

And he has four women whom he holds always<sup>1</sup> as his true wives, and the eldest son which he has of *the first* of these four women ought to be lord of the whole empire by right when the great Kaan *the father* should die. They are called empresses, and each of *those four women* is called *also* by her *other proper* name. And each of these four ladies holds a very *fine royal* court by herself in her own palace; for there is none of them who has not three hundred<sup>2</sup> *chosen* girls very fair and amiable. They have very many valets eunuchs and many other men and women, so that each of these ladies has in her court quite ten thousand<sup>3</sup> persons. And whenever he wishes to lie with any one of these four<sup>4</sup> women he makes her [36d] come to his room; and sometimes he goes to the room of his wife. And he has also very many other concubines, and I will tell you in what way. It is true that there is a province in which dwells a race of Tartars who are called Ungrat (*and the city likewise*) who are very handsome and fair-skinned people; and these women are very beautiful and adorned with excellent manners. And every second year a hundred maidens, the most beautiful that are to be found in all that race, are chosen and are brought to the great Kaan as he may wish. The great Kaan sends his messengers to the said province that they may find him the most beautiful girls according to the standard of beauty which he gives them, 400, 500, more and less, as they think right. And these girls are judged in this way. When the messengers are come, they make all the girls of the province come to them. And there are judges deputed for this purpose, who seeing and considering all the parts of each separately, that is the hair, the face, and the eyebrows, the mouth, the lips, and the other limbs, that they may be harmonious and proportioned to the body, value some at 16 carats, others at 17, 18, 20, and more and less according as they are more and less beautiful. And if the great Kaan has charged them to bring those of the value of twenty carats or twenty-one, according to the number ordered them they bring them. And when they are come to his presence he has them valued again by other judges, and of them all he has thirty or forty who are valued at most carats chosen for his own room. And he has them kept by the elder ladies of the palace, one to each of the wives of the barons, who use diligent care in watching them; and makes them lie with them in one bed to know if she<sup>5</sup> has good breath and sweet, and is clean, and sleeps quietly without snoring, and has no unpleasant scent anywhere, & to know if she is a virgin, & quite sound in all things. And when they have been carefully examined, those which are good and fair and sound in all their limbs are sent to wait on the lord in such way as I shall tell you.

<sup>1</sup> toutes foies V,VA,P omit. B. omits foies.

<sup>2</sup> TA<sup>s</sup>: cccc<sup>o</sup>

<sup>3</sup> FB: mille TA<sup>s</sup>: ij<sup>m</sup> Others "10000"

<sup>4</sup> quantite femes FA,FB: iiij.fames So perhaps read quatre femes

<sup>5</sup> sollo Read selle