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IBN-HAWQAL, THE CHEQUE, AND AWDAGHOST

BY NEHEMIA LEVTZION

THE records of the Arab geographers provide the earliest documentary evidence for the history of the Western Sudan. Modern historians use these sources extensively, mainly through translations into European languages. Yet they have paid more attention to analysing the information available in these sources for the reconstruction of history, than to a critical study of the way in which such information reached the Arab geographers. Such a study is all the more important because too much is sometimes inferred from the few and thin references to the Western Sudan before the eleventh century.

The Arab geographers may be divided into three categories according to the regions where they could have acquired their information; that is to say in the eastern provinces of the Muslim world, in the Maghrib and Spain, or south of the Sahara in the Sudan itself. It may be presumed that the nearer the author came to the region he was describing the more detailed and reliable his information would tend to be. It is almost unnecessary to add that later geographers benefited both from earlier records and from the fact that the growth of the trans-Saharan trade over the centuries brought the Western Sudan nearer to the Muslim world. Indeed, in all periods traders were the principal informants providing geographers with information about remote countries.

Arab geography first developed in the east, in Baghdad and the Iranian provinces of the Muslim world, where the geographical knowledge of Iran, India, and Greece was transmitted to the Arabs. The expansion of the Muslim dominions and the development of trade inside the empire and across its borders widened the horizons of the world known to the Arabs.¹ Al-Fazārī, who wrote towards the end of the eighth century, and represented the school influenced by Indian geography, was the first—as far as we know—to mention 'Ghana, the land of gold'.² Al-Khwārizmī, who died after 847 (232 A.H.), represented the Greek contribution to Muslim geography. He made an Arabic adaptation of Ptolemy's *Geography*, adding to Ptolemy's map geographical names unknown to the classics, *inter alia* the names of Zaghāwa, Kawkaw, and Ghana.³

¹ On the development of Muslim geography, see J. H. Kramers, 'Geography and commerce', in *The Legacy of Islam*, ed. by T. Arnold and A. Guillaume (London, 1931); Nafīs Ahmad, *Muslim Contribution to Geography* (Lahore, 1947); S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Djughrāfiyā', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, III, 575-87.

² Quoted by al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* (*Les prairies d'or*), text and trans. by C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, IV (Paris, 1861-77), 37-9.

³ al-Khwārizmī, *Kitāb sūrat al-arḍ*, ed. Hans von Mžik (Leipzig, 1926), 6.

These few names of towns and kingdoms in the Sudan reached the inquisitive geographers in Baghdad through Muslim traders who had been operating in the Maghrib, and had become involved in the trans-Saharan trade. Al-Ya'qūbī, writing in 891 (278 A.H.), mentioned traders from Khurāsān, al-Baṣra, and al-Kūfa in Zuwaila, a centre for the slave trade with the Sudan.⁴ Al-Ya'qūbī collected some of his information on the Sudan while he was working in the service of the Ṭāhirids in Khurāsān, before 872 (259 A.H.), and the rest after he moved to Egypt, when he also visited the Maghrib, including the Ibadīte principality of Ṭābert.⁵ Al-Ya'qūbī's information will be discussed later in this paper, but it should be noted at this stage that he was the first geographer to do more than give a mere list of names, and to provide us with concrete information about the kingdoms of the Sudan.

With al-Ya'qūbī one enters a new phase in the 'discovery' of the Sudan. He was followed by Ibn al-Faḳīh al-Hamadhānī, writing *ca.* 903 (290 A.H.), and al-Mas'ūdī, who died in 956 (345 A.H.). These two borrowed much of their information on the Western Sudan from al-Ya'qūbī, though each had something new to add. New pieces of information, however, brought no radical change in the degree of knowledge about the Sudan. Such a change occurred only in 1067/8 (460 A.H.), when Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī wrote the first detailed description of the Western Sudan, which allows a more solid reconstruction of the history of that region.

While reading al-Bakrī's description of the Western Sudan one is tempted to believe that he must have visited this region to get such an intimate knowledge of it. Yet it is certain that he produced this work in Cordova from reports and tales of traders and visitors to the Sudan. On the other hand, it is generally held by scholars that an earlier geographer, Ibn-Ḥawqal, crossed the Sahara and visited Awdaghost in 951/2 (340 A.H.), and so was the first Arab author who reached the frontiers of *bilād al-Sūdān*. It is the purpose of this paper to cast some doubts on Ibn-Ḥawqal's visit to Awdaghost, and to suggest that we have to wait four centuries more, until the middle of the fourteenth century, for a report by a traveller who undoubtedly himself crossed the Sahara. Ibn-Battūṭa's travels, with itineraries and dates, are clearly recorded in his accounts, which are full also of his personal experiences in these remote countries. On the other hand, Ibn-Ḥawqal's visit to Awdaghost may only be inferred from what he said about a cheque he saw in Awdaghost.

⁴ al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Lugduni Batavorum, 1892; BGA VI), 345; idem, *Les pays*, trans. G. Wiet (Cairo, 1937), 205.

⁵ References to the Sudan are available in two works by al-Ya'qūbī. He first wrote his historical work (*Kitāb al-Ta'rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, Lugduni Batavorum, 1883), which he completed probably in 872. Later, when he was in Egypt, he wrote the geographical work (*K. al-buldān*, quoted above), which he completed in 891. (See C. Brockelmann's article 'al-Ya'qūbī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed. vol. IV; G. Wiet's Introduction in *Les pays*, op. cit. viii-ix.) It is significant that the long list of kingdoms and peoples in the Sudan appears in al-Ya'qūbī's earlier work (*K. al-Ta'rikh*), which he probably wrote when he was still in the east.

The famous cheque from Awdaghost is mentioned three times by Ibn-Ḥawqal.

(1) When introducing his chapter on the Maghrib, Ibn-Ḥawqal described the shift of the caravan trade from a route which linked Egypt and Ghana, over al-Wāḥāt ('the oases'), to a new western trans-Saharan route from Sijilmāsa to the Sudan. He then went on to describe the great volume of the trade and the enormous profits of the traders of Sijilmāsa. This is demonstrated by the following anecdote:

ولقد رأيت صكًا كتب بدین علی محمد بن ابی سعدون باودغشت وشهد علیه
العدول بأثنين واربعين الف دينار.

I saw a bill [or a cheque] of a debt owed by Muḥammad ibn Abī Sa'dūn, written in Awdaghost and countersigned by competent witnesses, in the sum of 42,000 dinars.⁶

(2) In his description of Sijilmāsa, Ibn-Ḥawqal had many good things to say about this town and its people. The trade across the Sahara flourished, and the story of the cheque again served to demonstrate the prosperity of Sijilmāsa:

ولقد رأيت باودغست صكًا فيه ذكر حق لبعضهم على رجل من تجار اودغست وهو من
اهل سجلماسة بأثنين واربعين الف دينار وما رأيت ولا سمعت بالمشرق لهذه الحكاية شيئا
ولا نظيرًا ولقد حكيتها بالعراق وفارس وخراسان فاستطرفت.

I saw a bill in Awdaghost certifying a debt owed to one of them [of the people of Sijilmāsa] by one of the traders of Awdaghost, who was himself of the people of Sijilmāsa, in the sum of 42,000 dinars. I have never seen or heard anything comparable to this story in the east. I told it in al-'Irāq, in Fārs, and in Khurāsān, and everywhere it was regarded as a novelty.⁷

⁶ There are two editions of Ibn-Ḥawqal's *Kitāb šūrat al-arḍ*: the first edition was prepared by M. J. de Goeje (Lugduni Batavorum, 1873), based on three MSS from Leiden, Paris, and Oxford; a second edition, which replaced the first edition as vol. II of the BGA, was prepared by J. H. Kramers (Lugduni Batavorum, 1938-9) following the discovery of a better and more complete MS at the Old Seray Library in Istanbul. Kramers incorporated in his edition passages from de Goeje's edition which are not to be found in the Istanbul MS. Such is the case of the paragraph quoted here, which appears in de Goeje's edition on p. 42 and is reproduced in Kramers's edition on p. 61. (Throughout this paper the references are to Kramers's edition, unless otherwise indicated.) Following his edition of the Arabic text, Kramers prepared a French translation, which was completed and published after his death by G. Wiet (*Configuration de la terre* (Beirut and Paris, 1964), 58). The French translation of this passage reads: 'J'ai vu une reconnaissance de dette de Muhammad ibn Abi Sa'dun, d'Audaghust, contresignée etc.' (my italics).

⁷ Text, 99; translation, 97-8. The translation here is somewhat misleading as it goes: 'J'ai vu à Audaghust une reconnaissance de dette par laquelle un négociant d'Audaghust [the phrase 'who was himself of the people of Sijilmāsa' is omitted here] se recon-

(3) Ibn-Ḥawqal met one of the participants in this exceptional monetary transaction, from whom he was able to obtain information on the political developments among the Ṣanhāja of the southern Sahara, in the neighbourhood of Awdaghost:

وسمعت ابا اسحاق ابراهيم بن عبد الله المعروف بفَزَعٍ شَغْلُهُ وهو صاحب الدين
والصك الذي قدمت ذكره باودغست يقول سمعت تنبروتان بن اسفشر يقول وكان
ملك صنهاجة اجمع انه يلي امرهم مذ عشرون سنة .

Abū-Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abdallāh, known as *Faragha Shughlulu*, who is the creditor and the holder of the bill mentioned above in [connexion with] Awdaghost, told me about Tinbarūtān ibn Isfaishar, saying that he was the king of all the Ṣanhāja, and that he had been reigning over them already for twenty years.⁸

These three references allow us to reconstruct the whole transaction. Muḥammad ibn Abī Sa’dūn, originally from Sijilmāsa, settled to trade in Awdaghost. He owed a debt of 42,000 dinars to Abū-Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abdallāh, a trader from Sijilmāsa. A bill certifying this debt was written in Awdaghost, and was countersigned by competent witnesses.

A debt of this amount, unheard of in the eastern provinces of the Muslim world, indicates a flourishing trade across the desert between two termini of the trans-Saharan trails, Sijilmāsa and Awdaghost. For a later period—the fourteenth century—we have a detailed account of the organization of the trans-Saharan trade, with partners in the trading centres north and south of the Sahara. Five brothers of the Maqqarī family settled in Tlemsen, Sijilmāsa, and Walata, from which places they could control the trans-Saharan trade in all its stages, by responding to the fluctuations of supply and demand at both ends of the route.⁹ In the fourteenth century it was a family partnership, whereas the tenth-century partnership was based on a business relationship, as suggested by the bill of debt. Yet the trading system was probably the same, with one partner resident in Sijilmāsa while the other moved south, across the Sahara, to settle in

naissait débiteur envers un habitant de Sidjilmasa d'une somme de 42,000 dinars, etc.¹ Because of the importance of this text it may be appropriate to quote the version of de Goeje's edition (p. 70):

ولقد رايت باودغست صكاً فيه ذكر حق على رجل من اهل سجلماسة لرجل آخر
من اهلها باربعين الف دينار الخ .

‘I saw a bill in Awdaghost certifying a debt owed by a man from the people of Sijilmāsa to another man of the same town on the sum of 40,000 dinars, etc.’

⁸ Text, 100; compare the French translation (98): ‘J’ai entendu raconter par Abu Ishaq . . . qui était à Awdaghost, le bénéficiaire du chèque dont j’ai parlé.’ In de Goeje's edition this informant is referred to as Abū-Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Faragha Shaghlahu, without associating him with the famous cheque (71).

⁹ H. Pérès, ‘Relations entre le Tafilet et le Soudan à travers le Sahara du XIIIe au XIVE siècle’, *Mélanges géographiques et orientalistes offerts à E.-F. Gautier* (Tours, 1937), 409-14.

Awdaghost. (The latter was replaced by Walata as the southern terminus more than two centuries later.)

The bill of debt, as was to be expected according to the usual procedure, was held by the creditor, Abū-Ishāq Ibrāhīm of Sijilmāsa. It was probably in Sijilmāsa that Ibn-Ḥawqal met this man, in whose hand he saw the famous cheque. Indeed, Ibn-Ḥawqal says that he visited Sijilmāsa in 340 A.H. (951/2).¹⁰

According to the circumstances it is therefore likely that Ibn-Ḥawqal saw the cheque in Sijilmāsa rather than in Awdaghost, where the cheque had been written. Yet at least once the text says explicitly 'wa-laqaḍ ra'aytu bi-Awdaghost ṣakkan [I saw a cheque in Awdaghost]'. Here my point is rather weak, though it may be suggested that as the word 'bi-Awdaghost' is repeated several times in this context—with the preposition *bi* conveying different meanings—it could have been inserted here by mistake, either by the author or by one of the earliest copyists.¹¹ Admitting this weakness in the argument, we may turn now to Ibn-Ḥawqal's own information about the Sahara, Awdaghost, and the Sudan. Does this information convey the impression of a record by a traveller who crossed the Sahara to Awdaghost? Is this information satisfactory for one who reached the gates of the Sudan? Could Ibn-Ḥawqal have obtained this information without crossing the desert?

The journey across the Sahara would surely have been an exciting experience which would have left a deep impression on the traveller. Indeed, Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa's description of the caravan he joined, of the perils of the desert, and of the precautions taken to overcome them, is among the best pieces of the geographical literature which bears on African history.¹² On the other hand, Ibn-Ḥawqal's description of the desert does not reflect any personal experience, and is rather shallow:

وبين المغرب والبلدان التى قدمت ذكرها وبلاد السودان سقاوز ويراى منقطعة
قليلة المياه متعذرة المراعى لا تسلك الا فى الشتاء وسالكها فى حينه صتصل السفر
دائم الورد والصدور.

Between the Maghrib, the countries just mentioned [the region of Sijilmāsa—al-Sūs—Aghmāt—Fās] and *bilād al-Sūdān*, there are deserts and empty lands, where water is rare and pastures are unavailable. It can be traversed in the rainy

¹⁰ Text, 83, 99; translation, 79, 97.

¹¹ Compare my translation of Ibn-Ḥawqal's text (pp. 61 and 100) above with the French translation as quoted in notes 6 and 8 above. The disagreement in the translation shows the different meanings which may be attributed to the phrase *bi-Awdaghost*, according to the context and its position in the sentence. The disagreement of the MSS makes quite plausible the suggestion that the phrase *bi-Awdaghost* was inserted by mistake or misplaced.

¹² Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuhfat al-nuzār fī gharā'ib al-amṣār wa-'ajā'ib al-asfār* (*Voyages*), Arabic text and Fr. trans. by C. Défrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, iv (Paris, 1922), 377-83.

season only, and even then the traveller has to proceed without stopping on the way there and back.¹³

This description hardly differs from what had been said earlier about the Sahara desert by al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn al-Faqīh and al-Iṣṭakhri.¹⁴ Yet Ibn-Ḥawqal is distinguished by his information about the Berber tribes of the Sahara, in the form of a long detailed list of tribal names.¹⁵ T. Lewicki and H. Lhote have succeeded in identifying many of these names, and in showing that they are related to Berber tribes inhabiting, now as in the tenth century, the southern parts of the desert. Most of these tribes roamed not far from the Niger bend, with their political centre at Tadmekka, which is first mentioned here by name. Other tribes in Ibn-Ḥawqal's list live in the region of Air.¹⁶

During the first millennium A.D., Berber tribes moved across the Sahara from the northern to the southern fringes of the Sahara. By the tenth century most of the tribes already occupied their present habitations, or areas near by, but contacts with kindred tribal groupings north of the desert must have been closer than now. Population movements and trade routes made communications on the north-south axis, across the Sahara, easier than on a west-east line, from the western to the central Sahara. Hence information about peoples in the regions of Tadmekka and Air was more accessible in the trading centres of North Africa than in Awdaghost. Politics in North Africa during the tenth century involved inter-tribal relationships among the Berbers, who were often divided in supporting or opposing ruling dynasties in the Maghrib. If, as suggested by some scholars, Ibn-Ḥawqal worked in the service of the Fāṭimids,¹⁷ his attempt to collect as much information as possible on the Berber tribes could have served a political purpose.

Ibn-Ḥawqal described the competence of the Masūfa Berbers, the masters of the western trans-Saharan route, as guides for caravans who knew the desert well and were excellent camel riders. He himself saw one of the Masūfa overcoming a bolting camel.¹⁸ This Ibn-Ḥawqal could have witnessed in Sijilmāsa, where the Masūfa used to come to take charge of the caravans.¹⁹

So much for the Sahara and its tribes, which, it is tentatively suggested here, Ibn Ḥawqal came to know in Sijilmāsa and other trading centres of North Africa, and not from his own personal experience in penetrating the desert. We now turn to his information about Awdaghost, which he is said

¹³ Text, 103; translation, 101.

¹⁴ al-Ya'qūbī, *K. al-buldān*, 360 (*Les pays*, 226); Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (*Lugduni Batavorum*, 1885; BGA v), 81, 87; al-Iṣṭakhri, *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (*Lugduni Batavorum*, 1870; BGA 1), 45.

¹⁵ Text, 101-7; translation, 99-105.

¹⁶ T. Lewicki, 'A propos d'une liste de tribus berbères d'Ibn Hawqal', *Folia Orientalia*, 1, 128-35; H. Lhote, *Les Touaregs du Hoggar* (Paris, 1955), 126-7.

¹⁷ G. Wier's introduction to the French translation of Ibn-Ḥawqal, xii.

¹⁸ Text, 101-2; translation, 99-100.

¹⁹ Ibn-Baṭṭūṭa, *op. cit.* 377.

to have visited, and about towns and kingdoms in the Sudan, which, according to what is accepted, he may have known at close quarters.

Awdaghost itself is described very briefly:

واودغست مدينة لطيفة اشبه بلاد الله بمكة . . لانها بين جبلين ذات شعاب .

Awdaghost is a beautiful town. It resembles Mecca more than any other town in the world . . . because [like Mecca] it lies in a valley between two hills.²⁰

This description adds very little to what al-Ya'qūbī said earlier: 'then he [the traveller] proceeds to a town called Ghost, which is an inhabited valley with dwellings.'²¹ Ibn-Ḥawqal could have confirmed al-Ya'qūbī's description from what he himself heard in Sijilmāsa from traders who had visited Awdaghost. One of these was Abū-Ishāq Ibrāhīm, the holder of the famous cheque. It was from him that Ibn-Ḥawqal obtained the most precious information he contributed to African history, about Tinbarūtān ibn Isfaishar, the king of all the (southern) Ṣanhāja. This ruler, who had been enthroned twenty years earlier, extended his authority by accepting the allegiance of new peoples, of whom Ibn-Hawqal had not heard before. He had under his authority about 300,000 tents. The kingship of this tribe had been vested in this king's family from time immemorial.²²

It is quite possible that other information concerning political relations in the Sudan came also from the same informant, or from another trader in Sijilmāsa. Ibn-Ḥawqal heard that the king of Awdaghost maintained relations with the king of Ghana. The latter was the richest king in the world because of the vast quantities of gold he possessed. The king of Ghana exchanged presents with the king of Kūgha, although the latter did not possess the wealth and prosperity of the king of Ghana. The Sudanese kings were dependent upon the king of Awdaghost because of the salt which came to them, through his country, from the Muslim regions. The peoples of the Sudan could not live without salt, and the price of a load of salt in the interior and remotest parts of the Sudan often reached between 200 and 300 dinars.²³

Valuable as this historical information is, it may be regarded as disappointing for a traveller who had visited Awdaghost. With the friendly relationship existing between Awdaghost and Ghana, as described by Ibn-Ḥawqal himself, one would expect more details from a geographer who had been so near to Ghana, which by that time had already gained a fabulous name. It could be argued, however, that this deficiency is due to the lack of real interest in the pagan kingdoms far in the south. Had not Ibn-Ḥawqal himself said as follows?

I have not mentioned the countries of the black peoples in the west, the Beja, the Zanj, and the other nations in their regions, because the organization of

²⁰ Text, 92; translation, 90. His description of towns in the Maghrib which he visited is always short, but the few notes which characterize every town clearly suggest direct observation (e.g. text, 66-83; translation, 62-80).

²¹ al-Ya'qūbī, *K. al-buldān*, 360 (*Les pays*, 226).

²² Text, 100; translation, 98.

²³ Text, 101; translation, 99.

kingdoms is based on religions, customs, and justice, and civilizations depend upon good government. These peoples lack all these qualities, and therefore their kingdoms do not deserve to be mentioned apart as the other kingdoms do.²⁴

Yet this ethnocentric statement of Ibn-Hawqal was not originally his, but copied word by word from al-Iṣṭakhri.²⁵ Ibn-Hawqal admits that he was prompted to write his book after he had met al-Iṣṭakhri, to improve deficiencies he had observed in the latter's work. Undoubtedly, Ibn-Hawqal is indebted to al-Iṣṭakhri for more than he admits, though the chapters on the Maghrib and Spain are Ibn-Hawqal's original contribution.²⁶ The quotation above suits well al-Iṣṭakhri's work, where there is hardly anything about the peoples of the Sudan. But Ibn-Hawqal, who collected useful information in the Maghrib about the Sudan, was careless enough not to omit the above-mentioned remark from the introduction, which he copied, along with other things, from al-Iṣṭakhri. This remark, therefore, indicates bad editing rather than an intention to ignore the Sudanese peoples and kingdoms. On the contrary, Ibn-Hawqal endeavoured to collect as much information as he could about the Sudan.

This may be shown by the list of towns and kingdoms in the Sudan which Ibn-Hawqal recorded, indicating the distance between each two successive towns. These distances, however, look somewhat stereotypic, as seven of the thirteen mentioned were said to be of one month's march.²⁷ Moreover, none of the names mentioned in this list were new, and all had already been mentioned by earlier geographers, al-Ya'qūbī (Y), Ibn al-Faqīh (I), or al-Mas'ūdī (M), namely²⁸ Ghana (Y, I, M), Kūgha (M), Sāma (Y), Kanem (Y, I, M),²⁹ Kawkaw (Y, I, M), Maranda (Y, I, M), Zuwaila (Y), Ajdābiya (Y), Fezzan (Y) and Zaghāwa (Y, M).

Ibn-Hawqal added two new names only to the inventory of geographical names in the Sudan known to the Arabs. One is غرنوا,³⁰ which is probably the same as غيارو — Ghiyārū — of al-Bakrī, the important gold market south of Kayès near the Senegal river.³¹ The second is Awlīl, the salt mine

²⁴ Text, 9-10; translation, 9-10.

²⁵ al-Iṣṭakhri, op. cit. 4-5.

²⁶ J. H. Kramers, 'La question Balkhi-Istakhri-Ibn Hauqal', *Acta Orientalia*, x, 9-30; Wiet's introduction to Ibn-Hawqal, x-xi, xiv-xv; S. Maqbul Ahmad, op. cit. 582.

²⁷ Text, 92; translation, 90.

²⁸ al-Ya'qūbī, *K. al-Ta'rikh*, 219-20; idem, *K. al-buldān*, 345 (*Les pays*, 205); Ibn al-Faqīh, op. cit. 68; al-Mas'ūdī, op. cit. III, 2; idem, *Akhhār al-zamān*, quoted from MSS in *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti* by Youssouf Kamal (Leiden, 1932), III, 629.

²⁹ The name Kanem, which was known to earlier geographers, does not appear as such in Ibn-Hawqal's text. Instead there is a name كزوم (K. Z. M.), which is unidentified and does not occur again in the geographical literature. I would therefore incline to suggest that كزوم should be read كائم, i.e. Kanem.

³⁰ Text, 61, 64; translation, 58, 61.

³¹ al-Bakrī, *Al-masālik wa'l-mamālik; kitāb al-mughrib fī dhikr bilād Ifriqiya wa'l-Maghrib*, ed. M. G. de Slane (Algiers, 1911), 177; idem, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, trans. M. G. de Slane (Algiers, 1913), 331-2.

on the Mauretania coast.³² It is therefore about the sources of the gold and the salt, the two staples of the trans-Saharan trade, that Ibn-Ḥawqal's contribution is original. This is the kind of information that could well have been obtained in Sijilmāsa, which thrived on the trans-Saharan trade.

Al-Ya'qūbī and al-Mas'ūdī mentioned the names of peoples and kingdoms in the Sudan in describing the origin of the Sudanese people from Kūsh, son of Ḥām, son of Nūḥ (Noah). These peoples went up the Nile river from Egypt, and then divided into two branches, one turning eastwards and the other westwards.³³ In another context al-Mas'ūdī enumerated various Sudanese kingdoms that were spread along the 'Nile' flowing westwards to the Ocean.³⁴ Hence, both al-Ya'qūbī and al-Mas'ūdī counted these people from east to west, while Ibn-Ḥawqal did so in the opposite direction, from west to east. This may well be the result of a change in the trade routes by which information reached the Arab geographers.

Al-Ya'qūbī described the important trading centre of Zuwaila, through which slaves captured in the Central Sudan were sent to North Africa, and thence to the Muslim east. In Zuwaila, al-Ya'qūbī mentioned traders from Khurāsān, al-Baṣra, and al-Kūfa.³⁵ Less than a century later, Ibn-Ḥawqal visited the Maghrib and found Muslim traders from al-Kūfa, al-Baṣra and Baghdad flocking to Sijilmāsa in the west,³⁶ which emerged as the principal entrepôt for the trade with the Sudan, with gold as the main staple of this trade. Hence, whereas al-Ya'qūbī viewed the Sudan through an eastern trans-Saharan route, Ibn-Ḥawqal collected his information from the entrance to the western trans-Saharan route.

Ibn-Ḥawqal associated the growth of Sijilmāsa and the arrival of the traders from Iraq with the abandonment of an old trade route which linked Ghana with Egypt over al-Wāḥāt, the oases of Kharga and Dakhla. This route had already been described earlier by Ibn al-Faqīh: 'When you cross the frontiers of Ghana going to Egypt you reach a nation of the Negroes called Kawkaw, then another nation called Maranda, then one called Marāwa, then [you reach] Wāḥāt Miṣr [the oases of Egypt] in a place called Malsāna.'³⁷

³² Text, 92; translation, 91.

³³ al-Ya'qūbī, *K. al-Ta'wīkh*, 219-20; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, III, 2.

³⁴ al-Mas'ūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān*, 629.

³⁵ al-Ya'qūbī, *K. al-buldān*, 345 (*Les pays*, 205).

³⁶ Text, 61; translation, 58. In the 870s al-Ya'qūbī (op. cit. 359; *Les pays*, 225) did not record a flourishing trade in Sijilmāsa. The people of Sijilmāsa, he says, are mixed, most of them are Berbers, and among the latter the Ṣanhāja are the majority.

³⁷ Ibn al-Faqīh, op. cit. 68. R. Mauny (*Tableau géographique de l'ouest africain au moyen âge* (Dakar, 1961), 139) identifies Maranda with the water-point Marandet, south of Agades. T. Lewicki ('A propos du nom de l'oasis de Koufra chez les géographes arabes du XIe et du XIIe siècle', *J. Afr. Hist.* VI (1965), 296) reads the name as Marinda, and seeks to identify it with one of the Toubou tribes, which lived in the region of Air before the fifteenth-sixteenth century. Both scholars, however, suggest that the route from Gao passed over Air, and then to Tibesti, where T. Lewicki (loc. cit.) identifies the location of the Marāwa.

Ibn al-Faḡīh's information was related to the end of the ninth century, because al-Iṣṭakhri, writing a few decades later, said that the oases (*al-Wāḡāt*), which had formerly been inhabited, were ruined and deserted in his time.³⁸ Ibn-Ḥawqal gave a detailed description of these oases, and he may have visited them. He knew that the oases had declined and were deserted after the Egyptian ruler Aḥmad ibn Tūlūn (868–84) had forbidden the traders to take the route leading from al-Wāḡāt to the Sudan. He did this because the route became very dangerous, as many caravans had been lost when covered by sandstorms or attacked by brigands.³⁹ This piece of evidence is another important contribution of Ibn-Ḥawqal to African history, but it was obtained north, and not south, of the Sahara.

CONCLUSIONS

Ibn-Ḥawqal is credited by modern scholars as 'a first-hand authority since he visited Awdaghost'.⁴⁰ Yet his information often falls short of the high expectations placed on such an authority, who, it is said, reached the gates of the Sudan.⁴¹ Part of the information presented by Ibn-Ḥawqal is shallow and thin, or seems to have been borrowed from earlier geographers, while the best pieces of evidence—such as the political developments among the Ṣanhāja of the southern Sahara, the list of Berber tribes, and the abandonment of the old route from Ghana to Egypt—which represent his original contribution, were collected in Sijilmāsa, Egypt, and other places he visited in North Africa.

This analysis of Ibn-Ḥawqal's records suggests that he did not cross the Sahara to visit Awdaghost. It is true that at least once it is said explicitly that he saw the famous cheque *in* Awdaghost, but the circumstances point to the possibility that he met the holder of the cheque in Sijilmāsa.

This point is not proved beyond doubt, but one feels that more justice will be done to Ibn-Ḥawqal's contribution to African history if it is borne in mind that he may have collected his information north and not south of the Sahara. In this case his labours as an inquisitive geographer are praiseworthy, whereas for a traveller who crossed the Sahara his information is rather poor.

SUMMARY

It is generally accepted that Ibn-Ḥawqal crossed the Sahara and visited Awdaghost in 951/2 to be the first Arab geographer who reached the gates of *bilād al-Sūdān*. This is inferred from what he says about a cheque he saw in Awdaghost. A critical analysis of the references to this cheque suggests that it was a

³⁸ al-Iṣṭakhri, *op. cit.* 52.

³⁹ Text, 153; translation, 151. On these oases, see also Leo Africanus, *Description de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1956), II, 457–8.

⁴⁰ J. S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London, 1962), 22 n.

⁴¹ An implicit disappointment with Ibn-Ḥawqal's information may be traced in Trimingham (*op. cit.* 1) and Mauny (*op. cit.* 71–2, 215).

bill of debt owed by a trader from Sijilmāsa resident at Awdaghost to another trader from Sijilmāsa. The transactions between the two were part of the trans-Saharan trade, with one partner resident at Awdaghost and the other at Sijilmāsa. The bill must have been held by the creditor, whom Ibn-Ḥawqal could have met at Sijilmāsa.

It was from this man that Ibn-Ḥawqal recorded the information about the ruler of the Ṣanhāja in the southern Sahara, and probably also about his relations with Ghana and other Sudanese polities. Another valuable piece of information, about the abandoned route from Ghana to Egypt, was collected in the oases of Egypt. Also, the detailed list of Berber tribes inhabiting the area between Tadmekka and Air could have been obtained in North Africa, rather than at Awdaghost, because communications in the Sahara were more frequent between north and south than between west and east.

Ibn-Ḥawqal's description of the Sahara is stereotypic and adds nothing to what earlier geographers had to say, and the same applies to his words concerning Awdaghost itself. Towns and kingdoms in the Sudan mentioned by Ibn-Ḥawqal had already been recorded earlier by al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn al-Faḥīh and al-Mas'ūdī. For a traveller who crossed the Sahara, Ibn-Ḥawqal's information is rather poor, but if he collected his information north of the Sahara, as this paper suggests, his labours as an inquisitive geographer are praiseworthy.