

Through the Eyes of a Traveller

Interpreting Islamic Architecture through Naser e-Khosraw's 11th-Century *Safarnama*

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Naser e-Khosraw's *Safarnama*, written during his travels in the 11th-century Middle East, can be used to interpret Islamic architecture. Though Middle Eastern architecture has already been studied and examined, this research differentiates itself from others by using a less conventional medium, travel writing, to analyse Islamic architecture. Focusing on the way in which Khosraw captures spatial organisation, materiality, and embodied experience, several passages on mosques, institutional buildings, and urban environments are thoroughly dissected. The findings demonstrate that Khosraw's travel accounts do provide insight into how Islamic architecture was experienced in the eleventh century, though these accounts remain subjective and selective, often shaped by personal observation and an inconsistent methodological approach. This means that *Safarnama* functions as a fragmented architectural source, but requires contextualisation. This thesis argues that, while limited in its ability to fully reconstruct architectural form, travel writing does offer a valuable perspective on how architecture is experienced and opens avenues for comparative research with other historical travel accounts.

Introduction

Travel has been and remains an essential tool for understanding and interpreting both history and culture, shaping the base for new experiences and discoveries. It also serves as a method to perform ethnographic research, often resulting in reports capturing and trying to understand a people group's behaviour.¹ Another element that is frequently analysed in these reports is the architecture of the places the traveller visits. One way in which these travels have been captured, is through writing. These journals contain detailed descriptions of the author's explorations and represent their personal interpretation, as well as descriptions of their surroundings in various lengths and depths. An example of these travel reports is that of Naser e-Khosraw, named *Safarnama*. This medieval journal, written from a Persian-Islamic point of view and capturing Khosraw's travels through the 11th century Islamic world, spanning from Egypt to Persia. The aim of this thesis is to discover how travel reports, specifically *Safarnama*, can be used to interpret the architecture of the 11th century Islamic world.

According to Basumatary, travel reports are written in three distinct ways, starting with a travelogue which focuses purely on what the traveller sees and experiences, often maintaining an intent look on their journey.² *Safarnama* is categorized as a travelogue, as it is an extensive journal in which every observation of Naser e-Khosraw is described through only his view. The risk that arises with these travelogues is that the author might be solely capturing visual observations, causing them to neglect the other senses. Despite this providing a strong scope, focusing only on one aspect and strengthening the analysis, it does seem to exclude other integral parts of perceiving the author's surroundings. The second way of travel writing, travel stories, do consider these aspects, capturing the traveller's entire narrative and therefore including every aspect, at the risk of becoming more subjective and possibly clouding the analysis. Moreover, travel is written about through travel guides, that contain information on places that is meant for frequent travellers.³

Though these types vary in their layout and communication, the crux remains the same; travel reports are meant to deliver and summarize information about one's voyages. Yet, an element that becomes visible when visiting a place not similar to one's country of origin is the feeling of 'otherness,' observing a society and its surroundings from an outsider perspective, as Jean François Staszak addressed in his research.⁴ When a Western tourist, for example, visits a country of which its population do not conform to the norm of their country's majority, this group is oftentimes defined as the minority when in reality, the Western world makes up the lesser part of the world population. Though travelling and capturing one's observations leads to enriching perspectives, the risk of making uneducated conclusions and assumptions oftentimes remains present.

A theory intricately connected to otherness, through which travel journals and reports are also influenced is the 'tourist gaze'. Developed by British sociologist John Urry, this is a way of grasping how personal vision affects the capturing of travels.⁵ When entering the extraordinary while travelling, one's routine is shaped by activities they do not experience on a daily basis. The value of a place therefore lies in the fact that it is unknown and most importantly, different. Because this unknown circumstance is not experienced in everyday life, it happens that they

¹ Vasiliki Galani-Moutafi, "The Self and the Other: Traveler, Ethnographer, Tourist," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 1 (2000): 206.

² Barna Bijay Basumatary, "Importance of Travel Writing in Literature," *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology* 4, no. 5 (2018): 760

³ Basumatary, "Importance of Travel Writing," 761.

⁴ Jean-François Staszak, "Other/Otherness," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. Audrey Kobayashi (Elsevier, 2020), 25.

⁵ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (London: SAGE, 2011), 1-13.

draw conclusions on a group from a clouded point of view, thus creating this tourist gaze. In turn, this correlates to the work of Palestinian academic Edward Saïd on orientalism, in which he states that the Western world has constructed a flawed image of the Middle East, influenced by a tourist gaze established through colonialist power dynamics.⁶ These countries are often labelled as weaker, possessing less knowledge and are often less developed, statements that are based on stereotypes and stigma's. This reinforces unequal power relations and stereotypes that reduce complex societies to simplified, exoticized representations of cultural difference.

In architecture, travel is deemed as an essential medium to establish frameworks on the unknown yet present world. Deriu, Piccoli and Özkaya, three postdoctoral researchers on architectural history and humanities, state that travel functions as a formative process that actively alters how architecture is experienced, interpreted, and understood.⁷ It goes beyond simple physical mobility. Travel mediates architectural knowledge through interactions with many geographical, cultural, and material contexts, impacting not just what is observed but also how it is perceived. This results in a mutually constitutive relationship in which travel and architecture influence one another.⁸ This relationship is categorized by the authors, distinguishing between three approaches: the architect's journey, representation by travellers and architecture within tourism. The second seems to be the most fitting approach for this thesis, as it revolves around Naser e-Khosraw's interpretation of the architecture he encountered during his travels.

This thesis answers the following research question: how can 11th century Islamic architecture be interpreted through Naser e-Khosraw's travel journal? Though Middle Eastern architecture has already been researched and analysed, the unique research scope of this thesis is found in connecting architecture in a lesser used form of writing, namely travel writing. While architectural history has extensively analysed form and typology, the use of travel writing as an interpretative lens for spatial experience remains underexplored. Through reading and analysing Khosraw's textual travel passages, it shows if and how this type of literature can be used to interpret architecture in a valuable and relevant way. The method applied to this thesis is one of interpretation, discourse analysis and connection to both earlier discussed and newly introduced theories, which grants this research a multi-faceted approach. While *Safarnama* forms the core primary source, additional materials such as historical maps and institutional sources allow for triangulation between textual description and historical spatial context.

The first chapter clarifies the historical context for which the rest of this thesis is based upon. By explaining how Naser e-Khosraw undertook his voyages, how he took to compile his journal and by translating necessary information to modern-day dimensions, this chapter forms a preparation for the next phase. These following chapters mainly revolve around Khosraw's entries in *Safarnama*, specifically those in which mentions of the built environment are included. All analysed entries are included to be read in the appendix. To gain a multifaceted and diverse insight on Khosraw's writing, the analysis is split in three chapters, respectively examining mosques, institutional buildings and, to also analyse the writing on urban environments, cities. To provide the thesis with relevant nuances and to close off the thesis, a discussion is included to mention and write on limitations and further possibilities of this research, as well as its reliability and validity.

Ultimately, in addition to the main research question, the following sub-questions are addressed: In what ways do Naser e-Khosraw's personal background, journeys, and modes of observation

⁶ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1–7.

⁷ Davide Deriu, Edoardo Piccoli, and Belgin Turan Özkaya, "Travels in Architectural History," *Architectural Histories* 4, no. 1 (2016): 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.234>

⁸ Deriu, Piccoli, and Turan Özkaya, "Travels in Architectural History," 3–4.

influence his representation of the built environment in *Safarnama*?; How can mosques be interpreted through Khosraw's 11th-century descriptions?; How can institutional buildings be interpreted through Khosraw's 11th-century descriptions?; How can urban environments be interpreted through Khosraw's 11th-century descriptions? After addressing these questions, the thesis discusses its limitations and concludes by reflecting on the main research question.

Chapter 1: Historical context

This chapter clarifies the research's historical context by addressing Naser e-Khosraw not only as a traveller, but through his multiple identities, as well as highlighting the journeys that inspired him to compile *Safarnama*. Additionally, it is essential to clarify any unclear terms and dimensions, hence addressed in the second part of this section. By including this context before analysing the journal entries, the reader gains a clearer understanding of how the context of Khosraw's travels shapes his descriptions of the built environment.

1.1 Naser e-Khosraw and *Safarnama*

Born at the start of the second millennium, around the year 1003, Naser e-Khosraw grew up in Qubadiyan, in what is now known as Tajikistan.⁹ Before his travels, he spent his working days as a government worker for the Persian Seljuk empire, and this took a turning point in his early 40's after having a lifechanging dream. This vision led him to quit the career he had to seek knowledge through travel, so he left his home to pursue this mission.

The voyage he embarked on lasted for seven years, spanning from Central Asia to Cairo, as illustrated in Figure 1, while also visiting Persia, Arabia, Egypt and the Levant. Additionally, Khosraw stopped in Mecca for a total of five times to perform a religious pilgrimage. In Cairo, Khosraw, inspired by the Fatimid caliphate, decided to convert to Isma'ili Islam. This version of Islam led him to prioritize knowledge instead of subconsciously holding faith, and rejected superficial interpretations of scriptures. In his own work, the elements he held in high regard maintained close connection to his spiritual convictions, emphasizing divinity as well as knowledge and intellect. His conversion, however, caused an obstacle in his journey back home, as he found himself forcibly exiled by Sunni Muslims, to the Persian village of Yomgan.¹⁰



Figure 1. Map showing Naser e-Khosraw's travels (1046–1052), highlighting the cities mentioned in this thesis, from Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), x. Modified and simplified by author.

⁹ Edward Granville Browne, *Nasir-i Khusraw, Poet, Philosopher, and Traveller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897).

¹⁰ Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), vii.

Essentially, *Safarnama* is a collection of all the notes Khosraw wrote during his seven-year voyage, which were later compiled and published as one entity. The way these entries are written, contain valuable descriptions on the cultural and geographical context of all his visited places, through detailed descriptions of places and people. Despite his expertise in poetry, Khosraw's travel entries are mostly direct, avoiding any excessive poetic narration. This way of writing gives an opportunity to analyse his words and their meaning objectively and critically. Ultimately, Naser e-Khosraw should be understood as a philosophically informed traveller, whose observations of the built environment have been shaped by his spiritual and religious convictions.

1.2 Translating *Safarnama*

Safarnama, its cover illustrated in Figure 2, was written in the eleventh century, within a spatial and cultural framework vastly different from current Western ideologies and measurements. This causes some uncertainty in the dimensions and descriptions he wrote, not possible to be mapped without any interpretation and clarification. Rather than adhering to being purely technical, this process of translation raises broader questions about how spatial knowledge is translated across time, language, and cultural contexts.

A first remark to be made when discussing *Safarnama*, and especially its language, is that the English translation of the originally Persian document poses language barriers, risking the disappearance of Khosraw's intentions when writing *Safarnama*. This stance is supported by German scholar Lutz Richter-Bernburg, stating for example, that terms as '*malik*' and '*sultan*' cannot be understood merely as the English king and sultan, as it dismisses the present cultural and historical context of the writings.¹¹ This also applies to temporal terms, with words like '*qadim*' or old, which is supposed to refer to pre-Islamic times.¹² In Persian, it's often already interpreted in this way, however, the same logic cannot be linked to English writing as again, it misses the cultural and historical context. So, while compromising the readability and understanding of some sections in *Safarnama*, the English translation is still used, keeping in mind the limitations it presents.

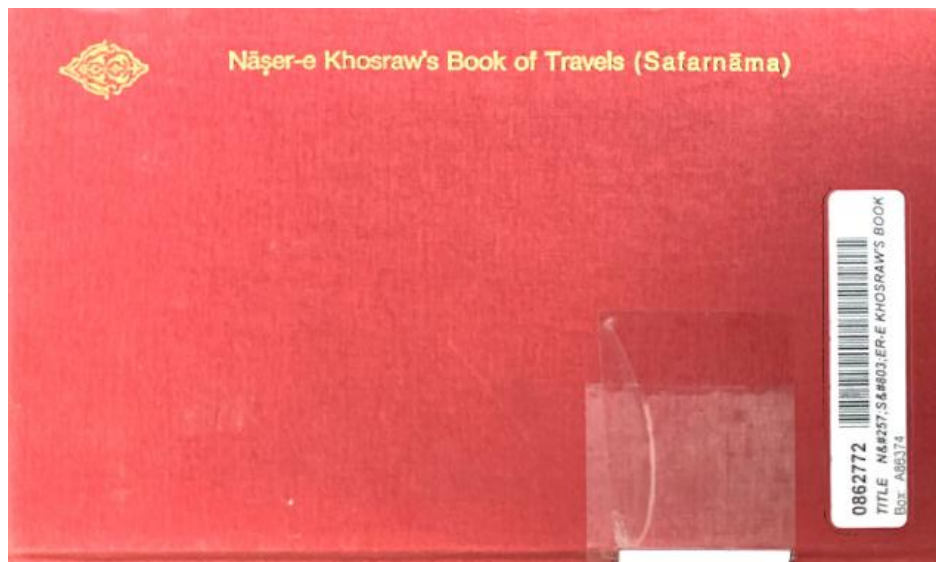


Figure 2. Cover of *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), translated by Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986).

¹¹ Lutz Richter-Bernburg, "Going Places with Nāser-e Khosrow and His Translator," *Die Welt des Islams* 33, no. 2 (1993): 263.

¹² Richter-Bernburg, "Going Places," 265.

Another note is that Khosraw frequently applies units like the cubit and the parasang to express dimensions in both buildings and urban distances. The cubit can be understood as the length of a forearm, around 50 centimetres.¹³ Khosraw applies the cubit to emphasize the size of an object, as well as the length, width, and height of architecture. Additionally, he measures shorter distances as the number of cubits. For longer distances, he uses the parasang (or farsakh), which is estimated at around three miles, or approximately 4.8 kilometres.¹⁴ It's important to keep in mind that these measurements are merely technical tools; they reflect a way of understanding and experiencing space from Khosraw's perspective, influenced through his own personal, historical and cultural context.

This becomes especially relevant when considering broader questions of representation. As discussed earlier in relation to the tourist gaze and orientalism, the way spaces are framed and understood is never entirely neutral. Similarly, translating Khosraw's measurements makes his account more accessible, but it also filters his observations through a contemporary framework. In this sense, translation does not simply transfer knowledge, but it provides a subtle transformation. For this reason, the dimensions used in this thesis should again, be understood as interpretative tools rather than exact reconstructions. Acknowledging this helps to clarify the approach taken here, while also reinforcing the idea that architectural knowledge in travel accounts is always shaped by the ways in which it is described, translated, and interpreted.

Chapter 2: *Safarnama* and its mosques

This chapter examines whether mosques can be accurately understood and interpreted today through Naser e-Khosraw's textual entries, and how they can subsequently be understood. His first encounters with the buildings, his use of language, how he articulates architectural elements such as spatial organization and materiality, and the way he represents the user's experience are central to this analysis. At the same time, the chapter assesses whether these texts can be used for deeper architectural interpretation.

The passages analysed contain information about two mosques: the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, which is included in the appendix, and the Bab al-Jawame mosque in Fatimid Cairo. The latter, however, is only referred to as Bab al-Jawame in the English translation by Thackston, as shown in Figure 3. This naming is problematic, as it is not used by other historians or scholars, nor does it appear in an overview of mosques in Egypt published by the Ministry of Waqfs.¹⁵ However, this document does provide clarification regarding the mosque Khosraw describes. In his account, he states that the mosque had been purchased from the descendants of 'Amr, son of al-'As, which corresponds to a mosque commissioned by him in 642. This correlation suggests that Khosraw is referring to the 'Amr ibn al-'As mosque, which still exists today and is located in the Fustat neighbourhood of Cairo.¹⁶

¹³ Emeri Johannes van Donzel, Bernard Lewis, and Charles Pellat, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Iran-Kha (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 659.

¹⁴ van Donzel, Lewis, and Pellat, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 273.

¹⁵ Ministry of Waqfs, *The Mosques of Egypt* (Cairo: Survey of Egypt, 1954).

¹⁶ Ministry of Waqfs, *Mosques of Egypt*, 8.

“In the midst of the bazaar is the Bab al-Jawame‘ Mosque, built by ‘Amr son of al-‘As when he was appointed governor. The mosque is held aloft by four hundred marble columns, and the wall that contains the mehrab 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-Hakem 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-Hakem 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 1% 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 rotls, a rotl 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”.

Figure 3. English translation of Khosraw's travel account on the “Bab al-Jawame” (identified as the Mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As), from Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama (Book of Travels)*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), 52.

2.1 Masjid al-Haram, Mecca, Saudi-Arabia

Upon entering the Masjid al-Haram, Khosraw first documents the location of the building within the city, noting that it lies at the centre of Mecca. He also refers to its orientation, stating that it extends from east to west and lies on the 71st north–south axis.¹⁷ Notably, his initial description is primarily functional, focusing less on experiential aspects and more on situating the building within its urban context. This approach provides the reader with immediate clarity regarding the mosque's position on a larger, urban scale.

Khosraw then proceeds to describe the basic characteristics of the building, including its dimensions. The reader learns that, in the 11th century, the mosque measures 424 cubits (approximately 212 metres) in length and 304 cubits (approximately 152 metres) in width. Another important observation concerns the mosque's walls, which he describes as slightly oval rather than orthogonal, allowing worshippers to face the Ka'ba from all directions. This marks a shift from purely metric description to a more interpretative observation, as Khosraw starts to reflect how design choices influence user experience.

The courtyard, containing the Ka'ba, and within it, the Black Stone, becomes central in later parts of Khosraw's account. It is here that he begins to elaborate more on materiality and experience, as this area holds the greatest religious significance.¹⁸ However, he does not entirely abandon his earlier focus on dimensions and orientation. For example, when describing the door of the Ka'ba, he adopts a personal perspective but does not neglect his use of dimensions, noting that he can reach it on tiptoe, as it is elevated four cubits (approximately two metres) above the ground. Additionally, he frequently refers to marble, mentioning it eleven times in his collective entries on the Masjid al-Haram. While these references are presented in a factual manner, they nonetheless emphasize the importance and frequent usage of the material.

When comparing his 11th-century description to a 19th-century image of the Masjid al-Haram, as illustrated in Figure 4, both similarities and differences become apparent. The Ka'ba remains the central element of both the city and the mosque, surrounded by a large courtyard. However, the edges of the mosque appear more orthogonal than the slightly rounded form described by

¹⁷ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 71.

¹⁸ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 71-79.

Khosraw. This could indicate that later expansions prioritized practicality over earlier design considerations, although it may also reflect a limitation of the visual source, looking past the detail of the slightly curved walls. Ultimately, both the religious and personal significance of the mosque are reflected in the length of Khosraw's account, which, at approximately 1500 words, is considerably longer than most of his other entries.



Figure 4. Persian illustration of Mecca depicting the Ka'ba and the Masjid al-Haram, 19th century (Ottoman period), from Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, via *Middle East Eye*.

2.2 'Amr ibn al-'As mosque, Old Cairo, Egypt

Following a similar pattern, Khosraw begins his description of the 'Amr ibn al-'As mosque by situating it within its broader urban context, noting that it lies at the centre of a bazaar.¹⁹ This passage forms part of a larger entry on Old Cairo, reinforcing the narrative structure in which Khosraw moves from the urban scale to the level of individual buildings.

Khosraw then turns to material description, stating that the mosque is supported by four hundred marble columns. This immediately conveys the vast scale of the building.²⁰ Furthermore, the repeated references to marble which is also prominent in his account of the Masjid al-Haram, suggest that again, this material holds particular importance in his descriptions. He also notes that the walls contain slabs on which the entire Qur'an is engraved. This observation not only highlights material and decorative aspects but also points to user interaction, as the mosque functions as a space of learning, with many students and teachers engaged in reading religious texts. In contrast to his earlier account, Khosraw also introduces a historical dimension, noting that the mosque had been sold, partially demolished, and later expanded. This adds another layer to the interpretation of the building, situating it within a process of change over time.

Both passages demonstrate that Khosraw's descriptions of mosques are multifaceted and follow a relatively consistent narrative structure. He begins with the urban context, then moves to quantitative descriptions such as dimensions or the number of columns, which provide a sense of scale. This is followed by attention to materiality and aspects specific to each building. In the case of the Masjid al-Haram, the focus lies on worship and pilgrimage, while for the 'Amr ibn al-'As mosque, greater emphasis is placed on its historical development.

To conclude this chapter and address the research question, these passages can be used to interpret how Islamic architecture is perceived through Khosraw's 11th-century descriptions,

¹⁹ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 52.

²⁰ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 52.

particularly in terms of spatial organization, materiality, and use. However, as the account is not written by an architect, certain architectural aspects remain underdeveloped or selectively described. At the same time, this perspective remains valuable, as it offers insight into how an Islamic traveller, already familiar with religious practices, perceives and engages with these spaces. Yet this familiarity may also limit his descriptions, as certain spatial or ritual elements are taken for granted and therefore left unexplained. While this reduces the risk of a purely external or “tourist” interpretation in the case of mosques, it remains necessary to approach his accounts critically, particularly when extending this analysis to other architectural typologies.

Chapter 3: *Safarnama* and its institutions

Like religious architecture, institutional buildings hold a significant position in society, although their importance is often perceived in a different way. This chapter examines Khosraw’s passages on palaces, to determine whether the way he writes and describes these spaces are relevant for contemporary interpretations. Examining religious and institutional typologies alongside one another allows these passages to be analysed across different contexts and domains of social life, without assuming that Khosraw applies the same descriptive sequence to every building.

The passages used for this chapter discuss only one palace but two occasions: the Sultan’s palace in Old Cairo, on which one general account and another describing the building during an event. This contrast makes it possible to analyse whether different situations provide diverse insights into how people interact with the palace, both during everyday use and special occasions. Furthermore, it is relevant to consider how an outsider writes about institutional buildings when he is not part of the institution itself.

3.1 The Sultan’s palace, Old Cairo, Egypt

Similar to his descriptions of mosques, Khosraw begins his account of the Sultan’s palace by establishing its location, describing it as situated in the middle of the city and isolated from other buildings.²¹ It is first necessary to examine whether Khosraw’s narrative approach in mosque descriptions is also applied here. Secondly, the significance of the palace is immediately conveyed, as Khosraw emphasizes that it is not surrounded by any other structures. He continues by highlighting the meaning this building holds for both visitors and locals, noting that the walls are so high that no one can see inside, and that from outside the city, according to Khosraw, it appears like a mountain. This latter observation is particularly notable, as he moves away from precise measurements, such as those used in his mosque descriptions, and instead relies on comparison to convey the immense scale of the palace complex.

The users of the palace appear to be primarily those who work there, including watchmen, wives, and slaves. The number of people Khosraw describes as being present, around thirty thousand, again emphasizes the vast scale of the palace.²² Michel Foucault’s concept of spatial power, in which architectural structures are used to organize visibility and regulate behaviour, provides further insight into this relationship between architecture and authority.²³ He argues that space can function as a mechanism of control by determining how individuals are positioned, observed, and directed within it. In this way, the palace environment described by Khosraw actively shapes social and political interactions, reinforcing hierarchy and power through its spatial organization.

²¹ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 45.

²² Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 45.

²³ Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 449-454.

This theme of power also recurs in Khosraw's description of the Sultan's palace during a banquet, held twice a year on the two major Islamic holidays.²⁴ From the context, it is apparent that he refers to Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, with the entry itself indicating that the event takes place at the end of Ramadan, and therefore corresponds to Eid al-Fitr. To further emphasize the significance of the palace during such events, Khosraw compares it to his previous experiences with Persian sultans, using familiar references to convey its majesty.

Khosraw's account of the banquet provides additional insight into the material use within the palace, describing various textiles and a gold-covered dais.²⁵ Some of these elements are temporary and intended for specific occasions, yet they collectively communicate the elevated status of the sultan within society. Although these features are neither permanent nor structural, they shape how the space is experienced from Khosraw's perspective. The remaining elements in his account provide limited information about the architectural structure or functional use of the building. However, Khosraw does note that all medicine in the city is distributed from the harem of the palace, further reinforcing the idea that authority and control are centralized within this space.

To conclude this chapter, Khosraw's writing on the Sultan's palace offers a specific perspective on how institutional buildings function within their social and political context. While his descriptions share certain similarities with his accounts of mosques, he adapts his narrative to suit the nature of the building. Where he relies on precise measurements in his descriptions of the Masjid al-Haram and the Amr ibn al-'As mosque, he instead adopts more abstract and comparative language for the palace, such as describing it as resembling a mountain. These passages are therefore valuable for interpreting the symbolic and political dimensions of the palace, particularly in terms of power, hierarchy, and representation. At the same time, this interpretation is shaped by Khosraw's own perception, raising the question of whether the palace's architecture actively enforces power, or whether this effect is primarily constructed through his narrative. Additionally, when it comes to reconstructing the architectural form in a precise and material sense, they remain limited, as they provide little detail on structure, dimensions, or spatial configuration.

Chapter 4: *Safarnama* and its cities

What the two previous chapters reveal about Khosraw's writing is that he generally begins by clarifying the larger, urban scale of buildings before zooming in on the building itself. In this case, this broader perspective is used to provide insight into the building's location and surroundings. However, in his travel accounts, Khosraw also pays attention to cities and urban environments. This chapter examines this aspect, focusing on how he interprets and represents everyday movement and practices on an urban scale, through spatial organization, materiality, and experience.

Again, two entries are analysed: the first on the Mesopotamian city of Amed, now known as Diyarbakir, Turkey, and the second on New Cairo, established as part of the Fatimid Empire. Both cities are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6 respectively.

4.1 The city of Amed

To begin with, Khosraw describes his first impression of the city as being situated on a monolithic rock, after which he outlines its dimensions in both length and width.²⁶ This shows that even in these entries, Khosraw prioritizes situating the environment and conveying its scale,

²⁴ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 57.

²⁵ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 57.

²⁶ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 8.

even at a larger, urban level. However, in this case, he adopts a personal, and therefore subjective, mode of measurement, stating that Amed is 2000 footsteps long and wide, rather than using cubits or parasangs.²⁷ One possible explanation for this choice is that the distance exceeds what could be easily expressed in cubits, while not reaching the length of a full parasang. This personal expression, however, brings up an unclear image of the city's size.

A recurring element in Khosraw's description is the city's heavy fortification. Amed is surrounded by multiple layers of walls made from black rock, for which he again provides detailed dimensions, including the height and width of the walls, as well as the weight of each slab.²⁸ The reader gains insight into the materiality not only of the walls but also of the four city gates, which are described as being made of iron. In addition, Khosraw refers to natural features of the city, such as a spring emerging from a granite rock, further contributing to the understanding of its material and environmental context.

When comparing Khosraw's account of Amed with an early twentieth-century urban plan of present-day Diyarbakir, as illustrated in Figure 5, it becomes apparent that although the city has undoubtedly expanded in size, it remains heavily fortified. The four gates are still identifiable, each positioned according to the cardinal orientations. This comparison demonstrates that Khosraw's entries can be useful for analysing how an urban environment has developed and transformed since the 11th century.



Figure 5. Early twentieth-century city plan of Diyarbakir (Amed), from unknown author, early twentieth-century city plan of Diyarbakir, via Alamy.

4.2 The city of New Cairo

Unlike Amed, Khosraw's account of the Fatimid city of New Cairo follows a slightly different approach, as he does not mention any dimensions. This makes it difficult to determine, based solely on this entry, the scale of the city. However, the elements he does describe place the city within a distinct and informative context. Khosraw begins by naming the five major gates of New Cairo, and notes that although the city lacks a continuous enclosing wall, the outer layer of buildings and dwellings is deliberately arranged in such a way that it effectively forms a defensive boundary.²⁹

²⁷ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 8.

²⁸ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 8.

²⁹ Khosraw, 46-48.

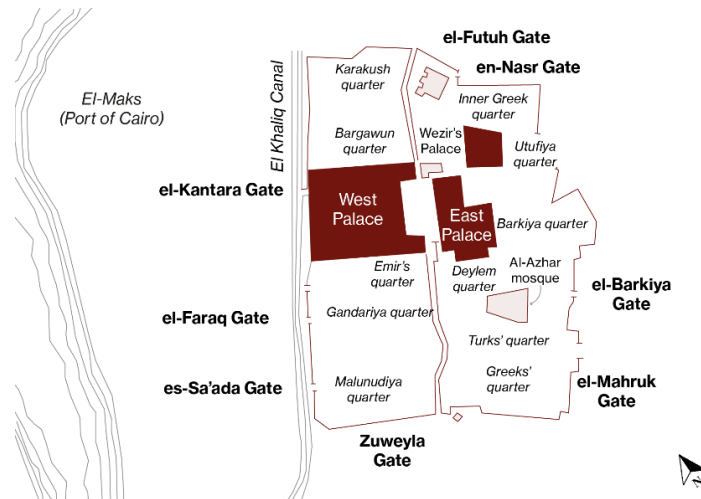


Figure 6. Map of Fatimid Cairo showing urban quarters, key gates, and palace complexes, from Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London: J. M. Dent, 1906), Wikimedia Commons. Modified and simplified by author.

A significant element that Khosraw repeatedly emphasizes is New Cairo's proximity to the Nile, which is also visible in Figure 6. He notes that drinking water is extracted directly from the river.³⁰ Although Amed is also located near a river, the Tigris, this characteristic is not emphasized to the same extent, suggesting that the Nile plays a more central role in the functioning of New Cairo. Khosraw does not limit his observations to the river itself; he also mentions the presence of wells, camels used as water carriers, and various bodies of water distributed throughout the city. These details point to a structured system of water distribution and highlight the importance of resource management within the urban environment.

When synthesizing both entries, it can be concluded that, on an urban scale, Khosraw adopts a mode of writing that differs from his approach to individual buildings. He focuses less on the user's experience and instead directs his attention to the configuration of the city, naming its gates and describing its fortifications. These accounts can therefore be used to understand how these cities functioned in terms of security and accessibility. In the case of Amed, the emphasis lies on fortification, while in New Cairo, this is briefly addressed before shifting towards the city's extensive connection to water.

One aspect that is less prominent in comparison to earlier chapters is the influence of design choices on user experience. For example, in his description of the Masjid al-Haram, Khosraw notes that the walls are slightly curved to ensure the correct direction of prayer.³¹ Such observations are largely absent in his accounts of urban environments. This may be due to the difficulty of capturing experiential qualities at a larger scale, or it may indicate that Khosraw prioritizes other, more relevant aspects when describing cities.

These entries can be further connected to theory through Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, in which space is understood as being shaped through practice, representation, and representational space.³² In Khosraw's descriptions of Amed and New Cairo, his writing aligns primarily with representations of space, as he focuses on the structural organization of the city, including its walls, gates, and overall layout. His attention to fortifications and accessibility also reflects aspects of spatial practice, as these elements regulate movement and circulation within the city. However, unlike his earlier descriptions of mosques and

³⁰ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 47.

³¹ Khosraw, *Safarnama*, 71.

³² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

institutional architecture, there is a noticeable absence of representational space, as Khosraw provides limited insight into how these urban environments are experienced by their users. This suggests that, on an urban scale, Khosraw prioritizes the configuration and functionality of space over its lived experience.

Conclusion

This study investigates the interpretation of Islamic architecture through the eleventh-century *Safarnama* of Naser e-Khosraw. The analysis focuses on how architectural space is articulated in terms of spatial organization, materiality, and use, through a close reading of Khosraw's descriptions of mosques, institutional buildings, and towns. It approaches *Safarnama* as an interpretative account that enables architecture to be understood as experienced and constructed, rather than treating the text as a purely descriptive source. This thesis is guided by the following research question: how can Islamic architecture be interpreted through the 11th-century descriptions of Naser e-Khosraw in *Safarnama*?

As this thesis reaches its conclusion, a summary is first provided before addressing the research question. Khosraw appears to adopt a narrative that, in relation to buildings, remains largely consistent, although there are certain variations depending on context. He typically begins by situating buildings within their geographical and urban surroundings, before moving on to their measurements, albeit with varying degrees of precision. In the case of the Sultan's palace, his more descriptive and comparative style suggests an intention to convey its prominence within the city. Describing the building as resembling a mountain when viewed from outside indicates its central and dominant position within the broader urban environment. These aspects of Khosraw's travel accounts demonstrate how architectural space can be conveyed through text, particularly in terms of scale, hierarchy, and material presence. At the same time, these descriptions remain selective and impressionistic, offering only a partial reconstruction of the buildings he encounters. Rather than providing a comprehensive architectural account, Khosraw's writing reflects what captures his attention, potentially overlooking less visible but equally significant spatial or structural qualities.

On an urban scale, Khosraw departs from this approach and instead focuses more explicitly on the broader context of the city. This is evident in his account of Amed, where he emphasizes fortification, and in New Cairo, where he highlights water systems. The attention he gives to these specific urban characteristics, rather than adhering to the same descriptive pattern, is valuable at this scale, as cities involve a greater number of interrelated factors than individual structures. At the same time, this shift results in a reduced emphasis on how these urban environments are experienced by their inhabitants. The focus on systems such as defence and water management foregrounds functionality, but offers limited insight into the social and spatial practices that shape everyday urban life.

The crux of the thesis lies in answering if and how Islamic architecture can be interpreted through the 11th-century descriptions of Naser e-Khosraw in *Safarnama*. To indeed address this question, the passages of *Safarnama* could indeed be used to interpret Islamic architecture through Khosraw's descriptions, albeit with important qualifications. His accounts provide insight into how architecture is perceived, particularly in relation to spatial organization, materiality, and context. This suggests that *Safarnama* is most valuable not as a source for precise architectural reconstruction, but as a means of understanding how architecture was perceived, prioritized, and experienced in the eleventh century. However, they remain inherently subjective, shaped by personal observation rather than a systematic architectural framework. Furthermore, variations in narrative and emphasis suggest that Khosraw's descriptions are guided more by individual interest than by a consistent methodological approach. As such,

Safarnama cannot be regarded as a uniform or comprehensive source, but rather as a fragmented and interpretative account that requires careful contextualization.

At the same time, there are several limitations that must be considered. Firstly, this study, as discussed in Chapter 1, relies on a translated *Safarnama*, which means that nuances in terminology, measurement, and general description could be altered or simplified. Furthermore, although key sites discussed in this paper can be identified with reasonable certainty, the descriptions themselves remain selective and shaped by Khosraw's personal perspective. His description reflects personal views, interests, and narrative decisions rather than attempting to offer a methodical or thorough architectural documentation. Because of this, the research is limited in how much architectural form can be properly rebuilt due to the source's interpretive and incomplete nature. However, these restrictions highlight the necessity of interpreting the source as a representation of architectural experience rather than objective form, rather than diminishing its worth.

Although this thesis demonstrates that *Safarnama* is only partially useful as a source for architectural interpretation, it still provides valuable insights into how architecture is perceived and described, indicating that other travel accounts may offer equally or even more comprehensive perspectives. Further research can expand on this work by comparing Khosraw's descriptions with other travelogues or historical sources. Additionally, one can examine how different travel narratives construct architectural experience in distinct ways, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how architecture is perceived and represented across time and space.

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Figure 2. Cover of *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), translated by Wheeler M. Thackston, from Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986).

Figure 3. English translation of Khosraw's travel account on the "Bab al-Jawame" or the 'Amr ibn al-'As mosque, from Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), 52.

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Figure 6. Map of Fatimid Cairo showing urban quarters, key gates, and palace complexes, from Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Story of Cairo* (London: J. M. Dent, 1906), via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_story_of_Cairo_\(1906\)_14782234955.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_story_of_Cairo_(1906)_14782234955.jpg). Modified and simplified by author.

Appendix 1: Selected *Safarnama* entries

All passages are taken from: Naser e-Khosraw, *Safarnama* (Book of Travels), trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1986).

***Masjid al-Haram* (p. 71-75)**

As I have already stated, the Ka'ba is situated in the middle of the Haram Mosque, which is in the middle of the city of Mecca. It runs lengthwise from east to west, and the breadth is on a north–south axis. The walls, however, do not meet at right angles, for the corners are rounded so that the whole is an oval shape, because when the people pray in this mosque, they must face the Ka'ba from all directions. Where the mosque is longest, that is, from Abraham's Gate to the Bani Hashem Gate, it measures 424 cubits. The width, from Bab al-Nadwa (Council Gate) on the north to the Safa' Gate on the south, the widest point, is 304 cubits. Because of its oval shape, it is narrower in places and wider in others. Around the mosque are three vaulted colonnades with marble columns. In the middle of the structure a square area has been made. The long side of the vaulting, which faces the mosque courtyard, has forty-five arches, with twenty-three arches across the breadth. The marble columns number 184 in all and are said to have been ordered by the Baghdad caliphs and to have been brought by sea from Syria. The story goes that when these columns arrived in Mecca, the ropes that had been used to secure the columns on board ship and onto carts were cut and sold for sixty thousand dinars. One of the columns, a shaft of red marble, stands at the spot called al-Nadwa Gate; it is said to have been bought for its weight in dinars and is estimated at three thousand maunds. There are eighteen doors in the Haram Mosque, all built with arches supported by marble columns, but none is set with a door that can be closed.

In the south wall, which forms the length of the mosque, are seven gates. The first, at the corner and semicircular in shape, is Bab al-Daqqaqin [Fullers' Gate] and has two arches. Slightly to the

west is another two-arched gate called Bab al-Fassanin [?]. At an equal distance is the al-Safa' Gate which has five arches. This middle gate is the largest of all and has two small arches on either side. It was by this gate that the Apostle of God went out to Safa' to pray. The threshold of this middle gate is of a large white stone, although it once was black. The Apostle placed his holy foot there and left an imprint. This footprint was later cut out of the black stone and set into the white stone so that the toes face inside the mosque. For a blessing, some pilgrims place their foreheads on this print and others, their feet. I thought it more fitting to place my head thereupon. A bit to the west of the al-Safa' Gate is the Bab al-Towa, which has two arches. A little farther on is the Bab al-T'ammari, again with two arches. Past this is the Bab al-Ma'amel, with two arches. Directly facing this gate is Abu Jahl's house, which is now used as a privy.

In the western wall, the width of the mosque, there are three gates, the first of which is in the south corner and is called Bab 'Orwa. It has two arches. In the middle of this side is the Abraham's Gate, which has three arches.

In the north or long wall there are four gates: in the west corner is Bab al-Wasit with one arch; to the east is the Bab al-'Ajala with one arch; in the middle of the side is the Bab al-Nadwa with two arches; past that is the Bab al-Moshawara with one arch, and finally at the northeast corner is the Bab Bani-Shayba.

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

The Shape of the Stone (p. 76)

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

A Description of the Ka'ba Door (p.76)

The door to the Ka'ba is made of teak and is a double door 62 cubits tall. Each half is 1% ells wide so that the whole door is 31 ells wide. The face of the door contains inscriptions and silver circles. The inscriptions are done in gold burnished with silver and contain the following Koranic verse: "Verily the first house appointed unto men to worship in was that which was in Becca."* Two large silver rings sent from Ghazna are attached to the door too high for anyone to reach. Two other silver rings, smaller than the first two, are attached to the doors such that anyone could reach them. To these lower rings is fitted a large silver lock, and the doors cannot be opened without removing it.

A Description of the Interior of the Ka'ba (p. 76)

The walls are six spans thick, and the floor is paved with white marble. Inside the structure are three small cabinets like platforms, one opposite the door, and the other two on the north side. The Moltazem is the name given, as Naser says, to the area of the Ka'ba wall between the Black Stone and the door into the interior. According to al-Azraqi it measures four cubits and is

considered a particularly appropriate place to render special votive prayers, in continuation of pre-Islamic customs.

The interior columns, which are attached to the ceiling, are made of teak wood and, except for one round one, are carved on all four sides. On the north side is a long, red marble slab set into the floor. It is said that the Apostle prayed on this slab; hence anyone who knows this tries to pray there also. The walls are faced with multicolored marble. On the western side are six silver mihrabs nailed to the wall. Each one is a man's height and elaborately worked in gold and burnished in silver. These niches are raised off the floor. From the floor to a height of four cubits the walls are plain; above that height they are covered with marble up to the ceiling, elaborately decorated and mostly plated with gold.

The tops of the three cabinets already mentioned, one each in the Iraq, Syria, and Yemen corners, are two wooden planks nailed to the walls with silver nails. These planks are from Noah's ark. Each one is five yards long and one yard wide. The top of the cabinet behind the Black Stone is draped with red brocade.

Inside the door, in the corner to the right, is a square structure three yards by three, in which there is a small door leading to the roof. A silver door is placed there and is called the Bab al-Rahma (Gate of Mercy), and there is a silver lock affixed to the door. On the roof is another door, like a trap door, both sides of which are plated in silver. The ceiling is wooden, but it is all covered with brocade so that no wood is visible.

Over the front wall is an inscription in gold with the name of the sultan of Egypt who took Mecca from the caliphs of the house of 'Abbas, al-Mo'ezz li-Din Allah. There are four other large silver plaques nailed to the wall with silver nails, on each of which is the name of a sultan of Egypt who sent a plaque during his reign. Between the columns are hung three silver lamps.

The roof of the Ka'ba is covered with Yemenite marble and looks like crystal. There are four skylights in the corners, and over each of these is a piece of glass, so that the light can come in but not the rain. The rainspout is in the middle of the north side; it is three yards long and is covered with gold writing.

The covering of the Ka'ba is white and has embroidery in two places. The embroidery bands are one ell wide and are separated by a distance of about ten ells. The spaces above and below the embroidery are equal, so that by means of the bands, the height is divided into three segments of ten ells each. On four sides of the covering are woven colored medallions geometrically decorated with gold thread. On each side are three medallions, a large one in the middle and a smaller one on either side. Thus the four sides contain a total of twelve medallions.

On the north side, outside the building, is constructed a wall about one and one-half ells high. Each end of this wall curves inward toward a corner of the Ka'ba so that the wall is bowed and semicircular. The midpoint of this wall is fifteen yards away from the Ka'ba wall. The wall and ground of this place are paved in colored marble in designs. This place is called Hejr, and the water from the rainspout pours into this Hejr. Beneath the rainspout is placed a green stone slab in the shape of a medallion, into which the water falls from the spout. The stone is large enough for a man to pray on.

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

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

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

The Bab al-Jawame mosque (p. 52)

The mosque is held aloft by four hundred marble columns, and the wall that contains the mihrab 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 fewer than five thousand people—students, the indigent, scribes who write checks and money drafts, and others. Al-Hakem 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-Hakem 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 rotls, a rotl 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.

A Description of the Sultan's Banquet (p. 57)

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 Saheb al-Setr. On the last day of Ramadan 440 (8 March 1049), the hall was decorated for the next day, which was the festival, when the sultan was to come after prayer and preside over the feast. Taken by my friend, as I entered the door to the hall, I saw constructions, galleries, and porticos that would take too long to describe adequately. There were twelve square structures, built one next to the other, each more dazzling than the last. Each measured one hundred cubits square, and one was a thing sixty cubits square with a dais placed the entire length of the building at a height of four ells, on three sides all of gold, with hunting and sporting scenes depicted thereon and also an inscription in marvelous calligraphy. All the carpets and pillows were of Byzantine brocade and bugalamun, 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 maunds of sugar were appropriated for this day for the sultan's feast. For decoration on the banquet table I saw a confection like an orange tree, every branch and leaf of which had been executed in sugar, and thousands of images and statuettes in sugar. The sultan's kitchen is outside the palace, and there are always fifty slaves

attached to it. There is a subterranean passageway between the building and the kitchen, and the provisioning is such that every day fourteen camel-loads of ice are used in the royal sherbet kitchen. Most of the emirs and the sultan's entourage received emoluments there, and, if the people of the city make requests on behalf of the suffering, they are given something. Whatever medication is needed in the city is given out from the harem, and there is also no problem in the distribution of other ointments, such as balsam.

Old Cairo's sultan palace (p. 45)

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 Mayyafareqin. 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): Bab al-Dhahab, Bab al-Bahr, Bab al-Rih, Bab al-Zahuma, Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Zabarjad, Bab al-'Id, Bab al-Fotuh, Bab al-Zallaga, and Bab al-Sariyya.

City of Amed (p. 8)

On the 6th of Day, old reckoning, we arrived in Amed, the foundation of which is laid on a monolith rock. The length of the city is two thousand paces, and the breadth the same. There is a wall all around made of black rock, each slab weighing between a hundred and a thousand maunds. The facing of these stones is so expert that they fit together exactly, needing no mud or plaster in between. The height of the wall is twenty cubits, and the width ten. Every hundred ells there is a tower, the half circumference of which is eighty ells. The crenellations are also of this same black stone. Inside the city are many stone stairs by means of which one can go up onto the ramparts, and atop every tower is an embrasure. The city has four gates, all of iron with no wood, and each gate faces one of the four cardinal directions. The east gate is called the Tigris Gate, the west gate the Byzantine Gate, the north the Armenian Gate, and the south the Tell Gate. Outside this wall just described is yet another wall, made of that same stone, the height of which is ten ells and the top of which is completely covered with crenellations. Inside the crenellation is a passageway wide enough for a totally armed man to pass and to stop and fight with ease. The outside wall also has iron gates, placed directly opposite the gates in the inside wall so that when one passes from a gate in the first wall one must traverse a space of fifteen ells before reaching the gate in the second wall. Inside the city is a spring that flows from a granite rock about the size of five millstones. The water is extremely pleasant, but no one knows where the source is. The city has many orchards and trees thanks to that water. The ruling prince of the city is a son of that Nasr al-Dawla who has been mentioned. I have seen many a city and fortress around the world in the lands of the Arabs, Persians, Hindus, and Turks, but never have I seen the likes of Amed on the face of the earth or have I heard anyone else say that he had seen its equal.

A Description of the City of New Cairo (p. 46-48)

The city of New Cairo has five gates: Bab al-Nasr, Bab al-Fotuh, Bab al-Qantara, Bab al-Zowayla, and Bab 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. 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 from one 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.