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# THE TERM AR-RĀDĀNĪYA IN THE WORK OF IBN HURDĀDBEH

Ibn Hurdādbēh in his work *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik* inserts a long and detailed description of the commercial activities of Jewish merchants called by him *ar-Rādānīya* (الراذانية)<sup>1</sup>. The origin and the meaning of this name is not very clear and, in spite of several attempts has not been, as yet, explained in a convincing manner.

R. Dozy advanced the supposition, probably based on the lection contained in the work of Ibn al-Faḳīh: *ar-Rāhdānīya* (الراهدانية)<sup>2</sup> that this name comes from the presumably Persian term *rāhdān* (راهدان — راه دان) „he who knows the roads“, „guide“<sup>3</sup>, not noticed however by the known Dictionaries of the Persian lan-

<sup>1</sup> *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik auctore Abu'l-Kāsim Obaidallāh ibn Abdallāh Ibn Khordadbeh*, ed. de Goeje, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum, vol. VI, Lugduni Batavorum 1889, p. 153, l. 9 — p. 155, l. 6; see also T. Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie do dziejów Stowiańszczyzny*, vol. I, Wrocław—Kraków 1956, pp. 74—77.

<sup>2</sup> *Compendium libri Kitāb al-baldān auctore Ibn al-Faḳīh al-Hamadhānī*, ed. de Goeje, BGA, vol. V, p. 270, l. 15; Lewicki, *op. cit.* vol. II/1, 1969, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, vol. I, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. Leyde 1881), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Leiden—Paris 1927, p. 562: „guide“. Dozy's suggestion was followed by some other research workers — A. Kunik, V. Rozen, *Izvestiya al-Bekri i drugikh avtorov o Rusi i Slavyanakh*, vol. II, St. Petersburg 1903, p. 142: „znakomye s put'ami“; J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge*, Leipzig 1903, pp. 24, 350: „die wegekundigen“; Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 119 and vol. II/1, p. 77: „przewodnik“ (guide).

guage. Such an interpretation, very attractive because of its simplicity evokes rather serious reservations. It does not seem probable that this name in its Persian form could have come from the Jewish merchants themselves since, as it clearly appears from the text of Ibn Hurdābeh, they have been living for centuries in Western Europe, most probably in France, though they were equally connected with Spain<sup>4</sup>. Neither their itineraries nor the specific character of their merchandise do not indicate that they favoured especially the areas of Persia. The above data are rather a proof that, in their commercial travels, they passed through Persia only transiently, making their way further to the East — to India and China. It is therefore difficult to presume that they would have served themselves of a word of Persian origin as their designation — a language which they knew, as well as many others which helped them in their extensive commerce in areas where many tongues were spoken. In this case it might be assumed that this Persian name was given to the Jewish merchants in the East. The problem might be considered as definitely settled if we could ascertain that its author was Ibn Hurdābeh, himself of Persian origin, who was the first writer to mention the Radanites<sup>5</sup>. Alas, all the three hitherto known manuscripts of his work consequently and exclusively present the lection *ar-Rādāniya*<sup>6</sup>. It would be difficult to presume that these manuscripts, probably written at different periods and in different places,

<sup>4</sup> Their descent is also derived from here by G. Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden im Mittelalter und der Neuzeit*, vol. I, Leipzig 1908, p. 127: „Als Ausgangspunkt der Reisen betrachtet Ibn Khordadbeh augenscheinlich den Westen, das Frankenreich und etwa noch Spanien. Die jüdischen „Wanderer“ waren nicht im Orient gebürtig, dessen Produkte sie dem Occident zuführten. Sie dürfen als Nachkommen und Nachfolger jener Kaufleute angesehen werden, die an den Höfen der Merovingerkönige in Gallien verkehrten“.

<sup>5</sup> In Ibn Hurdābeh's work the denomination of Radanites occurs only once, in the title of a passage devoted to them: „The road of Jewish merchants *ar-Rādāniya* (Radanites)“ — مسلك التجار اليهود الرادانية. The Arabic text does not suggest at all, that the merchants were thus named, although he admits this eventuality, in a certain sense.

<sup>6</sup> The Viennese MS. („A“ in de Goeje) is an exception. It gives the lection الرادانية; a small error made by the copyist, corrected however on the margin — comp. Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 74, note a.

originated from a common primary one which contained no other but precisely this erroneous form of the name. In this situation we are obliged to admit the fact that the original *Kitāb al-masālik wa'l-mamālik* contained the form *ar-Rādāniya* and that it was Ibn al-Faḳīh who introduced the Persian version into the Arabian geographical literature<sup>7</sup>. This last writer, also of Persian origin (comp. his nisba: al-Hamadānī) places the mention concerning the Radanites directly after the description of the town of ar-Rayy and the two are thematically connected. It is quite possible, therefore, that Ibn al-Faḳīh derived his informations on the Radanites from two sources: from Ibn Hurdābeh, the dependence on whom in this regard is obvious — and from some separate source which mentioned the sojourn of Jewish merchants in ar-Rayy which, as a great commercial centre, might have been one of the stages in their travels, but is not mentioned by Ibn Hurdābeh<sup>7a</sup>. This kind of association of the Radanites with

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that the so-called Mešhed MS. of the work of Ibn al-Faḳīh gives the original lection الرادانية (comp. Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. II/1, p. 28, note r and p. 76). It seems that the success and circulation of the work of Ibn al-Faḳīh were the cause that the name of Radanites appeared later in the Arab world, mostly in its Persian form. Thus, for instance, al-Muḳaddasī (946/7-to ab. 1000) mentions *ar-Rahādina* merchants (the plural for *Rahdānī*) dealing in linen and cotton materials (comp. *Descriptio imperii moslemici auctore Schamso'd-din Abū Abdollāh Mohammed ibn Ahmed ibn abī Bekr al-Bannā al-Baschārī al-Muḳaddasī*, ed. de Goeje, BGA, vol. III, 1877, p. 30, l. 16); we find a similar denomination in Sicilian documents of the XIII<sup>th</sup> cent. (M. Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. III, 1, p. 335, note 1) and, finally one of the quarters of Ḳayrawān was called ar-Rahādina, probably after the name of the merchants (*Riyād an-nufūs*, MS. of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, no. 752, 29 v<sup>o</sup>, cit. after Dozy, *op. cit.*, p. 562). The above data seem to indicate an evolution to which the activities of the Radanites were subjected. Under the influence of unfavourable circumstances, probably more of an economic than of a political nature, they limited their activities to the Mediterranean basin. At the same time, they relinquished the ample assortment of wares for a narrow specialisation in the commerce of tissues, perhaps of a West European origin.

<sup>7a</sup> Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, the father of Ibn al-Faḳīh, must have been that informant as it clearly appears from the text: قال محمد بن إسحاق الرّبي... Because of the great popularity of the work of Ibn Hur-

a Persian town, without impairing my previous deductions as to their limited activities on this territory, might induce Ibn al-Faḳīh, when he came in contact with an unknown and incomprehensible term, to seek its etymology in the Persian language<sup>8</sup>.

In turn, Simonsen tried to connect the name in question with the *nautae rhodanici*<sup>9</sup> who acted in the Roman period and in the Middle Ages in Southern France, from there Jewish merchants could really originate. The main difficulty in acknowledging this hypothesis as a correct one lies in the diametrical differences existing between the character and activities of an organisation of the *nautae* type and the activity of the Radanites themselves, such as has been described by the Arab author. The *nautae* established a whole series of associations, of a rather local importance. This is indicated by the considerable number of these corporations on the French terrain of that time and, on the other hand, by their adopting the names of particular rivers as their denomination. Their occupation consisted in transporting articles of trade on inland waters — rivers and large lakes. They probably did not conduct any independent commerce with their own merchandise, but were only engaged in service activities conveying, as transport agents, specific kinds of wares chiefly building materials — beams, stone blocks or marble and food — corn, oil and wine<sup>10</sup>, for this was the freight usually floated on waterways.

dāḍbeh, it is difficult to accept Marquart's supposition (*op. cit.*, p. 350, note 1), supported with a certain hesitation by Lewicki (*op. cit.*, vol. II/1, p. 15), that Ibn al-Faḳīh owed all the informations included in the chapter on the Jewish merchants only and exclusively to Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, and not immediately to Ibn Hurdāḍbeh.

<sup>8</sup> Comp. Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. II/1, p. 77. It is striking that, while Ibn Hurdāḍbeh mentions the acquaintance of the Radanites with the Persian language in the second place after the Arabic and before other languages, Ibn al-Faḳīh underlines this fact by placing it at the top of the list.

<sup>9</sup> Simonsen, „Revue des Études Juives“, vol. LIV, 1907; Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. II/1, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> Comp. A. Grenier, *Archéologie gallo-romaine*, in: Dechelette, *Manuel d'Archéologie préhistorique, celtique et gallo-romaine*, vol. VI, 1934, *L'Archéologie du Sol*, 2. Navigation, c. XIII; P. M. Duval, *La vie quotidienne en Gaule pendant la paix romaine (I<sup>er</sup>—III<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.)*, Paris 1953, pp. 188—189.

We therefore see that the relevance of the supposition in question depends on the existence of far-reaching alterations that should have taken place within one corporation in relation to the prototype of the organisation of the *nautae* type, presented here: 1° — In the first place, the nearly entire control of the Rhodan corporation by transport agents of Jewish nationality, not mentioned at all in the sources, and which would be a necessary condition for their adopting the name of *rhodanici*. 2° — A complete rupture with the hitherto existing character of the organization: out of local transport agents floating their wares on French inland waters or, at the utmost, on nearly coastal waters, they must have transformed themselves into great, international merchants, operating in enormous areas between Western Europe and the Far East. 3° — This should have been strictly connected with the necessity of a departure from mass and heavy wares, hitherto conveyed by them, and an adjustment to the trade with luxury articles and costly merchandise, much more profitable in far-reaching commerce and with which the Radanites actually dealt. I presume that the alterations presented above — and which are, as already stated, a condition *sine qua non* of recognizing the connection between the terms *ar-Rādānīya* and *nautae rhodanici* — are far too drastic to occur in reality.

Finally, we must still discuss the point of view of Katz who, probably on the basis of the Ibn al-Faḳīh's localisation of the mention concerning the Radanites, already referred to, advanced the supposition, that these merchants originated from ar-Rayy and that the Arabic term with which they were designated is a derivative from the name of this town<sup>11</sup>. This conjecture is erroneous and has been refuted by T. Lewicki who recalled that the adjectival form of Rayy in Arabic is *Rāzī* and not *Rādānī*<sup>12</sup>.

In my opinion, another possibility emerges for deciphering the origin of the name in question on the basis of a different activity of the Jewish merchants than a commercial one — an activity which they carried out sporadically and which came less to the fore, being thus less known.

<sup>11</sup> S. Katz, *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul*, Cambridge Mass., 1937.

<sup>12</sup> Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 120.

The Jewish merchants of Western Europe were sometimes employed in the character of diplomatic couriers, as we should call them now, in bilateral contacts between Christian and Moslem rulers <sup>12a</sup>. I shall mention here, as an example, the Jew Isaac who led, in the years 797—801, the mission of Charles the Great to Hārūn ar-Rašid <sup>13</sup>. Judas Hebraeus was entrusted with a similar mission, bringing a message from Barcelona to Charles II the Bald (843—877), ruler of the West Franconian State <sup>14</sup>. Finally Ibrāhīm ibn Ja'kūb al-'Isra'īlī himself, who acted as an envoy, in 966, from the Caliphe of Cordoba to the emperor Otto the Great, was undoubtedly also a merchant. This is indicated by the strong commercial interest which he often expressed in his relation of the journey. The sources are silent as to the eventual presence of Jews in other missions. However, their participation must be taken into consideration, if not in the character of a principal factor but as an auxiliary element — that of guides and interpreters <sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12a</sup> Comp. A. Szelągowski. *Najstarsze drogi z Polski na Wschód w okresie bizantyjsko-arabskim*. Kraków 1909, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Christians Lantfrid and Sigimund took part in the legation; Caro, *op. cit.*, p. 129 supposes however, that Isaac himself stood at the head of the mission. A. Vasil'ev, *Karl Velikiy i Harun ar-Rašid*, „Vizantijskiy Vremennik“, vol. XX, 1913, otd. I, p. 83 identifies Isaac with the Jewish merchant who, during the reign of Charles the Great, conducted an animated commerce with Palestine and became the hero of several anecdotes quoted by Western sources.

<sup>14</sup> Caro, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

<sup>15</sup> In the biography of the abbot Jean de Gorz, who was, in 956, the envoy of Otto I to the caliph 'Abd ar-Raḥmān III, we find a mention concerning the merchants of Verdun who were considered by their contemporaries as being the best acquainted with the routes leading to Spain; see T. Lewicki, *Handel niewolnikami słowiańskimi w krajach arabskich* in *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, vol. III, 1964, p. 192. Verdun had become, in the early Medieval Ages a great commercial centre where slaves were castrated. From here, Jewish merchants exported a considerable number of them to Moslem Spain. Such a mention, inserted in the context of the description of the legation to Spain, as the one above conveys the thought that the Jews must have been used then as guides and interpreters.

On the Jewish interpreters in Spain, who knew both the Hebrew

The entrusting of similar tasks to merchants appears to be logically justifiable, for in the very stabile world of that time only they could constitute a sufficiently mobile element, capable of a relatively rapid conveyance of messages. The question arises, however, why was it that, out of all the merchants of different nationalities the role in question fell to the Jewish merchants of Western Europe. It must be stated that the participation of Christian and Moslem merchants in a direct commercial exchange between the East and the West was rather inconsiderable, if it existed at all. A natural hostility was probably the cause that the Moslem or even the Jewish merchants from the East did not penetrate into the West European countries <sup>16</sup> and still less did Christian merchants appear in the area of the Caliphate or that of Spain. The only exception, probably on the principle of a third and neutral factor, were precisely the Jews of Western Europe, circulating freely throughout the contemporary world <sup>17</sup>. A perfect acquaintance with communication routes, which they had acquired, the possibility of support found in widely distributed Jewish communities and, finally, their skill in using foreign languages constituted additional arguments speaking in their favour.

Let us now pass to the second clause of our argumentation. In Gaul, during the Roman period, particularly at the end of the empire <sup>17a</sup>, a vehicle named *raeda* (also *rheda*) was in use. It was utilised, in the first place, by the couriers of the im-

and Arabic languages and the Castille dialect, as well as Latin and Greek — see E. Lévi-Provençal, *La civilisation arabe en Espagne*, Paris 1961, p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> W. Heyd, *Geschichte des Levantenhandels im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1879, vol. I, p. 59 considers that, up to the XI<sup>th</sup> cent. Moslem merchants did not appear in Christian Western lands.

<sup>17</sup> Comp. the penetrating comments, so important for the subject of our consideration, at Cl. Cahen, *Quelques problèmes concernant l'expansion économique musulmane au haut moyen âge*, *L'occidente e l'Islam nell'alto medioevo*, vol. I, *Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, vol. XII, Spoleto 1965, pp. 423—427.

<sup>17a</sup> Comp. *W dawnym Rzymie*, Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1968, p. 250 (= *Tutto su Roma antica*, Firenze 1963).

perial post in their official travels<sup>18</sup>; it must be noted, as especially important for our further considerations, that this vehicle was also known at a later period, in the early Middle Ages<sup>19</sup>. The Gallic name *raeda*, taken over from them by the Romans, beside the derived word with a more general meaning: *rhedarius* — „driver“, gave start to many other derivatives strictly connected with the above-quoted chief-function of this vehicle: *veredus* — „post or courier horse“, *paraveredus* — „special post horse“<sup>20</sup> and finally the most important: *veredarius* with the meaning of „a messenger“ or „courier“<sup>21</sup>. We can assume therefore with a certain probability that in the somewhat later period, and only on the territory of France, this last term began to be used for „a royal messenger“ or „state diplomatic courier“<sup>22</sup>. It may also be that there has developed still another derivative, closer by its form to the original name with the meaning of a man who serves himself with *raeda*, e. g. „a traveling merchant“<sup>23</sup>; however our last supposition, to which we do not pay too much consideration has not found a confirmation in the available dictionaries of the medieval Latin.

<sup>18</sup> Comp. Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 246: „... *raeda* ... employée notamment par les courriers de la poste impériale“; and also *Mała Encyklopedia Świata Antycznego* (Encyclopaedia Maeandrea), vol. II, Warszawa 1962, p. 236: „... *raeda* ... (wóz) zwykle używany też do przewożenia poczty państwowej“ („... *raeda* ... (cart, vehicle) usually used for the transporting of the state post“).

<sup>19</sup> Ch. du Cange, *Glossarium ad Scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis*, vol. V, Paris 1734, p. 1430; Ch. Lelong, *Życie codzienna w Galii Merowingów*, Warszawa 1967, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Comp. K. E. Georges, *Ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, Basel 1962, vol. II, p. 3422: „*verēdus* (*veraedus*) ... (aus gall. \*voredos, Pferd), das leichte Pferd zur Post, das Post- od. Kurierpferd“; p. 1473: „*paraverēdus* (vox hybr. v. παρά und *verēdus*), eig. das Nebenpferd, d. i. Postpferd bei besonderen Fällen, ein Extrapostpferd“.

<sup>21</sup> Comp. Georges, *op. cit.*, p. 3421: „*verēdārius* (*vereadārius*), der Postreiter, Kurier“; B. J. Schmid, *Kirchenlateinisches Wörterbuch*, Limburg a. d. Lahn 1926 p. 815: „*vērēdāriūs* — zu den Kurierpferden gehörig: *nuntiūs vērēdāriūs*: Kurier, Eilbote“; *W dawnym Rzymie*, p. 250.

<sup>22</sup> Comp. A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*, Strasbourg, p. 842: „*uerēdārius*, messenger, courier||courrier de l'État (à cheval)“.

<sup>23</sup> E. g. a \**raedanius*, or the like.

In the early Middle Ages, as I have tried to indicate above, Jewish merchants assumed, in a considerable degree, the responsibilities of diplomatic messengers. We could presume, in this respect, that the denomination itself was brought about with their functions. Another eventuality should not be excluded, that they themselves adopted the undoubtedly honorific title of the „king's messengers“ and used it readily in their foreign contacts to enhance their own prestige. The connection of Jewish merchants with the term *raeda*, arising from the use of a vehicle of that name, could have arisen at much earlier date, and this would greatly facilitate the application of one of the proposed derivatives of this word to them. It must be understood that this vehicle was exceptionally convenient for long and strenuous commercial expeditions: it was a heavy, capacious, strongly built cart with four wheels, usually drawn by four horses or mules.

It is evident that such responsible missions were not entrusted to all Jewish merchants. Only the most important ones could become couriers, if they had fully developed contacts with the lands of Islam, and were simultaneously sufficiently bound with the West so that their fortune, remaining there, would guarantee a correct discharge of their obligations. Such merchants are described by Ibn Hurdābeh. From among the Arab geographers it was only Ibn Hurdābeh who must have had the possibility of a direct contact with Jewish merchants appearing in both roles — commercial and political. He had devoted himself to the career of a civil servant and was at the outset a postmaster and head of the intelligence service (*ṣāhib al-barīd wa'l-ḥabar*) in the province of Ġibāl. He was transferred later to the court of the caliph in Bagdād or Surra man ra'ā but already as a minister (*wazīr al-ḥalīfa*) in probably the same department<sup>24</sup>. Within the framework of his duties he must have been obliged to collect all informations concerning the strangers who came to the capital of the Caliphate, especially so if they were the messengers of foreign rulers. He must have been taking obviously into consid-

<sup>24</sup> Ibn an-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, Miṣr 1348, p. 212 — cit. after Lewicki, *Źródła arabskie*, I, pp. 45—46; see also M. Hadj-Sadok, *Ibn Khurradādhbih, Encyclopédie de l'Islām*, nouv. éd., vol. III, p. 863.

eration the case that no exchange of correspondence with the Christian states of the West took place during his vizirship. But, even in such unfavourable circumstances, he could have become acquainted with the diplomatic role of the Radanites. Pieces of evidence exist that, when writing his work, he frequently availed himself of materials kept in the state archives of the Caliphate<sup>25</sup> where, of course, diplomatic correspondence was preserved, perhaps even provided with suitable comments as to the manner of its delivery. The Radanites themselves, finally, even if at that time they stayed in Baġdād only with commercial purposes, could have given him explanations as to the second field of their activities, serving themselves naturally of the name in question.

Finally, let us go back once again to the name itself, since we have to consider the possibility of a transition of the term *veredarius* or rather of its plural form *veredarīi* into the Arabic form of *Rādānīya*. The unusual resemblance between these two names is very remarkable. Bearing in mind the fact that the anlaut *ve-* must have been substituted by *-* (wa-//ve-) in the Arabic language, and as a weak consonant rejected afterwards, according to the tendencies of this language<sup>26</sup>, as well as that the Arabic *ā* (ا) could have represented also the vowel *ē*, and after the rejection of the Arabic ending *-ya* -we receive the following picture:

[ve]rēdārii//rēdānī[ya]<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, the early medieval West-European sources has delivered us no confirmation as for the application of this term to the Jewish merchants. The above-presented etymological prop-

<sup>25</sup> Comp. Lewicki, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 46; according to the opinion of this scholar the own words of Ibn Hurdābeh: „We have found in the office of harāġ ...“ evidently prove his archival researches; also al-Mukaddasi (BGA, III, p. 362) mentions Ibn Hurdābeh's admission to the archives of the Caliphate.

<sup>26</sup> Comp. A. A. Kovalev, G. Š. Šarbatov, *Učebnik arabskogo yazika*, Moskva 1960, pp. 496—7, where we find the examples:

ثَقَّةٌ ⇒ وَثِقَ and صَلَّةٌ ⇒ وَصَلَ

<sup>27</sup> In case of the existence of the above proposed term *\*readanius* this resemblance would have been still closer: *\*rēdānii//rēdānī-*.

osition, as well as our critical remarks concerning the previous ones have been rather based on nothing more than our suppositions. Nevertheless, certain elements revealed as a result of the presentation of our etymological proposition on a somewhat broader economical and political background of that time may, in our opinion, speak for it. This finds its confirmation in revealing certain data which suggest the possibility of Ibn Hurdābeh's, as of a public official of special kind, personal contacts with the Jewish merchants who came there as royal messengers and called themselves by that name.