

21. AMBERGRIS

ambra L, LT, P, TA¹, TA³,
VB, VL; R
ambracan, *ambracano* R

ambre F, FA, FB, TA³
ambrum P, Z
anbra, *anbran* V

ambre F
ambro VA
walrodis G

In BENEDETTO's Italian translation of Polo, «*ambra*» is mentioned in the chapters intitled «Tebet», «Males Island», «Scotra», «Mogedaxo», and «Çanghibar» (B¹, 187, 351, 352, 357, 361). But the English versions by RICCI and ROSS and by MOULE speak of «amber» in the chapter on Tibet and of «ambergris» in all other cases. The modern common usage in Italian and in French is to employ «*ambra*», «*ambre*» indiscriminately for both products. The question may be raised, however, of the extent to which this confusion prevailed in Italy in Polo's time. For the sake of clarity, I wish to state at the start that, although «amber» (*ambrum*) is mentioned in the chapter on Tibet only by Z, I accept it as a genuine statement going back to Polo himself, and also that general historical data preclude the possibility of understanding *ambrum* as «ambergris» in regard to Tibet (on the use of amber in Tibet, cf. B. LAUFER, *Historical jottings on amber in Asia*, in *Mem. of the Amer. Anthropol. Assoc.* 1 [1907], 211-244, especially 230-231). On the other hand, «ambergris» is clearly meant in all the other passages.

In his admirable *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen-Âge*, HEYD seems to have taken it for granted that all mediaeval mentions of «*ambrum*», «*ambra*» «*ambre*», etc., at least in Italy and in France, refer to «ambergris» (cf. his Index, and especially II, 571-574). The case is simple enough with Oriental sources (when they are clearly rendered), since the Oriental names for «amber» and for «ambergris» are fundamentally different; and it is certainly remarkable that in FERRAND's *Relations de voyages*, the scores of mentions of «*ambre*» in the translations of Arabic and Persian texts should always be interpreted as «ambergris». In his recent edition of Pegolotti (pp. 412-413), EVANS questions the truth of HEYD's too absolute views on «ambergris». For EVANS, *ambra*, may be both «amber» and «ambergris», and it is only «*ambracanno*» which he considers as «ambergris» definitely. In one case, EVAN's argument is decisive: Pegolotti speaks of *ambra*, while the corresponding Latin version of the privilege, in 1317, gives *ambre vulgariter dicte bernsteen*; Flemish *bernsteen*, Germ. *Bernstein*, never meant «ambergris», but only «amber»; moreover a privilege issued in Flanders is in itself more likely to speak of Baltic «amber» than of «ambergris» of the Indian Ocean. It is more difficult to decide in other cases. EVANS says that both *ambra concia* and *ambracanni* (plural; this is the only mention of the word in Pegolotti) occur side by side in one passage (p. 78) and therefore cannot be identical. I agree; but *ambra concia* means «finished *ambra*», «worked *ambra*»; *ambracanno* might be the name of the same material, but in a raw or unfinished state. When EVANS says «I suspect that when Pegolotti referred to amber perforated for beads he meant yellow amber», I was at first ready to concur with him, until I noticed that in the documents studied by G. LUDWIG in *Italienische Forschungen*, 1 [1906], 293-294, out of thirty odd «paternostri» mentioned between 1512 and 1557, only one was of *ambra zalo* («yellow amber»), and all the others of *ambracan*. In Polo's