

“Further, as above we have set down some details regarding the cities of Aleppo and Baghdad, it remains on us an obligation to say something about the city of Isfahan. It should be stated that it is situated in a large plain surrounded in a curve by various hills entirely destitute of trees, which causes the city to be very poorly supplied with wood, the dung of animals being burnt by the poor people to make up for lack of firewood.

“The city must have considerably more than 200,000 inhabitants: there is a large supply of artificers of all sorts of things and, on account of the very large concourse of merchants from India and the kingdom of Lahore in particular, everything is to be found there: there is an abundance of foodstuffs, of fruits especially, of which there is a most remarkable supply with the exception of figs. The houses are universally made of bricks of unbaked earth, as there is no facility for burning them because of the above-mentioned lack of wood: and, as the city is full of very extensive gardens, it has a scattered appearance, so that the streets and edifices are wanting in any stateliness of aspect, with the exception of those built by the present Shah, which are of stone and mortar, very handsome architecturally and many in number. There is a square, which certainly is larger and finer than any other in the world, more than 500 yards in length and broad in proportion, surrounded by porticos full of booths of different merchandise and with a row of fine plane-trees spaced out round it, which gives it an aspect of remarkable beauty. There are various very large dwellings for foreign merchants, called by these people ‘caravansarais,’ constructed by the present king with royal magnificence and grandeur: and on one side adjoining the city is a very broad road approximately four miles in length, which in parts is graced by various gardens and many handsome buildings, and this too on each side has two rows of very lofty plane-trees, while in the midst of it there flows an artificial channel of running water with which here and there various very becoming fishponds and some fountains in the Italian style have been ornamented. In the midst of this road there is one very fine bridge, one of the most ornate in the world, built by this Shah, by means of which a stream is crossed, which is artificially divided up into various small channels in the city, and provides the majority of the houses with running water, of which they make use in particular for irrigating the soil, which being naturally very arid would be totally barren without this water. There is a rather small castle, or fort, surrounded by earthen walls after the fashion already explained, and of the like material are all the walls of the city constructed, outside it being a fairly broad and deep fosse. Near the bridge mentioned, which will be about one mile outside Isfahan, to the right lies the new town of Julfa, built by order of the Shah a few years ago and inhabited by Armenian Christians, known from its name as ‘Julfaini’: for, having in past years taken from the Turks their country and destroyed the town of Julfa (there), he caused its inhabitants to be transferred to this new position and here built the new town. All the people of Isfahan dress most plainly in imitation of the Shah, so that nobles and plebeians alike go about dressed uniformly in linen clothes of various colours, reaching to half-way down their legs, with a long piece of cloth rolled round their waist, but without any outer garment.

“The whole race is vile and mean in its conduct: those who show signs of any loftiness of soul are very few in number: they are all so prone to lie that very rare are the occasions when they speak the truth. They are considered very abject and despicable by the Shah: and, although he moves about for the most part almost unattended and without making any outward show of majesty in any way whatsoever, and while going about he converses and discusses matters with all and sundry, yet he wishes to be respected and causes himself to be shown the most profound consideration.

“The king is forty years of age,¹ rather small in stature, yet well proportioned in his members and his face: his nose aquiline and eyes beyond measure brilliant, but he has been so tanned by the sun that his face has remained excessively dark-complexioned. He is curious beyond bounds, so that very often he goes off to different places, incognito and

¹ i.e. Born about 1569, which would make him sixty solar years old in 1629—which tallies with the figure given by Fr. John Thaddeus in his report of 1630.