

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD^s THE RELIGION OF TANGUT

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hold the religion of Nestorian Christians,¹ and also there are some Saracens. And the idolaters indeed have a language for themselves. But the town is between the Greek wind and the sunrising. And they are not people who have handicrafts or live by trade but they live of the profit of the corn which they reap from the land. And they have moreover many abbeys and many monasteries which are all full of idols of many kinds, to which they do great sacrifice and great honour and very great reverence, and have great devotion. And you may know that it is a custom in this province that all the men who have children, when a child is born, immediately have a sheep fattened every year in honour of the idols, and at the beginning of the year² or on the festival of their idol those fathers who have fattened the sheep bring it with their child before the idol and there do him very great reverence and make a feast in honour of their idol, both they and also their child. And when they have done this they have it all cooked; then [24a] they carry it again before the idol with great reverence and there they leave it until the priests they have said their office and their prayer; & they do this that the idols may save their son in health, and then they say that the idols eat the substance or savour of the flesh; of which those idols do not touch a thing, for they are deaf & dumb and without mouth. When they have done this they take that flesh which had been before the idols, and give the idols their share of the flesh, and take the rest and carry it to their house or into other place which they wish, and send for all their relations and friends and eat it with great reverence and in great festivity. And when they have eaten the flesh of this sheep they also collect all the bones and religiously keep them in a box very safely. But the priest of the idols has the head & feet & inwards & skin of such a sheep as this, and some of the flesh. And you may know that it is a custom in this province that all the idolaters in the world, when they come to die, ordain that the others make burn the bodies of men & of the women. And again I tell you that they do it in this way. When these idolaters are dead & are taken & carried from their houses outside the city or town to the place where they must be burned, in some places on the way³ the kinsmen of the dead have made a small house of canes or of rods with its porch, covered with the richest cloth of silk and with cloth of gold according to their power, in the middle of the road. And when the dead is carried before this house so adorned they are stopped and the men of the house place the body on the ground at the foot of that pavilion, and lay wine and food and flesh enough on the ground before the dead, thinking that the spirit of the dead is somewhat refreshed and

¹ Z: *aliqui turchi xristiani qui nestoriam legem tenent*

² L: *completo anno*

³ *entreuoies* possibly in *triviis* "at the crossways", but the early versions have not taken it so.