

IBRAHIM IBN-YA'QUB AT-TURTUSHI'S ACCOUNT OF THE SLAVS FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE TENTH CENTURY

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The report of Ibrahim ben-Ya'qub At-Turtushi is chronologically the latest extensive piece of Islamic geography written in the tenth century dealing with the Slavs. This source is particularly significant, for the information is detailed and comes close to being a first-hand account. Moreover, we know the name of the author and the approximate time it was written.

Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub's narration reads as follows:

Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub Al-Israili said: The country of the Slavs extends from the Syrian Sea¹ to the Surrounding Sea in the North. The Northern tribes have subjugated some of [the Slavs] and have been living among them up to now.² [The Slavs form] various peoples. They used to be united under the rule of a king called Makha;³ he came from a tribe of them, called W.linbaba. This tribe enjoys a great respect among them. Then divergences appeared between them, their order disappeared, they separated from one another, and every tribe came under the power of its own king.⁴

Now [the Slavs] are governed by four kings: the king of the Bulgarin;⁵ Buyaslaw, the king of Fraghah, Bawaymah, and Karakwa;⁶ Mashaqqah, the king of the North;⁷ and Naqun, who rules over the extreme West.⁸

¹ The Mediterranean.

² It is difficult to ascertain what Ibrahim means. The words "Northern tribes" are likely to mean Scandinavians, but for Ibrahim the Slavs were a Northern people as well (see the text). It seems that the author refers here to the Germans.

³ Kowalski remarks that in one of the manuscripts the following addition is made: "who is known as Mikha." T. Kowalski, *Relacja Ibrahima Ibn-Ja'kuba z podróży do krajów słowiańskich w przekazie Al-Bekriego* [Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub's Report on His Travel to the Slavic Countries Related by Al-Bakri], (Cracow: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, Wydawnictwa Komisji Historycznej), hereinafter referred to as: Kowalski, *Relacja*, the Arabic text, 1. This addition is, however, posterior in relation to the text.

⁴ Here Ibrahim apparently quotes Al-Mas'udi. Cf. Al-Mas'udi, *Les Prairies d'Or*, ed. and trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, vols. 1-9, Paris, 1861-1877, hereinafter referred to as: Al-Mas'udi, *Les Prairies d'Or*, 3: 61-65. An interpretation of this passage is given in my M.A. Thesis.

⁵ Peter (927 - 969).

⁶ Boleslas I (929 - 967), King of Bohemia. As Cracow was taken by the Poles only in 999, in this story it is mentioned as a part of Bohemia.

⁷ Mieszko I (960 - 992), King of Poland.

⁸ Naccon, ruler of the Obodrites (probably 955 - 967).

The country of Naqun borders in the west with Saksun⁹ and some Marman.¹⁰ The prices there are low, the horses are numerous, and they are exported to other lands. The [inhabitants of this country] have powerful arms consisting of coats of mail, helmets, and swords.

From Far.gh to [lacuna] ma yalihi,¹¹ there is a distance of ten miles; [lacuna] to the bridge there is a distance of fifty miles. It is a wooden bridge; its length is of one mile.¹² From there to the fortress of Naqun, there is a distance of about forty miles.

The fortress of Naqun is called "Gharad," which means "a big fortress." Before Ghrad there is a castle built on a lake with sweet water.¹³ In this way most of the Slavic castles are built. [The Slavs] go to meadows abundant in water and trees, trace there a circle or a square, as they like, which marks the shape and the extension of the future fortress. Then they dig a trench around this contour and put the carved earth above. Sometimes they strengthen the walls with boards or wood as the castles are built until the walls become as high as is necessary. Then, in the wall, they make a gate of any shape they like. One can get to this gate by a wooden bridge.

From the fortress Gharad to the Surrounding Sea, there is a distance of eleven miles.

Troops can hardly move in Naqun's country, for it abounds in marshes, woods, and mud.

As for the country of Buyaslaw, its extension from F.raghah to Karakwa

⁹ The country of the Saxons.

¹⁰ Norsemen (*Nurman*). Another possible reading, Germans (*Gharman*) is less probable.

¹¹ In Arabic *ma yalihi* means "the following thing." In this text, it seems to mean "the next settlement."

¹² For this word one can accept the interpretation of Westberg who suggests that the author means present-day Bollbrück. By the "bridge" Ibrahim means a wood-paved way. F. Westberg. *Kommentariy na zapisku Ibrahima Ibn-Yakuba o slavianah* [Comments on Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub's Account of the Slavs], St. Petersburg, 1903, hereinafter referred to as: Westberg, *Kommentariy*, 70.

¹³ According to Adam of Bremen, the capital of the Obodrites was Magnopolis, present-day Mecklenburg-dorf. *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. B. Schmeidler, SS. rer. Germ. 2, 76-77; hereafter referred to as: Adam of Bremen, *Kirchengeschichte*: *Deinde secuntur Obodriti qui nunc Reregi vocantur, et civitas eorum Magnopolis*. The question as to whether one should read *fi fili-ghrad*, or "in Velegrad," which seems to be the Slavic name of Magnopolis, or *fi qibli-ghrad*, or "before the Gharad" is still being discussed in the historiography. See Kowalski, *Relacja*, 68-71. I suggest that the following version is the most probable one. The text gives *fi qibli-ghrad*. By "the fortress of Naccon," Ibrahim actually means Mecklenburg, situated near the Baltic Sea. As for the fortress, it is, perhaps, Schwerin, situated on the shore of Schwerin-See. Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub probably came to Mecklenburg from the south, and in his description the castle is, therefore, placed before the city.

equals to three weeks of travel. On its length, it is limited by the country of the Turks.¹⁴

The city of F.raghah is built of stones and limestone.¹⁵ It is the richest place in goods. Russians and Slavs come there from Karakwa with goods. Moslems, Jews, and Turks come there from the country of the Turks and bring goods and trade balances. Flour,¹⁶ tin, and various kinds of furs are exported from there. Their country is the best among the lands of the Northern peoples, and the most abundant with means of living. The quantity of wheat which is sufficient for a human being during one month is sold there for one qinshar.¹⁷ With one qinshar one can buy there as well the quantity of fodder which is necessary for an animal during forty nights or for ten hens. In F.raghah, people make saddles, bridles, and round leather shields, which are all used in their country.

In Bawaymah they make light cloths shaped like a half moon and having the form of a net. They do not fit to anything. At every time their value is of ten cloths for a qinshar. They use them for purchases and transactions and possess entire jars of them. For them, they are money and the most precious thing with which one can buy wheat, flour, horses, gold, silver, and all the rest.¹⁸

¹⁴ Magyars. The denomination of the Hungarians as "Turks" is typical for the medieval Islamic geography.

¹⁵ To this, one can add the following fragment apparently belonging to Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub and preserved in the treatise *Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar* by Al-Himyari: "Prague is a town situated in the neighbourhood of the country of the Turks [or Magyars, see the previous note]. It is built with stones and limestone on the shore of a river which flows there. It is smaller than cities but bigger than villages. There is a market there in which one can buy all the goods which are necessary for travels or sedentary life. In the upper part of Prague, there is a big fortified castle. There is a brook there, the water of which traverses the valley." *Kitab Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar fi Khabar Al-Aqtar*. Ed. I. 'Abbas, Beyrouth: Maktaba Lubnaniya, 1975, 86, hereinafter referred to as: Al-Himyari, *Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar*; see also *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici (MMFH)*, eds. L. Havlik, D. Bartonkova, et al., (Brno-Prague: Statni Pedagogicke Nakladatelstvi 3, 1969), 420.

¹⁶ *Daqiq*. This word is given in the texts of both Al-Bakri and Al-Himyari, who used Ibrahim's data. *Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar*, 86. However, given that Prague was an important center of the medieval slave-trade, one cannot reject Kowalski's reading *raqiq* (slaves), *Relacja*, 76, note 41.

¹⁷ There are different opinions concerning the interpretation of *qinshar*. Some scholars believe that it is a distorted form of *dinar*, already known in Bohemia, F. Westberg, *Ibrahim ibn-Jakub's Reisebericht über die Slawenlände aus dem Jahre 965* (St. Petersburg, 1898), 22, hereinafter referred to as: Westberg, *Reisebericht*; R. Kiersnowski, R., *Początki pieniądza polskiego* [The Beginnings of the Polish Money] (Warsaw: PWN, 1961), 113. Another interpretation considers *qinshar* to be Ibrahim's attempt to transliterate *penez* (*pinjar*), Westberg, *Reisebericht*, 22. Kowalski believes that *qinshar* has appeared because of a scribal error when two words, *qirat* and *nithar*, meaning together "coins which were thrown around during ceremonies," were united into one, *Relacja*, 79.

Strange as it seems, the Bohemians are dark-skinned and black-haired. A blond person can rarely be found among them.

The way from Madhin B.r.gh¹⁹ to the city of Buyaslaw is as follows. From Madhin B.r.gh to Qualiwi,²⁰ there is a distance of ten miles. From there to Nub Gh.rad, two miles. Nub Ghrad is a fortress built of stone and quick lime. It stands on the river Salawah, into which the river Budah empties itself.²¹ From Nub Gh.rad to the salt mine of the Jews, which is also situated on the shore of the river Salawah,²² thirty miles. From there to the fortress Burjin, situated on the river Mul.dawah,²³ [lacuna] from there to the beginning of the forest,²⁴ twenty-five miles. The distance between the extremities of the forest is forty miles; the way goes between mountains and hills. From there to a wooden bridge built over mud,²⁵ about two miles. From the end of the forest [lacuna], one enters the city of F.raghah.

The country of Mashaqqah is the largest one among the countries [of the Slavs]. It abounds in food, meat, honey, and agricultural produce.²⁶ The taxes are collected in market weights. Those are the salary of his²⁷ men in every month, and each of them has a certain amount of them to get. He has three thousand warriors wearing coats of mail; a hundred of them is worth a thousand of other warriors in the battle. He gives those men clothes, horses, arms, and everything they need. If a child is born to one of them, he orders the child to be paid a maintenance, regardless of the latter's sex. When the child grows, and he is a boy, he marries him and pays the dowry to the father of the bride. If the child is a girl, he marries her and pays the dowry to her father. The dowry of the Slavs is very big, and they pay it in the same way as the Berbers do. If a

¹⁹ This information is not confirmed by other sources. Westberg writes about the use of cloth in trade in that region, *Kommentariy*, 28, but Kowalski rightly observes that in all the examples quoted by Westberg, cloth is a value in itself, and in Ibrahim's description it has a conditional value, *Relacja*, 83.

¹⁹ The description of the way suggests that the author means Magdeburg.

²⁰ Calbe.

²¹ Nienburg, situated in the place where Bode (Ibrahim's *Budah*) empties itself into Saale (Ibrahim's *Salawah*).

²² *Mallahat Al-Yahud*. Westberg identifies this place with Dürrenberg, *Kommentariy*, 32-33. However, Ibrahim may have meant Halle or Salzmünde.

²³ Würzen on the Mülde River.

²⁴ *Taraf Ash-sha'raa*. By "the forest" Ibrahim seems to mean the woods situated near the actual German-Czech border.

²⁵ Perhaps, present-day Most in the Czech Republic.

²⁶ It seems that one can accept the correction of Westberg, who suggests reading *hut* (fish) instead of agricultural produce (*harath*). See *Kommentariy*, 36. Al-Himyari gives *hut*, *Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar*, 560. Al-Qazwini gives *samak*, or fish (see note 28).

²⁷ In this fragment, "he" refers to *Mashqa* (Mieszko).

man, thus, has two or three daughters, he gets rich, but if he has two sons, he becomes poor.²⁸

In the east the country of *Mashaqqah* borders with the Rus, and in the north, with the *Burus*.²⁹ The *Burus* live on the coast of the Surrounding Sea. They have their own language and ignore the languages of the neighbouring peoples. They are known for their bravery. If an army comes to them, one does not wait for his companion to join him but comes out and fights without addressing anybody until he dies. The Russians attack them, coming on ships from the West.

To the west of the country of the Russians stands the City of Women. They have lands and slaves. They get pregnant from their slaves and kill the children if they prove to be boys. They ride horses and make war. *Ibrahim ben-Ya'qub Al-Israili* said: The information about this city is true. I have received it from *Hutu*, the king of the *Rum*.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. the article about "the town *Mashqa*" in the treatise of *Al-Qazwini*: "It is a big town in the country of the Slavs. It stands on the seashore in the middle of woods through which troops cannot pass. The king, who rules over that town, is called *Mashqa*, and the town is named after him. The town is rich in food, honey, meat, and fish. Their king has infantrymen, for horses cannot move through their country. He collects taxes on his possessions and pays wages to his warriors every month. If necessary, he gives them horses, saddles, bridles, weapons, and everything they need. If a child is born, the king pays the maintenance, regardless of the child's sex. If the child is a boy, when he grows, the king takes the dowry from his father and gives it to the father of the bride. Their dowry is big. If a man has two or three daughters, he gets rich, but if he has two or three sons, he becomes poor. The marriage is concluded by the will of the king, and people are not free to choose partners for themselves. The king gives them all their food and provides food for the marriage party. He is like a father who cares about his children. They are very zealous, unlike the other Turks," *Al-Qazwini, Zakariya Ibn-Muhammad Ibn-Mahmud el-Cazwini's Kosmographie, Zweiter Teil, Die Denkmäler der Länder*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1849), 415, hereinafter referred to as: *Al-Qazwini, Kosmographie*. *Al-Qazwini*, as it seems, does not copy *Ibrahim's* text exactly. The first two sentences are obviously taken from the description of the town of *Naccon*. The expression "the town *Mashqa*," which follows them appears, probably, as a result of a misunderstanding. The expression *Madinat mashqa*, which is found in the Arabic text, can be understood in two ways: as "the town *Mashqa*," or "the town of *Mashqa*," or *Mieszko*. *Al-Qazwini* tries to combine both interpretations but alters the sense of the original text. As for *Al-Qazwini's* description of the marriage customs of the inhabitants of the "town *Mashqa*," it seems to be rather his speculation than a passage copied from *Ibrahim's* text.

Almost the same text is given by *Al-Himyari, Ar-Rawd Al-Mi'tar*, 560. It is not quoted here to avoid doubling. It should be said, however, that *Al-Himyari* erroneously thinks *Mushqa* (his own vocalisation of *Mashqa*) to be a possession of *Prague*.

²⁹ Prussians.

³⁰ The stories about the Amazons seem to be popular in Germany at that time. Cf. *Adam of Bremen*: [...] circa haec littora Baltici Maris ferunt esse Amazonas, quod nunc terra feminarum dicitur. Eas aquae gustu dicunt aliquas concipere. Sunt etiam qui referant eas fieri pregnantes ab hiis qui praeterunt negotiatoribus, vel ab hiis quos inter se habent captivos, sive ab aliis monstris, quae ibi non rara habentur, et hoc credimus etiam fide dignius, *Kirchengeschichte*, 246-247. By *Hutu*, *Ibrahim* means *Otto I* (936 - 973).

To the west of that city lives a Slavic tribe called *Waltabah*.³¹ They live in dense marshy forests to the west and a little to the north of the country of the *Mashaqqah*. They have a big city which stands on the coast of the Surrounding Sea. The city has twelve gates and a haven for which the shore with firm ground is used.³² They make war on the *Mashaqqah* and are very powerful. They have no king and do not obey anybody but are governed by their old people.³³

As for the king of the Bulgars, Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub said: I have not entered their country, but I saw their ambassadors in Madhin B.r.gh when they came to King Hutu. They wear tight clothes and waistbands from which ingots of gold and silver hang. Their king is very powerful. He wears a crown. He has scribes, palace officers, and functionaries. He gives orders and rules, as great kings do. They know languages and translate the Gospel into Slavonic. They are Christians.

Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub said: the Bulgars [lacuna] embraced Christianity [lacuna] in the country of the Rum when they besieged Al-Qustantiniyyah. The emperor spoke to them in a kind and humble way and tried to gain sympathy with rich gifts.³⁴ One of his steps was that he gave his daughter to the Bulgar king as a wife, and she brought him to embrace Christianity.³⁵

[...]

Ibrahim said: Al-Qustantiniyyah is situated to the south of the Bulgars. In the East and in the North, the Bulgars border with the Pechenegs. To the west of them is situated the Venetian Lake.³⁶ It is a gulf which comes from the Syrian Sea, passes between the Great Land³⁷ and Al-Qustantiniyyah washes the coasts of Rumah and Lanqubardiyah, which belong to the Great Land, and interrupts at Aqulayah.³⁸ All

³¹ Velets.

³² The text gives *shuturan harilan*. Kowalski translates it as "stumps divided in two" (*przepolowione pni*), *Relacja*, 50, which is obviously a mistake. I believe that the original text is *shattan jarilan*, which means "the shore with firm ground." Only this shore could be used for mooring ships.

³³ The information, which Ibrahim gives in this fragment, does not seem very precise. It seems that by *Waltabah*, Ibrahim means two people at once—the Velets and the inhabitants of Wolin. The sentence concerning the wars between *Waltabah* and Mieszko apparently refers to the Velets. However, the city located on the ocean coast cannot be Rethra, the centre of the Velets, for the latter was not situated on the shore and must be identified with Wolin.

³⁴ By "him" Ibrahim probably means the Bulgarian ruler.

³⁵ Ibrahim seems to confuse some events. By the Bulgarian siege of Constantinople, he probably means Symeon's campaign of 923, but the marriage was concluded not between Symeon and the emperor's daughter, but between Peter, the heir of Symeon, and Mary, the granddaughter of Romanus Lekapenos (920 - 944). Finally, his sentence about the baptism of the Bulgarians as connected to that marriage makes no sense. It seems that to Ibrahim the baptism was the central event of Bulgarian history, and he tries to connect the other events to it.

³⁶ The Adriatic Sea.

³⁷ By the "Great land" (*Al-Ard Al-Kabira*) Western Europe is meant.

³⁸ Aquileia.

these places form a unique island washed by the Syrian Sea in the south and by the Venetian gulf in the east and the west. Only the western side is not limited by the sea.

The Slavs live on both coasts of this gulf, beginning from the place where it comes out of the Syrian Sea in the west. To the east of them live the Bulgars, and to the west—other Slavs. The Slavs who live in the west are more powerful and courageous. The people living in that region ask them for grace and are afraid of their force. Their country consists of mountains with bumpy ways.

Generally speaking, the Slavs are very powerful, and were they not divided, no people could compete with them in force. Of all the countries, they live in the most prosperous and richest one. They are engaged in agriculture and business and excel in these all the peoples of the North. Their trade is carried on by land and by sea to the Russians and Al-Qustantiniyyah. Many Northern tribes speak the Slavic language, for they are mixed with the Slavs. Among them are the Germans, the Magyars, the Pechenegs, the Russians, and the Chazars.³⁹ Hunger can result in their country, not from a drought or some dry years but from abundant diluvial rains and constant floods. The drought is not grave in their country, for it [the country] is humid and cold. They sow in two seasons of the year, at the end of the summer and in the spring, and have two harvests. Mostly they sow millet.

The cold, even when intense, is healthy for [the Slavs], and the excessive heat kills them. They do not dare go to Lanqubardiyah for it is too hot there, the heat damages them, and they die. They feel well only in the cold, but if it gets warm, they get ill and die because of it. They have two illnesses, and it is extremely rare that anyone would not have one of them: erysipelas and fistulas. They abstain from eating chickens, for this, as they say, makes them fall and provokes erysipelas. They eat the meat of cows and geese, and this food fits them.

Their clothes are loose except the cuffs which are tight.

Their kings guard their women, who are very zealous towards them. A man of them can have twenty wives and more.

Most of the trees which grow in their forests are apple trees, pear trees, and peach trees. In those forests lives a strange bird with green feathers, which can repeat sounds uttered by people and animals. It may be found in [...], and then they hunt it. The Slavs call it "saba."⁴⁰ There is also a hen called by the Slavs "tatra."⁴¹ It has tasty meat. They cry from the tops of the trees, and one can hear

³⁹ By these peoples Ibrahim means the Germans (the word *Tudishki* was largely used by the Jews for denoting them), F. Westberg, "K analizu vostochnyh istochnikov o Vostochnoy Evrope" [To the Analysis of the Oriental Sources on Eastern Europe], *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniya* [Review of the Ministry of Education] 1 (1908), 364 - 412, 377; Magyars (Hungari), Pechenegs, Russians, and Chazars.

⁴⁰ Starling. Pol. *sypak*; czech *špacek*.

⁴¹ Wood-grouse. Pol. *cietrzew*; czech *tetřev*

them from a distance of one farsakh. They are mostly of two kinds: black and motley. They are more beautiful than peacocks.

[...].

The country of the Slavs is very cold. The cold is the most severe when the moon appears at night, and the days are fine. In these days the cold gets more and more severe, the land petrifies, all the drinks freeze, the water in wells becomes like stucco and then petrifies as well. If people snuff up water and then reject it, pieces of ice appear on their beards, looking like glass, and one can hardly break them until he warms himself or enters a building. When the night is dark, and the day is cloudy, the freeze and the cold get slighter. At that time ships are broken, and those who are there perish, for pieces of ice which are on their rivers, similar to mountains, hit the ships. However, a young strong man from the crew can climb on such an ice floe and stay alive.

The Slavs do not have baths. Instead, they build wooden houses, caulk all the holes with a thing which grows on their trees, looks like moss, and is called by them "m.kh."⁴² They use it also as tar for their ships. So, they build a stone hearth in one of the corners and open in its upper part a small window through which the smoke escapes. When it gets warm, they close that window and close the door of the house. They have there jars of water. They pour that water on the warm hearth, and the steam starts rising. Everyone holds in his hand a bundle of grass with which he draws the air towards himself. Their pores open, the sweat flows from their bodies, and their manges and ulcers disappear. They call this building "al-at.bba."⁴³

Their kings travel in big vans which rise on four wheels. In the corners of the vans stand four columns on which a palanquin embroidered with dibaj⁴⁴ hangs, fixed with solid chains, so that the one who sits inside does not shake when the van shakes. This van is made for ill and wounded people.

[...].⁴⁵

Studying Ibrahim ben-Ya'qub's report, one usually has to address several problems, for Ibrahim's original treatise is not extant. Some fragments

⁴² Slavic *moh* (moss).

⁴³ This is not *al-at.bba*, as it is written in the text, but *al-izba* (*izba*). According to Niederle, the Slavic word *izba* originated from the Germanic *stuba* (oven) and entered the Slavic language as "piece pour le bain munie d'un poele," L. Niederle, *Manuel de l'antiquité slave*, vol. 2: *La civilisation* (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1926), 105.

⁴⁴ Golden brocade.

⁴⁵ The translation is given after A. Kunik and V. Rosen, *Izvestiya Al-Bakri i drugih avtorov o Rusi i slavianah* [Stories of Al-Bakri and Other Writers about Russia and the Slavs] part 1, (St. Petersburg, 1898); Kowalski, *Relacja; Jachrafiyya Al-Andalus wa Urubba min Kitab Al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik li Abi Ubayd Al-Bakri* [The Geography of Al-Andalus and Europe from the Book of Roadways and Kingdoms by Abu Ubayd Al-Bakri], ed. A.A. Al-Hajji (Beyrouth: Dar Al-Irshad, 1968) 54 - 91.

of his work have been preserved in other books. If only the fragments containing direct reference to Ibrahim are taken into account, we have the following materials: the description of the Slavs quoted by Al-Bakri; the stories about Fulda,⁴⁶ Rouen,⁴⁷ Schleswig,⁴⁸ and Mainz⁴⁹ cited by Al-Qazwini; and the story about the church of Lorca, preserved in some books. All these materials are quite different, presenting thus a number of problems.

The first problem consists of the fact that in all the sources Ibrahim is given different names. For Al-Bakri, he was Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub Al-Israili,⁵⁰ and Al-Qazwini called him Ibrahim Ibn-Ahmad At-Turtushi.⁵¹ The difference between these two names is significant. If the name Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub is most probably that of a Jew, then the name Ibrahim Ibn-Ahmad is almost certainly that of a Muslim. On the basis of this difference, Jacob puts forward his well-known theory, according to which, there were two persons bearing the name "Ibrahim," one who belonged to the African embassy and the other to an Andalusian embassy to Otto I. They supposedly attended the same reception and heard Otto's speech about the church of Lorca. According to Jacob, this explains the similarity of the respective fragments in Al-Bakri's and Al-Qazwini's treatises.⁵²

Jacob's theory was not accepted by his contemporaries,⁵³ but at the time, the only reason to reject it was that such a coincidence was hardly probable. Only in 1938, when Lévi-Provençal edited the fragments on Spain taken from Al-Himyari's geographical treatise, did it become clear that the difference in names was due to scribal errors and not to the existence of two Ibrahims. Al-Himyari calls the traveller "Ibrahim Ibn-Yusuf,"⁵⁴ but, it is curious that Lévi-Provençal names him in his transla-

⁴⁶ *Kosmographie*, 387.

⁴⁷ *Kosmographie*, 396.

⁴⁸ *Kosmographie*, 404.

⁴⁹ *Kosmographie*, 409.

⁵⁰ See the text above.

⁵¹ *Kosmographie*, 373.

⁵² This theory is developed by G. Jacob in *Ein Arabischer Berichterstatter aus dem 10. Jahrhundert über Fulda, Schleswig, Soest, Paderborn und andere Deutsche Städte* (Berlin, 1891); "Zwei arabische Berichte über Deutschland aus der Zeit Kaisers Otto des Grossen," in *Studien in arabischen Geographen*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1892), hereinafter referred to as "Zwei arabische Berichte," or *Arabische Berichte aus Gesandten an Germanische Fürstenhöfe aus dem 9. und 10. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, Leipzig: Gruyter, 1927), hereinafter referred to as: *Arabische Berichte*.

⁵³ See, for example, Westberg, *Kommentariy*, 8.

⁵⁴ Lévi-Provençal, E., *La Péninsule ibérique au Moyen-Age* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), 171, hereinafter referred to as Lévi-Provençal, *La Péninsule ibérique*.

tion "Ibrahim Ibn-Yahya."⁵⁵ The French scholar himself believed that all the authors are speaking about one and the same person.⁵⁶ The last argument came in 1965 when some parts of the geography of Al-'Udhri to which Qazwini referred were published. In the fragment about Lorca, Ibrahim is called Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub Al-Israili At-Turtushi.⁵⁷ This seems to resolve the problem of the author's identity.

With the exception of the name, almost nothing is known about Ibrahim. The idea that he was a Spanish merchant is accepted, at least tacitly, by almost all historians. Only Westberg⁵⁸ considers him to be African, but his arguments do not seem convincing. The following argument can be made about Ibrahim's probable motherland. Despite the fact that he called himself At-Turtushi or "Tortosan," he must have lived elsewhere. There would be no reason to call oneself "At-Turtushi" if one lived in Tortosa, but if one moved, such an addition to the name would be plausible. Moreover, the addition to the Arabic name, indicating the place of origin usually appeared when a person left his home and went somewhere else.

The question about Ibrahim's occupation appears more important. Two opinions are usually put forward in this respect. According to the one presented to the fullest extent by Jacob, Ibrahim was a member of an embassy. The other theory states that Ibrahim could hardly have been enrolled in a diplomatic mission and must have visited the Slavic countries for commercial purposes,⁵⁹ perhaps even dealing with the slave-trade.⁶⁰ The most radical partisan of this theory is R. Jakimowicz, according to whom Ibrahim had contacts only with his colleagues—Jewish merchants—and travelled across Europe, going from one Jewish community to another.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Lévi-Provençal, *La Péninsule ibérique*, 206, notes.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ahmad ibn-Umar ibn-Anas Al-'Udhri, *Fragmentos geografo-historicos de Al-Masalik ila Gami Al-Mamalik*, ed. A. Al-Ahwani (Madrid: Publicaciones del Instituto de Estudios Islamicos en Madrid, 1965), 8, hereinafter referred to as Al-'Udhri, *Fragmentos geografo-historicos*.

⁵⁸ *Kommentarij*, 83.

⁵⁹ Westberg, *Kommentarij*, 72, 84.

⁶⁰ K. Brockelmann *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, vols. 1-2 (Weimar-Berlin, 1898-1902); additional vols. 1-3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937 - 1942), 1 Supplementarband, 404.

⁶¹ R. Jakimowicz, "Kilka uwag nad relacja o slowianach Ibrahima ibn-Jakuba" [Some Observations Concerning Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub's Report on the Slavs], *Slavia antiqua* 1 (1948), 439-459, 440. See also: M. Canard, "Ibrahim ben-Yaqub et sa relation de voyage en Europe." In *Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), 2, 503-508, 506.

As there are no references to Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub in other sources, information about him can be gleaned only from the text itself. However, the text seems to have been modified by later compilers, and the fragment quoted by Al-Bakri is too short to be considered an independent report. In an attempt to reconstruct the original text, one can enlarge it, adding the fragments concerning Western Europe, but they differ markedly from the report on the Slavs by their content and style. The report about the Slavs seems to be similar to a chapter of the Anonymous report.⁶² It begins with the definition of the geographical position of the Slavic countries, presents different Slavic peoples, and focuses its main attention on political and military matters.

As for the passages about Western Europe, they are very different from the description of the Slavs. All of them deal with wonders: in Fulda, it is a statue of the Crucifixion; in Rouen, a person with a long beard; in Schleswig, a feast. The language is very different as well. In the description of the Slavs, Ibrahim mentions himself only to confirm his data. On the contrary, when Ibrahim describes Schleswig, he expresses his own impressions, saying that the singing of its inhabitants is like the barking of dogs.⁶³

The fragment about Lorca has a particular place in Ibrahim's legacy.⁶⁴

⁶² The Anonymous Report is a collection of accounts on peoples living to the North of the Islamic world, compiled at the end of the ninth century for administrative use. Its fragments can be found in many treatises, such as the books by Ibn-Rosteh, Gardizi, Marvazi, Mutahhar Al-Maqdisi, Al-Farisi, and in the anonymous Persian geography *Hudud Al-'Alam*, among others. The information about the Slavs, contained in the Anonymous Report, is analysed in my MA Thesis.

⁶³ Al-Qazwini, *Kosmographie*, 404.

⁶⁴ As this fragment is very important, it seems useful to quote it as well. Now we have three different versions of it, and the translation given below is a compilation of them. "Among the ancient stories about it [Lorca], I saw the narration of Ibrahim ben-Ya'qub Al-Israili At-Turtushi. He said that the king of the Rum had told him in Rome in 350 A.H.," Al-Udhri, *Fragmentos geografico-historicos*, 8; Al-Udhri mentions it in 450 A.H. saying: "Ibrahim ben-Ahmad At-Turtushi told me: 'I heard the king of the Rum saying to me,'" Al-Qazwini, *Kosmographie*, 373; "Ibrahim ben-Yusuf At-Turtushi said that the king of the Rum had told him in 305 A.H.:" Al-Himyari, in Lévi-Provençal, *La Péninsule ibérique*, 171; "I want to send to the ruler of the faithful in Al-Andalus a [intelligent - Al-Udhri] count with a gift [Al-Qazwini gives only the gift]. One of my greatest concerns in his affairs and my most important request to him [Al-Udhri and Al-Himyari only] is that I know for sure that in the noble hall there is a church in one of the parts of which there is an olive tree. When the Christmas night comes, it appears [*tawarrat* - Al-Udhri] (or: covers itself with leaves [*tawarraqat* - Qazwini]), (or: emanates a light [*tunawiru* - Al-Himyari]), produces ovary [in the night - Al-Udhri] and brings fruits the next day. I know that the martyr [whose grave is there - Al-Himyari] enjoys a high place with God, and I ask [the ruler of the faithful] kindly to be kind and polite to the priests of that church so that they give me the bones of the martyr. This is more important to me than any delight."

Al-Qazwini says that Ibrahim told Al-'Udhri that story himself.⁶⁵ This episode provoked extensive discussion. Kowalski, for example, rejects such a possibility, but does so on the basis of an incorrect dating.⁶⁶ Later scholars consider the theoretical possibility that such a conversation did take place.⁶⁷ However, Al-'Udhri's text shows that this author has never written about his talk with Ibrahim. Al-'Udhri says, indeed, that the information is taken from Ibrahim ben-Ya'qub, but the story about the conversation is obviously an invention of Al-Qazwini or the result of his misunderstanding the text. Mistakes of this kind are quite usual for Al-Qazwini. For him, the name Mieszko is not that of the king, but of a city.⁶⁸

The passage concerning Lorca can be considered as a part of Ibrahim's narration. Combining all the texts which are now available, one may come to the following conclusions:

Ibrahim must have written this report himself. This is evident by the fact that in some episodes he speaks about himself in the first person.

Ibrahim's report is an account of his voyage to Europe.

Some details suggest that Ibrahim was not guided primarily by commercial interests. When Ibrahim describes Prague, for example, he commits a strange mistake for a tradesman, saying that the Russians come to Prague from Cracow. Since the Jewish merchants who lived in Europe knew Kiev to be an important trade centre, it is difficult to understand why Ibrahim is silent about it.

Another consideration is that Ibrahim had specific interests. When speaking about the Obodrites, he describes first their method of building fortresses. When mentioning Mieszko, he writes about the organisation of his army. It is strange for a merchant to collect information about the Slavic fortresses and to describe in his book the way in which they were built. Finally, the most interesting feature is that Ibrahim even attempts to generalise his data, evaluating the force of the Slavs as potential enemies. This description seems, therefore, to be a report of a scout to his lord. In this case, the lord was Al-Hakam II (961 - 976), the caliph of Córdoba.

Ibrahim tries to provide his master with detailed information about

⁶⁵ *Kosmographie*, 373.

⁶⁶ Kowalski accepts here the Al-Himyari's date of 305 A.H., *Relacja*, 39, which he himself rejects in another place, *Relacja*, 40-41.

⁶⁷ M. Kowalska, *Sredniowieczna arabska literatura podróznicza* [The Medieval Arabic Travel Literature] (Warsaw-Cracow: PWN, 1973), 45. According to Kowalska, when the talk took place, Ibrahim was about eighty, and Al-Udhri, about twenty years old.

⁶⁸ *Kosmographie*, 415.

the Slavs. He creates a kind of a map of Europe, describing all the countries up to Russia and Prussia. Like Al-Mas'udi, he divides the Slavs, doing so not on ethnic basis but on a political one, mentioning only the kings⁶⁹ and speaking about the Velets, who did not have monarchs, only at the end of his description. This political description may have demonstrated to the Cordovan leaders with whom they would deal with if they had contacts with the Slavs. Moreover, Ibrahim knows very well for whom he writes and always attempts to confirm his data. Realising that the Moslem ruler would hardly believe in the existence of the city of the Amazons, he refers even to Otto I.

The Andalusian monarchs of that time seemed to have had a certain interest in Europe. Al-Hakam II, for example, had a book on European history and geography written for him by Bishop Gudmar.⁷⁰ He was perhaps interested not only in information of strategic character but also in wonders. Ibrahim, therefore, includes this information in his report. If the report was written for Al-Hakam II, one can suppose that an order was given to Ibrahim in the Cordovan chancellery. The Andalusian rulers apparently possessed information about the Germans with whom they exchanged embassies, but the Slavs were an enigma to them. They made use of the old practice of sending a person to explore and report.⁷¹ Ibrahim Ibn-Ya'qub, who knew at least one European language, was a very suitable candidate for that mission. As we shall see, it is highly probable that Ibrahim was a member of an embassy. However, this refers only to his stay in Germany. Apparently, he met no Slavic ruler; otherwise, he would have mentioned it. His voyage to the Slavs seems to be primarily of an informative nature.

Something should be said about the way in which Ibrahim's report was used after it was written. The data of strategic character were taken out of his text and placed in an administrative guide, replacing there the old fragment from the Anonymous report. Al-Bakri seems to have used this guide.⁷² As for Al-Qazwini, his geography is oriented towards the description of curiosities, and it would be natural to suppose that he

⁶⁹ A good example of this approach is the fact that Ibrahim calls the country of the Obodrites by the name of its ruler.

⁷⁰ Al-Mas'udi, *Les Prairies d'Or*, 3, 67.

⁷¹ About this practice see Lévi-Provençal, E., "Notice sur l'installation des Razis en Espagne," in *Arabica*, t. II, 1955, fasc. II, 228-230.

⁷² Some fragments of Al-Bakri's treatise are obviously influenced by the Anonymous Report. This refers to his accounts about the Burtas, Bulgars, and Magyars. M. Defremery, *Des peuples du Caucase* (Paris, 1849), respectively 19, 21 and 21-23.

used Ibrahim's work, but in his own way, taking thence the description of wonders.

Various opinions exist in historiography concerning the date of Ibrahim's travel. According to Jacob, Ibrahim visited Europe in 973. In that year, some time before his death, Otto I received a Bulgar embassy and then an embassy from Africa.⁷³ The fact that Otto I received the embassies at Quedlinburg, which in no circumstances can be identified with Ibrahim's Madhin B.r.gh, can, according to Jacob, be explained by the possibility that the Bulgar ambassadors may have accompanied Otto I to Merseburg, with which Madhin B.r.gh is identified. There, in Merseburg, Otto I received the African embassy.⁷⁴ This dating has some weak points. First, the description of Ibrahim's trip to Prague shows that the identification of Madhin B.r.gh with Merseburg is probably erroneous. After 967, Naccon is no longer mentioned as the ruler of the Obodrites.⁷⁵ Finally, Ibrahim does not write anything about the Christianisation of Poland, despite the fact that he speaks in details about the religion in Bulgaria.

The year 965 is proposed as an alternative dating. Identifying *Madhen Brg* with Magdeburg, Westberg says that 965 was almost the only year in which Otto I was in that city at the end of his life. In 965 the emperor issued some charters there.⁷⁶ This point of view is actively supported by Kowalski. Analysing the date quoted in Al-Himyari's text (305 A.H.),⁷⁷ Kowalski supposes that in the original text, it was written 355 A.H. Since the year 355 A.H. began on December, 28, 965, Kowalski thinks that Ibrahim has committed a mistake.⁷⁸

When Al-Qazwini quotes Ibrahim's narration about Lorca, in which the only date is indicated, he relies upon Al-'Udhri. As Ibrahim is referred to directly after Al-'Udhri, who is, thus, the second stage by

⁷³ *Annales Hildesheimenses*, ed. G. Waitz, SS. rer. Germ. 8, 23.

⁷⁴ *Zwei arabische Berichte*, 135. About the reception see Wittekindus, *Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei*, ed. P. Hirsch, SS. rer. Germ. 60, 152, hereafter referred to as: Wittekindus, *Sachsengeschichte*. This dating is also supported by Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, 1 Supplementarband, 410.

⁷⁵ From 967 Mstivoi starts being mentioned as the ruler of the Obodrites, Wittekindus, *Sachsengeschichte*, 142. Wittekindus calls him Mistav.

⁷⁶ Westberg, *Kommentariy*, 77, 78. These documents are contained in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Diplomatum regni et imperatorum Germaniae. t. V. Conradi I, Heinrici I et Ottonis I diplomata* (Hannover, 1879 - 1884), 411 - 416). They are dated from June 26 to July 9, 965.

⁷⁷ Lévi-Provençal, *La Péninsule ibérique*, 171 (text), 206 (translation).

⁷⁸ *Relacja*, 41.

which the narration about Lorca passed, one can suppose that Al-Himyari took the fragment in question from Al-'Udhri. Moreover, Al-'Udhri is the author closest in time to Ibrahim. One shall, therefore, address Al-'Udhri's treatise for information about the date of Ibrahim's journey. The respective fragment by Al-'Udhri, however, supports none of the above-mentioned dates. According to Al-'Udhri, Ibrahim met with Otto I⁷⁹ in 350 A.H. in Rome.

The year 350 A.H. began on February, 20, 961 and ended on February, 9, 962. Some noteworthy events in Otto I's life took place during this period. On January 31, 962, Otto I entered Rome where on February 2, he was crowned emperor. A few days later, on February, 14, 962, he left the city.⁸⁰ It is quite possible that Ibrahim met with Otto I in the beginning of February 962. The sources show that Otto I often received ambassadors after considerable victories. In 955, having beaten the Magyars on the river Lech and the Slavs at Recknitz, he *plurimos legatos suscepit, Romanorum scilicet et Graecorum Sarracenorumque*.⁸¹ In 973, the ambassadors were received after Otto, having defeating the Lombards and the Arabs, had returned from his third Italian campaign.⁸² It is possible that something similar occurred in 962. Otto had a very good opportunity to meet representatives of the Islamic world in Rome, both as emperor and as patron of the Roman church.

The fact that Ibrahim met with Otto I in 962 must be harmonised with Ibrahim's description of his meeting with the Bulgar ambassadors in Magdeburg. The only explanation is that Ibrahim must have visited Otto I's court at least twice—the first time in 962 in Rome and a second time, probably in 965 in Magdeburg. Two conclusions can be drawn from this fact. On the one hand, Ibrahim was obviously not a stranger to the German court, which explains, why the Bulgar ambassadors and the emperor himself were so sincere with him. He was a representative of

⁷⁹ And not with Pope John XII (955-964) as Al-Hajji thinks, Al-Hajji, A.A., *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with Western Europe during the Umayyad Period A.H. 138 - 366/ A.D. 755 - 976: An Historical Survey* (Beyrouth: Dar Al-Irshad, 1970), 248-251. Al-Hajji's theory seems to be vulnerable to some questions: (1) How could the Pope receive a Jew, who, in addition, came from Islamic Spain? (2) Why did the Pope share his diplomatic projects with a Jewish merchant? (3) How could the Pope send a count to the caliph? (4) Why does Ibrahim, who is usually very careful with his materials, commit such a glaring mistake, applying in the same text the title "King of the Rum" to two different men, both of whom he saw personally?

⁸⁰ G. Richter, *Annalen der deutschen Geschichte im Mittelalter von der Gründung des Fränkischen Reichs bis zum Untergang der Hohenstaufen*. III Abteilung. *Annalen des deutschen Reichs im Zeitalter der Ottonen und Salier* (Halle, 1890), 1: 88.

⁸¹ Wittekindus, *Sachsengeschichte*, 135.

⁸² Wittekindus, *Sachsengeschichte*, 152.

Córdoba, and, therefore, the emperor could tell him about his intentions concerning his relations with Al-Hakam II. On the other hand, Ibrahim's journey apparently acquired new features, and one can note his lengthy stay in Europe. The fact that Ibrahim remained in Europe at least more than one year can also be confirmed by the texts themselves. The information which can be found there refers to all the seasons of the year—the winter (references to cold and ice),⁸³ the spring (wood-grouse uttering mating calls),⁸⁴ and the summer (work in the fields).

During his stay in Europe, the chronological frame of which cannot be established more precisely given the actual state of our knowledge, Ibrahim must have undertaken several trips. It is difficult to reconstruct his exact itinerary. Jacob's idea that all the fragments concerning the European towns quoted by Al-Qazwini stem from Ibrahim⁸⁵ seems possible, but not much more than that. The text itself is very much reduced. It is not known, however, which regions and towns Ibrahim visited and which he did not. Ibrahim apparently visited Prague and the country of the Obodrites. He gives precise distances, and the character of the descriptions suggests that they have been made by an eyewitness. As for the descriptions of Poland, Prussia, the City of Women, the Velets, and the inhabitants of the Adriatic coast, the information is of general character and seems to be taken from other informants. Should one think otherwise, one would have to explain how it is that Ibrahim visited Cracow but did not learn that the Russian merchants only passed by that city or how he saw the force of the Prussians in battle. His information about the Velets is, as shown above, a compilation. As for Bulgaria, Ibrahim explicitly says that he did not visit that country.

Ibrahim's description of the Slavs is quite rich and unique. Ibrahim knows two groups of the Slavs, those whose dwellings were on the Adriatic coast and those who lived in Western Europe. The second are clearly divided from the first, at least as Ibrahim says, by their force. As for the Eastern Slavs, they are totally ignored. Only in one place can a second-hand reference be found indicating that Poland shares a border with Russia. Ibrahim seems to be interested only in those Slavs who dwelt in the lands with which Germany bordered. Ibrahim provides a detailed and exact account on them, basing his classification of the Slavs on their states. As it seems, this can be explained by Ibrahim's task—to give an account on the countries situated to the east of Germany.

⁸³ Al-Qazwini, *Kosmographie*, 387.

⁸⁴ Westberg, *Kommentariy*, 82.

⁸⁵ *Arabishe Berichte*, 5,6