

INTRODUCTION

Extraordinary events were taking place in the year 775. Baghdad was the capital of the world. Thanks to advances in ship design and navigation, the whole earth formed for the first time an international ecumene, a unified trading zone. At this auspicious moment in history, a group of Gallo-Roman traders and Frankish expeditionary forces including Jews from Brittany, Wales and Gaul set sail for Egypt, Palestine and Persia. They sought the fabled riches of Terra Incognita (Unknown Land) beyond India and China. Jews everywhere looked for the appearance of the Messiah. It was seven hundred years after the fall of Jerusalem. Now the Holy Land was becoming a protectorate under the Frankish king and Western emperor Charlemagne, son of Pepin. Commerce was booming. Knowledge and science were about to enter upon a renaissance. The Papal States sprang into existence to last another thousand years.

Charlemagne had just conquered Italy and allied himself both with the Byzantines and with the Abbasid Caliphate. The illiterate, six-foot-tall, squeaky-voiced Frank, who adopted the name David and was to go through as many wives and concubines as his biblical namesake, was thirty years old. He was a steely leader, with a brilliant career of ruthless conquests and canny political moves before him, one that would make him the first Holy Roman Emperor and earn him the title in posterity of Father of Europe. His deeds insured him a place as the foremost hero in the nascent epic literature of France, Italy, Spain and Germany, the so-called Matter of France.

Mercantile empires were forming in Central Asia. Revolution had toppled the Umayyad caliphate, replacing it with the Abbasids under Al-Mansur. Baghdad was considered the world's most powerful and sophisticated metropolis. Harun Al-Rashid would found the famed House of Wisdom there, a research center to rival the ancient library at Alexandria. The Tang Dynasty ruled in China and soon reached the acme of innovative and creative contributions to world civilization. The Tang capital of Chang'an and the Chinese emperors' major port at Canton numbered over a million inhabitants each. In Cholula in Mexico on any given market day there may have been as many as 50,000 people buying and selling wares ranging from

housing materials and foodstuffs to metals, leather goods, beads, bells and pottery.

In 560, the Chalchihuites Culture (Precious Stone Tradition) introduced the American Southwest's first city and town life via a chain of fortresses and thousand-mile trade routes. These reached from Michoacán in West Mexico up both flanks of the Sierra Madres and along the Pacific Coast. Spearheaded by international merchants, among whom Jews, Chinese, Tarascans and South Asians predominated, and spurred by the mineral wealth in what is now Arizona and New Mexico, the conquest and exploitation of Calalus (Desert Peoples, Hohokam) produced an efflorescence of trade and prosperity rivaling that of the Valley of Mexico. Known as *pochteca* (traveling merchants with a paramilitary function) and *trocadores* (traders), a sophisticated, multi-ethnic ruling caste developed the region's turquoise, salt, slaves, shell, peyote, gold and silver. Jacob, the second king of Rhoda, was described as "swimming" in gold.

A *pochtecatl* (the singular of *pochteca*) is a member of a hereditary class or ethnic group with its own rites, feasts, courts, hierarchy, guilds or insignia and patron deity. The Romans of Calalus worshipped the God of Israel and spoke Latin, while the Toltecs of West Mexico brought their gods Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl and spoke the Tarascan language, of unknown origin, as well as Nahuatl, the lingua franca of the vast Uto-Aztecan linguistic zone. Like the Jews of Europe, *pochteca* dealt mostly in exotic luxury goods of small weight and high value, such as spices, gemstones and feathers.

It was the heyday of trans-Pacific influence in the Americas, a period of shaft graves, gold and copper bells, the introduction of zero in mathematics, a new calendar of Asiatic origin, Hindu-Buddhist styled temples with lotus motifs and serpent staircases, Chinese-styled censers and braziers, Cambodian stepped pyramids, Ganesa the Elephant God, the Makara monster, colonnettes, fretworks, stupas and huge timbered ships. The Hindu merchantman carved in relief at Borobudur, Java could have carried 1000 tons of freight. A shipwreck from about the year 838 found in the waters between Borneo and Sumatra in 1998—near the capital of the Shaivite, or Shiva-worshipping, kingdom of Srivijaya—opens a window into the times. It contained mostly ceramic wares from the Changsha kilns of Hunan Province, China, and had ship-building features from Arabia and India. The cargo was stamped with Chinese seal script similar to the marks on the Tucson Artifacts. Lead and spices appeared among its exports. Indeed, if this ship was not owned or used by the very same Rhadanite Jews responsible for the Tucson Artifacts it certainly could have been, for it provides a textbook example of the carrying goods, traffic patterns and sea lanes Jewish merchants pursued at the zenith of their activity.

By 900, much of this cultural and economic upsurge was gone, erased by the hand of history in catastrophic events that swept the Christian as well as Arab world. As the elderly Oliver in Calalus signed the last entries and inscribed his final surviving words on artifacts exhumed in Arizona more than a millennium later, civil war gripped the Toltec Chichimec colonies in ancient Mexico. Violent northern tribes took advantage of the natural disasters and internecine fighting and wiped out Roman Rhoda on the site of Tucson in a single day.

The Tang Dynasty fell. The Abbasid Caliphate slipped into decline. The squabbling heirs of Charlemagne tore apart his empire with bloody feuds. Murderous bands of armed nobles trampled peace underfoot in city and countryside. The Papacy became a sewer of corruption and depravity, entering its lowest point. Judaism was riven with internal schism and apostasy, while anti-Jewish tendencies swelled to virulent proportions among Christians, to peak during the First Crusade. Viking and Muslim raids laid waste most of Europe. There followed a century without writing, without recordkeeping. Latin decayed, morphing eventually into French, Italian and Spanish, while its place was taken in barbarian lands by German, Anglo-Saxon and other previously unheard-of tongues.

Climate change buried the Tucson Artifacts under a six-foot mudslide on the Santa Cruz river. Trade ground to a halt and the sea lanes to China and across the Pacific Ocean stagnated and slowed. The new Dark Ages would not begin to lift until after the year 1000, when most of Christendom awaited the Resurrection and Last Judgment of souls. But the end did not come as expected. The new Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim's razing of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and destruction of Christian and Jewish sites in 1009 sent a thunderclap throughout the West as resounding as the sack of Rome by Goths in 410.

The story of merchant-adventurer Jews active in pre-Columbian Mexico must be understood against the backdrop of early medieval history in Europe and Asia as well as the colonization by Pacific-facing Mexican cultures of the U.S. Southwest. Cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives are necessary. Although they called themselves Romans, and the first three kings came from what is now France, these long-distance voyagers were part of an international trading world that extended from Far West to Far East, touching points in Arabia, Africa, India, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia. They were known as Rhadanites, or Rhodanites. Sallam, a Jewish merchant from Spain or Khazaria, was able to converse in thirty languages on his journey across Central Asia to the Great Wall of China in 845. The Rhadanites spoke Frankish, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Spanish and Slavonic according to the Arab geographer Ibn Kurradadhbah.

The term Rhadanites or Rhodanites found in Ibn Kurradadhbah's writing can be traced to Rhodes (Isle of Roses), the source of important colonies in Gaul and of all commercial law in the ancient Mediterranean. In Mesoamerica, our Rhadanites observed Toltec commercial law and sealed their records with *ulli*-drops, the Olmec equivalent of today's watermarks and digital signatures.

The present anthology of readings offers a choice of texts and documents aimed at illuminating these geographic and cultural connections. Most readings are translated from Latin; some are taken from Arab, Hebrew, Greek, Old French and even Chinese sources. They range from a Buddhist monk's description of Fu-Sang, early church councils and the emperor Justinian's codification of Roman civil law in the early sixth century to Arab geographers and copper plates of Indian rulers in ninth-century Kerala. The Hebrew Book of Yosippon is an important source for Jewish history, set down in its present form in the eleventh century but deriving from much older works. Most of these readings dovetail chronologically and

geographically with the very timeframe of the Tucson Artifacts. Four accounts of the coronation of Charlemagne in Latin sources relate to the year 800, a date mentioned on the Great Cross. The Carolingian embassy to Harun Al-Rashid and establishment of Frankish hostels and pilgrim churches in Jerusalem come from the same time. So too the charming tale preserved by Notker the Stammerer about Charlemagne, who explained the differences between a Viking longboat, Breton cargo ship and Jewish merchantman.

A famous saying of the Roman historiographer Arnaldo Momigliano was there “was no Jewish history between the fall of Jerusalem and the Italian Renaissance.” Michael Meyer (*Jewish Identity in the Modern World*) further commented, “There was no Jewish history-writing between Josephus and Isaak Markus Jost” in the nineteenth century. We know very little about Jews in early medieval Europe. Except for what can be spun out from a handful of funerary epitaphs, some family chronicles and a scattering of religious texts, it is a lacuna. Into this cryptic void one may now interject a major historical monument that sheds as much light on Western Jewry as on Jewish relations with Jerusalem, Babylon, Egypt, India, China and Mexico.

It is a period when Jews were holding their own against Christian zealots, who condemned them for their out-of-date beliefs and foreign ways. Jewish merchants were greatly admired and appreciated. Carolingian officials converted to Judaism and moved to Arab lands, where Jews felt more at home and enjoyed fuller rights. It is a time when there ruled a Jewish prince in Southern France whose alliance with the Carolingians became the stuff of epic poetry. Pepin, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald granted Jewish merchants special privileges. Charlemagne’s soldiery in Palestine was not only a help to Christian pilgrims but guarantee of overall good relations with the Arab world. Those who served Pepin’s Latin cross and the Patriarchal Cross can be viewed in some respects as forerunners of the Templars. Rhadanites were devout Jews of Rabbinical orientation. They financed the purchase of Jewish sites in Jerusalem and carried writings, especially mystical books and halakhic responsa (verdicts on questions of Jewish law) from one end of the world to the other. They were also responsible for helping spread into Western tradition the Sanskrit animal fables of the Panchatantra, Jewish fox fables of the East, liturgical Jewish poetry (Piyyut) of the Land of Israel and Arabic writings in science, medicine and mathematics.

Templar and Freemason esoteric traditions can be traced back to Jewish Merkabah mysticism in Babylon and Jerusalem, The Good, or Beautiful Land. Levites and Israelites named Joseph, Theodore, Jacob, Israel and Saul mentioned on the Tucson Artifacts were well educated merchants active in the high-profit, long-distance spice and metals trade. Belgian medievalist Henri Pirenne has drawn attention to Jewish merchants’ dominant role in trade in his book *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (VI.1). After papyrus, pepper and incense became unknown under the late Merovingians with the closing of the Mediterranean and eastern routes to India and China, the Jews reopened the supply of these and other goods in Europe. If they did not make the world go around they at least brought it together at a time when Christian and Muslim warred. No Christian could set foot in Muslim lands and no Muslim

was allowed within the borders of a Christian country.

Our section on India and China (VII.) will answer at least what is probably the most frequent question people ask about these records. How did “Romans” get to Arizona and what were they doing there? The answers can be seen in the readings devoted to maritime commerce. These start with the ancient treatise *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and continue through several Arab accounts about the luxury imports of India, Indochina, Indonesia and China. The sea lanes and trade winds fostered by the Indian Ocean monsoons and fast-moving currents of the West Pacific Warming Pool along with the “conveyor belt” of the Japan Current made a seaborne journey from Egypt, Arabia and Persia to India, the Spice Islands, China and the Pacific Coast of America the most profitable one in all commerce for nearly a thousand years. It is believed Indian and Indo-Chinese ships began to explore the Pacific Coast of North and South America from about the second century. Only after the fall of Canton in 877 did international shipping centered on the Spice Islands decay and the emphasis shift to the overland Silk Road.

Section VIII, “Mining and Metallurgy” covers a variety of out-of-the-way topics. I present several reports about mining in the American Southwest and Mexico proving the Spanish simply followed in the footsteps of indigenous peoples, opening very few new mines. American Indian turquoise mines go back to about 600 CE. The Mine with the Iron Door in the Catalinas was rediscovered and lost again in 1880 and may actually have been worked by our Romani (VIII.6). The old, old legend of “White Strangers and Papago Gold” (VIII.4) seems to concern America’s medieval Jewish visitors. The dark side of mining history in the use of slave labor, mostly women and children, is touched upon by a passage from the lost Greek author Agatharchides, a geographer of the second century BCE.

Prospecting, refining and the technical knowledge necessary for smelting gold and silver from different ores are subjects covered by several selections. Finally, “The Tucson Mining Districts at the Dawn of American Settlement” (VIII.11) presents a detailed survey of the oldest mines in the mountain ranges surrounding Tucson, what ores they were known for as well as how they were worked and when and by whom.

Turquoise was mined in the same places with lead and silver-gold ores. A single turquoise mask was worth a king’s ransom, and bits of the “god stone” substituted for currency. At the center of it all were wealthy Toltec Chichimec merchant elites of Hohokam Country in the Tucson basin with their jealously guarded mines, sprawling cities with ball courts and temples and irrigation canals feeding broad fields of maize and other crops.

If anyone wants hard evidence of transoceanic contact, colonization and trade between the Old World and the New, complete with names, dates and locations, they need look no farther than the display cases in the lobby of the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. The Tucson Artifacts shine a strong light not just on Southwest U.S. archeology and Mexican city-life under the Toltecs but on medieval Western Europe during a critical time of recovery and revival. They also provide perspectives on the early period of the Abbasid caliphate; the golden age of Rabbinical Judaism; the eventful centuries of the Gupta and other empires in India; the

spread of Hindu-Buddhist civilization to Southeast Asia and Madagascar; and the important accomplishments of the Tang and Zhou dynasties in China (618-907), a period of unsurpassed artistic and technological advances.

Foundational to the present publication has been the publication in 2016 of the book *Album of Photography with Transcriptions and Translations of the Medieval Latin*. Without a complete, accurate set of high-resolution photographs of the Tucson Artifacts—so ill-served anyway by representations in print, on TV programs and through online media, and difficult to capture with a camera—little progress in studying them could be achieved.

This second book goes a step further. It takes its inspiration from the classic compilation by Jewish-Italian-American historian Robert Sabatino Lopez, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents*. Selection VI.3 below reproduces his text “There Are Three Types of Merchant.” This was translated by Lopez from the Arabic of *The Beauties of Commerce*, a late ninth century work by a prosperous merchant from Damascus. Our selection describing the Rhadanites, “Routes of the Jewish Merchants Called Al-Radhaniyya” (VI.2), is quoted from Lopez’ translation of an extract from *The Book of the Routes and the Kingdoms* (mid-ninth century). This famous passage makes the first and only known mention of Rhadanites, or Rhodanites. The Tucson Artifacts agree with it extremely well in all particulars. They provide firsthand documentary evidence of Jewish merchants speaking Western European, Arabic, Persian and other Eastern tongues.

Any anthology winds up being subjective, open to charges of bias, personal opinion, mistaken assessment and other limitations, space among them. I have confined myself for the most part to the eighth and ninth centuries. The selections featured here stem primarily from that period, the same years as the Tucson Artifacts, and relate to them directly. The majority were written by authors in the better-known traditions of the West, chiefly Latin. Joining these are works in more exotic languages, including Tamil-Malayalam, Arabic and Cherokee.

Because of the multicultural nature of the Tucson Artifacts, I have striven for a certain degree of inclusiveness and extensiveness. Much must remain tentative and incomplete. Each reading is accompanied by a brief explanation placing it in its historical context and spelling out how it pertains to the Tucson Artifacts. These mini-prefaces are necessarily deficient in depth and documentation, but this is something I hope to make up for in a third publication on the whole topic of the Tucson Artifacts.

All translations from Latin are my own. Among them is a key passage from the mid-ninth century Carolingian author Hincmar of Rheims, “Jews Calling Themselves Christians” (IV.11). This witness to the existence of Breton Jews passing for Christian in the city of Nantes has never before appeared in English. Likewise, I have translated into English for the first time Rhabanus Maurus’ treatise “On the Battle Readiness of the Roman Military” so that readers can obtain an inside view of Carolingian military theory as it bears on the Tucson Artifacts (IX.2).

There are two diplomatic documents of particular interest. One, in Latin, is the “Cannes Land Grant under Charlemagne” of 791 (III.5), a charter from the emperor himself

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confirming Count Makhir of Narbonne, whom we identify with the “ruler of the peoples” mentioned by the Tucson Artifacts under the name Theodore and year 775 (nehushtan 18-2). The other, in Malayalam and Hebrew, is a celebrated copper plate preserved in Cochin synagogue and dated 861. This document grants aristocratic privileges to Joseph Rabban, a known Rhadanite, and appoints him head of the foreign trade colony in Kerala. We suggest he is the same as the learned Josephus eulogized by his son Oliver in artifact 5.

How do we know Jacob, Oliver and other of the adventurers came from Brittany? Not only is Brittany explicitly named as the origin of Jacob, the second king, but there are markings on many of the artifacts in an ogam alphabet common in Breton, Celtic and British lands. The variety is called Romesc Breas (Roman Breton, #31) in The Book of Ballymote, which lists ninety-three styles. On the Albion Cross, a gloss in ogam, reading from left to right, spells *da* (“good”) and identifies the Romani colonists as coming from Beaulande, the Holy Land, in other words as Jews.

The Tucson Artifacts did not drop from the sky. They are not fake news from a conspiracy of hyper-diffusionists. It is impossible to overstate their importance for the study of pre-Columbian Southwestern U.S. and Northwestern Mexican history. They are real records of living, breathing, thinking (and literate) inhabitants of the Toltec Chichimec region of Northwest Mexico and Southwest United States in the years between 790 and 900, corresponding to the Pioneer and Colonial periods of the Hohokam Culture. Their inscriptions are not hard to read or understand once recognized. Everything they tell us fits with what we know from archeology and supplements it. It is my hope that this collection of hard-to-find texts relating to the Tucson Artifacts’ cultural background and historical context fosters a better understanding and appreciation of an important lost chapter in America’s past.



Ogam gloss in Old Breton on the Albion Cross, reading left to right da (“good”).

