

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLDS OF THE DEAD IN TANGUT

.58.

boards a good palm thick, and those boards are well joined together, and the coffin is all VA VA VA nobly painted, and they put the body inside it and shut the coffin well, and they stop VA R the joints with pitch and lime. And then they cover it with such cloths of silk and so R arranged¹ [24c] both with camphor, saffron, and with many other spices that the TA L body does not stink at all to those of the house. And again I tell you that the kindred of the dead, these are those of the house, every day as long as the body stays there have a board set for him, and put there bread and wine and flesh and many V other kinds of food to eat and to drink just as if he were alive. And they put it in front of the coffin where the body is and leave it till one could think that the dead V man at his convenience could have eaten it; and they do the same at supper, and they say V that his soul comes and eats of the savour of that food and drinks; and thus they do it FB R FB every day, and all the relations stay in the house to watch him. In such way they keep VB him from the day the body died until the day that he comes to be burnt. And again I VB tell you that they do another thing; that these diviners often say to the kindred of the dead that it is not good that they take the dead body out by the chief door L of the house, but by some other, and they find occasion either from a star or from other L things which may face that door; and then the kindred of the dead have him taken out by another door; and often they have the wall which faces straight towards the R planet which is propitious and favourable broken and make a new door, and have him VB carried out by there to burn. The reason however why their astrologers say that a body must FB L not be taken from the house on any day is that it must not be taken out except under that planet under which he was born, or at least not under one in opposition to it;² & if the V relations were to take him out at another time he would suffer great pain. They say that the L dead would do much harm in the house; and it often happens that evil spirits hurt or kill some of the family. So that for this cause every one obeys the word of the astrologers. And if it V R were done otherwise they say that the spirits of the dead would be offended with those of the house and would do them harm. And if it happens that any one of the house meets with some ill or misfortune, or dies, the astrologers immediately say that the spirit of the dead has done this because he was not carried out when the planet under which he was born was in the ascendant, or indeed that it was in opposition to him; or indeed that it was not through that proper part of the house which it ought to have been. And all the idolaters of the world go in this manner and by the way that I have told you, their pagan blindness preserving this LT P superstition in the burning of the dead bodies of men. Now let us leave you this matter

¹ & si ordre V: drapi bodoriferi VL: siando lo corpo prima ben aromatizato

² vel ad minus in non sibi contrario V: ouer soto lo so chontrario, meaning probably the same thing, though not quite grammatically. cf. B. p. 45.