

THE DATE WHEN MARC POL REACHED CIANDU ≠ MARCO POLO

Finally, we may believe, the party, to which were now added two learned Dominican Brothers, left Acre about the middle of November 1271. The Dominicans unfortunately soon took fright and returned, "without reporting the fact to Gregory who believed them still to be on their journey".¹ The rest went on and, after a difficult journey of three years and a half, should have reached Shang-tu in the summer of 1275. No date seems to be given in the manuscripts.² But the date is important because in chapter 146 Marco Polo claims that he and his father and uncle had made the mangonels which were used at the assault of Hsiang-yang; and it is known from Chinese sources that the mangonels were made by I-ssü-ma-yin (Ishmael) a Moslem, and that after five years siege Hsiang-yang surrendered on 17 March 1273.³ Of the various attempts that have been made to clear Marco or Rustichello of the charge of serious blunder if not of fabrication, perhaps the most plausible is by BENEDETTO, who suggests that the Polo intervention took place not in China but in Persia whither Qubilai had sent for

future Pope, but also the future king of England (Edward I), and Rustichello of Pisa to whom, many years afterwards, he was to owe his immortality. cf. *Y. I.* p. 60; *B.* p. xv—xix; and p. 42, note 2 below.

¹ CAMPI *op. cit.*, p. 246, no doubt truly, though he quotes no authority.

² VG has indeed a date, 1308, which does not help us; and the alternative, 1269 or 1278, in LA is not much better.

³ "The Siege of Saianfu" in *JNCBRAS*, 1927, pp. 1-35; 1928, pp. 256, 257. It will be seen that the Persian account agrees with the Chinese in the date and main facts of the siege. It is to be observed that there is no mention of the Polo family having taken any part in the siege in the important group of MSS. Z, L, V. It is true that Z only begins the story and omits the greater part of it, while L omits it all. But V has it complete, mentioning "alemani" and the Nestorian Christian but not Polo, though otherwise following the form of F with verbal likenesses to Z. It is difficult to estimate the meaning of this interesting difference. A comparison of the story in F and V seems to show no sign of artificial insertion of the Polo passages in F or of their omission from V. BENEDETTO judges that Z, which is very defective in the earlier part, L, which is an avowed summary, and V, which is ludicrously corrupt, all nevertheless preserve traces of a text better and more complete than F. The text of V in this chapter is on the whole very good, and it is possibly just imaginable that it preserves the primitive version of the story to which the Polo passages were deliberately added by Rustichello. But this cannot be said to be a probable suggestion, though it is to some extent supported by the similar omission from the same three MSS. of the statement (of which again there is no Chinese or other corroboration) that Marco Polo governed Yang-chou for three years; and the question, like so many other Marco Polo questions, must remain for the present unsolved. cf. pp. 315-320 and PN.