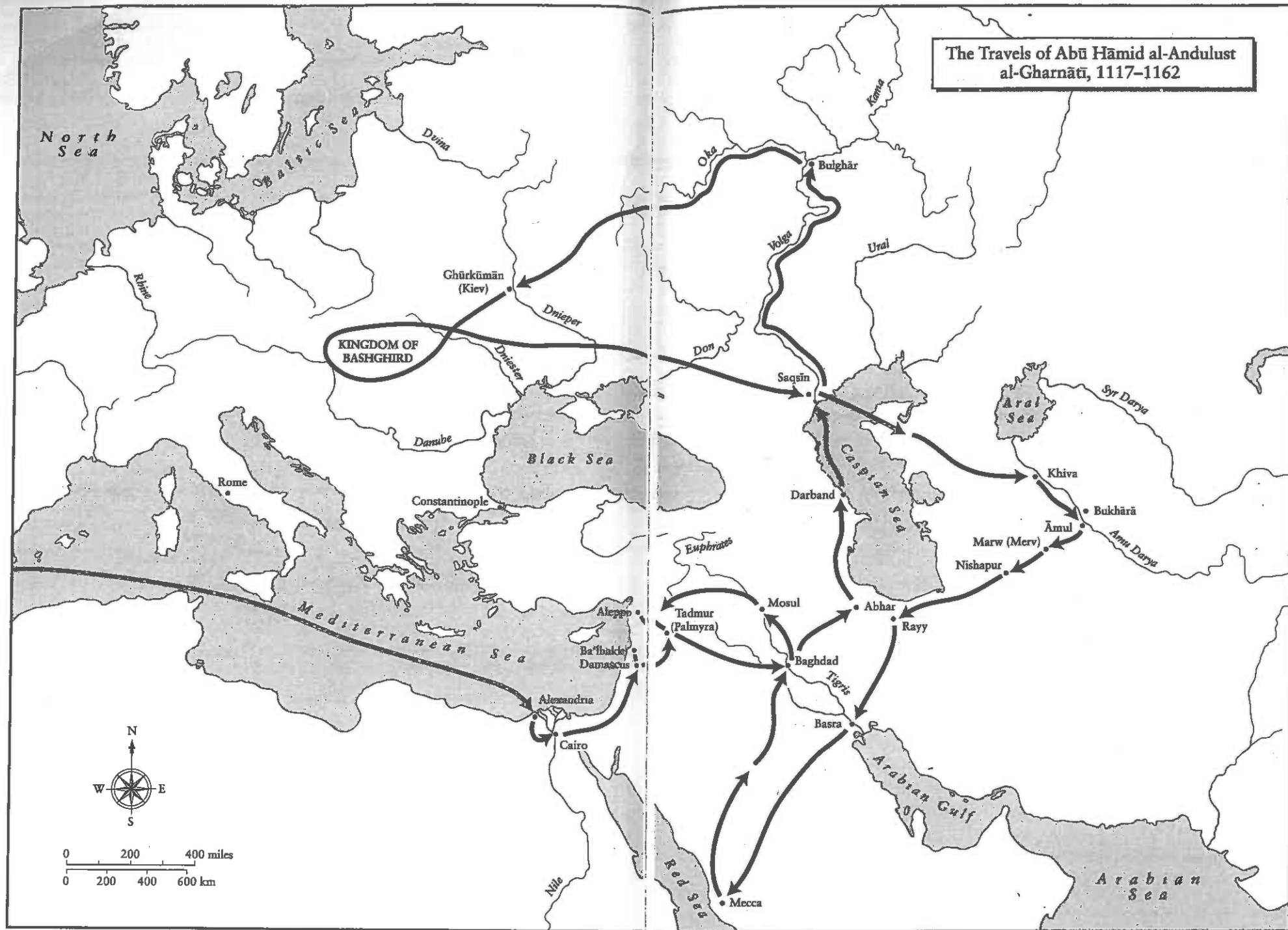
Translated with an Introduction by
PAUL LUNDE and CAROLINE STONE

PENGUIN BOOKS

----- Route of Ibn Fadlān

The Journey of Ibn Fadlān, 921-922





Introduction

In 922, an Arab envoy from Baghdad named Ibn Fadlān encountered a party of Viking traders on the upper reaches of the Volga River, not far south of the modern city of Kazan, while on a mission to the Muslim ruler of the Bulghārs. In his subsequent report he included a meticulous and astonishingly objective description of Viking customs, dress, table manners, religion and sexual practices, as well as the only eyewitness account ever written of a Viking ship cremation. That the earliest description we have of the Viking way of life – and death – should be written in the Arabic language may seem surprising. The meeting between Viking traders and an emissary of the Abbasid caliph was not, however, as unexpected as might at first appear, and is only one of many intriguing glimpses of life in the northern world to be found in Arabic sources.

By the time of Ibn Fadlān, Vikings had been in contact with the Muslim world, both as raiders and traders, for more than a century. During the late eighth century Vikings from Sweden began trading along the Russian river systems, opening routes from the Baltic to the Black and Caspian Seas and ultimately to the two richest markets for slaves and furs in the world, Christian Constantinople and Muslim Baghdad. The Viking northern trade network overlapped with the Muslim, first at the Khazar capital of Itil,¹ at the mouth of the Volga where it flows into the Caspian, and then at Bulghār on the upper Volga at its confluence with the Kama. It is our good fortune that when the two parties met, Ibn Fadlān should have been present to record it.

The encounter between the representatives of two such disparate worlds was the result of a series of complex religious,

political and economic shifts that followed the creation of the Islamic empire, which by 711 stretched from Spain to the borders of India. With the coming to power of the Abbasids in 751, a network of maritime and overland routes was established that linked Europe to China for the first time since the fall of the Roman empire. As good a symbolic date as any for its inception is 800, the year Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor and received the congratulatory gift of an Indian elephant from the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, shipped to Pisa from a North African port. Clearly, sea lanes and overland routes between east and west were already open at this early date.

The hub of the system was Ibn Fadlān's native city of Baghdad, founded in 763. It was the capital of the Abbasid empire and the largest and richest city west of China, rivalled in wealth and size only by Cordoba, the capital of Muslim Spain. As a multicultural and multilingual imperial capital, Baghdad was a clearing house for geographic, commercial and political information. News brought by merchants of the opening up of far northern lands to commercial exploitation, along with information about other distant trading partners such as India, China and the Indonesian archipelago, filtered into the works of the geographers, historians and scholars working in Baghdad and regional cultural centres.

The Routes of the Rādhānīya and the Rūs

The earliest description of the routes linking the provinces of the empire to Baghdad was written by the director of the Abbasid Bureau of Posts and Intelligence, Ibn Khurradādhbih. He completed the final version of his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* in 885, but it contains material dating back to the early decades of the ninth century. One of these early documents is a succinct description of four routes followed by an organization of Jewish merchants called the Rādhānīya on their trading journeys from 'the land of the Franks' to China and back. They were multilingual, speaking Arabic, Persian, Greek, 'Frankish', 'Andalusian' and Slavic. They exported eunuchs, slave girls

and boys, brocades, furs and swords, and brought eastern spices and aromatics back to 'Ifrānja', the land of the Franks. Ibn Khurradādhbih's document is unique evidence for the existence of organized long-distance trade between Europe and the east, both by land and sea, during a period when, it was long assumed, trade scarcely existed in Europe except on a regional basis.

Immediately after his description of the routes of the Rādhānīya, Ibn Khurradādhbih describes two northern routes followed by the Swedish Vikings, or Rūs, one leading to the Black Sea via the Dnieper, terminating in Constantinople, the other via the Volga to the Caspian, ending in Baghdad. The Rūs traded in furs and swords, and were able to communicate in Baghdad with Slavic-speaking slaves already resident there. Both the routes of the Rādhānīya and the Rūs passed through the territory of the Khazar empire. From their capital Itil in the Volga delta, the Judeo-Turkic Khazars dominated the emerging economies of the northern steppes and provided the template for the earliest Rūs and Slavic principalities.²

The northern trade was fuelled by Islamic silver. Silver dirham coins struck in Abbasid mints flooded west along the trade routes opened by the Swedish Vikings in their millions; hundreds of thousands have been found in Viking coin hoards. Most were obtained by Viking traders, in Bulghār and the Khazar capital of Itil, in exchange for furs, slaves, honey, wax and amber. Once again, it is Arabic sources that shed light on this lucrative trade, the profits from which led to the development of the first towns in Slavic- and Finnic-speaking regions. Kiev and Novgorod, among the earliest 'Russian' towns, were both originally founded as trading posts by the Viking 'Rūs', eventually developing into cities, losing their Viking character. By the end of the tenth century they had become Slavic-speaking and Orthodox Christian in faith.

Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb

Another tenth-century Arabic source confirms the accounts of trade between early medieval Europe and the east. A Jewish

merchant from Muslim Spain named Ibrāhīm ibn Ya'qūb visited a number of European cities, including Mainz, Schleswig (both in modern-day Germany) and Prague in 965, providing the first descriptions we have of these cities in any language. When he reached Mainz, Ibrāhīm was astonished to find silver dirhams struck in 913 by the Sāmānid ruler Nasr ibn Ahmad circulating in the markets; this was the same ruler who received Ibn Fadlān in 921 in his capital of Bukhārā (in what is today Uzbekistan), on his way to the land of the Bulghārs.

Ibrāhīm offers an even more surprising comment on the markets of Mainz: 'It is extraordinary that one should be able to find, in such far western regions, aromatics and spices that only grow in the Far East, like pepper, ginger, cloves, nard, costus and galingale. These plants are all imported from India, where they grow in abundance.' If it were not for his visit, we would not know that these towns were already important centres of international trade at this early period. This kind of unexpected comment, challenging the received perception of an entire period, demonstrates why the Arabic texts presented in this volume are so valuable.

The works of Arab geographers and historians contribute scattered but tantalizing information about northern lands and peoples, and the most important of these have been translated in Part III. Ibn Khurradādhbih, Istakhrī, Ibn Rusta, Ibn Hawqal, Muqaddasī and Mas'ūdī were all more or less contemporaries of Ibn Fadlān. They drew their information from travellers, merchants, soldiers and even government archives. Although sometimes difficult to interpret, these authors vividly bring to life the world of the far north. They provide striking information on everything from the institution of sacral kingship among the Khazars to Viking raids on Caspian towns, from the use of skis and dog sleds by peoples of the north to techniques for fishing sturgeon.

Gog and Magog and 'Alexander's Wall'

The regions north of the Caucasus and the peoples that inhabited them were always peripheral to Arab writers' primary concerns.

Nevertheless, the northern lands held a particular fascination for Muslims, for they played a crucial role in Islamic eschatology.

The Arab geographers placed the lands north of the Caucasus in the Sixth and Seventh Climes, the northernmost of the seven divisions into which the globe was divided. The peoples who inhabited this huge region were all considered descendants of Japheth, son of Noah, meaning that Chinese, Turks, Bulghārs, Khazārs, Alans, Avars, Magyars, Slavs, Lombards, Burgundians and Franks shared a common ancestry. They comprised the majority of the world's population and their numbers were 'uncountable as the sands of the sea' (cf. Revelation 20:8). Beyond the Seventh Clime lay the Land of Darkness, a mysterious, mist-shrouded land, inhabited by the tribes of Gog and Magog. These peoples, who appear in the Qur'ān (18:92-8) under the names Yājūj and Mājūj, as well as the biblical books of Genesis, Ezekiel and Revelation, were also counted among the descendants of Japheth, and were more numerous than all the other peoples of the earth combined. They were separated from the rest of mankind by high mountains, behind which they had been penned by a rampart of brass and iron erected by Alexander the Great. It was believed that at the end of time, they would break free and spread destruction throughout the earth, heralding the Apocalypse and the final days of mankind. These conceptions reverberate throughout Islamic geographical literature, reinforced by legends of the exploits of Alexander the Great in the Land of Darkness. Echoes of them are found in western sources as well, most notably in Marco Polo and *The Russian Primary Chronicle*.

The eschatological role of the tribes of Gog and Magog was always present in the minds of the authors of the texts collected in this volume, and shaped their view of northern lands. It haunted the caliph Wāthiq (reigned 842-847), grandson of Hārūn al-Rashīd, who one night in 842, in the palace of Sāmarrā outside Baghdad, dreamed that Gog and Magog had breached the barrier behind which they were imprisoned. He was so disturbed by the dream that he immediately sent an agent, Sallām the Interpreter, who was adept in more than

thirty languages, to inspect 'Alexander's Wall' and make certain the hordes of Gog and Magog were still safely imprisoned. On his return to Baghdad in 844, Sallām recounted his adventures to Ibn Khurradādhbih, who incorporated the story of his journey in his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*. Sallām's account of his journey to Alexander's Wall, included here, is one of the earliest first-hand accounts in Arabic of the Central Asian route to China.³ Despite its obvious folklore elements, it is clearly a description of a real journey to the Great Wall of China and additional evidence that the overland route to China was open in the mid-ninth century. The next official mission sent by a caliph to northern lands was that accompanied by Ibn Fadlān in 921, whose account is featured in this volume.

Ibn Fadlān

Ibn Fadlān's mission was dispatched in response to an envoy sent to the caliph Muqtadir (reigned 908–932) by the recently converted ruler of the Volga Bulghārs,⁴ Almish ibn (Shilkī) Yiltawār. The Bulghārs were semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Turkic-speaking shamanists, who at the time of Ibn Fadlān's visit had set up their winter camp at the confluence of the Volga and the Kama rivers, close to the rich sources of valuable furs in the northern forests. Almish had asked the caliph to send someone to instruct him and his people in the Islamic faith, to help build a mosque and to construct a fortress to defend his kingdom against his enemies. These enemies were the Khazars, to whom he was a reluctant tributary.⁵ By entering into diplomatic relations with the caliphate, Almish was evidently hoping to ally himself with a powerful and prestigious protector, yet one far enough away as to pose no threat to his independence. Judging by coin finds, the bulk of northern trade was already passing through Bulghār rather than Itil. Economic power was in the process of shifting from master to vassal. Since the early tenth century Almish had been coining imitation Abbasid dirhams in great quantities, and continued to do so throughout the reign of the caliph Muqtadir, who is mentioned by name on both the coins and in the *khutba*, the sermon delivered before communal prayers on Fridays.

The embassy set out from Baghdad on 21 June 921. The caliph's envoy was Sawsān al-Rassī, a freedman of Nadhīr al-Haramī, who seems to have been a sort of chief of protocol in the Abbasid bureaucracy. Two other freedmen accompanied the mission, Tikīn the Turk and Bārs the Saqlab,⁶ both of whom were chosen for their knowledge of languages and the customs of the countries through which the mission would be travelling. The caravan followed the old Khurāsān road to Rayy and Nishapur, then crossed the river Oxus to Bukhārā, where the travellers were received by the Sāmānid vizier al-Jayhānī, almost certainly the famous geographer whose lost *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* was probably the main source for information on northern peoples found in the later geographers. Disappointingly, Ibn Fadlān says little of this remarkable man.

The emissaries were received by the Sāmānid ruler, Nasr ibn Ahmad (reigned 914–943),⁷ and they read him the caliph's letter, which commanded him to turn over the revenues of a property in Khwārazm, owned by the disgraced Abbasid vizier Ibn al-Furāt and managed by one of his agents, to the caliph's representative, Ahmad ibn Mūsā. The revenues from this property, valued at 4,000 dinārs, were intended to defray the costs of constructing the fortress Almish had requested. Ahmad ibn Mūsā had not left Baghdad with the rest of the caravan, but was supposed to follow five days later. However, Ibn al-Furāt's agent, loyal to his master, contrived for him to be arrested on the frontier and he was imprisoned in Merv. Unsurprisingly, the 4,000 dinārs was never forthcoming, to the chagrin of Ibn Fadlān and the rage of Almish.

The party had spent twenty-eight days in Bukhārā and winter was setting in. They decided not to wait any longer for Ahmad ibn Mūsā to join them; they were still unaware that he was in jail. They returned to the Oxus and rented a boat to take them to Khwārazm, a distance of 200 *farsakhs*, about 600 miles. The capital was Kāth, on the eastern bank of the Oxus, not far from modern Khiva in Uzbekistan. Although geographically isolated by steppe and desert, ancient irrigation works made the area around Kāth immensely productive, and Khwārazm had long enjoyed close commercial relations with

the Khazars. The Khwārazmians were great merchants and travellers; Ibn Hawqal says they journeyed as far as the lands of Gog and Magog – that is, well into subarctic regions – in their search for fine furs.

Ibn Fadlān's travelling companion, Tikīn, had at one time lived in Khwārazm, and the Khwārazmshah regarded him with great suspicion, accusing him of having once sold arms to the Turkish tribes on his northern borders. As a loyal vassal of the Sāmānid *amīr* Nasr ibn Ahmad, the Khwārazmshah also feared that Tikīn, for reasons of his own, was trying to bypass the Sāmānids and establish direct contact and, perhaps, trade between Baghdad and the Bulghārs. Nevertheless, the Khwārazmshah finally gave them permission to proceed, and the travellers continued by river to Jurjānīya (Gurganj), a distance of fifty *farsakhs*. They intended to stay only a few days, but the river froze and the weather became too cold to travel. They were forced to spend three months in Jurjānīya (December to early March) awaiting the spring thaw.

The jurists and teachers who accompanied the embassy could not face continuing, and returned to Baghdad, reducing the party to Sawsān, Sawsān's brother-in-law, who is mentioned for the first time here, Tikīn and Bārs. Ibn Fadlān warned his companions that if they succeeded in reaching the camp of the king of the Bulghārs, he would immediately demand the 4,000 *dīnārs* promised in the caliph's letter. They dismissed his fears, and the party set off with a hired guide on 4 March 922, joining a caravan headed north. The travellers rode for twenty-five days through what is now Kazakhstan, wrapped in so many layers of clothing against the bitter cold that they could barely move. On the far side of a mountain chain, they came to the Ust-Yurt, the grazing lands of the Ghuzz (Oguz) Turks. Ibn Fadlān's description of their way of life, religious practices and customs is invaluable as it is the only eyewitness account we have of this important people before their conversion to Islam.

The travellers pressed on, crossing seven more rivers until at last they reached a Pečeneg camp, probably near the Ural River. Ibn Fadlān was struck by this people's poverty in comparison with the Ghuzz. However, the Pečenegs too were destined to

play an important role, serving the Christian rulers of Hungary as border guards in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. After only a day in the yurts of the Pečenegs, the party continued north, crossing the Jayikh (Ural River), the largest and swiftest flowing river so far encountered. One of their skin boats was lost fording the river and many men and camels drowned. They crossed seven more rivers and entered the lands of the Bāshghird, a warlike, violent and dirty people. They were clean-shaven, wore wooden phallic charms round their necks, worshipped nature gods, had clan totems representing fish, snakes and cranes, headhunted and ate lice. Despite their fearsome reputation, however, they did no harm to the travellers.

The party set off once more, forded seven more rivers, and in about a month's time reached the lands of the Bulghārs, their goal. On 12 May 922, when they were forty-eight hours from the royal camp, they were met by four 'kings' sent out with their retainers to welcome them. The next day, as they approached the camp, Almish, the 'king of the Saqāliba', as Ibn Fadlān always refers to him, rode out to meet them, dismounting and prostrating himself before them. This, of course, was extremely shocking to a Muslim, for Muslims prostrate themselves only before God. It was the custom that most upset Ibn Fadlān, and was ubiquitous among the peoples of the steppes. The king scattered dirhams over his visitors as a sign of welcome; these were probably locally-coined imitation Sāmānid dirhams, maintaining the weight and purity of the originals.

The envoys rested for four days while the king summoned the leaders of his people from outlying districts to attend the reading of the caliph's letter. When the day came, the envoys, carrying banners, presented the king with a horse and saddle which they had brought with them as a gift, and dressed him in black robes and turban, the Abbasid dynastic colour. Ibn Fadlān was in his element, for he had been appointed to read out the caliph's letter. Very much aware of his position as a visitor from a more advanced and sophisticated civilization, Ibn Fadlān insisted that everyone, including the king, who was very fat, stand while the letter was read out. When he pronounced the caliph's greeting, he paused and instructed his audience to

respond, as if the caliph himself were present. A translator rendered each phrase into the Bulghār language as the letter was read, and when it was completed, the audience roared *Allāhu akbar!* An hour later they were summoned to dinner, and Ibn Fadlān describes the manner in which this was done, for everything he witnessed was new and strange. The king himself cut a piece of meat for each of the guests and served them in order of precedence. As each was served, he was brought his own individual little table. Mead was offered, and Ibn Fadlān is careful to point out that the drink was licit, since it had only been allowed to ferment a day and a night, so did not qualify as an alcoholic drink. He also noticed that at prayer time the *khutba*, or sermon by the prayer leader, which always began with a prayer for the ruler, referred to Almish as 'King Yiltawār, king of the Bulghārs'.⁸ He informed Almish that only God received the title 'king', and that the *khutba* must be read in his given name and the name of his father. Almish pointed out that both his and his father's name were pagan, and asked if he could use the caliph's name, which was Ja'far. Ibn Fadlān thought this was a good idea, and chose the name 'Abd Allāh for his father. Henceforth the *khutba* was pronounced in the name of Ja'far ibn 'Abd Allāh, retroactively converting Almish's father.

Three days later, and just as Ibn Fadlān had feared, Almish demanded his money. Relations between the two were poisoned from now on, for it was clear that Almish did not believe Ibn Fadlān's version of events, and thought he was simply refusing to hand over the money. Ibn Fadlān was not only placed in an embarrassing and humiliating position, but a very dangerous one: Almish was an imposing figure, and Ibn Fadlān was a long way from home. Almish – Ja'far, as he now was – was also highly intelligent, and the psychological pressure he exerted on Ibn Fadlān, while both men outwardly observed diplomatic protocol, is recorded in fascinating detail. For example, Ibn Fadlān had noticed that the muezzin gave the call to prayer according to the Hanafi school of law, promulgated by the Sāmānid dynasty, and suggested that instead the Ash'arī form should be used, out of deference to the law school

favoured by the caliph. Almish agreed, and the new call was adopted for the next few days. He continued, however, to badger Ibn Fadlān about the money, and when he saw he was getting nowhere, ordered the muezzin to resume the Hanafi call to prayer. When Ibn Fadlān protested, Almish responded with a splendid display of analogical reasoning, showing why Ibn Fadlān, by his refusal to hand over the money, had lost all authority to admonish him over matters of religion, for in refusing he was disobeying the caliph, his master. The dialogue is beautifully reported, and as Ibn Fadlān engagingly admits, reduced him to silence. He adds that henceforth Almish nicknamed him Abū Bakr the Truthful (Abū Bakr al-Siddiq), after the sobriquet of the first caliph, who never told an untruth. The sarcasm was not lost on him, and it is much to his credit that he reports it.

The battle of wits between the two men continued, Almish apparently seeking to frighten his visitor by rather pointedly having his interpreter tell him the fate of a particularly intelligent visitor from Sind, who was hanged by his travelling companions as a most suitable sacrifice to Tengri, the sky god. Then Almish increased the pressure on Ibn Fadlān by taking him to a dark forest to view the remains of a giant that he had had hanged. The giant had been found swimming in the river, could not speak and was so hideous that pregnant women miscarried when they saw him. Apparently, he was from the lands of Gog and Magog, the threatening realm that featured so prominently in contemporary Islamic conceptions of the Apocalypse. The sight of the giant's remains, which included a skull the size of a beehive, must have been a sobering experience for Ibn Fadlān: 'I was astonished at the sight. Then I went away.'

Among the Rūs

It was in the Bulghār encampment that Ibn Fadlān met the party of Rūs, Viking traders who probably came from Kiev. He describes their dress, looks, sexual behaviour, customs, hygiene – or lack of it – and religious practices, and also gives

a fine description of a Viking funeral. The haunting figure of the 'Angel of Death', who strangles the slave girl who volunteers to die with her master, does not occur in the Norse sagas, nor do many of the other meticulously observed ceremonies, such as the ritual fornication on behalf of the deceased with the sacrificial victim before her own death. There is no reason to question Ibn Fadlān's account, however. The Rūs had long been trading in Baltic, Slavic and Finnish lands and had evidently incorporated practices from local cultures with whom they lived and traded.⁹

Another good illustration of the 'acculturation' of the Rūs is the description of their 'king'. He was clearly a sacral ruler, modelled on the Khazar *khāqān*, suggesting the influence of the Khazars on the Rūs and on this point confirming other Arabic sources. The 'king' was installed in a palace, sat on a throne, and his feet were not allowed to touch the ground. He was surrounded by a retinue of 400 warriors, who were sacrificed when he died. In another example, a lieutenant, corresponding to the Khazar *bāk* or *beg*, led the men into battle.¹⁰ All of this was foreign to Norse tradition, but of ancient standing among the Turcic semi-nomads of the steppes.

Wonders

Ibn Fadlān's account is remarkably free of 'wonders', the *mira-bilia* so beloved of medieval readers, and always expected, almost as a guarantee of authenticity, in descriptions of unknown lands. His description of the aurora borealis, as a vision of armies battling in the heavens, follows, as James Montgomery has pointed out, a tradition of description of such phenomena that stretches back to classical times; however, he is also trying to communicate an impression of a real event.¹¹ Ibn Fadlān was much struck by another natural phenomenon in northern latitudes, the long summer days and long winter nights. The short days of winter posed a real problem for Muslims, for it was difficult to fit the five stipulated prayer times into winter days that lasted only 4½, or farther north, 3½ hours.

The giant from the land of Gog and Magog was certainly

wondrous, but Ibn Fadlān is careful to indicate that he is only relating what he was told by Almish. Perhaps the skeleton Almish showed him in the forest was really that of a bear. At another point in the narrative, Ibn Fadlān describes a snake he saw slithering along the trunk of a fallen tree, 'almost as thick and large as the tree itself'. This would appear to be unknown to science, for the only large snake in Russia is the Amur ratsnake, which grows to the length of 180 cm. However, the fact that Almish assured him that it was harmless shows that it probably was a ratsnake, magnified by terror. Indeed, the only 'wonder' that is difficult to rationalize is the 'rhinoceros' Ibn Fadlān mentions; however, he is only relating what he was told by his informant, rather than claiming to have actually seen one. The three plates of onyx-like material, which Almish showed him and claimed came from the horn of a rhinoceros, may have been made of the material called *khutū*, fossilized mammoth tusk; this was much sought after for making knife handles because of its durability.¹²

What is most striking about Ibn Fadlān's little book is his objectivity. Much that he saw appalled him, particularly the open sexual congress of the Rūs with their slave girls and the always shocking beliefs and practices of pagans. He nevertheless made every effort to understand, despite the language barrier, what was going on round him. His attitude is almost scientific in its detachment as he describes food, drink, dress, manners, beliefs, customs, laws, taxes and burial rites – exactly the subjects a modern anthropologist would observe. His lack of condemnatory comment is striking, for these practices surely seemed very outlandish to a Muslim from Baghdad. Viking group sex and mixed bathing must have deeply shocked him, but he gamely records what he saw. He tried and failed to get the women of the Muslim community to veil, but refrains from derogatory remarks; later travellers, like Ibn Battūta, would not show such restraint. Ibn Fadlān has a sense of humour, and can laugh at himself: after all, there was no need to report Almish's nickname for him.

At the time he wrote, there was no established genre of travel writing in Arabic, so Ibn Fadlān had no model. He seems

simply to have jotted down his impressions as they occurred to him, and his book is all the better for it. He writes simply and without affectation; and most unusually in an Arabic work, never refers to written sources. Ibn Fadlān bore the hardships of his journey with great stoicism; indeed, his only complaint, on what was after all a difficult and dangerous mission, was about the bitter cold. Because the account of Ibn Fadlān's return journey has not survived, we never learn whether Almish, the Bulghār king, received the promised 4,000 *ḍinārs*. Nor is the complex relationship between Almish and Ibn Fadlān resolved, as it surely must have been in the fuller version, since we know from other sources that diplomatic ties remained intact. The geographer Dimashqī (1256–1327) mentions that the caliph Muqtadir sent a *faqīh* to teach the principles of Islam to the recently converted Bulghārs, and that afterwards a party of Bulghārs came to Baghdad intending to make the pilgrimage to Mecca; this suggests that relations between the envoy from Baghdad and the Bulghārs were resolved amicably.¹³

Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī al-Gharnātī

The only other Arab traveller to make his way to Bulghār and write about it was Abū Hāmid al-Gharnātī, 'the man from Granada' (sometimes known as Abū Hāmid al-Andalusī, 'the man from al-Andalus'¹⁴), whose account follows that of Ibn Fadlān in this volume.

Abū Hāmid was born in 1080 and left al-Andalus in 1106, never to return. He spent more than ten years in North Africa, then in 1117 sailed for Alexandria, passing the island of Sicily on the way and observing Mt Etna in full eruption. While there he took the opportunity of visiting the famous lighthouse, the Pharos, which he describes in detail in his *Gift of the Hearts* (*Tuhfat al-albāb*). He continued his studies in Cairo, where he spent the years 1118–1121, taking time off to make a trip up the Nile to Ikhmīm and gather information about the peoples of the Sudan and beyond. In 1122 he left Cairo for Damascus, where he taught *hadīth* and continued his studies. The following year he went to Baghdad and was fortunate

enough to befriend the powerful and wealthy 'Awn al-Dīn Abū Muzaffar Yahyā ibn Muhammad ibn Hubayra, who treated him as a guest and granted him access to his extensive library. Abū Hāmid left in 1127 for unknown reasons, and 1130 found him in the town of Abhar in Iran. He mentions in passing in the *Tuhfat* that he had visited Khwārazm three times; he may have made his first visit sometime this year.

The following year, 1131, found Abū Hāmid in Saqsīn, a great trading centre and the successor city to the old Khazar capital of Itil; this was to be his home for almost twenty years. He visited Bulghār in 1135, but does not tell us why or how long he stayed, and in 1150 he set out for Hungary, or as he calls it Bāshghird. He spent three years there, where he had close relations with the king, Geza II (reigned 1141–62), who at one point employed him to recruit Pečeneg Muslims to serve as light cavalry. Abū Hāmid was allowed to depart only on condition that he leave his son Hāmid, then in his thirties, hostage against his return. In 1153 he made his way back to Saqsīn via Kiev, and rejoined his wives and concubines. His stay was brief, however, for in 1154 he determined to make the pilgrimage. He crossed the Caspian and made his way first to Khwārazm, then Bukhārā, Merv, Nishapur, Rayy, Isfāhān and finally Basra, where he joined the *hajj* caravan to Mecca.

Abū Hāmid returned from Mecca in 1155 and settled in Baghdad, where he composed the first of the works by which he is best known today, *al-Mu'rib 'an ba'd 'ajā'ib al-maghrib* (*Exposition of Some of the Wonders of the West*). This is a work of popular cosmology and the 'wonders' of North Africa and al-Andalus, dedicated to his friend and patron, the vizier 'Awn al-Dīn. It includes, among many other miscellaneous topics, useful information on the calendars used by the Persians, Byzantines and Arabs; instructions for finding the direction of prayer; elements of astronomy; an explanation of latitude and longitude; and the division of the globe into Seven Climes (*iqlim*).

Abū Hāmid's true enthusiasm was for 'wonders' (*'ajā'ib*), deviations from the natural order of things, such as unusual fish and birds, or man-made, such as the Pyramids, the Pharos

Wonde

This is the book of Ahmad ibn Fadlān al-'Abbās ibn Rāshid ibn Hammād, the client of Muhammad ibn Sulaymān, the envoy of the caliph Muqtadir¹ to the king of the Saqāliba² in which he tells of all he saw in the lands of the Turks, the Khazars, the Rūs, the Saqāliba, the Bāshghirds and others, their various customs, news of their kings and their current status.

Ahmad ibn Fadlān said:

When the letter arrived from Almish ibn (Shilkī) Yiltawār,³ king of the Saqāliba, addressed to Muqtadir, the Commander of the Faithful, in which he asked for someone who could instruct him in the Faith, teach him the laws of Islam, build him a mosque and erect a minbar⁴ so that he could have the prayers said in his name⁵ in his lands and in all parts of his kingdom and also requesting that a fortress be built, for defence against the kings who were his adversaries, a favourable answer was given.

The envoy sent to him was Nadhīr al-Haramī.⁶ I was given the responsibility for reading the letter to the king, making over to him the gifts that had been sent him and supervising the teachers and jurists. The king was assigned a sum of money, which was to be delivered to him, to carry out the construction work we have already mentioned and to pay the salaries of the legal scholars and teachers, from the revenues of the town known as Arthakhushmithān⁷ in the lands of Khwārazm, which forms part of the estates of Ibn al-Furāt.⁸

The envoy sent to Muqtadir by the ruler of the Saqāliba was a man called Ibn Bāshṭū al-Khazarī.⁹ The envoy from the caliph¹⁰ was Sawsān al-Rassī, a freedman of Nadhīr al-Haramī,

together with Tikīn the Turk and Bārs the Saqlab.¹¹ I accompanied them, as I have said, and delivered the gifts to the king and his wife, children and brothers, as well as to his warlords, including the medicine he had requested in a letter to Nadhīr.

Departure from Baghdād

We set out from the City of Peace (Baghdād) on Friday, 11 Safar 309/21 June 921. We stayed one day at Nahrawān and set out again, marching at speed, and reached Daskara. We stayed there three days and then continued without halting¹² until we reached Hulwān. We stayed there for two days and set out for Qirmisīn.¹³ We stayed there for two days and then made for Hamadhān where we spent three days.

The Road to Transoxiana

We then continued our journey and reached Sāwa. We stayed there two days and set out for Rayy, where we spent eleven days waiting for Ahmad ibn 'Alī, Su'lūk's brother, because he was at Khuwār al-Rayy.¹⁴ Then we headed for Khuwār al-Rayy and stayed there three days. Next, we made for Simnān and thence to Dāmaghān, where by chance we ran across Ibn Qārin, the agent of the Dāī.¹⁵ We concealed ourselves in the caravan and hastened on our march as far as Nishapur.

Laylā ibn al-Nu'mān had just been killed. We met Hama-wayh Kūsā,¹⁶ the commander of the army of Khurāsān. Then we set out for Sarakhs and on to Merv and then on to Qushmahān,¹⁷ which is the fringe of the desert of Āmul. We stayed there for three days to allow the camels to rest before setting out into the desert. Then we crossed the desert to Āmul. Next, we crossed the Jayhūn (Oxus) and came to Afirabr,¹⁸ the *ribāt* of Tāhir ibn 'Alī. From there we travelled to Baykand.

Bukhārā

Then we entered Bukhārā and went to Jayhānī,¹⁹ the secretary of the *amīr* of Khurāsān, who was called in Khurāsān 'The Venerable Support' [*al-shaykh al-'amīd*]. He gave orders that we should be provided with a house and sent us a man to attend to our needs and provide us with everything we might want. We spent several days waiting and then Jayhānī requested an audience for us with Nasr ibn Ahmad.²⁰ We came before him and found he was a beardless youth. We greeted him with the title of *amīr*. He commanded us to sit down and the first thing he asked us was:

'How did you leave our master, the Commander of the Faithful? May God prolong his life and his good health – his and that of his officers and ministers!'

'We left him in good health,' we replied.

'May God increase his well-being!' he exclaimed.

Next, he was read the letter [commanding him] to transfer [the revenues of] Arthakhushmithān from al-Fadl ibn Mūsā, the Christian, agent of Ibn al-Furāt, to Ahmad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārazmī. He was also required to let us set out, provided with a letter for his governor in Khwārazm, ordering him not to hinder our mission. He was also to send a letter to the Gate of the Turk [ordering] an escort for us and not to place any difficulties in our path.²¹

'Where is Ahmad ibn Mūsā?' asked the *amīr*.

'We left him in the City of Peace (Baghdād). He was supposed to set out five days after us,' we told him.

He replied:

'I hear and I obey the order of our lord, the Commander of the Faithful – may God prolong his existence!'

The news reached Fadl ibn Mūsā, the Christian, Ibn al-Furāt's agent, and he used a trick to deal with Ahmad ibn Mūsā. He wrote as follows to the heads of Public Security along the Khwārazm Road from the military district of Sarakhs to Baykand:

'Keep your eyes peeled for Ahmad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārazmī in the caravanserais and customs' posts. He is a man of such and such a description. If you run across him, lock him up until you receive our letter about the matter.'

He was in fact caught at Merv and put in jail.

We stayed at Bukhārā for twenty-eight days. Fadl ibn Mūsā had come to an agreement with 'Abd Allah ibn Bāshtū and others of our companions, who said:

'If we stay any longer, winter will come and we will not be able to travel. When Ahmad ibn Mūsā gets here, he can catch up with us.'

Coinage of Bukhārā

I saw different kinds of dirhams in Bukhārā, some called *ghitrifi* dirhams,²² made of copper, brass and bronze. They are counted out, without being weighed, a hundred to a silver dirham. This is the way they settle the dowry of their women: so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, marries so-and-so, the daughter of so-and-so, for so many thousands of *ghitrifi* dirhams. This is how property and slaves are sold as well. They don't use any other type of dirhams for these purposes. They also have another type of bronze dirham, of which forty make up a *dānaq*. They also have a type of bronze dirham known as *Samarqandī*, six of which are worth a *dānaq*.

Khwārazm

When I had heard the words of 'Abd Allah ibn Bāshtū and others warning me against the approach of winter, we left Bukhārā to head back to the river and hired a boat to take us to Khwārazm.²³ The distance there from the place where we rented the boat²⁴ is more than two hundred *farsakhs*. We only travelled for part of each day – it was impossible to travel all day because of the intense cold, which lasted until we reached

Khwārazm. We went at once to the ruler of the town, the Khwārazm Shāh Muhammad ibn 'Irāq.²⁵ He showed us honour, admitted us to his presence and lodged us in a house.

After three days, he summoned us to discuss the question of visiting the land of the Turks. He said to us:

'I will not give you permission to go, for it is not licit for me to allow you to risk your lives. I know that this is really all a trick thought up by this *ghulām* – that is, Tīkīn – for among us, he was a blacksmith, engaged in selling iron in the land of the Infidels.²⁶ It was he who led Nadhīr into error and induced him to speak to the Commander of the Faithful, and it was he who arranged for the letter of the king of the Saqāliba to be delivered. The noble *amīr* – that is, the *amīr* of Khurāsān – would have more right to have the prayers read in the name of the Commander of the Faithful in that country, if he thought it advisable. Furthermore, between the country of which you speak and where you are now, there are a thousand tribes of unbelievers. The caliph has been misled in all this. I will give you a piece of good advice. You must write to the noble *amīr*, so that he can get in touch with the caliph – may God strengthen him! – by letter. As for you – you must remain here until the answer arrives.'

At that point, we left him. Later, we went back and kept trying to get into his good graces, flattering him and saying:

'Here are the orders of the Commander of the Faithful and his letter. Why refer to him again on this subject?'

Finally, he gave us permission to continue on our journey. We went from Khwārazm to Jurjāniya, which is fifty *farsakhs* away by river.

Coinage and language of Khwārazm

I noticed that the dirhams of Khwārazm are false, adulterated with lead or bronze. They call the dirham *tāzja* and it weighs four and a half *dānaqs*. The money changers sell *ki'āb*, *dāwāmāt*²⁷ and dirhams. The Khwārazmians are the most barbarous of people, both in speech and customs. Their language sounds like ||

animals the cries of starlings. In their country there is a village one day's journey away called Ardakuwa whose inhabitants are known as Kardaliya,²⁸ and their speech sounds exactly like the croaking of frogs. They deny the legitimacy of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib – may God be content with him! – at the end of each prayer.²⁹

The Jayhūn River freezes

We stayed at Jurjāniya for several days. The Jayhūn River froze for its entire length and the ice was seventeen spans thick.³⁰ Horses, mules, donkeys and carts slid over the ice as if on roads, and the ice was solid and did not crack. The river remained like this for three months.

The cold of hell

We saw a land which made us think a gate to the cold of hell had opened before us. When snow falls, it is always accompanied by a rough and violent wind. In this country, when a man wishes to make a nice gesture to a friend and show his generosity, he says: 'Come to my house where we can talk, for there is a good fire there.' But All-Powerful God has given them abundant firewood, and it is very cheap: two of their dirhams will buy a wagonload of *tāgh* wood, amounting to some 3,000 *ratl*.

It is the rule among them that beggars do not wait at the door, but come into the house and sit for an hour by the fire to warm up. Only then does the beggar say *pekend*, in other words, 'bread'.³¹

Our stay in Jurjāniya was protracted, for we remained there a few days of the month of Rajab and then the months of Sha'bān, Ramadān and Shawwāl.³² The cold and the hardships it causes were the reasons for the length of our stay.

I was told, in fact, that two men set out with twelve camels to load wood in the forest, but they forgot to take flint and tinder

with them. They had to spend the night without a fire and in the morning their camels were dead from the terrible cold. I saw how the intense cold made itself felt in this country: the roads and markets were so empty that one could wander through most of them without seeing a soul or coming face to face with another living being. Coming from the bathhouse, on returning to the house I looked at my beard. It was a block of ice, which I had to thaw in front of the fire. I slept in a house, inside which was another, inside which was a Turkish felt tent. I was wrapped in clothes and furs, but in spite of that my cheek froze to the pillow. I saw cisterns in that country lagged with sheepskins, so that they would not crack or burst, but it did no good. In truth, I saw the earth split and great crevasses form from the intense cold. I saw a great tree split in two from the same cause.

Folding boats

When we were in the middle of the month of Shawwāl 309/February 922, the weather began to change and the ice on the Jayhūn melted. We then set about obtaining what we needed for the journey. We bought Turkish camels and had boats made out of camel skin,³³ to allow us to pass the rivers we needed to cross in the land of the Turks. We laid in three months' supply of bread, millet and dried and salted meat.

Dressing for the cold

The local people, with whom we were on friendly terms, urged us to be prudent as regards clothing and to take large quantities. They made it sound very frightening and serious. When we saw the reality with our own eyes, however, we realized that it was twice as bad as we had been told. Each of us was wearing a tunic and over that a caftan, on top of that a cloak of sheepskin and over that again a felt outer garment, with a head covering that left

only the two eyes visible. Each of us wore a plain pair of trousers and another padded pair, socks, horse-hide boots and over those boots, other boots, so that when any of us mounted a camel, he could hardly move because of all the clothes he was wearing.

We now parted company with the jurist, the teacher and the *ghulām*, who had set off from Baghdād with us, because they were afraid to enter this country. I travelled with the envoy, his brother-in-law and the two *ghulām*, Tikīn and Bārs.

Ibn Fadlān warns his companions

When the day came for us to set out, I said to them: 'O people! The king's *ghulām* is with you and he knows everything that is going on. You are carrying letters from the caliph and I am quite sure that they mention the 4,000 *musayyabī dīnārs* that are intended for him. You are going to a foreign king. He will demand this money.'

'Don't worry about that,' they said to me, 'he won't ask us for it.'

I warned them and said:

'I know that he will demand it.'

But they would not listen.

The caravan to the land of the Turks

The caravan was extremely well organized. We hired a guide, called a *kilavuz*,³⁴ who was from al-Jurjānīya. Next we put our trust in God, mighty and powerful, and placed our fate in His hands. We set out from al-Jurjānīya on Monday, 2 Dhu al-Qa'da 309/4 March 922. We stopped at a *ribāt* called Zamjān, which is at the Gate of the Turks.³⁵ Then we set out on the following morning and reached a place called Jit. A great deal of snow fell, so that the camels were floundering in it up to their knees. We stayed at this wayside station for two days and then we entered the land of

the Turks, marching on across this flat, desert-like steppe without ever turning aside from the road or meeting a soul. We journeyed for ten days, suffering from endless difficulties, from exhaustion, intense cold and the constantly falling snow. Compared to this, the days of cold in Khwārazm were like summer days. We forgot all that had happened to us in the past and almost perished.

An attempt at conversion

One day, we were suffering from the most terrible cold. Tikīn was travelling at my side and next to him a Turk, who was talking to him in Turkish. Tikīn began to laugh and said to me:

'This Turk wants to say this to you; "What does our Lord want of us? He is going to make us die of cold. If we knew what He wanted, we could bring it to Him."'

I replied:

'Tell him that what He wants of you is this: that you should say: "There is no god but God."'

He began to laugh and answered:

'If we had been taught how to say this, we would say it.'

Then, we continued on our march until we reached a place where there were great quantities of *tāgh* wood. We stopped there and the caravan lit a fire. They warmed up and stripped off their clothes to dry them. We continued on our way each night, from midnight until afternoon or midday, moving as fast as we could and over the longest stages possible. Then we would halt. After having marched like this for fifteen nights, we reached a great mountain, very rocky, through which streams fought their way, filling depressions with water and forming pools.

The Ghuzz Turks

When we had crossed that mountain we came to a tribe of Turks called Ghuzz (Oguz). They were nomads, who live in felt

tents and come and go. You see their tents, first in one place, then in another, as is the way of nomads, depending on their movements. They live in poverty, like wandering asses. They do not worship God, nor do they have recourse to reason. They do not worship anything, but call their great men 'Lords'.³⁶ When one of them asks his leader's advice on something, he says: 'Lord, what should I do about this or that matter?'

'Their political regime is based on consultation among themselves.'³⁷ Nevertheless, when they have agreed on something and have decided to do it, the basest and most wretched of them can come and break the agreement. I have heard them say: 'There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God' to make a good impression on the Muslims who stay with them, but they do not believe in this firmly. If one of them suffers an injustice, or something bad happens to him, he lifts his head to heaven and says '*bir tengri*', which means 'by the one God' in the language of the Turks, for *bir* in Turkish means one and *tengri* is God.

Filth and immodesty

They do not wash after polluting themselves with excrement and urine. They do not wash after major ritual pollution [*janāba*], or any other pollution. They have no contact with water, especially in winter. Their women do not veil themselves before their own men or strangers. Similarly, the women do not hide any part of their body. One day, we went to the home of one of them and sat down. This man's wife was with us. As we were talking, she bared her private parts and scratched while we stared at her. We covered our faces with our hands and each said:

'I seek forgiveness from God!'

Her husband began to laugh and addressing the interpreter, said:

'Tell them this: she uncovers her private parts in your presence and you see them, but she protects them and allows no one near. Better than covering them up and letting you get at them!'

The punishment for adultery

Adultery is unknown, but if they learn that someone has committed an act of that kind, they split him in two in the following way: they bend down the branches of two trees, tie him to the branches and let the trees spring back into their original position. Thus the man who has been tied to the two trees is split in two.

A theological discussion

One of them, having heard me recite the Qur'ān and liked it, went to the interpreter and said:

'Tell him not to stop!'

One day, this man said to me through the interpreter:

'Ask that Arab, whether our great and powerful Lord has a wife.'

I found this deeply shocking and pronounced the phrases:

'Glory to God!' and 'I ask forgiveness of God!'

The Turk said: 'Glory to God!' and 'I ask forgiveness of God!' just as I had done.

That is a Turkish habit. Every time he hears a Muslim pronounce the phrases 'Glory to God!' and 'There is no god but God!', he repeats them too.

Turkish marriage customs

Here are some of the Turkish marriage customs. If one of them asks another for one of the women of his family in marriage, whether it is his daughter, his sister or any other woman he possesses, in exchange for such and such a quantity of robes from Khwārazm, he carries off the woman as soon as he has paid his debt. Sometimes the bride price consists of camels, or horses, or other things. No one can get a wife if he has not paid the bride

price agreed with the woman's guardian. Once he has paid for her, he comes without the slightest shame, walks into the house where the woman is and takes possession of her in front of her father, her mother and her brothers, and they do not stop him.

If a man dies leaving a wife and children, his eldest son takes her to wife, provided she is not his mother.

Taboo on washing

None of the merchants, or indeed any Muslim, can perform his ablutions in their presence after a major pollution; it must be done at night where they cannot see him, otherwise they become angry and say:

'This man wants to put a spell on us – he is practising hydro-mancy.'

And then they fine him.

Hospitality

No Muslim can cross their country without having made friends with one of them, with whom he stays and to whom he brings gifts from the lands of Islam – a robe, a veil for his wife, pepper, millet, raisins and walnuts. When he arrives at his friend's house, the latter pitches a tent for him and brings him as many sheep as his fortunes permit, so that the Muslim can take charge of slaughtering them, for the Turks do not cut the animal's throats, they only hit the sheep on the head until it is dead.

If one of the Muslims wants to leave and some of his camels or horses are unwell, or if he needs money, he leaves the sick camels with his Turkish friend, borrows the camels, horses and money that he needs, and sets out. When he returns from his journey, he pays off his debt and gives him back his camels and horses. Similarly, when an unknown man comes to a Turk and says to him:

'I am your guest and I want your camels and horse and dirhams', he gives him what he wants.

If the merchant dies on the journey he has undertaken, the Turk goes to the people in the caravan when it returns and says to them:

'Where is my guest?'

If they say: 'He died!', he has the man's baggage unloaded from the caravan. He then goes to the most important merchant he sees among them, opens his packs of merchandise while the merchant looks on, and takes exactly the money that is owing to him and nothing more. Similarly, he takes several of his camels and horses, and says to him:

'He was your cousin, and you are the most appropriate person to pay his debts.'

If the man has fled, the Turk does the same thing, going to the merchant and saying:

'He was a Muslim like you. Take responsibility for him!'

If he does not find his Muslim guest along the caravan route, he asks his companions:

'Where is he?'

Once he has been told where to look, he sets out in search of him, travelling for days until he finds him. He then takes back his possessions in addition to any gifts he may have given him.

Host responsible for death of his guest

This is how the Turk behaves when he enters Jurjāniya. He enquires about his guest and stays with him until he leaves. If the Turk dies in the house of his friend the Muslim and that man happens to be in a caravan going through Turkish territory, the Turks kill him, saying:

'You killed him by holding him prisoner. If you hadn't shut him up, he wouldn't have died.'

In the same way, if the Muslim has the Turk drink wine and the man falls off a wall, the Turks kill the Muslim for that.

If the Muslim in question is not in the caravan, they take the most important man in the caravan and kill him.

Pederasty

They consider pederasty a terrible thing. A man from Khwārazm went to stay with the tribe of the *kūdharkīn*,³⁸ the lieutenant of the king of the Turks. He stayed with a host from this tribe for a certain time buying sheep. The Turk had a son, a beardless youth. The Khwārazmian kept on making up to him and attempting to seduce him, so that finally the young man agreed to do what he wanted. The Turk arrived and found them at it. He reported the matter to the *kūdharkīn* and said to him:

'Gather together the Turks!'

So the Turks assembled.

The *kūdharkīn* said:

'Do you want a just or an unjust judgement?'

'Just,' said the Turk.

'Bring your son!' he told him.

He brought his son and the *kūdharkīn* said:

'The merchant and your son must be put to death together.'

The Turk was very upset and said:

'I will not give up my son!'

'Then let the merchant ransom himself,' said the *kūdharkīn*.

He did this and made over to the Turk a number of sheep in compensation for what he had done to his son. He gave the *kūdharkīn* 400 sheep for having changed the sentence. Then he left the land of the Turks.

A fragile conversion

The first of their kings and chiefs that we met was Ināl the Younger. He had converted to Islam. It was said to him:

'If you become Muslim, you will no longer be our leader.'

So he renounced Islam. When we came to the place where he was, he said to us:

'I will not let you pass, because this is something we have never heard of and which we thought would never happen.'

We talked to him pleasantly, until we had persuaded him to accept a caftan from Jurjān worth ten dirhams, a piece of cloth [*pay-baf*], round loaves of bread, a handful of raisins and a hundred walnuts. After we had given him these things, he prostrated himself before us, for that is their custom. When a man wants to honour another, he prostrates himself before him, and says:

'If my tents were not so far off your route, I would bring you sheep and grain.'

He left us then and we set out.

On the following day, we met a Turk. He was an ugly man, wretched looking, small and stunted in appearance, really ignoble. We had just been caught by a violent cloudburst.

'Stop!' he cried.

The whole caravan halted. It was made up of some 3,000 horses and 5,000 men. Then he said:

'Not one of you is going to get by.'

We halted, obeying his order, and said to him:

'But we are friends of the *kūdharkīn*!'

He began to laugh and said:

'What is this *kūdharkīn*? I shit on the *khūdharkīn*'s beard.'

Then he laughed and said: '*Pekend!*', which means 'bread' in the language of Khwārazm. I gave him some loaves of bread and he took them and said:

'Pass. I have taken pity on you.'

Treatment of the sick

When a man falls ill and he has male and female slaves, they serve him and no member of the family goes near him. They set

up a small tent for him at some distance from their dwellings and he stays there until he dies or recovers. In the case of a poor man or a slave, they cast him into the desert and ride off.

Horse sacrifices

If a man dies, they dig a great trench for him the shape of a house and they go to him, and dress him in his tunic, with his belt and his bow [],³⁹ then they place a wooden cup in his hand filled with *nabīdh*⁴⁰ and leave a wooden container of it in front of him. Then they bring everything that he possessed and put it in this house with him and set him in a sitting position. They put a roof on the house and above it a construction like a dome made of clay. Next, they bring his horses, no matter how numerous they may be, even a hundred or two hundred head, and kill them, down to the very last one, and eat their flesh. But they hang the head, hooves, hide and tail over wooden stakes, and say: 'These are the horses he will ride to Paradise.' If he has killed a man and been a warrior of note, they make as many wooden statues as he killed men and set them up on his tomb, saying: 'These are his attendants and they will serve him in Paradise.' Sometimes, they delay a day or two over the sacrifice of the horses. Then an old man, one of their elders, urges them on, saying:

'I have seen so-and-so – that is, the dead man – in a dream and he said to me: "You see, my companions have all gone ahead of me and the soles of my feet are split from my efforts to follow them, but I cannot catch up with them and I have remained alone."'

Then they go to his horses, kill them and prop their remains around his tomb. After a day or two, the old man comes to them and says:

'I have seen so-and-so in a dream and he said to me: "Tell my family and my companions that I have caught up with those who went ahead of me and I have recovered from my great weariness."'

Facial hair

All Turks pluck their beards, but not their moustaches. I once saw a very aged man, who had pulled out his beard, but left a tuft under his chin. He was wearing a kind of goatskin cloak, so that from a distance he looked exactly like a billy goat.

Yabghū and kūdharkīn

The king of the Ghuzz Turks is called *yabghū*, which is the title of the ruler. Each of those who has authority in this tribe is called thus, and his second-in-command is the *kūdharkīn*, and similarly all those who are second-in-command to a leader are known as *kūdharkīn*.

Atrak, son of Qataghān, and his wife

After leaving the region of these Turks, we stopped at the camp of the commander of their troops, who is called Atrak, the son of Qataghān. He had round Turkish tents pitched and settled us in them. He had followers, servants and numerous yurts.⁴¹ He had sheep brought for us and also horses. The sheep were to slaughter, the horses to ride. He invited a large number of his family and cousins and slaughtered many sheep for them. We had sent him a present of clothing, raisins, walnuts, pepper and millet.

I saw his wife, who had been a wife of his father. She took meat, yoghurt and some of the things we had brought as presents, went away from the tents into the desert, dug a hole and buried what she had with her, and she spoke certain words. I asked the interpreter what she was saying. He answered:

'She says: "It is a gift for Qataghān, the father of Atrak, which the Arabs offer him."'

An invitation to convert and gifts from Baghdād

When night fell, I went with the interpreter to visit Atrak, who was sitting in his tent. We had with us Nadhīr al-Haramī's letter, in which he urged Atrak to embrace Islam. He sent him 50 dinārs, among which there were many *musayyabī dinārs*, three *mithqāls* of musk, some pieces of well-tanned leather, two pieces of cloth from Merv, from which we cut out two tunics for him, leather slippers, a brocade robe and five silk garments. We gave him his present and a veil and a ring for his wife. I then read him the letter. He said through the interpreter:

'I do not want to say anything to you until your return. I will write to the caliph to tell him what I have decided to do.'

Clothes worn until they fall to pieces

Then, he stripped off the brocade garment he was wearing, in order to put on the robe of honour we have just mentioned. I saw the tunic he was wearing under the brocade. It was so filthy that it was in rags, for it is their custom never to take off a piece of clothing they are wearing until it falls to pieces.⁴² He had plucked out all his beard and moustaches and he looked like a eunuch.

A feat of horsemanship

I noticed that the Turks spoke of him as their finest horseman and I saw what they meant one day, when he was accompanying us on horseback. As a goose flew over us, he strung his bow and spurred his horse to a gallop under the goose, shot and dropped it.

The envoys under suspicion

One day, Atrak sent for the military chiefs who served under him. They were Tarkhān, Ināl,⁴³ and Baghliz. Tarkhān was the most noble and important among them. He limped, was blind and had a crippled hand.

Atrak said to them:

'These people are the envoys of the king of the Arabs to my son-in-law Almish ibn Shilkī, and it did not seem advisable to allow them to depart without consulting you.'

Tarkhān said:

'This is something we have never either seen or heard of. Never in our whole lives, nor in the lifetimes of our fathers, has an envoy of the caliph come to us. I can only think this is some trick of the caliph's and that he has sent these people to the Khazars to tell them to gather an army against us. The thing to do is to have each of these envoys cut in two, and take everything they have with them.'

Someone else said:

'No, let's just take everything they have with them and leave them naked to return to the place they came from.'

Another man said:

'No. The king of the Khazars holds some of our people prisoner. We will send these people as a ransom in exchange for them.'

They continued to argue among themselves for seven days, during which time we were at death's door, until the day they agreed to let us continue on our way and leave.

We gave Tarkhān a robe of honour – a caftan made of cloth from Merv – and two pieces of cotton cloth, as well as a coat for each of his companions. We gave equivalent gifts to Ināl. We also gave them pepper, millet and round loaves of bread. Then they left us.

Crossing rivers

We rode until we came to the river Yaghindī. Our people got out folding boats made of camel skin and stretched them out, then they took the saddle frames⁴⁴ from the Turkish camels, because they were round and placed them at the bottom of the boats, so they would be fully stretched, then they filled them with clothes and baggage, and, when they were full, a certain number of men, five, six or four – more or less – sat in each boat. They took poles made from a wood called *khadank* and used them as oars. They continued to row like this, while the water carried them and they spun around, until we had crossed. As to the horses and the camels, they called them with loud cries and they swam across the river. It was essential to get one of the companies of men-at-arms over the river first, before any of the caravan crossed, so that they could form an advance guard to protect the others, in case the Bāshghirds fell on our people while they were crossing. We crossed the Yaghindī in the way we have just described, then a river called Jām, also by means of these boats. Then we crossed the Jākhsh, the Udhil, the 'Ardin, the Wārsh, the Akhti and the Wabnā, which are all great rivers.⁴⁵

The Bajanāk

At last we reached the Bajanāk (Pečenegs). They were encamped at the edge of a body of water resembling a sea, for it was not flowing. Their skins were dark brown, their chins shaved and they were poor compared to the Ghuzz. In fact, among the Ghuzz, I have seen people who possess 10,000 horses and 100,000 head of sheep. The sheep mostly graze on what lies under the snow, which they scrape aside with their hooves in order to get to the grass. When they cannot find any, they nibble snow and become very fat. When summer comes, they eat grass and grow thin. We stayed one day with the Bajanāk.

More rivers

We set out again and stopped at the river Jāyikh which was the largest we had seen, the most impressive and the swiftest. I saw a leather boat overturned in midstream and those who were in it drowned. Many of our men were carried away and a certain number of horses and camels were drowned. It cost us great efforts to get across that river. Then we marched for several days and crossed the Jākhā, after which we crossed the Arkhaz, then the Bājāgh, then the Samūr, then the Kināl, then the river Sūkh, and finally the river Kunjulū.⁴⁶ Then we halted in the lands of a Turkic people, the Bāshghirds.⁴⁷

The Bāshghirds eat lice and fleas

We took every possible precaution against them, for they are the worst of the Turks, the dirtiest and the readiest to kill. When one of them meets another, he cuts off his head and carries it off with him, leaving the body. They shave their beards and eat lice. A man will pursue one through the seams of his coat and crack it with his teeth. We had with us a man of this people who had converted to Islam and who served us. One day, I saw him take a flea from his clothes and, after having crushed it with his fingernail, he devoured it and on noticing me, said: 'Delicious!'

The Bāshghirds carry a wooden phallus

Each of them carves a piece of wood shaped like a phallus and attaches it about his person. When he wants to start out on a journey, or when he meets an enemy, he kisses it and bows before it, and says:

'Lord, do this or that for me.'

I said to the interpreter:

'Ask one of them to explain their behaviour and why they consider such a thing to be their Lord.'

He answered:

'Because I came from such a thing and cannot imagine anything else to be my Creator.'

The twelve lords

Some of them claim that there are twelve lords, a Lord of Winter and a Lord of Summer, a Lord of Rain and a Lord of Wind, a Lord of Trees and a Lord of Men, a Lord of Horses and a Lord of Water, a Lord of Night and a Lord of Day, a Lord of Death and a Lord of the Earth. The Lord who is in the sky is the most powerful of them, but he is in concord with the others, so that each approves what his companion does. God is infinitely above the beliefs of these lost souls!⁴⁸

Qur'an

Snake and crane worship

We saw a clan that worships snakes and another that worships fish and another that worships cranes. These told me that one day, while they were fighting some of their enemies and were on the point of being defeated, the cranes began to give their call behind their opponents. Their enemy was frightened and turned and fled. This is why they worship cranes. They say:

'They are our Lord, because they scattered our enemies.'

And they worship them for that reason.

More rivers

We left the land of these people and crossed the river Jirimshān, then the river Uran, then the river Uram, then the river Bāynākh,

then the river Watīgh, then the river Nīyāsnah, then the river Jāwshīr.⁴⁹ From one of the rivers we have mentioned to the next, there is a distance of two, three or four days, or a little more or a little less.

The king of the Saqāliba

When we were a day and a night's journey from the king of the Saqāliba, for it was to him that we were heading, he sent out to welcome us the four kings who were under his authority, accompanied by his brothers and his sons. They greeted us, bringing with them bread, meat and millet, and they rode with us. When we were two *farsakhs* away from the king, he came out to meet us in person. When he saw us, he dismounted and fell down with his face to the ground to give thanks to God, the All High, the Almighty. In his sleeve, he had dirhams which he scattered over us. He had tents pitched for us and we settled down in them.

The reading of the caliph's letter

We arrived on Sunday, 12 Muharram 310/12 May 922. The journey from Jurjāniya to the king's country took seventy days. We remained in the tents that had been set up for us for the Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, waiting until he had gathered the kings, military leaders and people of the country to listen to the reading of the letter. On Thursday, when they had all arrived, we unfurled the two banners that we had with us, saddled the horse with the saddle which had been sent to the king as a present and dressed the king in black⁵⁰ robes and a turban. Then I got out the caliph's letter and said:

'It is not permitted to remain seated during the reading of the letter.'

Then the king rose and the principal men of his kingdom

who were present did likewise. The king was a very fat man with a large belly. I started to read the first part of the letter. When I reached the formula:

'Peace be upon you, for in addressing myself to you I praise God, beside whom there is no god,' I said:

'Return the greeting to the Commander of the Faithful.'

He returned the greeting as did all the others, without exception. Then the interpreter continued to translate the letter for us, word for word, and when we had finished reading, they pronounced *Allāhu akbar!* so loudly the earth shook.

Rich gifts

Next, I read the letter from the vizier Hāmid ibn al-'Abbās⁵¹ and the king listened to it standing. Then, I invited him to sit down and he sat during the reading of the letter of Nadhīr al-Haramī. When I had finished reading, members of the king's entourage scattered a large number of dirhams over him.⁵² Then I got out the presents, which consisted of scent, cloth and pearls intended for him and his wife, and I presented them, one after another, until we had finished the whole business. Then, I gave his wife a robe of honour before the whole company. She was sitting beside him, for that is their custom. When I had given her this robe of honour, her women scattered dirhams over her and then we went back to our tents.

A formal dinner

An hour passed, and then the king sent for us and we went to him. He was in his tent with the kings on his right. He invited us to sit down on his left. His children were sitting in front of him. He sat on a throne covered with brocade from Byzantium. He told them to bring him a table. It had nothing on it but roast meat. He began by taking a knife and cutting a piece of

meat which he ate, then a second and a third. Then he cut a piece which he gave to Sawsān, the envoy. When he had taken it, a small table was brought and set down in front of him. That is their custom; no one touches a dish until the king has served him. As soon as he receives his share, a table is brought.

Next, he served me with a portion and I was brought a table. [Then he cut off a piece and served the king seated on his right, who was then brought a table. Then he served the second king, who was in turn brought a table.]⁵³ Then he served the fourth king and he was brought a table, then he served his children, to whom more tables were brought. Each of us ate at his own table and no one took anything from someone else's table. When each guest had finished eating, he carried away what was left on his table.

When we had eaten, he had brought a kind of mead that they call *suju*, which had only been fermented one day and one night. He drank down a cup.⁵⁴ Then he rose and said:

'This bears witness to my joy concerning the Commander of the Faithful – may God prolong his existence!'

The four kings rose with him, as did his children, and we too got to our feet. When he had done this three times, we left him.

The wording of the khutba

Before I arrived, the *khutba* was read for the king from his pulpit in these words:

'O God! Preserve King Yiltawār, king of the Bulghārs.'

I said to him:

'The king is God and from the pulpit none but He, the All-high and the All-powerful, should be called king. Your master, the Commander of the Faithful, is satisfied that the following should be pronounced from the pulpits in both East and West:

'“My God, preserve your slave and caliph, Ja'far, al-Imām al-Muqtadir-billāh, the Commander of the Faithful.”'

'And the same was done by his forefathers, the caliphs who reigned before him. For the Prophet – may God's prayers and peace be upon him – said:

“Do not address praises to me, as the Christians do to Jesus, son of Mary, for I am only the servant of God and His messenger.”

The king adopts a Muslim name

Then the king said to me:

‘In what form may the *khutba* be read for me, then?’

‘Using your name and that of your father,’ I answered.

‘But,’ he said, ‘my father was an unbeliever and I do not want his name mentioned from the pulpit, and as for myself, I do not want my name mentioned either, because he who gave it to me was an unbeliever. But what is the name of my master, the Commander of the Faithful?’

‘Ja‘far,’ I told him.

‘Am I allowed to call myself by his name?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Then I shall take the name of Ja‘far and my father that of ‘Abd Allāh. Give the man who pronounces the *khutba* his orders.’

And that is what I did. He pronounced the *khutba* for him, saying:

‘O God, preserve in good health your slave Ja‘far, son of ‘Abd Allāh, *amīr* of the Bulghārs, client of the Commander of the Faithful.’

The king demands his money

Three days after the reading of the letter and distribution of presents, the king sent for me. He had heard the story of the 4,000 *dīnārs* and the trick that the Christian had played to defer payment. On my entering, he invited me to sit down. I did so, and he threw me the letter of the Commander of the Faithful.

‘Who brought this letter?’ he asked.

‘I did,’ I replied.

Then he threw me the vizier’s letter and said:

‘And this one, too?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘And what has happened to the money mentioned in these two letters?’

‘It was impossible to collect it,’ I answered. ‘There was not enough time and for fear of missing the season for reaching your country, we left it to be brought later.’

‘You all came together and my master [the caliph] paid all your expenses, and the only reason was so that you could bring me this money to have a fortress built to protect me from the Jews, who have tried to reduce me to slavery. As regards the presents, my *ghulām* could perfectly well have brought them.’

‘That is quite true,’ I said, ‘but we did what we could.’

Then the king said to the interpreter:

‘Tell him that I do not recognize these people. I only recognize you [i.e. Ibn Fadlān], for these other people are not Arabs. If the caliph⁵⁵ – may God aid him! – had thought that they could have obtained the same results as you could, he would not have sent you to protect my interests, read my letter and listen to my answer. I shall not demand one single dirham from anyone else but you. Hand over the money; it will be better for you.’

I left him and went out in consternation and much saddened. He was a good-looking man, stout and full bodied, who inspired respect. He was like a great barrel speaking.

I left his presence, gathered together my companions and told them what had passed between the king and myself.

‘I warned you about this,’ I told them.

A disagreement on the call to prayer

The king’s muezzin repeated the phrases of the *iqāma* twice when he gave the call to prayer.⁵⁶ I said to him:

‘In his dominions your master, the Commander of the Faithful, only has them said once.’

Then the king told the muezzin:

'Accept what he tells you and don't contradict him!'

For several days, the muezzin observed the rule. Meanwhile, the king asked me questions about the money and argued with me about it, but I made him despair of winning the debate by providing most excellent arguments. When he realized that he was not going to get the better of me, he ordered the muezzin to repeat the phrases of the *iqāma* twice. The muezzin obeyed, for the king wanted to use this as a way of starting up the discussion again. When I heard the repetition of the phrases, I ordered the muezzin to stop doing it and shouted at him.

The king heard of this and summoned me to appear before him with my companions. When we had all assembled, he said to the interpreter:

'Ask him' – meaning me – 'What would you say of two muezzins, one of whom repeated the formulae of the *iqāma* only once, the other twice, if afterwards each performed the prayer with his congregation? Would the prayers be licit or not?'

I replied: 'The prayers would be licit.'

He continued: 'Would there be divergent opinions, or would the agreement be unanimous?'

'Unanimous,' I answered.

Then he said to the interpreter:

'What would you say of a man who gave to others money intended for poor people, people who were suffering a blockade and reduced to servitude, and then was cheated out of that money?'

'It is not permitted,' I said, 'and such people would be evil-doers.'

'Unanimously agreed, or with differences of opinion?'

'Unanimously,' I answered.

Then he said to the interpreter:

'Say to him: Do you think that if the caliph – may God prolong his days! – sent an army against me, he could prevail over me?'

'No,' I said.

'Or over the *amīr* of Khurāsān?' he continued.

'No.'

'Is that not because of the great distance that separates us and the number of infidel tribes between his lands and mine?'

'Clearly!' I said.

Then he said to the interpreter:

'Tell him this: By God, although I live in a remote place, as you see, I still fear my Master, the Commander of the Faithful. I fear that he will learn something about me that will displease him, that he will call down God's wrath upon me and destroy my country without even leaving his kingdom, despite the great distance between us. But you – you eat his bread, you wear his clothes, you see him every hour of the day, and yet you have betrayed him on the mission upon which he sent you to me, to a weak people! And you have betrayed the Muslims! I shall accept no admonishments from you in matters of religion until someone comes to me who speaks with a sincere tongue. When such a man comes to me, I will accept what he says.'

We were at a loss for words. There was nothing we could answer, so we left his presence.

Even after this conversation, he continued to favour and honour me, although he kept my companions at a distance. He called me Abū Bakr the Truthful.⁵⁷

marvels

Northern lights

In his country I saw uncounted marvels. Thus, the first night that we spent in this land, before the light of the sun faded, [a full hour before sunset,] I saw the horizon turn a brilliant shade of red and in the upper air there was great noise and tumult. I raised my head and saw a red mist like fire close to me. The tumult and noise issued from it and in the cloud were the shapes of men and horses. These spectral men held lances and swords. I could see them clearly and distinguish them. Then suddenly another bank of mist appeared, just like the first, in which I saw men, horses and arms; it advanced to charge the first, as one cavalry detachment falls upon another. Frightened, we began to pray and beseech God most humbly, while the locals laughed at us and

were astonished at our behaviour. We watched the two armies charging. They clashed for a moment and then parted, and so it continued for an hour after nightfall. Then they vanished.

We questioned the king on this subject. He claimed that his ancestors said:

'They are the believing and the unbelieving Jinn. They fight every evening and have not failed to do so every night since they were first created.'⁵⁸

Prayer times during the white nights

One day I went into my tent to talk for a while with a tailor belonging to the king, who was from Baghdād and had come to this region by chance. We talked for the amount of time it would take to read less than half of a seventh part of the Qur'ān,⁵⁹ while we waited for the call to evening prayer. Suddenly we heard it and went out of the tent. Day was breaking. I asked the muezzin:

'To which prayer have you called us?'

'The dawn prayer,' he said.

'And the evening prayer?'

'We say it with the sunset prayer.'

'And during the night?'

'The night is as you see. They have been even shorter than now, for already they are beginning to lengthen.'

And he said that a month earlier, he had not slept at night, for fear of missing the dawn prayer. For if a pot is put on the fire at sunset, there is no time for the water to boil before the dawn prayer.

I observed that in their lands the days are very long and remain so for a certain part of the year and the nights are short. Then the nights lengthen and the days shorten. On the second night of our stay, I sat outside the tent and watched the sky. I saw only a few stars. I think there were about fifteen [scattered across the sky. The red glow that one sees before the evening prayer never fades],⁶⁰ and the night was not dark – a man can recognize

another from a bowshot's distance. I saw that the moon did not reach the middle of the sky, but lingered above the horizon for a while. Then dawn broke and the moon vanished.

The king told me that beyond his country, three months' march away, there is a people called the Wīṣū⁶¹ (Ves) among whom the night lasts less than an hour.

I saw the landscape dyed red at sunrise, everything – earth, mountains, all that one sees when the sun rises is like a great cloud and the red glow stays thus until the sun has reached its zenith. The locals told me that when winter comes, the nights go back to being the length of the [summer] days and the days become as short as the [summer]⁶² nights. Thus, if one of us were to set out at dawn for the place they call Itil,⁶³ which is only one *farsakh* away, when he arrived, night would already have fallen and all the stars have risen and covered the sky.

We did not leave the country until the nights had become long and the days short.

Howling of dogs a good omen

I noticed that the people of that land consider the howling of dogs as a great blessing and they rejoice on hearing it, saying: 'A year of plenty, blessings and peace!'

Snakes

I observed that snakes⁶⁴ are very numerous in that land, so that there may be more than ten of them twisted about a single branch of a tree. The people do not kill them and the snakes do them no harm. In one place, I saw a tree more than a hundred cubits high that had fallen. Its trunk was enormous. I stopped to look at it, when suddenly it moved. Frightened, I examined the tree more carefully. I noticed that there was a snake on it, almost as thick and large as the tree itself. When it saw me, it dropped

off and slithered away among the trees. In a panic, I hastened back and told the king and his council what I had seen, but they paid no attention. The king said to me:

'Don't be frightened, they won't hurt you.'

Wild berries, green apples and hazelnuts

One day when we were with the king we made camp and I went in among the trees with my companions, Tikīn, Sawsān and Bārs, and one of the king's followers, who showed us the stem of a plant. It was small and green, like a spindle in thickness, but longer and at the base, a large leaf spread out on the ground which was carpeted with new shoots which bore a berry.⁶⁵ If you tasted them you would think they were seedless pomegranates. We tasted them and found them incredibly delicious, and spent our time hunting for them and eating them.

I also saw that they have apples of a very brilliant green, with a taste more acidic than wine vinegar. The slave girls eat them and get plump.

I never saw more hazelnut trees than in their country. I saw forests of them, 40 *farsakhs* in area.

Tree sap,⁶⁶ meat and grain

I also noticed that they had trees that I do not know. They are extremely tall and the trunk is leafless, while the crowns are like those of a palm tree. They have narrow leaves like palms, but grouped together. The people of the region go to a place they know where such trees are, make a cut and with the help of a container collect the sap which is sweeter than honey. If someone drinks too much of this liquid, he becomes drunk as if with wine, or even more so.

They eat millet and horse meat, although there is also an abundance of wheat and barley. All those who sow, harvest for

themselves. The king has no rights whatsoever over their crops, but every year they give him a sable skin for each household. When the king orders them to form a raiding party for an expedition against another country and they bring back loot, he gets one share, like the rest of the troop. All those who give a wedding feast, or give a banquet are required to reserve a share for the king, proportionate to the importance of the occasion. They must also provide a measure of mead and a quantity of spoiled wheat, for their earth is black and stinking and they have no place to store their food, so they dig pits in the ground and put the food in them, with the result that within a few days it rots and becomes disgusting and is no longer of any use.

Cooking with fish oil

They have neither olive oil nor sesame oil; in place of these, they use fish oil, so that everything they make with it smells bad. They make a kind of porridge with barley that the young slaves eat, both girls and boys. Sometimes they cook barley with meat. The masters eat the meat and give the barley to the slave girls, but if the meat is goat's head, they give them some of the meat.

Doffing hats

They all wear tall pointed hats. When the king mounts his horse, he rides alone without a *ghulām* or anyone accompanying him. As he goes past in the market, there is no one who does not rise and doff his hat and put it under his arm. When he has ridden past, the people put their hats back on. It is the same whenever anyone visits the king, whether great or small, including his children and his brothers. As soon as they see him, they take off their hats and put them under their arms, then they make a sign with their heads in his direction and sit down, then they stand up again until he invites them to sit

down. Everyone who sits down before the king does so by squatting on his heels and does not take his hat out from under his arm, nor show it until he has gone out.

The king's tent

They all live in tents, but that of the king is very large, large enough for 1,000 people or more, and it is spread with Armenian carpets. In the centre is a throne covered with brocade from Byzantium.

The grandfather raises his grandson

One of their customs is that when a man's son has a child, it is the grandfather and not the father who takes the child, saying:

'I have more right than his father to raise him until he becomes a man.'

Fraternal inheritance

When a man dies, his brother inherits from him, to the exclusion of his sons.

I told the king that this was not allowed and explained to him how inheritance should work until he understood.

Lightning

I have never seen more lightning than in their country. When it strikes a tent, they do not go near it again, but leave it as it is, together with anything that is inside it – men, goods or other

things – until time has destroyed them. They say that it is a tent upon which the wrath of God has fallen.

The punishment for murder

If one man kills another deliberately, they execute him, but if he has killed by accident they make a box for the killer out of *khadank* wood, put him inside with three loaves of bread and a jug of water, and close it with nails. Then they set up three wooden poles, rather like the supports of a camel's saddle, and hang the box from them. They say:

'We place him between the sky and the earth, exposed to the rain and the sun – perhaps God will have mercy upon him.'

And he remains there until time has caused him to rot and the winds have dispersed his bones.

The sacrifice of the intelligent

If they see a man whose mind is lively and who knows many things, they say:

'This man deserves to serve our Lord.'

And they take him and put a rope round his neck and hang him in a tree until he falls to pieces.

The king's interpreter told me that a man from Sind had come to this country by chance and remained for a time in the service of the king. He was skilful and intelligent. A number of people from that country wanted to set out for reasons of trade. The man from Sind asked the king for permission to leave with them, but the king forbade him to go. The man insisted so much that the king gave him permission to go and he set off with them in a boat. The people saw that he was quick-witted and intelligent, and they discussed it among themselves and said:

'This man is fitting for the service of our Lord, so let's send him to Him.'

As their route took them near a forest, they took him there, placed a rope about his neck and hung him from the top of a tall tree. Then they left him there and went away.

Taboo against urinating while armed

When they are on the road and one of them has to urinate and does so while carrying his weapons, they will rob him [of his weapons]⁶⁷ and clothes. That is their custom. But if he sets down his arms to one side and then urinates, they will not attack him.

Mixed bathing

Men and women go down to the river together to wash completely naked, no one concealing their body from anyone else. Under no circumstances do they fornicate.

The penalty for adultery

If somebody, no matter who he is, commits adultery, they set out four iron stakes, attach the guilty person by their hands and feet, and cut them in two from the nape of the neck to the thighs with an axe. They do the same to the woman. Then they hang the pieces of both bodies from a tree.

Ibn Fadlān fails to impose the veil

I tried ceaselessly to induce the women to veil before men⁶⁸ but I did not succeed.

Punishment for theft

They put thieves to death in the same way as adulterers.

Honey

There is much honey in their forests, in beehives, and they know where to find them. They set out to search for it, but sometimes a band of their enemies falls upon them and kills them.

Furs

There are many merchants among them who go to the lands of the Turks and bring back sheep, and to a land called Wīṣū, from which they bring the skins of sable and black foxes.

Converts to Islam

We saw a kin group among them numbering 5,000 members, counting men and women, and they had all converted to Islam. They were known by the name of al-Baranjār. They had built themselves a wooden mosque to pray in, but did not know how to say the prayers. So I taught the whole group how it should be done.

One man called Tālūt converted to Islam through my agency and I called him 'Abd Allāh. He said to me:

'I would like you to call me by your name, Muhammad.'⁶⁹

I did what he asked. I also converted his wife, mother and children and they all took the name Muhammad! I taught him how to say: 'Praise be to God!' and: 'Say, He is God, the One.' His joy at knowing these two verses was greater than if he had been made king of the Saqāliba.

The market on the Volga

When we caught up with the king, we found him encamped by a body of water called Khallaja. It consists of three lakes, two large and one small, but there is nothing that can plumb their depths. A *farsakh* separates this place from the great river called Itil that flows from their country to the land of the Khazars. On this river is the site of a great market⁷⁰ which is held frequently and where all kinds of precious merchandise is to be had.

A giant

Tikīn told me that in the king's lands there was a man of extraordinary size. When I arrived in that country, I asked the king about him.

'Yes, he was living in our country,' he told me, 'but he is dead. He was not one of our people, nor was he an ordinary man. His story is as follows. One day some merchants set out in the direction of the Itil River,⁷¹ as they were in the habit of doing. The river was in flood and had broken its banks. A day had scarcely passed when a group of these merchants came to me and said:

'“O king, we have seen swimming on the waters a man of such a kind that if he belonged to a people dwelling near us there would be no place for us in these lands, but we would have to emigrate.”

'I set out on horseback with them and reached the river. I found myself face to face with the man. I saw that judging by the length of my own forearm, he was twelve cubits tall. He had a head the size of the biggest cooking pot there ever was, a nose more than a span long, huge eyes, and fingers each more than a span in length. His appearance frightened me and I had the same feeling of terror as the others. We began to speak to him, but he did not speak to us and only stared. I had him

taken to my residence and I wrote to the people of Wisū, who live three months' distance from us, to ask for information about him. They wrote to me, informing me that this man was one of the people of Gog and Magog.⁷²

Gog and Magog

'They live three full months from us. They are naked,⁷³ and the sea forms a barrier between us, for they live on the other shore. They couple together like beasts. God, All-high and All-powerful, causes a fish to come out of the sea for them each day. One of them comes with a knife and cuts off a piece sufficient for himself and his family. If he takes more than he needs, his belly aches and so do the bellies of his family and sometimes he even dies, with all his family. When they have taken what they need, the fish turns round and dives back into the sea. They do this every day. Between us and them, there is the sea on one side and they are enclosed by mountains on the others. The Barrier also separates them from the gate by which they leave. When God, All-high and All-powerful, wants to unleash them on civilized lands, He causes the Barrier to open and the level of the sea to drop and the fish to vanish.'

I questioned the king further about this man and he told me:

'He stayed with me for a time, but no child could look at him without dropping dead and no pregnant women without miscarrying. If he took hold of a man, his hands squeezed him until he killed him. When I realized that, I had him hung from a high tree until he died. If you want to see his bones and his head, I will go along with you and show them to you.'

'I would like very much to see them,' I answered.

He rode with me into a great forest filled with immense trees and shoved⁷⁴ me towards a tree under which had fallen his bones and head. I saw his head. It was like a great beehive. His ribs were like the stalk of a date cluster and the bones of his legs and arms were enormous too. I was astonished at the sight. Then I went away.

Local politics

The king set off from the stretch of water called Khallaja to a river called Jāwshīr, where he stayed for two months. Then he wanted to leave and sent a messenger to a people called Suwāz, commanding them to march with him, but they refused and divided into two groups, one headed by his son-in-law. His name was Wiragh,⁷⁵ and he ruled over them. The king sent them the following message, saying:

'God, All-mighty and All-powerful, has granted me the blessing of Islam and the rule of the Commander of the Faithful. I am his slave. This people⁷⁶ has recognized my authority, and if someone opposes me, I shall meet him with the sword.'

The other group was headed by a king of a tribe, named king Askal. He obeyed the ruler, but had not entered the faith of Islam.

When the king sent them this message, they were afraid of what he might do and all set out with him for the river Jāwshīr, which is a narrow watercourse, some five cubits across. The water only comes up to the navel, but in other places it reaches the collarbone. Generally, however, it is more than a man's height. All around, there are many *khadank* and other trees.⁷⁷

Rhinoceroses

Near this river there is a great stretch of desert land where it is said that animals are found, smaller than a camel in size, but broader than a bull. Their heads are like those of camels and their tails are those of the bull. Their bodies are the bodies of mules and their hooves are those of bulls. In the centre of their heads, they have a thick round horn. This horn grows thinner and thinner until it becomes like the point of a lance. Some of them are between three and five cubits in length, some more, some less. This creature grazes on the leaves of certain trees

that are very green. When it sees a man on horseback, it charges him. Even if the horseman has an excellent mount, he still finds it hard to get away safely. If the beast catches him, it lifts him from the back of the horse with its horn, tosses him in the air, and then catches him on its horn and continues to do this until it has killed him. But under no circumstances does it harm the horse. They hunt it across the countryside and through the forests until they kill it. They do this by climbing the tall trees among which it lives. They gather together a certain number of archers shooting poisoned arrows and when the beast is in their midst, they shoot at it until they wound and kill it. In the king's possession I saw three great plates of a material resembling Yemeni onyx, and he told me that they were made with the base of the horn of this animal. Some of the people of the country told me that this creature was a rhinoceros.⁷⁸

The sickness of the people

I have never seen any man among them with a ruddy complexion. Most of them are ill and many of them often die of colic, so that even babies at the breast suffer from this complaint.

Muslim burial rites

If a Muslim dies there among them and if a woman from Khwārazm⁷⁹ is present, then they wash the body after the Muslim fashion, load it on to a wagon and walk before it with a banner until they come to the place where they bury him. When they arrive, they take him from the wagon and lay him on the ground. Then a line is traced round him and they move him away and dig his grave within the line, hollowing out a lateral niche for the body. Then they bury him. They do the same with their own dead.

Pagan burial rites

The women do not weep for the dead, but the men weep over him on the day of death. They stand at the door of his tent and sob, making the most hideous and savage noise. This is how it is done by free men. When their lamentations are over, the slaves come with plaited leather thongs and weep continually as they strike their sides and any uncovered parts of their bodies with the straps, until their bodies are marked as if by the blows of a whip. They must set up a banner before the door of the tent. They bring the dead man's weapons and set them around his tomb. They continue these lamentations for two years.

When the two years are over, they lower the banner and cut their hair, and the close relatives of the dead man offer a feast to mark the end of mourning. If the dead man had a wife, she can then remarry. This is the custom among the great men of that land. The common people only perform a part of these ceremonies for their dead.

Taxes and custom duties

The king of the Saqāliba is required to pay a tax to the king of the Khazars. He gives a sable skin for each household in his kingdom. When a boat arrives in the land of the Saqāliba from Khazar territory, the king rides out and checks what is in each boat and levies a tithe on everything. When it is the Rūs or people of other races, who come with slaves, the king has the right to take for himself one head in ten.

Marriage of a Jewish prince and a Muslim princess

The son of the king of the Saqāliba is a hostage to the king of the Khazars. This last, having learned that the king of the Saqāliba had a beautiful daughter, asked for her in marriage.

But the king of the Saqāliba made excuses and refused. The king of the Khazars sent men and had her carried off by force. Now, he was a Jew and she was a Muslim. She died there with him and he demanded another daughter in marriage. As soon as this request reached the king of the Saqāliba, he hastened to marry his daughter to king Askal, who was subordinate to him, for fear that the king of the Khazars should carry her off by force as he had her sister.

A fortress for the Saqāliba

The king of the Saqāliba, fearing the king of the Khazars, wrote to the caliph and asked him to build him a fortress.

One day I questioned him, saying:

'Your kingdom is vast, you have great wealth, the taxes you raise are considerable, so why did you ask the caliph to build you a castle from his own, admittedly unlimited, funds?'

'I thought,' he answered, 'that the empire of Islam is prosperous and that its revenues come from licit sources. For this reason, I made my request. If I had wanted to build a fortress with my own money, silver or gold, it would not have been impossible for me. But I wanted to have the blessing which is attached to money coming from the Commander of the Faithful, and so I asked him for it.'

The beauty of the Rūs

I saw the Rūs, who had come for trade and had camped by the river Itil. I have never seen bodies more perfect than theirs. They were like palm trees. They are fair and ruddy. They wear neither coats [qurtāq] nor caftans, but a garment which covers one side of the body and leaves one hand free. Each of them carries an axe, a sword and a knife and is never parted from any of the arms we have mentioned. Their swords are broad

bladed and grooved like the Frankish ones. From the tips of his toes to his neck, each man is tattooed in dark green⁸⁰ with designs, and so forth.

Brooches, torques and beads

All their women wear on their bosoms a circular brooch⁸¹ made of iron, silver, copper or gold, depending on their husband's wealth and social position. Each brooch has a ring in which is a knife, also attached to the bosom. Round their necks, they wear torques of gold and silver, for every man, as soon as he accumulates 10,000 dirhams, has a torque made for his wife. When he has 20,000, he has two torques made and so on. Every time he increases his fortune by 10,000, he adds another torque to those his wife already possesses, so that one woman may have many torques round her neck.

The most desirable ornaments they have are green ceramic beads they keep in their boats.⁸² They will pay dearly for them, one dirham for a single bead. They thread them into necklaces for their wives.

The uncleanliness of the Rūs

They are the filthiest of God's creatures. They do not clean themselves after urinating or defecating, nor do they wash after having sex. They do not wash their hands after meals. They are like wandering asses.

The Rūs have sex with their slave girls in public

When they arrive from their land, they anchor their boat on the Itil, which is a great river, and they build large wooden houses

on the banks. Ten or twenty people, more or less, live together in one of these houses. Each man has a raised platform⁸³ on which he sits. With them, there are beautiful slave girls, for sale to the merchants. Each of the men has sex with his slave, while his companions look on. Sometimes a whole group of them gather together in this way, in full view of one another. If a merchant enters at this moment to buy a young slave girl from one of the men and finds him having sex with her, the man does not get up off her until he has satisfied himself.

Disgusting habits

Every day without fail they wash their faces and their heads with the dirtiest and filthiest water there could be. A young serving girl comes every morning with breakfast and with it a great basin of water. She proffers it to her master, who washes his hands and face in it, as well as his hair. He washes and disentangles his hair, using a comb, there in the basin, then he blows his nose and spits and does every filthy thing imaginable in the water. When he has finished, the servant carries the bowl to the man next to him. She goes on passing the basin round from one to another until she has taken it to all the men in the house in turn. And each of them blows his nose and spits and washes his face and hair in this basin.

Offerings to the idols

As soon as their boats arrive at this port, each of them disembarks, taking with him bread and meat, onions, milk and *nabidh*, and he walks until he comes to a great wooden post stuck in the ground with a face like that of a man, and around it are little figures. Behind these images there are long wooden stakes driven into the ground. Each of them prostrates himself before the great idol, saying to it:

'Oh my Lord, I have come from a far country and I have with me such and such a number of young slave girls, and such and such a number of sable skins . . .' and so on, until he has listed all the trade goods he has brought. [Then he adds:] 'I have brought you this gift.' Then he leaves what he has with him in front of the wooden post [and says:]

'I would like you to do the favour of sending me a merchant who has large quantities of *dinārs* and dirhams and who will buy everything that I want and not argue with me over my price.'

Then he departs.

If he has difficulty selling and his stay becomes long drawn out, he returns with another present a second and even a third time. If he cannot get what he wants, he brings a present for each of the little idols and asks them to intercede, saying:

'These are the wives of our Lord and his daughters and sons.'

Thus he continues to make his request to each idol in turn, begging their intercession and abasing himself before them. Sometimes the sale is easy and after having sold his goods he says:

'My Lord has satisfied my needs and it is fitting that I should reward him for it.'

Then he takes a certain number of sheep or cows and slaughters them, distributing part of the meat as gifts and carrying off the rest to set before the great idol and the little figures that surround it. Then he hangs the heads of the sheep or cows on the wooden stakes which have been driven into the ground. When night falls, the dogs come and eat all this, and the man who has made the offering says:

'My Lord is pleased with me and has eaten the gift that I brought him.'

The sick abandoned

If one of them falls ill, [the others pitch a tent for him] in a place distant from them. They leave him some bread and water, but they neither go near him nor speak to him. [They do not

even come to visit him] during all the days of his illness, particularly if he is a poor man or a slave. If he recovers and gets well, he comes back to them; if he dies, they burn him. If he is a slave, they leave him where he is, and the dogs and birds of prey devour him.

The punishment of thieves

If they catch a thief or a brigand, they lead him to a great tree, tie a stout rope round his neck and hang him [from the tree, and there he remains] until he drops to pieces [from exposure] to the wind and the rain.

The burial of a great man

They say that when their great men die, they do all kinds of things to them, of which burning is the least. I wanted to have certain knowledge of this [but did not] until one day I learned of the death of one of their great men. They placed him in his grave which they covered with a roof and they left him there for ten days, waiting while they finished cutting and sewing his garments.

The burial of a poor man

If the dead man was poor, they build him a small boat and place him in it and set it on fire. If he was wealthy, they gather together his fortune and divide it into three parts, one for his family, one to have clothes cut out for him and another to have the *nabīdh* prepared that they will drink on the day that his slave girl kills herself and is burned with her master. For they drink *nabīdh* unrestrainedly, night and day, so that sometimes one of them dies with his wine cup in his hand.

Funeral of a noble

When a great man dies, the members of his family say to his slave girls and young slave boys:

'Which of you will die with him?'

One of them replies:

'I will.'

Once they have spoken, it is irreversible and there is no turning back. If they wanted to change their mind, they would not be allowed to. Usually, it is the slave girls who offer to die.

When the man whom I mentioned above died, they said to his slave girls:

'Who will die with him?'

One of them answered:

'I will.'

Then they appointed two young slave girls to watch over her and follow her everywhere she went, sometimes even washing her feet with their own hands.

Everyone busies himself about the dead man, cutting out clothes for him and preparing everything that he will need. Meanwhile, the slave girl spends each day drinking and singing, happily and joyfully.

When the day came that the man was to be burned and the girl with him, I went to the river where his boat was anchored. I saw that they had drawn his boat up on to the shore and that four posts of *khadank* or other wood had been driven into the ground and round these posts a framework of wood had been erected. Next, they drew up the boat until it rested on this wooden construction.

Then they came forward, coming and going, pronouncing [words that I did not understand, while the man was still in his grave, not yet taken out].

The 'Angel of Death'

Then they brought a bed and placed it on [the boat and covered it with a mattress] and cushions of Byzantine silk brocade.

Then came [an old woman whom they call] the 'Angel of Death' and she spread the bed with coverings we have just mentioned. She is in charge of sewing and arranging all these things, and it is she who kills the slave girls. I saw that she was a witch, thick-bodied and sinister.

When they came to the tomb of the dead man, they removed the earth from on top of the wood, and then the wood itself and they took out the dead man, wrapped in the garment in which he died. I saw that he had turned black because of the coldness of the country. They had put *nabīdh* in the tomb with him, and fruit and a drum. They took all this out. The dead man did not smell bad and nothing about him had changed except his colour. They dressed him in trousers, socks, boots, a tunic and a brocade caftan with gold buttons. On his head, they placed a brocade cap covered with sable. Then they bore him into the pavilion on the boat and sat him on the mattress, supported by cushions. Then they brought *nabīdh*, fruit and basil which they placed near him. Next they carried in bread, meat and onions which they laid before him.

Sacrificial animals

After that, they brought in a dog, which they cut in two and threw into the boat. Then they placed his weapons beside him. Next they took two horses and made them run until they were in lather, before hacking them to pieces with swords and throwing their flesh on to the boat. Then they brought two cows, which they also cut into pieces and threw them on to the boat. Finally they brought a cock and a hen, killed them and threw them on to the boat as well.

The slave girl has sex with those present

Meanwhile, the slave girl who wanted to be killed came and went, entering in turn each of the pavilions that had been

built, and the master of each pavilion had intercourse with her, saying:

'Tell your master that I only did this for your love of him.'

The slave girl gazes on Paradise

On Friday, when the time had come for the evening prayer, they led the slave girl towards something which they had constructed and which looked like the frame of a door. She placed her feet on the palms of the hands of the men, until she could look over this frame. She said some words and they let her down. They raised her a second time and she did as she had the first and then they set her down again. And a third time and she did as she done the other two. Then they brought her a chicken. She cut off its head and tossed it away. Then they took the chicken and threw it on to the boat.

I asked the interpreter what she had been doing. He replied:

'The first time they lifted her up, she said:

['"There I see my father and my mother."']

'The second time, she said:

['"There [I see] all my dead relatives [sitting]."]

'And the third time she said:

['"There [I see my master sitting in] Paradise and [Paradise is green and beautiful.] There are men with him and [young people, and he is calling me.] Take [me to him."'] They went off with her] towards the boat. She took off the two bracelets that she was wearing and gave them both to the old woman who is known as the [Angel of Death – she] who was to kill her. Then she stripped off her two anklets and gave them [to the two young girls who served her. They were the daughters] of the woman called the Angel of Death. Then the men lifted her on to the boat, but did not let her enter [the pavilion].

Next, men came with shields and staves. They handed the girl a cup of *nabīdh*. She sang a song over it and drank. The interpreter translated what she was saying and explained that she was bidding all her female companions farewell. Then they

gave her another cup. She took it and continued singing for a long time, while the old woman encouraged her to drink and then urged her to enter the pavilion and join her master.

I saw that the girl did not know what she was doing. She wanted to enter the pavilion, but she put [her head] between it and the boat. Then the old woman seized her head, made her enter the pavilion and went in with her. The men began to bang on their shields with staves, to drown her cries, so that the other slave girls [would not be frightened] and try to avoid dying with their masters. Next, six men entered the pavilion and [lay with] the girl, one after another, after which they laid her beside her master. Two seized her feet and two others her hands. The old woman called the Angel of Death came and put a cord round her neck in such a way that the two ends went in opposite directions. She gave the ends to two of the men, so they could pull on them. Then she herself approached the girl holding in her hand a dagger with a broad blade and [plunged it again and again between the girl's ribs],⁸⁴ while the two men strangled her with the cord until she was dead.

The burning of the boat

Next, [the closest male relative of the dead man] came forward and [took a piece of wood] which he lit at a fire. He then walked backwards towards the boat, his face turned [towards the people] who were there, one hand holding the piece of flaming wood, the other covering his anus, for he was naked. Thus he set fire to the wood that had been set ready under the boat, [after they had placed the slave girl beside her master.] Then people came with wood and logs to burn, each holding a piece of a wood alight at one end, which they threw on to the wood. The fire enveloped the wood, [then the boat, then the tent,] the man, the girl and all that there was on the boat. [A violent and frightening] wind began [to blow, the flames grew in strength] and the heat of the fire intensified.

Why the Rūs burn their dead

[One of the Rūs was standing beside me] and I heard him speak to my interpreter. I asked the latter [what he had said.] He replied:

'You Arabs are fools!'

['Why is that?' I asked him.]

He said:

'Because you put the men you love most, [and the most noble among you,] into the earth, and the earth and the worms and insects eat them. But we burn them [in the fire] in an instant, so that at once and without delay they enter Paradise.'

Then he began to laugh in a very excessive way. I asked him why he was laughing and he said:

'His Lord, for love of him, has sent a wind that [will bear] him hence within the hour.'

And indeed, not an hour had passed before ship, wood, girl and master were no more than ashes and dust.

Raising the grave mound

Next, at the place where this boat had been drawn out of the river, they build something like a round hill and in the middle they set up a great post of *khadank* wood, inscribed with the name of the man and that of the king of the Rūs. Then they departed.

The king of the Rūs

One of the customs of the king of the Rūs is to have 400 men in his palace, who are the bravest of his companions, men upon whom he can count. These are the men who die when he dies and allow themselves to be killed for him. Each of them has a slave girl who serves him, washes his head and prepares every-

thing that he eats or drinks, and then there is another slave girl with whom he sleeps. These 400 men sit below the king's throne, which is immense and encrusted with the finest gems. Forty slave girls destined for his bed sit by him on the throne. Sometimes he has sex with one of them in front of the companions whom we have just mentioned, without coming down from his throne. When he wants to perform his natural functions, he does so in a basin. If he wants to ride, his horse is led right up to the throne and he mounts. If he wants to dismount, he has the horse move forward so that he can get down directly on to the throne. He has a lieutenant who commands his troops, fights his enemies and represents him in dealings with his subjects.

The king of the Khazars

The king of the Khazars, whose title is *khāqān*, only appears in public [once every four months]. He is called the Great Khāqān, whereas his lieutenant is known as *khāqān beg*.⁸⁵ It is he who leads the armies, directs the affairs of the kingdom, appears in public and receives the allegiance of neighbouring kings. [Every⁸⁶ day, he enters the presence of the Great Khāqān with a humble mien and words indicating submission and modesty. He only enters the presence barefoot, holding a piece of firewood in his hand. Once he has greeted the Great Khāqān, he ignites this piece of wood before him. When it has burned away, he sits beside the king on his throne, to the right of him.⁸⁷ He has as his second in command a man called *kundur khāqān*, who has in his turn a lieutenant known as *jawshīghīr*.⁸⁸

It is the custom of the Great King never to give public audience and never to speak to the people. No one, except for those whom we have mentioned, has access to him. It is up to his lieutenant, the *khāqān beg*, to nominate officers for all positions of authority, to inflict punishments and to take charge of the government.

The hidden tombs of the Khazar kings

When the Great King dies, it is customary to build him a house composed of twenty chambers and in each chamber to hollow out a tomb for him. They break up stones until they become like powdered antimony. They spread a layer of this powder and then throw quicklime on top of the body. Beneath this house there is a river, a great river that flows rapidly, which they divert over the tomb.

They say: 'This is so that no devil, or man, or maggot, or reptile can reach it.'

Once the king has been buried, they cut off the heads of those who buried him, so that no one knows in which of the chambers he lies. They call his tomb 'Paradise' and they say:

'He has entered Paradise.'

All the chambers are decorated with silk brocade woven with gold.

The harem of the king of the Khazars

It is the custom for the king of the Khazars⁸⁹ to have twenty-five wives, each of whom is the daughter of the king of a neighbouring country. He is given them freely or he takes them by force. He also has slave girls as his concubines for his bed, sixty in number, every one of them extremely beautiful. All these women, whether free or slave, are kept in an isolated castle, where each of them has her own alcove roofed with teak, and each alcove is surrounded by a pavilion. Each of them has with her a eunuch who protects her from all eyes. When the king wishes to sleep with one of them, he sends a messenger to the eunuch who guards her and he arrives with her quicker than the blink of an eye to put her in his bed, and then he remains standing at the door of the king's alcove. When the king has finished with her, the eunuch takes her by the hand and leads her back, without leaving her for a single moment.

When this Great King goes riding, all the troops set out with him as an escort, keeping the distance of a mile between him and them. None of his subjects sees him without prostrating themselves face to the ground, and they only lift their heads again after he has passed by.

The length of the reigns of their kings is forty years. If one of them oversteps this time even by a single day, his subjects and courtiers kill him, saying:

'His reason has diminished and his opinions are confused.'

The fate of cowards

If he sends out a detachment of his forces on an expedition, never under any circumstances or for any reason will they turn their backs on him. If they are routed, those who flee in the king's direction are killed. If his lieutenant or any of his military chiefs are put to flight, the king has them brought into his presence with their wives and children, and their wives and children are given away to others before their very eyes. The same is done with their horses, their possessions, their arms and their houses. Sometimes they are cut in two and sometimes crucified. Sometimes, the king has them hung from a tree by their necks. Sometimes, if he wishes to be kind to them, he employs them as grooms.

The Khazar city on the Itil

The king of the Khazars has a great city on the River Itil, on both banks of the river. The Muslims live on one bank and the king and his followers on the other. The head of the Muslim community is one of the king's officers and is known as *khaz*,⁹⁰ and he is a Muslim. All legal decisions concerning Muslims living in the land of the Khazars, or visiting the country on business are referred to this Muslim officer. He is the only

person with the authority to examine their affairs or judge their quarrels.

Revenge for the destruction of a synagogue

The Muslims in this town have a congregational mosque where they perform the Friday prayers. It has a tall minaret and a certain number of muezzins. When the king of the Khazars learned in the year 310/922 that the Muslims had destroyed the synagogue that was in Dār al-Bābūnaj,⁹¹ he ordered the minaret to be destroyed and the muezzins put to death.

'If I did not fear that not a synagogue would be left standing throughout the lands of Islam,' he said, 'I would have destroyed the mosque.'

The Khazars and their king are all Jews. The Saqāliba and all the neighbouring peoples are subject to him and he speaks to them as if they were slaves and they obey him most humbly. Some go so far as to say that Khazars are Gog and Magog.]

PART II

THE TRAVELS OF ABŪ HĀMID AL-ANDALUSĪ AL-GHARNĀTĪ, 1130-1155