

Meshed and Shibir Khan. He must have crossed desert first, and it may be identified with the nemek-sar or salt desert east of Tun and Kain. The six days must have been passed in the ranges Paropamisus, Firuz-kuh, and Bend-i-Turkestan. Marco Polo is not usually wont to scare his readers by descriptions of mountainous regions, but at this place he speaks of mountains and valleys and rich pastures. As it was of course his intention to travel on into the heart of Asia, to make a *détour* through Sebsevar was unnecessary and out of his way. If he had travelled to Sebsevar, Nishapur, and Meshed, he would scarcely call the province of Tun-o-Kain the extremity of Persia towards the north, even as the political boundaries were then situated.

From Balkh his wonderful journey proceeded farther eastwards, and therefore we take leave of him. Precisely in Eastern Persia his descriptions are so brief that they leave free room for all kinds of speculations. In the foregoing pages it has been simply my desire to present a few new points of view. The great value of Marco Polo's description of the Persian desert consists in confirming and proving its physical invariableness during more than six hundred years. It had as great a scarcity of oases then as now, and the water in the wells was not less salt than in our own days.