

## **MARCO POLO (1254–1324)**

### ***TRAVELS (1298)***

When the traveller leaves Kan-chau, he journeys eastward for five days through a country haunted by spirits, whom he often hears talking in the night, till he reaches a kingdom called Erguiul. This is subject to the Great Khan and forms part of the great province of Tangut, which comprises many kingdoms. The inhabitants include Nestorian, Christians, idolaters, and Mohometans. There are cities in plenty, of which the capital is called Erguiul. And from this city the road leads southeastwards towards the countries of Cathay [China].

Along this road lies a city called Sinju, which is also the name of the province. This has towns and cities in plenty and is likewise a part of Tangut and subject to the Great Khan. The inhabitants are idolaters and Mahometans, with some Christians. There are many wild cattle here, as big as elephants and very handsome in appearance . . . They are so handsome that they are a wonder to behold.

The people here are idolaters. They are fat and have small noses and black hair. They are beardless, except for a few strong hairs in the chin. The women have no hair on any part of the body except the head. They are very fair-complexioned with delicate flesh and all their limbs admirably proportioned. The men are much addicted to sexual indulgence and take several wives, since neither law nor custom forbids.

Let us now leave here and pass on to a kingdom called Dagroian. Dagroian is a separate kingdom on its own, with a king and a language of its own, but forming part of the same island. The people, who profess allegiance to the Great Khan, are out-and-out savages. They are idolaters; and I will tell you of one custom they have which is particularly bad. You must know that, when one of them, male or female, falls sick, the kinsfolk send for the magicians to find out whether the patient is due to recover. And these magicians claim by means of their enchantments and their idols and diabolic art to know whether he is destined to recover or to die . . . If they say he is due to die, the kinsfolk send for certain men who are specially appointed to put such persons to death. These men come and seize the patient and put something over his mouth so as to suffocate him. When he is dead, they cook him. Then all his kinsfolk assemble and eat him whole. I assure you that they even devour all the marrow in his bones.

Let me tell you next of the kingdom of Lambri, which also has a king of its own but professes allegiance to the Great Khan. The people are idolaters. The country produces abundance of brazil, besides camphor, and other precious spices in profusion. . . . Now here is something really remarkable. I give you my word that in this kingdom there are men who have tails fully a palm in length. They are not at all hairy. This is true of most of the men – that is, of those who live outside in the mountains, not of those in the city. Their tails are as thick as a dog's. There are also many unicorns and a profusion of wild game, both beast and bird.

**Taken from Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), 103–104, 255–256.**