

Strategic Role of Al-Ubulla Port in Trading with Far East Countries during 257-311 AH/ 870-922 AD

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The present study is a historical-explorative research of the Al-Ubulla port in the area of the Arab Gulf, highlighting its strategic role in establishing trade relations with the Far East countries during the period (257-311 AH/ 870-922 AD). This is the post Islamic emergence era and prior to the Mongol invasion of the region. The study shed light on the origin of the name Al-Ubulla, its geographical location, and factors that positively affected the trade practices, and export-import, with the Far East countries like India, China, and Silan (Sri Lanka). Historical research method in a qualitative study like this is particularly suitable when the data analysis and conclusions depend upon past events and their validity and authenticity is of much importance. This study collected data from written records, letters, and biographies which constituted historical, legal, and geographical accounts of the period of the study. This data included travel and biographical records of sailors, biographers and historians familiar with the Arab Gulf and its remote locations during the ancient period. The findings revealed that the Al-Ubulla port played a significant role in the field of trade from the fourth century BC till the period of destroying and looting the Al-Ubulla port by the black people and the Qarmatians. This study would be a useful reference for information about the state of trade relations through the Al-Ubulla port with the Far East countries.

Key words: *Al-Ubulla port, the Arab Gulf, Basrah, trade, Far East.*

Introduction

Al-Ubulla port enjoyed a strategic position in the Arab Gulf, due to its geographical location as a historical port since the fourth century, and having trade relations not only with the surrounding Gulf States but also with places as distant as China, India and Ceylon in the Far East (Ulrich, 2019). Located 12 miles east of Basrah on the right bank of the Euphrates–Tigris estuary connecting the Persian Gulf, Al-Ubulla possessed a canal, Nahr al-Ubulla on its northern side, merging with the Tigris river in the south east. According to medieval Arabic geographers Yāqūt al-Hamawī (1977) and Muḥammad Ḥawqal (1992), al-Ubulla was a town more populous and larger than Basrah, flourished during the Abbasid era (750–1258). The 'Ashar neighborhood of modern Basra currently occupies the site of al-Ubulla (quoted in Kramers, 2000).

Various other Islamic and historical records have heightened its heritage significance mainly as a port which had established trade relations with countries as distant as in the Far East. Boats and ships arrive at this port from these countries and practiced import and export trade of different types of goods. Owing to its being the center of the Old world, and the Arab Gulf connected with the Indian Ocean, Iraq was a natural and inevitable path connecting the eastern world with the western one. All ships travelling to Far East including India and China went through the Mediterranean Sea and so passed all the traded goods of the Byzantine Empire through Iraq including linen and shipbuilding material. This was the sea route used by Arabs which started from the Euphrates – Tigris estuary to Indus River in Sind. All ships on this sea route would sail from Al-Ubulla, passing through Oman and then to India and other Far East locations (Al-Qusayr, 2014).

For an example, the Lakhmid, present-day Al Anbar Governorate in Iraq, traded with China through the 'Isā River, which is connected to the Euphrates-Tigris estuary. During that period, the Lakhmid or Banu Lakhm were an Arab kingdom of southern Iraq with al-Hirah as their capital from about 300 to 602 AD, that is before the emergence of Islam. The Lakhmids were the allies of the Sassanian Empire and also participated in the Roman–Persian Wars. The common link was the Persian Gulf from Al-Hirah, and to reach there, the Lakhmids traveled in smaller boats to the Al-Ubulla port where they boarded on the sea ships to India and China (Bosworth, 1999; Al-Juthari, 1992; Al-Zamakhshari, 1999).

Records reveal that the most important harbors in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, besides Al-Ubulla, were Gerrha and Sohar (Oman) and Bahrain (Al-Hajjaj, 2018). An important event on record is in December 636 A.D. when Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab ordered Utbah ibn Ghazwan to head south to capture Al-Ubulla or "port of Apologos" and extend the Muslim dominion up to Basra and cut ties between the Persian armies. Utbah ibn Ghazwan invaded Al-Ubulla in April 637 A.D. and captured the region forcing the Persians to withdraw.

Historical records portray these battles vividly however, it is also mentioned that following these battles, the strategic importance of Al-Ubulla declined though it remained a major trade port until the Mongol invasion ((Ramini & Al-Zuraiqi,2020; Kramers, 2000). In short, Al-Ubulla played a prominent role in establishing trade and commerce during 4th to 8th century in the Arab Gulf zone. Prior to its destruction by the black people and the Qarmatians in the 9th century A.D., Al-Ubulla had been participating actively in the contemporary trade (Al-Husan, 1955; Al-Atheer, 1997; Al-Douri,1974; Al-Hajjaj, 2018).

Research Methodology

The current study is an attempt to discover the significance of the Al-Ubulla port in the light of the historical and geographical records available. This study adopted a historical and explorative method of research, depending upon the published literature by historians and geographers. The objective of this study was to explore the role and historical value of the Al-Ubulla port, particularly before and after the emergence of Islam. This study also furnished factors that made this port a useful center of trade.

Historical research method is particularly suitable to such studies when the data analysis and conclusions depend upon past events and ensuring their validity and authenticity through triangulated sources. The purpose of a historical research is also to collect, verify, and synthesize evidence from the historical records and establish certain facts about the events and occurrence in the past. Such data may be in the form of written records, diaries, letters, and so on. Some of these documents are of historical, legal, and biographical significance as these are associated with individuals and governments.

For this study, the researchers depended upon both primary and secondary sources, including travel and biographical records of sailors, biographers and historians familiar with the Arab Gulf and its remote locations during the ancient period. Most of these sources are the testimony of those people who witnessed events that happened or those who actually participated in them. Historical data cannot be free from criticism and therefore it was necessary to validate it by determining its authenticity through sources that could prove the genuineness of data. During the process of this research, a care has been taken to collect data only from the validated, authentic sources since most of the findings are in the form of excerpts and quotes from authentic historical and geographical records.

Data Collection

The Name of the Port

Historians have debated over the origins and the meaning of the name Al-Ubulla. Some historians suggest that this name is derived from *Akadian* language while others trace its

origin in the Greek language from the Greek word *Apologos* or Apollo which refers to the god of poetry and music (Baalbaki, 1973; Al-hajaj 2018). The Greek during the Alexandrian era had occupied Basrah for a while, particularly the neighborhood of Al-Bata'eh, in a city called Toreedoon, to be more specific. Al-Ubulla port served as the port for the Greeks as well as the natives of the surrounding areas. The Greeks particularly carried out navigation processes and practiced trade from this port and eventually also gave it this name (Al-Janabi, 2015).

A few scholars suggest that the word *Ubulum* is derived from the Akadian language (Al-Baghdadi, 1954). The Akadians were a group of Semitic people who lived on the Arabian Peninsula between Egypt and Mesopotamia. As the population expanded, this group moved northwards and during the era of King Sargon II (722-705 BC), it established its city-states of Sumer and Akkad which had later become centers of growing economic and political power of Mesopotamia. The Akadian Empire ruled over a rain-fed agricultural system of Assyria and had ample wheat production, so used ships and boats to carry off these crops across the empire. Some scholars have therefore suggested that there is a link between the word *Al-Ubulla* and the word *Abeerk* i.e. an Akkadian city (Al-Baghdadi, 1954).

The writings drafted during the era of an Assyrian King named Sennacherib (705-681 BC) have provided evidence of the use of the word *Ubulum* in cuneiform writings, but indicating that the word *Al-Ubulla* was an Arabic word. *Ubulum* was the name of an Assyrian clan that lived in the southern area of Iraq (Ali, 1971) and during this period, the Arabs who traded with the Assyrians called this port as *Al-Ubulla* (Hourani, 1958). Some linguists and dictionaries suggest that the word *Al-Ubulla* is derived from Nabataean language (Al-Bakri, 1945), which was heavily influenced by Arabic, especially in the 4th century or rather it was later accepted as a dialect of Arabic spoken by the Nabataeans (the Muslim Arabs). There is an interesting linkage between the word *Al-Ubulla* and a woman named *Hobbi* who used to work in a bar located in the area of the port. The port workers as well as some Arab travelers used to put their tools under the custody of this woman during the night. During that time the word *Hobbilat* also referred to a port, so it is assumed that the Arab clans turned the word *Hobbilat* into *Al-Ubulla* (Al-Bakri, 1945).

Lexicographers of the Arabic language and geographical dictionaries have however given several meanings to the word *Al-Ubulla* commonly referring to 'dates with yogurt' (Hamowi, 1977; Mandhur, 1970). Historians have accepted this meaning suggesting that the port is named so because the surrounding area of the port included many orchards that planted dates and palms. A few historians related it with trade and commerce. Since the port *Al-Ubulla* was a significant location for trade and navigation particularly for India and Sind, it was associated with meanings such as 'the land of India' or 'land of relief' for the people living in these places (Al-Tabari, 1967; Al-Masoudi, 1965).

A Geographically Strategic Location

It has been widely accepted by historians and geographers that the geographical location of *Al-Ubulla* city in the Arab Gulf was of strategic importance. This city was located in the right bank of the Euphrates–Tigris estuary connecting the Persian Gulf (Al-Saadi, 1976: p. 32; Al-Qazwini, 1969, 286), at a distance of four *Farasekh* (or 12 miles) away from Basrah near Shat Al-Arab i.e. Arvand Rud (Al-Baghdadi, 1954: p.1-18). This geographical description in the authentic sources explains its huge importance in the life of both rural and urban people. It is also suggested that sunshine did not reach many of the lands of this city as it is covered with numerous trees nor several villages were hidden inside these trees and were not accessible easily. Hence, for this reason, only the western areas of this city were inhabited (Al-Asatakhri, 1961: p.57).

A few geographical studies (Al-Idrisi, 1970:p.1-130) have provided references to this *Al-Ubulla* city located in the eastern area of Basrah, specifically near a river called *Al-Ubulla* River. This river flows into Shat Al-Arab i.e. Arvand Rud. The length of *Al-Ubulla* River was four *Farasekh* or 12 miles which was also the distance between Basrah and *Al-Ubulla* city (Al-Hajaj, 2018: p. 69). Hence, this close proximity with the major city of Basrah and at the same time connected to the villages of the river plains made this city strategically very important.

Al-Ubulla port before the emergence of Islam

There is evidence to show that *Al-Ubulla* port existed much before the emergence of Islam, particularly from the fourth century B.C. For instance, Nayar Khous, a sailor and a leader of the fleet in Alexander's army, mentioned the name of this port in his writings (Ziadeh, 1975). Alexander had decided to pass through this port in order to explore the water routes between a river in Al-Sind (Punjab in India/ Pakistan) and the estuary of Mesopotamia. Nayar Khous had taken a large fleet on his journey in 326 B.C. This port is mentioned as *Appolokhos* port from where several countries of the Persian Gulf entered into trade relations (Ziadeh, 1975). Later, in the first century A.D., there are references to *Al-Ubulla* in a book written by a Greek merchant, who lived in Egypt. This book entitled *The Guide of the Eritrean Sea* was translated by Dr. Nicholah Zyadeh (Hourani, 1958). The author sheds light on the Arab Gulf and mentions two cities: *Appolokhos* (i.e. *Al-Ubulla*) city and *Sharakes* (i.e. *Al-Muhammarah*) city. The author suggests that *Al-Ubulla* city was one of the cities of the Persian Empire and merchants exported goods up to Yemen through this port. Such goods included pearls, dyes, wines, dates, and gold. It was also suggested in the book that *Appolokhos* and *Sharakes* ports were used by many Arab, Persian and Chaldean people for trade and navigation purposes (Hourani, 1958: p. 79-107).

It is believed that the Persians sent ships from Al-Ubulla port up to China because during the era of the Sasanian Empire, Silan (Sri Lanka or Ceylon) Island used to be the water route connecting China and the Far East countries. Through this route, trade was practiced with China and the Far East countries (Battuta, 1979:p. 1-210). Ibn Battuta also suggests that Al-Ubulla port was a very large city where merchants from all over the Persian Empire and India arrived for trade and navigation purposes (Gibb, 1962).

Before the emergence of Islam, according to Al-Tabari (1967), Al-Ubulla city was inhabited by Arabs, Persian, Nabataean, Christians, and Jewish who used to live in Al-Ubulla city at the time of the early Muslim conquest. During the period (524-534 AD), i.e. prior to the emergence of Islam, there were worship houses in Al-Ubulla city for the followers of Nestorianism, a Christian theological doctrine. Al-Ubulla was then a part of several Arab Emirates such as Babel that were established during the fourth century B.C. to 127 B.C and which collapsed in 226 AD due to the attack of Ardashir the Unifier; a Sasanian King. Hence, there is also evidence of religious conflicts in and around Al-Ubulla. These Emirates remained under the authority of the Persians till the year 12 AH/ 632 AD and which were subsequently freed from the Persians by the early Muslim conquests (Al-Saadi, 1976:p. 119).

Al-Ubulla Port and the Early Muslim Conquest

Al-Ubulla is very frequently mentioned in historical accounts of the Muslim conquests in Iraq (Ramini & Al-Zuraiqi,2020). Al-Baladhary (1959) wrote a book called *The Early Muslim Conquests Of Countries* in which he described the early Muslim conquest of the Al-Ubulla city. He narrates how Uttbah bin Gazwan led the early Muslim conquest of Al-Ubulla and freed it. There are vivid accounts of these battles of this southern Iraqi port city of Al-Ubulla. According to some historians the port city was conquered twice, once in the year 14 AH / 634 A.D. before the battle of al-Qādisiyya and then again in 16 AH/ 636 A.D. After the conquest, Uttbah wrote a letter to Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab portraying Al-Ubulla city as a port with ships of Bahrain, Oman, India, and China sailing (Baladhari, 1959; Donner, 2014).

In another book, *The Essence of Jewels in the History of Basrah and Algeria*, Nu'man mentions a few more details about the early Muslim conquest of Al-Ubulla city. For instance, according to Nu'man, when Uttbah bin Gazwan arrived in Al- Khraibeh (i.e. Basrah), there was a mention of a harbor at Al-Ubulla city used by Chinese ships (quoted in Ibn Al- Iraq, 1973). There were also about 500 Persians in Al-Ubulla city who fought with Uttbah bin Gazwan and lost the fight and had to leave the city. Uttbah bin Gazwan was said to have passed through the Euphrates River to Al-Ubulla and take over the charge of the port city.

Nu'man quotes the account of one of the dwellers who had witnessed the early Muslim conquest of Al-Ubulla led by Uttbah bin Gazwa:

During the conquest, we ran into a ship that was full of walnuts. Thus a person asked what these stones are. We broke the shell of the walnuts and ate the kernel. After eating the kernel, I told them that the kernel tastes good”.

Nu'man also wrote:

Al-Ubulla city is small and beautiful city and includes many buildings. It includes many orchards. Its land is fertile. The people living in Al-Ubulla city live in luxury. However, they are not kind and seen as mean in comparison to the people of other villages” (Quoted in Ibn Al- Iraq, 1973, p: 75)

The Arab historians and geographers also often narrated similar accounts during the end of the third century AH, before Nu'man did. For example, Al-Astekhri (1961) says:

Al-Ubulla is a small fertile inhabited city. There is a river Basrah called Al-Ubulla River. The length of this river is 4 farasekh. This river extends between Basrah and Kufah. On the sides of this river, there are palaces and orchards. These orchards are connected with one another forming one big orchard”(Al-Astakhri, 1961.57).

In a similar account, Ibn Hawqal (1992) writes:

The orchards of Al-Ubulla city extend in a systematic manner. There are enjoyable assemblies held by people in this city. There are amazing landscapes, beautiful buildings and fantastic palaces at the latter city. There are tasty fruits and fruitful trees at Al-Ubulla city. This city includes many basils. It includes big pools. There are many visitors in the city” (Ibn Hawqal, 1992: p.212)

According to these authentic historical accounts, at the time of the early Muslim conquest, therefore, Al-Ubulla was a harbor by the people of Basrah. It was also a green and fertile land, with dates orchards and fruit trees. Besides, Al-Ubulla proved a strategic place for the merchants of Basrah who used its port for trade. On the sides of the river, there were stairs made of stone which facilitated the process of loading and offloading goods from ships (Al-Douri, 1974: p.136).

Al-Ubulla City and Its Role in Flourishing Trade Positive Factors

There are various factors that positively contributed to practicing trade in the Al-Ubulla city. For example, its geographical location in the central position between the eastern areas and the western areas of the world made it strategically very important. It connected India and other Far East countries with the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the traded goods of the Byzantine Empire passed through Al-Ubulla. Hence its location was a very positive factor in its usage as a trade center. The people living in this part of the Arab Gulf had been practicing trade since ancient times because the environment and surroundings were conducive to use this water route for trade and other commercial purposes. The people who traded were merchants, skillful fishermen and divers, and brave adventurers. The divers were capable of collecting jewels and pearls from the bottom of the sea. Moreover, the people living in this part of Arab Gulf manufactured ships of various types knew the art of ship building which they had learnt from experts in India and Egypt especially how to fix the sails and masts of ships (Al-Shami, 1989: p.96).

Moreover, this Al-Ubulla port boosted a new life in the economy of the region. People needed wood, metals and gemstones. A merchant named Suleiman provides a description for the fortunes that were gained through this sea route and trade with India and China. To be specific, he says:

“The Sea includes pearls, and amber. The mountains besides this sea are full of gold. In the land besides this sea, ebony, ivory and bamboo are obtained from the animals. In the latter land, there are trees of agarwood, camphor, walnut, and carnation. (Al-Serafi, 1999, p: 66)

A very positive factor mentioned was also that this water route from Al-Ubulla port was free from coral reef (Al-Ali, 1969: p.26) which made it convenient for practicing trade activities beyond Iraq. Al-Ubulla port was also considered the shortest and least expensive water route for travelers to Syria, Mediterranean cities and to Far East countries like India and China and to the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, and the African coasts (Al-Saadi, 1976: p.207). The Phoenicians who lived in the region—specifically in the area of Shat Al-Arab (Arvand Rud)—were known for their great water adventures and possessed great merchant ships (Al-Saadi, 1976: p.210). Besides, the people had a good knowledge of navigation and the ways in which the seasonal wind blew in the Arab Gulf and the Indian Ocean. They used to record the time and the season in which the seasonal wind used to blow (Abdel Wahab, 1990: p. 330).

The Muslims made a good contribution after their invasion and annexure of the Al-Ubulla city to improve the Al-Ubulla port. During this early Islamic period, two canals were built. These canals were Al-Ubulla Canal and Ma’qal Canal. The Al-Ubulla canal started from Shat

Al-Arab (i.e. Arvand Rud) and ended in Basrah. The course of Shat Al-Arab and its specified river routes linked the port with Basrah. Since big ships could not enter Basrah, they would anchor at the Al-Ubulla port. From there, goods were shipped in special ships to Basrah and other cities. They special ships passed through the second canal of Ma'qal. The goods were shipped from the side of the Tigris River to Basrah. Similarly, on return, the goods would reach Al-Ubulla port through this canal, and then were shipped for the eastern or western destinations (Hourani, 1958: p. 205)

The Al-Ubulla port and the trade activities were also responsible for the success and prosperity of the people of Basrah (Al-Douri, 1974: p.298) Al-Faqeeh also writes: “The people who are capable to earn money are the people of Basrah and Khuzestan. When entering Ferghana and Al-Sous Al-Aqsa, one shall definitely see a person from Basrah, Khuzestan or Al-Hirah” (Al-Faqih, 1988p: 176). So was the prosperity of the people of this region that Ibn Qutaibah wrote: “Basrah is the most beautiful place in Iraq. Al-Marbad is the most beautiful place in the Basrah” (Qutaiba, 1925:p.1-221) and Yaqoot Al-Hamoui wrote: “There are three heavens on earth; Al-Ubulla river, Samarkand River, and Ghouta in Damascus” (Al-Hamoui, 1977: p.1-77).

The Ship Building Profession

During the ancient times, the people of the states of the Arab Gulf built ships, an art that they had learnt from the experts in India and Egypt. They built new ships and also handled the tasks of fixing the sails and masts of ships. They learnt this art from Indian experts who accompanied business ships when they docked at the Arab Gulf on their way to the Tigris River and Al-Mada'en (Rasta, 1891:p.196). Ships were built from teak wooden planks by carefully making small holes in them. Then, these planks were joined with one another through stranded ropes. These ropes were made from the coir of the coconuts named Nargeel. Planks were then lifted up to support the sides of the ship structure. Iron rods were used to fix these planks through holes that were made in the wood. The use of rods instead of nails may be attributed to the fear of having the nails drawn out due to the Magnet Mountains located in the Sea of China. It may also be attributed to the fear of nails getting rusted and making damage to the wood. It may also be attributed to the high cost of nails (Badawi, 1967:p.245).

Ships were different from one another in terms of type, size and use (Al-Sheikhly and Al-Alousi, 1987: p. 139). Ships that were used to travel to China were very big with a height up to ten (10) feet above the sea level. There were stairs get into these boats (Al-Douri, 1974: p.145). During ancient times, Arab used small boats for coastal navigation while big boats were used for surfing. Ships were also built not only for shipping goods but also to move travelers, merchants, and voyagers as ferries across various waterways. Ships were also used during wars (Al-Shami, 1989: p. 102) to carry warriors and archers. On long voyages, ships

passed through Sahar (i.e. Masqat) where they were loaded with goods and provided with water supply.

Some ships used to pass through water routes that were near the coasts of the Persian Empire, Makran and Al-Sind. On these routes especially near Sumatra there was always the risk of sea pirates, so navigators showed caution and care (Hourani, 1958: p. 210). As a precautionary measure, these ships were white because they were greased with ghee and fat, obtained from the castor oil or fat of sharks. The fat obtained from sharks was considered the best to grease boats.

There was also a lighthouse built on the coast of al-Ubulla in order to guide ships. Naser Khusraw (1945) describes the lighthouse:

The lighthouse consists from four big columns that are made from teak wood. It was in the shape of a mangonel. The base of this lighthouse extended on a wide area and took the form of a square. The top of this lighthouse was thin. The height of this lighthouse was 40 cubits. The top of this lighthouse was made of stones. These stones were fixed on wooden columns. On the top of the lighthouse, there were guards. This lighthouse was built in a shallow area in water.

A need of this lighthouse was felt to prevent ships hit the coast. Before building this lighthouse, people used to light fire in a bottle to help navigators see the light and avoid hitting the coast. Another reason for building this lighthouse was to help navigators see the direction and watch the movement of the pirates. In case of any risk of pirates, they would change the direction of the ship.” (Khusraw, 1945: p. 100)

Winters were preferred for sea voyages. Al-Mas’oudi (1991) writes: “The seasons in which the Arab sailed on western marine routes of the Indian Ocean were the second half of November and the first half of December (Al-Masoudi, 1991:p.1-154). The duration of the voyage from Masqat to Canton (the port of Great China) was completed in 120 days while the voyage from Basrah, Al-Ubulla or Siraf was completed in six months (Hourani, 1958,219).

The Trade with the Far East Countries

People of Basrah participated in trade activities whole-heartedly after the Muslim rule was established in Iraq. The port of Al-Ubulla had been known for “kindness and hospitality of its people, the high profit of its trade, and the privacy given to worshippers” (Al-Hamwi, 1977: p. 1-77). Specifically the people of Al-Ubulla city paid much attention to trade activities and got skilled in its many fields. They were acquainted with Al-Safatja, for instance, wherein

merchants used agents to assist them in trade and enter into transactions on behalf of merchants. These agents were responsible for bringing goods and funds for the merchants (Al-Sharbasi, 1981: p. 221). The merchants in Al-Ubulla city were also skilled in using maps to guide them on their voyages. Al-Maqdisi talks about written records and a compass with merchants (Al-Tannoukhi, 1955:p. 235). The ships on their return to Al-Ubulla should go through an accurate inspection. (Al-Maqdisi, 1991:p. 10). All the Abbasid caliphs ordered the inspection committee to inspect the goods imported from countries. This order aimed at protecting people's health (Al-Nuwairi, 2002: p.12-43).

A number of countries had established business relationships with Al-Ubulla during that period, particularly those of the Far East like China, India and Sri Lanka. The trade was both way, that is export and import. When the ships went to these Far East countries, they returned with goods for the markets of the Islamic World (Al-Samer, 1977: p. 17).

- i. *China*: Arab Gulf countries imported several goods from China including Frankincense, camphor, cloves, Indian oud, musk, saddles, Alpinia, fur of sables & squirrels, and various types of leathers. Also included were wax, gold, copper, weapons, arrows, bayonets used for fishing and the wood of ebony (Khardaziba, 1889: p.64); grains, Legumes, fruits, and wool, silk, and cotton nonwovens, ink, peacocks, swords, and Chinese pottery (Al-Samer, 1977: p. 17).
- ii. *India*: Arab Gulf countries imported several goods from India including rice, medication, ruby of various colors, diamond, Indian oud, spices, piper, coconut, and bamboo. Also included were flowers for making perfumes, a plant named Caesalpinia used for healing people from snake bite, etc. (Al-Faqih, 1988: p.230). Other goods included Sandalwood, camphor, cinnamon, Warzenji wood, ivory and perfumes, Iron and copper, teak wood and pencil lead (Metz, 1967: p. 214).
- iii. *Al-Sind* (Punjab, India and Pakistan): Arab Gulf countries imported goods from Al-Sind like Al-Qest (i.e. a kind of dates), camphor water, teak wood, swords, bamboo, and arrows (Al-Biruni, 1936: p. 255).
- iv. *Sarnadeeb or Silan* (Ceylon) (modern Sri Lanka): Arab Gulf countries imported the most ruby as it was in abundance in the mountains of Silan. Other good imported were crystal, coconut diamond and pearls (Al-Biruni, 1936: p. 38).

During this period, the Arabs preferred using the clothes embroidered with strings of golds or silver. Women in Arab Gulf countries used accessories made of jewels, pearls, gold and silver. All these clothes and accessories were imported from China and India. Closets and vases were imported from China and India to hold these accessories and clothes. These vases were filled with aromatic plants (Ziadeh, 1975, 241). These imports made a significant impact on the trade and economy of the cities in countries like Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Arabian Peninsula. The Merchants also played a significant role in planting new types of

plants in Arab Gulf countries such as cotton, sugar cane, and bitter orange (Hawqal, 1992: p. 228).

Likewise, there were many goods exported by Al-Ubulla and the countries of the Arab Gulf to the Far East. These goods included pearls, jewels, gemstones, (Metz, 1967: p.214) oils, and Arabian horses; sulfur, silver, petrol, rose water, and fabrics (Al-Shami, 1989: p.109). Other goods included wine, dates, and lead which was used by Chinese people for making medications (Al-Saadi, 1976:p. 230).

The writings of Ibn Batoutah (Gibb, 1962) also reveal that the method used for selling and buying goods during ancient times was much similar to barter system or exchange of goods to buy and sell. The procedure was very unique and simple. The Arab merchant would leave his goods on the floor of a Chinese market and leave. On the following day, he may find a fur of sables or squirrels besides his goods as an exchange or an offer. In case the merchant accepted the offer, he would take the fur and leave his goods on the floor. But if he didn't accept the offer, he would still leave his goods on the floor and leave without taking the fur. Then he would return on the following day to find a new offer (Battuta, 1979: 2-719). This process would continue until the goods were appropriately exchanged mutually.

However, several developments took place in trade transactions. Gold, silver and metal coins were used for selling and buying goods. China was the first country to use paper money. The first paper currency was the Chinese currency called (Ka'ghed) currency. The size of this currency was similar to the size of one's palm. Every 25 Ka'ghed was equal to one Dinar (Battuta, 1979: p. 2-720).

As trade grew and several ships and merchants began to enter the market, the Far East countries adopted a taxation system. It was a kind of fees that must be paid by merchants in return for the facilities and the permission for them to transact their businesses. China was first to introduce the taxation system on the imported goods. Probably, China was aware of a similar taxation system being followed in the Islamic States of the gulf region as Chinese merchants had frequently visited the markets of the Islamic States (Ulrich, (2019; Al-Shami, 1989:p. 109). The historical records of the voyagers and geographers who visited these countries share the method of paying taxes on the imported goods: Ibn Battuta (1979) writes:

When a boat arrives at the city, the people onboard are asked questions to identify the owner, and sailor of the boat, and the place that the boat came from. Such questions aim at identifying information about the goods on the boat and the merchants on the boat. The information gained through such questions would be delivered to the Sultan. The sultan would host the ones who deserve to be hosted by him (Ibn Battuta, 1979: 2-721).

The Persian language was used by Arab merchants to communicate with Indian and Chinese merchants in all trade transactions (Le Bon, 1948:p. 614).as a result they borrowed several Persian maritime-related words such as *Nakhada* (the owner of the ship), *Rabban* (the captain of the ship), *Sarhak* (i.e. the guide at the port who is responsible for landing ships and *Didan* (i.e. the guard of the ship). In addition, the Indian and the Chinese languages also borrowed words from Arabic language.

Unfortunately, Al-Ubulla and its port region suffered damage and destruction due to wars. For instance, in 257 AH/ 871 AD, the black revolution resulted in total destruction of Basrah city. The mosques were damaged and for three years soldiers looted the city. In 311AH/ 923AD, the leader of the Qarmatians looted Basrah, destroyed Al-Ubulla & Basrah and locked down the roads between Baghdad and the countries of the Arab Gulf. Al-Qazweeni (682 AH/ 1282 AD) writes that all areas were significantly damaged (Miskawayh, 2000:p. 4-424). After half a century, Ibn Batoutah (727 AH/ 1326 AD) writes that Al-Ubulla had been reduced to a village with remains of great palaces (Battuta, 1979:p. 2-210).

Results and Conclusion

The study found out several historical facts about Al-Ubulla port. First and foremost was that the port enjoyed a strategic position in the Arab Gulf region. It was located 12 miles east of Basrah connecting both the eastern and western parts of the world ever since the fourth century BC. There is a debate among historians about the origins of the name Al-Ubulla. For instance, some historians suggest that this name is derived from Akadian language. Other historians suggest that this name is derived from the Greek language. However, many dictionaries suggest that the name was derived from the Nabataean language.

There are several reasons that contributed to a flourishing trade in Al-Ubulla port. Such reasons include, besides it being strategically significant geographical location, it was a destination of trade for several countries which practiced trade through this port. These countries included China, India, Al-Send, and Silan (modern day Ceylon). The port had remained under the control of the Persians till the year (12 AH/ 632 AD) when the early Muslim conquest freed the port. After freeing Al-Ubulla city through the early Muslim conquest, Al-Ubulla city was used as a harbor by the merchants of Basrah. Al-Ubulla River was used to ferry boats and ships.

Historical records reveal that the Arabs had much knowledge about sea, wind and navigation and the way in which seasonal winds blow in the Arab Gulf and the Indian Ocean. They recorded exact time and season when they would set on to trade voyages. The possession of such knowledge was the one of the reasons behind having a flourishing trade in the port. The port was also used highly for importing and exporting goods between countries of the Arab



Gulf and Far East Countries. Various types of ships were used for transferring merchants and voyagers and shipping goods. The countries of the Arab Gulf imported and exported many goods from the Far East. They played a significant role in supplying these goods to cities in Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Arabian Peninsula.

There were fees or taxes paid by merchants. The Far East countries adopted a taxation system. For instance, China had a taxation system for enforcing taxes on the imported goods. Probably, China was influenced by the Islamic State in this regard because the Chinese merchants were acquainted with the taxation system when they visited the markets of the Islamic State. The people of Al-Ubulla city had become very were skillful in trade. They were acquainted with (Al-Safatja) or making use of agents to assist them in trade. These agents were responsible for trading on behalf of the merchant, bringing the goods and funds to the merchants. The merchants in Al-Ubulla city used maps to guide them on their voyages.

The study also pointed out how Basrah and its port suffered from wars, damage and destruction during 257 AH/ 871 AD due to the black revolution. The revolution caused much damage to Basrah as several areas of the city were burnt down. For three years, soldiers kept looting the city. In 311AH/ 923AD, the leader of the Qarmatians looted Basrah, destroyed Al-Ubulla & Basrah and locked down the roads between Baghdad and the countries of the Arab Gulf. The study is a historical account of the Al-Ubulla port as it was during the Period (257-311 AH- 870-922 AD). This period was post Islamic era which witnessed both positive and negative attributes in the region.

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