A Description of the City of Old Cairo

The city of Old Cairo is situated on a promontory. To the east of the city is a hill, not too high, of rock and stone. On one side of the city is the Ebn Tulun Mosque, built on a rise with two re-inforced walls. With the exception of the walls of Amed and Maydāfeqín, I never saw the likes of this mosque. It was built by one of the Abbasid emirs who was governor of Egypt. During the reign of al-Hākem be-Amr Allāh, the grandfather of the present sultan, the descendants of Ebn Tulun sold the mosque to al-Hākem for thirty thousand dinars. Later, they were about to have the minaret torn down when al-Hākem sent word to them to inquire what they were doing, since they had sold him the mosque. They replied that they had not sold the minaret, so he gave them another five thousand dinars for it. During the month of Ramadān the sultan prays there, and also on Fridays.

The city of Old Cairo was built on a hill for fear of the Nile waters. Once the site was just large boulders, but they have all been broken up and the ground leveled. Now they call such a place 'topa'. Looking at Old Cairo from a distance, because of the way it is situated, you would think it's a mountain. There are places where the houses are fourteen stories tall and others seven. I heard from a reliable source that one person has on top of a seven-story house a garden where he raised a calf. He also has a waterwheel up there turned by this ox to lift water from a well down below. He has orange trees and also bananas and other fruit-bearing trees, flowers, and herbs planted on the roof.

I was told by a cretible merchant that there are many houses in Old Cairo where chambers can be hired. These chambers are thirty cubits square and can hold 350 people. There are also bazaars and lanes where lamps always must be kept lit because no light ever falls upon the ground where people pass to and fro.

In Old Cairo alone, not counting New Cairo, there are seven cathedral mosques built one next to the other. In the two cities there are fifteen Friday mosques, so that on Fridays there is a sermon and congregation everywhere.

In the midst of the bazaar is the Bāb al-Jawāne Mosque, built by 'Amr son of al-‘Ās when he was appointed governor of Egypt by Moʿāwiya. The mosque is held aloft by four hundred marble columns, and the wall that contains the meḥājah is all slabs of white marble on which the entire Koran is written in beautiful script. Outside, on all four sides, are bazaars into which the mosque gates open. Inside there are always teachers and Koran-readers, and this mosque is the promenade of the city, as there are never less than five thousand people—students, the indigent, scribes who write checks and money drafts, and others. Al-Hākem bought this mosque from the descendants of 'Amr son of al-‘Ās. As they were in financial distress, they had asked the sultan to give permission for them to tear down the mosque their ancestor had built in order to sell the stones and bricks. Al-Hākem gave them one hundred thousand dinars for the mosque with all the people of Old Cairo as witnesses. Then he built many amazing things there, one of which is a silver lampholder with sixteen branches, each of which is 1½ cubits long. Its circumference is 24 cubits, and it holds seven hundred-odd lamps on holiday evenings. The weight is said to be 25 kantars of silver, a kantar being 100 rots, a rot being 144 silver dirhems. After it had been made, it was too large to get in through any of the existing doors, so they removed one of the doors and got it inside, after which the door was replaced. There are always ten layers of colored carpets spread one on top of the other in this mosque, and every night more than one hundred lamps are kept burning. The court of the chief justice is located here.

On the north side of the mosque is a bazaar called Suq al-Qanādīl [Lamp Market], and no one ever saw such a bazaar anywhere else. Every sort of rare goods from all over the world can be had there: I saw tortoise-shell implements such as small boxes, combs, knife handles, and so on. I also saw extremely fine crystal, which the master craftsmen etch most beautifully. [This crystal] had been imported from the Maghreb, although they say that near the Red Sea, crystal even finer and more translucent than the Maghrabi variety had been found. I saw elephant tusks from Zanzibar, many of which weighed more than two hundred maunds. There was a type of skin from Abyssinia that resembled leopard, from which they make sandals. Also from Abyssinia was a domesticated bird, large with white spots and a crown like a peacock's.

Throughout Egypt is much honey and sugarcane. On the
third of the month of Day of the Persian year 416 I saw the following fruits and herbs, all in one day: red roses, lilies, narcissi, oranges, citrons, apples, jasmine, basil, quince, pomegranates, pears, melons, bananas, olives, myrobalan, fresh dates, grapes, sugarcane, eggplants, squash, turnips, radishes, cabbage, fresh beans, cucumbers, green onions, fresh garlic, carrots, and beets. No one would think that all of these fruits and vegetables could be had at one time, some usually growing in autumn, some in spring, some in summer, and some in fall. I myself have no ulterior motive in reporting all this, and I have recorded what I saw with my own eyes, although I am not responsible for some of the things I only heard, since Egypt is quite expansive and has all kinds of climate, from the tropical to the cold; and produce is brought to the city from everywhere and sold in the markets.

In Old Cairo they make all types of porcelain, so fine and translucent that one can see one's hand behind it when held up to the light. From this porcelain they make cups, bowls, plates, and so forth and paint them to resemble the buqalamun so that different colors show depending on how the article is held. They also produce a glass so pure and flawless that it resembles chrysoleite, and it is sold by weight.

I heard from a reputable draper that they buy a stone-dinar's weight of thread for 3 Maghrebis dinars, which is equal to 3½ Nishapuri dinars. In Nishapur I priced the very best thread available there and was told that one dinar-weight of the finest was sold for 5 dinars.

The city of Old Cairo is situated laterally along the Nile and has many kiosks and belvederes so that the people could draw water in buckets directly from the river; however, all water for the city is handled by water carriers, some by camel and some on their backs. I saw brass pitchers, each of which held three muids of water, and one would think they were made of gold. I was told that there is a woman who leases out no less than five thousand of these pitchers for one dinar a month each. When returned, the pitchers must be in perfect condition.

Opposite the city of Old Cairo is an island in the Nile that at one time was turned into a city. It is to the west of Old Cairo and has a Friday mosque and gardens. The island is a rock in the middle of the river, and I estimated each branch of the river to be the size of the Oxus, but the water flows gently and slowly.

Between the city and the island is a bridge made of thirty-six pontoons. Part of the city is on the other side of the river and is called Giza. There is also a Friday mosque there but no bridge, so you have to cross by ferry or canoe. There are more ships and boats in Old Cairo than in Baghdad and Basra combined.

The merchants of Old Cairo are honest in their dealings, and if one of them is caught cheating a customer, he is mounted on a camel with a bell in his hand and paraded about the city, ringing the bell and crying out, "I have committed a misdemeanor and am suffering reproach. Whosoever tells a lie is rewarded with public disgrace." The grocers, druggists, and peddlers furnish sacks for everything they sell, whether glass, pottery, or paper; therefore, there is no need for shoppers to take their own bags with them. Lamp oil is derived from turnip seed and radish seed and is called "sayt harr." Sesame is scarce, and the oil derived from it is expensive, while olive oil is cheap. Pistachios are more expensive than almonds, and marzipan is not more than one dinar for ten mounds. Merchants and shopkeepers ride on saddled donkeys, both coming and going to and from the bazaar. Everywhere, at the heads of lanes, donkeys are kept saddled and ready, and anyone may ride them for a small fee. It is said that every day fifty thousand beasts are saddled for hire. No one other than soldiers and militiamen rides a horse, while merchants, peasants, and craftsmen ride donkeys. I saw one dappled donkey, much like horses, but more delicate. The people of the city were extremely wealthy when I was there.

In the year 439 [A.D. 1047] the sultan ordered general rejoicing for the birth of a son; the city and bazaars were so arrayed that, were they to be described, some would not believe that drapers' and moneychangers' shops could be so decorated with gold, jewels, coins, goldspun cloth, and embroidery that there was no room to sit down.

The people are so secure under the sultan's reign that no one fears his agents, and they rely on him neither to inflict injustice nor to have designs on anyone's property. I saw such personal wealth there that were I to describe it, the people of Persia would never believe it. I could discover no end or limit to their wealth, and I never saw such ease and comfort anywhere.

I saw one man, a Christian and one of the most propitious men in all Egypt, who was said to possess untold ships, wealth,
and property. In short, one year the Nile failed and the price of grain rose so high that the sultan’s grand vizier summoned this Christian and said, “It has not been a good year. The sultan is burdened with the care of his subjects. How much grain can you give, either for sale or as a loan?” The Christian replied, “For the happiness of the sultan and the vizier, I have enough grain in readiness to guarantee Egypt’s bread for six years.” At that time there were easily five times the population of Nishapur in Cairo, so that anyone who knows how to estimate can figure out just how much grain he must have had. What a happy citizenry and a just ruler to have such conditions in their days! What wealth must there be for the ruler not to inflict injustice and for the peasantry not to hide anything!

I saw a caravanserai there called Dār al-Wazir where nothing but flax was sold, and on the lower floor there were tailors while above were specialists in clothing repair. I asked the keeper how much the fee for this caravanserai was. He told me that it was twenty thousand dinars per year but that just then one corner had been demolished for reconstruction so that only one thousand a month, or twelve thousand per year, was being collected. They said that there were two hundred caravanserais in the city the size of this one and even larger.

A Description of the Sultan’s Banquet

It is customary for the sultan to give a banquet twice a year, on the two great holidays, and to hold court for both the elite and the common people, the elite in his presence and the commoners in other halls and places. Having heard a great deal about these banquets, I was very anxious to see one with my own eyes, so I told one of the sultan’s clerks with whom I had struck up a friendship that I had seen the courts of the Persian sultans, such as Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna and his son Mas’ud, who were great potentates enjoying much prosperity and luxury, and now I wanted to see the court of the Prince of the Faithful. He therefore spoke a word to the chamberlain, who was called the Sāheb al-Setr.

The last of Ramadān 440 [8 March 1049] the hall was deco-

rated for the next day, which was the festival, when the sultan was to come after prayer and preside over the feast. Taken by my friend, as I entered the door to the hall, I saw constructions, galleries, and porticos that would take too long to describe adequately. There were twelve square structures, built one next to the other, each more dazzling than the last. Each measured one hundred cubits square, and one was a thing sixty cubits square with a dais placed the entire length of the building at a height of four ells, on three sides all of gold, with hunting and sporting scenes depicted thereon and also an inscription in marvelous calligraphy. All the carpets and pillows were of Byzantine brocade and buqalamun, each woven exactly to the measurements of its place. There was an indescribable latticework balestrade of gold along the sides. Behind the dais and next to the wall were silver steps. The dais itself was such that if this book were nothing from beginning to end but a description of it, words would still not suffice. They said that fifty thousand maunds of sugar were appropriated for this day for the sultan’s feast. For decoration on the banquet table I saw a confection like an orange tree, every branch and leaf of which had been executed in sugar, and thousands of images and statuettes in sugar. The sultan’s kitchen is outside the palace, and there are always fifty slaves attached to it. There is a subterranean passageway between the building and the kitchen, and the provisioning is such that every day fourteen camel-loads of ice are used in the royal sherbet kitchen. Most of the emirs and the sultan’s entourage received emoluments there, and, if the people of the city make requests on behalf of the suffering, they are given something. Whatever medication is needed in the city is given out from the harem, and there is also no problem in the distribution of other ointments, such as balsam.

The Conduct of the Sultan

The security and welfare of the people of Egypt have reached a point that the drapers, moneychangers, and jewelers do not even lock their shops—they only lower a net across the front, and no one tampers with anything.
There was once a Jewish jeweler who was close to the sultan and who was very rich, having been entrusted with buying all the sultan’s jewels. One day soldiers rose up against this Jew and killed him. After this act was committed, and fearing the sultan’s wrath, twenty thousand mounted horsemen appeared in the public square. When the army appeared thus in the field, the populace was in great fear. Until the middle of the day the horseman remained in the square, when finally a servant of the sultan came out of the palace, stood by the gate, and addressed them as follows: “The sultan asks whether you are in obedience or not.” They all cried out at once, saying, “We are his slaves and obedient, but we have committed a crime.” “The sultan commands you to disperse immediately,” said the servant, and they departed. The murdered Jew was named Abu Sa’id, and he had a son and a brother. They say that God only knows how much money he had. They also say that he had on the roof of his house three hundred silver pots with fruit trees planted in them for as to form a garden. The brother then wrote a note to the sultan to the effect that he was prepared to offer the treasury two hundred thousand dinars immediately for protection. The sultan sent the note outside to be torn up in public and said, “You rest secure and return to your home. No one will harm you, and we have no need of anyone’s money.” And they were compensated [for their loss].

From Syria to Qayrawan, which is as far as I went, in all towns and villages, mosque expenses, such as lamp oil, carpets, mats and rugs, salaries for custodians, janitors, muezzins, and so on, are handled by the sultan’s agents. One year the governor of Syria wrote to ask if, since oil was scarce, it would be permissible to use qab hád in the mosque. In reply, he was told that he was to obey orders, that he was not a vizier, and that furthermore it was not licit to institute change in things pertaining to the House of God.

The chief justice receives a monthly stipend of two thousand dinars, and thus every judge down the scale so that the people need not fear venality from the bench.

It is customary for a representative of the sultan to appear in the mosques in the middle of the month of Rajab and proclaim the following: “O company of Muslims! The Pilgrimage season is at hand, and the sultan, as usual, has undertaken the outfitting of soldiers, horses and camels, and provisions.” During Ramadan this proclamation is repeated, and from the first of Dhul-Qa’dî people set out for the appointed meeting place. At the middle of Dhul-Qa’dî the caravan moves out. The daily disbursement to the soldiers for fodder is one thousand dinars, over and above the twenty dinars each man receives per diem for the twenty-five days until they reach Mecca, where they stay for ten days. Thus, with the twenty-five days it takes them to return, they are gone for two months, and sixty thousand dinars are spent for provisions, not counting miscellaneous disbursements for rents, bonuses, stipends, and camels that die.

In the year 439 [A.D. 1048] an edict of the sultan to this effect was read to the people: “The Prince of the Faithful proclaims that in this year, owing to drought and the resulting scarcity of goods, which has caused the deaths of many, it is unwise for pilgrims to undertake the journey to the Hejaz. This we say in Muslim commiseration.” Therefore, the pilgrims were held in abeyance until the next year, although the sultan did send the covering for the Ka’ba as usual, which he does twice a year. This very year, since the covering was being sent via the Red Sea, I went along.

On the first of Dhul-Qa’dî [18 April 1048] I left Egypt, and we reached the Red Sea on the 8th. From there we traveled for fifteen days by boat until we arrived at the town called al-Jar. It was the 22nd of the month. From there it is a four-day journey to Medina, which is a town on the edge of a salty, barren desert. It has running water, although not much, and is a palm grove. In that locale the qibla is directly south. The Prophet’s Mosque is as large as the Harâm Mosque in Mecca, and the grating around the Prophet’s tomb is next to the pulpit. It is to the left when facing the qibla; and so, when the preacher mentions the Prophet from the pulpit, he turns to his right and points to the tomb. The tomb is pentagonal, and there are walls all around the five piers. Around the tomb is a balustrade so that no one can go in. There is also a net stretched across the top so that birds cannot enter. Between the tomb and the pulpit is a grating of marble that is called al-Rawda [The Garden], and it is said to be one of the gardens of Paradise, since the Prophet said, “Between my grave and my pulpit is one of the gardens of Paradise.” The Shi’ites say that the tomb of Fátima Zahra is there also. The
mosque has a gate. Outside the city to the south is a plain and cemetary called Qobur al-Shobada' [Tombs of the Martyrs], where Hamza son of 'Abd al-Mottaleh is buried.

We stayed in Medina for two days; then, as time was short, we left. The road leads to the east. Two stations outside of Medina is a mountain and a defile called Jofia, which is the masjid for Syria, the Maghreb, and Egypt (a masjid being the place where the pilgrims put on the churum [pilgrimage garb]). They say that once a year many pilgrims had stopped there when suddenly a flash-flood swept down and killed them all, which is why it is called "Jofia" ("sweeping away"). From Medina to Mecca is one hundred parasangs, but the whole way is easy and took us eight days.

On Sunday the 6th of Dhul-Hijja [23 May 1048] we arrived in Mecca and entered through the al-Safa Gate. As there had been a drought in Mecca that year, four mounds of bread cost one Nishapuri dinar. The mousa'yers were leaving the city, and no pilgrims had come from anywhere at all. On Wednesday, with the help of God, we completed the pilgrimage rites at 'Arafat. Afterwards we stayed on in Mecca for only two days.

Because of hunger and misery people were fleeing the Hejaz in every direction. At this juncture I will not explain the Pilgrimage or describe Mecca. I will describe what I saw the next time I went to Mecca, when I remained as a mousa'yier for six months.

When I returned to Egypt, it had been seventy-five days [from the time I left]. This year thirty-five thousand people came to Egypt from the Hejaz; and, since they were all hungry and naked, they received clothing and a pension from the sultan until the next year, when the rains came and food was once again plentiful enough in the Hejaz to support these people. The sultan gave them all clothing and gifts and sent them back home.

During Rajab 440 [January 1049] the sultan's representative announced once again that there was famine in the Hejaz and that, since it was unwise to go on the Pilgrimage, the people should excuse themselves from this obligation and adhere to God's commandment. This year also no pilgrims went, although there was no shirking the sultan's duty, and therefore...

25That is, the Koranic injunction of pilgrimage (5:97) is interpreted to mean that the Pilgrimage is not incumbent upon those who are unable to attend because of poverty, illness, or some other pressing cause (such as the famine spoken of here). Alternative rites to attendance at Mecca are given in Koran 2:196.

the covering for the the Ka'ba, servants, retinue for the emirs of Mecca and Medina, the gift for the emir of Mecca (the stipend for each being three thousand dinars a month), a horse, and a robe of honor, which are sent twice yearly, were duly expeditiated. This year a man called Qidi 'Abd Allah, a judge from Syria, was entrusted with these duties. I went in his company via Qozzom. This time the boat reached al-Jar on the 23rd of Dhul-Hija [1 May]. The season of the Pilgrimage being near, a camel could not be hired for less than five dinars. We traveled in haste and arrived in Mecca on the 8th of Dhul-Hija [14 May]. With the help of God, we performed the Pilgrimage.

A large caravan from the Maghreb had come to Medina, and at the gates of Medina some Arabs had demanded protection money from them on the way back from the Pilgrimage. A fight broke out, leaving more than two thousand Maghrebis killed, and not many ever returned home. On this same Pilgrimage a group from Khorasan had come by land by way of Syria and Egypt and then by boat to Medina. On the 6th of Dhul-Hija, as they still had 104 parasangs to go to 'Arafat, they had said that they would give forty dinars each to anyone who could get them to Mecca within the three remaining days in order for them to perform the Pilgrimage. Some Arabs came forth and got them to 'Arafat in two and a half days; they took their money, tied them each to a fast camel, and drove them from Medina. When they arrived at 'Arafat, two of them had died still tied to the camels; the other four were more dead than alive. At the afternoon prayer as we were standing there, they arrived unable to stand up or to speak. They finally told us that they had pleaded with the Arabs to keep the money they had given but to release them, as they had no more strength to continue. The Arabs, however, heedless of their entreaties, kept driving the camels forward. In the end the four of them made the Pilgrimage and returned via Syria.

Having performed the Pilgrimage, I returned to Egypt, since I had my books there and had no intention of returning.

The emir of Medina came that year to Egypt, since the sultan customarily gave him a yearly stipend because he was a descendant of Hosayn son of 'Ali. I was with him on the boat up to Qozzom. From there we continued in each other's company to Cairo.
In the year 441, while I was in Egypt, news arrived that the king of Aleppo, whose ancestors had been kings of Aleppo, had rebelled against the sultan his overlord. The sultan had a servant called 'Omdat al-Dawla, who was the emir of the matadehls and enormously rich and propertied. (Matadehls is what they call the people who dig for buried treasure in the graves of Egypt. From the Maghreb and the lands of Egypt and Syria come people who endure many hardships and spend a lot of money in those graves and rock piles. Many a time buried treasure is discovered, although often much outlay is made without anything being found. They say that in those places the wealth of the pharaohs is buried. Whenever anyone does find something, one-fifth is given to the sultan and the rest belongs to the finder.) At any rate, the sultan dispatched this 'Omdat al-Dawla to that province with great pomp and circumstance, outfitting him with all the trappings of kings, such as canopies, pavilions, and so on. When he reached Aleppo he waged war and was killed. He had so much wealth that it took two months for it to be transferred from his treasury to the sultan's. He had three hundred slave-girls, most of them beauties, a few of whom were of the type taken to concubinage. The sultan ordered them to be given their choice of taking a husband or, if such was not their choice, having the remainder of the man's unencumbered estate so that they might remain in their own house, no command or force being exerted upon any of them. When the man was killed in Aleppo, the king was afraid the sultan would dispatch his army, so he sent the sultan his seven-year-old son along with his wife and many gifts and presents. He also offered apologies for his past conduct. When they arrived they were kept waiting outside the city for nearly two months. Neither were they admitted into the city nor were the presents accepted until finally, when all the judges of the city interceded on their behalf at court, they were admitted with honors.

Among other things, if any one wants to make a garden in Egypt it can be done during any season at all, since any tree, fruit-bearing or other, can be obtained and planted. There are special people, called dhalis, who can obtain immediately any kind of fruit you desire, because they have trees planted in tubs on rooftops. Many roofs are gardens and most of what is grown is fruit-producing, such as oranges, pomegranates, apples, quince, roses, herbs, and vegetables. When a customer wishes, porters will go and tie the tubs to poles and carry the trees wherever desired. They will also make a hole in the ground and sink the tubs if wished. Then, when someone so desires, they will dig the tubs up and carry their fragments away, and the trees will not know the difference. I have never seen or heard of such a thing anywhere else in the world, and it is truly clever!

The Voyage to Mecca

Now I will describe my return voyage to Mecca from Egypt. I performed the prayer of the Feast of Sacrifice in Cairo and departed by boat on Tuesday, the 14th of Dhul-Hijja 441 [9 May 1050], bound for Upper Egypt, which is to the south and is the province through which the Nile flows before reaching Cairo. It is part of the realm of Egypt, and most of Egypt's prosperity derives from there. All along the banks of the Nile are too many towns and villages to describe. Finally, we reached a city called Asyut, an opium-producing region.

Opium is derived from a poppy with a black seed. When the seed grows and forms a pod, it is crushed and a molasses-like syrup comes out. This is collected and preserved, for it is opium. The poppy seed is small and like cumin.

In Asyut they weave turbans from sheep's wool unequalled anywhere in the world. The fine woollens imported into Persia and called "Egyptian" are all from Upper Egypt, since wool is not woven in Egypt proper. In Asyut I saw a shawl of sheep's wool the likes of which I saw neither in Lahore nor in Multan. It was so fine you would think it was silk.

From there we went on to a town called Akhnim, where I saw huge stone edifices that would amaze anyone who saw them. There is an ancient town with a stone wall. Most buildings there are made of twenty-thousand-maund and thirty-thousand-maund stones. What is really amazing is that there is no mountain or quarry within ten or fifteen parasangs of this place, so you wonder from where and how they were brought there.

Next we came to a town called Qus, which is a crowded and prosperous place. There are, in addition to a fortified wall,
many date groves and orchards. We remained there for twenty
days because there were two routes from here, one through arid
desert and the other by river, and we could not decide which
way to take. In the end we proceeded by river and reached
Aswan. To the south of this city is a mountain, and the river Nile
comes out of a defile in the mountain. It is said that boats can
proceed no farther up the river because the water flows through
narrow defiles and also because of large rocks coming down.
Four parasangs from this city is the province of Nubia, the pop-
ulation of which is all Christian. The king of this province con-
tinually sends gifts to the sultan of Egypt and makes treaties so
that Egyptian soldiers will not enter his land and molest the pop-
ulation. The city of Aswan is very strong lest anyone attack from
the direction of Nubia. There is a permanent garrison stationed
there to defend the city and province. Opposite the city in the
middle of the Nile is an island, which is like a garden, with date
groves, olives, and other trees and crops irrigated by
waterwheels. There I remained for twenty-one days because
there was a large desert before us to cross and two hundred par-
asangs to the shore. It was the time for returning pilgrims to be
arriving by camel. We were waiting until the camels were re-
turned to hire one and then set off. While in Aswan I came to
know a man called Abu 'Abd Allah Mohebb, son of Fadi. He
was a pious and righteous man and knew something about logic.
He helped me to inspect and hire a camel, which I got for one
and a half dinars.

On the 5th of Rabi' I 442 [28 July 1050], having gone eight
parasangs southeast, we came to a station called Deya, which is
in a valley in the desert and surrounded on two sides by wall-like
mountains. Between the two is an open space one hundred cu-
bits wide where a well had been dug; the water was plentiful but
not very good. Past this place there are five days of desert with
no water whatsoever, so each person had to draw a jar of water.
Next we came to a station called Hawd, which is a stone moun-
tain with two holes from which water flows. The water stays in a
pool and is fresh, but someone has to go inside one of the holes
to bring out water for the camels. It had been seven days since
the camels had been watered or fed, since there had been no
[water or pasturage]. The camels stopped once every twenty-

four hours, from the time the sun got hot in the day until the af-

ternoon prayer, and they proceeded the rest of the day and

night. The stopping-places are all known, because you cannot
stop just anywhere, since there might not be anything to burn,
and only in stopping-places can camel dung be found to burn
for cooking. It was almost as though the camels themselves knew
that if they pooled along they would die of thirst; they did not
need to be driven and, setting their own direction, went of their
own accord, although there was no trace whatsoever of a road.
Always headed east, there were stretches of fifteen parasangs
with little water, only brackish, and stretches of thirty and forty
parasangs with no water at all. On the 20th of Rabi' I 442 [12
August 1050] we reached the town of 'Aydhâb, having traveled
from Aswan about two hundred parasangs in fifteen days.

The town of 'Aydhâb is situated by the sea and has a Friday
mosque and a population of five hundred. It belongs to the sul-
tan of Egypt and is a customs station for ships coming from
Abyssinia, Zanjibar, and the Yemen. From there goods are
transported by camel across the desert, the same way we had
come, to Aswan and thence by boat to Cairo. To the right of this
town, facing the gâhâ, is a mountain beyond which is a large des-
ert with many herbivorous animals and people called the Ba-
jâwis. This nation has no religion and has had no prophet or
spiritual leader because they are so far from civilization. They
inhabit a desert more than one thousand parasangs long and
three hundred wide. In all this expanse there are not more than
two small hamlets, one called Bahar al-Nâ'âm and the other 'Ay-
dhâb. The desert runs lengthwise from Egypt to Abyssinia,
which is from north to south, and across from the Nubian River
to the Red Sea, from west to east. This nation, the Bjâwis, who
live in this desert, are not a bad people and do not steal or make
raids but tend their flocks. Muslims and others, however, kidnap
their children and take them to sell in the cities of Islam.

The Red Sea is a gulf that splits off from the ocean at Aden
and goes northward to the hamlet of Qollom. Every place on the
coast of this gulf where there is a town is called baq, for example,
there is a place in Qollom, 'Aydhâb, and Bahar al-Nâ'âm that is
so called. More than three hundred islands are said to be in the
Red Sea, and ships bring oil and dried curds from there. There
are said to be many cows and sheep on these islands, and the inhabitants are said to be Muslims, some belonging to Egypt and others to the Yemen.

In the hamlet of 'Aydhâb there is no water from wells or springs, only rainwater. When rain fails, the Bajâwis bring water to sell. During the three months we were there, we bought water at the rate of one or two dirhems a jug.

As the wind was northerly and we needed a southerly wind, the ship could not sail. When the people saw me, they asked me to preach to them. I obliged and acted as preacher until the winds changed and the boats could sail north and thence on to Jidda. They said that nowhere were such good camels to be had as in that desert, and they are exported even to Egypt and the Hejaz.

In the town of 'Aydhâb a man whose word I trust told me that once a ship set out from that town for the Hejaz carrying camels for the emir of Mecca. One of the camels died so it was thrown overboard. Immediately a fish swallowed it whole, except for one leg that stuck out of the fish's mouth. Then another fish came and swallowed whole the fish that had swallowed the camel. That fish is called qarš. I saw in that town a fish skin that in Khorasan is called sajân. We in Khorasan had thought it was a kind of lizard, but here I saw that it was a fish because it had fins like a fish.

While in Aswan I had a friend, as I have said before, named Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad son of Fâlîj. For my arrival in 'Aydhâb he had written a letter to an agent he had there to the effect that the agent should give me whatever I required and write to that effect so that he could settle the account. As I had been in 'Aydhâb for three months, and everything I had was spent, of necessity I presented myself to that person with the letter. He acted very politely and said, "Oh yes, I am holding a great deal of his money. You may just sign for any amount you require." I was surprised at Mohammad Fâlîj's generosity, that, with no prior dealings [with me], he should be so kind. Had I been a rogue and of a mind to do such a thing, I could have taken a great sum of money from him by means of that letter. Anyway, I took one hundred maunds of flour, which was extremely valuable there, and gave him a chit in that amount. He then sent the paper I had signed to Aswan, and before I departed from 'Aydhâb, a reply came from Mohammad Fâlîj that he should give me whatever I might require from his funds there, and, even if he should give me out of his own pocket, it would be made good, for the Prince of the Faithful 'Ali son of Abu Tâleb had commanded, "The believer does not hold back or take advantage." I have included this little vignette so that my readers may know that people can rely on others, that generosity exists everywhere, and that there have been and still are noblemen.

A Description of the City of Jidda

Jidda is a large city and has a strong wall on the edge of the sea. The population is five thousand. The city is situated to the north of the sea, has good bazaars, and the qibla of the Friday mosque faces east. Outside the city there are no buildings except a mosque known as the Mosque of the Prophet of God. The city has two gates, one toward the east and Mecca and the other toward the west and the sea. Going south along the coast from Jidda, you reach the Yemen via the city of Sa'da, which is fifty parasangs away. To the north is the town of al-Jâr, which is in the Hejaz. There are no trees or cultivation in Jidda, and all produce is brought from the outlying countryside. It is twelve parasangs to Mecca, and the emir of Jidda, a vassal to the emir of Mecca, is Taj al-Ma'âli son of Abu'l-Futuh, who is also the emir of Medina. I went to see the emir of Jidda, and he was generous enough to exempt me from the customs duties that would have applied to me. When I passed through the Muslim Gate, he wrote to Mecca saying that I was a scholar and nothing was to be taken from me.

I left Jidda on Friday at the time of the afternoon prayer. On Sunday, the last of Jumâda II, I arrived at the gate to the city of Mecca. There were many people from the Hejaz and the Yemen for the minor pilgrimage (umrah) on the first of Rajab, which is a great season, like the Ramadan feast and the Pilgrimage time. As they are nearby and the way is easy, they come three times a year.
A Description of the City of Mecca

The city of Mecca is situated low in the midst of mountains such that from whatever direction you approach, the city cannot be seen until you are there. The tallest mountain near Mecca is Abu Qobays, which is round like a dome, so that if you shoot an arrow from the foot of the mountain it reaches its top. Abu Qobays is to the east of the city, so that if you should be in the Harâm Mosque in the month of Day you see the sun rise from behind the top of the mountain. On top of the mountain is a stone stèle said to have been erected by Abraham. The city lies on a plain between the mountains and measures only two arrow-shots square. The Harâm Mosque is in the middle of the plain, and the city lanes and bazaars are built all around it. Wherever there is an opening in the mountain a rampart wall has been made with a gate. The only trees in the city are at the western gate to the Harâm Mosque, called Bâb Elrâhâm [Abraham’s Gate], where there are several tall trees around a well. On the eastern side of the Harâm Mosque a large bazaar extends from south to north. At the south end is Abu Qobays. At the foot of Abu Qobays is Mount Safâ’, which is like a staircase, as rocks have been set in such a fashion that people can go up to pray, which is what is meant by [the expression] “to do Safâ’ and Marwa.” At the other, the north end of the bazaar, is Mount Marwa, which is less tall and has many edifices built on it, as it lies in the midst of the city. In running between Safâ’ and Marwa the people run inside this bazaar.

For people who have come from faraway places to perform the minor pilgrimage, there are milestones and mosques set up half a parasang away from Mecca, where they bind their ehrâm. “To bind the ehrâm” means to take off all sewn garments and to wrap an eṣr or seamless garment, about the waist and another about the body. Then, in loud voice, you say, “Labbayk, alla-humma, labbayk,” and approach Mecca. When anyone already inside Mecca wants to perform the minor pilgrimage, he goes out to one of the markets, binds his ehrâm, says the Labbayk and comes back into Mecca with an intention to perform the minor pilgrimage. Having come into the city, you enter the Harâm Mosque, approach the Ka’ba, and circumambulate to the right, always keeping the Ka’ba to your left. Then you go to the corner containing the Black Stone, kiss it, and pass on. When the Stone is kissed once again in the same manner, one tawf, or circumambulation, has been completed. This continues for seven tawfs, three times quickly and four slowly. When the circumambulation is finished, you go to Maqâṣân Elrâhîm [Station of Abraham] opposite the Ka’ba and stand behind the Station. There you perform two rakâts called the “circumambulation prayer.” Afterwards you go to the Well of Zamzam, drink some water, or rub some on the face, and leave the Harâm Mosque by the Safâ’ Gate. Just outside this gate are the steps up Mount Safâ’, and here you face the Ka’ba and say the prescribed prayer, which is well known. When the prayer has been said, you come down from Safâ’ and go from south to north through the bazaar to Marwa. Passing through the bazaar, you go past the gates to the Harâm Mosque where the Prophet ran and commanded others to run also. The length is about fifty paces, and on either side are two minarets. When the people coming from Safâ’ reach the first two minarets, they break into a run until they pass the other two at the other end of the bazaar. Then they proceed slowly to Marwa. Upon reaching the end they go up Marwa and recite the prescribed prayer. Then they return through the bazaar and repeat the run until they have gone four times from Safâ’ to Marwa and three times from Marwa to Safâ’, making seven runs the length of the bazaar. Coming down from Marwa the last time, you find a bazaar with about twenty barber-shops facing each other. You have your head shaven and, with the minor pilgrimage completed, come out of the Sanctuary. The large bazaar on the east side is called Suq al-ʾAntârîn [Droppers’ Market]. It has nice buildings, and all the shopkeepers are druggists. In Mecca there are two baths paved with a green stone from which flints are made.

I reckoned that there were not more than two thousand citizens of Mecca, the rest, about five hundred, being foreigners and meijûvers. Just at this time there was a famine, with sixteen mounds of wheat costing one dinar, for which reason a number of people had left.

Inside the city of Mecca are hospices for the natives of every
region—Khorasan, Transoxiana, the Iraq, and so on. Most of them, however, had fallen into ruination. The Baghdad caliphs had built many beautiful structures, but when we arrived some had fallen to ruin and others had been expropriated. All the well water in Mecca is too brackish and bitter to drink, but there are many large pools and masn'uds, costing up to ten thousand dinars each, that catch the rainwater from the hills. When we were there, however, they were empty. A certain prince of Aden, known as Psear-e Shaddel, had brought water underground to Mecca at great personal expense. This water was used to irrigate crops at 'Arafat and was limited to there, although conduits had been constructed and a little water reached Mecca, but not inside the city; therefore, a pool had been made to collect the water, and water carriers drew the water and brought it to the city to sell. Half a parasang out on the Borqa road is a well called Bir al-Zahed (the Ascetic’s Well). A nice mosque is located there, and the water is good. The water carriers also bring water from that place for sale.

The climate of Mecca is extremely hot. I saw fresh cucumbers and eggplants and end of the month of Bahman. This was the fourth time I had been to Mecca.

For the first of Rajab 442 (19 November 1050) until the 20th of Dhul-Hijja 5 May 1051 I was a magister in Mecca. On the 15th of Farvadin the grapes were ripe and were brought to town from the villages to be sold in the market. On the first of Ordibehesht melons were plentiful. All kinds of fruit are available in winter, and [the markets] are never empty.

A Description of Arabia and the Yemen

One station south of Mecca is the province of the Yemen, which stretches along the coast. The Yemen and the Hejaz are contiguous, and both are Arabic-speaking. In local parlance the Yemen is called Hemyar and the Hejaz, Arabia. This land is bounded on three sides by water and is a peninsula. To the east is the Sea of Basra (Persian Gulf), to the west the Red Sea, which, as has already been mentioned, is a gulf, and to the south is the (Arabian) Ocean. The length of the peninsula that is the Yemen and the Hejaz, from Kufa in the north to Aden in the south, is approximately five hundred parasangs. From Oman in the east to al-Jār in the west, the width is four hundred parasangs. Arabia extends from Kufa to Mecca, and Hemyar from Mecca to Aden. There is little civilization in Arabia, its people being desert nomads, herdsmen, and tent-dwellers.

Hemyar is divided into three sections. The first is Tehama, which is bounded on the west by the Red Sea and has many towns and cities, such as Sa‘da, Zabid, San’a, and others. These towns are on the plain. The king of this area is an Ethiopian vassal to Psear-e Shaddel. The second section of Hemyar is a mountainous region called Najd, which has uncultivated regions and is cold, with narrow passes and strong fortresses. The third section lies to the east and contains many cities such as Najrān, ‘Āthr, Bishā, and others. This section is divided into many areas, each of which has a king or chieftain. There is no absolute potentate or ruler there. The people are rebellious, and most of them are thieves, murderers, and bandits. This area is 200 by 250 parasangs and contains many people of all sorts.

Ghodān Castle is in the Yemen, in a city called San‘a. Now, however, nothing much remains of the castle but a mound in the middle of the city. They say the lord of this castle used to rule the whole world and that there is much treasure buried in this mound; but no one, neither sultan nor peasant, has ever discovered anything. In the city of San‘a they do work in agate, which is a stone mined in the mountains, then heated in sand over a stove and cured in sand in the sun. It is then ground against stone. In Egypt I saw a word sent to the sultan from the Yemen that had a handle and pommeled made of one solid piece of red agate; it looked like ruby!

A Description of the Harām Mosque and the Ka‘ba

As I have already stated, the Ka‘ba is situated in the middle of the Harām Mosque, which is in the middle of the city of Mecca. It runs lengthwise from east to west, and the breadth is on a
north-south axis. The walls, however, do not meet at right angles, for the corners are rounded so that the whole is an oval shape, because when the people pray in this mosque they must face the Ka'ba from all directions. Where the mosque is longest, that is, from Abraham's Gate to the Bani Hashem Gate, it measures 424 cubits. The width, from Bab al-Nadwa [Council Gate] on the north to the Safa Gate on the south, the widest point, is 304 cubits. Because of its oval shape, it is narrower in places and wider in others. Around the mosque are three vaulted colonnades with marble columns. In the middle of the structure a square area has been made. The long side of the vaulting, which faces the mosque courtyard, has forty-five arches, with twenty-three arches across the breadth. The marble columns number 184 in all and are said to have been ordered by the Bagdad caliphs and to have been brought by sea from Syria. The story goes that when these columns arrived in Mecca, the ropes that had been used to secure the columns on board ship and onto carts were cut and sold for sixty thousand dinars. One of the columns, a shaft of red marble, stands at the spot called al-Nadwa Gate; it is said to have been bought for its weight in dinars and is estimated at three thousand maunds.

There are eighteen doors in the Harâm Mosque, all built with arches supported by marble columns, but none is set with a door that can be closed. 29 On the eastern side are four doors. Set in

29 This passage presents a good deal of difficulty on the names of the gates around the sanctuary. Nâzer says that the east wall has four gates (he names three), the south wall seven (he names six), the west wall three (he gives two), and the north wall four (he names five). Since the gates have changed their names over the centuries with the various repairs made to the sanctuary walls, as well as with topographical changes outside the sanctuary (not to mention the corrupt state of the Safaritama text itself), it is almost impossible to say for certain which of Nâzer's gates correspond to which gates as they were known earlier and/or later. A tentative correlation is given as follows:

29: The Prophets' Gate, also known as Bab al-Nabî [Funeral Gate]. (2) The next gate on this wall is known as Bab al-Abâs [Abbas's Gate] but is not named by Nâzer. (3) The next gate is Bab al-'Aţâ [Ab's Gate], also known as Bab Bani Hashem [The Bani Hashem Gate], in conformity with Nâzer's report. I do not know what to make of Nâzer's second gate at the southeastern corner, which, as he says, is also known as Bab al-Nabî: he may mean Bab al-Abâs, which was known, along with Bab al-Nabî, as Bab al-Nabî. (4) The fourth gate on this wall, at the northeastern corner, would be the Bab Bani Shâyba [The Bani Shâyba Gate], which Nâzer lists with the gates of the north wall at the end of his report.
the north corner is the Bāb al-Nabi [Prophet’s Gate] with three arches. On this same wall in the southern corner is another door also called Bāb al-Nabi. There are more than one hundred cubits between these two doors, and the latter has two arches. Exiting by this door, one is in the Druggie’s Market, where the Prophet’s house was. He used to come into the mosque to pray by this door. Passing by this door, still on the east wall, one comes to ‘Afi’s Gate, through which ‘Ali, the Prince of the Faithful, used to enter for prayer. This gate has three arches. Past this is another minaret, to which one runs during the sa’iy from the

On the south wall Nāser states that there are seven gates: (1) the gate he calls Bāb al-Dārṣqīn [Fullers’ Gate] should be the gate known as Bāb Būzān. Ebn Jauy, who was there in the 1180s, says that two of the south gates were known as Bāb al-Dārṣqīn. (2) Nāser’s “Bāb al-Fassānīn” (3) should be the gate normally called Bāb al-Būzān [The Male Gate], originally the Bāb Bani Sufyān b. ’Abd al-Aṣad. (2) This is Bāb al-Safā’I [The Safa’I Gate], as all are agreed. (4–6) Nāser gives two names, Bāb al-Tawā [The Tawā Gate, after a valley in Mecca] and Bāb al-Tammārīn [The Dateseller’s Gate]: it is difficult to say which of these corresponds to the gates normally known as (4) Bāb Bani Makkah [The Bani Makkah Gate], also known as Bāb Aṣyād al-Saghir [The Small Aṣyād Gate, after a hill in Mecca called Aṣyād and Jayyāl], (5) Bāb al-Majīlīyah, also known as Bāb al-Rahma [The Mercy Gate] and Bāb Aṣyād, and (6) Bāb Bani Taym [The Bani Taym Gate], later known as Bāb Madraṣat al-Sharif’ī Aṭtān. (7) Nāser’s “Bāb al-Ma’āmel” [Workshop Gate], outside of which was located Abu Jahi’s house, is the Bāb Orom Ham, also known as Bāb Al-Hadi Jahl and Bāb Aṣyād al-Kabir [The Great Aṣyād Gate].

On the west wall, Nāser says that there are three gates; however, he gives only two names: (1) his “Bāb ‘Uroz” is certainly a textual corruption of Bāb al-Hazwarah, named for a marketplace that was incorporated into the sanctuary, and Bāb al-Wedjat [The Farewell Gate]. (2) His Bāb Ebrūsham [Abrahám’s Gate] is in conformity with other sources and is also known as Bāb al-Khawāṣīn [Tailors’ Gate]. (3) This is unnamed by Nāser but must be the Bāb Bani Sahl, also known as Bāb al-‘Umr [Minor Pilgrimage Gate] and Bāb Bani Jumāh.

On the south wall, according to Nāser, are four gates: (1) his Bāb al-Wasit should be the gate known as Bāb al-Sodūr and Bāb al-‘Aţāq [Ancient Gate]. (2) This is Bāb al-Ajaḍ, as all sources are agreed, later known as Bāb al-Besītīya after the namass of ‘Abd al-Besītī [Besītī]. (3) Bāb al-Nawāwī [Counsel Gate] is also known as Bāb al-Ziyāda [Projection Gate]. Nāser does not mention the single gate into the Ziyāda known as Bāb al-Qabī [Qabī’s Gate]. (4) Nāser’s “Bāb al-Mas‘hāwara” [Advancement Gate] must be the single gate usually known as Bāb al-‘Arraṣa [Little Lane Gate]. The last gate named by Nāser, the Bāb Bani Shuyba, has been reckoned in the east wall, above. See A. Shawkat M. M. Al-Asrāfi, Aḥḥār al-Ma‘dir, ed. R. Bashir al-Nāsurī (Mecca: Dar al-‘Aṣrāf wa-Madīnah, 1385/1964), vol. 2, p. 387 f.; Ābu Hāsan Muhammad b. ‘Ubayd Ebn ‘Ubayd b. ‘Ubayd (Bâlût), Dir. ‘Aṣrāf, 1384/1964, p. 52 f.; Ābu ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad Nāsur al-‘Imrān, Book of Travels and the Ka’ba

Bani Hāshem b. ‘Abd Allâh, and which is one of the four minarets previously described.

In the south wall, which forms the length of the mosque, are seven gates. The first, at the corner and semicircular in shape, is Bāb al-Dārṣqīn [Fullers’ Gate] and has two arches. Slightly to the west is another two-arched gate called Bāb al-Fassānīn [2]. At an equal distance is the al-Safā’I Gate which has five arches. This middle gate is the largest of all and has two small arches on either side. It was by this gate that the Apostle of God went out to Safa’I to pray. The threshold of this middle gate is of a large white stone, although it once was black. The Apostle placed his holy foot there and left an imprint. This footprint was later cut out of the black stone and set into the white stone so that the toes face inside the mosque. For a blessing, some pilgrims place their foreheads on this print and others, their feet. I thought it more fitting to place my head thereupon. A bit to the west of the al-Safā’I Gate is the Bāb al-Towā, which has two arches. A little farther on is the Bāb al-Tammārīn, again with two arches. Past this is the Bāb al-Ma‘āmel, with two arches. Directly facing this gate is Abu Jahi’s house, which is now used as a privy.

In the western wall, the width of the mosque, there are three gates, the first of which is in the south corner and is called Bāb ‘Uroz. Its north is the south corner of the middle of the side is the Abraham’s Gate, which has three arches.

In the north or long wall there are four gates: in the west corner is Bāb al-Wasit with one arch; to the east is the Bāb al-Ajaḍ with one arch; in the middle of the side is the Bāb al-Nawāwī with two arches; past that is the Bāb al-Mas‘hāwara with one arch, and finally at the northeast corner is the Bāb Bani-Shayba.

The Ka’ba stands in the middle of the courtyard and is rectangular, with the length on a north-south axis. It is seventeen cubits long, thirty [high], and sixteen wide. The door is toward the east. Entering the Ka’ba, you find the Iraqi corner on the right, the Black Stone corner on the left, the Yemen corner at the southwest, and the Syrian corner at the northwest. The Black Stone is set in a large stone in one corner of the Ka’ba at about the height of a man’s chest.
The Shape of the Stone

The Black Stone is oval in shape, one hand, four fingers long and eight fingers wide. From the Black Stone to the door of the Ka'ba is four cubits. The space between the Stone and the Ka'ba door is called the Moltazem. The door is four cubits off the ground so that when standing on tiptoe you can reach the threshold, although a wooden staircase wide enough for ten men abreast has been constructed so that you can get inside when necessary. The floor is raised as high as the door.

A Description of the Ka'ba Door

The door to the Ka'ba is made of teak and is a double door 6½ cubits tall. Each half is 1½ ells wide so that the whole door is 3½ ells wide. The face of the door contains inscriptions and silver circles. The inscriptions are done in gold burnished with silver and contain the following Koranic verse: "Verily the first house appointed unto men to worship in was that which was in Becca." Two large silver rings sent from Ghazna are attached to the door too high for anyone to reach. Two other silver rings, smaller than the first two, are attached to the doors such that anyone could reach them. To these lower rings is fitted a large silver lock, and the doors cannot be opened without removing it.

A Description of the Interior of the Ka'ba

The walls are six spans thick, and the floor is paved with white marble. Inside the structure are three small cabinets like platforms, one opposite the door, and the other two on the north side. The interior columns, which are attached to the ceiling, are made of teakwood and, except for one round one, are carved on all four sides. On the north side is a long, red marble slab set into the floor. It is said that the Apostle prayed on this slab, hence anyone who knows this tries to pray there also. The walls are faced with multicolored marble. On the western side are six silver mahrebs nailed to the wall. Each one is a man's height and elaborately worked in gold and burnished in silver. These niches are raised off the floor. From the door to a height of four cubits the walls are plain; above that height they are covered with marble up to the ceiling, elaborately decorated and mostly plated with gold. The tops to the three cabinets already mentioned, one each in the Iraq, Syria, and Yemen corners, are two wooden planks nailed to the walls with silver nails. These planks are from Noah's ark. Each one is five yards long and one yard wide. The top of the cabinet behind the Black Stone is draped with red brocade.

Inside the door, in the corner to the right, is a square structure three yards by three, in which there is a small door leading to the roof. A silver door is placed there and is called the Bab al-Rahman (Gate of Mercy), and there is a silver lock affixed to the door. The roof is another door, like a trap door, both sides of which are plated in silver. The ceiling is wooden, but it is all covered with brocade so that no wood is visible. Over the front wall is an inscription in gold with the name of the sultan of Egypt who took Mecca from the caliphs of the house of 'Abbás, al-Mo'ez le-Din Alláh. There are four other large silver plaques nailed to the wall with silver nails, on each of which is the name of a sultan of Egypt who sent a plaque during his reign. Between the columns are hung three silver lamps. The roof of the Ka'ba is covered with Yemenite marble and looks like crystal. There are four skylights in the corners, and over each of these is a piece of glass, so that the light can come in but not the rain. The rainspout is in the middle of the north side; it is three yards long and covered with gold writing.

The covering of the Ka'ba is white and has embroidery in two places. The embroidery bands are on ell wide and are separated by a distance of about ten ells. The spaces above and below the embroidery are equal, so that by means of the bands, the height is divided into three segments ten ells each. On four sides
of the covering are woven colored medallions geometrically decorated with gold thread. On each side are three medallions, a large one in the middle and a smaller one on either side. Thus the four sides contain a total of twelve medallions. On the north side, outside the building, is constructed a wall, about one and one-half ells high. Each end of this wall curves in toward a corner of the Ka'ba so that the wall is bowed and semicircular. The midpoint of this wall is fifteen yards away from the Ka'ba wall. The wall and ground of this place are paved in colored marble in designs. This place is called Hejr, and the water from the rainspout pours into this Hejr. Beneath the rainspout is placed a green stone slab in the shape of a medallion, into which the water falls from the spout. The stone is large enough for a man to pray on.

Abraham's Station is to the east of the Ka'ba. It is a rock that has two imprints of Abraham's feet. It is placed in another stone and covered on all four sides up to a man's height by wood worked as finely as can be imagined, with silver drums affixed. On two sides the covering is bound with chains to the large rocks and with two locks so that no one can tamper with it. Between the Station and the Ka'ba is a space of thirty cubits.

The Well of Zamzam is forty-six cubits east of the Black Stone corner of the Ka'ba. The top of the well is 3½ ells square, and the water is brackish but can be drunk. The enclosure over the top is made of slabs of white marble two cubits tall, and all around the well are basins so that water may be poured for ablutions. The ground is covered with a latticed wooden grill beneath which the water flows away. The door to the structure is toward the east.

Opposite the Well of Zamzam, also to the east, is another square edifice with a dome. It is called Seqāyat al-Hāj [Pilgrims' Drinking Place] and holds water vats from which pilgrims drink.

To the east of the Seqāyat al-Hāj is another, rectangular

structure with three domes. It is called Khezānāt al-Zayt [Oil Storage]; and candles, oil, and lamps are kept there.

All around the Ka'ba are columns, each pair of which are spanned with wooden beams carved in decorative designs. These beams have rings and hooks for suspending lamps and candleholders at night, and they are called mashī'el. Between the Ka'ba and the mashī'el is a space 150 ells across, which is where the circumambulation is performed.

The buildings in the courtyard of the Harām Mosque, not counting the magnificent Ka'ba, are three: the well of Zamzam, the Seqāyat al-Hāj, and the Khezānāt al-Zayt.

Beneath the arcade next to the mosque wall are chests, one for each of the principal cities of the Maghreb, Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, the two Iraqs, Khorasan, Transoxiana, and so on.

Four parasangs to the north of Mecca is a place called Borqa with running water and trees and two parasangs square in area, where the emir of Mecca and his army stay.

This year I remained as a mojāzār in Mecca from the first of Rajab. During that month it is customary to open the door to the Ka'ba every day at sunup.

A Description of the Opening of the Ka'ba Door

An Arab clan called the Banu Shayba holds the key to the Ka'ba. They function as servants to the House and receive a stipend and robes of honor from the sultan of Egypt. Their chief keeps possession of the key, and when he comes to the mosque, five or six persons accompany him. As they approach the building, ten or so pilgrims bring the stairs we have previously mentioned and place them at the door. The old man mounts and stands at the threshold, and to open the door, a man on either side of him holds back the brocade covering as though holding a great robe with which he has been vested. He opens the lock and removes it from the rings. A great number of pilgrims will have assembled at the door, and when it is opened, they raise their

28 The "two Iraqs" are "Persian Iraq," or western Iran north of Khuzestān and south of Azerbaijan (also called Jebel), and "Arab Iraq," or lower Mesopotamia.
hands and shout in prayer. Since the voices of the pilgrims can be heard throughout Mecca, all know that the Ka'ba door has been opened and, all at once, shout in prayer so that a great tumult fills the city. Then the old man goes inside, with the other two men holding back the covering, and prays two rak'āts. Both wings of the door are then opened and the chief, standing at the threshold, delivers a sermon in a loud voice and invokes blessings upon the Messenger of God and his family. Then the old man and his two assistants stand aside from the door, and the pilgrims begin to pour in. Everyone prays two rak'āts and then leaves. This continues until nearly noon. When praying inside the Ka'ba, you turn your face toward the door, although any other direction is also licit. I counted the number of people inside when the building was filled to capacity and reckoned 720.

The common people of the Yemen who come on the Pilgrimage look generally like Hindus; they wear lungis, have long hair and plated beards, and carry Qatīf daggers called kattārā at their waists, like Hindus. They say that the Hindus originated from the Yemen, and that kattārā is originally from the Arabic gattāb.30

During the months of Sha'bān, Ramadān, and Shawwāl, the door the the Ka'ba is opened on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays. When Dhu'l-Qa'da comes, it is not opened again.

The Minor Pilgrimage from Je'rāna

Four parasangs north of Mecca is a place called Je'rāna, where Muhammad was with his army. On the 16th of Dhu'l-Qa'da, he donned the khābecca and came from there to Mecca to make a minor pilgrimage. There are two wells there, one called Bir al-Rasul [the Well of the Apostle] and the other Bir 'Ali bhn Abī Tāleh [Ali's Well]. The water of both is extremely good. They are ten yards apart. The custom of the Prophet is still maintained, and at the same time people make a minor pilgrimage. Nearby is a small hill with bowl-like depressions in the rock. It is

said that the Prophet kneaded dough with his own hands in those depressions. For this reason people go there and knead dough with water from those wells. Kindling is gathered from the many trees about, and bread is baked to be taken back home as a blessing. In that same area is a high hill where Belāl the Abyssinian is said to have called out for prayer; hence people still go there to give the call to prayer. When I went, there was an enormous crowd, with more than a thousand camel litters stretching clear to the next well.

The route I took this time from Egypt to Mecca was three hundred parasangs. From Mecca to the Yemen is twelve parasangs.

The Plain of 'Arafa lies in the midst of small, hump-backed mountains and is two parasangs square. There was once a mosque there built by Abraham, but now only a ruined brick pulpit remains. At the midday prayer, the preacher mounts this pulpit and delivers the sermon. Then the call to prayer is given and two rak'āts are accomplished in congregation, after the custom of travelers. After this, a prayer is made standing, and two more congregational prayers are done. Afterwards, the preacher mounts a camel and [everyone] goes off toward the east.

One parasang from there is a small stone mountain called Jabal al-Rahma [the Mount of Mercy], and here people stand and pray until the sun sets. Pesar-c Shādīdāl, who was the emir of Aden, had water brought some distance and at great expense from this mountain to the Plain of 'Arafa, where he had cisterns constructed that are filled during the Pilgrimage season. This same Shādīdāl built a dome with four large arches on top of the Mount of Mercy so that during the day and night when people are at 'Arafa, lamps visible for two parasangs can be lit atop the dome. It is said that the emir of Mecca took one thousand dinars before giving permission to build this structure.

On the 9th of Dhu'l-Hejā 442 [24 April 1051], with God's help, I completed my fourth Pilgrimage. After the sun had set and the pilgrims and preacher had left 'Arafa, everyone traveled one parasang to Masr' ar al-Harām [Sacred Shrine], which is called Mostalefa. Here a nice structure like a maqṣūra has been built for people to pray in. The stones that are cast in Mina are gathered up here. It is customary to spend the holiday eve in this

30 The Indian double-pronged dagger is called kātra in Hindi (from the Sanskrit kātra) and is a loanword in Persian as kattāra. Nijer erroneously speculates that the word is derived from the Arabic gattāb ("killer").
spot and then to proceed to Mina early the next morning after
the dawn prayer for making the sacrifice. A large mosque called
Khayf is there, although it is not customary to deliver the ser-
mon or to perform the holiday prayer at Mina, as the Prophet
did not establish a precedent.

The tenth day is spent at Mina, and stones are cast, which
practice is explained as a supererogatory act connected with the
Pilgrimage.

On the twelfth, everyone who intends to leave departs directly
from Mina, and those who intend to remain a while in Mecca go
there. Hiring a camel from an Arab for the thirteen-day journey
to Lahd, I bade farewell to God’s House.

On Friday the 19th of Dhul-Hejja 442 [4 May 1051], the first
of the old month of Khordad, I traveled seven parasangs from
Mecca. There was an open plain with a mountain visible in the
distance. Heading toward that mountain, we passed by fields
and villages. There was a well called Bir al-Hosayn bhn Salama
[the Well of Hosayn son of Salama]. The weather was cold. We
continued eastward, and on Monday the 22nd of Dhul-Hejja [7
May] arrived in Tâ’ef, which is twelve parasangs from Mecca.

A Description of Tâ’ef

Tâ’ef is situated on top of a mountain, and in the month of
Khordad it was so cold that you had to sit in the sun, whereas in
Mecca melons had been plentiful. The entire district of Tâ’ef
consists of a wretched little town with a strong fortress. It has a
small bazaar and a pitiful little mosque. There is running water,
and pomegranate and fig trees abound. The tomb of ’Abd Allâh
son of ’Abbas is there near the town. On this spot the Baghdad
caliphs had constructed a large mosque which had incorporated
the tomb into one corner, to the right of the mehkab and pulpit.
Now, however, people have built houses and live there. We left
Tâ’ef.

All along the way were mountains and rubble, and there were
small fortresses and villages everywhere. In the midst of some
rubble, they showed me a small, ruined fortress, which the
Arabs said had been Layâ’s house, although they tell many such
strange tales.31 Further on, we came to a fortress called Motar,
which is twelve parasangs from Tâ’ef. From there, we pro-
ceeded to a district called Thorayyya, where there were many
date-palm groves in which agriculture was maintained by means
of irrigation from wells with waterwheels. There is said to be no
ruler or sultan in that area: each place has an independent chief-
tain or headman. The people are robbers and murderers and
constantly fight among themselves. This place is twenty-five par-
asangs from Tâ’ef.

We continued on past that place and saw a fortress called Jaz’.
Within half a parasang we passed four fortresses, the largest of
which, where we stopped, was called the Bani-Nosayr Fortress,
and it had a few date palms.

As the man from whom I had hired my camel was from Jaz’, I
stayed there for fifteen days, there being no khafer [safe-
conductor] to take us on farther. The Arab tribes of that region
each have a particular territory in which they graze their flocks,
and no stranger can enter one of these territories, since anyone
who does not have a khafer will be captured and plundered.
Therefore, from each tribe there is a khafer, who can pass
through a given territory. The khafer is also called qal‘awuz.

By chance, the leader of the Arabs with whom we had trav-
elled, the Banu Sawâd, came to Jaz’, and we took him as our
khafer. His name was Abu Ghânem ’Abs son of al-Ba’ir, and we
set out under his protection. A group of Arabs, thinking they
had found “prey” (as they call all strangers), came headed to-
ward us; but since their leader was with us, they passed without
saying anything. Had he not been with us, they most certainly
would have destroyed us.

We had to remain among these people for a while because there
was no khafer to take us further. Finally, we found two men
to act as khafer and paid them ten dinars each to take us to the
next tribe.

Among one tribe, some seventy-year-old men told me that in
their whole lives they had drunk nothing but camels’ milk, since

31Layâ was the beloved of Qays, who, forbidden to marry her, roamed like a
madman among the animals of the desert; hence he was called “Majun”
(“mad”). This story was well known among the Arabs and has also inspired
several famous Persian romances on the subject.
in the desert there is nothing but bitter scrub eaten by the camels. They actually imagined that the whole world was like this!

Thus I was taken and handed over from tribe to tribe, the entire time in constant mortal danger. God, however, willed that we come out of there alive.

In the midst of an expanse of rubble, we reached a place called Sarbā, where there were mountains shaped like domes. I have never seen anything like them anywhere. They were not so high that an arrow could not have been shot to the top, and they were as bald and smooth as an egg, not the slightest crack or flaw showing.

Along the way, whenever my companions saw a lizard they killed and ate it. The Arabs, wherever they are, milk their camels for drink. I could neither eat the lizard nor drink camels' milk; therefore, wherever I saw a kind of bush that yielded small berries the size of a pea, I picked a few and subsisted on that.

Falaj

After enduring much hardship and suffering great discomfort, on the 23rd of Safar [6 July] we came to Falaj, a distance of 180 parasangs from Mecca. Falaj lies in the middle of the desert and had once been an important region, but internal strife had destroyed it. The only part left inhabited when we arrived was a strip half a parasang long and a mile wide. Inside this area there were fourteen fortresses inhabited by a bunch of filthy, ignorant bandits. These fourteen fortresses had been divided up between two rival factions who were constantly engaged in hostilities. They claimed to be the “Lords of al-Raṣīn” mentioned in the Koran. They had four irrigation canals for their palm grove, and their fields were on higher ground and watered from wells. They plow with camels, not cows. As a matter of fact, I never saw a cow there. They produce very little in the way of agriculture, and each man has to ration himself with two seers of grain a day. This is baked as bread and suffices from the evening prayer until the next evening, as in the month of Ramadān, although they do eat dates during the day. I saw excellent dates there, much better than in Basra and other places. These people are extremely poverty stricken and destitute; nonetheless, they spend the whole day fighting and killing each other. They have a kind of date called mawdat that weighs ten dirhems, the pit weighing not more than ½ dinar. They claimed that this particular date could be kept for twenty years without spoilage. Their currency is Nishapuri gold.

I stayed four months in this Falaj under the worst possible conditions: nothing of this world remained in my possession except two satchels of books, and they were a hungry, naked, and ignorant people. Everyone who came to pray brought his sword and shield with him as a matter of course. They had no reason to buy books.

There was a mosque in which we stayed. I had a little red and blue paint with me, so I wrote a line of poetry on the wall and drew a branch with leaves up through the writing. When they saw it, they were amazed, and everybody in the compound gathered around to look at what I had done. They told me that if I would paint the mehrab they would give me one hundred mounds of dates. Now a hundred mounds of dates was a fortune for them. Once while I was there, a company of Arab soldiers came and demanded five hundred mounds of dates. They refused to give it and fought, which resulted in the death of ten people from the compound. A thousand palms were cut down, but they did not give up even ten mounds of dates. Therefore, when they offered me that much, I painted the mehrab, and that hundred mounds of dates was an answer to our prayers, since we had not been able to obtain any food.

We had almost given up hope of ever being able to get out of that desert, the nearest trace of civilization in any direction being two hundred parasangs away through fearful, devastating desert. In all those four months, I never saw five mounds of wheat in one place. Finally, however, a caravan came from Yamāma to take goat's leather to Lahsā. Goat's leather is brought from the Yemen via Falaj and sold to merchants. An Arab offered to take me to Basra, but I had no money to pay the fare. It is only two hundred parasangs to Basra from there, and the hire for a camel was one dinar, whereas a good camel can be bought out-
right for two or three dinars. Since I had no cash with me, they
took me on credit on condition that I pay thirty dinars in Basra.
I was forced to agree to these terms, although I had never in my
life so much as set foot in Basra.

The Arabs packed my books and seated my brother on a
camel, and thus, with me on foot, we set out, headed toward the
ascent of the Pleiades. The ground was flat, without so much as a
mountain or hill, and wherever the earth was a bit harder, there
was rainwater standing in pools. As these people travel night
and day, without the slightest trace of a road visible, they must
go by instinct. What is amazing is that with no indication or
warning, suddenly they come upon a well.

To make a long story short, in four days and nights we came
to Yamâma, which has inside a large, old fortress, and outside a
town with a bazaar containing all sorts of artisans and a fine
mosque. The emir there is the Alids of old, and no one has ever
been able to wrest the region from their control, since, in the
first place there is not, nor has there been, a conquering sultan
or king anywhere near, and, in the second, those Alids possess
such might that they can mount three to four hundred horse-
men. They are of the Zaydi sect, and when they stand in prayer
they say, "Mohammad and 'Ali are the best of mankind," and,
"Come to the best deed."

The inhabitants of this town are
Sharifis, and they have running water, irrigation canals, and
many palm groves in the district. They told me that when dates
are plentiful, a thousand maunds are only one dinar.

It is forty parasangs from Yamâma to Lahšâ. During the win-
ter it is possible to travel because potable rainwater collects in
pools, but not in summer.

A Description of Lahšâ

To reach the town of Lahšâ from any direction, you have to
cross vast expanses of desert. The nearest Muslim city to Lahšâ

39These words characterize the Shī'ite (including the Zaydi) call to prayer. The Sunni call to prayer includes neither phrase. In Nâseri's terminology "Alid" (also) refers to any of the Shi'a, including (1) the Zaydis, followers of Zayd, son of the Fourth Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 547/115); members of this sect ruled

that has a ruler is Basra, and that is one hundred and fifty para-
sangs away. There has never been a ruler of Basra, however, who
has attempted an attack on Lahšâ.

All of the town's outlying villages and dependencies are en-
closed by four strong, concentric walls made of reinforced mud
brick. The distance between these walls is about a parasang, and
there are enormous walls inside the town, each the size of five
miles, around. All the water of the district is put to use so
that none goes outside the walls. A really splendid town is situ-
ated inside these fortifications, with all the appurtenances of
a large city, and there are more than twenty thousand soldiers.

They said that the ruler had been a shârîf who prevented the
people from practicing Islam and relieved them of the obliga-
tions of prayer and the fast by claiming that he was the ultimate
authority on such matters. His name was Abu Sa'id and when
you ask the townspeople what sect they belong to, they say they
are Busa'idis. They neither pray nor fast, but they do believe in
Mohammad and his mission. Abu Sa'id told them that he would
come among them again after his death, and his tomb, a fine
shrine, is located inside the city. He directed that six of his [spi-
atal] sons should maintain his rule with justice and equity and
without dispute among themselves until he should come again.

Now they have a palace that is the seat of state and a throne that
accommodates all six kings in one place, and they rule in com-
plete accord and harmony. They have also six viziers, and when
the kings are all seated on their throne, the six viziers are seated
opposite on another bench. Thus all affairs are handled in mu-
ternal consultation. At the time I was there they had thirty thou-
sand Zanzibari and Abyssinian slaves working in the fields and
gardens.

They take no tax from the peasantry, and whenever anyone is
stricken by poverty or contracts a debt they take care of his
needs until the debtor's affairs should be cleared up. And if any-
in Gillân, Daylam and Tabarzân in Iran from 864 to 1126 and founded a dy-
nasty in the Yemen in 901; (2) Isma'ilis, who followed Isma'il, son of the Sixth
Imam Ja'far al-Sâdeq (d. 148/766); to this sect belonged the Fatimids of Egypt;
and (3) Twelvers (ikhshâ'is), who followed the literal descent of imams from
'Ali until the Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mu'tazur (ca. 204/820).

39 Cf. Bernard Lewis, The Origins of Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-
one is in debt to another, the creditor cannot claim more than the amount of the debt. Any stranger to the city who possesses a craft by which to earn his livelihood is given enough money to buy the tools of his trade and establish himself, when he repays however much he was given. If anyone's property or implements suffer loss and the owner is unable to undertake necessary repairs, they appoint their own slaves to make the repairs and charge the owner nothing. The rulers have several gristmills in Lahsâ where the citizenry can have their meal ground into flour for free, and the maintenance of the buildings and the wages of the millers are paid by the rulers. The rulers are called simply "lord" and the viziers, "counsel."

There was once no Friday mosque in Lahsâ, and the sermon and congregational prayer were not held. A Persian man, however, named 'Ali son of Ahmad, who was a Muslim, a pilgrim and very wealthy, did build a mosque in order to provide for pilgrims who arrived in the city.

Their commercial transactions are carried out in lead [tokens], which are kept in wrappings, each of which is equivalent to six thousand dirhem-weights. When paying for something, they do not even count out the wrappings but take them as they are. No one takes this currency outside, however. They also weave fine scarves that are exported to Bahrain and other places.

They do not prevent anyone from performing prayers, although they themselves do not pray. The ruler answers most politely and humbly anyone who speaks to him, and wine is not indulged in.

A horse outfitted with collar and crown is kept always tied close by the tomb of Abu Sa'id, and a watch is continually maintained day and night for such time as he should rise again and mount the horse. Abu Sa'id said to his sons, "When I come again among you, you will not recognize me. The sign will be that you strike my neck with my sword. If it be me, I will immediately come back to life." He made this stipulation so that no one else could claim to be him.

In the time of the Baghdad caliphs one of the rulers attacked Mecca and killed a number of people who were circumambulating the Ka'ba at the time. They removed the Black Stone from its corner and took it to Lahsâ. They said that the stone was a "human magnet" that attracted people, not knowing that it was the nobility and magnificence of Mohammad that drew people there, for the Stone had lain there for long ages without anyone paying any particular attention to it. In the end, the Black Stone was bought back and returned to its place.

In the city of Lahsâ they sell all kinds of animals for meat, such as dog, cat, donkey, cow, sheep, and so on, and the head and skin of whatever animal it is is placed next to the meat so that the customer will know what he is buying. They fatten up dogs, just like grazed sheep, until they are too heavy to walk, after which they are slaughtered and eaten.

Seven parasangs east of Lahsâ is the sea. In this sea is the island of Bahrain, which is fifteen parasangs long. There is a large city there and many palm groves. Pearls are found in the sea thereabouts, and half of the divers' take belongs to the sultan of Lahsâ. South of Lahsâ is Oman, which is on the Arabian peninsula, but three sides face desert that is impossible to cross. The region of Oman is eighty parasangs square and tropical; there they grow coconuts, which they call nargil. Directly east of Oman across the sea are Kish and Mokrân. South of Oman is Aden, while in the other direction is the province of Fars.

There are so many dates in Lahsâ that animals are fattened on them, and at times more than one thousand mounds are sold for one dinar. Seven parasangs north of Lahsâ is a region called Qatif, where there is also a large town and many date-palms. An Arab emir from there once attacked Lahsâ, where he maintained seige for a year. One of those fortification walls he captured and wrought much havoc, although he did not obtain much of anything. When he saw me, he asked whether or not it was in the stars for him to take Lahsâ, as they were irreligious. I told him what was expedient [for me to say], since, in my opinion also, the bedouins and people of Lahsâ were as close as anyone could be to irreligiosity, there being people there who, from one year to the next, never perform ritual ablutions. This that I record is told from my own experience and not from false rumors, since I was there among them for nine consecutive months, and not at intervals.

I was unable to drink their milk, and whenever I asked for water to drink they offered me milk instead. As I did not take
the proffered milk and asked for water, they would say, “Whenever you see water, ask for it there!” In all their lives they had never seen a bath or running water.

Now let me return to my story. Having set out for Basra from Yamāma, we encountered some way stations with water and others with no water. On the 20th of Sha’bān 445 [27 December 1051] we arrived in Basra.

**A Description of the City of Basra**

The city has a large wall, except for the portion that faces the water, where there is no wall. The water here is all marsh, the Tigris and Euphrates coming together at the beginning of the Basra district, and when the water of the Hawīz joins the confluence, it is called Shatt al-‘Arab. From this Shatt al-‘Arab, two large channels have been cut, between the mouths of which is a distance of one parasang, running in the direction of the ḡebel for four parasangs, after which they converge and run another one parasang to the south. From these channels numerous canals have been dug in all directions among palm groves and orchards. Of these two channels, the higher one, which is northeast, is called Nahr Ma‘qel, whereas the southwestern one is called Nahr Obolla. These two channels form an enormous rectangular “island,” on the shortest side of which Basra is situated. To the southwest of Basra is open plain that supports neither settlement nor agriculture.

When I arrived, most of the city lay in ruins, the inhabited parts being greatly dispersed, with up to half a parasang from one quarter to another. Nonetheless, the walls were strong and well kept, the populace numerous, and the ruler with plenty of income. At that time, the emir of Basra was the son of Aba Kālījār the Daylamite, king of Fārs. His vizier was a Persian, Abu Mansur Shāhmardān by name.

Every day there are three bazaars in Basra: in the morning transactions are held at a place called Suq al-Khoza’a [Market of the Khozā’a Tribe]; in the middle of the day at Suq ‘Othmān[


[‘Othman’s Market]; and at the end of the day at Suq al-Qaddāhīn [Fintmakers Market]. The procedure at the bazaar is as follows: you turn over whatever you have to a moneychanger and get in return a draft; then you buy whatever you need, deducting the price from the moneychanger’s draft. No matter how long one might stay in the city, one would never need anything more than a moneychanger’s draft.

When we arrived we were as naked and destitute as madmen, for it had been three months since we had unloosed our hair. I wanted to enter a bath in order to get warm, the weather being chilly and our clothing scant. My brother and I were clad only in old lungis with a piece of coarse fabric on our backs to keep out the cold. “In this state who would let us into a bath?” I asked. Therefore, I sold a small satchel in which I kept my books and wrapped the few rusty dirhems I had received in a piece of paper to give the bath attendant, thinking that he might give us a little while longer in the bath in order for us to remove the grime from our bodies. When I handed him the change, he looked at us as though we were madmen and said, “Get away from here! People are coming out of the bath.” As he would not allow us in, we came away humiliated and in haste. Even the children who were playing at the bathhouse door thought we were madmen and, throwing stones and yelling, chased after us. We retired into a corner and reflected in amazement on the state of the world.

Now, as we were in debt to the camel driver for thirty dinars, we had no recourse save the vizier of the king of Ahwāz, Abu’l-Fath ‘Ali son of Ahmad, a worthy man, learned in poetry and belles-lettres, and very generous, who had come to Basra with his sons and retinue and taken up residence but who, at present, had no administrative position. Therefore, I got in touch with a Persian, also a man of learning, with whom I had some acquaintance and who had entree to the vizier but who was also in straightened circumstances and totally without means to be of assistance to me. He mentioned my situation to the vizier, who, as soon as he heard, sent a man with a horse for me to come to him just as I was. Too ashamed of my destitution and nakedness, I hardly thought it fitting to appear before him, so I wrote a note of regret, saying that I would come to him later. I had two reasons for doing this: one was my poverty, and the other was,
as I said to myself, that he now imagines that I have some claim to being learned, but when he sees my note he will figure out just what my worth is so that when I go before him I need not be ashamed.

Immediately he sent me thirty dinars to have a suit of clothing made. With that amount I bought two fine suits and on the third day appeared at the vizier’s assembly. I found him to be a worthy, polite, and scholarly man of pleasant appearance, humble, religious, and well spoken. He had four sons, the eldest of whom was an eloquent, polite, and reasonable youth called Ra’is Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ahmad son of ‘Ali son of Ahmad. Not only a poet and administrator, he was wise and devout beyond his youthful age. We were taken in and stayed there from the first of Sha’bān until the middle of Ramadān. The thirty dinars due the Arab for our camel were paid by the vizier, and I was relieved of that burden. (May God thus deliver all His servants from the torment of debt!)

When I desired to depart he sent me off by sea with gifts and bounteous good things so that I reached Fārs in ease and comfort, thanks to the generosity of that noble man. (May God delight in such noble men!)

In Basra there are thirteen shrines in the name of the Prince of the Faithful ‘Ali son of Abu Ta’lab, one of which is called the Banū Māzūn Shrine. The Prince of the Faithful ‘Ali came to Basra during Rāh’ī in the year 36 [September 655], while ‘A’isha was waging war against him, and married Laylā, the daughter of Mas‘ud Nahshali. This shrine was the house of that lady, and the Prince of the Faithful stayed there for seventy-two days, after which he returned to Kufa. There is another shrine next to the cathedral mosque called the Rā‘d al-Tīb Shrine.

Inside the cathedral mosque, I saw a wooden post thirty cubits long and five spans, four fingers thick, although it is somewhat thicker at one end. This post is from India and the Prince of the Faithful is said to have picked it up and brought it there. The other eleven shrines are in different places, and I visited them all.

After our worldly condition had taken a turn for the better and we each had won decent clothing, we went back one day to the bathhouse we had not been allowed to enter. As soon as we came through the door the attendant and everyone there stood
up respectfully. We went inside, and the scrubber and servant came to attend to us. When we emerged from the bath all who were in the dressing room rose and remained standing until we had put on our clothes and departed. During that time the attendant had said to a friend of his, “These are those very young men whom we refused admission one day.” They imagined that we did not know their language, but I said in Arabic, “You are perfectly correct. We are the very ones who had old sacks tied to our backs.” The man was ashamed and most apologetic. Now these two events transpired within twenty days, and I have included the story so that men may know not to lament adversity brought on by fate and not to despair of the Creator’s mercy, for He is merciful indeed.

A Description of the Ebb and Flow of the Tide at Basra

Every twenty-four hours the Sea of Oman flows twice, rising approximately ten ells. When high tide has been achieved it gradually ebbs, receding ten to twelve ells. The ten ells just mentioned can be seen either on a post erected at Basra or against the city walls. Where the ground is flat the tide covers an enormous area inland. The Tigris and Euphrates indeed flow so calmly that in places it cannot be determined which direction the water is flowing, and when the tide floods the river water rises for nearly forty parasangs, and one would think the flow had reversed itself and the water was backing up. In other places along the coast, however, the shore is relatively steep. Wherever the land is flat the water covers a large area, but wherever it is steep less ground is taken by the tide. They say that the ebb and flow of the tide are connected in some way to the moon because when the moon is at one of the nodes, which occurs on the tenth and [twenty] fourth [of the month], the flow is more; when the moon is on the east or west horizon, the ebb is maximum, and when the moon is in conjunction with or directly opposite the sun the flow is greatest and highest. During the quadratures it is the least, that is, the flow is not so great as during alignment with the sun, and the ebb is not so low as during alignment. For these reasons they say that the tides have something to do with the moon, but God knows best.

I found the town of Obolla, located by the channel named for it, to be populous, with more palaces, bazaars, mosques, and caravanserais than can be described. The original part of the town is to the north of the channel, although there are also quarters, mosques, caravanserais, and bazaars to the north. There are such pleasant edifices there as are to be found nowhere else in the world, and this section is called Shātir Orhmān.

The large marsh formed by the Tigris and Euphrates and called Shatt al-'Arab lies to the east of Obolla, the channel cutting across the south. The Obolla and Ma'qel Rivers join at Basra, as has already been stated.

Basra has twenty districts, each of which is comprised of villages and farms. The districts of Basra are as follows: Heshābān, Sharabba, Balas, 'Aqr (al-Sadān?), Maysān, Nahr Harb, Shatt al-'Arab, Sa'd (?), Salm (?), Jarayr, al-Mashūl, al-Sam'al (?), al-Jawwīth, Jazirat al-'Ozmā (?), Masroqānān, al-Shārir (?), Jazirat al-'Orsh al-Hamīdā (?), al-Howayza, al-Mofradāt (?).

They say that once, at the mouth of the Obolla channel, there was a huge whirlpool that prevented boats from passing, but a wealthy lady of Basra had four hundred boats constructed and filled with date pits. The boats were then tightly sealed and sunk in the whirlpool, and now ships can sail through.

In short, the middle of Shawwal 1443 [February 1052] we left Basra by boat. For four parasangs out of Obolla there was on both sides of the channel an uninterrupted series of gardens, orchards, kiosks, and belvederes. Tributaries of the channel, each the size of a river, opened up on each side. When we reached Shātir' Orhmān we disembarked just opposite the city of Obolla and stayed a while.

8Some of these names have been verified in Yaqūt, Muqarn al-Buldān, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866–1870). They are as follows: Heshābān (II, 272), Sharabba (II, 272), Balas (I, 788), 'Aqr (a 'Aqr al-Sadān is given in I, 697), Maysān (IV, 714), Mafāt (IV, 566), Nahr Harb (IV, 838), Shatt al-'Arab (not given in Yaqūt but sufficiently well known), Jarayr (II, 68), al-Mashūl (IV, 836), al-Jawwīth (I, 165, with this reading for Dāhir-Siyāq's edition, al-Junā), Masroqānān (IV, 829, with this reading as suggested by Dāhir-Siyāq for his edition's Masafrāl), al-Howayza (II, 3716). The others (Sa'd, Salm, al-Sam'al, Jazirat al-'Ozmā, Shārir, Jazirat al-'Orsh [perhaps al-Ford] al-Hamīdā [perhaps a separate name], and al-Mofradāt) have not been identified.
On the 17th we boarded a type of boat called busī, and great multitudes of people on either side called out, "O busī, may God speed you in safety!" When we reached 'Abbādān everyone got out of the boat. 'Abbādān is a coastal town something like an island because the marsh splits in two there, and the only way to reach the town is by water. To the south is the sea itself, which, during high tide, reaches right up to the city walls; at low tide, however, the sea recedes a little less than two parasangs. Some of our party bought carpets in 'Abbādān and others something to eat. The next morning the ship set out again toward the north. For ten parasangs the sea water was drinkable and good, since it was marsh water, the marsh flowing like a tongue out into the sea.

At dawn something like a small bird could be seen on the sea. The closer we approached the larger it appeared. When it was about one parasang to our left, an adverse wind came up so they dropped anchor and took down the sail. I asked what that thing was and was told that it was called a "khashshāb." It consisted of four enormous wooden posts made of teak and was shaped something like a war machine, squarish, wide at the base and narrow at the top. It was about forty ells above the surface of the water and had tile and stone on top held together by wood so as to form a kind of ceiling. On top of that were four arched openings where a sentinel could be stationed. Some said this khashshāb had been constructed by a rich merchant, others that a king had had it made. It served two functions: first, that area was being silted in and the sea consequently becoming shallow so that if a large ship chanced to pass, it would strike bottom. At night lamps encased in glass (so that the wind would not blow them out) were lit for people to see from afar and take precaution, since there was no possibility of rescue. Second, one could know the extent of the land and, if there were thieves, steer a ship away. When the khashshāb was no longer visible, another one of the same shape came into view; but this one did not have the watchtower on top, as though it had not been finished.27

27In his geography Abu'l-Fedā says: "To the south and east of 'Abbādān are wooden [piles] (khashshāb), which are markers in the sea for boats to tie up to and not to go beyond lest the tide be low and they strike ground. At night fire is placed on these markers as a beacon for ships." Abu'l-Fedā, Taucin al-hadīn, ed. by Reinaud and MacGuckin de Slane: Paris, L'Imprimerie Royale, 1840, p. 309.

Next we came to Mahrūbān, a large coastal town with a bazaar and fine mosque. Their only water is from rain, there being no freshwater wells or canals, although they have enough tanks and cisterns to insulate an adequate supply. Three large caravanserais have been built there, each one as strong and as tall as a fortress. I saw the name of Ya'qūb son of Layth written on the pulpit of the Friday mosque and asked how this had come to be. They told me that Ya'qūb son of Layth had conquered up to this town but that no other emir of Khurāsan had had the might to do it. When I was there, the town was in the hands of the sons of Abū Kālijār, the king of Fars. Foodstuffs and commodities all have to be brought in from outside since there is nothing but fish in the town, which serves as a customs station and port.

South along the coast are Tavva and Kāzarun, but I remained in Mahrūbān because they said the way was not safe, since the sons of Abū Kālijār had each rebelled against the other and had put the countryside into confusion. I was told that in Arrajān there was a great and learned man called Shāikh Sadiq Moham- mad son of 'Abd al-Malek. When I heard this, since I was so weary of staying in that town, I wrote him a note explaining my situation and pleaded with him to get me out of there and into a safe place. Three days later thirty armed foot soldiers approached me and told me they had been sent by the shāikh to take me to Arrajān. Thus we were hospitably taken to Arrajān, a large town with a population of twenty thousand, to the east of which is a river that comes from the mountains. North of this river four large canals have been cut at great expense to bring water through the town and out the other side to where there are gardens and orchards of dates, oranges, citrons, and olives in abundance. The city is so constructed that for every house above ground there is also one below. Water flows through these basements and cellars so that during the summer they can be comfortable. The people there are of most every sect, and the Mu'tazilites have an imām called Abu Sa'id of Basra, an eloquent man with some claim to knowledge of geometry and mathematics. We held discussions together on dialectic theology and mathematics.

We left on the first of Moharram and headed for Isfahan via the mountains. Along the way we came to a mountain with a narrow pass, said by the common people to have been cut by Bah-
râm Gor with his sword. They call it Shamshir-borid ["Cut-by-Sword"]. There we saw a great stream that emerged on our right from a hole and then tumbled down a great height. The common people said that this water flows continuously during the summer but stops and freezes over during the winter months.

We reached Lurajân, which is forty parasangs from Arrajân and which is the border of Fars. From there we continued on to Khân Lânjân, where I noticed the name of Toghrel Beg inscribed over the gate. It was only seven parasangs from there to Isfahan, and the people of Khân Lânjân were remarkably safe and secure, everyone occupied with his own business.

On the 8th of Safar 444 [9 June 1052] we reached Isfahan. It is one hundred and eighty parasangs from Basra to Isfahan, a city located on a flat plain and with a delightful climate. Whenever one sinks a well ten ells into the ground, refreshing cold water comes out. The city has a high, strong wall with gates, embasures, and battlements all around. Inside the city are courses for running water, fine tall buildings, and a beautiful and large Friday mosque. The city wall is said to be three and a half parasangs long, and everything inside is in a flourishing state, as I saw nothing in ruins. There were many bazaars; one that I saw was only for money changers and contained two hundred stalls. Every bazaar has doors and gates, as do all quarters and lanes.

The caravanserais are exceptionally clean, and in one lane, called Ku-Tarâz, there were fifty fine caravanserais, in each of which were retail merchants and shopkeepers. The caravanserai we entered had 1,300 kharâns of goods, yet there was no difficulty in finding space since there seemed to be no lack of room or fodder.

When Sultan Toghrel Beg Abu Tâleb Mohammad son of Mi-kâl son of Saljuq took the city, he appointed as governor a young Nishapuri, a good administrator with a fine hand, composed, well met, a patron of learning, well spoken, and generous, called Khwâja 'Amid. The sultan ordered him not to levy taxes on the people for three years, and, as he followed this order, the peasantry that had fled returned home. He had been one of the bureaucrats serving under Suri. 36

36Suri b. â-Îmââz, the chief of Khorasan under the Ghaznavid Mas'âd, according to M. Dhib-Sîlqâ in his second edition of the Safarnâma (Tehran, 1335/1957), p. 121, n. 1.

Before our arrival there had been a great famine, but by the time we came they were harvesting barley, and 1½ maunds of bread were selling for one dirhem, as were 5 maunds of barley bread. The people, however, were still complaining that never in this city had less than 8 maunds of bread been more than one dirhem. Of all the Persian-speaking cities, I never saw a finer, more commodious, or more flourishing city than Isfahan. They claimed that wheat, barley, and other grains could be left for twenty years without spoiling, although some said that before the walls had been built the air was even better than now and that it had changed with the construction of the wall so that some things would spoil. The villages, however, were said to be as good as ever.

As the caravan was not going to leave for some time, I remained in Isfahan for twenty days. On the 28th of Safar [29 June 1052] we departed and came to the village of Haythamâbâd. From there we reached Na’in via the desert and mountains of Maskinân, a distance of thirty parasangs. From Na’in we traveled forty-three parasangs to the village of Garm in the Bâyân district, which comprises some ten or twelve villages. It is warm there, and there are date trees. This region was formerly held by the Kufân, 37 but when we passed through, the prince Gilâki had seized the region from them and had stationed a detachment in a small fortress in a village called Pâyâda in order to control the area and keep the roads salient. Whenever the Kufân attempted banditry, Prince Gilâki’s cavalry were sent to capture and kill them. It was due to the maintenance of that prince the road was safe and the people secure. (May God keep just princes and have mercy on the souls of the departed!)

Every two parasangs along this Bâyân road, small towers with water tanks have been built to collect rainwater in places that are not brackish so that people will not lose their way and also so that travelers may stop off and rest for a while out of the heat and cold.

We saw great areas of shifting sands along the way. If anyone were to stray from the markers and wander into these shifting sands, there is no way he could come out again and he would surely perish. We continued past there, when brackish earth
came into view, all pocked and pitted; this lasted for six parasangs. If anyone went off the path, he would sink in.

From there we went via the caravanserai of Zobayda, which is called Rebát-e Marāmī. In that caravanserai are five wells. If it were not for that caravanserai and water no one would be able to cross this desert. After that we came to four villages in the district of Tabas, one of which is called Rostābād.

On the 9th of Rabi' I [9 July] we reached Tabas, which is one hundred and ten parasangs from Isfahān. Although it looks like a village, Tabas is actually large, yet water is scarce and agriculture minimal, with the exception of date palms and orchards. Nishapur lies forty parasangs north, and a like distance south across the desert is Khābis, while there are forbidding mountains to the east. At that time, the prince of the city was Gilaki son of Muhammad, who had taken it by the sword. The people were so secure that at night they did not lock their doors and even left their animals in the streets, despite the fact that there was no city wall. No woman dared speak to a stranger, for if she did they would both be killed. On account of this prince's protection and justice there was neither thief nor murderer.

Among the Arabs and Persians I saw four places remarkable for their security and justice: one, the region of Dašt during the reign of Lashkar Khan; two, in Daylamestan under the Amir-Amrān Jostān son of Ebrāhīm; three, Egypt during the reign of al Mustanser be’lāh, Prince of the Faithful, and four, in Tabas during the reign of Prince Abū’l Hasan Gilaki son of Mohammad. In all my travels I never saw or heard of any place so secure as these four.

[The prince] kept us in Tabas for seventeen days and showed us much hospitality. When we left he bestowed presents and apologized for any shortcomings. (May God rejoyce in him!) He sent one of his equerries along with me as far as Zuzan, which is seventy-two parasangs away. Twelve parasangs from Tabas we came upon a town called Raqqa, which has running water, farms, gardens, trees, walls, a Friday mosque, and villages and agricultural dependencies.

On the 9th of Rabi’ II [8 August] we left Raqqa and on the 12th arrived in Tun, twenty parasangs distant. The city of Tun had once been large, but when I passed through, most of it had fallen to ruin. Although it is on the edge of the desert, it has running water, canals, and many gardens on the eastern side. It has also a strong fortress, and there are said to have been four hundred workshops where rugs were woven. There were many pistachio trees inside the houses, although the people of Balkh and Tokharestan imagine that pistachios grow only on mountains.

After leaving Tun, [Prince] Gilaki's man told me that once they had been traveling between Tun and Gonābedeh when a band of thieves attacked. Out of fear, several people threw themselves down a canal well. One of them had a kindly father who came and hired someone to go down into the well and bring out the body of his son. They collected all the rope they had while lots of others gathered around to watch. Seven hundred ells of rope went down before that fellow reached the bottom. He tied the rope around the son's dead body and they hauled him out. When he came back up he said that a great amount of water was flowing through the canal, which goes for four parasangs and is said to have been built by Kay Khosraw.