



HAL
open science

From Kashgar to Xanadu in the Travels of Marco Polo

Amelia Carolina Sparavigna

► **To cite this version:**

Amelia Carolina Sparavigna. From Kashgar to Xanadu in the Travels of Marco Polo. 2020. hal-02563026

HAL Id: hal-02563026

<https://hal.science/hal-02563026v1>

Preprint submitted on 5 May 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

From Kashgar to Xanadu in the Travels of Marco Polo

Amelia Carolina Sparavigna

Politecnico di Torino

Uploaded 21 April 2020 on [Zenodo DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3759380](https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.3759380)

Abstract: In two previous papers (Philica, 2017, Articles 1097 and 1100), we investigated the travels of Marco Polo, using Google Earth and Wikimapia. We reconstructed the Polo's travel from Beijing to Xanadu and from Sheberghan to Kashgar. Here we continue the analysis of this travel from today Kashgar to Xanadu.

Keywords: Satellite Images, Google Earth, Wikimapia, Marco Polo, Taklamakan, Southwest Xinjiang, Lop Desert, Xanadu, Marco Polo, China.

The Travels of Marco Polo is a 13th-century book written by Rustichello da Pisa, reporting the stories told by Marco to Rustichello while they were in prison together in Genoa. This book is describing the several travels through Asia of Polo and the period that he spent at the court of Kublai Khan [1]. We can read Polo's words in the English version given by the Scottish orientalist Sir Henry Yule (1820–1889), at web site https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_Marco_Polo . In [2], some concerns are discussed about authenticity and veracity of the travels described in Rustichello's book, however many contents that we can find in it are giving an "ultimately overwhelming probability of the broad authenticity" of the travels of Marco Polo [3].

As told in [4], an approach useful to demonstrate that Polo actually travelled from Venice to Beijing and visited the court of Kublai Kahn is that of verifying the accuracy of the itineraries described in the book. For this purpose, we can use Google Earth and Wikimapia. In [4], we studied the road to Xanadu, the Summer Capital of Kublai Khan, from Beijing, the Winter Capital of the Yuan empire. The results were so good to encourage further analyses of the travels of Marco Polo. In [5], we analysed the travel from Sapurgan, today Sheberghan in Afghanistan, to Cascar, the oasis city of Kashgar in Xinjiang. In particular, we proposed a possible way for crossing the Pamir mountains, after Polo's words and the roads, rivers and lakes displayed by Google Earth. In [5], we told that "in a forthcoming article, we will show the itinerary from Kashgar to Xanadu, the Summer Capital of Kublai Khan. It seems that Marco Polo moved towards this capital when he left the Taklamakan desert".

Thanks to Google Earth and Wikimapia, we can try to perform this task. Let us read Polo's words in [1], and continue the travel from Kashgar to Xanadu. We propose a possible itinerary; its rule is to follow water and trading routes, besides the names of the places given by Polo of course. Let us note that from Calacian to Tenduc, Polo is giving poor information, therefore some possible places are guessed.

Here in the following, the screenshots of the itinerary that I prepared in 2017 are given, with the aim of helping and stimulating further studies on the subject.

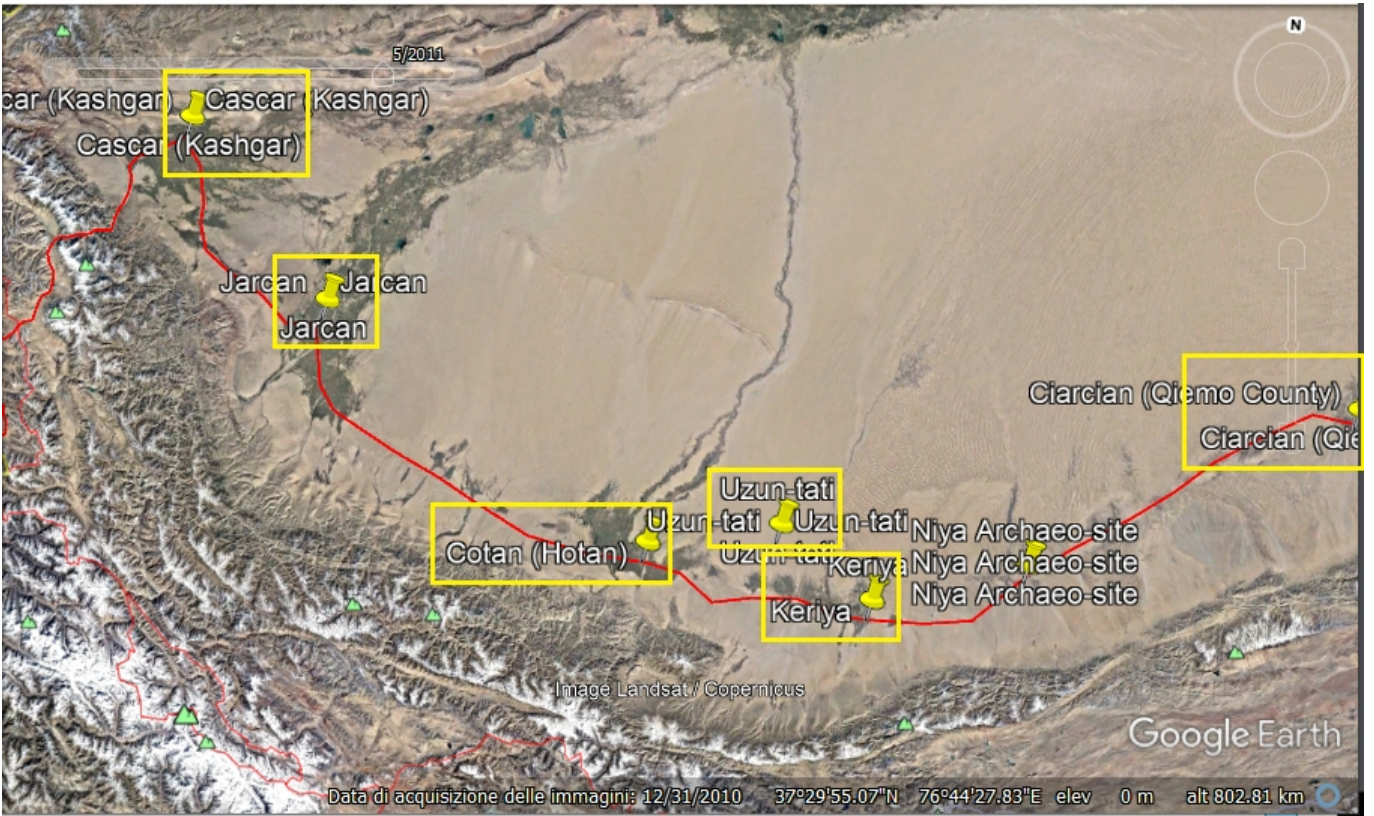


Figure 1: From Cascar to Ciarcian (names of places are given as in [1] too).



Figure 2: From Ciarcian to the Lop Desert.



Figure 3: From the Lop Desert to Campciu.



Figure 4: From Campciu to Calacian.

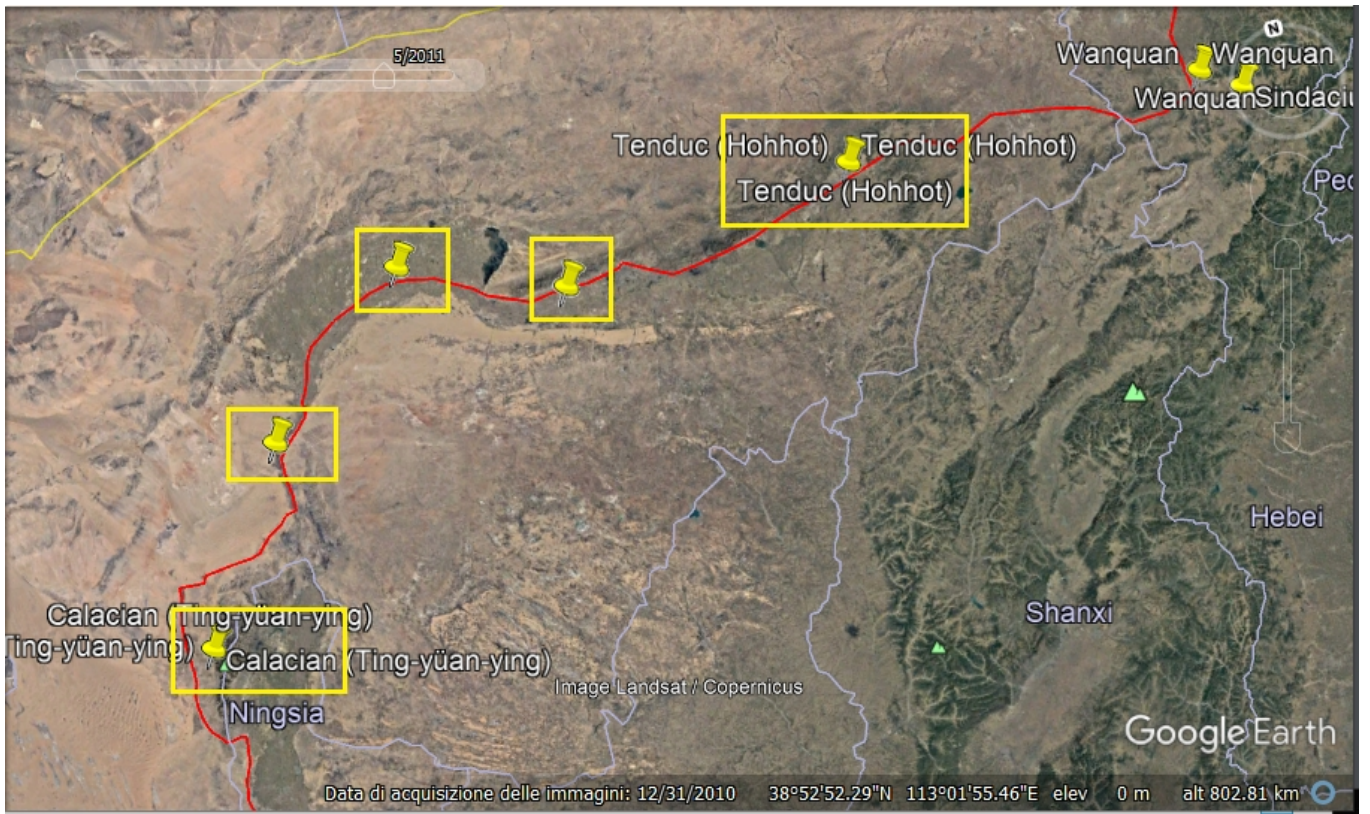


Figure 5: From Calacian to Tenduc.

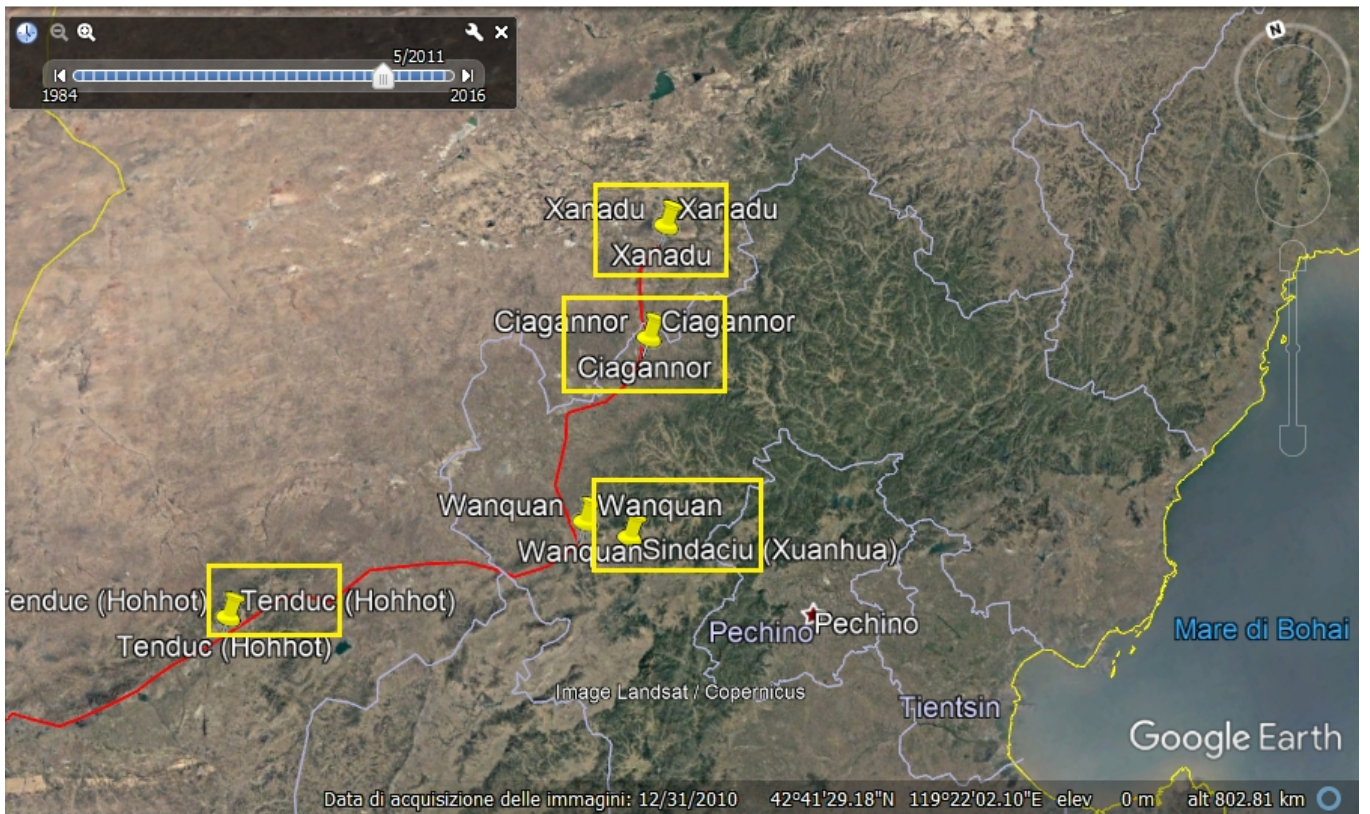


Figure 6: From Tenduc to Xanadu.

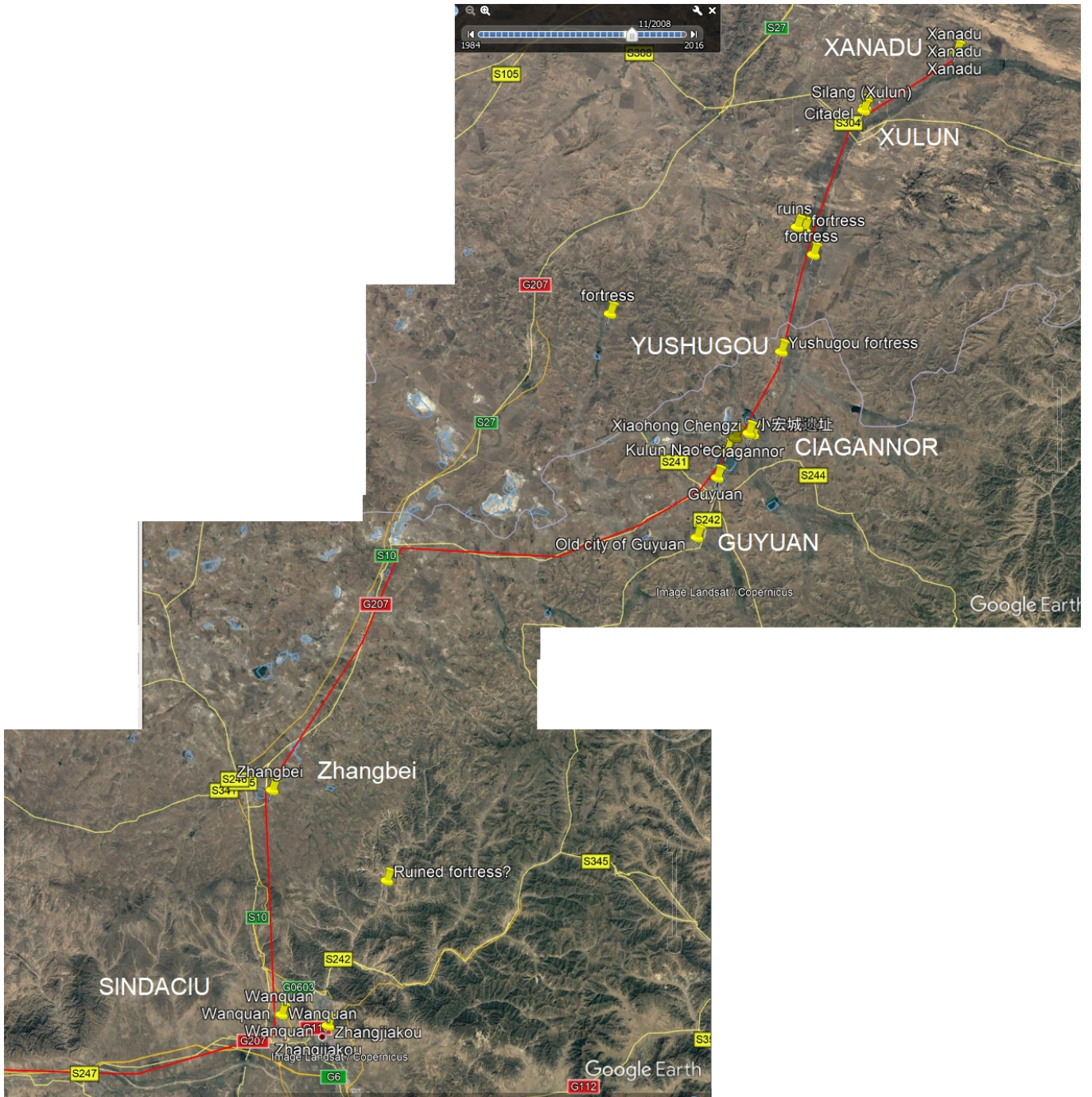


Figure 7: Detail of the road from Sindaciu to Xanadu, made by means of the fundamental help of Google Earth and Wikimapia.

In the travel to reach Xanadu, Marco Polo followed a branch of the Silk Road. The Silk Road consisted of several routes. From the ancient commercial centers of China, the overland intercontinental Silk Road divided into northern and southern routes bypassing the Taklimakan Desert and Lop Nur. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road . Polo used the southern route. The travel from Kashgar to Ciarcian is quite clear, because is it fixed by the local environment. Some references can help us in finding the places on the maps from the travel from Ciarcian to Xanadu. Of course, first of all, there are the words written by Rustichello [1], about the route to reach the palace of Giandu, that is Xanadu.

Ciarcian is the modern Qiemo, or Qarqan in Uighur. Qiemo is a county in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, bordering the Tibet Autonomous Region to the south. The county seat is at Qiemo Town. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qiemo_County

Stephen Haw tells, in his book [6], that **Ciarcian** or Qiemo is on the Charchan River. "Below Qiemo, the course of this river turns to run roughly east-north-east for a considerable distance. The bed is often dry from a short distance beyond Qiemo, but there would usually be water below the surface of the land. This would make it reasonably easy to follow the river valley until it finally loses itself in the desert" [6]. In the book [6], "Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khan", Stephen Haw re-examines Marco Polo's book, arguing convincingly that he did indeed go to China. The book concludes that Marco Polo's work is an accurate, important and useful source for an extraordinary period of Chinese history.

Then, let us use Google Maps, and there we can see clearly the river, connecting Charchan to Loubuzhuang. After Ciarcian, Polo is mentioning Lop. "**Lop** is Lob or Luobuzhuang, which still exists north of modern Ruoqiang (Charklikh), more or less exactly where the course of the Charchan River becomes indistinct. It stands near the south-eastern limit of the Taklimakan Desert, where it become possible to cross the Tarim Basin from South to north by following the valleys of the Charchan and Tarim Rivers", as told in [6].

"It was recorded that the Buddhist monk Xuanzang passed through a town called Na-Fu-Bo on his way home to China in 645 CE, and Marco Polo in the 13th century passed through a place he called the town of Lop, and both of these were suggested by Aurel Stein to be Charklik. Stein indicated that there is "conclusive evidence" that Charklik was already the chief centre of the region when Xuanzang passed through the town". From item on the Kingdom of Charklik en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Charklik .

Rustichello tells that "va una città ch'è nome Sachion, che è a lo Grande Cane. La provincia si chiama Tangut; La terra è tra levante e greco. Quegli dagl'idoli àno per loro speciale favella; no sono mercatanti, ma vivono di terra". **Saciu** (Sachiu, Sachion) is Shazhou, now Dunhuang in the far north-west of Gansu province. "The old town was on the western side of the modern one. Remains of its walls, made of compacted earth, can still be seen today. The name Shazhou was applied to the town and the district is governed early in the seventh century, under the Tang Dynasty. After about the middle of the eight century, it came under Tibetan control. Later, it formed part of the Gansu Uighur state and then of the Xi Xia kngdom. It was officially named Shazhou again in 1277 and become the seat of a lu three years later. Marco notes that there were many Buddhist temples and monasteries there. Dunhuang is famous today for the Mogao cave-temples near the town. Tangut is Xi Xia". From [6]. After Saciu, Polo found **Succiu**, which is SUCHOW, Suzhou, now Jiuquan. Formerly, 'Su' was pronounced 'Suk' or 'Siuk' [6].

About Ca(n)picion (Campiciu, **Campciu** in Tangut, KANCHOW, 38.9342,100.4520, ZHANGYE), we have information from [7], "Marco Polo's Asia", by Leonardo Olschki, University of California Press, 1960. "Canpicion è una cittade ch'è in Ta(n)gut, e è molto nobile e grande; e è capo della provincia di Tangut. La ge(n)te sono idoli, e àvi di quelli ch'adorano Malcomet, e èvi cristiani; e èvi in quella città tre chiese grandi e belle. ... Or ci partiamo di qui, e conteremovi d'altre verso tramontana. E sí vi dico che messer Niccolò e messer Mafeo e messer Marco dimorarono uno anno per loro fatti in questa terra. Ora

anderemo 60 giornate verso tramontana". Polo arrived to Sindaciu.

Tenduc and Sindaciu. Tenduc is a province (Tanduc, near TOQTO, KWEIHWACHENG, 40.810556, 111.65222). About these places we find information in [8] and in the notes given by the Henry Yule translation, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_Marco_Polo. SINDATUI (Sindacui, Sindatury, Sindacin, Saindatus, Sindatur, Sindincin, ZHANGJIAKOU may be). SINDACHU (Sindacui, Suidatui, etc., of the MSS.) is SIUEN-HWA-FU, "called under the Kin Dynasty Siuen-te-chau, more than once besieged and taken by Chinghiz. It is said to have been a summer residence of the later Mongol Emperors, and fine parks full of grand trees remain on the western side. It is still a large town and the capital of department or *Fu*, about 25 miles south of the Gate on the Great Wall at Chang Kia Kau, which the Mongols and Russians call Kalgan. There is still a manufacture of felt and woollen articles here".

The city called by Polo **Ciagannor** (Chagannour, meaning in Mongol "White Lake") "is the Chaghan Balghasun mentioned by Timkowski as an old city of the Mongol era, the ruined rampart of which he passed about 30 miles north of the Great Wall at Kalgan, and some 55 miles from Siuen-hwa, adjoining the Imperial pastures. It stands near a lake still called Chaghan–Nor, and is called by the Chinese Pe-ching-tzu, or White City, a translation of Chaghan Balghasun. Dr. Bushell says of one of the lakes (Ichi–Nor), a few miles east of Chaghan–Nor: "We ... found the water black with waterfowl, which rose in dense flocks, and filled the air with discordant noises. Swans, geese, and ducks predominated, and three different species of cranes were distinguished" (from Yule's book).

About this town we read in [9], in a IUB Lectures, Meetingd and Conferences, entitled "The Chaghan Naghur Palace and Yuan Royal Falconing", by Baohai Dang. "Chaghan Na'ur (Mongolian name for White Lake) Palace was an important imperial residence of Khubilai Khan and other emperors of the Yuan Dynasty. Its site, Xiao Hong Cheng, lies on the steppe of Guyuan County, Hebei Province, on the way between Khanbaliq (Dadu) and Xanadu (Shangdu). Chaghan Na'ur Palace was developed from temporary traveling ordo (royal yurts) into a permanent royal town in the reign of Khubilai Khan. It was presumably called the Royal Town of Asigh Dabusu. In the 1980s, the palaces and Buddhist temples built there were found in an archaeological investigation. Falconry was the most popular hunting form for ancient Mongol nobles. Because of the excellent environment, Chaghan Na'ur and the surrounding areas became the biggest falconry ground of the Yuan emperors. Thousands of falconers were organized to provide service for Yuan royal falconry". Since the Chaghan Na'ur falconry was vividly narrated in The Travels of Marco Polo, Ref.9 is analysing the related description given by Polo.

"Xiao Hong Chang, which has been identifies as Chaghan Na'ur, is located in a vast meadow near the Shandian he River in Guyuan xian. A large salt lake called Hulun Naoer (i.e. Hulan Na'ur, Red Lake) lies south-west of the ruins and can be identified with the lake of Chahgan Na'ur. A summer palace called Jingming gong had been constructed by the Jin dynasty nearby (in Lianxing). Chinggis and Qubilai visited it, but it was abandoned for a new construction. According to the archaeological reports by Zheng Shaozong and Yin Zixian, Xiao Hong Cheng consisted of two walled enclosures side by side. The walls of the larger enclosure were made of blocks of reddish stone and formed a rectangle of 346 m (north-south) by 308 m (east-west)". Coordinates 41.743529, 115.758393 [10].

References

- [1] Bellonci, M., Rimoaldi, A. M., & Della Valle, V. (2013). *Il Milione di Marco Polo*. Oscar Mondadori.
- [2] Vv. Aa. (2017). Wikipedia. The Travels of Marco Polo. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_Marco_Polo
- [3] Vogel, H. U. (2012). *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues*, BRILL.
- [4] Sparavigna, A. C. (2017). The road to Xanadu in the Travels of Marco Polo, PHILICA Article number 1097, ISSN 1751-3030
- [5] Sparavigna, A. C. (2017). From Sheberghan to Kashgar in the Travels of Marco Polo, PHILICA Article number 1100, ISSN 1751-3030
- [6] Haw. S. G. (2006). *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khan*. Routledge.
- [7] Leonardo Olschki (1960). *Marco Polo's Asia*. University of California Press.
- [8] René Grousset (1970). *The Empire of the Steppes, A History of Central Asia*. Rutgers Univ. press.
- [9] Baohai Dang. The Chaghan Naghur Palace and Yuan Royal Falconing. IUB Lectures, Meetings and Conferences, in the ASC Colloquium.
- [10] Drompp, M.R., & DeWeese, D. (2013). *Turko-Mongol Rulers, Cities and City Life*, BRILL.