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Relazioni

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A misconstrued link: Europe and the Economic History of Islamic Trade

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INTRODUCTION[1]

There is hardly a social and economic historian of medieval Islam who has not at one point or another, pondered the question of the Islamic economic decline at the end of the Middle Ages. Investigations of economies in decline usually find a combination of factors: decline in productivity, changing mentalities and social interaction, followed or accompanied by a decline in trade, which is in itself and of itself an outcome of changing conditions.[2] In the case of the Islamic world, while not everyone draw a direct link between trade and economic decline, there seems to be a consensus that a correlation exists between the sorry state of both the trade and the economy. The links range from directly blaming Islamic trade for being an inferior economic organization, claiming that European trade was the direct cause of the economic decline of the Middle East, or claiming that it caused it, or at least contributed to a process already in progress, and that in any case, it was either a reflection of it or consistent with it.[3] The premise that Islamic trade was at its highest point during the early Middle Ages, seventh-tenth centuries, the first centuries of Islamic history proper, which were seen as the Islamic lands' political, social and economic peak, also contributed to the formulation of this symmetry of early success as opposed to the later decline of trade in the fourteen-fifteenth centuries.[4] My ultimate goal is to write a new synthetical and analytical social and economic history of Islamic trade between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries, which is long overdue, but I propose here to enter the topic by the back door so to speak, by investigating the decline.[5] In this paper I would like to offer some reflections on the anatomy of the decline in Islamic trade, the dangers of ignoring institutions, and the role attributed to Europe in it, a subject which I have labeled "misconstrued link". By this I mean to a set of historical arguments about structures which were offered as a rationalization of the decline of Islamic trade, and how and why historians have linked them to Europe. While an analysis of structures and institutions, especially property rights, is finally being applied to the medieval Islamic economic history, problems in the application of the theory to the evidence, or lack thereof continue to plague the discussion.[6] While the new approach provides a more sophisticated analysis of this history, a scrupulous combination of the two is necessary. In the next few pages I propose to look at four different rationalizations for the decline in trade against new historical evidence and analysis, with the goal of getting a more accurate picture of the historical role of Islamic trade.

What is "Islamic trade"? For this paper I have adopted the most comprehensive definition of the term. It refers to the movement of goods by Muslims and non-Muslims from and to lands under Islamic rule. Included in this category are the long distance exchanges of goods between Islamic lands and non-Islamic lands, the so called "international" trade, also sometimes referred to as the long distance trade, which took place between Europe and Asia and the Islamic lands, using maritime and overland routes, as well as regional trade, which comprised the exchange of goods between neighboring regions living under Islamic rule. Thus Islamic trade could be carried on by Muslims and non-Muslims living in the Islamic lands as well as by Christians and Jews using non-Muslim boats for shipping goods from Europe, as long as its destination was, or the goods it carried originated in the Islamic lands. The essential premise of this paper is that the "Islamic system" provided a distinct legal, political, social and economic framework for trade and traders, which over hundreds of years provided a component of the Braudelian *longue durée* structures.[7]

Three main categories of sources, literary, notarial and archeological are used in the study of Islamic trade, , and I will refer to all three in the following pages. The "notaries" usually referred to in the studies are the European ones, mostly Italian, Spanish, French archival documents, which Europe-based historians have used for studying European trade with Islamic lands. However, Islamic and Arabic notarial documents are also available and while not so abundant as the European ones, are being used with benefit. The Arabo-Jewish sources, mostly the Geniza letters and documents bridge the categorical gap between notarial and literary sources. Literary sources would include Italian and Arabic mercantile manuals, and a variety of Arabic sources, including chronicles, and mostly geographers, but also the legal manuals, which may also be included in the notarial category. The growing number of archeological sites being excavated today include finds of artifacts, and mostly, coins. Arabic archival trade documents similar to the Italian notaries' series are to all intents and

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[1] Author's note: This is a work in progress - please do not quote without permission. The space limitations imposed by the presentation's format makes it impossible to develop here the full scope of the subject matter, neither could the entire scope of the evidence be displayed.

[2] The economies of Venice and Spain in the seventeen centuries are a case in point. See J. DE VRIES, *Economy of Europe in the Age of Crisis,* Cambridge 1976 (Cambridge University Press), pp. 25-29.

[3] A detailed discussion of the decline by Andrew Ehrenkreutz, Claude Cahen, Eliyahu Ashtor will follow.

[4] M. COOK, *Economic Developments,* in *The Legacy of Islam*, J. SCHACHT, C.E. BOSWORTH eds., Oxford 1979 (Oxford University Press), pp. 210-244.

[5] Since I have written a synopsis of the economic history of Islamic trade for the entry "Tidjāra" in the Encyclopedia of Islam, published in 1995 (M. SHATZMILLER, *Economic History of Trade in the entry "Tidjāra*, in *New Encyclopedia of Islam,* 1995), it became obvious to me that a new approach to the subject is mandatory.

[6] EADEM, *Islamic Institutions and Property Rights: The Case of the 'Public Good' Waqf*, in "Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient", 44, 2001, 1, pp. 44-74. See my forthcoming book, EADEM, *Her Day in Court: Women's property Rights and Islamic Law in Fifteen Century Granada*, Cambridge 2006 (forthcoming, Mass. Harvard University Press). See the discussion ahead.

[7] In his book on the Indian Ocean trade, K. N. Chaudhuri speaks admiringly of meeting Braudel, his wife, and the inspiring methodology of the using the sea as a unifying framework for what was going on the land. However, Braudel's concept of the Islamic cultural and legal framework of trade was incomplete. See K.N. CHAUDHURI, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750,* Cambridge 1985 (Cambridge University Press), pp. xi-xiii, 1-6.

purposes non-existent. The newly discovered Quseir documents of business correspondence and items are the exception which proves the rule.[8] While documents, either papyri or paper have been preserved and are found in different locations in the Middle East, Spain or European archives, those directly related to trade are revealing but insufficient for quantification. Thus, the main obstacle in writing the economic history of Islamic trade in the medieval period, especially in documenting the decline, lies in our dependence on the Italian archives for any quantitative approach. The lack of anything resembling the European archives to provide us with a consecutive series of numbers, results in the lack of quantitative studies for any other aspect of trade and in fact exposes the weakness of any estimates made on the basis of the European material alone.[9] This makes the existence of the Geniza documents very precious but its use also requires caution. Most of these documents date from the eleventh-twelfth centuries and are centered on Egypt. They describe a network of Jewish traders using, to a very large extent, Jewish law to regulate their transactions with fellow Jews. While there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the picture they provide of the geography of the trade, the goods exchanged and the general conditions, the structures that emerge are those of a Jewish rather than an Islamic network at any given moment. While this is in itself and of itself an important structure of the organization of Islamic trade, it should be taken as such. The picture of their moving hub, from Qairawan in North Africa to Egypt in the tenth century is another unique trait, not yet perfectly explained by political or economic shifts.[10] What was right for this particular case might not have been typical for the rest of the Islamic lands where traders worked within the framework of Islamic law.

ANATOMY OF A DECLINE

The historiography of the thematic triangle, Islam, trade and Europe, is frequently debated. The role of trade in Europe's economic decline is probably the most central to medieval history and at least as notorious as the Braudel's thesis. Otherwise known as "the Pirenne thesis" it has associated the role played by the Islamic expansion in the Mediterranean with a supposed purposely elimination of its trade, thus leading to Europe's feudalism among other things.[11] Few Orientalists have rushed to the defense of Islam since this most important historical link was made by Henri Pirenne in 1922, naming the cessation of Mediterranean trade as the culprit. No one actually questioned the premise, namely the causal effect of the Muslim conquest and the decay of Europe and commerce, until fifty years later.[12] Among them were Claude Cahen who focused on the methodological aspects of the role of Muslim coinage in the commercial relations between the Near East and Europe,[13] Ashtor, who explained that the decline of commerce resulted from the general maritime insecurity prevailing in the Mediterranean at the time because of the Islamic-Byzantine warfare,[14] and Ehernkreutz, whose view was that the new Muslim economy lost interest in the markets to the north of the Mediterranean,"Indeed, one of the most significant results of the Arab victory on economic history was a natural, organic redirection of commercial activities in the sensitive area of the Near East, brought about by a specific fiscal policy of the new regime, and by the ensuing emergence of lucrative markets within the borders of the Caliphate."[15] The Ehrenkreutz' thesis suggests that the new Arab immigration constituted a potent consumer class and increased economic productivity, although his paper is far from substantiating these claims, especially "the boom in the housing industry".[16] He uses some general facts about the development of the inland towns which replaced the coastal ones and the monetary reform which released a large amount of coins into the economy without triggering inflation as evidence. This affected the inter continental commerce: "...in view of the rapid growth of local market demand, the long-distance merchants had small need for the markets of Western Europe. ....(the merchants) could meet their profit requirements by directing their shipments or caravans to Damascus, Fusţāţ, Baghdād or Qairawān."[17] It was this normal economically motivated re-orientation of trans-continental commerce which precipitated a catastrophic decline in the trans-Mediterranean trade. While several of the previous premises, in particular those dealing with the demographic effect of the Arab migration on the Middle Eastern economy and markets, are based on sheer speculation, both Islamists and Europeans alike recognized the power of trade as a most powerful economic factor in deciding the fate of continents and societies.[18]

These very same authors also discussed the decline of Islamic trade. Their theories, as well as those of several others, refer to inadequate "Islamic" structures. I will first present the arguments of four protagonists and then proceed to challenge each of their arguments by the historical evidence. The first case I will look at is the analysis offered by Claude Cahen in an article entitled Quelques mots sur le déclin commercial du Monde

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[8] LI GUO, *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century*, in Leiden 2004 (E. J. Brill).

[9] See the tables drawn by Ashtor for the Levant trade. E. ASHTOR, *Levant Trade in the later Middle Ages,* Princeton 1983 (Princeton University Press).

[10] On this see Michael Brett quoted later.

[11] H. PIRENNE, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, in "Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire", 1, 1922, pp. 77-86.

[12] Summary in A. EHRENKREUTZ, *Another Orientalist's Remarks Concerning the Pirenne Thesis*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 15, 1972, pp. 94-104.

[13] CL. CAHEN, *Quelques problèmes concernant l'expansion économique musulmane au Haut Moyen Age*, in *L'Occidente e l'Islam nell'alto Medioevo. Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Mediovo, 12, 2-8 aprile 1994*, Spoleto1965, pp. 391-432.

[14] E. ASHTOR, *Quelques observations d'un Orientaliste sur la thèse de Pirenne*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 13, 1970, pp. 166-194.

[15] A. EHRENKREUTZ, *Another Orientalist's Remarks*, cit., p. 98.

[16] *Ibid*., p. 101.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 104.

[18] See the latest contribution: R. HODGES, D. WHITEHOUSE, *Muhammed Charlemagne & and the Origins of Europe*; *Archeology and the Pirenne thesis,* Oxford 1983 (Duckworth).

Musulman à la fin du Moyen Age, published in 1970.[19] This is one of the more accusatory papers addressing the trade question, though I personally think it is somewhat tainted by Cahen's Marxist Communist disdain for the Islamic merchant whom he described as bent on speculation and gain. His main thesis is that **Islamic Trade failed because it was never linked to production**. Cahen argued that while the land remained the major source of wealth almost everywhere, and while commerce did not affect all the aspects of the economy, the early Islamic economy was a mercantile one in comparison to the societies which surrounded it in time and space.[20] However, the problem with the Islamic "économie marchande" was that for a long time the Muslim world possessed plenty of specie and precious metals and merchants did not need to worry about how to pay for the luxury items they bought.[21] As a result no locally manufactured Islamic items were exchanged and there was no encouragement to produce any. In comparison, the Italian traders suffering from lack of specie had to sell local products in order to buy goods and were obliged to put the onus on exporting of merchandise to pay for their purchases, hence the development of Italian manufacturing.[22] "The idea of feeding commerce by a surplus in production, whether in order to ensure or increase the spectrum of labour and the exploitation of resources, or simply to balance import and export, which is elementary to each modern state, probably never inspired any state in the medieval Near East."[23] Production was never encouraged to go beyond its optimal regional level, techniques were sufficient to satisfy the needs of the local markets and the expectations of interior sale, and there was no need to aspire to a higher standard of production.[24]

As if that was not bad enough, Cahen was adamant in his belief that trade could not function without the State's blessing, even though it was not necessarily organized and conducted by the State. He blamed the structures of the Islamic political regimes for the failure of trade, claiming that **the Islamic state and the Islamic aristocracy shared a flawed attitude to Trade.** The Islamic regimes adopted an attitude which limited the *économie marchande*. Trade was actually discouraged by the State, which saw in the export of either resources or manufactured items the impoverishment of the Muslims, an act which deprived the State from providing properly for its citizens. The State and the aristocracy saw trade only as a tool for providing them with luxury items. The merchant class did not belong to the state's ruling class and their interests neither prevailed nor overlapped those of the political élite. There was no protection extended to traders. Moving to the fourteenth century Cahen claimed that the *Mamluk*s of Egypt could have stopped the Portugese and protected Islamic trade if they had really wanted to, but they lacked the conviction to do so. Finally, **the Great Discoveries were not the major reason for the decline** which occurred much earlier than the fourteenth century and **it is not the Islamic economy which declined but the entire previous system.** The Islamic decline began in the eleventh century, at the same time as that of Byzantium, and before Turkish tribes completely overran Asia minor. Cahen suggests that both Muslim and Byzantine merchants left the Mediterranean shipping to the Italians even before competition forced them to do so, suggesting that there might have been there a financial advantage in doing this. That means that the whole system collapsed and that Islam was not a victim - or certainly not the only victim if there ever was one. On the contrary, all the South-West Europe economies could be regarded as victims.[25]

A second analysis is provided by **Timur Kuran** in his paper "The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East," this too highlights the defective structure within which Islamic trade was conducted, this time the institutional-legal deficiencies.[26] Kuran points to the Islamic inheritance law as posing the main obstacle to the development of trading institutions. While Cahen stated that neither the Islamic **religion** nor the Islamic **law** had anything to do with the structural deficiencies of the Islamic trade, Timur Kuran believes otherwise. He speaks about the failure of Islamic commerce to evolve in the direction of the European commercial institutions. He identifies the Islamic inheritance law as the main culprit in the demise of commercial partnerships as the large and fixed number of heirs imposed by the Qur'anic prescription makes any investment in trade vulnerable to requests to dismantle it and susceptible to ending prematurely. That means that at any given time an heir could request a parent's share, regardless of the state of the investment. The most harmful effect of the law was on partnerships because it meant that any partnership could come to an end when one of the partners died.[27] Using the statistics which I have provided in my *Labour* book on the division of labour within each of the different sectors of the economy, Kuran concluded that the fact that there was no increase in the number of commerce occupations while the number of the bureaucracy, legal and religious occupations did increase, corresponded to "the persistent smallness and simplicity of the typical Middle Eastern partnership." [28]

Two other works address the link between trade and decline, this time using more European data as evidence, and placing less weight on structures. The first is a widely quoted article, written by Henry Miskimin, Robert Lopez and Avram Udovitch: "England to Egypt, 1350-1500: Long-term Trends and Long-distance

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[19] CL. CAHEN, *Quelques mots sur le déclin commercial du monde musulman à la fin du moyen age*, in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M.A. COOK, Oxford 1970, pp. 31-37.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 31.Mercantile economy might not convey the essence of économie marchande but is close enough.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[24] Loc. Cit.

[25] But see D. JACOBY, *Byzantine Trade with Egypt from the Mid-tenth Century to the Fourth Crusade*, in "Thesaurismata", 30, 2000, pp. 25-77. Reprinted in IDEM, *Commercial Exchange` Across the Mediterranean,* Aldershot 2005 (Ashgate Variorum).

[26] T. KURAN, *The Islamic Commercial Crisis: Institutional Roots of Economic Underdevelopment in the Middle East*, in *USC Center for Law, Economics & Organization*, Research paper No CO1-12 , 2002, pp. 1-49.

[27] Islamic law, "specifically the law of Islamic partnerships and its inheritance system" is nonetheless blamed for the Islamic commercial crisis of the modern period. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 18.

Trade".[29] The article charts the comparative economic evolution of England, Italy and Egypt after the Black Death, focusing on the monetary crisis at both ends of the trade route. For his part, in the section on Italy, Lopez blamed the Middle Eastern trade for the harsh monetary conditions afflicting that country. In spite of gold imports from Europe and West Africa, the Italian supply of gold was barely adequate for the purchases that the Italians made in the Middle East.[30] The Levant trade drained Italy of an ever growing amount of gold with Venice being the principal pipeline. Virtually every boat going to Egypt and Syria carried hard cash as such as Western commodities. Each of the 'big four' tried to fight this by producing cloth, selling slaves and producing glass, timber and metals, but as Lopez admits each of the Italian cities pursued the already existing drift towards production of, and commerce in, luxury goods for a small élite.

Udovitch, on the other hand, describes a Maml_k Egypt in total economic disarray, manifested above all in a collapsing monetary system. Gold and silver currency became so scarce that copper coins dominated the internal circulation and on all levels of transactions.[31] The gold standard was abandoned and then taken again, silver was rapidly disappearing from circulation, to be replaced by copper and Egypt's irregular gold coinage was progressively displaced by a massive influx of Italian ducats and florins. All attempts by the Egyptian rulers to mint gold coins of the same weight as the Italian coins, failed. The reason, according to Udovitch, was Egypt's unfavorable position in the international trade, and the trade imbalance.[32] While the only source of gold was the spice trade paid for by the Italians, the luxury consumption on the part of the Egyptian élite continued unabated. Fur coats and slaves were examples of the luxury items which Udovitch said were going to Egypt. Payments for both these items went to the Black Sea and drained Egypt of its gold. Even if the spice trade was a gold mine, Egyptians consumed spices themselves, so not all the revenue it brought in remained in Egypt, the rest being spent on the purchase of slaves. However, Udovitch also discovered that the income of merchants rose almost six times more than that of every other class. Where did all the gold from Europe and the Middle East go? Udovitch's answer "To India," an answer shared by consensus. The India trade siphoned off gold from both Europe and the Middle East. What happened to this gold in India is question which can not be dealt with in the paper but is of course of great relevance to the question of the role of trade in bringing down entire industries. Actually, the relevant sources show that some of Indian monetary surplus founds its way back to the Middle East, for the annual purchase of Arabian horses and to pay the salaries of mercenary troops and not simply turned into jewelry and removed from circulation.[33] The origin of this analysis lies in the theory concerning the effect of trade on the economy of Europe and in particular on the monetary system, and the availability of money in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which is discussed so well in a classic article written by A. Watson.[34] There he states that the Southern and Western Mediterranean Christian states, Italy and France " were the most vulnerable" to the pull on Europe's silver exercised by the Arab world.... As silver continued to be drawn out of Europe for three centuries, the damage was considerable. ..This is the price they had to pay for being intermediaries between East and West."[35] The role of trade in this is clear: it was the mechanism and the tool through which monetary disorder and instability ocurred. In the case of the Muslim countries "already in decline" it hastened their downward slide.

The last article linking the economic decline of the Islamic lands to trade examined here is by Ashtor, "L'exportation des textiles occidentaux dans le Proche Orient musulman au bas Moyen Age (1370-1517)".[36] Ashtor seems to agree that the Egyptian gold disappeared as a result of the Maml_k officers buying luxury items and on the *nafaqa*, cash payments made by the sultan to his Maml_ks, and hoarded away.[37] However, he also suggests that the massive export of cheap cloth by the Italians and its distribution in the Middle East markets in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries caused of the local industries' ruin. On one hand the Europeans bought the raw materials, mostly cotton, to supply the European industries and thus deprived the local industries of raw material, on the other hand, they practiced "dumping", flooding the markets with cheap cloth. The Muslim manufacturing sector, already suffering from stagnation and aversion to technological innovation, was now deprived both of raw material and markets; it could not compete.

To sum up, the Ashtor theory has brought us a full circle. From the Pirenne thesis that the Muslims' intention was to choke Europe in the eighth century by redirecting trade away, Europe had now succeeded in choking the Middle East by bringing its own trade to bear upon it. Italy's role in this scenario was Machiavellian: it was an intentional policy of flooding the markets with cheap textile imports from Northern Europe, Flanders, England, Burgundy and Germany, intended to ruin the Levantine manufacturing capacity by creating dependency. The main thrust of the several analyses reviewed here is negative. The fact that Islamic trade declined in the Middle Ages was never in doubt according to any of these authors, even though they might disagree on the direct cause. Some see it as a lengthy, unavoidable process due to failing structures and performance, while others see a defined moment where the decline occurred, some in the eleventh century, others in the aftermath of the Black Death, the fourteenth -fifteenth centuries. According to the most common consensus, Islamic trade could not perform well because it was the sum of its deficiencies, a dysfunctional

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[29] *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M. COOK, London 1970, pp. 139-15578-93.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.
[33] J.F. RICHARDS, *Outflows of Precious Metals in Early Islamic India*, in *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, ed. J.F. RICHARDS, Durham NC 1983, pp. 198-201.
[34] A.M. WATSON, *Back to Gold - and Silver*, in "Economic History Review", 20, 1967, 1, pp. 1-34.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 33. Also John Munro's paper to this meeting.
[36] E. ASHTOR, *L'exportation des textiles occidentaux dans le Proche Orient musulman au bas Moyen Age (1370-1517)*, in *Studi in memoria di Federigo Melis*, Naples 1978 (Giannini Editore), 2, pp. 302-377, 308. Reprinted in *East-West Trade in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. B.Z. KEDAR, London 1986 (Variorum Reprints).
[37] E. ASHTOR, *Les métaux précieux au Proche-Orient et la balance des payments*, Paris 1971 (S.E.V.P.E.N.), pp. 99-108.

system suffering from the inadequacies of its failing manufacturing structures to produce surplus, failing monetary and transportation systems, lack of support for traders from the political rulers and institutions, and a victim of a rigid legal system. In the economic decline which followed the Black Death, Islamic trade, whether practiced by Europeans or Muslims not only failed to redress the balance of payments but served as a tool in its own undoing and that of the manufacturing infrastructures. This is a grim scenario which I will try to contest and correct.

THE MANUFACTURING CAPACITY

The question here is two fold: could the economy produce a surplus, and was there an economic motivation for doing so?

Given that the lack of numbers precludes a quantitative study, the first question, that of capacity, will have to be answered through literary evidence. First, direct textual evidence of organized production geared solely for export at an early stage, and second, quantification of trade names in the literary sources which shows a higher division of labour and specialization in the manufacturing sector of the Islamic economies during the period in question, allowing a postulate of surplus production initiated by demand.[38] To begin with the first argument, that of the early period being an "économie marchande", the premise suggested by Cahen. While all indicators, historical and economic, pointed to an Asian oriented Islamic economy and society, rather than a European oriented one, but the mercantile economy image would be based solely on the import of a few luxury items to Baghdad, the center of the Abbasid empire in the eighth century, over the long distance route. I would urgue that such trade could hardly qualify as mercantile economy and that in fact the Islamic trade in this phase consisted not merely of imported luxury items but rather everyday items used by larger segments of the urban society. In fact a very active trade was taking place between Islamic regions. The list of items traded at this time shows that they originated in different areas but mostly in the former Sasanid lands, and were not restricted to luxury goods, but instead consisted of local raw materials, mined ores or manufactured metal utensils, agricultural products and foodstuffs, textile and leather goods, which were manufactured and finished in the Eastern and Northern regions of the Caliphate. As early as the ninth century, Islamic trade was already fueled by regional products, and handled locally manufactured items.[39] Cloth came from eastern and northern Iran, silk, silk products and carpets from Samarqand, Merv and Nishapur. Rayy and Yazd were the main centers of cotton manufacturing, while skins and hides were traded from Transoxania, Hamadan or Khawarizm, soap was manufactured in Balkh and perfumes came from Fars and Adjerbaidjān. The Northern Persian regions also supplied the Caliphate lands with non-perishable foodstuffs, honey, sesame oil, grease, dried fruit, and dried fish. Precious metals, silver more than gold, were traded together with wood from the Caspian forests and minerals, sal ammoniac and petroleum from Baku. The nature of the luxury trade, as described in the traders' manual of the pseudo JāḤiz,. and the travelers' guides, included slaves, furs, spices, rare metals, fancy textiles, foodstuffs, precious stones, and even rare animals.

Much more significant is the evidence from early centers of textile production such as Egypt. An uninterrupted trail of documents traces production directly linked to trade. The ninth century papyri documents reveal the organization of local trade in items manufactured to order, a pattern later confirmed by the *Geniza* documents, and pointing particularly to the link between the organization of local manufacturing for the purpose of export. The papyri from Egypt show that orders for textiles for export were placed as early as the eighth century by merchants in Fusţāţ, and sent down to weavers in the countryside.[40] By the eleventh century the interaction between traders and producers is not only regular but hands on. The Jewish traders of the Geniza documents appear to be involved in each phase of the production from inspecting the crops and monitoring the quality of the flax to purchasing and marketing.[41] As early as 1981, Gladys Frantz-Murphy wrote, "Mounting evidence indicates that the economic prosperity of medieval Egypt may have hinged on the Egyptian textile industry. This is in conflict with the traditional view which attributes that prosperity primarily to Egypt's passive role in East-West trade, i.e., transit trade."[42] Beside textiles, whose finishing was not exclusive to artisans in the cities, ceramics and pottery were produced for export and the archeological evidence from Fusţāţ, which points to an uninterrupted import of Chinese pottery, also points to local imitations, and hence to the diffusion and acculturation of techniques in the Islamic regions.[43] Excavations along the overland road suggest that the demand for foreign items was never widely present in the Islamic regions and that local artisans quickly learned to produce similar looking items. The evidence from the growing number of archeological sites excavated in recent years along the supposed route of luxury imports shows that most of it was supplied via the maritime route. This information should be taken into consideration given the current

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[38] M. SHATZMILLER, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, Leiden 1994.

[39] The list of items is taken from a large and detailed list attributed wrongly to al-Jāhīz. C CH. PELLAT, *ĞĀHIZINA I. Le Kitāb al-tabaşşur bi-l-tiğāra attribué à Ğāḥiz*, in "Arabica", ½, 1954, pp. 153-165.

[40] Y. RĀGIB, *Marchands d'étoffes du Fayyoum au III^e/IX^e siècle, d'après leurs archives (actes et lettres)*, 1, *Les actes des Banū ^cAbd al-Mu'min*, Cairo 1982 (Institut français d'archéologie orientale).

[41] M. GIL, *The Flax Trade in the Mediterranean in the Eleventh Century A.D. as seen in Merchants' Letters from the Cairo Geniza*, in "Journal of Near Eastern Studies", 2, 2004, pp. 81-96.

[42] G. FRANTZ-MURPHY, *A New Interpretation of the Economic History of Medieval Egypt. The Role of the Textile Industry 254-567/868-1171*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 24, 1981, pp. 274-297, 274.

[43] M. ROGERS, *China and Islam - the Archeological Evidence in the Mashriq*, in *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, ed. D. RICHARDS, Oxford 1970 (Bruno Cassirer and University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 67-80; G.T. SCANLON, *Egypt and China: Trade and Imitation*, in *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, in ed. D. RICHARDS, Oxford 1970 (Bruno Cassirer and University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 81-95.

theory that the luxury trade was carried on the inland or river transportation from North East Europe.[44] Egypt's trade in the eleventh century showed a healthy surplus of manufactured products and a superb trade organization directly linked to exports to Palestine, Syria, North Africa, Sicily and Spain.[45] All in all, the existing documentation from the papyri and Geniza sources indicate that the pull of demand emerged early and that local manufacturing was able to meet export demands very quickly, contrary to Cahen's statement that Muslims did not bother manufacturing for trade because the demand did not come from Europe, but instead from the regional economies. I propose to see in it a misconstrued link.

The statement made recently that: "The economic system identified as "Islamic" originated in the Sasanian territory",[46] has many implications, among them that the decline perceived in the late Roman world affected the economic development of the new Islamic polity on the Mediterranean shores, that the Pirenne thesis about the role of trade in the plight of the European Mediterranean would be the right observation explained by the wrong reasons, and that the Islamic urbanization away from the Mediterranean was not the cause but the effect of this reality. In that case political decisions, the arrival of an Eastern based dynasty, the Abbasids, and the move of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad, followed economic conditions, rather than created them. If the former Sasanid lands, and not the Mediterranean ones, were responsible for the early prosperity showing in the Islamic lands, this explains why at this point, there some trade with two areas, the Far East, mostly China, and Northern Europe, mostly the Baltic area, including Russia, but more importantly, trade was mainly regional, or short distance trade. This of course leaves us with two important unknowns, first the demographic dimensions of the consumer and productive regional societies, and second, what actually happened before the revival of trading activities in the Mediterranean described by R. S. Lopez in his synthesis of the commercial revolution.[47] In that case the only Islamic authentic shipping and trade patterns were those of the Red sea and the Indian Ocean and the trade we see later, as well as the development of an Islamic Mediterranean society were not only late arrivals for the Arabs dwelling on its shores but also a hybrid system.

The enigma about the kind of trade the huge silver hoards of northern Europe represent, and whether or not they represent trade at all or plunder, as is sometimes suggested, has not yet been clarified. As more evidence emerges and is analyzed more closely, this image, while not inaccurate, is nonetheless misleading. There is no doubt that the European hoards of Muslim coins could lead to the conclusion that Muslim traders did not export anything but instead bought luxury items, leaving their silver behind. An analysis of the Polish hoards for instance, has revealed Islamic coins covering a period of a hundred years and minted everywhere - Caliphate coins, Samanid coins and even eight century Maghrebi coins, which must have come via Western Europe.[48] However, if the Poles chose to use Muslim coins as ornaments and treasures, that does not mean that there were no Islamic surplus manufactured goods to feed Islamic trade, or no production geared for trade during those years, but rather that they could not buy, or chose not to buy Islamic goods, which brings us to my second argument, the capacity of the manufacturing sector to produce surplus.

For this argument I will draw on the conclusions I reached on the basis of a large body of data assembled and analyzed according to a system known as Occupational classification in economic sectors, which permitted quantification of trade names as indicators of division of labour and specialization. My premise in this study was that the numerical relationships represent a reliable indicator of the relative size of the labour force in the manufacturing sector and how it shaped its functioning. The data showed about 418 manufacturing trade names with a small contraction for the later centuries. When submitted to scrutiny through literary sources the data analyzed enabled me to reach the conclusion that while there was a very small decline in the numbers of manufacturing trade names from the early middle ages, the eight-twelfth centuries to the later, the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, the size of the urban labour power increased.[49] In pre-modern societies, division of labour may be seen as a mechanism for increasing market volume, without requiring a major technological change. The Islamic case is a good example of this, although technological improvements have been noticed everywhere. The findings allow us to confirm the hypothesis that division of labour was prevalent and extensively developed in Islamic manufacturing and that the capacity and dimensions of the Islamic manufacturing industry were much larger than anything which had existed before, and remained pretty much constant.[50] From what we now know about the organization of labour in the rural areas, and in the cities, we may state that the arrival of Islam in the Middle East also saw a change in the organization of labour and the increase in the scale of manufacturing also resulted in a greater number of commodities being produced in greater quantities. The most important structural changes which occurred were the elimination of slave labour in the countryside by the ninth century in both the Eastern regions, and in the Western, North Africa. Instead the creation of small private land ownership in the West, including Muslim Spain, coupled with the "agricultural

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[44] The question of Islamic Eastern bound trade will be discussed in my forthcoming paper to be presented in the XIV International Economic History Congress in Helsinki.

[45] S. D. Goitein collected information related to trade up and before the eleventh century in S.D. GOITEIN, *Mediterranean Trade in the Eleventh Century: Some Facts and Problems*, in *Studies in the economic History of the Middle East*, ed. M A. Cook, London 1970 (Oxford University Press), pp. 51-62. Also M. GIL, *The Flax Trade*, cit.

[46] M.G. MORONY, *Economic Boundaries? Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 47, 2004, pp. 166-194, 166.

[47] R.S. LOPEZ, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages 950-1350*, Englewood Cliffs 1971 (Prentice-Hall).

[48] R. KIERSNOWSKI, *Pieniadz kruszcowy w Polsce Sredniowiecznez*, Warsaw 1960, p. 117. I thank Severin Flikerski for providing me with an English translation of this important work. I have chosen the Polish case because it has provoked the least interest in comparison to the Russian and the Scandinavian hoards. See T.S. NOONAN, *When and How Dirhams First Reached Russia*, in "Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique", 21, 1980, 3-4, pp. 401-69.

[49] M. SHATZMILLER, *Labour*, cit., pp. 167-254.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

revolution" and growth in population size after the decline of the Roman and Byzantine periods, made surplus production an uncontested fact. The growing manufacturing capacity in the cities documented by the division of labour and specialization because production techniques were not only adequate but greatly improved, made trade profitable[51] The capacity to produce a surplus of manufactured goods, or extract metals for export, was matched by the organization of the mercantile and the transport sectors. My study provided 233 commerce occupations, which remained constant to the end of the period, as well as transport occupations, which constituted about 50% of the city's labour force engaged in services.[52] The trade names of those engaged in commerce show close links with the extractive and manufacturing activities but also a considerable range of division of labour and specialization. Here too, the limited number of financial services trade names corresponded to the limited numbers observed in modern economies until very recently. The only caveat is that while the expectation is that the share of these occupations will increase with the progress of the economy, that did not happen in the later centuries, but remained quite static. The transport section of the industrial services, while exhibiting a smaller division of labour, as is normally the case, was nonetheless sophisticated enough in each of its subsections, overland, maritime and human power, not only enabling Muslim traders to move goods around but also to integrate the rural and urban centers of the participating regional units in an efficient manner for the conduct of trade. The role of transport in integrating the two is directly related to two developments: first the diversified occupational structures of the commercial and industrial sectors, which illustrate the diversified and large scales of the markets, the second, the division of labour in the transport occupations. The number of occupations in the commercial sector matched the sophisticated nature of the monetary system, but there were also large groups of commerce occupations which included those selling raw materials grown, extracted or gathered in the countryside and brought unprocessed into the city, and by the middlemen who were differentiated according to location, enumeration and selling techniques, and integrated into specialized markets where commodities were traded. The textile industry is a good example of what I mean by integration. Merchants who ordered a certain quantity of textiles were involved in shipping not only the locally grown raw material but also the dyeing and tanning materials such as indigo, sumac, and gall-nuts from the growing areas in Egypt and elsewhere to other regions. They were the entrepreneurs supervising the entire process. The development in the transport sector is illustrated on the overland route by the riders of camels, mules, donkeys and horses, porters and couriers who moved smaller items or smaller quantities over short distances. Caravans, ranging from several animals to 500 camels, departed from urban centers, where camel owners, camel drivers and other organizers and participants, were to be found. How important were camels and how closely integrated was overland and maritime trade is demonstrated by the fact that the boats were built in Qūṣ, lower Egypt, then loaded on camels to get to the Red Sea. Camels were shipped and riding animals were offered for rent at the point of embarkation.[53] Furthermore, the importance of the land route can be seen in the continuous use of the measurement known as h,_iml, a camel load, used in the documents for all kinds of grains: flour and rice as well as wheat and barley.[54] The debate over the reduced historical role of Muslim maritime shipping in the Mediterranean, in both the early and later middle ages, when compared to the Red Sea and Indian ocean navigation, becomes quite complex. The general tendency, to minimize the role of Muslim shipping from an uncertain peak in the ninth-tenth centuries in the Mediterranean, is matched by evidence about Muslim navigation techniques, the use of navigational devices, the existence of Arabic navigation manuals, the different kinds of boats and the variety of boat building occupations in port cities, in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf which all indicate the existence of maritime industries and a significant commercial fleet. On the other hand, merchants who owned lighter boats also contributed to the development of river transportation by using them where rivers were navigable. Can we assume that the Mediterranean Islamic shipping was integrated with that of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, giving the cultural, linguistic, legal and shared economic conditions? The theory that Islamic ship building had come to an end by the eleventh century, not only because of Italian competition but because of factors ranging from lack of wood, the State monopolization of the arsenals, and the use of forced labour, needs to be further investigated in the light of evidence from mariners who were actively involved in maritime transport of bulk commodities over long distances in the Indian Ocean. How do we explain such discrepancy in a tightly linked Islamic world? This question is indeed crucial to the history of the third phase, fourteenth-sixteenth centuries.

THE MYTH OF THE STATE OPPOSITION TO TRADE

The idea that the Islamic state opposed trade and intervened in blocking export of resources, is a misconstrued link as well. More often than not Muslim rulers were partners to trade and built or owned the boats in which goods traveled.[55] Cahen considered that the State opposed export on Egypt. His interpretation of the Fāṭimid policies in the tenth and eleventh centuries were in line with those of later Egyptian regimes, the Ayyubids and the Mamluks, but even for Egypt the interpretation of the state policies could vary. On the basis of the *Geniza* documents, Goitein reached different conclusions and has taken precisely the opposite view, namely that the Fatimids were the most liberal of dynasties with regard to economic policies including trade, manifestly because they allowed for the most comprehensive involvement of Jewish merchants in trade ever to

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[51] On the improvement in production techniques see *Ibid*., pp. 179-249.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 259-275.

[53] LI GUO, *Commerce, Culture, and Community*, cit., pp. 42-43. also R.T. MORTEL, *Prices in Mecca during the Mamlūk Period*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 32, 1989, pp. 279-334. C. MEYER, *Glass from Quseir al-Qadim and the Indian Ocean Trade*, Chicago 1992 (the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago), pp. 97-131.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 31.Guo notes that the term himl was widely used as a measure of dry volume, and had a normal capacity of five hundred pounds. Does this mean that a himl could be loaded unto a ship?.

[55] J. DESOMOGYI, *State Intervention in Trade in Classical Arabic Literature*, in "Studies in Islam", 4, 1967, pp. 61-64.

have taken place.[56] Regardless of interpretations, no other Islamic region was like Egypt. What was feasible for centralized Egypt was not feasible elsewhere, and Islamic states in North Africa or Spain, did not have such extensive monopolistic measures, or controls in place, nor is there any indication that they opposed export because it would "impoverish the Muslims". Regional differences prohibit such generalizations. For instance, in the thirteenth and fourteenth century the Mongol empire rulers engaged themselves not only in trade initiatives, encouraging trade by offering incentives to outside traders, but also forced migration of artisans from the Persian and Arab centers they conquered to build local production of the textiles they coveted.[57] Where we are better informed is about political events, wars and nomads' invasions which interrupted trade activities in the Islamic lands, and where it is clear that rulers tried their best to put them down. Among the better investigated are the tenth century central Asian wars, which brought to a halt the trade with the Baltic sea, the Hilalaian invasion of eleventh century Ifriqiya, blamed for the interruption of gold shipments across the Sahara, and the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, blamed for the disruption of the central Asian inland routes. The forced monopolies imposed by the Mamluks on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade in the fifteenth century are also blamed for bringing down the Karimi merchants, an important network of spice traders which had functioned uninterruptedly and profitably dfor three hundred years.

ISLAMIC LAW- THE CULPRIT IN THE FAILED STRUCTURE LINK?

Timur Kuran's argument about the disruptive role of Islamic law of inheritance in the conduct of trade requires us to look at the role of Islamic law in the economy before we discuss the particular point he makes with regard to the inheritance law. Avram Udovitch provided a detailed discussion of the trade instruments formulated and constructed by jurists using the Islamic law, and has shown the accommodating and positive effect of these tools on the conduct of trade and economic activities in general.[58] Udovitch worked exclusively on Hanafi sources, the school of law adhered to in the Middle East and Asia. However I was able to extend his conclusions to the regions using the Maliki law, the school adhered to by the North African and Muslim Spain societies. The *mudaraba* contract of the Hanafi school, the equivalent of the Latin *commenda* is identical to the Maliki *qirād,* for which many models are provided in the Andalusian notarial manuals and the Maghrebi *fatwas*[59] Not only did Islamic law provide very early investment contracts and the financial instruments needed for the execution and regulation of trade, it also provided another important tool which helped the conduct of trade by enlarging the scope of investment capital, namely by creating individual property rights, and, most importantly, by providing strong legal protection for the preservation of capital within the framework of these property rights. While I agree with Professor Kuran about the weakness of institutional property rights,[60] I insist that individual property rights were well protected precisely through the inheritance law which he maligned. Although largely ignored so far in the debate over the economic performance of the Islamic world, the study of property rights in Islamic law and society points to their central role in the economy, with especially significant role given to women's property.[61] My study of the Arabic notarial and court documents from fifteenth century Granada has shown that in the case of women the law provided them with extensive property rights, well above and beyond what European women had, which enabled them to acquire property and control it. The documents, many of them dealing with estate division, also provided a better view of the effect of the inheritance law in practice. Kuran used evidence from the modern Arab Middle East, but the records of the estate division from Granada show how cooperation among family members at the moment of estate division prevented fragmentation. Family cooperation mitigated the effect of the inheritance law, no matter whether the estate consisted of land or of houses. The need to convert the assets to cash only arose when the state needed to collect its share from the estate, otherwise, the family members, and by the way, families were much smaller than the ones referred to by Kuran, divided the estate by exchanging shares of property in a way which would not split the assets and harm the economic potential of the property. In agreement with the Kuran thesis I can cite cases where endowments of property, *waqf* making especially where fragments of property were endowed, did indeed create disturbances for investment.[62] However, these were cases dealing with institutional rights as opposed to individual property rights. Property rights within the family, provided incentives for investment in trade. The organization of medieval trade in the Islamic lands was always a function of the nuclear family and of religious and ethnic ties, and examples such as the Rādhāniyya, the Ibādis, the *Geniza* merchants and the Karimis, abound.[63] There is no reason to assume that because they were following Islamic law, people acting as economic agents would engage in acts which will be harmful to themselves. I also propose to see in the intra-family investment pattern of the Islamic trade, a tool which enabled women to invest in trade by using their separate and well protected property and property rights.[64] Islamic society did not encourage women to

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[56] S.D. GOITEIN, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, I-V, Los-Angeles-Berkeley 1967-85, pp. 29, 31, 33.

[57] See TH.T. ALLSEN, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire*, Cambridge 1997 (Cambridge University Press).

[58] See A.L. UDOVITCH, *At the Origins of the Western* commenda*: Islam, Israel, Byzantium?*, in "Speculum", 37, 1962, pp. 198-207; IDEM, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam*, Princeton 1970 (Princeton University Press).

[59] H.R. IDRIS, *Commerce maritime et Kirād en Berbèrie orientale*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 4, 1961, pp. 225-239. H.S. KHALILIEH, *Islamic Maritime Law. An Introduction*, Leiden 1998 (E.J. Brill).

[60] See M. SHATZMILLER, *Islamic Institutions*, cit.

[61] See my forthcoming book, EADEM, *Her Day in Court*, cit.,.

[62] EADEM, *Islamic Institutions*, cit.

[63] See entry CH. PELLAT, entry *Rādhāniyya*, in the *EI*[2]. G. WIET, *Les marchands d'épices sous les sultans mamlouks*, in "Cahiers d'Histoire Egyptienne", 1955, pp. 81-145.

[64] A.L. UDOVITCH, *Bankers Without Banks: Commerce, Banking, and Society in the Islamic World of the Middle Ages*, in *The Dawn of Modern Banking*, New Haven-London 1979, pp. 255-273.

circulate in the public sphere and long distance active trading was out of the question though not unheard of for women to travel with merchandise. Information about females in the Shaykh's household in the mid thirteenth century, Ayyubid period, shows a trading family in the area of the Red Sea port of Quseir, whose female members were making investments and talking about tax collection money. They participate in long-distance business travels, too, actually traveling physically for either business or pilgrimage.[65] Women suppliers sell flour,66 and two women are mentioned as independent account holders alongside their male counterparts.[67] While Kuran is right to suggest that in principle the inheritance could exercise its power in a negative form he fails to recognize that in reality the legal system firstly ensured that women had property rights, property and control over it, and more importantly, that the separation of property in matrimony and the inheritance law together had the effect of securing property. If women could not learn where the markets were and what commodities were in demand, they could easily invest with male family members and share the risks and the profits. It was precisely the inheritance system, which by ensuring that every family member had a share in the estate provided protection for the investment.

THE END OF ISLAMIC MANUFACTURING? EVIDENCE FROM NORTH AFRICA

Another important misconstrued link is the tendency to paint the Islamic decline, whether its trade or manufacturing, without giving due attention to regional variations. One such case is North Africa in the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, the pinnacle of the decline in the Middle East, Syria and Egypt. My sources here are the Genoese archives documenting the import/export activities taking place across the Maghreb during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, utilized through the work of its historian, G. Jehel,[68] and my own findings in the Arabic records, in particular the data I gathered for Mar_nid Morocco.

Initially the Islamic urbanization process in **North Africa** was not that much different from that of the Middle East, and the urban withdrawal process from the Roman Mediterranean was evident there as well. Capitals, such as Qairawan for Ifriqiya, Tlemcen for the central Maghreb as well as the Qal ᶜas, or Fez for Morocco were built inland. However, this first line was doubled and then tripled by the creation of two sets of cities, one stringing the Mediterranean coast from Tunis to Bougie, Alger and Ceuta and providing the outlets for overseas or regional trade, the other trading posts straddling the Sahara desert.[69] These port cities of North Africa remained manufacturing centers and trading posts. Ifriqiya was an essential link of the trade triangle which also included Egypt and Sicily, exporting local products and importing other goods. If the region was not as productive as Egypt in terms of textile production, during the *Geniza* period it compensated by being a major exporter of oil and wheat.[70] A trading network preceded the arrival of the *Geniza* traders -that of the Ibādi traders of Tahert and the Mzab, and proceeded to co-exist with it later.[71] Michael Brett credited the "early Maghrebi trading networks with trading some luxury items such as gold and high-class slaves....and much more bread-and-butter trade from community to community across the Sahara", very much like the trade which took place in the Eastern lands, the Middle East and central Asia, where everyday items were carried by the regional trade.[72] The Mālikī legal sources concur with matching rich documentation on commerce activity, in particular using the *qirād, commenda,* partnership contract of investment in trade, the equivalent of the Eastern *mudāraba*, in the twelfth century.[73]

How did this picture change in later centuries? Numbers provided by George Jehel in his study of the Genoese archives put the textiles export to North Africa at 40% of the total value of Genoa's western textile export in the thirteenth century,[74] with Italy serving as the conduit for refined textiles to the Mediterranean countries from Northern Europe, Flanders, England, Burgundy and Germany. The ports receiving the exports are Tunis, Bougie and Ceuta, 12 for Bougie, 13 for Tunis, and 10 for Ceuta. In the fifteenth century English products become more prominent, however at the same time, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Sicily imported from the Maghreb pillows, coats, bournous, a kind of a Maghrebi overcoat, blankets, more delicate cloths, and leather articles such as saddles, bags, belts and ceramics, indicating that the markets for these items remained active and that manufacturing for them remained constant. In the thirteenth century Tunisian wool was feeding the textile atelier of Verona. This wool was also present in the Genoese markets in the thirteenth century. Bougie became the common port market for the sale of wool from the Maghreb. Cotton was also mentioned in export and import and Oran was also a base of cotton export to Venice in the fifteenth century. Ceuta exported linen and Venice received all these plus skins, though the volume became smaller by the end of the fifteenth century. Silk was one of the most important products manufactured in Tunis in the

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65 LI GUO, *Commerce, Culture, and Community*, cit., pp. 8-9

66 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

68 G. JEHEL, *L'Italie et le Maghreb au Moyen Age. Conflits et échanges du VII^e^ au XXV^e^ siècle*, Paris 2001 (Presses Universitaires de France).

69 H. PÉRÈS, *Relations entre le Tafilalet et le Soudan a travers le Sahara, du XII^e^ au XIV^e^ siècle*, in *Mélanges de géographie et d'orientalisme offerts à E.-F. Gautier, professeur honaraire à la Faculté des lettres d'Alger*, Arrau 1937, pp. 309-414, and M. BRETT, *Ifriqiya as a Market for Saharan Trade from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, in "Journal of African History", 10, 1969, 3, pp. 34-64.

70 On the Maghribi traders, in addition to M. GIL, *The Flax Trade*, cit. Also A. GRIEF, *Reputations and Conditions in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders*, in "The Journal of Economic History", 49, 1989, 4, pp. 857-882. S.D. GOITEIN, *A Mediterranean Society*, cit.

71 See the many articles by T. LEWICKI, *Les voies maritimes de la Méditerranée dans le haut Moyen Age d'après les sources arabes*, in *La navigazione Mediterranea nell'alto medioevo*, Spoleto 1978, pp. 439-469.

72 See M. BRETT, *Ifriqiya*, cit., p. 358.

73 H.R. IDRIS, *Commerce maritime*, cit., pp. 225-239.

74 G. JEHEL, *L'Italie et le Maghreb*, cit., pp. 165-166 for a list of textiles exported by Genoa in the thirteenth century.

fifteenth century and was exported to Genoa together with gold and cotton. This is the silk which would be finished in Italy and re-sold in North Africa as luxury items. Silk also came from Syria and Egypt in Genoese ships and was sold in Tunis. Silks from North Africa sometime arrived in Portugal on Venetian ships together with other plants which also came through the ports of North Africa.[75]

In terms of **grain**, North Africa became a main exporter of wheat to Genoa in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Morocco, which was never a part of the Sicilian cereals export, developed its own grain export policies. As I have shown elsewhere, fourteenth century Marīnid Morocco imposed a monopoly on the export and import of grains and dealt directly with the Christian merchants.[76] Tuna fishing and export was commonly practiced in North Africa, and the island of Gerba exported **oil** with the fish, as did Tunis, Tripoli, and Sfax.[77] **Salt** was exported to Italy[78] between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries and bought in Gerba by the Venetians. From the thirteenth century the Venetians, then the Catalans and the Marseilles traders became competitors of the Genoese in the North African coral fishing and finishing in Morocco and Tunis. In 1460 the Ḥafṣid sultan gave the Genoese a monopoly on fishing, exploiting and exporting coral. After this date the export of coral from Tunis turned towards Egypt where Venice was using the *muda al trafego* line. In 1475 there was a specialized line for dealing with this item, charged with the transport of coral from Tunis and Venice and the Tunisian coral was distributed in Europe but also in Syria, Egypt and maybe even in China.[79] In terms of **metals,** the Italians bought and sold **tin and copper, lead**, **silver and alum** from the mines of Zaghouan and Rosas in Morocco.[80] Silver was also exported in the fifteenth century and Jehel calculated on the basis of Genoese documents that silver bought in Tunis was cheaper than that bought in Genoa.[81] The Genoese began by buying in Tunis **copper** supposedly coming from Timbuktu and the white Moroccan **alum**, called the *Gharbi* alum, which came from Sijilmasa.[82]

No less significant to the theory of decline is the evidence concerning the North African gold. While Europe was minting imitation Muslim coins, Sicily was hoarding its surplus gold and the value of the coinage of the Ḥafṣids and the Marīnids went through the roof. In 1287 the Ḥafṣid gold dinar returned to the highest gold standards with 4.72 gr coin. These coins circulated in Genoa under the name of double de miro and were used in transactions, paying wages and rent. Whether the easily available gold in Morocco was the reason that no iqṭā^{c} ever developed there, or whether the legal system was responsible for it, is a question to consider, given the importance of the land tenure system to agricultural productivity in Iraq and Egypt. The fact remains that the state regularly paid wages to its standing armies, whether tribal or Christian mercenaries and never resorted to the distribution of land. In the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the Marīnid state paid all its salaries and expenses in cash so the local army never received land but gold coins, something which the Christian mercenaries in Spain were particularly happy about and willing to be recruited to serve in the armies of their sworn enemies. The boats which the Marīnids regularly leased from Aragon were paid for in gold. In the mid fourteenth century, when the city of Tripoli was bought back from the Christians for the fabulous sum of 50.000 dinars, the Marīnid sultan Abū ^{c}Inān, commented that it gave him a special pleasure to come closer to God's grace by rescuing Muslims for a trifle.[83] Historians noticed the remote nature of the Genoese involvement with the gold trade. Marc Bloch noted that the merchants did not have to penetrate the heart of Africa because gold was made available at the coast, contradicting Lopez's claim that the lack of documents showing inland Italian penetration into dark Africa had to do with the secretive nature of such activities. The interruption of the gold exports from 1250 onwards could be seen as a demonstration of the power of the North African states to control the flow of gold to Europe. The large amount of gold in their treasuries documented by the high quality and definitely proven of African source of the Almoravids, Almohads and Marinīds, would preclude the theory of an end to the gold excavation by that time.[84] North African money, Almoravids and Ḥafṣid coins, but also the Moroccan Almohad and Marīnid coins were used in local transactions in Italy and imitation Arab coins were used for the international trade. This is not to say that the region did not import wheat when it needed, and wine, honey and butter also went there by the end of the thirteenth century, while the export of tuna and cheese, sugar from sugar cane and dried fruits like figs and wood continued even in the face of papal interdiction. The Genoese played the role of intermediaries exporting spices to North Africa via Alexandria. Again Jehel fixes the Genoese trade in spices at 40%, mostly pepper, but also ginger and cinnamon went there as well as luxury products which circulated both ways: African ivory was exported from Tunis together with wax and feathers. The Venetians looked for North Africa skins, gold and spices. The export of exotic animals stimulated more interest and further demand while the export of horses became regular. The North African trade was

[75] F.TH. BARATA, *Portugal and the Mediterranean Trade: A Prelude to the Discovery of the "New World."*, in "Al-Masāq*"*, 17, 2005, 2, pp. 205-214, 207.
[76] M. SHATZMILLER, *The Berbers and the Islamic State. The Marīnid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco*, Princeton 2000 (Markus Wiener Publishers, pp. 77, 131.
[77] G. JEHEL, *L'Italie et le Maghreb*, cit., p. 160.
[78] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.
[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 167-169.
[80] B. ROSENBERGER, *Autour d'une grande mine d'argent du moyen age marocaine: le jebel Aouam*, in "Hespéris-Tamuda", 5, 1964, pp. 15-78.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 177. Cuirasses produced in North Africa were sold in Valencia, F.TH. BARATA, *Portugal and the Mediterranean Trade*, cit., p. 209.
[82] *Ibid.*, p. 162. CL. CAHEN, *L'Alun avant Phocée. Un chapitre d'histoire économique islamo-chrétienne au temps des Croisades*, in "Revue d'histoire économique et sociale", 1963, pp. 433-447.
[83] M. SHATZMILLER, *The Berbers*, cit., pp. 127-129 and the sources quoted. Islamic law entitled the state to collect a third of the proceeds of natural resources.
[84] R.A. MESSIER, *The Almoravids, West African Gold and the Gold Currency on the Mediterranean Basin*, in "Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient", 17, 19, 1, pp. 30-41. M. SHATZMILLER, *The Berbers*, cit., p. 174.

sophisticated, comprehensive, and involved locally produced items as well as transit, items originating in other Islamic regions. There is no sign of the destruction of the industries on the scale suggested by Ashtor for Egypt and Syria. The economy continued to function as an important trade partner to the Italians and sometimes, as in the case of gold was even in a position to starve the European markets. In his important article quoted above, Michael Brett successfully challenged the thesis of the collapse of the Ifriqiyan economy in the eleventh century as a result of the supposed interruption of gold supplies by showing that the Saharan trade was governed by the laws of supply and demand. He also showed that at the same time the rise of Morocco as a factor in splitting this gold market by the twelfth century was crucial. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Moroccan control of gold exports had tightened and played a similar role.[85] Certainly the available documentation does not point to North Africa becoming a dumping ground for Italian or European cheap textiles during the fourteenth and fifteen centuries, nor seemed to have been subjected to the industrial ruin which ensued. Regional policies mattered.

Ashtor not only claimed that the dumping of cheap European cloth put an end to local manufacturing but also that the deficient technical standards of Middle Eastern items made trade in these items impossible. The most recent archeological evidence of continuous medieval production comes from Quseir al-Qadim on the Red Sea and shows that glass production continued unabated. Quseir was a transit station but, like other merchants' colonies, was at the end of the manufacturing process. The findings contain the evidence of items of Mamluk glass manufactured in Fustat, Cairo, and Damascus, and evidence of glass manufacturing from Khanfar and Kawd al-sila dated to the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, while Middle Eastern glass dating from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries is reported from the shores of the Malacca straits.[86] Around Aden burnt kilns and many wasters and drips were found indicating that most items of tableware or containers for drugs, found in the company of many precious and not precious metals, silk, brocades and wool textiles, may well have been manufactured right there. More importantly, Chinese documentation shows that the Chinese preferred Middle Eastern glass because it was more solid and did not break so easily.[87] By the same token, silk production in Muslim Spain's Granada continued to the end.[88] But mostly what is troubling about Ashtor's claim is the lack of evidence to show that the European cloth was indeed cheaper than that of the locally produced items, and that the entire consuming society abandoned the local cloth for the European one. Much more evidence is needed in terms of the buying power of the villagers and the rural society which constituted at least 80% of the population. For instance, there is no cost for the locally produced items. How do we know that such was indeed the case? Could the luxury imports bought by the higher classes account for the elimination of local production? As long as such evidence remains unavailable, the ruin of the Islamic industries by the dumping of European luxury products remains a misconstrued link.

CONCLUSION

The study of the question of the Islamic trade and its decline has so far neglected several important aspects, among them the role of regional diversity in the history of trade. While the Islamic lands shared legal, cultural, language and tools, the regions experienced different economic cycles and as a result a different economic history of trade. Political regimes and political events also played a role and should be studied comparatively. Questions about the weight of trade in the overall economy and its role should also be asked. Don't we need to better understand the purchasing power of different segments in order to speak about a demise of local industries? Does it make economic sense to hinge the whole theory on what the urban centers did? Until recently, the question of the size of the trade has never been asked. The first and only time this subject was approached was in a recent book by Stuart Borsch in a study of the effect of the Black Death on Egypt's economy in the later Middle Ages. Total annual exports to the northern Mediterranean accounted for less than two percept of Egypt's GDP.[89] With the long distance trade between Egypt and countries farther East added in, Egypt's ratio of long-distance trade to GDP is relatively close to that of England.[90] How does one relates this number to the overall economic performance and to the ruin of the local industries?

The anatomy of the decline casts a heavy shadow on the performance of the economic institutions of the Islamic lands. Structural and mental blocks were called upon to explain why productivity in the Islamic world lagged behind and why the Islamic trade, which was part of this system was not only in decline, but never amounted to much. If we are to accept all this it would be a misnomer even to speak about a decline because Islamic trade never amounted to a functioning system to begin with. To my mind treating the Islamic trade as a deficient system robs it of its true historic role, strength and uniqueness. Treating it just as a cog, a component in the international East-West trade deprives Islamic trade of its individuality, but mostly of its economic significance. The authors reviewed here approached the question of the Islamic trade by comparing it to the European institutions and developments. While this approach may be attractive to the protagonists of a medieval global system, the comparative approach is not the only way of dealing with assessments. An equally valid approach will be to judge the performance of Islamic trade by studying how it affected the Islamic economy per se and how it was affected by it. There is plenty of historical evidence to substantiate the role

[85] M. BRETT, *Ifriqiya*, cit., p. 364.
[86] C. MEYER, *Glass from Quseir al-Qadim*, cit., p. 120.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 130.
[88] R. ARIÉ, *L'Espagne Musulmane au temps des Naşrides (1232-1492)*, Paris 1973 (Éditions E. De Boccard), pp. 355-356.
[89] Sturat S.J. BORSCH, *The Black Death in Egypt and England. A Comparative Study*, Austin 2005 (University of Texas Press)p. 19. See note 60 which estimates the total GDP in gold 144,467 kg. This is compared with Ashtor's estimate for the total value of exports to the northern Mediterranean as being 2,343 kg of gold and cites an entire chapter in E. ASHTOR, *Les métaux*, cit., pp. 65-96. I was not able to find it there.
[90] Loc. Cit. and note 61 referring to Nicholas Mahyew's estimates, that the total value of England's export amounted to about four percent of its GDP at this time.

played by trade in pulling together the rural and the manufacturing sectors. Last but not least, the economic history of Islamic trade, and for that matter of any trade system, cannot be treated in isolation, and many like to speak about "trade and civilization".[91] The charge that the Islamic trade was deficient and failed to initiate technical innovation and economic progress, ignores the environment in which it operated. It is hard to reconcile it with the burst of Islamic sciences, intellectual activity, material culture and artistic creativity, building activities and the applied technical manuals written for every human activity under the sun, not only trade manuals but also agricultural treatises and manufacturing of swords, haute cuisine and book binding, calligraphy and love making. Why do we deny Islam what we have so willingly lavished upon the Italian trade as the harbinger of the Renaissance?

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[91] See K.N. CHAUDHURI, *Trade and Civilization,* cit..

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