

THE MODESTY OF MAIDENS OF CATAI & MANGI = MARCO POLO

made then inquisition of all those who had been guilty of doing such treachery
 Z VB and were the chief supporters of this crime. And they all being brought into the presence of the
 Z great Kaan all those who are found [60c] guilty were by his order cruelly put to death
 FB FB by the two barons. And all the other lesser people he pardons and did them no harm
 VB FB and took them into his army; and afterwards they were always very faithful to their lord.

Z You ought to learn too that the girls of the province of Catai are beyond others pure and keep
 the virtue of modesty. They do not indeed skip and dance, they do not frolic, they do not fly
 into a passion, they do not stick at the windows looking at the faces of passers nor showing their
 own faces to them, they give no ready hearing to unseemly talk, they do not frequent feasts and
 merry-makings. And if it happens that they go to some proper place, as perhaps the idol temples
 [or] to visit the houses of kinsfolk and relations, they would go in the company of their mothers,
 not staring improperly at people but wearing on the head certain pretty bonnets of theirs which
 prevent an upward look, so that in walking they always direct the eyes on the road before the
 feet. Before their elders they are modest; they never speak foolish words, nor indeed any in their
 presence, except when they have been asked. In their rooms they keep at their tasks and rarely
 show themselves to fathers and brothers and the elders of the house. And they pay no attention
 to suitors. And we say in the same way of the boys [and] young gentlemen that they never
 presume to speak in the presence of their elders unless they are asked. And what more? So great
 is the modesty between them, namely between kindred and relatives that in no way would two
 try to go to the baths or stoves together. If however anyone wishes to give a daughter in marriage,
 or she is asked for himself by another, the father offers the daughter to the future spouse as a virgin.
 And in this point the father and spouse will agree together with obligations and bonds; for if
 the opposite were to be found the marriage would not hold. When the bonds also and agreements
 have been duly made between them and confirmed, the girl is taken for the testing of her virtue
 to the baths or stoves, where there will be the mothers and relations of herself and of the spouse,
 and on behalf of either party certain matrons specially deputed for this duty who will first
 examine the girl's virginity with a pigeon's egg. And if the women who shall be on behalf of
 the spouse are not satisfied with such a test, since a woman's natural parts can well be contracted
 by medicinal means, one matron of the aforesaid will cunningly insert a finger wrapped in
 white and fine linen into the natural parts and will break a little of the virginal vein so
 that the linen may be a little stained with virginal blood. For that blood is of such a nature
 and strength that its stain can be removed by no washing from cloth where it is fixed. And
 if it be removed it is a sign that she has been defiled, nor is that blood of her proper nature.
 When the test has been made also, if she is found a virgin the marriage is valid; but if not, not.
 And the father of the girl is punished by the government¹ according to the agreement which he

¹ dominium The Milan copy reads denarium.