

In all, some ten letters from Desideri's hand were in existence, although the one quoted above seems to be the only one of geographical importance.<sup>1</sup> In 1875, however, a manuscript of 630 pages in small folio, was discovered in Pistoia, Desideri's native town in Italy. It has the title: *Breve e succinto ragguaglio del viaggio alle Indie orientali del Padre Ippolito Desideri della Compagnia de Gesù*. This title only refers to a small part of the contents, as the author is also dealing with Persia, Kashmir, India and the mission of the Jesuits; and more than half is about Tibet. The manuscript, which is not in Desideri's own handwriting, was published in 1904 by the Italian Geographical Society.<sup>2</sup>

The Congregatio di Propaganda conferred by a special decree of 1703 the exclusive rights to missionary work in Tibet upon the Capuchin Fathers. There-with began a very interesting chapter in the history of Catholic mission in Asia, a chapter which came to an end in 1745, and to which we shall have to return later on.

In the meantime the Jesuit Ippolito Desideri obtained the permission of the chief of his order and the blessing of the Pope to go out and convert the Tibetans. And it is about the experiences on his long and adventurous journey he tells in the precious and valuable manuscript.

In the first chapter Puini gives a *Descrizione sommaria del viaggio fatto dal P. Desideri*. The missionary left Rome on September 27th 1712 in company with P. Ildebrando Grassi and went to India. From there he took P. MANUEL FREYRE as a companion.<sup>3</sup>

After having provided themselves with an interpreter, Desideri and Freyre left Kashmir on May 17th 1715 and went over a very high and snowy mountain, Kantel,<sup>4</sup> the Zoji-la of our days, and on 30th of May, entered the Primo

<sup>1</sup> N. DELISLE has collected some »Notes sur le Tübet par le P. Hippolyte Desideri», published by Klapproth. *Nouveau Journal Asiatique*, Tome VIII, Paris 1831, p. 117. It does not contain any important geographical facts. For, travelling from Yarkand to Tibet, it is said, one has to pass the desert of Ngari Jongar, at which one arrives through a passage between two mountains, with the exception of which the whole country is impracticable. At Karthou (Gartok) and in Ngari Jongar there are Tibetan garrisons to defend the passages. Barantola is the name the Chinese Tatars give to Lhasa and the southern part of Tibet. The second or Great Tibet is called Lata yul. The town of Lata is the capital of Great Tibet. Two roads are said to exist between Lhasa and Sining. From Lata for a two months' journey there are no difficult mountains. In the great desert between Lata and Lhasa there are very high mountains, which are the summits of Imaus. Tochoa, Rethöa or Redok »in mongol» are places on the road. The first Tibet is under China, the second is independent, the third is under the Great Mogul.

<sup>2</sup> CARLO PUINI: *Il Tibet (Geografia, Storia, Religione, Costumi) Secondo la relazione del viaggio del P. Ippolito Desideri (1715—1721)* Roma, 1904. In his introduction, Puini has a note regarding the history of the geographical knowledge of Tibet until the beginning of the 19th century.

<sup>3</sup> I am here going to follow the summary of the diary, only filling in those parts of the later chapters which are of special interest to us from a geographical point of view.

<sup>4</sup> The editor tells us that VIGNE identified Kantel with Zoji-la, but does not quote the place. He gets his authority from MARKHAM (*Narratives of the Mission of GEORGE BOGLE etc. . . . p. 304*) where it is said: »According to VIGNE, the summit of Bultul (Zoji la pass) is the Mount Kantul of the old maps.» Neither does Markham give the words of Vigne, which run as follows: »The elevation of