The local customs and commercial usages are the same as in San-süi.

4

The Travels of Marco Polo in the Southern Seas

The famous Venetian traveler, Marco Polo (1254–1324), was the first European to have recorded his journey to the Far East and Southeast Asia. The following passage, in which he discusses his observations in Java, Sumatra (Java the Less), and Champa, has been a subject of controversy among historians, many of whom contend that he never visited Java though he may have spent several months on the island of Sumatra. Marco Polo is reputed to have stopped in the Kingdom of Champa on his voyage back to Europe from China. Upon his return to Italy at the turn of the fourteenth century, Marco Polo’s half-believed travel account sparked a renaissance of interest of intellectual Europe in Asia.

Chapter V. Of The Great Country Called Chamba [Champa]

You must know that on leaving the port of Zayton¹ you sail west-south-west for 1500 miles, and then you come to a country called Chamba, a very rich region, having a king of its own. The people are Idolaters and pay a yearly tribute to the Great Kaan [Emperor of China], which consists of elephants and nothing but elephants. And I will tell you how they came to pay this tribute.

It happened in the year of Christ 1278 that the Great Kaan sent a Baron of his called Sagatu with a great force of horse and

¹ Ch’üan-chow, in Fukien Province. In Polo’s time a great port for the South Seas trade.

foot against this King of Chamba, and this Baron opened the war on a great scale against the King and his country.

Now the King (whose name was Accambale) was a very aged man, nor had he such a force as the Baron had. And when he saw what havoc the Baron was making with his kingdom he was grieved to the heart. So he bade messengers get ready and despatched them to the Great Kaan. And they said to the Kaan: “Our Lord the King of Chamba salutes you as his liege-lord, and would have you to know that he is stricken in years and long hath held his realm in peace. And now he sends you word by us that he is willing to be your liege-man, and will send you every year a tribute of as many elephants as you please. And he prays you in all gentleness and humility that you would send word to your Baron to desist from harrying his kingdom and to quit his territories. These shall henceforth be at your absolute disposal, and the King shall hold them of you.”

When the Great Kaan had heard the King’s ambassador he was moved with pity, and sent word to that Baron of his to quit that kingdom with his army, and to carry his arms to the conquest of some other country; and as soon as this command reached them they obeyed it. Thus it was then that this King became vassal of the Great Kaan, and paid him every year a tribute of 20 of the greatest and finest elephants that were to be found in the country.

But now we will leave that matter, and tell you other particulars about the King of Chamba.

You must know that in that kingdom no woman is allowed to marry until the King shall have seen her; if the woman pleases him then he takes her to wife; if she does not, he gives her a dowry to get her a husband withal. In the year of Christ 1285, Messer Marco Polo was in that country, and at that time the King had, between sons and daughters, 326 children, of whom at least 150 were men fit to carry arms.

There are very great numbers of elephants in this kingdom, and they have lignaloes [fragrant wood] in great abundance. They have also extensive forests of the wood called Bonús [ebony],
which is jet-black, and of which chessmen and pen-cases are made. But there is nought more to tell, so let us proceed.

CHAPTER VI. CONCERNING THE GREAT ISLAND OF JAVA

When you sail from Chamba, 1500 miles in a course between south and south-east, you come to a great Island called Java. And the experienced mariners of those Islands who know the matter well, say that it is the greatest Island in the world, and has a compass of more than 3000 miles. It is subject to a great King and tributary to no one else in the world. The people are Idolaters. The Island is of surpassing wealth, producing black pepper, nut-megs, spikenard [fragrant ointment], galangal [aromatic herb], cubebs [medicinal berry], cloves, and all other kinds of spices.

This Island is also frequented by a vast amount of shipping, and by merchants who buy and sell costly goods from which they reap great profit. Indeed the treasure of this Island is so great as to be past telling. And I can assure you the Great Kaan never could get possession of this Island, on account of its great distance, and the great expense of an expedition thither. The merchants of Zayton and Manzi\(^2\) draw annually great returns from this country.

CHAPTER IX. CONCERNING THE ISLAND OF JAVA THE LESS. THE KINGDOMS OF FERLEC [PERLAK] AND BASMA [PASAI]

When you leave the Island of Pentam and sail about 100 miles, you reach the Island of JAVA THE LESS. For all its name 'tis none so small but that it has a compass of two thousand miles or more. Now I will tell you all about this Island.

You see there are upon it eight kingdoms and eight crowned kings. The people are all Idolaters, and every kingdom has a language of its own. The Island hath great abundance of treasure,

\(^2\) Man-tzu, Polo's name for the old Southern Sung region centered on Hangchow Island.
with costly spices, lignaloes and spikenard and many others that never come into our parts.

Now I am going to tell you all about these eight kingdoms, or at least the greater part of them. But let me premise one marvelous thing, and that is the fact that this Island lies so far to the south that the North Star, little or much, is never to be seen!

Now let us resume our subject, and first I will tell you of the kingdom of Ferlec.

This kingdom, you must know, is so much frequented by the Saracen merchants that they have converted the natives to the Law of Mahommet—I mean the towns-people only, for the hill-people live for all the world like beasts, and eat human flesh, as well as all other kinds of flesh, clean or unclean. And they worship this, that, and the other thing; for in fact the first thing that they see on rising in the morning, that they do worship for the rest of the day.

Having told you of the kingdom of Ferlec, I will now tell of another which is called Basma.

When you quit the kingdom of Ferlec you enter upon that of Basma. This also is an independent kingdom, and the people have a language of their own; but they are just like beasts without laws or religion. They call themselves subjects of the Great Kaan, but they pay him no tribute; indeed they are so far away that his men could not go thither. Still all these Islanders declare themselves to be his subjects, and sometimes they send him curiosities as presents....