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JAPAN AS DESCRIBED IN
"SAFINA-YE SOLAIMĀNĪ",
A 17TH CENTURY TRAVEL-BOOK
IN PERSIAN

Hashem RAJABZADEH

ABSTRACT

"It is not hidden to the hearts of scholars and men of wisdom that the seas of this world embrace a multitude of islands and flow around coasts both flourishing and desolate". Thus Moḥammad Rabi' ben Moḥammad Ebrāhīm, the author of *Safina-ye Solaimānī*, opens a chapter in his book containing a description of Japan.

The book relates the visit of an envoy of Shah Solaimān the Safavid (r.1667~94) to the court of Siamese king, Phra Nārāi. The author was the secretary of the envoy and recorded in his book the embassy's journey to Siam, as well as a description of some other lands of the South East Asia and the Far East, including a narrative account of Japan.

The embassy's journey began on 17 June 1685 at Bandar 'Abbās on the Persian Gulf and took them, via the Port of Muscat and the Indian Port of Chinapatan, to the coast of Tenasserim, near the Siamese capital, where they arrived on 17 September 1685.

A description of Japan is a part of the fourth and last chapter of the book where the author includes observations on the areas near Siam and information he acquired from reliable travelers who had visited there. He describes Japan as a country abundant with precious metals and natural

riches, and praises her people as cheerful and industrious. He gives a brief historical background and a geographical description of the country. The social classes of medieval Japan, its people's life-style, and its rulers' care for their subordinates are some topics tackled by the author.

In spite of its indirect observation and some inaccuracy and confusion mainly caused by the author's reliance on travellers' accounts, the book provides valuable information on the 17th century Japan, and sheds some light on the country's image in contemporary Iran.

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE OF JAPAN

The author was a key member, the second or third in rank, of the embassy sent to the court of the Siamese king, and invested with the responsibility of drafting official letters, writing official account of the embassy (waqāye' nevisi), and keeping official documents and reports. It is therefore presumable that he had read the major works of Moslem and Iranian geographers referring, among other areas in the Far East, to Japan. In his description of the country, the author refers to, and quotes from, such works. For example, he refers twice to Rawzat al-Şafâ,¹⁾ an extensive geographical and historical work of the 15th century; an indication that he obtained a substantial part of his information on Japan from the book and other such sources.

During the embassy's journey, which took almost three years, members of the mission most probably came into contact with a number of people, especially natives of India and Siam with first-hand experience, from whom they could acquire some information about Japan. Some sources mention Siamese merchants who visited the Japanese port regularly,²⁾ as well as the embassies sent by the Siamese king to the capital of Shōgūn.³⁾

LAND OF JAPAN

The author starts his introduction to Japan with a description of the

land and its geography: "Of all islands that exist in the various seas, Japan is by far the richest and the most magnificent. It is known throughout the world for its beauty and the extent of its flourishing population." ⁴⁾

Japan is accessible by sea. According to the author's estimate, "during the monsoon, the voyage from Shahr-e Nāv (main port of Siam) to Japan takes fifteen days but the return trip takes forty. One side of the island is near the coast of China, but scholars believe that this island is the end of the inhabited world." ⁵⁾

The author elaborates: "The scholars who write on geography and have given details pertaining to Japan with slight differences, mention that the local king is called Maharāj or Bhu-rāj." ⁶⁾ The suggestion is evidently a mistake, since Mahārāj, an Indian word which means "the great king", has been mentioned by Moslem geographers as the title of the king of Zābaj (Jāva).⁷⁾ The text then quotes from the authors of ʿAjāyeb al-Maklûqât (compiled in 550 H./1155~1156) and Rawżat al-Şafâ (a historical work of 9th/15th century) an account of the Island of Zābaj, "which lies in the sea of China", completely irrelevant to Japan.⁸⁾ This reference was apparently mistakenly inserted in this chapter by subsequent transcribers of the book.⁹⁾

The land enjoys a pleasant climate. "The climate of Japan is perfectly balanced and has four distinct seasons. In this respect it is said to be much the same as Iran, the pleasure spot of the world, and due to the changes of seasons, the climate is very comfortable and healthy." ¹⁰⁾

Tales of Japan's advanced agriculture, cultivated fields, and abundant water, in sharp contrast to the dry climate of Iran, fascinated our author: "This island is one of the most developed parts of the world",¹¹⁾ and "everywhere there are flourishing settlements with fields under cultivation. Even the mountain sides have orchards which bear fruit summer and winter. All year it is possible to obtain ice and snow-." ¹²⁾

Being rich in nature, "the island has a large variety of wild animals and birds, falcons, the tarlân (a kind of falcon), hawks, the Shâhin falcon and pheasants. This rich nature has developed a passion for hunting in the natives of the island." ¹³⁾

The author names camphor as a commodity generally found around Japan, China and Siam.¹⁴⁾ He goes on to give a rather imaginary description of the camphor tree. It is evident, however, that the tree is a tropical plant and does not grow in Japan.

PEOPLE AND THEIR LIFE

In the eyes of the religious minded author, the most important feature of people's life is their faith. While admiring Japan as a country developed agriculturally and embracing a population more dense than any other part of the world,¹⁵⁾ he regrets that "despite all these advantages the king and his subjects are engaged in a religion and creed of infidelity. They are all idolaters." ¹⁶⁾ However, he commends Japanese people for their diligence: " Contrary to the custom of Below the Winds (Siam and surrounding areas), every native in Japan is occupied with some particular job." ¹⁷⁾

The author makes a brief reference to different classes of Japanese society: " Army, peasantry, merchants and craftsmen form separate classes of the society. However, despite the separation they wear real clothes ¹⁸⁾ and they are in the habit of shaving their heads. They spend their time happily and in entertainment." ¹⁹⁾

With regard to people's life-style, the author describes: " The island of Japan supports many brothels which are stocked with very good-looking women and the custom is that each house posts a price list on the outside door." ²⁰⁾ Earlier, in his account of the way foreign merchants are received and treated in the isolated Japan, he refers to another aspect of such habits: " ... If all goes well, the merchant is taken to his house and two boys are assigned to him as attendants. these boys behave like the wicked element of lust that is an ingrained part of man's imperfect nature." ²¹⁾ He goes on to explain the excuse a foreign merchant may make to reject the offer politely.

Among other surprising things of Japan, the author relates: " Men bear names like Mûsh, Lûh, Zarbâd, and women have familiar Muslim names like Zainab, and Fâtîma." ²²⁾ His fancy about the Japanese names was

probably caused by a similarity they have to the familiar Muslim names.

JAPAN AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The author of *Safina* gives a rather detailed account of the events consolidating Japanese isolation earlier in the 17th century, especially those related to the activity of Christian missionaries and the rivalry between the Dutch and the Portuguese: " Formerly there was a sizeable group of Portuguese Franks living in the port of that island and they carried off good profits from trade. They were held in high esteem and treated with the utmost dignity... until their padres decided to dig a tunnel of deceit... They began their digging from far off... until they reached the base of one of the larger idols. Then they hollowed out the inside of the idol from underneath... When this work was finished, someone secretly entered the statue and began delivering wicked sermons from within... With this kind of fraud and deception they had no difficulty in fooling the simple-minded Japanese."

" In no time at all thousands of misled Japanese joined the faith of these foreigners. The converts were so dazzled by this kind of trickery they handed over all matters of government and trade to the Franks... The situation continued like this until the Dutch discovered what manners of deception the Portuguese were practicing." ²³⁾

Memory of the humiliating defeat of invading Portuguese in Iran by Shah 'Abbās I a few decades earlier has seemingly encouraged the author to give a rather detailed account of their set-back in Japan. He relates that after the Dutch informed the authorities of Japan what a trick the Portuguese were playing, a great slaughter ensued; " the heretics were completely exterminated ²⁴⁾ and their places of worship were destroyed." ²⁵⁾

JAPANESE ISOLATION

The author explains that after the exposure of the trick and the prosecution of the Christian converts, the authorities in Japan adopted a

very severe attitude towards foreigners, and " no outsider is given permission to visit the ruler's capital, and even the merchants and travellers who come to the port are not allowed to remain longer than the monsoon season. No foreigner is allowed to acquire any information concerning the roads and highways which run throughout the kingdom..."²⁶⁾ " Even the Dutch who were clever and proved themselves trustworthy and acquired the exclusive rights to import all the items that sell for a high price to make huge profits, are treated the same as other nationals by the local authorities." ²⁷⁾

The author's account of the events leading to a policy of imposing more restrictions against foreigners generally corresponds to a description given by François Caron,²⁸⁾ a representative of the Dutch East India Company in the Far East in the 1630's who witnessed most of the events and is said to have masterminded the discovery of the Portuguese trick and its exposure to Japanese authorities.²⁹⁾

The author elaborates to some extent on the policy of isolation (sakoku) and the treatment of, and limitations imposed on, foreign nationals, including merchants, for entering the Japanese port.³⁰⁾ Prosecution of Christians was in full swing through these years: "When the officers escort the merchant (who has consented to sell his merchandise under the terms set by the authorities) they expect him to place his foot on the idol's face without any hesitation. If the merchant is reluctant or hesitates, they will kill him on the spot and confiscate his goods." ³¹⁾

ADMINISTRATION, RULE AND ORDER

The author's description of the way Japan is ruled also reflects his idea of public administration as well as his concept of a just rule and a benevolent sovereign: " ... There are still a few corners of the island which are not under the king's direct control. None the less, every local governor is submissive to the royal authority and the greater part of the island is included in the kingdom, which is indeed a mighty and splendid realm." ³²⁾ Following the common concept held by foreign, especially European, observers, the author mistakenly calls the Shōgūn 'King'. In his

understanding, the authority exercised by the 'shōgūn' could only belong to a king. He adds: " The journey up from the port to the king's capital takes fifty days but no foreigner has permission to visit the royal residence." ³³⁾ Wealth and glory of the Japanese ruler is exemplified by his castle; " It is said that the king's castle is located alongside a mountain where there are vast deposits of gold. The castle has twelve levels, and on every level stands a separate palace built from bricks of solid gold and silver." ³⁴⁾ The natural setting pictured here does not correspond to the Castle of Edo. This description could be the result of what the author had heard of the Shrines of Nikko, where Yeyāsu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1542~1616), is enshrined, and exaggerated by the author's image of Japan as a land of abundant gold mines.

The Shōgūn's taxation policy appeals to our author: " The king of Japan does not draw any revenues or profits from land and farming." ³⁵⁾ This was in sharp contrast with the usual practice of levying heavy taxes on agricultural lands and products in contemporary Iran, and of which the author implicitly expresses his dissatisfaction.

On commercial practices and business ethics, the author openly commends the Shōgūn's thoughtfulness in severely containing any monopolistic move: " One case (which came up) illustrates the king's justice: There was a particular troublemaker who found a chance to forward an unjust proposal to the king through one of the higher courtiers. The proposal was that 'Since Your Majesty has absolute power in these matters, let it be decreed that no one but I may manufacture certain goods that I now produce in competition with the other Japanese. If I am the only man who sells these goods, I will be able to raise the price as I please. For the privilege I would gladly pay the royal treasury a fine sum of money every year.' The king [was greatly disappointed and] said: ' From oldest times the subjects of our realm have been free to undertake the manufacture of these goods to make a living thereby. How could I interfere in this way and deprive the craftsmen of their daily bread. The fit course of action in this instance is to kill the intermediary, who dared to forward such an offer, together with the merchant along with all his family. A display of harsh punishment now will deter men from entertaining

such schemes in the future.' " 36)

To our author, devotion of the Japanese ruler to the state affairs and problems of his subordinates exemplifies his rule and the way he treats people, and is commendable: " From the early morning until noon and again from the afternoon to the evening the king attends to the work of public administration, and knows about his people's conditions well." 37)

In the eyes of the writer of Safina, the dark kimono the shōgūn wore resembled the customary robes of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs. 38)

INDUSTRIOUS PEOPLE

In Japan, "every native is occupied with some particular job." 39) This statement suggests the people's mobility and craftsmanship. The author also refers to many Chinese artisans working here: " Since Japan is so close to China, a large number of Chinese have crossed over and settled on the island.⁴⁰⁾ Most of them are professional classes and they manufacture a variety of ingenious novelties of wood, gold, silver and porcelain." 41) He is critical of the way they manufacture porcelain in Japan: " The porcelain in Japan is extremely fine and delicate, yet men of experience do not value it very highly. It is unfortunate but the potters do not take the pains to age their clay properly and the result is much the same as the old saying about a man who becomes overexercised in a case not directly concerning him: ' He is like a bowl that is hotter than the soup.' Thus the porcelain dishes of Japan do not resist well and are prone to cracking." 42)

The author speaks highly of Japanese paper, and even relates the origin of the then most appreciated paper to Japan: " The natives of Japan also manufacture a kind of paper known to be from Khān Bāligh.⁴³⁾ This paper is mistakenly attributed to Khān Bāligh." 44)

The author's account of the way they apply 'karang' ⁴⁵⁾ to process and paint wood in Japan implies the proficiency of the Japanese in wood work: " Another item [produced in Siam] is karang which is the sap of a certain local tree. Karang is exported to Japan and China where it is used by the natives in a peculiar way exclusive to them." 46)

Sword making is the most acclaimed industry of Japan. The author is so fascinated by Japanese swords that he devotes his most elaborate and most exciting account to them: "The craftsmanship is beyond all powers of description. The tongue's blade grows sharp and cutting and refuses to submit to the author's will."⁴⁷⁾ And "in the scales of competition only a hair's difference distinguishes the sharpness of this beautiful blade and the cutting edge of the beloved's arched eyebrows..."⁴⁸⁾ The author, however, is still confident and proud that the Japanese swords could not match in quality those produced in his native land: "It is true that the tempered blades of Japan can not be compared with the generally high level of work throughout Iran, such as that of the craftsman Asad,⁴⁹⁾ and the shape of their swords is odd, rather like that of a large knife with a straight wide blade,⁵⁰⁾ nonetheless, the magnificent temper and luster of their steel would make a diamond seem dim and worthless. It would be no surprise if the mere thought of such a flaming blade set fire to the haystack of the enemy's life...."⁵¹⁾

An interesting account is given by the author on how the Japanese manufacture their swords: "It is so time consuming and difficult that it takes a hundred years to produce one blade."⁵²⁾ He then explains how they treat steel and process it to get the finished product,⁵³⁾ and finally adds: "However, the last stage and exactly how they perfect the temper of the blade is not known."⁵⁴⁾ Swords in Japan are highly esteemed by the natives: "When a Japanese decides to get married, it is the custom for the groom and the bride to present each other with swords, as if they were exchanging wedding gifts. The women of Japan consider the sword a piece of jewelry and it is customary for women to adorn themselves by wearing a sword at their side."⁵⁵⁾

JAPAN, THE LAND OF GOLD

"The merchants who recently returned from the splendid island relate that there is a great abundance of precious metals such as gold, silver and tin. Every mountain and field is a potential mine... Since gold is not considered very precious, the natives do not use utensils of it."⁵⁶⁾

The author relates a fanciful description of the king's castle located alongside a mountain where there are vast deposits of gold. "The castle has twelve levels, and on every level stands a separate palace built from bricks of solid gold and silver."⁵⁷⁾ He quotes from 'Tarik-e Rawzat al-Şafâ' (a historical work of the 9th/15th century) and 'Aja'eb al-Maklûqât' by Zakariyâ Qazvinî (compiled in the 7th/13th century) that the treasury collects a huge amount of gold every day which is made into ingots and thrown in the sea as ordered by the king.⁵⁸⁾ "Despite this unusual abundance of gold the natives of Japan are forbidden to make use of it."⁵⁹⁾

The author's image of Japan as 'the land of gold' is apparently the result of some misleading information in his main source, Rawzat al-Safa, the writer of which confuses the island(s) of Zâbaj (Jâva) for Waqwâq which Moslem geographers mistakenly believed corresponded with Japan.⁶⁰⁾

European travellers, from Marco Polo down to the contemporary 17th century writers, have also fascinated their readers by accounts of the rich gold reserves in Japan, where the people "have gold in the greatest abundance, its sources being inexhaustible."⁶¹⁾ Though he never crossed the Sea of China, Marco Polo relates the story of "the extraordinary richness of the [Japanese] sovereign's palace..."⁶²⁾ the entire roof of which is covered with a plating of gold."⁶³⁾

Arnoldus Montanus delights his readers with tales of gorgeous chambers in Japan decorated with "curious imagery of massy gold."⁶⁴⁾

Caron, who visited Japan in the 1630's, relates that this country produced gold in great quantity.⁶⁵⁾ In his account of the rich Japanese merchants, however, Caron writes: "They go themselves to, or have factories at, Meaco, where they exchange their commodities for silver, gold or other wares."⁶⁶⁾

No matter how the author of Safina tries to fascinate his readers by the image of Japan as a land of abundant gold, a reference in the closing chapter of his account of Japan to the gold coins minted here, "which currency has been spread throughout the region,"⁶⁷⁾ suggests the ordinary use of gold in this country.

NOTES

1) Moḥammad Rabi' ben Ebrāhīm, Safina-ye Solaimāni, tr. John O'Kane, Persian Heritage Series (No.1), London, 1972, pp.189-90. References are given in this paper to the English translation, an admirable work to introducing this book to English readers years before the original Persian text was printed and published. The translation is in a rather free style, trying to give a more clear picture of the writer's concepts. The parts of the translation quoted in this paper were, therefore, sometimes adjusted to conform in wording to the original text. The original Persian text, scholarly edited and annotated by Prof. 'Abbās Fârûqi, was published in Tehran in 1977 (1356 S.) by Tehran University. Incidentally, the page numbers of the Persian edition generally correspond to the English translation.

2) F.Caron & J.Schouten, Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam, ed. C.R.Boxer, London, 1935, p.51.

3) *ibid.*, p.53.

4) *Safina*, p.188.

5) *ibid.*, p.189. As viewed by Moslem geographers, " 'the Great Ocean', stretched eastward to the Sea of China, consisted of seven seas embracing the seven continents or regions (âqlîm) believed to exist (cf. eg. *Safina*, p.160). China and territories beyond were considered lying on the shores of the Sea of China, and inhabitants of the region were known as the last (or, as some considered, the first) of the seven nations of the world (aqwâm-e haftgâna) (cf. Mas'ûdi, al-Tanbih val-Ešrâf -compiled in 345 H./956~957-, tr. A.Pâyandeh, Tehran, 1349S. /1970, pp.64 & 79). The author of Jahân-nâma -compiled in 605 H./ 1208~1209- writes: " The limits of the inhabitable quarter of the world are cities of China..., Sila (Korea) and the land of Waqwâq (Japan)." (M. Bakrân, Jahân-nama, ed. M. Riyâhi, Tehran, 1342 S./1963, p.9.

6) *Safina*, p.189.

7) Mas'ûdi writes: " The land of India is connected to Zâbaj, the territory of Maharâj, the king of the islands, whose country lies between

India and China (Mas'ūdi, Morawwej al-Ḍahab wa Ma'āden al-Jawhar, Vol. I, tr. A. Pâyandeh, Tehran, 1347 S./1968, p.75. See also *ibid.*, pp.78, 94, 151~52, 172, and 193~94; Bakrân, *ibid.*, p. 40.

8) Safina, p.189. The length of 1000 farsak (6000 km) mentioned by the author for the island (*ibid.*), following the commonly held opinion of Moslem and Iranian geographers, therefore applies to Jāva.

9) Hence the description of Japan as a land of abundant gold mines. (For the islands of Zābaj and their rich nature cf. M.Tūsī, Aja'eb al-Maklûqât, Tehran, 1345 S./1966, pp.283, 326, 530~56 & 590; Zakaryâ Qazvîni, Ajâ'eb al-Maklûqât, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1361 S./1982, p.98; and Tarik-e Rawżat al-Safâ, Mirkwând, Vol.VII, Tehran, 1339 S./1960, p.415.

10) Safina, pp.188-89.

11) *ibid.*, p.188.

12) *ibid.*, p.189. Kaempfer, who visited Japan in the 1690's, writes: "The Japanese are as good husbandmen as perhaps any people in the world. Nor indeed it is very surprising that they have made great improvements in agriculture, considering not only the extream (extreme!) populousness of the country, but chiefly that the natives are denied all commerce and communication with foreigners, and must necessarily support themselves by their own labour and industry. Not only the fields and flat country,... but likewise the hills and mountains afford corn, rice, and numberless edible plants. Every inch of ground is improv'd to the best advantage." (Engelbert Kaempfer, A history of Japan, tr. J.G.Scheuchzer, AMS Press, NY, 1971 (reprinted from Glasgow, 1906), pp.2/186~87.)

13) Safina, p.189.

14) *ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

15 & 16) *ibid.*, p.190.

17) *ibid.*, p.191. Moslem geographers have praised the natives of China and the countries beyond for their diligence. The author of Târik-e Ya qûbi writes on Chinese people: "They are taxed per head, and every man is required to pay a poll-tax, since they do not permit a man to live without a profession. (A. Abi-Ya'qûb, Târik-e Ya'qûbi, Beirut, 1960, p.183.)

18) Here the author refers to the contrast in appearance between the people of Japan and the natives of places around Siam where he was missioned. The rulers of Japan indeed cared what their subjects wore, The

3rd Tokugawa Shōgūn, Iemitsu (r.1622~1651) " prohibited the ordinary gentry and commonalty from wearing silk clothes, as also whores or comedians from wearing stuffs embroidered or worked with gold and gold brocade..."(Caron & Schouten, *ibid.*, intr. p.[i]).

19) Safina, *ibid.*, p.191.

20) *ibid.*, p.195.

21) *ibid.*, pp. 193-94. Some sources explain about concubines or overnight and temporary marriage arrangements for foreign merchants visiting the Japanese port (eg. cf. Caron & Schouten, *ibid.*, intr. p.[XII]).

22) " The three male names could be taken as words which mean mouse, tablet and gold wind or merely as strange sounds. The female names are actually common Muslim names for women" (Safina, note No. 16, p.274).

23) *ibid.*, pp.191-92.

24) Even a discussion was going on in 1638 about a planned attack on Macau and Manila to root out the Christian penetration (cf. Caron, *ibid.*, intr. p.XIV).

25) Safina, *ibid.*, pp.192-93. Here the author clearly refers to Shimabara rebellion of 1637. His version is rather similar to an official account of the event.

26) *ibid.*, p.193. Japanese merchants also were prohibited from travelling overseas " upon this consideration that the Emperor of Japan would neither offend nor be offended by any strangers...He would have no arms transported out of his Empire...But the chief cause of this inhibition is, least the natives of this country, travelling into the strange place, might be converted to the Christian religion..." (Caron, *ibid.*, pp.52-53). Diplomatic relations of Japan was also restricted: " The king of Spain, the Pope,... have sent several extraordinary ambassadors to this court, which were indeed honourably received and feasted, though never any returns made..." (*ibid.*).

27) Safina, p. 194.

27) Safina, p.194.

28) Caron, *ibid.*, pp.44-46.

29) Caron, *ibid.*, intr, p.XXXii.

30 & 31) Safina, *ibid.*, p.193.

32, 33 & 34) *ibid.*, p.190.

35) *ibid.*, p.194.

36) *ibid.*, p.195. As regards the sense of justice of the Japanese rulers at the time, and their care for their subordinates, Caron gives an account of a harsh punishment handed down for a local governor who had overtaxed his tributaries. The governor, together with his whole clan, were ordered to cut up their bellies (to commit 'harakiri') (Caron, *ibid.*, pp.39-40).

37) Safina, p.195.

38) 'Abbâsid dynasty (Bani 'Abbâs) who ruled the Islamic state as caliphs (132~656 H./750~1258) adopted black robes and black banners as their motto.

39) Safina, p.191.

40) The author does not mention Korean artisans in Japan. Since the land to the west immediately reached from Japan was generally known in the West Asia as China, all artisans from the continent were referred to as Chinese

41 & 42) Safina, p.197.

43) "Khân Bâligh, which gives its name to this paper is the 'Cambaluc' of Marco Polo or modern-day Beijing. the name is of Mongol origin" (O'Kane, *ibid.*, note 17, p.247).

44) Safina, p.197. Contemporary European visitors and travellers have also admired advanced technique of manufacture in Japan. Caron writes: "Printing and gun-powder was in use in this nation above one hundred and fifty years before we in Europe had the knowledge of them. These they learned from Chinese, who have had them long--" (Caron, *ibid.*, p.57).

45) 'Karanga' is a Siamis word meaning stick lac (Safina, Persian edition, p.149, n.1).

46) *ibid.*, p.152.

47 & 48) *ibid.*, p.196. One of the three sacred treasures of Japan is a sword. Hence, swords were highly appreciated since old times.

49) Asad al-Lâh-e Eşfahâni, a famous sword maker at the time of Shah Abbas II (r.1052~1077 H./1642~1667), won international fame for his craftsmanship (cf. Lambton, *Islamic Society in Persia*, London, 1954). Samples of the swords he produced are preserved in several museums around the world, of which two swords with gold blocked blades are now kept in the Wallace Collection in London (cf. A. Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art*, II, p.2575 and ill. Nos. 1424 A & B) (Safina, note 95, p.317).

50) Japanese swords, straighter and with a long hilt, are different in shape and style from those traditionally made in Iran, which were rather curved. Hence the Japanese swords looked unbecoming to the author who appreciated Iranian ones so much.

51) *ibid.*, p.196. Given the fact that swords were highly esteemed by Iranians from ancient times, it is not surprising that the author of *Safina* devotes the most extensive part of his account of Japan to the art and craft of swords making. Swords are much acclaimed in Persian classics. The sword, together with the pen, are considered the main pillars of state, power and rule. Swords, it is said, were first manufactured by Jamshid (*Kayyām*, *Nowrūz-nāma*, Tehran, 1343 S./1964, p.46; *Ebn-e Balkī*, *Fārs-nāma*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1363 S./1984). *Kayyām* who devotes a full chapter of his *Nowrūz-nāma* to a description of the sword and its merits, names 14 different types (*ibid.*, pp.46-51). *Yā qūbī* writes: "The natives of Persia were admired for their advanced technique of swords making (*Yā'qūbī*, *al-Boldān*, tr. E. Āyati, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1347 S./1968, p.87). Foreign visitors and travellers have also referred to the Iranians' delight and pride in their swords. Thomas Herbert who visited Persia in 1628, gives a detailed description of Persian swords: " Their swords (shamsheers they call them) are not straight as ours be, but more hooked and bending than our falchions; of pure metal, broad and sharp as any razor; nor do they value them, unless, if the arm be good, at one blow they can cut in two an asinego. The hilts are without wards, being of gold, silver, horn, ivory, ebony, steel, or wood... The Persian scimitars were of that esteem in old times that, as Herodotus, book 4, writes, it became the Scythians' god..." (Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia -1627~1629*, ed. W. Foster, NY, 1929). In more recent times, in his memoirs, H.K. Brugsch (1827~1894), Prussian ambassador to Qajar Iran, gives a detailed account of Persian swords and admires the weapon as one of the best of its kind in the world (Brugsch, *Safari be Darbār-e Solţān-e Şāḥab-qarān*, tr. Kord-bacheh, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1368 S./1989).

52) *Safina*, p.197.

53) " First they bury several quantities of their best steel in a spot which is very damp. There the steel remains for at least a few years before they dig it up and examine it. Whichever pieces do not show flaws

are taken to the furnace and made into sword blades, and then buried in the dump earth again. When several years have gone by, they dig them up and the best of the group are sent back to the furnace again. This tedious process is repeated several times until the sought after purity is attained. The process is so complicated and precise that the very hour when they will put the finishing touch to their work is determined in advance." (ibid.)

54 & 55) ibid.

56) ibid., pp.189-90 & 195.

57) ibid., p.190.

58) " Every day the peasantry is kept busy digging up vast quantities of gold and silver and this work goes on in the remote mines. The precious metal is packed on animals and sent directly to the king's court-. These huge amount of gold and silver are always extracted from the far-off mines while no one works the mines which are nearby." (ibid.)

59) " If a person is caught possessing or is known to be hiding a single atom of the metal, he and his family will be destroyed."(ibid., pp.190-91)

60) Rawżat al-Şafâ has in turn extracted its description of Waqwâq (Mir-kwand, ibid.) with some adjustment from 'Ājâ'eb al-Maklûqât by Zakariyâ Qazvini, who writes: "The islands of Waqwâq are connected to the islands of Zânaj (Jâva) which is said is made of 1700 islands, and is ruled by a woman-. Gold is so abundant there that its natives make dogs' chains and monkeys' collars of gold." (Qazvini, ibid., p.101)

The narrative is evidently a reproduction of earlier accounts by Moqaddasi and other writers. The author of *Jahân-nâma* describes Jâva (zâbaj) as a group of islands located in the Green Sea (Bahr-e Akzar) and ruled by Mahârâj, "whose daily revenue is 1 to 10 'man's of gold which is melted into ignots and thrown into the sea. The king says: 'The sea is my treasury' "(Bakrân, ibid., p.40; cf. also Mas'ûdi, *Morawwej.*, ibid., pp.79-81)

61) The Travels of Marco Polo, the Oriental Press, NY, n.d., p.262.

62) Interestingly, a similar account of Japan as a land of abundant gold in Marco polo's travels and in *Safina* suggest that some information on Japan found in the latter originally comes from the former.

63) In an introduction to his book titled Isles of Gold; Antique Maps of

Japan, Hugh Cortazzi makes a reference to Marco Polo's travels and concludes: "His false account of Japan's riches in gold may have been due to reports of Japanese roofs made of burnished copper, which can glow like gold." (Hugh Cortazzi, Isles of Japan, Tokyo, 1983, p.13.)

64) A. Montanus, Atlas Jappannensis Being Remarkable Addresses by way of Embassy from the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Emperor of Japan, tr. J. Ogilby, Tho. Johnson, London, 1670, p.385; cf. B.M. Bodart-Bailay, Kaempfer Restor'd, in: Monumenta Nipponica, Spring 1988(43:1), p.15.

65) Caron, *ibid.*, p.53. Caron also lists 'five great silver pots full of musk' among the precious articles presented by a young Shōgūn to an invited Emperor.

66) Caron, *ibid.*, p.52.

67) Safina, pp.197-98.