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► **To cite this version:**

| Amelia Carolina Sparavigna. Marco Polo in Persia. 2020. hal-02943905

HAL Id: hal-02943905

<https://hal.science/hal-02943905>

Preprint submitted on 21 Sep 2020

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Marco Polo in Persia

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Abstract: In three previous discussions, we investigated the travels of Marco Polo, with the help of Google Earth and Wikimapia. We reconstructed Polo's travels from Beijing to Xanadu, from Sheberghan to Kashgar, and from Kashgar to Xanadu. Here we propose Polo's travel in Persia. The place of a Mulehet Castle, close to Ferdows in the Tunocain county, is also evidenced. It is possible that Marco Polo was referring to this castle, the Ghal'eh Kuh of Ferdows, when he was reporting about the Old Man of the Mountain, and not to the Alamut Castle in the South Caspian province of Qazvin.

Keywords: Satellite Images, Google Earth, Wikimapia, Marco Polo, Persia.

Uploaded 15 August 2020 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3986482

The "Milione" is a book of the thirteenth century, written by Rustichello da Pisa. In it, Rustichello reported the stories and travels that Marco Polo told him while they were both prisoners in Genoa. The book also tells of the period that Marco Polo spent at the court of Kublai Khan [1]. An English version of Milione is that written by Sir Henry Yule (1820–1889), available at the link https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_Marco_Polo.

About Polo's travels in some previous articles we have discussed three routes. In [2], we have proposed the itinerary to Xanadu, the summer capital of Kublai Khan, from Beijing, the winter capital of the Yuan empire. The results were so encouraging that our study continued. In [3], we followed the journey from Sapurgan, today Sheberghan in Afghanistan, to Cascar, the oasis city of Kashgar in Xinjiang. In particular, a possible route through Pamir mountains has been proposed, following the words of Marco Polo and the roads, rivers and lakes that we can see in Google Earth. In [4], the itinerary from Kashgar to Xanadu was followed. We used, to find the places named by Polo, Google Earth and Wikimapia.

Now, let's read Polo's Milione [1] again, to find possible routes followed by the Venetian in Persia. Polo first talks about the countries of modern Turkey and Iraq, and then he moves on to Persia. Besides the routes, in the following discussion the place of a Mulehet Castle, close to Ferdows in the Tunocain county, will be also evidenced. It is possible that Marco Polo was referring to this castle, the Ghal'eh Kuh of Ferdows, when he was reporting about the Old Man of the Mountain, and not to the Alamut Castle in the South Caspian province of Qazvin.

... Let us leave from Toris (Tabriz) and enter Persia ([1], page 69). In Persia, there is Sava the town from which the three Magi started their travel. Marco seeks information about them in Cala (Qala = castle) Ataperistan (of the fire worshipers). He says that Persia has eight kingdoms: Casvin, Kurdistan, Lor, Sulistan, Isfaan, Serazi, Soncara, Tunocain. Marco Polo then tells of Jasdi (page 73). After seven days of travel we enter the kingdom of Cherman. ...



Many thanks to Google Earth for the maps that are here used for study and research.

Figure 1: From Toris (Tabriz), let us move to Jasdi (Yazdi), passing through Sava (Saveh). In Internet, we find told that the castle of the Old Man of the Mountain, to which Marco Polo was referring, was Alamut castle in the South Caspian province of Qazvin. Therefore this should be the district Mulete, Mulehet, but in [1] it is said that this district has not been identified. Here in the following, let us read what the Enciclopedia Iranica is telling about, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/polo-marco> - "Various chapters of the Description of the World are dedicated to the the Viel de la Montaigne/Veglio della Montagna, "the Old Man of the

Mountain,” the šayḡ al-jabal of the Islamic sources (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 128-32; 1975, sec. 39-42; 1999, pp. 138-40; 2001, pp. 166-69; Nowell 1947), Alaodin (‘Alā-al-Din Moḡammad) who was the seventh Grand Master of the Isma‘ilis of Alamut called Assassins/Assassini/Harcassis/Hasisins, a term probably derived by the word ḡašīš/ḡašīšiyin, although this etymology remains controversial (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 52-55). The country of the members of the sect is called Milect/Mulect/Mulehet/Milice, a corruption of the word molḡed “heretic,” mistakenly applied by Marco Polo to the region (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 785-87). The description given by Marco Polo of the marvelous garden where ‘Alā-al-Din Moḡammad and the Isma‘ilis lived, and of the activities of the Grand Master, are practically identical with those of Oderico da Pordenone (Wyngaert, 1929, pp. 488-89). Polo also describes the destruction of Alamut by Hulagu”.

<http://archive.is/A3KJI>

Leaving the town of Cherman, you have to ride for seven days, moving in a beautiful land with towns and villages. You reach a very high mountain, from which the route descends for two days. Then you arrive to a vast land where there is Camadi, in the Reobar (Jirufti) region. The region was infested with brigands, who took Marco. He managed to escape and found asylum in the Canosalmi castle (Pag. 77). After crossing a flat land you came to another descent to the land of Cormosa (Hormutz).



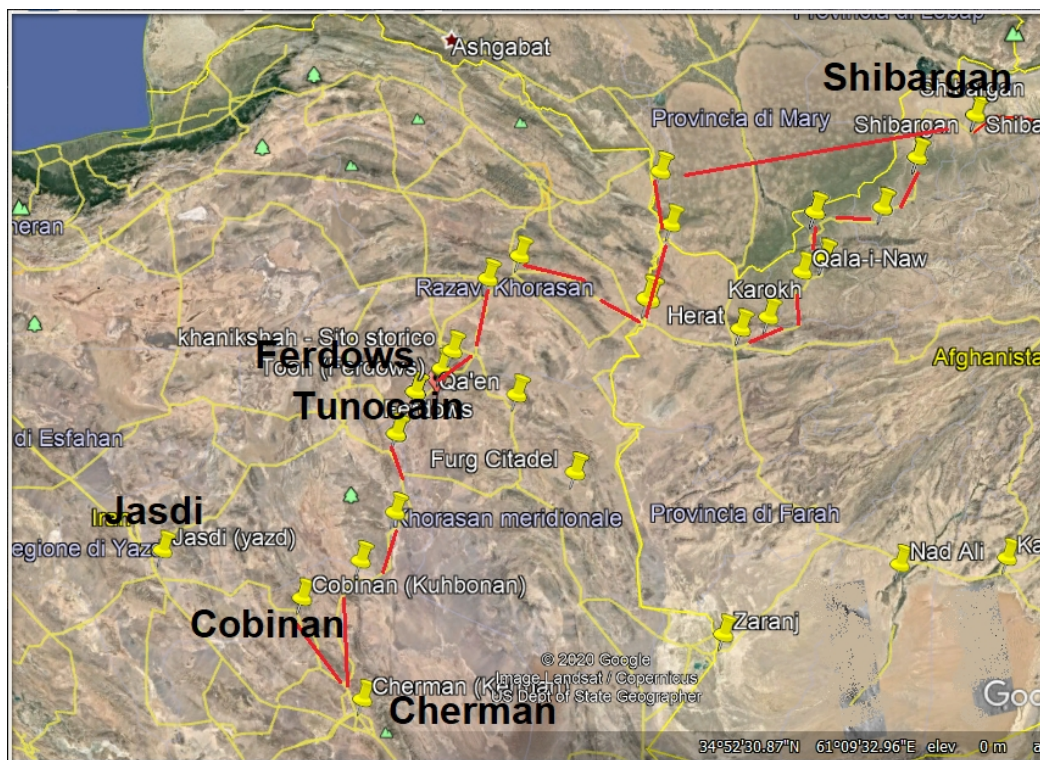
Many thanks to Google Earth for the maps that are here used for study and research.

Figure 2: From Jasdi, we can arrive to Cherman. Then we can move to Camadi (Jiroft), and then to Cormosa (Hormuz). Marco Polo told that he moves back from Carmose, following another route, and therefore we

followed another itinerary too. Let us read again the Enciclopedia Iranica about Camadi. "The village of Camadi or Camandi (Qamādin), a suburb near Jiroft, in the realm of Reobales (Rudbār?), was famous for dates and other fruits (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 139), and it was here that animals such as donkeys and rams with their typical fat tails could be found. The local population built walls of earth to defend themselves.

They sold slaves and were under King Nogodar, identified as a chief of the Carans/ Carans/ Charaunas/Caraonas /Scherani, the Qaraunas (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 183-96; II, p. 792) about whom Marco Polo gives information in various parts of his text (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXVI; 1938, I, pp. 120-22; 1975, sec. 8, 35, 114-15; 2001, pp. 158-59; see also Aubin, 1969). To escape from them Marco Polo takes refuge in the castle of Canosalmi/Ganasalim (probably *Qanāt-e Šāh: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 158)." <http://archive.is/A3KJI>

We return to tramontana (the north wind) by another route to Cherman (page 79). We arrive at Cobinan (page 81). Then we pass a desert and arrive at the province of Tunocain. There is a large flat land where there is the Albero Solo (the tree of Alexander the Great). Polo then reports of the Mulete region and of the Veglio della Montagna. Then, he resumed the description of the travel: for six days the traveler meets some deserts and then arrives in Sapurgan (Shibargan, Sheberghan) in Afghanistan.



Many thanks to Google Earth for the maps that are here used for study and research.

Figure 3: From Cobinan to Shibargan, this is the most difficult route to determine. Marco Polo tells that he

crossed the district of Tunocain. The name is thought to come from the union of the names of two towns, Toon (Tun) and Qa'en. Toon is today's Ferdows. Near Ferdows there are the ruins of a very important fortress (Kuh-e-Ghal'eh). In my opinion, this could be the fortress of the Mulehet district described by Polo, and not that near the Caspian Sea. I am telling this, because the description of the fortress of the Old Man of the Mountain is made just when Marco describes the road from Tunocain to Shibargan. Wikipedia gives information us about the fortress. "Ghal'eh Kuh of Ferdows is a ruined fortress on top of Kuh-e Ghal'eh , located south of Ferdows (Tun) in South Khorasan Province, Iran. The fortress was famously used by the Nizari Ismailis of the Alamut period, and was the biggest Nizari stronghold in the Quhistan region, according to the Tarikh-i Jahangushay. [1] It was connected to the nearby Ghal'eh Kuh of Hasanabad (also known as Ghal'eh Dokhtar) and to the city of Tun itself via secret tunnels discovered after the 1968 Dasht-e Bayaz and Ferdows earthquakes.[2][3] The fortress was destroyed and burned in May 1256 after its capture by the invading Mongols under Kitbuqa and Köke Ilgei [4][5]". <http://archive.is/tK7Eu>

Marco Polo doesn't provide detailed information about his route to Shibargan. We can imagine that he arrived in Razav and then went down to Herat, without reaching the town. Herat, which had fallen under the rule of the Mongols, was destroyed before the arrival of Marco Polo in Persia. Wikipedia tells that "Herat was invaded and destroyed by Genghis Khan's Mongol army in 1221. The city was destroyed a second time and remained in ruins from 1222 to about 1236. In 1244 a local prince Shams al-Din Kart was named ruler of Herāt by the Mongol governor of Khorāsān and in 1255 he was confirmed in his rule by the founder of the Il-Khan dynasty Hulagu. Shams al-Din founded a new dynasty and his successors, especially Fakhr-al-Din and Ghiyath al-Din, built many mosques and other buildings. The members of this dynasty were great patrons of literature and the arts. By this time Herāt became known as the pearl of Khorasan". Two possible routes are therefore indicated in Figure 3, the one from Herat too, but Polo does not tell us of the town and it seems very strange that, if he passed through it, he did not mention it.

Note

A previous version was proposed in Zenodo, <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3977962>

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