

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD'S IDOLS & THEIR ORACLES

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has made. And you ought to know that for the keeping of this virginity maidens always step so gently in the progress of their walk that one foot never goes before the other by more than a finger, because the privy parts of a virgin are very often opened if she take herself along too wantonly. Moreover this is to be understood of those who spring from the province of Catai. For the Tartars do not care about this sort of convention; for their daughters ride with them, and their wives, whence it may be believed that to some extent they suffer harm. The people of the province of Mangi observe the custom with Catai.

Another thing again is done in Catai which you ought to know; that among the idolaters there are eighty-four idols, each named with its own name. And the idolaters say that an appropriate power has been given to each idol by the supreme God, namely to one for the finding of things lost; to one for the provision of fertility of lands and showing them seasonable weather; to one for the keeping of flocks; and so with regard to each thing, as well in prosperity as in adversity. And each idol is named by its proper name; and they know and say that such is the duty and power of whichever idol you please. The idols indeed to whom it belongs to find lost things they set up as two small statues of wood in the likeness of boys who are of twelve years, and they decorate these with beautiful ornaments. And in their temple an old woman continually stays with them as sacristan. If however anyone has lost anything, either because someone has stolen it or because he does not know where he put it down, or in any way cannot find it, he will go or send to the aforesaid old woman to inquire of those idols about the thing lost. The old woman will tell him that he must incense the idols, and he will burn incense. When the incense has been provided the old woman will then ask about the thing lost, and they will answer her about it as it shall be. Then the old woman will say to him who has lost the thing, Look in such a place and you shall find it. And if anyone has taken it she will say, Such a one has it, tell him to give it you. And if he shall deny, come back to me. For I will make him certainly restore it to you. Otherwise I will bring it about that he shall cut off a hand or a foot, or shall fall and break an arm or leg, or that he meet with an accident in some other way, so that he will be compelled by force to restore it to you. And so it is found by experience that if any person has stolen anything from anybody and, after the order has been given him, has denied it and neglected to return it; if it is a woman, while she is at some work with a knife in the kitchen or doing something else, she cuts off her hand or falls into the fire or another misfortune happens to her. If it is a man, he cuts off his foot too in the same way while he is cutting logs, and breaks arms or legs or another limb. And because men now know by experience that this happens to them because of denials of thefts, they give back what they have stolen immediately. But if they do not answer immediately, then the old woman will say, The spirits are not here. Go away and come back at such hour, because they will come in the meanwhile and I shall ask them. He will come back then at the hour given him, and the spirits meantime will have given an answer to the old woman; which answer they produce whispering in a sort of thin and low voice like a