

Saracens.¹ And this is a nobler city and a better for merchandise than any other which at this day existeth in the world. For there is not on the face of the earth any kind of

throughout the middle ages a chief point of contact and trade between the Latin and Oriental worlds. It has been identified not only with Shushan of Esther, and the Achmetha of the Apocrypha, but with the northern Ecbatana and half a dozen other ancient cities of fame. Rawlinson, however, considers it not to be older than the third century (*Chardin*, Amsterd., 1735, i, 258; *Journ. Asiat.*, S. ii, iv, 117; *J. R. G. S.*, x, 109). There are now no traces of magnificence at Tabriz, though it was still in splendour in the seventeenth century (see note in Jordanus, p. 7). Tauris was made the See of a Roman bishop (William de Gigiis) in 1329, and a successor is traced as late as the following century (*Le Quien*).

¹ The Arbor Secco is repeatedly spoken of by Marco Polo, especially as existing in north-east Persia. Marsden (p. 111) identifies it with the *chínár* or plane tree, observing that "the epithet seems to imply nothing more than this; that when the form of the fruit promises an edible nut, the stranger who gathers it is disappointed on finding no perceptible contents, or only a dry and tasteless seed." This is accepted by later commentators; but none explain the evident interest with which Marco refers to it, or why the *Christians* should be specified as giving it this peculiar name. It is clear that the tree was the subject of some Christian legend. This I have not met with in full, but the following passage from Mandeville throws some light upon it. At Mamre, he says, "there is an oak tree which the Saracens call *Dirpe*, which is of Abraham's time, and people call it the *Dry tree*. They say that it has been there since the beginning of the world, and that it was once green, and bore leaves till the time that our Lord died on the cross, and then it died...and there is a prophecy that a lord, a prince of the west side of the world, shall win the Land of Promise, *i.e.*, the Holy Land, with the help of the Christians, and he shall cause mass to be performed under that dry tree, and then the tree shall become green, and bear both fruit and leaves" (p. 162).

The *Arbor Secco* is sprinkled about Central Asia by Fra Mauro, in his celebrated map, now in the Sala dello Scudo at Venice.

Clavijo, in the beginning of the next century mentions the *Arbor Secco* at Tauris, as still standing in the street "near an open space", and tells a story (in which there is some hiatus) about it in connection with a certain bishop who came to convert the city.

The stories of the dry tree were perhaps spun out of the words of the Vulgate in Ezekiel xvii, 24, "*Humiliavi lignum sublime et exaltavi lignum humile; et siccavi lignum viride, et frondere feci lignum aridum.*"

Polo it will be remembered gives a topographical sense to *Arbor Secco* in Persia. Lazari, the late Venetian editor, ingeniously suggests that he may have meant *Elborz-Kuh*, Mount Elborz, near which his *Arbor Secco* certainly lay.