

as a great frond of the *Ravenala* (*Urania speciosa*) cooked to pass as a ruc's quill. (*Marco Polo*, first edition, ii. 354; second edition, ii. 414.) Mr. Sibree, in his excellent book on Madagascar (*The Great African Island*, 1880) noticed this, but said:

“‘It is much more likely that they [the ruc's quills] were the immensely long midribs of the leaves of the rofia palm. These are from twenty to thirty feet long, and are not at all unlike an enormous quill stripped of the feathering portion’” (p. 55).

In another passage he describes the palm, *Sagus ruffia* (? *raphia*):

“The rofia has a trunk of from thirty to fifty feet in height, and at the head divides into seven or eight immensely long leaves. The midrib of these leaves is a very strong, but extremely light and straight pole. . . . These poles are often twenty feet or more in length, and the leaves proper consist of a great number of fine and long pinnate leaflets, set at right angles to the midrib, from eighteen to twenty inches long, and about one and a half broad,” etc. (pp. 74, 75).

When Sir John Kirk came home in 1881-1882, I spoke to him on the subject, and he felt confident that the rofia or raphia palm-fronds were the original of the ruc's quills. He also kindly volunteered to send me a specimen on his return to Zanzibar. This he did not forget, and some time ago there arrived at the India Office not one, but four of these ruc's quills. In the letter which announced this despatch Sir John says:—

“I send to-day per s.s. *Arcot* . . . . four fronds of the Raphia palm, called here ‘Moale.’ They are just as sold and shipped up and down the coast. No doubt they were sent in Marco Polo's time in exactly the same state, *i.e.* stripped of their leaflets, and with the tip broken off. They are used for making stages and ladders, and last long if kept dry. They are also made into doors, by being cut into lengths, and pinned through. The stages are made of three, like tripods, and used for picking cloves from the higher branches.”

The largest of the four midribs sent (they do not differ much) is 25 feet 4 inches long, measuring 12 inches in girth at the butt, and 5 inches at the upper end. I calculate that if it originally came to a point the whole length would be 45 feet, but, as this would not be so, we may estimate it at 35 to 40 feet. The thick part is deeply hollowed on the upper (?) side, leaving the section of the solid butt in form a thick crescent. The leaflets are all gone, but when entire, the object must have strongly resembled a Brobdingnagian feather. Compare this description with that of Padre Bolivar in Ludolf, referred to above.

“In aliquibus . . . . regionibus vidi pennas alae istius avis prodigiosae, licet avem non viderim, Penna illa, prout ex formâ colligebatur, erat ex mediocribus, longitudine 28 palmorum, latitudine trium. Calamus vero a radice usque ad extremitatem longitudine quinque palmorum, densitatis instar brachii moderati, robustissimus erat et durus. Pennulae inter se aequales et bene compositae, ut vix ab invicem nisi cum violentiâ divellerentur. Colore erant valdè nigro, calamus colore albo.” (*Ludolfi, ad suam Hist. Aethiop., Comment., p. 164.*)

The last particular, as to colour, I am not able to explain: the others correspond well. The *palmus* in this passage may be anything from 9 to 10 inches.

I see this tree is mentioned by Captain R. F. Burton in his volume on the Lake Regions (vol. xxix. of the *Journal* of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 34),\* and probably by many other travellers.

I ought to mention here that some other object has been shown at Zanzibar as part of the wings of a great bird. Sir John Kirk writes that this (which he does not describe particularly) was in the possession of the Roman Catholic priests at Bagamoyo, to whom it had been given by natives of the interior, who declared that they had brought it from Tanganyika, and that it was part of the wing of a gigantic

\* “The *raphia*, here called the ‘Devil's date,’ is celebrated as having the largest leaf in the vegetable Kingdom,” etc. In his translation of Lacerda's journey he calls it *Raphia vinifera*.