Paths of Faith: Following the Blessed Footsteps of Adam to Ceylon

Ananda Abeydeera

> He has made the earth a vast expanse for you, so that you may traverse its spacious paths.
>
> The Koran, sura LXXI

"Adam was hurled into Hindustan. In this land there is a mountain called Serandib, and it is reported that *there is no higher mountain in all the universe*. Adam landed on this mountain."[1] The subject of Serendib plays an important role in both the geographical and travel literature of the Arabs. Serendib, or Sarandib, is the transcription of the Singhalese name Sinhaladîpa, which means "island of the descendants of lions" (*singha*, "lions," in Singhaly). Already, in the Middle Ages, in the year 949, Arab merchants, who were well acquainted with the island of Ceylon, set up a branch in Colombo. The natural beauty and wealth of the island so touched the imagination of Arab voyagers that it appeared in the sixth voyage of Sinbad the Sailor, and it was also believed that Adam lived on the island after having been driven from Paradise: "The island of Serendib is located directly under the equinoctial line. . . . Men fish for pearls along its banks and at the mouths of its rivers, and some of its valleys are rich in diamonds. As an act of faith I myself took a trip to the mountain, to the very spot where Adam was banished after being exiled from Paradise. I even climbed to its summit."[2]

1. Tabarî, *Chronique*. Translated by Hermann Zotenberg (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose 1980, vol. I), p. 81. Italics are by the author of the article. This work is part of a larger project in which the author is engaged, entitled, "The Silk Trade in the Indian Ocean: Cartography and Travel Literature." It is associated with UNESCO's "Projets d'études intégrales des routes de soie: routes de dialogue." Throughout the article, the term Ceylon is used to designate Sri Lanka.

2. *Les Milles et Une Nuits: Contes arabes*. Translated by Antoine Galland (Paris: Garnier 1960, vol. I), p. 219. A reprint of the 1704 edition.

This excerpt, from *The Thousand and One Nights*, well summarizes the feelings of those Arab merchants whose accounts of their travels, in large measure, contributed to the spread of myths and legends about Ceylon.

Geographical information about the island, gathered by Al-Idrisi, was transferred onto the map of Serendib and inserted in the atlas he prepared for the Norman King of Sicily, Roger II. Along with the other sixty-nine maps of the Arab manuscript 2211,[3] this carefully drawn and colored map is part of the Islamic tradition of atlases. The mountain known as Adam's Foot is depicted here as part of a chain of mountains on which the words *gebel El-Rahouk* are inscribed. In the word *El-Rahouk* we can discern an alterated form of the Arabic word *Rohoun*, which itself is a transcription of the Singhalese *Rohana* or *Ruhana*. At the time the map was made, the word designated an ancient kingdom on the southeastern part of the island, where Adam's Foot is located. As to the perfumes and other aromatic substances Al-Idrisi mentions in connection with the mountain: the celebrated Arabic historian Tabari attributed them to the leaves in which Adam wrapped himself when he was driven from Paradise. "Adam was cast into India, on Mount Rahoun on the island of Ceylon. Apparently, some leaves from Paradise were sewn together to cover his body. When they dried, the wind blew them to India. It is believed (although God alone knows the truth) that these leaves gave birth to the perfumes found in these regions." [4] The various Islamic legends, embellished around the theme of Adam's fall into Ceylon, try to claim the sacredness of the mountain for Islam alone: "Oh! Such a mountain! It rises as high as the moon. It is said that, when Adam forsook the plan of God, he fell from Eden onto this high peak. The imprint of his feet can easily be discerned here, each one more than seventy paces in length."[5]

However, Singhalese tradition had made this mountain a holy site of exclusively Buddhist character well before the Islamic era. For the Buddhists of Ceylon, there were in total sixteen holy places on the island, several of which had been made holy by Buddha himself in the course of his three visits to Ceylon. Adam's peak, thought to be the dwelling place of the god Saman, one of the four guardian spirits of the island, was named Sri Pada, "The Auspicious Foot," in

3. Département des Manuscrits orientaux, Bibliothèque nationale. Paris.
4. Tabarî, p. 161.
5. *Le livre de Gerchàsp: poème persan d'Asadî de Toûs*. Translated by Henri Massé (Paris: Paul Geuthner 1951, vol. II), p. 22.

order to commemorate Buddha's visit. According to tradition, Buddha left a gigantic imprint of his left foot in a rock at the request of the divinity residing in the mountain. As a result, the divinity became the guardian of this object of worship.

Around the thirteenth century, Ceylon's fame as the island of Adam's mountain also reached the Christian world. Two voyagers, one Muslim and the other Christian, visited Ceylon within four years of each other. The arrival on the island of Ibn Battuta, "the Islamic voyager," in 1344, preceded that of the papal legate Jean de Marignolli, who arrived in March, 1349. Each undertook a pilgrimage to Adam's mountain and expressed, each in his own way, the importance he attached to his visit. Both of them added this extraordinary pilgrimage to the prize list of their peregrinations. It is to this aspect of their voyages – the description of their pilgrimage to Adam's mountain on Ceylon – that we will now turn our attention. As will be seen by the circumstances of their arrival, by their observations and inquiries, the narratives of the two voyagers reveal more about each person's temperament and vision of the world than is to be found in a typical account of a pilgrimage or a simple visit.

The Moroccan voyager Ibn Battuta had traveled throughout the Islamic world for more than thirty years, and in the course of his extensive voyages visited many of Islam's holy places; indeed he was in no way a lesser voyager than the other great voyagers of the Middle Ages, and in fact earned the title of "the Islamic voyager" – a title by which he is, even now, known. Ibn Battuta's Islamic conception of the world is reflected in the fact that he places his description of the island of Serendib within the larger narrative of his roundtrip journey from East to West and back. The ultimate significance of his description is derived from this context, since the Arabs considered the island an especially sacred site – as important as Jidda – in light of its association with the fall of Adam.

The piety of the second pilgrim to Adam's mountain, Jean de Marignolli, is quite different from Ibn Battuta's. A monk from the Franciscan monastery of Santa Croce in Florence, Marignolli had, for several years, been a lecturer at the University of Bologna (along with the Sorbonne, the oldest university in Europe). In 1336, the Great Khan of Peking sent a delegation to Pope Benoît XII, asking him to send missionaries to China. Jean de Marignolli, who participated in this papal delegation in the role of papal legate, departed from Avignon in 1338. He arrived in Peking in May or June of 1342,

and remained in China for four years. On the return trip via India, he was caught in a storm that forced him to "Seylann," where he sojourned for four months. From Ceylon he returned to Avignon via Palestine and Cyprus, finally arriving back in Avignon in 1353. The Bohemian King then called him to the court of Prague to serve as chaplain. However, at the same time, he was named the Bishop of Bisignano, in Calabria. Still, the king requested of Marignolli that he write a history of Bohemia. Jean de Marignolli agreed, composing a chronicle which, following the practice of the time, begins with a description of the creation of the world.[6] He inserts, or rather scatters, his memories of his voyage to "Seylann" in the first part of the chronicle, which he entitles *Theachros*, or "History of the World." He then sets to describing the voyage and "Seylann" itself, an island located near Paradise: "As I navigated toward Seylann, I saw a mountain rising up before me in all its glory, facing Paradise. According to the inhabitants of the island (who learned it from their parents), Seylann is located only forty Italian miles from Paradise. For this reason, it is said, one can actually hear on the island the noise made by water bubbling in the fountain of Paradise."[7]

For the Arabs, Serendib – since it was the birthplace of humanity – was also the site where Islam itself took root, a fact that Ibn Battuta did not fail to note. The mountain so impressed him that he thought it to be one of the highest in the world. This assumption also, of course, allowed Battuta later to bask in the glory of having made such an heroic, pious, and unusual climb – indeed descriptions of such climbs are quite rare in this kind of travel literature. Moreover, the reading that Ibn Battuta had done before his voyage would have more or less obliged him to make the pilgrimage to Serendib, even if he too hadn't been forced to land there because of a storm. Also, while in the Maldives, he had learned a bit more about the island from several returning merchants and pilgrims: "About ten days later, a ship arrived from Ceylon. On board were a group of Arab and Persian fakirs whom I knew and who informed the vizier's servants that they had information that would interest me. . . . I then requested the vizier to allow me to receive the fakirs who had just returned from a visit to Adam's Foot on the island of Ceylon."[8] But

6. "Relatio Fr. Iohannis de Marignolli." In *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. I: *Itinera et relationes fratum minorum saeculi Xii ey vol. XIV*. Edited by P. Anastasius Van Den Wyngaert O.F.M. (Ad Claras Aquas, Florence: Quarracchi 1929), pp. 524–525.

7. Ibid., p. 531.

8. *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah* Translated by C. Defrémery and B.R. Sanguinetti (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale 1854, vol. IV), pp. 139–140.

at no point in this part of the narrative does Ibn Battuta express the intention to make the pilgrimage to Serendib himself, even if he does drop a hint: "However, my intention was to visit this country [the Maldive Islands], then the Ma'bar, Serendib, Bengal, and then China."[9]

Jean de Marignolli, in his account of his "pilgrimage" to the mountain of "Seylann," recounts how, near the site of the imprints of Adam's foot, he noted the presence of Moorish pilgrims. He writes, "And I wasn't the only one who measured its length; another pilgrim, a Saracen from Spain, did the same. There are many such pilgrims to Adam's Foot."[10] Here, then, is evidence of the fascination exercised by Adam's Foot, even on Saracens who had to travel from far-distant Spain. The Venetian Marco Polo, who had preceded Jean de Marignolli and Ibn Battuta to Ceylon by some fifty years, himself wrote, "Saracens come here from far away, saying that Adam was once here."[11] However, except for the narrative of Ibn Battuta, we possess no other accounts from Muslim pilgrims, which is why Battuta's testimony is so valuable. What distinguishes Ibn Battuta's account from both Marco Polo's and Jean de Marignolli's is his striking sincerity and the documentary liveliness of his narrative, which includes a detailed itinerary of his pilgrimage to Adam's Foot. Also, Ibn Battuta deserves special mention for having carried out this difficult climb, to the summit of the second tallest mountain on the island.

As the pope's legate, Jean de Marignolli traveled in the name of the Christian faith. Ibn Battuta's voyage was for pleasure and, as long as he remained a good Muslim, he could travel the world as desire and circumstance willed, without any particular obligation to propagate his religion: in fact he traveled with his concubines, which contrasts sharply with the celibacy of the Franciscan Jean de Marignolli. In the course of his peregrinations, Ibn Battuta married several times, following Muslim custom, and several days before his departure from the Maldives, he divorced the two women he had married sixty-nine days earlier.[12] Like Jean de Marignolli, the Arab voyager embarked on what turned out to be a dangerous voyage; he sailed for nine days instead of the three that it usually took

9. Ibid., p. 135.
10. "Marignolli's Recollections of Eastern Travels." In *Cathay and the Way Thither; Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, ed. H. Yule (London, Hakluyt Society 1914, vol. III), pp. 227–228.
11. *Le Livre de Marco Polo*, G. Pauthier, ed. (Paris: Firmin Didot 1865, vol. II), p. 597.
12. *Voyages* , vol. IV, p. 164.

to cover the distance between the Maldives and the coast of Coromandel – all because of the captain's incompetence, according to Ibn Battuta. Although seeing the mountain of Serendib rise before him like a column of smoke, he did not – as Jean de Marignolli would later do – invoke divine providence as the reason for the successful arrival of his ship into port. For Jean de Marignolli, his passage to "Seylann" was an effect of divine grace.

The Franciscan's account of his arrival on the island is composed as a kind of prologue, describing the trials he had to overcome to arrive there. The storm he had to face is described in supernatural terms: "We faced so many storms . . . and were rocked so many times that on six or more occasions we were nearly submerged into the depths of the sea; and it was only by divine miracle that we escaped this fate. Such wonders did we see! The waves were like flames, and fire-breathing dragons were close at hand; as they passed by us, they swamped and killed the people on board the other junks. By God's grace and the body of Christ that I wore around my neck, by the virtues of the Glorious Virgin and Saint Claire, our ship remained intact. As the sea raged, calling all Christians to penitence and mourning, we raised sail and abandoned ourselves to God. Our only concern now was the salvation of our souls. Guided thus by divine mercy, we arrived, the day after the celebration of the Holy Cross [May 3], safe and sound in a port of Seylann, named PERVILIS, that faces Paradise."[13]

This excerpt from Jean de Marignolli is reminiscent of the account that Ibn Battuta wrote after his pilgrimage. In a kind of epilogue, Battuta describes the wreck of his own ship: "The wind blew stronger, and the water was ready to roll over the deck. Our captain was inexperienced. We brushed up against a line of rocks and the ship was nearly smashed to bits; then we entered shallow water and the ship touched bottom. We felt death at hand. Bidding adieu to each other and to life, the passengers threw themselves into the sea. . . . I myself climbed onto the ship's stern and waited there until morning. Finally, several idolaters came looking for us in one of their skiffs."[14]

Jean de Marignolli was no more seeking to sail to Ceylon than

13. "Marignolli's Recollections" pp. 230–231. The locale that Marignolli called Pervilis, and that other Europeans called Berberyn and Berberin, is Beruvala, a small port on the southeast coast of Ceylon. It sits at the mouth of the Kaluganga, one of the island's four principal rivers; its source, like the source of the other rivers, is at the peak of Adam's Foot.

14. *Voyages*, vol. IV, pp. 185–188.

was Ibn Battuta; he was heading for the west coast of India when God directed him to the shores of this island. According to his account, he immediately realized that he would have to endure many hardships, but through them would rediscover God and be able to purify himself before his encounter with the sacred site. And his premonition turned out to be correct: as soon as he arrived at "Seylann," Jean de Marignolli fell into the hands of pirates and was robbed of all his possessions. It was this experience that incited the Franciscan monk to denounce "the cursed Saracen, usurper of the Kingdom of Seylann, who rules its greater part, who usurped it because of its great treasure."[15]

Upon leaving the island of Qâlî in the direction of Kalanboû, Ibn Battuta had remarked that, "the vizier prince of the sea, Djâlasty, lives there with nearly five hundred Abysinnians who are in his service."[16] The term *habashî*, used here by Battuta to designate the vizier's guard, meant, at the time, the descendants of Abysinnian slaves transported from the horn of east Africa to India. The presence of these Abysinnians and their chief in Colombo, a port city on the west coast of Ceylon, shows just how far this commercial network – whose base was near the Red Sea – extended into the Indian Ocean. The narrow gap of four years separating the visits of Jean de Marignolli to Beruvala from Ibn Battuta's to Colombo (situated only forty-five kilometers to the south) would tend to prove that the "cursed Saracen" of Jean de Marignolli and the "prince vizier of the sea" of Ibn Battuta are one and the same person; what we apparently have here is a powerful Muslim prince, whom the local authorities were much too weak to resist, exercising his power both on land and at sea.

As to "the Islamic voyager": he too was a victim of a maritime misadventure, although well after his departure from Ceylon. Having fallen into the hands of Hindu pirates, Battuta was relieved of everything he owned, except what was strictly necessary to maintain his modesty: "The idolaters attacked us with twelve war ships. They fought bravely and seized our ship. They took everything I owned, including what I had laid away in case of adversity. . . . They left me with nothing but a pair of underwear."[17] Set adrift, their ship reached Ceylon. However, once there, his sailors took fright when they realized that the merchant ships were unable to unload their cargo safely because the port was in the hands of

15. "Relatio Fr. Iohannis de Marignolli," pp. 537–538.
16. *Voyages*, vol. IV, p. 185.
17. Ibid., pp. 206–207.

marauders. For this reason, Battuta's sailors were afraid to try to land the ship. The winds were raging, however, and Battuta, fearful of shipwreck, convinced his companions to drop him off on shore so he could arrange safe passage for them all. After acknowledging the local prince as sovereign, Battuta was able to get an audience with him. He turned out to be a vicious man and informed Battuta that he himself practiced piracy, using several of his vessels. Coupled with the comments of Jean de Marignolli quoted above, this revealing description helps to explain the characterization of the people whom the pilgrims to Ceylon encountered.

Ibn Battuta knew both the art of flattery and how to reap its rewards. When asked by the prince if he had yet seen in the islands pearls as beautiful as his, Battuta answered that he had seen none nearly as beautiful: "My answer pleased him and he said: 'Take them. They're yours. Now don't blush,' he continued, 'and just tell me what you want with me.' I said to him, 'My only wish, since I have arrived on this island, has been to visit the famous site of Adam's Foot.'"[18] As soon as Battuta expressed his desire to visit this sacred place, the sovereign, Arya Chakravarti, promised to organize the pilgrimage for him; he also promised to finance it and even to assure Battuta safe passage to India. This warm reception on the part of a host who was elsewhere described as vicious and a pirate is quite curious, especially in light of the description that Jean de Marignolli gives of him. The sovereign's hospitality even goes so far as to include a proposal to make the captain of Battuta's ship himself a guest; in any case, this captain apparently had no desire to leave the island until Battuta returned from his pilgrimage to Adam's Foot, probably because he considered his presence on board his ship a form of protection. An escort for the pilgrimage was even put at Battuta's disposal, a privilege rarely accorded to voyagers.

This escort was composed of several slaves, who carried Battuta's palanquin. Four yogis and three Brahmins also accompanied them, probably taking advantage of the occasion to make their own pilgrimage. Outside of another ten or so fellow travelers, the escort also included fifteen men who carried the extremely abundant supplies with which they were equipped. The presence of the yogis and Brahmins, it should be noted, points to the probability that the prince was a Hindu. Indeed it turned out that the four yogis in the

18. Ibid., p. 169.

group made this pilgrimage every year, which both made them invaluable because of their knowledge of the terrain and proved that they were extremely devout; it was for these reasons that their presence in the caravan – one is tempted to call it an expedition – was considered to be so important. Ibn Battuta seemed to have no objection to having Infidels along with him on the pilgrimage; at least he makes no ungracious comments in this regard. What counts most in the pilgrimage is that it be carried out, even if it means depending on the help of an Infidel pirate and the escort he provides. Battuta's insistence on having a Shirazien sheik, by the name of Othân, serve as his guide on the Ceylonese leg of his journey,[19] testifies to the importance he placed on the Islamic tradition of making a pilgrimage to Adam's Foot. The conditions of Ibn Battuta's pilgrimage contrast sharply with those faced by Jean de Marignolli, the humble Franciscan monk who had everything he owned stolen from him by a "cursed Saracen."

The Nostalgia for Paradise

In spite of his misadventure in Ceylon, Jean de Marignolli was fascinated by what he had seen there, nourishing the hope that, if the island was not Paradise itself, it in fact was not far distant from it. The idea of Paradise, of course, summoned for him the image of original sin, of Adam and Eve: "The angel took Adam by the arm and placed him on the island of Seylann, the same island on which I spent four months. Once, accidentally, Adam set his right foot down on a rock that is still there today. Suddenly, by a miracle of God, the form of the sole of his foot was imprinted on the stone, and remains there to this day. The size, I mean to say its length, is approximately two and a half palms length, or a foot and a half. And I wasn't the only one to have measured it; another pilgrim, a Saracen from Spain, did the same. There are many people who make the pilgrimage to Adam's Foot. The angel hurled Eve onto another mountain, four days distant from Adam. And as the histories of these countries tell (in no way contradicting Holy Writ), the two remained separated for forty days, lamenting all the while. Finally, the angel brought Eve to Adam, putting an end to his despair and giving comfort to both of them."[20]

Jean de Marignolli devotes an entire chapter to Paradise, because,

19. *Voyages*, vol. IV, p. 172.
20. "Marignolli's Recollections," pp. 227–228.

he insists, Paradise does exist on earth. Jean de Marignolli's concept of Paradise is the same one common throughout the Christian medieval world:[21] "For Paradise is a place surrounded by a vast ocean. It is located on the eastern side of the earth, beyond India, in Colombine, facing Mount Seylann. This piece of land rises higher than any other on earth, reaching, in the opinion of John Duns Scotus, to the height of the moon. It is not subject to change and is a place full of joy and splendor. In its midst a spring gushes up, fully irrigating all of Paradise and its trees. And all the trees that are planted there produce the most succulent fruits; their beauty, their taste and smell make them marvels of human nourishment. The liquid from this spring flows down the mountain and collects in a lake that the philosophers call an *amphithrite*; flowing through it, the water emerges thicker and different, and then divides into the four rivers that flow through Seylann."[22] Like all his contemporaries, Jean de Marignolli tried to identify these four rivers. He saw all of them in the course of his voyages: indeed he crossed the entire island of "Seylann." Yet he never found their headwater.

The search for the cradle of humanity is an aspect of the pilgrimages of both Jean de Marignolli and Ibn Battuta. But this return to the origin of life must, they believe, be authenticated. And it can be done, Jean de Margignolli believed; it can be done through an investigation of the origin of words: "Some people believe that on this tall mountain, perhaps the tallest in the world after Paradise, Paradise itself is located. But this is a mistake, because the name of the mountain proves the contrary. The natives call it *Zindan Baba*. The word *Baba* means 'father' in all the world's languages, while *Zindan* comes closest to our word 'hell'; therefore *Zindan Baba* can be translated as 'our father's hell,' meaning that our Father, when he was placed up there after his expulsion from Paradise, felt as though he were in hell."[23] Thus, words refer to things, and in this case it is the word that allows us to understand the place as well as return us to its origin. But Jean de Marignolli remains cautious: this mountain is not truly hell, but rather what Adam felt in comparison with Paradise. This interpretation agrees with Tabarî's. In truth, the word

21. See, in this regard, *De imagine mundi* by Honorius D'Autun who, in the twelfth century, situates Paradise in the East and describes it as a "site surrounded by a wall of trees reaching up to the sky. . . to where the tree of life itself is located, that is to say, the tree whose fruit confers on the one who eats eternal life." In J. P. Migne, *Patrolgia Latina*, vol. CLXXII, col. 123.

22. "Relatio Fr. Iohannis de Marignolli," pp. 531–532.

23. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 232.

Zindan is of Persian origin, and means "donjon" [dungeon]. It can be used as a synonym of the word "prison," which Tabarî uses in his *Chronicle*: "And Adam was alone, on the top of mount Serandib. When he made to rise, his head reached the first of the seven heavens. . . . At first, Adam was conversing with the Angels, which caused him great pain. Once more he fell to his knees and began to implore God in prayer. At that very instant Gabriel appeared and spoke: 'God greets you and says: I have made this world your prison, and I have made you smaller so that you can fit inside it.'"[24]

Returning to the Origin of Life

Even if this was not Paradise, it was nonetheless a sacred place that moved Jean de Marignolli. Gazing up at this mountain that was both sanctuary to the first man and symbol of the sins of humanity, he felt his eyes fill with tears. Then, laying aside his creaturely ignorance and mortality, Marignolli entered a world in which revealed secrets glistened in a spiritual light: "This incredibly vast mountain has a higher summit than all the others but, because of the clouds, it is rarely visible. God, however, taking pity on our tears, lit it up one morning, just before sunrise, and we saw it shine in all its flaming splendor."[25] Jean de Marignolli decided not to make the ascent to the mountain's summit, preferring instead to retain his mental image of the peak. Continuing his research into the time of Genesis, he was able to find, lower down on the mountain, evidence that served as a visible sign of Adam's stay on the island. He tells us that, as one descends the mountain, one comes upon a landing on which Adam's footprint can be discerned; then a seated statue appears, its left hand resting on the knee, the right raised and pointed west; finally there is Adam's house, which Adam apparently built with his own hands.

The entire site is imbued with the story of the first man. Tabarî himself, a distinguished exegete of the Koran and master of its subsidiary disciplines, treats us to an echo of the story, which shows just how important it was to the sources of Islam: "They [Adam and Eve] sowed crops on this spot [Serandib mountain]. Their labor bore fruit and they harvested goods of all kinds. But except for them, there were no human beings in the world; and there were no houses, except for the visited house [the *kaa'aba*]. Later, they set to

24. Tabarî, p. 84.
25. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 232.

building various structures, and they built houses too."[26] Thus Christians and Muslims have this same legend in common. However, Jean de Marignolli went further in his descriptions and even bears witness to some form of primitive architecture: Adam's house, he says, is rectangular in shape, like a sepulcher, and it has a door in the middle. It is constructed with large slabs of marble that are not cemented together but stacked, one on top of another. Probably, Marignolli had seen a replica of the imprint found at the summit of Adam's Foot. Along the paths leading to the summit, shelters and rest stations had been built. There were temples too, constructed in isolated spots, that offered the pilgrims a place for prayer and contemplation. In one of these edifices, at Palabaddala, a bronze model of the golden reliquary that once held the sacred imprint was kept; according to the Pastor Baldaeus, several Dutchmen had the opportunity to admire it in 1654.[27] Perhaps it was here that Jean de Marignolli saw a similar sacred imprint, as well as a statue of Buddha and a religious monument; for the Franciscan traveler, these perhaps became incontrovertible evidence that "Seylann" was "Adam's Garden."

The worship of the Imprint of the Feet was widespread throughout the island, which was surely a decisive reason for the discovery of Adam's footprint here by the Muslims, in the same way that Mohammed's footprint was discovered in the dome of the Rock of Jerusalem.[28] Ibn Battuta writes of a series of chains fitted into the rock in order to facilitate the climb to the top of the mountain. One of them, he tells us, the tenth, which is fitted with giant links, is called the Chain of the Profession of Faith; he says that we should understand it to mean a station on the last stage of any good Muslim's pilgrimage: "As to the tenth, it is the chain of the Profession of Faith. It is called this because the person who reaches it and stares down the mountain will be overcome by an hallucination; in fear of falling he should recite these words: 'I testify that there is no other god than God, and that Mohammed is his Prophet."[29] It should be noted that this chain is the twentieth Islamic cult object named by Ibn Battuta in the course of his account of his pilgrimage. This type of chain is mentioned not only by Marco Polo but by Mouffazzal:

26. Tabarî, p. 86.
27. Philip Baldaeus, *Wahrhaftige Ausführliche Beschreibung der... Insel Zeylon* (Amsterdam: Johannes Janssonius 1672), p. 147.
28. *Voyages*, vol. I, pp. 122–123.
29. Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 180–181.

"When Iskandar [Alexander the Great] came to this spot, he had two iron chains fixed to the mountain top. They were made of enormous links, each one a cubit in length, that were thread through faults in the mountain, from its highest point down to the ground."[30] Iskandar's hill, mentioned by Ibn Battuta as a landmark or a stage of his voyage, refers to an Arabo-Persian tradition marking the successive stages associated with the legend of Alexander the Great. This hill, which indeed bears the name of Alexander, simply could not have *not* been noted in a place as far away from the Mediterranean as this hill was. However, because of the rapid-fire manner in which he evokes it (along with other Alexandran sites), its mention does seem to receive a more secondary billing in the narrative than Ibn Battuta may have intended.

As his religious duty demanded of him, Ibn Battuta climbed to the top of the mountain, fulfilling the aim of his pilgrimage. There he saw what he had longed to contemplate: "The mark of that noble Foot . . . sank into the rock, causing the area around it to be flattened; its length is eleven spans." On this point Ibn Battuta thus completely abandons – in favor of the most simple kind of measure – the tradition of the "inconceivable mystery" of the oversized imprint. As Mouffazzal Ibn Abil-Fazzal had written: "It is said that any person, no matter how tall or short, stretching himself out on the imprint of Adam's foot, will find that it is the exact same length as him."[31] Until this time, Ibn Battuta had only known about the imprint by hearsay and reading. Once he had reached it, the pilgrim could bear witness *de visu* to its actual size while remaining within the framework of Muslim spirituality. It is only now that the pilgrim's spirit can truly manifest itself, bearing authentic witness to this return to the origin of life. One can imagine Battuta stretching out his hands to measure the imprint of the Noble Foot. By doing this, and then describing it, he is able to be that special witness who instills in his readers the desire to follow after him in such an unusual pilgrimage. After measuring and describing the "famous Foot of Adam," Ibn Battuta goes on to describe the Chinese presence at the site, as exhibited in an act of "pious" vandalism: "In the past, Chinese citizens would come here: once, they cut into the stone and removed the spot in which the big toe was located. They then transported it to a temple in the city of Zeïtoûn. People now

30. Mouffazal Ibn Abil-Fazail, *Histoire des Sultans mamelouks*. Translated by Marc Blochet (Paris: Firmin Didot 1929), p. 191.
31. Ibid., p. 192.

travel to that city from the most far distant provinces, just to see it."[32] The unjustified appropriation of a sacred vestige from a sacred spot is not only an act of vandalism: it is an act of sacrilege.

However, the veneration of a fragment of Adam's Foot causes contact with the saintly site itself, which was precisely what the faithful sought. Beyond his consternation over the vandalism, the Moroccan pilgrim also offered some ethnographic observations on the practices of the "non-Muslims" who made the climb to Adam's summit: "In the rock where the imprint of the Foot is located, nine holes have been dug; idolatrous pilgrims place bits of gold, pearls and precious metals into these holes."[33] The nine holes correspond to the nine remaining toes, the tenth having been carried off to China. There is no other attestation to this supposed appropriation in any of the extant sources. Nor does Ibn Battuta specify whether we are dealing with Muslim or idolater Chinamen. We do know from Jean de Marignolli that a Christian community existed in Zeïtoün, and its inhabitants engaged in proselytizing activities that rivaled those of the Muslims.[34] We can recall the words of Marco Polo on this matter: "Or advint que le grant Kaan oy comment sus celle montaigne estoit le monument d'Adam notre premier pere"[35]; and the Kahn had Adam's relics brought to Cambaluc. Should we perhaps not see in Ibn Battuta's account of the appropriation of the toe an allusion to the transmission of the myth of Adam's Foot to China, probably carried by merchants who landed at Zeïtoün? This city, in which the worship of Adam's Foot was practiced (in the form of a fragment of stone detached from the imprint), was indeed the famous port from which the majority of maritime commerce with India and the Muslim world originated. Also, Zeïtoün was the site of three large churches of the Franciscan order. It was here that Jean de Marignolli had two bells melted down in order to construct a church whose bell tower he had erected in the middle of the Muslim quarter.

Reception from the Infidels

Although the residents of Serendib were infidels, they made a good impression on Ibn Battuta. He appreciated their hospitality, distin-

32. *Voyages*, vol. IV, pp. 181–182.
33. Ibid., p. 182.
34. "Marignolli's Recollections," pp. 229–230.
35. *Le Livre de Marco Polo*, vol. II, pp. 597–599. Cf. Ananda Abeydeera, "Le voyage de Marco Polo dans le pays du bouddhisme," *Rever L'Inde*. (Paris: P.U.F. 1990), pp. 19–28.

guishing their attitude toward Muslims from that of the infidels of the Indian subcontinent: "The inhabitants [of Serendib] persist in their idolatry, but they respect the Muslim fakirs, offering them the hospitality of their home and table, even when their wives and children are in attendance. This is their practice, contrary to the other Indian infidels. The latter will not approach Muslims, will serve them neither food nor drink from their vessels, although the Muslims neither provoke nor offend them. We were obliged to have one of the infidels cook up some meat for us. The cook brought it to us in the same pan in which it had been cooked, and he sat some distance from us. . . . We ate some of this food, and what was left was eaten by dogs and birds. If a child, not yet of the age of reason, had eaten any of these leftovers, he would have been beaten and then forced to swallow some cow dung which, according to their faith, would wipe away the stain."[36] Battuta is, in this description, recalling the disgust felt by Hindus toward Muslims, who are eaters of bovine meats. Of all the animals, bovines in general and cows in particular are considered extremely sacred by Hindus: everything that comes from them is therefore deemed sacred too, including their dung and urine. This sacred quality of bovines explains Shiva's preference for bull mounts.

In another place in his narrative, Ibn Battuta offers a detailed description of a meal served to him – a "tremendous feast" that he greatly enjoyed – by the inhabitants of a Ceylonese city. The meal consisted of young buffaloes, tracked down in a nearby forest and brought back alive; rice, melted butter, fish, chicken, and milk. The slaughter of buffaloes, which is part of Muslim tradition, is not surprising in the context of a pilgrimage to the sacred site of Adam's Foot. However, we have no information concerning the reaction of the Brahmins and yogis who apparently witnessed the consumption of the meat in the course of the meal. Battuta says nothing about it. Apparently, it was possible for pilgrims who did not share the same beliefs – vegetarians, meat eaters, and butchers – to entertain cordial relations. What is important for us in Battuta's description is his constant recollection of the severity of the Indian infidels in comparison with the infidels of Serendib. Their behavior toward the Muslims, he says, had been changed by the miraculous intervention of the sheik Abou-Abd Allah: "It was he who found the path to the mountain of Serendib, on the island of Ceylon, which is part of India."

36. *Voyages*, vol. II, pp. 82–83.

The determining factor in the Moroccan pilgrim's narrative is a concern for piety. Crossing forests where elephants abounded, Battuta was affected by the sight of these mastodon-like creatures, as if they were animals from a fairy tale. He connects them to various wonders seen by the above-mentioned Muslim saint who forged the path Battuta was following: "There are many elephants here, but they harm neither pilgrims nor foreigners, and this is because of the saintly influence of Sheik Abou-Abd Allah, son of Khafif, the first man to have traveled this route to visit the Foot."[37] It can even be called a sacred route:

> It is told that one day he set out for the mountain of Serendib, accompanied by thirty fakirs. On the way to the mountain they were overcome by hunger, and they lost their way. The fakirs asked the Sheik's permission to seize one of the little elephants (they are numerous in this region, and are transported from here to the capital of the Indian King), but he forbade them to do it. Their hunger, however, overcame them, and they disregarded the Sheik's order. Seizing one of the little elephants, they slit its throat and ate its flesh. The King refused to take a bite of it. The next night, after the men had fallen asleep, the elephants gathered into a herd and descended upon them from all sides. Sniffing each one of the men, they then killed him, until all but the Sheik were massacred. They sniffed him too, but did him no harm. One of the elephants, wrapping his trunk around the Sheik, took hold of him and put him on his back. He carried him to a populated area. When the residents of the canton caught sight of the Sheik, they were taken by surprise and ran toward him, anxious to hear his story. When they approached, the elephant seized him from underneath with his trunk, and placed him before the people so they could see him up close. They approached him reverently, as if his presence were somehow sacred; then they led him to their King, to whom they told his story. They were infidels, and he stayed with them for several days.[38]

The image of the wise elephant may surprise the reader, but it is quite common in the folk tales of Ceylon; there are many such stories in the local literature.

The inhabitants of "Seylann" – in particular the monks, even if they were idolaters – made a good impression on Jean de Marignolli too: "And yet they never eat meat, because neither Adam nor the others [his descendants] ate meat until after the Flood. They walk

37. *Voyages*, vol. IV, p. 174.
38. Ibid, vol. I, p. 420.

about naked above the loins, and are always cooperative. Their houses, dispersed throughout the forest and filled with goods of all kinds, are constructed of palm fronds that could be torn apart by hand. Yet they live without fear of robbery, except for raids by penniless marauders who come from without."[39] Marignolli felt close to these monks who led such virtuous lives and who were so clean – "so clean that not one of them would enter a house in which someone has spit. If it happens that one of them has to spit (which is rare), he withdraws to a distant spot, as in other cases of natural necessity."[40] Rejecting all material pleasures, the Ceylonese monks reminded Marignolli of his brother Franciscans. The monks lived as mendicants and, to inspire purity in others, in absolute poverty, which prompted the following words from the voyager: "They eat but once a day, never more; they drink only water and milk . . . they never keep any extra food on hand for the next day. They sleep on the floor; they walk barefoot, and carry a walking stick. For clothing, they make do with a frock, worn like a Franciscan (although without the hood), with one of the flaps folded and thrown back over the shoulder *ad modum Apostolorum*. Each morning they form themselves into a procession and march into the village, where they beg for the single serving of rice that comprises their daily meal. The local authorities and others approach them reverently, offering them rice 'in amounts proportionate to their number'; they eat the rice soaked in water, with coconut milk and bananas. I describe these things as an eye-witness; indeed they prepared a *festa* for me, as if I were one of them."[41] Near Adam's Foot, in Palabadulla, a group of solitary monks lived, members of an order of forest-dwelling hermits; it is perhaps to this group of Buddhist monks that the poet Vedeha belonged, and it may have been this very community that looked after Marignolli during his stay at Adam's Foot. These monks did not live as total anchorites. They in fact played an important role in education, both ecclesiastical and secular: "They prayed in a very fitting manner. They taught children how to write their letters; first with their fingers in the sand, then with a pencil on pieces of paper, or should I say on the leaves of some kind of tree."[42] Jean de Marignolli's comments on the system of apprenticeship among Buddhist monks probably derives from his memories of his stay here.

39. "Relatio Fr. Iohannis de Marignolli," p. 539.
40. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 242.
41. Ibid., pp. 242–244.
42. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 242.

The Tree of Life

Next, Marignolli describes the veneration of a tree, at whose foot Buddha supposedly had his revelation of the truth. A shoot of it, brought from India in the third century B.C., was preserved in Anuradhapura, the first capital of the island. The numerous young plants that sprouted from it were transplanted throughout the island, in temple enclosures: "Inside the cloister, there are two trees that differ from all the others by their foliage. They are wrapped in wreaths of gold and other jewels, and a light is cast on them. The people have made a cult of these two trees. They worship them and affirm that the ritual they perform is a tradition passed down from Adam; since, they say, Adam had counted on the future salvation of the forest [the tree]. This assertion corresponds to a verse from David: 'Declare *to the nations that the Lord will reign in the forest;* or perhaps it might be better to say, according to the truth of the Hebrews, *He will heal with the tree.*'"[43] Henri Yule translates "*In claustro sunt* due arbores," by "*In their cloister they have* certain trees."[44] Yule's translation omits the indication of number, that is to say, the *two trees* by which Jean de Marignolli seems to invoke the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, which mark Adam's life in Paradise and the story of his Fall; however, in the enclosure of Buddhist temples in Ceylon, there is in fact only *one* venerated tree, the *ficus religiosa*, a symbol of the Illumination of Buddha. Marignolli's interpretation of the cult of the Ceylonese tree is based on the last verse of Psalm XCVI, in its *versio antiqua*, also called the *vetus italica*,[45] which adds *a ligno* to the term *reganbit*, which is wrongly glossed by the Franciscan traveler as *curabit*. Through this allusion to humanity's salvation on the wood of the cross, Marignolli is thus trying to imply that this cult is a trace of an initial evangelization of Ceylon.

In the center of the island, near Adam's mountain, there is a dense and thickly wooded virgin forest. In it, not only every kind of tropical tree and plant grow, but also conifers from the world over, except for the larch. This forest, green year-round, was, for Marignolli, an enchanting spectacle. As he looked at it, a psalm of King David came to mind. He alludes to it in quoting the verse "Dicite in

43. "Relatio Fr. Iohannis de Marignolli," pp. 540–541.
44. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 243. Emphasis is the author's.
45. *Bibliorium sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae seu vetus italica*. (Reims: Réginald Florentain 1713), vol. II, p. 191.

gentibus, quia Dominus regnabit in ligno." In the Psalter this phrase is followed by the evocation of images of forest and field. The poetry of these images, as he himself crossed this sylvan world, rightly filled the voyager's spirit: "Declare among the nations that it is in [or through] the woods that the Lord is King."

> Let the fields exult and all that is in them;
> then let all the trees of the forest shout for joy[46]

The Buddhist monk Vedeha, who lived in a monastery not far from Adam's mountain (and not long before Marignolli's arrival), wrote an encomium dedicated to the mountain. Here is an excerpt from it, testifying to the joy that the splendors of nature inspired n him, just as they would inspire Marignolli sometime later:

> The forest is like a floor where birds can dance
> Like a concert hall for singers echoing sweet
> A banquet hall for beasts who know to prance
> The forest brings but joy, a constant feast[47]

The supposed proximity of Paradise to Adam's mountain – according to the information supplied to him by local residents – nearly shook Marignolli's convictions concerning the actual location of Eden: "On the same mountain, in the direction of Paradise, there is a great spring whose waters are clearly visible from ten or more Italian miles away. Although it clearly gushes from up there, they [the local residents] claim that this water comes from the Fountain of Paradise. As proof, they cite the fact that, from time to time, great quantities of leaves of an unknown kind rise up from the depths of the water; from it also come bitter aloe and precious stones, such as carbon and sapphire, as well as certain fruits with curative properties. They say that these gems too come from Adam's tears, but this seems to be pure fantasy."[48] We should note, precisely on this point, the following passage from Tabarî's *Chronicle*: "It is said that he [Adam] remained in prayer for a hundred years. Tears streamed down his face and rolled across the mountain of Serandib; to this day, it is the tears streaming down Adam's face that cause large trees to grow, such as the various kinds of myrobolan and other similar shoots that have medicinal properties.

46. Psalm LCVI, verse 12, *The New English Bible*, Oxford 1976.
47. Thera, Vedeha *In Praise of Mount Samanta*. Translated by A. A. Hazlewood. (London: The Pali Text Society 1986), p. 89. Collection "Sacred Books of the Buddhists," vol. XXXVI.
48. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 235.

Their medicines are used even now, and are brought to us from the mountains of Hindustan."[49]

If the pious Franciscan monk Jean de Marignolli does not take the supposed origin of the precious stones seriously, he is quite interested in having a look for himself at the flora of "Seylann." He describes "Adam's garden," with all its marvelous plants. He begins by describing the fig tree, which is actually the banana fig, also known as Adam's fig *(musa sapientium)*, whose fruits have a taste similar to the fig. According to Marignolli, its leaves were used to cover the naked bodies of Adam and Eve.[50] These leaves, "extremely beautiful, very long and wide, of an emerald green color," had many uses in the daily life of Ceylon; they were used, among other things, as tablecloths and baby diapers. Their fruit, as Marignolli notes, is as long as a finger and should be allowed to ripen at home before being eaten. When cut open, he says, the fruit reveals the face of a crucified man, as if it had been engraved there with a sharp needle.

The crucifixion, which makes possible the path to salvation but is also a symbol of suffering and humility, has often been associated with Adam (the legend that Adam's skull was represented at the base of the cross, the legend that the cross was made with wood from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and others). Seeing the image of the crucifixion in the banana, Jean de Marignolli speculates that this fruit, representing the death of Christ as an atonement for the sins of the world, might correspond to the forbidden fruit and therefore should remind us of original sin. But the wood of the relics of the cross makes him think of the lemon tree; he thus deduces that the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve was more likely a lemon. He has in mind the hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi*, which is sung at Matins, and he quotes the following verse:

Ipse lignum tunc notavit
Dampna ligni ut solveret[51]

49. Tabarî, p. 82.

50. "The leaves are thin, flat and large; some are two or more feet in width, five to six feet in length. It is said that our first parents, Adam and Eve, used these leaves to cover their shame." Wolfgang Heydt, *Allerneuster geographisch und Topographischer Schau-Platz von Africa und Ost-Indie* (Wilhelmsdorf: J. C. Tetschner 1744), p. 155. Heydt was also part of the delegation, headed by the Dutch ambassador Daniel Aggreens, that made an official visit to the court of the king of Kandy in 1737.

51. "It was he [the Lord] who designated the tree by whose power the original damnation by the tree would be revoked." *Le Bréviare romain* (Paris: La Bergerie 1934, XVII).

Jean de Marignolli describes other shrubs and trees that he had never seen before, such as the *nargil*, *amburan*, and *chakebaruhei*. The *nargil* is the coconut. Its leaves remind him of the date tree; they are used, he says, in the making of baskets and measuring devices. Its wood is used in the framework of roofs, and its bark to make rope; the shell of the nut is used in making kitchen utensils, especially spoons. Inside the bark is a useful pulp whose taste is similar to the almond. It can be burned as fuel, and sugar and oil can be extracted from it. The juice sparkles like young milk and can be made, he says, into an excellent wine (here Marignolli confuses the juice of the coconut with palm wine, which is made from the palm tree's young shoots). Although Marignolli notes, without surprise, that some of the fruits found in the West are not seen in "Seylann," the absence of grapevines seems hard for him to believe. How, he wonders, can they live without wine, when it is indispensable to the celebration of religious rites?

Ibn Battuta too describes the many different plants seen on the mountain: evergreens, flowers of many different colors, even a red rose as large as the palm of his hand. In the same spirit as Marignolli, who, on his visit to Adam's' garden, discerned the figure of the crucified Christ on a banana cut crosswise, Battuta reports, "It is said that on this rose the names of God the most high and of his Prophet can be read."[52] However, it bears noting that no roses grow on Ceylon at this altitude. On the other hand, a type of red rhododendron does grow here, which Battuta probably took for a rose because of its color. As for the inscription of the names of God and of his Prophet, Battuta merely reports what he has heard. The pilgrim's picturesque impressions of the flora on Adam's peak allow him to give an air of authenticity to all his observations. They also allow him to convince his readers that he is both skeptical and unyielding to the statements of the infidels, and, for this reason, that he can distinguish the true from the false: "On this same path, near the bottom of Adam's Foot, lies *Dèrakht kewân*, the marching tree. It is a secular tree, and supposedly no leaves fall from it. I met no one who has ever seen a leaf on it at all. It is also called *mâchïah* [the mobile tree], because when seen from the top of the mountain it is judged to be far away, down at the foot of the mountain, but when someone sees it from the bottom of the mountain, he has exactly the opposite impression. On this spot I saw a herd of *djouguis* which, waiting for

52. *Voyages*, vol. 4, p. 179.

the leaf to fall from this tree, would not leave Adam's Foot. The tree is located on a spot impossible to reach. The infidels *spout various lies about the tree, among which is this one: whoever eats the leaves of this tree will regain his youth, even if he is an old man. But this is surely false.*"[53]

Like Marignolli, Battuta heard stories detailing various miracles, but in this case he is objective enough not to believe it, and he even disdainfully uses the word "spout." Does not his refusal to believe in this tree result from the fact that in this case the information comes from infidels? If he had learned of it from Muslims, the pilgrim would probably have believed. For example, earlier he described – exactly as it had been reported to him by several Muslim pilgrims – an inscription, found on a red flower at Adam's Foot, that praised Allah and Mohammed. Why did he not question the validity of these witnesses? In another place, Battuta uncritically relates a fantastic adventure related to him by some Muslim dignitaries at Deh Fattan,[54] in South India. The story concerns a magical tree located across the street from a mosque. These Muslims had supposedly seen a leaf fall from this "tree of witness," on which the reed of divine power had engraved the following inscription: "There is no god except God, and Mohammed is his Prophet."[55] Battuta expresses no doubts about these statements, since it might jeopardize the acceptance of the true faith among the infidel Brahmins of Deh Fattan. In fact this miracle caused their leader to convert to Islam. To Battuta, miracles are not unbelievable in themselves, but they become so when pronounced by infidels.

The Descendants of Adam

In Ceylon, Jean de Marignolli was sure that he was in contact with a people who had experienced a revelation from God, since they called themselves the children of Adam. Moreover, they knew and had retained, he believed, the basis of the same religion practiced by the Church. After their conversion the inhabitants had followed the correct practices of the true faith, but, over time, they had deviated

53. Ibid, pp. 183–184. The italics are mine. On the various optical effects of different natural phenomena, such as the luminosity of the sun on Adam's peak, see Andreas Nell, "Some Observations about Adam's Peak," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon)* vol. XXVIII no. 73 (1920), pp. 8–11.

54. Henry Yule identifies this settlement with Dharmapattam, near Cannanore. "The Geography of Ibn Battuta's Indian Travels," *The Indian Antiquary* (August 1874), p. 210.

55. *Voyages*, vol. IV, p. 85–86.

from them and finally sunk into practices associated with superstitious cults. The original message had been forgotten, and its meaning lost over the course of the centuries. And yet they had continued to worship God: "After Seth came his son Enoch, who began to invoke the Lord's name. He was the first man to entreat God with audible prayers, the first to institute religious discipline and rules that are followed (according to them) by the Brahmins and monks of Seyllan to this day, even though they have sunk into idolatry and the worship of a tree."[56] Marignolli bases his entire text on Scripture and its revelation. However, when it comes to the origin of the people of "Seyllan," his faith is put to the test, and he sometimes even finds himself in contradiction with biblical teachings: "The natives say that the Flood did not reach their island. This, they say, is why Adam's house still stands on its original site. They oppose their dreams to Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Saints. Yet they advance plausible arguments. They say that they descend neither from Cain nor Seth, but from children of Adam, for they assert that he had other sons and daughters. However, since this contradicts Scripture, I will say nothing more about it."[57]

Returning to this problem in a later chapter, Marignolli describes another one of the plausible "proofs" offered by the local inhabitants: "And the children of Adam in Ceylon offer numerous other proofs that show that the Flood did not reach them. One of their principle proofs is the presence, on the east side of the island, of a population of wandering vagabonds whom I myself saw and who are called the children of Cain. They have huge, hideous faces that terrify anyone who meets them. Because of the unbearable stench generated by their bodies, their presence cannot be tolerated in one location for more than two days. They are rarely seen in public, although they do engage in commercial activities. They carry their women and children – who are as demonically deformed as themselves – on the backs of donkeys. However, Saint Augustine and the other theologians assert that it is absurd to suppose that anyone not in the Ark could have survived the Flood."[58]

Marignolli's description of these "wanderers" is surely accurate, making him the first Western traveler to have noted the presence of these aboriginal peoples whose physiological and cultural characteristics apparently link them to ethnic groups that already populat-

56. "Marignolli's Recollections," p. 247.
57. Ibid., pp. 233–234.
58. Ibid.

ed the island in the most distant past. Marignolli's description of these local populations is valuable both to the historian and ethnographer, even if it is offered in a mythical framework, pervaded by the biblical references that determine the paths of his imagination.

The wandering vagabonds of Ceylon, he reasoned, could not have been on the Ark. Moreover, it seems possible to him that they are indeed the children of Cain, since he mentions that the settlement of *Kota* (Kotté in Singhalese), which is located on the west coast of the island, near Colombo, could have been founded by Cain before his flight to Damascus. Apparently, the papal legate sees no contradiction here with the Holy Scriptures. Next, he begins to speculate on the city that Cain built, which is described in chapter five of Genesis. Convicted for his crime and sentenced to live as a wanderer on the earth, the biblical Cain tries to find a place to settle down. It is in Ceylon that Marignolli locates the permanent dwelling that Cain constructed for himself and his descendants. We cannot discount the possibility that this tradition was known to his compatriot, Fra Mauro, *camaldule* of the monastery of San Michele in Murano, since, in his atlas of the world, Mauro depicts the *Isola de Saylam* as a beautiful city, located at the foot of Adam's mountain, surrounded by ramparts and towers, and even equipped with a drawbridge. To name it, Mauro uses the term *Cotte civita*, a term used by Marignolli. Kotté was in fact the capital of the island at the time when Fra Mauro was putting together his map of the world (1459).[59]

Although Marignolli does believe in the possibility of the salvation of the inhabitants of Ceylon, it is more difficult for him to believe in the salvation of the aborigines of the island, the *vedda*, whom he thinks of as demons. He seems ready to believe that they are the descendants of Cain, symbols of evil. Christianity could only have appeared among the best of the natives of the island, the descendants of Seth.

Ibn Battuta, after having taken, as tradition instructed, the path of the Father to climb the mountain, took the path of the Mother for the descent. The two paths are named in memory of Adam and Eve. The first, the path of the mother, is the easier one, but is to be used only for the descent, since anyone who takes it in the wrong direction is considered not to have made the pilgrimage at all. The second path,

59. Cf. Roberto Almagia and Tullia Gasparrini Leporace, *Il Mappomondo di Fra Mauro* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato 1956), pp. 25–28.

the path of the Father, is steeper and a more difficult climb; it is the southern route, leaving from Ratnapura. The path of the mother, the one used for the descent, is the northern route, and passes Maskeliya at an altitude of 1,215 meters. This is the site of the first of a series of Islamic holy places, the cave of Cheith, who was the son given to Adam for the death of his son Abel. The fact that Battuta locates this cave so close to the mountain points to the probable existence of several other pilgrimage sites known to Muslim pilgrims.

Before departing for Ceylon, Battuta had made a visit to the Cave of Blood, where Abel was killed by Cain, which is located just north of Damascus in the sanctuary of Mount Hacioun. In his short description, Battuta notes the red stain, preserved by God, that marks the spot where the murder took place.[60] Battuta locates the caverns of Seth and Cheim on Adam's peak. Perhaps this is the trace of a legend that strove to link the episode in question to Serendib. Marignolli says nothing about these caves. On the other hand, Battuta makes no allusion to Cain or to any city he may have founded. Also, Marignolli lets it be known that he heard several of the natives say that they were not the descendants of the children of Adam. Each of the two pilgrims seems to have interpreted this episode to his liking.

The Knowledge of Sacred Places

As we have seen, the voyagers' descriptions are a function of the religious themes inherent to their cultural values. Nevertheless, they have in common their *pilgrimage* to Adam's mountain. Both, consequently, have a duty to describe these sacred sites, and each applies the tone appropriate to his activity. In his account, Ibn Battuta relates his pilgrim's experience in order to edify and inspire his reader to undertake the same voyage. In describing his pilgrimage, Battuta hopes to show others how to earn the same merit he has: the knowledge of sacred places is a form of spiritual enrichment. By offering the believer a pilgrim's guide, the writer of the narrative is himself performing a pious and didactic act.

Marignolli's voyage is marked by acts of providence that are apparent from the very beginning, such as his being cast onto the shores of Ceylon by a terrifying storm – a storm full of the strangest and most mysterious phenomena. His narrative, under the weight

60. *Voyages*, vol. I, pp. 231–232.

of the supernatural, is reminiscent of the mythical voyages of Saint Brandon to the Island of the Blessed or of Aeneas in search of hell. The lands that he discovers are always likened to the geography found in Scripture, which is why he concludes, *de visu*, that the island of "Seyllan" is part of the sacred ground that has existed since Genesis. His frequent allusions to Paradise and recurring mentions of Adam's Garden – "traces" of which he sees on the island – demonstrate just how profoundly this idea influenced the man of the Middle Ages.

The idea of pilgrimage is common not only to Christianity and Islam but to Buddhism and Hinduism: it is an activity that has been observed from the time of the proto-history of peoples later converted to the great religions. What is striking is how both the Christian and Muslim pilgrim, as a result of the preservation of myths of origin in their religious traditions, are able to discover and acknowledge the location of their own first ground amid sacred sites where remnants of ancient cults are evident. Moreover, it remains true that the Christian and Muslim cults are "built" on ancient sanctuaries, the memory of which has not been lost to the local population, no more than the ancient cult which it serves. Although both narratives are full of supernatural elements – caused by the way our voyagers interpret the strange rituals, the surprises and exoticism they observe – their narratives nevertheless constitute a treasure lode of ethnographic observations.

Translated from the French by Thomas Epstein

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219204015907 Published online by Cambridge University Press