

Note on « Magellanic Clouds » offered to Prof. Louis Hambis, editor of the late Paul PELLIOU's *Notes on Marco Polo*, for the vol. II, s. v. *Mogedaxo*.

P. Pelliot having asked L. Massignon if any Arabic priority could be ascertained for the discovery of the « Magellanic Clouds », shown in Sumatra (= Giava minor) to Marco Polo (1285), here are some positive elements for an answer :

Ptolemaeus is mute on Magellanic Clouds, though Greek pilots, as says Humboldt (*Examen critique...*, 1839, t. v, p. 235), had the possibility to observe them, when crossing the Red Sea straits (on their way to Rhapta); but they didn't. But Arab pilots did, in spite of the blind worship of Arab astronomers for Ptolemaeus' exhaustiveness. Five centuries at least before the Portuguese pilots of 1515-1521 (see P.M. de Anghiera, A. Corsali, Pigafetta, 1515-1521). And it must have been in *Mogedaxo*.

It is in *Mogedaxo* that the boats coming from Raysût (and Zufâr) directly, and sailing for the southern Indian Ocean, had to change their « steering », leaving the North Pole Star (sunk under the verge), and steering by a South Pole Nebula (Magellanic Clouds are only at 12° from the South Pole), according to the example of the Indian pilots of Cutch (Kacch), their forerunners in the cruel and precious trade from the Zanj coasts, and Madagascar : slaves, ivory, and rhinoceros hide. As soon as our 8th century (Zanj slaves rebellion in Basra occurred one century later).

The first Arabic mention of the Magellanic Clouds, discovered by Ideler (*Untersuchungen...*, 1809, p. 263), studied by Humboldt (*l.c.*, supra), appears in the « *kawâkib wasuwar* » of Abdurrah-mân Sûfî (d. 376 H.), ed. tr. Schjellerup, Petersbourg, 1881, p. 229. It is in a rather doubtful remark that this accurate observer mentions an untested hearsay about « two white clouds at the feet of Canopus (Suhayl), named « al-baqar », not to be found in the *Almagest* : not visible in Iraq nor Jajd, but only in Tihâma (SW corner of Arabia). From where Sufi too this hearsay « true or false » ? Apparently not from pilots. Destombes thinks it was taken from a *kitâb al-anwâ*, one of these empirical guides (immemorial in India and Arabia), for the « steering of the caravanes » in the deserts, based on the so-called Calendar of the Pleiades. It may be so; but I must say that in the practical « rose sidérale » constructed by Arabs for the Red Sea, on the 14 + 14 = 28 *Anwâ* (lunar mansions), according to d'Abbadie (1841 : see G. FERRAND, *Introduction...*, p. 99 sq.), no « fixed cloud in the south » is mentioned, neither, near Achernar, nor near Canopus.

At the beginning of the 13th century, however, the testimonies collected from *Mogedaxo* on the *Bahr al-Zanj* by Yâqût (*Mu'jam al-buldân*, I, 501-502), were unanimous on the existence of a fixed mark close to the South Pole in the heaven, the only one (with Canopus) : « a thing of the seize of the moon, as an arch (*tâqa*) in the sky, or as a piece of white cloud, never sinking, nor moving from its place » : for the Zanj and the Madagascar people. Yâqût doesn't actually remind the name given to this asterism : our Magellanic Clouds.

We can go further : Muslim pilots (Arab and Persian) used these clouds for « steering »; they had borrowed it from the Indian Cutch pilots, who boasted having learnt Arabs how to build ships for crossing the Indian Ocean (W. HAMILTON, *Descr. Hindostan*, 1820, I, 596; quoted by G. Pauthier) and who told Lt. Leech how, on their way from Cutch (Mândvi) to Zanzibar, « at midway, there was