

Asiatic exploration. He set out from Lyons in 1245 and delivered the letter from the Pope to Kuyuk Khan, not far from the city of Karakorum. Two years later he was back with the answer from the Mongol Khan.

Friar John is specially interesting to us as being the first European to mention Tibet. After telling how Chingis Khan's army had been at war, the text runs, in Hakluyt's version of Vincent of Beauvais' abridgment, as follows:

»And in traueiling homewardest, the sayd armie of the Mongals came vnto the lande of Burithabeth (the inhabitants whereof are Pagans) and conquered the people in battell. These people haue a strange or rather a miserable kinde of custome. For when anie mans father deceaseth, he assembleth all his kindred, and they eate him. These men haue no beards at all, for we saw them carie a certaine iron instrument in their hands, wherewith, if any haire grove upon their chinne, they presently plucke them out. They are also very deformed.»¹

There is no doubt that this passage, which is very much in accordance with the narratives of Rubruck and Marco Polo, really refers to Tibet. The name Burithabeth is used some 60 years later by an oriental writer, namely, Rashideddin, in his *Jamiu-t Tawarikh*, relating of Singun, the son of Ong Khan that he »took his refuge in Bouri-Tibet». ² ROCKHILL thinks it is a hybrid word, composed of the native appellation Bod and the word Tibet, while d'Avezac suggests it to be a corruption of the Baron-Tala, by which name the Mongols designate Tibet. ³ Both these explanations seem, however, to be wrong, for the name Buri-Tibet also occurs in the *Ts'in cheng lu*, where it is said that Ong Khan's son fled to the people of Bo-li t'u-fan; and t'u-fan is one of the Chinese designations for Tibet. ⁴

Rockhill does not believe in Friar John's charge of cannibalism against the Tibetans. If 770 years ago they had the same habit as nowadays of cutting up their dead and throwing the pieces to the dogs, the description of this procedure may have been exaggerated before it reached Mongolia, or, perhaps misunderstood by early European travellers. ⁵ The habit of plucking out the hairs of their beards is still en vogue in Tibet, and nearly every Tibetan, even amongst the nomads, has an iron pincer in his belt exclusively for this purpose.

Several other missionaries were sent out to Asia in subsequent years, and amongst them the French Franciscan WILLIAM OF RUBRUCK is the greatest of all. Yule calls his narrative one of the best in existence. As an explorer, this admirable Friar could not easily be surpassed, for he indicated the sources and the course of the Don and the Volga, he showed that the Caspian was a lake, and that Cathay was the same as the classical country of the Seres, he made Balkash and the city

¹ The Texts and Versions of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis, edited by C. R. BEAZLEY London 1903, p. 118.

² C. D'OHSSON: Histoire des Mongols, Tome I. La Haye et Amsterdam, 1834, p. 82.

³ ROCKHILL, Op. cit. p. 151.

⁴ E. BRETSCHNEIDER: Mediæval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources, Vol. II, London 1910, p. 25.

⁵ See also Yule: Cathay and the way thither, p. 151, and Marco Polo I, p. 312.