

their goods imposed a recurring strain on the population, an imperial decree is recorded in 1078 restricting admission to the empire to duly accredited missions.

The extremely varied list of goods which this last notice enumerates among the usual Yü-t'ien 'tribute' is of interest as showing how many articles from the Far West then found their way to China through the commercial mediation of Khotan. Whether the trade relations thus renewed continued unbroken after the close of the Sung period (1126 A. D.), and the invasion of Eastern Turkestan by the Kara-Khitai which almost coincided with it, does not appear from the Chinese records so far rendered accessible²⁶. Nothing is known to us of Khotan during the period (circ. 1125-1208), when the Kara-Khitai held sway over Eastern Turkestan. Buddhists though they were, there is no evidence to show that their rule impaired the position which a century and a quarter of zealous repression must have created for Islām at Khotan. From 1218 Eastern Turkestan became part of Chingiz Khān's Mongol Empire, and Khotan may be assumed to have benefited by the facilities for trade intercourse which the vast extent of this empire created.

Kara-Khitai
and Mongol
supremacy.

When Marco Polo visited Khotan on his way to China, between the years 1271 and 1275, the people of the oasis were flourishing, as the Venetian's previously quoted account shows²⁷. His description of the territories further east, Pein, Cherchen and Lop, which he passed through before crossing 'the Great Desert' to Sha-chou, leaves no doubt that the route from Khotan into Kan-su was in his time a regular caravan road. Marco Polo found the people of Khotan 'all worshippers of Mahomet' and the territory subject to 'the Great Kaan', i.e. Kublai, whom by that time almost the whole of the Middle kingdom acknowledged as emperor. While the neighbouring Yarkand owed allegiance to Kaidu, the ruler of the Chagatai dominion, Khotan had thus once more renewed its old historical connexion with China.

Marco
Polo's visit
to Khotan.

The ampler flow of Muhammadan records may, perhaps, render it possible to trace some details of Khotan history during the troubled times of the fourteenth century, which saw the power of the successors of Kublai in China waning and Turkestan divided between two lines of the house of Chagatai. But this period and those following lie far beyond the scope of our historical sketch. We may, therefore, close with a brief reference to the Notice of Yü-t'ien in the Ming Annals, the last of those extracted in the *Pien i tien*²⁸. The record there given of some 'embassies' from Yü-t'ien, which arrived during the years 1420-1424, is of interest on account of the unreserved exposition of their true character as commercial ventures²⁹. The remarks imply that after a period of interruption the trade of the West towards China was once more resuming its ancient channel through Khotan. How long this revived use of the old route lasted we do not know. But we can still discern, perhaps, the probable cause which had led trade back to it. In 1421 the imperial court had been visited by an embassy, this time not a sham one, from Shāh Rukh, the Moghul prince of Herāt. When this mission, briefly referred to also in the Ming Notice, was travelling homewards in 1422, the ambassadors, on account of troubles

Notice of
Khotan in
Ming
Annals.

²⁶ The *Pien i tien* furnishes no extracts on Yü-t'ien for the periods of the Southern Sung and the Yüan or Mongol Dynasty.

²⁷ See above, pp. 139 sq.; Yule, *Marco Polo*, i. p. 188.

²⁸ See Rémusat, *Ville de Khotan*, pp. 100 sqq.; the notice is also translated by Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, ii. pp. 246 sqq.

²⁹ 'Those foreigners are very fond of Chinese productions, especially silk, and derive benefit from exchanging them with goods they bring from their countries. Thus the

foreign merchants were in the habit of coming to China under the false pretext of carrying tribute. They brought with them camels, horses, jade, and other things. When they had entered China, the government provided them with boats and carts to travel by rivers or by land', &c.; see Bretschneider, loc. cit., p. 247. For Goëz' description of the organization of these sham embassies which proceeded to Peking from Central Asia in his own time, comp. Yule, *Cathay*, ii. pp. 564, 582.