

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD<sup>s</sup> BANDITS AND PRODUCTS

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over much road in one day. But neither horses nor mules can do this nor could they endure so much labour as the above asses endure. For when the merchants of those parts go from one province to another they pass through great deserts, to wit places sandy, bare, and dry, yielding no grass or anything which was suitable for food for horses; and also because of the distances of wells and of sweet waters it would be necessary for them to make long marches if they wish the beasts to have drink; and because horses could not endure this, therefore so much the more willingly do the merchants use those asses only, since they are more swift and trotting well and are taken with less expense. And for this reason they are sold for more than horses. They use camels also which in the same way carry great weights and cause little expense; none the less they are not so swift as the asses. And note that in Indie the heat is so fervent that horses can by no means be kept there nor bred. And if one is born, it is born monstrous, that is defective in the limbs and deformed, of no value or strength. The people of these kingdoms take the horses and asses of which I have told you as far as to Chisci and to Curmos, which are two cities which are on the shore of the sea of Indie, and there they find the merchants who buy them and take them by sea into Indie and there sell them as dear as I have told you. In these kingdoms aforesaid are many very cruel & bad people and murderers, for they are killed one by another with mutual wounds every day, and if it were not for dread of the government of the great Kaan, or rather that is of the Tartar of the Sunrising, to whom they are subject, they would continually do great harm to all the merchants as they travel. For the lord of the Sunrising has them severely punished, and has decreed that in all the dangerous passes the inhabitants be bound on the demand of the merchants to give careful and good escorts from country to country for their protection and safety; and that for the payment of the escorts there be given them two or three grossi for each load, according to the length of the way. And for all the government they never fail to do them damage often as they are able, for if the merchants are not well provided with arms and with bows they kill them and ill-treat them badly and rob them all, or make them observe the law of Mahomet their prophet. And sometimes when they do not keep good watch they destroy them all. So that they are obliged to go well armed and banded together in a large company, if they wish to escape. And I tell you without mistake that they are all Saracens, for they all hold the law of Mahomet their prophet. In the cities are many merchants and artisans enough who live by trade and by labour, for they make cloth of gold and cloth of silk of all kinds in this province. And very much cotton grows there. And they have abundance of wheat and of barley and of millet and of panick and of all grains, and of wine and of all fruits in plenty and very good grapes of Persie both large and noble. But someone could say, Saracens do not drink wine because their law forbids this. To this it may be answered that they so gloss the text of their law, that if the wine boil on the fire till it is partly consumed and is made sweet, they can well drink it without breaking the commandment or law; for they