

desert over a month, and found neither dwellings nor roads, but pastures and water everywhere. M. Polo omits to mention a remarkable place at Sha-chow, a sandy hillock (a short distance south of this town) known under the name of *Ming-sha shan*—the 'rumbling sandhill.' The sand, in rolling down the hill, produces a particular sound, similar to that of distant thunder. In M. Polo's time (1292), Khubilaï removed the inhabitants of Sha-chow to the interior of China; fearing, probably, the aggression of the seditious princes; and his successor, in 1303, placed there a garrison of ten thousand men." (*Palladius, l.c.* p. 5.)

"Sha-chau is one of the best oases of Central Asia. It is situated at the foot of the Nan-shan range, at a height of 3700 feet above the sea, and occupies an area of about 200 square miles, the whole of which is thickly inhabited by Chinese. Sha-chau is interesting as the meeting-place of three expeditions started independently from Russia, India, and China. Just two months before Prjevalsky reached this town, it was visited by Count Szechényi [April, 1879], and eighteen months afterwards Pundit A-k, whose report of it agrees fairly well with that of our traveller, also stayed here. Both Prejevalsky and Szechényi remark on some curious caves in a valley near Sha-chau containing Buddhistic clay idols.\* These caves were in Marco Polo's time the resort of numerous worshippers, and are said to date back to the Han Dynasty." (*Prejevalsky's Journeys . . .* by E. Delmar Morgan, *Proc. R. G. S.* IX. 1887, pp. 217-218.)—H. C.]

(*Ritter*, II. 205; *Neumann*, p. 616; *Cathay*, 269, 274; *Erdmann*, 155; *Erman*, II. 267; *Mag. Asiat.* II. 213.)

NOTE 2.—By *Idolaters*, Polo here means Buddhists, as generally. We do not know whether the Buddhism here was a recent introduction from Tibet, or a relic of the old Buddhism of Khotan and other Central Asian kingdoms, but most probably it was the former, and the "peculiar language" ascribed to them may have been, as Neumann supposes, Tibetan. This language in modern Mongolia answers to the Latin of the Mass Book, indeed with a curious exactness, for in both cases the holy tongue is not that of the original propagators of the respective religions, but that of the hierarchy which has assumed their government. In the Lamaitic convents of China and Manchuria also the Tibetan only is used in worship, except at one privileged temple at Peking. (*Koepfen*, II. 288.) The language intended by Polo may, however, have been a Chinese dialect. (See notes 1 and 4.) The Nestorians must have been tolerably numerous in Tangut, for it formed a metropolitan province of their Church.

NOTE 3.—A practice resembling this is mentioned by Pallas as existing among the Buddhist Kalmaks, a relic of their old Shaman superstitions, which the Lamas profess to decry, but sometimes take part in. "Rich Kalmaks select from their flock a ram for dedication, which gets the name of *Tengri Tockho*, 'Heaven's Ram.' It must be a white one with a yellow head. He must never be shorn or sold, but when he gets old, and the owner chooses to dedicate a fresh one, then the old one must be sacrificed. This is usually done in autumn, when the sheep are fattest, and the neighbours are called together to eat the sacrifice. A fortunate day is selected, and the ram is slaughtered amid the cries of the sorcerer directed towards the sunrise, and the diligent sprinkling of milk for the benefit of the Spirits of the Air. The flesh is eaten, but the skeleton with a part of the fat is burnt on a turf altar erected on four pillars of an ell and a half high, and the skin, with the head and feet, is then hung up in the way practised by the Buraets." (*Sammlungen*, II. 346.)

NOTE 4.—Several of the customs of Tangut mentioned in this chapter are essentially Chinese, and are perhaps introduced here because it was on entering Tangut that the traveller first came in contact with Chinese peculiarities. This is true of the manner of forming coffins, and keeping them with the body in the house, serving food

\* M. Bonin visited in 1899 these caves which he calls "Grottoes of Thousand Buddhas" (*Tsien Fo tung*). (*La Géographie*, 15th March, 1901, p. 171.) He found a stèle dated 1348, bearing a Buddhist prayer in six different scripts like the inscription at Kiu Yung Kwan. (*Rev. Hist. des Religions*, 1901, p. 393.)—H. C.