

A FINE STORY ABOUT THE KING OF ABASCE ≈ MARCO POLO

VA VA this province of Abasce are *many* very good men of arms and *very fine* horsemen
 Z enough, and they also have horses enough. And this is quite necessary *to them* for
 FB TA you may know that they *always* have *great* war with the sultan of Aden and with
 R those of Nubie and with other people enough *who are on their borders*. Through their
 continual exercise they are counted the best men of war of all the provinces of Indie. Moreover
 TA I will tell you a fine story about it which happened to the king of Abasce when he wished
 to go on pilgrimage in the 1288 year from the incarnation of Christ. It was true that
 Z P this king who is lord of the whole province of Abasce,¹ who is Christian, said to
 VB VA his barons that he wished to go on pilgrimage to worship the *holy* sepulchre of our
 R Lord Master Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, for infinite numbers of the said people go there every
 TA year for this devotion. Now he was obliged to pass through the province of Aden who were his
 V Z V enemies. Then the nobles and barons dissuaded him and told him that it would be of
 P VB too great danger if he were to go there in person, being obliged to pass through so long
 a journey & through so many places and countries of the Saracens the bitter enemies of Christians;
 V & this was not only a very special danger to his person, but also to the whole province; and
 that he would never come back if he went, and advise him to send a bishop there or some
 FB VA VB other great prelate in his place, & to send what offering he pleased. The king, seeing that
 all the other lords objected to this his going, agrees to that which the barons advise him.
 Z R TA Then he sends for the bishop who was reckoned a man of very holy and good life
 and told him that he wishes him to go in his place as far as to Jerusalem to worship
 VB L the *holy* sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ & to offer gifts. He tells him that he
 will do his commandment as[that]of his liege lord. The king tells him to prepare
 himself and to go as soon as he can. And what shall I tell [93c] you of it? The
 Z bishop sets out and took leave of the king and then prepares himself and sets himself
 TA on the road in the manner of a pilgrim with a very fair company with much honour
 LT VB as befitted a bishop. And he went with no little labour both by sea and by land until he

Dec.) "in multas provincias profectus est . . . Parthis, Medis, Persis, Hyrcanis, et Bactris . . . Postremo ad Indos . . ." The Syrian *Breviary* (3 July) does indeed say "By S. Thomas the Chinese also with the Ethiopians have turned to the truth." (cf. *Christians in China*, p. 11), but it is doubtful whether Ethiopia (which is also assigned to S. Matthew) means Abyssinia (*op. cit.* p. 181). See PN (Abasce, Nubie).

¹ *qui est sire dou rauec la prouence de abasce* V: *questo il qualle signorizaua tuta la prouinzia de abasce il qual era christian* cf. Z (p. c), VA. Guided by these texts B. very ingeniously shows how *dou rauec* (which he read *dou rane*) can easily be made into *souran de*—"sovereign lord of the province". The minute differences between *rane* and *rauec* are negligible for this purpose, and B.'s emendation is perhaps to be accepted. L: *Rex de Rauce & tocius prouincie* L': *rex de rauec. et tocius prouincie* VB: *el re segnor de la prouinzia*