

med's tomb, which was believed to be in Mecca (whereas it actually is in Medina), and to consist of a coffin lifted in the air and maintained in perfect balance by the action of two concealed loadstones.³

The first eyewitness record of the unknown land of Arabia was brought to Europe in the early sixteenth century by an Italian adventurer, Ludovico Vartema.⁴ A soldier in the army of the Mamluk sultans of Egypt and Syria, he rode from Damascus to Mecca with a troop of cavalry charged with protection of the pilgrim caravan, and entered Mecca in May, 1504.⁵ He has written a description of the city and the rites of the pilgrimage in a book which also relates his travels in other distant countries: South Arabia, Persia and India.

Although Vartema was anything but a professional writer, his style is brilliant and his descriptions are graphic. But he was a superficial observer, and lacked education and scholarly interest. Nevertheless, he deserves our praise for having discarded the legend of the aerial tomb of Mohammed, and for having given a substantially exact report on the main features of the most sacred shrine in Islam.

After Vartema, we must come down to the beginning of the next century before we meet uncontroverted evidence of a Christian having visited Mecca. Two other men are credited with having made the dangerous trip to that city during the sixteenth century, but the genuineness of their adventures is not beyond suspicion.

George (or Gregory) Quadra (or de Quadra) was the captain of a Portuguese brigantine in the fleet commanded by Duarte de Lemos, a lieutenant of the illustrious con-

³ On this subject, see the exhaustive bibliography assembled by S. C. Chew in his learned and stimulating book *The Crescent and the Rose*, New York 1937, p. 387 note 1. I know by title only P. Giudici, *La vita di Maometto secondo le leggende e gli scrittori arabi*, Florence, 1912.

⁴ An English translation of Vartema's *Itinerario* was published in the Hakluyt series (vol. 32) in 1863, and reproduced by J. W. Jones (London, 1929) with an introduction by R. Temple. The latest edition of the Italian original text is that by P. Giudici (Milan, 1928), with a good introduction.

⁵ Vartema himself has "1503", and this date has been accepted without discussion by all those who have written on the history of the European discovery of Arabia. But it cannot possibly be correct. Vartema writes that he entered Mecca on May 18, and that the ceremonies of the pilgrimage began on the 23 ("a xxiii de Maio comincio ditto perdono in nel prefato tempio", p. 116 of Giudici's edition). As is well known, the yearly solemnity at Mecca begins on the afternoon of the 7th day of the month Dhu'l-hijja, and this day corresponded to May 23 in the Christian year 1504 (Islamic year 909), whereas in 1503 the 23d day of May corresponded to the 26th of Dhu'lqa'da 908, i.e., eleven days before the beginning of the pilgrimage. Therefore, Vartema was in Mecca in 1504.

queror of India, Afonso de Albuquerque. Cast by a storm on the southern coast of Arabia, in the year 1509, he fell into the hands of the sultan of Aden and, after a long captivity, was rescued by another sultan (probably the Mamluk ruler of Egypt), who conquered Aden and freed the prisoner, but only in order to take him into his own custody. In 1520, Quadra, whom everybody believed to be dead or lost, suddenly appeared at Hormuz, the Portuguese-held port on the Persian Gulf. To his astonished countrymen he declared that he had been compelled to become a Moslem and had taken part in the pilgrimage of Mecca, then had crossed the whole peninsula of Arabia, sharing the hard life of the nomadic tribes in the desert, and finally, having succeeded in escaping the close watch of his Arab hosts, had reached the Portuguese colony. In atonement for his apostasy, Quadra became a Franciscan monk.⁶ We have no means of judging the trustworthiness of Quadra's story; if it happens to be true, he would have been the second Christian visitor to Mecca, and, incidentally, a remote forerunner of Captain Philby in crossing Arabia from coast to coast.

The story of Vincent Leblanc, a Frenchman under whose name an account of the most romantic adventures was published in 1570, is so full of inconsistencies and nonsense that it deserves little or no credit.⁷ Whether Leblanc was at Mecca, as he claims, or not, what he is able to tell us about the Holy City is entirely dependent upon Vartema, and, therefore, deprived of any value.

None of the few Christians who visited Mecca in the seventeenth century, with a single exception to which we shall come later, supplies us with any valuable information, geographical, sociological or historical.

A Christian visitor to Mecca during the sixteenth century, about whom nothing was known before, has suddenly

⁶ See Hieronymus Osorio (Jerónimo Osorio), *De rebus Emmanuelis Regis Lusitaniae*, books V and XII (p. 190 and 446-48 in the edition Lisbon, 1571), on whom Wadding, *Annales Fratrum Minorum*, 16, 96-97 is entirely dependent; *Commentarios do grande Afonso Dalbuquerque capitán genral que foy das Indias Orientaes . . . novamente emendados e acrescentados pelo mesmo auctor* (i.e., Albuquerque's son), Lisbon, 1576, p. 479-80 (the first edition appeared in 1557). Comp. also A. Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité*, Cairo, 1935, 2, 199, and C. Beccari, *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales*, 9, 353-54.

⁷ *Les voyages fameux du sieur Vincent Le Blanc Marseillais qu'il a faits depuis l'âge de douze ans jusqu'à soixante ans aux quatre parties du monde . . . publiés par Coulon*, Paris, 1649 (another edition appeared at Troyes in 1658).

emerged from obscurity. The peculiar form which he gave to his report on his experiences, as well as the way in which it was discovered, are so unusual as to remind us of a "mystery story", with the sole difference, however, that not all the veils of the mystery can be lifted, as regularly happens in such novels.

While I was engaged in preparing a catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican Library, I came across a thin volume,⁸ containing a small section of the Koran (sūrah 25:21 to 26:109), namely the 37th part of a set of sixty.⁹ The manuscript, so far as may be judged from the script, belongs to the end of the 9/15th century or to the beginning of the 10/16th. Its binding, a very simple one of cardboard with leather back and edges, may be some decades younger.¹⁰

The fly-leaves at the beginning of the MS. (fol. 1 and 2 of the present numeration) are covered with a series of European numerals arranged in groups of varying size, each of them separated from the next by a dot. That it was code writing appeared obvious, and since the figures were by a European hand, it was also obvious that it was the work of a Westerner, who had owned the Arabic Koran.

Decoding the cryptogram proved a trifling task, since the code was childish. The figure 1 corresponded to *a*, 2 to *b*, etc., with two alternative signs, arbitrarily chosen, for *a*, besides the figure 1, and another one for *e* besides the figure 5. The language of the text so naïvely concealed under the cryptographic script proved to be Portuguese, rather archaic in its spelling and vocabulary, and the text itself a short but substantial report on a journey from Cairo to Mecca and Medina and back, performed by an unnamed traveler between May and September 1565.

Here follows a faithful reproduction of the singular document, with an English translation. The peculiar item-

⁸ G. Levi Della Vida, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vatican City 1935, p. 3 (Studi e Testi, 67). The entry is: "Vaticanus Arabicus 217".

⁹ As is known, the Koran is divided, for liturgical purposes, into thirty sections (*hizb*, plural *ahzāb*), and manuscript copies of it were often made up into thirty or sixty thin volumes, which were more handy than a single thick volume.

¹⁰ The blank leaves at the beginning and the end are of European paper, a feature which does not appear in Oriental manuscripts before the middle of the 16th century.

ization of the paragraphs has been omitted, since it would have been difficult to reproduce it in print.

Partimos do Cairo a .9. do mes de maio .1565. fomos a Birca .3. legoas do dito Cairo onde estiuemos ate os .28. do dito. Neste dia partimos para Agirut, castelo e agoada, que esta do Sues legoas duas a os .30. pola manham.

No ultimo a tarde partimos para Nahel castelo e agoada e chegamos ali a os dous de junho.

Daqui partimos logo para Acaba castelo e agoada na faldra do Mar Roso onde chegamos a os .5. de dito.

A os .7. partimos para Magara Zaib agoada e chegamos ali a os .9.

No mesmo dia partimos para Iumilcasab e chegamos no mesmo dia ia tarde.

A os [.9. *crossed out*] .10. dez partimos para Muela castelo, ou Birihen, e chegamos ali a os .11.

A os .13. partimos para Eslem castelo onde chegamos a os .15.

No mesmo dia partimos para Jhambo, a primera tera de Zarif da Meca, e chegamos ali a os .22. do dito mes.

A os .26. partimos para Bedri onde chegamos a os .28. Aqui Ilnur tabalcanaca.

No mesmo dia partimos para Rabacha e chegamos no ultimo de dito mes. Aqui se despem e uan nus ate a Meca.

No mesmo dia jha tarde partimos daqui para Bedri Honen, onde chegamos ao primero de julho.

No segundo partimos para a Meca e chegamos a os .3.

Partimos de Meca para Medinatelnabi a os .23. de julho e chegamos ao primero de agosto.

P (a)rtimos dali para o Cairo a .4. de agosto e chegamos a Birca aos .4. de setembro.

Da Birca ate Agirut castelo nam ha agoada.

De Agirut ate Nahel castelo nam ha agoada.

De Nahel ate Acba castelo nam ha agoada.

De Acba a Muela ou os Dos Poços ha .2. agoadas, Magara Zaib e a Iumilcasab.

De Muela ate Eslem nam á agoada.

De Eslem ate Jhambo há .4. agoadas, Igiú, Acsa, Elhora e Nabta.

De Jhambo ate Bedri nam há agoada.

De Bedri ate a Meca, se uai sempre de lugar en lugar.

De Bedri a Rabac, de Rabac a Bedri Honen, de Bedri Honen a Coles, de Coles a Batanamaru, de Batanamaru á Meca.

A mesquita da Meca hé muito grande e quadrada, tem em cada quadro .3. naues.

O foro he de madeira ia uelha, os arcos das naues se sustentan sobre colunas, alguas de marmore e oudras de pedra.

Tem a mesquita .99. portas e seis alcorons.

No uam da mesqu (i)ta esta a casa de Abraham, hé quadrada, tem em cada quadro .10. pasos.

Em hum dos quadros desta casa esta a pedra negra, tem de comprimento hum palmo e meio de largo.

Está esta casa rodeada de colunas de metal .31. asentadas sobre dados de pedra adintados, hum de uermelho e outro de branco.

"We left Cairo on May 9, 1565 and went to Birca,¹¹ three leagues from the said Cairo, where we stayed until the 28th of the said month. On that day we left for Agirut,¹² a castle and a watering place, which is two leagues from Suez, and arrived there on the morning of May 30.

"The last day of May we left for Nahel,¹³ a castle and a watering place, and arrived there on June 2.

"We left there at once for Acaba,¹⁴ a castle and a watering place on the shore of the Red Sea, and arrived there on the 5th.

"On the 7th, we left for Magara Zaib,¹⁵ a watering place, where we arrived on the 9th. The same day, we left for Iumilcasab¹⁶ and arrived late in the night on the same day.

"On the 10th, we left for the castle of Muela, or Birihih,¹⁷ where we arrived on the 11th.

"On the 13th, we left for the castle of Eslem,¹⁸ where we arrived on the 15th.

"The same day, we left for Jhambo,¹⁹ the first locality in the territory of the Zarif²⁰ of Mecca, and arrived there on the 22d of the same month.

"The 26th, we left for Bedri,²¹ where we arrived on the 28th. Here is Ilnur tabalcanaca.²²

"On the same day, we left for Rabacha²³ and arrived there on the last day of the month. Here people [*i.e.*, the pilgrims] undress and go naked until Mecca.²⁴

"The same day, late in the night, we left from there for Bedri Honen,²⁵ where we arrived on the first of July.

"On the second, we left for Mecca and arrived there on the third.

¹¹ Al-Birka, east of Cairo, where the pilgrims gathered before they began their formal march over the so-called "darb al-hajj al-miṣri", the route of the Egyptian pilgrimage. This route, which has been minutely described in several works, both by Arab authors and by European travelers and geographers, was discontinued at the beginning of the 19th century, when the sea-route was generally adopted. The pilgrims sail now from Suez and land at Jidda, the port of Mecca, whence they reach the Holy City by camel, or even, in the last few years, by a regular bus service.

¹² 'Ajrūd.

¹³ an-Nahl.

¹⁴ 'Aqaba, the well known port on the site of the ancient Aila of the classical authors, and near Ezion Geber, the city of Solomon.

¹⁵ Maghārat (or Maghā'ir) Shu'aib, "the cave (or caves) of Shu'aib". The Islamic tradition located there the tomb of the Midianite priest Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who is called Shu'aib in the Koran.

¹⁶ 'Uyūn al-qaṣab "the Springs of reed". Possibly, the author misread in his own manuscript 'iūmil' instead of 'uiūnil'.

¹⁷ Muwailih (Mwālih in modern pronunciation), and el-Bir'ain (el-Bir'ēn in modern pronunciation). The latter word means "the two wells".

¹⁸ Ezlem, a small port on the Red Sea.

¹⁹ Yanbo', the well known port of Medina.

²⁰ As is known, the whole territory of Hejaz, although nominally under the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultans, actually was ruled by the dynasty of the Benī Qatāda, who claimed to descend from Mohammed's daughter Fatima and the caliph Ali, and bore, therefore, the honorific title of Sherif.

²¹ Bedr, the place of the first battle fought by Mohammed against the Meccans, in the second year after the Hijra (623 A. D.).

²² Or rather "amir at-ṭabalkhānāt" (the author coded 9 10 12 19 16 instead of 9 10 1 11 9 16), *i.e.*, the official of the Ottoman government who took command of the pilgrim caravan at the approach to Mecca, and usually went ahead of it as far as the borders of the Ḥaram, the sacred territory around Mecca. The word *ṭabalkhānāt* is the plural of *ṭabalkhāna* or *ṭablkhāna*, literally "drum house", and thence "musical band" (see *Encyclopædia of Islam*, Supplement, p. 217-22). In the Mamluk state organization, which was taken over by the Ottomans, the amirs belonging to the higher ranks, when on duty, were preceded by a band of musicians.

²³ ar-Rābiḡh, on the Red Sea.

²⁴ The total nudity of the pilgrims, as stated by our author, is a slight exaggeration. The pilgrims, entering the Ḥaram, take off their regular dress and assume the so-called *ihram*, a garb consisting of two pieces of white cloth, one girdled around their loins and the other wrapped over their shoulders. This feature, as so many others in the Pilgrimage, is a survival of Pre-Islamic Arabia.

²⁵ Bedr Ḥunain (Ḥonēn in modern pronunciation), where another battle between Mohammed and the Meccans took place in the year 8 after the Hijra.

"On July 23d, we left Mecca for Medinatelnabi, and arrived on August the first.²⁶

"On August the fourth, we left for Cairo, and arrived at Birca on September the fourth.

"From Birca to the castle of Agirut, there are no watering places.²⁷ From Agirut to the castle of Nahel, there are no watering places. From Nahel to the castle of Acba, there are no watering places. From Acba to Muela, or The Two Wells,²⁸ there are two watering places: Magara Zaib and Iumilcasab. From Muela to Eslem, there are no watering places. From Eslem to Jhambo, there are four watering places: Igiú, Acsa, Elhora and Nabta. From Jhambo to Bedri, there are no watering places. From Bedri to Mecca, one is always going from one place to another: from Bedri to Rabac, from Rabac to Bedri Honen, from Bedri Honen to Coles, from Coles to Bañamaru, from Batanamaru to Mecca.

"The Mosque of Mecca is very large, and square; in each of its sides are three naves.

"The ceiling is of wood, already worn out; the arches of the naves are supported by columns, some of marble and others of stone.

"The Mosque has ninety-nine gates and six minarets.

"In the interior of the Mosque is located the House of Abraham, which is square, and measures ten paces on each side.

"In one of the walls of this house is the Black Stone, the length of which is one palm and the width half a palm.

"This house is encircled by thirty-one columns of metal, set on indented stone bases (dice), alternatively red and white."

In spite of its brevity, this itinerary is extremely accurate. Every station and every watering place on the way through the Sinai peninsula, along the coast of the Red Sea and in the mountainous gorges between ar-Rābigh and Mecca is painstakingly recorded, and the dates of arrival and departure are carefully given. The data supplied by the unknown traveler tally with the information which we possess from other sources about the old road of the "Egyptian Pilgrimage". Most of the passages of ancient Arab writers and Eu-

²⁶ July 3-23, 1565 corresponds to Dhu'l-hijja 4-24, 972 of the Islamic era. As stated above, the pilgrimage rites begin on Dhu'l-hijja 7 and last until Dhu'l-hijja 13. There is no doubt, therefore, that our unknown traveler took part in the rites in due time. As most pilgrims do, after having spent some days at Mecca (where many indulge in rest and pleasure after the hardship of the religious performances), he went to Medina to visit the Prophet's tomb and left for Cairo three days later. The route which he followed, although he does not mention it, must have been the same as that which was usually followed by the pilgrims on their way back: from Medina westward to Yanbo', and from there to Cairo by the road they had already traveled in the opposite direction.

²⁷ This paragraph appears to have been written as a direction for future travelers. Besides the places already mentioned, the author painstakingly points out all watering places met in his journey. Igiu, Acsa, Elhora and Nabta are, in correct transliteration, el-Wejh, el-Akra' (obviously, the figure 17= in the code is a slip, and 16=r was meant), el-Haurā' (el-Hōra in modern pronunciation) and an-Nabṭ or an-Nabaṭ (in Thévenot's itinerary, about which more will be said further on, they are transliterated Kalaat [*i.e.*, *Qal'at*, "fortress"] el Voudege, Ekre, Hhawre, Nabta). Coles is Kholaiṣ (Kholēṣ in modern pronunciation), Batanamaru is Baṭn Marr (see Yāqūt, 1,667 and the older geographers), a place which later (already at Thévenot's time) changed its name to Wādi Fātima.

²⁸ *i.e.*, el-Bir'ēn (see above, note 17).

ropean travelers referring to that road are quoted and discussed by Alois Musil in his standard work *The Northern Heğâz* (American Geographical Society: *Oriental Explorations and Studies*, No. 1), New York, 1926, p. 321-26, which may be supplemented by the map facing p. 58 in Bernhard Moritz's *Arabien*, Hanover, 1923, and by the numerous Arabic "Guides to the Pilgrimage", among which I will quote but one, the *Mash'al al-mahmal* by Mohammed aṣ-Ṣādiq Bey, printed at Cairo in 1297/1880, p. 7-23. A close parallel to the Portuguese Pilgrim's itinerary is afforded by the short itinerary which Jean Thévenot (1633-1667) reproduced in his *Voyages* (Paris 1689), 1, 476-79 and which he had obtained from "a Tunisian Prince who made that journey while I was in Cairo". The stations mentioned there are exactly the same as those which occur in our document, with only a few additions and omissions, and the distances, given in hours, closely tally with the Pilgrim's statements.²⁹

One of the most interesting passages in our Pilgrim's report is his short but accurate description of the great mosque of Mecca and of the Ka'ba, which is located in the centre of the wide courtyard of the Mosque. Even the most trifling details are exact, and provide us with the guarantee that the author is describing what he had actually seen; as, e.g., when he remarks that the wooden rafters in the ceiling of the porch are in a state of decay. Now we know that between the years 1572 and 1577 (979-84 after the Hijra), a few years after the Portuguese had seen them, the rafters actually were removed

²⁹ Besides Thévenot, Musil p. 325 quotes the Travels of Gabrielle Brémond ("*Viaggi*, edit. by G. Corra, pp. 163 f.>"). This mysterious traveler is said by the author of the article in *Biographie Universelle* 5, 467 (on which depends *Nouvelle Biographie générale*, 7, 317) to have been a woman, which would be a rare and interesting fact indeed—if it were true. I am strongly suspicious, however, that all biographic information in *Biographie Universelle* is drawn from no other source than the work itself, the complete title of which is *Viaggi fatti nell'Egitto Superiore, et Inferiore, nel monte Sinay . . . quello della Meka e del sepolcro di Moametto . . . opera del Signor Gabrielle Brémond Marsigliese da lui scritta in Francese, e fatta tradurre in Italiano, data in luce da Giuseppe Corvo [not Corra, as Musil has] libraro, Rome 1679* (the first edition, which I have not succeeded in seeing, was published in 1673). In spite of the French surname Brémond, no other edition than the Italian seems to have ever existed, and the given name Gabrielle represents an obsolete Italian spelling of the man's name Gabriele (Gabriel), not the French feminine name Gabrielle. Finally, the "Travels in Upper Egypt, etc." are but a plagiarism of Thévenot's book, the first edition of which appeared in 1664. My conclusion (which ought to be corroborated by a thorough inquiry, which I had no leisure to make) is that Gabriel Brémond never existed, or, if he did, his only travels were done across the pages of Thévenot. [Later.—I have recently come across a passage which proves that Gabriel Brémond actually existed. Ludovico Marracci, the author of the *Prodromus ad Refutationem Alcorani* (Padua 1698), writes (*Vita et res gestae a Mahumeto*, p. 29 b): "The reader will not be displeased if I report here what was written about this temple (i.e., the Ka'ba) and Mohammed's tomb by Gabriel Brémond, of Marseille, an intimate friend of mine . . ." (follows a long quotation from Brémond's book). I wonder if our pseudo-traveler should not be identified with an adventurer and novelist of the same name, who ended his life in Holland.]

by the Turkish sultans Selim II and Murad III and replaced by a set of vaulted domes of masonry.³⁰ The remark on the variety of the material in the columns of the same porch is also correct; of the 545 columns, 301 are of marble and 244 of a reddish stone.³¹ The minarets, which our author reckons as six, are now seven, but one of them is recent in its building.³² The only statement which fails to match the real facts is the number of the gates in the porch; they are actually twenty-five, not ninety-nine. As a matter of fact, there are many more doorways, since almost all gates are double; however, they do not reach a figure higher than forty-four.³³ Strangely enough, Vartema has made the same mistake, and affirms that the gates are "ninety or one hundred", and another description of Mecca, almost contemporary with the Portuguese, to which we shall come later, gives the same number of ninety-nine. I must acknowledge my inability to offer an explanation of this same misstatement in three independent sources.

The "House of Abraham" is of course the Ka'ba. The worship of that ancient heathen shrine had been so deeply rooted in the hearts of the inhabitants of Mecca that Mohammed did not dare to wipe it out completely, and embodied some of its features in his new religion, pretending that the Ka'ba had been built originally by Abraham and consecrated to the worship of the true God. The rectangular block of masonry, of which it consists, actually is forty feet long and thirty-three feet wide; the estimate of the Pilgrim, ten paces, is practically correct. Such, too, is his estimate of the Black Stone, the meteorite immured in the eastern wall of the Ka'ba, which is an object of deep veneration to the Moslems. The statement concerning the "thirty-one columns of metal" around the Ka'ba is no longer correct for the present time; but in the past there were there thirty-one metal poles,³⁴ which our author improperly calls columns.

³⁰ See Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 1, 16, and compare Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia*, 1, 241.

³¹ See, among others, Ibrāhīm Rif'at Pāshā, *Mir'āt al-ḥaramain*, Cairo 1344/1925, 1, 228; Rutter, 1, 227-29.

³² Rif'at Pāshā, 1, 235; Snouck Hurgronje, 1, 13. Comp. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 131.

³³ Rif'at Pāshā, 1, 229-34; Rutter, 1, 225 (p. 253 the total number is given as twenty-four, which is hardly correct).

³⁴ See below, note 44.