

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD ≈ THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE

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fruit and the fishes I have told you. And again you may know quite truly that *having found himself in this city of Quinsai when account of the revenues and number of the inhabitants was given to the factors of the great Kaan, Master Marc saw that in this city of Quinsai are registered 160 toman of fires in Italian idiom, or families, counting for a fire the family which lives in one house, that is to say 160 toman of houses. And I tell you that the toman is 10000, and then you must know that there are altogether 1600 thousands of houses, amongst which are a great quantity of rich and very beautiful and large palaces. In this city there is, in so great a number of people, no more than one very beautiful*

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them, because each one did his utmost to go with the greatest display and wealth in his power. Behind this pavilion of which we have spoken, which was entered through the middle of the great gate, there was a wall with a door which divided off the other part of the palace, where on entering one found another great place made in the manner of a cloister with its pillars which held up the portico which went round the said cloister, and there were various rooms for the king and the queen which were likewise worked with various works, and so were all the walls. Then from this cloister one entered into a walk six paces wide, all covered; but it was so long that it reached down to the lake. On this walk ten courts on one side and ten on the other stood facing one another, fashioned like long cloisters with their porticoes all round, and each cloister or court had fifty rooms with their gardens, and in all these rooms were stationed a thousand girls whom the king kept for his service. And sometimes he went with the queen and with some of the said[girls] for recreation about the lake on barges all covered with silk, and also to visit the temples of the idols. The other two parts of the said enclosure were laid out with woods, lakes, and most beautiful gardens planted with fruit trees, where were enclosed all sorts of animals, that is roe-deer, fallow-deer, red-deer, hares, rabbits; and there the king went to enjoy himself with his damsels, some in carriages and some on horseback, and no man went in there. And he made the said[damsels] run with dogs and give chase to these kinds of animals; and after they were tired they went into those woods which faced one another above the said lakes, and leaving the clothes there they came out of them naked and entered into the water and set themselves to swim some on one side and some on the other, and the king stayed to watch them with the greatest delight; and then they went back home. Sometimes he had food carried into those woods, which were thick and dense with very lofty trees, waited on by the said damsels. And with this continual dalliance with women he grew up without knowing what arms might be. Which thing in the end brought it about that through his cowardice and incompetence the great Kaan took all the state from him with the greatest [48A] shame to him and disgrace, as you have learned above. All this story was told me by a very rich merchant of Quinsai, when I found myself in that city, who was very old and had been an intimate friend of the king Fanfur and knew all his life, and had seen the said palace in being, into which he was pleased to lead me. And because the king deputed by the great Kaan stays there, the first pavilions are still as they used to be, but the rooms of the girls are all gone to ruin and nothing else is seen but traces. In the same way the wall which encircled the woods and gardens is fallen to the ground and there are no longer either animals or trees." See also pp. 499, 519 note 142.