

1 Travels of Marco Polo – written in 13th century

CHAPTER XII - OF THE SECOND KINGDOM, NAMED BASMAN

UPON leaving the Kingdom of Sumatra, you enter that of **Basman**, which is independent of the other kingdoms, and has its peculiar language. The people profess obedience to the grand **khan**, but pay him no tribute, and their distance is so great, that his troops cannot be sent to these parts. The whole island, indeed, is nominally subject to him, and when ships pass that way the opportunity is taken of sending him rare and curious articles, and especially a particular sort of falcon.

In the country are many wild elephants and **unicorns**. The unicorns are not much smaller than the elephants, but about double the size of a buffalo. Their hide resembles that of the buffalo. In the middle of the forehead they have a single horn; but with this weapon they do not injure those whom they attack. But they do use their tongue, which is armed with long, sharp spines, and their knees or feet to attack people. Their mode of assault being to trample upon the person, and then to lacerate him with the tongue. Their head is like that of a wild boar, and they carry it low towards the ground. They take delight in muddy pools, and are filthy in their habits. They are not of that description of animals which suffer themselves to be taken by maidens, as our people suppose, but are quite of a contrary nature.

There are found in this district monkeys of various sorts, and good falcons, as black as crows, which are of a large size, and pursue the prey in a good style.

Commented [CR1]: students may struggle to find all the place names on modern map. Remind them that names of places change over time and that the names may change through language translations. Also, in some cases, he may have incorrectly recorded the name of a place.

Commented [CR2]: students often overlook this key word but need to know the meaning to understand the decentralized monarchy of the islands.

Commented [CR3]: unicorns!? Students will learn, with a quick internet search of "Marco Polo" and "unicorn" the true.

Commented [CR4]: students often overlook this sentence. Direct them to research medieval unicorn myths and they will learn that the only person that can capture a unicorn is a virgin (or maiden)

Commented [CR5]: falconry was a popular sport in the Middle Ages. Marco Polo wasn't just interested in birds; he was viewing the birds through the sporting-traditions of his time.

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CHAPTER XXIX – Kingdom of Guzerat

Guzerat, too, is a great kingdom to the west, having languages and a king of its own, and subject to no other.

The greatest pirates in the world live here, and have a most wicked custom. After taking a sea merchant, they make him drink tamarinds and sea-water, then examine carefully if he voids any pearls or precious stones. Merchants are believed to swallow precious jewels when they are about to be attacked, in order to conceal them.

Here there is great abundance of ginger, pepper, and indigo. Cotton is produced in large quantities from a tree that is about six yards in height, and bears during twenty years; but the cotton taken from trees of that age is not adapted for spinning, but only for quilting. Such, on the contrary, as is taken from trees of twelve years old, is suitable for muslins and other manufactures of extraordinary fineness.

Great numbers of skins of goats, buffaloes, wild oxen, unicorns, and other beasts are dressed here; and vessels are loaded with them, and bound to different parts of Arabia. Coverlets for beds are made of red and blue leather, extremely delicate and soft, and stitched with gold and silver thread; upon these the **Mahometans** are accustomed to repose. Cushions also, ornamented with gold wire in the form of birds and beasts, are the manufacture of this place;

Commented [CR6]: students are often confused by this opening paragraph but with diligence can discover that the merchants swallowed jewels so pirates could not steal them; later the jewels could be rediscovered in the toilet.

Commented [CR7]: this is confusing to a modern reader because cotton used to manufacture modern cotton fabrics comes from this plant <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton> which is NOT a tree. Marco Polo may have been referring to this plant - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceiba_pentandra

Commented [CR8]: students often skip this word – it is key to understanding how religion influences views of the world when we travel.

and in some instances their value is so high as six marks of silver. Embroidery is here performed with more delicacy than in any other part of the world.

Commented [CR9]: be sure to ask students WHY he was so interested in these goods. Not just because he wanted to buy lots of souvenirs. Marco Polo was a trader, looking for good to import to Europe.

3 Travels of Marco Polo – written in 13th century CHAPTER XVII - OF THE ISLANDS OF NOCUERAN and Angaman and Seilan

UPON leaving Java and the kingdom of Lambri, and sailing about one hundred and fifty miles, you fall in with two islands, one of which is named Nocueran, and the other Angaman. The island of Nocueran has no king, and the people live like beasts. All of them, both males and females, going naked, without a covering to any part of the body. They are idolaters. Their woods abound with the noblest and most valuable trees, such as the white and the red sandalwood, those which bear the Indian (coco) nuts, cloves, and brazil; besides which they have a variety of drugs.

Commented [CR10]: encourage students to research the spice trade and why Asian spices were desirable trade items back in Europe.

Angaman is a very large island, without a king, and the people are idolaters. The people resemble large beasts, an extraordinary race with a head, teeth, and jaws like those of a mastiff dog. They are very cruel, and eat all the men of very other nations whom they can seize. They have great abundance and variety of spices, with fruits different from ours, but live chiefly on flesh and milk.

Commented [CR11]: students often overlook this word. It is key to understanding how Marco Polo, a Catholic, viewed other faiths.

On the island of Seilan, a thousand miles westward and to the south, the people have a king called Sendemain. They are idolaters and go quite naked, except a small covering around their middle. They have no grain but rice, living on it and on flesh. Here are the most noble and beautiful rubies, which can be found nowhere else. Also the sapphire, the topaz, the amethyst, and various other precious stones.

Commented [CR12]: were these people really beasts? Or was Marco Polo judging them through the standards of his own European culture?