

Burton relates a case of the verification of the superstition in the death of an English merchant who had cut down such a tree, and of four members of his household. It is the old story which Ovid tells; and the tree which Erisichthon felled was a *Dirakht-i-Fazl*:

“Vittae mediam, memoresque tabellae
Sertaque cingebant, voti argumenta potentis.”
(*Metamorph.* VIII. 744.)

Though the coincidence with our text of Hamd Allah's Dry Tree is very striking, I am not prepared to lay stress on it as an argument for the geographical determination of Marco's *Arbre Sec*. His use of the title more than once to characterise the whole frontier of Khorasan can hardly have been a mere whim of his own: and possibly some explanation of that circumstance will yet be elicited from the Persian historians or geographers of the Mongol era.

Meanwhile it is in the vicinity of Bostam or Damghan that I should incline to place this landmark. If no one *very* cogent reason points to this, a variety of minor ones do so; such as the direction of the traveller's journey from Kermán through Kuh Banán; the apparent vicinity of a great Ismailite fortress, as will be noticed in the next chapter; the connection twice indicated (see *Prologue*, ch. xviii. note 6, and Bk. IV. ch. v.) of the *Arbre Sec* with the headquarters of Ghazan Khan in watching the great passes, of which the principal ones debouche at Bostam, at which place also buildings erected by Ghazan still exist; and the statement that the decisive battle between Alexander and Darius was placed there by local tradition. For though no such battle took place in that region, we know that Darius was murdered near Hecatompylos. Some place this city west of Bostam, near Damghan; others east of it, about Jah Jerm; Ferrier has strongly argued for the vicinity of Bostam itself. Firdusi indeed places the final battle on the confines of Kermán, and the death of Darius within that province. But this could not have been the tradition Polo met with.

I may add that the temperate climate of Bostam is noticed in words almost identical with Polo's by both Fraser and Ferrier.

The Chinar abounds in Khorasan (as far as any tree can be said to *abound* in Persia), and even in the Oases of Tun-o-Kain wherever there is water. Travellers quoted by Ritter notice Chinars of great size and age at Shahrúd, near Bostam, at Meyomid, and at Mehr, west of Sabzawar, which last are said to date from the time of Naoshirwan (7th century). There is a town to the N.W. of Meshid called *Chindrán*, “The Planes.” P. Della Valle, we may note, calls Tehran “la città dei platani.”

The following note by De Sacy regarding the Chinar has already been quoted by Marsden, and though it may be doubtful whether the term *Arbre Sec* had any relation to the idea expressed, it seems to me too interesting to be omitted: “Its sterility seems to have become proverbial among certain people of the East. For in a collection of sundry moral sentences pertaining to the Sabaeans or Christians of St. John . . . we find the following: ‘The vainglorious man is like a showy Plane Tree, rich in boughs but producing nothing, and affording no fruit to its owner.’” The same reproach of sterility is cast at the Plane by Ovid's Walnut:—

“At postquam platanis, *sterilem praebentibus umbram*,
Uberior quâvis arbore venit honos;
Nos quoque fructiferae, si nux modo ponor in illis,
Coepimus in patulas luxuriare comas.” (*Nux*, 17-20.)

I conclude with another passage from Khanikoff, though put forward in special illustration of what I believe to be a mistaken reading (*Arbre Seul*): “Where the Chinar is of spontaneous growth, or occupies the centre of a vast and naked plain, this tree is even in our own day invested with a quite exceptional veneration, and the