

Excerpt from ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and India*, edited and translated by H.A.R. Gibb, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929. Page numbers in the original are in square brackets.

[194] On the next day we arrived at the city of Dihli [Delhi], the metropolis of India, a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength. It is surrounded by a wall that has no equal in the world, and is the largest city in India, nay, rather the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient.

The city of Delhi is made up now of four neighbouring and contiguous towns. One of them Delhi proper, the old city built by the infidels and captured in the year 1188. The second is called Siri, known also as the Abode of the Caliphate; this was the town given by the sultan to Ghiyath ad-Din, the grandson of the 'Abbasid Caliph Multansir, when he came to his court. The third is called Tughlaq Abad, after its founder, the Sultan Tughlaq, the father of the sultan of India to whose court we came. The reason why he built it was that one day he said to a former sultan "master of the world, it were fitting that a city should be built here." he sultan replied to him in jest "hen you are sultan, build it." t came about by the decree of God that he became sultan, so he built it and called it by his own name. The fourth is called Jahan Panah, and is set apart for the residence of the reigning sultan, Muhammad Shah. He was the founder of it, and it was his intention to unite these four towns within [195] a single wall, but after building part of it he gave up the rest because of the expense required for its construction.

The cathedral mosque occupies a large area; its walls, roof, and paving are all constructed of white stones, admirably squared and firmly cemented with lead. There is no wood in it at all. It has thirteen domes of stone, its pulpit also is made of stone, and it has four courts. In the centre of the mosque is an awe-inspiring column, and nobody knows of what metal it is constructed. One of their learned men told me that it is called *Haft Jush* which means "even metals," and that it is constructed from these seven. A part of this column, of a finger's breadth, has been polished, and gives out a brilliant gleam. Iron makes no impression on it. It is thirty cubits high, and we rolled a turban round it, and the portion which encircled it measured eight cubits. At the eastern gate there are two enormous idols of brass prostrate on the ground and held by stones, and everyone entering or leaving the mosque treads on them. The site was formerly occupied by an idol temple, and was converted into a mosque on the conquest of the city. In the northern court is the minaret, which has no parallel in the lands of Islam. It is built of red stone, unlike the rest of the edifice, ornamented with sculptures, and of great height. The ball on the top is of glistening white marble and its "pples " small balls surmounting a minaret] are of pure gold. The passage is so wide that elephants could go up by it. A person in whom I have confidence told me that when it was built he saw an elephant climbing with stones to the top. The Sultan Qutb ad-Din wished to build one in the western court even larger, but was cut off by death when only a third of it had been completed. This minaret is one of the wonders of the world for size, and the width of its passage is such that three [196] elephants could mount it abreast. The third of it built equals in height the whole of the other minaret we have mentioned in the northern court, though to one looking at it from below it does not seem so high because of its bulk.

Outside Delhi is a large reservoir named after the Sultan Lalmish, from which the inhabitants draw their drinking water. It is supplied by rain water, and is about two miles in length by half that breadth. In the centre there is a great pavilion built of squared stones, two stories high. When the reservoir is filled with water it can be reached only in boats, but when the water is low the people go into it. Inside it is a mosque, and at most times it is occupied by mendicants devoted to the service of God. When the water dries up at the sides of this reservoir, they sow sugar canes, cucumbers, green melons, and pumpkins there. The melons and pumpkins are very sweet but of

small size. Between Delhi and the Abode of the Caliphate is the private reservoir, which is larger than the other. Along its sides there are about forty pavilions, and round about it live the musicians.

Among the learned and pious inhabitants of Delhi is the devout and humble imam Kamal ad-Din, called “the Cave Man” from the cave in which he lives outside the city. I had a slave-boy who ran away from me, and whom I found in the possession of a certain Turk. I proposed to take him back from him, but the shaykh said to me “his boy is no good to you. Don’t take him.” The Turk wished to come to an arrangement, so he paid me a hundred dinars and kept the boy. Six months later the boy killed his master and was taken before the sultan, who ordered him to be handed over to his master’s sons, and they put him to death. When I saw this miracle on the part of the shaykh I attached myself to him, withdrawing from the world and giving all that I [197] possessed to the poor and needy. I stayed with him for some time, and I used to see him fast for ten and twenty days on end and remain standing most of the night. I continued with him until the sultan sent for me and I became entangled in the world once again—may God give me a good ending!

This king is of all men the fondest of making gifts and of shedding blood. His gate is never without some poor man enriched or some living man executed, and stories are current amongst the people of his generosity and courage and of his cruelty and violence towards criminals. For all that, he is of all men the most humble and the readiest to show equity and justice. The ceremonies of religion are strictly complied with at his court, and he is severe in the matter of attendance at prayer and in punishing those who neglect it. He is one of those kings whose felicity is unimpaired and surpassing all ordinary experience, but his dominant quality is generosity. We shall relate some stories of this that are marvelous beyond anything ever heard before, and I call God and his Angels and His Prophets to witness that all that I tell of his extraordinary generosity is absolute truth. I know that some of the instances I shall relate will be unacceptable to the minds of many, and that they will regard them as quite impossible, but in a matter which I have seen with my own eyes and of which I know the accuracy and have had a large share, I cannot do otherwise than speak the truth.

The sultan’s palace at Delhi is called *Dar Sara* and contains many doors. At the first door there are a number of guardians, and beside it trumpeters and flute-players. When any amir or person of note arrives they sound their instruments and say “so-and-so has come, so-and-so has come.” The same takes place also at the second and third doors. Outside the first door are platforms on which the executioners sit, for the custom [198] amongst them is that when the sultan orders a man to be executed, the sentence is carried out at the door of the audience hall, and the body lies there over three nights. Between the first and second doors there is a large vestibule with platforms along both sides, on which sit those whose turn of duty it is to guard the doors. Between the second and third doors there is a large platform on which the principal naqib [keeper of the register] sits; in front of him there is a gold mace, which he holds in his hand, and on his head he wears a jeweled tiara of gold, surmounted by peacock feathers. The second door leads to an extensive audience hall in which the people sit. At the third door there are platforms occupied by the scribes of the door. One of their customs is that none may pass through this door except those whom the sultan has prescribed, and for each person he prescribes a number of his staff to enter along with him. Whenever any person comes to this door the scribes write down “so-and-so came at the first hour” or the second, and so on, and the sultan receives a report of this after the evening prayer. Another of their customs is that anyone who absents himself from

the palace for three days or more, with or without excuse, may not enter this door thereafter except by the sultan's permission. If he has an excuse of illness or otherwise he presents the sultan with a gift suitable to his rank. The third door opens into an immense audience hall called *Hazar Ustun* which means "thousand pillars." The pillars are of wood and support a wooden roof, admirably carved. The people sit under this, and it is in this hall that the sultan holds public audiences.

As a rule his audiences are held in the afternoon, though he often holds them early in the day. He sits cross-legged on a throne placed on a dais carpeted in white, with a large cushion behind him and two [199] others as arm-rests on his right and left. When he takes his seat, the wazir stands in front of him, the secretaries behind the wazir, then the chamberlains and so on in order of precedence. As the sultan sits down the chamberlains and naqibs say in their loudest voice *Bismillah*.¹ At the sultan's head stands the "great king" Qabula with a fly-whisk in his hand to drive off the flies. A hundred armour-bearers stand on the right and a like number on the left, carrying shields, swords, and bows. The other functionaries and notables stand along the hall to right and left. Then they bring in sixty horses with the royal harness, half of which are ranged on the right and half on the left, where the sultan can see them. Next fifty elephants are brought in, which are adorned with silken cloths, and have their tusks shod with iron for greater efficacy in killing criminals. On the neck of each elephant is its mahout, who carries a sort of iron axe with which he punishes it and directs it to do what is required of it. Each elephant has on its back a sort of large chest capable of holding twenty warriors or more or less, according to the size of the beast. These elephants are trained to make obeisance to the sultan and incline their heads, and when they do so the chamberlains cry in a loud voice *Bismillah*. They also are arranged half on the right and half on the left behind the persons standing. As each person enters who has an appointed place of standing on the right or left, he makes obeisance on reaching the station of the chamberlains, and the chamberlains say *Bismillah*, regulating the loudness of their utterance by the rank of the person concerned, who then retires to his appointed place, beyond which he never passes. If it is one of the infidel Hindus who makes obeisance, the chamberlains say to him God guide thee."

If there should be anyone at the door who has come to offer the sultan a gift, the chamberlains enter [200] the sultan's presence in order of precedence, make obeisance in three places, and inform the sultan of the person at the door. If he commands them to bring him in, they place the gift in the hands of men who stand with it in front of the sultan where he can see it. He then calls in the donor, who makes obeisance three times before reaching the sultan and makes another obeisance at the station of the chamberlains. The sultan then addresses him in person with the greatest courtesy and bids him welcome. If he is a person who is worthy of honour, the sultan takes him by the hand or embraces him, and asks for some part of his present. It is then placed before him, and if it consists in weapons or fabrics he turns it this way and that with his hand and expresses his approval, to set the donor at ease and encourage him. He gives him a robe of honour and assigns him a sum of money to wash his head, according to their custom in this case, proportioned to his merits.

When the sultan returns from a journey, the elephants are decorated, and on sixteen of them are placed sixteen parasols, some brocaded and some set with jewels. Wooden pavilions are built several stories high and covered with silk cloths, and in each story there are singing girls wearing

¹ "In the name of God," which is the first word of each chapter of the Quran.

magnificent dresses and ornaments, with dancing girls amongst them. In the centre of each pavilion is a large tank made of skins and filled with syrup-water, from which all the people, natives or strangers, may drink, receiving at the same time betel leaves and areca nuts. The space between the pavilions is carpeted with silk cloths, on which the sultan's horse treads. The walls of the street along which he passes from the gate of the city to the gate of the palace are hung with silk cloths. In front of him march footmen from his own slaves, several thousands in number, and behind come the mob and the soldiers. On one of his entries [201] into the capital I saw three or four small catapults placed on elephants throwing gold and silver coins amongst the people from the moment when he entered the city until he reached the palace.

I shall now mention a few of his magnificent gifts and largesses. The merchant Shihab ad-Din of Kazarun, who was a friend of al-Kazaruni the "king" of the merchants in India, was invited by the latter to join him and arrived with a valuable present for the sultan. On their way they were attacked by a considerable force of infidels, who killed the "king" of the merchants and carried off as booty his money and treasures and Shihab ad-Din's present. Shihab ad-Din himself escaped with his life, and the sultan, on hearing of this, gave orders that he should be given thirty thousand dinars and return to his own country. He refused to accept it, however, saying that he had come for the express purpose of seeing the sultan and kissing the ground before him. They wrote to the sultan to this effect and he, gratified with what Shihab ad-Din had said, commanded him to be brought to Delhi with every mark of honour. When Shihab ad-Din was introduced into the sultan's presence, the sultan made him a rich present, and some days later asked where he was. On hearing that he was ill, he commanded one of his courtiers to go instantly to the treasury and take a hundred thousand tangahs of gold (the tangah being worth two and a half Moroccan dinars) and carry them to him to set him at ease. He ordered him to buy with this money what Indian goods he pleased, and gave instructions that no one else should buy anything at all until Shihab ad-Din had made all his purchases. In addition he ordered three ships to be made ready for his journey with complete equipment and full pay and provisions for the crew. So Shihab ad-Din departed and disembarked in the island of Hormuz, where he [202] built a great house. I saw this house later on, and I saw also Shihab ad-Din, having lost all that he had, soliciting a gift at Shiraz from its sultan, Abu Ishaq. That is the way with riches amassed in these Indian lands; it is only rarely that anyone gets out of the country with them, and when he does leave it and reaches some other country, God sends upon him some calamity which annihilates all that he possesses. So it happened to Shihab ad-Din, for everything that he had was taken from him in the civil war between the king of Hormuz and his nephews, and he left the country stripped of all his wealth.