

In the chapter *Partenza della Missione dal terzo e principal Tibet*¹ Desideri says that on this journey one has to pass over a very high and trying mountain called Langur; »which has such a quality that everybody who passes over it, will absolutely feel a great discomfort, specially great pains in the head and shortness of breath and difficulty of respiration, to all of which also comes the fever». Although he passed at the end of May he had heaps of snow and a killing wind and cold. »As it is impossible to ascend and descend the whole mount Langur in one day, there is a great house, in which passengers may rest for cover and protection.» But many travellers, from difficulty of respiration, are not able to stay in this house, and prefer to sleep in the open air. Remembering the curious explanation Father Huc gave of the mountain sickness, it is interesting to read Desideri's views 125 years earlier. Huc says: »on éprouve un malaise tout-à-fait semblable au mal de mer». Some of his party rested at a place where »les vapeurs pestilentiennes étaient, disait-on, moins épaisses; le reste, par prudence aussi, épuisa tous ses efforts pour arriver jusqu'au bout, et ne pas mourir asphyxié au milieu de cet air chargé d'acide carbonique . . . La présence de l'acide carbonique était cause qu'il était très-difficile d'allumer le feu . . .»² This was on the heights of Burkhan-Budda. Desideri has the following simple and sensible explanation: »Many people suppose that such inconveniences are due to vapours from certain minerals that are to be found in the interior of Langûr; but as no positive sign of such minerals has been obtained up to date, I would rather believe that such effects come from the great acuteness and subtlety of the air. I am still more induced to believe so by the fact that I experienced a more painful discomfort on the forthcoming of the wind, and that on the summit of Langûr I positively suffered from deathlike shortness of breath. And even more I do believe so seeing many people suffering more from shortness of breath when inside the large house, where the air is still more subtilized by the action of the fire, made to alleviate cold and for cooking, than when they sleep in the open air. If that inconvenience were caused by mineral or pestilential vapours from the earth, the effect should be quite opposite.»³

Such particulars as this in a narrative may serve to prove that the author is a sharp and conscientious observer. Adding to this the extremely clever chapters he has written on *Usi, costumi e Governo civile*, especially in Lhasa, it is no exaggeration to say that many of the modern explorers in Tibet may not at all be compared with Ippolito Desideri, who visited the country nearly 200 years ago.

¹ Op. cit. p. 82.

² Souvenirs d'un voyage etc. Paris 1853. Tome II, p. 210.

³ Op. cit. p. 83.