

THE SPLENDID RUBY OF THE KING OF SEILAN ≠ MARCO POLO

VB rubies are produced in this island, nor are they produced so good in any other part
 FB VB of the world *but there*. And there the sapphire also is produced and the topaz in
 Z L Z plenty and the amethyst, garnets and also very many other precious and good stones.
 R Moreover I tell you that the king of this province has, *it is said*, the most beautiful
 FB Z and the largest ruby that is to be found in all the world or that ever was seen or that
 V ought to be seen; and I will describe to you *its size*, how it is made. Now you may
 FB know that it is about a large palm long and quite as thick as the arm of a man.
 V V Z And it is the most splendid thing in the world to see. [78a] And it has no flaw in it.
 R Z And it is red like burning fire. And it is of so great value that it could hardly be bought
 V VB for money. Moreover I tell you for truth that *when he knew of this most notable*
 R ruby, Cublai the great Kaan sends his messengers to this king and sends to him
 V FB saying that he wished to buy this ruby, and that if he would give it him of his
 FB courtesy he would have the value of a city given him for it, or what he should wish
 VB Z to have. This king of Seilan answering him said that he would not give it for anything
 Z VB in the world nor would he part with it, because he says that it belonged to his father
 VB and to his ancestors for a very long time, and for this reason he cannot have it for
 VB anything in the world; that it would be to his great shame and dishonour that the ruby
 which was come to him through the hands of so many of his forefathers and which by right
 he should hand down to his sons and descendants for ever,—that he should be so mean as to give
 it to another; and that he prayed his lord not to wish nor ask of him a thing of so much dis-
 honour and shame and disgrace; nor would it be by his consent, as he considered this jewel a
 very great honour of his dominion. With this answer and without the ruby the ambassadors
 returned to their master. And I Marc Pol was one of the ambassadors and saw the said ruby
 with my eyes; and when that lord was holding it in his closed hand it projected below and above
 V the fist, the which lord put it to his eyes and to his mouth.¹ The men of this island are not
 V men of arms but they are cowardly & mean. But if it happens that they need to

¹ This addition of VB is not merely "irritante loquacità" nor wholly imaginary, for it pre-
 serves a tradition which was certainly current in the thirteenth century. cf. Y. II. pp. 315, 316;
 and CORDIER *Les Merveilles de l'Asie* p. 116 (Pl. IXb): *In insula de Sylen supradicta est Rex . . . habet*
rubinos duos. quorum vnum tenet ad collum appensum et alium in manu cum quo tergit labia & barbam qui
est maior in longitudine quam quatuor digiti per transuersum qui[cum]continetur in manu tantum excedit
uel apparet ab utraque parte quantum grossitudo vnius digiti. non credo mundum habere vniuersum tales
duos lapides nec tanti precii eiusdem speciei.; and HIRTH & ROCKHILL *Chau Ju-kua* p. 73, (*Cbu fan*
chih, 1914, fol. 10r^o), "The king holds in his hand a jewel five inches in diameter, which cannot
 be burnt by fire, and which shines in the night like a torch. The king rubs his face with it
 daily, and though he were passed ninety he would retain his youthful looks." cf. also PAUTHIER
Marco Polo p. 587(5).