

Araby and beyond...

by Leif. U. Schrader

The following text was written in Araby about three hundred years ago by an Arab by the name of Hasan Ibn Sabah. As far as we know the author travelled from Araby to Nippon in a period of thirty years. Since the author has written down his observations of the various small kingdoms on his way and their customs we have felt that it may be interesting for our readers to learn some of these things in order to conduct their business more efficiently with these lands and avoid any social error. Although most of the rulers mentioned below are long deceased, it is unlikely that the customs have changed very much.

It may be necessary to tell the reader something about the author. Although he is long deceased and we have little direct information from him, we have been able to extrapolate some facts both from his own writings and from other authors that refer to him. Hasan Ibn Sabah seems to have come from a town called Tanfar, that is situated in the southlands. His father seems to have been a merchant, who traded in salt shipped from the heart of the desert to the coast. As far as we know Hasan was sent to Araby in order to study theology and law. It is unknown if he ever finished his education. What we know for sure is that he travelled to the main shrine of his religion, situated in Marraket. Later he visited the shrine two more times. He did not return for twenty-eight years after leaving Tanfar. During his travels he met many of the local rulers and thanks to his pilgrimage to the shrine in Marraket he seems to have enjoyed a great deal of respect. This shows that the Arabian religion, no matter how heretical it may be, is more widespread than we have assumed.

Since some of the aspects mentioned below may appear to be alien to our readers, we have decided to add notes in italics whenever it was felt necessary. It should be noted that the sympathy the author has for some people seems to be dependent on the treatment he received from these people, rather than an objective point of view.

Marienburg in the year twothousandfourhundredandnintyeight

Marinus van de Lübbe,

Willem van de Geyn

Clerics of Hændryk in Marienburg

The beginning of my journey

I have left Tanfar on the third day of the second month in the year 1045 [2110 in the Imperial Calendar]. My father wished me a good journey and we spent the last day in the mosque to pray for Allah's help. I went to the market to meet an old friend of my father - Ibrahim Usta - after I have said farewell to my father and my mother. He traded with the lands east of Araby and put together a caravan bound to Marraket. After we had exchanged greetings and he had introduced me to the leader of the caravan, his son in law Hakim, we left Tanfar.



The caravan consisted of twenty-three camels. One of the camels was loaded with tents and water. Another camel was loaded with gifts for the sultan of Marraket. I rode next to Hakim on one camel. That was a great honour since all of the other members of the caravan had to walk along the caravan. Even the pilgrims that accompanied us had to walk on foot. The rest of the camels were loaded with spices and salt. After leaving the city we travelled for three hours before we rested and drank tea. During the rest I could talk with one of the pilgrims, whose name was Mustafah and who came from a small village near Tanfar. He told me that he had lost his three sons because of a disease that seemed to torment the small villages. He told me that the disease turned the tongue blue and that the gum started to bleed. The victim then fell into a coma and would not awake. He was on a pilgrimage to Marraket in order to pray for his last son and his daughter. I offered the old man my camel to relief his journey, when I heard of his misery. He thanked me a thousand times and prayed for my health. Later we continued our journey. We travelled for most of the night, for you must know that all caravans travel through the night, which is very cold and harsh in desert. We could see the stars above us and we thanked Allah for this magnificent view. We rode for most of the night and only stopped once to eat and drink something. The next morning I saw my first dawn in the desert and it was like the prophet himself had painted the sky in crimson and orange.

The following days we continued our pilgrimage. On the fifth day we could feel the presence of the dread city of Khemri nearby. This city was home of the ruler of which no one speaks, who perverted

the soil with his existence and was thrown down with the help of our lord almighty. The people living in this land long before our time annihilated the city. We pushed our camels forward and no one wanted to rest until Khemri was far away from us. Then we thanked Allah for his protection and we pleaded



that he always keep us on the right track.

Then we came to a city called Balak. This city is home of the mighty sorcerer-ruler Sadas, with whom Ibrahim is befriended and Hakim wanted to honour him and bring him presents. Therefore we entered the palace district and Hakim allowed me to accompany him. In this land it is required to stand before the ruler without shoes. Only the ruler himself is wearing shoes. We were lead into the throne-room, which was at the very heart of the palace and we gave Sadas the presents and we honoured him. He asked us of our destination and when we told him of our pilgrimage Sadas, praised be his name and Allah may protect him, prayed for us and he gave us ten times our

weight in silver and ten bales of the finest linen. He send greetings to the ruler Marraket. Then ten eunuchs entered the room and they carried ten plates with mutton and vegetables and with kalob kalash, which is a mousse made of fish and spiced with pepper and which is very expensive since the fish has to be brought the long way from the silent sea [the Black Gulf].

Then we left the palace and we gave the silver to the poor and the monks, since this is the custom in Balak and the only way for the ruler to give gifts to his people because wastefulness is a crime in Balak and only foreigners are allowed to donate money. Sadas is loved by his people even if he can never give his people any present directly.

On the second day after we had left Balak we met a caravan from Marraket to Balak and we exchanged greetings and drank tea together. They told us that Choteimein, the most noble ruler of Marraket will marry his fourth woman in a week and that the whole city is preparing for the ceremony. After two more days we could see the silhouette of Marraket in the evening light. We spend the night before the gates of Marraket, since it is customary to enter the city in the morning unless someone has to do business or has important messages for the sultan.

To be continued...