

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD^s ELEPHANTS ARE CAUGHT

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king, who like a brave captain recklessly went wherever he saw that the greater danger was, cheering & praying them to stand firm and unmoved for the fight, and made the battalions from the rear which were fresh come forward to help those which were tired, they refused to stay there longer but set themselves to fly as fast as ever they can. But at last the king of Mien, seeing that it was impossible to make them stand or to resist the attack of the Tartars, the greater part of his army being either wounded or dead and all the field full of blood and covered with slain horses and men, and that they were beginning to turn the back, he too set himself to fly with the remainder of his people. And when the Tartars saw that those were turned in flight they go beating and chasing and killing them so evilly that it was a pity to see, for they were for the more part dead, the others not ceasing to chase and to kill them till the evening. And the Tartars had the victory. And the reason was that the king of Bangala and Mien had not his army armed like that of the Tartars; and in the same way the elephants, which came in the front rank, were not armed so that they might have been able to bear the first discharge of arrows from the enemy and to go over them and put them in disorder. But that which was of more importance, the said king ought not to have gone to attack the Tartars in that position which had the wood on the flanks, but to have waited for them in a wide plain where they would not have been able to bear the charge of the first armed elephants; and then with the two wings of horse and foot he would have surrounded them and put them from the midst.¹ And when they have chased them a great while they go chasing them no more and let them go; but being gathered together the Tartars turn back and go for the woods to catch some of the elephants which were fled in there. Moreover I tell you that they cut down the great trees to put in front of the elephants so that they should not be able to go forward. But it was all of no use to enable them to take them. But I tell you that the men of the king themselves, who were taken, caught many of them, because they had greater skill and the elephants understood the speech of these men better than the Tartars; because the elephant has greater understanding than any other animal that is. And by this means they took at last more than two hundred elephants of them.² And from this battle the great Kaan begins to have elephants in plenty

¹ That is, "destroyed them".—*gli haueria messi di mezzo*.

² VB, followed by R, has this passage rather differently: The Tartars being gathered together after the slaughter of the enemy returned toward the wood, and perceiving that the elephants were entered into it they entered into the wood to take them; and found that those people who were escaped on the castles had cut down trees and barred the way to make themselves secure. But the Tartars immediately bursting through the defences which they had already made killed many of them, and many were already fled, and they took prisoners who knew how to manage the said elephants, by the help of whom they took about two hundred of those elephants. The rest were part dead and part escaped in the wood. (The words in italics are taken from R.)