

# Araby and beyond part 2

By Leif U. Schrader

## Marraket

We entered Marraket the next morning through the west gate. This gate is made of white marble, while the north gate is made of onyx, the south gate of basalt and the east gate of red marble. Marraket must be the most beautiful city in the whole world and Allah shall be praised to have allowed me such a magnificent view. The whole city was decorated with banners made of white silk to celebrate the upcoming wedding of the sultan. The people of Marraket are friendly but at the same time very serious and all of them are believers of the only god. Because Marraket is also a city of trade I saw many people from far away places. I saw a dark and grim merchant who came from the heart of the desert and I saw unbelievers from the west with their light skin, for you must know that anyone is welcomed in the outer city of Marraket even if he is wrong in his belief, for Allah, he shall be praised a thousand times, said that the truth from the mouth of an heretic is worth as much as the truth out of the mouth of a righteous man.

Marraket is divided into two parts. The inner city which is only accessible to pilgrims and the outer city where the houses of the citizens and the inns are and where all the markets and shops are. The outer city is governed by Sultan Choteimein Al'Asbas Ibn Turaget, who is a most noble scholar learned in all sciences and a devout believer. When we entered the city, Hakim send one of his servants to the palace to bring greetings and to humbly ask for his permission to trade in the city. This is the custom and anyone caught in the city selling or buying things without such a permission is cast out of the city and all his belongings are seized. Therefore we could not even buy water to refresh our dry tongues before we had the permission.



An hour later the servant returned with the permission and he brought greetings from the sultan. And the sultan invited us into his palace, because he had learnt that we brought greetings from Sadas of Balak. Therefore we handed the camels to the servants, who brought them to the market where Ibrahim had a small storehouse, and rushed to the palace, for it is offensive to let the sultan wait and everyone must hurry should he demand their presence.

The sultan's palace is in front of the only gate leading through the inner walls into the inner city and it is made of granite, so that no unbeliever can conquer it and enter the inner city. At the gates we were greeted by a servant of the sultan and a fedaikin. The fedaikin are the personal guards of both the Sultan Choteimein and the Sultan Tabas, of whom I will speak later. And the fedaikin have sworn to protect the city against unbelievers with their own blood and as a sign they write the holy name of Allah on their shields in their own blood. To be accompanied by a fedaikin should not be considered as a sign of mistrust, but as the greatest honour, since they are to secure our own safety, even if it is never threatened in such a holy city.

Before we could meet the sultan, we had to dress in white gowns and green trousers. Then we were brought into the throne-room. The Sultan Choteimein, blessed be his name, is an old and wise man, who has seen many places and was taught by the wisest men of his time. He sits on a simple throne made of carpets and behind him stand twenty of his fedaikin warriors. In front of him sat his eleven sons and his advisors. The air was perfumed with exotic odours and two eunuchs stood on each side of the room and fanned the air. After we had exchanged greetings and brought the greetings of Sadas of Balak, he ordered his servants to bring food and water that is flavoured with lemon and orange. The sultan only ate an apricot and drank one small cup of water, since he had begun an ascetic life after he had visited the city of El Andalus [today in Estalia] and sworn not to consume more until the right belief is brought to the whole world. We sat until the evening and we talked about the recent events in our world, when Hakim had to leave in order to look after the goods. He invited me to pray with him in the Crimson mosque in Marraket's inner city.

This was the first time for me to see the most sacred place of Allah. Before entering the inner city the pilgrim has to wash himself and dress in simple linen. To enter the inner city one has to walk through a tunnel that leads through the sultan's palace and no food nor animal is allowed in the inner city and even the birds in the sky do not fly over the inner city in order not to disturb the pilgrims' prayer. The court in front of the mosque is made of pink marble and the mosque itself is constructed of red stone, which I had never seen before and which gave it its name. It is of cubic form and each side is more than one hundred steps long. Its walls are decorated with the words of Allah, praised be his name. Inside the mosque is the stone, that is called the Messenger, since it was sent from the sky by Allah, praised be his name and his glory may enlighten the world, himself and revealed to the prophet, praised be his name and his kindness may bring warmth into the heart of the believer. We sat down and

waited for Sultan Tabas Haik-Al Aram to pray, for he is the high priest of the inner city and governs the inner city. After we had prayed together we returned to the palace of the Sultan Choteimein.



There we sat for a long time and he invited me to smoke with him and discuss the events of the world and he told me many things of the world east of Marraket, so that I felt the desire to visit these places. He also told me that his brother who is shakan [a kind priest] on the south coast saw three of the dread black archs of the evil sheitans a few years ago and that afterwards more and more of their soulless warriors tried to conquer the land of the righteous. He had send ten thousand of his fedaikin warriors and one hundred thousand of his soldiers into this region. And our enemy's troops could only be defeated with the help of Allah, praised be his name and fear shall struck into the hearts of his foes. Afterwards the sight of the black archs became rarer and they did not seem to pose a threat to our lands at the moment. When we finished our debate it was too late to go back to the tavern, since no one is allowed to walk on the streets after the second hour of darkness, the sultan, blessed be his name, gave me a room in his palace and allowed me to sleep in his palace until I wanted to leave Marraket and he said that he would introduce me to Sultan Tabas the next morning so that I could conduct my pilgrimage under his supervision. I thanked him a thousand times and went to bed.

The next morning I awoke with the first ray of light. I dressed in white linen and gave away all my clothes to the poor on the streets, since this is a custom in Marraket for all pilgrims and due to this the beggars are often dressed in the finest silk and linen, to begin with my pilgrimage. After I had finished the ritual of washing and made my first prayer, a servant of Sultan Chomeinein, blessed be his name and his family, approached me and told me that Sultan Tabas, blessed be his name and his soul shall come directly into paradise, was willing to welcome me.

The servant lead me to Sultan Tabas, he shall be blessed, who is an old man with a neatly trimmed beard. He had, so the legend goes, never left the inner city of Marraket and spent his whole life in prayer. He succeeded Sultan Aram fifteen years ago. Although he had never left the city his wisdom and knowledge were endless and he knew everything of what was happening in the world. We talked long about my home city and he wanted to know everything about Tanfar and the people living there. He also told me a lot about the lands of Ind and Cathay and upon hearing it my desire began to grow to see these far away places.

After our meeting Sultan Tabas, he shall enjoy endless pleasures in paradise, took me to the central court of the mosque and we prayed until the sun set. During the next two month I spend my days praying and the instructions and wisdom of Sultan Tabas.

When the day for Sultan Choteimein wedding came, the Sultan invited me to participate. The wedding began with the traditional parade from the north gate to the palace. The bride was dressed in green silk and her rosy cheeks gleamed in the morning light. She was carried on a sedan chair by four eunuchs. The ceremony took place in the palace of Sultan Tabas, where they both swore eternal faithfulness. Afterwards a banquet took place in the Sultan's palace. The ceremonies continued for ten more days, during which I had to continue my pilgrimage. At the end of the two months Sultan Tabas and Sultan Choteimein wanted to speak with me. They both already knew that I did not want to return to Tanfar, but travel eastward to the lands of Ind and Cathay. Both blessed me and Sultan Choteimein gave me ten camels and five of his fedaikin warriors to protect me against any evil until I reached the border to Ind or I no longer needed their protection. He also gave me one hundred gold and one hundred silver coins, so that I could live from this money. Sultan Tabas gave me a necklace with his coat of arms, so that I would find shelter in any house of a believer. Afterwards we drank tea for the last time and they wished me the protection of Allah. I thanked them a thousand times and promised to pray for their welfare.

Then I left Marraket and travelled in eastward direction with my escort of the fedaikin.

To be continued...