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Persian Heritage Series
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Nāṣer-e Khosraw’s
Book of Travels
(Safarnāma)

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time the twelver branch of Shi‘ism had recently entered into its eschatological phase with the Greater Occulation of the representatives of the Twelfth Imam in 940, and the Twelver Shi‘ites had no capital or power base of their own from which to direct propaganda. There were, however, numerous Shi‘ite pockets scattered throughout the Islamic world, notably in Daylam and Tabarestan (through which Naser passed) and in Transoxania, of which Naser makes no mention whatsoever.

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

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

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

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The Travelogue of Naser-e Khosraw

Thus writes Abu Mo’in Hamid al-din Naser son of Khosraw of Qobad Bey in the district of Marv:

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

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

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

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

“To be without one’s senses is no repose,” he answered me.

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

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

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

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1See Appendix A on Islamic dates.
everything, which had truly made a great impression on me. “You have waked from last night’s sleep,” I said to myself. “When are you going to wake from that of forty years?” And I reflected that until I changed all my ways I would never find happiness.

On Thursday the 6th of Jomâdâ II of the year 457 [19 December 1045], which was by Persian reckoning the middle of the month of Day, the last month before the year 414 of the Yazdgerdi era, 2 I cleaned myself from head to foot, went to the mosque, and prayed to God for help in accomplishing what I had to do and in abstaining from what he had forbidden.

Afterwards I went to Shoburghân and spent the night in a village in Fârâyân. From there I went via Samangân and Tâlaqân to Marv Rud and thence to Marv. Taking leave from my job, I announced that I was setting out for the Pilgrimage to Mecca. I settled what debts I owed and renounced everything worldly, except for a few necessities.

On the 23rd of Sha'ân [5 March 1046] I set out for Nishapur, traveling from Marv to Sarakhs, which is a distance of thirty parasangs. From there to Nishapur is forty parasangs.

On Saturday the 11th of Shawwâl [21 April] I came to Nishapur. On Wednesday, the last day of the month, there was a lunar eclipse. The prince at this time was Toghrel Beg Mohammad, brother to Chaghri Beg. He had ordered a school built near the Saddlers’ Bazaar, which was being constructed then. He himself had gone to Isfahan for his first conquest of that city.

On the 2nd of Dhul-Qa‘da I left Nishapur and, in the company of Khwaja Mowlafaq, the sultan’s agent, came to Qumes via Gavân. There I paid a visit to the tomb of Shaikh Bayazid of Bestâm.

On Friday the 8th of Dhul-Qa‘da [17 May] I went out to Dâmphân. The first of Dhul-Hejja 457 [9 June 1046] I came to Semnân by way of Abykhwari and Châshktâwârân, and there I stayed for a period of time, seeking out the learned. I was told of a man called Master ‘Ali Nasî, whom I went to see. He was a young man who spoke Persian with a Daylamite accent and wore his hair uncovered. He had a group of people about him reading Euclid, while another group read medicine and yet another

2The Persian Yazdgerdi era was calculated from the beginning of the reign of Yazdgerd III, the last Sassanian ruler of Iran (A.D. 632). See Appendix A.

mathematics. During our conversation he kept saying, “I read this with Avicenna,” and “I heard this from Avicenna.” His object of this was, of course, for me to know that he had been a student of Avicenna. When I became engaged in discourse with some of these people, he said, “I know nothing of arithmetic [nûqû], and would like to learn something of the arithmetic art.” I came away wondering how, if he himself knew nothing, he could teach others.

From Balkh to Rayy I reckoned the distance to be 350 parasangs. From Rayy to Sava is said to be thirty parasangs, from Sava to Hamadân thirty, from Rayy to Isfahan fifty, and to Amûl thirty. Between Rayy and Amûl is Mount Damâvand, which is shaped like a dome and is called Lavâsân. They say that on the top of the mountain is a pit from which ammonia is extracted, and also sulphur. Leather skins are hauled up and filled with ammonia, and when full they are rolled down the mountainside, there being no road over which they can be transported.

On the 5th of Moharram 438 [12 July 1046], corresponding to the 10th of Mordâd 415 of the Persian calendar, I set out for Qazvin and came to the village of Quha, where there was a drought. A mound of barley bread was being sold for two dirhems. [Displeased], I left.

On the 9th of Moharram [16 July] I arrived in Qazvin, which has many orchards with neither walls nor hedges, so that there is nothing to prevent access to the gardens. I thought Qazvin a nice city: its walls were well fortified and furnished with crenellations, and the bazaars were well kept, only water was scarce and limited to subterranean channels. The head of the city was an Alik. Of all the trades practiced in the city, shoemaking had the largest number of craftsmen.

On the 12th of Moharram 438 [19 July 1046] I left Qazvin along the road to Bil and Qâqân, village dependencies of Qazvin. From there my brother, a Hindu slave-boy we had with us, and I came to a village called Kharzavî. As we had few provi-

3The “subterranean channels” of which Nâser speaks were formerly called âbât (today called qanât) and are still in use for bringing water for irrigation from distant sources. Many of these channels have been maintained from ancient times, such as the one mentioned on page 101; see Mohammad al-Karaji, La Civilisation des eaux cachées, ed. and trans. with commentary by Aly Mazaheri, Université de Nice, Institut d’Etudes et de Recherches Interethniques et Inter-culturelles, Etudes Preliminaires 6 (Nice: L.D.E.R.L.C., 1975).
sions, my brother went into the village to buy some things from the grocer. Someone asked him, “What do you want? I’m the grocer.”

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

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

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

In Shami-ran I saw a good man from Darband whose name was Abu Fadl Khalifa, son of ‘Ali the Philosopher. He was a worthi fellow and displayed much generosity and nobility of character to us. We discoursed together, and a friendship sprang up between us.

“Where do you intend to go from here?” he asked me.

“My intention is to make the Pilgrimage,” I said.

“What I desire,” he replied, “is that on your return journey you pass through here so I may see you again.”

Azerbaijan and Beyond

who ordered this church plundered and pulled down, and it remained in this state of ruination for a time. Afterwards the emperor sent emissaries with many gifts to seek a reconciliation and to intercede for permission to rebuild the church. It is large enough to hold eight thousand people inside and is extremely ornamented, with colored marble and designs and pictures. It is arrayed with Byzantine brocades and is painted. Much gold has been used, and in several places there are pictures of Jesus riding on an ass and also pictures of other prophets such as Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and his sons, which are varnished in oil of sandalwood and covered with fine, transparent glass that does not block any of the painting. This they have done so that dust and dirt cannot harm the pictures, and every day servants clean the glass. There are several other places just as elaborate, but it would take too long to describe them. There is one place in this church painted in two parts to represent heaven and hell and their inhabitants; in all the world there is nothing to equal it. Many priests and monks remain here to read the Gospel, pray, and occupy themselves with acts of devotion all day and night.

Journey to Egypt

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

Shortly, I arrived at a port called Tina, from which you proceed to Tennis. I boarded a boat and sailed over to Tennis, which is on an island. It is a pleasant city and so far from the mainland that you cannot even see the shore from rooftops. The city is populous and has good bazaars and two cathedral mosques. I estimated there were ten thousand shops, a hundred of which were pharmacies. In the summer they sell koshleth in the market, since it is a tropical climate and people suffer so from the heat.

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

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

The population of this city is fifty thousand, and there are at any given time at least a thousand ships at anchor belonging both to private merchants and to the sultan; since nothing is there, everything that is consumed must be brought in from the outside. All external transactions with the island are made therefore by ship, and there is a fully armed garrison stationed there as a precaution against attack by Franks and Byzantines. I heard from reliable sources that one thousand dinars a day go from there into the sultan's treasury. Everyday the people of the city
turn that amount over to the tax collector, and he in turn remits it to the treasury before it shows a deficit. Nothing is taken from anyone by force. The full price is paid for all the linen and bypag-kamun woven for the sultan, so that the people work willingly—not as in some other countries, where the artisans are forced to labor for the vizier and sultan! They weave covers for camel litters and striped saddle-cloths for the aristocrats; in return, they import fruits and foodstuffs from the Egyptian countryside.

They also make superior iron tools such as shears, knives, and so on. I saw a pair of shears imported from there to Egypt and selling for five dinars. They were made so that when the pin was taken out, the shears came apart, and when the pin was replaced they worked again.

In that locale women are afflicted at times with a peculiar illness that causes them to cry out two or three times like an epileptic, after which they regain their senses. In Khorasan I had heard that there was an island where the women cry like cats, which is similar to what I have just described. From Tennis to Constantinople it is a twenty-day voyage by ship.

We set out for Egypt. When we reached the seashore, we found a boat going up the Nile. As the Nile nears the coast, it splits into many branches and flows fragmented into the sea. The branch we were on is called Ramesh. The boat sailed along until we came to a town called Sâlihiyya, which is very fertile. Many ships capable of carrying up to two hundred khawârs of commodities for sale in the groceries of Cairo are made there. Were it not done in that manner, it would be impossible to bring provisions into the city by animal with such efficiency. We disembarked at Sâlihiyya and proceeded that very night to the city.

On Sunday the 7th of Safar 439 [3 August 1907], which was Ormuz Day of Shahrivar, old reckoning, we were in Cairo.

A Description of Cairo and the Provinces

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Description of the City of Cairo

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

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

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

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

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

A Description of the City of New Cairo

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

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

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

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

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

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

Were I to describe everything about this day of [the opening of] the canal, it would take too long.

The sultan's soldiers stand in groups and battalions, and each ethnic group has a name. One group is called the Kotâmis, and they came from Qayrawân under al-Mu'izz le-Din Allâh and are said to number twenty thousand horsemen. Another group called the Bâtélis came from the Maghreb before the sultan came to Egypt; they are said to be fifteen thousand horsemen in number. Another group, the Masâmida, are infantry soldiers from the lands of the Masmûdîs and number twenty thousand. Another group, called the Mashârqa (Easterners), are Turks and Persians, non-Arab by origin; although most of them were born in Egypt, their name derives from their place of origin, and they number ten thousand powerfully built men. Another group is called 'Abîd al-Sherâ, slaves who have been purchased; they are said to be thirty thousand in number. Yet another group are called the "Bedouins," originating from the Hejaz, and all fifty thousand of them carry spears. Another group, called O斯塔dîs, are servants, both white and black, and were bought for service; they number thirty thousand horsemen. Another group numbering ten thousand, who originate from all over the world and are just foot soldiers, are called Sarâis: they have a separate commander-in-chief, and each ethnic group uses its own type of weaponry. Another group are called Zanjis, thirty thousand in number; they fight with swords only. All of these soldiers are on the sultan's pay, and each receives a fixed salary and/or wage according to his rank. Never has a draft been written against any tax collector or peasant; rather, the tax collectors annually remit the taxes of each province to the central treasury, and at stipulated intervals the army's pay is disbursed. Hence, no governmental agent or peasant is ever troubled by demands from the army.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are in the city of Cairo ten quarters, which they call as follows: Barjawan, Zowayla, al-Jawadariyya, al-Omarah, al-Dayalema, al-Rum, al-Bāṭelihya, Qasr-al-Shawk, 'Abid al-Sherā, and al-Masānedā.23
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 reinforced walls. With the exception of the walls of Amr and Mayyâfiqin, 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-Hâkem ben Amr Allah, the grandfather of the present sultan, the descendants of Ebn Tulun sold the mosque to al-Hâkem for thirty thousand dinars. Later, they were about to have the minaret torn down when al-Hâkem 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 Ramadân 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 `raphta`. 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 credible 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 there 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 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 Bâb al-Jawâne’ Mosque, built by ‘Amr son of al-‘As when he was appointed governor of Egypt by Mo’âwiya. The mosque is held aloft by four hundred marble columns, and the wall that contains the mecbâb 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-Hâkem bought this mosque from the descendants of ‘Amr son of al-‘As. 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-Hâkem 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-Qanâdîl [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 Maghrebi 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, myrobolan, fresh dates, grapes, sugarcanes, 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 buqalaman so that different colors show depending on how the article is held. They also produce a glass so pure and flawless that it resembles chrysolite, and it is sold by weight.

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

The city of Old Cairo is situated laterally along the Nile and has many kiosks and bawadres 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 mounds 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 dinhem 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 "saq hirr." 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 dinhar for ten maunds. 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 propertied 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 Dâr al-Wazîr 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 Sâheb al-Serît.

The last of Ramadân 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 construction, 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 cubic 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 muslâm, each woven exactly to the measurements of its place. There was an indescribable latticework balustrade 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 muids 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 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 obeisance or not.” They all cried out at once, saying, “We are his slaves and obedient, but we have committed a crime.” “The sultan command you to disperse immediately,” said the servant, and they departed. The murdered Jew was named Abu Sa‘īd, 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 so 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 Qaryawān, 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 sawi hārū 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‘da people set out for the appointed meeting place. At the middle of Dhul-Qa‘da 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‘da [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 qubba is directly south. The Prophet’s Mosque is as large as the Harām Mosque in Mecca, and the gravities around the Prophet’s tomb is next to the pulpit. It is to the left when facing the qubba; 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 gravite 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 Fāṭima Zahra‘ is there also. The
mosque has a gate. Outside the city to the south is a plain and cemetery called Qobur al-Shohada' [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 Jolfa, which is the *migār* for Syria, the Maghreb, and Egypt (a *migār* being the place where the pilgrims put up on the *cham* [pilgrimage garb]). They say that one year many pilgrims had stopped there when suddenly a flash flood swept down and killed them all, which is why it is called 'Jolfa' ['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-Safā Gate. As there had been a drought in Mecca that year, four mounds of bread cost one Nishapuri dinar. The *mujāwar* 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 'Arafāt. 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 *mujāwar* 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 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 thousand dinars a month), a horse, and a robe of honor, which are sent twice yearly, were duly expeditied. This year a man called Quli 'Abd Allah, a judge from Syria, was entrusted with these duties. I went in his company via Qolzom. This time the boat reached al-Ja'far on the 23rd of Dhul-Qa'da [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-Qa'da [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-Hijja, as they still had 104 parasangs to go to 'Arafāt, 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 'Arafāt 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 'Arafāt, 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 Qolzom. From there we continued in each other's company to Cairo.

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25 That 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 other pressing cause (such as the famine spoken of here). Alternative rites to attendance at Mecca are given in Koran 2:196.
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 maatlebi and enormously rich and propertied. (Maatlebi 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 outrage 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 dallas, 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 Dhu l-Hejja 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 Assyut, 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 Assyut they weave turbans from sheep’s wool unequalled anywhere in the world. The fine woolens imported into Persia and called “Egyptian” are all from Upper Egypt, since wool is not woven in Egypt proper. In Assyut 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 Akhmim, 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 Quos, which is a crowded and prosperous place. There are, in addition to a fortified wall,