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Näser-e Khosraw's
Book of Travels
Persian Heritage Series

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Preface

Nāṣer-e Khosraw, the well-known Persian poet, moralist and theologian was a mundane, prosperous and wine-loving bureaucrat in the Saljuq administration, until 1045, when a visionary dream brought him to a head his latent tendencies and transformed him overnight into a devoted man of faith. The following year he planned a pilgrimage to Mecca which was eventually extended into a seven year journey. It took him from Marw in northeastern Persia to Nishābūr, Rayy, and Azerbaijan and then through Armenia and eastern Anatolia to Syria and Palestine and finally to Mecca. He returned, however, to Jerusalem and took the route by land and sea to Egypt, where he became transformed by the country’s prosperity and its orderly administration under the Fatimids. It was here apparently that he embraced the Isma‘ilī doctrine.

After visiting Mecca three more times and returning to Egypt twice, he finally headed for his home country by going to south Yemen, crossing the arabian desert to Basra in southern Iraq and then by way of Isfahan to Balkh in modern Afghanistan. The Safarnāma or Book of Travels is a record of this journey.

Nāṣer soon, however, found himself harrased by the Sunni authorities and took refuge in the nearby village of Yomgān, where he lived in forced retirement at least for 15 years devoting his time to writing and to intense Isma‘ilī missionary activity.

A man of considerable culture and curiosity, Nāṣer-e Khosraw met in the course of his travels with many people, wondered at many monuments and public buildings, and set down his observations in his travel book. Written in a concise style sometimes resembling an abridgement, and enlivened from time to time by Nāṣer’s dry sense of humor, the Safarnāma contains many keen and valuable observations on peoples and places, as well as on the economic and social conditions of countries that he visited. In his lively descriptions, Cairo, Jerusalem, and Mecca and their monuments stand out. His account of a small “communistic” Carmathian city-state in al-Ahsa’s near Bahrain is of special interest.

Despite its reputation, the Safarnāma, had never been translated
into English in its entirety, Guy LeStrange’s translation of the sections on Syria and Palestine (Pilgrim’s Text Society, volume IV, London: 1883) having remained a partial rendering. The present complete translation by Dr. Wheeler Thackston is accompanied by a glossary of proper names, places, and terms, all in vigorous transliteration for the benefit of specialists, and an appendix listing the places visited by Nāser, together with a map of the route followed by him, as well as explanatory notes, which are designed to help those interested in philological, historical, and geographical aspects of the text.

Ehsan Yarshater

Introduction

While on an official trip in the autumn of 1045, Nāser, son of Khosraw of Qobādiyan (Marv District in northeastern Khorasan), by his own account, experienced a dream-vision that jolted him out of a “forty-year sleep of heedlessness” and awakened in him a desire to abandon the life of a civil administrator for a “quest for truth.” Several months after this experience Nāser obtained a leave of absence from his post and, ostensibly intending to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, settled his debts and set out from Marv toward Nishāpur, the cultural capital of Khorasan. However, instead of joining a caravan bound for the Hejaz, he began a peregrination that took him across the Caspian coast of Iran, into eastern Anatoila and down into Syria and Palestine. Although he did make a pilgrimage from Jerusalem, he did not return to his native Khorasan but rather retraced his steps to Jerusalem and thence made his way to Egypt and Cairo, the seat of the Fatimid caliphate. From Egypt he made his way to the Hejaz, across the Arabian peninsula and through Iran to return, some seven years after his departure, to his home in Balkh. The record of his adventures, observations and experiences is contained in his travelogue, the Safarnāma.

Of Nāser’s life we have little information, and of his early years practically nothing is known. From the fact that both he and his brother Abūl-Fath ʿAbd al-Jalil were employed in governmental service (the brother is mentioned in the Safarnāma as a member of the entourage of Abu Nasr, vizier to the prince of Khorasan), it may be inferred that the family belonged to the clerical/administrative class that regularly supplied the bureaus of state with those of its young men who had attained through rudimentary schooling a competence in the “three R’s.” That Nāser was not rigorously trained in the religious and theological “Arabic” sciences of a systematic Islamic education is evident in his philosophical works.¹


It is known of Nāser that at some point in his life he embraced
Ismailism, which caused him to serve actively as missionary in the Caspian region of Iran and later as exile in Yomgan (Badakhshan), writing treatises and poetry, where he is last known to have been in 1061. Although it cannot be proved, it makes good sense to assume that his conversion to Ismailism took place before he set out on the journeys described in the Safarnameh, for he made a tour of every important center of Ismailism west of Transoxiana, and the only places upon which he expended favorable comment throughout his travels are those ruled by Isma'ilis. If he was not being sent from one Isma'ilist stronghold to another, there is little to justify his eccentric skirting of the central Islamic world. And he makes no attempt to explain himself. He was not a rich man who could indulge himself in Wanderlust: he mentions once or twice in passing that he was accompanied only by a brother and one Indian servant. His observations of all he saw constantly betray the civil administrator: he admires fortifications, waterworks, strategic situations of towns, cities, etc. He was obviously captivated by monumental architecture and pomp and circumstance: the Dome of the Rock shrine complex at Jerusalem and the mosque precincts at Mecca are meticulously described, as are the public displays of Fatimid ceremony in Cairo. He mentions rare and delightful fruits and vegetables he encounters, and he converses with unusual persons in out-of-the-way places, and he never misses an opportunity to visit a saint or prophet's shrine. Yet there is little in his narrative that would characterize him as a professional traveler or a particularly interested observer of the people he met or the places he visited.

The Isma'il sect, to which Nasir belonged from at least middle age and for which he worked and wrote in his later years, was at this period in its history actively engaged in propaganda and conversion. The movement had originated as a schism from Shi'ism, the branch of Islam that recognized as the only legitimate successors to the Prophet Muhammad and interpreters of the revealed law the lineal descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatema and her husband Ali b. Abi Taleb. Because of a difference of opinion over the seventh Imam, the Isma'ilis split from the majority of the Shi'a, whose line of Imams continued down to the twelfth and who are consequently known as "Twelvers," whereas the Isma'ili line continued on. In Nasir's
time the twelver branch of Shi‘ism had recently entered into its eschatological phase with the Greater Occultation of the representatives of the Twelfth Imam in 940, and the Twelve Shi‘ites had no capital or power base of their own from which to direct propaganda. There were, however, numerous Shi‘ite pockets scattered throughout the Islamic world, notably in Daylam and Tabarestān (through which Nāser passed) and in Transoxania, of which Nāser makes no mention whatsoever.

The Seveners, or Isma‘ili, branch of Shi‘ism, by contrast, had ruled Egypt since the Fatimid conquest in 969 and ran its covert and overt propaganda machine from Cairo, where Nāser spent a goodly portion of his seven-year absence from his homeland. There he was most likely being trained in missionary techniques.

In Transoxania and eastern Iran, at precisely the time that Nāser left his administrative post and began his travels, the power of the Seljuk Turks was rapidly spreading; Marv had capitulated to them in 1037, and Herāt and Nishāpur in 1038, and Balkh and Tokhārestān were taken in 1040. Unlike their predecessors the Ghaznavids, the Seljuks, who were adamant Sunnis, were actively opposed to all forms of Shi‘ism and were determined to rid their territory of all Shi‘i opposition. If he was already an Isma‘ili, it is not at all unlikely that the advent of the Seljuks into Khorasan had something to do with Nāser’s decision to absent himself from the province.

In his travelogue Nāser does not touch upon theological or sectarian debates, and he makes scant mention of the political turmoils of the time. Yet his observations on the places he visited give us an interesting, if superficial, view into the eleventh-century Islamic world. More importantly they provide us with an insight into a personality of that time. Generally speaking, aside from the facts and figures Nāser records, most of which are easily found elsewhere, what he chooses to convey to his reader tells us more about himself than it does about what he saw and gives us a rare glimpse into the attitudes of a man from an age very different from our own.

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The Travelogue of Nāser-e Khosraw

Thus writes Abu Mo‘in Hamid al-din Nāser son of Khosrow of Qobādiyān in the district of Merv:

I was a clerk by profession and one of those in charge of the sultan’s revenue service. In my administrative position I had applied myself for a period of time and acquired no small reputation among my peers.

In the month of Rabi‘ II in the year 437 (October 1045), when the prince of Khorasan was Abu Solaymān Chaghri Beg Dāud son of Mikā’il son of Saljuq, I set out from Marv on official business to the district of Panj Deh in Marv Rud, where I stopped off on the very day there happened to be a conjunction of Jupiter and the lunar node. As it is said that on that day God will grant any request made of him, I therefore withdrew into a corner and prayed two ṭāfā, asking God to grant me true wealth. When I rejoined my friends and companions, one of them was reciting a poem in Persian. A particular line of poetry came into my head, and I wrote it down on a piece of paper for him to recite. I had not yet handed him the paper when he began to recite that very line! I took this to be a good omen and said to myself that God had granted my beseech.

From there I went to Juznian, where I stayed nearly a month and was constantly drunk on wine. (The Prophet says, ‘Tell the truth, even if on your own selves.’) One night in a dream I saw someone saying to me, “How long will you continue to drink of this wine, which destroys man’s intellect? If you were to stay sober, it would be better for you.”

In reply I said, “The wise have not been able to come up with anything other than this to lessen the sorrow of this world.”

“He cannot be called wise who leads men to senselessness. Rather, one should seek out that which increases reason and wisdom.”

“Where can I find such a thing?” I asked.

“Seek and ye shall find,” he said, and then he pointed toward the qabla and said nothing more. When I awoke, I remembered

1See Appendix A on Islamic dates.
everything, which had truly made a great impression on me.
“You have waked from last night’s sleep,” I said to myself.
“When are you going to wake from that of forty years?” And I
reflected that until I changed all my ways I would never find
happiness.
On Thursday the 6th of Jomâdâ II of the year 437 [19 Decem-
ber 1045], which was by Persian reckoning the middle of the
month of Day, the last month before the year 414 of the Yazd-
gerdi era, I cleansed myself from head to foot, went to the
mosque, and prayed to God for help both in accomplishing what
I had to do and in abstaining from what he had forbidden.
Afterwards I went to Shohurghân and spent the night in a vil-
lage in Fâyâb. From there I went via Samangân and Tâlaqân to
Marv Rud and thence to Marv. Taking leave of my job, I an-
nounced that I was setting out for the Pilgrimage to Mecca. I set-
tled what debts I owed and renounced everything worldly, ex-
cept for a few necessities.
On the 23rd of Sha’êân [5 March 1046] I set out for Nishapur,
traveling from Marv to Sarakhs, which is a distance of thirty par-
asangs. From there to Nishapur is forty parasangs.
On Saturday the 11th of Shawwal [21 April] I came to Nisha-
pur. On Wednesday, the last day of the month, there was a lunar
eclipse. The prince at this time was Tâghrêl Bêg Mohammad,
brother to Chaghri Bêg. He had ordered a school built near the
Saddlers’ Bazaar, which was being constructed then. He himself
had gone to Isfahan for his first conquest of that city.
On the 2nd of Dhu’l-Qa’da I left Nishapur and, in the com-
pany of Khwâja Mowâlîfaq, the sultan’s agent, came to Qumes
via Gâvân. There I paid a visit to the tomb of Shaikh Bayazid of
Bestân.
On Friday the 5th of Dhu’l-Qa’da [17 May] I went out to Dâmghân. The first of Dhu’l-Hejja 457 [9 June 1046] I came to Se-
nân by way of Abkhwarî and Châshhtkhwârân, and there I
stayed for a period of time, seeking out the learned. I was told of
a man called Master ‘Ali Nasî, whom I went to see. He was a
young man who spoke Persian with a Daylamite accent and wore
his hair uncovered. He had a group of people about him read-
ing Euclid, while another group read medicine and yet another

The Persian Yazgerdi era was calculated from the beginning of the reign of
Yazgerdi III, the last Sassanian Shah of Iran (A.D. 635). See Appendix A.

mathematics. During our conversation he kept saying, “I read this
with Avicenna,” and “I heard this from Avicenna.” His ob-
ject of this was, of course, for me to know that he had been a stu-
dent of Avicenna. When I became engaged in discourse with
some of these people, he said, “I know nothing of arithmetic
[snâq] and would like to learn something of the arithmetic art.” I
came away wondering how, if he himself knew nothing, he could
teach others.
From Balkh to Rayy I reckoned the distance to be 350 para-
sangs. From Rayy to Sâva is said to be thirty parasangs, from
Sâva toHamadân thirty, from Rayy to Isfahan fifty, and to Âmol
thirty. Between Rayy and Âmol is Mount Damâvand, which is
shaped like a dome and is called Lâvâsân. They say that on the
top of the mountain is a pit from which ammonia is extracted,
and also sulphur. Leather skins are hauled up and filled with
ammonia, and when full they are rolled down the mountainside,
there being no road over which they can be transported.
On the 5th of Moharram 438 [12 July 1046], corresponding to
the 10th of Mordad 415 of the Persian calendar, I set out for
Qazvin and came to the village of Quha, where there was a
drought. A mound of barley bread was being sold for two dir-
hems. [Displeased], I left.
On the 9th of Moharram [16 July] I arrived in Qazvin, which
has many orchards with neither walls nor hedges, so that there is
nothing to prevent access to the gardens. I thought Qazvin a
nice city: its walls were well fortified and furnished with crenel-
lations, and the bazaars were well kept, only water was scarce
and limited to subterranean channels.² The head of the city was
an Alid. Of all the trades practiced in the city, shoemaking had
the largest number of craftsmen.
On the 12th of Moharram 438 [19 July 1046] I left Qazvin
along the road to Bil and Qânp, village dependencies of Qin-
vin. From there my brother, a Hindu slave-boy we had with us,
and I came to a village called Kharzavi. As we had few provi-

²La Civilisation des sous couches, ed. and trans. with commentary by Aly Mazaheri,
Université de Nice, Institut d’Etudes et de Recherches Interethniques et Inter-
sions, my brother went into the village to buy some things from the grocer. Someone asked him, "What do you want? I'm the grocer."

"Whatever you have will be all right with us," said my brother, "for we are strangers passing through." Yet whatever edibles he mentioned, the man only said, "We don't have any." From then on, wherever we saw anyone like this man, we would say, "He's the grocer from Khazravi!"

Passing on from there, we encountered a steep descent. Three parasangs farther was a village belonging to Tārām called Barazal-Khavāt [7]. It was tropical and had many pomegranate and fig trees, most of which grew untended. Passing on, we came to a river called Shāhārud, on the banks of which was a village called Khandān, where a toll was levied for the duke, who was one of the Daylamite kings. As this river passes through this village, it joins with another river called Sāpādrud. When these two rivers have united, the water flows down into a valley to the east of the mountains of Gīlān, then on to Gīlān itself and finally empties into the Caspian Sea. They say that fourteen hundred rivers spill into the Caspian, the circumference of which is said to be twelve hundred parasangs. In the midst of the sea there are islands with many inhabitants, as I heard from many people.

But let me return to my own story. From Khandān to Shamirān there are three parasangs of desert that is quite rocky. The latter is the metropolis of Tārām. Beside the city is a high fortress, the foundation of which is laid on solid granite. It is surrounded by three walls, and in the middle of the fortress is a water channel connected to the river, the water of which is drawn up into the fortress. There are a thousand sons of the aristocracy kept inside that fortress so that no one can rise up in rebellion. It is said that the prince has many such fortresses in Daylam and that he rules with such complete justice and order that no one is able to take anything from anyone else. When the men go to the mosque on Fridays, they all leave their shoes outside, and no one steals them. The prince signs himself thus on paper: "Ward of the march of Daylam, the ghil of Gīlān, Abu Sāleh, client to the Prince of the Faithful." His name is Jostān Ebrāhīm.

In Shamirān I saw a good man from Darband whose name was Abu Fadl Khalīfa, son of 'Ali the Philosopher. He was a wor-

Azerbaijan and Beyond

1046]. That was the 25th of the month of Shahrivar by the old reckoning. This city is the principal town of Azerbaijan and is in a flourishing state. I paced off the length and breadth, each of which was fourteen hundred paces. In the sermon they name the padshah of Azerbaijan in this manner: Exalted Prince Sayf al-Dawla Sharaf al-Mella Abu Mansur Vahsudan son of Moham-
mad, chief to the Prince of the Faithful. I was told that an earth-
quake had occurred in this city on Wednesday night the 17th of
Rabi’ I 1434 [4 November 1942], which was during the interca-
lary days. After the night prayer, part of the city was totally de-
stroyed while other parts were unharmed. They said that forty
thousand people lost their lives.

In Tabriz I saw a poet named Qatrân, who wrote decent po-
cetry, but he could not speak Persian very well. He came to me
and brought the works of Manjik and Daqiçi, which read aloud
to me. Whenever he came across a meaning too subtle for him,
he asked me. I explained it to him and he wrote it down. He also
recited his own poetry to me.

On the 14th of Rabî’ I [18 September] I parted from Tabriz
on the Marand road and, accompanied by one of Prince Vahsud-
nan’s soldiers, came to Khoy. From there also I traveled with a
courier up to Bargri. From Khoy to Bargri is thirty parasangs.
We arrived on the 12th of Jamâdâ I [14 November]. From there
we came to Vân and Vastân, where they sell pork in the bazaar
as well as lamb. Men and women sit drinking wine in the shops
without the slightest inhibition. From there we arrived in the city
of Akhlât on the 18th of Jamâdâ I [20 November]. This city is
the border town between the Muslims and the Armenians, and
from Bargri it is nineteen parasangs. The prince, Nasr al-Dawla,
was over a hundred years old and had many sons, to each of
whom he had given a district. In the city of Akhlât they speak
three languages, Arabic, Persian, and Armenian. It is my suppo-
sition that this is why they named the town Akhlât. Their com-
mercial transactions are carried on in cash money, and their rotl
is equivalent to three hundred dirhems.

On the 20th of Jamâdâ [22 November] I left there and came
to an outpost. It was snowing and extremely cold. On the plain

*Nağır thinks the name of the town is derived from the Arabic root ḫalâda “to mix”; it is called Khîl in Armenian and was formerly known as Khelî in Ara-
bic. The derivation Nağır supposes is unlikely.

up to the town there is a section of the road with planks laid on
the ground so that on snowy and blizzardly days people can find
their way over the wood. From there I went on to Belâs, which
lies in a valley. We bought some honey, a hundred maunds for
one dinar, at the rate they sold to us. We were told that in this
town there were men who produced three to four hundred jars
of honey a year.

Leaving that place, I saw a fortress called Qef Onzor, which
means “stop and look.” Passing on, I came to a place where there
was a mosque said to have been built by Owâs Qarâni.

There I saw men who roamed about the mountainsides and
cut a wood something like cypress. I asked what they did with it,
and they explained that when one end of this wood is placed in
fire, pitch comes out the other end. It is then collected in pits,
put into containers, and sent all over for sale.

The regions that I have briefly mentioned after Akhlât are de-
pendencies of Mayyâfâreqân. We went to the town of Arzan,
which is a flourishing place with running water and orchards,
gardens, and good bazaars. During the Persian month of Aidâr
they were selling two hundred maunds of grapes, which they
call râs-î armânush, for one dinar.

The Region of Diyar Bahr

From there we went to Mayyâfâreqân, which is 28 parasangs
distant. From Balkh to Mayyâfâreqân by the way we came was
552 parasangs. It was Friday the 26th of Jamâdâ I 1438 [28 No-
vember 1940]. At the time the leaves on the trees were still
green. The place has an enormous fortiﬁcation made of white
stone, each slab of which weighs ﬁve hundred maunds, and
every ﬁfty ells is a huge tower of this same white stone. The top
of the rampart is all crenellated and looks as though the master
builder had just ﬁnished working on it. The city has one gate on
the west side in a large gateway with a masonry arch and an
iron door with no wood in it. It has a Friday mosque that would
take too long to describe. Brieﬂy, the ablution pool faces forty
chambers, through each of which run two large canals, one of
which is visible and is for use, while the other is concealed be-
neath the earth and is for carrying away refuse and flushing the cisterns. Outside of the city are caravanserais and bazaars, baths, and another congregational mosque used on Fridays. To the north is another town called Mohdathia, and it too has bazaars, a congregational mosque, and baths, all of which are well laid out. In the sermon they style the sultan of the district thus: the Great Prince 'Ezz al-islam Sa'd al-Din Nasr al-Dawla Sharaf al-Mella Abu Nasr Ahmad, and he is said to be a hundred years old. The roof there is equal to 480 stone dirhems. That same prince has built a city at a distance of four parasangs from Mayyafariqin and called it Naariyya. From Âmed to Mayyafariqin is nine parasangs.

On the 6th of Day, old reckoning, we arrived in Âmed, the foundation of which is laid on a monolith rock. The length of the city is two thousand paces, and the breadth the same. There is a wall all around made of black rock, each slab weighing between a hundred and a thousand mounds. The facing of these stones is so expert that they fit together exactly, needing no mud or plaster in between. The height of the wall is twenty cubits, and the width ten. Every hundred ells there is a tower, the half circumference of which is eighty ells. The crenellations are also of this same black stone. Inside the city are many stone stairs by means of which one can go up onto the ramparts, and atop every tower is an embrasure. The city has four gates, all of iron with wood, and each gate faces one of the four cardinal directions. The east gate is called the Tigris Gate, the west gate the Byzantine Gate, the north the Armenian Gate, and the south the Tell Gate. Outside this wall just described is yet another wall, made of that same stone, the height of which is ten ells and the top of which is completely covered with crenellations. Inside the crenellation is a passageway wide enough for a totally armed man to pass and to stop and fight with ease. The outside wall also has iron gates, placed directly opposite the gates in the inside wall so that when one passes from a gate in the first wall one must traverse a space of fifteen ells before reaching the gate in the second wall. Inside the city is a spring that flows from a granite rock about the size of five millstones. The water is extremely pleasant, but no one knows where the source is. The city has many orchards and trees thanks to that water. The ruling prince of the city is a son of that Nasr al-Dawla who has been mentioned.

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I have seen many a city and fortress around the world in the lands of the Arabs, Persians, Hindus, and Turks, but never have I seen the likes of Âmed on the face of the earth or have I heard anyone else say that he had seen its equal. The congregational mosque too is of black stone, and a more perfect, stronger construction cannot be imagined. Inside the mosque stand two-hundred-odd stone columns, all of which are monolithic. Above the columns are stone arches, and above the arches is another colonnade shorter than the first. Above that is yet another row of arches. All the roofs are peaked, and all the masonry is carved and painted with designs. In the courtyard of the mosque is placed a large stone atop which is a large, round pool of stone. It is as high as a man, and the circumference is ten ells. From the middle of the pool protrudes a brass waterspout from which shoots clean water; it is constructed so that the entrance and the drain for the water are not visible. The enormous ablution pool is the most beautiful thing imaginable — only the stone from which Âmed is built is all black, while that of Mayyafariqin is white. Near the mosque is a large church, elaborately made of the same stone, and the floor is laid in marble designs. Beneath the dome, which is the Christians' place of worship, I saw a latticed iron door, the likes of which I had never seen before.

From Âmed to Harrân there are two roads: along one of them are no settlements, and this one is forty parasangs long; along the other road are many villages, most of the inhabitants of which are Christian, and that way is sixty parasangs long. We went by caravan along the settled route. The plain is extremely level except for a few places so rocky that the animals could hardly go a pace without stepping on a rock.

On Friday the 25th of Jumâdâ II 1388 [27 December 1906], or the 22nd of Day, old reckoning, we arrived in Harrân. The weather at that time was like the weather in Khorasan at Nawruz. From there we went to a town named Qarul, where a young man invited us into his house. When we had come into the house, a bedouin Arab sixty years old came in and sat down next to me.

"Teach me the Koran," he said. I recited him the chapter be-

Qarul" is probably the modern Urfa, medieval Edessa. Qarul is not mentioned by the Arab geographers, however.
gunning “Qul ʾaʾidho be-rabbil-nūs.” He recited it back to me. When I had said the part that goes “menaʾl-jennate waʾl-nūs,” he said, “Should I say ʾaʾraʾaʾaytul-nūs too?” “There is no more to this chapter,” I replied. Then he asked, “Which chapter has the part in it about the naqḍīl al-hatab?” He did not even know that in the chapter called Tabbat the words hemma naqḍīl al-hatab occur, not naqḍīl al-hatab! That night, no matter how many times I recited the chapter beginning “Qul ʾaʾidho be-rabbil-nūs,” he could not learn it. A sixty-year-old Arab!

Into Syria

Saturday the 3rd of Rajab 438 [3 January 1947] we came to Saruj. The next day we crossed the Euphrates and arrived in Manbij, the first town you come to in Syria. It was the first of the month of Bahman in the old reckoning, and the weather was extremely pleasant. There were no buildings outside of the town. From there I went to the city of Aleppo.

From Mayyâfâregin to Aleppo is one hundred parasangs. I found Aleppo to be a nice city. It has a huge rampart, twenty-five cubits high, I estimated, and an enormous fortress, as large as the one at Balkh, set on rock. The whole place is populous, and the buildings are built one atop another. This city is a place where tolls are levied on the merchants and traders who come and go among the lands of Syria, Anatolia, Diyâr Bakr, Egypt, and Iraq.

The city has four gates: the Gates of the Jews, the Gate of God, the Garden Gate, and the Antioch Gate. The standard weight used in the bazaar there is the Zâheri roll, which is 480 dirhems. Twenty parasangs to the south is Hamâ, and after that Homs. Damascus is fifty parasangs from Aleppo; from Aleppo to Antioch is twelve parasangs, and the same to Tripoli. They say it is two hundred parasangs to Constantinople.

*In the first instance, the Koranic verse Nâser is trying to teach the man ends with the words non al-jennate waʾl-inda (“From the djinn and people”). The Arab asks, “A-naqḍīl linda?” (“Did you see the people?”), a non sequitur that indicates he has understood nothing but the last word. In the second instance the Arab asks Nâser for the chapter that speaks of the “wood-carrier,” but he uses a word for “carrier” other than the one used in the Koranic text.*

On the 11th of Rajab [11 January] we left the city of Aleppo. Three parasangs distant was a village called Jond Qanun. The next day, after traveling six parasangs, we arrived in the town of Sarim, which has no fortification walls.

Six parasangs farther on was Maʾarrat al-Noʾman, which is quite populous. It has a stone wall. Beside the city gate I saw a cylindrical column of stone, which had something written on it in a script that was not Arabic. I asked someone what it was, and he said that it was a talisman against scorpions. If ever a scorpion were brought in from outside and turned loose, it would run away and not stay in the town. I estimated that column to be about ten ells high. I found the bazaars to be flourishing, and the Friday mosque built on a rise in the middle of town so that from whatever place one wants to go up to the mosque, one has to ascend thirteen steps. Their whole agriculture consists of wheat, which is plentiful. Figs, olives, pistachios, almonds, and grapes also abound. The city water comes from both rain and wells.

In the city was a man named Abuʾl-ʿAli of Maʾarrat. Although blind, he was the head of the city and very wealthy, with many slaves and servants. Everyone in the city, in fact, was like a slave to him, but he himself had chosen the ascetic life. He wore coarse garments and stayed at home. Half a mound of barley bread he would divide into nine pieces and content himself with only one piece throughout the entire day and night. Besides that, he ate nothing. I heard it said that the door to his house was always open and that his agents and deputies did all the work of the city, except for the overall supervision, which he saw himself. He denied his wealth to no one, although he himself was constantly fasting and vigilant at night, taking no part in the affairs of the world. This man has attained such a rank in poetry and literature that all the learned of Syria, the Maghreb, and Iraq confess that in this age there is no one of comparable stature. He has composed a book called al-Fusul waʾl-qahṣāt, in which he speaks in enigmatic parables. Although eloquent and amusing, the book can be understood only by a few and by those who have read it with him. He has even been accused of trying to rival the Koran. There are always more than two hundred persons from all over gathered about him reading literature and poetry. I have heard that he himself has composed more than a
hundred thousand lines of poetry. Someone once asked him why, since God had given him all this wealth and property, he gave it away to the people and hardly ate anything himself. His answer was, "I own nothing more than what I eat." When I passed through that place he was still alive.

On the 15th of Rajab 438 [15 January 1047] we went to Kafr Tāhab and thence to Hamā, a fine, populous city on the banks of the Orontes. The reason this river is called ʻĀsī ["rebellious" in Arabic] is because it runs into Byzantium, that is, when it goes from the lands of Islam to the lands of the infidels it becomes "rebellious." On the river are many water wheels. From there the road forks, one way leading along the coast through western Syria and the other to the south and Damascus. We took the coastal route.

In the mountains we saw a spring that they say flows every year after the middle of Sha‘bān.³ For three days it flows, after which there is not a drop of water until the next year. Many people go there on pilgrimage and seek propitiation of God. They have built edifices and pools there. Passing on from that place, we came to a field covered with narcissus in bloom, and the entire place looked white because of all the flowers. Afterwards, we arrived in a town called ʻErqa. Two parasangs past ʻErqa we came to the seashore. Five parasangs to the south along the shore we came to Tripoli. From Aleppo to Tripoli is forty parasangs the way we came.

**Description of Tripoli**

On Tuesday the 5th of Sha‘bān [4 February] we arrived. The outskirts of the city are all agricultural, with orchards and gardens, with lots of sugar cane and many groves of oranges, citron, bananas, lemons, and dates. Just at that time they were making molasses. The city of Tripoli is so situated that three sides face the water, and when the water is rough, some of the waves lap against the city walls. On the eastern side of the city, which faces

³Since Islamic months are lunar (see Appendix A), the spring would begin approximately eleven days earlier each year, a fact that may have occasioned Naṣir’s comment.
Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre

From Byblos we went to Beirut, where I saw a stone arch situated so that the road ran right through it. I estimated the arch to be fifty ells high, and on all sides were slabs of white stone, each of which weighed over a thousand maunds. This edifice was made of bricks up to a height of twenty ells, and on top were set up marble columns, each eight ells tall and so thick that two men could scarcely reach around. On top of these columns were more arches on both sides, of such exactly fitted masonry that there was neither plaster nor mud in between. Above this was a great arch right in the middle, fifty cubits high. I estimated that each stone in that arch was eight cubits long and four wide, so that each one must have weighed approximately seven thousand maunds. All these stones had designs carved in relief—better in fact than one usually sees executed in wood. Except for this arch, no other edifice remains in that area. I asked what place this had been and was told that it is said to have been the gate to Pharaoh's garden and was extremely old. The whole plain thereabouts abounds with marble columns, capitals, and bases, all of carved marble—round, square, hexagonal, and octagonal—and of a kind of stone so hard that iron makes no impression on it. Yet there is no mountainous terrain nearby from which the stone might have been quarried, and all other stone there is soft enough to be hewn with iron. In the outlying regions of Syria there are more than five hundred thousand of these fallen columns, capitals, and bases, and no one knows what they were or from where they were brought.

From there we went to Sidon, which is also on the edge of the sea. Much sugarcane is planted there, and the city has a strong stone wall with three gates and a Friday mosque with a very pleasant atmosphere. It is covered completely with multicolored mats. The bazaar is so nicely arrayed that when I saw it I thought the city had been decorated either for the arrival of the sultan or because of the proclamation of some good news. When I inquired, they said that the city was customarily kept that way. The gardens and orchards were such that one would think an emperor had laid out a pleasure garden with belvederes, and most of the trees were laden with fruit.
Five parasangs away we came to the city of Tyre, which is located beside the sea. From the shore runs a spit on which the city is built. It is such that the walls are not more than a hundred yards on dry land, the rest being in the sea. The ramparts are all masonry, and the joints are plugged with pitch so that the seawater cannot seep through. I estimated the city to be a thousand cubits square, with buildings of five to six stories and many fountains. The bazaars are nice, and prosperity abounds. The city of Tyre is renowned among the cities of the Syrian coast for its wealth and riches. The inhabitants are mostly Shi'i. There was a judge there, however, who was Sunni by sect, named Ebn Abi 'Aqil; he was of a pleasant countenance and rich. By the city gate is a shrine furnished with many carpets, mats, and gold and silver lamps and lanterns. The town is situated on a high spot, and its water comes from the mountains. Up to the city gate are stone arches atop which water is brought into the city. Opposite the city in the mountains is a valley, and if one goes eighteen parasangs to the east, one comes to Damascus.

Acre

When we had gone seven parasangs we came to the city of Acre, which there they write 'Akkā. The city is situated on a rise, and some of the ground is uneven and sloping while other parts are level. Along the coast, they only build towns where there is elevated ground for fear of being inundated by seawater when the waves strike the shore. The Friday mosque is in the middle of the town and is on the highest spot. All the columns are marble. To the right of the qibla, outside the mosque, is the prophet Saleh's tomb. The courtyard of the mosque is partially paved in stone and partially planted with grass. They say that Adam cultivated that very spot. I measured the city, the length of which was two thousand cubits and the breadth five hundred. The walls are extremely strong, and the southwestern portion is on the sea. To the south is a mound. Most of these coastal towns have a mound, which is like a stable for ships. Built right against the town, it has walls out into the water and an open space of fifty ells without a wall but with a chain stretched from one wall to the other.

When a ship is about to enter the minā, they loosen the chain so that it goes beneath the surface of the water, allowing the ship to pass over; afterwards the chain is raised again lest strangers make untoward attempts on the ships. To the left of the eastern gate is a spring, to get to which one must descend twenty-six steps. This spring is called the Cow Spring, and they say that Adam discovered it and watered his own cattle from it, whence it derives its name.

To the east of Acre is a mountain where various prophets' shrines are located, but this place is off the main road to Ramla. I had an intention to see these holy pilgrimage sites and to gain God's blessings from them, but the people of Acre told me that there were evil people along the way who would set upon a stranger and take whatever he might have. What valuables I had I deposited therefore in the Acre mosque and set out from town by the eastern gate. Early on Saturday the 23rd of Sha'bān 1388 [22 February 1917] I visited the tomb of 'Akk, the founder of Acre, who had been a great and pious man. Since I had no guide with me to show me the way, I had become confused, when suddenly, thanks to God's great goodness, I chanced upon a Persian man from Azerbaijan who had visited those holy sites before and had returned a second time. I prayed two rak'āt in thanks to God and rendered thanks to Him for giving me a companion so that I could fulfill the intention I had made.

Then I came to a village called al-Berwa, where I visited the tombs of Esau and Simeon. Next I came to a small cave they called Dammun, which I visited too, since they say it is the tomb of Dha'is-Kell. Then I came to a village named E'bllin, where they claim the tomb of Hud. I made a visit. Inside the enclosure is a mulberry tree. The tomb of the prophet Ezra, which I visited, is there also.

Heading south, I came to another village called Hazira, to the west of which is a valley where there is a freshwater spring flowing from a rock. Next to the spring was a mosque built on a rock, and inside were two stone chambers with stone roofs and a door so small that it was difficult to enter. Inside are two adjacent tombs, one of Jethro and the other of his daughter, Moses' wife. The people of this village keep up the mosque and shrine very well, cleaning them and maintaining the lamps. Next I came to a village called Irbid, to the south of which was a hill with an en-
closure containing the tombs of four of Jacob’s sons, brothers of Joseph. Proceeding farther, I saw a hill in which was a cave containing the tomb of Moses’ mother. I made a visit and then went on through a valley, which ends at a small sea, along the shore of which is located the city of Tiberias. The sea is about six parasangs long and three wide, and the water is fresh and potable. The city is on the western side of the sea, and all the bath and sewage water empties into the sea, yet the people of the town and shore district all drink from the water of the sea.

I heard that once a prince of this city ordered the sewage drains that emptied into the sea stopped up. When they did this, the water turned so foul it wasn’t fit to drink. He then ordered the drains reopened, and the water became good again. This town has a fortified wall extending from the shoreline all around the town; there is no wall on the water side. There are many buildings in the water, and the bed of the lake is rock. They have made belvederes on the top of the marble columns that are in the water. The lake is full of fish.

The town has a Friday mosque; by its gate is a spring with a bathhouse over it. The water is so hot that unless it is mixed with cold water you cannot stand it. They say that it was built by Solomon, and I went inside to try it out.

On the west side of the city of Tiberias is a mosque called the Jasmine Mosque, which is exceptionally fine. Right in the middle of the mosque is a large platform containing several niches; around the platform are jasmine bushes, which is why it is so called. On the east side is a colonnade containing the tomb of Joshua son of Nun. Beneath the platform are the tombs of the Seventy Prophets who were slain by the children of Israel. To the south of the city is the Dead Sea, the water of which is salty, although it is south of Tiberias and the fresh water of the Sea of Galilee flows into it. Lot’s city was on the shore of this sea, but no trace of it remains. I heard from someone that in the bitter waters of the Dead Sea is something shaped like a cow that grows up from the bottom and resembles stone, but not so hard. It is gathered, broken into pieces, and peddled around in the towns because one piece of it planted at the base of a tree will keep


worms from attacking the roots and will repel underground vermin from a whole orchard. This, at any rate, is what I was told. Druggists also buy it because a worm called noga that gets into medicines is repelled by this substance. In the town of Tiberias they make reed prayer mats sold there for five dinars.

To the west of Tiberias is a mountain where there is a piece of granite inscribed in Hebrew to the effect that at the date of inscription the Pleiades were on the edge of Aries. The tomb of Abu Horayra is there also, outside the city to the south, but no one can go there because the people are Shi’a and whenever anyone does go, the children make a racket, attack, and harass and throw stones. For this reason I was unable to visit that place. Upon returning I came to a village called Kafr Kannā; on the top of a hill to the south there is a cell with an immovable door, said to be the tomb of the prophet Jonah. By the door to the cell is a freshwater well. Having made my visit, I returned to Acre, a distance of four parasangs. We remained in Acre for one day more and then left.

From Acre to Jerusalem

We came to a village called Haifa. Along the village road is much sand of the type used by Persian goldsmiths, which they call mukhi [Meccan]. The village of Haifa is on the coast and has many palm groves and orchards. The shipbuilders there make large seagoing vessels they call jadi.

One parasang from there is another village called Kanisa, where the road turns away from the coast toward the hills. To the east are desert plains called the Valley of Crocodiles. After a parasang or two, the road again joins the coast. Here we saw the bones of many sea animals that had been fossilized because of constant pounding by waves. Seven parasangs from Acre, we came to a town called Caesarea, a nice place with running water, palm groves, orange and citron groves, and a fortified rampart with an iron gate. There are springs inside the town and a Friday mosque so situated that when seated inside one can look out over the sea. There is a marble vase there as thin as Chinese porcelain, although it holds a hundred mounds of water.
Saturday the last of Shabban [28 February 1047] I left there. For one parasang there was that Meccan sand, then once again we saw many fig and olive trees. All along the way the hills and plain were planted with trees. Having gone a few parasangs, we arrived in a town called Kafr Sābī and Kafr Sallām. From here to Ramla is three parasangs, the whole way orchards, as I have said.

Sunday the first of Ramadan [1 March] we arrived in Ramla, which is eight parasangs from Caesarea. It is a large town with a fortified rampart of stone and mortar, tall and strong, with iron gates. From the city to the shore is three parasangs. Their water supply is rainwater, and inside every building are pools to collect it so that there will be a constant supply. In the Friday mosque there are large pools from which anyone can draw water when they are full. I measured the courtyard and found it to be three hundred paces by two hundred. Across a porch was an inscription to the effect that on the 15th of Moharram 425 [10 December 1038] there was a violent earthquake that destroyed many buildings, but no people were injured.

There is much marble here, and most of the buildings and houses are made of sculpted marble. They cut the marble with toothless saws and Meccan sand. The saw is drawn along the length of the shaft, not across the grain, as with wood. From the stone they make slabs. I saw all colors of marble—speckled, green, red, black, white, and multicolored. There is a kind of grape there that is better than grapes elsewhere and is exported all over. The city of Ramla is said to belong to Syria and western Palestine.

On the 3rd of Ramadan [3 March] we left Ramla and came to a village called Latrun. Farther on we came to a village called Qaryat al-Enab. All along the way I noticed great quantities of rue growing wild. We saw a spring with very good fresh water flowing out of rock; it was made with troughs all around and had several outbuildings about. From there we started up a hill as though ascending a mountain, on the other side of which one would expect to come down to a city. Once we had gone up a way, however, a vast plain came into view, partially rocky and partially soil. A top the hill is the city of Jerusalem. From Tripoli,

which is on the coast, to Jerusalem is 56 parasangs. From Balkh to Jerusalem is 876 parasangs.

Jerusalem

The 8th of Ramadan 438 [5 March 1047] we entered Jerusalem. It had been one solar year from the time we left home, and throughout our travels we had not stopped anywhere long enough to have rested completely.

Jerusalem, which the people of Syria and that region call "Quds," is visited during the season by people of the area who are unable to make the Pilgrimage to Mecca. They perform the requisite rituals and offer a sacrifice on the customary holiday. Some years more than twenty thousand people come during the first days of Dhu al-Ḥijjah bringing their children to celebrate their circumcision. From the Byzantine realm and other places too come Christians and Jews to visit the churches and synagogues located there. The large church will be described later.

The outlying villages and dependencies of Jerusalem are all in the hills, and all cultivation, olives, figs, and so on, is totally without irrigation, yet prosperity is widespread and prices cheap. There are villagers who collect each up to five thousand muids of olive oil in pits and tanks to be exported all over the world. They say there has never been a famine in the land of Syria, and I heard from reliable sources that a great man once saw the Prophet in a dream and said, "O Prophet of God, assist us in our livelihood!" In response the Prophet said, "The bread and olives of Syria are with me."

A General Description of Jerusalem

Now I will describe the city of Jerusalem. It is situated on top of a hill and has no source of water save rain. The villages, on the other hand, have springs, but there are none inside the city. Around the city is a fortified rampart of stone and mortar with iron gates. Near the city there are no trees, since it is built on
rock. It is a large city, there being some twenty thousand men there when I saw it. The bazaars are nice, the buildings tall, and the ground paved with stone. Wherever there was a rise or hill it has been graded down level so that when it rains the whole ground is washed clean. There are many artisans in the city, each group having its own separate quarter. The eastern wall is attached to the congregational mosque.

Passing out of the mosque you come out onto a large, expansive, and flat plain called Sâhâra. They say that this is where the Resurrection will take place, where all men will be gathered together. For this reason many people have come there from all over the world and taken up residence in order to die in that city. When God's appointed time comes, they will already be in the stipulated place. O God! on that day wilt Thou be Thine own servants' protector and Thy mercy. Amen. O Lord of the universe!

On the edge of the plain is a large cemetery, where there are many spots in which men pray and make special requests, which are granted by God. O God, receive our supplications and forgive our sins and evil deeds. Have mercy upon us, O Most Merciful!

Between the cathedral mosque and the Plain of Sâhâra is a large, deep valley shaped like a trench. Therein are large edifices laid out by the ancients. I saw over the door of one house a carved stone dome, and a thing more amazing than this could scarcely exist. I could not figure out how it had been raised. Everybody said it was Pharaoh's House and that this was the Valley of Gehenna. ⑧ I asked how it came to be called thus and was told that, in the days of the caliphate of Omar, the Plain of Sâhâra had been the site of an army camp. When Omar looked at that valley, he said, "This is the Valley of Gehenna." The common people say that anyone who goes to the edge of the valley can hear the voices of the people in hell. I went there but heard nothing.

Half a parasang south of the city, one goes down a hill to a spring, called 'Ayn Selwân [the Spring of Siloam], that flows from rock. They have built many buildings around it, and it

waters the gardens. They say that whoever washes in that water will be cured of chronic illness. Much has gone into pious endowment for that spring.

Jerusalem has a fine, heavily endowed hospital. People are given potions and draughts, and the physicians who are there draw their salaries from the endowment.

The Sanctuary of Jerusalem

The hospital and Friday mosque are on the eastern side of the city, and one wall of the mosque ⑨ is on the Valley of Gehenna. Looking at the wall from outside the mosque, one can see that it is one hundred cubits high and made of large, unmortared stones. Inside the mosque [area] the top of the wall is level. The mosque was built in that place because it is the site of the very rock which God commanded Moses to make the direction of prayer. When this commandment came, Moses did make it the direction of prayer; not long thereafter he died. Then, in the time of Solomon, as that rock was still the direction of prayer, the mosque was built around the rock, with the rock in the middle. This rock remained the direction people faced for prayer until the time of the Prophet Mohammad, when God commanded the direction to be toward the Ka‘ba [in Mecca], a description of which will come in its proper place.

I wanted to measure the dimensions of this sanctuary, but I thought that first I should get a general idea of the plan and layout, after which I could make my measurements. For a long time I wandered about the area, looking at it from different vantages. Then, on the northern side, near the Dome of Jacob, I discovered an inscription in stone over an arch to the effect that the length of this sanctuary is 704 cubits and the width 455 cubits in royal ells (the royal ell being what is called the gaz-e sha‘yegān in Khorasan, and equivalent to slightly less than 1 ½ ells). The ground of the area is paved with stone and the joints are filled with lead.

⑧The Valley of Gehenna is known in Judeo-Christian sources as the Valley of Jehoshaphat. "Gehenna" (Arabic jannah) is the Islamic proper name for Hell.

⑨Throughout this section Nâqer refers to the entire precincts of the Haram al-Sharif, the sanctuary of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqṣā Mosque, as "the mosque" (masjid).
The sanctuary is located to the east of the city and bazaar, so that to get to it from the bazaar one goes east. It has a splendid gateway, thirty ells high and twenty wide, from which two "wings" open out on each side. The gateway, the facing of the wings, and the open hall of the gateway are adorned with designs and patterned with colored tiles set in plaster. The whole produces an effect dazzling to the eye. There is an inscription on the titles of the gateway with the titles of the sultan of Egypt. When the sun strikes this, the rays play so that the mind of the beholder is absolutely stunned. Over the gateway is a huge dome made of stone, with two ornate doors set therein. The facing on these doors is of Damascene brass and looks like gold. They are covered with designs and are fifteen ells high and eight wide. These doors are called the Bāb Dāud [Gate of David]. Inside and to the right of these doors you find two great colonnades, each of which has twenty-nine marble pillars with capitals and bases of colored marble, with lead-caulked joints. Over the columns are masonry arches placed one atop the other, without mortar, such that each arch contains no more than four or five blocks of stone. These colonnades run to near the maqāra. To the left of the doors, that is to the north, is a long colonnade with sixty-four arches atop marble columns and another gate called Bāb al-Saqaq [Gate of Hell]. The length of the mosque extends from north to south, to where the maqāra opens out, but the shape of the court is square, with the qibla to the south.

On the north side are two more adjacent doors, each of which is seven ells wide and twelve high. These doors are called Bāb al-Asbāt [Gate of the Tribes]. Beyond these doors, which are along the breadth of the sanctuary leading eastward, there is another huge gateway containing three adjacent doors of the same dimensions as the Gates of the Tribes. All are ornately done in iron and brass of the best workmanship imaginable. This gate is called Bāb al-Alwāḥ [Gate of Gates] because in all other places the gateways come in pairs, and this gate alone is triple.

Between these two gateways, on the northern side, in a colonnade in which the arches rest on solid pillars, is a dome supported by tall columns and decorated with lamps. It is called Jācob’s Dome, as it is supposed to have been his place of prayer. On the broad side of the mosque is another colonnade, and in the wall is a doorway. Outside that are the cloisters of the Sufis, for that is their place of prayer and contains fine mehīrs. There are always many Sufis in residence at prayer, except on Fridays when they go inside the mosque to hear the exaltation.

At the north corner of the sanctuary is a fine colonnade and a large, beautiful dome on which is inscribed: "This is the mehīr of Zechariah the prophet." They say that he used to pray constantly in this place.

Along the eastern wall, in the middle of the sanctuary, is a large gateway of stone so finely hewn that one would say it has been made of a single block. It is fifty ells high and thirty wide, is carved in designs, and has two beautiful doors leading into it. Between the two doors is not more than one foot of wall space. These doors are elaborately made of iron and Damascene brass with rings and studs. They say these doors were made by Solomon son of David for his father.

Going inside through these two doors, and facing east, you find to your right two doors, one called Bāb al-Rahma [Gate of Mercy] and the other, Bāb al-Tawba [Gate of Repentance]. It is said that it was at these very doors that God accepted David’s repentance. On this spot is a beautiful mosque that was once a hall but has now been made into a mosque and decorated with all sorts of carpets. It has an independent staff. Men often go there to pray and seek communion with God. For the very reason that David’s repentance was accepted in that place, all people are hopeful to be forgiven their sins as well. They say that David had scarcely crossed the threshold when an inspiration came to him to the effect that God had accepted his repentance. There he remained, occupying himself with acts of obedience. I, Nāser, prayed there and asked God for grace in piety and to be
cleansed of the sin of disobedience. May God the Exalted grant grace to all his servants in accordance with his pleasure and grant repentance of sin, through the sanctity of Mohammad and his pure offspring!

In the south corner of the east wall is an underground mosque, to reach which you must descend many steps. It is twenty by fifteen ells and has a stone roof supported by marble columns. It contains Jesus’ cradle, which is made of stone and is large enough for men to pray in. I too prayed there. It is firmly fastened to the floor so that it cannot be moved. This is the cradle the Child Jesus was placed in when he spoke to people.89 In this mosque the cradle takes the place of the meḥrāb. On the east side is the meḥrāb of Mary and another said to be that of Zachariah. The Koranic verses concerning Zachariah and Mary are inscribed in these niches, and it is said that this was Jesus’ birthplace. One of the columns has the imprint of two fingers and looks as though someone had grasped it. They say that when Mary was in labor, she held onto this very column. This mosque is known as Makhd ‘Isa [Jesus’ Cradle], and many brass and silver lamps are hung here and kept burning throughout the night.

Passing out through the door, again on the east wall at a corner of the large sanctuary area, you see another very beautiful mosque, twice as large as Jesus’ Cradle Mosque, called al-Aqṣā Mosque. This marks the spot to which God transported Muhammad from Mecca on the night of his heavenly ascent, and thence to heaven, as is mentioned in the Koran: “Praise be unto him, who transported his servant by night, from the sacred temple of Mecca to the farther temples of Jerusalem.” [Koran 17:1].

In that place is a skillfully constructed edifice with magnificent carpets and an independent staff who are always attendant. On the outside again, along the southern wall and beyond the corner, there is an uncovered courtyard about 200 ells long. The length of the mosque along the west wall is 420 ells, with the maqṣūra to the right along the south wall; it [the mosque] is 150 ells wide. It has 280 marble columns supporting a stone arcade, the tops and bottoms of which are decorated and the joints filled with lead so that the construction is extremely tight. Between every two columns is a distance of six ells, and the ground is

flagged in colored marble tile, the joints again caulked in lead. The maqṣūra, in the middle of the south wall, is large enough for sixteen columns and an enormous dome inlaid in tile, as has been described. It is filled with Maghreb carpets, lamps, and lanterns each hung by a separate chain. There is a large meḥrāb inlaid with tile; on either side of the niche are two marble pillars the color of red carnelian, and the whole low wall of the maqṣūra is of colored marble. To the right is Mū’awiya’s meḥrāb, and that of Omar to the left. The ceiling is covered with wood carved in elaborate designs. Along the wall of the maqṣūra toward the courtyard are 15 gateways and ornate doors, each of which is 10 ells tall and 6 wide, 10 of them on the wall that is 420 ells long and 5 on the wall that is 150 ells long. One of these gates in particular is done in such beautifully ornate brass that one would think it was made of gold burnished with silver. It has the name of the Caliph Mu’āmun on it and is said to have been sent by him from Baghdad.

When all the gates are opened, the inside of the mosque is as light as an open courtyard. However, when the wind is blowing or it is raining, the gates are closed, and then light comes from skylights. On each side of the covered portion are chests from each of the principal cities of Syria and Iraq, and mujāhirūn sit there just as they do in the Haram Mosque in Mecca.

Along the great outer wall, already described, is an arcade with forty-two arches, all the columns of which are of colored marble. This arcade joins the western one. Inside the covered portion [of the mosque] is a tank sunk into the earth such that, when covered, it is level with the floor; this is for collecting rainwater. In the south wall is a gate at the ablation pool. When anyone needs water for making ablutions, he goes there and renews his ablutions, for the mosque is so large that if you had to leave it, you would certainly miss your prayer.

The roofs are all covered with lead, and there are many tanks and cisterns sunk into the ground, since the mosque rests entirely on rock. However much it rains, no water is allowed to escape and go to waste, since it all drains into cisterns from which it can be drawn later. There are lead conduits through which the water flows. Beneath the drains are stone troughs, and in the bottom of each of these is a hole leading to a channel through which the water flows uncontaminated into the tanks. Three
parasangs outside the city I saw a large reservoir in which mountain water is kept. There is a canal from there into the city mosque. Of all the city, the greatest abundance of water is found in the Friday mosque; however, in all the houses there are pools for rainwater, wherein each person collects the water from his own roof. The baths and everything else operate on rainwater as well. The cisterns in the mosque never need repair because they are made of granite, but even should there have been a crack or chink, the rock is so solidly reinforced that it never breaks. They say Solomon made all this. The tops of the cisterns look like ovens; and the well-covers, which are placed on top of every cistern lest anything fall in, are stone. The water of this city is the best and cleanest imaginable. Even when only a little rain falls, the water runs for two or three days. Even when no trace of a cloud remains in the sky, drops of rainwater continue to trickle. I have already said that Jerusalem is built on top of a hill and that the ground is not level. The site of the mosque alone is level and even; outside the mosque, wherever the ground goes down, the wall becomes correspondingly somewhat taller, rather than having the top of the wall follow the rising and falling of the ground. At every place in the city lower than the mosque, a door has been cut to lead up to the courtyard through a tunnel. One of these doors is called Bab al-Nabi [Prophet’s Gate]. This passageway is on the qibla side, that is, the south, and is built so that it is ten ells wide; the height, depending on the number of steps, varies from five to twenty ells. The roof of this passageway lies under the pavement of the mosque and is strong enough for a building of such enormity to be built on top of it with no trace of strain. There are stones so enormous that the mind of man cannot comprehend how human strength could have moved them. They say this structure was made by Solomon son of David and that our Prophet Mohammad, on the night of his heavenly ascent, entered the mosque by this passage; this door indeed faces the road to Mecca. On the wall nearby is a large shield carved in stone. It is said that Hanzza son of ‘Abd al-Mottaleb, the uncle of the Prophet, sat there with his shield on his back and that this is an impression of that shield.

At this gateway to the mosque, where this passageway has been constructed, is hung a double-leaved door. The outside wall at this point is nearly fifty ells high. The reason for this gate is so that the people of the quarter adjoining this end of the mosque should not have to go to another quarter when they want to enter. In the wall to the right of the door is a stone fifteen cubits high and four wide; there is no stone larger in the mosque, where there are many stones four to five ells long set at a height of thirty to forty ells in the walls.

Along the breadth of the mosque is a gate facing east called Bab al-‘Ayn [Gate of the Spring], outside of which is a hill leading down to the Spring of Siloam. There is also another gate at ground level called Bab al-Hatta [Gate of Forgiveness]; it is said that it was through this gate that God commanded the children of Israel to enter the mosque, as he said: “Enter into this city, and eat of the provisions thereof plentifully as ye will; and enter the gate worshipping, and say, Forgiveness! [hēta] we will pardon your sins and give increase unto the well-doers” [Koran 2:58].

Yet another gate is called Bab al-Sakina [Gate of the Divine Presence] and in the adjacent vestibule is a mosque with many mårab; the first door is kept closed so that no one can enter. They say that the Ark of the Covenant mentioned by God in the Koran was once placed there but was later borne away by the angels.

All the gates to the Jerusalem sanctuary number nine, as described.

Now I will describe the platform in the middle of the mosque courtyard, and the Rock located inside, which was the qibla before the emergence of Islam. The platform had to be constructed because the rock was too high to be enclosed under a roof; therefore the platform was built with the Rock as its foundation. The width is 330 cubits, the length 300 cubits, and the height 12 ells. The court is level and nicely paved with marble, and the walls, the joints of which are caulked with lead, are all four faced with marble so as to form an enclosure. The platform is so constructed that access can be gained only by specially built gangways. Going up onto the platform, you can look out over the roof of al-Aqṣa Mosque. There is a cistern built below the ground to store rainwater, which runs through niches into the

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14The name of this gate is taken from the post-Biblical concept of the shabihā, the “aura of the presence of God” that surrounded the Ark of the Covenant. The term occurs in Koran 2:248.
cistern, and this the cleanest and best water in the entire sanctuary complex. There are four domes on the platform, the largest of which is the Qubbat al-Sakhra [Dome of the Rock], which used to be the qibla.

A Description of the Dome of the Rock

The mosque complex has been designed so that the platform is in the middle of the court, and the Dome of the Rock in the middle of the platform. It is an octagonal edifice, and each of the eight sides is thirty-three cubits long. There are four doors facing the cardinal points of the compass with one blank wall between each two doors. The whole wall is of masonry twenty cubits in measure. The Rock itself is one hundred ells in circumference, although it is not a perfect shape; that is, it is neither circular nor square, but a rock of irregular form like any mountain stone. On each of the four sides of the Rock is a square pier the height of the wall. Between each two square piers stands a pair of cylindrical marble pillars the same height as the piers. Resting on these twelve piers and pillars is the base of the dome, beneath which lies the Rock itself; the circumference is 120 cubits. Between the wall and these piers (as I call the square ones) and pillars (as I call the round ones hewn from one piece of stone) are six more piers of hewn stone; between each two of these are three columns of colored marble. They are equally spaced so that in the outer row there are two columns between each two piers, whereas in the inner row there are three columns between each two piers. On the capital of each pier are set four volutes, from each of which springs an arch; on the capital of each column are set two volutes so that from each column there spring two arches, whereas the capital of every pier is the spring of four arches.

The great dome rests on the twelve piers around the Rock and is so shaped that from one good parasang away the dome appears like a mountain. From the base of the dome to the top is thirty cubits. The dome sits atop the octagonal structure's straight walls twenty ells high with buttresses forming the angles of the supporting walls on top of the platform, which is itself

The Dome of the Rock of Jerusalem, viewed from the south (qibla) side, showing the Maqsûm-i Ghûrî. Note that the triple stairway described by Nàser has been replaced. (Photographed by Felix Bonfils. From the Collections of the Harvard Semitic Museum, HSM 372.)
twelve ells high. Thus, from the ground of the sanctuary court to the summit of the dome is a total of sixty-two ells. The roof and ceiling of this structure are covered with geometric designs, and the column capitals and walls are ornate beyond description.

The Rock itself rises to the height of a man above the floor and is surrounded by a marble balustrade to keep people away. It is a bluish rock that no one has ever set foot on. On the qibla side is a depression that looks as though someone’s foot had sunk in, as into soft clay, for even the imprint of the toes remains; there are seven such marks. What I heard is that Abraham was here, and that when Isaac was a small child he walked there and these are his footprints.

There are always people in the Dome of the Rock as mujāhids and devotees. The place is nicely furnished with carpets of silk, and in the middle of the building is a silver lamp suspended over the Rock by a silver chain. There are many silver lamps here, and on each one is written its weight. They were donated by the sultan of Egypt. As I figured, there were a thousand maunds of silver. I saw one enormous candle, seven cubits long and three spans thick; it was as white as camphor and mixed with ambergris. They said that every year the sultan of Egypt sends many candles, one of which was this one, for it had the sultan’s name written in gold letters around the bottom.

This place is the third most holy place of God, and it is well known among those learned in religion that prayer made in Jerusalem is worth twenty-five thousand ordinary prayers. Every prayer said in Medina is worth fifty thousand, and every prayer said Mecca is worth one hundred thousand. May God grant all his servants success in attaining this.

I have already stated that all the roofs and domes are covered with lead and that on each of the four sides of the structure is a large double door made of teak. These doors are always kept shut.

Next to this structure is another dome called Qobbat al-Selsela [the Dome of the Chain], which is where David hung the chain that could not be reached by anyone other than the innocent, for the guilty and unjust could never pull it. This is well known to the learned.15 That dome rests on eight marble columns and

six stone piers, and it is open on all sides except the qibla direction, which is walled up and has a beautiful mahrāb. Also on the platform is another dome, which rests on four marble columns; it too is walled on the qibla side and has a fine mahrāb. This is called Gabriel’s Dome. There are no carpets in this dome, the ground being paved with flat slabs of rock. They say that on the night of the Prophet’s heavenly ascent, the Borâq was brought here for the Prophet to mount.16 Twenty cubits away from Gabriel’s Dome is another dome called the Prophet’s Dome. This too rests on four marble piers. They say that on the night of the heavenly ascent, the Prophet first prayed in the Dome of the Rock and placed his hand on the Rock. When he had come out, the Rock rose up because of his majesty. He put his hand on the Rock, and it froze in its place, half of it being still suspended in the air. From there the Prophet came to the dome that is attributed to him and mounted the Borâq, for which reason that dome is so venerated. Beneath the Rock is a large cave where candles are kept burning. They say that when the Rock moved to rise up, this space was left, and, when it froze, this cave remained.

A Description of the Stairways Leading to the Platform

There are six stairways up to the platform, each of which has a name. From the qibla side are two ways up the platform. Standing at a point along one side of the platform, one sees a set of stairs to the right and another to the left. The one to the right is called Maqâm al-Nābi [the Prophet’s Station]; the one to the left, Maqâm-e Ghârî [the Ghirid Station]. The Prophet’s Station is so called because the Prophet mounted the platform by these stairs and then into the Dome of the Rock. The road to the Hejaz is indeed on that side. Now these stairs are twenty cubits broad and are made of hewn stone, each step being one or two slabs of square-hewn stone. They are so arranged that they can be scaled on horseback. At the top of the stairs are four piers of a green marble that resembles emerald, except that the marble has many


16 The Borâq is the heavenly animal upon which the Prophet ascended into heaven. In late medieval iconography the Borâq is a winged horse with a human female head.
different colored flecks in it. Each column is ten cubits tall and
so thick that only with difficulty could two men reach around it.
AtoP these four columns rise three arches placed so that the
middle one is directly opposite the steps. The top of these columns is
flat, with a gallery and crenellations above so that the whole
arches squared off. The pillars and arches are covered with gold
and enamel designs and are too beautiful to describe. The balus-
des circled around the platform are all of a flecked green marble
that looks like a meadow with flowers in bloom.
The Ghorid Station stairway consists of a triple flight, that is, a
middle stairway directly opposite the platform flanked on either
side by stairways, so that people can go up by any one of three
different ways. Here too are similar columns, arches, and a ga-

dy made, as I have already said, of hewn stone. Each step is of
two or three long slabs. Across the arcade is inscribed in gold
and fine calligraphy, “By the order of Prince Layth al-Dawla
Nushakin the Ghorid.” They say that this Layth al-Dawla was a
slave of the sultan of Egypt and that he had these stairs and
gangways built.

On the west side of the platform there are also two stairways
all as elaborately constructed as what I have already described.
On the east side is only one stair, likewise elaborate, with col-

ums, arches, and crenellations. This is called Maqâm Sharqi
(Eastern Station). On the north side is another approach, higher
and broader than the others, but also with columns and arches.
It is called Maqâm Shami [Syrian Station]. I reckoned that a
hundred thousand dinars must have been spent on these stairways and
approaches.

Toward the north side of the courtyard of the Sanctuary, but
not on the platform, is something like a small mosque sur-

rounded by a masonry enclosure. Its walls are no higher than
a man, and it is called Mehrâb Dâ‘ud [David’s Oratory]. Nearby
the enclosure is a rock about as tall as a man, the top of which is
no larger than what could be covered by a small rug. It is a
rough stone and is said to have been Solomon’s footstool. They
say that Solomon sat there while the Sanctuary was being built.

This much I saw and sketched myself inside the Jerusalem
Sanctuary, and I made notes in a diary I had with me right

there. Among the strange things I saw in the Jerusalem Sanctuary
was a walnut tree.

I then decided to make a visit to the tomb of Abraham, the
Friend of God. On Wednesday the first of Dhul-Qa‘da 438 [29
April 1047] I set out for my destination. From Jerusalem to the
shrine is six parasangs to the south. Along the way are many vil-
lages and much cultivation and orchards of trees that need no ir-

igation, such as grapes, figs, olives, wild sumac, and so forth.
Two parasangs outside the city is a cluster of four villages where
there is a spring and also many gardens and orchards. It is called
“Paradise” because it is such a nice spot. One parasang outside
Jerusalem the Christians have a place they hold in great veneration,
and there are always many pilgrims and people holding re-
treat there. It is called Bethlehem, and the Christians, many
from Byzantium, make sacrifices there. I spent my first night out
from the city in that place.

A Description of the Shrine
of Abraham at Hebron

The people of Syria and Jerusalem call this shrine Khalil [He-
bron], whereas the proper name of the village, which they do not
use, is Mathun. The shrine is endowed with many villages in
addition to this one. The village has a spring that flows from
rock. Not much water comes from it, and it is a long way off, but
a channel has been dug to bring the water to just outside the vil-
lage, where a covered cistern has been constructed to store the
water lest it go to waste and so that there will be enough for
the people of the village and also for the pilgrims who come there.
The shrine is itself on the south side of the village, to the south-

east. There are four masonry walls eighteen cubits long, forty cu-
bits wide, and twenty cubits high. The top of each wall is two cu-
bits thick. There is a mehrâb and a maqsura along the width of the
structure, and in the maqsura are fine mehrâbs and two tombs
placed so that the heads are toward the qibla. Each one is carved

19Read, with Tehran edition, natinahd for Dabir-Siyahi’s bitnahd.

19Hebron, where the Shrine of Abraham is located, is known in Arabic as al-

Khalil, after Abraham’s epithet, Khalil Allâh (“Friend of God”), see 2 Chronicles
20:7.
from stone and is about as long as a man. The one to the right is the tomb of Isaac, son of Abraham, and the other is his wife's. The distance between the two is ten ells. Inside this shrine the floor and walls are decorated with costly rugs and Maghrebi carpets even finer than brocade. I saw a prayer carpet said to have been sent by a prince of the army who was a slave of the sultan of Egypt. He was supposed to have bought it in Egypt for thirty gold dinars, which is more than he would have paid for Byzantine brocade. I never saw its equal anywhere. Coming out of the maqṣura into the shrine courtyard, you see two structures opposite the qibla: the one to the right is a large building that contains the tomb of Abraham, the Friend of God. Inside there is another structure that you cannot walk all the way around, but it has four small windows through which visitors can look and see the tomb as they walk about. The whole structure is covered with brocade hangings from floor to ceiling, and the tomb is three ells long. Many lamps and silver lampholders are suspended therein. The other monument, to the left of the qibla, contains the tomb of Sarah, Abraham's wife. Between these two structures is a vestibule-like passageway containing the doors to the two small monuments. Here also are hung many lamps and lampholders. Coming out of these two houses, you see two more mausolea: the one on the right contains the remains of the Prophet Jacob, and the one to the left, those of his wife. Next to these are buildings that were Abraham's guesthouses. Altogether there are six tombs in this shrine.

Outside these four walls is a hill where the tomb of Joseph son of Jacob is located under a nicely built dome with a stone tomb. On the side where the ground is level, beyond Joseph's Dome and the shrine, is a large cemetery to which bodies have been brought for interment from all parts. On the roof of the maqṣura inside the shrine are cells to house guests who stop there. The place is heavily endowed with villages and freeholding in Jerusalem. Most of the crop is barley, wheat being less cultivated; there are, of course, many olives. Visitors, guests, and travelers are given bread and olives. There are also many gristmills where oxen and mules grind flour all day long. There are also young girls who bake bread every day, each loaf weighing one maund. Everyone who goes there is given a daily ration of one loaf of bread, a bowl of lentils cooked with olive oil, and raisins, a custom that has been maintained from the time of Abraham himself down to the present. On some days there are five hundred people present, all of whom receive this hospitality. They say that a long time ago, before this shrine was built, no one could enter and that the visit had to be made from outside. Then, when the Mahdi was established in the land of Egypt, he ordered the structure opened up. Many utensils, hangings, and carpets were placed therein and major reparations were made inside the shrine. The entrance is in the middle of the north wall and is four ells above the ground. On either side are stone steps leading up on one side and down on the other. There is a small iron door mounted there.

From there I returned to Jerusalem and then set out on foot with a group of people heading for the Hejaz. Our guide was a strong, pleasant-featured man who went on foot and was called Abu Bakr Hamadani. The middle of Dhū l-Qa‘dā 438 [May 1947] I departed from Jerusalem. After three days we came to a place called 'Ar'at, where there were gardens with running water. We then came to another stopping place called Wādi al-Qurā. After that we stopped in one more place and in ten days reached Mecca.

That year there were no caravans from anywhere, and food-stuffs were not to be found. We stopped in the Druggists' Lane just opposite the Prophet's Gate. On Monday we were at 'Arafāt, although the people were in danger of marauding Arabs. Returning from 'Arafāt, we stayed two days in Mecca and then set out again for Syria and Jerusalem.

On the 5th of Moharram 439 [2 July 1947] we arrived in Jeru-

The Christians have a church in Jerusalem called Bay'at al-

Qomāma (Church of the Resurrection), which they hold in par-

Tantiu m to visit it, and the Byzantine king himself comes in disguise so that no one will recognize him. In the days when the ruler of Egypt was al-Hākem be-Amr Allāh, the Byzantine emperor came, al-Hākem found out about it and said to one of his equer-

ries, "In the mosque of Jerusalem a man of such-and-such a de-

scription wearing such-and-such clothes will be seated. Go to

him and say that al-Hākem has sent you. Tell him not to imagine

that I have no knowledge of his presence and not to fear, for I

have no ill intent with regard to him." It was this very al-Hākem
who ordered this church plundered and pulled down, and it remained in this state of ruination for a time. Afterwards the emperor sent emissaries with many gifts to seek a reconciliation and to intercede for permission to rebuild the church. It is large enough to hold eight thousand people inside and is extremely ornate, with colored marble and designs and pictures. It is arrayed with Byzantine brocades and is painted. Much gold has been used, and in several places there are pictures of Jesus riding on an ass and also pictures of other prophets such as Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and his sons, which are varnished in oil of sandarac and covered with fine, transparent glass that does not block any of the painting. This they have done so that dust and dirt cannot harm the pictures, and every day servants clean the glass. There are several other places just as elaborate, but it would take too long to describe them. There is one place in this church painted in two parts to represent heaven and hell and their inhabitants; in all the world there is nothing to equal it. Many priests and monks remain here to read the Gospel, pray, and occupy themselves with acts of devotion all day and night.

Journey to Egypt

After Jerusalem I decided to voyage to Egypt by sea and thence again to Mecca. As there was such an adverse wind that the ship could not set out to sea, I therefore proceeded by land. Passing through Ramla, I came to a town on the edge of the sea called Ashalon, which had a fine bazaar and cathedral mosque. I saw an old arch said to have been at one time [part of] a mosque. It was of stone and so huge that it would have cost a great deal to pull it down. Beyond there I saw many villages and towns that would take too long to describe fully.

Shortly, I arrived at a port called Tina, from which you proceed to Tennis. I boarded a boat and sailed over to Tennis, which is on an island. It is a pleasant city and so far from the mainland that you cannot even see the shore from rooftops. The city is populous and has good bazaars and two cathedral mosques. I estimated there were ten thousand shops, a hundred

of which were pharmacies. In the summer they sell kashkab in the market, since it is a tropical climate and people suffer so from the heat.

They weave multicolored linen for turbans, bandages, and women’s clothing. The colored linen of Tennis is unequalled anywhere except by the white linen woven in Damietta. That which is woven in the royal workshop is not sold to anyone. I heard that the king of Fars once sent twenty thousand dinars to Tennis to buy one suit of clothing of their special material. [His agent] stayed there for several years but were unsuccessful in obtaining any. What the weavers are most famous for is their “special” material. I heard that someone there had woven a turban for the sultan of Egypt that cost five hundred gold dinars. I saw the turban myself and was told it was worth four thousand dinars. In this city of Tennis they weave [a type of cloth called] buqulamun, which is found nowhere else in the world. It is an iridescent cloth that appears of different hues at different times of the day. It is exported east and west from Tennis. I heard that the ruler of Byzantium once sent a message to the sultan of Egypt that he would exchange a hundred cities of his realm of Tennis alone. The sultan did not accept, of course, knowing that what he wanted with this city was its linen and buqulamun.

When the water of the Nile rises, it pushes the salt water of the sea away from Tennis so that the water is fresh for ten parasangs. For that time of the year large, reinforced, underground cisterns called masu’as have been constructed on the island. When the Nile water forces the salty seawater back, they fill these cisterns by opening a watercourse from the sea into them, and the city exists for a whole year on this supply. When anyone has an excess of water, he will sell to others, and there are also endowed masu’as from which water is given out to foreigners.

The population of this city is fifty thousand, and there are at any given time at least a thousand ships at anchor belonging both to private merchants and to the sultan; since nothing is there, everything that is consumed must be brought in from the outside. All external transactions with the island are made therefore by ship, and there is a fully armed garrison stationed there as a precaution against attack by Franks and Byzantines. I heard from reliable sources that one thousand dinars a day go from there into the sultan’s treasury. Everyday the people of the city
A Description of Cairo and the Provinces

The River Nile flows from the southwest, through the city of Cairo, and on into the Mediterranean Sea. When the Nile floods, it swells to twice the size of the Oxus at Termeh. The water flows through Nubia before reaching Egypt. The province of Nubia is mountainous, while Egypt lies on the plain. The first place one comes to in Egypt from Nubia is Aswan, three hundred parasangs from Cairo. All the town and provincial seats are on the banks of the river, and that region is called Upper Egypt. When ships reach Aswan, they can go no further because the water passes through narrow defiles and turns into rapids.

Farther upriver to the south is the province of Nubia, which is ruled by another king. The people there are black, and their religion is Christianity. Traders go there taking beads, combs, and trinkets and bring back slaves to Egypt, where the slaves are either Nubian or Greek. I saw wheat and millet from Nubia, both of which were black.

They say that no one has been able to ascertain the source of the Nile, and I heard that the sultan of Egypt sent some people who went along the Nile banks for a year investigating but were unable to discover the source. It is said, however, that it comes from a mountain in the south called Jabal al-Qamar [Mountain of the Moon].

When the sun enters Cancer, the Nile begins its increase and gradually rises day by day to twenty cubits above its winter level. In the city of Old Cairo measuring devices have been constructed, and there is an agent who receives a salary of one thousand dinars to watch and see how much the level rises. From the day it begins its increase, criers are sent through the city to proclaim how many "fingers" God has increased the Nile that day. When it has risen one ell, the good news is heralded and public rejoicing proclaimed until it reaches eighteen cubits, the normal increase. Less than this is considered a deficiency, and aims are distributed, holy intentions vowed, and general sorrow envoys. More is a cause for celebration and rejoicing. Unless the level goes above eighteen cubits, the sultan's land tax is not levied on the peasantry.

Water channels with smaller canals branching off have been dug from the Nile in all directions, and the villages of the countryside are situated along them. There are so many waterwheels that it would be difficult to count them. All country villages in Egypt are built on high places and hills because when the Nile floods the whole land is inundated. So that they will be flooded, the villages are thus placed on higher ground. People normally
travel from village to village by boat, and from one end of the realm to the other they have constructed earthen dikes, along the top of which you can walk beside the river. That structure is repaired yearly by an expert at a cost of ten thousand dinars to the sultan's treasury. The people of the countryside make all necessary preparations for the four months their land is beneath the water, and everyone bakes and dries enough bread to last these four months without spoiling.

The water usually rises for forty days until it has risen eighteen cubits. Then it remains at that level for another forty days, neither increasing nor decreasing. Thereupon it gradually decreases for another forty days until it reaches the winter level. When the water begins to recede, the people follow it down, planting as the land is left dry. All their agriculture, both winter and summer, follows this pattern. They need no other source of water.

The city of Cairo lies between the Nile and the sea, the Nile flowing from south to north into the sea. From Cairo to Alexandria is thirty parasangs, and Alexandria is on the shore of the Mediterranean and the banks of the Nile. From there much fruit is brought to Cairo by boat. There is a lighthouse that I saw in Alexandria, on top of which used to be an incendiary mirror. Whenever a ship came from Istanbul and approached opposite the mirror, fire would fall from the mirror and burn the ship up. The Byzantines exerted great effort and employed all manner of subterfuge, until they finally sent someone who broke the mirror. In the days of al-Hakem, the sultan of Egypt, a man appeared who was willing to fix the mirror as it had once been, but al-Hakem said it was not necessary, that the situation was well under control, since at that time the Greeks sent gold and goods in tribute and were content for the armies of Egypt not to go near them.

Alexandria's drinking water comes from rain, and all over the plain of Alexandria are those fallen stone columns previously described. The sea extends to Qayrawân, which is 150 parasangs from Egypt. The largest city of the Qayrawân region is Sejel-maâ, which is 4 parasangs from the sea. It is a large city, situated in the desert, with strong walls. Next to it is al-Mahdiya, which was built by al-Mahdi, a descendant of Prince of the Faithful Husayn son of 'Ali, after he took the Maghreb and Andalusia, which, as of this date, are in the hands of the sultan of Egypt. It snows there but never enough to cover the feet. To the right of Andalusia the sea opens out to the north. From Egypt to Andalusia is one thousand parasangs, and it is all Muslim. Andalusia is a large and mountainous province where it snows and freezes; the people have white skin and red hair. Most of them have cat-eyes like the Slavs. It is "under" the Mediterranean, since from their point of view the sea is to the east. Turning right at Andalusia and going north, the shore eventually joins Byzantium. Many go on raids to Byzantium; if they like they can go by ship to Constantinople, but there are many gulls, each of which is two to three hundred parasangs wide and cannot be crossed except by ship or ferry. I heard repeatedly from reliable men that the circumference of this sea is four thousand parasangs and that one branch of the sea leads to the Darkness, for they say that the head of that inlet is perpetually frozen because the sun never reaches there. One of the islands in this sea is Sicily, which can be reached from Egypt in twenty days. There are also many other islands. It is said that Sicily is eighty parasangs square and belongs to the sultan of Egypt. Every year a ship goes and brings tribute to Egypt. They bring very fine linen and striped stuff from there, one piece of which is worth ten dinars in Egypt.

Going east from Egypt, you reach the Red Sea. The city of Qolzom is located on the shore of this sea and is thirty parasangs from Cairo. This sea is a gulf of the ocean that splits off at Aden to the north and ends at Qolzom. The width of this gulf is said to be two hundred parasangs. Between Cairo and the gulf is mountain and desert where there is neither water nor growth. Whoever wants to go to Mecca from Egypt must go east. From Qolzom there are two ways, one by land and one by sea. The land route can be traversed in fifteen days, but it is all desert and three hundred parasangs long. Most of the caravans from Egypt take that way. By sea it takes twenty days to reach al-Jâr, a small town in the Hejaz on the sea. From al-Jâr to Medina it takes three days. From Medina to Mecca is one hundred parasangs. Following the coastline from al-Jâr, you will come to the Yemen and the coast of Aden; continuing in that direction, you will eventually wind up in India and China. Continuing southward from Aden and slightly westward, you will come to Zanjibar and...
Ethiopia, which will be described presently. Going south from Egypt through Nubia, you come to the province of the Masmudis, which is a land of broad pasture lands, many animals, and heavyset, strong-limbed, squat, black-skinned men; there are many soldiers of this sort in Egypt, with hideous faces and huge bodies. They are called Masmudis and fight as infantry with swords and spears, as they are incapable of wielding any other weapons.

A Description of the City of Cairo

Coming south from Syria, the first city one encounters is (New) Cairo, Old Cairo being situated farther south. Cairo is called al-Qāhira al-Mo’ezziyya, and the garrison town is called Fostat. This came about because al-Mo’ezz le-Din Allāh, one of the descendents of the Prince of the Faithful Hosayn son of ‘Ali, having conquered the Maghreb up to Andalusia, sent his army from the Maghreb in the direction of Egypt. To reach there, they had to cross the Nile, which is impassable for two reasons: first, the river is too broad, and second, there are so many crocodiles that any animal falling into the water is immediately devoured. Then, on the outskirts of the city of Cairo, they put a talisman on the road so that no men or animals would be harmed, but no one dares to enter the water any place other than there within an arrowshot of the city. Then al-Mo’ezz le-Din Allāh sent his armies to the spot where Cairo is today, ordering them to send a black dog into the water ahead of them so they could follow without fear. It is said there were on that day thirty thousand cavalrymen, all his slaves. And the black dog went in ahead of the army, which followed behind across the water without a single creature harmed. There is no indication that anyone had crossed the Nile on horseback before this incident, which occurred in 358 [A.D. 969]. The sultan himself came by ship, and the boats in which he arrived were emptied near Cairo, brought out of the water, and left abandoned on the dry land. The man who told me this tale saw these boats himself, seven of them, each 150 cubits long and 70 cubits wide. They had remained there untouched for eighty years, as it was the year 441 [A.D. 1049] when he reached the spot.

When al-Mo’ezz le-Din Allāh came to Egypt, the commander-in-chief from the caliph in Baghdad surrendered to him, and al-Mo’ezz came with his forces to the place that is now New Cairo. He named his army camp al-Qāhira (“Victoria”) since his army had gained victory there. He ordered that none of his soldiers should enter the city or go into anyone’s house. In the desert he ordered a garrison built, and he commanded his retinue to lay the foundations for houses and buildings, which in time became a city whose equal is hardly to be found.

I estimated that there were no less than twenty thousand shops in Cairo, all of which belong to the sultan. Many shops are rented for as much as ten dinars a month, and none for less than two. There is no end of caravanserais, bathhouses and other public buildings—all property of the sultan, for no one owns any property except houses and what he himself builds. I heard that in Cairo and Old Cairo there are eight thousand buildings belonging to the sultan that are leased out, with the rent collected monthly. These are leased and rented to people on tenancy-at-will, and no sort of coercion is employed.

The sultan’s palace is in the middle of Cairo and is encompassed by an open space so that no building abuts it. Engineers who have measured it have found it to be the size of Mayyāfārquin. As the ground is open all around it, every night there are a thousand watchmen, five hundred mounted and five hundred on foot, who blow trumpets and beat drums at the time of evening prayer and then patrol until daybreak. Viewed from outside the city, the sultan’s palace looks like a mountain because of all the different buildings and the great height. From inside the city, however, one can see nothing at all because the walls are so high. They say that twelve thousand hired servants work in this palace, in addition to the women and slavegirls, whose number no one knows. It is said, nonetheless, that there are thirty thousand individuals in the palace, which consists of twelve buildings. The harem has ten gates on the ground level, each with a name, as follows (excluding the subterranean ones): Bāb al-Dhahab, Bāb al-Bahr, Bāb al-Rih, Bāb al-Zahuma, Bāb al-Salām, Bāb al-Zabarjad, Bāb al-‘Id, Bāb al-Futuh, Bāb al-Zallāqa, and Bāb al-Sariyya[7]. There is a subterranean entrance through which

[7] Of these gates, the following are in conformity with the palace gates as they are known from other medieval and modern sources: Bāb al-Dhahab [Golden Gate], Bāb al-Bahr [River Gate], Bāb al-Rih [Wind Gate, reading n] for Dahir-
the sultan may pass on horseback. Outside the city he has built another palace connected to the harem palace by a passageway with a reinforced ceiling. The walls of this palace are of rocks hewn to look like one piece of stone, and there are belvederes and tall porticos. Inside the vestibule are platforms for the ministers of state; servants are blacks and Greeks. The grand vizier is a personage exceptional in his asceticism, piety, trustworthiness, truthfulness, learning, and intellect. The custom of wine-drinking has never been permitted there; that is, in the days of al-Hākem, under whose reign also no woman was allowed outside her own house and no one made raisins, as a precaution against making intoxicating beverages. No one dares to drink wine. Beer is not drunk either since it is said to be intoxicating, and thus forbidden.

A Description of the City of New Cairo

The city of New Cairo has five gates, Bāb al-Nasr, Bāb al-Fotuh, Bāb al-Qantara, Bāb al-Zowayla, and Bāb al-Khalij. There is no wall, but the buildings are even stronger and higher than ramparts, and every house and building is itself a fortress. Most of the buildings are five stories tall, although some are six. Drinking water is from the Nile, and water carriers transport water by camel. The closer the well is to the river, the sweeter the well water; it becomes more brackish the farther you get from the Nile. Old and New Cairo are said to have fifty thousand camels belonging to water carriers. The water carriers who port water on their backs are separate: they have brass cups and jugs and go into the narrow lanes where a camel cannot pass.

Siyyūqī’s edition asīrī. Bāb al-Zahuma, Bāb al-Zabarjūd [Emerald Gate] (usually known as Bāb al-Zomorrod; apparently Nāṣer or a later scribe has inserted the Persian word zabarjūd for the Arabic zomorrod, both of which mean “emerald”), Bāb al-‘Id [Festival Gate], Bāb al-Fotuh [Gate of Conquest] is one of the city gates; the Bāb al-Zalīqā was named for a ramp leading up to the gate, Bāb al-Salām [Gate of Peace] and Bāb al-Sawiyā (?), perhaps a scribal error for Bāb al-Torba [Tomb Gate]; have not been identified. See K. A. C. Creswell, The Muslim Architecture of Egypt (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1978), pp. 33ff. and Paul V. Ravaux, “Essai sur l’histoire et sur la topographie du Caire,” MMAFC, vol. 1, pp. 42ff.

In the midst of the houses in the city are gardens and orchards watered by wells. In the sultan’s harem are the most beautiful gardens imaginable. Waterwheels have been constructed to irrigate these gardens. There are trees planted and pleasure parks built even on the roofs. At the time I was there, a house on a lot twenty by twelve ells was being rented for fifteen dinars a month. The house was four stories tall, three of which were rented out. The tenant wanted to take the topmost floor also for [an additional] five dinars, but the landlord would not give it to him, saying that he might want to go there sometimes, although, during the year we were there, he did not come twice. These houses are so magnificent and fine that you would think they were made of jewels, not of plaster, tile, and stone! All the houses of Cairo are built separate one from another, so that no one’s trees or outbuildings are against anyone else’s walls. Thus, whenever anyone needs to, he can open the walls of his house and add on, since it causes no detriment to anyone else.

Going west outside the city, you find a large canal called al-Khalij [Canal], which was built by the father of the present sultan, who has three hundred villages on his private property along the canal. The canal was cut from Old to New Cairo, where it turns and runs past the sultan’s palace. Two kiosks are built at the head of the canal, one called Lulu [Pearl] and the other Jawhara [Jewel].

Cairo has four cathedral mosques where men pray on Fridays. One of these is called al-‘Azhar, another al-Nūr, another the Mosque of al-Hākem, and the fourth the Mosque of al-Mo‘ezz. This last mosque is outside the city on the banks of the Nile. When you face the qebīb in Egypt, you have to turn toward the ascent of Aries. The distance between Old and New Cairo is less than a mile, Old Cairo being to the south and New Cairo to the north. The Nile flows through Old Cairo and reaches New Cairo, and the orchards and outbuildings of the two cities overlap. During the summer, when the plain and lowlands are inundated, only the sultan’s garden, which is on a promontory and consequently not flooded, remains dry.
A Description of the Opening of the Canal

When the Nile is increasing, that is, from the tenth of Shahrivar until the thirtieth of Aban, with its level rising eighteen ells above the winter level, the heads of the canals and channels are closed throughout the land. Then the canal called al-Khalij, which begins in Old Cairo and passes through New Cairo, and which is the sultan’s personal property, is opened with the sultan in attendance. Afterwards, all the other canals and channels are opened throughout the countryside. This day is one of the biggest festivals of the year and is called Rokub Fath al-Khalij (“riding forth to open the canal”). When the season approaches, a large pavilion of Byzantine brocade spun with gold and set with gems, large enough for a hundred horsemen to stand in its shade, is elaborately assembled at the head of the canal for the sultan. In front of this canopy are set up a striped tent and another large pavilion. Three days before the Rokub, drums are beat and trumpets sounded in the royal stables so that the horses will get accustomed to the sound. When the sultan mounts, ten thousand horses with gold saddles and bridles and jewelled reins stand at rest all of them with saddle-cloths of Byzantine brocade and baguashen woven seamless to order. In the borders of the cloth are woven inscriptions bearing the name of the sultan of Egypt. On each horse is a spear or coat of armor and a helmet on the pommel, along with every other type of weapon. There are also many camels and mules with handsome panniers and howdahs, all studded with gold and jewels. Their coverings are sewn with pearls.

Here I shall describe everything about this day of [opening of] the canal; it would take too long.

The sultan’s soldiers stand in groups and battalions, and each ethnic group has a name. One group is called the Kotâmî, 21The Kotânî were Berbers of the Kotânî tribe who were successfully converted to Islam by the mission of Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shârî', who paved the way for the declaration of 'Omayyad Allah as wâli and caliph (see El., III, 552). The Rëjîla were also of North African origin and had a quarter near the Bab al-Zawaya. The Masmûds were of the al-Masmûd tribe, a North African tribe (see Yaqût, IV, 544); after “Masîmeda” in the text, read, with the Tehran edition, ṣâ’dîbūya “infantry soldiers” (for Darîr-Sîyâqi’s edition ṣâ’dîbūya “blacks”). The Mashârîqa, or mashârika (“Easterners”), were mainly Daylamite soldiers. The and they came from Qayrawân under al-Mo‘ezz le-Dîn Allâh and are said to number twenty thousand horsemen. Another group called the Bâtelis came from the Maghreb before the sultan came to Egypt; they are said to be fifteen thousand horsemen in number. Another group, the Masmûds, are infantry soldiers from the lands of the Masmûds and number twenty thousand. Another group, called the Mashârîqa (Easterners), are Turks and Persians, non-Arab by origin; although most of them were born in Egypt, their name derives from their place of origin, and they number ten thousand powerfully built men. Another group is called ‘Abîd al-Sharî, slaves who have been purchased; they are said to be thirty thousand in number. Yet another group are called the “Bedouins,” originating from the Hejaz, and all fifty thousand of them carry spears. Another group, called Ostâdîs, are servants, both white and black, and were bought for service; they number thirty thousand horsemen. Another group numbering ten thousand, who originate from all over the world and are just foot soldiers, are called Sayrâ: they have a separate commander-in-chief, and each ethnic group uses its own type of weaponry. Another group are called Zanjis, thirty thousand in number; they fight with swords only. All of these soldiers are on the sultan’s pay, and each receives a fixed salary and/or wage according to his rank. Never has a draft been written against any tax collector or peasant; rather, the tax collectors annually remit the taxes of each province to the central treasury, and at stipulated intervals the army’s pay is disbursed. Hence, no governmental agent or peasant is ever troubled by demands from the army.

There is also a contingent of princes from all over the world—the Maghreb, the Yemen, Byzantium, Stav, Nubia, and Abyssinia—who have come here but who are not reckoned in the ranks of the regular army. The sons of the Chosroes of Daylam and their mother have also come here, and the sons of Georgian kings, Daylamite princes, the sons of the khaqaq of Turkistan, and people of other ranks and stations, such as schol-
ars, literati, poets, and jurisprudents, all of whom have fixed stipends. No aristocrat receives less than five hundred dinars, some drawing stipends of up to two thousand dinars. The only function they have to perform is to make a salaam to the grand vizier, when he sits in state, and then withdraw to their places.

But let us return to our account of the opening of the canal. On the morning when the sultan is going out for the ceremony, ten thousand men are hired to hold the steeds we have already described. These parade by the hundred, preceded by bugles, drums, and clarions and followed by army battalions, from the Harem Gate up to the head of the canal. Each of these hirelings who holds a horse is given three dirhems. Next come horses and camels fitted with litters and caparisons, and following these come camels bearing howdahs. At some distance behind all of these comes the sultan, a well-built, clean-shaven youth with cropped hair, a descendant of Hosayn son of 'Ali. He is mounted on a camel with plain saddle and bridle with no gold or silver and wears a white shirt, as is the custom in Arab countries, with a wide cummerbund, which is called doradó in Persia but dabiqi in Egypt. The value of this alone is said to be ten thousand dinars. On his head he has a turban of the same color, and in his hand he holds a large, very costly whip. Before him walk three hundred Daylamites wearing Byzantine gold-spun cloth with cummerbunds and wide sleeves, as is the fashion in Egypt. They all carry spears and arrows and wear leggings. At the sultan’s side rides a parasol-bearer with a bejewelled, gold turban and a suit of clothing worth ten thousand dinars. The parasol he holds is extremely ornate and studded with jewels and pearls. No other rider accompanies the sultan, but he is preceded by Daylamites. To his left and right are thurifers burning ambergris and aloes. The custom here is for the people to prostrate themselves and say a prayer as the sultan passes. After the sultan comes the grand vizier with the chief justice and a large contingent of religious and governmental officials.

The sultan proceeds to the head of the canal, where court has been set up, and remains mounted beneath the pavilion for a time. He is then handed a spear, which he throws at the dam. Men quickly set to work with picks and shovels to demolish the dam, and the water, which has built up on the other side, breaks through and floods the canal.

On this day the whole population of Old and New Cairo comes to witness the spectacle of the opening of the canal and to see all sorts of wonderful sporting events. The first ship that sails into the canal is filled with deaf-mutes, whom they must consider auspicious. On that day the sultan distributes alms to these people.

There are twenty-one boats belonging to the canal, which are usually kept tied up like animals in a stable, in an artificial lake the size of two or three playing fields next to the sultan’s palace; each boat is fifty yards long and twenty wide and is so ornamented with gold, silver, jewels, and brocade that were I to describe them I could fill many pages.

The sultan also has a garden called ‘Ayn-al-Shams two parasangs outside the city: there is a freshwater spring after which the garden, said to have been Pharaoh’s, was named. Near the garden I saw an ancient edifice made of four large stones, each of which was thirty ells tall and shaped like a minaret. From the top of each of these water trickles, but no one knew what it used to be.

There is a balsam tree in the garden, and it is said that the ancestors of the present sultan brought the seeds of this tree from the Maghreb and planted them and that in all the world there is no other like it, not even in the Maghreb. Although many seeds are produced, they will not grow just anywhere, and even when a tree does grow elsewhere, it does not produce oil. The tree itself looks like a myrtle tree. When it reaches maturity, the branches are scored, and cups are attached to catch the sap-like oil that comes out. When the oil is completely drained, the tree dies up, and the gardeners take the wood to town to sell. It has a thick bark that, when stripped, tastes like almond. The next year branches again sprout from the roots, and the process can be repeated.

There are in the city of Cairo ten quarters, which they call as follows: Barjawn, Zowayla, al-Jawradiyya, al-Omara, al-Day’a’lema, al-Rum, al-Batellya, Qasr-al-Shawk, ‘Abid-al-Sherá, and al-Masá’nedá.

The quarter names that have special significance are: al-Omara [Enire, or Commanders], al-Day’a’lema [the Daylamites], al-Rum [the Greeks], al-Batellya [the Ba’aleh soldiers, see previous note], ‘Abid-al-Shera [purchased slaves], and Masá’nedá [the Mamluks, see previous note]. Some of these quarters survived as quarters until later times; see al-Maqrizí, Kitáb al-akhbár al-ma’_GLOBAL_ árizí (al-Shay’ah: Ebyá’ al-‘Ulum, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 194ff. and Ravaisse, “Essai,” I, 425.