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**The Maritime Spread of Islam in Korea and
Its Growth**

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This paper is designed to introduce the historical relations between Muslims and Koreans through Maritime Silk Routes supporting by the first-hand materials and other essential historical references of Korea and Arab world with specific focus on the period from the ancient times to 1950s when modern relations began.

I. ANCIENT RELATIONS BEFORE ISLAM

The ancient relations between Korea-the Middle East are regarded as an outcome of Korea-Arabia commercial contacts through the Silk Road before Islamic period. The ancient literature that might have shed light on early contacts with the Middle East was all but destroyed due to several reasons, moreover the documented references are very few and incomplete. Nevertheless, it is believed that Arab and Persian culture had had a significant influence on Korean culture since ancient times.

One example is the glass cups excavated from the 5-6th century Shilla tombs in Kyung-ju. Most of glass cups unearthed from the Shilla tombs were either from the Fertile Crescent region or Persia.¹ Another case is the Alfalfa (*medicago lentilata*), a plant which is believed to be native to Arabia and Persia. Alfalfa was transplanted to the Korean peninsula during the Shilla Kingdom (1BC-935AD) and at least four state-run farms were established to grow alfalfa.²

However, glass and alfalfa are not only things to have reached Korea before Islamic period. *Samkuksagi*, a chronicle of the Three Kingdom Period (1BC-7AD), has remarkable accounts on the luxurious rare materials which are believed to be imported from the West Asia or by the Arab-Persian merchants.³

From the above facts, it can be safely said that in the 5-7th century or even before, the Arabian and Persian merchandise had already found its way into Korea and was being used by the Koreans.

¹ Muhammad Qansu, *History of Shilla-West Region Relations (Korean)*, Dankuk Univ. Press, Seoul, 1992, p.245.

² Yi Y orig-Bom, "Trade Articles of Muslim Merchant written in SAMKUKSAGI", Commemoration for Dr. Yi Hong-*Jik*, Seoul, 1969, p.102 / Muhammad Quasu, op.cit, pp.188-193.

³[SAMKUKSAGI], Vol.33, 'japji' 2.

II. EARLY KOREA-MUSLIM MARITIME RELATIONS

A: Analysis of Muslim Sources

It has not yet to be determined when Muslims had direct contact with the Korean peninsula for the first time. Though sources from the medieval orient record Arab Muslims called "Ta-shi" traveling to and from the Korean peninsula in the early part of the 11th century, Muslims apparently attempted to make contact <with the Korean peninsula from the latter part of the Unified Shilla period (661-935 AD).

From Muslim manuals of navigation that have come down to us, it is clear that Muslim navigators were quite at home in eastern seas, where their own colonies called Fan-Fang were established as early as the 8th century. In Fan-Fang, men of virtue called Qadi and Sheikh were chosen and appointed by the Chinese government to administrate the colonies in accordance with Islamic law (Sha'riah) and customs. Through marriage with Chinese girls, they gradually settled down in China According to some Arab travelers who visited China in the middle of the 9th century such as Sulaiman al-Tajir and Abu Zayid, there were more than 100,000 Muslims in the southeastern coast of China, even though the report is believed to be a little exaggerated.⁴

Korea also had very close relations with T'ang China at that time because the Shilla Kingdom could realize its long cherished unification of the peninsula with the cooperative assistance of the T'ang. Due to a wide range of political, economic and cultural relations, the country was at the height of prosperity. Moreover, it was only a few days' voyage from the western part of Korea to the southern and eastern parts of China where large Muslim communities could be found.

It is very likely that Shila traders came into contact with their Muslim counterparts in China for the purpose of mutual trade. Muslim merchants may have extended their own trade routes to the Korean peninsula themselves or with the guidance of Koreans in China, too. While trade was the prime reason for contact, it seems that many elements of Islamic culture were introduced to the Korean peninsula as well.

⁴ Lee Hee-Soo, *History of Korea-Islamic Relations (Korean)*, Mundeoksa Press, Seoul, 1991, pp.79-80

This development is well supported by accounts on Shilla found in Islamic books of geography, history and travel authored by 17 Muslim scholars ranging from Ibn Khurdadbih of the mid-9th century to Abu'l Fazl of the early 16th century.

We will now present a survey of early Muslim contacts with the Korean peninsula, drawing on bibliographical sources on Shilla compiled in the Arabic and Persian languages. In the course of this exposition, we will illuminate some facts about early Islamic geographical knowledge of the Korean peninsula, Arab-Korean maritime relations and the early Muslim settlement in Korea through a detailed analysis of Muslim sources.

1. Geographical Knowledge of Shilla

Accommodating and incorporating the geographical knowledge of India and Persia. Islamic geography was the best in the world in medieval times. It progressed rapidly because Muslims needed to establish an effective network to rule and communicate in pace with the expansion of their new territories, to streamline traffic and trade routes by land and by sea and to determine the *qibla*, precise direction of Mecca toward which to pray. Geographical information and descriptions of North Africa, Central Asia and India in their sphere of influence shows striking precision even in the eyes of modern geographer. At the same time, the geographical study of China, a competing sphere of influence with the Islamic world, was also active and accounts of the Korean peninsula were associated with it.

In geographical descriptions and general accounts of locations on the Korean peninsula (Shilla), the majority of Islamic scholars employed the word, "East of China" Shilla was described as an island state located above the parallel to the east of cities on the southeastern coast of China such as Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou and Yangzhou where a number of Arab Muslims were living. Shilla was at the east end of the world. Other scholars such as Ibn Khurdadbih, Ibn Rustah, Ibn al-Naqlim, Abu'l Fida, Ibn al-Bakuwi did not specify Shilla as an island country but used a vague expression, merely saying that Shilla was a country located to the east of China. For instance:

Ibn Khurdadbih (d. 886)⁵ in *General Suroey of Roads and Kingdom (Kitab al-masalik wa' l-mamalik)* –"Shilla is located across from Qansu⁶ to the extreme end of China..."⁷

⁵ Of Persian origin, the author served as a director of the local post office in the city of Samara near the Tigris River. He was in a position to collect news and information from a far-flung area.

Ibn Rustah(d. 913)⁸ in *Catalogue of Precious Things* (Kitab al-a' laq al-nafisah)", There is a country called Shilla to the extreme end of China, abounding in gold... "⁹

Ibn al-Nadim(d. 995) in *Index* (Al- fihrist)¹⁰ –"There is Shilla in China... "¹¹

Abu'l Fida (1273-1331)¹² in *Summation of Information on Human Society* (Kitab al-mukhtasar fi akhbar al-bashar) –"Down under China, there is a place called 'China of China', a city on the final leg to the east The Pacific starts from behind it and the biggest city is called Shilla".¹³

Ibn al-Bakuwi (d. early 15th)¹⁴ in *Summary of Accomplishments and Awe of Great Kings* (*Talkhis al-athar wa aja' ib al-malik al-qahhar*) –"Shilla is the last country of China..." Shilla was thus described by its geographical location and form, not as an island country.¹⁵

It is apparent that the Arabic terms employed here, *al-shila*, *al-sila* and the like are the transliteration of Shilla "While some Muslim scholars, beginning with Ibn Khurdadib described Shilla vaguely as a country located to the east of China, some other scholars such as Sulairnan al-Tajir, Mas'udi, Idrisi, Qazwini, Ibn Sa'id, Dimashqi and Al-Nuwairi presented Shilla as an island, an archipelago or an island state.

A traveler of the ninth century, Sulairnan al-Tajir in *Guide-book of China and India* (*Akhbar al-Sin wa' l-Hind*)¹⁶ said, "In the continent beyond China, there are Dokuz Oguz of

⁶ On the location of Qansu, many scholars have different opinions. Qansu may be identified as Hangzhou located at the entrance of Yangzei River based on the following model. "Qansu --> Khansu --> Khansa (mentioned by Ibn Battuta) = Hangzhou". If we regard Qansu as Khausu, the modern sea-port of Hangzhou is probably our best guess.

⁷ Ibn Khurdadib, *Kitab al-masalik wa'l-mamalik* (ed., M.). de Goeje), Leiden, 1889, pp.70, 180.

⁸ Ibn Rustah was of Persian descent Though his Geographical writings have an astronomical leanings, his discussions deal with a variety of topics like the size of the earth, the founding of Mecca and Medina, seas, rivers, the climate as well as the geography of Iran and adjoining lands, and minute accounts of roads.

⁹ Ibn Rustah. *Kitab al-a'laq al-nafisah*(ed., M). de Goeje), Leiden, 1892, pp.82-83.

¹⁰ He might have been involved in the administration of a bookshop or library in Baghdad. The book, *Al-fihrist*, compiled in 977 A.D. is regarded as one of the oldest index collections. It included all reference sources and books about every nation known at that time, with their authors and brief contents.

¹¹ Ibn al-Nadim, *Al-fihrist*, Cairo, 1929, p.492.

¹² As an Ayyubid of Sultan family, Abu'l-Fida, a geographical historian, was educated from early youth in literature and military arts.

¹³ Abu'l-Fida, *Kitab al-mukhtasar fi akhbar*, Beirut, 1956, Vol.I p.14.

¹⁴ He was a writer of Baku origin.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Bakuwi, *Talkhis al-athar wa aja'ib al-malik alqahhar*, Moscow, 1971, p.6.

¹⁶ *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind* compiled by Sulaiman al-Tajir in 851 A.D., is one of the early Arabic sources which mentioned Korea. It is became known to the public in 931 when Abu Zayid published the book with his own appendix.

the Turkic race and Tibet Further on along the coast of China, there are islands called Shilla".¹⁷

Mas'udi (d. 957)¹⁸ in *Golden Steppe and Gem Mines* (Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jauhar) – "Not much has been known about China further along its coast except that there is Shilla and its accompanying islands".¹⁹

Al-Idrisi (1018-1165) in *Trekking Adventure across Remote Regions* (Kitab Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ihtiraq al-afaq) – "We move from Sanji to Shilla islands. Shilla consists of many islands each closely adjacent..."²⁰

Qazwini (1203-1283)²¹ in *Awe of Creation and Strangeness of Beings* (Aja'ib al-makhlukat wa ghara'ib al-mawjudat) – "Shilla consists of many islands..."²²

Ibn Sa'id (1214-1286)²³ in *Geography Book on Seven Qimate Zones* (Kitab al-jughrafiya fi'l-aqalim al-sab'a) – "There are islands called Shilla (al-Sili) to the far east of the ocean. There is an island called Sanji to its east..."²⁴

Dimashqi (d. 1317)²⁵ in *Spirit of the Time on Awe of Continents and Oceans* (Nukhbat al-dahr fi aja'ib al-barr wa'l-bahr) – "Inclusive of the Shilla archipelago and the Ustikun State, the eastern region of China rolls on along the parallel of the Sea of China... According to

¹⁷ Sulaiman al-Tajir, *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l Hind* (French trs. and ed., J. Sauvaget), Paris, 1948, p. 73.

¹⁸ Of Baghdad origin, Mas'udi himself travelled to Central Asia, India and Zanzibar. He was very well informed not only in Islamic science but also in the heritage and vestiges of the ancients. He attempted to use the methodology of Muslim Felsefe and natural science in the examination of evidence and developed there from a science of history which was an influential part of the background of Ibn Khaldun.

¹⁹ Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jauhar*, Cairo, h.346 (957 A.D.), Vol. I, pp. 155-156; Vol. II, p.6.

²⁰ Al-Idrisi, *Kitab al-mushtaq fi ihtiraq al-afaq* (ed., E.J.Brill), NaiXJli, 1970, p.92.

²¹ Of Azerbaijan origin, the author went to Damascus in 1232 where he travelled to many places as a civil servant.

²² Zakarya Qazwini, *Aja'ib al-makhlukat wa ghara'ib al-mawjudat*, Cairo, 1957, p.105.

²³ Born at New Granada in Spain, Ibn Sa'id travelled to various countries of the Middle East. As a poet as well as historical geographer, his geographical works were influenced by Idrisi's books.

²⁴ Ibn Sa'id, *Kitab al-jughrafiya fi'l-aqalim al-sab'a*, Beirut, 1970, p.110.

²⁵ As a cosmographer, he lived near Damascus. He was a very pious Muslim whose life was full of faith in Islam. He is known as a better and more original geographer, even though he is generally in accord with al-Qazwini's.

Ptolemy²⁶ and other geographers, the Shilla archipelago consisting of six islands lie to the east of the Sea of China..."²⁷

Al-Nuwairi (d. 1332)²⁸ in *The Ultimate of Literature and Art* (Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab) – "Yonder China, there is a place called Shilla (al-Shili) consisting of six islands..."²⁹

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)³⁰ in *Book of Admonitions* (Kitab al-ibar) – "To the south of the first *iqlim* there is Waq Waq archipelago... To its east there is an archipelago called Silan..."³¹

Al-Maqrizi (1365-1442)³² – *Explanations and Reference about the Relics and Settlements* (Al-mawa'iz wa'l-i'tibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar) – "There is a country called Shilla composing six islands..."³³

Al-Najdi (of the fifteenth century)³⁴ in *book on Voyage Tedulique and Rule* (Kitab al-fawa'id fi usul al-bahr wa'l-qawa'id) – "There is the Shilla island to the east end of the equator..."³⁵

As surveyed so far, scholars such as Sulaiman, Mas'udi, Idrisi, Ibn Sa'id, Ibn Khaldun and Al-Najdi saw Shilla as a country of many islands as was clearly marked in the world map of Idrisi.

In particular: Dimashqi, Nuwairi and Al-Maqrizi described Shilla as consisting of six islands, without referring to a definite source.

Geographical accounts of the location of the Korean peninsula by Muslim geographers tended to become more definite later in the course of time. Ibn Sa' id marked the Sanji (or Sahnkhai) to the east of Shilla at east longitude 180 degrees while Abu'l Fida placed Shilla on

²⁶ Ptolemaios Klaudias (100-150?): An Egypt born mathematician, astronomer and geographer. His eminent books entitled *Geography* and *Al-Mageste* dominated and guided the geographical works of Arab scholars later.

²⁷ Shamsudin Dimashqi, *Kitab nukhabat al-dahr fi aja'ib al-barr wa'l-bahr*, Petersburg, 1865, pp.14, 18, 130-131.

²⁸ Of Egyptian origin, Al-Nuwairi was known for his encyclopedic knowledge.

²⁹ Ahmad Al-Nuwairi, *Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab*, Cairo, 1923, Vol.I, p.230.

³⁰ He was born in Tunis as a son of a Spanish Arab. He served as a high civil servant in several states of North Africa and Southern Spain. In the course of a pilgrimage to Mecca, he resided in Cairo as a lecturer of Al-Azhar University. He was the first scholar who studied the theory of historical development based on philosophy.

³¹ Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-ibar*, Beirut, 1956, Vol.L Muqaddirna, pp.95-96.

³² Born in Cairo, Al-Maqrizi served in various capacities as a professor, a judge and other official ranks.

³³ Al-Maqrizi, *Al-mawa'iz wa'l-I'tibar fi dhikr al-khitat wa'l-athar* (ed.,G. Wiet), Cairo, 1911, p.59.

³⁴ Al-Najdi was a professional navigator. His family was descended from Beduins of Central Arabian highlands, who later migrated to the sea coast of trucional Oman where Al-Najdi found his residence.

³⁵ Ahmad b. Majid al-Najdi, *Kitab al-fawa'id fi usul al-bahr wa'l-qawa'id*, London, 1981, pp.219-220.

north latitude five degrees and east longitude 170 degrees in the first climate zone. Abu'l Fazl(1551-1602) of the latest period saw the location of Shilla at east longitude 180 degrees and north latitude 8.5 degrees.

Muslim geographers were under the influence of the Ptolemaic geography of ancient Greece and after the twelfth century, they employed the theory of Biruni (d. 1051), an outstanding geographer of the Islamic world. As a result, they placed Shilla in the first *iqlim* (climate zone) above the equator, among the seven climate zones. Furthermore, Muslim merchants taking part in the east saw Shilla at the distance of a few days' sailing to the east from their maritime trade outposts, Quanzhou or Hangzhou. Their geographical location of Shilla such as east longitude 180 or 170 degrees in the category of the Far East; north latitude 5 or 8.5 degrees above the equator; or *iqlim* of the first climate zone suggest that they perceived Shilla not as a peninsula connected to the northeast of China but as an island country lying further along the east coast from Quanzhou or Hangzhou.

2. The People and Things of Shilla

Muslim scholars' knowledge about the Korean peninsula in medieval times was scanty. Worse, some was fantastic or fictional based on hearsay or folklore. Accounts from later times frequently quoted or recapitulated earlier writings without supportive documentation or footnotes. Nevertheless, a few historians and geographers made some worthwhile observations in their accounts of the state of the peninsula. Their knowledge of the Korean peninsula was far from accurate because of Shilla's geographical location at the extreme end of Asia. Nevertheless, the fact that records related to Shilla from the early Muslim viewpoint are still extant today is worth attention.

Ibn Khurdadbeh briefly remarked that, "Shilla is mountainous and is governed by many rulers (kings)..."³⁶

The depiction of Shilla as mountainous is accurate and the passage "many kings" appears to describe the ruling system of the time. Unified Shilla divided the old territories of Paekche and Koguryo into nine provinces each ruled by governors called either *ch'onggwan* or *todok* following the reign of King Wonsong.

³⁶ Ibn Khurdadbeh, op.cit, p.70.

Mas'udi gave an account of Shilla in his geography book *Learnings and General Survey* (Kitab al-tanbih wa' l-ishraf) combining an heroic episode of Macedonian king Alexander and passages from the Koran, "Among cultural spheres of the world, one that lies to the end of the east is China and Shilla. This ends at the Great Wall built by King Alexander against the onslaught from Gog and Magog races..."³⁷

This passage mixes up the Koran with historical facts. "Gog" and "Magog" races, referred to in the Koran, are a sort of Qafir (infidel). According to the Koran, they are descendants of Japhet, the son of the prophet Noah, living outside the Great Fortification in the northeast of Asia, attacking and destroying people and civilization within the Great Fortification. The faithful who were harassed by them asked Zul-Qarnain to build a fortification (iron gate) and eliminate them.³⁸ Many Muslim scholars identify Zul-Qarnain in the Koran as the King of Maceonia, Alexander (336-326 B.C.). Muslims of medieval times seem to have known about the existence of the Great Wall but they credit it to King Alexander, not the Emperor Qinshihuang (221-209 B.C.).³⁹ This may be attributable at an expanded interpretation of the passage in the Koran concerning the Great Fortification. Some other bibliographical records from the Middle East even state that the capital of Tang, Changan, was built by King Alexander.⁴⁰ On this point, Mas' udi included Shilla, along with China, in one of the world's cultural spheres and set them apart from infidel-marauders of the "Gog" and "Magog" races.

Al-Idrisi tersely observed that "There is a city called Kaiwa in Shilla..."⁴¹ We cannot positively identify the location and the meaning of "Kaiwa" but the name may refer to "Kyerim" which was used in India to indicate Shilla. Kyerim was also called Kyegwi. Muslim merchants were also actively seeking contact and initiating trade transactions with India and southeast China. In this sense, "Kaiwa" may have been close to the Chinese pronunciations of Kyerim or Kyegwi.⁴²

³⁷ Mas'udi, *Kitab al-tanbih wa'l-ishraf*, Baghdad, h.1357(1938 A.D.), p.24.

³⁸ See Abdullah Yusef Ali, *The Holy Quran* (8:83-97) and appendix VII, pp.760-765; M Siddik Gumus, *Tam Seadet-i Edebiyye*, Istanbul, 1984, pp.60, 1024.

³⁹ Ibn Battuta, *Voyages* (trs., C. Defremery et Sanguinetti), Paris, 1954, Vol.IV,p.274.

⁴⁰ 40) Kim Jong-Wee, *Untersuclu.Lgen zum Olina-Bild der Muslime in der Fruhislamischen*, Literatur, Bochurn, 1975, p.39

⁴¹ Al-Idrisi, op.cit, p.92.

⁴² Koh Byung-ik, *Tongashia-ui chont'ong-gwa kundaehwa* (Tradition and Modernization of the East Asia), Seoul, 1984, p.78

Accounts concerning the origin of the Korean race are found in the *Guidebook to China and India* completed by Sulairnan al-Tajir in 851 and the *Learnings and General Survey* by Mas'udi.

While Sulairnan described Shilla people merely as a white race⁴³, Mas'udi gave a more detailed account.

"Shilla people, along with those from China and from around China, belong to the seventh community. They are descendants of Noah's son Japhet and Japhet's son Amur. They all serve one king and use one tongue."⁴⁴

Sulaiman defined Shilla people as a white race possibly because in those days the races must have been classified into only white or black, with no intermediary concept of yellow. Mas'udi's classification of the Korean nation as descendants of Amur seemed to have been influenced by earlier scholars. Amur is the same as Gomer and according to Genesis in the Old Testament, Gomer was the eldest child of Japhet, a son of Noah. Mas'udi divided the races of the world into seven groups and assigned Shilla people to the seventh group along with the Chinese.⁴⁵

Sporadic accounts are found on the main products and mineral resources of the Korean peninsula. Most important source here is Ibn Khurdadbih's *General Survey of Roads and Kingdoms*, which gives a catalogue of trade goods shipped abroad from Shilla. Of eleven trade goods, silk, daggers, musk, aloe, saddles, marten skin, ceramics, sail cloth and cinnamon have been identified. Almost all Muslim scholars took special note of the abundant gold from Shilla. Al-Maqdisi (b. 946),⁴⁶ introducing Shilla as a country rich with silk and gold in his *Book of Genesis and History (Kitab al-bad wa'l-tarikh)*, said that Koreans use cloth embroidered with gold thread, wear silk dresses and use gold to make tableware.⁴⁷ Dimashqi wrote that the Shilla archipelago had a variety of mineral resources and rich terrains producing precious gems.⁴⁸ In particular, Sulaiman and Qazwini knew that a great number of

⁴³ Sulaiman al-Tajir, op.cit, p.73.

⁴⁴ Mas'udi, op.cit, *Tanbih...*, p.73.

⁴⁵ Seven Ummah (Community) divided by Mas'udi are as follow:

1st – Persian, Afghanistan

2nd – Semitic Chaldean of Syria, Iraq and Arabian peninsula

3rd – European Greeks including Slav and Frank

4th – Hamitic Lybian of Egypt and northwest African

5th – Turkish, Mongolian and Central Asian

6th – Indian

7th – Chinese and Korean

⁴⁶ Arab origin from Jerusalem, Al-Maqdisi wrote on the creation of the universe and history as a request of a local chief of Bast city of Sijistan, Southeast modern Iran.

⁴⁷ Al-Maqdisi, *Kitab al-bad wa'l-tarikh*, Baghdad, 1007, Vol.IV, pp.61-62.

⁴⁸ Dimashqi, op.cit, pp. 130-131.

outstanding hunting hawks, colored white and gray, inhabited Shilla.⁴⁹ Since hawks were prized by Arabs and people from the Middle East as indispensable for hunting, they were drawn to Shilla as a good source of quality hawks.

Some scholars also referred to the relations of Korea and China. Sulaiman remarked on the exchange of gifts between Tang and Shilla "Shilla people send gifts to the emperor of China They say that otherwise there will be no rains coming from heaven."⁵⁰

This seems to refer to the tributary trade between Tang and Shilla as a form of a public trade for the sake of political stability between the two. Again, referring to the implication that the emperor of China was the son of heaven and about the gifts from Shilla, they seemed to have vaguely perceived how Shilla people thought about the deity in heaven. Mas'udi also writes in his *Golden Steppe and Gem Mines* that Shilla people maintained good relations with Chinese people, with no interruption in a sustained, reciprocal trade of tributes.⁵¹ However, in another book, *Learnings and General Survey*, he also states that Koreans and the Chinese used the same language under the same ruler.⁵² Qazwini left behind a few passages very similar to those of Sulaiman concerning the Korea-China relations.⁵³

Most writings by Muslim scholars fall short of original and accurate descriptions of the Korean peninsula (Shilla) because they viewed it as part of China Their knowledge about the Korean peninsula did not derive from personal experience but came from exaggerated and beautified descriptions made by the Chinese, the Shilla people living in China or by Muslim colleagues who had visited Korea or through uncorroborated statements in older bibliographical sources. Therefore, we cannot expect to read objective descriptions or legitimate historical records of the time. Nevertheless, citations concerning Unified Shilla by scholars from a distant cultural sphere may raise some important questions.

3. Muslim Contacts with the Korean Peninsula

Of the twenty writings by eleven Muslim scholars of the medieval age concerning Shilla, ten sources by nine scholars, Ibn Khurdadbih, Mas'udi and others, contain records of the advance of Muslim onto the Korean peninsula and their activities.

⁴⁹ Sulaiman al-Tajir, op.cit, p.73.; Qazwini, op.cit, *Aja'ib al-makhluqat*, p.105.

⁵⁰ Sulaiman al-Tajir, op.cit, p.73.

⁵¹ Mas'udi, op.cit, *Muruj...*, p.156.

⁵² Mas'udi, op.cit, *Tanbih...*,p.73.

⁵³ Qazwini, op.cit., *Aja'ib al-makhluqat...*, p. 105.

The oldest extant record, being not only the first remark on the Korean peninsula but also a mention of the settlement of Muslims on the Korean peninsula is Ibn Khurdadbiḥ's *General Survey of Roads and Kingdoms*. The book, which first edition was probably in 846-847 and its second edition in 885, was something like an official guidebook of geography, and is the oldest source book in geography extant today. The book contains detailed information about major places of settlement and trading routes and trade goods in many parts of the world. It also contains comprehensive knowledge about East Asia (China, Korea, Japan) and the like.

Two passages about Muslims' advance to the Korean peninsula and their settlement there follows. Their contents are somewhat similar.

Beyond China, across from Qansu, there is a country with many mountains called Shilla. It abounds in gold. Muslims who happened to go there were fascinated by the good environment and tend to settle there for good. There is no way of knowing what lies beyond there...⁵⁴

Beyond China there is a country abounding in gold, called Shilla. Muslims who advanced there, captivated by its congenial surroundings, tend to settle there for good and do not think of leaving the place.⁵⁵

The second Muslim scholar who mentioned the settlement of Muslims in Korea after Ibn Khurdadbiḥ, was Ibn Rustah (d. 913). In *Catalogue of Precious Things*, he wrote with little explanation that beyond China there is a country called Shilla which abounds in gold and that Muslims, once settled there, do not think of leaving.⁵⁶ His expression is similar to Ibn Khurdadbiḥ's *General Survey of Roads and Kingdoms* concerning Shilla like Yaqubi, Ibn al-Fakih, Qudama, Jahiz, Jayhani and the like, Ibn Rustah seemed to have been very much influenced by the writings of Ibn Khurdadbiḥ.

There are more detailed and factual accounts on Muslims living in Shilla in two writings by Mas'udi, *Golden Steppe and Gem Mines and Learning* and *General Survey*, published one century later following *General Survey of Roads and Kingdoms*. Mas'udi identified some of the foreigners living in Shilla as Iraqis.

⁵⁴ Ibn Khurdadbiḥ, op.cit, p.70.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.180.

⁵⁶ Ibn Rustah, op.cit., pp.82-83.

"Across the coast of China, not much is known except for Shilla and its accompanying islands. Iraqis and some other foreigners settled there, choosing the place as their homeland. They do not intend to leave the place because of its fresh air, clean water, fertile earth, prospect for the increase of profit and income, rich minerals and rich gems. Those who leave the place are quite few."⁵⁷

Being from Iraq himself, the writer must have collected reliable information either from Iraqi colleagues who had visited the Korean peninsula or from Chinese well versed in Korea while he was touring China and South Asia. Mas'udi is known as a scholar who collected reliable information from well-versed and trustworthy people wherever he visited and recorded what he collected after analyzing it and crosschecking it against verifiable sources.⁵⁸

Again in *Book of Genesis and History* completed in 966 by Al-Maqdisi, there are certain passages which do not directly mention Shilla but describe a familiar country.

"As has been recorded in *General Survey of Roods and Kingdoms*, there is a country to the east of China. Those who ventured to this country did not want to leave it because of its fresh air, fertile land, clean water, excess of wealth and the hospitable accommodativeness of its inhabitants."⁵⁹

As the writer himself indicated, this passage is quoted from *General Survey of Roods and Kingdoms*. A number of scholars in later periods left behind writings with the same title, *General Survey of Roods and Kingdoms* and the first extant today was written, no doubt, by Ibn Khurdadbih.

Al-Idrisi (1058-1154), the most outstanding Muslim geographer of the medieval age, completed a geography book entitled *Treking Adventurer across Remote Regions* in 1154 under the sponsorship of the Norman king, Roger II (1101-1154). In this book he left a brief record that travellers to Shilla do not think about leaving under the charm of the pleasant climate.⁶⁰ Although it was the middle Koryo dynasty when Idrisi's book was completed, Idrisi himself and subsequent Muslim scholars continue to describe the Korean peninsula as Shilla. This indicates that later scholars did not rely on the collection of new information but merely quoted older sources indiscriminately.

⁵⁷ Mas'udi, op.cit, Muruj... pp. 155-156.

⁵⁸ M. Reinaud, *Arab Geography* (trs., S.M.Ali), Aligarh, 1960, p. 40.

⁵⁹ Al-Maqdisi, op.cit, pp.61-62.

⁶⁰ Al-Idrisi. op.cit, p.92.

An historian of the Mongolian period, Qazwini wrote *Awe of Creation and Strangeness of Beings* and also referred to Shilla in a similar fashion.

"Once having set foot on the island of Shilla, no Muslim left the country because of pleasant living conditions."⁶¹

The writings of Dimashqi, Al-Nuwairi and Al-Maqrizi are worth particular attention. To our surprise, they recorded that part of the Alawi race (clans or the followers of Ali) took refuge on the Korean peninsula, fleeing persecution from the Dynasty of Ummaiya (661-750).

Shamsudin Dimashqi in *Spirit of the Time on Awe of Continents and Oceans* expresses,

"In the sea above and to the east of the Ammonia archipelago and down under China, there is a country called Shilla consisting of six big islands...Alawis found shelter there fleeing from the persecution of the Dynasty of Ummaiya. Despite very difficult living conditions no one wanted to leave this country."⁶²

The fourth Caliph, Ali, who reigned from 656 to 661 during the Orthodox Caliphate Age (632-661), was killed and the power of Alawis, the followers of Ali, quickly weakened. His rival, Muawiya (r. 661-680) destroyed the Orthodox Caliphate Age and set up the Ummaiya Dynasty in Damascus. In order to survive, Ali factions dispersed, seeking political asylum in many regions. The Alawi faction was known to have gone as far as the southeastern coast of China. According to the writing by Nureddin Muhammad al-Awfi, at the time of the inauguration of the Ummaiya Dynasty, a great number of Muslim Shiites, in allegiance to Ali, formed their own community and lived collectively on Hainan island, south of China.⁶³ We have no way of knowing how accurate or how credulous the writing of Dimashqi may be. Nevertheless the fact that Shiite tribes in allegiance to Ali were living *en masse* on Hainan island and in the southeastern part of China around the seventh century raises a possibility that some of Ali followers could have advanced as far as the Korean peninsula in search of utopia.

The account by Dimashqi on exile and settlement on the Korean peninsula by the Alawis is also found in the writing of Al-Nuwairi in a similar context. There is a following passage in his book, *The Ultimate of Literature and Art*:

⁶¹ Qazwini, op.cit., *Aja'ib al-makhlūqat...*, p.105 .

⁶² Dimashqi, op.cit, *Nukhabat...*, p.131.

⁶³ Nureddin M. al-Awfi, *Jami al-hikayat*, Ayasofya, No.3167(old Turkish edition).

"Yonder to the east of China there are six islands. This is the Shilla Island. Its inhabitants consist of Alawis. They found shelter there escaping from the persecution by Ummaiyan people. According to what has been known, they dislike leaving this place, despite living difficulty, on account of fresh air and clean water."⁶⁴

Al-Maqrizi (1364-1442) also tells of the settlement of Alawis in Shilla in *his* book, *Explanations and Reference about the Relics and Settlements*.

"On the sea to the east of China, there is a country called Shilla consisting of six islands. In the early period of Islam, Alawis fled there and settled down for good in order to escape from persecution."⁶⁵

This description by Maqrizi seems to have been quoted from the earlier writings of Dimashqi and Nuwairi in its account on Shilla consisting of six islands and on the life in exile of the Alawis.

A number of scholars from the Islamic sphere in the medieval age, referring to the Korean peninsula (Shilla), remarked on the migration and the lasting settlement of Muslims on the Korean peninsula. Only Sulaiman was clear that none of his race had ever reached Shilla, and thus, none of them had any direct knowledge about Shilla.⁶⁶ Sulaiman was known to have travelled many times to India and China. And only Sulaiman said that none of his fellow Muslims had ever gone to Shilla. This seems to indicate that he could not confirm the settlement of Muslims on the Korean peninsula from what he heard from the Chinese or Muslims while he was there. In fact, no scholars ever referred to the return of any Muslims from Shilla, what induced the migration to the Korean peninsula by Muslims who were assumed to be Arabs or from Iran?

An absolute majority of Muslim scholars indicated the climate of four seasons, fresh air, clean water, fertile land, rich resources, profit in trade, in other words, outstanding natural surroundings and pleasant living conditions found on the Korean peninsula. In particular, many scholars mentioned the rich resource of gold on the Korean peninsula as a reason for settling there. In an exaggerated remark about the abundant gold resources of Shilla, Idrisi said that in Shilla even dogs and monkeys wear gold necklaces and its people wear clothes

⁶⁴ Al-Nuwairi, op.cit, p.230.

⁶⁵ Al-Maqrizi, op.cit, p.59.

⁶⁶ Sulaiman al-Tajir, op.cit, p.73.

woven with gold thread.⁶⁷ Such fantastic living conditions in Shilla must have seemed like a sort of utopia to the eyes of Middle Eastern people accustomed to the scorching desert and desolate prairies. Thus, some scholars even compared Shilla to Atlantis, "an island of eternity and fortune, "an utopia worshipped by Europeans and Arabs since old.

Ibn Sa'id (1214-1286) in *Geography Book on Seven, Qimate Zones* mentioned.

"To the east end of the ocean there is an island called Shilla. This place compares to the Island of Happiness (Khalidat) lying at the west end of the ocean. While Khalidat is not inhabited by men, Shilla is a fertile land inhabited by men."⁶⁸

Abu'l-Fida(1273-1331), who inherited the scholarly manner of Ibn Sa' id m *Guide Catalogue of Kingdoms* (Taqwin al- buldan) wrote.

"Shilla belongs to the first climate zone to the east of China, comparable to the Island of Happiness in the west. The place is more blessed, abounding in rich produce than the Island of Happiness of the west."⁶⁹

The utopian conception of Shilla held by Muslims in the Middle East instilled 2 yearning for Shilla, a land where even incurable diseases could be healed. In this context, Qazwini (1203-1283) said in *Record of Relic Places in Other Countries* (Athar al-bilad).

"Shilla – very beautiful country lying beyond China. Its inhabitants do not suffer from illness thanks to fresh air, clean water and fertile soil. Inhabitants look quite wholesome and healthy. Sick people are very rare. It is known that amber fragrance emanates when water is sprinkled there. There are hardly no epidemic nor diseases. There are almost no flies or harmful insects. Anyone who fell sick in other countires can have their sickness cured immediately if they come to Shilla. Muhammad Zakariya al-Razi (865- 925)⁷⁰ said that "Those who went there do not want to come back because of fresh air, pleasant living conditions and abundant gold. Well, God only knows."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Al-Idrisi, op.cit, p.92.

⁶⁸ Ibn Sa'id op.cit., p.110.

⁶⁹ Abu'l-Fida, *Taqwin al-buldan* (ed. and trs., M. Reinaud), Paris, 1883, p.12.

⁷⁰ Together with Avicenna (Ibn Sina), he is the most illustrative name in the history of Arabian medicine. He was native of Rayy, near Tehran.

⁷¹ Qazwini, *Athar al-bilad*, Beirut, 1860..

Bakuwi, a century later, left a similar record about Shilla in his *Summary of Accomplishments and Awe of Great Kings* written in 1402.

"The thirtieth – the last country of China, very beautiful place. Thanks to fresh air, sweet water and perfect sanitary conditions, people do not get sick but remain healthy and amber fragrance flows out from every household."⁷²

In short the early accounts tell us that Muslims began to venture to and to settle down on the Korean peninsula from the ninth century or before. Among them there were Iraqis or a section of the Alawi, the core followers of Ali. Most of them were assimilated into Korean society after settling there. They were captivated by the remarkable environmental and social conditions of the Korean peninsula. Among the work written by early Muslims concerning the Korean peninsula of the Unified Shilla and up to the fifteenth centuries, there are many passages whose credibility and historicity are doubtful because of fragmentary and indiscriminate quotation of earlier works. Nevertheless, some features of the geography location and living conditions of the Korean peninsula are depicted. There are definite accounts of the advent of Muslims made onto the Korean peninsula 150 years prior to Sino-Korean historical records. This offers a new impetus and prospective on this period. Elucidating the impact of Islam and its culture in Korea by Muslim settlers now emerges as a meaningful research objective. This will become clearer when reinforced by other records which are scattered in historical materials throughout Asia of later periods.

⁷² Bakuwi, op.cit., p.76.

B. Records of Korean Sources

1. Koryo in the 11th century

The earliest official documents of Korea showing the mutual relations between Koreans and Muslims in the Korean peninsula, might be Koryosa, a chronicle of the Koryo dynasty (936-1392 AD). Koryosa informs us of Muslims' advance to Korea and their commercial activities in the several chapters as followings.

In 1024,

"In the month, Yol-ra-za (Al-Razi) and a hundred people from Ta-shi country carne (to Korea) and presented their native products to king".⁷³

In 1025,

"In September, Hason(Hassan), Raza(Razi) and another hundred people from Tashi babarian countries carne and presented their native products to king."⁷⁴

Again in 1040, same source registers that a group of Arab merchants headed by Bona-ga (Barakah?) came to Korea and brought such rare commodities as mercury, ambergris (amber), myrrh and sapan-wood. As a return gesture, the Korean king bestowed gold, silver and linen on them when they left Korea.⁷⁵

Ta-shi was said to be derived from Tazi or Tajir, a Persian term to call Arab traders. The names of Ta-shi shown in the text are, without doubt, typical Muslim ones.⁷⁶

In general, Arab trade missions came to Korea with more than 100 members. For the purpose of business with Korean court, they extended their lines from China to Korea to which they were familiar to the sea-routes by frequent voyage. In the 11th century, the Koryo dynasty increased its trading activities with foreign countries officially or privately. It was about this time that Bok-ran-do port became an international trading point which was used by such traders from China, Japan and Arabia.

⁷³ [KORYOSA] Vol.1.5, 'Se-ga' Vol.15, 15th reign of King Hyun-jong.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16th reign of King Hyun-jong.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6th reign of King Jeong-jong.

⁷⁶ Lee Hee-Soo, op.cit, pp.79-80.

Many Arab merchants might come to Korea, probably under the guidance of Chinese or Koreans at first, and by themselves afterward. During their stay in Korea, they were treated as important guests by Koryo king and returned with Korean products given by the king.

2. Koryo under Mongol Dominance and Early Chosun Period

When the Mongols controlled over Korea in 1270, many Muslims who had exerted their ability in most policy-making and administrative posts under the Mongol regime⁷⁷, came to Korea accompanied by the Mongols. During the Koryo Dynasty, particularly the Yuan (1270-1368) intervention to Koryo, we understand through detailed investigation of Korean historical references, many Muslims settled down permanently and assimilated to Korean society thanks to the preferential treatment toward Muslims and profitable economic advantages.

One example of Muslims' naturalization to Korean society is the case of "Samga" who is believed to be an Uygur Muslim came to Korea as a chamberlain for a Mongol princess, who later became a queen of the Koryo dynasty. He naturalized to Korea after marriage with a Korean woman and he is now known as the originator of Chang clan of Doksu whose communities are prosperous even in the present times.⁷⁸

Muslims in Korea formed their own communities in the Koryo capital and its outskirts, where they could keep on their own culture and religious tradition (Islam). They even possessed own shops selling native products. Further they built Mosques called "Ye-kung".⁷⁹ Religious leaders were chosen in the Muslim communities to perform act of worship in accordance with the Islamic law and customs. From time to time, the Muslim leaders had exceptional honor to be invited to attend court ceremonies where they practiced their own religious rituals such as Quran recitation to pray for king's long life and the prosperity of the country.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See M Rossabi, "The Muslim in the early Yuan Dynasty", China under Mongol Rule, Princeton, 1981.

⁷⁸ As an Uygur origin, Samga was thoroughly discussed by Lee Hee-Soo, op.cit, pp.127-137.

⁷⁹ Lee Hee-Soo. op.cit, p.147.

⁸⁰ [CROSON WANGJO SILROK(Chronicle of the Chosun Dynasty)], Vol.13, 23, 31.(King T'ae-jong, Se-jong, etc.)

But under the assimilation policy of the Chosun dynasty (1392 -1910), Muslim settlers in Korea who had secured quite high social and economic positions, shed gradually their native attire, custom and rituals to which they had adhered for about 150 years.⁸¹

In spite of the negative environments for the Muslim upgrading in Korea under the assimilation policy of the Chosun dynasty, high cultural and scientific achievements by Muslims such as astronomy, calendar science, medicine, musical and scientific instruments were introduced and utilized with wide range in Korean society.

According to the official chronicles of the Chosun dynasty, Korean lunar calendar system which was nation-widely used throughout the Chosun dynasty, was completed based on the theory of Islamic astronomy and calendar method.⁸²

In addition, the advanced Islamic science might contribute to new invention of such various scientific instruments in Korea in the middle of the 15th century, as celestial globe, water clock, sundial, astronomic clock, rainfall gauge, etc.⁸³

With collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the Ming dynasty was established in China, while the Chosun newly appeared in Korea replacing the Koryo. By the influence of political change and new government's conservative policy which had concentrated on Nee-Confucianism as a national ideology in Korea as well as external change in commercial dominance in the East Asia from Muslims Western maritime powers, Muslims' contacts to the Korean peninsula and their cultural and commercial activities became decreased.

III. Muslim-Korea Relations in Modern Times

1. Abdurashid Ibrahim's Korea Report in 1909

Islamic activities in the East Asian region became again vigorous with coming of some religious missions who were dispatched officially or secretly to China and Japan as a part of Pan-Islamic policy of the Osman Sultan II Abdul Hamid. Abdurashid Ibrahim Efendi, one of patriotic Pan-Islamic from Russia, came to Korea to initiate certain Islamic propagation, but his efforts were not successful because of several obstacles. Nevertheless his travel account named *Alem-i Islam* (Islamic World), is regarded as a very valuable resource for the modern

⁸¹ Ibid., 9th reign of King Se-jong.

⁸² Lee Hee-Soo, op.cit, pp.152-161.

⁸³ Ibid., pp.161-164.

history of Korea to show the real situation of Korean society with a Muslim's point of view just before Korean annexation to Japan in 1910.⁸⁴

2. Muslim Community of Turks in Korea (1920-1950)⁸⁵

Korean contacts with Muslims in 1920s were started with coming of Russian Turks to Korea who had escaped from pressure of the Russian Bolshevik regime. Around 200 peoples of Russian Muslim Turks, mostly Kazan Tatars, made permanent settlement in Korea.

Even before 1920s, the emigration of Russia-based Muslims, appeared in Korea for the first time in the last era of the 19th century. The Muslim merchants in Manchuria, who had settled down with the start of the Chinese Eastern Railway project in 1898, frequently began to come to northern part of Korea. As peddlers they were selling honey, soap, dried fish, cloths, etc. in the cities and small towns of Korea near Chinese boundary. A few of them was believed to be settled down in border area of Korea.

The second influx of Muslim Turks into Korean territory began with the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Among many Turks of various races who had emigrated to the Chinese Manchuria, some of them succeeded in entering into Korea under Japanese occupation. In addition, some Turkic soldiers of the Russian army and Turkic war prisoners in the Siberian labour camp, escaped to Korea for refugee or settlement.

The last and main influx to great extent of Muslim Turks into Korea happened in 1920s. With the help of the Japanese government-general in Korea, more than 200 peoples began to settle down Korea. As the number increased, Turks in Korea seemed to be scattered to every corner of the country.

Till 1950, they lived in Korea preserving their own culture and religion in their communities called "Mahall-i Islamiye". They purchased a second-floor building in Seoul and used it as prayer hall as well as cultural center and school. But these Turkic Muslims who had enjoyed themselves by the profitable regional trade between Manchuria-Korea-Japan and obtained high social position under the protection of the Japanese, were faced to emigrate to Turkey and other countries during the political turmoil between 1945-1950. Thanks to these Muslim Turks, some factors of Islamic and Turkic culture were introduced into Korean society.

⁸⁴ Korean parts of [Alem-i Islam] were translated into Korean Language by Lee Hee-Soo, op.cit., pp.209-244.

⁸⁵ See Lee Hee-Soo, *Islam ve Turk Kulturunun Uzak Dogu'ya Yayilmasi*, *Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi*, Ankara, 1988, pp.234-258.

3. Korean War and Formation of Modern Korean Muslim Community

Today's Korean Muslim community appeared in 1955 by another group of Turkish Muslims who had participated in the Korean War (1950-53) under the banner of the United Nations. These Turkish soldiers, besides their duties to defend peace and freedom, propagated their religion by which the first Korean Muslims opened new era for Islam in Korea.

In the Islamic activities, the great contribution made by Abdulgafur Karaismailoglu and Zubeyir Koch, Imams of the Turkish brigade, was particularly remarkable. Indeed, they initiated wide range of Islamic movement in Korea. They built temporary Mosque for daily prayers, and regular lectures on Islam were made by them. By dint of Turkish Imams, new converted Koreans formed "The Korea Islamic Society" in 1967 by which they came into contact positively with world Muslims.⁸⁶

Since then, Islam started to spread in Korea but in utmost slowness. In the succeeding years, many organizations and institutions in a number of Islamic countries show great interest in Korean Muslims. Till the 1960s, however, the relations were mainly focused on the South-East Asian countries like Malaysia and Pakistan. From the 1970s, Korea suddenly paid full attention on the importance of Islamic countries, particularly with advent of Oil Crisis.

In the middle of 1970s, Islam has new era for rapid development in Korea when many Arab and Islamic countries opened their arms and extended wide range of assistance to Korean Muslims. The Seoul Central Mosque and Islamic Center built in 1976 is the symbol of Korea-Arab cooperation. At the same time, Korea Muslim Federation has emerged as a unique and legal integration body for Islamic propagation in Korea.

To establish Central Mosque became a turning point for rapid Islamic spread. 5,000 Muslims in 1975 increased to 10,000 in 1979. The second and third mosques are completed in Pusan and Kwangju provinces in respective. Now in Korea there are 5 mosques with 35,000 Muslims.

⁸⁶ See Ibid., pp.296-300.

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