

# ARABIC SOURCES FROM QUANZHOU ON NISBAS OF ARABIA IN THE 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

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Quanzhou is the most important seaport in China on foreign trade in the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It had very close relations with the Arabia in the middle Ages. Quanzhou houses many Islamic monuments. Since 1920s, a great number of stone carvings in Arabic and Persian inscriptions were excavated from the ancient city wall. They belong mostly to the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among those inscriptions 28 "nisbâs" were recorded. Most are places in Persia only three in Arabia and others concern to Turkey, Jerusalem, USSR, China.<sup>1</sup> Those three nisbas in Arabia are al-Abyani and al-Hamdânî in Yemen, al-Tihami in Saudi Arabia. They are very rare evidences in China concerning Arabia in the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The writer will present about the following in this paper:

1. Mosque lintel, about the Yuan Dynasty (1276-1368), excavated at the foot of the South-east city gate of Quanzhou in 1940, Arabic inscriptions on both sides.<sup>2</sup>

Translation:

- a. "This gate was built and this mosque was enclosed with an enclosure by a pious and pure Sheikh Naynâ 'Umar b. Mansûr b. 'Umar al-Abyanî al-Yamanî. May God accept him and pardon him!"

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<sup>1</sup> CHEN Da-sheng, *Recherches sur l'Histoire de la Communauté Musulmane de Quanzhou (Fujian-Chine)*, Mémoire Diplôme de E.H.E.S.S., Paris, 1989, pp.36-37.

<sup>2</sup> CHEN Da-sheng, *Quan-zhou yi-si-lan-jiao shi-ke (Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou)*, Fuzhou, 1984, pp.13-14, fig.16.

b. "And (say) that the mosques are God's, and they should not call on any one with God." (Korân 72:18).

Commentary:

Al-Abyanî was located to Wâdî Banâ 18 km northwest of Aden in Yemen. In the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Abyân comprised several castles and the seaport of Aden, hence the full name was 'Aden Abyân. It was a prosperous commercial center of South Arabia and main seaport intercouring the east and Africa (Saddin Island). It was instead by 'Aden in the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Abyân was destroyed gradually and left today a ruin of about 3 square km. from which were found Chinese porcelain of the 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup>

2. Gravestone, about 7th/13th Century, found at Nan-jie street in Quan-zhou, in 1926;<sup>4</sup> Arabic inscription.

Translation:

"This is a tomb of a weak woman who needs compassion from Allah the Sublime, mother of al- Sayyid al-Burtumî b. al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Hamdânî. She was died on Wednesday..."

Commentary:

Al-Hamdânî is an ancient tribe of North Yemen. They inhabited originally at north of Sana'. According to An Historical Atlas of Islam, Hamdân was nearby northeast of Aden before the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and was nearby Sana' north of Aden after 622 A.D.

3. Gravestone, 736/1336, found inside Masjid al-Ashâb of Quanzhou, Arabic inscription on both sides<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Makami TSUGIO, Tao-ci zhi-lu (Porcelain Route), Tokyo, 1972, translated by LI Xi-jin, Beijing, 1984, p.46

<sup>4</sup> CHEN Da-sheng, Quan-zhou yj-sj-lan-jiao shi-ke (Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou), Fuzhou, 1984, p.26, fig.62.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp.22-23, fig.51.

Translation:

- a. "To go from this illusory world to the world of joy, and to plead for mercy of God the much-forgiving. The blessed, virtuous, abstemious women, Khadija Khâtûn, daughter of the late eminence Khawâja Mu'în al-Dîn al-Tihâmî. (She died) at the 6<sup>th</sup> day of month Shawwâl in the 736 A.H. (8 May 1336)"
- b. "Every soul shall have a taste of death: and only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained. The object (of life): for the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception." (Koran 3:185)

Commentary:

Al-Tihâmî: is an ancient adjacent province of Mecca, located along Red Sea coastland on west of Hejaz in today's Saudi Arabia.

Chinese sources from Quanzhou in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries also mentioned many places in Arabia. The writer will not explain all them except "Fo-lian" which tallies with the Arabic inscriptions found in Bahrain.

Zhao Ru-kuo mentioned "Bai-lian" as a part in Ta-shi-guo (Arabia). Hirth and Rockhill believed "Bai-lian" is Bahrain.<sup>6</sup>

Zhou Mi recorded that: "Fo-lian, a foreign Muslim from South and a wealthy merchant in the south Quanzhou, was a son-in-law of Pu."<sup>7</sup> He was rich and owned eighty merchantmen. He died in the year of Gui-si (1293). He left no son and his daughter was very young. The government took possession of his property, and found one hundred and thirty hectoliters of pearls."<sup>8</sup> Kuwahara argued that "Fo-lian" means Bahrain.<sup>9</sup> The writer agrees the opinions of Rockhill and Kuwahara because the Chinese mandarin of "Fo-lian" is pronounced as "Bo-lian" in pronunciation of Quanzhou.

An important evidence found recently in Bahrain was from two Arabic inscriptions. One was dated to 776/1374 which is in proximate time to the Chinese recording of "Fo-lian", and the other was dated about 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century. Both were recorded with the word of "Fûliyân". Ludvik KALUS identified that "Fûliyân" may be the same meaning of "Fo-lian" in Chinese. He also argued about pearls mentioned in the Chinese record which was very similar state with that in Bahrain in that time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Friedrich HIRTH and W.W.ROCKHILL, CHAU Ju-Kuo: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-fan-zhi, St. Petersburg, 1911, pp.117- 119.

<sup>7</sup> Pu Shou-geng, a Muslim manager of the customs in Quanzhou.

<sup>8</sup> ZHOU Mi, Gui -xin za-shi Xu-ji (Supplement Miscellanies of Gui-xin), II, about the Yuan Dynasty (1276-1368), "Fo-lian jia-zi" ("Property of Fo-lian").

<sup>9</sup> KUWABARA, Jitsuzô, On P'u Shou-kêng, in Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tokyo Bunko (The Oriental Library), no.2, Tokyo, 1928.

<sup>10</sup> Ludvik KALUS, Inscriptions Arabes des Iles de Bahrain – Contribution à l'Histoire de Bahrain entre les XIe et XVIIe Siècles (Ve - XIe de l'Hégire), Paris, 1990, pp.28-30, ins.9-10, pl.VIII.