

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD IS DIFFICULT TO FIX engineers.¹ But if the *Yüan shih* is right, I-ssü-ma-yin had already reached Khanbaliq in 1271 or very early 1272, when the Polo caravan had barely left Laias.² The Chinese accounts corroborate Marco Polo in every other detail except the important names and dates, recording even the trial of the machines before Qubilai, and it is perhaps wiser to admit that whether intentionally or not a serious mistake was made, and that this story cannot invalidate other arguments for the date of the party's arrival at Shang-tu. The year 1275 would fit well enough too with the final return to Venice in 1295, after about seventeen years in China and a journey by sea and land which may well have lasted for more than three years.³

¹ *Marco Polo*, 1932, p. 432.

² cf. *Yüan shih* c. 203, fol. 4v^o.

It is right to mention the solution proposed by the late A. J. H. CHARIGNON (*Marco Polo* III. pp. 53, 54, 297). Starting from a conviction that the story must be true and that three or three and a half years are impossibly long times for the journeys (see pp. 80, 84 below), he argued that the three years covered the journey from Bukhara to Shang-tu and back to Acre, while the three and a half years covered the same journey from Shang-tu to Acre, two years at Venice, and the return journey to Shang-tu. This complicated overlapping of the two periods, of which there is no trace in the text, is almost enough in itself to condemn the suggestion. But in addition it is to be observed that CHARIGNON accepts some figures—the year from Bukhara to Shang-tu, the seventeen years sojourn, the dates 1269 and 1290—with simple faith; he makes “going and returning” the exact equivalent of “returning”; he completely ignores the repeated statements of the exceptional difficulties and delays met with on both journeys, the recorded examples of other slow journeys, the possibility that the party was delayed by illness in the Pamir or by business at Kan-chou, and above all the fact that if his chronology is proved to be right the problem is still unsolved, because we have good reason to believe that the exact part in the siege which is ascribed to Nicolò, Maffeo, and Marco Polo was taken by quite other persons.

³ See PN (Cocacin). Marco Polo succeeded unfortunately well in his resolve not to describe his personal journeys, nor those of his father and uncle, after the summary statement of the first nineteen chapters. In those chapters we read that they rode from Soldanie to Bulgara; and thence they went to where the great Kaan was. They returned on horses, and rode till they were come to Laias, and thence by ship to Acre and Venice. Two years later they rode from Laias to Chemeinfu, and on the final journey home they sailed from Zaitun to Persia, and rode thence to Trebizond. But in what way Marco or his party travelled in China we are left to infer from the completely impersonal description of the routes. Everywhere “one goes”. In Cathay and the south-west one sometimes rides, and *ala* alternates with *chevauche* just as, at sea, it does with *naje*, “one sails”. But from Giogiu to Zaitun one always and only “goes”. The frequent *chevauche* of FG is not supported by F or by the other early versions except VB. Looking for other indications we find that, with the exception of the Brius and other streams in the south-west