

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 *matālebis* and enormously rich and propertied. (*Matālebi* 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 *dallāls*, 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 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 unequaled 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 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 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 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 population of which is all Christian. The king of this province continually sends gifts to the sultan of Egypt and makes treaties so that Egyptian soldiers will not enter his land and molest the populace. 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 parasangs to the shore. It was the time for returning pilgrims to be arriving by camel. We were waiting until the camels were returned to hire one and then set off. While in Aswan I came to know a man called Abu 'Abd Allāh Mohammad son of Faliḡ. 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 Dayqa, 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 cubits 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 mountain 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 afternoon 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 poked 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 'Aydhāb, having traveled from Aswan about two hundred parasangs in fifteen days.

The town of 'Aydhāb is situated by the sea and has a Friday mosque and a population of five hundred. It belongs to the sultan of Egypt and is a customs station for ships coming from Abyssinia, Zanzibar, 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 *qebḡa*, is a mountain beyond which is a large desert with many herbivorous animals and people called the Bajāwis. 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 Bahr al-Na'am and the other 'Aydhāb. 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 Bajāwis, 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 Qolzom. Every place on the coast of this gulf where there is a town is called *bāz*, for example, there is a place in Qolzom, 'Aydhāb, and Bahr al-Na'am 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 'Aydhāb there is no water from wells or springs, only rainwater. When rain fails, the Bajāwis 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 'Aydhāb 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 *qarsh*. I saw in that town a fish skin that in Khorasan is called *safan*. 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 Allāh Mohammad son of Faliḡ. For my arrival in 'Aydhāb 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 him to that effect so that he could settle the account. As I had been in 'Aydhāb 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 Faliḡ'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. Anyhow, 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 de-

parted from 'Aydhāb, a reply came from Mohammad Faliḡ 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 Tāleb 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 noble men.

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 *qebila* 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-Jār, 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 Tāj al-Ma'ālī son of Abu'l-Fotuh, 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 Jomādā 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 (*'omra*) on the first of Rajab, which is a great season, like the Ramadān 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 Harām 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 stele said to have been erected by Abraham. The city lies on a plain between the mountains and measures only two arrow-shots square. The Harām 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 Harām Mosque, called Bāb Ebrāhīm [Abraham's Gate], where there are several tall trees around a well. On the eastern side of the Harām Mosque a large bazaar extends from south to north. At the south end is Abu Qobays. At the foot of Abu Qobays is Mount Safā', 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 Safā' 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 Safā' 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 *ehṛām*. "To bind the *ehṛām*" means to take off all sewn garments and to wrap an *ezār*, or seamless garment, about the waist and another about the body. Then, in loud voice, you say, "*Labbayk, allā-homma, labbayk*,"²⁴ and approach Mecca. When anyone already inside Mecca wants to perform the minor pilgrimage, he goes out to one of the markets, binds his *ehṛām*, says the *Labbayk* and comes back into Mecca with an intention to perform the minor

²⁴The words of the *labbayk* mean approximately "[thy servant] has answered thy call, O God."

pilgrimage. Having come into the city, you enter the Harām 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 *taṭwif*, or circumambulation, has been completed. This continues for seven *taṭwifs*, three times quickly and four slowly. When the circumambulation is finished, you go to Maqām Ebrāhīm [Station of Abraham] opposite the Ka'ba and stand behind the Station. There you perform two *rak'ats* called the "circumambulation prayer." Afterwards you go to the Well of Zamzam, drink some water, or rub some on the face, and leave the Harām Mosque by the Safā' Gate. Just outside this gate are the steps up Mount Safā', 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 Safā' and go from south to north through the bazaar to Marwa. Passing through the bazaar, you go past the gates to the Harām 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 Safā' 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 Safā' to Marwa and three times from Marwa to Safā', 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-'Attārin [Druggists' 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 *mojāwers*. Just at this time there was a famine, with sixteen maunds 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 *masna'as*, 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 Pesar-e [son of] Shāddel, had brought water underground to Mecca at great personal expense. This water was used to irrigate crops at 'Arafāt 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-Zāhed [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 Dhu'l-Hejja [5 May 1051] I was a *mojāwer* in Mecca. On the 15th of Farvardin 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 Tehāma, 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 Pesar-e Shāddel. 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, 'Athr, Bisha, 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.

Ghomdān 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 sword sent to the sultan from the Yemen that had a handle and pommel 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

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'ats*. 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'ats* 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 plaited beards, and carry Qatifi daggers called *kattāra* at their waists, like Hindus. They say that the Hindus originated from the Yemen, and that *kattāra* is originally from the Arabic *qattāla*.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 Mohammad was with his army. On the 16th of Dhu'l-Qa'da, he donned the *ehram* 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 ebn Abi-Tāleb ['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

³⁰The Indian double-pronged dagger is called *katār* in Hindi (from the Sanskrit *kattārāh*) and is a loanword in Persian as *kattāra*. Nāṣer erroneously speculates that the word is derived from the Arabic *qattāla* ("killer").

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 'Arafāt 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'ats* 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-e Shāddel, who was the emir of Aden, had water brought some distance and at great expense from this mountain to the Plain of 'Arafāt, where he had cisterns constructed that are filled during the Pilgrimage season. This same Shāddel 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 'Arafāt, 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-Hejja 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 'Arafāt, everyone traveled one parasang to Mash'ar al-Harām [Sacred Shrine], which is called Mozdalefa. Here a nice structure like a *maqsura* 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

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 sermon 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 Laḥsā, I bade farewell to God's House.

On Friday the 19th of Dhu'l-Hejja 442 [4 May 1051], the first of the old month of Khordād, 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 ibn Salāma [the Well of Hosayn son of Salāma]. The weather was cold. We continued eastward, and on Monday the 22nd of Dhu'l-Hejja [7 May] arrived in Tā'ef, which is twelve parasangs from Mecca.

A Description of Tā'ef

Tā'ef is situated on top of a mountain, and in the month of Khordād it was so cold that you had to sit in the sun, whereas in Mecca melons had been plentiful. The entire district of Tā'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 Allāh son of 'Abbās 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 *mehrab* and pulpit. Now, however, people have built houses and live there. We left Tā'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 Laylā's house, although they tell many such strange tales.³¹ Further on, we came to a fortress called Motar, which is twelve parasangs from Tā'ef. From there, we proceeded to a district called Thorayyā, 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 parasangs from Tā'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 *khafir* [safe-conduct] 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 *khafir* will be captured and plundered. Therefore, from each tribe there is a *khafir*, who can pass through a given territory. The *khafir* is also called *qalāvōz*.

By chance, the leader of the Arabs with whom we had traveled, the Banu Sawād, came to Jaz', and we took him as our *khafir*. His name was Abu Ghānem '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 toward 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 *khafir* to take us further. Finally, we found two men to act as *khafirs* 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

³¹Laylā was the beloved of Qays, who, forbidden to marry her, roamed like a madman among the animals of the desert; hence he was called "Majnun" ("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-Raqim" mentioned in the Koran.³² 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 un-

til 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 *maydun* that weighs ten dirhems, the pit weighing not more than ½ dānaks. 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 maunds of dates. Now a hundred maunds of dates was a fortune for them. Once while I was there, a company of Arab soldiers came and demanded five hundred maunds 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 maunds of dates. Therefore, when they offered me that much, I painted the *mehrab*, and that hundred maunds 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 maunds 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-

³²Reading with Tehran edition, *raqim*, for Dabir-Siyāqi's edition, *rasim*. The "Lords of al-Raqim" are mentioned in passing in Koran 18:9.

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 Yamāma, which has inside a large, old fortress, and outside a town with a bazaar containing all sorts of artisans and a fine mosque. The emirs there are 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 horsemen. 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!"³³ 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 Yamāma to Lahsā. During the winter it is possible to travel because potable rainwater collects in pools, but not in summer.

A Description of Lahsā

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

³³These words characterize the Shi'ite (including the Zaydi) call to prayer. The Sunni call to prayer includes neither phrase. In Nāṣer's terminology "Alid" ('*alawi*') refers to any of the Shi'a, including (1) the Zaydis, followers of Zayd, son of the Fourth Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Ābedin (d. 94/712); members of this sect ruled

that has a ruler is Basra, and that is one hundred and fifty parasangs away. There has never been a ruler of Basra, however, who has attempted an attack on Lahsā.

All of the town's outlying villages and dependencies are enclosed by four strong, concentric walls made of reinforced mud brick. The distance between these walls is about a parasang, and there are enormous wells inside the town, each the size of five millstones around. All the water of the district is put to use so that none goes outside the walls. A really splendid town is situated 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 *sharīf* who prevented the people from practicing Islam and relieved them of the obligations 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 [spiritual] sons³⁴ 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 complete 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 mutual consultation. At the time I was there they had thirty thousand 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 Gilān, Daylam and Ṭabarestān in Iran from 864 to 1126 and founded a dynasty in the Yemen in 901; (2) Ismailis, who followed Esmā'il, son of the Sixth Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq (d. 148/765): to this sect belonged the Fatimids of Egypt; and (3) Twelvers (*ethnā'ashari*), who followed the lineal descent of imams from 'Ali until the Twelfth Imam Moḥammad al-Montazar (ca. 264/878).

³⁴Cf. Bernard Lewis, *The Origins of Ismā'ilism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), p. 99, n. 5, who translates "disciples" for "sons."