WILEY

Marco Polo's Travels

Author(s): P. Molesworth Sykes

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of Asiatic Russia. The route was then entirely unfollowed, but its claims were beginning to attract attention, and in the early seventies a Russian merchant offered a reward to any one who would open up trading relations by sea between Europe and the Obi river. Captain Wiggins seized the opportunity of putting his long-cherished schemes to the test, and resigned his official appointment. Voyages undertaken in 1874 and 1875 at his own expense were unsuccessful, in so far as that he was not able to ascend either the Obi or the Yenisei; but they resulted in the acquisition of much useful information about the navigation of the Kara sea, and paved the way to success. A third voyage, undertaken with financial assistance in 1876, on board the *Thames*, a vessel of 120 tons register, did not end until Yeniseisk was reached, 900 miles as the crow flies inland from the head of the Gulf of Yenisei. During the next twenty years various other voyages by Captain Wiggins to the rivers Obi and Yenisei confirmed his theory as to the practicability of the Kara sea route to Siberia. Once, in 1894, he lost his vessel in the Kara sea; but the loss was not due to ice, but to fog and to an unexpected current. The opening-up of the route, however, excited strong opposition among those interested in the overland trade, and practically nothing has been done to follow up Captain Wiggins's enterprise. None the less, his skill and courage received widespread recognition both in Russia and in this country. He lectured before the Imperial Russian Geographical Society at St. Petersburg, and was presented by the Emperor Alexander III. with a service of silver plate. King Edward (then Prince of Wales) manifested great interest in the voyages, and received the navigator at Sandringham; while in 1894 Captain Wiggins was awarded the Murchison Grant by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Marco Polo's Travels.

I. DID MARCO POLO VISIT BAGHDAD?

IN connection with the third edition of Yule's 'Marco Polo,' which has been recently edited by the well-known French geographer, M. Henri Cordier, it seems desirable to discuss some points which I have raised in my 'Ten Thousand Miles in Persia,' chap. xxiii., which chapter the French savant has referred to in various portions of the new edition. Chief among these questions is whether Ser Marco visited Baghdad. Not only is this important from the geographical point of view, but the question is one which, to a considerable extent, affects the veracity, or at any rate the accuracy, of the illustrious Venetian to no small extent. Consequently, it is a question which, in my humble opinion, should be settled without, if possible, leaving any doubt on the subject, and this I trust to be able to succeed in accomplishing.

Sir Henry Yule, in his introduction (vol. 1, p. 19), traces out the following itinerary for the travellers, viz. Ayas, on the Gulf of Scanderoon, and thence to Sivas and Mosul, from which point the Tigris was followed to Baghdad. From Baghdad the travellers, according to Yule, descended the Tigris and the Persian gulf to Hormuz.

This view I was, and am, unable to accept for the following reasons: Firstly, is it not unlikely that Marco should term the Volga the Tigris? * Secondly, in

* *Vide* vol. 1, p. 5 (2nd and 3rd editions).

describing the Caspian sea, the statement is made that "into it flows the great river Euphrates." *

Now, we know that Marco Polo never crossed the Volga nor saw the Caspian sea, and I hold that these colossal errors in geography are impossible, if we suppose that he travelled down the Tigris for many hundreds of miles, past its junction with the Euphrates. Any other view would surely lower the great traveller's reputation.

Let us, in the next place, examine the references he makes to Baghdad, or Baudas. Here he merely mentions that "Baudas is a great city, which used to be the seat of the Calif of all the Saracens in the world, just as Rome is the seat of the Pope of all the Christians." † The manufactures of Baghdad are indeed given, but no mention is made of the buildings, and, generally speaking, the whole description is meagre compared with his account of far less important cities, such as Yezd and Kerman. There is indeed a reference to the capture of the city by Alaü, or Hulaku Khan, but this, I would urge, by no means adds probability to Yule's views, as the echo of that grim tragedy must have resounded throughout all Asia and Eastern Europe.

Another point, albeit a minor one, is that, had Baghdad been the objective, would the travellers have taken so circuitous a route *viâ* Sivas, whereas, if we suppose them to be making for Tabriz, which was already beginning to attract through traffic at the expense of Baghdad, this route is more or less a natural one?

The above arguments are, however, but minor, if we consider the utterly inaccurate description of his supposed onward journey. To quote the text: "A very great river flows through the city, and by this you can descend to the Sea of India. There is a great traffic of merchants with their goods this way; they descend some eighteen days from Baudas, and then come to a certain city called Kisi, where they enter the Sea of India. There is also on the river, as you go from Baudas to Kisi, a great city called Bastra, surrounded by woods in which grow the best dates in the world." ‡

Now, in both these paragraphs there is separate and independent mention and inference that Kisi is at the mouth of the Sea of India or the Persian gulf, whereas it is situated some 400 miles from the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, which is the name given to the united streams of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Would Marco Polo have been guilty of such an astounding statement? Having studied his works carefully in parts where I can check it, I unhesitatingly answer in the negative.

This view is, I would urge, supported by a second reference to Kis, in which, on his return journey from China to Europe, he describes its position as regards the city of Calatu. The reference runs: "First, however, there is a point that I have omitted; to wit, that when you leave the city of Calatu and go between west and north-west a distance of 500 miles, you come to the city of Kis." §

Is it, I would ask, likely that Ser Marco would give this description of the position of Kis, or Kisi, if he had already touched at it on the way to Hormuz, his previous reference to which he mentions? One further point is that, if we accept Sir Henry Yule's views, the description of the route from Yezd to Kerman and thence to Hormuz must have been written in the reverse way to that in which Marco travelled, and this is surely out of the question, and by itself furnishes almost sufficient proof of the correctness of my views.

* Vol. 1, p. 52.

† *Ibid.*, p. 63.

‡ *Ibid.*, chap. vi. p. 63.

§ Vol. 2, p. 452.

It remains to add that Sir Henry Yule, in his note on the subject, wrote, "Polo is here either speaking without personal knowledge or is so brief as to . . . ;" and again, "I am inclined, however, to think that this was from not having visited it, *sc. Kisi*." In the plate entitled "Probable view of Marco Polo's own Geography,"* the itinerary is not shown as running to Baghdad. M. Cordier, however, in referring to this important subject, quotes from my work, but in my opinion hardly meets my points in his note, which runs as follows: † —

"Major Sykes, in his remarkable book on Persia, chap. xxiii. pp. 262, 263, does not share Sir Henry Yule's opinion regarding this itinerary, and he writes: 'To return to our travellers, who started on their second great journey in 1271, Sir Henry Yule, in his introduction, makes them travel *viâ* Sivas to Mosul and Baghdád, and thence by sea to Hormuz, and this is the itinerary shown on his sketch-map. This view I am unwilling to accept for more than one reason. In the first place, if, with Colonel Yule, we suppose that Ser Marco visited Baghdád, is it not unlikely that he should term the river Volga the Tigris, and yet leave the river of Baghdád nameless? It may be urged that Marco believed the legend of the reappearance of the Volga in Kurdistan, but yet, if the text be read with care, and the character of the traveller be taken into account, this error is scarcely explicable in any other way than that he was never there.

"Again, he gives no description of the striking buildings of Baudas, as he terms it, but this is nothing to the inaccuracy of his supposed onward journey. To quote the text, "A very great river flows through the city, . . . and merchants descend some eighteen days from Baudas, and then come to a certain city called Kisi, where they enter the Sea of India."

"Surely Marco, had he travelled down the Persian gulf, would never have given this description of the route, which is so untrue as to point to the conclusion that it was vague information given by some merchant whom he met in the course of his wanderings.

"Finally, apart from the fact that Baghdád, since its fall, was rather off the main caravan route, Marco so evidently travels east from Yezd and thence south to Hormuz, that, unless his journey be described backwards, which is highly improbable, it is only possible to arrive at one conclusion, namely, that the Venetians entered Persia near Tabriz and travelled to Sultania, Kashan, and Yezd. Thence they proceeded to Kermán and Hormuz, where, probably fearing the sea voyage, owing to the manifest unseaworthiness of the ships, which he describes as "wretched affairs," the Khorasan route was finally adopted. Hormuz, in this case, was not visited again until the return from China, when it seems probable that the same route was retraced to Tabriz, where their charge, the Lady Kokachin, "moult bele dame et avenant," was married to Ghazan Khan, the son of her *fiancé* Arghun. It remains to add that Sir Henry Yule may have finally accepted this view in part, as in the plate showing "Probable View of Marco Polo's own Geography," the itinerary is not shown as running to Baghdád."

"I may be allowed to answer that when Marco Polo *started* for the East, Baghdad was not rather off the main route. The fall of Baghdad was not immediately followed by its decay, and we have proof of its prosperity at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

"Tauris had not yet the importance it had reached when the Polos visited it on their *return* journey. We have the will of the Venetian Pietro Viglione dated from Tauris, December 10, 1264 (*Archiv. Veneto.*, 26, 161-165), which shows that he was but a pioneer. It was only under Arghún Khan (1284-91) that Tauris became the great market for foreign, especially Genoese, merchants, as Marco Polo remarks on his return journey; with Ghazan and the new city built by that prince, Tauris reached a very high degree of prosperity, and was then really the chief emporium on the route from Europe to Persia and the far East.

* Vol. 1, p. 107.

† P. xix. of Introduction to vol. 1.

"Sir Henry Yule had not changed his views, and if in the plate showing 'Probable View of Marco Polo's own Geography,' the itinerary is not shown as running to Baghdad, it is mere neglect on the part of the draughtsman."—[H. C.]

It is to be noticed that in the above note M. Cordier hangs his reply mainly on the fact that Baghdad was more and Tabriz less important at that particular period than I had imagined. Here I am ready to bow to superior knowledge, albeit the fact is not fully proved; but the main points of my argument remain, in my opinion, unanswered, and, with all respect to M. Cordier, I think that this matter should be fully discussed, and not dismissed by a reference to the supposed neglect of a draughtsman. Personally, I consider Marco Polo to have been a shrewd observer and incapable of confusing the Tigris with the Volga, and of making the Euphrates—this is really a second confusion with the Volga—discharge into the Caspian sea, except on the supposition that he was writing on hearsay. Consequently I hold it that he passed by a route where he could not make personal inquiries into these questions, and this route would be the one selected by me.

To conclude, I maintain that Marco Polo entered Persia near Tabriz, whence he travelled to Sultania, Kashan, Yezd, Kerman, and Hormuz. From that port, owing to the unseaworthiness of the vessels, the presence of pirates, the fact that the season was past, or for some other reason, he returned by a westerly route to Kerman, and thence crossed the Lut to Khorasán.

DID MARCO POLO VISIT THE TABAS?

A section of Ser Marco's journey on which I have gained some recent information is that portion which lies between Kermán and the north. As far as Cobinan, still known as Kubanán, there is no doubt as to the identity of the place, even if the route adopted is not absolutely certain. Consequently we have now to deal with the onward section to Tunocain. Before proceeding farther, I will quote the text which runs, "When you depart from this city of Cobinan, you find yourself again in a desert of surpassing aridity, which lasts for some eight days; here are neither fruits nor trees to be seen, and what water there is is bitter and bad, so that you have to carry both food and water. The cattle must needs drink the bad water, will they nill they, because of their great thirst. At the end of those eight days you arrive at a province which is called Tonocain."* I was under the impression that a route ran direct from Kubunán to Tabas, but when visiting this latter town a few months ago I made careful inquiries on the subject, which elicited the fact that this was not the case, and that the route invariably followed by Kubunán-Tabas caravans joined the Kermán-Rávar-Naiband route at Cháh Kuru, 12 miles south of Darbana. It follows this track as far as Naiband, whence the route to Tabas branches off; but the main caravan route runs *viâ* Zenagan and Duhuk to Tun. This new information, I would urge, makes it almost certain that Ser Marco travelled to Tun, as Tabas falls to the west of the main route. Another point is that the district of Tabas only grows four months' supplies, and is, in consequence, generally avoided by caravans owing to its dearth.

In 1893 I travelled from Tun to the south across the Lut as far as Chah Kuru by this very route, and can testify to the general accuracy of Ser Marco's description,† although there are now villages at various points on the way. Finally as our traveller especially mentions Tonocain, or Tun va Kain, one is inclined to

* Yule's 'Marco Polo,' 3rd edit., vol. 1, p. 127.

† The eight stages would be—(1) Hasanábád, 21 miles; (2) Darband, 28 miles; (3) Chehel Pái, 23 miles; (4) Naiband, 39 miles; (5) Zenagán, 47 miles; (6) Duhuk 25 miles; (7) Chah Khusháb, 36 miles; and (8) Tun, 23 miles.

accept this as evidence of first-rate importance, especially as it is now corroborated by the information I gained at Tabas. The whole question, once again, furnishes an example of how very difficult it is to make satisfactory inquiries, except on the spot.

P. MOLESWORTH SYKES, Major,
June 29, 1905. H.B.M.'s Consulate-General, Meshed.

The Masai Uplands.

Nandi, British East Africa, May 14, 1905.

IN reference to the sketch-map of Mr. C. W. Hobley, published in the *Journal of March*, 1905, I should like to make the following remarks:—

I made a trip in October, 1903, from the Government station at Nyeri (about 30 miles south-west of Mount Kenya), and marched in a northerly direction, crossing all the rivers forming the eastern watershed of the Aberdare range as far as the Pesi swamp. Thence I crossed the "Markham downs" to El Bor Lossat, and returned to Nyeri from there.

I made a plane-table sketch of the country I traversed, showing every stream I crossed, and it is interesting as filling up a gap between Mr. Tate's journey and that of Mr. Hobley.

The outline of the Pesi swamp I was unable to define accurately, as the whole place was a mass of papyrus, with the ground baked hard by the sun, and with the Pesi river cutting its way through in a deep channel. There can be no doubt that at certain seasons of the year the swamp is a large tract of inundated cotton soil, but owing to the dry season of the year at which I visited it I was able to traverse the whole of it dry-shod! The outline in my map is the extent of the papyrus, and I think coincides with the area of the swamp when inundated to its full extent. I could find no trace of open water. As regards the El Bor Lossat lake, which is a Masai name meaning "the deep swamp," I did not notice the neck of land separating the two lakes which Mr. Hobley marks in his map, and I could not have crossed it anywhere to my knowledge without wading through at least 3 feet of water. The circumference of the lake, marked by a continuous line in my map, is a well-defined bank about 18 inches above the water, which at the narrower end was covered with reeds and long grass, with numerous elephant tracks leading across. Wildfowl of all sorts were numerous. Mosquitoes were a perfect torment.

I notice Mr. Hobley does not mark Mount Korai, which is the high saddle-back hill forming the summit of Satima, the latter being the name of the northernmost block of the Aberdare range.

Nearly all the natural features in this district have both Masai, Dorobo, and Kilungu names; consequently different maps of the same district are extremely confusing, as showing totally different names for the same feature. Swahilis, on the other hand, if asked the name of features (say a river), will give it a name offhand, such as the Hippopotamus river (Nito ya Kiboko), or the Muddy river (Nito ya Topi).

I was travelling on my trip with Masai who had been bred and born on Laikipia, and, consequently, all the names of that district in my map are Masai

* Map, p. 480.