

I have chosen the following, short passage for the sake of the assignment. You should choose a longer passage for your assignment:

Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, p. 16-17:

The first of their kings and chiefs that we met was Inal the Younger. He had converted to Islam. It was said to him: "If you become Muslim, you will no longer be our leader."

So he renounced Islam. When we came to the place where he was, he said to us:

"I will not let you pass, because this is something we have never heard of and which we thought would never happen."

We talked to him pleasantly, until we had persuaded him to accept a caftan from Jurjan worth ten dirhams, a piece of cloth, round loaves of bread, a handful of raisins and a hundred walnuts. After we had given him these things, he prostrated himself before us, for that is their custom. When a man wants to honour another, he prostrates himself before him, and says:

"If my tents were not so far off your route, I would bring you sheep and grain."

He left us then and we set out.

Categorizing my Observations/Annotations:

Adjectives

- First
- Ten
- Round

Verbs

- Met
- Converted
- Become
- Renounced
- Came
- Let
- Heard
- Thought
- Talked
- Persuaded
- Accept
- Prostrated
- Honor
- Prostrates
- Says
- Bring
- Left
- Set out

Nouns

- Kings
- Chiefs
- Islam
- Muslim
- Caftan
- Jurjan
- Dirhams
- Bread
- Cloth
- Custom
- Tents sheep
- Grain

Foods

- Walnuts
- Bread
- Raisins
- Grain

Subject/pronoun

- Inal the Younger
- It
- He
- I
- He—> us —> we

Number

- Ten
- One hundred
- A (piece of cloth)
- Multiple (loaves)

Cause/Effect Phrases

- Become Muslim—> not our leader
- Converted—> renounced
- Talked—> persuaded
- Accepted gifts —> prostrated
- Prostrated —> honored
- Left us— set out

Free Association Exercise (Again, this is shortened for the sake of the example. You should spend longer unpacking each term)

Prostration:

- Humbling

- Worship
- Prayer
- Islam
- Christianity
- Church
- Mosque
- Respect
- Loyalty
- Vulnerability (giving up power)
- Weakness
- Begging
- Pleading
- king/servant

Bread:

- Life
- Sandwich
- Staple (food/of a diet)
- Grains
- Soup
- Offering

Kings/Chiefs

- Power
- Respect
- Royalty
- Wealth
- Status
- Tyranny
- Kingdom
- Subjects

Come out of Uncertainty/Think of the Free Associations with a free-write: (For sake of the example, I will do this in bullet points):

- There are a lot of words that suggest authority in this piece (king, chief). And there are also a lot of actions that suggest authority, such as forbidding someone to pass. At the same time, there are a lot of words, phrases that carry connotations of relinquishing power and of demonstrating vulnerability and weakness. I am thinking here about the words 'prostrate' and 'renounce'. So this passage seems to be saying something about power, though I am unsure about what that is just yet. I'm also struck by the list of objects— some of them carry connotations of sustenance, while others carry connotations of luxury. Are these standard gifts that one give someone in this society? I'm still confused about what the little anecdote about Islam is doing at the opening of this passage.

However, I am noticing as I'm looking back on my free association list and my other lists that this movement of conversion and reversion is echoed over the course of the piece in other ways. I am thinking here about the list I made that has the cause/effect. There are multiple moments in the text where something is given and something is received, or something is said which results in something else. This entire exchange between these two people is about giving and receiving. And maybe I can read the opening moment in light of this— Inal does what he needs to do in order to receive the respect of his followers or subjects. That seems to be renouncing Islam. In fact, now that I'm looking back at this passage, in light of everything I've written, I am realizing that the entire passage is about exchange and transaction. Every time someone gives something, they receive something, as well. Fadlan gives goods and Inal lets him pass. Everything but the conversion that is! Inal's conversion seems to have been problematic for this society, because it did not offer the people anything. In a society that values transaction this seems to be a problem.

Questions:

- Why is it important for us to know that Inal the Younger was Muslim?
- Who is Inal? What kind of person is Inal?
- What are rules that govern this society?
- What kind of value does this society place on faith? Mercantilism?
- What is Fadlan's attitude towards Inal?
- What can we learn about Fadlan's worldview from this passage? What about Inal's?
- How does Fadlan's worldview compare to Inal's worldview?

Choose Final Question:

What is the relationship between faith/conversion and mercantile transaction in the piece?