

BOOK OF THE KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 6: Further Eastern Travels and Central Asia

A Modern English Translation — Exhaustive Version

The later sections of the book describe further travels into Central Asia and the regions beyond Persia. The friar speaks of departing from Magot and traveling with companions twenty-five days' journey westward to the city of Bocarin, where the king always resides. It is a very great city, and a river flows by it which has its source in the Montes Caspios. Here he met with merchants who came from Catayo (China) and traveled with them thirty-five days' journey to another city called Cato, the head of a kingdom with very extensive territory. But all the residents live in the country, except the people of one city where the king lives. These two kingdoms have for a device a yellow flag with many white stars.

We departed from the kingdom of Cato and travelled a great distance without finding town nor city, yet the country was inhabited and with many flocks. We came to a mountain which is a spur from the Montes Caspios and extends to the Sea of Sara. This mountain is 125 days journey long. We crossed it by a very high pass and again travelled a long distance over a country without cities or towns, until we came to a great city called Norgancio in the empire of Uxbeco. Near it flows a great river called Organcio which rises in that spur of the Montes Caspios. The King of this Norgancio has for his device a white flag with the sign of Uxbeco Emperor of Sara red.

We left Norgancio and travelled for 30 days without seeing a city or town; but there was plenty of milk and meat and mouos. Then we came to the Sea of Sara, to a city which they call Raansinlia. It is in the Gulf of Monimenti. I stayed there for some time. Afterwards I embarked on the Sea of Sara in a ship of Coman Christians, and we anchored off a city called Godaspa, which is in the territory of Vnascayt Emperor of Persia. Further on a great river enters the sea called Tigris, which rises in the mountains of Toro. I followed up the course of this river until I came to the mountains of Toro which are in the middle of the land of the Emperor of Persia. From these mountains four great rivers flow.

They call one the Tigris which enters the Sea of Sara between two cities called Godaspa and Sarmagante which belonged to the empire of Persia. The other, called Cur, goes through Persia, and there are many cities on its banks. The kingdom near the mountains of Toro is called Eglesia and is inhabited by Armenian Christians. Another city is called Malascort and another Nasol, others Orbe, Suscar, Maxate, Mahumen, Brasar, and Aquisio on the shores of the Black Sea. The third river, called Eufrates, has on its banks Argor, Nega, Camac, Alargeo, and Malaxia. This river has three arms. One flows to the Red Sea, another goes by Arabia to the Black Sea, another flows by Damasco and the land of Jafet to the Mediterranean Sea. The fourth river, called Surmena, goes by Toris and Jorgania, entering the Mare Mayor near Trapesonda.

Then I left the mountain of Toro and went to see the mountains of Armenia the greater, where the ark of Noe arrived when it escaped the universal deluge. This mountain is of salt stone as white as crystal. Know that is one of the highest mountains in the world. No man has been able to ascend it, though attempts have been made many times. These mountains are in the empire of Persia. All round the country is inhabited by Armenian Christians who are the guards of the Emperor and he places much trust in them.

I departed from Armenia and came to the great city of Toris which is the capital of the empire of the Persians. It is one of the grandest cities in the world, well supplied, rich, and in a good climate. For this reason the Persians are wise and well versed in all the sciences. They have learned men with a profound knowledge of the stars. The Emperor of Persia has for his device a yellow flag with a red square in the middle.

Know that in Persia there rise two fountains and that each one makes a great lake 12 miles in width, and from each a river flows which crosses the whole of Persia. They call one fountain Marsargis and the other Marcargis. The two rivers unite and enter the Black Sea. The cities on their banks are Argis, Caperti, Salamanca, Ormi, Cade, Buxila, and Rastello. I crossed the river of Argis and went over a great part of Persia, going thence to the kingdom of Saldania and its rich and noble city. Its King has for his device a yellow flag with a red square.

I departed from Saldania and went with some merchants eastward to another city called Premua del Rey de Persia, thence to Abba. From thence I travelled a long distance until I came to the city of Ayras, called by the Tartars Sarax, where the empire of Persia ends. It is a well supplied city, rich, and very ancient. They say that in this city was first discovered the astronomy or law of the stars; for this city is in the line of the centre of Persia.

The cities I have visited in Persia are Casar, Serrans, Thesi, Spaor, Jorganian, Spalonero, Saldania, and Toris. In this last town is where Benacayt, the Emperor of Persia, was crowned. His empire extends from the Sea of Sara to the Persian Gulf where is the city of Hormixio, and from the Mare Mayor to Aquisio also on the Persian Gulf. Its length is 125 days journey and its width from the river Cur to the city of Siras 100 days journey.

Benacayt, Emperor of Persia, assembled a very great host and went to fight with Uxbeco, Emperor of Sara. There arrived more than a million and a half of cavalry. Then Benacayt promised some Armenian monks whom he consulted, that if he won the battle he would become a Christian. The Armenian Christians, who came with him, marched with a cross before them and, God helping, he conquered. Uxbeco was defeated and his cavalry fled. Many were killed or taken prisoners, all their tents pillaged, and their women captured. The conqueror advanced far into the enemy's country. After this some Moorish Hajjis who preached daily to Benacayt, gave him certain herbs and he died. But the Kings of Persia always favoured the Christians and trusted them.

After this I left Persia with some merchants who came from Catayo. We crossed the river Cur at the island of Ausero and came to the city of Mesopotamia in the empire of Baldac. Thence we travelled for a great distance without coming to any city, for all the inhabitants lived in the country. We next came to the river Euphrates and crossing it, came to a city called Lualaxa. Here a branch of the river turns to Damasco and the land of Jafet, falling into the Mediterranean Sea. Then I went along the river Ayuso until I came to a city called Tripul of Suria which is on the shore of the Mediterranean. There I embarked in a ship of Christians and went to Chipre, thence to the isles of Romania and Ancandia, thence to the Morea and thence to Creta, Negropont, and a kingdom of Greeks which they call Salonica, bordering on Macedonia, where the great Alexander reigned.

Notes on this Chapter

This final chapter covers the most eastern portions of the friar's travels: the regions around the Caspian Sea (Sea of Sara), the empire of Uzbek, the city of Norgancio (Khiva/Kharism), the long mountain spur from the Montes Caspios, the Tigris and Euphrates river systems rising in the mountains of Toro, Greater Armenia and the mountain where Noah's Ark rested (described as white salt stone), and the return journey through Persia back toward the Mediterranean and Constantinople. The text becomes increasingly based on reports from merchants and local accounts as the friar moves farther east. It includes valuable contemporary details about the political situation in 14th-century Persia and Central Asia, including the great battle between Abu Said and Uzbek.